

FEVER DREAMS

SCIENCE FICTION * HORROR * FANTASY

ISSUE 2 * APR-JUNE 13

The Spirits in Lorena Preli

by Philip Roberts

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THE LUTWYCHE CARNIVORE

by Cameron Trost

*

SELECTION

by Daniel Davis

*

SURPRISE ATTACK

by Mike Wilson

*

HENCHMAN ACADEMY

by Spencer
Carvalho

*

THE MAGPIE ENIGMA

by Dave Ludford

*

THE TRAVELLER RETURNS FROM THE L5 HABITAT ABOVE NEW TERRA

by Charles Von
Nordheim

*

ARTICLES AND REVIEWS

by Peter Bennett
Al Thomas
Matt Harris
Philip Meredith
Glenn Kohler
Sue McKenzie



WELCOME TO FEVER DREAMS ISSUE TWO

I joked in Issue 1 that the Old Ones had an interest in stopping the magazine from

reaching the public and if recent events are anything to go by then they tried twice as hard with Issue 2. We made the mistake of thinking that we had ironed out all the kinks in the first issue but coursework deadlines, exams and a spat of unexplainable illnesses (some of which looked suspiciously alcohol related) combined to test the team to breaking point but its finally here.

I have been amazed by the response to requests for submissions for Issue 2. My wife and I spent many evenings debating over the final selections and we hope you enjoy the fiction that we chose.

The team has also received lots of supportive e-mails from our fans, and it is good to see that our little magazine has reached a global audience. We included some of our favourites in the magazine, and listened to you when you told us what articles you enjoyed. Philip Meredith and Glen Kohler continue to offer advice to would be writers, Sue McKenzie continues her articles on the relationship between sex and science-fiction with a focus on the tales from Gor and, after an overwhelming response to his first article,



Issue Two Cover Art by Stephanie Bennett

EDITORIAL by Peter Bennett

Philip Meredith strapped on his camera and journeyed to Mains Castle in search of the ghost that dwells within.

We've also got the usual array of book, film, dvd and gaming articles from Matt and Al. A special note of thanks goes to Al who managed to complete his contribution to the magazine despite a stay in hospital. Get well soon, Al!

Now, sit back, relax and on with the show!

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FEVER DREAMS PUBLICATIONS

ARTICLE by Peter Bennett

So what's new at Fever Dreams despite a strange bout of contagious illness with symptoms that bear a distinct similarity to a hangover?

Work progresses on our line of classic genre e-books. We have selected a number of science-fiction, horror and fantasy classics and are in the process of converting them to electronic format. Each book will contain original artwork from the staff at the studio and a foreword discussing the importance of the work to modern speculative fiction.

We aren't just looking back, however, and we are in the process of finalising arrangements for the Scare To Care anthologies. We have received a number of e-mails from eager writers already but we can't give you any information until we've finished negotiating with the charities involved. Keep your eyes on our twitter feed as we should be opening submissions soon.

Glen and Philip are interested in creating an anthology of speculative fiction by writers who are unpublished in the genre. The source of the delay seems to be whether to settle the argument over theme with swords or pistols. I am assured they will be ready to open submissions by the end of May. I have also been talking to a number of authors about a series of e-novellas, and arranging for an annual anthology of speculative fiction.

Al and Matt have made a nuisance of themselves at a number of conventions, and would like to thank everyone who sent us invitations. We are always happy to have the opportunity to meet fans of speculative fiction. Our team will be present for Dundead, Dundee's Horror Film Festival, during the first week of May. If you see us then don't be afraid to come and let us know what you thought of the magazine. Matt will also be travelling down to London Anime Con and Ayacon later this quarter so don't be afraid to introduce yourself.

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

SAVE OUR SHORT STORIES

It is sad to see the number of new short stories being published in decline. Submissions to magazines like Fever Dreams has always been the basis for many creative writing groups and having work accepted has been the ultimate aim. Many editors are making excuses for the decline and for their decision to focus on advertisements over content. While I am sure that this is down to a matter of economics, it is good to see that there are still magazines that support new writers. It was an even greater delight to realise that this magazine is produced in Britain. We used to have a strong stable of writers contributing to all walks of speculative fiction, hopefully magazines like Fever Dreams will ensure that we do again. Keep up the good work.

MARTIN SAUNDERS
LONDON NW1

GHOST BUSTING

I felt that I had to write in response to Philip Meredith's article on the ghost of Balgay Bridge. I have always been a fan of "real" ghost fiction and was delighted to see that there are still some writers who refuse to take the sensational route and offer an objective review of the ghostly tales. His historical research was properly referenced and easy to find, his photographs were beautiful and his article had a delightfully eccentric voice. I look forward to hearing about another of Dundee's white ladies in Issue 2.

VERA PARK
SURREY

HONEST THANKS

I have to admit that when my story was turned down for publication in Fever Dreams Issue 1 I was a little annoyed, I didn't even get past the initial rejection. After downloading the magazine and seeing the quality of work that was selected I was surprised. Many online magazines struggle to achieve the level of quality after multiple issues that you achieved in your first issue. It was then that I went back to the rejection email and read through it again. The feedback was over and above anything that I have received from any American editor and shows how much the staff at Fever Dreams care about speculative fiction. The comments on plot, structure and, dare I admit, spelling were all deserved and I have spent the past week editing.

I look forward to Issue 2 and will always consider submitting my work to Fever Dreams first.

PETER McDONALD
CANADA

PUTTING THE SEX IN SCI-FI

Ever since my teens I have loved science-fiction but it has always been a mystery to me why there is so much focus on so called 'Hard' science-fiction to the detriment of the genre as a whole. I was delighted to read Sue McKenzie's article on the development of sexuality within science-fiction and how that related to the social-economic factors of the periods. It was also great to see some greatly overlooked authors being praised for their contributions. I hope that Sue will continue to provide articles on this subject.

EMILY THOMAS
LONDON E15

COMPLETING Your first Draft

ARTICLE by Glenn Kohler

In last months article I discussed how the focus of your story can impact upon the structure and influence story elements like plot.

I also described how the easiest way to find out what element of the story you should focus on is by writing a complete first draft. Completing a first draft can sometimes be a daunting task, especially for new writers. What makes things worse is that there is often no agreed upon method for completing a first draft. Some writers will tell you that you should plan the whole story beforehand, others would say to get stuck in and see what happens. Some will tell you that editing while writing is a sure fire way to get bogged down in your story whilst others feel that editing is a good way to stay in touch with what you've previously written. What then is a new writer supposed to believe?

In this article I hope to shed a little light on the pros and cons of each approach in the hope that this will help you to decide what is the best strategy for you.

TARGETS

Setting yourself a daily target is one of the most commonly recommended strategies for new writers. It basically comes down to

establishing a daily routine and sticking to it come what may. I personally advocate that writers set themselves a generous target each day (when I started out it was 1000 words) and reward yourself if you write more. This works far better than straining to write 5000 words a day and then feeling demoralised when you can't reach your target. Whilst working on my first novel I even made the decision that writing would be the first thing I did each day and wouldn't allow myself my morning coffee until I had reached my target. This did mean that often the first twenty minutes of my writing was absolute rubbish but it helped get me into the zone and reminded me that my novel was a priority.

PLANNING

If you attend writing groups or seminars then you will already be aware of the argument that is raging over the necessity of planning before you start writing. Creative writing courses often insist on the necessity of planning because it makes academic marking easier but I often find that there are people on these courses for whom planning is an afterthought, and one student, I know, passed his course by creating his plans after he'd finished the stories.

There is merit to knowing your characters inside and out before you start and creating a

roadmap, a basic outline of the plot, can help you avoid getting stuck in a dead end. I know that many writers who create roadmaps feel that a roadmap can help you skip over a particularly clumsy part of the story and come back to it later because you don't have to wait for the plot to reveal itself.

On the other hand there are an abundance of writers who firmly believe that, for new writers, the most important thing is to write. Many new writers find that they require a few chapters before their story really gets going and their characters begin to seem three dimensional. Once you have something down on the page, you have something to play with but if its stuck in your head then its useless to you.

I personally prefer to use a more measured approach and use charts and diagrams to help me see the various interactions of my story, but I also know that for a good proportion of writers this can become a form of procrastination that stops them writing. If you prefer a more organic approach to writing then you shouldn't be afraid to follow your instinct. I know many writers who begin by writing the ending of their story or a favourite scene and develop the story from there.

EDITING

As contentious as the issue of planning is, the issue of editing is even more so. Many writers advocate that editing while writing only serves to stifle the creative flow and will eventually get you mired in your story. A simple change such as a character's name or eye colour can mean that you spend hours making alterations and by the time you get back to where you started you have no idea where your story should be going.

Many writers prefer to edit as they write or as part of their daily routine. When I first started writing I would read the work I did the day before, and edit it, before starting on any new

writing. This served the dual purpose of allowing me to edit my work and also reminded me of where I was up to in the story, giving my creative juices the chance to get going. I know from experience, however, that a large number of inexperienced writers can struggle with this because of their inner critic. Your inner critic is that little voice that questions how authentic a character's actions are or whether a name is pronounceable, and for many writers once their inner critic is awake they feel unable to accomplish anything that day.

Personally I love to fiddle around with my story. I've often told myself that this is a way of getting to know my characters better or correcting some terrible mistake that will affect the rest of the story. This can be fine in small doses but I have to be constantly on my guard that my inner critic doesn't escape. Its important to realise that a story will never get finished while you are endlessly reworking another part of it.

FINISHED?

If you are able to manage your inner critic and add something to your story, even a single sentence, every day then you will finish your first draft but that is not the end of the road. I strongly recommend that you give yourself a break before returning to edit your story. When you do have a look at some of the ideas we talked about in the last issue. Ask yourself questions about plot and structure. Does the story start in the right place? Does it end naturally or are there unresolved issues?

In the next issue I will be talking about the best way to approach editing your draft and how to ensure that it is properly prepared for submission to an editor. Until then remember to keep feeding your stories. If you do then they will grow.

THE SECRETS OF SUSPENSE

Your heart is pounding,
your hands are moist
and you turn the page.

The villain is waiting beyond the door. You wish there was a way to prevent the heroine from opening it but there is only one thing that you can do. You are helpless, totally at the mercy of the writer and all you can do is turn the page.

Hitchcock stated that you create shock by having a bomb randomly go off, but you create suspense by letting the audience see the bomb and letting them know what is coming. This is the essence of suspense and a valuable tool for any fiction writer, but one of the most difficult secrets of the craft. It seems that every course has a module dedicated to it and every book devotes a chapter to the methods, yet still novice writers continue to make the same mistake. I am going to come right out and say it:

Creating suspense does not rely on keeping your reader in the dark. Great suspense depends on keeping your reader fully aware of events.

In order to create good suspense the writer must state what is at stake from the beginning. If we look at Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart* then we can see that the suspense is derived from the fact that we know where the body is

ARTICLE by Philip Meredith

hidden. Poe plays his cards open for all to see and in doing so takes a risk that some of the story's drama could be lost by making the reader aware of important story details.

This is one of the main reasons that creating suspense is such a challenging part of the craft. Many speculative fiction writers believe that suspense is too difficult to pull off, but the genres of science-fiction, fantasy and horror afford the writer a number of luxuries that writers in other genres are not. In speculative fiction a writer is free to use multiple points of view to create characters, they can present the villain and his motivations to give the reader insight into his character. Horror fiction particularly benefits from being able to pit the perfect villain against the hero. Not all genres have that luxury.

If you have been struggling with suspense or want to try your hand at it then here are my secrets to creating suspense.

VIEWPOINT

As I have already stated, in order to create great suspense the reader requires foresight. If your reader does not now that the villain is waiting beyond the door then how can they feel the tension?

Let the reader see the viewpoints of both the villain and the hero. This allows the reader to see the trouble before the hero does and feel the consequences of the dangers that lie ahead. The tension will build as the reader realises that the hero is on a collision course with disaster.

TIME CONSTRAINTS

Anyone who has ever seen an action movie or read an action thriller will appreciate that one of the best ways to ratchet up the tension is to pit your hero against the clock, and then make the clock work for the villain. When working against the clock, every moment that you short change your hero is a small victory for the villain and another knot in your readers stomach. Giving your hero a limited window to escape the villain or to find a cure for his condition are both successful ways to do this.

PLAY WITH HIGH STAKES

Many writers begin by thinking that “high stakes” has to mean global destruction and while this is certainly true its not all that we mean. Modern horror and science fiction fans will be familiar with post apocalyptic settings where global destruction would not mean much. The death of a friend, family member or other loved one can become far more important, for example in *I am Legend* the death of the main character’s dog is a pivotal moment in the book. If you want your reader to care about the stakes then they have to be high enough that the hero will do anything to prevent them from happening. If you do this then the reader will empathise with the hero and want to know if the hero manages to succeed.

This brings me to another important point and that is one of emotional versus physical risk. A threat against your hero’s life and limb is a great way to create some fast tension but often it will be necessary to go even deeper.

Emotional tension is the most palpable and troubling for your reader. If you want to really raise the stakes then fear of damaged love, intimate betrayals and irreversible emotional wounds are guaranteed to create more spectacular tension than any physical threat to your hero. If you want to really ramp up the tension then ensure that the risk is both physical and emotional. If you place the hero’s wife or child in danger then the risk is both physical, because she may die, and emotional, because your hero will lose her.

APPLY SOME PRESSURE

Your hero should be struggling against incredible odds. His skills and abilities should be stretched to their limits in order to succeed so feel free to pile on the problems. If you have ever seen someone spinning plates then this is exactly how you should challenge your hero. Your hero should be running around trying to keep the plates spinning while the villain keeps adding more and more plates to the equation. Just remember that your hero should never buckle under the pressure your villain applies, it may be necessary for the odd plate to drop but the hero should not have time to think about that plate for more than a moment.

THE LOSE-LOSE SITUATION

One of the best ways to create suspense is through dilemmas. Your villain will love putting your hero in a position where they have to choose between two seemingly terrible options. This could be the decision to save one person at the cost of another, or to allow the villain to escape to save the lives of hostages. It is in the villain’s nature to cross these lines without thinking about the consequences but your hero should struggle with his decision. Your hero should not let innocents die without trying to save them or abandon his principles without some degree of turmoil. It is in the hero’s struggle to decide

that you can increase the pressure on your hero and allow the tension to mount.

DO NOT BE PREDICTABLE

Life is unpredictable and nothing ever goes exactly to plan. This is as true of your villain as it is of your hero. You should ensure that your hero's success always come at a price and that he can not rely on anything to go right. The same should be true of your villain, the mere presence of your hero is designed to mess up your villain's plans and as such both your villain and your hero are having to constantly improvise. You should not make the mistake of overlooking outside influences in this equation and sometimes it may be necessary to use an unaccounted for element to change the situation in favour of your hero or your villain. Remember that because you are playing with an open hand the reader may know how the story will end but they should be unable to predict how they will get there.

THE VILLAIN

In some fiction it is important to keep the villain in the shadows, because you want to keep the reader from guessing who they are, but when writing good suspense the villain is in the open. The ultimate villain should be resourceful and motivated. They have created the hook that is going to hold your reader on the edge of their seat until the final page of the book. In horror many writers depend on the "he is evil" logic but the word evil means "without good" which means that you are effectively saying that he is the villain because he is not good and he does evil things because he is not good. Flesh out your villain, explore his motivations and character, and explain to your reader why your villain is the way he is. Make your reader believe in and fear your villain. Make him a worthy opponent for your hero. Anything else is cheating your reader.

THE HERO

A great hero may be key to any story but if you want to create great suspense then your hero needs to be someone that your reader believes in and cares about. He has to be the equal of your villain so spend as much time creating your hero as you do your villain. If your hero is in peril then your reader needs to care about his fate. In order for your hero to be sympathetic you should ensure that they are struggling, vulnerable and deserving. If your hero is strong, powerful and has everything going for him then we will find it difficult to empathise with him and his successes will not be as hard won. If you make your hero smart, attractive and incredibly lazy then it is unlikely that your reader will be able to empathise with him, will care little about his fate and as a result you will struggle to create much tension. That does not mean that your hero can not be a villain. In recent years the anti-hero has become incredibly popular. If your villain is acting for the best of reasons and the good outweighs the bad then readers will identify with them.

Even if you manage to put all these aspects together then you are not guaranteed to succeed if you pay no attention to your use of language. If you want to create fast, frenetic tension then you need to use short, sharp sentences. Likewise if you want your reader to experience a slow, sour building dread then you will need to use longer, ponderous paragraphs. The architecture of your language is important and carries meaning, so think carefully about how you relate the events of your story.

Remember that creating suspense is like creating a pressure cooker with no release valve. If you slowly increase the heat then the pressure will build. Successfully using the techniques I have outlined will allow you to increase the pressure and ensure that your reader never comes off the boil.

HAUNTED HISTORIES

DUNDEE

ARTICLE by Philip Meredith

Mains Castle is one of the few medieval buildings left in

Dundee. The castle consists

of a six-storey tower house and two lower ranges arranged around a small, walled courtyard. It was started sometime between 1480 and 1500 by the Grahams of Fintry and popular theory suggests that it was used as a hunting lodge. There is a date stone marked with the year 1562 at Mains Castle which coincides with the year that David Graham and Dame Margaret Ogilvy, his wife, took up residence. Thirty years later David Graham was executed for taking part in a failed attempt to re-establish Catholicism as the state religion. After his death the castle was passed through the hands of several owners before being abandoned in 1740. Sir James Caird bought and restored the castle in 1913, later handing it over to Dundee City Council along with the park. Towards the end of the twentieth century the castle had fallen prey to vandals and was little more than a crumbling ruin but was eventually restored in 1988 and for a brief period served as a restaurant. It is now no longer open to the public but has become a popular venue for weddings.

It is not uncommon to find that medieval buildings, like Mains Castle, become the focus of many local ghost stories. Mains Castle has more than its fair share and is home to one of Dundee's white ladies. The white lady of Mains Castle is supposedly the ghost of a lady of the castle who was caught in the act of infidelity by her husband and subsequently murdered. The origin of this story can be found in the pages of *Scotorum Historiae*, which can be roughly translated as The History of The Scottish People, by Hector Boece. In his account of the events at Mains Castle, he states:

"Earl Gillechrist of Angus, who had married the King's sister as a reward for the outstanding martial virtue he had often displayed... Was enraged because he suspected his wife of adultery. He first ejected her from his castle and then hanged her at Mannes, a village about a mile from Dundee."

Records from this period in history are confusing and often incomplete but it appears that the Scottish King William I was troubled with insurrections in Galloway throughout his reign, and on several occasions he sent Gilchrist, the third Earl of Angus, to deal with the rebels.



(above) Photograph of Mains Castle (P. Meredith March 2013)

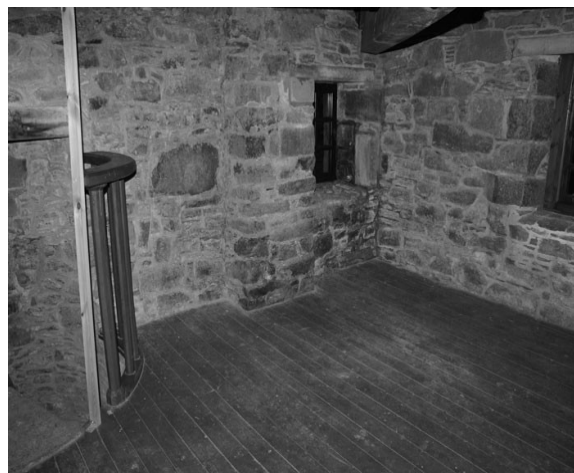
As the King's right arm against the rebels and a powerful landowner, Gilchrist would have been a suitable match for William's sister but there is no documentation that proves that any such marriage took place.

This has not prevented a number of interesting reports of ghostly phenomenon occurring at Mains Castle. Current occupants Victor and Elena Peterson have lived in the castle since 2007 and have a number of ghostly encounters to relate.

On one occasion Elena was in the main hall discussing wedding arrangements with a client and both she and the guest heard the sound of furniture being dragged across bare floorboards in the function room above them. Elena states that there was no body else present anywhere in the castle at that time and even if there was someone else the floor of the function room is entirely carpeted.

These reports attracted the attention of a paranormal research group called Ghost Finders Scotland. They visited Mains Castle on the 15th March 2008 and reported inexplicable temperature fluctuations. These fluctuations were reported to change in response to one of the team and could indicate that whatever is present at Mains Castle has the ability to cool the room upon request. The team also reported that they detected voices talking at a distance and that one voice was clearly a woman's voice. In each incident the sounds were heard by more than one member of the team and checks of the area indicated that the castle was empty and all the external doors were locked.

What is more interesting is that the team verified accounts of the ghostly dragging sound originating from the function room. The team had assembled in the second storey of the tower and, when everyone was present,



(above left) Photograph of Mains Castle function room prepared for a wedding and (above right) the topmost tower room.
(P. Meredith March 2013)

they heard loud noises that sounded like furniture being dragged across a wooden floor. They reported that they heard this noise a total of seven times and that between them they could hear running footsteps.

The absence of apparitions, moving objects and visual phenomenon may lead you to believe that there is a mundane explanation for the effects that have been documented at Mains Castle but that would be to discount the reaction of the medium who was present during the Ghost Finders 2008 investigation.

During the investigation the team visited every location in Mains Castle. As the team proceeded up the tower the medium became increasingly convinced that the location had been used for black magic and orgies. This feeling peaked in the topmost room of the tower where the medium became so uncomfortable that she was forced to return back down the narrow spiral staircase. She stated that this reaction was caused by an aura of medieval black magic and described the presence of three women and a man, who she felt was their leader. After such a dramatic response to the environment, it is not

surprising that other members of the team also began to experience similar feelings of nausea and discomfort. I have to say that standing in the attic space between the cross-beams that support the roof is indeed an eerie experience but I can not say that I felt any great surge of panic nor did I get any feeling that the tower had been connected with black magic. Towers and black magic have a common connection in local mythology but there are, as far as I can see, no links between the former occupants of Mains Castle and the eldritch arts. The same can not be said for the dark figure that I will be visiting in the next issue.

GHOST HUNTS

If you would like to visit Mains Castle and experience the disembodied voices, scratches, footsteps and other ghostly goings on first hand then Paranormal Events UK can give you that chance. On Saturday 11th May you can accompany medium Heather Angel to Mains Castle. For more information visit their website:

<http://www.paranormal-events-uk.co.uk>

THE TRAVELLER RETURNS FROM THE L5 HABITAT ABOVE NEW TERRA

by Chuck Von Nordheim

I have seen sleeping beauty
she waits in stasis
ensorcelled by ancient tech
her genes untainted
by unearthly changes
she orbits Eden
waiting for her true human

some say you can see
remnants of what we misplaced
in her perfect body
skin tinted like mythic oaks
green eyes like old seas
hair bright as our natal sun
legends clothed in flesh

ugly ashamed misshapen
I weep before her
I ache for what we gave up
I want to murder
those fools among our forebears
who thought the stars worth
giving up our human lives

sensor bots swarm
judgment falls on all who come
robot angels smirk
mocking our sins helps them bear
their eternal watch
suitors come each cosmic spin
but all wear weirdness

my test triggers shrill klaxons
angel claws grab me
I am an unfit Adam
Eden remains closed
so I slink to you
flung out as mutant trash
marked as nonhuman



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chuck lives in Dayton, Ohio, but spends his summers in Lawrence, Kansas, attending writing workshops at the Center for the Study of Science Fiction. He will attend the World Science Fiction Convention in San Antonio, Texas, this year even though, after a 22-year stint in the United States Air Force, he still shudders if he comes within 40 miles of the gates of Lackland Air Force Base. He has poetry forthcoming in the next issues of *Sorcerous Signals*, *The Lorelei Signal*, and *Tales of the Talisman*.

HENCHMEN ACADEMY

by Spencer Carvalho

The scene: a large warehouse with a sign reading **HENCHMEN ACADEMY**. Inside the warehouse, a group of young trainees in matching jumpsuits stands at attention in rows. A drill sergeant paces in front of them.

"My name is Drill Sergeant Remey! You will address me as either Drill Sergeant Remey or Sir! Is that clear?"

"Yes, Sir!" yelled the trainees in unison.

"It is my job to train you to become the best possible henchmen that you can be. Those of you who make it through this program will have what it takes to become henchmen for mad scientists, drug lords, criminal masterminds, or any number of overlords with plans for world domination. In the meantime, you will obey my orders. Is that clear?"

"Yes, Sir!"

"I was once a henchman myself, and I will do my best to impart as much of what I learned as possible to you."

Johnson raised his hand.

"Yes, Johnson."

"Sir, why aren't you a henchman anymore?"

"My boss was killed."

"How did he die, Sir?"

"He was decapitated with a sword and kicked into a pit of acid. Are there any other questions?"

One of the female trainees raised her hand.

"Yes, Gray."



"Sir, are we still henchmen if we're women, or are we henchpersons?"

"No, you're still a henchman even if you are a woman, got it?"

Gray nodded.

"All right. First I'm going to teach you how to fight using your bare hands."

Drill Sergeant Remey pointed to Wakowski, the biggest and most physically fit member of the group.

"You, get in the center of the circle."

Wakowski moved to the center of a circle painted on the ground. Drill Sergeant Remey pointed to Johnson and Smith.

"Johnson, Smith, get on opposite sides of Wakowski."

Johnson and Smith got on opposite sides of Wakowski at the edge of the circle.

"Now, before we start this exercise, you should know that it is very common for fighters to lose their shirts in hand-to-hand combat."

The female trainees looked at each other nervously.

"Now, there are many..."

Wakowski started to take off his shirt.

"Wakowski, keep your damn shirt on!"

"Sorry, Sir."

"Now, there are many reasons why a fighter might lose his shirt during battle. Your shirt might get badly ripped or it might catch fire or you might do that trick where a fighter takes his shirt off to wrap it over his opponent's head and then knees him in the stomach. All these situations result in shirtlessness."

Drill Sergeant Remey looked over to Johnson and Smith.

"Now you two, attack Wakowski."

Johnson and Smith did not move.

"Really?" asked Johnson.

"First off, did you forget that you are to address me as either Drill Sergeant Remey or Sir?"

"Sorry, Sir!"

"Second, you have now lost the element of surprise. Attack him now!" yelled Remey.

Johnson and Smith ran in to attack Wakowski at the same time.

"No, stop! Not like that. You attack one at a time. That's proper etiquette." Johnson raised his hand.

"What, Johnson?"

"Why are we following etiquette? Aren't we trying to kill him, Sir?"

"Are you a troublemaker, Johnson?" asked Drill Sergeant Remey.

"No, Sir."

"This stuff could save your life some day if you get into hand-to-hand combat."

"Couldn't I just carry a gun, Sir?"

"What if he knocks the gun out of your hand?"

"I could carry a back up gun, Sir."

Drill Sergeant Remey gave Johnson a stern look. "Let's move on."

The trainees moved over to a table with guns on it.

"Arm up, trainees. We're going to work on your marksmanship."

The trainees each grabbed a gun and moved over to the shooting area—a red line painted on the ground. Across from the line was a cardboard cutout of a guy in a tuxedo. Drill Sergeant Remey picked up a remote control with a red button on it.

“When I push this button, your enemy will move along a track from one side of the shooting range to the other. This will simulate your opponent running from gunfire. Your goal is to shoot toward your target’s feet, closely following his movement without hitting him.”

“Sir, why don’t we just shoot at him?” asked Johnson.

“Will you stop with all the damn questions, Johnson? First group move up to the line. Now get ready to fire!”

Drill Sergeant Remey pushed the button and the cardboard cutout started moving along its track. The first group fired. Sparks flew up right behind the target’s feet as it moved from one side of the shooting area to the other.

“All right, good. Second group, move up.”

The second group moved up to the red line.

“Get ready!” Drill Sergeant Remey pushed the button.

“Fire!”

The second group fired at the moving target. Sparks flew up behind the target’s feet. Smith, however, sneezed while firing, which made him jerk a bit to his left. His gunfire took off the target’s cardboard head.

“Damn it, Smith! What the hell do you think you’re doing?” asked Drill Sergeant Remey as he quickly walked over to Smith.

“Sorry, Sir,” said Smith, looking at his feet.

“He hit the target, Sir,” said Johnson. “Isn’t that good?”

Drill Sergeant Remey looked from Smith to Johnson.

“Shut your face, Johnson. Smith here broke protocol. Let’s just move on to the next exercise.”

The trainees moved on from the shooting range to an obstacle course. “The point of this exercise is for you to learn how to take cover. There will be many times when people will be shooting at you. Knowing how to properly take cover will keep you from getting killed.”

Drill Sergeant Remey moved some of the trainees into positions behind different objects on the course.

“In the event of a shootout, you should keep as much of your body behind something as you can. Any questions?”

Johnson raised his hand. Drill Sergeant Remey sighed.

“What is it, Johnson?”

“Sir, in this scenario, are they wearing what they have on now?”

“Yes, Johnson.”

“No special body armour or flack jackets, just the jumpsuits?”

“Yes. Why?”

“Well, Sir, it seems like a bullet would go through just about everything they’re using for cover.”

The trainees taking cover behind various objects started looking carefully at what they were hiding behind.

“Wakowski is hiding behind an old picnic table. That guy’s behind a couch. Hell, you have Smith taking cover behind a white picket fence...Sir,” said Johnson. Smith stopped crouching behind the white picket fence and looked to Drill Sergeant Remey.

“Damn it, Johnson! Do you want to teach this class?” asked Drill Sergeant Remey.

Johnson was quiet.

“That’s what I thought. Now shut up and pay attention. Next we’re going to learn about self-destruct buttons. Come on.”

Johnson rolled his eyes as Drill Sergeant Remey began to move on to another part of the warehouse. Smith lightly kicked the fence, which fell over. He shook his head and ran to catch up with the other trainees, where Drill Sergeant Remey stood by a pedestal with a big red button on it.

“It’s just some button? Anyone could just push it? There aren’t any security codes?”

“Well, smart ass, of course there’s security for this.”

Drill Sergeant Remey reached to the back of the pedestal and pulled up a clear cover, demonstrating how it fit over the button.

“Is that bulletproof?” asked Johnson.

“It looks like Plexiglas,” said Smith.

“This is a certified protective cover,” said Drill Sergeant Remey.

“You can probably shoot through it,” said Johnson.

“Actually, you could probably break it just by hitting it with the butt of a gun,” said Wakowski.

Drill Sergeant Remey began talking louder.

“You expect us to outrun a wall of fire? You can’t outrun fire; it moves at the speed of ... well, fire,” said Johnson.

“Your typical base or hideout will usually be equipped with some kind of self-destruct device.”

“Why, Sir?” asked Johnson.

“It’s a good way to quickly destroy sensitive information before it falls into enemy hands. It’s also a good distraction for a speedy getaway. This is an example of your typical self-destruct button. Now, this will...”

Johnson raised his hand.

“Yes, Johnson?”

“Is that all, Sir?”

“What do you mean, Johnson?”

“If the self-destruct system is somehow activated, it is important that you learn how to run away from the explosion. This technique will also be useful to you if you happen to encounter a wall of water rushing toward you—for instance, if a damn or giant aquarium should break.”

“You expect us to outrun a wall of fire? You can’t outrun fire; it moves at the speed of ... well, fire,” said Johnson.

“You run away. Then when the explosion happens, you jump and the force of the explosion knocks you to safety,” explained Drill Sergeant Remey.

"What about shrapnel? I mean, you're more likely to get killed by shrapnel than the force of an explosion. Wouldn't it be better to take cover?"

"You know, Johnson, you really make my life difficult. Fortunately for me, your training is complete."

"That's all? That's it?"

"There's a high demand for henchmen. We have to be quick to meet our clients' needs. Any final questions?"

Johnson raised his hand. Drill Sergeant Remey leaned his head forward and rubbed his eyes as he sighed. "What is it, Johnson?"

"Isn't there like a zero percent success rate for henchmen? I mean, isn't one of the reasons why the demand for henchmen is so high because there's such a high mortality rate? Heck, I've even heard stories where one really muscular guy took out like over 50 henchmen. And to make it worse, he would even come up with puns as he killed some of them. Also, just about every guy that hires henchmen has plans to take over the world, right?"

"Not everyone, but a lot, yes."

"Well, since the world isn't taken over yet, doesn't that mean that they have all failed?"

"Johnson... Are there any other questions, from anyone but Johnson?"

"What's the health care plan like?" asked Smith.

"There isn't one. Is that all? Well, then I officially declare you all henchmen. Luckily I was able to pair you guys up with a job very quickly. I would like to introduce you all to your new boss, Dr. Carnage."

A man in a nice suit walked out while holding a cat in his arms.

"Let's move along now. The helicopter is waiting outside to take us to my island," said Dr. Carnage.

Smith ran up to Dr. Carnage.

"Is there a volcano on your island?"

"Of course!"

"That's so awesome."

The henchmen followed Dr. Carnage out to his helicopter.

"I don't care what he says, I'm carrying a back up gun," said Johnson.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Spencer Carvalho has written short stories for various literary magazines and anthologies. His stories have appeared in the anthologies *Certain Circuits Volume 1*, *Another Wild West*, and *Remembrances of Wars Past: A War Veteran's Anthology*. To read more of his stories simply Google his name.

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SELECTION

by Daniel Davis



They sat down on the Fifth Moon of Planet XV0117, the ship landing neatly in an open field of what appeared to be a species of prairie grass.

Walton kept his face glued to the porthole during the entire landing; as a scientist, he was one of two crewmen (the other being the doctor) who didn't have any flying duties. Throughout most of the trip, he had felt like the forth wheel on a tricycle; but now, staring at the lush foliage that glistened beneath the nearest sun, he was getting back into his element.

Planet XV0117 was a sparse, uninhabited rock. Yet two of its six moons supported life. The first to be explored (the Second Moon) had yielded life forms of substantial size, surprisingly similar to Earth species. Walton had been stationed on Earth's moon when the results came back; he had seen the photographs, the statistical data, the video footage. He'd listened to the recordings of what sounded like a moose bellowing in the distance. After that first day, he'd gone straight to the Director and pleaded to be put on the mission to the Fifth Moon. It wasn't such a long shot; Professor Philips, studying the life on the Second Moon, was the world's foremost astrobiologist. Walton was the third; the second, Professor Matheson, was wheelchair bound. Walton's odds were greatly increased, especially since the President was an animal lover.

The exploration to the Second Moon was still there; Walton was planning to take one of the ship's shuttles and visit in the weeks ahead. There had been a lull in the information being reported back; in fact, there had only been three broadcasts—the last coming after Walton's party was well into its journey—and the subsequent six months were silent. That wasn't unusual, of course; Walton's commanding officer, Captain O'Donnell, was anticipating a four-month communications

blackout.

Almost as soon as the ship was down, Walton was getting into his suit. Light and tight, it like a wetsuit; this perhaps wasn't ideal to studying wildlife—especially alien, unpredictable wildlife—but it was the best available. Walton had tested the suit—complete with the sixteen-pound oxygen circulation system—in the African jungles as part of his training. He'd barely broken a sweat.

According to the reports, the Second Moon's temperature was about as variable as Earth's—moderately warm days, cool nights. They knew very little about the system, of course; they'd only been studying it a couple years, hardly enough time to have its climate sufficiently mapped out. But, if the Fifth Moon was anything like the Second, then Walton could expect to feel at ease outside the ship. It wouldn't be the same as breathing the air—judged to consist primarily of oxygen and nitrogen, but in the wrong proportions—or feeling the heat of the sun on his skin, but as an astrobiologist, he had an ample imagination, and was already enjoying the subtle brush of alien grass against his fingertips.

When the ship was down, O'Donnell and his second-in-command, Lieutenant Shonk, left their positions at the front of the ship and came to the back. They joined Walton inside the airlock. Dr. Kingsley was immediately behind them; he was fastening up his emergency kit, which he would be bringing with him even though, technically, he couldn't risk exposing skin to the atmosphere.

Walton sized the four of them up. They made an impressive bunch; each of the men was physically fit, kept that way during the flight by rigorous exercise and a strictly regimented diet, implemented by Kingsley himself. The doctor was the oldest; at forty, he was already balding, and wore special glasses

designed to withstand the rigors of spaceflight. He looked as though he belonged in an English countryside practice, making house calls on elderly peasants.

The Captain and the Lieutenant were both in their mid-twenties; Walton was just past thirty, one of the youngest astrobiologists ever certified (that wasn't saying much; the profession itself, in its current incarnation, only went back a few decades). The four of them had been picked not only because of their respective accomplishments, but also because of the way they worked together. They could expect to be stationed on the Fifth Moon indefinitely; they would return home at some point, but that length of time for them could be years, and would be decades back on Earth. Each man aboard the ship had sacrificed his life for the sake of science and exploration; when they finally returned home, everything would be changed, and they would most likely spend the rest of their days at the moon base, avoiding social interaction with their home planet. Oddly enough, each of them was already somewhat equipped to handle this; Walton and Kingsley were both academics, isolated wilfully; and O'Donnell and Shonk were military men, used to being uprooted and shipped around like industrial goods.

When they were all gathered, O'Donnell turned to Walton and said, "Professor, we're under your lead now. The Lieutenant and I will have the guns, but we will follow your orders. If things become hairy out there, I'll resume command; otherwise, you're in charge."

Walton nodded. The guns were a necessity, but they still made him nervous. He'd learned to shoot—it had been part of his training—but he didn't enjoy it.

"All right," he said. "I don't have to tell you that I have no idea what's out there. The party on the Second Moon sent us some images, and while everything looked similar to

life forms back on Earth, appearances may be deceiving. Odds are, if it has wings and feathers and flies, it's a bird; evolution follows certain tracks. But be careful." He glanced specifically at the officers. "That doesn't mean you should keep your fingers on your triggers at all times. Probably, whatever's out there will ignore us. It's like walking into the heart of the Amazonian jungle; the creatures there don't know what humans are, and as such are weary of us, or couldn't care less. It'll be dangerous out there, but only if we take chances and let it be so."

Stepping on the Moon's surface was an extraordinary sensation—entirely psychological, of course, but all four of them felt it. None of them had set foot on an unexplored region before; in fact, none of them had been further than Earth's moon. This was what Walton had dreamt about as a boy, and had spent the past years training for. It was the realization of his career, his life, and it was just as exquisite as he had imagined it to be.

Yet, he was expertly trained, and only

Stepping on the Moon's surface was an extraordinary sensation—entirely psychological, of course, but all four of them felt it.

O'Donnell gave him a brief nod. "Exactly, Professor. The tanks hold ninety minutes of air; I'm guessing we plan on seventy minutes of reconnoitring, keeping close together and near the ship. We're in the middle of the clearing; perhaps we shouldn't even go into the forest today."

"We'll see," Walton said, already knowing that he would go into the forest. He even had a pretence already established: they needed to know if there were any dangers nearby.

The others began putting on their suits, hooking up the tanks and testing the fabric for holes. When they were all dressed and ready, Shonk pressurized the chamber, and a couple minutes later, the door opened. A ramp descended to the alien soil, and Walton walked down it slowly, adjusting himself to the slightly lighter gravity. At the bottom of the ramp, he hesitated, glancing up at the blue sky, the sun abnormally large. He looked at the forest, perhaps half a mile opposite. He looked at the grass, waist-high.

let the joy overcome him for a moment; then he pushed it aside and said, "Let's see what's on the other side of the ship."

As it turned out, there was exactly the same—more empty field, more trees distant. The field wasn't exactly circular—more oblong, with one end sort of squared—but they were in the centre. Walton led them toward the nose of the ship; then he pointed towards the forest and said, "Let's work ourselves that way. It might help to have a direction."

O'Donnell nodded in agreement, but behind the mask, his eyes were narrowed. He knew what Walton was after; he wasn't going to stop the professor, that was clear enough, but he was certainly questioning the wisdom of it. The four of them had come to respect each other's talents and judgment; they were all professionals in their respective areas, they all knew what they were doing. They didn't always agree with each other, but they followed the expert's advice. Walton supposed that, at the moment, he was the expert, though he certainly didn't feel like one.

...it was just as thrilling as if he'd come across a Tyrannosaurus Rex.

As they walked, Walton studied the grass. He ran his hand over it; he couldn't feel anything through the suit, but the grass was pliable, much like Earth grass, and of a similar dull-yellow colour. Walton wasn't an astrobotanist (in fact, to his knowledge, there weren't any; a gross oversight, to be certain, but nobody seemed to care much about plants), but he could tell that the grass just wasn't right. It may not even be grass, he told himself; he was attributing familiar qualities to an alien species. Still, there was a gentle wind, and the grass was swaying with it, much like on the African savannah. The grass was different from Earth's—too heavy, the edges of the blades too serrated and irregular—but it was still, in his eye, grass. Walton decided he would have to study up on botany; there was far more to learn here than he'd ever imagined.

Walton was so caught up in watching the grass, in determining if it was grass, that he wasn't the first to spot the animals. That was Shonk. And even then, it didn't come with the surprise and delight that one would expect; instead, Shonk spoke in a calm voice, as though he were walking down a country lane back on Earth.

"Deer."

The group kept on walking. And then Walton stopped and turned to the Lieutenant. "Excuse me?"

Shonk pointed to their left. "Deer." Recognition slowly crept over his face. "Oh."

Walton turned. There were five of them, some looking directly at the men, some watching from the corner of their eyes. They

seemed nervous, restless. They were the size and shape of a white-tailed deer; their snouts were slightly longer and broader, and their bodies had a bit more bulk. Much below their backs, Walton couldn't see; partly because the grass was so high, and partly because the deer—animals—were almost the same colour as the foliage. Their fur—and it was fur, judging by the way the light played off it—was coloured subtly, seeming to almost shift as the grass drifted in the wind. When a couple of the creatures bobbed their heads down, they became completely invisible.

"My God," Kingsley said. He put a hand on Walton's shoulder. "Is this your first, Professor?"

Walton nodded. He couldn't speak because he was smiling too wide. It was his first extraterrestrial life. Once upon a time, he would have been bored at the thought of his first alien sighting being some sort of deer; but here he was, and it was just as thrilling as if he'd come across a Tyrannosaurus Rex. They were real; they were moving and breathing and, judging by the huffing noises the wind carried to them, were even communicating with each other.

"There's more," O'Donnell said. He nodded back towards the ship.

Another group of deer had appeared, four of them it looked like. One of them was sniffing the ship; the rest were examining the grass around the ship, too nervous to approach closer.

O'Donnell tightened his grip on his rifle; it had been pointed at the ground, but was now aimed in the ship's general direction.

Kingsley noticed and said, "Captain, they're just deer."

"Do we know that?" O'Donnell's tone was sharp; then he turned to Walton and said, his voice softening, "Do we?"

Walton swallowed. "No," he said. "I suppose we don't. But...they appear to be so similar to our Earth deer...and, judging by the coloration of their fur, there is clearly some sort of evolutionary process at play here. If it works the same way as evolution on Earth—and I can't think why it wouldn't—then, yes, most likely they're harmless herbivores. Our Earth deer got to be the way they are for a reason, after all."

Shonk was training his gun on the first group they'd spotted. He said, "These...these Moon deer might not be like Earth deer, though."

"A deer is a deer for many reasons," Walton assured him. "First and foremost is the fact that it is an herbivorous ungulate."

"Excuse me?"

"A hoofed plant-eater. There are no carnivorous ungulates."

"That's a good point, Professor," O'Donnell said. "But we can't see their feet, can we?"

"Judging by the rest of them, I'd say it's a safe bet."

O'Donnell glanced between the two groups of animals. "They have us nearly surrounded. And out-numbered."

"And deer have been known to attack people," Kingsley said. But he was smiling.

O'Donnell noticed his tone. "This is a serious matter, Doctor. I think it would be wise for us to head back to the ship, until we know

more."

"We won't know more until we actively go out and learn it," Walton said. "We're safe enough from these animals, Captain." He gestured towards the trees, now just a couple hundred yards away. "It's what's in there that worries me."

Shonk took a few steps towards the first herd. "Maybe fire a few warning shots over their heads—"

His sentence was cut off with a scream. Twisting violently to the side, he fell into the grass.

O'Donnell was by the Lieutenant's side in an instant. Walton stepped forward to see what had happened. The Captain held up a hand and said, "Stop."

Walton stopped. He'd almost stepped into the same hole that Shonk had. The ground was uneven; some animal had been digging around. Shonk had twisted his ankle in some sort of alien gopher hole.

"Jesus," the Lieutenant said. "Damn, that hurts."

Kingsley knelt beside him. "It's not broken, I can tell you that. But I want it immobilized immediately. I'll go get some supplies from the ship."

"Doc—"

Kingsley cut O'Donnell off. "They're deer. I'll be fine." He picked up a rock. "If any of them get to close, I'll throw this."

He headed towards the ship. Walton, noticing that his window of opportunity was quickly waning, said, "I'm going to scout out the forest."

O'Donnell actually laughed. "Like hell you are, Professor."

"We need to know—"

"You said yourself, there might be something dangerous in there."

"Most carnivores are nocturnal."

"On Earth."

"There are a few simple rules for life," Walton said. "Prey is easier to catch in the dark; that's one of them." He picked up the rifle that Shonk had dropped. "I'll take this just in case. Okay?"

"Now wait—"

He had to push the idea out of his head as he entered the forest. Light was dimmer here; the forest wasn't thick, but the canopy was expansive enough that there were pools of shadows. Almost immediately, Walton regretted his decision; he even started to turn around and go back out into the field, but instead he forced himself forwards. It wasn't pride, and it wasn't bravery, but something much worse—curiosity.

These were definitely trees; he wrapped his knuckles against one, and though he couldn't feel the bark through the suit, it felt and sounded like wood. Actual timber. Who

Who would've thought that an alien system would support life so similar to that on Earth?

"I've been waiting my entire life. I won't go far; just inside. I'll make sure I can see the clearing."

It went against all protocol, but in order to stop the professor, O'Donnell would have to abandon Shonk. So he nodded and said, "Ten minutes. We're starting for the ship without you."

"Got it."

It took him another two or three minutes to reach the forest; he forced himself to watch the ground in front of him, and to stop paying attention to the grass. Once, he glanced towards the ship; Kingsley was boarding, the deer staying out of his way. They had no experience with humans; they didn't know what to make of him. Everything was as it should be; Walton was surprised at how similar things were to back on Earth. Perhaps he and Professor Philips could collaborate on a book about the life on the moons of Planet XV0117. Walton had always wanted to write a definitive textbook on something.

would've thought that an alien system would support life so similar to that on Earth? It supported a theory that Walton, in his younger days, had readily endorsed; after college, he'd given it up, tending to shy away from such scientific debate, which rarely led to anything productive, and generally wasted the time of brilliant minds.

The theory, called the Equal Evolution Principle (primarily for media purposes; the public loved alliteration), held that evolution, on any two planets with similar chemical and elemental makeup, would be essentially the same. The theory had come into existence about the time life was discovered on Planet XIV407, a couple years before Walton was born. True, the life was extinct; some natural disaster had wiped the entire planet clean, leaving behind nothing but fossilized remains centuries old. But life had existed there, and since there were skeletal remnants, it was suggested that the organisms had been, in some ways at least, similar to life on Earth—carbon-based life forms, if nothing else. EEP

had been created almost instantaneously; suddenly, professors and scholars the world over suggested that, since Planet XIV407's makeup was comparable—though far from identical—to Earth's, then the organisms that had lived there, animal, plant, and otherwise, had been likewise similar. The theory was based around the same principle that Walton had just advocated: that evolution followed a purpose, an end result: survival. If the planets' atmospheres and chemical makeup were similar, then surely life would have evolved along similar lines. As proof, EEPers (as they were called by their detractors) demonstrated how life on Earth's various continents had evolved along similar tracks. Sure, occasionally you had some isolated spot, such as Australia; but even there, life evolved in a predictable pattern, at least comparable to the rest of the planet.

Walton had realized, as he left school and entered the field, that such theories were more or less pointless; it wasn't up to the scientists doing the grunt work to determine how or why the organisms had gotten there. For people like Walton, all that mattered was that the organisms existed, and that it was his job to find out everything he could about them. Such theories were impractical. The fact that it even crossed his mind now was due to his complete amazement that he was actually there.

He moved further into the forest. Twigs crunched beneath his feet. He felt like he was back home, a boy in the West Virginian wilderness. Was there water here? Were there insects? He couldn't hear any buzzing; but then, maybe the insects here didn't buzz. He could hear faint calls, similar in tonal quality to birdsong; but it could just as easily be the breeze blowing through some sort of vegetable matter, some extraterrestrial form of wind in the willows. There were so many possibilities...Walton didn't know what was

possible. Perhaps, he had to admit, anything and everything. There was no end to what he may find.

He approached an apparently old and gnarled tree. Its trunk was knotted and bulging; some sort of sap was leaking from high up. Walton dipped his finger in it; the liquid was deep amber. He wanted to smell it, to lick it. Instead, he wiped his finger on the bark, until most of the sap was gone. Then he turned around and almost screamed.

He couldn't see the clearing. His mind had turned to theories, and in his blissful ponderings, he'd lost his bearings. Before panic overcame him entirely, he stopped himself. He was facing the way back now; he'd walked in a straight line, of that he was certain. He glanced around on the ground, found a large twig, broke one end of it, and laid the twig so that the broken end faced the way out. He took a step back, closed his eyes, and opened them again; the twig, large as it was, stuck out from the rest of the forest floor. His heart slowed; they hadn't wasted their time training him.

Still, this was perhaps a good time to head back. How long had it been? He glanced at the watch on his suit; however, since he had failed to notice what time he entered the forest, he couldn't tell how long he'd been in there. Not long; they'd spent perhaps half an hour in the clearing, before Shonk's accident, and Walton still had more than half of his air supply. That meant, all told, he'd been in the woods no more than fifteen minutes. Longer than he'd agreed to, but not too long; O'Donnell would be furious when he returned, but Walton had the feeling that the anger wouldn't last long. How could one be angry when surrounded by so much beauty?

As he began walking in the direction of the field, Walton noticed the sound of twigs breaking. At first, he thought it was merely his

own clumsy footsteps; he stopped, and the sound continued for a couple seconds. He whirled, raising the rifle, but there was nothing behind him.

There was something nearby, though; he could hear it breathing now, heavy and slow. The sound seemed to be coming from all around him. His instincts told him the creature was on his right; but when he looked, he saw nothing, and figured the sound could easily reverberate through the trees, bouncing around until its direction of origin was all but impossible to determine.

And then he heard the twigs cracking again, this time from behind him. He spun, and came face-to-face with a lion.

At least, that's what it most closely resembled: something feline, large and sleek, with a flat head and long whiskers. Its mouth was perhaps a bit wider than a normal lion's, and its colouring was certainly darker—a mottled green. The fur was a bit too long, the body narrower, and its paws were almost too thin; they looked almost like small shovels, broad and slightly rounded. The cat was watching him, its body rigid now that he was staring at it. Its mouth opened, a black tongue coming out to lick its lips or taste the air.

Walton took a step back, lifting the gun. He was loath to shoot anything, yet he could do it if the creature attacked him.

"Easy, now," he said. He spoke as one would to an angry dog. "Easy now. You go your way and I'll go mine."

The cat was clearly disturbed by his voice; it, too, backed up a step, and then turned so that its side was to him. It slowly began walking to his left, and he turned to follow it. His first thought was that it was circling, trying to find an appropriate area to pounce from. As such, he slipped his finger



And then he heard the twigs cracking again, this time from behind him. He spun, and came face-to-face with a lion.

into the trigger-guard, ready to fire at a moment's notice.

But the cat didn't pounce. Instead, it reached the gnarled tree. It sniffed the spot where he'd touched the trunk, and then licked up the sap that was leaking out. The cat turned to look at him again; its eyes—a crystal blue, Walton noticed, with black dots for pupils—seemed to size him up. Sticking its tongue out again—definitely not licking its lips now, Walton noticed—the cat turned away from him and began pawing at the base of the tree, digging furiously between the roots. Walton watched, jaw agape, rifle slowly lowering. Did the cat have something buried there? Was it not attacking him because it had already killed?

No. He could see that as soon as the cat stepped away. In its jaws was something brown and dirty. Walton wasn't sure immediately what it was, but he knew it was some kind of tuber. A potato. The cat had

The cat had been a vegetarian; that didn't mean the exact opposite was true, did it?

turned down a meal of human flesh for a potato.

It bit the thing in half, swallowed the first part, then the second. Eying Walton again, it resumed digging.

By now, the rifle was pointed straight at the ground. Could it be that the cat, being entirely unfamiliar with humans, wasn't aware that Walton was vulnerable? It was possible, of course; cats were omnivorous, and even wild lions were known to eat vegetation if their normal prey was not available. But still...to pass up something clearly alive and so much smaller...

The cat's paws. They weren't really paws, Walton realized; not in the sense that he was familiar with, at least. They looked like shovels because that's what they were for—digging. The way the cat tore into the soil, expertly avoiding the roots, so quickly digging out tubers buried deep down...the cat was designed to eat rooted vegetables. It was herbivorous, or at least primarily so. The exact opposite of an Earth cat.

Walton gasped at the realization. He turned and ran; no more careful treading, no more observing every detail of his surroundings. He sprinted. It was difficult; the gravity was slightly less than that of Earth's, just enough to foil him, to make him collide with the occasional tree. Twice he tripped over roots. But he kept running, on the verge of shouting, until he reached the clearing.

The grass was too high for him to see anything. No deer, unless they were down below the grass. And no people, either. There was still the possibility that they'd made it back

to the ship; there was the possibility that he was wrong. In fact, yes, it was blind panic that had overtaken him. The cat had been a vegetarian; that didn't mean the exact opposite was true, did it? That didn't mean that the deer were...

His mistake had been understandable; there was at least that much to console himself with. Deer were ungulates; and it was true that most ungulates were herbivores. But pigs and hippopotami were also hoofed, and both species were known to feed on other animals. Whales, too, were closely related to the ungulates; killer whales in particular were aptly-named. There were plenty of ungulates that feasted on flesh.

His path through the clearing was still there; some of the grass had sprung back up, but not all of it. He could follow his trail easily enough. It led him back to the spot where Shonk had fallen. The first thing Walton saw was the blood; there was a lot of it. The second thing he saw was that there wasn't much left of either the Captain or the Lieutenant. Just enough to recognize the two men for who they had been.

Shonk had been injured, and O'Donnell had been concerned with the injury; they hadn't seen it coming. Classic pack hunting; separate the group, go straight for the injured. The men hadn't even stood a chance.

And the doctor? Walton glanced towards the ship. Yes—there was blood on the ramp. He couldn't tell exactly how much from this angle, but it looked like a sizable amount. That didn't mean Kingsley was dead, but the Doctor was certainly injured. And there could be deer in the ship by now.

Walton forced himself not to panic. Two, maybe three men were dead. He couldn't pilot the ship, but the autopilot could take off. He had to get to the Second Moon. Unless—had the same thing happened there? Six months without communication was a long time; not unforeseeable, but still...

Oh God. Evolution so similar and yet so wildly opposite. The concept was utterly terrifying; Walton felt his flesh go cold, as though a shadow had passed across the sun. In his ears he could hear a distant roaring, like waves against the surf, the sound of his heart beating furiously, trying to cope with his discovery, with the fact that things were so horrible and unbelievably wrong here...



No. It was something else. Not a roar; a moan, wet and thick, coming from almost immediately behind him. He steeled himself: Please, God, let it be a lion. Let it be a crocodile, a bear, anything but a deer!

He turned slowly. It wasn't a deer. Instead, Walton found himself staring up into the dead, flat eyes of a two-thousand-pound buffalo. The creature's mouth was open, and its fangs glistened in the sunlight.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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xkcd

by Randall Munroe

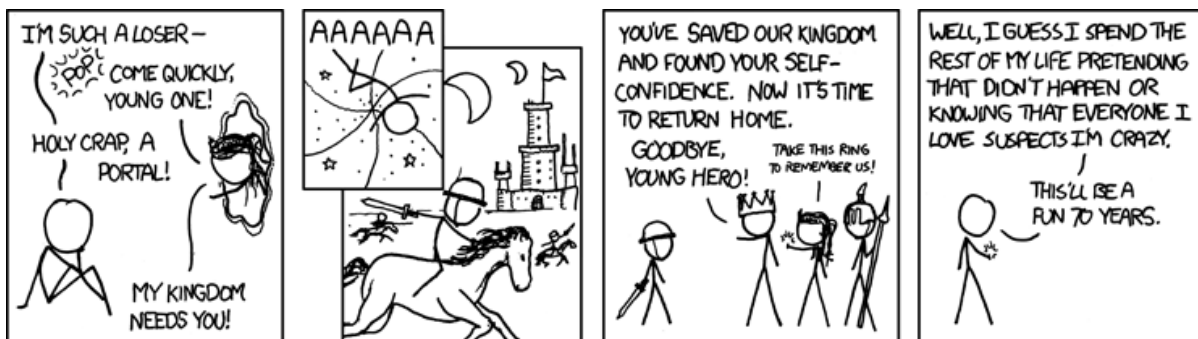


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SURPRISE ATTACK

by Mike Wilson

Ray had had enough. He was thick into another argument with Marge.

She just couldn't handle the fact that he liked to have a few beers after work. It was Friday night, and he wanted to relax. He was in the kitchen, leaning into the fridge, grabbing a beer, when she started in.

"We have repairs that need done around the place. And you promised Peter you would take him to the Science Centre," she said, standing there glaring inches from his shoulder. Although she was several inches shorter than Ray, you wouldn't know it by her cutting tone.

"Margery, the Science Centre is not open on Friday nights." He slammed the fridge door shut, and headed back to the living room, with her right on his heels.

"Yes they are. The Imax runs until Midnight. Maybe if you would call and check for a change."

"What is wrong with Saturday?"

"Saturday is one of my days off, and you promised me we would go to Lowe's, or did you forget that, too?" They ended up in the living room, near Ray's recliner, which he so badly wanted to relax in.

They traded more verbal jabs. He finally got exasperated, threw up his hands, and



said, "I'm going out."

"If you get shit-faced, I'm not letting you back in this house," Marge yelled at his back.

"I'm just going for a drive. Leave me alone, woman," he yelled. Ray stormed out the front door, slamming it shut behind him. Then he got in his Chevy pickup, sitting in the driveway, and took off. His cellphone sat back on the end table by the recliner, forgotten. Marge walked around in extreme agitation. Having nothing else to take out her anger on, she scooped up the cellphone and threw it against the wall.

Ray was fuming, partly because he knew Marge was right. He did need to do more with Peter, their intelligent 11-year old son. But work was so demanding lately, with all the new orders they had, his nerves felt like taut wires humming. Who could blame a guy for wanting to relax? Although it did not do his gut any good, he thought, looking down at his

middle-aged paunch. And that triggered an idea.

Ray decided to head to Water Works Park and do some walking. He still had about an hour of daylight left. And his camera was sitting on the front seat of the pickup. He hoped it still had enough battery power to take a few photographs. Suddenly, he remembered that he left his cell back home. Oh well, no harm, he decided. He would only be gone a short while. He soon forgot about it, caught up in his idea. When he returned, he could share the pictures with Petey - maybe suggest a future expedition to the park, just the two of them. Marge would calm down, soon enough. Buoyed by this line of thought, he turned on the radio and hummed.

The drive from his South-side neighbourhood to the huge city park did not take long. He drove into the main entrance, and followed the winding road all the way back, at least a mile. Back to a large expanse of woods bordering a creek. He finally parked the Chevy along the side of the gravel road, and then got out and gathered his things. One camera - check. The jacket he had grabbed - check. It was chilly, but he hoped that a brisk walk would warm him up.

He stopped to relieve his beer-filled bladder. Then he marched on into the wooded area down a narrow path, still a bit unsteady from the alcohol.

"Ahhh - fresh air - some walking, should be what the doctor ordered," he said aloud. He listened, and heard nothing more than an occasional crackling. The sun was quickly setting, and his feet crunched old snow and ice. He slowed, and got his camera out, and powered up. He looked around, and then up: there he saw a bunch of large birds, some perched in the trees, a few circling in the air.

They were Eagles.

He quickly snapped a few photos, then realized he should zoom in, and took some more. Some of them let out a series of loud chirpings, and one made a piercing cry. He was captivated by the scene.

Ray continued ambling down the trail, going deeper into the woods. He was thrilled, and couldn't wait to tell his son about this. While he looked to and fro for ideal camera angles, his feet managed to find purchase down the slippery trail. Until one foot caught on a tree limb that lay across the trail at an angle. There were a few smaller limbs just ahead.

Ray stumbled on the first limb, stuck his left foot in between two more ahead, and caught the other foot on another small branch. He finally tumbled, unable to regain his balance. His left foot got twisted at an odd angle as his 220 pound body went down, putting an incredible strain on the ankle. A bone snapped inside his foot, making him cry out even before he hit the ground. He fell hard, breaking some smaller branches as he landed on them.

He lay on the cold, snowy ground, and caught his breath. 'Okay, Ray, just try and raise up, and see how bad it is,' he thought.

He did so, raising himself to a sitting position. He felt several sharp pains from his foot, making him dizzy. He sat and breathed, trying to clear his head. The spots finally cleared from his vision. It was getting to be almost dark. He could see his left leg, and the foot, still partially wedged in the crook of two limbs. 'Damn tree anyway, why didn't they clear these trails?' he said to himself.

Very carefully, he inched himself up closer, and raised his leg. More pains coruscated from his foot, but he steeled himself against them. He managed to free the ankle from the branched crook, and then lay

They did not see a fearless human being, lethal and dangerous. No, this night they saw wounded prey.

the foot on top of the tree limbs. He felt another pain, this time from his hand. Examining it, he saw red. 'Must have cut it on something,' he thought, still feeling woozy.

"Okay, I have to deal with this somehow," said Ray to all of the uncaring trees and high-perched birds. He spied a nearby tree, and scooted himself over to it crab-style. He grabbed the trunk with his good hand, and raised himself up on one leg. If he didn't move the ankle too much, it shot pain a lot less. Not good, but tolerable.

He tried to limp, and immediately regretted it. He had involuntarily let go of the tree, trying to put a little weight on the foot. Of course, it collapsed and down he went. He let out a stream of curses.

After righting himself, he sat a moment. He realized the only way he was going to get out of these woods was to crawl out. Even though it was dark, his eyes were acclimating some. He could make out the dim outline of the trail ahead. If he could crawl back that way, he should be able to reach his truck.

Meanwhile, the eagles perched high above him were watching. They did not see a fearless human being, lethal and dangerous. No, this night they saw wounded prey. A large animal, to be sure. Lots of meat - for the many, many eagles that had depleted all of the fish in a nearby river in any case. One of the largest eagles started it off, by making a careful swoop just over the prey. Not much response was seen. Two more followed, and the three landed a few feet away from Ray. He saw them, and yelled, "Get away, you dumb birds."

They fluttered a bit, and backed off. Ray let his gaze fall on them, trying to take in their beauty even now. 'Why are they so close now? Surely they aren't...'

Just then, a few more eagles swooped down from the trees. Ray saw this, and felt the beginning pangs of fear. Why were they doing this? The improbability of these noble birds actually attacking him faded in the face of the reality that confronted him now.

Ray grabbed some snow, and tossed it at them. They fluttered their wings a bit, then stilled. He tried yelling at them again, with the same result.

Ray was cold, and tired, and his stomach was growling - dinner would be sitting on the stove back home right about now. He began to crawl again, trying to get back down the trail. His foot was dragging, and he grunted in pain. His hand left streaks of blood on nearby branches. The pungent smells drew still more birds. One swooped down, and tried to grab one of his shoulders. He cried out.

He stopped and scrabbled around for a stick or branch to fight them with. He finally found a short, wet stick. He yelled, swinging it, and moved towards some of the birds on the ground. They stepped back, and a few took off then. "Yeah, take that you bitches. Come and get it. You're messing with a human being, now."

But unbeknownst to Ray, the birds that had taken off simply landed behind him. He now had more than twenty eagles, many voraciously hungry, nearly surrounding him. He looked around wildly, and spied a half-buried brush copse about twenty feet

away. If he could make it to that, he could gain the shelter of the brush, and maybe safety.

He veered off the trail, and crawled that way, through snow and twigs. Every so often, he would yell, and throw some snow or twigs at the birds. They backed away a little, but mostly blinked at him, and waited. A couple took tentative swoops at him, but none landed talons - yet.

Ray made the bushy area, and found what he was seeking: a space underneath a thicket of small branches; a place to rest and make a stand against some very strangely-behaving eagles. He burrowed himself into the thicket, and tried to pull the branches shut. His ankle was throbbing mercilessly, his hand hurt, and he was feeling a creeping numbness. But he got safely ensconced in the thicket. Some of the eagles took off; only a few tried to walk along the ground after him.

at some snow, and threw it; they jumped back a short distance. Ray tried to see out of his tiny shelter:

There was nothing but feathers! A mass of eagles. He was trapped, and there was no way out.

"Ohmigod," he moaned, "I don't want to die out here. Help! Help - can anyone hear me?"

There was a couple cars of teenagers driving down the park road a half-mile away. But their Ipod was cranking out the latest rage from eight car speakers. Ray's muffled calls went unheard.

After yelling some, Ray noticed the eagles had finally backed off several feet. His next idea was to start a fire. Fire was a universal deterrent. Ray remembered an old scene from a wilderness show, of settlers

There was nothing but feathers! A mass of eagles. He was trapped, and there was no way out.

"Good deal. Fucking birds, get the Fuck away from me," he muttered. Ray figured he would shelter there, and already felt himself warming with the insulation provided by the thicket. He rested, catching his breath. His nearly exhausted body let him feel fatigue, and before he knew what was happening, Ray began dozing. He was transported somewhere else, mowing his lawn, having a barbeque. The burgers needed turning, and he was looking for a spatula. Then he felt a series of sharp pains. He quickly came to.

He was back in the thicket, and several small shapes were biting, no, pecking him. He tried to yell, and managed to croak out some sounds. The smaller eagles stopped trying to peck at him through the branches. He grabbed

fighting off wolves with a burning torch. But of course, Ray didn't smoke, nor did he carry matches or a lighter. He looked around wildly. His only recourse was to try something he had not tried since he was in the fifth grade, in Cub Scouts.

Ray managed to find a few sticks and leaves under the layer of snow, just outside his shelter. At one point, an eagle pecked his searching hand, making him yell, and throw the sticks he had found at the pesky bird. He recovered his composure, and grabbed up the materials, pulling them back into his enclosure. He had to dry off the leaves to get them burnable. So he undid his coat, overshirt, and shirt. Then he put several leaves and two small sticks against his skin, making him

shiver.

Then he gathered the rest of the material, and placed it up against one side of his shelter. He would have to burn his refuge to get away - there would be only one chance to do this. Then he would crawl as fast as he could back to the road, his truck, and safety. He estimated that he only had a few hundred yards at most to get back to his vehicle - this was inside the city after all!

The eagles walked around and chattered impatiently, and Ray tried to wait as long as he could. He finally retrieved the two sticks, and three dried oak leaves. He carefully folded the leaves over and set them under some other materials. Then, he lay one stick flat, and placed the other one edge-on against it. He began spinning the stick back and forth. An eagle reached it's beak in and pecked his side, hard. He cried out, and dropped the sticks.

"Damn damn damn," he roared in frustration. He threw some snow at it, and the aggressive bird finally backed away. Ray grabbed around, and located the stick, now a bit wet from snow. He repositioned it, and tried again. Spin back and forth, spin back and forth. A trickle of smoke. Spin, spin, and blow. Spine, spin, and blow. More smoke. Finally, he coaxed a flame from the prone stick. He grabbed a leaf, and put its edge against the flame. The flame went out, the leaf smoked, and that was it. The eagles arched their heads and peered, unsure of this new development. They kept their distance.

He tried again, at a different spot on the stick. spin, spin, spin. It caught in a small flame, and this time, Ray picked up the stick and angled it, letting the flame grow larger as it engulfed the whole stick. Then, he set it against the leaves and twigs. The leaves caught in a satisfying flare, and the twigs crackled. Ray fed the whole stick into the

Ignoring the stabbing pains in his ankle, Ray made the trail, and started crawling down it as fast as he could. Then, he realized there were stabbing pains coming from not one, but both of his legs.

flame, and it kept on burning. He found a few more small sticks, and fed the fire. Now it was rising a bit, beginning to lick at the branches forming one side of his shelter. The pungent smell of burning greenery impacted Ray's nostrils. This was it - do or die.

Ray crawled out of his enclosure as fast as he could manage. Then he stopped to look around, and spied the faint outline of the trail about twenty feet ahead. He headed that way. The eagles had moved aside, some taking off to escape the flames.

Ignoring the stabbing pains in his ankle, Ray made the trail, and started crawling down it as fast as he could. Then, he realized there were stabbing pains coming from not one, but both of his legs. He paused, to look back. Three large eagles stopped pecking at his legs, and went for his torso.

"What the hell!" he shrieked. Ray began flailing his arms, trying to yell and frighten them off. Two backed off, but the other one flew up and raked his face with its talons, then landed on his opposite side. He put a hand to his face and moaned.

Several smaller eagles landed, and began working on his legs, smelling the fresh



The eagles were finished tasting, they began to eat him in earnest.

red liquid oozing from a number of wounds. Ray lurched around and tried to bat them away. The larger eagle began pecking at his exposed neck, wounding it.

When Ray tried to turn and fend that one off, several more eagles went for his legs. A few began nipping his ears. Another one raked his back, trying to get a grip on him. Ray tried to scream, flailing his arms, but not much came out. The eagles were finished tasting, they began to eat him in earnest. For they had fished the nearby streams to depletion, and many were close to starving. Ray lived for

several more agonizing moments, before finally sinking into unconsciousness, and death. A mass of hungry eagles devoured his flesh, down to the bones.

The next morning, a hiker was picking his way through the snowy wooded path, and came across Ray's remains. Horrified, he looked around, wondering what could have taken a person like this. But he saw only calm, peaceful woods, punctuated by birdsong. And then he heard the beat of heavy wings, and looked up. 'Hey, Eagles!' he thought.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mike Wilson has been writing poetry and short fiction for a decade. Formally trained in the IT field, he resides and writes in Des Moines, Iowa, USA. Publishing credits include *Tales of the Talisman*, *Lyrical Iowa* and *Blinking Cursor Anthology*. Mike has two collections of fiction for sale on Amazon.com, "*Future Property*" and "*Mirror Worlds*". His blog can be read at <http://radical-readings.blogspot.com>

The Lutwyche Carnivore

by Cameron Trost

Legend has it that the werewolf only hunts when the moon is full.

That gloriously powerful satellite, capable of influencing the human mind from its distant throne in space, is claimed to be the trigger that sends the lycanthrope into a frenzied state. However, after looking into the dark and moonless sky that covered the city of Brisbane that Halloween, and then observing the streets below swarming with pint-sized monsters of all kinds, it could only be concluded that legend had it all wrong.

On any other day, Brook Street was just a normal thoroughfare in the quiet and unassuming suburb of Lutwyche. But on that evening when all manner of beings from the dark realms that exist in parallel with our own were allowed to cross the frontier, it was a disturbing sight to behold. Disturbing, that is, to those of a superstitious nature. For everyone else, it was rather an amusing one. Most of the children's costumes were pathetic mismatches of older siblings' worn out clothes, ghostly white bedspreads with holes cut out for the eyes, gory tomato sauce wounds, and cheap Crazy Clark's monster masks strapped on with elastic. There were pirates with cardboard cutlasses that wouldn't have even been able to slice through warm butter – let alone flesh and bone, as well as puny imps



with plastic pitchforks and mummies with toilet paper bandages.

But the Wolfman's costume was altogether different. Its wearer was much taller than those of the other costumes, presumably a teenager who didn't realise that he was getting a little too old for Halloween. It was terrifying in its life-like detail. From head to foot, it was a beast of rippling muscles beneath an outer layer of bristling grey fur. Its head was so much like that of a real wolf that anybody could have been forgiven for wondering if it had been hacked off a wolf's carcass, as ridiculous and grotesque as the idea seemed. Its amber eyes glistened like hot coals as the head moved from side to side, catching the glow of the streetlights that stood here and there along the length of Brook Street. It was hungry – there was no doubt about that. It seemed to be hunting – for something other than a pawful of sweets or biscuits. It even walked like a werewolf, its canine limbs bending backwards and bringing

its hind paws up with a snap, like a mousetrap. Its paws were thin but muscular and made it seem impossible that a human's feet could have been touching the ground at all.

A miniature vampire overtook the Wolfman, running eagerly towards Mr and Mrs Simonovic's house, knowing full well that the childless couple always had a generous stash of goodies put aside for Halloween. As it ran past, the little bloodsucker looked up at the furry beast and noticed drops of drool falling to the ground from the creature's muzzle. It released a little shriek of shameful fear and quickened its pace, dashing up to the veranda door of the Simonovic's house with its black cape trailing in the air behind it.

The Wolfman howled with delight, rejoicing in its ability to provoke terror, and every little monster in the street froze at hearing the dreadful sound. It wasn't like a human voice

dangerous stunts on his skateboard, watched the howling Wolfman nervously from behind his demon mask.

Many parents too were watching the scene from the doorways of their houses or the gateways of their front yards. They wondered who the Wolfman was. He was certainly too tall to be one of the children. Maybe he was an older sibling or even a father who had decided to get in on the Halloween action and take advantage of the occasion to enjoy some childlike fun for a change.

Dogs and cats had somehow picked up on the humans' sense of confusion and discomfort too. Grandma Jenkins' grey kitten peered at the giant beast from behind her rose bushes where it figured in its naive little feline mind that it was safe. However, Grandma Jenkins' was inside watching A Current Affair,

The howl sent shivers scurrying through the bodies of everybody on Brook Street.

imitating the savage call of the wild. It sounded like a real wolf's howl, just like the kind that could be heard on SBS wildlife documentaries, except that this was in the flesh. The howl sent shivers scurrying through the bodies of everybody on Brook Street.

The three Anderson witches stopped their girlish giggling and skipping and stared at the fearsome creature. Peter Harrison, dressed up as Harry Potter, stopped comparing his sugary bounty with his best friend, Kevin Trimble, whose confused eyes were now staring at the Wolfman through the holes in his phantom-white bed sheet. Even Grant Kerr, who was usually the bravest of the children in Brook Street and enjoyed entertaining the others by performing

she had no time for silly foreign traditions. The Dagostino family's two Jack Russell terriers, that usually never stopped barking, had become silent statues and the evil-looking American Pit Bull that belonged to the bogan who lived in the run-down house at number 28 observed the scene from behind a shoddy wire fence. None of the children dared go anywhere near that house. Even the Campbell's old Labrador, usually curled up under the house, had limped down to the fence to inspect the mysterious Wolfman from the relative safety of its own property. It was as though the dogs could sense, perhaps smell, that this beast was their superior in the cruel system that ruled the animal kingdom.

The Wolfman stopped howling and looked at the dark streetscape that surrounded it. Bewilderment and fear filled Brook Street with such intensity that leaves rustled and streetlights buzzed with these primeval sensations. The carnivore grinned with satisfaction and everybody was petrified to discover that its canine muzzle could actually move. The sinister snout sent a spray of drool gliding to the ground and the amber eyes flickered hungrily. Its grin then widened even further and, instead of seeing a human face inside the beast's mouth, there was only a long red tongue and a forest of vicious fangs.

The tiny ghosts, witches, demons and magicians all turned and ran away as fast as they could. Parents shouted at them to calm down but the children weren't listening. They were in the grip of raw terror.

Those who were lucky enough to be just outside their homes ran back to where mum and dad were waiting for them, innocently confident that even a werewolf could not harm them if they were locked in their parents' loving embrace. Others crawled under parked cars like frightened cats. A few ran all the way along Brook Street, eager to get as far away from the Wolfman as possible.

The dogs of Brook Street began barking and growling aggressively and the Pit Bull almost succeeded in jumping the low wire fence. Then, just when the parents were expecting the Wolfman to take his carnivorous head off and to have a hearty chuckle at all the chaos his amazing costume and creepy behaviour had caused, something completely unexpected happened.

The beast sprang forward with unearthly speed and chased down one of the children. Some of the onlookers, such as the local electrician and under-twelves rugby league coach, George Fuller, cheered the Wolfman

on. Others, like the Simonovic couple, shouted at the beast, urging it to ignore its instincts and stop the hunt. The Wolfman caught up with Harry Swinburne from number 19 and brought the skeleton costumed boy crashing to the ground. George Fuller cheered loudly, it was a great tackle. However, his cheering soon stopped as screams of pure horror filled the already troubled air. Anybody who had thought that skeletons couldn't bleed was shown the error of his assumption as the Wolfman's fangs sank into Harry's neck and sent a splash of crimson blood spurting into the air and onto the bitumen of Brook Street. Its claws slashed, shining dirty white and then turning a gut-wrenching crimson as the skeleton was disembowelled right there on the street.

Mrs Simonovic fainted where she stood on her veranda. Her husband, who had survived years of horror in a Nazi prisoner of war camp, raised his fists and prepared himself mentally to attack the creature – but then he came to his senses and realised that he was just a weak old sheep in comparison with this magnificent specimen of hunting prowess.

George Fuller wasn't so sensible. He was shocked and ashamed that just a few seconds ago he had been encouraging what he had thought was a ripping good practical joke.

He slammed his garden gate open and sprinted towards the Wolfman, ready to tackle it to the ground. His wife screamed at him to come back before covering her eyes, hoping it was all just a nightmare and that in a moment she would wake up to find a new day dawning.

Her husband would not be harmed though, he wasn't fit enough to keep up with the Wolfman as it bounded along Brook Street, shaking great drops of blood from its

monstrous maws. George's pace soon slowed to a desperate stagger.

The meat-eater's next victim was Brock Jeffries, one of Harry's best mates. Brock had made two stupid mistakes. He had decided to hide behind a tree trunk, not the safest place to seek sanctuary and, worse than that, he was dressed as a werewolf hunter. He wore a broad-brimmed black hat and long overcoat and carried a silver revolver – but there were no silver bullets in it. Brock screamed like a little girl as the Wolfman slashed at him with its left paw. He turned to run but the beast growled chillingly as it sank its fangs into the boy's neck. He fell to the ground and the Wolfman tore at him, pulling chunks of flesh from the boy's carcass.

The inhabitants of Brook Street didn't know what to do. Mr Dagostino had already called the police and, through the screams of petrified children and the wails of distraught adults, sirens could be heard as a patrol car and ambulance came speeding along Lutwyche Road. Hopefully, the officers had a supply of silver bullets and the paramedics were familiar with remedies of gypsy folklore.

The parents of the two boys who lay motionless on the street were not yet aware of their soul-destroying loss. The boys had lived a few streets away and so news of their sudden and unimaginable demise had not yet reached home.

After the initial shock of witnessing an unholy feast that defied comprehension, many of the men of Brook Street had gathered together and armed themselves with whatever they could. George Fuller, having caught his breath, rushed to his garden shed and picked his sturdiest hoe for the job. Despite what he had seen, he refused to believe that werewolves could really exist, especially in the middle of suburban Brisbane. As far as he was

concerned, there was a homicidal maniac on the loose and there was no way the madman would be able to withstand a few well-aimed blows to the upper neck with a hoe. The only problem was that the Wolfman was by now far from Brook Street. Mr Dagostino and his sons joined George in the hunt for the hunter. They got into their cars and sped off along the length of the street, only narrowly missing bewildered children in the process.

However, the hunt was a short one. The police got to the Wolfman before the lynch mob could. The mighty beast had run out of energy, or perhaps found it difficult to sprint fast enough to escape on a full stomach. Two police cars pulled up in front of the Wolfman at the corner of Bess and Brook Streets and got out of their patrols cars. The Wolfman froze in its tracks, its amber eyes studying the officers as though sizing them up. Its bloodied claws swung uselessly at its sides and its maws were closed, but its presence was still absolutely terrifying. It didn't seem as though it had given up just yet. It was quite possibly just catching its breath.

'Stop right there!' The sergeant ordered. His right hand edged ominously towards his Taser holster, even though he wasn't sure that the Taser's prongs could penetrate the fabric of the costume.

The beast didn't move.

'Take the costume off!'

The Wolfman didn't need to be told twice. He placed his ruddy paws on his head, twisted it, and lifted it off to expose the pimple covered face of a teenage boy.

'I'm sorry, officer,' he said with a breaking voice. The adolescent looked like he was about to burst out in tears. 'It was just supposed to be a joke.'

'A joke? You think taking a child's life is a joke?'

The teenager smiled nervously. 'You don't understand. They're my friends. We set this up as a Halloween stunt. It was supposed to be the scariest Halloween ever... but we didn't expect people to call the police.'

The sergeant and a constable helped the teenager get out of his costume. Once he was down to his underwear they cuffed him.

'I'm afraid that we are going to have to arrest you on suspicion of murder.'

'What do you mean? They're not dead. It was just an act!'

'Harry and Brock are fine. Officers are speaking to them right now. But what's the story with little Susie Anderson? What was it, you scheming little bastard? Revenge... jealousy... fear? Did you touch her where you shouldn't have and then get scared she would tell on you, son?'

'Who on Earth is Susie Anderson?'

The policemen helped the teenager into the back seat of a patrol car. Despite the panic he felt, he didn't offer any resistance. It was clear that his moment of exhilarating power was over. He knew that his costume was frighteningly accurate in its detail and that Harry and Brock were exceptional young actors, but he couldn't have imagined people would actually take the stunt for real. Nobody living in Australia in the twenty-first century could be so superstitious as to seriously believe in the existence of werewolves. That aside, what worried him most was this business with Susie – he asked again, 'Who's Susie? I don't know any Susie!'

'That's it - you just stick to your story! Once we're back at the station we'll contact

your parents and you can arrange for a lawyer with them. You're under eighteen, I take it.'

'I – just turned eighteen a month ago.'

The sergeant shook his head and tutted mockingly. 'What a shame!'

Meanwhile, back on Brook Street, Mr and Mrs Anderson were each holding one of their remaining little witches tight in their arms as a female police officer lead them back inside their house. Mrs Anderson was crying so profusely that she could barely see where she was going whereas her husband, a man who was generally gentle and soft spoken, was so furious it looked as though he too might transform into a werewolf.



The police cordoned off the entire street and told its inhabitants to stay within the confines of their property so that investigators could do their work without interference and so that their statements could be taken as soon as possible by an officer. What had been a scene of ridiculously impossible suburban horror just a few minutes earlier was now one of macabre reality. Susie Anderson, one of the little witches, lay dead on a stretch of poorly mown lawn situated between the street and the fence of number 28. Her black pointed witch's hat, now devoid of any magical properties it may have once held, sat twisted several metres from her body. Beside her was a bag full of lollies and chocolates, some of which had spilled onto the ground - the useless reward of knocking on many a door and saying those charmed words, Trick or treat. If the other Anderson girls ever regained

Blood stained the grass around Susie. Her vitality was being soaked into the earth.

their appetite, they would be able to indulge in their deceased sister's bounty in honour of her.

Inspector Murphy straightened his tie. A routine he always performed before investigating a crime scene. He had never been confronted with such a terrible murder as this before. He hoped that the so-called Wolfman had resisted arrest and given the officers a good reason to tenderise him a little before cuffing him.

He knelt down and inspected the corpse of Susie Anderson, feeling his stomach churn for the first time in well over a year – but he tried not to remember the circumstances of that particular case. The girl's face had been completely ripped apart. One cheek hung down from her chin, exposing her teeth, some of which had tiny chunks of green and pink jelly beans stuck in between them. Her button nose was nowhere to be found and her neck had been chewed at and pulled apart. Blood stained the grass around Susie. Her vitality was being soaked into the earth.

Inspector Murphy looked around. Some inhabitants were watching him with curiosity from the gates to their gardens. Others had gone back inside, closed their doors and probably tried to go back to watching the TV – pretending that nothing had happened at all. He knew very well that both were normal human reactions to a horror of this kind. There were no rules when it came to how a community responded to such a shocking and incomprehensible turn of events.

As far as he was concerned, the case was a no-brainer. Forensics would match the

blood on the Wolfman's teeth to Susie Anderson and, hey presto, the sicko would be locked up for an inadequately low number of years.

In the meantime, the police had to ask questions as a matter of procedure. Constables were taking statements from all of the residents. Inspector Murphy wanted them to talk to the inhabitants of the house he was in front of but there was no car parked outside and no lights on inside, so he sent Constable Tremar across the street to the Fullers' house.

George had not yet come home. His wife told the constable that he was probably with the Dagostino men, having a drink and trying to calm their nerves. She gave him as many details as possible about the terrifying incident, describing how realistic the costume had been and how she had seen the Wolfman tackle the boy dressed up as a skeleton. It had been so convincing. She hadn't seen the attack on Susie Anderson though. At that point, Mrs Fuller broke down in tears and the constable decided to leave her be.

Officers continued up and down Brook Street, taking statements from everybody, but it seemed that nobody had witnessed the attack on Susie Anderson. That was for one very good but completely overlooked reason – because they had all been watching the Wolfman.

Inspector Murphy wasn't concerned with the absence of witnesses. Once forensics found Susie's blood, and maybe even her nose, on the psychopathic mongrel's costume, he would be in for it. There was no mystery to solve, just evidence to process and present to

the court. Inspector Murphy felt confident - but he shouldn't have. Forensics wouldn't find Susie's blood on the Wolfman costume and the teenage pranksters would face no charges for their elaborate Halloween stunt. Little did he know it at the time, but the mystery that the inspector denied existed would go unsolved.

Ted Linsley from number 28 had been at home at the time of the Wolfman incident and his Monaro ute had been parked outside with Susie's corpse hidden between it and the shoddy wire fence. He hadn't witnessed the tragic event but it hadn't taken even a dim-witted bogan like him long to figure out what had happened. Diesel, his American Pit Bull, had been at home too and hadn't taken kindly to the Wolfman. The combination of confusion, fear and excitement had driven the already dangerous animal absolutely wild - so wild that it had managed to jump the low fence that was enough to keep it off the street under normal circumstances. It had attacked the nearest monster to it. For poor little Susie, it had just been a case of being in front of the wrong house at the wrong time. But, as far as Ted was concerned, it had been her fault for wearing a stupid disguise. The child should have known better.

Ted glanced at Diesel as he turned off Webster Road. The savage little canine had blood splattered all over its powerful muzzle and a faintly guilty but more prominently bemused look covered its brutal face. Ted had to get him cleaned up as quickly as possible.

He pulled into the deserted car park of Stafford City Shopping Centre, wedging his ute between an industrial bin and a vine covered fence. After ordering Diesel out, he led the dog through a gap in the fence that gave access to a hidden, litter-filled grove and the slow flowing water of Kedron Brook. This was the same brook that flowed down through Lutwyche and gave Brook Street its name. It was so dark on that moonless night that he could barely see where he was walking - but the obscurity comforted him.

Once Diesel had been cleaned up, Ted would drive into the countryside and they would sleep in the ute - pretending that they had been away all night. If the ridiculous Wolfman had been so terrifyingly distracting that nobody remembered his ute being parked outside or Diesel being behind the fence, they would get away with it.

As it turned out, Ted and Diesel were in luck.

'You silly bugger, Diesel,' he admonished the animal quietly - as though expecting it to be capable of knowing that it had done wrong. 'It's time for a bath - the biggest bloody bath you've ever had!'

Diesel submitted to its master. The dangerous animal, that had just taken a little girl's life in a fit of confusion and rage, was now as calm and obedient as a lamb.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cameron Trost is an Australian writer who concocts tales that combine a strong dose of mystery with an unsettling hint of familiarity while exploring the absurdities and peculiarities of society and the human mind. He is the author of the collection *"Hoffman's Creeper and Other Disturbing Tales"* and the dark thriller *"Letterbox"*, both of which are available from his blog at www.trostlibrary.blogspot.com

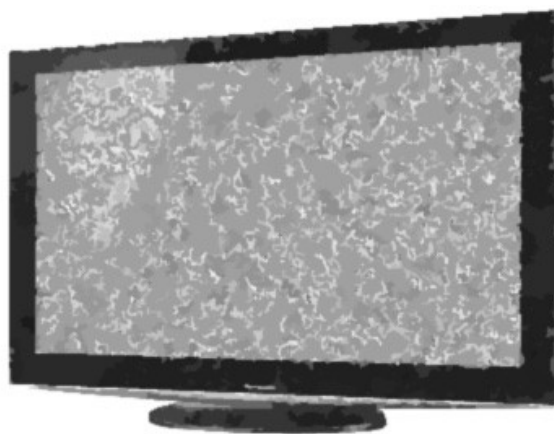
The Magpie Enigma

by Dave Ludford

The satellite 'Magpie' had appeared in Earth's orbit six months previously.

Nobody knew from where it came, what its ultimate aim was, or how long it would remain there. It transmitted an endless stream of alien game shows, talent contests and chat shows that nobody on Earth could understand. Nobody knew even why it was called 'Magpie'; that was part of the enigma. Unknown celebrities gushed inanities that people there found strangely addictive and compulsive viewing. Cable, satellite and terrestrial network channels were invaded and completely taken over, sometimes for hours on end. Then the programmes would just as suddenly disappear, and normal service would be resumed. The alien broadcasts would then reappear later picking up from where they'd left off. Everyone was confused by these occurrences but they felt mind-numbingly comfortable and familiar.

Droy was an underachiever and he knew it, and felt bitterly resentful as a consequence. Towards whom or what exactly he couldn't quite say. Sitting at the programme control desk on board the Magpie his job, quite simply, was to absorb information from Earth's multitudinous television channels and relay it to his comrades in the entertainment suite, and let them do the rest. The



information was translated into their own language, then the programmes were re-enacted and regurgitated back through the Earth channels, mimicking Earth mannerisms and presentation styles. The talent shows were the biggest challenge as the Magpie crew hadn't quite got the hang of replicating the weird sounds called 'music'. A lot of the jokes lost a lot in translation too. Droy felt it was all ultimately pointless but he persisted anyway; it was either this job or some other drudgery back home. He'd done those jobs, lots of them, and he wasn't in any hurry to go back to them. And this job had its compensations; the inhabitants of this crazy planet amused him with their addiction to meaningless trivia and anaesthetising garbage television. And suddenly a thought struck him; I really could liven this up a bit; shake these drones from their inertia just for sheer

enjoyment, stir the mud and see what would happen. He smiled slyly to himself; this would shake them up a bit, just a few adjustments to the output and away we go....

Trench was addicted to the game shows, talent contests and chat shows on his favourite satellite TV station. It was Friday night and he'd raced home from his boring factory job to watch them clutching a six pack of beer and a microwave dinner. Wonderful; he was in seventh heaven as he lowered his substantial rear end into the comfortable armchair in front of the television, balancing his meal on a tray onto his equally substantial belly. His obese wife sat slumped and snoring away in the seat next to him, a thin trail of saliva dribbling from her mouth, down her chin and onto her chest. She'd had her 'fix' of these programmes all day, rarely moving except to brew pots of tea. Trench turned the volume control back up to maximum and began to watch the first of his beloved programmes, forking glutinous

mounds of 'Curryquick' into the small mouth nestling between heavy, sagging jowls. After half an hour he became slightly dismayed that the channel had once again been taken over by the output from that damn alien satellite; but no matter, this was also enjoyable and he began to laugh out loud in an automatic reaction to the punch line of a joke he didn't understand. Then he was seized by a compulsion he had no way of resisting; but anyway it seemed the right thing to do. He picked up his dinner knife from the tray still balanced somewhat precariously on his belly and lifting it as high as he could over his head, brought it down in an arc, plunging it into his wife's flabby neck, where it stuck fast. Unable to wrench it free to effect a second blow to make absolutely sure, he was momentarily unsure as to whether he'd completed the job successfully. He need not have worried however; his wife's neck spurted blood, she gurgled horribly, then breathed no more.

Outside the flat, in the gathering gloom of evening, the prevailing sound carried on the cold wind was the wail of ambulance sirens mixed with the blood curdling screams of men and women dashing around in abject terror.



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.

The Spirits in Lorena Preli

by Philip Roberts

At the age of eight the young Lorena Preli stood before a panel of judges and won her way into the national spelling bee.

Though she didn't go any further, and she never claimed any prize in the years after, those in the small town of Belous knew her name and waited patiently to see what great things her future would bring.

Home schooled from birth, Lorena's seclusion increased her fame, and so people listened with interest when a gas station attendant named Hoyt Garr said he'd paid to have sex with the reclusive Lorena, now just shy of eighteen, and he'd heard of others who had done the same.

Three days after this announcement Douglas Froese showed up at the Preli family door and gently knocked three times.

The aged Douglas glanced around the unassuming, single story structure, the building well maintained, though he could spy a few weeds working their way through the flowers along the front walkway. He'd worn one of his better suits, even shaved off his normal thin, white beard, and combed his hair to the side.

He'd never spoken to Lorena or her father. From the whispers he'd heard, the mother had died when she was young, though

no one knew how, and now that this new knowledge of Lorena's sordid dealings arose, people began speculating about the girl's long dead mother. Given all of this Douglass didn't take offense at the way the wary, middle-aged man looked him up and down before finally stepping aside to allow him to enter. Mr. Preli himself appeared a bit better off than the typical resident of Belous, his money family earned, word had always said, and he'd taken up cheap living to drag it out, focus on his daughter's education. The man wore jeans, sneakers, and a faded black t-shirt, his eyes partially bloodshot, two days worth of stubble built up on his thick chin. Not a large man, Mr. Preli had the clear fat of a person unaccustomed to natural, daily exercise.

Douglass passed through the door into a small, quaint building, nothing larger than was necessary, and certainly a cramped space to be imprisoned in. A staircase leading down was visible in the far corner of the room, and when Douglas glanced over, he caught sight of the youthful face peering out at him before ducking away.

The elder Preli glanced at the door as well, yelled, "I heard you. Now shut that door and stay down there." The door immediately slammed shut. "Don't have much to offer other than water, Mr. Froese," he said, gestured for the two to sit by the dark fireplace.

"I don't need anything," Douglas said. His bones cracked uncomfortably as he



lowered himself, felt his sixty-seven years of life in each ache, but he didn't let his discomfort appear on his face. Instead he turned towards his host and said, "I'm afraid I don't know your first name, Mr. Preli."

"It's Barry. Look, I want to make two things clear," he said, leaned forward. "I'm not pimping out my daughter and I think it's disgusting anyone would even suggest it, and second, I only let you in because I know you have a bit of clout with most people, so I figured your word might be good enough to get rid of a lot of this nonsense."

Douglas smiled and nodded. "I understand, but I came to you for a reason. First, I simply wanted to confirm that your daughter was...well, that at least part of the rumours are true."

"Yeah," Barry said, slumped back in his seat. "She's been with quite a few of them, charged them herself from what she's told me, though I had to fight her tooth and nail to get that much. 'Too cooped up,' she said."

Three decorative plates were displayed above a shelf on the mantel, and at his last word one of them rattled lightly, drew both of their attention. Douglas ignored it and looked back at Barry. "Has this been recent?"

"That I've found out, sure."

"And how different would you say her behaviour is from normal?"

"I've never seen her act this way. I tell you, think you know your own kid, but what does it matter? Damage is done."

Douglas leaned in, let his eyes absorb Barry, fingers entwined on his knees, and said, "But is it really her doing this?"

Barry eyed him curiously. "What do you mean?"

"I've done rather extensive study in a wide variety of fields, and after hearing your daughter's actions, I feel there might be something else at play. A possession."

Before the man could answer the plate shook again, so violently it rolled off the mantel and crashed loudly to the wood floor. Barry cursed as he stood up and stared at the destruction. "Has this happened often?" Douglas asked.

Barry glanced over and frowned, shook his head. "Can't say I've seen it before."

Douglas stood as well. "I came here to explain my suspicions. I understand this isn't easy to believe, and I don't expect you to right away. Look for any other activity like this, of objects moving or any more extreme disobedience on the part of your child. Call me if you wish to look into this avenue of thought."

The man nodded and showed Douglas the door.

Only two days passed before a thick voiced Barry gave him a call, and Douglas once again stepped into the Preli's home. This time the basement door was already shut, and a new lock had been added to the outside of it.

"She won't speak anymore but it doesn't matter if she does, I know it ain't her, couldn't be her, not with the things she's been saying," Barry told him, eyes heavy and tired, stubble almost turned into a beard. The two men stood at the sealed door, and from down below they heard a crash, a thud, the clatter of a young girl destroying anything she could touch.

"Things will only get worse if we don't act quickly," Douglas said, coughed lightly, the pain deep in his chest more pronounced than normal, forcing his hand to his heart.

"You okay?" Barry asked him. Douglas frowned and nodded, gestured towards the sealed door.

As soon as Barry unlocked it the sounds from below stopped. "Has there been anymore odd movement in the home?" Douglas asked.

"Not that I've seen, but you can tell the change in her. All personality, but I can't believe she could harbour such things."

Douglas nodded and started down the stairs with Barry behind him. At the bottom Douglas saw the large bedroom, once decorated with posters, books, and pictures, all of it lay torn or discarded on the cluttered floor. Shelves had been over-turned, the mattress thrown from the bed against the wall, pillows ripped open, their innards drifting lazily across the floor from the slightest shift of air. In the middle of it Lorena stood and stared at the two, but her eyes focused more intently on Douglas, narrowed.

"Who is he?" she spat out, jabbed her finger towards Douglas.

"Someone here to help you," Barry told his daughter, stepped between her and Douglas.

"No, he wants to use me like the others." She began lifting her skirt, smiling cruelly at Douglas.

"Hold her," Douglas called out as he knelt to open the bag he'd brought, pull out the syringe. Barry caught hold of his daughter before she could pull back, and she screamed and bucked in his grip, cried out against the rape she claimed was about to occur, physically spitting towards Douglas's direction as he pulled closer and stuck the needle in her arm.

Lorena's body went limp, and Barry gently set her down on the floor.

"This is only the early stages," Douglas said, knelt over Lorena's body. "First come the

mental changes, followed by the physical. Within a few days your daughter will be lost if we don't act quickly enough."

"What exactly is happening to her?" Barry asked, knelt beside Douglas.

"A creature is attempting to take over her body. It's going to drive away anyone close to her so no one can interfere. Its goal is to take her body for itself."

"Can you stop it?"

"I intend to. The next twenty-four hours will be difficult, but I will do everything I can to help your daughter. I must begin the procedures now before the creature has more time to take the body. Could you give me some time alone with her?"

"Of course." Barry rose and started for the stairs. Douglas coughed again, felt something fiery burn the back of his throat, and felt Barry's eyes on him, paused on the stairs, before continuing up.

Time truly was of the essence, Douglas thought as he pulled his tools from his bag, for both Lorena and himself.

Mr. Preli stood at the front window and stared out at the road leading into town. In the late summer evening he could see the people walking up and down the road, acting, he knew, as if they strolled casually, but their faces always turned towards his home, maybe hoping to catch sight of his daughter at the window.

Below his feet Barry could hear the man chanting, could smell the stink of something burning, but he didn't dare go down and confront things he'd only recently even allowed himself to believe. Something in him

hated Douglas just as much as he appreciated the help the man gave. He'd invited the man in purely to help clear his name with the town, and though Douglas now potentially worked to save Barry's daughter, he couldn't shake the notion that whatever affected Lorena had come with Douglas into their home, maybe followed him in. The man had clearly dealt with these things before.

Barry turned from the window, tilted his head towards the basement door, towards the silence. Footsteps moved slowly up them until Douglas appeared, white faced and sweaty, his hands curled against his chest. "Damn, are you okay?" Barry asked, almost expected the man to fall over dead right then.

Douglas nodded gently and took up a seat on the couch. "The first ritual is always the hardest, when the demon is at its strongest." He leaned forward and stared at his own shaking hands. "I hadn't realized it would be so difficult," he whispered, the words so quiet Barry didn't know if they were to him or Douglas himself.

"What happens now?" Barry asked.

"The worst of the ritual itself might be over, but I'm afraid for Lorena, and perhaps yourself, there are far worse things to come. I've sealed the creature within this home and within Lorena's body. It will claw at your mind and make you doubt whatever it can, try to control you into doing whatever it wishes. Keep your thoughts clear and controlled."

It's all a lie, some part of Barry thought, one concocted by his daughter and this charlatan. He could see it so clearly, see Lorena and Douglas in bed together, just one of the many men she had spent her nights with, and as they relaxed from their labours, they'd talked about Barry and his wealth, about ways to make him look even more the fool than he already did.

He did his best to shut away the thoughts. "I understand," he said, felt Douglas's eyes watching him intently, and had to turn away from them. Outside the sun was beginning to set.

"We wait through the night," Douglas said. "The creature will waste whatever energy it has attempting to break free, and when it fails, it will be weak enough for me to remove completely."

"And Lorena? Will she be back to normal?"

Douglas stood up and placed a hand on Barry's shoulder. He smiled gently at him. "Completely. I suggest we take turns keeping an eye on her. The sedative is still keeping her asleep, but it won't last, and when the creature stirs, they won't work again. We can't leave her completely alone, either, or else the creature might harm her for revenge."

"You get some sleep now," Barry said. "I'll take the first watch. There's a guest bedroom down the hall you can use."

Douglas left, shambling slowly down the hall, and as he left Barry considered how easy it would be to sneak into Douglas's room once the man slept, to hold a knife to his throat and pull all the lies from him.

Barry's eyes widened at his own thoughts. He turned towards the basement door and jerked back at the sight of Lorena standing there, her long brown hair draped across most of her face, her day dress rumpled and stained. She smiled widely at him, eyes far too wide. He pointed towards the door, said through gritted teeth, "You get back in that damn basement."

Lorena lifted up her head, as if studying him, before glancing to the basement. "For

now," she said, a giddy quality to her voice. She turned and descended.



Barry paused before following, face pale and fingers tingling. He moved to the closet and pulled out a box of bungee cords, the closest thing he had to a rope in the house, along with an old, wooden baseball bat. He'd used it to play with Lorena when she'd been a child, before education took most of her attention. Now he walked down the basement steps with the bat in hand, ready to use it on his daughter should he need to.

She let him tie her down without a struggle, speaking gently to him, asking him what perverse things he intended to do to her. For hours she persisted as Barry sat on the bottom steps and stared into the ruined basement with his daughter tied in the middle of it.

As the sun sank, the world darkened, and the overhead light illuminated his smiling daughter's face, Barry could see the changes in her. The skin sagged around the eyes. Red lines seemed to crawl through her eyes, pulse with life, her fingers too long as they gripped her knees.

Occasionally her head drooped back as if in sleep, and somewhere the thoughts came in Barry's mind telling him everything was all right now, his daughter returned to normal, and he needed only to untie the bonds that

held her. He refused to heed the words, and not long after he resisted he saw her head rise back up, eyes locked with his, smiling wide at him, before the entire face would dip down into a scowl of disgust, the skin all but melting into the expression.

The thoughts were so intertwined with his own he had trouble distinguishing them when they came.

When wood creaked overhead he jolted up, eyes wide and tired, the bat gripped firmly in his hand, while behind him Lorena began laughing at his fear. He glared back at her warped face, more like a mask of skin now than his daughter anymore.

Douglas walked calmly down the stairs, movement more fluent than before, yet his face showed greater signs of age and sickness.

"Are you sure you're up to this?" Barry asked him.

"The mind is sharper than the body," Douglas said with a weak smile, "and the mind is where it will attack. No reason to let your own mind become too sluggish and offer it a chance in."

Barry nodded and started up the steps. "I'll be back in four hours," he said.

"Take as much time as you need," Douglas called after him.

Sleep came and went in those hours, left Barry unable at times to tell if he'd slept at all or spent his time tossing beneath the sheets. He hadn't bothered undressing, still wearing his jeans and t-shirt, eyes cracking open from what he presumed was sleep. The world came back to him through a daze,

unfocused and blurry, his daughter's face in his mind, but drifting out from the mind, until Barry realized his eyes were open, and he stared at her from up above.

She clung somehow with her back to the ceiling, arms held close, her hair spread wide and flat, only the outline of her visible in the dark bedroom. The undone bungee cords hung like metal hooks from the body, dangled above him. Barry jolted up, vision clearing more with each waking second, eyes adjusting to the dark to see his daughter's beautiful smiling face, lips glistening as if with lipstick. Only her eyes seemed off, somehow too sunken back within the head, nothing but dark holes.

One of the bungee cords fell loose, landed on the bed beside Barry, and he fell, his back striking against the floor before he could pull himself up.

Lorena brought her hand towards him, reaching out as if for help, but as she did the glisten of her eyes vanished, as if the eyes themselves sucked fully into the skull. Her arm stretched unnaturally downward, the skin oozing towards him; fingers opened wide, waiting, he thought, for him to grab hold of the hand.

He nearly did, hand outstretched, seeing only the beauty in the face no matter how abnormal the situation was. Before he could something loudly struck the open doorway, and Douglas stumbled in, close to dead on his feet, face so pale it seemed to glow in the darkness.

"Don't touch her," Douglas wheezed out, the baseball bat in his hand. He attempted to lift it but the arm faltered, and the bat hit the wood floor, rolled towards Barry.

Lorena screamed with rage and fell from the ceiling onto the bed. The bungee

cords fell loose all around her. The beautiful face sunk back into a hideous scowl nothing like the girl Barry had raised, the image barely resembling a human at all. Lorena rose up, her hair longer than before, draping down to her feet, thick lips pulling back into a scowl of disgust. She seemed to speak, but the words were impossible to understand, the mouth apparently no longer capable of forming them.

Images exploded into Barry's minds, ones of violence, hatred, left him on his knees clawing at his head, trying to get them to stop. He saw at the centre of them Douglas's face, felt a burning desire to end the man's life, and he clutched the bat without having realized he picked it up.

Douglas had slumped to the floor, his back against the wall, eyes open, mouth moving, but only a dry wheeze came out of him.

From the tangle of thoughts came his memory of the first moment he had heard the rumours of what Lorena had done, the certainty that his daughter would never do these things, never offer her body to strangers. The rage focused at Douglas turned towards the thing that had corrupted his daughter and taken her away from him.

He turned and swung the bat as hard as he could. Blood poured from the wound he tore into Lorena's face, and as he brought the bat up to swing again the creature inhabiting her body lunged at him. The dark shape crashed into him and brought both of them to the floor. Her fingers clawed fiercely into his throat, deformed face held right in front of his, the flesh almost melting off the bone.

A gunshot exploded beside Barry's head, left him deaf and blinded, the fingers no longer groping at his neck, body gone from on top of him. He coughed, tried to get the air flowing into his lungs as his vision returned to

him, and he heard the a wet, gurgling sound from in front.

He pulled himself up on his elbows, still blinking away the light, seeing again the dark bedroom and the shape hunched over.

"What happened," he wheezed out, fear starting to climb up his mind, aware of what the gunshot had surely meant, and the fate of his daughter.

The hunched form turned towards him, and Barry stared into Douglas's eyes, his mouth drenched in red, his bloody fingers bringing something up to his mouth, shoving the flesh in. A smile crept into the corners of the man's face, a much younger face, Barry suddenly realized.

He pulled himself completely upward to see Lorena's corpse on the floor, her face destroyed from the bullet, chest torn open and ravaged by Douglas. The man reached his fingers in to pull out another piece of flesh, and as Barry watched, the man bit into it.

"What the hell are you doing?" Barry shouted.

Douglas pulled himself abruptly upward, body tall and rigid as he stared back at Barry, his mouth dripping red. The gun that had ended Lorena's life was clutched in Douglas's hands.

"I cut it far too close," Douglas said, voice thicker and stronger than before. He looked closer to twenty than seventy.

"Lorena," Barry whispered, his back against the wall.

"Made a perfect host," Douglas said with a smile. He brought up a hand to wipe away the red. "Such possessions, if done correctly, alter the very body, especially the

heart. It knew what I intended to do, but my safeguards were too strong for it, so it couldn't attack me directly, merely flee from me when it saw my own body deteriorating. It came to you for aide. Thankfully, you didn't trust it."

"You put that thing in her?"

"It needed to grow within a host before I could make use of it. Hearing about your daughter was a blessing."

"The people she was with, the boys," Barry said, his eyes locked on the remains of Lorena's motionless face, his daughter's face. He didn't move as Douglas stepped closer, brought up the gun. Barry didn't defend himself at all as the barrel pressed up against his chin and Douglas's face pressed closer to his.

"I began the possession the day I first met you," Douglas told him. "All of her indiscretions before that were just acts of childish rebellion. No demon forced her into those men's arms."

He welcomed the bullet, but Douglas never pulled the trigger. He continued past Barry instead, and from far away, he heard the sound of a door as Douglas departed.

He pulled the remains of Lorena's head onto his lap; let his fingers run gently through her matted hair, eyes staring vacantly at the wall. Eventually he knew the town would come

to his door and find him with his daughter by his side. He doubted that Douglas would be around anymore; gone to wherever he had come, and nothing Barry could say would convince the others of what had really happened.

None of that mattered to him. He had no intention of telling them about Douglas. Barry intended to tell them the truth, and let them all know he had killed his own daughter.

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.

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:

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

Lessons in Lovecraftian Fiction

by Philip Meredith

It's not uncommon for a writer to begin his journey by emulating the work of a writer who's work they

admire. Many great writers have

begun their careers by creating fiction that uses the style and techniques of writers that they admire and one of the most commonly cited authors is H.P. Lovecraft. Lovecraft was a misanthropist and his tales revolved around the idea that life really was ultimately meaningless. Human experience was worthless, religions feeble artifices and if there were any Gods out there then they were either unconcerned with whether we lived or died or determined to torment us like a giant kid with a magnifying glass would torment an ant. Optimists have no place in Lovecraft's universe but that has not stopped droves of aspiring writers from believing that they could become the next H.P. Lovecraft.

If you aspire to write Lovecraftian fiction then you have much to learn. You must familiarise yourself with the ancient, arcane rules that govern his stories but step carefully, dear reader, because to lose your footing here will not merely cost you your sanity, it could cost you your soul.

While Lovecraft is famous for his association with Cosmic Horror, it is important to realise that he also wrote outside of this genre. *Reanimator* is a great zombie thriller in the tradition of *Frankenstein*, *The Picture In The House* deals with cannibalism and *The Tomb* is about madness. It has been argued that Lovecraft's focus was not Cosmic Horror but the very nature of insanity itself which would make him a pioneer in the field of psychological horror. Many of the characters in Lovecraft's work are driven mad, or battle with insane foes, or are confronted with their own fractured mental state. This makes us question whether we can trust that the story we have just read is true.

One of the most important lessons to learn from Lovecraft is that horror does not need monsters. It is certainly true that there is no shortage of terrifying creatures lurking in the shadowy corners of Lovecraft's world but the true horror of his work is on an existential level. Lovecraft asks his reader important questions about the point of life, what happens when we die, what is the point of human endeavour, are we alone in the universe and whether there is a God and does he really care. Lovecraft's work is often bleakness taken to extremes and

many writers find it difficult to plunge into the dark depths that he managed to reach.

These questions pave the way for Lovecraft's most influential legacy: The Eldritch Abomination, The Great Old Ones, The Elder Gods that slumber eternally. These beings wait patiently for the time when the stars will align and they will be free to sweep over the Earth and destroy all humanity. The most common mistake that new writers make is in believing that these Eldritch creatures are evil, or to reduce them to hulking creatures with tentacles. They are not evil, they are other. They have passed so far beyond our comprehension and understanding of how the universe works that their mere appearance is enough to drive men insane. A word of warning, Lovecraft was famously racist and many of his descriptions are not subtle in their comparisons of celestial horrors and disfigured creatures with particular ethnic groups. If you follow this path too closely then you should be prepared for the unfortunate associations.

Insanity is not the only fate of those unlucky enough to wander into the pages of a Lovecraft story. One of Lovecraft's strengths was his ability to play on the balance between the familiar and the unfamiliar and it is from this strength that his Body Horror draws power. The fate of many in Lovecraftian fiction is to be transformed into something inhuman, a grotesque parody of man, but with just enough humanity left to allow identification.

This is also true of the settings that he uses for his stories. Many of them are set in the heart of Lovecraft country in miserable, squalid out of the way locations where ancient rituals and dark arts can be practiced without the fear of prying eyes.

The most important characteristic of Lovecraft's work is that they very rarely end well. Lovecraft believed that human existence was and is futile, and this is reflected in his fiction. The Old Ones are coming and there is nothing that anyone can do about it. While a hero can win a minor victory, and I do mean minor, this will be a mere setback and even that will come at a great cost to the hero. If he is lucky then he will merely go insane. The other alternative is... I think I have covered that already.

It is Lovecraft's love of the bleak ending that has contributed to one of the most common ways that his work becomes subverted. Many people, readers and writers alike, are incapable of the bleak outlook that Lovecraft embraced and this means that for many of us there is a temptation to give in to hope. This can come in a variety of ways but commonly results in the omnipotent, all-powerful Old Ones failing to live up to their reputation. I have read countless works of Lovecraftian fiction where this is the case. If you want to write truly Lovecraftian fiction then you must accept the inevitable. The addition of hope often serves only to puncture the cynicism upon which Lovecraft's universe was built.

A common theme in Lovecraft's work is that there is knowledge that man was not meant to know. He firmly believed that there were some avenues of knowledge that man should leave well alone and that there are things that mankind would be better off not knowing. You are not ready for this knowledge and it will destroy you if you try to explore it too closely. I have given you that knowledge. Now it is up to you to decide what you do with it.

SEX AND SCIENCE FICTION

by Sue McKenzie

The novels in John Norman's *Gorean Saga* were some of the first

BDSM novels printed.

They introduced and encouraged a whole generation of kinky readers to bondage and slavery games. "Goreans", as fans of the series like to be called, have been acting out their kinky fantasies online since the birth of text-only chat rooms and were the first group to buy an island in virtual world Second Life. Yet the attention that this series has attracted has not always been positive. The *Encyclopaedia of Fantasy* states that "later volumes degenerate into extremely sexist, sadomasochistic pornography involving the ritual humiliation of women," and likely explains why the books have attracted such negative attention from feminist groups. In 1980 Daw Books dropped the Gor series on the grounds of falling sales prompting a backlash of abuse from fans and series author John Norman. The ensuing lull in the print schedule did nothing to deter its fan base and saw the value of John Norman's printed work rise dramatically on online auction sites but with the advent of digital print the *Gorean Saga* novels are once again available to the

public and John Norman has even added to it, making the *Gorean Saga* one of the most successful and longest running science fiction franchises of all time.

The world of Gor is detailed in 29 best selling novels written by John Norman, a pseudonym for philosophy professor John Lange, who currently resides in New York. Gor, also known as counter-earth, is a fictitious planet that is in the same orbit as Earth but on the other side of the Sun. It is a barbaric world ruled by steel and concerned with honour. It is primarily male dominated and has an ancient and universally accepted tradition of slavery. The planet is the domain of the Priest-Kings, a technologically advanced insectoid race, who monitor and protect Gor and populate its surface. It is through the actions of the Priest-Kings that the variety of human cultures have been transplanted to Gor from their homes on Earth. John Norman seems to take great delight in populating his world with a diverse range of cultures including Ancient Rome, Greece and Viking. It is also down to the wishes of the Priest-Kings that some technology, transportation and weaponry mainly, has been restricted whilst others, agriculture and medicinal, has developed far beyond that of Earth. The planet is also blessed with a lower gravity than Earth

which allows for the existence of large flying creatures and some breathtaking architecture.

The novels also feature a number of sentient alien races. Chief amongst these are the disinterested custodians of Gor, the Priest Kings, and the warlike Kurii. The Kurii are an aggressive race who seek to colonize Gor and Earth. Initially the Kurii are portrayed as technologically inferior to the Priest Kings and as such the threat they pose is not great. After "The Nest War" the Priest Kings position of power is severely weakened and the threat becomes far more dangerous.

The setting lends itself well to the space-opera adventures of the early books but as the series progresses the books become more philosophical and sexual. It is the sexual content of the latter entries that has led many people to argue that the Gorean Saga is little more than thinly veiled BDSM.

It is incredibly difficult to separate the fiction from BDSM. The media has often taken the opportunity to label it as BDSM whenever it appears in the news and many individuals within the BDSM community and lifestyle Goreans, people who practice a lifestyle based on the novels, also see Gor as a part of the community. Is Gor then simply an aspect of the BDSM community?

In 1974 John Norman released a non-fiction work entitled *Imaginative Sex*. This book is widely considered to be one of the first BDSM works ever published. The book has a number of strong connections to Gor, which first appeared in 1966, and as such it would be fair to assume that there is some connection between Gor and BDSM in the mind of the author. If we take this further and think about the diverse range of sexual activities that have been placed under the umbrella of BDSM. If we accept that each person who indulges in these activities has their own preferences then we can see that for some people BDSM is

nothing more than kinky sex, but for others there is a deeper element that affects their lives and not just in a sexual way.

This is also true of the fans of the novels. There are those who simply enjoy the novels, those who dabble in role-play and then there is the lifestylers.

Gorean role-playing, in its simplest form, is a game in which people pretend to be on Gor. It is a form of entertainment and can have its educational merits. These games may involve capturing another player or duelling that player to a virtual death and it is important to note that not everyone who indulges in Gorean role-play is interested in the BDSM aspect of the world. Role-playing in any form can cover a variety of subjects from romance to politics.

There are those members of the Gorean community who choose to engage solely in BDSM role-play and even within this group there is a diverse range of approaches. Slaves in Gorean books are mere property and have no actual rights, by our modern standards such slavery is considered harsh and brutal. Many Goreans do not adhere stringently to the nature of slavery depicted in the books, often opting for a more gentle approach. It can quite easily be compared to BDSM scenarios and in *Imaginative Sex*, John Norman does present a number of sexual role-play scenarios that involve domination, bondage and slavery that are evocative of the world of Gor.

For some people this is taken even further and becomes part of their everyday life. These lifestylers are most commonly compared to the BDSM community. Gorean lifestylers are a diverse group attempting to establish elements of Gorean philosophy and societal institutions in their everyday life. The most common institutions are the Home Stone, The Caste System and, of course, Slavery but there is no standard for lifestylers and personal preference plays an important deciding role in

how far the individuals lifestyle mirrors that of the books.

Slavery is by far the most commonly emulated aspect of the Gorean novels however slavery, though completely legal on Gor, is illegal on Earth and as such there are some necessary differences. The most important of these is that there are no forced enslavements. Lifestyle slaves enter into consensual slavery and as such have the ability to end that slavery at any time. Gorean slavery does not focus on the inflicting of pain, though it is not uncommon for this to be an aspect of discipline and it is common for individuals choosing to enter into consensual slavery to enjoy that pain. The Gorean community is also less representative than the BDSM community, with the majority of relationships being male dominated in the Gorean community.

Yet not all lifestylers engage in slavery. There is a proportion of the community that solely engage in philosophical role-play. To these people slavery is a societal institution on Gor and not a philosophical one. While these individuals advocate male dominated society, they do so out of biological truth, genetics and evolutionary history but they do not advocate that women must be slaves. Gorean philosophy is based upon metaphysics, ethics, political philosophy and draws its inspiration from Plato and Nietzsche. It deals with personal relationships and the role of the individual within society. It is vastly more encompassing than the BDSM community, where the focus is on a personal relationship alone.

If this is true then there must be a distorted influence at work within the Gorean community. This influence seeks to alter the dynamic of the philosophy and make it all about slavery and ultimately that influence originates with the works that have inspired the community.

No-one is under any illusion that the reason that *Fifty Shades*, and its myriad clones, have achieved the level of success that they have is down to one simple truth: Sex sells. Sex is one of the reasons for the success of the Gorean novels but also the reason that it continues to attract negative attention. The Gorean community has and will likely continue to attract individuals for whom the sole attraction is sex and slavery. These individuals host websites dedicated solely to the slavery aspects of Gor, they ignore conversations about philosophy and politics in favour of those about sex and slavery and because they are a large proportion of the online community they have created a skewed message about the nature of John Norman's work. In recent years the Gorean community have made a big effort to distance themselves from this distorted image, and to attempt to teach what they consider to be the realities of Gor.

Ultimately speculative fiction is about answering those big "What If" questions. John Norman was a pioneer in the area of sexual dynamics and made an important contribution to sexual diversification with his "What If" questions about relationships, but Gor is about more than just sex and slavery. There are certainly similarities between BDSM and Gorean lifestylers but Gor encompasses a vast array of subject matter that has nothing to do with BDSM and some people will find it difficult to see beyond the sex.

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

REVIEWS

Richard Ford mixes sword and sorcery with gritty crime drama to create a fantasy story set in the seedy underbelly of Steelhaven. Steelhaven is the capital of the Free States, its militia are under equipped and under appreciated and a war, the storm of the title, is brewing in the north. Refugees swarm into the walls of Steelhaven, resources are short and so are tempers.

Unlike many authors Ford doesn't focus on Kings and Generals but rather on small, inner city

HERALD OF THE STORM

Richard Ford

Headline

characters like the heartbroken blacksmith who craves revenge for the death of his son and a roguish con artist with a growing conscience.

Ford isn't a writer who focuses on excessive description. His prose are brisk but still the book starts sluggishly, no doubt because of the large number of characters involved, but as the book winds through its plots of slavery and ritual murder the pace picks up and the book ends with a number of satisfying bangs. Think sword and sorcery meets *The Wire* and you can't go far wrong.

Ford is definitely one to watch for the future.

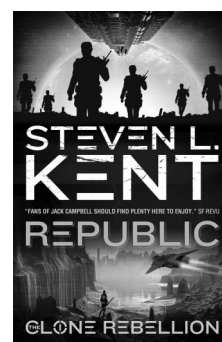
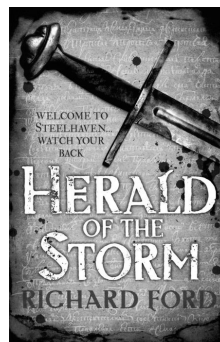
THE CLONE REPUBLIC

Steven L Kent

Titan Books

Wayne Harris is a Marine in the 26th century, raised in an orphanage amongst clones and expected to obey orders. This is presumably why he travels to the desert planet of Gobi where he meets a mercenary, Ray Freeman, and big adventures follow.

That description could be applied to any number of books and there is certainly no shortage of military science fiction. Yet while most writers simply manage to take World War Two or Vietnam and transpose it into an alien environment Kent's avoids doing so. He does have a tendency to wander into formulaic territory and often the problem with making a hero out of a soldier is that they lack social graces.



REVIEWS by Matt Harris

When he avoids the clichés, Kent's work is a joy to read. His pacing is excellent and he feeds the reader just enough information to keep them hooked.

Titan Books have a few more of his Clone Rebellion novels in the pipeline for 2013 and this series has the promise of being a solid and entertaining read. Definitely a book to put on your reading list.

THE DEMONOLOGIST

Andrew Pyper

Orion Books

David Ullman is a lecturer in Christian mythology, an atheist and his wife is having an affair. As his relationship disintegrates around him, he decides to fly to Venice and spend some time with his daughter. An encounter with a former colleague leads to death, disaster and demonic possession.

The possession sub-genre has become bloated in recent years thanks to a slew of movies and sadly there is very little in this book that you won't have seen before. Yet Pyper has succeeded in dragging elements of other stories into his world, a hefty dose of *The Da Vinci Code*, a pinch of *Don't Look Now* and a dash of *The Exorcist* can certainly be seen in *The Demonologist*. The fact that he borrows so copiously from other sources



may account for his often stilted dialogue and the copious amount of clichés therein.

Yet this book is fast paced, the settings are evocative and David is a fairly interesting, if conflicted, protagonist. The extensive references to Milton's *Paradise Lost* may indicate that the author had higher aspirations for this airport thriller but it is an entertaining read. Make a place for this in your holiday luggage and you won't regret it.

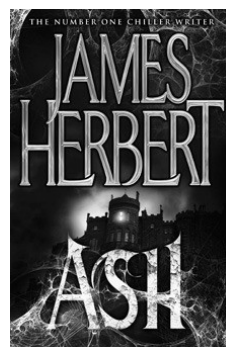
ASH

James Herbert

Macmillan

It would be impossible for me to review this book with mentioning the tragic loss of author James Herbert. Author of 23 novels that have sold over 54 million copies worldwide, James Herbert was one of the U.K.s most popular horror novelists. I have been a big fan of his since I first read my father's battered copy of *The Rats*.

With credentials like that you would expect this novel to be a real page-turner but sadly this book fails to live up to the author's previous work. The problem is that about halfway through the novel, the story just falls apart. The book is crammed full of clichéd ideas that he never fully manages to bring to fruition and several, including an implausible Nazi



connection, that it would have been better if he'd left well alone. Eventually the fantastic elements of the novel become ludicrous and the sheer number of war criminals living in the castle would be laughable if it wasn't so tragic.

The book becomes less about the intrepid ghost hunter and more about gross out effects. There are plenty of deliciously horrid scenes that will appeal to fans of gore. Splatter fans will enjoy this novel.

REVIEWS by Matt Harris

THE LIVES OF TAO

Wesley Chu

Angry Robot

When Edward Blair is betrayed and killed, Tao, an alien symbiont who lives within him, is forced to find a new host. This host comes in the unlikely form of overweight IT worker Roen Tan. Now dragged into a war between two alien species, Tan is forced to train and get into shape and he has to do it fast because people are looking for him.

The Lives of Tao is an engaging read from the beginning, and what drives the story forward are the relationships between the characters. Its entertaining to watch the relationship between Tan and Tao forced to breaking point. The constant question of whether Tan will accept Tao or force him into silence is key to their relationship because once Tao adopted him as host he became unable to choose a new host until his current host dies.



Chu does a clever job of weaving world history into the events of his alien war. The action is fast-paced and there are plenty of hand-to-hand combat scenes to keep you on the edge of your seat.

A fun sci-fi romp through history, Tao may have had numerous hosts in the past but you should make sure you catch up with Tan.

REVIEW by Matt Harris

THE RESURRECTIONIST

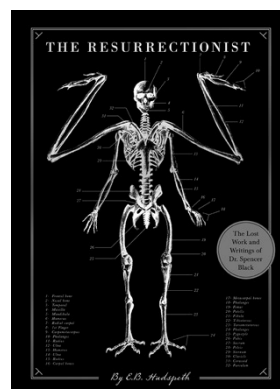
E.B.Hudspeth

Quirk Books

The Resurrectionist is a book of two halves. The first half is the biography of Dr. Spencer Black: anthropologist, taxidermist and latterly madman. The second half of the book is an anatomical study of a variety of mythological beings taken from Dr. Black's notes.

The fictional biography is an engrossing read that describes Dr. Black's descent into madness as he becomes engrossed in his theories of alternate evolution. While Hudspeth is certainly not the first writer to tackle the subject of crypto-zoology, her take on the subject matter is refreshing and brings to mind the works of H.P. Lovecraft and Edgar Allan Poe. My only criticism would be that it's a bit too short.

The anatomical study is beautifully macabre. The introductory notes for each entry contain details of where the specimens were found alongside Dr.



Black's theories of why the creature evolved as it did. These notes are then followed by lavishly detailed renderings of the skeletal structure and musculature which are the equal of any academic textbook.

This book is a grotesque sideshow that you just can't stop looking at. Highly recommended for fans of the macabre and anyone with an interest in gothic artwork and fiction.

REVIEW by Peter Bennett

UPCOMING RELEASES

A Guide to upcoming book releases for the second 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 2.

	TITLE	AUTHOR	PUBLISHER
APRIL	Hauntings (Horror)	Ellen Datlow	Tachyon Publications
	River of Stars (Fantasy)	Guy Gavriel Kay	Roc
	Protector (SF)	C.J. Cherryh	DAW
	Without a Summer (Fantasy)	Mary Robinette Kowal	Tor
	The Exiled Blade (Fantasy)	Jon Courtenay Grimwood	Orbit
	The Heretic (SF)	David Drake & Tony Daniel	Baen
	Fire with Fire (SF)	Charles E. Gannon	Baen
	The Forever Knight (Fantasy)	John Marco	DAW
	The Beautiful Thing That Awaits Us All (Horror)	Laird Barron	Night Shade
	Dead Roads (Urban Fantasy)	Robin Riopelle	Night Shade
	Blood Trade (Urban Fantasy)	Faith Hunter	Roc
	Iron Kin (Urban Fantasy)	M.J. Scott	Roc

	TITLE	AUTHOR	PUBLISHER
APRIL	London Falling (Urban Fantasy)	Paul Cornell	Tor
	Hot Blooded (Urban Fantasy)	Amanda Carlson	Orbit
	The Serene Invasion (SF)	Eric Brown	Solaris
	The Lives of Tao (SF)	Wesley Chu	Angry Robot
MAY	The Daedalus Incident (SF)	Michael J. Martinez	Night Shade
	Tunnel Out Of Death (SF)	Jamil Navir	Tor
	Shield of Sea and Space (Fantasy)	Erin Hoffman	Pyr
	The Fictional Man (SF)	Al Ewing	Solaris
	Portal (SF)	Eric Flint & Ryk E. Spoor	Baen
	Zero Point (SF)	Neal Asher	Night Shade
	House of Steel: The Honorverse Companion	David Weber	Baen
	Children of the Gates (SF)	Andre Norton	Baen
	Dead Ever After (Urban Fantasy)	Charlaine Harris	Ace
	Shadows of Falling Night (Urban Fantasy)	S.M. Stirling	Roc
	Generation V (Urban Fantasy)	M.I. Brennan	Roc
	Gods and Monsters: Unclean Spirits (Urban Fantasy)	Chuck Wendig	Abbadon
	The Tyrant's Law (Fantasy)	Daniel Abraham	Orbit
	The Human Division (SF)	John Scalzi	Tor
	Blood and Bone (Fantasy)	Ian C. Esslemont	Tor
	The Red Plague Affair (Steampunk)	Lilith Saintcrow	Orbit
	Tarnished (Urban Fantasy)	Rhiannon Held	Tor
	Antiaagon Fire (Fantasy)	L.E. Modesitt Jr.	Tor
	Life on the Preservation (SF)	Jack Skillingstead	Solaris

	TITLE	AUTHOR	PUBLISHER
MAY	The Eighth Court (Urban Fantasy)	Mike Shevdon	Angry Robot
	The Blue Blazes (Urban Fantasy)	Chuck Wendig	Angry Robot
	Tempest Reborn (Urban Fantasy)	Nicole Peeler	Orbit
	The Shambling Guide to NYC (Urban Fantasy)	Mur Lafferty	Orbit
JUNE	Earth Afire (SF)	Orson Scott Card & Aaron Johnston	Tor
	Steadfast (Fantasy)	Mercedes Lackey	DAW
	Abaddon's Gate (SF)	James S.A. Corey	Orbit
	Requiem (Fantasy)	Ken Scholes	Tor
	Burdens of the Dead (Horror)	Mercedes Lackey, Eric Flint & Dave Freer	Baen
	Cobra Slave (SF)	Timothy Zahn	Baen
	In Thunder Forged (Fantasy)	Ari Marmell	Pyr
	Joyland	Stephen King	Titan Books
	The Best Horror of the Year: Volume 5 (Horror)	Ellen Datlow	Night Shade
	Reanimators (Horror)	Pete Rawlik	Night Shade
	Casino Infernale (Urban Fantasy)	Simon R Green	Roc
	Eight Million Gods (Urban Fantasy)	Wen Spencer	Baen
	Limits of Power (Fantasy)	Elizabeth Moon	Del Ray
	Love Minus Eighty (SF)	Will McIntosh	Orbit
	Echo Rising (SF)	Danie Ware	Titan Books
	Wisp of a Thing (Fantasy)	Alex Bledsoe	Tor
	Sea Change (Fantasy)	S. M. Wheeler	Tor
	Before the Fall (Fantasy)	Francis Knight	Orbit
	iD (SF)	Madeline Ashby	Angry Robot

	TITLE	AUTHOR	PUBLISHER
JUNE	Cold Steel (Fantasy)	Kate Elliot	Orbit
	A Discourse in Steel (Fantasy)	Paul S Kemp	Angry Robot
	The Goliath Stone (SF)	Larry Niven & Matthew Joseph Harrington	Tor
	The Crash (SF)	Guy Haley	Solaris
	The World of The End	Ofir Touche Gafla	Tor
	Anno Dracula: Johnny Alucard (Horror)	Kim Newman	Titan Books
	Hunted (Urban Fantasy)	Kevin Hearne	Del Ray
	Damn Him to Hell (Urban Fantasy)	Jamie Quaid	Pocket
	The Resurrectionist (Horror)	E.B Hudspeth	Quirk Books
	The Classic Horror Stories: H.P. Lovecraft (Horror)	Roger Luckhurst	Oxford University Press
	On the Razor's Edge (SF)	Michael Flynn	Tor
	Caged Warrior (Urban Fantasy)	Lindsey Piper	Pocket

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.

Matt Harris

WHAT TO WATCH

A Quick Look At Upcoming Cinema Releases by Al Thomas

The Hollywood remake of *Evil Dead* arrives in early April. This film is designed to irk long-time fans of the cult franchise being scripted by *Jennifer's Body*'s Diablo Cody and not featuring the legendary Bruce Campbell.

Later in April Joseph Kosinski returns from *Tron:Legacy* with a film based upon a graphic novel. *Oblivion* focuses on the plight of a veteran soldier who has been court marshalled and sent to a distant planet. It has been in development for almost five years and features Tom Cruise and Morgan Freeman.

Iron Man returns to the big screen at the beginning of May in *Iron Man 3*. Hopefully this franchise will get a much needed shot in the arm from new director Shane Black, who was responsible for the *Lethal Weapon* movies and has worked with Downey Jr. in the past on the underappreciated *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang*.

If Iron Man 3 isn't quite your thing then J.J.Abrams new Star Trek film will be busting onto the big screen around the middle of May. Benedict Cumberbatch makes the transition from *Sherlock* to *Star Trek* for *Into Darkness* though despite rampant internet speculation he does not adopt the mantle of Khan.

Oddball entry, *Epic*, arrives at the end of the month courtesy of Chris Wedge, director of *Ice Age* and *Robots*. The film centres around a teenager who finds herself transported to a deep forest where a battle between Good and Evil is being waged. This 3D animated film features the vocal talents of Amanda Seyfried, Beyonce Knowles, Colin Farrell, Josh Hutcherson and Johnny Knoxville.

In June director M. Night Shyamalan returns to the big screen after a series of flops. The *Sixth Sense* director has pinned his hopes on science fiction film, *After Earth*. The film focuses on Will Smith and his son Jaden as they crash on a planet that was evacuated by humanity 1000 years ago.

Many people will disagree with me when I say that what we really needed this year was yet another relaunch of the Superman franchise. I will always have a fond place in my heart for the Richard Donner 1978 film, and a slightly smaller place for Bryan Singers' *Superman Returns* in 2006 but Zack Snyder, of *300* and *Watchmen* fame, promises to provide a very different take on the franchise by removing Lex Luther and pitting Superman against super villains from Krypton in *Man Of Steel*.

Seth Rogan returns to the screen with the rest of the *Knocked Up* crew in the middle of June. *The End Of The World* is a meta-textual comedy that focuses on the reactions of a number of celebrities who, while partying at James Franco's house, are faced with the apocalypse.

After numerous difficulties and a dramatically inflated budget the eagerly awaited *World War Z* is set to hit a cinema near you at the end of June. Don't be expecting to see the film of Max Brook's fan favourite set in the aftermath of a zombie apocalypse. The film focuses on the efforts of a U.N. Employee in a race against time as he travels the world trying to prevent the apocalypse that is central to the novel on which it is based.

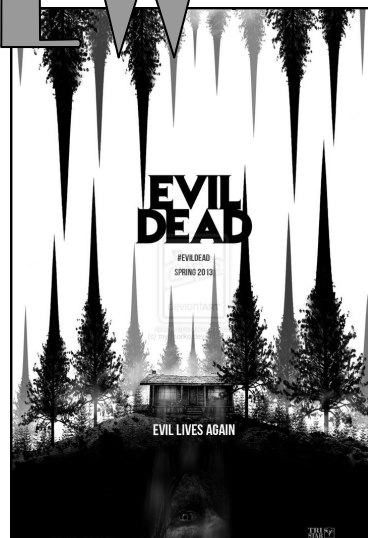
FILM REVIEW

by Al Thomas

It would appear that Hollywood has decided that what we needed in 2013 was not an original horror movie, like the outstanding *Cabin In The Woods*, but a remake. As with other remakes, like *Halloween*, *Nightmare on Elm Street* and *Night of the Living Dead*, this film will prove to be little more than a curio for many fans of the franchise.

The film has been extensively rewritten by Diablo Cody, of *Jennifer's Body* fame, and bears little resemblance to the cult classic on which it is based. It centres around Mia, a drug addict, who decides that the best way to end her addiction is to go cold turkey. To accomplish this feat she drags her brother and some friends to a cabin in the woods. The cabin is plagued with weird smells and the cellar is full of dead animals and the series iconic book, the Necronomicon. Despite the fact that the book is made of human flesh and bound in barbed wire, one of the characters decides to translate the tome and all hell breaks loose.

Raimi's masterpiece may be buried beneath Cody's unnecessary rewrite but, and lets be honest about this, you won't go to see *Evil Dead* for the story. This movie, like the original, is a gorefest and in that respect the movie doesn't disappoint. There are plenty of dismembered limbs, one character goes berserk with a nail gun and another is beaten to death with part of a toilet but only after being drenched in bloody vomit. The set pieces are fantastic and the climactic showdown does indeed feature a chainsaw,



EVIL DEAD

12TH APRIL 2013

because *Evil Dead* just wouldn't be the same without a chainsaw.

The only concern that I have is that due to the lack of story and character development, I knew very little about these characters and cared even less. This significantly reduced the impact of the scenes because I wasn't frightened or shocked, instead I was left thinking "I bet that hurt!"

One of the most important aspects of the Raimi franchise was the successful blending of horror with humour. I still laugh at the "Farewell to Arms" joke in *Evil Dead 2* despite the fact I've seen it hundreds of times and know its coming. The frights were real but they were mixed with laughs and Diablo Cody's version is completely humourless. While it was interesting to compare how effects and acting styles have changed in the last thirty years, this film about demonic possession is completely soulless.

FILM REVIEW

by Al Thomas

J.J.Abrams proved with his 2009 reboot of the Star Trek franchise that he has the knack for taking some of the most convoluted fictional lore, unravelling its narratives and making the core moments shine, even when they are grounded in some of the most ridiculous science-fiction scenarios. With Star Trek: Into Darkness he doesn't quite manage to pull off the same trick.

The film's narrative is quickly established. Kirk is still unable to control his impulses and is granted a romantic alien-babe sequence that will no doubt please hardened fans of the series. Spock continues to war with his emotions and Starfleet is still unable to shape them into the "perfect crew." The villain of the piece is John Harrison, played by *Sherlock's* Benedict Cumberbatch, who is responsible for a terrorist attack on futuristic London. As Kirk and crew pursue him there are the usual array of conflicts between colleagues, friends, and spacecraft.

As the narrative weaves around the character of John Harrison it is not surprising that Cumberbatch has some of the best scenes of the film. He has never been on better form, playing Harrison as an expressionless snake whose real face can only be seen when he lunges in for the kill. He is the perfect balance to the more comedic elements of the film and I was genuinely surprised by some of his fight sequences.

Benedict Cumberbatch's performance lifts him above the rest of the cast but that is not to say that the other performances are substandard.



STAR TREK: INTO DARKNESS

5TH MAY 2013

Chris Pine returns with more emotional weight than the previous film, which adds to his endearing and roguish portrayal of Kirk. Zachary Quinto's Spock is still as soulful and remains charmingly clueless about the human histrionics that surround him. Many of the other characters fade into the background. Simon Pegg's Scotty has a delightful sub plot that lifts him, albeit temporarily, out of the comic relief role that defines many of the other characters, notably Zoe Saldana's Uhura.

Into Darkness suffers from a tendency to warp its own logic and, while plot holes can be forgiven, nowhere is this more stark than in the final act which descends into fan-service. It seems a cruel irony that Abram's brave attempts to appease die-hard Trekkies may prove to be cause the most problems for his audience. The film may prove that the reboot was not a fluke but in many ways fails to build upon its foundations.

ON DVD

Dark skies opened in the USA back in February and if you are lucky then you may still be able to catch it in a local cinema. Scott Stewart's supernatural science-fiction thriller has done exceptionally well and why would we expect any less from the producer that brought us *Paranormal Activity* and *Insidious*. Jason Blum seems to have the Midas touch when it comes to big horror films and *Dark Skies* is no exception.

You may be tempted to view this because you've seen the reviews saying science-fiction and horror, but if you are expecting CGI then you are

DARK SKIES

going to sorely disappointed. This film had quite a small budget and relies on the actors to get the job done. Fortunately the actors, even the children, are more than up to the task.

If you've seen any of Jason Blum's other successes though then there won't be anything new for you here. The cinematography is similar to *Sinister*, and the soundtrack was reminiscent of *Insidious*. Not that these are bad qualities, it's just that they don't seem to be maturing.

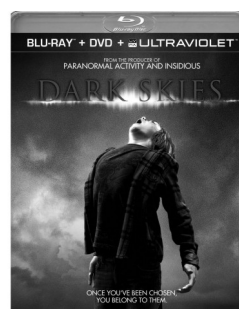
Dark Skies is a pretty standard haunting possession-type horror movie with aliens as the monsters but it's worth catching on DVD if you missed it in the cinema.

BEAUTIFUL CREATURES

Beautiful Creatures got a lot of bad press and in my mind undeservedly so. While the film is another teenage supernatural romance, anyone going to the cinema expecting to see *Twilight* had plainly not done their homework.

Beautiful Creatures has more in common with the Sookie Stackhouse novels than it does with *Twilight*. There is a romance at the centre of the novel but there is also Southern Politics, Civil War History and a healthy dose of religion. It's not surprising then that this film was so heavily panned by people expecting to see another *Twilight*.

I will say this once, if you've read the books then you may be disappointed by the lack of adherence to the storyline of the books but it does focus on the main points of the plot, and



REVIEW by Al Thomas

considering how some novel conversions have turned out then that is a very good thing.

If you like *Twilight* then you will like this film but let's be clear it is not *Twilight*. *Beautiful Creatures* has laughs, action, fear, romance and above all a healthy dose of magic that will appeal to the disenfranchised *Harry Potter* fans.

A solid young adult movie that will entertain the adults.

UPCOMING RELEASES

A look at second quarter DVD releases

There will be no shortage of Horror films out over the next few months as the Halloween and Valentine's Day Horror films hit the DVD schedule. While the April releases are slightly lacklustre foreign offering Thale and The Haunting in Connecticut 2 are probably worth looking at. Thale is a fantasy horror filmed in based on a Norwegian fairytale and is worth a look if you don't mind the subtitles. The Haunting in Connecticut 2 is one of a slew of possession movies going back to 2009. You probably won't find anything original here but if you enjoyed the original then its probably worth a punt. Bad Kids Go To Hell is your basic cookie cutter teen slasher and Night of the Living Dead: Resurrection is a remake of the cult classic filmed on location in Wales.

The release schedule starts to ramp up in May with some big films hitting the shelves. Cloud Atlas helps lift a rather dark release schedule and is a good family film. Beautiful Creatures may not be for the whole family but this film is certainly one that you can watch with your teenagers.

Side Effects is a clever psychological thriller featuring Jude Law and is supposedly the last hurrah of talented director Steve Soderbergh. It was written by Scott Z. Burns who also wrote Contagion.

Dark Skies is still doing well in the cinemas. This supernatural science-fiction film by Scott Stewart borrows from films like Poltergeist but not so much as to detract from your enjoyment of the film.

If you prefer you horror more brutal then Texas Chainsaw 3D will also hit the shelves this month. I also recommend that you consider picking up ABC's of Death. This 26 chapter mash up, one for each letter of the alphabet, by some of the most important names in horror will be receiving limited cinema release in the near future so you may have to buy the DVD to see it.

June sees the horror onslaught continue with Mama, American Mary and Come Out and Play

	TITLE	GENRE
APRIL	Bad Kids Go To Hell	Horror
	The Haunting in Connecticut 2	Horror
	Thale	Horror
	The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey	Fantasy
	Night of the Living Dead: Resurrection	Horror
MAY	ABC's of Death	Horror
	Cloud Atlas	Fantasy, Sci-Fi
	Texas Chainsaw 3D	Horror
	Side Effects	Horror
	Beautiful Creatures	Fantasy, Horror
	Dark Skies	Horror, Sci-Fi
JUNE	Escape from Planet Earth	Science Fiction
	Hansel and Gretel: Witch Hunters	Fantasy, Horror
	Warm Bodies	Horror
	Mama	Horror
	The Last Exorcism: Part 2	Horror
	American Mary	Horror
	Come Out and Play	Horror

ARTICLE by Al Thomas

getting their UK releases. The Last Exorcism: Part 2 did well in the box office despite a lot of criticism, so pick that up if you are short on possession films.

Hansel and Gretel: Witch Hunters feels like its barely out of the cinema, likewise with Warm Bodies and Escape from Planet Earth. If you can't wait to see them again then pick them in June.

GAME REVIEWS

REVIEW by Al Thomas

Moving away from the familiar undersea setting, Columbia is an airborne city carried on propellers and floating on a cloud of hubris. The beautiful architecture immediately conveys the wealth and prosperity of the city but, as you soon learn, the city is morally bankrupt. The city is also home to the Vox Populi, a group of anarchists who are, under the leadership of Daisy Fitzroy, inciting a revolution. All in all, it's not a great time to be visiting the city.

If you are familiar with the BioShock series then you will know that it isn't like other shooters. The first games, set in the underwater dystopia of Rapture, was an unusual blend of RPG and shooter. BioShock Infinite changes the blend in favour of all out-shooters like Call of Duty. You can kit out your hero with a variety of magical powers called Vigors but, while in previous games they could be used tactically, they have become little more than ancillary weapons. This change is likely the result of the fact that there are no benevolent creatures, like the Big Daddies of the first game, in Columbia. In fact the whole city seems to be out to get you.

This simplification may disappoint many die-hard fans of the franchise but it has allowed Irrational Games to construct a much tighter game with combat mechanics that stand shoulder to shoulder with the best in the genre. The RPG elements have not been completely abandoned, you can still power up your weapons and Vigors at a variety of cheery vending machines and the scarcity of



BIOSHOCK INFINITE

2K GAMES MARCH 2013

money will require you to make a choice about the powers that you upgrade.

BioShock Infinite's storyline is every bit as brave and memorable as its predecessors though its ending may not stand up to too much scrutiny. The big reveal at the end feels like its been ripped straight out of a movie blockbuster from the last decade. In many ways this is down to the science fiction theory that attempts to combine multiverse theory with time travel. At times this works well but often the science gives way to the requirements of a boss battle and the rules seem to change leaving you with a "wait! What?" feeling.

In the end it is Elizabeth that steals the show. Her relationship with the main character fluctuates and evolves as she develops her understanding of her ability to tear holes in space and time, and as she comes to learn the reality of the hero's true calling.

This game is a strong shooter with a fantastic setting and memorable characters but the plot needs work.

GAME REVIEWS

REVIEW by Al Thomas

One of the things I loved about the original Dead Island was the gore-soaked slapstick of the first-person action RPG. Often these comedic occurrences were the result of the clunky coding and glitchy geometry of the game and Deep Silver seemed to spend an awful lot of time patching the hell out of Dead Island. It would be reasonable to assume that Riptide will be building on solid foundations.

Riptide is more an expansion than a full-blown sequel, you can even import your save from the original, and follows the survivors of the original game as they become shipwrecked on the neighbouring island of Palanai. The setting is suitably tropical but far less touristic than Banoi with the hotel complex being replaced by waterlogged fishing villages.

In Riptide the levelling problems that were inherent to the first game have been addressed so you won't end up trying to fend off your friends Uber-zombies which makes the drop-in drop-out play a much more attractive feature than it was in the original game.

One important change is the addition of martial-arts expert John Morgan. He handles much the same of the rest of the characters but with the added bonus of having a flying kick. Initially this will feel underpowered due to the stat-driven nature of combat in the game but in time becomes a powerful tool against the rampaging horde of zombies.

The biggest change to the game, in my opinion, comes in the form of the siege



DEAD ISLAND: RIPTIDE

DEEP SILVER APRIL 2013

mechanics. As you explore the island you will stumble across a rickety fortress that has been hastily assembled by the Palanai residents. A zombie attack is imminent and you are charged with heaving a variety of metal fencing into place so that it blocks the gaps in the walls. You are just finished when a horde of zombies undoes all your hard work and you are forced to run around trying to stop them from eating your new friends. At low levels all you can do is rebuild the walls and savagely beat anything that gets through but as the game progresses and items like proximity mines become available then this aspect of the game really begins to shine.

That said a new character, a new game mechanic and some much needed engine improvements aren't enough to lift this game above its predecessor. Riptide is more of the same thing. If you're tired of bloodstained sand and viscera coated settings then there won't be much here to change your mind, but if you enjoyed hacking up zombies in beautiful settings then its time to pack your suitcase and take another trip.

THIEF: OUT OF THE SHADOWS

Square Enix Eidos Montreal 2014

It is not surprising that, with the unexpected success of *Dishonored*, Garrett is scheduled to be making a welcome return to screens throughout the world, well at least some of them. At the moment the new thief game has been announced for PC, PS4 and "other next-gen consoles," and Square Enix have taken great pains to point out that Thief has not been confirmed for Microsoft platforms. Though this could be because Microsoft has not made an announcement concerning its next-gen console.

Thief is not a game about a wronged hero mysteriously gifted superpowers to bring justice to the land. It's about a sprawling pestilent city filled with secrets that is being dragged into an industrial revolution and an anti-social loner who is exceptionally good at stealing things. Corvo may have his clockwork heart but all Garrett has is a blackjack and his wits. Progress through the game is made by darting between shadows, peeking around boxes and scurrying up and down the walls of buildings. This isn't a stealth game, it's the stealth game.

Controversially, the new Thief game will include a focus ability that can be used to takedown guards, pick pockets or slow time and will no doubt feel reminiscent of the contentious Instinct skill in *Hitman Absolution*. This feature is included to give a degree of flexibility and assist in making spur of the moment decisions. Focus, like health, won't regenerate and as such the player will have to make decisions about when and how to use it. Combat is not a recommended strategy in



ARTICLE by Al Thomas

Thief games but some contact is inevitable for the vast majority of gamers. Focus will assist in recovering from these situations accidental or otherwise, or if you are confident in your abilities then you could burn it to get additional money from a locked safe.

The whole environment is designed to be a playground. There are areas of shadows where Garrett will be able to hide but he won't be safe there indefinitely. In order to assist the player in deciding how safe they are the previous game's glowing gem has been banished in favour of a simple circular icon.

The game is showing a lot of promise and the voices from Square Enix are saying the right things. The team behind the game have invested a significant amount of time into the setting and the characters. For many gamers the crucial factor is going to be the impact that the Focus ability has on gameplay, as will some of the Assassin's Creed style third-person camera viewpoints associated with takedowns and climbing.

UPCOMING RELEASES

A look at second quarter game releases

The second quarter kicks off with science fiction action in Defiance and Star Trek. Horror fans may struggle with Dead Island: Riptide as there isn't much new in this title but if you enjoyed Dead Island then it may give you something to occupy your mind. Fantasy fans will find something to keep them occupied as Dragon's Dogma: Dark Arisen hits consoles alongside Injustice: God Among Us. Dragon's Dogma is an action RPG and was a big success last year. Injustice: God s Among Us is a DC Comics Universe fighting game from NetherRealm studios of Mortal Kombat fame.

In May Deus Ex makes it onto the Wii-U. The tendency to give Wii-U games titles like "Special Edition" or "Director's Cut" continues but there won't be anything terribly new here if you have the X-box or PS version. Far Cry 3 goes 80s retro in Blood Dragon. Set in a dystopian 2007 future where the world has been destroyed by a nuclear war. Kill the baddies, get the girl and save the world.

Metro: Last Night is the follow up to last years Metro. It was initially going to be called 2034 but apparently gamers aren't clever enough to realise that the games would be related. The game follows on from the bad ending and follows Artyom's quest to find "the prisoner".

Resident Evil fans will be delighted with Revelations as it makes the transition from the 3DS. The series returns to the survival gameplay of the early games in the series with its limited ammunition, focus on exploration and, of course, its puzzles.

Roleplaying fans will be well catered for in June with Shadowrun, Dungeons and Dragons and Warhammer Quest releases but my attention is firmly focused on open-world Zombie survival game State of Decay.

	TITLE	PLATFORM
APRIL	Defiance	X360, PC, PS3
	Dungeon Hunter 4	iOS
	Orion: Dino Horde	PC
	Injustice: Gods Among Us	Wii-U, PS3
	Fire Emblem : Awakening	3DS
	Dead Island: Riptide	X360
	Dragon's Dogma: Dark Arisen	X360, PS3
	Star Trek	PC, X360, PS3
MAY	Far Cry 3: Blood Dragon	PC, PS3, X360
	Deus Ex: Human Revolution	Wii-U
	Metro: Last Night	PC, PS3, X360
	Resident Evil: Revelations	PC, PS3, X360 and Wii-U
JUNE	Deadpool	PS3, X360, PC
	Shadowrun Returns	Win, Mac, iOS
	State of Decay	PC, X360
	Knights of Pen and Paper +1 Edition	PC, Mac
	Dungeons & Dragons: Chronicles of Mystara	PC, PS3, X360
	Warhammer Quest	iOS

ARTICLE by Al Thomas

UPCOMING EVENTS

Our Guide to upcoming conventions

APRIL

Date	Name	Details	Location
6th	The Dawn of the Federation	Star Trek www.theussfortitude.com	The National Space Centre, Leicester
6th—7th	The Highlands International Comic Expo	Comics www.hi-ex.co.uk	Inverness
25th—28th	Dead by Dawn	Horror Film www.deadbydawn.co.uk	Filmhouse, Edinburgh
28th	Wales Comic Con	Comics, Sci-fi & Fantasy www.walescomiccon.com	Glyndwr University, Wrexham

MAY

Date	Name	Details	Location
3rd—5th	Starfury: Invasion	Science Fiction www.starfury.co.uk	Renaissance Hotel, Heathrow
4th	Screen Con	Sci-fi/ Popular Culture www.screen-con.com	The Park Leisure Centre, North Shields
4th—5th	The Elstree Empire Day	Star Wars www.collectormania.com	Elstree

MAY

Date	Name	Details	Location
10th-12th	Happily Ever After	Once Upon A Time & Grimm www.massiveevents.co.uk	Hilton Metropole Birmingham, NEC
11th-12th	The Middle Earth Weekend	J.R.R.Tolkien www.middleearthweekend.org.uk/	The Shire Country Park, Hall Green, Birmingham
17-19th	Asylum 10	Supernatural Convention www.massiveevents.co.uk	Hilton Metropole Birmingham, NEC
24th-26th	London MCM Expo	Comics www.mcmcomiccon.com/london/	ExCel, Royal Victoria Dock, London.
31st May - 2nd June	Chevron 8	Stargate Convention www.massiveevents.co.uk	Hilton Metropole Birmingham, NEC

JUNE

Date	Name	Details	Location
9th	Celebrate 50 Years of Doctor Who: The Tom Baker Years	Doctor Who www.fantomfilms.co.uk	George IV Public House, 165 Chiswick High Road, London
14th-16th	Insurgence 5	The Vampire Diaries Convention www.massiveevents.co.uk	Hilton Metropole Birmingham, NEC
16th	Sci-fi by the Sea	Science Fiction baypromoteam.co.uk	Herne Bay
28th-30th	Starfury: Return to the Eleventh Hour	Doctor Who Convention www.massiveevents.co.uk	Hilton Metropole Birmingham, NEC
30th	Exewing Sci-fi day	Exewing Fundraisers Doctor Who Event www.exewing.co.uk	Pecorama, Beer, Devon

JULY

Date	Name	Details	Location
5th-7th	London Film and Comic Con	Comic www.collectormania.com	Earls Court
14th	Celebrate 50 Years of Doctor Who: The Colin Baker Years	Doctor Who www.fantomfilms.co.uk	George IV Public House, 165 Chiswick High Road, London
20th-21st	London Anime Con	Anime & Gaming www.londonanimecon.com	The Rocket Complex, London Metropolitan Uni.
27th-28th	Trekology	Star Trek Convention www.trekology.org	Trafford Hall Hotel, Manchester

AUGUST

Date	Name	Details	Location
8th-11th	Leaky Con	Harry Potter Convention www.leakycon.com	Grand Connaught Rooms
9th-11th	Wadfest 2013	Sci-fi & Fantasy Camping www.wadfest.co.uk	Trentfield Farm, Retford
9th-11th	Transformers Auto Assembly 2013	Transformers Convention www.massiveevents.co.uk	Hilton Metropole Birmingham, NEC
11th	Celebrate 50 Years of Doctor Who: The Jon Pertwee Years	Doctor Who www.fantomfilms.co.uk	George IV Public House, 165 Chiswick High Road, London
16th—18th	Ayacon	Japanese Culture www.ayacon.org.uk	Warwick Arts Centre

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