



SCI FI, FANTASY AND HORROR

STORIES, ART AND SATIRE

## Our Feature

### Stories:

**Sins of the Dead**

**Punishment**

**Cat Magic**

MIKE C BENE'S

STAR SEERS CONTINUES WITH

"THE HOUR OF HUNGER"

TROUBLE AT THE DOCKS

A NEW SERIAL BY JIM KING

FANTASTIC FIVE

MINUTE FICTION

**A Tribute To**

**HR Giger**

**Movie**

**Video Game**

**& Book**

**Reviews**

**WHAT MAKES A**

**WIZARD?**

**AUTHOR**

**INTERVIEWS**

**FIRST CHAPTER**

**READS!**

**ARKADY SZANTOVITCH**

**EDUCATES SOME ALIENS**



HELLO READERS!

*What a Month it has been! We have had over 500 views to our April Issue since it's release!*

*Needless to say, we are Thrilled!  
A BIG Super-Giant Sized THANK YOU to you all for supporting us*

*We have a few new faces in the mix as well as some of those who have remained with us and some fantastic new content.*

*We have had several new books to read and review from various Authors out there on the internet.*

*This month sees the Return of Mike C Bene's "Star Seers" as well as two new serials, one from our Stalwart Insane Asylum Patient... Arkady Szantovitch, whom we also interview in this month's new Interviews Section, Along with our Editor, Pete Sutton and Kris Austin Radcliffe, The other is "Trouble at the Docks" By Jim King, a Horror Mystery which will be continuing chapter by chapter every issue with more to come!*

*We have our usual Reviews and also starting up a new section: First Chapter Reads. These are the first chapters of published books that the Authors have let us give you, our dear readers, a Sneak Peek of!*

*We explore the world of Wizards, what makes the Wizard? Is it a grouchy old man with a long white beard? Or is it the handsome young mage who sweeps the ladies off their feet swooning with a love spell?*

*And of course we have our regular sections: Feature Stories, Five Minute fictions and our Reviews!*

*We are now on the Internet with our very own Webpage (<http://info-far-horizons.wix.com/far-horizons-omag>), and you can also find us on Twitter! (@FarHorizonseMag)  
Got a Story or Artwork you'd like to submit?  
Email us: [info.far.horizons@gmail.com](mailto:info.far.horizons@gmail.com)*

*Hope you enjoy our May issue of "FAR HORIZONS"*

*-Stacey Welsh, Editor, Contributor. May 2014*

## IN THIS MONTH'S ISSUE:

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## **Sins of the Dead**

**By Thea Gilchrist**

He stared them down as they charged at him. Blades at the ready, he waited for the end. But the demise found that day was not his. Nor was it theirs. No, the very world around them was the victim of that fatal charge. They crashed down around him as the air itself was torn asunder by the anguished screams of the dying army that charged him and the vengeful wails of the dead. He felt himself being dragged backward by spectral hands and thought this was his sentence. For he was as guilty of the crimes brought before the magistrates as they thought he was. His feet had no purchase on the ground and he began to panic ever so slightly. Was this truly the will of the Gods or had some foul magic been wrought to send him down into the depths of Hell to suffer for his crimes? He'd never know the truth... He spiralled out of control and felt himself spinning until he made contact with the ground. But it was a ground he'd never felt before. Where before the earth was soft, giving, yielding, this was hard and unforgiving. He ached all over and felt rough hands grasping at his belt, his dirk, his twin blades. His voice was coarse, guttural.

"Begone, foul wretch!"

There was a pause, then his would be assailant fled on foot. He got to his feet and found himself in a land of concrete and steel, though he knew nothing of those things. He only knew he wasn't where he should have been. Something told him to hide until he knew the ways of this strange new land... So he took cover in an alley and watched, a coarse grey blanket stolen from the wash line above used to hide his countenance, draped over his head like a cloak to help him blend in. There were plenty

of homeless people around and if one were to look past the sharp steel dirk and twin blades on his back, one would be inclined to believe he was just another hobo looking for a handout. But when darkness fell and all the others went to their cardboard boxes to get what little sleep they could, he stayed awake. He sat by a meagre fire one of them had built and kept it alive by feeding it bits of wood and other consumable materials. After dusk he lay back and let his eyes close. The fire burned itself out and went dormant without a wind to stir it up and move the few measly coals into a place where they could cause trouble. He fell into a dreamless void and knew this was the place he would strike next. He anticipated events before they happened and eagerly sought the gift the fates had bestowed upon him. (They also gave him the ability to understand where he was. The local speech had become familiar to him as the night passed.) Down into the ethereal abyss he fell, his body rising from its repose without waking the others.

A steady gait carried him into the depths of the city and he grinned in anticipation of what was to come. He put himself near a small group of people and waited. He never made a sound... Nor did the woman he pulled into the alley he'd been standing beside. Her muffled screams weren't loud enough to attract anyone's attention... They didn't last very long either. A swift pull of the dirk and her throat gushed blood upward to splash on his face. The splash was welcomed with a very soft sigh of contentment and he set about dismembering her corpse with a gruesome efficiency that suggested he'd done this numerous times before. There were other things to be done and he had very little time in which to do them. He stood and left her discarded remains to rot in the graceless heap he'd left them in, to walk out of the alley and pull the blanket over his head so nobody could see the blood on his face

before he had a chance to wash it off. His attention was focused on the task at hand when he heard voices.

“Come on, Mary, let’s go see a movie.”

“I don’t know, Gracie, the last time you saw a movie with me I had nightmares for a week.”

“Oh come on. Where’s your spirit of adventure?”

“I left it under the bed next to my bunny slippers.”

Laughter floated on the wind and rang in his ears and he knew they were his next targets. He followed them without making it look like he was doing so, an art perfected in a place that no longer existed to him. They were standing outside the theatre when he struck and pulled them both into a clothing store that had been condemned. The door was closed and locked before they had a chance to realize what was going on.

“What... Who are you?”

“What do you want?”

He gave an evil grin as he stepped into the light cast by the full moon through the skylight above.

“Who I am doesn’t matter. What I want is really quite simple.”

He laughed maniacally for a few seconds, just enough to unnerve them, before he continued.

“What I want...”

And he began to advance at a slow methodical pace that only emphasized his size and sent them into a wordless gibbering panic.

“Is for you to die.”

The whispering shriek of metal being drawn from leather heralded the twin blades being crossed in front of his face. They started to scream but no sound came out. One of them reached up to touch her throat and looked at her hand in confusion when it came up covered in blood. He’d moved so quickly they’d felt no pain as the keenly honed, razor-sharp edges whisked across the skin and sank through every layer of flesh to rip through the cartilage beneath. It was hard to scream when your throat was filled with blood... The crimson liquid welled up and poured down the twin slashes to bathe their clothing in a scarlet stream. One of them crumpled to the ground, dead of shock before he could torture her. But the other was still alive. He moved quickly and with such merciless precision that she didn’t have time to do more than blink before her fingers fell off one by one. They were followed by her hands... Which were followed by her arms... Which were followed by her feet... Which were followed by her legs... Which were followed by her head, the sightless eyes glazing over in death. The sight of his handiwork never ceased to amaze him. He turned to the one who died of shock and made quick cuts, leaving her in pieces beside her friend. The store had a small bathroom with running water. So he went in and found instructions on how to use the taps. The water ran rusty so he let it run until it was clear, then washed his hands and face to remove all the blood that had accumulated from his nightly activities. The three gruesome murders were splashed all over the news the next morning.

“How awful!”

“They were killed in public too.”

“I heard the killer cut them into pieces so small they couldn’t feed a rat.”

He pretended not to hear, but he smiled anyway. And his heart sang at the attention his efforts had gotten him. The police cruised the streets looking for information on the perpetrator, but nobody could tell them anything. The simple truth was, they didn’t have any information to give them. The shock of the slayings quickly wore off, only to be replaced by horror at the gruesome deaths that followed. The police would never find their killer. Nor would anyone else. Because you see, he’d been right under their noses all along. He left no evidence and there were no witnesses who could describe him. And he’d continue to leave his grisly calling cards wherever he went. Nobody stood a chance against...

The Sleepwalker Killer.

### Thea Gilchrist:

*When it comes to reading, Thea's no stranger to it. She practically grew up in the school library... She was happiest curled up in a corner with a good book in front of her. Even school reading assignments were fun to her, because she loved to read, no matter what it was. But it wasn't until shortly before she found out her mother had cancer that she started writing... She had a pen, an empty notebook and no idea what was going to come from it. As with most true artists, she is a slave to her muse and has many projects that are currently incomplete, but she's hoping to go back and finish them someday soon. She cites several different authors as those who guide and inspire her, the literary legend Piers Anthony among them. (Check out his Xanth novel series if you want lots of laughter.) And though her mother is no longer physically with her, Thea plans to dedicate her first novel to her.*



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## **Punishment**

**By Ana Marija Meskova**

Everything around Marnay was drowning in red. Thousands of bodies were lying around her, their blood was soaking the dark brown ground. Pain flooded every cell in her body, while anger started flowing through her veins. She could feel every drop of death and pain around her, every piece of suffering, so thick that if she wanted she could reach out and touch it. Her greyish purple eyes, even clouded by tears from the intensity of the energy around her, were still glowing like precious gems, the iris slowly spinning. She looked at her hands. Heavy smoke, a mix of violet and dark grey, was coiling around them, the emotions of thousands of dead and dying. Innocents, people with good hearts and pure minds. People that rejoiced at the sight of peace. Now all that was left of them were the remains around her and their cries in her head. She could not look at those in front of her with a calm expression anymore. She now knew the anger she felt wasn't coming from outside. It was coming from her own body, it was her reaction to the horrors that were being unveiled in front of her, to the realisation that that army of vile beasts had caused so much suffering, she couldn't even absorb it all without detrimental consequences. She knew what they were feeling. They could not hide it from an empath. There wasn't a single speck of regret or conscience in them, they had fun. This army had attracted the worst from every planet. There was not one of them she could deem worthy to live.

Marnay closed her eyes and focused, lifting her arms slowly. Her body summoned the smoke and it seeped through the pores on her skin. The screams were filling her mind,

and she could not believe the evil she was feeling.

The Colonel, a short human-like man, took a few steps back, and turned to the King. The fierce man with eyes as cold as ice, and hair Marnay would say had the same shade of black as his soul, read the panic in the voice of his subordinate with ease:

"Maybe... we should retreat now, Sire."

"We are not here to toy around. We already played the part of pest control. It's only one woman."

Those were the last words the King would ever speak. Pests. He thought these people were pests. He wasn't doing this for any reason that could be considered even remotely valid. Evil existed and would exist forever, she has dealt with that realization, but never like this. He loved suffering, he enjoyed holding thousands of lives in his hands, seeing their eyes glass over as they took their last breath. He enjoyed inflicting the pain that was now tearing her inside. She guided her power over the troops with a wave of her hand, the dark haze that came off them collided with her. Every victim, every innocent they ever hurt even for a moment across the galaxies they ransacked, had lent her their anger, their sadness, pain, every emotion in their bodies. Her desire for these abominations to be purged from existence was increasing to levels she didn't know were possible. Marnay lost herself in it all, allowing it to flood her until she had reached her breaking point, until her very essence couldn't take anymore, until every emotion she had access to was put to use. Then she released it all. Among the havoc her glowing eyes looked even more terrifying, the particles of the same colour as the smoke spinning wildly like they were propelled by wind. No one had ever felt or seen anything like this even in their wildest nightmares,

nothing could compare to the billions of screams that filled the space out of nowhere. The earth started to shake and break apart, people were falling in a whirl of blood-curdling screams, as their bodies tore themselves apart. They were experiencing every injury and emotion they had ever inflicted. She had her hands stretched out, energy from the pain she was causing was coming back to her, and she released it again without a second thought. The air was getting unbearable, even the planet seemed to ache, shaking violently under their feet, the crust cracking. And amongst all the dying, the King was cradling himself, the man that had killed thousands with his own hands was crying and begging for her to stop.

Marnay walked closer. She was standing over him now, her hands hanging beside her body, she didn't need to raise them anymore in order to control the hurricane. The blood flowing from them was staining the now already soaked ground. It was shining with the glow of the energy still inside of her. While everything around her was dying, she became stronger. He looked straight in her eyes, trying to find compassion, but all he saw was proof she would never heed his pleas. She knew he would never feel regret, that every ounce of conscience he had ever had was long drowned by the maniacal joy he got from his work. With every last piece of strength he had left, he lunged at her, knife in hand. But what could he do to the one that had experienced the pain of a thousand worlds? How much would her own bother her anyway? How did he think he would hide his intentions from her? These were all things he didn't think about. Marnay grabbed his wrist and held it tightly in her hand, forcing him to drop the knife.

"Let's see if you can handle the things you have dealt." As soon as her other hand made contact with his forehead, everything was over

in a vortex of well-deserved punishment. The pressure tore apart his body from the inside, but not before he could feel every single drop of pain and suffering his victims experienced. The pressure and pain shredded him to pieces as the planet split from the pressure. A blinding light was the only trail it left, now torn in a million pieces.

#

"Strange. The explosion had the strength of a supernova, but that is where the similarities end. I don't know what caused it."

Kalik was looking at where his home used to be. He didn't even hear the Chief Science Officer's last sentence. How could he? Everyone was gone. He was too late, help didn't arrive in time. He didn't know what had happened, why they would blow up the planet, and he didn't care right now. The only thought in his mind was that his family was gone. He was two steps away from falling into the chasm of sadness head first when his scanner picked up something that was so strange, it shelved all of his other thoughts.

In a few minutes they were staring at her through a pane of thick glass.

"How did that body make it? Even her clothes are intact, more or less." Marnay was now lying on the slab. She was definitely not a native, and surely wasn't one of the army judging from her build and the uniform. She looked human, pretty tall, dark blond, peaceful expression on her face with no signs of her having lived a rough life. Her clothes were functional: black pants and blouse, with a grey hood and boots with steel soles. She had a single long knife on her belt. Her clothes had a decorative element in a language they didn't understand. The only wounds, old or new, they could find were the deep ones all over the length of her arms, like her muscles had erupted on their own. She also had massive

internal bleeding. What got them stumped was the white piece of crystal around her neck. It was made of a material the scanner didn't recognise. Worried it was the cause of her death, or even the cause of the blast, they tried to do more invasive tests when it started to pulsate at the rate of a fast heartbeat. Before anyone could do anything, the glow spread to Marnay's entire body and she vanished. They never figured out the cause of the blast, or who she was. The only thing they managed to find out was that it was caused by some kind of energy surge, and that it took the entire army and their ships with it.

#

Marnay could feel their surprise even when her energy was spinning in the peaceful cocoon, and she still felt it after she woke up. It made her chuckle. Kalik had long since finished his existence. She checked and was assured that Kalik had lived a peaceful life. Marnay knew how sad and difficult being one of the handful that survived was. She had felt it, as she had felt a lot of things she wouldn't if she wasn't an empath. She couldn't save his people from the horrors provided by the King's Army, no one could. But she was glad she did what she did, she was glad she got rid of them before they could cause even more sadness and instil more fear. Marnay looked through the window at the peaceful surroundings and drank in the sleepiness of the village. The sun wasn't even up properly, but she could see it in all its glory. She was happy to be home.

### Ana Marija Meskova

*From a young age, Ana Marija has been fascinated by the written word. Feeling the need to release the characters from her head she turned to create that which occupied a large portion of her life. Her imagination making use of everything around her, she*

*sculpts scenes which can be both dreamy and dark in a way. Only one thing is certain, she will keep following her motto - Everything I write brings me closer to the quality I want my work to have.*



When Angst turned 40, he knew it was over. His chance to be a knight had long since passed. Not to mention that Angst is also one of the few able to wield "the magic" which has been outlawed for 2,000 years. But when Unsel is besieged by dangerous monsters without warning, the world that shunned magic now turns to Angst for help. And he is happy to listen - once his back stops hurting. On the edge of a mid-life crisis, Angst drags his reluctant friends along with him on an adventure. He's not sure where they're going, or even if they'll survive. But he knows this is his one chance to be a hero because the only way to fight magic is with magic.

<http://www.amazon.com/Angst->



**“Cat Magic”**  
**By Stacey Welsh**

Sylvie was perplexed, the spell had failed again. Her room was filled with blue smoke and her face was covered in blue powder. At this rate, she would never get this one spell right and this was the one spell she needed to learn in order to pass Magical Transformations 101. What should have happened, was that the small rock before her would be coloured blue, not her, and there should not have been a small explosion of blue smoke and powder.

She sighed and wiped the powder from her face.

“I’ll never get this right.” She said with an air of hopelessness to her empty room. The students’ quarters were usually noisy with other witches chattering away, reading and playing games, or repairing their brooms after a mishap in the air or with a tree. She was fortunate that today the other girls in her dormitory were out enjoying a picnic and daring each other to broom races.

Sylvie couldn’t even get her broom off the ground.

It wasn’t that she had no talent for witchcraft; both her parents were magically inclined. Her mother and grandmother were both members of the Full Moon Sisterhood, the most elite witchcraft coven that there was in the realm.

Sylvie knew how spells worked; she even had the complex patterns of magic worked out in her mind. But when she went to put the essential magic into them to make them work, the carefully selected Runes within her

mind’s eye collapsed or disintegrated into chaos.

So instead of harmonising into a working spell with effects that would gain her a pass in school, she found her spells would fail miserably.

She took a deep breath and tried again. The first Runes came easily and then the second set and finally the third. She drew the master Rune within her mind’s eye, the one which would bind the others together. The marks began to glow brightly, quickly gaining power. She was about to speak the mark’s name and activate the spell when she was distracted by a scratching at the window. Her curiosity got the better of her and she opened her eyes at the wrong moment.

The room exploded with blue powder again, this time covering everything in the room, including her. The scratching noise came again from the window. Sylvie moved through the blue coated room and the tiny puffs of remnant powder swirled around her, settling in a fresh new coating on her face hands and clothing. She wiped the dusty blue specks from the window pane so she could see what was happening outside.

On the other side of the window and at an impossible height, considering that her window was at least seven stories up in the dorm tower, sat a black fluffy cat with large green eyes.

“Well, are you going to let me in or not?” the Cat asked. Sylvie stared agape at the creature.

Cats didn’t talk. At least none of the cats that she knew talked. The Cat looked at her and slowly blinked its deep eyes at her. The spellbound girl returned to her senses and moved quickly and unlatched the window. A

cool breeze swirled the deep blue dust around the room as the Cat entered.

Strangely enough there was no blue powder settling upon the Cat's fur as she moved about the room and she left no paw-prints upon the floor as she walked across the powder coated boards.

Sylvie watched as the Cat inspected the room sniffing with great care and interest at each item she came across, before jumping up onto the bed and proceeded to clean herself. She stopped long enough to look at the young witch.

"Close the window; you're letting the cold air in!" the Cat ordered her. Still dumbstruck at the Cat's appearance Sylvie quickly closed the window, re-latching it against the rising wind.

"Who are you?" she asked the Cat as it continued to wash its back with long strokes of her head and little pink tongue.

"I'm... a friend." The Cat replied mysteriously.

"You can talk..." Sylvie observed. "cat's don't talk, and how did you get up to that window?" Sylvie began to pace nervously. "I must be going crazy." She whispered to herself.

The Cat sneezed twice in quick succession and looked at Sylvie as she licked her lips and nose after her sneezing.

"You're not crazy, I can talk, and how I got up to that window... well that's complicated. But now, we need to clean up this room. How are you with cleansing magic?" the Cat asked.

"I'm not very good, this was the result of a simple colour changing spell" Sylvie explained as she picked up a bowl and turned it

upside down, watching as the blue powder floated to the floor in a dusty haze. The Cat shook her head and twitched her whiskers.

"Project for me a cleansing spell." The Cat instructed her. Sylvie took a deep breath and imagined the spell's opening Runes. Unfortunately all she managed to do was set some of her hair on fire. She shrieked in fright and began to jump round the small room in a panic, knocking over several items that were heaped upon her desk in the process and scattering papers and blue powder across the floor.

The Cat was quick and nimble, jumping upon Sylvie's shoulder gently blowing out the small flames and using her magic to return Sylvie's honey-brown hair to its natural unsinged state, although there was still the stench of singed hair about the room.

"They were right; you need quite a bit of help." The Cat muttered to herself as she leapt with feline grace from Sylvie's shoulder.

"Who was right?" Sylvie asked checking her hair for burn marks. The Cat looked at her, sourly,

"No-one." She stalked across the bed and sat down on the corner of the straw-stuffed mattress; she stretched and pawed the bedspread to make it more comfortable. "Think of a calm place." The Cat advised her. Sylvie closed her eyes; the Cat could see she was still on edge.

"Relax, don't sour the milk." The Cat said soothingly.

Sylvie opened her eyes,

"Don't sour the milk?" she asked, curiously. The Cat glared at her.

“It means don’t think of anything else other than a nice fresh bowl of creamy milk. Something that calms you and makes you happy. To do magic you have to be happy with yourself, otherwise it blows up in your face.” The Cat leapt down off the bed and entwined herself around Sylvie’s legs, gently pushing the girl back towards her chair.

Sylvie sat down with a huff and a puff of blue powder. “I don’t see how any of this can help, you haven’t even told me your name.”

“I’m the Cat.” The Cat said smugly. “Now be quiet and relax, think of your favourite thing.”

“Grandma’s Cinnamon buns fresh made on a cold morning, still hot.” Sylvie said, dreamily.

“Or chasing mice, mice are always good.” Offered the Cat,

“I don’t eat mice.” Sylvie countered.

“Nor do I,” replied the Cat, “But they’re fun to chase and play with.”

Sylvie looked at the Cat with a disgusted air but noticed that she was smiling with her eyes closed in that contented way that cats seem to always have when they’re happy. She could have sworn that the creature was even purring slightly.

“Now, think of those buns and transpose those thoughts and feelings into your first Rune.”

“The first Rune or the first set of Runes?” Sylvie asked the Cat with confusion; this was not the way the magic mistress had taught the girls and this way would take longer.

“The first Rune, you must see them singularly, for you may have one or more of

your Runes wrong and if you do then you can catch it before it creates a destructive force in your spell casting.” the Cat explained as she returned to the spot on the bed which seemed to please her the most.

“All right, I’ll give it a try.” Sylvie said closing her eyes. The smell of the warm cinnamon buns in her grandmother’s kitchen came to her. The scents of other herbs that dried above the fireplace joined in the memory, she heard a cat purring loudly as it sat by the hearth in her grandmother’s kitchen. But her grandmother didn’t have a cat, she was allergic to them... part of her wondered how they got to her grandmother’s kitchen, something within told her that it was the Cat who had done this.

Sylvie looked to the fire; she saw the first cleansing Rune within the flames. She used her mind to capture and hold the Rune. It was warm but not blisteringly hot to the touch. She looked around and saw the next Rune within a branch of rosemary; she took the shape of it and brought it together with the first Rune. The third Rune she found in a barrel of water from which her grandmother would draw the water to clean her house with.

The Cat watched her from the hearth “Now, draw the final mark.”

Sylvie held the three marks before her, “But it’s not a full spell! What about the other six marks?” the Cat smiled.

“Trust me it will be more than you need, without it exploding.” She stretched and padded over to Sylvie; she checked the magical Runes with the tip of her nose and sat before Sylvie, curling her tail around her front paws.

Sylvie drew the final mark and brought all four together. She felt clean and warm and the scent of rosemary was strong in her nose and the taste of it was upon her tongue. She



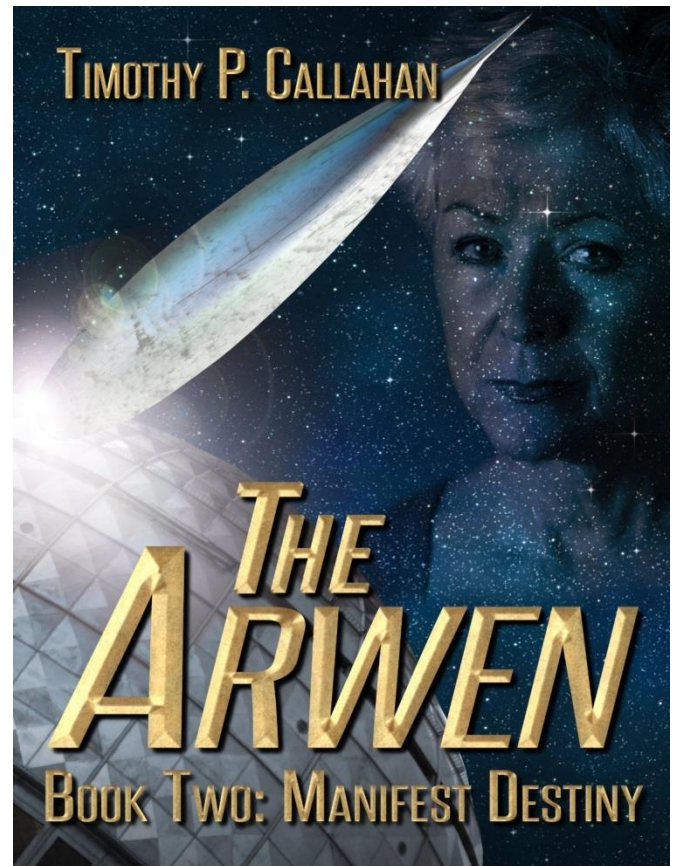
opened her eyes and they were back in her room but now it was clean and smelled sweet with the herb.

“Now, we can really begin your education.” The Cat smiled, curled up on her bed and promptly went to sleep.

### Stacey Welsh

*Learning to read at the age of four, while on holiday going across the Nullarbor Desert in Australia, Stacey found a love of reading, but it wasn't until she was almost 30 that she discovered her love of writing. One night's dream and 18 months of work later and she was Self-published with her first book Scarlett Blade: The Bandit Queen hitting the shelves of her local bookstore, and also Amazon.com and several other reputable websites. She is currently working on a few other projects which she hope to have published soon through Kindle, as well as contributing to Far Horizons*

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The Handlers, a race of centipede like aliens, want nothing less than to rid the universe of all intelligent life. The lifespan of each Handler is longer than most suns and there are countless trillions of them living in Dyson Spheres scattered throughout the galaxy. The Arwen, led by Captain Marjorie Cook, stumbles upon one while trying to find a way home after getting lost in deep in space. She has to sacrifice everything to prevent them from finding Earth.

The Arwen Book Two: Manifest Destiny, is the second book in the Arwen series which started with Book one: Defender. It is a standalone story and reading Defender is not necessary to understand the world or the characters.

[http://www.amazon.com/Arwen-Book-two-Manifest-Destiny-ebook/dp/B00EXS9VWI/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1399922734&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/Arwen-Book-two-Manifest-Destiny-ebook/dp/B00EXS9VWI/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1399922734&sr=1-1)

## **The Doom that Came from the Sky**

**By Pete Sutton**

The skystone lies in deepest shadow at the heart of the castle that was built around it. The lineage of the finder are its protectors. It is death, it is mayhem and it waits.

#

The first crashing collision reverberates through the hall. The prince looks at the dust lazily spiralling through the sunbeams contrasting it with the urgency of the sounds coming from outside. There is another resounding boom, drinks jump, plates shed cutlery. The chandeliers swing as more plaster dust rains from the ceiling.

The prince sighs. The third crash is the loudest yet, joined with a giant smashing tinkle as one of the windows gives out.

Medder thinks it is time “Prince Adelbern. It is time to leave, IF we can get past your brother’s army”

“I will not run.” The prince is stubborn, he didn’t leave when the army approached, refusing to give up as the siege engines were built, even though it is plain that the castle will fall.

Somewhere above them there is a resounding thump and the room seems to jump sideways as everyone is covered in debris.

“We stay and we ensure that they don’t take the stone.” The prince repeats, standing and dusting himself off.

“And just how do you propose to do that your highness?” Medder says.

“My brother has surrounded himself with fools. We will use the stone first.”

“The prophecy!” Medder says

“Sebastian was an idiot.”

“They say he was inspired by the gods.”

“To void his bowels and drool? No, we will use the stone.” The prince moves decisively and goes and puts his hands upon the stone.

#

The castle is silent. The crows feast. It is death, it is mayhem and for now it is sated.

**Pete Sutton**

*Pete Sutton is a UK writer. He is one of the organisers of Bristol Festival of Literature (<http://unputdownable.org>) and community engagement manager for Vala coop (<http://www.valapublishers.coop/home>)*

*You can follow him on Twitter @Sutlope and read his blog here: <http://brsbkblog.blogspot.co.uk/>*

## **A Bump in the night**

**By Jim King**

Mary Harper looked up from the TV program, something had gone thump upstairs.

“You all right love?”

George had gone upstairs a minute ago, it had sounded like a tap was dripping and she had sent him rather than miss the program. Besides, the sofa was far too comfortable. It had come with the house; the previous owners had left it behind.

Finding this place had been wonderful, they had been very lucky, a viewing the very day it came on the market and a huge discount for a cash payer. They had loved the place at first sight. Unlike most they had no chain or need for a mortgage, they had a buyer for their old place already and were desperate to move.

The place was in fantastic condition, the people had only just moved out, apparently they had new jobs up North somewhere so they needed to sell and move quickly. They had even left a lot of the furniture behind when they moved out, like this luxurious leather sofa. The estate agents had been fantastic as well; they had even turned over the flower beds ready to be planted.

Thump. “What’s that, what are you doing up there George?”

Thump. That sounded like it was on the stairs. “What’s wrong George? George?”

Movement, a shadow fell across her; she turned to smile at her husband and instead looked at a figure clad in black, all save the gleaming white of a hockey mask on its face. The eyes like black pits against the white plastic.

She gasped and drew a deep breath to scream, then the sound died in her throat as the figure lifted its right hand, a carving knife gleamed wetly in the light. Blood staining the blade to its hilt.

Then she screamed, terror gave her strength and she threw herself off the sofa and away from the figure that lunged toward her. She ran around the furniture and towards the kitchen whilst the figure followed her.

She made it to the hall, the kitchen was just ahead, the phone was there, the figure was behind her. Her slippers slid on the polished wood, she was falling. Instinctively she grabbed for anything in sight but there was nothing and she hit the floor with a thump. Crying she twisted onto her back and kicked frantically, trying to move on the slippery floor, one of her slippers came off and flew across the room.

A black clad hand grabbed her ankle and she was pulled closer to the bloody blade, closer, closer. A final scream, then silence.

#

The door opened, bright sunlight streamed in. The estate agent gestured for the elderly couple to enter and stood back while they stepped into the hall. They began to look around then walked into the lounge, exclaiming at how lovely the house was.

The estate agent glanced down and noticed a woman’s slipper, half hidden under the shoe rack by the door. He kicked it out of sight. Then he followed the couple into the sun filled lounge speaking to attract their attention.

“They had to move out quickly, jobs in Manchester. They want a quick sale but they did say they were happy to leave some of the furniture behind.”



## **Jim King**

*Stacey says I have to talk to people. She says I must write a Bio or she will send Pete the Editor round for a visit. So done under protest. Oh and she says it has to be third person so I asked HIM to write it.*

### **Who is he:**

*Jim King, Humanist, Agnostic, Thinker, Scribbler, Coffee Addict, Insane Genius.*

### **Why Does he Write:**

*Madness and coffee. Mostly madness. He says he can give up coffee any time but always has some excuse for just one more mug. Madness, well for him it's his usual state, He even talks to himself.*

### **No we don't!**

*He says he writes blogs and stories because he must. He says the words whisper to him, they talk to him, they shout and scream in his mind. He says the sentences follow him around insisting he write them, he says entire paragraphs haunt him at night, refusing to let him sleep until he has composed them and written them. He is clearly deranged.*

### **No we aren't.**

### **How Long Has he been Writing:**

*His Blogs, a year now. Short stories or as 'The Editor' calls them Novellas, two months now.*

*He has written plots and backgrounds for RPG games since he started gaming a century ago, yes ladies and gentlemen, he plays tabletop and computer games and RPGs.*

### **He is a gamer!**

*Nothing wrong with being a gamer!*

***Yes there is now shut up I'm writing this!***

### **What does he write:**

*Aside from being addicted to coffee and a raving madman.*

### **No I'm not.**

*His writing comes from the twisted depths of his imagination which has been described accurately as a strange and wonderful place though I would hesitate to use the word wonderful to describe him.*

*Not genre based as such, not limited by such things. Mild horror, steampunk, science fiction, darkness and the unknown. Anything that crawls out of his warped and alien mind really.*

### **Oi!**

### **-Editors' Note-**

*We the illustrious Editors of Far Horizons Love the humour of our fantastic Staff Writers... I ca't possibly imagine WHY they think we are such evil trolls! (While you are reading this, Pete Sutton is approaching Mr. King from behind... Sounds of a struggle ensue with muffled cries.)... We Really are not such meanies! It's not our fault someone 'fell' out of the airlock the other day!*

## **Tobias Sørensen's review of Killzone: Shadow Fall**

\*Possible spoilers: Read with caution\*

Killzone: Shadow Fall. That is the name of the newest instalment from the Killzone franchise. This time, you're taking on a new character, and not continuing from Killzone 3.



Your name is Lucas Kellan. You're one of the Shadow Marshals, an elite soldier capable of Rambo-ing everything. Though the game starts with you as a kid, and, as you progress through the opening of the game, you see cut scenes of yourself growing up, eventually becoming the right hand of your mentor, Thomas Sinclair.

The real action begins after about thirty minutes in. You're being sent on a mission into the Helghan part of the world.



I should probably explain for the readers who haven't played the game; Helghast is a different race to humans, though they look a bit the same. Helghan is the world where the Helghast came from, though it is uninhabitable during the game.

The game takes place possibly two to three decades after the happening of Killzone 3, explaining the need for Helghast to live alongside humans. The Helghast are still dreaming about dominance over the humans, which is the basic plot of this game, just like usual.

It took me about twelve to fourteen hours to complete this game, and that's with multiplayer and searching for collectibles. The story was okay for a new instalment, but comparing it to Killzone 2 (Which was the best in my opinion) and Killzone 3 (Second best) it could have been better.

There's a lot of potential in the game, even at the middle of the game I struggled with completing it because it was the same.

All. The. Time.

It literally became a Call of Duty game. Go to point A, shoot someone, go to point B, shoot someone and over and over. There was literally nothing else. The others had a lot more to it; sure, it's a FPS game, but come on. It's annoying.

Now, I'm not saying I have anything against Call of Duty. I'm just saying, there's a reason I stopped playing Call of Duty a few years back, it's the same thing every time.

Back to Killzone: Shadow Fall. The story could have been better, but when that's said, the design of the game itself deserves credit.



I mean, the lighting, graphics and art, it's amazing. It is exactly what kind of graphics the PS4 should start out with, and just imagine

when the developers learn to push the PS4 to its limits.

Oh boy.

Back to Killzone again, there are a few other things I'm going to validate. The voice actors are spot on. I mean, we even have David Harewood as the voice actor of Sinclair, your mentor. It's brilliant.

To end this off with, I'm going to give it stars. I thought about giving the game itself the stars, but the story would pull it too much down, so I'm giving each part I validated stars.

Story: 2 out of 6 ☆

Lighting: 5 out of 6 ☆

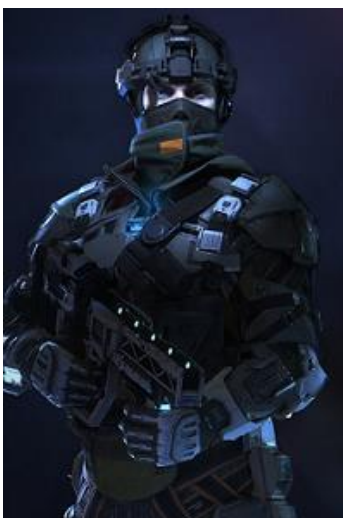
Graphics: 4 out of 6 ☆

Voice: 5 out of 6 ☆

You're maybe wondering, why I said story would pull it down. IT would pull it down to two out of six stars because for me, story is the most important factor.

This was my review of Killzone: Shadow Fall. Love it or hate it, it's opinions-based, so I can literally write anything I want.

I love opinions.

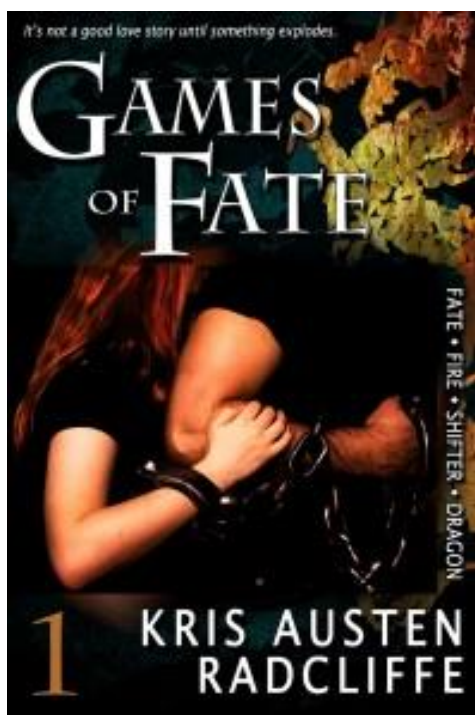


## **The Night that Death Came for Dinner.**

**By James Gray**

On the night that Death came for Dinner,  
All the fine china was loosed from its storage,  
And displayed nicely on the table no one eats at.  
  
The clock on the wall struck five minutes to  
midnight,  
  
And everyone was seated 'round,  
Waiting patiently for the guest of honour,  
The candles in the centre of the table flickered in  
the darkness,  
  
Casting an eerie glow over the faces there.  
Whispers in the hallway beyond caused heads to  
turn lifeless eyes to see  
Shadows passing mirrors without reflection.  
The light withered as darkness entered the room;  
  
The pale glow turning skin to sickly pallor  
Before extinguishing in a breathless air.  
Something seated itself at the head of the table,  
  
Lifting a glass that turned to sand;  
Touching a roll that mouldered;  
Caressing an apple that blackened.  
  
Eyeless, yet seeing all,  
it sat and waited.  
The clock on the wall struck midnight,  
  
The seats filled with souls,  
And they broke bread with Death.





### **Chapter 1 of Games of Fate,**

**by Kris Austen Radcliffe**

available on Amazon -

<http://www.amazon.com/Games-Fate-Fantasy-Shifter-ebook/dp/B00B7PI158/>

Rysa's meds weren't in her backpack. She fished through the lint under her laptop, catching only a pen and the corner of her wallet. Wads of paper and a few stray coins filled the bag's recesses, but her pills were nowhere to be found.

At lunch, she'd emptied all the pockets and stacked her stuff on one of the ugly lounge chairs in the student center. No pill bottle then, either.

Not that she trusted herself to be thorough. No meds equaled a super-sized portion of "flighty" and a bottomless cup of "hyperactive." She dug her hand into her stupid pack again.

Gavin sat across from her with his palms flush against the coffee shop table. She slapped down a notebook and the table

wobbled, a loud *clunk* popping from its uneven feet. His hands jerked up and he leaned back, frowning.

*Do you want help with your chemistry or not?* he signed, his hands moving through the American Sign Language with quick precision.

"Yes." She looked directly at him so he could see her lips clearly, knowing full well she'd also narrowed her eyes, even though she didn't mean to. Tonight, patience wasn't one of his virtues and his wasn't helping her make sense of her attention deficit world.

She needed his help, too. This close to finals, if she didn't figure out her assignments, she'd fail another class. The University would kick her out. She knew it.

Gavin's shoulders slumped and he crossed his arms—his way of giving her the silent treatment. He'd frowned about twenty minutes into the first problem when it became clear that helping her would take all night. He didn't have to remind her by shifting around in his chair and tapping his finger on his elbow when her mind strayed. How was she supposed to focus on homework without her attention meds? Rysa pulled a crumpled five dollar bill out of her bag and dropped it next to her notebooks.

He scowled this time, his gaze following her hand as it dipped into the bag again. She could tell by the way his neck tensed that he wanted to sigh, but sighing made guys look pathetic and Gavin wasn't one to diminish his manliness.

Her lips bunched up. He had no right to act like a jerk because she'd lost her meds and wasn't tracking her homework. It's not like he always understood his class work. She'd helped him with Human and Environmental Policies

last semester. He'd been a chore, no matter how much she tried. For a guy who was pre-med, he sure had issues understanding the bigger picture.

*Did I mess up your evening?* she signed, her hands working as fast as his through the ASL. A flick of the bag's straps and it plopped onto the floor next to her feet. "Were you sexting with that sophomore again?" This time she didn't look at him. His hearing aids worked just fine.

He stared, his expression flat. Gavin usually had the laidback calm of someone who'd just finished a good workout. Women found it charming. The boy had more contacts in his phone than the University had numbers in its database.

She slapped the table when he groaned and her calculator slipped off a book, jarring her chai. A splash plopped onto her Chemistry Principles syllabus. Steam rose off the course description as if she'd dropped acid on it, not hot tea.

Gavin's pointer finger twitched. *Isn't it a little late to be popping stim meds?*

A yellow stain spread across the syllabus and her attention snapped to the paper. The liquid ate away the words and they bled onto the tabletop, destroyed by her impulsiveness. She blotted at them, blinking.

"Rysa?" Annoyance worked across his features in little tics.

He signed something. She didn't catch it.

He sniffed and the titanium in his ears flickered with the light from the television behind her head. She'd sat with her back to the little café's screen for a reason. News crawls and no meds didn't mix well.

This morning, when she came down to the kitchen, her mom had been watching the news. A suburban Chicago mall exploded last night. On the drive to campus, the radio announcers had been on about big fires in several of the towns along Interstate 94, between Chicago and Minneapolis. All day, pundits had infested the news channels blaring in the student unions, bobbing their heads and pushing up their glasses, ranting about terrorists or gas leaks or 911 calls that may or may not have indicated a suicide bomb—

"I'm sure you left your meds at home." Gavin leaned back as he spoke. *Why don't you calm down so you can drive home?* he signed.

Calm down? Her syllabus disintegrated on the table, ruined by a splash of hot and random, much like her academic career. She stared at it even though she didn't want to. Her mind hyper-focused on the one perfect representation of her time at the U and it wasn't going to let it go.

"You should talk to Disability Services." His chair groaned as he shifted around again.

A new rainbow of reflections danced across his hearing aids and her attention snapped to the brilliance in his ears. His gaze jerked up to the screen behind her.

The images must have changed. She'd seen the stories at lunch: Before sunrise, a theme park in The Dells had exploded with a fireball visible from the interstate. Black River Falls had ignited in the middle of the afternoon. She'd come out of Chemistry to find the entire campus stopped, everyone staring at their phones and—

Rysa breathed, refusing to turn around and be caught by the news. She'd spent her last class staring out the window toward the east, her anxiety creeping up. Whatever stalked

Wisconsin felt like it was about to burst from the horizon and scorch all of campus—and her in particular. The effort it took not to freak out made her head ache and was as big a contributor to her inattention as anything else.

Today was not a good day to forget her meds.

Gavin said something again. Her face scrunched up as she tried to parse it.

“Rysa, did you hear me?”

He’d said something about Disability Services.

*What are they going to do?* she signed back.  
*Follow me around and nag me all day?*

They’d turned her down for a translator position when she applied last year even though she’d aced the exam and had no hearing difficulties of her own. Her damned ADHD reared its head during the interview.

His jaw tightened. *Pulling ninety-ninth percentile on all three parts of the GRE will only get you so far with grad school admissions.*

Why was he being such a dick? School, the fires—and to make things worse, her mom’s obvious pain this morning before she left the house—all combined to make the perfect Storm Rysa. At breakfast, her mother had held out a glass of orange juice, her hand shaking and her joints swollen and red. Rysa downed the juice in three gulps, more to keep her mom from worrying than because she wanted it.

The juice had distracted her, which was why she’d forgotten her meds. They were probably on the kitchen counter between the empty glass and her mom’s prescription pain killers.

“I’m going home.” She needed to get away from all the campus television screens. The blinking made her squint.

Gavin wrapped his hand around her wrist. “I just want to make sure you’re alright before you go off to graduate school. I can’t help you with your courses if I’m in Boston and you’re somewhere in the Rockies.”

She stared at his fingers until he let go. All her spazziness made her head throb in short, intense pulses and his exasperated fussing wasn’t making it better. She reached for her damned bag again. Maybe she had some acetaminophen. At least it would take the edge off for the drive home.

*Get some sleep. That helps,* he signed.

She pressed her temple. What did he know about what helped? Her head felt as if every muscle on her scalp was about to fight-club her sinuses.

The pain hadn’t been this bad a moment ago. Her head had hurt all day, but now the war raging inside her skull flared into her vision. The coffee shop looked too bright.

In one sudden moment all the chaos about school and the world and her mom fell away.

Nausea welled up.

Her mouth opened. Pain-fueled words about how Gavin should stop patronizing her because he just made it worse wanted to spill out. Sentences about the future and the past and how right now in the present she felt like she was going to throw up and she’d get control of her ADHD and he could be as mad as he wanted but he didn’t have the right to—

Blades of blinding light stabbed behind her left eye. Terrible, hideous light coming out



of nowhere and burning like she'd looked directly at the sun.

"What the hell?" she gasped. A real gasp, one that, in a split second, forced air all the way down into the base of her lungs. Her hands clutched her forehead.

This wasn't withdrawal symptoms because she missed her meds. Her brain just exploded. She was going to keel over in this little coffee shop under the Continuing Education Building and that would be the end of everything and she'd die.

Spots popped into her vision and floated like wiggly balloons between her and Gavin. They churned, each one its own burning, liquid universe. The spots didn't look real but she knew if she touched one, it would ignite and fire would spurt onto her hand.

A spot ruptured. Her nose filled with an acid stench so overpowering she stopped breathing.

One word overrode everything: *Aneurism*.

"Gavin..." She choked out the whisper. Her gut mirrored the pain behind her eye, squirming with an infestation of the fire bubbles. They burst in her stomach and ate her flesh. She'd have retched but the muscles of her belly and chest didn't move. They wouldn't respond. They—

Gavin stood up and pointed at the screen behind her head. He hadn't noticed her panic. "A gas station in Stillwater exploded!"

Half an hour from campus. Her chair knocked over when she turned toward the screen. The seatback scraped against the concrete floor and a nauseating metallic screech filled the coffee shop. The sound rasped against her ears, solid and touchable,

like the spots. It hung in the air around her limbs, a new phantom weighing her down.

Gavin stared at the screen behind her head. The freshman server behind the counter stared at her.

"What's happening?" Her lips formed the words, but her ears didn't hear. No vocalizations left her throat.

Gavin's gaze jumped from the screen to her and his face blanched. He shouted at the freshman. His mouth moved, his words forming, but she didn't understand. Something about calling 911.

Gavin, the freshman who stared at her with terror-filled eyes, the coffee shop's ugly halogen lighting, the darkening evening outside—it all spun. The planet got on a carnival ride and left her standing alone in the void.

She blinked. Warm air hit her nose as she pushed through the shop's door. The spots took on a sharpness that would rip her to shreds if she didn't get away. Their edges would slice and fiends would eat her whole.

The world fuzzed out as if someone had slapped a dirty bandage over her eyes. Where her feet landed, she didn't know.

A spot burst and a memory flashed: Her mother this morning at the kitchen counter watching the television. She'd rubbed her knuckles and Rysa had wrapped her arm around her shoulder. "Go to class," her mom said. "I'll be fine."

"Don't hit me!" Gavin yelled.

Her hand hurt. Her nails dug into the real skin of her real palm. Gavin staggered back into the evening gloom, his nose bloody. But—

Did she hit him? He glared at her like she was some kind of monster.

“I don’t... I d-don’t understand,” she stuttered. They stood on the hill, half way between the coffee shop and the student parking lot, standing under the streetlight where the path intersected the walk from one of campus barns. But she didn’t remember—

Another spot burst. Her vision filled with orange and hot yellow dropping over the world like a curtain.

She stood alone in the yellow bull’s-eye of a different streetlight. This one flickered like a strobe, buzzing and popping like it was about to explode. Her eyelids fluttered rapidly as her eyes adjusted to the pulsing shadows. The pressure in her head ratcheted and—

How the hell did she get into the student parking lot three blocks from the shop? She was losing time. Losing her sense of space. She felt like she was dying. She had to be. Her body dragged her out here to commit suicide and she couldn’t stop it.

A man, tall and lanky like Gavin, walked toward her between the hand-me-down cars, his step bouncing as if he was about to break into a tango. He wore red running shoes and a black nylon jacket over a blaze orange t-shirt—the fabric version of the damned fire-spots eating her mind.

He stopped a few feet away, a deep inhale bowing out his chest. His hand swept in front of his nose and he sniffed the air like some cartoon character breathing in fancy perfume. Another inhale and his head tilted at an angle that should have popped every vertebra in his neck.

“Who...” she stammered. Where was Gavin?  
“What...”

“Right where you’re supposed to be.” The man’s thick British accent made his words sound almost unrecognizable.

The same caustic stench from the ghost spots rose off his skin.

*Real* stench. She gagged, her lips and nose curling in a futile attempt to keep the chemical sewage rolling off this creature out of her lungs.

His teeth gleamed in the dim parking lot light. “The hubris of your kind.” He shook his head, tisking. “Calling yourselves Fates. You see the future but you know nothing.” He grabbed her arm.

“Let go of me!” The man made no sense and she hyper-focused on his fluorescing mouth, ignoring everything else. His teeth glinted, sharp and too bright. They’d rip her apart if they got near her skin.

She really was dying. Will die. The weirdness in her head bled into the real world and this man was its manifestation. All the spots, all the phantom smells—they were about to kidnap her. For *real*.

Her vision jiggled like she’d changed the channel for a microsecond and then switched back to what she had been watching before. But in that microsecond, in that very brief flash when she saw something she knew wasn’t really there, she saw the man lean forward to bite her shoulder.

Bite and rip flesh and take himself a right good snack.

Her chest tried to fill with air and her throat tried to constrict to make as loud a high-pitched noise as it could, but only a whisper came out: “Ghoul.”

He grinned at her with his razor-sharp teeth. A loud sniff rushed into his nose. "You smell tasty, luv. I might take myself a nip now, before you finish activating." He licked his lips.

"Activating?" She wasn't dying of a brain aneurism. She didn't know why, or what it meant, but the word held truth.

Ratty fingerless gloves clamped over her mouth and nose. "You're a bit of a freak, aren't you? Can't hold still. Stay normal for a moment longer, darling."

"Let her go!" Gavin jumped the lot fence, his feet pumping as he landed.

New panic flooded in, different from what she felt for herself. The ghoul will kill Gavin. The scene played through the pressure behind her eyes: He'll lock onto her friend's throat. He'll feel a surge of hunger and he'll salivate like an animal. Then his hands will cook Gavin's flesh.

*Run!* she signed. *Go!*

The slow dread of certainty fizzled through her consciousness, as heavy as the stink wafting off the man. Something bad was about to happen. Something as terrible as this ghoul.

Gavin halted like he'd run into a wall. He gagged, bending forward. The stench must have hit his nose.

"He your boyfriend?" The hand over her mouth loosened.

"Please don't hurt him." The ghoul could take her, but Gavin had a life ahead of him. He'd do good. Become a wonderful doctor.

The ghoul's eyes narrowed and his head tilted again as he peered at Gavin. He flicked

his chin toward campus. "You better listen, little normal. Better run. Before my mates find you."

Gavin stepped back, both his mouth and his hands working but not making sense.

"Run!" Rysa screamed. He had to get away. She'd make sure—

Then the world flickered hot yellow again and Gavin was gone. The ghoul stood on her other side, anger dancing through his eyes.

"Do *not* do that again!" He slapped and caustic chemicals burned her cheek. Yanking hard, he dragged her toward the break in the fence framing the walk to the road. "Claw me one more time and you'll be lucky if you keep your arm, you stupid cow."

She didn't remember clawing him. She didn't remember Gavin running away, either. What did she do? She'd had another blackout and lost more time.

Nothing made sense.

The man dragged her through the lot gate and into the street. He pushed her forward with one hand, the fingers of his other tapping in the air as if he played an invisible piano. The tips glowed and smoldered one at a time, turning on and off as he pressed each imaginary key. "Quiet now, luv."

[http://www.amazon.com/Games-Fate-Fantasy-Shifter-book/dp/B00B7PI158/ref=tmm\\_kin\\_swatch\\_0?encoding=UTF8&sr=1-1&qid=1380409480](http://www.amazon.com/Games-Fate-Fantasy-Shifter-book/dp/B00B7PI158/ref=tmm_kin_swatch_0?encoding=UTF8&sr=1-1&qid=1380409480)

## **Wisdom**

**By Valery Riddle**

The feeling of lovingly polished wood against my palm, every bump on it reminding me that it has been a growing branch before, radiating life and the sense of rebirth. In my view, learning from nature is what any sentient being should strive to do. I have made this staff myself, so that it obeys my movements as a trained horse would a confident hand.

The wood minutely presses against my palm with a tug as the staff impacts with the target. I make a note of every single shift, step or wrist movement I partake in when successfully landing this hit; also the surroundings such as the cool draft coming from the cracked door of the training hall. Then I return into the primary stance and close my eyes. Today my training is for blind attack. "Be one with the weapon. Be one with your surroundings", say the teachings. "All five senses are to be keen".

I admit, my teachers have had better students. However, I am not the worst, either: the patience with which I perfect my skill helps me prevail over most of my opponents during the training sessions. With a slow rise of my hand, arm and shoulder in one fluent succession with the staff as a complementing detail I repeat exactly the same motion in a line of four hits, one after another, quickening the pace, feeling the blows connect in exactly the way it has felt with my eyes open, except more intensely.

I shift from my original starting pose. I need to discern where the target is from all the supplementary factors such as the movement of the air around me and how the light changes when I turn away from it even if my eyes are

closed or where the warm rays of sun rest against my bare forearms and shins. My first blow lands a little off, resonating shakily through my wrist. The second one is compensated due to the mistake. The motto on the main hall wall is always present in my mind like a stigma: 'Wisdom in victory and defeat'. The third blow is almost perfect. The fourth blow never lands as I freeze. Somebody is in the room. I open my eyes.

Three people. I know one of them - he is one of my masters who has taught me in these walls. His facial expression is, as expected, reproachful. The other two are clad in typical grey armour, light leather, the lower part of their faces concealed with a piece of cloth, showing only the eyes, cold detached stares. I have never seen the Shadow Police so close up, nor have I seen much of anything else in the city, locked away in the monastery walls.

The master silently indicates they can take me away and I relax, putting down my staff. Wisdom in defeat, I can hardly show any resistance.

They are not gentle but they are not as harsh as I would have expected them to be. No matter what happens they treat everyone with dignity; it makes me wonder if I could live in such a society after all. I refuse to think about this any further; my mind is set and my reasons do not require any explaining as I have never been in the habit of lying to myself. There is nothing I can do to redeem who I am, as the nature of a man is something one should not be able to change at a whim. I have met those who disagree with my point of view completely and keep their mask on; it is obvious that the thing has already grown deep into their skin. I also do not believe there is such a thing as mask. A man does whatever is right for him. The motives are what is different.



But I am straying. No matter how important it is for me to dwell on my beliefs, I am now being led through the parts of the city I have not seen before, and that undeniably draws my interest. This is nothing I have imagined it to be, not the dark and ominous empire, clad in black, which I have had every reason to believe it has to be but rather the majestic tall columns of blinding white colour, thrusting into the deep blue sky. Ironically, the weather has been measured with divine precision bringing a cool breeze and warm sunrays, granting me short moments of pleasure before it all becomes for me just the mocking sign of what I have been waiting for since two days ago.

There are few people in the streets, they pass our procession without a glance. My guess is that they have seen such displays plenty of times before.

We soon near the grand building that takes up a fair chunk of the big square it is situated next to. The wall forms a semicircle that cuts into the pavement, as if devouring its prey. This is our destination as I can easily guess - the Arena. It is here that I am to meet my destiny.

We enter through a side door; inside the air is stuffy and reeks of sweat and simple unperfected fighting that does not have the right to be called art. I am presented to a high and heavily-muscled man, who looks me up and down as if saying 'this fly will not survive long under our fists'. I take the stare with due patience and as much disinterest I can possibly show.

He starts to explain the rules of fighting at the Arena (one pre-selected weapon, no magic tricks, fight to the death), but I skip

through the most of it as I am already sufficiently familiar with the subject. I am searched for hidden daggers and my staff, that has been dutifully fetched, is returned to me.

I am pushed out of the fighting gates into the ring, none too gently. The Arena itself, I note, is a boiling cauldron filled with a revolting concoction that contains shouts, cackling, arguing, drum beating, swearing, cheering, booing, coins jingling in pouches and of course sweat and intense sunlight. Just to add to my unease, the sand of the ring creaks under my feet, and my soles itch through the soft material of my shoes. I try my best to maintain a calm posture in this unknown dangerous zone, the rules of which could never become mine under any circumstances.

My opponent is pushed out of the gates across from me but he seems much more confident. He is dressed in a rather poor-looking leather armour, that has clearly seen its share of fighting. He has the bravado of a man who is used to winning, apparently he has been around the Arena long enough to become too sure of himself. I choose to disregard his confidence. I am not one for predictions as those men on the seats above us are. They do their thing and I shall do mine.

The bell has not tolled yet; my opponent has taken a knife out of its sheath, playing with it as if taunting. Paying him no mind, I start walking around to get as much feeling for the sand under my feet as I can. It can prove to be rather treacherous at any point of the fight. Standing on one spot is not the technique I should stick to - moving around and allowing for the friction in my steps will be safer.

The resonating sound that notes the start of the fight makes the smallest sand grains shift, the bell is numbingly loud and overlaps

every other sound around the ring. It also means that I am soon to start fighting for my life but I am not overly concerned about this burden. I have taken this rather philosophically, since regardless of the outcome my time in the Arena will come to an end. I would customarily take time to ponder on such a riveting concept as death but right now my opponent is coming at me. The dance has begun.

I duck to the left as the knife swishes past my shoulder, and one shift of the right forearm - blindly, it would only catch the opponent, were he still there, but he moves rapidly after me. I try to turn to my advantage the fact that my staff is longer than his reach: duck back, push forward with both hands to block the incoming blow, push sideways to reach into his comfort zone as he circles me. He prevents my blow from landing - quick and strong. I need to double my speed after the next move.

His next strike I meet with my staff horizontally, but my left hand gives in under the pressure and the knife grazes against the polished surface as it slides sideways, nicking my fingers. I hastily retreat a couple of steps back to buy myself time. My mistake is unbecoming but I have no time for evaluation - the most I can afford is flex my grip on the staff experimentally twice, the back of my left hand smarts but does not bleed extensively. It feels like a pulsating reminder of being alive.

Alarmed, I search for suitable techniques as we start to close up on each other again. A knife is not something I am used to fighting against, it grants swiftness and an opening for using another arm to hit and block. Staff is different in a patient, contemplative way from this feverish 'bite and jump away' technique.

I block all the incoming blows which grow more swift and impatient as he must feel that I linger in uncertainty. The noises of the crowd suddenly become more persistent, the sound presses me down as I involuntarily start to pay it more attention than I should, it means I am losing concentration. I grip the staff - the weaknesses, I must concentrate on the weaknesses. They have to be in his defence. I need to discern the main difference between our weapons before I lose irreversibly.

He comes onto me, slash from above then thrust from the chest, I barely manage to parry - and I see it. There are seconds before I comprehend and construct a plan. I nearly give in to euphoria in those seconds. Unforgivable, that. Must be because I am so close to death and only at this point I realize that I am. Euphoria is not something that goes along with concentration. I shut it down - and go into offensive.

He must see me opening up, because the knife is suddenly too close to my throat for comfort; now I need to keep myself from being both euphoric and reproachful of this emotion, any emotion is a mistake in a fight. The seconds slow down as the blood drums in my ears, the knife crawls towards me, its edge glistening in the sunlight, cackling at my vulnerability. Precision. One precise strike lands on the wrist to bat the invasive weapon away. While the staff is positioned vertically, keeping both of those hands at a safe distance, I slam it down into the foot that is put out to support body weight. He has not expected that. He crouches. I add a blow to his shin. As he is blindsided by the unexpected area of attack and cannot recover quickly enough, I rapidly slam my staff into as many tender places as I possibly can; my brain does not even register all of them.

He is down now, his knife lying on the ground, half-buried under the sand. There is ringing in my ears and it deafens me. My staff slams into his face. The words 'to the death' burn through my thoughts. Before he can even look up at me, I throw my staff away and grasp his head. One precise move of my right hand, its heel inverted towards the throat and the palm resting under the lower jaw, and the spine audibly cracks - my left hand feels the bones shift under the skin.

The sounds slam against me again as soon as the limp body hits the sand, sending the grains flying in all directions. My heart is pounding in my chest and my breath comes out in short gasps unlike any other fight I have participated in. My mouth feels dry with a tinge of copper in it. I am numb and time has stopped existing for me.

What I register now is one of my masters standing in front of me. We are not in the fighting ring anymore and I do vaguely recall walking out of it. My staff is with me, I am holding it loosely by my right side and it has a pleasant feel against my bare skin, except for the rough spot where the knife has scratched.

My master has a strange look on his face that I cannot place, also neither he nor I seem to be inclined to start talking. He must be thinking of ways to convince me yet again, I believe. What else could the silence mean?

The words I hear from him surprise me in a disappointing kind of way, it is merely a simple question - whether or not I still stand by my decision. I respond with immediate certainty. The look does not leave those eyes. He tells me I shall be escorted out of the city gates as I have survived the trial so they stand by my right to be set free.

I do not have many possessions. With all fairness, they fit into one tiny pouch. Of course, the staff is also with me, my one true companion. The city gates close behind me and I linger before starting my journey into nowhere. I look up at the mass of white towers, hanging over my head in their majestic beauty. My mind is yet to wrap itself around the fact that this maiden brightness is not what it seems. Behind these walls I have been taught to eventually embrace the one occupation that anyone training besides me has accepted gladly. I stand by my choice of denying it but the thought cannot help but nudge - how can anyone simply agree to become a creature by trade so vile and immoral? How can there not be crowds of apprentices running away from the monastery if the only ultimate purpose of their training is to become an assassin? And how can a city to bright and lively hide in itself a swarm of killers? I stand by my choice.

The look in my master's eyes comes back to mind. I am still surprised he has not tried to convince me. No words of doom followed me leaving, no curses. I shrug and turn away from the city.

The road takes me through fields, so much more familiar than the white stone. My thoughts stray. I have changed since I have last seen this landscape. Actually, I consider that I have behaved admirably today at the Arena. I fought and found my way in a real battle with a serious, tangible threat I had not encountered before. I am also proud of the way I have dealt with my opponent's life: without hesitation I have taken the right choice to defend myself. That must be what they call 'wisdom in victory'. I suppose I have taken the best out of my education. Hesitation is what makes a person weak, I think. To take a life without

succumbing to such a weakness is truly a personal growth.

There is spring in my steps by now, I feel rather proud of myself, marching down the dusty road towards any possible future I can have.

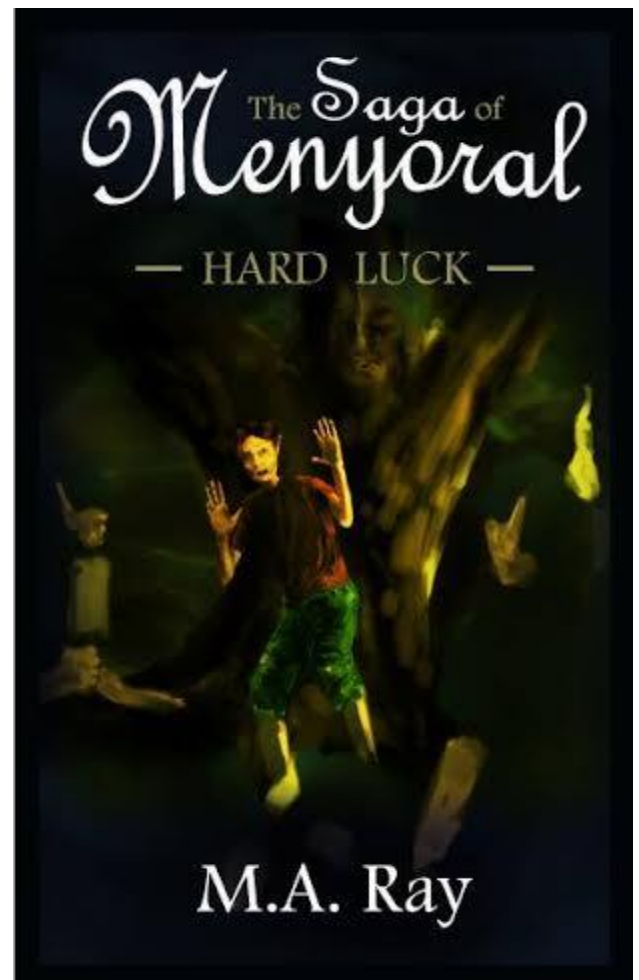
...Why was there this strange look in his eyes, I wonder?..

### **Valery Riddle**

*Having written her first poem at 8 and her first short story at 12, Valery Riddle has come a long way as a self-taught writer by trying to find herself in the one talent that really mattered. Between the understanding that small scribbles on the paper might mean something more than simple everyday words, and the hope that she has something to contribute, the writer dared to go deeper into the shadows of human weaknesses and desires to find the unquenched well of subjects. Be it an innocent human error behind some drastic action or frightful hidden motives in everyday life, Valery sets out on a journey to put her characters in such circumstances that would reveal it all. Just another face in the crowd, she watches people around her as a silent observer to find new plots to explore, while her true inspiration blooms in the quietness of nature, away from noisy cars and smoky cities, on seashores under the ever-changing sky. To follow her own words from the works that she herself calls "verses-in-prose": "People crave bread and circuses, and I crave to see those people. I will let them outrun me to see them better. However close the sunset is, the sun will always remain in the sky and my shade will not disappear. I will not walk off my path to become closer to people. And I know that when I am asked for an explanation I shall not give it".*

<http://valeryriddle.ucoz.org/> (\*Please note this

site is in Russian and may need to be translated\*)



Dingus Xavier has the worst luck ever. As if just being named 'Dingus' weren't enough, he's the red-headed son of an elven mother and a human father.

He might also be a berserker -- and those are just the things he knows about.

Sir Vandis Vail has always been too busy serving his goddess to consider training a Squire, but when he comes across a lynch mob attacking a young man, he can't let it stand. In obedience to his divine Lady, he takes the boy into the Order of the Knights of the Air as a Squire. Dingus Xavier, though, is far more than he bargained for; a gifted ranger, but deeply damaged by a life of abuse. Vandis doesn't know how to begin to help Dingus face his pain, and he can't handle his own paternal instincts, either. When a rival religious order targets the Knights for extinction, it could be the straw that breaks Vandis's back.

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/B00H5IPASW>



## Book Reviews

By Pete Sutton



**Invisible: Personal essays on representation in SF/F** edited by Jim C Hines

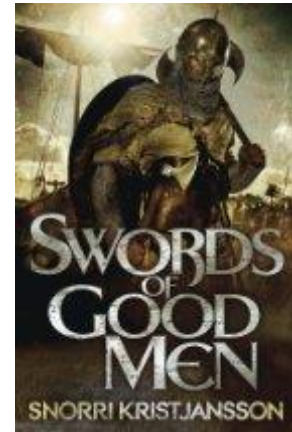
*People who read a lot of fiction form judgements based upon their reading about how the world works and should work. Books can give us dreams and ideals and goals. Saying to any group, "these dreams, these goals, are not for you" harms not just individuals, but our culture.*

This slim, but important and packed volume, is a must read. As the editor explains: *This project began as a call for a handful of guest bloggers to talk about representation in fiction, inspired by Alex Dally MacFarlane's article about ending the default of binary gender in SF/F* (<http://www.tor.com/blogs/2014/01/post-binary-gender-in-sf-introduction>), and the backlash that article received. Giving voice to thoughts on representation are; writers of colour, women, Trans, non-traditional gender, disabled, a writer with Asperger's and an impassioned appeal to stop making albinos evil, by an albino. Every single one of these voices underline why representation is important. More importantly, and highlighted in Derek Handley's brilliant essay, why representation without understanding can hurt as much as, if not more, than no representation at all. This is a book I'd love to put into the hands of many authors, one I'd love to see taught in creative writing classes and one I will be referring to often when discussing why representation matters, with the numerous folk who don't understand that concept. Stories make the world.

I'll leave you with Derek's words on representation:

*Representation is important. When you're a kid, it's about having a positive role model with your defining characteristics. When you're an adult, it's about being reminded that you fit in somewhere and escaping into that character. And when you're going through a major life change, it's about finding solace in stories that show you that someone understands and that maybe you can overcome the challenges you face.*

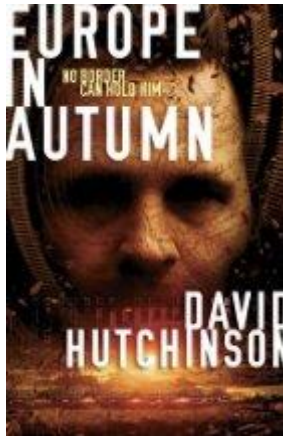
Overall – Slim but packs a mighty wallop. Highly recommended.



**Swords of good men** by Snorri Kristjansson

Kristjansson, an author originally from Iceland, has crafted an adventure tale set at the end of the Viking age when the old gods are in process of being displaced by the White Christ. There is a large cast of great characters and we switch POV between them fairly often. The action all takes place in Stenvik, a fortified town in Norway. War comes to Stenvik in the form of a Viking fleet and Snorri spends enough time to set up each and every character and the situation beautifully before the Vikings land. The prose is sharp, punchy and keeps the pace going and ratcheting up the tension throughout. There are a few twists and turns and when the battle finally comes it is cinematic in scope. The only off note was right at the very end but this is the first in a series so further books will, no doubt, claw that back. This is a pretty solid read that does exactly what you want it to. If you've a penchant for swearsy bearded men killing other swearsy bearded men in a Viking style then this is your thing.

Overall – a slightly off ending drops the rating a little but it is a rollicking good read nonetheless



[Europe in Autumn](#) by Dave Hutchinson

Rudi is a chef hailing from Estonia who has wound up working in a Polish restaurant in an alternative history Krakow. Following devastating economic and medical crises Europe has splintered into a plethora of tiny polities and splinter states. When Rudi gets involved in crossing a border on behalf of his boss's cousin he is drawn into a new career, part-spy, part postman, part people smuggler for an organisation called *Les Coureurs des Bois* (for which there is a real life equivalent - [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coureur\\_des\\_bois](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coureur_des_bois)). Starting as a part time hobby job Rudi is drawn ever further into the shadow machinations of espionage and counter-espionage, conspiracy and counter-conspiracy and the book winds us ever further into second guessing what is going on.

At first the genre element is very lightly done but later in the book we get to explore some very cool, almost Borgesian ideas, it has also been described as Le Carre meets Kafka which I think it deserves. I loved the fact that the really cool ideas are fully integrated with the plot and when we get to the revelation it feels natural. The Coureur organisation is quite a neat idea too, and I liked the introduction of the various special code words etc. Rudi's induction into the organisation was very well done and the succession of rug pulling felt exciting and interesting and certainly kept me reading. My only, very minor, gripes here are to do with pacing, although I'm not a thriller reader so perhaps it's just me but some of the set up feels a little slow, later when there are several POV changes it feels a little like a series of resets. However the overall quality of the writing, the characterisation and the central premise are easily good enough for me to forgive this. My only real complaint is that I didn't know this was the first in a series before starting it and I felt a little

cheated at the end when the story didn't end but sets up a sequel. Again a minor complaint, easily remedied by reading the next book, although since this is an ARC it may be a while before I get there!

Overall - If you like spy thrillers, if you like alternative history, if you like SF&F I thoroughly recommend you check this out.

### **Here there be Wizards!**

**Contributors: Jacqueline Driggers**

**Jim King**

**Thea Gilchrist**

A common misconception about wizards is that they're all wizened old men in dusty robes with oversized hats and staves taller than they are. Such is not the case! A wizard can be anyone from any walk of life and they may not use archaic totems like staves, orbs or crystals.

Typical folklore, such as the world depicted by J.R.R. Tolkien in his epic "Lord of the Rings" tales, show wizards as being patriarchal in nature and only those with decades of experience can wield such power... But each society has its own "rules", if you will, for wizards, and you may be surprised by what you learn! So join us as we journey down the paths of magic and men to reveal what is known,. Because without knowledge, information is just a rumour.

One requirement for wizards is a natural gift for magic and spells.

But what about those who have and use the magic without knowing it?

What of the mighty wizards and witches who wield powers beyond understanding without realising what they do?

What of the doctor who uses the same medicines and techniques as others and yet her patients heal faster and recover more quickly?

What of the artist who can paint great works that bring tears of sorrow or laughter from all who see his work but others who fake his works achieve nothing?

What of all the wizards and witches who live in a world where magic is tricks and illusions performed on stage and yet have real power?

Another point. Wizardry is often spoke of as the will and the way. A wizard must be strong of will in order to shape magic. He must have belief in his own powers, he must have belief in magic itself for the slightest doubt in what he is or what he does will destroy him.

So why do we not look to those who believe in magic, those who have true belief in the way, those who have not yet been corrupted by the weary and cynical world, those who wait for the tooth fairy and Santa Claus?

In children we find the belief in magic to be mighty indeed, all they need is the will.

Quick note: Piers Anthony first gave rise to the term "mechanical magic" with his "Incarnations of Immortality" series where he had those who used gems and pre-packaged spells mix flawlessly with actual magic users...

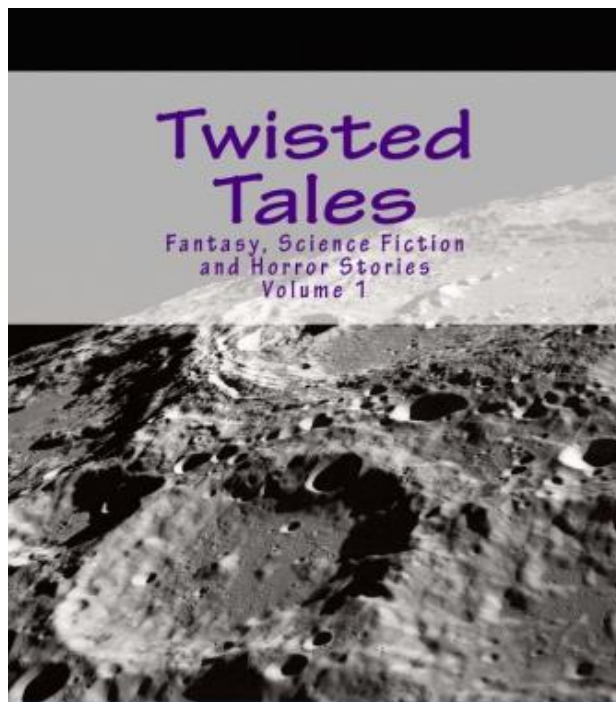
Which makes me wonder... What do YOU consider "mechanical magic"?

Native folklore calls wizards 'shamans' and gives them a revered status, as they see shamans as being very wise and in direct communication with the spirits around them... They have visions and their wisdom never comes into question; they have no reason to deceive anyone so why would it be?

Celtic wizardry is quite well known indeed; these people are Druids. Yes, Druids. The people who've been rumoured to frequent the standing stones known as Stonehenge. Their magic is nature-based; usually simple things like salves and remedies for common ailments. Fantasy has them as being able to change their shape and acquire the abilities of the animal they become... With the primary drawback being that it doesn't last long and they can't do it again for quite some time. Whether they're actually able to or not remains to be seen... Society has become quite cynical when it comes to magic and believing in it.

**Jacqueline Driggers** was born and raised in a small town in Kentucky, and still lives there too. She is a full time homemaker who is pursuing her high school dream of being a published author. Besides working on her first novel, she also does editing and book reviews. The best way to follow Jacqueline is through her facebook interest list, which includes her author's page, her other pages, and her timeline.

<https://www.facebook.com/lists/4934583413490>



**Mike Wolff**

Twisted Tales: Fantasy, Science Fiction and Horror Stories is a collection of stories spawned from the mind of the author, Mike Wolff. A lover of all things related to the above mentioned genres, many of these stories started out as dreams that the author felt the need to put to page. They are laced with dark humour and a twisted view on life.

This collection is filled with colourful characters, interesting plots, and a variety of locations.

So sit down, get comfortable and read these stories right before bed, and maybe you will be visited by some twisted stories of your own!

[http://www.amazon.com/Twisted-Tales-Fantasy-Science-Fiction-ebook/dp/B00JF4HDB6/ref=la\\_B00IEE9TBA\\_1\\_2?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1399926661&sr=1-2](http://www.amazon.com/Twisted-Tales-Fantasy-Science-Fiction-ebook/dp/B00JF4HDB6/ref=la_B00IEE9TBA_1_2?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1399926661&sr=1-2)



## **Diva Dragon Designs**

-Bracelets -  
-Necklaces -  
-Earrings -  
-Custom Designed Jewellery-

[mkdnfrnes@aol.com](mailto:mkdnfrnes@aol.com)



### **Author Interview Kris Austen Radcliffe**

#### **1 - When did you first start writing?**

I have been writing all my life, but I got serious about it three years ago.

#### **2 - Do you read much? If yes, have you always loved reading?**

I read non-fiction science, science fiction, fantasy, urban fantasy, and paranormal romance.

#### **3 - Who's your favourite author? What's your favourite book?**

Ann McCaffrey's Pern novels sparked my love of mixing fantasy and science fiction. Neil Gaiman, for his flow and his exquisite character building. Ann Rice, because of her brilliant setting and environmental descriptions. I can't say I have a favourite book.

#### **4 - What writers have influenced you the most?**

See above.

#### **5 - Do you have a favourite fictional character? Either from a book or movie or a TV show?**

When I was a kid, my favourite character was F'nor, from the Pern books. Nowadays, I'm partial to Cullen Bohannon from "Hell on



Wheels.” Excellent character who’s written and acted superbly.

**6 - Is there anything in particular that you do to get in the mood to write, or to get in the ‘zone’? Any particular pre-writing routines?**

Getting my little one on the bus is first thing. I need quiet to write. Then it’s making sure I have enough caffeine in my system to form coherent sentences.

**7 - Where do you do your writing?**

During the summer, I write in my office, as long as I have help with my little one. During the school year, I tend to write at the kitchen table next to my big dining room windows.

**8 - How do you approach your writing? i.e. - Do you do outlines? Character bios? Etc.?**

I sort of outline. I know my major scenes—the midpoint, the black moment, the climax—and I aim my characters at them. Other than that, no. I never stick to an outline, so for me it’s a waste of time.

**9 - Do you have any advice for other writers?**

Write every day. Write the best book you can. Then write another. And another.

**10 - Are you a morning person or evening person? Day or night?**

I’m by nature a night person, but my nature and my daughter’s school schedule do not coordinate, so I’ve been forced to become a morning person.

**11 - Do you have any pets?**

One kitty, Midnight, aka “Handsome Cat.”

**12 - What’s your favourite ‘I need a break from writing’ activity?**

Writing is my break from everything else.

**13 - How do you approach writing sex scenes? They can range from mild to wild. Where are you on the mild to wild meter?**

I’m not graphically hot, at least not with the characters I’m writing right now. It depends on the POV. When I’m writing Rysa, the love scenes are more about her emotions than the sex itself, but that will change as the series moves forward and she becomes more sure of herself. When I’m writing Ladon, the scenes are more explicit, but only because he uses a different vocabulary.

I do have a couple of Erotic Romance stories I’m planning on writing. They will be hotter than what I’m writing right now, because that’s the story, and the characters.

**14 - Do you write in one genre? Or more than one?**

I like the science fiction and fantasy sandbox and I don’t think I’ll be moving out of it anytime soon, except for the erotic romance novellas I have planned.

**15 - Are you self-published or with a publishing house?**

I have my own publishing house, Six Talon Sign Media. Six Talon Sign has three imprints: The main Six Talon Sign, which publishes the Fate ~ Fire ~ Shifter ~ Dragon series; Talon One, which publishes my science fiction; and Six Love, which will publish my erotic romance.

**16 - What are your thoughts on getting a literary agent?**

Don't bother. I suggest reading Kristine Kathryn Rusch's blog for a much better explanation as to why than I can give.  
<http://kriswrites.com/>

**17 - What about marketing? How do you approach that area?**

I'm an introvert, so I hire help. There's also some traditional, publisher-oriented promotion stuff that I'm learning right now.

**18 - What about beta readers? Do you use them? How many do you have? Where do you find them?**

I'm weird about beta readers. Part of the problem is that I write too fast for beta readers to be of any true use to me. I can't sit around and wait for people to finish, so I work with a content editor whom I LOVE, Annetta Ribken at <http://wordwebbing.com/> . Annetta's a professional. She understands my process and deadlines and working with her is by far the best solution for me.

I also work with a copy editor I know and trust (Terry Koch at <http://beyondgrammar.com/>). After Terry's done, the manuscripts go to my "Proofing Crew" who read for typos. They're the closest thing I have to beta readers.

**19 - What's your favourite food?**

I have all sorts of dietary issues—no dairy, no gluten, no this, no that—so my favourite food is what I can eat that won't make me sick.

**20 - What's your favourite colour?**

Dragon. \*winks\*

**21 - Is there a particular website or Facebook page or blog that you, as a writer, find very helpful?**

<http://kriswrites.com/>

**22 - What's your favourite time of the year?**

Early September. School starts, the weather cools, and I get back to writing 5000 words a day.

**23 - What's your most recent book about? And where can people buy it?**

Visit my author page on Amazon to keep up with my latest.

Amazon page: <http://www.amazon.com/Kris-Austen-Radcliffe/e/B002BMGMFC>

**24 - What do you feel is your strongest gift, talent or skill that helps you the most as a writer?**

I'm visual. My training is as a filmmaker and script writer. I'm also a photographer. It can be a problem sometimes because you can't let imagery get in the way of deep POV, but I'm good at "showing."

**25 - Please share some of your links with us - Facebook author page, website, where people can find your books –**

The Kris Austen Radcliffe Street Team:

Most of the fun happens on the Facebook Group:

<http://www.facebook.com/groups/TeamKAR/>

Information at my web site:

<http://krisaustenradcliffe.sixtalonsign.com/fate-fire-shifter-dragon-street-team-info/>

Contact me:

E-mail: [krisradcliffe@sixtalonsign.com](mailto:krisradcliffe@sixtalonsign.com)

Web site: [www.krisaustenradcliffe.com](http://www.krisaustenradcliffe.com)

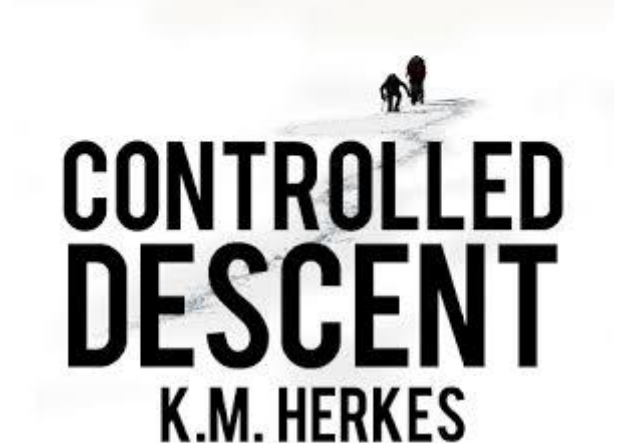
Facebook Fan Page:  
<http://www.facebook.com/AuthorKrisAustenRadcliffe>

Facebook Profile page:  
<http://www.facebook.com/kris.austenradcliffe>

I'm also a photographer:

Six Talon Sign Media LLC Photography:  
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## **Trouble at the Docks (Part one)**

**By Jim King**

### **Prologue.**

I woke suddenly, the dusty corridor dark around me.

How did I get here? Where was Garrety? I staggered to my feet, my legs were unsteady, my left knee a ball of pain. There, ahead of me, that door.

We had been standing by that door, constables were right behind us, we had a judge's warrant. Then we heard the scream, a girl, loud, just behind the door. A terrible scream. Garrety kicked the door open while pulling his revolver from under his jacket; I covered him, he always went in first.

Where were the men? The constables had been right behind us on the stairs. Garrety stepped in and suddenly he was gone, jerked forward like a puppet on strings. I had jumped forward to help him and then I woke in the corridor.

I limped to the open door, the lock torn out of the cheap wooden panels. The room was shadows and darkness, the shapes of furniture and nameless lumps on the floor.

There. One of Garrety's shoes, he always wore dress shoes, always polished and clean.

Where was my revolver? My holster was empty. No I had drawn it; I must have dropped it into the darkness.

Where were the constables?  
A ripping sound. Cloth and something else, thicker and wetter. Movement within the shadows, a dark form, massive, shoulders far wider than mine. Strange shadows and shapes. Almost like horns and scales. One shadowed arm moved and something came into the light from the corridor.

A body, its head gone, a dark suit soaked in blood, a big pocket watch, tarnished silver, just like mine. I checked my waistcoat pocket, my watch, big, tarnished silver, from my grandfather.

I stared at the hands, hours, minutes, seconds. Nothing moved.

My watch had stopped.

When I died.

### **Chapter 1.**

Normally I never notice myself waking up, I am just awake. But sometimes, if I am very tired or hurt, I wake slowly. The world comes into focus from nothing to a blur and then to clarity.

This time it was taking forever, my body felt distant apart from the dull throb of heat and pain that was my left knee. There were sounds but they were so far away. The light around me was dim and I was surrounded by shapeless forms of white and black.

The strange dream had faded away and was quickly forgotten. There was a noise, , getting louder and closer. Someone was muttering, I could just make out the words.

“I’m sorry chief Inspector; he took a blow to the head. We have treated the wound but he could be asleep for hours yet. Yes of course. I will have a nurse keep an eye on him. Yes Chief Inspector I will send word when he wakes.”

One of the dark blurs moved away and out of sight. Then the other blurs moved around and I drifted back to sleep.

This time I woke up normally, bright sunlight, a plaster ceiling above me going a bit grey with age. The smell of flowers and something sharper that stung my nose. The rustle of movement, cloth and something else. Something rigid or starched rubbing against itself. The nurse leaned over and smiled. Her freshly starched uniform bright in the morning sun that streamed through the window beside my bed.

I was so thirsty my voice was no more than a croak but she knew what I needed and held a glass to my mouth, I tried to gulp the warm water but she took the glass away and told me to sip.

I nodded and she bought the glass back allowing me to take a number of sips.

Once I could speak again I thanked her, my voice barely recognizable. She put the now empty glass on the small table and left, slipping out of the door past the short but stocky figure in an ill-fitting police sergeant’s jacket.

I waved Peck into the room wondering yet again how he had ever become a constable,

he was several inches below the height limit but more than made up for that by being the toughest man I had ever met.

“Come in sergeant” I croaked as I gestured to the one chair in the room. While he went for the chair I lifted myself up in the bed and winced when sharp pain stabbed through my left knee as I moved it.

As he dragged the chair closer I caught the faint smells that came from him, coal, rotten wood, smoke, oil, dead fish.

“A Problem at the docks sergeant Peck?”

#

Not long after dawn and the docks were busy, newly arrived cargoes were unloading whilst goods to go out with the tide were loading. Crewmen, dock workers, merchants and passengers were everywhere.

Steam driven cargo cranes lifted nets full of crates and sacks from dock to ship or ship to dock.

Twenty years on the docks, five years as a crane man and still Samuel Sutton was amazed at how stupid people were. He had no sooner cleared a spot on the dock by lifting a cargo net full of barrels than some idiot passengers had decided that would be a good place to stand. Women in cheap colourful clothing, men in cheap brown suits.

He dropped the cargo net safely on the deck of the ship that would carry the barrels off to some distant country. The ship’s steam engine already belching grey smoke into the



sky as its crew tried to race the tide, no doubt cursing how slow the dockers were working.

While the net was being unloaded on the deck of the ship Samuel took a minute to lean over the edge of the platform where he worked, twenty feet above the ground, at the point where the crane rotated. He shouted at the bloody fools to get out of the way before he crushed them flat with his next load of cargo. For emphasis he used a few of the more colourful words he had picked up working with the Irish dockers.

The men below were surly, the women shouted back with a few things that were new even to a hardened docker like Samuel. One woman in particular was clearly an immigrant, half of what she said sounded Italian.

Still they moved out of the way so the matter was done.

As Samuel turned back to the metal saddle that served as his seat he glanced down to the water by the dockside and something caught his eye. Something bobbing up and down, a shape like a keg or small barrel but wrapped in cloth.

He shouted down to the crew that loaded his nets, pointing as he did so. A few of them wandered across to the edge of the dock and looked down into the water.

One crossed himself, others swore or started to shout. All across the dock people stopped what they were doing. People along the dockside shuffled away from the water, ships' crews stood as if on guard, eyes watching the waters around them.

A whistle was blown at the far end of the dock, then another further away. The great steam whistle at the dock office blew, once, twice, three times, summoning senior dockers to the manager's office.

Another victim of the monster.

#

What was left of the body had been pulled out of the water and left on the dockside. The closest ships had pulled out as soon as they were loaded and the whole section was being left empty. Incoming captains saw the police everywhere, the sheet of canvas covering a misshapen lump, and decided to wait for another space to become available.

Constables were taking statements from the few who wanted to talk; most of the crowd were standing back as if the body was contagious or that the monster would leap from the water to claim another soul in broad daylight.

Sergeant Obadiah Peck of Her Most Britannic Majesty's Bristol Constabulary had just arrived on the dock, of the more than a dozen Sergeants available, two already standing on the dock, they still sent for him.

Damn that case, African cultists, a bunch of mad men doing ungodly rituals and sacrificing girls kidnapped from the poorest streets. Peck and Inspector Thorn had worked on that one, found the hideout and gone in with a dozen constables. It had ended with the two fighting back to back. Thorn using his revolver to hold back the cultists while Peck used the heavy wooden club he had snatched from the

hands of the cult leader. To fight, Something.

Most of the constables had been wounded, three killed, they all saw. Something. They talked as coppers do and Inspector Thorn and Sergeant Peck had become the men assigned when the really weird stuff turned up. Inspector Thorn would have been given the case but he was still in hospital after whatever the hell had happened in that cheap hotel yesterday.

So the dockside monster had struck again and it was 'send for Sergeant Peck', it didn't matter that he had just finished a night shift and was going home, no, the chief inspector himself had said "Send Peck".

Bollocks.

Sergeant Peck walked over to the bodies, ignoring the stares of the crowd and the looks of relief on the faces of the two sergeants who found themselves suddenly relieved of the case. Unnatural things happening, Peck had arrived, his problem.

Peck pulled back the canvas sheet and grunted as he looked at what was left of a man. Right arm gone at the shoulder, left arm missing from the elbow. Both legs missing below the knee and the upper legs looked as if something had torn great chunks out of the flesh. The head was still on this one, the face was gone, just blood and bone at the front, the last one had been a bloody stump at the neck.

Still wearing a jacket, now stained black from blood and water. The torso on this one looked intact, the shirt was undamaged across the chest, the other two had both been

disembowelled.

Peck dropped the canvas back across the body and walked across to the pair of sergeants who had watched all this from a good twenty feet away.

It took only a few minutes for the two to bring Peck up to speed on the case then both left hurriedly, neither looked back at the body, the dock or Peck. When Thorn and Peck were given a case it was because it was weird, bizarre, ungodly or worse. No copper wanted to be any part of those cases and both sergeants got themselves out of sight as fast as they could.

#

It took over an hour before the sawbones arrived and the body was put on a stretcher and into the back of a horse drawn police wagon. Both horses spooked as soon as it was carried close to them and the driver was nearly thrown as he fought to stop them bolting.

Peck watched this from a short distance away, someone standing close to him might have seen the slightest expression cross his face. Or perhaps they would have simply imagined the look of a man who was thinking of another day when police horses had been spooked, outside a warehouse being used by demon worshipers.

With the body inside the rear compartment the horses calmed down and the driver was able to turn the wagon around and leave the docks, as he did so the crowd and the constables pulled back leaving a wide area for

the wagon to pass by.

The driver hunched down in his long coat, between his up turned collar and his hat nothing was visible apart from his eyes which were dark and squinting in the morning light.

The wagon left the docks, turned onto the street and vanished in a clatter of horse shoes on cobbles.

Peck dismissed the last of the constables and sighed to himself, he would need to file this which meant it would be midday before he got home.

He finished his last comment in his battered old note book and put it back in his breast pocket then turned to walk back to the station, a thought came to him as he left the docks. From the docks to the station he was only a few minutes away from the Hospital where the Inspector had been taken.

He could check how the inspector was doing. For the lads at the station mind you, Garrety had been from down town, working the murders, his death was another nick's problem but Thorn was theirs and him dying would set everyone in a black mood.

((to be continued))



Artwork by Laurie Smith

**Abductions, a lack of buggery, and  
revelations of intent.**

**Part one:**

**By Arkady Szantovitch**

There was a light, a bright fucking light. That's the first thing I remember. I was in bed, minding my own damned business when the light shone under my door. That would be when those little grey fucks appeared. C'mon, you know who I'm talking about. Big eyes, no hair, usually naked, no noticeable genitals. No you asshole, not Billy Corgan... Fucking aliens. E.T. Fucking Day the Earth Stood Still and shit. Wait! Where the hell do you think you're going?! Come back! It's all true I tell you! Do I look crazy? Hold on, don't answer that. I can see my amusingly hideous shirt would give you cause to doubt my lucidity. I can assure you my friend, this shirt is ENTIRELY. FUCKING. SANE. Oh? The aliens? Right, yeah.... My bad.

So sit down, order us another pitcher and I will tell you a mighty tale. The fact those extra-terrestrial pricks didn't even let me put on clothes before they paralysed me did nothing to earn points in my book. Did I mention that? I don't know what these little Corgans were after, but I immediately resolved that there would be no probing me without a fight! I don't know how they got me aboard what I assume to be their ship. They either blanked my memory of that part, or I still hadn't quiet shaken off the whiskey from earlier. But there I stood, in some bigass featureless room. Bland and offensive as only an extra-terrestrial room or a FOX News anchor could possibly be. Three of the Corgans stood before me, indistinguishable from each other, looking me up and down with a clinical eye. My muscles tensed, I was sure that a probing would not be

far off. Let's see the grey little bastards try... I've been probed by better, BETTER I TELL YOU!

Right, sorry... back to my tale of wonder. Are you gonna finish that pint? Shit, then order another one! You think I'm going to relate this sober? Sober?! And you call ME mad.... I stood there before them, naked and proud as the day I was pushed unceremoniously into this world, buttocks clenched in dread. "You may relax yourself human, we have no intention of violating you." Said the middle Corgan in a voice that reminded me strongly of Ian McKellan. Weird, I know... but there it is. I'm not gonna lie, part of me was a little disappointed, but I like to think I quickly got over it. What? Why are you looking at me like that? Don't tell me YOU haven't ever fantasized about being rectally violated by extra-terrestrials? You haven't? Well.... Shit. Right, so unwitting disclosure of my own perversions aside, I was a bit confused here. This whole "alien abduction" thing was not going as expected. "Alright, so ignoring the fact that I got saddled with the one ship of alien prudes... " I said "What the hell did you drag me up here for?" After a bit of whispered and urgent conversation, the little grey bastards looked back at me again with those dead fishy eyes of theirs and the centre one replied "We wish you to help us understand your people" That's right. ME. Okay, you can stop laughing now. Really, it's not THAT funny! Dude, you are SUCH a prick. Can I finish?

Right, so there these short little swine are, looking to me for enlightenment. After stifling my own outburst of rude and hearty laughter, I was finally able to ask "Alright, ask me what you need to know" Their spokes-alien informed me "From our observations, you

seem well acquainted with the history of your world. We wish to understand why your societies developed as they did.” Nodding sagely, I responded “I can do that. I will need some vital supplies though. I believe a forty of whiskey and a pack of smokes should do. This needs to happen. It’s part of my process. A vital part in fact, so vital that I am at a loss as to why I’m not holding them now.” The few features on my new hosts seemed to fall a little, and there was some more whispered and urgent conversation amongst them. I could tell already... They had finally realized. With a growing look of horror on their faces, they finally realized that the man they had tapped to help in their pursuit of knowledge was a complete and utter drunken prick. With a smile of the purest of pleasure on my face I said “Right-o my little grey lads, where do we begin?”

### Arkady Szantovitch

*Arkady Szantovitch is a glorious Renaissance man who hides amongst the populace of Toronto. Poetic epics have been written in honour of his glorious hair and beard, whilst a statue bearing his likeness stands at the foot of Everest after having scaled its peaks while carrying a Sherpa on his back. He has penned many a shameless love letter to the exploitation genre he so loves. When not tending bar, Arkady can be found politely turning down the political leadership of Namibia. History shall remember him as the man who brokered the Treaty of Versailles, but he tries to remain humble and allow the French to claim credit for it.*



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## **Like Ants To Honey**

**By Laurie E. Smith**

“You think this is a *first contact scenario*?”

Tom Evans, coming back into the East Point Wilderness Station from a stint of surveying the town of Secord Landing in the valley below through his binoculars, entered the cabin’s kitchen just in time to hear Frank Nesbitt’s shout of consternation and disbelief. The heavy-set blond botanist was standing beside the coat rack near the back door and glaring at their colleague, Yosef Mustafa, who was sitting at the kitchen table with one elbow resting beside a cup of half-finished mint tea. Outside the net-covered windows, propped open to let in the mild air of a late spring evening, the forest susurrated with unusual noise: rustlings, shiftings, mutterings and soft screeches. Too many dogs and cats packed into too small a space, high above their usual habitats in more civilized areas. Alarums and excursions, as Shakespeare would have said.

Yosef, long-shanked and usually, almost painfully, soft-spoken, was gazing back at his huskier teammate calmly. In spite of having moved to Oregon from Yemen only a year ago and still having occasional trouble with the English language, he was one of the most talented and quick-minded ornithologists Tom had ever met: it was he who had first noticed, three days ago, that bird species from much lower elevations were appearing in the high mountain zone where the wilderness station was located. Initially this had been a source of puzzlement, significant in some enigmatic way but not particularly ominous. Events over the subsequent seventy-two hours had turned it

into the first syllable of a profoundly alien sentence.

“Yes,” Yosef said softly, acknowledging Tom with a fleeting glance of his mild dark eyes. “That is precisely what I am proposing.”

With an equally swift glance Tom took in the details of Frank’s appearance: light jacket and hiking boots, a travel bag in one hand, and most importantly, the keys to one of the station’s Jeeps in the other. “Planning a little trip, Frank?”

“My sister’s in Portland, damn it!” Frank turned belligerent blue eyes on his boss. “Not answering her email or cell phone. I can’t just sit here while she’s...” He trailed off with a little gesture of frustration at his own lack of knowledge.

“Yes,” Yosef repeated. “That is the question, isn’t it? While she is WHAT, precisely? While everyone is... what? All over the world the animals are running away from the cities as fast as their legs can go; people are running into them, toward the silver pillars. ‘Beautiful’, the broadcasters say before the news feeds go dead. ‘Inexplicable’, the Internet says, and then they go silent too. But they are in cities, and that is where the pillars appeared, yes? And now even the outliers are not updating.”

“There could be a thousand explanations for that,” Frank protested. He tightened his grip on his travel bag. “We’re not learning anything sitting up here, with nobody answering their damned phones. And if Janice needs me, I’ll be damned if I’m going to waste any more time!”

Yosef nodded. “Yes, I am thinking time is something we do not have much of anymore.”

Tom held up both hands. “Hold on, Frank. Let’s talk this over, huh? Rushing off half-cocked isn’t —”

“FUCK half-cocked!” The botanist’s tension, which had been building up over the past three days, exploded in a roar. “The black bastard’s right about one thing: Something’s gone rotten, and we’ve got to DO SOMETHING!”

Tom winced at the racism, but decided to let it pass. At the moment there were bigger fish to fry. The frenetic light in Frank’s eyes wasn’t merely anger: it suggested outright mental instability. “We’re just going to talk, okay? Five minutes either way won’t make much difference, will it?”

Yosef made a low sound that could have been amusement. But more importantly, Frank, after another couple of seconds of glaring, dropped the bag on the floor and crossed his arms. “Okay, Tom. You’ve got your five minutes. But damn, this better be good.”

Instinctively Tom looked to Yosef, the only person in the room who seemed to have even an inkling of what might be going on. Yosef’s trace of a smile faded away, and he closed his eyes briefly as if thinking.

After a moment he said, “You see a new house. Beautiful, big, perfect to your needs. But,” he made a skittering gesture with his fingers, “you also have ants. Many ants, everywhere. So what do you do?”

Tom, who’d had an uncle with a house foundation like a sieve, answered at once: “You mix up some sugar water and start laying traps.”

“Yes!” Yosef’s eyes opened wide and his bright grin lit up the room. “Yes, that is it. Precisely! But that only works in the short range. There is a thing you have here...” He tapped his forehead with his clenched fist, a habitual gesture when particularly frustrated by the English language. “You hang them in gardens during parties, to attract insects. They emit this sound, this musical note only —”

“Bug zappers.” Tom felt a frisson of ice chase down his spine. “You think that’s what this is? You think those pillars are...?” The thought was at once appalling and far too plausible.

“That smoke rising from the centre of the city, you think it’s the sign they’re having a party?”

The chill became a shiver. “No. No, I guess I don’t.”

“It is worse than that.” Yosef gestured toward the binocular case slung over Tom’s shoulder. “What of Secord Landing?”

Yesterday there had been movement in the town, cars and people, and lights in the night. Today... “I didn’t see a living soul. Or a whole lot of cars.”

Yosef’s thin smile held a trace of humour and much sadness. “They have heard the Call.” He nodded toward the noise beyond the cabin. He glanced at the butterfly in its glass prison; the insect sat on its twig, idly flexing its wings. “But not here. Not yet.”

Tom wondered, briefly, how long a wave of the kind Yosef was proposing would be held off by five miles of linear distance and two hundred feet of elevation. Frank, still looking unimpressed, countered: “Fine, smart ass... so

why the mass animal migrations if this thing is supposed to be an attractant?"

Yosef shrugged. "Animals will vacate an area when an earthquake is about to strike. Their senses are sharper. Maybe they smelled this bait or heard this note, and they know what it means. So they ran."

Tom felt the first faint throb of a headache. "Smarter than we are, eh?"

"Perhaps. Or it is by design. The bait only appeals to organisms above a certain level of intelligence. The higher the intelligence, the stronger the pull."

Frank emitted an explosive snort that turned the throbbing behind Tom's eye sockets into a dull drumbeat. "That's crazy, and you both know it! The whole thing's..."

He kept talking, but Tom couldn't hear him. The pounding in his head was rapidly becoming a pulse of heat, the soul of longing made manifest. Blindly he turned toward the west, dimly aware that Yosef was rising and also turning, turning, turning toward the holy place, the sweetest song, the source of all that was bright and nourishing and needful.

His last free thought, as the sound of thousands of animal feet moving east continued around them, was that Frank was going to be going to Portland after all — and he was going to have a lot of company.

THE END

Laurie E. Smith

*Laurie has been writing since she could first clutch a pencil in her right fist, and seems to do so compulsively (having currently*

*amassed 1,000,000+ words and counting on the Archive of Our Own fan fiction archive). She pays her bills by colouring comic books and plying her Wacom tablet as a freelance commercial artist. She takes part in NaNoWriMo each year and hopes to one day give birth to a bouncing baby novel. In the meantime, she writes short stories when the whim takes her and she has a free hour to devote to her iMac's well-worn keyboard.*



From the moment she was born, Nathalie was always the odd one out, gifted by a force that comes to her in her dreams. The only person who feels right... a homeless and insane man, Gideon. Little does Nathalie know that her gifts are meant to stand against a coming darkness, and that Gideon isn't as crazy as he seems. As the world starts to fall, she will need to accept him, and her destiny, if she is to become a champion for humanity.

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## A Deal

By James Gray

A man sits at a small wooden table; a single light hanging from the ceiling by a chain directly overhead illuminates the scene in a dim glow. His dominant leg crosses casually over the other; his posture is laid-back and nonchalant. At his left hand, a marble ash-tray sits in stark contrast to the dark varnish of the tabletop. The embers of a dwindling cigarette, held loosely between his index and middle fingers, fall lazily within the tray like leaves in autumn, landing in scattered drifts. In his right hand, a pocket watch of considerable age rests, cupped within his open palm, top flipped open to reveal its face. 7:22, it reads. He has the time, but he does not close the watch. Instead, he simply continues to stare at the hands as they tick-tick-tick-tick-tick-tick...

A sharp rapping at the door alerts his attention, though he still does not look up from the timepiece in his hand.

"Do come in." His voice, a rich tenor, carries easily in the small space.

The door creaks gently as it is opened a fraction. Light from the hall sneaks in through the crevice to invade the darkness before the door is flung wide, flooding the dimly-lit room in artificial light. Three men stand in the doorway; all of them of average height and build, biding their time before entering. There is a small silence between them, broken only by the faint ticking of the pocket watch before it is snapped shut and deposited in the first man's waistcoat pocket. His eyes flicker up to gaze upon his company, pupils dilating to compensate for the glow. He addresses the man in the middle.

"I deplore shadows and games, sir, so if you wouldn't mind, come forward and be known."

The door is shut behind them as they step into the confined quarters. The man in the centre of the three reaches out and takes the back of a wooden chair opposite the first man, pulling it free from under the table and turning it slightly so as to seat himself upon it. He is an older man. Lines run like roadmaps across his features; his hairs beginning to silver. His eyes, a piercing blue, gaze intently over the top of thin glasses that hang off of a hooked nose. He holds the air of experience about him, and of a patience wearing thinner by the second.

He speaks.

"I, too, deplore games, and I have been playing against my will for the past few hours. Now either you give me a damn good reason as to why I've been summoned all the way out here, or this is over and we will leave."

The man sitting across from him taps the dying embers of his cigarette into the marble ashtray twice for good measure, and then sets the butt against the rim. His eyes flash calculatingly to the other two men in the party of three that stand mere feet away, and then turns his hawk-like gaze back to the man opposite. Steepling his fingers, he turns and rests his palms and forearms on the edge of the table, leaning forward so as to be fully immersed in the single light.

"You know," he begins, "I don't smoke. Never have, really; I find it to be an awful habit. I simply like the smell of burning tobacco - which isn't the oddest thing in the world, I'm sure."

He lets the silence ring a moment afterward, watching the three men passively; seeking the growing agitation in the older

man's face as he begins to tap his digits on the varnish.

"Yes, a dreadful habit. Awful. It leaves a smell that lingers on clothing and colours the skin, and it is nearly impossible to wash out or hide. Not unlike blood, really."

Drawing a smile, he unclasps his hands and sits back in the chair. The older man, unable to hold back his rising ire, interrupts.

"What does this have to do with me being here, or with anything at all for that matter?"

A small twitch of a smile affects the corner of the first man's mouth.

"Well, you see I don't smoke and you don't kill people for a living; and yet here I sit with a death-stick smouldering away in an ashtray, and here you sit with a debt to pay and copious amounts of blood on your hands."

A look of bewildered shock creeps across the old man's face stunning him into a stuttering silence.

"I d-...but...how?"

The first man shakes his head and lets out a small laugh.

"We're both liars, John. One far better than the other."

The old man stammers again, "But I don't understand..."

"You've got red all over you, John. You stink of it. It clings to you like cigarette smoke and it stains your hands like tobacco, and no matter how hard you try, John, you just can't get it off. 'Out, out damned spot!', I can hear you wailing in anxious trepidation. But it never goes, does it? It lingers, and it only gets darker,

and darker, and darker, until you can't see your palms for all of that damned blood."

The old man sits, visibly shaken; rage welling up within him begins to push down his initial fear and confusion.

"Who the hell do you think you are? How dare you sit here in the dark and presume to accuse me of these things of which you have not a single iota of evidence, or any kind of fucking clue as to what you are referring?!"

The first man reaches into his jacket pocket and produces a carton of cigarettes, deftly flipping open the lid with his thumb and retrieving a single dart before depositing the package back from whence it came. Lighting it, he sets it lit-end up on the edge of the edge of the ash-tray and watches the initial dregs of smoke waft into the air like incense. Looking back at the old man, he speaks.

"Time is running out for you, John, as it does for all men; however, your time is shorter than most. You have debts, my friend; debts to be paid in full to some very nasty people who will want collecting, which is exactly where you and I come in. I can make all of that disappear. You, however, must do something for me in return."

"And that is?"

The first man produces a piece of paper and a pen-knife and slides them both toward the old man, to which he is met with more confusion.

What is this?"

A smirk and a reply.

"Call it a lease on your freedom; a debtless existence with a worry-free guarantee. All I require is a signature."

"A signature?"

"A blood-signature, John. Debts in blood to be paid in blood. Do we have a deal?"



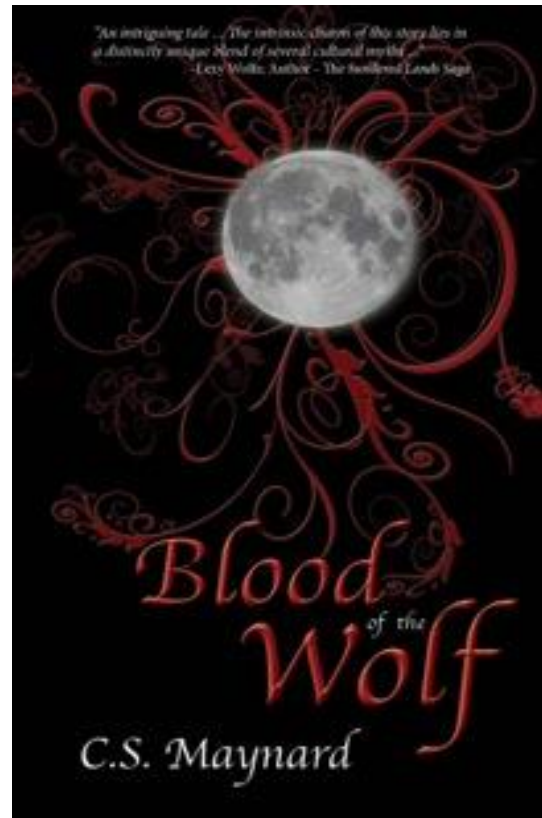
With shaking hands, the old man lifts the pen knife and draws it across his open palm producing a thin, red line that blooms shortly after. He pauses a moment, turning his gaze between his hand and the knife, and then turns his palm downward, pressing it onto the sheet of paper and making his mark.

The first man smiles and takes the paper and the knife away, pocketing both. Standing then, he fixes his suit jacket and makes to leave before the old man speaks up.

"Who are you, anyway? I never got your name"

Before he leaves, the first man stops and turns back with a grin saying simply,

"I told you, John. I'm a liar."



When she gets into a car accident with her mother, it changes Kaylee Losee forever. Infected by her mother, she discovers the family secret and how she is now a part of it. She struggles to learn about the wolf that is suddenly contained within her. With the help of her mom and a previously unknown grandmother, Kaylee fights to keep the wolf under control, before someone she cares about gets hurt or killed.

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## **Call For Help**

**By Ana Marija Meskova**

The air was heavy and warm, the kind you need conscious effort to breathe. It meant the ventilation was shot. She felt like she was drowning and the running didn't help. But she had to keep moving. It was the only thought she had left echoing in her mind. She managed to push the small round door open with her shoulder and push herself in the small space in the wall. She then began climbing up the ladder, her broken arm hanging limp while she lifted her body up with the other. 'Keep moving, just keep moving.' she repeated to herself, trying to ignore the pain and the fact her body was getting heavier and heavier. She finally made it to the top, pushing herself out of the hatch on the floor. 'Don't rest, move.' she made herself get up before she took a second to orient in the darkness. Most of the lights were offline, and the halls were desolate. She ran to her left, and after a few minutes she knew she was going the right way, the room numbers giving her a kind of a security line. 'You only need to keep moving, don't stop.' She was powering through, even though her speed was decreasing. She could hear scraping, like someone was dragging sandpaper over metal. She wasn't sure where it was coming from, and she didn't have the luxury to stop and check. She got to the end of the narrow hall and placed her hand on a small grey panel next to the door in front of her, using the time to also catch her breath. A small needle punctured the middle of her palm and connected to the chip under her skin. There was a ding and the oval door opened. She tried to run in, but she barely entered. Her legs felt like lead. 'Gotta... keep... moving...' her brain was slowing down. Two more steps and she fell on her knees. She reached towards the control console, but the distance was far greater than she thought, so she dropped to the floor. 'Move... I have, to move...' Every centimetre felt like a victory. Her vision was getting hazy, and her broken arm was numb. Her entire body was screaming

at her to stop, to surrender, to close her eyes and sink, but she was trying her best to float. Her hand finally touched the legs of the chair and she made an effort to lift herself up. Her fingers dug into the seat as she moved with every inch of strength she had left. But it was a task her body was not up for. She slammed on the floor, hitting her head on the edge of the square desk and falling on her broken arm. She was fighting to stay conscious but darkness was overflowing. She stopped thinking and sank.

"Anyone there? Please respond." the voice coming through was not very clear, but even with all the white noise you could tell the man sounded desperate. The noise was slowly overwhelming the voice, until the man could no longer be heard clearly. The power was dwindling, it wouldn't be long until everything went offline. Then they would be almost impossible to find.

Her eyes were closed, her body was cold. The blood on the floor had already coagulated into a jelly-like goo, and there were drag marks going back out from the door. It needed warmth. It might have gotten what it wanted, but it would not survive this way for long. And wherever she was, if there was such a thing as life after death, it would not be a stretch of the imagination to say that she was floating.



**Scarlett Blade The Bandit Queen**

**By Stacey Welsh**

The damp grass made her skirt hem wet and stick to her bare running legs, she could hear the muffled thunder of the pursuing horses' hooves upon the ground, and if she could make it to the nearby forest, then she might be able to save herself and the bundle in her arms.

She knew the father of that precious new-born babe she held would never allow either of them to live. The man's history had proven that, several other children had the misfortune to be born of his seed and none had survived beyond its second day of life, their mothers following them into the afterlife shortly after. Despite many of them fleeing, their Lord's power was far-reaching and his wrath, deadly.

Ahead she saw a small outcropping of rocks; and hope flared within her fast beating heart. Perhaps she could hide there while the soldiers hunted her and the new-born babe and plan her next move. She slipped in the mud, her clothes gaining weight with the cloying heavy mix of earth and recent rain sticking to her skirts. Stumbling, she made it to the rocky cover and collapsed exhausted behind the three largest rocks as she heard the distant shouts of her hunters as they arrived in the clearing. "She's gone to ground! Find her!" cried one. "A bag of gold for the fellow who finds her and the brat!" shouted their leader.

She trembled in fear as she heard them gaining ground, beating at bush and searching every nook and cranny of the rocky area, she knew they would find her. She took a deep breath, having reached a decision. The Dederon cliffs were not far, and the ocean kissed their base. The mid-wife's sleeping potion had helped to keep the baby sleep soundly through their ordeal.

She looked down upon her baby girl, dearly wishing that she could have been there to raise her, teach her to walk, and talk, kiss those scraped knees, and teach the young woman that she prayed desperately she would grow to be, the games of men and women, perhaps even, one day, to bounce a grandchild of her own upon her knee. But the maid knew that if her daughter was to have a chance of survival, she would have to sacrifice her life for that of the child, and the dreams of raising her daughter and living to see a grandchild were dashed as the waves were upon the rocks at the base of the cliffs below.

She removed the outer shawl that she had wrapped the child in, and nestled her daughter between several of the smaller rocks, she found a rock that resembled the same size as the child and wrapped it in the baby's outer shawl. She said a quiet prayer to the Sword Bearer and the Lady of the Shield to protect her daughter and gently kissed the sleeping baby, knowing that she would never know her mother, and praying that she would never meet her father in this life.

She chanced a peek around the rock, and noting the men were coming closer, rousing small animals as they continued beating at the bushes searching for the woman and child. She took a deep breath, cradled the shawl-wrapped stone in her arms and ran towards the cliffs. The smell of the ocean gave her strength to carry the heavy stone bundle to the cliffs for the final, fatal dash. She heard the shouts of the soldiers as she was seen.

“She’s there! Take her alive if you can!”

The horses whinnied and snorted as they were pushed again, foamed saliva flecking their broad muscled chests and sweat streaking down their hides.

One of the soldiers unlimbered a small crossbow and loaded a bolt while the horse cantered towards his target. The cliffs loomed closer and the wind had begun to howl in her ears. She stopped at the edge, and looked down, the waves smashed on the rocks, the tide was out. She took a deep breath consigning herself to her fate and hoping desperately that someone other than the guards would find the baby, else her sacrifice would be in vain.

Suddenly she felt something hit her. Confused, she looked down; Protruding from her stomach was the sharpened head of a crossbow bolt. The pain flared through her shocked mind.

Losing her balance, she fell short of the edge, the shawl wrapped rock secure in her arm, she was exhausted, and her life was draining with the blood that began to pool around her. Knowing the men watched her and were still gaining ground, but slower now that she had been downed.

She slowly clawed her way towards the cliff’s edge with her free hand. She reached the edge, and heard the shouts of the men grow louder in alarm. They were only a few feet away now, and as one man closed in on her, she hauled her dying body and the wrapped bundle over the edge.

The closest soldier skidded to a halt almost going over the edge himself. He peered over the edge and watched the woman’s body hit the rocks, the bundle wrapped tightly in her arms.

His Lord would be pleased with the news that the favoured maid who had dared to bear his child and the whelp that she had borne were no longer alive to threaten his future, but he would not be pleased that the evidence of their demise would be irretrievable, His Lord demanded to see the evidence as proof of the job.

He knelt down and grabbed a handful of rocks that lay scattered upon the cliff’s edge, and then rose and threw them over the side, showing his frustration. He turned and ordered the men to remount and head back to the castle. Returning his gaze to the ocean, he spat over the side and waited a few moments before returning to his men. He mounted and turned the horse to lead his soldiers on the long journey home.

#

In a forest not too far from where the baby had been hidden, Richard, the Grey Fox as he was better known, laid down the shovel beside the small grave, tears moistened his eyes and ran down his stubbled face.

He laid the stillborn child wrapped in white linen into its final resting place. His wife had borne him no living children and it grieved him greatly each time she wept at a child’s blue-tinged, still form. This child was the fifth he had to bury, his wife Laurel rested in the safety of the camp, as she could not stand to watch another child of hers buried, and she was quite weak from the labour of this birth.

He gently layered the dirt onto the grave asking the Lady of the Shield to watch over the babe in the afterlife as he had done too many times before. He patted down the earth on the grave. Richard leaned on the shovel and sighed, taking a few moments to compose himself before heading back towards his camp. As he walked, the thought occurred to him to go by the Dederon Cliffs, perhaps the sea air would help to clear his thoughts a little.

As he walked through the open ground near the cliffs, a sound carried on the wind, it was a baby’s hungry cry. Richard hurried towards the sound emanating from a gathering of rocks and boulders. He carefully moved two rocks and discovered the baby hidden within.

He took the child in his arms and she quietened. The little one looked up at him, her blue eyes still slightly scrunched up; she could not be more than a few days old. He looked about for signs of the mother, and noticed the marks in the earth and the blood upon the rocks by the edge of the cliffs. He quickly came to the conclusion that there had been foul play involved. He approached the edge and peered over to the depths below, a pale figure lay amongst the rocks as the tide began to wash in to the base of the cliffs. a young woman, her hair was dark like the child's, her features serene in death. The mother of the child that lay in his arms lay at the bottom of the Dederon Cliffs with a crossbow bolt through her stomach.

Richard moved away from the edge and the mother's final resting place. What was he to do? There was no way that he could leave the little one out here, the baby would surely die, it got very cold at night this time of the year and there were always predatory animals about at night. But what would his wife think? She was still weak and grieving the lost child he had just buried. Sighing he took off his own cloak and wrapped the child in its warmth and began the journey back to the camp.

The barking of the camp's dogs and the smell of the smoke from the cooking fires greeted him. Men and women looked up and waved to the Grey Fox as he made his way through the camp.

"Richard!" called Hammond as he arose from his cooking fire and the company of his wife and two sons. Kate, his wife was large with child herself; she and Laurel had spent many happy pregnant days together resting for their upcoming births and motherhood.

Hammond came quickly up to him, and noticed the babe in his arms. "I thought that..." he started confused, Richard stopped him with a gesture.

"I found her under an outcropping of rocks near the cliffs, I think she was abandoned, there were signs of a struggle nearby and a woman's body at the bottom of the cliffs. I was thinking of taking her to Laurel, maybe we can raise her." He explained.

"You want to raise her in the camp? You are aware of how dangerous our lives are due to our profession, or has the grief gotten to you?" Hammond asked. "Banditry has its risks, my friend, but we have plans in place in case we are threatened by the Royal guard or the army." Richard smiled at his friend. Then he looked at Hammond's own two boys, "Besides, you raised your lads in camp, there are other children here as well. It is the life we return to, not the one that we have out upon the road in which she will be raised."

Hammond looked upon the small child in Richard's arms, "Well my opinion doesn't count for much when you are the boss." He laughed, knowing full well that Richard held him in High regard.

"I have to go but we will talk later old man. Give my regards to your Katie." Richard waved to Hammond and continued to his tent.

Not too far from Richard and Laurel's tent a small herd of horses grazed with two young boys watching over the herd, ensuring none wandered too far from the camp; those boys would eventually enter their banditry apprenticeship, perhaps even next summer. But for now they were learning the smaller tasks required to keep the camp running while the men were out hunting or engaging in their Bandit raids upon the trader's and King's roads.

Richard nodded a greeting to the two young boys as he passed them before reaching his tent.

The cured deer hide had been sewn together and formed into a round tent, not unlike the others in the encampment, Richard raised the flap of the tent and entered its dark warmth; he quietly approached the sleeping area where his wife lay resting.

"My love, I have something to show you." He said softly, his wife moved slowly arranging herself, "I found something while I was in the forest." He handed the bundle to his wife.

"She cannot be more than a few days old. Where are her kin?" she whispered holding the little one to her chest, the baby began to cry, Laurel's homespun shirt grew damp as her body responded to the child's hungry demand, she unshouldered her shirt and held the little



one to her breast to take the milk that had begun to seep.

Richard shook his head, "I know not my love, I found her abandoned amongst an outcropping of rocks by the Dederon Cliffs, though near to her hiding place there was blood spilt and the signs of horses upon the ground. I looked over the edge, and there was a woman's body, she looked similar enough to be the child's mother."

"An unwanted child perhaps?" Laurel supposed looking at the suckling child. "She is unwanted no more, for we shall raise her as our own." Laurel sighed, the child was not of her body but she would take her as if she were. They had lost too many babies to the Lady to give away such a blessed gift.

"What will you name her?" he asked, watching as the baby suckled and snuggled closer to her new foster mother.

"Arienne." she smiled at the babe.

*Scarlett Blade: The Bandit Queen*, available at *Amazon.com*:

<http://www.amazon.com/Scarlett-Blade-The-Bandit-Queen/dp/1742843344>



Artwork by Laurie Smith



Of all the magical things that could happen to a gamer geek in the mundane world, dating a shape-changed Dragon has to be up there. It's like getting your Hogwarts letter, but with sex.

Rose Drake has come to Earth for three years in order to soak up the local energy and increase her chances of having happy, healthy, baby hatchlings when she goes home. In exchange for his time and energy, David's body and love life both undergo extreme makeovers. It sounds like the deal of a lifetime.

Fate doesn't let David and Rose off so easily. A friend of theirs is murdered, their homeowner's association starts harassing them, and they have to complete a quest for an Elven sage in order to stop a genocidal Unicorn from turning Earth into a radioactive wasteland.

After all, when you're dating a Dragon, you're already a hero. It says so in the fine print.

<https://museituppublishing.com/bookstore/index.php/new-releases/life-with-a-fire-breathing-girlfriend-detail>

## **Author interview - Arkady Szantovitch**

I regained consciousness in the cells deep below the dread citadel of Far Horizons home base. I don't know how long I was out, or how long I sat there in the darkness, only my own thoughts and the cockroaches to keep me company (The largest I named Scott, he's an alright guy but absolutely out of control when he drinks). After what I can only assume to be days without food or water, an iron grate slid roughly open and a small document landed on the floor. It contained a series of questions, a crayon, and a set of instructions. Wondering briefly when Jigsaw was hired on by the staff of Far Horizons, I read the instructions. They simply stated "Answer the questions, and we will feed you". Having long since eaten the other roaches, and being somewhat reticent to eat Scott my only friend in here (it really does pay to have friends in prison), I set about answering these questions. If you are reading this, please... I beg of you.... Contact the U.N.... get me out of here....

### **1. When did you first start writing?**

I have always been of a creative bent. Writing short stories, poetry, music, plots for world dominion, or screenplays... I love it all. As to when? In the womb. It was a bit cramped, and there wasn't much light to work with... but I truly think I did some of my best work in there. Pity it is lost to time.

### **2. Do you read much? If yes, have you always loved reading?**

I read constantly. Also, yes... I have always loved reading. As a student of history, it's kind of expected as they have yet to develop history textbooks on tape.

### **3. Who's your favourite author? What's your favourite book?**

I'd be hard pressed to list a favourite really. There is too much good shit out there. The late, great Hunter Thompson will always be a source of joy and influence to me, as is H.P. Lovecraft. Otherwise, I'll read more or less anything. Except of course for "Green Eggs and Ham". That thing is pure evil. I tried green eggs and ham once, I was ill for a week.

### **4. What writers have influenced you the most?**

But... but... this is like that question up there! SORRY!!! I'll answer it! Just put the electrode cables down! Hunter Thompson again is a huge influence. His hyperbolic narrations and shameless self-insertion into his wonderful and crazy world makes me laugh, but his deft hand with language turns the description of a drug soaked adventure at the Kentucky Derby into pure poetry. He can make me howl with laughter and then weep with sadness at the death of the American Dream inside of a paragraph. That is skill kiddies!

### **5. Do you have a favourite fictional character? Either from a book or a television show?**

Yes, yes I do. Do you?

### **6. What are you working on right now? Can you tell us something about it?**

Currently working on two screenplays. One is a werewolf film taking place in a traveling carnival, the other is a sequel to the original Szantovitch masterpiece known as "Cowboys vs. Nazis". Truly, a masterpiece of Kubrickian film that was. Otherwise, I'm slowly pushing forward on my novel. Can I tell you something about that? No. You haven't fed me for days and I've had to live off of cockroaches. I'm not doing you any fucking favours.

**7. Is there anything in particular you do to get in the mood to write, or to get in the “zone”? Any particular pre-writing routines?**

Generally I drink. I mean a lot. Whiskey and wine are my general poisons of choice (though rarely at the same time, that’s just weird. What kind of degenerate do you take me for?) I find that after a goodly amount of inebriation I just write everything that comes to mind, no matter how bizarre or nonsensical. The morning after, I’ll look at it again whilst nursing a hangover and cut out the parts that don’t work with all the cold lack of mercy that a decent whiskey hangover can instil in a man.

**8. Where do you do your writing?**

On my typewriter generally, though in this horrifying silicon age of internetty nonsense, I’ve taken to writing on my computer more often for ease of transferring it to where ever it needs to go, like so many unwanted orphans. It’s really not the same kind of catharsis from pounding out a story on a typewriter, but you do what you have to do.

**9. How do you approach your writing? i.e.- Do you do outlines? Character bios? Etc.?**

I believe I explained before when I mentioned “drink” but I can understand that some others seem to have a bit more of a “process” that they cleave to. I am not one of those writers. I am made of sterner stuff. Chock full of piss and vinegar! Spite and Scotch!

**10. Do you have any advice for other writers?**

Go out and live. Experience life in all its hideous and rude splendour. If you just shut yourself away and hammer at a keyboard, it will have no resonance because you’ve never actually experienced fuck all. Get out there! Do

something utterly irresponsible and crazy! THEN write about it!

**11. Are you a morning person or evening person? Day or night?**

I’m generally an evening person, though I don’t really sleep much so I suppose I could also be called a morning person. I haven’t actually seen the sun since you bastards imprisoned me here. I don’t even know what time it is now.

**12. Do you have any pets?**

Well... There is Scott here. Say hello Scott. Otherwise, back home I keep many tarantulas and a lovely ball python named Monty. I know, hilarious right?

**13. What’s your favourite “I need a break from writing” activity?**

Finding a patio somewhere with friends and playing some chess over a series of pints. Failing that, I’ll pick up my violin or guitar and give the poor instrument hell.

**14. How do you approach writing sex scenes? The can range from mild to wild. Where are you on the mild to wild meter?**

Really depends on the needs of the story. If it’s a tender moment of love making, I’ll write it like that (in theory). However if it is a zesty and riotous session of sweaty, kinky fucking... well, I’ll write it like that! Unless this question was simply a pickup line? Is that really what it will take to get out of here? Well.... Wouldn’t be the first time....

**15. Do you write in one genre? More than one?**

Most of my work follows the Exploitation genre, with a very healthy dose of Gonzo Journalism thrown in to give it spice. That

being said though, I'll happily drift into whatever genre suits the story I'm writing. I've always thought the plot comes first, you'll figure out what genre it fits into later.

**16. Are you self-published or with a publishing house?**

Self-published for the most part, though these days it is getting much harder to send manuscripts via carrier pigeon. Dear gods, why did I just say that? Scott, why didn't you stop me? I'm starting to sound like a madman... or was that your plan all along Far Horizons?!?!?

**17. What are your thoughts on getting a literary agent?**

Sure, why not? It will be nice to have someone working with me who is just as hilariously corrupt as I am.

**18. What about marketing? How do you approach that area?**

The story is your marketing. If it's good, then people will talk about it. Otherwise, I am experimenting with marketing via interpretive dance, though I've yet to find a movement that properly conveys the meaning of "massive breasted motorcycle babe wielding a broadsword". You wouldn't have any suggestions, would you?

**19. What about beta readers? Do you use them? How many do you have? Where do you find them?**

If by "beta readers" you mean my poor put upon friends whom I will scream "READ THIS" at the top of my lungs at? I can take 'em or leave 'em honestly. I'm not writing for them anyhow.

**20. What's your favourite food?**

Favourite food? You think this is funny? Tease the starving prisoner? You fucking monsters. Also, good English style fish and chips.

**21. What's your favourite colour?**

Black? Red? Purple? Or was this an ill-timed Monty Python quote? What is your quest?

**22. Is there a particular website or Facebook page or blog that you, as a writer, find very helpful?**

Well I found this really great one called Starl... okay, I'm sorry. I know... I just want you to know that this is under duress, but here goes.... \*ahem\* I think that Far Horizons on Facebook is EXTREMELY helpful and useful. It is an excellent means for new authors to meet and discuss with peers, as well as an opportunity for them to get their works published. They will in no way kidnap you in the dark of the night in order for you to be a tortured shill for their e-zine. You have the Arkady guarantee on that!

**23. What's your favourite time of the year?**

That middle period between spring and summer. When it's warm and great out, but not humid enough that you wish you had brought scuba equipment in order to breathe.

**24. What's your most recent book about? And where can people buy it?**

My most recent work is the hilarious romp of Historical What the Fuckery known as "Pints, Betrayal, and Dictatorship", which can of course be found at the wonderful, benevolent and entirely NON-KIDNAPPING Far Horizons.

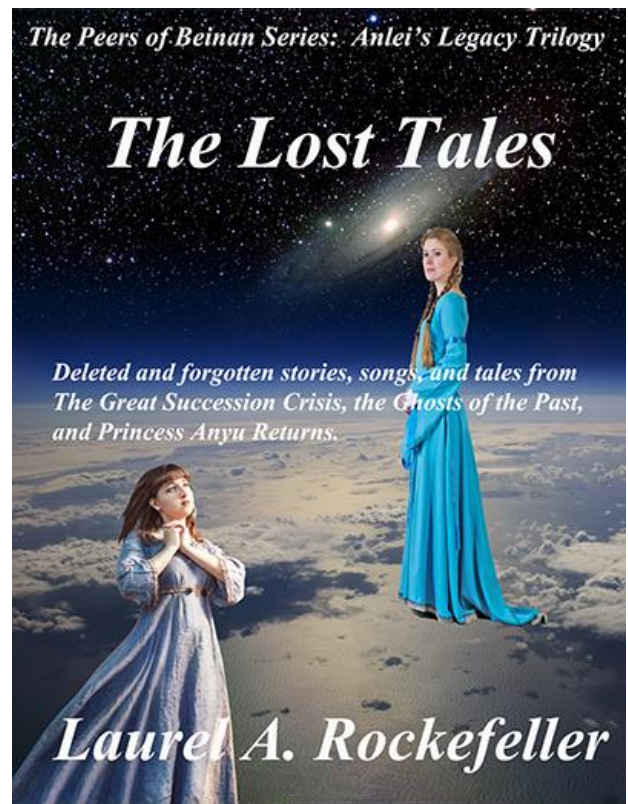
**25. What do you feel is your strongest gift, talent or skill that helps the most as a writer?**

A complete and utter lack of a filter. What most people would write off as ridiculous, campy, or tasteless I embrace wholeheartedly. Besides that, I'm relatively certain I may possess a bionic liver.

**26. Please share some of the links with us - Facebook author page, website, where people can find your books.**

I can be found on Facebook as Arkady Szantovitch. If I'm ever allowed contact with the outside world again, that is likely how I can be reached. Otherwise, Cowboys Vs. Nazis will be hitting your favourite file sharing and YouTube sites soon, so keep an eye out. Otherwise, just please... in the name of all that is merciful and good in this world... SEND. HELP. There. I answered your fucking questions. Can I please eat now?

*Editor's note: We LOVE Arkady's sense of humour, we don't actually have him strapped to a rack in a smelly dungeon, suffering from starvation... Honestly! We don't....(Sounds of whips cracking can be heard)... We might see him next issue... if he behaves*



Three generations after The Great Succession Crisis, terror ravages Beinarian cities as healing centres planet-wide fall to unseen assailants. Orphaned by two separate terrorist attacks, it falls to Lord Knight Elendir of house Ten-Ar to find the truth and stop the terrorists before they kill everyone he loves and the Gurun dynasty falls.

[http://www.amazon.com/Ghosts-Past-Peers-Beinan-ebook/dp/B00BVBHND0/ref=la\\_B008YVJ1JFE\\_1\\_3?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1399922560&sr=1-3](http://www.amazon.com/Ghosts-Past-Peers-Beinan-ebook/dp/B00BVBHND0/ref=la_B008YVJ1JFE_1_3?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1399922560&sr=1-3)

## **Star Seers Episode 1 (Part 1): The Hour of Hunger (Serial continuation of Star Seers from Issue 1)**

**By Mike C. Bene**

It had been at least a few weeks since the crew of The Harbinger went A.W.O.L. after their decision to instead serve the people of the Alliance, and not the Alliance's politicians. Since their departure they have helped a few Alliance worlds from the threat of destruction by the Dothran Horde Slaver Ships, and from quite a few other troubles in the 'verse. Three weeks after their last victory, of exposing a political dissident working on behalf of the interested parties within the Alliance, they received a distress call.

A Few Par-Secs away was a Biomedical Research station located in orbit around a planet called Farox 8. They could use whatever research was aboard, meanwhile in the time it took to get there their medics could be healing the crew's injuries. Upon arrival at the station however, they picked up a distress signal that used the Alliance's coding. Eric was the first to recognise the Station.

"That's station Horizon Delta...I used to work there so they'll probably be willing to let us help." He explained as they ventured close to the orbital station, which was looking silent amongst Farox 8's wastelands. Eric began trying to hail the station, but received no immediate response.

So as the first order of business he organized an away rescue team to at least hopefully rescue any members of the station crew and their research.

The away team arrived on the station after having to manually hack their teleportation grid, and beam each member one at a time. Camille came in last as she had

manually operated the teleports herself. The away team consisted of: Eric, Camille, George Greyson, one of the ship security officers, Devon Dale, one of the many Echo Psychics on board at the time of going A.W.O.L., and Jimmy Stonewall, the ship's cleaner and recently elevated security officer. Devon started by using the Psychic Echo Location to find any living members of the crew nearby, sadly he couldn't detect any and they started to move through the level. After an hour however they had an encounter that showed them the reason why there was no distress.

The smell was what hit them first...the repulsive stench of decaying flesh gone to rot was hit The Team as they turned the corner. Then the screaming started echoing as they saw it ... the decaying crewmen crunching and gnawing on the flesh of one of their own. The eater of this strange feast turned to see the away team and snarled, it wasn't afflicted with normal decay... it looked more of an acidic metallic nature as the bits of cybernetic modifications combined with their decaying flesh shone in the light. The decayed crew looked at the team with only one feeling reflected in their eyes - hunger.

The Team instantly started running as the snarling monstrosities slowly stood up and gave chase as they ran back down the corridors towards the teleport centre, but it was deadkeyed and locked down by the station's A.I. to stop the release of the infection. Eric however pointed out the security control room on the left of a hall, and suggested the team got into it. The Team locked the door behind them. The room however was more fucked over than the ship as the Communications control console was broken, and they were now left with a pressing problem...how to get back to The Harbinger alive.

((To be continued))



## **The Memories of Yin**

**By Thijis Van Sise**

One day a child was walking down the road returning home from the village market. His small sales of eggs, cheese and his families homemade bread was enough for him to return with coin in pocket and sweets in hand (and mouth as well).

The day was clear and warm. The roads empty but safe. The cart he rode most of the way home had dropped him at the crossroad a while back. He was still about a half hour from home but in no hurry. It was a good day at market and a better one to walk.

Looking up and observing the clouds he noticed a hawk circling not far from the road. Trees were just getting thick nearing the woods to the left of the road. Smaller but no less impressive trees dotted the plain to the right. It was above this area the hawk seemed to be targeting in on it prey. A field mouse or vole the boy supposed. Seeing birds of prey wasn't uncommon.

The hawk made its move. Diving speedily, wings folded in and taloned legs ready to grab. The hawk came down in the field not far from where the boy stood watching.

The mouse or other small field creature was torn apart and devoured quickly. The boy was always glad to see nature in its balanced state. But then the bird seemed to notice him for the first time. Its head turned and gave him that one eyed stare all birds excel at.

Hopping, wings doing part of the work, the hawk made its way towards the boy. This was amazing he thought. No bird in the wild ever acted this way. Perhaps this was a noble's hunting bird loose and lost. But he saw no cord

of leather about its leg. It came to a stop no more than ten feet from him and spoke.

"What is your name" it asked.

Startled by its actions but more so from its abilities he realized what this must look like. A boy no more than ten summers old and a hawk staring at each other in the middle of nowhere. He smiled at its strangeness.

"My name?" He said confused. "I did not know birds could speak, let alone ask for names."

The hawk made a sound of irritation. And moved a bit closer. "I am not just a hawk. I am Yin." Seeing that the boy had no reaction to the name he made another sound to show his displeasure.

"You have heard of me, yes?"

"I'm afraid I have not." Said the boy "Oh and people call me Bur. They say it's because I always stick around where I'm not needed and I'm a pain." He stopped and looked down. "But I don't mind."

The hawk made a strange sound moving in a small circle. His shape changed, melted and contorted. His feathers pulled into his body and wing tips moved out spreading to four points. His legs and torso stretched, his body became pale and he grew upwards to the height of a fully formed man. The face was one of the last parts to change. The beak shifted and retracted to become a nose the eyes moved together and up. His face was now that of a man. His body from head to toes (of which there were four as well) was the colour of pale flesh. Plates of thickened protective armour made of skin covered his manhood, chest and limbs. But his face was queerest of all. Yellow eyes which one moment were slit like a cat's then moved to round dark portals then to other shapes as well. Bur thought one second they

were goat eyes. His head was misshapen and bald. But the sides pressed outwards almost as though horns grew just beneath the skin. Points ending near his jaw tip. He was like nothing Bur had ever seen.

"Well now you see me for what I truly am. Behold Yin, Shape Changer King. I learned the arts from my master who taught me to walk with all animals of the land. Flow with the rapids of the great rivers. Grow alongside the tall trees of the Neverwoods and even speak to stupid boys who walk alone along the roads."

Bur was impressed but also scared. This man (if that's what he truly was) had stopped to taunt him? "What can I help you with, err, uh sire?" He stammered.

"Help me?" Yin said. "You cannot help me with anything. I do not need your help." in a voice bordering on anger. "I was merely bored and decided to see if the boy walking the road would enjoy a game. So it is I who will be helping you today."

Confused further Bur did not say anything. He could not think of anything to say that would help. But a game? What kind of game did he mean? He had no Stones Board or even string for the finger game.

"Well?" Spoke Yin. "Would you like a game?"

"I suppose but I will have to be quick. My mother expects me back before midday for chores and lunch." He thought that mentioning his parents would help. You never know.

"Good, the game is this then. You name me an animal, plant or whatever else comes to mind and I will become it. Then, in my turn, I will change and you must guess what I have become."

This actually sounded fun to Bur. Perhaps this meeting was not going to end with him lying dead in a field. "Ok, deal" said Bur.

"Ah but what game is fun without a wager to back it up?" Asked Yin. "If you win I will give you this." He said holding out a small light green gemstone polished to a shine. When it moved Bur could see flecks of gold refracting inside. "But if I win, I will change into a mountain cat and chase you down, tear you to pieces and eat you like I did with the field mouse." He grinned and his pointed teeth showed his intent.

"Sire, I don't see a choice other than yes."

"No, you're right on that. Then let us begin. I will go first."

With that he shifted his stance and as his body contorted fur sprang up and before the boy stood a white tailed deer.

"A deer." Said Bur. "Correct."

Bur thought. His father had a small book with paper sheets inside. Unlike the wood cuts the drawings had been more detailed. Animals Across Our World was the title. It had illustrations that he never thought could be totally real. One was a water dragon with a mouth of jagged teeth. "A water dragon." Asked Bur.

Yin shifted, fur became scale. Horn became tooth. Next he changed and scale moved up and became thick bark and legs rooted into soil.

"A maple tree." Yelled Bur

"Verrrrrrry goooooood." Came a utterance which sounded like voices low and moving with the wind.

Bur then thought of the tree he had heard of called white bark. He had never seen one, heard of yes, but would like to see now.

Yin listened then changed. It looked just like he was told of. Crumbling white bark on a thin trunk. Yin then changed again. This time becoming a swirling mass of cloud funnelling down to the ground. Bur felt wind tugging and pushing. "A twist cloud!" He shouted above the gust.

"Yes." Came the roar of thunder across the field.

Bur had already chosen his next change in his previous thought about fast winds. "What about a speed sparrow?" He asked.

Yin coalesced into solid mass. Condensed down. Deeper, denser. To a fraction of his previous size. A tiny speed sparrow zipped back and forth. His wings a blur of motion.

On this went for one hour, two, three. Bur was running out of animals and plants he could name and had even come close with a couple. Yin had let them slide because their names had been a little different but the right answer for this territory.

Shapes shifted and changed. Finally Yin had come to a billed bird that Bur thought looked familiar but was not sure. Its body was large but the beak was larger. With a pouch below like a giant wobbly chin. He had heard of it, he knew it.

"Do you yield?" Asked the bird. When Bur did not reply and only stood there with his look of concentration, Yin shifted to a giant dark brown furred mountain cat. "If you cannot say (he growled in a low cat like voice) then I suggest you begin running.

Bur, scared and sweating, trying hard to remember. The mountain cat snarled and

clawed the ground in front of it. It was then he remembered the tale his uncle had told him. It was about the sea birds that would dive down and fill their mouths with water and fish. That was it!

"A fisher bird." He spoke quickly, holding his hands up pleading.

"Correct." Snarled Yin.

This is where my luck should end he thought. I cannot think of any new things. Being a child of only ten or so years his knowledge of the entire world has run out. He strained his memories. Thought hard and deep but just could not think of anything new.

"Do you forfeit the game then?" Yin growled. "All this fun has me hungry and you're just the right size for dinner."

Bur had not realized the time. It was indeed many hours since he started. But what did that matter? In seconds he would be chased down and killed for this monsters fun. He had to think. What could he ask? What did he know that the Shape Changer King would not. Nothing. Everything he asked had been met with answers immediately. At this point Yin began slowly circling. He closed his eyes to think without the distraction of a giant hungry cat. That didn't help. Eyes only close out things you don't want to see. He still heard a low rumble of growls, the padded feet circling. Something came to him then. What did this man look like?

"I have one. I know what to ask!" Bur shouted opening his eyes.

"Hurry up then. I tire and want to dine." Said Yin with teeth exposed.

"Yourself." Said Bur. "Change into yourself."

The Shape Changer King tilted his head. He then shifted to his form from earlier.

"Satisfied?"

"No." Replied Bur. "What you REALLY look like. No human ever had eight fingers and toes. No human ever had almost horns or skin so tough; nor eyes as such."

Yin looked confused and almost worried.

"You cannot ask me thus." He said "Tis not part of the game." He lied.

"Do you forfeit?" Asked Bur with relish in his voice.

"NEVER!" Yelled Yin. "Never would I lose to such." With that his face took on a look of severe concentration for the first time since starting the game.

His body, the skin waxy and soft looking, moved and shifted. One hand began to grow another finger. Struggled and stayed. Legs took on a more human quality. Feet and torso began to right themselves. His height changed as well. Apparently he was shorter than he led others to believe. But his face gave him the most trouble. It elongated and twisted. Moving almost like a clay sculpture in the hands of an amateur. Shapes came through the shapelessness. The rest of his body couldn't handle the strain though. As his head came closer to a recognizable human shape his body, so long in flux between so many shapes, started to revert to its comfortable size and dimensions. Straining, struggling. Yin could not make it happen. He had spent so long as something else he could no longer remember. And it hurt.

"So you give in?" Asked Bur? "You're unable to do it?"

Yin did not want to admit defeat. But the strain physically and mentally had taken its toll. How

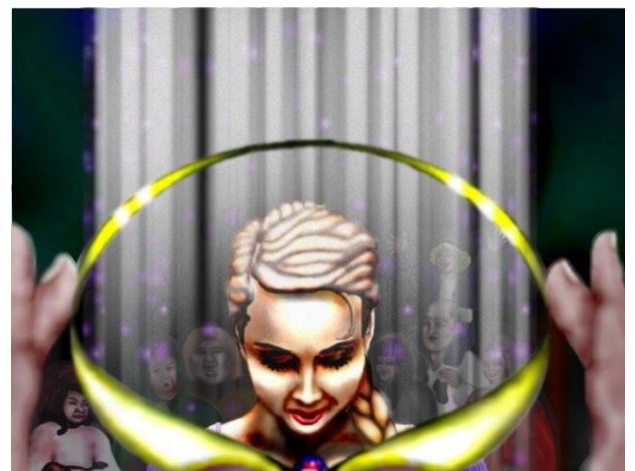
had he forgotten himself? He was important above everything and somehow he had lost himself. "I concede defeat." He whispered.

Shamed and tired. Confused and angry with himself, he threw down the stone. In a moment he took the form of a large bird. Something he could escape from the boy with. Taking flight he gained altitude and fled off towards the spine of mountains far to the east. Perhaps going home would help him remember who he was.

Bur picked up the green and gold gem. Wiped off the dirt stuck to one side and held it up to the dying sunlight. Gold and green reflected in his satisfied eyes. He turned and continued his trip home.

The impromptu adventure, when relayed to a worried but upset mother, dampened her anger when he presented her with a gemstone worth more than their entire farmstead.

Never forget who you really are.



Artwork By Rose Campbell

## **HR Giger – A Tribute.**

On May 13<sup>th</sup> one day prior to this Issue being



published, The Science Fiction World lost one of the creators of one of the most well-known creatures in Science Fiction.

Hans Rudolf Giger, Born 5<sup>th</sup> February 1940 left this world 12 May. Known as the creator of the Alien from the “Aliens” Trilogy he was also well known for other works including the prequel to the Aliens Franchise – Prometheus and Species. His Oscar winning designs for Aliens stemmed from designs from The Necronomicon. He was also an artistic presence in Omni Magazine.

Giger started with small ink drawings, progressing to oil paintings but working primarily with Airbrush. He has accredited many of his works to his suffering of Night Terrors, one wonders at the amazing imagination that he possessed, to be able to create such fantastic works of Sci Fi and Horror Art.



Other influences have included the writer H.P Lovecraft, Salvador Dali and Ernst Fuchs. The world is poorer today for the loss of an artistic genius.

Far Horizons would like to thank HR Giger for his fantastic work, it has entertained, and terrified us (but in a good way) for many years.

***HR Giger 5 February 1940 – 13 May 2014***



This Picture by Keith Whittington



## **Author interview – Pete Sutton**

### **1. When did you first start writing?**

I wrote short stories in school, and a play, that the school put on. But then got a different English teacher (one not so encouraging) and started writing for RPGs and prose kind of went away for a while, about 30 years give or take. Then I got involved in a litfest in my home city, became inspired to try creative writing again and in April 2013 wrote my first short for a long time. Since then I've won a competition and been published online and on paper.

### **2. Do you read much? If yes, have you always loved reading?**

I'm a bibliophile. I read a lot, and have always loved reading.

### **3. Who's your favourite author? What's your favourite book?**

I have a list of favourite authors and books, far too many to go into in such a short space. I would struggle to choose a top ten never mind a top author or book!

### **4. What writers have influenced you the most?**

Writers are influenced by everything they read. However I think Jeff VanderMeer introduced me to New Weird and interstitial fiction and that's where I've tended to read and write for the last few years – although genre is just a marketing tool and I do have a broad taste.

### **5. Do you have a favourite fictional character? Either from a book or a television show?**

No

### **6. What are you working on right now? Can you tell us something about it?**

As well as working on anthology for the writing group I'm part of, I'm working on an anthology of my own work as well as my first novel. I don't tend to talk about works in progress...

### **7. Is there anything in particular you do to get in the mood to write, or to get in the "zone"? Any particular pre-writing routines?**

Not really, I often read and edit something I have been working on in preparation to starting something new.

### **8. Where do you do your writing?**

I don't have any special place, although most seems to take place in the room I keep my books in (I grandly refer to as my library).

### **9. How do you approach your writing? i.e.- Do you do outlines? Character bios? Etc.?**

I'm mostly a pantsier, although I do have some loose outlines for my novel, which I have updated several times as the plot goes off in unexpected tangents. I know I ought to do character bios but they bore me.

### **10. Do you have any advice for other writers?**

Read critically, persevere, understand that there are as many ways of becoming a writer as there are writers, write when you can (I personally cannot write every day, it just doesn't work for me and actually hinders), learn the rules (even if you want to break them), read your stuff out loud and recognise where you're putting breaks and emphasis and then make sure the text has those breaks and emphasis, read a lot, write. Take advice that works for you and ignore the rest, but try everything out to see if it works before deciding to ignore...



**11. Are you a morning person or evening person? Day or night?**

I'd like to be a night person but 9-5 office hours don't allow. I don't cope well with lack of sleep!

**12. Do you have any pets?**

Never work with children and animals

**13. What's your favourite "I need a break from writing" activity?**

Reading or film, occasionally TV (but most TV isn't very good)

**14. How do you approach writing sex scenes? The can range from mild to wild. Where are you on the mild to wild meter?**

I've never written a sex scene, not out of prudery, none of my stuff has needed one yet.

**15. Do you write in one genre? More than one?**

Genre is a marketing tool, there are only good stories and bad stories. I aim to write good stories

**16. Are you self-published or with a publishing house?**

Not published although I have a story published in an anthology via the traditional publishing route. At least one of the anthologies I'm working on will be self-published though.

**17. What are your thoughts on getting a literary agent?**

If you are going to deal with publishing houses you need one, if you are self-pub you may not need one

**18. What about marketing? How do you approach that area?**

Haven't needed to yet

**19. What about beta readers? Do you use them? How many do you have? Where do you find them?**

I'm part of a crit group online and a writing group that meets every fortnight. I also know a lot of writers and folk interested in writing so occasionally ask people to read my stuff.

**20. What's your favourite food?**

I like spicy food

**21. What's your favourite colour?**

I don't really have one

**22. Is there a particular website or Facebook page or blog that you, as a writer, find very helpful?**

I'd recommend Terrible Minds - <http://terribleminds.com/ramble/blog/> and Bridget McKenna <http://www.bridgetmckenna.com/1/post/2013/06/self-editing-for-everyone-part-2-vampire-verbs-zombie-verbs-and-verbs-that-kick-ass.html>

**23. What's your favourite time of the year?**

I like bits of each season

**24. What's your most recent book about? And where can people buy it?**

I won't be sure what it's about until I've finished it & it's not finished yet!

**25. What do you feel is your strongest gift, talent or skill that helps the most as a writer?**

Having a thick skin, self-belief and being a stubborn bastard

26. Please share some of the links with us - Facebook author page, website, where people can find your books.

Find me on Twitter at @suttope and my blog here: <http://brsbkblog.blogspot.co.uk/> My story *Artifice Perdu* appears in the anthology *Airship shape and Bristol fashion* which can be found in all good bookstores & online at Amazon, Book Depository etc. It's published by Wizards Tower press:

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