

**HALLOWEEN EDITION
ONLINE ISSUE**

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ISSUE #105**



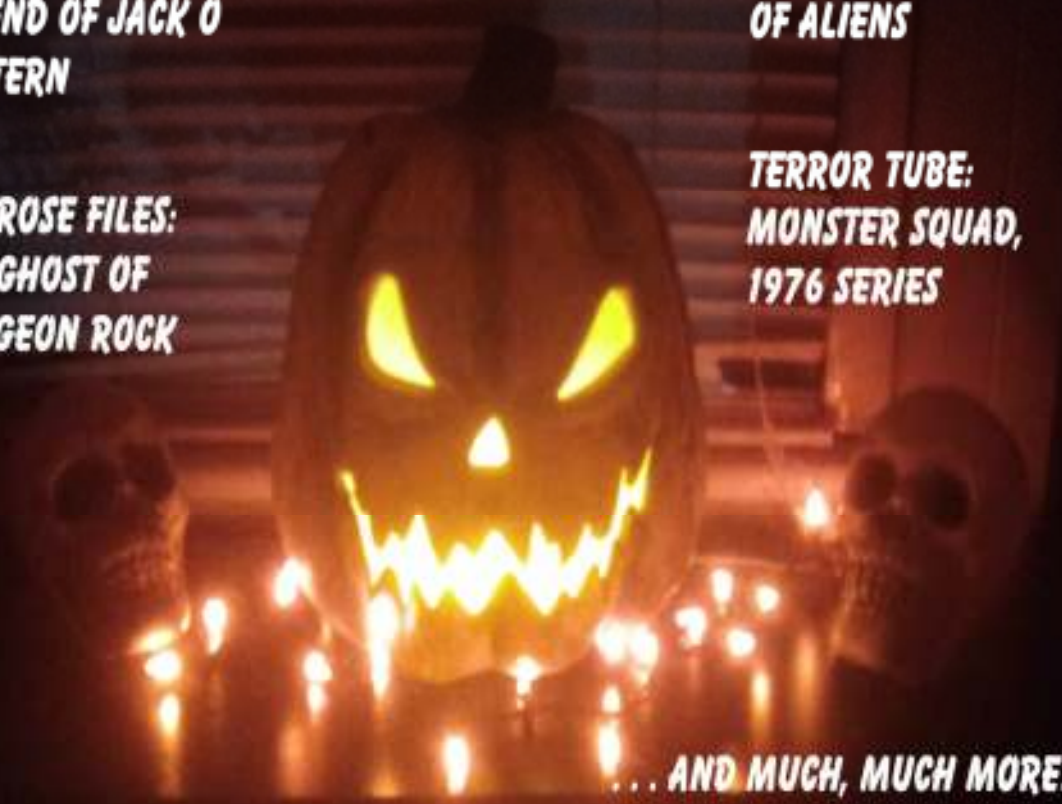
BLOOD MOON RISING MAGAZINE

**CREATURE FEATURE:
STINGY JACK - THE
LEGEND OF JACK O
LANTERN**

**SPECIAL FEATURES:
40TH ANNIVERSARY
OF ALIENS**

**THE ROSE FILES:
THE GHOST OF
DUNGEON ROCK**

**TERROR TUBE:
MONSTER SQUAD,
1976 SERIES**



... AND MUCH, MUCH MORE!

Blood Moon Rising Magazine
Issue #105
For Aspiring Writers and Artists
Halloween Issue 2026

Staff

Publisher: AL Vermette
Editor / Writer: D.W. Jones
Editor / Writer: William Pratt
Writer: Dark Soul
Writer: Kraven The She Wolf
Writer: Rose Titus

BMR Logo Enhancement: Danny Jones
Cover Art: Photo by AL Vermette
Contributing Artists: Sandy Reece

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BLOOD NOTES

By Publisher AL J. Vermette

Welcome back my Legion to Issue 105 of Blood Moon Rising our Halloween edition. Due to circumstances, we will not be hosting our annual Halloween live show Blood Fest again this year but hope to bring it back in 2027. And while speaking about Blood Fest, though I would like to talk about the rock band that has come and played more shows than anyone else over the events 21year history. The alternative rock band Coventry Carols who play Blood Fest in 2022, 2023, and 2024 was to date the only band to perform three consecutive shows in a row. The groups members of Jon “Soda” James lead vocals and guitar with Clifford “Sugarbear” Catropa on bass and Terry Taylor rounding out the group on drums have been together as a group since 2020.

Although Coventry Carols has played the last three Blood Fest events for us, its front man Soda as we know him by, has in reality been a part of Blood Fest since our every first show back in 2003. That first show held in the Boonton, NJ saw Soda fronting a band called His Mighty Robot and was the very first act to ever play a Blood Fest show. Since forming his new band Coventry Carols, Soda and his band mates released their first self-titled debut album in 2022.

In June 2026 Coventry Carols released “Open Up, Fall Apart” as their next album with 8 all new and original songs like Super Ache, Flutter, Deep Sleep, Autobiographies, The Ins And Outs, Open Up, Fall Apart, The Process, and Written In Cursive. You our Blood Moon Rising fans could order the CD of Open Up, Fall Apart by going to the Coventry Carols web store or through streaming platforms like Spotify, YouTube Music, Apple Music, and Deezer/ I Heart Radio.



I want to take this time to thank Tech Reel for all the work that he has done in order to get this issue out. Tech Reel is our behind the scenes assistant who helps wherever he can and does a great job at it. With this particular issue, he was instrumental in getting this issue published while we worked offsite and did a fantastic job. We want to say thank you for your hard work and we dedicate this issue to him.

Dark Soul's Nightmare News Bleed all about it



This October, Universal Studios Florida will be gearing up for their 35th year of running Halloween Horror Nights. The long running haunted house theme event will feature 10 all new Haunted Houses and 4 new Scare Zones for the month-long scary celebration. Retuning this Anniversary year will be their original characters Jack the Clown and Dr. Oddfellow to help celebrate their 35th year. Halloween Horror Nights will play every night from August 28th, till November 1st. Tickets are available through the Universal Orlando HHN website.

Horror moves are a plenty with a remake of Resident Evil releasing on September 18th along with Crawlers, Clayface, Victorian Psycho, Don't Move and Onslaught to end out the 2026 horror movie season. 2027 looks promising as well with a remake/sequel of The Blair Witch Project and a new Exorcist remake or sequel or whatever but wait for releasing this coming March.

For the convention fan, you can look forward to Horror Hound Weekend in Cincinnati, OH. Monster Mania Con in Baltimore, MD, Monster Bash in Cranberry Township, PA, Horror for the Holidays in Austin, TX and the Chiller Theater Expo in Parsippany, NJ.

This November, our little sister publication Krampus: The Magazine will be releasing its 3rd issue in time for the holiday season. Once again, it will feature short fiction, articles on Krampus and the other holiday monsters that haunt the season along with artwork, and other fun and scary holiday fun. So look for Krampus: The Magazine releasing this November.

This fall, the 8 episode TV series Crystal Lake, a prequel to the Friday The 13th film series, releases on Peacock. Said to be the story of Pamela Voorhees, Jason's mother and the killer from the 1980 classic film. The show will follow Pamela after the "death" of her son Jason and the psychological grief she feels that leads up to the events in the 1980 film. Will this be a slasher? We don't know yet, I guess we will have to tune in to find out.

The Final Trick-or-Treater

By Ayesha Mansoor

The town of Willow River continuously felt diverse on Halloween night. The houses, as a rule calm and standard, appeared lively with flashing lights, paper phantoms, and carved pumpkins that smiled with spiked teeth. Children ran entryway to entryway in their ensembles, their giggling filling the discussion, whereas guardians followed from a cautious remove. For most families, Halloween implied sweet and safe fun.

But for Emma Turner, Halloween had continuously carried a shadow.

She had developed up here, and she recalled the whispers—old stories told by grandparents in yards and around firepits. Stories of a veiled child who showed up as it were on Halloween, continuously alone, continuously noiseless but for one interesting address: “Will you let me in?” The legend said if you denied, something awful would happen in the night. If you said yes, you’d never be seen again.

Of course, individuals said it was a fairy story, a phantom story to frighten kids into carrying on. But Emma had never overlooked it. Not after what happened when she was ten.

That year, her neighbor, Mrs. Callahan, opened the entryway to a trick-or-treater who wasn’t like the rest. Emma recalled standing over the road, dressed as a witch, observing with wide eyes. The child wore a split porcelain veil and an old-fashioned dress as well as a slick ensemble. He didn’t carry a bucket or sack for candy.

Emma swore she listened to him talk, in spite of the fact that no one else appeared to. “Will you let me in?”

Mrs. Callahan snickered apprehensively and closed the entryway. That night, the police were called. No one ever saw Mrs. Callahan again.

Emma shook herself as the memory surfaced. That was twenty-five years prior. A lifetime. Still, as she made a difference and her child Jake altered the vampire cape on his shoulders, she couldn’t shake the unease squeezing at her chest.

“Ready, Mom?” Jake smiled, plastic teeth jabbing out.

Emma grinned, constraining herself into the minute. “Ready. Let’s get you a few candies.”

They ventured out into the fresh October night. The discussion noticed the clearing out of candle wax from the pumpkins lining each doorstep. Children ran past, yelling, and guardians chatted in clusters on the sidewalks. Emma held Jake’s hand firmly, in spite of the fact that he attempted to wriggle free.

They went house to house, Jake's pack filling with chocolate bars and candies. Emma loses marginally, getting a charge out of his fervor. Perhaps today evening time would be standard after all.

Until they conclude Sycamore Lane.

The final house stood separated, its patio light dim, a single pumpkin burning on the steps. The carved confront was rough, nearly irate. Jake wavered. "That one looks spooky."

"We can skip it," Emma said quickly.

But as they turned to take off, she solidified. A child was standing at the foot of the steps. Little, no taller than Jake. Dressed in dull, old-fashioned clothing. A porcelain cover, broken down the cheek, shined in the candlelight.

Emma's blood ran cold.

The child looked at her. Or at the very least, the veil did. Gradually, intentionally, the figure started to climb the steps, feet making no sound.

Jake whispered, "Mom... he doesn't have a bag."

The child halted at best, confronting them. At that point, in a voice that was lean and empty, like wind through dead trees taking off, it spoke.

"Will you let me in?"

Emma's throat fixed. The words she had feared all her life.

She yanked Jake back, stumbling. "Come on."

They rushed down the road, Emma's heart beating so difficult she thought she might black out. When she turned back to look, the patio was empty.

But the pumpkin's smile appeared more extensive now.

Emma scarcely rested that night. Each squeak of the ancient house and each blast of wind against the windows made her heart jump. Jake had fallen snoozing rapidly, his sweet stash on the nightstand, his vampire cape hung over a chair. But Emma lay alert, gazing at the ceiling, tuning in for strides that never came.

By morning, she persuaded herself it had been a few expanded outfits. Perhaps a more seasoned kid attempting to spook guardians. Still, she couldn't shake the memory of the child's words.

At breakfast, Jake brought it up some time recently; she might halt him.

“Mom, who was that kid last night? The one with the mask?”

Emma constrained a calm grin. “Just a trick-or-treater, sweetheart.”

“But he didn’t inquire for sweets. He inquired to come in.” Jake scowled. “That’s odd, right?”

Emma’s hand trembled as she set down her coffee glass. “Don’t stress approximately it. Likely a fair prank.”

But afterward, while driving Jake to school, she caught two guardians talking on the sidewalk.

“Did you listen approximately to the Harrisons? Lights on, but they didn’t appear at work this morning.”

“Both of them?”

“Yeah. Neighbors said they saw something interesting on the patio the final night. Some... kid.”

Emma’s stomach dropped. She held the wheel tighter.

By the time she came domestic, her nerves were shot. She closed all the shades, double-checked the locks, and sat at the kitchen table gazing at the front door.

At nightfall, the thump came.

Three moderate taps reverberating through the house.

Jake was in his room, murmuring to himself. Emma’s heart beat as she crawled to the peephole.

The veiled child stood on her porch.

Emma sponsored absent, covering her mouth with her hand. The thump came once more. Louder this time.

And at that point, the voice. “Will you let me in?”

Emma ran to Jake’s room, whispering quickly. “Stay calm. Don’t move.”

They crouched together until the thumping ceased. Hours passed. At long last, silence.

When Emma was challenged to look outside, the patio was purged. But in the center of the doormat sat a single piece of sweet corn, shining against the blurred fabric.

The taking after days obscured together. Emma attempted to carry on, but her nerves were frayed. At work, she caught herself gazing out windows. At domestic, each shadow appeared to move. She kept Jake near, denying to let him play outside after dark.

On the third night, the child showed up once more. Not thumping this time—just standing over the road beneath the streetlamp, motionless.

Jake saw him to begin with. “Mom,” he whispered, clutching her arm, “he’s back.”

Emma pulled the window ornaments closed.

That night, she envisioned the porcelain cover. She envisioned Mrs. Callahan’s yard. And when she woke, she knew the truth.

This wasn’t a trick. It wasn’t a few kids. It was the legend.

And it needed Jake.

Halloween came once more, the taking after year. Emma attempted everything to maintain a strategic distance from it. She told Jake they were going out of town. She drove him to her sister’s house three towns over. They turned off each light and disregarded the doorbell.

But as midnight neared, Emma woke to the sound of scratching at the window.

The child was there, face squeezed against the glass.

“Will you let me in?”

Emma shouted, pulling Jake from his bed, surging down the corridor. But at each window they passed, the child was there. Each corner, each reflection in the glass, that same split veil and empty voice.

“Will you let me in?”

They blockaded themselves in the cellar, Emma holding Jake near. She whispered supplications she hadn’t said in years.

And then... silence.

Emma thought perhaps it was over. Perhaps they had survived. She held Jake until he floated off in her arms.

When she at last looked up, her blood turned to ice.

The child was, as of now, inside.

It stood at the foot of the stairs, its cover shining in the dark.

Jake's eyes opened gradually. He grinned faintly, as if in spite of the fact that it was a dream, and slipped from Emma's grasp.

Before she could halt him, he strolled toward the figure. The veil tilted. A pale hand comes out.

Jake took it.

"No!" Emma shouted, lurching forward. But the storm cellar filled with obscurity, gulping them whole.

When the light returned, both Jake and the veiled child were gone.

Emma was alone.

The police never found Jake. They never accepted Emma's story. Neighbors shook their heads, whispering, almost stretching, almost melancholy, making individuals envision things.

But Emma knew.

Every Halloween, she waits.

And in some cases, when the wind is just right, she swears she hears it again.

A child's voice, lean and empty, floating through the night.

"Will you let me in?"

About Ayesha Mansoor: Ayesha Mansoor is a passionate software engineer from Pakistan, working remotely with an American company. She loves solving complex problems and building impactful technology. Beyond tech, she writes creatively, exploring fiction, nonfiction, love stories, gardening, flowers, fashion, and fairy tales, blending imagination, emotion, curiosity, and lifelong learning with empathy always.

The Lunch Lady

By Christa Planko

The school hallway seemed infinitely long as Jacob zig-zagged through the crowd of middle-schoolers. Why did his first day of school have to fall on Halloween? Like it wasn't bad enough being the new kid. Halloween with its costumes and pranks seem to make everyone act all the bolder and crazier. Jacob pulled up the hood of his sweatshirt and tried to make his way from class to class unnoticed.

By lunch time, all the Halloween excitement had escalated to chaos. Jacob had no problem finding his way to the cafeteria. The clamor booming from its doors was a dead giveaway. It sounded worse than feeding time at the farm he previously lived on. Jacob slipped inside, found the food line, and positioned himself at the end of it. He kept his head down, hood up, lest he be noticed.

"Hey, you," came a male voice from behind, followed by a belch. A hand swiftly yanked the hood from his head. Jacob immediately turned.

"Who the heck are you?" asked the sandy haired grim reaper behind him. He held a skull mask tucked beneath one arm. "Ohhhh...you must be the new kid! Jackson, right?"

"Jacob, actually."

"JAAAAY-COB!" Stan said. "I'm Stan. I am the eyes and ears of Hillsdale Middle School and can give you the gossip on everyone here."

"Everyone, huh?" Jacob asked, amused.

"EVERYONE," Stan confirmed. "Like, see that one lunch lady behind the counter? The big-boned gal?"

Jacob turned to look. Beneath one flickering lightbulb, he saw a large, busty woman in a hairnet. It covered her silver-streaked, tightly kinked hair. She wore a face mask—the antibacterial kind—that partially covered her red-blotched pasty cheeks. Her gloves glistened with grease. Her eyebrows furrowed as she barked orders to keep the line moving.

"Yeah," Jacob said.

"She once got really mad at the cook," Stan said. He leaned in closer, his voice lowering to a hoarse whisper. "So, she took a kitchen knife and cut off his toe!"

Jacob didn't believe it but shuddered anyway.

"True story!" added a newcomer in a devil costume. "I've seen it with my own eyes!"

“Meet Satan himself,” Stan rolled his eyes. “Flynn, Jacob. Jacob, Flynn.”

“You saw her cut off someone’s toe?” Jacob’s tone was skeptical.

“No, but I saw her holding it all bloody and stuff. She was putting it in a bag with ice. I guess she was saving it to eat later!”

“Or serve it,” Stan added.

“I don’t think you saw what you think you saw,” Jacob told Flynn.

“But I did!” he protested. “An ambulance showed up and everything. They took the cook away, but the lunch lady just disappeared. I didn’t see her again for about a month. They must’ve locked her away in a mad house or something.”

“What’s she doing back here then?” Jacob asked.

“There’s all kinds of discrimination laws these days,” Flynn shrugged. “The school probably didn’t want a lawsuit for firing a loony or something.”

“I see,” Jacob said.

“Anywho,” Flynn continued. “Since you’re the new guy here, you need to do something big if you wanna be in with Flynn.”

“Is this a prank?” Jacob asked, cynically.

“It’s not a prank,” Flynn said. “I need you to stand on that table over there and announce yourself as the new kid. Tell everyone your name and that you loooooove ketchup. Then take that ketchup squeeze bottle over there and drink the whole thing!”

Stan snickered. “Then while everyone’s distracted, me and Flynn make off with some free grub!”

Jacob stared. “You can’t be serious.”

“Let’s put it this way,” Flynn said. “If you don’t announce yourself, I’ll announce you myself! I’m pretty popular here, so I don’t mind.”

Jacob folded his arms defiantly across his chest. He felt his forehead bead with sweat. He turned to face forward. The line was moving. He’d be up to get his lunch soon.

Suddenly, a voice boomed above the cafeteria cacophony.

“Ladies and gentlemen, may I get your attention, please!”

Jacob turned to find that Flynn had mounted one of the tables and was now addressing everyone. His deep, loud voice defied puberty. The room instantly hushed.

“We’ve got a new kid joining us today!” Flynn belted from the table. He pointed to Jacob, who awkwardly waved a hand. He felt flames rise to his cheeks. “Can we all give my friend Jacob here a big Hillsdale Halloween welcome?”

With that, Flynn snatched a half-eaten hot dog off the table and launched it at Jacob. It struck him in the center of his chest, leaving a mustard splatter.

“BOO-YA!” Flynn pumped a fist in the air.

“BOO-YA!” rang out across the entire cafeteria as Jacob instantly became the target of all kinds of food missiles. The lunch lady quickly came around and grabbed him by the wrist. She whisked him behind the counter, to the back of the kitchen.

A scream escaped Jacob’s throat. What was this hell his family moved to? Wild kids, bullies, and body-part butchers. He backed into the corner of a counter. It felt like a knife had pierced his side. He let out another scream.

“Please don’t cut out my organs!” he cried.

The lunch lady pulled down her face mask.

“Cut out your organs?” she laughed. “Young man, I saved you because them rotten kids wouldn’t cut it out!”

As she hunkered over him, Jacob felt swallowed by her shadow. He could smell onions emanating from her skin. Trapped against the wall and the counter, he looked desperately from side to side.

“What’s your deal, young man?” she asked him. “I haven’t seen your face around here before. You new or something?”

“Y-yes,” Jacob stammered. “My family just moved here from Iowa. It’s my first day.”

The lunch lady threw her head back and laughed heartily.

“On Halloween?! You poor thing! The kids here are already nuts, but this holiday makes them nuttier!”

“Yeah, I noticed it’s pretty nuts around here,” he said, wondering just how nutty things were about to get. The lunch lady drew closer. She poked a gloved finger into his hoodie. Maybe she was checking how plump and juicy he was. Jacob’s heart raced. He closed his eyes and gulped.

“You got ketchup and mustard all over your top, son,” she said softly. “I’m gonna get you a wet dish towel so you can clean yourself up.”

He kept his eyes on her as she went over to the sink and picked up a knife. A BIG knife.

“Please don’t cut off my toe!” he cried.

She turned and looked at Jacob, puzzled, as she slowly laid the knife down.

“I was just getting this,” she said, lifting a dish towel that the knife had been sitting on. She turned on the faucet and dampened the dish towel beneath the warm running water. She approached Jacob with the towel. He took it and began wiping himself down.

“Now what’s all this fuss about me cutting out your organs and slicing off your toe?” she asked.

Unsure of what to say, Jacob began scrubbing harder.

“Are those dang kids telling you stories about me?”

Jacob just looked at her.

“Yo, Patrick!” she called to the cook. “Could you come here a second?”

Patrick was an older man with papery skin, tall and wiry. He walked over with a slight limp.

“Yes, ma’am?” he asked, then he saw Jacob standing there. “Well, hello there, son. I see you met Miss Gabrielle. This woman is a godsend! She helped me through a terrible accident one time.”

“Tell him about it, Pat,” said Gabrielle.

“Well, there was this one time I was standing right about there. I was chopping carrots when suddenly I lost my grip on the knife. It fell and severed my toe. I was wearing flip flops at the time.”

Jacob’s eyes widened.

“Whoa! What’d you do?”

“What happened next was all Miss Gabby,” Patrick continued. “She found that toe and put it on ice immediately so that the doctors could reattach it to my foot. Then she wrapped my foot in a dishtowel to slow the bleeding while she called for an ambulance.”

“They saved the toe?” Jacob asked.

“*Miss Gabrielle* saved the toe,” Patrick corrected. “Imagine if she had been squeamish or thoughtless. I wouldn’t have all 10 my toes today.”

Patrick smiled at Gabrielle. She smiled back. It softened her face. Her eyes were kind, Jacob thought. Actually, *she* was kind.

“I’m guessing you heard some kind of spin on that story, huh?” Gabrielle asked Jacob.

“I may have heard something,” Jacob said. “But your story is better.”

“Cause my story’s the truth!” Gabrielle said.

Jacob smiled.

“You must be hungry,” Gabrielle said. “I’ll get you a sub and you can eat it at our little table back here. You like ham or turkey?”

“Ham,” Jacob answered. Gabrielle began to make the sandwich. “Is it ok if I hang here tomorrow, too, during lunch? I’m not gonna live down this embarrassing first day in the cafeteria.”

“You afraid that bully’s gonna start with you again? He the same guy that spread the gossip about me?”

Jacob slowly nodded.

“Don’t you worry about him!” Gabrielle said. “We’re gonna teach him a lesson!”

* * *

The next day, Jacob attended his classes. Surprisingly, he didn’t get as much heat as he thought he would about being the new guy or about being welcomed with flying food. Now that Halloween was over, the kids had settled down. They chattered about their Halloween nights, eager to hear about who did what and who had the better time.

When it was time for lunch, he headed toward the cafeteria. He was about to enter the staff door leading to the kitchen when someone spun him around. It was Flynn and Stan.

“So, you’re back for more, I see,” Flynn sneered.

“Do I have a choice?” Jacob asked. “My folks moved here.”

“I saw you hanging out with the lunch lady yesterday!” Stan laughed. “She your new bestie?”

“Actually, she’s a very nice person,” Jacob said. “Her name’s Gabrielle. You should get to know her.”

Flynn thought about how he could capitalize on this.

“So, if you’re friends with her now,” he said. “Maybe that means free lunch for you and your two new friends.”

“She actually gave me free lunch yesterday,” Jacob said. “She said she’d give me free lunch anytime I’m in a bind. All I have to do is ask.”

“Uh-huh,” Flynn scratched his chin. “Well, you’re gonna ask her for it today. Then you’re gonna give it to me. Acceptance here costs you one free lunch. You want in with Flynn, you gotta feed my need.”

“Fine,” Jacob said. “Let’s go.”

Jacob got in the food line. When it was his turn to order, he went directly to Gabrielle.

“Hi, Gabby,” he said.

“Well, hello again,” Gabrielle smiled at Jacob, then glanced behind him and saw Flynn. She couldn’t forget that face. “What can I get you?”

“Remember what we talked about yesterday?” Jacob asked her. “I kinda need that favor. Some guys stole my lunch money.”

She clucked her tongue.

“That’s just terrible! Of course I’ll help you out. Hang in there.”

Jacob turned to Flynn and Stan. He raised his eyebrows and smiled. Flynn grabbed a napkin and tucked it in his collar, signaling he was ready to eat.

Gabrielle came back with a bowl of stew on a tray.

“Here ya go,” she said, plopping a handful of packaged crackers onto the tray.

“Thank you,” Jacob winked, then left the line to sit down with Flynn and Stan.

“Stew?” Flynn asked.

“If I ask for free lunch, I have to get whatever Gabby is willing to serve.”

“Wouldn’t have been my first choice, but I never spring for the hot meals ‘cause they cost more. This should be good!”

He watched Flynn as he dipped his spoon into the bowl. Something suddenly floated to the top. It looked like a carrot at first. But something about its gnarly form made Flynn pause to examine.

“What the...?” he poked at the carrot with his spoon. It rolled over to reveal what looked like a toenail. “Is that...?” Flynn gasped and prodded it with the spoon to discover sinewy fibers dangled from the other end. He pushed the tray away, quickly rising to his feet. He released a shriek as deep and loud as the voice he used yesterday during his cruel announcement.

Stan had already turned and vomited all over the floor.

Suddenly, an ambulance sounded outside. The cafeteria was still and silent. Jacob quiet silently. This turned out better than he imagined! He knew the makeshift “toe” was really just a chopped carrot with a sliced almond attached to it to look like a toenail. But he didn’t anticipate the ambulance. It added more of an element of reality to the scene.

Suddenly, a maniacal laugh caused everyone to turn towards the kitchen. Gabrielle tossed her head back in laughter. She held what appeared to be a ketchup-stained knife in one hand.

“Serves you right, kid!” she bellowed. “Who wants to be served next?”

The single flickering light swung above her head, alternating light and shadow on a mean-set face.

Flynn ran to the bathroom to get sick. Jacob wasn’t too sure what was happening. The ambulance parked outside and the driver was getting out. He was heading towards the cafeteria! Did something really happen?

He looked into the bowl of stew. The “toenail” had fallen off. The floating digit was clearly a vegetable of sorts, albeit a knotty, white one. Maybe Gabrielle used a parsnip inside. His dad had grown them on the farm. It kind of looked like a white carrot and would be a more believable toe.

The ambulance driver was now inside and approaching the kitchen. He walked up to Gabrielle and gave her a big hug.

“Meet my cousin!” Gabrielle boomed. “This was only a prank. Get back to your lunches, kids, and let this be a lesson to you all!”

Jacob ran to the back and thanked Gabrielle for her help with this somewhat outlandish prank. She introduced him to her cousin Tim who was agreeable enough to drive the ambulance over during his lunch hour “for added effect.” Jacob shook his hand.

From that day on, Flynn was ridiculed for falling victim to the kind of cruel prank that he usually pulled. It also turned out there were more kids who didn’t like Flynn than who actually liked him. He kept to himself for a while after that and left Jacob alone to adjust and make new

friends, which he did. Rumors about the lunch lady also subsided as more students got to know her and find her lovable. Jacob was happy for her and always made it a point to say hello to her. He was truly grateful.

About Christa Planko: Christa is a copywriter with a passion for creativity. She has had her work featured in several publications, including *Wingless Dreamer*, *Rune Bear*, *Jitter Press*, and *Every Day Fiction*. Her story, “The Olde-Tyme Village,” won the 2021 WordCrafter Fiction Contest. Currently, she resides in South Jersey with her feline muses. For her bio and list of published works, visit christascorner.godaddysites.com.

Graveyard Cinema

By Dark Soul

Evil Dead Burn

4 Gravestones



So was the newest Evil Dead film in the franchise worth seeing? Hell yeah it is! Forty five years after the classic 1981 film, Evil Dead Burn keeps the Deadites alive and well and still making people's lives a living hell. Although not connected to the previous film Evil Dead Rise, this also takes place in the present mid 2020's where a family are under attack by the undead legion of demons.

I have to say I was looking forward to seeing this movie's Title Card at the beginning because the open title for Evil Dead Rise was the damn coolest with a female deadlite rising out of a lake with the title rising over a set of mountains in the background in blood red lettering. This movie proved the same with the title written out in flames....so cool!

Although long time Evil Dead creator and director Sam Raimi was on set to give his input, this film was helmed by Sebastien Vanicek who also wrote this new installment in the long running franchise. Like all Evil Dead films, you can expect lots....and lots of crazy demon action with people dying left and right or just plain being turned into the creatures themselves. Once again the Necronomicon, The Book of the Dead, is used very unwisely to bring forth the demons as they run amok as we so love to see them do.

Like in Evil Dead Rise, the makeup for the creature's looks great in this film, although I thought the makeup in Rise looked a little more creepier, but still good here. Makeup artist Jane O' Kane served as the hair and prosthetic designer on the film along with artist Amber Adams. Where the original film in the franchise took place in a cabin in the woods and Evil Dead Rise took place in an apartment building, this movie takes place mainly in an old house where a family must fight off the evil demons. So is Evil Dead Burn a worthy film in the long running franchise? Oh yeah! Although this movie lacks the humor of the first three films in the series, this like the Evil Dead remake in 2013 and Evil Dead Rise 2023 takes itself dead serious...and that's not a bad thing.

The Pumpkin Man

4 Gravestones



This 2023 Halloween horror movie features a town legend about a demon known only as The Pumpkin Man. The legend says that anyone who reads from an old witches scroll will bring forth the monster on Halloween night. While the people of the town dismiss the tale as just a scary legend, one teen named Cat believes in the myth so much that she wants to put it to the test. After finding the old witches spell, she and her friends Jenny, Michael, and Tina decide to read the spell for fun not realizing that it will in fact give rise to The Pumpkin Man for real.

Soon the town is being haunted by the pumpkin headed silent killer that would make Michael Myers proud. One by one Cat sees her friends getting picked off and realizing her mistake, seeks to send the evil demon back to Hell. What sets this slasher film apart from others of its kind are the characters themselves. These are nice, kind kids and not the normal teenage stereotypes we normally get in these kind of films. No jocks, sluts, assholes or nerds here and that's refreshing to see. The lead actress is fantastic as Cat and played by Barbara Desa and she really carries the movie. The Pumpkin Man himself is simple but very cool with a creepy pumpkin Jack O Lantern face carved into it and is at least 8 feet tall thanks to well hidden stilts under his costume.

I enjoyed this movie and one of the best things about it was that it is very Halloween focused. Images of Halloween are everywhere really brings you that spooky Halloween vibe. This movie is currently running on Tubi for free.

Spirit Halloween: The Movie

4 Gravestones



This kid friendly Halloween movie is like one long marketing ad for Spirit Halloween stores but I guess it was bound to happen sooner or later. This really feels like a feature length Goosebumps episodes, but in a good way. When pre-teen friends decide to sneak into a Spirit Halloween store and spend the night, all kinds of crazy things happen when the ghost of a greedy landowner starts to possess some of the store animatronics. When one of the boy's older sister comes looking for them, she too gets into the store where they all are now trapped with living toy monsters. This really would have made for a good Goosebumps episode.

Some of the more highlighted Spirit Halloween animatronics that come to life and chase the kids are Mr. Dark, Buzzsaw, a Teddy Bear, Nightcrawler and a few others. Sadly, none of them have that much screen and I would have liked to have seen more of them in action. Buzzsaw only gets a few moments on screen, and he is not even seen by the kids at all.

The film has a cameo with Christopher Lloyd at the start of the movie and you hear his voice as he possesses the store's animatronics. The cast of young actors do a good job of carrying

the movie. With a running time of just 88 minutes, it never seems too long and the kid actors don't ever get annoying. Spirit Halloween The Movie is an enjoyable film to add to your holiday movie list.

Interviews

A Conversation With Mr. Graves, Internet Horror Host for The Haunted Hotel

By Dark Soul

He is the host with the most residing at the Haunted Hotel where he presents classic movies to a new generation of horror fans. With his creepy ambiguous appearance and attire, Mr. Graves is a horror host with the passion of a fan with a true love for the genre. Over the past few years this host and I have become friends and now we present to you our interview about his show and what got this ghoul into horror hosting.



Dark Soul: Please tell our readers how and why you become an internet Horror Host?

Mr. Graves: This was a dream I have had since I saw my first local horror host on TV. I was a Monster Kid from when I was six years old after being scared by watching The Birds. I realized being scared could be fun and started reading Monster comic books, collecting Monster trading cards, reading Monster stories, and reading and collecting the Monster Kid Bible, Famous Monsters of Filmland magazine. At 10, I watched my first horror host, a vampire named Asmodeus on a program called Psycho Cinema and was hooked. Here was a show that played all of these great classic horror films I read about in FM. Not only was this guy showing these films, but he was talking about them as well. I knew that this was something I wanted to do, too.

In 2012, I discovered and went to a convention called Monster Bash which celebrates the classic monsters from the silent era into the 60's and 70's. While there, I met Penny Dreadful & her sidekick Garou, the werewolf of Shilling Shockers. We chatted for awhile about monsters and horror hosting, she even knew about our Indianapolis legend Sammy Terry. While driving home, the 10 year old that still lives in me said here was someone in the genre who might have an idea on how you can make your dream come true. I wrote her an e-mail telling her how much I enjoyed talking with her and asked if she might have some advice for me about becoming a horror host. The next day I got a reply from her saying that she also enjoyed our talk and was happy that I wanted to continue the hosting tradition.



Over the following weeks we emailed back and forth while I brainstormed on creating my persona, keeping her informed all the way. She advised me on the look and the reason I for the show and after a couple of months Mr Graves and The Haunted Hotel

was formed. She then told me to see if we had a public access TV station in my area because that is where she started. I found one that was part of our local library, went in and told them my idea. They were thrilled with the idea, and gave me the help I needed to get started. Our first show was on Halloween Night in 2012 and we have been doing this ever since.

Dark Soul: Your character's look and persona is amazing. How did you come up with the look of your Horror Host and what was your inspiration?

Mr. Graves: Penny advised me not to just use a mask as it would be hard to speak clearly with one on. She suggested using makeup. I knew nothing of how to use make up when my wife found the morph suit I use. I liked the idea of the suit as it hid my real face and I could be understood quite well while wearing it. I also like the idea that I was honoring a friend of mine, another horror host that I grew up watching called The Shroud on Nightmare Theater. He was very tall and looked like a medieval executioner with only his eyes showing. I loved the mystery of who he was and wanted to do something similar. I decided to make myself look like someone from the 50's to give the show that old time creepy feeling. Also, it helps make the show more about the movies we do instead of focusing on myself.

Dark Soul: Please tell us a little about your show?

Mr. Graves: We start off by introducing My Children of the Grave (as I call my fans) to the deadtime story we will be telling them. We tell them the name of the show, who the stars are and a brief outline of what the show is about. At about the halfway point, I come back and tell some trivia about the show, its stars, or some information about how it was filmed. I then ask what we call our Monster Question, something that is connected to the show. After the show is over, we come back, give the answer to the Monster Question and then give a preview of the next deadtime story we will be showing.

Dark Soul: How long have you been doing your show and what were some of the movies you have hosted over the years?

Mr. Graves: This October we will celebrate 14 years of scaring people. We have done over 350 episodes and are creeping up on 400. Some of the deadtime stories we have told are The Phantom of the Opera, Night of the Living Dead, The House on Haunted Hill, Plan 9 From Outer Space. The Ape Man, Terror Island, and many others.

Dark Soul: What movie have you not hosted yet that you would most like to cover?

Mr. Graves: The early Universal movies; Frankenstein, Dracula, The Mummy, & The Wolfman. These are the ones that everyone needs to watch. Back then it was not about the blood but the suspense, what was lurking behind that door or in the basement. The scares came more from what we didn't see but would imagine in the theater of our minds. Those scares were sometimes worse than the real thing.

Dark Soul: Of all the shows you have done over the years, is there one that stands out to you as a favorite?

Mr. Graves: That is a tough one to answer. I love so many of them but if I had to pick just one, I would say it would be 1925's Phantom of the Opera starring the man of a thousand faces, Lon Chaney. I try to play as many of his films as we can find, to keep them from being forgotten, and hopefully introducing them to the next generation of Monster Kids.

Dark Soul: What does the future look like The Haunted Hotel?

Mr. Graves: I hope to continue doing this for as long as I can. I have met many other hosts from all over who have become friends and even family. Someday I would like to be syndicated to reach a larger audience and share my passion for these great films and stars. Until then, we will do our best to frighten & entertain anyone who enjoys this genre as much as I do.



Hell and The Devil

By Diane Head

It wasn't the first time he'd heard a noise outside the flat that he couldn't quite identify. It was a flutter, a scrape, a thud, as if a bird, up long past its roosting time had taken flight and lost its way.

He lifted his head from his work, his pen pausing above the creamy white paper. A drop of black ink splattered down. "Hell and the devil," he muttered, pushing his chair away from his writing desk.

He moved across the room to the window overlooking the street. Outside, the gas light on the corner feebly illuminated an empty thoroughfare. A lone Hansom cab passed, the horse's hooves slowly clopping on the cobblestones of St. Leonard's Terrace.

Nothing outside the building alarmed him.

Earlier, he'd tapped out a fine cigar, leaving a good portion for later. He clipped it and relit, settling in one of the wingback chairs, content to smoke and contemplate the portion of this manuscript he'd been writing.

The sound came again, louder this time. Insistent.

Lowering his smoke, he turned his head. He was sure the noise came from outside the window, a harsh scratch, a brush of something soft. It would not gain entry.

He glanced at the grandfather clock in the corner. The hands sat serenely on half-past two.

Against his better judgment, he levered out of the chair and moved to the window again. He lifted the pane and peered out. "Who's there?" he called softly. Florence, his wife, and his son, Neil, slept in the adjoining room. He had no wish to wake either of them with some childish prank.

There was no answer from the street, but a man's figure moved from the stoop at #18 to the street. "It is I, Bram." The voice was deep, seductive, quiet. A dark cape swirled around the man's calves. "Let me in." Mists rose from around the stranger.

"You're beyond mad," he hissed. "It's past two, man. Go home."

"But I am home, you see." The man in the street spread his arms in an expansive gesture. "The place I was created."

"And you're drunk. Go before I alert the constables." He lifted his arms to pull down the window.

"Not drunk. Merely.... hungry."

As the writer peered down into the dark, he could have sworn the man's eyes glowed. He shook his head; too much wine at dinner, too much cigar smoke, not enough sleep. "Leave at once," he advised.

The stranger's lips lifted in a slow smile. "I have all the time in the world."

He shut the window and returned to his desk. But the swift flow of words to which he was accustomed refused to come. Doodles along the edges of his paper were all he produced.

The grandfather clock tick-tocked the late-night seconds away.

He wasn't sure he'd heard correctly, but he thought the stranger in the street might have called him by his given name. Who would know him so intimately?

"Blast it all," he swore softly. Resting his head upon his arms, he lowered his head to the surface of the desk. He slept badly, dreaming of something he knew and yet didn't want to face.

By morning, all thoughts of the night before had almost crowded themselves into non-existence.

Florence was a-flutter with the excitement of the ballet they'd planned to attend that evening, flipping through her sequined dresses and holding them up one by one. Leaving her to her task, he shrugged on his overcoat, picked up his cane and case of papers, and walked to his club.

He'd done a fair job with his latest story by the time he started for home. After a quick dinner with his wife, they dressed for the night's event. Hailing a cab and he handed his wife in, enjoying the ride down London's streets.

The crowd at the ballet crushed itself into the lobby, friends greeting friends, drinks being handed around. He soon lost sight of Florence, but knew she'd make her way to their box seats in the balcony. Shrugging, he climbed the stairs. She'd be in time for the performance, without a doubt.

To his surprise, Florence wasn't alone when he arrived. One of the extra seats had been moved to the front of their box. It was taken by a tall, aristocratic man who leaned close to Florence's neck. He murmured something that made her laugh. A surge of jealousy flared, an emotion he hadn't felt since he'd been courting her, the most beautiful girl in Cornwall.

"Excuse me, sir," he began. "I don't think I've made your acquaintance." He moved to the wall of the balcony and stared at the stranger. There was no doubt this intruder held himself in high regard, his clothes of excellent cut, his manners impeccable. Rising with a fluid motion, the stranger extended his hand. "Vlad Tepes, Count of Romania."

The man's hand was icy cold, fingers long and thin, his grip strong and sure. Bram tried to pull away but was unable to loosen his hand.

"And you, sir?"

He stuttered and pulled back, still unable to release his fingers, which were being crushed by this man's vice-like hands. "Stoker, Bram Stoker."

"But of course. The writer." Vlad released Bram's hand. "And your lovely wife, Florence."

The blood drained from Bram's face, the name ringing a warning bell in his brain. He knew the name, he recognized the man, but where and when? Why did the man's presence feel like the deepest peril?

The orchestra tuned up, and the ballet began. Bram slid into his place, but heard not one note from the orchestra, and did not see one graceful turn of the ballet dancers. He only noticed that Vlad Tepes leaned toward his wife more often than proper.

A feeling of relief washed over Bram when the music stopped, the dancers took their final bow, and Florence waved to some old friends and excused herself to visit.

"What do you want?" Bram asked, turning slightly toward Vlad.

A slow smile crept over Vlad's face. "As I told you last night, I am but hungry."

It rushed back. The hours spent writing *Dracula*, the scenes of horror he himself had created. How could it be? How could Count Dracula be here in London in the flesh? This was mad. Dracula was but a creature of imagination, but this man was all too real.

"What do you want?"

What you *made* me want, Bram. Blood. I care not whose it is, but Florence's blood smells enticing. Perhaps, since we've made friends this evening, she will let me in." He examined the silver wolf on the head of his cane as if he'd never seen it before.

"No, not her."

"Oh, my dear man. Then who?" Vlad stood and faced his creator. "Who?" he whispered.

"Anyone. Not my boy. And not her."

The Romanian stepped closer. "But I don't want just anyone." He paused, lifting his eyebrows.

"You don't mean..." Bram stammered, unable to rise from his seat, unable to stand up to this apparition.

“Ah, but I do.”

“Not tonight, please. I’m not ready.”

Vlad pulled his cape from the nearby cloak hooks. “One is never really ready, are they?” With a deft swirl, the black silk cape settled around his shoulders.

It was a long time before Bram could gather himself enough to face the lobby full of people he knew, but he needed to find Florence. The longer he thought about Vlad’s message, the more unsure of what the stranger had said made sense. Did he mean to attack Florence or himself?

How he got home, he wouldn’t recall. But once at #18 and Florence was safe, he locked the doors and pulled clean sheets of paper from his desk. His will needed to be rewritten, he had papers to organize, things to be said to people he’d neglected. Days bled into nights. The stranger did not reappear.

Word came at the end of the week that his long-time rival, Oscar Wilde, had been found dead. Although the news article Bram read cited another cause of death, he carefully examined the photo of Oscar and noticed two small puncture wounds on the writer’s neck.

He had no doubt who was responsible for Oscar’s death.

That night, the soft brush of wings and the clack of sharp claws slid across the windowpanes again. Bram, startled from his writing, moved quickly to see what had caused the noise. His right hand fell upon his silver letter opener. He slid it into his vest pocket. “Hell and the devil!” he exclaimed.

There, in the street, stood a tall man wearing a black cape. Bram rushed downstairs and burst out into the street. “What do you want?”

The monster brought an elegant hand up to the closure of his cape. “You know.”

Bram raised a fist. “I do not.”

“You created a monster that must feed. Did you not read about poor Oscar?” A sly smile creased Vlad’s handsome face. “And now, I must feed again.” He stepped closer. “Who is it to be? You, the boy, or the fair Florence? I’m sure she will admit me to the house.”

Bram staggered back. There was no choice, really. He had known this time would come. Vlad moved close and Bram reached into his vest pocket. As if paralyzed, the writer could not look away from the vampire’s hypnotic gaze.

“Hungry,” Vlad whispered.

The pain, when it came, was less severe than he’d thought, less than he’d written. His head thrown back, the light of the moon winked out behind thick clouds, no doubt presaging rain. He

felt the slide of the razor-sharp fangs entering his neck, the slow drain of his life force. Weakness caused him to clutch the shoulders of this creature he'd brought into being, merely by the strength of his writing. He pulled Vlad on top of him, both tumbling to the cobblestones. There was no doubt Vlad had no intention of making him one of his minions, a creature of the night. He intended to feast upon every drop of blood.

With the last of his strength, Bram reached into his vest pocket and withdrew his silver knife. "To hell with the devil," he murmured and withdrew the blade. He only hoped the silver weapon would be long enough to do its job. He thrust once into the creature's body as bright consciousness slipped into dark nothingness.

About Diane Head: Diane Head is the author of four volumes of plays for beginning readers and a middle grade historical novel set in South Carolina. She lives near Clemson, South Carolina where she's busy writing middle grade horror novels.

A Father's Plea

By Caolán Mac An Aircinn

Hullo, I'm wondering if you can help me. I'm wondering if you've seen the *ollphéist*.

No—please don't shoot. I'm unarmed. I'm just a fisherman. Look—see? Just a fisherman, out here off the western coast of Ireland. Look at me—my woollen gansey and tweed trousers and pampooties will tell you that I am a simple man, and the grey hairs on my head and the lines on my face will tell you that I am an old man. My boat is just a simple coracle, hides over wooden slats; no threat to a ship of the British Navy. I live just up on that headland there, in that little cottage—yes, the one with the peeling whitewash and the rotting thatch. Please, I am no threat to the British Navy, and certainly not to a captain such as yourself. May I come aboard?

No, I promise you I'm not insane either. Yes, I know I'm shouting words at you in a language you don't understand, but you'll have to forgive me. My English is not very good, and I do not know what you would call an *ollphéist* in English. Besides, if you had seen it, you would know. Believe me, you would know.

No, please don't—all right, look. See this jug here? It is full to the brim with whiskey—not parliament whiskey either, brown and watered-down, but Irish firewater from the hills beyond the coast. We call it *poitín*, but I don't have an English word for that either. If you will just... if you will just talk to me, I will give it all to you.

Thank you. Thank you, you are a kind man. Most of your rank would not give the time of day to one such as I, especially not... especially not since I ran across the *ollphéist*. Yes, I'll gladly sit down—no, this coil of rope here will do me just fine, thank you. Thank you, sir, I really mean it.

What is the *ollphéist*? Ah, well there's a long story now. But I will try to make it short, as I know you're a military man and you don't have time to be wasting on such as I. An *ollphéist* is a creature... I suppose it would be some sort of great fish, or better say a serpent, sir, a great big long thing with fangs and scales and fins; though the word in Irish really means 'great worm,' so perhaps it is more a sort of a worm of the sea, with a jointed body and a round maw full of fangs, like you might see on a lamprey or a hagfish. I am not quite sure, in truth, as they are creatures of the seas and of the lakes and rare is the seaman who gets a good look before it swallows them down whole.

Yes, sir, they have a fierce hunger on them for ships, and for the flesh of men. They were commoner in this country in the days before the saints and heroes; but the saints, St. Columba for example, banished *ollphéisteanna* from the country, and the Fenian heroes of old—no, sir, I don't know anything about today's Fenian Brotherhood; the politics doesn't make it this far out west, sir—but the Fenian heroes of old, I declare, would vanquish *ollphéisteanna*, and that is how there comes to be so few.

Yes, I know the scientists say that there is no such thing, but the scientists do not fish this sea. I do, sir, if you'll forgive my being impertinent. I know they're wrong.

How? Well, sir, if you'll pardon my being impertinent, I have seen an *ollphéist*. I saw it the day it took my son. Have you seen it? But no—you would know. Most likely, you would be dead.

Yes—oh, yes, sir, such a creature would certainly constitute a danger to shipping and trade and fishing and... well, whatever else goes on above the sea, sir. Yes, certainly. Indeed, I'm sure Her Majesty would be very grateful to anyone who could bring her the corpse of such a creature. If you could kill it... my God, sir, if you would kill that beast, send it down to whatever watery hell spawned it, I would fall to my knees and thank you from the bottom of my heart. It is an evil, monstrous thing leftover from an older world, and it has no place here.

You want to know what happened? I... I suppose I can. I do not like to tell the story, but less still I like the thought of me in my little *currach* alone against that beast. And there's not much further I can be hurt.

I will tell you a little about myself first, sir, if you will be patient with me, for the story makes not much sense without it. You will remember, sir, that it is not so long since the potatoes failed and the Great Hunger swept this country. We here on the coast were better able to survive than the poor creatures inland, thank God, for we always had the fish, but that is not to say that we did well. Before Black '45, sir, I was blessed with ten children and a beautiful, kind wife."

"After... well, all I had was Michael. He was the light of my life, sir. Even if he had not been a good, kind, strong, loyal, brave boy in himself, he was all that I had left of his mother, and I would have loved him for it if he were devil spawn otherwise. But he wasn't, good sir. He was a good boy. He was only a little thing when his mother and his brothers and sisters... He helped me bury them. Wasn't much use, mind you, being as he was so small, but he wouldn't let me do it alone...

I taught him the fishing. Manning a boat isn't an easy craft, as you know well, sir, and fishing is harder still, and hardest of all is to know the signs for when you can go out without bad luck; but Michael learned them all diligently, sir. He threw himself into being a fisherman, sir. He was determined he would build our family back up, build our village back up. He was determined that he would be the best fisherman he could possibly be. Well, sir, he grew up into a fine, strapping lad. Handsome, too; all the girls of the village had their eyes on him, I'm sure of it, and I thanked God that for all he had taken from me, he had left me enough of a family that we would carry on.

Now he and I were out fishing... oh, is it three months ago now? Every day feels like an eternity, sir. It feels like it has been three thousand years since I went into that boat with my son. However, we did it and we did it right. We avoided red-headed women and priests on our way down to the water; we carried an ember of the hearth with us for good luck, and an iron knife for the same; we made sure the boats went out of the harbour three at a time, so as to avoid the bad luck of being third out. I can see it in your aspect, sir, you think I'm full of silly superstitions.

Maybe, sir. Maybe. But I can think of one silly superstition that turned out not to be so silly, and in any case, that's how we've always done things around here.

So we set ourselves up—I'm sorry, sir, if I'm boring you, I do go on a bit—I'll try to be short. But we set ourselves up at dusk. We were a good ways out, so we set up the spillet line and the drift nets. It was a clear night, sir, I'm delighted to say, or more likely it is that we would both now be rotting on the ocean floor; but the stars and the moon lighted us beautifully, and there wasn't need for the little tallow lantern I keep in the boat. So that was that, for a few hours at least, and we were hauling in a good lot of mackerel, when Michael said to me:

“Father,” he said, “father, look at that out there. Do you see it?”

I looked. First I could not see what he was pointing at, but then I saw—it was a great ripple in the water, much as you might expect from a shark swimming below the surface, but larger—much larger, sir, near as large as this boat. Now we had spears on the boat, and I saw Michael reach for one, but I said:

“Don't do it, Michael. Whatever it is, it is greater than we are and you should leave it be.”

I have told you, sir, that Michael is ambitious. I could see from him that he itched to spear that thing below the waves, and I could see he was thinking of the fame and glory that would accrue; why, when he sold the story, we would be able to give up the fishing altogether. But, God love him, Michael is a loyal boy. He put down the spear.

Much good it did us.

The creature erupted from beneath us in a spray of foam and bitter water. I just had time to see it—long, serpentine, as I say; it might have had scales or fins, or it might have been segmented like a worm. I don't rightly know, sir. All I remember is that one minute, that wake or ripple was approaching us; and next, this column of a creature was in front of me, and the splinters of my boat were raining about me in the water, and my son, my only son surviving, sir, he was in its mouth. I could hear him crying for me—but then it swallowed, and there was silence.

How old was he? Is he, sir, how old is he. He is sixteen, sir.

Sir, there is another superstition in these parts which I am sure you will think is awfully backwards, and that is that the sea will have its own. If the sea takes your boat, it was owed it; if your brother, or your son, or your own self fall overboard, sir, the sea has claimed you, and it will visit dread bad luck upon you to deny it.

For all of that, sir, I swam. I do not swim well, sir, but that day I swam to shore. I do not know why the beast did not claim me, and I tell you true that the exhaustion nearly did. When I finally made it to shore, I did but lie on the claddagh for the rest of the night, gasping for air. But then I hauled myself back up to my cottage. I did this, sir, so that I could devote my every remaining moment of life to freeing my son, and because there is nothing more the sea can take from me. The Famine had my family, the sea has my son. Even death itself, sir, would be a sweet

release now. So I have built myself another boat, and I have let my house fall into rack and ruin; I spend my every moment on the waves, looking for the creature, and when I find it, I will cut my son out of it.

Why am I so sure he is alive? Well, sir, I think it must be like Jonah and the whale. That *ollphéist* was so very big, sir, that my boy could very well stay alive in it. And if not... if not...

I don't know, sir. I do not want to think about that.

So you will not help me. That's all right, sir. I understand. I know I sound like a madman, and I understand that you have your own business to be about. But the thing is, sir, if you'll forgive my being impertinent, you don't have a choice. No—no, as I told you, I am unarmed. You can put your gun away. No, I say so because I have been looking at the water behind you, and I see a ripple in the water just such as I saw on the night that Michael was taken from me. And now...

Yes, that is the same creature, the one which has just ripped the bow from your boat. An ugly creature, isn't it? God rot it. Never mind bailing out, sir; the longer we stay on this now-sinking ship, the more time the *ollphéist* has to drag us all down one by one. Our only recourse now, sir, is cordite and courage. Pass me that dead man's rifle, and I will do my part.

I'm coming, Michael. Your dad is coming to get you out. Just hold on a few minutes longer, son... just a few minutes longer.

END

About Caolán Mac An Aircinn: Caolán Mac an Aircinn is a translator, classicist and musician from Dublin, Ireland who writes both in English and in his native Irish. He has published numerous short stories and poems both in Irish and in English in the horror and science fiction genres."

Dark Poetry

Middle-Tier Reaper Work

By Paul Tristram

I'm so terribly bored, it's painful
... yeah, it gets like this,
there's nothing doing right now,
except 'Elite' or 'Basic'.
Oh, did you really, how was it?
... aye, I know the feeling,
I haven't bothered tagging along
with a 'Basic' since last year...
sooo tedious, like pulling teeth.
I actually yelled at the last one,
"Just rip and tear, for Christ sake!"
Ha! Management weren't happy,
I got a month unpaid suspension.
But, a fortnight ago, I got lucky,
me and the twin albino girls
did mop-up on a 'Multiple'
with one of the upstairs 'Elites'
... of course it was 'Him',
I've never seen 'Workmanship',
to that standard, done so quickly.
We just stood, backs to the wall,
in absolute 'Awe' as he Crafted
... made the three of us
want to quit, imitate, or stalk him.

Complete Radio Silence

By Paul Tristram

The "Last Supper Pieta"
- Cherry Finish,
Ivory Velvet Interior.
So very Brave,
all through the Trial...

it was the Aftermath,
and all of that
(Crippling) 'Time'
to Imprison the Mind
... like a stuck record,
R-E-P-E-A-T-I-N-G
the 'Jolting'... without
(Ever) any Release,
Clemency, or Fade-Out.

My Jackdaws (And Where They Originate From) **By Paul Tristram**

I just Kant fall in line with the
'Categorical Imperative'
... there are far too many
'Moving Parts' to ignore.
It 'Rained' today...
and this made her Angry
... triggering a Doorway
back to a (Ruined) Birthday
somewhere in her childhood
... and I Screamed!!!
I dim electrical lighting
when I get slightly annoyed,
blow fuses and appliances
when I (Unbuckle) Rage.
Last week I (Unwittingly)
drew a Séance to a close
... the Medium in charge
exclaimed rather worriedly,
"There's a Gentleman here
who claims you drowned him
within a roadside-ditch
in a previous incarnation...
and he wants to Thank You,
it stilled his (Internal) Pain...
he often sends you Jackdaws."

About Paul Tristram: Paul Tristram is a Welsh writer who has poems, short stories and flash fiction in many publications around the world. He yearns to tattoo porcelain bridesmaids instead of digging empty graves for innocence at midnight; this too may pass, yet. His novel "Crazy Like Emotion", collection of shorter fiction "Kicking Back Drunk 'Round The Candletree Graves",

full-length poetry collections “The Dark Side Of British Poetry”, "It Is Big And It Is Clever", “South Wales Outlaw”, “Uncivil Disobedience Is My Forte” and "The Gutter Symposium", are all available by Close To The Bone Publishing.

Sare

By Fiore

Screeched hearings
Forsook trust
Lines of hate
Deepened by wake

Crude hair
Ism's lost
Cost of Sare

Crooked faucets
Humidor dust
Wailing steam

No worth for thee

About Fiore: He resides in Vancouver BC Canada.

Special Features

40th Anniversary of the movie Aliens

By William Henry Pratt

After the runaway hit that was 1979's *Alien* written by Dan O'Bannon and helmed by Ridley Scott, the world of the Xenomorph went silent for seven years until director James Cameron, the man behind the smash hit film *The Terminator*, had an idea to expand that world created by Dan O'Bannon and take it in an all-new direction. The plan was to have the last surviving member of *The Nostromo*, Ellen Ripley, found in her escape pod 75 years later while still in stasis after the destruction of her ship when fleeing from the alien creature that was running amok aboard her ship.



Cameron's idea would not only keep the first story in the movie *Alien* going, but it would expand on that story and give us, the viewer, much more of a in-depth look into the life cycle of the title creature, but also most importantly where the creature can from and what gave birth to it. Not looking to just rehash the original 1979 movie, Cameron wanted to follow that film up with a true sequel, unknowing that this would be the start of a full-on movie franchise featuring the Xenomorph. Where the 1979 film was more of a haunted house movie in space and a sort of, but not official remake of the 1958 film *It: The Terror Beyond Space*, *Aliens* was to be a kick ass action movie. This idea to take the story in a new direction paid off big time and *Aliens* was not only a box office smash hit, but the film gave us one of horror cinemas greatest monsters, the Alien Queen.

The plot followed Ripley after being discovered in her escape pod still asleep and is brought back to Earth. She tells her story of how her crew aboard *The Nostromo* was killed one by one by an alien creature. She tells how the monster was brought on aboard and that to kill the beast, she had to destroy the mother ship and flee in the escape shuttle. Only later to discover to her horror that the monster followed her and had to blow the beast out of the air lock.

She tells the people who saved her, the same people who own the company and her lost ship, about the planet where the eggs were found and how the creature was birth from one of her friends and crew members. She is told that the company has had people living on that world for years now and they have found nothing like she talks about with alien eggs or monsters. They tell her everyone is fine until as time passes and all contact with the colony had ended. Fearing the worst after what Ripley told them about the creature, they asked for her help to return there along with a group of Colonial Marines to discover what happen to the people of the colony.



Once on the planet surface, the Marines encounter not just one creature as Ripley and her crew did but an entire horde of creatures that overwhelm them and it becomes a fight of survival. In the skirmish, they discover a lone survivor of the colony, a young girl nicknamed Newt who was hiding from the creatures. Unlike the crew of Ripley's doomed ship who had little weapons for defense with their monster, the Marines are fully armed, but the overall numbers of creatures prove too much for even the seasoned warriors to deal with.



One by one the team falls to the creatures until only Ripley, Newt, a hurt Hicks and Bishop, the group's resident android, are left. However, before they could leave this hellish world, Newt is taken by the creatures, forcing Ripley now in protective mother mode to gear up and face the monsters alone. After saving the child, Ripley is then confronted with a true nightmare when she encounters the mother of the creatures, the Alien Queen.



When Ripley destroys the creature's eggs, the angry monsters goes after Ripley and Newt, just before Bishop saves them as he pilots the landing ship just in the nick of time. What they don't know is that the Queen has attached herself to the outside of the ship and journeys to the mother ship, The Sulaco. There, with the use of a powerloader, Ripley must face off with the creature in one last battle until she manages to blow the Queen out into deep space just as she did in the previous film.

What sets this film apart from its predecessor is that there are a lot more Alien creatures Ripley and the space Marines have to deal with along with the mother of the monsters herself, the Queen. In the original film seven years earlier, we saw what the “Facehugger” hatched from before it implants an embryo inside crewman Kane’s body. His body is where the Alien will incubate before bursting out, killing him before swiftly growing into a 7-foot monster that kills everyone but Ripley on board The Nostromo.



James Cameron wanted to show in his movie what was it that laid all those eggs we saw in the first film. Now we know that these creatures have like a nest of ants or bees and they have a Queen. She was nothing less than striking.

Created by makeup and visual effects master Stan Winston and his team crafted the beast life size. She was a 14 foot tall puppet powered by a mix of hydraulics, cables, control rods and a crane to hold her massive body up. Two people were inside the creature to operate its four arms with a team working outside to aid in the creature's other movements.

This amazing screen monster may have made her debut in this film, but she would go on to play in two other films, Alien Resurrection(1997), and Alien vs Predator (2004) as well. She was just too good a character not to be seen again.

Returning in the role of Ellen Ripley was Sigourney Weaver after her breakout starring in the original 1979 film. The Ripley character would go on to continue in the franchise for Alien 3, and Alien Resurrection.



This was also the very first film to use the word Xenomorph in the script. It comes as Lieutenant Gorman is addressing the team and uses the word Xenomorph. Although this was not James Cameron’s intention to give a name to the beast, it was fans of the franchise that later on would use the word Xenomorph to give the creatures a species name.

Now 40 years later, Aliens is just as watchable as it was back in 1986. I saw this movie upon its release in theaters and have always been a fan of it and the franchise as a whole. The Queen of the hive alone is worth watching this movie for as she was right there on set, that big and terrifying. In later films, she would be mostly digital as in Alien vs Predator, but here she was right there facing off with Sigourney Weaver as Ripley and damn she is impressive as was this whole film.

Creature Feature



Stingy Jack: The Legend of Jack O Lantern



By AL J. Vermette

Irish folklore tells the story of a man who was so mean, so unkind, so callous that even the Devil himself wanted nothing to do with him. A blacksmith by trade, but known more for his drunken nightly fighting and just all-around nasty reputation that all who knew him stayed far away from him. His name was Jack or better known as Stingy Jack as the townsfolk called him because of his cruel self-centered nature.

When the many years of Jack's heavy drinking at last took its toll, it was Satan himself who made the journey to the land of the living to reap his soul because he wanted to meet the man even more wicked than himself. But Jack ever being the con man that he was, talked the Devil into joining him in one last drink before the Devil would take his soul.



The two soon found a pub, a place Jack knew well and upon the end of the night after round after round of drink, the bartender asked for the two to pay their tab. Jack nor the Devil had any money on them, but being the con artist that Jack was, he talked Satan into turning himself into a coin so that they could pay the bill and once paid that the Devil could again return to his true form. The Devil in his drunken state agreed and when the bartender was not looking, Satan turned himself into a gold coin so that the tab could be paid.

However, once his dark companion turned himself into the coin, Jack quickly tossed that coin into his jacket pocket right beside an old cross he carried to use as a bargaining chip for him to con his way into Heaven once he departed from the world of the living. Once Satan realized that he, the dark lord of the underworld was fooled by Jack, he screamed to be released. But Jack being Jack just walked out of the pub and into the night.

The Devil still demanding to be set free, gave Jack a wish and agreed to give the evil man another ten years of life. Jack agreed to this and released the Devil from his pocket as the dark one returned to his true form. "Now remember I have another ten years of life," Jack told the Devil as Jack walked off into the night and the Devil returned to Hell empty handed.

With that new revision on live, one would think that Jack would at the very least try to become a better person, to be kinder to others and be the best man he could. However Jack just doubled down on his immoral ways and spent the next ten years being even more sinful and unpleasant as he could. As time went on, both God and Satan took note of Jack's malevolent ways and on the very day ten years later, Jack found himself once again facing death and again the Devil came calling for him to collect the debt.

When Satan appeared to Jack to reap his soul once again, Jack had a plan. Jack asked the Devil if he wanted his soul, that before he did so, that he could have one last meal. The Devil asked what was it that he wanted and Jack replied that he only wanted to have a single apple from a nearby tree. Satan agreed and walked over to the tree to retrieve a single apple from a high

branch. Once he did this, Jack rushed in and with a knife carved a large cross into the tree's bark binding the evil creature to the tree. He then carved crosses into the ground additionally trapping the devil even more.

Seeing that he was fooled again by the wicked man, the Devil had no other course of action then to given into Jack's demands. Angry with Jack and mostly himself for being tricked again by the man, Satan asked what do you want from me, another ten years of life?" Jack being the sly wicked man he was replied, "No I now want even lasting life, I want to live forever and to never give my immortal soul to you."



To be set free, the Devil agreed and Jack removed the crosses in the dirt and the Devil was set free. "Now remember, my soul will never be reaped by you," he told the dark one who in furious rage agreed. Once the Devil vanished, Jack went about his life never again fearing the wrath of the Devil again.

Years went by and Jack still never learned his lesson until one day after many years of fighting, drinking and all sorts of immoral living, it caught up to him and his body just simply gave out. Upon his true death, his soul was released from his body, he looked down at his empty corpse he knew it was his time to make the journey to the afterlife. When reaching the gates of Heaven, he asked to be let in but God himself stood just inside the mightily golden gates and told the evil man that he was not welcomed here. "For all your wicked ways in life, you can never enter the gates of Heaven," the Lord said before turning away leaving the soul of Jack to remain there alone.

After being turned away from Paradise, Jack set his sights on the other realm and made the long journey to the land of the dead in the underworld set far below the crust of the Earth. There he would beg the Devil permission to enter Hell, but there too he was turned away. "You shamed me for the last time Jack, you are forever barred from entering Hell and must walk the Earth as a lost soul forever. As Jack turned to leave, the Devil gave him one single ember from the fires of Hell itself for him to lead his way through the dark of as he returned to Earth.

Jack took the ember and used it to light his way through the dark while leaving Hell, later he carved out a small turnip to use as a lantern to light his way. Jack would now forever wander the Earth as a lost spirit carrying his hand carved lantern as his only source of light in the dark world of the dead. It served as his only way to guide his way but also his only companion in his ever-ending walk through the land of the dead.

In Celtic lore, they say Jack could be still seen on the night of Samhain, All Hallows Eve, wandering forever carrying his lantern to light his way. When the Irish tradition came to America, the practice of carving scary faces into turnips to honor the story of Jack and to keep him at bay when the world of the living and the dead was at its closest changed to the use of Pumpkins. Because the pumpkin was much larger to carve a scary face into, it soon became the go to custom still used today by everyone celebrating Halloween.



The holiday of Halloween may have changed over the years from its Celtic roots of Samhain to our modern celebration we know today. Today we carve spooky faces into pumpkins not to keep Jack away and the other creatures of the night such as the Dullahan, a headless horse riding ghost and the foundation for the story The Legend of Sleepy Hollow, and the Aos Si faeries evil creatures unlike the storybook faeries like we know from Peter Pan's Tinkerbell.. Today the Jack O Lantern along with the ghost and the witch is the symbol of Halloween and what we think of when it comes to the holiday.



But after you light that pumpkin and hang the ghosts on Halloween night, take a moment of your time to think about Jack, who is still out there walking the Earth carrying his lantern to light his way. Jack, Jack of the lantern, Jack –O-Lantern.

Hold Your Position

By Hossam Belal

Sometimes it is difficult to please a person, and as a person, I have the courage to say that nothing truly satisfies us.

When summer comes, we hate the hot weather and call it an oven on Earth. And when winter comes, we hate the bitterly cold nights and whisper to ourselves, “We miss the summer sun.”

I felt that same way that night. The winter was harsh, and I almost froze to death. Alongside the biting cold, there were two other companions that night: silence and loneliness.

I was standing in the middle of that dark, frightening desert, with no one else in that place but me and the cold night’s darkness.

When I was a child, my father loved to tell me stories about demons, ghosts, and the scary girl. He always used to say: “Beware of women, my son. Some are beautiful and we love them, but some are frightening and could ruin your life. If you love one, make sure her inner beauty is more captivating.” Of course, he would change the subject whenever my mother entered the room.

My mother tried hard to stop him from scaring me, but he found pleasure in it for reasons I never understood. Over time, I too found a strange pleasure in his stories—but the terrible nightmares ruined that pleasure and only increased my fear and terror.

So, as bedtime approached, I would turn on the lights. My father had his own reasons. He thought that by doing so, he would make me stronger and increase my ability to face and overcome my fears—may he rest in peace. But I believe he was wrong, because I never stopped being afraid of the dark throughout my life.

That night, I was nineteen years old, and it was my first night watch. Most nights, the other soldiers would take the night watch, and when it was my turn, they covered for me. They knew how afraid I was of the dark, and I was well liked.

However, the commander himself intervened that night and gave the captain direct orders: I had to stand guard. At the time, I didn’t know why he was so insistent, but there was no option except to obey.

They gave me a heavy coat to protect me from the cold of the night, but nothing to protect me from my terrifying delusions—the demons and the scary girl.

During the early hours of that night, I recalled the last words spoken to me by the officer in charge, who was seven years older than me and bore three stars on his shoulders:

“I know you are afraid of the dark, soldier, but I want you to listen carefully. Do not panic, no matter what happens. Hold your position. Even if you see the devil himself, with his ugly,

terrifying face as depicted in movies and legends—shoot him with your Russian rifle, and don't be afraid. We are short on soldiers, and we need you tonight.”

He was restless, which only increased my fear, for I felt that something was bound to happen that night. I clung to my rifle tightly, like a drowning man grasping a piece of wood in the vast ocean. The rifle was my shield and my only means of protection.

But what could I do to stop those terrifying illusions and hallucinations that consumed me? If I heard a sound, I thought it was the devil creeping up from behind to drag me to hell. And if I imagined something moving, I thought it was the scary girl coming to stab me with her sharp knife. God forgive you, Father—you completely failed to make me strong. Here I am, just a frightened soldier clutching a rifle.

As I contemplated the pitch-black darkness around me, I remembered the captain's words: “You know there are dangerous prisoners inside that building behind you. The country is collapsing, and we are doing everything we can to achieve security and stability until it returns to normal. There are those who will try to attack us tonight to incite these prisoners. We must prevent that by any means possible. Do your duty and hold your position.”

And suddenly, I heard a sound. It wasn't imaginary this time—it was real.

The sound of a car approaching. Then the vehicle appeared, though all I could see were its blinding headlights.

I shouted, “Stay where you are!” and fired three shots into the air. Perhaps those in the car thought a brave soldier was standing against them, but the truth was that I was trembling with fear.

The car stopped. Silence swallowed the place. Then the headlights went dark, plunging everything back into blackness. But this time, I wasn't alone.

Seconds—or minutes, I don't know—passed, stretched unbearably long. I stood frozen, staring at the silent ghost of the car, waiting for what would happen next.

Without warning, the headlights flared on again—and then bullets rained down on me. I dove behind the concrete barriers and fired back.

The gunfire came from all sides, heavy as a storm. A bullet nearly took my eye, but struck the concrete just inches away.

I fired wildly—at the car, its windows, its tires, at everything. My bullets riddled its body. I was like a drowning man, thrashing in the water—kicking, flailing, struggling desperately to survive, but unable to swim. Sinking was inevitable.

They were relentless, determined to free those prisoners. My mission was to stop them.

We traded fire through the long night. It was a fierce battle—the first I had ever faced.

And I realized I was not shooting out of courage, but out of fear.

I was no attacker; I was a defender. They wanted me dead, and I was only trying to stay alive.

Then I understood the scale of the assault. From inside the building came the sounds of chaos—explosions, gunfire, screams. The battle there was fiercer still. I prayed to Almighty God to protect my comrades and the captain, for I could do nothing for them but pray.

At dawn, the shooting from the car ceased, and I lowered my rifle. I was certain I had killed one or two of them, and I knew I myself was bleeding, deep wounds burning in my chest.

Then I noticed movement inside the car. One of them was still alive. Indeed, one of the men got out of the car, its body mangled with hundreds of holes. He seemed injured, dragging himself with difficulty as he ran, and shouted, “We will come back to kill you, you scoundrel!”

I shot him in the back of the head, and he fell dead instantly. Even while trembling with fear, I managed to aim with deadly accuracy. Perhaps that was why they kept me in the unit and never expelled me.

The sun finally rose, emerging from behind the concrete barricades for the first time in eight hours. I approached the car and found two bodies drenched in blood. Then I glanced at my uniform—it too was soaked in red.

I was dying. My whole life flashed before me, from childhood until this moment. I was supposed to lie on the ground, remember God, and prepare for death. Would I end up in heaven or in hell? I didn’t know.

But I decided to gather what little strength I had left and head toward the building. I had to die among my comrades, right?

I couldn’t walk far without stumbling and falling, my minutes in this world numbered. Yet I chose to spend them moving forward. Something strange and fierce pushed me onward—I had to reach the building, no matter the cost.

When I finally entered, I discovered the horror of what had happened.

It was a massacre. Bodies piled up here and there—soldiers and attackers alike. The walls were riddled with holes, just like the car outside. Fires consumed vehicles and machinery scattered inside.

My heart filled with grief when I saw my comrades lying dead. They had fought fiercely to the last breath, bravely—just as I had fought outside.

But I wondered: had they succeeded in thwarting the attack, keeping the prisoners locked inside? Or had the enemy succeeded in freeing them?

I searched for the captain among the fallen, but I couldn't find him. My body grew weaker; I couldn't even remain standing. My time was almost over. I collapsed beside my comrades.

Then I heard footsteps behind me. Someone is coming, I told myself. Surely one of the attackers had come to finish me off. My rifle was still at my side, ready for another round—but I wasn't. I was dying, and I surrendered to my fate. After all, I was already dead.

But it wasn't an enemy. It was the captain—staggering from his wounds, his face and uniform caked with blood and mud. He was dying like me. And behind him stood a number of armed men, rifles in hand.

In that moment, I realized the truth: the attack had succeeded. We had been defeated.

I caught my breath and whispered, “Did they free the prisoners?”

The captain glanced at the armed men around us and said: “They are not prisoners; you know they are not prisoners. Has the illusion we planted in you become so real that you now believe it? You know they are hostages, not prisoners.”

The captain was right. But obeying orders is often more sacred than obeying one's conscience. Over time, we come to believe that orders are the conscience—and then the conscience slowly disappears, leaving only the orders.

The armed men headed to the cells and opened them. Out came women and children—crying children, screaming women. They cried because they had finally been freed, finally liberated from our grasp. I had known from the beginning that we were holding women and children captive until the men surrendered themselves, but it seems I had buried this truth. The orders had forced me to forget.

Parents embraced their sons, daughters, and wives before our eyes. The sound of gunfire faded, replaced by whispers, sobs, and the tears of reunion after long separation.

One of the women approached us, looked straight into our eyes, and spat on us in contempt before returning to her family.

I turned to the captain and asked: “Does this mean we are evil? That we won't enter paradise?”

The captain drew his last breath and whispered: “You know we were the villains from the very beginning. But these are the orders, soldier. Obeying orders made us believe we were on the right side, but the truth is what you see now. Prepare for hell, soldier—because that is where we are going.”

In those final moments of my life, we gazed at the clear blue sky. What a magnificent sight to behold before death—before heading to hell.

The color of the sky darkened. My eyes closed. And then the sky disappeared into eternal darkness.

About Hossam Belall: I'm a fiction writer with a focus on psychological drama and character-driven storytelling. My work explores themes of memory, guilt, and social decay, often set against the backdrop of small-town Egyptian life. My writing is influenced by both classical Arabic literature and global psychological fiction

Awakening

By Stephen Tillman

Michelle put the pillow over her head, trying to block the sounds of her mother's cries of pain and Gabe's cursing. Tears came to her eyes. This was not an isolated event. Gabe was physically abusive to her mother whenever he got drunk, which happened most days.

Suddenly her mother's shrieks penetrated even through the pillow. "No, Gabe, no! I'll do whatever you say! Please don't..."

Then came what sounded like a primordial scream followed by Gabe bellowing, "Get up you lazy bitch! You ain't hurt that bad!"

Though terrified, Michelle got out bed, tiptoed toward the kitchen, and peeked around the corner. Her mother lay on the floor, her head at an awkward angle, with blood bubbling out of her mouth. Gabe, fists bunched, stood over her.

Michelle gasped. Gabe must've heard her. He whirled around, smiled nastily, and said, "This must be my lucky day. If this fat cow won't come across, you'll do nicely. You're turning into a sexy little thing with them boobies poking against your pajama top. Time somebody broke you in so you know how to please a man."

Gabe started toward her. Michelle turned to run, slipped, and fell. Gabe reached for her, but she was able to scramble away. Unfortunately, she found herself backed into a corner, with the refrigerator on her right and the stove on her left. Gabe cackled as he approached her again, his arms outstretched. In a panic, she grabbed a skillet from the stove and swung it at Gabe with all her might. It caught him on the side of his head. He dropped like a stone, his skull crushed.

Michelle jumped over Gabe's body and ran to her mother, but the woman just lay with open eyes staring sightlessly at the ceiling. Gabe's phone was on the kitchen table. With shaking hands, Michelle punched in 9-1-1.

"They're both gone," the EMT said to the detective. "The guy's skull looks like a melon that was hit with a sledgehammer. Hard to believe a girl so young would have that much strength. She's barely over five feet tall, and I doubt she weighs 100 pounds. Gabe's gotta be 250 if he's an ounce."

"You'd be surprised," the detective replied. "I've seen people do amazing things once the adrenaline starts flowing. Besides, she's not as small as she first appears. She's very muscular in a wiry kind of way."

"Any repercussions for her? She did kill a guy."

“Not a chance,” the detective scoffed. “Clearly self-defense. Nobody will miss this slime-ball. Unfortunately, she has to enter the system in foster care.”

“Think she’ll be adopted?”

“Unlikely. She just turned thirteen. She’s attractive, but people want babies, or maybe toddlers, not teenagers.”

“Is that all you’re having?” Michelle asked her friend Janice as they stood in the lunch line. Janice had only a carton of milk. “You can’t be on a diet. You’re skinny as it is.”

“This is all I have money for,” Janice replied, looking downcast.

“I’d loan you some, but I barely have enough for my own lunch. Didn’t your parents give you money for the week?”

“They did, but I-I l-lost s-some of it,” Janice stammered as tears came to her eyes. “My father said it’s my responsibility to take care of my cash.”

“Tell you what,” Michelle said, thinking that Janice wasn’t telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. “I’m not that hungry. I’ll split...”

Michelle was interrupted when a boy yanked on her ponytail and snatched the money from her hand. He and another boy started laughing as they backed away. No student intervened on Michelle’s behalf.

Moving so quickly she was almost a blur, Michelle dropped her tray, kicked the thief in the groin, and as he leaned forward in agony, she punched him in the face. Blood spurted.

The vice-principal came running over, demanding to know what was going on. Several students began talking at once.

“Suspended again!” Mrs. Crendale, Michelle’s foster mother, said indignantly. “You broke Tommy’s nose! Why can’t you stay out of trouble?”

“He deserved it,” Michelle declared. “He came up behind me and pulled my hair. It really hurt! Then he grabbed my lunch money. He’s a complete jerk. Janice told me afterward that last week he and Billy posted some stuff about her which made her seem like a slut. They said they’d keep doing it if she didn’t give them money. Today she didn’t have enough to buy lunch for herself.”

“Why didn’t Janice report them?”

“She’s afraid to. Her mother saw the original posts and believed them. Her parents cut her allowance in half.”

“You’re making that up,” Mrs. Crendale stated, shaking her finger at Michelle. “Billy and Tommy wouldn’t do that. Yes, they’re a little wild, but they come from good families. They don’t need to steal money. This is the second time you’ve been suspended. You’re grounded indefinitely. Your teachers sent over your assignments. Go to your room. No phone, no television, no computer, no friends over. You may leave your room only to use the bathroom, to come down for meals, and to return to school once the suspension ends. You are to come home immediately after school. You’ll be on dishwashing duty for the next week. After that, if you’ve behaved yourself and all your homework is completed, we’ll see.”

Michelle stomped up to her room, slammed the door shut, and locked it. *It’s so unfair*, she thought, as she paced back and forth. *Nobody ever takes my side. A bunch of kids saw what Tommy did. They all laughed and told the vice-principal that I overreacted. Even Janice was afraid to support me.*

As Michelle continued to pace, she became more and more angry. Suddenly her entire body started to tingle. She began having trouble breathing. The sensation became so extreme she thought she must be dying. She fell to her hands and knees, trembling all over. Then...

The leopard looked around wildly. She was trapped in a small enclosure and was bound in something that inhibited her movements. In a panic she ripped at the binding with her powerful jaws. They came away easily and in seconds she was free. She hunkered down behind the bed, her tail swishing back and forth, and waited for the attack. It never came.

After a while the leopard calmed down and took stock of her surroundings. She recognized that she was in Michelle’s room. She knew that Michelle had been angry. Somehow, she knew Michelle was very important. Michelle became the focus of her thoughts. Then...

Michelle found herself on the floor of her room. Her heart pounded, and she could barely catch her breath. Eventually her breathing and heart rate returned to normal. She got unsteadily to her feet.

Did I just hallucinate about turning into a leopard? How come I’m naked? Why are my clothes torn to shreds and scattered around the room?

Michelle was able to recall the leopard’s thoughts, but knew the animal was not able to reason the way a human can. Instinctively she knew telling anyone about it would be a disaster. Either they’d lock her up as a nutcase or take her away for “scientific study.”

Over the next two weeks Michelle used her isolation status to practice her newfound ability. The more she did it, the easier *changing* form became. She discovered that it always took a lot out of her, so multiple *changes* within a small timeframe were a bad idea. She could give the leopard

instructions, which the cat would obey, but after a while the animal became confused. At that point she usually *changed* back to Michelle.

By experimentation, Michelle found that while she was in leopard form knives would not penetrate her hide. She “borrowed” a silver fork from Mrs. Crendale’s collection. The leopard held the fork in her mouth and was able to make the tines pierce the skin of her paw.

“It’s like the old Lon Chaney werewolf movies, Michelle thought, once she was back as a human. It takes silver to kill a werewolf. Probably the same for a were-leopard.”

“Here, Michelle,” Janice said with a forlorn expression. “I want you to have this.” She handed a nearly new laptop computer to Michelle. “The one you’ve been using is really old. You’re the only one who takes my side. I’d give you my clothes, but they wouldn’t fit.”

“You don’t have to give me stuff...” Michelle started to reply. Then it dawned on her. *Holy crap! She’s going to kill herself! I’ve got to find some way to talk her out of it.*

“I want you to have it,” Janice insisted.

“You’re planning to hurt yourself. You don’t have to do that. It’s Tommy and Billy again, right? I can help you.”

“Nobody can help,” Janice said as she began to cry.

“You know I broke Tommy’s nose. I can do the same or worse to both of them. I’ll get them to back off. I swear I can do it.”

“You got in a lucky punch. They’re both way bigger than you. They’ve been posting stuff about me again. They photo shopped some pictures of me. They posted one of them. It made my complexion look even worse than it really is. They made it look like my entire face is covered in zits. With my allowance cut it half, I don’t have the money to pay them. Now other kids are beginning to make fun of me. I hate going to school. You’re the only one who’s nice to me.”

“You could go to the police.”

“They have other pictures which make me look naked. If they posted those my parents would send me to a military school for girls. I heard them talking about it. It’s practically a prison. My father is really strict.”

“Wait a couple of days and give me a chance to fix things,” Michelle implored. Then an idea came to her. “Better yet, come to my house after school today. We’ll tell Mrs. Crendale that I’m still behind in schoolwork, and you’re going to help me catch up. I’m sure she’ll allow it. I’ll show you something that you’ll have trouble believing.”

“Well, well, well,” Tommy said, licking his lips in anticipation. He closed the cabin door. “You brought the girl who broke my nose. I thought you were kidding when you said you could do that. But don’t think you can exchange her for yourself. Now we have both of you.” He and Billy both produced large knives. “In case you decide to try anything, we’ll be ready, and we’re not afraid to use these. Both of you, give us all your money.”

In one motion Michelle discarded her clothes. Then came a *whump* sound. Where Michelle had been was a full-grown leopard. The boys shrieked. The smell of urine and feces permeated the air as they soiled themselves. Billy ran for the door. The cat blocked the way. He tried to stab her with his knife, but it wouldn’t penetrate. She knocked it aside and raked his body with her claws, ripping his shirt and putting a gash in his side. He started to cry.

“I didn’t tell you that I’m a witch,” Janice said with a malicious grin. “I was hoping to keep that a secret, but you left me no choice. I summoned a demon from Hell. I had it take Michelle’s form so you wouldn’t be scared away. If you want to get out of this in one piece, you’ll do everything I say. Is that clear?”

“Y-y-yes,” Tommy stammered.

Billy, still blubbing, began to beg for his life, saying it was all Tommy’s idea.

“Shut up, dickwad,” Janice barked. “First of all, remove all the pictures you have of me, including anything you might’ve backed up to the cloud.”

The boys frantically took out their phones and began pushing buttons. Tommy claimed he didn’t know how to delete from the cloud. The leopard growled and advanced on him. Billy showed him how to do it.

“Next, give me back the money you took from me,” Janice said, holding out her hand.

“We, we don’t have it all,” Billy said. “We spent some.”

“Give me what you have. You can give me the rest later. Or else...”

The boys complied. Janice counted it and put it in her pocket.”

“Now French kiss each other,” Janice ordered.

They were reluctant at first, but that changed when the cat snarled and showed her formidable teeth. Janice used her phone to take a video of the boys’ action.

“I’m warning you,” Janice said. “If any more disgusting posts or pictures of me show up where anyone can see it, this video goes viral. Also, when you run across the actual Michelle at

school, you'll leave her alone. Otherwise, the next creature I summon will make this one seem like a pussycat. Get out of here before I get really angry. You both stink."

"I can't thank you enough," Janice said, hugging Michelle. The boys were gone and Michelle was back in human form. "I didn't think anyone could get me out of this, but you did. Whatever you want that I can deliver is yours."

"You don't owe me anything," Michelle replied. "This was the most fun I've had in a long time. But I have to remind you. If you tell anyone about this, they won't believe you, and you might be put away."

"Don't worry, your secret is safe with me," Janice assured her.

It's great having this power awakened in me, Michelle thought. But the fewer people who know about it, the better off I'll be. I'll have to be careful as to how I use it.

About Stephen Tillman: Stephen Tillman is a professor of Mathematics at Wilkes University. He holds a Ph.D. in mathematics from Brown University. An avid reader of mysteries and science fiction, he has published several stories in both genres. His novels, *Leopard's Daughter* and *Leopard's Revenge* have been published by Azure Spider Publications.

Dark Poetry

Afflicted

By Emily Jones

What do you do when words aren't enough?
When feelings try to claw their way out of your hands
They twitch restlessly beside you, desperate to express their torment
But your fingers are as useless as the words that won't come
Can't taste destruction, can't summon silence
Left alone to cry and thrash and hate the things inside of you
If you can't set fire to the world, rip the paint off its flesh
Piece by jagged piece until its powder white and bare
Destroy what you can't create until you can scream
Writing in a tongue that has lost its sense
Strike the page until your fingers bleed black
Your heart won't know peace if you can't carve out the pain
And to exist without peace is to exist without sanity
Your bones blind and broken, too deaf to drink the cure

Always

By Emily Jones

Keep your heart from falling for their words and outstretched palm
The good will misdirect you, you're a fool to trust their charm
Listen to me closely, shut your mouth, don't be alarmed
Your life was meant for danger, I will always do you harm

I'll keep the air you breathe if you defy me- DON'T SPEAK!
Restrict you like a corset, choking you until you're weak
I'll shout into your ear instead of whispering like a snake
I'll make your life a hell you're never able to escape

I'm in the skin you bleed, in your thoughts and in your hate
Go cry yourself an ocean but you're mine, accept your fate
You can hang your pretty neck or throw yourself into a well
I'd stalk your soul in heaven, I would follow you to Hell

I'll always bring you pain, every second, every day
You need my striking hand; you know that I'm the only way
With every vibrant shade, you'll be strong and you will thrive
Bloody, broke and ragged, you'll be grateful I'm alive

Remember what I said, every single word is true
You'll blossom in the dark, your pains my greatest gift to you
Expect a chill of dread when I beat you black and blue
Remember what I said and you will thank me when I do

Twisted

By Emily Jones

I'm alone with your screams
The shadows twisting to reflect your pain
I find comfort in the sound
My home in the heart of your nightmares
We used to be the same
Quiet and free, soaring above the chaos
Then we were crippled, lost and crawling
Held prisoner in the frozen depths
Now I'm at one with the agony
The blood of despair keeping me warm
I thrive while you continue to fall
My soul disfigured by the dark
Soon you'll be ash beneath my feet
A sad memory in a world of horror

Unseen

By Emily Jones

*Lifeless words penned by blood
Left to rot before the blind and sightless
Darkness consumes my mind
Burning whatever light remains
I curl up alone in the storm
And hold myself like a mother would
Hateful and cursing, I'm bleeding
Bitter and broken – I can't stand the silence
It's turned on me like a childhood friend
Ripped through my spine and left me crippled*

Left me cold and afraid
Of the shadows that lurk under my bed
Desperate, I chewed off my tongue
Cut off my hands to stop them leading me astray
But still they whisper in my ear, plaguing my thoughts
Their wet laughter loud and hollow
I can't fight them anymore
I've no more blood to shed
Yet I fear their presence even in the afterlife
Their ugliness branded on my name
Where can I go?
Where will I finally be free?

About Emily Jones: Emily is a passionate writer who turns everything into an idea, even her darkest moments. She writes in many forms, from drabbles to novels, and enjoys exploring the darker side of genres. She has been published by The Horror Tree, Dark Holme Publishing, The Horror Zine and others.

Vengeance Gained

By Tom Kropp

In prison demonic possession became my soul's obsession.
To kill with a knife became my goal in life.
To watch him bleed as his soul was freed.
To hear him scream was my dream.
Together we did the crime, but he snitched to give me the time.
While I sat behind bars losing my young life, he gained a wife and lived right.
I lost both my time and mind.
I sold my soul in exchange for strength to continue my drive and survive.
In prison I lost it all and had no one I could even call.
My caged rage grew in might every long night.
Then came the night when he was in my sight.
He saw me and started to scream.
I jumped and thumped him with a punch I chucked that dunked in his stomach.
I dashed and slashed a gash that passed through his throat in a clean stroke.
He dropped like a rock as I continued to sock and chop with knuckles and knife taking his life.
I heard the siren and spun pulling my gun.
The cop's flock of shots clocked me.
The slugs plugged and shoved me.
I fell hearing the cop yell.
I looked over at my former friend, now dead.

I choked on the flood of blood in my lacerated lung.
I blacked out expecting oblivion.
I woke up in prison.
I had come full circle to achieve vengeance and would have to pay penance.

About Tom Kropp: Tom Kropp's work has appeared in *The Horror Zine*, *J Journal*, *Chiron Review*, *Churches*, *Children and Daddies*, *Down in the Dirt*, *Freedom Fiction Journal*, *Short-Story Me*, *Blood Moon Rising*, *Dark Harbor*, *Flash Phantoms* and others.. His play *Jailhouse Confessions* was performed at the Kennedy Center in 2019. He has numerous novels and audiobooks available. You can read more of his writings at <https://tomkropp.wordpress.com>.

Special Features

Behind the Mask: Why Michael Myers' Face Became One of Horror's Most Powerful Images

By Lee Coombs

Some horror villains need only a silhouette to give themselves away. Freddy has the fedora and razor glove. Jason has the hockey mask. Ghostface has that elongated white face.

But for me, none of them is quite as unsettling as Michael Myers.



Michael's mask shouldn't really work. It's plain, almost featureless and has none of the deliberately grotesque details we'd normally associate with a horror monster. Yet nearly five decades after *Halloween* first arrived in 1978, put that pale face in a dark doorway and you don't need to see a knife or hear somebody scream.

You already know exactly who is standing there.

And that's what makes the mask so bloody effective.

A Face With Nothing Behind It

One of the cleverest things about Michael Myers is that the mask gives us almost nothing to work with. There is no anger on his face. No smile. No visible enjoyment. No expression telling us what he's thinking.

Nothing.

That emptiness fits perfectly with the way Dr Loomis describes Michael in John Carpenter's original film. Loomis doesn't regard him as an ordinary murderer. He talks about looking into Michael's eyes and finding something completely absent of humanity.

Then Michael puts on a face that's just as empty.

Carpenter and cinematographer Dean Cundey understood exactly how to exploit it. Michael is frequently kept at a distance, partially hidden or allowed to emerge from darkness. One of my favorite moments in the original *Halloween* remains the scene where his white face gradually becomes visible behind Laurie Strode.

Very little actually happens.

And it's terrifying.

The lighting makes the mask look like a face materializing from nowhere. Give Michael an elaborate monster design, and I don't think that moment works nearly as well.

The Most Famous Cheap Mask in Horror

The story behind the original mask has become almost as famous as the film itself.

Production designer Tommy Lee Wallace modified a Captain Kirk mask, famously associated with William Shatner, widening the eye holes, altering the hair and painting the face white.

What emerged barely resembled the original product. More importantly, it didn't really resemble a person anymore.

That's the genius of it.

Michael isn't frightening because his mask looks realistic. He's frightening because it sits somewhere between a human face and something completely lifeless. We know there's a man underneath it, but the mask removes the visual cues we'd normally use to understand another person.

You can't reason with that face. You can't tell whether it's angry. You can't even tell whether it's enjoying itself.

It simply watches.

When the Mask Isn't Quite Right

The *Halloween* sequels also accidentally proved how important that original design was.

Over the years we've seen plenty of variations on Michael's face. Some worked extremely well. Others shouldn't be discussed without appropriate counseling.

Horror fans can argue endlessly about which Michael Myers mask is best, and we frequently do. Hair shape, eye holes, color, weathering — details that would sound ridiculous to anybody outside horror fandom become incredibly important.

There's a reason for that.

Change Freddy's jumper slightly, and he's still Freddy. Put Jason in a slightly different hockey mask, and most audiences will happily go along with it.

Michael's mask is different because **the blankness is the character**.

Get the proportions wrong or allow too much expression into the sculpt and something immediately feels off. It stops looking like the Shape and starts looking like somebody wearing a Michael Myers costume.

Later films understood this particularly well. The weathered mask used for Michael's return in 2018 retained the original's essential identity while letting decades of damage become part of its look.

It had aged.

Michael hadn't changed.

The Mask Became Bigger Than Halloween

What I find remarkable now is how far that image has travelled beyond Carpenter's original movie.

You don't have to be a devoted *Halloween* fan to recognize Michael Myers.

Walk into a Halloween shop in October, and there he is. Horror conventions are full of him. The mask appears on posters, shirts, toys, figures and collectables. Fans spend serious money chasing increasingly accurate reproductions of something that began as an inexpensive mask modified for a low-budget horror film.

That's an extraordinary legacy for such a simple design.

But perhaps simplicity is exactly why it survived.

Michael's face isn't tied to one particular decade's idea of what a monster should look like. It doesn't rely on complicated prosthetics that eventually become dated. No elaborate creature design demands explanation.

It's just a white face in the darkness.

Our imagination provides everything else.

The Shape Behind the Face

I love plenty of horror villains, and many of them are far more visually elaborate than Michael Myers.

But Michael taught horror an important lesson.

Sometimes showing us less gives us considerably more to fear.

That mask turns a man into the Shape. It removes personality rather than adding it. Nick Castle's physical performance in the original film completes the illusion: the measured movements, the stillness and that occasional curious tilt of the head make Michael feel like something studying human behavior rather than participating in it.

Take away the mask, and Michael is a man.

Put it back on and suddenly you're looking at something else.

Nearly 50 years after *Halloween*, filmmakers have given us monsters created with enormous budgets, extraordinary prosthetics and visual effects Carpenter could never have dreamed of having in 1978.

Yet somehow one of horror's most powerful images remains incredibly simple.

A dark hallway. A silent figure. And that blank white face staring back at you.

Sometimes that's all you bloody need.

About Lee Coombs: Lee Coombs is the founder and editor of Please Rewind, an independent movie site celebrating horror, film culture, and the movies many of us grew up with. When he's not writing about movies, he's usually finding another excuse to talk about the 1980s. Website: Please Rewind — <https://pleaserewindmovies.com>

Nightmare Gallery



**Artwork by Sandy
Reece**





Artwork by Sandy Reece



The Rose Files

The Ghost of Dungeon Rock

~ Rose Titus ~



Mostly everyone loves a good pirate story – and this story has everything – pirates, buried treasure, dark history, *and even ghosts!*

Lynn, Massachusetts is an ordinary city, and it has typical city problems. It has an unfortunate history and reputation with drugs and crime. There is an old saying, “Lynn, Lynn, the city of sin.” Coincidentally, it is close to Salem, Massachusetts, another city with an unfortunate history and reputation. But that’s a different story. Lynn is near the sea, which of course means pirates. And pirates are definitely outlaw types. Lynn had a skeezy reputation even back in the olden days. So, Lynn is a good place for pirates to hide out and conduct whatever dishonest business they would historically get themselves into.

But Lynn is not all bad. One nice and enjoyable feature of Lynn is the Lynn Woods, a forest of over 2,000 acres available for the public with scenic walking trails. And there to be found in the Lynn Forest is the notorious Dungeon Rock. This is a rock formation with a cave where allegedly a pirate named Thomas Veale hid his treasure during the 1600’s, but then he himself was buried alive during an earthquake.

The pirate Tom Veale used the cave in the woods to also hide out from the law. This legend is brought to us from a book written in 1829 by Alonzo Lewis called *The History of Lynn*.

According to the author Lewis, Veale and three other pirates from his crew found this cave when they anchored their ship and rowed up the river in a small boat. They landed the boat and went into the forest, as witnessed by locals. The ship was gone the next day, but a note was left at an iron works placing an order for hatchets and other items to be created and then left at a location in exchange for silver. The iron workers did as requested; they left the items and then received their money. The pirates left the area but then came back months later and built a hideout in the Lynn Woods called “Pirate’s Glen.” There the bandits of the sea built a hut. They also had a garden and a well. They remained there for a while but then they were discovered by the law. Three of the men were apprehended, but Tom Veale escaped and went to hide in the cave at Dungeon Rock.



Veale resided in the cave and actually worked as a shoemaker since he was no longer able to earn a dishonest living as a pirate, and he would wander into town to purchase supplies. Unfortunately for Veale, in 1658, an earthquake collapsed part of the cave, burying him within it.

All these events are according to the author Alonzo Lewis, but there is no other evidence of these events to be found elsewhere. And ever since that time, people have been trying to get at the treasure which is supposedly buried in the cave along with the pirate.

In the 1850's, a spiritualist named Hiram Marble bought the land where this cave is located, and with the help of his son began digging. They even used dynamite to blast away at the rock. Marble believed that he was receiving communication from the ghosts of the pirates – both Thomas Veale and Captain Harris, instructing him to go after the treasure, where to look, and how to find it. Marble even used the services of a medium to help communicate with the ghosts.



Hiram Marble and his son Edwin went on and on digging and searching for many years. He even built himself a house near the cave along with a tool shed and storage for blast powder. After years of searching for this lost treasure, all his savings were used up and gone. He opened the site up to visitors and charged twenty-five cents to tour the cave. He even sold bonds for a dollar each, promising a share of the treasure when it was found.

Finally, they did find something. They found a cutlass – a type of sword that was popular with pirates back in the day.

They also found trouble. In 1855 Edwin was badly injured while attempting to use dynamite for their excavation of the cave, and it detonated prematurely. He suffered broken bones and damage to his face and neck.

But they kept at it, intrepid as they were. They were determined to find the pirate's hidden treasure and make themselves filthy rich. Their activities continued on into the 1860's -- digging, searching, contacting spirits through mediums in order to obtain instructions and advice from the Far Beyond.

Curious people would visit the excavation site and Marble and son would inform the visitors that they were receiving instructions on which way to dig from mediums and ghosts.

In 1866, the tunnel they were digging went to 140 feet long, and the newspaper the Public Ledger reported on the events, describing Hiram as a "blasted old fool." And in 1868 another newspaper, the Reading Eagle, reported that the "deluded Marble is still blasting out Dungeon Rock" and that the "misguidance of the spirits has changed his direction twenty times within the past year."

And yet Hiram continued on with his mad quest. He passed away in 1868, aged 65, without achieving the riches that he so endlessly sought.

His son continued the search, and he also claimed the he was being advised by inhabitants of the spirit world. But then he finally admitted that the ghost of Tom Veale was no longer instructing him, and that the spectral pirate told him to rely on his own intuition. Edwin's own health began to fail. By this time the tunnel was so deep that water began to pour in, and he had to carry the water out by hand, carrying it out in pails. Like his father, he went on until he finally passed away in 1880, aged 49. The treasure, if it even existed at all, was never found.

Edwin was buried at Dungeon Rock, as that was his final wish.

In 1881, the city obtained the land around Dungeon Rock and it became a 2,200 acre park known as Lynn Woods Reservation. But Edwin's widow still lived nearby and she herself was also a practicing spiritualist. Mrs. Marble still believed that the treasure might be down there, somewhere...

In these modern times, the tunnel is supposed to be now open for the public to visit. There is an iron gate that protects the entrance, but it is supposed to be open for exploration.

And so one day I decided to do a little exploration myself. I went with a friend who was also interested in this ancient mystery to check this out. We hiked the long distance through the scenic forest, in oppressive 98 degree heat and humidity, hoping not to get ourselves lost. Finally, we found the cave – the focus of so much trouble over the centuries. We went into the cave and I brought a strong halogen flashlight – similar to the type used by Mulder and Scully on the X-Files – to have a good look down that murky and mysterious tunnel. We didn't expect to see any ghosts or find any gold or meet any pirates. We just wanted to have a good look down into the dark, spooky and infamous place.



And when we got there, the iron door that closed the cave off to the world was locked shut. And then I realized we had the same problem as Hiram Marble – all that effort and at the end we found nothing. At least we didn't spend decades digging and hoping.

Perhaps the lesson in this story is to never take financial advice from a ghost – *especially the ghost of a pirate.*

If you want to learn more about the Ghost of Dungeon Rock, check out these resources:

1. Brook, Rebecca Beatrice, *Dungeon Rock in Lynn, Massachusetts*, History of Massachusetts Blog, June 7, 2021.
2. Jagolinzer, Jordyn, *Dungeon Rock in Lynn, Massachusetts Started With a Pirate Ghost and a Treasure Hunt*, CBS News .com, September 5, 2024.
3. Author not named, *The Pirate Ghost of Dungeon Rock*, Salem Ghosts .com, April 16, 2025.

Terror Tube

Monster Squad 1976 TV Series

By Kraven: The She-Wolf

Not to be confused with the popular 1987 classic horror/comedy of the same name, but a completely different beast all together. Monster Squad, the television series, was a 1976 Saturday morning kids show that bore the title name 11 years before the movie we all so love. The idea was what if Frankenstein, Dracula, and the Wolfman got together to fight crime and were the good guys of this story.



It made its debut on the morning of September 11, 1976 on NBC as a live action half hour children's show. For some of us little ones at that time, this was our first introduction to these classic monsters and it was done in a fun, funny and kid friendly way. The premise of the show was that Frank and company were figures in a wax museum who were brought to life by a special crime computer machine hidden by the night watchman in a large stone sarcophagus. When turned on, the wax figures would come to life and with the help from Walt, the night watchman. They would hit the streets and fight the bad guy of the week. I know this sounds crazy but this was a real show back then. Ah, the 70's, what a time to be alive!

The monsters were played by Michael Lane as Frank, Henry Polic as Drac, and Buck Kartalian as Bruce W. Wolf aka the wolfman. An amusing note here, actor Michael Lane who played Frank on Monster Squad also played the Frankenstein Monster in the movie Frankenstein 1970. His hulking 6-foot 8 frame made him ideal to play such a large imposing creature. He was also once a pro wrestler as well. Leading the team of crime fight monsters was Walt, the museum night watchman, played by Fred Grandy just before sailing the blue sea on the television series The Love Boat in 1977. After playing around classic monsters and hanging out on The Love Boat, Fred Grandy went on to become a member of the House of Representatives for Iowa.



Each week the Monster Squad would take on a new and wacky villain like the male/ female Albert/ Alberta, a funny hermaphrodite character that had the likeness of a man on one side of his body and a woman on the other side. Whichever side faced the camera, that was the personality we saw talking. If Albert spoke, the individual spoke in a male voice and when he turned around,

he spoke with and showed the female side complete with long dress and talked with a women's voice. Other campy bad guys were The Weatherman, Ultra Witch, and Queen Bee to name a few.

The show was like if you took the campy antics of Adam West's Batman from the 60's and mixed it with the Universal Monsters from the 30's and 40's and you get the idea of what this show was like and there was a good reason for that. This series was the brain child of Stanley Ralph Ross, the main writer for the 60's Batman show. Ross wrote most of the Batman episodes, most notable the ones featuring Catwoman. In fact, Catwoman actress Julie Newmar (the very first Catwoman actress) played the supervillain Ultra Witch on Monster Squad.



Although a fun little show, it ran on NBC for only one season with just 13 episodes produced. Although today mainly forgotten, even by fans, the show did get a bootleg VHS copy and DVD and can be seen on YouTube for free. If you have never seen this little gem from the mid 70's, seek it out. As silly as it is, the show has a certain charm to it and it's nice to see our classic Monsters play the good guys for once.

Lingering

By Amy Tryphena

Ghosts of the old world make themselves known upon Penwith moor. Through their standing stones and cairns, ancient menhirs paying homage to a prehistoric past.

Every year from Mid-Summer to Mabon eve lights are seen dancing from Madron to Morvah. A procession of lanterns trickling its way across Bosulow Common, past Men an Tol and Men Scryfa. Onto Boskednan where there stands a gateway. A doorway between worlds.

The creak of a rusty door hinge, followed by the sound of crunching footsteps upon gravel, told Simon he was, again, the last to be ready. Fumbling in panic, he grabbed his rucksack off the bed and dropped his phone unnoticed onto the floor. He flung himself out the door of his holiday cabin.

He caught up to the group waiting for him by the gate of the glamping site.

“Sorry guys - I mean ladies as well of course. Sorry – sorry everyone.”

He pulled his coat on over his head, catching his head in the arm hole. Blinded, he spun around, tripping on the rucksack at his feet. He extricated himself from his waterproof to see the smirks on the group’s faces. Mortified, his fair complexion flashed red. Heat rose up his neck to meet his cheeks.

“Right,” the self-appointed leader boomed.

“In case anyone wasn’t paying attention at dinner last night - I’ll go over the plan one more time. We are doing Madron moor today, following the tinner trail. It’s a fair old walk. We’ll be taking in some prehistoric monuments and Ding-Dong mine. I’ve sent you the route on your phones, use your map app if you get separated from the group. But try to stick together - and Simon – that means you too hey.”

There were sniggers. Simon flushed crimson again.

The walkers set out up Gear Hill toward the remote heathland of Penwith moors. They headed north up a tree lined lane that passed for a road.

As the walkers ascended, the road became narrower and collapsed into pitted broken ground, potholes full of rainwater swarmed by midges. Toward the common the trees thinned out revealing a view of craggy, granite peaked Carns. Now late summer, the bracken had started to wane to a rusty red, so when caught in the morning sunlight, flames appeared to dance upon the hillsides.

Crows cawed as they circled overhead, in the distance a pig squealed.

The road collapsed into a dirt track, lined with hedgerows swollen with blue blackthorn sloes and dripping with sticky puce blackberries. Ancient lichens and verdant mosses dressed the dry-stone granite walls. Simon couldn't help but stop to marvel at the flora. His colleagues didn't wait for him, forcing him to jog to catch up.

"Sorry, sorry," he panted.

They reached one of the derelict engine houses that littered the landscape, the detritus of an industrial past left to ruin. Nearby a stone-lined mine shaft sunk deep into the earth. Simon peered through the metal cage that capped the hole, swooning with vertigo as he peered down into the black. There was a glint in the darkness. He squinted, and for a split-second he thought he saw a pair of owl eyes blinking back at him. He drew back sharply and stumbled against the blackthorn bush. Its sharp, thick thorns pushed back.

"You alright there mate?"

Laughing it off he answered, "Yeah I err - I just tripped, it's all good."

Summer's twilight was turning the heathland ahead of them was a swathe of green gorse sprinkled with yellow flowers, patched with heather which had started to morph into its autumn lilacs on the hillsides.

The moors were bare of trees, except for the odd lone hawthorn, standing squat and gnarly, permanently windblown by the fierce south-westerlies.

They left the byway onto a marshy footpath, the mud sucking at their feet. The sodden peaty turf was snaked with streams that ran throughout the heathland. Long coarse stems of grass brushed at their legs; depositing seeds as they navigated the trail.

The humid air sat close, making the party sticky with sweat. Simon had dragged his coat back off over his head to fix around his waist.

Thirsty, they agreed to take a pit stop next to some large granite slabs with veins of quartz that glinted in the sunlight.

As Simon lay back enjoying the warmth of the rock, he was startled by a deep gravelly voice behind him.

"Alright? Nice day for it innee."

Behind him stood a swarthy, wizened old man, with sun-baked, deeply lined skin the colour of thick syrup, with startling topaz eyes. A cloud of white hair stood straight up on his head. He leant upon a stick of twisted hawthorn with a smirk upon his face.

"Wasson here then?" he asked.

“Oh, um. Sorry,” Simon mumbled unsure what to say.

Fortunately, another member of the walking party jumped in.

“Hello – Good Morning! We’ve walked up from the campsite, hoping to take in a few of the local sights.”

“Ah tourists! Lovely. Where’d you all come from then?”

“Milton Keynes. We are on a work team- bonding trip,” Simon replied.

“Oh, is it. Mmmm.” He paused. “Going to see Boskednan circle are eee?”

“The Nine Maidens - yes, that’s the plan.”

“You know these were part of a cairn?” he said gesturing to the granite slabs.

“What, a grave?” Simon asked.

“Well, some might say that. Others might tell you a portal to another world. Best to show respect. You don’t want to upset the small folk. Wear an item of clothing inside out when walking the moors, that’ll save you from being pisky-led that will.”

“Okay, thanks,” Simon replied. Despite not knowing what on earth the peculiar old man was talking about.

There was an awkward silence as the man continued to stand there watching the group pack away their water.

“So anyway, we must get on. Nice to meet you.”

They waited for the stranger to take the hint and leave but he just continued to stand there with a queer smirk upon his face. Instead, the group took their leave and started walking. Simon turned to see the man still there watching.

“Strange guy,” he said to his colleague.

“Nah, just some crazy old local, trying to scare the tourists with silly tales,” she replied.

“Hey,” she called to the rest.

“We should do that; it’ll be a laugh.”

“What - wear our clothes inside out?” Simon asked.

“Just our coats or jumpers. Go on it’ll be funny.”

Laughing the party agreed and Simon reversed his coat.

Later that afternoon the horizon blurred, and the blue sky faded to grey, as the atmosphere pressed closer. Slowly the air filled with beads of moisture as the sea fog pushed in. Despite the damp, the humidity forced Simon to remove his coat again.

He continued to be enraptured by the moorland flowers and fungi, but felt confident he wouldn't lose the group, as their incongruous wet weather gear stood out, garish against the heathland colours.

A glossy orange mushroom drew his eye off the path. He couldn't resist bending to inspect the specimen.

"A parrot wax-cap," he spoke aloud to himself, gently stroking its slimy neon dome.

The rest of the group were now far ahead. He stood to find himself enveloped in a thick damp shroud reducing his view to only a couple of metres. He spun, panicked. Disorientated, he wasn't even sure which way it was to the path. He stumbled in one direction and soon found himself embroiled in a gorse bush, the spiny thorns snatching at his trousers and refusing to let go. He pulled himself free and found his way to what he presumed was the footpath.

No landmarks were visible, not even the granite peaked top of Carn Galva which usually dominated the landscape. He could only guess at which direction to go. He shouted for his companions, but the fog absorbed the sound. Swelling, oppressive, it weighed heavy upon him. Pushing tendrils into his nose and mouth, choking him with dread.

With no landmarks, or sun, visible to navigate, he may as well have been on an alien planet. As if he had crossed the threshold into another eerie pale dimension.

His heart thundering against his chest, he had no choice but to keep moving.

It could have been minutes; or it could have been hours that he walked. He had no idea. He felt dislocated from space and time. The world just a thick cloud to wade through.

Suddenly little bright smudges appeared, like little fireflies, dancing in the mire. His breath caught with hope, relieved to see something other than gloom. He changed direction and headed toward the lights. Staggering and stumbling through the undergrowth, sinking and squelching through the sodden ground he forged on.

The odour of meats cooking, wood smoke and other wonderful scents that he could not place, reached his nose. As the scents grew thicker, he could hear the sound of laughter, raucous and hearty, mingled with drumming and the jingling of bells.

Drawn to the safety of the gathering, he followed the lights and alluring aromas.

The bank of fog came abruptly to an end. Like he stepped through a curtain to reveal a scene beyond comprehension, lit up in the pearly moonlight.

The black night sky was peppered with a million stars, but something about the celestial vista looked different, out of place. It was not the Milky Way humans had observed since the beginning of time.

Ahead there was a circle of eleven granite stones, streaked with iridescent white quartz. Nine of the stones were four to five foot tall except for a pair that stood in their grandeur over seven foot tall. Strung with a festival of lights that twinkled in a riot of colour. In the centre of the stones, he saw what seemed like a circle of drummers with people inside them dancing around a fierce fire. Tall flames electric blue and ruby red licked at the sky.

There was something deeply disconcerting about the sight, but overjoyed to be found. Simon dismissed those thoughts. He raised his arms above his head and shouted to the gathering.

“Hello there! Please, I need your help!”

There was no reaction from any of the revellers. They probably couldn’t hear him over the drumming he reasoned

He got closer to the stone circle and stood upon one of 3 great granite slabs lying in the heather to get a better view of the party and catch their attention. He soon wished he hadn’t.

As he shouted a second time, the drumming stopped, the dancers froze, and every peculiar face turned toward him. Only now he realised the people were only three-foot high at the most. Some were swarthy and squat, with ancient, deeply lined, leathery faces, others willowy with peachy fair skin. Dressed in an unusual garb, an assortment of garments, woven from grass fronds, stitched with a patchwork of lichens and luminous green velvet moss. Wide, unblinking, owl shaped eyes fixed upon him. Their lips pulled back to reveal yellow, jagged, needle teeth.

Simon’s head rung with confusion then panic. Frozen to the spot, like one of those nightmares where limbs don’t do as they are willed.

He spotted what was spit-roasting upon the fire in the centre of the revellers. Rotating on a spit was what looked like a dark-pink-skinned human, but with the ears and snout of a pig, the cloven hooves of a goat and the tail of a rat. His mouth gaped; he wanted to scream but a fist of fear was lodged in his throat. Instead, he retched and vomited on his shoes.

As he spat the last of the bile out, a hand snaked out of the heather to seize his ankle and yanked him down off the rock.

Instead of hitting the ground he spun like a whirling dervish, and tumbled down into the earth that parted before him. He was in a whirlwind of hands grabbing, pinching, clawing, slapping, gouging at his eyes and flesh. He could feel clumps of hair being pulled from his scalp.

Blood dribbled down his face as he spun and spun. Sharp needle teeth sunk into his arms and legs, clawed nails sliced at him- carving canyons down his back. The torment was relentless.

His head swam with pain, and he could taste iron, earth and blood. Squeals of laughter and hooting rang in his ears. It could have gone on for hours, it could have gone on for days. He could feel darkness calling, promising to release him from his pain. He gave in and fell unconscious.

He awoke cloaked in fog. Cocooned in a fetal position. The world was silent and still. The pain had gone but his head was as thick as the gloom. He was confused. It felt like an age had passed but he presumed it was the day after the night before.

He sat up and through the mire he could make out a ring of jagged lichen granite menhirs surrounding him. They had lost their glimmer and stature in the daylight. Now just a collapsing testament to an ancient age long forgotten. Several had fallen and were lying prone. A crow was sitting on the largest, regarding him with one obsidian eye. He rocked himself to his hands and knees, head swooning as if he were drunk. A wave of nausea overcame him, and he lay back upon the soft ground.

Voices approached.

“Oh wow, here it is! Boskednan.”

“The stone circle, I can’t believe we found it in this weather.”

“God knows where Simon’s got to though.”

“What’s that there in the centre? That red thing?”

“Shit, that’s Simon!”

“Simon, bro, what are you doing there?”

His head full of cotton wool, Simon just gaped at the walkers as they entered the circle, unable to piece together the puzzle in his confusion.

“Mate! Are we pleased to see you. We lost sight of you about an hour ago and just hoped you was somewhere behind us.”

Simon, with a rush of recognition, burst into tears. Clambering to his feet, sobbing with relief, he lurched toward the group and clutched to the first person he reached.

“Alright mate, steady on. You okay?” the man asked, returning his colleague’s unexpected embrace.

“You look like shit, why are your clothes all messed up?” he asked Simon.

“Hmmm. You smell good though, like a hog roast. You’re making my mouth water - Let’s head back to the site and get the BBQ going.”

For the second time, Simon vomited upon his shoes.

About Amy Tryphena: Amy Tryphena is a Cornish writer who explores contemporary imaginings of Cornish folklore, prehistory and enigmatic megaliths in her short fiction and non-fiction writing. When she is not reading or writing she can be found outdoors, exploring Cornwall's bountiful beauty and rich historical landscapes. She's published in Literally Stories, Close 2 the Bone, Northern Earth, Elsewhere-Journal, The Clearing, Mande and Asylum magazine. She can be found on Bluesky - [@realkernow.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/profile/realkernow.bsky.social)

The Unwritten Epiphany

By Rajeshwar Prasad

Professor Robert was a classic example of a man from the very core of the academic world that had been created by tradition. For 27 years, his voice would be heard as one of the most distinguished and formal professors at Blackwood University. The polite, though sometimes distant, interactions between him and his students, the crisp rustle of the lecture notes and the prompt delivery of his subject would be among the numerous and varied things the halls of the University would witness.

He was teaching knowledge theory through his Epistemology course, and basically, Robert was not very far from reality when he made his decision or statement. Room 4 was certainly the place Robert knew the reality of – the paint that was coming off the wall by the window, the constant sound made by the third chair from the left of the second row, the regular transformation of afternoon light across the used oak lectern.

Across every single one of the twenty-seven years, with the changing of autumns and the falling leaves, and the coming of spring and the new faces, Professor Robert had not once dreamt of or even thought about ghosts. He found such ideas preposterous – ghosts that suddenly appear, leftover ectoplasm, the retaliating whisper of the invisible. His worldview was one of visible things, reasoning, and evidence. Ghosts were just something from dime novels and the imaginations of superstitious people, not the intelligent ones from Blackwood University.

He used to make fun of the matter sometimes, in company with other professors, that if a ghost ever appeared in his classroom, he would immediately give it a research paper to work on. The notion itself was crazy. His space for instruction was governed by reason, a lack of space for absurdity, and nothing immeasurable could occupy the students' minds.

Just another Tuesday, the accident occurred with the sky grey and dreary. A dull standard daylight entered through the tall windows of Room 4. As usual, Ali was on time and with his leather satchel that he had put under his arm, he entered the classroom. In response to his brief and polite greeting, which he gave to the few students already in the classroom, he was given a mixed reception consisting of the most diligent teachers and the most strategically punctual students or a mixture of the early and the late.

He supported his notes on the lectern and, after adjusting his spectacles, he looked around the room. Forty faces – some bright with eagerness, others that appeared to have just woken up stared back at him. His knowledge of them, or to be more precise, their names, attendance, their inclination to ask questions or become trance during the boring part of Kant, either, was something he was very good at. He saw them as coal mines that supply the power he needs for the intellectual exercise he is engaged in, the cogs of the knowledge machine.

"Good afternoon," he said, "Today's topic is the illusion of certainty – how our senses, our very understanding of things, create worlds that are, in fact, very weak constructions. We will

review Plato's Cave, Descartes' evil demon, and the current effects of algorithmic curation on the shared epistemic landscape of humanity."

Robert started off his lecture with sufficient eloquence, well-chosen words, arguments supported by examples, and even humorous personal experiences. He was in his element, a conductor with an orchestra of brilliant minds; he led the students to the complicated world of philosophy. He talked about the vulnerability of collective belief, how the concept shared could be changed, influenced or even entirely created by being in agreement or through manipulation. He was using gestures, pacing, and his energy increased, thus the speed of his thoughts.

He stopped halfway through a sentence and glanced at a particularly confusing section of the notes. Only the noise of a few pens scratching and papers moving quietly could be heard. That was typical. Often, his students were either deeply engaged or at least quietly respectful. Without thinking, he cleared his throat, found his spot, and lifted his eyes to go on with his lecture.

His voice, however, was not steady.

But the silence wasn't just respectful; it was absolute. It was that silence which folds upon itself, that leaves no space for even the slightest sound, light, or soft humming included. No more scratching pens. No more rustling papers.

His eyes, used to looking all along rows of heads, encountered... nothing.

The seats were empty.

Not only mostly empty, not only sparsely populated, but completely and terrifyingly void of any occupants. Under the soft light, the worn oak of the desks glistened, reflecting nothing but the empty air. The backpack that had occupied the second chair of the front row, the half-eaten apple of the drowsy student next to the window, the bright yellow marker on the floor – all gone.

The room was quiet, still. But it was too quiet and too still.

Robert, who had to face a lot of scepticism, nihilism, and even the idea of non-existence in his lectures, felt a shiver that was beyond any philosophical idea. It was basic. It was cold. It was the creeping terror of something completely impossible.

His heart, which normally is a very calm and steady metronome of the intellect, bravely started knocking hard against his ribs. This is not real, he thought, his brain running through different logical explanations. I must be dreaming. A sudden blackout? Did they all get an emergency alert? However, the lights are turned on, they are hardly humming, and they cast a pale light onto the vacant seats. Normally, the door to the sounds coming from the tiny hallway is shut, but it is closed now.

Using both hands, he gripped the sides of the podium, his ungloved fingers showing the sign of stress by turning white. He could not believe what he saw, and thus, he tried to wash away the impossible image from his sight by one more blink, then two more, and finally, a very vigorous

blink. Then, he shook his head, looked around, and with his eyes wide open, he saw that Room 4 was still an empty room with echoes.

He moved away from the lectern with a loud, polished shoe step that he took first, and then another one. The linoleum floor was extremely silent, which made the sound of the clicks reverberate very loudly and was impossible to hear. He passed the first row, walked alongside it with his trembling hand and touched the smooth and cold wood of a desk to be sure with his hand. It was very clear that it was made of solid wood and that it was not occupied. But for how long was it unoccupied? Were they there just a few minutes ago? He recalled the last few sentences he'd uttered, their faces, their poses, seemed so fresh in memory. Now, it is as though they had never existed.

A drop of sweat from his forehead passed his temple and went down his face. His carefully arranged and very well-structured mind, which was sharpened by decades of critical thinking, started to weaken at the edges. Mass hysteria? A prank? But how? There was no movement and no sound of people leaving.

He turned around, looking quickly at each side, his breath getting tight in his throat. The marks on the floor caused by barely visible shoes, the posters on the wall that are already old, and the clock that should not be noticed ticking very quietly above the door – are all the way they should be. It was only the living presence, the twenty-three young humans who had occupied those seats that had disappeared. Completely and Without a Trace.

The silence involved him more and more, pressing on him like a heaviness and almost suffocating him. There was not just a lack of noise from the town, but a lack of life too. He felt the most horrible, overwhelming loneliness like he was the only person in existence on Earth, trapped in a place blessed by a perfect break in time that took everyone, except himself.

His throat made a whimper that he had never heard from his body before. It surprised him more. He, Professor Robert, who was until now convinced that ghosts do not exist, is given to experience something that is much worse than a mere ghostly apparition, namely, the ghost of reality, a reality which has just been visibly undone right before his very eyes.

He was suddenly overcome with panic – a feeling as cold and sharp as a knife which had stabbed into his chest. His whole brain kept yelling at him to get out of there as fast as possible. Somehow, he had the impression that he was still in the house, but this particular room, which was unfamiliar to him, was a place where the emptiness that was to take him was lying in wait. With his back, he went back very hard and thus he struck a desk with a thunderous bang that could be heard from far away like a shot, but still, he didn't dare to look back. He couldn't look back, and he only wanted to get out of there right away.

He had disorganised the area trying to locate the doorknob; his fingers were sweaty and slippery. He twisted it, pulled it open with force and rushed into the hallway. The hallway that was usually full of students or the distant noise of the activity was very quiet at that moment, and that was very different from the normal situation. A large and empty area. The terror increased.

He didn't run alongside the professors or anything. But with a speed and desperateness that were strange even to him, he dragged himself away from Room 4, from the void of silence that seemed to have devoured his students. He escaped, leaving behind the phantom of his daily routine, the old certainties, and the terrible and haunting question of what, in fact, had transpired.

The following days were so tangled with confused questions, glances of sympathy from the colleagues, and self-doubt that kept growing, that he hardly remembered them. No one else had witnessed anything. The students whose names he had written down were there. Just not in his class – they were in other classes, the library, their homes. They insisted that, as usual, they had come to his lecture. Their looks contained the mixture of uneasiness and bewilderment which was as if he was the only one who had suddenly disappeared from reality.

"Robert, do you seem quite?" The Dean's voice was dripping with feigned concern. "Maybe a sabbatical? A bit of rest?"

Robert was clear about the reality, even if no one else was. The students had disappeared. He was the only one there. The dread was tangible. Still, the outside world that he saw with his own eyes did not explain, nor did it confirm. He was in a frightening emptiness where his objective reality had become very different from everyone else's.

It was within that abyss that a new type of understanding began to take shape. It began as a slight pang of discomfort but had developed into a visceral and undeniable kind of knowing.

Robert had been a professor for twenty-seven years. He had taught by example, elaborated on complex theories, and challenged the basis of the intellectual discourse rigorously. Still, had he really noticed his students? Had he actually made a connection with them, not as the recipients of his knowledge, but as fellow humans, with their own fragile certainties, their own fears, their own dreams?

Thinking about the vacant seats made him feel that it was not only an absence in the physical sense. It was an echo of the absence of true involvement, of being there for each other. He had been there, in person, in mind. But was he present? Were his students truly there for him, or just filling the space, taking their information quietly?

His talks about "the illusion of certainty" would from then on be chillingly intimate. Only so, he had been so sure of his objectivity, his pedagogical effectiveness. And yet, that certainty was like a glass that had been smashed, with a very dark and very deep void showing through. Students hadn't gone out of the room, but in a deeper sense, they had always been just a bit unreachable, like ghosts in his corner of the eye, never really rooted in his immediate, human awareness.

The ghost was not a spirit. The ghost was the silence, which was the sign of his loneliness and the void of the connection which had never been strong. This was the reminder of his own intellectual arrogance, the belief that knowledge alone would be sufficient. The awful truth that he had been doing the teaching at them, not with them and consequently, by this act, he had made them invisible, was the thing which had upset him most.

The dreadful moment in Room 4 was not a scary supernatural incident but a very human one, which was supposed to open up his eyes. Or maybe his own unconscious had the same effect. It gave him a shock of such a power, such a totality, that he was left naked before the terrible truth of his own detachment as all his intellectual traps had been bypassed. He became aware of the terrifying truth of his own separation from the world when he lost the certainty and was left empty-handed.

The horror did not lie in the disappearance itself, but it was rather the recognition of what it meant: a life spent in comfortable and scholarly isolation where the human aspect was always second to the intellectual one. The fright was in recognising that not only had he been a ghost for almost three decades – an intellectual, but an emotional area.

The realisation, however, it was of absolute terror, yet it was the source of a new and very optimistic feeling. He had received a terrible, profound, and undeniable sign. A flash of insight hidden in a nightmare.

By all means, he ought to have taken a leave of absence, but he decided not to do the latter. Professor Robert went back to Blackwood University as if it were yesterday, but it was different this time. In his lectures, though he was still going deep into Epistemology, his mode was quite different, very subtly but essentially. Not only did he address questions to his students, but he, himself, became this inquiring mind. He did not just hear but really listened to their answers, worries, and perceptions. He looked for the quiet ones, those who reminded him of himself. He was there during the extra office hours, not for the clarification of the concepts, but also to talk to them as people. He got to know them beyond their roster numbers. He did not just look at their faces; instead, he really saw when the instant of apprehension, the spark of interest, and sometimes, the faint trace of hesitancy were there.

Not that he was interested in marks, but he formed a discussion group for the pure pleasure of shared inquiry and jointly constructing knowledge, one brick of human at a time. He permitted disagreement and even conflict, provided that it was done in an atmosphere where ideas were not just put forth, but also closely examined.

The phantoms of those students who were absent in Room 4 were still there in his mind, a very loud and clear reminder. However, now that he saw his students, he glimpsed different things. He perceived not merely intellects to be filled, but also hearts to be touched. He felt their humanity, powerful and impossible to ignore. He saw a common ground, a joint experience, and not just a platform for his performance.

He was still sceptical about ghosts from folklore or movies. Nevertheless, he realised that there are also other kinds of haunting – the ghost of silence, the ghost of no connections, the ghost of living without the whole life. Moreover, he understood that the greatest terror was not being alone in an empty room but being alone in a crowded one.

The day students disappeared from Professor Robert's sight will always be in his memory. It had been a moment of utmost terror in his life. However, at the same time, it was the experience that made him more human. It compelled him to confront his own ghost and to reconstruct his

universe not based on the superficiality of certainty but on the fragile, beautiful, and entirely human shared experience of life. Not only knowledge but the profound, frightening, and eventually optimistic truth that we feel real only when we really see others is what he embodied, the inexplicable of him, Professor Robert, and as a result, he became the one who was actually seen and really alive.

About Rajeshwas Prasad: **Rajeshwar Prasad** is a literary titan, acclaimed poet, playwright, novelist, thinker, philosopher, academician and columnist, who pioneered the Absurd Theatre in India, penning 14 thought-provoking books, 27 research articles and 16 other creations brimming with philosophical depth. His dedication to teaching and prolific writing, evidenced by numerous awards and publications.

Interviews

Interview with Horror Movie Host Slash Cooper

By AL J. Vermette

His name is Toby Long, but he is better known as Slash Cooper, the internet horror host of “Slash’s Graveyard Tales.” along with his faithful spider companion Dooey. Together they keep the spirit of TV horror hosting alive and well in the modern world.



AL J. Vermette: Please tell our readers how you first got into Horror Hosting?

Slash Cooper: Well HOWL, from a young wolf pup growing up here in Indiana in the 1980's, there was a horror host, in fact the longest running horror host in the world, Sammy Terry (Bob Carter). He hosted nightmare theater here on WTTV Channel 4 from 1962-1989. Then returned in 1980-1989 with the show then called just Sammy Terry. So, he was who I watched back then and still do, his son (Mark Carter) took over the role after his father passed in 2013. Mark has been playing Sammy since 2010. Also, of course Elvira, The Cryptkeeper from Tales from the Crypt and Joe Bob Briggs on Monster Vision.

AJV: Who or what inspired you to become a Horror Host yourself?

SC: Sammy Terry. I had the pleasure of meeting Bob three times. Once in 2006, 2007 and again in 2011. Sadly, not as Slash, but as myself. In 2011, I met Mark for the first time and attend stage shows he would put on. In 2014, I started talking to him and in 2019, began a professional friendship with him and even opened his 60th anniversary stage show like I previously mentioned.

AJV: How did you come up with your alter ego persona of Slash as your Horror Hosting avatar, and when did he first take center stage?

SC: Growing up watching all the names I listed, and I was also a pro wrestler for 23 years. So, after retiring from the ring, I needed an outlet for my creativity. I am an artist and a sculptor, and I come from the haunted house industry. I spent nearly 10 years working alongside John Jeffries, aka Mr. Scary. The originator of one of Indiana's most known haunted houses is the Harrodsburg Haunted House.

It ran 32 years. I look up to John and respect the HOWL out of him. I learned a lot about theatrics and set building etc. from him. So, in a way he was a mentor even when he didn't know it. So, in 2009, I was watching a lot of internet horror hosts, some good and some bad. I thought to myself, I could do this! So, one night at work, I came up with the idea of Slash and Slash's Graveyard Tales. I love nostalgia, for those who know me knows the show is all 80's based. So, I took inspiration from my favorite music artist Billy Idol. I took his hair style, and rockstar appeal, made it my own. With a little Jack Nicholson, some Sammy Terry, Joe Bob, Tales from the Crypt and Pee Wee's Playhouse and weaved them together and my sense of humor and the show is a product of that. But like I said, in 2009, it was just an idea on paper. So, it sat in my mind until 2014. I didn't know how to edit, or even how to get in contact with some of the people I was watching doing the host thing online. So finally, I just pulled the trigger and started building the set in my pole barn. I knew what I wanted to be in my head and slowly it all came to life. Then once that was done, I officially made my debut on Eerie House TV on Halloween night in 2015. So I think I can safely say Slash is Toby are one and the same just with the personality turned up a few notches.



Slash & Dooley



Slash alongside Sammy Terry

AJV: Please tell us about your co-host Dooley, and how he joined your show?

SC: Ahh Dooley...my little beady eyed big, butted co-host. I can tell you this, Dooley has been by my side since the very beginning. He came to me late one night to the graveyard here in Sleepy Hollow, Indiana and made his way into my cave. He started making himself right at home eating all my food. He would invite scratch n sniffs over (his females) and would be up for days slinging his web. For anyone who's watched the show knows Dooley loves the women. Doesn't matter what the quality of them are, it's about the quantity. But regardless, even though he's a pain in my rear, I still love him.

AJV: When did the first episode of Slash's Graveyard Tales make its premiere, and how did it feel to become part of the Horror Host community?

SC: Like I previously stated, it was Halloween night in 2015 on Eerie House TV ran by Dale Kay. I came in like a breath of fresh air and a lightning strike or, so I am told. Cause I was different in every way, other hosts noticed me and I was really received well and respected. That meant a lot to me. Other channels would message me and show interest as well.

AJV: What was your favorite episode of Slash's Graveyard Tales that you have done and why?

SC: Man, there is so many. You got to look at how many I have done in the last 12 years. Almost that entire 12 years there's been a show once a month or sometimes twice a month except in 2024-2025 due to life issues. To answer your question, myself along with another horror host Stevie Gothling, who plays Tim the Enchanter on his show called Scary as Hell Theater, we did a crossover episode where we hosted Spider Baby and I really had a lot of fun with that one. Also, we had a crossover episode in 2024 where my horror host brother, the big cheese Mr. Multo of Morbid Mansion Theater, where we hosted Puppet Master the Little Reich. We had a lot of fun in that episode, we even did a cover of Ozzy Osbourne's song Perry Mason. To add one more, I had a crossover episode with Roxsy Tyler in 2020 and with Evelyn Carnate. The one with Evelyn, her and Dooley teamed up and made me lose my precious hair! There's so many but those ones I treasure. Also in 2019, there was a crossover I did with Gruesome Graves, I appeared on his show The Haunted Hotel, where we hosted The Giant Gila Monster! We had a HOWL of a time!!

AJV: What movie have you not shown on the show that you would most like to host and why?

SC: Well, I have shown a lot that a lot of other hosts don't show. I work with a lot of indie directors, filmmakers and actors and get permission to host some mainstream or high end B movies. But if I could host some that's copyrighted it would be The Shining. I love that movie and love Nicholson's performance in it. Psycho 1 and 2. I love Anthony Perkins as Norman Bates. Three would probably be the mainstream slashers like Nightmare on Elm Street, Scream and Halloween to name a few. Since my show and the character of Slash can really fit in any timeline, any movie can work but those pop culture slasher classics would be a dream to host,

AJV: In all, how many episodes of Slash's Graveyard Tales have you produced over the years?

SC: Well like I stated usually 12 movies a year and going on 12th year give or take a few months around 144 movies.

AJV: Where can our readers see Slash's Graveyard Tales and watch you and Dooley do your thing?

SC: The fans and viewers can see yours ghoully and Dooley on the Slash's Graveyard Tales FB live page. The last Wednesday of the month known as Werewolf Wednesday at 8pm! You can search on Facebook Slash's Graveyard Tales, Slash Cooper, and Toby Long (Slash) oh and Dooley has a Facebook page now too. But via those links you can find me. I am very open with my fans and have an online presence and I am very responsive, if you send a message, I will reply. I love my fans, all the Ghoulters!

Special Features

The Great Pumpkin Turns 60!

By AL J. Vermette

On October 27th 2026, the classic holiday TV special “It’s The Great Pumpkin Charlie Brown” will turn 60 years old. The long, long running classic special about a boy named Linus who waits all night in a pumpkin patch believing that the magical spirit of Halloween itself known to him as The Great Pumpkin will come and bring forth gifts for all the good little boys and girls who believe in him. He is joined by his best friend’s sister Sally and together they wait, wait and wait some more but the phantom of the holiday never makes an appearance.



The 25 minute, 30 with commercials holiday special, made its world debut on CBS on October 27th, 1966 and became an instant holiday treasure. It followed nearly a year later after “A Charlie Brown Christmas” in 1965, kicking off a series of holiday themed specials like A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving (1973), It’s The Easter Beagle Charlie Brown (1974), and Be My Valentine Charlie Brown (1975).

The Great Pumpkin was the second holiday gift given to us kids at the time by Charles M. Schulz, a cartoonist turned television producer, who turned out all of the Charlie Brown network specials. The Great Pumpkin is broken up into three main segments. The main plot where we see Charlie Brown’s best friend Linus, who so believes in the Halloween spirit that he is willing to sit in a cold pumpkin patch all night waiting on it. However sadly for him and Charlie Brown’s little sister Sally, the phantom never comes.

The other plot line is Charlie Brown and the rest of his friends going out doing what kids do on Halloween night, they go trick or treating. While all the other children collect all sorts of goodies and candy, poor Charlie Brown keeps receiving rocks in his bag and it become the running joke of the show. After each house, the kids would say what they got and Charlie’s reply would always be “I got a rock!” After trick or treating is over, the gang all get together for a Halloween party where things still don’t go well for Charlie Brown when



his big hairless head is used as the template for a Jack O Lantern.

The last subplot of the special is focused on Charlie Brown's dog Snoopy, who pretends to be a World War One fighter pilot who is shot down over the French countryside and must make his way through enemy lines. While on his imaginal quest, Snoopy enters the pumpkin patch where Linus and Sally are still waiting for The Great Pumpkin. Poor Linus thinks it's the spirit of Halloween itself and faints in his excitement only to later find out that it was just Charlie Brown's beagle.

Like all of the Charlie Brown holiday specials, "It's The Great Pumpkin Charlie Brown" becomes a beloved classic and has been enjoyed by generation after generation since first airing in 1966. For us kids growing up in the 60's, 70's, 80's, 90's and into the 2000's, this was the go to show to watch each and every year around Halloween time. The special was fun, funny and it just had enough of the Halloween spirit to get you in the mood for something fun and spooky.

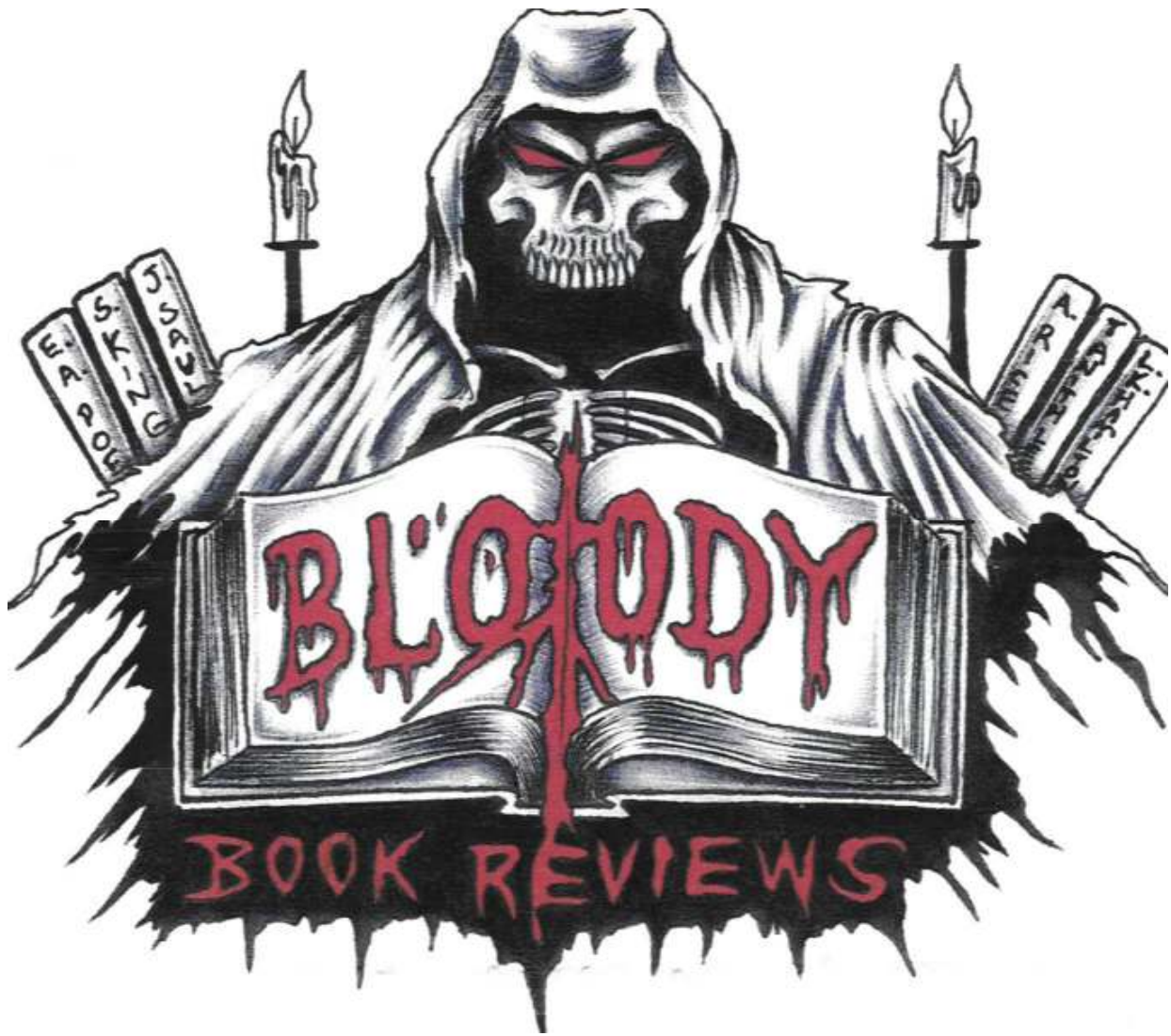
Although other children's Halloween television specials would follow over the years like *Witches Night Out* (1978), *Garfield's Halloween Adventure* (1985), *The Halloween Tree* (1993), and even the long running series *The Simpsons*, with their annual Halloween themed anthology specials *The Treehouse of Horror*, nothing has been more beloved than *The Great Pumpkin*.

However, one question remains. Although we never, ever see *The Great Pumpkin*, but we must wonder, what would it have he looked like if it did come on screen and into the pumpkin patch that Linus sat in until dawn. For years, many of us fans of the special have speculated what this entity could have looked like. For me, I see him as a ghostly like spirit with a pumpkin head, a Jack O Lantern face as he flies in the night. Maybe some of you envision him the same way. Some years ago, I found this toy that reminded me of *The Great Pumpkin* and today he hangs on the wall over my desk. In fact, I'm looking at him right now. But to me, this was what I think of when it comes to *The Great Pumpkin*.



Today sadly, this beloved show can no longer be watched on Network television as it was sold to Apple TV + some time ago and unless you have this streaming network, you, we are screwed. For such a classic in children's programming, this is a damn shame that this masterpiece is held hostage. I feel for the kids of a new generation who may never get to see this Halloween classic.

For us, we have grown up with the classic that is nearly as old as I am, we treasure the years that it played on Network television where we all watched and enjoyed this Halloween treat. It was something we all looked forward to watching and it was what made the Halloween season what it was. In a time before movies like *Halloween* (1978), and *Trick N Treat* (2007), this was what we kids had to get us into that spooky mood.



Welcome my bloody readers! We have reached our favorite time of the year – Halloween! It is a time when all of the creepy things come out and mingle with us humans. Well, we have a couple of books to offer for you in between decorating your house, watching horror movies and trick or treating. The first is about a serial killer taking out werewolves in a community of supernatural beings. Second is the next book in the Canadian Werewolf series. So, check these books out and enjoy!

D.W. Jones

Cursed By Fun: A Little Red Riding Hood Retelling by D.C. Gomez

When this book came to us, I definitely knew that it would be a fun book. Anytime you can take a classic story and remake it well, then you probably have a book that is going to please its audience and become popular. Gomez succeeded with *Cursed By Fur*. He puts together a compelling story with a cast of characters from all parts of literature to make a fun novel.

The story is that shifters are turning up dead with no cause of death. These shifters are specifically werewolves. There are no clues and nothing to go on for the officials in Texarkana, the safe haven for all supernatural creatures. Time is short as Halloween approaches and the rival packs of shifters are sniping at each other. It's up to Death's interns to find the killer and prevent a pack war before it all explodes on Halloween.



Gomez does a great job with taking aspects of the fairy tale and spinning it into a modern day thriller. His story takes off running right away keeping the reader enthralled in the story and drama. He gives you a big cast of characters that all play a important part in the story. These characters are a motley crew coming from all over literature like Constantine, Death, werewolves, ogres, witches, pixies and more. The story is thrilling but fun giving it a light horror movie rated a light R. He lats a sudden twist at the end that you probably won't see coming but feels right.

This book is a definite recommend for people who've seen Supernatural or True Blood. You can get this book on Amazon.com. If you like this book, you should read the whole Intern series by D.C. Gomez which tells the earlier history of major characters in this book.

Stowe Away by Mark Leslie

This is the second book in the Canadian werewolf series based on the character Mark Andrews, bestselling author by day and werewolf during the full moon. Leslie continues the story putting his main character in a unique situation. I was looking forward to reading the novel, more like a novella, but keeps you interest in his protagonist as he navigates his life with uneasy balance between man and beast.



The story begins with his friend Gail's uncle Albert is deathly sick and she is going to his bedside in Vermont. Mark gets the message and wants to be there as a friend. But it is the time of the full moon and the travel time will leave him little time before the change. But he decides it's worth the risk and boards the next train. The trouble starts shortly after.

As he starts to form a plan to prepare for the change, he comes across a young girl in trouble. He can't resist the urge to help someone in need, he gets involved. Now he must help the young girl and get to Gail before sundown and he loses himself. Can he do this without exposing himself or hurting anyone near him?

Leslie continues his storytelling and world building from the first book by fleshing out his main characters more. He puts his main character in a difficult position and as the reader, you find yourself trying to solve the issue along with him. Since this is more of a novella, the action more quickly and before you know it, it is done. But just when you think it's done, Leslie adds an emotional kick that give the reader more depth into these lives and makes you see them as real life.

I would definitely recommend this book to readers who like werewolves but more towards a Marvel version of them. It is a fun read with likable characters and fun situations. If you are looking for more horror blood and gore, this might not be the novel for you.

Making Monsters

Making Monsters: Spotlight on Hollywood Makeup Artists

Tony Gardner

By Michael Corvin

Born on September 25, 1965, in Cleveland , Ohio, Tony was born to create monsters. With such films under his belt as *Zombieland*, *Seed of Chucky*, *The Addams Family* plus non-horror productions like *Hairspray*, *Smoking Aces*, *Jackass*, *Shallow Hal*, and *There's Something About Mary*, Tony is the go to makeup-special effects artist that has covered it all. However, his crowning jewel though has to be his creation of the jello like space amoeba organism for the 1988 remake of *The Blob*.



Since this was a time before CGI effects to create the Blob creature, Tony used various techniques to bring the title monster to life. One such effect was using silk bags filled with methyl cellulose, a food thickener, to give the creature its form. Yet another was to go back to classic tried and true effects work using stop motion for some shots for the monster's rampage in town and in the movie theater. For the production of the Blob remake, Tony led a team of 33 special effects masters to join him like Bill Sturgenon, and Chet Zar.



Again, this was a few years before the advent of CGI effects so all blob and other effects seen in the film were all done with in camera (mostly) practical effects. To create the shots of the creature consuming its victims, special mechanical rigs and prosthetics were used to create the effect of people being dissolved by the monster when feeding. It was an amazing effect for a time before CGI would take over for such gore effects just a few years later.

Tony Gardner also worked on the small screen as well as he and his production company Alterian Inc crafted the caveman makeup for the GEICO ads starting in 2004. They were also behind the redesign of the Smokey The Bear for TV commercials as well. Tony and his crew were also nominated for an Academy Award for



the movie Jackass Presents: Bad Grandpa for his work on actor Johnny Knoxville.

Other films Tony and his company worked on were Darkman, Army of Darkness, Hocus Pocus, and Zombieland: Double Tap as well and the future looks bright for this amazing makeup visual artist. Who knows what other movie creatures he'll work on next.

Simulacrum

By Jaslynn Middleton

Nemo's footsteps echoed through the dimly lit exhibition halls. During the day, fluorescent lights cast a soft glow over all the displays. Such illumination wasn't needed after the museum closed and the administrators and researchers went home. Only Nemo and a few of the security guards remained in the building after dark and he didn't work longer than a few hours a night.

"Slavery Throughout History" had closed and it was time for its successor: "Human Evolution". Nemo had no part in the exhibit selection process; he only handled animatronic reprogramming and maintenance. Actual researchers developed the exhibits, choosing topics, creating characters, and selecting artifacts for display. He was certain the museum partnered with a local theatre for costuming; authentic period clothing was too delicate to entrust to a machine that might tear it in a mechanical seizure.

Nemo opened his email to see the order of business: all five of the museum's animatronics were to be used, which wasn't surprising. The breakthrough technology had been marketed as a replacement for human interaction, robotic companions that would take care of everyday tasks for their owners. When it turned artificial intelligence wasn't up to the task, their operating systems were stripped and the chassis sold. Nemo transformed a handful of the abandoned robots into interactive displays, which had made the museum quite a bit of money.

He approached Eve, portraying the character of Alina the Former Child Bride, and started the process of denuding it.

He always hated this part. During daylight when fully dressed, Eve and the other animatronics could pass for human. Their pre-scripted movements were smooth and their borrowed voices natural. Their skin, however, was cold and rigid and did not continue beneath the fabric they wore; it only covered the areas that would be exposed. In this state of undress, Nemo could see them for what they were: imitations. Like the changelings of yore, they only mimicked human movements and affected human emotions. There was no life in their eyes, no shine of mirth or weight of sadness. Just a blankness, as if they looked right through him.

He stripped Eve quickly, tossing its costume into a bin, and then peeled away its wig and latex coverings, separating them into their respective bins. Now confronted with only bare metal and carbon fiber, Nemo could relax. Eve's unnatural stuttering and contorted position were easier to contribute to its artificial nature, a machine under his control.

He checked the museum's shared drive. Eve's new persona, Lucy the Australopithecine, was completed and her lines recorded. He only needed to program Eve and she'd be ready. He wasn't certain how an "australopithecine" was supposed to move, but the researchers had learned how to write him fairly detailed instructions. Syncing her movements to her speech would probably take all night, even though he'd created a repertoire of gestures and motions, and he decided to upload Lucy's files into Eve while he finished denuding the rest of the animatronics. He plugged Eve in and turned his back to it.

He decided that Carol would be last. Its character, John the Laborer, was mostly naked and Nemo didn't feel comfortable touching that much faux flesh. Bob was closest to him out of the remaining robots and its costuming didn't seem any more challenging than the other two, so it would be next.

Nemo was groggy and his mouth tasted like vomit, a sensation he recalled from his bygone college days. He was fully dressed, including his street shoes, atop his bedcovers. He groaned, groping at his sides for his phone, and didn't find it. In fact, after intense search, he couldn't locate it anywhere in his apartment and he was forced to head into work without it.

No one was around to chastise his tardiness. He rarely saw his supervisor or any of the administrative staff. He was a clear communicator and his exceptional work never gave them any reason to disturb him.

Their trust was a good thing because the exhibition hall was a mess. All the animatronics had been denuded and they stood in a line near the terminal, save for Eve. She faced them, dignified and stiff like a commander inspecting troops.

In contrast, their paraphernalia looked like it had been removed by a drunk with a utility knife. Costumes had been stripped away by ripping seams or widening gaps. Although the skins had been handled more gently, tears had still developed from impatient handling, and the wigs were scattered about like beached jellyfish.

Nemo closed his eyes, took a deep breath, and studied the room again. He could not recall what catastrophe left this chaotic aftermath, but he knew it had been of his own making. None of his coworkers would have dared to mess with him like this. With a deep sigh, he picked up the items closest to him and sorted them into their respective bins.

He returned to Eve's side a short time later. His stomach inexplicably tightened as he turned on his laptop and checked his email. Nothing in his inbox explained the state of the exhibition hall nor were there any additional instructions. His insides hardened, freezing into a shard of ice, when he reached for the data plug.

He pulled his hand away. It was shaking.

He ignored the tremble, attributing it to skipping breakfast, and slid the data plug into Eve's port to check the prior night's upload. Everything was there, including all the new movements that he'd needed to program.

He shook his head. He was simply overworked. Exhausted. He'd been telling the museum for months that he needed an assistant. If not a fellow programmer, then at least someone to help him denude and enrobe the animatronics.

He keyed up Eve's new programming. It drew itself up, puffing its chest out and holding its head proudly. Its movements were fluid, almost aristocratic, despite its recorded lines being accented with grunts and other apelike noises. Artistic license was necessary of course – how else might Lucy tell guests about herself if she couldn't speak in contemporary language? – but her posture seemed too modern for a Neanderthal. He'd learned a lot since he'd began work at the museum, dispelling a lot of ignorance and stereotypes, and this exhibit clearly had a lot to teach him about human ancestry.

Nemo's normal order of business was to keep each animatronic on the same stage: denude, program, enrobe, and place. But he felt compelled to continue work on Eve until Lucy was completed. Maybe he felt guilty about misjudging the early evolution of hominids, or maybe he simply felt that he'd fallen behind on his work. Regardless, Eve would be ready for display by the morning.

The paraphernalia for Human Evolution was stored in separate bins labeled individually for each character. They were stacked, even though he'd repeatedly asked that they wouldn't be since they were heavy. Lucy's was in the middle and he had to strain to reach the top bin.

Clack. Clack. Clack.

He stopped, arms over his head, and turned around. Eve seemed to have taken a few steps toward him, an impossible task since the animatronics had the locomotion in their legs disabled. He must have misjudged its distance earlier.

He opened Lucy's bin and marveled at the packaged skin. It was smoother than he anticipated; he thought that early hominids were hairy like gorillas with similar postures. He felt ashamed of that stereotype now and he was thankful that he worked in a museum where he could keep learning.

Darkness stretched around him like an ocean, rocking him on waves of unconsciousness. Euphoria greeted him at each crest, while his stomach churned and his head turned inside out every time he plunged into a trough.

He gripped the cool, wet sheets between clawed fingers, willing the world to cease its inexplicable movement. He tasted bile and his rumpled clothes were soaked through with sweat. The ceiling light beat down on him like the noonday sun and for several minutes he didn't know where he was.

Then knowledge slammed into him like a cinderblock. He, Nemo, was late for work. Wait, Nemo... Nemo what? He could not recall his surname nor the previous night, but he didn't have time to contemplate his strange amnesia. He didn't even have time to shower, no matter how disgusting he felt, because he needed to finish the exhibit. He would write an email to his supervisor tonight and emphasize again that he needed an assistant.

To Nemo's relief, the exhibition hall wasn't a mess. Four of the ainimatronics formed a rank next to his terminal while Eve, enrobed, stood in the center. Its character, Lucy the Australopithecine, looked far more masculine than he expected, with a shortly cropped modish hairstyle, angular features, and modern clothes. Nemo scowled, scratching the back of his head, and found a port at the base of his skull.

When he was a college boy with big dreams, it had been trendy to surgically install a computer connection directly into one's brain. The cutting-edge interface promised to allow humans to directly interact with technology around them and to eliminate the need for many physical items, such as phones, but the bubble had burst before Nemo could save enough money to receive the link. Or so he thought.

"I need more rest," he muttered to himself.

He turned to the line of ainimatronics. Since Eve was done, it didn't matter which one he chose next. Dick was the closest to the terminal, so it was easiest to start with that machine.

He felt a tap on his shoulder and a masculine voice said, "You haven't finished with me yet..."

Nadie's sneakers squeaked as she trod through the emptied exhibition hall. The offer had come quickly, right before her rent was due, and she accepted it without a second thought. While she'd loved her old job and her coworkers, the company couldn't afford to increase her pay and money was tight now that her roommate had moved out. The museum offered a substantial raise and allowed her to work independently. The only issue was the hours; she did not like working at night, but she'd get used to it and the isolation it caused.

The serendipitous offer was strange though. She didn't remember sending her resume to the museum, nor did she recall the former programmer, who'd recommended her by name. He'd apparently been well-liked and he only left the position due to family circumstances. She'd have to thank him if she ever met him.

Nadie's new supervisor had gone over the process with her and she was confident that she could easily adapt to her new tasks. The character files were on the shared drive along with detailed instructions for enrobing and denuding. She could easily handle the programming, especially if her predecessor had already coded a catalogue of ainimatronic movements.

Three robots were lined up in a row next to the far wall. Each ainimatronic in the museum's inventory had been given a cute name. Alice, Bob, Carol, and... Where was the fourth?

Dick stood in the center of the room next to the terminal, ready to be plugged in.

About Jaslynn Middleton: Jaslynn Middleton became a writer to cope with being a neurodivergent teenager. She is currently writing her third novel, a sci-fi story set on a derelict spaceship. When she's not writing, she picks fights with technology (especially office equipment) or hangs out with her two stubborn shiba inu.

A Bad Night's Work

By Tom Kropp

Eighteen year old Scot Lancer sat at the corner bar feeling like a duck out of water. He was a good looking kid with buzz cut blond hair and blue eyes, but his handsome features were marred by scars on both sides of his head near his face where he'd been shot and surgery done. A myriad of other scars etched his face and lumpy often broken nose. He stood only five foot six, but his physique was quite impressive with a lot of bulging muscles and lean waist. His oversized Kevlar hoodie hid his build at the bar.

He was surrounded by a Latino crowd in one of the few well developed Honduras cities in the region. Outside the city limits the poverty stricken peasants starved and often existed without electricity or safe drinking water. Scot was there helping Kelly and her team search for a terrorist cell supposedly operating in the area.

"Scot, there's three mean looking men focused on you. Directly behind you discussing how to hit you." Sharon warned him while watching the men.

"Really?" He sighed.

"Really." Sharon insisted.

A nearby drinker glanced at Scot suspiciously, not comfortable with a man that talked to himself.

Only Scot could see Sharon's astral soul glowing beside him. Sharon was a former FBI agent that was murdered and chose not to enter the tunnel of light when she died. She was a beautiful woman in life and remained so with long blond hair and blue eyes along with a fantastic figure. At times her astral form was foggy and thick and sometimes quite translucent, but she always glowed. She'd discovered Scot dying and rescued him to save her partner Leia while avenging herself.

Sharon liked being a free flying soul on Earth and used Scot to help catch the killers, rapists, human traffickers and terrorists she found and spied on. As an entity of energy, she could fly faster than jets with phenomenal fast senses and extraordinary agility. No walls could stand in her way from her hunting predators. But Scot wouldn't go after thieves or dealers because as a kid he had sold drugs and stole cars for chop shops to make a living. In exchange for Scot helping Sharon catch evil people, Sharon helped Scot cheat gambling at poker and blackjack by telling him the cards other players had.

Scot could see souls because at age 16 he was shot in the face and head. He woke up seeing souls and the tunnels of light when they opened. He could also see the dark demons from hell when they came through wormholes to drag evil souls to hell.

"Are they armed?" He asked.

"No guns. One has a knife. The other two look like bulky brawlers. They're gonna start trouble and there's a cop car down the block. You should leave." Sharon advised him.

Scot guzzled his beer and got up to go.

"Too late. Here they come." Sharon warned him.

Scot turned around. Rather than grabbing the gun from under his hoodie, he pulled out money deliberately dropping some on the bar and a couple twenties on the table between the men and him. They looked at the cash he left as he headed for the door. He was hoping they'd take the bribe and let him go. But he was doomed to disappointment as the biggest brawler lunged and punched. Scot ducked his head so the man's ham sized hand drummed the top of Scot's skull. Scot stumbled, but shuffled close bringing his stun gun out and up. The flickering fork of blue energy crackled between the metal points and zapped the monster. The impacting energy jolted through him, making all his limbs flounder out of control. He fell flopping on the floor. The other pair hesitated.

"Behind!" Sharon shouted too late.

Another man paid to rough Scot up was at the bar behind Scot. He chucked his beer glass that smashed the back of Scot's skull. Scot spun down pounded by the pair. Scot's combination of many real fights and mixed martial arts expertise came into play. He snatched a falling foot with a jujitsu twist of his wrists that mangled the man's ankle with a sharp pop and crack. The dude dropped screaming and seizing his ankle, out of action. The other guy kept a sharp lashing limbs battering Scot.

Almost instantly, Scot snagged an arm and grappled the guy to the ground locking a guillotine choke on his throat. The fellow flopped furiously for a few moments before he slowed in the hold getting groggy. He was passing out when Scot was kicked in the back. The impact rolled him and he saw the guy that cast the glass now waving a knife. The guy dashed and slashed at Scot's face. Scot's robotic fist clubbed low in a boxing blow in the guy's gut. The foe fell unable to breathe.

Scot spun as the biggest guy that had socked his skull while tackling him. They went down in a wild blur of brawling bodies and whiplashing limbs. The bigger dude was good at applying his size and strength for a mounted ground and pound position. Scot jammed a thumb in the guy's eye making the monster howl and twist. Scot turned the tables on him establishing a mount arm lock. The massive man roared like a Viking, but tapped the floor in submission as the agony jolted through him. Scot jumped up. The others were stirring. He pulled his pistol pointing it at the nearest pair.

"That's enough!" Scot shouted in Spanish.

They stayed put as he backed toward the door. Two cops coming inside didn't offer any warning. They pulled their pistols and started shooting. Scot felt a flurry of sledgehammer blows to his back that smacked him flat on his face. He rolled low below the cops view due to the tables

in the way. Scot saw outstretched arms with a gun stepping in and swung his sights to settle as he squeezed the trigger. Scot's 45 popped loud and that round shattered the shooter's skull like a melon under a maul. The cop dropped dying. Scot could see the other cop's legs under the table. Scot aimed and fired. The bullet nailed the cop's kneecap busting it to bits of bones and mauled meat. The cop dropped screaming and holding his hurt knee, forgetting his gun.

Scot and Sharon watched a dark wormhole form. From it stepped three demons. They were shadowy things with burning red eyes and immense, intense figures resembling a cross between Cape buffalo and bears as they loomed over the room. Horns hooked from their heads and spikes bristled from their spines along with huge claws and fang filled maws and tails undulating behind them. The demons reached inside both slain cops' bodies and seized their screaming and struggling souls yanking them out. Both men weren't really cops, they were evil men wearing uniforms. The demons chuckled and rumbled as the men's floating souls squirmed and squealed in their clutches. The demons carried the damned men's souls through the wormhole and it sealed shit behind them.

Scot realized he'd just shot two crooks pretending to be cops. He had to go.

He dashed past people out the back door and jogged to his hotel. He was terrified of doing time in a Honduras prison. He was a CIA consultant. The American government with its money received full cooperation from Honduras, but killing fake cops was something they might insist Scot face justice on. Now he had to hope he could flee the country successfully.

About Tom Kropp: Tom Kropp's work has appeared in *The Horror Zine*, *J Journal*, *Chiron Review*, *Churches*, *Children and Daddies*, *Down in the Dirt*, *Freedom Fiction Journal*, *Short-Story Me*, *Dark Harbor*, *Flash Phantoms*, *You Phantomaniacs Anthology*, *The Listening Eye*, *Evening Street Review*, *Conceit*, *Outdoor Life and Muscle and Fitness*. You can read more of his writings at <https://tomkropp.wordpress.com>. He has numerous novels available through Smashwords and Google Play Books.

Dark Poetry

Oracle Bones

By Meg Smith

Everyone is gathering them
from the dried pine needles on the forest floor,
the nest of only feathered tufts remaining,
over even among the leavings of the quarreling gulls,
or turkey vultures, crisp in the blue-black best.
There lies more past than future in them,
a quail caught in the hunter's run,
a fledgling fallen before even dreaming of flight.
But all will say, how harsh a winter, how bare an autumn,
how much weeping in the harvest, hands clasped
over a window candle's receding warmth.

A Witch Rises in the Lake Foam

By Meg Smith

The riddles of green rush as if drawn by
a moon they have conjured; quiet, invisible, blue.
Pebbles, stones, dance over each other;
candidate moons, they are seeking their own world.
This is everything she knows: the only magic
that begets itself in the shadow of boats, park benches,
a playground and a black trail, linking water
and earth to an unseen mine.
She will walk the rest of the way from here; under such
a nude and unsleeping sky, even a broom will burn.

Danse Macabre Doll

By Meg Smith

Because I like to flutter like those dried seeds
from maple trees, humor me:
The sun is burning, the sky will follow.
Houses slack, forward, nails slipping through rust
and they too fall toward their true, dark Earth.

So we can, you and I, you and I,
in beauty; velvet, or paper chains of garland,
in whatever waltz or minuet or stagger,
swim together in our own final froth,
pared apples in their tastes, remaining.
Will you do this for me, in your perfection of bones, unpinned.

About Meg Smith: Meg Smith is a poet, journalist, dancer and events producer living in Lowell, Mass. In addition to *Blood Moon Rising Magazine*, her poems and short stories have appeared in *The Horror Zine*, *Dark Moon Digest*, *Siren's Call*, *The Cafe Review*, *The Lowell Review*, and more. She was a finalist for the 2025 Stanley Kunitz Poetry Medal, a member of the board of Lowell Celebrates Kerouac!, and founder [of Poe in Lowell](#), celebrating Edgar Allan Poe's visits to Lowell. Forthcoming soon are her second book of short fiction, *Night's Wheel*, and her seventh poetry collection, *The Singing Lake*. She welcomes visits to megsmithwriter.com.