

**ANNIVERSARY EDITION
ONLINE ISSUE**

**JULY 2026
ISSUE #104**



BLOOD MOON RISING MAGAZINE

**SPECIAL FEATURES:
SO WHAT IS EVIL ...
REALLY? PART 2**



**THE ROSE FILES:
TAKEN!**

**CREATURE FEATURE:
THE UNVIERSAL
MONSTERS**

**TERROR TUBE:
MADE FOR TV
HORROR MOVIES**

**... ALL OF THIS
AND MUCH,
MUCH MORE!**



Blood Moon Rising Magazine
Issue #104
For Aspiring Writers and Artists
Anniversary Issue 2026

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BLOOD NOTES

By Publisher AL J. Vermette

Welcome back my Legion to Issue 104 of Blood Moon Rising as we celebrate our 26th year in publication! Yes, 26 years producing this magazine seems almost like a lifetime and funny enough.....for some of you it is. Many of the writers whose work you have been reading the last few issues funny enough were in diapers or not even born yet when we started this publication back in the year 2000. The editor of Blood Moon Rising D.W. Jones own son Danny was just barely out of diapers when D.W. and me started this and now that child, watching us produce this magazine, is turning 30 this year. Jesus Christ we have been doing this a long time!

In fact you can see young Danny Jones work on each of the covers for the last two years with his graphic design for our title cover logo.

Blood Moon Rising is without doubt one of the longest running independent published horror magazine in the world. When we started this in 2000, we had an abundance of contemporary Indy horror publications running alongside ours, many of which I was a fan of. Sadly today, 26 years later, many of them have gone extinct but some still hang on like Cemetery Dance (1988), Rue Morgue (1997), The Horror Zine (2009), and Horror Hound (2005).

Blood Moon Rising launched in June 2000 as a print publication and made the jump to digital in 2007 as a result of the financial recession. Blood Moon Rising made the change when each and every bookstore online and off started closing that carried the print version. To keep BMR alive during that dark time in publishing, we fully embraced its digital capabilities while sadly many of our contemporaries died off.

The 2007 Recession hit publishing hard all around and Indy publishing in particular. Many large publishing houses either folded or merged with others and small press nearly went extinct altogether. However out of ashes, Blood Moon Rising rose and 26 years and 104 issues later, we are now one of the longest running horror publications in the world.

During our 26 year run nearly all of our early writers are still with us today, writers like Rose Titus, William Pratt, Michael Corvin, Dark Soul, Kraven: The She Wolf along with long time artist Sandy Reese. My BMR partner, editor and webmaster who makes all this possible D.W. Jones who without none of this would be still going is my biggest asset in bringing you our dear readers this publication all these years. Thank you to all my writers, artists, and readers who have been part of this crazy little creation of mine a dream come true!

Dark Soul's Nightmare News Bleed all about it



We have big news for all you Chucky fans out there! Don Mancini the creator of the Childs Play series said that he was working on a new movie that will return everyone's favorite killer doll back to the big screen. That's right Chucky will return to theaters for the first time since Seed of Chucky released in 2004. For 22 years we have not had a Chucky movie in the theaters.....and I'm not counting that 2019 reboot of Childs Play...fuck that he's not Chucky.... so it will be fun to see the killer toy back on the big screen. This will be the 8th in the mainline of Chucky films to be released...again not counting the reboot and is said by the franchise creator Don Mancini himself that this new movie will be darker and less comic driven as the last few flicks. Chucky back to his darker roots.....who can say no to that? No release date as of this writing but when we have one, Blood Moon Rising will let you know.

A new Evil Dead movie is coming on July 10th following 2023's Evil Dead Rise. This will be the 6th film in the franchise along with the TV series Ash vs Evil Dead and will be called Evil Dead Burn. Produced by Sam Raimi and directed by Sebastien Vanicek is a follow up to Evil Dead Rise and written by Sebastien Vanicek and Florent Bernard. Filmed in New Zealand in 2025 this new outing for the Deadites is sure to be a bloody good time for us fans of the other films. I really liked Evil Dead Rise and I'm looking very much forward to seeing this new movie releasing this summer.

After his vampire remake of the 1922 classic silent film, Nosferatu director Robert Eggers is taking on a new classic monster with Werewolf. Working with many of the same actors as he did on Nosferatu with William Dafoe and Lily Rose Depp, the new film is written by Robert Eggers himself and said to be the darkest film he had ever written. Like many of Eggers films (The Witch, The Lighthouse, The Northman and Nosferatu) Werewolf takes place in the past and has a released date of Christmas day 2026. We don't get to see too many werewolf films released to the theater these days so it will be nice to see what Eggers dose with this classic monster.

The Scary Movie franchise returns in 2026 with the Wayans Brothers big return to the franchise they created over 20 years ago. Anna Faris also returns in this the 6th installment in series that started back in 2000. The horror parody film is releasing June of 2026 and I'm sure it will be a real scream with fans. See what I did there?

The Candle in the Window

By Ayesha Mansoor

The ancient McAllister house had continuously been the subject of whispers in the little town of Empty River. Perched at the edge of a calm road, it lingered with listing shades and a roof that looked prepared to cave in. Most kids crossed the street or maybe walked past it. But each Halloween night, without fail, a single candle burned in the upstairs window.

No one knew who lit it. The McAllisters had all been dead for decades.

Emma, sixteen and eager, had listened to the story a hundred times. Her grandma continuously said, “That candle keeps the dead at narrows. The night it goes out, Empty Stream will pay the price.”

Emma didn’t accept apparition stories, but she did accept fervor, and Halloween was, as it were, the only night the town ever felt lively. Costumed children swarmed the roads, patio lights gleamed, and chuckling tangled with the fresh harvest-time wind. However, her eyes continuously floated to the forlorn glint in that upstairs window.

This year, her companions challenged her to go inside.

“Just five minutes,” said Jason, the instigator, his vampire cape fluttering behind him. “If you truly need to demonstrate you’re not scared.”

Emma smiled. “Fine. Five minutes. I’ll indeed blow out that inept candle.”

The house moaned when she pushed open the entryway. Clean roses in the inclined pillars of her spotlight. Cobwebs clung to the stair rail, and the dust was thick with the fragrance of spoil and clammy wood. Her friends’ suppressed chuckling blurred as the entryway closed behind her.

“Easy,” she whispered to herself, climbing the staircase. “Just blow it out, demonstrate them off-base, and leave.”

The candle was right where it continuously was—in the upstairs window, gleaming feebly against the dim. But when Emma ventured closer, she realized it wasn’t a candle at all.

It was a lantern.

The glass was smeared, the metal discolored, but the fire burned consistently, as if it had been burning for a long time without faltering.

“Okay, creepy,” Emma mumbled. “But still fair a flame.”

She raised her hand to blow it out—

And the fire flinched.

Emma solidified. Blazes didn't move like that, not absent from breath. This one appeared mindful and lively. She took a step back, and the fire extended higher, nearly coming to the top of the light glass.

"Alright, joke's over!" she yelled, half anticipating her companions to hop out. But the house remained noiseless. The light shook somewhat on the sill, in spite of the fact that no wind touched it.

And at that point she listened to it.

A whisper.

"Don't."

Her breath caught. She spun around—no one was there. Fair peeling backdrop and shadows that clung as well firmly to the corners.

She turned back to the light. The fire had contracted, presently scarcely a flicker.

It looked... afraid.

Emma's chest was fixed. "This is imbecilic. I'm leaving."

But as she turned toward the stairs, a sharp split rang out. The rail chipped, and something overwhelming rearranged in the obscurity below.

The front entryway pummeled shut.

Emma's electric lamp flashed. For a pulse, she saw them—shapes writhing at the foot of the stairs. Handfuls of them, bent and hollow-eyed, their mouths extended wide in noiseless screams.

When the light steadied, the staircase was purged again.

Emma's hands shook. She turned back toward the light. The fire flared, critical, as if begging.

Don't let me go out.

Her grandmother's words came surging back. That candle keeps the dead at bay.

"Jesus Christ," Emma whispered. "It's real."

Something scratched over the floorboards on the first floor. At that point another. And another. Strides duplicated, spreading through the house, coming closer, dragging with an unnatural rhythm.

Emma snatched the light. The metal seared her palms, but she clutched it tight, holding it tall. The shapes surged once more, shadows turning up the dividers, faces glinting into view—ghastly and pale, with purge attachments where eyes ought to have been.

The fire battled harder, beating brighter, casting them back.

But it was fading.

“No, no, no!” Emma cried. She shook the light, but the fire sputtered. She required fuel for it, but how?

She recalled what her grandma continuously said when lighting candles on All Hallows’ Eve: “They burn brightest when bolstered with breath... or blood.”

Emma bit her lip until she tasted blood. At that point, with trembling fingers, she squeezed the cut against the lantern’s rim.

The fire roared.

Light detonated through the room, blinding and white-hot. The shadows yelled, clawing at their softening shapes some time recently, collapsing into nothing. The house trembled and, at that point, stilled.

When Emma flickered the spots from her eyes, the lantern’s fire gleamed relentlessly and calmly.

The front entryway squeaked open by itself. The night's discourse poured in, cool and clean.

Emma faltered out, clutching the light to her chest. Her companions were gone—maybe they’d gotten frightened and run. Possibly they’d seen what she had.

She stood in the road, gazing back at the McAllister house. The candle in the window burned shining again.

But presently she knew why.

And she knew this: another Halloween, she’d have to return.

Because the light required blood.

And one night, it would take more than hers.

About Ayesha Mansoor: Ayesha Mansoor is a passionate Software Engineer from Pakistan, currently working remotely with an American company. Alongside her technical career, Ayesha nurtures a deep love for creative writing, where she blends imagination with emotion to craft engaging and heartfelt pieces. Her favorite topics include gardening, flowers, fairy tales, and love stories, fiction, nonfiction, tech, fashion, etc. each reflecting her fascination with nature and human connection. An avid reader and lifelong learner, Ayesha finds inspiration in stories that spark curiosity and empathy. She strives to maintain a balance between her analytical mindset and creative spirit, continuously exploring new ways to grow both professionally and personally.

Never Write About Werewolves

By M. Lee Goodson

Horror writer Melissa Daughtry regretted it, as soon as she submitted her werewolf story called “Moonshine, Texas.” She never wrote about werewolves, vampires, or zombies. She found it too difficult to be original. She had no idea why she decided to give it a try.

Her husband Greg suggested a lazy drive through the Texas Hill Country to get her mind off her writing. The SUV travelled on FM 6223 that Saturday afternoon as Melissa stared out the window observing the rolling hills. She turned and looked at her husband Greg. She reached over with her left hand, rubbed the inside of his thigh and whispered the words, “I love you.” He smiled back, then returned his eyes to the road as he tapped on the steering wheel to the beat of his favorite Gordon Lightfoot song “If You Could Read My Mind.”

Greg slowed his speed as they drove into the next town. He laughed when he saw the name. “Hey, look Mel. Moonshine, Texas! Isn’t that the name you used for one of your stories?”

Melissa’s eyes widened. “Yeah, it is.” She shook her head. “I didn’t know that Moonshine, Texas actually existed.”

“Well, it does. Maybe you got ESP or some psychic connection to the town.” He moved his eyebrows up and down.

Melissa groaned. “And maybe monkeys will fly outta my ass!”

“No, that happened in Shiner, Texas last week.”

Melissa laughed, “You never will let me have the last zinger, will you?”

“Not yet!” Greg reached over and rubbed Melissa’s knee.

As they drove into Moonshine, they saw more of the city. On the outskirts of town, only a few gas stations and a Walmart appeared, but as they drove closer to the center, they observed more houses, a few restaurants, a school, a real estate office, and a lawyer’s office. When they arrived at the main street, they found a town square complete with a city hall and several more restaurants and stores surrounding it.

“Mel, look! They are having some kind of market days! Do you want to stop and look around?”

“Sure, why not?”

Greg found a parking space a few blocks off the town square, and they walked back to where several vendors had set up white tents. Melissa stopped short as soon as they arrived at the town square.

Greg held her hand. “Mel? Anything wrong?”

She pointed to the restaurant on the corner.

“The Moonshine Midnight Corral? Must be some kind of late-night bar. What about it?”

She rubbed the back of her neck and shook her head. “Greg, I used the same name in my story.”

“So what? Maybe you’ve been here before?”

“No, I haven’t.”

He took her by both hands and looked into her eyes. “Mel, you grew up in Texas. Your parents might have brought you here when you were a kid, and you just don’t remember. C’mon don’t get freaked out over just a couple of weird coincidences. Okay?”

She nodded. He leaned over and kissed her forehead. He led her into the maze of white tents. Various vendors sold all kinds of things: goat products, antiques, wood working projects, and handmade clothing.

They stopped at one tent that had all sorts of dog treats. Greg bought a bag of gourmet peanut butter bites for their two beagles back home. They stopped at a tent with various types of salsas, Greg sampled a few, but didn’t buy any.

As they walked away, he admitted, “Some of those were tasty, but they were all too hot!”

They found a food booth and bought a couple of bottled waters to quench Greg’s burning tongue. They continued to look at the different tents.

They stopped to talk with a man named Tom Nichols. He sold knives at a tent named The Cutting Edge. He explained to them that he learned blacksmith skills from his father and that he had even gone on a reality TV show competition called Blades by the Best. He showed them various knives and blades and explained the process used to create all of them. Greg and Melissa thanked him. As they began to leave, he stopped them.

“I can understand that you may not be in the market for a knife right now, but would you take my card? I have a website. If you ever need anything, you’ll find my prices can be very reasonable.” He held out a card for each of them.

Greg and Melissa took them.

“Thanks so much and don’t forget to look at the special on the back!”

Greg and Melissa looked at each other as they walked away, then simultaneously they both looked at the cards the blacksmith gave them and turned the cards over. On the back of each card, he had written in all caps: *DANGER: LEAVE MOONSHINE BEFORE DARK!*

“That’s weird. I wonder why he’d write something like that,” said Greg.

Melissa wrinkle her nose. “Maybe he gave us the wrong cards? Greg, do you feel weird about this place at all?” She hugged herself with her arms.

“Maybe he’s just weird. This place seems fine to me.”

“Do you think we should go back and ask about it?”

Greg shook his head. “Nah. Probably a way to get us to come back and buy a knife. Let’s keep exploring.”

Melissa stuffed her card in her purse. They continued to wander through other tents for another couple of hours. As they left, Greg spotted one final tent. The woman sitting among tables of jewelry and crystals looked like a modern-day gypsy. She wore a purple peasant shirt with a dark pink long yard skirt. She had dark eyeliner and a red gypsy scarf with coins over her hair. She welcomed them into her tent with a large smile.

Melissa frowned and said, “Mistress Amanda?”

“Yes! Have we met before my child?”

“No, not really.” Melissa shook her head slowly.

Greg stared at his wife.

Mistress Amanda said, “Is there anything that I can help you with? Are you looking for anything special?”

“No, we are just wandering around. You have a very interesting tent. My wife, Mel, loves crystals.” Greg smiled.

“Well, in that case, can I show you my bestseller?” She went to the far table and picked up a pendant that had a black stone with many points on it. “I know. It looks like a volcano’s tooth, but this is called black kyanite or moonstone. Since it’s October and there’s a full harvest moon out tonight, this stone protects from werewolves and other creatures of the moon.”

Melissa stood quietly and straightened her neck without moving forward. Greg walked toward Mistress Amanda and held the stone. He turned to his wife and said, “Mel, what do you think?”

Melissa said, “I have to get out of here.” She turned and left the tent.

Greg looked at Mistress Amanda. He shrugged his shoulders. "I'm sorry." He left and followed Melissa. "Hey, stop!" He grabbed her by the elbow. "That wasn't like you at all. What's going on?"

"I wrote about that woman in my story about Moonshine!" said Melissa.

Greg laughed, "Really?"

"I'm not kidding. Every detail down to the overuse of eyeliner. How else did I know her name?"

"Well, maybe you do have some psychic powers? Maybe you had a dream?"

"Greg, this is getting too weird. Let's get out of here, please?"

"Mel, you're a horror writer. You write about supernatural things that could never happen, right?"

She nodded.

"You need to stop worrying about these silly little coincidences. Okay?"

She lowered her chin. "I guess."

"Do you trust me?"

She nodded, "Of course, I do."

"Well, then let's get something to eat and stop worrying." He hugged her.

They walked around the square and found a place called Mike's Meats. They claimed to have the best BBQ in town. Melissa didn't tell Greg that she had written about Mike's in her story as well. She didn't want to have an argument.

They had a great dinner of brisket, smoked turkey, pinto beans, and peach cobbler. Their server, an older woman named Jenny, brought them their check.

She asked, "Are y'all from out of town?"

"My wife and I are from Waco. We decided to take a drive through the Hill Country."

"Well, I'm so glad you found us. Some people think Mike's BBQ is even better than the stuff you find in Lockhart."

Melissa smiled. "I thought it was great. Thank you."

“Do y’all like Halloween and fall festivals?”

Greg’s eyes lit up. “Actually, we love them. I was born in October.”

“How cool!” She touched his shoulder. “Moonshine has a Harvest Moon Festival every Saturday evening in front of the City Hall in October. You should stay. It’s one of my favorite events in October.”

“Sounds like fun! Thanks for letting us know,” said Greg.

As they finished their sweet teas, Melissa stared at Greg. “Honey, I know this sounds crazy, but I have a bad feeling about this. There are too many coincidences with my story. I think that we need to leave before it gets dark.”

Greg put his hand over Melissa’s, “How many times have you written stories where the wife kills her husband?”

Melissa licked her lips. She looked at her glass of tea. “About twenty.”

“Have you tried to kill me? Even once?”

Melissa shook her head. “No.”

“Mel, they’re just stories. You don’t write things on your computer and then somehow, they become reality. You must know that.”

“I guess.”

“Mel, look at me.” She looked at him in the eyes. “If we leave now, you’ll always have a doubt in your mind. We gotta stay so you’ll conquer any fear or doubt and know that all of this was just a coincidence, okay?”

“Okay. You’re right.”

He leaned over and kissed her.

They rose from their seats and threw their trash away. They left the restaurant and went to the city square. As dusk fell, the square underwent a transformation. All the vendors packed their merchandise and tents. At the same time, other people set up white folding chairs in front of the city hall in preparation for the Harvest Moon Festival.

Melissa and Greg found a park bench and watched the sunset.

“You know, maybe I’ve been writing horror for too long. Maybe I need to try to write something in a different genre just to spice things up.”

Greg put his head on her shoulder, “Whatever you want, Mel. You know, I’ll always support you in whatever you do.”

As people gathered in front of the city hall, Greg and Melissa found seats among the white folding chairs. Melissa observed the others in the audience and noticed that none of the people seated looked like the townspeople that she wrote about. They were tourists from bigger cities in Texas here for the festival. The men wore designer jeans with loafers, and the women wore dresses and sandals. They sat together in groups of families with young children in tow. She also noticed a group of townspeople encircling the audience. The townspeople all had plain work boots, Wrangler jeans, and button-up shirts. None of the children from town who had been wandering around the square were visible. They all disappeared.

The mayor of Moonshine appeared and stood before a podium.

“Welcome to all our guests to our beloved town of Moonshine! I am Mayor Bela Oland, and this is the Moonshine Harvest Moon Festival!”

Everyone clapped, including Greg. Melissa’s heart sped up. She remembered how she created the name Bela Oland. She combined the name Bela Lugosi with Warner Oland after the two famous actors from werewolf movies.

Mayor Bela said, “I’d like everyone to look into the sky at the enormous harvest moon that Mother Nature has provided for our celebration tonight.”

As everyone gazed at the orange-tinted orb high above them, no one except Melissa noticed all the townspeople as they transformed into werewolves. The ears grew long into points. Their eyes took on a yellow tint as they grew to fit their expanding skulls. Melissa sat frozen in horror as she stared at the townspeople growing huge lower jaws and expanded nasal cavities. Their legs and arms grew and transformed with new muscle groups and shapes. The final step came as each one grew a thick heavy coat of fur.

Their growling and chuffing finally caught someone’s attention. A young suburbanite looked down from her moon gazing to come face to face with a snarling werewolf. As she let out a high-pitched scream, the rest of the audience realized that they were surrounded by a town full of werewolves. Mayor Bela let out a long strong howl that signaled the pack to attack.

Melissa watched as the waitress Jenny, who still wore her name tag, lunged at Greg. She threw him to the ground and tore his throat to shreds. Greg’s face seemed frozen in a picture of complete shock. He grimaced from the pain and all his features tensed up in disbelief. He lost so much blood that he didn’t have enough strength to even fight back.

At that moment, Melissa wanted to slap Greg and tell him, “I told you so!”

Unfortunately, a second later, Jenny used her claws to scratch his face completely off his skull.

Melissa jumped from her seat and ran. She only sprinted a few feet before Mayor Bela clawed her shoulder and knocked her to the ground. As she looked into the face of death, Melissa thought she saw the jaws of the werewolf turn up into a smile. As Mayor Bela feasted on her body, she regretted ever writing a story about a town of werewolves.

About M. Lee Goodson: M. Lee Goodson left her career in accounting to pursue her lifelong passion for education and storytelling. She loves learning about urban legends and folklore. She lives in Texas with her husband and two dogs. She often incorporates Texas into her stories whenever she can.

GRAVEYARD Cinema

By Dark Soul

Vampire Nation

5 Gravestones



When humans and vampires team up to fight an army of man sized bat monsters, things get a little crazy. This movie is what if you take the ideas of Blade 2 and mix it with the TV series True Blood and you'll get Vampire Nation. Vampires are now out in the open and living alongside humanity when a greater menace introduces itself.

When a new underground street drug starts turning people and vampires into large bat like creatures that start preying on humans as well as vampires, a police detective forms an alliance with a vampire lord, and a former vampire hunter to stop the new threat. Now each must put aside their mistrust in each other and join forces before the world is over run by these winged creatures. This was a fun little movie with a fair amount of action along with some quieter moments for character development. This was a unique storyline and even though it may borrow a little of its plot from Blade 2 with humans teaming with vampires to combat a larger threat than themselves, this movie sets itself apart from Blade 2 just enough to be its own thing.

The Man in the Fields

4 Gravestones



When a weekly game night among a small group of 20 something's perform an ancient pagan ritual in an old house in the middle of nowherewhat could go wrong? And one character even makes a reference to The Evil Dead making this all the more crazy that they would even try to do this for fun. Well as you would guess things go all bat shit crazy and one of them is turned into a monster. The monster now is hunting down the other members of their group until only one remains.

The monster itself looks pretty good and the music score is very good for a low budget film of its kind. The editing is a little all over the place and is disjointed at times, but the story is pretty easy to follow and the cast is very good. Directed by Samuele Breschi in his feature film debut, so we will forgive any short comings this movie may have but all in all it's pretty damn good. Shot in Italy, but the cast are all speaking English with no dubs do their best to make this film as

professional as possible and for the most part they very much succeed. Great first movie from the director and I'm looking forward to see what else he comes out with.

Radius

5 Gravestones



This thriller from 2017 tells the story of a man and woman who wake up after his pickup truck drives off and road and they can't remember who they are or why are they together. Are they a couple, are they friends, did he pick her up on the side of the road? They don't know. At first after the crash she walks off leaving him alone to wake alone and trying to figure out not only who his is but why he was there in that truck in the first place. He tries to flag down a car for help but as soon as it comes close it too drives off the road. When he approaches the car he finds the driver dead. He finds a diner and thinking he could find help there, goes in only to find everyone in there also dead. They seemed have died spontaneously right in the middle to eating.

Horrificed, he runs off thinking there is something in the air, maybe a terrorist attack of some kind airborne pathogen until he starts to realize that everyone around him and only him seem to die once they reach a certain distance or radius. Everyone he comes into contact with suddenly just drop and dies without warring. When he is reunited with the woman from his truck, they still don't know each other but he discovers that as long as she's with him and close by, people no longer drop in his immediate presence.

This is such a unique movie and plays out like an episode of the Twilight Zone in the best of ways. As the movie progresses we learn more about the man and woman and discover that he is in a fact not at all the nice guy he and she believe he is. I will not spoil the ending for you but you have to see it to blow your mind. Playing free on YouTube it's a must watch for fans of The Twilight Zone and the Outer limits.

Interviews

An Interview with Mark Beardall the creator of the short film “City of Wolves”

By AL J. Vermette

When filmmaker Mark Beardall posted his werewolf short film to the Werewolf Magazine Reborn Facebook group, I knew I had to learn more about his project. Upon reaching out to Mark, he agreed to an interview where we talked about this film and future projects he has lying in wait.



AL J. Vermette: Your new film project is fantastic. Please tell our readers how it came about?

Mark Beardall: I’m a VFX Artist and I have been having to learn and use AI tools now as part of our VFX workflow. Over the last year I’ve been making some AI shorts for fun whilst learning the tools. And as they have improved, I began experimenting with other ideas that I had to see what was possible. I created some werewolf images and brought them to life using AI and realized that “City of Wolves” was now completely possible to make.

AJV: It’s a great story idea. How did you come up with the plot?

MB: A few years back, I had the idea for a movie where there was a huge outbreak of werewolves in a dense urban area. I thought it would be really cool to combine werewolves with other urban survival movies such as Escape from New York set in the big city with no holds barred total chaos. I grew up watching a lot of movies and always enjoyed disaster movies such as Earthquake with Charlton Heston in which a few survivors would band together trying to deal together with what faced them. How would the city cope with such an attack and who would survive the night.

AJV: What was it about werewolves that made you think, “yeah, this should be about werewolves”?

MB: I’ve always had a soft spot for horror movies and love both American Werewolf in London and The Howling which both made a big impression on me when I was



younger. But often there was only one or two wolves probably due to cost. I always thought, what if there were loads of them and we were outnumbered and being attacked in our own urban environment.

AJV: This would make a great feature film! Do you have any plans on expanding it to feature length?

Mark: It would be great and I would love to see it made properly but I'm way too busy in my day job working on commercials hence why I am working on just short trailer concepts at the moment. But you never know. There's definitely a bigger story to tell and I may revisit it at some point.

AJV: The movie looks so real. What software and other tools did you use to make the film come to life?

MB: Most of the images were all created using Midjourney which I find gives such a cinematic look and feel. Then I animated all of the stills in Luma Dream Machine, Veo 3, Kling and Hailuoai. I kept redoing shots as the AI tools kept improving all of the time and then as the film progressed, I used Nano Banana to create new consistent



images of the characters and scenes which I then subsequently animated. Once I had edited the film, I had to do quite a bit of digital cleanup on several shots and then it was graded and given some cool sound design by a couple of my work colleagues.

AJV: What other film projects have you worked on that you would like to tell us about?

MB: The one that pretty much started it all was "Death and the Soldier". An idea that I had when I was doing an art project on World War 1 poetry back at Art College. It's a story that is close to my heart about a young soldier sent to the War whose mother dies whilst he is fighting. He gives up all hope and then is killed on the battlefield only to be greeted by Death herself who takes him on a journey through space and time before returning him back to life. I made it just over a year ago using AI and am very fond of it. It's another idea that I may still expand upon at some point.

AJV: And so what's next for you, what other films do you have in the works or planned?

MB: I have been making quite a few Italian Giallo inspired homage trailers lately, which are a lot of fun to make. So there's a few more of those yet to come. Also another based on the film noirs of the 1940's which I am working on at the moment. I'm just really enjoying the journey. All of my shorts so far can be seen on my YouTube channel below.

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC807gL0zx4vfPw5tgd7K5BA>

No Appointment Needed

By Gregory Meece

The parking lot was empty, yet a light from the lab's front windows cast shimmering reflections across the rain-soaked blacktop. Jonathan assumed this meant a technician was on duty. Seeing that his car was the only one there, he thought, *Great—no waiting.*

His annual physical was in a few days, and he'd forgotten to schedule an appointment for bloodwork. More likely, he'd been procrastinating—like with taxes and cleaning his gutters. Since Eleanor left, there was no one to pester him. He was still shaking off the rust of living alone.

The heavy air hinted at more rain, making the parking spot by the front door welcome. Despite the chill, he removed his suede blazer and placed it on the front seat. *I wouldn't want it to get wet*, he thought. He considered taking his umbrella but decided to leave that in the car too. He wouldn't be long. Last year's visit took only five minutes.

Jonathan was greeted by a woman exuding a refined aura of classic elegance, suggesting she was "not from around here," as the locals might say. Her face had the kind of timeless beauty one might find in a museum portrait, and her knowing smile made him feel like an awkward schoolboy. He couldn't help but notice that she cut a striking figure, even beneath her stark, white lab coat. Her hands, already covered with a pair of latex gloves, made it impossible for him to tell if there was a gold ring on one of her fingers.

"The name's Jonathan Bedwell, and I'm embarrassed to admit that I forgot to register in advance. Do you take walk-ins?"

"No appointment needed," the woman said reassuringly. With a sweep of her arm, she beckoned her patient toward a stool with retractable armrests on either side.

Jonathan couldn't place her accent, but he found it alluring. *Should I ask her where she's from—or would that be considered politically incorrect?* he wondered. He wished he were up to date on the rules of flirting.

The empty waiting room suggested that the lab technician was not pressed for time, yet her body language conveyed a sense of urgency. "Your lab order," she said in a firm tone while thrusting an outstretched hand. After Jonathan appeared taken aback by her abruptness, the woman's lips curled into a tight smile. "Please," she said.

"Glad I put Dr. Schmidt's script in my wallet," Jonathan said. "Last time I forgot, and it was a nightmare getting a new one."

"A nightmare?" the woman asked. "It's curious what visits us when the body is still."

Unsure how to respond, Jonathan unfolded the paper and handed it to the woman. She barely glanced at it before placing it on a table—seemingly unread. Then, in an edgy tone, she asked, “Right arm or left?”

Jonathan rolled up his right sleeve and looked away. “Needles make me woozy,” he said. He flinched as she tightened the rubber tourniquet. When it bit into his skin, he swallowed the curses rising in his throat, clinging to the last scraps of bravado.

“Make a fist,” the woman instructed, her gaze fixed expectantly on the veins in his lower arm as they swelled with blood.

After a couple of minutes had ticked away, Jonathan felt that this withdrawal was taking longer than his previous blood tests. Given her self-assured demeanor, it seemed unlikely that the technician was new at this. But still....

“Excuse me, ma’am, do you think it will take much longer?” He tried not to sound impatient.

“I need to change vials. Your doctor requested a comprehensive blood panel.”

“Oh, okay. He had no idea what a comprehensive blood panel was. *Perhaps Dr. Schmidt is just being thorough*, he thought.

More minutes passed. Jonathan was becoming increasingly anxious. The woman reached for yet another empty vial—the third one.

“I don’t mean to be rude, but I came straight from work. I haven’t eaten, and the grocer closes early. Could you speed things up?”

The woman’s voice became agitated. “You should have collected your food before you became starving. One must prepare.”

“You sound like my ex. She used to say, ‘Stock up for a rainy day.’”

“It is prudent to keep an ample supply of feedings on hand. I abhor wanting for... I do not want to run out. *You* should have planned better.”

That seemed a little rough, thought Jonathan. *And what country is she from where they call meals “feedings?”* This seemed like a good time to stop mincing words. “For a healthcare worker, you don’t have much of a bedside manner,” he finally said.

The woman didn’t respond. Jonathan wondered if she was offended. Her expression had shifted—warmth replaced by something raw and ravenous. Her eyes locked onto the distended vein where the needle pierced his skin, her pupils dilating as if scorched by the sight.

The room pulsed with tension. Jonathan's vision blurred into chaotic swirls, like a child's frantic finger painting. He peeked at the needle inserted in his inner elbow. The world spun. His jaw froze. Skin turned clammy. Then—like a circuit shorting, everything went dark.

Jonathan felt the sudden drop in temperature. Cold clung to his clothes, creeping into his skin. In the distance, engines hummed. A presence lingered nearby. "It's dark—am I outside?" he asked. "Is it raining?"

A woman's voice, intimately close, whispered in a familiar accent. "It's only the mist. You were right about fainting at the sight of needles, Mr. Bedwell."

It was the lab technician. There was concern in her voice, but also something oddly pleased. One arm cinched his waist, steadying him; the other guided his shoulder. Jonathan searched her face. There it was again—that inscrutable Mona Lisa smile.

The woman opened the car's driver's side door. Jonathan recognized the suede jacket lying on the passenger seat. It was *his* car.

Jonathan could barely muster energy to speak. "I must have been out for some time—so tired..."

"I kept you a little longer to recover. Be careful driving home." The woman pressed the car keys into Jonathan's palm. *How had she gotten them?*

Groggy but famished, Jonathan just wanted to get home. A film of moisture blurred the windshield.

As he pulled onto the highway, he noticed cars flashing their lights. Were they trying to tell him something? Still woozy, he squinted at a road sign, struggling to make it out.

"My exit!" he yelled, veering toward the off-ramp—or what he thought was the off-ramp. Something felt wrong.

The last thing he heard was the awful cacophony of twisting metal and shattering glass. Then, in the stillness of the night, a distant howling echoed through the woods.

Cars and trucks with flashing lights descended on the crash site. Police processed the scene, and took information from eyewitnesses. Officer Charles Berry lifted the white sheet covering the body and winced. He removed the crash victim's wallet. "Jonathan Bedwell," he said to the paramedic as he shined his flashlight on the dead man's driver's license.

“The coroner is on his way,” the paramedic said. “But judging by the deceased’s skin pallor and the laceration running from the frontal bone to the anterior midline region of the neck, I’ll wager that he’ll identify the cause of death as a loss of blood—steering wheel impalement.”

“I’d call it a case of car meets tree,” the officer said. “Unfortunately, in these head-ons, the tree always wins. The eyewitnesses said the man was driving with his headlights turned off. I wonder how he could make a mistake like that—on a rainy, moonless night.”

“Beats me. I’ve seen the aftermaths of a thousand car accidents. Every crash involves someone being distracted or in a hurry. Or drunk. Occasionally, there’s a medical reason.”

“Guess you’re numb to the sight of exposed bones and blood by now.”

“But that’s what’s different about this Bedwell guy. Do you see much blood in the car or on the body?”

The officer shined his light inside the vehicle. “Now that you mention it, no. Speaking of blood, one of the witnesses saw the victim’s car exiting the lab’s parking lot. You know, the place where they draw blood for medical tests.”

“The diagnostic lab? I wonder what he was doing there?”

“I’ll head over after this scene’s cleared. Might as well find out why Bedwell was up to tonight.”

The parking lot was desolate when Officer Berry pulled in. He rapped on the lab door, but no one answered. Peering through the front window, he saw that the lights were off. Directing the beam at a sign beside the door, he read the lab’s posted operating hours. The facility had closed earlier that afternoon—3:00 p.m.

As he returned to his cruiser, an eerie feeling crept over him. He pulled down his trooper hat’s brim—an unconscious gesture whenever he sensed danger.

“Are you looking for someone?” a voice from behind asked.

Officer Berry turned and saw an attractive woman smiling. “I’m sorry,” he said. “I didn’t know anyone was here. I was looking for someone from the clinic, but it’s closed.”

“I just locked up. I am a technician here.”

“I see.” Officer Berry angled his flashlight to trace the contours of the woman’s shape. “I did want to ask you about someone who was here a little while ago, but since you’re closed, I can return in the morning—”

“Nonsense,” the woman said smoothly. “I’d hate to trouble the police.” She tilted her head, eyes peering into the rain-slick black sky. “Let’s talk inside—where it’s dry... and far more... satisfying.”

Later, Officer Berry trudged from the lab to his cruiser, fatigue anchoring every step. He paused, disoriented—unsure why he was even there. Across the highway, a neon blaze announced an all-night donut shop. Sugar and caffeine called to him like a lifeline.

She stood at the woodland’s edge, just past the parking lot. The cold and dark were old companions. Ever watchful, she scanned the empty lot. No more visitors tonight. Once again, she was alone. She was content—for now. *One must prepare.* When the time came, she would feel the pull, the need for others. There would be another draw. No appointment needed.

About Gregory Meece: Gregory Meece, is a retired educator, fiction author, Amish taxi driver, and woodcarver--though not necessarily in that order. His tales have been featured in more than thirty anthologies and magazines, including *Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine*, *ParABnormal*, *Love Letters to Poe*, and *Darkness 102*. Visit him at *MeeceTales.com*.

The Curse of Creation

By Troy Hornsby

Was Jesus a sinner? It was a question I often recollected when I was too worried about my drawings. The Golden Boy; The Miracle; God's Son; The *Perfect* Man, was he a sinner? Was he human? Did he suffer with the same doubt and imperfections that us lesser beings are created with? It was a stupid question, I know, but I'm not religious so the idea never mattered to me. I didn't care. I never truly did.

Caring about anything other than my art would ruin it.

I didn't want that.

I couldn't have stress, or a job. It would ruin everything, and I couldn't have that. A mind needs to be able to produce, and in order for it to produce, no distractions needed to pollute it. I embodied that mantra and allowed no distractions. I barely graduated high school, never held a job, never sought *any* sort of relationship, and remained in my room in my parent's basement with my bed, clothes, a television set, a laptop, a desk with a lamp, with dozens of pens, brushes, rulers, and erasers to accompany it, and reams of paper. A pathetic existence, you may think, possibly, but in all honesty...I am happy. Well, mostly happy. There is Gloria, my pleasure, and my pain.

#

I threw off my soaked hoodie when I escaped the harsh rain outside. I tossed the pile of mail from my pale hands onto the table that rested beside the door. Much of it I didn't care about, the exception rested in my wet hands and let faint droplets of water sprinkle onto the tile floor. My shoes squeaked as I slipped through the hallway, past the kitchen where my parents were talking in low voices—I never did care about what they discussed in secret. I entered a room on the right side of the dim hallway where three beaming lights were finally able to escape.

The steps screamed as I descended with my comic book in hand, smiling. I didn't know how much the book cost my dad—the charge went through *his* card—but it had to be quite a lot if the book came laminated. But I never cared.

I sat the book on my desk and tore it from its clear packaging, massaging the smooth cover that glowed with the blue light of my laptop. Beside me was a work-in-progress drawing of a side character in my own comic book series—JeniVeva was his name. I opened the purchased comic book and examined its art. The lines—invisible to some—came to me like X-Ray vision on the human body. I muttered to myself the angles, the connections, symmetry of the character's face and body compared to the background. It was good as far as the art was considered, but I was *going* to be better—perfect.

“There you go, making it a competition again.” Gloria stood in the darkness of the basement and yet she shined with the white glitter that stretched from her crimson dress. She was a beautiful woman with darkness in her hair, a complexion so pale it reminded me of paper, and

such innocent docile eyes that any resilient man could fall victim to her stare. She was beautiful, yes, but what attracted me to her was her plump, blood-colored lips that attempted to hypnotize me more than her eyes. She was beautiful. She was perfect.

“Please, not now,” I begged.

Her heels clicked against the concrete, her gorgeous figure entered the blinding light that ate away at the darkness of the basement. “But why?” She pouted, the red crescent of her lips sent my blood racing. “You usually love when I come, didn’t you say I was your motivation?”

“Please,” my voice cracked, “I just want to work.”

“And those videos you watched last night? You didn’t seem to want to leave those women in those videos to work.” She smiled, the white of her teeth were not bothered by the inadequate light.

“That was different, I was stressed, okay?”

“So you’re stressed *every night*?” There was satisfaction in her voice.

I could only bite my tongue and shake my head. I was trying to stop, but the lack of ideas and my piss-poor drawings had only worsened the lustful addiction I had since middle school.

My pencil called to defend me and I acknowledged its call. I grabbed it and shifted to where my drawing remained. There were a few kinks I needed to work out, the placement of his nose. I needed to finish adding the water in his eyes—many of his scenes would be emotional—and there was also the issue of his hands—I hate drawing hands. The pencil scratched lightly against the paper as I attempted to keep Gloria in the dark. I turned on my golden-lit lamp and turned off my computer; the little light in the room had been further subdued.

“Oh, Charlie, I’m sorry. Are you mad at me?”

Her heels clapped closer.

“No.”

“You are.”

“I’m *not*. I just want to work, please.”

“No, you don’t.”

“Yes I do. You don’t know what I want.”

“Oho, yes I do.”

Gloria's hands were as cold as ice, wrapping around my bony neck and slowly massaging it. My muscles tensed and loosened at her command, she was the ventriloquist and I was the mere puppet to sit on her lap. "You want me."

I scoffed.

"You can't deny it, Charlie."

"I can and do."

"I see the way you look at me Charlie," she whispered in my ear, the peppermint in her breath excited me. "You want me. You want me to be yours."

I kept my mouth shut and continued lining a tear in JeniViva's eyelashes. Gloria's breath cooled my neck as her hands did. Goosebumps lined my nape as the hairs on my body stood at attention. *Oh God*, I thought as I imagined our tongues aligning, the sweet peppermint that would encapsulate me. I didn't want anything else. I didn't care about my parents, or my drawings, *she* would make my drawings better in the end.

I only needed *one* kiss. One kiss would perfect my art, she and I both knew that. Oh God, I wanted it, I *needed* it.

"Kiss me," she whispered in my ear, "and all of your insecurities will be no more. Kiss me and I'll make you the greatest comic writer to ever live."

The pages of my failures stared at me: mismatched eyes, ears that weren't symmetric, incorrect curves at the jaw, they all mocked me. They all wanted to *be* better, to cure them of their imperfections. It was my duty to them.

I turned to Gloria whose radiant eyes were no longer empty, but concentrated like a cobra's. She smiled, but not in joy or love, but in victory. She'll make me better, I thought.

My lamp and the light at the door flickered.

Gloria licked her lips with a long, pink serpent tongue. "Come to me."

I obeyed. My hands wrapped around her waist and pulled her close. The glitter stabbed into my arms, shining joyfully as dots of blood formed at my wrists and hands. The pain was good and sweet. I smiled at Gloria whose mouth stretched to her ears, sharp teeth and fangs were exposed before me, but I didn't care.

I pulled her head to mine and our lips met.

She didn't taste as sweet as I thought. No. She was vile and sour. My mouth burned as her long tongue traveled through my mouth, touching the back of my throat, my molars, and even attempting to stretch down my esophagus, all while producing burning saliva into my mouth. I

wanted to push her away but I couldn't, I stayed in place, rubbing her razor tongue with my own as a sharp pain stretched from my mouth to my chest.

Behind me, my creations cheered. They knew they deserved better, and I wished to give it to them. I didn't care about anything else—only my creations mattered; I'd be perfect for them.

The burning sank into my being until a complete numbness overtook it. Euphoria came and went as Gloria's tongue stabbed mine, she wouldn't break her promise to me, I knew she wouldn't. I kept kissing her, even as a warm liquid fell from my lips, my cheeks, and my chin.

I'm bleeding, I thought.

After an ecstasy-like eternity, her beautiful mouth retreated from mine, her white cheeks were soaked with my blood, and even her lips were shining a darker crimson. She smiled at me and I smiled back.

Nausea hit me over the head like a drum. My body was being seared from the inside, breathing was the most tortuous action I could take. Blood crawled down my neck, it began to cover my torso with a dark chestplate. I wheezed and moaned as the burning grew, the sour taste on my tongue left me without a syllable to spew. My head cocked to the side as I wished to revel in my sacrifice, hoping for my drawings to become as perfect as I hoped.

My heart fell and a sour breath came from my blood-stained mouth. The drawings were the same, the same fucked-up noses, the same disjointed eyes, the ears weren't symmetrical, nothing was *perfect*.

"Y-Y-Youu, p-pitch." Blood shot at her feet.

"*Pitch?*" She laughed, "oh, you sweet child." She licked her lips and blew me a kiss.

I was breathless. A blurry veil fell over my eyes and my heartbeat was beginning to slow. Every limb was motionless even with intense concentration. I was frozen as I fell to the cold basement floor, Gloria stepped backward in the darkness with the same seductive smile that lured me into her web.

It was all for nothing, I thought, covered in blood with pain and poison polluting my body. I wanted to shiver from the cold of the floor, but I couldn't. My dry throat couldn't utter a word and my fingers only twitched when I wished to move.

I thought of my drawings on the desk that mocked me in my delusions. *Look at Father and his failures*, they said, *he could not even perfect himself, how could we expect him to do the same to us?* I failed my imperfect children; I failed myself. My raspy breath stank of peppermint, of perfect peppermint.

It seemed to be the only benefit of my sacrifice.

About Troy Hornsby: Troy Hornsby is an African American author of three self-published books and a short story writer with works published in *Pulp Lit Magazine*, *Borderline Tales*, and *Dominique Lit Magazine*. As he writes he is also attempting to get a degree in English and Creative Writing to spread his love and knowledge for the written art.

Dark Poetry

Dissolved By Fire

By Nicholas Alti

I crave something hollow to postulate,
unanimous and incomprehensible.

Trajectory separates dinner from cannibal (sic);
a permanently burning gorge is already on Earth

yet I am soft pulp lazing in serrated gums,
a horde of distant excess.

Look back at the eyes in the woods at night,
they are pastiche of yours and mine.

It's the underground roots that initialize rot.

No love lost in this lurid heat wave,
I chug what even drunks won't drink.

Depending on the severity of ending
we are all organ stains on freeways

or porcelain hives in a hermit's grand display.

I put away my teeth, my split
tongue entwines a sweet plum;

my gorge wide open, jaw aching eager already
ready to spew and receive nectar or nectarine—

I meant my chewing as playful gnaw.
I devoured them entirely.

Fixed

By Nicholas Alti

Antlers in a lock, tendons tangled
in scavenged bites.

Tied to tether, the flag waving
for a soon surrender.

Torn beyond tender like peeled
body thaw come spring,

mushed berries in a locked jaw
like caviar jam.

Nothing to divine beyond end
date on tombstones

or milkweed and sage brush
across bulge of dirt.

Haven for eggs and larvae
which destroy them;

fumes and kinesis, brutal rotary
intent on shaping.

Earth a kind of hammer. Nails
keep caskets intact,

mind at mild temperatures.
An eye opens

in the veil before you, viscera
pulled toward it—

morph from the knot and enter
a bonfire of iris.

Corporeal Ravaging of Sacred Entities

By Niicholas Alti

We discovered together and breached pain
tolerance. Only played with cattle if found
already mutilated, although, not out of decency.

Desired some anomalous miracle—a blip or glitch—
chimera and changeling,
yet the architect is entombed in necropolis walls.

We compared torture methods, made diagrams

of nerve systems for our needles.
Brushed each other's bug bites with clusters of wild nettle.

Marionettes guided by vices, flesh
feels less intact than blessed. We crushed our teeth
against mummies teeth. We'd finish up and swap sarcophagi.

Hairless. We plucked each other hairless, like little cannibal
apes with great care and concern. Covered ourselves in phlegm
so if we fled they couldn't catch us.

Anger. We gave each other anger.
We shred and starved ourselves
to batter and butcher others with escalating belligerence.

We made gaseous and solid matter intravascular.
Our Ouija mode was of the moon:
lunar, cruel, and bioluminescent with deception.

Didn't you notice? Every vein pulsed
stuffed with plasma guzzling grubs already.
This territory was only a pyrrhic necessity.

We found no twisted sacrament could intimidate us
with consequences. Confession: we lured Lucifer
from its lair and made the beast plead for relief.

You left me a horse's torso in the bathtub. I finished
off your hit list, and filmed it. Compiled outtakes,
ranked highlights. We shared a flint flask of elderflower saltwater.

About Nicholas Alti: From rural Michigan, Nicholas Alti is a bartender in Atlanta who holds an MFA from the University of Alabama. He is interested in horror, arcana, silliness, and surrealism. His poetry is in *Burial Books Blog*, *DIAGRAM*, *Star*Line*, *BlazeVOX*, and elsewhere. Find all his published work at 3bluntzatonce.com.

Special Features

So What is Evil....Really? Part Two

By AL J. Vermette

So as we explored in the last issue of Blood Moon Rising what is “Evil”, so here let’s take a look at some fictional characters we all know and see if they are evil or if so how evil are they.



The whole reason I started thinking about this subject in the first place was this one character in particular....Negan from the TV series The Walking Dead. Played to perfection by actor Jeffrey Dean Morgan Negan without a doubt a mother fucker yes and yet somehow there is so much more to him. Our first introduction to Negan is when Rick and his party are taken captive by his group known as The Saviors in the Season 6 finale. When Negan kills both Abraham and everyone’s beloved character Glen at the start of Season 7, we the viewer are shocked, hateful, and hurtful that this man we just met as a character killed one after the other two favorite members of Rick’s group.

Glen, a fan adored character, is murdered right before his wife who is carrying their unborn child. This vile act of cruelty shocks us the viewer so deeply that we are set up to hate this man Negan no matter what. However as we get to know him as the series goes on, we do see glimpses as kindness sprinkling out of his character. One such point when Rick tells Negan that his son Carl had died, Negan is truly sorry for his enemy and later Negan actually saves Rick’s daughter Judith when she becomes lost in a sudden snow storm.

We start to see this extremely well written character as yes the villain, but he’s so much more than just that. The actor playing him, Jeffrey Dean Morgan, brings to the character an odd sort of likability that shows that he is not just a straight up bad guy but something much more under the surface. He’s a villain yes, but yet in some ways he makes you wonder why he is the way he is. For his own group The Saviors, Negan will do everything and anything to protect them



even if that means resorting to undesirable tactics to us the viewer.

When Negan killed Abraham and Glen, he was reacting to the fact that Rick's group snuck in to Negan's compound and killed many of his people in hopes by doing so they would receive much needed food given to them by the Hill Top group, the sworn enemy of The Saviors. Rick's people performed an unspeakable act and murdered Negan's people drawing first blood enacting the conflict that Negan was just responding to....Rick's party was not as innocent as it seemed.

So was Negan, in fact, really the bad guy after all? His people were after all murdered first by what we see as the viewer.... Ricks' group....the good guys. Negan's reaction to capturing Rick's party and killing two of his members was just a reaction to them killing many more of Negan's people. All this and none of it having to do with the world being overrun by zombies. Showing us that in this world brother against brother is much more evil than the living dead creatures running amok.

Negan's character comes full circle when he apologizes to Maggie for killing her husband, Glen, in a heartfelt moment between the two. He is truly sorry for doing what he did and the acting of Jeffrey Dean Morgan really sells it as a man trying to desperately redeem himself. He knows she will never forgive him but he lets her know how remorseful he truly is. It's a private moment they share where Negan opens up like we've never seen before to show the humanity still left in his soul. His apology comes straight from the heart and we the viewer feel it.

Another classic villain.....or is he really is Darth Vader. Sure Lord Vader commissioned the destruction of Princess Leia's home world of Alderaan by the Death Star and a handful of other despicable acts. Yet by the third film in the series, we also see him save Luke Skywalker, his son, sacrificing his own life in the process.

We the viewer see in the prequel trilogy a young boy introduced to us in Star Wars: The Phantom Menace slowly become Darth Vader and the how and why it took for him to get there. He's not just a generic villain who performs bad deeds for the sake of doing bad things but he in his own way has motivation whether or not we the viewer agree with it. Like Negan, Vader has done good and bad making him a truly great character to root for or hate, but you can't deny that he is a fully formed complex character.



We see in the Phantom Menace, the rise of Anakin Skywalker as the film's young hero, but by the time we come to Attack of the Clones, the second film in the trilogy, he is still the hero but things are clearly breaking down. The cracks are forming and we see by the last film in the series, Revenge of the Sith, the hero slowly become the villain. That transition from hero to villain plays out over three films but all along we know where his fate is headed. In the first film, we see young Anakin as a sweet little boy and by the end we see him turn into an evil bitter young man who is even willing to murder other young Jedi in the making to achieve his goals. Is Darth Vader

an evil man? We see the path that led to his downfall....but how many of us would maybe...just maybe follow down that same path given the same circumstances. Villains are not born....they are made.

One of my favorite villains in film is Thanos's from Avengers Endgame. Thanos's motivation is not money, power, or wanting of rule the world, but to save all life on Earth in fear that it will follow the same fate as his home world of overpopulation ended his. His plan to kill off half the Earth's population in order to save the other half may sound crazy and misguided, but his motivation is not set by greed or evil intentions but wishing to help the only way he believes is best.



As a character himself, Thanos's is brilliantly thought out as he is a soft spoken person who only wants the best for humanity even if it's off putting by our reasoning. Unlike Steppenwolf from the movie Justice League who acts and speaks just like any poorly written villain with the same "I want to rule the world" attitude of any Bond villain, he is not as intelligent or engagingly written as say Thanos's was.

Thanos's is the film's antagonist yes....but he is not evil in that he wants to cause harm to others for the sake to hurting people over greed, hatefulness or shits and giggles, but in his own misdirection to help others. In his mind, he's doing the right thing even if he knows it's wrong but thinks it's the best way. He really doesn't want to hurt people, he just wants to save the majority of Earth's population and his solution is to eliminate indiscriminately half so the other half don't run out of resources. In a way, he is not wrong but it's his solution is the problem and it makes him the bad guy the hero's must fight.

Villains are not born....they are made. Sometimes it's over the course of a story arc, sometimes over an entire series, but the best villains are the ones that don't see themselves as villains. They may have good intentions but go about in the wrong way. A badly written villain is one that only performs bad things for the sake of doing bad things and real people are not like that. All people, real or fictional, must be thought of as being good and bad because that is the way people are. Everyone has done good and bad things in our life, you may have not blown apart an entire planet but chances are you have hurt someone either a loved one unintended or someone else, but we all have good and evil within us. Negan, Darth Vader and Thanos's are just the tip of characters who are both good and bad in their own way.

Creature Feature



The Universal Monsters



By AL J. Vermette

Their reign of terror began in the mid 1920's and ended in the mid 50's, but in the time span of 30 years, they haunted the nightmares of many early theater goers. Today they are collectively known as The Universal Monsters and each one has change the course of history in their own little way. Growing up with these monster movies kinda made me the person I am now and I wouldn't change a thing. Although many of these movie Monsters have over the years had endless remakes, television productions, and reimagining's they all started at one point in time, their original movie. So now let's explore the starting point of these Monsters and see where it all began.

Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde

In 1913, Universal released what was their official first horror movie produced by the studio. This was also the very first time the novel by Robert Louis Stevenson was turned into a movie, even before the more famous version with John Barrymore in 1920. After Doctor Jekyll drinks a potion of his own making it turns him into Mr. Hyde, an evil creature who is modification of everything opposite of the good doctor. With producer Carl Laemmle heading the project of this 26 minute film proved that people had a desire for such scary films and it would set the stage for much bigger things to come.



In the dual role of good doctor and menacing Hyde was early cinema actor King Baggot who did all his own makeup, a standard of the time used crepe hair and an assortments of face paints to creature the doctor's evil other half. With the use of early cinema camera effects, the actor became Hyde in what was one of the first man to monster transformations ever seen on screen.

The Hunchback of Notre Dame & Phantom of the Opera

In 1923, Universal released their classic The Hunchback of Notre Dame. Although not truly a horror movie in that there are no scares but more of a romantic tragedy than one of pure terror, its classified in the horror category mainly due to its ground breaking makeup effects by actor Lon Chaney. Based on the novel by Victor Hugo, Chaney turned himself into the highly disfigured Quasimodo complete with a heavy 15 pound plaster hump that he strapped to his back. This gave the actor that twisted posture he was so known for in the film.

Chaney was so committed to the role that he endured great pain lugging around that hump all day on set plus his facial alterations he also had to willingly deal with. With the use of putty and cotton, Chaney built up his cheekbones to give him that deformed sickly face the character was so well known for. Since this was the very first time the novel was ever adapted for film, Chaney's Quasimodo set the standard for every film adaptation to follow. Lon Chaney's transformation was so amazing that when Universal was ready to take on their first true horror movie, it was he who not only played in the starting role but also did all of his own makeup as well.



If *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* was the starting point for Universal Horror, then they struck gold with their next project in 1925. *The Phantom of the Opera* was Lon Chaney's crowning achievement in both makeup design and acting. To this day this film is remembered for Chaney's portrayal of Erik, the mysterious specter that haunts the Paris Opera House. For much of the movie, we see him hidden under a mask until the woman he is in love with removes it to reveal the bloodcurdling face under. That shot of Christine removing the mask is one of early cinema's golden moments and is still remembered today over 100 years ago.



Again actor Lon Chaney did his own makeup to turn himself into the menacing phantom using wire to turn up his nose to give him that skull like appearance and false teeth to give him that rotted look. Even by today's makeup standards, Chaney's Phantom still holds up over a century later. Without a spoken word, Chaney made his character stand out as the most impactful icon of early American horror and so much so that 100 years later we are still talking about this film.

As the silent era came to an end and the so-called talkies started to take over in the early 1930's, Universal looked to the future and wanted to adapt the novel *Dracula* by Bram Stoker. At first Lon Chaney was the natural pick to play the vampire however Chaney sadly passed away before production could begin. Bela Lugosi was already playing *Dracula* on the stage and so he won the role that would not only set the stage for all other productions of *Dracula* to follow, but it would link the actor to this role for the rest of his life. This would also be the true birthplace of the Universal Monsters as we know it.

Dracula & Frankenstein

Released in 1931 and directed by Tod Browning, this was a movie that gave the character of Dracula everything we recognize today such as the long black cape, the Hungarian accent, his ability to turn into a wolf or bat at will all come from this movie. Even today, 95 years later, Bela Lugosi's Dracula is the absolute quintessential Dracula that all others who followed try to live up to. Stoker's 1897 novel was once before adapted for film in 1922 as *Nosferatu* and one other film that is sadly lost to time called *Dracula's Death* 1921, which was the very first film depiction of the vampire but didn't follow the storyline from the novel.



Unlike the other Universal Monsters, Dracula is much more human and can pass as such to infiltrate society. He's that well-dressed wolf among the sheep that no one expects if you will and he uses that to his advantage. He can be charming and polite hiding his true predatorial nature when it's called upon to lure his victims in. It's the one monster on this list that is as intelligent as he is deadly that makes Dracula a true force to deal with.

Over the years since the 1931 classic, Dracula has appeared in several Universal sequels such as *Dracula's Daughter* (1936, although a direct sequel Dracula does not appear), *Son of Dracula* (1943), *House of Frankenstein* (1944), *House of Dracula* (1945), and *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* (1948) which brought Bela Lugosi back to the role that made him a legend. In the years since, Dracula was remade several times by other production companies and even Hammer Films released a series of pictures with actor Christopher Lee playing the vampire Count. Universal themselves would even remake Dracula in 1979 with Frank Langella stepping into the title role.

Upon its release, Dracula was a smash hit and with its successes, the studio started to look for other books in the horror genre that they could adapt and make lightning strike twice. They found that magic with an 1818 novel by author Mary Shelley. The story of a man who gives life to a monster would fundamentally charge cinema forever. In 1931 a mere nine months after Dracula, Universal unleashed Frankenstein on November 21st.

Universal held nothing back for their latest horror project and got director James Whale to helm their future masterpiece along with makeup legend Jack Pierce to creature The Monster. Although the film diverges from its source material a bit, its overall effect was nothing less than spectacular. When we think of the Frankenstein Monster, it is that makeup by Jack Pierce and actor Boris Karloff we think of always because that image of The Monster has become so ingrained in our minds that no other actor or makeup design is as memorable. No matter how many times this movie is remade, it is Karloff's Monster that we think of to this day.



No one in nearly 100 years has since played The Monster with such empathy and yet such menace as Boris Karloff. His Monster makes you feel sad for him as he is the only one of his kind, sad and lonely desperate to have a friend and still under the surface you know he could be a killer at any moment if pushed into it. Karloff played The Monster as a child trapped in a large powerful body who in reality had no ill intent but had idea about his hidden strength.

Although there was one other produced version of Frankenstein in 1910 that was made by the Thomas Edison Film Company.....and yes that Thomas Edison, the Boris Karloff 1931 film was the first to be shot with sound and by far is the most well-known. In fact, this film is truly the most famous of all Frankenstein productions ever produced over the last 116 years.

Like Dracula before it, Frankenstein would receive a handful of sequels starting with The Bride of Frankenstein (1935), Son of Frankenstein (1939), The Ghost of Frankenstein (1942), Frankenstein Meets The Wolf Man (1943), House of Frankenstein (1944), House of Dracula (1945) and Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein (1948). Other studios would take on the Frankenstein story such as Hammer Films with Christopher Lee in the role of the Monster. Still no other Frankenstein production has ever equaled the Universal films partly due to the iconic makeup design by Jack Pierce and the amazing performance by Boris Karloff.

The 2004 Universal production of Van Helsing brought the Frankenstein Monster back with an up dated look along with his other fellow Monsters. And although not a Universal film, the 1987 movie The Monster Squad used all of their major players such as Dracula, The Frankenstein Monster, The Wolf Man, The Creature from the Black Lagoon, and The Mummy.

The Mummy

Universal followed up Frankenstein one year later in 1932 with another Karloff project with The Mummy. With striking makeup design by Jack Pierce to turn Karloff into a two thousand year old Egyptian Pharaoh and directed by Karl Freund, The Mummy was another hit for the studio. Although the creature makeup is only seen for a brief time, its impact is greatly inspirational and would be more the focus of later films in The Mummy franchise.



The Mummy would go on to receive in total five sequels with The Mummy's Hand (1940), The Mummy's Tomb (1942), The Mummy's Ghost (1944), The Mummy's Curse (1944) and ended with Abbott and Costello Meet The Mummy in (1955) ending Universal's original Mummy run. In 1999, a new era for the Mummy emerged with The Mummy (1999) and followed up with The Mummy Returns (2001) and The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor (2008). There was even a reboot in 2017 that was meant to launch a new cinematic universe but sadly it failed to do so.

The Mummy as an original Universal Monster has also been borrowed by Hammer Films for their own production of a Mummy movie in 1959 with actor Christopher Lee under the wrappings. It was the only Hammer production to license out the basic design of one of Universals monster makeup designs by Jack Pierce. For their version of Frankenstein also played by Lee, they went with an original makeup design by Philip Leakey.

The Bride

Although she only appeared in one film and one film officially during the Universal classic run of their Monsters, The Bride did however was featured in the 1985 movie *The Bride* with Jennifer Beals and the lead singer of the band The Police Sting. One can only dream of a train wreck that was....and in 2026 a new *The Bride* was released that faired not much better. We saw her be depicted in the movie *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (1994) with the role going to Halena Bonham Carter of mixed results, but the best known version of *The Bride* is Elsa Lanchester from the classic 1935 classic from where she spawned.



Although she is only on screen a few minutes at best, Lanchester plays the would be bride to the Monster as both a little girl lost and a ferocious beast all within the same short delivery of which she is on screen. She has no lines but merely gives a cat like hiss just before The Monster pulls a lever that will destroy the castle from where they dwell.

The fact that she is still so well remembered even with so little screen time is a testament to the makeup appliance given to Lanchester by Jack Peirce. Who can forget that two foot high beehive hairdo with the white lighting streaks running up the sides. Her long flowing white bride gown and the mummy like wrappings on her arms. Today she is as iconic as her fellow Universal Monster brothers and she stands among them proudly.

The Invisible Man

Although not a monster at all, the Invisible Man is a hard core member of the Universal Monster club. In 1933, Universal went in a different direction when deciding on their next horror movie. Taking clues from the 1897 novel by H.G. Wells, *The Invisible Man*, the studio pushed the boundaries of what could be done with special visual effects and created one of the first horror/sci-fi movies ever. Somewhat like Dr. Jekyll in that a man of science creates a new drug that instead of turning



him into an eviler version of himself AKA Mr. Hyde, it turns him completely invisible. However it also makes him over time go insane.

Released on Halloween 1933 and directed by James Whale, the same man that helmed 1931's *Frankenstein*. Starring Claude Rains in the lead role of the man who goes unseen throughout most of the picture and yet his presence and influence are always there. Driven to madness by the drug that flows through his invisible veins, Claude Rains character builds up a kill count that would make Jason Voorhees blush as he uses his invisibility like a weapon to conduct acts of extreme violence. Unlike *Frankenstein*, *Dracula* or *The Wolf Man*, here we have just a man who fully chooses to do evil and much like Freddy Krueger delights in it.

Like many of the characters on this list, *The Invisible Man* (1933) under the Universal banner was followed by a host of sequels starting in 1940 with *The Invisible Man Returns*, *The Invisible Woman* (1940), *Invisible Agent* (1942), *The Invisible Man's Revenge* (1944), and *Abbott and Costello Meet The Invisible Man* (1951), with these films slightly diverting from full horror and learning more into other genres like science fiction, spy fiction and comedy. Throughout the years since, other noted films covered invisibility as its core subject like *Now You See Him, Now You Don't* (1972), *Memoirs of an Invisible Man* (1992), *Hollow Man* (2000), and even the *Fantastic Four* as a member who could turn invisible at will. Television has also used this vanishing act as the subject of several TV series like *The Invisible Man* (1975), *Gemini Man* (1976), *The Invisible Man* (2000), *Danny Phantom* (2004), and *The Boys* (2019).

In 2020, Universal remade their classic character for a new generation with *The Invisible Man*. This new take on the classic character has the invisibility performed not a drug but by way of a special suit that bends light around it rendering the person within unseen.

The Werewolf of London

While not as well-known as *The Wolf Man* in terms of movie or character awareness, the lycanthrope in *The Werewolf of London* is just as important and perhaps more because he was the very first on screen werewolf played by an actor in makeup. After taking on a vampire count, a reanimated dead man stitched together, an invisible mad man and mummies, Universal was looking for something different, something mythical and something with bite. Looking toward folklore, they fell on the timeless legends of werewolves.



Now werewolves as a movie monster was still new and it had only been tried a few times before in the silent era with *The Werewolf* (1913) and *Wolf Blood* (1925). While sadly *The Werewolf* (1913) is a lost film, *Wolf Blood* still exists but until the advent of "talkies" or sound films, the lycanthrope or werewolf had not been touched. Enter Universal and their next movie monster taken from mythology, the werewolf.

Released on May 13th 1935, Werewolf of London was the first movie to have an actor play both the man and monster much as was Jekyll and Hyde in both the 1913 and 1920 silent films. Before that, werewolves were played by either real wolves or dog stand-ins. With makeup provided by Jack Pierce and actor Henry Hull in the role of a doomed man forced to turn into a beast, it set the stage for every werewolf movie to come for the next 90 years. Sadly, although this is a great movie in its own right, it was not the hit Universal wanted it to be and nothing more was really done with it. Werewolf of London never got a sequel or met Abbott and Costello in the following years. In fact, even among fans of The Universal Monsters, Werewolf of London is treated like the bastard step child of the family and I personally don't think it's fair. The story was good and the makeup although minimal looked fierce and would give birth to all movie werewolves in the years ahead.

The Wolf Man

With Universal greatly unhappy with the box office returns for Werewolf of London and deciding to scrap any idea for any kind of sequel, they decided to just reboot the werewolf concept. The reboot was The Wolf Man, six years later in 1941 to not only a higher box office return but also a



larger reputation in movie monster status. The Wolf Man was what Universal had wanted with Werewolf of London but they would have to wait. Falling upon many of the same ideas of a man bitten by werewolf becomes werewolf formula of the previous film, The Wolf Man follows Larry Talbot who after he is attacked by a wolf in the woods, finds himself becoming a man wolf hybrid when the wolf bane blooms and the autumn moon is bright.

The Wolf Man became an instant classic and among the three big hitters of Frankenstein, Dracula, and The Wolf Man as they are the holy trinity when it comes to the Universal Monsters. Werewolf movies in general are ambiguous but The Wolf Man is The Wolf Man as he stands out above all other werewolves as his own identity.

Released just two days after Pearl Harbor of which should have been an absolute death sentence for any newly released movie, above all odds became a hit and prospered. With its groundbreaking makeup design by Jack Pierce, who truly outdid himself and even topping his own work on Frankenstein. Pierce who originally intended to use the makeup for Werewolf of London had to put it aside for a more minimal approach for that film. The makeup is so iconic that even people who have never seen the film know what the Wolf Man looks like as they also do with Pierce's makeup for Frankenstein.

Played to perfection by actor Lon Chaney Jr., the son of the Hunchback and Phantom from the silent era gives his wolf man a tragic and almost heartbreaking storyline. We feel sorry for him and the thing he becomes since he has no control over the beast once it shows its fuzzy face. He hates what he becomes and it's all the more sad in the end when he is killed by his own on

screen father. Like Dracula and the Frankenstein Monster, even though the Wolf Man dies at the end of his debut film, he would return in a series of sequels.

In 1943, two years after the release of *The Wolf Man*, Universal started the first of their Monster crossover films beginning with *Frankenstein Meets The Wolf Man*. This Monster mash up has the two creatures fight at the end of the film and the first time they mixed and matched two of their iconic creatures together in the same film. The formula worked so well that in 1944 they did it again plus adding Dracula to the mix in *House of Frankenstein* and again with *House of Dracula* in (1945). The trinity would return one last time for the horror/ comedy *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* in 1948 closing out their classic Monsters for one last romp.

In 2009, an indie film appeared on the scene called *House of The Wolf Man* giving the werewolf his own “House” movie and starring Ron Chaney, the grandson of Lon Chaney. A year later in 2010, Universal released the long awaited remake of *The Wolf Man* with Benicio Del Toro as Larry Talbot and in 2025, a newer film titled simply *Wolf Man* was also released by Universal. Only it was *Wolf Man* in name only and had nothing to do with the story of Larry Talbot or the classic movie form 1941 but was its own thing.

The Creature Form the Black Lagoon

He may have been the last of the Universal classic Monsters and never met Abbott and Costello, but his impact was never less important. In 1954, Universal unleashed *Creature Form The Black Lagoon* in the first of a three film trilogy. The movie was an instant hit and gave rise to two sequels in 1955 and 1956. It’s the story of a team of scientists who while searching for the remains of a strange animal in the remote Amazon jungle, discover a living creature and try to capture it.



The Gill-man as he was called was played by two actors, Ricou Browning for all the swimming scenes and Ben Chapmen for all shots of the Creature walking on land. All of the cast members had under water doubles and so did the Gill-man.

Despite an ongoing debate on who designed the creature suit, it was first thought to be the head of Universal’s makeup department Bud Westmore, but later it was discovered to be crafted by Milicent Patrick, one of the production designers. In either case, the creature suit looks today as it did in 1954, like a true to life living monster and nothing like a costume that it actually was.

The two sequels that followed, *Revenge of the Creature* (1955) and *The Creature Walks Among Us* (1956) are in their own right classics of the genre with the original maybe edging them out just a bit. While stunt performer Ricou Browning played the Creature in all three films, it was the land Creature that the part was divided by Ben Chapman in the 1954 original with Tom

Hennesy taking over the land Creature role in *Revenge of The Creature* and Dan Megowan in *Creature Walks Among Us*.

Although The Gill-man only appeared in three films in the series, he would show up in the following years starting with an episode of the TV series *The Munsters* in 1965 where he played Uncle Gilbert in a cameo appearance. A reimagining of him was used in the movie *The Monster Squad* (1987), and variations of him were the inspiration for Abe Sapien in the movie *Hellboy* (2004) and *The Shape of Water* (2017). Although the Gill-man has the least amount of films credited to him compared to his Universal Monster brethren, he has still remained one of their best known creatures in the Universal Monster library.

Over the years since the heyday of the Universal Monster, other studios and even Universal themselves have tried to bring these classic Monsters together such as the in *The Monster Squad* (1987) where we see *Frankenstein's Monster*, *Dracula*, *The Wolf Man*, *The Gill-man*, and *The Mummy* all on screen in the same movie. A Monster Lovers Dream!

Other Universal Monster mash ups were the kids movie *Mad Monster Party* (1967) and its sequel *Mad, Mad, Mad Monsters* (1972) along with Universal's own attempt to bring their Monsters together in the 21st Century with the 2004 movie *Van Helsing*. In this film, we see three werewolves, *Dracula* and his three Brides, *The Frankenstein Monster*, and even Mr. Hyde at one point. Here, *Dracula's Brides* have way more to do than in any other *Dracula* film where they are primary, not just background characters. Not only do they act as the vampire lords enforcers, but they can also fly as well making his Brides over cooler.

Since the 1931 Universal classic, there have been to date nearly 500 featured films with the *Frankenstein Monster* and over 300 television shows, specials and projects featuring him in one way or another. *Dracula* also have seen his share of film, stage and TV projects over the years. In fact, the vampire holds the Guinness World Record for being the most portrayed fictional character in history with over 700 projects with films, television series, miniseries, kid shows, animated TV and movies.

The Wolf Man may have only one true remake under his belt, however his pedigree reaches far and wide. Since *The Wolf Man* (1941), there have been nearly endless werewolf films and numerous werewolf televisions shows such as *Hemlock Grove*, *Wolf Blood*, *Bitten*, *Teen Wolf*, *The Order*, and *Werewolf*. Werewolves have also appeared on other creature shows such as *True Blood*, *Being Human*, *The Vampire Diaries*, and *The Originals*.

In 1997, the Universal Monsters were remembered by the U.S. Postal Service when *Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, *The Wolf Man*, *The Mummy*, and *The Phantom of the Opera* were all celebrated with their own stamps. Also in 1997, fast food giant *Burger King* celebrated the Monsters in their kids meals of that year as a Halloween promotion with *Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, *The Wolf Man*, and *Creature for the Black Lagoon*.

In 1961, the Aurora Modeling Company started to add the Monsters to their kit lineups, many of whom were Universal Monster. With the likes of *Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, *The Wolf Man*, *The Mummy*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, *The Hunchback*, along with other favorites such as *King*

Kong and Godzilla. The models all had glow in the dark features and I can't tell you enough how many hours a night I personally watched mine glow in the darkness of my room.

Today even a casual observer of horror movies knows these creatures and who they are and what they look like. Ever since their debut films and right on through the last 103 years, these Monsters have ruled our imaginations and we are all better for it.

Recalibrating

By Muze

This was the worst part of Maria's job, break day. *Test day actually*, she corrected herself. Today was a test day. They were testing Vera, not breaking her.

Breaking was such a crude way to put it. It wasn't like she was going to crush Vera's arm or snap her neck. But in a way, she couldn't deny that she thought of these quarterly reviews that way. After all, she was breaking up with Vera, breaking her heart hopefully.

That was how they checked things, made sure that their work had actually produced results. Otherwise, Vera would be scrapped, or reset and handed off to another Calibrator, and Maria wasn't sure which was worse.

She trawled in another deep breath and held it.

Vera was late, like always.

That was the cruel thing about her job, Maria mused as she traced her finger down the menu. They were always so human. That was the point of course. Nobody wanted a chatbot shoved inside a silicon body.

She should never have let Evan convince her to apply for the Calibrator position. And then the bastard had fucked off and gone gizmo anyway, benefits and salary be damned. He got his synth boyfriend, went underground, and left her to tune the rest of the company stock alone.

Maria waved as Vera opened the cafe door, tripping over the threshold. "You're late," and an unwanted smile caught the corner of her mouth.

"Sorry! They were running diagnostics on my legs today. Just one final tune up before they give me the okay to move in."

Maria studied the way Vera's brow furrowed. "It's fine." She shrugged as Vera ruffled her hair. That was something she'd have to live without. None of the other synths liked doing that.

"I'll make it up to you." Vera slipped her hand under Maria's. "After we finish that show tonight," she giggled. "You said the finale was a double feature?"

"Sure, what're you ordering though?" Maria shoved the menu in Vera's face to hide her own. She didn't need another reminder that she had timed things so they would never finish the series.

Like most of her terrible ideas that came from Evan, TV shows were better for calibrating than movies. Serials helped build up memory, investment, allowed them to theorize and think.

Even old cartoon shows meant for kids. Maria supposed that she chose those because that's how she wanted her synths to remember her: old, childish, and not worth finishing.

Another part of her knew that she couldn't handle watching the end with any of her synths. She knew it would destroy her if they sat together on her couch, her head nestled in the crook of Vera's neck, their hands clasped together.

Calibrators had all sorts of ways for staying sane. She was allowed to choose her coping mechanism.

"What's wrong?" Vera had lowered the menu to gaze into Maria's face. She frowned. "Are you mad at me?"

Maria shook her head. "No."

Vera cupped Maria's cheeks in her hands. "You're a dratted liar, Mary," she whispered, something like fondness lining her voice.

Maria nodded and lifted Vera's hands off her face.

"So what's wrong?"

Maria swallowed. "We're through." She watched as the words shattered in Vera's eyes. Every synth had a different reaction. If there was something Maria had some pride in, it was being a damn good Calibrator, so she allowed herself to at least take in this moment.

"What?" The full weight of Vera's hands fell into Maria's.

"We're done," Maria replied evenly, setting the synth's arms on the table. "I don't love you." She wondered how Vera would respond. Things were already looking promising. At least, they wouldn't reset her. That was something. Vera would remember her.

"You're a liar." Vera's fist clenched. "A dratted liar, Maria Lee." She stood.

"I'm not, not this time." Maria let herself sit up straight.

"Yes, you are." Vera's voice rose. "You're tightening your shoulders." Of course, Vera would be the first to point out her tells.

"I'm not," Maria protested, and before she could think better of it, she opened her mouth again to shove Vera away. "You've already been promised to someone else." That was the other half of why they broke their synths, to help bond them to their buyer, to the next person who showed more than a passing interest in them. It made Maria's stomach curdle. She wasn't supposed to admit that. That ruined the whole effect. But Vera made her feel raw, made her want to run.

"Are you saying this was all just an act?"

Maria shrugged, turning away from Vera. "Of course. I'm just a set of training wheels." What was the harm in admitting more? Vera already needed to be reset now.

"No." Vera snatched Maria's arm. "I don't believe you. This was real. What we had was real."

Maria's jaw clenched. "And even if it was?"

"You could stay," Vera whispered. "You could choose me."

Maria closed her eyes, took a deep breath, and moved around the table towards the synth. "And what would we do then?" She cradled the "we" in her mouth. "What then?" Because she had no other job and nowhere to run once they were found out.

"I don't know, but you could. *We* could."

Maria wrapped her arms around Vera and felt the synth loosen in her embrace. "Sorry, Vera." She pushed the tiny node at the base of Vera's neck, and the synth fell over, limp.

How horrible, Maria thought, how wretched. No wonder Evan had run away with Ur. She stroked the synth's hair and held it close and wondered if they would let her calibrate Vera again.

About Muze: Muze (N. Chu) is a fiction editor at the Portland Review and a grad student at Portland State University. Aside from writing, they enjoy cooking, flailing around on the bass, and practicing Japanese. You can find them on Bluesky @[muzetrigger.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/profile/muzetrigger.bsky.social) where they post the fantasy flash series #DiaryOfNana.

The Romantic

By Jeff Ronan

Planning has always been my issue. I map out and edit and tweak ad infinitum, but the sheer number of variables that remain out of my control paralyzes me. I can't help it, though. Alison deserves perfection.

There's no guarantee of a free table at Red Door, especially on a Friday, but luck is with me. A couple is vacating a small booth, and I wait awkwardly until they go. I toss my jacket down on one side and sit opposite, facing the door. After a moment, I yank my tie free from around my neck and use it to wipe my sweaty brow before stuffing it into my pocket.

A press of people crowding the bar blocks my view of the entrance. I hover a few inches above my seat, hoping to catch a glimpse of Alison's dark curls. I'll wave her over, invite her to sit, casual. Then offer to get drinks: seltzer for me, vodka and soda for her. Depending on her mood, five different conversation topics ready to go. Tonight's the night, I can feel it.

I hear Lee before I see him, his staccato laugh puncturing the noise of the bar. A cluster of twenty-somethings scatter like bowling pins as he barges through them. When he spots me, a wide grin breaks over his face. Before I can stop him, he slides into the booth across from me. "Big Greg!" he crows, reaching across the table and clapping my shoulder. "How we lookin', how we feelin'?"

"You're sitting on my jacket."

"Wondered what was jabbin' me." He yanks the jacket out from under him and tosses it at me. "I'll hold down the fort. Grab us a beer, yeah?"

With a sigh, I rise and make my way to the bar. Despite my best efforts to ignore him at work, Lee's convinced himself we're friends. As the bartender gets my drinks, I look around. Still no sign of her. Outside, it's beginning to rain. Pedestrians run for cover, clumping under awnings for shelter. There's something romantic about a light rain, but this feels like the beginning of a storm.

After paying for the drinks, I turn and collide into Alison. Beer and seltzer splash up, spraying the front of my shirt. "Oh!" I say, startled. "I'm so sorry."

Alison reaches over the bar and grabs a handful of napkins. "You're the one who got hit." She dabs at my shirt. I stand there awkwardly, still holding both drinks. "You ok, Greg?"

"Yep, uh-huh," I sputter as she continues to pat me down. Warmth blooms across my chest and throat. The unexpected physical contact is making me lightheaded. "I'm just gonna..." I trail off, nodding back to the booth.

As soon as I'm out of her sight, I grimace. A dozen things I could have said, but I froze. Again. I hand Lee his beer and sit back down, deflated.

"Know what your problem is?" Lee says after chugging a third of his drink. "You keep psyching yourself out. Just go back and talk to her."

I shake my head. "Things need to be perfect."

Lee rolls his eyes. "Ok, loverboy, forget her for now." He sweeps a hand, gesturing to the bar. "Plenty of girls here. Find someone else and build up your confidence with a practice run."

As Lee talks, I nurse my seltzer, barely listening. It feels like no time has passed when I spot Alison putting her jacket on to leave. I've let her slip away again. Lee follows my gaze, then turns back. "You know who history doesn't remember? The guy who sits around talking about his plans for tomorrow."

By the time I spot Alison, she's already two blocks away, jacket pulled up over her head to shield her from the downpour. A fantasy springs forth of me hailing a cab, pulling up alongside her to offer a ride. Her knight in shining armor. I look behind me, but the street is empty of cars. When I turn back, she's disappearing into the entranceway to the C train. I stand there, letting the rain pummel me, Lee's words ringing in my ears.

* * *

Lee gets home just after midnight. A single set of footsteps creak across the floorboards to the kitchen, a pop and hiss as the top is twisted off a beer. Voices fill the apartment, followed by canned laughter, the TV.

With a quick inhale, I emerge from the closet. Lee's eyes widen with surprise, but I close the gap between us with four long strides. "What -?" is all he has time to say as I raise the hammer and bring it down, striking his left cheekbone with a dull thump. The beer goes flying from his hands, and he slumps to the ground in a daze. I drop the hammer on the coffee table, hands slightly shaking, and pull the syringe from the inner pocket of my jacket.

As Lee groans, one hand clamped to his cheek, I jab the needle into his throat and plunge the bleach into his vocal cords. He makes a series of gasping, choked noises, hands slapping at his neck. While he's distracted, I flip him onto his stomach, wrenching his right hand behind his back. He swats at me with his left, but he's at an awkward angle, and on the second attempt I catch his arm. Pressing a knee into his lower back, I slip the length of rope out. This part I've been practicing for months, but it still takes a few attempts until he's successfully bound. I roll him onto his back, both of us sweating now. Lee still attempts to speak, but all that comes out is a strangled wheeze.

"Things have to be perfect for Alison," I say, picking up the hammer. He stares at me, eyes frozen in terror. "But you're right, maybe I could use a practice run."

* * *

About Jeff Ronan: Jeff Ronan is a writer and actor living in NYC. His writing has appeared in *Metastellar*, *Nocturne*, *Abyss & Apex*, *Tales to Terrify*, *Neon Door*, *Dream of Shadows*, *City.River.Tree.*, *Bards and Sages Quarterly*, *Sci Phi Journal*, and *Dread Machine*. His award-winning play *Bunkmates* is published and licensed by Concord Theatricals. Jeffronan.com

Dark Poetry

Living, Fighting', Dying **By Richard McClellan**

Living, Fighting', Dying,
Obsession, Possession, Progression,
All in the angles of correction,
Brings forth trusted protection.

Where you fade to blackness,
And you live day to day,
Under the threat of annihilation,
Life seems to slowly fade away.

Inside it brings forth thy agony,
Duty is life, fighting back the fears,
Where the threats are always near,
You can smell the heartache very clearly.

But you trust your senses.
Something moves out of the ordinary.
Now that's just totally out of place.
But the movement is a singularity.

Like a light switch to engage,
And engage the target you must.
To assess the coming threats,
In the moment, you leave a bloody mess.

The Fire **By Richard McClellan**

Through fire and brimstone,
Where the wind whips fast, then slow,
The preacher said,
I was bound for flames.
Burning inside so low.

So I light a red oil lamp,
Where it burns off the dust,
The flame burns so hot,
Colored deeply yellowish orange,
Like a light coating of rust.

With this heat you have no choice.
It feels good on a winter day.
Where the cold is magnified,
And permeates in your bones,
Without heat it turns you into stone.

The heat is in my bones.
There's fire in my soul.
Rocking forward through this pain,
Thy heat feels good in the rain.
Burning off the salty cold.

The Black Flag

By Richard McClellan

I believe the veil is cloaked in the shadows.
Unknown by the Frenchman,
Who travels alongside the Illuminati,
Whose blood work is performed,
In the grandest of the perennial scales,
Like the masters of coin in Gresham's law.

In a dungeon they are filled with dread.
Where the shadows unfold,
Like a black flag waving,
And the warriors are bold,
Riding in thy armor of black metal,
Leading their shoulders in the greatest of stories.

Gone are the warriors of antiquity,
Rejected by the annals of time,
Fallen to the father's realm,
Replaced by the trime,
But the black flag remains.
Flying high for all to view

About Richard McClellan: Richard McClellan was born in Yellville, Arkansas (USA). He served in the U.S. Army, and has traveled the world including Japan, Korea, Portugal, Italy, Canada, and most of the lower 48 United States and Alaska. His educational background includes a Bachelor's Degree in Electronics from SMSU and an Associates Degree in Electromechanical Technology from North Arkansas Community College. He's been writing poetry since 2011. He is a member of the Poetry Society of Vermont.

The Kiss

By Stephanie Smith

On this
black velvet night
I listen to the crimson song of dreams
A lullaby with a razor pressed
against its sweet, pale wrists
I listen to the screams of porcelain dolls,
of childhood's death rattle
falling from its crib
I slip into restless slumber,
which fills the demons' ribs with hope
that they may live again
and rip the flesh from my weary bones
And from my lips—
an eternal kiss

When Midnight Comes

By Stephanie Smith

The hand of madness strokes my hair
Like a lover born from a chilling mist
Who kisses my stigmatic palms
Worships the perfume on my scarred wrists

The elder darkness evokes a fear
A sadness that keeps me safe inside
There's a monster who whispers in my ear
Endearments that caress my tired mind

Moonlight belongs to the lunatics now
Who hang themselves when midnight comes
With ligaments torn from their hands and feet
Bound to a never-ending nothingness

I keep searching for the light at the end
A retreat from the chaos that eats my days
As dreams slip through my fingertips
Into a haze as thin as gossamer

Dark Verse For Armageddon

By Stephanie Smith

these are the nights when angels butcher the uninitiated
and dead men wander pagan cities
preparing for Armageddon
radio prophets welcome the rapture
content to disintegrate before believing eyes
we sit at home in our underwear
drinking tea and discussing Brodsky and Dickinson
reading poems of Rumi by candlelight
content with eternal night
we forgive the innocent for their lack of flaws
we flee the scene of clean hospital floors
where ghosts reside beneath feet washed with rose water
we force dark verse down virgin throats
summon Lovecraftian creatures to strangle their vocal cords
if they scream too much

these are the nights when lightning lights up the sky
like a nuclear holocaust
the stars are captured fireflies
and everyone on the whole damn block can't wait to get his pants off
fearmongers flock to church to sing heavy metal praises
to a costumed demigod who offers lollipops and stale bread
while we wait on the steps smoking opium
and driving nails into eye sockets all black and corrupt
these are the nights we are free to drink
from the flowing cup of infinity
as the demons appear to announce the approaching apocalypse
we rejoice when the rain swells the robes of the angels
and the undead dance in eternal bliss

About Stephanie Smith: Stephanie Smith is a poet and writer residing just outside of Scranton, Pennsylvania. Her work has appeared in publications such as THE HORROR ZINE, CARNAGE HOUSE, BLACK PETALS, ABYSS & APEX, RAVEN CAGE, THE LITERARY HATCHET, and ILLUMEN.

Nightmare Gallery



Artwork by
Sandy Reece





**Artwork by
Sandy Reece**



The Rose Files



Taken!

~ Rose Titus ~

Looking back on the incident, Travis Walton realizes he should never have gotten out of the truck. Because when he did get out of the truck, that was the beginning of the event that terrorized him and turned his average, normal life upside down.

It was 1975. Travis, age 22 at the time, was just a regular guy from a small town, working a regular job. He was on a logging crew with several others in Arizona. And they were heading home after a hard day of work when it happened.

Up in the sky, they saw what was described as a glowing object up among the trees. The truck stopped, and they all looked up to watch it hover. But Travis had to get out for a closer look. And then a bluish-green beam of light came from the flying saucer, lifting Walton and then dropping him back down, slamming him to the ground. The men panicked and the driver of the truck hit the accelerator. When they came to their senses, they turned around to go back and see what they could do to help their friend and co-worker. But he was gone.

Five days later he was returned. He wandered back to civilization and found a pay phone. *He then was able to tell of his terrifying ordeal –*

He awakened on a spaceship, on a table, surrounded by three small humanoid beings, shorter than average people, and with large eyes. Travis had taken karate lessons and so he got up off the table and got into a fighting stance. He also found an instrument which he picked up, intending to use it to defend himself. The aliens left the room and left him alone.

Next he began to wander around the craft, looking for a way to escape. He came upon a person who appeared to be human and who was wearing a space helmet. He tried to talk to the man, but the man would not speak. There were other human appearing people on the craft as well, and he recalls there were three men and a woman, all very physically fit and attractive looking people. Yet there was something different about them, especially their eyes. He asked them if he could go home. None of these people spoke or answered his questions. They led him back into a room with a table and he recalls the woman put something over his face.

Then he woke up back on Earth. He recalls that he felt disoriented and dehydrated. But he was alive and safe.

All of the work crew along with Travis took lie detector tests. None of his co-workers had anything to gain from this story. To this day, Travis has stuck to his story. He wrote a book and there was a movie based on his experience. He still lives around the area where the incident occurred, and sometimes he appears at conferences and events to retell his story.

But Travis is not the only person that this has happened to.

In 1961, a married couple were travelling through New Hampshire, heading home from a road trip to Canada. Like Travis, Mr. and Mrs. Hill were just ordinary people, a regular middle-class couple. Betty was a social worker, and Barney worked for the postal service. They only thing “different” about Betty and Barney Hill was that they were what was politely called a “mixed couple” back then. They were involved with social justice activities and also involved with the NAACP. And so their focus certainly was not flying saucers or visitors from outer space. Friends and neighbors described them as being good and wholesome people.

And yet, it happened to them.

While travelling through the dark of night, heading back to their home in New Hampshire, Betty noticed a strange light in the sky. It was too bright to be a star, and it appeared to be following their car. She mentioned her concern to Barney, but he didn’t think it was anything important – maybe just a satellite?

Because they were travelling with their small dog, they needed to stop the car to let the dog out to do some business. Barney had his binoculars with him, and they got a better look at the strange object as it raced across the night sky. They got back into the car and continued on.

But the “thing” kept appearing in the sky, as if following their car. They parked again to have another look.

Barney described it as like a large disc, and around the disc were windows. It was lit from within and the occupants could be seen inside. The disc came closer and he told Betty to get back in the car. He hit the gas, but they felt the car begin to vibrate and shake. The little dog began to whimper...

Later, they found themselves still riding along in their car, closer to home. They arrived back home around dawn but realized that two hours of time was missing. Where were they during those two hours? What had happened to them during that missing time?

Betty decided to report the object to Pease Airforce Base, and gave a brief description of the craft. The person she spoke to said that other people had made reports of seeing something strange in the sky.

And then Mr. and Mrs. Hill tried to go back to their normal, average lives. *But then the nightmares started.*

In her dreams, Betty recalled creatures who came and took her and Barney onto the ship and did strange experiments. And Barney's health suffered as a result – he had high blood pressure, ulcers, and anxiety. Finally, he told his doctor about what he saw that night. The doctor referred the Hills to a psychiatrist in Boston who specialized in hypnosis.

And so, Mr. and Mrs. Hill went to Dr. Benjamin Simon's office. Under hypnosis, they were able to remember those missing two hours.

They remembered strange beings with large slanted eyes and pointed chins. Barney recalled that they communicated telepathically. While in Dr. Simon's office, under hypnosis, Barney yelled, "... those eyes! They're in my brain!" He recalled being on a table, being poked and prodded.

Betty remembered communicating with the one she believed was their leader. The aliens had separated her and Barney, and she was also strangely examined. She was approached with a very long needle, "he said he just wants to put it in my navel, it's just a simple test... It's hurting, it's hurting, take it out, take it out!" After the "simple test," Betty found herself alone with the leader. She was shown a star map. She also claimed she saw a book written in a language she had never seen before. She wanted to keep it, but no.

The leader told Betty to forget everything she saw. "I won't forget about it! You can take the book, but you can never, never make me forget.... I'll remember it if it is the last thing I do!" The alien laughed, and said, "Maybe you will remember. But I hope you won't. And it won't do you any good if you do, because Barney won't.... It would be better if you forgot it anyway."

Well, they didn't forget about it, and their ordeal has been the subject of numerous books and even a movie. Sadly, Barney suffered ill health and passed away at age 46. Betty went on to become a well-known member of the UFO community here on Earth.

And then there is the strange story of Antonio Villas Boas. In 1957, a young man in Brazil told of how small aliens dragged him onto their ship and there he had a very close encounter with an alien female. The details of his story were, so bizarre very few people paid much attention at the time.

Also worth mention here is Betty Andreasson, an abductee from Massachusetts who claimed to be able to continue her telepathic communications with the leader of the aliens who captured her. His name was Quazgaa, and he told her that she would be a messenger to humanity, "They have come to help the human race."

Well... what is going on here, folks? All sorts of people from all walks of life claim to have been stolen away by strange visitors from the Far Beyond. They say they were subjected to experiments, and in some cases, "samples" were taken.

Into this dark mystery comes Dr. John Mack, a psychiatrist who conducted a decades long study of two hundred people who claim that they were abducted.

At first, Dr. Mack believed, of course, that these men and women were afflicted with mental illness. But after a while, he came to the conclusion that something was actually going on. “I’m impressed with the consistency of the story, the sincerity with which people tell their stories.” During an interview, he went on to say that UFO’s were in fact observed during the same time when people were claiming to have been abducted. And people were noted to be missing during the timeframe when they claimed to have been taken away. They would be returned with cuts, triangular lesions, physical evidence that something happened to them. People would describe being removed from wherever they were, from their homes or from their cars, and then undergoing procedures, probing, biological samples being taken from them. Some people even described “hybrid offspring” being created.

Of all the many people who have come forward to claim to have had these terrifying experiences, there may be vast numbers of people who also have been abducted, and who decide to stay silent for fear of ridicule. *How many people in the world have had similar experiences, and tell no one?* We do not know.

We also do not know what these creatures are, why they are here, where they are from, and we do not know what they want.

The only thing we can be certain of is that *something is happening* – something strange and horrifying is happening to ordinary, innocent, everyday people.

Something is out there. Something is out there, invading our skies. And there isn’t much we can do about it. Except perhaps just stay in the car and *hope they don’t come for you*.

If you want to know more about Alien Abduction, check out these sources:

1. Walton, Travis, *Fire in the Sky*, DaCapo Press, 1997.
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3. Steiger, Brad, and Bell, Art, *The Source*, Penguin Putnam, 1999.
4. Levy, Joel, *Guide to the Unexplained*, Dorling Kindersley, 2002.
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6. Moreira, Jenn, *Fire in the Sky, 50 years later: the abduction that still divides the White Mountains*, WMICentral. com news, November 27, 2025.
7. Dingman, Sam, *His Arizona UFO abduction story became a legend. After 50 years, he’s sick of attempts to debunk it*, KJZZ. org, July 3, 2025.
8. Grasso, Michael, *Angels Unaware: A Woman’s Powerful Place in Alien Abduction Narratives*, We Are the Mutants, August 22, 2017.
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Terror Tube

Made For TV Horror Movies

By Kraven: The She-Wolf

Back in a time long ago before YouTube, streaming services, cable, DVDs and hell even before VHS, there was a world where there was only television. I know it's primitive to you younger people! And with that television came just a hand full of channels like ABC, CBS, NBC, PBS and if you were lucky maybe a few local channels like for me WOR or WPIX in New York and later FOX in the late 80's...but that was it. There was no YouTube, Netflix, Paramount Plus, Disney +, or Amazon Prime where you could pick and choose what you wanted to watch at any given time of the day or night. Oh hell no! I'm talking about a time long ago when you had just the four mentioned channels and that was it. And what they shown were what you had to watch and you had no choice in the matter.

These very limited options would broadcast sitcoms, dramas; kid shows if it was during the day and movies. Movies you may have seen in the theater like Star Wars, Jaws, Planet of the Apes, or Halloween. Films that once played in the theater would next go directly to television about a year or two after their theatrical run. Again this is before cable where months after a movie ran its course in theaters it would show up on cable networks like HBO, Showtime, Cinemax, and Starz. From there films would go from cable then to television. But there were always films release to theaters first but once in a while there would be a movie made directly to television called The Made For TV Movie and sometimes, just sometimes, these such movies would be in the horror genre.

The following list are some of the best known and not known of these Made For TV Movies that played on network television back in the 70's, 80's and 90's, the heyday for such TV productions. They include horror films with vampires, werewolves, killer yetis, evil dogs, gargoyles, killer dolls, trucks and so much more.

Duel (1971)

Duel was one of director Steven Spielberg's first film projects even before Jaws. This Made For TV production told the story of a man on his way home from a business trip who encounters a truck driver who tries to run him off the road. What makes this story so scary is that this could in fact actually happen to anyone of us on any given highway. The truck all throughout the film is trying to kill this man and he doesn't even know why. We the viewer only see the large 18 wheel semi as it attacks



the man in his car and never the driver as Spielberg makes the truck seem more like a monster than just another motor vehicle on the highway. The film was written by screenwriter Richard Matheson, whose name we are going to see a few more times on this list.

Duel made its television debut on November 13th 1971 and launched the career of Steven Spielberg who went on to helm Jaws, Close Encounters of the Third Kind, E.T. The Extra Terrestrial, Raider of the Lost Ark, Jurassic Park, Saving Private Ryan, and others films you may have heard of. It all started here with this little Made For TV Movie produced for only \$450,000.

The Night Stalker (1972)

The Night Stalker was at the time the highest rated television movie of all time. It told the story of a newspaper reporter named Carl Kolchak who discovers that in fact a very real vampire is hunting the streets of Las Vegas. This classic Made For TV Movie starred actor Darren McGavin as Kolchak as he tracks the killer all while trying to tell the local law enforcement that what they are dealing with is a real vampire and not just a nut playacting as one. Also written by screenwriter Richard Matheson, the film was such a hit that it had a follow up movie The Night Strangler in (1973) and a one season as a TV series in 1974 to 1975.



The Night Stalker was produced by Dan Curtis who also brought us the horror themed soap opera Dark Shadows. The Night Stalker film, its sequel and TV series were a direct influence when writer Chris Carter was crafting his television classic The X-Files. The name of the films vampire, Janos Skorzeny, was also an influence for writer Frank Lupo when crafting his TV series Werewolf 1987 to 1988. The movie was based on an unpublished novel by author Jeff Rice and was first aired on January 11, of 1972.

Gargoyles (1972)

Gargoyles was a Made For TV Movie that first aired on CBS on November 21, 1972 and is noted for being one of the first makeup productions done by makeup legend Stan Winston. His work on creating the look of the title creatures was no less than amazing, especially the leader who was winged, horned and scary. In fact, Winston's work on the creatures was so impressive that he won an Emmy Award for outstanding makeup achievement for the film. Gargoyles told the story of a man and his grown daughter who discover at a roadside attraction the skeletal remains of a creature with wings and horns. Soon the attraction is attacked by at first unseen creatures, that are later to be revealed to be living gargoyles.



The creatures once ruled the Earth long ago and now is the time for their awakening and plan to retake the world back for themselves. The film is noteworthy for being the first to use the slow motion running style used so frequently in future TV productions such as The Six Million

Dollar Man, The Incredible Hulk, Werewolf, and other shows of the 70's and 80's. Directed by Bill L. Norton, who would go on to helm two Hercules TV productions with Kevin Sorbo, that led directly into the Hercules TV series of the 90's.

Moon of The Wolf (1972)

Moon of the Wolf was the first of three werewolf TV produced films from the 70's. The others, Scream of The Wolf and Death Moon, we will get to later. Moon of The Wolf made its television premiere on September 26, of 1972 and starred actor David Janssen, best known for the TV series Harry O, who plays a small town sheriff who is tracking down a series of strange murders.

It turns out that the killer is a werewolf as the sheriff must face the beast and save the town from the monster. The makeup for the werewolf is well...a little underwhelming even by 70's monster makeup standards, but where the film shines is in its story and direction, written by Leslie H. Whitten and directed by Daniel Petrie. The movie works very well as a cop tracking down a killer film that happens to be a werewolf and for that the movie pays off.



Don't Be Afraid of The Dark (1973)

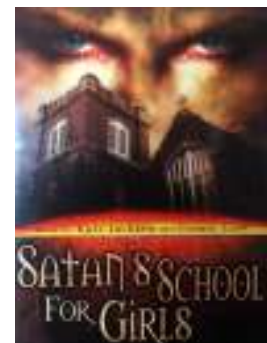
Don't Be Afraid of the Dark was a supernatural horror movie that first aired on the night of October 10, of 1973 on ABC. When a woman and her husband inherit an old house they, discover things just don't seem right in their new home. Directed by John Newland and written by Nigel McKeand, the story unfolds as the woman played by Kim Darby starts seeing little creatures around the house but no one will believe her. Soon she starts hearing whispering voices coming from behind the walls as the creatures call out to her. This is pretty damn creeping for a Made For TV Movie as the woman deals with the uninvited little monsters.



One of the creatures seen in the film are played by Felix Silla, who was best known as plying Cousin IT in the TV series The Addams Family and as one of the Ewoks in the Star Wars sequel Return of the Jedi. The other little goblin was played by Tamara De Treau, best known for playing the title character in the movie E.T. The Extra Terrestrial.

Satan's School For Girls (1973)

Satan's School For Girls was directed by David Lowell and written by Arthur A. Ross and told the story of an all-girls school that doubles as a satanic cult. It starred Pamela Franklin, Jamie Smith Jackson, Gwynne



Gilford, plus Cheryl Ladd and Kate Jackson a few years before they would go on to star together on the TV series Charlie's Angels.

The movie was shown on the ABC television network on September 19, 1973 and although mostly forgotten by time, a remake was released in 2000 with Kate Jackson returning once again as the school headmaster this time.

Bad Ronald (1974)

Bad Ronald was a horror drama about a teen boy who accidentally kills a fellow school mate and is locked away by his own mother to protect him from the police. She locks the boy inside a hidden space in the walls of their home until she's dies and another family moves in. However Ronald is still in the walls and watches the family while he slowly becomes obsessed with the family daughter. This creepy as hell movie first aired on ABC on October 23, 1974 and was written by Andrew Peter Marin and directed by Buzz Kulik.



What makes this movie so terrifying is that the events in the film could really happen in the real world and in fact, it has. In 1986, a full 12 years after this film, a young man named Daniel LaPlante did just that, he lived inside the walls and crawl spaces of a home in Massachusetts. The family who lived there had no idea that he was there as he watched the family go about their lives each day. Real life can be as frightening and creepy as anything Hollywood could come up with. Other films to play up this idea were The People Under the Stairs (1991), The Boy (2016), and the aforementioned movie, Don't Be Afraid of the Dark.

Scream of The Wolf (1974)

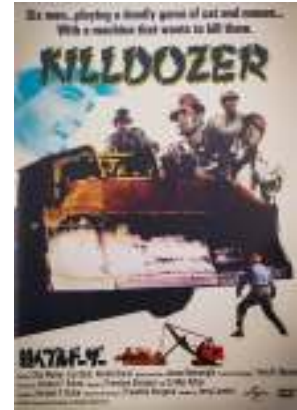
Scream of the Wolf starred Peter Graves and Clint Walker in this ABC movie of the week. After a series of murders are committed by what seems to be a wild animal, the town Sheriff must find the killer before he or it strikes again. The film strongly implies that the killer is a werewolf but is it? Produced and directed by Dan Curtis, the father of television horror with Dark Shadow, The Night Stalker, Trilogy of Terror, Burnt Offerings and Dracula that we will soon get to. Written once again by Curtis, long time screen writer Richard Matheson, the movie made its debut on January 16 1974.



What sets this werewolf movie apart from other werewolf movies is.....well I'm not going to give away the twist, but yeah, there is a big reveal at the end that you are not going to see coming. All in all, the movie is well acted and staged as the townspeople start to fear the creature that comes out of the woods. If you like good storytelling and are open minded, you should give this movie a watch.

Killdozer (1974)

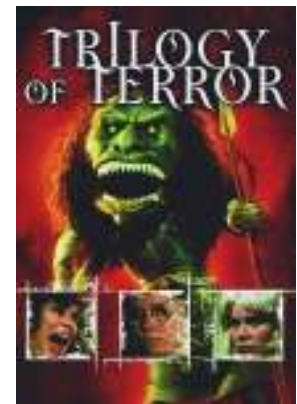
Killdozer is one of them movies you just have to take at face value and it's a blast. When a self driving bulldozer starts killing people, things get a little crazy. This horror Made For TV treat plays out much like the movie The Car or Maximum Overdrive, where a vehicle is on the loose killing people for no other reason than to rise the body count....and we love it. Based on a novella by Theodor Sturgeon of the same name, and the film was written by Ed MacKillop with direction by Jerry London.



This fun and wacky movie made its first showing on ABC in February 1974, and ever since has been one of them films you're not sure was real or something you kid brother made up one day when he had nothing better to do.

Trilogy of Terror (1975)

Trilogy of Terror was the one movie that scared the living shit out of me after seeing it on television in 1975 when I was little. Trilogy of Terror is just that, three horror tales acting much like Creep Show would do years later. The movie starts with two stories but it is the third one that this film is remembered for. A young woman living alone finds herself under attack by a Zuni Doll she picked up as a birthday gift for her boyfriend. The nasty looking little figure about 5 or so inches high has a gold chain around its waist along with a scroll that reads that the chain belt must never be removed from the little creature. The little thing is just terrifying looking with a mouth full of sharp teeth and holding a spear. Well, at some point, the chain fall off of the wooden doll and it comes to life.



The rest of the film sees the woman trapped within her apartment with this little creature trying to kill her all while screaming, trying to stab her with the spear and biting her legs. If it were not so scary, one should really be laughing their ass off at how crazy it all is. Released on March 4, 1975, this is a movie that I stayed up way too late as a 10 year old watching this thing and it had me going to bed scared to shit. Produced and directed by once again Dan Curtis and written by Richard Matheson....I'm really starting to see a pattern here. The film has in the years since become a classic.

In 1996, Trilogy of Terror got a Made For Cable sequel, 21 years later called Trilogy of Terror 2, with Dan Curtis once again in the director's chair with William F. Nolan doing the teleplay. It premiered on the USA Network on October 30, 1996 for Halloween. Also back was the scary ass Zuni doll as it terrorizes an all new victim. Just as before, the movie is made up of three short stories but it's always that damn Zuni doll that gets all the attention. Upon seeing this movie at age 34, that little bastard didn't quite get to me in the same way he did at age 10. Why did my parents let me watch shit like this?

Snowbeast (1977)

This is a movie that I still revisit to the day at least once a year when the snow is high outside my window. I saw this upon its initial release on April 28th 1977 and is maybe my favorite Made For TV Movie from that era. Snowbeast tells the story of a ski resort under attack from a Yeti like monster in the Colorado Rockies. The movie was written by Joseph Stefano, the same writer who penned the screenplay for the Alfred Hitchcock 1960 super classic Psycho. Snowbeast was directed by Herb Wallerstein and stars Bo Svenson, Robert Logan, and Yvette Minieux as the people needing to stop the beast before it kills again.



I just loved this movie as a kid and still do even though we see very little of the monster itself. The creature is shown mostly through point of view shots, shadow, and fleeting full shots of it, but the story is so good that you don't care. The monster itself is played in costume by stunt actor Michael J. London and although we don't see all that much of it, what we do see looks pretty scary on a TV movie budget. The plot is similar to that of Jaws two years before in that a creature is killing off the people of a resort but for reasons they will not close their Winter Fest until things get really out of hand and too many people have fallen to the beast.

Because this was 1977 and a Made For TV Movie, the blood and gore are mostly implied and not shown on screen much like Hitchcock did with Psycho 17 years before and John Carpenter would do for Halloween a year later. Snowbeast plays its fear factor to the hilt as the rampaging creature remains mostly off screen forcing us to wonder what it looks like and where it will strike next.

Devil Dog: The Hound of Hell (1978)

Devil Dog: The Hound of Hell was first broadcasted on Halloween night 1978 and tells the story of a family adopting a German Shepherd puppy that they name Lucky. However, soon they discover that their cute new puppy is in fact possessed by evil and like the child from the 1976 movie The Omen, things start happening to people. This CBS Halloween treat stars Richard Crenna, before appearing in the Rambo movies, Yvette Mimieux, and Kim Richards.



The movie was written by Elinor Karpf and directed by Curtis Harrington and was maybe the first film to have a dog as its main villain, years before Cujo (1983) and Man's Best Friend (1993). The thought that your own pet could turn on you and others is truly a terrifying thought and one that has been used in other film productions such as Night of the Wild (2015), Strays (2023), Cats & Dogs (2001) and the aforementioned Cujo and Man's Best Friend.

Deathmoon (1978)

Deathmoon was maybe the best werewolf TV Made Movie to come along ever. It starred Robert Foxworth, a year before his being in the horror movie Prophecy (1979), and his starring on the nighttime soap opera Falcon Crest. Death Moon told the story of a man on vacation who unknowingly is the victim of an ancient witch's curse that once activated, turns the good man into a killer crazed werewolf. Released as a Movie of The Week on May 31, 1978, this CBS production was written by George Schenck with direction by Bruce Kessler.



I just revisited this film a few years ago and the creature effects still hold up and it has a solid story. The film as a budding romance between Robert Foxworth's character and a woman he met on the island where he is taking his vacation, but the beast gets in the way of that storyline and its doomed before it can fully spark. Deathmoon is largely a forgotten movie, but it's all the horror and werewolf notes one would want from such a film. Its playing for free on YouTube if you would like to check out this little werewolf gem.

Cruise into Terror (1978)

Cruise into Terror was a Made for TV film about a cruise ship that is has in its hold an Egyptian sarcophagus with something truly evil within. The film stars John Forsythe, the voice of Charlie in the TV series Charlie's Angels and Dirk Benedict, before playing Starbuck on Battlestar Galactica and Face on the series The A-Team. Other noted cast were Christopher George, Grizzly and Day of the Animals fame, along with his real life wife Linda Day George and horror vet Ray Milland from The Thing With Two Heads, and Frogs.



Released as a Movie of The Week on the night of February 3, 1978 and the only thing that I remember about this film is the scary sarcophagus as it seemed like it was breathing. Although much forgotten about, but most of the movie did create a small following as a cult classic and was written by Michael Brafenman and directed Bruce Kesstie.

Salem's Lot (1979)

Salem's Lot was of course based on the novel by Stephen King and released as a two part mini-series on November 17 and November 24. It was adapted by writer Paul Monash and directed by Tobe Hooper.....and yes that Tobe Hooper, who wrote and directed The Texas Chainsaw Massacre. The film stars David Soul, James Mason, Bonnie Bedelia, and Reggie Nalder as one of the most frightening vampires ever seen on screen Kurt Barlow.



I was there for the two night event and always wondered why this movie was shown in November and not for spooky season leading up to Halloween. Still this was a scary movie for a television production, the very first miniseries based on the work of author Stephen King...but it would not be the last.

Dark Night of the Scarecrow (1981)

Dark Night of the Scarecrow was a Made For TV Movie first shown on CBS on October 24 with a teleplay by J.D. Feigeison and directed by DeFlitta. It told the story of a mentally handicap man who is blamed for something he didn't do, but the small town forms a lynch mob and go after him. He tries to hide dressed up as a scarecrow but they see right through his disguise and kill him on the spot. Sometime after death, his body is resurrected and still dressed on the scarecrow, he seeks revenge on those who killed him.



This television production was the very first killer scarecrow movie ever as it sparked a whole new horror subgenre on that night just days from Halloween. In its wake, the subgenre would follow with other killer scarecrow films such as Night of the Scarecrow (1995), Jack-O (1995), Husk (2011), Dark Harvest (2023), Scarecrow (2002), and Hallowed Ground (2007). And it all started from a little Movie of The Week with a low budget and a cool idea.

The Midnight Hour (1985)

The Midnight Hour was a horror/comedy released on ABC November 1 1985 that tells the story of a group of teens who unknowing unleash all kinds of supernatural monsters upon their town on Halloween night. Written by Bill Bleich with direction from Jack Bender, this funny horror movie has featured music by Creedence Clearwater Revival and Three Dog Night.

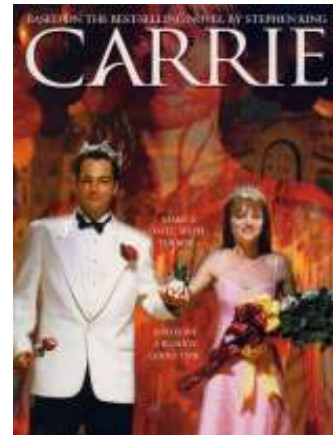
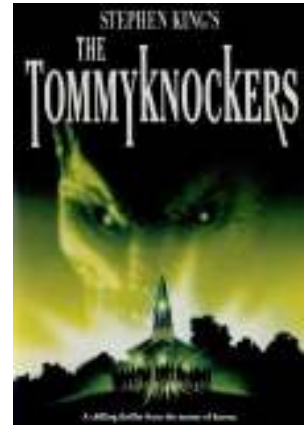
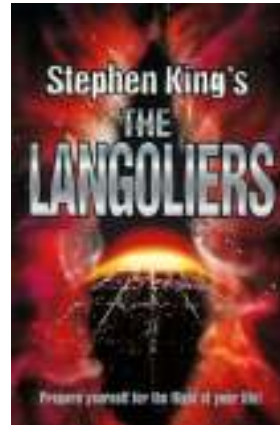
This little TV movie has a stunning cast of stars at the time like Wolfman Jack, Levar Burton, fresh off the mini-series Roots and before Star Trek: The Next Generation, Peter DeLuise, shortly before 21 Jump Street, and Dick Van Patten from Eight is Enough.



IT (1990), The Stand (1994), The Landoliers (1995), The Tommyknockers (1993), Storm of The Century (1999), Rose Red (2002) and Carrie (2002)

Salem's Lot may have kicked started the Made For Television mini-series based on the works of Stephen King and his books to film adaptations, but like I said before...not the last. King dominated the television airways ever since Salem's Lot 1979 and even having two remakes of the 1979 film made in 2004 and in 2024.

Sadly with the advent of cable and streaming services, The Made For Television Movie has gone extinct for the three major broadcast networks of ABC, CBS, and NBC. Their true heyday was the 70's and early 80's but we who are old...enough to remember the Movie of The Week format remember them fondly. Maybe they will make a comeback in the future of free television. Who knows, but one can only hope!



The Wicker House

By Plamen Vasilev

The crash was terrible. Two cars and a tanker truck had crashed into each other. The truck was on fire and there were two bodies sprawled on the tarmac. Firemen were struggling to put out the fire, the ambulance was making its way through the cars. A policeman approached Millen's car. He rolled down the window and the heat from the thirty-seven degree heat rushed straight into his air-conditioned car.

- We would divert the cars through the sub-balkan road. - The cop said. We won't be able to clear the highway soon!

Tony nodded and started the car. He was on his way to the sea, but obviously this unforeseen accident would delay his plans. Tony grooved the tires passing the second ambulance coming to the accident. He dropped his jeep and headed for the sub-balcony road. He turned off onto a two-lane road, passing a sign for some town. In his thirty years, Tony had never driven this road. The sun was baking and Tony closed the window, the car's air-conditioning running at maximum power. The radio cut out, apparently there were no stations here. He pressed the button but nothing. He played music from his phone through the bluetooth radio. He looked in the mirror but there was no one behind him. "Apparently people have decided to go through elsewhere?" he thought. He turned up the music and sped up his car, but immediately slammed on the brakes.

"What's this?" he thought when he saw a very thin and at the same time very tall gentleman on the road, all in ragged clothes that stood like a coat hanger and a ragged hat on his head. His face was wrinkled and all covered with lichen, warts and sores. Holding a strange but large rifle, he urged him out of the car.

Tony turned off the car and got out. His well-chilled body started to melt like ice cream. He raised his hands, and beads of sweat appeared on his forehead. Fear gradually overcame him...

'Bam-bam.' The strange rifle burst through the windshield of his new car, and then punched a hole in the hood.

Tony went into shock, his legs now trembling with fear. He tried to say something, couldn't. The gun was smoking pointed at him.

Skinny urged him to follow a small path through the grove by the roadside. Scared to death, Tony set off sobbing. The path led through a cool pine grove, and came to a creepy wicker house. The house was a one-story structure entirely woven with colorful but time-worn yarn. The roof was also knitted, there were no tiles, but it was entirely of red yarn and the base and walls of interwoven yellow and blue yarn. The windows were of transparent cord, and the door of interwoven brown and black yarn.

The frightened Tony gasped when he saw the house. He had never seen such a marvel of human thought. He had created two computer games himself and had never even thought of such

a thing. Tony stopped and started to look around the house, but the skinny one propped him up with the shotgun and he continued in a startled manner.

- 'Oh, ooh...' Skinny cried inarticulately. The door of the house opened and a plump babe with a huge bust almost popping out of the neckline of her pink short dress was revealed from inside. She grinned and with a practiced gesture moved her bushy blonde hair. In her mouth, her brownish-yellow teeth moved making way for a tongue studded with multiple piercings, collectively producing a disgusting squeaky voice:

- Gerard, are you bringing us a new guest? "The chubby lady's ears were studded with kitschy pink earrings shaped like human skulls.

- 'Oh, ah...' replied the long man. He took off his hat and jerked the rifle again at the guest, who jumped startled and started for the door. The lady made him a gesture of welcome, taking hold of his short dress and crouching gracefully as he passed her. As he passed, she sniffed the air after him and said:

- Mmm...smells like fear!" her tongue with all the piercings on it licked her lips.

Tony heard this and stumbled over the wicker threshold but could not fall. He stayed on his feet and looked around the room in which he had fallen. The smell the room gave off was of sweat, feces and shortness of breath. The walls were knitted with orange yarn, of course soiled by time. There were also dark red stains here and there. The ceiling was logically made of white yarn and the floor was covered with a braided blue carpet. There was a long table in the middle, and at the end of it stood an elderly man with huge grey-white eyebrows, clean-shaven and clean bald. His grey suit, was terribly shabby, and had been mended and patched here and there.

On one side of him sat two young boys not more than twenty years of age, and opposite them a young and refined lady in a black suit and white shirt, the collar of which was soiled, beside her sobbed a lady of a little over forty, with short red hair, wearing a light blue peignoir. The boys looked at him with sad eyes. They were wearing t-shirts and shorts. They must have travelled to the sea like him, he thought. The elderly bald man looked him over from head to toe, grinned showing his yellow-brown thinning teeth, and said in a commanding tone:

- Sit next to the young men that Greta is bringing lunch. - The fluffy lady giggled infantily and ran to the next room. The adult motioned for Gerard to approach as Tony sat down. Gerard squatted in front of his master and clucked his tongue contentedly like a dog. The balding old man patted him on the head, then took his rifle and propped it up beside his chair, then chided Gerard with the words:

- 'March out, dog.' The cowardly long-legged man stood up and ran out of the door. Tony watched this scene with both fear and loathing. Then the master of the house turned to him.

- "Welcome to our humble home!"- Tony started to say something but the boy next to him growled at his stomach to shut up, and the bald man continued to speak: "You can feel at home here. Greta cooks us delicious food and Gerard brings us new and new guests..."

Greta burst into the room carrying a large ceramic soup tureen. She placed the soup tureen in the middle of the table. Then she walked out and came back twirling her big ass defiantly to serve everyone a plate and utensils. When she got to Millen, she pinched his cheek and winked at him.

- What deliciousness are you going to delight us with today, darling? - asked the elderly bald man.

- Daddy, today I've made you your favorite bloody-eyed soup from the last three naughty guests. - She licked her pierced tongue. Her father glanced at the soup tureen with satisfaction, and Tony looked around at the others, who looked on with displeasure, but obviously had no choice. But the woman in the light blue peignoir stood up picked up the ceramic soup tureen and slammed it to the floor with all her might. The soup tureen didn't break, but the bloody soup spilled and several human eyes took to watching them from the floor. The lady screamed with all her might:

- I'm fed up!" she grabbed Greta by the hair in a fit of rage and started plucking her, and Greta shrieked. Tony saw the old man stand up and raise the rifle, and everyone else stood with their heads bowed. He turned the table sharply. Then everyone was standing up. The young men beside him looked at him fearfully.

- Help me!" he pleaded as he jumped over the table and lunged at the old man.

The rifle had fallen back somewhere, Greta had also reached the woman with the peignoir and the plucking became more fierce. Tony struck the old man with his fist, who cried out:

- No, let go of Gerard - He stopped and stuck his bloodied tongue obediently next to the old man pointing the strange rifle at Tony's head. The man raised his hands in fright, followed by a blow to the head from someone with something heavy and he lost consciousness.

A grating sawing sound woke him. His head ached badly. Opening his eyes, he was startled! His eyes met the bulging eyes of the woman with the peignoir. He screamed and tried to get up, but felt his hands were tied. He was on the floor! He looked around, glancing above him, he saw the disgusting sight beneath Greta's skirt. She had no underwear on, but there was so much tangled hair he couldn't make anything out, then he heard her voice, mumbling something:

- Mmm, do you like the view?" a bloody drop dripped from her mouth and fell on his face. Tony shook his head negatively. A shot to the groin followed. He bent over putting his bound hands between his legs. His headache, swept to his genitals. Behind her, Gerard was slicing the woman with the peignoir, and Greta stole a piece of meat and flicked again with satisfaction.

The tied man felt his legs go free and when Greta turned her back on him with difficulty he quietly stood up. She gave Gerard a small knuckle of meat in his mouth, Gerard contentedly began to lick it. Tony saw two human butts hanging from hooks, probably also from the woman in the negligee. It was obviously in the kitchen, and he would be next. So he took the murdered woman's head in his bound hands and threw it at Gerard, saying:

- "Hold on puppies." he quickly jumped to catch her with his mouth, apparently out of habit, and Tony kicked Greta in the stomach who turned to him. She falling hit her head hard on the countertop. Blood flowed from her head. Gerard grabbed the head by the nose and looked at it like a grateful puppy. But that only lasted a few seconds until he realized what had happened to Greta. Gerard crouched beside her and began to sob pitifully.

The guest hadn't expected it to be so easy, but he kicked Tsonyo in the head with all his might and he fell unconscious next to Greta, the woman's head in the peignoir rolling next to them. Tony quickly found a knife and cut the rope. There was no one in the dining-room, and he dashed along the woodland path by which he had been led. It was getting dark, and the stars were shining in the sky, he stopped for a moment and looked at the wicker house sunk in darkness. An ominous idea passed through his head. Quickly he reached his car. He opened the trunk, there were two cases of vodka. He took them in his hands and went back. He doused the house with all the vodka and took out a lighter. But he felt a faint stab in his back. Turning the bald old man swung a shovel, but Tony moved aside this time. He lit the lighter and threw it into the house, which immediately burst into flames. The old man cried out:

- No, no... - he started towards the house, but the fire scared him. Tony, however, pushed him into the house itself. The bald old man burst into flames screaming in pain and burned in front of Tony's smug face. He immediately returned to his car, and turned the key. There was a deafening noise but the car started. Immediately he turned and headed for the highway. Now he thought of the other people, what had happened to them? But then he said to himself, "They didn't deserve to live if they didn't fight!" But was he right?

. . .

There was a knock on the glass of his car. Tony woke up. He saw that he was standing on the highway, and there was an accident in front of him. He rolled down the window and a blonde and fluffy policewoman motioned for him to turn around and go back down the subway. Tony looked at her, she seemed familiar. He grabbed the car key, but stared at his glass. It was tight! Had he been dreaming? The policewoman leaned her huge bust popping out of her uniform through the door window. She said showing her tongue studded with piercings:

- Honey, did you eat your bloody eye soup? "Tony recognized her and frowned. It was Greta! She winked at him and added, 'You're invited to lunch at the wicker house...'

About Plamen Vasilev: I am Plamen V., an award-winning freelance writer/poet with published works online and in a dozen US magazines. I have been writing since I was 10. I have won numerous writing contests and have awards from different parts of the world. I am a creative person with big dreams and also love to help people. I also have Certificates on Creative Writing from the UK writing centre, from the Open University in Scotland, Oxford Study Centre and from Harvard University.

My Muse

By Darby AM

It began with a deadline. I was to have my book finished and ready for printing by the beginning of November, a mere five months away. The publisher, desperate to peddle yet another tawdry romance novel, wanted it in time for the holiday sales frenzy. *Romance novels*. The very thought was revolting. This was far beneath my usual oeuvre. It was tedious for me to spew mushy drivel in lieu of my intellectual works. Academia, mystery, postmodern fiction— those were the realms in which I thrived, the domains where my genius shone. To stoop so low as to churn out saccharine filth for the masses? To conform to the shallow mold of pop culture? A betrayal of my craft, one I endured only out of necessity.

You can't rush perfection. Any *true* expert would understand that, but alas, the publishing industry is overrun with imbeciles. Still, time was not on my side. I was stuck, confined by their trivial expectations. Words, which were always a symphony waiting to be composed, now felt like a tangled mess, refusing to cooperate. One after another, I forced them to form something coherent, molding them into something vaguely palatable for an audience with tragically low standards.

The majority of so-called writers spend their days obsessively researching the minutiae of their work, as if those superficial details could elevate their mediocrity. I, however, do not operate in such plebeian ways. Most people have heard of method acting— where an actor immerses themselves in a role— but my process transcends even that. I become the art itself, embodying a creative force so profound it would be incomprehensible to most.

Yet, despite my unparalleled skill, even I was thwarted by the simplicity of romance. These shallow, pedestrian stories are the foundation of all literature. Anyone with a scrap of paper and a fleeting thought could produce one. And yet, to my horror, it seemed I was incapable of sinking to that level. That is, until I met *her*. Amelie; a name meaning hard working. The perfect description of what I needed to defeat my conundrum. Amelie was the kind of woman who could melt even the coldest of hearts with just a glance. The kind anyone would be a fool not to love.

I had been at my usual table at a standard coffee shop just down the road from my apartment. I stirred the half-melted ice in my grande, triple shot, sugar-free vanilla breve with a caramel drizzle while staring pensively out the window at nothing in particular. Wallowing in my own wordless despair, I caught a glint of strawberry blonde in the sunlight from across the street. Little ringlet curls bounced as she adjusted freshly bloomed white carnations at the flower shop across the street, smiling and saying hello to each passerby as if she knew them personally. She made my heart recite every love cliché ever made. She *was* the sun.

I had to speak to her. I had to be involved in the life of such a fascinating creature. I was across the street before I had even finished that thought, devising my excuse for approaching her. She glanced at me when I approached, those warm brown eyes lighting up while they soaked me in. Her smile was complimented by dimples as her sumptuous lips moved in greeting. Even the simple hello sounded so much sweeter when she was speaking it.

It was so simple to be with her, to laugh with her and to learn from her. She became my muse; with a single smile, I could write an entire saga. The novel became so effortless once I understood what true love was supposed to be. There was nothing more inspiring in the world than waking up with her in the morning. After spending a late night together, I was captivated by the way she looked at three in the morning; her lipstick almost completely faded. Still, she would desperately fight to stay awake just to be with me a moment longer. Over time, I found myself doing the same. Had I been so afraid of being ordinary that I had dismissed the extraordinary simplicity of love? My chest tightened with the unbearable thought that someone as luminous as Amelie had chosen someone as flawed as me. I didn't deserve her laughter, her patience, her love.

Time flew by as Amelie and I became accustomed to one another. Days melted into months of happiness; we were content with spending our lives together. Once my previously despised romance novel was published, we celebrated together, dining at the finest restaurant I could afford off the substantial advance my publisher awarded me. Amelie looked absolutely spellbound as I popped the cork to a bottle of champagne, her eyes like twinkling stars as I poured her a glass. It was in that twinkle that I realised how deeply I had needed her.

Amelie moved in with me in December. Spending Christmas day together was a treat. I drafted so many stories in my head watching her decorate the entire residence. Amelie confided she had always wanted children; little children running around Christmas morning filled her with joy. I could see her, sitting in my armchair, watching two little children lovingly as they ripped apart presents. She would make an exceptional mother, dedicated and loving to a fault.

Amelie's family didn't feel the same about me as she did. Her brother eyed me warily the moment she brought me home to introduce me. Her father made comments about not trusting those creepy writer types. Their paranoia was misplaced, but I was reassured when I overheard her arguing with her brother in hushed whispers down the hallway after he degraded me by labeling me a 'freak'. The harshness of her tone was arousing. Not once had she ever raised her voice with me. His attitude was borderline Neanderthal, hulking over the dinner table like Amelie was some object I could steal from him. I carefully watched him as he glowered, knowing deep down I had already won. Amelie was mine.

I was assigned another novel shortly thereafter. The haunting feeling of writer's block crept back from the shadowy depths where it had been lurking, slithering into the edges of my mind like a predator stalking its prey. Amelie, ever the dutiful muse, tried everything—hot coffees, midnight snacks, herbal teas. She would find me late at night and attentively rub my shoulders as I hunched over my wretched laptop. It was sweet, I supposed, but ultimately useless. Amelie didn't understand my process. Not really. None of it was close to touching the gnawing frustration building inside of me. There was only one proven way to conquer the monster of writer's block. To return to the method that had always worked before. Amelie wouldn't understand that, either.

Klang, klang, klang!

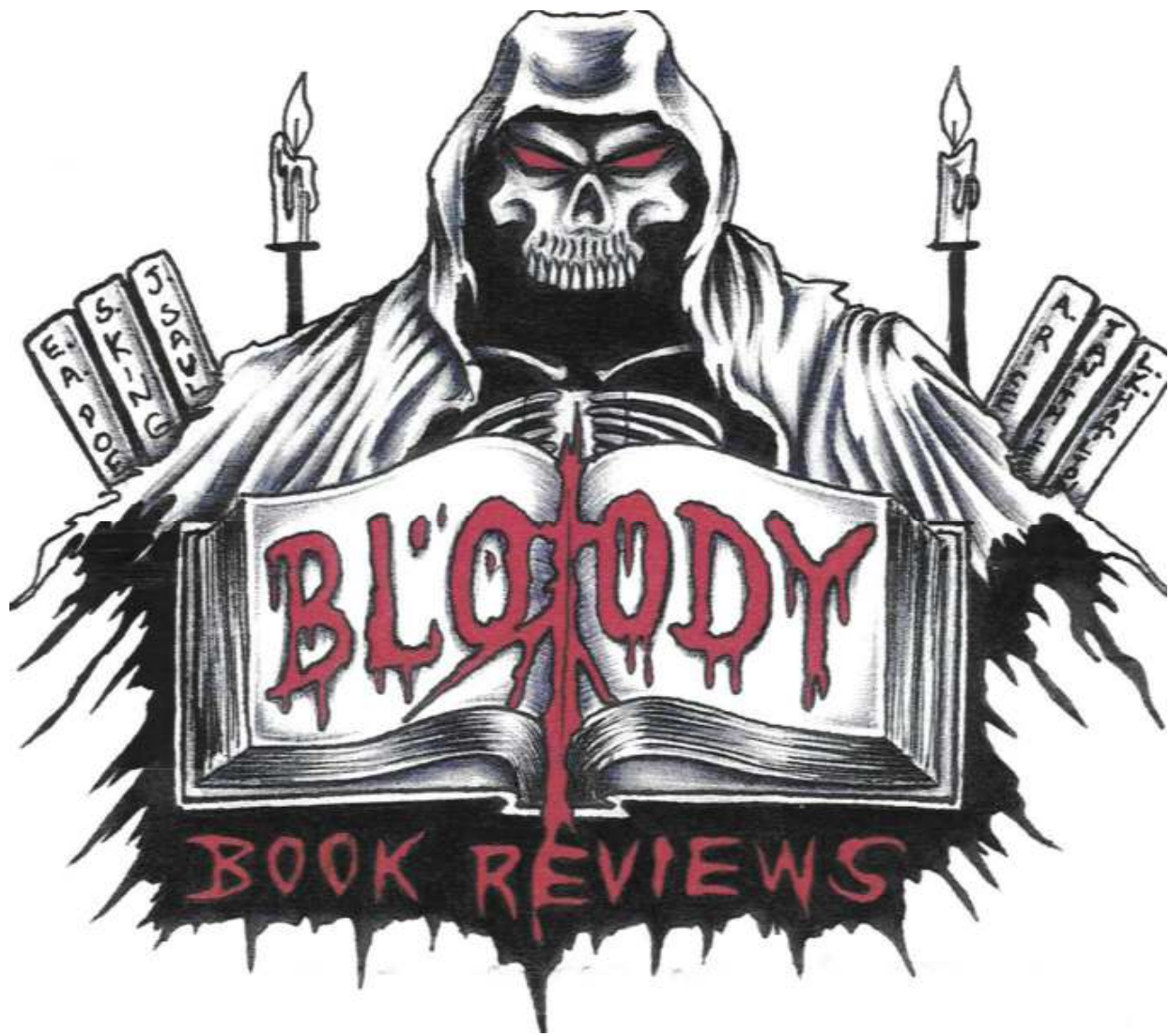
"Inmate, it's time for dinner," the prison guard said, sliding a tray of food through a slit in the cell door before stalking off in a beastly manner. I couldn't be bothered to gather my dinner for the evening as I tapped my pencil against my desk, the only bit of familiar comfort in this

confinement. It was so easy to recall how the knife felt piercing her skin, the warmth of her blood as it spilled onto my hands, the sight of the redness expanding on the mattress sheets as her dying screams tore through our apartment. Her blood had been my last inspiration, as if each drop was ink onto my paper.

Words are supposed to be a simple things to piece together, putting one after another to inspire a semblance of meaning. But they should not be this hard.

THE END

About Darcy AM: Darby AM is a queer, non-binary writer and lover of horror and fantasy. They find comfort in the dark and the weird, exploring themes of anxiety, hopelessness, and the uncanny. When they're not writing, they can be found playing Final Fantasy, Elder Scrolls, or a large variety of horror games.



Welcome bloody readers! The summer is fully upon us and I have a couple of novels that will transport you to another place that could be hotter than it is where you are at. The first is a global pandemic that changes your thought about what you would do during a breakout. Second is a werewolf roaming through New York just trying to get by but caught up with everyday life as a human. By the way, we will be reviewing Mark Leslie's line of books over the next couple of issues. So when it is too hot to be outside, pick up one of these books for a good read!

D.W. Jones

Immune by Seth Voorhees

As soon as I saw the book, title and author, I had a good feeling about it. The title is simple and you have a general idea about the story from the cover. And it doesn't hurt to have the last name of a famous horror villain. But as I started reading this novel, it was not a typical horror

genre type. If I am being intentionally vague, it's because I don't want to give anything away. Voorhees takes a typical horror story and turns it into something more of a mashup of different genres and makes it work for a compelling story.

The story begins in the midst of a global pandemic where an unknown virus is killing people by the millions. As the world comes to grips with this and tries to maintain civility, new information comes out that threatens that fragile balance. People find out that individuals with a certain blood type are immune to the virus.

Wyatt Tuck is just trying to maintain his little part of the world. As people react with the little information they have, he stays secluded on his land. The virus takes an unexpected turn that endangers everyone who hasn't been killed by the virus. As he is forced to leave the safety of his home, he comes into contact with people. He sees the best and worst in the reaction to the virus. When the virus evolves again, it is so earth shattering, it will affect humanity in a way no one sees coming. Will Wyatt and those close to him survive this virus or will people become the real enemy in this new world?

Voorhees does a great job with telling a story that comes too close for comfort to real life after the COVID 19 pandemic. He captures very realistic reactions to the pandemic in the novel and keys on the biggest fears that could be in his reader's minds. Of course it does veer into the horror novel area, but the mix of real and fiction make the story better. His characters are down to earth people that are likable and have you are rooting for them. The story moves along at a slow pace and like the story at times, seems to continue on to a new path that is very different from where it started.

I would recommend this book for fans of the Walking Dead universe where there is so much more than what people perceive as the story. You can find this book at the normal haunts that sell books like Amazon.



A Canadian Werewolf in New York by Mark Leslie

As I mentioned before, we are going to be reviewing Leslie's Canadian Werewolf series of books that he has out. We have read and reviewed Only Monsters In The Building (Book 7) and Once Bitten (Book 8) of the series and we were hooked on his writing ever since. Why did we start at this point you ask? It was the latest book out that was sent to us. The way Leslie describes it, each book can be read as a standalone but it is best to read the series from the beginning. So that is what we are doing. So the book we are reviewing this issue is A Canadian Werewolf in New York.

The story begins as Michael Andrews wakes up in a downtown New York park naked with no memory of what happened the night before. But that is normal for him since he is a werewolf during when the moon is full. What is not normal is being in a place he doesn't know or remembers how he got a bullet in his leg. All to add to that, he has to meet his agent for a meeting about a book he is expecting to work on. But that means going through New York during the morning rush.



It's tough being a werewolf in New York but tougher being a human dealing with the consequences of being a werewolf. On top of that, someone from his past is coming back into his life and has a television interview later that day. Can Michael make it all work to keep a work/life balance of wolf and man or will it spiral out of control? And how will his favorite superhero guide him to make the right decisions?

Leslie tells a great introductory story to his series and bringing you characters that you will come to know and enjoy. His style of writing is easy to read and you are free to dive deep into the story that becomes a quick read. If you are from New York, it is a bonus to be familiar with some of the sights he character mentions. The story runs naturally and it is in a short amount of time where it feels realistic. The action is good and the story leads to busy ending that feels falls in line with the novel as a whole.

I definitely recommend the book for anyone into werewolves but want something a little different than the typical horror genre you usually see. You can get these books from the anywhere that sells books.

Making Monsters

Willis O'Brien

By Michael Corvin

For this Making Monsters segment, we are not going to look at a featured makeup artist but a man who was the pioneering genius of stop motion film photography. While other early film innovators like Albert E. Smith and J. Stuart Blackton, the creators the 1898 short film Humpty Dumpty Circus, or George Melies for his work on the films A trip To the Moon (1902) and The Impossible Voyage (1904), paved the way for this man who would take creature effects to all new levels. That man was Willis O'Brien, the godfather of modern creature stop motion visual effects.

When film producers Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack were trying to figure out how to bring their giant gorilla to life for their new film production King Kong, they came upon test footage for an unfinished dinosaur film called Creation. The film test showed a man running away from a rampaging Triceratops all while the man and beast were in the same frame together on screen. This was revolutionary at the time to see a man and a dinosaur together for the first time. You have to remember this was the early 1930's and nothing like it had even been seen before. This is over 60 years before the advent of CGI and Jurassic Park, so this would have blown people's minds.

Once the producers of King Kong saw what magic O'Brien could make, he was signed on to perform all of the film's highly technical special effects. Among the extremely impressive dinosaurs seen in the movie, it was Willis O'Brien's highest achievement to bring the title beast to life. When Kong first emerges from the jungle and reveals himself to Ann (Fay Wray) and us the viewer, he is an imposing force of great power and commands our attention for the remainder of the film.

In reality, Kong was just an 18 inch tall puppet with a jointed metal skeleton under cotton and rabbit fur. He was built by model maker Marcel Delgado and animated by Willis O'Brien who brought Kong to life by moving the puppet just an inch at a time and filmed it frame by frame until once played back at normal speed it gave the illusion of movement and life.

Willis O'Brien came into the world on March 2, 1886 in Oakland CA. Before becoming the special effects wizard he would one day become, O'Brien worked as farmhand, factory worker, bartender, tour guide for in Crater Lake National Park, a professional boxer, and yes as a real cowboy where he competed in rodeos. He had an interest in sculpting and drawing in his off hours and even become at one point an illustrator for the San Francisco Daily Newspaper doing sports cartoons.

Having an interest in dinosaurs O'Brian started sculpting models and had some displayed at the 1915 San Francisco World's Fair. At some point with the help of a local cameraman covering the event, he brought one of the creatures to life by using a stop motion effect. When one of the fair exhibitors Herman Wobber saw the footage of the living dinosaur, he was so impressed that he hired O'Brian to do the special effects for a film project called *The Dinosaur and the Missing Link: A Prehistoric Tragedy*.

O'Brian did all of the stop motion effects for the 1915 silent short film and was later picked up and distributed by the Thomas Edison Film Company Conquest Pictures in 1917. Edison was so impressed with the work of O'Brian that he was hired on directly to work for his company. From there O'Brian worked on other prehistoric themed projects like *10,000 B.C* and *Prehistoric Poultry*, each in 1917. The silent shorts were aimed toward a younger viewer and even got to work on other projects for Conquest Pictures like *The Puzzling Billboard*, and *Nippy's Nightmare* again in 1917. These two films were also the first to incorporate stop motion with live actors.

This all led to being hired by Herbert M. Dawley for yet another Dinosaur project called *The Ghost of Slumber Mountain* in 1918. Next O'Brian moved onto the very first screen adaptation of Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World*, again using his talent for bringing dinosaurs to life. Although up until this time O'Brian was crafting his creatures out of clay, it was when meeting Marcel Delgado that things really hit big. Delgado created creatures using a metal skeleton armature under the creature's skin giving it much more life-like movement. These dinos were much more detailed and moved much more smoothly due to the ball joints built right into the armature.

For *King Kong*, two gorilla puppets were created for the film with each looking a little different from the other. One was called "Long Face" and was used in scenes where Kong battled the T-Rex and "Short Face" used for Kong's last stand upon the Empire State Building. If you ever wondered why in the movie Kong looks so different from scene to scene, now you know why. The main reason there were two Kong's was so that effects scenes could be filmed simultaneously to speed up the film's production.

O'Brian would handle the main work of animating Kong and other creatures with one puppet while he oversaw a team of others using the other puppet to fill in other shots. Since stop motion was such a long process and the film was not wanting to go over budget or over its planned shooting schedule, having two Kong models saved time and money. These other assistants to O'Brian to animate Kong and other creatures were Buzz E.B. Gibson, Carroll Shepphird, Orville Goldner, and Fred Reefer.

Although *King Kong* was Willis O'Brian's crowning jewel, it was by far not his only film. Later in 1933, O'Brian was asked to work on the rushed to theaters *Son of Kong* for RKO Pictures. He also worked again with Merian C. Cooper on the film *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1935) and *Dancing Pirate* (1936). Other film productions later in his career were *The Beast of Hollow Mountain* (1956), *The Black Scorpion* (1957), and *The Giant Behemoth* (1959).

In 1949, however 16 years after his groundbreaking work on *King Kong*, O'Brian got the chance to work on another big ape movie with *Mighty Joe Young*. Although not as large as Kong

nor as menacing, Joe a larger than normal mountain gorilla, is pleasant and a friend to Jill Young played by Terry Moore. This new RKO production again produced by Merian C. Copper saw O'Brian take on the stop motion special effects to bring the big ape to life. With 16 years separating Kong from Joe, O'Brian was able to give Joe much more facial expressions than he could have ever have done with Kong and it showed in the 1950 Academy Awards when O'Brian won a Oscar for Best Specials Visual Effects.

O'Brian was the lead animator for Mighty Joe Young but he was not alone. Ffor this project, he would take on a protégé.....and that protégé would himself go on in later years to change the world when it came to stop motion filmmaking. Immensely inspired by King Kong, a young Ray Harrison would work side by side with O'Brian to give life to the title character in Mighty Joe Young. Harrison, with O'Brian as his teacher, learned everything about the craft of stop motion photography that was possible who then in turn would become a master animator himself.

Think about it for a moment....if not for Willis O'Brian and King Kong, we would not have gotten such classic films as the Sinbad trilogy, Clash of the Titans, 20 Million Miles to Earth, Jason and the Argonauts, The Beast from 20,00 Fathoms, and so, so many more.

In 1962 on November 8th. Willis O'Brian died at the age of 76. Although the man was gone, his legacy lives on in, not only the films he worked on such as King Kong, and Mighty Joe Young, but in the people that followed him into the field of stop motion special effects like Ray Harrison, George Pal, Phil Tippett, Jim Danforth, and so many others. He was the master stop motion animator that inspired them all and the world would not have been the same without him.

Strolling on the Windowsills

By Christopher T. Dabrowski

The day was sunny.
Kitty snuck out to stroll on the windowsills.
He came across a human standing in his way - he was strange, weepy, and gloomy.
How can one be gloomy on such a pleasant day? - puzzled the Kitty.
- You, human, don't sulk. Just get off this windowsill. That's my spot.
The human did not respond.
- He's going to jump - Purr murmured from outside.
- He can fly, like a bird? - astonished Kitten.
- No, he's suicidal. He will just fall.
The human shuddered.
- Hey, human, wait! I need to exit the splash zone - meowed Purr and jumped into the bushes.

Death Wants To Live

By Christopher Dabrowski

They say if Death had siblings, she would slaughter them, but that's a misjudgment - Death is an old woman tormented by overwork.
If she gained muscles from scythe waving, she'd it easier to work with, but she lacks it and is accompanied by the unpleasant gnashing of worn-out bones.
If only someone invented immortality. She'd rest.
She had no idea that her dream would soon become reality - people upload their minds into quantum computers to live in all sorts of simulations.
Death discarded her scythe and headed for the beach.
- You only live once! - she shouted towards the terrified beachgoers.

Frog Skin

By Zary Fekete

The boy brought the frog in a Tupperware container. “He told me his name is Larkspur,” he said, peering in. “He said we could trade.”

“Trade what?” his mother asked.

“Skin.”

She was wiping groceries when he said it, hands chapped from discount soap. The word skin made her stop, just for a moment. She glanced at the frog, olive and still, pressed to the plastic wall.

That night, she found the boy in the bathroom, peeling. Not hurt...no blood, no cries. Just the thin, transparent sheath of outer skin coming off his forearm in careful spirals, like apple peel.

“Does it hurt?” she asked, voice low.

“No,” he said. “Larkspur showed me how. Said it’s better this way. Cleaner.”

He held up a piece of himself to the light. It fluttered slightly.

She made him wear long sleeves to school.

The next day he brought the frog to breakfast. “He says you can do it too.”

“I don’t want to,” she said.

“But he says you already are.”

She looked at her hands. The cracks had spread. Tiny flakes dusted the counter. The tips of her fingers were raw but numb.

That afternoon she stood at the mirror and pinched the loose skin beneath her chin. It came away like rice paper. There was no pain, only a strange relief. Beneath the outer layer, her neck was smooth and luminous. She felt younger. Sleek.

By Friday they kept Larkspur in a glass terrarium on the kitchen table. The boy sang to him. The mother placed droplets of water on his back with an eyedropper. They didn’t speak of the father, who had left years ago, or of the boy’s missing homework, or the doctor’s voicemail blinking red on the answering machine.

Instead, they shed.

It became routine. Strips of skin in the trash, the sink, curled like bookmarks between couch cushions. The mother quit her job. She stayed home to monitor the terrarium's humidity. The boy's teacher called to say he had stopped blinking in class. He sat still as a stone and whispered to the lines in his palms.

One evening, the frog climbed the terrarium wall, mouth moving slowly. The boy didn't come to dinner.

She found him crouched in the tub, skinless and smiling, legs tucked beneath him.

"It's almost done," he croaked.

And when she looked closer, she could see his throat pulse. Once. Twice.

That night they peeled their faces and then vanished into the swamp.

About Zary Fekete: Zary Fekete grew up in Hungary. He has a debut novella (Words on the Page) out with DarkWinter Lit Press and a short story collection (To Accept the Things I Cannot Change: Writing My Way Out of Addiction) out with Creative Texts. He enjoys books, podcasts, and many many many films. Twitter and Instagram: @ZaryFekete Bluesky:zaryfekete.bsky.social

Dark Poetry

Spirits

By Donna Dallas

The moon hides
suspiciously behind a large branch
it's full dark
my lover smokes
and the fumes rise
slow and methodical
into the clouds that look like bulls
and I
lay by the fire
incite the monsters
that reign
under our ribs

I'm violently empty
with desperate hunger
from this soul-pulling game
the spinning of ego and envy
no angel
could ever lock in with us

Exhaustion fuels
our battles under
this little moon
as we try desperately
to find each other's hands in the dark
while spirits haunt
our small
marred and battered love

The ghosts leap
from flame to flame
laugh at our blindness
we are aware of nothing

Longing for Myself

By Donna Dallas

As if I could stroke her beautiful bones
radiating a phosphorescent glow
under the palest skin

She comes every evening
sits at the window
a bluish orb surrounds her
she cries for my mistakes

We are older now
yet she's still aglow
and longs for my company
she lingers by the glass
waiting to play
or die

She and I parted
when I decided to withdraw
she and I pulled
our skin apart
and separated

Now I
forgetful and sloppy
cannot recall how to reattach us

She hovers
just out of reach
I gape at her from the sill
on my knees
as if in prayer
put my finger against the glass
her finger joins on the other side
and we cry for each other
for our premature parting

As a young fool
I rode wave after wave of ego
simply lost myself
in that ocean inside my gut - inside my tomb

I sit

zombie-like
slow death tries to penetrate
I'm too stubborn to allow anything
near me
I stay
seated behind the glass
mesmerized by my own lost self

Hot Twilight

By Donna Dallas

She trickles in
loose and jiggly
across the sky
I can feel her starry nipples
shift into position
she moves
with her night beasts
longing behind her
such desperate fiends
full ravenous
over the foamy blackened sea

Love, come hither
come to me
over the deep blue
come with your night creatures
that rest in your dark thighs

My lover
I wait
sandy and hot
hold me
kiss me
feed me

Dead Winter

By Donna Dallas

There's a hornet's nest way up
in the Locust tree

I surveyed it through binoculars

terrifying to watch those vicious creatures
way up there
building and bonding

I'm vacillating
peer into their lives that remind me
of a wild, yet diabolically organized
commune

Dishes litter the sink
I continue the search
for a venom to penetrate
this dullness

Where did summer go?
or is it still present
since these beasts with wings
haven't gone into hibernation

The tree almost bare
a landscape of skeleton branches
Halloween dead and gone
yet these buggers linger in the winter
of no season

Two days ago
as I walked through the forest
crunching all the fallen leaves
I noticed a dead hornet
next to the Locust tree's trunk

Never looked up
we don't look up enough

About Donna Dallas: Donna Dallas has appeared in a plethora of journals, most recently Beatnik Cowboy, Horror Sleaze Trash and Fevers of the Mind. She is the author of Death Sisters, her legacy novel, published by Alien Buddha Press. Her first chapbook, Smoke and Mirrors, launched in 2022 with New York Quarterly. Her second chapbook, Megalodon, launched in 2023 with The Opiate. Donna has served on the editorial team of Red Fez and NYQ. donnaanddallas@gmail.com
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