



PURGATORY
Cover Art by David Bowlin

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Dead in Thirteen Flashes 2: Body Count

Horror comes in many flavors and sometimes in sequels.

It instills an intense nervous and depressed feeling —then we as horror authors and artists have done our jobs in the genre. If we cause our fans of horror to shiver with dread, if we drive wrinkled waves of terror through their veins to render a shudder, HORROR has been accomplished.

Horror authors and artists provoke terror through a gloomy; dreariness. Breathing a dark horror into the woods, life into inanimate objects, mixing a unique formula of making something living-dead and something dead-living! Sometimes horror comes upon you through a silent scream while other times it is a hammer horror that is relentlessly beating on you. It comes cloaked in darkness and brings evil as its cohort. Sometimes, even *Nursery Rhymes* can take on a horrific tone.

These deathly horrors along with the visuals are so surreal they will do just that to its readers. Beware you fearers of the unknown, unexplored, and ugly side of life—death! Brace yourself, these stone-cold authors and artists have offered you deadly flashes of their blood-soaked nightmares.

—*Brutal Dreamer*
October 2004

AT THE MORGUE
of
DEAD IN TH13TEEN FLASHES 2:
BODY COUNT

TITLE	AUTHOR or ARTIST
FREE JAWBREAKER EYE CANDY THE SKULL & BONES CLUB	ELIZABETH R. PEAKE KENNETH C. GOLDMAN NANCY JACKSON RAQUEL TAYLOR
BODY	DAVID MAGITIS
BENJAMIN BLOODSISTER THAT'S MY BODY	KEVIN ANDERSON DAVID BOWLIN JEFF BROWN
DEAR LORD	KEITH WIGDOR
KICKING AGAINST THE PRICKS HAMMERHEAD	STEVEN L. SHREWSBURY SAMUEL MINIER
ABDULLAH	DAVID MAGITIS
NURSERY RHYME WHO KILLED COCK ROBIN?	JOSEPH PAUL HAINES STEPHEN M. WILSON
AFTER AGE	DAVID BOWLIN
IN THE SIERRAS OCCUPANT	J. L. NAVARRO SABINE NAUS
BAD DOLLY	DAVID MAGITIS
TRUE LOVE THE TREE	KEITH GOUVEIA KELLI DUNLAP
LITTLE MISS DEATH	DAVID BOWLIN
HOUSE OF STONE & BLOOD RAW IS WHERE IT IS AT	MEGAN POWELL MICHAEL CALDWELL
ANGELS OF DEATH	DAVID MAGITIS
OBITUARIES	

FREE

by Elizabeth R. Peake

His steps were heavy and slow, much like the nightmare he wished it was.

“I’m coming, Missy!”

Hair so dark and eyes so blue, four-year-old Missy’s head submerged into the deep, salty water for the second time.

Johnny ran through the course beach sand, mouthing that silent prayer only a parent knows ... *Please God, let me get there in time. Don’t let my baby die.*

“Missy! Hang on, baby! Daddy’s coming!” As Johnny’s feet slammed into the cool water, he shot a final glance over his shoulder. *Where’s Becky? I can’t do this alone. This free vacation was YOUR fucking idea!*

Johnny saw his daughter break water the third time and grabbed her hair. She kicked and clung to him, forcing his head beneath the waves. Missy could see the look in her daddy’s eyes as he tried to come up for life-giving air. But even at four years old, Missy was capable of accidentally drowning her hero.

Using his shoulders as a pushing board, she kicked off of him with enough thrust to kick and paddle her little body into the shallowness that covered the wet sand her feet longed to feel.

Coughing up spurts of water and calling her daddy’s name, Missy felt the granules of sand cling to her wet feet and legs. Pushing her soaked hair away from her pale face, she saw her mother running towards her.

“Missy! Are you all right?” Becky instinctively began checking her daughter’s body for cuts and bruises.

“I’m fine, Mama. But I think daddy’s still in the water. Did I do good?”

“Yes, sweetheart, you did just fine.” Becky reached for her daughter’s small hand and together they walked up and down the length of the beach for the rest of the afternoon. They didn’t go home until they were certain Johnny had indeed drowned.

After dinner, Missy devoured a large piece of pecan pie. While chewing the last bite she said, “I’m so glad I can live with you again, Mommy. Daddy never let me eat what I

wanted and would never let me go swimming. You were right. Being free is the best feeling in the world.”

Becky smiled at her daughter and thought to herself: *I'm right about a lot of things, Missy. I knew daddy would try and save you even though he couldn't swim. And even though you haven't lived with me for the last three years, I know you're deadly allergic to nuts.*

“Yes, baby. Being free is the best feeling there is.”

#

JAW BREAKER

by Ken Goldman

“Imagine an imaginary menagerie manager
imagining managing an imaginary menagerie.”

Speech Therapy Exercise for
Norman Oliver, age 26

Melissa, all in pink . . .

Was any sight more incredible? Seeing his little girl dressed up for his sister's wedding looking like a walking china doll was enough to make Norman believe that his life had meaning after all. Not long ago that same conviction would have proven a hard sell, but sometimes life turned on a dime and things just straightened themselves out. His speech therapy seemed finally to be paying off. He had pulled that ace straight from the deck like a magic trick, and *voila!*

“Daddy, Daddy! Look at me! Watch me, Daddy!”

Melissa, giggling as only a six year old can, tossed her ball into the air, spun three times, and caught it just before it hit the ground. Precious moments in Norman's life had been few and he intended to savor this one.

"Six thick thistle sticks . . . six thick thistles stick . . ."

Norman repeated the tongue tangler under his breath before he shouted out, "That's just great, honey!"

'Great' seemed an inaccurate term to describe this moment, but he wasn't ready to risk "Wonderful" just yet. Some words tangled on the journey between his brain and his tongue, and he still blew wind with his W's. But he no longer gurgled his G's nor locked his lips around his M's.

Margaret had remained inside. His wife wouldn't leave dishes in her sink even if she had to clean them while wearing her best dress. Old habits die hard.

"'Three free thugs set three thugs free' . . . *Hot damn!! Got it!*" Norman said. He was going to nail that congratulatory speech for his sister like a champ.

The garage door opened. Margaret was backing the Camry into the driveway. She rolled the window down and waved to her husband. Lost in his brief reverie it took a moment for the thought to register.

Melissa . . . Where . . . ?

The little girl had stepped behind the fern bush to retrieve her ball and had reappeared upon the blacktop, but Margaret's wave had momentarily preoccupied the woman from seeing her.

Margaret didn't see her daughter.

Melissa didn't see the car.

Melissa, all in pink . . .

Norman's mouth struggled forming the words.

"W-w-w-w-w-watch ---"

###

EYE CANDY

by Nancy Jackson

Screams echoed from inside the building. Gargoyles with penises and breasts hung above the entrance with kama sutra pictures depicting women with the devil.

“Guess they weren’t kidding when they said this haunted house was adults only,” said Mike. His wife of three years squeezed his hand.

“I’m so excited we’re here,” she said. He eyed her supple breasts popping out of the Elvira costume.

“I’m excited anytime you dress up sexy,” he said. “You make good eye candy.” Jenna laughed.

“It’s our turn!” she cried and pushed him ahead. The first few rooms were dark and no one jumped out as they had expected. Around the corner they kept their eyes on the tattooed body holding a chainsaw.

“Think it will move?” she whispered. Mike shrugged and opened his mouth to answer. An ear splitting noise masked his words as the chainsaw started up. The chainsaw swung out in midair and stopped half an inch away from their faces. Four bloody dildos trailed behind it.

“Shit!” Jenna cried. “I almost pissed myself!” Mike laughed and pulled her along.

They climbed a set of rickety stairs and listened to odd crashes and doors slam shut. At the top of the stairs he took a step into another room and lost his footing.

“Mike you okay?” Jenna asked.

“It’s slippery in here,” he said. “Take small steps.” He felt her hand slip back in his and tensed his muscles to keep her from falling. What the hell was so slick? Strobe lights flashed on and he crinkled his nose at the worms under his feet.

“This is gross,” he said. Loud shrill screams came from around the corner and he tried to make his eyes adjust to the dark. Something grabbed him and pushed him hard into the wall. A strange odor permeated from within the room and he gagged.

“What the hell is that?” he cried.

“The smell of your wife crapping herself,” said a voice.

“What the?” he started. Something tight wrapped around his chest and he couldn’t move his arms. The blindfold came off and he looked around the room. A fake hand fell out of his and he panicked. When had Jenna let go of his hand?

“Jenna, where are you?”

“Relax,” said a vile looking man. With bloodshot eyes and severe acne, Mike was sickened by the thought of the freak touching his wife.

“You will be reunited with her shortly,” he said. “We always separate the couples.” Mike was led into a room where four other males stood before him.

“Come take your turn in line,” said a naked woman. “It’s time to play a game.” Her large breasts jiggled as she walked around the room. Mike had a hard time not staring at them.

He turned his attention to the man in front get blindfolded and was handed a stick. “Now I’m going to spin you around and then you swing that stick against the piñata,” explained a troll-like looking creature. Mike’s eyes followed upwards. Hanging from the ceiling was a large piñata in the shape of two large breasts. He forgot his panic and let the inner kid come out and play.

The first man spun around and swung the stick three times with nothing to show for it. Both the second and third guys in line made contact, but not enough to dislodge anything. Mike could smell the woman’s perfume as she walked around him smiling. Again he turned his attention back around to the guy ahead of him. A tall blonde-haired man dressed in western gear was next and Mike figured he’d knock it open for sure. He envisioned condoms, small plastic bottles of Baileys, and cards with pictures of porn stars falling out. If he was quick enough, he could snatch up a major load.

“Let’s see if you can swing like a man,” said the woman.

“Not a problem,” the cowboy mumbled.

After he turned three times, the blond-haired man walked forward and swung the stick. Swoosh. All he got was air. A second time he nailed it dead on and two round objects fell to the ground.

“Did I get something?” he asked. Mike stared.

“Yep, but you got one more shot left,” said the woman. The man swung again. Before Mike could see what fell, he was blindfolded and the stick was thrust in his hand.

“You finish it off,” the woman whispered in his ear. Her hands trailed around his body and lingered on his belt buckle for just a moment. It was dark. Something nagged at him but he shook it off. He figured it was guilt for looking at another woman. She spun him around gave him a push. He walked forward until he felt sure he was under the piñata. He raised the stick up over his head and sliced through the air, only to slam it against the floor.

“Come on, you can do better than that,” she said. Mike swung again and this time felt the impact.

“One more time!” she cried.

Mike felt confident. He flexed his muscles and slammed the stick hard against the side of the piñata and heard the contents fall. He tore off the blindfold and froze. Body parts were strewn along the floor with blood splattered everywhere.

“Disgusting!” Mike cried. He stared hard at the round objects amid the blood and gore. Emerald green orbs with soft gold flecks along the rim stared back. Just like Jenna’s. His heartbeat sped up and he looked at the woman.

“What are these?” he asked.

“You said your wife made good eye candy.”

###

The Skull and Bones Club

by Raquel Taylor

Her skin was pale as parchment paper, a flawless alabaster without freckle or vein. Long, onyx hair traveled down her back to her tiny waist. Christopher stared at her in sensual awe. She had a gothic thing going on right out of a Bram Stoker novel. Her breasts bulged against the jet black of her slinky dress. The dress itself scraped the ground in an ebony fan behind her. Where it clung to her curves, it molded itself like paint. The dress was spit up the sides so that it ran to the identical black garter belts that she wore on both legs. On those garter belts were twin black roses, the centers of those black roses were dyed crimson. One rose was the home of a single ladybug, the other was the domain of two snails. Slowly, with relish, the ladybug's wings fluttered. He gasped out loud. The damn thing was real. It was alive. Weird.

She stood in a thin shade of mist outside the *Skull and Bones Club*. The wind fanned her jet colored hair so that it writhed about her head in thick ebony coils. She had long, black fingernails that curved at the tips. She ran them up her pale white thighs. Her lips were painted black as well. They parted with a promise of untold delight and her pink tongue snaked out to caress her full bottom lip.

"I hate Goth chicks," Alicia said from beside him, "All those intricate make-up troubles, just to look like something returned from the dead. It doesn't make any sense. Damn, this line is stretching around the block. This is ridiculous."

Christopher thought the Goth chick was sexy as hell. Wisely, he kept his mouth shut. Alicia slipped her hand in his. She leaned back into him and pressed her lips to his throat. "That waste of space turning you on, lover?" she asked, her tongue flickered across the pulse at his jugular. He felt his body grow hot as he buried his face in her platinum hair. Alicia was short. She barely came up to his neck. Her hair smelled of some sensual flavor he couldn't quite name.

The Goth chick was an Amazon. He looked over Alicia's blonde head. The Goth chick was also gone. A wave of disappointment went through him. Even as he pressed Alicia's soft, inviting body close. They were having a pleasant first date, and getting into the *Skull and Bones Club* was seeming less and less important in the face of the lust the Goth chick inspired in him and the way the little blonde woman before him was fumbling with the waistband of his pants. He gasped out loud.

"You wanted that black haired bitch, didn't you?" Alicia whispered warmly in his ear. Her tone was hot and demanding. Her tone warned him not to lie . . . She was running her teeth along his jugular now, not hard enough to hurt but hard enough to get his attention. "Alic-" he started. *What about all these damn people?* He thought.

Pale hands slid across his chest from behind. Black nails ran across his shoulders. Alicia looked up from his throat. Her eyes were red, whites and all, angry, blazing red.

"Damn, Rose, there might be something to that Goth shit after all," she hissed and chuckled madly, "But, just remember, I brought the dinner tonight."

The patrons standing outside the *Skull and Bones Club* turned to Christopher as he found himself in the viselike grip of the thing behind him. He turned to face the Goth chick and she smiled at him, fangs and all. Alicia nipped his neck playfully and then bit down until he screamed in agony. Goth-chick held him still as the line for the club descended on him in a hungry wave. They spent the next half an hour languishing in his blood and devouring strips of his flesh.

#

Sated, they tossed his skull and bones into the deceptively decorated, abandoned building with all the rest.

###



SLAUGHTER HOUSE
Art work by David Magitis

BENJAMIN

by Kevin Anderson

Death lingered just outside the bedroom door of the elderly couple. Knowing that it was not quiet time, the dark angel moved over to a hallway window where it sought to view the western mountains now flush in the afterglow of sunset.

Inside the bedroom a man that had survived two major wars cradled his dying wife in a loving embrace. She had been dying for some time and the doctors had been

unable to find the cause of the slow and painful breakdown of her insides. But none of that mattered now as the end approached.

"Jacob," the women said.

"Yes, my sweet," her husband answered.

"Its almost time. I can feel it."

"Don't speak, darling."

"But I must, I can't go with this guilt in my heart."

Jacob sat up and said, "Whatever it is, it doesn't matter now."

"But it does," she insisted. "I never wanted it to happen, but it did and I can't forgive myself."

"You don't need to tell-" Jacob tried to stop her from getting to worked up, but she interrupted. "I've been unfaithful. God help me, Jacob, I betrayed you."

Jacob brushed his hand over her gray locks.

"When you were over seas, I was very lonely."

"Shhh," Jacob said, "there is no need-"

"The worst part is that it was with your best friend Benjamin. When he got wounded and came home I visited him at the VA hospital. We were both so lonely, Jacob. So very lonely."

"Hush sweetheart." Jacob tried to quiet her.

"It went on for almost a year, then the war ended and you came home. We acted like it never happened..." Jacob brushed her hair and wiped a tear from her cheek. "I've felt so guilty for so long. I don't want to take this pain with me to Heaven," she pleaded.

"Everything is going to be all right, my love. There is no need to unburden yourself any further," Jacob said with sincerity. "I've know all along about your infidelity. Who do you think has been poisoning you for the past year?"

The woman's eyes widened.

"And don't worry about your lover. After the last shovel full of dirt comes to rest on top of your coffin, I'll deal with Benjamin."

###

BloodSister

by Dave Bowlin

"She's dead, Shade. She's dead." Doc's voice was flat, unemotional. Shade had seen uncountable numbers of dead bodies in her life and this one, although it was her mate lying beneath the moonless sky, covered in blood, was no different than the rest. Doc closed the dead woman's eyes, stood, and walked down the street without looking

back. The rest of the gang followed her into the darkness, a battle-scarred group of women without hope of a better life.

Alone, Shade looked at the body, then at the rumbling sky. Lightning flashed, thunder crashed, the forerunner of the nightly rain. Something deep within her ached, but she would never admit it to anyone. Weakness was punishable by death, a law enforced on more than one occasion by Shade herself. There was no room for weakness in this new world where the few remaining humans had to fight and kill to survive. The lucky ones had died in the wars; the rest, the damned, survived by deceit and the blade, always hungry, always cold, miserable.

Fat drops of rain pelted the dead woman's face. Blood mingled with the rain and drizzled into the cracked street, a silent testament to the ruthless, cold world, a world Shade hated beyond imagination. She shivered as she watched the bloody rivulet disappear into a crack in the ancient asphalt. Whether the shiver was from the chill rain or her cold heart she didn't know, didn't dare to guess.

She knelt down and plunged her thumb into the fatal knife wound in the woman's chest. "Sleep, BloodSister," she whispered, "for your torment is ended." She wiped her bloody thumb across the dead woman's brow, then down her forehead, making a bloody cross. "Sleep in peace, Bloodsister."

Shade stood, picked up her whip, and looked around. Old relics from another time rusted and rotted as far as the eye could see: soda machines, the skeletal remains of automobiles and apartments, an old washing machine turned on its scratched and battered side. The world had moved on and left mankind to fend for itself, man against woman, slave and enslaver, barbarians and heathens merely trying to survive in a brutal, dying world.

She walked away, swallowing the tears that wanted so desperately to be spilled. Reaching the dark husk of an ancient building, Shade glanced over her shoulder at her dead companion and sighed. "Now you're one of the lucky ones, Slice," she said. "Now you're one of the dead, and not one of the damned."

Shade, the leader of the BloodSisters, a cold, cruel woman even by the brutal standards of this forsaken, forgotten world, released the tears held in check from a lifetime of pain and hate and misery into the darkness of her makeshift bedroom. A long time later she slept, only to awaken once again cold, miserable, and sadly, still alive.

###

THAT'S MY BODY

by Jeff Brown

That's my body over there. Crumpled and still, hidden by the over brush and trees. Do you see it? If not, move a little to your right, and take a few steps toward that extremely rich green colored bush by the water. Ah, there you go. Now, do you see it?

See? There's a foot—a boot used to be on it, but now just a mud covered white sock (well, the sock used to be white before it got drug through the mud). I can't believe they stole my boots.

Hey, get a little closer. You gotta see what they did to me. Yeah, that's right—it was three on one and I lost the fight. And, you know, it really wasn't much of a fight.

The four of us had had a few beers and were going night swimming. After we got here, to this remote little pond, they attacked me. The bunch of cowards. Hard and metallic. I felt the back of my head explode when (what I guess was a baseball bat) I was hit. I went down quickly. They kicked and hit me, and the one with the bat (I don't know which of the three it was—Brad, Dolan, or Richie—but, it was one of them. And, when I find out—and I *will* find out—poor, poor boy) wailed away at my back and ribs. Oh, how the bruises welted and the bones broke. But, that really doesn't matter, after the first shot with the bat I was all but dead.

I would have been okay if they would have just left then. But, I think they had this wild notion that I was something other than human. That I was something evil, and they were making the world a better place by getting rid of me.

Brad took my boots. He said he had always liked them. He had even mentioned how much he liked them that night; how he wished he had a pair just like them. It's little things in conversations like that—"Man, I wish I had a pair of boots like that."—that people pay no never mind to. Things that people say that they are *really* thinking, or of what their intentions *really* are. And, I missed the hint. But, that's okay. Brad's got the boots, this I am sure of. I'll get them back eventually.

I think it was Dolan who took my ring. My ring. It had been with me for years. It has my family's coat of arms on it. I guess that was just something he always wished he had, just like Brad and my boots.

But, you see, it's Richie that I really want. Why? Why, you ask? Well, he was *supposed* to have been my friend. He's the one who introduced me to Brad and Dolan. And, although Richie didn't take anything, he *did* do something far worse.

What is that, you ask?

Come here, around the bush. Do you see that? Yeah, that's exactly what it looks like.

After they beat me down, it was Richie who rolled me over, placed the sharp stake to my chest and drove it through my heart. Killing me. That's what Richie did.

So, that's my body over there. Those are my hands that are wrapped around the blood stained stake. And, those are my eyes, staring blankly at the sky, glazed over

and unseeing. But, this is my soul up here, amongst the tree limbs and the birds. Someone will be coming along soon enough. And, that someone will be not-so-bright enough to pull that stake out of my dead chest . . . and become dinner for me.

And, my three "friends," well, they are as right as rain: I am not normal at all, and when I am found and awoken they will see just how not normal I am. I can't wait to get my boots back.

###



DEAR LORD
Art by Keith Wigdor

KICKING AGAINST THE PRICKS

by Steven L. Shrewsbury

“I hear the cries of long dead heroes whistling in the void, and the shouts of forgotten gods. To each being there is an appointed time, and even the gods must die...”

ROBERT E. HOWARD

THE TWILIGHT OF THE GREY GODS

Moonlight crept into the small chapel as the long doors swung open. The heavy boots of the men who entered alerted those in the sanctuary of danger. In the dim, lunar radiance and the flicker of many candles, those cavorting upon the altar froze. Jagged smiles from men in the robes of priests spread fast at the echo in the sanctuary. The sound from the intruders wearing armor was that of swords being unsheathed.

Never did a metallic visor rise on any helmet as the knights ran forward. Roughly, under the power of many hands, the monks exited the altar.

One of the ruddy skinned Clerics shouted, “So, you caught us, damn you all! We have defiled this church under the cross of Christ itself! You are too late!”

The men in armor said nothing as they stripped the counterfeit monks. Under their religious clothes the naked bodies were painted and tattooed with wicked, myriad symbols of long forgotten gods.

More knights sporting crosses on their chests dragged other fake men of God into the region near the altar. Each man wore religious vestments of Roman Catholic Priests or Monks of the order of Benedict until they were unclothed. Sans their garb, each flushed skinned man swore and spat at the knights.

“So, you have us, curse you, each and every one!” the man from the tryst on the altar snorted with great arrogance. “We are not monks, warriors of Christ! I see your crosses and know that by your armor you have just returned from the so called Holy Land! Bah! I spit on your cross and your new sect of a carpenter! We here still worship the gods of the oak as our ancestors did in Gaul before the time of Rome! You will never get us to

accept your cross. We call down the dark forces of night on you, no matter what you may promise or threaten.”

The Crusaders said nothing, but hauled the nude men down the aisle of the church. One of the pagans put up quite a struggle and the Crusader in the rear confiscated his head. The geyser of blood shot far, tainting the urn of holy water near the doors.

Once outside in the light of the moon, the six knights assembled in a semi-circle around the heretics who dishonored the church.

The mouthy leader of the pagans stood up and blinked, staring at the wooden cart that accompanied the Crusaders’ horses. “What have you for the King of France? Is it gold or booty from the Holy Land? Is it a relic so precious that none may see it for free? There is a black case! Do you bring religious articles for foolish pilgrims to fawn over?”

Five of the Crusaders wrestled the nude men down and made them go to their all fours. The sixth man who wore the Cross of Christ on his chest walked to the cart and opened up the long, slender ebony casing.

Again, the director of the pagans laughed and taunted them, saying, “Do you not give us the chance to convert? Are you going to behead us all and never offer us Heaven? Many found heaven on this spot before you fools placed a church here!”

From out of the artifact case came a long, gleaming treasure. At last, the voice of the lead Crusader resounded in the French countryside. “Death to the unbelievers, such are the words of God.”

The face of the pagan registered confusion as the moon shone on the relic, and the odd curve of the object that sparkled so in the light.

When the knights raised their visors, the heretic swallowed hard. It all became real to him just who had him at a disadvantage. Leering at their dark skin and dark hair, the pagan shouted, “You are not Christians! You are Saracens! You are not our enemy!”

The man in Crusader armor said, “The holy words say *fight and slay pagans where you may find them*. I care naught for your ancient gods for they are not mine. With this, the sword of Mohammed itself, I shall kill the King of France. With this divine instrument, the Christians will know terror. For as the words of the prophet say, *I will inspire terror into the hearts of the unbelievers*.”

The Saracens dropped their swords and the heads of the pagans rolled onto the grasses of France.

As the night deepened, those in Europe under subversive means dined on the communion wafers and wine. Consuming their fill, they looked up to the Heavens.

Under the light of the crescent moon, their leader declared, “God is great.”

###

Hammerhead

by Samuel Minier

Please.

No.

It's the last one. Just to get us through, until we're finished –

No.

(Silence)

(Silence)

Aren't you gonna ask? Aren't you even curious?

No.

Why? But oh please, why not?

Because I'm tired. My hands ache. My mouth is raw from grinding. I don't want to do anything but finish this, and then sleep. Crawl into a coma.

Please.

(Chewing sounds)

For me.

(Silence, then a sigh)

So. What's this one about?

Thanks –

Don't. Just tell the goddamn pitch, don't fawn like some goddam little girl. And keep working while you're doing it.

Ok.

(Deep breath of preparation)

Ok. I call this one Hammerhead. There's this poor little deformed kid, an actual kid with a head shaped like a hammer head shark –

Human mouth or shark mouth?

Oh. Human, definitely.

Hm.

What?

Nothing. Keep going. And pass that, the left one.

Here. But what's wrong with the mouth? Oh it sucks already, doesn't it? I'm never gonna break into the movie biz –

Don't start, goddamit. Don't even fuckin think about it. Tell. Your. Idea.

Ok . . . ok. So this poor little deformed boy, with a rectangular head, one eye stuck on each end. His skin is shriveled and hangs from his bones like drapery. Each eye is shrunk to a pinpoint, from lack of sunlight –

- cause his mom doesn't let him go outside to play.

Right! Of course not.

Course not. Can you do your share? Pretty fuckin please?

Ok.

(Becoming muffled. An occasional crunch).

Ok, so he's not allowed outside because of his mother. She's worried they'll all make fun of him, all the other kids. So he just sits in his boarded-up room and watches movies all day, and puts his beady little eyes, one at a time because of the shape of his head, you know, he alternates each eye, peering through the single knot-hole in the

planks over the window. Straining to see outside. That's his days – movies and the knothole. And checking to see if she forgot to padlock the door.

And then one morning she does.

Right! And so he charges out the bedroom triumphantly, running to the front door, his beautiful spirit shining through his horrible face –

But when he makes it outside all the kids scream and scatter.

Wrong! Just as he is opening the front door, his Mom returns home. And when she catches him, catches him breaking her number-one-rule . . . she kills Makura.

She kills the kid?

No, not him. Makura.

Who the hell is Makura? Here, give me that. I can snap the bone down easier.

Makura's his pet shark. Didn't I mention that?

No. Where the hell does he keep a shark?

In his aquarium, on his dresser. He's only like two feet long. Hammerheads only grow to the size of their containers.

I think that's alligators.

Oh . . . oh shit, you're right. I'll have to rework –

(A slurping noise)

- that. But yeah, when his mom catches him trying to leave, she throws him back into the bedroom, then reaches into the aquarium, snags Makura by the tail, and smashes him against the wall!

(Sigh)

The boy beats the Mom to death with the shark's lifeless body, right?

Damnit!

(pause)

Damnit! How did you see that coming?

I just know how your mind works. Kinda hard not to.

It sucks, doesn't it? Just like all the others?

(Silence)

Doesn't it?

(A pause, then a thick, choking, raging laugh)

Yeah. It fuckin sucks. But at least it's not as bad as the rest. The deformed shark-boy who makes the team, becomes a football star – yeah, that'll work –

Shut up.

– or the – oh God – the deformed shark-boy who falls in love -

(More hacking laughter. Spattering of food bits against a wall.)

Shut up!

– with a fuckin carp . . . oh God . . .

I'm just trying to better our lives, get us out of here . . .

No, that was my decision! Remember, two days ago? And now I'm stuck listening to these shitty pipedreams, ever since we –

DON'T!

YES! Because that's it. Your blockbuster idea, your runaway hit. Not inspirational claptrap, not fuckin romantic comedy. But lurid family murder – now there's an idea . . .

. . . that's what I told . . .

A hammerheaded boy, yes. Deformed, a shut-in, with a tyrannical mother? Absofuckinlutely. But –

. . . no . . .

- two mouths. On the great block of his head, the human one. And another, hidden in the folds of the skin that cascade around his neck. This one wide and serrated. Like a shark's.

. . . wrong . . . this is all wrong . . . I don't like this pitch, no one would . . .

Well certainly not mothers. Whiny, fearful creatures, berating and beating. Til one day the mouth on that great block-head just can't take it anymore, and finally goes along with what the shark-mouth has been saying, for fuckin years . . .

(Silence)

(Silence)

I . . . I still don't think it would sell . . .

Don't you want to find out, though? Once we finish this mess off. REST. Then leave this miserable room forever. Get an apartment . . . a typewriter . . .

. . . typewriter . . .

But we gotta finish first. Leave NOTHING behind. Not a single bit.

I'm trying. Your . . . your teeth are stronger than mine.

Keep scraping the little bits off the walls. I'll take care of the pelvis.

Oh god. Oh god, keep it downwind it stinks like –

Shut up. Eat. I know what she smells like.

#



ABDULLAH
Art by David Magitis

Nursery Rhyme

by Joseph Paul Haines

The man who was once Jack Farley stood between his nightstand and bed and looked down at the worn cover of his favorite childhood book: Mother Goose.

"Jack Sprat could eat no frat," he said. "His wife could eat no team." Jack giggled

until his sides ached, the chain of the handcuffs rattling against the wood of the nightstand, then finished "Although between the both of them, they'd pick a carcass clean."

He smiled down at his book of nursery rhymes. "Was that right?" He asked.

Mother Goose smiled back, her hooked cane gleaming with the sheen of stainless steel. "Why yes, Jack. That was very good."

Jack bounced on his toes in excitement at the unexpected praise. Mother Goose was hard to please, after all. He'd found that out over the last fourteen months.

A scream came from the other side of his closed bedroom door. Jack looked to Mother Goose. She was smiling, too. Jack put his fingers over his mouth and giggled more. "Do I still have to wear these handcuffs, Mother Goose?"

"Just a little while longer, Jack," she said. "Why don't you recite another nursery rhyme?"

"Which one?"

"Why don't you choose. Pick something I'd like."

Jack thought hard. "How about this! 'Jacky Peter, Pumpkin-eater, had a wife but couldn't beat her. So he put her in a basement cell, and there she endured a living hell!'"

The smile on Mother Goose's face couldn't have been any bigger. "Jack, you are such a good boy."

The noise from the living room stopped. "Is it okay now, Mother?" Jack asked.

Mother Goose shook her head gently. "Not yet, dear. Just give me one more rhyme, okay, and then."

Jack bit his bottom lip and looked toward the ceiling. Then, he snapped his fingers and said, "Resis-tential, have you any pull? Yes sir, yes sir, body bags full! One by the window glass who went with a scream, and one by the garden gnome, it wasn't a dream."

"Jack," Mother Goose said, "You're the best I've ever trained. You may go get the key now."

Jack beamed with pride. He opened his bedroom door and walked over to the middle of the living room, where the decapitated police officer sat next to his own head. Jack stopped a moment to enjoy the cool breeze blowing in from the missing window pane.

He reached down and picked up the cop's keys. A minute later, the handcuffs were undone.

Jack walked out his front door and and grabbed the other police officer under the arms. The garden gnome smiled at him like always, blood streaked around his mouth like strawberry jam. Jack pulled the body inside, let it drop, then walked to the basement door and opened it.

Jack looked down the stairs into the darkness and yelled, "Honey? It's dinner time!"

Jack grabbed the dead cop by the leg and dragged him down the stairs.

#

Who Killed Cock Robin?

by Stephen M. Wilson

For Every Evil

For every evil under the sun
There is a remedy or there is none.
If there be one, seek till you find it;
If there be none, never mind it.
—Mother Goose

Recently I attended a symposium for the American Psychiatric Association.

Doctor Robin Fell, a prominent forensic psychiatrist was the keynote speaker:

“We are gathered here to discuss the question: ‘What is Evil?’”

“What I have is an outline of 26 indicators that could be used to rate the ‘evilness’ of criminals.”

I had been in the shadows of Dr. Fell for several years, often at odds in our opinions of criminality and punishment. As well respected as Robin was, all I could think about him was, a diller, a dollar, a ten o'clock scholar!

He droned on telling gruesome stories of mothers burning their children, serial killers, and cannibalism.

When I retired to my hotel room, my dreams were wrought with gruesome images. The most vivid of them was partially a childhood memory.

This dream started a pair of young female twins, Mandy and Molly Grundy, who I knew as a child in the late 1960's. They were identical except for one small detail; Mandy had a curl in the middle of her forehead. One day Mandy gutted her twin with a pair of scissors. When later asked why she did it her reply was:

“My sister, Molly’s, guts fell out,
And here’s what the hell it was all about
The bitch loved coffee and I tea,
And that was the reason that I murdered she.”

In my dream, horrid little Mandy was sitting in the audience at the symposium. Suddenly she flew across the room toward the podium screaming:

“I fuckin’ hate thee, Doctor Fell;
I think I’ll send you straight to Hell;
Though I know I’ll end-up in jail,
It’s worth your death, I say, ‘ Oh well!’”

She whipped a pair of scissors from beneath her frilly apron and did Doctor Fell in, blood and gore splashing those in the front rows inciting many of the prominent psychiatrists present to bouts of vomiting. When she was through, Mandy turned to the audience brandishing the scissors as if a sword. Impaled onto the sharp end was one of Doctor Fell’s eyes, a curl of veins dangling from the end that matched the curl on Mandy’s forehead.

I woke from the nightmare drenched. I stumbled into the restroom and flipped on the light. What I saw was that I was covered in blood. I stripped from my red sticky pajamas and took a long steamy shower. After sluicing-off the evidence, I searched the room and sure enough found a pair of bloodied Fiskars tangled in the sheets.

They tell me that I have suffered from a latent yet volatile combination of narcolepsy and sociopathy—a volatile combination.

They say that the two disorders were aggravated by my abhorrence for Dr. Fell and, *especially*, by his speech the previous afternoon. Suffice it to say, Dr. Fell was found murdered in his room, stabbed over 200 times. Several witnesses saw

me leaving his hotel room covered in blood, the gore slicked Fiskars gripped in my fist.

Now I sip tea and contemplate the nature of evil in my cell in an asylum named Pumpkin Shell where they assure me I'll keep very well.

###



AFTER AGE
Art by David Bowlin

In the Sierras

by J. L. Navarro

They went camping every year, usually to the same place in the Sierras. They liked to believe that it was their spot; reserved for them alone during the time they stayed there.

The father and son set up the tents while his wife and daughter unloaded the supplies. By the late afternoon, they had built a fire ring out of stones and had collected dead wood to burn. When their camp was ready, the boy said, "Can we build them now?"

"In the morning," his father said. "We'll be here for a while. There's no rush."

The next day they began to gather the required materials. They laid out the sticks and twigs on the ground first, and then they brought up the mud from the banks of the lake and began to fashion the legs, arms, torsos, and heads over the skeletal pieces of wood. When the bulks of the mud bodies were done, they put in stones for the eyes, and leaves and pine needles for the hair. After they finished, they stood back and looked at what they had formed. They looked primitive and crude. Each year they did the same thing.

The girl, who was the older of the two children, said, "I don't understand why we can't eat. God knows we've worked hard enough. Even a candy bar is better than nothing."

"When it's time," her mother said.

"Bring the clothes," the man said to the boy. "They're in the backseat."

When the boy came back with the box, they placed three rocks, one for each mud form, at the top of their heads, then placed a set of clothing on each of the rocks. Each item was neatly folded. The man placed the pants, shirt and socks on the rock and then put a pair of sandals on top of the pile. The boy did the same for the smaller of the forms and the mother and daughter likewise placed clothing on their respective forms.

"That's about it," the man said.

The next morning they found the three people sitting around a fire near their tents, wearing the clothing they had left for them.

When they came out of their tents, the three new people waved to them.

"Well," the father said, "at least the clothes fit."

The three people sitting around the fire looked exactly like their creators. They had pleasant smiles on their faces. They were happy to see them.

"We took the liberty to build a fire," the woman said.

The mother and father went up to them and shook their hands and asked them how they were doing.

The brother and sister stared at their counterparts while they listened to their stomachs growling. Each year, unlike their parents, they were initially surprised to see themselves duplicated by lumps of mud.

They spent the day talking to the new arrivals and swimming in the lake, all the while listening to their stomachs persistent growling. At sunset, the parents gave each of their kids a .38 revolver and told them to shoot their counterparts once in the head. The boy and girl went and stood behind themselves. The duplicates didn't move, their hands clasped in front of them, and they had something that looked like shy smiles on their faces. The brother and sister raised their guns to the back of each head and pulled the trigger. The bodies slumped to the ground, bleeding, and then the parents took the guns back and each went and put a bullet into the forms that looked like them. When all four were on the ground, they went and stripped them of their clothes and began to cut large pieces of flesh off the bodies and then they placed these steaks into hot frying skillets while the father chose to roast his over the open flames. The mother and father and their children sat and ate until the moon rose in the summer sky.

The next day they found the remains of their creations turned to dust mounds over the earth. The father and son went and scattered the branches and stones and kicked the leaves and pine needles away. After packing all their supplies in the car and taking down their tents, they drove away, going home again, already thinking of next year.

###

OCCUPANT

by Sabine Naus

I reside with my house. Does that sound odd to you? Well, it's the only way I can put it. Let me explain. A year ago on Halloween, I was part of a crew commissioned by the town of Brockton to bulldoze the old Cromwell home. It stood empty for nearly 10 years. A large, 2 storey, grey brick home with a turret on each side, the house posed quite a picture. For nearly a century, it was occupied by Cromwells. One generation inheriting it after the next. The house went up for sale after Olivia Cromwell, a barren aged spinster, died and no relatives could be found. She also passed away without a will. So, if she'd wanted the place to be donated to a cause or to be converted to a cat sanctuary, it never happened. The house was put up for sale briefly. Only a handful of people came to look at it and even after the price was reduced, realtors could not interest anyone to take a look.

Perhaps it was the neighbourhood children who initially rumoured that the house was haunted. It did look forlorn after nearly a decade of neglect: scraggly hedges, a chipped, sagging fence, tall weeds, shriveled bits of grass, boarded windows and darkened bricks. These were not enticements to potential buyers.

The neighbourhood became concerned when it was learned the house was being used as a hangout by teens. Upon investigation, police saw that indeed the old home had been sporadically inhabited. The word 'drugs' was mentioned in the local newspaper article upon completion of the police inspection. A large 'condemned' sign was finally hammered into place on the front door of the house when the decision was reached that it would have to be torn down as it was deemed an eyesore and a menace.

I took my last look at the house on Halloween, a month before the scheduled bulldozing. It was evening. The kids were dressed in costumes and making their house calls for candy. I drew up beside the house and stared at it.

"Hey, Mister, dontcha know that place is haunted?" A Scooby-Do character called out to me in passing. I waved to the kid and chuckled. Yes, I'd heard the stories that had been circulating over the last few years. It was said that the ghost of Ezra Cromwell, the original owner of the home, was roaming the house. One report said that Ezra Cromwell had been seated in front of a table laden with cakes moaning plaintively and wringing his

hands. Right. A ghost with a sweet tooth. Perhaps he was moaning because of a cavity.

I shrugged off the silly notion and decided to look inside one more time. I donned my hard hat so that passersby would believe I was making a legit walk through of the place when in fact it was simply curiosity on my part.

It wasn't hard to pry off the board over the basement window. It was harder pulling away the muck and weeds. I slid through as carefully as I could and immediately began coughing from the musty air. I took out my flashlight and shone it around what appeared to be a pantry. There were shelves, a sink and a counter. I went to the door, pulled it open and climbed the steps to the main floor. I stopped suddenly. Was that light coming from the front room? I thought I even heard creaking. It must be a reflection. I shook my head. Old houses made noises, didn't they? I proceeded cautiously but was puzzled when instead of fading, the light became stronger. Fire? No. I would see flames. I would smell smoke. Heart beating faster, I carried on. I'm not a coward. I wasn't about to retreat. When I reached the doorway, I blinked my eyes and grabbed the wall for support. There was a table laden with cakes and pies and puddings. The light came from a large candelabrum in the centre. And then I heard it - the moaning.

"Why? Oh why?" I was hearing words. I peered around and saw an old man seated in a corner, head in his hands.

Gathering my composure now that I was sure this was a derelict with a right sweet tooth, I called out:

"Sir, can I help you? Are you alright?"

"They want to destroy my house."

"Pardon?"

"They want to tear down my home." The old grizzled man groaned as if in agony. He was looking at me and I saw tears in his eyes.

"Please, won't you have a seat? Have some cake?" He beckoned. "I'll tell you what I need you to do."

"Pardon?" I stumbled and grasped a chair to steady myself.

"There's Devil's food cake, Angel food cake, and of course, your favourite, banana cream pie."

I swallowed hard. Good guess.

"Come, come."

As if in a trance I sat down, switched off the flashlight and laid it on the table. A slice of pie was directly in front of me along with a fork.

"Sir, who are you? Are you a relative? If so, why didn't you show up sooner?"

The man roared with mirth. His laughter was loud and hollow and echoed eerily throughout the entire house. It bounced off the walls and into my head.

"I'm Ezra Cromwell." He announced and swiped a dab of icing from the Devil's food cake.

Okay, I was obviously hallucinating. Perhaps from left over marijuana fumes?

"I have a proposal for you.," continued Ezra, mindless of my stunned silence. "Listen carefully, as it will be beneficial to both of us."

I listened.

Three months later I was the new owner of the Cromwell house. How? By agreeing to the rules laid out by old Mr. Ezra Cromwell himself:

- 1) Buy the house
- 2) Keep him company
- 3) Get married and fill it with children.

I'm still working on the last one! Hopefully Ezra will be a good granddaddy!

#



BAD DOLLY
Art by David Magitis

True Love

by Keith Gouveia

I love her.

I really do.

Not because she has the face of an angel or a pair of breasts that make me want to suckle like a new born baby, but because she's smart, funny, and affectionate. She's the only one at work who talks to me as a human being. Everyone else tries their best to avoid eye contact with me. It's been that way for years. Everyone treating me as if I am the plague.

But not her. She is special.

That is why it is so difficult to see her with another man. Loving him instead of me. Jealousy is a spiteful emotion and when combined with Envy the sheer destructive force that can be unleashed is immeasurable.

I know what you're saying, "Why don't you just kill the competition?" It's a good question really, but I'm afraid after a brief period of time she would move on. There will just be another, then another, and another. It would be a vicious never-ending cycle of pain and torment for all parties involved.

Besides, killing is immoral.

I'm not delusional; I know I would never stand a chance with her. Maybe if I hadn't played with those matches...maybe I'd be good looking enough for her to view me in that way, but we'll never know. My face is hideously scarred. The burns trail down my neck and reach halfway down my abdomen.

I'm a freak.

She is a goddess.

The two don't go together.

She looks so peaceful sleeping; it would be a shame to disturb her.

I'm in her room now, as I am every other night. Though I may not have good looks, my mind is sharp as a tack. Three months ago, I convinced a lock-smith to make me a key. He contemplated the morality for a brief minute, but seeing the tightly

wrapped wad of greenbacks, the moral objection went out the window. It took me nearly a week to make my little retreat in the crawl space above her room.

Thanks to my deformity, I receive disability and I get to leave two hours earlier than Sharon. This gives me plenty of time to grab a bite to eat and then sneak into her lavish home. I usually spend several minutes rummaging through her personal belongings, sniffing her dirty panties and savoring the moment. The tantalizing aroma drives me close to the edge of orgasm, but I restrain. I save that pleasure for when she's about to experience an orgasm. We cum in harmony and it's always a blissful experience.

She's alone tonight.

Though I hate seeing her with that superficial bastard, I enjoy watching them make love. When I entered the house, I was already sporting an erection in anticipation of the sweaty ritual and was looking forward to spanking it down. They had a little lover's quarrel tonight. I listened intently as they screamed and shouted over the phone, but they would make up tomorrow. That's when I realized tonight would be the perfect time to put my plan in motion. I've decided the only way I can have her to myself is if I slice into her flesh and deform her.

Change that angelic face to that of a demon.

Would he love her then as I do?

I doubt it.

I'll slice off the tip of her nose and part of her ears. I'll pull out several of her front teeth with a pair of pliers and cut deeply into her rosy cheeks. Of course, I'll nurse her back to health myself. I won't let any doctors destroy my work of art, rape me of what is rightfully mine. For once she is disfigured, she'll have no choice but to love me, else she'll face the same isolation and loneliness that has haunted me for twenty years.

All I want is to be loved and have my love returned to me. Is that so wrong?

I think we'll have beautiful children together.

Don't you?

###

THE TREE

By Kelli Dunlap

Martin lay in bed with the blankets pulled right to his nose, his eyes barely looking over the edge toward the window and the darkness beyond. A sound woke him from sleep and just when he thought it was nothing and settled back into his pillow, he heard it again. A scraping noise. Eyes wide, he held his breath and listened.

The tree outside his window sometimes rubbed the house and tapped at his window like a bird pecking to get in. Yet the limbs were still so he knew there was no wind tonight. The shadowy room grew darker and his tired mind wandered.

It was a good climbing tree and it didn't drip sap like the other trees in the yard did. Thick, sturdy limbs called to him and Marty climbed the maple every day that he could. The rough ruddy bark felt like silk and he didn't mind the tiny bits that stuck to his clothing wherever he leaned against it. Even in the winter, he could be found sitting on the branches reading a book or day dreaming.

The tree towered over the house by thirty feet and perfectly spaced limbs led right to his bedroom window. He had never tried, but he knew when he was older he could use it to sneak in and out without his parents knowing. Marty loved that tree, but right now that tree was not his favorite place. Right now that tree was a threat, as he realized how easily someone else could climb it. His eyes widened slightly at the realization and he returned his full attention to listening in the darkness.

Some part of his seven year old mind told him he was being silly. That it was a squirrel or bird making the noise. His mother would soothe him and gently tell him there was nothing wrong. His father would laugh and say that big boys weren't afraid of the dark. The side of him that tried to be strong for his dad told him to go to sleep and forget about it, but he couldn't ignore the nagging fear.

Marty was so intent on the window that he didn't notice his bedroom door open. He stared at the tree and the dangers he imagined lurked right below his window sill. He didn't notice the dark form ease into his room soundlessly. If he would have heard any noise and turned around he would have caught the glint of moonlight off the steel of the bloodied knife.

The man had already made short work of Marty's parents, choosing to take on his father first. In one fluid motion he clamped his gloved hand over Sean Engle's mouth and stabbed deep into the side of his neck before pushing the blade out the front. He felt the sharp metal sever arteries, vocal cord, and all hope of survival, just as the military taught him. Sean Engle was dead before he was awake. Emily though - Mrs. Engle, wouldn't be so lucky. She would suffer. She would bleed. She would be unable to do anything while she lay there dying, wondering and worrying about Marty.

He crept around to Emily's side of the bed quickly, to reach her before her subconscious mind realized she was wet with the sprayed blood of her husband and woke her. He clamped a hand over her mouth just as she opened her eyes and he was rewarded with instant terror and tears. He tossed the covers aside, partially covering Sean's bleeding corpse. She squeezed her eyes shut. He traced her veins with the tip of the knife, opening her forearms and thighs just enough to let the blood flow freely. He pulled the blade down her cheek and over the edge of her chin to her neckline, then stopped and looked at her.

Even in the dark he could see the deep green of her eyes shining. He could smell her fear and he smiled as he felt himself harden slightly. This wasn't what he was after, but it was a nice touch. Using the blade he tore open the front of her t-shirt and pushed the halves to the side, then he wiped both sides the bloodied knife across her breast. Cleaning it off terrified her further. He smiled again as he nicked a nipple and felt the vibrations of her yelp under his hand.

He held up the weapon in the moonlight and showed her the blade, tilting it back and forth and sending blinding reflections into her eyes. Ever so slightly she shook her head. Ever so slowly she softened her features to plead with him. Ever so purposely he showed her the new direction the knife had taken as he pointed it straight down to her chest. An intake of air against his hand told him what her features tried so hard to hide, she knew.

He poised the knife above her chest, centered between the blood smeared breasts. He dragged it slightly off center and poked it into her flesh with just enough pressure for the fear to return to her face. In one motion he removed his hand from her mouth and placed it over his other hand before pressing down sharply with his weight, sinking the cold metal into her chest. Emily's blood pushed out around the intrusion. Her body relaxed and mouth went slack. He pulled the knife free and looked up at the open doorway. Both parents were dead; it was time for the boy.

Marty didn't see the man standing there against the wall of his bedroom. He didn't hear the footsteps as the man approached the bed. His fear was so focused on the window, his imagination so intent on the outside world, that Marty never noticed the gloved hand that came down swiftly over his mouth.

#



LITTLE MISS DEATH
Art by David Bowlin

The House of Stone and Blood

by Megan Powell

From the moment I saw the little stone cottage, I knew we had to buy it.

Charlotte was less sure, but eventually gave in to my enthusiasm. She hadn't been sure about spending our retirement in the English countryside either, but I had persuaded her to come back to our roots. After all, what was the alternative? A retirement home in Florida? Hardly our style. And, since we had no children or close friends to tie us to the U.S., and a nicely-sized bank account to see us through our twilight years, we could afford to take chances.

The cottage was old, in a way that buildings in America aren't. This building had been standing for centuries, and before that, another building had stood in its place. You could feel that history--I could, at least. Charlotte just thought it was quaint; I shouldn't have expected anything more from a retired banker.

The U.S. never got the hang of stone, either. Oh, some buildings are very nice, but they're usually on college campuses, very conscious copies of some other building. Wander around Oxford or Cambridge, and then visit one of the Ivy League schools--there's a palpable difference. In the U.S., this little cottage (assuming it was ever built, and survived untimely demolition) would be ridiculous. Proper stone buildings need to be built near barrows...contemporaries of Hadrian's Wall...constructed with a thought to cathedrals being erected over the course of generations. Without that history, that immediacy, the stone is just building material.

For my entire life, I had worked simply with building material. How I wish my parents had not emigrated! Even before I could properly articulate my feelings, I knew I belonged in "the old country" which I had never seen. I should have moved here decades ago.

From the moment I saw the little stone cottage, I knew I was home. The financial arrangements were made quickly, and Charlotte and I moved out of the flat we had occupied for our first months in the country. I was pleased to see Charlotte taking an interest in the place; I left the interior design in her hands. Selecting carpets and paint and window treatments seemed to amuse her. She would often waste a day driving to different stores to compare prices, which at least freed me from her presence. Over dinner, she would triumphantly announce that she had saved a few pathetic pounds, clearly expecting praise for her intelligence and tenacity.

I was concerned with the structure itself. I have worked with buildings all my life, first in construction and then as an architect. I know things which others do not appreciate. You cannot tell what a building is by looking at lines on blueprints or a computer screen; that will be the downfall of the profession.

To truly understand a building, you must stand in it, walk around inside and out, watch how it responds to the elements, run your hands over the stone. Charlotte laughed. I knew she wouldn't understand, so I pointed to gaps in the mortar, places that needed to be repaired, and pretended that was where I was concentrating my efforts. Fixing something was acceptable; efforts to become one with my surroundings were the subject of mockery.

She didn't take the cottage seriously, didn't respect what it takes for a building to stand for all those years. She thought the ivy growing up the outer wall was pretty, and pouted when I killed it; she simply didn't appreciate the damage being caused to the building. She thought the mortar looked strange, and told me that she didn't expect I'd be able to find a match. The cottage, she predicted, would look patchy and unfinished. She respected my skills no more than she respected the cottage.

Building is too easy, these days. Slap up a ridiculously overdesigned building, then tear it down a few years later when the land is worth more than anything built on it. I hate suburbia, I hate the sprawl. I long for the days when buildings were built to last, when they were a song in praise of gods and a legacy to the ages. It is too easy now, too much science and no art.

And no sacrifice. The pyramids killed their builders; even skyscrapers claimed their price. Greatness always requires sacrifice.

Charlotte never could understand that.

But I understand. I always had an inkling, but the cottage helped me articulate what I previously could not. I woke in the middle of the night, suddenly understanding the ingredient that made the cottage's mortar so special.

Charlotte was right about the mortar. I would never have been able to find a match from a supplier. They don't understand what is necessary.

She was wrong about the cottage. I had enough mortar to go round, enough to fix the entire building.

She's visiting her sister, I tell the neighbors. I rarely see them. I do not care for them; they may as well be Americans, thoroughly modern and out of touch with the primal beauty of the land they inhabit.

Not like me. I can feel the essence of the place permeate throughout my body; I have never felt so alive. The cottage has been rejuvenated, and I can feel its joy. It is sated, for the moment, after such a long hunger.

In a perverse way, I feel closer to Charlotte as well. She never did this much for me in life, and I would like to think that, if only for a brief moment, she understood what I needed to do. I think that would be nice

###

Raw Is Where It's At

by Michael Caldwell

It felt like fruit flesh, smooth and soft. I wasn't sure I enjoyed the sensation, which was akin to eating a papaya, both pungent and sweet, both aromatic and repugnant. It felt like swallowing my own tongue. I gagged and hoped I wouldn't puke.

The sashimi slithered down my throat as if a snake burrowing into a hollow and my eyes watered with the effort. Hal slapped me on the back, "Whatdaya think? Great isn't it? Want some more?"

It tasted primal, subtle and extreme. It tasted like power and who doesn't hunger for more power?

"Give me another piece," I told Hal. With a flash of a blade he swiped another thick chunk off the swordfish's flank. I thought I saw it shiver, and it both disgusted and excited me. This time I took a larger bite, and in my haste, I bit the tip of my tongue. Blood sprung forth and mingled with the bolus. My lust was inflamed, and I gulped down flesh and blood without further chewing.

"Well whaddaya think?" Hal repeated.

I'd forgotten he was there. "Give me that knife," I said. He passed it to me pleased I had taken to his offering. I raised the blade and hacked off slab after slab.

"Hey man, what are you doing? That's gotta last till..." He stopped short when I turned on him and buried the blade into his chest. The smell of fear wafting from his every pore only served to further invigorate me. When he started to scream my senses heightened, my power magnified. I felt a new found and tremendous liberation. As Hal fell, I snipped a piece of cheek from his face and popped it into my mouth. It felt like fruit flesh, smooth and soft. I'd heard of the merits of a raw diet, increased vitality, better nutrition, and leaner body. Now I knew for myself, raw was where it's at.

It was dark by the time I'd cleaned the deck and washed Hal's blood overboard. The sea spread out before me like a black blanket and I felt at one with her because now I knew her secret and source of power. Life feeds on life and I was at the top of the food chain.

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PLAY ANGELS OF DEATH
Art by David Magitis

OBITUARIES



Michael Caldwell's wife has one leg longer than the other. His baby girl is part dinosaur. There is room for one lucky agent to represent his recently completed novel, tentatively titled, *Beyond Sex, Drugs and Neurosis: Adventures in Asia*. Some of the publications in which his writing has appeared include: *Lotus Magazine*, *BMA: Sonia Sanchez Literary Review*, *San Diego Union Tribune*, *CityBeat*, and *writersmontly.com*. Email him at michael_caldwell@yahoo.com.



Joseph Paul Haines has at one time or another been a police officer, a bodyguard, a title officer, a convenience store clerk, and restaurant manager. He is a graduate of Clarion West and lives in the Pacific Northwest with his beautiful wife Catherine, who tolerates his dementia as best she can. He has a cat, Griffyn, instead of children as he opposes competition of any kind. You can find him on the web at: <http://www.journalscape.com/jphaines>.



Nancy Jackson has work in *Corpse Magazine*, *Night to Dawn*, *Horror Carousel*, *The Hacker's Source*, and various anthologies including *Small Bites*, *Cyber Pulps Halloween 3.0*, and *Ghostbreakers: Vampire Hunters*.

Lurk at her website <http://www.nancyajackson.com> if you dare!



David Bowlin works as an independent IT contractor and attends Western Kentucky University where he is usually thoroughly confused and most always late on homework assignments. Part of the problem, says he, is the continued distractions of so many other interests that it is virtually impossible to focus on just one. He is hoping someone will invent or discover time travel soon so he can take advantage of all the time he should have been doing other things instead of doing other-other things.



STEVEN L. SHREWSBURY, 36, is the author over 300 published tales online or in print. His fourth novel, GODFORSAKEN will soon be released by Behler Publications. His third book, BULLETPROOF SOUL, was released from BLACK DEATH BOOKS in 03. BDB will release the Dack Shannon novel STRONGER THAN DEATH in 05. His other novels out are NOCTURNAL VACATIONS (02) and DEPTHS OF SAVAGERY-eBook (03).

His tales have appeared in print magazines like ADVENTUROUS, CYBER-PULP, ELDRITCH TALES, DARK WISDOM, NOSTALGIA, FIGHTING CHANCE, BLACK PETALS, LOST IN THE DARK & MYSTERY BUFF. Over a hundred of his poems are in magazines like PENNY DREADFUL, BIBLE OF HELL and DEATHREALM.

He has appeared in many anthologies, most recently BLACKEST DEATH-I, GHOSTBREAKERS: SINISTER SLEUTHS, DEATHGRIP-2:LEGACY OF TERROR, KINGS OF THE NIGHT, FREAKY FRIGHTS, SCARY, LABOR POOL, CEMETERY POETS, ATROCITAS AQUA. He will soon will appear in REALTY CHECK, HISTORICAL HARDBOILED, ENTER THE REALM and BLACKEST DEATH II.

His website is

www.stevenshrewsbury.com



Sabine Naus Writing has been a passion of mine since 6th grade when I discovered enjoyment in penning my imagination. I write fiction, poetry, articles and essays and hope one day that this will be my way to earn a living while I live somewhere in the sunny south.



Otherwise known as the HorrorWench, **Kelli Dunlap** spends her time behind the scenes of <http://horror-web.com> where she reads, pimps, plays with, and reviews other writers because she's too chickenshit to submit her own stuff. Offline you can find her in cannibal central, er Wisconsin.



J. L. Navarro's most recent short story collection is The Blood Cake Vendor and Other Stories. For more info, visit his website: www.jlnavarro.com



Elizabeth R. Peake Born in the heat of the Arizona desert, Elizabeth Peake is keenly aware of what hell is. In 1993, she decided to move her family to Minnesota, where hell goes by a different name. She has written numerous short stories and they have appeared or will appear in various webzines and print magazines, including www.horrorfind.com, www.artofhorror.com, The Fear Within anthology, Femmes de la Brume anthology, Tales From the Gorezone anthology and Scary! Holiday Stories to Make You Scream anthology. She currently resides in Louisville, Kentucky with her husband and three kids. She is currently working on THE DARKEST HOUR, a full-length novel based on her short story, The Holler. Visit her at www.elizabethpeake.com.



Samuel Minier's publication credits include over forty stories and poems in numerous magazines, webzines, and anthologies including *Flesh and Blood*, *Space & Time*, *CHIAROSCURO*, *IDEOMANCER UNBOUND*, and the upcoming anthologies *DEAD WINTER*, *Kings of the Night III*, *Dark Elation Vol. 1*, and *Deathgrip 3: It Came from the Cinema*. He's also received two Honorable Mentions in The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror and was nominated for the Science Fiction Poetry Association's 2001 Rhysling Award. Please visit www.samuelminier.com for further access to Sam's work.



Raquel Taylor resides in Chicago, Illinois and has been writing horror since she can remember. Her dreams are filled with nightmares. She lives to share them with you...



Ken Goldman resides in Pennsylvania and the Jersey Shore. His stories appear in over 345 publications in the U.S., Canada, the UK, Ireland, and Australia with over twenty due for publication in 2004-2005. He won 2nd place in the Rod Serling Memorial Foundation Writing Contest (1993), 1st place in the Preditors & Editors 'Best Poem In The Universe On The Internet 1997' Readers Poll Contest, and 2nd place in the Preditors & Editors Horror Short Story Contest (2003) ; 2nd place 'silver' in the Sullivan Short Story Contest, Horror Division (2000), 2nd place in the Horizon Literature Awards Contest (2000), 3rd Place in The Rose & Thorn Writers Contest (2000), 1st Place in the Red Writer Hood Contest (2001), and Second Place in the Harrow Murder Contest (2001). He received honorable mentions in Datlow and Windling's Year's Best Fantasy and Horror 7th and 9th Annual Editions, the Horror Writers Association recommendation for a 1995 Bram Stoker Award, and Datlow and Kelly Link & Gavin J. Grant's Year's Best Fantasy and Horror 17th Edition.



KEITH WIGDOR SURREALIST My name is Keith Wigdor. I am a Surrealist. I intend to invade your mind and DESTROY LOGIC!!! That is the purpose of my work and I continue working in Photomontage and Collage, Digital Art, Abstract Oil on Canvas and Automatic Ink Drawings too. My creative output also includes Science Fiction/Horror (and Psychedelia), along with Dada and Political-Satire Artworks as well. I am the organizer of the past online internet event, SURREALISM 2003, where I featured many surrealist and surreal artists (and poets) including: Gregg Simpson- (Legendary Surrealist from Canada), Oleg Korolev, David Magitis, Peter Lewis, Hiroshi Matsushita, Pauline Jones, Hisham Zrake, Andrey Doukhan, Daniel Bonato, Luc Langlois, and Andrew Penland. I have been featured in two issues of CHURN ART MAGAZINE, <http://www.churnmag.com> (I appeared in the same issue with the award winning surrealist artist H.R.GIGER and also legendary surreal horror artists CANIGLIA and MIKE BOHATCH, both are friends as well). I was on exhibit last year online at THE HAMMOND GALLERY, for their virtual art event, THE SEVERED GARDEN, the URL is: <http://www.hammondgallery.co.uk>. I am also a regular featured artist on THE HAMMOND GALLERY as well. I have been creating artworks since 1998, a desire to show the world my work which I had put off since 1985! I have many artist friends from all over the world and I am now currently working in Photomontage. In 2001, I did the cover art for the SFWA, THE SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY WRITERS OF AMERICA, a magazine called, "THE BULLETIN", winter 2001 issue and I also provide artwork for independent underground writers, (BRUTAL DREAMER), on the internet as well. "DARK SURREAL" is an art chapbook from 2003, that I collaborated on with my best friend, surreal horror artist, David Magitis. My art has been featured in CD-ROM Format, "THE IDEA", an Electronic Arts E-Zine published in a CD-ROM Zine from New Delhi, India back in 2001. I have been a contributor to past issues of the online zine, THE DREAM PEOPLE, <http://www.dreampeople.org>. My art has also been featured in pdf.format in the online chapbook, "DEAD IN 13 FLASHES" and is available from THE DREAM PEOPLE. I have also created art for the website of the Industrial/Trance band from Toronto, Canada, DISTANT SUN. I am now working primarily in Surrealist Photomontage and I collaborate with various underground and independent small press on the Internet, as well as other websites such as ORIONS ARM and THE DOORS4SCORPYWAG. I will continue to work primarily in Surrealism and maintain my creative output in other areas of interest as well for many more years to come! Thank You, Keith Wigdor, Surrealist



Megan Powell's short fiction has appeared in various publications, and her anthologies and novels can be found (currently or in the near future) at Double Dragon, Cyber-Pulp, and Zumaya Publications. She maintains a homepage at www.meganpowell.net.

