

TIGERSHARK Magazine



Issue Seven – Summer 2015 – Exploration

Tigershark Magazine

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Exploration

Editorial

Join us as we set forth in search of new and uncharted realms. As you may notice, there was substantially more interest in exploring this and other worlds through the medium of poetry than in the form of prose, perhaps because it allows the mind to drift away to visit strange new vistas.

Best, DS Davidson

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Editor and Layout: DS Davidson

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Next Issue's Theme: [The Sea](#)

villa

By Christopher Mulrooney

the sun over the hills
leaves the lakeshore in shadow
still the trumpets of yellow
across the azure surface
beckon to the boats

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villa

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Under Waves and Radar

By AJ Huffman

Great white.
Ocean terror.
Stalking surfers and seals.
Unseen until dorsal fin breaks
Surface.

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Tranquility

after Tranquility by the Sea, artist Osnat Tzadok
By AJ Huffman

The morning divides the scene into distinct bands:
sky, sea, sand. Each respective stripe adds dimension,
a mosaic drop of rainbow to perpetuate pondering.
Eyes focus on accessories. Wings and shells contrast
but never disrupt. A methodical comforting
is found in shades of simplicity. Leaning back,
body exhales, becomes part of the flow.

Shut up and listen

By Gary Hewitt

Jimmy ducks. A pint glass smashes a window.

"Right you, get out."

The Landlord marches a cheesestring on Kestrels to the door. He turns his attention to the glass chucker's friends.

"Any more of that and you'll be following."

He storms over to Jimmy Daniels.

"I take it you're the entertainment. I warn you they're a bit wild. What are you playing?"

"The harp."

The landlord shakes his head.

"Mate, tell me you're having a giraffe. This is a South London boozer not the Albert Hall."

"I have a booking. I was told to contact Margaret Hodges."

The landlord points to the stage.

"That dopey Mrs of mine wants to turn this place upmarket. Well good luck mate, you'll need it."

Jimmy pushes through. He ignores pearls of abuse when he plants the harp at the edge of the stage. He wires the instrument into the speakers. He flicks away several empty beer cans and prepares.

"Oi mate, what are you, bloody Mozart?"

"Not for me. I prefer something meatier don't you?"

He plucks the harp. His three audience members soon swell to thirty three. They pogo and heads bang. The crowd raise devil hands and roar in approval.

"Did you know Lucifer himself forged this instrument in the bowels of hell?"

Jimmy's hand tingles. The audience are insane for more. Jimmy blasted out number of the beast. He swore to himself making heavy metal from an electric harp was the best brainwave yet.

Ends

LEGEND

By Neil K. Henderson

There, people infest themselves
with careless sores -
the verminous legacy
of civilisation...
Burnt holes in the sea of time:
a causeway to the undermined.

On foundations hewn from living rock
they built sandcastle lives -
incessant, self-renewing.
Fire burns down to ash...
But the rock remains,
like bones.

Published

"T.O.P.S." Summer 1989;

"Handshake" no.18, November 1995.

A Crusader's Secret Heart

By Donna Salisbury

Memories,
A book of time,
Laughter that echoes down the years,
Tears of joy that were shared,
Tunes of music that were heard,
Remind me of things that I have done.
No one can take away,
Those enchanted hours or days,
The madness and the fun.
They're locked away in my heart,
I alone hold the key,
If I knew then what I know now,
This is what I'd see.
To love is to trust,
To trust is to listen,
To listen is to learn,
To learn is to see,
To see is to feel,
To feel you must open your heart.
Love is invincible,
A crusader,
Faithful, true and brave,
Every fight to right a wrong,
A knight of the secret heart.

THE CALL OF THE SIREN

By Julio Toro San Martin

One night he awoke to a strange song emanating from outside his windowpane: a faraway sound with the inflections of no normal human voice. Hypnotic in its appeal, brittle as dried autumn leaves, it seemed a mere whisper could dissipate its cohesion and send it scattering noiselessly into empty space. This melody caused him to dreamily dress, and leave the safe comfort of the place which for a while he called home.

In silence I watched him, from a dark wall I rested on.

The song – a conduit it is for strange influences of body and mind, and this is why I suppose he left in search of its source so thoughtlessly, past the gray framework of the front door, and into the eerie twilight world of shadowy rustic scenery. No bird sang in the dank air and a heavy atmosphere of expectancy hovered over everything.

I dropped carefully to the floor and followed him. My predatory instincts subdued for the moment.

I knew where he was going. He longed to see that fantastic creature of awe and wonder viewed by few men.

My curiosity and sense of wonder were piqued by all I had witnessed, and now as if reading a secret yearning the soft voice called to him, and like an emotionless sleepwalker he went, past the house and the needled pine grown twisted beside it, into the backwoods of the little plebeian estate. He walked deeper into this luxuriant fauna of swollen trees now shadowed with twilight coverture, where no animal stirred, save hidden creatures barely glimpsed through the trees, that flew on night-wings, and I knew were neither owls, nor any species of bird or bat. The only sound was the flattening of the grass below his feet, and that droning voice whose song is not of this world, but I fancy of the vortices beyond our dimension and of our space itself.

I followed him flying and circling, concealed amid the treetops, my hands outstretched in the air. The woods as we neared the ocean began to glow with an unearthly dullish hue of light brown, and the leaves followed suit. As we wandered out from the gently swaying forest, I noticed the ocean glowed too, and the sandy bank, as did the cloud-cast sky above –a peculiar glow that accentuated the normal color of things, though still grayish and dark in background. Through this weird luminescence of darkness, the oncoming waves made an especially brilliant display of watery sparks, as they dissipated on the rocky shore.

On this shore I noticed printless feet gently maneuvering along the coastal margins, dancing to their own hypnotic song. She danced nude along that lonely stretch of sand: an aspect of serene beauty, a splendor of the ocean, a dream-herald of long concealed divinity. And where she stepped on air too close to the ocean, the waters swiftly parted, and where too close to the ground, the sand and rocks were blown aside. Atop her yellow swaying hair I saw speckles of water shine, like miniature silvery stars that danced in tune to the music which her lips sent forth –a litany of sounds which only spirits can make.

On the sudden she turned towards the land. She looked at him and beckoned him to follow.

I lay secretly extended on a shoreline rock, and growing more curious by the moment, I lifted my head and unfolded and branched out further my mind. My mind melted deeper into his. I could read now more of his thoughts.

Standing on the threshold of Chiloe, he remembered that Pincoya was the daughter of the sea and a mortal woman, and possessed the cryptic nature of the gods, but mostly he remembered the sadness, when Pincoya had renounced his love, had heard the call of her father, and left him for the sea.

Now walking into the water he shivered with cold, as the wide Pacific slowly grew around him and always like a stringed puppet he moved, through the subtle influence of that song, towards the dark svelte shape in the waters. Above him the stars seemed to spin in the most miniscule of spirals, leaving tiny wisps in the ever-lowering night. The beetling wind, coasting softly off the silky texture of the scene, the fine waves, woods, and trees, had the low, mournful dirge of a lone, abandoned conch.

I watched from a distance and then upstarting from my lucid-reverie of dream, I walked, flew, and crawled closer to them, as they advanced into the strangely-sombrous, strangely-litten sea. Always she was before him and he trailed, cresting somnambulistically the surf, not far behind.

In his mind I read both strong recollections of pain and desolations, and fears of future terrors, of which perhaps this small episode formed only a scintilla of what to expect, mixed with a full, elating wonder. And through his mind, also, I saw her face, and on it was written the temper of the ocean –a face like the beautiful, vast, tsunamic, calm, mysterious and treacherous ocean –as she beckoned him deeper into the sea.

Languidly he advanced into that dark world, swimming, rising above and cresting the oncoming beakers, and then he seemed to lose all effort to swim, he gasped hard, his hands went dangerously limp, his feet fell below and pulled him, like a lodestone, down. He sank fast, deeper and deeper, down.

Then what vistas opened up to him! He saw the dark brine and its tiny amoebic shapes, heard the roar of the ocean, and the dull muffled noise of its millions of teeming, percolating life; and a hole, and through it, vast shapes between worlds, liquid spheres, secret passageways, other more occult universes, with darker scenes than the ones up above; and through it all and overpowering all, her transformed webbed, cosmic hand, gruesome fish eyes, and large spiky teeth reaching speedily up to meet him.

I watched, terrified and yet enraptured, until our bond was broken. I felt him no more. He'd been pulled through that monstrous portal. Soon the magic of the night passed into normality. The mystery disappeared. The strange luminescence, dimmed. Noises could once more be heard in the woods, and as the last of the stars faded out, I licked and groomed some of the thick hairs on my black spider-shaped limbs, and dissolving into the awakening day, vanished as well.

Is he alive? Is he dead?

Don't ask.

In all my nightly hunts since then I've never seen him again.

Ends

EXPLORING THE PATH OF FLAWED JEWELS

"Dedicated to Sieka Dracul"

By Frederick J. Mayer

Dark, desert cold, white.
Glass calla lily castle,
The crown of prime creation
Porcelain Princess
In its clear lock core,
within frozen hot perdition.
Outside the old night.

A statue of flesh,
soft warm breeze of winter,
Porcelain Princess,
tender intoxicant,
Love's final access.

Down on dry blown sand,
a form lies cut by lust's pains,
as beast runs horizon's land,
his heart bleeds no stain.
Prostrate to castle,
now prosaic proselyte,
as "New Love's" remains.

Still, he remembers:

*There abides in nature a certain pure
matter which, being discovered and
brought to perfection by the alchemic art,
proportionality converts to itself all
imperfect bodies that it touches.*

Arnold De Villanova

There, in this verdant paradise,
came resins fragrant love pure prize.
Home of Princess, harmonizing bliss,
its colour bright, from this
flows river of everlasting blood
giving birth life to
carnation flowers,
calla lilies pale,
roses of all hues.

This love passes death
and its ever sweet smell;
at this place's very core
the Heart does beat true.

Into this Oasis,
crawled man, being,
imperfection, eyes seeing
with the emptiness called...;
dimmed that lately shone
Gethsemane garden from alone.

Before his wasted
sullen eyes, appears,
amidst rose and mystic blues
of plants the souls mirrored image,
Princess.
Lady of Love, not the mundane and false,
the incontestable,
beyond phosphorescence of decay,
embodiment of luminous light
Royalty high
in this jewelled flora bower,
she of skin porcelain cool
lotus flower soft
as their eternal dreams.
Heart Heaven's realm,
not reflection, but is,
and forever is ever so her kiss.
Eyes flash fiery ruby,
sapphire, pearl ecstatically,
and emerald hues
which create depths of celestial passion.
Opal refractions as she moves,
hair flows as willow fingers
that control strongest winds
with their caress,
bringing soft ecstasy.

Deeply she gazed
into his slit heart's pane.
Ancient times primordial drums
non-spoken words
for his past nostrum.
Princess spoke of truth
the nature of Love and Pain.
Words like the stain glass of holy,
rippled through mind's maze
with blatant affection.

Doctrine of Caring Passion
Love is classical music
with driving beat,
heat
heat of the rhythm,
breathe to the rhyme...
Fire burns when
heart beats strong.

The truth is
willingness to more than
sit around the flame
but, reach into with loving hand
and burn!

You're a fool, jester,
mixed lust's false passion
for the passionate Love;
Afraid to touch are the lesser
of those who know true love in its extreme,
supreme
fire.

Here she kissed him and her refrain
flowed
Hold your head high and know:
Love burns hot/clean,
Lust melts within obscene.
Now believe.
Love alchemic, everything that matters,
pure,
with loving Nature and me be sure.

There came voidness
of the multitudes
worshippers
of the chameleon weddings.
Users of Lust's dry breath,
released the barren winds
through the cranium of the man,
Time's restricting sands
blew forth and destroyed
all before his vision.

Now, man's mind rejected
the truth of the heart, Princess;
freed the green Fire envy,
turning the grains to desert
and glass.
In this fervid, blazing wave,
burning madness,
Princess
finished in heat;
a death flower castle there.

Hearts happy in an hourglass
cry their tears of joy,
lightning strikes desert form...
Man, fool in supplication,
tottered and fell,
lies before glass prison donjon
encasing Love's final embodiment.
However, like all fake jewels,
it will not last...
It's "flawed."

Exploration

By Aeronwy Dafies

The explorer passes
Beyond the known world
Past the boundary of knowledge
Into the world of the Other
Unknown
Seeking the same
Seeking fame and fortune
Their name recorded

As an annotation on a map
A record
An indication
A vindication
Of their adventure
Replacing 'Here Be Dragons'
With 'Kilroy Was Here'

The Pyramid of Light

By DJ Tyrer

“It’s entirely practical,” Murdoch Hammond said, defiantly. Just because he raided archaeological sites, carried a whip and wore the same sort of hat, didn’t mean he was an Indiana Jones wannabe – it was just that, in his line of work, the hat was the best to wear and a whip had a myriad of uses. It was just a *coincidence*, that was all.

Murdoch Hammond was an archaeologist and proud of it. In fact, he was about to set off on quite possibly his greatest adventure so far. That was why he was here in this sleazy Guatemalan bar seeking people to join his expedition. So far, all he had got were snide comments about his attire. It was beginning to look as if he would be heading into the jungles of the Yucatan alone.

In the end, it was him, a taciturn Mayan called Quez and an opinionated macaw known as Steve who made their way into the steaming rainforests. The going was tough, the growth dense and almost impenetrable. Slowly, he and Quez hacked their way through the intertwined verdant strands whilst Steve fluttered this way and that behind them, screeching comments such as “Work harder!” and “Try the left!” If the dusty old map that he’d uncovered in an old library in Guadalajara was accurate (and, there was no guarantee of that, it having been drawn by a crazed conquistador) they would soon arrive at the mythical Pyramid of Light, a Mayan step pyramid of exceptional height topped with a gigantic diamond that glowed with a mystic inner light, rumoured to be worth millions. But, there were hints it might not be an easy journey: the map marked the location of hostile tribes, a terrible chasm and, even, a spot denoted *Here Be Dragons...*

As much as Murdoch might be dismissed as a poseur, he knew how to use his whip and it saved him more than once on the expedition when he needed to swing across a raging watercourse or fend off a terrified tapir. He even made use of the *crack!* of the unfurling whip to scare away a band of *Halluulluu* headhunters. The *Flanapanatl* warriors he encountered next were not so easy to deal with, forcing the trio to flee – the whip came in handy again as they were forced to escape across a broad stand of brutal thorns, which could only be crossed on wing or by whip. Another time, the sting of the whip forced a jaguar to retreat.

Thanks to Steve scouting ahead – a macaw going unnoticed in a jungle full of parrots and other brightly-coloured birds – they managed to avoid any contact with the *Maqtouacan* tribe (feared by the Maya for their blood rituals – which was saying something), whilst the *Nxaustiq* tribe proved nowhere as fierce as their reputation suggested and were happy to receive glass beads and other simple trade goods in return for allowing them safe passage. Who got the better of whom in the exchange remains uncertain.

Beyond the remote territory of the *Nxaustiq*, a whip-swing across a chasm, the going got even tougher and the jungle even denser and it seemed as if they were constantly hacking at the growth in order to progress, as if every step were a battle to be fought. In the heat and humidity, it was exhausting work.

They were drawing close to the spot that the conquistador-cartographer had denoted with the traditional legend of *Here Be Dragons* and Murdoch was aware of an unnatural silence that had descended upon the normally raucous rainforest. Every day, nearly all day (and most of the night, too), they had been serenaded by a chorus of animal sounds and crashing branches. The only time the sounds ceased was when a predator was on the prowl and everything hid away. That wasn’t a good sign. Nothing seemed to move and nothing made a sound, nor were there any of the paths or tracks that animals made through the undergrowth, explaining why the wall of vegetation seemed so impenetrable. Even the distant sound of animal life in the jungle behind them had faded way to nothing, muffled by the dense plant life. Murdoch shivered slightly; he felt nervous in a way he never normally was in his beloved jungle. Beside him, Quez was even more taciturn than usual, which was saying something, and even Steve’s inane chatter and squawks had been reduced in both volume and frequency. That, too, wasn’t what we would call a good sign. His hand reached down almost unconsciously and felt for the handle of his whip where it hung from his belt – just in case...

Suddenly, he spotted a parrot sat upon the branch of an old, gnarled tree. It was the first life they had seen for some time. It put its head on one side and eyed them inquisitively. Steve fluttered over to the parrot and landed on the branch beside it, asking, “Who’s a pretty boy, then?” before the pair held a conversation of squawks and clicks. After a couple of minutes, the strange parrot seemed to get bored with things and flapped lazily away. Steve gave a sort of shrug of his wings and fluttered down to perch on Quez’s bony old shoulder as they prepared to move off.

A few minutes later, Murdoch thought he had spotted a second parrot as something flapped quickly across a small clearing ahead of them. Then, he realised it had to be a bat, as it was denuded of feathers. Except it didn’t have the proportions of any bat he’d ever seen and was in possession of a curiously-reptilian head... If he hadn’t known any better, he would have sworn it had an unfeasible name beginning with a ‘p’ and a ‘t’... It wasn’t the only one he saw by the time they had gone for some distance, and, once he’d seen enough, he had to accept they were not any animal with which he

was familiar outside of a natural-history museum's palaeontological wing. Slowly, it dawned on him that *Here Be Dragons* might not have been solely a flight of poetical fancy.

Still, the awkwardly-unextinct flying creatures didn't seem to be dangerous, largely appearing to flit about in pursuit of their insect prey. Less than scary, it was just their general silence – they vocalized no sounds and even their flapping wings were near-silent – that made him feel nervous. He wished there were more of the noises that were so familiar to him. If only the parrot would return with a few of its pals and start making a row...

They continued to press onward, through the silent jungle. Suddenly, the vines before them parted under the blows of their machetes to reveal a great carved stone head sat upon a circular plinth. The plinth alone almost reached his waist and the head had to be about his height, towering above them. The head was carved with the anomalous with the anomalous Negroid features that characterized the mysterious Olmec relics and wore the *de rigueur* ballgaming helmet. Various theories had been advanced to explain the meaning and origin of the statuary, but Murdoch tended to think they represented winners of the ballgame that had been a mania amongst the native tribes. Sort of a 'hall of fame', writ large.

It was an interesting find, but he had more on his mind than a nigh-immovable lump of stone in an inaccessible location. Still, it probably meant they were nearing their destination: such monuments were unlikely to have been carved out in the middle of nowhere, so they could likely expect to find ruins nearby – and the only ruins marked on the map were those they sought...

They hadn't gone more than half-a-mile before the dense jungle began to thin, giving way to tall pampas grass and swathes of marshy ground. They actually began to see patches of sky where tree cover was missing, but progress remained just as difficult due to patches of foul-smelling, sucking mud. With the thinning of the forest, there also came sounds of animal life: unfortunately, these were not the familiar, reassuring sounds they had hoped to hear, but raucous roars unlike those of a jaguar and the sounds of something large crashing through distant stands of trees – something *far larger* than anything he would expect to encounter around here.

Suddenly, Steve gave a squawk of alarm and flew right up into the air from the old Mayan's shoulder as something leapt out from a stand of bamboo: the something looked like a long-snouted lizard that had learnt to walk upright. In fact, it reminded him of nothing so much as something out of the **Jurassic Park** films. He hoped he was wrong in that assessment...

The fearsome creature let out a terrifying hiss and charged at them, leaping upon Quez: it tore at him more brutally than Murdoch had ever seen – and, he'd seen some pretty vicious animal attacks in his time. Having slain his guide, the creature turned its beady gaze upon him and prepared to leap.

Quickly, more instinct than thought, Murdoch span around and began to run towards a particularly swampy area that they'd passed a few minutes before. Overhead, Steve flew in circles, squawking in alarm. Murdoch's hand reached down to his belt and unhooked his whip: as he reached the swampy area, his wrist gave an expect flick, casting the twist of rawhide out to curl about a branch, allowing him to swing over it, whilst the pursuing monstrosity plunged straight into the cloying embrace of the mud, trapping it.

It was as he swung upwards at the end of his arc across the marshy ground that he saw the bulk of a vast pre-Columbian stepped pyramid rising up above the verdant expanse of the surrounding country.

Quickly, but cautiously, he made his way towards it. He could make out the soft glow of the gigantic diamond's mystic inner light, diffused through the surrounding forest. The object of his long and lethal search was *mere yards away*. Steve fluttered ahead of him, scouting the country for threats.

From somewhere in the distance, he could hear a harsh, rhythmic sound. It seemed rather as if it were the product of the large creature he'd heard crashing its way through the trees earlier. He hoped it wouldn't draw any closer, and was disappointed to hear it was.

Finally, he pushed large, lush leaves aside to reveal the pyramid in all its bulk. Steve fluttered about, nervously, eyeing the bat-like flying creatures that flitted back-and-forth around the pyramid, hunting insects. Another parrot, possibly the same one he'd spotted earlier, perhaps one of its relatives, sat in a nearby tree watching him with one beady eye. Well, this was it: here, before him, stood his goal.

As he paused there, taking in the sight and allowing himself to catch his breath, the rhythmic thrumming sound grew louder and a helicopter hove into view. As it neared the relatively-open space before the pyramid, where, once, long ago, an Olmec ball court had lain, the helicopter began to descend.

Typical, Murdoch thought, bitterly: you put in all the effort and, then, someone else scoots in to grab the glory! With a sigh, he turned and walked back into the jungle, neither knowing nor caring where he would go or what he would do...

Ends

Originally published in [Grail 3](#) from Atlantean Publishing



The Lamp

By DS Davidson

The lamp shines no light
But unleashes a horror
Promises and pain

Crew does not realize
As they land on new planet
Whole globe is quicksand

By Denny E. Marshall

Haiku

By Aeronwy Dafies

Pass beyond confines
Liberating new knowledge
Explore the unknown

WHY EXPLORERS ARE BASTARDS (ADVERTISEMENT)

NEW FROM BEDSORE BOOKS

Have you ever wondered why all explorers are bastards? asks Neil K. Henderson. Did you ever feel the great adventurers of old had hidden agendas? Do you wish you'd known what you were letting yourself in for when you went on that cave diving expedition with your boss from accounts? Wonder no more! In one all-inclusive, heavily unillustrated volume, the drives, foibles, dirt and bastardliness of the exploring psyche are laid bare to view for the very first time.

In *Why Explorers Are Bastards* we have enlisted the help of numerous academic and literary minds who, from the perspective of their learned desks and intellectual armchairs, have formulated fascinating theories and insights into the obsessive minds of "the bastards who go exploring".

- Is it true Scott of the Antarctic told his mates they were just going out for a swim - bring some dogs and ponies for a laugh?
- When Franklin entered the arctic ice, whose 'Northwest Passage' was he really out to enter?
- What did David Livingstone do with a spoon when he reached Victoria Falls, and why did his portrait of the Queen have to be destroyed?
- Why did Marco Polo blame it all on the Chinese?

Staying home tonight?

Read *Why Explorers Are Bastards* and arm yourself with the facts.
They'll never call you couch potato again!

John Betjeman

Stops on the Moon

By John W. Sexton

His spaceship looked just like a teapot
And was made of the very same stuff;
His space suit of tweed was hardy but dull,
And his boots were crocodile rough.

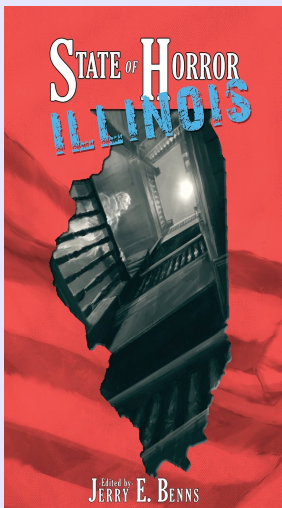
He'd landed in an ocean of talcum,
As grey as the ash in the grate;
But the dust had clogged up his fulcrum
And the engine could no longer relate.

"I'm stuck on the moon with no verses,"
He said to the Nothing right there.
And he let out a stream of foul curses,
But the Nothing cared not to care.

"There's nothing and no one to talk to;
Oh why did I come to this place?
There's nothing but dust and the smell of old
must,
And the landscape is gone past disgrace."

But the Nothing said nothing and left him
To moulder away on that plain,
And Betjeman rhymed when he was inclined,
But no one could hear him complain.

This Laureateship was his last one,
All alone on that stone in the sky.
But nobody heard his poor verses,
And nobody heard his last cry.



State of Horror: Illinois - Available to order now in paperback and on Kindle from Amazon - featuring a story by Tigershark contributor DJ Tyrer

MISSION TRAIL

By Bryn Fortey

Stars shine like night-time eyes
Seeking sinners on old Mission Trail

Cranked to a grinding crossroad blues
Bitter ghosts of missed opportunities sway

Burro hooves stir ancient dust
Passing old adobe ruins

Night-time spectres see all
While sinners miss so much

The Mission when reached
Will offer no answers

Planet Fantastic

By Denny E. Marshall

Land spaceship upon planet fantastic.
Eons past, wise enough too see future.
All around the landscape glows majestic.

Earth near identical atmospheric.
No need of suits, normal surface pressure.
Land spaceship upon planet fantastic.

On horizon, see mountains volcanic.
Robust upper winds blow away mixture.
All around the landscape glows majestic.

Three of moons visible, scene is cosmic.
All directions feature after feature.
Land spaceship upon planet fantastic.

Lush meadows and trees, plant life organic.
Exotic animals roam in nature.
All around the landscape glows majestic.

Like our own world has unique signature.
Untouched by humans, air and land is pure.
Land spaceship upon planet fantastic.
All around the landscape glows majestic.

A VOYAGE IN SPACE

By Drummond Henderson (1900 - 1961)

Somewhere, far through the cosmic stream,
The last faint nebula flows unseen
To the fast tide race where stars are bred:
Beyond is space, cold, dark and dread.

Without beginning, it has no end;
Infinite, with eternity to spend
Cradling the new-born nebulae
In the depths beyond the Milky Way.

Whence came the primal cosmic stress?
From what, in this vast emptiness?
Creating new worlds with its gaseous breath
To procreate in atomic death.

What is this fertile fount of space
That spawns the twinkling night-sky race?
What mystery rules - or is it chance -
This Nothingness in which stars dance?

Yet Nature seems to have its laws,
There's no effect without a cause;
If chance it be, what rare defect
That Nothing should some thing direct.

What then the mystery unseen
That circumvents the time machine?
Will it unfold and leave revealed
What only man's mind has concealed?

Sages and savants said of space
That ether filled, we could embrace;
But do we understand the less
With Nothing the term to cloak our guess?

Is Nothing, then, but something gone,
Like darkness after light has shone?
And cannot man, the substance flown,
Conceive the converse, though unknown?

Can truth be found while still we think
With finite minds, whence abstracts shrink?
Is life the mask that makes man blind,
And space the soul beyond the mind?

If space some tangible thing could be
Of rare, though unknown, quality,
It surely must begin and end,
Like other things we comprehend?

But if 'tis infinite, 'twould seem
'Tis either Nothing or a dream,
From which on wakening we shrink
And ask what then's beyond the brink.

Could stars in orbits well-defined,
Revolving each with others timed,
Be just electrons fixed to stay
Within a giant atom, pray?

What monstrous substance then 'twould make,
With millions such to integrate;
And ultra-microscopic man
The mystery in such a plan.

There's a ghostly ship on a phantom sea,
Sailing to find what space can be,
Through the vast expanse of the space-time realm
With the mind of man at the mystic helm.

It calls, as it goes where no wind blows,
At uncharted ports where no light shows;
And the helmsman cries, "Ahoy, what's there?"
But the void replies, "Take care, take care!"

On through infinite timeless space,
Through absolute cold, in a silent race,
To the Ultima Thule of this vast domain;
And Nothing is found that man can name.

The helmsman studies his surmise,
Grown older, but no whit more wise;
Yet a name he needs for a thing so odd,
And he calls this unknown darkness God.

The ship comes at last to the end of the way,
For thought must cease with the brain's decay;
And looming dimly through the gloom
Appears, approaching, the shape of doom.

It towers ahead, supreme and grim,
A silhouette to eyes grown dim.
"What's this?" he cries, with bated breath.
"'Tis the end of space - men call it death."

The mind of man on its time-bound sphere,
Wakes from its dream with a start of fear;
For the brain he boasts can fathom never
Space and time that last forever.

What if on rays of light we sped,
Ten thousand million years since dead;
And travelling on for aeons to come,
Could we the mighty secret plumb?

And would we reach some strand afar,
Not earth or moon, nor sun or star?
Or would we find the cosmic plan
Had brought us back where we began?

Like meteor's flash on darkened sky,
We live a little, then we die.
A grain of sand on ocean's floor
Endures a thousand lifetimes more.

Then while through space we sail, press-ganged
Aboard our ship of earth, unmanned,
Keep clear the mind and bold the hand
'Gainst landfall on an unknown strand.

THE EXPUNGED EXPLORERS

"Dedicated to David W. Long"

Poem and Art by Frederick J. Mayer

Come to the fore
explore man's Earth
Come forth...come unlikely to converse
 free from Time and that whispered
 rhyme rune holding
 the crimson dawn...
Now blossoms seed
let it be
dead tree living
the seedlings
blood buds starting
ever see
come rend evolution
children of once perverse
Flora Meretrix
the earth's birth spawn
traverse as before.

Art: Flora Meretrix



Troubles

By Mitchell Grabois

Troubles melt like lemon drops but lemon drops are acidic. Harsh in my esophagus, they reflux. In my gut begins ulceration. Ulcerate is a NZ death metal band that plays gigs with Psychocroptic, Disgorge and Suffocation. I'm the roadie for them all. I procure drugs and women.

My surgeon dances with his young, blonde nurse, then performs a colonoscopy, peers into the charity ward guts of me, sees those melted lemon drops re-forming as cancers. You can't trust troubles to melt like lemon drops and not resent the betrayal of their essential nature.

The Grail of Derwandir

By DS Davidson

Derwandir – a name to conjure with,” pronounced Malgo. The planet they were heading for was surprisingly well known of – if not well known *about* – despite being many parsecs away from the spacelanes that linked the human worlds. A wild and untamed world, it was often the subject of spacer’s tales.

“Conjure is the right word,” Sevastin opined, “not a speck of truth in any of the stories told about it!”

Where Malgo had enthusiastically signed up for the mission, Sevastin had been sceptical from the outset. He would not have come at all if Phelix hadn’t offered him a fortune. Phelix had been rich enough to hire the best.

Once, such a mission would have taken many months to plan and years to execute and a vast crew to man the starship. Today, a man such as Phelix could conceive of such an adventure, pick a couple of assistants and be in orbit within a matter of days. Still, once on the ground, they would be busy for weeks or months – on a backwater world like Derwandir, without transmits and suborbital shuttles, your progress was greatly restricted.

Phelix was the kind of person that the word dilettante was invented to describe: rich, well-educated, and unwilling to just sit back, relax and be pampered. Although his attention span wasn’t always quite up to completing his grand schemes – his lavishly appointed laboratory and studio were littered with unfinished inventions and works of art, while an entire wing of his vast library was stuffed full of started, but not completed, manuscripts, fact and fiction of a variety of genres (as befitted his eccentric demeanour, he preferred to *write* rather than type) – he never lacked for enthusiasm!

Malgo had been top of his list for companions on the mission – the youngest professor of xenomorphology in the League – given his great knowledge of Derwandir lore. His *Overview of the Derwandir Mythos* was widely credited as the best book on the subject. Where he had been chosen for his knowledge, Sevastin had been chosen for his skills: he’d a long and illustrious career as an explorer and big game hunter behind him. He’d visited Derwandir itself more than once and would be acting as both their guide and guard. Unlike the romantically-inclined Malgo, he was much more straightforward in his beliefs.

The planet grew larger and larger, filling the viewscreen as they descended from orbit.

“We’ll put down at Askandir; it’s got a small prepared landing point; it’s the main offworlder settlement.”

Derwandir had a small native population and an even smaller offworlder population. The former had suffered enslavement for a period until the League had sent marshals in to end it. The latter were mainly miners, traders and kesh-farmers. Neither group was terribly plentiful, and much of the world remained virgin.

Not long after, the trio exited the craft, stepping out into the hot, humid air of Derwandir. Sevastin crossed into Askandir to pick up additional supplies and some native bearers, while Phelix and Malgo oversaw the unloading of equipment by the ship’s robots.

Away from Askandir, farmlands gave way to lush forest tangled with vines. Eventually they had to hack a path through the clinging wall of creepers. Somewhere deep within the verdant wilds was the reputed location of the Lost Temple of Derwandir. Of course, no-one could say for certain, given that it remained lost and little more than mythological lore. The Temple had supposedly been built by the first humans to land on the planet, a curious little sect known as the *Lomali* that had reputedly come to revere a strange black crystal they’d found in a native village. Legend claimed the natives, angry at the loss of their god, had slain the cult, but had been unable or else unwilling to repatriate the stone to their care and, thus, or so it was said, it remained within the Lost Temple.

Putting aside the potential value of the stone – if, as some had claimed, it was the biggest piece of Hasselanium on a planet rich in it – for Phelix and Malgo it was the holy grail of their research: discovering the Temple and its contents would, they believed, answer a great many questions concerning pre-contact native culture and the earliest human presence on the world.

Unfortunately, all anyone had been able to discern from scans was that the region in which the Lost Temple was presumed to be lost was extremely rich in Hasselanium – which substance tended, in large concentrations such as this, to render scanning inaccurate at best. Thus no-one had been able to discover it from orbit and the only certain means of ever doing so was to go into the area in person.

They had those encounters and close-calls that were to be expected of such an environment: predators and plant-life and such natural events as quicksand and swollen rivers. But, a combination of good planning and good sense assured there were no serious mishaps. They were, therefore, all the more surprised when their native aides turned and fled.

The lead bearers were with Sevastin, hacking at the undergrowth, when they noticed a large stone object concealed beneath a cloak of succulent plant life. At Sevastin's command they hacked at vines until it was partially uncovered. Just then, the natives threw down their tools and cried out in fear. The others came to view it and they jabbered a moment in their harsh, guttural tongue, before turning and fleeing with their peculiar long-legged gait, leaving the three humans standing there, dumbfounded at their reaction.

The stone object was a statue. Although the style was definitely native, a very pure form of their art, the shape was clearly intended to portray, albeit a little crudely and very much fearfully, the human form. Despite its simple lines and minimalist detail, that ancient carver had imbued it with an awesomeness clear even to those who didn't comprehend its meaning.

"It would seem," Malgo said, as he examined the statue, "that this is some sort of marker – a boundary marker, I would guess. Given the effect it had, and which it was obviously intended to have, it would imply it was meant as a warning and a ward, designed to keep people away from something – something forbidden..."

"The Lost Temple, you mean?" asked Sevastin.

"That would be my contention, yes," Malgo replied.

Phelix literally clapped his hands in glee. "Wonderful news! Let's proceed forthwith to the Temple!"

Sevastin reined in his employer's enthusiasm: "Slow down! We need to stop and think – there is no way to can manhandle all of this," he pointed at their baggage, "any real distance. I suggest we make camp and consider our next move. The Temple might be nearby, but it could equally be quite some distance away – it might not even exist at all..."

Phelix harrumphed, but conceded the point and they proceeded to set up camp in the shadow of the statue. Once that task was finished they sat down together and discussed their next move: which proved to be proceeding forth in search of the Lost Temple, Phelix winning through sheer enthusiasm and force of will. The only concession to the grumbling Sevastin was a promise to restrict their explorations to no more than twenty-four hours out of base camp.

Such a time limit proved not to be needed. They'd been out of camp no more than ten hours when they literally stumbled across the Temple – a region of overgrown stone slabs that had become uneven over ages of subsidence, making their progress difficult. Pulling back the vines, Sevastin uncovered the slabs prompting a further exploration of the area that revealed ruinous columns and walls of weathered basalt.

“Eureka!” Phelix exclaimed. “We’ve found it!”

“Well, part of it,” Malgo pointed out. “The legends indicate the Temple complex was vast.”

“I suggest,” Sevastin said, “we return to the base camp, collect our supplies and re-establish camp here to better facilitate our explorations here.”

They spent the night at base camp, much pestered by small, black, biting flies, not the best night’s sleep, and the next morning they moved camp. After a freeze-dried lunch, they continued their explorations, recording discovery after discovery on their datapads; Sevastin assisting Malgo in taking measurements, while Phelix dashed around like a child in a toyshop. There were a great many buildings of different sizes from tiny cell-like structures to vast halls. Many were open to the sky, their roofs now long since collapsed and mighty trees climbing upwards into the air. They also discovered underground tunnels and chambers, but had trouble exploring them as they had partially filled with stagnant water and some even had collapsed. But, of the main temple and its sacred black crystal there was no sign.

“This task will take us days,” Malgo told Phelix as they reviewed their work at the end of the day. “This place is so large and has so many nooks besides the main rooms that we need to explore. Without orbital scans, we have no idea of the boundaries. Perhaps, if we knew more of the layout we might see the location of the main temple suggested. As it is we are blundering around blindfold.”

“Still, it’s but a matter of time,” Phelix said, confidently, “then all shall be revealed!” Being so near, he refused to have his enthusiasm dampened.

With their discoveries catalogued and the next day’s work planned for, they retired to their tents for sleep that would prove just as disturbed as the night previously and, yet, for wholly different reasons.

Malgo’s fearful cries woke the others with a start. He was thrashing about in the torments of nightmare. Sevastin shook him awake.

“Eyes! Deep black eyes staring at me!” He could articulate no more of his nightmare, but it had clearly disturbed him, and he didn’t get back to sleep again that night. Phelix was asleep again within minutes, but Sevastin took much longer. There had been something about the look in Malgo’s eyes that was disturbing. Something that chilled his soul.

Malgo was exhausted the next morning and Sevastin not much more awake, yet Phelix was as wide-awake and hyperactive as ever. He insisted on their recommencing their exploration of the ruins as soon as they had eaten. He rambled off ahead as they wearily followed on behind.

“Does he never tire?” moaned Malgo as they climbed yet another mound of rubble.

They rounded a corner and a great temple came into view. Previously, it had been concealed from view as they’d been threading their way through narrow alleys between cell-like structures. Now, they found themselves looking out across a wide plaza that was little touched by nature, although a corner of it was flooded and fringed by lush growth. Opposite them, across the plaza, was a colonnaded temple front that towered imperiously above them.

“We’ve found it,” Phelix pronounced. “This is it!”

They crossed to the temple front and found it was thick with vines, which they wasted no time in clearing. Once inside, they were refreshed to discover the interior of the temple was dark and cool, unlike the humid atmosphere outside. It was also in a surprisingly-good state of repair, without the strewn rubble that had elsewhere impeded their progress.

“Somewhere in here,” said Phelix, “is the target of our quest.” Malgo wondered at that, but said nothing aloud.

Their torch beams easily pierced the darkness and revealed a column-filled hall. Sevastin unslung his lasrifle – something about the shadowy hall put him on edge. He kept nervously glancing around as they penetrated deeper into the building. Phelix strode confidently ahead, while Malgo trailed behind him. Their footsteps echoed eerily around them, confusing the soniscanner that Malgo carried to map the interior. The hall stretched away into darkness with no end in sight.

Eventually, their torch beams revealed a plain stone altar and, upon it, a black jewel that glinted darkly as their beams played across it.

“The Grail of Derwandir,” Phelix murmured. “The Lost Crystal of the Lomali. This is it.”

“This is a great archaeological discovery!” exclaimed Malgo.

“It’s more than that!” Phelix retorted, cryptically, as he stepped towards the altar.

“Careful!” Sevastin called to him. “It could be booby-trapped!” But, Phelix ignored the shout, reaching out instead for the crystal, his fingers closing upon it. Triumphantly, he lifted it.

“Free!” he rasped in a harsh voice unlike his normal one. Suddenly, his head snapped back and a mix of bile and blood erupted from his throat, causing them to recoil in horrified disgust. A moment later, black tentacles burst forth from his mouth and whipped towards them.

Malgo screamed in terror and tried to run, but was entangled by the viscous black serpentine limbs.

Automatically, Sevastin had levelled his lasrifle and taken aim at what had been their employer, but was now transforming into something hideous and alien – literally, he was turning inside out as *something* tore forth, as if from a chrysalis. Sevastin opened fire. The blast sent the tentacled thing that had been Phelix staggering backwards with a roar of pain. He kept squeezing the trigger, sending dozens of bolts of light into it. Finally, it fell to the floor in a charred and blistered mess, the black crystal rolling away as it fell from limp hands. Sevastin fired a few more times into it in order to be certain.

Malgo was on his hands and knees nearby, being sick as he gasped for breath. Sevastin dragged him to his feet, yelling, “We must leave!” Malgo just stared at him, dumbly. Then, he turned and began to reach for the crystal, the darkness seeming to reflect in his eyes.

Sevastin paused only a moment before opening fire, a bolt of light burning a hole clean through Malgo’s head. He toppled forward and fell beside the crystal, his hand reaching towards it.

“Damn you!” Sevastin muttered as he took aim at the crystal and fired. The beam seemed to disappear into it, leaving it undamaged. He fired again, but still it remained unaffected. It almost seemed to glow, if darkness could be said to glow. He turned and began to run, fleeing from it.

Several weeks later, he finally stumbled out of the jungle and walked into Askandir, where his reappearance caused quite a stir. There would be questions, and whispered rumours would add to the lore of the Lost Temple of Derwandir, but Sevastin would say little, playing down all talk of treasure and emphasising the deadly nature of the forests and the ruins they hid. Until the day he died, he’d always fear what lay concealed on that distant world; a dark and deadly evil as old as time.

Ends

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A Familiar in a Strange Land
By Frederick J. Mayer

It's All The Same

By Ian Dunlavy

It's all the same.
Only, I'm allowed to wait here
but still it feels the same
Not the drugs but the waiting.
I pace the aisles of the pharmacy instead
of the dope city streets
It's all the same
Only, I'm not afraid of John Law
I'm allowed to have these drugs
non narcotic feel goods
beast calming
devil suppressing
liver wrecking brain fixers
to keep the council down
gives the folks in my head
a hushed finger
library voices, please
I like that about them
They don't kick me as hard
But I don't wake up on fire everyday
sometimes I still want to exit but i kill
the though quicker
but it looks the same
sweaty money and nervous cigarettes
waiting for the white coat to take my papers
count and price and call my name
as I tap my left leg and clench my jaw
a minute is ten in a pharmacy or a dealers
van
all the same
not the nearly new needles or the exchange
mornings exchange, it's still the same
I still work on a payment plan
I'm still broke but the pills last longer
It's just the bar room small talk
first name basis
judged by the script
you know goddamn well what these
little white and blue
numbered and lettered monsters do
and what they are for
bipolar mood disorder major depression
disorder general anxiety
disorder ADHD recovering alcoholic and

drug addict daddy issue
god fearing lost christian afraid to ask for help
afraid to trust
and to pray
you know the tall order that I have become
instead of a shot a beer a snort a pull
and a slam
it's two in the morning
one three times daily
and take as needed
IT IS STILL THE SAME
but without all the pain and hurt and fear
it's still a fuzzy crystal clear
It's still me dancing
appointments are appointments
parking lot or back alley
waiting room
it's all the same
waiting for them to kick in
a glass full or a spoon full
just get me out of me
It's still the same
I don't know who I am or what I mean
But I don't want to feel like what I look like
ME
It's the same
it's head phones on the bus
it's minimum wage jobs to fund
It's dreaming way to big
and living way to small
closed walls
keeps me between the lines
keeps me out of the garage at night
looking for god knows what to do god only
knows
it keeps me showered and dressed like you
groomed and cleaned like you
it makes me blend in the same
a little more talkative but the same
the only difference is when people ask
"What in the hell is a matter with you?"
I get to say "A lot." Instead of "I don't know."
So what the hell is a matter anyways?

On Passing Through a Graveyard on a Warm Summer Night

By Dave Fragments

"Fundraisers, casino nights, always some wish or dream with you, never common sense facts." James Reed became campy, picked a piece of invisible lint from John Morris' uniform, and placed the back of his hand on his forehead. "Oh Ashley, take me to the ball tonight."

"I got thirty minutes to get to the VFW, and you're playing Scarlet O'Hara," John said sarcastically, as he slipped on a ten-gallon hat and fringed jacket for tonight's charity fundraiser.

"All you need's a pair of six shooters and a noose. If you don't talk, no one will know you're a Yankee bent on Tara's defeat," James twittered in a falsetto, giving him two thumbs up.

John laughed.

"This bunch of make-believe soldiers might require more than a few drinks to encourage them to start thinkin' about stringin' up each other from the nearest tree. We both know that they only load those blunderbusses with wads of cotton for volleys. They is all 'fraid of some fool shooting their foots off. They call it fun, they say. We ain't fighting reconstruction, they say." He could see the look of disapproval on James' face. James hated when he acted southern. John looked at his watch.

"Time to go."

"It's only fittin' you going to have to walk through the old graveyard dressed like some heathen Yankee abolitionist. My great, great, great grandfather is 'go-an' turnin' in his grave." James whistled Chopin's *Marche Funebre*. "Speaking of graveyards and the dead walking, we have reports of meteors frighting the sky, obscure birds clamoring, and the ghosts of dead abolitionists searching for Quantrill. It's an unruly midsummer night - - a pasturage for those gone on to the other realms." James said.

John folded his arms and shook his head, impatient with the superstitious foolishness of the report - - fodder for the gossip columnists.

"Children's myths, no, anti-mythological tales designed to soothe losing egos, nothing more than that. I'll write the story tonight. It can be in tomorrow's edition. Lock up, please," He ordered and left the newspaper offices.

John chuckled at the irony of this fundraiser. It wasn't a Midsummer's Night staging in a provincial theater with a gay midget playing Tevye like it was in last year's production. That was a lark, a gig to remember. This definitely wouldn't be ghostly fun with a grandmother shrieking Mazel Tov in a bad dream, not tonight. This Midsummer's Night was Casino Night for the Sons of the Civil War, a troop of re-enactors right here in Lawrence Kansas.

In a few minutes, he would be up to his eyeballs with old men trying to be blue or grey, and intent on winning the war with dice, cards, play money and most important alcohol. A few blocks from the newspaper office stood the wrought iron gates of Pioneer Graveyard.

He looked inside at the headstones and monuments and marched forward. In the chill of night, not wishing to see what lurked within, the moon hid its face behind gray clouds. The artificial twilight of the street lamps faded and the black of night remained. The entry fountain gesticulated in mock innocence; a solitude possessing all who came near. Shadows slithered between the trees like snakes searching for Adam and Eve. A feverish breeze shuffled the leaves, tap-tap-tapping tree limbs together like a military tattoo beckoning to the unseen dead.

"Foolishness! The dead are dead and do not leave their graves tenantless to squeak and gibber in the night," John said for his ears to hear. His courage remained deaf. Branches snapped underfoot, distant gunshots remembering the ground they fell upon.

He walked faster. Still, strange sough seeped from the graves, whined in his ear: "Soldier boy. Soldier boy. Where ye be? We've waited for the master of all to set us free. This time we swarm and subdue."

Such talk disturbed. Some fool was in the graveyard with him. Why would anyone be in the graveyard this late? In what illogic or misguided thoughts force one to keep company with the dead? The dead do not keep company with the living unless they are loved. In the dark of the earth, the dead make do with the dead. The dead speak a dead language with their own, secret and unknown to the living. The living do not keep company with the dead, he thought.

But we all keep the dead softly in our minds, remembrances, and hearts.

He turned off the road and took the shorter footpath that crossed through the graveyard, first passing a linden grove, then a cluster of mausoleums, and the old and venerable Oak that the graveyard was built around. In less than a mile, this path ended at the parking lot of the VFW hall. There was no reason to rush, plenty of time to get to the hall, no reason to run like a scared and silly fool.

A squirrel scrambled across the path followed by a cat close behind. The squirrel ran up a tree and escaped across the thinnest of branches and twigs. Its meal thwarted; the cat hissed and turned away.

"Tough luck cat," John said aloud, feeling silly.

I am such a jerk, he thought. Something hanging from the oak tree brushed across his face. He swatted it away. A screech owl swooped past with a field mouse dangling from its claws. Above him, the pale moon moved out from behind a cloud and cast a bloody hue on the grass.

The blood brought a voice.

"You are remembered. O perfidious paladin. O foresworn assassin." It was the voice of a soldier-boy from someplace unseen. John choked. His words wouldn't form properly. His mouth wanted not to speak.

"Who are you?" John wanted to scream but fear stopped the words from leaving his mouth. Memories caused pain.

"Remember your actions, the kiss of Judas Iscariot was sweeter," the voice said. Behind the oak tree, soldiers in regimental gray stood, loading caps into guns. The sounds of distant battle rose from the earth. He must not stay. His feet moved fast, but his body remained in place. Across the rows of memorials and headstones, a band of Redlegs and Jayhawks stood with rifles and bayonets.

A ragged troop -- farmers and storekeepers, young men with scraggly beards and old scars, old men with mud on their clothes, all men with blood on their hands -- stepped forward in lock-step. The leader waved the Eagle flag of the abolitionists.

"The threat of slavers is upon us. Take up your rifle and fight for our town. Bloody Kansas will have its revenge," their leader yelled.

John called on them to stop, but the dead do not hear the living. His feet tried to run, to sprint for the gates of the graveyard. Gray clad soldiers blocked his path. The sound of war fills his ears.

"They slaughtered and burned our town," a Johnny Reb corporal standing next to John yelled in anxious repartee. He had the face of an angel, the blond hair of Adonis, and a hatred of all things Northern. He slips behind a tree, loads a rifle and a pistol and waits. This killing is all wrong, all backward, John thinks.

Unable to leave, he sees the guns spit fire. Plumes of acrid smoke billow in the night air. Lead bullets rip through the ranks. A black hole appears in Johnny Reb's doublet, spinning him around, revealing his bloody back, clothing ripped, flesh rent asunder. Blue soldiers stand barely a dozen yards away.

John takes a bayonet in hand and battles a blue-clad soldier, steel on steel, a mad panic of thrusts and slashes as he feels wind swing past him. Lightning and thunder deafen him.

Pain fills his world. A bloody sleeve hangs empty at his side. His right arm lies on the ground still gripping his bayonet. He fumbles for his pistol, but a second report fills his gut with pain and slowly his stomach puffs forwards and bursts open, blood and viscera soaking his uniform. He falls into the dark of the grave and joins his companions from a century and a half before. The battle fades like smoke. It is the end, for life does not linger in a graveyard. It lets the dead return to their solitude and sleep. The graveyard is once again silent.

At sunrise, a mourner visiting Pioneer Graveyard found John Morris' body hanging from an oak and shot twice through the torso.

The moon took back its bloody light and slid beneath the horizon. Cold-hearted orb gives way to dark and sleep-filled nights. While nights give way to the new dawn and the day begins anew. It is the day that reveals the deeds of the night.

Sheriff Baker sought James Reed, coworker and friend of John Morris, to identify the body. By the time they reached the graveyard, the old coroner, Jedediah Wright, had made the body presentable, hiding most of the gaping wounds beneath a sheet on a gurney. He lifted the sheet enough to show the upper half of John's face. James pulled it lower. The purple tongue made James turn away. An ugly red rope burn stretched across the neck from ear to ear.

"Hung from a tree until he died," he said to the Sheriff and then turned to James: "Death ain't ever a pretty sight. Is it?"

James shook his head affirmatively, covering his mouth with the back of his hand.

"He left the house just at sunset. He had a gig dealing poker for the re-enactors at the Casino Night."

"That explains the uniform. Them boys at the VFW sure do like to dress up to lose their money for a good cause. You got the time of death?" Sheriff Baker asked.

"From body temperature, lividity, and rigor mortis, I'd estimate that he died shortly after sunset." Coroner Wright cleaned his spectacles with a red plaid handkerchief. He folded the hanky, put it in his pocket and squinted at James.

James offered unnecessary explanations.

"He's the last person I'd suspect of suicide. He must have come here to the oak and hung himself. I know he didn't leave the newspaper with a rope. He must have stashed it here earlier. How else would he get a rope in a graveyard?" James asked. Coroner Wright's eyes opened wide and turned his way. He waved his right hand at James in a circular motion while he formulated his next little speech.

"Suicide? Who said he hung himself?" The coroner lifted the sheet to show the bloody torso. "There's two bullet holes in him. That's what killed him when he was dangling, nasty way to kill a man. First string him up and then shoot him through and through twice. This wasn't a robbery. A thief would knock him over the head and snatch his wallet. We have his wallet and found something even stranger. He had thirty dimes in a sack hanging from his belt."

"The price of betrayal, the price of suicide," James crossed himself as a sign against evil. The coroner turned away still mumbling and waved at an attendant who closed the body bag and rolled the gurney to the Morgue Wagon.

"No, no, no, this wasn't suicide. It was murder and as Shakespeare says, 'murder most foul'. That's where the evidence leads. Somebody waited in that tree, snagged the victim's neck in a noose, and hauled him off his feet."

James shuffled. Sheriff Baker stood speechless. Wright turned to James and poked an index finger into his chest. He buttonholed the nylon fabric of his jacket. "I need your name and address for my report young man. Can I see your driver's license?"

James fumbled at his back pocket.

"I don't have my wallet." He turned his pockets out and pushed them back into his pants. One of the coroner's assistants stood with a clipboard. James recited his name and address as the man wrote it down. While that happened, the coroner lifted a pair of handcuffs from Sheriff Baker's belt.

"I'm sorry. I should have realized that you didn't have time to pick up your wallet when you got dressed today. Why would you pick up a wallet to come to a crime scene? Why does anyone carry a wallet anywhere? It's those cell phone things all you young folks carry now. Can you humor an old man and hold out your hands out palm up?" the coroner asked in his old, rambling way.

"You are one very strange, old man." James held both hands out palm up, fingers curled. The coroner slipped the handcuffs on his wrists faster than James could pull them away.

"You senile old bastard, why did you do that? Take these off me this instant."

Coroner Wright uncurled James' fingers.

"Rope burns," Coroner Wright said. Each of James' hands bore red streaks across the palm and on several fingers. "I thought I saw the marks when you walked up." He turned to the others. "Check his shoes to see what he stepped in. Check the tree. Check for footprints under the tree and over by those graves. That grass wasn't trampled like that yesterday. He must have done it during the night. Go to his apartment and search the laundry for the clothes he wore. There's bound to be blood. My staff has the rope. We'll find DNA on it." He snapped his fingers at his assistant. The man came over. "Get an evidence kit and clean under his fingernails."

"You might have just told me," Sheriff Baker growled.

"It had to be done here, and now; and now, the show's over." The coroner said. Police and staff moved quickly to their tasks.

When the Morgue Wagon pulled away, Sheriff Baker and Coroner Wright walked not more than ten feet from the oak to a granite memorial with the name Wright. It bore two cartouche, one blank, and the other bore the name Sarah with two dates. Wright knelt on one knee and crossed himself.

"I figured you'd pay respects to your Sarah. She was a fine woman," Sheriff Baker said.

"She called me last night, you know."

"About the hanging?" Sheriff Baker sympathized with him and didn't question his statement.

"I'd like to say an old man outwits the young fox..." he paused. "...but not today. James Woods is a cold-blooded, calculating murderer. He hung the guy, shot him, hung the thirty dimes in that little sack, and stood back, all proud, admired his handiwork. That's when he saluted the dead body and blasphemed."

The description startled Sheriff Baker. Jedediah Wright could not have witnessed the crime. He wondered if Wright's insights were imaginary and would stand in court. He didn't get the chance to ask. Wright explained.

"Those two, Reed and Morris, have history. Sarah and I used to host the re-enactors every couple years. After the Civil War one of Quantrill's Raiders, a James Reed, his namesake, participated in the robbery of a San Antonio stagecoach with the Jesse James Gang. History reports that James Reed talked his friend, John Morris, into traveling back to Missouri. It was in Missouri that Morris persuaded Reed to leave his gun in his saddlebags and shot him twice in the chest. That much is in the history books." He paused to swallow. "It was this bloody business brought down to last night - - the heir of James Reed taking revenge on the heir of John Morris. Premeditated murder. Reed gave him a betrayer's death - - hanging. He chased the son of the son of the son who murdered his forefather and gave him two bullets and thirty pieces of silver to pay for the betrayer's passage to Hell." Wright took a rosary from his pocket and crossed himself with it.

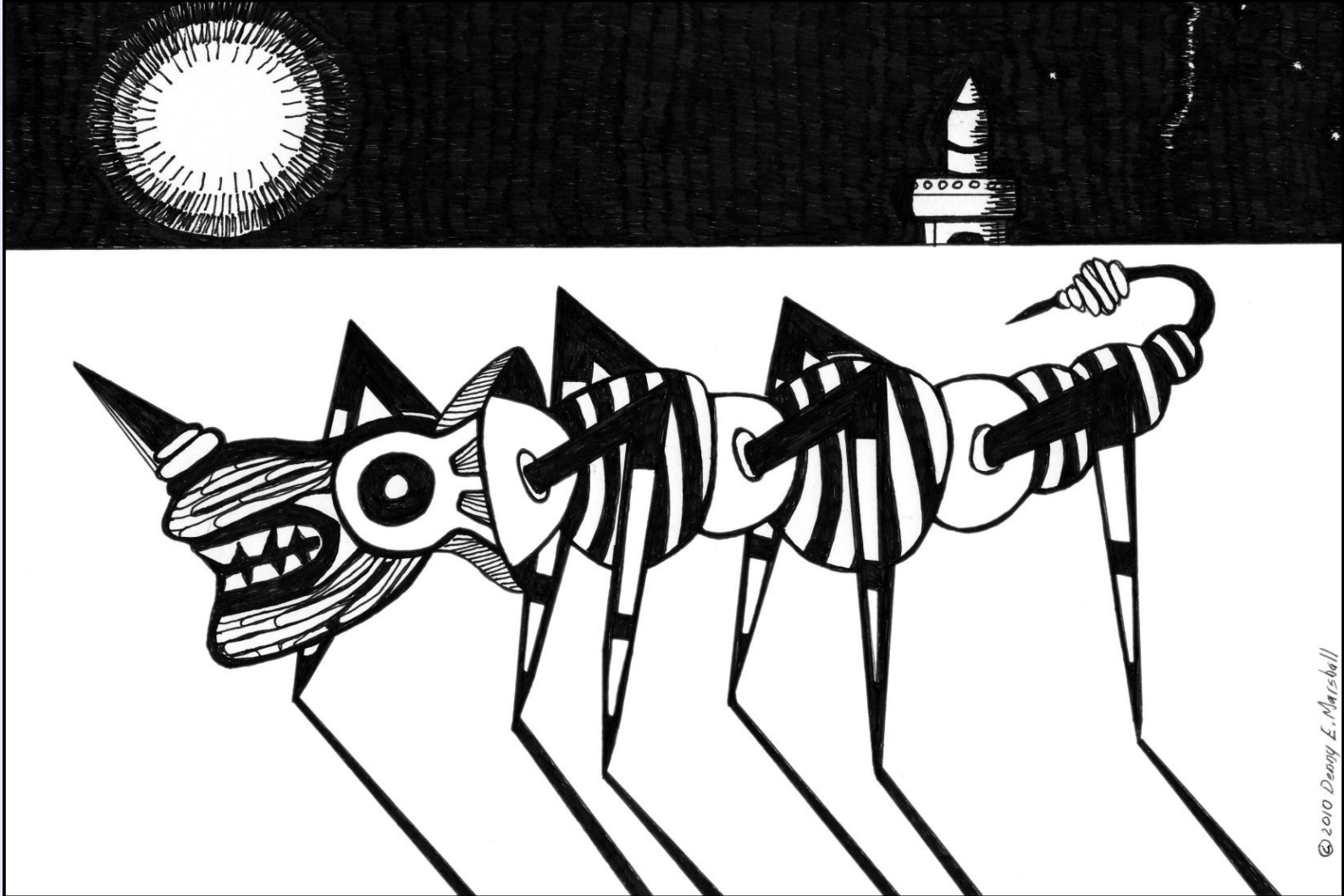
"They say thirty pieces of silver was the value of a dead ox or a new slave," the sheriff said and politely retreated a step to give Wright some privacy.

"A friend who betrays, the worst of all sins and justice in the old biblical tradition, an eye for an eye. What a terrible act and he did it in front of witnesses. Here, all these people, saints and sinners but still here, listening, watching. None more so than my dear and gentle Sarah," Wright said. Tears ran down his cheeks. "Tomorrow my dear, I shall plant violets on your grave in such profusion that the angels will be jealous and the all the morning of summer, you can tell me all about them." With that, he stood.

"Imagine their pain. Witnesses to murder that not one of them could stop. Sarah was disconsolate when I came to her this morning. She told me the story before I called Central Dispatch and reported it. All the years I kept the horrors of my job as coroner from her and last night she witnesses a murder not ten feet away from where she sleeps."

Sheriff Baker never spoke about this revelation until many years later when he told his grandson to tread carefully in Pioneer Graveyard and made him swear to plant violets on the graves of Sarah and Jedediah Wright every year on Midsummer's night.

Ends



Desert of the Spiral Tower

By Denny E. Marshall

Dreamscapes

By Donna Salisbury

Sail away on the sea of hope,
Bound for the land of love.
Walk through the valley of dreams come true,
Whispered magic of earthly powers.
Harmony floats upon the breeze,
Fingers of twilight caress the land.
Like treasures of wisdom evading my touch,
The fading light, a velvet blue sky,
Carry me away into the night.
Search the sky for moonbeams,
Touch the sea of tenderness,
Place the silver moon in my hands.
Touch my heart and my soul,
Touch the one you have come to know.
Touch the thoughts of my mind,
Touch my life and you will find,
The castle of everlasting love.

From Anger This Anger

By April Salzano

Stares and screams. I run
interference between my son
and my husband, between autism
and frustration, love and fury, fury
and love. Fists and fathers
are no strangers, like worry
and fear and worry and fear.

The Burning in the Urn

By Robin Wyatt Dunn

In this darkness,
Where I hold you,
We will hold our secret stillness.
We will practice being the waif, to keep the guards at bay,
And we will practice being a will to make them come.
And we'll grow darker, every night.
Underneath the mountain where we grow,
We come to the good that we must do,
But it is hard.
And it is sweet,
To see you hesitate,
At your first burning of the air by the eyes of village guards,
You hold your hand but you don't want to cast the spell,
And so I cast it for you,
Making them make us the food we need to go up mountain.
Of course, we could have asked,
But then we'd be remembered.
And we don't want that, not yet.
"Do you know what's in the mountain?" I asked you.
You shook your head.
"It's you," I said, "It's you."
And you smiled, smiled in the dark.
The darkness comes more now,
We can feel it,
Deep inside our bones,
Behind our eyes,
It bears us like a corpse,
It bears us deeper in.
We say its names and hold each other,
Sweating in the night,
To keep the fear away,
To keep each moment coming closer.
To keep the day approaching,
When the spell is born,
When we'll turn the people round,
And tell them names we have inside.
"What name is it?" you ask, and I whisper it to you,
Again, again, again.
Deyendenna Preytall, the Washer in the Wide.
Deyendenna Preytall, the Washer in the Wide.
She is one name for our God, the mountain, who is you.
For the mountain is a woman angry,
And her children are coming back.

"Will you love me forever?" you ask, and I nod,
But I am distracted by the sky:
It has a colour I don't like,
And I'm forced to take you closer in,
Beside the village,
And we wind the colours in the air, setting another spell,
But it gives the people too much sleep,
And all the strength we want to give them,
Comes too slow for what is coming.

"This burning hurts because we are the burning, and we are the fuel," I tell you, but
you already know, I think, somewhere inside you knew it.

We are what is burning by the mountainside, to bring the spirits back.

I am your strider,

And you are my axe,

I am your letter,

And you are my wax,

Over these our dark horizons.

Love, the burning will not stop,

We're thinner every passing season,

Spreading our religion round the Seven Urns,

The Seven Sisters,

Every mountain and her Children,

With the word we heard,

The Spirit in the Whirl.

"We have to stop here," you said. "I'm pregnant."

--

It is a boy.

--

This mountain has a new name now; I call it a man.

Every colour's brighter. By my son.

What will the mountain do now?

I have not done enough.

You work in the village. And so do I, wanderers no longer. Only barely trusted.

Why did the spirits pick us for the work?

Why do I fear the mountain still?

Why does the darkness please my heart?

LLOIGOR THE SPIRIT GUIDE

Poem and Art by Frederick J. Mayer

Extended 'tween Spirit Poles
of star spawn guides carved from wind
Xothic high priestess must choose
of Zhar or Lloigor
Proclivity of one god
erotic tentacles use
Lloigor, travels air streams,
Zhar, dreams, mentally writhing
"Obscene Twins" are they of lore
told by the Tcho Tchos
Rites of cannibal People
carnal knowledge to begin
Experienced now she
holy communion, sky souls.



Garden of Eden

By Dakota-Luise Wolf

Memories of you have stained me forever
To let you go would kill me
To make you stay is certain death
Total confusion,
Of my body, mind and soul,
Your eyes hold contempt
As you speak words of love so sweetly
Trying to tempt me to take some fruit
The garden has died at my feet.
Yet you lead me to our tree
Where it all began
The stars cannot foresee what the future holds
I wonder what your motives are, as you kiss me,
The smell of flowers fills my senses
As you take all of me in
The garden appears to bloom again
Full of life,
You turn from me,
Breaking our kiss
I try to catch you,
But you run from me laughing
I look around to see nothing,
But myself
All alone in the night,
Standing in the moonlight
Surrounded by the death
Of my sanity.



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