

# NIGHTMARE

A group of people in a dark setting, some with bandaged heads and blood on their faces, holding a large wooden cross.

HORROR & DARK FANTASY

E. A. PETRICONE  
ANUEL RODRIGUEZ  
STEPHEN GRAHAM JONES  
ERICA RUPPERT

ISSUE 101 | FEBRUARY 2021  
EDITED BY WENDY N. WAGNER

**NIGHTMARE**  
MAGAZINE

# NIGHTMARE

M A G A Z I N E

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Issue 101, February 2021

### FROM THE EDITOR

[Editorial: February 2021](#)

### FICTION

[We, the Girls Who Did Not Make It](#)

E.A. Petricone

[The Girl with the Voice Made of Stone](#)

Anuel Rodriguez

[Hairy Legs and All](#)

Stephen Graham Jones

[And Lucy Fell](#)

Erica Ruppert

### NONFICTION

[The H Word: Horror, Through Colored Lenses](#)

Justin C. Key

[Interview: Hailey Piper](#)

Gordon B. White

### AUTHOR SPOTLIGHTS

[E.A. Petricone](#)

[Stephen Graham Jones](#)

### MISCELLANY

[Coming Attractions](#)

[Stay Connected](#)

[Subscriptions and Ebooks](#)

Support Us on Patreon, or How to Become a Dragonrider or Space Wizard

## About the Nightmare Team

---

© 2021 *Nightmare Magazine*

Cover by Grace Legault

[www.nightmare-magazine.com](http://www.nightmare-magazine.com)

Published by Adamant Press.

**FROM  
THE  
EDITOR**

**“A welcome addition to the Best American series.”**

**—WASHINGTON POST**

“An almost unheard-of diversity of tales absolutely sing in this superlative anthology of short speculative stories.”

**—PUBLISHERS WEEKLY,**  
starred review

“The year’s most innovative and interesting. These are stories to take your breath away, to make you laugh, to bring you to despair, to give you hope, to creep you out, and even to break your heart.”

**—BOOKLIST,** starred review



**LOOKING BACK AT PREVIOUS EDITIONS . . .**



“Dystopic, sometimes darkly humorous collection of twenty hard-hitting stories feels timely.”

**—PUBLISHERS WEEKLY,**  
starred review



“Intellectually demanding . . . a very elite, highly curated . . . set of primal, classic-seeming tales from our past, present, and future.”

**—KIRKUS REVIEWS,**  
starred review



“Stellar . . . An illuminating anthology for genre devotees and curious readers interested in exploring science-fiction and fantasy.”

**—LIBRARY JOURNAL,**  
starred review

**VISIT [JOHNJOSEPHADAMSBOOKS.COM](http://JOHNJOSEPHADAMSBOOKS.COM) TO DISCOVER MORE**



[hmhbooks.com](http://hmhbooks.com)



[@hmhbooks](https://www.instagram.com/hmhbooks)

## Editorial: February 2021

Wendy N. Wagner | 1166 words

Welcome to issue 101 of *Nightmare!* I'm Wendy N. Wagner, writing to you in my first-ever editorial, and let me just say: It is an honor and a privilege to be writing to you, our wonderful readers. Thank you so much for joining me on the next leg of our magazine's terrifying journey. I hope we have a great time together!

When it comes to horror, I'm what might be called a "true believer." Horror novels, video games and movies have gotten me through some of the roughest patches in my life. I've escaped unhappiness by diving into the thrills of countless monstrous adventures; I've felt my will to live return after a good jump scare—and I've found tremendous insight into the human condition in the work of horror creators across all mediums. Horror and dark fantasy offer us an amazing realm to learn about ourselves, our fellow humans, and our relationship to the world.

I feel so lucky that I've spent the last six years as a part of *Nightmare*, immersed in the work of an incredible community of dark creators. We've published stories ranging from the experimental to the revolting to the crushingly sad: a remarkable variety of fiction. But if there's one thing that unites the last 100 issues, it's a commitment to humanity. To sharing work that doesn't just *scare*, but which touches you. *Nightmare* has always been a place for fiction with heart, and I hope this issue continues in the same fine tradition.

This month sees a few changes in the usual *Nightmare* line-up as we swap out reprints for original micro-content we're calling "The Horror Lab." Every month you'll see a piece of flash fiction, plus a poem or a piece of creative nonfiction—all of it unsettling and delicious. This month's nasty little bonbons include "The Girl with the Voice Made of Stone," a prose poem by Anuel Rodriguez that spins the murder and social critique into a dark fairy tale. Our flash story is a tiny, bloody morsel from Erica Ruppert called "And Lucy Fell."

Our short fiction this month includes *Nightmare* newcomer E.A. Petricone's "We, the Girls Who Did Not Make It," a story of ghosts, abuse, and our culture's obsession with serial killers. The inimitable Stephen Graham Jones returns with an eight-legged tale of regret: "Hairy Legs and All."

In "The H Word," Justin C. Key talks about what it's like being a Black horror fan experiencing a genre where he felt unwelcome—and what it's like today creating horror through his own Black lens. We also have spotlight interviews with our short fiction writers, and an in-depth interview with author Hailey Piper.

There is also a special story about our cover art this issue. We were contacted by creative director and model Grace Legault with a photo submission of these very unsettling nurses. Of course we couldn't resist them! If you'd like to check out more of Grace's work, you can find her on Instagram, where she's @heygracie\_. The rest of her team includes photographer Marshall Stonefish (@marshalls.worldx), make-up artist Cassidy Shkimba (@thepowderroom), and models Mya Matos (@myasoleil) and Emilee Farquhar (@emileefarquhar).

Throughout the rest of the year, I'd also like to take more time to celebrate our wonderful *Nightmare* community. Our staff of volunteers includes some of the most hard-working and insightful folks I've met, and you deserve a chance to get to know them a little better. I thought I'd start with one of our dirtiest jobs: copy editing. If it weren't for the hard work of copy editor Melissa V. Hofelich, this magazine wouldn't look nearly as good. We all owe her a standing ovation for her years scrutinizing punctuation and capturing typos! Here's a little bit more about this hero:

### **How did you get started working with *Nightmare*?**

My dear friend Rachael K. Jones originally told me about an open position at *Lightspeed Magazine*. I worked on *Lightspeed* for several years. When the Copy Editor position opened up at *Nightmare*, you asked if I was interested. Five years later, here we are!

### **What's your favorite part of your work here?**

I get to read some really amazing stuff. Every once in a while, I come across a story or author (Isabel Cañas or Livia Llewellyn, for example) that's so good, I have to force myself to slow down and focus. A great story can still carry me away. I also really enjoy "The H Word." There have been some very thought-provoking essays in that column.

### **Would you call yourself a horror fan? If so, what brought you to the genre?**

Like a lot of people my age, I read Stephen King's *It* way sooner than I should have. My parents are both big readers, and passed that love on to me and my brother. Someone had given my mom a copy of *It*. Since she's not into horror, it sat unread on a bookshelf until I picked it up around age ten. (A few years later, that's also how I came across my first romance novel. But that's a story for another time.)

My mom was horrified when she found out, but she let me finish the book. Then she steered me over toward more age-appropriate fare. So, so, so many Christopher Pike books! I remember tearing through them incredibly fast and loving every minute of it. Even when I watched Disney films, I loved the villains more than any hero or heroine. I was particularly obsessed with Maleficent from *Sleeping Beauty*. As I got older (and was allowed!), I moved onto reading more King, Clive Barker, and many other authors that are considered horror classics today.

### **What's your favorite horror villain or monster?**

Because he was indelibly imprinted on my mind at such a young age: Pennywise from *It*. I

was absolutely terrified by the idea that he could disguise himself as anyone's worst fear. While the clown and some of his other manifestations were really effective, finishing it up with spiders was a gut punch. I'm petrified by spiders.

••••

Thanks so much for all your hard work, Melissa!

And a thank you to all our authors and readers—we're so glad to have you travel with us on this nightmarish road.

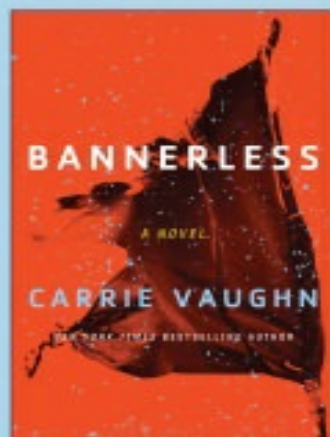
---

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Wendy N. Wagner is the author of the forthcoming horror novel *The Deer Kings* (due out summer 2021) and the forthcoming gothic novella *The Secret Skin* (fall 2021). Previous work includes the SF thriller *An Oath of Dogs* and two novels for the Pathfinder Tales series. Her short stories, poetry, and essays have appeared in more than fifty venues. She also serves as the managing/senior editor of *Lightspeed* magazine, and previously served as the guest editor of *Nightmare's Queers Destroy Horror!* She lives in Oregon with her very understanding family, two large cats, and a Muppet disguised as a dog.

**FICTION**

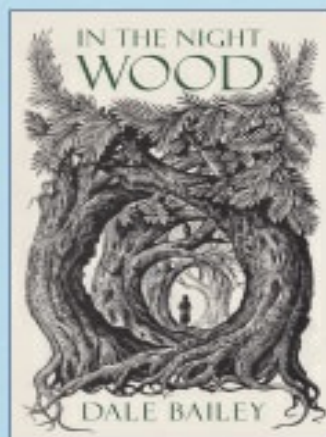
# Discover JOHN JOSEPH ADAMS BOOKS



WINNER OF THE  
PHILIP K. DICK AWARD  
"A fine murder mystery  
and a multi-layered  
look at a different kind  
of society."  
—ANALOG SCIENCE  
FICTION AND FACT



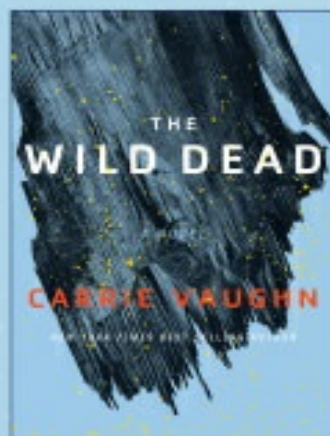
"A thrilling ride. The  
world belongs to robots,  
we're just living in it."  
—DANIEL H. WILSON



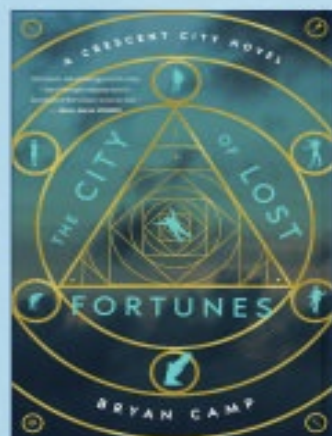
"Luminously written,  
transporting, and all-  
around excellent. I  
couldn't put it down."  
—KAREN JOY FOWLER



"Artful, witty, Oscar  
Wilde pastiche with  
the heart of a  
paranormal thriller."  
—DIANA GABALDON



"A tightly plotted  
mind-thrill."  
—MEG ELISON



"You might not come  
back from *The City  
of Lost Fortunes*, but  
you'll enjoy the trip."  
—RICHARD KADREY



"A story you won't  
forget from a talented  
new voice in sci-fi!"  
—A. G. RIDDLE



"A riveting two-fisted  
weird pulp adventure . . .  
Great fun!"  
—MAX GLADSTONE

VISIT [JOHNJOSEPHADAMSBOOKS.COM](http://JOHNJOSEPHADAMSBOOKS.COM) TO DISCOVER MORE

# We, the Girls Who Did Not Make It

E.A. Petricone | 8148 words

We are not where we are buried. We are where they kept us. We float now, and see the low building in the woods from above, the long plates of rusted metal, the desiccated grass bundling against the sides like a pyre, the orb spider poised over a corroded edge. But when we were alive, we only knew the inside of the basement, where we had all the usual things girls have when they are being held and killed.

There are thirteen of us girls. You might be thinking, *oh, but can you really call yourselves girls?* None of us are under eighteen, it's true. But *girls* waterproofs us—somewhat—from the assumption that we deserve to be here. *Girls* makes it sound as though we should have been protected.

Not that girls are ever protected, but we are dead, so let us have this.

••••

This is Sandy. We hate her. She was Trevor's "girlfriend." She lured many of us here. *No I didn't*, she protests.

Don't listen to her. She may not have led us with a trail of gumdrops and the promise of a candy house, but she smiled at us, laughed openly, *so* friendly, put us at ease as we slid into their car.

*Look, they've got a woman with them, we thought. They must not be murderers. We understand now: assume they are all murderers.*

••••

We are where they kept us. They drag the new girl through the heavy steel door, a cloth wrapped tight around her face. Number fourteen.

Rolly steers her while Trevor presses the mouth of his gun against her back, herding her down the steps. Down here.

*Oh no, we think. Oh no.*

••••

This is Kaitlyn. She loved baking, especially cookies—the kind you taste once and give up store-bought forevermore. Sometimes she added lemon zest to chocolate chip, she tells us. *People don't expect it, and if you add too much you're screwed, but just enough? With that butter and brown sugar? Perfect.*

Kaitlyn wore a brace on her left leg. They keep it upstairs in a peeling kitchen full of stains.

Kaitlyn's favorite color is strawberry frosting pink.

••••

Jenn loved really sappy romance movies. Bonus points if it was a Christmas story. She'd listen to those movies any month of the year, even in August. Give her a meet-cute, give her a *Pride and Prejudice* first dislike, give her a bad—but not unfixable—misunderstanding, give her a kiss and maybe a proposal at the end. So long as everyone ends up happy.

Jenn is blind (even now), but she says she understands the concept of color, and there's nothing like rose red. Soft petals against your lips, scent heady as passion. *I like classic*, she says.

••••

We wish we were zombies. We wish we were vampires. We wish we were werewolves. We wish we were she-demons with long claws. We wish the full moon rose and our stories ended with us picking our captors out from between our teeth. We wish we'd been stronger. We wish we'd lived.

••••

The new girl's shaking, and we know where her head is at, propeller spinning with no air to catch. She's trying to take in her surroundings, find a handhold.

And the smell. It smells like them down here; there is no question of what will happen to her.

Her name is Monica. She keeps trying to introduce herself. She doesn't ask Trevor or Rolly their names; she's probably reasoning that if she can't identify anybody, they'll let her go.

Cooperate, and maybe they won't kill you. Cooperate too much, and maybe it'll just make it easier for them to kill you. Fight from the start, come hell or high water. Cooperate, get your bearings, find the right moment to strike—

Or at least, that's the idea. Monica tries to make a break for it, but there's no smooth spring and extension of spine like in an action movie. She hesitates for a sliver of a second, and that's when Trevor grabs her by the hair and drags her the rest of the way.

She struggles. She cries. She pleads. They shackle her ankle so that with the length of the chain she won't be able walk more than three feet past the stained and spore-thick futon in the corner.

••••

Netta worked as a farmhand. She didn't like the drudgery, but she adored the songbirds at the edge of the fields. She knows them by their song, by the sound of their wings. She makes us laugh doing impressions of the perpetually vexed catbird, *mew*, of the dashing but tone-deaf cedar waxwing, *scree*. She teaches us to hiss when we see cowbirds because holy shit, what a bunch of assholes.

*At least my babies weren't with me*, she keeps saying. Her daughter's favorite bird was the chickadee, her son's the blue jay. She taught them to hold their palms out flat with sunflower seeds, to be patient while the birds summoned up the courage to land on their hands.

*My sister and I were close*, she tells us. *I'm sure she must have taken them in after I didn't come home*. She nods to herself and we agree with her instantly: *She must have*.

Netta loves the goldfinches most, birds that barely bend a stalk of thistle with their fairy weight. In the spring the males take on happy yellow feathers, and that's her favorite color.

••••

Deanna lived above her cousin's garage, and the moment she'd get home from working retail she'd binge-watch television series until she fell asleep.

When her old friends from high school texted her she'd ignore them, not because she didn't like them but because somehow the thought of responding made her feel so heavy. The same with her laundry, with her mail, with leaving home in general.

After talking to Sasha, Deanna thinks she probably was depressed. She wonders if she could have gotten better.

*When I put my hand on the car door*, she says, *I felt this zap in my eyes, like I'd touched a live wire. I just knew*.

She tried to calmly turn around, amicably decline, but it was three against one, so. Deanna remembers, clearly, that she managed to hook a finger under the door handle when they had her in the backseat. But it was locked.

Her favorite color is the purple of the lilacs that lined her neighbor's yard when she was growing up.

••••

You want us to stop talking about ourselves. You want to know about *them*. Everyone wants to know about them, and if they ever get caught, they're all anyone will hear about. You want to know if their mothers made them wear dresses when they didn't want to wear dresses, if their fathers locked them in with rabid dogs, if some uncle forced them to kill baby rabbits with a sledgehammer—

Or you want to know what they did to us.

As though you don't know what they did to us.

••••

Fine. Trevor is the kind of guy who's good-looking if you don't have a lot of guys to choose from. He's the one who carries the gun. He's the one who decides who'll go first. He keeps a flask in his pocket, and when he occasionally offered it to Sandy, she'd always turn it into this big operatic gesture, curving the inside of her wrist up as she extended her arm with that stupid beneath-lowered-lashes look like she was a concubine seducing a king.

Rolly—Trevor’s cousin, in some complicated kind of way—has that vacant look and hollow skin that makes you think his parents weren’t around much to feed him. Before he laughs there’s always a split-second pause when he looks to Trevor, to make sure it really is something he can laugh at.

He’s not dumb though, don’t let him fool you, don’t you dare write him off as a feeble-minded and trusting accomplice. He enjoys it just as much. Trust us.

••••

Lily is still getting used to it. *I really wanted to live*, she keeps saying. *I wanted it so badly.*

So far, we only know that she was in college, and she wasn’t doing so well. She did Adderall to try to make herself more productive, but it wasn’t working the way she thought it would.

Her favorite color is forest green.

••••

We’re afraid Trevor will take it further, but he glances at his watch. “I’ve got to make an appearance,” he tells Rolly. “Keep an eye on her.”

In other words, don’t start without him. Monica has a little more time. We try not to think about the inevitability breathing through the walls like black mold.

Trevor and Rolly take turns leaving the basement and doing some odd errand or sitting in a nearby restaurant. Places where people they know will see them acting normal. They’ve done that ever since they killed off Sandy. Trevor especially. He probably thinks he’s clever.

Maybe he is. No one has caught them yet.

••••

Trevor jingles the two sets of keys as he climbs the stairs. The key to the leg shackle bounces around on a teal—*teal*? yes, that surprised us too—wrist coil. On a piece of masking tape stuck over the bow he’s written “Freedom” in permanent black ink.

Ha.

Trevor leaves the wrist coil—teal parrot squawk among the rest of the dull and grubby upstairs—on a small hook outside the heavy metal door. The heavy metal door key, however, stays with Trevor. Always.

The heavy metal door is complex. There’s some kind of mechanism where it’s easy for the person entering from the kitchen to pull it open but it takes both of them to push it open from the basement side, even when it’s not locked. In fact, it’s such an effort that Trevor uses a short metal shovel—a *spade*, Netta politely corrects us, *you can tell by the square blade*—to prop the door open wide enough to squeeze through.

If we nearly dislodged our ankles from our legs, we could stare up at that tantalizing opening. We regarded the obelisk of light slanting through it as though it were holy, sacred.

Where life began. But of course, we were on the wrong side.

• • • •

You might be thinking, where did they even get a door like that? Who even owns this building? Who has the *time* to lure and murder women? How could they get away with this so many times?

Yet here we are. They wanted it badly enough, we guess.

• • • •

Zoe was addicted to meth and it was easy to carrot her into the basement. Her last boss, a sturdy woman who ran some east-nowhere truck stop diner, was kind to her. She'd corral Zoe into the kitchen, saying she was too skinny and needed to learn how to cook.

*You heat the pan first, she'd say. Then the oil.* And Zoe enjoyed it actually, working with the pots and pans, with food.

But she stole money. With the life she'd led, there was something inevitable about being fired—*but maybe it wasn't*, she says, and maybe that's why it felt like something clawed at her insides when her boss wouldn't look at her, told her she wouldn't call the cops, *just get out.*

Zoe's favorite colors are watermelon pink and lime green, don't make her choose.

• • • •

Rolly's talking to Monica. What luck: Monica works as a junior developer at a video game company, one that makes an RPG that Rolly really likes to play. He sits just by the futon, firing questions at her. Can you use grenades to teleport to the Hall of Elders? How can you unlock the secret map? Is it true that if you ask the Behemoth what kind of toothpaste it uses, you can tame it?

She's smart. "Oh man," she says, shaking her head. "The new release is going to blow your mind. You have no idea."

And Rolly—*that absolute shit*—opens his mouth a little to gasp. Sits up straighter on the floor just by the futon where he held us down, all wide-eyed, innocent as a kid on Christmas morning.

"It's hard to think though, with," and Monica gestures to the chain. "Do you think you could take this off, so we can really talk?"

Though we no longer breathe, all of us hold our breath.

The temptation seems to pain Rolly. "The key's upstairs."

"I'm not going anywhere," Monica jokes, but her desperation sends a branching crack through her tone.

Rolly stares at her ankle shackle for a long time. "No," he says finally.

We sigh. Monica is at a distinct disadvantage, in that she is number fourteen, and many women before her have tried a similar maneuver.

Inexplicably Rolly starts explaining the RPG to her.

To *her*, the person who works for the company.

But again, she's smart. She plays it casual, asking Rolly what kind of character he plays, his stats, what quests he's completed. Raises her eyebrows, makes little *ohh* noises, all impressed by his answers. (Though according to Kaitlyn and Octavia, who used to play the game they're talking about, Rolly's a complete noob).

"I know the guy who designed that mod," Monica says at one point. "I bet he'd love to hear your ideas. I could put in a word . . . tell me more about what you'd do with the Red Swamp." She leans forward so convincingly that Rolly chatters on, and only we can see how every time she leans back in postural agreement, *oh, totally*, how her eyes dart around, searching for opportunity.

Monica, this girl, she's smart.

But then again, so were most of us.

••••

This is Ellie. Her fiancé's favorite color was green, so it was hers too. She'd spend hours editing photos of them for Insta. She liked dressing up for him, cooking for him, pulling recipes from the internet so he wouldn't get bored.

We didn't say a word until one day she said, dumbfounded, *I didn't have a life of my own*, and then the floodgates were open.

She thought telling them how much she loved her fiancé would help her; that they'd see her as another man's property maybe, the way you could put a guy off in a club by inventing a boyfriend, except she really did have a fiancé.

We give Ellie credit: she didn't scare, she didn't scream, she gave them nothing to get off on until they ripped her finger off and her engagement ring with it.

It took her a while to really think about it, but her favorite color is burnt orange.

••••

We cowered under their gun, their knives, their fists, their unzipped pants. We cried. We did whatever they said. We told them to fuck off. We tried to talk them out of it. We mentally disappeared. We scream-begged *please please no*. We tried to fight. We tried to charm them we tried to reason with them we tried we tried to just breathe.

In the end we all died in horrible pain, in terror, and even when we slipped away we entered a black without comfort.

••••

Theresa's favorite childhood book, the one that she made her mother read over and over again before bed, was called *Ophelia the Opossum Runs Away from Home*.

Ophelia the opossum (*baby opossums are called joeys*, Theresa says) lived with her mother in a cozy burrow beneath a great oak tree.

One day, after a fight with her mother, Ophelia runs away from home, thinking *I'll never come back—that'll show her*. She scampers farther and farther, deeper and deeper into the woods until none of the trees or rocks look familiar.

As it starts to rain Ophelia realizes how lonely she is, how scary the woods are and how terribly she misses her mother. But the rain's washed away all scent and sense; she cannot remember the way home.

Shivering under a wide leaf (*of course Ophelia didn't bring her coat, that would be something her mother would tell her to do*), she starts to cry. She's so lost now, how can she ever find her way back?

But then, the corner of the wide leaf lifts, and whose eyes stare back at Ophelia but her mother's!

"How did you find me?" Ophelia asks as her mother hugs her tight in the drizzling rain.

"Little one, I will always find you," her mother says, and here Theresa always makes the joke that her mother made that line sound affectionate or threatening depending on how crazy Theresa had driven her that day.

The book ends with mother and child—*joey*—back in their burrow. When Theresa recites the last part—about how the rain continues but inside the burrow is warm and dry, how Ophelia's mother wraps a soft blanket around them both and they snuggle, how the last thing Ophelia hears before drifting to sleep is *you're home, safe and sound, safe and sound*—we weep. All of us, even the ones without parents. By all reports Netta hated her mother, *hated her*, and even she wipes away non-existent tears. We want to hear it again.

Theresa worries about her mother, and what's happened to her; if she believes Theresa is dead; if she believes she is still alive.

Theresa's favorite color is the fairy blue of forget-me-nots.

••••

We wish that there was a moment, a low so offensive that something in us snapped, and we summoned a power beyond ourselves. Snap, flare in our eyes, and rise, shackles broken, blowing that door off its hinges. Wouldn't that be satisfying.

••••

That's why you're here, isn't it? You've got a narrative hard-on, waiting for us to do something. To fight back. To glow. To infuse Monica with superhuman strength.

We can't. You knew from the first sentence that we are dead; why are you putting so much on us?

Do you think we didn't hope for the same?

At first we thought that between all of us our psychic energy could combine, and we could do something! We could break the chain, we could unlock the door. We could pick up a long stick, impale each of them and plant them by the side of the road for crows.

But really. If groups of women who died horribly had the ability to manifest supernatural

power, the world would be a very different place, don't you think?

In fact, you better hope we never do.

You leave us behind. Always. You write books about *them*. You can't stop trying to empathize with *them*. You hold *them* in your palm, in your heart, forever, but you abandon us in a lonely grave just like they do.

••••

Yes, some of us sold our bodies for money sometimes. We will not tell you who.

Are you bored? Are we *boring* you?

What would you like from us.

Would you like us to be wearing sacrificial white dresses and flower crowns? Would you like us to thank you, kiss your hand for listening?

Would you like us to be more *interesting*—more violent, more powerful, secretly able to murder our captors with a pinky?

Would you like to be like them?

Would you like to bite our breasts? Grab the inside of our thighs, hold us down until bruises raise from our skin like islands from the sea?

Fill us with your trash and say that it makes us trash?

You go ahead and tell us what you want.

We will ignore it. We are dead.

••••

This is Octavia. Her parents named her for the science fiction author, not the Shakespeare character. Ironically, she was addicted to reading ghost stories, couldn't get enough of them.

*Ghosts are usually women*, she says with a shrug. *Read into that what you will.*

Octavia's more frustrated than anyone by how powerless we are, because she's read about every other possibility. *We can't even be poltergeists? We can't even nudge a freaking pencil?*

When they had her, Octavia got a punch in that was magnificent. Full sucker, not the middling scratches most of us managed. Trevor, pathetic piece of shit, cried in pain over it and wore the bruise for a good two weeks. She paid for it.

Octavia's favorite color is the—yes, ghostly—silver-blue of the butterflies she chased when she was little.

••••

A small part of us, thin as white crescent on nails, wants Monica to die. Because we are so tired of watching. Because for her to survive when we are dead is unconscionable.

We wish our fate on no one. We wish our fate on everyone.

••••

That sound. Our heads swivel like owls’.

A car. A *car* is crunching up the weedy dirt road toward the building. A four-door sedan that does not belong to Rolly or Trevor.

We’re in the middle of the woods, but we’d be less surprised if a shark jawed its way up the drive. We’re so stunned that when Jenn asks what the hell’s going on, we have trouble moving our mouths.

The license plate signals that the car’s a rental. The driver and passenger are career-looking women. Blazers, blouses. *That jacket’s Prada*, Lily says out of nowhere, and we exchange glances to return to that little reveal later. The driver, a woman we peg as being in her thirties, gets out and scans the building, the tall whispering grass.

• • • •

The woman in the passenger seat holds her phone to different spots in the air and makes frustrated noises. She’s in her late twenties and she has the weary, irritated tone of someone who’s repeated herself all day. “There’s no reception out here, we’re going to be late.”

It hits us that the younger woman is the professional superior to the older one, and we think *damn, the job market’s messed up*—but we even miss that.

“It was just *weird*,” says the older one. She keeps a hand on the car roof. “Wasn’t just me, right? Those guys staring at her. It was creepy.”

“All men stare,” the younger woman rejoins, giving up and dropping her smartphone back into her tote. “That’s what they do.”

“It was creepy.”

“If we stopped for every creep, we’d never get anything done,” the younger one snaps. “You don’t even know what you saw.”

“Something just—”

“OK, not to dismiss your perspective or anything,” the younger one sounds as though she’s repeating something from an HR workshop. “But you’re overreacting—we’re late.”

The older one gestures. “That building—”

“Is probably a meth den. You saw her, that’s probably her jam. Their trucks aren’t even here.”

*They hide!* Theresa shrieks, and the rest of us jump—which is absurd, because what could happen to us now? But living habits die hard. *They hide the trucks!*

Raw-throat desperate she screams: *She’s in here!*

That breaks the spell of our daze, and then we’re all screaming, swinging down as far as we can from the building, waving our arms, trying to get the living women’s attention. *IN HERE, IN HERE, IN HERE, IN HERE*

“This is going to hurt our numbers,” the younger woman says, taking a deep breath, manager mode. “I don’t want to sound like a, you know, but if we don’t get on the road right now . . . like, I can’t *not* put that in your review.”

A flicker of fear across the other’s face; we watch the age-old woman’s war between intuition, pragmatism and self-preservation play out. “Alright,” she says finally. She skims

the low building for a last moment and then relents, climbing back into the driver's seat.

*INHEREINHEREINHERE.*

Neither even lifts their chin in clairvoyant pause as we scream our non-existent guts out. They back down the driveway like sun from the shadow of the earth.

••••

We see Monica even more tragically now. She almost had help. She almost had rescue.

Rolly's banned from starting the worst things, but that leaves a lot of things. Monica's doing everything she's supposed to do. She's fighting. With the least amount of slack, she's jabbing at him, rocking her weight, trying to throw him off balance, earn herself a chance.

But he's big, and he's done this before, and from the blood scrapes under the dark hair at her temple, she's already been hit in the head at least once today, which all of us can tell you impacts your whole system in ways you can't always foresee.

We watch, shredded and stripped like celery strings.

So many of us sat in that passenger's seat at one time or another. We'd see things, things that activated some primal part of our brain, *threat here*.

But if it was going to mess with our paychecks, with what people said about us . . .

Like she said. If we stopped every time a man was creepy, what *would* we ever get done?

Easier to smile. Easier to brush it off. Easier to roll our eyes at bitchy women who overreact to *everything*.

Easier to choose and defend the reality where nothing is wrong.

Easier to say some women belong in the basement.

Who put us here, really?

All of you.

All of us.

Maybe we deserve the monsters we choose not to slay.

••••

Reyna was obsessed with pomegranate-flavored things. Pomegranate in her lip balm. Pomegranate in her BB cream. Pomegranate in her shampoo, in her chocolate, in the drink she'd order at the bar.

*I don't care if I'm a basic bitch*, she tells us. *Pomegranate me up*.

One day she bought a real pomegranate from the grocery store, strange red round fruit with a flare sticking out the bottom of it like a trumpet.

What did she think?

*I didn't know what the fuck to do with it*, Reyna says, and that cracks us all up. Grinning: *That is a weird frickin fruit*.

Her favorite color is, *um, hell yeah*, pomegranate red.

••••

Sasha was earning her master's in social work. She cheated on her boyfriend and she wonders a lot if he ever found out. She worries that maybe after she disappeared the police targeted him or her lover as suspects.

*You cheated?* Sandy says to her, appalled, and we all throw our hands up because *Jesus Christ, Sandy.*

Sasha's favorite color is the pale blue of an open sky.

••••

Trevor killed Sandy because she told him to tuck in his shirt. That's what earned her the shackle, the chain, the futon and all the rest. She insists he didn't mean to, that she's not like *us*, and Trevor was just *crushed* about it afterward because he loved her so much.

But if you aid and abet murderers . . . can you be *that* surprised if you get murdered?

Sasha's her greatest defender, which astounds us, considering that Sandy lured her to the basement all on her own. When she heard what Sasha wanted to do with her life she tearfully "confessed" that she was in an abusive relationship and could Sasha come with her to get her things so she could escape?

As soon as Sasha set foot in the low building, she knew very bad things had happened there, things beyond her experience. Immediately she reached for her phone to call the police—but of course, no reception.

Sandy cried crocodile tears, begging, please just go with her to the basement for her things and then they'd go? *I don't think I can do this, please please please don't leave me.*

*I won't,* Sasha promised her, looping her arm through hers, holding her up and nodding. *You and me, we're in this together. I promise.*

Through the steel door. Down the stairs.

Just as they reached the bottom Sandy shoved and swung Sasha headfirst into a beam, and before she could regain her footing Sandy had shackled her as a "gift." Sasha had nearly torn her leg off when Trevor and Rolly pulled open the heavy steel door, Sandy twirling and declaring, *ta-da!*

And *still* Sasha never gives up on Sandy. Not an inch, defending her from every phantasmal beating and revenge we'd like to dole out.

A lot of us want to give Sasha a reality check, but Rachel disapproves, and generally we listen to her. *Sasha believed in helping others,* she says gently. *She bet her life on it.*

We still grumble about it, don't like it, considering that it's Sandy who benefits from us holding back. But who knows, maybe with therapy Sandy wouldn't have been such a piece of work.

Yeah, Sandy has a favorite color.

Who gives a shit.

*It's white,* she pipes up anyway. *Like a wedding gown.*

••••

We had wild hope, with the car there. But now there's nothing else to do except wait the long wait to take Monica in, welcome her as one of us. We open our arms, ready to embrace her.

• • • •

The car skids back up the drive.

The younger woman, red-faced, shouts as the older one shoves open the door. “The *second* we're in range I'm calling—”

And then we all hear Monica scream.

• • • •

We see their heads raise like prey animals. Watch them lock eyes, strip everything that came before. Track their thoughts like rabbit footprints in the snow. *Danger. Get out, don't get involved, call the police at most, and only from a safe distance away.*

“Call the police,” the older one says, vaulting herself out of the car.

“But you—” the younger one now seems so much younger.

“Back up and try by the exit,” the older one responds.

In their exchange we learn their names—Danielle is the older one. Kelsey is the younger. *Danielle. Kelsey. Danielle. Kelsey.* We repeat their names to each other like we're passing buckets of water down a fire line.

Danielle's taken off her sensible heels, hurry-creeping to the door in pantyhose that's a couple shades darker than the tan of her skin. Kelsey, face gone pale, climbs into the driver's seat, backing up with one hand on the steering wheel and the other holding her smartphone in front of her.

*She should drive the car right into the building!* Reyna screams in frustration. Maybe she's right, but here we are.

Back to Danielle. She's shaking, holding her sensible heels with one hand as she quietly opens the rusty screen door. Monica's cries burst from the basement like scalding water.

Danielle stops in the arch of the grubby kitchen and we know that she knows: this is her last chance to turn back. We can tell she really wants to.

She swallows. She keeps going.

• • • •

She reaches the heavy steel door that leads to the basement and glances at the spade keeping it propped open.

*Bring something with you,* we yell at her, gesturing to the various items lying around the kitchen she could use as a weapon (we know they could be used as weapons because so many were used on us). The discarded pipe in the corner. Knives. Garden shears. Kaitlyn's leg brace propped up against the wall.

Yet she doesn't, not anything other than the heels she clutches with one hand. Angling her

body carefully she steps over the spade onto the steps.

Rolly must assume it's Trevor padding down because he doesn't turn right away. Not until Danielle can't hold back a stifled shriek does he whip his head around.

Monica, our girl, our *girl*, seizes the opportunity and kicks Rolly's legs out from under him.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if he cracked his head on the concrete and died instantly?— but no, all his critical parts bounce off the futon and he rolls back up quick, frantic.

Now it's messy. Monica's yelling at Danielle, pleading for *the key, do you have the key get the key*. But Monica's having trouble speaking and Danielle just found a battered woman chained in a basement.

We cheer when Danielle hits Rolly's head with her sensible heels and he yelps like the weasel he is.

But scrawny or not, he's still bigger than Danielle, and he's done this before. He launches himself at her and she's not fast enough to evade, hitting the floor with a crash that pushes a high grunt from her lungs. Up again, Rolly yanks her clear of Monica's reach.

He kicks her ribs as Monica shrieks at him to stop, hands to her head, astonished at how badly things have turned. Rolly kicks for a good while before pausing.

Danielle contracts into a ball on the floor, paralyzed with pain and anticipation of the next kick. Monica's backed into the concrete wall, chain rattling. Rolly loops his belt he'd removed earlier around Danielle's neck and draws it tight, hauling her whole body up with the force.

*No.*

*NO.*

*NONONONONO*

We scream screams that no one hears, howl like wolves denied the moon.

Two of them, *two of them against one*, and still—

• • • •

Rachel was the first. She'd been having such a terrible day. Her apartment had been flooded by a malfunctioning water heater, her landlord threatened to evict her when she asked for money to live elsewhere temporarily, and she wasn't able to clean up before her job interview.

She went to the interview anyway, forced herself to look the interviewers square in the eye and say she wasn't having a good day, but she showed up. *That's what you're supposed to do, isn't it? Show up no matter what?*

Except the junior interviewer looked at her soiled suit pants, crinkled his nose and said that really, she should have rescheduled. The senior interviewer seemed more sympathetic, but with cringing acknowledgement—*poor thing, you tried*— rather than admiration for her doggedness.

Yet Rachel answered the questions as best she could. *If they were listening to me*, she says, *they'd know I knew what I was talking about.*

Dejected, Rachel sat at the diner scrolling through her dying phone, calculating how much it would cost to take the bus versus hailing a ride share. How far she could realistically walk. It was raining.

(For the life of us, we can't figure out why Rachel couldn't make it as an artist; she draws in the fog and she's really good. Shouldn't she have been rich from selling her paintings? She tells us being "a creative" is very hard.)

So there she was, weighing her options while the waitress gave her dagger eyes for taking a booth and only ordering coffee and for being so dirty, when three young-ish people walked in, two men and a woman.

Desperate, Rachel asked if they had a phone charger. Rather than flicking their eyes away, they seemed interested in her, happy to help. They asked her questions and listened attentively to her answers. They were so nice. Trevor told a funny story about how Rolly filled his truck with chickens as a prank. *The smell!* His voice rose over their laughter.

*We're going that way!* Trevor said when Rachel mentioned her neighborhood—vaguely, and certainly not her exact street name; she knew the rules of strangers. *Come with us,* Rolly urged, *save your money.*

If it had just been the two men, she never would have considered accepting such an offer. But there was Sandy, nodding along and smiling at her. *We'll take you.*

When Rachel hoisted herself up by the handle above the truck door and swung into the backseat they were all laughing—*don't worry, this isn't the chicken truck*—as though they were old friends, giddy on the threshold of a road trip. She remembers catching Trevor and Rolly exchange glances and hoping they weren't having second thoughts about letting a stranger ride with them. She couldn't believe how kind they were.

Since she was first, they were impulsive, sloppy, manic; she only lasted three days. People who don't know what the fuck they're talking about would call that lucky.

*Wouldn't it be something, if I'd gotten the job?* Rachel asks us sometimes. *Wouldn't that be something?*

••••

When we entered the dark, it brought us no comfort. Nothing solid, nothing to grip. When we touched our left-behind bodies—thin, hollow, sunken—nothing happened. When they took hold of our corpses, rough, our minds collapsed, became nothing but wail, our thoughts like our elbows knocking against the stairs as our bodies were dragged where we could not follow.

Because who cares about the girls who do not make it?

Not you. You want the girls who overcome. The girls who win. Or at least, the girls who survive. All our names together will only make *them* more memorable; it lends nothing to us.

It's an awful thing, to witness your own descent into irrelevance. Before our eyes our lives dissolved, liquefied, plunged down grates into the dark.

*I was never a person.*

*I was never more than meat.*

*My life meant nothing.*

*I was nothing, I was nothing Iwasnothing—*

And then Rachel, setting herself before us, solid as stone. *What's your favorite color?* she asked, guiding us through the concrete where we couldn't see.

She'd have to repeat her question several times before we could focus enough. To answer was hands pushing aside heavy water, forced us to shake out the folds, our memories like heavy cloth, *thwack*. Unroll our lives over a desk and down the hall, our fingers instinctively skimming toward our childhoods, when color mattered the most—crayon nubs, cheap markers revived with spit, rainbows staining the sides of our palms—or did that ever go away? Tracing the myriad threads after, the colors searing so bright we blinked.

If we answered with one word, Rachel would press us gently for more. *Purple? What kind of purple? Pink? What kind of pink?*

Her favorite color is the red of life, even now after everything that was done to her. When she was young, her mother had to deliver her friend's baby in their kitchen, and Rachel never forgot the squalling life-full scene, the red on her and the red in the baby's cheeks.

•••

A noise from the heavy door like a bell into still air, breaking the spell. *Oh no, Trevor?*  
No. It's Kelsey.

Barreling down the basement steps clutching something in each hand and the teal key coil round her wrist. When Rolly lunges toward her she flings something at him, and though he ducks she lands a strong spray of mace into his ear.

Hitting him in the eye would have been ideal, but we'll take the ear because he rears back, pawing at the side of his head and coughing.

Through the arresting sensation of pepper spray Danielle is on her feet again shoving him off balance. Kelsey aims the mace and pulls the trigger—again, missing his eyes but landing some directly in his mouth, which from his reaction is quite fine with us.

While he struggles to right himself, Danielle draws her arm down and hits him with the spade handle in back of the head.

Rolly topples over and we think *don't let him fool you*—but Danielle's way ahead of us, turning the spade around and striking him again and again in the head with the square edge.

Monica's fixated on the key—how can she not? She's spent an eternity staring into the holes on her shackle lock, imagining its curves, willing it into existence.

"The key," she says to Kelsey, and gestures to her wrist. Kelsey seizes the lock, draws the key with the carefulness of a seamstress threading a needle. They're all still coughing from the pepper spray, gasping through watering eyes and gummy throats.

Danielle continues making square-shaped strikes until Rolly's skull is completely crushed in—and even after kicking his lifeless form three times, she still puts two fingers to his neck to be sure there will be no horror movie miraculous awakening.

We love Danielle.

*Where is he?* Zoe demands, hovering over the mash of Rolly's head. *Where is he? He's*

*trapped with us now, right?*

The thought a branch of lightning, exhilarating some of us and petrifying others. We gather, witches-to-cauldron-like, watching Rolly's body stop completely.

For naught, as Rolly does not join us. That Rolly could leave this world without having to face us lights us with rage. Another denial. Another injustice.

We're brought back by the *click* of the key, of the pneumatic *hhh* of the shackle opening. Monica draws her freed leg close to her chest and rubs the angry red imprint on her ankle.

"The other one," she chokes out. "The other one has a gun."

"Police?" Danielle asks through a cough. She shrugs off her blazer and wordlessly hands it to Monica, who quickly slips her arms through the holes and covers herself.

Kelsey's doubled over, wiping the tears and snot off her face with the bottom of her expensive camisole. "No," she says guiltily. "I had to come back, I had this feeling—"

"Good thing," says Danielle hoarsely, slinging Kelsey in a brief half-hug before turning away for another round of coughing. The force makes the spade she'd been white-knuckle gripping slip from her fingers, clattering wet on the floor.

*The spade?* It hits all of us at the same time, including Monica.

*The spade the spade thespade.*

The spade from the top of the stairs. The spade that was the only thing propping open that heavy steel door. The door that only Trevor can open from the outside once it closes.

• • •

"The *door*," Monica shrieks with such alarm that immediately Kelsey and Danielle take off up the stairs toward the thin sliver of sunlight outlining the doorframe.

Miraculously, the very thing that makes the door so deadly is what saves them; it's so difficult to move on the hinge that the lockbolt didn't fully enter the bed. They're not locked in.

Leaving the problem of pushing it open. The stairway swirls with the lingering smell of pepper spray and blood. Kelsey shoves and the rebound force almost sends her down the stairs. The door doesn't budge.

"*Fuck*," Danielle's voice a wail.

"We only have to open it wide enough for us to get through," says Kelsey with the determination of a commander telling her line to hold—*huh, maybe she's a good manager after all*—and slams her side into the door again. Down the steps: "We'll need that shovel back."

*Spade*, we all correct automatically, which the living girls ignore.

Monica grunts, wipes blood from her nose and staggers to her feet as Danielle jams her shoulder next to Kelsey's. They groan with the effort, struggle to keep their footing (they are at the top of the stairs after all, and the last thing anyone needs is a girl with a broken back).

On the fourth step Monica slips in her own blood, almost plummeting down, but she rights herself, gets back to it, uses the spade like a climber's pick.

Their adrenaline is waning. The door is so heavy. They're weak from the pepper spray

messing with their eyes and nose and lungs and skin, hurt from the struggle in ways they can and can't name.

*Hurry.* Trevor will be back soon, and he has a gun. *Hurry.*

The living girls strain themselves heaving out of sync, watching the opening widen slower than a watch's secondhand and narrow again.

They pull back, exhausted. Danielle clutches her midsection where Rolly kicked her.

"Count of three," says Kelsey in between shuddering breaths, glaring at the steel under her fist. She turns to the others. "On three, we give it every-fucking-thing we've got."

Danielle sets her side in place, positions her feet. Monica aligns herself against the bottom left of the door, ready to push and stick the spade back in the opening as soon as it's wide enough. They nod at each other, bees thrumming a map we cannot follow.

Do we hear the sound of Trevor's tires creeping up the drive, or is it our imagination?

*Ready?*

We know we are dead. We know we can do nothing.

*One*

Yet here we are, all of us but one swooping toward them, arms outstretched, palms out.

*Two*

*Sandy*, Sasha barks, and to our shock Sandy listens, gliding down and looping her arm with Sasha's. We hear the promise: *Together.*

Seeing them does something to all of us, twist, splits us from everything that came before. Not forgiveness; no, we'll never forgive. This is something thicker. Fiercer.

In unison we turn to the heavy steel door, driven as beak to eggshell. Sparking, swelling with all the colors we were, all the colors we'll never be, all the colors we want for them. A crackling spectra of loss, our pigments rich down canvas.

Stacking like firewood on top of each other, we set ourselves against the cold steel, press our non-existent hands above and below the shoulders of the living. Kelsey's voice, coil to spring, gong to bell, match to flint, noose to shove. All of us together, *push.*

©2021 by E.A. Petricone.

---

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

E.A. Petricone writes dark and strange things. Her work has appeared in or is forthcoming from *Apparition Literary Magazine*, *Slice Magazine*, *All Worlds Wayfarer*, *Metaphorosis Magazine*, *Liminality*, *Triangulation: Extinction*, *Allegory*, *The Writer's Chronicle*, and other marvelous places. She holds a BA from Hampshire College and an MFA from Lesley University. She lives in Massachusetts. You can find her on Twitter @eapetricone or at eapetricone.com.

[To learn more about the author and this story, read the Author Spotlight](#)

# The Girl with the Voice Made of Stone

Anuel Rodriguez | 460 words

*This poem came about after reading more of Aileen Wuornos' story and thinking of the ways society makes monsters out of victims. It is my first attempt at a dark fairy tale in verse.*

—AR

I.

climbed out of an abandoned car deep in a forest in Michigan after sleeping through another cold night alone. Her bones were stiff and she could feel winter dyeing its teeth in her bloodstream. She had no basket of food to deliver to her grandmother (who had recently died of liver failure). No wine or cake. No makeup to cover her facial burns or the frostbite scars on her hands and feet. She was homeless, although she lived with a pack of wolves sheltered in the feral white spaces of her skull. Her only possession was a single silver key without a lock. She made her way to her grandfather's house nearby. She broke in through a window and found him sleeping in his bed. She could smell the alcohol on his breath and the soot in his lungs. She waited until he stirred before she screamed and watched his skin and eyes harden and turn the color of dry cement.

II.

This is actually the second time I wrote this—I threw away the first, unsatisfactory version years ago. But this is one of those ideas that doesn't give up easily, and the final lines haunted me until I wrote it again. She had inherited a curse from her mother that, once activated by the touch of a man, turned her hay-blond hair into an ecosystem of bats and bees and made the sound of her voice so hideous that any man who heard it turned into stone. Just one drop of her blood in the ocean was said to be enough to petrify seaweed, birthing new pink-red skeletons beneath the surface. With nicotine wings and pool cue claws, she drifted like marine snow and fell into the arms of older sinewy men. In Florida between 1989 and 1990, she murdered seven men by shooting them at point-blank range, turning their exit wounds into blooming red geodes. Their bodies were later discovered in the woods like naked terracotta warriors. Police found condoms, blonde hairs, and rubies in their abandoned cars.

III.

- A) Did taking the lives of those men make her feel like Medusa holding up Perseus' head?
- B) Did it make her feel like she was killing her grandfather over and over again?
- C) Maybe she felt like a monster formed from the ribs of dreaming men.

D) Maybe she felt like the scarlet fear in their loins.

©2021 by Anuel Rodriguez.

---

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Anuel Rodriguez is a Mexican-American poet and freelance writer living in the San Francisco Bay Area. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Cincinnati Review*, *Glass: A Journal of Poetry*, *PANK*, *decomp*, and elsewhere.

## Hairy Legs and All

Stephen Graham Jones | 1500 words

Like the time you put the shoes on you hadn't worn for maybe two years but you just saw there in the corner of the closet and you wondered why you'd stopped wearing them since you kind of liked who you were that summer or at least you remember that summer favorably, and these shoes were definitely part of it, so, trying to maybe live a little bit of that time again, you hauled them out, stepped both feet into them, right first then left, like always, only what you didn't realize but should have considered was that maybe a dark forgotten shoe-cave like that in the way back of the closet might be the perfect cool musty place for a tarantula to sleep one off for a month or two, however spiders live or hibernate or do whatever they do, which is to say, not some normal little spider going golden-pale in the winter from no food, no blood, but a full-on hairy-legged tarantula, which generally makes you kind of freak the hell out anyway and climb whoever happens to be standing next to you, *that* kind of spider, the one that usually just nests in the back of your mind, waiting for a slack moment to pounce, and your toes in your right sock didn't just blunder into this suddenly very real spider, they pretty much crushed it, and cranking the laces down tighter probably only hurt it more, six of its eight legs surely cracked beyond saving, the other two crammed behind it, useless, but in the last moments when it sensed its death coming down through the mouth of its perfect cave, it had enough time to turn to face this attacker, your foot, your toes, such that, when it was dying, and before you could *untie* the knot in your laces you'd blundered into because your fingers were having the panic attack of all panic attacks, that desperate lashing-out tarantula had time to bite into your longest toe six times, lacerating the tip, each incision another wasp sting at least, except worse, because your mind was working fast, you knew *exactly* what was in this shoe, you knew you should have shaken it, tapped its heel on the floor, maybe paid to have an x-ray shot just in case, but spiders are soft tissue, that would have been stupid, only its sharp little mandibles would have shown up, or whatever it was biting you with, its rack of shiny eyes wheeling in the darkness, its own juices soaking into the white of your sock, and because you hadn't gotten the shoe off yet to look, to see, this was still just a "spider," and for all you knew, because this was just your luck, it was probably a brown recluse, why not, the *king* of all brown recluses, meaning your foot was going to go necrotic, you were going to have a crater of rotted skin where your toes used to be, and no more sandals now, no more bare-footing it to the mailbox, those days were over, summer's gone forever, you're in winter now for the duration, and you were hopping backward across your bedroom with all this reeling through your head, you were yipping and starting to cry, and when the knot *still* wouldn't come out, was only getting worse and tighter—another bite, sting, whatever spiders do—you went on the attack, kicked the side of the bed with your hurting foot, then the wall, then the frame of the door three times hard which started the dog barking in the other room but screw him, he should have found this monster in your shoe weeks ago, he should have sniffed it out, chewed it up, and then Sid's footsteps were pounding in from the kitchen because what is all this clamor about, and the main thing in the

world you were wishing for right then please please please was a button you could push to take back the last minute, you were wishing you'd donated these stupid shoes, you were wishing that, that—you were wishing that summer *hadn't* been a good enough summer that you'd want to remember it by slipping into a shoe from that time, and that was when the coldness tunneled up from your foot, along the inside of your thigh, across your pelvis and into your heart, the back of your throat, your eyes, your memory, and it was poison, you knew it was poison, that it was traveling along nerve pathways or hormone highways or it didn't matter, but then it went cold enough that your foot suddenly didn't hurt anymore, was just numb, which you assumed was some kindness nature had programmed into this venom, some way of calming the prey so as to make the end soft, ease it—you—into death, and maybe part of that was your senses dulling, because now the dog wasn't barking anymore, and now Sid's footsteps stilled, and the smells of dinner were somehow gone too, meaning your nose and your ears were fading, probably meaning your vision would be next, hold on, you're about to fall backward into some forever black void, and instead of spending your last few rods and cones on Sid's worried face coming down the hall for you, you looked down to this guilty shoe, this traitor of a shoe, and your fingers, calmer now that you're accepting this death, they finally beat that idiot knot and you slung the shoe away with a yell, one that's probably going to stop Sid cold in the doorway, because you're not supposed to get mad enough to throw things anymore, you're supposed to be past that, only . . . she should have been there by now, and the dog should have been here even before that, which made about zero sense now that you were thinking about it, so to prove to her that she should have hurried to save you, to at least witness whatever violent thing was happening in the bedroom, you padded over to that shoe, flipped it upright with a coat hanger and tapped the heel on the ground to pour the spider out, but when it didn't pour like a dead spider should you angled the shoe up, held the tongue out of the way to look inside, and there that tarantula was, bunched up in the toe like you knew it would be, hairy legs and all, and it was glaring hard at you with its eight eyes, with its eight *unburst* eyes, which is when you finally clocked that all its legs were working and functional too, they're what was holding it there against your tapping, they're what was keeping it from shaking out, so, holding this shoe as far from you as possible, you carried it in to the other room like evidence, already forming the story for Sid, making it even more dramatic and terrifying than it was, only, only—not only had she not made it to the bedroom yet, but neither were the black and white barn photographs all along the hallway, the ones she brought when she moved in, and the dog she'd brought's raggy bed wasn't by the sliding glass door in the living room anymore either, meaning your place, you had to realize, had to admit, was pretty nearly what it was before you even met her, which was . . . that's why that summer was so great, that's the summer you met her, that's when you first *had* these shoes, except, just now, in a fit of pain and rage and shortsightedness, you wished on every star you'd ever seen or would see, you offered your soul and more in trade, anything to stop this pain, this abject and all-encompassing terror, and for once, maybe because you were so desperate, so insistent, or maybe because something with a sense of humor was listening, you wished this pain and terror away just like you wanted, just like you needed, only, doing that involved going back and back to *why* you were going to have put that shoe on in the first

place, and now that magical summer, it's gone, you're now in a branch of your life where that summer passed uneventful, like all the summers before, like all the summers waiting up ahead, and the only thing you got for that is that the second toe on your right foot never got bit into by a spider, and when you looked into that shoe for that spider again, to wish harder, to wish it all back, please, undo this trade, it was gone of course, never to return. Like Sid. Like everything.

©2018 by Stephen Graham Jones.

---

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Stephen Graham Jones is the author of twenty-five or so novels and collections, and there's some novellas and comic books in there as well. Most recent are *The Only Good Indians* and *Night of the Mannequins*. Next is *My Heart is a Chainsaw*. Stephen lives and teaches in Boulder, Colorado.

[To learn more about the author and this story, read the Author Spotlight](#)

# And Lucy Fell

Erica Ruppert | 557 words

*This is actually the second time I wrote this—I threw away the first, unsatisfactory version years ago. But this is one of those ideas that doesn't give up easily, and the final lines haunted me until I wrote it again.*

—ER

If I am mad, it is because I cannot taste your mouth.

These nights end too soon, each dawn coming without your touch. You are so close. I hear your nails scratch against the walls, I hear you breathing, out there. I open my mouth in hope, press it to the walls that separate us, kiss the cold wet stone. No matter my imaginings, it does not taste of you.

If I am mad, it is because I cannot reach past the bars to touch you.

Cold iron holds you back, sealing your hot sharp mouth away from me. Your bandy arms. Your grasping hands.

Every night I know you are there, just beyond the damned iron bars. Waiting.

But the smell of iron cannot bury the smell of you. Your reek is like a smoky weight in my lungs. Your breath is vapor on the black air, rich as old roses, heavy as peonies. I am drunk with you. You are heady enough to sustain me through any madness, with your rough, red sighs and your hard, white teeth.

I cannot touch you. But I have not been idle while I wait. Pining is for the weak.

Every night I scrape away at the stone where the bars are socketed, wearing away my fingerprints, turning the stone to mud with my thin blood.

And my blood *is* thin, wasted and dilute with waiting. How many times have I ripped my own veins wide with my own imperfect teeth, to wash the stone sill for you, to give you my strength to lap up?

And all that has come of it is a black tar on the windowsill where it dried untasted, and my teeth pulled out to save me from myself.

They tied me to my bed, but even without teeth I could chew through their ties. When they chained me I twisted like a worm on a hook, wearing holes in my skin, straining the metal until it snapped. They did not try to bind me again. They locked the door, and they did not come back. I think they hoped that these walls and these bars would hold me. But enough time will crumble anything they can devise. Even this cage.

Last night, near dawn, the left-hand bar turned loose in its socket. I spent the day awake, worrying it, greasing the stone with what seeps from me. Now the bar is free.

I would fly to you, but before they left me alone for good, they cut my wings away. No amount of persistence will grow them back. I have tried.

So now when night comes down again, I will remove the bar, and wait for you one last time. And when I finally taste you in the air outside, I will sing out, Come in, love, come in, and show me what you have done with the gifts I gave you. Wrap me in your arms and claws

and tattered wings. Let me see your teeth.

©2021 by Erica Ruppert.

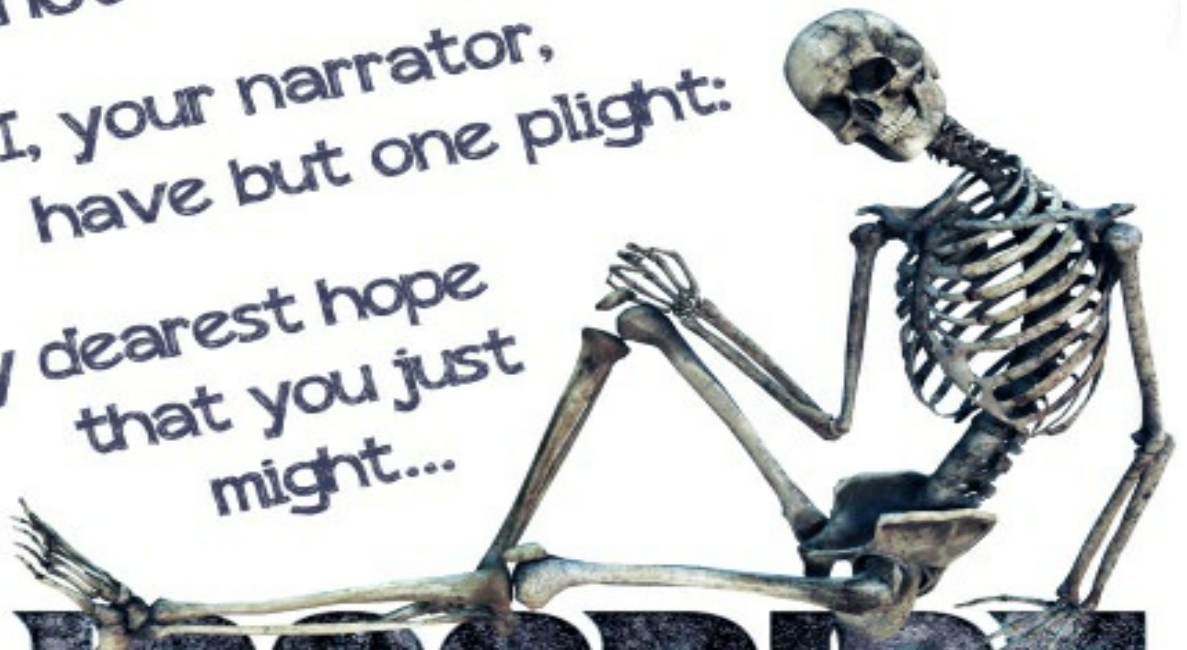
---

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Erica Ruppert lives in northern New Jersey with her husband and several spoiled cats. Her work has appeared in magazines including *Unnerving* and *Weirdbook*, on *PodCastle*, and in multiple anthologies. Her novella, *Sisters in Arms*, will be published by Trepidatio Publishing in 2021. She is currently working on an unplanned yet persistent novel. When not writing weird fiction and occasional poetry, she reads a great deal of nonfiction and gardens with more enthusiasm than skill. Her book reviews and other musings can be found at Erica Ruppert's NerdGoblin.

**NONFICTION**

These NIGHTMARE stories  
give me such a fright.  
Every dark tale is a gruesome delight.  
But I'll not disassemble; I'll be forthright—  
for I, your narrator,  
have but one plight:  
It is my dearest hope  
that you just  
might...



**SUBSCRIBE**  
**TO OUR**  
**EBOOK**  
**EDITION**  
**AND SAVE** **33%**

[NIGHTMARE-MAGAZINE.COM/SUBSCRIBE](http://NIGHTMARE-MAGAZINE.COM/SUBSCRIBE)

# The H Word: Horror, Through Colored Lenses

Justin C. Key | 1212 words

*What scares you, Justin? What is it that you're trying to say?*

I was halfway through the first draft of “One Hand in The Coffin” (*Strange Horizons*) when I discovered what my story was really about. It had just turned midnight on July twenty-third, the anniversary of my cousin’s murder, and one of the main characters had his name. The horror wasn’t the possessed therapy puppet. It was a society that demands multiple jobs from a single mother to make ends meet. It was the lack of access to mental health services in black and brown communities. It was loss and hopelessness. The puppet just gave it all a name.

The black experience of racism, I found, is horrific. Why make up monsters when there are so many to fear in real life?

Of course, this wasn’t always the case for me. As a child, I enjoyed a good horror story as much as anybody. My love for the genre started with R.L. Stine’s *Goosebumps* series. I devoured these fun little stories about evil dummies, cursed cameras, and monster’s blood. As an anxious kid who worried about death and dogs and the dark, I looked forward to being “safe-scared.” It felt good to exhaust my fears on something I knew couldn’t actually harm me. Did I notice that none of Stine’s main characters were black like me? No. At least, not consciously.

As I grew, so did my tastes. *Gremlins*, *Arachnophobia*, *Child’s Play*. Stephen King, Clive Barker, Peter Straub. Surviving a horror novel was like conquering the big-kid rides at the amusement park. An uncomfortable self-awareness crept in, however, while watching *Scream 2*. I instantly aligned with the opening scene’s young black couple. When they were killed off in the first five minutes, it left me with a feeling of “oh . . . this wasn’t made for me.” Suddenly, I wasn’t “conquering” the ride after all. I was the kid crying inconsolably from just outside the gate, my distress meant to add to the triumph felt by those who stepped past me and onto the loading platform. Perhaps before I had protected myself from this by inserting my brown skin into the written narratives. Now, in full color on the big screen, it was undeniable: I was either a prop for white entertainment or watching from the sideline.

This epiphany tainted the genre. Where *were* the people who looked like me, after all? I wouldn’t like the answer. All too often, horror has been a tool to reinforce the principles of white supremacy. Monsters in fiction and film—from King Kong to Xenomorphs to Freddy Krueger—represented the unknown and the misunderstood, stripped of history or context, there only to frighten and justify any measures required to defeat them. They allowed the irrational but ubiquitous fear of black people to fester unchecked in society’s imaginations without triggering white guilt. Once the monster was suppressed, society could return to a “normal,” safe existence.

These portrayals have lasting psychological impacts. I saw it when I ended our family outing early after my five-year-old son’s white playmates chose him to be the monster in a game of playground tag. I felt it when my Uber driver loudly refused me service at a New

York airport and for a second I thought that maybe—just maybe—I really *was* the villain. I see it continuously in the news every time someone “feared for their life” when faced with a black person just trying to live.

Lacking this crucial understanding of race in horror at the beginning of my career left me stranded in the genre. Although I had grown up in a black home, went to black schools, and lived in black neighborhoods, my first attempt at a horror novel centered on a white family. I crafted what I thought was a standard haunted house, replete with gruesome ghosts and capped off with the mandatory twist ending. Only it wasn't scary. As I reflected, I wondered how I had gone some hundred thousand words and multiple drafts without incorporating my blackness. No black main characters. No inner city setting. No community pride mixed in with societal fears. A recurring song throughout the novel was from a genre I didn't even *like*. Fiction writing can be a window into one's psyche, revelatory in what's put on and left off the page. What exactly, then, was I trying to escape?

I came to horror as a naive tourist in a xenophobic world that centered whiteness. Now, as an active participant to the genre, I challenge myself with two questions: One, what scares me, and two, what do I have to say about it? When I was first starting out, I thought it was ghosts and the undead. But they were only as frightening as the human experience that inspired them. Stephen King once commented that the idea for *Pet Sematary* came from just barely stopping his young son from chasing a loose ball into highway traffic. What if he hadn't been able to grab that shirt? What if he'd been a second too late? The horror isn't having people come back from the dead. The horror is in losing a child and not being able to deal with that.

The black experience is frightening, cutting, and can evoke a level of discomfort only the truth can assuage. Who needs monsters? Well, we do, to make our experience more digestible. Horror—and speculative fiction in general—allows art to relieve us from the hard truths of our reality by juxtaposing with both the supernatural and the macabre. They warn us in “safe-scared” spaces what humanity is capable of. What *racism* is capable of doing to black and brown bodies, legacy, and mental wellness. My upcoming novella *Spider King* (Serial Box) is my blackness's answer to *The Fly*. It takes the historically demonized “other” and makes society the monster. I attempted something similar in *The Perfection of Theresa Watkins* (Tor.com). I took two things usually seen as menacing in America—black people and those struggling with mental illness—and made their experience of society the horror. By the end of my stories, the so-called “monsters” are the least to fear.

It's all also a bait and switch, to be sure. Maybe I want you to learn something about my experience, because a world with a little more understanding is a little less horrifying for those who are historically and chronically misunderstood. How popular would *Lovecraft Country* be if it were just about racism in the Jim Crow South? How about if *Watchmen* was just about the Tulsa Race Massacre? Horror, in a sense, may be my way to lure you onto a faulty plane and give you something familiar as you buckle your seatbelt and settle in for the ride. And during the flight I'll attempt to give you a little bit of me through some tough-love turbulence. Hopefully we'll land safely on the other side, together.

---

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Justin C. Key is a speculative fiction writer, psychiatrist, and a graduate of Clarion West 2015. His short stories have appeared and are forthcoming in *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, *Strange Horizons*, *Tor.com*, *Escape Pod*, and *Interstellar Flight Magazine*. He is currently working on a near-future novel inspired by his medical training. His novella, *Spider King*, is set to be released by Serial Box in early 2021. When Justin isn't writing, working in the hospital, or exploring Los Angeles with his wife, he's chasing after his two young (and energetic!) sons and marveling over his newborn daughter.

## **Interview: Hailey Piper**

**Gordon B. White | 4294 words**

Hailey Piper is the author of *The Worm and His Kings*, *The Possession of Natalie Glasgow*, *Benny Rose*, *the Cannibal King*, and more. She is a member of the HWA, and her short fiction appears in *Daily Science Fiction*, *Flash Fiction Online*, *The Arcanist*, *Dark Matter Magazine*, *Year's Best Hardcore Horror*, and elsewhere. Once hailing from the haunted woods of New York, she now lives with her wife in Maryland, where they spend weekends summoning goat monsters and singing to the moon. Find Hailey on Twitter via @HaileyPiperSays or at haileypiper.com.

**First off, congratulations on a very busy 2020! Last year saw the release of two books—*Benny Rose*, *The Cannibal King* (Unnerving Press) and *The Worm and His Kings* (Off Limits Press)—as well as quite a few short stories. For our readers who aren't yet familiar with your work, however, could you introduce yourself?**

I'm never sure how to answer once my books have been stated, but in a nutshell: I'm Hailey Piper, and I write horror and dark fiction. I've had stories in *Year's Best Hardcore Horror*, *Daily Science Fiction*, *The Arcanist*, *Flash Fiction Online*, *Tales to Terrify*, and numerous anthologies. I used to creep around the haunted woods of New York, but now I creep around the apartment I share with my wife in Maryland.

**You've amassed quite a bibliography over the last few years—your website lists over fifty pieces of short fiction published or slated to appear between 2018 and 2021. What is your writing background? What kind of advice do you have for others who aspire to similar productivity?**

I've been writing since I was seven or eight, somewhat prompted by reading *Jurassic Park* by Michael Crichton, but writing didn't become a passion until I was sixteen and read Stephen King's *It*. If I've partway figured out what I'm doing in the slightest, that's only come in the last couple of years. There are many myths about productivity. I believe the most important thing writers can do is know themselves. "Write every day" sounds nice if that best nurtures your creativity, but not everyone's the same. I know people who write only on weekday evenings, or who take month-long breaks between two-month periods of rapid writing onslaughts. A writer who forces themselves to work under someone else's process isn't going to be productive; they're going to be resentful. Finding out your personal process is the best way to be productive.

**It looks like 2021 is also shaping up to be a big one in terms of new releases, as you have**

**both a novel and a story collection scheduled for this year. What can you tell us about your upcoming novel, *Queen of Teeth* (Rooster Republic/Strangehouse Books)? What's it about, and how did it come to be?**

Funny enough, the story seed for *Queen of Teeth* hit when I began writing *The Worm and His Kings* and ended up having almost nothing to do with where the story ultimately went. The main character, Yolanda “Yaya” Betancourt, pretty much took over my plans. *Queen of Teeth* is a body horror novel that begins with Yaya discovering a growth inside her after a one-night stand. Circumstances escalate beyond her control while trying to figure out the source, and she ends up on the run from authorities. Her troubles only grow as the thing inside her changes. The world of the book is a little off from ours, with historical events differing from the late '80s onwards. Readers will be in for an odd experience.

**You're also scheduled to release your first collection in 2021—*Unfortunate Elements of My Anatomy* (The Seventh Terrace). That's an incredibly evocative title, so could you tell us about how you came to choose that and how it ties into your work?**

Originally, I meant to name the collection after its opening short story, “Feast for Small Pieces,” which appeared last year in *Year's Best Hardcore Horror, Volume 5* from Red Room Press. While talking to my wife about bodily stuff, because women's situations with our bodies often involve some horror in my experience, I phrased it as “dealing with unfortunate elements of my anatomy,” and she told me to write that down. Credit goes to her from snatching that in the moment. It suits the stories, many of them involving issues with the body, its changes, or how it acts in tandem or apart from our minds, while exploring queer horror and the monstrous feminine.

**What was your process in pulling together and arranging the stories for *Unfortunate Elements of My Anatomy*? You have quite a back catalog of stories, so how did you choose which ones to include? Did you aim for a broad sampling, perhaps, or is *Unfortunate Elements of My Anatomy* more focused on a particular area?**

Laura Mauro noted with their collection *Sing Your Sadness Deep* that they didn't want to collect all of their stories to a chronological point, but to gather what they felt was their strongest work to date. That seemed wise to me; you only get one first collection. I listed out everything, prioritized, and looked for connecting thematic tissue (and which stories I would have the rights for, of course). Granted, I put this collection together in early 2020, and I'm proud of every story to be published since, but to keep shifting the table of contents would mean never publishing. Eventually, you have to push the book out the door, same as when it's one long story. I tried to balance length and tone throughout, mixing longer stories with flash fiction, balancing severe tales like “The Law of Conservation of Death” against more

humorous ones like “I’m Not a Chainsaw Kind of Girl, But . . .” and then acknowledging that all of this might get thrown out the window by readers who like to hop around out of order.

**Since you’ve had so many stories published in so many venues, it can be hard for readers to keep up. Are there any stories in the collection that you’re particularly pleased to be able to offer a second life and a chance to reach a broader audience?**

Absolutely! While a handful of stories are available free to read online, others appeared early, like “The Burning of the Blueberries,” and that story of a trans man seeking friendship in a secret society largely went unnoticed. “Candyland” appeared in a February 2020 anthology that was later de-published, so few readers even had a chance to check out a world where teenage girls want to be turned into candy and eaten. Likewise “Hairy Jack” or “Forgive the Adoring Beast.” I’m excited readers will get a chance to check them out at last.

**One of the benefits and downsides to horror is that it lends itself well to standalone stories and novels. Do you have any interest in exploring more connected works or even a series at some point? Or do you like being able to start anew with each piece?**

Connecting tissue has certainly crossed my mind before. I’ve had readers ask for follow-ups or further explorations of *The Possession of Natalie Glasgow*, “Feast for Small Pieces,” “Crones in Their Larval State,” “Endless Parade,” and most frequently, *The Worm and His Kings*. My interest in dipping back into these words comes and goes. Without a story seed that seems right and doesn’t diminish the original work, I can’t really begin to explore further. Starting anew is refreshing. I make new discoveries, sometimes into an entirely new world, depending on how far the premise reaches. I can’t rule out that it will happen, but I like that any reader can pick up any of my work, in any order, and not worry that they’ve missed something.

**Your work covers a large swath of different flavors and subgenres of horror and dark fiction. For example, *The Possession of Natalie Glasgow* is—as the title suggests—a story about supernatural possessions, while *Benny Rose*, *The Cannibal King* is a throwback to 1980s pulpy supernatural slashers as part of Unnerving Press’s “Rewind or Die” series, and *The Worm and His Kings* is tinged with cosmic horror. Your short fiction, too, covers even broader ground. Is there a particular kind (or kinds) of horror that most appeals to you? Do you see any deeper connections between your pieces despite the different modes of dark fiction, or do the different subgenres inspire different themes?**

I’m certainly a fan of reading cosmic horror, even though I’ve only written a little of it,

and I adore coming-of-age horror. Kids versus the monster speaks to me, and I think speaks to much of my work even when the characters aren't children. I'm interested in tales that follow the powerless, the marginalized. My book protagonists have all been queer; many of my stories follow queer characters or themes. Monique from *The Worm and His Kings* is homeless; Yaya from *Queen of Teeth* works at a corner store before her life falls apart. I'm less interested in exploring stories from the perspective of the powerful; politicians, celebrities, overlords, and so on. While the subgenres draw out different facets, this core carries through each.

**One of the threads that seems to emerge in your work is the idea of storytelling and, in particular, how stories can be misunderstood. For instance, the enormous not-quite-human Gray Hill in *The Worm and His Kings* is an urban legend to some, a monster to others, but—in her own history—something completely different. The Worm itself seems to be a cipher onto which its adherents project their own theories and desires, right or wrong. The titular *Benny Rose, the Cannibal King* is also an urban legend come to life, but one whose origins are constantly revised, obscuring the truth. What role does this shifting of identity play in your work? How does this storytelling operate, both as a method of control and—as in the end of *Benny Rose*—a method of reclaiming?**

We can't help making assumptions sometimes. We know we shouldn't, but we do it anyway. The unknown frightens us, and so a human response to this is to explain it. Sometimes we hear the phrase "unexplainable phenomena," but that doesn't hold up to the scrutiny and presumptuousness of human imagination. We don't need to know all the facts, or *any* facts, to decide we understand what we're talking about and invent a story around it. That's part of what makes people frightening, too. These invented stories can be used to exploit, or justify, or to comfort. Even as readers, we can't help but assume or speculate on what's going to happen next, or believe that we know the mystery's answer before the end, and sometimes we're led astray by others' assumptions. But at least when we're reading, that's us looking ahead. We're trying to find the answers. The tales told around Benny Rose are so mired in the past that any genuine exploration of them, like Desiree speculating on the truth in the finale, a new approach becomes focused on the future. Against a presumptuous past, that's a radical action.

**Your books—such as in *Benny Rose* and *The Worm and His Kings*—feature very central “monsters,” but they also include ordinary people who are devotees or conspirators, and therefore find something useful in the monster. These people don't necessarily summon or create The Worm, Gray Hill, or Benny Rose, but they find a way to exploit them for their benefit. How do you view “monsters” in horror fiction? How does this work with the monstrousness of everyday people?**

I'm a queer woman, and we horror fans of the queer community have spent a lot of horror history sympathizing with the monsters. Not just the obvious ones like Frankenstein's monster or King Kong, but the lot of them. I think many of us can also relate to exploitation. Everyone and everything has their own perspective and the capacity to both heal or harm others, their own goals. They'll justify the harm they do with what they intend to gain, especially if they view it as worth the cost, as in *Benny Rose*, or empirically valuable or even selfless, depending on which character you ask in *The Worm and His Kings*. Ultimately, these are people who cannot get what they want by their own power, but they can find a tragedy and exploit it.

**We've touched on how your work crosses subgenres, but who are your particular influences when it comes to horror? Other than those influences that you are drawn to, are there any authors or works that you move away from—ones that your work aims to push back against or respond to?**

My most prominent influences when I was an adolescent were Neil Gaiman and Stephen King. Later, those shifted into discovering writers whose works span earlier, such as Shirley Jackson and Ramsey Campbell, to contemporary influences such as Caitlin R. Kiernan, Sara Tantlinger, and Stephen Graham Jones. I can't say that I focus on or intentionally push against any particular author. They're not in my head while writing, usually; my characters, themes, and stories dominate. That said, story seeds have dropped out of frustration with overdone tropes or ignorant takes. "Feast for Small Pieces," for example, came to life after I'd read three stories in a row, in different publications, where a femme fatale archetype had really been minding her own business while the protagonist blamed her for his troubles and the eventual destruction of his life. My frustration poured onto the page.

**One of the issues of writing in horror and its various subtypes is that they often come loaded with pre-existing cultural baggage. Here, I'm specifically thinking about *The Worm and His Kings*, which has been described as "cosmic horror," given its exploration themes like humanity's place in the cosmos and how we respond to immensely powerful yet disinterested forces and voids. The term "cosmic horror," however, still has strong popular ties with H.P. Lovecraft and his work, such that almost any work in this area—rightly or wrongly—is assumed to be in conflict or conversation with him. To that end, did you feel the influence of Lovecraft while writing *The Worm and His Kings*? Do you have a relationship with his work?**

Oof, this is a rough spot. I'm always hesitant to speak about Lovecraft; he has an inarguable influence and countless fans. I've read many of his stories, and while I think the imagination is something truly special, the perspective is extremely limited. There really isn't consideration for the perspective of the other, no sympathy for star-crossing devils

except a brief comment in *In the Mountains of Madness*, and then it's only to demonize another species. I didn't consider Lovecraft while writing *The Worm and His Kings*, only my world, my perspectives, but it's undeniable that his influence is present. There are different kinds of cosmic horror, for example, fiction influenced by *The King in Yellow*. The focus on unfathomable forces that move through the stars and treat eons as moments is certainly more Lovecraftian, and the concept explained early in *The Worm and His Kings* that our world is a parallel abomination from Earth's original timeline fits a similar cosmic dismissal of humanity's ideas of self-importance.

**Shifting from the past to the present, who are some of the contemporary authors that you find to be doing interesting work?**

I've mentioned Caitlin R. Kiernan, Sara Tantlinger, and Stephen Graham Jones already, but I could go on all day. Gwendolyn Kiste, Laird Barron, Eden Royce, Laurel Hightower, Lee Murray, Joanna Koch, Laura Mauro, John Langan, K.P. Kulski, Jessica McHugh, and many, many more. I could keep at it endlessly. There is so much fascinating, unique work being done today. It's nearly impossible to keep up. We're living in a rich time for horror fiction.

**Because your work crosses so many subgenres, are there some that you haven't yet gotten a chance to delve into, but that you'd like to? When you are developing a story, do you first pick a type of horror to work in, or does some other element kick off the process and dictate the subgenre it ends up falling into?**

The story seed always comes first, whether that's a line of dialogue, a character's personality, a plot premise, a setting, or so on. Everything else grows from there. Potential subgenres either bud or wither from there, as these can go in more than one direction. For example, *Benny Rose, the Cannibal King* carries elements of coming-of-age horror, slasher, and folk horror. I could have leaned more into the folk horror elements and a different book would have emerged, likewise had I leaned deeper into coming-of-age horror, but while those two subgenres still leave their fingerprints on the book, I steered its focus toward slasher because I felt that would tell the strongest possible story, Desiree and her friends versus Benny. What story seeds appear in the future will say what else I end up working on, but there are certainly ones I'd love to explore whenever the story seed comes. I would love to work on a werewolf book someday, and certainly a book that leaned deeper into coming-of-age horror than *Benny Rose, the Cannibal King*.

**Given your experience working in different areas of the genre, do you have a theory of horror in general? What is it that you look for in horror, and is there a particular area which you think horror does particularly well that other genres might not?**

Horror is healing. That's my theory in a nutshell. I get emotional sustenance from consuming horror. Dread excites me, tales of overcoming the terror fill me with hope, fear and empathy for the unknown gives me connections to people and things that have never existed. Horror heals because it tells the horror in my heart that I'm seen and understood. I also feel horror is the genre of honesty, and while I wouldn't call other genres dishonest, I think horror can't help but be inherently honest. Everything feels more real to me when it's steeped in horror, no matter how fictional.

**Conversely, are there any areas you see where horror falters or struggles? What kinds of genre tropes or presentations are you ready to see retired?**

Tying back to honesty, this leans on the downside. With horror feeling inherently honest, it comes off as crass and unnecessary when an author goes out of the way to shock and insult the reader and then paint this as daring. It isn't daring; it's lazy. I'm sick of men writing about sexually assaulting women, for example. The "you can't handle me" writers show a lack of understanding for the genre and how fear and dread work in human hearts.

**In addition to writing, you're also making your first foray into the world of editing as the guest editor for a special issue of *Planet Scumm*. Notably, the call for submissions was focused on seeking out work from writers of normally marginalized and underrepresented genders—specifically, from cisgender women, transgender women, transgender men, non-binary people, and genderqueer people. While there's been progress in recent years towards increasing representation in speculative fiction, there's obviously still much more to be done. Can you tell us about why this work for representation in this area is so important? What do you hope to see going forward?**

In 2019, multiple women in horror noted, without naming names, that a horror anthology had released with several men and only one woman on the TOC. We soon realized we weren't all talking about the same anthology, and then discovered anthologies that had no women on the TOC in the same year. Evening out the gender representation barely scratches the surface for inclusivity, let alone POC rep, queer rep—it's severely limiting the perspective of the overall book and ignoring the variety of talented writers. We do not live in a homogenous world. And the problem isn't special to horror; you can find it in every genre. Hopefully, a day will come when these special calls won't be needed to help even things out, but right now, it's necessary. I hope to see more editors take care when observing both their tables of contents and their own biases that they probably don't notice. When an editor says they only want the best stories, and the TOC turns out mostly straight white men, they have an extremely limited view of what "best" means. A limited perspective needs expanding.

**Going back to the issue of representation and portrayal of historically underrepresented identities, your work includes a number of queer characters. Sometimes the character’s identity is just one small facet of the character—I’m thinking, for instance, of Margaret (the midwife/witch) from *The Possession of Natalie Glasgow*, who we incidentally learn has a wife—and one which doesn’t have an overt narrative impact. By contrast, the protagonist of *The Worm and His Kings* is Monique, and her being a trans lesbian is inextricably tied to the plot, theme, and the very bones of the story. So, while your work features queer characters, their queerness ranges from a minor detail to a central element. Could you tell us a little bit about how you see the work of representing queer people in your stories? How do you approach representation in terms of how centralized a character’s identity as the “Other” is to the story?**

To borrow a phrase, “I’m also a client.” I’m a queer woman, and I want to see myself in horror. Queer characters, definitely, but also queer themes, queer worlds. That ideology often decides more about the story than the plot in a bones-deep way. Short fiction offers a wonderful avenue for these explorations. The central character of “The Law of Conservation of Death,” the second story in *Unfortunate Elements of My Anatomy*, is presented as a straight woman haunted through her reincarnations by a ghost from a past life, but the story pairs thematically with transitioning, the past often feeling inescapable and all-consuming (at least at the time I wrote it). There’s room for queer characters to have their relationships or self entangled in the story, and that’s good for highlighting our issues in the LGBTQIA+ community. Likewise, there’s value in queer characters experiencing situations that are neutral to their sexuality as it helps normalize the perspective of our presence in the world, especially for readers who don’t know queer folk in real life. *Queen of Teeth*’s protagonist is a lesbian, and she engages with other women throughout the story, but plot-wise she isn’t targeted for this, and thematically the book focuses on agency in a world where our bodies are considered someone else’s property. And yet despite saying this, I know that my queer perspective colors everything I write. I don’t know a different way to see the world. Maybe the past really is inescapable in that way, every presentation of relationships and societal expectation seen first from the doorway of a closet. Or am I being limiting? I have no idea. There are so many facets to queerness, even within a single person’s life experience, that the possibilities for exploration feel endless. My hope is that readers feel something new that they hadn’t considered before, whenever they’ve finished one of my stories.

**Finally, what else is on your horizon? In addition to concrete projects and set releases, are there any new directions you’re looking to explore in the near future?**

Right now, I’m working with my publishers to finalize the 2021 releases. I’m also working on short story deadlines, which feels like something I’m always doing, and gathering up notes for the next book that will explore some new territory, but it’s too early to talk about

that yet. I'll probably start in April. Or maybe June? I wrote *Natalie Glasgow* in June 2018, *Benny Rose* in June 2019, and a lot of *Queen of Teeth* work in June 2020, so, maybe? June seems to like me for books.

---

#### **ABOUT THE INTERVIEWER**

Gordon B. White is the author of the collection *As Summer's Mask Slips and Other Disruptions* (Trepidatio Publishing 2020). A graduate of the Clarion West Writing Workshop, Gordon's stories have appeared in dozens of venues, including *The Best Horror of the Year Vol. 12* and the Bram Stoker Award® winning anthology *Borderlands 6*. He also contributes reviews and interviews to outlets including *Nightmare*, *Lightspeed*, *Hellnotes*, and The Outer Dark podcast. You can find him online at [gordonbwhite.com](http://gordonbwhite.com).

# **AUTHOR SPOTLIGHTS**

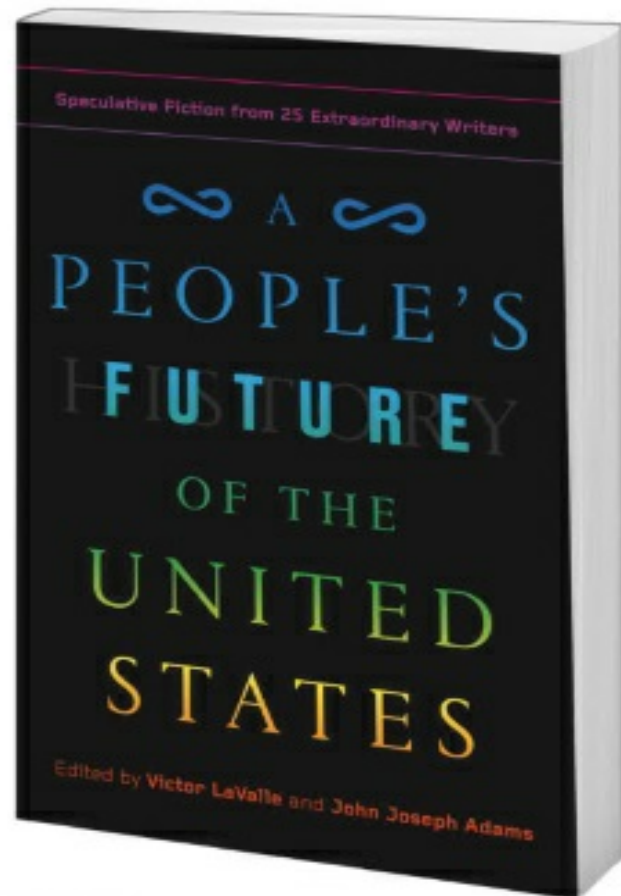
---

# THE FUTURE IS CLOSER THAN YOU THINK

---

**FEATURING STORIES FROM**

*N.K. Jemisin*  
*Charles Yu*  
*Jamie Ford*  
*Daniel José Older*  
*Charlie Jane Anders*  
*Tananarive Due*  
*Seanan McGuire*  
*G. Willow Wilson*  
*Lesley Nneka Arimah*  
*Omar El Akkad*  
*and more*



**EDITED BY**

Victor LaValle and John Joseph Adams

*"An outstanding collection written by 25 heavy hitters of speculative fiction, offering dazzling and often chilling glimpses of an uncertain future in which America teeters on the brink."* – PUBLISHERS WEEKLY (starred review)

**COMING FEBRUARY 2019**



## **Author Spotlight: E.A. Petricone**

**Xander Odell | 1587 words**

**A powerful opening paragraph can make or break a short story. The first paragraph of “We, the Girls Who Did Not Make It” stopped me in my tracks. I read it and sat there for a few moments taking in the chill beauty of those words. Why did you choose such a gut punch to open the story? Did it immediately come to the page, or was it coaxed to life during later edits?**

Thank you for your kind words! The opening came right away, pretty much fully written. At the time, I was angry, so wicked angry that I think I sent my best friend sixty venting text messages. And then the girls started speaking. It didn't feel like a gut punch, to write. More like a knife against a throat: *listen*.

It sounds so goofy to say that—channeling voices, hearing voices, oh boy—but that's the truth. It's a wild feeling, when a story comes to you like that—on one hand, you're not really there, you're just channeling it, and at the same time you're more there, more alive, more present than you've ever been. You're aware of the very space between the air and your skin.

Haha, I guess you'd call this method “extreme pantsering” on the plotter-pantser writer spectrum? As I typed the opening it felt very much like the girls were drawing their boundary with me: whatever expectations I had as writer/reader looking at a girls-in-basement situation could be thrown out. This was their story, and they were going to tell it the way they wanted to. Weirdly, the moment I knew the opening I also knew the last line, and could vividly picture the final scene. The actual words in the last paragraph changed in a million small-knife ways, but the last sentence was written from the start.

**Tell us something about the inspiration behind the story and your focus on the victims.**

I have to rein myself in because this story brought together a lot of things I'm passionate about. I'd read a short story that made me angry. Actually, it wasn't the story itself, but the cultural groundwater flowing unseen beneath it. How we think about and talk about people in the real world who are abused, sexually assaulted, and murdered is never far from my mind. And how gender, race, ability, economic circumstances, etc., plays into it. We've gotten better at it. We have a long way to go. No one is the perfect victim or the perfect survivor. Yet we try to insert narrative wires in victims, make them bend and pose to accommodate the story we want to see.

The girls who did not make it came to life in reaction to that. They had to be ghosts. I think ghosts are the American woman's greatest supernatural ally. I love them. Even if they only stand (or float) for injustice, they're a powerful device to talk about (or talk around) domestic abuse, violence and just plain dying wrong.

The other thing is that Greek tragedies and Greek religion (the gods, goddesses, spirits,

etc.) always find their way into the things I write. I'd like to think that across story time the girls are giving a nod to the Choruses in Greek tragedies who spoke as one, who refused to let the audience watch the action on stage without making their comments heard. The collective voice can be powerful; I wanted more for the girls, though.

Finally, one of my best friends is Amelia Royce Leonards, whose tremendous, evocative, and often very funny watercolor fantasy art has been featured all over the world. (Her IG is @amelialeonardsart—check her out if you're into haunting depictions of fae, man-eating trees, huldras, and/or silly animal puns.) She's also my art teacher. I'm so grateful she's in my life; I'd written myself off as "can't even pull off stick figures" before I met her. Anyway, one of the first things she taught me was color theory (which, with a Massachusetts accent, sounds like *kah-lah theory*). And I think art theory is a bit like finding religion—once you've learned it, something in your soul shifts, and you can't imagine processing the world without it. What's your favorite color? And why? Those are a child's questions, sure. Small things, easy to dismiss as ordinary, unremarkable. But the ordinary and unremarkable can be full of meaning and worthy of our attention.

**There is an intimacy to this story. I know each of the girls. I've seen them before, lived next to them, nodded to them on the street or in a café. It is that intimacy that makes the story all the more terrifying. Do you think horror lends itself to such intimacy? Why?**

I love our gruesome and often very beautiful genre so much. Horror is your home. Horror is your heart.

Absolutely, yes, I think horror lends itself to the full spectrum of intimacies—from the intimacy of feeling like you really know a character to the intimacy we feel when a character faces a universal fear or grief. Horror also lends itself brilliantly to humor, which invites us to another form of intimacy (here we are, in on the same joke). That's one of the contradictions I absolutely love about horror. On one hand, it can be full of awful, awful stuff. The worst of the worst. On the other, horror can move you and connect you to your fellow humans like nothing else.

**In particular, this line has stuck with me: "Everyone wants to know about them, and if they get caught, they're all anyone will hear about." What is it about the killer, the monster, that excites us? Why is it so much harder to empathize with the victims even in a fictional setting?**

Oh gosh! This is a topic near and dear to my heart and I could go on forever about it. I think the monster, or the killer, fascinates us for a lot of reasons. Morbid curiosity, maybe. Intrigue. Wish fulfillment (in the case of righteous revenge stories, anyway). As readers I think we're attracted to narrative movement and agency. And the killer, the monster—they're

a lot of things, but they're not still, if that makes sense. They're active. And for various cultural reasons we tend to equate active with *power*. This is maybe a cynical thing to say but I think most people don't feel very powerful on any given day.

Moreover, I think there's an unconscious cultural impulse to place people in one of two camps: the person who does bad things, or the person to whom bad things happen. Powerful or powerless, strong or weak, predator or prey. More of us than we'd like to admit, given those two choices, would rather identify with the person who does bad things. Even if we've been on the receiving end of those bad things! To empathize with the victim is just too scary, makes us too vulnerable. We don't want to look there. We don't want to be there. It's quite a psychological trick, isn't it? The story killer plays on that fear, bullies us all to align with them.

The girls who did not make it took the form as ghosts—not zombies, or some other supernatural creature. Many “true” ghosts in the United States are women, and are depicted as comparatively passive (uncharitably: weak), the supposed energetic opposite of the active killers.

**You have written both short fiction and poetry. Are there any other writing forms you would like to tackle in the future?**

All of them! Although really, it's not so much the form that matters. I just want to get better at telling stories. I try to read as much as I can, and you know how it is, when you come upon a story that moves you, that does something different or is executed so effectively that your whole spirit lifts out of your skin. It makes you want to achieve the same in your own work. I have so much to learn.

I'm working on a novel; that whole process is a huge pain. I'm on Team Slow Writer, so trying to complete large projects is a nightmare. I try to not get overwhelmed by the bigness of the novel and just focus on writing one good scene after the other, but it's hard. I also want to explore creating visual stories, mixed media projects, things like that. I'm so envious of people who have access to giant art barns or studios where they can weld and throw paint and work with unconventional materials and set things on fire to their heart's content.

Yet another thing that perpetually vexes me is that there's never enough time to master all the creative stuff we want to in a lifetime. We're stuck doing the best we can with the time we have. But I love how there are so many ways to tell stories. I want to read them all. I want to write them all.

---

#### **ABOUT THE INTERVIEWER**

Xander Odell lives in Washington state with their husband, sons, and an Albanian miniature moose disguised as a dog. Their work has appeared in such venues as *Jim Baen's Universe*, *Daily Science Fiction*, *Crossed Genres*, *Pseudopod*, and *Cast of Wonders*. They are a Clarion West 2010 graduate, and an active member of the SFWA. Find out more at [writerodell.com](http://writerodell.com) or follow them on Twitter at [@WriterOdell](https://twitter.com/WriterOdell).

## **Author Spotlight: Stephen Graham Jones**

**Xander Odell | 1156 words**

**This story is . . . wow. Spiders, grief, doubt, wishing, dissociation, and the gray mists of loss. What inspired “Hairy Legs and All”?**

Just my fear of exactly this happening. I mean, with a spider probably not quite so big. And I guess with a spider that’s not like that fish you catch that grants you wishes. How would we know, though, right? If you knee-jerk a wish up like this and *Lathe of Heaven*—change the world around you, then . . . I’m guessing you start to forget, like those kids in *It*. Too, growing up way out in the pastures in West Texas, I learned early on to shake my boots out each morning, because scorpions would sometimes have fallen in for, I don’t know, scorpion reasons—I always imagined scorpions are just real hopeful, are always thinking there’s scorpion burgers way in the toe-end of *this* boot—and then I guess they couldn’t get out.

**One element many horror stories overlook is the power of stream of consciousness. I feel that stream, that single sentence, is one of the strengths of the story. It forces you to focus on every word, not gloss over to the end, and then you, as the reader, realize that the “you” as character has reached the same conclusion at the same moment. What was the biggest challenge writing this story?**

Revising it was super tricky, since it’s just a burst of a moment, a string of clauses, a word snowball rolling faster and faster downhill, getting larger and worse. So, going back in and fiddling with this phrasing, with that word-choice—so much else depended on it, not only in that word or phrasing’s moment, but then later on down the line, too. It was like I’d worked all day standing dominos up around the gym floor, and then I was trying to tippy-toe among and between them all, to change this double-six out for a one-five, and not start the whole line of them falling away from that change in either direction, leaving me standing in that clattering wreckage one more time . . .

**I once took a class with you where you unpacked the importance of story form when crafting a particular narrative. Are there any stories that speak to you in this regard, any shining examples of different structures that serve to enhance the story?**

Yeah, I remember that. As for what alien forms or just weird stories contribute some DNA to *this* story, there’s a couple of Gordon Lish novels I read that imprinted on me pretty deeply, where the whole book is a single sentence, but, really, I think where this comes from is this dream sequence from Richard Grossman’s *The Book of Lazarus*, which is bar-none

the best sixty-odd pages of prose I've ever read. Each clause and bit keeps turning into other clauses and bits, and, because there's no punctuation, you can't stop, you just keep getting pulled in deeper and deeper. It reads amazing on the paper page, in some monospaced font, but you can dial it up online too ([bit.ly/3nvURiZ](http://bit.ly/3nvURiZ)). And, the funny thing is, I'm generally super opposed to dreams in fiction, unless that dreaming space is a real space, with actual consequences or bleed-over, since writers tend to use dreams just to smuggle exposition in, and to show off their armchair psychoanalytic engineering, and to, you know, "get crazy with the kaleidoscope," but this dream works for me all the way. Don't know how many times I've read it, but I know there's more reads coming. I think what pulls me in so fast and so completely is the magic of Things Becoming Other Things. Which is basically what story is, for me.

**Let's turn the tables a bit. What is one spur of the moment decision you wish you could take back?**

Probably about half the eBay purchases I win in the last two seconds. I always tell myself I'm going this high and no higher, that this old tool or that old VHS tape isn't worth anything in the first place, meaning it's for sure not worth ten dollars more than it's already going for. But then I get locked in that auction-frenzy thing, and end up paying more for the item than I should have—and probably twice what it's going for over on Etsy or somewhere. But? Sometimes it works out. The other day I won some old slasher VHS, then went to My Purchases to make sure it was showing up, that I hadn't just fallen into a wishing well of my own making, and . . . I'd just bought the same version a couple days earlier, and it was already en route. And of course, it wouldn't be cool to try to cancel that win. So, I figured I'd just have two, and try to make that make sense in my life. But then, a couple days later, the seller wrote to refund me, since it turns out they'd already sold the tape. Possibly to me, I didn't check. I like to think so, though—that that seller and I were locked in a repeat of that bidding war from earlier in the week, but this time it wasn't actually for the prize, it was just for the rush (and instant grief) of a higher and more ridiculous price.

**You have a new novel coming out in 2021, *My Heart is a Chainsaw*. Can you tell us anything about this new taste of Stephen Graham Jones?**

If I had to stand it up alongside any of my other novels, then . . . *My Heart is a Chainsaw* goes pretty well with *Demon Theory*. And sort of with *The Last Final Girl*. It's a slasher, I mean. But, where *Demon Theory*'s set out at a farmhouse in a snowstorm, and *The Last Final Girl* is in and around a high school in Riverhead, I think—no state, but that usually means Texas for me—*My Heart is a Chainsaw* happens up in a mountain town in Idaho called Proofrock, that's idyllic enough that all these Richie Rich-types have moved in, are taking over, building their version of Camelot on the far shore of this postcard lake. But bodies are stacking up, as they do. There's blood in the water, and there's more coming, and

there's one girl at the swirling center of it all who's both been praying for this day, and is kind of wishing now she could take it all back.

---

#### **ABOUT THE INTERVIEWER**

Xander Odell lives in Washington state with their husband, sons, and an Albanian miniature moose disguised as a dog. Their work has appeared in such venues as *Jim Baen's Universe*, *Daily Science Fiction*, *Crossed Genres*, *Pseudopod*, and *Cast of Wonders*. They are a Clarion West 2010 graduate, and an active member of the SFWA. Find out more at [writerodell.com](http://writerodell.com) or follow them on Twitter at [@WriterOdell](https://twitter.com/WriterOdell).

# MISCELLANY

**ANALYZING  
READING PATTERNS...**

**RESULT: YOUR HIGH AWESOMENESS QUOTIENT AND  
PREFERENCE FOR SOPHISTICATED GENRE FICTION INDICATES  
YOU WOULD ENJOY: LIGHTSPEED MAGAZINE.**

**DID YOU KNOW THAT YOU CAN**

**SUBSCRIBE**

**TO THE EBOOK EDITION  
AND  
SAVE**

**PASSING ON THIS  
DEAL DOES NOT  
COMPUTE!**



[LIGHTSPEEDMAGAZINE.COM/SUBSCRIBE](http://LIGHTSPEEDMAGAZINE.COM/SUBSCRIBE)

## Coming Attractions

The Editors | 142 words

Coming up in March, in *Nightmare* . . .

We have original short fiction from Woody Dismukes (“A Cast of Liches”) and Joanna Parypinski (“It Accumulates”). “The Horror Lab” includes a flash story by Michael Kelly (“That Which Crawls from Dark Soil”) and a poem by Meg Elison (“Modern Promethea”).

We also have the latest installment of our column on horror, “The H Word,” plus author spotlights with our authors, and of course a review.

It’s another great issue, so be sure to check it out. And while you’re at it, tell a friend about *Nightmare*!

••••

Looking ahead beyond next month, we’ve got new fiction on the way from Tim Waggoner, Gillian Daniels, A. T. Greenblatt, and Marc Laidlaw. You definitely don’t want to miss any of these creepy new works!



## **Stay Connected**

### **The Editors**

Here are a few URLs you might want to check out or keep handy if you'd like to stay apprised of everything new and notable happening with *Nightmare*:

#### **Magazine Website**

[www.nightmare-magazine.com](http://www.nightmare-magazine.com)

#### **Destroy Projects Website**

[www.destroysf.com](http://www.destroysf.com)

#### **Newsletter**

[www.nightmare-magazine.com/newsletter](http://www.nightmare-magazine.com/newsletter)

#### **RSS Feed**

[www.nightmare-magazine.com/rss-2](http://www.nightmare-magazine.com/rss-2)

#### **Podcast Feed**

[www.nightmare-magazine.com/itunes-rss](http://www.nightmare-magazine.com/itunes-rss)

#### **Twitter**

[www.twitter.com/nightmaremag](http://www.twitter.com/nightmaremag)

#### **Facebook**

[www.facebook.com/NightmareMagazine](http://www.facebook.com/NightmareMagazine)

#### **Subscribe**

[www.nightmare-magazine.com/subscribe](http://www.nightmare-magazine.com/subscribe)

---

## Subscriptions and Ebooks

### The Editors

If you enjoy reading *Nightmare*, please consider subscribing. It's a great way to support the magazine, and you'll get your issues in the convenient ebook format of your choice. All purchases from the *Nightmare* store are provided in epub, mobi, and pdf format. A 12-month subscription to *Nightmare* more than 45 stories (about 240,000 words of fiction, plus assorted nonfiction). The cost is just \$23.88 (\$12 off the cover price)—what a bargain!

Visit [nightmare-magazine.com/subscribe](http://nightmare-magazine.com/subscribe) to learn more, including about third-party subscription options.

We also have individual ebook issues available at a variety of ebook vendors, and we now have Ebook Bundles available in the *Nightmare* ebookstore, where you can buy in bulk and save! Buying a Bundle gets you a copy of every issue published during the named period. Buying either of the half-year Bundles saves you \$3 (so you're basically getting one issue for free), or if you spring for the Year One Bundle, you'll save \$11 off the cover price. So if you need to catch up on *Nightmare*, that's a great way to do so.

Visit [nightmare-magazine.com/store](http://nightmare-magazine.com/store) for more information.

---

# Support Us on Patreon, or How to Become a Dragonrider or Space Wizard

The Editors

We already offer ebook subscriptions as a way of supporting the magazines, but we wanted to add an additional option to allow folks to support us, thus we've launched a Patreon ([patreon.com/JohnJosephAdams](https://patreon.com/JohnJosephAdams)).

## TL;DR Version

If you enjoy *Fantasy*, *Nightmare*, and/or *Lightspeed*, our Patreon page is a way for you to help support those endeavors by chipping in a buck or more on a recurring basis. Your support will help us bring bigger and better (and more) projects into the world.

## Why Patreon?

There are no big companies supporting or funding our magazines, so they really rely on reader support. Though we offer the magazines online for free, we're able to fund them by selling ebook subscriptions or website advertising.

While we have a dedicated ebook subscriber base, the vast majority of our readers consume the magazine online for free. If just 10% of our website readers pledged just \$1 a month, the magazines would be doing *fantastically* well. So we thought it might be useful to have an option like Patreon for readers who maybe haven't considered supporting the magazine, or who maybe haven't because they don't have any desire to receive the ebook editions—or who would be glad to pay \$1 a month, but not \$3 (the cost of a monthly subscriber issue of *Lightspeed*).

Though *Fantasy*, *Nightmare*, and *Lightspeed* are separate entities, we decided to create a single “publisher” Patreon account because it seemed like it would be more efficient to manage just one account.

Basically, we wanted to create a crowdfunding page where, if you enjoy the work Adamant Press puts out, and you want to contribute a little something to help make it easier for us to produce more cool projects, then our Patreon is the place to do that.

## What Do I Get Out of Being a Patron?

Well, you get the satisfaction of helping to usher the creation of cool new short fiction projects into the world! Plus, the more support we get, the better we can make the magazines and compensate our authors and staff. By becoming a supporter via Patreon, you help fund our growth and continued publication of two award-winning magazines. Of course, if you're already one of our ebook subscribers (thank you!), you are already supporting us. This is for those who prefer to read the issues each month on our free websites, or wish to support our efforts more generally.

By becoming a supporter, you are also bestowed a title, such as Dragonrider, or Space Wizard, or Savior of the World and/or Universe, thus making you instantly the envy of all your friends.

## **Thank You!**

If you've read this far, thanks so much. We hope you'll consider becoming a backer on Patreon. That URL again is [patreon.com/JohnJosephAdams](https://patreon.com/JohnJosephAdams).

Thanks in advance for your time. We look forward to hopefully being able to make the magazines—and our other publishing endeavors—even better with the support of people like you.



# About the *Nightmare* Team

## The Editors

### **Publisher/Editor-in-Chief**

John Joseph Adams

### **Managing/Senior Editor**

Wendy N. Wagner

### **Associate Editor**

Arley Sorg

### **Podcast Producer**

Stefan Rudnicki

### **Podcast Editor**

Jim Freund

### **Podcast Host**

Jack Kincaid

### **Art Director**

Christie Yant

### **Assistant Editors**

Lisa Nohealani Morton

Xander Odell

### **Editorial Assistant**

Alex Puncekar

### **Reviewers**

Adam-Troy Castro

Terence Taylor

**Copy Editor**

Melissa V. Hofelich

**Proofreader**

Devin Marcus

**Webmaster**

Jeremiah Tolbert of Clockpunk Studios

**Associate Publisher/Director of Special Projects**

Christie Yant

**Assistant Publisher**

Robert Barton Bland

---