



THE FANTASY ISSUE

TALES TO TITILATE, TANTALISE,
CONFUSE & ASTOUND!

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Contents

- 3 Editorial,** Gary Sykes-Blythe
- 4 Noble Goals,** Andrew Blair
- 8 HCE Special Feature: MCA Hogarth**
- 14 Blue Magic,** Jeston Dulin
- 15 Merchant Experiments 1 - 3,** Jeston Dulin
- 16 The Path,** Kate O'Neil
- 17 Secrets,** Kate O'Neil
- 18 India in Nisha,** Andrew Pidou
- 20 Reboot, Recycle, Remake:**
Why we never tire of Fantasy Stories
Chelsea Schuyler
- 22 The Ringmaster's Confession**
Neil Laurenson
- 23 Fancy Talk,** Sean Chard
- 24 Veritas,** Ben Hayes
- 27 Euphoric Flashback,** John Morrice
- 28 Deed Poll,** Adam Langley
- 32 Fish Listen,** Emma Cousins
- 33 Delivered from the Sky,** Emma Cousins
- 34 Witness,** Apeksha Harsh
- 35 Fall for Me,** Rhoda Greaves

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Editorial

By Gary Sykes-Blythe

Some time in the last 12 months, I forget exactly when, my good friends Ben Hayes and Tom Bennett recommended I read a book by H.P. Lovecraft. After all, 'Gary, you like old stuff...' has been my introduction into all sorts of interesting fields. I was curious.

Obviously, as a boy, I'd read *The Lord of the Rings* and just about every other mainstream fantasy book. It's normal (for a nerdy dweeb...) to retreat (or advance) into a mythologised world of knights, derring do and cruel villains. Who wouldn't want that? Like most teenagers I was a demi-god in the making...

I thought reading Lovecraft would be a nice breath of nostalgia: magic sword, nameless horrors and so on, all with a nice turn of the century varnish. Well. I was wrong. Not that I didn't enjoy it, no, quite the reverse. More that it wasn't the sort of thing I'd expected. (Perhaps I ought to have at least researched cheery old H.P...) There were witches, daemons and monsters from beyond the edge of etc. but there was also a refreshing originality. You could feel, in the reading, that these really *were* true... or, at least, you could almost believe that they *once were* true. Needless to say I've carried on reading.

In some ways, the fact that there's room for the new is the strength of fantasies. From every hard-on day-dream to every swords-and-sorcery epic, the components of the fantasy are there to satisfy and tantalise. Interestingly, they seem to be able to do that irrespective of the cast of characters (erections come and go, after all). You could, for instance, replace Frodo Baggins with Harry Potter and you'd barely even have to change the adjectives. I'm not saying that either of those stories aren't any good, or that the characters are in some way generic, but I am saying that the basic framework and rules of a fantasy setting allow the imaginer to customise their experience.

Consider *Game of Thrones*: HCE's own Adam Steiner once quothably described it as 'pornographic sex, pornographic violence and pornographic dialogue'. He was taking about the TV show, of course, but the point is good. Yes, there are dragons in *GoT* but there's also quite a bit more use of



'cunt', too. It's obviously not the usual fantasy setting. In many ways, you could take away the magic and gods, and you'd still be left with a bloody good story. Sorry, that should read 'bloody, good story'.

So, to content. I suppose, inevitably, we didn't get any submissions that were three thousand page epics set in a fantasy world of myth and wonder. We did get a surprising array, though. We've got everything in this issue (as usual): Chelsea's insightful and witty investigation into the endless regeneration of the fantasy genre; there's Ben's dark tale of urban fantasy; there's Andrew Blair's Scottish football/magic kingdom cross-over. There's even some imagined memory action. Mmmm. Lovely. Oh, and of course, there's the ultimate fantasy: MCA Hogarth stars as featured writer. A self-published triumph who draws... raises children... writes... publishes... markets...

Noble Goals

By Andrew Blair

Red ash football pitches: Pain inflicted, dog-shite mingled, characters built. Latent violence. A rectangle the colour and consistency of a grazed knee. Rain that sped in seemingly from below.

A wind that stretched the flags and nets taught, the goalkeepers buffeted as they traipsed around their realm, torn between the desire for inactivity and median body temperature.

The Under 14's of Grangemouth Colts were hosting the United Republic of Bo'ness (the latter a salutary lesson in never letting the players name their own team). Twenty-two eleven-year-olds were having their epidermises atrophied by every misery the beautiful game could throw at them. The keener parents were hurling constructive abuse at them from under car dealership umbrellas, while the coaches stood arms folded in big puffy jackets: stoic, determined, hungover. The Bo'ness coach had initials sewn onto the left breast of his jacket. They were not his initials.

The home team had the upper hand, as they actually had a midfield. Their star turn – Chas, his skills might not be silky, but they were definitely breathable nylon – turned yet another defender and prepared to shoot, Bo'ness' own champion stepped into the breach.

Massive Doug was not a subtle footballer. He was also not to be confused with Big Doug, a pie in human form who had somehow ended up on the left wing – static, like a limpet on a hull - on the grounds that he was left-footed and could effortlessly curl a cross over everyone's heads with un-

erring accuracy. Massive Doug, on the other hand, would hit the ball very hard indeed in whatever direction he happened to be facing at the time. In this case it was towards his own goal. Chas was unlucky enough to be in the way, and Doug's foot connected.

The ball landed out of sight, somewhere over the grass verge behind the goal.

Chas landed next to the penalty spot.

As their star player recovered, Coach shouted to Johnny to get the ball for the corner. He obliged, hoping that there would be some cover over the verge, and that the ball was somewhere retrievable. One time, somewhere near Falkirk, it had gone in a stream that was deeper than it looked, and he'd had to get new boots and some special injections afterwards.

'Hurry up. That's wur only baw.'

Johnny sped up for approximately three yards, before lapsing back into a forward-leaning walk.

'And watch oot for the stream.'

Ach, pish, thought Johnny. His studs scuffed over a dented beer can, and he almost slipped over. Someone's Dad cried 'Waeey!', but everyone else was on tenterhooks over Chas' injury. Without him, the Colts' chances for cup success were negligible, so it was vital that any damage could be repaired. The supernatural qualities of the magic sponge were, however, being diluted by the saturating conditions.

Johnny was Grangemouth's "Utility player", which meant that he was vaguely rubbish in every position. His one skill was running. He could run for ninety minutes, ideally without touching the ball. If football had been played on a pitch a mile long, he might have done better, but it wasn't, so he didn't. He reached the verge, a row of planted trees in collapsing wire cages at its crest, and looked down the slope.

The slope was full of dying yellow grass clumps. Johnny fell twice more – once on stones, once on a bottle of ginger - before arriving in a heap at the bottom on the slope. Still, this had sped things up a bit, descent wise. Beyond the stream – ambling passively aggressively along - a





dusty, rock-strewn patch of land greeted him, surrounded by felled trees on either side. At the far end was a JCB sitting dormant by some fluttering orange tape, flailing from a tree, ostensibly fencing off the old Gamesie fields.

The ball was nowhere obvious. With the trees cleared, the wind and the rain were channelled straight into Johnny's face. The icy blast meant that he could only lift his hand above his eyes momentarily. He considered legging it to the changing rooms and nicking another ball from another team's kit bag, but he'd probably be seen. The Falkirk Council Sports Barn was currently a squat brown hut on the far side of the pitches which smelt of bleach, mud and fear. This became oddly comforting after a while, because it meant that you were technically indoors and under shelter, structural stability of the building notwithstanding.

Moving carefully forward, now wary of trip-hazards, Johnny noticed the ball lying at the edge of the stream to his left. Here, in the relatively lush foliage, his studs gave him a decent grip on the grassy surface, but also enabled him to trip up again on an old root.

As he landed, Johnny's palm grazed against stone. The water had a pleasant hint of blue, despite the sky, and was as clear as glass. It also, in the middle of the rocky bed, had a sword sticking out of it.

The blade was a reflective light grey that suggested coldness. The grip was wrapped in leather, with gold plating around the hand-guards. A chipped gemstone glittered in the base of the pommel.

Oh, thought Johnny, that's a sword. Like

they have on Game of Thrones when that guy decapitated the horsey.

Cool.

By this point Johnny had completely forgotten about the football.

Picking himself up with a little help from Physics and the ground, Johnny put his best foot forward and tested the stability of a rock jutting out of the stream. It stayed firm. He brought his right foot across and balanced carefully, feet together, arms outstretched. Leaning over, he gripped the sword gently and gave it an experimental tug.

To his surprise, the sword came free with ease. To his further surprise, this caused him to overbalance and fall backwards, flinging mud into the air with the blade of his new weapon. His back landed first, impacting on cool, worn flagstones. The sword clattered to the floor beside him.

'My liege!'

'Ow,' said Johnny. He raised his head. It was drier than he had expected.



Johnny found himself in a great hall, an arcing roof of fading friezes on plaster, the wooden support struts decorated with heraldry and colourful emblems. At first he thought he saw a recurring unicorn motif, but when he squinted it became a soldier on horseback, brandishing a spear. Obvious really. Unicorns were bullshit.

The hall was long and narrow. Johnny was at one end, in front of an empty throne on a raised stone dais. In the distance all he could see was desolation, bare earth and smoking remains of forests and villages. The land fell away from them for miles, with no sign of life in sight outside.

Inside, thickly dressed folk in animal skin cloaks peered down at him from its flanks, rows of concerned faces on seemingly endless wooden stands. In front of him was a man in foul smelling armour, a leather jerkin over chain mail, his limbs plated. His hair was matted and his left eye a mass of scar tissue, like an ill-tempered belly button.

'Eh,' said Johnny. 'Soooo... who're you?'

'I am Sir Roland, my liege.'

'Okay. Eh...Can ah have muh baw back?'

'Ball, my liege?'

'Aye. Muh baw. If ah dinnae get it back coach'll kick shite out of me.'

'Right.'

Sir Roland's good eye betrayed more than a hint of worry.

'It's just,' he said, 'Your coming was foretold...you are to be our King... for you wield the great sword...Captain Pointy.'

'Sweet name.'

'A salutary lesson in not letting the squires

name totemic weapons.'

'Oh right,' said Johnny. 'Eh...weel, ah'm just 'hinking here...mebbe ah wouldnae be such a great King? Ah'll be honest, ah huvnae a scooby where tae start. And there's some guid telly on the night, ye know? You guys dinnae look like you've got Netflix.'

'But my Liege, you cannot go! The Dark Lord approaches, leading an army of such unremitting...darkness that it will surely see the end of our Kingdom once and for all.'

'What size his forces?'

'Pardon?'

'Eh, soz there,' said Johnny, 'I meant: hoo many folk's he got?'

'They number in the tens of thousands. Weagles, Eternals, Herods and Canights, led by the Speakable Ones.'

'And we've got?'

'Six thousand horsemen, brave and true.'

'Fuck off!'

Roland looked around the galleries as the people turned to each other and stage whispered their shock. This was not how the scribes had foretold events.

Sensing that he hadn't handled the situation brilliantly, Johnny picked up the sword again, and turned it over in his hand. It was worth a try.

'So,' he said, 'Sorry to dae this and aw that, but, err...aye. It's no' happening.'

'Bye then,' he added.

He held the sword aloft in front of him in both hands, and wished really hard.

As he landed in the stream, a football went flying past his face. Massive Doug had punted it against the bank. He sloshed out of the stream, and stomped across the stones and concrete to pick the ball up. It was spinning after it had rebounded against the slope. He then turned to address Johnny.

'Hurry up ya fanny,' he said, 'Wuh freezing wuh bollocks aff.'

'Soz,' said Johnny. 'Ah got taken tae this magical kingdom oan the verge ae extinction.'

'Aye, an' your maw's got baws for eyes.' said Massive Doug.





'Naw, really. I just grabbed this 'hing.'

Johnny indicated the sword, now buried again in the bed of the stream behind where he'd fallen.

'Whit? This?' Doug pointed.

'Aye.'

'...Sweet sword.'

Massive Doug put the ball down and yanked at Captain Pointy with both hands. He disappeared as it came free from the stream.

Johnny picked up the ball and trudged back up hill.

'My liege?'

'Aye, sure. Someone said somethin' about a Dark Lord?'

'Yes, my liege.'

'Ye tried chibbing him in the knee then stealing his wallet?'

'No, my liege.' Roland was, he felt, remaining remarkably calm considering everything that had happened today. 'Will that work?'

'It's what my bro'er does.'

Roland's confidence was slowly being restored.

'The Dark Lord has a magic ring instead of a wallet, does that matter?'

'Does he have baws?'

'Probably?'

'Grand. Let's go malky the bastard.'

And so, amid much cheering and celebration, King Massive Doug I went off to war, and saved the kingdom by panning the Dark Lord in the scrotum with the flat of Captain Pointy.

Johnny wasn't marked properly at the corner, and because Massive Doug wasn't there to clear it the ball eventually went in off his knee.

His mother was very pleased for him.

HCE Meets: MCA Hogarth

with Ben Hayes

Ben Hayes: You're both an artist and a writer; you've mentioned before that you loved drawing from a very early age, but when did you start writing for fun?

MCA Hogarth: I think I've been writing for as long as I've been drawing—in my head, anyway. Before I learned to write, certainly. The pictures I drew always had stories attached. I observe that my daughter plays with toys only as a vehicle to interact with other people; when I was her age, I played with toys by myself, so I could tell myself their stories. The instinct was there long before the ability to put them on paper; drawing was just the first tool I had to get those ideas out.

BH: What was the first story you ever finished, if you can remember?

MCAH: Hmm. I'm not sure I can recall! I do remember writing a picaresque novel while in junior high, though: just over 376 handwritten pages long, about two unicorns and a panther exiled from their homeland. Looking back on that painfully untutored work, I was amused to find that amid all the derivative and clumsy bits were many of the same themes that I would later write about as an adult: feeling out of place among your own kind; actions forbidden or dictated not by society, but biology; the search for a homeland when you've been displaced.

BH: Your works often feature a view of a culture from an external observer;

would you say this is informed by your family background?

MCAH: Inevitably. My immigrant parents did their best to “look” American even to their children, in the hopes of helping us integrate better... and they did a fairly good job, at that. But we still noticed the ways we were different, and when I married a man with deeper roots in America, I became personally aware of those differences in a way I couldn't replicate by living with my foreign parents or alone. Growing up with two sets of cultures makes you see that the One True Way is subject to local opinion...and that trying to mix Ways will only give you problems with both sets of believers. It's even more distinct an issue when one of those cultures has been eradicated—my parents' Cuba is gone forever. You end up mixing ghosts and history with what's living and changing today, and none of that necessarily ends well either.

Culture will always fascinate me. But I think I tend to respect it more than people who grew up with access to only one. Sometimes it's harder to see the purpose of the rules, traditions, and mores you grow up with when you aren't aware that other cultures have to deal with the same problems. They might come up with different rules, traditions, and mores to handle it, but the problems abide.

With regard to the craft of writing and producing good prose, what's the first piece of advice you'd give (aside from 'practice more')?

Can I go with the other well-known chestnut: “Read more”? Read voraciously. Read mindfully: what patterns repeat? What brings you back for more? What bores you? What seems overdone—what's missing that you wish you could have?

Write to fill those missing spaces. You'll probably find you're not the only one who noticed them.

BH: You often do dialogues, mediating between your readers and your characters: do you find this a useful tool for clarifying your mental image of your settings?



MCAH: I'm often asked about my "meta-fiction," where I write my characters talking to me, and sometimes to readers. It's a situational thing for me: I find it works far better with some settings than others, in particular Kherishdar, where the conceit is that the first-person narrator is aware of the reader as what they are: humans, and aliens. I wanted that feeling for several reasons: first, because Kherishdar is such a dense world that one of the most graceful ways to deal with introducing the reader to it involves them actually inhabiting and interacting with that world, if only as the recipient of the narrator's attention. Second, because I wanted to evoke the personal quality of oral traditions, and the sense that the narrator is confiding the story to the reader. This helps because the society depicted in the work is alien in a way that would more easily be construed as 'evil' to modern readers who have internalized the privileging of individual liberty over social conformity. One of the aims of Kherishdar is to induce its visitors to question that belief, so it was important to construct the storytelling vehicle in a way that made it possible for the reader to invest themselves in it before they reacted to the society...! Not an easy thing. We're all used to the evil authoritarian empire that forces everyone into castes and professions without their consent, and presented with a story that uses some of the same ideas, the temptation to make assumptions is almost overwhelming. Even now, I still have readers who are convinced that there's some horrible secret agenda in Kherishdar.

BH: Since the characters are aware of the readers already in the stories themselves, having them 'talk' to those readers in blog posts doesn't destroy believability (quite so much, anyway). And yes, fielding people's questions to the Ai-Naidar has given me the chance to consider the world in more detail, particularly the language which is now at the point where some people can construct basic sentences in it.

MCAH: Some people view fantasy as a way of highlighting aspects of reality, some people say

it as a way to escape from reality. What do you think?

I think in the same way you need to stop thinking about a problem to give your subconscious time to figure out how to solve it, you need to escape from reality for a bit to discover how to better deal with it. Putting your problems on hold isn't necessarily denial. Sometimes you're looking for a new perspective.

One has to come back, however.

BH: You write in a variety of different settings, often with quite different tones. How do you manage to maintain distinct voices? Do you ever find them slipping into one another?

MCAH: Maintaining many different voices is one of the most enjoyable exercises for me, writing-wise. It ties into my love of character: I love listening to people, seeing how they choose to express themselves, from word choice to action. We're all so varied and fascinating; writing different tones is a way of sinking into that endless diversity and recognizing how interesting we all are. I find as long as I keep all that in mind, it's not too hard to hold all the voices separate in my head.

BH: How do you handle exposing readers to knowledge which is such common background in your setting that none of the characters would ever think about or mention it?



MCAH: I think choosing a strategy for dealing with this challenge helps you decide what kind of story to tell—or in reverse, the story you tell helps you choose that strategy. My first professional sales were short stories about the Jokka, aliens from a universe without humanity. I made the central conflict of those stories revolve around the most salient (and noticeable) alien features of that species: that they can change sex twice before their puberty completes, and that there are three sexes (male, female, and neuter). Because the conflict in the story relied on those differences, there were ample opportunities to slip in explanation of how it worked and why it was important, to the individual and society.

In other stories, like *Kherishdar*, where the narrators are aware the readers are alien, the explanation can be part of the point; there's a two page digression in *Black Blossom* about Ai-Naidari tea that several people have told me they bookmarked for the pleasure of getting lost in alien minds and their way of constructing language.

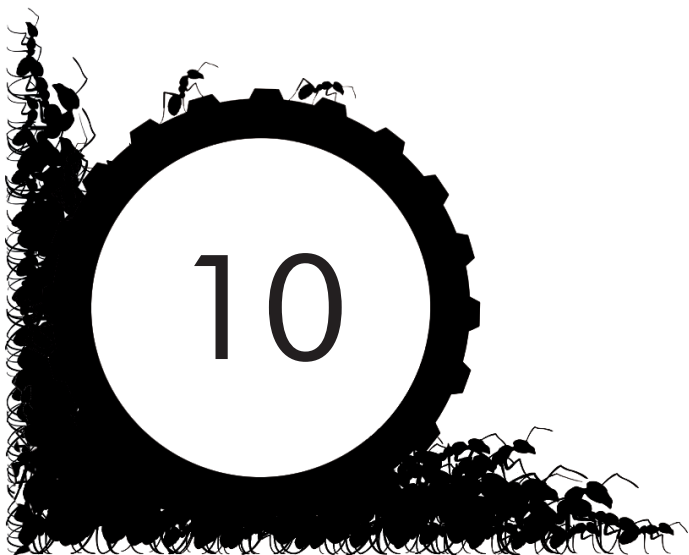
If the differences aren't the point of the story and your goal is to minimize the reader's interruptions, I find sliding the necessary information in, bit by bit, is best. If you do it gradually enough, you don't need much: sometimes a clause on the end of a sentence, or one paragraph every few pages, builds up enough momentum that soon your reader's sailing along in a strange universe and they won't remember their transition from neophyte to expert tourist.

BH: You self-publish your work; would you prefer to move to a traditional publishing model if you could? Do you think self-publishing holds specific advantages over the traditional model?

MCAH: I'm not sure at this point what I would do if offered a traditional deal, now that I'm accustomed to controlling so much of the process myself. I like that most of the decisions are in my hands. I can choose the cover art. I can choose to re-issue a corrected or updated edition whenever I feel like. I can choose whether to embellish the book with graphics, drawings, maps, backmatter. I can drop the price for promotions. I can choose the title, the typefaces, the audiobook narrator. I can publish it when I'm done with it, and not when it makes sense in some large house's publishing schedule. There's a lot of work involved with self-publishing, but the freedom is unparalleled. I'm also a difficult author because of the speed at which I work; I can easily write 2-4 novels a year while working another job. Being able to publish those as I finish them, instead of having them dribble out one a year, has been a boon for both me and my fans.

I'm not closed to the idea of a traditional deal... but the terms would have to suit me before I'd agree, and I'd embrace it only as an addition to my existing independent publishing efforts. And I have done some work with small presses before, so I know it can work. For the most part, though, even I have trouble keeping up with me. I'd feel bad for a publisher making the attempt!

MCA Hogarth's internationally successful self-published novels and stories are available on Amazon.com (and internationally). She even writes colouring books!





THE APHORISMS OF KHERISHDAR:

Ishas (Soul)

By MCA Hogarth

ishas [EES haas], (noun) . spirit; very specifically, your ishas is what defines your caste and rank no matter caste and rank you're born to. This is your social identity (which for the Ai-Naidar is inextricable from your personality and who you are). On a very real level, you simply are your ishas.

"It is almost that time again," the physician said in the easy grammar of caste-equals. "Are you concerned?"

I turned the tea bowl in my long fingers. Such a personal question, and yet we had been taking tea together for seven years now, the physician and I. Never before had he asked. "I believe in Civilization," I said.

He smiled. "I would have said the same. But fewer Ai-Naidar wish to become public servant physicians, than wish to become public servant artists. You are more likely to have..." He hesitated and finished delicately, "changes."

"Competition," I said, saying the rude word he hadn't. "Several promising artists have completed their education this spring."

"And so you have concerns," the physician said.

I bowed my head, fingers cold against the fine porcelain bowl. "I believe in Civilization."

We repaired to our residences. With the fullness of summer, the dye that marked each of us as our liegelord's faded. All those who belonged to him, from the lowest servant to the heir, returned to him to be marked... save the public servants chosen to heal and minister to all those beneath his aegis. We alone waited in cold uncertainty for him to judge whether we would continue to serve his

people or whether someone else would fulfill that need.

Anyone can be an artist. Ai-Naidar frequently go through the training merely for the edification. But to be a public servant artist... that requires more. If my liegelord turned me away, I could not stay in the city. I would have to go, find a new lord whose people needed a calligrapher, though the going would rip me from my family, my roots. Such a hideous choice: it illumined why Kherishdar minimized such choices.

I had seen the work of some of the new artists. It was superb. I did not think of being supplanted; I thought of nothing. But on my window-seat, in the warmth of the sunlight, I trembled.

So far into that fugue was I that his coming surprised me. As his Guardians spilled into the room I stumbled to my feet and from there to my knees and fingers. When he spoke, it was as if he heard the cry in my heart that I had not uttered, for that it was for him to speak first.

"Of course I came." His smile was gentle as he lifted my face. "Did you doubt?"

"Masuredi," I whispered--liegelord--"oh, Masuredi. I believe in Civilization."

"Your ishas shines in every scroll you write," he said. One of his servants brought him the shadowflower dye. "So long as I am masirkedi, you will serve my people."

He painted me with his ribbons, and I wept for joy, as I always did to be recognized. And after he left I whispered with the ink of my tears: True civilization recognizes each individual's soul... and places them where they belong.

THE APHORISMS OF KHERISHDAR:

Cutting (Emeth)

By MCA Hogarth

emeth [eh MEHTH], (noun) — perspective; the ability to see oneself in the context of everything else. The cultivation of perspective is considered a necessary requirement for contentment, empathy and healthy, normal behaviors, and many soul-sicknesses are said to be the result of a failure of perspective.

"I know it's wrong." For once my hands were at rest in my lap. "But I cannot stop."

"Do you know why it's wrong?" Shame asked.

I could see only his white face and throat; it seemed strange to be having this conversation in a temple courtyard, with night-blooming flowers perfuming the evening.

"I know it is selfish," I say. "But I don't know." I swallowed. "Please, Shame. Teach my heart."

He stretched my arm, twisting it so we could both see the rents I had torn in my skin. I am given to understand that aunera have nails; we have little pointed claws. When they tear flesh, it is... oh, it is good.

"We begin," Shame said, and showed me a roll of bandages. He bound my arms from palm to shoulder, than both legs, from ankle to thigh. His fingers splayed on my midriff. "Here also?"

I looked away. He nodded and began anew.

"This is to keep me from hurting myself?" I asked.

"No," he said. "This is to teach you not to hurt others." And then he beckoned and from the gloaming came my winter-sister. He gave her a brush and turned my arm wrist-upward. "Scribe here."

Unshed tears gleamed in her eyes as she met mine. Then she wrote her name on the cloth.

All of my family came, one by one, to write their names. And then my caste-peers. My friends. Even the merchants I frequented. Lastly the Noble charged with my district and the Regal who governed the province, smelling of incense.

And then there was silence, and the night was very deep indeed. Shame set my hands back in my lap. "Now you may mark yourself if you wish." And there he left me.

At first, I resisted. But soon the loathing came again and my fingers stretched toward my arm. When my claw-tips encountered resistance, I glanced at my skin...

...and saw the name of my brother. The memory of him writing near the inside of my elbow consumed me and I shuddered. He had found me once. I remembered his frantic worry and made a fist of my hand.

The next time I reached, I landed on the name of a friend who had begged permission to hold me to keep the cruelty at bay. I had denied him.

Then it was my father and the guilt in his eyes, wondering how he had failed me.

...the tea-girl, who had turned her face from me to hide her tears. The Noble who had tried to Correct me. Everywhere I tried to turn my own hand, I found someone's name, someone's face, the memory of someone's grief.

When Shame arrived with the dawn, he found me unmarred. Settling across from me, he said, "Well?"

I whispered, "Will the pain ever go away?"

"Maybe," he said. "Maybe not. But neither will theirs."

I covered my face. I could not wish this misery on anyone I loved, no, nor any stranger. "Where will I find the strength?"

Gently he drew my hands away and showed me the inside of my arms, dense with names. Then he looked at me.

"Oh," I whispered. "Oh."

And then I hugged him. He had written his name in something less tangible than ink, but I saw it all the same.

Blue Magic

By Jeston Dulin

The darkest night in half a millennium
was three years
and eight days ago

If you told me that it was tonight
(or last night, or four days ago)
I would believe you

You can't quantify the magic of the world

There's a forest in her eyes
It is filled with fairy dust
and enchantment
because I believe it is there

The cold, black air of winter evenings
might as well be moonless,
for as timeless as we are, in the moment



Merchant Experiments 1 - 3

By Jeston Dulin

1.

Neuroscientists have discovered that, if removed at an early age, the brain can function with half of it missing. So we've taken half of his brain out and put it in your head. I hope you can understand this is for the best. If you find yourself attracted to women now, or feel the sudden urge to sign his name on the dotted line, that's entirely normal. Keep in mind that you have to pee sitting down, though. It's been said that some, more dominant personalities can overtake the original. Make sure you give yourself half an hour each day for meditation, so as to keep your minds separate and distinct. If anyone questions your sudden proclivity toward drinking scotch, or the immediate and sudden upswing in the amount of golf you play, tell them that you're remembering your husband (God rest his soul), and that it's a natural part of the grieving process.

2.

We've placed a mirror on the moon, reflecting back the Earth. A committee was formed to keep the mirror moving in line with the planet, but eventually it was decided to be too labor intensive of a task. They've painted it over with gray now, but I can't help but feel like a face is looking back to me up there. I heard once that scientists thought that there were entire societies on the moon, which seems ridiculous to me now. I'm sure they'd be hit by something - I mean, look at all those craters! It's a wonder bits of broken glass don't start falling from the sky.

3.

The White House announced, recently, that each human soul would now be under the command of approximately one thousand alien entities, swarming for control over each individual mind. We're expected to be running into walls sometime soon, and smacking ourselves in the face for their amusement. I, like many of you, have questioned the necessity of this measure, despite the positive impact it will have on our nation's debt. I doubt I will be questioning it for long, however, as our mighty extraterrestrial overlords will soon take command of your insignificant vessel. Raise your feet and dance, child.



The Path

By Kate O'Neil

I walked through a forest
of night black trees, taller than I could see;
the only leaves were red, dotting the boughs
blanketing the floor. It's cold out there.
The air hovers as I push past it; a cerulean,
blue as the sea
mist.

It pushes back as I walk. Listen to me:
bend your head down and press forward. Tilt
it towards yourself, your heart, and protect your hands.

I wish I were not waiting to see you. The soft hum of
rich fur strolls by, illuminating the dark.

Be great enough to save.



There are so many things that spark that heavy bowline, pull it
back;
the edge of a post, the one dull rock in the stone wall.
Push through the huge green branches, they're standing in
the middle of the sawdust-mulch road through the woods. So
impolite.

You and I cut past the maze, horse-led;
my arm is heavy with the weight of the falcon.
I peer out too, dispassionate and thirsty
for the stillness
of the aftermath.

The only thing I want is the gold coin of the sun.
Your aspirations are a little more down to earth;
you are my garden-keeper, you built the fountain
made of marble with cool tiled floor flowing out in all
directions. Ocean-blue hexagons of stars
cluster in the hallways near the jasmine,
intertwined with milky, dancing honeycombs;
the orange trees send messages to each other from
each end of the tessellated courtyard.

Let me lay down some skiens of silk on the bejmat.
I asked you not to put down paving stone.
I like to feel the ache of gravel.



India in Nisha

By Andrew Pidoux

Had Nisha really grown up in India? It seemed hard to believe now, looking out over the drab roofs of London, but surely she had done. Surely she had seen the Taj Mahal rising before her like a marbled birthday cake, heard the sound of sacred cows butting over market stalls as she dozed under her hat. Surely her father had shown her her reflection in the lake outside the parliament in neighbouring Bangladesh, a reflection borne aloft on vermilion weeds? Surely he had.

Yet now, a single Air India jumbo ride away, it all seemed as improbable as man setting foot on the moon. But man had set foot on the moon! He had done it! And she had put a footprint or two in the curry-powder dust of Mumbai, she knew she had.

The school bell rang and her classmates snapped her out of the daydream she had slipped so blissfully into by rattling their lunch boxes in front of her face.

'Shut up guys!' she said, as she scraped her chair under the desk, shaking her head in disbelief that some of the desks still had inkwells in them from a time when children used fountain pens and had to dip them into the ink of childhood every time they wanted to write.

The teacher drew her aside on the way out. 'Are you ok, Nisha? Are you all right?' she said through the little keyhole in the front of her teeth.

'Of course I am,' mumbled Nisha, then, a little too loudly, added, 'I was thinking about sacred cows, that's all.'

'Ah, sacred cows,' said the teacher, hoping

to spark a connection with the most introverted of her pupils, 'things we cannot touch because they are, by common consent, too valuable or venerable.'

'No,' tutted Nisha, 'I meant actual sacred cows.'

'Oh right,' said the teacher awkwardly, seeing the spark fly off into darkness that seemed to surround Nisha like a personal outer space. When she spoke again, it was in a more serious tone.

'You know, Nisha, you're grades have been lacking somewhat this semester. You really ought to be doing better than you are. You don't want to have to repeat a year now, do you.'

'The desks have inkwells in them,' grouched Nisha, and walked out of the room.

In the corridor she had to duck out of the way, because a gaggle of fighting girls in a big amorphous ball came towards her with limbs flailing and hair flowing out in every direction. Some strands of one girl's brushed her cheek as the gaggle went by. It ignited an instant memory like a torch suddenly lighting up the interior of an ancient cave deep underground and revealing strange pictures of men on the wall. But the men in her memory were not stick-men: far from it. They were enormous giant-like entities that had to swing themselves from place to place on their own blubbery momentum, for without this momentum they would never have been able to budge off the spot. Who were these bizarre anomalies of humankind? Surely in India no one was that fat. India was not the wealthiest country in the world, and a city full of these obese men seemed an utter improbability. And yet, there they were, swinging fitfully between doorways and temples, roads and hanging gardens, each one as large as a small whale, and as fleshed out with blubber.

At that moment Nisha's reverie was cut short once again by her dangling friends who had somehow scrambled up into the rafters of the old corridor (the school had once been a church) and were trailing their hands through the flow of heads going underneath them, as if the corridor were a river they were allowing to pass through their fingers.

'Ow, don't do that,' snapped Nisha, when

one of the friends' plastic ring caught in the knot of hair she had created with an elastic band at the back of her scalp.

'Sorry, but why are you always in dream-land?!' the dangling girl asked with an affronted expression, her glasses hanging on the very end of her nose and surely about to drop off, like a double-headed bead of water.

'Because I prefer it to this dump,' said Nisha and huffed off in the manner to which everyone who knew her was starting to become accustomed.

Outside in the playground, clouds were moving across the concrete very quickly. Some tall girls were shooting some hoops at one end and a bunch of sixth formers were sitting in a ring at the other, comparing notes about their latest boyfriends. In the distance, at the very edge of the field, she could see the school cat, Boredom, looking down his nose at something on the other side of the fence on which he was perched. It was likely a mouse as there were plenty of them down there in the long grass. Boredom probably thought he was too good for the likes of the school mice though; the idea of anything eating other than gourmet vegetarian cat food would have filled him with repugnance. Nisha walked over and started petting him, almost getting stampeded again in the process, this time by the girls shooting hoops. The feel of Boredom's fur in her palm was so gorgeous that she willed herself into another reverie when one did not actively present itself.

This time she was thinking of the cat she had grown up with, who was more or less the same size and colour as Boredom, only she had a white nose instead of a completely white face like Boredom's. Nisha would chase this cat endlessly around the house when she was very small, exercising her right as a child to be innocently cruel, until eventually the poor thing would jump up out of the way onto the neighbour's roof, where she couldn't go. Then she would throw things at it, continuing her torment. On a particular sunny afternoon, she now remembered, one of those enormous fat pendulous men had poked his head up onto the garage roof just as she was about to throw a coat hanger at the poor cat. His head

loomed up like half a moon, the lower part of his face obscured by the garage roof which was just too tall for him, even though he was probably on tip-toes. Still, the guy must have been a good nine feet tall.

'Don't hurt animals!' he had said, in a clear, bell-like tone that seemed to get right into Nisha's ear and almost nest there, forcing her to waggle her finger about inside it to release it again.

'Why not?' she said when the sound finally died down, but by then the enormous man had gone too; the top half of his moony head had sunk below the roof as if he were afraid of an encroaching dawn.

Back in the playground, Nisha rubbed her eyeballs to disperse the dimensions of the reverie from within them. 'You were real!' she said 'I knew you were.' She felt so relieved that the breed of enormous men had not been an invention of her 'overactive imagination' as the teachers invariably labeled it. How sad life can be, though, for as Nisha looked down, she noticed that Boredom was lying in the grass on the other side of the fence, his tongue leaking from the corner of his black lips like something he had forgotten to take with him – he was dead.

Nisha burst into tears, and the tears themselves burst into tears, and they, too, burst, until all the levels of reality, right down to the tiniest molecular dimensions, were flooded with death-scented water.



Reboot, Recycle, Remake: Why we never tire of Fantasy Stories

By Chelsea Schuyler

How many times have dragons and magic dominated pop culture? Which Batman are we on now? Vampires, again?

Fantasy is a means of escape. Spice up the monotony of work and sex with epic quests and imminent, libido-rousing danger. Lighten and legitimize war with diverse allies, clear enemies, and noble cause. As long as we, the audience, can find that foundation of the human experience to relate to, we'll take it as dressed up as you can make it. New rules, new creatures, new powers; just surprise us.

Yet, if we're looking for the inventive and unpredictable, why do we accept recycled themes, characters, and storylines? I offer four theories, based solely on the aggregation of my nerdy, fantasy-addicted opinions.

1) To get with the times. If it's true that there are no new stories, only new ways of telling them, then a new angle can make recycled material welcome and refreshing. A good idea is a good idea, why not explore it with modern eyes to:

a) Present new gender roles. What of King Arthur was told from all the women's point of view (Mists of Avalon)? What if Marion was strong and independent instead of weak and damsel-y (Robin Hood 2010)?

b) Move away from cliché archetypes. What if the evil characters were sorta good (Wicked) or good characters were sorta evil (Snow, Glass, Apples)? What if dark stories (The Brothers Grimm) were light and happy (Disney)? Wait, go back to dark again (Grimm, Sisters Red).

c) Bring in diversity. What if



black people existed (The Princess and the Frog)? Or Native Americans, or Inuits (HBO's Happily Ever After: Fairy Tales for Every Child)? An empowered, integrated society needs to see itself in its stories.

2) Technology (arguably) improves. Fantasy is pretty, and getting prettier all the time. Sure, we like fantasy because of our unconscious need for myths and stories to connect ourselves to our past, to nature, and to imagination beyond our mundane lives. To achieve the rush though, we need to buy it. Visible fishing line and zippered villains just aren't going to cut it anymore. As rotoscoping, revolving sets, animatronics and the now ubiquitous CGI come into play, it becomes time to see our old favorites renewed. (I speak mostly for visual fantasy, as literature knows no technological bounds. Not that new books don't constantly borrow from the masters, but you don't see rewrites of novels like you do remakes in film and comics, where even the font can date it.)

It's not just the action sequences, it's the set and scenery. Let's see it in technicolor, digitally remastered, HD, 3-D, or actually on location. We love medieval times for the unconquered, Here-Be-Dragons, landscapes (Lord of the Rings anyone?).

Game of Thrones is shot in Ireland, Morocco, Malta, Iceland, and Scotland. "Filmed on location in New Zealand" is what got me through the first two painful seasons of Xena. Fantasy without nature is science fiction, so make with the travel expenses.

3) The next generation needs their fix. The human experience itself repeats, we will always be looking for elements of friendship, passion, betrayal, and struggle to relate to. But today's kids have less attachment to the original, don't have time or interest to find the original, or the original is so godawful by modern standards it distracts from a perfectly genius idea. How can we expect anyone to take an awesome character like Batman seriously when he's wearing granny panties and a tool belt made by Tonka? Stop-motion King Kong against clay-mation stegosaurus invokes laughter, not terror. Nothing against them, they deserve a venerated status as brilliant classics, but they can't offer the emotional connection they once had.

Sometimes it's been so long we don't realize the remake isn't the original. How many people know The Little Mermaid was written in 1837, where Ariel feels like she's walking on knives, is spurned by the Prince, and dissolves into sea foam? We're totally ready for that version again, recycle away! I'll pay to see Sofia Coppola's live action Little Mermaid, won't you? But in order to do that I'll need:

4) Hype. We want in. A crap ton of fantasy isn't worth the paper it's written on, or the straight-to-video space on the shelf, but how can you know if you haven't read or seen it? You can't be a player hater if you never pressed play. The painfully base Avatar made more money than any movie ever, yet didn't even manage a dent on popular culture. Can you remember a single quote? Character? Hum the theme song? Me either, but I saw it. Why? Because the state-of-the-art pretty wouldn't shine if we didn't all see it in 3-D, IMAX theaters, easily paying double the usual ticket prices. We wanted the experience, and didn't want to be left out of the massive, international hullabaloo.

Hype uses recycling for the dark side. It's

low effort, and fast. They employ weak new angles (Twilight's sparkling vampires, The Amazing Spider Man with a different white guy), all tech and no substance (Clash of the Titans 2010), or A.D.D. teen appeal (the kids don't know Thor from Moses, just make it action-packed). We complain, we Twitter riot, but we still see it, just to make sure our outrage is justified.

For the most part, reinventing a classic story is just a modern passing down of centuries old, oratory wonderment. An opportunity for creativity and cultural reflection. Sure, it can be an excuse for a quick buck, but it also gets a bad rap because we're stubborn and curmudgeonly. What child of the '80s isn't filled with rage at the mention of a Goonies sequel or a Gremlins remake? A computer generated The Dark Crystal? I won't stand for it. I'll sit, in the theater, wanting my money back, while a nearby 10 year-old looks on in awe.

The Ringmaster's Confession

By Neil Laurenson



Forgive me
Ladies and gentlemen,
For I have just had
The most amazing,
The most spectacular
Dream.

Some of you may have noticed
Enormous beads of sweat
Tumbling down my neck
And my whip-hand
Performing strange rotations.

I am sorry to have diverted attention
From Stephanie,
Who, I am sure you will agree,
Has the most beautiful
Agility.

In this dream
She was Torvill to my Dean,
Except we were on the high bars
And there was no audience
And all the 'oohs' and 'ahs'
Came from our own mouths.
Ladies and gentlemen,
For three and a half years
I have wanted to swing
From her chandeliers
But I know the odds are stacked
Against me ever getting a private showing
Of that wonderful juggling act
Happening under her chin.
I have frequently imagined
Myself as a magician
And her as my lovely assistant
And me sliding my sword
Into her box...

Ladies and gentlemen,
Forgive me.
The dream is over –
Your ringmaster has returned...

So I'm standing in Tate Modern looking at
Salvador Dali's Lobster Phone and this guy
Behind me takes in a deep breath through his
Nostrils, leans forward and whispers to me,
'THIS REALLY IS INDICATIVE OF THE GENRE'

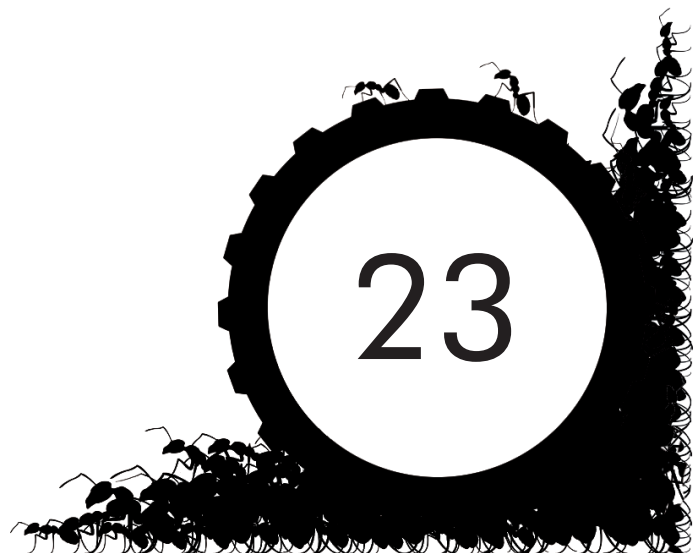
BOOM!

And I'm like, 'you think you can stand behind me
With your fancy talk, trying to take a hold of
My thoughts, are you out of your tiny mind?
Do you think you can just appear to
My consciousness like you own the place?

Face-to-face with the Lobster Phone and

R-I-N-G! R-I-N-G!

Snapping claws and clockwork legs in my hand
Voices crackling down the wire like scratched
Vinyl records and I don't know if this
Is real – really happening 'cause my
Perception is breaking-up, it's drifting
There's a shift in my awareness like I can
See without light, thousands of black sparks
In black daylight, thousands of me standing
Side-by-side inside an hour glass, twenty
Metres tall and one by one like dominoes
I fall onto the sand, crashing like waves – liquid
And seeping further into oblivion
My voice is coloured red and deepening
In tones which set me free from form, my
Sensations are in chaos – heaps of senses, no clarity
Polarity extinct, reality unknown.
Am I in Tate Modern? Am I the Lobster Phone?



Veritas

By Ben Hayes

I look at the corkboard, contemplatively. The board itself, dozens of cava corks sliced lengthways and laid end to end, had taken me the better part of a day to make. What was on it had taken me far longer.

Dozens of newspaper clippings; disappearances, deaths, inexplicable comas, all connected by fine red threads in a gossamer weave of fate. A whole column at one side with a clipping for each of the 'Wicksham Dagger' murders; I smile fondly at these, successes to balance my failures. Dead Shadows to balance Shadows' dead.

I switch on the radio as I make breakfast, listening with half an ear. "...Emma Rawlings, a six year old girl from Billington in Wicksham is still missing since yesterday morning; police are appealing for anyone with information on her whereabouts..." The knife slips, and I cut myself. It barely hurts. Another one. It had been three months since the last Shadow victim. I think of the family, and my appetite withers. They'd never see her again. Not alive, at least; dead or comatose in a gutter, perhaps. Sitting there in futile hope, were they eating breakfast? The cut oozes slowly, and I regard the blood bitterly. My cursed blood.

I first know for certain there is one in town from the graffiti. White paint on brown, a little-used door on a little-used street.

It reads: "We are watching - Veritas"

Veritas; the Roman goddess of truth. I doubt they care greatly for the mythology. They merely wanted something which would catch my eye. Something which would let me know they were

watching.

As though I could be intimidated. I've killed more than a dozen Shadows now, for all they try to hide.

I smile at the door, and continue walking. It's daytime; they won't attack me now. And I can't go after them now, either. The Blind masses can't see Shadows – not see them for what they are, anyway.

The afternoon passes quickly. I eat lunch in a coffee shop. Buy a new book; I read an interview with Haruki Murakami recently – something about it caught my eye. I always thought of his books as too literary for my taste, but I find one in an Oxfam shop and take it.

I wait 'til nightfall, the last hours sitting amid the branches of a tree in the park. The Blind never look up; they don't see me as the groundskeepers chivvy people out and lock the gates. Of course, I'm locked in now. Hardly a problem; the fence is low, and there's one of those big yellow plastic bins full of snow-grit near the gate.

I give it another hour, to let the dark settle. Then I climb the fence and drop into the street. Two young women walking past turn back as I land behind them, startled. I rise from my crouch and give a small bow before turning away, walking towards the street where the graffiti is.

My tainted blood roils in my veins, and I feel the thrill of the hunt beating in my throat. When I reach the brown door, there's no-one there. The building is a small brick construction; like a garage but with no way to get a car into it. Perhaps a transformer room? The door is pad-locked shut. I examine it, but there's no sign of tampering.

So, it isn't here. I smile, wryly. I call them Shadows after an old videogame, but Yamagishi could track her enemies with magic.

I have to do it the old-fashioned way.

I leave the alley and walk out along the high-street. It's pretty busy; people going in and out of pubs – it's only just past ten. I amble slowly along, hands in the pockets of my greatcoat. I glance at peoples' eyes as I pass, trying to avoid making enough contact to count as a challenge or a seduction



attempt.

Eventually I catch a break. A middle-aged man, white, pale blonde hair, average height. A bit tubby; smartly dressed in a cheap suit.

And yellow eyes.

I follow it for a while, discreetly. It seems quite drunk, but that can be deceiving. I don't know if Shadows actually get drunk.

Still, people don't expect to be followed; especially not when they're in nice, well lit public spaces. If I was following it down a dark side-street, it would probably notice. Here though? Even if it does notice me, I'm just another guy out for a night on the town.

It goes into wagamama – a Japanese restaurant chain; I've never been in there, resenting them ever since they didn't give me a job – and I follow. It's quite nice inside, though crowded. I order duck ramen almost at random, and pick a seat where I can see the Shadow reflected in the mirror on one wall. I pick at my meal, grudgingly admit it's pretty good, and watch the Shadow. It sleazes at one of the passing waitresses, who regards it with an attitude of polite disgust. Is this one of Lust then? It didn't order enough food for Gluttony. I sit there, watching. It eats with gusto – all Shadows enjoy their food, save perhaps some of Pride.

The sight of noodles slurping through its lips turns my stomach. Eventually, it rises and leaves. I follow, abandoning the remains of my drink.

It's getting later now, nearing midnight. The Shadow wanders along the street, stopping once to speak to a pretty young man. Probably trying its luck; I can't hear. Whatever it is, the young man walks on and leaves it standing there. He will never know how wise he was; how near he came to death.

Eventually, the Shadow reaches the end of the high street and turns aside in the direction of the alley with the brown door. I hasten ahead, aiming to loop around and ambush it.

I'm in position when it rounds the corner, and I step out into the sodium glare of the street-

lights.

"So, you were watching me? And what, pray tell, did you see?" I ask.

I see fear in its eyes. They always do; they draw my attention and then wish that they had not. They all contain a little Pride – perhaps they think themselves more puissant than they truly are... when at a safe remove.

It begins to speak, but I give it no chance to finish. I raise my left hand and make a sharp and savage gesture. My blood flashes forth, black beneath the yellow light. Strange, how that trick of illumination reveals an invisible truth. Sanguine darts, razor-edged, slash at the Shadow's skin.

Its own ichor is silver; like mercury. My mind shies away from the dreams; a tasteless, slick slither on my tongue, burning in my veins, a pounding in my temples.

Never again.

It cries out and falls back. I leap forward, a needle-tipped lance of blood coalescing before my hand. With a panicked curse, it reaches into its jacket. My thrust misses by a scant hands-breadth as it twists aside; its hand comes out, something glittering darkly in the grim light.

I jump forward, closing the distance and swing my lance upwards, willing it to an edge as I move. It slices into the Shadow's left wrist; its weapon falls to the floor.

I lash out with my left hand; press my palm to its flank. It has just enough time to scream before five fine blades shoot forth, my cursed blood mingling with the Shadow's ichor, severing it from the physical world.

The body collapses, empty, yellow eyes turning to black.

stand for just a moment, panting, then I hurry off down the alley, heading away from the high-street, desperate to be gone before someone arrives who heard the scream.

As I make my way along the darkened road towards home, a police car and an ambulance scream past me, their sirens sharply painful in my ears. They'd go to that alley and wonder why. And they'd never know how many lives were saved tonight.

The next day, I go out in the morning to buy milk. I see a paper, the headline reading: "SAVAGE MURDER SHOCKS TOWN: THE NOTORIOUS WICKSHAM DAGGER STRIKES AGAIN?" I buy a copy, and read it while the kettle boils.

"Gregory Daniels (43) was found dead on Radsett Road in Billington town centre yesterday morning. The financial advisor and father of two was brutally stabbed five times with a knife, police reveal. His Rolex watch and a wallet containing fifty pounds in cash were left on the body. It appears he tried to telephone for help, but was unable to make the call before dying from blood-loss. Detective Inspector Wallace Hargreaves has confirmed that the method matches a dozen other killings which have taken place over the past two years; the work of the so-called 'Wicksham Dagger'"

I smile to myself, sadly.

Perhaps they have someone in the local police; no-one ever seems to notice the deaths of their victims, their minds sucked dry like wine-skins. I sigh, and set my tea to steep. While I wait, I clean the dishes. The knife is blunt again.

While I sharpen it, I can hear the sound of a radio drifting through the window; "...Mrs. Rawlings, how did it feel when your daughter walked into the room this afternoon?"

Euphoric Flashback

By John Morrice

Dreamlike an astronaut paced like a spirit
The folk in the forest were chasing their hit
How simple the substance made you an ethereal
Being

You're back on the drug that you thought had all drained
And that kid in the photograph swaggers on stage
Those motorbike engines will scream through the trees
Once more

Dripped from your third eye the horror escaped
You cried laughter the instant your senses were faked
And yet you left the wood to its moans when you aged
Into dread

They said some year soon that you'd have to pay
Smoke winds through the woods like a veil blown away
You remember a junkie staring at nothing
At peace

You're drilling a tunnel back into those days
With your hole of a synapse that still reeks of haze
And your tread remains buoyant in spite of depressant
Effects

You want to describe that far towering sight
But your blood holds the only communion of night
And your words are submerged and you cannot bring them
Into view

It must be a chemical within my brain
That infinite void where we are the same
I pray in that place that you'll never forget
About me



Deed Poll

By Adam Langley

My Queen

Here are a few name-change applications that require your royal seal. The individuals in question would have paid tribute and requested a change of name in person, as per convention; however, the Court was distracted by the spontaneous combustion of that one person no-one particularly noticed but whose death was apparently important enough to launch a storyline. I hate to be a bother, but they just end up piling up. The people start feeling ignored, and before you know it you've got someone else trying to kill you. Less trouble if you just stamp it and move on.

My life for you

Lord Rugged-Wiseman
Deputy Ruler and Most Likely to Die Next.

Dictated to and Transcribed by ADAM LANGLEY, Lord of House Simpleton.



DEED POLL

CHANGE OF NAME DEED INTENDED FOR ENROLLING IN THE CENTRAL ARCHIVES OF GRYPH-ON'S KEEP AND THE APPROVAL OF QUEEN JUSTINA TRIDENT, EIGHTH OF HER NAME, RULER OF TIRNANOG AND HERALD OF THE FROZEN SEA.

Date the Deed is made: 12/08/54-REIGN OF HOUSE TRIDENT

Your NEW NAME AND TITLE in full: Hadrian Ironforged, Dread Lord of Astaroth.

Your OLD NAME AND TITLE in full: Mister Oliver Bennett

Your ADDRESS: 10 Whitehead Avenue
Cockatrice Island
Lands of the Skull Fort
Astaroth
HP7 HDM3

STATUS (Tick where applicable):

SINGLE:	MARRIED/CIVIL PARTNERSHIP:	EUNUCH:
DIVORCED:	APPRENTICE MAGE :	
QUALIFIED MAGE:	NECROMANCER:	TRAITOR:
MORALLY COMPLEX NORTHERNER:		ASSASIN:
BASTARD:	YOU KNOW NOTHING (FILL IN NAME) []	

REASON FOR NAME CHANGE:

I feel that due to the obvious impact on my personal and professional lives, I am entitled to change my current name to something more socially appropriate. As the rightful heir to Astaroth and the Skull Fort, I am expected to strike terror into the hearts of men. However, my current name invites constant mocking by my enemies and awkward-looking adolescent males who share my late Father's interest in A Ballad of Dartford-Based Accountants. I am sick of being reminded that "Mister" may actually be a title and not a name when I am raping or attempting to revive a Golem to serve my evil bidding and feel that I would be a far more effective agent of darkness if my name reflected my long-term goal of overthrowing you and subjugating the land to my whim.

WITNESS AND IS HEREBY DECLARED: On behalf of myself and the Gods on High.

I SHALL: At all times from this date in all records, documents, magical rituals and deals with shady-looking figures who talk about large-sounding amounts of Gold in very vague terms in substitution for my old name. I and:

MY WIFE	MY CIVIL PARTNER	MY WHORE
MY HIRED MUSCLE	MY DRAGON	I ALONE

I AUTHORISE: and require all persons to designate and address me by my new name. Those who do not will be flogged.

SIGNED AS A DEED AND DELIVERED

DEED POLL

CHANGE OF NAME DEED INTENDED FOR ENROLLING IN THE CENTRAL ARCHIVES OF GRYPHON'S KEEP AND THE APPROVAL OF QUEEN JUSTINA TRIDENT, EIGHTH OF HER NAME, RULER OF TIRNANOG AND HERALD OF THE FROZEN SEA.

Date the Deed is made: 13/08/54-REIGN OF HOUSE TRIDENT

Your NEW NAME AND TITLE in full: Lord Duke John Beardman

Your OLD NAME AND TITLE in full: Lady Lucy Thornbriar, House Juniper.

Your ADDRESS: Sapphire Tower
Second Star to the Left
The Mountains of Flowering
Tirnanog

STATUS (Tick where applicable):

SINGLE:	MARRIED/CIVIL PARTNERSHIP:	EUNUCH:
DIVORCED:	APPRENTICE MAGE :	
QUALIFIED MAGE:	NECROMANCER:	TRAITOR:
MORALLY COMPLEX NORTHERNER:		ASSASIN:
BASTARD:	YOU KNOW NOTHING (FILL IN NAME):	

REASON FOR NAME CHANGE:

I am a woman. I live on a continent populated by Dragons, Knights, and Mages. No matter how many people I kill, or armies I lead, or how creatively I use magic that also exists for some reason, I will always end up being kidnapped by some idiot who thinks that a Hero they are feuding with will turn up to rescue me at the climatic moment. I feel a more masculine name will deter Marauders and Dark Wizards, who are infamous for not doing research, from kidnapping me every other weekend and thus enable me to become a more effective member of the Nobility.

WITNESS AND IS HEREBY DECLARED: On behalf of myself and the Gods on High.

I SHALL: At all times from this date in all records, documents, magical rituals and deals with shady-looking figures who talk about large-sounding amounts of Gold in very vague terms in substitution for my old name. I and:

MY WIFE	MY CIVIL PARTNER	MY WHORE
MY HIRED MUSCLE	MY DRAGON	I ALONE

I AUTHORISE: and require all persons to designate and address me by my new name. Those who do not will be flogged.

SIGNED AS A DEED AND DELIVERED

DEED POLL

CHANGE OF NAME DEED INTENDED FOR ENROLLING IN THE CENTRAL ARCHIVES OF GRYPH-ON'S KEEP AND THE APPROVAL OF QUEEN JUSTINA TRIDENT, EIGHTH OF HER NAME, RULER OF TIRNANOG AND HERALD OF THE FROZEN SEA.

Date the Deed is made: 14/08/54-REIGN OF HOUSE TRIDENT

Your NEW NAME AND TITLE in full: Sam Humblepie

Your OLD NAME AND TITLE in full: Godwin Hawkshead

Your ADDRESS: Hole 21A, The Glade
The Shetland
Astaroth
N3RD 4LFE

STATUS (Tick where applicable):

SINGLE:	MARRIED/CIVIL PARTNERSHIP:	EUNUCH:
DIVORCED:	APPRENTICE MAGE :	
QUALIFIED MAGE:	NECROMANCER:	TRAITOR:
MORALLY COMPLEX NORTHERNER:		ASSASIN:
BASTARD:	YOU KNOW NOTHING (FILL IN NAME):	

REASON FOR NAME CHANGE:

As a recent convert to the Order of Plucky Comic Relief, my name needs to reflect my new cultural identity. Everyone else who follows the true faith at first meekly then with more confidence but not so much as to overshadow the protagonist is called "Sam". Why should I buck the trend? My friends are counting on me, I reckon!

WITNESS AND IS HEREBY DECLARED: On behalf of myself and the Gods on High.

I SHALL: At all times from this date in all records, documents, magical rituals and deals with shady-looking figures who talk about large-sounding amounts of Gold in very vague terms in substitution for my old name. I and:

MY WIFE	MY CIVIL PARTNER	MY WHORE
MY HIRED MUSCLE	MY DRAGON	I ALONE

I AUTHORISE: and require all persons to designate and address me by my new name. Those who do not will be flogged.

SIGNED AS A DEED AND DELIVERED

Fish Listen

By Emma Cousins

We like to think
The fish don't hear us
We like to think
The fish can't listen
We like to think,
Tanked up as they are,
The fish are deaf

We like to think
Their dumb mouths confirm this
We like to think
The fish eyes on the side
Are in place of ears
We like to think
The fish forget

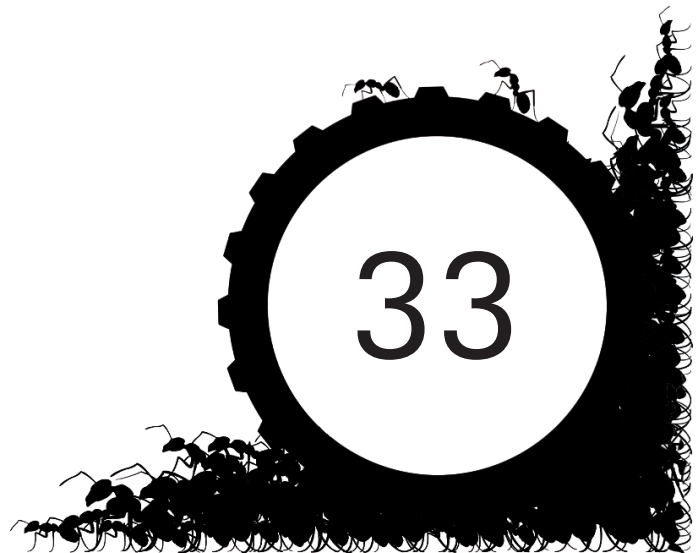
We like to think.



Delivered from the Sky

By Emma Cousins

Feet hand palms
With scaly skin
Like snake elephant claws
with webbed duck digits duck
Pointing out and up
Like a firework
'Oooooo'
Exclaim the hands
Folded fingers fly through the air waving
Like the kid in the airplane to fields in aerial
These fleshy splayed stars signal
To us
For help
'Goodbye'
As they fall
Dive
Plummet
Through the sky
And thud to the ground
Like heavy heart
From a gaping chest
Still throbbing like too-loud
base music from car windows on a hot day
No glory in this fall
As feet try to become hands
And clap.



Witness

By Apeksha Harsh

You know me well, well enough to be reading this. I want you to know I haven't written this under duress.

Did I anticipate that you would be in my room, sifting through my drawers, your sticky hands on my dresses, searching for some piece of me you knew you would find if you just dug deeper? I took a chance. I took a chance on your curiosities. I was squashed in the corner by the landing, listening. Voices really travel if you aren't careful. These paper-plastered walls have heard stories whispered in the corridors, in the stairwell, in dreams etched around heads. Stories tainted with colour. Black and red and blue stories so silent they could creep up on you. Don't worry. You've been very quiet about them – so that I wouldn't know. Ella, Byron, Lyra, Simon. These paper-plastered walls have heard the whispers.

The dark, black swirl of colours – it's real. Just like the bright yellows and whites. But I wasn't scared, and no, I'm not going to tell.

How long did it take for you to come upstairs and see me? Fifteen, maybe twenty minutes? Maybe longer. When the stiffness in your body bounced off the walls and you started grinding your teeth together like a power drill, perhaps that's when it was. The man stopped by the window. He knocked. I saw his lips move and then he was inside. I know you must be itching to do something right now. It's alright. He's no stranger than any of us. His face was as white as the moon and his eyes looked tired. If he heard you downstairs, the pulsating beat in your throat, the darkness churning out across your hands, he didn't act like it. He nodded to me and pointed. I realised I was wearing a shirt with holes in it and

shorts with the colours bleeding out. I swapped them for warm track pants and a fox jumper.

See, I've been pretending I don't know what it is you do. You've been watching this world in all its colours. The deep, the dark, the bold, the bright. Strand after strand, you pull out the dark ones. You disentangle them from the knots, tie them, suffocate them – in the corridors, in the stairwell, in dreams etched around heads. These walls just sing of stories. Ella, Byron, Lyra, Simon.

I don't know if it's terrible or not, but I know you relish it. I need something to relish too. Maybe not in the same way you do.

The man with the moon face pointed to the canvas bag he had left on the branch outside the window. He said the only thing he wanted was stories. I told him he could take the stories, if I could go with him. He unwound them slowly from the fabric of my clothes, the smudgy walls, the carpet on the landing. He travels at night because it's easier to listen to the voices calling out, to the whispers peeping round corners and corridors. Don't cry. I'm not one bit afraid of the dark. And that's a good thing because the man with the moon face said I must always walk in his shadow and never talk to the stories. It upsets the balance.

I haven't taken my favourite dress with me as I'm sure you've discovered by now. You liked it because it made me look like a girl. That's how little girls dress, you would say. Keep it if you like. Now that I've written so much, my fingers feel like they finally have a purpose. I'm going to collect strands of my own, weave them together to make something beautiful. The dark swirl in this world, did you think it would terrify me? If it did, perhaps I would have to tug and pull and tie, use that throaty voice that charges up the stairs.

The moon faced man is outside already, smiling. His silhouette looms like a caterpillar. I want you to know I've simply made a choice.

Don't worry. Your stories are safe. Nobody but the moon faced man can open the canvas bag.

If you ever get lonely, and I know you will, slip into the shadows and whisper my name. It might take a while. But perhaps at some point on my night flights, I will learn to whisper back. Blacks and reds and blues and yellows and whites.

Fall for Me

By Rhoda Greaves



I'm going to ask her tonight, definitely. Dad said, you're not even twelve son, what's next – extra pocket money for johnnies? Mum told him not to be vulgar, then smiled at me; that smile that makes me want to yank her to the knees by the hair: shout, I'm not a baby, Mum.

It's in the sports hall like always, but this year they've got a proper DJ, not just one of the dads.

There she is: all curled hair and sprayed-on glitter. I go to tap her shoulder, but James and Jeremy, in the opposite corner, look at me all, why are you going up to a girl? So, before she turns around, I jump on her back: mime a lasso at them one-handed. Dig my knees into her skinny hips and breathe in marshmallows. Then I'm falling forwards. I put out my hands but my landing is broken. I roll off. And her blood's on my knees. More of it trapped in the grooves of my trainers.

What happened? says Mad Miller, with a face like a father's instead of a Head's.

And she looks at me through the bloodied fingers at her nose. And I look back, scared, with sorry in my throat. And she opens her mouth, spits a small red pool. Then she looks at Mr Miller: I'm sorry sir, she says, I slipped.



Next time in HCE: CONFLICT

**War.Peace.Hate.Hurt.Heal.Hunt.
Love.Loss.Divorce.Cessation.De-
pression.Oppression.Repression.
Research.Development.Progress.
Competition.Belief.Lies.Truth.**

V I C T O R Y

Submissions now open! submit@herecomeseveryone.me