

DEMONIC TOME

MARCH 09 SPRING WRITING CONTEST EDITION



**A WORD
FROM
MR. DEADMAN**

Demonic Tome is proud to present the 2009 Spring Writing Contest: Aleyin's Sorrow. The stories in this edition have either won in the contest or were such strong contenders that we couldn't pass them up. Now with respect to those that won this amazing event, we introduce fine authors like, **Ty Johnston**, **Holly Day**, and **James M. Hartley**. All three of these authors have something in common in that they won, not only a modest gift card to Amazon.com, but also the opportunity to receive discounted publishing from E-booktime.com, which is a company that, despite its name, does publish physical copies. The Author shrine will be updated by 03/10/09 with these wonderful and talented authors, and not to exclude those of the previous contest, they will receive not just a place among other authors, but a symbol to recognize their contribution.

We present to you Aleyin's Sorrow.

When light glows with such magnitude that it glares in the face of its followers, it then renders the beacon of protection into a taunting aura that provokes the impossible of threats. Those that carry their presence with such pride, fueled by the disdain of those are not them, are merely pawns that allowed the game to run its course. The overwhelming light washes over into areas where darkness was home, disturbing those that only wanted peace in solitude, and nothing tolerates such abrupt awakening. It is shocking that the ones that enforce the light and the presence of good were appealed by the act of resistance, but that is only with a kind perspective for their cause, because even they, being man, would have done the exact same thing.

The Demon, the one that gives license for this realm to exist, found intolerance on their front and he did what he had to do to restore order, but being the powerful entity that he is, his devastation tore a much deeper wound, causing the deity of light, and life to emerge.

When two polar opposites collide it takes extreme force to make them meet, and the closer they get the more dramatic the ripples become. Nothing is spared from the widening touch of destruction, casting the people whether involved or not, into nothingness. Violent flames rose from the friction of the grinding rocks, scorching the land, rendering it into a mass burial field. These two challengers, **The Demon and Aleyin**, are in this not for justification, not for the label of being right, but for the absolute domination of the other.

These tales are not of that battle, no, that would be far more depressing than anything Voltaire had ever produced. Instead these are the tales that are fit enough to summon forth a wide following, bolstering the Demon's Strength...





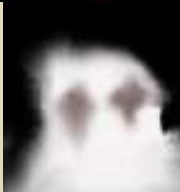
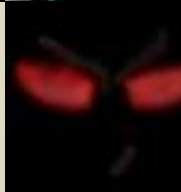
CONTENTS

AUGUST <i>by Ty Johnston</i>	5
JOINT CUSTODY <i>by Holly Day</i>	12
WEEDS <i>by James M. Hartley</i>	14
MR. JOHNSON AT THE CROSSROADS <i>by Stephen R. Bonnich</i>	23
CLEAR AND PRESENT DANGER/ HEROES EPISODE 314: BY JESSE DEDMAN	32
CASE STUDY: WHAT DRIVES US? BY JESSE C. DEDMAN	34



Author Shrine Update

The Author Shrine now has poets listed in a separate drop box, as well as a way to recognize the work of various contributors. We present to you a brief list of identifiers that would be used to portray the works of the author. Now, we are not trying to turn this into a meek game of sorts, but we do want to give credit where credit is due. These icons are a work-in-progress.

	Simple enough to explain without the need of words.		For those that have shed a ton of blood.		Sinuously Wicked and bound by no religious restrictions.
	Editor's Chosen. In this case it is good to have red.		Spirits and ghosts...		Gaze into the eyes of the fearless...

AUGUST *by Ty Johnston*

1st place winner of the Spring 2009 Writing Contest

The phone rings and I light up another cigar while putting my feet on my battered desk.

“John August,” I say into the receiver as gray smoke drifts around my head.

“Is this the ... private investigator’s office?” an elderly female voice says on the other end. I get a picture of her instantly. She’s pushing eighty with all-white hair; she’s thin and wearing a grubby navy dress with light blue and white flowers patterned on it. I also know she has lung cancer from all the filtered cigarettes she’s been smoking, the filters doing her no good. Too bad she doesn’t know about the cancer, but she’ll find out during the next visit to her doctor in a few months.

“Well, I am an investigator of sorts,” I say in my usual collected manner, “and I’m about as private as they come. I suppose you could call me a private investigator. What can I do for you?”

She hesitates. She feels strange and afraid. She got my number from the lady who has been doing her monthly palm readings.

“Mrs. Forest, I’m the person you need to talk to, so go ahead.”

She hesitates again, but now the fear has grown. “How did you know my name?”

“I get paid to know things,” I say. “Like, for instance, I know a little brown cat is circling your feet, waiting for you to hang up the phone because it’s feeding time.”

There’s quiet as she looks down to see Mr. Whiskers doing just what I said. Then she starts thinking that she should just hang up because this is getting too scary.

“Mrs. Forest, please, calm yourself,” I say, getting rid of my spooky voice, trying to sound like a normal homo sapien. “I’m the only person within five hundred miles who can help you with your problem. I know this is all a bit strange for you, dealing with someone like me, but I’m your best bet.”

“Please, I don’t have anyone to talk to,” she says quickly, then gulps for air. “I ... my husband. The problem is with him. He’s not himself anymore.”



“What’s the problem with your husband?” I ask. I don’t know this one. It’s clouded from me for some reason, but occasionally things are.

“He’s dead,” she says.

I take another puff of my cigar and take my feet off the desk. “How long has he been dead?” I ask while reaching for the long coat I was sitting on.

“I think just a day or two.” She’s near crying.

“You think?” I ask, pulling on my coat.

“I don’t know,” she says. The tears are coming now. “I came home from my volunteer work at the church and found him in his bedroom upstairs.”

“Uh huh, and what’s the problem?”

“He won’t leave,” she says.

*S*itting on the subway train, I begin to think things through. I’m pretty sure the lady hasn’t gone bonkers. I can usually pick that up right away. Plus there was the blind spot when I had to ask what happened to her husband. Normally I would know something like that without having to ask. When I can’t read something from someone, it means there are higher powers involved, or the person is someone who knows how to block me. Rarely, say everyone in a hundred thousand regular Joes, there is someone whose mind I can’t read, but that’s just because some people have more will power than others. So, my being blocked leads me to believe there’s more here than meets the inner eye.

I didn’t bring my pistol. I was sure I wouldn’t need it in a case like this, whatever that was. Firearms can be dangerous when you’re dealing with the dead. A fellow I knew once blew his own head off because a demon inside a little boy told him to; it wasn’t likely my friend had had a choice.

I get off the stop at Fourth Street and amble my way through a cluttered alleyway so that I come up the back way to the house. No reason to let anyone see me enter.

I knock at the back door and hear a screech from inside the house. I must have scared the old lady nearly to death.

“Mr. August?” she says as she opens the inner door to stare at me through aluminum mesh.

“That’s me,” I say. She looks exactly as I pictured her, though I knew she would.

“I guess you should come in.” She opens the screen door and I walk inside.

I think I’m going to puke as the smell hits me. It’s one of those old folks’ houses where the cats have been running the show since at least the Nixon administration. There are little tufts of different-colored cat hair on everything, in the corners and floating across the tables and even clogging the kitchen

sink.

But the smell is what really puts the clincher on my stomach. I have to grit my teeth and force my tongue to the roof of my mouth to keep the stench from making me throw up. Don't get me wrong, I don't mind cats. I'm not exactly crazy about them, but I don't mind them. But this is too much. It smells like I'd gotten a new job scrubbing lions' asses at the zoo.

"Would you ... like a cup of tea?" the old lady asks.

I take one look at the stove where the kettle sits and decide I wouldn't have the tea. There are little cat hairs flaming away on two of the burners. I smack at the hairs to put them out. I don't want the house to burn down, least ways not while I'm in it.

"I'll pass on the tea," I say, grimacing. "Perhaps I should get upstairs and finish with this."

"Oh, yes, surely." She leads me toward the front of the house.

I stop her and look up the dark stairway. "What's your husband's name?"

"Harold," she says. She's more frightened now than ever. She's thinking of running down to the deli on the corner for something to eat while I do my business upstairs. I know she won't. More than anything, she wants sanity returned to her life. Too bad. I don't specialize in sanity.

"Alright, Martha," I say, giving her one last look as I take the first step. "I want you to go into the kitchen and fix yourself a cup of that tea. Sit at the kitchen table and read something from your Bible."

"Will ... that help?" She's quivering as she asks.

"Yes," I lie, and start up the stairs.

I look back once to make sure she is gone, and then I proceed to the landing. All five doors in the hall are closed, including the closet at the far end, but I know the bedroom is the second door on the right.

I grasp the dirty brass knob and turn it slowly. I'm not quite sure what's waiting for me on the other side, and I'm not in too much of a hurry to find out now that I'm here. I can feel cold waves seeping from the room, drifting through the cracks around the door.

"Hurry up and get your ass in here, boy," a croaky voice says from the other side of the door.

I thrust the door open, step into the room and slam the door closed behind me. I hear the lock latching itself without any help from me.

In the far corner of the room is a stained mattress with no covers on top or a frame beneath. A bloated, cabbage-smelling figure sits on the mattress with its back against the wall. Grime and dried blood cake the front of the figure's shirt.

“So, you must be Harold,” I say.

The dead thing points a crooked finger at me. “Oh course, I’m Harold, you little piece of shit,” it says with a gurgling voice. “Now that you’ve shown up, why don’t you have a seat?”

I glance around the room and see a dresser on the right wall and its duplicate on the left. I bend down so one knee is touching the ground. “This’ll have to do, I’m afraid.” I return my eyes to the abomination. “Nowhere to sit.”

The thing gurgles louder and I can’t tell if it’s trying to speak or if it’s laughing. Finally it says something distinguishable from the rest of its noise. “You could come over and sit next to me.”

“I don’t think so. I like this end of the room.” I notice there are two windows, both closed. One window is in the wall in the back on the right, the other in the back on the left.

There’s some more gurgling crap coming from its mouth. “So, if you’re not going to get comfortable, then get down to business.”

I nod. “Very well,” I say. “I want you to leave this house and leave that poor woman downstairs alone.”

“Pfah!” It spits blood and mucus. “That sorry bitch never did anything for me in her life. Why should I do anything for her in my death?”

My hands are sweating, even though it’s cold in the room, so I rub my fingers. “Don’t you want to know what’s beyond?” I ask.

“No,” is the instant answer, then, “I’ve got a pretty good idea what awaits me. I was a miserable, rotten son of a bitch during my time. I’m in no hurry to go on and be a miserable, rotten son of a bitch in hell.”

“Well, if you want to hang around, that’s fine with me,” I say, “but you should have the decency to leave your body and let your poor wife get some peace of mind.”

“Poor wife, my ass,” the thing says. “She’s done things, things I’d suspected but never really known. You learn a few things when you die.”

This guy was a pissed ghost with a grudge, and still hanging around in his body, the worst kind. Pissed ghosts don’t want to leave because they enjoy making others as miserable as they are.

“If you’re not going to do this the easy way, then I’ll do it the hard way,” I say, making sure to stare the creature in the eyes.

For a brief moment I sense fear in him. Then, “Go ahead and do what you want, faggot. I got nothing to fear from you. Do your worst!”

“Alright.” I nod and turn to open the door.

Laughter greets my back as I twist the knob and the door won’t budge.

“You can’t get out that way,” the thing says.

I close my mind and picture the knob floating in space. I concentrate and try to turn the knob again. I hear a soft clicking sound near my hand and a roar of hate behind me.

Walking out the doorway, I look back at the beast. "I'll be right back."

A scream of rage is softened once the door shuts.

I run so fast down the stairs I almost fall.

"Mrs. Forest, would you mind running down the street to get me some garlic?" I say quickly as I trot into the kitchen.

The old woman looks up from the Bible she is reading at the kitchen table. The book is turned to somewhere in Job. She stands slowly and asks, "Will that help?"

"Tremendously," I lie to her for the second time. I just want her out of the house.

She ruffles through a closet in the kitchen for her threadbare coat and I help her put it on with one hand while my other sneaks a large butcher knife out of the drawer behind me. I pocket the knife in my coat while she's retrieving her purse from the living room.

"How much do you think you'll need?" she asks at the back door.

"Three cloves should be enough."

She checks her purse, and then scampers out the door and down the stairs of the back porch. She gives me one last, sorrowful look before she is gone out the gate in the backyard.

I turn back to the house.

"Pussums," I say in my sweetest voice while half-kneeling to the ground. "Come on, pussums. It's time for din din."

There's no answer. I take out the butcher knife, wipe the sweat from my brow with a coat sleeve and only then notice the electric can opener.

The mechanical hum of the machine brings the cats, all twelve of them. They climb up on the kitchen table and jump up to the counter top.

I grab the closest orange-brown tabby by the back of its scrawny neck and slice open its throat with the knife. The little beast puts up a fight for a second until I smash it into the sink, crushing its little furry skull.

The rest of the cats flee into the nether parts of the house.

Blood pools in the sink and splatters the counter. I look down to see more than a few drops on my coat. Damn. I just had that dry cleaned.

I drop the knife in the sink and begin the journey back up the stairs to the dead thing's room. I didn't want to have to do things this way, killing the cat and spilling blood over half the house, but you work with what you've got.

In front of Harold's door, I stop and knock.

“Go the fuck away,” is the garbled answer.

I enter the room with a smile, holding the dead cat before me by its tail.

“You little cocksucker, you’re going to ruin everything,” the dead man says to me from the mattress. “All those years alone in this house, even with her and all her fucking cats, and then I find out all this shit about her. And now you’re going to take my revenge away from me.

“I hope we meet in hell.”

I squeeze the cat’s body so more blood slides out its open throat while I make a half circle around the mattress, leaving a moon-shaped trail of scarlet on the floor. I make sure the windows are not inside the crescent of blood.

“You’re protecting her from me,” the thing says, “and you don’t even know what she’s done.”

The half-circle of blood is completed. I drop the cat and close my eyes and peer back into the past of Martha Forest. I get an image of their wedding day, her appearing gay only to those who were paying no attention. I see her first night with her husband; she screams with pain as he forces himself inside her. I catch bits and pieces of the rest of her life, most of it painfully boring. It would help if she were present, or if I could hear her voice. I could see into her mind a little better if there were a physical aspect of her available.

“Let me tell you what that filthy cunt did to me,” the thing says. “She got pregnant before I went off to Korea in ’52. Next thing I know, I’m getting a letter from her telling me she lost the baby.”

“It happens sometimes,” I say, feeling slightly sympathetic toward him despite myself.

“That’s not the half of it, you fucker.” It screams and spits blood. “She didn’t lose the baby. She had it fucking cut out of her! And do you know why? Do you know why she had the baby killed?”

“I haven’t a clue.”

“Because she’d fucking run off with another man!” The thing screams again, and tears roll down its vulgar face.

The monster continues to cry as I contemplate the sometime meaningless side of our existence. His wife had run away with someone else, and then had an abortion, thinking she could just say there had been a miscarriage. Apparently her little fling had fallen apart before the war was over. Mr. Forest came home to find his wife waiting for him. He hadn’t known all these years. He had suspected something had happened while he was away, but he had never known what it was or just how bad. Fifty years later he dies and the truth is revealed to him. What a sad, sordid fucking life this guy had.

I turn to the door.

“Where the fuck are you going?”

I point to the moon of blood I had drawn. “That will keep you from harming anyone,” I say. “You’re trapped inside the circle, unless you can tear through the walls.”

“You’re just going to leave me here?”

I nod. “You two deserve one another,” I say. “Besides, your body will rot away in another few weeks. There’ll be nothing but skeleton. You can still haunt the room if you want, but you won’t be able to go anywhere and you won’t be able to harm anyone.”

The thing continues to cry as I silently close the door behind me.

I walk out of the house and make my way to the subway station without running into the old woman. She’ll have a hell of a mess to clean up when she gets home.

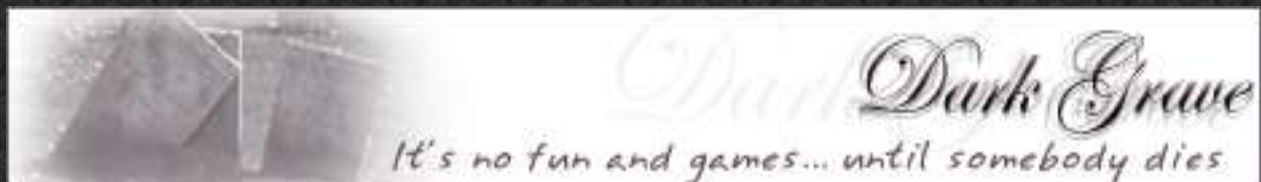
Back in my office, I throw my coat on the floor, sink into my chair and put my feet up on the desk. Outside, the rains starts tumbling down. I hear thunder in the distance.

My phone rings.

I open a desk drawer and retrieve a cigar and a lighter. The cigar is half-finished by the time the ringing stops.

Ty Johnston has been writing fiction nearly twenty years. He has had stories published in the anthologies "Deadlines" and "The Return of the Sword." He has a story upcoming in the anthology, "The Infinity Swords." When not writing or reading, Ty enjoys spending time with his wife, their beagle and three house rabbits.

The main character’s dialogue meshed perfectly with him, and the story explains his personality and view points through interaction with environments. The talk with the spirit is what ultimately won the attention of the judges. -Kingwood



JOINT CUSTODY *by Holly Day*

2nd Place in the Spring 2009 Writing Contest

The bag was growing heavier with each step Justin took, turning from nothing at all to uncomfortably-angular concrete blocks in a manner of minutes. The car was just at the other side of the hill. If he really cared, he could make it, he thought. There wasn't anything in the world he loved more than spending time with his boy.



He reached the car within a few minutes in a fit of new energy, charging down the side of the steep hill, letting gravity do most of the work. He nearly slammed into the side of the car as he came down, his feet and exhaustion tripping him up. "Damn!" he whispered, jiggling the car handle. It seemed he couldn't stop for traffic lights without locking his car door anymore, even in the middle of the night in the middle of nowhere. "Too many years in LA."

He set the heavy bag down and fumbled about for his car keys. He finally caught hold of the key ring, looping the tip of his index finger through it and wrenching the thick stack of mostly-useless keys out. Another wave of exhaustion loosened his joints, triggered by setting down the heavy bag. "Almost there."

He swung the bag carefully into the passenger side of the car, taking a wild guess as to which was its upright position. As an afterthought, he buckled the shoulder strap across the filthy canvas. "Can't be too cautious," he muttered. He lurched around the vehicle and slid into the driver's seat, his back involuntarily crackling as he settled into a more comfortable position. "You ready to go, kid?" he asked the dark space inside the car—getting no response, he grunted softly and yanked the stick shift into reverse.

The radio offered the usual pap of late night talk shows on the way home. The tinny voices of sex-crazed maniacs filled the otherwise-silent car, lured on by the sultry voice of the show's hostess. "Is it so wrong to want more women than I could possibly satisfy?" cried one voice, so desperately serious that Justin almost ran off the road, taken by surprise by the inanity of the question, choking on his own spit. He sobered up quickly and righted the car. No use sending the kid back to Mom with horror stories of bad driving and

traffic accidents.

He pulled into the well-lit driveway of his apartment complex, turning off the headlights before they flashed into anyone's bedroom. "It's the sort of considerate thing I wish everyone did," he said. "You treat people the way you want to be treated, and you really can't go wrong." The car slid quietly into the cramped space of the garage, stopping inches from the back wall. A rusty lawn rake threw crazy shadows across the hood of the car, the tines stretching like skeletal fingers all the way to the far wall.

Justin let the engine shake itself to a complete stop before opening the door to get out. The hard soles of his boots clicked loudly against the oil-stained pavement, a shock against the otherwise silent night. "Let's try to be quiet, okay?" he said. "I know how sound can carry through these walls. We don't want to wake anybody up now, do we?" He walked around to the passenger's side of the car and clicked open the door. "We'll just sneak in, quiet as mice."

He held his breath as the heavy bag hit the stairwell several times on the way up to his apartment, vibrating against the aluminum handrail. "Almost there, kiddo," he whispered behind him, his keys already in his hand. "Just around the next corner and—viola!" He quickly opened the door of his apartment and went in, letting the door close by itself behind him.

"We made it!" Justin finally let his breath out. He headed directly for the sofa and set his burden down on the floor. Part of the canvas fell away, revealing a small, gray hand. Justin stared at the hand for a second, and then shook his head. "We've already let most of the night get away from us, Son," he said. "We've only got a few hours before I've got to get you back in bed, next to your mother." He pulled the rest of the fabric away from his small son's body, grave dirt falling onto the shabby, tan-colored carpet. "One of these days, I'm going to try to get you here for the whole weekend," he continued, pulling the body out and setting it up on the couch next to him. "Maybe we could go to the beach or something, eh? Just like old times."

He put his arm around the still body and drew it close to him. The small head refused to rest properly against his shoulder, so he tried slouching more, to make it fit. The remote control slid easily into his other hand, almost as if by telekinesis or even its own free will. He switched on the set at the far wall and grinned happily down at his little boy. "Check it out, Tony," he said, patting the damp, gray, hair-covered skull. "I got cable!"

Holly Day lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota, with her two children, husband, and cat. Her newest nonfiction books are Music Theory for Dummies, Music Composition for Dummies, and Walking Twin Cities. Her poetry and fiction have most recently appeared in Coe Review, Laughing Dog, and Pearl.

To add personal touch to why I liked it over the rest, I would have to declare that the ending was very much a surprise. There was a similarity to "A Rose For Emily" by William Faulkner in that the main character was attached to a dead significant person. -- Mr. Dedman.



WEEDS *by James M. Hartley*

3rd Place in the Spring 2009 Writing Contest

*I*f the meteor had hit a hundred feet north, in Sam Jackson's yard, or a hundred feet south, on Bob Cole's property, things might have been different. Big doses of weed killer applied early enough would probably have stopped things--literally nipped them in the bud--at least, that's what most of the scientists said. But the meteor landed in Pete Brady's back yard.

Sam and Bob both spent inordinate amounts of time during the spring and



summer tending their lawns. If there had been such a thing as a Nobel Prize for Lawns, they would have been in the running. Any weeds that dared show their heads were promptly troweled up, or zapped with weed killer. The lawns were mowed diagonally, northeast to southwest one week, and southeast to northwest the other. The mowers had bags on them of course, and after the weekly mowing the trash men had to pick up a dozen plastic bags of grass from each yard. Sam and Bob were proud of their lawns. They were totally ashamed to have to be seen living next to Pete Brady.

Pete Brady mowed his lawn every two weeks--well, sometimes it went three, if it rained or something, or if he was busy doing something else and couldn't find the time. He mowed the grass, and he mowed the clover, and he mowed the dandelions, and he mowed everything that got in his way. He mowed around in a circle, and he didn't have a bag on the mower, so the cuttings went all over the place. Pete didn't much care; to him mowing the lawn was a disagreeable chore to be completed as fast as possible. So when some strange new weeds began to appear in the middle of his backyard, he just mowed them down.

This worked the first couple of times, anyway, but of course it spread the weeds over ever wider parts of Pete's lawn. And then in August, it rained every weekend, and Pete was getting home late most nights because he was working overtime. From the end of July, the lawn didn't get cut until the Labor Day weekend. When he finally got to it, Pete of course started mowing from the outside in as he always did, and the grass was so tall that the mower kept stalling just on the ordinary stuff.

When he got in to where the new weeds were, though, the mower simply wouldn't cut at all. A month of growing with lots of rain had allowed them to mature and toughen to the point where Pete's mower was totally ineffective. He took the blade down the basement and sharpened it, but even then the little 2.5 horsepower motor on his little hand-propelled rotary just stalled.

After a while Pete gave up and went over to Bob Cole's house to ask for some help. Bob had a big lawn tractor with a 20 horsepower engine, and he had special chrome steel blades that he kept at razor sharpness mounted on it. Always glad of a chance to show off his toy, he agreed to come over, and shortly thereafter drove his tractor around the end of the fence and headed for the weed patch.

"Ole Babe here'll take care of your weeds, Pete," he yelled. He engaged the blade and headed for the weeds at top third-gear speed. He hit the weed patch and Ole Babe promptly stalled. "Sonuvabitch, Pete, you do have some tough weeds, don't you?"

He disengaged the blade, started the engine, and backed up a bit. Then he put the machine in first gear and inched in toward the weeds, foot poised ready over the clutch pedal. As the blade hit the weeds, the engine lost speed and Bob hit the clutch. Not soon enough, though, the engine stalled again. He repeated this cycle several times, and finally backed away from the weeds and turned off the tractor.

He walked over and inspected the weeds, shaking his head in amazement at the lack of cut marks. Then he got down on his knees and peered underneath the machine and gave a long, low whistle.

"Something wrong, Bob?" asked Pete, who was now feeling less upset at the failure of his little mower to penetrate the weed patch.

"Damn blade is all chewed up. Chrome steel blade and I just sharpened it, too. Looks like I was trying to mow a rock garden."

"Gee, I'm sorry, I guess that's my fault. I'll buy you a new one."

"No, you couldn't expect this. I didn't. But I got one more ace in the hole. Just wait." He ran around the end of the fence into his own yard. Five minutes later he was back carrying a new blade. "Latest thing on the market. Has a tungsten silicide monofilament edge, whatever the Hell that is. Gotta install it with the wrapper on, otherwise they say it'll cut your hand off."

Pete looked on as Bob quickly dismounted the old blade and handed it to him. Even someone as unused to lawnmowers as Pete was could see that the old blade had been through the wars. Bob mounted the new blade just as quickly, then mounted Ole Babe and started her. He engaged the blade and started inching the mower forward.

This time, as the blade hit the weeds, there was a terrible noise, like fingernails on a blackboard only worse. Bob hit the clutch and Ole Babe stopped her forward progress. Gradually the sound diminished and faded into silence. He backed the mower away and went over to inspect. A few weeds around the edge had been cut and were oozing a reddish fluid, but most of the plants showed no effects at all.

Again he looked under the mower, and this time he cursed violently. Then,

without another coherent word, he remounted Ole Babe and drove her at top speed around the end of the fence to his own yard. Pete shook his head, looked back and forth from the weeds to his little mower, and went and put the machine away. Then he got a beer and plopped down in the hammock to mull things over.

The weeds spread rapidly after that. There was a trail of them leading over into Bob Cole's yard, following exactly the path where Bob had driven the tractor back home. Bob got a new super-blade and started mowing that area every day, and for a while that worked. But as soon as he mowed the rest of his yard, the weeds spread everywhere. There just wasn't time, even for a lawn fanatic like Bob, to mow the entire yard every day, and soon the weeds got the upper hand.

But they had a good head start in Pete's yard. It wasn't long before they had gotten all the way across the yard and were right up against the foundation of the house. One night Pete and his family were wakened by what they thought was an earthquake. The 911 dispatcher had heard nothing of any earthquake threat, but sent over a police car and a fire truck. Close examination showed that tendrils of the weeds were forcing their way into the foundation of the house, into the mortar between the cinderblocks. In some places they were even crumbling the blocks. As the foundation disintegrated the rest of the house was settling, causing instability and the shaking the Brady's had felt.

When they saw what was happening, the family grabbed their clothes and headed for a motel. The next day Pete rented a truck and with the help of a few friends got as much as possible out of the house. Two days later the entire house collapsed.

Bob Coles' house was the next to go, a week and a half later, and Sam Jackson's house held out for two weeks after that. By that time, the weeds were visible on every lawn on the block. All the families living there were making moving plans, and the insurance companies were being besieged by claims.

Mayor Terhune of Bradford sat in his office with a worried look on his face. Addressing Chief of Police Wickham, he asked, "What are your men doing about this problem?"

"Us?" replied Chief Wickham. "We're cops, not lawn mowers or landscapers. We give out traffic tickets, we shoot crooks. We're not equipped to do anything about weeds that tears down houses."

"Well, then, who is? Who can we call?"

"One of my men had a suggestion, Mr. Mayor. His brother-in-law is in the National Guard, and told him they have flame-throwers that'll burn almost anything. Get some of them in here."

"Sounds good to me, Chief. I guess I'll have to call the Governor, get him to mobilize some Guard troops for us."

The initial contingent of Guardsmen, almost one hundred strong, deployed around the perimeter of the infected area. Their orders were to burn out a twenty foot wide strip all the way around the area, providing containment of the weeds, before moving inward.

PFC Pete Hayes stood about ten feet from the nearest weeds as he ran through a checkout of his flame-thrower, and then hit the ignition button. The flame scorched all the ordinary vegetation in front of him, and then he moved in toward the weeds. Even as the flames got close, the weeds showed no effect. Then, as the hottest part of the flame hit a large cluster of weeds, something happened. There was a sound, like popcorn popping but much louder, and the air was filled with green particles. Hayes swung his weapon up toward the cloud of particles, expecting them to burst into flame, but they just continued to spread through the air until the cloud engulfed him.

Hayes stood there in shock as the particles landed on his clothing and flame-thrower, and instantly began to grow into weeds. He took a deep breath so he could yell for help, but it felt like he was breathing fire, the particles searing his throat and his lungs. He collapsed, dead before he hit the ground. PFC Pete Hayes was the first casualty of the operation, but by no means the last. By the time his comrades got to him, the weeds in his lungs were forcing their way out between his ribs and tearing through his uniform.

Quarantine was slapped on those Guardsmen still alive. A convoy of mobile decontamination units was brought in. The troops were subjected the humiliation of

stripping completely in public and throwing all their clothes and gear as far into the infected area as possible. They were shaved completely, lathered, and showered in the open, and only then moved into the decon units. Even with these precautions, two of the decon units had to be abandoned when they sprouted weeds.

This time a larger group was gathered in Mayor Terhune's office. "What happened out there?" asked the Mayor.

"Unfortunately, the flame-throwers made things worse," said the National Guard commander. "I think Dr. Swenson, a Botanist, will be able to explain it best." He nodded toward a middle-aged woman sitting next to him.

"Up until this incident, we had only seen the weed spread on the ground," said Dr. Swenson. "However, it has an alternate means, via air-borne pollen. The heat of the flame-throwers caused the pods containing the pollen to burst open. And the pollen grows much more virulently than the adult plant, almost explosively. Inhaling the pollen causes instant death."

"Why didn't the pollen burn?" asked Chief Wickham. "Could we use something hotter, napalm or something like that, to kill it?"

"The pollen is extremely heat resistant," said Dr. Swenson. "It would take thermonuclear temperatures to burn it. How many H-bombs do you want to set off here in the middle of town?" The question was unanswerable, and there was silence for a few minutes.

Finally, a man wearing General's stars spoke up. "We have some, er, herbicides, that might help. They are extremely powerful, and might help."

"Herbicides, General Porter? Are you sure you don't mean defoliants? Of course a lot of those are banned, just curious how you might happen to have them...?" asked Dr. Swenson.

"Well, er, yes, I guess you could call them defoliants, Doctor. Left over from actions that took place before they were banned, kept at a carefully controlled Top Secret facility, in case of an emergency--like this one! Limited supplies, but if they work we know how to make more, banned or not."

"General, I want you to know I was instrumental in the campaign to get those defoliants banned. But," Dr. Swenson said, "I think I have to backpedal on this one. We have to do something, and we have to do it quickly. Bring your unholy chemicals out and try them."

The convoy bringing two tank trucks of defoliants to Bradford had so many armed vehicles that it caused traffic tie-ups across three states. Interstates were closed for twenty miles in front of and behind it, roads leading to overpasses were blockaded, and the FAA was enforcing a no-fly zone over a hundred mile circle. The tank truck drivers, and the crew that would do the spraying, were dressed in outfits that looked like spacesuits, and were breathing bottled air.

When the convoy arrived, weather forecasts were checked in detail, and the tankers were positioned in a spot that was upwind of the weeds and likely to remain so for several days. Other trucks parked and braced themselves, putting out long booms that would hold the hose nozzles a hundred feet downwind of the trucks and their crews. Finally everything was ready and the spraying began.

Any other vegetation in the target area shriveled and browned instantly when the defoliant hit, but the weeds were unaffected. As far as anyone could tell, they might as well have been spraying water. The spraying continued for half an hour in the hopes of a delayed reaction, but nothing happened. Dr. Swenson and General Porter, both wearing their spacesuits, looked at each other and shook their heads. Then the General signaled to stop the spraying.

The hoses, the booms, and much other equipment was abandoned in place rather than cleaned. The tank trucks, still containing significant amounts of defoliant, were washed half a dozen times until they were declared clean enough to leave the site. A high perimeter fence was erected well outside the area sprayed, and the convoy left for the base it had come from, again snarling traffic.

The next meeting was in the Oval Office. All those from the previous meetings were there, as well as a number of other powerful individuals. Mayor Terhune and

Police Chief Wickham sat in the back row, feeling very much out of place.

General Porter spoke first. "Madam President, we have a real crisis here. The area infested by the weeds is still growing, and nothing we have tried so far seems able to contain it. I'll let Dr. Swenson here explain the details."

"Ma'am, these weeds are not affected by the most potent herbicides, defoliants, we know of. The adult plants are also immune to heat and flames up to any temperature we can generate via chemical means. In addition, high temperatures rupture the weed's spore pods, and the spores appear immune to any temperatures short of a thermonuclear explosion."

The President's face took on a very upset expression, and she interrupted, "Are you saying we should H-bomb this place? Are you serious, Doctor?"

"No, Ma'am, that wouldn't work. We thought about it, but then we realized it would make things worse. At ground zero the weeds would be killed, but further out the pods would burst but temperature would be too low to kill the spores, and the blast would just spread them over a much larger area. But we do have a possible solution."

The President relaxed a little. "Well, what is it, Doctor?"

"I'm going to let my colleague explain it, Ma'am." She gestured toward a man sitting several chairs over. "Doctor Smythe, a noted Radiobiologist."

"Thank you, Dr. Swenson." Turning to the President, he said, "Ma'am, I have tested a few samples of the weed, and it is vulnerable to high levels of radioactivity. A radioisotope dust, applied in a strong enough concentration, will destroy the weeds."

The President's upset expression had returned. "Dr. Smythe, I'm sure you are well aware of the dangers of such an action. If that dust were to get loose who knows how many deaths we might have? Is the danger here really so great that it justifies such a risk?"

Dr. Swenson interjected, "Yes, Madam President, the danger is that great. Remember the effect of two buildings collapsing on 9/11? If we don't stop these weeds, eventually they will reach New York and bring down every building in the city."

Dr. Smythe continued, "We have established safe parameters for this. The weeds currently occupy a roughly circular area between two and three miles in diameter, but there may be a few outlying infections. By dusting a circle ten miles in

diameter we are certain to get them all. And we put a strong, high, fence around the ten mile circle to keep people out."

"But Doctor, what if some of the dust gets out of that area?" asked the President. "A strong windstorm, for instance?"

"Yes, Ma'am. But if we put another fence outside that, enclosing a twenty mile diameter circle, the chances of enough dust escaping to cause any harm is infinitesimal."

"Wait a doggone minute!" came Mayor Terhune's voice from the back of the room. "You're talking about wiping out the entire town of Bradford, and most of the county around it!"

"Yes, we are," continued Smythe. "But frankly, there is no other choice. Madam President, we must do this."

The President sat and stared for a moment. Finally she said, "Go ahead and start preparations. I'll declare it a Federal Disaster Area." She sighed. "OK, thank you all for coming, let's get busy." She continued to sit there as the others got up and left the room.

The two fences, twenty foot chain link topped with barbed wire, were erected around the area and posted with radiation hazard trefoils. On a calm day, when the danger of wind spreading it was minimal, radio-isotope dust was spread over entire ten mile circle enclosing the weed infested area. In a few days the weeds, and every other plant, were dead. In fact, every living thing in the infested area was dead. Everyone just forgot about recovering what was inside. The government paid to relocate the people.

Two months later, little Jennifer Brady was getting settled into her new house and her new school in Summerdale, a hundred miles from where Bradford had been. She kind of missed Alice Cole and Marcia Jackson, who had moved somewhere else, but there were lots of kids around and she was making new friends in her neighborhood, and her class at school.

Today was the class Science Project day, and Jennifer was showing her project, a potted plant. "This is a very strange kind of plant. I can't find it in any of the books in the library, so I don't know its proper name. I got this plant in the back yard of the house

we used to live in."

James Hartley is a former computer programmer. Originally from northern New Jersey, he now lives in sunny central Florida. He has published a fantasy novel, "Teen Angel," and stories in Illusion's Transmitter, Written Word Online, Clonepod, Every Day Fiction, Lorelei Signal, KidVisions, Raygun Revival, and the anthology "Desolate Places." He is currently working on a second novel, "The Ghost of Grover's Ridge."

This piece of fiction was different from the others and from what we normally present in this magazine, but there was a certain vintage quality to it that stuck with us. One the first read through we found it to be okay, but more and more we began to discuss amongst ourselves the underline points that this story could be making. What is more horrifying than monsters, serial killers, and the unknown is the decisions we make as human beings, and our ability to deal with question provoking situations. Kingwood

A Moment of Perspective

Case Study

What is Human Nature?

MR. JOHNSON AT THE CROSSROADS *by Stephen R. Bonniel*

A story we just couldn't pass on. The brutality screams Demonic Tome...

David Gilbane was on top of his game. The successful author had just sold his 19th novel, the 6th movie made from his body of work was making a killing at the box office and the 7th movie was set to begin filming in his hometown of Barrington, Rhode Island. These days, there was never even a question as to whether he would sell a book or not. His tagline was literary gold. His name was synonymous with horror, like King and Lovecraft. He used to joke with his wife that he could sell a bare bones outline or even



a concept, so hungry was his reading fan base. That was before his wife took the kids and left him. He was sad at first but he did what any mega-rich author would do. He built a mansion on the shores of his boyhood aquatic playground, Hundred-Acre Cove. He caused quite a stink when he did this, by buying not just one oversized waterfront lot but half a dozen additional homes in his immediate vicinity. These he bulldozed, giving him instant seclusion in the midst of suburbia. This caused much consternation and a fairly loud public outcry. He quieted the complaints as he always did – with cash. He donated \$100 million to build an aquatic recreation and research center across the cove on the old Walker Farm land. The town was very grateful, and quiet about whatever he did with his land from then on.

After building what local Barringtonians called a McMansion, he let the surrounding land grow wild again, much as it had been when the Wampanoag Indians lived there in the 1600's. He still occasionally found their pottery shards and arrowheads as he toured his wild estate on his ATV. He kept these souvenirs of the original inhabitants of his land. They were some of his most prized possessions. He always kept his ATV use to a set system of trails he had created about his land, so he did not overly disturb the abundant wildlife that he shared his land with.

He shared his land with the normal suburban wildlife, squirrels, rabbits, possums, chipmunks, skunks and all sorts of birds as well as more wild species such as deer, raccoons, foxes, coyotes, pheasants and turkeys. He also had ospreys and bald eagles nesting on his land. This suited him just fine, for the animals did not bother him for autographs, donations, or ask him to serve on town committees.

He had become a bit of a recluse since moving here and the lack of human companionship, which would be maddening to some, only served to fuel his creativity. The words flowed from his keyboard and the cash streamed into the bank. This seemed like a good trade-off to him, even if it meant he rarely saw his kids. He provided well for their every need and the trust funds he had set up would take care of their education, including graduate school if they were so inclined. Just as he had with the citizens of Barrington, he kept them happy with money. At least he thought he did.

His house was as close to the shore as permitted by zoning laws and Department of Environmental Management regulations. The front of the house faced the street; not visible through the double rows of 12-foot hemlocks he had planted, bordering the road. The front yard was exquisitely landscaped and well kept. A long winding gravel driveway led to his 5-car garage. There were no bright, welcoming flowers at the entrance to his driveway like other Barrington homes. He didn't want to go that far. He would prefer if people stayed the hell away, especially strangers. He had even mounted a nice bronze plaque on a post near the road that read, "No Soliciting". He figured this would keep away the clipboard hugging environmentalists, who were always looking for donations. He hoped as well to deter the various religious groups who either wanted to save his soul, for a small donation, or save his ass when the end of time came, also for a small donation. He figured the sign would actually save these groups time, as he made it a habit, when he opened his door and encountered someone like this, to abruptly say "No Thanks" and shut the door politely before they could utter a word.

And so it was that when the doorbell rang on a bright summer day, just as he was sitting down at his PC to write, he found himself surprised and a bit curious. He meandered from his water-view office at the back of the house to the front door and opened it. He found himself face to face with a well-dressed man in a business suit.

He began swinging the door shut, just on the verge of uttering his “No thanks” when the man spoke his name.

“Mister Gilbane?” he said politely, fedora in hand. “I’m Mister Rothschild, Lew Rothschild from the publishing agency. If I could just have a quick moment of your time and then I’ll be out of your way.”

Dave thought to himself for a split second, that at least this guy knew the rules and he hesitated with the door. That was all it took. In a heartbeat, this man was inside the house and shutting the door for him. It was at that precise moment that Dave Gilbane’s long string of good luck took a turn for the worse. He watched mutely as the man held his outstretched fingers toward the door’s latch mechanism. Some sort of blue discharge shot from his fingers, scorching the edge of the door and jam and fusing the doorknob and deadbolt permanently locked.

“There now,” This man who called himself Rothschild said politely, “We shouldn’t have any interruptions now.” With that said he drew his arm back and hit David across the face with his forearm, sending him flying into the wall, where he landed in a crumpled heap. Half delirious, Dave watched in disbelief as the man went to the front window, and pointing his index finger at each window, appeared to nail them all shut.

“What the...” Dave struggled to form the words, “What the hell are you, some sort of human nail gun?”

In an instant Rothschild was upon him, almost as if he was watching a video in fast forward. He reached out and grabbed Dave by the throat with his left hand. He lifted him up high, holding him against the wall as Dave flailed around. Before he knew what was happening, the man held one of his hands against the wall and drove a nail through his hand and into the wall. As Dave screamed, the man moved lightning fast and nailed his other hand, exclaiming with glee how good it was that he had just happened to hit a wall stud.

“Nail gun indeed, Mr. Gilbane,” He shouted, NAIL GUN INDEED!” He finished off by Nailing Dave’s feet together into the wall as well.

Dave screamed as loud as he could, thinking he was nailed like Christ to a cross.

“No Mr. Gilbane,” the man exclaimed, apparently reading his mind, “Not like Christ. Christ was a prophet, a saint. You, my friend are a worthless piece of shit nailed to a bunch of flimsy kiln dried studs in a two bit piece of crap house!”

Dave continued to scream in agony, knowing full well that his seclusion would prevent anyone from hearing.

“My dear Mr. Gilbane,” Rothschild said, You simply must stop this caterwauling. Might I remind you that your Jesus stayed on a cross for 3 days and barely uttered a cry? Now you can do better than that, can’t you?” With this last question he pointed his right index finger at Dave’s face, holding it just inches away. Dave could see blue sparks or some sort of aura dancing on his fingertip. He snapped his mouth shut.

“There, I thought so. Now you just shut the hell up and “hang loose” for a while, while I finish securing the house.”

David had no choice but to hang loose. He hung there Whimpering like a baby, tears streaming down his face as he saw this evil man securing the house. As he had noticed initially, there was something odd about the way the man moved. He seemed to move from point A to point B in a blurry burst of speed. It almost seemed as if he was somehow bending time, nailing the windows shut as he did so. And suddenly, there he was again, standing in front of him. He reached both hands up towards Dave’s impaled, prone body.

“No...no...no...no...no...no” He whimpered, Please don’t”

“Oh stop it!” Rothschild said, “This is really getting tiresome.” And with that he waved his hands, and David fell to the floor, bruised, bleeding and terrified.

“GET UP!” his captor ordered him.

He did as best he could, leaving streaks of blood on the wall where he touched it for support. When he was ordered into the dining room he did as he was told, hobbling on his ruined feet. He sat at the dinner table as ordered and asked one question.

“Why are you doing this to me?”

“I’m here sir to collect on a very important and long overdue debt.” Rothschild said.

“Then it’s money you want? Look I have a safe upstairs. I have gold coins, silver dollars, lots of cash, All yours...all yours.” Dave told him, the faintest glimmer of hope flickering in his mind.

“I don’t want your filthy cash or your precious metals!” He screamed at Dave. “How dare you insult me!”

“Then what?” Dave began, but as he looked at the vicious man, something seemed to happen to him. As he stared at his tormentor, his complexion began to change, getting rapidly darker, until within a few seconds his skin was a deep black. It then appeared that his skin was cracking open, curling back like paint on an old New England barn. His skin seemed to flake off, falling at the feet of a terrifying creature. He screamed like a little girl as he found himself facing a hideous dark green scaly dragon or reptile of some sort. His mouth was a mass of needle-like teeth and long tendrils of mucus hung down from his putrid mouth. His eyes were huge and were like those of a snake. His long muscular arms ended in three-fingered hands. Each finger had a fearsome claw at its tip. His gaze shifted to his feet and they were huge, almost dinosaur feet, again capped with fearsome claws. His legs were large muscled masses, and it was when his eyes made their way to the apex of his thighs that, David cried uncontrollably. For he could see the thing’s penis, if indeed it could be called that. It was long and seemed to come to a sharp point, almost like a wooden tent stake. Its hard scaly length looked about 18 inches in length and seemed to be pointing straight at him. He saw movement on it and noticed that it was covered in some sort of crawling things.

“Starting to get a better idea of why I’m here now David?” The reptile spoke in Rothschild’s voice. When Dave didn’t answer, it roared at him.

“I’M HERE FOR YOU SOUL YOU MISERABLE PIECE OF CRAP!”

“Huh? What?” was all Dave could muster past his vocal chords.

“We made a deal my friend, twenty years ago, on September 16 at 9:37 AM. You said to me and I quote, “I’d sell my damn soul if I could just sell one damn novel!”

“But I didn’t mean that. I was pissed off. I had just gotten a rejection notice from an agent that had finally seemed to find my work interesting. I just blurted it out.”

“Hold on now.” The demon spoke. “Do you think for one moment that when a man is dying and with his last breath he cries out for God or Jesus to help; do you think THEY question the urgency, the validity of that call for one

second? Of course not you silly ASS! They HELP! Same here man. Do you think I have the time or the inclination to question every pledge of a soul to me? HELL NO!”

“But....But...I didn’t SIGN anything! How could I? How could you?”

“Listen, I don’t owe you shit by way of an explanation, but I have waited for this moment for so long. I suppose a few more minutes won’t matter. I know you surf the Web. I’ve been tracking you for quite some time. You like those porn sites don’t you, you filthy bastard! How many times have you downloaded software or entered a web site and had to acknowledge some sort of user agreement, by clicking a little ‘click here’ button? Same thing with our little transaction pal. The minute the words left your mouth and you achieved your fame, you ‘clicked here’. Face it. YOU’RE SCREWED DUDE!”

As he explained this he had been rummaging through Dave’s kitchen cabinets. He emerged finally with a cast iron frying pan. He grabbed a stick of butter from the refrigerator and threw it in the pan, turning the burner on medium high.

“You don’t mind if I eat do you?” The demon said, approaching him now. With one hand he picked Dave up and bent him over the table, eliciting a new round of terrified squeals from his prey.

“OH STOP IT YA LITTLE BABY! I’m not gonna rape you. Believe me I wouldn’t stoop so low as to put my beautiful shaft into the likes of you! I am gonna stick THIS in you though!” He said as he held a stainless steel syringe and a needle that looked more like a nail in front of Dave’s face. Before he knew what happened, he felt excruciating pain, as the needle was jammed into his spine. He felt a burning sensation and then his legs went numb. He was roughly picked back up and thrust back down onto the wooden chair.

“There, that should help keep you still.

He bent down to the floor then, rummaging around near Dave’s feet. Dave felt no pain, but revulsion, when the creature stood up and held his hands out. In his claw-like hands he held all of Dave’s toes. He bellowed a guttural laugh as he returned to the stove and tossed the severed toes into the frying pan. As Dave began blubbering like an insane man, he noticed the creature’s shape blurring, partly morphing back into Mr. Rothschild again. He seemed to have a human face but the rest of his body was reptilian.

“Ahhhh,” He said as he reached his bare hand in to the frying pan to delicately turn the toes over, “There’s nothing like some pan-fried toes to get a body’s juices flowing.”

“Please,” Dave pleaded with him. “Please just kill me. Kill me and take my soul.”

“Ah ha-ha-ha. Is that how you thought this worked?” He mocked him now. “Did you think you would pledge your soul to me like the old blues man, Robert Johnson, down at the crossroad, falling down on your knees, signing some piece of paper with blood, and then when you die I collect the soul that is owed. Well that would be a nice deal, FOR YOU! Unfortunately I hold the cards and it doesn’t quite work like that. There would be no fear in that now would there,

and unfortunately for you, fear, my friend, is what this is all about. I have to harvest the fear and shortly after it the soul. You see, fear is like a fine wine. It must be aged and matured before it can be enjoyed properly. Until that time, I must satisfy myself with your yummy toes. For now at least.”

And with that he reached into the hot frying pan and retrieved one of Dave’s now caramelized toes. He put the end in his mouth first, and began gnawing on the fat pad of Dave’s big toe. He removed it from his mouth for a second and spat the toenail out of his mouth.

“Some of my kind eat the nails, but I can’t say that I like them. The sweet human flesh is where it’s at my friend.”

As he said this Dave became aware of the smell of his own cooked flesh. It seemed to smell gamy and buttery. He remembered, as a kid, seeing a house fire where an old couple burned to death. This brought to mind the smell of their burned bodies. The thought that it was him that he smelled made his stomach turn somersaults.

“Wee, wee, wee, wee, wee, “The evil entity intoned, “This little piggy went right in my mouth.” And with that he popped the last toe in his mouth and ate it bones and all. And then he started in Dave’s direction again. Out of nowhere the needle appeared again. Before he could protest, the demon had given Dave a shot in both forearms and swiftly sliced off his hands. Dave screamed till his throat was raw, and vomited uncontrollably when he saw the demon throw his hands, the instruments of his trade, in the frying pan.

“Oh Look,” Rothschild said with glee. “They flex!” and with this he brought the frying pan over to Dave so he could watch in horror as his dismembered hands clenched and unclenched as they cooked. For the briefest of moments Dave was reminded of how he and his friends would cook freshly caught eels from the cove and how they also would slither about the pan as they cooked. Then he puked again and lost consciousness.

When he awoke from his brain vacation, he had no idea how long he had been out. He looked at the floor, waiting for his vision to clear. With horror, he noticed his hands, picked clean of flesh, lying on the floor near the bones of his feet. When at last he looked up, he saw Lew Rothschild, looking as normal as he had when he’d first come to the door, at the stove preparing yet another meal. He saw that apparently his unwelcome guest had rummaged through his pantry and found a can of baked beans, which he was now heating. Nearby on a plate sat a toasted hot dog bun, some relish, mustard and chopped onions. Despite his agony and fear, Dave felt his stomach grumble. He looked at his torturer with hazy vision, amid a state of delirium.

“Dude – Saturday dinner.”

“Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes!” The man-beast exclaimed. “Good old Yankee Saturday dinner. It just wouldn’t be Saturday without beans and hot dogs for dinner! Although I must say I am a bit disappointed in you Mr. Gilbane. Try as I might, I could not find the main ingredient. No bother though. In the spirit of Yankee ingenuity, I believe I have found a substitute.”

In his fogged state of consciousness, Dave Gilbane missed the hint, did not

realize what this evil a-hole was talking about, that is until the beast came at him with a carving knife. He placed the knife on the table right next to Dave. There was no danger in that. With no hands, there was no way Dave could pick it up and stab him with it.

“Now, I’ll need to tie you up for this next extraction. I hope you don’t mind.”

“Like I have a choice?” Dave asked.

“True.” The beast answered. “True as my shaft is straight. Now then do you have some rope?”

“No, No rope.” Dave half mumbled.

“No bother, Mr. Gilbane, no bother at all. I’ll just have to improvise.”

And with that, he tore Dave’s clothing off, in a blur of motion. Before Dave had even a second to consider this, Rothschild’s hand turned to reptilian claws once again and he tore open Dave’s abdomen. Dave let loose a blood-curdling scream as he saw his steaming intestines in the reptile’s hands. Swiftly he began wrapping the intestine around the carnage of Dave’s midsection, tying him to the chair with his own guts.

“I learned that trick on Discovery Channel – one of those survivor shows. Who knew I would need to use this trick so soon?” And with that, he grabbed the knife and Dave’s penis in the other. Ignoring Dave’s cries of ‘No-no-no’ he yanked it as hard as he could and cut it off at the root.

“Wow! Now look at this!” He said, holding his prize in front of Dave’s eyes. What a nice specimen! That’s got to be, what? Eight, nine inches? And don’t tell me you never measured it. We all do. I bet you kept the ladies happy with that hunk of pork!”

“Eight and a half,” Dave choked out through the copious amounts of blood that flowed non-stop from his mouth. He was covered with blood and filth and his eyes bulged with terror as he watched his severed manhood dancing in front of his face.

“What a handsome tip too.” I just want to bite it right off uncooked.” He held it up to his open maw, but then snapped his mouth shut.

“Nope. Can’t do it. No cheating” he said as he strode back to the fry pan and tossed Dave’s pride and joy into some hot sizzling butter. “Ah look how red it’s getting. The ladies must have loved to devour this didn’t they; all engorged and full of man juice.”

“AHHHHHHHHHHH! Just kill me now you filthy rotten prick! Do it! Do it and get it over with, take my worthless soul and kill me!”

“AH, AH, AH, It’s not nice to rush the Devil he said as he began devouring the trouser snake that had once belonged to Dave. He scooped beans up with his hands and by the time he was done, he had brown bean juice running down his face and neck.

“Besides, I’m not done with you yet. There are still a few morsels left before I’m ready for desert.

With this last statement he morphed once again into his true reptilian self and approached his dying prey. A growing pool of blood spread from his mangled feet, where his toes had been. Blood flowed freely from his torn open

abdomen, groin and the stumps of his arms. He was starting to lose consciousness.

“WAKE UP ASSHOLE!” he slapped him across his face, his sharp claws tearing his jaw off in the process. He was awake now all right and this brought forth a new round of wailing from a dying Dave.

“You know what?” The demon now said. “As much as I love your fear, the incessant noise you make is really getting to me. I hope you’ll excuse me. Actually I don’t give a God Damn if you excuse me or not but hey we can be civil in the midst of slaughter, can’t we?”

And that said he approached Dave once again. He roughly grabbed his hair and yanked his head backwards. He bent down now so his needle-sharp teeth could reach the remnants of Dave’s mouth. As if to kiss him, he moved in close to devour his tongue. With a wet, sucking sound, he bit it and ripped it out. Dave began to scream; sobbing bloody screams, but the serpent poked his finger down Dave’s throat and zapped his vocal chords much as he has done earlier with the doors and windows. Now the only gauge of Dave’s pain of fear would be via his bulging eyes.

He stalked back to the frying pan and threw the tongue and the rest of the chopped onion in. This he could barely wait to cook as he grabbed his knife and fork and began cutting pieces off and eating while it was still cooking.

“This is so good! I guess you could say it’s to die for.” He taunted him. “But oh where are my manners? Would you like a taste? But wait! What the hell was I thinking? How the hell can you taste a piece when I am eating your very taste buds? AH HAHHAHAHAHAHA! That was rich! Don’t you agree?”

He speared the rest of the tongue and plopped it in his mouth, devouring it instantly, then he stalked over to Dave. He reached down between Dave’s legs and grabbed his balls that he had left behind earlier. He held this and a tangled bloody mass of tubing up to his mouth.

“Ah...Man grapes. I almost forgot.” He popped them into his mouth and Dave could hear his testicles pop as he bit down on them. Then he raised the mass of male tubing to his mouth, proclaiming, “Seminal vesicles! They taste almost like spaghetti with white clam sauce, Only the clam sauce in INSIDE! HAHHAHAHAHAHA!” He put this mass in his mouth and began chewing, unspent seminal fluid dripping down his chin. When he was done with this last delicacy, he paused, and sniffed the air, like a dog catching a scent. He moved closer to Dave as he did this.

“SOUL’S A RIPENING SON! AH YES, YES, YES THAT’S IT! I DO BELIEVE IT’S HARVEST TIME!” And with that he began changing again. His face changed into one gaping round hole or mouth surrounded by curved teeth. It reminded Dave of the mouth of a lamprey eel, those dastardly fish parasites he occasionally found in the Runnins River as a kid. The rest of his head and shoulders now became a mass of slithering tentacles; each equipped with eyes and shark-like teeth. They reached for him, grabbing him by the back of the head, biting into his skull and pulling him forward towards the mouth from hell. He felt it latch onto his face now as the tentacles plucked his eyes out

and chewed his ears off. And then he felt or sensed something different. He felt his essence, his life force, the very electromagnetic field that was HIM; being pulled or sucked from his body. He knew at once that his soul was being devoured. This was confirmed by the wet gurgling sounds of almost orgasmic enjoyment the thing now made as he devoured the last "delicacy" that he had come for. Then in his last moments of life, David Gilbane felt heat, intense heat, flowing into his body. He felt his body begin to burn from inside out.

Barrington Times

Local author found burned to death in waterfront home

The Body of David Gilbane, noted Barrington Author and philanthropist was found dead in his home Saturday by Barrington Fire officials responding to a report of smoke at his residence. Firefighters initially had to chop the front door in as the locking mechanism seemed to be melted shut, possibly by the intense heat. Chief Bob Hunt said it appears that Mr. Gilbane succumbed to Spontaneous Human Combustion, a rare and mysterious occurrence where the body somehow burns itself up from the inside out. The chief reported the inside of the residence was scorched in the immediate vicinity of the body, but other than some smoke damage, the house was relatively undamaged in the incident. In a related development, Gibane's attorney, Mr. David J. Harris Esquire, reported that according to terms of the author's last will and testament, his home will be bulldozed and the entire parcel of land will be allowed to return to its natural state. The entire 15 acre parcel will be deeded to the town to be known from this day forward as the David F. Gilbane Nature Preserve.

No bio at this time.

What really got me into this one was the torture the main character goes through. It was nice to have background information as that is needed for any story, but as I was reading it there were parts that I had to read over twice just to make sure I got it correctly. The gore reminded me of another story we published, "Daddy's Little Girl." By Christopher L. Knives and as you all might remember, I have a thing for blood and pain. -- Kat

The
Author Shrine
Engrave your name

CLEAR AND PRESENT DANGER/ HEROES EPISODE 314:

BY CRAIG LOCKHART



Heroes, a show created by **Tim Kring**, depicts the lives of ordinary people with not so ordinary abilities. A show with themes that run sinuously with comics such as the X-men, it is easy to see how it won the attention of many people in only a few episodes. A great start is the best way to describe the beginning, and it was an amazing feat for scripted television in a time period where the average person would rather watch a nobody from a nowhere town sing on a stage before a panel of judges; however, this is not about reality shows and the damage they have done, instead this is about Heroes and the damage it hopes to repair.

With every good start, especially the fast and frantic growths, it is believed that only a short life span could follow and that seemed the case a season ago. I don't blame the amazing speed in which it became popular, because a good start is just that, a great beginning, and it would be futile and misguided to remove the label that it was given. Granted a fast beginning often brings audience that have few patience for their short-term needs. Instead of lavishing on that idea it is best to pin point where the show lost its appeal, in which the fans fled in herds in fear that the boat was doomed to sink. This moment is easy to spot because in the world of scripted TV there is one thing that can really cripple production, and that my friends is the Writer's Strike. That particular event spared nothing, in fact while it caused abrupt endings in just about every scripted show; it also gave rough and uncertain beginnings to many more.

The second season of Heroes was one of the great pillars that collapsed because of the debating and arguing of the writers and producers. The ending episodes felt hollow of content, and behind the actors expression and lines, there seemed to be a faint and lingering issue at stake. Naturally a show like this has to make use of every episode to tell the growth and development of a vast amount of character, so there are going to be moments where our patience is needed; however, this emptiness was not protocol and it had a lingering effect. It crippled the beginning of the third

season, and with every episode a few more fans left disappointed. The impact was massive to the fan base, but while a good portion remained loyal, it seemed foolish to give hope to writers that were frequent in flaws and mistakes. Prime example being Tracy Strauss, who originally had some multi-personality disorder, but now has the ability to freeze people; let us not even begin with the disappearance of her son.

The latest episode, episode 14 of season 3, opens the second part with a bang. The writers didn't make you wait for the tension; instead they utilized the set to bring you into the current world and happenings of the Heroes universe. It began with an opening that revealed a TV that was tuned to the news, where Nathan was already speaking about his intentions, but with such vagueness that his words took on a double meaning. Tracy seemed nervous about something, but that was only given a moment of focus in the favor of starting the episode right with direct confrontation.

Not to give away too many details, as I do not want to spoil it for any of you. This episode was kind of reminiscent of those in the first season in that the action and direction was clear and precise. They didn't spend 30 minutes on one character, instead they used only a few on various character, efficiently using the amount of time to build up to a plot that resonated with cruelty of a covered up genocide, but with such a front that it I suspect that most didn't find it to lead that way at all.

Rebalancing the characters was something that should have been done a longtime ago, and now that problem has been fixed. Sylar is, of course, an unstoppable killing machine, and though he is jaded, he isn't free from the touch of raw emotions, such as empathy and desire. He searches to find answers, and thus lost with no one to help. But with Nathan leading this purist movement it might be helpful to those he traps to have him on their side, even though his allegiance is to himself.

Nathan is bold in his approach and cares very little about those he used too, such as his brother and his friends. His fearless compassion to this idea of getting rid of the "special people" made him more like a little Hitler than I initially thought, but even with that said there is a weakness for his daughter.

In the end, it did kind of resemble Lost, but to not give out spoilers I won't say anymore of the specifics. I will say that the episode did win my faith in the writers just a little bit more. I hope they continue along this path without fear of creating monsters out of favorite characters, I would personally like to see an "all hope is gone" Noah. He is at his best when his cool is under fire, and they (the writers) have all sorts of angles to play with this time.

A Moment of Perspective

Case Study

What Drives Us?

CASE STUDY: WHAT DRIVES US? BY JESSE C. DEDMAN

What is more fascinating, more alluring, than the human mind? Like Pandora's box the contents are built upon the shroud of unknown. Contents like that of personality, which is something that is self designed and, more often than not, vulnerable to external influences of our world. This is not to exclude the fundamentals of our (human) basic psychological make-up such as the instinctive traits of love and belonging, power, freedom, and fun, which are executed in various levels. These traits are often regarded by many psychologists as the basic principles; furthermore, I believe that these traits are the foundation of satisfaction. Some act like that of a raw and just formed creation of flesh and bone with moves and actions that strike the core of our instinctual build, while others are govern their actions with careful and in depth thought: however, these ways of behavior are not pre-programmed to be absolute for any individual, which renders our mind that of a paradox when sorted, even if sorted very finely.

Follow me, Jesse C. Dedman, as I search with great depth the various traits that we as people exhibit. I do not do this to develop biased opinions, as that would only tear us as social beings further apart. What I hope to achieve is to form research that could be useful in understanding why we act the way we do, regardless of public opinion, and why we choose the choices we make.

I am driven by the curiosity to what really drives us, and even at times when it is obvious, there are small wonders that frequently rise, but only if we care to look. I will look at all the angles and treat each segment with such open-mindedness that it might make you question my personal stance. I will let you know now that I am not in any way trying to promote anything other than thought to the subject. If you feel I am portraying it negatively that might be because the question is inverse and provoking thought on things that are often regarded as the underbelly of our world.

Furthermore, I think it is time for me to begin today's segment with:

A Japanese Tradition....

Traditions are formed not because of a repeatedly practice ritual, although that doesn't prevent them from becoming just that, they are formed because of a ritual that is accepted by large groups of people, and with a large group—majority—the ritual becomes more than what it started out to be. It grows into this colossal entity that, in some cases, prevents opposition; in fact, it seems most traditions continue to grow even if negative thoughts are present. For example, the practice of Easter, and Saint Patrick's Day has a common trait in that they may not be most convincing, and yet they are celebrated in numbers, and to the point to where they have become seemingly immortal. All the Irish could disappear one day and the tradition of drinking and wearing green would still be there because it is frequently practiced and even if there were gaps in the participation there is always history.

Traditions can be argued to be a part of our lives, a part of our social involvement with one another, for good or for bad, and the personal opinion regarding view has little merit on the existence of tradition, and to further back that point, I present to you the sexual fetish that formed from traditional practice, Bukkake.

Bukkake is, to be put so bluntly, is the act of a host, gender is of no factor, positioned center of a group of men taking loads of semen to the face. This sort of act is not on the top of most, and one is often thought of being a different level of perverted to willingly watch, but it has risen significantly to become much more than a fetish; furthermore, it has expanded to just about every country.

Besides being filmed in pornographic studios, which often really refers to someone's house, apartment, or another not-so-public location, Bukkake has been practiced in celebratory ways. There are parties in which a mass of people will take part in this activity, willingly. It has been taken been practiced so much that there are even [“techniques” and “schools”](#) for this sort of fetish.

This tradition dates back to 12th century, feudal Japan, and is believed to have formed from a punishment in that wife of questionable infidelity would be carted into the open square of a village. The woman would often be fastened to a fixture, bound by rope and/or chain, while men gathered around to publicly humiliate her with rain of jizz.

Unlike the sexual adaption, the origin of birth lacked safety in that the woman would sometimes drown from the waves of fluid washing her face, soaking into the pores, irritating the eyes, damaging the hair, and running down the throat.

Now, that is the cruel and undocumented history. That might help those that found it extremely appalling, but it does spotlight the oddities we produce with imagination. The known history is that it appeared in film in 1986.

Now I will not throw in my personal judgment, but it is apparent that this is an activity and sexual

act that is regarded as bizarre, and in a society that is driven by “ethics” and “morals”, which some may bound to religion, while others based on principle, it is astonishing to see that areas of instinct matter to play a role, but even then it could be question as to what sort of instinctual urges; furthermore, how one’s psyche could handle such treatment.

It cannot be denied that there is a lingering curiosity as to what would give someone the desire to undergo such a fetish. Specially in a society that shares a wavering animosity towards anything pornographic, it is easy to see how the common thought would be to shun this act as if it was a mere smut film. A woman, or man, would willingly volunteer themselves as target to this charade is astonishing, and really begs one to ponder what goes on in their mind.

I don’t think I need to describe the picture any more clearly than what has been presented here, but imagine how we, as human beings, could undergo this sort of act without any implication to the core building blocks that consist of an individual’s satisfaction and, furthermore, without any implication on those just merely involved.

It would seem damaging to one’s drive for power to participate as the target, and it seems that there would be a loss of freedom, and perhaps fun, but what about belonging? It is a social event where people are generally happy with power and fun being the core components, perhaps even the element of freedom. The people standing around arguably have it best, while the target just takes, what some could consider, abuse.

One could imagine that they feel a loss of power, but perhaps it is that they have power over themselves by volunteering to do such an act. They could be wrapped in self-loathing misery that makes them feel like trash, and no matter how she hides it, the others can tell. This misery could expand and allow a morbid constriction of what is fun, which could explain why those targeted are often smiling in enjoyment.

The other side is that, perhaps, the person is not miserable. They could very well enjoy it, and as hard as it might be for some to imagine, perception has little effect to reality, for it is built upon everyone’s perception. So we could argue that he, or she, finds enjoyment in this rain of jizz, and that these people volunteer out of sheer will, and carry with them a sense of happiness.

There are also the other factors, such as drugs and money, which could influence someone’s decision, and even though these agents may be darn right convincing, they do not shield from the emotional. At best these conditions might delay, but when sobriety comes, the feelings will hit.

Now I really leave this up to you to question the rest, or question further what has thought to have been answered. I want everyone’s honest opinion so that I could offer a follow up for the next issue.

[Submit Responses Here](#)

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Jesse C. Dedman is an undergraduate at the University of Houston Clear Lake, where he is working on his Bachelors in Psychology. He also has a moderate history of publication; one of his most recent works was published in DemonMinds.com entitled "The Bleeder".

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