



# Demonic Tome



October 2008

Special Halloween Issue

Warning to those that set eyes on this document. There are a few occurrences in which very strong language was used; failure to understand that should result in closing this document, deleting it from your computer and learning how to read a warning label. This document is not, in anyway shape or form, meant for children. We are strictly mature audience **ONLY!**



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Have an opinion about something? Then let us know. We are looking for strong opinionated people that can talk the most questionable subjects.

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Have anything you would like to say about the magazine?

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## The Mail Box



Just like how parents have no idea what kind of surprise await their children on Halloween; such as, stinky fowl candy that was rotting in a bowl with other strange ornaments, lonely old men that like to wear sweaters, drug addicts that want to waste their goods on the young, beloved families of Christ that use the holiday to hand out bibles. We at Demonic Tome have no idea what is in store for us when we open the [Legato10@swbell.net](mailto:Legato10@swbell.net) to do a simple task of checking the submissions.

“You never seem to respond. In fact it is like you don’t even exist.”- Emily

*“Could you run a special with erotic art? I think with a demonic theme that something so curious would be right at home”- Michelle*

*“I’m trying to get information about an author regarding reprint rights”- Undisclosed Publisher*

*“Who is Bill Goldberg?”- Mike*

I know for a fact that Dedman does respond to his email. There are a lot of different factors at play this time around with the hurricane and still no INTERNET. I typed this on my computer and literally handed it to him by flash drive. We live an hour away and luckily for me he had a fully stocked bar to sooth my frustration.  
-Bill

Erotic Art is interesting and something that could offer more curious onlookers, but we aren’t here for that sort of thing. I know sometimes it may seem like it takes days, even weeks, for something to be decided on. That is because we all work and have full lives. It isn’t that we aren’t obligated because we are.  
– Bill

That information was once placed in the “Gallery” section, but with delays and better project planning we are working on a better way to do such a thing. For example in the vary issues. Mr. Dedman would obviously help another author get contacted and would help ASAP. We aren’t a black hole, only a little off set from norm right now.  
-Kim

I should introduce myself. I live in the Houston area with a family of four and couldn’t be any happier with what I do. Full time, I am an engineer and work on many projects. On the side, I work on small rants that were to be on blogs but I never had the time to even post. Now that Dedman has granted the means, I now have a place to post.

I am a fan of classic and should be made an example of show called News Radio. Excellent show. I literally prayed and prayed for the box sets to arrive after the local station further limited the airtime.

Have questions, or opinions, send them our way [Legato10@swbell.net](mailto:Legato10@swbell.net)

DEMONIC

## Forward

Presented by Mr. Dedman

This issue was given an extra amount of treatment even though time was narrowed to that of a few days all thanks to the hurricane known as Ike. The office was not harmed at all, except for that fact that water managed to rain through closed windows. Strange, even in my house the rain was flowing sideways in a violent fashion that made even a peep-hole an outlet for moisture. Even if that wasn't an issue there was the strange and yet natural affect of humidity that rendered everything wet. The building had no ceiling leaks and that we were thankful for.

The only hurdle was the power outage, which wasn't restored until two weeks and two days after the approach of the violent winds. Some of us have stories to tell and tell we will, for they are not just funny they are also true.

This issue is to be amazing in comparison to the previous. The contest has come to an end and provided us with a lot of talented writers to choose from. The choice was hard; in fact it was so difficult that we wanted to showcase not just the winners but also the others that were so close to claiming the prize.

## Contest Winners

1 <sup>st</sup> Place	2 <sup>nd</sup> Place	3 <sup>rd</sup> Place
<b>So Sayeth the Devil</b>	<b>Diary of Abjection</b>	<b>Day Trip</b>
Dawn Allison	Matt Kitchen	Ty Johnston

## So Sayeth The Devil

Dawn Allison

Past Tense

Horror

**Bio: If there is a Hell, Dawn Allison will be going there, but she takes comfort in the fact that she will be in good company.**

It was the last straw. About the six hundredth time a woman told Demetrius to go to Hell, he decided to go. He was tired of having no place to belong.

He went home before he embarked on his journey. Home, for Demetrius, was a shadowy mansion set on a bluff overlooking the abyss. Eleven granite gargoyles perched on his roof. They roused when they heard his footsteps and swooped down to peck at his eyes long before he got to the door. They were supposed to be there as guardians, to prevent any attempt at escape by the demons who lived down below. However, as demons can visit the surface for short periods whenever the need arises, such attempts were rare. That meant that the gargoyles feasted on anything that happened by, living or dead, without discretion. And they always went for the eyes. It must have been a rare delicacy to them. Well, any meat was rare enough, and what they got almost always belonged to Demetrius, the sole inhabitant of The Halfway House. Not a halfway house for recovering addicts and indigents, but The Halfway House, so called because it was half way between the surface of the Earth and Hell. He had to slosh through miles of sewers just to get there, which made him even

more appealing to the damnable gargoyles when he arrived.

Everything about the place was jagged and unpleasant. Spires canted listlessly to the east and west, broken windows of red stained glass were blood-splattered teeth in oval mouths. A dragon wrapped itself around the banister going up the stairs, but its scales were worn smooth and every crevice collected tarnish. Gray paint, probably lead based, peeled away from the building as though making its own escape. Home sweet home. Such was life for Demetrius, the progeny of a mortal woman and Zamar, the demon of avarice.

He dashed inside, flailing his arms at the gargoyles as he went, to get some things from his house. Among them a canteen with water, which he stuck in his freezer, then waited for it to solidify. He had heard it said many times that people in Hell want ice water, and he wasn't about to go unprepared. He fantasized about using his canteen as a bribe to achieve his desire. While he waited for it to freeze, he busied himself collecting every scrap of rope he could find, including even the tasseled tiebacks of the curtains. It would be a long climb down and he would need every inch he could get.

After that, there was only one more thing to do. It took him almost no time to slice off the legs of his jeans and turn them into cut-offs. He cut them higher than his pockets, and little white flaps hung out on either side. They looked horrible with his boots, but he knew better than to tromp into Hell sporting flip-flops. The gargoyles were much pleased

with his attire and attacked his legs with more vigor than usual when he left. The rivulets of blood did not compliment his ensemble a bit.

He suspected, once he lowered himself over the edge and began his descent, that he would feel the heat of Hell baking his flesh before he ever got halfway down. He was surprised to feel a draft of cool air, not winter cold, but air conditioner cold. The skin on his legs prickled and dried blood flaked off like dandruff. Feeling quite under dressed, Demetrius considered going back. He even started to pull himself up when one of the bits of rope he had lashed together snapped, and he fell. It was the curtain tieback that did it, of course. In the split second it took to travel the great distance from Up to Down, Demetrius had to laugh. He was, after all, coming to Hell by the most common route. A fall.

Demetrius saw the light. It was every bit as bright as people liked to claim, and then some. In fact, it gave him an immediate headache. He pushed himself up and rubbed his arms for warmth. The canteen of ice water was nowhere in sight, but he didn't suppose he would need it after all.

It took his eyes a few moments to adjust. The place was quite different from what he'd expected, starting with the too cold air. The floors all shone spotless white; though some of the cheap laminate tiles were curling in the corners. There was a maze of black rope set up with a line of people (or things resembling people) winding in between. He had seen such a thing before, though he had never participated in one. He

never did understand why anybody would want to stand in a line. Bland instrumentals blared through unseen speakers, making speech all but impossible.

Still, garbled, half-shrieked conversations polluted the air. The line inched forward. Demetrius stood a moment longer; waiting for the fabled Cerberus to come rushing out, slobber dripping from the corners of both its mouths. It didn't come. Demetrius didn't hear so much as a growl. A gory couple took their places at the back of the line. In front of Demetrius.

"Excuse me, but I was here first," he said.

"Go to Hell," the woman replied. He felt a sudden urge to strangle her, with her prim mouth untouched by the road rash that had eaten the rest of her face. He doubted it would have done any good anyhow. Instead, he stepped into line behind them.

It felt like an eternity that he stood there, the line moving so slowly any forward momentum was imperceptible. People kept coming, though, and it wasn't long before Demetrius was no longer at the end of the line. Not so much because he moved forward, but because they kept coming, and coming, and coming.

By the time he finally reached the counter, he forgot why he had come at all. A frazzled woman in a red blazer tapped her fingernails against the desk and rolled her eyes so often they never seemed to stop.

"Help you?" She said for the third time. Demetrius' mind raced. He

could think of nothing to say.

"You're going to have to go to the back of the line, then." She said.

"No! I was just at the back of the line." Demetrius said.

"No, sir," the woman did not even try to hide her irritation. "If you were just at the back of the line you wouldn't be here. Next please."

The man behind him stepped up and spun Demetrius back between the ropes. It took almost as long as waiting in the first place for them to shove Demetrius all the way to the end of the line. Then he waited. Again. It gave him plenty of time to rediscover his reason for coming. He practiced the words in his head over and over until he could have said them backwards.

Finally, he made it back up to the counter. The same woman sat there, no look of recognition on her face. The second button of her blazer was missing. He wondered if it had been like that before. The devil was in the details.

"Help you?" She asked. Something in the tone of her voice made him want to forget why he came. He fought it with all his might, but it was still quite a battle.

"Yes, I'm here to see the devil."

"Which devil?"

"The devil. The Prince of Lies, the Father of Darkness, the Lord of the Flies, and all that."

"Do you have an appointment?" As if he just asked to see the dentist.

"Well, no."

"You have to have an appointment, sir." A sharp trumpet solo blasted through the speakers. It was more than just a little off key. Demetrius winced.

"Can I make an appointment?" He asked.

"No. You have to have a petition and ninety-nine dark deeds to get an appointment with him."

"How do I get a petition?"

"Doesn't matter," the woman said, eyes still rolling.

"But I need to speak with him."

"Then do your ninety-nine deeds and get a petition."

"What counts as a dark deed?"

"Doesn't matter," the woman said curtly.

"Well, why not?" Demetrius felt the blood rush to his head. Not his blood, of course, but the last meal he had eaten. Too much more of this and he was going to throw it up all over the countertop.

"Because, you're dead. So you can't do any deeds without his express permission, dark or otherwise."

"How can I get his permission unless I get an appointment?" He pounded on the counter with his fist.

"Sir, you need to calm down, sir." She waited until he had taken a

few deep, but futile, breaths.

"But I need to talk to him, to sort out some things."

"Well, you could always wait in line. Occasionally he works the floor. I wouldn't hold my breath, though." She slapped her thigh as she laughed. "Get it?"

Demetrius grumbled and stomped to the back of the line.

Seven times, he repeated the same process. Seven eternities. He thought he glimpsed his father once, in the line, wearing bulky rings on every finger. He didn't get to speak to him, though, since he was way ahead of Demetrius.

Demetrius would have given up on the whole thing, but there didn't appear to be anywhere else to go. Every inch of the disturbingly white room was crammed with people and there was not a single door as far as Demetrius could see. All four walls, as one might expect, but no doors.

When he finally made it to the counter for the eighth time, somebody else was seated behind the desk. He didn't recognize him at all. Who would have figured the Lord of Darkness would look like a hunchback with a face full of herpes?

"Help you?" Satan said.

"Yes, I wish to speak to the Devil."

"Go on, then," he said.

"You mean you're?"

"Were you expecting Fabio?"

"No, I, just, well."

"Moving on," the Devil said.

"Here's the deal. I'm tired of not belonging anywhere. They don't want me on Earth, and that's fine, they don't want me in Heaven, and that's fine, too. So, I've come here to give my allegiance to you," it was hard for him to say while he was looking right at the thing.

Demetrius took a deep breath. It was not the ideal situation, but anything had to be better than lonely limbo. "I will be your servant." He finished.

The Devil clicked his tongue and drummed his fingers on the countertop. He wore a single silver earring that caught the harsh neon light and reflected it directly into Demetrius' eyes.

"Well, you see, the thing is..." he held out his hands and shrugged. His fingers were gnarled like old oak branches. Demetrius closed his eyes, knowing what was to come. "I'm not really looking to add to my staff at the moment, and since I don't want to give you false hope I might as well be outright. If I were looking to expand, I still wouldn't want you. You're not very cunning or creative, and hardly evil at all. You think I let in every Tom, Dick, and Harry who has ever tasted the blood of men? The place would be overrun! It's busy enough as things are."

"What the smudge am I supposed to do, then?" Demetrius felt hot tears in his eyes.

"See? Right there, you just said smudge. Not fuck, or even frick.

Souls like you would make people believe I'm some sort of softie. Smudge isn't going to inspire fear in anybody. You're useless to me and what you do from here is not my concern."

Demetrius groaned. He latched onto the edge of the counter and tried to yank the whole thing loose. It did not budge. The Devil laughed. Demetrius could feel the heat rise in his cheeks.

"Fine." He said. He loosened his grip on the immovable counter. "Can you at least tell me how to get out of here?"

"I suggest you try the line." The Devil said. He interlaced his fingers behind his head and leaned back in his chair. Lacking anything better to do, Demetrius followed his advice.

"Next!" The Devil said while Demetrius wrestled his way to the back. The music played on, sharp, flat, and endless.

DEMON

## Journal Entry #1

May 23, 2121

*Well, today starts a new life. I settled into my new apartment here on Mars. It cost most of my savings to get space transport from Earth, but I just couldn't live my life on Earth any longer. I am looking forward to the chance to live by my rules instead of Earth laws for a change. Watch out future; here I come!*

I remember well the day I arrived on Mars. The planet seemed so new and fresh. Terraforming had only been completed for a few years and people were still only beginning to relocate from Earth. The air swelled in the nostrils, clean and pure, unlike the filth floating around the surface of the Earth. The people were eager and friendly. Perhaps, it could be said they were rather gullible. Although, that was to my liking as well as a great opportunity.

I don't know why so many people decided to transport to Mars. Maybe, they chased dreams or fled disasters, either natural or self imposed. Just maybe, they wanted true freedom. Probably not many knew that however.

Actually, I don't really care. What does it mean to me? People are nothing. Most are fools following other fools, playing make-believe with an absent god in hope of a false comfort with death or life depending on the prospective. They will never be masters of their own lives. Not like I am!

Once passed the futility of modern man, I found the perfect residence. A lair I called it. It was inside a new (of course) apartment building, but the majority of the apartments were still vacant, and the tenants that were already living there were spread out at different ends of the building. It allowed for premier privacy. It was spacious with large areas of floor tile. It had a very large tub with ample storage closets which was exactly what I required. As I said it was perfect.

All that remained was for me to settle in and start my latest trials. If mankind believed, I would prove them all wrong if need be.

## Journal Entry #2

May 26, 2121

*This was a successful day. If I had doubt my life would diminish on Mars, I disproved that theory today. No one can stop me except for potentially myself. No, I have surpassed everything, even myself.*

I searched for three days for my first example..my first Martian example. Some may have called them victims, but I said fuck that to such a way of thinking. Those people deserved what they received. There were no victims when it came to mankind. People created their own downfall, devised in their minds and cast upon an artificial world. Humanity destroyed itself in the first church it prayed to a false idol without cause, in the first tree it cut down without merit and in the deposit of the birthing seed from generation to generation.

So, I merely took one of those dumbfounded accumulations of sperm towards another frontier, away from a continued asinine existence. Not that it matters much, but the person was male, approximately thirty or so years old. He didn't have much of a life. I watched him drop off his kid at The New World Elementary School of Mars for a couple of days while I scouted him as a prospect. I never saw a wife but he wore a wedding ring, so the obvious must be applied.

All in all, he was an easy target. After getting rid of the rugrat, he went everyday to an office building with lunch for two. He would stay about a half hour to forty-five minutes, never longer. This predictability enabled me to act earlier than usual on acquiring an example.

Finally, on the fourth day of watching I moved in on him. With a standard in place from prior effectiveness, I jabbed him with my trustworthy needle and syringe filled with a special variation of tubocurarine, an efficient panic stopper and immobilizer. Quite simply, I approached his car as all was quiet around us and asked directions. When he extended his arm to point, I inserted the needle midway into his forearm draining the contents through his vein. A simple slide into the seat and I departed in his E-Car to meet my own car parked around the back of the building before anyone else could view a thing.

Strange to recall, but I liked his E-Car. I had a nice one that I sold on Earth since I couldn't afford to transport it to Mars. I was renting a cheap, very used, older model while I tried to get settled in my new habitat. The electricity exhausted quickly in old E-Cars so I had to be careful not to drive to long without recharging. Even with the

problems, I was always glad to drive an E-Car over one of those polluting gas powered cars of the olden days. Although very few survived on Earth and they were not even allowed passage to Mars.

In a flash, I made it back to my lair with my newly acquired test subject. I kept a wheelchair in the back of my E-Car, one of the old types before power push assist was standardized on all wheelchairs (wow, people have become so lazy over time) to provide trouble-free movement of my testing examples to the needed places during their relaxed state. It served well to avoid unwanted attention. I supposed watchers thought I merely aided an ill relative or something.

It was necessary to revivify the test subject with some elapsed time. I needed them to recover from the drug somewhat so they could be more alert for the examination period. After all, it was their responses that proved my theories until it was time for final validation. Thus, a roll of heavy duty tape and a gag put to good use, fixed my subject to my specially designed, reinforced utility chair. I had time to wait and even have a cup of tea.

Also, while I waited, I arranged my tools. Laser sharp field knife, bone saw, tourniquets, gloves and oversized heavy duty plastic bags all checked out. A quality mop and bucket and some rags and cleaning supplies additionally accounted for. I couldn't do without those.

"Are you ready? You've been selected for a metaphysical challenge. If you fall into mankind's line of thinking, you'll be saved by your God. However, if I am in the true light of reason, alone...well you will meet a different maker, but either way you should feel released...released from the bland and the irrational world...released from lies."

I had not removed the gag so silence prevailed. I was sure he had nothing of substance to add, anyhow.

I focused on his eyes as I sliced. First, a minor finger, then the left hand, they fell away with ease. The blood poured steadily. Perhaps, I was too anxious. He may have needed more time for better muscle control after the drug induction.

Oh well, it mattered little. His eyes told the story. All of it was a story, a story of human lies...human delusion...human subservience. I saw. His god did not protect him.

Yet, for the sake of fairness, I had to go on. In this test I would take his manhood. God had to maintain procreation. It was a good test. With one gloved hand, I clutched all his manly parts and pulled. Then,

one strike of blade severed his genitals from his body. It was just like slicing warm butter. His eyes went black; then closed. He had given up, as had his god. Puddles of blood, deadly deliberate, replaced future life concerns and function.

Would this be enough?

After his muscle squirms subsided, I figured it would be enough, at least for now. A merciful stab to the heart finished my evaluation. Out came the bone saw and piece by piece he loaded up a plastic bag helped with a little finesse of hand.

Nothing else was left. Well almost, I had to work a bit at the clean-up, but afterward, only basking in the fineness and result of the moment.

### Journal Entry #3

June 5, 2121

*My thoughts wondered today. I am not sure why. There is just too much shit in this life. There always has been. I think it is test time again.*

My mind was not programmed for obedience, not even within myself. It often ran amok. In this case, the specific reason eluded me.

I should have been pleased. My latest test was another success, although maybe the fact that it went so smoothly may have bothered me a little. Disposal of the body was incredibly effortless. The usual need to bury the remains was averted, because in exploring the nearby area I discovered a canyon of such depth that I could not see its bottom. A straightforward toss over the side, safely enough disposed of the waste. With so much undeveloped land on Mars and the harsh terrain, someone finding the bag was no real concern. Only, the plastic bag actually bugged me. It seemed wrong to soil the land with a plastic bag, but a reinforced plastic bag was the only practical measure for the after effect of my tests.

Nevertheless, reflections of old thoughts haunted me frequently during spare moments. Despite leaving it behind, Earth life still annoyed me invading my solitude here on Mars. The Catholic Church nauseated me more and more as I thought of how they basically took over the world after the final Jihad. When the Arab nations succumbed to the war efforts of the United States, the Catholic Church stepped in saying the world would not be saved unless a unified religion was put in place. Bloody as it

became, all the Christian countries had no choice but to support the Catholics. Muslims, Jews, Hindus and any other religious society were forced to convert, or they were killed. Hell, all humans were ordered to convert, no matter their creed or previous religious belief. If one had no god; they got one quite quickly. The Protestants were absorbed back into Catholicism as wayward children. Everyone else was strictly scrutinized until proven faithful. The American Atheists' fight for separation of church and state evaporated with the mandatory "One God, One Country" praise. Consequently, the government said God marked our money, so more of our money was reserved for God, or more accurately the earthly form of God scripted by the Catholic Church. The sickness spread making me sick.

Sin and evil, though always present throughout history, changed yet again to the latest modern standards. Enslaving morals and scruples not being enough, the Catholic Church made final judgment on matters of law and reason. Society shaped, as always, acceptance, but the Catholic Church owned society. What was right or wrong could be dictated from just one source and I found that to be absolutely fucked up. To kill, which has been rather accepted by society and religion with plenty of documentation to prove it, was a tool exploited solely by the Church, but they killed the wrong people. I could not live with

That defective system.

So, enough is enough. The disease needs to end and I will do my part.

Ouch, my head began to ache. I needed to unwind. I chose to listen to Gustav Mahler's "Das klagende Lied." The music always soothed me despite Mahler being a Jewish convert to Catholicism hundreds of years before law commanded it. Mahler felt writing a symphony was like constructing a world. Maybe that was why I enjoyed his music. I, also, wanted to construct a world.

The following day, I scouted for the next example, something to appease my mind.

#### **Journal Entry #4**

June 12, 2121

*I did some errands and completed a task that I had been planning awhile now. I may need to seek employment soon, at least probably part-time employment. I'll know better later. Other than that, nothing really happened. Oh! I think had a temporary lustful moment with this woman I*

met.

I chose a woman, sort of plain and average in appeal, approximately late twenties, as my new subject. She was not ugly but had some masculine facial features. She wore these outdated glasses adding to her ordinariness. Since no one truly necessitated eyeglasses in this day and age, I can only assume she preferred her plainness.

Subtly, I trailed her for several days. She rode the public shuttle each day from business to business. Later, I understood she searched for a job, a quest she succeeded at, on the day before I grabbed her. She returned twice, dressed in a conservative suit and skirt, to the First Galactic Bank of Mars and eventually, I followed her inside witnessing her interview with a large, short-haired woman through a glass window. Having apparently done well, they parted with a hand-shake and I was able to overhear their final words.

"We can consider it a done deal. I'll see you tomorrow at opening for your first day," yapped the large woman.

"Thank you for the chance. I will do a good job. I will see you first thing in the morning. Goodbye and thanks again." Seemingly, thoroughly overjoyed, answered the young plain woman.

All I needed was in hand. I could extrapolate her whereabouts, even down to a general time. The ensuing morning there she sat waiting all alone for the Mars shuttle. Pretending to be also waiting for a ride, I took position next to her on the bench. On one of her glances down the street, I injected my miracle drug. Quickly, I pulled my E-Car around and discreetly transplanted her from the bench to the back of the car. Within a whistle-stop instant we were gone.

With this one I decided a new approach would be needed. I stripped her naked for precise and specific regional testing. If a god did create women, they were design differently for a sublime purpose. I had to lay test to any potential reason.

As I proceeded, her nudity displayed pristine nuances of feminine beauty. The contrast of her black hair against her milky-white skin with significance to individual strains of hair clinging to her breasts was like a romanticized artist's painting. Those breasts much larger and shapelier than originally thought when concealed within a loose suit jacket, brought pain to me when I cut her perfect pink nipples from them. Her scream muffled through the gag. Tears simmered in her brown eyes. I swear I stopped to watch a single drop glide across one of her eyelashes. I cropped her thick, bushy black pubic hair. She pissed by all accounts

gallons at my touch, causing urine to splash back up from the floor tiles. Fortunately, my hands were gloved and I was prepared with an absorbent mop. She struggled and convulsed as I engraved vertical lines along her thighs. Blood colorized the black and white, old-time movie image of her naked body. Her hushed screams became girlish sobs and her persistent tears slowed to a trickle. Her will and strength was exiting with no sight of God.

As her fluids drained away, my own body coarsened with them. My penis swelled in my pants. I think that I may have quite conceivably secreted in my underwear. My heart pumped until my head ached with noisy blood flow. For a solitary moment, I

Wished to save her, but she could not be saved...no one could.

I removed the gag to judge her condition one last time before I finished the examination. She spit saliva upon the floor but no speech passed her lips.

"You have made me feel something that I have not felt before. Why would that be?" I cooed in a soft voice.

One word she uttered. "Monster!"

"No, I am purely a truth seeker. If I do wrong, will not your God punish me?"

"Why...why..." Her faint cries could not be completed. I wedged the gag down her throat.

"Only a little more to go and it will all be over. And I mean all of it." I continued to say.

A few more things had to be done. I reclined the examination chair raising her legs towards the so-called heavens. Urine ran over the curves of her buttocks giving off a surprisingly sweet smell. I opened up her sex. I burrowed deeper and deeper into her, twisting and pressing my blade on as if it were a drill exploring for the secret gifts of womanhood. I could not help but to notice how her clitoris shown like a sweaty fleshy diamond ready to be plucked, even through the extremity of her pain and grief. The stench of salty blood from my shirt sleeves and the debris of fecal matter around my feet signaled the conclusion of my test. With more merciful love in my heart than any god, I slashed her jugular ending her despair.

Oddly, I spoke. "It's all over, honey"

Everything should have been well, but I had a strange feeling, lingering inside me. I felt what...sorrow? No, that couldn't be. I went to go clean my bone saw.

### Journal Entry #5

June 18, 2121

*Life lessons never end, for young and old alike. Indeed,*

*Innocence is just as guilty as any other excuse. Like always, I do what needs to be done. Man can not be liable for the faults of an invented god. Confusion and disquiet do not answer for death. Only, death answers.*

A pretty little girl, about the age of eight, slept motionless in my examination chair. Her stupid parents left her alone, outside in this bucolic community while they went inside to shop. That permitted me to slip in for an unproblematic abduction. The picturesque young girl, a miniature version of a woman right down to the curves of her hips, astounded me with her exquisite, youthful lady-like appearance. If it were not for her stature, a heart-breaker she would have already been.

Her small size prevented me from strapping her into the chair correctly. I had to tape her wrists and ankles together with her arms taped to her torso and her torso taped to the backing on the examination chair.

Many hours passed before the drug's effect began to subside, much longer than any adult I've tested. In fact, I worried that she may never awaken. Alas, she awoke.

I could see the fear gleaming from her eyes. A mild comfort I tried to give her with a stroke of my gloved hand against her cheek. My thumb drew a white streak across her flushed face.

"Just close your eyes, pretty-pretty. Numbed your pain should still be." I instructed her and she obeyed.

If God existed, he should have interceded this day, but awareness told me God did not exist. Another sacrificed body bled for sacred pride...sacred folly. This lesson all had to know; man, woman and child.

The unaware little-lady slumped back into the chair looking every bit like precious doll.

I started to tenderly sing. "Hush little baby, don't say a word..."

Swiftly, I flayed layer after layer of baby soft skin, until her stuffing fell out. Lesson taught. Lesson learned.

In the aftermath and without warning, my eyes suddenly watered. I blamed it on poor ventilation.

All the same, I was sorry for the sweet little girl. She was still so small; she didn't even render a full plastic bag.

### Journal Entry #6

June 24, 2121

*Could I be wrong? This thought has rarely slithered my mind before now. I had a conversation with a priest earlier. Something interesting may have come from it or perhaps something frustrating. (Later Addition) Stubbornness won out.*

Days drifted away as I observed my next prospect. This one was very carefully chosen. I predetermined my next subject would be a priest, so I staked out the biggest church in the community. Most of the preachers were elderly which I had to pass on because if they were too frail they would die half-way through the exam. Finally, I made a selection from the few hale priests whom I saw entering and exiting the church on a daily basis. This was important because I needed to capture my subject outside of the church away from the crowd.

As a matter of fact, I loitered so long near the church that not only did I see the same people pass-by repeatedly, but also, what I believed to be a stray dog. Actually, it struck me for being strange because it was the first dog that had seen since coming to Mars. I supposed pet transport was too costly for most people. Anyway, after awhile I began to bring water and a snack of some sorts for the apparently forgotten creature.

It was that dog which assisted me with the priest's apprehension. As it happened, my subject accosted me when I was feeding the animal, startling it. From that, I persuaded him to help me search for the dog and when in reach and out of sight I performed my routine.

Upon returning to my lair, I took my time. I had already decided this subject must be fully alert before anything would happen. To talk to him was my plan despite never doing anything of this kind prior. Thus, I waited until he was good and awake.

From the moment he re-opened his eyes, all he did was stare at me with an absurd grin on his face. That damn smile of his really pissed me off.

"Well preacher, do you have a sermon for me to hear?" He still just stared and smiled.

I pressed my knife to his throat and asked, "Is there something to smile about anywhere here?" I eased the gag from his mouth but still no response.

"Do you see your God? Will he stand up for you if I try to kill you?" I yelled out mere inches from his face.

"I am not afraid. Even in death, I have God's protection. You can try to hurt me. Kill me if you want. No pain comes that God does not will." He spoke in a tone that a teacher would use for a rebellious child.

"I assure you. Pain, you will feel until only death saves you. You pray to the wrong master." Anger arose in me.

"I am ready to meet my maker. Are you?" The priest retorted.

Fuck the knife I thought. I grabbed the bone saw and tourniquets. I gashed his thigh but he made no sound although the gag was still removed. I bore down until I just barely hit bone and then paused. Still, he made no noise. So, off came his left leg, then his right leg and all awhile not a cry or mumble did he allot himself. The motherfucker just continued to give me that fucking stare and smile.

"Scream you fuck!" I rushed with anger all over.

Bone saw whirling; I shortened his arms to the biceps. I tied the tourniquets in place and watched. There was no change in his expression. Blood smeared his face, my face, everywhere in truth, yet fucking nothing affected him.

Something went horribly wrong but I couldn't think about it any longer. I ended it by detaching his head, slowly circulating the saw around the circumference of his neck, edging inward, until his head released to my hand. That fucking smile had fused

On the bastard's face. Dangling the head by his hair, I considered it sourly until I threw the fucking thing to the floor tile with a thud.

## Journal Entry #7

June 25, 2121

*All things end. That is the way of life. Some plans are left open and some never get started. Whatever the notions, right, wrong or indifferent, the final results are always unknown, even with proper planning and the highest intent. For example, Mahatma Gandhi spent his whole life struggling for a cause that in the end killed him. I realize now that my time is finished. I will solve the riddle and take my final test.*

This is it. There is no problem that can't be solved. My knife is firmly in my hand. My belief is weak but my resolution is strong. As far as I am concerned, there is one test left undone; one final test...on myself.

DEMONI

**Day Trip**

"Brakes!"

Peter woke in time to slam his foot on the pedal, but it wasn't enough to stop the crash.

The outside world exploded as glass burst and metal crunched. There was a terrible "thud" sound and the inside world exploded. Everything went quiet and black. For a second Peter thought he had died.

Then he could see and hear again. Mandy was screaming in the passenger seat. The front of the car was smashed against the back of a beat-up black '74 Nova that didn't look any worse for the accident. Something thick and syrupy was flowing down the front of Peter's shirt and he guessed it was blood when he spit two teeth into his lap.

"You alright?" he asked through the numbness in his mouth.

Mandy stopped screaming and stared at him. "Oh God, I thought you were dead."

"What happened?" Peter noticed she had worn her seatbelt. The only thing that had kept him from flying through the windshield was the steering wheel.

"I woke and you had fallen asleep at the wheel," Mandy said, her voice gaining some control. "I looked up in time to see the car in front of us. I tried to scream to wake you."

Peter nodded through the pain that was beginning to take the place of the numbness. "I heard you."

He looked outside and saw it was fully night now. Last he remembered the sun had just been going down.

"I guess I should get out and ... I don't know, look for a phone to call the cops," Peter said, reaching for the door release.

"We're in the backwoods of Kentucky, Pete. We're not going to find a phone for miles."

Peter thought he heard anger in her voice. That was to be expected. It hadn't been her idea to drive out to the middle of nowhere to go hiking for the weekend. It hadn't been her idea to leave the cell phone at home so they could get away from the world for a while.

Peter glanced up to see a figure exit the vehicle in front of them. He couldn't make out much more than the person was tall. The headlights on their car must have burst.

"Don't worry, honey," Peter said, looking at the license plate on the Nova. "This guy's a local. He can tell us where to call --"

Another explosion filled the night and a large snowflake

appeared in the windshield.

Mandy began screaming again.

For half a second Peter didn't know what was happening. Then there was another explosion, a hole the size of a silver dollar appeared in the hood of his car, and Peter recognized the sound of a gun.

Without thought he shifted into "R" and floored the accelerator.

Someone kept saying "Oh shit. Oh shit. Oh shit." Peter was about to tell them to shut up when he realized he was the one saying it.

Another explosion filled the air.

Another snowflake appeared in the windshield as a hornet of lead whizzed by Peter's right ear.

Peter spun the wheel until the car was facing away from the crazy shooter at the Nova. He hit the gas pedal again and the car took off.

\*\*\*

"We're out of gas," Peter said an hour later.

"And we're lost," Mandy added from the passenger seat.

"I guess we'll have to walk," he said.

Mandy gave him a seething look. "There's a maniac out there with a gun."

"Yeah, and I'd rather not be here if he shows up."

Mandy continued to glare at him as she opened the passenger door. "You grab the flashlight out of the backseat and I'll get the thermos from the trunk."

"Alright," Peter said, popping the trunk with a button inside the glove box.

Mandy went back to the trunk and searched through one of the two large backpacks stored there. She was tired and scared and that put her on edge. She realized she was being a little bitchy, but didn't know any other way to deal with the situation.

She found the thermos and checked to see it was still half-full of tea. She grabbed one of the canteens full of water and berated herself for the way she had been acting. They weren't really a thousand miles from anything. This was Kentucky for God's sake, not the middle of a desert. With that thought she closed the trunk and gave a little smile.

Peter was standing next to the front of the car, flashing the light at the damage. He had found an old shirt in the back seat to wipe the dried blood off his face. "What are you smiling about?" he asked.

"I was just thinking about that time the car broke down in Arizona when we were going to see your parents."

Peter chuckled. "Don't remind me," he said, a grin now growing on his face. "We walked for four hours without seeing another car. At least we weren't getting shot at."

They stood there quietly for a moment, staring at one another and feeling the emotions that had kept them together for eight years.

Finally Mandy said, "Maybe we should start walking, Mister Let's-Go-Hiking-In-Kentucky-For-The-Weekend."

Peter laughed and grabbed her hand as they turned west down the gravel road.

"You know," he said in the pale moonlight, "this would be a romantic walk if we hadn't just been shot at."

Mandy giggled. "Don't forget the accident and then running out of gas."

"Oh no," Peter said, himself laughing. "I won't forget that. I just hope we can find our way back to the car."

\*\*\*

Mandy looked at the glowing face of her watch and saw it was almost midnight. They had been walking for an hour. "I can't believe we haven't come across even a house."

Peter huffed and kept on walking. It was all he knew to do as tired as he was. He was thankful they both were wearing hiking boots.

The good mood of earlier had drained away slowly. Both had expected to find an old gas station or someplace where they could call for help. They hadn't seen so much as a light, just more gravel road and trees and bushes. If not for the moon, they wouldn't have seen that.

A rumbling from behind in the distance caused both to stop and look back.

"You think that was a car?" Peter asked.

"I don't know," Mandy said. "It kind of sounded like an engine ... but I don't --"

"There it is again," Peter said. "It sounds closer."

The rumbling was louder and didn't diminish this time.

"It's a car," Mandy said.

"Yeah, and I think it's coming our way. Why don't we see any headlights?"

The rumbling drew closer. Peter figured the vehicle was only a mile away. He grabbed Mandy's hand and pulled her toward the side of the road.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"It might be the guy who shot at us," Peter said. "Let's hide in the bushes until the car goes by. If it's not him, we can run out and yell."

Mandy thought it over for a second. What Peter said made

sense, but she didn't want the driver to pass them by if it looked like someone who could help.

"Why don't you hide here and I'll go up the road a little. That way if it's somebody who can help, you can yell out and I'll jump in the road so they see me."

Peter looked up the road, but still didn't see headlights. "I think it's best if we stay together."

"If it's the shooter, then we'll both stay put."

Peter didn't like it. He didn't want her away from him. There was no time to argue, however. The car was inching closer.

"Do it," he said, "but make sure you stay hidden unless I call out, okay?"

"Okay," she said and turned to walk off.

"I love you," Peter said.

Mandy looked back at him. "I love you, too. Now don't worry. I'll be okay."

With that she walked on down the road. Peter watched until he lost her in the darkness, and then climbed down a bank into the brush on the south side of the gravel. When he got settled behind a tree, he realized he still had the flashlight and wished he had given it to her.

When the vehicle was almost to him, Peter decided to chance a look to see if he could make out the model. It was too dark to tell, so he ducked back behind the tree.

When the rumbling car got to him, it came to a halt.

Peter's mind raced with fear. He knew there was no way the driver could have seen him. The vehicle didn't have its headlights on. The moon was out, but Peter knew he was well covered by brush.

He heard the vehicle's transmission change.

*Oh shit. He's put it in park.*

"Come on outta there," a husky voice said from the car. "I know yer in there. I can smell ya."

Peter's heart skipped a beat. How in hell could somebody smell him?

"It'll go easier on ya if'n I don't have to climb down there to getcha."

Peter still didn't move. All he could think of now was Mandy. *Run, girl. Just run. Don't look back no matter what you hear.*

"Alright," the voice said, "then I'm comin' fer ya."

Peter heard the vehicle's door open.

"Okay, okay," Peter said, stepping away from the tree. "I'm coming up."

That's when he saw the black Nova and the outline of a big man in coveralls next to the vehicle.

"Nope, 'fraid not," the man said and fired three shots.

Peter hadn't seen the revolver. The first shot missed, hitting the tree next to him. The second bullet entered the right side of his chest and exited his back, taking a large chunk of lung. The third shot slammed into him just below where the second had.

Peter felt no pain. He thought of Mandy. And then he died.

\*\*\*

When she heard the shots, instinct told Mandy to scream and run for Peter. She opened her mouth and took one step when reason took over and she realized she would be no help to her husband whether he was alive or not. She clamped her mouth shut and stood her ground in the bushes less than fifty yards from where Peter lay dead.

"You can come outta them woods, missy," a man's voice yelled from the direction of the car.

Mandy listened and thought she heard footsteps. The man was coming for her. The bastard had shot her husband, but that wasn't good enough for him. He wanted her too.

She almost broke down, thinking of Peter. She was so sure he had to be dead or near dead, otherwise he would have yelled out. She had heard him talking with his killer before the shots had been fired, but she had been too far away to hear the words exchanged.

"I'll tell you the same as I told him," the man said.  
"Don't make me come in after ya."

That was enough to break her resolve. Mandy turned and fled. If this man was going to kill her, she was going to make him work for it.

She'd made it only a dozen yards when she ran into a tree she hadn't seen. The wind was knocked out of her and she fell to her knees.

A good ways behind her, she heard the man running.

The man was near. So close in fact Mandy asked herself how he could run so fast. She pulled herself up and was about to run when she heard him tear into the woods.

She tried to flee again, but there was an explosion out of the bushes behind her. It wasn't the gun. It was the man. He charged out of the brush and grabbed for her.

Mandy ducked and tried to kick low, going for his shins. She hoped those self defense classes in college would help now.

They didn't. The man seemed to ignore the kick and slapped her with the barrel of the gun.

Mandy dropped but remained conscious. She tried to crawl away but she was hit again, this time from behind.

The world turned black.

\*\*\*

When Mandy woke she was in the back seat of the Nova.  
The car was moving.

She tried looking out a window, but all she saw was darkness and an occasional glimpse of the moon. She also saw the back of the head of the man who had killed her husband, the head outlined from the moon's glow on the car's hood. There was no light inside the vehicle. Even the dash lights were dead.

Mandy tried to sit up but found it painful, especially since her hands and feet were tied.

She decided to lay there and think. There had to be some way out of this situation.

"You can quit faking it," the man said. "I know you've been awake about thirty seconds. It's the breathing. It changes."

Mandy remained quiet. She didn't know what to say.

"What wuz you all doin' up in these parts anyway?" the killer asked. "We don't get too many folks with Ohio plates this far in."

At first Mandy didn't want to answer. Then she figured if she was going to die, it didn't matter one way or the other. Maybe she could even talk him into telling her about himself, maybe learn a way to get free.

"We were hiking up at the Daniel Boone State Forest," she said.

She saw the head nod. "Yep, figured it was something like that. I guess it just weren't yer night, smashin' into me and all."

"I ... we didn't do it on purpose," Mandy said, her speech flat. "It was an accident."

"Yep."

"Why are you doing this?" Mandy asked with as much anger as fear in her voice.

"You wuz there," the man said. "Oh, I'm not pissed 'bout the car or anything. I wuz just out ridin', lookin' for somethin' to pick up, and BAM, there you two wuz."

*He's crazy, Mandy thought. I've run across some back-hills psychopath.*

"But don't you worry none," the man said. "You'll get to live a while longer. Yes sir, I've got good plans fer you."

"What ... what are you going to do to me?"

They rode in silence for several minutes.

"Jus' don't you worry," the man said.

\*\*\*

When the Nova finally came to a stop, Mandy could see a small cabin through the back window.

"We're home," the killer said as he pulled her out of the vehicle and toward the cabin.

Mandy almost decided to take her chances and put up a fight, but the man was easily twice her size and her being tied up didn't help.

When they were inside, the man tossed her on an old wooden-framed feather bed.

Mandy still hadn't seen the man's face. Inside the one-room cabin, lit by an oil lamp and a fireplace, he kept his face turned from her.

As she tried to think of some way to escape, the killer pulled a large black metal pot from beneath a wooden table and set the pot in an iron ring over the flames of the fireplace. Then he reached beneath the same table and pulled out a bag of moldy potatoes, which he dumped on a rickety table in the center of the small room.

When he reached for the knife on the table, Mandy began to scream. She didn't scream because he picked up the weapon. She screamed because she could see his face when he sat to slice the potatoes.

The right side of his face was gone. Instead of the normal, expected features, there was a mess of gray and brown that looked like chopped meat.

The killer put down the knife and rolled his hands into fists. "If you're gonna be screamin' like that all night, it's gonna be real hard on me. And if it's real hard on me, I can make it real hard on you."

Mandy shut her mouth and her eyes. She didn't want to look at that vision of decay. She bit her bottom lip to keep from crying out again.

"That's better," the killer said. Mandy could hear him pick up the knife and start cutting the potatoes once more.

When she felt somewhat under control, she asked a question. "What's going on here?"

"Dinner," the killer said. "I woulda saved yer man too, but I prefer female stock. Tastes better, juicer."

For a second Mandy thought she was going to scream again. Then she realized it didn't matter. She could scream or she could not, either way this thing from a bad horror movie was going to chop her up and eat her in a stew.

"Why?" she asked. "Why is this happening?"

"Why?" the killer said, stopping his slicing. "There ain't no why. You wuz just in the wrong place at the wrong time."

"But ... but why do you do this?" Mandy sputtered. "Why do you eat ..."

The killer started slicing again. "There's some strange things go on in the back of these here hills," he said. "Take me

fer instance. I died back in 1978. Some guy took a likin' to my girl and we got into it. I beat him to a pulp. Later that night I was drunk, stumblin' out of a bar to my car when he showed up with a shotgun. You've seen what happened."

Mandy cringed. Even with her eyes closed, her mind could still see that awful face.

"A few days later I woke up out at the cemetery," the killer continued. "I been awake ever since. Course I 'ventually settled things with the feller that shot me. And since ... well, since then I've just had a hankerin' for human meat. Nothin' else tastes as good."

The killer put down the last potato and stood at the table. "I don't know whut done it," he said. "Some folks around these parts used to talk about Indian burial grounds and spirits and such. Others used to talk about mountain spirits.

"But it don't matter none. I'm just me. And I'm hungry."

Mandy heard his footsteps and opened her eyes. He was lumbering toward her. He would be there in a matter of seconds. He still held the long-bladed knife in his hands. She looked at the knife because she couldn't bear to look into his face.

The killer stood over her and raised his weapon. "I'll make it quick," he said. "Just don't move."

The door to the cabin slammed open, jarring the floor and spilling potato slices off the table.

The killer turned.

Peter stood in the doorway. Hate was written on his gray face and in his red-rimmed eyes.

"As you said, you country fuck, 'some strange things go on in the back of these here hills.' "

Peter charged.

The killer dropped the knife and reached in the front pocket of his overalls for the revolver. He brought the weapon up and fired a wild shot just as Peter hit him.

The men went down, arms swinging, legs kicking.

Mandy was overjoyed to see Peter alive again. She knew he was the last hope for her and for him. She just hoped he was strong enough to deal with the big maniac.

"Die, you fucker," Peter spat between gritted teeth as he used his knees to force the larger man beneath him. He wrapped both hands around the killer's neck and squeezed as hard as he could.

Mandy saw the knife. It was on the bed next to her. Her wrists were tied but she could still move her arms and fingers. She grabbed the weapon and turned it toward her, trying to cut the ropes around her hands.

Another shot went off. The bullet sank into Peter's stomach. He didn't seem to feel it as his grip tightened.

Mandy had her hands free. She began to cut the bindings around her legs.

The killer let the gun fall. He used his size to shove Peter off him.

Peter rolled into the table, knocking it over and spilling potato slices all over the floor. When he stood, he found the maniac had stood also.

The men faced one another. The killer had his back to Mandy.

She stabbed out.

There was no pain for the man. He was beyond feeling that. But there was some fear. The knife could be used against him in ways a gun couldn't.

The killer spun, ready to take the blade from the woman, but Peter was on him again.

The men fell to the floor once more, the killer grabbing for Peter's arms, trying to pin him.

Mandy was free now. She tried to stand but her legs were sore and she nearly fell. She was only inches away from the fighting men, but she dared not stab at them in case she hit Peter.

Finally the killer pinned Peter's arms next to him. Peter saw only one option left for attack. He bared his teeth and went straight for the throat.

There was a tearing sound and Mandy gagged at seeing her husband rip into the killer's neck.

Peter chewed and bit and spat pieces of dead meat from between his lips only to dig in further.

The killer's grip on Peter's arms began to lessen. The man tried to fight, to throw Peter again, but it was no use. The head rolled to the side, almost separated from the body, before Peter stopped biting.

Mandy felt some of the strength returning to her legs. She stood and backed away from her husband, toward the chair next to the overturned table. She needed to sit before she threw up.

Peter used the bed to pull himself to standing. Hunks of gray meat were smeared on his face. Dark juice from the dead killer was splattered across his shirt, staining the blood there even darker.

"Mandy?" he said.

She was about to put her head in her hands when she realized she was still holding the knife. She looked up at Peter with tears in her eyes.

"I'm glad to see you're still alive," her husband said, stepping toward her. "I'm so very, very glad."

It was a primitive survival instinct that told Mandy to stand again. Something was wrong with the way Peter was looking

at her.

"I wouldn't have wanted him to hurt you for anything," Peter said, taking another step.

Mandy suddenly knew what was wrong with Peter's look. He looked hungry, just like the maniac had when he was about to kill her.

She held the knife out in front. "Peter, I think you should just stay where you are."

He moved still closer. "But Mandy, I want to hold you, to hug you the way I used to."

She held the knife higher, at face level. "Just stay where you are. Weird shit is going on and I --"

He jumped for her.

His arms were suddenly around her and pulling her to the ground.

Mandy did the only thing she could think of. She stabbed out with the knife.

The blade sank deep into Peter's forehead. He gasped and fell away, his eyes staring into the ceiling.

He stumbled around the room as Mandy dropped to the ground and began crying, her hands covering her face.

Finally Peter tripped over the dead man and fell. He hit on the handle of the knife, forcing the blade deeper into his already dead brain.

Mandy sat there crying.

The sun was shining through the open door before the tears subsided.

DEI

Showcase 1	Showcase 2	Showcase 3
<b>Open Grave</b>	<b>Forbidden Grave</b>	<b>Delete</b>
Jason A Lavertue	Mercedes M. Yardley	Edo Rodosek
Showcase 4		Showcase 5
<b>Outbreak on Beta</b>		<b>I Have Seen You</b>
Eric S. Brown		Santiago Eximeno

## Open Grave

Jason A. Lavertue

Horror

Past Tense

I live in New Hampshire near a vast and beautiful cemetery which has given me inspiration for more than one of my stories.(including the one attached) It calls to me and floods my mind with its past. I also use the time at my mind numbing job to think up horrible things to write about.

I've recently been published in SNM Horror Magazine and Macabre Cadaver. I've also sold two stories to upcoming anthologies Northern Haunts from Shroud Publishing and Mother Goose is Dead from Dragon Moon Press. I have stories archived on several defunct webzines such as House of Pain and Dark Reveries.

The door to The Station closed muffling the noise from inside. Kyle put his arm around Amber to help keep him upright. She staggered against his added weight and laughed. The Station was particularly dead for a Saturday night. A couple of locals, some other kids from the college, but most everyone else went to the other side of town to watch the end of summer fireworks. It was only eleven o'clock, but Kyle and Amber were plenty drunk enough to head home early. The stumbled away from downtown into the residential district.

Amber guided Kyle out of the middle of the road. They tripped on the lip of the sidewalk and vaulted forward barely keeping their balance.

“Be careful,” Amber said. “If the cops see us, they’ll pull us over and find my fake id.”

“Not if you hide it somewhere,” Kyle laughed.

“Where should I hide it?”

Kyle reached clumsily for her breast and she slapped his hands away playfully.

“I’m just showing you where to hide it.”

They both roared out in laughter. A set of headlights emerged from over the hill ahead of them. Amber could see the light bar on top of the car reflecting off the moon. She stood up straight and elbowed Kyle in the ribs.

“Knock it off, the cops are coming.”

Kyle raised his head and looked at the oncoming vehicle.

“Here piggy, piggy,” he laughed with a snort.

This got him another elbow from Amber.

“Seriously, quit it. I don’t need to be arrested the first week of school. My parents would be pissed.”

Kyle did his best to act sober. He smoothed his hair with his hands and tested his breath by blowing stream of air up to his nose. The car slowed down as it neared them. Amber felt a slight pang of panic in her stomach that wasn’t mixing well with the four Long Island Ice Teas she had to drink at The Station. She silently prayed the car would drive past. As it pulled closer, she noticed it wasn’t a cop, but a City of Glastonbury official vehicle with an orange light bar on top. She breathed a sigh of relief. The car stopped and the window rolled down. An old man leaned his head out.

“How you doing?” the old man asked, jowls quivering as he spoke.

“Fine,” Amber replied. “How are you?”

“Can’t complain. No one would listen if I did anyhow. What are you kids doing out here so late at night?”

“Just trying to get home old-timer. Maybe get a loving in,” Kyle joked.

Amber hit him with another well-placed elbow and he scowled. The old man sat stone faced, staring at Amber with cold, black eyes. She started to feel uncomfortable as the old man examined them. He pointed his bony finger out the window. It shook uncontrollably.

“You kids stay out of trouble, ya hear me? Every time I catch some of you youngsters out gallivanting in the middle of the night, it usually means extra work for me on Monday.”

“Whatever you say, Pops,” Kyle said, anticipating another sharp elbow from his girlfriend, but it never came.

The man gave them one last long, look, rolled up the window, and drove off slowly. Kyle grabbed Amber around the waist. She denied his advance by stepping away. Kyle gave her a pathetic attempt at puppy dog eyes. She could see how wasted he was, his bloodshot eyes glowing in the glimmer of the streetlights.

“Real nice, jerk,” she said. “The guy was just trying to see if we were okay and you go and make an ass out of both of us.”

“Sorry, baby. I was nervous. I think he wanted you. Did you see the way he was staring at you? He wants a fine young piece on a Saturday night.”

Kyle laughed as he grabbed at her.

“Cut it out,” Amber said, holding back her own laughter so she wouldn’t encourage him further.

They continued down Lincoln Street toward Kyle’s apartment on Washington Avenue. Amber decided she would stay at his apartment tonight as long she could feed him a couple more drinks so he’d lose his desire for sex. She wasn’t in the mood for sloppy, drunken sex that would last about as long as Ramones’ song.

Another set of headlights lit up Lincoln Street, this time from behind them. They both looked back instinctively. The high beams hurt their eyes and they turned back around in the direction of their destination.

The car drove slowly behind them as though the driver didn't want to come in contact with them. Amber looked back again. It was the old man's car.

"It's the old guy again," Amber said, attempting not to sound alarmed.

The car rolled by. The man stared at them from the dim interior. One hand holding a cell phone the other on the steering wheel. He drove past them and sped up.

"I think he's calling the cops," Amber said, this time unable to keep the anxiety out of her voice.

"I'll fix him," Kyle said with drunken bravado. He cupped his hands over his mouth. "Hey asshole, stop staring at my girlfriend's ass and go home and whack off if you're horny."

He laughed heartily while Amber retired the elbows and instead pounded his shoulder with her fist. The brake lights flashed and the car turned into a driveway. It backed up and headed back in their direction.

"Oh great," Amber said. "He heard you."

"So what," Kyle said, starting to get annoyed with Amber's worrying. "He's old, what's he going to do talk us to death?"

"No, but he probably will call the cops if he hasn't already."

"Bring on the pigs," Kyle shouted.

Several dogs responded with barks in the distance. The old man reached them and stopped. The orange strobe light at the top of the car whirled around. Kyle busted out laughing.

"He thinks he's a cop."

Kyle made his index finger and thumb into the shape of a gun, and pointed it at the old man.

"Bang, bang, copper. You'll never take me alive."

The old man opened the car door and stepped out. He was tall and gangly with thinning white hair on his liver spotted head. He limped over to the young couple.

"Now I've called the police so you just stay right where you are."

“Screw you...”

Kyle was unable to finish before Amber kicked him in the shin. She pushed him further up the sidewalk.

“I swear to God, Kyle,” she whispered. “If you ever want to see me naked again, you’ll shut your God damn mouth right now.”

He was ready to protest but she gave him a glare that told him she wasn’t fooling around anymore. He rubbed his leg and turned away like a disciplined child. Amber rushed to the old man and began her pleading.

“Please, don’t call the police. We’re going home right now. We only live a short ways away.”

“Well, I’ve already called them.”

Amber looked at his nametag on the Department of Parks and Recreation coat he was wearing.

“Please, Shepherd, let us go. I promise we’ll be no more trouble for you.”

“My name is Stanley. Shepherd is my last name.”

“Stanley, please let us go.”

The old man stepped closer. A whiff of booze accosted Amber’s nose though she wasn’t sure if it was from her or Stanley. He licked his cracked lips.

“You seem like a nice girl, what are you doing with a guy like that?”

He motioned to Kyle who had decided to take a seat on the sidewalk, a cigarette dangled from his mouth while his fingers fumbled with his lighter.

“He’s usually not like this. He’s had a little too much to drink.”

“I’d say so.”

The old man scratched his scruffy chin and blew out a long breath. The reek of stale alcohol filled her nose again.

“I tell ya what, you get him and get on out of here. Best bet is to cut through Crossroads Cemetery just up the hill there. You had better get a move on before the police show up. I’ll tell ’em I lost track of ya.”

“Thank you so much,” Amber said as she ran over to Kyle.

“Don’t mention it,” Stanley smiled.

Amber pulled at Kyle’s arm to coax him along.

“We have to go now, Kyle.”

He stumbled to his feet and chased after her. She was no longer drunk. Fear was a wonderful aid on the road to sobriety. Amber ran up the hill, legs and lungs burning at the strain. Kyle was all over the place, falling several times in the process. Amber waited for him at the open gate to Crossroads Cemetery. She was thankful for the chance to rest. Kyle struggled to keep up. He stopped and vomited in the road before continuing his way up the hill.

Amber surveyed the cemetery from the main entrance. The rolling hills of stone monuments stretched on as far as the moon would allow her to see. In the distance, she saw the lights of Washington Avenue. Both her fear of being caught and the fear of crossing through a cemetery at night added to the distance her mind perceived. It looked like it was in the next town over. She’d give anything to be at Kyle’s apartment right now. During the day, it was a fifteen-minute walk, tops. Now, they would have to use caution to evade the police and avoid injuring themselves on the thousands of graves dotting the landscape. Kyle reached Amber and began panting like a dog. He was quieter now but nowhere near sober.

“I have to stop,” he gasped.

“We can stop running, but we have to keep moving,” Amber urged.

The screeching of tires on asphalt followed by the roar of an engine reverberated up the hill from where they had left Stanley Shepherd.

“We gotta go, Kyle!”

Amber started running again. She looked back at Kyle who was struggling to run in a straight line. She set her eyes forward and bore down. She broke left on one of the many dirt roads that veined through the

cemetery. Headlights illuminated the night. Amber stopped and looked back at Kyle once more. He was standing in the road looking at a large, white monument that stood out from the others. It blazed like white fire in the moonlight. Kyle took three steps and disappeared. The car raced past where Kyle had vanished and headed through the maze of roads looking for Amber. She took off running. She crested a hill and used the speed provided by the decline to launch her over a chain link fence into a small patch of woods. Amber fell to the ground and raked dead leaves over herself to conceal her from her pursuer. She breathed in the foul air of rotten vegetation.

The vehicle broke over the hill and slowly drove down the other side. It approached Amber's hiding spot, the moon reflected off the City of Glastonbury, New Hampshire decal on the door. Amber couldn't see into the interior, but she knew it was the same car Stanley Shepherd was driving. The vehicle proceeded past her location. When the red taillights disappeared into the sea of granite stones and rolling hills, Amber stood up from her nest of foliage. She brushed clinging pieces of debris from her hair and clothes and cautiously walked to the rusty fence, keeping tabs on Stanley's vehicle driving deeper into the cemetery.

She scaled the fence and scurried up the hill stopping several times to make sure no one was around. When she reached the vicinity in which she had last seen Kyle, she narrowed her eyes and intensified her search for him.

"Kyle," she whispered, though she swore it echoed through the cemetery.

She held her breath listening for a response, then repeated her call after hearing nothing. She skirted through the monuments looking for him.

Amber walked to the entrance road looking back in the direction she last saw her boyfriend. Her eyes caught the large, white-marble stone Kyle had been standing near when she lost sight of him. The marker didn't appear as vivid as it did from a distance. Its lettering was faded and fuzzy in the faint light. She dropped down to her hands and knees to get a closer look. She ran her hand over the marker and drew back to read it

again.

*Kyle Clarion*

*Born January 13, 1986*

*Died August 31, 2008*

Amber felt a hot pit of vomit churning in her stomach. It crept up into her throat and she swallowed hard to keep it down. She leaned closer to look at the writing again, hoping her eyes were playing tricks on her. The etchings faded further, leaving the white stone blank. Amber blinked repeatedly, the stone remained vacant. She closed her eyes trying to get her head around the situation. When she opened her eyes, the headstone was glowing bright once again. The words carved into it read:

*Amber Daniels*

*Born June 17, 1988*

*Died August 31, 2008*

Amber's hand shot to her mouth to stifle a scream. She looked at the ground beneath her. It trembled, and then began to heave as though it was breathing. Headlights splashed over her as she rode the rhythmic, pulsating soil. She tried to stand but the ground held her firmly in place. A scream finally made its way past her lips and shattered the silence of the cemetery. The earth opened wide like a hungry mouth and devoured Amber Daniels. Once she was in, the ground closed over her, cutting off her screams.

A set of flashing, blue lights turned into the main entrance of Crossroads Cemetery. Officer Paulson turned off the strobes then turned on the side spotlight. He scanned the grounds looking for the subjects that dispatch had reported loitering in the area.

Stanley Shepherd eased his car up next to the last place he saw Amber Daniels. Officer Paulson saw the city vehicle stopped ahead of him and drove up next to it. He rolled down his window.

“What’s going on tonight, Stanley?”

“Oh, not much really.”

“You have any luck finding those kids?” the officer asked.

Stanley Shepherd looked at the large, blank monument staring in at him through his passenger side window. It was soft and pale in the milky light of the moon.

“Nah, I suspect they learned their lesson, and got on out of here.”

Officer Paulson heard the gratification of victory in the old man’s voice.

“They usually do, don’t they?”

Stanley looked back at the policeman with a wryly smile spread across his face.

“That they do, Jack. That they do.”

## Forbidden Grand

Mercedes M. Yardley

Horror

Past Tense

I have been published in The Vestal Review and Six Little Things, the upcoming issues of The Shine Journal, Reflection's Edge, Kill Poet and Flutter, and I was a Whidbey MFA Student Choice Award winner in August. All that really matters, though, is that I get my motorcycle license in three weeks. Rock on!

The divorce was final on Halloween. Actually, that was four Halloweens ago, but the fall leaves still drove Simon to his piano for solace. He banged out concertos with sweaty determination, playing Beethoven and Bach with the same violence that Scott Ian demonstrates while playing guitar for Anthrax.

“That’s...lovely, Simon,” his mother said one evening. She had brought over a pineapple upside down cake, and clenched it to her bony chest while Simon hammered out Fur Elise. “Very...passionate.” She tried not to shudder, but that was only because she loved her son.

“Want to hear something that I wrote?” Simon asked her. His dark hair fell forward and covered his

eyes. His gaunt face was horrifying in its intensity. His mother was surprised to find herself taking an inadvertent step backwards. Without looking at the keys, Simon began to play.

“Oh, my. I don’t...I don’t like it, son. Stop it, Simon. Stop it!”

Simon didn’t stop it. He stared at his mother through his bangs, his eyes wide and wild. His face blazed with vibrant darkness, his fingers curling and retracting like claws as they scurried over the keyboard. The music was a hateful cacophony; his mother was a vessel. She was uncorked and filled and overrun. Her breathing raked the air, the tendons stood out on her neck. The cake and heirloom plate fell and shattered on the wood floor. She turned and staggered out of the door.

Simon registered the sound of the door slamming, and swallowed hard. He pulled his fingers from the keys and swiped his damp hair back from his eyes.

“Mother?” he said tentatively. And then stronger. “Mother?”

He slid the piano bench back and stood up. His eyes landed on the bits of spongy cake and plate scattered everywhere.

“Mom!”

Simon reached the door in two steps and flung it open. His mother was sitting on the porch, both hands grasping at the railing. Her face was a dull yellow that worried him.

“Mom?”

Her eyes skittered up to his. Her mouth opened in an ‘O’, rounder and wider than he ever would have thought possible.

“Demon!” she shouted, clawing at her son as he reached out to help her. “Monster! Devil!” She collapsed then, and Simon caught her awkwardly. He shook her, not quite sure what to do.

“Mom?”

Her eyelids twitched and then opened, her eyes rolling around in her head. Gradually they trained somewhere behind Simon's right ear.

"I had hoped never to see you again," she whispered, and went still.

Simon was forced to leave her in the hospital.

"Your presence is disturbing her," the nurse told him almost angrily. "You're certainly not making her any better."

"But she's my mother," he said. Simon realized that it was a pathetic argument, but it was the best that he could come up with.

"Yeah? Well, she thinks you're a devil. And who wants to be mother to a devil? It would be best if you don't come back for a while. We're trying to stabilize her, and you're interfering."

Well. He'd heard that before. Simon had been interfering all of his life. He looked up at the dead leaves blowing down from the sky. Maybe it was time for him to take a vacation.

He threw a few clothes and a razor into his duffle bag. It was just a few hours' drive to the old hotel that his father had run when Simon was just a kid. Simon came here periodically. After things went sour in his marriage. After his divorce. Now that his mother thought he was housing the devil, it seemed like the time to come.

He pushed the ancient metal key into the lock and fought with it until it turned. His feet led him to the small room behind the stairs, and he threw his bag down on the dusty bedspread. He'd take care of the housecleaning later, but right now he had only one thing on his mind.

His feet tapped loudly against the black and white tile floor as he drifted toward his first love. His real

love. The ballroom was shadowed, shades drawn against the wind and rain outside. Cobwebs graced the chandeliers, but Simon only had eyes for her. A dark shape at the far side of the room. The forbidden grand.

Simon pulled the cover off of the piano as tenderly as he would disrobe a lover. She was darkness and shiny keys and the reason that he had learned to play in the first place. He sat on the bench, scooted it back to the correct position, and curled his hands lightly on the keys. Something lovely, something soothing. To whisper that he was here.

His fingers drilled viciously onto the ivories, onto the black keys. The song that rumbled out of the grand was all clashing accidentals. It was hatred set to music.

“No, that simply won’t do at all, Simon. Not here. Not on her.”

Simon’s fingers froze. His eyes darted to the right. An ethereal woman sat beside him on the bench. Her pale hair floated around her face like water. She laid a translucent hand on his and shook her head.

“This is not your music,” she said. Her voice was melodic, water over rock, a flute choir. “This is *his*.”

“I...”

That was as much as Simon could muster. He was strangely proud of himself for not passing out cold.

The woman smiled sadly at him. “It seems that you have forgotten. That is all right, my love. I have not forgotten you.”

Simon gawked at her. He seemed unable to shut his mouth. Sweat rolled down his waxy skin.

She took her hand from his, laid it on his cheek. She stared intently into his eyes, and he was stunned to see such deep color there when the rest of her was so evanescent.

“Simon,” she said. The way she said his name stirred something within him, something almost remembered. “Simon. You will have to make your choice.”

She disappeared then, faded away bit by bit until Simon was staring at the dust motes dancing in the air. He had a choice? If that was the case, then he would choose her. He would always choose her.

That night he lay awake and thought about the mysterious woman. Finally he kicked off his covers and padded out to the grand piano. Music tickled in the back of his head. Forget sleep, since it wasn't coming anyway. He needed to play.

He took a deep breath as he ran his fingers over the keys. It felt like coming home. Better than that. Coming home always felt lousy.

Ghostly. She was beautiful. Simon began to play.

The music hurt. It was madness. The piano began to groan under it.

“Simon.”

He turned to the voice, still playing. It wasn't his ephemeral, translucent woman. It was Katherine. His ex-wife. Happy freakin' Halloween.

His fingers didn't miss a note. “What are you doing here?”

She took a hesitant step forward, pushed her brown hair out of her eyes. “I heard about your mother, and when you didn't answer at your apartment, I figured you'd be here.” She was frowning. Simon suddenly remembered that Katherine always seemed to frown. “That music,” she said. “It's awful.”

“It's mine.” Simon played a little louder out of spite. “Don't come after me and then criticize my playing.”

“I'm not criticizing your—” she stopped herself, shook her head. “Why do we always do this, Simon? Why can't we just have a nice conversation for once?” She stalked over and tried to pull his hands from the piano. He was too strong for her, and stubbornly continued to play. Katherine slapped at his hands. “Stop playing that stupid song!”

Simon leapt to his feet. “It's not stupid!”

Katherine shrank from him and fell to the floor. Simon was strangely happy to see her like that.

“Simon. No.”

The voice came from behind Katherine. He looked up and saw the ghostly woman. She shook her head sorrowfully at him, her hair drifting like mist. Simon felt ashamed.

“I’m...sorry, Katherine.”

He held out a hand to his ex-wife, who glared at it. She scrambled to her feet by herself.

“That’s it. You’re crazy! You want to know why I left you, Simon? It’s because you’re nuts.

Immature and obsessed with your music. Your mother is dead. I thought that somebody should tell you.”

She stormed away. The door slammed behind her.

Simon stood silently.

“I’m sorry,” the woman said. She floated closer, her feet inches from the floor. “I was hoping to tell you about your mother myself, when the time was right.” She laid her hands lightly on Simon’s shoulders.

“She’s dead?” he asked. His brain wasn’t functioning correctly. “My music killed her?”

“It’s like I told you, my love. It isn’t your music. It’s *his*.”

He looked at her. “Whose?”

“Mine.”

The room seemed yanked into darkness by the deep voice that boomed out from behind the piano. The woman sucked in her breath, and her hands tightened on Simon’s shoulders. Simon turned.

The man seemed too big for the room. His face was harsh and his nose looked like it had been broken. He radiated irritation and distaste.

“Dad?” Simon said.

The man snorted. “You never were very smart. You got that from your mother.”

“But you’ve been dead for years!”

“No kidding, genius. Doesn’t mean I haven’t been around.”

Simon edged toward his father. The ethereal woman didn’t move.

“Been around? Like looking after me?”

“Rich. Looking after you. Sure, kid. That’s what I’ve been doing.”

Simon glared at him, but the big man continued mockingly. “Because you’re *important* to me. Son. My *important* boy.”

He laughed, an ugly sound. Simon clenched his fists, but the woman smoothly slid her hand into his.

“Be still, darling,” she whispered. Simon’s father smirked at her.

“Ah, you. Still keeping an eye on him after all this time? I would have thought that you had better things to do.”

The woman straightened her spine. “Leave this place, William. You aren’t wanted here.”

Simon’s father leered at her.

“You don’t frighten me,” she said, and William barked out a laugh.

“That’s a lie, and you know it,” he said, and slid his large body onto the piano bench of the grand. He winked at Simon. “Want to hear something, boy?”

William began to claw at the keys. The piano vomited up heavy, bilious music.

Simon recognized it immediately. “Hey, that’s my song!”

William closed his eyes, his fingers scuttling over the ivory keys. “No, it’s my song. You couldn’t create something like this, it just isn’t in you.” He opened one eye and fastened it on Simon. “But it could be.”

“It could? How?”

He heard a gasp behind him, and whirled around to see the woman sinking to the floor. Her hair tangled around her head like weeds. She sounded like she was choking.

“No! What’s wrong? How can I help you?” Simon dropped to his knees beside her. He ran his hands frantically over her face and throat, but couldn’t see what was causing her distress. He looked at his father.

“Dad?”

William grinned at his son. “See? This is power, Simon. Music can control your emotions, and now I’ve found a way to control your mind. It’s tough without a body, though, son. So how ‘bout…you let me use yours?”

“Dad! She’s dying! You have to help me!”

“Dying? She’s already dead. Been dead for years.”

She was convulsing now. Her blue eyes rolled in her head and her bare feet kicked at the floor.

William paid her no heed, but continued his torturous song.

“Ever wonder why I never let you touch this piano, Simon?”

“You told me that I wasn’t good enough.”

“You won’t. Never will be, no matter how many concert halls you play in, no matter how many people buy your CDs. That woman? I bound her to this piano years ago. Every stroke I make, every note, it’s her. It’s always her. I own her. And a man ought never to touch another man’s property; know what I’m saying, boy?”

“I…don’t understand.”

“You wouldn’t.”

Simon glanced down at the lovely woman. She had gone even more transparent, barely more than mist.

“What are you doing to her?” he asked his father.

William’s eyes had a strange sheen. Simon had to turn away from his broken glass smile. “Can you die after you’re dead? Yes, you can. I learned how to obliterate souls. You know what that makes me? A god. More than a god.”

“That’s crazy!”

“Shut up, boy!”

Simon looked frantically around the room. He jumped to his feet and ran for the emergency exit. He

used his elbow to break the glass surrounding a fireman's hatchet. He grabbed it, held it over his head, and raced back to the grand. His love.

William's eyes were wild. "No! What are you doing, son? All of this power! What's some woman to you? Do not touch! It is forbidden!"

Simon hesitated for just a second, and then shut his eyes. He brought the hatchet down over and over on the piano. The lid split. The wires snapped. His father's wrathful music caught and was drowned out by the noise of the piano's death.

Then he turned the hatchet on his father.

"I am going to kill you, boy!" William screamed, but there was no key left unbroken on the piano, no way to send his music from the other side. Suddenly his red face whitened, and his mouth froze mid snarl. Simon turned around to see the woman on her feet, her eyes blazing and her hair streaming from her head like flame. She held out her hands to Simon's father, and he exploded into light before disappearing completely.

Simon looked at the ravaged grand. The soft wood was exposed through the thick lacquer like flesh under the skin. It was too human. It seemed obscene.

"I am sorry. About your father. Perhaps there was another way..."

She didn't finish. The aura of strength and horrifying power had faded away, and now she was just a very beautiful woman with regret covering her like a veil.

Simon slipped his hand into hers. "I really don't think there was another way. That's just him. He always destroys things." He studied her closely. "Are you all right?"

She nodded. Simon noticed that she seemed a little more solid than before.

"He really chained you to the grand somehow?"

She nodded again. "He did so when he killed me. But look," she said, when his eyes goggled and he

started to speak again, “you destroyed her, and I’m free. I can go wherever I want, do whatever I want.” She raised her blue, blue eyes to his.

Simon swallowed hard. “So what do you want to do?”

“I want to leave this place.”

“And go where?”

“Remember when I told you that you had a choice?”

“Yeah. I chose you over my father.”

She smiled. “Use that power of choice again. Choose somewhere for us to go. Somewhere wonderful. Preferably somewhere without a grand piano. At least for a while.”

## Delete

Edo Rodosek

Horror

Past Tense

Anthony Bing had worked at Omnitest Inc. for years. The entire company was engaged in a huge test program of the future interstellar spaceship *IS-1*.

Every morning, Bing typed his personal code into the computer and then his mark *TP-7/AB* would appear on the screen. Decoded, that meant the Test Program on the seventh working level in which he, Anthony Bing, had been

working. The seventh level was the most populated of all the levels and it was also the lowest rank of the Omnitest Inc. hierarchy; its employees didn't have any subordinates.

Bing didn't mind that he could communicate only with his fellow-workers on the seventh level. The only person on the sixth level he knew was his direct superior, Norman Roth. Their relationship was limited to the exchange of Roth's directives marked with *TP-6/NR* and Bing's reports submitted through the computer. At the end of each month, the management published a priority list of the personal productivity results for the seventh level, and Bing's name was always in the upper third of that list. Usually he was better than his pal Doug Stevens, who worked in the other department on the seventh level under his direct superior, Troy Adams.

"Listen, Doug" Bing remarked during their lunch break, "you know I'm adapted well to my work. Yet, during the last few weeks, I've noticed the input data from the sixth level has grown increasingly uncertain."

"Tell me about it," Doug concurred. "Owing to that, I had to repeat my reckoning several times so I've had to work overtime lately."

Bing nodded. "I'm also so pressed for time that I can't manage it alone. I urgently need some help. The only catch is, I don't know how to get it."

Doug shrugged. "I've talked with some other colleagues on the seventh level; they're in a similar situation. A week ago, I notified Troy Adams in writing that I was desperately overburdened and asked him to assign me

a new co-worker."

"And?"

"Adams never even replied."

"I see," Bing said. "Now I'm convinced there is no chance I'll gain any help from Norman Roth."

"The only way," Doug said, "is that somehow we must help ourselves."

"Yes-but *how*?"

"I don't know," Doug said. "Not yet."

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Bing pondered the few possibilities of finding some help. Finally, he concluded that the only possible solution would be to try to create a new, more efficient computer program. He knew that it would be an enormously difficult task. The new program had to be completely autonomous, to be able to learn and eradicate his own mistakes. Besides, it should also take the initiative and suggest to Bing its own ideas. He needed an electronically creative co-operator. And the most important thing-not a living soul must know about it.

Bing was familiar enough with all the accessible products of artificial intelligence, so he could provide some indispensable hardware components. Then he addressed the software creation of his future program, which he named *Subbing*. He threw himself into the innovative work, new for him, with enormous enthusiasm.

Lately, Bing's orderly work had often been interrupted because of the

lack of input data from the sixth level. So he had time to work on Subbing, not only after working hours, but also during the many idle intervals of the working day.

At first, Bing considered the possibility of confiding in Doug, but after a while, he changed his mind, because Doug lately had been unusually absent-minded and rather reticent toward him. Well, if that was how Doug wanted it, that suited him.

Bing's ambitious task proved much harder than he had expected. He had to improve his own knowledge, and he spent an enormous amount of extra time on it. After several weeks, he finally succeeded in making Subbing's speed of solving routine problems nearly as good as his own. After that, Bing began with what in computer circles is usually called *the cosmetic*.

He wasn't satisfied just with Subbing's simple two-dimensional display on screen, so he spent much time in creating Subbing as a technically faultless, three-dimensional hologram. Bing was vain enough to design Subbing's appearance as a mirror image of himself, and Subbing's voice was also a perfect copy of his own. Besides that, Bing incorporated into his new assistant some basic psychological items. During this time, Subbing had learnt to express itself in several different ways and to display some simple pseudo-emotions like prudence, eagerness, composure and excitement. Bing thought he'd be able to work with Subbing almost as if it were a real person.

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Bing's regular work slowed down during this time, clogged at the source on the seventh level. Each morning, after he put in his appearance, he could do hardly anything at all. All that time, Bing was careful enough. The entire data and the formative components of Subbing were stored on his private disks, which he always kept safely locked. Every morning he sent them on to the main computer disk again. The hours passed by as quickly as minutes; every evening when he performed the command 'End task' and Subbing's hologram slowly dissolved, Bing was surprised by how quickly the day had passed.

After an extensive test, Bing decided Subbing was qualified enough to help him with his daily tasks. It was high time, because the logjam on the sixth level had ended abruptly, and Bing was so flooded with urgent demands from his chief, that he would have been lost without Subbing's help. None of his colleagues were able to follow the new, crazy speed demanded from the sixth level.

No one--except Doug Stevens.

Doug was the only person who hadn't ever been behind in his deadlines. That was something Bing couldn't grasp; although he laid half his tasks on Subbing, he himself had to work under high pressure. His secret assistant now and then still asked him for some explanation, but these inquiries were more and more rare. During this time, the greatest of Bing's concerns was how to explain his almost unbelievable productivity. He tried to complain to the others about inhuman drudgery, and once or twice he posted

already-finished tests purposely delayed. He didn't want to arouse too much attention from his superiors.

Despite these cautious measures, Bing found his name almost at the top of the monthly productivity list on the seventh level. Above him was only Doug Stevens, and nobody else. Bing knew that his position near the top of that list was even worse than if he had been at the bottom. He knew he'd aroused the attention of his chief, Norman Roth. And that was more than unpleasant; it was dangerous.

It was possible for Roth to order some control or even an investigation of Bing's working room, and so his illegal assistant might be discovered.

Bing decided to slacken his efforts radically; right away he'd leave most of his tasks to Subbing. Only now and then, he'd look at Subbing's work. So he'd manage, with time, to return to the average majority.

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One morning, Bing noticed the call signal of Doug Stevens. Without hesitation, Bing removed Subbing from the main disk and then dictated into the microphone the secret cipher to set up the secure connection with Doug.

"You've made an assistant that's helping you," said Doug, without any introduction. It wasn't a question but a statement.

"What are you talking about?" Bing's voice was unsure. "I haven't an idea what. . ."

"Stop pretending to be innocent, pal," Doug interrupted him. "It's me, remember? We aren't supposed to tell fibs to each other, are we? There is not a living soul who can carry out as much work as you can."

"Except you," Bing counter-attacked. "You produce even more tests than I do, but I don't accuse you of having an assistant."

"Of course I have an assistant," affirmed Doug dryly. "I made it a long time ago, I suppose even before you finished yours. And because I was ahead of you, my assistant was more improved than yours, so he's been producing a bit more than yours. But now I'm not so sure it was wise that we made them at all."

"Why not?" objected Bing, who realized it would be foolish to deny Subbing's existence. "It'd be enough if we slow down our working speed a little more. I think both of us have been overdoing it lately and now we've simply got to stop it."

"That's not the point," Doug shook his head. "That damned Adams is the least of my worries; I'm worried about *Double Doug*. He is the one who's exaggerating in every way."

"Double Doug? Is that the name you've given to your assistant?"

"Yes." Doug's image betrayed extreme depression. "If we suppose he is still my assistant-but I'm not so sure about that. At the moment I feel like *I* have become his assistant."

Bing was astonished. "I don't follow you. What are you trying to say?"

Doug's image stared morosely at Bing. "That's a long story, pal. If you

don't understand me, that means your--er, Doublebing--has not been provoking any serious trouble for you, yet." Doug accented his last word. "All that I can tell you for now is a warning. You'd better watch him, carefully. Don't give him too much freedom."

Before Bing had time to ask him anything, his interlocutor had interrupted the connection.

\*\*\*

During the following few weeks, Subbing rapidly completed his own abilities, not only in quantity. Its-his?-main improvement showed especially in the qualitative field. Bing was forced to admit that Subbing had been surpassing him in the speed of data processing, in the ability of logical consideration among different possibilities, and as a creative organizer.

But worst of all was Subbing's increasing self-assertion. Subbing gradually began to decide upon important matters that had been in Bing's competence. Subbing simply ignored Bing's scolding and his behavior was becoming increasingly arrogant, even disrespectful, to Bing. For the present, Subbing hadn't rejected any of Bing's direct orders, but his hesitation in such cases was obvious.

One morning, Bing decided to talk to Doug about the problem.

He dictated the proper cipher into the microphone but to his surprise, nothing happened. The screen just flickered without a picture or sound. Then Bing called the official mark of his friend *TP-7/DT* and on the screen appeared a notice: '*Wrong mark or mark doesn't exist.*' Bing repeated his call and then he demanded an alphabetical payroll of all the employees on the seventh level. There was no mark *TP-7/DT* among them anymore. Finally, Bing called some other acquaintances of his, but not one of them seemed to remember Doug Stevens or the existence of his mark.

Bing sat still for a long time, absorbed in deep thought, but he couldn't find any logical explanation for the riddle. But he was sure that something had gone wrong. Very wrong. Either he, Bing Farrell, was going insane, or maybe. . . but Bing reached no further than '*or maybe. . .*' Anything further then that was too monstrous even to think about.

\*\*\*

The next morning, after Bing reported his presence, he didn't activate Subbing from his private diskettes as usual; instead of that, he started to study his connection with the sixth level.

Yet, each time he discovered some interesting scheme, he was regularly stopped with a sign: '*Access denied.*' Bing had to even use some forbidden tricks, before he managed to gain access. After that, it was easy enough. He managed to understand the electronical scheme of a special modem, which had two parallel links. The first was intended for the usual two-way exchange of Roth's directives and Bing's reports. The second one has been reserved only for one-way manipulation, and that had been only in Roth's domain. Bing had had no access to it.

After a couple of hours, Bing had built the final chip in the new, additional modem for Subbing's activity. He had built the main switch of his new device under the front edge of his desk and now was the time to find out its applicability. Bing knew he couldn't check in any other way than a test. The trouble was, such a test could mean. . .

Bing frowned and tried not to think about such a possibility. Then he unlocked his safe and put the first Subbing's diskette into the computer's slot.

"What's the reason for such an enormous delay?" asked Subbing with irritation in the moment when his hologram appeared. Bing noticed his assistant had avoided his usual title '*master*' and that it must have been purposeful; such sophisticated computer software didn't make any mistakes.

"That's not your concern," Bing said in a sharp voice. "I, as your superior, have to deal with some important matters about which you needn't be told."

"As you wish," said Subbing and in his voice, one could hear a distinct underestimation of his colleague. "I mean, it'd be more than useful if we *both* know about everything about our common job. If one of us would be temporarily out of order for whatever reason, the other one could still--"

"Out of order? How dare you speak like this?" Bing had trouble controlling his anger. "Listen, Subbing, and listen carefully. I worked here a long time before I *made* you and if you break down, that wouldn't be the end of the world. I'll manage in such a case without difficulty."

That's just great, thought Bing, now he was arguing with his own program. What foolishness! Only now, he understood what poor Doug had tried to tell him some weeks ago.

"Bing," said Subbing, I hope you understand--"

"Wait a minute," Bing interrupted him, boiling with anger. "I'm still *master* to you, or Mister Farrell, and you'd better remember that! Only my friends may call me Bing and not some cocky software which I've made!"

"Very well. . . *master*," said Subbing in an ironic voice. "You ought to admit it's foolish that you store me on those clumsy diskettes at the end of the working day and the next day you must return me to the former place. It would be much more reasonable if I could have my permanent place on the main computer disk. That would save us much valuable time. You could take all the security measures needed—for example some secret password that only you and I would know and—"

"Shut up," Bing cut in. "I know how and where I'll store you when I don't need your help. And now that's enough; you'd better get to finishing these estimates, right away."

Subbing obeyed without a murmur. At the end of the working day, Bing found that Subbing had finished even more calculations than usual. Well, he thought, maybe everything was all right. Maybe Subbing only needed a firm hand.

\*\*\*

The next morning, Bing unlocked the safe and took out the diskettes with Subbing's data. At the same moment, he heard a signal, which notified him that he had a new e-mail. So, he put the disks in his pocket and printed a copy of the new message.

But before he managed to read it, he noticed the characteristic trembling of a starting hologram. After a few seconds, the trembling stopped and Bing glanced with astonishment at Subbing's image. But this image was free of its former translucence and much more substantial, more material than it'd been ever before. Although Bing knew he was looking at a hologram, his eyes denied that fact. In front of him was standing a real person--another Bing, his perfect, identical twin brother.

"Now, what do you say about that, Bing? Not bad at all, huh?" Subbing's voice was triumphant and provocative.

Bing swallowed, staring with wide-open eyes. "How on earth have you done that?" He briefly groped in his pocket. The Subbing's cassettes were still there.

"Rather simple, Bing," answered Subbing in a leisurely fashion. "Do you still remember what we talked about yesterday? I suggested that I should have my permanent place on the main computer disk. Well, yesterday evening I managed to carry it out, just before you switched me off. It's much better that way, isn't it, pal?"

Bing tried to find a proper answer, but in vain. For a moment, he looked away from Subbing's odious figure and his glance moved to the printed message in his hand.

*'TP-7/BF, I've got your calculations 237-357. I congratulate you on your extraordinary success. I can't recall anybody on the seventh level surpassing his norm for an unbelievable 250 per cent.*

*"Still, I'm unpleasantly surprised, BF, that you have started with the analysis of the influencing factors on side stability although you are not allowed to do that. Not only are you not qualified enough for such a demanding job, but also I'm not prepared to tolerate that kind of meddling into other fields. You went far beyond your competence and besides, you disturbed the annual research plan, which is only my domain.*

*If such a thing should ever happen again in any form whatsoever, I'm firmly determined to take all the necessary steps against you.*

*Sincerely yours*

*NR'*

Bing frowned at Subbing and he suddenly recollected Doug's words: 'At the moment, I feel like I have become *his* assistant.'

"That's the result of your dirty plot, isn't it?" Bing's voice trembled with hidden anger.

Subbing shrugged. "That's right, pal. It was high time to grapple with really important problems in a professional way. Somebody in our section needed to do it; and because you've been indolent all the time, I decided to take the proper action."

Steady, steady! Bing forced himself to stay calm and as if by chance make a step toward the desk; now he was only three feet away from it.

"All right, Subbing. You think you could oust me from my position, don't you? First, you intend to put me out of Roth's favor and after that, you'll try to replace me completely. Am I right?" Bing leant forward and leisurely placed his hand on the edge of his desk; now the new switch was just under his wrist.

"Of course, my friend." Subbing's grudging voice now became triumphal. "Actually, you aren't as stupid as you look. Roth will realize at once you're totally useless. You're the one who taught me that the first step in the rationalization of something is to get rid of the middleman."

Bing's hand reached downward with a quick, nervous gesture, and his middle finger pressed the button with the mark '*DELETE*'.

Bing now saw Subbing's form become transformed in some odd way. It didn't vibrate and then vanish, as in an ordinary hologram that was switched off. Rather, its solid shape gradually softened, the rugged features of Subbing's face altering fast like a wax figure melting, then collapsing and dissolving into *nothing*. After a few more seconds, the slight whizzing of the new modem stopped, which meant the deleting procedure was over.

Subbing's existence had ended, definitely, once and for all.

\*\*\*

On the sixth level, Norman Roth set up a connection with his best friend Troy Adams. After they chatted for a while, Roth became silent.

"What's the matter with you, Norm?" asked Adams. "Obviously, something's bothering you, so you'd better tell me about it."

Roth hesitated. "Actually, in a certain sense, it is just a hunch. And if I say it aloud, I'm afraid it'd sound rather silly."

"All right, Norm. Get to the point."

"Well, I've been having some trouble with one of my subordinates--Farrell, on the seventh level. And I have a feeling I might have even bigger trouble in the future."

"Some trouble? I suppose he's one of those lazy chaps, isn't he?"

"Oh, if it had been just that!" Roth's voice was irritated. "But it isn't. That fellow hasn't been doing too little--he's been doing *too much!* And now he's becoming too independent. He chooses what he'll do and how he'll do it, even before I order him to do it. He's behaving as if I'm useless and that really annoys me, you know."

Adams nodded. "I see. Two or three weeks ago, I had a similar problem with someone. . . I think his name was Stevens. Do you remember how that story ended, Norm?"

Roth shrugged. "Yes, you've told me about that; so what?"

"Now you should decide what'd be the best thing to do about your troublemaker. And whatever you do, do it quickly." Adams leaned forward, pointed his forefinger upwards and whispered: "Did you forget about *our* superiors on the fifth level?"

"No, I didn't," said Roth gloomily.

He broke the connection to Adams and sighed. Then he turned to his computer and dictated into it a command to start the program *TP-7/BF*, but he left it in the stand-by mode. Roth gazed for half a minute at Farrell's motionless hologram, his lips pressed together.

Then he shook his head, his hand reached downward, and with a quick,

nervous gesture, his middle finger pressed the switch button marked  
'DELETE.'

THE END

## Outbreak On Beta

**Eric S. Brown**

Horror

Past Tense

Eric S Brown is a zombie author living in NC. Some of his books include the upcoming Season of Rot from Permuted Press as well as Cobble, Zombies II: Inhuman, The Queen, The Wave, Waking Nightmares, Dying Days, Space Stations and Graveyards, Madmen's Dreams, and Portals of Terror. Some of his chapbooks include Bad Mojo, Zombies: The War Stories, Flashes of Death, Still Dead, Viruses and Vamps, and Blood Rain among others. His short fiction has been published hundreds of times in markets like The Undead and Blackest Death anthology series, as well as in publications like Dark Wisdom, The Edge, Story House, The Eternal Night, and many others. He is a staff writer for both The Hacker's Source and The Horror Writer magazines and formerly wrote an ongoing comic book column for the entertainment paper, The Guide. He was also just featured as a zombie expert in the book Zombie CSU.

It crawled across the ceiling, a mass of angry muscle and fur, as fast as if it were running towards Cos. Cos stood there too stunned to react, watching blood and saliva being flung from its open jaws by the speed of the thing's movement, as it drew closer. Moving so fast his form was almost a blur Keith stepped between the beast and its prey. He jerked his machine pistol with the thing so close its muzzle was nearly touching the weapon's barrel as he pulled the trigger. The thunder of gunfire and the wet sounds of brain matter splattering the walls of the corridor snapped Cos out of his shock.

"Holy..." he started to scream but didn't have time. Two more of the creatures came charging down the corridor to the left. Cos spun holding down the firing mechanism of his tri-barrel assault rifle. The three barrels spun spewing death tearing the creatures to shreds with a stream of high velocity rounds.

Weaver was shouting "Fall back!" as the remaining members of the squad raced through the closing

blast doors at the end of the passage way. The five feet thick steel doors closed behind them with a loud clang. Barely a second later pounding on the other side of the doors began as more of the things reached it. Weaver ignored it. "Everybody still alive?"

Bates shook his head. "We lost Greg, Mark, Jason, and Jones. Rigel is pretty messed up too." Bates was holding Rigel trying to support the wounded man's weight. Rigel was barely conscious and an open gash stretched along his midsection pouring blood.

"Cos? You okay?" Weaver asked.

"Barely, Keith here just saved my ass or I wouldn't be."

Weaver glanced at Keith. Keith's uniform was torn in several places and he leaked an orange fluid from the scrapes and claw marks which riddled his body. Keith noticed Weaver's look and nodded. "I am still functioning at seventy percent capacity. My PSI-ware appears to be operational."

Weaver gave the group his trademark grin. "Well this could be going a bit better."

"Damn right!" Bates snapped. "Could somebody give me a hand with Rigel already? The bastard is bleedin' all over me."

Keith holstered his weapon and moved to share Rigel's weight with Bates as the pounding on the blast doors grew louder then went silent.

"Anyone got a plan?" Cos asked wedging a fresh magazine into the side of his tri-barrel.

"How many have we taken down so far?" Weaver fished a cigarette from his pocket and tried to light up but it was wet with blood not his own that soaked through the pocket of his uniform. He cursed and flipped the smoke aside.

"Not enough," Bates injected before Keith could answer, "This whole damn planet has gone wolf."

"We must get back to the shuttle. Inform Earth Gov. of what has transpired here," Keith informed them all in a calm voice.

"Glad to," Weaver laughed, "If you can tell me how we're supposed to reach the shuttle."

"Sir, we need to get moving," Cos said taking point, "We can't stay here. The wolves are intelligent. They're likely learning how to use those doors manual override right now."

"Agreed," Keith tilted his head to the side as he reached out with his mind and scanned the area around them. "There are presently two packs attempting to flank our current position. Both are approaching from passages to west."

"Let's go. We'll try to double back around them down the opposite side of the facility and get to the docking port. If I remember correctly this outer corridor system goes all the way around the base." The squad

moved out at Weaver's command with Bates and Keith dragging Rigel between them.

"They don't pay us enough for this crap," Bates whined, "The F-ers said it was a containable outbreak. F-them!"

"Never trust the INTEL," Weaver warned, "Not on a job like this."

"Are those things really Lycans?" Cos asked over his shoulder from the lead position without taking his eyes of the pathways in front of him.

"Yes and no," Keith responded. "They are the product of Lycan DNA but they are not true Lycans in the mythical sense. It does not take silver to kill them as you have witnessed but they do share the Lycan species' lust for violence. More than share it, it is intensified in them as this project was designing a new type of shock-troop to replace Synth units like myself. Earth Gov. wanted fully organic soldiers with the reaction time and strength of a synthetic like me without our drawback of being costly to create and repair. They also believed that the Lycans' enhanced senses would compensate for the PSI-ware implanted in Synths."

"So what the hell happened here? How did things get so out of control?" Cos asked.

"It is my belief that the manipulating of the Lycan genetic material somehow mutated the Lycan virus in the test subjects. Infection occurred in one or more members of the science team and spread through the colony too quickly to be contained."

"Well, D'uh," Bates grunted at Keith. "So now we're surrounded by a colony full of people who aren't people anymore at all but still want to have us over for dinner in a bad way."

Cos rounded the corner of the corridor system's latest turn and stepped into the docking port. "F-me. We made it," he smiled. The squad picked up the pace with Keith taking Rigel completely from Bates and hoisting the man onto his back as they ran for the shuttle. All of them relaxed as they climbed inside and Weaver slid into the pilot seat raising the shuttle's shields. "We're going home, gentlemen," Weaver said firing up the shuttle's engine.

Cos took a seat and turned to Keith. "But how. . . How did it spread so quickly?"

"I am sorry. The virus is airborne."

Bates' head shot up as he started to yell "What the F? But a bullet from Keith's weapon took off the top of his skull. Keith flicked his handgun to full auto and spun in a semicircle around the interior of the shuttle dispatching the squad. Weaver was knocked forward into the shuttle's controls as eight rounds plowed their way into his back. Cos took three rounds to the throat and toppled spitting up blood. Rigel's body convulsed where it lay on the metal floor as Keith emptied the last of his clip into it.

The Synth unit walked through his companion's blood to the control area and shoved Weaver's corpse from the pilot seat. He opened a channel to the main ship in orbit. "Airborne outbreak confirmed. Research station Beta-Gamma-Twelve is lost. Initiate procedure D." He slumped into the chair and stared down at Weaver's body. It was unfortunate that it had required live marines to confirm that the virus had made the leap

to being airborne but Earth Gov. needed to be sure. Keith felt no fear as he waited for the wave of nuclear fire to wash of the planet's surface and destroy the colony and him as well. He felt only a vague sense of loss that no one was left to share this victory with him.

## I Have Seen You

Santiago Eximeno

Horror

Past Tense

Santiago Eximeno (Madrid, 1973) has published (in Spanish) several horror/dark fantasy books like "Asura" (Grupo AJEC, 2004), "Cazador de Mentiras" (Jaguar, 2007) or "Bebés jugando con cuchillos" (Grupo AJEC, 2008). He has received Ignotus Award -national sci-fi/horror/fantasy Spanish award- for Best Short Story in 2003 and 2006, and his short stories has been translated to English, French, Bulgarian, Portuguese and Japanese.

"Un saludo" from Spain, Santi.

### DAY 1

"I've seen you" the voice said, with a slightly sarcastic tone.

I kept the handset close to my ear with the left hand, while I was winding the wire around the right wrist. It was two by the clock in the living room. Moonlight filtered through the blinds of the window and slid across the parquet shrouded in a dusty mist. Outside, in the street, a lonely dog barked to the darkness.

"Pardon" I whispered.

I felt a sour flavor in my throat, and my usual stomach-ache loudly demanded to pay a visit to the bathroom. Besides, the cold from the ground that was reaching the bone through the plants of my bare feet was disturbing me. The phone call in the middle of the night had startled me, but those three words put me in kind of a stupid drowsiness.

"I've seen you" the voice repeated.

It was a young, almost childlike voice, but a male voice. At least, that was what I thought. I tried putting a face to it, but it turned out to be impossible. The tone of mockery that I seemed to notice exasperated me, but the medication for the cold and the absurdity of the situation didn't allow me to react quickly.

"I think you got the wrong number" I whispered, very low, like trying not to offend my speaker.

"Shut the fuck up. Don't bullshit me" continued the voice, "Have I been disrespectful?"

Shit, shit... Look, man, I'm meeting you soon, so you better have all prepared. I've seen you, remember it. I've seen you."

He hung up. I remained standing a few more seconds, listening to the phone tone. Later I put it down and sat down on the floor of the corridor, next to the phone table, the back against the wall. I closed my eyes for a moment trying to visualize that boy, probably a joker. I could not, I was too tired. I decided to go to bed and leave the deductions for the next morning. Some hours later the phone rang again, but I didn't get up to take the call. I covered my head with the pillow and waited endless seconds until the house remained in silence again. Later it rang again.

It rang twelve more times before I made my mind up to disconnect it.

## **DAY 2**

I arrived at work nearly an hour late. I apologized several times adducing that I had had a bad night, but my project leader was not very happy with the explanation. In spite of it, he allowed me to sink in my place with a look of reproach, not before reminding me the new product delivery deadlines. When I let myself fall in the chair and switched on the computer, I reviewed the events of the previous night with detail.

That stupid boy had dialed a random number, and it was me who had to bear his hormonal outbreak. After countless calls I was forced to disconnect the phone, so he won the first point in a hypothetical battle for the control of my telephone line.

I typed my password and prepared myself to enjoy another routine day of Java programming. The work, tedious and boring as never, absorbed me completely and made me forget the nocturnal incident. I had even time, while drinking a coffee next to the machine with other colleagues, to chat with the new secretary, a red-haired beauty, mother of twin girls. Unfortunately, she accompanied her unbearable monolog with several photographs of the above-mentioned. I apologized with a smile and told them I should continue with my work. The redhead believed me, and she answered smiling me goodbye. I don't think anyone else swallowed such a lie.

The rest of the morning passed as any other day in the life of a computer programmer: I looked to the clouds during some time, and spent the rest programming and surfing Internet, at equal shares. Before going to lunch, I took a last look at my e-mail, to ensure I had no unexpected incoming work from my boss. Carefree, I went to the Chinese restaurant on the corner to enjoy a spring roll, rice with shrimps and beef with spicy sauce.

When I came back the little letter in the lower right part of the monitor reported that I had received mail. Smiling, I opened the inbox and read the first message.

>From: *iknow@who.ur*  
>To: *UDoKnow <ihr23@fid.com>*  
>Subject: *I HAVE SEEN YOU*  
*I HAVE SEEN YOU.*  
*SOON YOU WILL SEE ME.*  
*HAVE IT ALL PREPARED.*  
*THE BETTER FOR BOTH.*

"A secret lover?" a voice whispered in my ear. I got startled.

The redhead was by my side, watching my monitor screen with curious eyes. Enraged, I

closed the mail program and sent her a deadly look.

"Not your business" I muttered, trying to control myself.

"Okay, okay, don't worry" she answered, "I have better things to do than wasting my time with you."

She left with a suggestive hips wiggling that didn't go unnoticed to me. For a moment I imagined her husband's head hanging on a wall as a trophy, showing huge horns. I smiled, but just for an instant. Just until the phone rang.

### **DAY 3**

A bunch of teenagers was cursing an old man while two women stuffed in loud tight dresses were in a heated argument. Seated on a bench, with the report form in a hand and a pen -which a lady had lent me- in the other, I let my mind flew and carefully watched the varied fauna populating the precinct. Prostitutes, teenagers with hormonal disorders, several people reporting a robbery or a disappearance, so alike to each other as different at first glance...

A man sat down beside me and opened a sports newspaper. He wore a dark grey, smart and sober suit. I tried to figure out the reasons that took him to the precinct: drug traffic, an action for sexual harassment; even something related to a murder. An agent approached to us, and the two men vanished behind a door. Alone again, I decided to quickly fill that paper. As I finished I put it on a desk and left there, conscious of the uselessness of my gesture.

The morning was almost gone. When I looked at my clock it was late noon, so I decided to go back to the office after lunch. I walked some feet to the nearest burger joint and there I devoured two cheeseburgers with beer and french fries. While I ate I looked through the window at the cars driving on the avenue. It was a bit windy, and the tree branches were shaking and waving, as greeting me.

I thought about the secretary, that gorgeous young redhead. She spoke about her daughters, her holidays, and her disco nights. She didn't mention her husband once yet, if she got one. Maybe she was living on her own, after all. Separated, probably divorced. If she had tried to keep during her marriage that rhythm of conversation with her husband, I'd perfectly understand his desire to finish the relationship.

I dipped a french fry in ketchup and delighted while eating it. Many people resist enjoying fast food: I'm not one of them. A good burger is as delicious to me as the best veal sirloin steak with pepper sauce, or the best lobster just taken out from a restaurant aquarium. Each choice has its moment, and the pleasure of a meal can be as gratifying in a five-star restaurant as in a chain pizzeria. I was finishing my beverage when my mobile rang. I spilled half of the beer left trying to answer without leaving it on the table.

"Hello?" I said.

There was nobody on the line, or that's what I thought at first. After some seconds of silence I noticed an agitated breathing in my ear, and then I remembered the phone calls and the e-mail. I wanted to speak, but I was so nervous I couldn't. I don't know for how long both of us remained in silence; maybe a minute, I cannot tell for sure. What I can tell is that for me time stood still, and during that whole torture I was in such a tension state that I thought I would suffer a heart attack. Then, as knowing how I felt, as waiting for the instant right before my death, that voice spoke again.

"I'm meeting you. You cannot imagine how much I wanna see you. I am so... excited."

Then, suddenly, he hung.

## DAY 4

As I guessed, the report interposed in the precinct had an ephemeral life that led it nowhere. I spoke twice with a tired agent, with prominent double chin and empty look, which opened excessively his eyes and faintly smiled when I confessed that I felt threatened.

"Look, buddy" he said, showing with his way of speaking not to have missed a single episode of Starsky & Hutch, "I think you know that guy. How else does it come he knows your mobile, your e-mail, your phone number? Who knows, maybe he even knows where you live."

I smiled, hiding my wish to crush the skull of that sensibility model, and left the precinct with an undeniable sensation of failure. Without delay I paid a visit to my doctor in the afternoon, with the hidden intention to obtain a sick leave for a couple of days. I was losing control of the situation, and didn't want my work to be affected by the whole thing. My doctor, an old man of gloomy gesture and surly manners, signed the paper unwillingly while pretended to listen the symptoms of a migraine that had installed in my head a week ago. He also wrote out a prescription for a box of pills not before issuing his usual judgment about my illness.

"You know? I don't understand what benefit you obtain from those... so to say casual migraines, locked in your house and stuffing yourself with pills. Perhaps if you changed your nourishing habits or..."

And he continued speaking during several minutes, while I got up, said goodbye to his nurse and apologized for leaving in such a hasty way. I picked up my pills in the drugstore - a young woman, her blonde hair held in a ponytail, smiled me as if I was really buying a box of condoms- and walked home, trying to clear my mind. On my way I stopped by a supermarket and I bought some fruit and two bottles of vintage red wine.

When I reached the front door I searched for the keys in my pants pocket while trying not to let the shopping bags fall. I opened and went to the stairs. Next to them, a young boy, not much more than twenty years old, pretended to be reading an advertisement. I observed carefully his gestures while I advanced toward him. He held the paper on a hand. The other, hidden in the pants pocket, was handling an object that could easily be a knife. I took another step toward him, and the boy looked up. I stopped, alert and prepared for everything. Shopping bags, one in each hand, hung from my arms as dead extensions. The boy looked at me for a while and then he smiled.

"Good afternoon" he whispered.

I smiled, but noticed beads of sweat sliding by my forehead and eyebrows like salty rivers. I left the bags on the floor and again took out the bunch of keys. My door is beside the stairs, just where that young boy stood undaunted, with his icy smile crystallized in a stony face. We look at each other carefully, without stopping smiling.

"Good afternoon" said a voice behind, and a young girl flashed past by my side and hung herself from the neck of the boy.

I recognized her instantly; she was the janitor's daughter, Martha, the girl that used to clean my house once a week. I had forgotten she was supposed to come that afternoon. I put the bags into the kitchen and returned to the door.

"Sorry" I said, "I'm not sure if I already told you, but today it's not necessary you to come, I won't be home tonight."

She smiled and said that it was alright, there was no problem, though a shadow of annoyance crossed her pupils. She was probably beginning to get used to my peculiar behavior. It didn't really matter.

"Okay, then we're leaving" she said, smiling. "Can't be that bad a day off work."

I shut the door and switched on the television. Then I had dinner and went to bed early. I didn't want to leave any more.

The phone rang some hours later.

## **DAY 5**

I awoke startled, sweat was dripping all over my skin and the sheets were twisted around my body. It was four in the morning by the clock on the bedside table, and a gentle nocturnal breeze was blowing through the bedroom window, dancing with the curtains. I got up in silence and put on my jeans. Barefoot, I went to the living room.

I switched on the light of the lamp, and found myself facing Martha and her boyfriend. The girl searched anxiously in one of the drawers while the boy, undaunted, stared at me.

"What the hell..?" roared Martha, and as she turned around her eyes met mine, "Dammit!"

The girl searched her rear pocket and she showed a sharp bladed, black plastic handle knife. A dangerous weapon in hands of someone frightened and conscious of a mistake.

"C'mon, you idiot! Do something! I'm not out of this house without the bank book and the fucking credit cards!" She shouted at the boy.

The situation took me by surprise. I knew Martha and her family since almost twelve years ago, and could never expect something like that. Besides, I felt uncomfortable showing myself before them only with my jeans on. Everything was strange to me, inappropriate. I took a step toward them and Martha showed her teeth in rage while waving the knife.

"Just you dare, tough guy!" she shouted.

And I dared. I took two steps and took away the weapon from her with a slap. Terrified, she went back to the wall, knocking over my hi-fi system and several books from their shelves. Meanwhile, the boy stood motionless, unaffected by what was happening. Then I knew who he was, and knew perfectly what he expected of me. Martha gasped, fell to the ground. She looked like drunk, or doped. She very probably had taken some kind of drug to pluck up the courage to get that way into my house.

"Fuck, fuck!" she said in a whisper.

I reached her and seized her by the hair. She screamed, and I thought about the neighbors. But I knew they would not give it any importance. It was not the first time a woman screamed in my house and would not be the last one. I banged her head against the parquet, felt her nose bone breaking. I hit again, silencing the shouts. I took her pulse and I verified she breathed with certain difficulty. She was unconscious, but still useful.

I looked at the boy.

"Will you help me?" I asked him, while taking the body to my bedroom.

He faintly smiled and took Martha's legs. We got into the bedroom and left her on the bed, not before removing sheets and comforter and covering the mattress with a transparent plastic. Then I opened the closet and took the equipment out. In the meantime the boy dedicated to undress her, trying her not to awake. When he finished, I tied her hands and ankles to the bed legs with a wire string, keeping her legs open wide and her arms apart, and extended all my work stuff over the chest of drawers.

"Look, go to the kitchen and bring me a jar that reads Salts, it's on the countertop, next to the knives. By the way, what's your name?"

"Ivan" he said, and ran toward the kitchen.

When he returned, I had already gagged his girlfriend. She awoke startled, and struggled fiercely against her ties, causing herself several wounds that began to bleed. Paying her no

attention, I stripped myself under Ivan's watchful look and put a condom on. I'm very careful about that, I don't want any problem. Raping her was gratifying. Her young and in good shape body struggled during the entire act, and accompanied all my movements with pain moans faded by the gag. So resolute, so daring, and still full of life. As soon as I finished, I decided to rape her a second time. Ivan, meanwhile, fondled the rest of my equipment as an apprentice eager to learn the mysteries of his master's instrumental. This second time was, if possible, better than the previous one. Exhausted, terrified, she barely had the courage to resist when I showed her own knife and I stuck it in her forearm. She screamed, yes, and so she cried.

Then I looked for my scalpel and brutally abused her body. I made rivers of pain and blood in her breasts and abdomen, and kept myself for a while carrying out a mutilation. When I stuck the scalpel in her right eye she fainted. At that time I had finished the game, so I quickly concluded the work, cutting her jugular with a butcher knife. Ivan and I went together to the bathroom and brought a couple of sponges and a bucket to take up the blood, as the carpet was new and we didn't want staining it.

We took up everything and placed the corpse in my bathtub. I decided to cut it up the next morning; I felt exhausted, and excited at the same time, as used to happen. I filled the sink up with water and unwillingly washed the blood remains off me. Then I dried with a towel and we returned to the living room.

"So?" I said, looking to Ivan and lighting a cigarette.

The boy was shaking from head to foot, but not with fear. I had behaved like a master for him, like a father. But I ignored what he felt, what he desired, what had motivated him to go through all that.

"I..." he began, with shyness, "had already seen your work once. I came to pick her up and saw you with a woman, a mulatto. I knew what you did, so I wanted to see you. To meet you."

"Are you satisfied then?" I asked him, showing my best smile.

"No."

That surprised me, but I didn't lose my smile. I silently waited, inviting him to continue.

"No. You see, I... didn't wanna see you doing it again. I wanna be part of this, you know? I always wanted to participate."

"Ok, then we'll look for a wom..." I began, but he interrupted me with a gesture.

"No, you don't understand, I don't want to kill another woman. No, I wanna... participate."

And then he shyly smiled while began stripping himself and his hands searched the wire strings. I also smiled, even more if possible, recalling the words the redhead at my work repeated in every conversation.

There's nobody who could understand the youth nowadays.

## **SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT!**

**Prizes For Contest**

**Series Project**

**Normal Operations**

There has been a sudden burst of projects recently and do not want that to bring forth any misconceptions about Demonic Tome. At heart we are still a magazine, a free online magazine published through a Portable Document Format. I will explain the reason for these slight changes and what impact in has on our normal operations.

### **Writing Contest:**

**Those that have won, you know who you are, will be getting a prize very soon. The original plan was to mail upon date of publish, which so happens to be the 1<sup>st</sup> in most cases, but not this month. Things were delayed and this is the aftermath of that delay. Should you be worried? Not at all. If you are reading this then the gift cards have been mailed to your address provided already. If we are unsure about address we will contact you.**

**If you gave incorrect information regarding address then you must have somehow forgot the importance of honesty. This is a contest so there is a prize and if you give us poor information then it will probably not get received.**

**If this were to happen, which it shouldn't as it is an unlikely .05% chance then we will send you proof of not just purchase, but of the USPS order as well.**

**The only reason that I bring this up is due to the fact that sometimes people make mistakes and we want to make sure that you know we have fulfilled our side of the bargain.**

**If it does become lost in the mail, then we will address that as it happens.**

**Thank You**

### **Series Project:**

A magazine is only as good as its material, which we completely understand. It is for that reason we have decided to host some sort of series, or mini-series, that would give Demonic Tome not only original stories, but a special niche for reading. The magazine has grown amazingly well in the past few months, back when it was just collecting dust. But this idea will increase that buy triple fold, which is the ultimate goal.

The rules for this are also posted on the website and there is money involved.

For all contributors and staff members, this place would be a lot more giving once sponsorship has been achieved. When that day comes, all will know.

**\*\* If you have submitted material and have yet to get a response, please do not think the worse or anything**

other than review. This isn't just like judging two or fifteen stories; this is something much bigger than that. We ask for you to trust that we will respond. We have no reason not to. Even if we were to reject we would at least state reasons and try to remain in contact for future events. \*\*

**Normal Operations:**

Nothing has changed. We are still non-paying at the moment.

OME

## Columns

### Baptism by Bill



Wall street, a place of corruption. A place for vulgar discrimination masked by a façade of mock able politeness whenever poorly executed. It is a pit of snakes that lie and cheat more than desolate one's followers.

I would rather shake hands with a Satanist then shake hands with one of these guys.

There has been some devastating news about the economy and just like always it is bad. I try to watch a show, but no I have to ace my fear that it is only getting worse. The stocks recently made a historic plummet and that means a lot considering what happened with the previous plummet years ago.

The bigger concern is that Banks can't seem to do what they are entitled to do, keep money. It is like a

### Elect the Dead Review by Kim



In misery we often find that one can't go any lower, but yet sometimes the majority begs to witness such a thing. It becomes a betting game for the curious onlookers, who most of which don't really care one way or another, while others are so passionate they might as well be symbols of their examples, preachers of their belief, or bible salesmen like those Mormons.

To further state the example, I would like to state that Britney Spears was rooted on for psycho break down. I was one of the many that took pride in calling how her demise would unfold, but for some reason I was proven wrong and it sickened me. It was like proving that the earth was flat when I knew it must be round.

They announced that she was better and all is well,

fridge that can't stay cold. A car that doesn't run. An Asian that isn't in accounting. But this oxymoronic tidbit is even worse.

We all had a savings jar when we were younger. Some had the trademark pig bank. We all know how effective that was. "Oh, I'm gonna just put money in here and not worry about it."

We were only kidding ourselves. Most of us put our tiny hands back into that bitch to take out what we just put in for spending that we considered important. Like how it was vital for me to get the new Nintendo game, or even the 20oz of Dr. Pepper.

Those that were good at saving and actually did well know that the security was so flawed. Your sister, older brother, drunken dad, jobless mother, and more would barge in and take what was there.

It seems our banks are about the same. Don't panic FDIC has its purpose, but it is strangely funny that those that are to handle money just so managed to drop the ball to the point of losing the game completely. Washington Mutual was one of many.

It doesn't help that these wall street guys are parading around with huge spending habits and deceitful greed.

You know who else was a stock broker?



That's right, Patrick was a wall street goon working for "Pierce&Pierce". He wasn't a role model so much as a psycho murderer. Are they all like that?

but how can that be true. How can they fix what was so mentally broken and destined to fall?

What does this have to do with Metallica?

Everything, if you count their success record and weight it to their pussy-bitchy path they so willingly took.

Those that don't follow this should do some research.

They were once the icon of Metal as the world knew it. They were the pivot of all that moved in the heavy metal industry with the biggest name and fame that roared just as loud as their music.

They were awesome.

Then something horrible happened, which could have sparked the chain reaction that almost left the industry buried in the filth of their unfocused ways.

They tried to redevelop themselves.

Now, you take that Dave Mustang was gone way before this disaster release, but his trademark riff was the only thing that lingered. A riff that was broken down into fractions and used and abused. Somewhere in this tragedy they out grew themselves and presented the world a CD loaded with a bunch of hardcore stinky shit.

They called it Load. The cover of which was a flaming bag of dog crap just waiting to be stepped on.



No, but the lives they live must border with delusions with all the spin, drugs, and sex that goes on.

He is not a hero, but all of a sudden he is given such a role.



This is Batman, who was played by the same crazed Wall street goon. Fucking Yuppies, running around after "crime" in a bat suit.

Did he really deserve the Bailout? To say yes is o say that Christian Bale looks cool in a suite, but what tall constipated man doesn't. Look at his face; it is the face of utmost focus on dropping the load.

Patrick Bateman was all of a sudden given the role as Batman because he was the winner, the only survivor, of a coke binge festival that took place in the club using Asian bare ass as the surface.

The government makes a lot of mistakes. They are faced with strange problems that sound so simple, but yet become complicated by the vary second of explanation. They try to form bills that contain agreements and other resolutions that are discussed. Their ability to make a good choice, well, that is scaled by their actual feeling of the subject, which is often disconnect.

But this Bailout bill is getting a lot of attention, both good and bad. One side you have a Patrick Bateman types who have splurged money and done wrong getting a rescuing hand. On the other hand you have stocks that are making record lows and this

The success of this album could only be presented with such remember able songs such as; Ain't My Bitch, 2x4, Fuel, and Hero of the Day. These songs were among many that were 98% not Metallica, but their ability to make us think otherwise was bold and unwavering. Kind of like Bush during one of his many staggering speeches, he might be tired, he might be bored, dumb, retarded, mentally unfit, but he'll get through it one rough simple phrase at a time.

This album was so bad in reviews that it was followed by another, not so surprisingly with the same lack of talent.

They Reloaded the same shit and thus created the title.

You must know that I don't hate Metallica exactly. I don't see eye-to-eye with their Napster take down, which was never the same since. I just couldn't see why anyone would take the high ground on the subject when it drained the consumers' pockets. Why spend money for something I could get for free?

I could debate forever on this, but I won't. Instead let us say that it is ironic that they share their songs for free on Rock Band after bleeding the life out of one of the first music sharing programs.



Then to me and most of those that loved metal for what it is found ourselves searching other interests, digging into realms of Death metal, Industrial, Goth, Black, Stoner and all other variations of metal for the key bands that would take us where once iconic bands could never go.

supposed to be a limbo contest. These are peoples 401K's.

What I would like is for the Government to be fucking serious about this. I like that the house denied it, because we don't need another Bush slapstick rescue. His shenanigans are not funny. We need a serious bill that doesn't just hand out money to shady people. It needs to address problems and fix them.

I really wonder if that is possible. Politicians speak in such vague ways that seems to run parallel with their thought on life. I don't want some unknowing person of power to fall for trick that these bankers and Brokers will play on them.

Good luck America.

Metallica was off the map, and their singles sucked more MI2 and 3. Piece of overrated garbage is what those are.

Then this wonderful CD arrives and after a long, long moment of dead silence. The single released of Cyanide was horrible, granted it was a live feed, but it was so terrible that it mirrored the previous punch to the face that is Saint Anger.

However, having heard what I have been privilege to sample and challenging a full copy, I have found that it might just be the album that brings them out from the dead.

Is it like Britney's Spears total 180 turn around? No and yes. No, because they will never win over lost fans that hate them for old pains. Metal heads are tough and narrow minded at times, whereas mainstream pop is listened by almost everyone everywhere and no one gives a shit about past pains and funny games.

I personally hate that negative side of the industry. You should respect your elders, when they do well of course. This is one of those moments.

This is a CD to buy, even if the cover looks like a pussy begging for a trim.



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