

ANNIVERSARY EDITION

FIGMENTS OF IMAGINATION

MORE TALES FROM THE

WASTELAND

25





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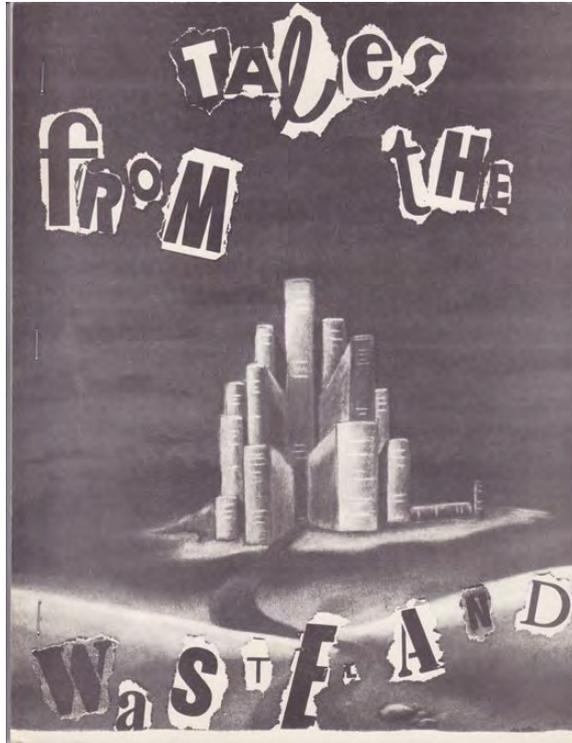
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Toni Van Horn

In the spring of 1992, Bismarck State College instructor Judy Swartz began an endeavor to highlight the creative talents of students in a new class called Fiction Writing 299.

She and the class collected the best selections written by the students and created a publication they named Tales From the Wasteland.



The following semester the project was expanded and English 213, Literary Publications, was introduced. The course was launched specifically to gather student manuscripts and artwork for the purpose of publication. Thus, in the spring of 1993, Figments of Imagination, BSC's very own literary arts magazine, was born.

We invite you to celebrate the 25th anniversary of BSC's literary magazine with us. This year we have included work from BSC alumni in our publication to highlight the rich literary history at Bismarck State College.

Welcome to Figments of Imagination: **MORE TALES FROM THE WASTELAND.**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1 Today by Carmenetta Malone
- 2 Untitled by Anna Nelson, Lachesism by Marcus Dietrich
- 3 Death by Victoria Andrus, Anna by Anna Nelson, In Bruises by Anna Nelson
- 4 A Bird of Apollo by T.J.E. Hostetter, The Beekeeper by Kaslynn Westerman
- 5 Today I am a Champion by Tyler Auck
- 6 Tides by Carmenetta Malone, Lake by Leif Everson
- 7 Making Amends by Grace Wolfgram

- 11 Judith and her Maidservant: Master Copy by Rachel Eliason
- 12 Summer's Inferno by Ben Suess

- 16 Ulsan, South Korea by Bin Moon
- 17 Stream by Leif Everson
- 18 Distressed by Tyler Rietz
- 19 Finding Beauty and Peace in Mother Nature's Dregs by Derick Doll
- 21 My Jubali by Meghan Kostelecky

- 22 25 Years of Figments

- 24 Duality by Meghan Kostelecky, Deep Blue Mug by Timothy Adams, Iris Platter by Judi Carlson
- 25 Junk Golem by Ben Makay, Laughing in the Sun by Kaslynn Westerman, Upon the Precipice by Kelsey Skenderovic
- 26 Hope by Taryn Fischer
- 27 The Cat by Kaslynn Westerman, The Last Nail by Peter Woodrow
- 28 Evolution by T.J.E. Hostetter

- 33 Runaround by Lance Geving
- 34 Dreaming no. 1,2,+3 by Brittany Anderson

- 35 Lena + Untitled by Casey Fiest
- 36 Machu Picchu 1 by Casey Fiest, Machu Picchu 2 by Casey Fiest
- 37 Issues of Nostalgia No. 1+2 by Brittany Anderson
- 38 Farm Freedom by Angie Milakovic

- 41 Sense of Home by Brittany Anderson
- 42 Sunset Sentinel, Vicious Circle by Melissa (Kivisto) Gordon, Untitled by Melissa (Kivisto) Gordon
- 43 Moon, Secret Hideaway by Casey Fiest
- 44 Focus by Brad Slaubaugh, Sideways Truck by Casey Fiest
- 45 Haunt Me by Brittany Anderson, Untitled by Casey Fiest
- 46 Hi-Line View by Kayla Sorby, The Mountains by Tom Delozier

TODAY

By Carmenetta Malone

Today

No one, but you and I existed
Swirling through time
Oblivious to anything else but our unity
Galloping around
Blending in, to the point of transparency
To label it happiness would be unjust
For it is much greater
Much more sacred

Today

No one, but you and I danced
Under the sun's reflection on the moon
In a space where there's no gravity
From the seasons of autumn, winter and spring to the Summer Solstice
Spiritually combined

Today

No one, but you and I understood
That each molecule each atom had its own significance
That the traveling of sound
The movement of air
The habitual reoccurrences of energy
Had a story to tell

Today

No one, but you and I reflected off of each other
I off you and you off I
More luminescent than Sirius A
Lightening up the galaxy
Freely spreading amour
Embracing that which conquers all

Today

No one but you and I heard the calling
The small subtle yearning
That which wakes us from our slumber
That which commands our whole being
Reminds us that we are loners in ecclesiastical time

Today

No one but you and I existed

UNTITLED

By Anna Nelson

green tea then
read to me
or
tell me a story with truth

my eyes close
while the story unfolds
listening to the sound of pure proof

imagination
divine creation
exploration of youth

epic monstrosities
chaotic philosophies
mentions of wondrous, childish curiosity

characters of nobility
ghosts with no identity
clarity with inevitable stupidity

word hunger
flooded grumble
spoken memories unfolding

now bring me back, to here and tonight
the story will continue along
your clouded consciousness was honest,
an accomplished promise

crowded mind
filling time
sleepless nights in sheets

goodnight, dried ink
you made me think
so
finally, it's time to sleep

LACHESISISM

By Marcus Dietrich

Some of us,
if not most,
if not all,
exist in a bubble.
An invisible, intangible shield,
just atoms thin,
blocking out sounds, sights, sensations
we do not want.
But if I were to guess,
I would say some of us,
if not most,
if not all,
in our obscure buffer,
crave for something intrusive,
to rupture the useless barrier.
This wish is not some simple intrusion
like dandelions in the flowerbed,
or ants in the sugar,
but an intrusion to shake us to the core,
feel something new,
leave the old us behind,
start over, from scratch,
without that invisible, intangible shield.

DEATH

By Victoria Andrus

Death tried to say hi today, but don't worry I walked away. Sometimes I think about replying but I decide I have too much to live for.

Death tried to say hi today. But once again, I walked away. It was harder this time though. I don't feel nearly as happy. My friends don't notice I try to hide my sadness and pain with a fake smile.

Death tried to say hi today. This time I barely walked away. He bothers me while I sleep. He tells me "You have nothing to live for,". But still I don't reply.

Death tried to say hi today. This time I tried to reply. I saw the blade and knew it wouldn't take much. I woke up in the hospital. But I still didn't get the chance to reply to death.

I said hi to death today. My friends and family gather in black, they realize now that the smiles were fake. I left a note and all it said was "Death said hi today and I simply replied."

ANNA

By Anna Nelson

If I told you I loved the rain,
and lilacs and books,
sleeping in the sun,
birch trees and the sound of babbling brooks.
would you tell me I'm plain
and pretty,
with nothing cruel or heavy to hide?

Beware--
my smile.

I need not tell you
the depths of my unhappy,
because in every heart,
there's more than just the happy part.

IN BRUISES

By Anna Nelson

The blues and green remind me of you.
They're a warning sign with beautiful designs
and edges of yellow and grey.

This mark you said was love,
though I know it shouldn't hurt this much.
But that is how you love and this is how I end.

A BIRD OF APOLLO

By T.J.E. Hostetter

I am a Bird of Apollo
casting light
where there is shadow.

Ask, what is a Bird of Apollo?
Listen, and light will follow.

A Bird of Apollo
is a peculiar fellow.

Someone that makes right where there is
wrong.
A person who cannot just stay silent for long.

We see the world, as we soar up high.
We see what is wrong
and we plan to make it right.
Our world has problems
and we need to be the light.

Now I ask, with a heavy heart.
Will you rise up, and leave your mark?

Will you rise up, and spread your wings?
Will you rise up and shine with a bling?

Will you rise up and help those in need?
Will you rise up and get others off their knees?

The choice is yours
but heed my words.

You have potential

You are a Bird of Apollo.
Spread your wings
and light will follow.

THE BEEKEEPER

By Kaslynn Westerman

They come for my honey in swarms.
I watch as your sweet presence is absorbed into their compound eyes,
while their brightly-colored bodies dance around you.
They attempt to communicate with you.
But, my honey is stuck, unable to move.

I watch as you struggle to find me.
You hope that I will harvest you soon.
Why did the bees choose honey that had already been claimed?
Do they not know the beekeeper watches nervously?

I watch as they circle around you
buzzing with pleasure.
I try to ignore them, hoping they will leave you alone,
but their bone-chilling sounds make me want to swat.

I approach the swarm.
Ignoring the stinging looks, I grab onto your arm.
At that instant our love repels the vermin.
We watch as the bees walk away in defeat.
My sweet honey, untouched.

TODAY I AM A CHAMPION!

by Tyler Auck

My face that was once covered with fear and blood is smiling and feeling the rays of sun kissed by the wind!

My heart that was once surrounded by an empty lifeless addicted body is pounding hard and fast with a shell of hope and strength and confidence and with a love never felt before.

The green eyes that have seen things that people should not see now look into the eyes of the people that are close enough to see past the scars that damaged their ability to see and to allow the tears of gratitude to flow like the rains.

The hands that once held the devil so close and destroyed so many things, now they protect the beautiful flowers in life and touch everything in a new softer and gentler way.

The mouth that once ingested and spewed venom now speaks words of beauty and love!

The feet which stumbled over themselves and always seemed to go the wrong direction now hold the map to a healthy and magical life!

Today my strength and recovery makes me a champion!

Thank you for your love!

Flowers Forever

TIDES

by Carmenetta Malone

Liquid memories crashing my thoughts like waves against the coast line
The heart sinks in deeper holding onto the lungs like an anchor
Temporarily allowing oxygen in at random intervals
Moisture weeps
Fog rolls in
Visibility instantaneously decreased creating potential for engulfment
Recalling stored data
In fractured bits of reasoning
They form images-perceptions
Standing at attention through one's senses
Those on the surface tend to distance themselves particles diminishing
While others gain energy forcing their way in
Demanding to be felt
Pleading to be heard calling for equilibrium
Only to be drawn back out with the moon
Amplified only to crest from the sun's tugging
But they are fluid like water, like the atmosphere
They will seek a place to go setting the tone, the mood, the gist
A period, complete, harmonious, and stationary
Carrying principles of superposition



LAKE by Leif Everson

MAKING AMENDS

by Grace Wolfgram

Christopher was in a rut. He had to confront someone he loved. He knew how the problem started but dug himself into a bigger hole when he decided to ignore said problem. The whole mess began as an idea, turned into a plan, and then, all at once, it became reality.

Christopher was a smart man. He was left-brained, meaning he loved working with math and equations. He could punch out numbers like a robot while being as silent as a wall. Since he was an introvert, he didn't like chaos, noise, or conflict. He thrived on one-on-one conversations. Christopher would think before speaking. He thought long and hard before coming up with an explanation. So if he did speak, people better shut up and listen because he usually gave pretty decent advice.

He married a petite young woman named Elaine. Elaine was very patient with him, knowing he'd say what needed to be said his own time and way. Months later, they had a sweet, little, dark-haired boy named Joel and three years later a dainty, tiny, blonde-haired girl named Hannah. Joel was quiet like his father while Hannah was out-going, yet patient, like her mother. All at once the kids grew up too quickly. They now had a moody eighteen-year-old and a bright fifteen-year-old under the roof.

They had just moved from St. Louis, Missouri, to Bismarck, North Dakota two years earlier because of the oil boom. The family needed the income. Elaine was open to the idea as well as Hannah, but Joel took some pushing. The only way the parents could reason with Joel was to draw up an agreement over college. The terms included Joel's choice of college upon graduation from high school. The problem was Joel wasn't applying himself to high school. Christopher and Elaine were trying to push him to look at some of the local colleges.

Christopher had assumed he would fit right in with the oil and had done a lot of research for the job before even seeing the place, but it wasn't meant to be. The family had moved up to Williston, but the city was too noisy for him as well as the chaos of crime that originated from the fracking. He got a job at Jack's Steakhouse in Bismarck instead. He was smart and organized. Those above him noticed his skill set, and immediately gave him the job on the spot for Office Manager.

Christopher was busy. The holidays always seemed to get busier. He sat at his cramped but neatly organized desk with elbows leaning on the edge, his chin in his left hand, and his right absently, somewhat impatiently, clicking a pen. His left hand slowly fell asleep under the weight of holding his head for so long. His head kept nodding as he attempted to keep his eyes open. He was a burly, stout, and dark-haired man. His bristly hair was cropped short, and it framed his wide, rosy-colored face. Underneath his bushy, dark eyebrows rested his bright blue eyes. Freckles brushed across his button nose. The bottom half of his face was shrouded in a thick beard. He wore a navy polo shirt that had the Jack's Steakhouse logo. His hands were clean and callused. He wore dark navy slacks with a brown belt. His keys hung from a ring on a belt loop.

The numbers blurred as he studied. He shook his head to clear it. It was late. He had to get the inventory done so that everything else went smoothly. After that, he could go home to his family. He hastily checked the very last item and quantity, stood up only to be blinded by spots in his vision for a moment, and shoved the stack of papers into the filing cabinet to the right of his desk while the pen was safely towed away into a well-stocked non-descriptive coffee cup. He was forced to carefully pivot back around, pushed in his soft, plush chair, and grabbed his coat. He absent-mindedly grasped his keys to lock up as he rubbed the back of his neck. Lights were switched off, and he was out the door.

For some reason, the holidays seemed worse this time around. The fact that his son, Joel, was planning to move this next year to a college far from home when there was one closer, more affordable might have been the problem.

The garage lights were on and waiting for him as he drove into the driveway. The garage door opener was a heaven-sent. The door could open and close while Christopher stayed comfortable within his truck. He slowly drove in, parked, and stumbled out. He opened the door to the house. The salty, spicy smell of taco salad assaulted his senses. My favorite! he thought. Christopher shrugged off his coat and hung up his keys on the hook.

“Elaine! I’m home!” called out Christopher.

His wife, a light-haired petite woman, came into view from a dark hallway smiling in welcome while enveloping him in a warm hug, “Chris! How was your day?”

“It was good. I got the inventory wrapped up and done. Hopefully, the rest of the holiday season will go well.”

“I’m sure it will. Come, I have dinner ready, and the kids are home,” Elaine walked him towards the dining room.

They had to alter their schedules after the move. Christopher’s and the kids’ schedules were crazy, so dinner was set at a later time. Elaine worked from home and was seemingly always on the phone. Christopher could hear nothing as his wife pulled him into the room. The silence became clear as the two teenagers were both on their smartphones. While both teenagers were clearly engaged in the devices, Christopher harrumphed loudly startling the pair of them. The girl looked up sheepishly at her father while the boy just rolled his eyes.

“Dad, you’re home! Joel, look. Dad’s home!” Hannah cried. The boy rolled his eyes again.

“Joel, greet your father! He’s had a long day,” Elaine exclaimed.

Joel finally looked up at him with a blank stare. His face was withdrawn and pale while he stiffly flicked his oily, ebony bangs out of his face.

“Hello,” Joel mumbled.

Christopher inwardly sighed but nodded respectfully towards his son.

Life grew complicated at home when Joel decided to announce his plans for college. He had plans before the whole move even took place. His decisions were understandable because the university was closer to St. Louis, therefore, closer to his friends. He wasn’t looking at other options. Neither knew what their son wanted to do, but Joel stayed quiet yet adamant in his decisions. Christopher knew that he wasn’t helping the problem when he had become tired and overwhelmed with his job. Elaine had to push him to say anything at all to his son. Hannah was the complete opposite. She loved being here. Perhaps it was because she didn’t like being in a big city like St. Louis or the wicked crime infested city of Williston. The people in Bismarck seemed more down to earth than the crowds in St. Louis and much safer than Williston.

No, Joel needed a talking to. It was hard to express the love and pride they had for him when their son didn’t want to hear any advice. He was a loner at the high school. As far as Christopher knew, Joel didn’t have any friends here. All he did was stare at his phone all day and text. The teachers at Legacy High School were trying to help him, but all he did was push them away. Teachers told the principal, and then principal called parents.

The message came in yesterday and it was relayed like so in an email: He doesn’t do the work. He ignores anyone who even tries to approach him. Teacher or student. No change. It seems like he’s depressed. We’ve tried having the guidance counselor talk to him, but no breakthroughs. Now the ball was in their court. Something had to be done. Christopher just didn’t want to confront Joel. Confronting meant conflict, conflict meant arguing, and arguing meant noise. In Christopher’s mind the logic seemed sound, but to an extroverted reality, introvert logic rarely made sense.

He was brought back from his musings by Elaine as she shuffled him to his seat. Soon everyone was seated, the table prayer spoken and piled on condiments on their own taco salads. Dinner was quiet as Christopher was tired from work. Even though there wasn't any talking, tension mounted as the meal went on. Although his wife didn't say anything, her face said enough. She raised her eyebrows when she caught his eye and indicated Joel with a cock of her head. Christopher silently shook his head and averted his eyes. He kept his focus on eating instead of the signals his wife kept giving him. After a while, his taco salad started tasting too salty as he kept shoving it into his mouth. His only thought was to avoid the talk that was sure to explode in his face in the near future.

Soon everybody was done eating, dishes were placed in the dishwasher, and both kids were in their respective rooms. Hannah was working on her homework while Joel was at his laptop Skyping his friends from St. Louis. Joel's laughter was only echoed through the house during his long distance meet-and-greet with his friends. The parents sat in the living room with the TV on mute, soaking up the sound of Joel's contentment.

Christopher had long practiced the act of reading the local newspaper without obtaining any amount of information. He had also secretly assumed that his wife did the same with her book because she was able to read and have a conversation about any concern that she had at the same time. Multitask wasn't something that Christopher could quite attempt. The would-be conversation was also something he did not want to do at all for fear of the kids eavesdropping.

When the kids had gone to bed, the parents were pulling back the neatly made bed sheets as they quietly discussed their predicament.

"Why didn't we talk this evening?" Elaine asked pointedly as she punched her pillow to fluff it.

"We as in?" Christopher pointed to himself and her and then mimed a circle.

"You know what I mean, Chris!" Elaine slightly raised her voice in the dimly lit master bedroom. Christopher sighed and shook his head. Elaine took that as an answer.

"We can't keep avoiding this! What will we do when he graduates and moves across the country? Will he even keep in touch after this?" Elaine threw up her hands as tears swelled in her eyes. She knew how Christopher dealt with conflict. He would surrender his own defense if it meant any sort of peace stayed intact. Any presence of the amicable mood of the room suddenly left as the tension once again mounted.

"I know we can't," Christopher quietly stated feeling helpless. "I just don't know where to start."

"I understand," Elaine didn't want to repeat herself but she couldn't stop the urge to continue as she crossed the room to hold her husband. "But we can't just ignore it and hope it goes away."

"I know, I know." Christopher took a deep breath, looking like he was on the way to the slaughter house. After a minute or so he finally stated, "I'll try tomorrow, okay?"

"I will help, you know," Elaine reminded him. "It'll be a family affair. Dinner tomorrow evening."

"So... how was school, Joel?" Christopher asked as awkwardly as he could and lifted a slice of pizza up off the pan. A string of cheese grew as Christopher pulled the slice onto his plate. The day passed quickly in nerves, this certain conversation in the center of his mind. Christopher could honestly reprimand anyone at work, only if he didn't get to know them. The distanced work relationship helped him. However, reprimanding at home was a different ball game. The choices he made and said would stand longer in the household. Elaine had baked a homemade pizza to calm her nerves. She knew that this conversation, if not handled correctly, could go up in smoke.

“How do you think it went?” Joel bit out shifting in his seat and crossed his arms.

“Well, we don’t know unless you tell us, right?” Elaine jumped in, looking across to her husband, and gave him a nod of encouragement. She finally flicked the long string of cheese, tore it away from the pizza, and ate it.

“Huh.” Joel raised his eyebrows as he eyed his mother and wrinkled his nose. Joel sat back in his chair pushing off the table so that the chair balanced on two legs. He was not expecting the confrontation, “I guess not, but why do you want to know?”

“We are asking because the principal called us,” Christopher figured telling the truth was the best route to take. He put in, “And because we’re curious.”

Joel shrugged, “It is okay, I guess.”

“Okay? All right, I’ll take that. Elaine?” Christopher replied shifting in his own seat, uncomfortable with the whole situation.

“How could we help you?” she asked. She pushed her plate forward to lean forward with her arms on the edge of the table to convey openness.

Joel cocked his head to the side, furrowed his eyebrow, and mumbled confusingly, “The only thing you could do was to never move in the first place.”

Christopher sighed and nodded. “I understand, but what can we do right now? To currently help you?”

Joel went quiet for a moment. His face became blank as he contemplated the question. “I don’t know. But I had plans in St. Louis. First, I was going to graduate with my friends and then go to Washington University together!”

“Okay, and what degree are you getting there?” Christopher asked raising his eyebrows.

It was then Joel looked uncomfortable. His chair landed on all four legs with a soft thud that jerked Joel’s body.

“I– I don’t actually know. I’ve been undecided for a while now. But I’ve been interested in engineering a little bit.”

“Engineering? Joel, have you checked any of the colleges here?”

Joel sheepishly shook his head. “No, I didn’t really think of it.”

“How about you give North Dakota a try? Bismarck State College sounds like a good start, even if you’re unsure.” Christopher named the first local college off the top of his head. He had seen a commercial of it last night.

Joel shrugged as he looked back and forth between each parent. “I guess I could look into it.”

“That’s all we ask,” Elaine said smiling, eagerly nodding her head.

“One last thing, please try to graduate high school first before making bigger plans. I know college is important to you, but high school is your first priority.” Christopher finished as he placed his hand on the table in finality.

Joel silently nodded. Christopher nodded in agreement, happy to have dealt with conflict and actually come out on top. A mood of contentment rested over the family for the first time since they moved to Bismarck.



JUDITH AND HER MAIDSERVANT: Master Copy by Rachel Eliason

SUMMER'S INFERNO

by Ben Suess

The sky was blue and cloudless, like an upside-down field of flax suspended from a great giant's garden. From it hung the glaring sphere of the sun, burning in the brilliant tones of ivory and amber as its rays pierced down through the air-like lances spearing their shimmering way deep into the blue green, undulating depths of the ocean that stretched over and across the horizon. From the ocean rolled forth waves curving forward in an arc tipped with frothing white foam, before they crashed down on the golden beach freckled with brown, black, and grey pebbles. Further down the beach a single woody palm tree swayed with a splintering wound in its side.

Across the beach and over the horizon, stretched a winding reddish brown dirt road that a navyblue van with the neon orange words, "Official Military Vehicle" sarcastically spray painted on the side, was slowly trundling its way down. The van was clearly not the choice of nobility or even the Gentry, for that matter, based on the way it kept rocking back and forth as it kicked up massive rusty clouds of gritty dust as it rumbled and grumbled its way down the path to its destination.

Above the van three great, dark shapes could be seen circling high above with the sun to their backs so only their outlines could be seen, and not very clearly at that. At first glance one might have thought them birds, but the wings bore the claw-like form of a bat and the tails and necks were far too long for either bat or bird no matter the size. Any illusion of these being an ordinary batch of mere beasts would have been viciously ripped apart and ground into the dust when one opened its maw and spat a glowing, fiery orange blast of plasma.

As if by some invisible and inaudible command, the three dark shapes stopped circling and made a beeline for the beach. They crashed into the surf sending up great plumes of water and sand before crawling up to a drier area of the beach and shaking themselves off. They were dragons: one black, one red, and one white.

The black one was the largest and had thick, jagged scales with glowing red eyes and a head dominated by a hooked, cruel mouth and two pairs of massive segmented ebony horns. One crescent moon shaped and swept backwards towards the rest of the body, and one curved that swept forwards towards the jaw. The red one possessed smooth shiny scales and long black spines along its back and tail, the ends of its wings, and along the bottom jaw. Its head was smooth and blunt, but also very long with a single pair of smooth horns that curved forward towards the jaw. The white one was the smallest, and its scales were indistinguishable from one another and almost translucent. It had no horns or spines, and its head was like that of a deep sea fish with large, flat, unblinking green eyes and long needle-like teeth that stuck out even when its jaws were closed. All three were of the wyvern variety; one pair of wings and one pair of back legs so autocannons, laser, missile launchers, or whatever other weapons could be strapped onto the chest for combat.

The van came to a rumbling stop and coughed out a puff of smoke before settling down. There was only silence for a while, followed by the sound of scuffling before the door opened and three figures spilled out from the van and into the sand. The first to get up and brush herself off was a girl of around nineteen years of age, though a bit on the short side, with dark brown hair veering to black that was tied back in a ponytail though it still reached down to her waist. She wore a pair of black shorts and a shirt with a Jolly Rodger on it.

Her one eye was covered in an eyepatch, but the other had a sharp, fierce look about it and darted around hungrily taking in the beach. She was fiery, harsh, and energetic like the sun blazing up above. The next to pick himself up was young man of twenty with hair the color of gold that stuck up and out every which way. His eyes were a bright-bluish green that, when combined with his golden hair and calmer disposition seemed to reflect the sea itself. The last to pick himself up was clearly a robot, rendering age a redundancy, that had a large, vaguely humanoid shape with four-fingered hands and toeless feet. It was covered in shiny, pure white armor, and its head was dominated by a single, sky blue ocular sphere that seemed to stare across into eternity.

The front door of the van creaked open one last time and a man stepped out onto the beach. He was rather different from the trio of ruffians milling around behind him. He had a rather tall face with ears that seemed to stick out a bit. His hair was brown and very short and coarse. Signs of balding were beginning to show making his hairline look like an upside-down camel's hump, and his head a balding coconut. He stood tall and what would have been straight if it weren't for the slight sway in his posture, caused by his artificial leg. His suit was a dark, woody brown and impeccably kept. Of course a seagull, being the complete and utter bastards that they are, immediately decided to poop on his suit.

"Ugh," the man sighed pulling out a hanker chief to wipe away the stain as best he could.

"Pfft," laughed the dark-haired girl, "geez, Marcus, ya gotta watch your head!"

"Oh, don't go giving him a hard time, Claudia," grumbled the boy, "there's no way he could have seen that coming."

As if on cue, the black dragon lifted up its head and squawked at the assembled noisy humans.

"See," said the boy jerking his thump back, "Gothicus agrees with me."

The girl gave a frown and turned to her dragon with her hands to her hips. "Oh, teaming up with Leo, now, are we?"

The dragon just gave another squawk and turned his back on its rider. The robot came up to Marcus and reached out its hand.

"Here, sir, let me take care of that." A laser shot from the robot's finger and scorched the stain away without even a scratch on the suit.

"Thank you, Isaac," said Marcus mopping his brow with his hand. "It is much appreciated."

"Very good, sir," intoned the Robot, "I'm glad to be of service."

Just then the two heard a sharp cry and looked to see Claudia dragging Leo off by the ear waving at Isaac energetically.

"Come on, you bucket of bolts," she shouted jumping up and down.

"Ow, hey, Claudia, let go of my ear," Leo whined.

"I'd best get over there," muttered Isaac, "before she yanks the poor boys ear off."

"Right," agreed Marcus, "just make sure those two don't get into any trouble."

"It's a little late for that," replied the robot, "those two have a knack for such things."

Marcus sighed how true that was. Having nothing better to do he crutched his way across the sand a debris to the palm tree and sat under it enjoying the cooling effects of the shade. He reached over to his robotic leg and took it off to do some diagnostics on it.

It had been many years since he had gotten this thing. Back then he had been a commander in the army fighting the good fight, praised by the higher ups, respected by his underlings. But then bam! One day a shredder bolt to his left leg took all that away from him. They had given him a cybernetic replacement, but rejection syndrome set in, and the new leg would not take properly. Losing his leg left him effectively crippled and unable to serve.

Command couldn't have him out in the field, but they couldn't just let him go either. So they transferred him to looking after a trio of soon to be privateers and their dragons. The girl Julia, the boy Leo, and the robot Isaac who would soon be out plundering, pillaging, and looting the ships of any enemy that dared to stray into the Empire's territory.

Marcus sighed and watched the trio play a form of volleyball. Claudia on one side, Leo and Isaac on the other, bouncing a ball back and forth over a line in the sand.

"Geez," he sighed again. "they're not even close by and their energy tires me out." He yawned, closed his eyes, and drifted off to sleep.

When he awoke he quickly noticed that the scenery had changed in one key way. It was sunset. "Christ," he grumbled sitting up and brushing some accumulated sand out of his hair. Looking around, he saw that Leo was sitting a few feet away hands in his chin looking off into the sunset, or so it seemed. As Marcus looked out to the sun set itself, he saw that Leo was actually looking at Claudia. The dark-haired girl was standing with her back to them, perfectly still, her feet being splashed by the tide. Marcus sighed and picked himself up and walked over to Leo before sitting down next to the boy.

"Watcha staring at?" Marcus ask abruptly.

Leo jumped slightly and looked over at the older man. "N-nothing," he stuttered unconvincingly.

Marcus raised an eyebrow but didn't say anything. Leo sighed knowing he had been defeated.

"Okay, yeah, I was looking at Claudia," he finally admitted scratching the back of his head, "to be honest, I didn't even realize I was doing it until you started talking to me."

Marcus snorted he knew the feeling. It had happened to him before back when he was young, but those days were over. "To be honest," he grunted, "I have no idea what you see in that one considering how much she likes to push you around."

"Yeah," Leo admitted, "Claudia is bossy, pushy, aggressive, foul mouthed, and more than a little bit greedy. But..."

"But?" Marcus prompted.

"She's also really brave, honest, and, frankly, really inspiring," Leo sighed. "She's always upfront one hundred percent of the time. I find it rather dazzling to be honest."

"You like her, don't you?"

"A lot, actually," Leo responded with another sigh.

"Take some advice from an old man with a past," Marcus advised. "People who give you that kind of feeling only show up once in a very rare while. I had someone like that, and I let it slip by. Do not let the same thing happen to you."

"But I don't really think she's into me in the same way," Leo protested.

"Don't be daft," Marcus scoffed. "That girl drags you with her everywhere, and when somethings actually wrong, and she's feeling down, you're the only one she will talk to. She just tells me and Isaac to shut up and leave her alone. At the very least, she's very seriously considered asking you out herself. The only thing getting in her way is her pride."

"Oh," muttered Leo to himself, but other than that he was silent.

"How'd she get that eye patch," Marcus finally asked breaking the silence.

"Shredder round," muttered Leo grimly, "same as this." He rubbed at the side of his face wiping away some make up that hid a long, angry red scar going from the corner of his mouth to the corner of his eye.

“Same here,” said Marcus motioning to his leg, “and that’s the thing about this profession. You’ve got to take what you have when you have it. You don’t know when it will vanish, and you’re a privateer, so that’s something you should know better than anyone.”

Leo thought about what Marcus had said for a moment before getting up and nodding.

“Right then,” he replied with conviction bubbling up into his voice. “I’ll take that chance then.” He quickly set off at a brisk walk towards Claudia who turned towards him, and the two began talking. Marcus couldn’t make out what they were saying, but after a while Claudia leaned over and kissed Leo on the cheek. Marcus sputtered as Isaac came over and sat down beside him.

“Just what have you done,” muttered to robot. “Your advice is going to get those two into all kinds of trouble.”

“They get into enough trouble either way. My advice isn’t going make a difference,” Marcus grumbled as reached out his hand.

“Hand me a beer would you? I feel I’m going to need it.”



ULSAN, SOUTH KOREA by Bin Moon



STREAM by Leif Everson



DISTRESSED by Tyler Rietz

FINDING BEAUTY AND PEACE IN MOTHER NATURE'S DRESS

by Derick Doll

We all own a perception of beauty and a way to find inner peace. Some of us prefer manmade structures of concrete while some of us prefer a version of mother nature in a manicured and manipulated state. A majority of us prefer large groups of like-minded people, performing task, for a common goal. Fewer of us yet, prefer a lonely and raw, undeveloped type of wild beauty, neither manmade or manicured, to find inner peace. The Truss, spanning the back water flood plain of Truman Lake, where nature's un-manicured beauty, and lack of people, allow me to feel humbled and at peace, readies me for the daily rat race task of society's demands that lay ahead.

The Truss, simply referred to, is an old railroad bridge spanning the back flood plain waters of Truman Lake where peacefulness abounds. I meander down the old railroad tracks like Dorothy following her yellow brick road, with a specific destination as my goal, but in no great hurry to get there. The railroad ties are laid out in their methodic equal spacing, the metal, perpendicular track lines overlaying them, forming a rough but simple roadway to a serene place of beauty and peace. I saunter down this path, enjoying the essence of the day and acceptance of the world, anticipating the feeling that awaits. Relishing every step down the path of knotted tracks, savoring the journey, I go forth. The faint cedar tree essence blows on the breeze like a hint of wild perfume tickling my nose. The orange box turtle meanders down the side of the tracks, a partner in the journey to my destination, each of us lost in our own thoughts.

Arriving at the Truss, taking up my normal vantage point where the Truss itself starts to span the desolate, distinct flood plain, I look out unto my private humility. Like an old soured buzzard or even a wizened, grayed eagle, taking up roost, to sit and watch the workings of the world I perch. The contrast of the dilapidated mud flats versus the glass-like water is similar to the moon standing out in a clear night sky. All the edges are vividly seen, the rough and smooth textures, colliding onto one canvas like a prized painting. Willow trees dot the mud flats here and there, twisted in majestic formation, like pristine dancers at an eloquent ball. The willow trees having small, elongated leaves, with their branches spiraling and intertwined, make a formal dress all of their own accord for the occasion. Gnarled drift wood haphazardly floats in sections of the glass-like water, roses thrown to the dancing willows at their ball. An understanding of how insignificant of a mark I inject into the dance, creeps into my conscience.

Next, sitting upon my roost, reaching out for a slender piece of blue stem grass next to my perch, I ponder the struggles of the day. The stem so slick and smooth between my fingers, the hint of dampness around it, make a treat behooving a pauper. Ever carefully, a reflex in nature, I place the stem into my mouth, savoring the richness of its rewards. Suckling on my treasure, the sweet, mild flavor is refreshing and relaxing, the woody and pulpy texture a contrast in my mouth. The hard, stalwart rocks beneath my body produce an opposing feel to the essence in my mouth, a vivid reminder of the day's differences and obstacles rich in their own rewards.

Suddenly standing, I spot a treasure in the distance, reminding me of the world's beauty and acceptance. High above, soaring in the sky, a group of migrating ducks, equal in their formation and stance, fly beautifully into the setting sun. Sun gleams off their plumage, like fire dashed prisms of color, each a spectacle to behold. A pair of geese take notice of the new comers, letting out the greeting of honks, loud and surreal. Friends welcoming old friends back home, a safe voyage and passage of another year. The blue heron takes flight, raucous with its loud disagreement, moves on to the next vantage point for the evening meal. The ducks, geese and even the heron form a family with a special bond, always accepting each other in spite of each other's differences.

Then, slowly returning to my roost position, breathing in the rich, humus smell of the bottoms mud, a feeling of content washes over me. The bottoms, strong in decay, but full of a promise of life giving nutrients, formulate a smell rewarding a farmer. The hint of fresh fish laced in, not strong in decay, but fresh and poignant, with memories of the catch. Fresh air, with no trace of manmade intrusions, rewarding in a simple and pure way. Seeing a carp jump up out of the water, a flip and twirl, ever so shiny and sleek, I smile. The carp, like a circus acrobat, performing a majestic gymnastic act, defies its natural limitations. The sinking sun, glittering off its glistening wet scales, add a shimmer and flash to its act. As suddenly as it arrived, it returns to its natural home, with little less than a silent plop and splash in the water. The majestic performance completed, ever so swift and calculating, ends with a formal bow and no ado. Sitting upon my roost, the last performance of the day complete, I raise myself up and head back to the world of civilization, ready to once again battle my way through the day.

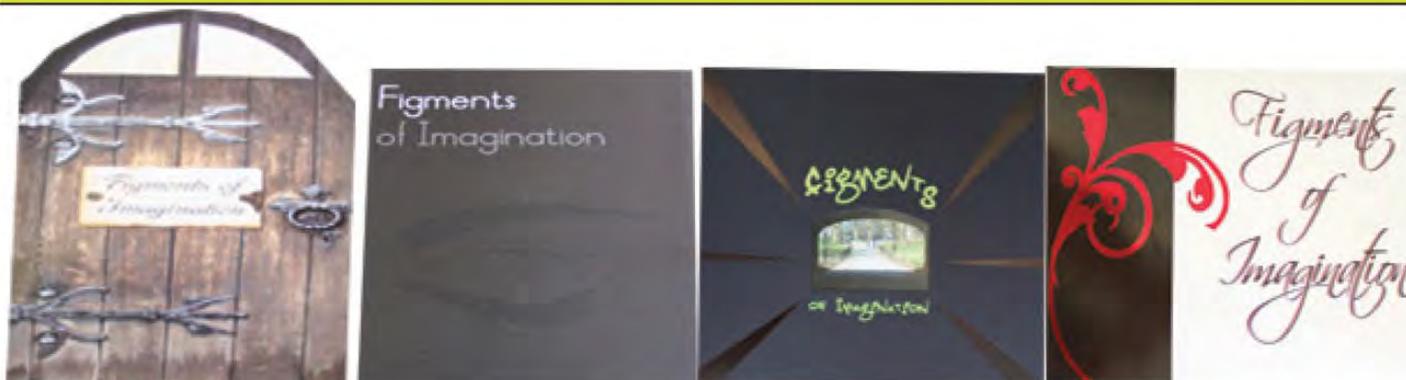
We all own perceptions of what we consider beautiful. No two of us are alike, experiencing different life obstacles and learning different cultures in society. We all need our place, as we all need our reset button. We all should see the beauty, and find our place of peace in the world in some way. I consider the Truss beautiful in a raw and peaceful way. The stress of society falls off my shoulders and with no other humans there to judge my misgivings, the tightly wound coils of my defense's unwind. I relax and enjoy the vast greatness of something bigger than myself, with such a simple, raw beauty, even a child could see it. With no concrete sidewalks and very little fellow humans around, most individual's find the Truss remote and inhospitable, but it is serene place in my world that allows me peace and the ability to remember my humility.

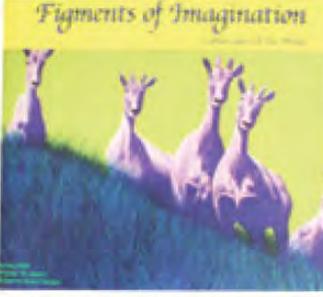
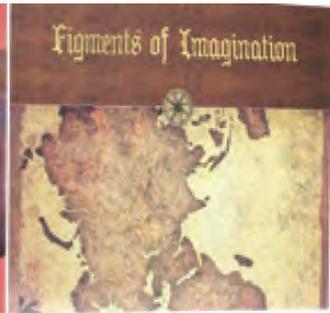
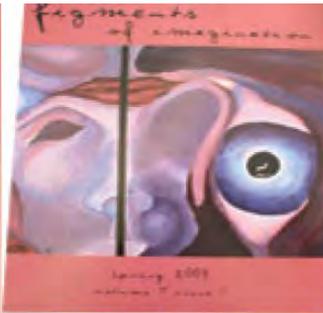


MY JUBALI by Meghan Kostelecky



CELEBRATING 1992 - 2017





25 YEARS OF FIGMENTS OF IMAGINATION





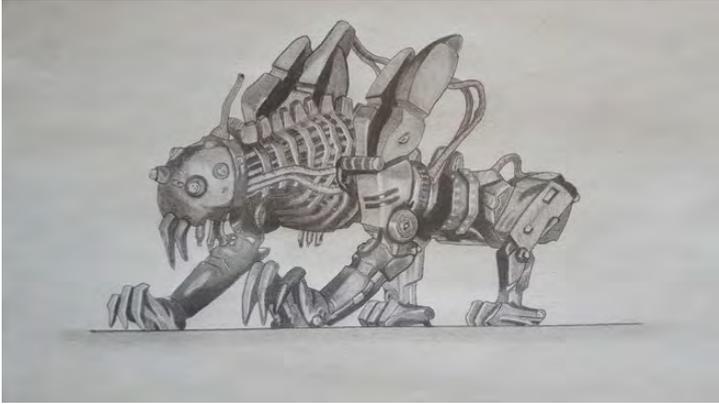
DUALITY by Meghan Kostelecky



DEEP BLUE MUG by Timothy Adams



IRIS PLATTER by Judi Carlson



JUNK GOLEM by Ben Makay



LAUGHING IN THE SUN by Kaslynn Westerman



UPON THE PRECIPICE by Kelsey Skenderovic

HOPE

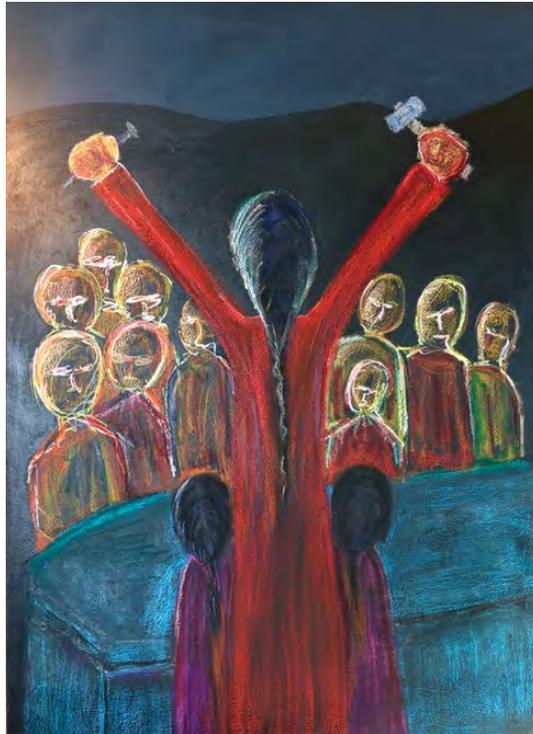
by Taryn Fischer

There's this glimmer out there
When one blinks it can vanish into the air
And sometimes can be hard to grab again
To some they never let it go once they have it
Others are naturally born with it
It comes in many different shapes and forms
When the sun rises and when it sets
The smell of coffee in the morning
The winter becoming spring
When the flowers start to bloom
Hearing a baby laugh for the first time
Someone happy to see you and gladly shows it
Having some alone time or being in a huge group
Getting to have your favorite candy
Buying your first toy to your first house all on your own
Seeing family and friends often
Christmas Eve night waiting for morning to come
Meeting with a long ago forgotten friend
The rain coming to help everything grow
A night in summer with no mosquito bites
Family vacations always being together
Someone you know doing well and being happy for them
A rainbow after a terrible storm
Listening to the world around you and truly seeing it
All these and more have that glimmer
Sometimes it shines so bright you may call it a star
Only it is seeable at night and in the daytime
Even in the fiercest storm or calmest day it is visible
One may only need to look to find it
Others may have to search a little harder
But no matter what it is always there
Waiting patiently to be needed
Never leaving and never wavering
Its goal and mission all too clear
When everything else fails it never will
It may seem as if you lose it

But if you really try you will find it
It can vanish but one can always call it back
Even the darkest of nights have it somewhere
All of us can have it
The thing that is most needed to survive life
This glimmer that is so easy to attain then loose
It has one name to which all know
We call on it whenever in need
It can be taken sometimes but if you fight it can return
This glimmer that can be so dim at times
And at other times brighter than the sun
Its name is simple only four letters
This glimmer is made up of entirely Hope



THE CAT by Kaslynn Westerman



THE LAST NAIL by Peter Woodrow

EVOLUTION

by T.J.E. Hostetter

Prologue

North Dakota is in quarantine. A virus has come out of nowhere that turns dead corpses into zombies. The people of the state are forced to fight for survival. But it's not easy. My name is Tanner, and there are nine of us in our group. We have been fighting for survival for a month now. Hope is being lost every passing day. We are running out of resources, and we don't have the means to fight off the swarm that we see every day. But recently... I've been having this dream. I dream of a monster. The monster comes out of nowhere, and it's not a zombie. But... for some reason, the monster actually does something good. Despite how brutal he is, he somehow makes a difference and ends this suffering, but I don't know how or why. He tears his enemies apart like they were shreds of meat. I cannot make sense of it. I don't know what it means. I can only hope for the best. But, hope seems lost, and I can't tell my friends that. However, I think they already know that.

Chapter 1

The Bite

Meghan and I are in the open, surrounded by zombies. They come within reach quickly. My gun is empty. I knew I should have brought an ax. They pounce onto us, knocking us over. Suddenly there is a burst of gun fire. Zombies drop dead around us, and I see Krissy and Margaret with their guns. I throw the zombie off, me and help Meghan up, but out of the blue a zombie bites her.

“NO!” I yell.

“It's too late,” says Krissy. “I'm sorry Meghan.” Krissy points her gun at Meghan's head, and pulls the trigger. Meghan drops dead. I gasp at the sight of her death. I pant heavily. But then Margaret grabs me by the hand.

“Come on,” she says. I quickly follow them leaving Meghan. As we walked, I pulled down my sleeve hiding a bite mark on my wrist.

Chapter 2

Red Eyes

We get back to the shelter in the abandoned apartment, and we are greeted by Frank, Brandon, Robert, Alexis, and Alicia. Krissy and Robert lock all the doors, and make sure that nothing followed us. I feel tired, so Margaret leads me to a bed, to sleep, and closes the door behind her. I lay there thinking of Meghan; how my friend is now dead. I look at the bite mark on my wrist and wonder, “Why am I still alive?” I suddenly feel as if the virus has entered my brain. I try to fight it, but it's no use and I pass out.

The virus starts infecting my brain, but something happens. The virus doesn't recognize something. My brain is faster than a normal human. The speed at which my brain functions does something to the virus... something no one would have expected. My arm slowly starts to grow large black scales, which grow all the way up to half my torso. My fingers grow claws, my teeth turn very, very sharp, and strange black organic things grow around my eyes. I feel a strange feeling of excitement, and I smile, my eye glowing blood red. A design of markings on my scales light up bright red as I rise to my feet.

The rest of the survivors are sitting in a circle, when all of a sudden they hear the sound of moaning from down the far side of the hall. Frank grabs his baseball bat with the words “Problem Solver,” carved on it. He heads over to from where the sound is coming.

“Alright, come out and face the Problem Solver!” Frank shouts. He heads closer to where the sound is, turns a corner, and he sees a zombie limping down the hall. He gets ready to go after it, but suddenly something grabs the zombie and pulls it back into the shadows. The sound of tearing flesh enters the room, and Frank steps back for a moment. He walks closer to where the zombie was standing and finds nothing. Suddenly from the ceiling, the zombie’s body drops and it lands in front of Frank. Frank freaks out, and notices that the zombie’s brain and a few internal organs have been ripped out. He then hears a sound like an animal eating. Frank starts slowly walking backward. He turns the corner again until he bumps into something. He quickly turns around, and sees a horrible sight. A pair of red glowing eyes staring at him.

“Hello, Frank,” says a familiar voice. Frank backs away in panic, as I step into view, my sleeve torn from my scaly arm smiling with my sharp teeth, and blood on my clothing, fedora, face and lips.

“Tanner... what the f#@k!” panics Frank. In my hand I hold a human heart, I raise it to my mouth and I devour it. Frank panics and swings the baseball bat but I dodge it, over and over again. I lash my scaly arm at the bat, and it shatters into pieces. Frank holds the broken half of the bat as I hold a broken piece, and laugh maniacally. Frank yells, and sprints away, but quickly I throw the piece at him, and it strikes him in the back of the knee causing his leg to be cut off. He falls to ground and struggles to crawl away.”

“What the f#@k! What the f#@k! What the f#@k!” he yells.

“What’s wrong, Problem Solver? You sounded brave a moment ago. You’ve only lost you’re leg.” Frank keeps panicking, and crawling away, but then I lunge my arm forward, and out of it fires an organic whip with a claw on it. It grabs onto Frank’s leg and starts pulling him in. Frank claws, and struggles to break free, but fails.

“What’s the matter Frank, old pal? Trust me... this will only hurt... a lot.”

Frank’s yells were heard by the rest of the survivors, and they started running towards the sound with their weapons. But then they hear a loud, “NO!” and they stop in their tracks. They then hear something disturbing.

“Did no one ever tell you Frank, the expression, Evolve or Die? Well tonight, we’re proving that you, long haired bitch, are definitely behind on the food chain. Did no one ever tell you, that you never mess with a man in a fedora?” The sounds then stop, and the rest walk slowly to where it was coming from. They turn the corner and see a pool of blood on the carpet, with no trace of Frank or what killed him.

Chapter 3

Morals Can’t Kill Monsters

The survivors start running away from the blood, and head back to the bedrooms. They quickly lock themselves in different rooms. Margaret locks herself in the room that I was in and notices that I am not there anymore. Brandon and Alexis share a room, Robert and Krissy lock the door to their room, and Alicia is all alone in her room. She grips her weapon, a revolver, her only source of light is a flash light. She quickly pushes one of the beds and puts it in front of the door. She then crawls under the other bed, turns off her flash light, and tries to relax. But then Alicia hears something. It sounds like something is crawling through the vents. She holds her breath, and for a whole minute makes no sound.

But then, a large bag falls from the ceiling and lands a foot away from her. The bag looks like it's made of the clothes that Frank was wearing. Alicia slowly reaches for her gun, but realizes it's not there anymore. She tries to feel for it frantically, but finds nothing. She then glances over to and sees she left it on the bed she pushed in front of the door. Alicia freezes, not making a sound, not moving a muscle. Suddenly the bed above her is ripped off the floor, thrown across the room, and I stand over Alicia. She screams, before she realizes it's me, but this time the scales on my armor have grown three small spikes.

"What... Tanner... What happened to you?" she says. I smile, my sharp teeth at her, and bend down to her. I grab her by the shoulder and push her up against the wall. I chuckle as I bare my blood soaked teeth at her.

"I've been transformed, my pretty little one." I then raise my claws at her, and slowly shove them into the side of her head. Alicia screams.

The scream is loud enough to be heard outside the room. Alexis quickly darts out of her room, and pounds on her door. Brandon follows her with his shotgun. They kick at the door but it does not budge. Brandon finally shoots the doorknob. He kicks the door in and it breaks open a little but it hits the bed blocking the door. Brandon then shoots the door two more times and they break it down and crawl in. They see Alicia, but her body is against the wall, eyes closed, her head bleeding, and she's not breathing. Alexis runs over, and checks Alicia's pulse. It's not there. She opens her eyelids, and sees that her eyes are blood red. Alexis cries and hugs Alicia's body. Brandon notices the bag in the middle of the room. He walks over and opens it. He gasps at the sight. The bag is full of human organs, consisting of a brain, a heart, lungs, a liver, and kidneys. He backs away, and grabs Alexis by the shoulder. He pulls her out of the room. But they see something in the shadows. Two glowing eyes. In rage and panic, Alexis grabs the shotgun out of Brandon's hand and starts shooting. The eyes dart away, and Alexis charges at the figure in the dark. Brandon tries to stop her but fails. Alexis disappears in the darkness, and chases the figure, shooting multiple times but misses each time.

She follows the figure into the main hall, to find me standing in the moon light. She shoots me once. The shotgun pellets strike me in the shoulder that is not armored. Alexis shoots again, but this time she is out of ammo. She starts shaking after seeing that I am still standing and still smiling.

"Oh my dear mortal friend... That was a good shot... but you just threw it away. For I can't be killed by a mortal. It takes a monster to kill another monster," I say, as I lunge for her with my teeth. My teeth enter Alexis's neck, and she screams once... only once.

Chapter 4 A Slaughter

Brandon bangs on the door to Robert and Krissy's room. They come out, and Margaret also rushes out of her room.

"What's going on?" asks Robert.

"Alicia's dead and Alexis just took off after that thing," says Brandon.

"What is that thing?" asked Krissy.

"I don't know, but Tanner's body is also gone," said Margaret. Then they all hear Alexis's final scream. Robert and Krissy raise their guns. They all slowly step backward, away from the sound, until after a minute, a new sound enters. The sound of footsteps, and the chewing of flesh. "You know what's... peculiar," says a voice. "Frank's blood. It tasted rather bitter, yet still enjoyable. As for Alexis... well it started sour, but it eventually turned sweet, then back to sour, and back to sweet. Peculiar thing indeed."

I slowly step into view smiling, blood soaked, and the scales have grown all across my upper torso, tearing my shirt in half, and red markings are coming out of the left side of my face. In my hand is a human liver. I raise it to my mouth and quickly devour it.

“So what does your blood taste like?” The survivors all start running away from me, but in the dark they get separated. Brandon and Robert end up together, and find themselves in a lounge, but it’s a dead end. The only exit is the windows, but there are zombies outside. They look for a place to hide, and they see a closet. Robert gets an idea and quickly throws a metal vase at the window. It shatters, and they both run to hide in the closet. They peek out to see the zombies are clawing in as I walk in. My smile turns into a grin as the zombies shuffle toward me.

“Well this just got a lot more... exciting.” I charge toward the zombies. Robert and Brandon watch in horror as the dozens of zombies are slaughtered, ripped in half, and torn apart in a blood bath as I rip the brains and organs out of the zombies. Within five minutes, the zombies are all dead, and I devour a few of their organs. Robert and Brandon witness the horror, while my scales slowly spread across my torso, to my other shoulder and down to my other arm, and up my neck. I rip my shirt off, revealing my scaly torso. Then I pause. I take a breath, and I turn to the closet. I know they are hiding there. I can hear their breathing. I crack my fingers, and slowly walk toward the closet. In a panic, Robert jumps out and starts shooting at me, but the bullets are deflected by my scale armor. Robert runs out of ammo quickly, and draws a knife.

“Robert,” I speak with a smirk. “My old friend. Why run from your fate? This can go two ways. Accept or run, running won’t get you anywhere.”

“I don’t care who you were,” said Robert. “You’re a monster now.” Robert lunges his knife at me, but I dodge it, grab his arm, and kick him in the leg and break it. Robert yells in pain, and swings his dagger again, but I grab it in my hand and the blade shatters in my grasp. I then tighten my grip on Robert’s arm and break his wrist. I release my grip and raise my arm. Out of my fingertips, large spikes grow, and my arm has transformed into a large claw.

“Evolve or die... and you made your choice,” I say as I ram my claws into his torso. Brandon yells in fear at the sight of it all, and falls to the ground in a panic. He backs up against the wall. I look toward him, and throw Robert’s body to the side. I slowly walk towards him and my arm turns back to normal scales. I then reach my hand out and put my hand over Brandon’s eyes.

“This won’t hurt, old friend. Well... not too much I guess.”

Chapter 5 Evolution

Margaret and Krissy are hiding in the laundry room, both hiding in a different machine. Krissy sticks her head out, and looks around. She climbs out and opens Margaret’s. She helps Margaret out and they both look for a place to run. They slowly walk toward the back door, and open it. The door hinges break off, and they find themselves outside surrounded by zombies. In a panic they rush back in and again hide in the dryers. The zombies shuffle into the room, but they don’t know where the two survivors are hiding. They walk right past the two, as Krissy and Margaret make as little sound as possible. But they also shriek at the next sound they hear.

“Well... the two little ones got me a present.” They tilt their heads slightly enough so they can see out of the dryer and see me walking toward the zombies. Suddenly both my arms transform into massive claws, and I charge at the zombies. I cut them down in another bloodbath, turning entire bodies into shreds of meat. As all the zombies fall, my arms turn back to normal, and I take a few organs for myself. After I am done, a large black cape grows out of my back.

It shifts and transforms and forms an organic coat around my torso. I then walk around the room and look for the two, but I do not find them. I smile, because I know they are in the room. I notice the open door, so I reach over, grab the dryer, and place it in front of the door. I take the second machine and place it on top of the other one blocking the entry way. I walk out of the room. Krissy and Margaret climb out of their dryers and try not to throw up over the carnage. They see the dryers blocking the exit and they cannot lift them. They slowly walk to the door they came in from, and check the hallway. They see nothing so they start heading down the hall, and enter the lobby. Suddenly from the ceiling, I drop down, hanging by a grapple right in front of them.

“Surprise ladies!” Krissy and Margret scream and start running back. Krissy turns around and starts shooting. The bullets cannot break my armor. She empties her clip and continues running. They don’t get far, as I transform my coat into two large tentacles coming out of my back and grab them both by their legs. They both fall and I drag them closer to me.

“No, no, no! Monster!” shouts Krissy in a panic. I smile, as they both are at my feet. I raise them with my tentacles, but I throw Margaret over to the wall, and I raise Krissy to face me.

“Yes that’s what they keep saying,” I say. “And you’re the one who shot Meghan before she turned. So what does that make you? A survivor? A killer? A monster? But now I’m thirsty. Robert’s blood was rather calm but flavorful. What does yours taste like?” I then bite Krissy’s neck. I drain most of the blood from her veins, and drop her dead body. I then look toward Margaret who is crawling away in horror.

“I must say. Her blood was the sweetest of them all.”

“Tanner what happened to you?” she asks. I smile as I walk toward her.

“I have evolved beyond your kind,” I say, as I reach down and a large spike comes out of my wrist. I grab her by the shoulder, and I stick the spike in her eye. She screams in pain before she passes out. I retract my spike and grab her leg. I pick her up, and then grab Krissy’s body. I carry them to the rooms. In one room, lies the mutilated bodies of Robert, and Alexis, as well as the bag of organs I left from Frank’s body. Laying on a bed is Alicia and Brandon. I place Krissy next to the dead bodies of Robert and Alexis. I then gently place Margaret down next to Brandon and Alicia. I walk out of the room. A moment later I come back, and throw in another large bag full of organs from the zombies that I have not devoured. I walk out again, and walk into the lobby and wait.

A few more hours pass, before Alicia, Brandon, and Margaret’s eyes open, but now they are all blood red, like mine. They all smiling their own sinister smiles. They all get up, and bare their sharp teeth at the dead bodies and organs I have left for them.

I sit in the hall, and listen to them feast on the organs. I wait a few minutes, before they exit the room, and they all now have scales growing out of their arms.

“You were right,” says Margaret. “Krissy’s blood is sweet.” I smile at the sight of them.

“Come my friends,” I say. “The night is young and this world is ours for the taking.”



RUNAROUND

Isaac Asimov

3 RULES

A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm. A robot must obey the orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law. A robot must protect its own existence as long as self-protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law.

RUNAROUND by Lance Geving (Class of '07)



DREAMING NO.1 by Brittany Anderson
(2011 - 2013)



DREAMING NO.2 by Brittany Anderson (2011 - 2013)



DREAMING NO.3 by Brittany Anderson (2011 - 2013)



LENA by Casey Fiest (Class of '14)



UNTITLED by Casey Fiest (Class of '14)



MACHU PICCHU 1 by Casey Fiest (Class of '14)



MACHU PICCHU 2 by Casey Fiest (Class '14)



ISSUES OF NOSTALGIA NO.1 by Brittany Anderson
(2011 - 2013)



ISSUES OF NOSTALGIA NO.2 by Brittany Anderson
(2011 - 2013)

FARM FREEDOM

by Angie Milakovic (Class of '95)

Daniel and his siblings smelled like delicious bacon every morning when they tromped onto the dusty, mud covered school bus. He was the fifth of six children in a hard-working rural dairy farm family. Every morning, seven days a week, at 5:30 am he would throw on an old black t-shirt and tight fitting Wranglers. He'd fly out the front door of the white, two-story farm-house to feed calves to help his dad, Gene, milk their forty head Holstein dairy cow herd. Gene had recently blown up the basement of that house with a match, a propane furnace, and a reason for everything. How he lived to tell the tale, only God knows, but that is another mind-blowing story for another time. Accidents seemed to run in the family DNA along with an ability to survive these accidents like they are really robots from a Terminator movie, masquerading as a mild-mannered Catholic, North Dakota farm family. The family was seemingly indestructible.

Daniel would sometimes trip up the school bus steps with a piece of bacon in his hand. It was a race against the clock to get chores done on time to make the bus's tight schedule in the first place. He didn't have a driver's license yet, so the school bus was his super un-classy, limousine to school. He dreamed of driving to school one day soon. The world would be his oyster. Freedom from the hard work requirement of the farm was something he dreamed of.

Daniel's cute younger sister of two years, Cindy always seemed to get out of having to do chores. She was thirteen years old and the youngest girl in the family. To say the least, she was babied in every sense of the word and could have gotten away with murder if she so desired. What was worse was that she knew how cute she was and how to bat her eyelashes as if she were a southern-belle on a first date

with her gentleman suitor. It was her super power to be cute. Daniel was always irritated that she would get out of doing chores so often, but there's not one thing he could do to change it, and he was smart enough to know it was easier just to go on with his life and take help from Princess Cindy when it was offered and she felt like giving it. If she had a crystal ball to see into her own future, it is a certainty that she would have perhaps rethought some of her actions. She continuously stole her best friends' boyfriends. She went out drinking at the local gravel pit every Friday and Saturday night with the rest of the high school. She snuck out of the big white farm house and ran ¼ mile up the lonely gravel road to meet the friend who would pick her up for a clean getaway in the middle of the night after her parents went to sleep. They would slowly drive down the path without headlights on, wheels slowly turning with guidance from the light of the moon until the coast was clear, and Gene and Janeen wouldn't see the glare of the lights. Later in life, Cindy changed her name to Mary, and she became a nun. She moved to Minneapolis and started sleeping on straw mattresses and praying a lot.

The brood always smelled like a mouth-watering, home cooked, hot breakfast in the morning because that's what hard-working people ate. They ate a lot of bacon. No one made fun of them for smelling like bacon, though. Daniel's older brothers would have pounded any school bus rider into dirt in the back seat of the school bus in such a way that they would have regretted every last uttered insult. No one made fun of the family for smelling like greasy bacon because deep down inside all the kids on the bus longed for a few strips of that hot, sizzling bacon, too.

Rarely sad or bothered about anything, Daniel normally wore a huge smile on his face when he would bound up the school bus steps. He was perpetually happy. Even though he was only fifteen years old, his brown, thinning hairline had receded up his deeply tanned forehead like his hair was stuck at permanent low-tide. The lack of hair still fit his personality well, and no one could imagine his hair looking any other way. He wasn't very tall, at only five foot seven and a half. He always wore faded blue jeans and a fitted black short sleeved t-shirt. When he laughed he would actually foam at the mouth and spit would fly out like an excited basset hound. He laughed and giggled so hard and loud that he would throw his head back in sheer pleasure and his body would shake. If a girl was making fun of him, which happened often, he'd laugh and lightly punch her in the shoulder. If a guy was making fun of him, which would happen often, he'd laugh and tackle him to the ground like the high school football linebacker that he was. His hands were huge and calloused, as if he'd been working the fields hoeing corn by hand for the past fifty years. He was solid in every sense of the word. He could give a good whopping to anyone who deserved it, but only in jest, of course. His brown eyes always matched the smile on his freckled face.

Recently he'd needed an emergency trip to the hospital during wood shop class at school because he cut off half his thumb on the table saw. Blood was squirting from his thumb with every heartbeat like the old Saturday Night Live skit when the weight-lifters fake arms ripped off, and fake blood squirted from his shoulders. The exception is that the situation with Daniel was real. Daniel passed out from the sight of his own blood almost immediately. Mr. Richter, the shop teacher and basketball coach, loaded him up into his pickup and sped ten miles north to the Linton hospital for ER care. Daniel survived the incident just fine, and now had half a thumb to show off at parties.

There was not one person on God's green earth who didn't like Daniel. It was un-American not to like Daniel, and no one wanted that handle attached to them. When people talk about him, they shook their heads and laughed because

he was hilariously funny. If something can go wrong, it will go wrong for Daniel. Everyone knows that the reason why he has nine lives like a cat is because he is close personal friends with Jesus and Jesus's dad, God. His close personal friends, Jesus and God, look out for him because he loves them both so much. They must really love him, too. It is surprising that Daniel isn't the new Pope just based on principle. Pope Daniel didn't roll off the tongue well enough, and he probably didn't get the job because he won't wear anything but black t-shirts. Knowing about Daniel's personal holy relationships is enough information to fully understand how he can avoid being killed, almost daily, by incredibly bad decisions or freak accidents. It is divine intervention at the local level.

Daniel's mom, Janeen, baked sweet caramel rolls that were known county wide for their delicious buttery, sticky, gooeyness. She sold them at church bake sales. Everyone knew that she baked love into each one of those rolls and that is the reason why they tasted so good. One of those caramel rolls could make a healthy hombre an instant diabetic. Janeen was a full-time morning cook at the nursing home in Strasburg when she wasn't at home on the farm helping with chores, loving her husband Gene, and taking care of her kids. Barbara Mandrell sang a song back in 1979 called "If Loving You Is Wrong, I Don't Wanna Be Right." Well, if loving Gene was wrong, Janeen didn't wanna be right. Hers was a church arranged marriage in North Dakota in the late 1960s. A priest in western ND knew of Gene and that he was a God-fearing, hard-working man who was looking for a wife with the same qualities. This priest also knew Janeen was a good Catholic girl looking for a husband. So she said, "I do" and he said the same without hardly knowing each other. Six kids later, Daniel being the fifth in the pile, the love that bloomed from that pre-arranged relationship helped Daniel to become the kind-hearted, accident-prone, good man he was turning into. Remember, his dad just about blew up the basement not long ago. The whole house blew off its foundation, and all Gene lost was an eyebrow in the fireball inferno, for God loved Gene, too.

Daniel's heart was as big as the Pope Mobile, and his intentions were always good. He was the type of friend anyone would be honored and lucky to have. He made friends easily on the school bus, even though the ride was a short five miles with only one stop before pulling into Daniel's driveway. Sitting in the very back seat of the long yellow school bus was always a magnificent treat if he could manage snagging it. He was like any other kid riding the bus who longed for the controlled danger and adventure that came with sitting back there. The back seat in this particular bus was a coveted spot for different reasons depending on how old a kid was. Reasons included doing naughty, evil, or rule-breaking deeds such as lighting up cigarettes or snapping rubber bands at unsuspecting kids sitting nearby. Sometimes the high school kids would steal and rip things from the unsuspecting younger kids just to slam the windows down and whip their precious items out into the dust storm created by the bus's wheels. Dust clung to the bus as it skidded around section line corners and careened down township roads. Anything thrown out these windows would never be seen again. Rumor had it that duffle bags full of gym clothes, Barbie dolls, and other miscellaneous items from the bus ended up in the mythical world of Narnia after being thrown out those windows, though it can't be proven.

High school kids would crouch down as far as they could so the bus driver couldn't see them doing things such as taking off their pants, lighting cigarettes, or making out with their significant others. Daniel's personality didn't fit the "back seat" persona whatsoever, but sometimes he would be lucky and get to sit there. When the bus driver would drive over potholes at 55 mph, kids flew off their seats at least two feet into the air if they were lucky enough to be sitting in the back seat. Riding the school bus was like riding one of those Viking Ship rides at the County Fair. Sometimes a child would fly so high in the air after hitting a bump in the road that they would come crashing down on the hard brown seats sideways with legs flailing in the air. It was insanely fun. That's why all the little kids wanted to sit in the back seat.

Many of Daniel's siblings had either had graduated

from high school, moved away, and had families of their own, or were studying to be priests. Sometimes his older siblings would drive to town to get to school instead of riding the lame school bus. After-school Class B basketball or football practices would keep them much later than the busses would run. Freedom from the farm for each kid in the family came in the form of driving a 1984 rose colored, two-toned Chevy Celebrity with two missing hubcaps and no muffler. Half the door moldings had peeled off, and the car was covered in a layer of thin brown dust from constantly driving the gravel roads. The struts were shot, and every time the car hit a pothole it made a noise akin to what five kids jumping up and down on an old squeaky bedframe at grandma's house would sound like. If Cindy wasn't wearing a seatbelt shed sometimes hit the ceiling after a wheel would lurch out of the potholes and washboards.

The interior was the same color, with plush bench seats and a few small holes scattered throughout. It smelled as if there was an invisible square straw bale in the back seat. A five foot long, 3 foot wide, seventy five pound straw bale that had been shoved in the back seat after being soaked by a drenching, prairie soaking rain, and dried after a scorching 100 degree day in the blast furnace heat of summer. Maybe that bale had a small family of mice living in it, too. The smell would burn the nostrils of anyone riding in the car. It was a fresh yet soggy and musty smell with a hint of dirt. No one could ever figure out where that mystery stench came from, but it wasn't unpleasant enough to keep any kid in that family from the front-wheel drive freedom it represented. If the car speed exceeded 60 mph, it would shudder like the Starship Enterprise when it was about to go into Warp speed. Daniel and his sister Cindy usually rode the bus home no matter what the circumstances were, until the day Daniel got his driver's permit. He didn't realize that he yearned for driving to school as much as he did and escaping the bus. He would miss riding the school bus. The kids would miss the smell of bacon. The people of the world subconsciously shuttered in fear the day Daniel earned his driving permit. Jesus put His hands over His eyes and prayed for the best.



SENSE OF HOME by Brittany Anderson (2011 - 2013)



SUNSET SENTINEL by Melissa (Kivisto) Gordon
(Class of '92)



VISCIOUS CIRCLE by Melissa (Kivisto) Gordon
(Class of '92)



UNTITLED by Melissa (Kivisto) Gordon (Class of '92)



MOON by Casey Fiest (Class of '14)



SECRET HIDEAWAY by Casey Fiest (Class of '14)



FOCUS by Brad Slaubaugh (Class of '15)



SIDEWAYS TRUCK by Casey Fiest (Class of '14)



HAUNT ME by Brittany Anderson (2011 - 2013)



UNTITLED by Casey Fiest (Class of '14)



HI-LINE VIEW by Kayla Sorby (Class of '15)



THE MOUNTAINS by Tom Delozier (Class of '16)

JUDGES

Lance Geving

Michelle Kraft

Sabrina Shey

Jack Glasser

Jason Lueder

Marlene Anderson

Laura Kalvoda

Johanna Bjork

Dave Lewellyn

Andrea Fagerstrom

Robert Wilson

karen Bauer

Tom Marple

Michael Tomanek

Conrad Bauer

Kevin Cavanagh

Joe Vuolo

Joshua Kern

Erin Price

Sean Thorenson

“Feel the city breaking and everybody’s shaking but we’re staying alive...

Staying Alive”

- Bee Gees

