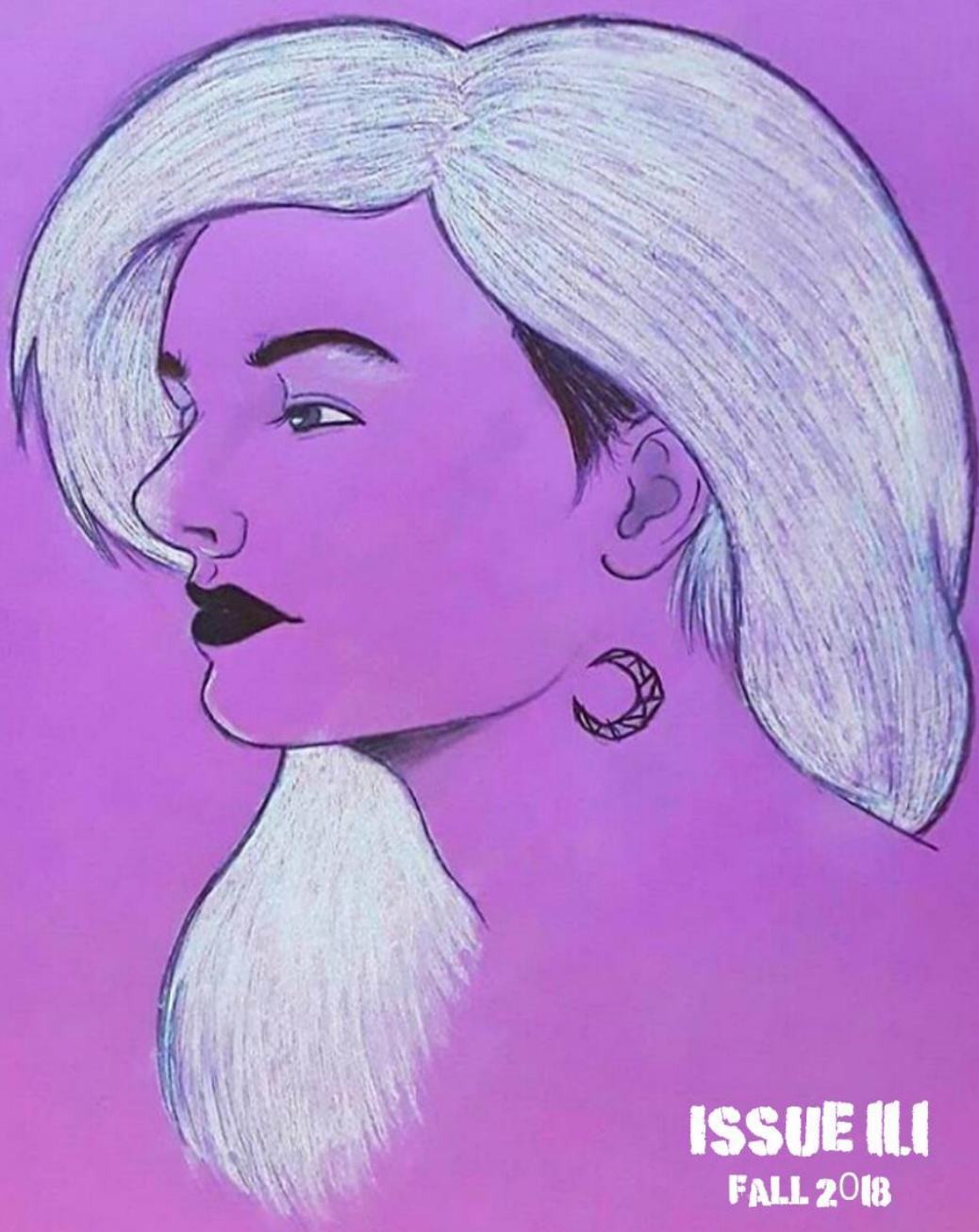


# ELEKTRAPHROG



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# Write

by Cassandra Carmichael

My heart says write  
My brain says make money  
My heart says write  
My stomach says make money  
My heart says write  
My wallet says make money  
My heart says write  
My car says make money  
My heart says write  
Society says make money  
My heart starts to cry,  
“Forget me. Go make money.”



"Sakura" by Miranda Olsen

# Pill of the Century

by Xavier Beckom

As Donavon sits down for dinner at the ripe age of 60, the same commercial flashes across the screen, the same commercial every night for the last 3 weeks at 7:30 pm on every single channel. No matter how fiercely he grabs the remote to surf the vast multitude of channels his cable company provides, he cannot escape his fate of seeing this message.

“Free Human Trials for Eternity Pill, patent pending. Human Trials in effect, 1,000 people have already tried it. Our oldest participant is now 112 and counting. Why let this life end when you don’t have to? Contact your health insurance provider about further details and requirements for inclusion into the pill of the century.”

Every night this commercial runs and every night Donavon sits at his kitchen table and sulk in the fact that he has no use for such a pill. For everyone he knew and loved has already passed. Both parents just missed the mark and passed of old age and heartbreak of loss, his wife of 7 years passed from cancer a year ago, they had no children. Donovan was truly alone in life. He works for a great company making good money as an ecologist., so he can afford the arm and the leg of expenses it would cost him to be able to participate in the pill of the century. But why should he. Even now he only lives for his 9-5 Monday – Friday schedule, why should he continue this life when it seems like so many of the good things have already left this life.



Monday rolls around as usually Donavon rolls out from a bed that hasn’t been made in ages. Shrugs over to the coffee maker and hits the start button and in the time it takes to brew a cup of coffee he jumps in the shower lathers, brushes his teeth, rinses, and dries off. He goes back out to the

kitchen makes himself a cup just in time to go decide what he will wear for the day. His commute to work isn't but a 10 minute drive from the company owned townhouse that he leases. He has his own office with a corner view of the industrial park, the office some magnificently bleak views of the surrounding warehouses and truck bays. There is a man-made fountain that for two months out of the year isn't covered in a green film and the water actually runs, making it into a fountain, but this month is not one of those two. Donovan sits down at his desk and is welcomed by the bell of a new email in his mailbox.

“With great joy I inform you \_\_\_\_\_ that you and your department have been selected to join the thousands of people who are able to take the Eternity Pill. In efforts to secure the long-term success and profitability of this company, you have been placed on moderator status which means your department will be our first life long branch partners. This is a huge honor and should not be taken lightly, accommodation will be made for family members as well, enjoy the rest of your day, more information will find its way to your registered townhomes.”



75 years have gone by since Donovan was given eternal life. At the age of 135 Donovan is in love with a young vibrant 80-year-old, together they feel like they're in their fifties. He has gotten two dogs because they aren't ready for children yet. Life seems perfect from the outside looking in. However, Donovan still longs for his wife, and the remnants of his old mortal life. Through the company Donovan was given his own division to report on population growth in consideration to the planets resources, however an anomaly arose about 10 years ago that suggests if people continue on the path towards eternity in about 500 years there won't be enough physical room and food for everyone to live. So the drive behind the Pill of the century died out and taken an

ugly turn. Now it's a matter of civil rights as those who are eternal are pitted against those who are mortal who will never be given the chance. A constant stigma between blue collar and white collar. Due to the findings of Donovan's division the company has taken a hit financially resulting in a massive downsize and Donovan is unfortunately named the fall guy and let go for it. Now he was no longer living for his 9-5. He had two dogs and women he loved but not enough and still dinner at 7:30 pm every night except this time there was another commercial on tv.

“Tired of Eternal life? Is it not what you expected? Well you're in luck, from the same scientists that brought you The Eternity Pill, we present to you the Mortality Pill. It places a 50-year countdown clock on your life so you can pass on in peace without the looming for of planetary collapse. Get some rest knowing that the end is coming. Contact your health insurance provider about further details and requirements for inclusion into the end all pill of the century.”



# An End

by Juan Oviedo

The beating of my heart resembles tribal drums in a celebration.

Faster, louder, harder;

Anxiety engulfs my body, almost intimately.

Like a crack in my being expanding, the intensity increases.

To suffer experiencing serenity, time and time again,

Only to have it ripped away in moments of uncertainty:

A fate worse than death.

In death there's peace, a quietness.

All weighing thoughts vanish into the wind

As if they were the petals of the roses I once held with hopefulness.

All uncertainties, all responsibilities, disappear like promises I was once given.

Death,

This is the only thing I can expect.

# Mistakes

by Danielle Johnson

My biggest mistake keeps me up at night.  
Yes, worse has been done,  
and worse things have been done by me.

There was the wedding,  
I left her alone at the altar.  
Pretty white dress and tears in her eyes.  
And words were said to a dying man  
cruel, mean, terrible, awful words.  
“I hate you”  
the last words I would ever say to him.

The worst thing I have ever done though was stealing that  
damn pen.  
That stupid pen from 12<sup>th</sup> grade English.  
Final Exams.  
I forgot mine, and nobody was in a lending mood.  
I was desperate, I couldn't fail.  
*I needed* to graduate.

She had a perfect 4.0  
One bad grade wouldn't hurt her  
She had a 103 in this class.  
She would still pass if she didn't take the final.  
The pen was just sitting there,  
calling to me.

I grabbed it when she wasn't looking.  
I had to.

I got a 72.  
She couldn't find her pen.  
0.  
Now I'm lying awake at night,  
haunted by the memory of that damn pen.

Poor Sally Mae.  
Her final grade was a 72.  
The first C of her life.  
Harvard kicked her out.  
She was going to be a doctor.  
Two years later her parents kicked her out.

I saw Sally Mae on the street last week.  
Everything she owned in a backpack.  
That same backpack from the 12<sup>th</sup> grade.  
Twenty-four years had passed.

I got my pass and am just scraping by,  
awake at night haunted by the hollow eyes of poor Sally  
Mae  
all because of that god damned pen.

# Roadkill

by Amanda Finsel

My self-esteem sits like roadkill on the side of I75  
It takes the beating of the wheels of society every few  
hours

Smearing more of my heart across the pavement

Graffiti of doubt and belittlement

I paint the ground with my insides like roadkill

I use the blood on my fingertips to draw hopscotch

I throw my negative vocabulary like pebbles into the  
squares

Jump to see what I will tell myself repeatedly today

I am not good enough for this sidewalk

The expensive Gucci heels that walk upon it leave trails of  
significance

The normal minded people that can simply see in them-  
selves what they know others will not like

and not tell everyone about it

The normal minded people that advertise their confidence  
rather than their insecurities

The normal minded people that don't envy roadkill

I am not good enough for this sidewalk

I have days when it feels like my soul and my mind are two  
separate weeds growing in the

cracks beside me

They try to become one by making a large mass overlap-  
ping my corpse

Growing through my body

Garden of unwanted yellow flowers and thorns that bite  
me

I am not good enough for the dirt and weeds that grow  
through me

I have some days I like my eyes  
In the right sunlight they reflect the positivity that others  
want to hear from me

Other days they drown in their own visions  
Floating like lilies on pond water

Body forgive me

Body forgive me for the “constructive criticism” I put it  
through to feel better

“I already ate today”

“I don’t like dessert”

“I need to workout first”

All of my favorite pickup lines when I’m asking myself out  
to dinner

Some days my own vomit tastes better than giving in to  
the temptation of eating

I have some days when my appearance holds so much  
weight that I feel like a Chevy truck is  
sitting on my lungs

I breathe in and out the fumes of exhaust

Exhausting myself

Mirror contemplation

I say

This is when I’m giving myself admiration

I don’t realize I’m cinching my belt in closer to my bones  
like a tourniquet

Circulation cut off

Like roadkill

Sometimes

I ask if God makes all things beautiful then why did he ask  
someone else to make me?

I ask

If I am worth something

Then why do I only feel worthy of pennies?

Why do I feel like no one wants to pay any attention to my  
affection unless I am doing

something for them?

If I give someone my body then I am giving them the world  
but to them I'm giving them a dead

animal from the sidewalk

I am not good enough for this sidewalk

Some days it is easier to wonder who will cry at my funeral

Than it is to think about dying

Some days I think about dying

Dying like that roadkill on the sidewalk

But I am not good enough for this sidewalk

So I won't die like that

Some days my self-esteem feels fine

Just not today

# “He ignites the match”

by Zachary Werdell

He ignites the match,  
resting the cigarette between his lips,  
as he pulls it out, he inhales deeply.

The streets are hollow, orchestrated by rain.  
the wind whips through the alley of where the bargain  
mart and tattoo shop meet  
he turns towards the howls of this alley,  
he looks past the waste of forgotten memories  
his eyes fall into the small window of a diner.  
He sees a child whom he imagines is around 8, sitting with  
his mother.

They sip on hot chocolate while polishing off a plate of  
whip cream covered waffles;  
the mom laughs as the boy smiles at her, hands over eyes,  
with whip cream on his nose and chin.

A drop of rain sinks from a rusted hole of a gunshot in the  
awning,  
the winds of the alley carry it over the cigarette.

He exhales, switching his gaze he stares as the ember  
slowly fades  
the smoke offers no solace as it dances out of his lungs.  
He watches the rain and tobacco as they turn the white pa-  
per into a mixture of yellow and brown

He looks at the window of the old diner  
the child and his mother are gone.



"Florida Heat is Hazardous to Goths" by Claire Vanessa Gray



# He Loves Me

by Danielle Johnson

It was your typical high school into college romance. He loved her, she loved him. They dated, had fun, made some memories. Then, one day he dumped her. Whatever. It happens right? The only thing is, it doesn't happen. Not to me.

I was not going to be the girl who got dumped. Besides, he told me he loved me. He told me he loved me for *three years*. Then one day out of the blue he tries to tell me that he doesn't love me? Yeah right. I don't believe him. He *has* to love me.

Sooo I decided to wait for him to come back to me, and he would come back, because he loves me. After two weeks and still no call, text, DM, or contact of any kind I decided just waiting wasn't enough. So, I decided to wait and watch. And before you say it, yes, I know it is kind of creepy to be outside his house at 10 p.m. watching lights go on and off from room to room as he gets home from work, takes a shower, eats dinner, and goes to bed. But it's all okay because he loves me. He has to.

So I watch and wait. I watch as he brings that blonde bimbo bitch from the coffee shop home. I watch as they drink wine and flirt, and you *do not* want to know what they did on the kitchen counter that night. But I was fine with it, because that one-night stand would only brig him closer to realizing that he loves me.

I watch as he gets a dog. (I always preferred cats, but whatever.) I watch as that one-night stand turns into two, and then three, then a month, and then *two years*. I see as each room of his, no *our*, house is defiled with that bitch. I watch as he proposes to her and she says yes. It was quite romantic from what I could see. I watch as wedding invitations go out. (I think mine got lost in the mail, but that's okay.) And all the while I tell myself the he needs this to realize that he loves ME.

I watch as she walks down the aisle, but I really can't see all that well from this this bush I'm in. He won't say I do. He loves me! He says I do.

Three months later I watch as the "happy couple" moves out of *our* house. Nine months after that I watch as their baby is born. I keep watching because deep down I know he still loves me. But, after the second kid, I kind of begin to wonder: Does he love me? I shake my head, that's crazy talk. Of course he still loves me, even though he did call the cops on me *both* times he has caught me watching over the years. He loves me. He *has* to.



“Orion Long Exposure” by Paul Robinson

# Burying My Boyfriend

by Miranda Olsen

Fuck he was heavy. If I had known murder would be this much work maybe I would have gone a different route. I dropped his body and looked up at the moon for a moment. The October night air was cold, but not cold enough to be uncomfortable. I was wearing a thick black sweater and tights, with my hair in two braids. I was supposed to be Wednesday Adams but I couldn't afford the whole costume, so I had gone to Goodwill last night and gathered a blouse, sweater, skirt, and tights. The sweater smelled like Victoria's Secret body spray and cigarettes. I was grateful tonight was Halloween, and that weird shit was going on all around town. Of course, I wasn't in town. I was in the woods outside of town. Dragging my boyfriend's body in a hefty bag. He was a small, skinny man, and for once I was grateful. It sucked when we were dating, though. I was over a foot taller than him. I hated when people compared us to Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes. I kicked the Hefty bag out of anger. Even in death he was pissing me off.

I couldn't find a shovel at my apartment so I had one of those really wide plastic beach shovels you use to scoop sand. It was in my left hand while the Hefty bag was in my right. I had been dragging my boyfriend for miles. Maybe two or three. I didn't know if it was enough, but I was exhausted and it had to be past midnight by now. I sighed and dropped the bag. It was now or never. With my plastic shovel I knelt down in the dirt and started digging. It was harder than I had thought. The dirt was heavy and my shovel was pathetic. I ended up scooping most of the dirt out with my hands. More time passed. I was covered in dirt and roots by the end of it. The hole wasn't very tall or wide, but it was pretty deep. I wanted to jump in it but I didn't know if I could get back out, so I figured it was around six feet. I kicked the bag into the hole and slapped the dirt off my hands. Bye bye boyfriend. I knelt down to pick up the shovel

and realized I wasn't finished yet. I still had to cover him up. Fuck. I could almost see the sun. I had no time for an alibi. Worst of all, I had no time to finish burying my boyfriend. I kicked as much dirt as I could on top of him but it still looked like a grave.

I grabbed my shovel and backpack and tried to find my way back to my car. I wasn't in a state park, so there were no trails to follow. I ended up dropping the shovel. I kept going in circles. It felt like I was never going to get out. I screamed and fell to the ground, punching it with my bare hands. I heard leaves crunch and turned around to see my boyfriend. He was covered in dirt like me, and looked just as upset. Fuck. I hadn't killed him. I stood up, knees shaking, and took a step towards him. He pulled me into his arms.

"Are you okay?" He asked.

"Yeah," I replied, confused.

"Someone's trying to kill us. We have to get out of here," he said. He took my hand and together we managed to find our way out of the woods. The drive home was awkward, to say the least. Since I had bashed my boyfriend's head in with a wine bottle I figured I should drive. He ended up passing out in the backseat. We went to the hospital and they treated him for a concussion. The last thing we remembered was watching scary movies at my apartment. At least, that's what I told the police. That whack to the head must have knocked something loose in my boyfriend, because after the night I buried him he was better than before. He actually listened to me. He was turning his entire life around. Maybe it was the fact that he had escaped a killer. Or maybe it was the wine bottle after all.

# Relationship Wanted

by Craig Eckert

I am between 5'7" and 6'3", and weigh between 175 and 234 pounds. My interests include but are not limited to listening to music preferably your favorite type, getting a healthy amount of exercise in before dawn, crying as I watch the sun rise, and eating lunchmeat straight out of the package.

I am currently looking for a man or woman to respond. I am not too picky, and you shouldn't be either. I want a dark-haired blue-eyed person to be outside of the Olive Garden off of 5<sup>th</sup> Street at 9pm waiting for me. You may not recognize me at first because of the vague description I gave. This is because mystery is good in a relationship. That is why you will not know my home address.

I will pick you up outside only if it is not raining. If it is raining do not bother showing up as I cannot ride my tandem bicycle there for fear of getting struck by lightning. When you are picked up we will bike together for 13.2 miles until we have reached a location I have predetermined for our meeting. This location is safe and secure for me.

While being brought here as we get nearer, I will need to blindfold you. Do not worry the blindfold is satin and feels soothing covering your eyes. This is to maintain that the location we are going to is still secure in case our meeting does not work out. For your sake I hope this meeting works out.

If the meeting works out, I will provide a contract. This is to be signed by you, no witnesses will be there for this is a secure location. Do not take my pen. I have very nice pens that I take good care of. This is for your own safety that you return my pen. After the contract is signed, we can move on to dinner.

There is a very limited menu for dinner. We can share one rib from an undisclosed animal, Saltine crackers with

mustard and ketchup, two cups of peaches split evenly amongst us, or a green salad. Do not ask me what kind of greens that is the color and all you need to know. For dessert we share a milkshake with one straw because I am a romantic.

If we move on to more amorous activities, I must warn you that I scare easily. We will have to get undressed in the dark. Do not mind any furry bodies that may travel across a foot or brush up against your legs. This is my pet Anders and he is just curious as to what new smells are in the room. I do not have my own protection save for some saran wrap. If you wish to bring your own for me and yourself that is encouraged. I can never be too careful, I did meet you through an ad you know. The affair will be quick and businesslike. I do not do foreplay as I think that this is a waste of time, if you require foreplay to get in the mood then we are not for each other.

After various amorous activities are concluded we will see about you leaving. This is a secure location, so I can't just let you leave. That would be very foolish of me, and I am not a foolish man. You may like the place and want to stay for an undisclosed amount of time. Many have chosen to do so, and you may hear them from time to time. No worries there as they are safe in a locked room. You would also get your own locked room. If you choose to leave there will be consequences.

Leaving results in my location being compromised, and I can only let you do this if you promise to wear a bag over your head while leaving and for the duration of the bike ride. You should be deposited safely back at the Olive Garden we had met at earlier in the evening. If you decide to leave this will be the last, you will be hearing from me. Please do not disclose the nature of our engagement for I will find you. Hopefully this turns out to be a pleasant evening we can both enjoy.

# Meat

by Miranda Olsen

It was too late to run now. The bear had spotted me. I grabbed my rifle from Ezra and aimed carefully, but without warning, the bear charged. My rifle was knocked out of my hands and my body landed on the ground with a hard thud. I saw a blur of brown fur move towards Ezra and a wave of fear rushed over me. I removed my knife from my holster and plunged it into the bear so swiftly I didn't have time to aim. It howled in pain and turned around to face me. I looked for blood and saw that I had wounded its neck. The bear was weakened now. I could take it by force.

I began circling it, the two of us performing some strange dance, until Ezra made a noise and bear looked away. Now was my chance. I stabbed it again, only this time I kept stabbing. It swiped at me with its paw and tore a small chunk of flesh from my arm. I screamed but kept going until it fell to the ground, panting hard. Ezra was crying. He shakily handed me my rifle but I shook my head. I took my knife and stabbed the bear in its heart. Ezra dropped the rifle.

"I'm sorry, Pa," he said, sobbing. I knelt down and wiped his face.

"It ain't your fault, son. It's mine. I hesitated."

"Your arm is bleeding." I looked down and sighed.

"I'll be fine. Your mother will patch me up," I said. I picked up the rifle and wiped the sweat off my face. My wound looked worse than it felt, but I feared what Ruth would say when she saw it. I took an axe out of its holster on my back and cut down a small tree. Ezra and I fastened the bear's limbs to it so we could carry it home. It was a two mile journey, and we didn't make it home until sunset. We dropped the bear on the ground and Ruth came running out. She gasped when she saw it.

"What have you done?" She asked.



“Provided for my family. Our crops won’t grow and we can’t live off of beans and corn any longer,” I said. Ruth pulled Ezra towards her.

“Go inside now. Read the scripture to your sisters,” she said. I nodded, and he ran inside the house. Ruth lifted up my arm and made a face.

“You’ve got the mark of a beast on you. It’s a bad omen,” she said.

“You’re too superstitious, Ruth.”

“There isn’t enough light left to skin the bear. Put him in the barn and tend to it first thing in the morning. Ezra will help you.” I wrapped my bloody arm around her small shoulders.

“A man provides for his family, Ruth. No matter the circumstances. I’ll kill a hundred bears if I need to.”

“You wouldn’t have to if those Indians hadn’t forced us off their land,” Ruth said bitterly. She rested her head on my chest to hide her tears. I put both hands on her cheeks and looked her straight in the eyes.

“All will be resolved. I promise. If by the end of spring our crops are still failing, we’ll leave Georgia and head west.”

“This land is cursed. We should have never left,” Ruth said, and went back inside the house. I dragged the bear to the barn and locked the doors. For extra measure, I placed our water barrels in front of it. Night came and I found the house by moonlight. Inside, all was quiet. Ezra and his sisters were fast asleep, and Ruth was staring at the fireplace. Our simple log house was even simpler inside, with few pieces of furniture but plenty of fox and rabbit pelts. I laid down next to Ruth and she fell asleep on my chest. After a while, I drifted to sleep too.



The next morning, I woke to someone shaking my body. I opened my eyes to see Ezra, face full of excitement, trying to stir me from my sleep.

“Wake up, Pa! We have to skin the bear!” He shouted.

“Enough. You’ll wake your sisters,” I said. Hannah and Leah came fumbling through the doorway, giggling and shrieking. I smacked Ezra upside the head.

“They’ve been awake for hours,” Ruth hollered from the kitchen. I got up and noticed my wound was inflamed.

“This needs to be cleaned and bandaged,” I said, heading to the kitchen. I sat at the table and set my arm down gently. Ruth set a plate of grits on the table for me to eat. With my left hand I took a spoon and finished within a minute. Ruth reached into a chest for the bandages and Ezra fetched a pail of water from the well. I took off my shirt and Ruth cleaned my wound with a wet cloth. I winced in pain but allowed her to do a thorough job. She wrapped my arm tightly with bandages and Ezra brought me a fresh shirt and a cloak for the inevitable mess that would come next. Ezra was also served a plate of grits, and then we both went to the barn. The barrels hadn’t been moved. A good sign. Ezra and I shoved them out of the way and unlocked the door. Inside, the bear corpse was starting to smell, but only a little. Another good sign. We pulled it out into the open and I showed Ezra how to angle his blade so it cut the skin quickly and precisely. Ruth came to work on the hide while we cut the meat and pickled the organs. The whole process took up half the day. It was past noon by the time everything was finished.

“That bear pelt should be ready in a few days,” I said with pride.

“Let’s hope we can fetch a good price. We used all the salt we have. The next few meals won’t have much flavor, I’m afraid,” Ruth replied. Hannah and Leah came running out of the house and I used my cloak to pretend to be a monster. They squealed in delight. I handed the cloak to Hannah.

“You girls are six now, old enough to be washing clothes,” I said. Ruth took them aside and showed them how to use the washboard. Ezra and I went back to the house, equally exhausted. I opened the door to my bedroom and clicked my tongue. Ezra turned around.

“You ain’t too old to sleep with your Pa,” I said. We both kicked off our shoes and passed out the second our heads hit the pillows.



A scream startled me, and I sat up so fast my head felt like it was made out of lead. Ezra was a heavy sleeper and was laid next to me, completely unconscious. I put my boots on and checked the sitting room, but all the chairs were empty. I stepped outside to see Ruth on the ground, crying. We hadn’t bothered to put barrels up in the barn this time, and an animal had gotten in and taken the pelt.

“They must have smelled the salt,” Ruth said. I helped her up but she collapsed in my arms.

“We’re ruined,” she said. “I told you this was cursed land.” I looked at the girls, who were playing with the small tufts of fur that remained and sighed. I helped Ruth back inside and the girls followed behind me. Once they were all situated, I went back outside to evaluate the damage. It had probably been foxes or wolves. The paw prints in the dirt looked small. But how did they open the lock? I stepped inside the barn and cursed under my breath when I saw the pathetic remains of the hide. The meat was stored above the rafters, thankfully, but that hide would have provided much needed income, and now we had no salt to last us the winter. I buried my face in my hands to muffle my screams. Our corn and wheat fields were small and the crop they yielded was even smaller. We had spent so much time and money on the house and farm. We couldn’t leave. I took a walk outside to clear my head and decided to take our only horse into town. It was dangerous to ride at night but I didn’t care. Stealing was the only way we were going to survive. I figured I could break into the General Store easy enough.

The ride to town was relatively short, just under an hour or so. We had a painted horse, which Leah had named Cow when she was just a baby. He was a good horse, and could last for many miles. I reined him in as we neared town, but

as I tied him to a post I looked down and saw a beggar, moaning. Cow didn't see him in time. He stood up on his hind legs and when he fell back down his hoof landed on the beggar's head. With a sickening sound I heard his bones break and crunch. I looked down at the horrific scene and an idea struck me. I threw his corpse on the back on my saddle and rode back to the farm. The barn door was open, and I rode Cow inside. I threw the beggar to the ground and put my hand on my chin. At first, I didn't know what to do with him, then I realized he was just like any other animal. I stripped his body, bathed it, then skinned him and seasoned the strips of meat. I spent all night grilling the meat and boiling the organs down to lard. I took whatever remained and buried the parts in the cornfield. Perhaps it would help fertilize the crops. In the morning I made eggs to go with the meat, and Ruth and the children rushed to the table, eyes wide with curiosity.

"Is that meat?" Ruth asked.

"It is," I said. She took a bite and smiled.

"It's delicious. Is this the bear meat?"

"I'll be smoking the bear meat for winter. We'll need it. Last night I went into town and one of our distant neighbors offered me part of his pig."

"What neighbor? We live completely outside of town."

"He was a good Christian man. I told him of our troubles and he happily obliged to give us this meat. There's more in the barn," I said. Ruth took another bite, then Ezra and the girls tried it. After just one taste, they quickly began shoveling more in. I watched in horror as my family happily consumed the beggar, but this was the only way for us to survive. I ate a small helping myself, then took Ezra to tend to the crops. Our corn was small and half dead as usual, and our wheat was no better. Ruth and I spent all week harvesting the crops and using them to make beggar soup and stew. It wasn't until when the meat ran out on Sunday that things began to go awry. I had avoided as much of the meat as I could, but Ruth and the children had completely indulged in it. When Sunday came and the meat was gone Ruth began

to get very agitated. She was pacing around the kitchen as if she was looking for it.

“The bear meat just doesn’t compare,” she said. I put my hands on my shoulders and looked into her eyes. Her pupils were dilated so much they were almost entirely black.

“I used the same exact seasonings,” I told her. She pulled away from me.

“We should get a pig.”

“Ruth, you know we can’t afford that.”

“I don’t ask for much.”

“I am the head of this household, and I know what’s best. Thanks to the bear and the crops, we shall not starve this winter. You should be thankful of our good fortune,” I said.

“What good fortune do you speak of? We were kicked off our land by those filthy heathens only to suffer in this harsh wilderness. We are cursed.” I held Ruth tightly while she wept.

“We are not cursed. God is always with us,” I said. Her head was against my chest, and she took a deep breath, then moved up towards my neck.

“What is it?”

“You smell like the stew,” she said. Ruth smelled my chest again and then bit into my shoulder. I howled in pain and pushed her off of me.

“You’ve gone mad!” I shouted, then grabbed the kitchen knife off the counter and pointed it towards her. Ruth lunged at me again, but her hunger had made her strong, and she managed to bite a piece of my ear off. I tried not to scream, for fear of waking the children, and instead took a washcloth to stop the bleeding. She put a foot back and prepared for another attack, but I expected it, and plunged the knife into her heart before she could deliver a final blow. I cradled her body as she bled out in my arms. I didn’t recognize her at all. The children appeared as I set her on the floor. Instead of shock or horror, they looked intrigued, and knelt down to sniff at her body. I pushed them away from her and held her corpse in my arms, weeping. I put her body

in the barn and this time remembered to put the water barrels in front of it. I wouldn't let her be torn apart like the bear. Then I took Cow and rode into town to fetch the pastor and the grave digger. I led them to the house as they rode in a carriage behind me. I approached the barn but stopped when I saw that the barrels had been moved. It had to be the children. I threw open the doors to see only a bloodstain on the hay. The pastor and gravedigger looked at me, puzzled.

"Where is your wife?" The pastor asked.

"Foxes."

"Foxes?"

"We've had a fox problem lately," I said.

"I will say a prayer for your wife's body, then," the pastor said. He knelt down and inspected the bloodstain.

"You know, a beggar went missing just last night," he remarked. I tried to hide my anxiety. The pastor sent the gravedigger to the carriage and started walking towards the house. He threw the door open and we both gasped when we saw the children huddled together, faces covered with blood. They eyed the pastor hungrily.



“Gator at SCF” by Paul Robinson

# Alien Life

by Aaron Battishill

Do aliens exist here with us  
In a place we cannot see  
Are they scared of us and what we be?  
The universe upon unveiling  
Shows nothing but bacteria  
We keep looking never stop looking  
Even if the universe is booking  
Were we early?  
Are we alone?  
Are we radical, lucky, first in this race of life?  
These are questions we ask ourselves  
Sarcastically we laugh saying that it is impossible  
We could not have shown up early  
Rationally the universe shows  
Nothing  
Only the void going on and on.  
We are lost little losers  
Too early to see others rise  
Before we fall.



We sit on a blue marble  
And just wait  
Hoping we do not crumble  
We wait together  
Hoping  
Patiently  
To see something eventually  
But for now  
We are alone  
Possibly too early for that gate.



“Unidentified Plant SCF” by Paul Robinson

# They're Inside You

by Rachelle Hargrove

Do you feel them under your skin? They're there ya know. You should've gotten that vaccine when you went on that international holiday. Sure, those drinks were nice on that moonlit beach, but you didn't see them dig into your skin. Burrowing in between your toes and moving up your legs. They're now crawling around between your muscles and bones. Their legs scratching as they scatter, making a noise like when your teeth grind together. You got to get them out, you gotta cut open your skin and get them out.

Take some tweezers and dig in between your arteries and tendons. They need to get out or else you're gonna develop a tick. They need to get out or else you're gonna develop a tick. They need to get out or else you're gonna develop a tick. They need to get out or else... too late now you got one, tweaking out like a person with OCD on their fifth Red Bull doing shit over and over again by an unseen compulsion. You don't even realize that you've started scratching. Now they are nested between your brain and spine, a nice little soft spot in the back of your skull for a growing family. Makes your neck twitch with a violent jerk and weird angles with no warning at any time.

Now you're gonna be scratching forever trying to get them out. Now you're gonna be picking at scabs from where you've itched so much and not letting them heal. That pretty face of yours will look like you've been on acid. Your fingers are gonna bleed from chewing on the nails and the quick and the cuticles, because you're so anxious about them and feeling them inside your body feasting on you. You should've just dug around with the needle nose pliers, grabbing the little bastards by their swollen bellies. Cut your arm open like you're about to do some sick surgery on yourself. Don't worry about getting blood on that nice new carpet cause now they're really inside you, now they're gonna make you their

home. An infestation inside the one place you can never escape and can never truly clean.

See that one that just moved across your arm? No? Well you're going to. They're in there. They're in our skin, in our brains, slurping and feasting on us. God, they make me itch so bad. I got one out before, oh yes I did, but the doctors didn't see it, but I did. I saw it. Its disgusting eyes and sick stomach filled with contents of me, my own blood, skin and who knows what else. I cut myself open and dug around my tendons and in between muscles and I caught one. I squished it between my fingers, feeling the crunch of its exoskeleton and squishy insides. I felt so much peace in that moment, I finally got it out. Yet, I wasn't quick enough, I gotta be quicker than that, cause it already laid its eggs. They're everywhere now, all over me. I can't cut myself quick enough to grab them.



“Webbed Leaf” by Paul Robinson

# Test Subject Wanted

by Craig Eckert

Needed for invasive procedures, various probing and prodding are bound to happen. Allergies to medication and sterilizers preferred, such as iodine and penicillin. Allergy to latex will not be tolerated. There are height requirements, you cannot be shorter than 4'2" or taller than 6'1". The eye color must be either brown or blue, green and hazel eyes will not be permitted. While most children fit the height requirement we need a signed waiver allowing the procedure. The signature does not need to be the parents. Please bring a list of next of kin that should be notified if something goes wrong. Something usually goes wrong, so this is a must.

You will not be given anesthesia for the procedures, nor any types of painkillers. You may show up sober or inebriated that is your choice. There will be no food or drink provided. Just the instruments which will be used, and our cheery demeanor. Our cheery demeanor includes one smile, a slow wink, and a thumbs up.

The procedure involves either or both removing and adding objects from your body, heavy bleeding, the scent of formaldehyde, and copious amounts of physical agony. There is a mandatory tooth removal, you will not get this back. If you think you may lose too much blood bring your own. This is a BYOB operation meaning you bring your own blood. The blood you bring should match your own blood type. No, we will not tell you your blood type. We want to know the length of your intestines. Don't you want to know how far they can stretch? Or if you can jump rope with them?

We want to jump rope with them. The current record is six before they tear. We would like to beat this record, hopefully yours is sturdier than the last.

Compensation is limited. We have one very used stuffed lion, the set of instruments we operated with, three two-dollar bills that have been made into origami cranes, or a group hug led by the team. I do not recommend the group hug as some of the surgeons can get handsy.

# Madness Unlocked

by Jarrod Watson

As I write this hastily on paper it is October 16th, 1947. I have come across a terrible discovery which I cannot fully comprehend, yet I will do my best to collect myself and retell the events that transpired this past week. My name is Damien Lake and I am a Biology professor at Arkham University in the coastal college town of Haleport, Massachusetts. I had recently transferred here from my quaint hometown in sunny, northern Florida. As much as I loved my town, the money Arkham had offered was too tempting to merely pass. I traded my sunshine for a paycheck.

While the gray and dreary weather was quite the disappointment, it wasn't all bad here. The locals seemed pleasant enough, and the university was in excellent condition, with gorgeous Roman styled columns and grand archways. However, all pros and cons were thrown out of the proverbial window when I went for a morning hike this past Tuesday around the outskirts of Haleport. I came across what seemed to be an ancient ruin hidden underneath the forest's overgrowth. What was visible were the remains of a red door, seemingly gothic in architecture, with green veins of ivy across the wood. The stonework surrounding it was beautiful craftsmanship, and very old. It had piqued my interest greatly. As an avid seeker of knowledge, I tried but to no avail to gain entrance into this mysterious formation.

I made my way back into town, with the intent of asking a fellow professor what he knew about Haleport's history and the areas surrounding it. One professor Adams, a world history professor and scholarly gentleman, seemed my best option. He was an older man, yet he had a certain spry nature about him. He told me Haleport had a dark past of cunning murderers and animal sacrifices by the hands of deranged cult zealots. Some townsfolk have claimed to have seen

strange, bipedal fish-like creatures emerging from the sea at night, or how strange lights would appear then vanish in frightening instances. He admitted he didn't believe a fragment of these tales but couldn't deny that the town indeed was plagued by stories of the occult. After I had mentioned my newfound discovery his eyes passionately lit up, and he agreed to investigate the scene with me on the morrow.

That night I had a horrific dream, so vivid and grounded in reality it shook me to my very core. I had entered the red door, and was accosted by a hellish group of robed men chanting some nonsensical words that sounded nothing like the various languages I have come to learn in my lifetime. The most accurate recollection I have was the phrase, "Xyleigh, alun xyleigh merees kountar," Clearly utter gibberish and hogwash but the way they chanted it was menacing and full of malicious intent. Right before I had my throat sliced open, I awoke in a cold sweat.

The next day I came by Professor Adams' house and was puzzled when he wouldn't answer the door. I tried the knob, and found it was left unlocked. I knew I shouldn't have, but I let myself in to search for Adams. Step by step the floorboards groaned beneath my feet, and my stomach was turning. I felt awfully uneasy, my forehead perspiring now. I slowly turned the knob to what I could only assume was a bedroom or a study of some kind. I was terrified upon finding his lifeless corpse, horrendously torn to shreds in his own home! His stomach was ripped open with great force, and red ribbons of intestinal organs covered the hardwood floor beneath him. What on Earth could have done this? I ran over to his bathroom unable to contain the geyser of vomit my body needed to expel. Once I collected myself, I reentered the room and found Adams' journal open to his last few words written on page. He had apparently been a busy man and went off without me to investigate the red door. Adams had cracked open his old archeology toolset late at night to find a way to enter the structure. He had written in his journal like a paranoid madman, claiming to hear voices and seeing shadows dancing around the forest. Some of his



writing was unintelligible gibberish, but the last page had filled me with dread,

“I returned home in a state of blind panic. *Oh dear Lord above, save me.* I can’t stop hearing the sounds of scratches against wood! It’s coming for me. What exactly, I do not know. But it is coming for me. I should never have gone to those damned ruins. Lake, if you’re reading this. **DO NOT SATIATE YOUR CURIOSITY.** It will only lead to madness. *Oh, god. The scratching at the door. I hear it again.*

“I stood in Adams’ study with my mouth agape. I could hardly understand or figure out what could have possibly happened here. I knew though, that it all led back to the red door in the woods. I had to discover the cause of this, even against all of Adams’ warnings.

I made way immediately to the same spot I had found during my hike. Instantly I saw Adams had indeed unearthed this tomb. As I made my way inside, I felt the temperature drop even lower than the crisp weather outside. I was quickly enveloped by darkness, but my eyes eventually adjusted due to a single ray of light that was peeking through part of the roof that had collapsed. I almost wish it would have stayed dark, for I saw hideous reliefs carved into the walls of some monstrous form. It appeared to be a large winged centipede-like creature, with disgusting mandibles and six large black eyes gazing into the darkness of the cathedral I had entered. Its antenna were long and slender, and where most insects would have two, this being had eight atop its head. The reliefs depicted it in many poses, some in a resting position, some upright and appearing to roar, and others coiled up in a nauseating spiral. In the far end of this unholy church of insanity, I found a decaying and forgotten book resting on an altar. My instincts begged me to run and abandon it, but I could not resist.

The madness of it all! Horrific depictions of primordial entities roaming the Earth long before we had arrived, twisted rituals in search for gaining their favor, incomprehensible languages and descriptions of technology I could never have fathomed were all contained within this tome of forbidden

knowledge. I ran faster than my legs could carry me. Now I am here at home, plagued by insomnia. How I wish I never had discovered that red door in the woods. I can't rid myself of the feeling that I might be going insane. I have heard whispers when there were none but I in my own home. I have sworn I could see figures looking through my windows. Worst of all, *I keep hearing this incessant scratching at my door.*

# The Clinic

by Pascale L. Pomerleau

On the outside, the clinic was like any other. A rather dull looking building overlooking the woods to its right side and a parking lot to its left. The sign in the parking lot was where the similarities ended.

*Dr. Ghastly's Oddities Clinic – open 9 pm to 9 am.*

A girl, no older than 12, approached the sign dressed in a heavy parka and a winter cap. A nighttime clinic was unusual around this town, especially one so open to the general public. Nevertheless, this was the best clinic she knew of, and the closest to her home.

She entered the clinic on her own. Inside the clinic was normal as well. The cold air they always kept the waiting room around, a television droning and playing the local news, a receptionist bored with her job, it was all there. She sat in an empty chair next to some magazines. All were boring tabloids from weeks ago. She still picked one up and opened to a story. There wasn't much else to do.

It wasn't long before she felt a dozen eyes on her. She glanced up from her magazine. The other patients had fallen silent and begun to stare. A cloaked figure with yellowed fangs and peeling red skin. A man covered in thick fur, madly scratching at his arms. A woman in a wheelchair with a long scaly tail where her legs should have been, and fishing hooks embedded deep in her hands. A skeleton dressed in a two-piece suit with a gaping hole in its cranium. Giants crouching under the ceiling, which was low for most of them except their youngest.

“Pardon me,” said the skeleton, tipping his hat. “Are you lost?”

The girl shook her head and continued to read the tabloid. She could hear a harsh whisper. The vampire leaned over to speak to the werewolf.

“What’s a human doing here? Isn’t this a monster clinic?”

The girl tried to ignore their idle talk.



“Ivy Wood?”

Upon hearing her name, the girl hopped off her chair and was led into a room by a nurse. The nurse gave her a look, the same confused look that the other patients gave. Again, she tried to ignore it.

Ivy was led into the doctor’s office. Or what she assumed was the doctor’s office. It was littered with things that she thought she would never see in a doctor’s office: talismans, charms, spell books. Locks of hair and vials of silver, gold, iron fillings and herbs of all kinds. A potted plant sat on the windowsill, though it wasn’t one she recognized. It had a massive purple flower with yellow spots and broad leaves.

Dr. Ghastly entered the office with a smile she knew was tinged with confusion.

“Ivy is it?” he asked, flipping through his checklist. Ivy nodded in response.

“I’m sorry dear, but you must be mistaken,” he continued. “I’m not particularly well versed in human medicine. This is a monster clinic.”

He looked up from his checklist. Hayley kept her eyes on the ground. He returned to his notes, shaking his head.

“I’ll transfer your file to the nearest human clinic. It should be just down the road—”

“I’m not a human.”

The doctor looked up from his notes again, this time confused.

“I’m not a human.” Ivy repeated.

Dr. Ghastly chuckled. “I know what a human looks like, dear. Unless you can prove you’re not a human, I’ll have to transfer you to a human clinic.

“Ivy scowled. She turned her back to him and pulled off her parka. Underneath was a pair of fairly tiny, silvery wings that glistened in the early morning sunlight. She arched her back and they fluttered. Dr. Ghastly was taken aback.

“Oh goodness ma’am. I’m very sorry. I didn’t know you were—” “A fairy? Yeah, we get that a lot.”

Ghastly sat at his desk and straightened his papers. Ivy put her parka back on, annoyed with his antics.

“What seems to be the problem?” he asked.

“I’m supposed to be flying in the clouds with the rest of the fairies, but I can’t.” Ivy rustled her parka. “I can’t fly with these stupid tiny things.”

“Of course,” said Ghastly. “I know just what to give you.”



Ivy clutched her vial of iron filings at arm's length. The stuff was absolutely poisonous, and she could feel it what up in her hand through the glass. She promised she would never visit Dr. Ghastly again, if he was going to be this much of a quack.



“Moonchild” by Miranda Olsen

# Jack Frost

by Miranda Olsen

I swear I saw Jack Frost today  
Painting my window with his brush

He was about the size of my hand  
And he looked cold to the touch

His clothes were made of dead leaves  
And his skin was white as snow

Perhaps Jack was a fairy  
Although he was bigger than most

I did notice that he had wings  
They were long and made of ice

He caught me staring and nipped my nose  
Which I thought was not very nice

Perhaps Jack was more like a sprite  
The type who liked to play tricks

When he tried to leave I grabbed his wings  
And he told me he was homesick

I let Jack go and away he flew  
Back into the woods

I swear I saw Jack Frost that day  
For my window had never looked so good.



“Webbed Seeds” by Paul Robinson



# Haunted

by Danielle Johnson

Late at night  
tucked away,  
out of sight.

Safe and sound  
I close my eyes.  
Dreaming of you,  
I try  
try to find the will to fight.

The demons grow,  
and I start to cry.  
I begin to wish  
to simply say  
goodbye.

I ask myself why I try,  
I remember you,  
and remember why.

You are both my  
salvation and demise.



“Orion above the Spanish Moss” by Paul Robinson

# “Oh Florida, your sun shines so brightly,”

by Zachary Werdell

Oh Florida, your sun shines so brightly,  
you fry my eyes like eggs,  
sunny side up...just how I like em!

You gift me with perspiration,  
from the curls of my hair  
to the backs of my knees.  
As if coated with a doughnuts glaze  
my shirt sticks to my chest.

ah, and the refreshing breath you give  
when I step outside!  
as if opening a bakers oven, sticking your head in  
and inhaling.  
That breath, is the breath,  
I am forever craving!

Each hour spent together on the beach  
gives a color not even lobsters could achieve.

Never can I take my mind off of you,  
not even when I lay to rest.  
for moving under the sheets,  
is as if 10-inch nails are lined straight up  
and sharpened like a tigers teeth.  
Sending tenacious tingles spindling down my spine  
Oh, my Florida sun,  
These must be tears of joy.



“The Lillypads Float as the Dock Sits Empty” by Paul Robinson

# Rod and Gunther: A Tale of Family Matters in Eizenweld

by Jordon Moran

## Part I

*As Told by Bryce The Bard, 13<sup>th</sup> Incarnation (Aquarius)*

Gather one! Gather all! For a tale most illustrious! I will weave for you a story full of adventure, turmoil, love and, of most, acceptance. Sit and drink! Brace yourself for a night of entertainment galore!

\*AHEM\*

Bryce the Bard, known for his wits, and his charm. Maidens beware, his appearance will disarm. The common-folk are his brothers and kings are his friends. When time to perform no other contends. Be silent and listen for this tale will quicken all emotions you contain. For this is my story of family, and what it means to have Bryce the Bard as your name!

It all started with my sixth birth to who would become my mother and father everlasting. Their names were Clora and Gunther. Clora has always been a beauty to behold and she had eyes only for Gunther, the carpenter of the town of Shadecliff. My father was a boulder of a man with a heart full of sheep's wool. Somehow, his mass of muscles were always the softest, warmest embrace one could ever know. Though, surely you all have heard of Gunther Woodman having made a name for himself as a carpenter as I have as a Bardic Champion Extraordinaire.

At this point I had only known my calling to be a Bard for four lifetimes. Though I had misfortune being reborn since learning of my craft. My families did not have the money or resources for music, that is until Gunther and Clora. Upon introducing myself to my parents at nearly 3 years of age, and through song, of course. I had also presented to them my internal shame of having mastered only one instrument in all that time, the harmonica. Of which is not among my

favorite instruments as of late, yet it is affordable and access to them is no obstruction. How I longed for a lute, I told them, the companion of choice for most bards in Eizenweld. Without access to instruments I would never be able to seriously pursue my calling. I had almost given up my own destiny.

The week before my next birthday Gunther took me into the forest and had me pick out a tree, but not just any tree would do. “The trees know what it is you desire. They see the vision in your mind and they will call to you, but you must be ready to listen to them.” Not sure what he meant, I closed my eyes and listened... nothing. Only wind and the rustling of leaves. I concentrated on my desire, my lute, I could see it clearly. It was shining burgundy in the firelight with strings of silver threaded along the neck. Then the wind nudged me and I opened my eyes. Before me was an island of trees in the middle of the forest and on that cloudy day, that small island was the only space haloed in sunlight. I walked through, arms outstretched, caressing the bark of each tree as I walked by until I found it. Father knew, said nothing, and we went home.

On my birthday I received that exact lute that I conjured up in my mind’s eye and any doubt I had about my calling faded with the first strum of the strings. Astraya and I have only been separated by death since then, and I always find her after I am reborn. “It was a magical experience creating this lute for you. The wood guided me, I knew exactly what to do and it took no time at all. That tree wanted to be this lute, it was destined to be this lute, and you were destined to each other. If you are to be fulfilled in your existence you should know everything about your calling. You don’t have to be a carpenter, but you should know how to create the instruments you use.”

Our first was a fiddle. Father made me do most of the work to acquaint myself with the tools. The hardest part was acquiring horsehair and hairing the bow. The end-product was technically a fiddle; let’s just say I’m not the best car-

penter in Eizenweld. There was progress in my second attempt and we continued working as father and son, introducing challenges to each other's calling. I would provide him with instruments to build and he would provide me with instruments to learn and master and we grew together in our skills and our bond. We eventually started a family business, "Bardic Harmonies," Eizenweld's first purveyor of instruments known and unknown. My mother, Clora, was our clerk and accounts manager, father would build any request and I would teach and play concerts to bring in extra revenue. That was the beginning of our family's grand success and our happiness was elating. Mother, father and I shared so much love and created such a bond, and we now have establishments in all seven domains. However, times of fortune seldom last, and tragedy would soon strike our family without mercy.

I was eighteen and father couldn't have been more than forty. We had gone into the wilderness to gather lumber for a harpsichord I had been eager to build and learn. When, suddenly, we were attacked! Taken unaware while mid-swing with my axe, I felt a massive force against my chest and lost all air within myself and was unable to inhale any more. Later, I was told my ribs were broken and my lungs had been punctured by said ribs. Luckily, I was long dead before the beast consumed my face and limbs. It killed my father as well, though it did not eat him, the last thing I remember before entering the darkness of the void for my wait, was Gunther, running wildly with his axe towards the bear and falling to the ground as well. We were gone, and Clora was all alone.

Bar maiden! Another flagon!

How many of you tavern dwellers know what twins are? Hm? None of you? Not surprising, the phenomenon know as twins is when a mother gives birth to two children at the same time. Yes, yes. "Impossible!" You say. Well it is true, it is quite rare, and I was once, many lifetimes ago, privy to the experience of being a twin. I had once, the privilege to meet the creator of our world. He told me many truths that

would make a lesser man go mad for eternity, but he also told me interesting secrets, about his world, Earth, and similarities between his home and mine. On Earth twins are not common but appear often enough that all people know of the occurrence. Eizenweld works differently. To become a twin in Eizenweld two people must die in the same place at the same time. My twin brother, Gunther, and I were born to a lovely couple on the coast about a month later, far, far away from Shadecliff. Far away from Clora.

My poor mother was now a grief-stricken widow that had to bury her husband and only son together, and she has decided to take her own life. She climbed the jagged terrain to the top of the cliff the loomed over the town, bestowing its namesake upon it. She now stood at the edge of the cliff, that from this point forward would be known as “Widow’s Woe,” and cast herself into the wind. The ground was approaching rapidly and the winds were cruel against her skin and so loud in her ears. She turned her body to face the sky, she was ready, calm, resigned to death, but death never came for her that day. Instead, she heard a word, even louder than the rushing air, “ENSNARE!” Suddenly, green vines sprouted from the cliff side and Clora felt herself suspended in midair. As the vines gently lowered her to the ground she saw a man approach.

Clora recognized the man, a hunter, Rod, if she wasn’t mistaken, and somewhat new to town. “Are you hurt?” he asked, concerned. “How dare you!?” She retorted. Shoving him away, she trudged home sobbing. She was so close, she missed her boys, they were everything to her. How could she go on without them? She composed herself and decided to try once more; this time when nobody will be around to stop her. She began her ascent just before the moon was at its peak in the night sky, giving her enough light to make the climb fairly unhindered. As she approached the cliffside she saw something move. She hid behind a rock and peeked out to find that someone else was already at the top! She couldn’t see who because, whoever it was, they were silhouetted by the unusually large and beautiful new moon. It was



a figure, a man, that much she could tell, but who? Who would be crazy enough to climb this stony cliff, let alone at this time of night? “You can come out, I know you’re there! What are you so afraid of? You came here to die didn’t you?” Immediately she knew who it was.

Rod was a burly man, but lean, this was the result of his calling. Clora would eventually learn that Rod was a hunter. He realized this eight lifetimes ago and has been working hard to master his craft ever since. There are many skills for hunters to learn and master: ranged weapons, sneak, tracking, survival, animal knowledge and training, and much more. It truly is an endearing goal to become the master hunter. At the time, Rod had mentioned he’d been training in Trap magic in the hopes of learning a new spell. “You must be quite talented indeed, being able to manipulate mana with but a single word.” Clora admitted with a smidgeon of bemusement. Rod looked her in the eyes, but more through her, he was contemplating something, then he spoke.

“I’ve never been able to do that before. Granted, that’s the first time I’ve used that spell to *save* a life. I think you brought that out of me, and for that I owe you. I am aware that you have come here this night to leap to your demise, and to repay my debt, I shall not stand in your way. Though I have one request of you. It’s been so, so long, I’ve been alone all this time and I’ve never said it aloud. I’ve never told anyone before; I don’t know if I ever could tell anyone. It’s poison, eating away at my heart. I need to let it out! I need someone to hear it! I can tell you, you are about to die anyway, also, you remind me of her.” His voice was strained, as though he were holding back tears.

“Remind you of who?” Clora couldn’t help but be intrigued.

“Astrid, my wife.” This took Clora by surprise. She had seen Rod around town for about a year, but never with a woman. “She died, some time ago. It was all my fault.” His face darkened with that last statement.

“What did you do?” She blurted out, so caught up in the moment she couldn’t help it. Clora turned away embarrassed by her boldness. When she turned back, she was hypnotized by the way his falling tears glistened in the darkness, streaming down his high cheek bones and off his chiseled jaw, reflecting moonlight like diamonds on their way down to burst on the rocky ground below. She notices how handsome he is, in his dire sensitivity. She embraced him, and he said, “I know how you feel. My Samuel was only five.” He started to sob. “It was all my fault. I thought it was dead! I thought it was! I did! It happened right in front of me, but I was too late.” His breathing came in quick spurts, and the widow held him ‘til he calmed. She managed to coax the story out of him, assuring him she would take it to the grave. “I have only ever loved twice in all my lives...”

He spoke humbly when he spoke of her, it seemed odd to hear coming from such a gruff looking fellow. He would say that Astrid had, “Constellations for freckles,” and, “Raven’s hair that was so black ‘twas blue.” For a simple manner of speech, Clora found it to be quite poetic... sincere. Yet, she was confused. Clora had red hair, so red and fiery that it was flame in sun and blood in the moon. No freckles either, Clora had skin so pale and clear it was like fresh cream. “How do I remind you of her? From what you say, we look nothing alike.”

“Just you. The way you talk, no, more your attitude. Mostly your eyes. You have the exact same emerald green eyes. You are different, but I see her in your eyes. Like you’re kindred spirits. I see her even now. As you look at me, I see her! I’m so sorry I failed you, Astrid, Sam! I’m sorry!” He slammed his gloved fist into the hard ground. The pain throbbed, and he forgot for a moment the pain in his heart. Only for a moment. He looked Clora in the eyes and found comfort, trust, and for the first time, true empathy. He took a breath, calmed himself and spoke aloud for the first time the worse five minutes of his existence. The memory of witnessing his family, his first and only wife and young son, meet their untimely deaths.

And that is a tragic tale full of vengeance and a duty of love unfulfilled, doppelgangers, drakes with razor sharp tails and full of tricks that belie their bestial appearance; with adventure and turmoil. A sensational story that is certainly not for the faint of heart. Do you wish to hear how the hunter's family met their doom? How Rod ended up in Shadecliff? Well, you beautiful, effervescent pub goers of the island of Eiz Insel are in luck. You have a once in a lifetime opportunity to bear witness to the great bardic champion Bryce perform part two of this intrinsic account of family dynamics in this wondrous world of magic we inhabit. Perhaps, I shall even share more secrets of the creator. For, in Eizenweld, it is up to each of us to decide who is our true family, our family everlasting. My business in the sanctuary of Eiz Empel is scheduled days from now. If you enjoyed the evening's entertainment please leave a contribution towards my stay on your lovely island and treat the bar wenches as though they were family, you never know, one day they just might be.

## Contributor Bios

**Aaron Battishill:** I lived in a household that was considered poverty. I did not even know if I was gonna actually be able to go to college after high school, because of how much I screwed up during it. But now I'm almost done with college and possibly going to a university for animation. When I was younger I was a history and science fiction nut. My days watching the history channel before I discovered the internet have stuck with me and have influenced my story telling. I was always interested in aliens and I even have a few characters I have made up that are aliens, so this short story and poem were written in Dr. Ford's Creative Writing class.

My name is **Craig Eckert**, and I am currently enrolled to get my AA at the Venice Campus. I enjoy playing Dungeons and Dragons with my friends, and also play the Pokemon TCG. I live in Nokomis right near the beach which I love.

**Amanda Finsel:** I am an Honors SCF student, Sigma Kappa Delta member as well as Phi Theta Kappa member. I am currently perusing a degree in forensic psychology but poetry has a special place in my heart. Creative writing is a beautiful outlet for my emotions and my thoughts. As well as being a poet, I am a dancer and an artist.

**Claire Vanessa Gray** is a digital artist with a traditional background in fine arts that infuses her digital art with traditional drawing and painting techniques. She has been practicing her craft in different mediums for a lifetime and finds that she prefers to use the digital medium as she has a great passion for technology and computers. She is looking to pave a path into an art career after graduation and has already greatly improved her skill by attending the State College of Florida. When Claire isn't expressing herself creatively she enjoys gaming with friends and other geeky activities. She identifies as a nerd and a goth and her art reflects it. To Claire, being artistic

is a destined lifestyle that she has no choice but to give in to because she cannot resist the urge to create, so why not embrace it?

**Rachelle Hargrove:** I was born in Florida but grew up in Tucson Arizona. I'm a military brat, my dad is retired Air Force, and I also have the support of my loving mom and younger sister. I will be graduating SCF with an Associates Degree and then will continue my education and be getting a bachelors degree in Aerospace and Aeronautics.

**Danielle Johnson** is an English major. She enjoys writing poetry and short stories. When she isn't writing or studying she loves to read. She has lived in Venice her whole life. Danielle also loves animals.

**Pascale L. Pomerleau** was born and raised in Massachusetts in 2000 before moving to Florida in 2011. She participated in State College of Florida's dual enrollment program in her senior year of high school, where she developed her writing as more than a hobby. Pascale is working toward a degree in Computer Animation, hoping to transfer to Ringling College of Art and Design. Pascale has been drawing and writing stories for many years.

My name is **Paul Robinson**. I'm a 29-year-old photographer as well as a student, writer, and veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation New Dawn. I attend SCF as a Digital Photography major. My journey in photography began at 16 years old with a 35mm SLR. Around that time, I gained skill composing images of a wide variety of styles including Portraits, Landscapes, Nature, Macro and Astrophotography. You can find my images on my website [PaulRobinsonPhotography.MyPortfolio.com](http://PaulRobinsonPhotography.MyPortfolio.com).

# Elektraphrog Editors

**Miranda Olsen** was born in Port Charlotte, Florida, in 1998. She is currently attending State College of Florida as an English major, and is set to graduate in December. She has been writing since she could hold a pencil, and has written school plays, won writing awards, and even self-published a novel her senior year. She was a student journalist for the Asolo Theatre and worked with theatre and television critic Jay Handelman. She currently has her own website, editorial, and poetry blog. Miranda is also an artist, and attends conventions all throughout Florida, selling her work and meeting famous faces. She enjoys helping her friends with their English classes and has tutored in the past. She has worked as a daycare teacher and a camp counselor on and off for years, and has a passion for working with kids. Miranda plans to teach English overseas. You can find her in local libraries, bookstores, or coffee shops, usually writing or sketching.



**Max Lieberman** is one of the biggest nerds you will meet. From his love of League of Legends and video games to his love of eSport and comics, he can't be beat. Max was born and raised in Bradenton, Florida and for as long as he could remember was writing. Writing stories and poems but later switched to writing more articles. In high school he joined the yearbook staff and those years, 2014-2018, the staff won the All Florida's Award for their book. Being on yearbook staff unlocked a new love for journalistic writing in Max, and he now is getting his bachelor's in journalism in hopes to work as an interviewer for eSports events.



**Danielle Johnson** is an English major at State College of Florida. After completing her A.A. Degree she plans on transferring to University of South Florida to enter in their education program. She was born in Venice, Florida and has lived there for her entire life. Danielle fell in love with reading at a very young age, and became a writer just a few short years later. She writes mostly poetry and an occasional short story. She currently has a poetry blog, which she created in 2014. For many years Danielle dreamed of becoming an editor, but has since settled on becoming an English teacher. You can almost always find Danielle somewhere quiet with her nose in a book.

**Zachary Werdell** is just your average travel junky. He's currently working in a law firm as an assistant but most likely dreaming of his next destination. He is best known for his travel blog done while working in Costa Rica as a surf camp volunteer and in Panama as a bartender. Recently, he has been "backyard traveling" and is writing articles on local establishments. His Philosophy is best put in words by Logic's quote "Peace, Love, & Positivity. When he's not writing, he's enjoying a night playing acoustic guitar with his girlfriend, Casey, playing piano and his best friend, Logan, playing electric guitar.

**Matthew Wuethrich** was born in Portsmouth, Virginia in 1997. He was raised in Virginia Beach until the age of 12, when he and his family relocated to North Port. Wuethrich has always been an avid reader ever since childhood, and enjoys biographies, articles, and novels. In high school, he was a varsity swimmer, and still enjoys the water. Wuethrich is a Political Science Major, and plans to improve the country through activism. He enjoys fine dining, cooking shows, and documentaries. Wuethrich is one of three triplets, including his brothers Douglas and Gregory. He is a dog lover, and enjoys spending time with his German Shepherd Greta.







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