

The background of the cover is a full-page landscape painting. It depicts a wide, sunlit valley with a winding river or stream in the middle ground. The foreground is filled with golden-yellow and green fields. In the distance, there are dark, forested mountains under a sky filled with large, white, billowing clouds. The overall style is impressionistic and colorful.

# **ARISTER**

## **2020**

**The Creative Arts Magazine of  
Christian Brothers Academy**

## *Editors' Letter*

*For the past year, it has been an honor to lead the Arister staff in working with the best short stories, artwork, photography, and poetry that the CBA student body has to offer. A little-known fact about this magazine is the origin of its name. The Arister started under retired CBA English teacher Mr. Joe Fili, who named the Arister after the Greek word "arista", meaning creative excellence. As in past years, I feel that through their submissions to the 2020 Arister, CBA students have continued to embody arista in their creative works.*

*This spring, significant time off from school due to the coronavirus outbreak has presented the staff of the Arister with an unprecedented challenge in assembling this year's magazine. I'd like to thank my fellow staff members for their flexibility and persistence during this period of time. Despite these trying circumstances, I am confident in saying that the 2019-2020 Arister has still been able to fully capture the creative potential of the Academy. This year, I was pleased to see a wide range of students submit their creative works. Many underclassmen took the initiative to submit to the Arister for the first time, and numerous seniors were still happy to offer their creative energy even in their final months of high school. The Arister continues to serve as a useful outlet for all CBA students to express their creativity and to discover passions and talents that they never knew that they possessed. As Dr. Suess once so eloquently said, "Think left and think right and think low and think high. Oh, the things you can think up if only you try".*

*I hope that reading the 2020 Arister brings you as much enjoyment as helping to curate the magazine has brought me during my four years at CBA.*

*Happy Reading,*

*Matt Bell, Editor-in-chief 2019-2020*

*Your Faithful Editors*

*Staff - Maximus Bean '20, Sebastian Marchese '21, Patrick Dolan '22*

*Moderator - Mrs. Viola*



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*\*Winner of the Arister Scary Story Contest*

*\*\*Winner of the Arister Cover Art Contest*

# An Outsider's Perspective on Fairy Tales

## By Maximus Bean

0

O! Here I start  
Pray the Gods wish me well  
As this bard tells his part  
In the Grimm's folklore Hell

1

I can first remember the boy named Jack  
He was indeed wandering around  
Until he came across my humble claque;  
He was selling his cow for five pounds  
I heard he was later talked  
into this current giant mess  
By climbing up some beanstalk  
And raiding some Giant's chests.

2

One day, I was traveling through the wood  
When I saw this teen girl with a basket  
She was wearing a pretty, scarlet hood  
But a wolf stalked behind her; I asked it:  
"How are you balanced on your hind legs?"  
Yet he did not reply  
He was dressed to the nines, despite in the dregs  
It seemed he was quite shy  
I was suspicious admittedly  
But I just strung up a tune  
The one of the two, indeed went free  
The path; the girl should follow through

3

Upon my travels, only once I've seen  
A tower reaching high into the sky  
This place was hidden behind the green;  
At the tower's base, thorns did lie  
I only had a glimpse of the golden locks  
That hung outside of the stained window  
I wondered, "Have they ever hit the bedrock  
And get tangled in the thicket below?"

4 (1)

In my early days, into the woods I had come  
I once stopped to draw a pail for my horse  
When my sight had encountered a trail of light crumbs  
And I decided to make a new course  
I began to follow upon that new path  
When hated sparrows came down to feast  
I spurred my horse to inflict my sudden wrath  
I let my steed trample over those beasts.

(Interjection)

I spurn sparrows with a spirit, if you could not already tell  
They carried off my father and mother  
My elder siblings sought after them, only to be sent to Hell  
I was left alone--for I had no other  
That may explain my horrid treatment  
Of these evil, untrustful birds  
Now I will resume about my predicament  
With a surplus of rhyming words

4 (2)

I followed the trail until I saw a domain  
It's windows were shining bright  
The house itself appeared very plain  
But I soon glanced a different sight  
The house was made of delectable treats  
That I'd not seen in years  
Curious, I dismounted from my seat  
I heard the sound of tears  
I knocked on the door with the intent to aid  
It opened with a loud creak  
I called out to whomever was in the shade  
Two kids silent, not a squeak  
They looked at each other  
They stared at me  
The sister and brother  
Intending to flee  
They raced to the back  
I clamored for a pause  
But when I ran through their tracks  
They had disappeared; a lost cause  
I hastily returned to the front of the place

To continue my last course  
But anger and horror appeared on my face  
those kids were stealing my horse!  
I cursed at them and sprinted fast  
My mighty horse ran much faster still  
I was stranded, hungry and aghast  
So I grabbed a piece of windowsill  
I began the long walk home,  
I brought bits of that house to sustain me.  
It was all night that I roamed.  
Soon I crashed on my bed with new pastry

5

Admittedly a bad habit of mine  
I am a consistent insomniac  
But honestly, I really do feel fine  
Though hallucinations oftentimes attack  
One night I was returning to a fine inn  
Of where I was known to play often  
When suddenly appeared a monstrous sin  
A pale vampire out of it's coffin!  
Then my mare trampled over it.  
Anticlimactic; I am aware  
But if you fall to a ride's mitt,  
You will soon have plenty to repair.

6

I was failing to sleep in an inn one night,  
Heartbroken over a jilt.  
When a little man gave me quite a bad fright  
As I was wrapped in a quilt.  
My eyes opened to a monologue  
Much to my tired dismay  
For ten full minutes this man slogged  
About gold and bales of hay  
I, however, simply wanted to rest  
So I shooed him out, past my oak door  
But just when I turned my back to that pest  
He burst in to pester about lore!  
I could not sleep with all his commotion  
So I kicked at that rotten thorn

He asked me to quiet my emotions  
To sleep, I must give my firstborn  
At this point I was very drained  
My hands felt on fire!  
I held my lute in a restrained  
glare of mighty ire  
My fingers glided across the strings  
A soft, beautiful melody rang  
He stepped closer; I readied a swing  
It knocked into his head with a clang  
He flew, but was cut in two.  
By a hanging axe on the wall.  
Oh you should have seen the view!  
I slept soundly after his fall.

# **Dominic's Traumatizing Treasure**

**By Thibaut Fabricant**

**Dominic had lived in a bubble for all of his life  
He avoided all causes of unneeded strife  
But one fateful day he came upon a chest  
That he opened and found a perilous quest  
“To obtain riches beyond your wildest dreams  
Venture to the dungeon that is not what it seems”  
Confused, he bit his lip, in a thoughtful way  
And abutting the chest, he spied a door made of clay  
His heart began pounding as he lurked through the opening  
He smelled a rancid effluvium that almost seemed to sting  
Proceeding further through the dungeon, Dominic rounded a corner  
Before popping his head out, he seemed to hear a murmur  
As he peeked into the chamber, his movement seemed drawn out, for his  
Sight fell upon a corpse, flexed, in rigor mortis!  
Nearly fainting right then, he dashed through the room  
Finally finding the room of treasure, flowing out of a tomb!**





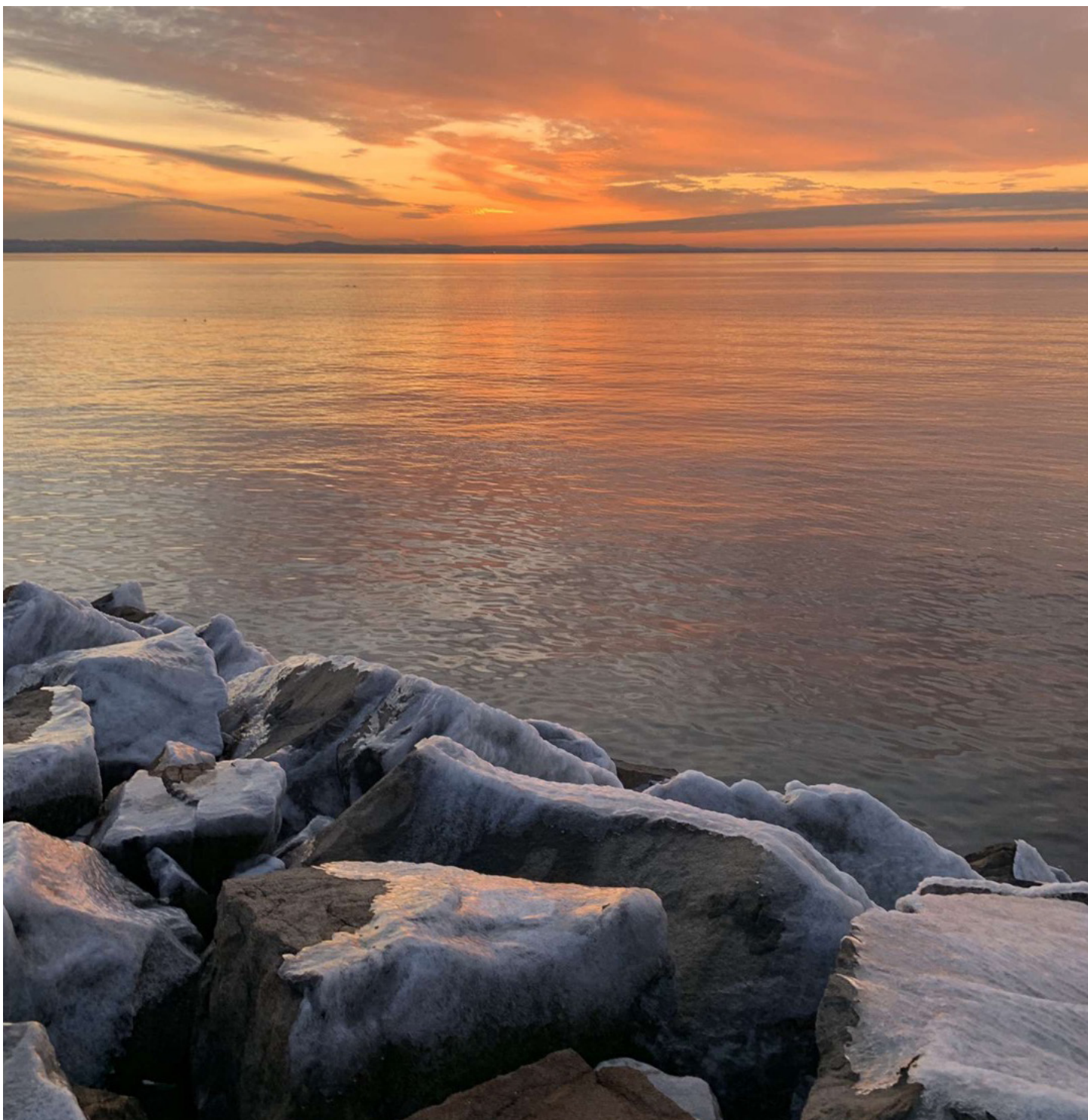
**Photographed by Troy Rudolph**





Photographed by Troy Rudolph





**Photographed by Troy Rudolph**



Photographed by Eric Hawkins





**Photographed by Matt Bell**





**Photographed by Ryan Perry**



**Photographed by Gary Fletcher**





**Photographed by Maximus Bean**

# An Apple A Day

## By Tyler Umbra

For years he'd survived on the orchard, free from their prodding fingers; now it was twenty-four hours since he'd eaten his last remaining apple. Sitting across from the door with a shotgun in his arms, he began to look back on how his life had come to this conclusion. A group of survivors –a mother and her children– had picked the trees clean back in late September. He didn't stop them. He had defended his land before but what was he supposed to do? Kill a kid? He wasn't a monster, and he wasn't going to allow the madness outside to turn him into one. That harvest was for early October, but he still had the harvest from mid-September. The October harvest would've gotten him through the spring until the summer clusters came in. That mid-September harvest was only meant to get him through the winter. It almost didn't. The doctors managed to shut down the power grid and his refrigerator stopped working. After two weeks the apples turned wrinkly and mushy. This, coupled with the fact that he had no heat, created quite a hopeless situation. However, the human spirit can take a person very far. For the month of February, he ate only rotten apples. Towards the end, it took him hours to get them down each day, and for what? They were never going to last him until summer, he knew that from the beginning. Something kept him going, but he couldn't place it.

"Forget all that!" he said aloud. What good would it do to think it over now? This was the end. He sat still for a moment. This was the end. He saw that clearly now. A single tear rolled down his cheek and soon, so did many more. His cries were interrupted by footsteps outside the cabin.

"Are you ready for your checkup?" He froze. There was a metallic tapping on the door. They were using stethoscopes to hear inside.

"We know you're in there." They began to break down the door with their reflex hammers. Panic spread across his face, but he was still unable to move. One doctor saw him through the hole they created and threw a syringe –just as one might throw a dart– directly into his chest. This pulled him out of his paralytic state. After forcefully removing the syringe, he pumped the shotgun and aimed it at the door...

# The Forest of Plasin

By Gianluca Scardino

The quaint town of Plasin was known for many things: great food, kind people, and the beautiful forest that surrounded it. The forest, as mysterious as it was vast, is by far the town's most magnificent feature. No one would be able to tell you how Plasin came to be encompassed by the marvel of trees and shrubs, but for as long as it has been around, people couldn't resist visiting. In fact, those who visit usually end up staying, like Tom Bretherford, a resident of Plasin for over 20 years. Tom was a man of large stature, and had a beard that hugged the sides of his face like the wrapping paper on Christmas presents. Tom had a benevolent family, consisting of two young girls, and a wife named Betsy. Tom was always a hard worker, spending most of his days at the local logging industry. By the time he came home from his ten hour shift, Tom's daughters were fast asleep. Tom wished he could make more time for his children, but this thought was clouded by Tom's desire for a promotion. Although he could never expect his children to be awake when he returns, Tom could always bet on Betsy bombarding him with her incessant nagging. Nothing was ever good enough for her, and as her daily comments persisted, Tom's loathing for her grew. The thought always came to his mind, but Tom never followed through. It was tempting, urging him everyday, until one day Tom decided to switch up his post-work routine. So on the 21st night of September, as the full moon rose on the innocent town of Plasin, Tom arrived at his house after his shift and headed straight towards his bedroom closet, almost knocking his wife over as he sped up the stairs. Behind the hung up shirts and jackets, laid an axe, sturdy and sharp, which Tom promptly picked up. He raced down the stairs, and approached the kitchen where her voice was projecting from. Betsy seemed confused, watching as her husband approached her with an axe. Tom held a sinister grin on his face, and broke the silence with a booming exclamation.

"I'm going to do what I should've done along time ago," Tom pronounced, examining the weapon in his grasp.

He approached closer to his wife, who seemed concerned for her well being. "I'm going to the woods to chop down the most beautiful tree, that we shall place in our front yard for all the neighbors to admire," He proclaimed.

Before Betsy could respond, Tom was already out of the house. It just so happens that the Bretherford's had a long line of lumberjacks that preceded them. In fact, Tom's own father was one of the greatest lumberjacks in Plasin, until he suddenly disappeared on the night of a full moon. Tom was no stranger to cutting down trees, and if it wasn't enough that the lumberjack blood already ran through him, Tom had a great incentive. He would finally have something that would please his wife, and hopefully keep her from complaining for a while. Betsy loved the forest, every aspect of it, and she always wished to have a tree as amazing as the forest's to look at from home.

Tom wasted no time, reaching the trail that led directly through the forest just as the town clock struck midnight. The forest seemed alive this evening, more than it ever has. The wind was strong yet soothing, and the moon illuminated the trees. It was hard to imagine that



this forest could appear any more inviting, but this night was unlike any other. However, for whatever the reason, the enchantment of the forest had no effect on Tom. Tom was oblivious to the odd behavior of the forest. Perhaps he was too occupied with his goal. As he walked through, none of the trees seemed special to him. In fact, they all seemed to be exactly the same, all except one. A single tree, standing in a clear section in the forest, glistening as though it was being presented to Tom. He darted towards the perfect tree, feeling the dead leaves break under his shoes as he ran. The moonlight projected on the tree like a spotlight, its sturdy trunk awaiting the embrace of a sharp axe. Tom swung the axe behind his body, and brought it into the tree with great force. As the axe connected, it seemed as though the entire forest went silent. Tom removed the axe from the tree, and prepared for another swing. Just as he brought his arm back again, a rustling noise came from the bushes behind him. Tom turned around slowly, gripping his axe tighter than before. As he approached the bush, a figure could be seen, just beyond the light of the moon. Tom was horrified to see that the figure behind the bush, was a bear, at least twice the size of himself. Tom hurtled backwards on his back and held his arms over his head, using the axe to block his vision. As he prepared for what he thought was going to be an attack, nothing happened. Tom quickly rose to his feet to investigate, shaking with fear. As he looked closer, Tom noticed that the bear was bleeding, and twigs were strung all throughout its body like puppet strings. The tree behind the bear began to shake, and as it did, fluid began to course out of the bear, through the twigs and into the tree. It seemed as though the bear was being drained, until it was shrunk into an empty bag of skin and fur. What once was the bear, fell to the ground as the tree retracted its arms. Tom was speechless, he had just witnessed what seemed to be a tree feeding on an animal. He knew that trees and plants were alive, but this behavior was unheard of. Tom slowly walked back, until he felt a sharp pain in his right ankle. Looking down at his feet, Tom saw the limb of a tree sticking through his foot. He screamed in pain, but mostly in fear, grabbing his right leg and pulling with all of his strength. Tom did all he could do to be free of its grasp, but his efforts only caused him to fall over. Before he could stand back up, more tree limbs stretched out under his arms and wrapped around them like a snake would to its prey. Tom was becoming entrapped by the tree he deemed perfect. His leg went numb with pain, and he made one last effort lunging forward to grab his axe that was knocked out of his hand. Just before he could get ahold of it, the tree limbs that wrapped his arms pulled Tom off the ground. Two more twisted limbs enveloped Tom's legs, stretching him out like Jesus on a crucifix. The twigs on the tree's limbs crawled down Tom's arms and legs, scraping down his skin. Tom was unable to move, paralyzed by pain, but convoluted as the tree dug its jagged branches into Tom's wrists. His cries resembled those of an animal, piercing through the quiet night sky. Although as he cried, the wind began to pick up, creating a massive wind tunnel of sound, blocking out Tom's screams for help. Tom could feel the tree sucking the blood through his arms, draining them until his skin stuck tightly to the bones on his arms and legs. As the tree continued depleting the rest of Tom's body, he looked at the rows of trees ahead of him. They shimmered and shook, as if they were celebrating something. The lack of blood left Tom delirious, making the situation seem somewhat comedical. During his last few seconds of consciousness, Tom was in a fit of laughter, until the forest went completely silent.

On the morning of September 22nd, the people of Plasin gathered at the edge of their beautiful town. Whenever there was a full moon, the town would take time out of their day to get an up close look at the forest. No one would be able to tell you why, but the forest always looked so alive after a full moon, and everyone was excited to get a glimpse. One may wonder why the town loved its trees so much, and why they never grow tired of the sight. Whatever the reason, there was no denying that the forest of Plasin looked especially magnificent that morning.

# The Spirit of the Jungle Diamond

## By Stephen Makin

Doctor Richard McCollough stepped off the midnight train to New York City. It was 1869, and he had been in a bit of a tight spot since the end of the war. He needed money and, well, crime was easy. He was in a new city, ready to continue his interesting little “profession”, as he so dearly called it. The doctor often got this feeling after leaving town on the midnight train. It was dark out, and the cold air felt refreshing. Nobody would ever find him here. He was simply a tiny little speck in the midst of a giant colony of little specks, huddled together for warmth and security. What better way to escape than to go out at night, when everyone is tucked away in their homes, sound asleep?

The black smoke billowed out from the train, as the coal burned hot in the cold October weather. The whistle blew loudly and clearly, and Doctor McCollough watched as the engine chugged forward along the cold, steel tracks. All of a sudden, he got the sensation that he had left something on the train. He tried to remember the contents of the briefcase which he had left on his seat, and briefly began to panic. However, his panic subsided almost as soon as it had begun, as he remembered that it contained only false clues to deter the lawmen. He had removed the most important item before he had left.

Doctor McCollough removed this item, a small postcard, from his jacket pocket, but saw that it was simply too dark outside to read it. That didn't matter, though. He had read through it enough times already. The postcard went something like this: *“Have you ever wished to see the wonders of ages past? Attend the grand opening of the Museum of Natural History, New York City!”*

There were some pictures of old dinosaur bones, ancient Egyptian relics, and old relics of civilizations once lost to time. However, one picture interested Doctor McCullough the most. Towards the bottom of the postcard, there was a bright, shimmering diamond. It was the most beautiful object which, in all his years of thievery, he had ever seen. The diamond had a bright blue hue, and the light shining off of it seemed to dance around the paper, even in the cold October darkness.

Doctor McCollough had to steal it that night. He didn't have any more time. The law was on his tail. He needed money for a passport, and train tickets to Mexico. There, he would be scott free. Until then, he had in his mind only one solitary objective: steal the diamond.

The doctor walked up the street, until he got to Central Park. He stopped, and took in the surroundings. It was so pretty at night. *Perhaps*, he thought, *I can move here in my old age, after my trouble with the law is over.* He knew his chances were slim, but why not take a chance? It was New York, after all, the city of opportunity.

The doctor finally arrived at the steps of the Museum of Natural History. He knew better than to go up the stairs. There were security guards, who were most likely armed. With a musket wound, the doctor knew he would never make his escape quickly enough. Instead, Doctor McCollough withdrew a short rope from his trenchcoat. He crept around through an alleyway to the back entrance, where security would be lighter, and the walls would be short enough for his rope to reach the roof. He tossed the rope up around the corner of the roof, and tied the

other end of the rope to his waist. The doctor began to pull himself up to the top of the museum.

Doctor McCollough swiftly found a skylight, which he smashed with his boot. He untied the rope from the edge of the roof, and used it to rappel down into the museum's grand entryway. The rope was not nearly long enough to reach the floor from that position, and he was forced to jump. The doctor sprained his ankle, and the pain began to spread.

He cursed his rotten luck. Now his chances of escape were extremely threadbare, and were shrinking by the second. The guards had, of course, heard the sound of the skylight being smashed, and were on their way to the lobby. Doctor McCollough limped away to the nearest exhibit. Anywhere was better than where he had been standing.

He hobbled into the next room, and was stunned by how dark it was. The walls were painted black, and the room had no candles or lanterns. The doctor realized that this was a line queue, and that the real exhibit was down the hall. He shuffled down the dark corridor, and began to see a dim light at the end. The light grew steadily larger, until he could see it radiating around the room. He knew what was next. It was the diamond!

Doctor McCollough had never beheld such a beautiful object in all his life. He read the plaque beneath the glass case. *"The Jungle Diamond,"* it read, *"was a coveted prize in ancient India. Recovered from a temple believed by locals to be haunted, the diamond is reportedly able to summon a great spirit from another world. The ancient diamond was once fought over by many great dynasties, until an unknown monarch was, legend has it, beheaded by the mythical ghost."*

The doctor almost laughed. Even in childhood, he had been immune to the thrill of ghost stories. Even the possibility of God seemed unlikely to the doctor's rigid mind, let alone a tale of some anonymous ghost from ancient India.

Doctor McCollough's ankle pains became dull and numb. He no longer felt the effects of the chilling winds. He felt only greed. Disregarding the pain from the shattering glass, the doctor punched through the glass panel in front of the diamond. All he could focus on were his thoughts of finally completing the perfect crime.

Upon removing the diamond, his mind flashed back to the inscription on the plaque. *"... the diamond is reportedly able to summon a great spirit from another world."* The doctor's mind began to wander, taking him back to his studies of India as a schoolboy. He remembered that it was a splendid place for archaeologists, and that it had once been brimming with shining gold and forgotten relics.

He remembered an old story which his uncle had told him, of an old adventurer by the name of Richard Gierik. Gierik was a brave, swashbuckling explorer who dedicated his life to finding as much ancient gold as he possibly could, all while escaping with his life. One night, it was said, the man met his untimely demise attempting to steal another relic from the vaults of history. But it wasn't this that frightened Doctor McCollough. The doctor knew that death was simply an occupational hazard for a grave robber such as Gierik. Instead, the doctor was frightened of something else: it was said that Gierik had been beheaded... by a ghost!

With the diamond in his hands, Doctor McCollough began to make his way toward the archive hall, where he knew that there would be a discreet exit. He tried his very best to put the ghost story out of his mind. It was difficult, though, as this was his first experience with the

numbing, chilling thought of a bloodthirsty phantom. Most learn to get over this fear quickly as they age. The doctor, forever known to those who met him as a man of reason and rationality, was only beginning to know fear. It didn't help matters that this may well have been the worst possible time to be struck with such a worrying sensation.

The doctor finally shook the thought from his mind as he approached the door to the archives. Luckily, it appeared as if all of the guards had traveled to the lobby in search of the man responsible for the broken skylight. As the doctor reached for the door to the archives hall, he was struck by the thought that perhaps the guards had discovered the diamond. Perhaps they were on their way to the archive hall at that exact moment. Could he be *trapped*?

The doctor knew that the first onset of fear was bound to bring on more. He knew that in order to escape with his life and sanity, he would be forced to confront his fears of the otherworldly spirit. He sat down by an unlit lantern, and went to light it. He hadn't seen the light since the previous day. He then remembered that he had no matches, and let out a small sigh. He placed the diamond on the ground, and began to stare at it intently.

The room seemed to grow darker. The doctor could feel the fear beginning to engulf him. He quieted his mind, and reached out to touch the diamond. Its temperature was merely a synopsis of the recent weather: cold. The doctor thought he saw the oddest of quiverings from the diamond's blue light. He began to see the words from the plaque play out in his mind. He began to hear his uncle's story of Richard Gierik, and the piece about the beheading began to form out in his brain, repeating over and over again.

Doctor McCollough drew himself up swiftly, with his vision of terror ending almost as soon as it had begun. He tucked the diamond back under his long trenchcoat, and began to limp away. Along the way, he began to feel his heartbeat. It began to beat faster. Soon it was even faster. It began to speed up with every step that he took. He stopped, and the diamond fell out of his coat. Immediately the speed of his heartbeat began to relax. Instead, the diamond itself began to tremble, vibrating and taking tiny hops along the hallway in no particular direction.

The doctor looked back, and saw a light. It was the lantern which he had seen earlier! Was it the guards? The doctor picked up his diamond, began to run. He disregarded the pain from his ankle, even though the pain seemed to grow exponentially with every stride. The lights began to catch up with the sprinting Doctor McCollough. Looking back, though, he saw no guards. The lanterns appeared to be lighting up spontaneously, as if by magic.

Suddenly, the doctor tripped. He couldn't tell why, as there had been nothing blocking his path. He noticed that it was a struggle to stand. In fact, it felt as if he was being forced down by some mysterious weight. The doctor was trapped. The diamond began to glow in his coat pocket. The light radiated from his trenchcoat like warm daylight from the sun. All of a sudden, all of the light vanished from the diamond. It appeared to be leaking out of the coat and onto the ground. The light began to swirl along the floor. It began to take shape, a definitive form... it was the Ghost of the Jungle Diamond!

Doctor McCollough let out a blood-curdling shriek. For a moment, he forgot about the guards. He forgot about his injury. He forgot about retirement. He just wanted to escape. The diamond, with no color or shining luminance, was worthless. It wouldn't be enough for train tickets all the way to Mexico. However, he felt as if the diamond had caused him too much



trouble to simply be left behind. He reached over across the floor to pick his prize. He still could not stand up, and had to stretch every muscle in his arm to retrieve the discolored stone.

When he turned around, diamond in hand, the ghost let out a nightmarish roar. The doctor turned to face it. The ghost was about ten feet tall, and seven feet wide. He had a bluish hue, much like what the diamond once had. He had long, razor-sharp teeth. A liquid began to drip from the spirit's mouth, which the doctor soon identified as blood.

"YOU HAVE STOLEN MY DIAMOND!" roared the ghost. "NOBODY WHO HAS STOLEN MY DIAMOND LIVES!"

"I'm afraid you are mistaken!" shouted Doctor McCollough, still trapped beneath the invisible force. "Let me up, and I'll be on my way, I promise!"

The spirit glared at the doctor, with murder in his unholy eyes. "WHAT GOOD ARE PROMISES FROM A THIEF? YOU LIVED, AND WILL SOON DIE, FOR ONLY YOUR-SELF!"

At this point, the doctor remembered that his life really was at stake. He began to struggle underneath the weight keeping him subdued. The more he struggled, the more it hurt. He still refused to give up the fight.

The doctor threw the diamond down the hall with what little strength he had left. The ghost saw it, and gasped. The spirit chased after the stone, completely disregarding Doctor McCollough. The force on the doctor's back subsided, and he could stand again. He knew that the ghost would return soon, though, and took off toward the exit.

He began to hear a strong wind sweeping down the hall. He heard the shouts of the ghost, and realized that the ghost was getting closer. Following him. Stalking him. The doctor ducked into a closet filled with skulls. They appeared to be of some breed of ancient humans, more ape than sentient lifeform. The skulls rattled as he stepped inside. The doctor got the odd sensation that they were watching him.

Five minutes went by. Then ten. Then twenty. The doctor began to feel sleepy. He hadn't slept in three days, between plotting and carrying out his crime. It seemed, in his tired mind, completely depressing that he had not been able to pull off the one scheme which had been keeping him awake for the last few nights. He vowed revenge against the ghost if he ever got out alive. He cursed his poor planning, and his lack of sense. The doctor let out a yawn, and began to sleep among the bones.

His dreams were dark and stormy. They soon began to morph, and took the shape of nightmares. Unseen evils danced around in his mind. He saw the diamond, he saw himself steal it. He witnessed the ghost, and saw it roar. He saw the guards... they were laughing, mocking the doctor's careful planning and acute strategy. Someone in the dream let out a scream, and then a cry for mercy. Then silence. Then he woke up.

The doctor opened his eyes to see that he had fallen out of the closet. The skulls had fallen all over the floor. The doctor was surprised to see that they all appeared to be looking straight at him. He began to laugh at himself, and began to believe that the ghost himself had been merely a dream, a night terror that had felt real, but wasn't. He had almost convinced himself of this when all of the skull's eye sockets turned bright blue. Diamond blue. Ghost blue.

The soft blue light began to pour out of the skulls. It swirled around Doctor

McCollough, engulfing him. It was the brightest light that the doctor had seen for some time. The light once again took the form of the ghost. The ghost grabbed the screaming doctor, and lifted him off the ground. Blood dripped onto the doctor's face from the ghost's bleeding mouth. The doctor struggled at first, but soon gave up. There was nothing he could do. He was surprised to see that the ghost was taking him to the museum's exit.

The ghost placed his gnarled blue hands on the lock, unlocked the door, and opened it. The ghost threw the doctor onto the sidewalk. Suddenly, the ghost's right hand began to melt away. It began to take up a new form. With no other choice, the doctor waited anxiously to see what it would turn into. The doctor identified the hand's new form as a large battle axe. He knew that his sanity must have been slipping away as the ghost raised the axe above his head, and brought it down swiftly on the doctor's neck. In the split second before his mind faded to nothingness, the doctor had a moment of shock. He remembered something from the train. He had, in fact, forgotten something. He had left it there with his briefcase. What could it have been? The doctor didn't have much time to ponder this, as he fell asleep, this time forever.

He had died on the midnight train.

# Melancholy

## By Maximus Bean

Ethan Bellam needed to move. This fact became clear when his filtration system somehow broke for the second time this week. The “water” now leaking into his sink had turned into a black ooze. Ethan was washing the dishes at the time, so it was quite disruptive. The smell was foul, navigating its way through the kitchen and invading every crack and seam of the house. Ethan’s concern for this ooze amplified when something snake-like shot up out of the liquid and tried wrapping around his hand. Ethan cursed and dropped the plate he was cleaning. It crashed into the floor, breaking into several pieces. For a moment he stopped to stare at the strange shape. He snatched a few warm washcloths and mentally prepared himself to grasp the creature. Soon it was wriggling from his hands, smoking. He heard a demonic screech from the pipes... no time to dwell on that. With his elbow, he managed to speed-dial Father Adrian, a priest at the local church. Ever since moving in a few weeks ago, Ethan had taken up the habit of calling a priest when these types of issues arose. It was cheaper and cleaner than other options, although it was more often than not a short-term solution. The priest soon picked up.

“What is it now, Mr. Bellam?”

“Hey Father, sorry for the late call but I’m pretty sure something has possessed my pipes again.” Ethan could hear the priest sigh with exhaustion on the other end.

“Do you think that I can do this one over the phone?”

Ethan agreed and put him on speaker. Father Adrian started the exorcism and began chanting what seemed to be gibberish. The usual Latin hocus pocus. Even so, the ooze screamed again as the image of a contorted face presented itself to Ethan’s surprise. Ethan screamed and let go of the ooze snake. The goop huddled in the corner of the sink with haste, writhing and smoking in pain. It was too thick; it could neither go back through the faucet nor down the drain. The goop continued smoking until it evaporated in sync with the final verses of Father Adrian’s mantra. As soon as Father Adrian uttered the last phrase, the elderly priest quickly hung up before Ethan could thank him. Soon after, Crystal clear water flowed through the nozzle when the sink was turned on. The stench had disappeared. Thank God for religion, he noted with a smirk. The old wives’ tale about silver crossed Ethan’s mind. He hung a silver fork over the faucet with some twine and continued to clean. He figured it was somewhat sensible now considering what had happened.

Ethan parked his car and stepped out into the sunlight. He was at the Nature Observatory and Water Management building. It was a shoddy building; vines wrapped themselves around the building making it look like a Christmas present laid out five months too early. The dome structure on top looked like it had succumbed to years of torment, illustrated by the thousands of cracks and marks in the glass that could be seen from the street below. His knock on the door was soon answered by a young redheaded woman clad in green and brown. She gave him a nasty sneer and called him a “city-dweller” before slamming the door in his face. Ethan had a brief thought about leaving after that; but before he could, the door opened again.

In the doorway stood a pretty brunette with a bandage on her right hand.

"Please excuse my...er..sister, now what was it you wanted?" she said with a chuckle.

"Uhh... something keeps cursing my water. Black goo poured out of my faucet, and it made horrific noises. I just want to get my water working, that's all." Ethan looked at her hand. "Are you alright?"

When mentioning the word "cursing", her face had turned a ghastly white. Her cheerful demeanor had become dark and almost volatile.

"I'm fine. I just burned myself making dinner last night." she replied in a quiet tone. She stood aside. "Come on in and we'll see what we can do for you."

Ethan entered with caution. The building's interior was less of a building and more of one of those indoor nature preserves. It was far bigger on the inside than it appeared from the outside. There were trees all around, with a few rough stone paths along the floor leading in different directions. Wooden signs pointed the way around the observatory. The ratty-haired woman led him along towards the path that marked the water station. They passed a few muddy-looking individuals dressed in animal skins who gave Ethan dirty looks as he passed into their field of vision. After a few minutes of walking side-by-side; her stroll maintained on the grass and him lumbering on gravel. The pair then reached the door that read "Water Maintenance". She ushered him inside. The room was dark and a wicked stench reached Ethan's nose. He tried to flick the light switch on, yet nothing happened. It was clear this room hadn't been maintained well. Ethan was suspicious that something more sinister was going on. Unperturbed, the woman lit a candle.

"Here we go! Come along now!" She continued walking, leaving Ethan in the darkness. The woman stepped over something, but Ethan tripped over it.

"Excuse the bodies," remarked the woman.

"*Bodies?! What the H-*"

"Yes, bodies! How else do you think we keep the water clean?!"

Anxiety and confusion began to take hold of Ethan's mind. When he looked around, he could make out the decaying portions of other cadavers on the floor. Even so, he shuffled along close to the protection the dim candle offered. He had a sudden compulsion to leave. They were tampering with the water somehow. And killing people, that as well.

"Hey, uh..I-I think I should go... You guys probably have it all figured out with the water and such..."

"Are you sure?" The woman stared at him with tempting eyes. "I mean we're almost there. It would be *quite* a shame to leave now."

Ethan heard shuffling a few yards in front of him.

"I'm sure," he whimpered.

"Very well."

She tried to snatch his arm, but it was to no avail. Ethan was off; he burst towards the door, sprinting like his life depended on it.

"SISTERS!" shouted the woman.

All that the running man could add to her statement was "Shitshitshitshitshit!"

Straightaway Ethan saw a figure move to block the exit of the room. He crashed into her with a yelp, falling into the sunlight. The glint of dark red hair tipped him off that it was the same chick from earlier. She howled and grabbed at Ethan. In a barrage of cursing and hollering, Ethan shoved off her and made a beeline up the path. The woman pursued, screaming that people like him are destroying the “Great Replenisher”. As Ethan ran, he looked around, trying to remember where he entered from. With desperation clouding his thoughts, he ran onwards. Ethan heard the sound of more footsteps pounding behind him. Ethan glanced back, only to see a crowd of women with sharp knives and unlit candles right on his tail. Quickly, he turned back around only to plow into one of those wooden signs he saw earlier. The thin wood broke with a crack and the figure that ran into it recovered with little delay. Ethan saw the path to the exit, and he raced towards it, all the while grabbing stones and tossing them behind him at his pursuers. The stones slowed some of the women down, who moved to rub their exposed, bare feet. He could hear their cries when he ran out the door. Sunlight blinded Ethan for a moment before he caught sight of the rusty roadmaster he traveled with. He hopped in hastily, locked the doors, and hit the gas.

About a minute later, the party of women flooded out and ran after his car as it skidded out of the parking lot. He had finally made it out to the open road. Ethan took a few deep and needed breaths as both his heart and mind calmed down. He turned on some music and focused on planning his next move. With the help of some cash, he could get some private company to clean out his pipes. The problem is, Ethan didn’t have much money. Pondering for a moment, Ethan thought of alternate solutions. He could call the police, he thought. That could work too.

As going to the direct source was no longer a desirable option, Ethan thought he might go to the town council to complain. It was a tradition that had been around since the original settlers founded the town in the year 1873. The settlers had worked hard to turn two miles of lush, green nature into a mediocre community. This community got together twice a week to discuss what they didn’t like about the place. Now, it was time for Ethan to take part in this time-honored tradition of local government at work tomorrow. Today was Monday, and usually the meetings were Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday.

Dusk fell over the day’s sky. As Ethan went to wash his face, he took off his silver necklace and turned the sink on. It spouted blood. Ethan cursed loudly and turned it off; his hands were sticky with the sanguine plasma. They were still screwing with his water! He re-donned his necklace and ran down to the fridge for a jug of the ‘real stuff’ (kept on-hand for emergencies, when he didn’t want to bother the priest again). He washed himself off with it over the kitchen sink, declaring that he would fix it tomorrow. Stressed, Ethan climbed into bed and slept like a dead man in his coffin.

The next morning, Ethan woke up to a strange sight. He examined a circle burned into the area around his bed, including the part of the wall his headboard was on. Either someone or something had entered and trashed his bedroom. There was clothing thrown all over the floor. His furniture and drawers had looked like something struck by a tornado. Ethan ran downstairs; his entire first floor looked like the aftermath of a college frat party. He entered the kitchen, noticing that the only untouched part was the sink, with another ring encircled around the sink. He was deeply confused at the current situation. Ethan checked out his



necklace... it was *silver*! Of course! What was an old family superstition had worked out without fail! Yet again, Ethan decided not to dwell on it. Soon after this revelation, his phone started to ring. The Caller ID showed that it was Noah, who was a good high-school buddy of Ethan. Ethan was happy Noah was one of the few guys who Ethan could rely on for a good, refreshing talk. He decided to answer.

"What's up?" Ethan began.

Noah's meek voice replied. "Hey man, what's the name of that one movie... y'know the thing with the Antarctica base? With that monster?"

"The Thing?"

"Yeah...the Thing."

Ethan sighed.

"Noah, why are you asking me this?"

"I think I killed one, man...It's... so God-damn weird."

"Language..."

"Shut up! I killed one, dude!" hollered Noah

Ethan paused for a moment.

"How do you know it was the Thing?"

"It screamed and burned up after I hit it with my car."

"You could say that about a bunch of things"

"Well, it turned into some monster first. I'm gonna dissect it."

"No, you idiot!..." exclaimed Ethan. "You know what? I'm not gonna get involved."

"No! We can work together on this!"

"Noah, don't do something that'll get you killed. Just burn the damn thing up."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes! Yes, I'm sure...Hey, didn't you move out of Melancholy a week ago?"

"Yeah, why?"

"Do you..."

Ethan paused for a moment before responding.

"Do you think the supernatural stuff is spreading? Like, before it was only here, now it's...where you are."

"I wouldn't call it spreading. More like the supernatural stuff is...waking up."

Ethan shuddered at this thought.

"Noah? Buddy? You're scaring me."

"Hold on-"

The *click* and empty buzzing of the line caused Ethan to call back immediately, anxious about his friend. There was no response.

Ethan put his phone back in his pocket and held his head in his hands. He let out a soft sob before he got ready for his meeting. Worry often clouded his head for the last few weeks, ever since he moved into his new place. To cope with these feelings, he often watched horror movies and studied the decisions made by the characters, mostly to make sure to do the opposite of what they did. This, combined with consistent Wikipedia searches on the subject, allowed Ethan some amount of closure. He wanted to learn and study how to prevent psycho killers or ghosts or demons or whatever it was from getting to him. Ethan even had a short list

of places not to go (and even the spirits he encountered), which included:

- The cemetery at 11:34 PM--Don't go near the chain man--*Shake-Chain Jack*
- The basement during the holiday season. (November 27th to January 7th, estimation)--Bring flashlight--*Spirit of Fogginnightern*
- The upstairs bathroom between the hours of two and four AM--Do not look in the mirror or Kick her in the face before the plants take over--*Weeping Willow*

He could assume it was a hex at least. Or possibly another curse. Whatever it was, Ethan was planning to end it all tonight. Not with violence, but with a good old-fashioned debate. The thought that it would be dangerous still bothered Ethan though, considering how this town keeps it's water clean, he couldn't expect for something to come up without it going sideways in more ways than one. He decided to go in prepared for anything. Silver bullets soaked in holy water? Check. Licensed revolver? Check. Upon reviewing the town hall meetings, he was surprised to learn that weapons were common, including hatchets, bees, chainsaws, machetes, staffs, and possessed puppets.

Of course, knowing the battlefield is often half the battle. This battlefield was not what Ethan expected. Instead of the dull meeting hall that was run by a group of middle-aged men in ties, he saw that the place was populated with many creatures. Some were straight out of nightmares, while others looked like Father Adrian, who happened to be wearing his favorite necklace, the one that had the Cross of St. Peter on it. Of course, this came to Ethan as he was sitting down amongst these creatures that something was very, very wrong, and that the Cross of St. Peter might mean something else, but his one-track mind had laid out that all he wanted to do was fix his God-damn water so it wouldn't spit out blood or goo the next time he turned the tap on. Ethan felt the carvings etched into the six-shooter on his hip, hoping he wouldn't have to use it.

The noise of the meeting was split in two. He heard the voice of the lone Councilmayor; a mass of tentacles, etch itself into the minds of the masses.

"Silence, everyone! The Meeting is about to begin. Cathy will read out the schedule, if everything goes to plan."

The schedule was read. There was a small presentation on why road humps were better than road bumps. This was all surprisingly boring considering what had gone on with Ethan in the past day or so. After a long, long hour of deliberations on the issue of replacing the haunted well with a more high-tech, sleeker water dispensary unit (still haunted), it was time for the council to receive questions from the freaks who lived in the small town of Melancholy.

Ethan stood up first. He felt the tentacle of the Councilmayor seize him. It poured open his head. He felt his questions and concerns drain out through his mouth-pipe and onto the floor below, where it sizzled and bubbled and melted through. The Councilmayor was silent for a few minutes. It then grabbed the brunette in green off of her feet.

"The concern for clean water has been heavy on the taxpayers minds. We will do nothing, for there are creatures unlike those with the flesh sacks you call bodies that require the supplements our water provides. However, anyone

who requests a filter *must* receive it in a matter of 32 hours and it must work for a minimum of six generations. Who is next?”

Ethan slouched down, relieved. One by one, people stood up and had their concerns addressed. Turns out the unfiltered water system held vitamins like calcium and Vitamin A for the people who couldn't get them, like those albinos with the sharp teeth down the street. After a slow, traffic-ridden drive home, he made it to his house. He slogged his way inside, shutting the door on the way in and collapsing in a heap. Ethan rubbed his eyes. He didn't know how late it was, but he didn't care. He was happy. Ethan knew they weren't going to change the condition of the water, but at least the filters would work and take out all the gooshy stuff. Now, after all this time, he could start looking for a job.

# Molecule Manipulator

## By Eamon Sullivan

June 16  
3:03 PM

A kid was walking in the forest. His thoughts were tortured by this place. Once a place of refuge, the forest now haunted him. With every step, his pain and frustration filled his mind. This place was one from his childhood, where some of his best memories had taken place. That happiness ended though, when it struck down his sister. She was almost dead, and he was enduring it for her.

This kid was Pele. Average height, and in his last year of middle school. He had a bright mind, but his judgement was being clouded by his fear. He was scared of losing his sister, but he was trying to push past it. *Focus, you need to find out what happened here. That spider is out here somewhere, I need to find it.*

He paused for a few seconds, trying to calm down. The crinkling of the leaves at his feet soothed him, but it did little good. Turning around, Pele saw every detail in this forest, he knew every inch. He was standing again at the spot where the impossible happened.

However, Pele couldn't ever work alone. That's why there was a slightly confused friend lagging behind.

June 16  
3:04 PM

*What the heck is Pele thinking of now,* thought Joe. Joe was 5'5, had black hair, and dark skin. He never understood why Pele was always so keen on coming out here. This place was dangerous. Although Pele had spent his childhood here, Joe's parents never let him step a foot in the forest. They, like everyone else in the near vicinity, thought that it was too dangerous. After everything that happened, they felt their claims were justified.

Still though, Pele insisted on coming out here. Joe knew that they could easily end up like Pele's sister, yet Pele never seemed to care about the danger. The only reason Joe was with Pele was that Joe knew that going out here alone was crazy.

Worried that there seemed to be no point in this excursion, Joe said to Pele, "What are we going to do? Just standing here at this spot won't do anything." Pele looked as if he was going to answer, but then froze. "What is it Pele?" Joe asked, as his curiosity overtook his fear.

"Can you hear it?" Pele whispered quietly. Joe closed his eyes and listened, and there seemed to be a strange buzz. "It's the same sound that I heard that night. C'mon!" Pele said, and he started running.

Joe tried to follow, but he ran out of breath. *Stupid asthma,* he thought. Joe bent down, panting. Then, he looked up and saw something strange. There was a building that should be impossible to build out here. Moss had grown over it, and there was a large hole in the corner. He just barely got a glimpse of Pele walking inside. It started to drizzle, and Joe heard thunder in the distance.

*Guess I'm stuck following him in,* thought Joe.

June 16  
3:09 PM

Instinct and sound guided Pele as he ventured through this underground complex. Inside the building was a trapdoor into this area, but Pele isn't thinking of that now. He is hardly thinking at all right now. He is just focused on a particular buzz.

Luckily for him, a sharp corner made Pele bang into the side of the wall. Coming to his senses, Pele thought, *O frick. Where the hell am I?* He decided to follow the direction he had been going, as the buzz grew louder in that area. A door creaked and Pele walked into an obviously closed off room.

*What the hell are these things,* he thought. There were spiderwebs all over this room. A bee or wasp seemed to be eating the spider eggs. *This is so crazy. If this is where those spiders originate, then this has to be man-made! But who created it, and where are they now?*

The room had several chairs and a desk, as well as some sort of glass cage. However, the glass from the cage was shattered on the floor, as if something had escaped. Pele walked inside the cage, and saw it was filled with more spiders

"I am only left." That was a note scribbled on a piece of paper, lying on the floor. It seemed to be torn out of a journal. He searched the desks and found the book of origin. The beginning of it was soaked beyond recognition, but Pele could decipher some of it near the end.

Today, Subject 5d infected some spiders. They developed venom, and one of those spiders bit Jerry. He then started throwing up right then and there. We sent a request to abandon the project and seek medical attention, but it was denied. -

We don't have enough medical equipment here, and none of us are 'doctors'. Jerry's now dead. We still can't leave, and this monster is only infecting more spiders. One almost bit me today, and I don't know what to do. -

Todd left, running out to the woods. I don't know what's happening to him, but I doubt it's long till they get him. Secrecy is key, and they won't let anyone escape. -

The spiders got out of subject 5d's cage again. Both Michael and Jason were bit. If the poison kills them too, it'll just be me left. -

Subject 5d is banging on the glass, and it looks like it's weakening. I want to go and try and comfort Michael and Jason, but I can't risk losing sight of the subject. I should see them though, if I don't, they'll die alone. -

The Subject is out. I don't know if anyone's reading this, but whoever you are, LEAVE NOW. Get the military to burn the place down and find a way to kill the subject. It's too risky to let her live.

That scared Pele, but he had to know more. The cage that 'Subject 5d' must have been in was covered in spiderwebs. It looked like the breeding ground for these creatures. Pele wanted to burn it all, just to be safe, but he couldn't risk the fire spreading. He then noticed strange markings on the walls. "yOu thiNk yoU cOnTrol me, You caNnOt." "I WIIL KiLL yOu." A creeping presence filled Pele, but he needed to know more. If this 'monster' was sentient, he had to find and reason with it.

But then, feelings of doubt began to fill Pele. Sure, he found the source of the problem, but those who created it couldn't cure the poison. He couldn't even question them for details, if they really were all dead.



*I can't save her.* Doubts filled Pele's mind. He broke down on the floor, tears filling his face. Joe walked in the room, but Pele barely noticed him. "Oh frick. Pele, this is too dangerous, we need to get out of here. Now."

As Pele tried to frantically explain to Joe, Joe just dragged him out of the room. "C'mon Pele, focus. You can't let this place get to you. Life sucks, but we need to get out of here and regroup. It's raining now. You've been lost in here for an HOUR. Pull it together!"

Joe sighed; Pele wasn't responding. Joe took his head and faced it up at a skylight. "Focus on the lightning. It's flashing up in the rain. You can't let this place hold you down."

Looking, Pele saw the lights. It was beautiful. His curiosity piqued. *Why is there a skylight? Is it to watch so-. Wait a minute, that light is too close-* He didn't have time to finish the thought. Lightning struck down on him, straight through the glass.

"PELE!" Joe yelled out in fear, instinctively jumping back. The bolt flung Joe back, and as the debris settled all he could see was Pele lying in the center of the room.

# Excerpt from *Violet*

By *Bruce Martin*

The cold had never bothered Jordan much. All through his life, he had enjoyed the winter months more than most. He often cracked a smile when he could see his breath in front of him, or when the tiny fingers of ice stretched long across his window in the morning. As long as he could remember, he always felt that the empty branches or the frost-white grass was just as beautiful as the first bloom of spring.

But this cold was different. His coat was now dressed with tears and could not seem to protect him from the frigid temperature. He stuffed his fingers inside his pockets, for his gloves had ripped as well. In fact, most of his garments were in some way torn, leaving him at the mercy of the winds. He could feel his teeth quaking in his mouth, and his raggedy beard provided little protecting from the icy gale that was berating his face. The door of St. Crispin's Food Pantry was locked, and the lights were still off. Jordan was once again early, yet he was not sure just how much longer it would be until someone would arrive to take him in. There was no watch on his wrist to alert him as to when he should get there, but he was too afraid to miss a meal that he always ended up waiting. After what felt like centuries, a short man began to hobble from the church across the street. He clearly saw Jordan standing there, but that did not make him walk any faster. His warm clothes seemed to blind him from Jordan's shivering. At last he reached the door, fumbled with the keys for a moment, and let a blast of heat fill out into the chilled world around him.

"Early again, I see," said the man, out of breath from his brief walk.

"Gotta be the first in line, Brother Don," Jordan spoke softly. "That woman from down south always takes the best pies. I'm tired of rhubarb."

"Yes, that Cynthia does have a bit of a sweet tooth," the Brother replied. "I assume she's told you but she has an interview coming up. You may not need to worry about her taking your pies much longer."

"Good for her. It's about time she graduated from this place," Jordan proclaimed with a smile. He had been going to the food pantry for over a year now. Save for a few elderly people, he had been going the longest. Week by week, he saw people around him getting new jobs and getting back on their feet, yet he never had his break. He felt that he was too far gone, damned to be a beggar for the rest of his days. Yet somehow he was always genuinely happy for those who had better fortune than he, congratulating them with a wide smile and a warm hug. There was not a jealous fiber in his body.

As the night went on and the temperature dropped further, more people showed up to the pantry. They signed in, got their food, and got on their way. Jordan however remained, conversing with the volunteers and sipping his coffee. They spoke to him as if he were a friend, yet whenever he got too close they took a step back. Jordan recognized this but did not mind. He knew it was not the fault of the volunteers. They had been taught to fear the homeless since they were young. Mercy was seen as dangerous by many.

When the pantry was about to close, Jordan noticed two clean shaven men in fine suits

conversing with the woman at the front desk. They were leaning in on her, as if they were looking for love in a dive bar. She was clearly agitated, and after a few minutes of a whispered yet clearly hostile debate, the men stood straight up and began to speak a little louder to her. Jordan listened in, only able to make out a few words. He slowly began walking closer, but when he caught the eye of one of the Suits he stopped dead in his tracks. Instead he sank against the wall closest to him and continued to listen in. For the first time in their conversation Jordan was able to understand their mumbling. Clearly frustrated, one of the men spat out, "If anyone here wants to get out of this hole, give them our number." They turned swiftly and walked away.

Once the door had closed behind them Jordan went up to the front desk. "Emily, who were those guys?" he inquired.

"Just some guys trying to take advantage of the people here," she said.

"What did he mean by 'getting out of this hole?'" Jordan continued.

"Don't worry about it, they're not-"

"They were offering work, weren't they?"

"Jordan trust me, you don't-" she began, but it was too late. Jordan had already tossed his half empty cup of coffee into the trash and was walking outside to follow the men. Their car was parked across the street, an Audi in perfect condition. They were opening the doors to get in when Jordan tracked them down. They saw him coming and put a forced smile on display.

"Did that girl at the front desk send you?" said the one in the driver's seat. "Thought she was a lost cause."

"More or less," Jordan replied. "Did I hear right that you guys are hiring?"

"Yes, we are," the driver answered, reaching into his pocket. "Take this pamphlet, read it over and call the number on the back if you're interested."

"I don't have a phone," Jordan told him.

"Well if you read it over and really love it, then just show up to the address under the phone number and tell them Dr. Schultz sent you."

They closed their car doors and started the car, driving away in the night. Jordan looked down at the pamphlet, turning it over a few times in his hand. He then stuffed it into his pocket and began walking away. The shelter was only a mile or so away, but it felt like a marathon for him. He had made the journey many times, yet contrary to what he thought it only got harder. As the wind turned his face to a tundra and his eyes seemed to freeze over, the address on that pamphlet became more and more enticing.

A few days passed since the incident involving the men in suits, and Jordan had decided he was fully on board. The pamphlet described a pharmaceutical company called LucidArts, who was looking for test subjects for a psychological study. They were paying two-hundred dollars a visit, which is more money than Jordan had even dreamed of for a while. Unfortunately, their facility was close to an hour away, so he had no way of travelling there on his own. He plucked up the courage to ask Brother Don when he saw him next to drive him. Reluctantly, he agreed, though he thought that Jordan should wait for a better option. Jordan had grown tired of waiting however. He saw these trials as an opportunity to get his life started again.

The car ride was silent. Brother Don repeatedly began to open his mouth, as if he was trying to give Jordan his last words of discouragement. Yet every time his lips moved, he would

quietly gasp for air, but this subtle action was followed by nothing but silence. Jordan understood his concern, yet it did not phase him. He had made up his mind. His mind began to drift as he daydreamed of what he would spend the money on. It would not be enough for rent, but maybe he could get himself cleaned up for an interview, get himself a job. Or maybe he could buy a car, just to help him get around, maybe to a better area.

Finally, they reached the facility. The building was massive, yet very rectangular and plain. Jordan swore that it was half a mile long, and just as wide. The grounds it sat on were lush and green, though he could not see anyone working on them. The trees were tall and full, and animals of every kind could be seen wandering. The whole scene was so perfect, Jordan imagined that every thing he saw had been made inside the lab. When he opened the door, Brother Don grabbed his shoulder firmly and told him, "I know you need the money, but just remember: it's not worth risking your health for a couple hundred dollars. Don't let them do anything that they're not one-hundred percent sure is safe." Jordan nodded, gave him a hug and thanked him, then exited the vehicle. As he walked towards the building, he swore it was only getting bigger and bigger.

He opened the main entrance and was greeted by an even more spectacular view on the inside. The main room was gigantic, to the point where Jordan could barely tell he was inside. The floors were pristine, a dark grey color that somehow managed to glisten like the purest of whites. There was a series of staircases that lead towards elevators with glass walls that allowed you to gaze out into the building. The elevators went horizontally, since the building was much more long than tall. The place reminded Jordan of a beehive, with employees bustling about, going in every direction at every moment.

Seconds after walking through the grand glass doors, people began to shoot Jordan nasty looks. He knew he was out of place, as no one in the building other than he was wearing shabby clothes or had an unshaved beard. Nonetheless, he confidently walked up to the front desk and smiled at the woman sitting there. She surprisingly welcomed him, extending out her hand to shake his. "Hi, my name is Jan. How can I help you?" she said.

"Jordan Mayfield. I'm uh, here for some trials? Someone named, um, Dr. Schultz sent me. I don't know if you're familiar but-"

"Of course I know the doctor. He's in his office right now with a client of ours but his assistant, Spencer, can show you to your quarters. I'm assuming you have all the paperwork filled out?"

"No, I wasn't aware I had to bring any with me."

"No worries! Spencer can help you take care of that as well. He'll be up in a moment."

"Thank you," Jordan told her as he went to a waiting area. He found it peculiar that she used the word "up" when the entire building seemed to be one floor. He chalked it up to be a slip of the tongue and sat down on a chair, browsing through the magazines around him. After what felt like an eternity, an extremely young looking man in a lab coat walked over to him. His hair was long and gelled on top of his head. His smile looked straight out of an ad on TV, so perfect it seemed synthetic. As he moved, there was a certain bounce in his step, which unnerved Jordan for some reason.

"Jordan, it's nice to meet you. I'm Spencer," he said with an unidentifiable accent. "Follow me please. On the way to the lab I'll fill you in on what exactly the trials are going to be



like. I have some people filling out paperwork for you as we speak. Of course you'll need to input the specifics but I figured we'd save some time." Jordan followed Spencer to an elevator, which had the most complicated panel he had ever seen. A series of access codes had to be plugged in, followed by numbers that must have indicated the destination. Jordan felt something in the floor underneath him shift, and they shot off so fast that it knocked him off his feet. When he regained his balance, Spencer chuckled and said, "You'll get used to it. Took me only a matter of days."

As the elevator moved, Jordan saw more and more of the lab, but it only increased his confusion about the place. There were machines beyond his wildest dreams, and experiments going on that frightened him. He was assured by Spencer that what he was signing on for was much less scary. Finally, after a few minutes of motion, the elevator came to a halt and Spencer led Jordan down a hall to a small room. On a table in the center of the room he noticed a stack of papers which he was instructed to finish filling out. Most of it was benign, asking for his social security and such, but when he came to the portion where he had to sign, he hesitated for a moment. The words of Brother Don echoed in his head, and his fingers trembled ever so slightly as he delicately moved his hand towards the paper. He lightly placed the tip on the line, and after taking a deep breath, Jordan wrote out his name in sloppy cursive.

# ***Everyday***

## ***By Josh Ferro***

It was on the top of the ferris wheel at Six Flags, and the ride had stopped to let other people on the wheel. The air was cold while we stayed warm in each other's arms. The lights shined bright but not as bright as her eyes. When she was near me, I never had anything else on my mind. Everything about her drew me closer to her. My mind was racing and my heart was pounding. Little drops of sweat began to fall from my forehead, and my cheeks looked like 2 slightly bruised tomatoes. Pressure was rising for me, and if I didn't time this moment right, I would lose her. It would create an awkward path filled with tension that I didn't want to go down. As thoughts were racing through my mind, all of a sudden, it finally happened! The bitter coldness of the air around me disappeared. Our lips touched and there was an irreplaceable warmth that entered my heart. Any worries that entered my mind before had vanished, never to return. And at this moment, here she was, embracing me, kissing me, and bringing me emotions I never thought were possible. Through my teenage years, life had just come and gone, rolling through the motions without any clear path. A path had suddenly cleared up in my life for me to walk on, and it had her name on it. She was my path, and my life's purpose. My future had no certainty, except that it would have her in it. It's as if every time I saw her, everything I felt on top of that ferris wheel came back to me. I'd relive that kiss on the ferris wheel everyday. I realized that I was in love, and I never wanted to let it go. Whenever I had to live my life without her, at school or at home, I wasn't living. I was dreading the days I had to spend without her in my arms, near me. I was going through the motions, business as usual. But, then, a dreadful 2 weeks later, there she was again! She shone bright like a star, standing out from the crowd. From her beauty to her optimism and kindness, she had everything. This time we went out for breakfast, and then back to my house to binge some Christmas movies. I was nervous yet again to make a move. My mind was racing and my heart was pounding. Little drops of sweat began to fall from my forehead, and my cheeks looked like 2 slightly bruised tomatoes. During a Christmas movie, we kissed again, and the warmth, that came with our embrace re entered my body. Everything that I felt the first time was just as prominent here. Whenever I was with her, I'd relive that kiss on the ferris wheel everyday. On the upper left corner, it read "0:00" in bright red numbers, flashing before my eyes. I felt a headset covering where I thought my eyes were, and removed it to find myself in a simulation room next to an assistant with a VR nametag on.

"Where is she?! Where'd she go? Where am I?" I frantically asked this assistant.

"Relax, sir, you've been in our newest installment of our VR simulation, which has been enhanced to virtually simulate your life before your eyes. However, there was a glitch in the system, which made you live a specific memory repeatedly throughout your timeline, it was one during your high school years I believe..." Suddenly, with this realization, my eyes widened and I froze. It all came back to me in a flash, my real life now, and who I was. I remembered our marriage and the fact that we were highschool sweethearts and had an entirely healthy relationship. Sadly, I also remembered that she crashed in a car accident years ago, and passed away shortly after. All the anxieties I had felt before our magical moment had come

back that day. Sweat dripped from my forehead, and at that moment, I quickly breathed into a paper bag to cope through my anxiety attacks, and hopefully lower my heart rate. A couple of years later, after failing to search for my purpose, I signed up as a test subject for the next installment of this simulation to cope through the life I was given. To heal, through the simulation, I'd relive that kiss on the ferris wheel everyday. My life at the moment had no purpose so there was no reason to continue living in the present. I had to find a way to go back.

"...Hey, miss, your simulation here is very realistic, and well designed. But, I feel my experience isn't entirely complete, can I have the headset for a few minutes? And while we're at it, can you teach me how to use it?"

"Our goal here at VR is to maximize our customers' experiences. To maximize your VR experience, we will teach you controls and give you extended time with the headset. You may use the knob on your right hand side to scroll through your timeline. However, memories will blend together throughout the timeline if it glitches. Once you have found what part of your life you want to simulate, press the button on your left hand side to select that moment to relive it from there. We hope you may enjoy some memories of your life with VR." Once the set was back on, and now in my control, I knew exactly where I was going and what I was going to relive for the rest of my life.

It was on the top of the ferris wheel at Six Flags, and the ride had stopped to let other people on the wheel. The air was cold while we stayed warm in each other's arms. The lights shined bright but not as bright as her eyes...



# Locked Open Doors

By Sebastian Marchese



# *Array of Colors*

*By Sebastián Marchese*



# Under the Same Sky

By Sebastian Marchese





