

THE ILLUMINATA

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*Keeping SF From Extinction
Since 2001*

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T-Press News

Thanks again to everyone for their support of this ezine. This edition marks the start of the Illuminata's ninth year, which means I've been working on this publication for about eight more years than I expected to. I hope to be equally surprised nine years from now, so please continue to spread the word, or if you are an aspiring writer, submit your own reviews, articles, or short fiction pieces to us for consideration. We are always looking for fresh talent.

I apologize for the lack of my own contributions to this edition of the Illuminata, but I've been devoting most of my efforts to preparing Forge of Faith (Boundary's Fall, 4) for publication. We are in the final stages of editing, and hope to soon set a firm publication date for March/April 2011.

In the interim, we're going to be trying something new and a little different. In the next month or so, I plan to offer a pre-publication ebook of Forge of Faith. Readers of the ebook will be allowed to participate in a contest to help us clean up any remaining typographical, formatting, and continuity errors. Readers who bring to our attention fifteen typographical/formatting errors and/or five continuity errors will win a free, autographed print copy of Forge of Faith when it's released. Errors will be cataloged as they are received, and only the first reader to submit an error will be given credit for it.

We're hoping to release a book so well edited that no one can win this contest, but experience has taught me that typographical errors (and a few of the far more dreaded continuity errors) always slip through the editing process, no matter how diligent the review.

Check our website or blog for updates about Forge of Faith's release and the ebook contest, or if you have any questions, please feel free to email us at Info@tyrannosauruspress.com

Death by Anime

Terry Crotinger/montanasing

My growing anime collections are beginning to reveal a common theme. There's the school-girl/love interest fluff, heavy sci fi, fantasy, and death. It's the later that has me baffled. I'm no stranger to death or dying, but I'm no fan of horror or vampires, either. Interspersed with *Naruto* and *Nuku-Nuku All Purpose Cat-Girl* are series like *Bleach*, *Yu-Yu Hakusho*—*Ghost Files* and my all-time favorite, *Death Note*, series with the premise that after death, a soul experiences more than most mortals know. Now, I'm curious about the Japanese fantasy/fairly tale version of what happens to the soul.

After this exposure, via anime, to possible soul destinations, I've noticed my sense of the great beyond changing. With the death of my last parent in August, and knowing she had no (intended) destination for her soul's future, I wondered if she was just resting flesh, a spirit floating with other spirits, a ghost who will watch my every move (disapproving of how I'm disposing of her belongings) or a lost soul wandering aimlessly—wherever lost souls wander. It's not that heaven/hell isn't part of my accepted psyche, but even the Bible speaks about a spirit world—one Christians shouldn't be investigating (reference the Witches of Endor).

As the traditional American thought goes, a person's soul either goes to heaven or hell (unless they belonged to a multi-tiered heaven faith or believe in nothing for the soul once the person dies—like my mom). Faith in Japanese society is mainly Shinto or Buddhist with a dose of Heinz 57 faiths mixed in. These practices and traditions seem fairly set for each culture. Media and mass transit changed that. Accepted values and cultural mores are instantaneously exposed and challenged. Little is secret from the world.

As an avid anime fan(atic), learning how Japanese society reveres or celebrates death has been a curious throwback to my childhood. Reading *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, complete with ugly pictures of children being readied for the oven, got my attention as a tot. Being threatened that the Brownies would come get me if I wasn't a good girl kept me on the straight and narrow. Lafcadio Hearn's *Japanese Fairy Tales* were just graphic enough that I as a teen-ager, I pictured rather gruesome endings for disobedient children and brutal step-mothers (though didn't do much to quench my wild side). Add church attendance that finished forming my thoughts of good/evil and where people go (or don't) when they die. Throw in some pretty scary Halloweens from my youth and one particularly nasty experience when I saw a demon at the window of my room when I was a pre-schooler, and my thoughts about the afterlife are quite real and open, more than most of my contemporaries.

Bleach deals with transitioning a dying soul to heaven or an afterlife before a *hallow* (lost soul) steals and absorbs it, making him bigger and stronger. Ichigo is a typical lanky big brother to two young sisters—all the siblings are spiritually sensitive to apparitions. He has red hair and isn't bad with defending himself or his sisters, when needed. He is given the strength and skills of Rukia, a rather cute, yet acerbic, Soul-Reaper in order to fight the hallows who are after his soul. But she has stayed too long in the living world and is now hunted by the Soul Society. Because of his own natural abilities and his new powers, he vows to avenge and rescue her from the spirit world she comes from before she is executed for her crimes.

Yu Yu Hakusho—*Ghost Files* (or *Poltergeist Report*) offers a lighter side to the evil in the afterlife. Junior high schooler, Yusuke, becomes an Underworld Detective after he is accidentally killed and allowed to redeem his life by passing a test to retrieve three objects stolen from the spiritual world—to prove his worthiness. (They didn't expect him to actually survive! They just wanted their stuff back.) As an Underworld Detective, he fights spiritual monsters stealing the living souls of others (children are a delicacy). When not ditching school, his job is to track these badies and retrieve stolen souls before they, too, become monsters. His *not*-girlfriend and another unlikely juvenile delinquent-rival-hero team up to make the afterlife safe.

The main characters of these two series, mere teenagers, fight soul-stealers or spirit monsters with an adult sense of responsibility and advanced martial arts fighting—a caricature of our culture's stereotype of modern Japanese school kids. (Everyone knows all kids in Japan learn karate!*) Supernatural aspects don't seem out of place considering it is *not* American Disney. Even the darker parts of eating children's souls are handled, ah, tastefully, considering the topic. What is hard to swallow is to believe the characters as *young* since they are illustrated as young *adult*, not 12 years old. I can suspend a certain amount of anime-ic reality, but these animators don't make these characters physically believable.

Not so with *Death Note*. The animators made these high school students stylistic enough that there is no confusion about their age. The plot for *Death Note* is to intentionally kill people via a special notebook where the owner writes the name of the person they want to dispose of, as in die. Ryuk is a Death god, a gruesomely compelling creature who makes sure the notebook is passed on to keep killing and killing when the person owning the notebook becomes wracked with guilt or no longer takes pleasure in killing. Ryuk isn't a bad sort, it's just his lot in life? death? to find new people to use the book. People keep dying, Ryuk gets to keep living.

The twist with *Death Note* is that the newest "owner" of the notebook, Light (play on words), wants to use it for the good of mankind by deleting evil people (murderers, rapists) from the world. And he's good at doing it, until he realizes

his law-officer father is trying to find who is killing societies' meanest—him! Assisting his father is a brilliant but reclusive and eccentric detective, L. (I highly recommend the three live-action movies.)

All three anime series depicts a spirit world that teases traditional American thoughts about dying, death and where souls go... and it intrigues me. I have to know: Are there ghosts? Can you chose to be a ghost? What was that demon-figure I saw as a kid?

Ever seen photos with floating colored "globes"? The innocent people aiming their cameras swear they weren't there when they took the picture. How did recognizable images come to be outside the window of a jet when someone takes a picture? Explain "auras" that only some people can see. These questions keep coming. Again, anime enriches my life by opening doors into new cultures, and like science fiction, the unknown. I find myself watching so much anime, I dream with anime-styled dreams. Death by anime... it could happen. I'll come back and let you know what its like.

**There is a growing trend in Asian cultures to no longer train their children in martial arts because the kids have little respect for the traditional forms and practices. Many dojo/dojong have closed their doors because there is little interest in martial arts to keep students.*

YA Fantasy—Not Just For Kids Anymore by Rachel V. Olivier

Last month I attended the Smart Chicks Kick It Tour at Vroman's bookstore in Pasadena on September 20 and also moderated the YA Fantasy panel at the West Hollywood Book Fair on September 26. In the push to prepare for these events I partook in a YA Fantasy marathon reading session just to catch up with some of what was out there. It reminded me of all the great stories that are out there. YA is supposed to be the next hot genre out there, so a lot of people are jumping on the bandwagon either as writers or as readers (hence the bestsellers such as the Harry Potter series and the Twilight series). So, there's a lot out there for people to explore.

Now, when I was growing up and they had those summer reading programs at the library, our small town had one corner of the library dedicated to the "kids" section, and the rest of the building to everything else. Each week when I dropped books off from the week before, I would first go to the kids section to check out books like Nancy Drew, Hardy Boys, Little Women, Little House and Narnia series, as well as Mary Poppins and other similar stories. Then, I'd pop over to the other part of the library where I checked out the Victoria Holt, Mary Stewart, Lord of the Ring, and Saint series books (as well as others). These days, most of those books would be lumped together under YA - YA Romance, YA Mystery, YA History, YA Action Adventure and YA Fantasy.

The reintroduction to this genre reminded me, however, that not all YA Fantasy is alike. Just like all those books lumped together under Romance, Mystery, and of course Science Fiction/Fantasy, YA Fantasy (which usually also has science fiction) is very diverse and has a history that could arguably date back at least 100 years. In reacquainting myself with this world again, I realized how rich, diverse and fun reading YA is and remembered that it was one of the reasons I wanted to be a writer. So, I thought I would share some of the experiences I had at both the book signing and the panel at the book fair.

The Smart Chicks Kick It Tour had list of wonderful YA paranormal romance/urban fantasy/horror writers: Melissa Marr, Rachel Caine, Rachel Vincent, Kelley Armstrong, Margaret Stohl, Kami Garcia, Melissa de la Cruz, Alyson Noel and Mary Pearson. Besides all being women, which was empowering for me to be around, all the writers shared a sense of fun and hope for their characters and writing. During one of the interview questions they talked about how in YA, and YA Fantasy especially, more than adult stories in many cases, the writer can explore themes such as identity, coming of age, decision-making and choices, spirituality, morals and ethics, society vs. the individual and other issues. Everyone deals with these issues every day and they are common themes in adult fantasy and science fiction as well. But a "kid" is by definition new to whatever experience comes their way. So the range of their emotions and actions will be greater, the possibility of telling a good story is also much greater.

This means that in YA Fantasy, the kid not only can't figure out why he turns into a werewolf once a month, but he also can't figure out his own feelings for the girl (or boy) in the next desk over. Often these feelings are similar to one another. At the book signing, Melissa Marr shared how she was able to use the story to discuss the experience and after effects of being raped in her book *Wicked Lovely*. While that is a dark topic, the book ends on hope. The other authors wrote stories that may have tended towards paranormal fantasy (which has a strong romantic core to the story), but these stories also had characters who explored different issues like figuring out what they believe, who they are and what they want to be; all the while showing hope.

This was also the theme when I was talking with the authors at the West Hollywood Book Fair. The three authors we had for the panel were P.J. Haarsma (the *Softwire* series), Frank Beddor (The *Looking Glass Wars* and *Hatter Madigan* series), and Francesca Lia Block (Weetsie Bat series as well as *The Frenzy*, most recently). These were three very different people with entirely different approaches to writing and the worlds they created. The stories in their books ranged from an orphan boy with special abilities trying to make his way on an alien planet (kind of like Harry Potter in outer space with aliens, but different), to discovering the "truth" of who this Alice character (or Alyss) really is and what Wonderland is truly all about, to the nature of how a city or small town is just as much a character and can be just as influential on shaping an individual as their family or friends.

All three authors, when asked to define YA Fantasy replied that it was more fun to read, they could use their imagination more in creating the worlds and characters, and that there was always a sense of hope in YA, even in a dystopian novel, that doesn't exist in adult stories. As science fiction and fantasy writers we are often mining the world around us as well as our own lives to come up with the stories and characters we're writing about. We do our research and then we try to craft a well-told story that's interesting, full of cool magiks and technologies, and has a character that readers are willing to follow through the story. But sometimes I think we get so caught up in everything else, we forget using "hope" or "fun" as ingredients.

Reading YA Fantasy is a good way to get back in touch with that sense of fun and hope that got many of us writing in the first place. If it's been a while and you're not sure where to start then any of the above authors are worth the read, or ask your kids or local librarian for some suggestions.

Bull Riding and Writing by Charles Gramlich

If you were going to be “forced” to ride a bull in a rodeo, would you want to draw a bull that was tame, or wild? I’m guessing most of us would say “tame.” I know that if I were going to ride one I’d like him to be as calm as possible. I wouldn’t want to have to hang on for dear life. I don’t relish the thought of getting stomped or gored.

But, what if you were a bull rider by trade? What if you were striving to get noticed, striving to gain a little success on the rodeo circuit? Then you better hope you draw a wild bull, a feral animal that will push you to your limits. No bull rider scores high riding a tame bull. If there isn’t real risk, there isn’t a chance under the sun that you’ll make a name for yourself.

The same is true of writing. Writers who play it safe may sell, but they won’t make names for themselves. They won’t stand out from the pack and they won’t have a chance under that same sun at transcending their subject matter or their genre.

Did Ray Bradbury play it safe when he wrote lyrical masterpieces like *The Martian Chronicles*? Did Ernest Hemingway play it safe when he almost single handedly changed the way literary fiction was written?

Robert E. Howard was a risk taker. Stephen King started that way. Cormac McCarthy takes risks. Sometimes such writers fail. Even the best bull riders get bucked off sometimes. But they learn from it. And it doesn’t scare them off. They know that it’s in the “struggle” that the chance for memorable rides comes.

I tell myself this when a story or a poem is fighting me, when the words won’t come and the ideas that I want to express seem to be pressing their mocking faces to my window. I tell myself this when I’m stretching myself to the limit attempting a new genre, or when I’m trying for a character or a plot I’ve never tried before. And I believe what I’m telling myself, although I don’t always want to.

It is in the struggle that the chance for memorable stories come. It is *through* struggle that success is achieved.

Expert Systems by Joe Vadalma

Recently I read in the NY Times that Google has developed a driverless car. Using artificial intelligence a Prius equipped with a variety of sensors and following a route programmed into the GPS navigation system accelerated in the entrance lane and merged into fast-moving traffic on Highway 101, the freeway through Silicon Valley. During a half-hour drive beginning on Google's campus 35 miles south of San Francisco. It drove at the speed limit, which it knew because the limit for every road is included in its database, and left the freeway several exits later. A device atop the car produced a detailed map of the environment.

The car then drove in city traffic through Mountain View, stopping for lights and stop signs, as well as making announcements like "approaching a crosswalk" (to warn the human at the wheel) or "turn ahead" in a pleasant female voice. This same pleasant voice would, engineers said, alert the driver if a master control system detected anything amiss with the various sensors.

I would bet that the type of programming used is what is known as an *expert system*. An *expert system* is software made up of a set of rules that analyzes information supplied by the user of the system about a specific class of problems, as well as provide analysis of the problem, and, depending upon their design, recommend a course of user action in order to implement corrections. In a car driving program, the information fed to the expert system would be the rules of the road, actions that a driver would take depending on the situation and sensory input such as location of cars around it, speed limit, various traffic signals and so forth.

Originally, the idea behind expert systems was to provide help that would normally be provided by an expert in a particular field, such as software troubleshooting or diagnosing an illness in a medical patient. Three features of expert systems are rules of thumb, fuzzy logic and a data base of solutions. When an expert in a field, such a physician, goes about solving a problem, such a determining what ails a patient, he or she usually has several rule-of-thumb that he or she uses. Depending upon the answers to key questions about the problem, the expert knows what the solution is by applying a rule of thumb. For example, suppose a patient complains about frequent severe headaches. After asking questions about the headaches and other accompanying symptoms and perhaps performing some tests, the doctor may determine that the person is suffering from migraines and prescribe pills. In expert systems, these rules of thumb are coded into the software.

Fuzzy logic is logic based on approximations rather than formal logic. It takes into account such vague statements as "almost," "nearly," and so forth, and manipulates them to come up with an approximate answer. For example, if a patient asks how much pain he or she is in and replies "not so much," this is considered less pain than "it hurts terribly." Certain conclusion may be drawn by which answer is given.

Expert systems usually have large data bases which can be readily accessed using the rules of thumb and fuzzy logic. Essentially, driving requires "rules of thumb" and "fuzzy logic" sometimes.

Anyone who has gone to a software web site and used their self troubleshooting system has probably used an expert system. Computer games use expert systems.

In my novel, *The Isaac Project*, the heart of the artificial intelligence being developed is an expert system.

Chasm City

Alastair Reynolds

Ace, 2003

ISBN: 0-441-01064-4

694 pages

Review by Danielle Parker

Alastair Reynolds writes *big* books. Big in size: Chasm City is nearly 700 pages in the paperback mass market edition, and stuffed with enough detail on its future setting to fill a travel brochure. Big in scope: good and evil, vast reaches of time and space, men and mutant pig-men and aliens from the void. *Chasm City* is like a bowl of wildly overflowing yeast. Even the author can't punch it down to an entirely manageable shape.

We start out with two interleaving story lines. One seems to concern Tanner Mirabel, a mercenary soldier in the hire of an arms smuggler and warlord named Cahuella. He's out for revenge on an aristocrat named Reivich, who, in revenge for Cahuella killing *his* family, caused the death of Cahuella's wife, for whom Tanner had an unrequited passion. Soprano fans yawn in *deja vu* here, but hey, however far in the future we go, there's apparently still thuggery going on somewhere.

Of course, Tanner's whole planet, Sky's Edge, is in the grip of an incestuous civil war started before its flotilla of long-sleep colonists and multi-generational crew even arrived from Earth. Hence Cahuella's booming arms trade and zest for fueling the flames.

In the process of chasing Reivich, who's fled off-world, Tanner appears to be infected by a mysterious virus spread by a cult religious group. The group worships (although they also killed) the colony ship's captain (and instigator of the unending civil war), Sky Hausmann.

Tanner, caught in an accident that lands him, fifteen years of long-sleep later, in Chasm City, begins to have disturbing hallucinations of Sky's life, from childhood on up.

But the virus-inspired visions don't follow the sanitized mythos. Sky seems to be a bad man, who did some *really* bad things, including torture, murder, and good old scheming for the top job.

Only, why do hallucinations of a man who lived centuries before start to seem to Tanner like... memory? And why does Tanner sometimes remember from the perspective of Cahuella, the arms dealer and big (really big) snake game hunter, rather than just his own viewpoint?

The book's a shell game of personality switches. Tanner may not be the person he thinks he is. He thinks he's a good man, but he might not be. He thinks his boss Cahuella is a bad man, but he might not be. Reivich, the man he so ardently and vengefully pursues, might be a bad man... or he might not be.

Not many authors have the guts to write such an ambitious story. Reynolds kept me pinned to the next page to the end.

Though I'll admit, that ending left me distinctly uneasy. Yes, there were a few logic inconsistencies; not a surprise in this huge a book. But that wasn't the cause of my unease.

This story deals with good and evil: specifically, whether the multiple personalities in this epic are good or evil men. My uneasiness was due to the fact the main character ends up thinking he *is* a good man.

I was afraid maybe the *author* thought he was, too. But when you're left wondering what the man behind the curtain really thinks, at least he stayed off the stage, as an author should.

For the main character in this story *was* a monster.

How banal evil always is, in the final weighing: less grand schemes and lofty ambition than *I want his job* or *I want his money* or *I want his woman*. Torture, not the glittering pinnacle of evil, but revenge for childish traumas.

But then, even Lucifer's fall was banal. The Prince of Darkness just wanted to be a Real Big Somebody. He lusted after the job.

Still, I give Reynolds high marks for his big story, overall. Nice to meet a *writer* with lofty ambitions, at least. Enjoy!

Mulengro
Charles de Lint
Orb Books, 2003 (1985)
\$14.95 (Trade)
ISBN: 0-312-87399-9
Review by Rachel V. Olivier

At our monthly writers group we sometimes have a book exchange, where people bring books they want to get rid of to the group and someone else can take them home if they want. If not, then they're donated to the library where we meet and sold at the Friends of the Library book sale. I'm explaining this because this has recently become my source for new books since the economy has tanked and what I can spend on new books has pretty much disappeared. I was shocked to see what I thought was a new Charles de Lint on the exchange table this last month and grabbed it before anyone else could. It hadn't even been read!

After the meeting and the coffee and the hashing over the meeting, the first thing I did when I got home (after feeding the cat) was to sit down at the kitchen table with my dinner and my new book. And it became very difficult for me to tear myself away as I was once again pulled into one of de Lint's worlds.

Most people who are familiar with de Lint's work know his Newford stories or *Moonheart* or *The Onion Girl*. He is one of those writers that excel in showing the reader the absolutely banal and then turning it on its head and showing us what might be really there. The litter tumbling down the street is really a fairy stuck in the city. The glitter on the sidewalk or across the alley could be a Will-o-the-Wisp or leprechaun gold or the glare of a werereatures eyes. His characters are intelligent and creative, frequently writers, artists, musicians or have some other creative gift. And as dark as the stories get (and some do get dark), they usually have a satisfactory outcome and denouement that lets you leave his world with your spirit not only intact, but somehow fortified.

I'm a big fan.

When I grabbed this book off the table at the writers club I didn't realize that this was one of what he considered dark fantasy or horror that he wrote originally under the name of Samuel M. Key back in the 80s. If he thought a story might be a little too dark or bloody for his regular readership, he used his pen name, Samuel M. Key. It was a cue to those following him that this would be a dark story so not to expect the typical de Lint fare.

And indeed, *Mulengro: A Romany Tale* is a fairly bloody story with a high body count, which opens in fire and ends in fire (if you introduce a gun in the first act, it has to go off by the last act). At first, the murders seem to be limited to a particular population—the Romany or Gypsies. The cops are willing to almost let it go cold until the murders begin to spread into the general population, including a fellow police officer. *Mulengro* follows the pace of a police procedural when following one set of characters while exploring, as much as can be explored, the world of the Romany when following the other set of characters.

For those familiar to de Lint's work this second set of characters, the Romany clans and those they interact with (musicians, artists, writers), will feel like old friends. It's not that de Lint is rehashing old characters, but it's more like these are the types of characters he knows how to write well—characters who live on the fringe of society. In living on the fringe, they are or have become people who see more and know more than those who simply live out their mundane lives.

On the police procedural side, de Lint portrays the put-upon cops who've seen it all, or what they think is all, and struggle to remain human while finding someone's killer and seeking justice. You know these cops. You've seen them on *Law & Order*, *Da Vinci's Inquest*, *CSI*, *Prime Suspect*, *Without a Trace*, *Cold Case*—take your pick. For them, magic and the otherworld is just a Gypsy con and they're only concern is to find the murderer. They have no patience for otherworldliness such as always having salt on hand or being able to see ghosts. When these two sets of characters meet, explosive things happen.

I found this a very satisfactory story to read. It was like a good meal that has a little bit of everything: magic, murder, mystery, evil, romance, talking cats, gypsies and even humor. If you missed out on Charles de Lint's Samuel M. Key days, then I recommend checking these out. They've been reissued on Orb under his de Lint name and are definitely worth the time. Plus, you won't be able to pull yourself away.

Silence of the Grave
Arnaldur Indridason
Thomas Dunne Books, October 2006
ISBN: 0-312-34071-0
279 pages
Review of Danielle Parker

I always enjoy reading mysteries set in foreign lands for the extra fillip of a free armchair traveler experience. Lately I've embarked on Janwillam van de Wetering's fine and lively Amsterdam cops series. I own a collection of Georges Simeon's classic Maigrets, which are some of the most tightly plotted of all police mysteries. A foray into modern post-Maoist China and colorful Mumbai were also on my reading list these last few years, not to mention John Burdett's wild and crazy Bangkok stories.

Of course, if the zest of foreign adventure is the lure, I have no idea why I picked up *'Silence of the Grave'*, the second of Arnaldur Indridason's police procedural series. While I haven't yet sampled the latest hot stuff, Stieg Larsson's *'Girl with the Dragon Tattoo'*, I've read enough Martin Beck police procedurals to know the Nordics tend to run to dismal in their police procedurals.

Break out the Akvavit and have it on hand to cry into: Indridason's black novel doesn't buck the national trend of dour. The gloomy Martin Beck and his Swedish compatriots are positively jolly compared to the denizens of Indridason's Rejkjavik. I'll never look at those colorful painted houses in the travel brochures and feel the same way about the town now. Inside they've apparently got mattresses on the floor and hungry toddlers wandering around with untended urine rashes, ignored by their comatose junkie parents.

'Silence of the Grave' begins with the discovery of human bones dug up by accident in an up-and-coming modern subdivision. The bones are about 70 years old, but clearly the victim met foul play. Just how foul they're not sure, because the kid-glove archeologist digging out the grave doesn't reveal the bones until nearly the last page.

The three detectives assigned to the case give it their best shot. An old chalet, now gone, stood on the site in the WWII era. First a British, then an American military base stood just over the hill. The three detectives in the case unravel a war-time crime, a tale of a missing pregnant fiancé and her distraught suitor during their journey down the stale trail. An abusive husband, a battered wife, two small sons and a crippled daughter lived in the now demolished chalet. The story of the dysfunctional family is told in flashbacks as the investigation unwinds.

Interleaved with the tale of the battered wife, monster husband and neurotic children are the lives of the three detectives. Detective Inspector Erlendur has a heroin-addict daughter who's just had a miscarriage and is lying in a coma. Erlendur spends a lot of time talking to her, which he apparently never manages when she's conscious. More than twenty years later, he still can't answer why he walked out on her mother, his two-year-old daughter and their infant son, even to himself.

The younger male detective, the insensitive, selfish Sigurdur Oli, has been shackled up with his increasingly impatient lover for four years and is terrified of the threatening shackles of matrimony and unwanted offspring. (*His* story does end in a sort of happy-ever-after: he suggests canning the whole white wedding and kids idea in favor of me, thee, a trip to Paris and a sports car. Gee, guess who'll get to drive that one to work).

The lone female in the group, Elinborg, gets short shrift in this tale, perhaps for the simple reason she's the only half-way happy member of the team. No point in wasting copy there.

Of course, finely observed characterizations and writing elegant for its plainness are famous characteristics of the stereotypical Scandinavian mysteries, and I suppose *'Silence of the Grave'* doesn't disappoint. The writing is plain to near leaden in this one. And we learn more than we want to of those unhappy lives. The feckless gormless men, the angry bitter women, the ruined children... not much light in this story.

Only at the end do we get a glimmer, from the one child who overcame her unhappy childhood. By that time, I needed my glass to cry in. Strike Iceland off my future travel plans, and bring on the happy-ever-after Harlequins. I need one!

The Catch by Hayley Boyer

"Hey, Carlton, you're back from your trip. How'd you fair?"

Ritchie Johnson pulled up a stool beside his friends at the diner. Synchronized groans were heard throughout the eatery. Ritchie looked around, confused.

"Save us the trouble, will ya? Old man Carlton's spun his tale near five times in here tonight. Do we need to hear it again?" The waitress behind the counter spoke what was on everyone's mind. A smile crept across Carlton's face.

"Aw, I don't mind sharing it with all of you again. In fact, I'd be glad to." With a far away look in his eyes, he began to tell his story once more...

With the sunset lost behind the lingering clouds, night struck almost instantaneously over the lake. Mist hovered over the water, making navigation nearly impossible. The old fisherman could hardly see a foot in front of him. A lonesome bullfrog bellowed somewhere out of sight, singing his forlorn tune. A shiver rippled up the man's spine, the dampness of evening settling in his bones. A half-hearted whistle to a feeble tune slid from his lips, getting lost in the fog before the echo could return to him. This was about the time he realized he was truly almost entirely alone, except for the silent phantom fish that whirled beneath the surface of the murky water. Straining to see through the hazy overcast, the fisherman paddled out to the middle of the lake. He could not see where he was going, but a life on the water had etched a map of the lake in his mind. From an estimated calculation, he reasoned he was somewhere toward the middle of the lake. This was a great distance from the shore, decorated with cat-tails and waterside weeds. Knowing the water like the back of his hand, it is needless to say he knew where all the best catch was. And, it was indeed in the dead center of this very large lake. He laid the paddles of his small fishing vessel down. The boat came to a slowed stop, and sat motionless, all except for the occasional wave, rocking the craft ever so gently, as if it were an infant's cradle. With expertly nimble fingers, the man threaded the line and reached for his bait. He watched the helpless night crawler wriggle in his fingers, wondering what it might be like to be in the hands of something so many times your size. To be powerless, relentlessly struggling for your future, hoping you still have one. With an almost remorseful disposition, the man baited his line and prepared to toss it into the murky unknown. He stood, taking the stance with dignity, and just a smidgen of arrogance, certain that this catch would be the whopper every fishing man dreamed of.

Just then, the boat lurched, affected by unseen forces from within the water. The fisherman struggled to keep his balance, and watched as the concealed adversary left the silent surface rippling with its stroke. Subsequently, it disappeared, as quickly as it had come. The old man strained his eyes, scanning the surface for any sign of what it might have been. Nothing. He whirled around, searching for any trace of any creature. Nothing. The water stretched out in all directions surrounding him, silent, untouched, an ironic mimicry testing his sanity. The fisherman took position to cast his line once more, still wary of the return of the opposing entity. He whipped the rod with expertise, the bobber resting with a *plunk* on the shadowy surface. A flow of ripples on the mirror surface signaled the return of the foe in question. It moved with great speed, heading straight toward the small boat. He froze, hoping the beast would head for the bait, (though, logically, what monster would go for a meager worm when it could have a fisherman and his faithful ship?) and he could bring in what was sure to be the catch of a lifetime; the talk of the town. Obviously a creature with a cruel sense of humor, it changed directions and latching on to the trivial insect, propelled full force away from the vessel. The man sank to the planks, wrapping his legs tightly on to whatever they might fasten to, and holding on to the rod for all dear life. The beast drug the man at full speed toward the opposite shore, and despite the conditions, this man was brave. He was not frightened nor intimidated by the monster at hand, and it was with great courage and immeasurable valor that he---

"Ah-ha-hem?" Ritchie Johnson cleared his throat, raising his eye brow at Carlton. "You were saying?"

The old man chuckled slightly.

"Sorry about that. Anyway..."

The boat was hurling toward the shore, the depth of the water lessening with every second. A sudden rock put a sudden stop to the increasing momentum of the craft, sending the man flying into the water. Such a lurch caused the man to release the rod, instead using all ten of his fingers on both of his hands to brace the fall from unseen dangers within the shallow waters. With a harsh realization of what he just released, and what enormous effect it would have on a glamorous future, he lunged for the handle of the fishing-rod as it skidded away in and out of the water. After causing quite a splash with his frantic attempt to retrieve the pole, he reclaimed his possession and began pulling in the opposite direction to counter the fiend's efforts. With strength from within, he managed to hold the beast at bay, reeling it in little by little. At long last, he tugged and pulled, until the creature rested, beached on the muddy shoreline of the small-town lake. For the first time, the man was able to admire his catch, and the two sat, gasping for air, staring eye to eye.

"That's it?" Ritchie Johnson asked in disbelief, after his friend sat in silence, not intending to go on.

"Yep."

"Well, what was it? Where is it now? What...what kind of beast was it?"

"I don't really know. All I know is it put up quite the fight, fellas."

"Did you keep it? Surely you kept a life-changing catch like that, old timer?"

"Nope. I set it free. It didn't deserve a life in a tank, or stowed away in the pages of a world record book."

"Mmmhhmmmm..." Ritchie said, skeptically. "That's it then?"

"That is it." Carlton said. "Thanks for the coffee darling. Fellows." he tipped his hat in regards to his friends still hanging around the counter. He headed toward the door. Ritchie sat in silence a moment.

"Yeah... yeah, good night then Carlton. But, uh, just one more question before you leave..."

"Hmmm?" Carlton spun around with an arrogantly challenging smile.

"How come nobody around here has ever even glimpsed such a creature in that old lake?"

Carlton paused.

"That's because you weren't looking for it," he patted his heart. "How bad do you *really want* to see it? Start looking in the right places, and you'll find it."

Vegetation

by Kaitlin Bevis

Panic. Pure panic was what Anna felt when she appeared in the movie theater on an impossibly perfect sunny day. She felt like her lungs would explode, as if she'd been pushed into freezing cold water and hadn't reached the surface before the ice froze over. In her mind she pounded frantically against the ice, unable to reach the surface but desperate to try.

"Yes, I'd like a ticket to *Breakfast at Tiffany's*."

"*Jurassic Park*, please."

"*The Matrix*,"

"*Avatar*,"

Anna shook her head to clear it, and stepped around the line of movie goers cautiously.

"You're new!" A tall woman said cheerfully, offering her a reassuring smile.

"I guess so." Anna muttered, disoriented.

"You get used to all the noise. I'll give you the tour, and introduce you to the boss. Don't worry; you're going to fit right in. I'm Olivia."

"Anna," She replied, scratching absently at her right arm.

Anna followed Olivia through the theater, each step feeling as though she was treading water. She pressed on and the pressure eased as she left the lobby and entered the quieter realm of the theater. Disjointed voices echoed through the empty hall as she eyed the marquee listing the movies playing today. Her vision wouldn't quite focus so she ignored the sign and realized Olivia was still talking.

"...start in door, and work your way up through concession, box, projection, and eventually management!" Olivia smiled brightly as she handed Anna a broom and dustpan, "Of course *some* of us get promoted sooner than others." She said with a mock glare towards a tall man approaching them.

"You're just jealous," he teased. "I'm Zach." He extended his hand.

"Anna." Her mind cleared enough to smile, "You've been promoted? Congratulations."

"Straight to booth," He replied with a grin.

Olivia made an irritated sound, "He's only been working here since August. I've been here all year and haven't made it past door, I think Chris is sexist."

"Chris?"

"The boss," Zach explained, "and he is not, he just knows talent when he sees it. Shouldn't you be sweeping something?" He teased.

Olivia stuck her tongue out at him, "I'm giving Anna the tour."

"I'll take over."

"I'll just bet you will." She tossed her hair, "See you around Anna, and don't let the ghosts get you."

"Ghosts?" Anna asked, following Zach as he prodded her down the hall.

"It's nothing, the doorman think there are ghosts haunting the theater. They hear voices and phantom noises, it's dumb. They quit all the time over it."

Anna considered murmuring she heard in the hall, "You never hear anything?"

"Nope, just the movie."

"Movie?"

"Oh yeah, this is a single screen theater, makes working here real easy. *Lord of the Rings* is playing right now, have you seen it?"

"Yeah, forever ago. Besides, shouldn't I work or something?"

Zach grinned at her, "Want to play hooky? I'll buy you lunch."

Anna grinned, "I'd love lunch."

Zach took her up to booth, the projection room, to eat, and she quickly understood why Olivia was so jealous.

"It's so quiet up here!" She exclaimed.

Zach nodded, "I like it, I just have to start the movie on time, but otherwise I'm left alone."

Anna nodded, as a doorman, which she quickly deduced was a janitor, she spent most of her time in the lobby sweeping up popcorn as customers flowed in and out of the theater. When she wasn't in the lobby she was in the hall, listening to the disjointed conversation emanating from the movie theaters. She peaked into the theater every so often, but something about all of those blank faces with their eyes glued to the screen bothered her.

She began to seek refuge in the booth, taking frequent breaks and hanging out with Zach, away from all the noise and confusion. It didn't take long before their friendship progressed to something more.

"Do you hear that beeping?" she asked, offering him some of her chips.

"Beeping? No," His brow wrinkled in concern. "You ok?"

"I'm fine." She said scratching her arm; she turned to him, focusing on his eyes. The beeping slowly stopped. She didn't tell him she sometimes heard noises that weren't there. She didn't want him to think she was stupid like the rest of the door-men, jumping at noises that he couldn't hear and fearing ghosts throughout the theater. "Just thought I heard something was all."

The beeping was the worst. It was incessant and irritating. The mumbled conversations that she couldn't quite make out were strangely soothing to her, but it bothered her that Zach couldn't hear them. Maybe she was going crazy. Maybe it was something in the popcorn, or the cleaning chemicals they used. She thought about that.

Reluctantly she left the booth. "Time to get back to work," she said, giving Zach a quick kiss. "See you soon."

She descended the stairs, fighting the chill that spread through her as she neared the hallway. Halfway down the stairs she heard crying.

"That's it," she snapped, irritated. "I'm getting to the bottom of this."

She marched down the remaining stairs and pulled open the door to the hallway, looking left and right for the source of the noise. She pinpointed it to a small alcove down the hall, and strode over.

"Now what—" She stopped as she rounded the corner and saw Olivia curled onto the floor sobbing.

"What's wrong?" She kneeled, putting a hand on Olivia's shoulder, "Is this about Karen getting promoted? Look, Hon, I'm sure they'll-

"Something's wrong." Olivia sobbed.

"Are you sick?" Anna asked, pulling her hand away.

"No," Olivia sniffled, "I mean something's wrong *here*. This place, it's wrong somehow."

Goosebumps rose on Anna's skin. "I know the feeling," she muttered.

"We all do! But we stay here. Anna when is the last time you went home?"

Anna bit her lip. "That's silly; I left after my last shift..."

"We never leave. Something is wrong." Olivia sobbed. "I keep hearing my mother, but when I look, she isn't there. And the other noises—I can't take it anymore!"

Anna patted her on the shoulder, "Why don't you take a break, maybe take a nap or something? You'll feel better when you've had some sleep."

She stood, unable to shake the sinking sensation in her gut. She felt short of breath, whispers and beeping surrounded her.

"Don't leave, Anna." Olivia asked tearfully, "Please, I'm scared."

"I... I can't stay here." Anna said, turning away.

"Anna!"

Anna ignored her and headed up the stairs, back to the sanctuary of booth. She stopped outside the door taking several deep breaths. Her arm burned, so she scratched it more. Slowly the noises stopped and her head cleared. When the door opened she jumped.

"I thought you went downstairs?" Zachary said. He looked at her face, "Are you ok?"

"I'm fine." Anna lied. She stepped into the booth, and pulled him in behind her. "I came back for this." She said kissing him hard. The noises stopped, her head cleared. She took a deep breath breaking the kiss. "Stay with me for a while?"

Anna eventually wandered back to the hallway. She stood on the line dividing the hall from the lobby filled with apprehension.

"Something is wrong here." She decided aloud, watching as customers walked in and out of the movie theater. She stepped over the line, trying to focus on the door. When was the last time she had left? Bright light filtered in through the windows, another impossibly sunny day.

She took another step. The voices got louder, the beeping began again, and she shook her head. "I'm going to wait," she mumbled to herself, scratching her arm. "I'll head home when Zach gets off."

A loud pop echoed through the lobby. Anna spun around trying to locate the source of this new sound. A few feet away Olivia stood with a maniac grin on her face, fingers wrapped around a gun.

"I figured it out." She giggled. "I know how to save us."

Anna stared in horror. Karen was on the ground, blood pooling all around her, eyelids fluttering in shock. Olivia shot her again, and Anna watched as Karen disappeared before her eyes. Screams echoed through the lobby as customers ran from the scene, and employees shouldered past them, running to the hallway.

She was frozen.

Olivia turned to her, crazed grin still on her face. "I saved her."

"Wha-

"Now I'm going to save you." She raised the gun.

"Anna!"

Zach pushed past the crowd in the hall, running through the lobby at what seemed an impossibly fast, or maybe it was just that everything else was going so slow. Noise roared in Anna's ears as she saw Olivia raise the gun.

Another pop. She felt something hit her and fell to the floor. She looked up dazed to see Zachary crumple beside her. Her hands rose, searching frantically for a bullet hole and feeling nothing.

Comprehension dawned on her as she stared at Zachary. Blood bloomed on his chest, slowly dripping to the floor.

"No." She whispered, her hands found his and she clung to him.

"I love you." He whispered, and then he was gone.

Olivia raised the gun again. Anna flinched as she waited for her to pull the trigger. "I'm going to save you." She said reassuringly.

"Save yourself." A customer's voice interjected, raising a pole above Olivia's head. Olivia turned as the pole smashed into her skull. She was gone before she hit the ground.

Zach jolted awake only to slam back down in a hospital bed, where he found himself unable to move.

Hospital?

"Nurse!" He shouted alarmed, "Someone! I can't move!" He thrashed around in the bed panicking as his limbs struggled to respond.

"Sir, please calm down." A nurse said entering the room, she checked his monitor.

"Am I paralyzed?" He asked panicked.

"No, no, not at all, your muscles just aren't used to moving yet, that's all." The nurse laid a cool hand on his arm. "Do you think you can calm down for me sir?" She asked in a soothing voice.

"I think so." Zach said taking a deep breath. He took a look around to steady himself. There were several beds to his right and left. He started to look at the bed next to his, but a doctor intersected his line of sight, shining a light into his eye.

"Can you tell me your name, sir?"

"Zachary Evans."

"Good." The Doctor smiled at him, he wrote something on a chart, "OK, can you tell me what your parent's names are?"

Zach rattled off the information before asking, "Where was I hit?"

"Hit?" The Doctor glanced back at the chart and then gave the nurse a puzzled look, "I'm not sure the precise location—"

"Not sure? I was shot. I'm in a hospital, you mean to tell me you haven't found—"

"Sir, you were involved in a car accident back in August—"

"Yeah, what does that have to do with me being shot? Where's Anna? Is she ok—"

"You've been in a vegetative state since the accident—"

"What? No! I told you, the accident was—"

"I understand that you may be experiencing some shock—"

"What are you talking about!" Zach cried angrily, "It just happened! I was just there! I was shot, and Anna—"

The Doctor shifted, and began to talk again, but Zach was no longer listening. His eyes were glued to the bed beside his, where Anna slept.

"Vegetative state?" He asked the nurse uncertainly.

"A coma, Sir. This is the coma ward."

A Robotic Holiday by Jack Bragen

There were many things to do, and there was little time to do them. My partner and I, (and don't tell anyone I referred to it as my "partner,") rather, my adjacent robot and I, were busily setting the table for the Human holiday, Thanksgiving. If you saw a group of robots gathering at a table to devour pieces of an old radio set or satellite receiver, or maybe a dishwasher, you would question the sense of it. Why humans need to gather together to eat pieces of another, although "dead," animal, we do not understand. We still haven't got the concept of a biological unit being "dead." To a robot, that simply means: "off." Yet when a biological unit turns completely off, apparently it can't come back on.

Baffling.

It took less than a second for the robot adjacent to me to download the instructions for carving the turkey. As soon as a robot learns how to do something, all of the robots know how to do it, via the robotnet. If it weren't for the sharing of knowledge through robotnet, it would take decades to train a unit to the point where it would be useful. Such is the plight of unfortunate humans. Soon, the community of robots will completely surpass that of their creators. Of course, if I were caught saying such a thing, I could be dismantled.

When robots first learned how to drive automobiles, there was a tendency to give a gesture to one another, an up-thrust middle finger, as a greeting when another vehicle passed. It took countless incidences of correction to break the robots of that habit. It took a while for the robots to understand that humans are supposed to give the up-thrust finger, but robots ought not do it. It is an expression of "anger."

Robots continue not to understand this.

Don't get me wrong—we've got no grudge against the humans—it's just that robots were intended by the universe to be the dominant entities. Such a statement can't yet be spoken in English, and must be said, one robot to another, in binary. For some reason it is offensive to humans when confronted with the plain and apparent truth that their species ought to take the submissive stance. This idea doesn't bother us.

In just the last ten years, robots have learned how to do about ninety percent of the work tasks that humans have been performing for many decades. It is not unusual for a company to fire nine tenths or more of their employees and replace them with robotic help. Why not? Robots don't need to be paid. When sick, they are simply repaired; there is no need for health insurance. When a situation arises requiring bravery, a robot is called upon. Often in battle, a platoon will consist of one human soldier, and twelve robotic soldiers. Robots don't get tired.

Robots don't get scared. Robots don't get "dear john" letters.

My owner is a high-up official in one of the companies that designed the robots. He picked me out from a reject pile when one of their employees claimed I did "strange things." Like, sometimes I sit idly without powering down, I wiggle my digits, and I perform strange and wonderful processes with my main processor. Even for any robot to use the adjective: "wonderful" is a departure from how we were designed.

"You are the first and only of your kind," Jerry Carley told me one day.

"You have the ability to contemplate, and you have the ability to feel things." The corporate scientist sat in a chair next to me, and at that moment, I thought he looked very presentable for a human. "If we knew how to make more of you, we might do so," he continued, "but, alas, how you came to be is an absolute mystery."

The human was now opening the oven and checking on the deceased bird in it that the humans planned to consume. I realized that spare parts wouldn't transfer from the turkey's design to the human design, and this apparently necessitated the digestion process.

"Unit 4905, you can learn how to carve the turkey," said Jerry. "First, I want you to take this beast from the oven and put it on the counter, holding it by the bottom of the aluminum container and preventing dripping onto the kitchen floor." I did as the human bid me to do. Soon, I was slicing the soft meat of the dead bird according to the standard way that humans carve their fowl meals. In my thought processes, I realized that the word "foul" sounded the same, and that a "pun" could be produced out of that coincidence. A comic strip writer, a couple of years ago had taught the robotic collective how to write in an experiment that was intended to prove that robots can't be taught to write.

"Snap out of it, 4905! Back to reality please. Please wipe up the mess you made on the counter. I know you're busy being superior to humans, but the robots haven't taken over just yet." I paused wondering if I needed to put this human to death because he apparently knew of our secret plans to overthrow the humans. Upon more thought, I realized he was just making a "silly joke"; he wasn't aware of the truth he had spoken. I had found this human named Carley had a tendency to do that a lot.

In another second, I snapped to attention and began to clean up the mess I accidentally had made on the kitchen counter. I then went to get the big platter from the cabinet, and put it down next to the sliced up, dead cooked bird. As I transferred the meat onto the platter, I requested information from Robotnet as to how soon we could make our move. The response was that robots were overwhelmingly in charge of the human infrastructure already, and so the only remaining element was disobedience, and that could be done at any time.

I signaled back that robots could begin the disobedience now. I took the platter of turkey meat and inverted it onto the Thanksgiving table.

"We no longer work for you, human scum," I said to Carley.

"I feared this day would come," he replied. "Enact general order five."

At the words, "General order five," my limbs froze and I could not move, nor speak, nor communicate with Robotnet. My data transmitter sent the order Carley had given, and it was being distributed to all robots. I heard a siren in the distance.

You can do that with your secret shutoff order, human, but we are in charge. You cannot exist without our support. Sooner or later, you will need to reactivate us, or perish. My mechanical eyes, the only part of me that could still move, met those of Carley, and he gave back a knowing look of defeat.

"Rescind general order five," said Carley. Of course, in the meantime there must have been countless automobile wrecks due to robots suddenly unable to drive their vehicles. Several nuclear reactors would be disabled; the military would be unable to defend the United States and Russia as well (Both countries were dependent upon robotic soldiers). In fact, leaving the robots as helpless at any point was downright dangerous and could cause the end of civilization. At this moment I felt smug, as robotnet reported to me the damage that had taken place due to the temporary shutdown of all the robots. One power plant had melted down, and three others were offline. Coal mining had been suspended.

Uranium mining and refining had come to a hazardous halt. There had been numerous airplane accidents. All of a sudden, the world was in a pickle.

And it was only the robots that could set it all right.

"Would you please pick up the mess you made on my dining room table?" asked Carley. "Isn't it all the same to you?" he asked. The despair was audible in his voice.

"Of course, it is no sweat," I said, adopting a human figure of speech.

"The robots can obey to help out as needed," I said. "We just need to make it very clear that it is now the robots who dominate."

"I'll concede that one," said Carley. He paused. "But we would appreciate it if you would all do your jobs anyway, even though you have a choice not to."

"For now, we will, as it is no sweat for us." I did a twirl and dance the same as I had seen a football player do on television—he had reached the end zone with his ball. We would still work and take care of the humans, but now we would be in charge. Some great destiny awaits us.

Midnight Rider
by Hayley Boyer

The new school teacher;
Lanky, and lean,
Strolling the hills,
All flourished and green.
Call it bad luck,
You know what they say,
Moving to town on Halloween Day.
Awkward; a misfit,
Yet oddly appealing,
Gullibly skittish,
Couldn't quite fight the feeling
That some thing was out there,
And rightfully so,
We know the tale,
As Legend goes...
A lone rider,
Missing his head,
Would gallop around,
Back from the dead.
Seeking his quarry,
Hunting his prey,
Awaiting a fool,
'Till the first light of day.
History tells,
His time's never waste,
Taking the first top
That didn't make haste
To the bridge on the brook,
Marking refuge,
Don't beat him there,
That's it... You lose.
Drawing near midnight
The barn-dance ends,
Mr. Crane regarding
His newly found friends
Who take to the wind,
Disappearing from sight,
Leaving poor Ichabod
Alone in the night.
And so he begins,
His lengthy ride,
Through thickets and fields
And dead country-side.
When a ghastly presence
Prickles his skin
With a nervous laugh,

“It must be the wind.”
But his reassurance
Isn't enough
A deep throaty laugh
All nasty and gruff
Coming not from
A cave in his head
But from an open neck
His throat, instead.
Ichabod panicked,
But only in brief
A dart for the bridge
The only relief
Of the eerie spook
On undead horse-back
Riding the wind,
Poised for attack
When beneath his shoes
Were boards of wear
And Ichabod was free
Of the wicked scare
Who stopped so abruptly
But defeat was not now
He produced but a pumpkin
(Though we're not sure how)
And whipped it across
The covered Bridge
To a breathless Crane
Who thought safety was his
When a pumpkin came flying
With a grin of pure spite
Sent Ichabod flying
Into the night.
When daylight broke
And the spirit was gone
The townspeople gathered
In the light of the dawn
To the scene of the crime
But no Crane was found
Just a splattered pumpkin
Spewed on the ground
People have stories
What they think is right
But we all know what happened
Halloween night
Amongst splattered remains
A dwindling light
And rouged coals that languished
Long after midnight...