

Corner Bar Magazine

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Page 1 – SOMETHING IS WRONG WITH THE CAT by Robert P. Bishop. Mr. Bishop, a former soldier and teacher, holds a Master's degree Biology. He has worked in North and South America, Africa, and the Mid-East. His short-story fiction has appeared in *The Literary Hatchet*, *The Umbrella Factory Magazine*, *Commuterlit*, *Lunate Fiction*, and *Spelk*. He lives in Tucson, Arizona

Page 6 – A SHRUNKEN STONE by Hareendran Kallinkeel. Mr. Kallinkeel lives in Kerala, India, after a stint of 15 years in a police organization and 5 years in the Special Forces. He writes fiction. Recent publications include: *Pif Magazine*, *BlazeVox*, *New Reader Magazine*, *As You Were: The Military Review*, *Reality Break Press*, *Palabras Journal*, and *Queen Mobs*. His works will appear in *Djed Press*, *Bryant Literary Review*, and *Pennsylvania Literary Journal*.

Page 8 – PERSISTENT SORCERY by Charles Wall. Mr. Wall writes, "I am a librarian and graduate of Christopher Newport University seeking to establish a literary portfolio with my speculative fiction short stories. In my short stories I try to focus on aspects of the genre that I find interesting. In *Persistent Sorcery*, I take a different perspective on magic that I hope is represented in the story."

Page 18 – 1504 by Thomas Fitzgerald McCarthy. Mr. McCarthy is a licensed English HS teacher, a short story writer and a semi-professional poker player from New Jersey.

Page 21 – FREEDOM by Shainur Ullah. Mr. Ullah writes, "My name is Shainur Ullah and I am from England. I like writing short fictional horror stories on the creepypasta site (<http://www.creepypasta.org/user/ullahshy>). I also have a reddit account called Shortstory1 with more horror short stories. My most popular horror stories online have gone "viral" - "Crunched Up Paper House," "The Camera Man," and "The Guys Behind Hollywood." They have also been narrated onto YouTube - check them out!



“SOMETHING IS WRONG WITH THE CAT”

by ROBERT P. BISHOP

“Neal, something is wrong with the cat,” Mary said. “Look at him.” Neal didn’t respond to Mary’s comment but he did rattle the newspaper he was reading. “Neal, did you hear me?”

Neal sighed and put the newspaper on the table. “I heard you. You said something is wrong with the cat.” He picked up the newspaper again, the sports section, and tried to find his place in the article he was reading about the playoff chances of the Seattle Seahawks.

“Yes, that is what I said. Something is wrong with KittyKat.” Mary sat on the other side of the table, facing Neal. She held a cup of coffee in her hands.

“He’s a cat, Mary. Cats are weird. There’s probably nothing wrong with him,” Neal said from behind the newspaper. “Other than being a cat,” he added.

“Neal,” Mary protested. “Look at him. That isn’t normal.”

Neal sighed again and put the newspaper down. He recognized defeat when he encountered it. “What isn’t normal?”

“He keeps licking himself. It is just too strange for him to do that all the time.” Mary drained her coffee cup, got up, fetched the carafe and refilled both their cups. It was their morning routine; drink the carafe dry while Neal hid behind the

paper and Mary talked to him before getting on with their day. Neal picked up the paper again.

Mary returned to her chair. “Now you watch, Neal, see if I’m right.”

Neal put the paper on the table and focused on KittyKat lying in the stream of warm air coming from under the front of the refrigerator, working methodically on his luxurious black fur with his tongue. Neal sipped the hot coffee. “It’s how cats keep clean, Mary. When they lick themselves, they shampoo and brush their fur at the same time. It’s a natural thing for cats to do.”

“Oh, gross!” yelled Mary when KittyKat lifted his leg and started licking his balls.

“Bad KittyKat,” Mary said, “bad, bad Kitty. Stop that!” When KittyKat didn’t stop, Mary cast reproachful eyes on Neal, as if he were to blame for the cat’s behavior. “He does that all the time now. It’s nasty. Make him stop.”

“I can’t make him stop, Mary. How would I do that?” Neal laughed. “Besides, it probably feels good. That’s why he does it.”

“Don’t be disgusting,” huffed Mary. “I think KittyKat is overdoing it.”

“By licking his balls?”

“Yes,” shouted Mary. “That is what I

mean. Can't you understand?"

Neal shrugged.

"I'm going to call the vet, see if he can examine KittyKat this afternoon. I'm sure there must be something wrong with him," Mary said. "The vet will figure it out."

At mention of the word vet, KittyKat looked at Mary with the yellow eyes of an apex predator. He lay still as death, watching her. When she remained in her chair he started licking his balls again.

"See, see?" Mary howled. "He's doing it again. Oh, oh, it's so disgusting!"

"He's a cat, Mary. That's what cats do, for crying out loud." Neal picked up the newspaper. Now his balls itched furiously. He put the newspaper down, stood up and raised his leg. He scratched. Mary watched him, her lips turned down in a frown.

"For Pete's sake, Neal, you're as bad as the cat." She rolled her eyes.

Neal leered at her. "What do you think, maybe tonight when we go to bed you can li..." Mary interrupted him.

"Don't you even start that," she said sharply.

Neal sighed and picked up the newspaper. He realized he spent a lot of time sighing recently whenever he and Mary talked. KittyKat continued grooming himself in front of the refrigerator. "Lucky cat," Neal muttered from behind the newspaper.

"What did the vet say?" Neal asked when Mary came into the kitchen carrying the metal cage with KittyKat in it. Mary didn't answer him. She put the cage on the floor, opened the door and waited for

KittyKat to come out.

"The vet said there's nothing wrong with him, but I don't believe it," Mary said and watched KittyKat head for the warm air flowing from under the refrigerator. He lay down and started licking his fur. "Poor little thing, just look at him. I think the vet shined me up. He didn't spend much time examining KittyKat."

Neal poured two glasses of wine, handed one to Mary. He peered at her over the rim of his glass. "What are you going to do?"

"I think KittyKat needs a bath."

"Cats hate water."

"Well, that's just too bad." She drank some wine. "I'm sure he has fleas. Or maybe dandruff."

"Who? The vet or KittyKat?" Neal emptied his glass and refilled it.

Mary snorted. "Of course, I mean KittyKat. Why are you so obtuse all the time?" She emptied her wine glass then held it out to Neal for a refill.

"When are you going to do it?"

Mary ignored him. She watched KittyKat, sprawled in front of the refrigerator, still grooming himself. She drained her glass, held it out for more. Neal emptied the bottle into it. KittyKat lifted his leg and started licking his balls. "Oh, oh," exclaimed Mary. "He's doing that nasty thing again."

"Lucky cat," Neal muttered.

"You males are all alike," complained Mary. "That is so, so... ugh." She finished the wine, set the glass on the counter. "I'm going to run his bath now."

“That isn’t going to turn out well,” Neal cautioned. “I wouldn’t do it.”

“Don’t be silly. It’s just a bath.”

“I don’t want any part of it.” Neal sipped his wine.

“Of course you don’t,” snapped Mary. She left the kitchen. Neal heard water running in the bathroom. He finished his wine, rinsed the glass, got out the bottle of whiskey and poured the glass full. He sat at the kitchen table.

“This is going to be interesting,” he said aloud and took a good hit of the fiery liquid.

Mary returned to the kitchen. “I have a wonderful surprise for you,” she cooed as she picked up KittyKat. “You are such a lucky KittyKat, oh yes you are,” she purred. “Mommy loves you sooooo much.” KittyKat stared at her with his yellow eyes.

“Maybe I do want to watch this.” Neal followed them to the bathroom and stood in the doorway.

Mary held KittyKat to her bosom. “First you have to get good and wet, then I’m going to give you such a marvelous shampoo,” she said, as if KittyKat could understand her words. She knelt by the side of the tub and plunged KittyKat under the water.

“Ow, ow, ow,” Mary screamed as KittyKat scratched and bit her hands. She released her grip on him. He shot to the surface, screeching and splashing water everywhere, his eyes wide and wild. He clawed his way up her arms and onto her head. Mary screamed as his claws dug into her scalp. She jumped up and flailed at

KittyKat with her hands. He dug his claws in deeper and screeched again.

“Jesus Christ!” Neal shouted from the doorway. He drank some whiskey.

“Oh, oh!” screamed Mary. “Get him off, get him off!” She spun around, slipped on the wet floor and fell down. Her head thumped against the floor tiles. KittyKat sprang into the air and raced out of the bathroom, leaving a trail of wet behind him. Mary lay still, with her eyes rolled up so only the whites showed.

“Jesus Christ!” Neal shouted again from the doorway. He drank some more whiskey.

Mary moaned.

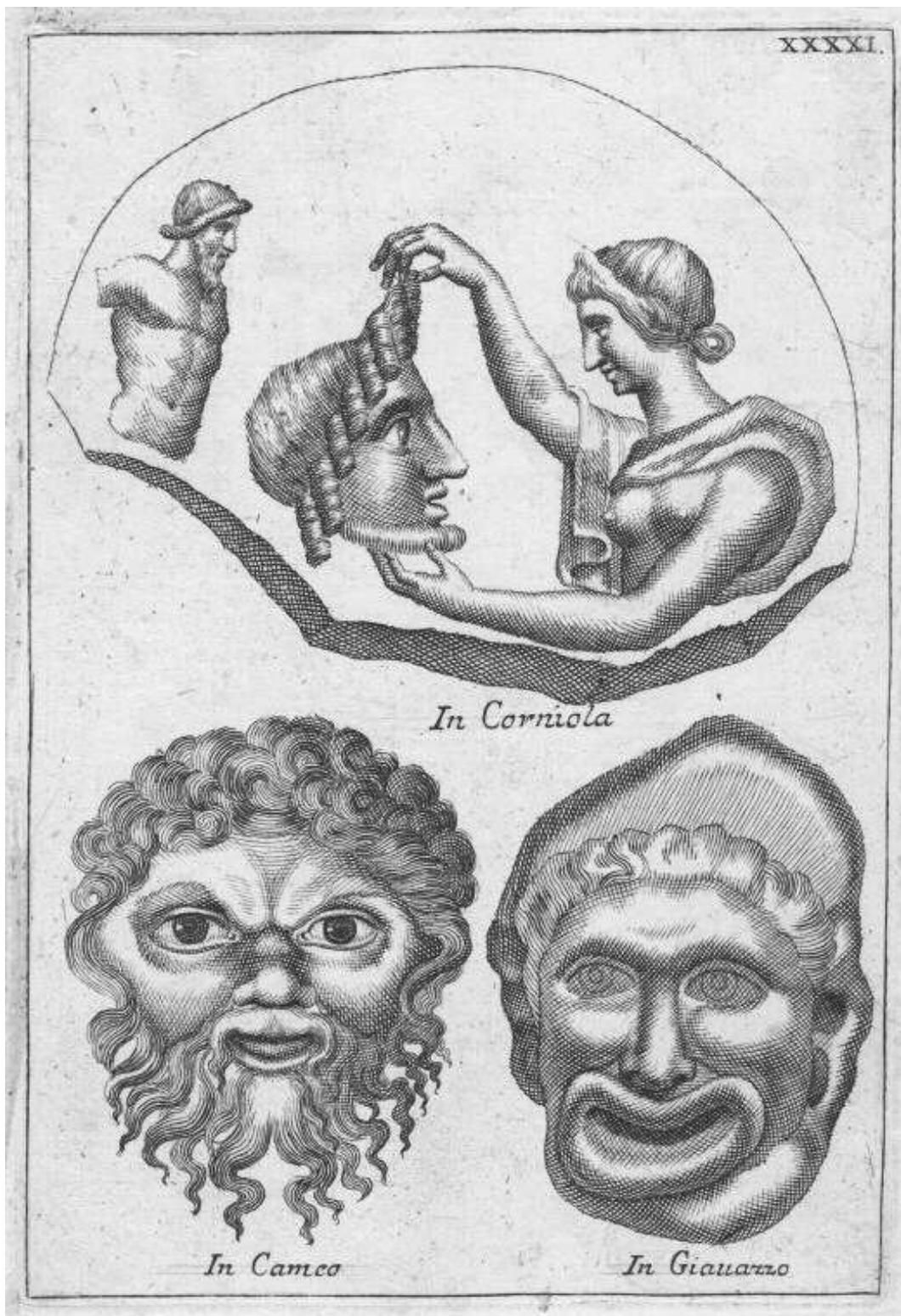
“Are you all right?” Neal asked. He drank more whiskey.

Mary moaned again, blinked several times, sat up and glared at him.

“That didn’t go very well now, did it?” he observed and finished the whiskey. She held out her hand. He took it and pulled her to her feet. Mary left the bathroom without saying a word to him. “Hunh,” Neal grunted. “I told you cats don’t like water.”

KittyKat remained under the sofa for the rest of the afternoon. Neal and Mary didn’t mention the bath fiasco, but they did empty the whiskey bottle. That helped make the day mellow.

In the evening Mary coaxed KittyKat from under the sofa by putting his favorite food in his bowl by the refrigerator. He crept out and approached the food cautiously, his eyes glued on Mary. When she



tried to pet him, he spat and hissed at her, his back arched, fur standing on end.

“At least his fur is dry,” she said and pulled her hands back.

KittyKat ate the food then hid under

the sofa again.

“I think he hates you,” Neal said.

“Don’t be silly. He’s just a little upset. He’ll get over it.”

“I don’t know,” Neal said. He was sit-

ting at the kitchen table, trying to finish a New York Times crossword. “The old boy was eyeballing you pretty hard. He was giving you the evil eye. You know, that stink-eye look he gets when he’s annoyed.”

“Oh, for heaven’s sake, Neal, he’s a cat. What does he know?”

Neal shrugged. “Cats are crafty.” He went back to the New York Times crossword puzzle.

“I’m going to take a couple of Valiums and go to bed,” Mary said. “This whole day has been a disaster, just a horrible disaster.”

“Hunh,” Neal snorted.

KittyKat poked his head from under the sofa and watched Mary leave the room. His pupils were long vertical slits, giving his eyes a dangerous, reptilian look. They locked onto Mary and followed her like a radar beam. He retreated under the sofa when Mary was no longer visible.

KittyKat crept from under the sofa when the house became middle-of-the-night still and dark and padded down the hallway to the bedroom where Mary and Neal were sleeping. Mary lay on her back, arms at her sides, mouth slightly open, in a deep sleep induced by alcohol and tranquilizers. Neal lay on his side with his back to her.

KittyKat jumped up on the bed by Mary’s feet and paused. When neither Neal nor Mary stirred, KittyKat crept up the bed and lay across Mary’s face. He dug his claws into the pillow on either side of her head and pulled his body down, pressing tightly against her nose and mouth.

The medical examiner remained behind after his assistants had bagged Mary and taken her away. He and Neal stood near the front door. “I’m sorry, Mr. Nerks,” the medical examiner said. “Sometimes a person just stops breathing in the night and doesn’t wake up.”

“Do you think that is what happened to Mary?” Neal asked.

“Yes, I do. Of course, I’ll know more after the post-mortem, but it looks like she simply stopped breathing, or experienced cardiac arrest.”

“Yes, I imagine so,” Neal said, wondering how one experiences cardiac arrest. “Aren’t you supposed to survive in order to have an experience?” he asked the medical examiner.

The medical examiner left without answering Neal’s question. He was alone in the house, except for the cat lying in front of the refrigerator, licking his fur. Neal poured a cup of coffee and sat down at the kitchen table.

KittyKat stopped grooming himself, raised his leg and started licking his balls. He paused and looked into Neal’s eyes.

Neal laughed. “You don’t have to worry about me,” he said to the cat. “I’m never giving you a bath.” ❖

“A SHRUNKEN STONE”

by HAREENDRAN KALLINKEEL

An aristocrat, in a chariot drawn by several horses, arrives at a crowded street corner. Men and women, half-clad in dirty and torn clothes, flock around vendors selling their staple of rice, littered with tiny worms and mites their malnourished eyes can hardly detect; or vegetables, shrunken and drained of juices, like their shriveled souls.

“Our city,” the aristocrat says. “Why is it devoid of beauty, any freshness to greet my thirsting eyes?”

His bard, following close-by on foot, pauses for a moment, takes a deep breath. “Your muse, she’s on vacation, as you may remember. The townsfolk aren’t forewarned.” She wipes the sweat dripping down her chin, into her deep cleavage.

“Alas, thou art a pleasure to my ears, thy voice sweet as honey, I’ve almost forgotten...” The aristocrat pauses as a sudden gust of wind sweeps a cloud of dust onto his face. He spits a lump of blood near the bard’s feet.

“The wines you devour, oh lord, the love you make, have begun to corrupt your liver...” The bard’s song begins to sound like a lament.

“Behold, ye singer of praises,” the aristocrat speaks aloud, holding up his hand. “Here cometh she, the beauty I wish to be drunk on, unto death.”

A woman, clad in a white sari, its tail wrapped across her shoulders, yet revealing the fleshiness of her shapely breasts beneath, enters the street, with two maidens flanking her sides. Her garment rather accentuates than conceals the contours of her hips and thighs as she walks along the street with a dancer’s grace evident in her strides.

“So lustrous and illustrious, oh lord, I must say,” the bard sings. “No praises enough a tribute to this damsel that devastates.”

The aristocrat picks up a bag that contains gold coins, kept by the side of his seat, throws it at the woman’s feet.

“For you to take,” he says. “A hundred, for spending some time with me...”

Rain in the making announces its arrival. Dark clouds swarm on the horizon. A bolt of thunder jerks the chariot’s wheels.

The woman, undaunted by the change in the climate, picks up the offering, holds it aloft, as if weighing its worth. “Sorry, I’ve already given my time to someone else,” she says.

Wind lashes, a cold chill sweeps along the aristocrat’s face, carrying the stench of the rot from a nearby drain.

The woman’s nose wrinkles, she wraps

her arms around her chest, as her sari gets shifted a little when the gust gathers momentum.

The aristocrat takes out another bag, concealed beneath his seat, and throws it towards her. "It's a thousand," he says. "It should be enough to buy anyone of your kind." He climbs down the chariot and approaches her.

The woman picks up the bag, examines its hem, sewn with gold threads. "Nice design," she says. "But, again, I'm sorry. The one to whom I've already given my time, I can't back away from my commitment." She thrusts the bags toward him.

"Not even for a thousand, and well, a hundred plus already?"

"Sorry, no. It's a matter of bonding, with the *atman*."

The rumbling of thunder shakes the earth. The aristocrat feels the tremors beneath his feet. "*Atman*?" he says. "Where in hell can one find one?"

On the steps of the shrine, flanked by several younger priests of lesser significance, the chief priest stands.

The woman touches the ground before the first on a flight of steps, brings her hand to her forehead, in a gesture of respect for her Lord.

"How shameless can a woman be," the chief priest says. "Entering a premise where whores like you have no purpose..."

He pauses as a blast of wind splatters sheets of rain across his chest.

"I'm here to visit Lord *Nataraja*, the king of dances, his *linga*; the divine phal-

lus." She bows before the shrine.

"Yes, divine," the chief priest says, "not a place for dancers like you, whom the landlords and aristocrats bed once you finish your *nrithya*, the so-called dance."

Thundershowers, like an avalanche, keep crashing down from the sky. A torrent lashes across the temple's courtyard, edging over the shrine's steps.

"No priest can deny a true devotee her right to pray," the woman says.

The gushing water turns into tiny ripples that embrace the ash-smeared stones along the flight of steps.

The voice of the aristocrat's bard booms in the chief priest's ears. "Pave way, the lord is on the path."

The priest holds his palms together in salutation; the rampart built by his aides' bodies opens up. The aristocrat climbs the steps to the shrine.

The woman retreats, her Lord, his mighty phallus, stronger than ever, a captive within her soul.

The aristocrat bends before his God, chants the mantras he learned, closing his eyes, as tradition dictated.

As the thunderbolt's cadence wears off, he opens his eyes.

In the sanctum sanctorum, with the rain's anger, the thunder's rumble, and lightning's ferocity gone, the aristocrat stands bewildered.

He stares at the Lord's phallus, shrunken, shriveled, and drained; the stone? ❖

“PERSISTENT SORCERY”

by CHARLES WALL

Meditation is not a luxury granted to the hunted, but Millicent sat cross-legged on the overturned tree trunk regardless. She meditated to forget her surroundings, but the rustling of branches nagged for her vexation. She wanted nothing more than to write in her journal but cursed herself for slathering the last of the ink on her bracer earlier that day.

When she opened her eyes and scowled around the clearing, she found the shadows of the forest had only moved by a couple of inches. She closed her eyes again, fighting back sleep that beckoned to her with its tranquil tendrils wrapping around her thoughts. Every time it threatened to take hold, she snapped back to alertness, remembering her pursuers would make short work of her traps.

The hunters were close. She could feel it in the same concretely intangible way she could feel power coursing through her fingertips after casting a spell. She buried everything she didn't need, she avoided the main roads, she never built a fire; anything she could do to keep the hunters off her trail. Still they closed in on her with each passing day.

Moments after she tried to fall back into meditation, she heard a cry resonate in the distance. She listened and it came

again, a terrified cry that sent chills down her spine. The sounds of the forest had become all too familiar to her in the past month and this sounded nothing like the cries of prey as nocturnal predators began their wakeful hours. This sound belonged to a person, not an animal. It crossed her mind that the sound could be bait to lure her into a trap. But after two months of running, she had no desire to hide from her hunters.

As she stalked through thickets and bushes the cry changed into a scream. When she arrived at the source of the sound, she looked through the dense bushes and saw a horse-drawn wagon stopped in the middle of a dirt path cutting through the forest. An old man sat atop his horse, shouting at a black wolf sitting in the middle of the road. The beast ignored the old man's protests and stared at him like a furred gargoyle.

The old man pulled on the reins and told his horse to back up. Instead, it reared up, knocking its rider to the ground with a loud thump. With its prey on equal footing, the wolf advanced towards the farmer. Each step it took made its muscular shoulder blades jut up like furred mountains. In the rising moonlight, Millicent could see the wolf's glistening

maw as it stalked closer to its next meal.

Disappointed in her findings, she turned back towards her clearing. She knew that without her help the farmer's blood would stain the wolf's moon colored fangs. But there was no benefit from starving the wolf of its next meal, at least until she came up with a purpose for him. It didn't take her long to come up with an idea. When it did, a smirk graced her face for the first time in two months: a remnant of her old self.

Muscles showed under the wolf's fur as it lunged at the farmer. The farmer screamed and squeezed his eyes shut, bracing himself for the mountain of mange to set upon him. As the wolf pounced, she dove between them. In a motion too fast for the farmer to see, she swiped the fingers of her right hand against the bracer on her left arm, coating them in a layer of black ink. Flecks of ink flew through the night air, punching holes in the stream of moonlight coming from between the branches. In a motion just as fast as her first, she traced a symbol on her palm with the ink covered fingers.

When the farmer opened his eyes he found the wolf hovering midair, struggling to break free from the invisible strings holding it suspended. It snapped its teeth at Millicent, blaming her for its imprisonment. With a swipe of her hand, she sent the wolf soaring through the air. The beast landed several feet away and scampered deeper into the forest with its tail tucked between its legs.

Millicent watched the wolf as it fled,

satisfied with her work. Out of the corner of her eye, Millicent saw a figure moving towards her. She whipped around with her finger pressed against the palm of her hand, ready to sling a spell at whatever might come at her.

She turned to find not a beast but the farmer coming towards her. When she turned, the farmer let out another shout and fell onto his rear. She tried not to laugh but the hood and tail of her robe flapped in the wind with a sound like laughter.

"Please! Don't hurt me!"

"I wouldn't think of it oldtimer." She said and offered her hand to him. He took it and stood eye to eye with his savior. "Are you okay?"

"I think so. Thanks to you sorcerer."

"Please, call me Millicent. What is your name?"

"It's James Tuttle. I'm in your debt."

He said with a peasant's bow.

"Under normal circumstances I would say there is no debt, but these are not normal circumstances. I need something from you."

The farmer's donned a frown that made him look years, if not decades older. Millicent didn't require sorcery to read his thoughts. "What do I have that a sorcerer does not? What could a peasant like me know that a sorcerer did not? What could they not learn from the thousands of tomes available to them at the Library?" Despite his appearance, the farmer bowed again. "Anything you ask."

Millicent was impressed; no coercion

necessary. "I need somewhere to stay for a couple of nights and then I will be on my way."

He hesitated. "My farm is over yonder." And gestured towards the other direction of the path.

Millicent shook her head. "That won't do. If my pursuers find me they will not hesitate to kill you and anyone else there."

James flinched at her words as if she had stabbed him. "There is an abandoned cottage deeper in the woods. Townsfolk call it the Welshire house." He hesitated, "Though I doubt it's suitable for a sorcerer of the Library."

"It'll do." She said and interrupted James before he could protest. "I am no pampered ward of the Library. Two months ago you may have been right. But life on the road has a way of changing you." She thought, 'But life on the *run* has a way of changing you' would have closer to the truth.

"Aye."

"I will also need food, paper and ink from town. You mustn't tell anyone you met me or we will both be in danger. Bring the supplies in three days. Understand?" She handed him a single gold coin, more than enough to pay for the supplies she requested.

"I promise." There was no conviction in James's voice but Millicent said nothing. If she couldn't trust him after she saved his life, then she might as well have let the wolf slaughter the man.

"Let us be off." Millicent said and hopped on the back of the cart. James

climbed to the rider's seat and took them deeper into the forest, where the Welshire house waited in the dark.

Three days later, James found himself standing in front of the Welshire House. All James carried with him was a leather bag with the supplies the sorcerer needed. For the past ten minutes he'd tried to muster enough courage to knock at the door, but it stood over him like an ancient golem.

He held his breath and tapped his knuckles against the rotting surface of the door. When no reply came, he said. "It's James Tuttle!" His fingers tightened around the leather bag while he looked back at his donkey. He wished more than anything he could ride away and forget this cursed place ever existed.

He turned back to the door and watched it swing open on its own. He stood frozen, staring into the puncture wound of a door frame. An odor of decay struck his nose, bludgeoning its way up his nostrils and strangling his sinuses with its stench. He stepped through the door to find spiderwebs cluttering every corner. In one of the webs James saw a beetle convulsing in its silk prison while a fat spider stared at its victim with eight unblinking eyes.

The door slammed shut behind him while he searched for Millicent in the shadows that blanketed the cottage. Without the light from the doorway, all he had to guide him were the flickering candles placed on shelves and windowsills.

In the dim light James saw black markings painted on the floor and walls. The markings bent in sharp right angles that stopped and started without completing any pattern.

“Welcome.” Millicent said from behind him. James reeled in surprise, turning to see the sorcerer seated at a table in a dark corner of the room. “I hope you don’t mind the mess. It feels good to have time to research again, even if it is temporary.” Millicent said and lit a half-melted candle. “Do you have what I asked of you?”

“Ink, paper, and provisions.” He said and sat the bag of supplies down on the table.

“Very good. Keep the remainder of the coin. Please, have a seat.” She said and unpacked the supplies from the bag. James tried to read her face, but what little emotion he might have seen was lost in a vignette of candlelight. Instead, he watched her uncork the bottle of ink and pour it into her hand. She then rubbed the ink on the bracer on her left forearm, coating the metal surface with the glossy liquid.

While she worked, James studied the symbols on the floors and walls around him. “Did you make these markings? Or were they here before?”

Without looking up from her arm she said, “I made them. They’re sigils or supposed to be, at least.” A half-smile curled on her lips. “I don’t expect you to know what that means. Few sorcerers know of their existence, fewer know how to use them.” She paused. “How much do you know about sorcery?”

“All I know is from the stories I’ve heard from travelers. They say sorcerers use symbols they paint to cast spells. But it’s been years since anyone I know has seen a sorcerer in person.”

“Correct. But there are two types of symbols. All sorcerers use spells.” She lowered her right hand to her left wrist and slid her index finger across the length of the bracer, coating her fingertip in a layer of ink. Then she brought her finger to the palm of her left hand and traced a round curving symbol.

When she finished, the symbols glowed orange and a small flame appeared in the palm of her hand. James watched with wide eyes as it drifted between her fingers, speeding up with each lap. “Spells like this and the ones you saw the other night are simple, fleeting.” She caught the flame in her hand and when she opened it again, the fire and symbols vanished.

Again she painted ink across her hand and she raised her palm to face James. This time a series of sharp angles covered her hand, similar but different from the ones painted on the cottage interior. “This is a sigil. Few sorcerers besides the top Librarians know of their existence. Sigils can alter reality itself for as long as I choose.” The sigil glowed blue and she vanished without so much as a sound.

James found himself alone, the silence and darkness in the cottage pressing in on him in every direction. “Come back!” He said and in the next instant she reappeared in her seat.

“Then what do these do?” He asked,

pointing towards the markings behind him.

“They’re all incomplete versions of the same sigil. With some adjustments it should allow for teleportation. I was on the verge of a breakthrough before the Librarians discovered my research and sent their hunter after me. I’ve been on the run ever since.”

“I can’t believe met a sorcerer. I have so many questions I’d like to ask you.”

But Millicent didn’t hear him. Her eyes were distant, seeing something that James couldn’t. They glowed with a pale purple light that reminded James of the light Millicent’s sigil emitted when she activated it. “The hunter’s here.”

He listened for evidence of someone moving outside but only heard birds singing. “It’s probably some kids poking around where they don’t belong.”

“Stay here. If I don’t return soon, leave through the back and go home.” She said.

Without another word, she stepped out of the cottage into the evening sunlight. Squirrels scurried through the overgrowth of grass as she stepped out into the yard. A breeze swept through the clearing, fluttering her cloak and making the building behind her creak.

“Come out. Or I’ll topple those trees on top of you.” She said.

A man stepped out from the understory. He wore light armor that covered his forearms, shoulders, and chest. The parts not covered by armor hid behind dark green cloth, including gloves and a high collar. A mask made from the same steel as his armor covered his face. It bore

no expression, with lips and a nose that would look at home on a dead man. The man’s eyes glared through slits in the mask, making up for all the emotion the mask lacked. More important than his clothing was the weapons the man carried. On each hip, a sword rested in its sheath.

“You’re no sorcerer. Who are you?”

Behind the mask, the hunter’s eyes twitched with uncontained anger. She could feel his hate channeling through the mask like sunlight through a looking glass. “The Librarians call me Costel or just ‘hunter’.”

“If you don’t put your weapons on the ground and leave this will be your last hunt. I won’t show you mercy, even if you can’t use sorcery.”

“I do not expect your mercy, for I’ll show you none.”

He took a step towards her and before his foot could touch the ground, a beam of light streaked across the clearing. The hunter lunged sideways seconds before the ground next to him exploded.

Millicent slung another spell and aimed it at the hunter’s chest. He slid across the ground as the beam passed overhead. Although the beam missed, the resulting shockwave rippled through the hunter’s body and sent him flying. The blast was strong enough to topple several trees which crashed to the ground with a groan. A cloud of dirt spread throughout the clearing, concealing the hunter.

The spells should have been enough to dispatch the hunter but she didn’t want to take any chances. She stared into the dust

cloud with her fingers covered in ink, ready to cast a spell at a moment's notice.

Something moved from within the cloud and an instant later Costel came at her at full speed. Dirt and debris covered his armor but he still managed to dodge and weave between her spells.

His blades swiped at her chest and arms, each slash cutting closer and closer. The next spell Millicent cast bathed her hand in a dark orange glow. With the same hand, she grabbed the blade without it cutting into her. Millicent twisted her wrist and sent the sword flying across the clearing with a clang.

Costel withdrew his second blade and swung at her. There was no time to cast another spell before the sword connected with the gauntlet on her left forearm. Pain exploded through her arm, but she refused to let it stop her. She painted a spell on her right hand and pushed it into Costel's stomach. Fire burned between her fingertips and smoke drifted up from Costel's abdomen as the blade fell from his hand.

With the hunter disarmed, Millicent readied to deliver the finishing blow. Before she could cast the spell, Costel's hand wrapped around her throat and lifted her off of her feet. She gasped and reached up to pry the fingers from around her neck.

Millicent looked down at the hole she punched in Costel's abdomen and saw flakes of charred flesh falling away to show threads of healthy tissue closing the wound. After several seconds the gap closed and a tattoo began to form on the fresh skin. Her

skin went pale when she saw how the tattoo twisted in sharp right angles and knew it was a sigil.

Her fingers dropped away from the hand around her throat and she used the little amount of ink left on her fingertips to cast a spell that flung her from Costel's grip. Air rushed back into her lungs making it easier to think. She knew she had no choice but to run. She painted a spell on her palm that released a cloud of smoke, allowing her to escape into the woods.

Roots and weeds lashed at her as she stumbled through the unfamiliar forest. Behind her the hunter followed in her tracks. As Millicent ran, she slung spells in his direction. Trees came crashing down around Costel but he didn't miss a step. She fled until she came to a dirt road at the edge of the forest. Further down the road Millicent saw a broken wagon standing tilted on three wheels.

Millicent tripped as she crossed the road, cutting her elbows on the dry dirt. With the hunter close behind, she crawled behind the wagon, hoping it would give her enough time to regain her footing. The hunter slowed when he saw Millicent crawl to the other side of the wagon, knowing that he had her trapped. He stepped around the side of the carriage in time to see Millicent scabbling to her feet.

"Enough running!" He said with a step forward and noticed the ink dripping from Millicent's fingers. He looked down and saw a circle of spells surrounding him. He opened his mouth to shout but a white orb

of light surged up from under him to vaporize the words from his throat. The spells glowed with white-hot energy that expanded within the circle to form a dome, disintegrating everything it touched.

When the orb reached its apex it consumed every trace of the hunter in a white void. After a moment, the orb flickered out of existence with a pop of air. Other than the smooth crater in the ground, there was no sign that Costel or the spells ever existed. Millicent exhaled. She wiped off her hands on her robe and began tending to her injuries. Although pain flared through her body, she couldn't help but smirk in satisfaction.

A sound like crackling firewood made her turn back to the crater. In front of it, she saw specs of ash floating in the air collect together in shapes as they scorched into existence. Millicent's heart stopped. She counted six of them. Together they formed a rough pentagram with sigil in the middle.

The particles solidified into black sigils that conformed around a body that was yet to exist. The smell of bone meal filled the air as bones snapped into place, some floating in the air before connecting with others. Ribs aligned themselves on the skeleton's chest while vertebra linked into place along its spine. Above it all, a grinning skull molded together and turned to glare at Millicent with hollow sockets.

For the first time in her life Millicent wanted to scream but found she couldn't. When she tried to look away she found her body paralyzed by terror. Her skin crawled

at the sound of bone grinding against bone as ligaments formed. Muscles gathered around bones, each fiber weaving with another as if the flesh were cloth on a loom. A heart and lungs expanded from knobs of flesh, bulging until they filled the empty chest cavity.

Millicent flinched as arms wrapped around her and lifted her to her feet. She clawed at them until she realized it was James pulling her away from Costel. "Can you move?" He asked.

She nodded. With a few strokes of her fingers, she cast a spell that created two chunks of ice around Costel's feet. "We have to get back to the house. Now." Millicent said.

James nodded and led her back to the edge of the forest. Before they disappeared into the treeline Millicent turned back to look at Costel. His body had nearly finished rebuilding, revealing the uninterrupted network of tattoos across his pale skin.

When they returned to the cottage Millicent fell to her knees and began working on the sigils on the floor. "You have to go!" James said. "There is no time! Leave now while you still have a chance to lose him."

Millicent refused to look away from her work. "This is the only way." James wanted to argue with her, but knew it was no use.

James heard a rustling sound from outside and moments later, the cottage's front door slammed open. He didn't have time to react before he felt a knife pressed

against his neck. Millicent ignored the hunter's intrusion and continued scribbling at the sigils while Costel pulled James towards him.

"Don't move old man. This blade might be blunt, but it'll get the job done." Costel hissed, pressing a knife against James's neck hard enough to draw blood. "And we both know it won't be pretty." He said through a grin full of hate. James swallowed and felt his Adam's apple bob against the rusted metal. "Sorcerer. Remove your gauntlet and come here."

She stood up, her back still turned to both of the men. She winced and loosened the straps that kept the gauntlet tight against her arm. Then she turned around to toss it towards Costel. With her arm bare James could see a gash oozing blood down her forearm.

"Don't do it Millicent!" He said, but she took a step towards them, her hands in the air.

With Costel focused on Millicent, James took his chance. He drove his elbow into Costel's stomach in one strike. The hunter doubled over and let go of James. In that instant, Millicent pushed James towards the door. He landed on the ground away from them and looked up to see Millicent grappling with Costel.

She wrapped one arm around Costel's neck and dragged him to the ground. While they struggled, the sigils beneath them glowed. Instead of landing on the wooden floor, Costel and Millicent sank into the floorboards, sending ripples out around them. They sunk deeper until both

disappeared and the floor returned to normal.

Millicent opened her eyes to see an ocean stretching out across the horizon. Waves crashed against the shore with maddening tranquility. She stood up only to lose her footing and teeter at the edge of a cliff overlooking the ocean. She regained her balance and fell to the ground much like James had when he first saw her.

Her mind relaxed only for a moment before she realized she was not out of harm's way just yet. Millicent scanned the line of trees farther inland and checked behind boulders but found no trace of Costel. He could be hiding anywhere, waiting for the perfect opportunity to strike.

But she couldn't waste time looking for the hunter. She had to get back to the Welshire house, this time without bringing Costel with her. It would be simple enough to create a partner for the sigil back at the Welshire house, countless miles away. She already had a design in mind and could have the sigil painted within minutes. She reached down for her bracer but instead of cool metal pressing against her fingertips, she felt warm blood gushing out of the gash along her forearm. Pain swelled through her arm, but it wasn't without a reward. With her fingers coated in her own blood, she began tracing her fingers across the stone beneath her.

The ocean breeze howled in her ears as she worked, it ruffled her clothes and disheveled her hair but she ignored it in

her fierce focus. When the wind finally died down, a sound came that made her heart stop. Stone pebbles crackled and she heard labored breathing so quiet that she couldn't be sure that it was real. She stopped to listen and heard the sound again. This time she determined it came from beyond the cliff overlooking the ocean. She peered over the edge and saw Costel's grimacing face look back at her several yards down the cliff.

Costel bared his teeth as his fingers clutched the rocks sticking out from the cliff. Deep cuts and punctures covered his body but the sigils were hard at work repairing his wounds. At the bottom of the cliff Millicent saw dozens of pointed rocks sticking out from the ocean like standing needles. Costel was already halfway up the cliff and only moved faster when he and Millicent locked eyes. Half panicked, Millicent scrambled back to her sigil.

She was almost finished when she looked up to see one hand and then another reach over the edge of the cliff. Muscle memory made her reach for her gauntlet but instead of ink, she covered her fingers in more blood. She cursed and used that blood to start a new symbol.

Millicent could hear Costel's bare feet tapping against the stone as he limped towards her, chunks of flesh still missing where the pointed rocks pierced him. Millicent painted the new spell in four motions to create a wall of fire that blocked Costel's path. The hunter hesitated at the heat of the flames but when he saw the sigil was close to finished, he took a step

forward even as the flames scorched his legs.

Millicent dragged her fingers across the ground a last time and the sigil began to glow. She dove into it without looking at Costel. The flames burning all around him extinguished but the pain of his charred flesh flaking off remained. He approached the spot where Millicent disappeared to find the blood used to create it now drying. Costel pushed his hands against it and screamed but the sigil did respond.

James moved away as the floor beside him shimmered and Millicent tumbled through covered in sweat. She turned back at the floor, expecting Costel to appear in front of her. Long seconds passed before she peeled her eyes away from the blood sigil's partner.

"I need to get out of this damned place." Millicent said and snatched her casting gauntlet up off the floor. James followed after her, not wanting to stay in the cottage a second longer than he needed. He found Millicent outside, looking at her gauntlet as if it had been years since she had last seen it. She strapped it on, wincing in pain as it tightened around her wounded arm.

Millicent reached in her pouch and took out a scroll. She unfurled it and swiped her fingers across the bracer. Instead of the blinding speed she used to paint spells when he first met her, now her strokes were like an artist taking their first brushes at a blank canvas.

When she finished, she handed the

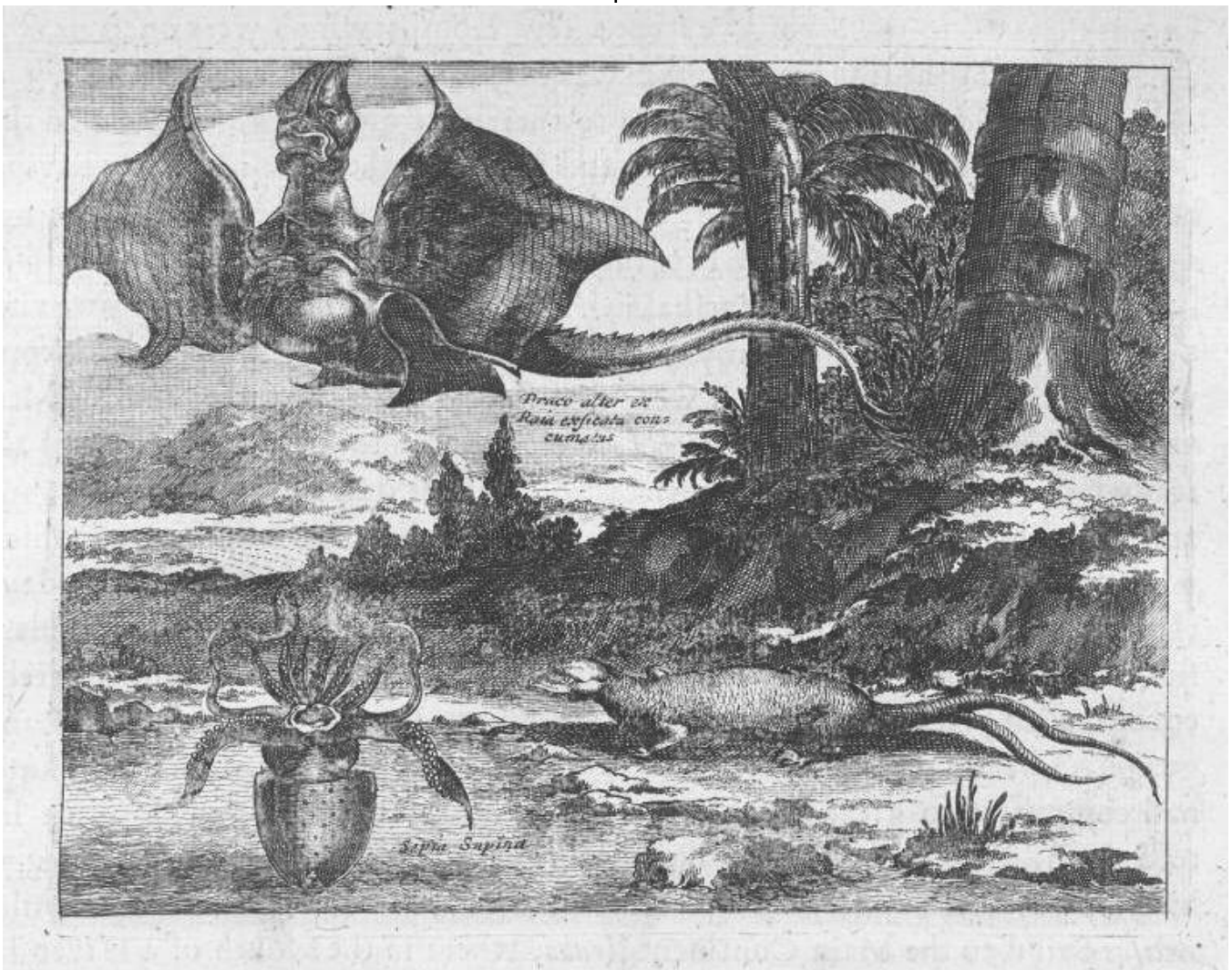
scroll to James. "What does it do?" He asked her.

"I did the best I could. I sent him very far away. I don't think he'll ever come back. But if you ever need my aid, for anything at all, just open that scroll and I will return." She paused. "It doesn't feel like enough for the help you have given but it is all I can offer."

"Thank you." He said, holding the scroll in his hand as if it were an artifact handed down by his family for generations.

Millicent nodded, but said nothing. She didn't bother with a goodbye. For the first time in her life, she was free of the

Library's oppression. Free to do as she liked now that she defeated their unkillable hunter. But her thoughts kept returning to her once captors and how one day she might return to them, to teach them the lessons their hunter taught her. ❖



“1504”

by THOMAS FITZGERALD McCARTHY

They found the monster hiding in the only orange tree left standing.

A flash flood had destroyed most of the grove. Nick Marsh was the first to lay his eyes on the wreckage. Tim Craigs and Sarah Tucker held their breath. Nick began to weep and hurled his rifle into the sand with a dull plush. Shaken with helpless fury, he stood at the top of the sand drift and cursed toward the dry thunderheads recoiling southward. A fierce afternoon sun smoldered down over them, baking the dusty desert. It burned so brightly that even the moon came out to watch, far above the horizon.

The moon doesn't belong there, Tim thought distantly.

He already knew what was waiting for them on the other side. Where a once thriving farm had once stood, only dark rivulets of caked mud remained, carving up the valley like the ugly, varicose veins of a drug addict. Forests of stunted cacti and salt flats were laid bare to the white rock beneath, like the bones of a dried cadaver.

Oranges were scattered everywhere, crushed and split open. The adobe walls surrounding the grove were mostly rubble. The splintered pole of a cottonwood tree was jutting through the south wall like a battering ram. A few cacti and juniper

plants were strewn about the ruins, half-swallowed by the mercurial silt.

Tim thought that he should say something comforting, maybe something about the reliability of their food stores. Replanting trees wasn't the same thing as replanting ruined corn stalks. It would take twenty years to rebuild all of this. Beside him, Sarah Ward was crying. This was their largest farm. Nearly a full third of their harvest was gone, and half the orange trees were unsalvageable for future harvests. Nick Marsh was still panting, his eyes wide and filmy with unfocused rage as they drank in the scene.

It felt like an act of God. The colony would be devastated.

Before Tim could say anything, Nick snatched up his rifle and swiftly descended the sand drift. Something had caught his eye. Tim and Sarah clambered down after him, carefully picking their way through the jumble of boughs and severed stumps.

Tim froze in mid-step as he caught sight of the Gaborl.

It was perched in an orphaned tree at the peak of the north rise. The creature's shape was unmistakable, blotted against the spiderweb of orange-laden branches like a gangly knot in a tangle of wires. The tree provided pitiful shade. It was dark green

and amphibian-like. Its eyes were as big as goose eggs and as black as oil. It was hairless and ribboned with muscles. Four huge fangs as large as butcher's knives were sheathed behind its thick gums.

Tim's father had shown him a terrifying cartoon film called *The Hobbit* when he was a boy. There were these foul creatures called goblins that lived in dark caverns and had disproportionately large mouths big enough to swallow a goat. Tim didn't know where the name Gaborl had originated, but it started with a 'G' too, so maybe it was related.

Was the Hobbit based on a true story? Tim wondered.

"How did it get here?" Sarah demanded.

Gaborl were nocturnal amphibians. The sun blistered them, but didn't kill them outright unless they were subjected to long term exposure—a form of execution still popular among some in the colony for captured Gaborl. Sunlight didn't turn them into pillars of salt or clouds of ash, like the vampires from those old pulp fiction stories. But it caused them excruciating pain.

"The flood," Tim mumbled, saluting to keep the sun off his face. "Some river, somewhere."

Above them, the moon floated aimlessly across the sky, like a drunken actor lingering onstage after the curtain had fallen.

The first Gaborl had been discovered in an extensive subterranean system in Indonesia at the beginning of the twenty-first century, geographically isolated for mil-

lions of years. Small domes grew on their skin, like great blisters, isolating the deadly diseases that their immune systems had failed to purge. When the first creature stepped out into the sunlight and its skin split open, all of the horrid little monsters that they had been keeping prisoner for so long swept the globe, eradicating human civilization with the same relentless proficiency as smallpox flattening the Native-Americans.

Overhead, the moon continued to brave the blue infinity, drifting closer to the sun, as if angling for a fight.

Who understood such things anymore, though? For nearly ten years, members of the Colony had regarded a film called *The Matrix* as a historical docudrama.

"It's all your fault!" Nick screamed madly at the silent creature. "The wars—the plagues—the flood—everything!"

Marsh raised his rifle and shot off the nubs of a few branches. He seemed to miss intentionally. Maybe to frighten the thing, toy with it. Behind them, Tim heard the rest of the group arrive, a hush falling over them as they surveyed the carnage. Slowly, one by one, the monster's presence seemed to incense them, like a rapidly spreading wildfire.

The creature shivered, either in pain from the unrelenting sun, or fear of what would become of it as the human mob began to mass beneath the tree.

"Torches!" Someone yelled, and surely enough there were torches.

"We shouldn't—" Tim murmured. But no one listened. They were angry. They

wanted blood. The creature's presence seemed predetermined. A gift from the gods. A sacrifice to sate their bloodlust. The thing might as well have fallen out of the sky, because that's exactly where it was going.

Tim didn't fear the Gaborl so much. They were lethal, but only when provoked, and mostly when confused. They were like great white sharks. They only attacked when they were backed into a corner, or mistook humans for fat deer.

Several years back, a playful sergeant named Todd Longmore had wandered out of the colony's barracks on Christmas Eve, drunk and wearing a beer helmet with reindeer antler's tapered to them, and had been carried off by several of the creatures.

They set the torches to the base of the tree, but it didn't burn, the bark still damp from the night before. So they fired off a few more shots and hooted menacingly.

Tim wanted to say something...

Darkness suddenly fell across the desert. Dumbfounded, he glanced up into the heavens. Something had abruptly moved in front of the sun, directly centering itself over the star's white-hot corona.

His thoughts suddenly drifted to a documentary that he'd watched on the History Channel as a boy. A man from some distant continent called Europe landed on an island named Jamaica, seeking spices and natural resources. The natives were distrustful, regarding the sea captain with unnatural white skin at the point of a spear. Until finally, this man—Tim believed that his name was Columbus—turned their

attention toward the sky and predicted a lunar eclipse to enthrall them with his power. With tremendous awe, they watched as the moon slid into the daylight, slowly snuffing it out. Humbled by the fulfilled prophecy, the tribes began to listen.

When he looked again, Tim found that the sun was a black hole scalloped in a ring of liquid gold.

Columbus was said to have smirked when it happened, extending his hand in friendship to a local chieftain.

There was a fierce, inhuman caterwaul, followed by a sharp crash. Someone screamed. Gunshots glanced off tree bark. More screams. Bodies hit the wet ground with sickening thuds. Before Tim could think to move, blood sprayed the left half of his face. Hot breath plumed over the back of his neck.

The New World. March 2074. March 1504. ❖

“FREEDOM”

by SHAINUR ULLAH

Ed. Note: Gentle reader, welcome to the first episode of the serialized short novel Freedom. In this story, alien beings feed and survive off the freedoms of humans, who can only combat them by restricting their own rights, even to the point of slavery. Enjoy....

Episode 1

Awake, I rubbed my eyes, it had not yet dawned, the sun was held by the gloom, at that moment I remembered getting off my bed. I went down the stairs ready to ask for help to drink some water, but I had the feeling that I should not scream, or at least that's what I remember; I walk down a big hall, then I see her, my grandmother, the one my parents had said I would never see again.

Trying to offer me through an exaggerated gesture the desired liquid, but also speaking to me of freedom and to accompany it, extending a hand, I felt sleepy and my reflexes forced me to take it, I felt a strong squeeze in my stomach and as if flying away quickly away from the room in which our reunion happened; I heard screaming, crying and I felt very confused. That night I slept in my parents' bed, I was four years old when I saw them for the first time, not

in the way they are really, but in the friendliest way they could find, my grandmother had died only a few months ago, and at this moment I realized that I did not understand, and her first attempt to take me was almost successful.

It would not be the first time I would see them, there were many more attempts, all unsuccessful, what worried my parents most was the frequency with which they happened, and every year that passed I was becoming more aware of everything that was happening, not I could understand why they called me and wanted me on their side.

I confess that at first I was quite scared by the possibilities of never seeing my family again, or that these beings hurt them, I told my parents, one night my mother entered the room, I had noticed all the worry that I had been around for a long time, and as a self-sacrificing mother, I had to find the way in which I felt protected. My mother sat on the bed and said, "you should not fear, we will always be by your side taking care of you." "Mom, why do they want me? There are a lot of children in the world, why are they still chasing me?" I said between sobs. "You are a very, very special child, they seek to have that wonderful mind inside that little head, but

nobody, not even you should allow it," and at that moment my mother took an object out of her pocket. She opened her hand over mine and gave me a medallion, she told me that it had belonged to her grandfather, and also to his father, the use of this object had given him great value, and that while he was wearing it, he would never be afraid. The medallion was of a very rare material, I do not remember what name she said to describe it, she promised to take it always hidden, because it was valuable and maybe there was a danger that someone would steal it from me. From that day I have hidden it in my pocket, somehow I thought that this would give me the courage to face them, but sometimes I could feel that their presence called me.

One day I told my parents that I was attracted by the company of these beings whom I knew at that time as "beings beyond the earth", it was something unusual for many people the presence of these entities, some people in the town said that a couple of similar cases had occurred in regions thousands of kilometers away, and that in many cases these beings had gotten their way, had managed to take many of our own, my parents were disturbed by the fact that only they had taken people who had a good economic status, like us, we never heard of an incident with the slaves, no person who was in the service of another; We still had very little information at the time, but we hoped that there was some way to prevent them from contacting me.

One day I heard a person close to our family talk about that another appearance

of these beings had been reported, in a town quite close to ours, I hid behind some furniture to hear this conversation, the truth is that this topic interested me Too much, I could say that I even obsessed, and although sometimes I was very afraid, when these beings came to meet me I had a feeling of familiarity, the truth had the desire to take his hand and go on a trip with them, as unknown, to nothing, or whatever is beyond.

"The official figures are of three people who have disappeared into the hands of these beings, the truth is that no one knows where they are going, or what happens next, there was a family that thought they saw their son in a nearby park, they say that He has gone completely " John, my father's friend, told him this and he paid great attention to all the details, it was clear that my father wanted to get these beings away from me.

After that night several months passed before a new attempt arose, it happened in the patio of my house, a child approached me, said he was lost, he wanted a little company, I asked him about his parents and he told me that they let him take walks alone, that he was free to do whatever he wanted; When he started talking about this, I had a strange sensation in the body, I knew it was another entity, I could not understand why he did not react the way the friend described the other people, he said that they almost immediately accepted the deal , because they always found the most attractive way to convince their victims.

My parents almost never left me alone,

but there were times when this was inevitable, that day dad left early and mom was taking a bath so I decided to go out into the yard, and now I was in this situation, my father told me yesterday, "Whatever the offer these beings show you, any promise they make to you, any question they have for you, you should always say no, promise it," to which I replied, "I will never accept anything from them." My parents taught me that promises cannot be broken, so I should always say no.

The boy began to tell me that his parents let him eat sweets every time he wanted, that he could go home at the time he wanted, and many more, that he was always happy and satisfied, that his life was wonderful and that your parents would like to offer this opportunity to other people. I played in silence for a few more minutes, I heard a strangled cry, my mother was petrified at the door, I turned to look at her and when I looked back at the child, this was a monstrous looking creature, really disgusting, I took courage (although I could listen to the beating of my heart very loudly in my ears), without stopping looking at him I said firmly, "no thank you, at home I am happy," and ran into my mother's arms. She locked the door, pressed me hard against her chest and cried until Dad came home; he found us on the floor of the room and he knew exactly what had happened. That night I slept with my parents and talked about a trip, apparently my father would go with the authorities of the nearest town to know the details of the last case, they just wanted to protect me.

The next day my father left, they decided that they would keep an eye on me throughout the day, my mother agreed and promised to take care of me day and night, and that's how it was. He appointed several of our slaves to be with me at all times, and they would notify immediately when something happened, they had a fairly strict schedule and they would keep watch at night.

As we were a wealthy family, there were many slaves who could cover all areas of the house so that I would never be alone. It took a couple of days for Papa to return, and he did not return at all animated, he sat me and my mother in the main room and told us, "they do not know what this is all about, nor where the creatures come from, much less how fight them." My mother was sad, but determined to do everything in her power to prevent these creatures from taking me away from her arms, I was her only son.

"Jacob is safe, he is guarded all day, nothing and no one can enter his room without being seen," said my mother looking into my father's eyes. I went to bed shortly after my father arrived, I was tired, I was not afraid anymore, I just did not want to see my mom and dad sad anymore.

So the years went by, I grew up without seeing more of the mysterious beings who persecuted me so much when I was just a child, now being an adult I was more aware of everything that had happened, and suddenly I was interested in asking a little more about the past events, however, to my parents this did not seem like a good idea,

they did not want to remove the memories of a time when they could not even rest well with the idea that at any moment they could lose their son, a stage in which peace had abandoned their lives, and worry and stress was what abounded in our home.

Every time I approached them looking for information about what had happened to me, they only changed the subject. I know that my questions did them a lot of damage, but I wanted to know what happened, and I also wanted to know if I would visit the entity that wanted to accompany him.

One day I was in one of our lands, watched our slaves, saw how they worked the land, the foremen were even more cruel when my father or I were close, maybe he thought that this way he could show that he was doing a good job, the truth is That did not interest me, I only care about the results, I liked that the family business was quite productive.

Things in the nation were changing continuously, slavery was popular, but not a norm, not even in the homes of wealthier families like mine, in the environment there was a much freer air. I remember that the prohibitions regarding the treatment given to workers were at first somewhat insignificant for a master like me, for example, to reduce one hour of work for all.

I never considered myself a very strict master, nor very kind, but I must confess that at first I did not think that this would affect the way we handled those people under our orders, however, little by little, this process would change the way we saw

life and also the lives of the slaves.

My family and I tried to adapt to all the changes that arose daily in the nation, but they were already somewhat old, that is, they spent a great part of their lives taking care of me incessantly so that no one could harm me. Their hard work had aged their bodies, and also their vital energy, they were also slaves in a certain sense, my slaves, because every step I took had to be supervised, they always had to take care of me, they could not do anything else. I never understood why we were the only family of that place which was persecuted by these beings, that is, I never heard of anything like it, everywhere I went was the "weird" or the "phenomenon", when I was sad cause of any rejection, I could feel that "they" would come for me, however, my mother and father always knew how to cheer me up, then that sensation was immediately removed, it was me again.

In adulthood I understood that I was always strong enough in spirit, that is, what child would reject a house full of sweets or better yet, play without stopping, live without rules, be free to do what you want; However none of this was enough to convince me, for this reason I always felt strong and secure, practically invincible, I was sure that if at this moment these beings visited me, surely they would take a good scare, that is, I would dare to fight them without fear. It seems that "they" heard that thought, because I did not have to wait long to feel their presence again.

Sometime later, really significant changes were presented to all the slave own-

ers, certain laws had been passed which indicated that having "slaves" was not considered as ideal, that these should be treated as a kind of "workers", what a surprise for my parents, it seemed an abomination to them what was happening, as I said before, they were old, it was not easy for them to adapt to the changes, I think I always agreed with what was now dictated, but I definitely did not want to admit it.

Soon, my slaves became my workers, they would have to do the hard work, in exchange for a salary, it was not long after this for the beings to make a new visit. He was witnessed by a small group, a family of "workers". They say that one of his ancestors approached one of his children, and told him that he would not have to work anymore, and the boy simply touched this figure and died in front of his family's eyes. I knew the little one, he was a good boy, curious and hardworking, it was an unexpected and sad news.

Days later I saw the boy walking in front of the patio of the house, I went out to make sure my eyes were not deceiving me, then he turned around and stared at me. "Jacob, come with me, this place is wonderful, you will like it." I knew that I tried them, they would never leave me alone, I had to find answers, I did not know who would give them, or how to start, but I knew that at some point my father would have to give me details about the places he visited during the time he had lasted the visits of the beings to our home.

That night I decided to speak with my

father again, and I decided that I would not retire without some explanation, some indication that I might have about these events, so after dinner I decided to go up to his bedroom and demand an answer, after all it was me who was disturbing all this mysteries, so I think that at least some information was necessary to understand much of what had happened to us and what was still happening.

I approached my father, who this time had a different face, surely one of our workers saw the scene in which the child approached me to offer me again the freedom to be with them. My father had tired eyes, my mother, who had stayed in the room too, this seems to have cried at the new appearance of these beings, surely this touched something inside her, something he thought he had forgotten. I demanded explanations from my father, who told me that he traveled to the town closest to us, where these beings had completed their task and had taken a child they had been chasing for a few weeks. That day he came to the town and spoke with the authorities, at the beginning there was a time when the officers did not want to attend him, however he insisted and told them that he was going through a similar situation, the personnel designated for the case treated him much better, and they even asked for more details about what was happening to me at that moment.

They told her that a few weeks ago the family tried to seek help from the authorities, since they were living something very strange, her eldest daughter, who had

already been deceased for several years, visited her brother on several occasions; the gentleman had always talked about his little girl, who had fallen ill and later the disease had claimed his life, however these brothers had not met, the child recognized by family photographs that they kept in a visible place. The child told his parents that his sister came to play with him and asked to accompany her, first they thought it was something "supernatural" and in a way it complied with the description of the word, but it was much more tangible than an "entity."

Mr. Wilson, the father of the boy, went to a religious authority to help his little one, but he did not find anything that would merit the help of the church, many thought that the signs were hallucinating or maybe he wanted to attract attention, to give him a little life to a place as quiet as that town was. Nobody could help this, so he went to the authorities, without an argument that was really valid, much said that perhaps they had not completely overcome the death of his daughter, and that reflected in the little William Wilson. The father of the boy went home, defeated, but soon they had to contact the man, they had heard of a similar case very far away, in that case the girl had died, she gave herself to these beings because she could not resist more fleeing from them at every moment.

The officers decided to go to the Wilsons' house, so they prepared everything to move there and give them information about what was happening in that distant place where also a person (who was no

longer among the living) near the family circle of the girl he had proposed to give his life for in exchange for the tranquility that he was looking for.

The person who was attending told me, "I know that if I tell you, you will not believe it. For this reason I prefer you to read it yourself." He then approached a desk, removed some things and took out some sheets, placing them in the room where we were sitting and brought me to them. It was the statement of one of the people who went to the place. At first I had the regulatory information, but then I read something that interested me: "... we arrived at the place and knocked on the door, about three times, and nobody came to the call, however, looking through the window we spotted four subjects inside the room, we thought that maybe they were in a situation of risk, for which we decided to act and made use of force to enter home. We found Mr. and Mrs. Wilson with little William, and he was staring at a person in front, a girl, whom we later identified as little Sarah Wilson (deceased), the boy had his hand outstretched and Sarah took it, and at that moment her appearance changed, she was a horrible creature, of funereal aspect, almost like a corpse, and with a creepy voice she said that the little one would be fine because she is free. Later the body of the boy fell to the floor, without life, and the creature disappeared" Of course, these statements seemed as scary as the description of the creature, when relating all this to my case, I understood that the frequent method of these creatures

is to take a friendly look, so that we may take their proposal seriously, without intending to frighten us with their real aspect, and that they can find the characteristics of close relatives, or familiar people, as a means. But what caught my attention more than what I had read was that they could not take the aspect of beings that were alive, or at least that is how I had concluded it, for if one of the creatures so wished that I leave with them, it could easily have taken on the appearance of my father or mother. Imagine that they could end the lives they wanted to achieve their purposes, I thought, and this caused me chills.

I thanked them for the attention they

had given me, and I left the place, but not before I had asked for Mr. Wilson's address. I knew from experience that people keep some information in their memory that does not seem useful to them reasons, and I thought that perhaps something that did not seem relevant would help me to understand much more, or even to back the theories that were rapidly circulating in my brain. I knew that somehow this would help me. I took all my things ready to go to the house of Mr. Wilson; the house some years ago my parents had avoided the death of a son; although these parents had to deal with much more, the disappearance of their offspring by the hand of a creature in the form of their deceased daughter. ❖

END TRANSMISSION