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## WRITER'S TOOLBOX

### 3 SHORT STORIES

### INTERVIEWS with

- zO-AlonzO Gross
- Nzondi
- Mark Leslie

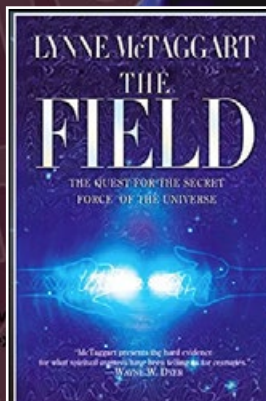
### TALES FROM THE SCRIPT

### BOOKENDS REVIEW

# zO-AlonzO Gross

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# OCTOBER 2022

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“Either write something  
worth reading or do  
something worth writing.”

—Benjamin Franklin



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## Can You Smell CHRISTMAS?

I ask this in disbelief. We have a saying in my family that after July 4th, the path to Christmas is just a few blinks away.

As I write this Halloween decor is everywhere. Some stores are holding an advance Christmas sale. In essence the year is almost over!

### Are you ready for 2023?

With the year rapidly coming to a close, you can see that chunk of time was not necessarily spent in your favor.

"Time is the fire in which we burn," a line from the poem, 'Calmly We Walk through This April's Day,' by Delmore Schwartz.

Whatever your politics, you have to agree that we stand at a crucial time in human history, one where massive changes are taking place.

Each generation faces this, although I suspect that this generation will face it more severely.

The fabric of one generation dissolves into an undefined future. An 'undiscovered country,' as Shakespeare called it.

So how do you record this year? Have you met your goals? Have you managed to meander through the obstacles that have presented throughout the year, the challenges, restrictions, adaptations and the like?

It's never too late!

**William Gensburger**  
Author/Publisher

## SHORT STORY

# SEVEN DAYS

by Kayla Hunter-Phillips

## BEFORE THE CHAINS WENT ON, WE WERE TOLD NOT TO LOOK BACK, OR WE'D REGRET IT.

Knowing what we all were going through, we weren't willing to risk it.

On the first day, we walked in complete silence. The sun was beaming down on the back of

our necks,  
and there  
wasn't  
struc-  
ture  
any-

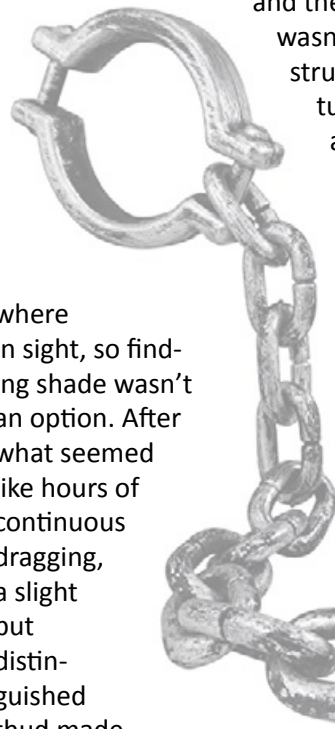
where  
in sight, so find-  
ing shade wasn't  
an option. After  
what seemed  
like hours of  
continuous  
dragging,  
a slight  
but distin-  
guished  
thud made  
us all jump. Since  
there wasn't a tug of what  
seemed to be fallen weight, we  
kept walking as the chains felt  
slightly lighter.

On the second day, we came across a table with small brown bags and a sign that read: "Take

one and don't stop."

As frightened as we all were, that's exactly what we did. Inside we found a half-full water bottle and an apple. The prior whimpering was drowned out by the sounds of biting and gulping. I don't know about the rest of them, but I once again felt the chain lighten a bit.

On the third day, things got very difficult. When the sun reached its highest point in the sky, a stampede of noise formed behind us as we walked. As the sounds became louder, we all began to run. At that moment, we knew we were being chased by dogs. The chains were long enough to



bare-  
ly do  
so, but

I never turned around to confirm what was following us. After what seemed to be hours, the noise finally ended. Of course, the silence only followed after some of the others cried. But when the silence began, I

again felt the chains had lifted some of the previous weight.

The fourth day, and what seemed to be the easiest and shortest of the days, was filled with nothing but rainfall. The downpour lasted the entire day and felt as though the droplets got heavier with every step taken. As hot as the previous days were, this was the highlight of the journey we had undertaken. The cold brought a calming and peaceful feeling none of us had felt in a long time. Hoping it would last, I knew that tomorrow would not be so easy. None of us could tell, with the weather being as rough as it was, that once again, the chains had become lighter still.

On the fifth day, the weather was far worse and made everything up until this point seem less difficult. The wind blew so hard we feared we could be lifted from the ground and blown away. There were dark rain clouds, but not a drop of rain in sight. The thunder and lightning exchanged roles for hours and walking in silence wasn't necessary anymore.

As time passed, every so often we heard cries from others. I no longer remembered how long it had been since we had a decent meal, and I wasn't sure how long we could hold off with what we had eaten days ago. I just wanted this to be over. I just wanted it to stop.

As the storm finally subsided and night fell, so did the weight of the chains. Nothing behind me dragged anymore, and I didn't hear anything other than my footsteps.

On the sixth day, still afraid to turn around, I began to assess what was different as each day passed. Every day had been different, and nothing was the same by the end of each walk. I still had farther to go, but knowing what I knew now, this would soon be over, that this day would be the last day of walking in chains. The sick and twisted game was finally drawing close to being over.

On the seventh and final day, a truck was waiting at the end of the calculated distance. I hated everything about what would come next, but I had survived this long, and I wasn't about to slip up now.

As I walked closer to the truck, I peered into the cargo bed and saw precisely what I knew was there. There lay the six bodies I was chained to for seven days.

This game that I'm always forced to play has been a recurring tradition played by my family plays on their firstborn son.

I remembered it all now. I always led during the seven days, always the one to survive it. I had to report what I could remember and how I felt during those crucial seven days.

It's always the same. After we get back home, or prison, as I prefer to call it, I help with the disposal. After the garbage gets removed, I'm finally released from my chains.

My father would go out and abduct people of all ages who were easy enough for him to control and herd through countless towns and cities before bringing them back here, just

for this game of his. Every day I hoped that it would stop. Each day I'd wait for the opportunity to find a means to get out. I've waited twenty years for such a chance and never found one.

The skill I used to have, plotting and making sure I remained on my father's good side, disappeared a long time ago. Wishing I'd eventually become free now seems like a dream. To make it easier on myself, I have adapted. Now I teach my son that such freedom never truly existed. •

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:



*Kayla Hunter-Phillips enjoys having her thoughts, ideas, and creations published as short stories.*

*Her goal is to see her work developed into books and movies. She works regular hours, has everyday interests, including food, sleeping, roller blading, as well as hanging out with her peers, and finds the time to write down her ideas and stories.*



**A CONVERSATION WITH...**

# ZO-ALONZO GROSS

## Award-Winning, Neo-Shakespearean Poet

Born and raised in Pennsylvania, Zo- Alonzo Gross went on to graduate from Temple University with a BA in English literature and a Minor in Dance. He started dancing, writing songs, poetry, and short stories at age 7, and successfully performed at the Legendary Apollo Theater as a dancer by age 18.

Zo released a book of art & poetry in 2012 titled: "Inspiration Harmony & The Word Within."

A month later, he won the Lehigh Valley Music Award for "Best Spoken Word Poet."

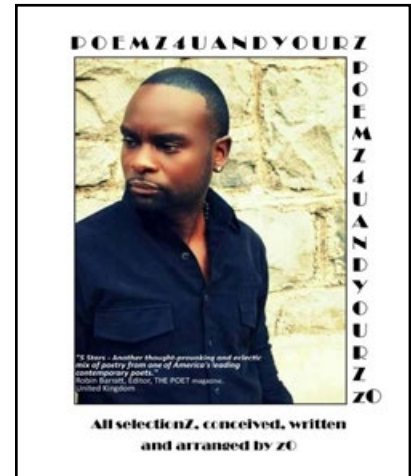
In 2014 Zo traveled to Los Angeles, California to be one of the featured poets/musicians in a documentary film called "VOICES" directed by Gina Nemo. Zo was again Nominated for "Best Spoken Word Poet" in 2016.

His Poetry has been featured in several anthologies, as well as magazines. In 2016, he released a Rap CD "A Madness 2 The Method," along with

a new book of poetry: "Soul EliXiR"

"PoemZ 4 U AND YourZ," is his latest work, Rap music inspired poetry and art/ photo event where the blues street meets the neo-classical, and earning him the monicker as

a Neo-Shakespeare. The book also won the 2022 International Book Award Urban Poetry Book of the Year.



**B&P:** When did you realize that your 'gift' was poetry?

**zAG:** I realized this when I was in first grade. We had an assignment to do Haiku and I was able to grasp the concept of Haiku and its attributes at a young age and I can even remember my first Haiku,

*"A Pretty Flower  
Is like a Pretty Feeling  
Sniff One You Will See"*

This was actually my first Haiku poem when I was 6 years old. I saw the look in the teacher's face of bewilderment of how I could write something at that

age in her words, "With such depth." She even held a meeting with my mother to get me into the Gifted Writing classes in first grade. It was around that moment when I first started hearing the word, "Gift" and "Talented" in regards to how I expressed myself through words.

**B&P:** What's your writing process like?

**zAG:** My writing process usually starts writing with Jazz playing or the sound of waves, anything that does not distract from my process. Silence is also golden. I'm listening for that voice inside to guide me to the

words through a deep meditation and through this meditation, I'm grateful to be blessed with



zo interviewed for the second time on WFMZ-69 news with anchors Bo Koltnow & Karin Mallet, September 2022



insights that I normally wouldn't have. To create a full length book, I compose anywhere upwards to 300 poems formulate them into a book with the pieces that align to the common theme. Not unlike someone who makes records.

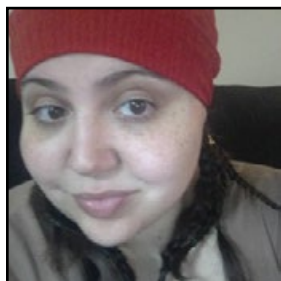
B&P: Where do you get your inspiration?

zAG: First and foremost from God. It can also be from something that I read, music that I hear or create. Also from observation of people, places, and things and life in general.

B&P: Your wife also has a book out. Can you share some information about her and her book?

zAG: My wife and I have our own publishing label called, "Seed Royale Publishing" where we also publish other artists.

My wife's latest book, "Every" is the first book from this label which is part memoir, part poetry. It's about her experience in life as an Egyptian/Palestinian woman, born in America with some of



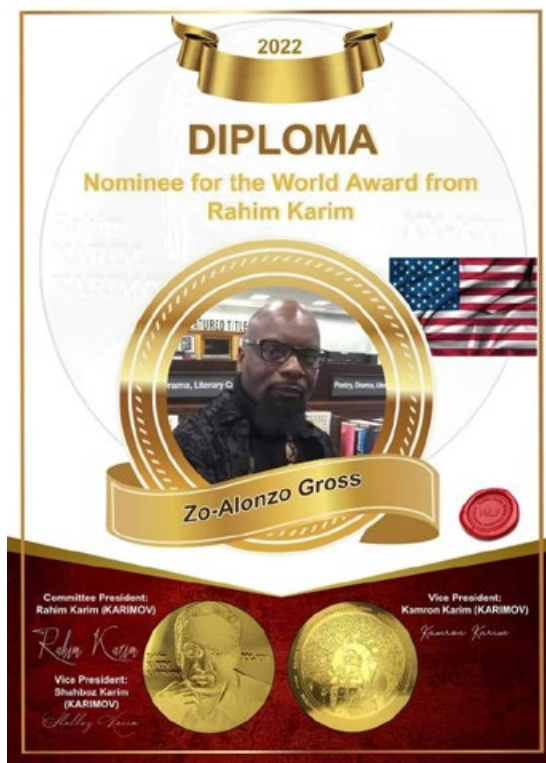
zO's wife, Alexia Zakariya, author of the book 'Every.'



<https://amzn.to/3R0Uqen>

the obstacles, tribulations, and eventual successes that she's had along the way. The book also contains her brilliant poetry done in a poetic memoir form.

B&P: Your poetry book "PoemZ 4 U And YourZ" won the 2022 International Book Awards. How did that make you feel?



zAG: That made me feel really ecstatic. My wife and I were vacationing in National Harbor, Maryland when I received the email that I had won. I felt very grateful because this was my second book award. The first was Poetry Book of the Year at the Bookfest Book Awards in April

of 2022. I'm honored to have also received The Golden Heart Literary Prize from the World Foundation as well as being nominated for several other book awards that are forthcoming.

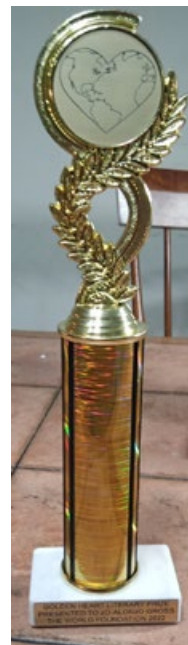
B&P: You have a social media presence. How have you found this to help you, or publicize your poetry, and what do you wish was more available to further help?

zAG: I've found that it helps my work to reach people across the world instantly. I can talk with them in regards to how they feel about creativity, some who ask me about my process, and to share ideas with other great artists globally. We actually found my publisher, Rebecca Anne Banks of Subterranean Blue Poetry, for my second book of poetry released in 2018 called, "Soul Elixir The WritingZ of zO" as well as my current book,

"PoemZ 4 U And YourZ" that way.

She actually contacted me after seeing my work Online and offered her services. She did a wonderful job.

B&P: What makes poetry a powerful



medium?

zAG: Poetry is about feelings and every living human being has feelings. If an Artist can tap into those feelings, he or she can move the reader or listener to tears, happiness, motivation, or bliss—the work touches some part of their soul.

B&P: Do you believe that poetry can transcend race, gender, politics? Or is that the strength of poetry, to bring these things to the forefront?

zAG: I would say that if you believe that all good things come from a higher power, or the God of your understanding, whomever that might be, and you are blessed with a certain gift, be it music or poetry, it is not a burdensome task for the work itself to transcend to all corners of the world. It is in this way, that the work becomes spiritual, thereby, reaching the masses universally.

B&P: What advice do you have for new writers, or poets? Things you wish you had known earlier?

zAG: It's okay to be fearless because mistakes are your allies. Through making mistakes you can discern some of your highest truths. Many people are afraid to make mistakes but making mistakes are actually blessings as they guide you to your purpose. Triumphs are also beautiful, don't get me wrong, but it's usually through making mistakes

that the triumphs follow you soon after. So be Fearless.

B&P: What future plans do you have?

zAG: I am currently working on an Audio Music and Sound Book (AMS book) for "PoemZ 4 U And YourZ" which will be part au-



diobook, along with my original music composition that I will be scoring, and also with sounds to make the book seem more like a movie than just an audiobook.

I'm also working on my next Rap CD to release sometime in 2023. My Wife and I are collaborating on a children's book, and I am working on a Memoir Poetry Book. My wife and I are looking to publish other artists and writers through our Seed Royale Publishing Label, as well as a Stage play based on my book, "PoemZ 4 U And YourZ."

Also, whatever else God has in store for me I'm open to experience.

B&P: Anything you would like mentioned that I have not asked?

zAG: I would like to give a

special thanks to my big brother/mentor/teacher Bobby Ivory for teaching me the fundamentals of music, art, dance, fashion, poetry, and literature at a young age. If you are blessed enough to have someone who believes in you wholeheartedly in your gifts, it is nothing short of miraculous.

My brother has the 'Millionaire Mindset' which is also the name of his clothing line. The Millionaire Mindset has little or nothing to do with money, but it is a way of life, thinking, like having a million dollar smile. He taught me to conduct my art with that same smile.

And also my beautiful wife, who also is an extraordinary artist and who is often my collaborator on many projects and usually she is the first person to see my work before it ever gets out. She has helped to make my work also grow exponentially and I wish only to do the same for her.

[Watch](#) zO reading '(Only) The Pure in Heart' from his latest book:

<https://fb.watch/eDZRInEoFV/>

Find zO-Alonzo Gross at:

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# 2022 International Book Award for Poetry

## zO-AlonzO Gross

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POEMZ 4 U AND YOURZ



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Robin Barratt, Editor, THE POET magazine.  
United Kingdom

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**All selectionZ, conceived, written  
and arranged by zO**



PoemZ 4 U AND YourZ by Zo-Alonzo Gross, a Rap music inspired poetry and art/photo event where the blues street meets the neo-classical, on the wings of doves, creating an original art house poetry offering. Including an eclectic mix of artwork, the work features 17 illustrators/photographers, particularly Michaël Lezay, Kevin J. Taylor, Jahbu Art, Dwayne Jones, Jahim Trotter, Danielle Siegelbaum, Keila Zuniga amongst others.

A truly great write, this poetry is an original creation in style, iconographic.

Zo-Alonzo Gross is a poet, songwriter, recording artist, dancer, and writer.

**Buy it Today: <https://amzn.to/3zEk5ms>**



## SHORT STORY

# Open Wounds

by Lee Conrad

Angelo ‘Angel’ Ranalli waited at the dark street corner next to an old brick building spray painted with “Stop the War!” and peace symbols.

He fidgeted in his fatigue jacket pocket for his pack of Winston cigarettes as he kept a watchful eye. His fingers brushed his gun. No one around except a junkie who passed by weaving and muttering to himself. The stink in the nearby alley made Angel’s throat restrict. It was worse in Vietnam, he remembered. You never got the smell of the dead out of your nose or the sight out of your mind.

Angel’s homecoming from the war five months ago was fraught with uncertain times and nightmares that chased sleep away. He wandered through life like a phantom, straddling reality, not back and not gone. Platoon buddies whose lives were wasted in the war walked side by side with him. He saw them, even if no one else did.

The sound of footsteps and someone singing echoed among the rundown buildings. Angel put his hand in his jacket pocket for his gun and settled it along his side. He went nowhere without it. From one war zone to another. His silent pact: he survived Nam; he would survive here.

“Easy, Angel, it’s me.”

Angel put the gun away.

Bobby Sullivan stood next to him. They gave each other a soul brother’s handshake and embraced.

They had come home from Vietnam to a collapsed economy and a society tearing itself apart. One Irish, one Italian and barely in their twenties. Bobby, tall with long straight red hair, Angel short, with curly black. They shared a common background. Both came from the street, got drafted, and sent to Nam. They wore the same set of clothes: dungarees and their olive drab army fatigue jackets. The two vets also shared a purpose. It was 1971 and the days of peace and love had shattered when the Ohio National Guard shot anti-war protesters at Kent State and Florida cops killed black students at Jackson State the preceding year. This past spring over a thousand vets, organized by Vietnam Veterans Against the War, marched on Washington DC and flung away Purple Hearts, Silver and Bronze stars, and other medals on the steps of the Capitol Building. They occupied offices in congress and refused

to leave until forced out by Capitol Police. Revolution was in the air, and Bobby and Angel wanted to be part of it. They vowed to get back at those who sent them and their friends to that hellhole in SE Asia.

“Didn’t mean to rattle you, Angel. I’ve been back longer than you. Forgot your instincts are still on the surface.”

Angel relaxed the trip wire in his head.

“Where’s the meeting at, Bobby?”

“A place on Dewitt Ave. We got time to do a toké or two. Just don’t let the demons creep into your head.”

“That only happens when I’m alone, Bobby.”

A bitter late fall wind washed over them.

Bobby hunched his shoulders to the cold. “Let’s go. Hope the fuckers paid their heat bill.”

Dewitt Ave was in a rundown part of town. Empty lots with trash and rubble of burned-out buildings. The owners cashed their insurance checks and split town long ago. A few buildings that survived the wrecking ball were broken up into student

housing. Cheap rent, party time, and hopes of a gleaming future. Old, dilapidated hotels catered to transients on their way through to another journey in their desperate lives. A never-ending conduit of misery and shattered dreams until they met a dead end. Young combat veterans with damaged souls walked the streets angry at people who cheered on the war and turned a blind eye to a homeless vet sleeping in the park.

Bobby and Angel reached Dewitt Ave and the meeting place in an old apartment building.

They walked up the rickety wooden steps to the third floor. The smell of incense seeped under the door. The Temptations "Ball of Confusion" was blaring from the stereo system inside, as were voices, some strident, and laughter.

Bobby knocked three times, then two, and the door opened. A tall, black man wearing a black and gold Dashiki shirt with bell bottom jeans welcomed them.

"Hey, brother! Come on in."

"Ricardo, my man. Nice digs."

"Yea, man. It's a steal."

"This is my friend Angel."

"Nice to meet you, Angel. Any friend of Bobby is my friend."

Bobby and Angel walked into a large room filled with people. Most were sitting on the floor, a hookah between them. Chairs were almost non-existent. A few looked at them as they came in and then looked away.

"You didn't tell me we were going to a party, Bobby."

"We aren't. This is just the cover. The people we want to meet are in another room."

Ricardo walked them down a long corridor. He knocked on a door and stuck his head in.

"They're here."

"Show them in," said a voice in the room.

Posters of Che Guevara and Angela Davis hung on the walls. Bundles of pamphlets sat on the floor with 'Power to the People' in big bold black print. In the corner were three shotguns and a couple of old M1 rifles.

Bobby and Angel stepped into the room. Six people stared at them.

Angel looked at the people who sat around a long rectangle table. Two white guys, one with long brown hair, a red headband and Fu Manchu mustache, the other with blonde hair and a full beard. A beefy black man with a black beret sat between them. Two black women and one white woman with honey colored hair stared back at Angel with stoic faces. All three wore Afro hair styles. Everyone at the table under thirty years old.

"This your friend, Bobby?"

The voice came from the black man with the black beret. He wore a fatigue jacket, a black sweater, and jeans. His pock-marked face was clean-shaven except for a small goatee.

"Come in and sit."

Angel thought, this guy is all business, not a smile on his face.

"They call me Julius. Bobby has told us about you. He's been with us for a short time but has already shown he is a soldier in our fight to end the war and liberate the people."

Julius nodded to Bobby.

The white guy with a Fu

Manchu mustache and shoulder-length brown hair broke in and pointed at Angel.

"How do we know he isn't a cop?"

Julius turned to him.

"Because Bobby knows him and trusts him, Raymond. That is good enough for me. We need his expertise."

Julius's brown eyes burned right through Raymond.

Raymond leaned back in his chair.

"This is just an initial meeting, Angel. You'll get to know the others and get some political teachings later. Until then Bobby will fill you in."

Julius stood.

Bobby whispered to Angel.

"That's our cue to leave."

Outside, Angel lit a cigarette.

"Damn. Them's some hardcore people."

"You said you wanted to get even. Those are the people that can do it," said Bobby. "Calls themselves the Peoples Vanguard. The people at the table have gone underground."

Angel looked at Bobby, apprehension clouded his mind.

"That Julius guy had on a fatigue jacket. Is he one of us?"

"I don't think so. He asked a lot of questions about our training and I had to explain some things to him, like to someone in boot camp."

"So, what now?"

"I'll call you when Julius has another meeting. Right now, I'm heading to see Donna when she gets out of work at Woolworths and hopefully get her over to my pad." He grinned. "Later, man. Oh, and I'm getting a car."



“Cool, Bobby. Later, brother.”

Angel walked the three blocks to the apartment his parents rented over on Spruce Street in an area known as Little Italy. The apartment building needed some work on the outside, but his mom and dad kept their place painted and clean. Down the street was Angel’s Aunt Philomena, called Aunt Phil for short, and his Uncle Mario. Across from them were their children and grandkids. An enclave of Italians who looked out for each other.

Angel stepped onto the sagging front porch, went into the building, and walked up the long wide stairs to the second floor. Inside the apartment, his mom stood over the stove and stirred the tomato sauce for tomorrow’s dinner. It had already simmered for hours since she got out of work at the shoe factory. The smell of garlic, meatballs, and sauce permeated the apartment. Rosa Ranalli stretched her back. Her short stout frame worn out from long hours at the shoe factory and the stove. She swept back her hair, prematurely white at 45 years old.

Angel walked over to his mom and hugged her. He grabbed a chunk of bread off the counter and dipped it in the sauce.

“Man, that’s good. How I missed that in the boonies.”

She patted her son on the cheek.

“Take some more. We need to fatten you up some.”

Rosa turned inward thinking of the day she and her husband Frank stood in the Greyhound bus station and said goodbye when he left for Vietnam. The tears wouldn’t stop, and she feared she would never see her baby again. They thought he was being a good American, fighting in the war. But the news on TV got worse. When she and Frank watched Walter Cronkite and the nightly news, her tears would flow again. Frank would try to calm her saying he came back from World War Two and Angelo would come back from this one.

He came back, skinny, haunted and hard. She almost didn’t recognize him when he got off the bus. And his eyes... what had he seen that would make his eyes look that way, she thought.

Angel walked into the living room. His dad was asleep in his chair, the newspaper on the floor, and Hawaii Five-O on TV. On the table was a family

portrait from three years ago of him, his parents, his older sister, married and in another part of town, and his younger brother away at college, the first one in the family to do so. He went to his bedroom and closed the door. It was a small room, enough for a bed, a dresser, a nightstand, and a table he could put his turntable and stereo receiver on. Stacked against it were a few albums. Angel put a new album by a group called War on the turntable and let the tonearm down on a track called Slipping into Darkness. He opened the window a few inches, pulled a joint out of the drawer in his nightstand, and lit it. He put his gun under the bed.

Angel woke and screamed in the middle of the night. The demons had crept in.

Rosa, wrapped in an old faded blue bathrobe, rushed to the room. Her little boy was no longer five years old, but instincts kick in no matter how old your child is.

She pulled him close and rocked him in her arms as she did so long ago.

“Angelo, Angelo, you are home. You are safe.”

Angel, half-asleep, wasn’t sure where he was and struggled until he saw his mother’s face.

“Ma, they just won’t stop! I keep firing, but they keep coming! Jackson’s dead Ma, they blew his face away!”

Angel sobbed as his mother hugged him tighter. Tears welled in her eyes.

The next morning Angel walked into the kitchen. Rosa was already by the stove, tonight’s sauce simmering. It was 10 am and his dad had long ago gone to work at the garage where he was a mechanic.

“Buongiorno, Angelo. The coffee is perking.”

“Morning, ma.” Angel liked that his mom still spoke Italian.

He hugged her.

“Sorry about last night.”

“Don’t you worry none. Your war is over. You are home and safe.”

I wish that were true, ma; I wish all that were true; he thought.

“Here, a plate of scrambled eggs will be just the thing for you.”

She sat down beside him.

“Angelo, maybe if you got a job your life would be much better. Your father said there might be an

opening at the garage pumping gas."

"No offense, ma. But working with dad and him still giving me orders would drive me crazy. Besides, Bobby's girlfriend might fix me up at Woolworths."

That was a lie, but anything to bide time.

They heard the door open on the first floor.

"Hey, everyone. It's Bobby."

"Come on up," yelled Angel.

"I smell sauce," said Bobby as he entered the apartment.

"You smell right, Bobby Sullivan. Grab a piece of bread and help yourself," said Rosa.

"Mrs. Ranalli, I could stand here all day and dip into this sauce."

Rosa laughed.

"You know, Bobby, in the old days no Irish kid was allowed in the neighborhood, let alone in the house." She smiled. "I am glad times have changed and my Angelo has friends like you."

"Me too, ma. Them Irish kids are tough." Angelo grinned at Bobby.

"I'd show your right here, but I don't want your mom throwing me out before I get more sauce," Bobby said.

"Let's go to my room and listen to some music. You got the new Rolling Stone with Hunter Thompson?"

"Yeah, I am done with it. It's yours."

Once they got into Angel's room and they put music on, Bobby told him there was another meeting with Julius on Friday.

"I think this one will be a little more laid back. He just wants to talk with the two of us without

the others being there."

That Friday night Bobby picked Angel up in his "new" 1967 VW. He honked the anemic horn twice and Angel came out and placed a knit hat on to keep the cold at bay.

Angel got in the VW. The radio was barely audible and the heat non-existent.

"Shit, Bobby. You gotta get an American car with a real heater."

Bobby laughed and shifted into first gear.

The ride was brief, only a few blocks. They went up the stairs of the apartment building they had been at before and knocked. Ricardo let them in and left. All was quiet tonight. There was a party somewhere else, and Julius put out the word that he wanted everyone out.

"Hey, guys," said Julius from an overstuffed chair near a window. "Come on in." He placed a book of Langston Hughes's poems on the table next to a picture of a young black man in uniform. "Want a beer?"

Well, this is a different Julius, thought Angel.

"Sure," they both said in unison.

"Follow me," said Julius as he led them into the kitchen.

He grabbed three Schmidts out of the refrigerator and smiled. "I'm kind of partial to Schmidts, hope you don't mind."

"Free beer is always up my alley," said Bobby.

"Let's sit here," said Julius.

The kitchen table had a metal top and legs. The mismatched chairs bought at the Salvation Army for a couple of bucks apiece.

"I wanted to talk with you about your time in Vietnam first, then down with some business. Most of the brothers around this neighborhood who have come back won't talk about it, or they are so strung out they can't. I thought you guys might rap with me for a while."

Julius knew he made a mistake when he looked at Bobby and Angel.

"Oh, brothers, I'm sorry." He hung his head and his eyes watered.

Angel looked at Bobby. He knew he didn't want to talk about Nam either, but Julius's reaction to their stone faces confused them.

"Why you asking us that," Bobby said coldly. His laughing self had left the room.

"My little brother was there."

"So why don't you ask him? Where is he now?" Angel asked.

"Where is he now?" An anguished look erupted on Julius's face. "I visit him now and then... at Spring Forest Cemetery."

Bobby softened. "Sorry, man."

The big man that was all business the first time they met had shrunk down in Angel's eyes. He too felt the pain of losing someone in the war and wanted to get even.

"His name is... was, Curtis. He got drafted in 1969. Went from boot camp to San Diego and then to Vietnam. He was only there for three months. We got the letter he was killed in March 1970 in some ambush at a place I can't even pronounce. Damn near killed my mother when she got the news. I shoulda been the one that went. I know how to



fight. He never did. They killed my baby brother, and I don't mean the Viet Cong. The government did."

Julius cleared his throat and waved his hand absently in the air. "We don't need to talk about the past, just the here and now and the future."

"We're down with that, Julius. What do you want from us?" asked Angelo.

"There is a discussion in the group about taking action. The Man is ignoring us. We need the government and Nixon to pay attention."

Angel and Bobby leaned forward.

"What kind of action?" said Angel.

"Taking down that Army recruiting office on State Street. It's all by itself. Raymond thinks we need to show our leadership for the revolution. He is pushing this hard, and I agree with him. Nothing is going to change by demonstrating or handing out newspapers and flyers. More brothers are going to die in this war if we don't help stop it. That recruiting station with its sweet talkers has to go."

"You don't need much to do the job," said Bobby. "You got explosives?"

"We have a source," said Julius.

"Just me and Bobby. We don't need amateurs tripping over their feet or freaking out. We can handle this by ourselves," said Angel.

"OK, we have a meeting Tuesday to go over the logistics," said Julius.

Angel and Bobby slammed their beers.

"We got to head out, Julius," said Bobby. "See you Tuesday. Let's book, Angel."

Once outside and in the car Angel said, "Well, that was weird."

"Let's go over to Terry's Tavern. Here, light this up," Bobby said as he passed a joint over to Angel.

"Does that cheap ass radio go any higher? I can barely hear the music."

Bobby turned it up, but Gimme Shelter by the Rolling Stones barely came out of the tinny speaker.

"Here, I'll sing it to you," Bobby said.

Angel turned his head. "Please man, no. I've heard your singing. I can hear the radio just fine."

They both laughed as the VW made it's way to Terry's.

Terry's Tavern was a typical neighborhood bar with a mix of people, young, old, straight, and

heads. They went into the bar and sat on the last two bar stools in the place. It was smoky and music blared out of the Juke box.

"What'll you have, Angel? I'm buying. Got my unemployment check today."

"Same as you."

Bobby ordered two drafts with shots of whiskey on the side.

"Julius had some balls asking about Nam," said Angel.

"I wasn't sure why he was asking us until he mentioned his brother. I know you didn't want to talk about it. Shit, he is a civilian, he would never understand what we were up against... and why we did what we did to survive and protect our buddies," said Bobby. "You and I have had times where it just spilled out of us, but talk about it with dudes that weren't there? Fuck that. And it certainly wasn't like those war movies we grew up on. Shit, guys get shot and just fall over? No one blown to pieces? No blood? Fucking joke."

"I hear ya, Bobby. If we knew what it was really like more of us would have gone to Canada."

A guy weaved up to the bar next to Angel and ordered a drink. He was about 40, with short brown hair, medium build, his tie askew on his button-down collar and white shirt.

He put a pudgy white hand on Angel's shoulder. Angel tensed, became silent and still, like a gathering storm.

"Hey, longhair, maybe you and your buddy should serve before you wear those jackets. Yea, I know it's fashionable now, but you hippies wearing them make me sick." He glared over at Bobby.

Bobby's green eyes turned dark and cold. He got up off the stool and stood next to the drunk.

"Hey, asshole, we both served our time and did our tour." He bent the drunk's wrist back and pulled it off Angel's shoulder. "And by the way..." He whispered in the drunk's ear. The drunk blanched.

"Sorry, fellas. I didn't know."

"No, you didn't, motherfucker," said Bobby.

"Here, have a few on me." The drunk reached into his pocket and threw two crumpled dollars on the bar and scampered away.

Angel relaxed.

"Jesus, Bobby. What did you say to him?"

Bobby's smile was back. "Nothing important. Hey, the man said the beers are on him. Let's drink up and get the fuck out of here."

At two in the morning, Bobby pulled his VW in front of Angel's place.

"Talk to you later, man. You gonna make it up those stairs?"

"No problem. I'm an expert," slurred Angel as he staggered into his building.

The following Tuesday Bobby picked up Angel and they went to the meeting with Julius and the Peoples Vanguard.

When Ricardo let them in, they could hear heated voices in the meeting room.

"Why should it just be those two?" said Raymond. "We don't know this Angel guy. More of us should be with them."

Ricardo knocked on the door.

"What!" said Julius.

"Angel and Bobby."

"OK, let them in."

When they walked in, Raymond was angrily stubbing out a cigarette in the filled ashtray in front of him. The others eyed the newcomers intently.

"Time you knew everyone here," said Julius testily.

"This is Raymond. He was part of the Liberation Front until it got smashed by the cops. He was lucky not to get caught when they had that bogus drug raid at their headquarters."

Raymond scowled and nodded.

"Next to him is Ericka. She worked with the Panthers in Oakland before moving here."

Ericka gave them a clenched fist salute.

"Next to her is Vanetta. She is doing outreach and food banks for the black community on the Northside. It is her neighborhood, and she is doing great work."

Vanetta smiled.

"Sarah and Burt come out of the student anti-war movement and continue outreach at the University."

They flashed Bobby and Angel the peace sign.

Julius turned back to the two vets..

"Let me be clear. We have our above ground work and we have our underground work. Under no circumstances are you to tell anyone you know about this committee. Understood?"

"We got it," said Angel.

"You know that this war isn't stopping and more young brothers are still dying. Raymond has said, and we agree, that we must step up our activities and take it to the Man. We need to show them we will do anything to stop this war and liberate our people. The Peoples Vanguard is going to bring the war home to America."

Julius paused.

"You know why we recruited you, right? We need people with your expertise. Vietnam vets have that. Raymond believes the movement of vets into organizations like ours is critical. We saw what you all did in DC in April. Fuck man, you all marched on Congress and threw your medals away! You scared the shit out of them honky mothers."

Raymond's eyes bored into Angel.

Bobby caught it and sensed hostility. What the fuck? Does he

really think Angel is a cop?

"Our plan," continued Julius, "is to destroy the recruiting station on State Street. There is no one there after nine, so there won't be any casualties. Raymond thinks more of us should go with you."

"No way, Julius. I told you before, it is me and Bobby. We know what we are doing. No offense, you fuckers don't and if anyone has a bigger grudge, other than Julius, say so."

Raymond sat there smoldering.

"Bobby, have you thought about how you are going to go about it?" said Ericka..

"Standard procedure. Angel and I will recon the area a couple of times to see if there's hidden dangers or civilians and make a plan. Search and destroy."

"We have done this before," said Angel. "That's why we are here, right?"

The next day a call was placed to Police headquarters and the Red Squad, the department responsible for surveillance of radical groups in the city.

"Detective Benson."

"It's me. It's on. They are going to bomb the recruiting station on State Street."

"When?"

"I won't know until next week. They got two radical vets to do it for them. Julius is going to get the explosives for them."

"We have been getting reports from the FBI about vets. We need to send a powerful message to these traitors."

"Oh, I agree. Makes me sick. I will keep you updated."



"What about that nigger, Julius?" said the detective.

"I'll take care of him the same night." said the caller.

"And the rest of that crew? They going to be at the recruiting station?"

"Nah. The vets didn't want anyone else around. Called us rookies. We'll have to round them up later. I am sure we can find something to charge them with. They're all drug users."

"Good. We have to nip this group in the bud. They have been making inroads in the community with that rag of a paper they give out and recruiting too many people to their ranks. That demonstration in front of City Hall last month really pissed off the mayor. And now a bombing, thanks to you. That should get us both a promotion when we bust them. Keep me posted."

Detective Benson hung up the phone and reached into his drawer for a series of letters from the FBI. It required local police to follow their lead in infiltrating and setting up radical groups with the purpose of eliminating their leaders and arresting as many as they could. The FBI operation was called Counter Intelligence Program or COINTELPRO. Although the operation ended a few months ago after it was exposed by activists, local and state police kept up their activities to break the movement. The powers that be wanted these groups eliminated. And the upside? A lot of promotions within the ranks.

Angel woke up the next day feeling rested and upbeat, excited at the prospect of blowing up

the recruiting station.

He went into the kitchen singing.

"Angelo, you are in a good mood. You slept well last night?"

"Yeah, best in a long time."

"Here, sit down and eat."

"Just coffee and toast. Bobby is picking me up in a little while."

Angel finished and went outside and waited on the porch. It was a bright morning, and the day warmer than usual for December. Bobby pulled up and Angel got in the VW.

"I figured we would check out the recruiting station in the daytime front and back and do it again tonight."

Angel grinned. "Lead on Sargent Sullivan."

After a couple hours, Bobby dropped Angelo off at his place.

"I'll pick you up at nine. We hit a few bars, then take a walk by the place and see if there is anything unusual. Sound like a plan?"

"Ok with me. Catch you later," said Angel.

That night, after a few beers at some local hangouts, Bobby and Angel drove over to the recruiting station, got out of the VW and walked around. It was 11 pm, and the street was quiet. It was an industrial area, no night shifts and no houses. They walked around casually, talking like two friends just out for a walk, but their eyes and ears were tuned. The recruiting station was dark, no late night cleaners inside. Angel and Bobby walked around a side street and scoped out the back of the recruiting station and the glass

door. They got back in the car and Bobby dropped Angel off at his place.

Bobby headed to the Shamrock Inn on the East Side for last call. Some of the regulars were there, and guys he grew up with. A few had gone over to Nam, but most had not. Bobby was a hero in their eyes, but he didn't feel like one and he made his views known. No, he didn't like Nixon, in fact he hated him. He told them we needed to get the fuck out of Vietnam. He didn't wave the flag, and he didn't care what anyone else thought. One of his non vet friends remarked that he used to be a lot friendlier. Those were the guys that brought the worst out of him. He clutched his beer bottle, "you caught me on a bad day," was all he said. What he wanted to say was that even on his good days he struggled from sliding into a bad day. His time in Nam was still raw to him. He had his inner explosions under control. He wasn't sure Angel did.

Angel caught the same flak from his father. The constant comments about his long hair, not having a job and his political views. You sound like a communist his dad said. That is usually when Angel stormed out of the apartment and walked the neighborhood, his long dead platoon buddies next to him.

The following day Bobby called Angel

"Why don't we go downtown tonight?" asked Angel. "Different crowd, more chicks."

"That my friend is an excellent idea." said Bobby.

Downtown was bustling with

students from the university. Almost the same age as Angel and Bobby, but a universe apart. Angel looked at them as they walked the streets. They never had to fight for their lives or their friends. They didn't face kill or be killed. They didn't have the nightmares or the feeling the walls were closing in. No thousand-yard stare.

At the corner of Court and Washington stood The Blue Moose, a bar mostly for students.

Angel stopped Bobby. "Let's go in here."

Bobby looked in the big front window. "Are you sure? Doesn't look like our type. But they are playing good music."

They went in to the crowded bar. Cigarette smoke and something sweeter hung in the air.

"I think we will be fine here," said Angel. "My turn to buy. I got my check too."

As their beers were served, the discussion turned to the recruiting station.

"Looks simple enough, Bobby. Dark in the back of the station. Glass door. Smash it, put the explosive in, and split.. Makes you wonder why they hadn't done it before. More talk than action? For us it is just like another day, I guess."

"Yeah, and we are the new guys. Like being on point, expendable. Something doesn't smell right."

"You can't think Julius is a fink, do you, Bobby?"

"No, not him. Others I'm not so sure about."

"Let's do it and figure out what we do after," said Angel.

The bar continued to fill up and they blissed out, reminiscing about dances at the Sheraton and their favorite movies in the time before they were drafted, the boundary between normal and horror. It did them good to talk about the past.

The two vets went to the final meeting before the bombing. As usual, Ricardo escorted them to the meeting room. The mood inside was not tense like the previous meeting.

"We would like you to do it on Thursday next week," said Julius.

"You guys up to it?" said Raymond, who seemed to be more upbeat than usual.

"We're ready. Right, Bobby?" asked Angel. "Where are the explosives?"

"Outside in the garage," said Erika. "Too dangerous to keep in here."

"You come back here Thursday night and I will give the package to you," said Julius smiling. "This is a big deal, brothers."

At 11pm on Thursday, Julius met them at the door and walked them into the kitchen where the explosives sat on the table in a suitcase.

Angel opened the suitcase and looked at the three sticks of dynamite with the disconnected timer and blasting caps. Bobby nodded to Angel and they walked out the door.

A few hours earlier, twenty local police had assembled at the police headquarters.

One of them addressed his fellow police officers, some in uniform, others in undercover

civilian garb.

"Tonight we are going to eliminate a threat to our city and the country. As you all know from recent reports, the so called Peoples Vanguard has been involved in seditious activity. We have also learned they plan to bomb the Army recruiting station on State Street."

A ripple of angry comments and murmurs rippled through the gathering.

"I will lead two operations. The first to apprehend the leader of this group and second to eliminate the threat at the recruiting station. The operations are as follows... "

At 11: 30 Ricardo came out of his room dressed for a late night on the town.

"You going to be alright here by your lonesome, Julius?"

Julius laughed. "You my mother now?" Julius looked at him wearily. "It will be nice and quiet here tonight. No meetings and no parties."

"OK. Later then."

Ricardo walked out the door, giving Julius a clenched fist salute as he left. Julius settled into his chair and picked up his book of Langston Hughes poems from the table next to a picture of Curtis in his Army uniform. A shotgun nestled in the corner.

Angel and Bobby went to the Rockbottom Diner. Coffee and food tonight. No bar run. They were on patrol in a few hours and needed to be sober. It was midnight.

At the same time Julius was dozing in his chair, the book of poetry in his lap.

Silent footsteps came up the stairs to the apartment door.

A battering ram smashed the door in. Julius startled, looked at the first person through the door, his police badge hanging from a lanyard on his neck.

"You?" asked Julius dumb-struck. He looked over to the shotgun in the corner, too far to reach in time.

"He's going for the gun," yelled the cop.

Eight cops opened fire with shotguns, rifles and pistols.

Julius was shredded. The book of poems, blood soaked and tattered, dropped to the floor. The shattered picture of Curtis fell face down.

The lead cop stood back and surveyed his work, a smile on his face.

"You guys take care of the scene, I am going to gather up the other team for the recruiting station."

At the Rockbottom, Angel and Bobby were on their third cup of coffee. The eggs, hash browns and bacon long finished, the plates taken away. It was 1 am and the bar crowd was coming in, famished from drinking and hoping to ward off a hangover with a full belly before they went home.

"We should do this job early and go home, Bobby. Doesn't matter if it is 1:30 or 2, right?"

"I'm with you on that. Let's get this over with. I don't think Julius will mind."

They drove over to a side street off of State, parked the VW and got out. Angel held the bomb. A light snow drifted down.

"You get set up, Angel. I'm going on recon."

Angel went behind the recruiting station and hid in the darkness away from any street lights and cars that might drive by. He huddled against the building, trying to stay warm and focused. The time in the bush came back to him. His senses alert. He closed his eyes for a brief second. When he opened them he saw Jackson and a few other buddies, long dead, standing around him.

Bobby walked a wide circle around the recruiting station, starting two blocks over. He noticed a jumble of footsteps imprinted in the new snow leading towards the station. His time in the bush perked. Something's not right here. Bobby moved slowly towards the station, eyes searching everywhere for danger. He stopped near a house with high bushes and heard low voices.

"OK, now be alert. These guys will be here in a half hour. If we can't take them alive, then too bad."

Bobby saw cops and one civilian with guns drawn by the side of a warehouse near the recruiting station. The brightness of the new snow and the streetlights lit them up. The civilian with a cop's badge hanging from his neck was the one talking.

It was Raymond.

"Fuck!" said Bobby.

Bobby backed away and circled around to where Angel hunkered down at the station.

Angel was still there, but talking to someone.

Bobby came in from behind

and Angel reached into his pocket for his gun.

"Angel, we got to get out of here. There are cops over at the next street. They are ready to ambush us. And get this, Raymond is a cop!"

Angel had a faraway look in his eyes. "That's what Jackson told me."

"What?"

"Don't you see him, Bobby?"

Bobby sighed and put his arm around his friend. "Come on, Angel, time to go home."

They drove away from the recruiting station with the disconnected bomb to Division Street Bridge. Angel looked down at the river, its dark current swirled under him. He tossed the bomb into the water.

"Do you think Julius will be disappointed, Bobby?"

"Angel, remember, it was Raymond who set this up. Raymond is a cop and we were set up."

"Oh, yea, right. We should warn Julius."

"Let's go there now and wake him up."

Bobby drove down Dewitt Ave towards the apartment. He could see the lights flashing and cops milling about from a block away.

"Holy shit, Bobby!"

Bobby kept driving, a grim look on his face.

At the recruiting station, the cops were getting antsy. Raymond gave them their last instructions.

"OK, let's move in, quietly."

The force came to the front of the recruiting station and fanned around to the back.

No one was there.

Guns lowered, they looked



around.

Two sets of footprints led away from the recruiting station.

Raymond stood incensed. "Let's wrap it up. We got nothing."

Bobby pulled in front of Angel's apartment. The drive had been silent.

"That can't be good, Bobby."

It took Bobby a minute to reply.

"No, Angel, it's not. I want you to go upstairs, grab some things and leave your mom a note. Tell her you are staying at my place for a few days. Do it quick... Raymond is coming for us."

Angel came back down, threw some things in the VW and got in. Bobby drove away slowly, not wanting to draw attention.

They pulled up in front of Bobby's apartment building.

"You stay here, Angel. I will be right down."

Angel, confused, watched his friend go into the apartment. A few minutes later Bobby came down and threw a small suitcase into the back seat.

"We aren't staying here, Angel. I am assuming Raymond knows where we both live. We got to lie low."

"What the fuck did we get into?" Angel said.

"Hang tight, I have a place we can go to."

Bobby pulled the VW around the back of a house on the south side of the city, turned it off and walked to the back porch. Before he could knock, the door opened, and a shotgun was pointed at his face.

"It's Bobby Sullivan," he whis-

pered.

"Shit, man. What the fuck? It's a little late, you know. I could have wasted you."

"I know, Cat, but my friend and I need a place to crash for a while."

Cat looked out at the VW.

"Is he one of us?"

"Yep, been back to the world for five months."

"How's his head?"

"Passable, but he is my responsibility."

"OK, brother, our place is your place. Bring him in."

They nicknamed the house "Camp Delta". Everyone there a Vietnam combat vet. Of the five, two had jobs, John "Cat" Catalano was unemployed and two went to community college. When Bobby and Angel walked in, a few came out of their rooms to investigate the commotion. They saw Bobby, waved, and sleepily returned to their rooms.

"Not much room in this place for guests, but there is a walk in attic. It is clean and warm and I have a couple sleeping bags you can use," said Cat.

"Thanks. And Cat? Can you get a newspaper in the morning? We need to check on something."

"Sure. Anything you want to tell me?"

"Not now. We need to crash. But we'll talk tomorrow."

In the morning Bobby and Angel came down from the attic to the kitchen. Cat sat at the table, a cup of coffee and the paper in front of him. The vets that had jobs or classes had left already.

"Grab some coffee, its hot. Here's your paper." Cat looked hard at Bobby.

On the front page was a picture of the apartment on Dewitt, a side picture of Julius and a bold headline: **RADICAL KILLED IN POLICE SHOOTOUT.**

"They killed him, Bobby," said Angel, his voice anguished.

"What has this got to do with you two?" asked Cat.

"We had some meetings with Julius a few times and met some of his group."

"And?"

"They wanted us to blow up the recruiting station on State Street," said Angel.

Cat stood up.

"Jesus Christ!"

Cat calmed himself and sat back down at the table.

"OK, so how far along was this?"

Bobby and Angel filled Cat in on the details, including the fact that Raymond, whose plan it was to begin with, was an undercover cop.

"Man, he really set you guys up. Good thing you walked away and ditched the bomb. Those cops would have killed both of you. Listen, he has nothing on you. You weren't found at the station and no bomb was found. You went to the meetings with Julius, but there is no proof you picked the bomb up, right?"

"No, Julius answered the door. Another guy named Ricardo lives there, but he was in his bedroom," said Bobby.

"Bobby, you and I go way back and I think like you do about this fucking war, but this is way above my pay grade. I will march against this war... but bombing? I have had enough of that to last a lifetime."

"Well, we didn't accomplish that, did we?" said Angel.

"A damn good thing you didn't! And seriously, they would have shot you with the bomb in your hands."

Cat sat back in his chair. "Bobby, I'm going to move my car out of the garage. You put yours in there, cover it with the old canvas in the back. I will tell the others yours has engine problems. Another thing, you guys need to split up. Stay here a few more hours but brothers, you got to leave. Not everyone in this house thinks like us, and we don't need that motherfucker Raymond tracking you here."

Raymond sat in Detective Benson's office smoking his third cigarette.

"What the hell happened, Ray?"

"Something spooked them. It was supposed to go down at 2 am. We saw footsteps leading away from the back of the building. It had to be them."

"Well, the sun this morning has melted any proof of that and you got no eyewitnesses. You don't have a case against these two vets. They committed no crime. But you got Julius. Your report said he went for a shotgun. Will your team back you up on that?"

"Absolutely," said Raymond, an icy glint in his eyes. "We eliminated a threat."

"Unless you have proof of conspiracy by the others, just stick to surveillance for now. Can you find them?"

"Shouldn't be a problem. The only one that knows I'm a cop is

dead."

Bobby and Angel decided Cat was right and went their separate ways. Angel went searching for Ricardo and members of the Vanguard to warn them about Raymond. He shed his fatigue jacket for an old coat Cat gave him and blended in with the down and out in the city. On the same track was Raymond, looking to infiltrate back into the group and trap the two vets in another scheme. Bobby went back to his old neighborhood and the Shamrock Inn. He needed to escape the thoughts that bothered him: that he put not only himself but Angel in mortal danger.

Angel walked down Dewitt towards the apartment, scanning faces. His long hair tucked up under his knit hat and the high collar of the coat up around his face. He looked but didn't want to be seen. A few people stood around the apartment building and talked about the police raid. Most didn't know Julius stayed there. In a small crowd of people stood Ricardo, agony etched on his face. Angel walked by him and said, "Ricardo, it's Angel. After a few minutes walk down the street towards the park."

Ricardo, shocked at the voice, hesitated, looked around and after five minutes calmly walked towards the park.

Angel sat on a bench. He took his knit hat off and turned the collar down.

Ricardo sat next to him, his eyes red rimmed.

"Angel? You and Bobby okay? Fucking pigs killed Julius."

"One of those pigs was Raymond," said Angel.

"What!"

"He set us up at the recruiting station. Bobby did a recon and saw him with a bunch of cops waiting to ambush us. You have to warn everyone."

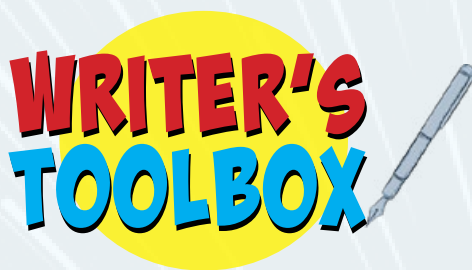
"I can do that, Angel. Julius entrusted me with knowing their hangouts and safe houses. I'm assuming Raymond's is bogus." Tears welled up in Ricardo's eyes. "Julius and Curtis were my cousins. That's why he trusted me to be the doorman. I didn't do a good job of it, did I," he sobbed.

"Raymond would have killed you too, Ricardo."

Across town Raymond stalked the University looking for Burt and Sarah. He questioned people, some a little harder than he should have. A few became suspicious and word spread, beware of Raymond, he is unhinged.

Raymond wanted Bobby and Angel, dead or alive. His brother, a career Army officer, was in Vietnam on his second tour, and Raymond thought anyone against the war was a communist who aided the enemy. He held a special contempt and loathing for veterans who turned against the war and the country. Raymond joined the police with the sole purpose of being an undercover cop who would do whatever it took to bring the anti-war movement down. He infiltrated the Liberation Front, planted drugs in their office, and then told Detective Benson to make his move. The police raided it one afternoon and arrested

**Continued on page 26**



# Give Me **ONE** Reason Why I Should Care About **YOUR STORY?**

## THE DIFFICULT TRUTH!

When you submit your story to a publisher, agent, or script reader, you are one of many submissions. THOUSANDS! It's insane the sheer volume of material that is written and submitted, and each one has to be looked over by someone before getting pushed forward, or rejected.

That's the truth of it. While your story may feel important to you, you are not the decision maker when it comes to publishing.

Consider the reader in your place. You have a pile of stories to read. And it has to be finished TONIGHT! You've had a long day. You're tired. You want to find a story worthy of publishing, but you know you cannot logistically read every manuscript completely. There are just not enough hours in a day.

## WHAT DO YOU DO?

The first thing that happens is the first page read. This means, the very first words on the page need to grab the reader.

With their interest piqued, they will read further, enough to decide whether they like the story or not.

Did you start strong and peter out after a few paragraphs? You can still lose the reader even a

few pages later.

## WHAT THE READER WANTS

The reader wants to see the "Wow Factor." The reader wants to find his/her attention grabbed from the page. The reader wants to be delighted. The reader wants your story to make up for the mass of other stories that have not achieved this simple thing.

## MAKE THE READER CARE!

The reader **MUST** care about your story. And this will not happen unless you create the story to compel the reader to care.

So how do you do this?

- Compelling Characters
- Compelling Storyline
- Compelling Writing Style

All these are great suggestions. But you **MUST** also offer a properly formatted manuscript, error-free.

## MOVIES SHOW YOU HOW!

Movies offer a format to grab the viewer. A catchy title. A gripping establishing shot—the first thing you see. Appealing characters. You know what makes a movie work for you. Apply that to your story.

Let's look at Star Wars. Everyone knows Star Wars. It's the story of how farm-boy Luke Skywalker becomes a galactic hero, a Jedi Knight, and battles the evil Empire.

So why didn't the film start on Tatooine with Luke doing chores?

The same reason why your story should not start with your character doing chores. Chores are mundane, unexciting, common. Who cares about chores?

Instead, the film starts with a big fanfare title in space. That was a "Wow." Then it shows a small ship being chased by a larger ship—no, a giant, never ending, dark, cruiser that is immense next to the puny ship.

Still "Wow."

Then we meet the droids. Cute, quirky. The ship is captured. The soldiers ready to defend.

The main door is melted open, and there is the absolute evil villain: Darth Vader. There is no escape for you now—you're totally hooked.

Can you do this with your story? It does not have to be epic, but it does need to have elements that make the reader **WANT to KEEP READING!**

Which means start with an important point and **make the reader care about your story.**



# WRITER'S TOOLBOX



## Is Your Book A Bestseller or a Best Seller?

Congratulations. You made the Amazon bestseller list. But what does that mean, and are you really a bestselling author?

The truth of the matter is you are a little of both. Being an Amazon bestselling author means your book reached the top rankings on Amazon, for as little as a few minutes.

### AMAZON BESTSELLER

Amazon ranks books by the categories listed when the books are published. Generally it is difficult to reach the number one spot in a general category such as fiction. However, if you list your book in an OBSCURE category—there are many obscure categories—you might be surprised that after a few sales your book is now the #1 Bestselling book on Amazon.

The problem is that you are NOT a best selling author, and your royalty statement will show you that.

It is a feel-good, nice and easy piece of advertising you can now use to promote your books and yourself.

Want to be an International Bestselling Author? Simply get your book listed in another Amazon country, like India, with an equally obscure category listing and *presto...* International Bestseller!

### USA TODAY BESTSELLER?

To be a genuine bestselling author requires that you have a certain number of books sold and reported by the selling outlets. These results are tabulated and printed in such lists as The USA Today or New York Times Bestselling Books.

Even still, this criteria is skewed. The number of book sales required is quite low, as low as a few thousand. Good publicists, agents, managers and publishers can easily skew this for their clients' prestige. Because an NYT Bestseller sells more books and holds more weight than other types, especially Amazon.

### HOW WOULD YOU KNOW?

A simple test of a bestseller is how many people have heard about it. These authors are promoted in book stores, as well as stores like Target, Walmart, airport book stores, Costco and more. People know the names of these authors, and their books are at the supermarket, their authors interviewed on television news shows.

Our advice—focus on writing the best book you can. Great books get noticed, eventually. Write your best work.

### ARE BOOK AWARDS GOOD?

Another cheat are book awards. Having said that let me clarify that there are MANY solid book awards. The problem is that you will not likely have one.

Anyone can create a book award and the Internet is replete with companies, publishers and more offering book awards.

The first hint comes if there is a fee involved in entering. These award mills seem legit, offer categories to enter, and awards in these categories come in multiple levels. Chances are, pay the fee and you will get an award. But even that is not guaranteed. Still, if you get an award there is some recognition. Is that so bad?

If you are trying to appear successful than any award is a recognition. But truthfully it is like getting a sticker for showing up at school. While the public might have no clue, professional authors will know.

Winning an award gets you a sticker that you can buy to place on book covers. You can also use the image on your website and enhance the look of your book.

### WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

Winning isn't everything, but in a highly competitive field, it's nice to have something to show for your efforts, even if the luster

is less than that from a prestigious award source. And since the reader does not care, what's the harm?

Life and modern society is awash with lies, half-truths and exaggerations. We wear clothing to look better. Women use makeup to enhance their natural features. Our mannerisms and affectations are such to enhance our persona. If an award is an embellishment, then let it be one that helps you to strive to be better rather than use it as a crutch to validate your self-esteem.

There are many established and reputable quality awards out there, many difficult to win. But then that is what excellence is supposed to be about.

Here are a few:

- BookBrowse Awards
- Pulitzer Prize Winners
- Booker Prize
- The John Newbery Medal
- Michael Printz Award
- Edgar Awards
- National Book Critics Circle

Award

- National Book Awards
- Costa Book Awards
- Women's Prize for Fiction
- PEN/Bellwether Prize

Beware that some award mills are really sticker businesses—after you win they want to sell you stickers to put on your book.

To find a list of awards out there and where they stand, The Alliance of Independent Authors has create done. You can find it [HERE](https://selfpublishingadvice.org/author-awards-contests-rated-reviewed/) <https://selfpublishingadvice.org/author-awards-contests-rated-reviewed/>



## The Value of Freestyle Writing

Freestyle writing means to simply write without thought of grammar, spelling, formatting, or any of the conventional rules.

The benefit of freestyle writing is to unleash the creativity of your mind, allowing you to express avenues of a story without any distraction or concerns.

appearance, gestures. All these things will pour onto your page, details that you may have otherwise overlooked in your haste to construct a story.

Include your feelings as you write. What emotions are evoked? What about your energy level?

### GREATER INSIGHTS?

Many authors find that as their mind wanders within the context of what they are working on, greater insights, ideas, storylines often appear in greater detail, far more expressively than writing conventionally.

### THE VALUE OF NOTEBOOKS

Bring a notebook with you and jot down what you see. Sit at a park bench and watch the world pass by. Sit alone in a restaurant and observe the people there, their mannerisms, conversations,

### STAGES OF FREESTYLE WRITING

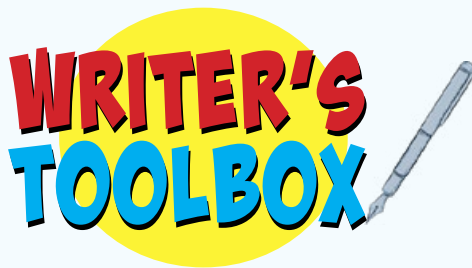
The first stage is the freestyle writing itself. Once you have completed it you are ready to rewrite it into something more cohesive, tighter, more polished, devoid of errors.

You may wish to revise and change some of what you wrote—often added thoughts

will enter at a later time, and you may find you wish to adjust what you wrote.

Finally, the last stage is editing your work and getting it ready for its intended use.





## WARNING: Proper Formatting is Very Important. Don't be an Amateur!

We may live in an electronic age, however, there are RULES and EXPECTATIONS that publishers and editors have when it comes to YOUR submission. Spelling and grammar is important, but too often, these days, I receive stories that are NOT FORMATTED or incorrectly formatted.

The function of formatting is to make it easier for the publisher/editor to know who submitted the story, the title of the story, an approximate word count, and also, with double-spaced lines, sufficient room to write comments and make notations, both for themselves, as well as their typesetters/designers.

So when you send your story, single-spaced, no

Your Name  
Your Address  
City, St. Zip  
Phone  
Email

About 3100 words

Words With Sharp Edges  
by William Gensburger

"I believe life ends with death, and that is all. You haven't both gone shopping; just the same, in my new black leather phone book, there's your name and the disconnected number I still call." -Tony Harrison Long Distance II.

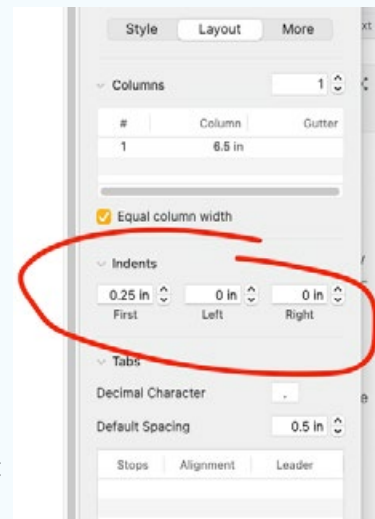
He didn't know what to expect when he got home again after 15 years away. As the wheels of the giant jet screeched onto the runway, his gaze was out the small clouded window at the hills. These were unfamiliar buildings, not at all like the outline of Hong Kong that he remembered when they used to land at Kai Tak: that was a landing one would never forget; low and slow over

Title - Name page 2

Kowloon, tenement skyscrapers on either side, a hard right at the checkerboard marker at the base of Lion Rock, wingtips seeming to barely avoid rooftop laundry hanging in the wake,

title, no name, and riddled with errors, no matter how good the story, you will irk the reader, and that could mean a rejection, or, if you're lucky, a rejection to resubmit properly formatted. Besides which, DON'T LOOK LIKE AN AMATEUR. You're supposed to be a professional.

On the left is an example of proper formatting. One (1) inch margins all around. Your contact information upper left. Approximate word count upper right. The title is centered halfway down the page. Byline beneath it. (Do you wonder why you have your name twice on the page? The reason is simple: your legal name—the one the check will be made out to—goes on top. But your author name or pen name might be different. This avoids confusion.)



Please DON'T use TABS to indent your paragraph. Either leave it with a double

return, or format your word processor to include an automatic indent of 0.125" or so.

Use the HEADER/FOOTER options to have your name, an abbreviated title and the page number (also an option feature in most word processors) appear correctly. You can turn it off for page 1. If you do not know how to do this GOOGLE it. There are many videos out there to show you step-by-step. Do NOT add it manually where you think the page starts because different computers will show



this in different places.

*Text that you have written and there will be a lapse before I continue.*

#

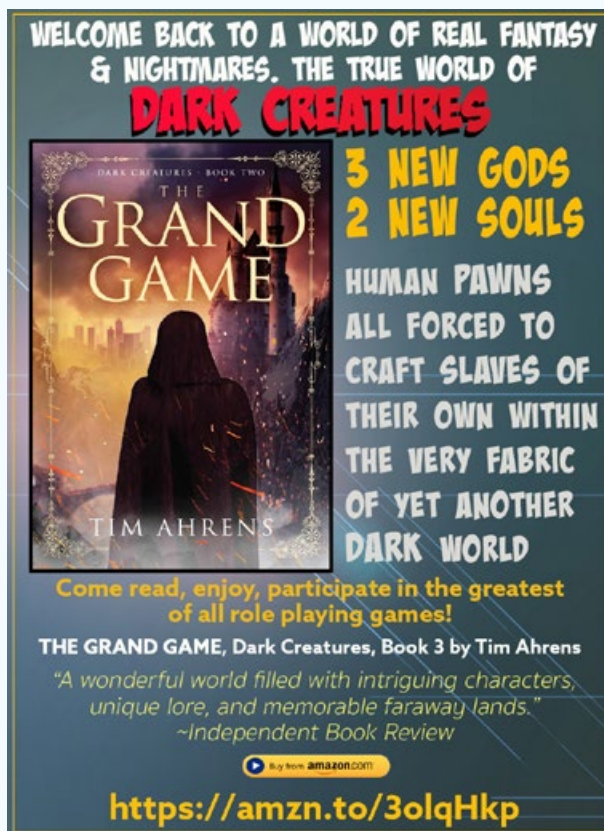
*Some time later, the character does something*

Page 2 (see sample) has the header in the right place and the story text just flows from page to page.

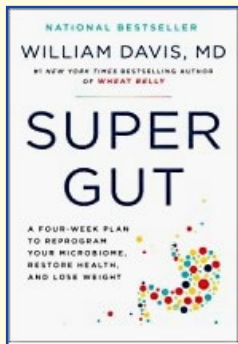
TRANSITIONS: If your story has a transition, a lapse of time between scenes, you can indicate that by a line return, then centering a single #, then another line return. It will look like this:

At the END of your story indicate it by centering and including ###. This tells the reader the story has ended.

Proper formatting will keep you looking professional, not distract from the experience of reading your story, and increase your chances of publication.

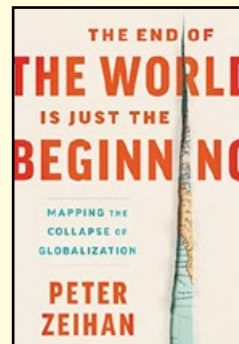


# HAVE YOU READ THESE **EXCELLENT** BOOKS



Super Gut shows readers how to eliminate bad bacteria and bring back the missing “good” bacteria with a four-week plan to reprogram your microbiome.

**CLICK HERE.**  
<https://amzn.to/3KYxWbG>



2019 was the last great year for the world economy.

For generations, everything has been getting faster, better, and cheaper. Billions of people have been fed and educated as the American-led trade system spread across the globe.

All of this was artificial. All this was temporary. All this is ending.

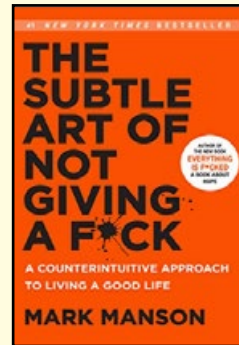
**CLICK HERE.**  
<https://amzn.to/3R2lv0w>



John Perry did two things on his 75th birthday. First he visited his wife's grave. Then he joined the army.

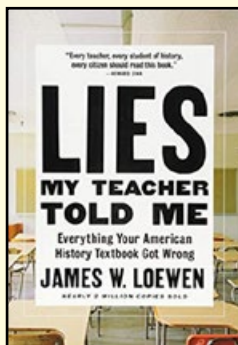
The good news is that humanity finally made it into interstellar space. The bad news is that planets fit to live on are scarce and aliens willing to fight for them are common. The universe, it turns out, is a hostile place.

**CLICK HERE.**  
<https://amzn.to/3R36Hz1>



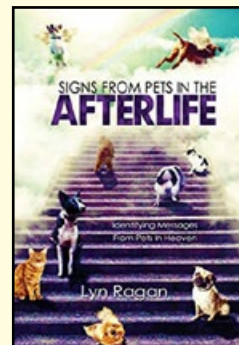
For decades, we've been told that positive thinking is the key to a happy, rich life. “F\*\*k positivity,” Mark Manson says. “Let’s be honest, shit is f\*\*ked and we have to live with it.” In his wildly popular Internet blog, Manson doesn’t sugarcoat or equivocate. He tells it like it is—a dose of raw, refreshing, honest truth that is sorely lacking today.

**CLICK HERE.**  
<https://amzn.to/3bdrSPy>



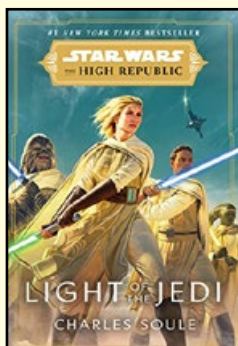
James W. Loewen brings history alive in all its complexity and ambiguity. Beginning with pre-Columbian history and ranging over characters and events as diverse as Reconstruction, Helen Keller, the first Thanksgiving, the My Lai massacre, 9/11, and the Iraq War.

**CLICK HERE.**  
<https://amzn.to/3R7xf1L>



Signs from beloved pets are seen by thousands every day. Some communications are received in ways that do require an acute awareness as well as more interpretation. From the Heavens above, Signs are shared by deceased pets to connect with their families they left behind.

**CLICK HERE.**  
<https://amzn.to/3qUP7SX>



It is a golden age. Intrepid hyperspace scouts expand the reach of the Republic to the furthest stars, worlds flourish under the benevolent leadership of the Senate, and peace reigns, enforced by the wisdom and strength of the renowned order of Force users known as the Jedi. When a shocking catastrophe in hyperspace tears a ship to pieces, the flurry of shrapnel emerging from the disaster threatens an entire system.

**CLICK HERE.**  
<https://amzn.to/3LEHct6>



The death of Queen Elizabeth II on 8 September 2022 was more than just a moment of profound sadness; her passing marked the end of an era in our national life – and the final closing of the Elizabethan Age. For millions of people, both in Britain and across the world, Elizabeth II was the embodiment of monarchy.

**CLICK HERE.**  
<https://amzn.to/3LUc8kx>



**Open Wounds continued from page 19**

12 people. Raymond was conveniently somewhere else.

His cover in the Liberation Front was so convincing that when he met the Peoples Vanguard, they welcomed him, no questions asked. He destroyed one radical organization, and he was determined to destroy the rest as well. Julius recognizing him just before he died made Raymond smile. The thought of Angel and Bobby walking free made him furious.

Bobby Sullivan walked the streets of the city, deep in thought. He first met Angel at an anti-war demonstration at the Federal Building in the city during the summer shortly after Angel came home from Vietnam. Angel was wearing a "boonie" hat and Bobby asked him if he was a vet. They struck up a conversation, each telling the other their unit and where they served. Angel was angry at losing friends and wanted revenge. They became fast friends in a sea of civilians who had no clue to what they went through. Bobby thought of Angel as the little brother he never had.

Bobby didn't see Raymond come up behind him. He had let his guard down.

"Hey, Bobby! Hold up."

Bobby turned, his face frozen. No emotion, but his brain was thinking "kill".

"Shit, man. The pigs killed Julius," said Raymond. "Do you know where the others are? We need to regroup."

"I don't know where they are, Raymond."

Raymond lit a cigarette and glared at Bobby.

"What happened with the bombing of the recruiting station? You guys lose your nerve?"

Bobby shoved Raymond up against the wall of a building. People walked by heads down, not wanting to get involved in a fight between two hippies.

"You son of a bitch! I know you're a cop. I saw you waiting to ambush us at the recruiting station. We got there early, fuckhead, and a good thing too from what happened to Julius."

Raymond grinned at Bobby.

"You killed Julius?"

"My team and I did. We eliminated the enemy. You should understand that. By the way, where is your treasonous buddy Angel?"

"Right here, Raymond."

Angel stepped around the corner of the building and shoved his .45 into Raymond's side.

"Stay calm, Raymond. We are going to have a friendly chat."

"Shit, Angel. Where did you come from?" a relieved Bobby asked.

"I was across the street and saw you, then I saw Raymond come up on you. When you went around the corner of the building, I got worried. I got here just as this dirtbag admitted to killing Julius." Angel poked Raymond harder in the ribs with his gun.

"So now what are you two going to do? You can't kill me, Angel, not here in daylight and with people around."

Bobby saw the look in Angel's eyes and recognized what he saw. Angel had gone to another time and place. He put his hand

on his friend's arm.

"No, Angel."

Angel focused on Bobby's face and let his arm slip down. He backed away from Raymond, still on guard.

"You are a lucky man, Raymond. You don't know how close you were," said Bobby.

Raymond's grin had disappeared. "So now what?" he asked.

"You are going to walk away from here and a suggestion... leave town. Your days as an informer are over."

Raymond laughed. "What makes you think so?"

"Because we are going over there and tell them all about you," Bobby said, pointing across the street to the offices of the Barricade, a city wide radical newspaper. "By the time we are done, and the news goes out, no group in this town will let you in, and you know what? There might be someone like Angel waiting for you at night, with no one like me to hold them back... or it might be Angel himself."

"You assholes don't scare me. Get the fuck out of my way." Raymond pushed Bobby aside.

"Nothing worse than an undercover cop, Bobby."

"Or a murderer."

"Aren't we murderers?" asked Angel.

"Angel, you and I were 19 and put in harm's way, trying to survive. They made us killers and we were lied to about the war. We weren't on the side of good and right, just the opposite. Someday people will understand."

Angel wasn't so sure.

"Come on, let's go over to the



Barricade,” said Bobby.

Angel and Bobby spent hours with the staff of the paper, telling them everything they knew about Raymond. An artist with the paper drew a likeness of Raymond for the story. The two vets had one condition: don’t print our names.

The Barricade came out with the story front page: Cop infiltrates local anti-war groups Kills local leader alongside the artist’s rendition of Raymond.

Late at night in Detective Benson’s office at the Red Squad, a dejected Raymond sat and stared at the paper with his likeness on the front page.

“Your usefulness as an undercover operative is over Raymond. But not to worry you will always have a position on the force if you want it. But cut that hippie hair and stupid mustache,” said Benson.

“I’ll think about it. There are other places I can go. You can’t possibly think I can give this up do you?”

Raymond went out the back door of the police station and walked along Riverside Park towards the Division Street Bridge. He was angry that Angel and Bobby blew his cover. If he cut his hair and joined the force as a detective, he might bring them up on any charge he could fabricate. It was easy to do. If he stayed as an undercover cop, he would have to go to another city and start over. Angel and Bobby would slip through his fingers.

He thought on this as he stared at the river.

“Hey, Raymond.”

When Raymond turned

around, a .45 caliber bullet entered his chest, blowing a hole out his back. He dropped to the ground.

“That’s for Julius.”

Ricardo stared at the face of Raymond as the life went out of his eyes.

“Here’s your gun back, Angel.”

“This was my last patrol, Ricardo. Toss it in the river.”

They walked away from Raymond. Neither showed remorse but Ricardo was shaken. For Angel it was just one more body.

“What you going to do now, Angel?”

“Not sure. Maybe something will come to me on my walk home.”

“I won’t be going back to the apartment on Dewitt. Just couldn’t do it. When I get settled come see me, Angel.”

“Will do, brother.”

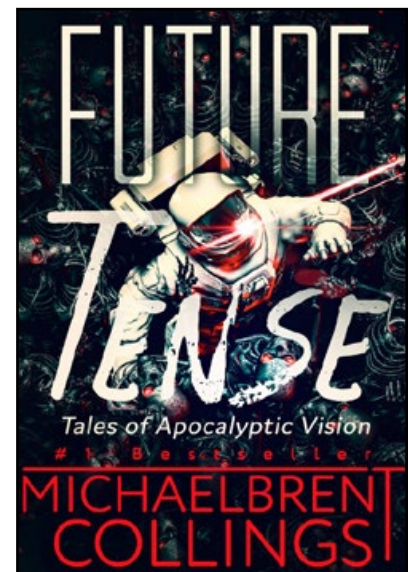
Angel began the walk home. He passed over the Division Street Bridge and thought back on the past few weeks. He would meet Bobby tomorrow to let him know Raymond won’t be coming for him. Life will go on. Angel wondered if his would. His mom said that he could work with his dad at the garage. He chuckled, if I survived Vietnam and the army I can survive working with dad. Angel knew he would never get the horror of the war out of his mind without help. Bobby told him about the new Vietnam veterans group that had rap sessions for combat vets healing open wounds of the soul. Next time Bobby went, he would go too. Angel looked up at the cloudless night at the stars. A meteor flashed. Some-

one has died went the old myth. The war was still going on and Angel wondered if the meteor was a kid just like him but face down in a rice paddy. Enough, he said to himself. He remembered his pact: I survived Vietnam, I will survive here. He turned the corner to Spruce Street and his parents apartment. He knew he would never forget his lost buddies, but he had to live. As he got closer to the apartment the ghosts of Jackson and the others faded. Angel’s mind cleared. He was home.



#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Lee Conrad lives in upstate New York, is a Vietnam era veteran, worked at IBM and as staff at a major labor union. His stories have appeared in *Down in the Dirt*, *Fiction on the Web*, *Literally Stories*, *Longshot Island*, *Commuterlit*, *Ariel Chart*, *Sundial Magazine*, *The London Reader*, and *The Magazine of History and Fiction*.



# Nzondi

*Ace Antonio Hall*

Nzondi (Ace Antonio Hall) is an American science fiction and horror author. His novel 'Oware Mosaic' won the Bram Stoker Award for Superior Achievement in Young Adult fiction; the most prestigious award given to horror writers in the world. He is the first African-American to win in a novel category, including the YA novel category.

A former Director of Education for NYC schools and the Sylvan Learning Center, the award-winning educator earned a BFA from Long Island University. Hall currently lives bi-coastal in New York and Los Angeles.



**B&P:** What got you into writing and when did you decide that was the future for you?

**N:** I didn't pick a future as a horror author, it picked me. I've always been a griot, a storyteller. I got my kicks by scaring the crap out of people with my stories.

**B&P:** You received a spec deal to produce your songs at a recording studio in 1987. Tell us a bit about that and how that transitioned to writing horror.

**N:** It was the dawn of the golden era of hip hop and I was

recording a variety of songs like New York Garage-type club music, hip-hop and R&B ballads. The owner of a recording studio I frequented, heard one of my ballads called 'A Touch of Romance' and loved it so much, he gave me a spec deal in which I could record there for as long as I wanted in the late hours of the night as long as I paid him back when I signed to a record deal. I met a lot of artists in that studio back in the day from Black Sheep to A Tribe Called Quest, who also recorded at Calliope Studios on 37th Street in Manhattan. Good times.

I never signed to a record label but the experience was invaluable.

**B&P:** Why did you select horror as the genre of choice?

**N:** Horror is the genre that resonates with me the most partly because a lot of creepy stories are really just commentaries of life. I've come across many

zombie stories that represent brain-dead societies or groups of people that shamle throughout their lives like sheep doing whatever is dictated for them to do.

Vampires tales reflect on sexuality and desires. They reveal how a person's insatiable urges can suck the lives out of our humanity. Some alien stories are commentaries on race and sexism, while other horror literature and films mock capitalism and socialist societies.

Horror truly is a genre that has so many paths creatively that can be hidden from the naked eye and only brought out by our fears and misconceptions of what something or who someone really is. It's an amazing art form that uses the unknown as a catalyst for storytelling.

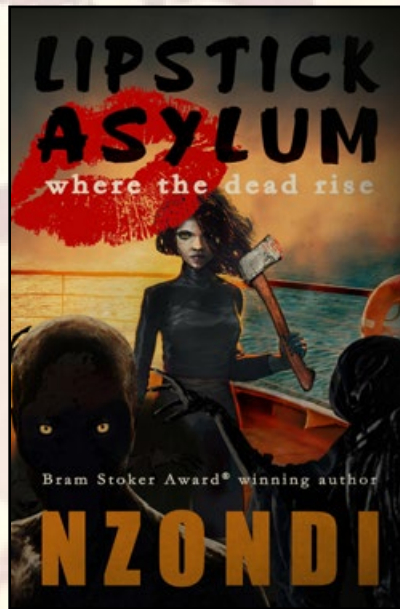
**B&P:** You were winner of the Bram Stoker Award in 2019, and the first African American to do so. How did that make you feel and what effect did that have on your writing?

N: I've gotten over the initial shock of finally doing something in my life worth recognition from my peers. I am humbled that it's such a prestigious honor, world-wide. My father, who was part of an artist-activist group called AJASS, broke many barriers when he and its founders started the Black is Beautiful Movement opening the doors for many African-Americans to be the FIRST of something. Winning the Bram Stoker Award was the most significant achievement in my career that I've achieved so far and is the hardest thing that I've ever worked for. Writing Oware Mosaic was difficult on so many levels.

Winning gave me the attitude to continue to hone my craft and write books that readers of horror and science fiction can fall in love with, and read over and over again. It made me dig deeper into characterization and the human condition. It also inspired me to create Easter eggs in all of my projects that came afterward that tied each novel to the other.

B&P: What's your writing process like? Are you strictly disciplined or not so?

N: Originally, I followed Christopher Vogler's outline religiously, and then I took Alexandra Sokoloff's class and learned how to expand on Christopher's ideas. On my most recent project, I threw all that structure out of the door and wanted to be more organic, not knowing what I was going to write until it hit the page.



This process was and is a big mess but I believe it has giving me the freedom to write my best work yet. It's a big mess because I find myself cleaning up a lot of things but I'm so happy with the essence of the story. Part of it is simply a process of getting it down and then fleshing it out after my ideas are strong. I wouldn't have evolved to this point had I not started out the way I did. However, less restrictions allowed me to take more risks and become more imaginative. The caveat in it all is that I had to learn the rules well before I dared attempt to break them, and part of learning the rules involved a ton of reading books in the perspective genre and writing well over a million words.

B&P: Why did you decide to leave the education field?

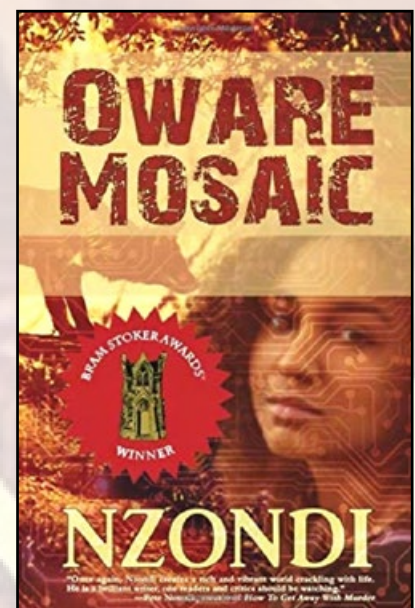
N: Not to make light of anyone who served in the armed forces but I'd felt like being in the class-

room was like a tour of duty. Heck, one of the first days in a classroom, I got hit in the head with a bandstand and had to get stitches.

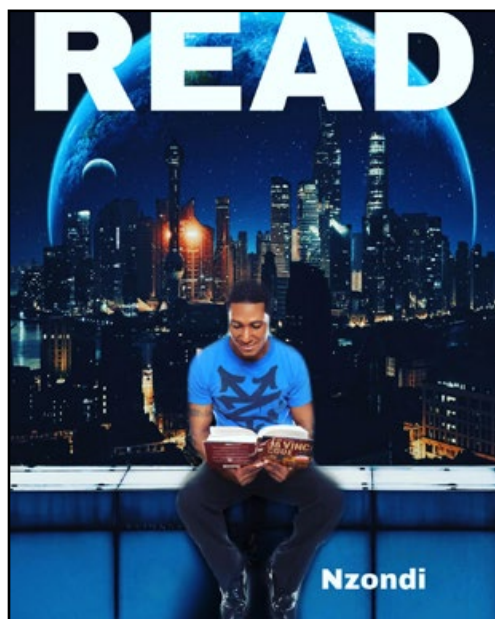
I'd served as a teacher long enough, reached many accolades in the field, paved the way for many children to become successful and decided that the void in my life was growing to large to ignore it any longer. I was put on this planet to write and made the choice to quit my nearly six-figure job and go back to the basics.

I had to learn how to write novels from scratch and it took me the better part of six years from 2008 up until I was published by Montag Press in 2014. The day my first novel was released, something inside of me changed, evolved, and I knew that I'd found my purpose.

B&P: Your central characters in both novels are female. More so, reviews by women seem to indicate that you nailed it well. What







made you decide to have female leads and was it difficult to write for those characters?

N: I'm a bit of a contrarian when I hear someone advise a writer to "write what you know" simply because that worn-out cliché, when told to a person of color, often alleviates one having the imagination to write about fantasy and space operas, romances between a couple outside of their demographic, etc., but in this case, I wrote what I knew.

Most of the people in my life were women. There weren't many men in my family. The matriarch was not only a word, it was a way of life in my upbringing. My mother, grandmother, sisters, aunts and cousins were my teachers. I loved them, empathized with them, understood them and interacted with them so much that the characters in my books all portray the pains, worries and hardships the women in my family endured, as

well as the courage they exemplified.

B&P: What's coming up next for you?

N: I'm nearly finished with my science fiction-horror novel and I'm in development with creating a story for film about my father and the group of pioneers he was in called AJASS (African Jazz-Art Society and Studios). Since receiving a proclamation from the New York Senate pro-

claiming May 15th as AJASS Day, and a documentary about them has won several awards in film festivals, I feel it's time that his story be told. I'm working with a Hollywood Executive Producer on bringing the story to the masses.

Also, a legendary producer sent me a song the other day and he wanted me to write something to it. More than likely, it will be a part of the project I'm writing now as my story includes a teenage group of vampire-like creatures who sing in a band.

B&P: Any advice to new authors trying to get started?

N: Keep your head up, read a ton of books in your genre and write a million words. People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.

Literary agents and publishers can see how much you care about your craft by reading your writing and vice-versa. They can

tell how much care you didn't put into your craft as well, so there's no short cuts. Do the work.

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**SHORT STORY**

# NOT VERY FUNNY

A series of short shorts by Adam Breckenridge

## *The Chicken's Longing*

The endless stretch of dirt and sand between the barb-wire fence and the vast gray death was all the world the chicken had ever known. It was a meager world she had - short on shelter, food or water and always with the rattling beasts who tore across the gray death, certain to kill her if she ever got near them.



Far in the distance on the other side of the gray death she could see another strip of land, by all appearances similar to the one she claimed as her own but far away as it was she often wondered if it held greater promises than what lay before her. Her land barely kept her fed and the fence seemed to never end, giving her no escape from this barren space. It was hard not to

wonder if things were better over there.

There was only the matter of the gray death. She had seen so many others try to make their way across it but the beasts were merciless to any creature who strayed onto their territory. Some had succeeded, but the gray death was littered with the bodies of the many who had failed.

Eventually the day came when she found the courage to try. She was able to see the expanse of the gray death far in both directions and could see that not a single beast was upon it from horizon to horizon. She stepped into the deadly space, so much harder under claw than the gentler dirt she had always known. The gray death was empty but she felt the vulnerability that came with stepping here.

The land remained calm until she made it to the yellow demarcation in the middle and felt the rumble of a beast beneath her feet. One of the giant, flat-faced creatures was coming down the road. They were the most dangerous of all, the kings of the gray death.

She ran for the other side, feeling the vibrations intensify as the beast came closer, moving faster than she ever could. She was only halfway to the other side when it was upon her, passing over her, roaring all around her but somehow not hitting her.

And then the beast was gone. It had spared her, left her to finish the journey. She crossed the rest of the gray death and arrived on the other side, shaken but intact, only to find the new land was as barren and hopeless as what she had left behind.

## *The Drunkard's Shame*

No one came to this bar to celebrate. It was a place purely for the meditation of sorrow and solitude. Even the men and women who drank together were really drinking alone, since it was the drink in front of them that was their only true companion and, despite what many of them would claim, it was not a mutual friendship.

But still, most of them, if not happy, would at least claim a sort of contentment when they were wallowing in their misery here in this dismal bar, the world outside a terror they would stave off as

long as they could, and those rare occasions where some monstrous face of the outside world came into the bar to confront them never went well.

And never had any such faces as the two that came in on an otherwise unremarkable afternoon been seen in this bar before, and they shook the regulars like no spirit ever had.

"I'm afraid we've gotten lost and were hoping someone here could help us," the priest said to the bartender, who couldn't meet the holy man's gaze, "my friend and I are in the neighborhood for an interfaith conference but we need to get to Hamilton street."

"I told my friend here we should have gone left two blocks back," the rabbi who was with him said, "but he insists we just haven't gone far enough yet."

Every man and woman in the bar shifted uncomfortably in their seats. Many played nervously with their glasses, some seemed even to try to hide their drinks, but not a single one of them dared raise their sin to their lips in the presence of these men of God.

"It was a right one block back," the bartender stammered out. His voice was the only sound in the bar.

The rabbi turned to his friend.

"So we were both wrong. How about that?"

"Thank you my friend," the priest said to the bartender and, to the relief of everyone in the room, the two men departed.

The silence hung for a long time over the bar until the first man brave enough to raise his glass again sent everyone back unthinkingly to their vice.

## *The Beauty's Embarrassment*

The tears just had to come while she was applying her mascara.

"I'm not dumb," she said to her reflection, "I'm not."

She knew she was lying to herself. She had always struggled in school, had never once gotten an A in any class, and at nineteen already had a lifetime of embarrassing memories of klutzy moments and innocent comments that she would only learn from the ridicule that came afterwards had been her blonde stupidity. Only when she was silent and

radiant did anyone care about her.

The world could not have made the lesson any more clear: keep your damn mouth shut. People only care about your beauty. Your mind is nothing.

So what if I am dumb, she thought, am I not a good person? Have I not always been kind to people? Does that not count for anything?

She had to listen to so many older women gloat over the inevitable fading of her beauty. "You're gonna look like me someday," they'd cackle, stretching their grin to make their wrinkles more pronounced, "and where you gonna be then? In the doghouse, that's where."

Did they know what fear their words struck in her? Could she ever articulate why, that she feared not the loss of her beauty but the marginalization that would come when the only thing about her that anyone cared about was taken from her? She had tried so many times to show the world that she was more than her beauty but the world had never once cared. Would they finally care once it was gone?

She put down the mascara. She was crying too hard to apply it properly. Instead she combed out her golden bangs, hoping to distract people from the mind that lay behind them.

## *The Loner's Misery*

It often seemed he was the only man in the world who had no friends or family, who was as truly alone as anyone could be. It was not for lack of effort either: he had tried to meet women Online but they never responded to his messages no matter how thoughtful he was in composing them. He had tried going to bars and starting up conversations with strangers, but the art of conversation that seemed to come so effortlessly to others was an unnavigable labyrinth to him. Even his coworkers never talked to him, and what members of his family he hadn't disowned due to past traumas had instead disowned him.

And so, though he longed to be anywhere else, he spent most of his days sitting at home, watching TV or browsing the Internet. He particularly frequented message boards, where the interaction with other fans of his favorite shows and games was the closest thing he had to any sort of com-

panionship. Sometimes it almost made him happy.

The longer his solitude stretched on the more painful it became. He stopped watching some of his favorite shows because he could no longer bear to see the happiness of others on screen. He started lashing out on the message boards he frequented, getting enraged at even trivial contradictions to his opinions. One by one he found himself perma-banned from each of the boards he frequented until even that tenuous human connection was severed.

After that he decided to head out for an entire day and made a promise to himself: if even one person smiled at him he would go on. If not, when he got home he would slit his wrists.

He went to the beach, wandered up and down the row of shops that lined it, to the mall, out to eat, to the bookstore and then back home. Not a single person had smiled at him.

He drew a bath, like he had always seen them do in the movies. He wasn't sure why that was a necessary part of the process but he would do it anyway. He stripped naked and then went to the kitchen to grab a knife. He wondered how long it would be before anyone found his body. How long does it take a wet corpse to stink? Two days? Three?

As he was making his way back to the bathroom, knife in hand, he was startled by a sound so improbable he thought surely the universe was toying with him, but it was unmistakable: two loud, firm knocks on his

door.

He looked down at his naked body and the knife he carried. He could hardly answer the door in this state but he feared that this strange visitor might leave before he had a chance to make himself presentable. Instead he called out to the mysterious companion beyond the door:

"Who's there?"

## *The Pollack's Pride*

His old friend Josef was dead. His health had been deteriorating for months but Brodsky never thought Josef, war hero he was, would end it by suicide, especially in such a foolish fashion.

"With a rubber band," everyone was saying, snickering to themselves as they told the tale. But it left out so many details. For one thing it was an industrial band used for securing oil drums, it's not like Josef had strung together office supplies for the deed, and even in his youth the two of them together couldn't have stretched one of those bands more than a couple of inches, so it made sense that Josef, without a rope in the house, wouldn't have thought the elasticity would have cracked his head into the rafter repeatedly after he kicked the chair out from beneath him. But all people cared about was the punchline. "Pole found dead with bumps in his head. He tried to hang himself with a rubber band."

None of them would be laughing if they'd seen Josef fight in

the Warsaw uprising, none of them would be laughing if they saw how many Nazis he killed by bullet and blade, none of them would be laughing if they'd seen their friend Krzystof's arm blown off by a German mortar round. But poor Krzystof climbs one tree and waves at a passing friend while he's up there and suddenly the war hero is a laughing stock.

"But that's always been the lot of us Poles," Brodsky said to his reflection as he prepared himself for the funeral. "No one's ever there to celebrate our triumphs, but they're always there to laugh when we fall."

For the first time since the war he found himself fighting back tears. So many of his friends dead now, and always by such strange means. How would his end come? Did he have any hope of dying with dignity?

He straightened his tie.

"Oh well," he said, "at least I'm not a fucking blonde."

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**



Adam Breckenridge is an Overseas Traveling Faculty member of the University of Maryland Global Campus where he travels the world teaching US military stationed overseas and is currently based in Japan. He has thirty-three story publications to his name and has most recently appeared in the *Fantastic Other*, and *Lucent Dreaming and Beneath Ceaseless Skies*.

Find him on Twitter:

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## TALES FROM THE SCRIPT

Observations and Opinions on Screenwriting by  
script doctor LANCE THOMPSON

### Write Like A Producer

Trying to sell spec screenplays is a challenge, as most screenwriters know. It is easier, some believe, to produce their scripts themselves or partner with an independent producer. In addition to creating occasionally noteworthy independent films, this also imposes a useful discipline on writers—to create with an eye on the bottom line. In other words, to write like a producer.

“Creatives” are not programmed to like, trust or admire producers—much less imitate them. Producers are the cost-conscious tyrants who tell film makers that they are out of time, out of money, and out of line. But if producer-worthy economy is employed by the writer, the script has a better chance of being produced on time and under budget.

Writers grouching about how this will limit their creative options should remember that the vast majority of scripts are written to particular specifications, whether in casting, subject matter, location, budget, or any number of other requirements. In the heyday of the studios, writers worked under such conditions all the time, and turned out countless quality scripts and pictures.

The independent film community is used to making movies

on shoestring budgets, but the writers need to get into the act as well. The easiest place to save money on a production is in the screenplay. Here are some examples:

Horror and psychological thriller films are ideal for low-budget productions, but costs can be reduced even more. There's usually a scene with policeman. A street cop needs a police uniform with a radio, a belt full of tools of the trade, a gun and holster, a badge, and a budget-busting police car. This is an expensive list of props. However, a detective needs only a badge and maybe a gun. He can dress in plain clothes and drive a nondescript sedan. Huge savings for the prop and wardrobe department if your obligatory policeman is a detective.

Writers love placing conversations in moving vehicles. This was easy to shoot in the studio days when every back lot had a rig with half a car—missing everything from the windshield forward—and a rear projection screen to provide a moving background. But those rigs aren't so common anymore and a conversation in a car now involves a process trailer, elaborate camera rigs, or an improvised solution such as the one used in a recent independent production where an expensive camera was duct-

taped to the hood of a car and sent out into traffic. In the interest of economy, if the conversation does not require a moving vehicle, set it in a stationary location that's easy to light and shoot.

Speaking of locations, they are complicated. There are permits, crowd control, rental of the premises, transportation of cast and crew. Minimize the number of locations. Utilize those that are easiest to secure and control. A recent local production arranged to shoot at the zoo, but their length of stay, the areas the crew had access to, and the number of crew members admitted were all extremely limited. A murder in a downtown alley, a romantic rendezvous in a sidewalk café, a musical production number in a swanky bar are all more easily staged on accessible property owned by friends or family.

Montages are tempting to a writer—allowing a great deal of exposition to be dispensed with in a page or two. But remember that each shot in a montage is a separate scene with its own location, lighting, camera set-ups, cast and crew. Even if the shot lasts only a few seconds, it could take half a day or more to shoot it. Fewer scenes mean fewer production days. If money is an issue, montages are not



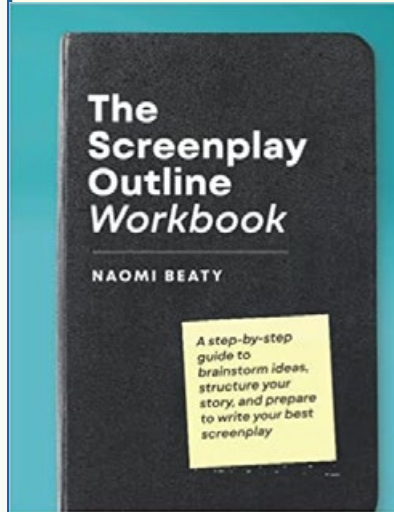
economical.

Subject each character, each location, each scene, each line of dialogue to the strictest scrutiny. Can characters be eliminated or combined? Are there simpler, easier locations? Does this scene advance the story and reveal character? Is this line of dialogue vital? Eliminate anything that isn't vital to the story.

Be ruthless. The money you save could be your own.

**Lance Thompson is a script doctor, ghost writer and actor. He can be reached at [script-doc88@gmail.com](mailto:script-doc88@gmail.com)**

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# BOOKENDS

by Fran Cain

## Queen of the Rhino

by Jill Hedgecock

"Queen of the Rhino" by Jill Hedgecock (2022, Goshawk Press, paperback, 334 pages, \$12.50) is the second book in the series about Claire, tagged Queen of the Rhino after risking her life in Africa to save two endangered black rhinos in "Rhino in the Room".

Hedgecock takes the reader on an African "Ferrari-safari", a bumpy, fast-paced ride, that is a combination of teen drama, education about Africa, a mystery filled with twists, young romance, and most importantly, wildlife preservation.

Claire, 17, has been invited to travel to Kenya a year after her initial visit to Africa. Seemingly out of the blue, Mr. Sudan, a wealthy and mysterious donor has taken an interest in Claire and her Rhino in the Room Foundation, which she started after nearly being killed by rhino poachers in South Africa.

Claire passionately wishes to save rhinos from extinction and Mr. Sudan has generously offered to pay all her expenses. He also promised to arrange for Claire and her partners, Junior and Dugger, to see the last two northern white rhinos on earth in exchange for some marketing photos of Claire with the rhinos.

Claire is determined to take

advantage of this opportunity. However, her struggles with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) caused by the violent confron-

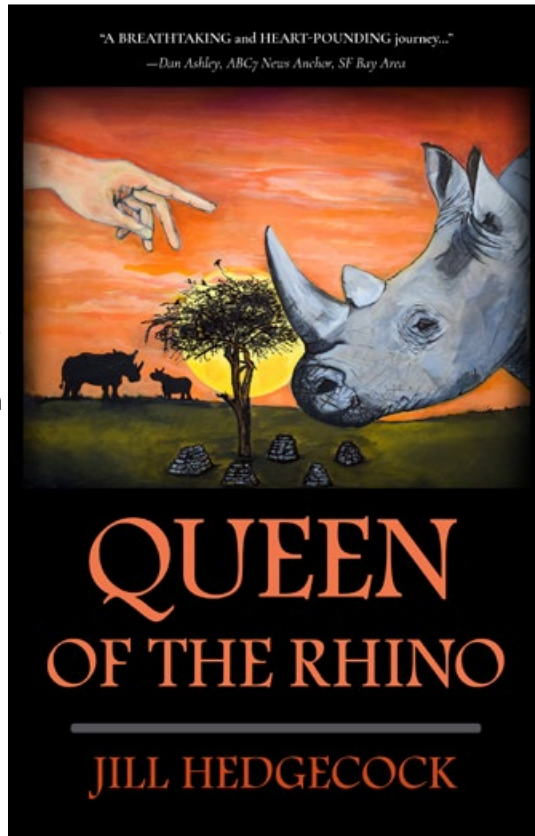
allow for consolation side trips operated by strange, unqualified men which distract Claire from her increasing unease about this invisible, maybe too-good-to-be-true benefactor.

Hedgecock seamlessly uses these treks to inform the reader about a myriad of birds, elephants, giraffes, lions, mountain gorillas, rhinos, etc., and the horrendous damage done by poachers. Perhaps the most impressive trip is a visit to Rwanda where we learn the wrenching history of the 1994 genocide of 800,000 people as well as the groundbreaking work of reconciliation. These interwoven portraits of Africa are the stunning backdrop for a plot that unfolds little by little.

Claire is again at the center of a conflict that will test her bravery, her family's bonds, her dedication to rhinos, and Junior's love for her. This is exciting storytelling, leaving the reader hopeful for the rhinos and hungry for the next adventure.

*Jill Hedgecock received her master's degree in Environmental Management from the University of San Francisco and is an award-winning and internationally-published author. The first novel in the series, 'Rhino in the Room,' received a New Apple Solo Medalist Award. She is also the author of two Doberman-inspired suspense novels, 'Between Shadow's Eyes' and 'From Shadow's Perspective.' Follow her at [www.jillhedgecock.com](http://www.jillhedgecock.com)*

>>>[Buy the novel HERE](#)<<<



tation on her first trip to Africa threaten to derail not only the meeting with Mr. Sudan, but the reunion with her handsome hero, safari guide and foundation partner, Junior. For the past year, their budding romance has been reduced to frustrating Zoom meetings across continents.

Once they arrive in Kenya, scheduling snafus abound which prevent Mr. Sudan from meeting Claire in person. These delays



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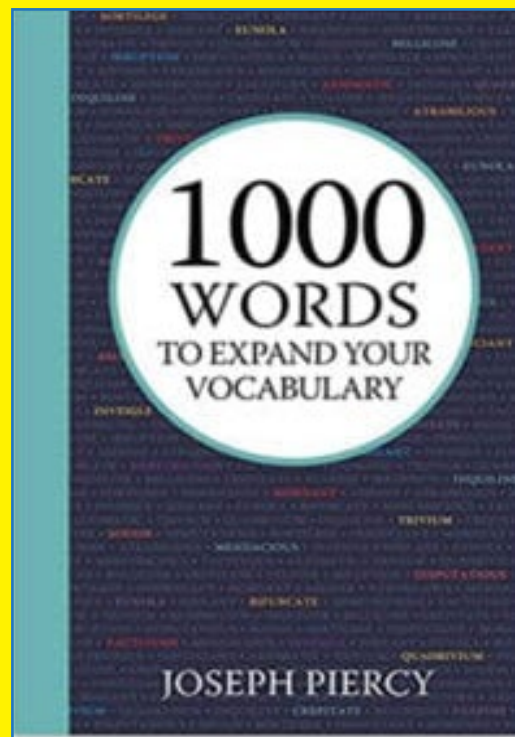
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**A CONVERSATION WITH...**

# MARK LESLIE

## An Author of Many Talents

Mark Leslie Lefebvre has been writing since he was thirteen years old and discovered his mother's Underwood typewriter collecting dust in a closet. He started submitting his work for publication at the age of fifteen and had his first story published in 1992, the same year he graduated from university. Under the name Mark Leslie, he has published more than a dozen full length books.

He pens a series of non-fiction paranormal explorations for Dundurn, Canada's largest independent publisher. He also writes fiction (typically thrillers and horror) and edits fiction anthologies, most recently as a regular editor for the WMG Publishing Fiction River anthology series.

He has worked in virtually every type of bookstore (independent, chain, large-format, online, academic and digital).

Between 2011 and 2017, Mark worked at the Director of Self-Publishing and Author Relations for Kobo where he was the driving force behind the creation of Kobo Writing Life, a free and easy to use author/small-publisher friendly platform designed to publish directly to Kobo's global catalog in 190 countries.

Stark Publishing is an imprint Mark created in 2004 when he released his first book 'One Hand Screaming.

**B&P:** How did you get into writing?

**ML:** I've always been fascinated with story and with storytelling. It started with my love of comic books, particularly the serialized stories that rolled out monthly in the Spider-Man comics.

I used to tell myself little stories like that playing with Fisher Price action figures. I would spend endless hours in this pretend play-land creating stories and tales of action and adventure.

Then I discovered the permanence of what happens when, instead of keeping those stories in your own head, you put them

down on paper. You could leave and someone else could pick it up and experience those tales.

It started with little cartoons and comics I would create.

Crude, mostly stick-figure creations. Then the "speech bubbles" and the box narration in those cartoons started to grow and grow – and I realized storytelling in long form narrative was more my style.

So it turned into writing. Initially by hand, and then, a little later, at about

the age of fourteen, I discovered my mom's old Underwood typewriter until a dust cover in the back of her closet.

I spent hours typing my stories







with two fingers and reveling in that experience.

I started submitting my stories for publication when I was fifteen,

and, of course, received my first story rejections then. My first sale happened about four years later, in 1992, when my very first story “The Progressive Sidetrack” a YA humor tale, was published in a digest sized small press magazine called Chapter One.

B&P: Why did you select Horror and Thrillers as your primary genre?

ML: For some reason I was always fascinated by the shadows and the darkness. I was always compelling to wonder what existed in those spaces we couldn’t see. I’ve long been very curious, and driven by thoughts of “what if.” All of those things resulted in wanting to write speculative tales – and, in particular, tales that would seem to fit best on an episode of The Twilight Zone.

Because the tales I wrote were mostly not definable as science fiction or fantasy, I gravitated to the descriptor of horror.

Although technically, I suppose they are often a mix of all three genres.

My love of thrillers come from the action of the Spider-Man comic books I grew up on. I enjoy the suspense, the edge-of-your-seat moments, the cliffhanger tales that compel a reader to want to get to the next chapter.

When it came to some of the “real hauntings” books I’ve done that experience true ghost stories – or, as one of my writing

on haunted locations. Some, like Haunted Hamilton, Creepy Capital and Macabre Montreal, are about specific cities. Others like Tomes of Terror and Haunted Hospitals, focus on types of buildings or locations.

B&P: How much time do you spend researching prior to writing?

ML: When it comes to writing those “real hauntings” type books, I can spend anywhere

from three to nine months doing research. This would be going on historic ghost walks and talking detailed notes, readings from books, magazine and newspaper articles, and interviewing people about their first-hand experiences with the paranormal.

When writing

fiction, a lot of the research is to get geographic location details correct, or to look into a character’s background and what their job, for example, entails. For a pair of books from my ‘Canadian Werewolf’ series – Fear and Longing in Los Angeles and Fright Nights, Big City – I did extensive research on Hitler’s fascination with the supernatural and the occult, the concept of trying to create a super-soldier army, the alleged werewolves from that army, as well as detailed research into the occult. I needed



mentors, John Robert Colombo would sometimes call them “tales told as true” – that came from my fascination with ghosts and the unknown. I read a lot of books about ghosts, UFOs, Bigfoot and similar things when I was young. And later on, in Ottawa, Ontario, I experienced my first historic ghost walk. I fell in love with the storytelling manner and the unrolling of fascinating tales that merged history and ghostly legends. So I began researching and writing a number of books that focused

to create a modern-day neo-Nazi group that was trying to endow their membership with supernatural powers and I needed the rituals and the “science” behind it all to seem reasonably believable within the context of the world I had created.

B&P: What’s your typical writing day look like?

ML: I usually get up at about 5:30 AM, I feed our dogs and cats, put on the coffee, and then begin to write. I usually have a good solid hour to hour and a half of writing time before I wake my partner up and get her coffee on and see her out the door for

her work. Then I usually try to get another hour of writing done before my day evolves into day-job activities (I work part-time in the book industry as the Director of Business Development for Draft2Digital – a company that helps authors with free tools to assist them with indie-publishing their self-published titles) and other maintenance and adminis-

trative tasks.

When I had deadlines, that hour or two tends to stretch out. I might write for a longer stretch in the morning, or do more writing later at night – I typically write better after dark for some reason. Or, in urgent moments, I’ll write all day over the week-ends.

B&P: You’ve stated you do not outline. Generally, how do your

characters, putting them in a situation and then watching how they deal with, react to, or get through it, is where the magic happens. I’m sometimes shocked to hear the words that come out of a character’s mouth at times. Or startled that they decided to go in one direction whereas I would have definitely gone in another. That’s a lot of fun.

I get ideas from everything and everywhere. There’s an



ideas form and go from that to actual writing?

ML: You’re right. I’m a “pantser” or “seat-of-the-pants” type of writer. If I wanted to get fancy about it, I might describe myself as a discovery writer. I enjoy seeing where the situation and characters might take me.

For me, understanding the

endless bombardment of concepts, ideas, and notions hitting me every day, like the so many cosmic rays that make their way through the Earth’s atmosphere. Most of them pass through and are forgotten; but some of them stick. Those usually make their way into a writing project.

Now, while I don’t outline any sort of details in a blow-by-blow

or chapter-by-chapter way, I will often take notes. Mostly a page or two, at most, of bullet points about characters, situations, landmark moments in a story, or other ideas that occurred to me along the way. Some of those notes and ideas make their way in to that book. Sometimes they don't. And sometimes, they get pushed off for me to explore in another future project or story.

B&P: Do you know the endings before you start?

ML: Yes, I very regularly know the ending, or at least have a notion of how a story might end. Sometimes it's clear in my mind. Other times it's not, but it becomes clearer to me as I continue on through the story.

But, sometimes, even when I believe I know the ending, something will happen in the writing of the story that informs me that the resolution I had originally imagined might not be where the characters are going to take this tale. I do my best to actually listen to them as the story unfolds, and try hard not to force them into the originally imagined ending, which might not seem like a natural progression.

B&P: You've written about your foray into romance, with 'Lover's Moon' the fifth book in your 'Canadian Werewolf' series. Now that you've co-written, and a romance, no less, is this something you see doing more of in the future, either a romance, or co-writing?

ML: 'Lover's Moon' was definitely a unique experience for me. While it was the fifth book in the series, it needed to satisfy both long-time readers of that series as well as those who might just want to enjoy a stand-alone romance. Writing it was a response to readers who wanted to know the full story of when Michael and Gail, the two main characters in the series, first met and fell in love half a dozen years earlier.

So Julie Strauss and I had to construct it as a standard happy-ending romance story that could be taken as a stand-alone – which is what you get in Chapters One through Twenty. But the Prologue and Epilogue needed to continue the current story-line and tease out, for readers, what might be happening next.

Julie is organized and a planner. And since we were writing alternative chapters – I wrote the chapters from Michael's point of view, Julie wrote Gail's – we needed to know where we were going. And so we did create a spreadsheet to follow the tropes of the romance genre, and fleshed them out with a paragraph each of what happens then. We tweaked it a bit along the way and then set about writing it in tag-team fashion, over the course of a month.

I trust Julie 100% - there's no way I'd hand over a beloved character like Gail to someone I didn't have complete faith in. And she did such a beautiful job. And the experience was fantastic. I loved every minute of that collaboration.

It turned out so good, in fact, that, when I began making some notes for the next book in the series, Hex and the City, I realized that I needed to have that book split the POV's into two. I needed Michael's POV storyline, and then also Gail's, since the two would be "fighting" the same fight, but in separate arenas in parallel. And so Julie and I are co-authoring that one, and will be outlining the story in October 2022, and writing it in November during NaNoWriMo (National Novel Writing Month), for publication in March 2023.

That one won't be a romance – it'll be a humorous urban fantasy adventure – but I know it's going to be as fun as writing 'Lover's Moon.'

B&P: What's the worst part of writing for you and how do you overcome it?

ML: For me, the worst part is my procrastination, and putting off the process of actually planting my butt in a chair and getting my fingers on the keyboard.

Once I do that, it happens. The words flow. Things get done. But it's getting to that which for me is the hardest part. I am a serial procrastinator. I work to deadline.

A few things help me overcome that.

The first is actually blocking writing time, specifically for certain projects, into my calendar. The other is forcing actual deadlines. With a traditionally published book that's easy, because there's a contract and obligations with a publisher. But



with indie-published titles it can be harder. But contracts with an editor, and setting up a pre-order on retailers, forces me to stay on track. (Not to mention, when co-authoring, I do not want to let my partner in this project down, so that often motivates me)

B&P: Do you have any advice for new authors?

ML: I could write books filled with advice for authors – and I actually have, under my full name of Mark Leslie Lefebvre. So I'll try to keep this short.

Three of the things I've found common in the thousands of successful authors I've interacted with over the past thirty years are patience, practice, and persistence. First you need to write as much as possible, and consistently. In whatever manner works for you. Keep writing. Keep getting better at your craft. And keep learning. With practice comes patience; but patience is also so critical because regardless of what publishing paths you choose, patience is a requirement. Things can always take much longer than expected. And that can defeat many authors used to getting things instantly in our point-and-click culture. And persistence, or the ability to keep pursuing your goals, your dreams, and working hard toward that, is so extremely valuable. Because success is often the result of sticking it out for that much longer, or trying it yet again in another way when the first series of attempts had failed.

Ultimately, I think writers

should clearly understand what their goals are for writing and why they are writing. And they should focus on what those goals are, rather than what other people think their goals should be.

Because writing is not easy. Sure, there may be parts of it that are easy. But it's not just the writing, it's the publishing it's the marketing. There's a ton of hard work to do once you do the



hardest thing that most people will never do, which is to get the end of the manuscript – or at least get it to a point where you feel it's ready for the next step, rather than spending a decade re-writing it over and over.

And never give up on yourself, or your goals.

B&P: What lies ahead for you?

ML: While I'll be continuing to write in the 'Canadian Werewolf' series, with 'Hex and the City' slated for March 2023, I will also be writing more true ghost story tales. The next one of those, 'Weird Waterloo' will be about the city I now live in, and that one will be pitched to traditional publishing. That'll also be co-authored with another local author who lives and grew up in Waterloo.

But more immediately, I'm wrapped up the final work on

a decided different non-fiction book. 'The Canadian Mounted' launched on Canadian Thanksgiving, in October 2022. It is a trivia guide for lovers of the movie Planes, Trains and Automobiles. The title for the book comes from a pornographic mass market paperback that Del Griffith (played by John Candy) is holding at the New York airport where he and Neal Page (played by Steve Martin) first officially meet.

This Thanksgiving is the 35th anniversary for the release of this classic holiday film, and it's been so fun to explore the use of the prop book (and how Ryan Reynolds had the prop department make him a replica of the book John Candy was holding to be used in Deadpool 2) as well as numerous intriguing stories behind the movie that I've researched.

Mark's Latest Books:

[LOVER'S MOON](#) (May 2022)

[ACCOUNTING FOR AUTHORS](#) (April 2022)

[FRIGHT NIGHTS, BIG CITY](#) (Dec 2021)

[THE RELAXED AUTHOR](#) (Sept 2021)

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**EXCERPT****An Excerpt from 'The Tenth Cycle': A Thriller (A Rossler Foundation Mystery Book 1)**

Dr. Zacharias began with a statement, "Before the turn of the last century, Josiah Willard Gibbs said, 'Mathematics is a language.' Indeed, it has been called the universal language. As we explore the mathematics of the Great Pyramid today, consider whether the message is just that; a message from the builders of the Great Pyramid."

Daniel's interest was piqued. He had been approaching his questions from the stance that if he could solve the riddles involved in the construction, he would have the answers that would give his theory credence among Egyptologists and other archaeological scholars. What if that had been the wrong approach all along? Daniel listened as Dr. Zacharias cited fact after fact that begged for explanation.

Beginning with the fact that the Great Pyramid is precisely located in the center of the land mass of the earth, could it be a coincidence that the curvature built into the sides of the pyramid exactly match the radius of the earth? Daniel could see that Sarah was taking rapid notes, but these were facts he already had stored in his database. He listened closely as the noted speaker went on with another quote about mathematics being a language.

"Mathematics is the language with which God wrote the universe. Galileo Galilei said that. Can we doubt it when we see that two facts intersect in the language of the Great Pyramid? The first is that the estimated weight of the pyramid, multiplied by ten to the eighth power gives us the earth's mass. Can it then be a coincidence that twice the perimeter of the granite coffer, multiplied by the *same* ten to the eighth power, gives us a number exactly equal to the sun's mean radius? Is this not a message that the builders of the Great Pyramid knew of the relationship of numbers that we did not know until centuries later?"

Daniel could hardly contain his elation. Here was an expert that was raising the same questions and anomalies that he had catalogued. Not only that, but Dr. Zacharias was posing a theory that would account for it; it was a message! But, what message? And who had left it? Hoping the answers would be forthcoming, Daniel quickly made a note on his iPad; 'It's in the math'.

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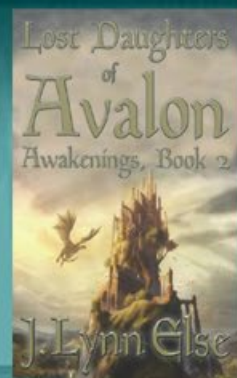
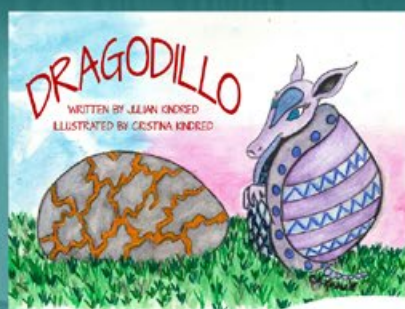
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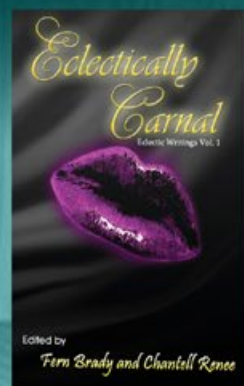
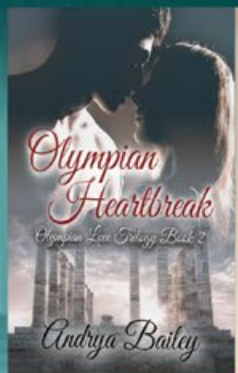
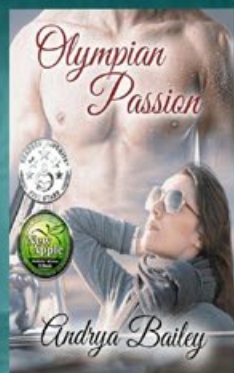


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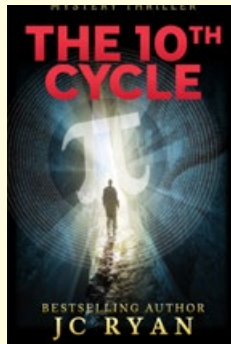
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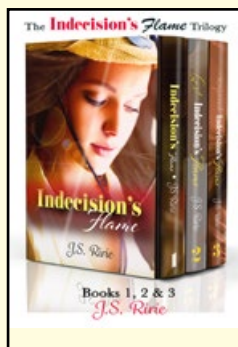
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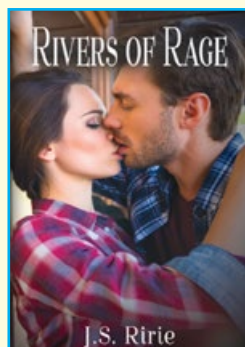
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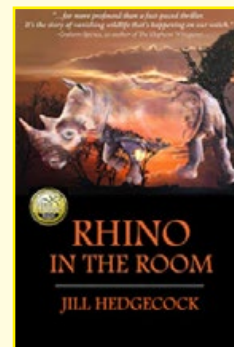
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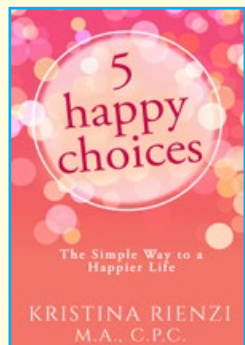
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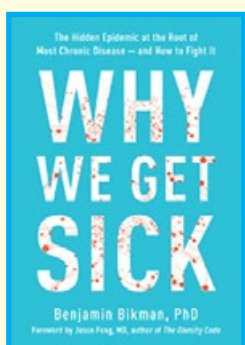
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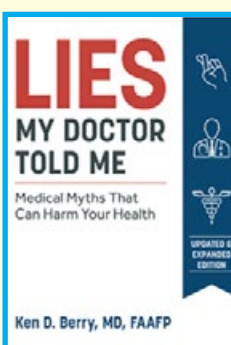
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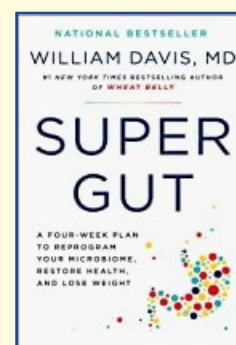
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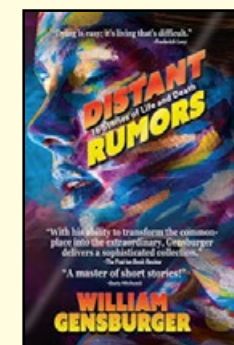
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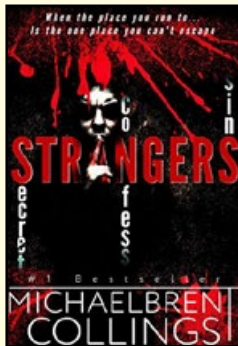


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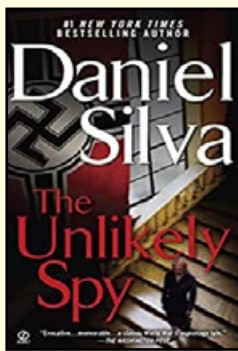
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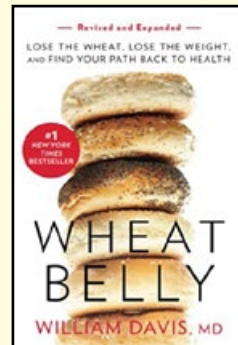
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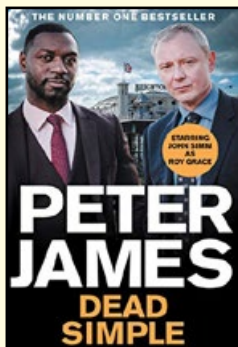
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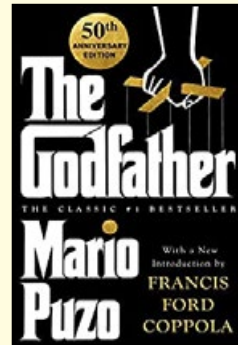


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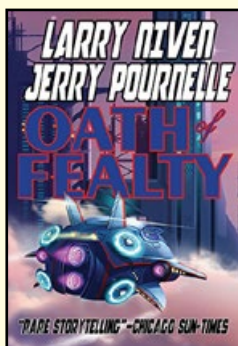
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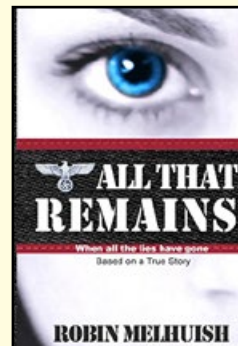


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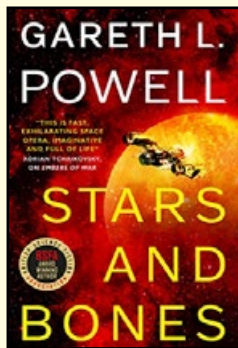
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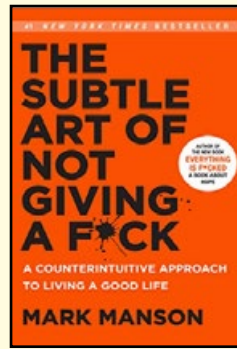
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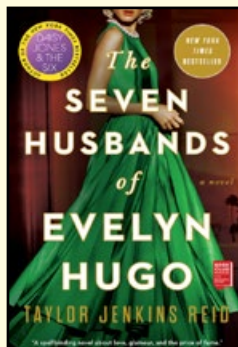
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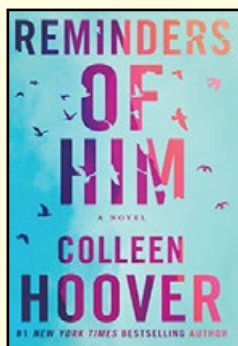
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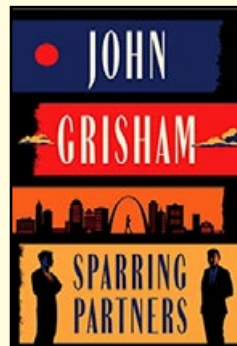
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