

TWISTED REALITIES:
OF MYTH AND MONSTROSITY



edited by Kate Monroe

Twisted Realities: Of Myth and Monstrosity

Sirens Call Publications

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It Lives In Us

Thomas James Brown

'Spring, Summer and Fall fill us with hope; Winter alone reminds us of the human condition.'
Mignon McLaughlin, The Second Neurotic's Notebook, 1966

A black frost spread across Lynnwood, icing the tarmac with a lustrous sheen. Street lights were visible; pools of orange in the ice, but they were few and shone dully into the night. The village was dark and still, but it would not remain still for long. Something stirred inside the residents of Lynnwood, something hungry, and on this night it would not be quietened.

The village was an old one, dating back to the fourteenth century, when settlers flocked to the New Forest from Britain's towns. The Black Death alone claimed thousands of souls. Starvation and society damned more. And so people died. Those who did not die fled the cities, their tails between their legs, as rank and lean as the very rats that had sickened them.

A number of settlements sprang into being within the Forest, their inhabitants drawn by its bounty, if not the imagined safety of its trees. The soil was poor, as forest soil so often is, but a living could be scratched from the wildlife. Pigeon was abundant; but then the forest settlers ate for nourishment, not taste. There is little people will not do, nor eat, when it means the difference between life and death. The Forest did not disappoint them with its offerings. These settlers proved most resourceful when it came to finding food. Even in the winter months, when darkness dragged and bodies froze, there was meat to be found, if they would only eat it. Lynnwood grew from a legacy of hunger.

But it was not the haven they had envisaged. Such a place could not have existed, did not exist. How could it, except between the pages of the Good Book - or any book, for that matter? No; the winters were long, the nights dark and, whilst there was some shelter from the plague beneath the boughs of the trees, there was no outrunning sin. This was Lynnwood's real legacy.

In those respects, little had changed. For three hundred and sixty four days of the year, Lynnwood was a pleasant enough place in which to live. Hemmed in by the ancient oaks, there was a very real sense of community, as tangible as the roots that wound their way beneath the moist forest mulch. The trees were not restricted to oaks, but beech too, and yew and holly; any naturalist's dream. Together they kept the village their own, tucked away behind branch and thistle and trunk. There was but a single bus that went as far as Lyndhurst, which left and returned once each day, and one long, vermicular road. Those were the only ways in and out of the village. Traffic was unheard of. In the hottest months, the dead of summer, the locals would spill out from the pub into the middle of the high street, to drink and talk and celebrate the sun with local ales. Nobody worried about collisions or disruption. There was no need. It was simply the way of things.

Reemergence

Nina D'Arcangela

“Michael! Michael, what are you doing son? Get away from the rail; it isn't safe to stand there!”

Michael turned in desperation seeking help from the other deckhands, but in a maelstrom such as this, the men were encumbered with more important tasks. Securing the lines; pulling in the oiled cloths that serve the Three-Masted vessel they were trying with all diligence to keep afloat in the churning, violent waves; and tying down any loose debris that might be tossed about injuring crew or ship. It is no wonder Michael's calls for help go unanswered.

“Son, I said get away from the rail!” the Captain orders while wrestling to keep the wheel from spinning wildly off course, lest they be swamped by a wave large enough to swallow them whole and pull the entire ship and its crew to the bottom of the sea with its brutal fury.

Michael turned to the Captain, “But Father, I can see her, she is struggling in the waves, we must do something to help her. We cannot just leave her to the ravages of the storm!”

“No Michael, there is no one there! Get away from the rail son, we need you on deck!”

As the ship is tossed to and fro on the frothy angry sea, Michael leaned out, hands cupped to his mouth shouting a warning that he has seen her, for her not to be frightened, they will find a way to rescue her from the water's angry clutches. As Michael bent further still over the rail in an effort to be heard above the din of the howling wind, the Captain gives orders to his first mate to take the wheel so that he may save his fool of a son before it is too late.

Just as the Captain relinquishes the wheel, the ship is hit by not one, not two, nor even three, but four consecutive waves that force a moan from deep within the bowels of the vessel, sounds of a cracking hull. In the same instant, the main Mast began to give way under the force of the onslaught. The tide of churning water that rushes across the deck knocks all off their feet, including the Captain and thankfully washing him and his first mate into the upper deck railing and not overboard.

When the Captain regains his footing, he looks around to assess the damage done to his vessel. Upon seeing the broken Mast, he calls out to Michael to come help him and the others move the massive piece of wood off the bodies of the men trapped below it. Rushing to the main deck, the Captain is not immediately aware of his sons' absence. In the confusion that follows, no man can say for sure what exactly transpired, though one deck hand swears he saw the Captains son jump from the rail into the water just before the consecutive pounding of the waves began.

Broken in heart and spirit, the Captain cannot fathom how his eldest boy would be so foolish as to leave the relative safety of the ship in lieu of the ravaging waters below.

Mosaic

Jonathan Templar

Ever since they had arrived at Aviandale, the trees had unsettled Andrea.

The woods were dense, but not unusually so. The trees rose up from the hollow in which the settlement had been found, surrounding them on all sides, but she could still see the blue midday sky high above with the careless patterns made by the jet engines that scarred it. If she concentrated, she could even hear the steady sound of traffic from the busy road that lay not half a mile away from where she stood.

But there was *something*, some rising sense of being swallowed up. It felt almost as if the woods were stealing her gaze, that when she looked upon them they looked back more intensely. She was proud of her gaze, her discriminating talent for observation; she did not want to believe that it could be compromised. She had to push the uneasiness down, not let it take hold. It was all just nonsense, nothing more than a silly city girl's fear of the great unknown that hid behind nature.

There are no birds though. The trees are empty.

Professor Callan was certainly unconcerned. He was humming a ditty, happily digging at the dirt with his trowel. Beneath their feet was slowly emerging the outline of what had once been a dwelling; a villa, in all likelihood. It was far from unique in this region. There were remnants of Roman settlements all over the surrounding countryside. But that didn't diminish the excitement of finding a new one, at unearthing the remnants of an ancient life that that had been given over to the elements.

Professor Callan held up a small piece of interesting debris to the light, dusted it down gently with a small brush.

"Anything?" asked Andrea.

"Triple-A battery," Callan sniffed, and tossed it into the bucket of rubbish that was already half full.

"I've uncovered some fascinating detail over here," Andrea told him. "There's some sign of erosion, but it's clearly a very detailed mosaic and the quality of the design is exceptional."

"Yes," Professor Callan said absently, seemingly more interested in the latest artefact he held between his fingers, which Andrea hoped turned out to be a desiccated dog turd. He'd shown little or no interest in the mosaic since Andrea had first discovered it. And she knew *that* was why. Because *she* had uncovered it. Not for the noble professor the sharing of glory, the pleasure of a team discovery. Oh, no. If he couldn't claim it as his own, he didn't care what it was.

Selfish, self-centred old fop.

Riddle Me Real

Lisamarie Lamb

I look across at my therapist and watch as she deftly flicks her voice recorder on, as she twirls her pen – expensive, ink – around in her hand so that it faces the right way, pointing down towards the notepad – cheap, recycled – that rests on her bony knee. A drop of black ink falls from the silver nib and lands fatly on the paper below. It soaks in, is sucked in, and spreads itself across the page, tendrils reaching out in search of something. I am fascinated by it.

I am also fascinated by the woman herself. Not beautiful, not even particularly pretty, but powerful in her own way; always asking questions, delving down deep, deeper than I ever could with my limited enquiries. She is like me. She is like me in a number of ways, but none of the ones that matter.

She ignores me. It's a curious tactic for a therapist. If she expects me to speak first, she will be disappointed. I can wait for her. Waiting. It's what I've done for millennia. There's no reason why I should rush anything now. We sit opposite one another, both outwardly relaxed in our matching leather chairs. Strangely, I can't read her, or I would know whether this was an act or not. It is for me. I am nervous. I know what I want to say and yet I don't know how to say it. I wonder if she can section me. I wonder if she should. She's not a priest - she's not bound by the confessional - so I have no idea whether she would tell on me. Of course, she would have to believe me first, and there's the sticking point. I don't think she will.

“So, why are you here?”

Her voice is as I thought it would be. Smooth, velvet. It is calming and cajoling, and I think I will tell her everything, despite my misgivings. Surely the worst that could happen would be a lifetime – many lifetimes – spent in a white walled hospital where I could rest and be at peace? That doesn't sound so bad. I clear my throat.

“I am tired. I am old and worn out, and I am no longer needed.” I can feel tears stabbing my forehead. My eyes grow wet and my vision blurs briefly. I think I must look ridiculous, *sound* ridiculous, but the therapist nods, a tiny, tiny nod, and notes something down. I crane my neck to see, but cannot read her words. I'm not entirely sure that I want to.

“You're old? What makes you say that?”

Honey, dripping, I want to taste it.

“My date of birth.” We both laugh, and she seems genuinely amused. But I am serious. I am older than humanity, older than the world, and she has no idea. She looks at me, expecting more, expecting the truth after my little joke. I comply. “I *feel* old then. I've been around a long time.” The problem is I look like I'm in my twenties, maybe my thirties. I do not look as though I've had thousands of years of living. The images of me do. The statues. They show the wear that I feel. But how can I explain that?

Voices

Kate Monroe

At some point in time, everyone knows how it feels to be alone in a crowded room. For Maeve Regan, that feeling was her constant and relentless companion.

She didn't belong here.

Hell, Maeve wasn't even her name. Even that didn't belong to her. She feared that nothing did, not any more.

No one believed in the gods of old. Maeve blamed the internet for the birth of the new wave of cynicism that had pervaded throughout the world she restlessly roamed. No one accepted anything at face value these days.

Magic was once widely acknowledged and respected; witches and warlocks were a common feature of every village that she cast her net over. Now it was no more than a child's fairytale and literary escapism for those who quietly rebelled against the skepticism of the twenty first century. Even the lore of old was dismissed as old wives' tales and uninformed mumbo-jumbo. What chance did the gods stand when to almost everyone they were intangible, inexplicable; and, in the truest sense of the word, incredible?

Maeve, though – or the being that wore the name of Maeve Regan – was a goddess. She had reveled, once, secure and resplendent in the soothing embrace of unfailing belief in who she was and what she stood for. Entire armies would fall at her feet and sing her praises, lifting their voices to the heavens in exaltation and fear. Oh, yes; *fear*! She shuddered in delight as she allowed herself a moment's somber recollection.

Now, though, most people did not even bat an eyelid when she walked past them. In America, Maeve was no more than one amongst millions. It galled deeply, but at least she had had all she needed to thrive upon from...other quarters, she supposed it could be said. She had taken a more direct route to get what she needed.

She had been forced to adapt to carve out her own place in this brave new world. Unlike many of her past companions, Maeve did not need belief to sustain her – all she needed was bloodshed and carnage. Belief was a luxury. Death was a necessity. That wonder was in as good supply now as it had been in the days of glories past.

Humanity hadn't changed all that much.

She bowed her head and willed herself to blend into the background of the circular room that had been her favored dominion over the past century; designed by an Irishman, no less. Today, she did not want to be noticed – and so she was not. It was far simpler to do her work this way, to allow her influence to weave into the subconscious minds of those she sought to manipulate.

Two men were seated at the desk that dominated the room. One Maeve knew better perhaps than any human now alive, for she had been the voice in the back of his head for six years now; the longest she had spent with any one human for centuries.

Memorial

Joseph A Pinto

"I believe it's pointless to ask, Anthony. Those days have long past. Plainly you can see this." With mournful eyes, the man sipped his bourbon, while into his chest, as if some wounded animal, burrowed a mercilessly bandaged hand.

Anthony's hand lingered across the tacky remnants of liquor upon the table; within balled fist, a cold wad of bills. He glared upon the sullen man seated before him. "See? Yes, I can." Fist inched forward, awkward in its urgency. "And as you can plainly see, a job well done will be rewarded."

"What I do...what I *did*...never constituted a job. A job does nothing to stir the soul. Only passion achieves such a state of grace." The man inhaled deeply—of the bourbon or the proposal, left to dangle in air—Anthony was not sure. But he did not appreciate the smooth impassiveness across the man's alabaster face. Did not appreciate it in the least.

"Passion?"

"Yes. A job is measured by hours. But passion's hours are timeless."

"It seems your passion has nearly left you a cripple, while my job has left me a wealthy, wealthy man," Anthony sneered.

"You are my brother, Anthony. And had you not been, I'd find your gaffe of words truly insulting."

"At last, bravado found at the bottom of your glass. Is that the residue of passion, Nicholas, or merely passion's inspiration?"

A thread's breadth parted Nicholas' lips as bourbon drizzled tongue. Eyes danced but to the song of another day, transfixed by noiseless, ghostly chords. "Some people wish to choose their vice. But for others, the vice chooses them."

"Killing yourself slowly with alcohol now, then."

"It's not alcohol of which I speak." The words hung between them.

Hesitation. Eventually Anthony loomed over the table. "She's gone, Nicholas," and instantly the music ceased; a blackened veil draped his features. Hand plummeted to the table, the snifter nearly shattering atop the sticky grain. Bourbon splashed Anthony's knuckles, but fast his posture remained. He studied his brother with dulled satisfaction. Slowly, by inches, he lowered his considerable frame, pouring his bulk into the opposite seat. Watching intently. Silence, broken only by Nicholas' strangled mewls.

Nicholas dabbed at the corner of his trembling lips. "When?" His voice a hoarse murmur.

"Six months ago. You've changed your haunts. It's made finding you difficult, but not impossible. I thought you had fallen from the face of the earth, too. Like Catarina."

Stinging, the words. Nicholas winced, eyes searching. Searching.

The Silver Comb

J. Marie Ravenshaw

Aisling Grey maneuvered her car into the hidden driveway of the house she rented along with her best friend, Shayna O'Neill, and Shayna's long-time boyfriend, Callum Connor. It was hard to see the entrance at night. As she turned the corner, she could just barely see the house through the trees. The porch lights were off.

They lived on two and a half acres in a little rental house nestled right in the midst of a thick wood. She knew that as soon as the headlights were off, she'd be plunged into darkness. She rolled her eyes and muttered, "God, you'd think they'd at least flip the fricken' light on for me ..."

Aisling pulled up close to the garage - knowing that both stalls would be in use - and turned off the car. She grabbed the groceries and her purse. Deciding to leave her books in the car -she didn't need to crack them until Sunday anyway- she slid out and slammed the door behind her.

Aisling glanced toward the front door, mapping out the path she would take in the utter darkness. Out of the corner of her eye she saw a shadow flit by at the edge of the woods. She stopped dead in her tracks and turned toward the area. Narrowing her eyes, she yelled, "Who's there?" No answer. Chills ran up her spine, making her shiver in response.

A thought crossed her mind, making her smile and immediately staving off her fear. She yelled again. "Cal? You messin' with me again? 'Cause if you are ..." She shook her head and continued toward the front door.

As she stepped onto the bottom step, the porch light came on, illuminating the front yard and temporarily blinding her. She raised her arm to shield her face from the bright light. Her eyes widened as the front door opened to reveal Cal's grinning face. "Hey! Aisling! What're you bellowin' about? You gonna stand out 'ere all night? Spaghetti's almost done!"

"Jesus, Cal! You gotta yell when I'm standing right here?"

Cal looked down toward her. "Sorry, didn't see you there. The wine must be gettin' to me." He pushed his fingers through his raven hair, making it stand on end. "We're on the third bottle already. You're gonna be playin' catch up." He dropped his hand to his side, smiled, and held the door open for her.

She passed the groceries to him and set her purse and keys on the entryway table as she walked toward the kitchen. Shayna leaned around the corner with a bottle of red wine in her hand. She swished it back and forth. "You wanna glass? Or shall we pass the bottle about?"

Aisling wrapped her fingers around the neck of the bottle, snatching it from Shayna's hands. "I think this one's mine." She brought the bottle to her lips, a mischievous smirk gracing her mouth as she tipped the bottle up and took a couple of healthy swigs.

Keine Solche Sache

Edward Lorn

"Parthenogenesis is a dream. Or a nightmare, depending on who you are talking to." Johan Schmidt said. "Christians call this *The Immaculate Conception*. They believe that Mary, the mother of the baby Jesus, had never known the *internal* touch of a man. I believe the lady just cheated on her husband."

The hotel banquet hall livened with short bursts of nervous laughter. Johan waited for them to subside before continuing.

"No other religion has this belief. Allah didn't impregnate some unknowing woman. Buddha didn't tiptoe through the tulips to drop seed in some impoverished house wife. And don't get me started on Shiva! The Jewish community doesn't even believe Jesus was the son of God. So, if you're hearing this, and you are, in fact, Jewish, you think Mary was an unfaithful wife, too. Don't you? That's what I thought."

More sporadic laughter.

"I may be German, but even you must admit I have a point. The Nazis - and yes, my family tree does contain one or two - researched the possibility of this *Parthenogenesis*. They wanted to make the super soldier, as it were. A cloned man, or woman - they were not sexist - with infinite powers. They theorized that if they could map and control the human genome, then they could unlock the ninety percent of the brain us normal bipeds could not."

Johan was losing the crowd. He noticed the yawns and the shuffling bodies in their seats. He sighed inwardly. They wanted him to get to the point.

"Toward the end of the second world war, Wolfram Sievers enlisted the help of Doctor Gerhard Strauss, my great uncle on my mother's side. Doctor Strauss - a man of science and invention - perfected the cloning process fifty years before that abomination known as Dolly was conceived in a vial. Yes, you have a question?"

"Is that the sheep they cloned in Sweden?" A big nosed, college aged boy asked from the middle of the crowd. The guy's name was Walter Nathan and he had just inherited a cool million from his recently deceased father. Johan knew him from the newspapers.

"Correct. And though Dolly was a solid thesis, she died only two months later. The staff that worked with her, built into her DNA a... shelf life, as you Americans call it, so that they would not have to explain why she'd not lasted."

"Dolly lived for six years, Mr. Schmidt," Walter Nathan returned.

Johan laughed. "So they would have you believe. Dolly was an inferior product, and much further behind my Great Uncle Strauss."

Hades and The Hydra

Amber Keller

The world changed on December 21, 2012, but it wasn't due to the Mayans' grim prophecies like everyone had expected.

It was business as usual. The day had started like any other. New York City was bustling with the normal activity of the big city at dawn. People already crowded the streets, business owners were busy with opening the many stores, and the street was filled with a never-ending stream of taxis and other vehicles. The cornucopia of smells that completed the city wafted in on a cool breeze. There was nothing different, as far as anyone knew. But in truth there was a sinister plan nearing fruition underneath the unsuspecting city.

In the depths of the Underworld, Hades sat in the vast expanse of a large, dark, cavernous room, on a throne built of obsidian bones. Cerberus, the three-headed dog, lay at his feet. snoring.

"Persephone, come to me." Hades cracked his knuckles as he issued the command.

Persephone glided into the room, her head down. She crossed the expanse and knelt beside him.

"Today is the day that I shall finally have some fun," he said as he stroked her silken hair.

Flames filled the large mantle and licked up in various spots around the room, hovering in the air, causing shadows to move and slither in dark excitement.

"What will you do?" she asked.

A smile crept over his face as he put a finger under her chin to make her look up at him. "I will return to the mortals and I will bring back more subjects to serve me." Persephone's eyes widened. "But you can't return to the surface! You have been given the order not to do such a thing."

Hades' smile turned to a snarl and he stood quickly, waking up Cerberus who gave a sharp bark from each of his heads.

"*Order?* Who says I have to obey a trite order from my brother?" He walked down to peer out of a window, cracking his knuckles again on the way. The Underworld lay stretched out beyond his palace. Fires danced, shades shuffled in confusion, and his minions carried out their tasks with a morbid fluidity. His mood returned to one of satisfaction.

"It's time that I stirred up a little bit of... chaos," he said to himself.

A large slab of granite that stood on more bones acted as a desk. There were many books and papers scattered over the surface. Hades went to it and leaned over, shuffling through his work.

A Fair Price

Alexa Muir

Five blissful days had passed since they'd arrived at the Chateau; neatly placed between Carcassonne and Narbonne, but remote enough to be quiet and secluded. Hannah thought it looked more like a Spanish villa than a French countryside retreat, but had chosen long ago to let her husband Matt have the final say on architecture. It didn't interfere with her relaxation either way. She watched her Irish Setter, Jess, run around the pool in the last rays of the sun, the patio baked to a comfortable warmth. She massaged one of her shoulders and was relieved to feel how loose they had finally become in the last few days. She placed her book on the side table and sat up on the lounge, the light flashing into her eyes. Jess, spotting the movement from the back of the garden, gave up bounding after imaginary prey and ran full speed into Hannah's lap instead.

"Get off, you stupid beast, you'll cover me in mud!"

Jess was oblivious, licking and wiggling her way into forgiveness. Hannah hugged her before pushing her off, telling her to go find Daddy. Jess, ever obliging, bounced off around the side of the house to the front drive where they had left Matt repairing some loose cobbles. Hannah grinned as she saw the speed with which Jess took the corner, nearly spilling herself into the bushes.

A splash sounded to Hannah's left. She swung her head, her copper hair cascading over her neck, but saw only ripples in the water by the side of the pool. Puzzled, she got up from her comfortable perch and walked over to the pool's edge. Though she peered intently into the pool's depths, she saw nothing; the water was clear and sparkling all the way to the mosaic bottom. With an internal shrug, she decided to seek out Matt for herself.

Studying her nails as she wandered past the lounge, Hannah reached down one handed to pick up her book, only for her fingers to meet the wooden tabletop with a scrape. It wasn't there. Grumbling, she went onto one knee and peered under the table, and then under the lounge. Still no book. She could have sworn she put it there. A little worm of unease slinked into her guts, but she decided to ignore it and continued her way around the house. She could hear Matt laughing and knew that Jess would be the source of the amusement.

"Jess, stop, get off, stop it!" The words came fractured between Matt's laughter, and when Hannah came round the corner she saw that he was having a tug of war with Jess for the hose he'd been washing the paving with. It looked like Jess was winning.

"You need a hand there, lover?" Hannah asked, leaning against the white washed wall.

Matt grinned even wider and pulled on the hose, making Jess dig her paws into the ground. "I think I got this, thanks." He abruptly let go of the hose, making Jess tumble backwards. With her prey now still, she dropped her end of the hose and took to prancing around Matt's feet instead.

"You didn't happen to give Jess some Red Bull, did you?"

Drakul

K. Trap Jones

My name is Drakul and I have become a lost cause, a faded shadow of my former self. I was once a loyal follower of Dionysus, the God of grape harvest and wine, until the others discovered my weakness. Immortality flows through my veins along with the wine, but only one of them actually helps me to erase the memories of my past. I turn to my friendly liquid for acceptance and for denial of what I have become. I am a satyr; half-goat, half-man, but a full drunkard. I am immortal, but death can greet me from the hands of any God.

The wine has become my only friend, for it is that within the goblet that I truly consider my companion; but alas, even he is not above betraying me on occasion. I had an unfortunate event that pushed me away from the glory of the Gods to where I find myself today. Before I wallow too deep in the present, allow me to reflect upon the past. For it is within the sands of time that my prosperity truly reigns supreme. It was within the protection of the Gods where I truly became gifted, but it was within the winery orchards where I found my betrayers.

I was created for the mere purpose of serving the Gods and I achieved great success. There were many satyrs created for different purposes, but I was the one chosen to serve alongside Dionysus, for he only had a few close companions. I refer to my past as the glory days, for they easily overshadow the tasks that I oversee today. My past was filled with the most wonderful wine, nymphs and festivals of which few were able to participate. I soon became the envy of all other satyrs as Dionysus' trust in me had spread throughout the village. When I slept, the others would scavenge to take my place by trying to better me, but Dionysus was no fool. He allowed the others to pamper him, but there was no replacing his most trustworthy ally. I was always by his side and eager to please. We were inseparable as a team. It was the closest I had ever been to becoming recognized as a fellow God. He entrusted me with his secrets, even those forbidden to be heard by the ears of Zeus.

With that much power and that much difference between myself and the others, it was only natural that they would allow their jealousy to take hold. When Dionysus slept or when I was not by his side, I was not welcomed to join the others. I became an outcast within my own village and was made aware of that on many occasions. During the meetings and trials of the Gods, I was left behind to suffer the wrath of my colleagues. Without the watchful eye of our master, I was often mocked and belittled. My food rations would be tainted and my personal treasures would be stolen by thieves. I did not allow myself to be bullied, as I knew that all would be well as soon as Dionysus was to place one foot upon the soil of the village.

Having that close of a relationship with a God did have its benefits. I did not have to participate in labor chores of the winery, nor did I have to handle messaging chores. The two tasks were brutally cruel in each of their own ways. The winery task consisted of hand picking the grapes for the production of the wine. This also included the toting of the barrels and the stomping of fruit to produce the liquid. It was said that Dionysus purposely created us with flattened hooves for that reason alone. We were masters of squeezing the life juice out of the grapes for the maximum volume allowed. The weathering elements were chaotic in nature and followed the mood swings of Zeus.

The Plight of Phaylen Ponsford

Julianne Snow

Scrape. Scrape. Scrape.

The sound of her trowel scraping across the earth was a rhythmic catharsis that flowed up Phaylen Ponsford's arm and radiated throughout the rest of her body.

Scrape. Scrape. Scrape.

Each thin layer of dirt removed had the potential to reveal a relic of a lost time; perhaps a treasure of incalculable value. Phaylen had wanted to be an archaeologist for as long as she could remember. The desire stemmed from the continual playback of a childhood favourite that still held her spellbound; good old Indy never let her down. With all of the bad things that had befallen Phaylen, Indy always remained a constant source of inspiration. Even after the fire.

It happened when Phaylen was nine. An electrical short in one of the wires connecting her favourite pink lamp with the frilly nightshade to the wall. It could have picked any point in its life to short out, but instead it chose a moment when a young Phaylen was sleeping next to it. Within that instant her life changed – in the worst possible way.

Gone were her frilly pink lamp, her bed that had once been covered in a pink and purple polka dotted bedspread, and all her toys. In their stead was just pain; both physical and emotional.

Phaylen had always been a heavy sleeper; a trait that her alcoholic mother had once considered a Godsend. In the wake of the devastation and the mounting medical bills, she began to consider it a curse.

It wasn't long before she considered Phaylen cursed as well.

It was her mother's constant and very vocal opinion that she would amount to nothing. Especially given the fact that the majority of her young body was covered in the rippled and pocked design that the fire had left in its wake.

Some said that it might have been better if Phaylen had just died that night. *Easier on the poor girl . Certainly easier on her mother.* Death, however, wasn't in the cards for either of them. Instead, Phaylen faced a long road to recovery and her mother faced a mountain of medical bills that she knew she'd never be able to pay. One might think that the lamp company would have helped to pay for the damage that it had wrought, but the simple fact of the matter was they had gone out of business two years prior to the unfortunate incident. It had been something to do with the recall of that same lamp bankrupting the entire business – a recall that didn't make its way into the consciousness of Phaylen's mother. A recall that would have saved her skin. It was a memory that depressed and troubled her mother when she sobered up and one that ultimately kept her firmly entrenched at the bottom of a bottle.

The Authors

Thomas James Brown

Thomas James Brown, Staff Writer for Dark River Press and postgraduate student at the University of Southampton, UK where he is studying for an MA in Creative Writing. Staples of his fiction include insects, decay and Dionysian Man. Huge fan of Nietzsche's 'The Birth of Tragedy', Blackwood's 'The Wendigo' and the stories of M. R. James.

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Nina D'Arcangela

Nina D'Arcangela was the type of girl who, when given a doll as a child, would immediately pop its head off to see what was inside, then spend countless hours contemplating how so many fantastic and fantastical things could be in her own head when the doll's was so very vacant. As a relative newcomer to the writing scene, Nina is just beginning to let the world have a glimpse of not only her imagination, but darker ruminations as well.

Enamored by the classically woven tales of Edgar Allen Poe, Lovecraft, or H.G. Wells, and with landscapes dancing in her head prompted by the likes of Edgar Rice Burrows and Arthur C. Clark, magical worlds took form from their inspiration in her own head that would keep her awake night after night reading by flashlight under the covers, or nesting in a closet with the door shut so as not to awaken others by her insatiable need to read more wondrous tales. While willing to read just about anything that is well crafted, she has a soft spot for the darker side of writing in the Horror, Sci-Fi and Other World genres.

Nina can be reached through Sirens Call Publications at Nina@SirensCallPublications.com; or directly at darc.nina@gmail.com. Please visit her on her blog "Sotet Angyal: The Dark Angel" at <http://sotetangyal.wordpress.com>

K Trap Jones

K. TRAP JONES is an award winning author of literary horror novels and short stories. His passion for folklore, classic literary fiction and obscure segments within society lead to his creative writing style of "filling in the gaps" and walking the line between reality and fiction. With a strong inspiration from Dante Alighieri and Edgar Allan Poe, his stories involve topics and situations where very little is known, which provides an open canvas to explore. He is a member of the Florida Writer's Association and hopes to rejuvenate the classical era of horror one story at a time. More Information can be found at www.ktrapjones.com

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Amber Keller

Amber Keller is a writer who delves into dark, speculative fiction, particularly horror and suspense/thrillers. She has been fortunate enough to be included in various anthologies, and features short stories on her blog. A member of the Horror Writers Association, she also contributes to many websites and eMagazines, including providing horror and science

fiction movie reviews. When not at her laptop, she can be found looking for things that go bump in the night.

Links to Online Presence:

My blog: <http://adiaryofawriter.blogspot.com>

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Lisamarie Lamb

I was five when I wrote my first short story - it involved a car going over a cliff, Jessica Fletcher and the Phantom Raspberry Blower. It didn't have much of a plot (he did it, she solved it) but it did have rather colourful (crayon) illustrations and it did make me realise that writing was for me.

At 12 I wrote my first novel during the school summer holidays. Loosely based on the Famous Five, with a bit of James Bond thrown in, it was an adventure story and my English teacher made me read some of it out in class. And that's when I realised that I wanted people to hear my stories and read my work.

Over the intervening years, I have written various short stories, plays, poems and novels in different genres, including romance and children's books. If you wish to see more examples of my writing, I have a blog in which I showcase flash fiction (www.themoonlitdoor.blogspot.com).

I have self-published a horror novel, *Mother's Helper*, and a collection of short stories entitled *Some Body's At The Door*. I am also part of the anthologies *Satan's Toybox: Demonic Dolls*, *Satan's Toybox: Toy Soldiers*, *Skeletal Remains*, *At The Water's Edge*, *The Old Sofa*, and *100 Horrors*.

I have been accepted into nine more anthologies due to be released throughout 2012.

I promise I'm better at plots now, and I use my own characters, but the excitement, fun and just a little wonder are still there. My crayon skills have not improved.

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Edward Lorn

"Edward Lorn is an American horror author presently residing somewhere in the southeast United States. He enjoys storytelling, reading, and writing biographies in the third person. His debut novel, *Bay's End*, is now available through Amazon.com."

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Kate Monroe

Kate Monroe is a red-headed author and editor who lives in a quiet and inspirational corner of southern England. She has penchants for chocolate, horror and loud guitars, and a fatal weakness for red wine.

Her interests in writing range from horror to erotica, taking in steampunk and tales of the paranormal on the way; whatever she has dreamed about the night before is liable to find its way onto the page in some form or another...

<http://fromkatesquill.blogspot.com>

Alexa Muir

Alexa Muir is a film and video games addict who by day works as a Catalogue Manager for LOVEFiLM and by night scribbles down stories. A Londoner through and through, she graduated from King's College London with a BA in Classical Studies With English, which filled her head with plenty of dark and twisted tales. She is currently working on getting those stories down on paper so that they stop talking to her at night. Despite there not being enough hours in the day, she has also taken up an interest in photography, as it's faster than painting. She can be found musing on her blog,

<http://awannabewriters.blogspot.com>, and on her Twitter feed

(https://twitter.com/#!/awannabe_writer) about films, books, cats and all things writing related.

Joseph Pinto

Joseph A. Pinto is a unique voice horror fans should prepare themselves for. He lives in New Jersey with his wife and young daughter. Author of *Flowers for Evelene* and the poignant *Dusk and Summer*; you can keep up with him on his blog at josephpinto.wordpress.com or at penofthedamned.com

J. Marie Ravenshaw

J. Marie Ravenshaw is a married mother of two hailing from the upper mid-west of the United States. She enjoys spending time with her family, at her job, and trolling the internet for riding crops. Sometimes, she writes.

You can find her at:

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Julianne Snow

It was while watching Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* at the tender age of 6 that solidified Julianne's respect of the Undead. Since that day, she has been preparing herself for the (inevitable) Zombie Apocalypse. While classically trained in all of the ways to defend herself, she took up writing in order to process the desire she now covets; to bestow a second and final death upon the Undead. As the only girl growing up in a family with four children in the Canadian countryside, Julianne needed some form of escape. Her choice was the imaginations of others which only fostered the vibrancy of her own.

Days with the Undead: Book One is her first full-length book, the basis of which can be found in her popular web serial of the same name. You can find Julianne's *The Living Dead of Penderghast Manor* in the anthology *Women of the Living Dead* and stories in Sirens Call Publications anthologies *Childhood Nightmares: Under the Bed* along with *Twisted Realities: Of Myth and Monstrosity* which is to be released the end of May 2012.

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Jonathan Templar

Jonathan Templar has written horrible things for a number of publishers including Smart Rhino, Open Casket, Wicked East Press and Rymfire Books. His recent stories include 'The Meat Man' for Cutting Block Press's charitable anthology *Horror for Good* and 'Basher' for the shared world anthology *World's Collider* from Nightscape Press.

Jonathan can be found hiding from the sunlight at www.jonathantemplar.com

