

DARK MOON DIGEST

The Horror Fiction Quarterly

ISSUE NUMBER 1

COLUMNS

Demonic Children

**A Brief History
of Zombies**

Shadow Soul

STORIES

Slut

Jack and Jill

Moon Medicine

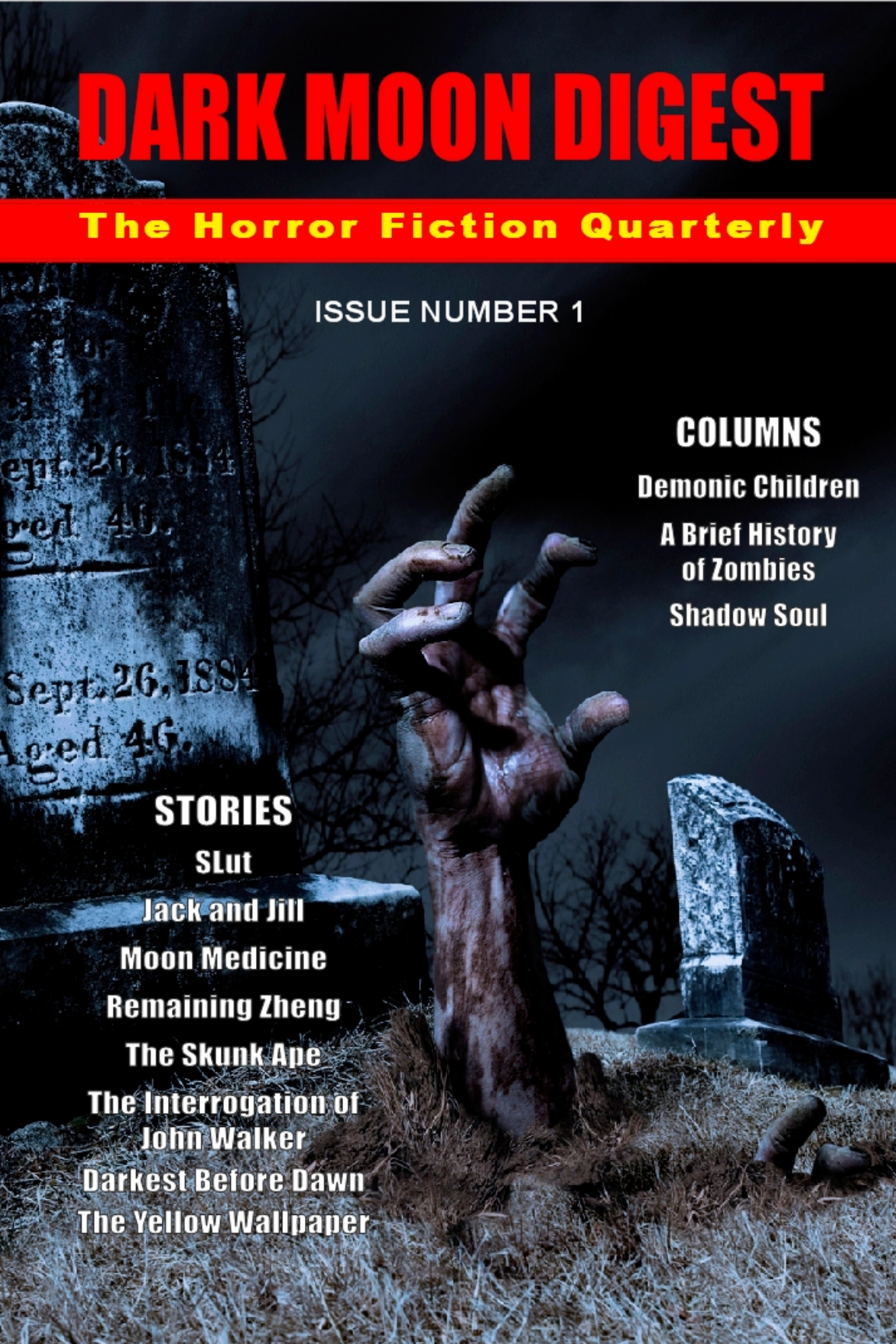
Remaining Zheng

The Skunk Ape

**The Interrogation of
John Walker**

Darkest Before Dawn

The Yellow Wallpaper





DARK MOON DIGEST

The Horror Fiction Quarterly

ISSUE NUMBER 1

If you don't own a nightlight, maybe now's the time to invest in one.

That's because the first issue of *Dark Moon Digest - The Horror Fiction Quarterly* is here! *Dark Moon Books* is proud to present this exciting new publication geared toward horror fans and authors alike.

Published four times per year, we feel this 100-plus page magazine will be a solid addition to any horror enthusiast's library. Each issue will contain several short stories (many of them from new and emerging authors) that will tingle your spine and heighten your senses. Issues will also include horror poetry, columns, book reviews, contest information, a classic horror story and more.

Also scheduled for future issues will be a graphic novel serial, more book reviews, new columns, a novella in serial format and anything scary we can think of. Of course, your ideas and suggestions are always welcome.

Dark Moon Digest will be available in e-pub format as well as in a hard copy version. Our objective is simple -- to create a new venue for writers of the horror genre (and what a great genre it is) as well as a quality publication for horror enthusiasts everywhere.

And now, better check to see if you have a nightlight that works...

DARK MOON DIGEST

www.darkmoondigest.com

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CONTENTS

FICTION

<i>Slut</i> by Erin K. Coughlin	7
<i>Jack and Jill</i> by C. W. LaSart	23
<i>Moon Medicine</i> by Christopher Leppek and Emanuel Isler.....	29
<i>Remaining Zheng</i> by Corey Kellgren	45
<i>The Skunk Ape</i> by Nicholas Conley	58
<i>The Interrogation of John Walker</i> by Jay Wilburn	65
<i>Darkest Before Dawn</i> by Kevin McClintock	78

CLASSIC HORROR

<i>The Yellow Wallpaper</i> by Charlotte Perkins Gilman	92
---	----

COLUMNS

<i>From The Dark</i> “ <i>Demonic Children</i> ” by Jeremiah Dutch	56
<i>Chattering Bones</i> “ <i>A Brief History of Zombies</i> ” by Manny Frishberg.....	74
<i>Under the Basement Stairs</i> “ <i>Shadow Soul</i> ” by Michael O’Neal.....	109

BOOK REVIEW

“ <i>Black Wings</i> ” by Don Webb	32
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HORROR POETRY

<i>Poetry and Prose</i> by Francis W. Alexander, Wynne Huddleston and Stan Swanson	108
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DARK MOON DIGEST

The Horror Fiction Quarterly

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Submissions must be made via e-mail to **HorrorQuarterly@gmail.com**. The publisher assumes no responsibility for material sent via snail mail.

Open the door and come on in . . .

I know the hinges on the door are creaky and 100-year-old dust layers the floor. And, yes, it's quite dark inside, but that's the whole idea, isn't it?



So, on the behalf of myself and my wonderful staff, welcome to the first issue of **Dark Moon Digest**. It has been a wonderful (and appropriately a little scary) journey and we hope you enjoy it.

It somehow seems fitting that our first issue is coming off the press in October. You know, Halloween and all that. We didn't plan it that way. It is either a coincidence or a quirk of fate. Believe whichever you wish, but we feel maybe there were some nonhuman forces at work here. Hmmmm.

So, happy haunting and we hope you enjoy the tales and columns within. Oh, and close the door behind you, please. You never know what the night might drag in . . .

Stan Swanson
Editor/Publisher, *Dark Moon Digest*

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Please send all letters to the editor in e-mail format to darkmoondigest@gmail.com with "Letter to the Editor" as your subject matter.

Do You Have A Zombie Survival Plan?

If so, we would be interested in hearing about it. Please keep your comments to less than 250 words. The most interesting survival plans will appear in the next issue of *Dark Moon Digest*. The best survival plan (as determined by our editors) will receive a free copy of the issue in which it appears. We will also print "snippets" of other survival plans we find interesting. *Dark Moon Digest* reserves the right to edit these comments as needed for content as well as length. Send your zombie survival plans to darkmoondigest@gmail.com and use "Zombie Survival Plan" as your subject matter.

NO FLESH SHALL BE SPARED

From the creative mind behind *Carpe Noctem Magazine* and a contributing writer to *Fangoria* and *Dread Central* comes an epic tale of exhilarating action and paralyzing horror.

This "Gladiator - meets - Dawn of the Dead" horror action novel pulls the reader into the world of the undead with Carnell's imagery. His unique background as a long-time genre journalist, funeral arranger and embalmer gives him a credibility few other writers have achieved.

"NO ONE HAS DONE MORE FOR LEGITIMIZING THE BEAUTY OF THE HORROR GENRE THAN CARNELL."
- CLIVE BARKER

With over 400 pages of heart-pounding, blood-spattering action, *No Flesh Shall Be Spared* promises to be a classic in the zombie pantheon.

Do zombies exist?

the debut novel by

carnell

artwork by aaron acevedo

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Slut

ERIN K. COUGHLIN

Surrounded by naked, bony trees, the house appeared out of the darkness—a shapeless black mass against purple mountains far beyond and a blemish on the sparse landscape already ravaged by the harsh October cold. None of us liked it, though it had everything we needed: a wrap-around porch, weatherboard walls, three floors with a locked basement, no curtains, and few neighbors.

My mother, usually an adept pretender, didn't even bother. She rode shotgun, hunched near the glass, mouth pinched and twitching so badly she finally covered it with her hand. My brothers followed her lead, heads bent over whatever beeping, glowing shit they brought to distract them. The pair of small screens lit the car but shadowed their faces. My little sister cried the entire trip. We'd all gotten so used to that, we barely heard her anymore.

Only my father, the token optimist, sat resolute behind the wheel, playing Pollyanna in cautious three word packets. His voice nearly cracked under the strain.

“New beginnings, guys! Great unknown, guys!” Et cetera. Our own personal day calendar.

He did his best but his smile trembled. More than once, his bloodshot eyes met mine in the rear-view mirror to apologize silently. At least, I thought they did. Maybe they were just tired.

We drove down the bumpy dirt path to our new home. I pressed down tightly on the lid of the tin I carried carefully on my lap. It was so full now; the lid never went on without a fight. It finally snapped shut when the car stopped.

Mother made a weak noise. My little sister, salty and exhausted,



asked for her mommy's arms. My brothers didn't bother a glance from their beeps.

Father cried out, "We're here, guys!" Now it was home.

I had to go inside first—one of the rules. From the trunk, Father handed me one of the cardboard boxes carefully marked in blue pen. I passed everybody, climbed the porch, and pushed open the unlocked door.

The house had been furnished for us, mostly with dark wood, velvet cushioned furniture about a century old. The one exception was the bare living room which would be home to the presents. A steep wooden staircase shot up further than where I could see. The door to the dining room lay open, and a yellow glow from the kitchen spilled over the wide, uncarpeted floor.

Directly opposite, buried in a corner beside the entrance to the living room, stood a white door with a glass doorknob. On the doorknob, somebody had stuck a piece of paper decorated with a large capital *D*. Blue, of course. I knew it by reputation —the locked basement door.

I also knew something waited for me in the mailbox, but I wasn't ready. While I stared at the *D*, everything froze inside me. I forgot to breathe. Every creak in the house wailed like a battle cry. My hands hung numb at my sides in anticipation.

When my family squeaked through the door, they each carried something of mine and set the pieces down assembly-line style, their eyes searching the shadows from corner to corner. Without a word, my mother dragged my little sister away, toward the yellow glow. My brothers shifted their weight and glared.

Father pulled his gloves off and let them fall to the floor.

"Well," he said, trying to hold his smile, "is it everything you wanted?"

That voice, so fake and yet so eager to put me at ease, almost broke me.

"I don't want it, Daddy."

His smile fell and he crossed the floor in two paces to wrap his arms around me.

"I know, baby," he said softly. "I'm so sorry. I didn't mean it that way."

I remembered being my little sister's age. At that time, I thought he could do anything. He could whistle while I sat on his shoulders, pick out the planets from the stars, kill any monster that dared try to hurt me...

He stepped away, held me out at arm's length, and forced my eye up. "Is it everything it should be?"

"Once I unpack the boxes."

"Well." The awful smile returned. "Guess you better get to it."

"Mom hates it," I said as he walked off through the dining room.

"She'll get used to it."

My brothers had moved to the stairs and hung on the banister, faces behind the rail bars as if they were playing prisoner. They hadn't said a word yet.

I bent to pick up the first box. Their eyes went wide and they jumped.

"Did you check the mailbox yet?" they both asked at the same time.

"No."

"Check. Check."

In unison too. I wanted to slap them.

No choice now so I went outside. The cold night air pinched my face. For a few seconds, I stood in the archway, breathing, allowing my nose and mouth to get good and numb. But then the creaking started behind me and I went back to business.

The mailbox, a wrought-iron bear trap that hung beside the door, waited patiently. Its edges were so sharp, I nearly cut myself lifting the lid. When I reached inside, the paper flew between my fingers, itching. The typical find—yellow legal paper, folded twice, blue ink.

It read, *Hello, Darling. Cheer up.*

Each word sat in the middle of the folded boxes, like a child's game. An arrow at the bottom told me to turn it over where there was more writing.

Take out your presents.

I lifted the lid again and stood on my tiptoes. Something silver caught the yellow porch light. I reached again inside. My fingers touched metal and pulled out a pair of matching bracelets tied together — thick circles with a pattern of twisting briars engraved on each. From the simple white string that bound them, a tiny note dangled bleeding more blue ink:

Wear with love, Darling.

* * *

To read the remainder of this story, please purchase Issue #1 of Dark Moon Digest from your favorite online bookstore.

DID YOU KNOW?

Over 160 actors have played Count Dracula in the movies, more than any other horror character.

WANTED DEAD OR ALIVE!



Well, in this case, it's better off if you're alive (or at least a member of the undead with some skills, so zombies need not apply).

SHORT STORY SUBMISSIONS

Dark Moon Digest is looking for quality short stories for future issues. Any category or topic will be accepted as long as it is in the horror genre. There are no deadlines for sending us your tale as submissions will be selected for future issues, so submit at your leisure. Check out our website at www.darkmoondigest.com for more information.

Dark Moon Digest

HORROR FLASH FICTION CONTEST



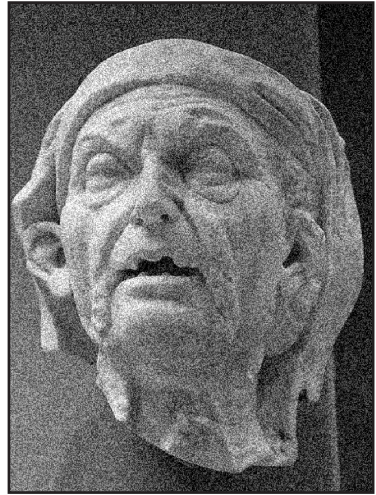
This contest is open to all writers, published or unpublished. It is an ongoing contest with a winning story chosen for each issue of *Dark Moon Digest*. Story style does not matter as long as it fits the horror genre. **Stories must not exceed 500 words.** (Stories exceeding 500 words will not be considered for the contest.) Submissions selected for publication will receive a complimentary copy of the issue in which their story appears. Deadline for each contest is 30 days prior to publication. (e.g. Deadline for the January issue is December 1st.) Please visit our website for complete details. (Dark Moon Digest reserves the right to edit stories as necessary for content, but will not edit stories down to 500 words if they exceed that.)

Check out our other current contests by visiting our website at www.DarkMoonDigest.com.

Jack and Jill

C. W. LASART

Jack sat at the worn kitchen table, his hands buried in the guts of an ancient radio, tinkering with the parts in a vain attempt to fix the antique. He told the owner, Mrs. Jones, that he feared the radio was beyond fixing, but she insisted with a clear statement that she held complete faith in his abilities. He mentioned how cheap it'd cost to replace nowadays, but she liked that one and would hear nothing of the new fangled junk they peddled at the ritzy stores in town. In the end, he let himself be brow beaten by an eighty-four year old woman who stood a foot and a half shorter than himself.



Though he mainly worked as a handy man around town, word of mouth brought him some additional side jobs when people started to realize his proficiency with small household electronics. It was difficult to find steady work being an ex-con, so he happily accepted whatever odd jobs came his way. This one, however, proved more work than the twenty-five dollar fee was worth.

A scraping sound from the room above the kitchen drew his attention from his task.

She was moving around up there again.

He sighed and lit another cigarette, dragging deeply and rubbing his eyes as he exhaled a cloud of bluish smoke.

Too soon. He had nearly been caught the last time.

He turned his attention back to the project at hand, hoping that if he pretended not to hear her, she'd return to sleep, or whatever else she did up there. He no longer went upstairs.

He could smell her sickly sweet odor long before he heard the moist slap of her feet on the linoleum behind him. Jack sat up straight in his chair and stared directly ahead at the fading rose-patterned wallpaper, keeping his breaths shallow through his mouth to avoid the stench of decay. Only one thought went through his mind over and over again, like a dog chasing its tail.

Don't touch me. Please don't touch me.

Her gravelly voice made the hair on his arms stand up. "I'm hungry," she said.

"I know."

* * *

To read the remainder of this story, please purchase Issue #1 of Dark Moon Digest from your favorite online bookstore.

HORROR POLL #1

Who is your favorite author of horror fiction of all time? We're talking anyone from Stephen King, Dean Koontz and Graham Masterson to Poe, Lovecraft and Atherton.

Current Poll Results as of this issue:

1. Stephen King
2. H. P. Lovecraft
3. Clive Barker
4. Anne Rice
5. Caitlin Kiernan

This poll will be updated in each issue of Dark Moon Digest. Want to participate? Send a list of your top five favorite authors of all-time to darkmoondigest@gmail.com.

“I became insane, with long intervals of horrible sanity.”

—Edgar Allan Poe

BOOK REVIEW

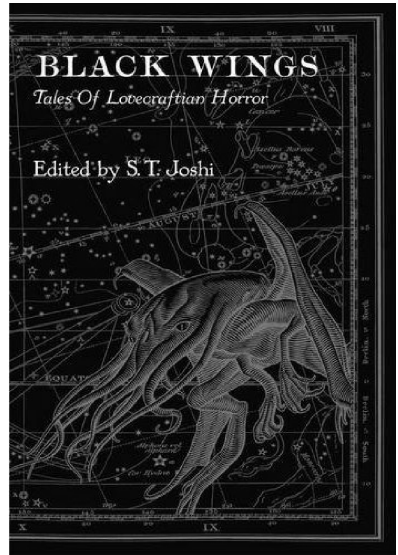
BLACK WINGS **Edited by S. T. Joshi**

Black Wings ed. S.T. Joshi – PS Publishing (427 pages) \$40.00

When I was growing up I had the good fortune of encountering the cosmic tales of H.P. Lovecraft. I could see that this writer had caught a facet of human consciousness that no other writer had caught quite as well. Similar to Jung's Shadow, Lovecraft noticed that what humans think is the strangest most disturbing thing – the thing that doesn't fit their scanning pattern – turns out (horrifyingly) to have a counterpart deep in their own lives. S. T. Joshi has restored and furthered the original wonder and horror in this collection from PS Publishing.

* * *

To read the remainder of this book review, please purchase Issue #1 of Dark Moon Digest from your favorite online bookstore.



Moon Medicine

CHRISTOPHER LEPPEK and EMANUEL ISLER

Somebody once asked me, just before I retired after thirty years on the force—twenty-five of them in the trenches of homicide—what common thread linked the hundreds of murders I had investigated. It wasn't the motive. Not jealousy or greed or vengeance or anger or passion or madness.

It was simply that the victims, most of them, deserved exactly what they got.

Sounds hard, I know, like I don't give a damn, which isn't true. I did care about the kids. None of them deserved it. Those scenes haunt me, like unswept dust in a corner, despite all these years.

I saw the faces of the victims, the pain, often the surprise, and wondered whether they'd be alive if they'd kept their mouth shut or surrendered from a challenge. Maybe they should've treated the perpetrator a little better somewhere down the line. Perhaps they'd gotten away with something in their past, and only finally received their due.

At least, I used to think that way.

I have to admit, through the investigations of scores of murders, the lines started to get a little blurry. I wondered about things.

Objects haunt me too, like the rubber-banded batch of yellowed files, unsolved cases, lingering in some detective's drawer at the precinct. There were some cases—not many but *some*—that were never solved. A few never even explained.

Not long after earning my stripes, I learned a valuable lesson – knowing when to put a case into the file and forget about it.

No, not *forget* about it. Abandon it. Walk away.

I have to admit, some of those unsolved cases always remained open in my mind, wounds unable to scab over. The most glaring, the most



maddeningly frustrating, involved a perfect killer with the harmless sounding name of Benny Hoskiss. Even though I managed to drive him elsewhere, I knew I'd done nothing more than interrupt the horrors he was so fond of perpetrating.

Benny would always represent my greatest failure.

Jackie's voice, soft but knowing as always, interrupted my dark stroll down Memory Lane.

"You're getting morose, Charlie," she said. "Have another."

I regarded the foaming pilsner below her caring eyes. You're reading my mind again, Jackie. To myself I thought, I'm glad she really can't read my mind. Not a place most want to go.

"Thanks, kid," I said.

"That's my job."

Out the hazy window of the bar, I caught a quick glimpse of the moon, fat and round, beginning its slow rise from the unseen horizon.

I took a tiny vial containing my medicine from my breast pocket and let its white powder drift slowly into the beer. Then I lifted the seal from a can of tomato juice and let its red clouds tumble down.

Easier on the stomach, they say. Takes the bitterness away.

I laughed softly, briefly drawing Jackie's glance. If only it would take the bitterness away and more.

There was a loud hoot behind me. A radiologist beat a paramedic on the shuffleboard game, both of them off shift for the night. There were other off-duty types hanging around the Oasis, and a handful of useless retirees like me, sitting on ancient stools, drinking through their idle time. The place was loud and smoky and utterly unremarkable in every way, except one.

There was a stranger here tonight. That didn't happen very often at the Oasis. Worse, he was staring in my direction, though I couldn't be positive in the dim light. Worse yet, I sensed something familiar about him.

When I turned my head, he glanced down at the table. He was well-dressed, a little too well-dressed for a working man's joint, in a neat black jacket and stylish slacks. Brown wingtips. Clean shaven, gray hair nicely combed, a little long in the back.

I'd seen him before. I don't forget faces, never have. Just couldn't place him, too much smoke.

Call me paranoid, but don't call me stupid—I didn't appreciate the stranger's interest. You put in two and half decades in homicide, you

make plenty of enemies, believe me. Some of *them* don't forget. Vengeance dies hard.

I suddenly remembered the time. Twenty till eleven. It was Wednesday—third Wednesday of the month—and I had an appointment with Barb. I downed the beer, pulled the filter off a Winston and bade Jackie goodnight.

I glanced at the man in the corner before I passed through the exit. This time, he didn't avert his eyes.

The air was cold and moist. Tugs moaned in the river illuminated by the pale moon. When clouds shrouded the sky, the city grew coal mine dark, especially this section, where the streetlights seemed hard-pressed to fight the shadows. The streets were shimmering, quiet; the only footsteps I heard were my own.

Still, I wasn't feeling cocky. I've learned to trust my instincts.

I stepped into the doorway of a warehouse and pressed my back against the cold glass door. I cooled my heels, hand on the stock of my Smith and Wesson, waiting for the stranger to show.

After ten minutes he didn't come, so I went on my way. Maybe I was wrong. It's happened before.

* * *

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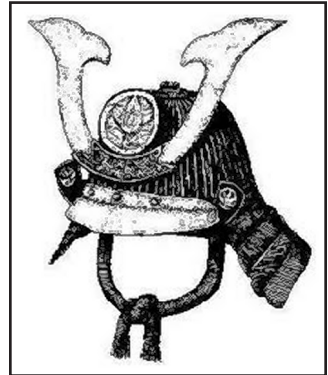
“He was a clot looking for a place to happen, a splinter of bone hunting a soft organ to puncture, a lonely lunatic cell looking for a mate.”

—*Stephen King*

Remaining Zheng

COREY KELLGREN

Zheng Sanbao stood atop the wall and stared west toward his future. The landscape stretched in greens and browns, straddling the rolling hills and mountains of the Badaling Pass as far as the eye could strain, the peaks of the furthest mountains hazy and indistinct even on the clearest day. Zheng knew, with the certainty of a man not given to examine history too closely, that his grandfather Jianguo had fallen in this country fighting the Mongols. A man of honor, Jianguo's portrait occupied a revered place in Zheng's home.



Behind him, to the east, lay the past that did nothing to secure his place in the pantheon his grandfather now occupied.

There stood a wall of great gray bricks, four men high, laid foot by agonizing foot. He knew the path of that wall better than he recalled the face of his oldest son. It wound and plunged along the highest ridges of the land like the sinuous body of a massive dragon, feet planted invisibly below the treeline.

Perhaps Sun Tzu would have approved of this great effort to secure the Ming, but Zheng would rather have faced the Manchu or Mongols openly, dao in one hand, a company of long-guns at his rear. Such was not his lot, however. He commanded a small garrison, and those only to watch over the great number of slaves, peasants, and stonemasons that devoted their lives to constructing the epic structure.

Zheng strode across the wall to the ladder that led down to his responsibilities, but soon stopped. Out in the green and brown, something caught his eye.

With one foot on the ladder, Zheng peered into the afternoon sun. Someone was moving through the trees. If concealment were the figure's

motive, it proved the worst attempt at stealth Zheng had ever witnessed.

A Manchu spy? A Mongol scout? A curious peasant from a local village? A hunter?

No, nothing so innocent. There was something *wrong* about the man's motions.

Zheng went down the ladder, then signaled two of his men, noting with approval that both carried their crossbows slung across their backs.

"There is someone approaching," he said. "Come."

They angled down off the top of the ridgeline to avoid becoming an obvious target against the sky. There was no need for soft feet. Between the general mayhem and noise of construction, a cavalry charge might have gone unnoticed.

They hurried through the forested slopes for several minutes, leaving the worst of the din quickly behind. Soon, on his right, atop the ridgeline, stood the forked tree from where he'd triangulated the unidentified man's position. He paused and gestured with his hands his instructions to the men.

One man. Unknown if armed. Last location thirty paces. Approach quietly and engage.

Zheng started up the ridge, all senses on the alert. They crept between trees, the sounds of the worksite now a quiet throb .

The man saw them at the same time they finally spotted him. He stood fifteen paces off, half-heartedly hidden behind a tallow tree.

Zheng drew his dao. One of his men moved off to the right, his own dao snicking from its sheath. Behind him, he heard the groan of a crossbow string.

"Step out," Zheng said. The man didn't move. Zheng took several swift steps forward. "Come. If you are a peasant, you are in no danger."

The man didn't respond.

"I will not ask again."

This time the man stepped from behind the tree and Zheng gasped.

The left side of the man's head appeared perfectly normal, down to the scraggly beard falling past his throat. However, the right side of his face was a pocked, diseased ruin. The eye socket stared at him, empty. Flies buzzed over his peeling, dirt-smeared flesh. On his left forearm, a deep gash showed a glimpse of bone and rot.

Zheng took a step back. "Who are you?"

The man . . . the *thing* smiled, or rather, half of its face smiled. The

other twitched spasmodically.

“I live here,” it responded, surprisingly clear.

“Where?” asked Zheng.

“Along the ridge.”

“Why are you here?”

“To see what you are doing. You are building a wall. We fear it may come through our village.”

“There are no villages in this area.”

The thing gave another twitchy smile. “Therefore, I must be lost.”

“What . . . happened to you?” Without an answer, it turned and started to walk away. “Wait!” shouted Zheng and raised his left arm. “Last chance.”

The figure did not give any indication that he’d heard.

His arm dropped. A sharp crack and a bolt slammed into the thing’s lower back, to the right of its spine. It staggered and fell to its knees. A good shot, thought Zheng, designed not to kill immediately, should he want to question the fellow further—

The creature rose and resumed its slow, downhill shamble.

Zheng stared for a few moments in disbelief, then raised his left arm again. “Reload.” Once his men had obeyed he order them to send a second volley.

This time two bolts hit the creature, one on each shoulder, no doubt breaking its ribs and piercing its heart. Again, the force of the blows knocked the thing to its knees.

And again, it rose to resume its retreat, seemingly unaware of the metal and wood piercing its body.

“Commander?” one of his men spoke, most likely as awestruck as himself.

Zheng's voice barely rose above a whisper. “Back to camp. Quickly.”

* * *

To read the remainder of this story, please purchase Issue #1 of Dark Moon Digest from your favorite online bookstore.

Dark Moon Digest

WINNERS OF PAST WRITING CONTESTS

Zombies! Short Story Contest

1st Place: **Remaining Zheng** by Corey Kellgren

2nd Place: **Plan Z** by Roger Hobbs

3rd Place: **The Interrogation of John Walker** by Jay Wilburn

Monsters! Short Story Contest

1st Place: **Slut** by Erin K. Coughlin

2nd Place: **Moon Medicine** by Christopher Leppek/Emanuel Isler

3rd Place: **Mrs. Walker's Cellar** by Jeremiah Dutch

Check out our current contests. Visit www.DarkMoonDigest.com.

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FROM THE DARK

DEMONIC CHILDREN

Did horror filmmakers have something against children around the time I was born? What was with all those movies about creepy, possessed, diabolical children? While some of these pictures are strong examples of New Wave Cinema as seen in Roman Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby* or William Friedkin's *The Exorcist*, the majority seem to be down on the idea of having kids.

Certainly the 1960s and 70s were a time of rebellion and massive change, and perhaps a natural target for that change was children. People's faith in Christianity and traditional family values was weakening and filmmakers such as Polanski and Freidkin were taking risks and breaking taboos in cinema—such as the taboo surrounding the sanctity and innocence of children. This might be one explanation, but maybe there is more.

* * *

To read the remainder of this column, please purchase Issue #1 of Dark Moon Digest from your favorite online bookstore.

HORROR POLL #2

What is your favorite “classic” horror short story of all time? We're not talking Stephen King, Dean Koontz, Peter Straub or Graham Masterson here. We're talking classic stuff from the 1800s and early 1900s.

Current Poll Results as of this issue:

1. “The Yellow Wallpaper” by Charlotte Perkins Gilman
2. “The Monkey’s Paw” by W. W. Jacobs
3. “Pickman’s Model” by H. P. Lovecraft
4. “The Tell-Tale Heart” by Edgar Allan Poe
5. “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” by Washington Irving

This poll will be updated in each issue of Dark Moon Digest. Want to participate? Send a list of your top five favorite authors of all-time to darkmoondigest@gmail.com.

The Skunk Ape

NICHOLAS CONLEY

So, my buddy George Wilkins and I were looking down at that animal corpse in the woods, over yonder. I couldn't believe my eyes the second I saw it. George, well, he didn't believe it either. All I knew was that thing wasn't a bear, not even close.

"What do you think it is?" George asked. His eyes almost popped out of their damn sockets.

"I ain't really sure," I muttered.

We'd took a small hike through the woods behind my buddy Jack's trailer. He lived up in Gamewell, North Carolina. It was home to us, but to most people just a check mark between Morganton and Lenoir.

George felt down after getting dumped by his girlfriend. We wanted to light a joint to get him back up. We asked Jack, but he said no drugs in the house . . .

That's why we went out. Fresh air, if you know what I mean, though we never did get a chance to smoke. What we didn't expect was a fucking bloody animal corpse bigger than the both of us.

At first, I swore it had to be a bear. Nothing else could be that big. The thing would've stood eight or nine feet tall when alive. Its fur was black, with a white streak that ran from its chin down to its belly, like the garter snakes we used to find inside used tires.

Then I noticed the animal's face. It resembled a monkey, or a gorilla. Or a human, if that don't sound crazy.

The corpse was pretty mutilated. Something got to it before us and tore the poor son of a bitch's guts out. The dead ape—I took to naming it that because what the hell else should I call it—smelled like a trash bag filled with rotten milk and old, raw meat.



“You think it’s...do you know what I mean?” George asked.

“Hell no, I don’t know what you mean,” I answered.

“*Bigfoot?*”

“Actually—,” I was surprised at the fact I was actually going to say it, “—y’know what it might be? A skunk ape.”

“Come again?”

I shrugged. George was one of my best friends, but his scrawny ass remained a Yankee from Springfield, Illinois. He sure as hell wouldn’t know about a skunk ape. To be honest, most of my buds born and raised here in Caldwell County probably wouldn’t know either, so I shouldn’t be prejudiced. I only knew about skunk apes because of Jack.

“Skunk apes supposed to be a myth,” I said “We usually don’t get many Bigfoot sightings here in the South. The skunk’s our local Bigfoot, I guess you’d say.”

“Man, we could get rich off this shit!”

“Maybe so,” I muttered.

George got real excited at the prospects of our find and I did too.

For some reason, I also felt uneasy. Something felt wrong about the whole situation. Truth be told, at that moment I suddenly wanted to get out of those woods and fast.

But I shook the feeling off. *Stupid superstition . . .* something in the back of my mind, maybe that Jack said once. I don’t remember. Too paranoid. Besides, George was right. If we found ourselves a true skunk ape, we’d be rolling in the dough in no time.

“Let’s bring it down to the trailer,” I said, “before someone else finds it. We can throw it in the backyard. Scare the crap out of Jack and see what he says.”

“Good idea,” George said. “Grab the legs. I’ll grab its head. We’re going to be famous, man! Fucking famous!”

It took some doing because that bitch was heavy, but we dragged the body through the woods, soaking ourselves real good in that nasty-smelling blood. Though I held it by the legs, I kept looking right at the sucker’s ugly face. There was no doubting it was dead, but its eyes stayed wide open.

Goddamn, they looked human. If I’d seen this thing alive, I definitely would’ve shit my britches.

By the time we finally drug it behind Jack’s trailer, night fell. The woods always got real creepy at night. No streetlights out there. Just a dark that could swallow you for good if you weren’t too careful.

We ran inside and woke up Jack, passed out on the couch.

“Jack!” George hollered at him, “You have to see this!”

“See what?”

“We found Bigfoot!” George said with a huge grin.

“Skunk ape,” I said.

Jack’s eyes got real big when we showed him the body and he smacked George on the shoulder laughing. You see, he was into that kind of folktale, mumbo-jumbo. We followed him into the trailer again and he got out a few books and started telling us maybe more than we needed to know.

It was weird, though. I still felt nervous. Couldn’t figure out why. We were about to make millions, or at least enough to get well and drunk for a good long while, so why the worry?

And that’s when I heard a rustling in the leaves outside and looked out the window.

“Hey,” I said, “where is it?”

The guys joined me at the window.

The body was gone. In its place lay a big pile of its insides and a trail of blood along the grass that led back into the woods.

When we weren’t looking, someone must’ve dragged it out of sight.

“I knew we should’ve put a tarp over it or something!” George yelled. “You got some kids or somebody hanging around here you don’t know about?”

“I dunno—” Jack answered.

The argument stopped quick as it started. Out of the woods came a hooting and hollering so loud it had to be right in the tree line outside the trailer. I couldn’t place what kind of animal made those noises. But they were deep, frantic. And big . . . something huge hid out in them trees.

* * *

To read the remainder of this story, please purchase Issue #1 of Dark Moon Digest from your favorite online bookstore.

The Interrogation of John Walker

JAY WILBURN

The Beach—Z plus 2053:

Zombies shuffled down the beach toward Captain Cooper in both directions. The wind blasted his neck and face with needles of sand where he had lifted the riot mask and pulled open his bite collar.

What was the point of fighting your way to the beach if you couldn't feel the spray on your face, he thought. His company probably wondered, what is the point of fighting our way to the beach just so the Captain can stare at the water while we risk our lives.

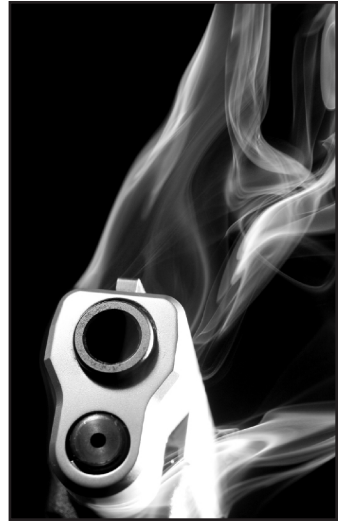
That was the privilege of rank. Civilians never came out from behind the walls and fences and neither did anyone above the rank of captain. That made him the king of this little stretch of coastline—until the walking dead decided to dethrone him in their own mindless, yet effective way.

Gunshots rattled on both sides of him, echoing up the coast among the deserted resorts. The dead would really join the picnic now.

He started to order the retreat when he noticed movement at his elbow. He jerked out his side arm and aimed it at the head of the creature that had slipped past his men.

For a second, Cooper wondered if the company might be trying to end the mission detours to the beach for good by allowing one through. There was more than one way to depose a king.

The creature showed no fear of the barrel pressed to its skull, but it also did not reach for the gun either. That was new. By the look of the thing, it had been a 14 or 15 year old boy before it died.



You should salute, son, Cooper thought. I'm still the king after all.

One of the soldiers in the Company started to approach and the Captain paused before he pulled the trigger.

And that's when the zombie spoke.

"Rule 217," the zombie said. "Don't pull a gun unless you plan to use it."

I must be crazier than the soldiers believe, Cooper mused, wondering if the voice was just a figment of his overworked imagination.

In the distance more gunfire cracked. The growls of the approaching zombie horde was rising with each new ambling body.

The soldier standing behind the boy lowered his rifle.

"Captain, this one is alive," he said checking the boy's neck for a pulse.

A female soldier shouted over her shoulder, "We need to go soon, sir."

Their newfound survivor surveyed Captain Cooper's ocean.

"Rule 81," the boy whispered. "When the zombies come, stop counting, start running. Walkers walk."

* * *

To read the remainder of this story, please purchase Issue #1 of Dark Moon Digest from your favorite online bookstore.

HORROR POLL #3

What is your favorite “modern-era” horror novel of all time? We're talking books by Stephen King, Dean Koontz, Peter Straub and Graham Masterson here.

Current Poll Results as of this issue:

1. *The Stand* by Stephen King
2. *It* by Stephen King
3. *Dead Until Dark (Sookie Stackhouse 1)* by Charlaine Harris
4. *The Vampire Lestat* by Anne Rice
5. *I Am Legend* by Richard Matheson

This poll will be updated in each issue of Dark Moon Digest. Want to participate? Send a list of your top five favorite authors of all-time to darkmoondigest@gmail.com.

CHATTERING BONES

A Brief History of Zombies

Here's a quick monster quiz: I'm what you might call the strong, silent type; I drag my ass—literally; I'm not much to look at (but you still can't take your eyes off of me); as a rule, I'm not much of a conversationalist. Oh, and I *really, really* hate salt. If you haven't guessed by now, here's one more clue: my motto is "All I really needed to learn I learned by eating smart people's brains."

If you guessed "Zombie," give yourself a gold star (and take off 10 points for having already forgotten the title of this column).

Zombies are in hot pursuit of those other darlings of the undead, vampires, for the most popular monster in mass culture today. Vampires definitely have the edge when it comes to series television because, well mainly because they can talk intelligently and they don't stink of rotting flesh (a sure turn-off when you're trying to seduce the romantic interest). But like the vamps, they're evolving—not a bad trick for creatures that don't reproduce the old-fashioned way, when you think about it.

Today's zombies are flesh-eating creatures who have a special taste for cerebral tissue and are getting better by the film at locomotion and coordinated action, especially hunting the remaining humans in their vicinity. But it was not always that way. Mostly they owe their improved posture and gait, and much of the increase in collective IQ to Danny Boyle and Co., whose *28 Days Later* and *28 Weeks Later* are among the best of the current batch of decaying-corpses-come-back-to-life films. Boyle, in turn, owes his inspiration and a lot of the current version of zombie lore to George A. Romero, the creative force behind *Night of the Living Dead*.

* * *

To read the remainder of this column, please purchase Issue #1 of Dark Moon Digest from your favorite online bookstore.

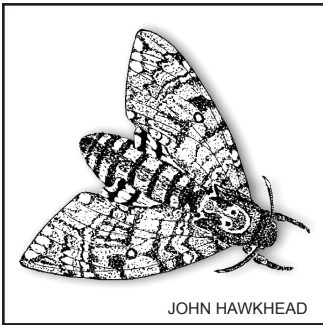
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Darkest Before Dawn

KEVIN McCLINTOCK



Marty woke to the wail of a distant siren. He rolled over, unexpectedly, atop his sleeping wife, Amelia. She snorted in her sleep, grumbling about a dirty kitchen, before she flopped onto her left side.

“Sorry,” he muttered automatically. There on his back, cocooned deep inside three quilts, he woke in stages.

It was a Monday, and early, the light outside still a sickly pasty orange. Normally the throttling roar of the garbage truck would earthquake the neighborhood, but not today. On Friday, an ice storm had swept south from Canada and chewed up large chunks of southwest Missouri, slinging seven inches of snow and at least an inch of ice. By Saturday morning, the power had flickered and failed. All day Saturday and all day Sunday, he and Amelia stayed put inside their freezing house, wrapped in blankets, barely daring to move.

As gently as he could, he parted the covers on the right side of the bed and neatly slipped out, sliding his butt across the sheets.

Amelia mumbled. “Siren-?”

Marty cocked his head. The siren still warbled, but faintly, blaring from the north side of town. It didn’t sound like a tornado warning, though it was absurd to even think tornadoes would be on the ground here in late February. Besides, tornado sirens peaked and deflated in cycles. This particular one rang a monotonous drone, a scream that rolled across the featureless miles.

“Probably a fire siren. Or maybe one of those national emergency test thingies,” he said while he slipped his feet inside knee-high boots, still caked around the edges with road salt.

“Make it stop,” Amelia said sleepily.

Marty chuckled. “Put a pillow over your head.”

He zipped up his coat and suppressed a monstrous yawn before he made his way through the living room and over to the back door. He paused to peer through the frosted window. Outside the world sparkled, an ice-encrusted shell. At least the sun was out. Heavy cloud cover made the last few days gloomier than hell. Still, it was a winter wonderland, just as Felix Bernard intended in the famous Christmas song.

Even through the glass, he heard his two dogs growl, very low in their throats. Both sniffed along the north-facing fence. Probably Jimmy, their neighbor from across the street, Marty thought when he came out of his garage with an ice-scrape shovel in hand. Velvet, their black lab, never cared for Jimmy all that much, even when he occasionally tossed her treats.

Marty cracked open the door. Both dogs perked at the sound, then bolted toward the house. Velvet and Lady, their overweight Beagle, wiggled their butts and lulled their tongues. He cooed at them, rubbing each in turn behind the ears, the way they liked it. Carefree, they bounded away from him, happy to chase each other.

The siren stopped, slowly bleeding away into silence. It had probably been a test all along. God knows why, with half the countryside still without power.

It stayed quiet for only a good 30 seconds before the howls, barks, and panicked yaps of frenzied dogs filled the void—dozens of them, coming from the north, the same direction as the distant downtown siren.

Marty felt a surge of relief. Had the electrical trucks finally made it to this side of town? He didn't hear any revving engines, but that certainly didn't mean they weren't out there, somewhere.

He pulled shut the door and made his way through the kitchen and into the garage.

The garage wasn't insulated. An immediate half-dozen degree drop in temperature made him shiver. Outside, the howls and barks continued, filtering through the cracks to bounce off the garage's interior walls. They yelped more urgent than before.

He unhooked the cable from the garage door opener and tugged. The ice on the ebony felt at the bottom of the door resisted. There was a tearing sound, but then it yawned open with a groan from the frozen hinges.

Marty fired up both his wife's Corolla and his own smoke-grey Taurus. He'd let them idle for five minutes or so, just to shake out the cold, and rubbed his hands together to do the same to his fingers.

He gingerly stepped out onto his driveway, into the morning mist, mindful of the ice. Damn near every single tree suffered in some cataclysmic way. Shattered by the weight of the ice, tree limbs covered the road and numerous yards. Next door, one of those portable basketball nets, bent over by the winds, rested halfway down the street. Overturned trashcans lay transformed into white humps. Brian Watters' roof across the way had been punched through in two spots by a large Oak tree. Three houses down, the Harvey's metal drainage chute along the roof was peeled back like a strip of dead skin. Cars and trucks sat encrusted with muddy snow. It would take entire cans of de-ice and a sturdy scraper for his neighbors to slowly reveal the glass and paint buried beneath.

He looked up and down the street. The only thing visible was the grit road crews dumped across the pavement to help tires better grip the ice. Sadly, no big diesel-powered yellow trucks were in sight.

Two towering black columns of smoke billowed up from the north horizon. Fires of some type; house fires, perhaps. He shook his head. People were stupid with their generators.

The neighbors dogs continued their frenzied chorus. In the distance, Marty heard a car revving, or hell, maybe a gun firing several times in a row. The cold deadened sound over distances. Even on days like this, hunters apparently couldn't resist the itch for a shotgun's embrace in their arms.

And there was also a new sound.

Marty paused. He strained to listen but didn't know what the hell to make of it. Some kind of chattering.

He glanced again toward the twin columns of smoke and there he froze.

Something on the road was moving.

The black grit, what he'd earlier dismissed as dirty salt on the snow and ice, rippled. The eerie, chattering noise came from there.

More curious than spooked, Marty made his way slowly up the driveway and used his privacy fence to approach the odd movement. On the other side of the fence, Velvet stayed right with him, growling deep in her chest.

It wasn't a solid mass, not like cloud shadows meandering across a patch of grass. Rather, it was made up of...a bunch of tiny black things. Circular things, like glazed pebbles, or maybe tiny grains all stitched together.

Behind him, his two dogs whipped themselves into yet another

tantrum. Whatever they smelled, they hated.

Marty left the fence and knelt beside the road, only a foot from the strange stuff. Unzipping his coat, Marty slipped from his breast pocket a ballpoint pen. He used it to poke at the mass. A majority of specks moved around the intruding pen, but others flowed toward it, surrounded it, and climbed it. Their movement was inchworm slow but methodical.

Intrigued, he lifted the pen for a closer look. Bits of the things lost their grip and plummeted into the churning mass below. But others held on for the ride.

He'd be damned if they weren't insects of some type, tiny round bugs about the size of a silver BB. They reminded him of beetles. Each possessed a dozen bulbous eyes, and just as many claws attached to the ends of many segmented arms --

One of the bugs clinging to the pen leaped at his face. On instinct he jerked his head away. It missed his nose and burrowed instead into his frost-slicked goatee.

Dropping the pen, he slapped at his face with his gloved hands. Marty felt a sting on his chin and another just below his lower lip. He tore off his right glove and rooted around in his beard with bare fingers. On his tongue, he tasted copper.

The black carpet reached the heels of his boots. It shifted to surround his foot and climbed his soles.

* * *

To read the remainder of this story, please purchase Issue #1 of Dark Moon Digest from your favorite online bookstore.

DARK MOON BOOKS
Novellas, Novels and Graphic Novels
Open for Submissions: March 1, 2011

Dark Moon Books, a division of *Stony Meadow Publishing*, will begin accepting submissions for horror novellas, novels and graphic novels beginning in March of 2011. Authors must own all copyrights and it must be an original work. Novels: Please query with a synopsis and the first 3 chapters of your finished manuscript to ***darkmoondigest@gmail.com*** beginning March 1, 2011. Novellas: Send complete manuscript. Graphic Novels: Send synopsis and first three pages of complete work.

HORROR POLL #4

What is your favorite horror novel of all time? Era and author do not matter.

Current Poll Results as of this issue:

1. *The Stand* by Stephen King
2. *Dracula* by Bram Stoker
3. *Exquisite Corpse* by Poppy Z. Brite
4. *Salem's Lot* by Stephen King
5. *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley

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The Yellow Wallpaper

CHARLOTTE PERKINS GILMAN

It is very seldom that mere ordinary people like John and myself secure ancestral halls for the summer.

A colonial mansion, a hereditary estate, I would say a haunted house, and reach the height of romantic felicity—but that would be asking too much of fate!

Still I will proudly declare that there is something queer about it.

Else, why should it be let so cheaply? And why have stood so long untenanted?

John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage.

John is practical in the extreme. He has no patience with faith, an intense horror of superstition, and he scoffs openly at any talk of things not to be felt and seen and put down in figures.

John is a physician, and PERHAPS—I would not say it to a living soul, of course, but this is dead paper and a great relief to my mind)—PERHAPS that is one reason I do not get well faster.

You see he does not believe I am sick!

And what can one do?

If a physician of high standing, and one's own husband, assures friends and relatives that there is really nothing the matter with one but temporary nervous depression—a slight hysterical tendency—what is one to do?

My brother is also a physician, and also of high standing, and he says the same thing.

So I take phosphates or phosphites—whichever it is, and tonics, and journeys, and air, and exercise, and am absolutely forbidden to “work” until I am well again.



Personally, I disagree with their ideas.

Personally, I believe that congenial work, with excitement and change, would do me good.

But what is one to do?

I did write for a while in spite of them; but it DOES exhaust me a good deal—having to be so sly about it, or else meet with heavy opposition.

I sometimes fancy that my condition if I had less opposition and more society and stimulus—but John says the very worst thing I can do is to think about my condition, and I confess it always makes me feel bad.

So I will let it alone and talk about the house.

The most beautiful place! It is quite alone, standing well back from the road, quite three miles from the village. It makes me think of English places that you read about, for there are hedges and walls and gates that lock, and lots of separate little houses for the gardeners and people.

There is a DELICIOUS garden! I never saw such a garden—large and shady, full of box-bordered paths, and lined with long grape-covered arbors with seats under them.

There were greenhouses, too, but they are all broken now.

There was some legal trouble, I believe, something about the heirs and coheirs; anyhow, the place has been empty for years.

That spoils my ghostliness, I am afraid, but I don't care—there is something strange about the house—I can feel it.

I even said so to John one moonlight evening, but he said what I felt was a DRAUGHT, and shut the window.

I get unreasonably angry with John sometimes. I'm sure I never used to be so sensitive. I think it is due to this nervous condition.

But John says if I feel so, I shall neglect proper self-control; so I take pains to control myself—before him, at least, and that makes me very tired.

I don't like our room a bit. I wanted one downstairs that opened on the piazza and had roses all over the window, and such pretty old-fashioned chintz hangings! but John would not hear of it.

He said there was only one window and not room for two beds, and no near room for him if he took another.

He is very careful and loving, and hardly lets me stir without special direction.

I have a schedule prescription for each hour in the day; he takes all

care from me, and so I feel basely ungrateful not to value it more.

He said we came here solely on my account, that I was to have perfect rest and all the air I could get. "Your exercise depends on your strength, my dear," said he, "and your food somewhat on your appetite; but air you can absorb all the time." So we took the nursery at the top of the house.

It is a big, airy room, the whole floor nearly, with windows that look all ways, and air and sunshine galore. It was nursery first and then play-room and gymnasium, I should judge; for the windows are barred for little children, and there are rings and things in the walls.

The paint and paper look as if a boys' school had used it. It is stripped off—the paper—in great patches all around the head of my bed, about as far as I can reach, and in a great place on the other side of the room low down. I never saw a worse paper in my life.

One of those sprawling flamboyant patterns committing every artistic sin.

It is dull enough to confuse the eye in following, pronounced enough to constantly irritate and provoke study, and when you follow the lame uncertain curves for a little distance they suddenly commit suicide—plunge off at outrageous angles, destroy themselves in unheard of contradictions.

The color is repellent, almost revolting; a smouldering unclean yellow, strangely faded by the slow-turning sunlight.

It is a dull yet lurid orange in some places, a sickly sulphur tint in others.

No wonder the children hated it! I should hate it myself if I had to live in this room long.

There comes John, and I must put this away,—he hates to have me write a word.

We have been here two weeks, and I haven't felt like writing before, since that first day.

I am sitting by the window now, up in this atrocious nursery, and there is nothing to hinder my writing as much as I please, save lack of strength.

John is away all day, and even some nights when his cases are serious.

I am glad my case is not serious!

But these nervous troubles are dreadfully depressing.

John does not know how much I really suffer. He knows there is no REASON to suffer, and that satisfies him.

Of course it is only nervousness. It does weigh on me so not to do my duty in any way!

I meant to be such a help to John, such a real rest and comfort, and here I am a comparative burden already!

Nobody would believe what an effort it is to do what little I am able,—to dress and entertain, and other things.

It is fortunate Mary is so good with the baby. Such a dear baby!

And yet I CANNOT be with him, it makes me so nervous.

I suppose John never was nervous in his life. He laughs at me so about this wall-paper!

At first he meant to repaper the room, but afterwards he said that I was letting it get the better of me, and that nothing was worse for a nervous patient than to give way to such fancies.

He said that after the wall-paper was changed it would be the heavy bedstead, and then the barred windows, and then that gate at the head of the stairs, and so on.

“You know the place is doing you good,” he said, “and really, dear, I don't care to renovate the house just for a three months' rental.”

“Then do let us go downstairs,” I said, “there are such pretty rooms there.”

Then he took me in his arms and called me a blessed little goose, and said he would go down to the cellar, if I wished, and have it whitewashed into the bargain.

But he is right enough about the beds and windows and things.

It is an airy and comfortable room as any one need wish, and, of course, I would not be so silly as to make him uncomfortable just for a whim.

I'm really getting quite fond of the big room, all but that horrid paper.

* * *

To read the remainder of this story, please purchase Issue #1 of Dark Moon Digest from your favorite online bookstore.

ATTENTION ALL ARTISTS

COVER ARTWORK

Dark Moon Digest is looking for quality cover art for future issues. All artwork submitted must be an original work of art. Artwork for our cover does not have to be color, but it is preferred. Check our website for more information.

INTERIOR ARTWORK

We also need artwork for use on interior pages of *Dark Moon Digest*. Art should be black and white (pen and ink, etc.) or grayscale. Again, check our website for additional information.

HORROR PROSE & POETRY

Averil for Vultures

During the Middle Ages, averil (usually soul bread and ale) was served at funeral feasts to welcome the new heir.

They come
out of nowhere,
dressed in black—
black enough to look blue.
They tap
on the door,
fly in,
circle over the remains,

for Averil,
peck and fight over
each claim,
then perch hungrily
on their chairs
at the funeral feast,
where they fold
their claws
to prey.

--Wynne Huddleston

Zombie Haiku

Zombie cowboys dance
In herky-jerky motion
Howling at the moon.

--Stan Swanson

Moonless Night Haiku

the blind ghost bumping
constantly bump bump bumping
against my bedpost

--Francis W. Alexander

What's Wrong With Me?

Mom says where's your homework
And take a bath, you reek.
Mom says change your underwear
Jeez, I did that just last week.

It's strange I can't remember things
Now doesn't that seem weird?
My head is empty, dull and blank
My past had disappeared.

Maybe I'm a zombie kid
A dead amnesiac.
And when mommy's fast asleep tonight
Perhaps I'll have a snack.

Mom sounds quite delicious
I know I can't abstain.
A little bit of innards
A smorgasbord of brain.

So no more silly homework
No dumb bedtime curfew
And I'll never change my underwear
'Cause zombies never do.

--Stan Swanson

ATTENTION ALL POETS

Dark Moon Digest is open to submissions from poets for horror poetry of all types ranging from dark and frightening to humorous. We are particularly interested in shorter works. Payment will be in the form of the issue of **Dark Moon Digest** in which your poem appears. Submit your poetry to ScaryPoems@gmail.com.

Under the Basement Stairs

SHADOW SOUL

Since childhood, I've always been fascinated with the arcane, the spiritual, the biblical, the supernatural. Seeing these four words together shows obvious similarities and conflicts, but one word ties them together.

Soul.

In most religions or ideologies, a soul, or an essence other than flesh that continues after death, is at the forefront of their beliefs. In both Christian and Muslim faiths, the soul is the part of us either to be judged or damned based upon our actions, and was created by God to reflect his light. The Egyptians built massive homes for their pharaohs' spirits and believed in many parts of them that existed separate from the body. Philosophers debated the nature of the soul from the ancients to Kant et al.

Yet all have

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Something to be feared—that we should pray or hope never to find...
Wherever this takes you, whether it be down some religious path of exploration or perhaps on a Lovecraftian cruise down the gulfs of insanity, I challenge you to explore the idea of our most prized inner self being a thing of darkness, terror, or the worst kind of discovery.

Beyond death, perhaps something worse lies in wait.
Find it.

--Michael O'Neal, Assistant Editor