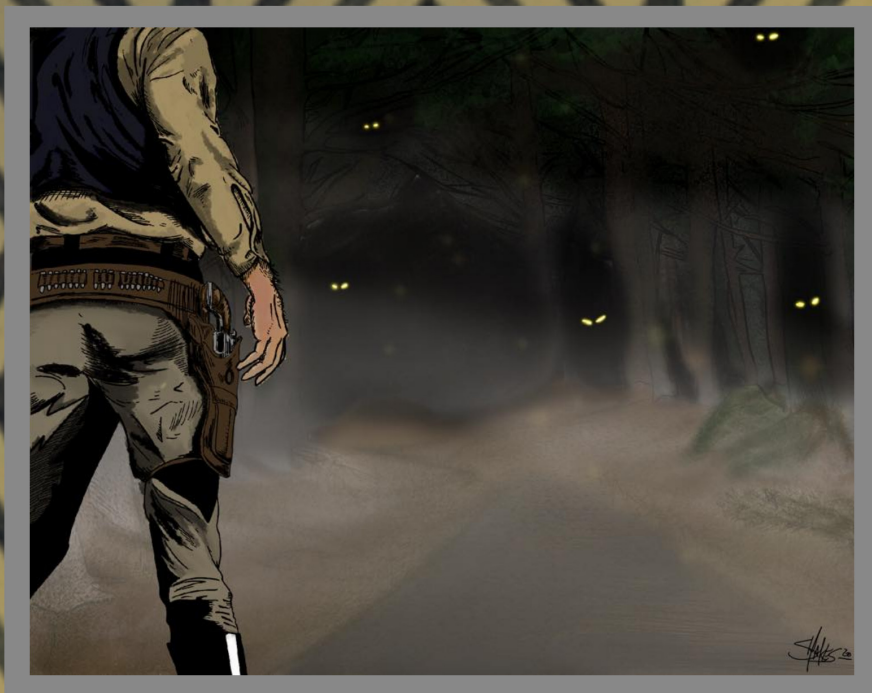


# **PULP FACTORY**



**February  
2021**

# **Pulp Factory E-Zine**

## **February 2021**

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**Issue 3**

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**Edited and Compiled by  
Ian Mallon and Blake Ray**

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Edited by Blake Ray



## From the Editors

**Greetings and salutations, Dear Readers!**

**Thanks for checking back and sticking with us! I think this month was my favorite issue we've done so far. This was easily one of my favorite pieces of prompt art I've drawn so far, and I love what it brought out of this month's featured writers!**

**I hope you enjoy the journeys you're about to embark on! And stay tuned for some awesome stuff we got coming at you in the coming months. I can't say much more than that right now, but trust me- it's gonna be terrific! Thank you for your continued support!**

**Ian Mallon**

**Readers,**

**Allow me to reiterate what I have said before, and say that I love working on this magazine. The stories we get and the responses to them are fantastic and inspiring. It makes me wish that I could write for it myself!**

**You will notice something as you peruse this month's issue, and that is the common themes of the intersection of the supernatural and the rugged individualism of the frontier. These kinds of serendipitous moments of intertextuality are truly interesting to me as a student of the written word. It is like reading Salinger's *Nine Stories* and finding out that the stories were all written by people who didn't know each other and had never met.**

**I hope you love what you read here; I certainly did. There are big things in store for us, and we will let you know more as soon as we can.**

**Sincerely,  
Blake Ray**

**The first place winner for this month is “Redwood” by Zachariah T. Wolfenstein. The story is one that stuck with us for a long time. The premise itself is troubling and the ending nearly caused one of us (Ian) to have a panic attack.**

\*

Zachariah T. Wolfenstein is an accomplished socialite and amateur writer from North Georgia. Among his many achievements, Mr Wolfenstein has been forcefully ejected from a number of businesses, museums, and holy sites across the nation, including at least three Applebee's.

Born and raised in a literal barn, Zach spent his formative years developing a deep love for creating art in its many forms and an even deeper hatred for practicing and being good at things. Much of that creative nonchalance has been directed at a litany of strange music projects over the last decade, but COVID has ruined that for the time being so he guesses he will write some stuff.

## Redwood

by Zachariah T. Wolfenstein

Jake looked up from his cards with a startled expression on his face.

“Did y'all hear that?”

“Hear what?” Asked Harlow, a large, boisterous man staring over the top of his hand.

“That...voice—like a woman singing.” Jake turned to stare out a window into the moonlit street. “It was beautiful.”

Harlow slumped back in his chair with a sigh, pulling his cards in close to his chest.

“You know damn well none of us heard shit. *E-specially* not a woman singin'.” Harlow stifled a chuckle as he gestured toward the woman tending bar. “Loretta's the only woman here, and her singing is more akin to shriekin'. Hell—she's the reason the reverend stopped breakin' out the hymnal during services.”

Harlow and the other players at the table let out a laugh, and Loretta shot Harlow a mean glare before going back about her business of cleaning up for closing.

“If you're tryin' to get outta your hand, just say so,” Harlow said with a nasty grin on his face as the other players chuckled. “I suppose I've taken enough of your money for tonight.”

“No. I know what I heard.” Jake tossed his cards down on the table, gathered up what was left of his cash, and headed out the front door.

Harlow shook his head.

“Well when you get done sulkin' around the swamp with your fictional woman, I'll be right here to lighten those pockets a' yours a bit more!”

The other players let out a round of laughter.

Jake didn't pay any attention to Harlow's jab. He'd gotten used to them

by now. Though neither he, nor any one else, could explain why they kept going back to that table night after night just to lose more money. It was a wonder Jake could still afford to pay Ms. Loretta for his room.

"I know what I heard," Jake stated abruptly over their laughter as he stood up and walked out the door. He checked his gun belt and snatched a lantern off the hotel's porch before heading down the quiet street and over the small bridge at the town's limits.

Redwood wasn't much of a town. It was really just an inn and a few shops all built around the same spot in the middle of nowhere South Georgia. They don't have a proper mayor, but everyone seemed to listen to Harlow. Jack sort of figured it was because he was the loudest.

Jack knew going out after dark was dangerous, but if anyone could manage it, it was him. He'd lived his whole life in backwater towns just like Redwood, and he knew swamp country like the back of his hand. No gator, snake, or bear was about to stand between him and whoever made that music—that beautiful melody that, try as he might, he just couldn't remember.

He wandered into the swamp for what seemed like an eternity, maybe a bit too long, watching the path beneath him carefully as he took each step through the muck and mud.

He was almost ready to give up when his face shot up wide eyed staring off into the darkness.

"There it is again!" He exclaimed, trudging forward with renewed vigor. "I'm comin' for you ma'am! You just hold tight!". On he splashed through inky black water he might normally think twice about even getting close to. He was so excited that he hardly even took notice as the night seemed to grow just a bit darker around him, the giant moon starting to set through the trees and moss.

"Ma'am?!" He shouted again into the night. "Can you hear me?" But there was no answer besides a chorus of crickets and frogs. This didn't sit well with him. As much racket as he was making those creatures should be getting quieter, not louder.

"Oh well," he sighed.

Jake stared ahead as he pushed on, squinting his eyes to make out his path in the limited light his lantern provided. To make matters worse, a looming fog had begun to set in, hampering what little visibility he still had.

"Ma'am, its right dangerous to be out here alone at night!" he shouted to no avail. "Just come on out and I'll walk ya' back to town!"

Nothing.

If he was being completely honest with himself, Jake knew he didn't just want to walk her back to town. He had another, more selfish purpose now. He needed to hear that song. He needed to recall the melody that seemed to remain just on the cusp of his memory.

Jake, now considerably frustrated, continued to push his way through

the thick underbrush. He *knew* she was just up ahead. He just needed to push on a bit further.

He kept on through tangled green vines, hanging moss, and thick roots all sprouting from the swamp he had known so well his whole life, yet was beginning to feel far less familiar with. Even still, he rushed and moved much faster than caution should warrant. In his hurry, Jake's foot got caught in a mangrove root hidden beneath the water's surface and he tripped, tumbling down face first into the cold, black water.

"Dammit!" he yelled as he shot back up out of the water, got back to his feet, and wiped the mud from his face. Jake opened his eyes and realized just how much trouble he was in. The powder in the revolver at his hip was almost certainly waterlogged, and far worse, his lantern was extinguished in the fall. With its light gone, he could now see just how dark the night had gotten. He could barely see six feet ahead of himself.

"Where the hell is the moon?" he asked out loud. "I coulda' sworn it was full when I started out." He had a vague memory of the moon falling below the visible horizon, but couldn't put his finger on when exactly that had happened, or even *if* it had happened. He pondered it for a brief moment more before letting out a short sigh and continuing on.

Jake knew his best bet was to find this woman and hope she had a lantern, or maybe even a patch of dry land to start a fire on. It had been some time since he heard her and was once again struggling to recall the melody, but he was somehow still perfectly confident he was heading in the right direction.

Just a little further.

Still, the night grew darker and the cacophony of night-dwelling creatures had begun to soften, seemingly in concert with Jake's own slowing pace.

He could just barely make out the tips of his fingers on his outstretched arm, and by this point, a tinge of true fear began to set in. He was too far from town to ever be found, not that Harlow would even bother, and who knew how far he'd have to walk before he ever found anything resembling civilization. All the while he tried to push back the real terror haunting his mind—the things that were undoubtedly already out there hunting him.

But the only thing he ever found around the next bend was more darkness and more damp, miserable swamp. By now he couldn't even see his own nose.

He pushed on only a bit further before finding himself completely unable to navigate his way through the pitch black. Panic had fully set in by now and he started to run, pushing his way through water and mud going from ankle to waist deep and back every few yards. Traveling faster now, all he could hear were the bugs and frogs again, back and far louder than before. He couldn't see, and for all intents and purposes, he could no longer hear.



Turning his attention behind him to face an imagined predator, he tripped and fell once more into the water. This time he couldn't seem to jump back to his feet, as his entire leg had become entangled in a massive green vine lurking just beneath water's surface. Gripped by terror, he twisted and thrashed madly in the dark, yelling for help from anyone who might answer as he became more entangled, his body slowly sinking further into the murk with every desperate movement.

But nobody answered—just the darkness.

**Our second place winner this month is “Redemption” by Duke Raulston. We published another of Raulston’s works in our very first issue, and we are very excited to present his work again.**

\*

Duke Raulston owns *The Marion County Messenger*, an online newspaper. He also co-hosts a weekly horror show, *Tennessee Macabre* that airs on OtherworldsTV and iTVChattanooga. He has always loved pulp fiction.

Duke grew up reading Robert E. Howard and H.P. Lovecraft. It is his desire to spend the rest of his life creating pulp fiction. Duke hopes you enjoy this piece. It has been rumbling around in his head since July. When he saw the prompt, he had to get it on paper. In time, Duke hopes to develop this into a Novella. For now this is a start.

## Redemption

By Duke Raulston

### Prologue

Over four thousand years ago, in a cellar carved into the living limestone, deep beneath the city of Memphis, the Priest Set-u-ka and his most devoted follower, the Priestess Ha-Mehen, led their followers in a chant. They faced an altar carved of black basalt. Upon it was a writhing squirming girl, stripped of clothing, tied and bound so she could not scream.

She was the daughter of some minor nobleman from Imau. She was slated to a life of mediocrity. No more. She would serve a higher purpose now. Her body would slake the lust of the creature that dwelt in the caverns beneath this temple. Later, when it tired of her, it would feast on her flesh. He would have liked to feast upon the girl himself, but such was the sacrifice he made to maintain his position of power. No matter—he would find another in the streets of Memphis later. He was not so picky as the thing below. He would find someone young, weak, and poor—someone that would not be missed. It would draw less attention to him.

In the world above Set-u-ka was a priest of Ptah called Sabu. The Priestess Ha-Mehen was the daughter of one of Pharaoh's concubines, Heba. Ha-Mehen's position would not save them if it was found out that they were heretics that practiced human sacrifice. Not that Set-u-ka worried—his life was not for a human to take.

Set-u-ka was a dweller from the depths too. Though his companions had no idea, his true form was much more reptilian. He concealed this in the form that humans called Set-u-ka. It was a little bit of magic that smoothed his iridescent green scales into dusky skin and concealed his curved fangs in a convivial human smile. It was hypnotism that lured new followers from among Memphis' elite. It was mind control as well that helped him lure his

victims to their fate. Still, he needed the other dwellers of the depths.

It was their magic that elevated Set-u-ka to his position of power as a priest of Ptah, and they also elevated his followers to positions of power as well. It made it much easier to conceal the people that were disappearing from the streets of Memphis. It also meant that he and his followers lived in comfort but not yet in security. There were still officials in Memphis that did not serve him. They did not serve the dwellers in the depths. They were still loyal to Pharaoh.

If one of them got the slightest hint that there were heretical practices going on beneath the city, they would bring everything down around his ears. This sacrifice would bring him more supernatural help in replacing his enemies. Maybe one of them would get sick and waste away. Maybe one would get caught up in some minor scheme to make a little extra gold. He never knew exactly how it would happen, but it always did. One of his followers would be ready to fill the spot when it opened up. It was surprising how much of the bureaucracy of Memphis he actually did control.

The black-robed supplicants swayed in the dim light as they chanted. Grey clouds of sickly-sweet incense drifted through the room. He heard the first signs of the dweller coming up the shaft behind the altar, a faint scratching. His followers heard it too. The chanting quickened as they worked themselves into frenzy. The scratching was louder now, and the girl was squirming harder, desperately seeking to free herself. She was straining against the ropes binding her wrist and ankles until they were stained crimson with blood. The creature coming up from the abyss scented the blood. The scratching was quicker now—almost frantic—and it was accompanied by an occasional huffing sound. The chanters were screaming now, no longer speaking any language ever spoken by man. They were gyrating wildly in the flickering torchlight, many of them had cast off the black robes and their bodies were beaded with sweat. The thing from the abyss was there.

It was roughly man shaped, but much bigger. It was a sickly gray color, like the creatures that dwell in the caves nearer the surface. It had large red eyes. It sniffed the victim, bound on the altar. Her hysteria had now turned to paralysis, as she was frozen to the slab. The creature's tongue flicked from out of a mouth lined with sharp fangs. It licked the bloody bonds about her ankles and then ran up her shin to about half way up her thigh. The girl shuddered visibly. The acolytes were writhing nude upon the floor, all except Set-u-Ka. He stood before the altar with outstretched arms and uttered a supplication to the creature that no one in the room understood.

The beast seemed to revel in the girl's fear, and in the perversion of Set-u-Ka's followers. It reared its head, maw agape, and roared. A spear arced through the dimly lit room and lodged in the creature's mouth. The roar of ecstasy turned quickly to agony as the creature thrashed, trying to remove the spear with clawed hands. A thick gray tail toppled the basalt altar, it shattered on the limestone floor and the girl rolled away. Soldiers

poured down the stairs as the supplicants screamed in terror. One of the soldiers scooped up the young girl and ran back up the stairs.

Set-u-Ka dropped his human disguise. Ha-Mehen screamed when she saw his true form. A bronze sword glanced harmlessly off of his iridescent scales. No human weapon could harm him. The creature from the abyss had long since plucked the spear from his mouth. Now the two God-like denizens of the deep places of the Earth turned their full fury on the soldiers coming down the stairs. At the top of the stairs a Priestess of Sekhmet directed the soldiers. Set-U-Ka ripped into the soldiers between him and the Priests. She looked him in the eye and smiled. She retreated through the door. Set-u-Ka heard her give the order to seal the passage. He saw the heavy stone door close. He knew that the shaft would be filled with rubble and that this passage would never again see the light of day.

When the last of the soldiers had been dispatched, he knew that he would never walk the streets of Memphis again. A handful of his followers yet lived. Many were dead. Tonight he would revel and feast with the creatures from below. Tomorrow he would enter the passage and travel through the underworld until he found another passage to the surface. Another temple. Another priest. Another Age.

### The Preacher

The Priest that had once been known as Set-u-kah wandered in the deep places of the Earth. Over the millennia he would occasionally enter the upper world to serve the other dwellers of the deep as he had in Memphis. Always he would wander. Today he would enter the upper world again. Again as a Priest.

Bright sunlight from a shaft above blinded him. How many centuries had it been since he had last seen the sun? He changed from his true self. His iridescent green scales turned to bronzed human skin. The lesser beings that live in caverns near the surface had procured clothing for him. They had communicated with him telepathically while he slumbered in the deep. He knew how to button the white shirt, he knew how to wear the collar that came with it, as well as the black coat, the pointed toe boots, most curious to him was the .45 Colt Peacemaker and gun belt. He put it around his waist and tied the holster down to his thigh with a rawhide thong. He knew where he was, Sweetwater, Texas. The year, at least according to these people, would be 1882. That didn't mean much to him, but he needed to know.

Once dressed, he started up the wall toward the sunlight. It was a steep, deep pit. An ordinary human would have never been able to make the climb. The light at the top of the shaft was fading and he knew that he would enter the world at night. That would be best. It had been communicated that he would find a medicine show nearby—he wasn't sure that he understood that concept. Only that it was a means to travel, to seek converts, different

from any other temple that he had ever ministered at before. His mission was different this time. He would seek souls for the denizens of the deep, and create servants for them in this world. He reached the top of the pit.

He stuck his head out into the hot dry air. He had almost forgotten how hot and dry it could get. It reminded him of the Egyptian desert, but it was not quite that desolate. He stood up at the edge of the limestone shaft and scanned the horizon. In the distance he could make out the twinkling light of a small campfire.

Dr. Alexander McPhee sat near the fire, poking at a plate of beans, still wearing his suit and top hat from the medicine show. On the other side of the fire sat Louisiana Pete Le Roux. Pete provided the music for the show. A pretty blond dancer named Evangeline stirred the pot of beans that hung over the fire. Her name was no more Evangeline than Pete's name was Louisiana, but Dr. McPhee thought it added to the show. As a matter of fact, he wasn't a doctor but this was show business, or at least the ass end of it.

The three were passing a bottle of McPhee's Miracle Cure back and forth. It was nothing more than cheap whiskey flavored with licorice root. They were eating beans and celebrating a moderately successful show in Sweetwater. They were already too drunk to hear the Preacher walk up.

"Who sthat?" McPhee slurred.

The Preacher stepped into the circle of light. He was tall and skeletal. Dressed in black, strands of stringy pale hair hung out from under his black Stetson.

"It's a Preacher!" Pete exclaimed, "Whacha doin' out here this time of night!"

"The Lord's work," he answered flatly.

"Might I entice you to try some of McPhee's Miracle Cure? Furth's a free sample." McPhee extended the bottle.

The Preacher starred at the bottle; a lone coyote howled in the distance.

"Go on Preacher, it won't bite...hard!" Evangeline chuckled.

The Preacher took the bottle. He took a long drink, and he smacked his lips.

"It's missing a little something." He removed a glass vial from his vest; it's contents glowing red in the firelight. He opened the flask and poured a few drops into the bottle. He put the flask back into his pocket, and he swirled the bottle a few times and then took another drink.

"That's much better!" he exclaimed, handing the bottle back to McPhee.

McPhee took another drink and passed the bottle to Pete.

"I can't tell a bit of difference."

"You, know I can't either—what was that anyway?" Pete asked, passing the bottle to Evangeline.

"Oh it's a secret ingredient that my people have made for ages." The

Preacher answered.

“What does it do?” Evangeline asked.

The Preacher smiled coldly.

“It works a miraculous change in the body.”

“Are you going to buy some McPhee's from us?” the doctor asked.

“Of course not! I want your wagon and gear.”

“Hmph!” Doc snorted. “Not for sale. You best take your secret ingredient and move on!”

“I never said I was going to buy it,” the Preacher answered.

Pete struggled to his feet and grabbed a hickory ax handle that was propped against the wagon. He staggered forward. The Preacher just smiled. The Preacher's hand flew like lightning. A shot tore through Pete's head. Evangeline wailed like a banshee as she was showered in blood, brains and bone fragments. Pete's lifeless body swayed with the ax handle raised high above his head before falling back into the fire. The Preacher silenced Evangeline with a shot to the chest.

The Preacher looked at the flames licking at Pete's body. Dr. McPhee watched him for a long moment before he was able to speak.

“You can have...you can have it all. I will never say a word. I will take whatever gear you leave me and walk east. I will never say a word. I promise. Just don't kill me.”

“Don't be silly,” the Preacher answered, “For those miraculous changes to happen you have to die.” The Preacher laughed as the Peacemaker roared one more time. McPhee fell backward. The Preacher spun the gun on his finger once and holstered it.

### The Sweetwater Monsters

Starr Killer was born in the Indian Territory in 1859. His mother, Lorette, was a runaway slave from Louisiana. She had made it all the way to the Indian Territory. There she married George Bell, a member of the Cherokee nation. Starr had been born a few years later, right before the Civil war. He couldn't remember a whole lot about that—mostly fights between different Cherokee families. It was less about North and South and more about who had signed the treaty of New Echota and who hadn't. Of course, he was not born Starr Killer.

He was born plain old George Bell, Jr., and so he remained for the first fifteen years of his life until he met John Starr. John was a member of the Starr outlaw clan and Sam Starr's younger brother. John rode into town one day liquored up and looking for a fight—George was only too willing to provide one. John drew on the younger man, but he was too drunk and George was too fast. He drilled him twice before he could clear leather. From that point on, the Cherokee called George Starr Killer.

The Starr clan were not forgiving folk. There were a lot of them, and

they had many friends. Starr Killer had been drifting around the Nations, Texas, and the New Mexico territory. He hired out sometimes as a cowboy, sometimes as an extra gun. A few months ago he hired on as a deputy in Seguin, Texas. It was a good job but doomed to failure. Texas had been a slave state and a deputy who was half black and half Cherokee didn't sit too well with the locals. Before he moved on he became friends with a local Franciscan Friar, Father Miguel Morales. The good Father had an interesting offer for him.

Father Morales said that he needed a hired gun. Starr had asked what a Friar needed with a gunfighter. Father Morales had said that he would let him know when he had a job. He told him to go to Austin, the state capital, and check into the Victoria Hotel. The Church would pick up the tab, the Church would pay for his meals in the hotel as well, and every Friday he was to pick up a \$20 Gold Piece from the manager. It was pretty good work, if you could get it.

Last week when he went down to collect his gold piece it came with a telegraph from Father Morales.

"Come to Sweetwater as soon as possible. Meet me at the O'Hanlan ranch, just south of town."

No explanation—nothing.

Starr thought long and hard about riding to Sweetwater. It had been a good few months—he could just head over to the saloon, spend one more night with that delightful young lady from New Orleans, and then ride west in the morning. Something told him that he would probably be better off. Whatever this Padre had hired him to do, he was pretty sure it wasn't going to be easy.

The other side of him, the side that had worked through fifteen Oklahoma winters as George Bell plowing cornfields, bringing in crops, and chopping wood for winter fires, that side couldn't walk away from a job that he had been paid to do. He spent one more evening with Marie, and at first light he was on his horse riding north. That had been five saddle sore days earlier.

Now he was crossing the O'Hanlan ranch. As the sun sank slowly in the west, Starr thought he could hear something moving in the scrub. He was not given to fear things that go bump in the night, but this had his hackles up. He told himself that it was just a coyote as he loosened the strap on his Peacemaker. He rounded a curve in the road and saw the ranch house through the mesquite scrub. He urged his horse to a trot.

When he trotted past the fence of the ranch house, he felt a weight ease off of his shoulders. He looked around and couldn't see or hear anything moving in the scrub. He wrote it off as his mind playing tricks on him. He tied his horse to the hitching post and knocked on the live oak door.

Father Morales answered carrying a flickering kerosene lantern.

"Ahh! My son, come in, come in. You must have many questions?"

"You could say that father," Starr answered entering the ranch. "But let's keep it simple. What the hell is going on here?"

"Simple to ask, difficult to answer, but I will try. Maybe you would like to eat while I chat?"

"Now that you mention it, I could eat the ass end out of a rag doll," Starr answered.

"We can do a little better than that, have a seat."

The rotund Padre scuttled off and returned with a plate of frijoles, cheese, tortillas and a bottle of wine. He sat the plate in front of Starr, who dug in greedily and poured some of the wine in a wooden mug. Morales sat down with a groan, and the wooden chair creaked in reply.

"Where shall I begin. Ah yes, do you know the difference between a friar and a monk, Starr?"

"Umm-uhh!" Starr replied.

"A monk lives in retreat from the world in a monastery; a friar lives in the world trying to do good works for his fellow man. I am a friar. My calling is to identify threats to God's faithful. Identify them and, well deal with them. That is where you come in."

"You want me to be goddamn..."

Father Morales interrupted, "Please my son, I am a man of the cloth!"

"Forgive me, Padre," Starr responded with cynical politeness, "You want me to be a bounty hunter for the Church?"

"In a manner of speaking, but a bounty hunter hunts men with a price on their head. Sometimes they bring them back alive, sometimes dead. What you will be hunting are not exactly men, and you won't be bringing any of them back alive."

"What am I hunting, the bogey-man?" Starr snorted.

"Precisely," Morales replied.

Starr froze with his fork half way to his mouth. He stared at Father Morales in sudden comprehension. He dropped the fork, grabbed the wooden mug and drained the wine in a great gulp. Starr had little experience with the white world before he left the territories. He had grown up in a Cherokee world populated with supernatural figures and magic. He had also shared in his mother's world of Louisiana Hoodoo, a mix of Christianity and African Spiritualism. The scientific rationality of the white man that rejects everything that could not be reduced to numbers or captured and dissected, was totally alien to him. He believed the Padre. He thought he understood why he had become so strangely frightened in the Mesquite thicket outside the ranch.

"They're out there ain't they?" he growled.

"I am afraid so, Son."

"I ain't your son! I ain't your boy! And you ain't got enough money for me to hunt this what-ever the hell it is that's out there. What is it? Why did you lead me into this trap?"



"As to what they are, I am unsure. They attack in the night. Mostly nights with a full moon, that seems to be when they are strongest. They mutilate their victims and drain their blood. The victims then become like themselves, undead fiends that prowl the night. I picked the O'Hanlan ranch because they were the first victims. It is a ways out of town and I thought that they would not be back. Evidently, I miscalculated".

"You sure as hell did."

"Sorry," the Friar replied sheepishly. "I first noticed them about lunch time."

"I thought you said that these things only came out at night!" Starr yelled.

"I never did, I said they attacked at night, usually when the moon was full. That is when they are most powerful. They can move about in the day, but that is when they are at their weakest. When I noticed them I buried pieces of the host at the four corners of the property to sanctify the house. It has worked so far..."

"But!" Starr anticipated.

"The full moon will be rising any minute now. I don't know if it will hold them. We have to fight them."

"You mean *I* have to fight them?" Starr asked angrily.

"That is why I asked you to come," Morales said.

"I wouldn't have taken the job if I knew it involved fighting the undead."

"No. You would've taken another job, and another, and another—selling your gun all over the country, killing for money. One day, on one of those jobs, you would have drawn down on a man that was faster than you. Then there would have been another cheap funeral for a hired killer that nobody knew and nobody would remember. This isn't a job; this is a calling. I am not just offering you money; I am offering you redemption. Are you going to take it?"

Starr Killer looked at the Padre for a minute. He asked, "So what do I have to do? Go out and kill those things? That's it?"

"No. This is a lifetime position. Those things out there aren't here by accident—someone or something made them that way. They were once human beings. We have to find the thing that made them and kill it. If we succeed there may be other tasks for us. Do you accept this?"

"I do," Starr answered

"Do you reject Satan and all of his works and all of his empty promises?"

"I do."

"Do you believe in God the Father Almighty, creator of Heaven and Earth?"

"I do."

"Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only son, our Lord, who was born

of the Virgin Mary, suffered death and was buried, rose again from the dead, and is seated at the right hand of the Father?"

"I do."

"Do you believe in the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting?"

"I do."

"This is our Faith. This is the Faith of the Church. We are proud to profess it in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The Friar then removed a flask of oil from his robes. He pulled the cork and placed his thumb on the opening, turned the vial up spilling some of Chrism on his thumb. He reached out and traced the sign of the cross on Starr's forehead.

"Starr Killer, be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit. Go forth Starr and be the Lord's Warrior."

Morales walked over to a rifle rack on the wall. He took down a box wrapped in brown paper. He tossed them to Starr.

"Load your Peacemakers with these."

"Starr quickly cut the twine that bound the brown wrapper. There were twenty five cartridges in the package. The bullets were not the dull gray of lead but silver. Starr looked curiously at the ammunition.

Morales smiled, "The bullets are made of lead encased in silver. That way they still penetrate, but they pack the magic of silver. They have also been blessed. I made them myself."

Starr drew his Peacemakers and emptied the cylinders on the floor with a tinkle of brass. He quickly slid the silvered cartridges into the chambers, and holstered the pistols. He walked to the door, put his hands on the handles of his pistols, pulled them halfway out and slid them back in, just to make sure that they slid from the holsters easily. He looked at the Friar one more time. Morales stood, rosary in hand, praying silently. He opened the ranch door and stepped out into the muggy Texas night.

Starr walked briskly to the gate, hands ready to draw. As he neared the threshold, a bright orange full moon rose in the west, and he heard a wolf howling close by. As soon as he crossed the threshold, he felt like he had been hit in the chest by a sledgehammer. He felt instant fear of what he did not know, but it took all of his grit not to take off back into the ranch house. The smell was overpowering—sickly sweet like meat gone bad. It took every ounce of willpower that he had, but he stood stock-still, clearly ready to draw on anything that crossed his path.

He wasn't sure what he was seeing at first. There were two pale, sickly-green lights in the Mesquite thicket. He realized that they must be eyes. Soon they were joined by two more sets. They didn't move. There was no sound; they just stared. Starr's palm was beginning to sweat. He was losing his edge—those eyes were intimidating him. Then it occurred to him, "What am I missing?". He rolled his eyes to the right. Nothing. Then to the left—

there was something dark and shadowy slouching slowly down the fence line. His hands rested on the butt of his pistol. The creature knew it had been seen. There was a low, canine growl and then it sprang.

A giant wolf.

Starr drew and fired. The first shot plunged into the black beast's chest. The second tore through its skull, sending a fountain of brains and blood into the air. It whimpered once before falling where Starr had been standing, but he had holstered the guns and rolled forward.

He came up, drawing the guns as he did. He thought that he was ready for whatever came next, but he was wrong. Three cadavers came out of the woods, the flesh falling from their bodies as they ran. Eyes rolled back in their sockets. The Peacemaker cracked again, and a flame shot from the muzzle. The Padre had loaded the rounds hot. The head of one of the things coming at him disappeared in a cloud of red. A second one took a round from the Peacemaker in its chest, opening up a fist-sized hole in the creature. It fell backwards with a thud. He fired again at the third one and missed. A shot from his other Peacemaker caught it in the chest. The creature jerked but kept coming. Panicking, Starr holstered the Peacemaker in his left hand and fanned the one in his right pumping .45 slugs into the creature's ruined midsection. It fell at his feet. Remarkably the creature was still able to speak.

"The preacher sends his regards!" it gurgled before falling over dead.

Starr scanned the mesquite, but he knew that the things were gone, as was the panic that had held his heart in a steel vise. The smell was beginning to get a little better as well. He backed into the ranch house before he holstered the pistol, all the same.

"Padre, one of those things said something about a preacher, do you know what they were talking about?"

"No idea, what did it say?"

"The Preacher sends his regards!"

"I have no idea. There have been no men of the cloth among their victims. We must remember that." The Friar took a notebook out of his pocket and made a note. Starr strode over to the washbasin and poured water over his head and hands. He leaned over the basin and let the water drip into it.

"Are you okay?" the Friar asked.

"I guess as well as can be expected. I just killed a Lupe Garrou and three zombies. Is that...Is that all of them?"

"I am sorry to say, no. There have been at least five more people killed so that means that there are five more out there somewhere that we are going to have kill before we leave Sweetwater. I would also like to investigate and see if we can find out more about how this started and who this preacher might be. We can start that tomorrow. Tonight we rest. Would you like another plate of beans or some wine?"

Starr just stared at him...

**Our final story this month is “A Strange Occurrence in Sainte Jeanne’s Parish” by Kelly Whitmore. In many ways it continues the traditions of the best of weird fiction with a western twist.**

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Kelly Whitmore is an aspiring writer and current adjunct professor trying to make a living with a Master’s in literature. She lives with her two dogs and doting boyfriend in Olympia, Washington.

### A Strange Occurrence in Sainte Jeanne’s Parish

The new sheriff rode into town a few moments after high noon. The church bells had just stopped ringing. Sweat rolled down his face and neck in the humid July air. The people of Sainte Jeanne’s Parish didn’t come outside to greet him. The streets were conspicuously empty.

Sheriff John Cardiff rode on toward the jailhouse at the end of the main road. The horse, tired as she was, plodded on down the dry dirt lane. A mosquito buzzed close to Cardiff’s face. They were big here, even for the Louisiana Territory, but the sheriff tried to ignore little things like that.

At the jailhouse, John walked his horse around back and stabled her. He came around the front of the building to see people scurrying out of the afternoon sun far up the street. He had heard rumors that the people around Sainte Jeanne were skittish and scared of outsiders. It seemed that the rumors were true.

Inside the jailhouse, a lean man was cleaning his revolver at the sheriff’s desk. He was rail thin with salt and pepper hair. His hands worked over the gun with spider-like movements and a fanatic’s meticulousness.

“Sheriff Cardiff I presume,” the thin man said in a thick French accent without raising his eyes.

“I am. And you are—“

“Deputy Allard, Louis Allard,” the lean one interrupted.

John extended his hand in greeting, but the deputy either didn’t notice or didn’t care. John let the gesture fall to his side.

Sheriff Cardiff waited most of the day for the mayor, who never showed up. As the sun set behind the big trees to the west, John began to gather himself up to go and see what was happening in the big inn he had passed on the way in. He was tired of the sulking presence of the deputy anyway.

“Where you headed?” Allard asked as the sheriff made his way to the door.

“I was going to see if I could meet someone a little more talkative.”

“No one around here stays out after dark,” the deputy remarked in an off-handed way. “Least, not at the bar. They’ll be in church.”

“Church?”

The deputy nodded without looking up. He had turned to playing solitaire with a strange-looking deck of cards hours ago. Something about the cards, with their intricate pictures and unfamiliar suites unnerved the sheriff. Perhaps it was the way the man was handling them. It was as careful and meticulous as the cleaning of the gun had been.

The sheriff walked out of the door with a shudder he couldn't quite explain.

Down at the opposite end of the long dirt groove that ran the length of the main part of town, a large church sat on the edge of the tall forest. The windows glowed warm against the dying daylight and people were still straggling in through the big doors. There was something strange about the look of the place, but the exact strangeness eluded John as he walked down the middle of the street.

The sheriff was about fifty yards out when he realized the steeple of the church was damaged. The arms of the cross were gone, giving it the look of a large lightning rod. It seemed strange that the people of the town would not have fixed it. Something like that was usually a priority. But the people of the Louisiana Purchase were different, and John let his general prejudice and distrust of the French-speaking people fill in some inscrutable reason for the poor repair.

John didn't like the Louisiana Purchase much. He had been living in the Republic of Texas for a few years. He had been a lawman out there until an unfortunate misunderstanding between himself and another man regarding the man's wife. Officially, he had shot a man who pulled a gun on an officer of the law, but he knew when the time was right to cut his losses. He had kicked around back east, but the frontier was calling him, and when the letter came from a former associate, Cardiff had packed up and made his way West.

By the time John had made his way to the church, the doors were closed. The sheriff eased them open and slipped inside. It took a minute for his eyes to adjust to the dimness of the chapel.

The mass, John assumed it was mass, was in a language the sheriff didn't recognize. It was probably Latin, he supposed. He knew from a little bit of time up north that Catholics still worshiped in Latin. The sound of the chanting was calming in a way. John slipped into a pew in the back. His eyes soon grew heavy with the sound of thick, unknown syllables, the warmth of the evening, and the smell of myrrh. He slept.

When John Cardiff opened his eyes, the church was different. It was darker and the air was thick with pungent, heavy incense. The people in the church were all bent in prayer, intoning a shared phrase.

"Iä! Iä!" the priest shouted.

"Cthulhu fhtagn!" the congregation responded.

The sheriff looked up to the priest. His collar was hanging open and sweat was pouring down his face. He was crying silently. The crucifix behind

him had strange symbols haphazardly painted on it and a twist of black cloth secured over the eyes.

All at once there was silence. The guttural chanting hung in the rafters then died out. The congregation rose in one accord. They filed out of the church past the lawman without acknowledging him. As if in a dream, Sheriff John Cardiff followed.

Once outside, the townsfolk walked purposely into the thick deciduous trees hanging with moss and wetness. Cardiff followed to the tree line and then stopped himself with considerable effort. Something was dragging him forward like an undertow. Deep in the woods the sounds of chanting started.

John looked into the forest and the forest looked back at him. Reflective eyes stared at him, catching light from the moon and glowing yellow. There was a low rumbling from deep in the trees. A hand fell on John's shoulder. He whirled to see the angular face of the deputy.

"It is hell in there," the deputy intoned in a sleepy whisper.

The sheriff reached to his hip. His Colt was there. He stepped away from Allard.

In the forest there was no light from the moon. The tree cover was too thick. John could faintly see the flickering glow of a fire ahead. He pushed forward, underbrush pulling at his legs as if the forest itself were trying to hold him back.

The sheriff pushed through the trees into a clearing. In the center were a blazing fire and a black column of stone. Silently, the town folk turned. Their faces were waxy and slick with sweat in the humid night air. The heat of the fire pressed oppressively on John's skin.

The priest held his hands up in a gesture of supplication.

"Âme d'un meurtrier," the priest said.

"Jusqu'au bout du monde," the crowd replied.

The next moment was a nightmare made real. The congregation turned as if with one mind. They reached for the sheriff. He reached for his gun. His hand faltered. Something was climbing the stone column—all eyes and teeth and tentacles. It was something before time, before the Earth had cooled. It was an abomination before God and science.

Sheriff John Cardiff's mind splintered like brittle glass.

He died screaming in a language he himself didn't know. The god of the parish sat toad-like on its pedestal and watched.

By the time the townsfolk were back in their homes, Deputy Allard was reading his cards. He stared at them for a moment then began to write in another man's script, inviting another lawman to try his luck in the parish. He signed it with a name the recipient would know.

"To the end of the world," the deputy said to himself. "La fin du monde."