

# One hundred and forty



#140Word

Stories



Stu Andrews

## One Hundred And Forty #140Word Stories

Explanation:

Three years ago, thereabouts, I thought a fun project would be to write some stories of one hundred and forty words in length. Kind of like Twitter, except words instead of characters.

This was a far harder prospect than it first seemed, especially after the idea of one hundred and forty of the stories firmed in my mind.

But here we are.

Most of the stories are standalone, although there is one passage of twelve which were an experiment in adapting a longer short story. Not sure if it worked.

Really, each of these stories is a window into a larger world. Open them up and you get a glimpse of something more.

My hope is that you, dear reader, will find something here that makes you smile, laugh, or even get a bit, like, emotional knapsack. Right on.

Thanks!

**Copyright © 2014 Stu Andrews**

Acknowledgements:

To my wife who fears the LORD.

To my kids who fill up life.

To the folks who birthed, nurtured and raised me.

To those who have read these stories when they didn't understand or agree with a few, some, most or all of them.

To the story-tellers who drew me into their worlds of epic journeys, terrible choices, ferocious beasts and ultra-cool masters of the blade.

And to Him. God above. Hallowed be His Name. Creator, Sustainer, Life-Giver. I can only poorly mimic His creativity and imagination.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

Genesis 1:1-3

## Contents

Love, The Fiercest Din.....	9
Where It Rains Every Day Except One.....	10
Between The Water And Shore.....	11
A Rock On The End Of A String.....	13
Horror Film Script #1, Man In Black.....	14
Seeds That Fall Out Of The Ground.....	15
Opening Doors With Code.....	16
The Doctor Wept To Fill The Ocean.....	17
Twice Upon A Time.....	18
Sir, We Would See Jesus.....	19
Alackaday.....	20
The Eye Of The Storm.....	21
A Family Reunion.....	22
Robin Hood, Not That Man You Think.....	23
Fenrick The Dragon.....	24
How Rugby Saved The Planet From Alien Zombies.....	26
Bram And The Gorilla.....	27
Love Is Not Emotion.....	28
Eshiel's Friday At The Scary Hill.....	29
Eshiel's Sunday Of Good News.....	30
Buzz And The Ice Cream Drop.....	31
The War That Turned On A Kiss.....	32
The Little House At The End Of A Little Road.....	33
The Boy Who Could See Methane.....	34
It's Hard For A Dragon To Find A Home.....	35
A School Without Bullying.....	36
A Thief In The Rain.....	37
Professor Jones And The Importance Of A Subplot.....	38
The Little Man With A Blocky Walk.....	39
Scotland The Brave.....	40
Me And My Light Brown Van.....	41
The Collins Crime.....	42
Love And The Battlefield.....	43
Larry And The RockChewer.....	44

Tommy The Bug .....	45
Longing For Sleep.....	46
Cheryl's Musical Nature .....	47
Win Or Lose, Today We Fight! .....	48
The Funeral Of William Brown .....	49
Sung A Little One.....	50
Daddooo! .....	51
Mr Kingwelder Brings Hope.....	52
Tell Me How Can Music Listen?.....	53
The Fear Of Fenrick.....	54
What Brendan Knows .....	55
The Battle Joined.....	56
As Life Flashes Past.....	57
Ferocious Pete, The Fiercest Man In The East .....	58
The Problem With Letting Off Steam.....	59
Children And Parents.....	61
Proudblood's Revenge, Part 1 .....	62
Proudblood's Revenge, Part 2 .....	63
Proudblood's Revenge, Part 3 .....	64
Proudblood's Revenge, Part 4 .....	65
Proudblood's Revenge, Part 5 .....	66
Proudblood's Revenge, Part 6 .....	67
Proudblood's Revenge, Part 7 .....	68
Proudblood's Revenge, Part 8 .....	69
Proudblood's Revenge, Part 9 .....	70
Proudblood's Revenge, Part 10.....	71
Proudblood's Revenge, Part 11.....	72
Proudblood's Revenge, Part 12.....	73
I'm Watching You All.....	74
Back To The Mud.....	75
My Home Is Gone.....	76
The Light Beckons.....	77
Rab The Super Spy.....	78
Hiding In Plain Sight.....	79
Staying Quiet .....	80

I Was Dreaming.....	81
The Nasal King.....	82
The Justice Band Of Avenging Mutants .....	83
Pivot, Crux, Center.....	84
Five Strikes Of The Bell.....	85
The Shadow King Rises .....	86
Ronny The Rain Maker.....	88
A Veritable Feast Of Muddy Puddles .....	89
Shelter For the Night.....	90
The Terrible Twos.....	91
Silas And The Mystery Of The Missing Woman.....	92
Followed By Clouds .....	93
A Board Game With Grandpa.....	94
A Gorilla Walks Into A Bar .....	95
I Saw A Man I Did.....	96
Patience Is A Virtue.....	97
Being Alive Is Good.....	98
Find The One Who Cannot See.....	99
How To Tell A Story.....	100
Mike, The Sentient Pair Of Glasses .....	101
Mystery Fridge Juice.....	102
A Story Of Redda Hode .....	103
Heroism Vs Pragmatism.....	104
At Long Last.....	106
A Man Who Smiles Too Much.....	107
Theseus And The Minotaur.....	108
Dust Settled.....	109
A Change Is On The Way.....	110
Hunter Of The Strange .....	111
Gorn And His Magic .....	112
Shaking With A Thundercloud.....	113
Paenrath's Blessing.....	114
Down At The Park .....	115
A Birthday To Remember.....	116
Nothing Will Ever Be The Same.....	117

<b>We Turn About And Walk Away.....</b>	<b>118</b>
<b>Future Fellas .....</b>	<b>119</b>
<b>The Old Man.....</b>	<b>120</b>
<b>Coding Is Writing.....</b>	<b>121</b>
<b>Home At Last.....</b>	<b>122</b>
<b>Justice.....</b>	<b>123</b>
<b>Jaine Begins Her Adventure .....</b>	<b>124</b>
<b>The Thief Who Hurt .....</b>	<b>125</b>
<b>Biology Is Important.....</b>	<b>126</b>
<b>Smooth Talk Only Gets You So Far.....</b>	<b>127</b>
<b>One Coupon For A Magical Make-Believe Dragon .....</b>	<b>128</b>
<b>What Is Loss?.....</b>	<b>129</b>
<b>Not Wrapping Presents .....</b>	<b>131</b>
<b>Horror Film Script #2, The Return Of Mr Pain .....</b>	<b>132</b>
<b>Wield .....</b>	<b>133</b>
<b>Shoo Doggy! .....</b>	<b>134</b>
<b>Carry On .....</b>	<b>135</b>
<b>Bare Feet And Shoes .....</b>	<b>136</b>
<b>The Joker's Malaise.....</b>	<b>137</b>
<b>A Wooden Sword.....</b>	<b>138</b>
<b>What's In A Motto? .....</b>	<b>139</b>
<b>The Hawthorn Kingdom, Part 1 .....</b>	<b>141</b>
<b>The Hawthorn Kingdom, Part 2 .....</b>	<b>142</b>
<b>The End Of The River.....</b>	<b>143</b>
<b>The Nature Of Crying.....</b>	<b>144</b>
<b>The Problem With Unifying Kingdoms .....</b>	<b>145</b>
<b>A Tofu Conspiracy.....</b>	<b>146</b>
<b>The Inexplicable Power Of Sales Agents.....</b>	<b>147</b>
<b>Wielding Light Is Hard.....</b>	<b>148</b>
<b>And Now They Were At War .....</b>	<b>149</b>
<b>Memories And Cats.....</b>	<b>150</b>
<b>A Special Song.....</b>	<b>151</b>
<b>The Calvary.....</b>	<b>152</b>
<b>Horror Film Script #3, The End Of Pain.....</b>	<b>153</b>
<b>This World Is Made Up Of Stories.....</b>	<b>155</b>

<b>In Eternal Solitude Of Joy Unknown.....</b>	<b>156</b>
--	------------



## Love, The Fiercest Din

*Truly, neverly, always running over  
The heart of the young is given  
And given twice over again  
To pursuits of power  
Fully swayed  
Love.*

*Always, tethered with cord  
Three-fold is best  
But alas not most  
Gained and thought conquered  
Lying await or grown  
Love.*

Gareth put down his pen. What rubbish, utter tripe.

But his heart longed. It ached. When they were apart the memory of her encompassed every segment of his mind. When they were together ...

Lightning and fire and warmth.

*She is all I can think about. Why is that? What manner of electrical impulse causes me to be so bewildered with love?*

Gareth took up his pen.

*Dear heart. Lonely no more.  
Knocking at the door of love.  
She opens, smiles,  
And calls me in.*

*And all the while,  
The fiercest din,  
Beats within my soul.*

## Where It Rains Every Day Except One

Once upon a time there was a city in which it rained every single day of the year except for one.

On this one special day, people all over the city would stop doing just to bask in the difference.

It was different, this city. They were a people of violence and chaos. But on this day they stilled, halted, and their faces turn upwards to the sunlight.

Tomorrow blood would be shed. Tomorrow anger would again rear its ugly head. Tomorrow the rain would fall and wash away the purity of this one day.

One child remembers. She remembers the one day. And the hope that sparks in that little child's heart is the same hope in a man dying of thirst who sees water ahead.

It is the hope of life. Of light. Of a day without rain.

## Between The Water And Shore

Under the Bridge, between the Water and Shore, lies a realm you would do best to stay away from. You Mortals and fish alike.

Nargaraki is a world filled with magic.

Not the magic you are thinking of - cones of ice and face-melting fireballs - no, this is the magic of colour and dreams. This is the undercurrent of thought and subconscious imagination which drives all people onwards.

Should you ever find yourself in Nargaraki, take care.

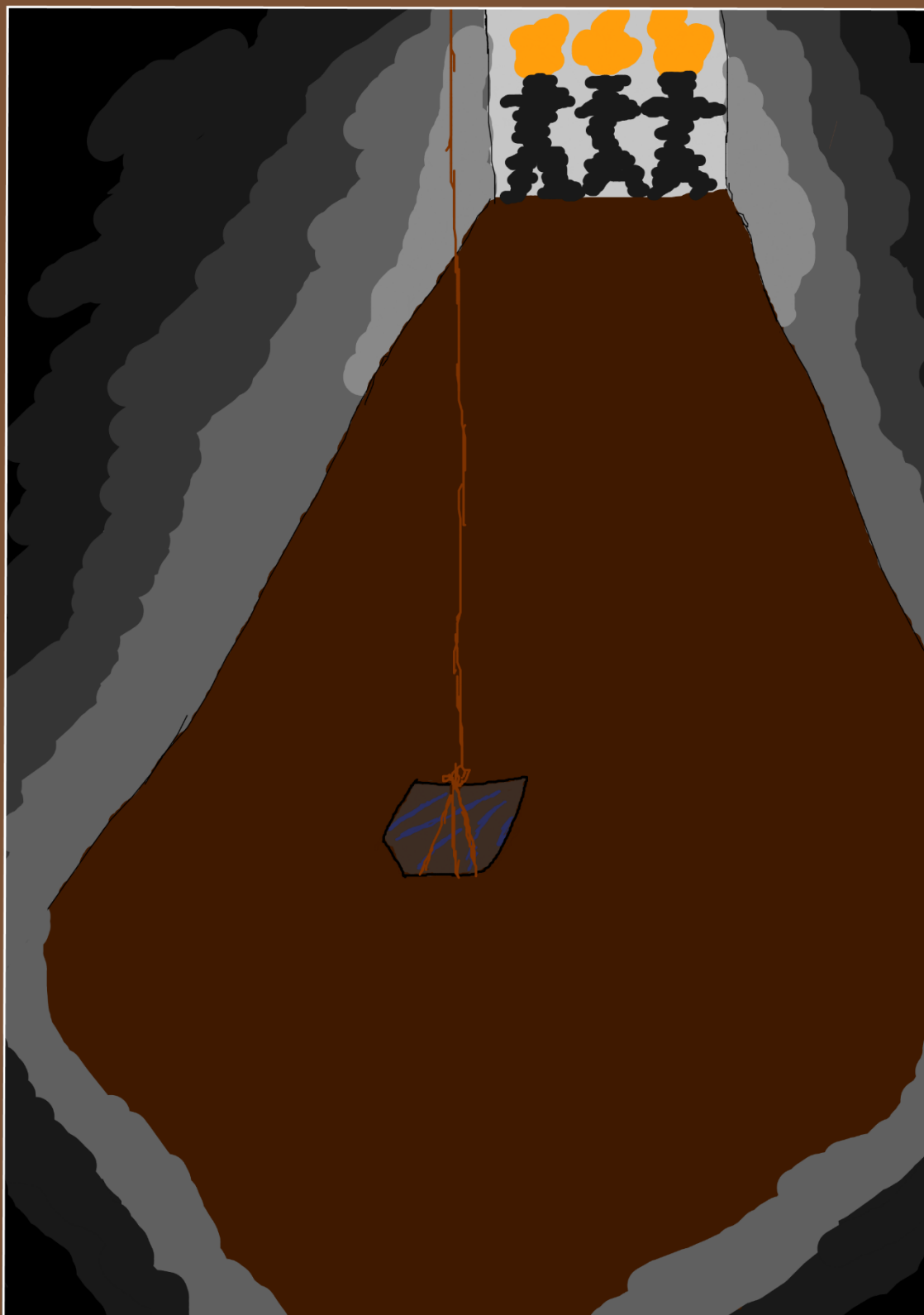
Desire and vice mix with beauty and purity. There are creatures who could grab your world in their hands and throw it like a ball, crush it with a thought. There are beings who emanate such light as would burn you to nothingness.

If you don't believe me, then come. Sit under a bridge, between Shore and the Water.

It's easy.

See.

A Rock On The End Of A String



#140Words

## A Rock On The End Of A String

The burger was so very good. She hadn't eaten in days - *ragged, ruin**y, retched* - So it really was the most delicious and tasty food.

Carefully licking her fingers, despite the dirt and grime of weeks on the run through city and field alike, Bethany came to her feet.

The alley was dark and gloomy. The perfect place for what was to come next.

She muttered something about being too old for this kind of adventure then took out a string with a rock tied to the end.

The three men appeared at the end of the alley. Men with golden eyes and silver weapons.

Whirling, the string made a burr sound.

Whirling, the rock at the end began to sparkle.

The air began to buffet the loose rubbish and trash cans.

A door appeared.

*Whirling.*

Bethany stepped through.

## Horror Film Script #1, Man In Black

Cue mysteriously hauntingly wondrously scary music.

The man in black steps out. He's awesomely scary. Also, he has a hook for a right hand, no, he's holding it, no, a hook! And, AND ... on his left hand there's a chainsaw. No, a machine gun ... NO! A grenade launcher AND a chaingun.

MAN IN BLACK

Prepare yourselves for pain and darkness. I am darkness. I bring pain!

SCARED TEENAGER

Sir, we were just watching a movie. Pray tell what egregious error we have caused thee?

MAN IN BLACK

I am pain! I bring darkness!!!

SCARED TEENAGER #2

Eeeeeeeekkkk!

MAN IN BLACK

And here is my partner in crime and bringing painful darkness. Mr Pain!

MR PAIN

GRRROOOAAAAARRRRR!!!!

GIRL WITH ATTITUDE AND TATTOOS

I know pain mister, and you ain't it. You don't scare me.

MR PAIN

GRRRRROOOAAARRRRR!!!

End Scene.

## Seeds That Fall Out Of The Ground

The seeds fell out of the ground as the hoe dug along the surface.

Nathan (Daddio) didn't think the harvest would be that great, especially since this was the first time planting.

Gazing around, marvelling at the blocky beauty of his home and surrounding landscape, Nathan (Daddio) wondered if he should go back to his mine.

He'd just found a vein of diamond, five blocks. Five blocks! More than enough for a diamond pickaxe.

But would that be a waste?

Nathan (Daddio) looked across the bridge he'd made in the beginning. Watched the others busy toiling on their houses. The village was coming along well. Of course, some people excelled in architecture, and some not so much.

But it was all amazing.

A world where you can create what you imagine, within the limits of the world itself.

*Minecraft rules.*

## Opening Doors With Code

The single piece of code swam before eH0x's two eyes.

It was past three in the morning, for the fourth night running.

*I have to sleep before five.*

Her alarm went off at six am, but eH0x was still at her desk, fingers almost preternaturally skimming the keyboard, code block after code block stacking together.

This was not just an application. It was not just a game.

*This is History, and it is the Future.*

Seven million dollars was already in her account, forwarded by The Big Eight, a consortium of men and women with mind-boggling wealth and influence.

Nine times out of ten attempts eH0x had successfully completed projects for them. This was the eleventh, and if successful, it meant something more than money could buy.

A door to another world, through code.

*A land where my family is.*



## The Doctor Wept To Fill The Ocean

The doctor wept to fill the ocean.

Before him lay hundreds upon hundreds of broken soldiers. Born into tragedy, dying from sorrow and futility.

He brought his hands up, blood-smeared, and stared at them.

*Blood-letter.*

They brought him the sick and dying - too many bodies - and he healed them.

*It's not enough.*

The fields were littered with tents and stretchers and makeshift beds.

*What hope is there in this war?*

A Captain arrived, barked orders, then left.

He didn't really hear the man.

*This madness cannot continue.*

So the doctor - who fixed the broken - walked towards the Fields of Glory. He shrugged off hands that would stop him. He broke limbs he had fixed together when they would halt his progress.

He stood in the middle of the war and spoke a word.

The war stopped.

## Twice Upon A Time

Twice upon a time there lived a little girl.

This little girl did everything twice!

She always ate two apples. Every night cleaned her teeth twice in a row!

In the morning she would kiss her mother "good morning" twice, and laugh at her daddy's joke exactly two times.

At school the little girl would answer questions once and then give the answer again.

Nobody thought this was strange, because in this world, important actions and words should be repeated.

Everything this little girl did and said (and even thought) was important.

Why?

Because this little girl was the daughter of the King.

When the little girl grew up, she continued to say things twice.

She chose two suitors, and had two sets of shoes.

But then, on an important day, the little girl said only one thing.

"I will."

## Sir, We Would See Jesus

The preacher sat behind the pulpit, waiting. One of the congregation members was reading the Old Testament passage.

"For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground;"

The preacher looked at the little piece of cardboard, stuck to the back of the pulpit by his predecessor.

*Sir, we would see Jesus.*

"He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;"

The preacher gripped his own bible, sermon inside, and closed his eyes.

"... Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,"

*Sir, we would see Jesus.*

The preacher gripped harder as memories of past sins reared up.

"... And the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

*Sir, we would see Jesus.*

The preacher stood and spoke to them of Jesus.

## Alackaday

Tears fell down craggy lines in the King's face.

"Alackaday!"

He gripped the podium with those great sword-tempered hands, hands which had conquered the kingdom's enemies for the last thirty-five years.

"Of nothing were we, to come to such great heights.

"But nothing I would return to, that she might be returned to me!"

The crowd was silent, grieving as the King grieved.

His rose, his light, his wife and closest friend was dead.

Behind the King, where his retainers and loyal servants stood, Lady Veronica breathed out quietly.

*Finally.*

Veronica had to forcibly stop a smile from appearing on her lips.

*His hope is gone.*

The plans of a hundred years and more would soon see fruit.

*Vengeance.*

A people hunted to near extinction.

*The truth will out.*

The Southern Tribes would rise again.

*And I will be queen.*

## The Eye Of The Storm

The eye of the storm was not, as she had always heard, calm.

Stella closed her eyes for a moment before gazing again on the destruction that surrounded the remains of her home.

Man-sized clouds of lightning floated about, sending out deadly tendrils at any living thing which came within a small radius.

High up, her wings marking time - treading the air like water - Stella watched the edges of the storm.

From this point it seemed obvious that there was a single purpose behind the lightning-clouds.

*Oh. No.*

Stella turned in a circle.

The eye was shrinking. Toward her home. Toward her.

*That is what you get for loving and leaving the storm king.*

With a blur of her wings, Stella began to fly upwards. Faster.

*Now I have to find him again. Another adventure. Better pack light.*

## A Family Reunion

Hank was veteran police officer. He'd fought in the 'Natti Riots, shed blood against the Capital Killer, and busted open the deepest case of conspiracy in the government since that reporter had disclosed the identity of a few dozen Super Heroes.

Sitting in the car - a stakeout - with William was a pleasant enough experience. The young officer was eager to prove himself, and excited to be partnered with the legendary Hank "Steel Bones" Farris.

Hank grimaced at the name. He had no steel. All he could claim was that chaos and blood hounded him. That was his "blessing".

So they waited. And Hank knew the night would not end peacefully.

"Get ready son. Something is coming."

They got out of the car. The air was quiet.

"*FINALLY.*"

Hank grimaced. His family had arrived, after many long years.

"Odin."

## Robin Hood, Not That Man You Think

The truth of the matter is that Robin Hood was a thief, brigand and murderer.

Rabbich Hude never amounted to anything growing up. He was a poor scholar, a poor warrior, and a poor friend.

He betrayed his companions, sold his wife and then, fleeing the anger of his peers, joined the army.

Rabbich linked himself with a commanding officer through petty like-mindedness and skullduggery. He continued to ply his trade of secrets and lies, selling gold and goods and man alike.

So Rabbich became skilled, as he never was as a child.

He had mastered the art of seducing the mind.

Prince John - The Mighty One, John The White, Slayer of Dragons - was a king born to rule, but for the sting of one petty man. Robin Hood.

He is not the man you think he is.

## Fenrick The Dragon

The Dragon - whose name is far too short to repeat - snorted.

"Little manling, what are you but a moth? Fluttering about for a day and then become dust."

The man stood and watched the Dragon. He calmly met the eyes of the majestic and fearful creature.

"Tiny one, take care. Within me is the power of a star."

The man spoke without any fear.

"Fenrick Flametongue. You are called to answer the many claims of pillaging, destruction and murder most foul. On the fourth night of this moon, be here in your stedfast. We will come to you."

The man then turned and began the long walk out of the mountains, leaving Fenrick - see, short - the Dragon to contemplate his words.

Fenrick sighed. He unfurled his wings and flew upwards.

*They never imagine I'll just leave.*





## How Rugby Saved The Planet From Alien Zombies

The game of rugby union is the single greatest achievement of the human race. Forget the light-bulb. Forget the internet. You can even forget that social media app.

When the aliens landed in 2023, they weren't green, gangly, googly-eyed little men.

They were zombies.

And they wanted our brains.

War broke out quickly, there was no quarter given. Man against zombie, humans versus aliens.

And we were losing. Every battle more of us were dead, and more of them dropped from the heavens onto our planet.

One bright summer's eve, Battalion leader Gork Bloodmasher happened across a pub that was showing repeats of the 2019 Rugby World Cup. The final had been voted time and again the best game of any sport across the span of time.

And they were hooked. The war stopped, the battles ceased.

Zombies love rugby.

## Bram And The Gorilla

Fear.

*Whoever said that you need to conquer your fears never faced an angry ten-foot tall gorilla.*

Bram bent and dived away as the gorilla charged. But the movies lied. Combat didn't work like that.

The gorilla simply changed course, grabbed his leg and hauled Bram off the ground.

In a moment he was upside down watching massive fangs and razor-sharp teeth grinning at him, an inch or two from his face. The smell was unbearable.

Bram did the only thing he could think of. He screamed. A girly, high-pitched, ugly squeal.

The gorilla dropped Bram on his head, seemed to lose interest, and ambled off into the jungle.

*Well if that wasn't the strangest ...*

For the second time that day Bram felt hot, stinky, breath on his skin.

Turning slowly he came face-to-face with a gigantic wolf.

*Bollocks.*

## Love Is Not Emotion

They sat out under the stars and talked all night.

Towards the end - when words melted as the sun began its ascent - their hands met and linked together, fingers entwined.

Theirs was a new love, born of the joy and frailty of two souls meeting in youth.

There were many reasons why they shouldn't have married, why they shouldn't have shared that first kiss.

He was a nerd. She was a princess.

He loved comics. She dined with presidents and kings.

He wrote science-fiction movies. She starred in romantic comedies.

And yet, as with the best love stories, they covenanted to be one - together - until death did them part.

And when death came, swift and timely, they grasped hands.

Two folk, once young, now old.

Entwined. Beloved. Married. Covenanted.

Love is not emotion.

Love is *time*.

## Eshiel's Friday At The Scary Hill

The sun bleached out the colour of the sky.

*He was my friend.*

Eshiel had not wanted to go to the scary hill, but his father and mother had made it clear that they all would be going.

Eshiel had three sisters - Mary, Rebecca and Niah - and a younger brother, Mathias.

*He taught us about hope.*

The crowds dwindled. Some of the adults had jeered, throwing insults and rocks together. A few of the children too.

Eshiel and his siblings did not throw anything.

*He cries out.*

The sky darkened suddenly. Wind whipped and howled, appearing as from nowhere. The earth began to move.

The cacophony was more than sight and sound. It wrenched at Eshiel's chest, hurting the sad way.

*He drops His head.*

Dead. Dead. Dead.

*He said "Follow Me".*

Eshiel shut his eyes and cried.

## Eshiel's Sunday Of Good News

Eshiel was very sad. A heavy weight sat upon his little heart.

It was as though his family, his friends, his dog had all died and left him alone.

Heart-broken.

The family sat quietly in the house. Father and Mother whispering to one another.

The door burst open and a lady appeared, crying and laughing and talking all at once.

"He lives! He has risen!"

Father jumped up. "He has risen?"

The woman grinned and nodded vigorously. "Yes. We have seen Him. Touched Him. Heard Him."

Then she cried out. "HE HAS RISEN!"

Mother covered her mouth with her hands and began to cry, great sobs wracking her body. Father put his big arms around Mother, and looked at his children.

The family all came together, hugging, crying, laughing, praying.

Eshiel's heart was full of joy.

*He is risen indeed!*

## Buzz And The Ice Cream Drop

Buzz flew around the kitchen. He was bored.

The life of a fly had many highs - finding a pizza box, a dead kangaroo, spilt soda - but a clean kitchen was not one of them.

Gravity pressed down and Buzz felt its merciless effect on his tiny body, on his membranous wings.

*Curse you gravity.*

Spotting what looked like a drop of melted ice cream on the floor Buzz made his circular route downwards.

*Yes!*

Someone hadn't cleaned up the delicious sugary treat.

Buzz landed next to the sticky area and began snacking - a little here, a little there - until finally he went for it.

*Nothing like jumping right in.*

Unfortunately for Buzz, he got stuck and couldn't get out.

The lesson - for flies and humans - is that ice cream should always be cleaned up.

## The War That Turned On A Kiss

The turning point of the war was a kiss.

Teresa Fallow was a princess. Daughter of the King of the Nines.

Maddrick Poll was a knight, Captain Commander of the armies of the Redlands.

They met at a dance. They held hands a year later to the day.

Then the continent of Cammil erupted in war and they were on opposite sides, of the war and of the world.

"She is my love!" Maddrick thundered. It made no difference.

"He is my dear heart!" Teresa pleaded. It made no difference.

And so, through secret and mystery, they covenanted to meet together, a year to the day of holding hands.

Under the bright moonlight, amongst the trees in the sacred grove of snow lilies, they kissed.

The kiss ended the war.

How?

The kiss turned them and the armies into frogs.



## The Little House At The End Of A Little Road

There once was a little house, found at the end of a little road.

This little house was built by a husband and wife at the beginning of their marriage. They toiled for many hours, sawing, hammering, gluing and boiling the kettle.

They put their mailbox at the entrance to the little road. It read "Mr and Mrs Gilmore. Lovers of fine wine and other historical pursuits".

One day a tall man walked to the end of the little road and read the mailbox.

The tall man laughed as he knocked on the door of the little house.

Mrs Gilmore opened the door and her face blanched.

"Hello Mary. May I come in?"

The door slammed shut. The tall man tsked. Before setting out on the little road he scratched a mark on the mailbox.

*Another time. I will return.*

## The Boy Who Could See Methane

Hello. My name is Steve. And I can see methane.

It's not a super-power of choice. It's a curse really, when you think about it.

I mean, I see every single expulsion from the human body. Don't get me started on cows.

"It's a gift boy." In his gruff voice my father would try and encourage me.

*Some gift.*

For a while I began to go all "Doctor Evil", using my powers for the detriment of other people's dignity. Evil cackles and sniggers were in abundance.

Can you imagine what it's like to be able to know just who dealt it?

But today is the first day of a new job in a software development startup. We're going to change the world. Nobody here knows about my little ocular olfactory secret.

And no, I can't see my own gas. Thankfully.

## It's Hard For A Dragon To Find A Home

Fenrick sighed again.

He had been flying for many weeks now, ever since that pesky calm man had come and called him to account.

*They never think about how hard it is for a Dragon to find a home.*

Ahead was a line of mountains that showed some promise.

Dragons don't see cartography the same way as humans. Being able to fly has something to do with it, but mostly it's about the passage of time.

See, a Dragon can only be killed by great violence, or if they simply grow tired and give up their ghost.

Fenrick soared across the face of the mountains, over a village or two, and then he landed with a ground-shaking thump in front of a cave entrance.

*Oh.*

Ericka Heart-Breaker, a green-eyed monster of a Dragon, appeared.

*This could be painful.*

Fenrick sighed.

## A School Without Bullying

Have you ever been to a school where nobody made fun of you?

Now that would be something huh?

My mother used to say a school where nothing bad happened was a school without people. I guess that's true.

But Longshore's Preparatory Academy, Prepacad for short, was such a place.

At least, that's what I thought for the first few weeks.

If you were to peer under the surface you would discover something far different.

You see, down under the library sat a withered old woman. She didn't eat or drink, and she never spoke.

But she was the reason the school could boast it's impeccable record, high marks and prestigious alumni.

Margarite. Binder of souls. Dream Walker. The Silent Librarian.

How the school was freed is a long emotional story for another day, but today you have the beginning.

## A Thief In The Rain

The driver of the taxi stank. Not just a polite smell, but the disgusting smell of unwashed skin. Sweat layered upon sweat upon sweat.

*Nasty.*

Amanda wondered again why she was sitting in the taxi. Or rather, wondered whether what she was doing was the right thing.

*A ring of gold, a mask of bone and a book of lies.*

Three items of untold power and wealth, or so various heavyweights in the antiquities world believed.

It began to rain as the taxi slowed to a halt in front on the King's Hill museum.

Stepping out onto the curb Amanda tilted her face towards the sky.

*The rain feels so good. So ... natural.*

Amanda walked up the stairs to the museum entrance.

*Gold. Bone and Lies. Walk in, grab them, walk out.*

*Easy enough.*

Turns out it wasn't really.

## Professor Jones And The Importance Of A Subplot

"The main plot is important, but the subplots are just as vital in the scheme of creating a good story."

Professor Jones walked across the stage, looking out over his students.

"Too many writers, aspiring and paid, make the mistake of underestimating the importance of the subplot.

"For example, imagine a road. On the road walks a man and his dog. It's a large dog, perhaps some wolf blood in the family tree. The scene opens ..."

A student had put their hand up. Professor Jones stopped talking and motioned to the student.

"Professor, I was just wondering, what happens when the subplot becomes more important than the actual plot line?"

He laughed. "Lost?"

The class laughed.

"There are many examples in our world today. Keep an eye out. The truth is ..."

The students responded with gusto, "OUT THERE!".

## The Little Man With A Blocky Walk

The little man walked on unsteady legs across the bumpy ground.

His whole body leaned left, leg moving off the ground, then he leaned right. It was an almost-comical wooden dance.

The little man's thoughts were laced with fear and worry. Dismemberment, reanimation, eaten by gigantic monsters.

Ahead, along the bumpy ground, lay his house. Or at least, he thought it was his house.

Today there was a door. Yesterday there hadn't even been a roof.

The little man opened the door to his house and walked inside.

*Strange.*

A car steering wheel was attached to the floor.

*This is crazy. Why would I want a car steering wheel on the floor?*

The ground shuddered.

*Oh no.*

A massive hand appeared and picked up the little man.

A voice boomed, "Come on Fred, it's time to play with the Lego!"

## Scotland The Brave

"Light blossomed from beneath the statue. It sprang out of the ground in tiny shafts, bits and pieces, growing and emanating until the surrounding area was illuminated as day.

"The statue was of William Wallace.

"And that was the day he came back to save the Scots.

"Of course, for this to all make sense I need you to forget what you know of your own earth history. Easy enough right?

"Wallace never lost.

"That's right. He never lost at Falkirk, and that's where things will get a bit messy for you."

Drill-Seargent Jim Carrick Lawsson laughed. An evil-sounding cackle if you ever heard one.

"So, my little soldiers, you've stumbled into an alternate dimension. We don't care where you came from, who your mother or father is. And we certainly don't care about you.

"Welcome to Scotland the Brave."



## Me And My Light Brown Van

"Have patience, have patience,"

The song was being sung towards the back of my head, in a place I couldn't easily squash it.

Traffic was bad today. The rain pelted down and at angle, making the windshield of my car a barely penetrable by the eye wall of liquid.

Cars ahead. Cars behind. Cars to my left, to my right.

Why do we do this day in and out?

A taxi, ahead of me and to the right, suddenly veered into my lane.

It was obvious that breaking would cause the car behind to crash, and there were no spaces to the left of me.

Nothing for it then.

I reached into *that place* and pulled the car upwards.

Me and my light brown van soared above the traffic.

*I guess this is why I do it. What about you?*

## The Collins Crime

Detective Daine Stevens surveyed the crime scene.

Mr Collins, the husband of Mrs Collins, lay face down on the tiles of the foyer in their mansion. Ragged cuts across his back, legs broken, placed at strange angles.

*Perhaps he fell down the stairs.*

Brown's voice rang from up the stairs.

"Daine."

There was no need for him to say Daine would "want to see this". They had been working together long enough that a simple call was enough.

Daine took the stairs slowly, two at a time. Carefully.

Detective Brown stood at the entrance of the bathroom. As Daine approached the room he stepped out of the way.

The first thing Daine saw was Mrs Collins. Dead.

The second thing Daine saw was the writing on the large ornate mirror.

*The Shadow King Rises.*

Not good. Not good at all.

## Love And The Battlefield

Juss growled as his horse shuddered.

Around him was the carnage that battle is. Blood and chaos, death marching and gathering to his company.

Juss belted the man in front with his hammer, *Uresheim*. It meant "Your Time Is Now". Juss did not like it, but a prince must abide by his father's demands.

Uresheim had been a gift for his twenty-first birthday. Juss had then devoted himself to mastering the weapon, regardless of his feelings.

And so, Juss the High Prince of Garrick, Kings Clan, wielded Uresheim to the dismay of enemies.

*All except her.*

A brown-cloaked horseman appeared, swinging his sword at Juss.

Thinking of that blasted woman had nearly cost him his life, or at the very least a limb.

Juss grunted as he let the sword hit his shield.

*Love has no place on the battlefield.*

## Larry And The RockChewer

Larry the worm moved through the earth.

Although he did not have legs, he felt that if he had his calves would be burning, his feet would be sore, and his thighs would be chaffing.

Larry could feel an itch on his neck. Well, on his back. It was that itch, probably latent telepathic ability, which said he was being followed.

He sensed a rock up ahead and made to detour around it.

*No, hold on. I could get a glimpse of what's behind me.*

He carried on, as though not noticing then wiggled underneath and directly behind the fist-sized rock.

Larry waited.

And waited.

The rock shuddered, and a gigantic creature passed by.

*Phew. A RockChewer. Good thing he's not hungry.*

Larry waited a good ten minutes before continuing on his way home.

The itch was still there.

*Great.*

## Tommy The Bug

Tommy was a bug. A big hairy audacious bug.

He loved his life. It was awesome. Flying about, touching things, leaving festy germs everywhere. The sort of thing bugs do.

But there was one thing Tommy loved best above all else.

Tommy loved to eat.

He would eat three times a day, or more! Breakfast, lunch and dinner. Elevenses. Oneses. Fiveses and Midnight snacks.

One day at the gates a tall handsome figure arrived.

Kaerig the Bug Hunter.

Tommy wasn't scared. He'd fooled Kaerig before. But that had been months ago. Kaerig looked like he'd come a long way since then.

Tommy flew away and hid. Kaerig tracked him and found him.

Tommy escaped again, by the hair of his chinny-chin chin. But again Kaerig tracked him down.

And with extreme prejudice, Tommy, a piece of rogue code, was squashed.

## Longing For Sleep

Sleep.

Belle knew that things were bad when she couldn't remember the last time sleep had comforted her. It had been at least a week ago.

How could the body endure such a time?

*I have to sleep. But they'll be there.*

Bone-weary, Belle stumbled over the rocks, upwards, ever upwards. The hillside was fast becoming *mountaintaneous*.

The word made her laugh a little, although a strange cackle was the only sound that came out. Years ago, when everything had been different, she had come up with the word on a driving trip with the family.

Lost and lonely in the mountains, Belle Tallahas hadn't met a single person in weeks now. And because of the dreams - those fearful dreams - she hadn't slept in days.

*Where are you Dad?*

Belle fell down and wept. Then slept. Without dreams.

## Cheryl's Musical Nature

The music blared loud, almost crushing Cheryl's mind with its force. Implanted within her, not from any set of headphones or speakers.

*It's in me, within, surrounding, encompassing.*

The music - suddenly quiet, haunting, melancholy - did not hurt as much as tear and rend at the heart.

*I'm breaking apart.*

The music - now pulsing with energy like the sun - threatened to burst forth into the surroundings, the class that sat around her unknowingly.

*In their eyes I'm already strange. But am I strange because of the music, or is the music part of my strangeness? How can I hear it?*

Questions that had been a part of her as long as the music. Questions Cheryl had no answer for.

The music - loud, soft, pulsing, heart-breaking, uplifting - mixed all together, discordant and harmonious at once.

*Help.*

## Win Or Lose, Today We Fight!

*Focus.*

General Liam Whittaker - the third of his name, but not his rank - surveyed the ground below him.

Sitting high on his warhorse, Hawkeye, the view was clear across the gentle hills.

His battlefield! The thought was fierce.

*Momentum.*

Arriving first was of great importance, even if his fighting men and women were a little tired. The strategic value was so vital that, even against superior numbers - sometimes *especially* against such numbers - the battle would turn in his favour.

*Concentration of Force.*

Whittaker worked over the strategy once more, even as the soldiers were swiftly moving into position.

The stream a mile away would be the first contact. That hill over there would be scouts, making themselves seen. And here, from his hill, this would be where the charge started.

*Win or lose, today we fight!*



## The Funeral Of William Brown

Detective Daine Stevens stood at the back of the crowded church.

William Brown had been his partner, his friend ... His brother in many ways. They had shared food, trials and tribulations, blood and sweat and tears.

His face, in contrast with every other face in the church, was clear of any salty tears.

Brown had been loved by many people. His grace and charm won over hearts easily, and he had been selfless with family and friends.

But Daine could not mourn, not right now.

*They are here, amongst the crowd.*

The people who had murdered Brown had sent him word that they would attend.

The letter had simply said, "We will honor our enemy with presence".

*Perhaps they do not fear me. More fool them.*

Detective Daine Stevens closed his eyes and bowed his head.

"Our Father ..."

## Sung A Little One

*Starlight. Star. Bright.*

Glistening with sweat, Boranadorous Melkiridale Fes bent over, breathing hard.

Looking back, over the trees, the black smoke piled higher and higher into the sky.

*My people. My family.*

"Sung a little one. Over the hills, far away. Sung a great long song. Under the hills, right unnnn-derrr."

Boran jumped. So close. How could she be so close.

She - the Monster under beds, the Lady who never dreams, the Fairy Who Walks - had butchered every one of his family, every one of his village, and laughed while watching Boran run.

"Sung a little one. Boooooorrrrrrrraaaaaannnnnnnnn."

*She comes.*

Boran stopped. He would end this now, one way or another.

"Come out monster. Come out, come out, where-ever you are."

And the Lady came out.

And the battle was fought.

And the victor sang a little one.

## Daddooo!

"Daddooo!"

The cry of joy greeted my husband as he walked through the door.

Our seventh, still a baby, waddled forward with speed to her father, giggling and grinning and more cries of "Daddooo!".

Jim picked up Roza in his arms as the other kids swarmed in.

*We are so very blessed.*

Later - as the kids were cleaning their teeth, helping the younger ones, bickering back and forth - we talked in the kitchen.

"It's so different hon," I'd been stirred up that day at playgroup, comments about raising kids from people with one child, people who send their children to daycare four or more days a week. "It seems like our choices veer further and further from the rest of our world."

Jim folded me in a big hug.

"That's not a bad thing baby."

*So very blessed.*

## Mr Kingwelder Brings Hope

"Here lies one who died of apathy. Not his own, but others."

Charlie imagined his gravestone would say something like that.

Since he could remember Charlie had faced apathy. He loved to create things. He loved to take apart machines and put them back together better than before. He grew in skill and stature, making wonderful objects, building works of art.

But nobody saw him.

Apathy.

Now Charlie had a different life. He lived in a city with millions of other folk. He worked for a company, entering data all the day long.

Then, on a rainy overcast day, an email arrived.

"Charlie, I met your father at a conference last week, and he showed me one of your designs and the object itself. I'd like to talk. - Reginald Kingwelder, CEO King Maker Enterprises, Fortune 500, Revealer of Dreams."

## Tell Me How Can Music Listen?

Music drifted across the face of the wind.

Long notes of string plucked against wooden boxes, constructed with diligence and the utmost care.

Here and there, over the bridge and under the rainbow, the music halted for a moment. And the music listened.

You might now ask - and quite rightly so - "Tell me then, how can music listen?"

Notes and chords, dots and strokes - mixed together on harp and lute and lyre. Tambourine shakes as guitar strums. Piano keys as violin draws.

Music listens because the nature of sound is to cause vacuum in it's absence.

Music listens because - in the end - there is nothing else for it to do. Once composed, once played, once heard and felt, music claims the space between sound and listens.

What does it listen for?

*A reply in kind.*

## The Fear Of Fenrick

It is said - by village paupers and city magistrates alike - that Dragons know no fear.

*Bollocks*, said Fenrick to himself. *Plenty of fear in me now.*

The truth of the matter is twofold.

First. Dragons do know fear.

And second, far more intriguing, is that they know the day of their death.

Fenrick perched atop the mountain, surveying the village below him.

He had arrived a year ago, after that nonsense to the far south.

He had arrived, but someone was waiting. A little one, tinier than usual.

*A child.*

She had watched the great Dragon land, dust and leaves billowing everywhere. She had stood there ... *Now there was fearlessness.*

And then the little girl had said hello.

So now, with the day of his death approaching, Fenrick feared. For loss. Heartache. And for the little girl.

## What Brendan Knows

"I feel like God has abandoned us. Does He hear our prayers?"

*Careful. Even though you treat yourself with brutal honesty, your wife is a precious jewel to be loved with grace and compassion.*

Tears streamed down Helen's face.

*Such a beautiful face.*

Brendan wanted to take her in his arms. He wanted to whisper things will be okay, everything will be okay.

But he didn't know what the Lord had planned. He didn't treat himself to any trite sympathies. God is Sovereign. His will always happens.

*Oh Lord God. Please ... Please save us from this misery. From this situation of our own making. We are nothing.*

The moment continued, clinging in the air.

Brendan moved across the space between them and wrapped arms around his wife.

"He works all things for our good. That is all I know."

## The Battle Joined

Fifteen men thundered across the ground towards the enemy. Bloodlust and fire were in their eyes, their hearts pounding fast.

Five or six of them focused in on the point of impact.

The signal had reached its apex and the trajectory was laid plain.

It would strike ... *There*.

Nathan watched carefully as he rushed forward, trusting in his instinct but also calculating.

The ball would be caught by that big tall fellow. They'd shaken hands a few minutes before, looked into each other's eyes and saw no quarter given. At least, Nathan had seen it. He hoped the other had seen something of the same in his eyes.

**\*\*CRASH\*\***

The next few seconds stretched, longer than normal. Nathan took the tall player in the sweet spot, directly under the arm, in the ribs.

**\*\*CRUNCH\*\***

Nathan ploughed forward, bellowing.

"DDDRRRRIIVVVVEEEE!!!!!"



## As Life Flashes Past

"Oh."

Blink.

*The wedding bells rang out. The preacher spoke of Christ and His love. The rice was surprisingly soft.*

Time slowed immediately.

*Jasmine Hunter, born on a cold day in June. Beautiful eyes. Her mother's eyes.*

Arching upwards while turning, the dashboard came into focus. Adam had never noticed the hairline cracks.

*Davey had taken his first steps that afternoon, giggling with delight.*

Downward now, still turning.

*Jasmine on the steps of school. Davey, Lockey and Becca standing with Susan.*

A long way down. The rocks and water were visible out of the glass.

*Susan putting out the washing.*

Still downward, still turning.

*Lockey on his wedding day.*

Close now.

*Becca's funeral.*

The force was colossal, coming just before a great crack blew through his hearing.

Adam woke, sweat and fear mingling together in his nostrils.

*Was I dreaming?*

## **Ferocious Pete, The Fiercest Man In The East**

"But Mum, come on!"

Ferocious Pete was a Mummy's Boy.

Not in a weak sense. In a sweet caring way.

Ferocious Pete, the Fiercest Man in the East, loved his Mum.

Right now however, his Mum was being a tad annoying.

"You can't leave now. There's a million things to do. We've got the Imperials to harry, the Colonials to betray and the Loyalists to meet head on. It will be a busy week. And ..."

His mother, beautiful still at ninety years of age, watched her son with a mixture of compassion and toughness.

"And I need you Mum."

Raising her hand to his face required effort, but most things worth doing did.

"You are my Pete."

And with a sigh the mother of Ferocious Pete, Fiercest Man in the East, left her little boy alone in the world.



## The Problem With Letting Off Steam

"Yes Sir."

The older man - balding, with a slight paunch, skin red and angry-looking - didn't stop.

"And furthermore!" He almost screamed the last word, a strange accentuation, probably designed to attract the attention of anyone with headphones who hadn't heard my already-loud public humiliation.

"You won't ever amount to anything much at all, you impudent little boy." Mr Erickson's mouth quivered with rage, and his eyes bulged.

I gripped my books a little tighter, and nodded. "Yes Sir."

My own anger boiled away in my head, not far off the surface. Was I fooling anyone? Why shouldn't I just let him have it?

I knew the answer, but I sometimes didn't like it.

*Because humility comes before honor.*

Of course life got a bit stranger a minute or so later when Mr Erickson transformed into a giant caterpillar.

## Children And Parents

*No child will fully please their parents.*

*No parent will always be pleased with their children.*

As David wrote on the blackboard in front of the class, he listened to the chatter.

"Dad is such a loser. Making a big deal because I got caught with ..."

"My Mum thinks she is so cool. But I know about ..."

And then the noise quietened, dying down to bleak silence.

David glanced up from the board as he finished the last sentence, the last word, "Blessing".

Principal Dour was, well, a dour man. Tall and grim. His eyes said "no smiling", the thin line of his mouth said "no talking".

"David." He nodded slightly.

"Dad." I returned the slight nod.

"Please attend me in my office when you next can."

*Alas, it's true indeed. No child will fully please their parents.*

## Proudblood's Revenge, Part 1

I don't like going back to earth. Too many memories.

Here there is some protection. There, it's all raw flesh and bleeding edges.

My name is James White, and I catch bad guys.

Sand whirled about my legs as I walked towards the oasis. I was in the desert, west of the Kotor Highlands. Sand and wind was to be expected.

This oasis had a Gate. And the escaped prisoner had not long gone through.

He was a tricky one, a shifter. Most people would see a face much the same as their own, a body like theirs, right up until the shifter exploded into violence, shedding blood and bringing death.

This was my job, what I do. Fighting and catching - sometimes killing - bad guys.

And Thomas Nallahan Proudblood was a bad guy.

I stopped before the Gate.

## Proudblood's Revenge, Part 2

The Gate was made out of sandstone, laced with silver and gold. Silver to bind and gold to hold firm and fast.

The sandstone would be kept whole, the connection pure, as long as both metals and the symbols made with them were present.

At least that was the lore I'd managed to piece together over the last few years.

Removing the gold and silver, disrupting them, wouldn't remove the Gate. Even breaking up the sandstone wouldn't stop a Gate from *being* there. However, a Gate that lost its structure was not a safe place to be around.

Recently I'd come across a book, more a collection of notes, which proposed that the Gates were all connected to one another.

*Needs investigating.*

Gripping my staff hard enough to bring a little pain to my hand, I stepped through the Gate.

## Proudblood's Revenge, Part 3

Moving through a Gate is an ability. Most people, either here or on Earth, will simply walk through one as if it were not there. Like walking through a doorway. An arch or a wardrobe (yes, you know what I'm talking about).

Nobody I've talked to knows exactly what gives someone the ability to use Gates. But there it is. I can use them. So, apparently, could Thomas.

Gates are powerful. Not just because of the energies that make them, but because of what they represent. Transport between places, between worlds. This one went between here and Earth.

Gates are dangerous. It's best to avoid them, and I usually have no problem with that. As I said earlier, I don't like going to Earth. Too many memories.

Light. Then suddenly I was through, standing in the middle of a graveyard.



## Proudblood's Revenge, Part 4

Rain splattered on the stones, on the grass, on the flowers left by beloved ones. Earth.

Thomas stepped into view.

"Hello James. Good to see you."

He was standing beside a gravestone I knew, his hand resting on it lightly. Then he slapped the stone.

"You remind me of him, your grandfather. Big."

I willed my suddenly rising anger to subside. Nothing good would come from that rage boiling inside.

"Step away from his grave."

Thomas smiled and went on as though he hadn't heard.

"We were friends once. Good friends. Fought together against the Keepers a few times."

Huh. I didn't know a lot about my grandfather's past. But I did know that he had had a big influence on me.

"Step away from his grave. Put up your hands."

Thomas laughed.

"I have an offer for you James."

## Proudblood's Revenge, Part 5

*An offer?*

I started to speak, but he put his hand up.

"Now just hear me out. I'm not going anywhere."

He smirked.

"I'd like you to join me."

I waited.

"There are people who want you dead, that's obvious. There are many things about you, special things, which cause fear and loathing in others. Not the least of these is your apparent inability to wield magic. You have a pedigree and bloodline few dream of."

*That didn't make any sense. I was an alien to the other place, come from Earth. Born on Earth.*

"There are other people who want you very much alive."

He patted the gravestone.

"We want you to join us. There is a war coming, just like in all the stories. Battles will be joined, blood will be shed, and we shall all be changed."

## Proudblood's Revenge, Part 6

Typical. A mish-mash of epic fantasy speak and biblical verse. That sort of thing used to be like an adrenaline surge for my imagination.

Thomas continued.

"If you let me, I'll take you to see a man. It is to him that you would have to pledge. To be employed under."

I laughed. It wasn't a happy laugh either.

"That's enough. There isn't a chance in any world or reality that I would join you."

Thomas's voice quavered ever so slightly.

"Oh, I don't know about that."

I grinned. A lifeless rictus that didn't touch my eyes.

"I do. Without doubt. I work for one who is higher up the chain. Actually, right at the top of the chain. And He does not ask of me to sign my soul away to created beings."

Red anger blossomed in Thomas's eyes.

## Proudblood's Revenge, Part 7

"Fool." Thomas was no longer genial. "You still signed your soul away."

I shrugged. "I am created. He is Creator."

"Boy," The word was dripping with venom. "So secure. You know, I enjoyed killing Enoch. Grace was more difficult, but she made her decision a long time ago."

My heart stopped, skipped, and motored into overdrive. My eyes squeezed a little tighter as I tried very hard to control myself.

"They died in a ... It doesn't matter. Step away. I won't tell you again."

Thomas put his hands up in a supplicating fashion, and moved away from the gravestone.

I knew the words engraved on that stone by heart.

*Here lies Enoch White. A meeker man there was not. Here lies Grace White. Truest of name, she lived by faith.*

Memories rose unbidden. I fought them tooth and nail.

## Proudblood's Revenge, Part 8

Moving closer I readied my staff. Thomas could move very quick, but neither he or any other shifter I'd met had been my equal in combat.

Thomas didn't move quickly. He stepped away at the same speed I came toward him. Then he turned and went toward the graves of my most beloved ones.

"Do not go near them. No. Stop. Now."

My anger was rising, and controlling it was like trying to stop the tide with little sand moats. It had been four years ago I'd stumbled from Earth into the other place, amidst the funeral of my wife and children. Four years since my heart was ripped and torn asunder.

Thomas stopped by Brook's grave.

"I was promised my revenge. But only if I delivered the offer. Are you sure you won't consider joining us, our illustrious company?"

## Proudblood's Revenge, Part 9

The notion was unthinkable. Tying myself to them would be to reject all that I believed in. I took the manacles out of a pocket.

"Bind yourself."

I threw the manacles, specially made with spellbound oak and steel, and Thomas caught them deftly. He pushed his left wrist into them, and I heard the click.

He closed his eyes for a moment, before speaking.

"Enoch was no good for her. Your grandmother should have chosen me. I loved her like no-one else."

The anger enveloped his face instantly.

"I hated Enoch for that, in the end. She should have chosen me!"

Thomas began looking around. The change in him was scary. One moment he had been cool and in control, the next jabbering on the edge of memories lost.

"Put the manacles on."

Thomas laughed at me again, loud cackling.

## Proudblood's Revenge, Part 10

It wasn't a clever or haughty laugh. It was edged in madness.

"Fool! I was promised my revenge! Revenge upon his bloodline. Upon all that the fool held dear."

He stopped and caressed Brook's gravestone. My own anger roared back to the surface. My left hand curled into a fist, and my right gripped the staff tight.

"Get away from her."

Thomas stopped his hand.

"They died slowly."

White light exploded in my head. Afterwards I deconstructed what had happened, but at the time it was white and nothing else. Noise and sight left me. The rage, the passion, the anger consumed me. I was screaming, surely. My body screamed.

A door, some kind of locked thing, opened in my mind. Immediately I became aware of more, a well of power within. Deep and moving strong, like a mighty river.

## Proudblood's Revenge, Part 11

I did not hesitate, but pulled in as much of the river of power as I could. More and more, further, deeper. More.

And then a tiny infinitesimal portion escaped.

The explosion lifted me off my feet and hurled me across the graveyard.

After a time - minutes or hours I had no clue - I groggily stood. No bones were broken, but there were plenty of scrapes and bruises. My head was pounding fit to break.

As my vision cleared, I saw Thomas. He sat slumped against Brook's gravestone. Unmoving. Blood was pouring from his nose, a cut on his forehead. His left forearm was snapped, white bone poking through flesh. His face and arms and legs were already bruising. Black and blue and bloody.

*Here lies Thomas Nallahan Proudblood. Murderer of ... Stop.*

I forced the thought away.



## Proudblood's Revenge, Part 12

I went and found my staff, then picked Thomas up with a grunt and hauled him over my shoulder.

He'd been right about me being like my grandfather. Big. Big enough to carry a shifter, whose mass was more than what it looked.

Turning to where the Gate was open, shimmering brightly, I began walking.

A lot had just happened. I'd need time to process it, to deal with it. Or to bury it.

I turned back and looked at the graves. Brook lay here. The kids lay here. Grandpa and Grandma lay here.

*Why am I leaving Earth?*

It was the first time back since being ripped away at the funeral. It should have been momentous.

*This isn't home anymore. My home is there.*

I stepped through the Gate.

My name is James White, and I catch bad guys.

## I'm Watching You All

I moved my head slowly to the left.

The place was massive. Three or four stories high, pallets and crates, boxes and cartons.

Food. Clothes. Electronics.

You could buy almost anything in this shop. This ... Colossus to modern society's all-consuming need for BIG.

Far be it said that the human race would examine itself from time-to-time.

Me though, all I did was examine. Everything within my sphere of vision - impaired as I was - recorded, analysed and reported.

A girl, young and frail-looking, stuffed a packet of peanut-butter cups into her schoolbag.

A woman pushed one of the big trolleys found here, two babies squalling in the double seats.

An old man shuffled along, his cane tapping. Tap. Shuffle. Tap. Shuffle.

I moved my head slowly to the right.

My red light blinked.

*Yes. I'm watching you all.*

## Back To The Mud

The battle raged, moving across the field - this way and that.

The grail - that prize which meant so much, without it you could not win - had changed sides many, many times.

The muddy ground came up to meet his face with alarming speed. He was being driven, propelled by his companions into the fray - right into the teeth of the enemy.

But driven downwards, into the mud.

*Back to the mud*, although not the same as that author meant.

Wriggling and turning, he managed to get at an angle so that his face would not be underwater. Breathing was good.

The grail fell and rolled out, landing to his left.

He could do nothing.

He was on the bottom of a ruck, and the laws of rugby were clear.

No playing the ball on the ground.

## My Home Is Gone

"My home is gone."

The words spilled out of Prince David, Whitesword of the Anakethi people. His heart was breaking, and only this woman before him could help.

"Will you help me?"

The woman, silver highlighting deep auburn hair, smiled at David.

"Of course I will. You are my child. And you are the prince. Soon to be king.

"Of course I will help you."

David nodded, and began to discuss his plans, his dreams.

As the sun rose the next morning David sat at the edge of the cliff, looking over the lands that were his by birth.

Lands that were infested with the enemy.

Janson walked over and spat over the cliff.

"Puking Blackened. We need to get down there, start the revolution."

David grinned up at his friend.

"Aye. The journey begins, and we change the world!"

## The Light Beckons

The rain pummeled into Jackson as he lay on the road. Sheets of falling water criss-crossed on and around him.

Water lay on the black tar and gravel, causing a strange reflection of the street light.

It pulsed and beckoned.

Blood leaking from his wounds dissolved into the water on the road.

The light pulsed and beckoned.

The sound of the traffic, of horns and sirens, of people screaming and yelling came back into focus.

The rain continued to fall.

The reflected light pulsed.

The world had gone mad. Great beasts tearing and rending. Strange black-robed figures commanding hordes of shuffling corpses. Red-soaked violence that came through a rift between worlds.

The pooling of red-tinged water around Jackson shone and rippled the reflected light.

It beckoned.

Jackson smiled a little.

An old world called to him. He was going home.

## Rab The Super Spy

The wind shrieked at Rab as he leapt across the top of the train carriages, two shadows chasing close behind.

Bad enough they had spotted him as the door had been opened by the steward. Bad enough they had slaughtered Toddy, his rookie partner. On top of it all, it was night.

And in the night there are worse monsters than enemy spies.

Dark shapes began to appear, loping alongside the racing train.

How could they move so incredibly fast?

The dire wolves howled with the thunder and wind that swept and buffeted the men on the top of the speeding train.

Rab leapt sideways, grabbing the edge of the carriage roof and swung down, crashing through the glass window below.

A spy living in a world where fairy tales are very real.

Ethan Hunt never had it so good.

## Hiding In Plain Sight

Barrack laughed, "Boy, do you think me a fool? There hasn't been a worg in our lands since Orbalok hunted down Shael."

Lance glared at his father. "I saw the woman ... Veer. She became a gigantic silver wolf."

Barrack looked out over those gathered in the village hall. He took a brief moment, gauging their mood. A little fear, courage, some anger. And somewhere - he sniffed, testing the faint whisper - somewhere in this room was the smell of female wolf.

'Alright Son. Take your blooded and see what you can track. And boy," Barrack eyeballed his son. "If a worg exists, we want it alive for questioning."

A sly grin appeared on Lance's youth-stubbled face.

"Perhaps there are others."

Barrack watched his son.

He suspects.

The truth would out, eventually. Barrack's time as chief was drawing to a close.

## Staying Quiet

*Shhh.*

My eyes blinked open. Light was streaming in from the window.

I was awake. Sitting in bed, wide-awake.

This in itself was strange, given how long it usually takes me to get into gear after a night's sleep.

*Shhh.*

Eliza was still sleeping next to me. Stopping-my-heart-beautiful as always.

Sounds from down the hall. The kids would have been up for a while.

*Shhh.*

Memory of dream, fading and smokey, slipped around my mental fingers. There was a spectre, a shadowy figure, cowled and cloaked.

*Shhh.*

I got up and walked out into the hallway. The noise in the lounge room stilled. That should have warned me.

*Shhh.*

Tall, very tall, the cloaked and cowled figure stood at the far side of the room.

"Hello Ronan. You really should have stayed quiet."

Oh. No.

I should have stayed quiet.



## I Was Dreaming

**I was dreaming.**

The heavy clouds opened and rain sluiced down. Lightning ran jagged across the skies, thunder booming impossibly loud.

Can you escape a dream?

The storm raged around me, around the tower I was imprisoned on top of. Firstly, I just had to figure out how to undo the chains and magic glue that bound me in place.

**I was dreaming.**

Also, being atop a very large metal spire in a storm wasn't very healthy. Lightning rod anyone?

*Thooooom.*

The tower vibrated like it had been kicked with a very big foot.

**I was dreaming.**

A clawed hand appeared over the edge of the tower and a shaggy bear-like figure pulled itself up, growling.

The rain washed over me.

I could feel the lightning strike building.

The tower shook, and it creaked loud.

**I was dreaming.**

I hoped.

## The Nasal King

Nasal.

The word appeared in Ken's mind as he listened to His Majesty Jesual Forkia the Fourth, High King of All Known Lands, Commander of Every Sea, Lord Bastion of the High Slopes.

Jesual had another name, used in taverns and markets. The Blackheart.

Jesual Forkia was ruthless, petty, arrogant and volatile.

But tonight Ken found the king's voice unbearable. It was as though the King had a crimp on his vocal chords. His words came out of his nose as much as his mouth.

Ken let his mind wander.

Representatives from most of the princedoms had arrived.

Tonight was to be the spark that lit revolution throughout the lands.

Freedom from the vices brought by Jesual Forkia.

An end to his tyranny, his malefic rule.

And a blessed silence from his nasal voice.

That was something worth fighting for.

## The Justice Band Of Avenging Mutants

Jeb let his power spring forth. A spear of ice flew across the road, missing the tree monster by a fair margin.

*Why can't I get this right?*

Nathan sprang vertical, and the charging behemoth missed him. Then he overbalanced, careening down toward the ground in a mess of arms and legs.

*We trained for this. What is so wrong with me?*

Marian bubbled into a gaseous form just as a wraith-like assassin tried to skewer her.

*Wow, that was close.*

Brin hugged her knees, cowering down behind rubbish bins. The thoughts of everything around deafening her mind.

*Is this what I do then? Hear all the violent intent while doing nothing? Some hero.*

In little more than a year they would be known as the Justice Band of Avenging Mutants.

But right now they were getting their butts kicked.

## Pivot, Crux, Center

Time is a line.

It began.

It will end.

Marked with ups and downs, the rise and fall, the writ of this creation, yet it continues to march to the drumbeat.

One. Two. Three.

There was beginning. Life sprung from Word.

There is end. The straight rolled up like a carpet.

And there was, importantly, a middle. A crux. A turning point.

Messiah.

Wholly man, wholly God.

Born that blessed day.

Hosts surround. Hosts around. Hosts sing glory-luia.

He lives. He loves. His people and His Father.

He speaks. He heals. He casts out sin and darkness.

He bleeds. He bows. He conquers death at calvary.

He lays. He rises. He shows to all who see.

He leaves. His Spirit. To guide and to protect.

He sits. He rules. He comes again to judge.

The pivot. Crux. The center.

Messiah.

## Five Strikes Of The Bell

The breeze stirred up dust, swirling around the horse's feet as it walked along the road.

Ahead was the town, Justice.

*Clang.*

The town bell rang.

Saul rode in to the town. Justice was not a peaceful place.

The door of the local store slammed shut as his horse walked down the main street.

*Clang.*

A group of men and women tumbled out of the saloon, the doors clattering loudly with their passing.

They were laughing and cursing.

*Clang.*

Saul's horse stopped with a little pressure through the knees.

The revelers stopped also, straightening, all traces of laughter gone.

*Clang.*

Saul grimaced and spat to his left. "Leave. Now."

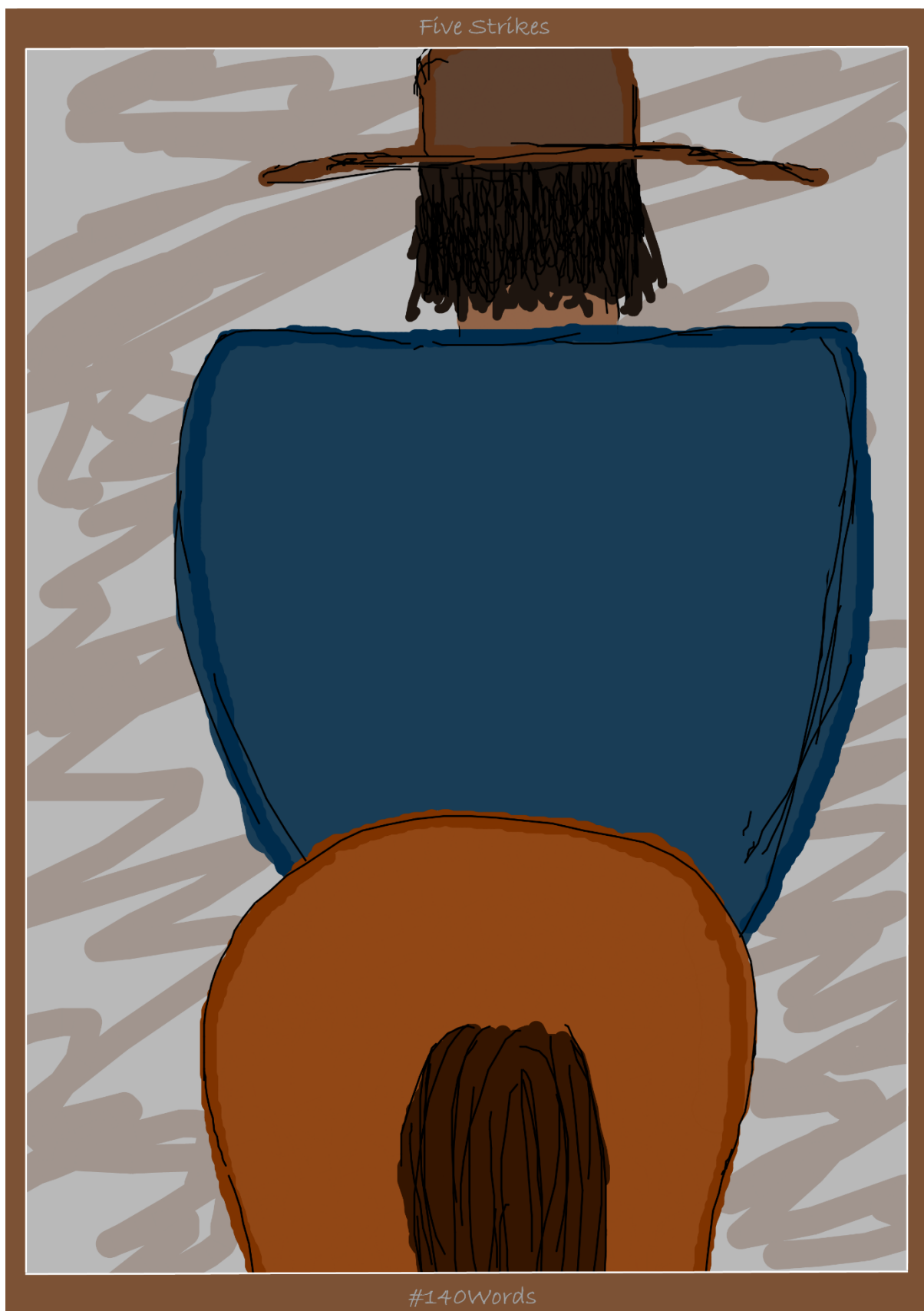
A small woman, thin and hard, grunted. "Saul the Nail, King's Weapon. Let us be."

*Clang.*

Five o'clock. Five strikes of the bell. Prophesied.

"No."

And with that, the fight began.



## The Shadow King Rises

Once-Detective Daine Stevens rubbed at his eyes. Sleep was clamoring, but he couldn't rest.

The stench of stale sweat and leather hung in the air.

*The Shadow King rises.*

No longer in the police force, Daine Stevens had dropped off the radar.

Brown was dead. Elaina lost. Ben and Meyling had been turned.

*The Shadow King rises.*

It had all started with the big brother case, so long ago now. Investigating murder in a house with cameras everywhere.

Nolan Meekes.

*The Shadow King rises.*

And now Stevens waited, crouched in darkness at the back of a small gym. A front for trafficking of various things, which was itself a front for something even more dangerous.

Tonight Meekes and the others hope to bodily raise the Shadow King, bringing untold bloodshed.

Once-Detective Daine Stevens was going to stop them.

Or else.

## Ronny The Rain Maker

Ronny the Rain Maker grew up in a little suburb on the outskirts of a big city where it never ever rained.

Rain is quite important. You think about *not* rain.

One day, an old lady arrived in their little community. She moved slowly down the street and approached his group of friends.

There was Timothy Bucknall, Roger Stevenson, David Ruglian and Evan Loganshire. Solid boys, loyal and steadfast friends.

To Timothy she gave a blue feather. He flew away.

To Roger she gave a rock. He pushed over a mountain.

To David she gave a book. He invented anti-matter transporters.

To Evan she gave a Turtle. He walked with animals.

To Ronny she gave a bottle of dirty water. There was mud and sticks and little swimming insects in it.

From that day on Ronny could call down rain.



## A Veritable Feast Of Muddy Puddles

Grady, Elsie, Ava, Fielding and Isolde loved muddy puddles.

They were brothers and sisters who lived in a house somewhere near where the mountains met the sea.

Grady loved to understand muddy puddles.

Elsie loved to float things in muddy puddles.

Ava loved to pour more water into muddy puddles.

Fielding loved to build dams around muddy puddles.

Isolde loved to watch muddy puddles.

And they all loved nothing more than jumping in muddy puddles.

One day it began to rain. There were muddy puddles everywhere!

A puddle to understand. A puddle to float things in. A puddle to pour water into. A puddle to build a dam around. A puddle to watch.

Grady and Elsie and Ava and Fielding and Isolde jumped in the muddy puddles until Mummy called them in for dinner.

It was the best day ever.

## Shelter For the Night

Joe and his father were tidying up the common room of the inn when there was a knock on the heavy front door.

All the rooms were full. There was a census happening. "Counting people," His father said.

Joe stood quietly as his father opened the door.

It was a husband and wife. There was something about the lady. She held her tummy, and rubbed it. A little baby grew inside.

His father shook his head, sadly. There was no room in the inn.

Joe knew he might get into trouble, but it didn't seem important.

"They could sleep in the stables Father."

His father nodded.

"Yes. It's not much, you'll be with the animals. But it's shelter for the night."

The man gripped Joe's fathers arm strongly. His arms were muscled, and his hands rough.

"Thank you. Thank you."

## The Terrible Twos

As Billy, Sara, Timmy and Mikey ran amok through the playground, an argument between parents was overheard.

"You need to smack that kid."

"Smacking? That's barbaric, cruel and the lowest form of discipline."

"Discipline is a bad word."

"That's because you were never properly disciplined yourself."

"You can so reason with a child."

"Forget discipline and reasoning, kids will be kids. Let them find out themselves."

"Ouch. What kind of life did you have?"

"Right. That's it. You all have no idea what it's like to ..."

"What? Be a parent? Come on."

"I have more kids than you."

"That other Mum has more kids than anyone."

"Big deal."

"How could you have more than one kid?"

"Back to the smacking. You shouldn't do it."

"Hey. Where did Billy go?"

"Hey. Where is Sara?"

"Where's Timmy?"

"What happened to Mikey?"

## Silas And The Mystery Of The Missing Woman

The fan turned, pushing at the hot muggy air.

Silas looked at the cases spread across his desk. Manilla folders, paper clips holding photos, pieces of paper with notes scribbled on them.

There was a mystery afoot.

All of the cases on his desk were connected.

One person at the same burger joint where another worked. The driver in an accident having served under the second cousin of the wife of the man in the other car. A dog owner who frequented a park near the building where the explosion had gone off.

And in the middle was an old woman, missing.

The wife of the first World President, mother to the first Starship Captain, and great grandmother of the woman who had approach Silas four days ago.

The fan turned again. Silas stood up.

*Time to get to work.*

## Followed By Clouds

Ever wondered why clouds move across the sky the way they do?

It's not because of science, although some scientists may tell you so.

It's not because of magic, although some free-wheeling hippies might convince you so.

Clouds move across the sky because they are following something.

Someone.

Hollowland is a big world. There are continents vast as other entire worlds, mountains that tower to the reaches of space, rivers wide enough to hold a city in their grasp.

Today it is the workings of clouds, which cover the surface of our planet, that interest me in this discourse.

Who are the people that clouds follow?

Are they blessed beyond comprehension, or perhaps cursed?

Are the clouds a sign of the blessing/curse, or are they simply attracted to it?

So many important questions.

Is that a cloud following you sir?

## A Board Game With Grandpa

"A good old-fashioned board game. Come on everyone, let's play!"

You'd think at the age of ninety-three my grandpa's excitement for board games would have diminished somewhat.

Not Edward Finickee Nolan. My grandpa. He was something special.

So we gathered around the big wooden family table. Old and scarred, scratched by kids across the years.

They laid the board out, pieces being sorted. Red and blue dice in cups.

"Let's rock!"

I laughed. Grandpa was the best.

He rolled the red dice.

Seven. Seven. Seven.

Oh.

My Mum rolled the blue dice.

One.

No.

The last dice continued to spin, and I found myself not wanting it to end.

I knew this sequence. My dreams had burned it into memory.

Six.

The numbers meant the end of this age. And it happened here, playing a board game with my grandpa.

## A Gorilla Walks Into A Bar

Erick the Gorilla walked into a bar.

He ambled over to a table where his friends sat.

Hermoine the Giraffe. Yennifer the Antelope. Lucius the Cheetah.  
Mycroft the Buzzard.

Of course, the table wasn't your average bar table. In fact, to cater for the clientelle, the bar was not your average bar. After all, catering for a giraffe and a buzzard is a tricky business.

"Howdy Friends, how goes everything?" Erick asked, polite as per usual.

Mycroft looked up from his chips. "Everything? These fries are okay."

Yennifer shuffled her back legs a bit, energy builds up when an antelope sits after all.

Hermoine looked down at everyone, being the only giraffe in the pub that night. "Everything is well Erick, thank you for asking."

Lucius smiled at Erick. "Hey buddy. How are you?"

And Erick proceeded to tell them.

## I Saw A Man I Did

"I saw a man I did. Such a man you never did see!"

James heard the preaching before he turned the corner into the city square.

There on an actual soapbox stood a big fellow, unkempt, rough-looking.

He stood with one great hand, more like a paw, holding what James presumed was a Bible.

The other hand, the whole arm, waved about with vigour.

"His Words will open your eyes."

James looked at the man with his eyes. He just couldn't see why someone would do this.

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!"

Israel? We live across the oceans from Israel. What is this fool talking about?

The man stopped talking. He looked at James, and for some reason James met his gaze.

"Son. Open your heart."

James shrugged and walked on.

*Open your heart.*



## Patience Is A Virtue

"The charge of the fifth cavalry unit at the Battle of Uresh Plains is in our history books."

Scholar Edmunson looked out at the young men and women in his classroom.

"Who knows why?"

A bright young woman raised her hand.

Edmunson was hoping another would try and answer, and he waited a moment before answering. "Yes, Jessydor?"

Jessydor Thursday was a gifted young mind. Brilliant perhaps, although time would tell.

"The main company of enemy foot were pushing across the river. Seargent Wallace Beaumont saw this and signalled the charge."

Edmunson nodded. "Correct. That charge saved our King, our lands, and the kingdom from slavery under the Browncoats and their Council of Eleven."

It had been a bleak day. Edmunson was patient though. The Council would be happy with his work. And Jessydor was at the heart of it.

## Being Alive Is Good

Kate dived to the left of the barrel, and the swing of a double-bladed axe meant for her instead smashed deep into wood and wine.

The barbarian growled. Another warrior appeared around the end of the tavern, draw his sword and charged, bellowing a name Kate didn't quite hear or understand.

The small village of Redhearth had the unfortunate pleasure of being in the path of a barbarian warlord, Yasick.

Yasick wanted to rule the lands. He was cunning, strategic and ruthless.

Kate had just happened to be passing through. Although it was suspicious that this was the path her directions gave.

Anyway.

Try not to get killed right now. Worry about other things later.

"It's like my mother used to say," Kate said to the first barbarian as she drew her short sword and dagger. "Being alive is good."

## Find The One Who Cannot See

Daine Stevens stirred in the dim light.

*Where am I?*

He groaned. Head aching from the blow which had come from an unknown assailant as he battled with Nolan Meekes.

*The others were down, I was sure.*

He was lying on a bed in a small room. There was a wash basin in the corner.

Stevens got up and went over to it, washing his face.

*At least the water is cold.*

The mirror showed a haggard face, scarred and bruised. A shadow flicked and Stevens sighed and turned around.

"Who are you?" But there wasn't anything visible in the room.

"DAINE STEVENS."

The voice crashed through his senses.

"Who?"

The voice continued. "DAINE STEVENS. YOU ARE LOST. GET AWAY FROM HERE. FIND THE ONE WHO CANNOT SEE."

The door clicked.

*What else can I do?*

Stevens opened the door.

## How To Tell A Story

The young man played his fiddle.

He tapped his feet, moving as the music dictated, faster and faster still.

His legs began to shift, stepping across the stage.

The beat of his heart seemed to echo in the ears of those listening.

The young man now leapt about the stage, the fiddle being played with a ferocity that belied the peacefulness the music started as.

A story was being told.

The music slowed.

A bell echoed, or it seemed as though one did. Bagpipes trilled in the distance, or at least the listeners thought so.

Then quieter still.

Around the campfire, telling of the cruelty of liege lords and the kindness of a beggar princess.

Without warning the music ended. The young man stood impassive, his fiddle still, the only movement his chest heaving.

And the crowd roared their approval.

## Mike, The Sentient Pair Of Glasses

I am a pair of glasses, and yes, I'm sentient.

It all started with a piece of sand.

This was no ordinary piece of sand, nope. This was magic sand.

And you might not know this, but like sand is used in the creation of glass, so magic sand is used in the creation of magic glasses.

My creator was a canny scientist, Professor Judith Pilsner. Unfortunately she is now the "late" Professor Judith Pilsner. My weight is heavy to bear.

At the moment I'm in the hands of some rough fellows who are trying to sell me to the highest bidder.

Being a magic pair of glasses isn't really that much chop.

I'm constantly talking to myself for one thing, haw haw.

Oh. How rude of me.

Hello, I'm Mike the sentient pair of glasses. How do you do?

## Mystery Fridge Juice

The mystery juice sat at the bottom of the fridge.

"Kids!" I called out. "Who ... What ... Come on!"

My youngest skipped over and took a look inside.

"Ewwwww. Looks gooey." She giggled.

"Yes dear. It is gooey."

My eldest walked over, slouching a little. He shrugged.

"What's the big deal?"

Figurative steam came out my ears.

"The big deal? Do you know who has to clean this up?"

He shrugged again. "I dunno. You?"

"That's right. But no more. Today is the last straw, here I stand. From now on, kids will clean up their own messes."

And so the mystery juice on the bottom of the fridge grew. And grew. And one day it birthed the Destroyer of Worlds.

But for the moment, it was just goo at the bottom of my fridge not getting cleaned up.

## A Story Of Redda Hode

Little Red Riding Hood dropped her basket of muffins on the side of the road. One or two fell out of the basket and bounced away.

She gave the closest one a good stomping with her steel-capped right boot.

"Redda Hode! Pick that up girl. Whaddya think you're doing?"

*Crappola!*

It was Constable Bill.

Without a moment's thought for the consequences, little dressed-in-red riding-a-bike Redda Hode leapt onto her custom built Harley-Davidson Sportster.

A throaty roar erupted as she kicked the engine over.

But then yellow eyes blinked at the corner of her vision.

Red turned the engine off.

He always knew. Was always there, prowling the edges.

She apologised to Constable Bill and began to pick up the muffins.

One day.

One day her heritage would be birthed from within.

On that day the wolf had better watch out.





## Heroism Vs Pragmatism

"A thousand spears, flung by a thousand strong men in a great circle, all aimed at you. Should you be on a hill or in a hole?"

Robert put his hand up, and Sir Jesse nodded at him.

"On a hill?"

Sir Jesse, a great knight of the realm, frowned.

"Are you asking me the answer to my question boy?"

Robert blushed. "No. I'm saying the answer is that I would want to be on a hill."

Sir Jesse nodded. "And why?"

Robert smiled. "Because a thousand spears all aimed at me, if I were the center of that circle, at least a few would turn against my enemies with only a bit of movement on my part."

Sir Jesse clapped his hands. "Correct! But even more correct would be to not be on the hill in the first place!"

## At Long Last

[Static]

"Can anyone ..."

[Static glitches the signal]

A gramophone plays softly, scratchily, in the background.

"Mayday! Mayday! We've hit rocks, sinking."

The gramophone repeats one bar of piano again and again.

[Static bursts across the speakers, followed by screaming]

"Land sighted. But some kind of creatures are swarming the deck. Help!"

A hand moves the needle on the gramophone and the melancholy slow, soft and scratchy tune continues.

"It's chaos out here, if anyone ..." [More static] "We've sighted the mainland, Hollow City can be seen, but ..." [Static burst] "We won't get there."

[A thumping beat is heard, interspersed with static]

"... Is the end. Goodbye, and ..." The voice trails off in a scream.

[Beeping]

[Drumbeat]

Singing, high and clear, wove into the music of the gramophone.

"At last." Said a voice in the room.

"At last."

## A Man Who Smiles Too Much

"For every ten lines of code you get a star."

It felt surreal to Lewis that he was working for Boogelle.

He was writing code for the greatest software company in history.

Everyone cheered as Hersey Molotov, CEO and all-round good guy, finished his speech smiling.

He made a lot of speeches. And he smiled a lot. Sometimes, too much.

*No. Don't overthink this. You have an amazing job. Do not blow it.*

Hersey walked off the stage.

Lewis turned to Francis and Michelle, his two double-scrum buddies.

"Another speech huh?"

Their eyes glazed over.

"Mr Molotov is wonderful, he is kind. He will save us."

*Whoah.*

That day Lewis began a dangerous journey, full of adventure, love, betrayal.

But perhaps more importantly, Lewis discovered the truth of the saying, "Don't write code for a man who smiles too much".

## Theseus And The Minotaur

Theseus and the Minotaur were once the best of friends.

They played and laughed and carried on, with naught a care to fear.

Blood brothers now, the years gone past, and all seemed very good.

Too good in fact, they soon would find, and good would change to bad.

Kings are kind only in dreams and the princess never waits.

Romance the curse.

It broke their bonds.

The King cried out. The Princess smiled. And Theseus lost his way.

He killed his bro. His friend. His shield.

And life was not the same.

Pale shadows followed him ever more, the memories of their time.

Listener beware, this tale of woe, it started out so fine.

Watch out for love, watch out for yarn and don't forget this truth:

Romance is but one such love that makes the world go round.

## Dust Settled

Dust settled.

It settled on an old wooden, very ornate and regal, chair that sat in front of the desk.

It settled on the surface of the desk, which was also old and wooden-looking.

It settled on the papers scattered across the desk.

It settled on the books stacked in a number of piles on and around the desk.

It settled around the pen that lay on yellowed vellum paper.

The pen. Oh. The dust settled around the pen.

Dust settled.

It settled on the hand that lay next to the pen, speckled a little with almost black, but probably dark red, blots.

It settled on the arm and on the body connected to the arm, sitting in the large, old, wooden and very ornate chair.

It settled on the spectacles of the man sitting in the chair.

Dust settled.

## A Change Is On The Way

THRUM

In the town they felt the vibrations. The Innkeeper watched as the bottles on his shelves rattled. He feared they might fall and break. A little boy running past the Inn stumbled and fell.

THRUM

In the village they heard the sound. The blacksmith watched the water in his barrels ripple and shiver. He feared the sky might fall on his head. A farmer hitching his horse to the stump outside the smithy looked up. He too feared the sky and its falling.

THRUM

In the city they saw the atmosphere shift. The librarian watched as the books on her shelves shifted, the shelves creaking. She feared for her books, for the knowledge in them, for the little ones who came to read. A child sitting in the library looked up and wondered why her heart felt better.

THRUM

## Hunter Of The Strange

I'm just a kid. Nineteen years old.

I hunt the strange monsters, the magical creatures, the myths and legends that you are afraid of.

Varian the Gray stood before me. She was old, older than the Primes perhaps.

For reasons I have yet to discover, Varian doesn't see me as the enemy.

"You are late Youngling. Perhaps I should teach you the cost of tardiness."

I wasn't happy.

"I'm in the middle of a hunt Varian. What is it?"

Her shadowed face broke into a smile. "Such haste Youngling. Your little monsters will wait. This cannot."

So I displayed great patience and stayed quiet.

"Darius has called his clan together. Iolanthe is driving her tribe to the surface. And Rhemus has been woken."

Three Primes. Vampire. Zombie. Were.

This could get interesting.

I'm just a kid.

Hunter of the Strange.

## Gorn And His Magic

Gorn stood, watching the man in front of him. Blood oozed down his face, leaking from the gash across the top of his right eye.

The wind was soft, whispering about the two figures in the sand-blasted arena.

*The time has come,  
The master said,  
And we must all be known.*

The old song came to Gorn.

*At the end perhaps, but not here. Not yet.*

Gorn could work *magic*. It was the only word he could think of to describe what he did.

The Black Mask swayed, and Gorn leapt forward, putting his magic into use.

For no more than three seconds the world stopped.

Gorn delivered the final blow.

Thundering cheers crashed into the silence of the moment. He had completed the Greater Test.

Gorn closed his eyes and pulled in the moment.

Now for the Final Test.



## Shaking With A Thundercloud

Harry didn't know who he was, where he was, or why he was where he was.

He was sitting on a stone table, and a very tall, skinny and hairless man was standing in front of him. Dressed in bright colors. Although not all the colors.

Harry got off the table, plucked up his courage and stepped forward, holding his hand out. "Hey there, I'm Harry."

"You dare to *shake* with me!" The man's voice a roar. "You would *shake* with a Thundercloud!"

Instantly the man's face softened.

"I am sorry my good friend. I forget so quickly, you came from the Table. It's two nods for a friend, three nods for family." The man nodded his head twice towards Harry. "I am Littlecheef, and I welcome you, Harry of the table, to our country. Landofree."

Harry nodded back. Twice.

## Paenrath's Blessing

The dawn came slowly. Cracks of light appeared, bringing rooster crows.

"Waithlir Ghaorn of Tarkim, step close."

Her father, Paenrath the Strong, Chief of Tarkim, motioned her to kneel, and when she had he put his hand on her head.

"Child of mine. Promise of mine. This is your blessing.

"To love and love again will be your promise. To kill the hated ones and light the black torch. Banishment and betrayal you will suffer. You will pit friend against friend, uniting foe and foe. Childless and barren till the moon is set behind the sun, sorrow will follow you.

"Pure of heart, your testing will not end until everything does.

"Hold true. Hold true."

Waithlir was trembling, clutching the bed with her hands.

*What does he mean?*

Her father's voice and been strange, quiet and thin.

"Child. Hold true."

## Down At The Park

Ronny asked himself what felt like the most important question of his life.

Should he ride his bike down to the park?

Down at the park was a mystery that caused his teenager heart to flutter and wriggle, his breath to come up sharp and a shocking depth appear in his stomach.

*Isolde Jameson.*

Down at the park boys and girls from all across the neighbourhood would gather and play.

Some boys played marbles in the dirt.

Some girls brought dolls and teacups for imaginary parties.

Some boys and girls bounced a ball on the concrete.

Isolde did none of these things.

Down at the park Isolde Jameson sang.

Isolde sang of old stories. Isolde sang songs of loss and mourning, of joy and happiness.

Down at the park, each day, Isolde Jameson sang.

That day Ronny rode his bike.

## A Birthday To Remember

*Go down, Moses. Way down in Egypt-land.*

Moses Lawd woke to the sound of his grandmother's voice. And joined with it were the voices of yesterday.

The anticipation was there too, excitement in his veins as he pushed himself out of bed.

*Tell old old Pharoah, To let My people go.*

He was thirty-three years old. He looked out at the sun rising over the hills.

At that sight the song in his head rose in exultation.

Moses turned away, and thought about eggs for breakfast. The phone rang. He went over and picked it up.

"Moses."

There was a different tone in Ted's voice. Strained.

"They have Sue and the kids. They're going to kill them if you don't come."

Ted never joked about his family.

"Ted. Who has them?"

The phone went dead.

*Go down. Moses. Way down.*

## Nothing Will Ever Be The Same

Lora watched as the two men began to battle. First one way, then another. Swords clanged and crashed, sparks flying.

The Wolflord was huge and strong, two swords flashing with power. Barghath was quick, faster with his sword and buckler.

The rage was fading, disappearing, leaving her mind awash with what had happened.

Understanding was blurred, but the knowledge was coming. As metal clashed with metal, as blood mingled with sweat, and death waited patiently, Lora realised just what she had done.

*Magic. I have used magic. WHAT AM I?*

The bell tolled, and the word came again, Lora couldn't seem to stop it.

*Sacrifice.*

She turned and ran for the forest, leaving all behind her. The swords and blood. The man, Jemael, who had looked at her. Even Bo.

Lora fled them all and ran fast and faster still.

## We Turn About And Walk Away

There isn't much  
That makes much sense  
In this world or the next

Unless your view  
Your lens  
Your eyes  
Are filtered by the truth

He made the stars  
Flung far and near  
Creation sung in place

He was  
He is  
The great I AM  
Eternal light and love

Forgotten by the smartest folk  
The brains of all the lands  
His strength is weakness  
To the world  
Shown freely in His Son

The Son is King  
Is Lord of all

The Word of God  
The Word of Life  
The Word before all time began

He is the Word  
In flesh appeared  
He is the Light  
In this dark world

God speaks a Word  
And all things hear  
Creation bows it's weary head

But man does not  
He disbelieves  
We turn about and walk away  
We turn about and walk away

## Future Fellas

"You ever think about the future Mikey?"

Mikey "The Toe" Kaplowski shrugged. "Sometimes. Seems like a hard place. On account of the worrying." He shrugged again. "What about you Vinnie?"

Vinnie "The Rat" Coromanski sniffed. "Not much. But lately, like today in fact, I'm thinking about it. On account of our situation that we find ourselves in." He sniffed again.

Morgan Black, who didn't have a proper nickname, smiled at the two men tied up.

"Fellas."

Mikey squinted. "Vinnie, Can you hear something?"

Vinnie sniffed once more. "It's a conundrum alright.

"Here we have the two of us, important men, trussed up like a dinner for five. And over there you have a man who seems to be in control of this here situation."

Morgan smiled.

"Would you like to know your future fellas?"

Mikey shrugged. Vinnie sniffed.

"Show us."

## The Old Man

The old man sat quietly.

His spectacles were old too. The lenses had been crafted by an unknown scientist. The metal frames created by his own hand.

The old man stood. Quietly.

Outside his room a war raged. People spoke of it as "The war to end all wars". Funny how incongruous those words actually were. War plus war does not equal peace. Peace plus peace does not equal war.

The old man stepped quietly across the floorboards.

He hoped they wouldn't squeak and betray his presence.

The Lawkeepers had arrived, and they wanted to slay him.

The old man had once been a young man who raged when he should have been quiet.

The old man opened the door. Quietly.

They came with knives. They came with hate.

The old man left quietly.

Later, the old man cried.

Quietly.



## Coding Is Writing

If the world was flat then we would sail off the edge.

Take all the oranges in that basket and peel every one of them.

If the world was flat then take all the oranges in the basket and peel every one of them.

If a horse walked into a bar then take every bottle of milk in the bar and check if the used-by date is past today and if it is, then the horse will not drink it. Otherwise, the horse will definitely drink it.

Select every knight of the realm who is over twenty years old and was born within eighteen miles of the royal city and do the following: Give them a new sword; If they are over fifty then move them from active duty into senior duties.

Coding is just writing without so many words.

## Home At Last

A quiet fell over the crowd as they watched.

Karrigh trembled, the point of the sword steady against his throat.

The carnival and celebrations for the new Queen of Happiness were no longer a place of joy.

Longsword resting at the throat of Karrigh the Oathkeeper, the cloaked warrior waited.

King Titus Faelbach the Second spoke. "Stranger. What is this?" His voice was deep and commanding, as befit as king.

The stranger swept back the hood. Long hair, raven black, framed a woman's face.

Gasps and murmurs came from the crowd.

Titus blanched. "Serena!"

The daughter of the King smiled.

It was, on reflection if one saw it, a sad smile. Full of hurt and pain, longing and loss.

"Father. Long has it been since I saw your face."

Serena Faelbach, Singer of Mystery, sheathed the longsword.

"Home at last."

## Justice

Justice.

Her heart beat furiously, adrenaline pouring through her limbs, making her giddy with its force.

Justice.

It had been thirteen years. But for Karen, they were but a moment, a yesterday gone.

Tears ran down her face and fell from one side of her chin and the other. Great heaving sobs wracked her body.

Justice.

Standing on the wooden boards were the seven men and women who had caused the death of her husband and child.

They were robbers and thieves, and they had killed the prince's men without quarter.

Justice.

Karen wanted justice. She wanted justice for Bryce, her strong and loving husband. And oh, she wanted justice for Courtney, her beautiful sweet little one.

A twang and arrows appeared in the guardsmen. Galloping horses careened through men, women and children.

Robin Hood had come.

Justice.

Karen wept.

## Jaine Begins Her Adventure

Sun dawned on the land. Golden beams, shafts of pure light streamed across farms, over hills and into the windows of sleepy villages and hamlets.

The city bustled with movement.

Jaine walked through the markets. She listened to the cries of selling, the haggling of buyers. She breathed in the smells of meats and fruits and flowers.

Jaine wanted to stay here. Here she could pretend to be normal. Nobody cared who she was. Nobody sought her out. Nobody.

Except.

There.

A young girl moved out of sight too quickly.

*They have found me. Again.*

Her mother, Queen Eliza, would not be happy. Her father would be too busy to care.

An old woman bumped Jaine. Suddenly a rough canvas bag was pulled over her head.

The sun shone on the city. And Jaine began the adventure of her life.

## The Thief Who Hurt

Shorty gave a sigh of relief.

The plan had gone off without a hitch.

The bank vault opened, the money taken and no witnesses, eyeballs or electronic.

So why did he feel so bad?

You see, it hurt Shorty to steal.

Orphaned as a baby. Foster homes until he was eleven. Juvie for a few years. Through it all, he stole. Bread. Money. A heart or two.

Shorty was the best thief in the tri-state area.

But it hurt him to steal.

His heart broke, it bled into his soul. At least, that's what Shorty imagined was happening.

Shorty Holloway made a promise to himself.

*If I get outta this, I'm gonna stop stealing.*

Shorty survived the caper. Barely.

He then gave up thieving for good, but found that his heart still hurt.

So he went looking for something more.

## Biology Is Important

"Ahhhhh."

"Mr Harrison, flies will get caught in your mouth. Proceed please."

"Right then. The order is ... Kingdom?" I waited, looking around.

Tommy was grinning at me, loving the awkwardness. Joelee shook her head slightly.

"No, sorry. Life first. Then K..." Another slight shake. "Life, Domain, Kingdom!"

Miss Hawshaw smiled a little. "Okay. Three down. What are the rest?"

Biology was a subject that didn't mean a great deal to me at the moment.

It would, later in life. I don't want to brag, but I'm the guy that cured the big one, the "zombie maker" disease.

I digress.

"Life, Domain, Kingdom. Then Phylum, Class, Order, Family ..." The last two escaped me.

"Anyone else?" Miss Hawshaw looked around.

Kylie put her hand up. "Genus and then Species Miss."

"Thank you Kylie. Mr Harrison, you can sit down now."

## Smooth Talk Only Gets You So Far

"This guy was met-tic-you-LUS!"

Jimmy Lowder loved to enunciate his words with vigor and passion. Spiky black hair, intense slate-gray eyes, Jimmy could be a con-man, a teacher, a hallelujah preacher.

Jimmy Lowder could rob you blind and get you to say thanks. He could convince the staunchest athiest that the possibility of God was probable.

And at this point in time, Jimmy Lowder was talking to a group of hard-eyed men and women.

See.

Jimmy Lowder, the smoothest talker in all of Kentucky had met Haylan Nathan. "The Rock of Gibraltar", "The Eyes That Never Sleep", "The Stone of Compassion".

And so Jimmy Lowder was demonstrating to the parolees about to head out into the world that there is nothing more important as giving up their crime for pursuing other more excellent goals.

Meanwhile, Jimmy had a plan.

*Escape.*

## One Coupon For A Magical Make-Believe Dragon

One coupon for a "Magical make-believe Dragon" turned out to be a terrible present from Suzie's estranged father.

Suzie loved the coupon. She fell asleep that birthday night with it grasped firmly in her hand. Suzie carried the coupon everywhere. Playing in the backyard. Going to church. Sitting on the couch.

Suzie cherished that coupon.

It meant so much to her fragile heart.

Suzie was walking down the street with her mother. There was a coin on the sidewalk. A strange coin, and in fact, it wasn't a normal coin.

But for Suzie it was a shiny object, and she bent to pick it up.

At that moment a gust of wind buffeted them.

Suzie's hand let go of the now worn and mostly illegible coupon.

"No! Mummy! Help!"

An angry-looking dragon landed on the road with a great thump.



## What Is Loss?

What is loss?

BEFORE

Joy. Light. Happiness.

AFTER

Pain. Sorrow. Heartbreak.

BEFORE

Memory of a fight. Joy. Smiles. A little badness.

AFTER

Memory of smiles. Pain. Sorrow.

BEFORE

Remember the fights? Remember the hard work? Remember the anger?

AFTER

Remember the laughter? Remember the bliss? Remember the hands held in cold winter months?

BEFORE

We were in love. We were joyful. We had pain. We argued and fought. We cried and shouted and loved. We birthed children, gave them joy and peace and love.

AFTER

Where is my love? Where is my joy? In memory I remember you. But it is fading now. Years gone. Remember those summers at the beachhouse? Remember how in winter we would sit in front of the fire, holding each other close?

Remember?

THEN

Death. Sacrifice. Heartache. Tears. So many tears.

What is loss?

LIFE

## Not Wrapping Presents

"You ever think about not wrapping presents Limey?"

Limey, a short man, shook his head. "Nope."

Jerry, an even shorter man, smiled. "Really? That seems odd. Given who your pap was."

Limey stopped working.

"Listen Jerry. I like you. You're a real stand-up kinda guy. But leave it."

Jerry clenched his jaw. Just a little.

"Limey. Why you got to be so ornery?"

Limey sighed, and started wrapping again.

Jerry waited a little while longer, then got up and went over to the fridge.

"Want a beer?" He said, yanking open the big old steel clasp-lock fridge door.

Limey shook his head. Again. "Nope."

Jerry shrugged. "Okay. Suits yourself. More for me."

The walls shook, dust drifting out of them as a massive thump echoed through the building.

A little fear thrilled down Limey's spine.

*The big man was home.*

## Horror Film Script #2, The Return Of Mr Pain

Cue the whispering - hauntingly scary but with tendrils of happiness - music.

We see a neat modest house. *Zoom*. We see the dining room. *Zoom*. We see a family sitting around the table having dinner. *Zoom*.

\*SHOCK\*

We see Mr Pain sitting at the head of the table.

*Dun. Dun. Dun.*

MR PAIN

Groar. Groooooar, grrrrr, grrrooo. Groooar?

WIFE

Yes dear, a brunch with the Fenwicks would be lovely. I'll speak with Daphne in the morning.

MR PAIN

[Smiles, although "smile" is stretching it ... Haw haw. Get it. Stretching. Skin.]

[Turns to one of the children.]

Groar grrr. G.R.O.A.R.

[The child looks suitably chastened.]

There is a knock on the front door.

MR PAIN

[Gets up and goes to the front door.]

[Before he gets there, the front door explodes.]

MAN IN BLACK

I bring pain!

End scene.

## Wield

*Wield.*

"Down. Across. Back." The quartermaster stomped across the training ground.

"Again! Down. Across. Back."

Jesmond only heard one word.

*Wield.*

"Boy! Listen. It's not hard. It's a simple drill. Down. Across. Back."

The quartermaster, Pulson "Sir Nasty" Chaurin, turned to the group.

"This is the first drill. You will remember it in your dreams.

"This drill is the foundation of everything we believe in the Legion. This is how we beat the hordes of Janishmen, how we defeated the armies of King Davin the Black. It's how Sir Robert won his title.

"For you, it will be how you survive your final exam.

"Down. Across. Back."

Jesmond listened. They were doing a simple something over and over until it became without thought.

His father, dying hard, had given him a single word that for Jesmond captured this entirely.

*Wield.*

## Shoo Doggy!

"Shoo doggy!"

Little Elaine Carpenter shooed at the big dog, with all the confidence of a four year old.

The dog was gigantic. Black with red-brown lines running across it's back, shoulders reaching far above Elaine.

But Elaine didn't scare easy.

"Do you want a lolly?"

The big dog, feared across six kingdoms and countless fiefs and forests, opened his mouth in a grin, tongue lolling out the side.

"Tiny one, I will have a lolly. Thank you."

Elaine wasn't sure if dogs could talk, but it didn't bother her overly much.

She rummaged about in her little backpack and found the last five-day-sucker-sweet-ball, a present from Uncle Steven.

"Here you go doggy. This should make you not hungry for a little bit."

And it did.

They became friends.

And one day the big dog gave his life for Elaine.

## Carry On

"Carry on my wayward son!"

Sally sang with loud and free abandon as she drove down the highway in her black chevy.

Nothing made you feel alive as a long stretch of road with Kansas on the radio, wind gusting through the open windows.

Thinking back over the past few months, since her eighteenth birthday, Sally took stock.

First there had been a gang of elderly corn-eating memory-stealers.

*There'll be peace when you are done.*

Then, an angry giant mother, mourning the loss of her son. The giant had been Sally's first kill.

*Lay your weary head to rest.*

Not long after, a raggedy set of twin dolls had come to life and wreaked havoc on a small town in the mid-west.

*Don't you cry no more.*

Righteous fury burned within Sally.

Each step led closer to vengeance.

*Carry on.*

## Bare Feet And Shoes

Shoes.

You ever think about shoes?

I do.

All the time.

The thought of a new pair of shoes fills my head with euphoria.

And my feet. They love shoes.

I wear them walking. I wear them running. I wear shoes when I go to work, and sometimes (if cold) when I sleep.

Shoes are part of my life, and for most of you folk, they'll be part of yours.

--

Bare feet.

You ever think about bare feet?

I do.

All the time.

My feet love being free.

I love walking in bare feet. I love the feel of the grass between my toes. I love the sound of my bare feet hitting the ground as I sprint across the fields.

Bare feet are part of my life, and for most of you folk, they'll be part of yours.



## The Joker's Malaise

"Ahoi matey!"

The two ships were twenty yards.

One ship, The Crown Northwind, was lean and sleek, built for speed.

The other ship, Joker's Malaise, was dumpy and wide, built for short trips along the coast or up a river. Transporting parties of the rich and pompous.

Joshua called out again from the Northwind.

"Ahoi matey, anyone awake?"

He could see sleeping bodies across the deck of Joker's Malaise. At least.

Joshua quickly called out. "Bosma, come and have a looksee."

A large man walked over and looked.

"I see ... Death."

The harbour was alive with noise, but the Joker's Malaise was silent.

"Something is amiss. Get Dodger, Phil and Manny. We'll go over."

They went over. A mystery was uncovered. A war began.

Joshua Halakaen, a captain in the King's Justice, was in the middle of it all.

## A Wooden Sword

Casar watched as the two soldiers walked through the trees, away from her father's grave.

Stepping carefully Casar moved alongside the rocks piled over her father's body.

*'This was Bradley Gerod. The Bradley Gerod. Hater. Hunter.'*

The older soldier, Maten, had known her father.

The younger man had stuck a wooden sword into the rocks over the grave.

*The sword that killed my mother, all those years ago. The sword that tore apart the heart and mind of my father.*

A wooden sword.

Cris.

The little boy playing with his friend.

Casar looked at the sword. She watched it grow large in her focus. The forest and surroundings faded and blurred into shadow.

She could burn it, bury it, could break it in pieces.

Instead Casar reached down and gently prised loose the wooden sword.

*I will keep it close.*



## What's In A Motto?

The motto of the Fifty-Fourth Heavy Commando Battalion was unusual to say the least.

Most mottos in the armed forces are versions of power and courage, equal parts an encouragement to those protected and a warning to those who would bring harm to the protected.

But the Fifth-Fourth Heavy Commando Battalion's motto almost seemed weak.

David Baenling had dreamed of entering Heavies Battalion since he watched them break the Siege of Dunlevy. The Heavies had single-handedly brought about peace negotiations between the Skethis alien force and the Human and Meta armies.

These were the toughest fighters going around.

So how could a deadly and dangerous group of soldiers hold to such a weak-seeming string of words?

As he stood waiting in the line of potential candidates, David looked at the motto bolted above the gates.

*In meekness there is strength.*

## The Hawthorn Kingdom, Part 1

"The Word of Britannia is the oldest current periodical, according to our records."

Erica Burlough, Vice-Principal of the New London King's College, and Dean of Modern History, really enjoyed giving the first speech to new students.

"Does anyone know who contributed to the very first edition?"

Silence reigned. Because Erica changed the question each year, you would have to memorise each and every contributor to each and every periodical they had in their library to answer.

A single solitary hand rose, somewhere toward the upper back of the slanted auditorium.

"Yes. Please give your name, then your answer."

Erica Burlough was a teacher at heart, not just in the head.

A voice coughed, then began. "Ulysses Frederick Chastain. The five contributors were, according to the contents, Jesse Klintoff, Margaret Illanois, Paul Cumberlatch, Serena Waals and Thomas Bruce."

Erica nodded. "Correct."

## The Hawthorn Kingdom, Part 2

Erica continued, "Now given ..."

Ulysses spoke over Erica. "However, there were only four contributors. Jesse Klintoff and Paul Cumberlatch were the same person writing under a pseudonym."

Erica snorted. "How do you know this?"

The young man smiled, sadly. "Because I am that man."

Laughter erupted, along with cat-calls, whistles and various other exclamations.

"Very well Mr Chastain. Would you be so kind as to come and address the class."

Ulysses Chastain made his way down to the front of the auditorium and bowed to Erica.

"My name is Ulysses Frederick Chastain. I was born crown prince of the Hawthorn Kingdom. And I am immortal."

Erica blanched. Blood and fire had destroyed the Hawthorn Kingdom.

The doors of the auditorium broke open with a crash. Armored men appeared.

Erica Burlough didn't solve the mystery of Ulysses Chastain that day.

## The End Of The River

Lancelot the leatherback sea turtle dreamed of swimming up the river on this side of the big island.

Today Lancelot was going to try for the first time.

So he did.

The water started to taste a little funny, and it smelled different too.

"Hello mate, got a bit lost have you?"

Lancelot looked around, as far as his neck would let him.

The turtle had black armored plates for a shell, and a massive beaked set of jaws.

Lancelot was, in all honesty, a little afraid.

"Hello."

The armored turtle gave a laugh.

"No worries mate. My name is Bill, and I'm not going to hurt you. But if you want to keep going up the river, you'll need a friend."

So Lancelot and Bill became fast friends.

And a year later they reached the end of the river.

## The Nature Of Crying

*Babies cry.*

*When did I stop crying?*

*Some children cry often. Some don't.*

*When does a child stop crying?*

*Some young people cry each night.*

*Why?*

*Some adults cry when they are not sad.*

*Do they hurt?*

*Does crying make a man less?*

*Does crying make a woman more?*

King Julius put down the quill and rubbed at his eyes. He could not sleep, thoughts burning in his mind and allowing no rest.

Sighing, he picked up the quill and kept writing.

*Tears are made out of pain and sorrow, but also from laughter and joy. Tears can be constructed too.*

King Julius wanted to know the nature of crying.

*If I keep bleeding, no matter how it happened, I will surely die.*

*If I keep crying, regardless of what brings me to tears, will something of me bleed out?*



## The Problem With Unifying Kingdoms

Perhaps the founding members of the Great Lands Kingdom thought that any bitterness would be swept away with joy in a single unified country.

One hundred and forty-three years had passed since Union, and any joy or happiness people experienced was brief and fleeting.

Georgia knew the problem.

*People.*

Practically the elected parliament had been a majority of Easterners, with a sprinkling of Northmen and just three Southerners.

Publically, they said this was because of population. The Southern Tribes kept to themselves, refusing any of the census takers. The Northerners lives were hard and rarely more than single births came from marriage.

*People.*

Georgia was hoping to find a way to solve the problem.

She was the heir to the forgotten Westland Kingdom. And if the kingdoms were not unified under her banner, they would not survive the coming enemy.

## A Tofu Conspiracy

"May I take your order please?"

"Yeah. I'd like a triple-burger rib-stack super-large meal please, make it cheese-dipped fries for the side."

"Okay sir. Would you like a heart-attack with that now, or five minutes down the road when you're stuffing your face at the lights?"

"Excuse me?"

"Oh. Apologies. I thought you were someone I cared about. Nevermind. That'll be twenty four dollars and thirty cents. Please drive through."

Willa didn't like working here. She struggled to maintain the kind of upbeat attitude that was expected.

*How can I be perky when I know the truth?*

Yesterday Willa had stumbled onto a dark secret that lurked within the basement.

The company, Big Fatty Burgers, was a sham. Every product, including the drinks, was variants of tofu stuffed with taste modules.

*Nothing matters. How can there be a tofu conspiracy?*

## The Inexplicable Power Of Sales Agents

The T.V. commercial blared across the hospital waiting room.

"I'm John Griffords, the greatest Real Estate Agent this side of Kentucky!"

Heather Jaye was restlessly fidgeting at the broken arm cast, while her mother read intently from a fashion magazine.

"So you are going to buy or sell a house? Don't be distracted by the beautiful faces of these other 'so called' agents."

Matthew Rosanov sat carefully, watching the blood slowly leak into the bandage his sister had applied to his very broken wrist.

"They are cheap imitations."

Mr Yancy moaned continuously, softly, but still moaning. Arms around his stomach, the old man looked very pasty, very gray, and very nearly dead.

"I'm the best. Chuck out the rest!"

Nurse Coltain stopped writing notes and looked up from the station desk.

*Why do I suddenly want to sell my house?*

## Wielding Light Is Hard

Shakry shook her head, the little bells and tiny bangles tinkling.

"No. Too much thinking."

She tapped Olain's head. Hard.

"Not enough heart."

Her finger thumped into his chest.

Olain closed his eyes again. Light must be harnessed. Light must be controlled.

There were three shapes that light could be moulded through.

Circle. Square. Triangle.

Only a handful of people in any generation, across the entire known world, could wield light. Or so Shakry had said.

Of those, one or two were found and taught.

And of those, in the last hundred years, none had survived the learning process.

Olain imagined a circle in his mind. He imagined a square, and a triangle. Light blossomed in each of them, and then died.

*Perhaps it's better this way. At least I won't be part of those dead students.*

"Again. Try again."

## And Now They Were At War

Daine Stevens stood on the sloping hill.

*Fury.*

Across the valley, soldiers formed up into sections, lines and lines of them.

*Righteous fury.*

With him were hundreds of the Wode Men. Hardy warriors, but not enough.

*Anger at him.*

The Dark King's armies had wrought destruction in this land, conquering with steel and magic. They had brought with them death and bloodshed.

*And yet.*

Once-Detective Daine Stevens had learned a hard truth.

The hardest truth in his life.

It wasn't that magic was real. Or that his closest friend had been working with an evil king. It wasn't the truth of travelling between worlds, and it certainly wasn't anything to do with the heady love experienced over the past few months.

No.

Daine Stevens had discovered who his father was.

*He is my father.*

And now they were at war.

## Memories And Cats

Bottle purred fit to shake my desk.

She was a "bitsa" cat, I like to think having the best bits and pieces.

Scratching underneath her jaw, I laughed as the depth of the purring increased.

Bottle pushed herself into my arms, nudging my hands with her soft and moist nose.

I laughed again.

What would this world be without pets?

There would be far less joy, that's for sure.

Jacky Jones, my other cat, a russet colored Persian yawned from her regular sleeping place on the clothes basket.

My kids used to joke and call me the crazy cat lady.

And I would be, I'd have a hundred of them.

Except that these are now just memories. Bottle died thirty years ago to the day. Jacky Jones five or so years back.

And as for me, I'm a memory myself.

## A Special Song

"Be my heart, my lonely heart."

He sang with such passion that the crowd swayed and rocked as the timpani drummed, as the violin played, as the guitar strummed and plucked.

"Be my eyes, my blinded eyes."

It was a love song, similar but not quite the same to many gone before. Those in the crowd with discernment found themselves daring to believe.

"Be my voice, my ragged song. Sing it loud, my beloved one."

The song went on, seeming forever.

The town halted. Then the country. And finally, the whole world stopped and listened.

"Be the one to heal my heart, to open my eyes, to speak my words."

The song pulsed outwards from our earth, across the solar system, into galaxies, past stars and comets and moons alike.

"Be my one. My only. Love."

And the song ended.

## The Calvary

The spit of gunfire was loud in the cockpit.

Strafing behind him were three Fast Fighters, agile and lean planes manned by the best pilots in the enemy army.

Konrad spoke into his headset.

"Enemy on my tail. Three of them. Orders?"

Static. Then, "Kssshzzzz. Kilo. One. Five."

A monotone voice repeating numbers and call-signs.

*That's not right. Where is base operations? Have communications been cut?*

"Again, I repeat. Enemy on tail. Orders?"

And again, the static. And then, "Seven. Echo. Three."

Konrad was certainly afraid. Instead of freezing him into indecision however, it increased his desire to get out of this scrape.

Watching the air behind him, Konrad breathed a sigh of relief.

Huge and fearsome birds appeared, flying impossibly fast. One plummeted into a fighter, tearing it to pieces. The other fighters began evasive maneuvers.

*Ahh. The cavalry.*



## Horror Film Script #3, The End Of Pain

Silence. The screen is silently black.

The creak of a door.

Light blossoms.

We see an outline in the doorway.

MAN IN BLACK

Have you reconsidered Irenicus?

The camera turns to a big man strapped into an large chair.

MR PAIN

[voice is soft, broken]

Groooaar.

MAN IN BLACK

For a moment, a passing whisper, you were my instrument, you were my  
pain to bring.

The Man In Black shakes his head.

I had such high hopes. A shame.

MR PAIN

Grrr.

MAN IN BLACK

Yes yes. Don't harm your family. Etc etc.

Waves his hand.

MR PAIN

[Laughs weakly]

MAN IN BLACK

Such bravery. Perhaps we ...

There is a thud, and the Man In Black falls.

Mr Pain's wife stands there, a large piece of wood in her hands.

MR PAIN

[Smiles. For real this time.]

End scene.

## **This World Is Made Up Of Stories**

"How many stories are there in the world at any given time?"

Students put up their hands.

"Yes Billy?"

"Forty billion, exactly!"

Sniggers came from various points in the room.

"Oh? And how do you come to that total Billy?"

Billy Masterson grinned. "Well Miss. You see, given the population of the world is eight billion, and that each person has at a minimum five stories happening at once - for example, currently I'm engaging with you (#1), dating Veronica over there (#2), captain of the football team (#3), parents are having another baby (#4), and yesterday some people told me they were going to change the world (#5) - That equals forty billion."

Miss Olive Temple stood, smiling.

"Well done Billy. Solid reasoning. Excellent."

*He's arrived at the deepest truth there is.*

*This world is made up of stories.*

## In Eternal Solitude Of Joy Unknown

*Long before this world began  
In eternal solitude of joy unknown  
The three of You  
Were*

*King of Heaven  
Omnipotent Might  
Omniscient Thought  
Omnipresent Being*

He - Three in One and One yet Three - Is more bright to us than the sun to the ant in a desert land.

*Specks of dust  
In multitude we are  
Lonely hearts without hope  
Except but for You*

Hope we can hope in because He has called us to. In His word, penned by men infused with His Spirit.

Faith is a required absolute, but not born within our selves. From our King alone is the gift given.

Saved by Grace of the Father.

Saved by the Righteousness of the Son. His Blood. His Death. His Life.

Saved by the light of the Spirit Illuminating. By His breath Renovating. By His will Preserving.