

NONFICTION  
SPECIAL

EVERY INTERVIEW AND FEATURE!

FROM

TWO YEARS

OF THE QUIET ONES

# the quiet ones *Vol. 2*



*Vol. 2 - Issue 2 - Summer Special - June 2023*

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"Summer Special"

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# BLOODLETTERS

*from the editors*

*Two Years!*

*...and along the way, so many great stories, poems, and flash pieces. We've also been blessed to share intimate conversations and soul-opening essays through the pages of *The Quiet Ones*. This summer, we want to celebrate the latter with newly formatted pages collecting the full two years of nonfiction features in a single tome. Every insight into writing! Every enticing beat of new music! Every new look at craft, queer classic horror, and lost souls searching out community is here for you. Whether you're revisiting these pieces or reading them for the very first time, welcome. We hope that this collection will inspire you in your work, your art, and your lives. Stay well, friends, and thank you for two incredible years!*

Sincerely,

David Fey

Co-Executive Editor of *The Quiet Ones*



# ghost stories written ghost stories lived

(a conversation with Nova Ren Suma)\*

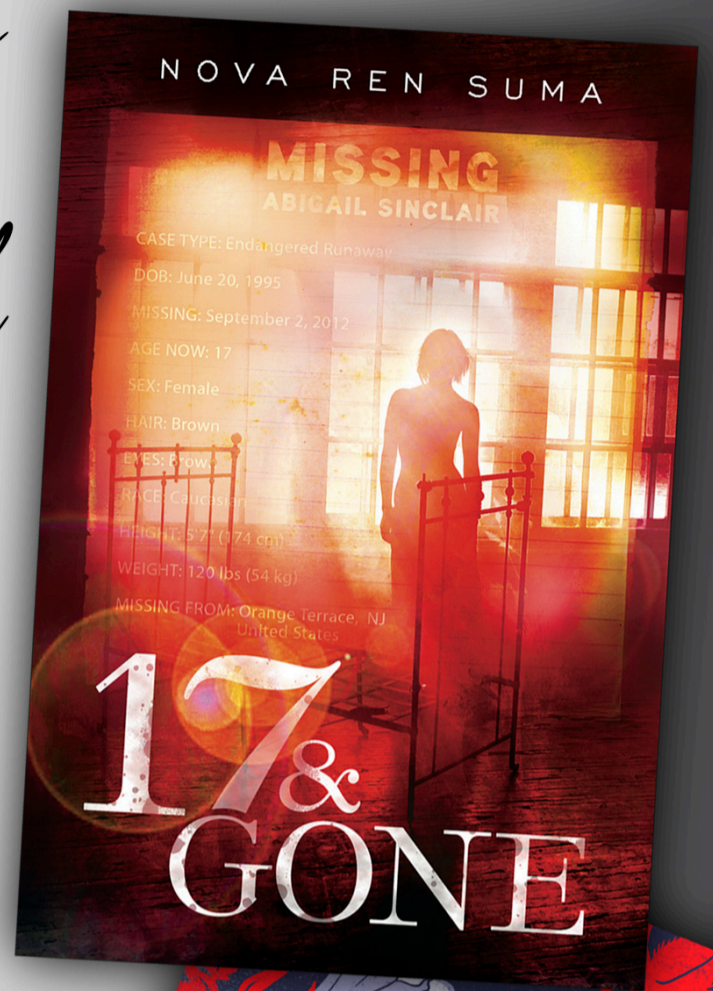
by Emily Young

Nothing gets me in the mood for spooky season better than a Nova Ren Suma story. Her latest novel, *A Room Away from the Wolves*, has been appropriately called “shiver-inducingly delicious” by the *New York Times* – the kind of book you want to read half under the covers, with a glass of warm apple cider by your bed. A bestselling author of young adult novels and a two-time Edgar Award finalist, Nova is also the co-editor of the recent anthology *FORESHADOW: Stories to Celebrate the Magic of Reading & Writing YA*, published by Algonquin in Fall 2020.

I had the honor of taking two of Nova’s workshops and ghost-hunting with her on the supposedly haunted campus of Vermont College of Fine Arts, where she teaches creative writing.

Be sure to check out her work and her upcoming workshops at [www.novaren.com](http://www.novaren.com).

I’m delighted to have had the chance to chat with Nova about everything from her favorite writing prompts to late-night ghostly encounters. . .



\*This interview has been edited for length and clarity

**EY: One of the things I really love about your novel *Imaginary Girls* is that there's so much beneath the surface. We never fully see it, which is so much scarier because then we can picture whatever it is that scares us the most.**

NRS: A lot of people have really vivid, wild imaginations and can insert their own terror, their own personal fears into something. I would never want to take that away from a reader. I love when people fill in the blanks. What's in somebody's own personal jar of horrors is always going to be so much more scary than if I over-described the monster that I see.

*When you get into the psychological horror and that feathery, slippery edge where you can't tell the difference - that's the part where you can actually find real terror.*

**EY: There's always a cost to enjoying horror because I do get very scared.**

NRS: We're currently renting a three-story row house in Philadelphia. It's an old house. And while we live in this house, because I have trouble sleeping, I can't watch any horror movies or television shows. So I have this long list of all these things - when we move out of this house, I'll get to watch all these things, because I know if I watch them now, my imagination will absolutely run away with me.

**EY: Is there something about the house that makes you suspect it might be haunted?**

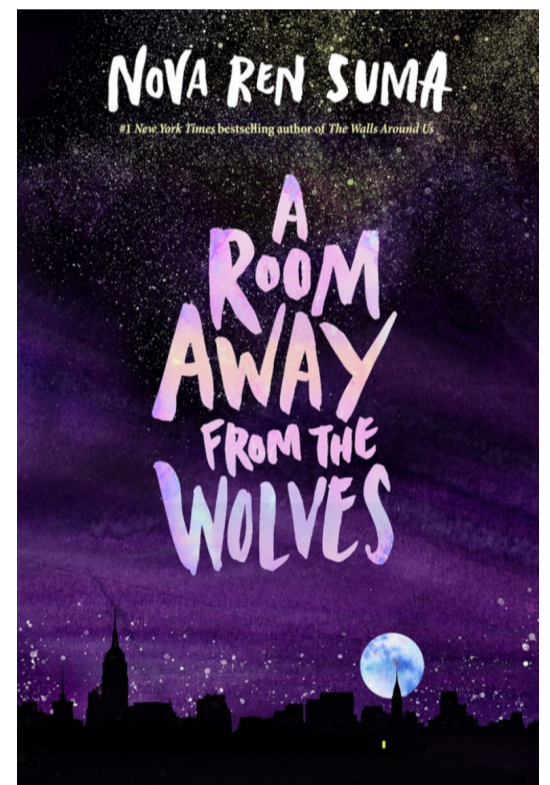
NRS: This is a confession. My imagination runs a little wild in places with staircases. It's the walking up the stairs, thinking someone's behind you on the staircase. I think it's because we moved around a lot when I was a kid, and I would be running up the stairs really fast thinking there was something behind me. I think what affects you when you were a child, what frames you when you're a child - often you carry a little piece of that with you.

**EY:** I lived in an apartment where one day I walked into the kitchen and there was like, *lettering* on the wooden countertop. I didn't remember it ever being there. And everyone who had been in the apartment had never noticed it before either. It looked like it was etched in, all these jumbled-up letters. So I had to be very careful in that apartment not to watch anything scary.

**NRS:** Oh, wow. That's a wonderful, terrifying little ghost story. I just got a shiver from that.

**EY:** Two of your novels that contain haunted houses, *17 and Gone* and *A Room Away from the Wolves*, feature compelling settings. Do you have any tips for writing a compelling haunted house?

**NRS:** I teach at Vermont College of Fine Arts. One of the thesis students that I worked with, Elizabeth Hooks, did a wonderful lecture and really in-depth study on revealing character truths and secrets through haunted houses. A haunted house wouldn't hit the same way if it wasn't seen through the eyes of someone who's going through some kind of personal struggle, reflected in the house. When that happens, then the setting really comes alive. I wonder if maybe because my own work is so character focused, it feels like a haunted house couldn't be written without first having the character who's connected to that haunting.



**EY:** What are some of the challenges of writing something spooky without resorting to gore?

**NRS:** The best way to do this, for me, is working with an unreliable narrator and thinking about the questions: Is this really happening? Is this psychological? Is this an actual ghost encounter? Does my character have a grip on reality, and how loose is that grip? When you get into the psychological horror and that feathery, slippery edge where you can't tell the difference - that's the part where you can actually find real terror. It doesn't need to have fangs and blood and murderers with knives to be frightening when you're dealing with the human mind.

**EY: I like the tone of your novels, because I feel like really good horror (or a story that is tinged with horror) should be cathartic. It should keep us on the edge of our seat and terrify us. But at the same time, it should be a safe place to have that cathartic experience.**

NRS: I think I gravitate toward writing this kind of story because I was a bit of a strange young girl and a bit of a loner where I grew up. Because we moved around a lot, I would go to a new place and have the opportunity to reinvent myself and kind of hide who I was before. When I was 12, 13, 14, is when I started to get interested in creepy things. Those were like the hardest years; that was when things started to turn in my life, in my family.

I was drawn to the Ouija board, and reading horror on my parents' bookshelf, and scaring myself, and wishing I was a witch. I think it was because it was cathartic. It was a way to escape the reality of what was happening in my life and my family and at school - and to slip into a place where my fears are a tangible thing that I can say that I'm afraid of. 'I'm afraid of this ghost speaking to me through the Ouija board.' I could turn my attention to that. And there is a safety in that.

I think that's why, especially in YA, these kind of stories are so important. There are so many readers who need this kind of cathartic, frightening place to be with their fears in the world of a story, and take their mind away from what might be very frightening in their real life that might be harder to face.

**EY: We're talking about emotional wellbeing, and I feel like all of us have been experiencing a lot of burnout this year and a half. How has that been for you?**

NRS: When the pandemic started to hit, I was working on finishing the draft of a book that I was to be turning in. I just got so shaken up by everything happening in the world that I was unable to work on it. I basically lost a year.

Then, in the spring of 2021, I really got on fire with my writing, and I felt so inspired out of nowhere. It kind of turned my world upside down and it made me have to re-start the book in a way, so I was able to write the draft then.

I've also been writing short stories. A lot of the short stories are kind of horror tinged, or there's



something eerie or creepy going on in them, which might be a reflection of the world.

A while ago, when I used to live in New York, my previous city, I was part of an in-person workshop where we would get prompts and write on the spot. Then I moved away, and I wasn't able to be part of that, but something the pandemic brought back is people being able to meet from all over. So suddenly, a few of us from that workshop started a Zoom meeting. In that workshop, I started to write these little short stories. I'd take whatever the prompt was, and it always turned into something frightening. I couldn't just write like, a nice scene. There was always something monstrous or terrifying in it. I think that was just my outlet for the pandemic.

*...these kind of stories are so important. There are so many readers who need this kind of cathartic, frightening place to be with their fears in the world of a story, and take their mind away from what might be very frightening in their real life that might be harder to face.*

For anyone who is still feeling stuck, I think that's something that these times have opened up, which is a way for writers and people to connect from afar. That brought some writing back into my life. And then also the idea of writing what scared me, because I was scared, you know? That's what I've been doing. So I am now writing much more - much, much more.

**EY: Can you tell us anything else about the projects you're working on right now?**

NRS: I'm working on the novel, and it's a YA novel. It is not a ghost story. I know this is shocking. I consciously told myself, 'You've written a few things that have ghosts in them, and you need to try and push yourself and not fall back on what you always would fall back on.' So every time I would be working on the book and I'd be like, 'Oh, but I could just do a ghost!' Then I'd say, 'No. No ghosts.' There is kind of a magical place in the story. But beyond that, it's realistic.

I can't say any more than that, mostly because I'm at the early stages of what the book could become with my editor, so it could change. Wouldn't it be funny if it comes out and there's a ghost in it? And you'll be like, but you *said!*

**EY: But we don't know the title of it, so you could just be like, oh, that's a different one.**

NRS: [Laughs] That's so true! So that's the novel. Then I've been working on these short stories. I do have some ideas for what I might want to do with them, but as I've said, they started as a way of getting through these difficult times, like a coping mechanism for me, but they felt so alive when I was writing them. It would be the feverish kind of writing where you're just thrown into it, and your mind is racing faster than your fingers.

And I'm allowing myself to have as many ghosts as I want in these stories.

**EY: What are some of your favorite ghost stories?**

NRS: *The Haunting of Hill House* by Shirley Jackson. The reason I love that book so much is because I feel like it gives us the fear before you see anything frightening. The fear of what might be there, for me, has always been the most terrifying part of a ghost story, or living life, you know?

There's this one scene in the book where Eleanor is sleeping in a bedroom with her friend Theodora, and it's dark. They're in separate beds across the room. She feels like she's holding her friend's hand. There's this moment where she's like, we were scared, we heard sounds in the hallway, we're holding hands. And then she realizes she is not holding her friend's hand, because her friend is across the room. Then there's this line that says: 'God God, whose hand was I holding?' It just stuck with me because that's the kind of thing that terrifies me. I don't need to see the ghost. I can imagine all the terrible things around the ghost.

**EY: Have you ever seen a ghost?**

NRS: Yes, I think. There are two different stories. I'll tell the one about when I was staying at a place that we both have in common.

## *Nova's Favorite Ghost Stories*

### ***The Haunting of Hill House by Shirley Jackson:***

"The reason I love that book so much is because I feel like it gives us the fear before you see anything frightening."

### **Mariana Enriquez short stories (*Dangers of Smoking in Bed*):**

"Her horror is raw and uncomfortable and terrifying to me."

### **"Mothers, Lock Up Your Daughters Because They Are Terrifying" by Alice Sola Kim:**

"The ghost of a birth mother comes back to claim her lost daughters... This wild story has been a huge influence on my writing lately."

### ***Eva Moves the Furniture by Margot Livesey:***

"This actually isn't scary, but this is one of my favorite ghost stories, and it has been for a very long time. It's this beautiful story of this young girl in Scotland whose mother died. What she calls 'The Companions' are these ghosts who have followed her and watched her, her whole life, who she thinks also knew her mother."

When I was teaching at Vermont College of Fine Arts, staying in a small, old house where faculty would stay, I had a room upstairs. This was during a residency that was pretty early on in my teaching in this program. I had a lecture coming up and I was extremely nervous. I was having trouble sleeping.

I remember I was in the bed. And I looked toward where the doorway is, and where the end of the bed is. A man was in my room. The man had white hair. It was kind of glowing. He was leaning over, looking at me. In the moment that it was happening, it wasn't frightening because it felt like he was just checking, 'Is this person, okay? Who is this person in the bed?'

But of course I am frightened about everything. I sat up and screamed. I am shocked that the person staying near me didn't hear. I turned on the light. There was no one in the room. The door was locked. It's not like anyone had wandered in to look at me.

I turned the light off again. I remember feeling like there was something at the end of the bed. So then I

was like, I'm just going to sleep with the light on all night.

I later found out that the campus had been once used as a Civil War hospital for wounded soldiers. I think that the house that I was in may have been where the doctors would stay. Someone told me this afterwards. I absolutely did not know ahead of time.

*I was drawn to the Ouija board, and reading horror on my parents' bookshelf, and scaring myself, and wishing I was a witch.*

When I think about it, I know I was very tired. I was having a hard time sleeping. I probably just saw a flash of light and it looked like glowing white hair. You know what I'm saying? Like, your imagination can absolutely put the pieces together. But when I heard the story of what the house had been and the hospital on the campus, I thought, 'Oh my goodness, maybe that's something that happened.'

**EY: Yeah!**

NRS: I don't even know if I should tell this last part of this story because it's so silly, but I'm going to tell you.

At the end of the residency, I was afraid that I had seen this ghost, but I was just telling myself, 'You were just half asleep, you were delirious, it's nothing.'

I was packing up to go home. I had my mess of the room all laid out, trying to stuff everything back into my suitcase, because I had a very early shuttle the next day. And I had a very specific kind of tea that I drink in the morning. It's a Jasmine tea that I would buy from a tea shop across the street where I used to live. I would only drink that in the morning, so I wanted to have it ready for me when I had to get up at like four in the morning.

I went to sleep. My suitcase was all packed and zipped and everything was set. I realized, in my sleep, *oh, no, I packed all the tea in the suitcase.* And I wondered, should I get up?

This is the weirdest thing. I was holding the pillow, and under the pillow, my hand was in a fist. I rolled over. [Laughs.] No one's going to believe me. I opened my fist and there was a bag of my Jasmine tea in my hand.

And I was like, 'What the...?' So in my mind, very late at night, I told myself *it's the ghost.* The ghost was caring for me and knew that I wanted my tea and put it in my hand. Now I'm laughing about it. I probably like, in my sleep, I don't even know, had the tea and just forgot about it and then woke up.

But I told myself, 'See, the ghost is not harmful. The ghost wants me to be okay.'

**EY: It seems like a very Doctor Ghost to thing to do. I hope that it is a Doctor Ghost who takes care of the people now who stay in the rented spaces of his previous hospital.**

NRS: I know. So every time I went back to campus, after that first semester, I would always ask to stay in that specific room. People would say, 'I thought you saw a ghost, what's wrong with you?' And I said, no, it's okay. I need to be in that room because I just felt safe in that room. I never was scared in that room ever again.

Sometimes, a story like that is a little bit of a comfort.



*photo credit: Erik Ryerson*



# We Are The Weirdos

*My Love Affair with Horror* - by Antonia Rachel Ward

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**FOREWORD** - Ghost Orchid Press bloomed at the dawn of the worldwide pandemic and, in the care of its founder and sole operator, Antonia Rachel Ward, has since rooted itself among the fastest growing and most highly respected small press publishers of modern horror, inspiring several others to plant their own literary seeds. Among them? *The Quiet Ones*.

Our editors reached out to Antonia and asked her if she would be willing to share her story - how she found horror (or how horror found her), about the haunted trails she walked that lead her from outcast to innovator, culminating in the launch of her own press.

What we received was everything we could've hoped for and more: a raw, real, and vulnerable gaze into the untamed fire of one of the horror genre's brightest new stars.

*The Quiet Ones* proudly presents, in her own words, Antonia Rachel Ward.

(foreword by David Fey)



## ***“We are the weirdos, mister.”***

So says Nancy Downs, leader of the coven of teenage witches in the 1996 teen horror movie, *The Craft*. When that film was released I was only eleven, and I remember watching it multiple times over the course of my teenage years. It was – and still is – a favorite of mine. I think it was something about the bond between the four girls – misfits, loners, depressives, and outcasts – who find friendship and a refuge from bullying in each other. Even though in this case the harmony doesn't last that long, I appreciated the defiant way they embraced their out-of-the-ordinariness. In their strangeness, they found strength. In their togetherness, the ability to stand up to their bullies. For any teenage girl who felt left out or ignored, it was an appealing idea. For me, it was one of my earliest forays into horror, and a first taste of how the genre gives a voice to the 'weirdos' who are so often sidelined.

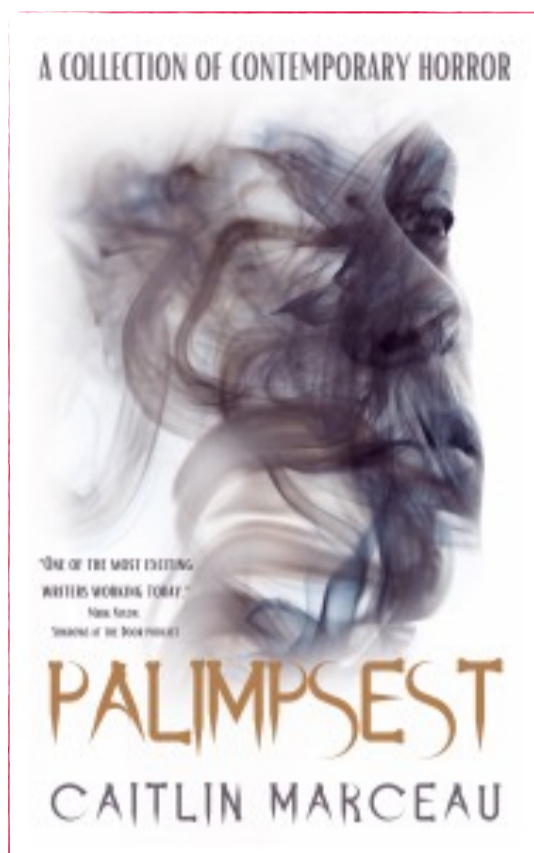
*I was fascinated by the idea of becoming one's doppelganger, and taking on the persona of someone braver, more exciting, more popular than oneself.*

Then there were the Point Horror books I devoured in middle school, by authors like Caroline B. Cooney and R.L. Stein. Titles like *The Boyfriend*, *The Cheerleader*, and *The Perfume* were marketed to appeal to teenage girls, whose only other options for reading material at the time seemed to be *Sweet Valley High* or *The Babysitter's Club*. But unlike those mostly wholesome tales (which I also enjoyed, by the way), the stories of Point Horror trod an altogether darker path.

My personal favorite, although not the most well-known or acclaimed of the series, was Caroline B. Cooney's *Twins*, in which the protagonist, Mary Lee, is able to step into her identical twin Madrigal's shoes after Madrigal dies in a skiing accident. She soon discovers that her beloved sister was very different from the person Mary Lee believed her to be. I was fascinated by the idea of becoming one's doppelganger, and taking on the persona of someone braver, more exciting, more popular than oneself. It was an idea I started to explore in my own writing: to become someone new seemed like a

perfect outlet for those darker, unspoken fears and desires that most teenagers deal with from time to time.

Challenging literature, the Point Horror series was not, but for a teenage girl looking for her place in the world, the books made for an addictive escape. I soon progressed to Christopher Pike and Stephen King, and then floundered. There didn't seem to be anything else for me in the horror genre – not that I could see, anyway. I went to university, studied English Literature, and became immersed in the classics instead. *Wuthering Heights* became a firm favorite, along with *Dracula*, and *Frankenstein*. The eerie hillsides and dingy corridors of Gothic literature became my second home. In my studies, I traced my way back through Austen's Gothic pastiche, *Northanger Abbey*, to the women writers who inspired her, like Anne Radcliffe, Clara Reeve, and Charlotte Dacre.



These women were a revelation. Female writers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, trapped in the limitations of their domestic sphere, had found a way to imagine their way out of their confined roles. Ghostly apparitions, Italian castles, banditti hiding in the hills . . . Look past the veneer of respectability and these stories are passionate, vengeful, frightening. And what's more – rebellious. Radcliffe's Emily St Aubert flees her domineering stepfather. Dacre's Victoria kills for love. These women writers and their characters were radicals in their own way, refusing to conform to a society that wanted them to be meek and placid. Their novels show a distinct mistrust of male authority figures and a sense of the oppressiveness of "home."

And other women read these books in their droves, just like I'd raced my way through the Point Horror novels. I was interested to learn how subversive womens' reading was seen to be at the time. Many contemporaries felt that a woman reading a novel on her own was opening herself up to imbibing dangerous ideas – ideas about personal freedom and autonomy; education; sexuality. In a nutshell, she might learn to think for herself.

I wrote my Masters' dissertation on imagination in the Gothic novel, and, as anyone who's studied literature will know, when you have a reading list the length of your arm, there's not much time to read



for fun. When I finished my degree and was free to pick up whatever books I wanted, I struggled to find contemporary literature that interested me. I worked in a bookshop at the time, and the horror section was, as a lot of bookshop horror sections tend to be, a shelf or two of Stephen King, Anne Rice, maybe a little Charlaine Harris, and not a lot else. It didn't really occur to me that there was more going on in the genre – even if it had, I wouldn't have known where to look.

Then, about two-and-a-half years ago, I joined a writer's site called Scribophile to get feedback on the science fiction novel I was writing. In the process of exchanging critiques with fellow amateurs, I found myself reading more and more horror. I also made some amazing friends and discovered that there was a wealth of unpublished talent around. Young writers whose work was striking, fun, and more importantly, what I wanted to read. After a long hiatus from the genre, I started to get a taste for horror again.

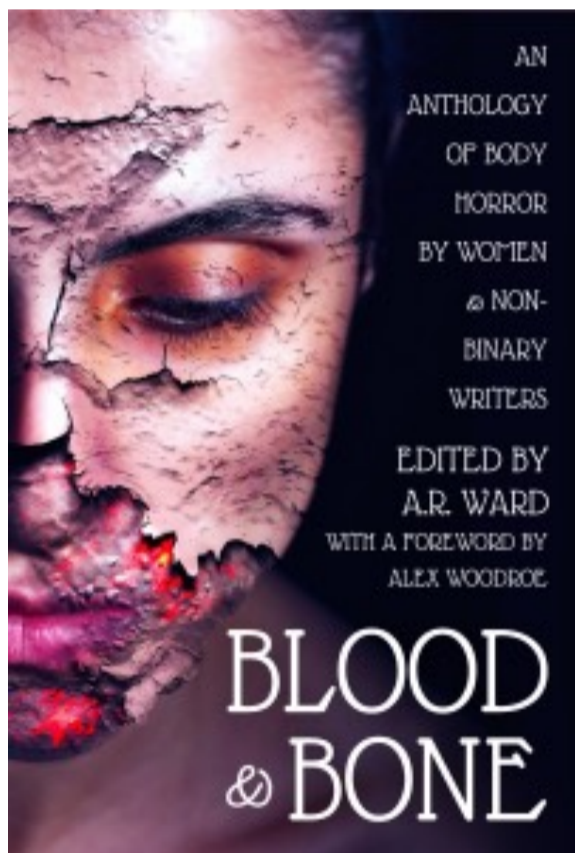
*Horror became a way to deal with the endless undercurrent of anxiety that none of us could escape.*

I picked up recommendations from my new writer friends and raced through as many horror novels and movies as I could find. Writers like Jack Ketchum, Adam Nevill, and Silvia Moreno-Garcia were suddenly on my radar when they never had been before. It was an eye-opening experience, to say the least. And as for films – they were a goldmine. I started small, easy, not-too-scary, but soon began testing my mettle with slasher classics and modern fright-fests alike. During lockdown, these books and movies were a lifeline for me; an escape from reality that I badly needed. Horror became a way to deal with the endless undercurrent of anxiety that none of us could escape. Like a true adrenaline junkie, I hoovered them up.

It's not that horror was totally unfamiliar to me. It's just that I somehow never linked modern horror to the Gothic classics I knew and loved. I was well-acquainted with writers like Bram Stoker and Edgar Allen Poe, but I'd never before followed that strand of literary history through to the present. I had no

idea of the breadth and diversity of the genre, nor the fantastic levels of creativity shown by modern creators. Here, I realized, were my people. Here was what I'd been looking for all along.

Of course I started writing horror, too. I'd written three unpublished science fiction novels, all of which had a slightly Gothic undercurrent running through them, but I was tired of sci-fi. It was becoming hard work trying to keep pace with the rapidly changing technological landscape we now live in. And when the pandemic hit, that was the final nail in that particular coffin, for the time being at least. I'd been writing a dystopian novella about a group of people locked in an underground bunker for thirty days, and in lockdown, that storyline seemed a little too close for comfort. Horror felt like a much better outlet for my pandemic stress – historical horror in particular. After a few months when I struggled to write, I eventually got stuck into a new novella, *Marionette*, which drew on my love of Gothic horror and featured a nineteenth-century Parisian setting. Writing it felt comfortable, like coming home.



Around the same time, I judged a few contests on Scribophile. One of them was a ghost story competition for Halloween, and the entries were of such high quality that I spent a very pleasant cozy afternoon reading them. They could easily have been a book – *should* have been, even. I wondered, not for the first time, why these authors weren't already published.

I think the pandemic changed a lot of our priorities, when it comes to flexibility of work, and the idea of following our own passions when we have the chance. Many years earlier, I'd had a pipe dream about one day starting a publishing company of my own, but it seemed impossible. Unrealistic. And besides, I had no clear, concrete ideas about how it would work. But then, in November 2020, the inspiration hit me all at once. I had experience building a business from scratch; an accountancy qualification; a wealth of knowledge about bookselling. Other people could do it. Why not me? And so, within weeks, Ghost Orchid Press was born. I learned on the go, researching my next steps at the same time as I set everything up. Website, social media presence, printers, cover design, formatting, sales. It was quite a learning curve, but so much fun.

One of the first submission calls I put out was for hundred-word horror stories on the theme of "home." I'd first discovered hundred-word stories, or *drabbles*, as they're often called, around a year earlier, when I spotted a call for them from another press. I wrote five for that call, themed around ocean horror, and two of them got into the book. Not only were they my first published fiction, they were also the first true horror stories I'd ever written. And I *loved* writing them.

Drabbles are addictive. They're quick and fun, but also challenging. Trying to tell a full story in exactly one hundred words is no mean feat, and it's a great skill for a beginner writer to hone. It forces you to think very hard about your word choice, and whether you're really making your words work as hard they possibly can. It also makes you consider what exactly constitutes a story, as opposed to a vignette, and how to grab a reader's attention quickly – skills I was able to take forward to my longer fiction.

*... I discovered an amazing sense of community among horror writers; a willingness to pitch in and support a total newcomer like me that was both gratifying and humbling.*

My ambition in launching the *Hundred Word Horror* submission call was mainly to encourage others to try their hand at drabble-writing, and to give them the opportunity to see their work in a book, just as I had. It was also a practice run for me in the process of creating a book and putting it up for sale. What I didn't expect was that it would be so popular. It turned out that other people enjoyed writing drabbles as much as I did. They made a big fuss of the book, and wanted to submit more, so I opened two more calls right away. Then another two. One reader featured the stories on his Book Talk videos on Twitter every week. I was really blown away by how popular they were. More importantly, I discovered an amazing sense of community among horror writers; a willingness to pitch in and support a total newcomer like me that was both gratifying and humbling.

But paying writers a fair rate is a core principle of mine, and while *Hundred Word Horror* was a fun way to launch the company, and get the attention of lots of readers and writers, they were not paying

calls, and once Ghost Orchid Press was a bit more established, I was keen to make the shift to paid calls as soon as possible. I felt there was a hunger amongst readers to see more diverse voices in horror fiction, and I noticed how publishers like Kandisha Press were looking to carve out some space for women writers, in particular, with their women-only anthologies. From the perspective of my background in Gothic studies, that gave me pause for thought . . .



It was a surprise to me that horror was seen as so typically male-dominated, when my view was colored by those early Gothic writers like Ann Radcliffe and Mary Shelley. When I got the impression that some people thought some kinds of horror –like body horror – weren't really for women, I was a bit bemused. What could possibly be more of an appropriate subject than body horror for women and female-identifying writers, who deal with issues relating to their bodies on a day-to-day basis?

I myself had just come out of a difficult few years where I dealt with miscarriage, pregnancy, and childbirth, swiftly followed by being diagnosed with breast cancer when my daughter was only one year old. Thankfully I've since had the all-clear, but the experience shook me. I know what it's like to feel as though your own body has turned against you. So when the idea of a body horror anthology for women popped into my head, it captured my imagination and I mentioned it on Twitter right away.

The positive response was exciting. Readers and writers –women and men alike – seemed keen to support the project. I was eager to put it into production, and I have never read a group of more emotionally raw, hard-hitting stories than the ones that were eventually selected for inclusion in the anthology. I often found myself having to take breaks whilst slush reading and editing, because these stories shook me to my core. But that was what I wanted. Not to put together an anthology that gave women a seat at a table that had traditionally been reserved for mostly men; but to remind everyone, in the most visceral way possible, that women were part of this genre from the beginning. Horror – be it the Gothic of Radcliffe, Reeve, and Dacre, or the body horror of Mary Shelley – belongs to women as much as it does to anybody. To me, the fearlessness of the writers featured in the *Blood & Bone* collection only serves to prove that point.

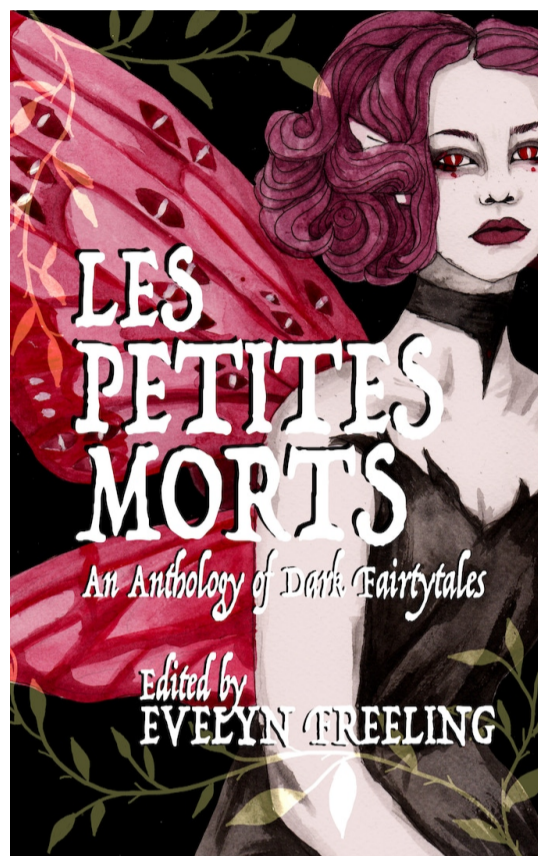
Of course, Ghost Orchid Press is far from the only independent publisher pushing at the boundaries of horror today. There are many, ranging from those who've been around for a few years or more, to others who have been newly established in 2020/21. And lots of them are turning to marginalized voices or progressive ideas to hone their product choices. Take Dread Stone Press's eco-horror anthology, for example, or the aforementioned Kandisha Press's women-only publications. Not to mention the amazing Tenebrous Press, whose output is of breathtaking quality and made with such love and care.

*Writing is often thought of as a solitary activity – a lone author scribbling away in isolation – but sharing stories is a social act.*

I've been incredibly lucky to have worked with many of these publishers in some small way – mostly through stories of my own that they've published or are due to publish – and it's wonderful to feel like part of a group of like-minded individuals with a sense of a shared cause: to champion emerging horror authors, and find new audiences and fresh approaches for this incredibly versatile genre. I was naive and pretty much unaware of all this other, complementary work going on when I decided to start my own publisher. Somehow, I just got lucky and unwittingly tapped into a bit of a zeitgeist.

Which leaves me wondering, why horror? Why now? What's caused this sudden upsurge in popularity for the genre amongst readers, writers, and independent publishers alike? Perhaps it has something to do with pandemic anxiety – some have theorized that horror fans find it easier to deal with real-life fears as a result of exposing themselves to fictional ones. I can attest to the fact that seems to be the case for me. Or perhaps it's a need to process and respond to dark times; to unravel dark emotions. No doubt the true upsurge began well before the pandemic, after all. Perhaps telling scary stories is a natural human response to times of uncertainty. An act of catharsis. And an act of community, too. A gathering around a campfire, sharing tales to both acknowledge and neutralize our fears of the dark.

Indeed, time and again I come back to this idea of community. Writing is often thought of as a solitary activity – a lone author scribbling away in isolation – but sharing stories is a social act. We share to be understood, and to understand others. So much of horror is about empathy – about stepping into another’s shoes, and feeling their fear, revulsion, disgust along with them. We can learn so much about our fellow humans by understanding what frightens them, whether that be the notion of their bodies



turning against them, anxieties about climate change, or the pulse-quickening feeling of being stalked down a dark alley. And when others acknowledge *our* fears – empathize and sympathize with them – we feel listened to. Emboldened. We feel we are not alone.

Maybe that’s why horror seems like such a great genre for those who’ve become accustomed to seeing themselves as the misfits, the loners . . . the "weirdos." Through our writing, we can connect with others like us, and indie horror in particular has a punkish, rebellious vibe. In a world where publishing houses are notoriously risk-averse, indie horror dares to be different, take risks, tackle difficult subjects, and center new and diverse voices.

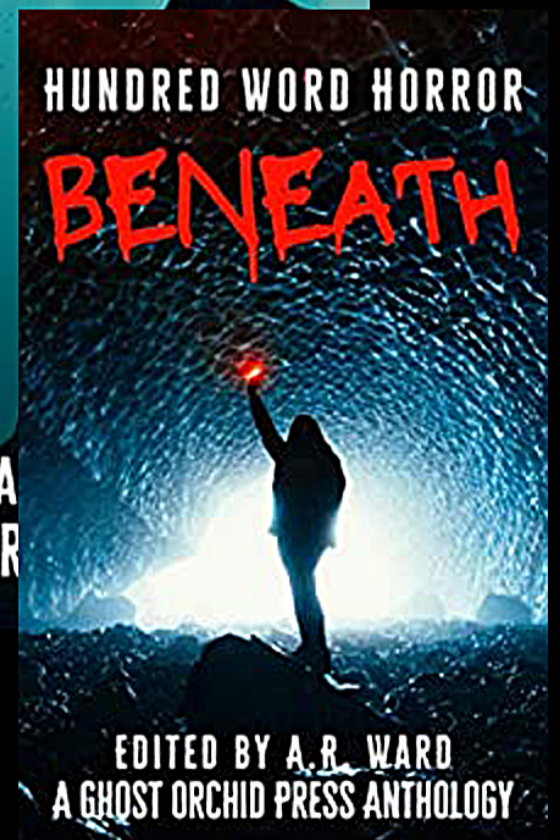
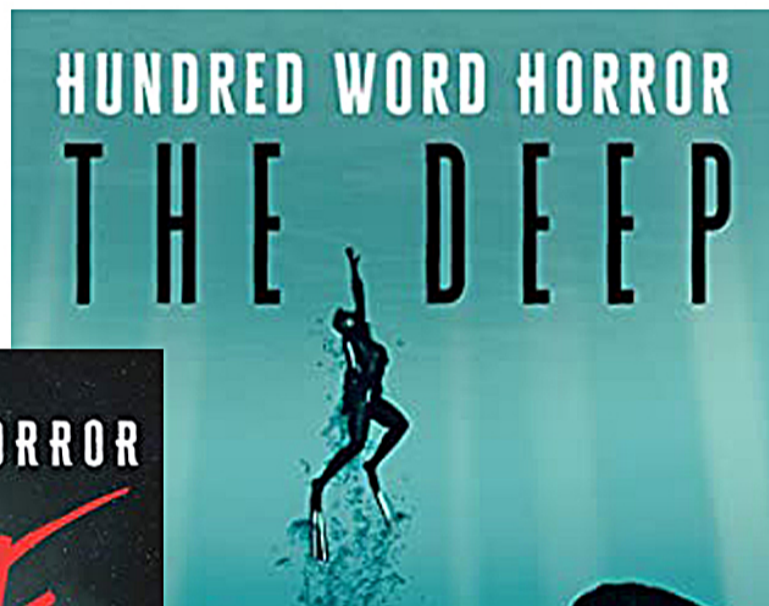
This is also my aim as I take Ghost Orchid Press into 2022. As I grew more confident, and accustomed to the publishing world, I dared to put out a call for novellas in the summer of 2021. That was a scary moment for me – it meant making a serious commitment to support and raise up my chosen authors to the absolute best of my ability. I meant to choose only two novellas to begin with, but the standard of submissions was so high that I ended up with four. I’m incredibly proud of the fact that they’re all debut authors, and also of the fact that three of the four are home-grown British talent. As a matter of fact, one of the novellas is a book I first read in its infancy when I critiqued it on Scribophile and so, in a funny way, that brings my journey full-circle.

My inspiration and my passion was to find a way to nurture talented new authors and give them an opportunity for their work to be noticed, and it’s an honor and a blessing to be able to do just that. I’m also overwhelmingly grateful for the writers, readers, reviewers, and fellow editors and publishers of the

horror community who've always been open to collaboration and quick to extend their support, kind words, encouragement and sympathy as needed. Here, I've found true friends as well as workmates, and I sincerely hope that continues.

Meanwhile, I've benefited from the same spirit of community and collaboration when it comes to my own writing. The help and encouragement of my author friends has been integral to all my small publishing successes, from the short stories I've had accepted over the past year, to my novella that's due to be published by Silver Shamrock Publishing in November. I could never have done any of this without such a supportive community around me.

Now, I'm working on a second novella, a novel, and hopefully my first screenplay. My to-do list is full and I couldn't be happier. This is about so much more than writing alone in a room. I feel I have found my people. Weirdos we may be, but there's so much love in the horror community, and I'm incredibly grateful to be a part of it.

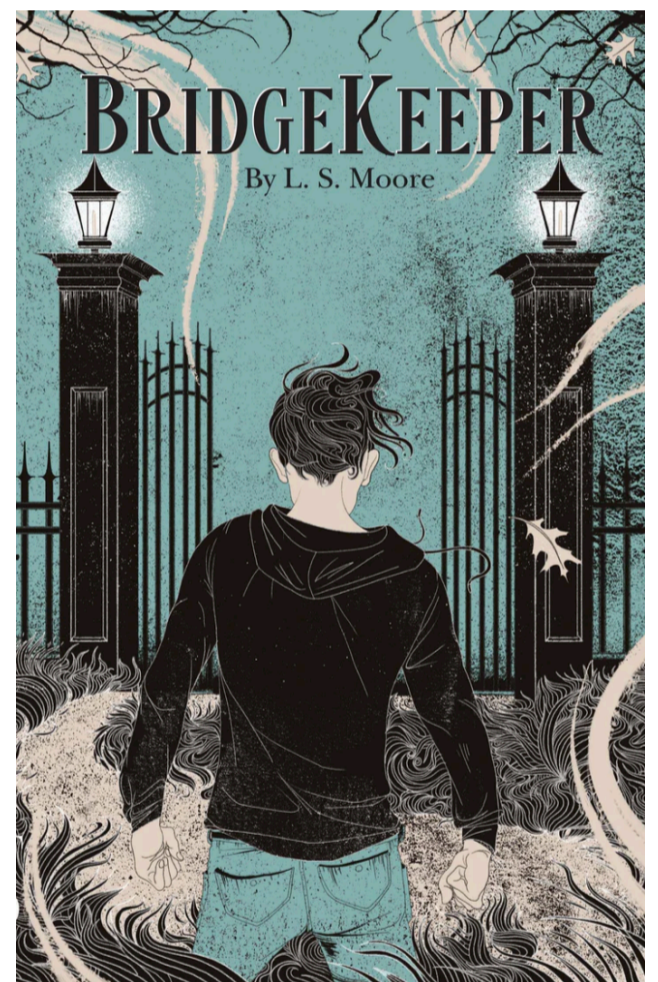


# Minding The Gap: An Interview with L.S. Moore

**W**hat does it mean to cross over the Void and into the embrace of eternity, and who among the living bears responsibility for the souls yet to make the journey? In *BridgeKeeper*, author L. S. Moore grapples with existential questions; the fear of death and the fear of truly living, in a debut that is equal parts bone-chilling and heart-warming. *The Quiet Ones* is proud to present, in conversation, L. S. Moore.

**TQO:** Leading off, we'd like to congratulate you on your debut. *BridgeKeeper* is a beautifully enthralling story, rich with a wide variety of noticeable influences for a broad audience. We got notes of the CW show *Supernatural*, the film *The Sixth Sense*, and novels like Neil Gaiman's *The Graveyard Book*, and Victoria Schwab's *City of Ghosts*. Can you speak about your actual influences and what drew you toward the modern-day ghost story? Did we get any correct?

LSM: Thank you so much. I'm certainly happy with this list of authors! They're some of my favorites. I have to give the show *Supernatural* credit for kicking off my writing life though. My first novel, actually the first piece of fiction I ever wrote, was fan-fiction for the show. When I was a child, long before I knew there was a name for the stories running through my head, my imagination supplied fan-fiction adventures inspired by the books, movies and television shows I loved. I'm not sure why, but the impulse to write those stories down didn't hit me until rather late in life. My sons were in their early teens and fans of *Supernatural* too. I'm sure that had something to do with it. I spent over a year writing and revising the story, wandering away from the canon of Eric Kripke's creation, adding my own characters and conflicts. . . People all over the world followed along as I



*BridgeKeeper* Cover by Cristina Bencina



posted a chapter a week. I even won an award! There's no emotional high like having fans of your fiction! That novel was the first and last piece of fan-fiction I ever wrote, but I never looked back.

**TQO: What were some of the unique challenges you encountered in crafting *BridgeKeeper* from its inception all the way to publication and what advice would you give other writers who might be experiencing similar hardships?**

LSM: I've learned that there's no *right* way to become a writer. You either are one or you're not, even if you're the only person who knows it. By far my biggest challenge was, and still is, learning to write. Before I submitted an early draft of *BridgeKeeper* for my first professional critique, I'd never taken a fiction writing class. My mentor gave me encouraging feedback, but I wanted to do better. I asked her if

*I enjoy exploring how love and rivalry interact, how obligation becomes loyalty.*

I should go back to school to earn another degree? My first was in theater, a whole different kind of storytelling. She told me that college was a valid choice, but she also suggested a different path. She introduced me to the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators, SCBWI. My local chapter was very active, and still is. I lucked into the most incredible critique group, started attending workshops and retreats, and discovered excellent books on the subject. Twelve years later, here I am. Maybe not the shortest road I could have taken, but it fit into my lifestyle with work and kids. It's been a wonderfully intense journey.

**TQO: In *BridgeKeeper's* world of magic and mystery, it's a powerful choice to tell the story from the point of view of the sidekick who, himself, has supplemental special powers. What led you to that creative decision and how did it inform your craft as you developed the novel?**

LSM: I'm a sucker for characters based on regular people fighting past ordinary weaknesses and flaws to discover the hero inside themselves. I'd go out for a beer with Robin rather than Batman any day! Standing in the shadow of their partners, sidekicks have many more challenges to overcome. They're not as powerful, gifted, self-assured or driven, but have to face the same dangers and conflicts. It makes them much more interesting to me. For readers, especially teens, I think it's easier to imagine yourself as

the sidekick rather than the person up on the pedestal. It's not such a huge leap to think, *Yeah, I'm a kid like Robin... I could do that too.* In early drafts I told the story from different points of view, but I always came back to Will, the younger brother.

**TQO: Throughout the novel, the theme of family and familial responsibility reigns supreme. What is it about the relationship between siblings that made you choose that angle for your central characters?**

LSM: Deep bonds between characters hook me into a story whether I'm writing it or reading it, but there's nothing like the inescapable blood ties of siblings. Siblings' brains, bodies and personalities literally develop alongside each other. You can't divorce your sister. There are no ex-brothers. In real life, few of us test our sibling bonds the way we can test them in fiction. I enjoy exploring how love and rivalry interact, how obligation becomes loyalty. I'm intrigued by the idea that it's possible for a person

*I'm a sucker for characters based on regular people fighting past ordinary weaknesses and flaws to discover the hero inside themselves.*

you've known your entire life to surprise you. You asked earlier about what influences led me to write a modern-day ghost story. I'll mention a few sets of brothers. Jim Butcher's wizard Harry Dresden has a brother named Thomas. I loved Rob Thurman's series with Cal and Niko Leandros. *Rot & Ruin* by Jonathan Maberry pitted brothers against the zombie apocalypse. Those authors, and my two sons, helped make writing sibling characters exciting to me.

**TQO: The end pages of the novel feature images of graves with a caption referencing the "tombstone tourism" that has taken you all over the country. What are your top five most beautiful American cemeteries?**

LSM: Only five? I've visited so many! I even found a gem of a cemetery in a grocery store parking lot once! But my top five would start with Genoa, a tiny town in the mountains of Nevada. There were probably only a few hundred people buried there, but their families had lovingly and lavishly decorated the graves with native quartz, personal mementos and hand-carved markers. Each grave told a

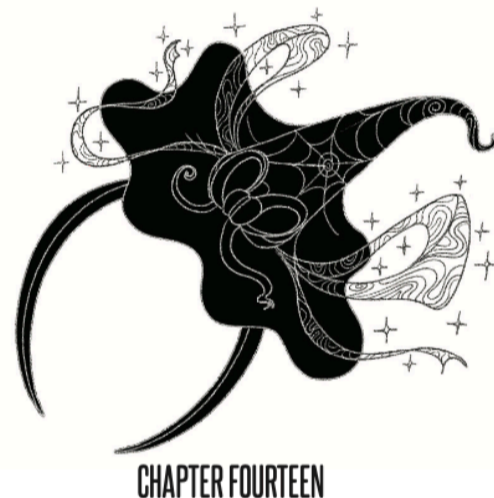
fascinating story. Also in Nevada, on the hill behind Virginia City is the most evocative old west cemetery I've ever seen. The day I visited, there happened to be a full solar eclipse happening. The sun shadows flickering on the tombstones were magical. One more civilized cemetery is Lake View in Seattle. The grounds are gorgeously landscaped, but the best part is the "unkindness" of ravens that claim the stones and monuments there and have for generations. Mount Mora in St. Joseph, Missouri was full of poison ivy the last time I visited, but it has some of the most elaborate and haunting mausoleums I've ever seen. And lastly, my fifth favorite cemetery is the next one I find along a country road or sandwiched between two freeways in the middle of a city or preserved in a parking lot. They're everywhere, you just have to stop and take them in. Cemeteries are great places to write in, by the way. Whether you need a quiet, beautiful spot or a dreary, spooky one, they're meant to be visited. I find great character names strolling among the stones. Quirky epitaphs can spark a story idea. You never know what you'll find.

**TQO: Your book also features a gorgeously illustrated cover and chapter headers by Cristina Bencina. What was it like to work with her on BridgeKeeper?**

LSM: It's been a dream! All the credit for finding Cristina goes to my publisher. The chapter headers were her idea, and I love them. That said, I gave input on every image in the book. Cristina was incredible at taking my clumsily expressed ideas and turning them into art. She read

BridgeKeeper before she started so all it took were a few reference photos, and a little back and forth on details. I got exactly what I wanted, without knowing it was exactly what I wanted, if you know what I mean. The style and artistry are all Cristina.

**TQO: Before we go, do you have any final words of wisdom for our writers and readers?**



**N**ormal wasn't exactly what waited for me on the porch. Nico looked like a casualty from a smoothie explosion.

*Interior Page from BridgeKeeper with art by Cristina Bencina*

LSM: For writers, here's something I wish someone had told me. Don't saddle yourself with self-imposed deadlines. Ignore that voice in your head that says, *If I haven't published within two years, I'm a failure. Or I'm getting too old for this.* Arbitrary restraints like that squeeze the joy out of writing. As long as you're studying your craft, improving, and enjoying yourself, you're not wasting time. Find a community, a critique group or workshops and dive in. Also, these days there are many pathways to publication. Everything from online magazines like this one, to mid-sized independent publishers in all kinds of niches, don't be afraid to explore non-traditional paths.

And readers, thank you so much! I meant it when I said there's no rush like the rush we get from having fans. Keep reading and please support the authors you love by posting reviews.

\* \* \*

BridgeKeeper is available for pre-order everywhere books are sold. Secure your copy direct from the publisher at <https://thelittlefig.com/products/bridgekeeper>.



**BridgeKeeper** by L. S. Moore is out August 2023.

# The Fury of The Far Realm

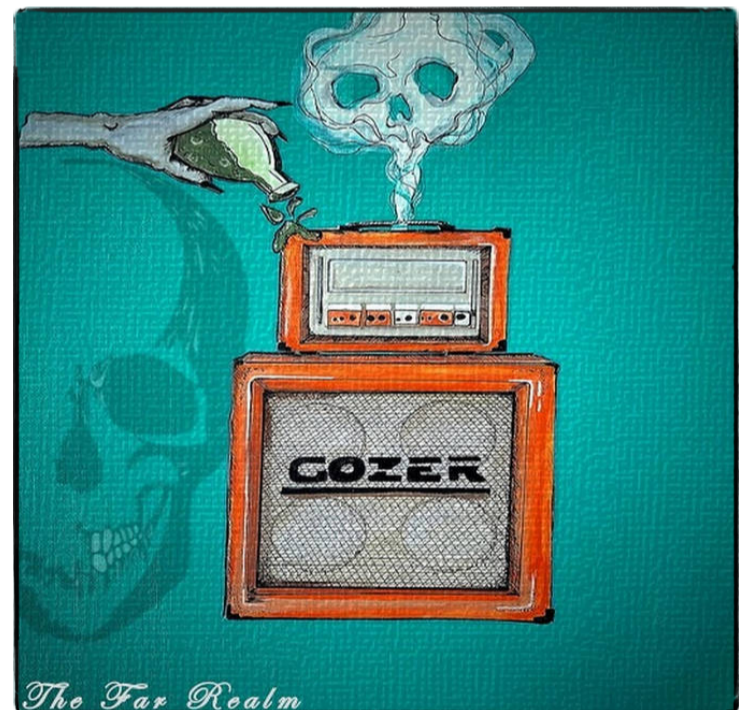
*An introduction to* **GOZER**



by: David Fey

Cold winter air claws through the seams of an unassuming Scotia, New York garage. Red lamps soak the walls with an otherworldly ochre glow. Pressed up against exits are black Marshall cabs and golden drums. Cameras roll. The cement floor shudders. Gozer rises to life wearing a Poisoned Crown.

Taking their band's name from *Ghostbusters'* famous herald of the end times, Mykah Dillenger, Nick Kossor, Sean Murphy, and Nick Masucci's debut album: *The Far Realm* is a thunderous and aggressive essential for the "play this loud or not at all" crowd. With echoes of bluesy old-school metal and mystical contemporary rock, the only apocalypse on the heels of this Gozer is the one that aims to rid your ears of meandering, forgettable riffs. . . and melt your face off. *The Quiet Ones* are excited to introduce you. The traveler has come!



Album: *The Far Realm*  
Cover Art: Jenn M. Harding

**TQO: Can you give us a little history of the band's formation?**

**GOZER:** Gozer started out as a concept born in Nick K's attic. He and Sean had been playing in another band that had just dissolved, and were contributing music to various podcasts to keep scratching their musical itch. Nick put together a guitar demo that ended up turning into our track, "My Design."

He and Sean quickly wrote two more songs and turned their attention to filling out the rest of the band. Disastrous Craigslist auditions and troubled short residencies followed. It was really an exhausting process, but it makes us appreciate having a lineup of solid individuals that much more.

**TQO: As a group, who are some of your biggest influences?**

GOZER: As a group we are influenced by a combination of Black Sabbath style stoner rock, The Sword, and contemporary hard rock artists like Story of the Year and Periphery. We think the blend of the styles helps shape an individualized sound that widens our listener spectrum.

**TQO: Can you describe your song writing process? How do tunes like "Space Vikings," "My Design," and "Poisoned Crown" come to be?**

GOZER: "Space Vikings" was written for our friends of "Botched: A D&D Podcast." That one was meant to be an over the top, 80's/90's cartoon theme. They do an annual panel at Dragon-Con by the way, definitely check them out.

For most of the songs, the writing process is pretty remote. One of us will come up with either a riff/idea or a full demo and structure. Once everyone agrees to move forward, we all put our own influences in. It's a very "do your homework" style format. After the music is assembled, either Mykah or Nick K. put lyrics and a melody to it. Overall, it's a pretty collaborative process, and that's something we pride ourselves on. We've all been in bands where one person calls all the shots and that can be a bummer. As an example, "Zeke" was originally written to be played much faster until one of us suggested we should play it super slow. Though, conversely, "Poisoned Crown" was written by Sean in a day or two. One of those moments where the music just poured out.

**TQO: Tell us a little bit about the recording of your first full-length LP, *The Far Realm*. How were those sessions and what did you learn about yourselves as a band going through them?**

GOZER: Recording for *The Far Realm* was a blast. Very laid back and chill sessions where we got to hang out and have fun as friends, but also make a record that we're extremely proud of. We learned to really trust each other. Our producer, Tim Lynch of The Recording Company, helped create a safe and fun

environment too. Each song took hours to fully assemble so, we got to recognize how important it was to have fun with what we were doing. Having spent so much time together, we're pretty good at reading each other. Each of us can recognize patterns and communicate without words, which really helps at gigs too.

**TQO: No doubt there's been a lot of memorable gigs so far.**

**GOZER:** There are so many great and memorable moments to choose from! We recently played a gig in Albany that seemed to be a drummer's nightmare. Before the show, the drummer of an out-of-town band got hit by a car while grabbing pizza! Thankfully, he wasn't hurt too badly. Nothing broken, and he played his set no problem but his elbow was pretty swollen after!

That same night, Nick M.'s kick drum pedal ended up breaking and the dude finished the second half of our set just kicking that thing with his left foot. That was pretty bad ass and it saved the show.



*(from left to right: Sean Murphy, Nick Masucci, Mykah Dillenger, Nick Kossor) - Photo: Amy Klemme*

## Mykah Dillenger



Photo: Bryan Lasky

**Instrument(s):** Vocals

**Favorite scary movie or book:** I would have to say both versions of *IT*. The made-for-TV version had such a creepy vibe to it. Tim Curry will always be a great Pennywise, but Bill Skarsgard always had the creepy smile and that more demonic voice of it.

**Other than Gozer, your favorite *Ghostbusters* ghost:** From the movie I would say the Gate Keeper and Key Master. From *The Real Ghostbusters* cartoon I would say the antagonist from "The Sand Man" episode.

**Your favorite Gozer track to play live:** That's a tough one. I would have to say I really love playing "Poisoned Crown." Especially when Sean drops that sick base beat. I always love to fall to the floor like a dead man when he drops that towards the end.

**Who in the band is most likely to be abducted by aliens, and why?** Nick M, our drummer! I feel they would abduct him for his crazy reflexes on the drums and his untold knowledge of all that is DnD and retro video games.

## Nick Kossor

**Instrument(s):** Guitar

**Favorite scary movie or book:** *John Carpenter's The Thing*.

**Other than Gozer, your favorite *Ghostbusters* ghost:** Vinz Klortho the Key Master if that counts. Second place goes to Slimer.

**Your favorite Gozer track to play live:** "Weight of The World."  
The whole song has such a groove to it.

**Who in the band is most likely to be abducted by aliens, and why?** Mykah. Aliens would find him the most interesting out of all of us.



Photo: Amy Klemme



## Sean Murphy



Photo: Bryan Lasky

**Instrument(s):** Bass and Vocals

**Favorite scary movie or book:** I'm a big fan of the old school horror movies from the 70s/80's era. The first two *Hellraiser* films from the late 80's are probably my go to. Our track "My Design" actually pays homage to those films as well as some other favorites.

**Other than Gozer, your favorite *Ghostbusters* ghost:** I don't think the other guys in the band even know this, but I've never seen it! (*GASP!*) I know, I know... but hey, in my defense I didn't come up with the band name.

**Your favorite Gozer track to play live:** Right now, it's probably "Poisoned Crown" for sure. It's just got a great groove and the outro is especially a blast that hits even better in a live setting. That song was actually one of the last tracks we wrote for the album and seemingly wrote itself within a matter of days.

**Who in the band is most likely to be abducted by aliens, and why?** Definitely Mykah, but I have absolutely no idea why. Probably because he would have an amazing story to go with it. Hopefully not me, because *fuck that!*

## Nick Masucci

**Instrument(s):** Drums

**Favorite scary movie or book:** Favorite scary movie is *Hereditary*. Scariest movie ever.

**Other than Gozer, your favorite *Ghostbusters* ghost:** Slimer. He's a fan favorite for a reason!

**Your favorite Gozer track to play live:** "The Beast That Lies" is my favorite to play live; it has such high energy and usually garners a fun reaction from the crowd.

**Who in the band is most likely to be abducted by aliens, and why?** Abstaining from this one!



Photo: Amy Klemme

# MY DESIGN

lyrics by: Nick Kossor

Drowning in sisters  
Forming new blisters  
By these laws I do abide  
She said to gargle cyanide  
And it's all by one's design

Raise Deadites from a book  
Hanging victims from a hook  
What's your pleasure, what's your pain  
Cause where we're from it's all the same  
And it's all by one's design

Screams like thunder, they'll put you six feet  
under.

Masked killers thin the herd  
Ripped apart by flocks of birds  
Teppish drinking blood like wine  
Hotels that can see you shine  
And it's all by one's design

Trapped in Argento's church  
Ed Pretorius does research  
Scared by what isn't seen  
Forever chased within a dream  
And it's all by one's design

Screams like thunder, they'll put you six feet  
under.



Support Gozer @Gozer\_Music on all socials.

Purchase *The Far Realm*:  
<https://gozer4.bandcamp.com/>

# It's Alive and It's Gay:

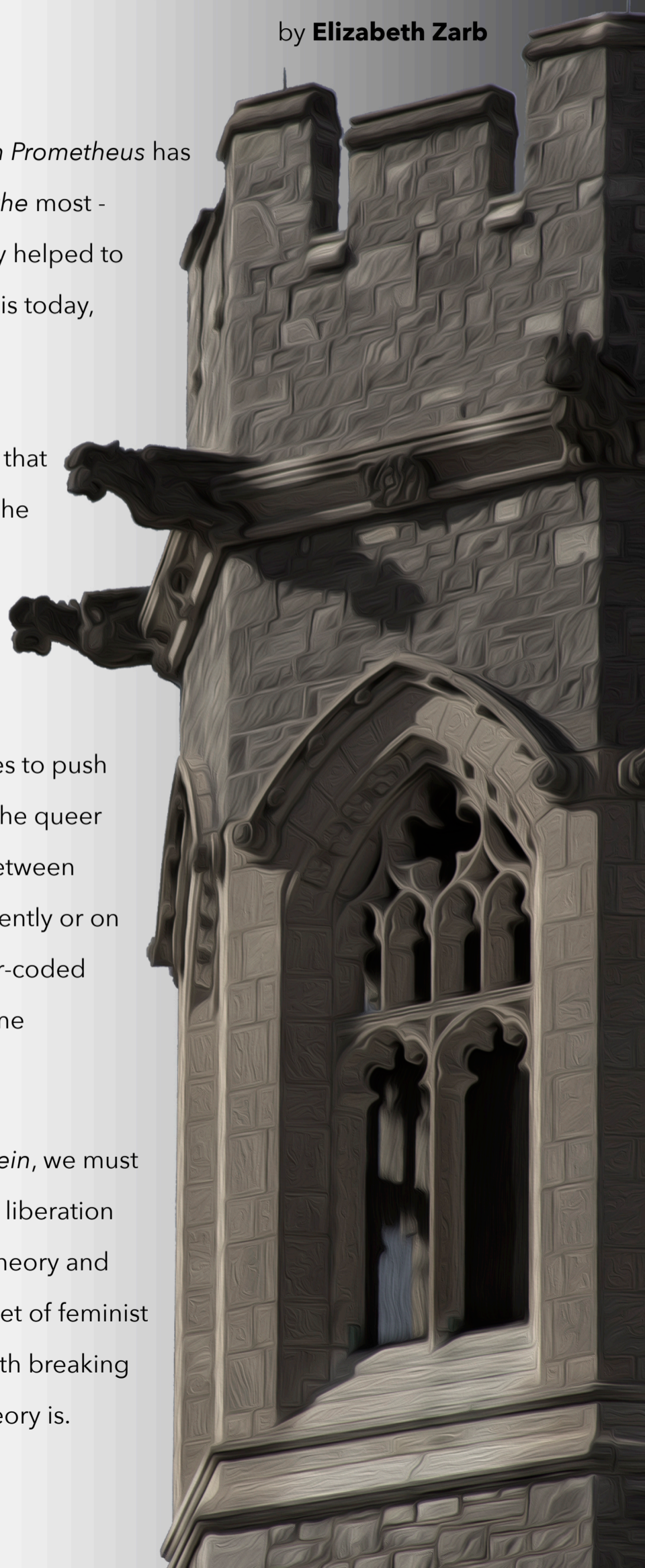
## Queering Mary Shelley's Frankenstein

by Elizabeth Zarb

Mary Shelley's 1818 novel *Frankenstein: or, The Modern Prometheus* has prevailed for over two-hundred years as one of - if not *the* most - influential gothic novels in history. *Frankenstein* not only helped to found the science fiction genre and mold it into what it is today, but the entire story was all about pushing boundaries.

Victor Frankenstein plays God and creates life, a notion that was - and continues to be - very taboo in media (upon the release of the 1931 film adaptation, his exclamation of "now I know what it feels like to be God" was cut from screenings in multiple states due to claims of it being blasphemous). Beyond this explicit, in-text example of testing cultural limits, *Frankenstein's* subtext continues to push these limits in subtle ways. Perhaps most interesting is the queer subtext of the story that is present in the relationship between Victor and his creation. Mary Shelley - whether inadvertently or on purpose - created a main character that is deeply queer-coded and a main "monster" that experiences much of the same ostracism that the LGBTQ+ community experiences.

In order to discuss the inherent queerness of *Frankenstein*, we must first discuss queer theory as a whole. Queer theory and liberation rose to prominence around the same time as feminist theory and the feminist movement, so it is often considered an offset of feminist theory. However, feminist theory is not as concerned with breaking down the gender binary in the same way that queer theory is.



In her book *Epistemology of the Closet*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick explains that a straight woman, while not benefitting from sexism, may still benefit from homophobia, saying "a woman's use of a married name makes graphic at the same time her subordination as woman and her privilege as a presumptive heterosexual" (Kosofsky 135). Conversely, queer theory is more interested in breaking down binaries and learning about what exists *between* these binaries, as well as exploring relationships that do not fit into traditional heteronormative conceptions. It is important in establishing a definition of queer theory to explain the explicit differences between it and feminist theory so that we do not confuse the two while analyzing *Frankenstein*.

It is not an unusual thought to analyze Victor Frankenstein as a gay character, as there are many moments in the text that attest to his queerness. The most clear and obvious of these is the main plot point of the story: the synthesis of his Creature. Victor - the narrator of this portion of the story - does not give an in-depth reason as for why he is intrigued in creating life, but we can infer a couple of reasons. He explains that during his first two years at university, he was deeply interested in science and natural philosophies as a whole (this is evident in his close professional relationships with both Professor Krempe and Professor Waldman). However, in recounting the mental milestones leading to his decision to create life, he simply states he was "particularly attracted" to "the structure of the human frame" before eventually telling Captain Walton - and therefore the audience - that he "became... capable of bestowing animation upon lifeless matter" (Shelley 76-77). We do not receive a lot of information leading up to the creation, nor do we know a lot about Victor's motives, but it is possible to draw conclusions through other moments in the text. For example, after the Creature comes to life and Victor is horrified by the result, he explains to Walton that "[the Creature's] limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful" (Shelley 84). While this statement is not inherently homoerotic, it does beg the question as to *why* he was so intent on picking the most beautiful parts for his Creature, and is the Creature therefore a depiction of what Victor is most attracted to? If so, and if we are to believe that Victor is heterosexual (and we are, due to his betrothal to Elizabeth), why would his depiction of attraction be a man? Still, these are all inferences, but they add up and definitely correlate to a queer-coding of the character.

Perhaps the most queer - and the most intriguing - aspect of Victor's process of creating his monster is the fact that he, canonically, gives the Creature working reproductive parts. While Victor never tells the audience this directly, he inadvertently reveals it after the Creature comes to him in

desire of a wife. Victor initially refuses to make a second Creature, but eventually gives in and begins working on her. Midway through the process, however, he begins to have his doubts, one of which is the concern that “one of the first results of those sympathies for which the daemon thirsted would be children, and a race of devils would be propagated upon the earth” (Shelley 214). In other words, Victor is concerned that if he makes the Creature a wife, the two of them would reproduce. In order for the two to reproduce, the Creature would *have* to have working reproductive organs. This may seem innocuous at first glance, or even like a throw-away line, but it adds an important piece to the queer-coding of Victor. Why would Victor go out of his way ensure that the Creature had working genitals if he had no intent for the Creature to use them? Is it outrageous to wonder if Victor then made the Creature for his own pleasure?

*Victor's relationship with Elizabeth is notably absent of any sex, while his relationship with the Creature seems to be full of it.*

The final portion of Victor's characterization that implies implicit queerness is the direct contrast between his relationship with the Creature and his relationship with Elizabeth, his adopted-sister-turned-fiancée. In the first chapter of the novel, Victor paints his relationship with Elizabeth as one that is like siblings, with no romantic or erotic interest. When it is finally revealed to the reader that the two of them are to be married, it seems more out of obligation than out of desire. It is Victor's mother, not the two of them, who pushes the relationship, as on her deathbed she “joined the hands of Elizabeth and [Victor]. ‘My children,’ she said, ‘my firmest hopes of future happiness were placed on the prospect of your union. This expectation will now be the consolation of your father’” (Shelley 60-61). This dialogue erases any possibility of this relationship being seen as romantic and instead paints it as something that is done in order to placate the final wishes of a dying matriarch. Throughout the rest of the novel, whenever Victor describes Elizabeth, he uses docile and almost infantile terms to describe her. She is often “good,” “kind,” “gentle,” or “innocent;” there is nothing sexual or passionate about their relationship. Even on their wedding night, instead of consummating their marriage, Victor allows Elizabeth to go to bed alone (which ultimately leads to her death). This is in direct contrast with Victor's reactions towards the Creature, which are *much* more eroticized. The night after the Creature comes to

life, Victor describes his physical reaction by saying “sometimes my pulse beat so quickly and hardly, that I felt the palpitation of every artery; at others, I nearly sank to the ground through languor and extreme weakness” (Shelley 86). The description of heart racing and high sensitivity followed by fatigue is not unlike an orgasm, a comparison that seems quite deliberate when put in context with the other aspects of Victor’s characterization that paints him as a queer character. Each time they meet after his first interaction with the Creature, Victor experiences some sort of similar bodily reaction, as well as becoming entranced by the Creature. Victor’s relationship with Elizabeth is notably absent of any sex, while his relationship with the Creature seems to be full of it.

While the queer-coding of Victor is rooted deeply in explicit textual evidence, the queer-coding of the Creature is evident in subtext and the parallels between the way he is ostracized and the way that queer people in society were - and continue to be - ostracized. As mentioned above, Victor selected the Creature’s body parts specifically to be beautiful. However, once the Creature actually comes to life, Victor describes him as follows:

His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only forced a more horrid contrast with his water eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion, and straight black lips. (Shelley 84-85)

This description is often used to point out the fallacy in Victor’s plan to play God; he can animate a body, but he cannot make it look lifelike. But when looking at the description through a queer lens, it becomes much more. When Victor makes the Creature, he essentially gives birth to it. Here, the Creature is something beautiful that he takes deep pride in. However, once the Creature reveals his internal self (i.e. comes out), he is immediately rejected as something unnatural. This parallels the way that many homophobic parents care for their children when they are young and have yet to discover their sexuality, but once the child comes out as anything other than the heteronormative standard, the parent sees them as an abomination. The way that Victor rejects the Creature is the same as the way homophobic parents reject their queer kids.

Besides Victor's rejection, the Creature is also consistently rejected by members of society due to a perceived difference. In his time away from Victor, the Creature stumbles across a family that he begins to almost idolize. He sees them as the perfect family - and as something that he cannot have. For months, he watches them live a preliminary version of the nuclear family, and longs to have that. However, he knows that if he were to reveal himself to the De Lacy family, they would shun him based on a first impression of who he is. It is only the blind old man of the family that eventually learns that the Creature is not so different from them, because he is unable to see the thing that makes the Creature hideous to society's standards (Shelley 172-173). This directly parallels the way that many heterosexual people shun the idea of homosexuality, and yet upon actually getting to know a queer person they realize that there isn't any fundamental difference aside from whom they love. And yet the Creature's time with the De Lacy family - as well as their rejection of him - deeply impacts the outcome of the rest of his story. It is not until after the altercation with the De Lacy family that the Creature begins to desire a wife. This compulsory heterosexuality comes from both the only family the Creature knows being a heteronormative one (the De Lacy's), as well as his desire to be accepted by society. It is not unheard of for a closeted queer person to adopt a "beard," or a person of the opposite gender that they date in order to ward off suspicion that they are gay, or in order to feel that they are fitting into society's mold about what is "correct." The Creature does the same thing when he demands Victor make him a wife; he saw the way that the De Lacy's rejected him and he resolved to fix it somehow. He sees compulsory heterosexuality as a solution to all of his problems *because* of his interactions with the De Lacy family.

*Victor's almost orgasmic reactions toward his Creation,  
as well as his clear desire for a male companion...*

The queerness of both Victor Frankenstein and his Creation becomes more apparent the deeper into the text one looks. Queer theory allows us to look into the subtext of the narrative in order to make inferences about characters, and gives a voice to a marginalized community by giving examples from classic literature. LGBTQ+ people have always been around and will continue to be around, and it becomes almost cathartic to recognize queerness in the literature that is taught to us. In the case of *Frankenstein*, Victor's almost orgasmic reactions toward his Creation, as well as his clear desire for a male companion, and the Creature's wish to fit into a society that continuously rejects him over

something he cannot control show that Mary Shelley not only pioneered the science fiction genre, but also created two characters whose inherent queerness allows them to be relatable to LGBTQ+ people of all ages two hundred years later.



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# The Storyteller Speaks

an interview with Ann Dávila Cardinal

**W**hat sort of writer are you? What types of stories stir in your soul?

For Ann Dávila Cardinal, who debuted in 2019 in the YA Horror market, the answer to those questions aren't so easily contained. After two horror novels for teens, Cardinal's newest work takes a detour from terror and tells a vibrant and heart-wrenchingly familial magical realism story for adults.

Following in the genre diverse footsteps of such renowned horror greats as Clive Barker, Stephen King, and Anne Rice, *The Storyteller's Death* isn't as much a departure for the emerging Ann Dávila Cardinal as it is a sooner-than-expected leap out of the horror sandbox. It's a leap that Cardinal lands with elegance, and sends a clear message to other developing writers that creativity need not be boxed in by labels like genre or age range. If there's a story in your soul aching to be told, tell it.

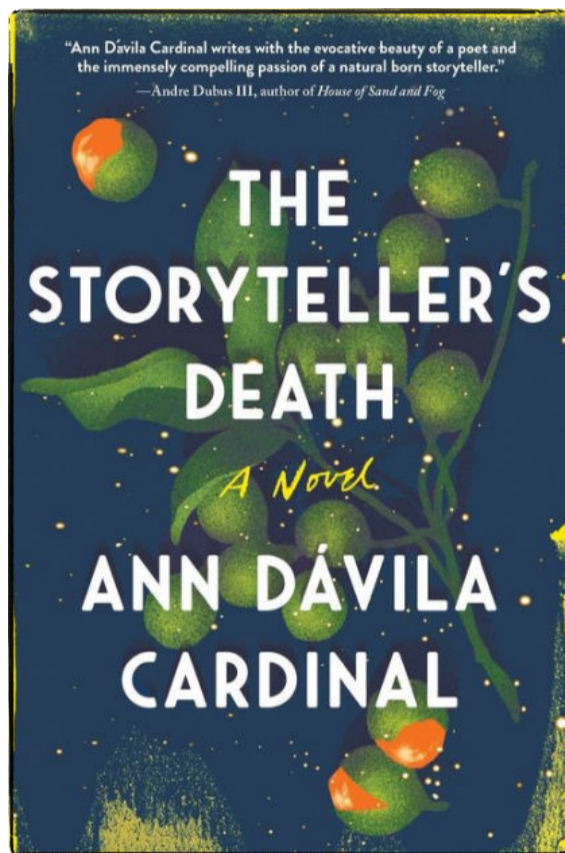
We reached out to Ann Dávila Cardinal to speak about her latest novel and what the future holds for her and her writing (spoiler alert: horror *rom-com*, anyone?), and we're proud to share the conversation that followed.

**TQO: First off, congratulations on *The Storyteller's Death*. You've said this book took 17 years to make it onto shelves. And in that time you've published a duology of young adult horror novels (*Five Midnights* and *Category Five*) and several shorts in various anthologies including our own debut issue last year. What kept you always creatively returning to this novel over all that time and writing?**

ADC: Thank you, I'm so excited it's finally out in the world! I think it kept drawing me back because it was a story I had to tell. It sounds cliché, but it really is the book of my heart and soul, and it continued

to haunt me, much like Isla's visions. So I kept coming back to it. And back to it. It went from third person to first, to third, and finally back to first. It wasn't until I worked with my Sourcebooks editor, Christa Desir that I felt it was ready. Well, as ready as we ever think they are.

**TQO: Did working on other projects over those 17 years help unlock the places you were stuck on earlier drafts of *The Storyteller's Death*?**



ADC: I mean, I don't think so? But they definitely honed my novel writing skills. Writing for young adults is wonderful. You have to pare a novel down to the heart of the story, keep it lean, no pontificating. It's a very pure kind of writing, and I love it. But this work was inspired by the magical realist books I was raised on. Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Isabel Allende, Julio Cortázar. I loved the lush language of the magical realist movement, the settings you can see, hear, taste. And I wanted to begin when Isla was a child, something not generally done in young adult literature, so it made sense to do this as an adult novel with a retrospective narrator. But I'm proud of my young adult work, and I will continue to write them.

**TQO: Without getting into spoilers, *The Storyteller's Death* centers on Isla, who comes into possession of a familial ability to bring to life the tales of her deceased family members - memories and stories that play out in front of her - and one memory in particular that could have very real, very fatal consequences if left unaddressed. How much developmental writing and brainstorming went into building Isla's deep familial history?**

ADC: Well, a lot, but formal and intentional writing. That's because I was learning to write while writing this novel, so I just...went for it. And truthfully, at the inception of this story I didn't know how to think about plot or world building in a systematic way, it was more intuitive. But during my MFA in Writing program at VCFA, I deepened my writing by going beyond my storytelling skills, and learned how to thoughtfully build a story and a world. However, as mentioned earlier, it took many years past graduation and dozens of revisions to really get it where it needed to be.

**TQO: Would you say that you did as much or more personal history building as you did world building for this novel?**

ADC: Wow, that's a good question. I think the two are so woven together in this novel you can't even examine them separately, because even the world of the visions is informed by personal history, Isla's and my own. But I would have to say I did more personal history building, because capturing the feeling of Puerto Rico in the 70s was so important to me, but the world was one of my own senses and memory. Even the world building I do in *The Storyteller's Death* is constructed on the scaffolding of personal history.

*I loved the lush language of the magical realist movement, the settings you can see, hear, taste.*

**TQO: As a novel in the first-person, one of the things we loved about *The Storyteller's Death* was how you maintained a real sense of warmth and community around Isla even as the stakes grew higher and her need for urgency increased. Here we all are, living through three anxiety-filled years of COVID trauma, and you present us with a character in a dire situation who nevertheless gives your reader a sense of calm as she navigates the storm. It makes the book a much cozier read than your horror novels which are full of deliciously unrestrained tension. Was your narrative tone always so empathetic toward the reader or was that attitude reshaped by the last three extraordinary years?**

ADC: I'm pretty sure that tone was there all along, and I'm glad you found it empathetic. In answer I would have to say that I will always be a reader first and a writer second, so my thoughts are always with the reader. So much so, that when I started writing horror (which I have always read and loved), I had to make myself throw more at the protagonist, even kill off characters I had grown fond of. They always start out tame in the first draft because I feel the need to protect my characters, but then I gradually make their lives darker and riskier and threatening. I usually wince as I write those scenes, and whisper apologies at the screen.

**TQO: We mention COVID as a collective trauma, but it's important to note that your stories either take place in or center Puerto Rico which, during COVID, has had to also face Hurricanes Fiona and Ian, and the aftermath of those life-altering storms.**

ADC: Yes. It is an island and people of tremendous resilience and gratitude. I am in constant awe of my family and the people who live on the island and how they maintain their hope, generosity, and faith under tremendous strain.

**TQO: Speaking of those hurricanes, your horror novels, *Five Midnights* and *Category Five*, as well as the piece you wrote for the October 2021 debut of *The Quiet Ones* are all centered on storms. Being a Puerto Rican author, is it fair to say that the trauma of Fiona and Ian fed into your writing and do you find that sharing these stories helps to unpack and heal from the lasting damage of these real-world disasters?**

ADC: I mean, I can't compare the trauma I've felt during these times to those of people living on the island. No one can understand what it's like to live through such a tragic disaster unless you're there.

*I love changing formats and genres and age groups, it keeps me sharp. It's like a writing exercise on steroids.*

But not knowing how your people are, whether or not they're alive or safe is not easy. I think every hurricane season anyone with Caribbean blood is holding their breath. I was working on copy edits of *Five Midnights* when Maria hit, and I asked my editor if I could make my second TorTeen book a hurricane story, and she agreed. Writing that novel did help me deal with the fear and helplessness, but it can't compare with what those on the island experienced. I wish I could put a glass bubble over it to protect it, but then how could you feel the winds?

**TQO: Do you find that writing in different genres helps you to explore the complex spectrum of emotions that real-world traumas and anxieties inject into you?**

ADC: Absolutely. I love changing formats and genres and age groups, it keeps me sharp. It's like a writing exercise on steroids. And the emotions they release are similar but painted in different hues. I don't think I'll ever stay in a lane, in my writing or my life.

**TQO: What works of fiction, in your life, helped you through difficult times?**

ADC: Oh, *Charlotte's Web* saved my life. I was reading it over and over when I was eight. I was clutching it when they took my father's body out of the house. I didn't know then that it was a manual for children on how to deal with death, all I knew is that it comforted me. Then a year after I graduated high school *The House of Spirits* was released. Oh how I loved that book. I found Allende's work more accessible and relatable to my life than some of the other magical realists. I carried my dog-eared copy of that novel with me everywhere when I was trying to figure out adulthood. I'm not sure I've done that yet, though.

**TQO: Next year, you return to the horror genre with something very special and very different in tone from your other works so far. What can you tell us about *Breakup From Hell*?**

ADC: That was the most fun I've ever had writing. It is a horror rom-com, my first based in Vermont (my home for the last thirty years). It features a Puerto Rican protagonist living with her Abuela in Stowe, dealing with ordinary teenage problems while an extraordinary guy appears in her life. And she finds out that she's not so ordinary after all. It's funny and irreverent and Mica's group of friends were a blast to spend time with.

**TQO: We can't wait to spend time with them when *Breakup From Hell* drops on January 3rd, 2023. Thank you, Ann. Before we go, would you share some final words of wisdom for our writers and readers?**

ADC: To the readers? Thank you. Support the writers you like and post reviews: it really helps us in these days of algorithms. For the writers, be relentless in your quest to deepen your writing. Find a



community, even if that's just one or two other writers, who you can run work past and whose work you read as well, and listen for patterns in feedback. And that last revision where you're like, "I can't look at this any more! I can't do it!" Do it, because that revision is the one that makes the difference. It has proven true for me time and time again.

Just when I'm ready to give up, I dig even deeper and the work does too.



# The Forgetmenauts: a lure of sirens

You could say our band writes songs about vampires, werewolves, ghosts, and demons - and you'd be right. You could also say we write songs about navigating the world through lived queer experiences - that's also true. What it really comes down to, as our bassist Emma put it, is that we write songs about people who are a little bit different.

Being even a little bit different can often be seen as monstrous by those who are part of the status quo. It feels empowering, then, to embrace the monstrosity - to make our experiences of being between worlds into something both beautiful and community-focused. We take our joy, anger, longing, and determination and magnify these emotions through the lens of fantastical storytelling. Our music creates a space for people who have felt the constant tensions of being a little bit different to come together and safely share friendship, dancing, singing, storytelling - and, of course, some cathartic howling.



Album: *Be Nimble, Be Quick*  
Cover Art by: Wren Nowan

In our songs, we are gay werewolves navigating the nebulous space between man and beast, avenging the murder of our lover with the help of our pack. We are sirens luring sailors to their doom with our beautiful voices and need for validation, demanding to be told we're pretty. We are shape-shifting Tam Lin; we are the lover who rescues him; and we are the Faery Queen who stole him away.

A lot of myth and fairy tale themes involve elements of horror. The stakes are high, as is the

tension. There is dazzling beauty and glamor as well as terrifying darkness and danger. There are both spoken and unspoken rules that must be followed, and you can't tell how bad the consequences for breaking them will be until they're broken. Figuring out what it means to be queer and how to navigate your own identity can also often feel this way. Sometimes the world is bright and beautiful and more magical than you could have ever dreamed; sometimes the things that are most familiar or comfortable to you take on an edge of horror or danger.

*Our songs allow us to live tangibly in the in-between spaces we occupy as queer artists. The community we've built through our music has supported us immensely in our own explorations of gender & self, and has in turn enabled us to directly support and expand our LGBTQ+ circles.*

The thing is (at least, in the songs we write), the entry into the magical world is always worth it, even in moments of despair or anger. Persephone embraces the darkness of the underworld; Thomas the Rhymer misses his days as the Faery Queen's captive; Bigfoot and Mothman ride happily into the sunset together. This lyric from our song "Jack" pretty much sums it up: "If every boy in every story had listened to his mother / there'd be no more tales to tell around the fire." Being who you truly are, embracing both the beauty and the monstrosity, is worth the risk.

Our songs allow us to live tangibly in the in-between spaces we occupy as queer artists. The community we've built through our music has supported us immensely in our own explorations of gender & self, and has in turn enabled us to directly support and expand our LGBTQ+ circles. Since our band came together 4 years ago, The Forgetmenauts has become an integral part of both the queer music and folk punk scenes in the San Francisco Bay Area. We've self-recorded and produced two full-length albums of original songs, co-hosted events with other local LGBTQ+ organizations and bands, and (until the pandemic hit) were playing at least two shows per month at locally-owned, inclusive, queer-friendly venues. Our shows have helped raise funds for Trans LifeLine, the LGBTQ Freedom Fund, and Queers Makin' Beers.



We believe that one of the most powerful ways to reach people's hearts is through storytelling - and that stories full of magic and music are usually the best ones to get lost in. Our musical stories of myths and monsters allow us, and the other queer folk in our community, to see ourselves in a way that we don't often get to see ourselves in real life: Powerful. Beautiful. Valid. Real. Our songs help us capture those emotions and internalize them, even when we leave the stage. As one fan said in a message to us, "Seeing queer folklore creations feels like a restoration of a history we were denied."

- Katharine (Kit) Gripp, The Forgetmenauts



*(from left to right: Tyler, Kit, Abe, Walker, Danielle, Emma, Collin) - Photo: Sean White*



**Walker Staples (they/them)**

**Instrument(s):** Guitar/Banjo/Vocals

**Favorite scary movie or book:** *Let the Right One In.*

**Favorite cryptid:** Jackalope.

**Who in the band is most likely to survive a horror movie, and why?:** I think it's gonna be Tyler; most resources, best equipped for building booby traps.

**Tyler Gary (he/him)**

**Instrument(s):** Clarinet, Saxophone, Trombone, Keys.

**Favorite scary movie or book:** Recently I read *Mexican Gothic* and while it wasn't my all time favorite, it definitely captured some good haunting creepy vibes. Would recommend for the mushroom horror.

**Favorite cryptid:** The chupacabra.

**Who in the band is most likely to survive a horror movie, and why?:** I'd be the second or third to die. "Quick everybody, I have a plan! All we have to do is..." \*Dies in a horrible dramatic way\*. I think Abe would be last to die. He would disappear early on and we would think he's dead but he actually just went on a hike and came back at the end.



**Abe Finkelstein (he/him)**



**Instrument(s):** Cello, un-mic'd backup vocals and banter, howling.

**Favorite scary movie or book:** *Oryx and Crake*. And I listened to a great podcast about *Midsommar* but will probably never have the guts to watch it.

**Favorite cryptid:** The Baba Yaga house.

**Who in the band is most likely to survive a horror movie, and**

**why?:** Definitely Emma. She lives on a sailboat and is a great problem solver, and good at engineering. You might think I was on a hike but I was actually dead the WHOLE time.

**Danielle (she/her)**



**Instrument(s):** Drums!

**Favorite scary movie or book:** I am scared easily and don't really watch horror movies! You didn't ask about this, but my favorite scary-ish video games are *The Last of Us* and *Dead Space*.

**Favorite cryptid:** Loveland frog.

**Who in the band is most likely to survive a horror movie, and**

**why?:** Walker, they would out-maneuver the attacker/swarm/pathogen/whatever the horror of the horror movie is.

**Kit Gripp (they/she)**



**Instrument(s):** Mandolin, vocals.

**Favorite scary movie or book:** *Sunshine* by Robin McKinley (ok so it's not that scary but there's lots of blood and vampires, so it counts).

**Favorite cryptid:** Nessie.

**Who in the band is most likely to survive a horror movie, and why?:**

Probably Collin. If it were something corporeal, he'd knock it out with a baseball bat. If it were an angry ghost, he'd talk to it and de-escalate the situation.

**Emma Williams**



**Instrument(s):** Bass.

**Favorite scary movie or book:** *House of Leaves*.

**Favorite cryptid:** Selkie.

**Who in the band is most likely to survive a horror movie, and**

**why?:** I think Walker would be the most likely to survive because they are very nimble and quick.

**Collin (he/him)**

**Instrument(s):** Drums!

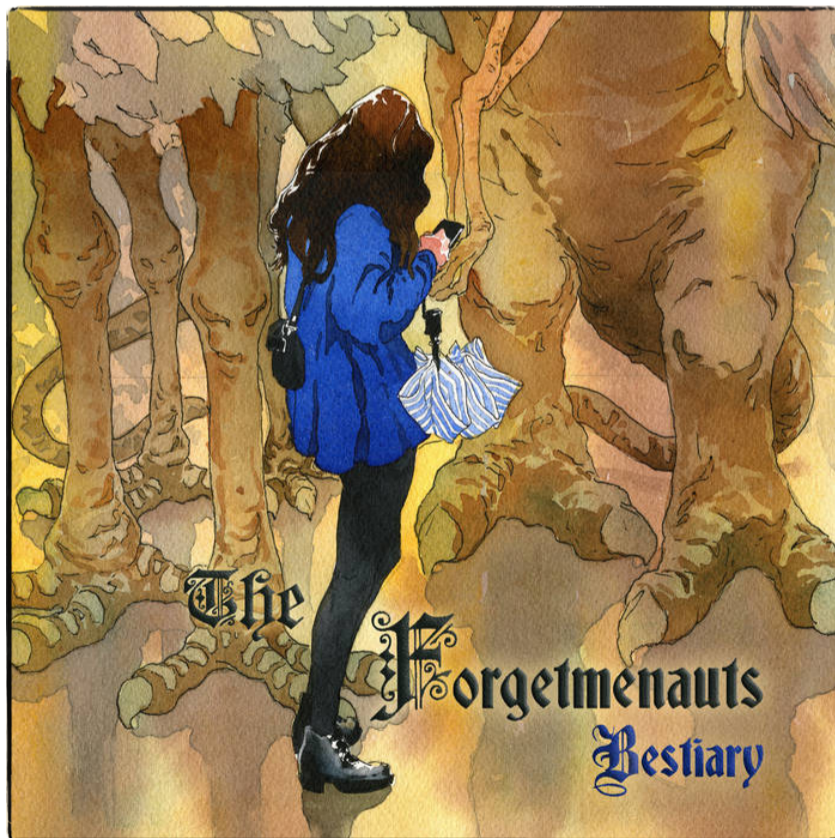
**Favorite scary movie or book:** Hard to pick a favorite scary movie!

*Maybe Let the Right One In* (the original one). It's rare that horror films are at once so beautiful, disturbing, and sympathetic to the villain.

**Favorite cryptid:** Michigan Dogman.

**Who in the band is most likely to survive a horror movie, and**

**why?:** Kit survives the horror movie, for sure. Zombie flick? Kit decapitates the shambling hordes with lethal pirouettes. Teen slasher film? Kit distracts the villain with some concocted-on-the-spot YA fiction just long enough that he doesn't even notice he's walking right into his own poetic and ironic death. Vampire horror show? Please. Kit was the vampire. Kit was *always* the vampire.



Album: *Bestiary*  
Cover Art by: Wren Nowan

**Find The Forgetmenauts at:**

[theforgetmenauts.bandcamp.com](https://theforgetmenauts.bandcamp.com)  
[www.youtube.com/c/TheForgetmenauts](https://www.youtube.com/c/TheForgetmenauts)  
[www.instagram.com/forgetmenauts](https://www.instagram.com/forgetmenauts)

# GAY WEREWOLF MURDER BALLAD

*lyrics by: Walker Staples*

Men like me must live with their sins.  
A boil in my blood like a fire 'neath my skin.  
As I search every face for the marks of my kin  
for no one else may know.

What I became with the moon overhead,  
in the glow of their torchlights when they  
caught us in my bed.

When I found him in the churchyard he was  
already dead. My lover, my sweet darling one.

When man lies with man we are killed for our  
crimes. But they'll wish the first life they'd taken  
was mine.

For wolves hunt in packs, and the death isn't  
kind. The forest looks out for her own.

*(Here there be Howling)*

It was full harvest moon on the night we  
returned. I knelt by the spot where his  
body was burned.

And I tore off my clothes and I howled my  
grief. And then we turned our teeth on the  
town!

And it wasn't my first taste of the sweet flesh of  
man, as we descended on the town every wolf in  
the land.

And our hot breath and our white fangs grew  
wet with the blood of the men who murdered  
my love.

*(ahwooo... Ahwoooooooo....  
AHWOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!!!!)*

Men like me must live with our sins.  
The boil in our blood like a fire 'neath our skins.  
As we search every face for the marks of our kin  
for no one else may know.



# FLIPPING THE SWITCH

## A CONVERSATION WITH A.S. KING

by Emily Young w/David Fey

In *SWITCH*, time has stopped. But society refuses to acknowledge this.

Instead, people invent pretend clocks and invent “new ways to lie to themselves,” as the novel's narrator, Truda, observes. Unlike so many around her, Truda is discontent with the new normal. Through empathy and decisive action, she struggles to return her world to the way it was. But, what's a girl to do when you can never go back, and neither you, nor the people around you, can see the way forward and through?

As a surrealist novel, *SWITCH* embraces elements and themes found in horror, dystopian, and post-apocalyptic works. A.S. King is a master of weird fiction. Her novels have earned her numerous honors, including the Michael L. Printz Award, the Los Angeles Times Book Prize and, most recently, the 2022 Margaret A. Edwards Award, which recognizes an author, their body of work, and its “significant and lasting contribution to young adult literature.”

We are grateful to A.S. King for talking to us about her latest novel, *SWITCH*, and the hard work of writing through trauma and pain, in the search of profound truth and raw emotion. The Quiet Ones proudly presents, in conversation, A.S. King.

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**TQO: Amy, so much of this novel centers around trauma-both the social trauma (time has stopped) and personal trauma that the narrator and her family experience. How do you care for yourself, as a writer, when exploring such a sensitive topic?**

KING: I think writing books about trauma is the biggest way in which I care for myself. I am a trauma survivor several times over and I started writing novels as a way to survive ongoing trauma. It's not a life I'd have chosen for anyone, or myself, but it's the life I had, so I tried to navigate it the best way I knew how. By writing it down, making it into metaphor, and facing it head-on, I've been able to work through a lot of my trauma effectively. But that doesn't answer your question.

I can admit it is hard to write trauma all the time. I seem to be built for it (co-star Astrology says so!). But I also take care of myself. I meditate. I am generally mindful. I have small but helpful rituals. I work to stay physically and spiritually grounded. Staying grounded is difficult when one is a writer—as we have to fly up to grab our ideas from the sky—but I take the time to do it because it helps so much. I stay connected with a really beautiful found family. I go to therapy. I keep several journals. I talk to spiritual guides that help me build confidence and self-esteem after a lifetime of putting myself last. I take really wonderful late night walks with my kid. And then I write more stuff because that's how I process.

**TQO: You use Surrealism to convey your protagonist Truda's experiences and state of mind. What are your tips for authors who want to try this technique?**

KING: Surrealism is fun. For me, it's a special kind of code that helps reach trauma survivors—which is most of us—and helps heal them as readers. I think the first step to trying anything new in writing is

*It's a pretty universal wish when we tragically lose a loved one—that time would stop so we can somehow give our grief the proper amount of attention.*

reading. I recommend going back in time and reading some early surrealists. Hit up some Burroughs or Rimbaud or some Kafka and then grab a few contemporary titles. My favorite inspiration? Zachary Schomburg's *The Man Suit*.

It is hard to find female writers in surrealism—surrealist women were rarely published—but I've found a few collections. This is, I can say firsthand as a woman writing, a somewhat shocking and strange reality—to be snubbed because you see the world differently to the typical woman, or more accurately, you see the world differently to the men and women who are in charge of publishing. I believe this is the

epitome of surrealist irony. I'm not sure any canon stacked with white men is an accurate portrayal of the head-shakingly surreal lives of the marginalized, especially in this country.

**TQO: SWITCH is dedicated to the class of 2020. How do you think the pandemic has affected our sense of time?**

KING: The dedication seemed appropriate. There is so much of my life wrapped up in this book. 2020 was the year my daughter Gracie was supposed to graduate. This was the first book I wrote after she died. The idea of time stopping came to me naturally. It's a pretty universal wish when we tragically lose a loved one—that time would stop so we can somehow give our grief the proper amount of attention. It doesn't happen—people have to go back to work and life—but in our minds, time changes forever to allow us a subconscious space in time where we can adjust somehow.

*...surrealism is an effective escape from that reality, a validation that the world is, in fact, on fucking fire, as well as a balm for our freaky-truth-loving souls.*

As for how the pandemic altered our grasp on time, it's actually quite similar. And every person is different. For those who didn't lose anyone in their close families to Covid-19, time is slowing and speeding up and all over the place because of isolation and change. For those millions and millions who lost people during the American Covid situation, it's a mix of everyday American cognitive dissonance (in every town where people died, there was at least one rogue sign or pamphlet that claimed Covid-19 was not real—in my town people literally wrote propaganda in chalk on the sidewalk on Main Street—*SCAMDEMIC!!*), Covid-grief time-stoppage (with the added suffering of not being able to even have a funeral), and the same time-marker that's implanted in your mind forever when a close loved one has died.

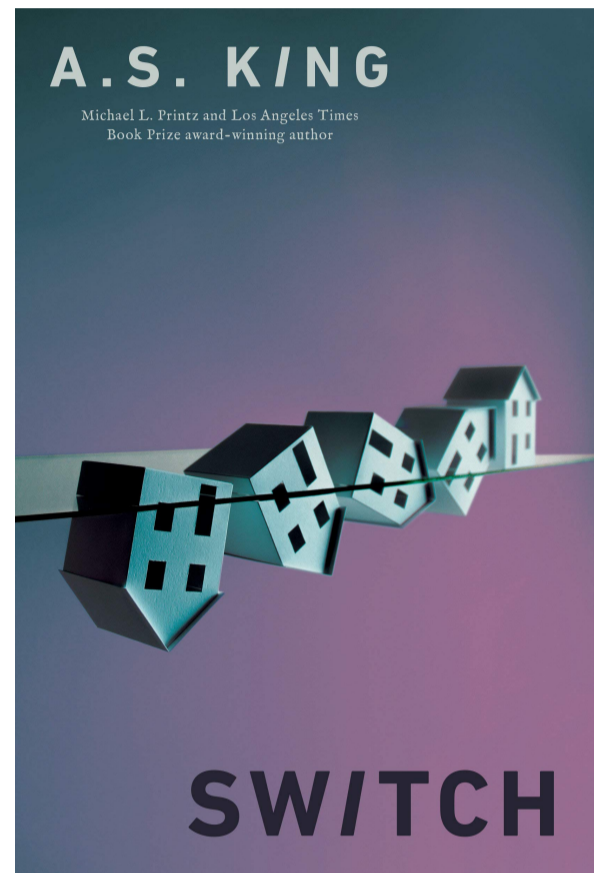
During lockdown, people talked about how they couldn't keep track of days of the week but that time was moving more slowly than ever. Now that we are "coming out" of the pandemic, time has moved forward again at a ridiculous pace. For example: How is it suddenly July?



Short answer: I think time is a construct no matter how you come at it. A pandemic made us slow down and simply notice.

**TQO: Why is surrealism an effective way to explore trauma?**

KING: Surrealism was born in a WWI field hospital in Paris. Breton and Aragon had found themselves in an unbelievable situation. A hospital filled with wounded and dying soldiers, and in large common rooms, a stage with a piano and performers. Picture that. Now picture modern day America. The capitalist surrealist reality that has the upper and middle classes begging for basic health insurance and reasonable taxes and most of the population living below the poverty line, while a few guys who have billions of dollars pay no taxes and blast themselves into space for kicks. Picture the mega-surrealism that surrounds a school building on any given day: disposable children practicing intruder drills when they know that every school shooter knows the drill . . . while outside, a pack of open-carrying hypocrites with placards rally against masks during a pandemic and claim to be “pro-life.” That’s reality. And that’s surreal.



Why is surrealism effective to reach the students in this scenario? Because it’s the same language as life at that moment, and in the moments that surround that moment. It isn’t asking a reader to live inside the day-to-day cognitive dissonance of America, which is allegedly “great” or “great again” or something like that. As I wrote this answer, the SCOTUS overturned Roe v. Wade. This is a good example of how fascism takes over. Because fascism is surreal. And people who want to control you deny the surreal. They tell you that you’re overreacting. We are so used to being fucked over / hiding in closets / shot at, that it’s fine. It’s all fine.

I suppose the best way to say it is: since we collectively refuse to talk about reality and we collectively refuse to believe in science or experience, and we’re supposed to be pretending everything is fine or else suffer the wrath and ridicule of the space-walking elite backed by their poor-but-faking-affluence

sidewalk-chalk wielding small-town army, then surrealism is an effective escape from that reality, a validation that the world is, in fact, on fucking fire, as well as a balm for our freaky-truth-loving souls.

**TQO: Truda uses Robert Plutchik’s emotion wheel to process her feelings. How did you feel when you first heard about his emotion wheel? What draws you to this concept?**

KING: I found Plutchik’s wheel when I was writing a speech for a library event in Kansas. I wanted to somehow, in this speech, convince adults in the room that their teenagers’ emotions were important. I don’t know what I googled to find the wheel, but I know that once I did, I saw it as a clock and I then wrote my speech about a hypothetical emotion clock and what life would be like if adults were made to live by that clock for a week.

*Feel what you feel, young ones! And then slowly learn how to express how you feel. And then live a beautifully fulfilling life. Ignore adults who think you’re the worst. They’re the worst.*

As I wrote that speech, I fell in love with Plutchik’s work. I bought every textbook he ever wrote and read them. I looked into his later work, which centered around the mental health and suicidality of teenagers and I fell in love even harder. The man dedicated his life to my favorite things. Emotions.

What drew me to the concept? The extreme validation Plutchik gives us through his work. We are humans and we feel stuff. Period. My earliest memories, like many a human, are of adults telling me to shove my emotions deep down into myself because they were made uncomfortable or annoyed by them. As I watched adults walk through the world, I didn’t understand it. They had plenty of emotions. Why weren’t kids allowed to have them? Then—teenhood—what a minefield that is re: emotions. Seriously. Before you ever get there, you’ve learned to roll your own eyes at yourself.

Teenhood is billed as dramatic, dumb, over-the-top, and nearly every “experienced” parent will stop to tell you: it’s worse than toddlerhood. Me: Oh, shut up. Just shut up! Feel what you feel, young ones!

And then slowly learn how to express how you feel. And then live a beautifully fulfilling life. Ignore adults who think you're the worst. They're the worst. They abandoned their teen selves in order to look mature and will dearly pay for it come age 45 or so.

That's what drew me to the concept.

*My earliest memories, like many a human, are of adults telling me to shove my emotions deep down into myself because they were made uncomfortable or annoyed by them.*

**TQO: As with many of your other novels, the presentation in *Switch* is often surreal and strange, and it explores a world that, even though it was once the world we know, has become unrecognizable. When you write the unrecognizable how do you keep it relatable?**

KING: I think what keeps any piece relatable is the connection to human emotion and experience. For this, let's look at Truda and her friends in school. They are still being treated poorly by Nigel, their teacher, as they continue to work on the outrageous Solution Time initiative, a national invention to keep them occupied during the time stoppage. This is metaphor. (All surrealism is metaphor, right?) This is what American public school has become in most places. Again—cognitive dissonance. We are being told we're great—when we are not, in fact, even really okay. We are barely hanging on. But as adults told us to when we were little, we must pretend that we are awesome and we must shove those emotions down so as not to look immature or silly. *No crying! Remember that! No matter what happens to you! Stay strong, fellow American! That's what makes America great!*

This American fascism suit is itchy as fuck. A majority of us are wearing one. We know the feel of it so well that it takes a mere hint to help others relate to the scratching.

**TQO: Truda's dad builds all sorts of literal boxes around the things and people he wishes to protect. How did you come to that creative choice?**

KING: That's where the book started. I mean, for the ninth time. Let me explain. The book was sold on three chapters back in the way-back times before my own house was right-side-up. At that time, the book was about the internal sex lives of teen girls. As you can see, the book changed a lot since then. So did my life.

*This was a metaphor for so many things I was working through as a human being. Grief. Decades of domestic violence. The truth about the unknown-to-me betrayals that destroyed my family.*

When my daughter Gracie died, I read an article on how best to help my family through grief. The article suggested taking trips in order to mark time together. (Funny how time became even more important during that part of our lives when we wished it would stop.) So at the four-month mark, I took the three of us to St. Thomas. During the hottest part of the day, we allowed ourselves 30 minutes of phone time. I wrote a poem that wouldn't end. No matter how much I tried, it kept opening, not closing. It started like this—which is still how this part is introduced in the book, pretty much.

*In the center of our house  
there is a switch.  
No one knows what the switch controls  
and no one wants to know.  
So no one ever touches it.  
And we don't take any visitors.*

This was a metaphor for so many things I was working through as a human being. Grief. Decades of domestic violence. The truth about the unknown-to-me betrayals that destroyed my family. The verse

gave me the first clues about what the book would be about. The rest of the book was personal archeology. I have touched all the switches now. Things are a lot better.

**TQO: What books are you reading right now?**

KING: I am mid-reading frenzy, which is a weird thing. It means I'm not reading books cover-to-cover, but looking at them as a visual art form to suss out the structural decisions authors make. I'm also looking at white space and what dense paragraphs stacked on top of each other feel like. I am looking at a lot of graphic memoir because I have one partially written and I'd like to finish it. On my nightstand: Plath's *Ariel* and *The People of Paper* by Salvador Plascencia.

**TQO: Give us your best advice on surviving the apocalypse.**

KING: Honestly—cutoff jeans, a comfy tee, flannel shirt, barefoot and probably some champagne, which is the only thing I drink anymore, which feels about right for the setting. Loud Reggae. Maybe friends if they're not all hyped up on apocalyptic shit. Truly. If it comes, I will simply dive in. I'm tired. One of the first speeches I ever wrote was called "How to Be a Superhero." I was in the tenth grade. Everyone else was teaching the class how to do actual things like icing cakes and French braiding. I talked about how to save the world with compassion. So if the apocalypse is legitimately here, I will know by then that I have failed and I will most likely need a rest.

Otherwise: probably a flamethrower.



# CONTRIBUTOR BIOGRAPHIES

## **A.S. King**

A.S. King is an award-winning author, an enthusiastic teacher, and she is building an invisible house out of poetry. Visit her at [as-king.com](http://as-king.com).

## **Ann Dávila Cardinal**

Ann Dávila Cardinal is a novelist and director of student recruitment for Vermont College of Fine Arts where she earned her MFA in Writing. Ann lives in Vermont and spends her free time cycling, doing fiber arts, and preparing for the zombie apocalypse.

## **Antonia Rachel Ward**

Antonia Rachel Ward is an author of horror and Gothic fiction, based in Cambridgeshire, UK. Her short stories and poetry have been published by Silver Shamrock Publishing, Blackspot Books, Kandisha Press, and Orchid's Lantern, among others. She is also the founder and editor-in-chief of Ghost Orchid Press.

## **Elizabeth Zarb**

Elizabeth Zarb was born and raised in New York and attended Emerson College in Boston, where she earned her BFA in Creative Writing in 2021. When she's not writing, she can be found making BookTok videos on TikTok under the username @liz\_zarb.

## **Katharine Gripp**

Katharine Gripp's short stories have been published in several speculative fiction collections, including *SciPhi Journal* and *Tales From OmniPark*. They are the Communications Manager for the nonprofit National Novel Writing Month (a.k.a. NaNoWriMo), and a graduate of the MFA in Creative Writing for Children and Young Adults at the Vermont College of Fine Arts. When not writing, Katharine can be found playing music with their fairy tale-inspired folk punk band, The Forgetmenauts. They live in Berkeley, CA.

**L.S. Moore** has lived many places, including Rome, but calls the Kansas City area where she was born and raised, home. After studying theater at the University of Missouri, she moved to Chicago to try her hand at acting and became a professional bartender and cookie baker. Finally, her passion for storytelling found its outlet in writing. When she isn't crafting ghost stories for young adults, she's walking about cemeteries indulging her obsession with gravestone designs or cultivating her garden, growing bushels of veggies for her husband and two sons.

### **Nova Ren Suma**

Nova Ren Suma is the author of the #1 *New York Times* bestselling *The Walls Around Us* and *A Room Away from the Wolves*, both finalists for an Edgar Award for Best Young Adult Novel, among other novels. She co-edited *FORESHADOW: Stories to Celebrate the Magic of Reading & Writing YA*, published by Algonquin in Fall 2020. She teaches creative writing at Vermont College of Fine Arts and the University of Pennsylvania and currently lives in Philadelphia.



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