

Digital Dragon m a g a z i n e

Issue 17
October 10

featuring
Vociferate
by Pete Turner

new fiction by
Robert Schmigelski
Agnes Cadieux
T.W. Ambrose
Kent Rosenberger

Plus the Continuing Sagas of
The North Star by Bryan Schmidt & **Comet Born** by Grace Bridges

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Contents

Comet Born #7 Grace Bridges	10
Wizard Cube Robert Schmigelski	13
Desert Tea Agnes Cadieux	15
Rash T.W. Ambrose	18
Too Much of a Good Thing Kent Rosenberger	29
The North Star #4 Bryan Thomas Schmidt	34

Featuring
Vociferate
by Pete Turner

pg.
5

For comments about the magazine, website or stories, please go to our forum.
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Thanks!

Departments

04	From the Editor's Desk T.W. Ambrose
14	Time Warp Randy Streu
25	Book Review T.W. Ambrose



From the Editor's Desk



Present and Future

T.W. Ambrose, Managing Editor

Dear Readers,

It's so good to have you back as we enter this, our seventeenth issue of Digital Dragon Magazine. I appreciate the patience of our amazing readership as this issue is late in coming, and correspondence has slowed over the past few months to a snail's pace. Things had geared up to full on crazy here with the loss of a job, the acceptance of a new job, and a big move, but they should be settling down now, and we hope you will keep the submissions coming as you keep reading and we move into the holiday season.

Speaking of, we will soon be upon the December issue. After the positive comments towards our holiday themed stories, I would love to have several more this year, so if you have a fantasy or Sci-Fi holiday themed story, I hope you'll send it our way.

Next on the agenda, I wanted to take a moment to answer one of the more popular questions I have been receiving lately. What's up with the anthology? Well it is still on the docket and our hope would be to get it out before the first of the year. We have faced a number of setbacks as we look to launch our publishing house, and put out our first print book. But we have overcome them as they have come before us, and once we get this process down, future anthologies (and other novels) should come much easier to us.

Well enough of everything else, I am excited to bring you this October issue. We have for you a feature story by Pete Turner. Pete is one of the newest faces in Christian Horror, and my guess he will soon be a household name with the likes of Ted Decker and Frank Peretti. We also have several new faces to DDM this month with Kent Rosenberger and Agnes Cadieux bringing us some great new fiction that will keep you reading. Finally, a new poem by Robert William Shmigelsky and our always exciting features should make this October one to remember.

Finally, you will probably notice I have included one of my own works, I do not like to make a habit of promoting my shorts here in DDM, although so many people enjoyed my piece last October, I decided to publish another one. I hope you enjoy it.

4

Until next time, keep reading, keep writing, keep praying...

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"Pete is one of the newest faces in Christian Horror and my guess he will soon be a household name."
▼

Digital Dragon Feature



Vociferate

Pete Turner

Soma's eyes tried to open. They were so heavy. Sealed shut it seemed. She rubbed them with her fingertips and finally coerced them to comply. A faint light blurred through, but offered no help. She was disoriented.

She blinked a few more times gathering her thoughts hoping to find her bearings, but the synapses were firing too slowly to make a recognizable connection between her mind and memories. She pushed herself up to a seated position, and forced her eyes to remain open longer, desperate not to blink until her faculties returned fully.

She swiveled her head a few degrees and saw molded ashen walls with the paint peeling in large chunks. Where am I? She blinked again as the data returned. She was alone in a basement of the abandoned building she had occupied the past few weeks.

The building was once a great cathedral, a beacon of hope in a world drowning in the darkest of times. She grunted a prayer but not audibly. Her brain quickly flashed memories and she allowed them to upload to her consciousness. This church was her church, the very beacon that saved her life.

She remembered that she was on the run from those alien creatures, the Sonneillonites. They arrived with their unseen leader, Leviathan, and infested and ravaged the planet a little over a month ago.

The Sonneillonites were an unstoppable force and no one had yet discovered a secret to their weakness. Soma was determined to do just that. Ancient One give me strength, she whispered.

Her brain flashed back again as if watching her thoughts on the movie projector screen she had witnessed the news of their arrival in the city that day. One hundred vessels landed, one in each of the largest cities in the world. Contrary to the most popular theories of intelligent life in space, the creatures had not come in peace and exhibited their might quickly executing every leader in every major city. They became the global dominators.

After the annihilation they instituted their own laws. The first decree was that the book of the Ancient of Days be banned. Their reign of fear began and no one challenged it. Any dissention to their authority was met with their justice, meted out swiftly and without mercy.

Soma blinked and returned to reality. She pulled herself up to her feet as her knees popped loudly. It echoed loudly, but she stopped fearing the robotic enforcers (those flying metallic contraptions) another form of justice. Their technology surpassed everything the global scientists here had ever fathomed. Big brother was more than conspiracy theory now.



Oh Ancient One, what would you have me do? Suddenly, she felt a finger touch her head, as if

Feature: Vociferate (from Pg.5)

pushing a reset button. All her memories came flooding back. She sat down again and slipped off her boot, twisted the heel and removed a key concealed there. She fingered it tracing the shape of it with her fingers. The key was shaped like a cross. She strained her eyes to look out of the room where she sat and down the long narrow hallway before her.

In a flash she remembered, jumped up jerking her boot on and stepped into the hallway. At last door was a stone frame on the wall with the molding of a cross shape in its middle. She pressed the key into the slot and the wall hissed and scraped like two flints striking each other.

A stone drawer eased out from the wall. It contained a small book, a dagger shaped green crystal and a small sword. She recognized the writing of the book as one of the books of the Ancient of Days. She picked it up first and read it quickly. It's an instruction manual. It contained only a few sentences, explaining the use of the book as a map, the purpose of The Living Sword and the dagger carved from the Crystal Sea.

She removed the other objects and placed her hand on the drawer to replace it when it shifted and returned parallel to the wall.

She stood at the edge of the ebony forest. She gripped the handle of the sword and allowed her fingers to open and close on it as if drumming for courage. She paced back and forth outside the dark tree line, stopping and facing it, and then angled her foot away and paced again. Her thoughts warred inside her head and would come to physical blows if her mental faculties would allow.

She sighed loudly and spoke through partially clenched teeth, "I will walk through the forest of the shadow of death, but will fear no evil! Please, strengthen my faith!"

She removed the Living Sword from its sheath and held it above her head. She stepped into the thick forest and allowed the darkness to envelope her. Her eyes dilated, and adjusted quickly. The Sword acted as though it adjusted as well and exhibited a luminescent glow, and soon engulfed in flames like a torch.

The sounds of the forest groaned in anguish as the darkness evaporated within a ten yard radius. Soma thought of the saying of the prophets, the darkness could not comprehend the light. She smiled as she prayed silently and her courage multiplied with each step.

She gazed at the markings on the trees as she briskly walked past them. They did appear as the prophets had described like elongated alien faces. At a different time she would have investigated them further, but her time was running out and she focused on completing her mission.

6

She shook the musings from her head as the silence of the forest became even more unsettling. The only sound present was the crunching of the leaves beneath her boots. She stopped once to ensure they were her footfalls. She swung around holding the sword in front of her.

Feature: Vociferate

Thank You, Master. She breathed.

As she turned back around she noticed the markings on the tree to her left. It was an upside down cross, her first clue with only two additional markers to find.

Twenty minutes later, she found the upside down pentagram with the face of a goat. Her heart beat out of control as she knew the cave where Leviathan slept was within the next ten steps. She moved cautiously walking right up to the final marker, the language of the fallen ones, and saw the cave entrance to her left.

As she stepped in the Sword lessened in intensity as if helping her be more stealth. She touched her hand to the cave wall and allowed it to guide her as well. Only a few minutes had passed when she entered a large chamber room.

The dragon Leviathan lay only twenty- five yards or so away from her. He grunted and opened his ebony tinted eyes. He rolled over to his side to view her closer.

She withdrew the sword from behind her back, it engulfed in flames instantly. Leviathan cackled loudly, and growled "They've sent a dog with a stick to defeat me?"

He laughed more.

"I come to you in the name of the Ancient of Days, whose throne sits in front of the Crystal Sea!"

The dragon's countenance quickly grimaced and he bellowed, "Silence!" He stood upon all four feet and flexed his body, filling the entire cave. Fire spewed from his mouth. He growled again nonsensical words.

"I'm going to crush you, pathetic worm. Let's see your toothpick flame or your savior stop that!"

Even on all fours, he stood at least seven feet taller than Soma and she instinctively back up. If Leviathan stepped one step closer, she would be directly under him and he could easily crush her.

"STAND FIRM IN YOUR FAITH, SOMA!" an audible voice whispered.

She did not wait for another second and ran underneath the scaly dragon and plunged the flaming sword deep into its skin. It pierced its hardened shell easier than she imagined.

She ran back to the front of the chamber's entrance. Leviathan wailed and deflated in size. He fell to the ground and writhed in anguish. He was nearly her size now.

A light exploded into the cave like a nuclear weapon had been discharged.

She shielded her eyes with her arms as she squeezed them together tightly. It was over seconds

[\(continued on pg.8\)](#)



Feature: Vociferate (from Pg. 7)

later.

She opened her eyes and the dragon was gone. She was standing in complete darkness. The sword had vanished, her only light. What will I do now to get out of here? She prayed for physical guidance and for a miracle to lead her home.

She felt for the wall and followed it west. She walked as quickly as possible only stumbling twice.

She exited the cave much faster than she anticipated and soon felt the cool night breeze striking her cheek. A deafening roar greeted her. It was a Sonneillonite vessel landing in a small clearing ahead. They must be checking on their leader, she thought, the Master has provided a way of escape.

She ducked behind a tree and pulled out the green dagger shaped crystal from her pack strapped to her side. A piece of the Crystal Sea may be all that is needed to stop these weaker creatures, she convinced herself. She waited until he was passed and leapt on his back pressing the crystal to his throat and screamed, "I've destroyed your pathetic leader and you're next."

In her left hand was a voice recording modulator. "State your name vermin."

He snarled his name as he tried flipping her over his shoulder, the crystal pierced his skin and he wailed in anguish falling to the ground. He disintegrated in front of her. She snatched up the crystal grasping it tightly in her hand.

She jumped to her feet and sped up the metal ramp still extended from the ship. She dropped into the driver's seat scanning the controls, praying for a simple start button. "Identify yourself, Captain." A voice crackled through the ship's speaker in front of her. She pulled out her voice modulator and pressed her thumb into the groove on top.

"Sonneillonite Captain 2 2" a voice bellowed out. KA-VROOM. The engine roared to life.

"All engines compliant. Ship is in working order. Welcome Captain 2 2." The speaker crackled again.

This is really gonna work. Soma thought as she smiled. She eased back into the uncomfortable seat and prayed silently for safety.

"Awaiting destination Captain 2 2." The voice crackled again.

Panic squeezed her heart again; I had not thought of that, she whispered. Should I just say it? I mean what if it is not even a real planet? What if it is only a fictional place imagined by science fiction writers and movie producers? A myth believed to be reality? And what if the pseudo scientists are wrong and it is non-habitable and I won't be able to breathe and live and interact with the species that inhabit it? She breathed another prayer, cleared her throat and tried to mock the voice of the Sonneillonites deep and gruff, "Earth."



"Destination Earth, Captain 2 2? Please validate."

Feature: Vociferate

She smiled and spoke again, “Earth. Validated.”

“As you have ordered Captain. ETA, one week.”

Soma sighed as she looked out the window in front of her as the vessel spun around and lifted slightly off the ground turning in a semi-circle

“Goodbye planet Nede! May the glorious gospel of Christ illuminate your iniquitied souls!”

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Pete Turner is a Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor in the state of Kentucky. He has worked in many avenues in the mental health field: social work; grief therapy; and Christian Counseling. He holds an MA in Community Counseling from Eastern Kentucky University (1999). And a BA in Psychology and Pastoral Care and Counseling from Oral Roberts University (1997).

He has been a licensed ordained minister for many years: serving at differing times as a co-pastor; evangelist; teacher; seminar speaker; youth pastor; children’s church director; and musician.

While, *Whisper a Scream* is his first full-length novel he has written for small locally owned Christian publications, written and directed three church plays and began production of a screen play years ago. He also founded and played drums for the now defunct Christian Rock Band, *Screaming Archangel*, recorded professionally in 2004. He was the lyricist of all thirteen original songs on the CD.

He is married to Tammi and they have four children (Josh; Rachel; Eden; and Gideon).

You can order his book, follow his blog, or read more from Pete Turner at <http://peteturner.webs.com>.



Digital Dragon Serial

Comet-Born Episode 7: Imminent Departures

Grace Bridges

MUCKROSS ESTATE, DUBLIN, IRELAND, 22nd JANUARY 2021, 11:38 PM

Only the computer screen lit Liam's bedroom in the dark of approaching midnight. Colours reflected off the keyboard and the chilly windowpane as he scrolled through page after page of travel destinations. Where would be a safe, neutral place to meet the others—a place chaotic enough to vanish in if necessary? He'd considered the locations of each person, but realised it was too dangerous to have the whole group so close to one set of relatives. America? Neutral, maybe...but the bad guys were in Chicago. Sure, it was a big country and all, but he was wary of the unified federal system. Too easy to have someone inside of that who had the power to find anyone, anywhere.

That left continental Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. He'd dismissed Europe, pretty much his own backyard, and too much pesky administration to let five kids go unnoticed. Asia might work, but there was the language barrier, though he had no doubt they'd learn soon enough—but they'd also stand out in any crowd.

The Middle East was still a dangerous place to be, even if the wars seemed caught in the doldrums for now. He pulled up a map and peered at the satellite images of pale desert by the blue sea. His heart thudded as he took in the Sea of Galilee, often read about but never seen in person.

"Israel," he whispered, and opened his encrypted email account.

GLENFIELD, AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND. 22nd JANUARY 2021, 4:23 PM

Joelle entered the silent house by the front door for once, shut it behind her, and slunk towards her room. She froze in the hallway. Was that the sound of laughter? She reached into her room to press the power button on her netbook, then tiptoed through towards the north end of the house. The back door was open, and she could hear the pool water sloshing about. She sidestepped into the laundry room and peeked out the slatted window there.

Her mother cavorted in a swimsuit, half out of the water. Wait! Those were hands lifting her waist. A man's hands. No wonder she was laughing. Maybe this was the bloke she'd been texting like crazy all week. Joelle slipped away, unease forming in the pit of her stomach. Well, perhaps this guy wouldn't last any longer than the previous one.

10

Seated at her desk, Joelle took a deep breath or two before logging into her email. She'd set up an automatic forward from the "secret" address, to be sure she wouldn't miss anything sent there. A message popped up and she opened it quickly.

Peace be with you. I have a suggestion for what we should do next, and an idea how we can make it work. My belief, as you know, is that we all meet up together to

Comet Born #7: Imminent Departures

evade our common enemy and figure out the next step from there. Well, what would you say to meeting in Jerusalem? It's an international city—we'll get by with English as long as necessary—and there's enough strife and unrest that no one will notice us if we lay low. I'll write up trust documents for our "tour group" so that you can get your parents to okay it, all above board and proper like. Wouldn't want them to worry now.

Joelle harrumphed. So he was deciding for all of them, just like that? She had to admit it sounded like a strong idea. Israel...just seemed so far away. She presumed this was Liam, though the sender was a nonsense combination of letters and numbers. This was, after all, his personal greeting—Peace be with you. She'd have to ask him about it when they met.

With a sigh she returned to her main inbox. Another message from the same nonsense sender appeared. She clicked on it and was surprised to see a slickly-formatted missive.

International Youth Experience Trust

Dear Miss Harrison,

We are delighted to inform you that your application to the Trust has been accepted and you have been awarded a scholarship to begin at the start of our Spring Semester on February 15th, 2021. We apologise for the short notice, but this year's candidates were of such high quality that we had to call in extra judges to decide the matter.

The scholarship includes one year's tuition in the Rothberg International School at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and board at Youth Experience House. Please ensure you have your own spending money available.

You will be expected at Youth Experience House in Jerusalem no later than January 31st. Please inform us of your travel details so we may arrange airport pick-up.

Yours,

L. Stewart

Trust Chairman

Joelle gaped. L...for Liam? Of course, it was from his address. This was all moving very fast. Was it really necessary? Still, she moved to print out the page with its impressive header. Her mother would never guess it was only stock photos—if she even knew what stock photos were.

She snatched up the paper and stormed out to the pool, then regretted her haste as her mother leapt up off the lap of the man in the deckchair. "Oh. Sorry, Mum."

"No, come here, won't you? I want you to meet Allan." She reached for a towel and wrapped

[\(continued on pg. 12\)](#)



Comet Born #7: Imminent Departures (from Pg. 11)

herself in it.

Allan extended a hand, an almost-apologetic look on his face. "Joelle. Pleased to meet you."

Joelle nodded, shook his hand, then shook the paper in the other. "Mum! I have some really exciting news. You know that scholarship I applied for months ago?" A slight frown crossed Mum's face, and Joelle hurried to explain. "I forgot it too, it was just something everyone at school sent in, you know?"

Her mother's expression eased, and she reached for the printed page. Joelle let her read it in silence.

"Why—why, this is fantastic! Oh, my little girl!" Her face fell. "You'll be going away for a whole year."

Joelle gave what she hoped was a sympathetic grin and moved to rest her cheek on Mum's shoulder, the only embrace possible without getting her clothes soaked. Mum caressed her head for a moment while Allan looked on awkwardly. Then she straightened.

"There's no time to lose. Go get my credit card from my purse and book a flight immediately. Then we're going shopping. You'll need all new clothes and—oh, everything!" Her eyes shone.

A sigh of relief escaped from Joelle. It wouldn't be a big deal. Well, it would, but not in any problematic kind of way. "Jerusalem, here I come!"

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12

Grace Bridges is a sci-fi author (Faith Awakened, 2007, and Legendary Space Pilgrims, 2009) and owner of Splashdown Books, an independent publisher of inspirational sci-fi and fantasy. She's a Kiwi of Irish descent living in beautiful New Zealand, and a chocaholic cat-lovin' Trekkie, Jesus freak, web designer, and all-round DIY gal who also takes care of the Lost Genre Guild blog. Tweets: @gracebridges - or visit www.gracebridges.com for more.

Digital Dragon Fiction

Wizard Cube

Robert William Shmigelsky

Inside an enchanted sage's mansion, bold but cautious footsteps tip-toe down a long and narrow hall within a stretched out maze of paneled hallways and plain wooden doors. Counting your steps, you proceed down the first hall to your left, the second to your right then continue on until coming to the seventh door to your left. You open the door, see there before you: resting on a tall, magic-glass pedestal, keeping it bound to the exact center of the room, a tiny device known as a wizard's cube: a grooved and rectangular puzzle in a box, checkered with vividly colored squares. Small enough to fit in palm of hand with dozens of squares colored red, brown, green, and blue (the elements of magic: fire, earth, air, and water).

You take a step towards the cube, see the owner had been particularly untrusting of strangers: the cube also came with the colors black and white (the colors of the other elements: dark and light). You proceed, but your mind skips away from you as you ponder the cube's power to shrink any object down in size - be it magic blue wand, ruby red ring or a thief attempting to steal its secrets - and place them safely inside, tucked away in the space within where they would be everlastingly preserved until released. Knowing there are few who would dare give a wizard's cube a try, wizards of old with knowledge of the arcane there being no longer, you find yourself hoping that should you fail that the previous owner at least had refined taste: a secluded mountain vale, an enchanting forest glade - or perhaps even a tropical island with long sandy beaches out somewhere in the middle of a vast blue ocean.

How to open a wizard's cube? Solve the sequence by rearranging the elements to their preferred sides. The clues? The etches along the grooves. Sounds simple enough. Trouble is, you recall, the elements can change hues if turned the wrong way: the holder only a set amount of turns to make. Only the one able to plan ahead, his moves right to the end, will be shown the door and allowed inside: to come and go as he so pleases. To solve a wizard's cube no one has yet managed, but you believe you will be the first. Unlike those who came and tried before you, you happen to have something that they did not. As your conniving mind sifts through your plan a second time, your nimble fingers unsheathe a knife; pull out a slip of paper: step by step instructions on how to forcibly pry open a wizard's cube. Unaware that this just could be the kind of trick only a wizard would think up to make sure you join his fore-mentioned collection, you take a quick glance at the long, wavy hand-written note then with your other hand you diagonally insert the tanged copper blade into the blue-lit space of a groove moments before the light flares up in retaliation through the widened crack then disappears, leaving the cube to drop back to its pedestal and rattle to a halt with you inside it.

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Robert is an aspiring fantasy writer taking English courses at Okanagan College to try to improve his writing. Besides reading and writing, some of his hobbies include computers and history. He has a dry sense of humour, which he blames his stepfather for. Also, he has a habit of making history jokes no one but him understands. He is currently working as a certified care aide in beautiful British Columbia to support his writing.

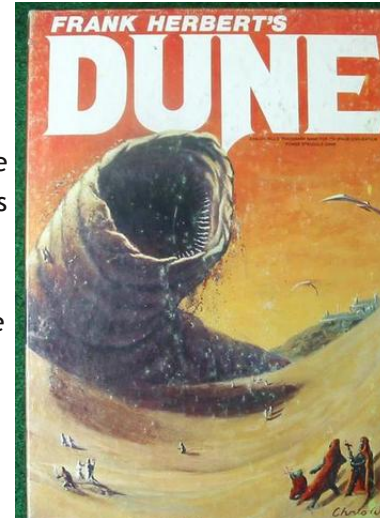


Time Warp

Dune

Randy Streu

A reviewer once called Isaac Asimov's "Foundation" Trilogy "Hard Science Fiction's answer to 'The Lord of the Rings.'" That is to say, that "Foundation" is The Definitive Sci-Fi Epic. But of course, speculative fiction is a wide open category, and host to as many "definitive works" as you care to name. Asimov's "Robot Series," could be argued as the definitive work on humanoid machines, for example. But does Speculative Fiction, itself, have a "definitive work?" One book or series which, above all others, offers readers an almost perfect example of the genre as a whole? I suppose it depends on who you ask - but I say it does. And for me, that work is Frank Herbert's "Dune."



Herbert's seminal work is a rich blend of hard SF and mysticism, mixing generous portions of political thriller, ecological and Messianic epic. The setting of Dune is a vast galactic empire, where imperial assets are run through a single profit-bearing corporation and managed as planetary fiefdoms controlled by the Padishah Emperor, through the Great Houses. This is the backdrop against which the drama of the Atreides family - and specifically young Paul, heir-apparent of Duke Atreides - plays out.

After House Atreides is appointed by the Emperor to oversee Spice production on the planet Arrakis - and with it, the hub of the entire Imperial economy - Duke Leto begins to believe he's walking into a trap set up by the Emperor himself, and a rival house: Harkonnen. As we soon discover, his fears are well founded, and his son Paul is forced, along with his mother, to survive in the vast desert of Arrakis. Here he meets - and joins - the legendary Fremen, Desert Warriors wary of Imperial control and dedicated to the return of life on their planet. Paul's introduction into the Fremen, his development as warrior and leader - and ultimately Messiah of this desert world - is the chief story of "Dune."

Frank Herbert's richly textured Magnum Opus is more than an epic masterwork, however. It has become a template for much of modern epic Spec Fiction. Even Star Wars - itself a definitive work in the Speculative genre - owes much of its origin to "Dune."

The book series is also the inspiration for the beautiful (and jarring) 1984 David Lynch film, along with a very well-done Sci Fi Channel (before it was horrendously renamed Syfy) miniseries "Dune" and "Children of Dune." If you want to enjoy all of these works (and may I humbly suggest you do so, post haste!), I would consider starting, of course with the original novel, then the Lynch Film, and finally the first miniseries. Both film works are fairly faithful to the book, with the miniseries being the more complete (due to time considerations on the first).

14

But even if you watch neither the miniseries nor movie, read the book. In that reading, you are sure to gain both a greater understanding and appreciation of Speculative fiction. And after all, isn't that what the Time Warp is all about?

Digital Dragon Fiction

Desert Tea

Agnes Cadieux

“Please, please tell me a little about them” Aevlyn begged. They were sitting under one of the thick, beige tents, sharing a flask of honeyed tea that Mattias brought along with him from the Borderlands. The desert sun hung low in the sky, a large, red orb rippling with the heat from the hot summer day.

“Why are you so curious about a bunch of unruly boys?” he asked, chuckling. “Wouldn’t you rather talk about how you’re doing? How are your lessons coming along? What of your dancing?”

“I hate it,” Aevlyn mumbled, sliding her feet over the brown and gold rug that had been placed on top of the smooth sand.

“Don’t get discouraged. It will come.”

“I’m the oldest one in the troupe. Even the six-year olds are outperforming me.”

“You will catch up, I know it. Matron Katia would not have invited you to learn if she did not see potential in you. You will make her proud with your dancing one day.”

“Ahem. Your sons?”

Mattias laughed. “Alright, I will tell you a little about them, but only if you can name them all. In order.”

Aevlyn looked at her guardian incredulously and pouted. He snickered and playfully pushed her over onto the rug. She sat back up and drew a deep, exaggerated breath. “Cael, Luthias, Aidan, and Thorin,” she said, sticking out her tongue.

Mattias laughed and wrestled her into a headlock. Aevlyn struggled against him, groaning with effort as she tried to pry her head out from under his arm. She giggled; then squealed when he poked her ribs.

“Not fair! I named them all, in order. Your turn!” She mumbled through his tunic, her arms and legs flailing helplessly in the air. Mattias let her go so suddenly that she tumbled away from him, catching her mug just before it toppled over.

“They are very unruly, are you sure you want me to terrify you with the details? You may not look at me the same way again once you realize what sort of evil children I have,” he said.

“I don’t care. And you’ve already said they’re unruly so that doesn’t count. What else? You said

[\(continued on pg.16\)](#)



Fiction: Desert Tea (from Pg. 15)

one of them is a dragonrider. Tell me about him.”

“I cannot, only a dragonrider can speak his tale.”

“Mattias!”

Her guardian laughed and picked up the flask of honeyed tea. Aevlyn held out her own mug and then brought the sweet liquid to her lips. She dug her toes into the sand at the edge of the rug, and picked at the stitching on Mattias’ cloak.

“Why don’t you want to tell me about your sons? Aren’t you proud of them?”

“Of course I am, what father isn’t proud of his children? But as you know—”

“—Yes, I know, ‘a Borderlander’s tale is his own to tell’ but they are still young, so I’m sure they won’t mind if you spoke for them—for now at least.”

“Young? They are all older and bigger than you, little bonsai.”

“I am not a stubby tree stuck in a clay pot!”

“Well, you are certainly outgrowing the pot, that’s for sure.”

Aevlyn looked up at Mattias. He waggled his graying eyebrows at her and she giggled.

“Is it because talking about them reminds you of their mother?”

Mattias sucked in a breath to speak, but instead he exhaled and looked out beyond the tent flaps. Various shades of orange, red, and purple painted the evening sky and several stars already shone bravely despite the sun’s remaining glow.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to upset you,” Aevlyn whispered.

“No, child, I am the one who should apologize.” He looked down at her and smiled. “Who would have thought that you of all people would see beyond this old man’s shell and right into the wounds of his heart? Yes, every time I look at them they remind me of their mother.”

16

“So that why you don’t talk about them.”

Digital Dragon
magazine.net

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Digital Dragon Magazine exists to seek out quality, family-friendly speculative and fantasy fiction, to find new talent in these genres and present that talent to a new, growing audience.

Submit:

accepting short fiction, poetry, and art submissions now for future issues! see digitaldragonmagazine.net/submit.php for detailed information.

Feedback:

like a piece? hate a piece? comments? suggestions? love and/or gushing praise? let us know in the forum: digitaldragonmagazine.net/forum.php

Fiction: Desert Tea

“Not exactly.”

“Then why not?”

Because I am looking out for your well-being, that’s why.”

Aevlyn wrinkled her brow. “Are they dangerous?”

“You could say that.”

“Are they evil? Do they spit fire and terrorize villages? Do they carry away baby lambs and burn down crops?”

“No.”

“Then what is so dangerous about them?”

Mattias grinned. “You see, Aevy, what is even worse than spitting fire and carrying away baby lambs is the fact that if I tell you about them, you will fall in love.”

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Agnes Cadieux is a full-time writer who moonlights as a healthcare worker - or is that the other way around? Her love of writing has had her scribbling on everything from walls to computer screens her entire life, but just recently has she been brave enough to finally start sharing her thoughts and quirky ideas with the world. Her writing credits are on the rise, and include regular articles to Ottawa's (Cult)ure magazine, and a very proud short story featured in the Aurora Wolfe Literary Journal. She is keen on eliciting deep-set emotions from people, bringing dragons to life, and building characters so real, you'll swear you've met them somewhere before.



Digital Dragon Fiction

Rash

T.W. Ambrose

I woke suddenly to a scream. It took me a moment to get my bearings; I wiped the drool from my cheek as another scream rattled through the house. “Andrew, are you OK?” It sounded as if he were upstairs. I rolled off the couch and headed down the hall. “Daddy’s coming.”

“Daddy!” my son screamed back. He sounded terrified. But to a five year old everything was an emergency. Besides, he sounded like he was in the bathroom, not a fun place to have an emergency. Ugh, I wish my wife was here. She was so much better at dealing with the whole potty issue. “Potty.” I’m even thinking the lingo now. When did my life go away? When did I become the dad who wears sweats and spends his Saturday afternoons sleeping and watching Sponge Bob?

I got to the top of the stairs. “Almost there buddy,” I shouted. Andrew was sobbing now. I opened the bathroom door, and the smell of crap hit me like a wall. “Ohhh, buddy, what did you do?” There was a pile just a few feet away from the bowl and the floor seemed wet with urine.

“Daddy!” Andrew wasn’t in much better shape, and he was still crying.

“Hey buddy, we all have accidents,” I lie. I’m pretty sure I never had an issue like this as a kid. I hate cleaning up poop. The experts say when you love the person, it’s easier. I love my son; it’s not easier. I hate the experts. “Let’s get cleaned up, OK?” I took Andrew’s hand and helped him in the shower, careful to turn both the hot and cold on equally. I don’t want that accident again. I turned to clean up the floor. “Hey bud, you hold tight, Daddy needs to run downstairs and grab the paper towels and bleach.”

“But Daddy, it hurts.” He seemed calmer now but was still crying quite a bit. “I don’t want to be alone, Daddy.”

“What hurts buddy?” I stuck my hand in the water; it seemed a little cool but far from painful. “Why can’t you be alone?” I looked down at him, and for the first time noticed the thick rash around his leg. It really did look painful. “What did you do here, crazy?” I examined his leg closer. I hadn’t seen anything like this before. He started crying harder.

“Hey, buddy, you need to focus, tell Daddy what happened.”

18

“It was a pterodactyl Daddy, in the toilet, it grabbed my leg.” He sniffed.

“A dinosaur grabbed your leg, huh?” I grinned “Trying to pull one over on your old dad.”

“No Daddy, a pterodactyl, like with an octopus. Go look.”

Fiction: Rash

“You mean a tentacle grabbed your leg?” I looked back at the toilet, then back at his leg. It was a strange looking rash. And it was swelling.

“Hey buddy, maybe we better go to the hospital when you get out. And I’m gonna want you to tell Daddy what really happened.”

“Daddy, I’m not lying, it was a big tentacle!” He was getting noticeably frustrated with the conversation.

He didn’t complain anymore about the pain, which was strange. He just sat in the tub with a far away look on his face. I went back to his room and grabbed a T-shirt and shorts. I paused to look in the mirror. I so wish I had showered this morning. I stopped in my room and switched my pizza stained sweats out for a semi-clean pair of jeans and my Florida Gators cap. My wife had promised me an easy day today.

She owed me big time.

When I got back to the bathroom, Andrew hadn’t moved. That just didn’t seem right; he was talking softly about an imaginary tentacle as I took him from the tub dried him off. His leg really didn’t look good. The rash seemed to cause numerous small circles all around a section of leg. I had no idea what a tentacle would do to a human leg; but I could see why he thought it would look like this.

The roads were clear on the way to the hospital. At least the world wasn’t entirely against me. I turned down the radio and leaned my chair back a little. “Andrew, I want you to tell Daddy exactly when this rash started.”

Andrew was silent for a moment then answered. “Daddy, it’s not a rash, it was a tentacle.” I peered back. Whatever it was, it seemed to be turning black and blue. The more I looked at it, the more I could see where tiny suction cups could have attached to my sons legs. Although I was also sure I had probably just been watching too much Cartoon Network. “It came from the toilet, Daddy, a long arm with suckers like an octopus.”

I looked back at his eyes this time. “Did a giant tentacle really get your leg, Andrew?”

A smile finally crossed his lips. “Yes, Daddy.”

It didn’t take long to arrive at the hospital. I picked up Andrew and carried him in. The nurse at the front desk gave me a cold look when she saw Andrew’s leg, but she waved us back. One of the nice things about living in a small town is that you seldom have to wait at an ER. It also helps my son was very accident prone. As they knew us well here; much better than I wished they did.

“Hello, Mr. Weathers, what is the problem today?” she asked. I finished laying Andrew in the hospital bed.



[\(continued on pg.20\)](#)

Fiction: Rash (from Pg. 19)

“Well, I think we’re dealing with a rash, although Andrew is claiming rouge octopus attack.” I tried to grin. “It does kind of look like a tentacle or something was wrapped around his leg, doesn’t it? I mean, have you ever heard of something like that before?” I felt like such a fool even asking. “An octopus or squid or something, living in the sewers?”

“You want me to put octopus attack on this chart, Mr. Weathers?” Nurse Beth apparently was not a nurse with a sense of humor; weren’t heavy people supposed to be jolly?

I shifted uncomfortably on my feet as Beth took Andrew’s vitals. I held his hand but he seemed distracted, probably because of the Sponge Bob playing on the TV. “No, of course not, I told you I think it’s some sort of rash. I heard him crying upstairs and when I got there, his leg looked like this.” I leaned down and kissed his forehead. “Poor little guy.”

Blood pressure normal, temperature normal, pulse up a little but that was to be expected. I was never sure if I was meant to keep track of all these details or not. Would Stacey want to know? Would the doctor be giving me a pop quiz later? I hate hospitals. Are they made to make us feel stupid? Wouldn’t all these things be normal anyway if Andy had been attacked by an octopus?

“Mr. Weathers, the doctor will be in to see you and Andrew shortly.” I sat by the bed running my fingers through Andrew’s hair. “Any minute now, buddy.” He merely shook his head. He was tired; it had been a long day.

I was tired, too. Unable to handle any more Sponge Bob, I flipped through the 12 channels on the little TV mounted next to the bed. The world once again seemed against me, and after flipping through a Discovery underwater special and Oprah interviewing a shark attack survivor, I was forced to settle on Little House on the Prairie. I put my head down on the corner of Andrew’s bed and closed my eyes. Within minutes I was asleep, dreaming of octopuses and giant squids.

“Mr. Weathers, I’m sorry to have kept you waiting. I’m Dr. Allen, this is Mrs. Cole with the Department of Social Services, and this is Officer Elkhart. The two of them would like to have a few words with you as I examine your son’s injuries.” I looked up, squinting as the light stung my eyes. The lady and the cop stood behind the doctor. She wore a light pink suit and held a stack of file folders.

“What’s the problem? Was there really an octopus, or maybe a squid? I’d rather not leave Andrew alone right now; the hospital can be a pretty scary place.” The cop stepped forward. He looked menacing.

“Your wife has been notified and will be here shortly, Mr. Weathers; please, come with us.” His voice was deep. He smiled in front of my son and the doctor, but I could tell he meant business. I couldn’t believe they were giving me a hard time about this, unless... unless they were in on it too. They knew about the monster and wanted me to cover it up. I had to find out for sure; this had to be the answer.

20

The woman in pink put her hand on my shoulder. “Please, Mr. Weathers, this will only

Fiction: Rash

take a moment.” She had a cool voice; it reminded me of my second grade teacher.

I followed the two of them down to a small room, and the two of them waited for me to enter, then followed close behind. Mrs. Cole sat in her pink suit on one side of the table and me on the other; the cop stood silently by the door. “Mr. Weathers, I would like you to explain your son’s injuries today”.

“Well, it may sound crazy, but I’m thinking you may already know and that’s why we’re here.” I leaned back confidently.

The woman just sat there looking at me from across the table. I was beginning to feel uncomfortable again, and sweat formed at my temples. She sat there, her green eyes burning into my own, and the second grade teacher had turned into an evil librarian.

Fine. My son, he may have, or well,” I stumbled over my words. I took a breath. “I believe my son was attacked earlier today by some sort of monster while using the bathroom,” I blurted out and then stopped. This did sound crazy; really crazy. “I’m a good dad, you know; I had fallen asleep on the couch, but only for a minute. Then he screamed.”

“Mr. Weathers, your son has a ring of bruises around his leg. It’s black, blue, and swelling badly, and its width is very similar to the width of your hand. Can you explain your child’s injuries?”

Alright, maybe they weren’t here to cover up a monster octopus attack. Man, am I stupid. “Listen, maybe you should speak with Andrew. He claimed he was attacked by some sort of tentacle in the bathroom. I had just fallen asleep on the couch after the Florida game.”

Mrs. Cole just sat there. “Well, Mr. Weathers, we are here now, why don’t we just talk?”

“I don’t know, maybe he had some sort of accident or something, I don’t know,” I repeated. “I’m offended by what you’re implying, and I’d like to go check in on my son now. I’d like to go and find out what hurt my son.” A cold sweat broke over me. I needed to get home. I started to stand but the cop helped me back to me seat.

“Maybe it was an accident, Mr. Weathers? Like Andrew’s split lip from last month?” She held up the first of a stack of file folders.

“He fell down the stairs.”

“And the chest and back burns?”

“He had a shower mishap.”

“The burnt hand?”

[\(continued on pg.22\)](#)



Fiction: Rash (from Pg. 21)

“He touched a hot lawn mower.”

“The broken arm?”

“He fell out the back of my truck when we were washing it.”

“The cracked skull, Mr. Weathers?”

“Another trip down the stairs.”

“And now a... tentacle, was it? Do you really expect us to believe that?”

“Yes, I do!” I shouted. Man, I hate this woman. “My son said he was attacked by a tentacle, and I believe him. Now I need to get home and see if I can find the thing that hurt him. I didn’t hurt him, so you can either make yourself helpful and come with me back to my house, or you can get out of my way.” I stood up this time and moved towards the door.

Mrs. Cole remained calm. “We would love to come with you, Mr. Weathers. Please prove us wrong.”

As we left the room, I could see my wife down the hall with my son. I wanted to go talk with her, but I had no idea what they had told her at this point. I would return home first and find the monster that hurt my son.

I made my way back to my house. I could see Mrs. Cole and Elkhart in the car behind me. I was starting to regret my decision to invite them along. Was I really expecting to find a monster just sitting there in my toilet? Stacy was always getting on my case about making rash decisions. I preferred to think of myself as decisive. I wished I hadn’t been so decisive this time.

It didn’t take long before we were pulling into my driveway. I glanced around, making sure the neighbors weren’t out, and then looked back to my house, wishing I had mowed or painted the shutters recently. My lawn looked like the lawn of a guy who would be arrested for child abuse. Although the unpainted shutters said, ‘Perhaps a giant octopus lives here.’ A giant octopus; I still can’t believe this is best case scenario.

I got out of the car as Elkhart and Cole pulled in the driveway, and they were at my side before I had gotten the door unlocked. We walked through the house in silence. I turned to the cop. “So, ever kill a monster before?” He didn’t smile.

22

I heard a splash. “Stop!” The three of us stood in silence, and then I heard the sound again. It was coming from the upstairs bathroom. I dropped my keys and raced up the stairs.

As I opened the bathroom door I heard a splash and something descended into the bowl.

Fiction: Rash

I rushed forward to catch it, but slipped on the pee, and slammed into the sink, ending up on my back. I sat up and reached into the toilet, I splashed around trying to force my arm down a hole that was too small.

Cole and Elkhart stood there looking at me like I was insane. “I’m sorry, Mr. Weathers, I didn’t hear anything,” Mrs. Cole said in her normal cool voice.

“Fine, we’ll just have to remove the toilet.” I started removing bolts, and turning off the water. “Well, aren’t you gonna give me a hand? What did you come along for, anyway?” Mrs. Cole gave Elkhart a look, and he stepped forward and helped me lift the bowl. I peered into a long, dark, empty tube.

I wasn’t sure how long I stared at the empty tube. Mrs. Cole and the cop had moved outside the bathroom and were talking in hushed tones. I strained to look even further down the hole. Wait, was something moving down there? It was, and it was coming up.

“Hey,” I started to say, but no one paid any attention. Elkhart stood with his back to me. I stood and charged him, crashing into him and knocking him through part of the hallway’s drywall. I grabbed his gun wildly shot three times at the hole in the floor of the bathroom. Mrs. Cole screamed as I ran to the hole. It was empty. I turned, bringing the gun on them. “Shut up, just shut up!” I paused. “And get in here.” We were all watching the hole.

I realized my heart was racing, I had just kidnapped a cop and a social worker, and there was no going back. But they had to see it, they had to believe. I know what I saw. “I’m sorry about this, I really am.” Mrs. Cole looked at me. “Look at the hole!” I screamed. “Now, listen, I’m not a bad guy. I have a degree from the University of Florida. I teach at a private school. I’m on my church leadership board. I didn’t do anything wrong. There has to be a monster in the toilet. There has to be.”

I paced throughout the room. Where do I go from here? I looked out the window, lights were flashing down my street. Man, it doesn’t take long to respond to a gun shot in this neighborhood. I should be happy: my tax dollars at work.

As the police got out of the first car, I opened the window and shouted down to them. “It’s ok, I have everything under control,” I waved the gun at them. “Everything is under control. Don’t come up here, it’s dangerous.”

They didn’t leave, but scattered behind the doors of their cars. Soon more cars were arriving. Well, that didn’t work. I left the window open, but shut the curtains. Walking back over to the hole I saw nothing, but tears were streaming down Mrs. Cole’s face.

“Mr. Weathers, we have you surrounded.” I looked out the window and saw a man with a megaphone at the center of the cars. “You have no place to go. We would ask that you let the hostages go, and no one has to get hurt.” I could hear the uncertainty in his voice. This must have been his first hostage situation. It was mine, and I was scared out of my mind

[\(continued on pg.24\)](#)



Fiction: Rash (from Pg. 23)

I shouted back, “This isn’t what it looks like. It’s all a mistake.” There may have never been a greater mistake. “There is a monster in my sewer lines, it attacked my son; we’re waiting here to see it.” If only the tentacle would show up, this could all be over.

“Mr. Weathers there will be no more waiting. Send out the hostages or we will be forced to come in.”

“I don’t want any hostages, but I don’t want to get hurt. I need to find this thing. Let me talk to my wife. I’ll send out Mrs. Cole if you let me talk to my wife.”

I assumed the silence was a yes, and I used my gun to wave Mrs. Cole to the door. I’d seen too many movies. Time passed slowly. I could hear footsteps in the halls coming towards me, and I kept Elkhart staring at the hole.

“Honey? What are you doing up there?” Stacey’s voice was a sweet release from the madness; the stress seemed to wash away.

“I’m waiting for the monster that attacked Andy, you need to make them understand, show them his leg.”

“Nothing attacked Andrew. You need to come down. Andrew had been outside playing in the woods while you were asleep. He didn’t want to get in trouble so he made up the story about the tentacle. He only came back in because he had to use the bathroom. But he waited too long and had the accident.

I stumbled back from the window devastated. What had I seen? I guess it didn’t matter now. What was I going to do?

“I’m coming out. Back off, though.” I waved Elkhart out with the gun, and he flashed me a look that said I didn’t want to go back to the station with him. “I’m coming out myself,” I shouted. “I didn’t hurt anyone.”

I could see cops with their weapons drawn at the far end of the hallway. Still holding the gun, I had lifted my hands over my head and started to step out the door when I felt something wrap around my leg. I tripped, falling forward through the doorway. The tentacle! My finger tightened around the trigger and I heard the gun go off, then I heard several other shots, pain ripped through my body, then nothing.

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24

T.W. Ambrose is the awesome editor of this magazine. In the past he's had a number of short stories credited to his name, today however his time is full with editing, publishing, and learning dead languages. If you would like to check out his less then often updated website, you can at www.twambrose.net.

Book Review



Whisper a Scream

Pete Turner

Reviewed by T.W. Ambrose

When Pete Turner first contacted me about his book, I almost turned him down. Digital Dragon is not always a place for Christian Horror, and I knew I wasn't going to have the time to review for both DDM and Flame in the Dark (our sister magazine a Christian Horror Zine). But after getting to know Pete a little bit, and the passion with which he writes, I knew I had to read this book. And what better month to do it, then this month of scary movies, scary houses, and Batman costumes.

Now before we go into it, I don't want to take this into yet another article on what is Christian Horror. So I will simply give you this verse, Ephesians 6:12 says "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." And Pete Turner's book drops us precisely in that place, a battle against the rulers of darkness of this world.

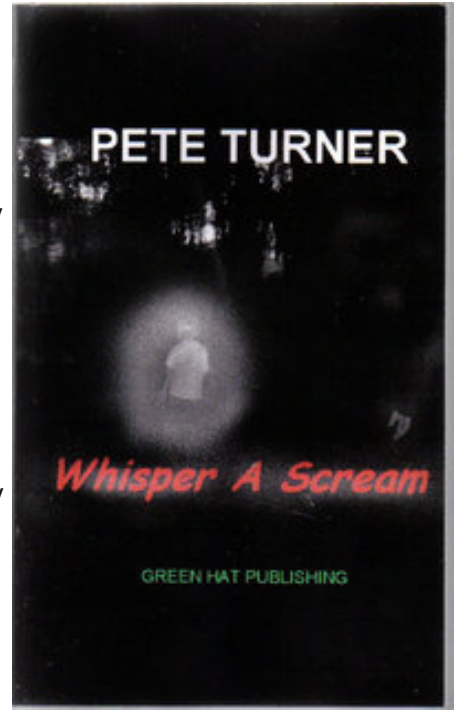
The book tells the story of Solomon Noche, a small town therapist working in a home for troubled boys. As you may have guessed, Solomon had turned his back on God, due to the loss of his wife and son, but everything is about to change, when Pete's dreams start calling for him to examine the horrors that had been committed at this spot over the last few hundred years.

Turner creates a very true to life character in Solomon as he writes the entire story in first person. He also adds many aspects of his own life, helping Solomon to come alive as a person you've known for some time. Solomon is also dropped into a situation that is truly terrifying, from the secluded small town, to the vision/dreams he keeps moving in and out of, to the idea of being all alone there with no one to share with; finalizing with a showdown with a Philistine demon - truly hitting the mark with Christian Horror.

That's not to say the book is without fault. There are points in this book where the fact that this is Pete's first book shows. For example, he repeatedly goes to journal entries from a 1800's pastor. Strangely enough, in grammar and spelling, this pastor talks and writes much like people from this day and age. The other flaw I found was the fact that in a first person format, Solomon reveals to us secrets that he doesn't know.

In the end though, Turner has taken a path few choose to walk in Christian Horror. He has created believable characters and a world in which to place them. He may not yet be mentioned with the

[\(continued on pg.26\)](#)



Digital Dragon Fiction

Too Much of a Good Thing Kent Rosenberger

“Oh, I am so sick of vampires!” Nedd complained again. “This is just ridiculous.”

Vass was shaking his head. “You don't have to tell me. It's out of control anymore.”

“You know, it used to be that vampires were rare. They were dark and scary, with sinister eyes, pale skin, tragic romance and impeccable taste. But now...now they're just everywhere and they're about as tragic and frightening as a magician's bunny rabbit. They're a bunch of shiny pretty-boys who just brood like pansies and keep claiming they're all 'misunderstood.' They make me want to vomit.”

Bukk, the third member of the trio, stepped up from behind the two of them with his own lament. “You know what I'm sick of? Werewolves.”

“Oh, don't even get me started.” Nedd was on his soapbox now. “It's all the same at this point. Werewolves and vampires. Vampires and werewolves. You can't swing a corpse these days without hitting one or the other. Or both. I just can't stomach them anymore. Isn't there anything else out there?”

“Well, there's only one way to find out.” Vass dropped the carcass of the fanged creature he had been cradling, drew his laser pistol from the holster at his side with his three-fingered reptilian hand, and waved for the other two to fall in behind him. “Come on, there's got to be someone better in this castle to eat.”

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Kent Rosenberger is the author of four novels, five short story collections, over 1700 poems, and other assorted items of interest. A writer in search of a serious publisher, his published credits include a short story with 365 Tomorrows e-zine and a story in the upcoming October issue of the Absent Willow Press.

Book Review: Whisper a Scream (cont from Pg. 25)

likes of Peretti and Decker, but he may not be many books from such company. In my recommendation, if you'd read This Present Darkness, House, and Decker's newest work, I say hop on Amazon and pick this one up. My guess is by the time you're finished, you won't be able to 'whisper a scream'.

26

While it's true, Pete's theology may not match up 100% with mine, mine wouldn't match up with his 100% either. I give Whisper a Scream four stars for awesomeness, two thumbs up for loading this book with enough scripture to not miss no matter how hard someone may try, and a gold star for writing a book I'd read a second time. I know I'll be looking forward to his next book.

Digital Dragon Serial

The North Star Episode 4: The Ambush

Bryan Thomas Schmidt

The Korelean cruisers hadn't appeared on any scanners, and Janaai didn't know why. The North Star came out of ultra-light to find two cruisers waiting for them above the planet Qural, but now there were ten, and the North Star was in trouble.

They'd received distress calls from Quron just as they'd wrapped up their investigation in a neighboring system. Two cruisers didn't cause her concern, but, as Janaai watched Hin's unsuccessful attempts at evading ten, her brow furrowed.

Ensign Hin continued adjusting controls at a marathon pace. "I can't slip by them, Captain!"

"Lieutenant, send distress calls on all channels."

"I'm trying, sir," Akruba responded. "They're jamming us."

Cruisers weren't equipped to jam transmissions except at close range, so the Koreleans used smaller communications ships capable of jamming from a considerable distance.

"Jammed? Commander, do we have a comm ship on scans?"

"Just coming out from behind the third moon, sir," Ensign Thom said from weapons.

"Shields on full, weapons locked!"

"We can't take them all on, Captain," Watts said with alarm.

"You have a better idea?"

"Unless you can find a way to take out the comm ship, no, sir."

Janaai raced through scenarios in her mind. There had to be something she'd picked up at the Academy. She wasn't the type to just give up, but she was starting to feel helpless. A thought came. "Who's our best computer tech?"

"Ensign Hin," Watts said without hesitation.

[\(continued on pg.28\)](#)



The North Star #4: The Ambush (from Pg. 27)

“Lieutenant Borges, take the helm. You have command. Ensign Hin, Lieutenant Akruba, and Commander Watts, please join me in the elevator.”

Borges slid into the chair Hin had vacated as Janaai and the three officers hurried toward the elevator. As the elevator doors began to close, Janaai glanced at the bridge screen and saw the cruisers drawing closer.

“Where are we going? We’re needed on the bridge,” Watts said.

“Trust me,” she whispered.

As the elevator began moving, Janaai turned to Hin. “Ensign, is there any possibility you could reprogram a life pod so when it launches it reads as a malfunction on scanners?”

Hin shrugged. “I’ve never considered it.”

“Think fast. Our lives depend on it.”

“I’d have to do it on board the pod itself, but in theory, yes,” Hin said, after a moment.

“What’s the point of this?” Watts asked, his face a question mark. “We don’t have time for games!”

“Lieutenant, send a distress call as soon as you’re clear.”

“Of course, Captain.”

“She can send it from here once the comm ship’s destroyed,” Watts said.

“Not if the ten cruisers get close enough to jam us,” Akruba said. “Their combined jamming will make that impossible.”

“You and Hin go prepare a life pod for launch, Lieutenant,” Janaai said.

“Commander Watts will join you in a moment.” The elevator stopped on

28

Level Eight as explosions rocked the ship and Klaxons blasted around them.

“Yes, sir,” Hin and Akruba said together as the doors opened and they hurried toward the life pod bay.

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The North Star #4: The Ambush

“We can’t go out on a life pod in the middle of a battle,” Watts said. “We’ll be slaughtered.”

“They won’t pay it any mind when their scanners show it as a malfunction.”

“There are ten of them,” Watts argued. “All it would take is one.”

“Do we still have mines on board?”

“I kept the partial box we opened.” Watts’ eyes widened with sudden understanding.

Janaai smiled. “It may be our only chance. You’d better hurry.”

Watts shook his head. “Where’d you learn this stuff?”

She smiled. “Improvisation is one of my gifts. Go!”

Watts hurried after Hin and Akruba as Janaai hit a button to return to the bridge.

As soon as Borges heard the plan, he began objecting. “The security chief leads landing parties!”

“You’re needed here.”

“So are Hin and Akruba.” The floor vibrated beneath them from another explosion.

“Hull at ninety percent,” Thom said.

Janaai smiled. “Can you program computers, Lieutenant?”

“No, but if the cruisers target them—”

Janaai motioned to the helm. “We’ll just have to distract them. Fly zig-zags.”

“Zig-zags?”

Janaai nodded. “Alternating speeds, switching direction every few minutes. You’ll have to switch to manual.”

“I don’t understand, sir.”

Janaai grabbed the arms of her chair as the ship rocked again. “If they can’t anticipate our

[\(continued on pg.30\)](#)



The North Star #4: The Ambush (from Pg. 29)

course, it'll be harder to target us." Borges started to object again. "Just do it, Lieutenant!"

Janaai glanced out the bridge screen as Borges began typing into the computer. I hope this works.

Watts took the controls and launched the life pod as Hin worked on the computer.

"This seems risky in the middle of a battle," Akruba said, puzzled. They'd both given him funny looks when he'd brought the mines on board.

"A destroyed comm ship can't jam us. We need to get that message out."

"Done!" Hin said in a satisfied tone.

"Good. Take the controls while I prepare the mines."

As Hin took his place at the controls, Watts moved back to the rear of the life pod. "Get us as close to that comm ship as you can, forward or aft."

"We'll be sitting ducks."

"They only have two turrets, and neither faces aft. Lieutenant, get that distress call ready."

Akruba nodded, hands ready at the comm panel. "Ready, sir."

Hin frowned at the scanner. "I think the North Star's been hit."

Watts glanced up from the mines. "What happened?"

30

"She's flying erratically, sir."

Watts glimpsed it through the port side window. "Let's just focus on our task. I'm sure the Captain has a

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The North Star #4: The Ambush

plan.”

The bridge commlink beeped as Borges continued maneuvering the ship.

“Specialist Rigel, open the channel, please,” Janaai ordered.

“Open, sir,” Rigel said, pushing a button on her console.

Commander Kryk appeared on the screen, his uniform pressed and neat, unlike their previous encounter. A broad smile covered his face. “Captain Resnick, how nice to see you again.”

“I see you brought some friends.”

Kryk laughed. “I do love you humans’ sense of humor. Unfortunately, your time for laughter will be very short.”

“How sad we didn’t have the chance to meet in person,” Janaai said.

“Yes.” Kryk smiled sadly. “Your engines seem to be malfunctioning, or is it your navigator?”

“We’re having technical issues.”

“I can send one of my technicians to make repairs.”

Janaai laughed. “Oh yes, we’d welcome him with open arms.”

Hin brought the life pod to a stop aft of the Korelean comm ship as Watts loaded several mines into the expulsion tube. “We’re only going to get one shot at this, so let’s hope it works.”

Hin nodded. “I don’t know if we can get out of range fast enough.”

Watts smiled. “Then let me say it’s been an honor to serve with you both.”

“You, too, sir,” Akruba replied with a resigned look.

“Here goes.” Hin turned the life pod so the expulsion tube aimed toward the comm ship.

[\(continued on pg.32\)](#)



The North Star #4: The Ambush (from Pg. 31)

“Bombs away.” Watts hit a button and watched the mines slip away from the ship, lights flashing. “Go, Ensign!”

As Hin accelerated and turned the life pod around, Watts heard its engines straining. He turned and looked out the back window, watching the mines continuing toward the comm ship. A blinding flash of orange, yellow and red made him squint as the mines began to hit. Debris flew away from the comm ship and headed toward them.

“Change course to port, Ensign!”

Hin turned the life pod. It seemed to take forever. “She’s not designed for evading, sir.”

Watts sighed. Lord, protect us!

Janaai and her crew watched through the bridge screen as the mines struck the comm ship. Cheers erupted around her.

“Let’s hope this works,” Janaai said.

Kryk frowned as he appeared on the screen again. “Very tricky, Captain. Unfortunately, you won’t live to receive a commendation.”

The comm ship exploded on her combat radar. The crew cheered again.

Kryk scowled as a crewman approached with the news. “Too bad no one will arrive in time to answer your distress calls.”

Rigel turned toward Janaai, punching a button muting the comm channel. “Destroyers Marx and Pacific responding on the secure channel. ETA two minutes.”

“Let’s hope we last that long.” Janaai heard a hiss as the comm channel opened again.

“You killed my childhood friend at Eleni, Captain.”

“You fired on your own friend’s ship.”

32

“You left me no choice. Better he should die with honor than face the humiliation of capture.”

Janaai saw Rigel listening intently to her ear piece. Rigel turned and nodded. “Farewell, Commander,” Janaai said.

The North Star #4: The Ambush

Kryk nodded and the screen went blank.

Suddenly, two Coalition Destroyers popped out of ultra-light and fired on the cruisers.

Janaai smiled as her crew cheered again. “Stop maneuvers and lock weapons!”

“Weapons locked, Captain,” Thom reported.

She heard Borges whispering a prayer of thanks from the helm. “Emmanuel, Lieutenant. Our God is with us.”

A series of torpedoes left the North Star and headed for two of the cruisers. Janaai saw a cruiser explode as three others limped on damaged engines. I prefer a more even playing field. “Any word from the life pod?”

“They’ve landed on one of the moons, sir,” Rigel reported.

“Several cruisers damaged, sir. The others are breaking off,” Thom said, his face full of excitement.

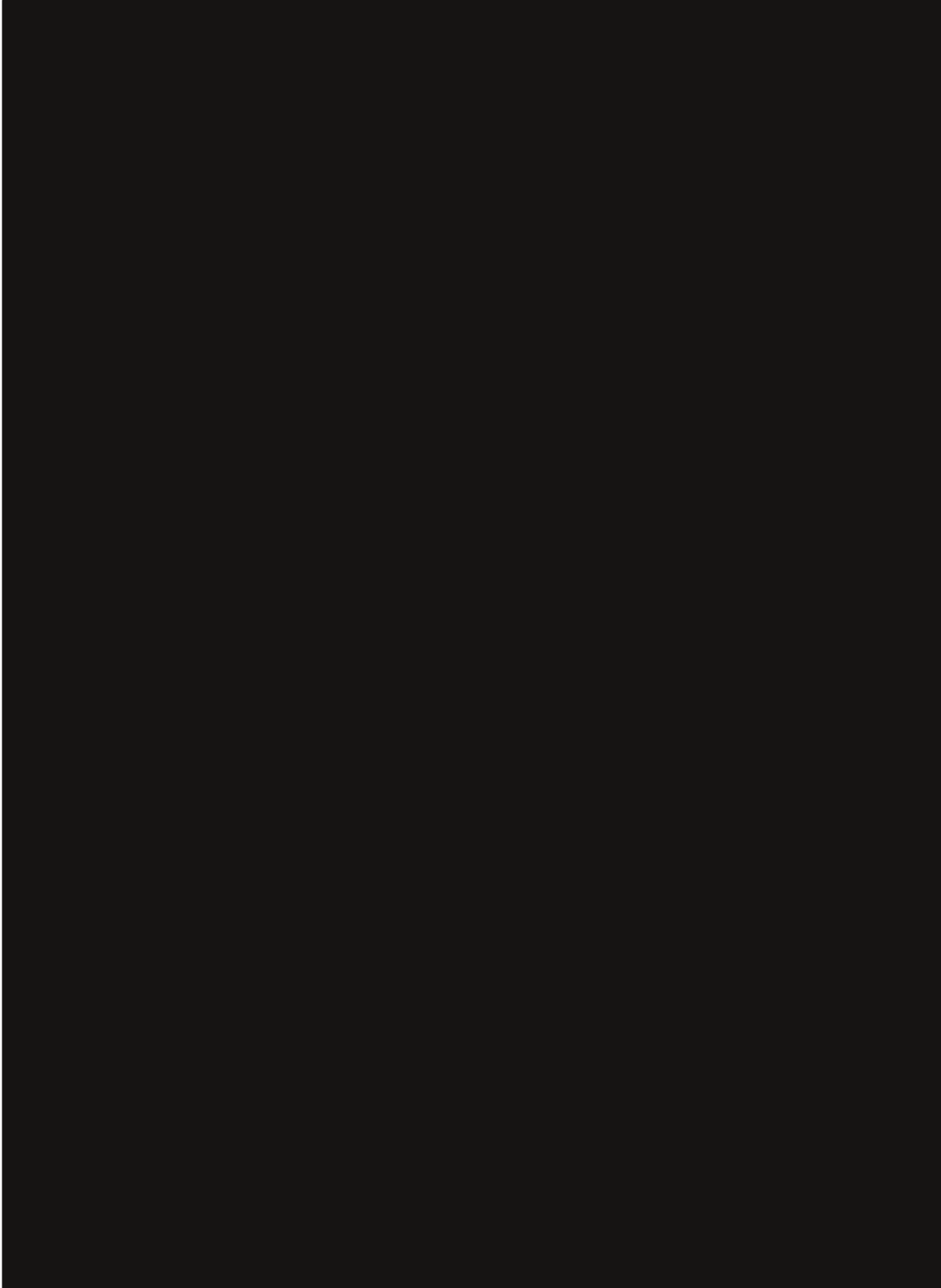
“Well done, everyone.” Janaai leaned back in her chair relieved and offered a silent prayer of her own.

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Born and raised in Central Kansas, Bryan spent five years working in the television and film industry. Bryan currently resides in El Paso, Texas with his wife Bianca and their cat, Doce, and dog, Louie. He has had many stories and devotionals published in magazines like Digital Dragon Magazine, and more. He is currently marketing his first science fiction novel, *The Worker Prince*, to agents and publishers, while working on drafting his fantasy novel, *Sandman*.



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