

# TIGERSHARK magazine



Issue Nineteen – Autumn 2018 – Heroes

# Tigershark Magazine

## Issue Nineteen – Autumn 2018

### Heroes

#### Editorial

Heroes inspire us. In this issue, you'll find both epic heroes and everyday heroes, as well as failed heroes. Hopefully, they'll inspire you!

Best, DS Davidson

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Editor and Layout: DS Davidson

### Next Issue's Theme:

## Dark of Winter

The chill nights are drawing in...

<https://tigersharkpublishing.wordpress.com/tigersharkpublishing@hotmail.co.uk>

#### Dragonslayer

*By DJ Tyrer*

Ground shudders, shakes, quakes  
Mighty dragon devouring  
Kingdom helpless falls  
Shining sword in hero's hand  
How the mighty are fallen

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## Hero To Zero

By Troy DeFrates

Do you believe there is true love for life  
maybe, but it is extremely quite rare  
for two people to change and to compare  
I believe over time, love is lifeless.  
Marriage is difficult, not without strife  
challenge your wife, this to you I would dare  
soon you will find yourself sleeping downstairs.  
Love is tolerance, putting up with gripes  
compare your love to that twenty years past  
it has changed as both of you have altered.  
What either will tolerate becomes thin  
Change with the wind like ropes on a ship's mast.  
If the hero does not change he falters  
your love will turn back to zero again.

## Two Warriors

By Mark Hudson

In Evanston, I ride the local train,  
and interesting characters always ride.  
An old man got on, and began to complain,  
and an Apache train worker came inside.  
The Apache is known to try and entertain,  
and he talked to the man, with nothing to hide.  
"I was a marine, the Orient my domain,"  
the Apache said in order to confide.  
"Were you in the service?" came from his brain.  
"I was stationed in Germany," the man replied,  
"Right in the middle of Hitler's reign."  
The bonding of the two was not denied.  
My stop approached, I wanted to stay,  
and listen to more of the things they might say!

## Man's Best Friend

By Troy DeFrates

During the most bleak moment held  
A bond with your dog like a weld  
You can tell you are their friend  
They are heroes in the own right  
Not letting you stray from their sight  
Through the night until the end

*This poem was written with a Cywydd Llosgyrnog Poetry Style.*



# The Scales of Justice Never Lie

By John Tinney

*Black Market Pizza Causes Death!*

*Ice Cream is Poison!*

*Cake is a Mistake!*

*Burgers Make You Impotent!*

*Smuggling Trans Fats = A Sentence of up to 25 Years in a Labour Camp!*

Government warning signs always sent an Arctic chill through number 723811. He was sweating like an overweight pizza smuggler being chased by those sex-starved sniffer dogs. Desperate people jogged on the spot and tried to lose more weight. It was pathetic, futile. The entire queue was full of panic-stricken proles and the odd smugness personified bastard who did everything his fascist government told him to do. 723811 was just like them from year zero to thirteen. He was the Party's wet dream: a good, docile devotee of the doctrines. But never again. Something cracked and now he was constantly buying little tastes of freedom on the dark matter web. They had everything: pizza, beer, cigarettes, white bread, kebabs, smack suppositories, chocolate, coffee, Rights of Man, Slaughterhouse-Five, Nineteen Eighty-Four, London Calling, Exile on Main St. Behind closed doors in illegal underground havens, 723811 was able to smoke, drink, read illicit books, listen to decadent and/or subversive music and stuff his arse and face until he was ill for days. It was truly wonderful and liberating.

The weight watchers in his neighbourhood had shopped him. He was sure of it. Someone must've smelled the cheese contraband on him and done their duty for supreme leader and country. Why else was he here now? His next scheduled weighing was meant to be two months away and here he was having to strip and have BMI checks done. There was no way he was passing this. Those two strikes for being a few pounds over the last time and testing positive for goat's cheese were hanging over him like a tonne weight on a rusty chain. One more violation and he'll be eating kale three times a day and building IKEA bots with meltdown triggering assembly instructions. It was a terrifying prospect. People were never the same after doing kale. All life was battered out of them by savage, shredded fitness instructors who were more drones and droid than the ones currently engaged in the Intergalactic Resource War with the Polycycle planets.

Two guys with excess chin fat were hauled away and cuffed. A woman trying to resist was zapped and sedated. Another man was dragged off a scale screaming like a brat with too many toys and no concept of self-denial. The immaculately pressed government fat crusher force were loving it. They always took a little too much glee in enforcing laws that would make Draco hard and proud.

723811 was ordered to the scale by a sadist with a stun baton. He was given a light shock to make him feel extra welcome. The chisel-jawed guard chuckled like a donkey with his ripped mate. 'You know the drill!' 723811 began hesitantly stripping. 'Faster!' The guards laughed at his understandably terrified, hibernating cock and made disgusted noises at the sight of a slight belly.

'This guy's a big fat pig!'

'Fascist bastard,' 723811 mumbled.

'That sounded like dissent to me.'

'Dissent?!' Lantern-face said like he was about take off from the ground. The steel baton crashed off 723811's shoulder and he stumbled towards the scale. 'Get on it!' It kept on rising and rising until a flashing red light went off.

'Grossly overweight,' announced the shrill automated voice.

'Overweight!' The guard said with a face of pure malevolence. 'The Scales of Justice Never Lie! Third violation, eh? You're going to be sewing our uniforms and building sex bots for your betters, fatty!' 723811 sighed and reached between his cheeks. The guards were confused and repulsed.

'Revolution!' 723811 shouted, zapping his oppressors with a micro if still uncomfortable to smuggle raygun. His comrades reached in and did the same. Revolution was the cry throughout the world.

*Ends*

## London, 1940, Night

*By Tom Sheehan*

Darkness falls feathering as we  
wait underground for bombers.

Silence is mischievous  
tickling our ears. We listen

for high sounds of motors  
that race ahead the way scouts

outdistance infantry.  
The sound's lethal and aimless

and performs a function  
engineers never dreamed of.

Even the earth between us,  
loamy and asphalt ear-

defenders, cannot catch all  
the wild revolutions thrown

down from the clouds when hands  
reach for midnight or bombsight.

We grope for eternity, scratch  
each other's backs, lock fingers

long into dim ritual grip,  
keep score on near-misses.

Milk sours at breast, children cry,  
tremors run their train echoes

under our skin. There's a need  
to make love one more time.

This is how we surpass ourselves,  
stretching desires, falling short,

as darkness, fleeting temptress,  
lifts away with morning dew.

## Just Because, Bad Heart

*By Michael Lee Johnson*

Just because I am old  
do not tumble me dry.  
Toss me away with those unused  
Wheat pennies, Buffalo nickels, and Mercury dimes  
in those pickle jars in the basement.  
Do not bleach my dark memories  
Salvation Army my clothes  
to the poor because I died.  
Do not retire me leave me a factory pension  
in dust to history alone.  
Save my unfinished poems refuse to toss them  
into the unpolished alleyways of exile rusty trash  
barrows  
just outside my window, just because I am old.  
Do not create more spare images, adverbs  
or adjectives than you need to bury me with.  
Do not stand over my grave, weep,  
pouring a bottle of Old Crow  
bourbon whiskey without asking permission  
if it can go through your kidney's first.  
When under stone sod I shall rise and go out  
in my soft slippers in cold rain  
dread no danger, pick yellow daffodils,  
learn to spit up echoes of words  
bow fiddle me up a northern Spring storm.  
Do you bad heart, see in pine box of wood,  
just because I got old.



## The Doctor's Note

By Toli Kram

She turned off the deep romantic baritone of Barry White; put out of her head the thoughts of enacting any scenes of 'Shades of Grey;' unenthusiastically slipped out of her little black number. The clock's hands showed the agony of time creeping by instead of enjoying the timeless ecstasy of intimate moments sweeping past. She wanted to tantalise, tease and play, to toy and blush, now all she wanted was to tear and punch, scratch and scream. Her hunger for the evening meal was now spoilt, dry, cold and congealed like her dispirited passion. She cleared away the plates, cutlery and glasses. All that remained was a scattering of red rose petals along the length of the table, sinister now, looking like a hunter's trail of blood. The scented candles warm and heady with anticipation were now sickly and pointless.

Several calls to his mobile phone each one more frantic and questioning as they remained unanswered, or disregarded. She sat on the sofa in her dressing gown, slippers feet now instead of stilettos, socks instead of stockings and cocoa instead of Chianti. Not butterflies in her stomach now, only spiders, and instead of kisses on her lips a Kit Kat. She hugged her hot water bottle tightly with her slender arms instead of her hunk, thoughts of sleeping on the sofa instead of her fresh linen bed. Turning on the TV gave her many voices for company instead of the one she wanted, but turned it down low, she couldn't enjoy the sound of others laughing when she could not.

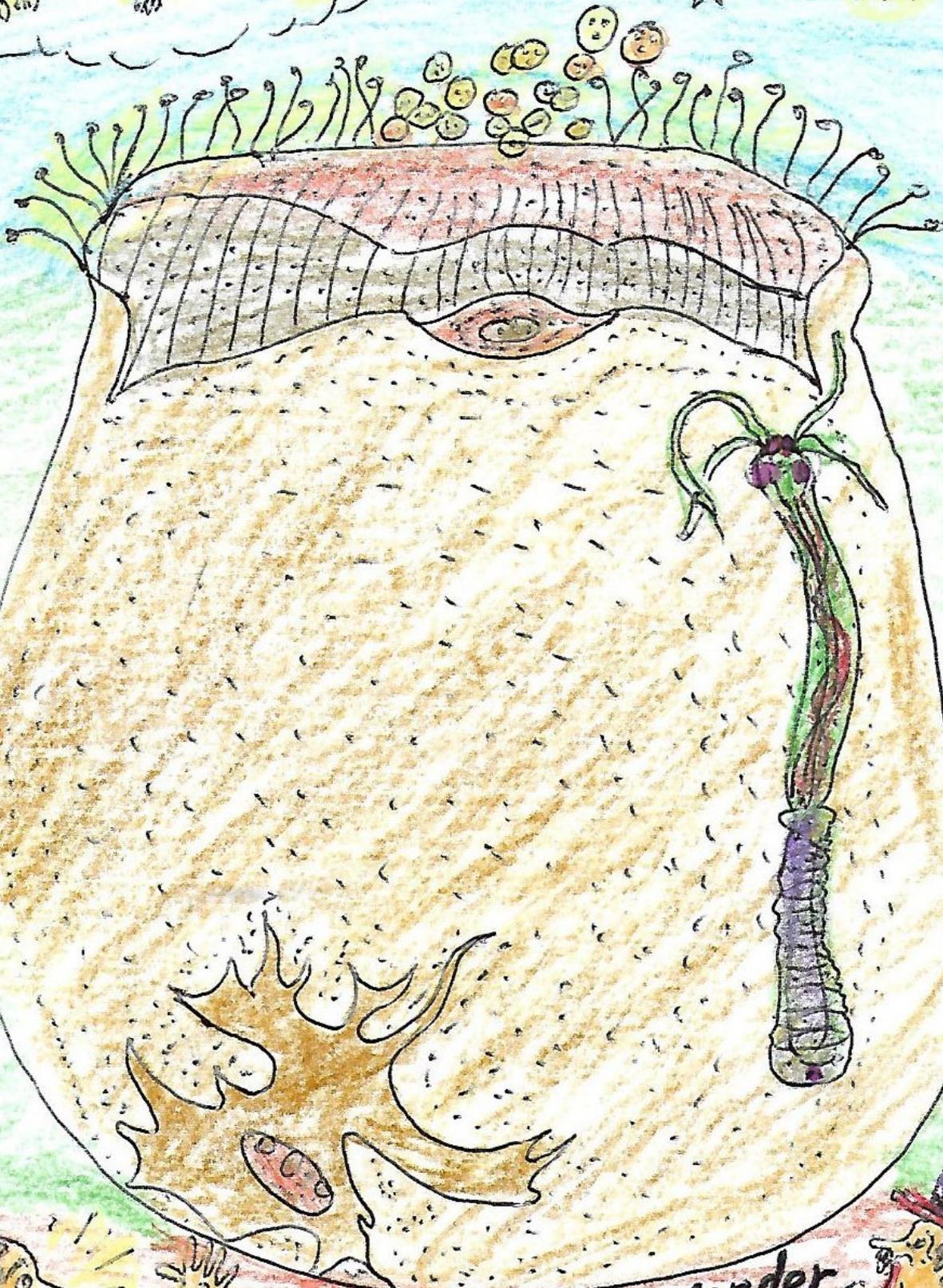
A mascara smudged face resting on a cushion startled when the doorbell rang... she ignored it. It rang again, she ignored it once more. A third time it rang and she muttered 'f... off' but it continued. Clenching her fists she opened the door and the chain rattled to a thud. It was raining heavily and a soaked police officer stood there with wet silver buttons and asked "Ms Shaw? I have something for you." He passed her an envelope through the gap. "I have been asked to return with a reply ma'am, I'll wait here."

She removed the chain and turned her back to read the contents of the letter. It read.... "I imagine the meals ruined and your hearts broken, but I'm the only medic attending a horrific accident on the motorway a few miles from you. If you want to reschedule just say yes, or no to Gus my mate, he's waiting for an answer....."

*Ends*



# Dog Constellation



A Sense of Wonder



# They Die in Eight Minutes

By Peter DiChellis

*Tick, tick . . . 11:52pm.* They die in eight minutes.

Shadows crept across the outside walls of the house. Moonlight. Hand signals. Whispers.

Cops. Three slipped to the front door. Two sneaked to the back.

“Ready.”

Ready just in time, Sheriff’s Detective Benton Hammel thought. They die at midnight the man had promised. Not a second sooner, not a minute later. The man’s ex-wife, stepson, daughter-in-law, all of them. Dead at midnight.

Narcissistic psychopath, Hammel figured. Precise, cold, game player.

“Careful,” he’d whispered to his team moments ago. “The guy won’t kill his family until midnight, but he’ll kill us anytime.”

*Tick, tick . . . 11:53.*

Hammel had already briefed the team on the suspect, situation, and the isolated location. He had pushed them hard and they’d raced here, to this secluded housing development at the far edge of the county, after an anonymous caller alerted cops to the address. Hammel knew the area, had been house hunting nearby last month. Without that lucky break, and Hammel’s swift reaction, nobody could have arrived in time to save the family.

“Bust it open,” Hammel ordered.

The front door cracked off its hinges. Then the back door.

The cops’ flashlights dotted the pitch-black rooms as they hustled through, searching.

“Clear! Clear!”

“All clear!”

“Check for a basement,” Hammel instructed.

“No basement.”

“Attic.”

“No attic.”

“Backyard, garage, outbuilding, anything!”

“Nothing! Nothing! Nobody here!”

Wrong. They are here, Hammel calculated. All of them. Hidden somewhere in this dark unsold house in an abandoned tract of unfinished new homes. At 427 Maple. A perfect spot for a midnight killing.

*Tick, tick . . . 11:57.*

Hammel would find the family, needed to find them, to save their lives and his own career and marriage. To get a ticket out of this backwater Sheriff’s Department. He recalled his wife’s latest tirade.

“We need to stop looking for a house, you need to start looking for a job someplace else,” she’d ranted. “Why did we even move here?”

Because after he got blamed for his supervisor’s screw up, this was the only job he could get, that’s why, Hammel had told her. He forced those images away. Focused. He’d shopped houses just like this one. Try to remember. Think.

*Tick, tick . . . 11:58.*

“Outside,” he screamed. “North side. A crawl space. They’re underneath the house! *Underneath the house!*”

Hammel bolted outside. Fast, muscled, still the alpha dog. A hedge of shrubbery masked the crawl space entry. He shoved the shrubbery aside, crouched behind it, and peered into the crawl space, flashlight in one hand, automatic pistol in the other.

“Clear,” he called out. “Nobody.”

Nothing from the other cops, until a soft rushing sound as one exhaled.

Hammel holstered his gun, pulled out his phone, called the boss. “Nobody here. Somebody’s info was no goddamn good. Screwed us up.”

“Bullshit. I checked the info myself.”

“I’m at the location. 427 Maple Street. Nobody here.”

Silence.

“Where the hell is Maple Street? 427 Maple *Drive*, Hammel. Maple *Drive*.”

Shit.

*Tick, tick . . . midnight.*

*Ends*

*This story originally appeared at Shotgun Honey in January 2014.*

# The Things They Carried (Pastiche)

## A True War Story

*By Ana Caetano*

They were heading East to My Tho to evacuate some villagers when it all happened. I wasn't there, I don't know exactly what happened, but here is what Lieutenant Jimmy told me: "an ambush, man. Fuck! It was my fault". That's it. That's all he told me. He felt responsible for all those deaths, just like any other death that occurred in our battalion. So I decided I wouldn't burden him with any more of my questions and curiosity. Sammy's and Red's M-163 APC was the only one left.

It was a calm day; the sky was ocean blue with no clouds to be seen. Tall vines, mahogany eucalyptus and some thick underbrush were surrounding us. Some men were smoking pot near the river. Others were relaxing, writing letters to their families or reading familiar books. And I was packing my carriers for my next mission. You could even hear the sound of the water flowing down the river bed or the birds flying by if you were silent enough. The bright sunlight was penetrating through my skin when the first and last APC arrived on our camp - carrying countless dead bodies.

They were piled one on top of the other, like expired food packages waiting to be thrown on the garbage. Soulless. I could see their red, thick, vivid blood, pouring out of their wounds and running down their entire body. A stinking smell of death. All because they were trying to do some good by evacuating defenseless vietnamese villagers. The entire camp was speechless. Staring blankly at those cadavers. An image which will forever haunt our minds. They were all kids fighting in a wrong war. A war in which they didn't belong.

And right then came the guys who took part on the evacuation. The lucky ones who survived... or maybe, the unlucky ones. Then I saw Sammy, the youngest of us all, grabbing on to his brother's shirt as if too afraid to let go. Why should a sixteen year old boy be at a war? A war he did not ask for. A war he did not deserve. Sammy always dreamed of going to Med School. He was at the top of his class, won 9 awards out of 8 subjects because the school felt he deserved an extra one for effort and merit. And that dream was ripped away from him, teared down to pieces and thrown in the trash. Because even if he did come out of war, even if he did manage to survive the hellhole he was put in, he would never be himself again. And Med School would be just a silly illusion he once had. But there he was, hands intertwined with his brother's, holding on to the last possible glimpse of hope. I could see the blood stained shot in Red's stomach, looking almost as vivid as his bright, curly, red hair. He remained still, pressing an already stained piece of cloth to his deadly injury. I could feel his suffering right there, when he squeezed his lusterless eyes shut and bit down on his mouth right after letting out a rough, low growl. There was too much blood, I thought. He wouldn't make it. And Sammy would not let go of him. He kept telling him "come on Red! Hold on...I will take care of you brother" or "don't you dare leave me!". He would not let go of his last piece of hope. He couldn't. They were all each other had. Mother and father killed by a drunk driver in a car accident. Their house taken away from them since they had no way or no one to help them pay for it. They had no close relatives, no one to help them, to look after them. So Red volunteered. He volunteered to come to this stupid war because he was too consumed by longing and loneliness and anger. And by doing so he condemned his brother to his own horrible misery.

The next morning Sammy was dead. Boom. Dead. Just like that. With a shot in his head and a gun on his hand. Lifeless. Lying motionless on the grass before me. And right beside him was his brother. Bruises all over his head and body and still it seemed like he was peacefully sleeping and soon would wake up to tell us a joke about how he chased the cat down the street and ended up being arrested for animal mistreatment, or how he was caught by the school's headmaster smoking pot in the bathroom, making us all laugh. But that was a lie, I told myself. He would not wake up. He was dead. It was over for both of them. Two more war casualties in this gravely land. Because this is war and it is much bigger than all of us. There is no peace at war. No peaceful moment and no peaceful memory. The truth is that we have no control over it. Over our future or our loved one's future. At war, things will always happen in spite of our wants and needs. We are all puppets, waiting for death to kiss us goodbye. Feeling utterly useless and purposeless.

If I could ever tell the story right, then you would believe what I say next – Sammy Clark was dead the moment his brother volunteered. He was dead long before he shot himself. Because the moment he arrived at Vietnam was the moment his life became a complete nothingness. That was when he truly died. And when his brother died he was entirely alone in this evil world. No family. No real friends. Not even a home to go back to. His brother was all he had left, and when you lose the only thing you have left, there's no silver lining, there's nothing in the world that will keep you sane again. He couldn't stand this consuming feeling of loneliness, so he shot himself to get over the pain of death. His brother's death. His death. And he was a hero, I thought. He did not care about what people would think of him. What others would talk about him. Or who he would be remembered for. He just did it. He killed himself and got over the misery. As simple as that. Death brought him peace. Then maybe he was just a coward after all.

You can tell a true war story by the morbid feeling of pointless and helplessness. And you can never disagree with it. Because to disagree with it would be to say that you matter, when you don't. You are just one more body at war, just waiting, waiting for death to come. War takes away the only thing that makes you yourself, your identity. It strips away your purpose and turns you into statistics. A true war story portrays the incurable wound that you will carry for the rest of your life. And this is the truth, the most miserable and pitiful truth.

*Ends*



## **Hollywood Heroes**

*By Troy DeFrates*

Hollywood heroes are made  
They are all quite overpaid  
Riding in their motorcade  
The red carpet walk sashayed  
With fake identities played  
Their memory one day fades  
A real hero stays with you  
They do not try to evade

*This poem was written using a Cyrch A Chwta Poetry Style.*

## The Splendid Brothels of Ganymede

*By Andrew Darlington*

*'I never found those lips again'  
(CP Cavafy, via Max Noiprox)*

encounter and ending  
on this body-stained bed  
in sensual quivers of air  
in dark-night lunar eclipse  
in murmured delight and subtle pain  
in sordid fear and secret pleasures  
far from black-sun detonations, we  
coil and shudder, caress other skins  
long red tongues dart and flicker  
gaunt with bristling spines  
in erotic tease sequestered  
from dimensions of horror  
where nebulae flood extinctions  
where butchered worlds split apart  
where we unsleep with ghouls  
for fear of the squirm of dreams,  
an encounter, and an ending, for  
I will never find this peace again...

## True Heroes

*By DJ Tyrer*

True heroes are not brave  
Bravery is just another word  
For stupidity and recklessness;  
True heroes feel fear  
But confront it head on  
And do what must be done.  
True heroes have nightmares  
That will haunt them forever  
But save them for their sleep.



## Men in Uniform

*By Megan Merchant*

My husband tells me about the woman they saved,  
how fit and attractive she was in hiking in shorts and thin sleeves,

fit for forty-something, he says, and packed water enough until the wrong  
turn became a series and blanded the desert into a bed,

she fought exhaustion and coyotes and the night temps lowering her own,  
but was smart enough to follow the tracks a utility truck

had made days before, smart to watch the moonrise and know if she  
followed it would pull her closer to the lights,

and though she barely survived, had blistered lips and dry heaves,  
he still spoke of her body as a sexed thing.



# The Avenger

*By Mark Halpern*

I was already 27. Accepting the transfer to Japan was an easy way to get taller and bigger. Over there, other people were shorter and smaller. But it took half a year before I realized that Japan also gave me the chance to become The Avenger.

Think about it. Suppose you're riding a subway in, say, New York, which I've done a few times. Suppose another passenger starts behaving in a really unacceptable way. Believe me, it happens. And what are you going to do? Confront him? He might have a gun. He might be hoping for an excuse to use it. Waiting for his opportunity. I'm definitely not anti-gun or anything, but there's no reason to risk your life needlessly. And – as you'll see – my point is that real toughness has nothing to do with guns.

But it's a fact that in America, there are too many people itching to fire off their weapons. I sometimes get that feeling about airport security personnel when I visit home, though once a female inspector used a water bottle in my duffel bag as an excuse to flirt with me. Which was nice, but unfortunately she wasn't my type.

So, no. When someone behaves rudely on a New York subway, you either just bear it quietly or change your seat. And the root problem is unsolved. But in Tokyo, you know nobody's carrying a gun. Guns are not allowed – it's their country and they get to choose the rules. Even if we wouldn't choose the same rules. Heck, here even the guys who drive around in armoured cars with sacks of cash only carry batons.

Anyway, back to me. The best thing about Japan, along with the cleanliness and order, is the good manners. Which, basically, is the way I was raised. It's considered important, and it's generally expected, that everyone behaves properly in public – all the time. But what's generally expected doesn't always happen. I really respect and admire the Japanese people as a whole, but whatever country you go to there are rotten apples. I mean people who are deliberately impolite. They probably behave reasonably okay at work all day, but only because they have no choice. Then, when they can be anonymous, they relieve their frustrations by behaving rudely. Just because there are no consequences. My own workplace is fine and I get along great with my buddies there, some of whom are Japanese. When I come across the rotten apples, it's usually on the train.

Let's not mince words. People like that lack moral fibre. I'd say that they are bad Japanese.

As a well-treated guest in this country and as an American, I feel a special responsibility. And that responsibility is even greater for someone like me, who was raised to never be embarrassed for being who I am. So for me, part of being a good foreigner means I should not be afraid to do something about these bad Japanese.

Now, as to actually taking action, the first time was totally unplanned. I was about to leave work at six o'clock on a Friday, but my boss told me to prepare some figures to send to Minneapolis by their opening time. I worked until late, and by the time I got to Shibuya Station it was after midnight. At that hour, and just before the weekend, lots of passengers had of course been out drinking. Well, I have nothing against drinking as such, and I accept that being drunk sometimes leads to accidents and sometimes poor judgement. But, as my mother would say, drinking is no excuse for rudeness.

Anyway, the train was extremely crowded, but the passengers were behaving in a fairly orderly way – the right Japanese way. Everyone managed to get on. But once on board, there was this middle-aged guy I was pressed against – close enough to smell the alcohol on his breath. He started pushing his legs farther apart and grabbing a different hanging strap with each arm, even though other people were closer to the straps. Then he poked his elbows outward, wriggled his feet wider and more backward on the floor, and he pushed with his arms and back and legs against me and the other passengers. He was deliberately creating his own private empty space. He didn't care that everyone else got more crushed. Maybe even that's what he wanted.

It was bad enough for me, but I could take it. Others were suffering more. Especially one lady who got the jerk's elbow in her face, with no room to move away. So this poor lady, maybe around fifty, probably somebody's mother, had to keep her neck bent to one side.

Well, by American standards I'm not huge, but here I'm considered big and sturdy. Six feet even – or, as the Japanese say, 183 centimetres. I go to the gym regularly and, though it's hard to tell just from looking, my gut is mostly muscle. So I felt totally in control, and more powerful than the jerk. Anyway, I knotted my fingers behind my head and stuck out one of my elbows so it started to poke into his head, as if unintentionally. His first reaction was to move away the right and let go one of the straps. Then I quickly shifted my right leg so he couldn't put his left leg back where it had been.

Then came good luck. The train braked suddenly, throwing people off balance, including the jerk. I was still perfectly in control, but pretended I'd been pushed towards him, and he had to let go the other strap. Next, I forced him into a tight space, against a pole and some tourist's big suitcase. Then I stayed in my position, holding my body absolutely rigid. The result? Everyone else had more space and he had less than average. Justice. And then I angled myself so he couldn't see my face and I couldn't see his. That way, there was no possibility of escalation.

He got off a few stops later and, I guess, was probably angry at me. But he couldn't have been sure it wasn't all an accident. For my part, I felt satisfied all the way home and through the next day. This is what life should be about, right? To do good and then feel happy because you did good. That's my point. Simple, right?

So I made a decision. I'd take the responsibility for protecting weaker people from bad behaviour on trains and subways. Whenever I had the chance.

And since the trains are often crowded, and people are who they are, there are lots of chances. Sometimes it's people taking up more than their fair share of space, like that first jerk. But there are lots of categories. Like people whose backpacks prevent others from moving down the train, getting everyone bunched up by the doors. Like people holding coffee cups that might spill, or even eating snacks with crumbs falling on other people. And please note: In Japan, it's bad manners to eat or drink on trains, except inter-city express trains with proper seats in rows and fold-down tables.

Or people who talk on cell phones or don't use "manner mode" – the name here for vibration mode. Isn't that great? Or people who cross their legs when other passengers might brush up against their dirty shoes. Or – and this one really cheeses me off – guys who press too close to women. Anyway, there's lots more and I won't go into the details. Let's just say, I've mastered techniques to deal with all the kinds of bad manners you find on trains.

As this duty became a bigger part of my life, I started thinking of myself as The Avenger. Probably it's more precise to say The Train Avenger, but that doesn't have a good ring to it. Anyway, I don't call myself The Avenger to other people. In fact, I never talk about my good deeds at all, since that would make it look like I'm motivated by glory. Which is counter to the whole purpose, and not the way I was raised. My point is, I do good and punish evil. And I protect innocent people who – unlike me – are afraid or unable to do something about it.

Maybe you'll say "The Avenger" is too strong, because I obviously don't have any super powers and because the evil I'm fighting is just rudeness and not crime. But so what. The point is to do the right thing and help society. And, anyway, if I did come across crimes I'd fight those too. But this is Japan, so I never see any crimes.

Now I'll tell you about a really funny time.

This one day I took the morning off work for an errand. I got on the train just after rush hour, heading away from central Tokyo, so it wasn't crowded. Most passengers were older people or middle-aged women or younger women with small children. Everyone was sitting, except me and a woman in her twenties without a wedding ring. She was very good looking.

There was one empty seat in the "Silver Seat" section – that's where pregnant women and the elderly etc. get priority. I wouldn't have sat anyway, since I'd probably have to get up when some old person got on at the next station. But the problem was the young guy in the next seat over. He sprawled his body – in a very sloppy way – so his leg went partly over the empty seat.

From the way he was dressed I guessed he was around twenty. But, see, you couldn't actually tell because he'd draped a small towel over his face, I guess to keep the light out and help him sleep. Or maybe he was just pretending to sleep.

Then, just as I'd expected, an elderly woman got on. She must have been over 70, and looked like she really wanted to sit down. She saw the half-empty seat, but what could she do? By this point, everyone was glaring at the young guy, but he was oblivious, since the towel covered his eyes. I gave him exactly 60 seconds, and I couldn't take it any longer.

I walked to right in front of the boorish young guy. Then, in a single motion, I snatched the towel off his face and threw it in his lap. As the towel landed there, I said in an intense voice, but not loudly, like shouting in a whisper: Chanto suwarinasai! This is how mothers tell little children to sit up straight. So I was talking to him like he was four years old. And maybe some memory of his mother or something suddenly sprung up in his mind, because right away he just said hai very politely – like "yes sir" or "yes ma'am". Then he sat up perfectly straight in his seat.

The old woman said arigatō gozaimasu and bowed to me very nicely. I replied the way you're supposed to here, in a modest way, especially with older people. As I went back to where I'd been standing before, I didn't particularly want to see the other passengers' faces. Especially, I avoided looking in the direction of the young guy, who seemed very embarrassed and to have properly learned his lesson. But then I realized that everyone else was staring at the floor and trying very hard not to laugh. And that's when I figured how funny it must have looked. You see, before that time nobody – except maybe the wrongdoers themselves – ever realized I'd been acting deliberately. So now I too was struggling to keep a straight face.

The good-looking young woman held back her laughter like the others. But afterwards she was smiling, smiling at me. With a different kind of smile – not the laughing kind. I knew she must be attracted to a confident man of action, like me, and probably wanted me to start a conversation. But I didn't do it – even though she really had a pretty face. And in that kind of situation I never will. Nobody should ever think I do what I do in order to impress women. Of course, I have nothing against women, generally. I definitely like women. Definitely. But that's not a good motive and would spoil everything. It's not what motivates The Avenger.

I'll bet at dinner that night the other passengers told their families what happened. A humorous anecdote about a foreign guy doing a good thing. And that's okay, because a story like that reinforces good manners, and maybe gives other people confidence to do the right thing, like me. So I don't mind being an inspiration. But my point is, being The Avenger isn't for anyone's entertainment. It's better nobody knows what I do. It's like a secret identity.

Also, you have to understand that being the Avenger is not all fun and games. Usually, it's tough work. In addition to physical strength, confidence, experience and a sharp eye, The Avenger needs wisdom and mature judgement. All the time. Especially to spot the difference between a deliberately bad act and someone just having an accident or making a mistake.

For example, last week I had a close call. This older guy sitting across from me laid a sports newspaper over his lap, right at the page that had a big photo of a topless women. Next, he pulls out a thick Swiss Army knife, and starts glancing repeatedly at the teenage girl sitting next to him. I, of course, am taking in everything and formulating a plan. Then he opens a blade. I'm ready to pounce, my muscles completely tense. But right away he closes the blade and instead opens a nail file and starts filing his nails. I think he put out the newspaper to catch the filings, and the topless photo was just a coincidence. Also, I can see he's only glancing at the girl to make sure he doesn't disturb her. So you see, I was absolutely ready to turn into The Avenger, but I had the good judgement to wait until the very last possible moment. This shows how The Avenger is as much about brains as about brawn.

As I said, I don't do this stuff when I visit the States. I'm not stupid. Probably in a year from now I will move back – the work project I'm here for should be over then. So I'll have to find another way to fulfil my responsibilities to my fellow man. But for now, just thinking about my special role in Japanese society makes me feel good. Japan is a great country. When I leave, I will know I did my part to keep it that way. How many people can say that?

Also, I said I don't tell anyone about The Avenger, but that's not 100% true. I did tell my mother, but only so she won't worry about me too much. Anyway, next month she's coming to visit Japan for the first time. I'm hoping there will be an opportunity to show her The Avenger in action.

*Ends*





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# Sacrifice

*By DJ Tyrer*

Having suffered shipwreck, Olbur of Rokol and his companion, the princess Minon-Azal, currently maintaining her identity as the youthful swordsman Peltamash out of convenience rather than necessity, found themselves wandering in a generally south-easterly direction through stark, frost-rimed pine forest far from the more civilised lands where they could hire out their blades for gold. This was a situation they were keen to remedy as soon as possible, despite the apparent pleasure of the gods to leave them lost.

At this very moment, they were encamped in the lee of a sheltering rock, warming themselves at a fire over which cooked the somewhat scrawny carcass of a squirrel Peltamash had brought down using a bow constructed by Olbur. Although he had spent long years in the balmy southlands as a mercenary, Olbur was a native of the chilly north and had adventured in its wild places before travelling south and retained many useful skills from his youth.

Olbur breathed deeply. "It may be a meagre feast, but the scent of it refreshes my weary body, just as the smoke of a sacrifice en vigours the gods."

He lifted it from the fire and, taking a knife from his belt, divided it in two. They began to eat.

A sudden shriek startled them from their meal.

"What was that?" asked Peltamash, looking about. Shadows danced about them in answer to the flames. "Was it a beast?"

"Maybe." Olbur rose, spear in hand. "But, it seemed more like a woman." He wasn't entirely convinced: there were things that sounded like people but were not, luring the unwary to their doom.

The shriek came again, closer.

Peltamash stood, bow ready. "We have to help."

"Follow me, but be careful. Do not be fooled. We cannot be certain what it is."

They moved swiftly between the trees, eyes darting about for any threat. The scream came a third time and they ran towards it.

It was a woman. Clad in a thin white gown unsuited to the chilly evening, she was stumbling barefoot over roots and rocks, clearly terrified. Dark hair billowed out behind her as she went.

Olbur called out to her and she turned to run towards them.

"Help me!"

Something dark and winged with a long, whipping tail swooped towards her from amongst the shadows that seemed to cling to the trees.

"Help!" She screamed as it seized her, lifting her from her feet and carrying her up towards the sky.

Peltamash loosed an arrow, but the creature vanished, undeterred, leaving only the echo of the woman's scream.

"We have to help her," said Peltamash.

Olbur cursed. Such acts of heroism seldom ended well. His entire career was predicated upon putting his own needs first, enriching himself and taking no more risk than was absolutely necessary. Unfortunately, he found it difficult to silence that little nagging voice demanding that he act, especially when that voice was his lover's.

"Very well." He hefted his spear over his shoulder and began to jog in the direction in which the woman had been running from, hoping the creature was carrying her back thence. "Come on."

Despite being shorter than Olbur, Peltamash had little trouble keeping pace with him. They had to hurry, for night was falling fast. Soon, they would have difficulty seeing anything.

Suddenly, something swooped down at them.

In a single fluid movement, Olbur swung the spear from his shoulder and threw it at it. The spear tore through the creature's leathery wing and it tumbled to the forest floor, screeching.

As Olbur's hand snapped towards the sword at his waist, the creature's tail lashed his arm, drawing a bloody line along its length. He grunted in pain.

Peltamash's blade slashed and the tail fell free, twitching obscenely. Without pausing, Peltamash drove the sword point deep into the screeching creature. It fell silent.

Olbur retrieved his spear and prodded it, to be certain it was dead.

“I think we must be close,” he commented.

Peltamash looked at his arm. “You’re hurt.”

“It’s nothing, just a scratch.”

“That as might be, but that tail barb could be poisoned.”

Olbur shrugged, then commenced to clean and bind his wound. “Do you know what venom it is, let alone the cure? No? Then, let us not worry about the possibility. Come, I can hear her scream.”

They followed the woman’s cries to a clearing. Crouching at the forest’s edge, concealed behind a fallen trunk, they observed the scene. A group of five tall stones stood at the centre of the clearing, like the fingers of a gigantic hand clawing its way out of the earth. Outside of it were around a dozen men, some carrying blazing torches which added to the moonlight illuminating the scene. They were wrapped in heavy cloaks of fur and clutched spears or axes. Within the stones were two more of the winged creatures, their tails twitching as if anticipation, the woman, now tied to a central slab, and a wild-haired man with a forked beard, dressed in long, dark robes. In his hands, the man held a long, curved knife which glinted in the moonlight.

As they watched, the man raised his knife over the woman’s chest and chanted strange syllables in a harsh and guttural tongue.

Olbur heard the sound of a bow being drawn and, a moment later, Peltamash loosed an arrow at the man. It whistled softly as it sped across the clearing, the men without the stones starting to turn at the noise. Then, it buried itself in the wrist of the man holding the blade: he yelped and dropped the knife, his ritual interrupted.

Before anyone could react, Peltamash released a second arrow. One of the men cloaked in fur gasped and fell, the arrow buried deep in his chest.

Olbur burst from cover, Peltamash just behind him. He threw his spear as he ran, taking down another of the men. The others faltered and some began to run, others readied their weapons to fight.

Olbur slashed and thrust, blood splattering his sword arm with every blow. Beside him, Peltamash danced and lunged, parried and riposted, with a grace that contrasted with the unyielding force of Olbur’s blows.

Whoever the men were, they weren’t hardened warriors and those who survived the initial shock of their attack turned and ran.

They let them go, charging at the two monstrosities within the stones.

Tails lashing, the creatures flew at them.

Olbur swung his sword and decapitated one with a single blow.

Beside him, Peltamash screamed. Olbur turned to see the creature had wrapped its limbs about his lover and was carrying her skyward.

He jumped and seized hold of its tail with his free hand. It struggled and twisted to break free of his grasp.

Using all of his strength, he swung it and smashed it into one of the stones. It crumpled and let go of Peltamash.

Olbur raised his sword, but abandoned the swing as he heard the robed man chant a short series of syllables. He turned and only just managed to leap aside as a stream of darkness seemed to spit out from the palm of the man’s hand.

Olbur lunged forward and, with a single blow of his sword, removed the man’s hand. The sorcerer howled with anger and with pain. Olbur punched him and he fell, silent, to the ground.

Pausing to glance back to check Peltamash was fine, Olbur slashed the ropes that bound the woman to the slab and pulled her to her feet. Peltamash grabbed her and began to pull her away.

“You fool,” gasped the sorcerer, who was up on his knees, clasping his bloody stump. “You damn fool.”

Olbur kicked him back, then followed the others.

“We’ll get you home,” Peltamash told the woman.

She nodded. “Thank you.” Her voice was little more than a whisper, hoarse from her screams.

“Where do you live?”

The woman looked about, uncertain. “I’m... not sure.”

“Well,” said Olbur, “we’ll get you away from here.”

Peltamash nodded. “We’d best not tarry, in case those men regain their nerve or that wizard summons some more of his demons.”

But, the woman seemed too weak to continue, so Olbur handed his spear to Peltamash and heaved her up onto his back and carried her until they had gone far enough to feel safe in stopping and resting.

“No fire,” said Olbur. “Just in case.”

The woman leant back against the trunk of one of the pines. Now, Olbur had the opportunity to examine her in detail. Like him, she had light skin; only hers was smooth and pale, untouched by wind or sun. Her hair was long and dark. But, it was when he looked into her eyes that he gasped in shock: they were filled with darkness like two black orbs.

“I feel ill,” she murmured.

Olbur jumped back and seized his sword.

“What is it?” Peltamash exclaimed.

“Something’s wrong...”

Her eyes were completely black. She opened her mouth and darkness began to spew out from it.

Olbur stumbled backwards from the groping tendrils and Peltamash leapt aside.

“Destroy it!” The voice was that of the sorcerer, who stepped out of the darkness.

The woman turned her head and sent the tendrils of inky blackness coiling towards him. The sorcerer spat a curse and blue flames danced from the fingers of his remaining hand, forcing the tendrils to twist back from him.

Olbur lunged, but darkness lashed at him and he staggered back.

Peltamash slashed at the woman, distracting her. Olbur lunged again and the blade of his sword bit deep into her shoulder. The woman slumped back against the tree.

He swung his sword and took her head from her shoulders.

“It’s done,” he gasped.

It wasn’t: Darkness began to flow from the stump of her neck rather than blood and started to coalesce.

The sorcerer repeated his curse and flames engulfed the darkness, causing it to evaporate like morning mist.

He spat at them. “Your foolishness has released the darkness back into the woods.” The sorcerer sighed. “I bound the evil into her and, had I managed to complete her sacrifice, would have banished it from this world, back to the realm from whence it came. Instead, it is free to kill again.”

Olbur and Peltamash shared a glance.

Olbur looked at the sorcerer. “You mean: you bound that demon into an innocent woman?”

The sorcerer shrugged. “Who, truly, can be called innocent? Her sacrifice was for the good of all those who dwell in these woods.”

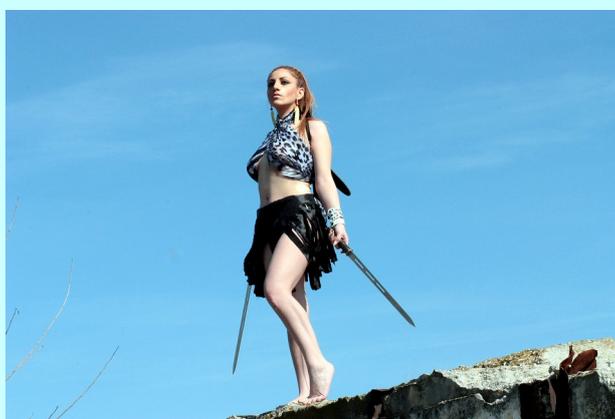
“She didn’t deserve to die.” Olbur hefted his sword, and, without another word, removed the man’s head with a single blow. He sagged, his arm was growing weary.

He looked down at the sorcerer’s corpse. “Who, indeed, is innocent?” He turned to Peltamash. “Help me burn these bodies. We need to be sure that neither will return.”

His lover turned without a word and set about gathering wood.

No, reflected Olbur, acts of heroism seldom ended well. He spat at the sorcerer’s body, then went to assist Peltamash. Better to fight for gold; a heavy pouch never let you down.

*Ends*



**Burial for Horsemen**  
**(For my father, blind too early.)**  
*By Tom Sheehan*

The night we listened to an Oglala life  
on records, and shadows remembered  
their routes up the railed stairway like  
a prairie presence, I stood at your bed

counting the days you had conquered.  
The bottlecap moon clattered into your  
room in vagrant pieces...jagged blades  
needing a strop or wheel for stabbing,

great spearhead chips pale in falling,  
necks of smashed jars rasbora bright,  
thin flaked edges tossing off the sun.  
Under burden of the dread collection,

you sighed and turned in quilted repose  
and rolled your hand in mine, searching  
for lighting only found in your memory.  
In moon's toss I saw the network of your

brain struggling for my face the way you  
last saw it, a piece of light falling under  
the hooves of a thousand horse ponies,  
night campfires riding upward in flames,

the skyline coming legendary once more.



## Coda

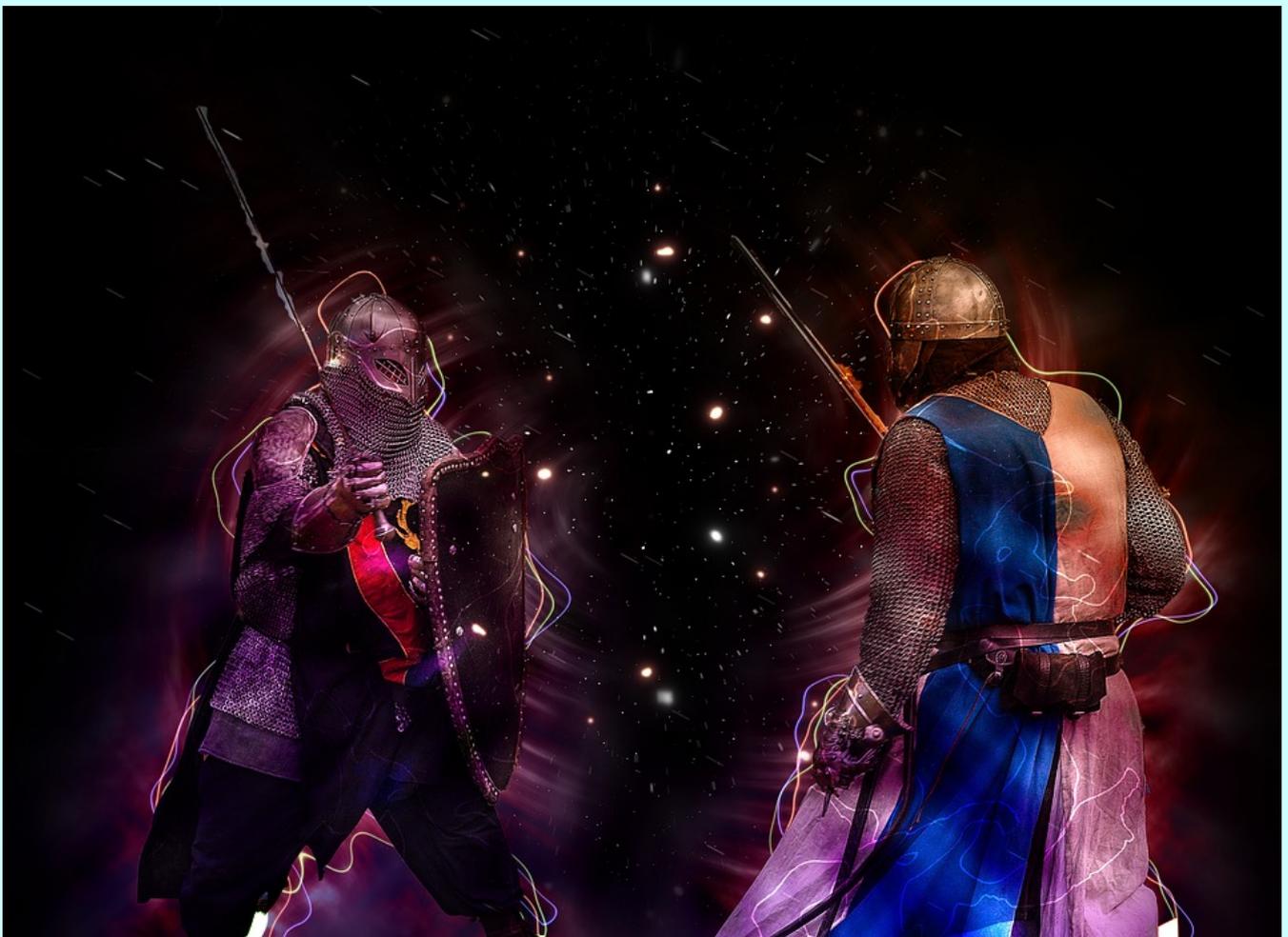
*By Christine Despardes*

At approximately eight p.m. Zoe pulls in to the old traffic mall  
in the Rockies, on a Suzuki, noting gas pumps, parking, eatery,  
the brook that runs through town and starts right here.  
She can think only of home, of return, as if it could ever be.

Occasional copters fly overhead, sometimes a jet.  
The ever active skyways are a flood of stars;  
she feels intensely aware of everything,  
at a hundred miles away from crowds,  
halfway up a mountain  
in a clearing on a ridge with pines.

Few cars pass, a camper, a pair of bikers.  
The night air is a cold dose of reality.

She wants to stay here longer,  
to hide here for easy self-restoration,  
roadside grocery and the motel pending,  
like she tried to do before the long trip home from Asia  
back to the light from a fallen village,  
across a continent, an ocean and all of human history.  
She feels focused on life and reality again  
and it focused squarely upon her,  
able to go back there and do something about it again.



## Seedy Secrets of ‘Pigeon Head’

By Neil K. Henderson

We’ve seen him here, we’ve seen him there, we’ve seen that pigeon in George Square. But now it appears that all has not been as it seemed in the world of superhero – or antihero, if you prefer – Pigeon Head, our favourite guardian of the crumb-ridden streets. We all knew or believed he was a full-size man from the neck down, with just a tiny pigeon’s head above the line. It was common knowledge he wore a prosthetic human head to cover it, and pulled this off when called to action.

But now, if former sidekick and love interest Courtney ‘Coo-Coo’ Dove is to be believed, Pigeon Head has been living a lie. It turns out he’s not a tall man born with a tiny pigeon’s head, but really a shorter man with an ordinary head tucked inside his shirt and a pigeon’s head growing out of his man’s head. With the collar up, it looks as if the pigeon’s head is all he’s got.

“He’s not a *real* pigeon-headed man at all,” sneered the jilted Coo, with all the bile of a woman wronged. “He’s just a phoney with a tiny growth.”

“That still makes me a mutant,” said our hero in his own defence. “My pigeon head is perfectly real. I have deceived no-one. I’m just not as tall as some assumed, that’s all.”

Nevertheless, he was still accused of fraud inasmuch as it was his human head did all the thinking, while the public had been led to believe his pigeon head had endowed him with special ‘pigeon sense’.

“He was never in the top league of superheroes,” one disillusioned rescue victim said. “But I thought the guy did pretty well for only having a bird-size brain. Now I think all that bread I bought to encourage him was wasted. I want my money back.”

He is not alone, according to one top lawyer we spoke to.

“There are many more like that poor soul, who invested their savings in birdseed and breadcrumbs to support a superhero they perceived as genuinely flawed. But since we have learned he operated under false pretences, it is only fair the so-called ‘Pigeon Head’ should have to pay them compensation.”

“Talk to the prosthetic head,” our hero countered. “These two heads ain’t listening.”

*Ends*





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