

HALLOWZINE

SHORT STORIES • COMICS • ART • POETRY



HALLOWZINE

A YEARLY HAUNTING

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WHO ALSO HAPPENS TO BE THE EDITOR

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THE CALLS ARE COMING FROM INSIDE THE HOUSE

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BY EVAN JOHNSTON



GREETINGS, HALLOWZINER!

IT WAS 1980-something and I was 9 or 10. I had purchased what I knew would be my greatest Halloween costume ever:

Werewolf makeup. That's right. The picture on the package was nothing short of inspiring: a regular Teen Wolf fellow looking in disbelief at his dire predicament.

Werewolves were big at this time: they were exciting because they were uninhibited and could teach us how to party. So clearly this costume—all these tubes of makeup, created by werewolf experts!—was going to be epic.

Except it wasn't. I started applying the makeup as best as I could, when my skin started to feel hot. And then I could see it turning pink. That's when I realized that I was *massively* allergic to my halloween costume. And there were just minutes until I was supposed to go to a Halloween party.

But in a rare moment of calm, I realized that werewolves were still *people*, and a person with a rash *might* be *just about* to turn into a werewolf. Once I was out in the night air, I felt great, my skin calmed down, and I still collected way too much candy. And that's what I love about this holiday. There is no wrong way to celebrate.

In the spirit of costumes, scares, goofiness, and even rashes—which if you think about it, are a form of body horror—I present you with *Hallowzine*, a collection of stories, illustrations, comics, and poetry. I would like to extend a huge amount of thanks to all of the contributors and readers for making this possible. You are the true werewolves.

—EVAN JOHNSTON, 2023



MOUNTAIN CREATURES

EMILY GAUDETTE

THE THING CROUCHING in Eileen's dark kitchen was wearing her husband's body. It wasn't Denny in there. Denny was lactose intolerant, for one, and the thing inside him was placing Kraft single after Kraft single into its mouth, chewing slowly. The fridge beeped sadly into the night, pleading to be closed again. Denny's skin looked oily. The thing in him hadn't showered in days. It didn't seem to like water.

"Den," Eileen said. She didn't know what else to call it. It stiffened and turned, a horned owl caught in a flashlight beam. Eileen drew her bathrobe over her pregnant belly. "Come to bed," she said. "Keepin' me awake with your mouth sounds." The thing watched her leave, licking its lips.

The bedroom was heavy with incense. She'd liked burning it ever since she was a teenager. It had made her Jesus-freak daddy angry. He'd hated all of Eileen's things: her candles with runes, her sparkling dice, her selenite wands, and the pewter wizard statue she'd picked up at the craft fair. Everything she'd liked growing up, her father had called it a sign of the devil.

He'd told her to avoid the men in work clothes who bought her Takis at the gas station and asked how old she was. What they wanted was the devil's bidding too, he said. But Eileen couldn't stop them. The men in town could smell something on her, no matter what she wore—Cookie Monster pajama pants,

an angry rod through her septum, a baggy Pantera shirt. They hunted her from the cereal aisle into frozen foods, asking why the frown, how's school, and where's my hug? She got so used to being in their crosshairs that it didn't seem strange when the thing started talking to her too.

It had started with a boy's voice, high and nervous, calling to her from the thicket as she walked home after school. The moon painted a long, white line up the dirt path as it rose, like the glowing spine of some great beast, and Eileen walked alone as dusk bled out over the mountain. From out of the dark, the voice had said "hey!" She'd looked into the trees. There were no homes for miles. The cicadas hummed in every direction, surrounding her in a throbbing, unseen horde. The voice called "hey" again. Closer. Nothing moved in the trees. She'd kept on walking.

She heard that same "hey" whenever she walked at night, always the same tone. Slightly wrong, like a strange bird call, or as if something was puppeting a human head and could only make it say one thing. Eileen let this go on for a week before she'd told her father about it. He'd taken her by the shoulders and said, "you know better." His breath stank of liquor toward the end, and his eyes had always been red-rimmed and teary. "Things came out of the coal mines when my granddaddy lived here. Things that ain't human, but ache to be."

She'd changed her route, and then she'd dropped out of school to look after her father when his liver failed. After he'd died, the church had sent folks to check in, and one of those folks had been Denny. He was a math teacher who'd come to Clay County to teach "underserved, at-risk youth." Eileen had blinked and he'd been in her bed. She'd blinked again and he'd

gotten her a ring. At first, he'd talked about Eileen going back for her GED. But then the jokes started, because she sounded out long words under her breath. She didn't have enough books in the house, and Denny was embarrassed when his friends visited from Berkeley. It wasn't her fault, he said. She'd had a bad start and he was there to save her.

Sex with Denny just happened to Eileen. He was so in control that she felt like he'd drawn those two little lines on the plastic test she got at the gas station. Nobody bothered her when she bought a Gatorade and drank it on the stoop, because she had the test in one hand, still sticky with pee. That night, Eileen had meant to water the plants out back, but she'd kept on walking until she stood on her old path to school, cold and small in her nightgown, peering into the trees. "Hey," the voice had said. And this time, Eileen had whistled a long, low tone like a promise. At home, she'd put Denny's sneakers on the back stoop and left the porch light on.

Leaving her to rub her swollen feet, Denny had gone to a conference at the university in Lexington. Long after it was supposed to be over, his truck was found a mile down the road by a logger. The driver-side door had been torn off the hinges. That night, Eileen had been curled on the couch eating ice cream when the thing wearing Denny slouched into the living room.

It was covered in mud with its head hanging off a snapped neck. "You're dripping on the carpet," she'd said. And the thing had dropped one shoulder, rolling Denny's head forward. His eyes were milky white, like the bellies of two dead trout.

She'd lived with it for months, making it sleep under the stairs. But she was nine months along now, and the nights were long. The house groaned like it hurt to stand.

As Eileen washed her face and brushed her teeth, she listened to the thing in the kitchen put the cheese back in its wrapper. It had trouble with Denny's fingers, although it had learned to move his legs and arms alright. She lay down in bed and turned off the lamp, watching the ceiling fan turn overhead like a lazy animal.

The thing inside Denny hadn't gone to the school, so it had lost the teaching job. But it helped in the garden, digging holes with Denny's hands, and it brought home carcasses Eileen could butcher and marinate and freeze and simmer into stock. And some afternoons, it watched Eileen paint, squatting by her easel as it used a stick to work gristle from Denny's teeth. And it didn't try to help her improve. It didn't say her work looked like three other painters it knew. "I'm painting a beach," Eileen explained once. The thing pulled Denny's lips back into a red-streaked grin. It hadn't noticed it was making his gums bleed. It liked when she talked.

Denny had squirreled his dirty laundry into spots all over their house for her to find and take to the washing machine out back, but the thing in Denny's body was neat. It stoked the fireplace and made the bed every morning. It used the broom, even on the porch. Eileen thought maybe the thing had learned to cover its tracks.

That night, the mattress sagged as the thing in Denny lay down. Eileen turned toward it, grunting with the effort because she was bigger than she'd ever imagined she could get.

"Any day now," she said, caressing the firm curve underneath her belly button. "He's coming." The thing raised one of Denny's hands and held it up like it was deciding what to do. Then it gently placed the hand on Eileen's belly. The baby rolled at its touch. "I wonder if he'll like me," she said.

The thing used Denny's thumb to stroke Eileen's skin. It smelled wet, like a layer of moss under a monstrous fallen tree. She could see it baring Denny's teeth in the green glow of the alarm clock.

Maybe it knew what the baby inside her felt, floating in his black fluid with his eyes closed and his spine curled. Knowing only the roar of Eileen's heart. The baby hadn't come from anything good, but neither had she.

The thing shifted until it faced Eileen with the baby between them.

Someone had told Eileen the baby would take what it needed to grow. "If you don't eat right, it'll take it right out of your bones." She admired that, its greed. Maybe they were all the same, the three of them. Just mountain creatures in a rickety bed, all hungry, all knowing that we crawl miles of mindless night to be born.●

NOVEMBER AS THE HAND AROUND YOUR ANKLE

Under this face, another face, but not.
Under this skin, the veins of the sky.
There's a graveyard for shadows; it's called light.
There's a hospital for hearts; it's the dark.
Above my head, the lightbulb, flickering;
above my soul, a house, looking for haunts.
The voice in the static whispers, *You'll see*;
the dusk inside the dawn, *You'll soon know*.

October gives way like a rotted plank,
but not yet, not yet. It's waiting for us
to descend the basement stairs, bright coffin
behind us. Swallowed by our silhouette.
Somewhere, someone screaming, *Don't go down there!*
It could be anyone, but it's us. It's us.

—GREGORY CROSBY

NO MORE MR. KNIFE GUY

You never forget your first
Final Girl, the one who
got away (literally). Now
that I've quit, & hung up
the big blade, the black
gloves, that white mask
as blank as a page, my
thoughts turn again to
her; I see her blood-
streaked face—full of
triumph, trauma. So
beautiful through that back
window as her rescuer's car
sped away. So *beautiful*.
Worth it, though then
I had to relocate three
states away. In a way,
my most successful
relationship. Maybe
someday, after **the**
therapy that **fails**,
she'll track **me**
down to take
her revenge.
Worth it. I
would die,
truly *die*,
if I could
see her
once
mo
re.
♦

—GREGORY CROSBY



40.66150° N
73.98365° W



40.66570° N
73.98095° W



40.66524° N
73.97638° W



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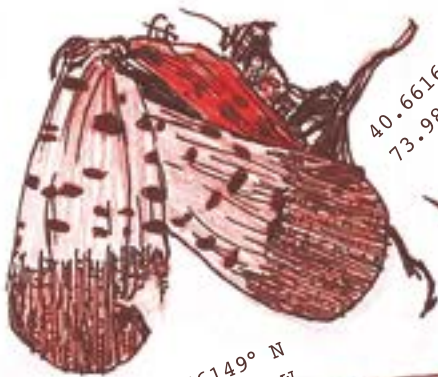
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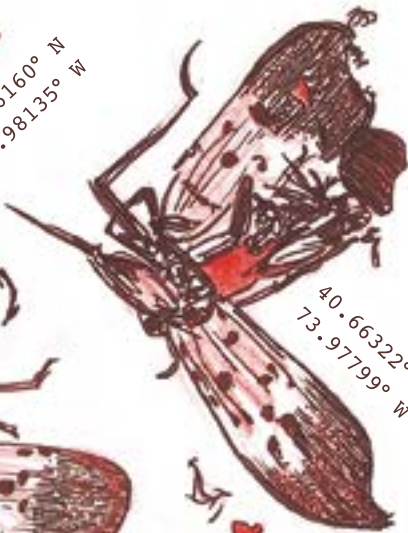
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Spotted Lanternflies (*lycorma delicatula*)

Squashed between
08/17 - 08/23



40.66200° N
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40.66181° N
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There are more slasher movies than there ever will need to be, but only one is written by Rita Mae Brown, author of *The Ruby Fruit Jungle*—the noted lesbian coming-of-age autobiographical novel. That movie is *Slumber Party Massacre*.

Brown wrote it as a comedy, but the producers decided that it should be played straight. The result is a tone that is just like nothing else. There's a character named "Mr. Content", a next-door neighbor who is of no use to anyone. Wry commentary on the genre and just, really, society, is throughout the film. It *might* be the only horror movie with a heroic gym teacher.

The original poster art looks like a stag film gone wrong. This poster by Mariel Ashlinn Kelly, created alongside with the podcast *We Really Like Her*, keeps the tension and overall creepiness of the movie (along with the era-appropriate typeface), but this more approachable characterization hints at the allegorical intention of the writer. But I guess when it's a horror movie it's alle-*gore*-ical.

★
REVUE
CINEMA
★

WE REALLY
LIKE HER!



The
Slumber
Presented on 35mm
Party
directed by Amy Holden Jones
Massacre
and written by Rita Mae Brown



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SMASH!

JON THAVENS

That's the three of us coming up the street this Halloween: Jay, Hack, and myself. They call me Z.

Yes we are thirteen and finally too old for trick-or-treating and that is what makes this night so intoxicating. We are done with begging for candy, tonight we go in for the mischief that truly keeps this night alive. Or so I've heard from the bigger kids at school.

Our costumes? Look, we don't have a lot of money. I'm going to feed you the information and you can guess. We went with lumberjack shirts because we already owned those, and then we spilled some blood on them because it's fun to combine Karo syrup and red food coloring the way the monster makeup manuals tell you to do. Then we have these cheap plastic masks that are intended for children but are now worn by us.

Jay has a devil, he's wearing his mask around his neck, because Jay likes to wear his headphones whenever he can and the mask gets in the way of that. He could have been a jock if he didn't spend so much time hanging out with me and Hack, trying to skateboard and draw deranged comics. We took a stab at graffiti but that shit was too hard.

Hack has some kind of goblin-dracula mask, he's wearing it on his face which it barely even covers. So there's just a tangle of blond curls around this greenish blueish goblin thing. To look at him you might think that he just sits around and does

nothing, because he's quiet and usually just lounges while other people talk. The thing is, he is the only one of us to have done a kickflip, and he did it on the first try.

I have a dragon mask, but I can't put mine on my face, the plastic is sharp, and the elastic is tight, so I wear it on my forehead, which it cuts into just slightly. Maybe it will look tough. Maybe it will look like I have been in a fight.

We have burlap sacks, and in them is some candy, mostly from those fools who leave out a bowl for everybody. But the sacks also have the tools of our trade.

Can you guess what we are?

We are Murder Hobos.

And the thing we primarily murder?

Pumpkins.

I don't know exactly what a Murder Hobo is, but I have heard the term and I assume it's that formative part of a murderer's career where they are free to wander and ply their trade. I like to imagine a scene in which the hobo has broken into—oh no, is that yelling? Yes. That's my mom, from the porch, just about forty feet away.

"Z, what are you doing?" If you're not going to have an adult with you, I think you all need to stay home. You can't just roam the streets for Halloween", she yells at me.

"We just want to remember what it's like to be a kid!" I yell, dramatically. Jay and Hack stare at me. Mom looks at me blankly and then I look down. I leave the guys behind and walk over to her.

"I want to have some kind of fun. Once Halloween is over, I'm just going to be a near-adult. I'm not ready to be whatever that is."

She looks like she's going to say something and then stops. She brings up that kid who went missing on Halloween last year, who was my age.

"He was by himself," I say, and she counters, "No, he was with a friend. It wasn't in the news stories, but he was with a friend. They were chased by some bigger kids, they were separated, and that's when he went missing. I don't want that to happen you."

"Oh my god Mom you have got to stop listening to true crime podcasts."

She thinks this over. "You can help me hand out candy," she says, smiling and making a bunch of lines in her forehead, "I was looking forward to that."

"I just want to see my friends. I'll help hand out candy next year. Please?"

I have the best mom.

The primary problem with mischief on Halloween, which I am rapidly discovering, is that there are so many kids out and about with their parents. This might be harder than graffiti.

We wander aimlessly, taking in costumes. I see a knight with a cardboard helmet and sword, wearing a tunic that must have been made from a table cloth. Jay is alarmed to see more than one kid dressed up as scary knife-wielding clowns and curses under his breath. Hack spots a family of five, all dressed like cows, walking in a row.

"That's scarier than the clowns," I mutter.

"I just saw a kid dressed as Soundwave," says Jay in awe.

"Like an oscilloscope?" I ask.

Jay punches me hard in the arm: "No, like Megatron's right-hand man" he says.

“Megatron is a very poor judge of character,” says Hack.”

“CAN WE FOCUS ON THE TASK AT HAND?” I say, rubbing my arm from where Jay hit it. “I think we’re well aware that there are too many eyes on us because we’re too old and we don’t have parents with us. We need to make that work for us.”

“Well when I was little, my brothers had to take me trick or treating, and they hated it—so they would trail behind. And even if they weren’t dressed up, they would get some candy just for like, being there,” says Hack.

“Brilliant,” says Jay, “So we trail some kids.” I think about this for a bit.

“We can’t get too close,” I say, “Just enough distance between us to make it seem like we might be there to help. And then once people aren’t looking at us? We start taking out pumpkins.”

“I like this concept,” says Jay, “But where’s Hack?”

Oh my god. That damned maverick.

Hack has picked a house with a lot of hedges and an undefended 35-pound pumpkin out front. It’s amazing. He watches as a posse of about ten kids leave happily popping Jolly Ranchers and Tootsie Rolls in their mouths, almost seeming like he’s part of the landscape.

Jay pulls me into a pile of leaves, grabbing me right where he punched me in the arm earlier, and we vanish into the landscape, our heads poking out of the leaves.

Hack is moving slowly and I can see something in his hand, and I hear something swinging, and I realize when the moonlight catches the chain in the night, that he’s about to use

his favorite weapon.

“The meteor hammer. . . ,” says Jay breathlessly.

Hack’s meteor hammer is a chain—like, three feet of chain with a padlock on the end. He swings it, the padlock hits its mark and pumpkin folds in on itself, releasing flames and pumpkin chunks.

“Ooooooh,” Jay and I say at the same time.

Hack starts running. Wait, why’s he running? Just past the hedges is a grown man wearing a monk’s costume who is now chasing Hack.

We run, leaving scattered leaves in our path.

We sprint all the way to the Taylor Elementary school playground, where there’s a large tube slide. We are hidden inside it. Hack is at the bottom of the slide, I’m in the middle, and Jay is at the top. He has the easy job of just sitting at the top of the slide while Hack and I have to stick out our arms and legs so that we don’t, you know, slide down the slide.

“That was so sick!” I say, when we finally catch my breath, my voice having a weird reverberation inside the slide. We had to run a few blocks before the Monk gave up, towards the elementary school, and now we’re a good mile away from any trick-or-treatable houses, but it was worth it. We have our freedom.

“You gotta smash one now,” says Hack. “We all have to get one before the night is over.”

“We need to wait, though,” says Jay, “That monk is gonna let people know that we’re around.”

“Let’s hit the woods,” I say, “Then we’re off the grid.”

Taylor Elementary has a hiking trail nearby. It’s not much of a hike, but it’s dark, and it’s dense. I produce a mini flashlight from my bag and we quickly find the trail, and then switch the light off.

“So what’s in your bag?” Hack asks Jay.

“Throwing stars,” says Jay.

“Are you serious?”

“Yeah! I had to ride the subway to Chinatown to get them but it was worth it.”

“What about you, Z?”

“I went with a classic,” I say, and I produce a can of hair-spray.

“I can’t see anything, dude,” says Jay, “It’s dark.”

“A can of hairspray,” I say, confidently.

“You’re going to tease out your hair?”

“No man! You spray this near a pumpkin with a candle and it basically becomes a firebomb. Honestly, I think it’s a bad idea. But you only live once. . . .”

“That’s right,” says a voice in the woods.

Oh shit.

There’s four of them, all dudes. They have dark hoodies and rubber skull masks, and they’re bigger than us, which means they’re older than us. They’re certainly stronger than us. One of them has a baseball bat.

They start moving towards us and that’s when Jay reaches inside his bag and does something I’ve never seen a human being do in real life:

He throws a throwing star at the nearest Skull. I see the star flash through the air for a second and that's when I start running. And I hear a horrible yowling behind me, and I wish that I could see what happened, but Jay and Hack are already ahead of me.

I try to say something about how we should get out of the woods but it comes out like "*Hnnnnnhhhh*".

I look over my shoulder and the skull masks have come off, probably because it's hard to wear a mask when you run. I haven't seen them before, at least I don't think they have.

One of them yells, "Come back! It's not safe! Which is weird but there's no way that they are here to help anybody right? And then I hear a loud SMACK and I think that dude has run into a tree, like a cartoon. I want to laugh but I can't stop running.

Finally, some time passes. We go up a hill that I didn't even know was there. We look back. There are no skulls following us. I realize how much darker it is, and how much more woods there are than I had previously thought. We stop running.

"Jay," I say, "I have no idea where we are. We should have at least been going uphill by now, we should have seen the school."

"What's that?", asks Jay, pointing in the distance. We all stop and stare. Here, in the middle of the woods, about three hundred feet away, is a little orange house.

It's smaller than most of the houses I've seen, almost a cabin. There must be about four rooms, and no upstairs. There are two, large, fat jack-o-lanterns set out front, grinning largely, their triangle teeth proud. But all around us is just... nothing. Trees. No streetlights. Just darkness and this.

“This is weird,” says Hack. “Is it like a prop? For a movie?”

“We gotta turn around,” I say, “There’s no way anyone normal lives in that house.”

“What the hell,” says Jay, “Did you notice the windows?”

“What?” I ask.

“They’re triangles. Like a jack-o-lantern.”

Sure enough, the two windows that we can see from the front of the house are triangles. Through one window you can see that there’s a soft white-ish orangeish carpet, and a fire in the fireplace. Through the other, there’s a dining table where places are set for three people.

“Hunh.” I say. And then we hear it; voices in the distance, twigs snapping and some cursing. The Skulls have caught up. It sounds like they’re right behind us.

“What do we do?”, asks Hack.

Jack steps forward, we can see him moving toward the door. He puts a foot on the porch step. “You know what’s weird?” he asks, “It smells like candy co—” and then he falls right through the steps, in a fleshy-looking hole that has suddenly appeared in the steps. There’s a gushy sound as he slips away.

Hack and I look at each other, completely bug-eyed. Hack gets out the chain, runs over to the steps, and threads it through the hole, telling Jay to grab it. I then watch as suddenly the chain tightens and pulls Hack in, who screams, but the scream is almost muffled immediately.

I run over. I look over my shoulder and there are the Skulls.

“Don’t go to the house!” one of them calls out. His voice sounds more like a kid than I thought it would.

I turn towards them, slowly just a bit, and I see that yes, two of them are running toward me. I step towards the house and am immediately pulled into the ground.

I am surrounded by pumpkin guts that are pulsating and quickly smothering me. The guts are in my eyes so I can’t see a damn thing.

And then I’m falling, and I start flailing, trying to grab onto anything, and I hit a soft, squishy, wet floor, flat on my back. It feels horrible.

“Jay? Hack?” I call out. I try to get up and feel my body resist—ooof. I guess I’m not moving just yet.

I can’t see anything, but I sit upright and start extracting myself from the mess when I hear something. It’s a very small noise, like a little kid. I’m not sure if it’s laughing or crying.

“Hello?” I call.

Silence.

“Hack? Jay?”

More silence. I stand up, start brushing the pumpkin muck out of my eyes. My whole body feels like its been stung by something, but I think I’m going to be OK when suddenly I see a shadow in a corner rush at me and I feel like I’m getting

punched, only the punch is stuck in my shoulder.

“Hey wha—“

I see a pale hand coming at my face with long fingernails, and then there’s a feeling like cuts of fire on my face, and then I feel something sharp in the right side of my neck—teeth, there’s no mistaking it.

I make a guess on where the thing’s kidneys are and elbow it hard in that place. There’s a shriek and the thing falls away. My eyes open now, I can’t quite believe what I’m seeing:

It’s a kid, my age, but he’s wearing a grim reaper costume that’s seen better days. His hair is gone, he looks emaciated, and he’s got blood on his face—oh I guess that’s mine. He hisses at me and starts to run when I see something I never thought I’d ever see:

A small angular object, thrown like a frisbee, connects with his eye and splurts out blood. The ghoul and I both scream, but in different ways, because I realize that Jay has just thrown one of his throwing stars at this ghoul’s head.

The kid starts to rush at me again but reconsiders now that Hack and Jay are standing next to me, both just covered in pumpkin guts. Hack is holding the chain, just waiting for a reason.

“Jay that was so cool!” I say and then I see the kid’s face again.

It’s real scratched up and bloodied and he looks afraid. His hand is pressed to his bleeding eye. His voice is tiny, like he’s younger than he looks, “You won’t get out,” says the ghoul, “You’re going to end up here like me. You’ll have to wait for the offerings.”

I decide not to think about what that means and just focus on the positive. “Do you want to get out? We can take you with

us.” Hack is already shaking his head.

I shine my flashlight around, looking the walls of the pumpkin. The walls are orange, with white veins, and they have a subtle pulse to them. They’re very slimy.

“A pitcher plant,” says Jay.

“Yesssssss,” says the pale boy, Hack punches him and he shuts up.

“What do you mean?” I ask.

“I mean we have this organic . . . thing . . . that lured us here and then swallowed us up, like a pitcher plant. The orange liquid is acidic, like the juice in a stomach. You can feel the burning sensation when it touches skin. And it also explains this—“

Jay extracts a femur from the muck around our ankles.

The pale boy laughs, and it’s a high-pitched laugh that makes my skin crawl. “The pumpkin juice makes the flesh so tender,” he says.

Hack punches him again.

Jay is very quiet for a moment. Then he looks over at me and Hack.

“I don’t know if any insect has ever made its way out of a pitcher plant. But I know that we aren’t insects. I think if we cause it some problems, it might reconsider eating us,” I say, and I produce my can of hairspray, and my green see-through plastic lighter.

“Cry havoc,” says Jay.

Hack and I speak in unison, “*And let slip the dogs of war.*”

What happens next is pure chaos. Flames singing pul-

sating pumpkin walls. Hack bashing into everything in sight with his chain. Jay throwing ever sharp-bladed object that he brought with him into the walls. And then we start kicking, and punching.

For awhile, our pitcher plant is unmoving, and then something seems to break. In the corner of my eye, I see the ghou-boy slashing at the walls with his hands, with that terrible nails-on-a-chalkboard laugh of his. And then the walls around us start shaking, and the floor beneath our feet rises, carrying us with it, and we are carried closer to the ceiling of this thing—it's a black canopy with orange and white veins throbbing, and strangely smelling like candy corn.

Suddenly the floor falls again, and we're all knocked over. "DON'T STOP!" screams Hack, "IT'S WORKING!". So even while we're prone, we start kicking this monster that has swallowed us, I treat it to some hairspray flames, and now Jay is just dragging the throwing stars all over the walls, Hack is flailing around with the chain, and our ghou friend looks like he's in the world's grossest sandbox, clawing away at the stomach of this beast.

The floor starts rising again, and I realize it's going to throw us up.

"Guys!" I say, "I think—"

Everything goes black for a minute, there is a tremendous roar, and then silence.

"Don't move them!", says a voice that I don't recognize. I can feel the night air, and also I'm being carried. But I keep slipping, because I'm covered in pumpkin goo.

“We have to move them from the area, or it’ll just eat them all overe again, dipshit!”

“OK but don’t wiggle their spines around, we might paralyze them.”

“Probably better than being eaten?”

“... OK probably.”

I blank out for a while. When I awake, I hear “Put him over by the swingset.” And I am uncermoniously dropped. “Not like that you idiot!”

“They’re slippery!” comes another voice.

There are two bodies right next to me, and I just know that it’s Hack and Jay. One of them punches my arm, and it hurts. Yeah that’s Jay all right.

I open my eyes and I see the Skulls—well, they’re not skulls any more. They’re wearing their black hoodies, but the masks are long gone. They look older, sure, but not as old as I first thought.

“Did you find the kid in the costume—?” I ask.

“What are you talking about? We found the three of you. The ones we chased. There’s no—“

“No,” I say, “Forget I mentioned it.”

But I will never stop thinking about it.

That was our last Halloween as kids. Ever since then, we’ve spent the following years scouting the woods, with the Skulls, making sure if the pumpkin house does return, no kid ever sets foot near it. We keep an eye out for the ghoul. Maybe it’s

worked! There have been no more missing kids on Halloween night for the last two years.

Of course, we also haven't seen the house again. Maybe it's still in there, somewhere, waiting to get stronger. Maybe it's like that ghoul who I'm convinced is still out there, somewhere.

Truth be told, I don't really know what we're going to do when that orange house shows up again. But I can tell you that it doesn't know what we're going to do either. Because there's something that we do, and we're very good at it:

We murder pumpkins.●

THE HARBOR

You stood by the harbor,
looking through my skin—
as though I were transparent,
a ghost without a face.

I tried to speak, but my voice
caught in my throat—
swallowed under wave-noise,
gone without a trace.

You began to laugh,
& the sound of it chilled me—
so familiar somehow,
like a memory I couldn't place.

—ABIGAIL WELHOUSE



GOLIATH

ABIGAIL WELHOUSE

THERE WAS ONCE a young girl named Alicia, perhaps not so different from you now. Or if you are not a young girl, perhaps not so different from young girls you might know. Alicia was kind, and perhaps not beautiful, but who is beautiful at age twelve? She loved to do many things: reading, climbing trees, and spending time with her best friend, Phoebe. However, more than anything, both Alicia and Phoebe loved horses.

Their respective parents didn't understand it.

"Why don't you go to the mall?" Alicia's mother would suggest.

"Don't you like boys yet?" Phoebe's mother worried.

Both mothers were sure that their daughters would have outgrown their horse phase by now. Weary of the countless pony rides at the zoo and begging for horseback riding lessons, Alicia and Phoebe's parents finally agreed to let them attend a sleepaway camp where they could ride horses every single day.

When they arrived at Camp Horseshoe, it was everything they'd hoped and dreamed. It was a sunny afternoon and fifty horses grazed in a large green pasture that was dotted with wooden cross-country jumps. Alicia had never seen so many different coat colors: chestnuts, bays, palominos, pintos, Appaloosas. "I wonder where they go at night," Phoebe said.

On the first night, some of the girls who had been to camp

before were whispering about a ghost horse named Goliath. "His face glows in the dark," one girl said. "I've seen it."

Their counselor, Laney, interrupted: "We don't talk about Goliath anymore."

"Why not?" Alicia asked. "Who's Goliath?"

"I don't want to be woken up in the middle of the night because you're scared," Laney said.

"Is Goliath real?" Phoebe wondered.

"Of course not. Anyway, stay in your beds after lights out, and you'll never have to worry about him," Laney said.

After lights out, Alicia and Phoebe were snuggled into their bunk beds, reading their horse stories by flashlight under the covers, when Alicia dropped a note down from the top bunk to Phoebe on the bottom bunk. It read: "Meet me outside the back door in ten minutes. Wait a few minutes after I leave, and if anyone asks, say that you're getting a drink of water."

Alicia quietly shimmied down the ladder from the top bunk and grabbed her boots. She tip-toed down the stairs and out the back door, where she sat on the porch to put her boots on. She waited. In a few minutes, Phoebe came out, eyes wide.

"What are we doing?" Phoebe asked nervously.

"Don't worry," Alicia said. "Just put your boots on."

Phoebe laced up her boots. "Okay. Let's go. Where are we going?"

"To the pasture," Alicia said.

The two girls crept over to the pasture fence.

"You're walking too loud," Alicia complained.

"I'm just walking," Phoebe said. "I can't help it."

"Well, help it," Alicia said.

The two girls waited at the fence, watching. It was a clear

night with no stars, and now that they could no longer hear the crunch of grass under their feet, it was eerily quiet.

“Now what?” Phoebe said.

“We wait for Goliath,” Alicia said.

“He’s not real.”

“Then why won’t Laney let us talk about him?”

“I don’t know.”

“Just be quiet and watch.”

For a few minutes, they were silent. “Nothing’s going to happen, Alicia. Let’s go back.”

“Let’s wait a few more minutes,” Alicia said. “You want to see him, too, don’t you?”

“I just don’t think he’s re—”

“Shhhh! Did you hear that?”

“Hear what?”

“Be quiet.”

Off in the distance, there was the sound of hoofbeats.

“It’s probably one of the camp horses,” Phoebe said.

The sound of the hoofbeats grew louder. “Look!” Alicia said, pointing off toward the woods. The shadow of a dark horse galloped across the pasture. Something on his face seemed to glow... what was it? The horse disappeared into the woods before Alicia had a chance to figure it out.

“It was probably just a coyote or something,” Phoebe said. “Come on. Let’s get back before we get caught.”

“I can’t believe you didn’t see him,” Alicia said—but she knew that Phoebe was right, that they should be careful about being gone too long. After all, if they got caught, it would be harder to sneak out the next night.

When Laney was out of earshot, the other girls started to

talk about Goliath again. “He’s so mean that he eats little girls,” one girl said.

The next night, Alicia thought it would be best if they waited just a little later—to vary the routine, so no one caught on. She set her alarm clock to vibrate at 2:30 AM, and went to sleep. When her bed shook, she climbed down the ladder to wake Phoebe.

“Pssst. Get up.”

“I don’t think this is a good idea, Alicia. Besides, I’m tired. Aren’t you tired?”

“Fine. I’ll go without you,” Alicia said.

She stepped out into the night, quieter alone—though she did miss her friend. Still, she knew she had to meet Goliath, no matter the cost. Bolder this time, she scaled the fence and ventured out into the pasture and toward the woods. She walked over to the treeline, where she had seen the shadowy horse the day before, and sat against a tree to wait.

Alicia woke with a start. How long had she been asleep? It was still dark out, at least. She heard the sound of a horse’s snort, and jumped to her feet. Peering around the tree, she saw nothing. Then she felt a wet muzzle on her arm.

“Oh!” she said, leaping back. The black horse turned and ran. “Goliath, wait!” she called. *Oh, goodness, that was stupid*, she thought. *I shouldn’t call out to him—someone might hear me. Instead, I’ll leave him some carrots.*

She’d taken a few carrots from the dining hall for Goliath, though she hadn’t been sure if ghost horses even liked them. Was there such a thing as ghost carrots? *Well, it can’t hurt*, Alicia thought, depositing a small pile of baby carrots next to the tree. She arranged them to spell out her name.

The next night, she came back to the woods to see if Go-

liath had eaten the carrots. They were gone, anyway, though Alicia supposed that didn't prove anything. She stood for a moment, surveying the scene. The woods were a bit louder tonight, abuzz with cicadas. She thought she could see an outline of a horse between some trees a little ways away, so she carefully began to walk toward the form, taking care not to snap too many twigs under her feet that could startle Goliath.

"Goliath," she said softly, shining her flashlight on the ground. As she got closer, she turned off the flashlight. She could now see Goliath clearly illuminated in a patch of moonlight through the trees. Sure enough, he was gigantic—but he certainly didn't look like he had any interest in eating girls. Which, of course, would make him more successful at it if he *was* so inclined. He had a stripe of white down the middle of his face that seemed to glow. He stood and looked at her inquisitively.

"Hello, Goliath," she said.

She remembered that she had learned in her horse care lesson the day before about how to approach a horse. She wasn't sure if it applied to ghost horses, but since he had eaten the carrots, perhaps it was a good precaution. Alicia knew that horses should always see you when you walk up, so it was good to approach their shoulders, since they couldn't see well directly in front or behind them. She knew to approach slowly and continue to talk to them. So she murmured some calming words, and continued to walk closer. When she was about ten feet away, she stopped for a moment. He continued to look at her, ears pricked.

"It's okay, Goliath. I'm Alicia. I won't hurt you," she said. She stood in the clearing, hand outstretched.

Slowly, Goliath began to walk toward her. Alicia's heart pounded, and her knees began to shake. He nosed her pockets.

“Oh! I do have carrots,” she said. She pulled some out of her pocket and held her hand flat. Goliath happily munched the carrots. *Maybe he is a vegetarian*, thought Alicia.

Now that she was close enough to him to look at his face, she saw that the glowing part looked like some kind of fungus. Perhaps there was some kind of salve that she could get from the camp nurse that would help that. Goliath itched his face against a tree, clearly uncomfortable. Alicia reached out to pet his shoulder. He nickered softly, and nuzzled her.

After a few minutes, Goliath began to walk deeper in the woods. He looked back, seeming to motion to Alicia to follow him. He led her to a tree stump, and walked up beside it.

Beside the tree stump, Alicia noticed a riding helmet. Could Goliath really want her to ride him? She put on the helmet. Goliath was still standing patiently by the tree stump. He wasn't wearing a saddle, so when Alicia stepped onto the tree stump, she propelled herself onto his back with a giant leap, unassisted by any kind of stirrup. Goliath looked back at her, nuzzling her leg.

“Let's go,” Alicia said, grabbing his mane. Goliath took off at a gallop, and although Alicia had never felt like she was the best of riders, now she had no trouble staying balanced. They galloped through the woods, leaping over fallen logs and splashing through streams. Goliath seemed to be having such a good time, and so was Alicia. *It must be very lonely when everyone is afraid of you*, Alicia thought.

That summer, Alicia visited Goliath in the woods often. She brought him a salve for the fungus on his face and the camp nurse laughed when Alicia said who it was for. Phoebe didn't believe the stories, either.

But then the last week of camp, Alicia disappeared. The

counselors assured the campers that nothing was wrong, and that she'd simply been picked up early due to homesickness. But when Phoebe stood outside the counselors' lounge, she heard Laney's worried voice discussing the search party the night before.

“It was so strange,” Laney said. “Everything looked completely normal. Except next to the tree stump in the pasture, there was a chewed-up helmet buckle.”●





INTRODUCTIONS





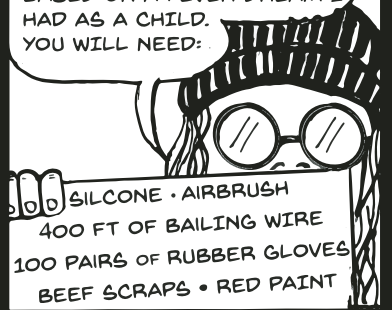
DECORATION TIME †

HELL-O SPOOKLINGS!
TONIGHT, WE'LL BE MAKING
CREEPY DECORATIONS
FOR THE SPOOKY SEASON!
OUR GUEST IS-



SCARY SCOTT
ROTTING FLESH
PRODUCTIONS!
I MAKE UNSETTLING
REALISTIC PROPS
AND DISPLAYS!

I'M GOING TO SHOW YOU
HOW TO CREATE A ZOMBIE
MOTHER-AND-CHILD DISPLAY
THAT FEATURES LOTS OF
BLOOD AND GRISTLE! IT'S
BASED ON A FEVER DREAM I
HAD AS A CHILD.
YOU WILL NEED:



AND OF COURSE, SCOTCH
TAPE! NOW, THIS PROJECT
TAKES 300 HOURS, IT'S
A LITTLE EXPENSIVE, AND
YOU ALSO NEED A STRONG
STOMACH. FIRST YOU--



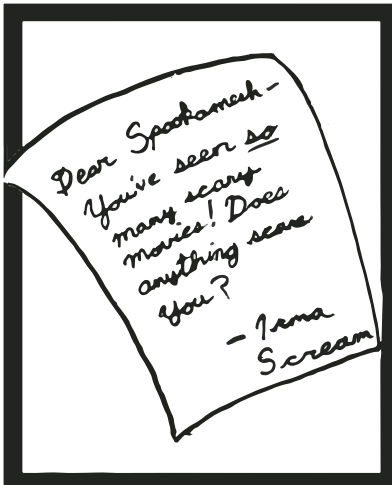
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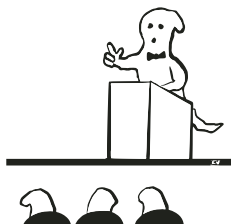


LETTERS TO SPOOKAMESH



MY FAVORITE HAUNTS

EVAN ALLGOOD



HELLO, NEW SPIRITS! My name is Phil Spector. That's Spector with an E. As one of Spirit Academy's longest-tenured ghost-professors, I predate that other Phil Spector by several hundred years. Unfortunately, he's got better SEO. (Hold for laughter.)

But enough about Phil Spector with an O. Soon you'll sail out into the earthly realm, cooking up all manner of supernatural hijinks. Ergo, the academy asked me to share some wisdom about my favorite, and least favorite, haunts.

Whether you're a ghost, a ghoul, a fellow specter, a rival poltergeist, or simply a presence, I hope you find these insights *frightfully* illuminating. (Hold for chuckles.)

CARS

This used to be a blast, in a campy, Stephen King way—but turning SUVs into self-driving murder-machines has really lost its luster ever since Tesla came along.

HOUSES

I see a lot of your eyes lighting up (many were already glowing). But here amongst the pros, a haunted house is considered pretty “first-thought.” We’ve been haunting houses for so long, in so many deranged ways, that it’s hard to make it new or original. Maybe you could take a tiny home and move it halfway across the state while the guests are sleeping? Or scrawl a WiFi password in blood when all they want is to disconnect? Food for thought.

GARBAGE DISPOSALS

Like taking candy (a hand) from a baby (an adult). When you think about it, kitchens are pretty much full of weapons. It’s crazy.

EXERCISE EQUIPMENT

I almost feel bad attacking people who are trying to improve themselves. On the other hand, they shouldn’t hoist a heavy bar above their neck unless they want to die. Done right, this is karma for bros.

BOOKS

Books have a lot going for them: their pages tend to flap, as if flying; they make a nice loud THUD upon impact; and once in a while, the haunted gets a papercut. Four out of five stars, as the mortals say on Goodreads.

DESK CHAIRS

No one is afraid of a desk chair, except for people with office jobs; even then, it's more about what the chair represents (capitalism). Still, I highly recommend racing the roly ones and spinning the spinny ones. You'll feel like a kid again, unless you perished very young, in which case, you'll feel like yourself.

OTHER TYPES OF CHAIRS

Not worth your time unless it's one of those iron torture chairs, but those are menacing even when they're not haunted, so why bother?

TELEVISIONS

Do kids today even know what static is? I'm not sure if they'd be scared or just confused. Forget the TV—drain their PS5 battery during a *Baldur's Gate* boss fight. Horrifying.

VACUUMS

Not particularly effective unless you want to terrorize a dog, in which case, there's no place for you here at Spirit Academy, and you may see yourself out by phasing through the back wall there. We're ghosts, not monsters.

DOGS

Animals are off-limits, except goats for some reason. They seem to enjoy being possessed.

SUITS OF ARMOR

Yes. YES. Those of you who were killed in Scotland are in for such a treat. There's no greater joy than clanking around like a big medieval robot and swinging a giant sword at some unsuspecting dope. You can barely see through the visor, but that makes your movements and attacks even more delightfully (and, yes, frightfully) erratic. It's the best.

Well, that's my spirited little spiel. Have fun out there, and happy haunting!

(Hold for floating ovation.)•

CONTRIBUTORS

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GREGORY CROSBY (*Poetry: November as the Hand Around Your Ankle, No More Mr. Knife Guy*) is the author of *Said No One Ever* (2021, Brooklyn Arts Press) and *Walking Away From Explosions in Slow Motion* (2018, The Operating System).

JOCELYN FUNG (Lanternfly illustrations) is a game artist and designer with an affinity for both digital and analog methods and materials, which she applies to making epic Halloween costumes—including an 8-person pizza, Bjork's swan dress, salmon nigiri, and a velcro hooks-and-loops couple's costume.

EMILY GAUDETTE (*Fiction: Mountain Creatures*) is a copywriter in San Diego who creates content for Adult Swim, Cartoon Network, and Prime Video. Her work has appeared in *Newsweek*, *Glamour*, *Polygon*, *The Huffington Post*, *Inverse*, *The Hairpin*, and more.

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MARIEL ASHLINN KELLY (*Slumber Party Massacre* poster) is a Canadian illustrator and comic artist who ran away to Wales in 2022. She is interested in quiet moments, narrative clusters, and finding meaning in the everyday. Her work has appeared in a variety of newspapers, magazines, blogs, and zines, and her 2022 graphic novel *Monster* is available from Black Eye Books. You can find her at marielashlinn.com or on instagram @mari-elashlinn.

LEONIE O'MOORE (Artwork: *Goblin Party at the Haunted Tree*, *Gill Man Blob painting*, *Wolf Man Blob Painting*) is an Irish writer and artist. Her published works include *Heavy Metal Magazine*, *Joan Jett 40 x 40* and the *ALIEN Art Book*. She developed the course and wrote the curriculum for the BA Degree in Comics and Graphic Novels for Teesside University, UK. She currently resides in sunny California where she enjoys eating ice cream and looking at the sea.

JOHN THAVENS (Fiction: *Smash!*) is a pseudonym and almost an anagram.

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SEE YOU NEXT YEAR