



The Chronicles

Poetry, fiction and graphics
supplement : number four
a collection of members work

Count Karnstein

Mingled in the mist and storm
He stands beneath the oak and thorn
Black tombstone forest, ancient bog
Off he flies on wings of fog
Find the hamlet within the woods
Flesh and bone are his goods
A young maiden in despair
He drains her youth, without a care
Off he goes through thicket and tree
Only the moon and death to see
Floating through this ancient realm
His crooked fingers scratch on elm
Teeth as white as virgin snow
He will drain you dry, from head to toe
Velvet red, frock coat flap
Spraying blood across tree sap

Moon and midnight spire
Blue rings of fire
Rise, rise, rise,
Rise with me
Fresh hunters moon to see

Above the freshly open grave he stands
Without words he gives demands
The said maiden looks to the skies
Silhouette of the devil she spies
Burning eyes of bleeding fire
Claw through earth, higher and higher
Together they stand in wind and sleet
Devils walk with earthly feet
First feed, to rid the pain
We all listen to the smell of the rain
Now they drink their deep fill
Creatures of the forest all lay still
Many see there wraith like forms
With open mouth bodies are torn
Their souls not for the divine
Off we go to castle Karnstein

Moon and midnight spire
Blue rings of fire
Rise, rise, rise,
Rise with me
Fresh hunters moon to see

Castle high on craggy rock
Local village it does mock
In they go, steep entrance gate
Castle old with rooms of hate
Dine with me, not on wine
Forever and ever you shall be mine
Ancient hall, full of ancestors grim
The oldest painting is of him
Deep they went by candle light
Archways tall, imposable height
Swords of old, cling to walls
In they came, crypt last of all
There she spied her coffin bed
Face serene without dread
Leather bound books from human hides
Now at last I have another bride

Moon and midnight spire
Blue rings of fire
Rise, rise, rise,
Rise with me
Fresh hunters moon to see

Antony Cummins



The Editor

Want some more Culture?

A short supplement this time as we are under pressure getting out the next Chronicles magazine as well. Remember this supplement is a measure of submissions sent in by members and we will print this at least once a year so long as we get contributions. The stuff we have received is improving in quality, but we would like to see more so get your pens out and let's see some more copy.

On page nineteen there is a new competition - you can be serious or frivolous and we have been generous in the past when it comes to prizes. One condition - it does have to be a proper Limerick, and not just any old type of rhyme - if you aren't sure what this is, check in a poetry book or maybe Google can tell you.

Anyway, we hope you like it, so "till next time" as they say!



Mick

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Contents

	page
Count Karnstein <i>(poem by Antony Cummins)</i>	2
...Act 1 <i>(poem by Pete Kelly)</i>	4
Fledgling <i>(poem Ash)</i>	5
Blood of the Tainted <i>(continuing story by Darren KJ Powell)</i>	6
Bushel of Blood <i>(poem by Antony Cummins)</i>	14
The Churning of Blood and the Crunching of Bone <i>(poem by Antony Cummins)</i>	15
Jahn's Word <i>(story by Nancy Schumann)</i>	16
The Green Goblet <i>(story by John Williamson)</i>	17
My Only Sin <i>(poem by GothicSue)</i>	19
New Competition <i>(come on try this one!)</i>	19
Lamia Mia <i>(Karaoke by Klif)</i>	19

Pictures on front and back pages:

Front: pic taken at last Whitby Goth Weekend - period roleplayers.

Back: picture taken in the Sedlec Ossuary near Prague, from the last LVG trip.

.....Act 1

The night plays host to the moon once more
Insignificant creatures are busy in existence
Above such fraught life glides a lonely soul
Leaving behind a wake upon the swirling mist.

Silvery light reflects off the crow of mirror
black
As this vessel of ancient wisdom quests
Searching for a sign of foreboding doom
From which this assiduous bird never rests.

Within the vague border between Earth and
sky
A light emanates from a defiant pillar of rock
This gesture wrought to remind the forgetful
Though evil passes the doorway is never
locked.

With heightened purpose the crow descends
To where upon this stone edifice a courtyard
sits
Expectancy bears awareness to be stealthy
To deny the clawing fingers this evil pile emits.

A sight of refined elegance in evil pretence
For skeletons waltz in manic twirls of red
Tattered ball gowns hang from frames like
skin
Uniforms cling to soldiers of the undead.

Like the iris to a pupil of a staring eye
They prance around a circular abyss
A momentum from within draws them close
Lending an impression of a focus intense.

From within screaming lost souls trumpet
The loosened progeny of Caine their father
Reflected in the eye of the crow
Thirteen childer rise as a fountainous pillar.

Around the boundary walls thirteen statues
Stand ready to accept them as hosts
Flying to their respective malignant likeness
To transform from an ancient curse as ghosts.

The statues explode in mind rendering mad-
ness

Expelled rock absorbs all light for a moment
As this beacon in the mist flickers to relight
The dust settles to reveal an evil amusement.

The crow sheds a tear, for this dutiful medium
Conveys the sadness of those sharing his sight
Stirrings underground far from foul awareness
A disturbance of air as the crow takes flight.

Awakening from a sleeping millennium
Buried head down to read Earths vibrations
Twelve warriors emerge with aspects grim
from knowledge
As was foreseen though realised with such
trepidation.

So with grins that would burn a pure soul
The vampires acknowledge their resurrection
With arms raised to the night they emit
A screaming shockwave of death and destruc-
tion.

The skeletons are plucked with shrieks of
delight
Into the ferocious vortex as a tornado of bone
Opening like a budding flower in bloom
From which this ancient malevolence is sown.

Upon this emanating tide the skeletons ride
Lifeless eye sockets scour the land before them
Descending as death to claim the flesh of the
dead
After the wave has struck down those con-
demned.

They dress themselves in the lifeless flesh
To be re-animated for such evil intentions
From the abyss rats in scores of thousands
Pour like liquid to feast upon naked skeletons.

Fear spreads like a ravenous cancer
Children swept up in the arms of mothers
Men huddle together frozen in their panic
While all around the legion of the dead gathers.

The twelve warriors form a circle about a fire
Begin chanting an incantation of invoking
For the one to complete the number thirteen
Who beneath the throne of god lies sleeping.

Within the cosmic ceiling to the world
A star brightens then fades in darkness
The twelve fall deathly silent in anticipation
Of the one to lead the army of holiness.

The thirteen heads of the vampire clans
Shift their gaze to look upon the abyss
For there is one more player to appear
A movement within signals a chant of grue-
some hiss.

All those of human form feel a struggle
As the world itself be rent by forces so power-
ful
So from the bowels of the Earth in darkness
rises Caine
While reborn from the heavens in light
appears Abel.

Such a pause before some eternal fate
Stillness befalls minds of intelligence
Only an aroma of power stirs the air
Bearing a subtle hint of omnipotence.

Like a spell broken awareness returns
Soldiers of Abel fall to their knees in reverence
With heads bowed they offer their weapons
To swear by their souls of undying allegiance.

In turn to each childer a goblet is passed
Performing a blood let of ritual instinct
For suspicion and jealousy lies within constancy
So this binding of all, from the goblet Caine
drinks.....

Pete

Fledgling.

With slight sorrow,
I embrace the dishonourable,
The incestuous,
The murderous,
The damned.
Sorrow for all I've known,
All I've loved.
But all those things are dead.
My mistress will teach me well,
In all things,
How to lie,
To seduce,
To kill.
I'll welcome all things dark and evil.
The night will belong to me.
Maybe I'll walk in the shadows,
Waiting for you.
Maybe I'll be the flirtatious vamp in a club.
Maybe I'll let you take me home,
Give you pleasure you have never known,
Before I rip out your throat,
To get to your precious blood.

Ash.



Blood of the Tainted part two

A Tragick Meeting

It had been over six months since I'd written *Need to Know Basis* when I saw him again. I was out again, drinking too much and doing stupid things as usual in all the right places with all the right people - to use his phrase. The last time I met him I don't recall speaking at all, although I do remember that there seemed to be some two-way communication between us. I must have sat there like his marionette, nodding and making the right gestures on his cue. I recall being very pissed off about the whole thing actually, afterwards anyway, after I had given the strangeness of his words some pondering before dismissing them as a fabrication and invention. Lies. There he is again and this is curious as I had found myself thinking about our last meeting only this week and, although I do not fully remember my dreams, I recall seeing his face all too recently. I would like to talk to him, just to say something like 'oh, yes very funny' and 'by the way did you hypnotise me or drug me?' But I have really had too much to drink and very little to eat today and I feel like I'm taking off a bit. The music to too loud and this place is too hot and packed. He would have it even easier than last time.

He is alone, standing at the bar, and nursing a tumbler of whiskey and ice with disinterest and I do not think he has seen, or if he has, remembered me. His fingers are very long and thin and some are ringed with silver. He is wearing a black velvet jacket and trousers and a white poets shirt. His hair hangs like a black mane and is very lustrous, as he stands facing the bar I am looking at his profile and I cannot see his face properly. It is then I realise that I cannot be sure that it is really he. I have not actually seen his face this night and his dress is blandly unfamiliar, at least in these present surroundings. Yet I know it is he and the sensation is a little like *déjà vu*. Anyway by now I'm saying a few quick goodbyes to some people, giving the excuse that I'm tired and hungry which is true really. I don't want to talk to him. I want to get something to eat, go home and sleep. I walk past him on the way out, his back to me, still nursing the drink and standing alone. I ponder for a second tapping his shoulder and giving him a hard word-

less stare before departing. He raises his hand from the glass and gets the immediate attention of the bargirl.

"Double Jack Daniels please, just a little ice." He orders and this is my usual order and this causes me to pause. He pays for the drink and turns to face me with the drink in his hand. He is wearing a lop-sided smile on his face

"A little Jack for my fine friend Jack. How are you keeping?"

I take the drink

"So, is this how you did it last time..." and he gets that hard wordless stare for good measure anyway and then I closely examine the glass

"You put something in my drink."

"I assure you not. I have just ordered it, did you not see. Neither did I put anything in your drink the last time we met at Torture Garden."

I reminded myself what he looked like, lean and pale, long black hair and eyes such a curious shade of violet that they must be cosmetic contacts. I would say that he is striking to look upon if not handsome and there is a cruelty about his face. I don't want this encounter. Whatever it was this guy could do I really didn't want him fucking with my head again. I was freaked already, he knew I was standing behind him and he couldn't have known I was there and I don't ever recall telling him my name. I knocked back the drink.

"Thanks," I slammed the glass down with some force and gave him a surly look and turned to leave "By the way, interesting story, if total bullshit." My best parting shot, poor, I know.

"Yet you wrote about it. You wrote about our last meeting and you had it published in that magazine." His manner was easy, just like a friendly acquaintance.

"So what! If it's a royalty you're after then name your percentage. I got nothing for it so you can have a cut of that. I'm off anyway; if this drink is drugged at least I'll be able to enjoy it in the privacy of my own home."

"Don't go yet. I'm not after any money from you. I may have more items of interest to you, things you can write about."

"More of your crap about half-demons living among us?"

"The Tainted...yes, I have more crap, as you eloquently put it, to tell you if you have a mind."

"I don't believe you. I admit being interested in your concept but before you tell me anything more I want you to know that I don't believe a word of it, who would, who could."

"That is my dilemma. I really need for people to start believing in this thing very soon. It will become very important, very soon."

"That's what you said last time..."

Against my better judgement my interest was already whetted. This guy was some delusional crackpot who really believed that he was some type of vampire or demonic offspring and harboured a fantasy of there being dimensions packed with such beings just next door. Then again he could just be pulling my plonker. Either way he spun a good yarn.

"So. If you've got another good story to tell why don't you just get on with it as I really do intend to leave soon?"

"I have much to tell you but it is important to me that you believe what I say. Tell me Jack, what could I do that would make you believe what I say?"

His face was earnest and had lost its sardonic edge.

I started to laugh, what could he do; give me a course of mind-altering injections, or somehow induce madness, sensory deprivation, hypnosis? I was about to start throwing these in his face when I remembered he had some strange abilities.

"What can you do, really? I will never believe you unless you can show me some evidence of the Otherworld and the Tainted. I must see this with my own eyes!"

"Yes, exactly."

His eyes were wide open and fixed upon me.

"How do you propose to do this, take me there?"

"Yes. Exactly!"

I excused myself then and fought the crowd to get to the toilets. Mercifully the cubicle was free and I was just in time. I puked up the last two hours drinking and the taste made me wonder why I bothered drinking at all. I washed my hands and face in cool water and chewed some gum. I was feeling better and I checked my reflection for any signs of looking like I'd just blown my biscuits. Just play along, I thought to myself, unless things start looking ugly. He's slightly taller than me but I'm much broader and I thought that, in a fair fight, I'd be the one who I had my money on. Whatever happens there will be some sort of story to tell, so I would just go back and appear to be politely inter-

ested in his proposals and I would not allow myself to become railroaded into any situations where I could be taken advantage of. If things become nasty I would just walk away and if he had a problem with that then I would just have to deal with it as best as I could. I was fairly confident and happy with my own proposals and nodded my acquiescence to my reflection and he seconded me immediately.

He was still standing at the bar when I returned and was talking to a girl who appeared to be fairly enamoured of him even though I'd only been gone a few minutes. I felt a slight pang at seeing this, I'd tried to make her acquaintance earlier but we didn't appear to click. He gave me his attention again as soon as I returned and handed me another tumbler of my namesake and my stomach turned a somersault.

"No thanks. I take it that you are suggesting actually going to this Otherworld."

Forced nonchalance was the way to go.

"I am."

"O-kay."

"You don't believe me, you have just said this and you and I both know this and it is very important to me that you start believing me very soon. There is nothing I can do or say that will make you believe me apart from this. I must take you there."

By now the girl had flicked her hair a couple of times in an effort to regain his attention and then went off to join some friends, she didn't look happy and was no doubt casting the same dispersions on his sexuality as I was hers earlier.

"So where exactly are you planning to take me? Is it dangerous?"

"The potential for danger exists, yes, does it not in all situations where there are variables and the potential for stupidity."

"Thanks."

"You misunderstand me. Let's say, for example, that you were to stagger naked and inebriated into a pub swigging from a bottle of whiskey and start molesting the first girl you see it would be very likely that you would get into some sort of trouble."

"Yes."

"This would be stupidity, yes?"

"Agreed, but I fail to see your analogy."

"Where we are going you will be the proverbial fish out of water. Your appearance will pass casual inspection, with a few additions, but it is your actions that could betray you. You must stay close

to me and keep your gaze to yourself, you will see many strange sights and your eyes must not linger overlong on these unless you wish to betray yourself to be an outsider and this is not advisable."

"Out of interest and fear of death, what's the worst that could happen?"

"Think on my analogy, you will attract attention and this will lead to trouble. Any attention is bad. So please don't be stupid."

"Okay, I think I understand. So tell me where exactly you intend to take me, give me some details."

"The place I intend to take you is called Nexcross and it is the largest of the free cities of the Otherworld. A free city means that the place is not under the direct control of a particular Otherlord, although it has not been unknown for agents of the aforementioned to have usurped control at many times in the past through a puppet ruler. The rulers of Nexcross seldom last very long anyway. It was deliberately built to exploit certain local natural features; it is a nexus, a meeting of many paths in the Otherworld and some yet to other places besides."

"A meeting of paths, I don't understand."

"Portals, Passages, Doors, the pathways between dimensions, it will become clearer to you later. Suffice it say that there are a great many of these that are anchored in Nexcross."

"I've read some Brian Lumley, I think I get your drift. So where is the entrance to the Gateway in this World?"

"It is in London, very close to St. Paul's Cathedral."

"Keep going. Tell me some more."

"Nexcross is a haven of sorts; it is not pretty though I assure you, it is also a literal hive of scum and villainy. To some it is sanctuary, others a cage, for many it will be their death while others will thrive within and there is active trading. Apart from selling goods and services the main employment is crime at all levels and other mercenary activities. It is cities after all; there are inns and taverns, food halls, marketplaces, healers, tailors and armourers, weapon smiths and peddlers of drugs and poisons."

"Sounds great, do tell me some more." I drank the JD, I needed it and I wished I had a pad or tape recorder to get some of this down while I play Mr. Sycophant and watch the stories roll in. Still, I have a good memory for details, just not for names curiously enough.

"There is a legend that Nexcross was originally built by an excessively despotic Otherlord."

Tragick continued and his expression became far-away

"His workers were forced to toil until they expired from their efforts and their corpses were piled and more workers bought forth to the slaughter. You will note that the bricks and mortar of Nexcross are tinged with red and this is because the corpses were pulped and added to the mixture of these building materials. Apparently there is no better method for production and many Otherlords have followed this model when they build their cities and fortresses. Yet in this case there was a revolt, a particularly charismatic Tainted called Nex, created to serve his Otherlord as a chief architect arranged for a series of deadly traps to be placed in the Otherlords personal chambers and that the same chambers had extra thick walls built into them and reinforced with panels of metal. All exits from this chamber were false, excepting the one main entrance, and Nex arranged for this to fall to ruin and rubble after the first time it was used. It is said that a true Otherlord can never die, despite any injury, yet they can be maimed beyond their regenerative powers by some extremely brutal methods. I think that this is what Nex had in mind when he finally entombed the Otherlord after he had taken residence in his new city dwelling. Apparently, in some areas of Nexcross, you can still hear the Otherlords mindless howls of pain and frustration on occasion."

"So, what makes you think that I can pass unmolested through this terrible place? Some sort of disguise perhaps."

"No disguise necessary Jack, just a few...additions."

"Like what?"

He laughed a little to some private joke and looked directly at me "You and I could be brothers Jack, or a least look related. You will not need a disguise for you will look a little like me and that is all you will need for your protection."

I think I went onto a state of shock shortly after hearing his words, or I really have had far too much to drink. Perhaps he had drugged me yet again but this does not feel the same as last time. As I looked at him he became me, yet it was just the subtlest of changes like a trick of the light and, as I blinked to clear my eyes, he could have either been himself or a vision of me. Yet it is not me,

but then again it may be, a darker me, a different me...and definitely a crueller looking me. Little more was said that I recall, nothing springs to mind except at some stage we agreed to leave this place, and then we hailed a black cab and got in.

I am enjoying the sensation of the cabs movement and the relative luxury of the interior. It is cool and comfortable within and the cab smells clean and new. The rain batters at the windows and blurs the passing lights in kaleidoscope patterns that dazzle my eyes. The only sound within is the soporific swishing of the windscreen wipers. I'm drifting off and the sensation is very pleasant. We stop off outside a townhouse a short distance away from Kings Cross and Tragick leaves our driver and myself with his reassurances that he will just be a moment. The rain continues and the driver makes some comment to which I agree. So rain is so hard that I cannot see outside the cab, the rivulets of water distort everything. He returns wearing a long black leather coat and he carries a Gladstone bag...we set off again...we are on Grays's Inn road...

...But I do have some nagging doubts at the back of my mind...

...Am I fucking crazy, why in hell am I doing this? This guy is a fucked up motherfucker and, very possibly, wants to do me some terrible harm but only after he has molested and disabused me to the core of my being. More than likely he will kill me afterwards, as corpses cannot speak of pain and shame and suffering. Excepting of course to the poor forensics team who will pick over my mangled carcass and only then can they guess and shudder at the thought. Corpses cannot speak at all unless they are found. Shit. I have family. I have a mother and father who will bury a son and friends who will cry at my funeral. Funeral! I should be so lucky; I'll finish my existence with a one-way trip to the bottom of the fucking Thames! No grave for Jack Evans, just his photo cropping up in free newspapers and magazines emblazoned with the all too familiar epitaph - Missing. Or am I to be the next big news story when some unidentified yet significantly large portions of my carcass turn up as a stinking mess in a drainage grate or litter bin somewhere? You read about stuff like this in the newspapers all the time and, just perhaps, that the people who actually do all this shit

really believe that they are these Tainted and from the Otherworld and do this because they think they need to, to feed and to indulge their warped and perverted desires. That's how the whole thing has become a watchword with alternatives in the first place, a BDSM fetish gone far too far. No, I am to end my existence bombed out of my head on Rhohipnol, and abused to death for the purpose of some S&M snuff film that will be watched by the kind of people who would surely be fast-track certified if they were ever examined by a fucking psychiatrist.

"WHY THE FUCK AM I DOING THIS?" I broke my slumber and my haunted thoughts by shouting out loud. This surprised all three occupants of the cab, especially the driver, who braked heavily in response sending my strange companion and me forward in our seats.

"Jack, what are you doing?" he reached out for me.

"Fuck off you FREAK!" I screamed, snatching my arm away, and the cab had now stopped and I rattled at the handle. The driver had not yet released the lock, he was facing us and speaking loudly himself but his protests were lost on me

"Jack, stop, calm yourself." His voice was soft yet it cut through my own ranting and the protestations of our driver.

"What is your problem? If you have changed your mind, fine, I will ask our driver to take you wherever you wish (if he still wants to). This is your decision now. You have agreed to come along but if you have changed your mind I will respect this."

I looked at him; he had sat back in his seat, his arms folded, not looking at me. He looked resigned but I sensed there was also a disappointment in him. I guessed that he was disappointed in me and not himself.

"What's it going to be?" demanded the cab driver "You can either calm it down or get out now, both of you."

"Carry on," I said "St, Paul's Cathedral".

I sat back and folded my arms and caught a glimpse of the driver checking us in the mirror with a pissed off expression. He was looking at two guys both with long black hair and coats, both with their arms folded and I wondered whether he thought we were brothers.

Jackass

The cab dropped us off on the courtyard outside St Paul's. I looked at my watch and it was 11.53 and, at this time of night and being in the City, the place was deserted. I couldn't help but think that the next time our cab driver went out with his mates how he would go on about the two weirdo goth faggots that he picked up in Camden who wanted dropping off outside St. Paul's and had a big lovers tiff in the back. The fact that he was alive reassured me a little as I thought, just for a second, that when Tragick reached out to pay the driver that he was going to kill him. I knew this was an irrational thought but I was more than a little scared at this stage. I realised that, despite my best intentions I had already broken the caveat that I had set myself less than an hour ago. The fact that our cab driver was alive and able to speculate as to whatever sexual perversions or heinous drugs we were supposedly at that location for slowed my beating heart a little. Just a little though. I couldn't help myself but think that he might just be right!

The cab turned around, back towards Ludgate Circus, and his headlamps lengthened and animated our shadows and two impossibly tall spectres haunted the forecourt of St. Paul's this night and we were quite alone. Tragick started to walk to the rear of the cathedral. I started to follow him and then stopped. I can't just go off like this without contacting someone. I took out my mobile and started to compose a text that I would send to a few people. I didn't get very far.

"What will you say?" Tragick asked, voicing the thought that had just entered my own head.

"I should say something."

He said nothing and just continued walking, after a moment's pause I turned the phone off and returned it to my pocket. It made me feel very isolated and I followed.

"Keep that gun out of sight and do not take it out unless you intend to use it and keep your knife a little visible, wear it on your belt or strap it to your boot." He said.

"I really hope now that this is some elaborate prank," I was feeling the edge of hysteria again, talking too fast and my voice too high and the tone grated me further. I was holding an automatic pistol in my hands turning it over and over looking

for some sign that it was not real. The words BERETTA, the weight of the thing, it all looked too real, the only real thing in this surreal situation. He had handed me the gun and the knife from his Gladstone bag as soon as we were around the back of St. Paul's as if they were Mars bars or something. The knife was a vicious thing; over a foot long including the handle and the blade, when I drew it from the scabbard, was slightly curved backwards, wickedly serrated and honed to a fine edge (I nicked my thumb). It was unlike any blade I had even seen, not least for the fact that the metal had a reddish tinge. As for the gun...

"This is a blank firing replica isn't it? Where did you get these things? Listen to me, I know that any minute now you're going to crack up and either break into paroxysms of laughter or maim, rape and/or kill me and I'm kinda hoping that you'll just get it over and done with."

"Jack, you are babbling, calm yourself and breathe easy. Stop waving the gun around, you look like a maniac; put it away before I take it off you."

Jerkily I shoved the gun down the back of my trousers because that's what they always did in films and it seemed the right thing to do. Then he was upon me and I knew then that whatever it was this madman had in mind for me it was going to start right now and it was going to be very bad indeed. He was behind me and his first move was to reach for that gun, to disarm me, then he spun me around to face him, to face my torment and death. There was a look of sardonic amusement in his face and he held the gun in the palm of his outstretched hand.

"Take it." he said and I reached out to do so

"Jack, my fine friend," his thumb brushed the safety catch and I waited for the pain to start "before you shove a pistol down your trousers make sure that the safety catch is ON. Now put it away."

I was so surprised at this turn of events that I took a few steps backwards tripped on the hem of my coat and fell on my arse. He looked down at me and shook his head

"Of all the right people in all the right places and I chose you. Do we regret the things that we do, or not do? Here."

He took my wrist and pulled me easily to my feet.

"Listen to me. I gave you the gun to reassure you, after all if I wanted to kill you why should I give you a way to defend yourself? Do yourself a favour and take some deep breaths, have a ciga-

rette, calm down. I would put the gun in your coat pocket as we really don't want it falling out of your trousers at some inopportune moment now would we."

I took his advice and lit up and breathed deep. I looked again at the gun and checked the catch (now I knew where it was). Then I blew a plume of smoke into the barrel of the gun and just struck just one pose before pocketing the thing and the spare clip in my pocket. I hoped Tragick didn't see me and as he made no comment I assumed this was the case.

We went a little further and he stopped at a manhole cover. This he removed as if it weighed nothing, with his thumb and forefinger, and set it down with a flourish as if it were a platter of canapés.

"Erm, are we going down there?"

"We are. What's wrong now?"

"It smells."

"It does," and in a flurry of coattails he was already descending the ladder "...that I can guarantee you."

I followed reluctantly and I don't wish to elaborate on the experience. I descended into darkness and fetid stink. The rungs of the ladder were damp and the skin of my hands recoiled at the touch. The smell was incredible. I tried breathing through my mouth to avoid it at first but then remembered that the whole purpose of having a nose is so that you have a method of filtering the air you breathe. I remembered reading once that the nose would adjust to any smell within a period of something like 30 seconds if continually breathed and I dismissed this article with some venom.

"What was that?"

"Nothing, something I read once, a load of crap."

"You don't say." His voice echoed through the scents and liquid sounds of sewerage.

When I stood again on terra firma, after a short climb that seemed much longer, it was slick underfoot. Tragick was crouching and he held a let Zippo in his impossibly long fingers and was fishing through his Gladstone bag. Inside I saw glimpses of black and chrome metal. He took and a small and archaic looking lantern, like a glass bead studded pomegranate of gun-metal, and pulled at a ring on its underside and lit the emerging wick. The light from this device was incredible, like a super-fluorescent, and Tragick stood illuminated like some nightmare vision. The hand

that held the lantern was a claw, his face impossibly hollowed so that his eye-sockets and cheeks were just pits of darkness, his body impossibly thin and gangling. I gasped to see him so altered.

"Relax," said the demon in the bluish light "It's none too flattering I know. You should see yourself. It is a light that cannot be seen from afar, it was made in the Otherworld and should serve us better than a torch. On second thoughts, as you are being so jumpy this night, perhaps it's best not you see yourself."

Angel

"Here. This is the Place."

Tragick did not need to point out this feature with an elaborate gesture for it was immediately apparent. A bas relief upon the wall, an angel it was with its hands clasped before it as if in prayer and its wings spread out behind it. Slightly larger than man sized it was impressive but terribly old and decayed and if it once had an expression of benevolence and beauty then time had etched and tormented the inanimate angel's features. Its visage was sunken and scared and held an expression of indescribable cruelty and malice. It struck me then that perhaps Tragick's gesture was not mere flamboyancy and perhaps this was his genuflection to the petrified seraph before us.

Tragick bent down in a fluid moment and there was a metallic tone, his boot knife was in his left hand and he used the blade to push back the sleeve of his coat and the skin of his wrist was reflected in the blade. He looked at me and in the bluish light he was a true demon again and his face took on an indescribable cruelty.

"No," he intoned for his voice had taken on a menacing hollow resonance "let's do this properly..." he spun the blade and it became a singing circle of metal in the air before, with a fluid and lightning quick snatch, he returned it to his boot scabbard.

"Now Jack, for your first test, to see the power of the blood of the Tainted." His smile was a cruel grimace he raised his head and I saw clearly his canines lengthen into long thin fangs. He bit deeply into his own wrist and his blood flowed forth thick and red. He extended his arm like a fist and tensed and a twin spurt of blood spattered the twisted features of the angel.

He raised his terrible fanged countenance then and emitted a great baying cry like the cry of some tortured beast...and the sound died away echoing in the murky caverns of the London sewers...at the centre of the scared angel a fiery point appeared which spread, like a line of mercury, from the entwined tips of his wings to his sandaled feet, bisecting the bas-relief with perfect symmetry. Then like a door the sections of wall slid outwards. The grating of stone was deafening. I felt it, more than I heard it, for I must have been deafened as soon as the rumbling cacophony commenced. I felt it in my bones that took up the grating resonance of heavy stone grinding upon stone and I swear that the very walls of the sewer quivered. I watched transfixed for standing face on it appeared that the angel's hands were opening to embrace me and the webs of the ages stretched between his fingers like ectoplasm. Beyond was a passage, taller and wider than I and it is perfectly square and choked with webs. Beyond this gossamer veil the passage appeared to shift, to twist and at it's centre a shimmering vortex a swirling well of a substance that looks like oil on the surface of water. Black but with all colours of the spectrum intermingled. It made feel sick to watch it, the same way that heights give me vertigo.

"Wha...what is that?" The sound of my own voice startled me now we were back in relative quiet.

"A portal, I may have mentioned them. But for now I must apologise to you."

"Apologise, for what?"

"For this..."

He grabbed me about the shoulders and his strength was incredible. I felt that he could have effortlessly crushed me had he wanted to. He raised his wrist to my face.

"Jack, you must drink." He whispered into my ear "otherwise this will all be for nothing, you wont be able to go through safely."

I struggled but it was pointless, when I tried lifting my legs to make him overbalance he bore my weight like I were a child, and my kicks were just as ineffective. He forced his wrist to my lips and parted my mouth but still I would not drink and his blood dribbled down his arm and over my chin.

"Jack, I could have mesmerized you and made you do this. Out of wanting your respect I have not done so and given you a free choice all the way along. You must do this of your own volition. If you do not drink, fine, we will go back and part

our ways and you will never see me again. If you want to go on then you must drink. Just like Alice in Wonderland...you don't get through the door unless you take a little drink. You have the choice, my fine friend, so make up your mind. Drink Me."

I paused at this ultimatum but not for long. I drank and his blood burnt like over proof spirit, I gagged, but Tragick merely tensed his fist and I felt a great spurt of his blood enter my mouth and I coughed most of it down. He let me go and I fell to my knees on the filthy floor clutching my belly, which was filled with agonising fiery serpents. The fire was spreading, I could feel it in my loins and thighs, in my chest and arms, and in my head that felt like it would explode.

"What have you done to me, I am dying." I croaked as I rolled in agony and filth. I wanted to vomit but could not. I wanted to die, anything but the pain.

"You are not dying. It will pass shortly. My blood will enervate you for a time once this passes. You will be stronger, maybe a little faster and this you may need where we are going. It will give you the edge. You also need the infusion of blood to carry you safely through the portal but I gave you a little more than strictly necessary. Calm yourself now, just a little longer and it will start to feel a whole lot better."

I resigned myself again to his voice. If I was to die from his blood then it was going to happen. If not...then I would certainly have something to write about. These were my only tangible thoughts in my personal world of agony that seared through my entire body yet my eyes were transfixed by the swirling liquidity of the portal which spun above me. I guess that I would have panicked in only I hadn't been in so much pain. So much pain...

...Which eventually begins to abate and pass. Except that it does not pass at all, I still feel it coursing through me but it is more like a central core of burning power with tendrils that writhe and tingle throughout my entire body. My fear is gone and is replaced with a burning invincible fierceness. I could feel a power coursing through my muscles. My bones are reinforced with steel, my muscles are bunched metal cables and my skin is a weave of flexible alloys.

"Jack."

Tragick stood over me and with the fierceness came a terrible hatred of him, his sardonic smile, his patronising nature, and his knowledge. He reached down to help me and I raised my leg and

shoved him backwards with a New Rock boot to the chest and was on my feet the second after. Not entirely to my surprise the blow sent him flying back a good distance before crashing into the wall. His curious lantern went flying and hit the ground with a metallic sound where it rolled causing the blue light to flicker and wane and its dying beams traced insane patterns over the walls and over Tragick's eerie and demonic silhouette. He had risen to his feet, his posture telling me that he was not at all happy about being attacked, long hands clutched like talons, his body squared and balanced. Frantically I started fishing in my coat for the berretta...and then his laughter begins to ring out like a great resonant bell. In the stink and the darkness, the madness of this situation, that I should be hearing laughter stopped me dead. It was so infectious that I joined him in raucous laughter until we were both breathless and the lights had all gone out save for a faint shimmering of kaleidoscopic light from the passage.

"My fine friend Jack, you have just passed your second test," panted Tragick in the darkness "You have found your strength in the gift of my blood and you have learnt very fast indeed."

"So," I took another lungful of air before I could speak "What then is the third test?"

"Did I mention a third test?"

"No, but isn't there always."

"There is indeed. Let us assume in this case...well lets just say that passing the third test would be getting back alive."

There was no more laughter in the darkness after that.

Yet there is another sound. A sound of something coming towards us from away in the sewer both the way we had came and from the continuing passage and its voice was a high pitched squeezing but I heard another voice, another intoning voice, and it said a word and that word was 'blasphemer'.

"What is that?"

"I don't know but I doubt it is good for us, through the portal now, just close your eyes and keep walking forward. You must ensure you keep your eyes shut until I tell you to open them, this is important."

A figure appeared then, a solitary figure coming towards us from the same way we had come. He was illuminated by a fiery brand, which he carried in his left hand, and in his right he carried a curved sickle-like blade. The flames from the brand were

reflected both in the curved steel blade and in the folds of the voluminous robe. Despite his illumination the walls around him were shrouded in a liquid shadow that was overtaking the figure at the centre that was cowed in a robe of liquid black.

"Blasphemer. To take one of the mundane through is forbidden."

"Jack, just go now, shut your eyes and go..." Tragick spoke first in imperious tones to me and then with indignation to the figure "...What do you want? My business here is my own."

"My business is the business of both our betters," the figure hissed and then made a sound, an animal sound that sounded like a word of command. The black shadows that surrounded the figure came on with a redoubled pace covering the wall like black tendrils, it is then I realised that these were not shadows at all but a swarm of black sewer rats - hundreds, maybe even thousands of them, all driven as if by a single will. I had been frozen with fear since we first set eyes upon the monkish figure and the realisation of the living tide of scurrying, clawing and biting rats was too much. Tragick rushed over and clamped his hand over my eyes and lifted me from my feet...

...My stomach churns as if from the most terrible vertigo and I cannot tell in the imposed darkness which way is up or down...

...The sound is stolen from my ears like a sonic boom that leaves only white noise and chaos that turn my conscious thoughts to gibberish...

...Mwa havnt genty, turnty jacyting, mwarkity...

...Wyaat ty hiyl aim aey thnkying...

...When I permitted to see again I know that we are, most definitely, somewhere else...there is no question of that any more left in my mind...I can only be left to hope that this is all in my mind.

Darren J Powell



Bushel of Blood

With a bushel of blood and a hand of dripping
cud

I come to your castle and bang on locked gate
The moon it hangs in my embrace
I've come for you to put you in a grip of hate
The castle timbers they rock and shiver
As I deliver a message without hope
Mine eyes are white, my teeth of blood
I smell your fear, you can not cope

With a bushel of blood I bring a thousand men
Your walls I will shatter to earth and wind
My gauntlet rasps upon my hilt
I draw my blade I am the devils fiend
The bolt and hinge, they fly without a cringe
The night drips into your decadent fort
Here I come bold and I a rage
I'm here for my prize, to claim your throat

With a bushel of blood I search your halls
Tapestry filled corridors of stone
The torch, it shines like my desperate rage
Ill strip you of your flesh and bone
My wife you stole that hag that bitch
You have her in a bed of oak and red
Her lust filled body yours
I'll have you both fucking dead

With a bushel of blood I spy a figure and hood
Into a chamber the door locks with a crash
Mine eyes gleam, at last, at last
My hands afore me, upon it I smash
I tear it down, a puzzle of brown
From my muzzle, I hiss
I will bring you and your kin down
My mind is fixed, a sight such as this

There you lie,
Draped in crimson attire
An orchestra of candles illuminates your sin
My wife, a pale beauty, committing indecencies
with joy
Her face silhouetted against a tower so high
A crucifix shadow hides yours from me
But deep within the dark your two eyes shine, tear
free
Oh, how I collapse to thy knees,
A face of anguish
A thousand men trample for her perfect form

No, stop!
Let there not be a tear!
No tear of sorrow shall fall from me!
Only tears of hate!

With a clink my armour erects
A gleaming demonic form with blonde frame
Mine eyes pale with hysterical vision
A twisted mouth with a thirst for vengeance
I'm coming you sinner's, I'm bringing venom
Upon the bed my physique uncoils
With a flash of blue she spies he end
Her eyes look in pleading prayer as,

With a bushel of blood my sword does thud
Her neck like ham, a butcher's charm
Her bodiless scream sends hawks to flight
For this deep wound there is no balm
My foe, my foe, you now see your woe
But my mind is set with war and death
My body goes stiff I see your grief
But I only wish to piss in your last breath

With a bushel of blood I take your manhood
Your scream fills the Forrest so wide
I like your fear, I move without peer
Drinking your blood, my life supplied
Oh the joy and the glee sound in the mist
Now you have paid for your black covin
My old friend, my partner, my kin
I set to work with knife upon your treacherous skin

With a bushel of blood I am araged
Your lifeless stump no joy can bring
I suffer your portrait not at all
I cling to window frame by old ring
Now I'm board with you, all forbled
I spy a parapet lean and sharp
Without lunes I leap from this port
Down I swoop, a black robed dart

With a bushel of blood I give a last wend
My gizzard pierced atop a barbian
8 gallons of life-source blend
With rain, fog and a stone guardian
Mine eyes a white glare, without life filled stare
My soul has started on its journey south
My sword it falls without care
My blood it issues from gargoyles mouth

A bushel of blood,
Where a barrel of apples once stood
A bushel of blood
A castle burning true and good
I am vengeance I am hate, I come for you, to deal your
fate

Antony Cummins

The churning of blood and the crunching of bone

The churning of blood
And the crunching of bone
We march through the wood
To a flesh stricken throne
The churning of blood
And the crunching of bone

A cob of bread
Suckled in red raw
Upon the table of the dead
Mashed between ancient jaw
When Hansel and Gretel
Failed in their scheme
Of rose, thorn an petal
They again were never seen

Skin as white as snow
Lips as red as blood
Heads and tears bow
For the fate of little red ridding hood
The wolf he failed not
Drinking with crimson glee
Avoiding woodman's garrote
Dining between ancient tree

In archaic hut and black hill
Beneath the rustic thatch
Within the mist and chill
Chick-less eggs hatch
Upon the table of the dead
Between crystal and silver plate
Is the tortured menaced head
Of one with bloody fate

Maybe a prince with enchanted dish
When you think that hero near
It was invented by those who wish
Just to give children cheer
However in the real world
Prince charming is dispatched
With black cutlery unfurled
They dine at last

Antony Cummins

Jahn's Word

So here you are after all these years back at your old local. Who would have thought? However did this happen? Worse still, what did not happen? Absolutely nothing has changed. The same dusty decoration that had been old when you first lay eyes on it. Same bar, same drinks. Same tables, same stage. And, most importantly, the same selection of faces. There are the young: barely legal and full of hope, who still think this place is cool. They are glad to finally get in, to drink alcohol, to party, to stay out late. They are special in the midst of all thing ordinary. They'll remain special for a few more years but they'll leave this place behind very soon.

There are the old who come here because there's nowhere else for them to go. They don't need sleep. So they stay up all night in a place like this. There are those who are still young, who never made it out of here and who look older than the old. Their faces masks of disillusionment. They don't expect anything to change. That's why they come here. The place is still as it was when they were very young. So they can pretend that there still might be the big break ahead for them. All this would be fascinating if I hadn't seen it all a million times before. It just so happens to take place where once upon a time I myself was young and cool. If you read vampire stories they'll you that the thing that finally gets to every vampire is the fact that they remain the same in an ever-changing world. That, my friend, is rubbish. Neither does it get to you, nor is it the truth. If only you live long enough you'll see everything repeating itself. Humans do notice it when 14 year old girls start wearing the same fashion their mothers put in the bin some 20 years ago. A few very brainy ones even see history repeating itself since they have started

to record and read their own history. And yet they have no idea. They think they're progressing, developing, that they are superior to the humans who lives 1000 years ago. In truth everything has existed before. I have seen humans invent the wheel about three times since, well, since I started to pay attention.

"S'cuse me, I think we know each other", mumbles a drunk guy in my ear. "I doubt that" is my polite reply. It is after all entirely impossible. Last time I was here that boys grandparents hadn't been conceived yet. He is one of the disillusioned ones. I shan't bother with him. They are no fun. Killing him would probably be an act of mercy but I'm not out to kill tonight. I suppose you could say I'm being nostalgic. My young companion, who quite literally dragged me here, doesn't know that I've been here before. He thinks the place is curiosity. Nothing more. He is one of the young ones that have moved on from local places such as this one. He has seen some of the world and finds such a primitive place refreshing.

Refreshing is also how I find him. I still remember how my mother used to warn me never to go with strange men. These days she'd probably warn them about me. They wouldn't listen. Neither did I. Nobody ever does. I suppose some just get lucky. If I had to answer to my mother now I couldn't even claim that he was glamorous or that I trusted him in my defense. I had known there was danger; never trusted the man I followed into the lonely darkness. Hell, I might even have sensed the vampire in him. The so-called supernatural wasn't as unconceivable back then as it is to modern people. And yet, I didn't hesitate for a moment. I had no reason to. When I moved on from the local dancing establishment I moved straight into eternity. He'd found me right here

in this shabby little place where the beer tastes like the dishwasher. Funny, I still remember that taste. Judging by comment my companion made that hasn't changed either. Why should it? They will always cater for the same people. This place is as eternal as I am. I haven't come home after centuries; I have merely returned to remind myself why I left in the first place. Indeed leaving is exactly what I should do right now. My vampire-father left me after a few decades. I have left every place I ever lived in sooner or later. I will leave this place and leave my young companion with it. If I take him with me he will die, eventually. It is a necessity after all. Tonight I feel merciful. I will leave. Maybe it'll hurt, maybe it will even break his mortal heart but he'll have decades to fill the void. This will be my gift to him: that he can return home and fight disillusionment like any other human being. They say only the

good die young and that they never have a chance. That indeed is true. They don't. Humans never do. We make that decision for them. The ones that entertain us will see the world, though never know our secret. The rest will live their petty little lives in places just like this, always hoping for the big, special day, that won't ever occur. Humans don't get a say in the matter if they live to 30 or 90. It is our decision and this one shall live. Left as a sacrifice at the altar that saw me die.

Nancy Schumann



The Green Goblet

The Reverend Willoughby Sackcloth held the vessel up to the crackling firelight and gazed through the green glass into a crazed, miniature world of leaping flames. True, it was rather crude in its making, perhaps late 17th Century, but the depth of luminous colour had caught his eye despite the thick layer of dust that had covered it. Perhaps not a rare find, but none the less, it seemed that the curio shop owner had been willing to part with it for a veritable song. When the venerable reverend returned from town to the vicarage, the thing had started to burn its way into his curious mind: he simply had to clean it now! There was no time to wait for the return of Mrs Handstaff, his stout and somewhat foreboding housekeep-

er. Better to do it himself, perchance to discover its mysteries all the sooner. 'The Green Goblet...', the words seemed to mumble their own way into his mind as he washed the thing in the scullery sink.

'A glass cloth.... where did the woman keep such things?' he'd found his mind mumbling again. What a strange picture he made wandering around the kitchen like a moth fluttering in a jar, abstractedly ricocheting from draw to cupboard and back again, aged muscles and ligaments struggling to impel any meaningful kind of forward motion into his gangly legs. A Dali-esque scene played out in the dim, scantily lit confines of the housekeeper's realm. Eventually a distinctly unpriestly rash of impatience overcame the rev-

erend, propelling him post-haste to his study, where he'd used the backcloth from his leather armchair to dry and polish the goblet.

And now... And now. Before the blazing fire his covetous eyes surveyed this strangely compelling object. 'The green goblet,' he whispered to himself once more. It was still an hour before evensong, and really not the proper thing to do at all, but the world inside the glass seemed such a cheerful, interesting place, filling his fusty senses with a warm pervasive....desire.

Before he had even thought about it, a bony hand that barely seemed to be his was already pulling the cork from a favourite bottle of port with a merry 'Plop!' Suddenly the goblet was full to the brim. Green glass, blood red port, leaping flames.... Sackcloth's mind sank deeper and deeper, following his gaze down, plummeting down and down into the goblet. It was all that existed, all that had ever been, all that ever would come. The reverend drank the red liquid down, drained the vessel dry, emptied it of its charge of port in one glorious bob of his Adams apple. He hadn't meant too, he hadn't planned, but before a pang of guilt could etch itself into his mind, the goblet had refilled itself. Nothing to do with him, he told himself. This time there'd been no 'plop', and sure enough the bottle was still sat on the table where he'd left it. But still, the glass was full again, full near to the brim..... Green glass, blood red port, leaping flames. He sank down again into the fiery depths and as his head swam, so to did the fulsome port, all the way down his gullet. Glass after glass followed, the goblet whispering its sweet insinuations into the man of God's dry soul until his very mind had decanted itself, draining, draining until it was as empty as the once-full port bottle.

It was only perhaps two or three hours later when Mrs Handstaff knocked on the study door, but by that time the reverend's mind had gone completely. Gibbering on the floor, the

reverend Willoughby Sackcloth had irretrievably met his end, although the husk of his body clung onto life for a few weeks. Medical opinions were divided. The doctor offered no definite views. Perhaps it had been a stroke, perhaps a sudden onset of dementia, or some unknown shock to his senses. After all he'd been an old man and his time had probably come. Maybe he'd seen the end coming, for he'd surely tried to drown himself in drink. A sad end, the Bishop agreed, for such a staunch supporter of the church.

A few weeks later Mrs Handstaff was looking for employment elsewhere, and the vicarage lay empty and up for sale. Unlike the reverend Sackcloth, it had outlived its usefulness, its contents scattered to the four winds.

Jack Metcalf was the model of a self-made man. He'd been in the scrap metal business in the sixties, and what with the back-handers to builders and re-developers he'd made a pretty pile. As he made his way back to the car, the rain fell hard, then still harder, forcing him to seek shelter in the doorway of the old curio shop. He'd not noticed the place before; what a dump, scraping a living selling yesterdays rubbish! But hello, what was that old glass at the back of the window? A sunbeam shot a hole in the clouds, kindling a spark of brilliant green. A luminous, deep, oh so deep green that was about to alter the path of Jack Metcalf's life for ever.

John Williamson



My Only Sin

He came to me most every night
By the ghostly glow of the pale moonlight.
I slept with a cross on my breast,
Oh, dear reader, I did my best:
He offered me riches and trinkets of gold,
Eternal youth - never to grow old,
Garlic cloves above the bed,
The Holy Book I fervently read,
I was not tempted; well, not at first,
But as time went by, I knew I was cursed,
Then, to my shame, I let him in,
I fell in love, my only sin.

GothicSue

Last year we held a competition for this Literary Supplement and the task was to complete a Limerick having been given the first line. Some submissions were so impressive that we actually gave prizes! Others were rude and some arrived too late for our team of celebrity judges to consider. Here is one of the late, but creditable, arrivals.

Limerick Competition

The vampire, her victim was stalking,
She regularly went sleep-walking,
She slipped on Hampstead Heath
And chipped both her teeth,
So they spent the night just talking.

GothicSue

New Competition

Ok folks, here's your task for the next few months. It's another Limerick and we'll give you the first line again. Try to complete a five line limerick with this starting line:

In the spooky and threatening dark,

That should give you some options. Deadline for this will be June 2008, but don't leave it till then, eh?

Lamia-Mia

(Sung to the tune of Abba's 'Mamma-Mia')

I've been feeding off you since I don't know when,
And before very long your life will come to an end,
You taste so good, will I ever stop,
Drinking your blood,
But my thirst I can not control,
I'm a creature without a soul,

Just one taste and I can drain you to death,
There's no waste 'til your very last breath, o-o-ohh

Lamia-Mia, Here I go again,
Yum-yum, gulping down the red stuff,
Lamia-Mia, your type 'O' again,
Cry cry, will I ever get enough.

I come to you at midnight,
Stay 'til the start of daylight,
Then I crawl back to my gloomy lair,

Lamia-Mia, know you really know,
Mine, mine I will never let you go.....

New Lyrics by Klif Fuller



