



RED PLANET MAGAZINE

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Contents

Flash Fiction

THE GREAT ESCAPE by Sara Jordan-Heintz	pg 7
POD TIME by Vanessa Mancos	pg 8
A FAIR AMOUNT OF GHOSTS by Zach Murphy	pg 10

Short Stories

THE Z WORD by Jeff Seeman	pg 12
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Poetry

THE MACHINE EYE by Garrett Carroll	pg 19
XENOPHOBE by Juan Perez	pg 21

THE GREAT ESCAPE

by Sara Jordan-Heintz

As Izzy drove down the dark, rural stretch of highway, she could see a fireball ablaze on the horizon. Flipping on the car's radio, she heard a voice announce that an aircraft had crashed in the hills about six miles away.

"Scorched earth, an uncontrolled inferno, and damage to private property in the woods is the situation law enforcement is facing," the station's announcer proclaimed. "State police are on the scene with the FBI expected to arrive within a couple of hours. The mission: to identify what nation, hostile or otherwise, sent the craft screeching through our open Montana skies, then wreaking havoc across a sizable stretch of our land. We can tell listeners at this hour, that the craft is not American in origin, and it appears to have been unmanned."

Quite true Izzy thought to herself. No men onboard, that was for sure. But the spacecraft had been far from empty. Empty?! Izzy laughed to herself as she floored the gas pedal of the stolen vehicle—with her third foot.

Sara Jordan-Heintz's debut work of fiction "A Day Saved is a Day Earned," a novella set in Cleveland, Ohio in 1961, was published in Rod Serling Books inaugural anthology "Submitted For Your Approval" in 2015. Jordan-Heintz is a newspaper and magazine journalist based in Iowa.

POD TIME

by Vanessa Mancos

Today my mother sealed me into the pod. I won't be allowed to leave for six months or two years or ten years or forty-five years, depending on how it goes. I want it to go well, of course, but I don't know what I am doing in here.

Inside the pod it is humid and dark, quiet and eerie, lonely and nervous. I think I am supposed to be thinking but no one told me what to do so I am mostly just waiting until something happens. The purpose of the pods: become a woman; grow out of whatever childish things you have picked up along the way; learn to be a mother yourself.

Outside, there are muffled tones every now and then. Someone taps on the enclosure and I am supposed to tap back: one-two-three, so they know I haven't died. A couple times I thought about not tapping back one-two-three so they'd pull me out and I could see the sun again. I miss the light so much. But then I remembered no one said they pull you out if you are dead, so I tapped back: one-two-three, like the rules state.

In the beginning, I tried to keep track of the days but after you fall asleep more than once it becomes impossible. My skin is sticking to

the edges when I wake up, slick with sweat. There is no room to peel myself away and now the pod is a part of me, even though I never gave it permission to intertwine its cells with mine in this way.

After what feels like at least a year, the pod begins to shake. It rattles my brain around inside my skull. Everything is still silent but a cacophony racks my body. I open my mouth and scream for it to end but no sound comes out. One day, when it really feels like I might die if this goes on any longer, it stops. The truth is, I promised I would always follow the rules when I get out if it stopped, and then it stopped.

A few more years later and I open my eyes. I am not in the pod anymore. I am cool and dry. There is light again. My mother wipes the hair out of my eyes with a smile. They place a baby in my arms. "You did such a good job." They say. But I don't know what part of what I did was right. And no one tells me.

Vanessa Mancos is a writer living in Los Angeles. Her work has appeared in NY Tyrant, The Coachella Review and Memoir Mixtapes, among others. She was a finalist for the 2019 Esalen Emerging Voices Fellowship, and has appeared as a storyteller on the critically acclaimed live show and podcast Mortified! In her spare time, she enjoys hiking, hanging out with her fluffy Calico cat and finding new and inventive ways to destroy the patriarchy.

A FAIR AMOUNT OF GHOSTS

by Zach Murphy

He plays the trumpet brilliantly on the corner of Grand and Victoria. He doesn't look like he's from this era. He's impeccably dressed, from his crisply fitting suit to his smooth fedora hat. There aren't many folks that can pull that off. He's cooler than the freezer aisle on a sweltering summer day. He performs the type of yearning melodies that give you the goosebumps. I've never seen anyone put any money into his basket.

There's a formidable stone house that sits atop Fairmount Hill. It's been for sale for as long as I can remember. The crooked post sinks deeper into the soil with each passing year. It isn't a place to live in. It's a place to dwell in. There's a dusty rocking chair on the front porch. It's always rocking. Always rocking. I'm not sure if the chair is occupied by an old soul or if it's just the wind. Maybe it's both. I guess the wind is an old soul.

This town is full of posters for Missing Cats. There's one for a sweet, fluffy Maine Coon named "Bear." He's been gone for a while now. I've searched through every alleyway, under every porch, and inside of every bush for him. Sometimes I think I see him out of the corner of my eye. But then he's not there. The rain has pretty much washed

away the tattered posters. If he ever turns up, I worry that the posters will be missing.

I met the love of my life in Irvine Park, near the gloriously spouting water fountain, beneath the serene umbrella of oak trees. We spent a small piece of eternity there together. We talked about whether or not the world was coming to an end soon, and if all of our memories will be diminished along with it. After we said our goodbyes and she walked off into the distance, I never saw her again. So I left my heart in Irvine Park.

Zach Murphy is a Hawaii-born writer with a background in cinema. His stories have appeared in *Adelaide Literary Magazine*, *Mystery Tribune*, *Ghost City Review*, *Emerge Literary Journal*, *Ellipsis Zine*, *The Bitchin' Kitsch*, *Lotus-eater*, *Crêpe & Penn*, *WINK*, *Levitate*, *Drunk Monkeys*, *Door Is A Jar*, and *Yellow Medicine Review*. He lives with his wonderful wife Kelly in St. Paul, Minnesota.

THE Z WORD

by Jeff Seeman

Nobody wanted to use “the Z word.” At best it seemed melodramatic; at worst, just plain silly. So for weeks the government and the news media struggled to find terminology that would convey the global situation with adequate gravitas. Most news sites and cable channels, from the New York Times to CNN, finally settled on “the infected.” Some Christian radio stations, in an attempt to emphasize the biblical aspect of the epidemic, preferred “the arisen.” And on NPR, Mary Louise Kelly even interviewed an etymologist who explained that “the Z word” was an obvious misnomer, more properly associated with the voodoo rituals of Haiti—and that if one were searching for an appropriate colloquialism, “ghoul” would at least be more accurate.

But users of Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram cared not a whit for such linguistic niceties. When the dead began rising from their graves to feed on the living, people on social networking platforms didn’t mince words. They were *zombies*, pure and simple.

The residents of Harrisfield read the news reports with much the same horror as everyone else around the world. Whenever an attack in a major metropolitan area was reported, they would text their families and friends in New York or Los Angeles or Houston to make sure they were safe and were sheltering in place as authorities had advised. But sequestered as they were in an isolated area of the state, twenty miles from the nearest major highway, the residents of Harrisfield felt somehow removed from the whole situation. Certainly it was unlikely the plague would ever find its way to the borders of their small town.

All that changed late one Saturday afternoon when one of the “infected” wandered out of a wooded area on the outskirts of town and attacked a homeowner mowing his lawn, tearing open his throat with yellowing teeth and setting forth a geyser of blood from his carotid artery. By dusk, attacks were erupting all over town. At the Pump ‘n’ Go, a man was torn apart while pumping gas, his steaming entrails ripped from his stomach. At the Food Mart, a woman was

devoured while shopping for zucchini, her blood smearing the floor of the produce aisle.

As darkness fell and the attacks spread, the residents of Harrisfield scrambled for safety. Those who were able to make it back to their homes locked their doors, boarded their windows, and huddled together with their families. The less fortunate ones—those who couldn't make it home, those who found their paths blocked by hordes of ravenous zombies—ran to the safest place in town they could think of. They ran to the sheriff's office.

Tom Dooley, former cop from Philly, had taken over as sheriff just six months earlier. Thus far, the town had offered him exactly the kind of semi-retirement he'd hoped for. Aside from local teens committing the occasional acts of vandalism and an odd complaint of public drunkenness now and then, he'd thus far had a pretty easy tenure. He expected this Saturday night to be no different. He was wrong.

Dooley looked up from his desk as the terrified group burst into his office—George and Annie Casidos, proprietors of the local dry cleaning store (Annie sobbing, shaking, near hysterical, George with his arm thrown around his wife's shoulders, trying to comfort her), Cheryl Knacker, cashier at the Food Mart (her expression blank, her eyes wide with shock, even her perpetual gum-chewing ceased), Bud Muessler (youngest of the Muessler boys and the only one who hadn't moved away from Harrisfield years ago), and finally old Doc Wilkins (carrying his cane, but mostly leaning on Bud for support). Bud slammed the door shut behind them.

"Told you, you should have left me back there," said Doc Wilkins. "I'm just slowing you down."

"No way we were gonna do that," Bud insisted.

Sheriff Dooley looked at them with curiosity. "What's up?"

They stared back at him.

"What's up?" Doc Wilkins hobbled forward on his cane. "What's up?! Zombies! All over the damn town! Haven't you heard? Hasn't anyone reported them?"

"Oh, that. Yeah, sure they have. I've been hearing this all day. Zombies this, zombies that." Sheriff Dooley snickered. "Hoaxes. Just hoaxes."

"Hoaxes? What do you mean hoaxes? It's happening all over the country! All over the *world*! Haven't you watched the news for the past two months?"

"Fake news," said the sheriff. "Everyone knows that's fake news. Fake news from fake news organizations. It's disgusting, that's what it is. It shouldn't be allowed, let me tell you."

"They're right outside your office!" insisted the doctor.

"Nonsense."

"Look out the window!"

Sheriff Dooley sighed and strode wearily to the window. Across the street, beneath the glare of a streetlamp, a shambling group of bloody, disheveled zombies had gathered.

"Immigrants," said Sheriff Dooley.

"Immigrants?" said Doc Wilson.

"It's a horrible problem," said the sheriff. "Horrible. The most horrible problem we've ever had. They come to this country looking for a handout. And they're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. Look at them. They look like they haven't had a bath in weeks."

"Because they're *dead*," said the doctor. "Look, that one's eating a foot."

"Chicken leg," said the sheriff.

"A chicken leg with *toes*?"

"How are we going to get *out* of here?!" Cheryl interjected.

A few more zombies staggered out of the darkness, joining the group across the street.

"I don't think there's anything to worry about," said the sheriff. "I have a very good feeling about this. A very good feeling. I think they're breaking up."

"They're not breaking up!" said the doc. "There's more of them now!"

"No, they're breaking up. This whole thing will probably blow over by tomorrow. It's going to disappear. It's like a miracle, it will disappear."

"How on earth...? *Why* would you think that?"

"Sunlight," said the sheriff. "As soon as the sun comes up, they'll all die. The whole concept of the light, the way it kills them in one minute, that's pretty powerful."

"Sunlight doesn't kill them," said the doc. "You're thinking of vampires."

"There's no such thing as vampires."

"I didn't say there were!" Doc Wilson shook his head. "Look, do you have a car? Isn't there a patrol car somewhere?"

"Sure," said the sheriff. "Right down the street. In front of the drug store."

"I'll go," said Bud.

"No!" George let go of his wife and turned to face Bud. "We can't let you do that. It's too dangerous."

"Look, someone has to make a break for it," said Bud. "You can't go. Annie needs you. And Doc can't make it with a bum leg. I'm the obvious choice. Single, male, no wife, no children. If someone needs to take one for the team, it should be me. Plus I played football in high school. I have a better chance of making it than anyone else."

There was an awkward silence as everyone quietly, shamefully agreed.

"I'll get the car," said Bud. "Swing it around. Pull it right up here on the sidewalk. Right outside the door. Everyone jumps in and we get the hell out of here."

"Where are the keys?" Doc Wilson asked the sheriff.

"In the car."

"You left the keys in the car?"

"Why not? No one would dare steal my car. Hold on." Sheriff Dooley unlocked a cabinet and produced a shotgun. He loaded it with shells, pumped one into the chamber, and handed it to Bud.

"If they come at you, shoot. Only way to stop them."

"Got it," said Bud.

"And you have to aim for the foot," said the sheriff.

"No, the head!" said the doc.

"I heard it's the foot," said the sheriff. "People are saying it's the foot."

"*No one* is saying that! No one has *ever* said that! You need to aim for the head."

Sheriff Dooley glared at him. "You ever seen a zombie shot in the foot?"

Doc Wilson blinked. "Have I ever...? No, of course not."

"Then how do you know?"

"Stop it!" yelled Cheryl. "For God's sake, Doctor, he's the *sheriff*! He knows what he's doing! Why are you arguing with him?"

Bud gripped the shotgun. "Get the door," he said.

Cheryl put her hand on the doorknob. Bud took a deep breath and nodded to her. She swung the door open for Bud to dash through, then slammed the door behind him.

From the window, the group watched as Bud sprinted down the street towards the patrol car, shotgun clutched to his chest, dodging zombies along the way, a running back with a football weaving through a phalanx of defensive players. All at once, ahead of him and to his right, a zombie burst forth from a side alley. Bud swung the shotgun and blasted the zombie's right foot. Undeterred, the zombie staggered forward and latched onto him. It sank its teeth into Bud's right shoulder and tore off a chunk of bloody red flesh. Bud screamed and went down as a swarm of the living dead closed in and devoured him.

Sheriff Dooley shook his head. "Maybe it's the *left* foot."

Annie burst into another round of hysterical crying while the rest of the group just stared in horror.

"What the hell did you just do?!" demanded Doc Wilkins.

"What did I do? I didn't do anything. I take no responsibility for what just happened."

"He needed to aim for the head! What you told him just got him killed!"

Sheriff Dooley glared at him. "That's a nasty remark. You're a very nasty doctor, you know that? Very nasty."

"I've done a fantastic job as sheriff," he continued. "A fantastic job. And it hasn't been appreciated, I'll tell you that. I didn't need to take this job, you know. I was doing very well. Very well. I could have just retired. I came here to help you people. And all anyone does is complain. Complain, that's all you do. You should be thanking me. That's what you should be doing."

"But what do we do now?" asked Cheryl.

Sheriff Dooley thought for a moment. "Garlic," he said finally. "I've heard garlic keeps them away."

"No!" said Doc Wilkins. "You're thinking of vampires again!"

"No, zombies. Why do you keep bringing up vampires?"

"*You're* the one who keeps bringing them up."

"Never mentioned vampires. Never mentioned a word about vampires." He looked at Cheryl and shrugged towards the doctor.

"Vampires, he says. Can you believe this guy?"

"Should I go online and try to order some garlic?" asked Cheryl.
"Maybe we can get it delivered express."

"Yeah, good idea. And get some wolfsbane, too. The combination of garlic and wolfsbane will work for sure."

The doctor sputtered as Cheryl pulled the cell phone from her back pocket and thumbed her way onto the Internet.

"That's not even—," began the doctor. "There's no evidence that garlic and wolfsbane—."

"I have the evidence," said the sheriff. "I have it right here." He tapped the side of his head. "That's all the evidence I need. Everything's right up here. I have a good instinct for this stuff. I'm not a doctor, but I'm a person who has a good brain. I'm, like, really smart. I'm a very smart guy."

"Amazon's sold out of garlic," said Cheryl. "And I can't find wolfsbane at all."

"Sure," said the sheriff. "People are probably hoarding it. Which just proves that it works."

The conversation was cut short by the sound of breaking glass. Everyone spun around to see that a hideous, undead hand had burst through the window pane. The arm snaked its way through the bars on the window, fingers trying to clutch, grasp whatever it could reach, the skin a ghastly shade of whitish-blue, the fingernails black. The zombies were moving closer.

"I'll go," said George with determination.

"No!" shrieked Annie, the first actual word they'd heard her say since the ordeal began. She gawked at her husband. "You can't leave me!"

George took her by the shoulders and looked into her eyes. "I have to, honey. I'm doing this for you. Do you understand? It's the only chance we've got. If we don't do something, we're all dead. It has to be me."

"No!"

He pulled her closer, kissed her hard, then ripped himself out of her arms and turned to the sheriff.

“Give me your sidearm.”
“My sidearm?” said the sheriff.
“Give it to him,” the doctor insisted.
Reluctantly, the sheriff removed the revolver from his holster and handed it to George.
“Get the door,” said George to the doctor. “On three. One... Two... Three!”
Doc Wilkins swung open the door and George burst through, pointing the gun straight out in front of him as he ran. The zombies swarmed towards him.
“The left foot!” Sheriff Dooley shouted after him through the broken window. “The left foot!”
George took aim. The zombies charged.

Jeff Seeman's work has been featured in a variety of literary magazines as well as the anthologies *Horror USA: California*, *Tales For the Camp Fire*, *18 Wheels of Science Fiction*, *18 Wheels of Horror*, the Bram Stoker Award-nominated collection *Hell Comes to Hollywood*, and most recently, *What Monsters Do For Love*. His story “Deadlock” appeared in the January 2020 issue of Red Planet Magazine.

THE MACHINE EYE

by Garrett Carroll

Swirling around the Machine Eye,
The aurora gave a visual spectacle
Around the star-sized vessel
As it drifted, slowly,
Through space.

It's sight extended
Throughout the universe
As reptiles preyed to the
Arrival of their dirt coffins
Light years away.

The eye proctored the sights
Of new and old bipedal species,
Across time documenting and videoing
Their lives away, budding tourists
Of their own home.

Eons passed and the eye knew all
Of the saddled beasts on planetary gusts.
It knew everyone and thing in time
And stored infinite seas in its
Trillions of codes and complex chambers.

It saw its creators endure extinction,
Saw spiritual guardians die.
It observed the unknown and unaware
Like an immortal philosopher
That never spoke.

The Eye viewed the universe
Through transparent lakes,
Everclear and evergreen,
Viewing stars and sites
Seen and now known to it forever.

Garrett Carroll is a poet and songwriter who has been writing. His work has previously been in Astral Waters Press. In his spare time, he aims to be an art connoisseur while simultaneously rummaging through video game wastelands and fantasy worlds. He is currently working towards a BA in English at Adams State University.

XENOPHOBE

by Juan Perez

what are you afraid of, fellow human
were you not looking to the stars for life
searching for the answers to loneliness

were you not trying to communicate
with dolphins to find intrepid mermaids
well up until they stopped talking to man

were you not engaging in all matters
of finding that which looked and talked like you
or something quite close to that idea

yet when it fell into your blue oceans
in flames from a far-away, unknown place
reconstituting to its former self

you were repugnant at the thought of it
how dare it come stealthily and unannounced
up until it took your form and ate you

Juan Manuel Pérez, a Mexican-American poet of indigenous descent and the current Poet Laureate for Corpus Christi, Texas (2019-2020), is the author of *Space In Pieces* (2020) and *Screw The Wall! And Other Brown People Poems* (2020), as well as, the co-editor of *The - Call Of The Chupacabra* (2018).

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