

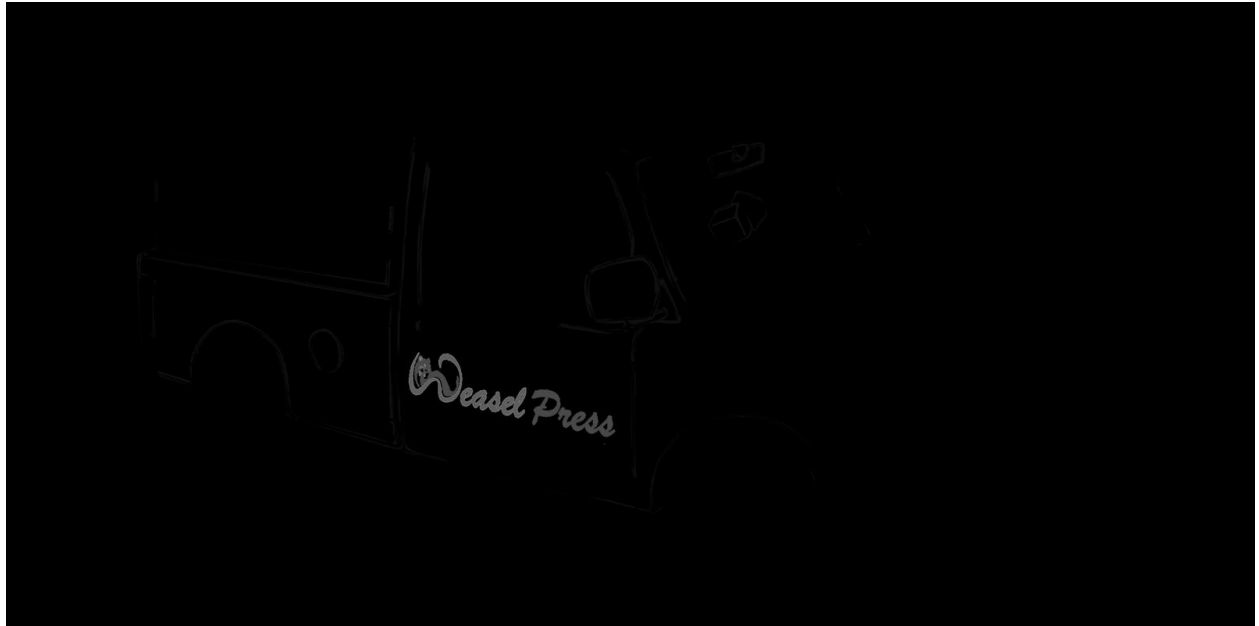
# Typewriter Emergencies



December 2017

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**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: Weasel**

**Assistant Editor: Sendokidu Adomi**

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## Chestnut Wish

Mary E. Lowd

Olea started screaming first, whiskers quivering with rage. She was an otter and should have enjoyed tumbling and playing all day. But she was also an adult, and Shaun was a toddler. No force on Earth or in space could keep pace with a toddler otter—except for another toddler otter, but Shaun was a rare litter of one. No sibling playmates.

All Olea wanted was to flop down, drape her long spine over the couch, and watch some TV show with fast-talking cats and dogs in suits throwing quips at each other. But as soon as she grabbed the remote, Shaun pointed at the TV and chirped in his high-pitched squeak, “Cho-bolos!” over and over—*whatever that meant*. Why couldn’t the doggarned kid learn to speak? Humans hadn’t uplifted otters a hundred years ago so they could chirp nonsense words. *Language*. It was the whole point of being uplifted.

Shaun kept chirping “Cho-bolos,” his squeaky voice growing more and more urgent. Olea knew that if she didn’t turn on some brain-melting episode of neon cartoon tripe with songs about sharing, Shaun would start screaming.

And she couldn’t take it anymore.

So, she beat him to the punch—Olea started screaming. Then Shaun screamed back. The two otters—adult and toddler—squared off, screaming in each other’s faces, large, round noses nearly pressed together, whiskers quivering.

All Olea had wanted was to hear some adults talking to each other, using real words, saying clever things. It was a dumb reason to yell at a toddler. Olea was fighting with a child, and she was the idiot throwing a tantrum.

Shaun was just—rightfully—objecting to his mother turning into a psycho otter before his eyes. *How do you get out of that? What do you do when you’ve lost it so bad that your toddler has the moral high ground?*

Shaun’s father, Dover, wouldn’t be home for hours, and Olea’s littermates and parents all lived on the space station. She hadn’t had time yet to make friends with the squirrels down here in Tree Town. She was still hoping that Dover would get transferred back to Deep Sky Anchor. Though he was such a successful liaison to the squirrels, that was looking less and less likely. She didn’t know how he managed it; the squirrels’ jittery movements always made her nervous, and she hated nut-based food.

Olea knew that she and Shaun needed to get out of the apartment. They’d been cooped up in that little space too long. So, she grabbed his little body around the

long middle and held his arms down tight while he wiggled and screamed. With enough maneuvering, she got the slippery otter babe strapped to her back in a carrier. As soon as the last buckle latched into place, she felt his body relax. Of course, now her body was carrying the weight of an entire extra person. *Hadn't this all started because she was tired?*

Olea trudged, one paw in front of the other, out of the apartment and down the winding, narrow staircase that circled the outside of the tree-like building she lived in these days. The ground floor of the building housed a bakery, and Olea stopped to stare through the glass windows. Squirrels buzzed about inside, ordering baked goods from the honeycomb of cubby-shelves housing them. Olea thought about going in and buying a treat for her and Shaun, but everything she saw involved nuts—almond macaroons, hazelnut-stuffed croissants, walnut pudding, sunflower seed cookies. Not a single crab cake or clam chew.

Her own reflection in the glass caught Olea's eye. Shaun was peeking over her shoulder from the backpack. She stood staring at the reflection of his sweet, brown, bewildered eyes. *Why was his mamma just standing here?* she could see him wondering. Then the little devil caught sight of her reflection staring at him and gave her the sweetest little lopsided smile.

*What do you do when your jail cell is also the only thing that makes life worthwhile?* Olea wondered. It was hard to believe the world had ever seemed to have purpose or happiness before she and Dover had Shaun. Yet she'd have given anything to just dump the little otter at a table in that cafe, buy him a sticky bun, and abandon him among the squirrels.

Olea got her paws moving again and padded her way along the twisty cobblestone streets of Tree Town, listening to the sound of squirrels traversing the rickety ladder walkways above her. None of them would fall on her. She knew that, but she still flinched whenever one of them passed directly overhead. Why did everything here have to be so *vertical*? If she'd been on Deep Sky Anchor, she could have jumped in the central river and swum to her destination. So much easier. So much more relaxing. Instead, her paws were sore by the time they got to the nearest park.

The autumn sun gleamed on the silver branches of the artificial climbing trees and other play structures. As soon as Olea unstrapped Shaun from her back, he scampered across the grass and dried leaves to the tallest slide in the playground.

Maybe if he got his energy out, things would be better. Although, he wasn't the one who'd started throwing tantrums, and somehow, Olea still wasn't watching fast-talking, suit-wearing felines trade quips and catty remarks with each other while solving crimes.

She sat down on a concrete ledge near a couple of squirrel moms, but she

couldn't bring herself to talk to them. In fact, she could barely keep from snapping sarcastically at them. The squirrels kept saying things like, *"Allisyn says she thinks adults should just sit down and talk things out over a bowl of candied nuts when they get mad, because candied nuts make everyone happy. Isn't that sweet?"* and *"Oh my gosh! Kits are so wise! That's exactly what I do with my litter when they get argumentative—sit them down with a bowl of candied nuts!"*

They wouldn't have understood Olea's problems, and she could barely stand listening to theirs. It was a relief when the squirrels packed up their litters and moved on, even if it did leave Shaun alone on the playground.

Once the little otter was the only pup on the playground, the shining metal equipment lost its appeal, and he started wandering around the edges of the play area, looking for sticks, poking at the dry leaves, and pulling up blades of grass.

Shaun bounced back to his mother and presented her with a smooth, dark chestnut. He proudly proclaimed, "Cho-bolo!", the same nonsense word she hadn't understood earlier. She still didn't understand it.

"That's a chestnut," Olea said, handing it back to him. "Squirrel scientists had to genetically redesign chestnut trees to grow here. There's an old squirrel fairy tale about how chestnuts grant wishes. My mum used to tell it to me when I was a pup."

Shaun grinned widely and said, "Yeah!" Then he ran off to collect more of them.

Olea was still sitting on the concrete ledge, rudder-tail going numb, next to a growing pile of chestnuts, when Dover finally texted her phone to say he was on his way home.

They'd been at the park for hours. She'd watched families of squirrels come and go, ignoring the fish-out-of-water pair of waterdogs. "Come on, Munchkin," Olea called to Shaun. "It's time to go home."

At home, there would be dinner to make, bedtime rituals, and laundry to start—loads of fast-drying clothes that never got wet anymore except when they were washed. By the time it was all done, Olea would be too tired to watch some cat-and-dog buddy show. The fight had been drained out of her, sitting in the park for hours, drying up like a jellyfish on the sand. She felt sad thinking about the days stretching out in front of her—each day filled with precious but mind-numbing hours of watching Shaun play, taking Shaun to places he wanted to go, and never having time for anything as simple and stupid as watching a TV show without neon dinosaurs, something that didn't use to be a luxury.

Olea loved Shaun, but he made her feel so trapped, she could cry.

Shaun was her world. His smile was the center of the universe.

Olea picked up one of the chestnuts, felt its smoothness against her paw pads, and tried to imagine what she could wish for to make her life better, but all she could picture was blankness. No matter how hard she wished, her family on Deep Sky Anchor wouldn't move Earth-side just for her, and she couldn't wish away a job that Dover loved so much. She loved Shaun, but she didn't think she could handle having a second litter. Olea wasn't even sure her life would be better when Shaun was older. Once these precious moments that were tearing her apart had all passed... then she would miss these days. Every older otter told her so, and she knew in her gut they were right. Olea already missed the fuzzy baby, warm and snuggly, sleeping in her arms. Sometimes, she hated Shaun for growing up even this much, becoming a gangly toddler otter instead of a fuzzy baby one. The loss of the baby was a knife to her heart and an ache in her arms.

And someday, Olea knew she would miss the rambunctious toddler just as fiercely. Every moment with Shaun was a grain of sand, falling away forever while scratching her in the eye, despite three layers of eyelids.

Olea squeezed the chestnut in her paw, wishing for a wish; wishing for a vision of happiness that she knew how to live with; finally, wishing that the whole world were unmade—if it had never existed, if otters had never been uplifted, she would never feel this way. Everyone would be free.

If the chestnut were a button she could have pushed to end the world—or at least undo a hundred years of evolution—she would have pushed that button.

But it was just a chestnut. And she was an otter who needed to take her toddler home.

Olea wrestled her tired, slippery little otter, against his protestations, back into the carrier on her back. And she went home to face the hours of the evening until she passed out, exhausted in front of the TV. Tomorrow, she'd find a way to do it all again. There was no other choice, and no amount of chestnut wishes would help her.



## A Trickster's Solstice

BanWynn Oakshadow

Coyote strolled down the bank of a small creek, eating winter-dried blackberries still clinging to their brambles as he found them, and pondering if it was worth the effort to cut a sapling to make a gig and spear one of the large, lazy brown trout he saw in the brook. But then he would have to make a fire and a spit to hang the fish on, and sit and turn it to cook the trout evenly before he could eat. It was too much work, so he continued to stroll, as lazily as the trout swam.

When his paws ached, he sat down and cooled them in the icy waters coming down from the mountains where the snow let down trickles from under the ice formed this close to the longest night of the year. He sighed. The Winter Solstice was going to be a very long night. Not a good night to spend alone.

He had wanted to sleep with Porcupine's wife and came up with the idea of challenging Porcupine to a contest to see who could kill enough rabbits in time for dinner. The winner got to sleep with the other's wife. Coyote had already mapped out the warrens and placed his snares. All he would need to do to win was wander his circle and set them. Porcupine was not well-known as a hunter.

Unfortunately, Porcupine was a fine digger and unearthed a small den of young rabbits and collected seven, to the three that Coyote snared that day. In accordance with their agreement, Coyote opened his home to Porcupine and informed his wife about the bet. After the screaming was over, she and Porcupine retreated to the bedroom. She began to yip and whine, and Coyote had yelled for Porcupine to stop, his sharp quills obviously hurting Coyote's wife. She had yelled for him to shut up, that Porcupine's "quill" was doing a fine job and said that Coyote could learn much from his friend.

So, Coyote did not want to spend that long night alone with his smug wife or even smugger friend. Instead, he moped about his bad luck. When his paws were nearly numb, he pulled them from the stream and saw a disc of perfect blue and green turquoise, polished by the water gleaming among the pebbles in the stream bed. Taking this as a sign of good luck, he grabbed it and dried it on his coat. It was a perfect oval, nearly a finger in length. It would make a perfect piece of jewelry. Searching around, he found the remains of an elk and the black horns attached to the skull of a buffalo. Using a broken arrowhead and a hot wire, he carved the bone and horns into beads. He climbed a tall tree and stole several silver beads from a raven's nest. Ravens were known thieves, so it was not actual theft to take stolen goods. Besides, ravens and coyotes never got along that well

to begin with. He worked through the night with the stone and bones and horns along with some sinew and a patch of tanned buckskin. When it was finished, he marveled at the magnificent armband that he had made.

Coyote started to slip it on, knowing how fine he would look wearing it. He was sure to get many admiring smiles from the maidens and maybe even a night or two rolling beneath the buffalo robes. Then he remembered the long night again. Looking fine was important, but not being lonely, very rarely, was even more important. He remembered his friend Kokopelli. It had been months since the 'incident' which had not actually been Coyote's fault anyways. How was he supposed to know that the flute player was already under the blankets of the maiden with the green eyes and hair so black it flowed like purple water in the sun? He would give his fine armband to Kokopelli and show everyone that he was not only a fine artist, but generous, forgiving, and a fine friend as well. He might even end up sleeping under many blankets for doing it.

Kokopelli lived far to the south among rocks and cacti and a long, wearying, and footsore journey away. Besides, the maiden with green eyes may still be an issue with Kokopelli. He enjoyed holding onto a grudge...unlike Coyote who had already decided to forgive him for being between him and the maiden when Coyote began his lovemaking. He would have to find some way to make Kokopelli to come to him, so he sent a message inviting his fellow Trickster to a Winter Solstice party. That he had no place to hold such a party was not much of a concern at that point.

Kokopelli was delighted by the invitation. He had been playing his flute and dancing around the same village to encourage fertility and growth a little too long. Three maidens were demonstrating how fertile they were, and growing big in the belly. Their mothers were less than pleased with Kokopelli, and he thought the invitation a fine excuse to make himself scarce for a few months. He decided to make a fine gift to give Coyote to show that he was the best and most generous and forgiving friend that Coyote could ever hope to have...even if the magical musician had taken to keeping his loincloth covering his backside during his lovemaking.

He carefully searched the fields until he found the perfect gourd hanging from a dried vine still wound around a standing stalk of corn. It had a straight neck and was the perfect size for a rattle. The spotting on it was even a beautiful pattern of random spots of color and bumps. He carefully hollowed out the gourd and carved a handle to slip into the neck. He went through the winter store of corn and selected ten perfect kernels of different colors, ten small pieces of gold-bright pyrite, and three teeth from a cougar skull, checking each time until the tones of the rattle were just right. He laced the skin of a diamondback rattlesnake

around the handle and topped it off with a tuft of strawberry blonde hairs from the tail of a pony at the end. When he was finished, he shook it as he played his flute and danced in the field. It was the best rattle that he had ever made. Unfortunately, it was also several hours before dawn and, rather than praise for his work, he got yelled at to be quiet and go away.

Kokopelli had had a falling out with the Trickster Raven over who had found a certain perfect quartz crystal first. Raven had ended the dispute by taking the crystal in his beak and retreating to the top of the tallest tree in the area, pretty much ending any claims that Kokopelli may have had on it. He decided to invite Raven to Coyote's party in hopes of making amends...and getting that crystal. It really had been a beauty.

Kokopelli's messenger happened to stay the night in the village where Iktomi the Spider, who also happened to be a Trickster, lived. When Iktomi heard about the party, three things came to mind. First, he had not been invited. Second, that he really did not like Coyote that much and crashing the party would make for some good fun. Third, that he had made arrangements to visit a young maiden in her teepee after her parents were asleep, but the maiden and his wife switched places as soon as it was dark and he had accidentally ended up sleeping with his wife. The sex had been phenomenal, and his wife had been impossible to live with since. It would be good to get away for a while.

He decided to make Coyote jealous by making a wondrous thing and give it to Raven instead. He fasted for three days and nights and then spent another three nights in the sweat lodge. For three more days, he fasted as he began using his medicine to spin the finest silk ever made. He formed it into a long scarf for Raven to wear in the icy, and seemingly eternal, winters to the north. To make it even more special, he called on two other medicine men, and together they used their sacred pipes to call for a winter rain and a small rainbow. Iktomi used his eight legs to scramble up the rainbow before it could fade away and gathered some of its colors and wove those into the scarf so that it would reflect different colors depending on how the light hit it. It was perfect! Coyote would get ulcers just thinking about someone else wearing it. He sent the messenger on his way along with his own greetings to Raven.

Raven got the message. He was the last to receive an invitation. He was always last, and it pissed him off to no end. No one wanted to come up and appreciate the majestic beauty of the Alaskan wilderness dressed in its finest sparkling ice and snow. As he sat on top of himself on top of a totem pole wondering whether or not to attend, he saw the bright, brass casing of one of the white hunter's rifle shells. The hunter had been poaching seals, and his bones were somewhere under the ice being cleaned by the crabs. Unable to resist

anything shiny, he scooped it up and dropped in his huge nest where it happened to roll right up against the very crystal that he and Kokopelli had fought over. He was definitely attending that party! He would fit the crystal into the end of the shell and string it on a necklace and give it to Iktomi, who he disliked the least of the other Tricksters. That would teach the quarrelsome flute player a lesson. Besides, he was freezing his tail feathers off, and it would be nice to get somewhere warm for a change.

Raven spent a week polishing the cartridge and used his medicine to make sure that it would always stay as bright and shiny as it was possible to get. He poked his beak into the narrow opening of the casing and turned it until he had widened it enough to fit the base of the crystal, which really did look like the clear ice of the perfect glacier and threw off a shimmering rainbow of colors when held up to the sun. When the gemstone was well sealed, he closed his beak on the neck of the shell and squeezed and turned it around and around until there was no chance that it would ever fall out. He flew down and snatched a beak-full of tail hairs from the most handsome sled dog in the village. Safely back in his nest and ignoring the barked complaints of a very insulted husky, he braided Snout's tail fur into a necklace from which to hang the pendant and prepared to head off to the party...wherever it was.

Coyote had a new problem on his paws. No one would let him hold a party at their home. He had a reputation. That it was well-deserved was beside the point. Eventually, he was forced to give up and decided to hold it outdoors under the moon in a very nice and wind-sheltered glade that he had cleared of snow. He was able to convince the local villages to provide food for the feast. They were more than happy to oblige if it would keep him out of their hair, even for a night. There was corn porridge with honey and dried berries, strips of bison and hot fry-bread, hominy soup with rabbit and quail, wojapi made from pounded berries smoke dried on a frame of willows, snakeroot tea and mint tea. Everything was in place as all three guests arrived at the same time.

They prayed and called in the Four Directions, gave thanks to Grandfather Sky and Grandmother Earth, and sent them up on the tobacco smoke from the chanupa, the sacred pipe, for Golden Eagle to catch and carry up to the Great Spirit. Afterwards, they feasted together and swapped the most outrageous lies each could come up with. They told old stories and new. They shared embarrassing stories about the others. It was a grand time.

When their bloated bellies had shrunk somewhat, each gave their special gift to its recipient, and all were amazed at the beauty and quality of each. Everyone was very careful to compliment each gift and the skill and generosity of its giver. Each also realized that the gift that they had given was much better than the one

that they had received.

Coyote realized that nothing could make Kokopelli as handsome as Coyote would look wearing the armband...besides, the dancer had just given him a vegetable on a stick in return. If Coyote were to wear the armband in front of his wife, she would probably forget all about Porcupine's "quill". Kokopelli realized that Coyote did not have the sophistication to appreciate the perfect tones of the rattle, let alone the skills to play it. Iktomi realized that giving his wife the scarf instead may have ended her smug expression and gotten him some more of that good lovin' instead of a bullet hanging from dog hair. Raven realized that the necklace would be invisible between the Spider's big head and bloated abdomen and would be much better displayed on his own fine breast of feathers.

As they prepared to play and dance, each secretly swiped the gift they had given back from the one that they had given it to. If they didn't appreciate it enough to protect it, they weren't worthy of keeping it...besides, two Solstice gifts were twice as good as one.

Kokopelli pulled out his flute and began to play and dance beneath the moon. Iktomi sat on a rock and proceeded to play two hand drums and two log drums, all at the same time. Raven sat on a branch and spread his wings, adjusting his feathers so that the wind hummed through them melodically. Coyote danced with Kokopelli and howled his songs to the sky.

As the party broke up, each discovered that their gift had been stolen. Loud arguments and even hitting, kicking, and biting ensued. As each had assumed that they were the only thief, they were genuinely angry...and had to put on a good show to make themselves look innocent. In the end, they parted company, vowing never to see or speak to each other again...until the next time.

As soon as they were out of sight of the others, each pulled out the gift that they had made and smiled as they headed home. Though none would ever admit it, each one decided that it had been the best solstice ever.

## **DreamKeepers Vol. 1 (A Review)**

Hakuzo Sionnach

Today I will take you into the world of dreams. David Lillie of Vivid Publishing creates a world filled with nightmares that try to invade the dreams of people. Only one thing stands in their way, DreamKeepers. Everyone has a Dreamkeeper that protects them from this supernatural threat.

Every DreamKeeper is born with a special power that keeps them safe. A DreamKeeper usually has an anthropomorphic animal they take on. The DreamKeeper has the same personality as their human counterparts. Nightmares return to the dream world and now no one is safe any longer.

With this background established, David creates a graphic novel independently. He created his own publishing company to keep full creative control over his work. David draws you in with believable characters and a story that is rich and involving.

Once you open the book, you will be transported to a wonderful world of dreams. Every panel tells you a deeper second story. Every picture builds a world that holds many secrets. Every detail tells the story rather than just the dialog. Every page reveals new twists and turns as it pulls you into a world so vastly different than anyone has seen before.

The story is well written and continues to evolve. The story has many layers beyond just the main story. Each subplot builds into blind turns and deeper mystery. The story stays consistent and drive forward at a comfortable pace.

Volume one covers three chapters and introduces most of the main cast. Elements of danger and threat drive the characters to action. You will see only a fraction of the vast dream world. This volume gives only a taste of what the dream world holds and the journey continues on even now each day David creates more graphic novels thanks to support of the community.

Each week, the comic also updates with a side story that shows the lives of the main cast. These comics are viewable without cost on the publishers website: [www.dreamkeeperscomic.com](http://www.dreamkeeperscomic.com) and you can access other content as well.

David involves and listens to the community as well. He has hosted several Halloween contests and he encourages fan content. Every Thursday fans can chat with David on Discord and he listens to everyone's feedback. David also engages the fans on Twitter and other social media.

Pulling it all together, David builds a great community of fans and creates content unlike any other. Each step is an adventure that always pleases. I

recommend everyone to try out the series and meet the community.

## Until the Very End (Part 1)

Kageichi Kagi

I never understood why I was born like this, why I could see the things I saw, or hear, or even feel. Because sometimes those sensations... were from someone else.

*I remember when it first happened  
And whom it happened with.*

The night was cold; it was something the gray wolf had become used to in his cell. It was certainly much colder in the winter however; not even the flimsy blanket his bed had could give him much warmth. Without his home, without his family, it seemed that it would be yet another lonely December 31st. "Didn't even get visitors today... guess they were too busy getting ready for New Year's." He sighed, seeing his breath in the cold air. The snow outside began to pass by the iron bars of his small window. Far off on the wall across his cell was a clock pointing at 11:59PM. "Guess I might as well celebrate by myself..." The wolf watched as the clock went into its final ten seconds and counted down to 10.

9  
8  
7  
6  
5

*'Yet another year in this godforsaken prison...'* The wolf walked away from the bars and fell back in his bed. *'And another birthday by myself...'*

4  
3  
2  
1

The lights outside his window shined in different colors, no doubt from a fireworks show to celebrate. "Happy New Year... I guess." He stared blankly back to the ceiling, his eyes slowly drifting to sleep. "And since nobody else will



say it..."

"Happy Birthday!" The sudden voice made the wolf jump to his feet in surprise, his eyes darting left and right outside of his cell for where he heard that young voice. "Huh? This... isn't my room..." His ears perked up as the voice came from behind him. Turning slowly his eyes looked in disbelief as the voice belonged to a small child. A little red fox in blue footie pajamas stood in the middle of his cell with a very confused expression on his face. "Mom? Mom!?"

"A kid?" The wolf's voice startled the boy as he quickly hid behind the bed, trembling in both fear and perhaps the cold in the cell. He tried to step closer but noticed how the fox flinched in fear. This wasn't the right way to confront the boy. He had to calm him down, so he spoke as gently and calmly as he could. "Hey there, what are you doing here little guy?" The wolf asked, trying not to frighten the boy any further. The poor fox trembled and seemed he'd almost turn to tears. "Come on, don't cry.... I'm not gonna hurt you. Why don't you tell me your name?"

The little fox's tail wrapped around his body. He held it against his chest as he moved from behind the bed. "J-Jonathan... my name is Jonathan..." Jonathan whimpered as the tears began to fall down his cheeks. "I wanna go home... I don't know where I am... it's cold... and dark..."

"Hey, come on, keep it down. You don't have to cry." The wolf had to find a way to keep the little fox from making too much noise or he might bring the security guards in. Not wanting to answer any questions he couldn't, he grabbed the blanket from his bed and wrapped it around Jonathan. "Here, come sit on the bed. It's not much, but it's better than standing on the cold floor." He patted a spot on the mattress, letting the little fox sit, albeit still nervous to be around him. "So, Jonathan, huh? I bet your parents call you Jonah for short, right?"

"Mhm..." Jonah nodded slowly. "H-How did you know, sir?"

"Be perfectly honest? My mom called me that a lot." The wolf chuckled nervously. "She always said that I looked like a Jonah... even though my name Cain..." Cain's ears picked up a soft giggle from the fox. "Oh? You think that's funny, don't ya?" He smiled softly and returned to the question at hand. "So, Jonah? Do you know how you got here?"

"No... before I came here, I was just celebrating my birthday. I turned six years old this January for the New Year." Jonah told. "I was bouncing on my bed counting down till twelve o'clock. Mom said I could stay up for it since I was a good boy. But when it turned twelve, I found myself here. What is this place?"

"It's the Washington State Penitentiary, I understand that a kid your age wouldn't know about this place. It's a prison." He told the boy honestly.

"Washington? B-But... I live in Connecticut." Jonah's confusion brought a

shock to the wolf, even more to the fact that he was here.

*Connecticut? How could a kid get from there to here on his own? And how could he get into a prison?* Nothing made sense to Cain. Just what was going on? “Jonah, do you remember any-!?” The wolf’s eyes widened as he looked at the spot the fox sat in, but Jonah, however, was nowhere to be found. “Jonah? Jonah, where are you?” There wasn’t a single place the fox could’ve hid in his cell. *Just what is going on?*

*It was that day that I met Cain for the first time and first experienced what made me special. But it was only after a few days that I learned this. It was when my Mom brought me to the local park. I was playing in the sandbox by myself as she was talking with friends, just making a little castle when a large shadow loomed over me.*

“Hey little guy, I like your sand castle.” The large figure speaking to Jonah was a portly boar in a brown trench coat. He crouched down and smiled at the fox. “You must’ve worked really hard on it, huh?”

“Yeah, thanks mister.” Jonah grinned, liking the praise as the boar handed him a lollipop from his coat. “Is this for me?”

“Yeah, I got plenty more in my van if you want it?” The boar suggested.

The little fox was ready to nod and say yes when a sudden voice said, “What the hell is this?” Looking over his shoulder, he found that the voice belonged to Cain. The wolf standing beside him in his orange prison jumpsuit, his surprise more adamant on his face when he saw Jonah’s face. “Jonah? So that wasn’t a dream?”

“Cain! It really is you!” The little fox jumped to his feet, facing the wolf. “I thought I was dreaming, too, but you’re really here.”

“Yeah, but why am I in a park?” He looked at his surroundings, more confused than ever as he was just in his prison. His eyes quickly focused on the suspicious-looking boar in front of them. “And who the heck is this guy?”

“He’s a nice guy who gave me candy. He even said he’d give me more in his van.” Jonah told.

“Um, who are you talking to little man?” The boar asked, watching as the fox spoke to himself. “Your imaginary friend want some candy too?”

*So, people can’t see me. Just like how no one heard Jonah’s voice.* Keeping that in mind, Cain spoke freely to the fox. “That’s a bad guy, Jonah. If you go with him, you won’t be able to go home again.”

“Huh? I-I won’t?” This made the little fox nervous to turn around, aware of

the boar waiting for him. "What do we do?"

Looking around, Cain noticed a policeman walking across from the sandbox. A grizzly bear who looked to be just big enough for intimidation. "Alright, I want you to yell exactly as I tell you."

"Hey kid, do you still want that candy or not?" The boar asked, showing a little irritation in his voice.

Nodding to the wolf, Jonah slowly stood to his feet, turning away from the boar, and yelled. "Help, stranger danger!" At the top of his lungs. Yelling it louder a second time caught the ears of the bear cop close by. His eyes crossed paths with the boar beside Jonah, and he quickly dashed forth to apprehend him. The boar shot up and tried to run, but the sand caused him to slip and fall. Which in turn gave the cop more than enough time to pounce on top of him.

"Oh, good, he got him." Cain grinned, looking as a female fox rushed over in distress, obviously Jonah's mother as she went and thanked the police officer. "That was a close one, Jonah. You shouldn't be talking to people you don't know. You never know if they're a bad guy."

"I'm sorry..." The little fox pouted as he felt Cain ruffle his head fur.

"Sometimes, it takes talking to another bad guy to find others. You'll figure it out if we meet again." Cain grinned.

"But... you're not a bad guy, Cain."

*That's what I truly thought. Cain wasn't a bad person. It was what made me like him so much. He always treated me well and took care of me, even when he wasn't really there. It was like having a brother I never had, and back then I needed that more than anything.*

*Years passed by as I got into high school. As I got older, I found myself feeling distant from my parents. Unable to tell them how I felt, or what exactly I was feeling. Every day since I felt that way, I felt like I couldn't be understood. One day, I locked myself in my room, fell to my knees, and buried my face into my bed. I felt so confused that I cried. But then Cain's voice called out to me.*

"You're crying again?" The wolf spoke, sitting above the teenage fox. His face had aged but still showed a tender expression that cared for the boy. "Did something happen in school, Jonah?" The fox didn't answer, which was becoming more irritating. "You've been acting like this for a good while. Why don't you go ahead and talk to me about it?"

"... I don't want to talk." Jonah muttered.

"And why don't you?"

“Because I don’t, ok!?” He snarled, wanting to end the conversation, but hearing that only made Cain pull him by his shirt so they made eye contact.

“Don’t get the wrong idea, Jonah. I like you, but I’m not gonna stand listening to some teen angst.” The wolf growled back. “If you wanna get this over with, then go ahead and talk, but if you want to be an idiot, just get the hell out of my cell!”

“I didn’t ask to be here, you know it just happens!” Jonah retorted. “What would be the point of talking anyway? Like that would even help me...” The fox gripped at his tail tightly in frustration. “I don’t even know what I’m supposed to say! I’m confused about everything!”

The wolf felt his irritation rising, but he knew that this would happen; no matter what, every teenager feels unsure about themselves. Like they don’t know themselves or are worried about their future. In times like these, they need an adult to support them. “You may not know what you’re supposed to say, or even how to say it. But since you’re here now, I don’t see a reason you can’t talk to me about it now.” He reached out and gently patted the fox’s shoulder. “Take your time... and tell me what’s been going on.”

Jonah felt the tears well up in his eyes. He wiped them from his face as he took a deep breath. “When I started high school... I made a really nice friend. A big bear who had my back when some bullies tried to mess with me, and got to be really close. We would hang out a lot, at the movies or arcade, or at each other’s houses. Even in our Junior year, we’re in the same classes. But one day he... he told me he liked me. Even more than a friend...”

“More as a friend, huh? So, he swung that way?” The wolf asked.

“And when he told me how he felt he... he pulled me in and...” Jonah’s paw trembled, pressing a finger against his lips. Cain knew exactly what he wanted to say from that.

“I see...” He knew this would be a hard topic to talk about, but the wolf continued. “So, you’re scared to talk to him because you don’t feel the same.”

“No... it’s not that...” The fox’s tears rose up again. “I always liked him as a friend, my best friend, but now I... it feels more than that. But what am I supposed to do?” He sniffled while trying to wipe the tears away. “What would my parents say if they knew that I... that I...?”

*I felt scared about myself back then, scared of why I could meet Cain like this, my sexuality; none of it made sense to me.*

“It’s not as scary as you think, you know?” Cain told him, catching his attention. “Instead of freaking out about it, why not just take your time and do what you want?”

“W-What I want?” Jonah questioned.

“It’s your choice if you tell your parents, your choice if you decide to be with your friend. Every choice that you’ve made up until now has been yours and yours alone. So why don’t you stop worrying and just make whatever choice you want?” The wolf explained. “You’re old enough to do that for yourself, aren’t you?”

“Yeah, but... why can’t the choices be easy?” The fox looked as Cain chuckled to himself. “What’s so funny?”

“Kid. If choices were made easy... do you think I’d still be stuck in this cell?” Cain’s response perked the fox’s ears to attention, the wolf noticed. “This is about you right now, not me, so think of asking about it. My point is... choices aren’t always easy. But sometimes enduring them can lead to better outcomes.”

“But... what if enduring them causes those I care about to leave me?” Jonah asked. “I don’t want to lose my friend... or my parents in my choices. I don’t want to lose you, either, Cain.”

“Heh... don’t think I’ve heard anyone say that to me. Especially no kid.” Cain chuckled, feeling an honest twinge of thanks to the boy. He softly ruffled his head and smiled. “I’ll stay with you until the very end. Does that make you feel any better hearing that?”

The young fox sniffed and stifled a chuckle. “That’s ambiguously lame.”

“Well get used to it, ‘cause you won’t get rid of me that easily.”

*It was ambiguous, but it meant a lot to me to hear Cain say those words. But I never imagined how painful those words would be in the future.*

*The very end is just the end, no matter how it happens... and no matter what, it will always be painful to us...*

*Always...*

# The Projectionist

Dwale

Irvine was stroking his phone and ponytail when the chime sounded, indicating the end of his shift. He'd taken cover in one of the projection rooms, which were good hiding places. It was all automated now, and these Tuesday late shifts were always slow. The underlings could handle whatever needed doing. He was in charge, so if he wanted to spend the evening on weird porn instead of working, well, that was just the privilege of being an alpha wolf with a portly, pendulous cock like him.

He stood up and stretched his thick frame. His back popped, and he sighed. It had been a long day, as listening to the same movie four times in a row can take it right out of you. He was thinking that maybe he would reward himself with a few drinks on the way home when he stepped into the hallway and ran into Diego the armadillo.

Irvine growled, as he did when he was startled, and louder than he might otherwise have done because the mere sight of Diego was enough to get his hackles up.

"What are you doing up here?" he barked, ears flat, fangs out. Diego blinked twice and switched off the vacuum cleaner he'd been using.

"What?"

"What are you doing up here? I thought I told you to scrub those tiles!" Irvine puffed his chest out and made no effort to regain his composure. With his teeth bared like that, he looked like he would have leapt on the man and sundered his throat.

"I already did, sir, both bathrooms," said Diego mildly, his rubbery snout atwilt with nervous energy. "And I did the front windows and took out the trash, too."

"Good!" Irvine said, then turned and stormed off. He would find some more work for Diego, just to make him stay late. And if Diego went around his back and told their manager he liked to spend his shift hiding in the projection rooms, well, then those weird armor plates might just be put to the test. The more he thought about it, the more it pissed him off. He couldn't bring himself to trust these foreigners. They were too damned shift.

If it wasn't enough that Diego was a foreigner and an insectivore, he also belonged to that crock terrorist cult, *Adoração*, which was "Adore a cow" in Irvine's head, and might as well have involved cow worship for all he knew

about it. All he needed to know was that gypsies are either terrorists or potential terrorists. Everyone said so, so it must have been true. If he had been in charge of hiring, he never would have given this guy a job; it was too great a risk. Someday, the armadillo would slip up, and Irvine would be there to fire him.

Most of the lights in the concession stand in the lobby had been switched off; only the lone fluorescent in the wall-mounted menu remained active, casting long shadows across carpeted floor. There, he found his cousin, Norton, mopping the counter.

“Hey, bro,” the smaller, younger wolf said. “Dude, Diego was talking shit about you earlier.”

“What?” Irvine asked with a voice like solid ice.

“Yeah, he asked me if we have any husky in our family tree. I asked him why, and he said he thought you looked like you might be part husky.”

Irvine’s eye popped open a moment, then narrowed to slits. He grabbed a deck broom from where Norton had left it propped against the wall and started to unscrew the handle.

“I’m gonna kill that son-of-a-bitch,” he said. He was not part husky, that was a malicious rumor started by some envious person. Just because he had a grandfather no one seemed to know much about didn’t mean he wasn’t a pure wolf. The husky-like markings, faintly visible on his fur if he forgot to use the dye, were genetic coincidence. They weren’t husky markings, they were wolf markings which domestication had brought to the forefront of the dogs’ degenerate line.

He cut around the back and crept up behind the bastard. It was easy enough to accomplish since Diego was preoccupied with vacuuming. He swung the broomstick’s metal cap down onto the back of the armadillo’s head, screaming in rage. Diego curled up on the floor as the follow-up blows came down.

“You filthy gypsy, don’t you ever fucking call me a dog again! This is wolf country, you understand?”

By the time his anger had been spent, the haze of his dark rage cleared, Diego was in a sorry state. Armored plates notwithstanding, his skin was split about the upper torso, his uniform splotted with fresh red stains. The twin scents of blood and urine filled the narrow walkway with their stink. Irvine flung the broomstick aside and spat.

“You wanna keep your job, you’re gonna scrub all your shitty blood out of my carpet before you go home. Off the clock.”

He strutted down the hallway and would have left it at that had he not run into a pair of cops on his way back downstairs. Norton must have called them, but how could they be here so soon? He realized he must have beaten on Diego for

several minutes at least.

“He’s up there,” Irvine said, the lie taking shape before he was even aware of it. “Damned gypsy said I have dog in my family, which I don’t, and then he took a swing at me. I had to defend myself.”

The three of them went upstairs to where Diego was still floored. The officers noted the bloodied weapon Irvine had used, and how there wasn’t a broom-head anywhere in sight, but said nothing as they slapped the handcuffs onto the armadillo and lugged the sagging, broken body to their squad car over his feeble protests.

“We’ll have to ask you to come down and give a statement,” a cop explained to Irvine in the empty parking lot.

“Of course,” he said, and smiled.

“But, it looks pretty ‘open-and-shut’ to me,” the police-wolf smiled in turn as he gave Irvine a congratulatory handshake. “Everyone knows those people are a bunch of savages.”



## The Fox

The fox walks through the woods,  
Through red and gold,  
Of fall.

Fur mixing with leaves,  
Hiding its russet form,  
Creating an illusion.

Red, red, red and gold,  
White, red, and black,  
And gold's bright mold.

What little light can,  
Be shown in the cloudy,  
Sky.

The fox treads through,  
The grass and wood,  
And field.

Its red form,  
Like a dancing flame,  
Running.

Through brush and weeds,  
Through leaves and path,  
Never stopping, always seeking.

Shine, shine down upon,  
The little fox,  
Creating a halo's glow.

Its head darts,  
Back and forth,  
And then runs off.

—Bruno Schafer

## Typewriter Chats with Sherayah Witcher

*Rayah is THP's head bunny, and she has been for a little over a year. She usually says this means she has a cup of coffee in one paw and a spreadsheet in the other paw while staring at her overflowing email inbox. When she's not managing THP's projects and editing, she can usually be found doing her own writing, reading a good book, or standing in front of a classroom trying to impart the art of writing coherent sentences to her students.*

**01. Tell us a bit about yourself? Do you write? If so, what do you write, and where can people find your work?**

My name is Sherayah or, as I am known to many in the furry world, Rayah. I am a writer. I have written primarily short stories and flash fiction. However, I have dabbled in poetry, and I would like to write a novel someday. Currently, my works can be found in the following anthologies: *Seven Deadly Sins*, *Species: Wolves*, *Ordinary Madness*, and some small college literary journals.

**02. What is your role in Thurston Howl Publications, and how did you get started with them?**

My role at THP is Associate Managing Editor. I got this job after meeting Howl, our editor-in-chief, in college. I heard he ran a publishing house, and I asked if he was hiring. He didn't have anything for me at the time, but I was interested and really persistent. He finally gave me a couple of books to beta read, and, after that, I think he either saw my potential or that I wouldn't leave him alone, and he trained me as an editor and eventually managing editor. You could say the rest is history!

**03. How would you describe THP? What kind of work would you say the house specializes in?**

THP is a small but FAST-growing independent publishing house. We specialize in animal and furry works, but we also love diversity. We love seeing LGBT+ work and stuff from other minorities and under-represented voices.

**04. As an editor, what are the top three things a writer does that frustrate**

**you?**

This is a hard one. I guess I would have to say getting attached to scenes that are really fluff or too mundane and need to be cut to make the story flow a little better and/or let the story progress. In the same vein, I'm also not a fan of frontloading background info on characters. I always suggest to authors that finding out about their characters should be like a friendship, little by little. You don't usually have someone in real life tell you their whole life story at the beginning of a friendship, so don't do it in your writing. Redundant scenes also get to me, and I always recommend those be cut. It's not good to be repetitive and bore the reader. The good thing is that all of these things are easy to fix, so they are only temporary frustrations!

**05. What book have you enjoyed working on the most?**

Can I cheat and say all of them? I have truly enjoyed working on every book for different reasons. I think the one I am most proud of right now is *Where Werewolves Fear to Tread* by Alan Gordon. I really enjoyed that one as a reader, and it gained the endorsement of New York Times bestselling author, Charlaine Harris. However, *The Pride of Parahumans* by Joel Kriessman will always have a special place in my heart because it was the first larger piece I edited, and it was my introduction to furry literature.

**06. What kind of material would you like to see more of in the furry fandom?**

I would love to see more pieces that incorporate more of the LGBTQ+ community. I see a lot of straight and gay male storylines, but I would love to see more asexual, lesbian, trans, and other characters that represent more of the letters in the acronym. I would also in general love to see more strong female characters.

**07. What resources would you recommend to emerging writers looking to get published?**

I am a fan of Submittable and just searching that site to see what is out there to submit to. I would also recommend, above anything, just to make sure that when you are submitting works for publication you read and follow the call for submission VERY carefully. It's best to follow the directions.

**08. What do you feel is the best advice you could give an emerging author?**

I would tell them what I tell my college writing students and that is to make sure you are reading. You need to read and read often to become a better writer. There are many studies that support the idea that the more you read the better you write, and I am a big believer in that. I always recommend to people who tell me they want to become a better writer that the way to improve is to make sure you are reading books in your genre of interest. It's hard to write a sci-fi or romance or fantasy or anything else without knowing the conventions of the genre and what's already out there. Not to mention, it also really helps with inspiration to look at what others are doing.

The only thing I would really say other than that is have others beta read your work and give you feedback before you submit it anywhere. It can help to get other perspectives. You may not realize what readers think of your work without hearing from them.

**09. What would say are the Do's/Don'ts when submitting to Thurston Howl Publications?**

I would say you definitely need to follow the guidelines on our website. I also urge you to pick your preferred editor from our site; we have them all easily listed by genre on there. Sometimes you don't get your preferred editor, but most of the time we try to accomodate that if they have availability.

I don't really know of any real don'ts. I guess the biggest thing would be please don't send a short story to us without telling us which anthology you are trying to submit to. We don't just take stand-alone short stories.

**10. What is furry to you?**

It is enjoying anthropomorphic animal characters for whatever reason and wanting to be a part of the furry community. I am fairly new to the furry community, but I have been blown away by the warmth and acceptance of most in the community. It's a place where no one really cares about your orientation or race or identity or creed, and you can take on a fursona that you feel represents you. It's a happy place for me. I would much rather be a bunny than human any day!

## Tick of Approval

Timothy Pulo

*Ixodes scapularis*

Amongst the leafy spread of a wild-growing acacia bush was where he was first spotted, blissfully unaware that he was being hunted. Ticks weren't the most predatory hunter, but what they lacked in lion-like kills, they made up for in their opportunistic ingenuity.

"Are you going to do it?" Jed bellowed at Tyrese, who, in comparison to Jed's sizeable girth, resembled more of a weevil than a tick. Jed had long considered himself the alpha parasite on this particular eucalypt branch. Even from birth, he was bigger – twice the size of the other larvae that he once shared a mother with. Though he lacked a distinguished body type, he was as broad at the top as he was at the bottom. He leaned against a gum leaf, its corners blackened from the recent heat wave plaguing the area. Jed was a veteran of two successful attachment missions – managing to attach himself briefly to a wiry Jack Russell and, for a fleeting moment, a blonde-haired human boy. The incident with the boy's mother caused some mental scarring, rendering the parasite decommissioned from future duties. He was thankful the mother used an old sewing needle from a poorly maintained first aid kit and not the deadly methylated spirits like he had been justifiably raised to fear. He played his role as grizzled war vet to perfection, sauntering up and down the branch, convincing his smaller peers to take the leap of faith. The leap, both literal and symbolic, was a rite of passage but also usually a final act for the brave member of the branched community. If Jed was indeed the alpha male, Tyrese would have found himself much lower down the Greek A to Z.

"I'll do it. I'm ready." Tyrese yelled, futilely attempting to pump himself up in front of his larger, more dominant peers.

"Are you, though?" A rotund onlooker muttered boldly. "You've never even attempted leaving this here branch. There's no way you'll be able to fell that dog. It's a beast."

Tyrese could feel his emotions bubbling to the surface. The parasite had a valid point: going from zero to canine would be challenging for even the most ruthless parasite.

"You can't send him boss. He's an unknown quantity. Frankly, he's the runt of us all."

“Firstly, Gary. It’s Gary, isn’t it? You know what, I don’t care what it is. I know you think you are making a harmless suggestion, but may I remind you what happened the last time a suggestion was made that undermined my power?” Since his rapid ascension to the position of apex predator, Jed cautiously approached all potential acts of treason, regularly flexing his sizable muscle to squash opposing thoughts. Tyrese’s rival took a step backward, hopping down from the knot on the branch that moments earlier tripled his height. On level ground, several meters in the air, precariously dwelling on the Australian icon, the rotund, outspoken tick, incorrectly named Gary, suddenly wasn’t so much bigger than Tyrese, and Tyrese knew it.

“You know what.” He yelled toward the broad shoulder leader of the parasites. “Maybe I should prove myself. Boss. Let me prove myself against him. Against old Gary.”

Jed deliberated over the audacious suggestion for a moment. He couldn’t afford to stall for too long – not only for fear of being viewed as weak, but the dog was content marking its territory for now, but that window of opportunity would close at any moment. Tyrese stormed forward, taking the matter into his own hands. Catching his rival unaware proved advantageous, and he fell in a heap under Tyrese’s limited, but forceful weight.

“Still don’t think I’m ready?”

“Okay, okay. I was wrong. Get off me and go take down that bloody mutt.”

“Can I, Jed? Can I jump?”

With his de-facto boss’ approval, Tyrese methodically stalked his prey. He could tell it and its human master was oblivious to his presence; the dog, now burying its nose amongst a fresh pile of feces, the human, eyes affixed to its mobile telephone.

The dog continued to walk, pacing closer and closer to the now prone Tyrese. This was his chance to earn notoriety and do what Jed could not. There was no way he was going to blow it. The dog and he lined up; the several meter drop was immense, but necessary. Tyrese turned one last time, offering a final raised arm salute to his family of disease-carrying parasites, before launching himself onto the unsuspecting beast below.

### *Canis lupus familiaris*

Reebok loved walks, particularly when Liam allowed him the freedom of being off his lead. For Reebok, there was no greater thrill in his still-infantile life than stretching his lanky legs and treading paw on dirt. Saturday mornings, like clockwork, meant a trek through the trails overlooking the Pacific at Crackneck

Lookout. Signs condemning his company amongst the gum, bottlebrush, and Burrawang only fuelled Liam's motivation to bring his canine best friend. After all, the hours they frequented the native reserve, they were usually the only two, human or otherwise, braving the long, overran bush trail.

The smells, the glorious smells emanating from the floor of the rugged bushland – territories marked from dogs of all breeds and sizes. Clearly, the council-posted signs acted merely as a minor deterrent and nothing else as most owners insisted on their four-legged company. Reebok was an Irish setter, named after his resemblance to a clunky pair of sneakers Liam purchased on a whim at a Sydney market. Unlike the knock-off kicks, shipped to the trash after a month of heavy wearing, the dog was far more reliable, doting, and as loyal as they came. He was big, but for his particular breed, that was common, and his hair was long – in fact, it was his glossy locks of wiry, red hair that initially drew Liam to the dog. He'd seen an advertisement in the local newspaper of the local pet store selling puppies saved from illegal puppy farms and decided to at least see what was on offer. As he walked into the store, amid the heavy traffic of children in prams being entertained for free, he immediately spotted Reebok. The dog, along with its slightly stockier sibling, was nestled amongst a litany of shredded newspaper intended to serve their hygiene needs. Liam ignored the sign saying otherwise and poked his index finger carefully through a gap in the cage. With a small piece of yesterday's headlines still firmly attached to its mouth, Reebok approached the finger and dressed it with his soft tongue, erratically nibbling with sharp puppy teeth. Liam (and in turn, Reebok) was sold.

Most Saturdays, Liam brought an old, chewed tennis ball, nothing fancy, just something to keep Reebok entertained as they ventured through the walking trail. He considered his aim, and Reebok's dexterity and grace, more than able to steer clear of the twenty-meter drop into the ocean below. He reeled back his arm as Reebok eagerly watched, anticipating the impending chase, before hurling the ball meters ahead into some low-lying shrubbery. Like a bolt, the dog obliged to the primitive game and bounded through the knee-high nature before momentarily being side-tracked by a new scent. He paused under a tall eucalypt, waiting for Liam to fetch the absent ball before dotingly following the commands of his master until they reached their destination.

The walk over, Reebok lay lethargically amongst the plush of his pet bed. Today, unlike others, the adventure had taken its toll on his infantile body, particularly his usually spritely hind legs. They lay bent at foreign angles under the weight of his ginger frame.

"Tired, mate?" Liam asked his companion, hoping to receive some affection. The dog wearily rose to its feet, albeit fleetingly, before succumbing to a spell of



dizziness and falling back into his bed. “What’s the matter mate? You’re not usually clumsy.” Liam didn’t think much more of the issue, opting to leave Reebok in the safety of his bed.

The dog scanned his immediate environment, desperately searching for his water bowl. There it was, in its usual position by the glass sliding door. He lumbered from his pet bed, searching for the last of his energy and slunk his body towards the door. His heart pounded rapidly. It was as though his body was just then reacting to a run with Liam, *not* a lazy afternoon in the lounge room. The animal steadied himself, refocusing his eyes with a gentle shake of his head. His long, droopy ears flailed from left to right, but his vision remained a haze of navy, yellow, and dark gray. Strings of saliva fixed themselves to his flews, dangling tantalizingly close to the floating, wooden floorboards below. Reaching the bowl, Reebok collapsed his tongue into the tepid water, lapping mouthfuls in an attempt to sooth the tightening of his throat and airway. A guttural gurgle rose, deep within his stomach, erupting its contents in a multi-colored force across the lounge room floor, while the pooch’s enlarged esophagus prevented the intake of further liquid. Simple movements he once took for granted now seemed impossible. The weight of his legs was unbearable, and, with Liam preoccupied in another room, the dog surrendered to his pain, hopelessly crumpled on the floor beside his water bowl and a sea of regurgitation.

### *Homo sapiens*

“You’ve got to do something. Please.” Liam begged, almost crying as he stormed open the entry door to his local veterinary clinic. As a single man in his midthirties, his dog was his everything. Where his peers plastered the online forums with photographs of babies and investment properties up north, Liam’s account merely demonstrated his complete adoration for his best friend. With considerable strength, Liam carried his beloved friend to the receptionist’s counter, careful not to tread on the recovering Kelpie lounging across the cool tiled floor of the waiting room. He gazed into the eyes of Reebok; no longer the exuberant window to his happiness. He offered little recognition to his master as his head drooped to the side while Liam fumbled with the wallet inside his shorts, desperate to exchange details as quickly as possible.

After a length of time that was longer than it had any right to be, the vet summoned Liam. For every accelerated beat of its heart, the man sensed his companion was slipping further into the infinite ending of the afterlife.

“Come on big guy, let’s get you in there.” He bundled the dog into his arms, the vomit-laden beach towels providing him a physical barrier. Reebok looked

up to his master, offering a sigh and a whimper.

Following the vet's calm, matter-of-fact instructions, Liam placed Reebok onto the stainless-steel bench. He hated her for her complete lack of emotion – for her lack of decency and compassion. She was young. Straight out of studying, Liam guessed. “How the hell could she be so immune to emotion?” Liam thought. Again, he followed her instructions, replaying the morning's events out loud, stressing the symptoms he witnessed.

### *Canis lupus familiaris*

Reebok peered at the inconsolable master standing over him. The rough hands once used to stroke and gently pat him were now tightly clenched and clammy. This trip to the clinic hadn't been like all the others that ended with a cuddle and a liver treat. No, this time was different. There was something much more sinister about this visit. Reebok welcomed his master's unsteady hand, momentarily freeing himself from agony to experience a final moment of happiness, of connection with his human world. A cold, sharp needle entered his body under the direction of the veterinarian. He lacked the energy or determination to bare teeth at the act, allowing instead for his body's muscles to completely relax. The heart that raced moments earlier dramatically ceased.

### *Ixodes scapularis*

“My brothers,” Jed announced to the congregation surrounding him on the knotted eucalypt branch. “At 3 P.M., we received word that Tyrese was successful in his mission to fell one of the hairy beasts. Though we know the condition of the dog, Tyrese's condition is currently unknown. It is our understanding he entered the ear canal and remained there until the beast's demise. Together with his wife, and thousands of children, we pray that his successful return to the branch is possible.”

### *Homo sapiens*

His pillow had borne the weight of his emotion for almost a week. The time had passed excruciatingly slow, paining him as dog toys and treats remained throughout their home. The wounds were far too raw to even consider moving his bowl and favorite chew toy.

The sharp ring of his doorbell garnered his attention and removed him from his mourning. Liam sat up from the supine position in bed and trudged down his

tilled hallway toward the front door. He was still dressed in clothes from the day before, but his appearance was insignificant at the moment. He opened the door; the fresh morning air greeted his stubble-covered face, and he felt better than he had for days. A box, roughly the size of a DVD box set, was positioned on his brown, leaf-covered welcome mat. He carefully picked up the box and took it to a wooden bench seat overlooking the garden that sporadically grew majestic sunflowers. Carefully still, he opened the small box and removed a ceramic urn. It was grey, dusted with flecks of ginger reminiscent of Reebok's coat, and had a small, metal medallion affixed to its narrow neck.

“Reebok, a better man than I.”

## **Biographies**

**Dwale** is a semi-sapient congeries of dross and shadow-play who walks the path illumed wherever the moon touches the sea.

**Kageichi Kagi**—I found that I really liked writing stories when I was about 14 or so, writing fanfiction was my beginning and then I began to try my hand at original stories. I found a lot of people liked my work and even more in the furry fandom. I hope to publish a book that everyone can enjoy and maybe change the world for the better even if its a small change. That's a dream I'm willing to strive for no matter what!

**Mary E. Lowd** is a science-fiction and furry writer in Oregon. She's had four novels published by FurPlanet, including the *Otters In Space* series, and more than ninety short stories published in various markets. Her fiction has won an Ursa Major Award and two Cóyotl Awards. She's also the editor for ROAR Volumes 6 - 9.

**BanWynn (Suta) Oakshadow** is 54yo hermit, writer, husband, father and Cancer. His turn-ons include sushi, long walks in the woods, interesting people that he can exploit as characters in his stories and tilting at philosophical windmills. His turn-offs are people who use bit-torrent rather than buying books, food that doesn't excite and fear of new experiences. He loves writing, but despises finding good homes for his work and is attempting to train his Border Collie to become his agent. He lives on a little 400yo farm in a forest in southern Sweden with his husband, dog and lots of mice who have set up a nightly NASCAR circuit in the ceiling over their bed.

**Timothy Pulo** is a husband, father, educator and avid writer. He is involved in many aspects of pop-culture and enjoys referencing these in his writing.

**Bruno Schafer** is a writer and historian who lives in Indiana. He has been writing since he was fairly young and this passion for writing has stayed with him to this day. He writes a mish-mash of different genres that have varying themes and ideas behind them. His writing inspirations include Kenji Miyazawa, Richard Adams, and Kenneth Oppel.

**Hakuzo Sionnach** is a white fox with grey ear tips and tails. He follows the Shinto ways.