

The Portal

A cool collection of short stories and poems

*We now have stories/poems in Spanish!

Halloween Edition



Hunan Eats By DiVitto Kelly

"What the hell's this?" screamed Pauly as he spooned around for something recognizable in his bowl of wonton soup. "It looks like there's a freaking eyeball in here."

"We're at a Chinese restaurant in the middle of nowhere," replied Johnny, slurping up his large bowl of egg drop soup. The neon sign outside the shabby white storefront flickered Hunan Eats in bold red letters.

"Tough it out -- it's probably just a chunk of wonton or piece of tofu. You really need more culture in your life."

"Don't tell me I ain't cultured, 'because I'm cultured." Pauly clammed up as shifted his body in annoyance.

Johnny poured himself some warm tea and took a sip. "The Olive Garden is not exactly my idea of cultured, so stop sulking just because I got to choose where we got to eat."

The waitress came over and picked up the soup bowls. "You don't care for soup, sir?" She eyed Pauly, seemingly disappointed.

"Sorry ma'am, I guess I'm just a Campbell's Chunky soup kind of guy."

Johnny rolled his eyes. "The soup was excellent; my compliments to the chef."

"That would be me," replied the woman, petite and middle aged, her crow black hair showing strands of gray. "I'm a lone wolf out here in Everglade City."

"I never trusted my husband to cook anything." She leaned in and whispered, "He drowned everything in soy sauce!" The woman gave off a chuckled snort and went back into the tiny kitchen. She returned seconds later with their dinner: chicken and broccoli for Pauly and General Tso's chicken – medium spicy for Johnny.

"It looks delicious, don't it Pauly?" probed Johnny.

Pauly took out his cellphone from his suit pocket and glanced at a text. His eyes furrowed. "Uh, yeah; it certainly does, ma'am. Thank you."

"Eat up both of you," she persisted. "You'll need your strength to find him." Both men looked at each other, taken aback.

"Find who?" asked Johnny, barely able to get the words out as he munched down on a sizable

piece of chicken. "This is good -- interesting flavor."

"That strange man," replied the woman. "He lives deep in the mangroves."

"I'm sorry – Christina is it?" said Pauly, reading her name tag. He squirmed a bit on the red vinyl chair creating a squeaky sound. "I'm afraid we don't know what you're talking about."

"Oh yes you do. I served up two people just like you last week. Same dark suits and dark hair. Both of you look like you get dress tips from Good Fellas." She broke into a gargantuan laugh. "Don't worry, I don't tell anybody."

Johnny wiped his mouth and took another sip of tea. "So why are we here, Christina?" His once polite smile evaporated before her eyes.

Pauly's empty stomach sang out like a pack of singing humpback whales from hunger, fumbling with the chopsticks like a barbarian. Before he could ask, the woman handed him a plastic fork.

Johnny finished off the tea like he was doing a shot of jack. He pulled the adjacent chair over with his foot and eyed Christina to sit down. "So why are we here again?"

Christina peered down at her lap. "I'm certain those two guys are dead, just like the other two who were here a month ago."

"Sounds like they got an army tucked away in that swamp," said Pauly, who managed the fork with much better ease.

"So who do you think killed 'em? Was it a single person, a group of guys, what?" persisted Johnny.

"It's not who," replied Christina, suddenly nervous, "but what."

"I'm not following you?" said Johnny. "What do you mean by what?"

Pauly barged in. So if it ain't a person, then you mean it's like some kind of animal? A big gator or croc?"

"I've been here two years, just me and this small restaurant along this empty stretch of road. I do well, especially from that one strange customer. I deliver food to him every week. Christina cleared her throat.

"It lives alone in the mangroves; places money under a broken terracotta pot." Her eyes got big. "I mean stacks of cash. He's scary, but very generous." She was shaking. "I've said too much already."

"Sounds like we may have ourselves a counterfeiting operation smack dab in the middle of the glades," thought Johnny.

"What does he – I mean it, look like? He's human, right? We're not talking some sort of X-Files crap, are we?" inquired Pauly, offering up an anxious laugh.

Johnny reached into his pocket and pulled out a crumpled up 4x6 picture. "Actually, this is the man we're looking for."

Christina got quiet. "Uh . . . I think that's him. What's he done?"

Pauly took out his wallet and showed the woman his ID. She stuttered. "You're a policeman?"

"Yes, we are ma'am," replied Pauly, now responding in an Army-seasoned voice. His real name was Paul Hackett, a seven-year vet with the Everglade City Police Department. He was a former soldier, having fought four years in Iraq. At five-foot eight with a slender build, he didn't look too imposing. Of course he had the necessary skills to kill a man in seconds.

"You make a lame mobster, Mr. Hackett," smiled Christina. "And what's your real name, big guy?"

Johnny smiled. "Detective Hue Jackson, ma'am. I'm originally from Palm Coast, but transferred here last year. I'm still trying to get used to these damn flies; they're a bitch and a half."

"More like two bitches, my friend," answered Christina. "By the way, dinner's on me."

"No can do," said Hackett. "That would constitute a bribe." He smiled and took out a pair of twenties. "Keep the change."

"So you think other people may have been here looking for this guy?" asked Jackson, a bear of a man standing six-foot two and topping the scale at 230 pounds.

"Uh huh. No one ever comes back. At his shack, you'll see. There's quite a few cars there too, some now rusted – no plates. I get scared sometimes especially at night when I drop off food."

"What does he usually order?" asked Jackson.

"Always the same thing . . . chicken chow fun with black bean sauce. And I mean a lot. It's one of my specialties." The two men stood up.

Hackett took another sip of tea and pushed in his chair. As the two men were about to leave the restaurant, Christina asked them a question.

"So what's he done?"

"Not he, Christina – she. What has SHE done?"

"It's a she?"

"Yes. You Christina Wan are under arrest for the murder of your husband, Tommy Wan and a prime suspect in four other missing persons. The picture I showed you IS your missing husband, correct?"

Christina remained silent then offered up a Cheshire grin. "I wouldn't say he's missing . . . completely."

Both men looked at each other, their guts curdling. They escorted the woman from the restaurant. Jackson placed the cuffs on her slender wrists and opened the back door of the black four-door sedan.

Hackett turned around, facing the restaurant owner. "Please don't tell me you put eyeballs in my soup."

"No eyeballs," she replied.

Hackett sighed. "Thank God."

"Just the one," answered Wan.

"My husband had lovely hazel eyes you know, but like I said, he was a horrible, horrible cook."

Hackett turned white as a marshmallow, placing his hand over his mouth in horror. He ordered his partner to stop the car. Hackett jumped outside where he proceeded to ralph next to a park bench. He came back moments later, his face full flushed.

Hackett coughed, regaining his composure. "Next time, it's the Olive Garden, okay?"

Jackson glanced in the rearview mirror. "I don't believe you."

Christina offered up a devilishly sharp grin. "I'm glad you enjoyed YOUR soup Detective. Personally, I never thought my late husband had good taste."



Attack of the Eye Creatures By DiVitto Kelly



Michael Nagle loved monster movies. Every Saturday night, the ten-year-old would camp out in the family den under a beautiful dark wood rectangular table, gazing up at the 25-inch Zenith color television. He'd even bring his worn Snoopy stuffed animal . . . just in case.

The boy's ritual started with mom and dad assisting with popping popcorn. He'd open a chilled Tiger Red soda pop and nestle under the elongated, six foot by three foot long table in a sleeping bag. It was the perfect place to view . . . and hide! Hey, watching scary movies was serious business.

The television program started with the always effervescent hippy Cool Ghoul, the official monster movie host. He served up a smorgasbord of classic monster movies; both A and B material, mostly the latter.

Michael took on every monster movie there was: Classic Universal monsters like Frankenstein, Dracula, and the Mummy. Check. Rampaging Japanese monsters like Godzilla and Mothra? Piece of cake. Flying saucers filled with alien creatures ready to conquer earth? Bring it on! Supersized insects the length of school buses? Por favor!

Oh sure, there were monster movie moments that scared the heck out of Michael, especially one titled "Night of the Demon," a 1957 British gem of a film that gave him nightmares for months, especially the scene where the towering creature displays those monstrous claws for the victim to see. Yikes!

There were other movies where Michael remembered only bits and pieces, probably because he was hiding under his red and blue checkered blanket during the scary parts. In one horror movie, possibly a Hammer film, a man is peering through a pair of cursed antique binoculars. Suddenly, while focusing, spikes jut out and skewer the man's eyeballs. Double yikes!

Through the blood, gore, and actors dressed up in rubber monster suits, Michael's mom and dad were surprisingly Laissez-faire about the whole thing. Dad occasionally wandered in to watch the older movies like the Invisible Man and The Thing from Another World. Sometimes Michael's seventeen-year-old brother, Brian, would stumble in after shooting night hoops with the Healy twins and tease the ten-year-old for being scared, but for the most part, Michael didn't care. He owned Saturday night, from 10 pm until the witching hour.

Michael also loved his collection of Aurora monster movie models, some with glow in the dark pieces. The one with the Phantom of the Opera was especially cool and creepy.

His room was filled with monster models, at least seven were perched up on a long book shelf; another two sitting on his desk. For some, watching monster movies was simply a young person phase. Others, it became a passion. For

Michael, it was as much fun as playing baseball or watching the Big Red Machine at Riverfront Stadium. But there was one film in particular that not only frightened Michael, giving him multiple nightmares, but nearly killed him.

It started out as any other Saturday evening double feature. The first film was one of Michael's favorites, "Them," starring James Whitmore and James Arness. Michael tried to get his mom to watch, but she already had a fear of ants, so anything featuring ones the size of Cadillacs was met with a resounding no.

The second movie was called "Attack of the Eye Creatures," a 1965 science fiction film featuring a flying saucer that lands somewhere in the deep, dark woods – the only kind that really mattered in horror films. Multi-eyed alien creatures soon terrorize a bunch of unsuspecting teenagers making out in the – yeah, you guessed it, the deep dark woods. Maybe it was the similar landscape of his own house: lots of trees, and lots of creepy darkness. Michael's imagination ran wild.

From his two-story house nestled up on a slight hill, Michael had a clear view of the surrounding back yard, five acres in all. Sometimes at night, he would open his bedroom window and absorb the potpourri of sounds -- from croaking frogs to chirping crickets. Throw in an owl, barking dog, or screeching cat and you had a nighttime symphony. And because there were few houses around, the blackened night offered stargazers like Michael a perfect view of the constellations.

One night, Michael couldn't sleep due to another nightmarish dream of Godzilla gazing through

his bedroom window and trying to devour him. Every room he ran to, Godzilla seemed to track him down. Somehow, he always ended up in the basement with nowhere to go. He looked at his clock; it was nearing two in the morning. At least it wasn't a school night, he thought. Michael stumbled over to the bedroom window and opened it. Surprisingly, he didn't hear a sound. He scanned the whole backyard; nothing. There were two rolling hills to the right of the house that he and his friends used for sledding in the winter. At the bottom ran a narrow creek. Last summer, Michael and his friends built a makeshift wood bridge, about ten feet long, over the widest part of the slow-moving water. With nothing in sight, he closed the window and finally fell back to sleep.

The next evening, Michael was up late again, but finally fell asleep, a comic book lying open on his chest. This time, he had a different nightmare. This one involved dreaded eye creatures marching up the backyard hill towards his house eager to kill. Michael twisted and turned. He finally woke up, covered in blankets. Sometimes he wished he didn't like horror films so much, but he just wasn't into the Wonderful World of Disney stuff.

Dropping the comic book on the floor, Michael walked over to the window, nearly tripping over his Rawlings baseball glove. He hesitated, peering outside first. Michael noticed a glowing light that seemed to fade in and out far off in the deep woods. He slowly lifted the window open, trying to be as quiet as possible. Lately, the window had developed an irritating squeak. Not a sound this time.

Michael reached for his binoculars on the top of his dresser,

but stopped cold when he brought them up to his eyes, thoughts of a certain horror film flashed before him. Instead, he took out his telescope, nothing fancy, a Christmas gift from three years ago. He focused the telescope as best he could, first everything appeared blurry. "Alright, much better," he said. Hold on, there was something.

"What's that moving?" Michael whispered to himself, keeping his worried voice low. It was early October. Half the leaves were still attached to tree limbs, a few in multicolored form. It was hard to make out the object.

Michael's door creaked open, Michael turned, startled. "Ugh! Oh, it's you Karloff." The tabby was named after one of Michael's favorite horror actors, Boris Karloff, star of Frankenstein and the Mummy.

The cat hopped up on the desk next to the open window. Gazing outside, the feline took in a heavy sniff then hissed. It jumped off the desk and ran back out of the room. Michael panned the backyard with the telescope; he still didn't see anything. Then, near where the glowing was, he saw something move . . . lumbering, slowly, but it was definitely something.

First there was one, then another, and off to the side, a slightly shorter one appeared. "Eye creatures?" Michael uttered to himself. "No way."

There they were; Michael's latest and greatest nightmare in full bloom, a reality. The stoic creatures were dirty white with black, pancake-sized black splotches all over. They resembled the Michelin man with warts. He stepped back, pacing in circles, petrified. He darted back to the window. The eye creatures were inching closer,

struggling now to get up the grassy incline.

"If this is real, then bright lights should kill them," Michael thought, referring to the film's finale, but where could he find a bright light? His brief life could be over in minutes! The boy couldn't take his eyes off the menacing, slow-moving beasts. Michael looked into the telescope again. He could barely make out the dozen eyes and fingerless limbs. Suddenly, one pointed its cumbersome arm in Michael's direction.

"Oh no, they saw me!" gulped the boy. "I've got to do something!" Michael had only one idea – a flashlight, but he wasn't about to confront this nightmare up close and personal with a lousy flashlight. But he had no choice; he had to save himself and his family. This included his younger sister, sound asleep in her all-pink bedroom, and his older brother -- always annoying to the tenth degree.

Michael ran downstairs into the kitchen. He peeked outside through the window above the sink and could see the creatures reaching the top of the hill. They were almost there! "What do I do?" Michael begged. Then the light bulb went on.

Michael remembered how the creatures met their demise in the film – headlights, bright headlights from a car! All Michael had to do was wake up mom and dad, have them back up their cars from the garage, drive them into the direction of the oncoming frontal assault, and voila, no more eye creatures! "Piece of cake!" Michael exclaimed.

"Hold on, I can't wake them up; they'll think I'm having a nightmare and then they won't let me watch monster movies anymore!" he postulated. I'm doomed," sounding

like Linus from *It's the Great Pumpkin Charlie Brown* Halloween special.

Michael pulled back the kitchen curtain again. To his horror, an eye creature was staring right at him, raving and groaning. The dozen-plus soulless black eyes glared at the boy. Michael jumped back, scrambling. The creature pounded on the window. The boy snagged his brother's car keys dangling from the wall mounted key holder. He sprinted down stairs into the basement then to the garage. There, his brother's recently polished apple red Volkswagen Beetle convertible glistened from the lighting above.

The automatic garage door opener sat on top of the black vinyl dashboard. Michael pressed the button; the door gently rattled and rose. Michael often observed his brother starting the car when he took him to baseball practice; hopefully he learned enough to actually drive it. The ten-year-old turned the key, starting the car. He revved the engine then . . .

"How do I do this?" Michael panicked. His dad often let him drive the beastly orange Jacobson riding mower, and on rare occasions, even let him steer the Oldsmobile 98 – the ultimate in automotive land yachts around the neighborhood, but this shifty thing was a different animal.

"Okay, take your time," said Michael as he took in a deep breath. He remembered his brother pressing on the brake pedal then shifting the stick thingy. Did that sound right? Michael placed his bare foot on the appropriate pedal then fiddled with the stick shift. He crossed his fingers as he placed it in first gear.

The car practically leaped from the garage like a prowling tiger, throwing Michael back hard against the seat. He quickly turned left to where the eye creatures were advancing.

Michael bore down on the three eye creatures standing in the back yard next to the swing set. Searching for the high beams, he accidentally turned on the wipers. The radio turned on, blaring *Light My Fire* by the Doors, as he drove on the bumpy backyard turf. The three monsters raised their bulbous limbs and began . . . waving?

"Stop! What are you doing!" screamed his brother, his voiced muffled as he struggled to pull off the costume head.

Michael slammed on the brake pedal, coming to a sudden halt. The boy flashed the headlights wildly, flicking them on and off. Nothing.

"You're supposed to die!" yelled Michael, freaking out. The convertible top was down so it was just a matter of seconds before he'd succumb to the deadly eye creature's frontal assault.

The boy watched in horror as the creatures appeared to rip their own heads off. "Oh my God!" Michael cried out in horror. "Huh?"

"You almost destroyed my car, booger snot!" screamed Brian. His two friends, Tim and Terry Healy, a pair of blond-haired bone headed twins, were laughing hysterically.

"I take it you're not eye creatures?" asked Michael, now starting to feel like a complete moron. Michael's brother often enjoyed teasing him about his obsession, as he liked to put it, about all things monsters.

"No duh, crap head," said Brian, looking at his friends, grinning. "Nice job, huh?" All three were quite proud of their artistic skills.

"Who knew papier mache could look so threatening!" added Terry, spouting the words in a goofy, over the top French accent.

"You're a real barf bag!" said Michael, looking around at the pranksters. "You needed six of your friends just to scare me?"

"Six?" asked his brother, "What do you mean six?" Michael started counting off, starting with his older brother and two friends, and the three coming up the hill.

"It's just me and the Healy twins," Brian replied, "What are you talking about?"

"Behind you?" pointed Michael, beginning to feel anxious again. His brother and two friends turned around.



"I don't know who they are," said Brian, looking over his shoulder. "The joke's over folks; time to go home." No answer. The three figures moved closer, making strange sounds like a gargling fountain. They kept coming, arms outstretched in evil intent. Over their shoulder, the four boys spotted a deep yellow light, fading in and out from the darkened woods. Closer they came, now mere feet away.

"Maybe we should get out of here," said Michael, directing his brother to get in the passenger seat, Tim and Terry leaping into the back of the car. "Hurry!"

Michael drove the car in a looping circle, bringing the car face to face with the menacing creatures, a modest hint of fury in their numerous, beady spider eyes.

"High beams! I need to turn on the high beams!" yelled Michael. His brother reached over awkwardly and turned them on in a split

second. The creatures raised their clumsy appendages over their deformed, marshmallow-esque faces, doing their best to shield themselves from the penetrating rays of death, but to no avail.

The two stream of light met the creatures head on. One by one they began to dissolve, slowly burning down into a grayish ash like spent charcoal. Stunned, Michael and his brother looked at each other. The towering Healy twins covered in the back seat. Michael parked the car. He and his brother got out and walked to the edge of the hill.

Suddenly, a pulsating highlighter green glow appeared from the woods followed by a deep, humming sound. Like a reverse shooting star, the flying saucer lifted off the forest ground and torpedoed off into space. The Healy brothers took off for home not looking back. The two stood in dead silence simply gazing at the stars.

“So what do you think . . .” uttered Michael.

His brother barged in. “No comment.”

“But it could be . . .”

“No comment,” replied Brian.

The two went inside the house and back to sleep, or at least Michael tried to. For the remainder of the evening, he sat in a chair parked by the bedroom window, blanket and binoculars in his lap.

The following Saturday evening, it was raining, with a heavy dose of lightning and thunder mixed in. Michael and his older brother Brian were savoring their popcorn, soda and a double helping of horror flicks. They survived the first one, The *Monolith Monsters*, but not now things were about to get serious. The second one was the black and white original, “*Night of the Living Dead*.”

The two watched as a pack of zombies munched down on their hapless victim. Michael was partially hidden under his customary blanket. Brian squirmed on the sofa. Out of nowhere, Dad poked his head in, startling both sons. “Hey kids, tomorrow evening I’m grilling ribs!” Both kids groaned in unison.

Michael peeked over to Brian, noticed his older brother suddenly half hidden, clutching a small throw pillow. “Wanna borrow my Snoopy?”

“Uh, yeah . . . thanks.”

***Writer’s note:** In the early 1990’s, I would later see “*Attack of the (the) Eye Creatures*” on the television program *Mystery Science Theater 3000*, which did a wonderful job lampooning this motion picture debacle. Little did I realize this film, which had given me countless horrible nightmares as a child, would be considered one of the worst films ever made. It now scares me for other reasons.



TRICK
OR
TREAT



Samhain
By Rick Weber

It was the Iron Age and the Romans had just entered this part of Gaul. The end of summer was upon them and Cuinn was helping his father Briag to finish a hay rick, a thatched pile of hay, near the family home in what would later be called Scotland. The harvest had been good. A storage pit had already been built and stocked with the crops to get their family through the winter. They were almost done as the sun began to set and Briag addressed his son.

“Tomorrow is Samhain. Will ye be frolicking with your friends?”

“I will,” Cuinn uttered with a bit of reluctance in his voice. He felt he had outgrown things, such as, this new Roman custom of bobbing for apples with other children. Cuinn was maturing and knew this would be his last year for such frivolity.

Cuinn did enjoy the other rituals associated with the Gaelic New Year.

“I will also help chase the evil spirits away,” he added in a more assertive tone. “May I use the head of the sheep we slaughtered for my costume?”

“You may,” his father replied with a slight smile on his heavily bearded face. “Will you be dancing between the bonfires tomorrow night?”

“Yes, father. I want to make sure that only the good spirits are with us on Samhain. I hope grandfather Padruig can visit us when the walls between our worlds are at their thinnest.”

“We can only hope. We will have a place set for him at the table. It has been almost a year since he died. I do miss him.”

Then looking up to the gray overcast sky, Briag said, “We have to get the hay ricks finished for the animals before the weather becomes dark and cold.”

Briag and Cuinn headed to their home; a byre, a stone structure with a thatched roof which served part as their home and part as a stable for the animals they were keeping through the winter. Their descendents two thousand years later would no doubt find this arrangement unhealthy and repulsive but at this time it was a necessary arrangement. Even though they used peat to heat their home, it alone did not provide enough warmth during the winter. The animals needed a place to stay and their owners needed their body heat to help keep them warm during the season of darkness.

Sorcha, Cuinn’s mother, was inside and prepared a sparse supper for them. “We’ll be eating plenty tomorrow at the Vigil of

Samhain,” Sorcha told Cuinn and Briag as they entered the byre.

“I see you have hazelnuts set aside. Will you be asking the druids to tell our fortunes in the New Year?” Cuinn asked.

“I may,” Sorcha responded as she doled out the evening meal to Cuinn and his father.

“Let’s eat!” Briag bellowed. “We need our rest tonight. Tomorrow we have to bring our herd down from the pasture and into the byre before the vigil.”

“We will have our feast tomorrow,” Sorcha informed them. “The sheep slaughtered by you and your father will give us more than enough to eat. I will prepare more of your favorite treats but don’t ask me which ones. I want that to be a surprise.”



The days were getting shorter. Beltane, the season of light, was almost over. Samhain, the season of darkness, would begin the next night. Beltane and Samhain were the principal seasons of their year. Unlike their descendants whose day would begin at dawn, this family’s day along with the other ancient Gaels began at dusk, symbolizing not an end but a new beginning. The vigil of Samhain provided a number of things; a chance to talk with the dead, the opportunity to cast off evil or mischievous spirits, and to look at a new beginning. For them, Samhain was the more important of the two seasons.

The next morning, Briag and Cuinn moved the livestock from the pasture and placed them in the byre. They also erected another

hay rick to feed their animals during the dark months. As dusk was beginning to settle, Briag extinguished the fire in their hearth and Cuinn placed an unlit candle in the west window of the byre. It would be lit later that evening to guide the spirit of Padruig to them for the feast.

The food had all been prepared by Sorcha and at the table in the byre on a cool, crisp, night they would eat. A separate place had been there set for Padruig. Their neighbors also had places set for the ancestors in their homes. These next two nights would be the most challenging of the year when it came to the spirit world. For the most part, everyone would stay inside as not to have too much contact with the dead. This would not prohibit them from participating in the bonfires’ ritual later that evening. It would not bar them from calling on the ghosts of their dead ancestors, but they also had malevolent spirits to deal with.

In the middle of a clearing in the forest, Cuinn and Briag observed Lanval, an old Druid, putting together two piles of wood which would be the bonfires as part of the night’s ritual. Lanval was assisted by two young Druids who were new to the area. The Celts were in awe of the Druids and the mystical powers they possessed. Some from the community had lined up to have Lanval tell their fortunes for the coming year. Sorcha hoped that a druidess would be there so that she might get a potion for what was ailing her, a mild aching, but persistent problem in her back and joints.

Cuinn had joined his friends to don their costumes to chase the evil spirits away dancing between the bonfires. The ceremony was called

to order by Lanval as the day ended. Lanval announced the end of Beltane and the beginning of Samhain. As part of the ritual he lit the bonfires with the help of the other druids. Cuinn and his friends in the animal skin costumes and animal heads danced between the fires.

As the ritual progressed, a person from each home went up to the fire. As head of his household Briagg took a flaming piece of wood and headed to his home. There he relit their hearth with the burning branch and the candle in the west window of the byre to guide his father's spirit to the feast.

As Briag was doing this, Sorcha walked between the fires throwing in some bones from the sheep Briag and Cuinn had slaughtered into each of them. She did this, not only, to help drive the evil spirits away from the Samhain ritual, but also, to help prepare Padruig's spirit pass on to the world of the dead. This was part of the purification rite of Samhain.



Winter would soon be upon them and the days would become shorter and colder. Cuinn grabbed a leaf falling off a tree on his way back to the byre with his mother. Briag later asked him, "Do you know what that means? It means you will have luck in the New Year."

"I hope so," Cuinn replied enthusiastically. "I hope that we have a better harvest in the year to come than what we had this past year."

"We did not do badly," Briag said with a note of caution in his voice. "You best not say too much. We

don't want the gods to think that we are ungrateful."

In their home, the family partook of their Samhain feast.

"We best eat while the food is still fresh," Sorcha instructed. With that the family ate and prayed for the spirit of Padruig to visit them.

Suddenly, a loud wind was heard coming up outside the byre. The three of them looked at the window sill where the candle was burning. Before anyone could speak, the candle's flame was extinguished. Sorcha leaned over to her husband touching his hand and whispering in his ear, "Briag, you father has passed on to the world of the dead. I hope he left us some kind of message before he departed."

"I hope so, too," Briag responded. "If my father is of the same nature in the afterlife as he was in this one, I am sure that it may take us a while to find it."

That winter was long and cold, but the family fared well under the circumstances. They were fortunate that they lost no livestock during Samhain and even a couple of calves were born late in this season of darkness. Some snow had fallen but it was not much. As Beltane neared and the days became longer, Sorcha remarked to Briag, "Samhain has been kind to us this time and we even have a couple more head of livestock than we did last year. I think your father left us this as his message."

"Maybe, he did," Briag said with a smile as Cuinn looked on.

Samhain to them was over and the festival of Beltane was at hand. Bonfires would again be built by the druids and the walls between the worlds of the living and the dead would become thin again. Briag and Cuinn took their herd out of the

byre and let them up to the pasture for the summer. During Samhain, Cuinn experienced changes of his own. He had grown and was almost as tall as Briag. Facial hair was beginning to sprout on his face. Soon, he would have a beard as thick as his father's. As they led the livestock up to the pasture, Cuinn spoke with Briag about Beltane.

"Father, when will we be planting the seeds for this year's crops? I think that we should do it soon if we want to make the most of this season of light."

Briag looked at Cuinn and thought to himself, "My son has become a man." Briag could only smile and nod at Cuinn.

That Beltane was the best one Briag, Sorcha, and Cuinn ever had. Their harvest was bountiful and when Samhain came, they had much to thank the good spirits for, especially Padruig, who seemed to be keeping watch over them. Cuinn did not don a costume to chase the evil spirits away. Instead, he took bones from a calf he had slaughtered with Briag and placed them into one bonfire, walking over to the other, and doing the same. Cuinn hoped, as did Briag and Sorcha, to be visited by Padruig's spirit.

A few years later Cuinn took a wife. They subsequently had children of their own bringing them up in the Gaelic tradition. The seasons of Samhain and Beltane were observed. Cuinn's children bobbed for apples and wore costumes on Samhain just like he did when he was young. Briag and Sorcha were proud of their grandchildren.

More time passed and one Samhain was bittersweet. Shortly after their youngest grandchild was born in the middle of Beltane, Briag

passed away suddenly from some malady that would be given its name centuries later. Sorcha missed him deeply. That summer came to an end and the festival of Samhain was again upon them. The feast had been prepared. The druids had readied the bonfires. One of the druids opened the festival but, it was not Lanval. He had fallen victim to a plague a few years earlier prompting some to say that Lanval had sacrificed himself for their benefit to chase away the evil spirits responsible for the pandemic.

Cuinn had taken a burning piece of wood from a bonfire to their home where he lit the peat in the hearth and also lit a candle in the west window of the byre. The rest of the family returned from the bonfires and they had their feast, that year with a place set for Briag, as well as, Padruig. As they enjoyed their meal together, they heard a great wind stirring up outside their home and without saying anything, turned their heads in unison to the window where the lit candle was. As the wind reached its crescendo, the candle was blown out and the wind immediately became calm.

“My father’s spirit has passed on to the other world,” Cuinn told his family. “I wish him peace.”

“All of us wish him peace,” said Sorcha with a smile.

Sorcha, Cuinn, and generations of their descendents would pass away over time but, Samhain would evolve over the centuries into the season to be known as ALL HALLOWS’ EVE.



Ghost of All Hallows Eve From the book, *Skeleton Key*

By Edward White/CP Bialois
<http://cpbialois.wordpress.com/>

Hanging above the fire, the cauldron bubbled as though it were alive. The vapors climbing from it filled the small room with a pungent smell. The lone figure in the room stood bent over the edge of it, stirring its contents. Eliza Wilkes was as old as the small town of Follets and twice as twisted with age. When she finished stirring the cauldron’s contents, she hung the ladle off to the side on a set of steel hooks embedded in the large tree serving as the eastern wall of her home. She slowly straightened as she stepped away from the hearth, but her back remained bent as her aged and weathered face shone in the dim firelight emanating from beneath the cauldron.

The land had once been a place of peace and remembrance, but that had been before the settlers came to destroy the balance of things. For over seventy years, she watched and waited for her power to grow. The conjuring required strength one could only imagine. Once she was prepared, Eliza had only to wait for the time when she’d be able to avenge the spirits of

yesteryear. Once a year a day came when all spirits, great and small, were free from the confines of eternity. During that one day, she would be able to summon the most powerful and deadly of spirits to do her bidding and restore that which had been taken. For centuries, that day had been celebrated by the Celts as Samhain and by Christians as All Saints Day. It was a day when the dead were celebrated for their lives and the living looked forward to a new year. Those practices were mostly forgotten as a wretched people from a far off land destroyed the truths that had bound the worlds together. She could hear the intertwined cries from the dead and the land as it twisted in agony. The sound they made cut deep into her heart as a wailing infant would cut into its mother’s. Those cries would soon be answered in ways the heathens now walking the land could never understand.

Eliza trudged across the dirt floor of her small home that stood no bigger than eight feet across and fashioned mostly from mud, tree branches, and stones. Despite it’s size, it had served her well. She stopped when she reached a small table in the middle of the room. The table was constructed by binding four short boughs of wood together with a thick dried animal skin stretched over to serve as the top. Each wooden bough, or legs, were driven into the ground until the table stood even at four feet high. It was the sole piece of furniture she ever owned and was nearly as old. Due to its age, the animal skin had begun to tear.

A polished human skull sat in in the center of the table, its eyes were illuminated by a pair of candles sitting inside it. The shadow it cast danced eerily across the

walls and lit Eliza's face in a ghastly hue as she neared it. Reaching out a withered hand, she carefully lifted the skull in her claw-like grip. The candles fluttered briefly, but continued to burn as she knew they would. The power contained in them was greater than any she ever felt, for they had been crafted from the fat of the greatest animal of all. They burned with the savage power of the grizzly bear as she tipped it towards the cauldron, pouring the wax in. The ferocity of the beast roared as its essence mixed with the contents and swirled through the thick composite within the cauldron. Her work nearly complete, Eliza cast her head back and, with a final surge of adrenaline, threw herself into the cauldron.

The night was cool and crisp as Wilfred Clemmons stepped out from his office and locked the door. The day had been an active one for the Mayor. Not only were the Halloween festivities in full swing, but his office had been filled with people all day with complaints from their sheds being toilet papered to burning bags of dog poop on their doorsteps. Throughout the day, he fought to contain his chuckles. He had fond memories of doing much the same things in his childhood, but as the mayor of Follets, he had the obligation to hear any and all issues that stemmed from his beloved town.

The one that stuck out in his mind was a letter his office received that morning from the oldest member of their community. Written in what he thought was blood and on the dried skin of a chicken, Eliza Wilkes had again proven to be a bit of an eccentric. "Kooky Wilkes" was the name most people in Follets gave her due to her antics. The letter was a demand for the people

of Follets to seek forgiveness for their sins against the natural order of things and leave the town at once. Many of the town's council members thought it was utter madness that such a woman would speak things of that nature. It wasn't unusual for her to make proclamations, accusations, or even demands around Halloween, as she'd done every year for as long as he could remember. For that reason, it went by without worry but plenty of ridicule was heaped towards the strange old woman.



With casual mirth, he pulled the collar of his expensive *Jim Bean* winter coat tight around his neck. The night was beautiful, as the entirety of stars high above were easily visible. When the sun's light reflected off the portion of the moon still visible, the street lights proved to be of little help as the land was cast in a ghostly white glow. It was clear any warmth the ground had gathered from the afternoon sun quickly dissipated into the night sky and left everything below as cold as an alien landscape. Wilfred chuckled to himself at the sight. He could live with the cold as long as every night was as beautiful as that one.

With every exhale, a large cloud of vapor appeared before him, the sight of his breath was a definite sign winter had reached them early that year. Perhaps he shouldn't have walked that day, but he quickly brushed the thought aside. What good was a mayor of such a small town if he always hid behind the glass and steel of his car or the wooden door of his office? True, the night had become much colder than

he'd thought it would, but he'd survive. His home was less than a block away from the office, it wouldn't take him more than a minute or two to make his way there.

He stopped at the corner of the street and took a moment to take in the sight of his town as it was decorated for Halloween. Each house had their decorations up and they varied from one house to the next. Directly across from him at the other corner of Tucson Avenue, the Benjamin's had turned their yard into a huge haunted cemetery. Each of their styrofoam headstones had a carefully crafted cardboard cutout of ghosts, vampires, and even a wolf man attached to them in various poses.

To their right, the Johnson's had turned their kids' tree house into a haunted house and so on down the street. Small groups of children stopped at each house during their quest for more candy. Such a site caused a swelling of pride in him. This was his home and these were his friends and neighbors. He regularly boasted that Follets should be a tourist town during the winter holidays, but it was much too small for anything like that. Perhaps someday they could become what he envisioned, but for the time being they'd be happy with what they had.

As Wilfred was about to step down from the sidewalk and onto the road he paused when his eyes caught a glimpse of something toward the heavens. A moment earlier the sky had been clear and pristine, but as he watched it began to fill with a blackness that spread like spilled ink over a desktop. The sight of such a strange occurrence caused his breath to leak from his mouth without him noticing. As he

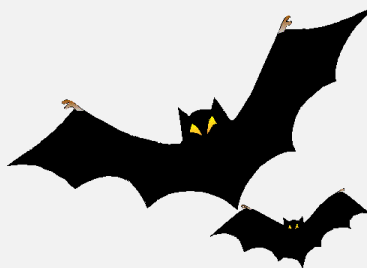
stood and watched it from his vantage point, the blackness moved down from the heavens until it filled the streets like the darkest night. The clear view he had a minute before had been replaced by something far worse than an empty void. The blackness was so thick and heavy he felt as though he was trying to move through a quagmire.

The coldness the blackness brought would've taken Wilfred's breath away had he remembered to take a breath before then. The freezing cold of the grave that fell upon them pierced his heavy coat as thousands of needles of ice cold air pricked his skin. The scream that would've normally sounded, came out as a quiet gurgle as he gasped in pain and fell to his knees. Through tears that froze instantly on his face, all he could see was the impenetrable blackness around him.

From all across Follets he could hear screams of those that hadn't lost their breath from the shock of seeing the blackness descend. While he couldn't see them, Wilfred knew the children were suffering just as he was. The thought of sharing their fate gave him the strength to take a breath, to try to scream out for help. The cold air pierced his lungs as it had the rest of his body. Wilfred clutched and tore at his chest in an effort to tear out the pain. Within seconds, he fell to the ground close to unconsciousness, the pain continuing to tear at him as he fought to breathe. The blackness over him seemed to move, it was pushed out of the way as something even darker stepped forward. The figure glided past the form of Wilfred Clemmons, it had no quarrel with those not of the One but their fates were not within its power to

control. Silently, it moved along unimpeded by such obstacles the people of that realm dealt with.

The figure moved through the town, its gaze was everywhere as it surveyed the result of its terror. The blackness had caused massive death as it spread through the streets and into the homes of the people of Follets. The only act of mercy the blackness was capable of was those that managed to survive the cold of death were left as little more than wraiths once the figure passed. Their lives ended in much the same way as they had lived them, in painful torment. The power of the blackness had its limits, as it had no effect on the figure. In fact, the figure wore the blackness as a cloak, using it as a shroud for its victims. The town of Follets had all but ceased to exist, there was but one house the figure needed to complete its work.



Just outside Follets' boundaries, Anita Bauman's house stood against the backdrop of the woods and overlooked the town an eighth of a mile away. The old whitewashed clapboard siding creaked as the wind blew across them. Like the rest of the town, Halloween was one of her favorite holidays, but Anita preferred to stay home at that stage of her life. Her kitchen was small and decorated in a 1950's style, meaning it was more functional than stylish, but it was very comfortable. For years, she

thought of replacing the old wall paper that peeled away in small pieces, but she'd never been able to bring herself to do so. There were too many memories in that paper, those walls, and even the town.

Anita sat in her kitchen, flipping through her family album. It had always been one of her favorite ways to pass time. Now in her seventies, she remembered when Follets had been in its early years. When everything about it was young and filled with hope. Anita paused as she looked down at the face of her mother. She'd been so beautiful when she was younger, but that was before the town was forced to fast. It'd been difficult on them, as it had the other families, but her mother never complained.

Even as she gave Anita the little nourishment she could, she cited the benefit of the group over the one. The beautiful face that had been captured in the photograph had withered and aged decades over the course of a few years.

Anita's memory of her mother was as yellow and bent as the edges of the photograph. She'd never seen her mother when she was beautiful. It was just one of the many things Anita regretted not seeing in the course of her life. As the child of the founding member of Follets, Anita weathered the early storms from neighboring towns at her mother's side. Without the help of friendly neighbors they survived. As she grew strong, the town grew in size over the years. Some residents had come there to get out of the city, but most were there by her invitation. She only wanted certain types in her town, none of the riffraff that plagued the cities.

The screams in the night air caught Anita's attention as she

turned the page of her photo album. Her eyes rose from the pictures of herself as a young child to the window next to the kitchen table. The black film that had lowered on the recluse town filled every hole and crease it could find. In many ways, it seemed to pulse as if it were alive. All that was visible was the blackness engulfing Follets, but she was sure she saw something within it move about the town. The sight of it chilled her to the bone. Filled with terror, she couldn't take her eyes off the shifting darkness as it pulsed and looked to be growing.

At first Anita thought it was her imagination that it had drawn closer to her home. When it touched her sidewalk leading from her house towards the town she closed the photo album and used the table to push herself to her feet. She was more certain than ever that she had seen something within the dark mist move about of its own free will. A voice deep inside her screamed she should know what it was that had come for them, but she didn't. She could only back away from the window and the terrible view as the blackness drew closer to her home and to her.

As she watched, the blackness moved over her house in an oily way, not as a vapor would. In seconds, the power to the house flickered and died, causing her to look around in barely controlled terror. She reached out and felt for the walls until her hands found the familiar wallpaper. With short, terrified steps, Anita moved away from where she had been standing in front of the window. Once her hands rested on the familiar paneling of the kitchen's back wall, she stepped into the opening that led into the main hallway to her right. It led through the heart of the

house and ended at the back door. Certain she could make a run for it, Anita let out a small breath. When she drew in another she noticed the temperature within her home had dropped to almost freezing. Thinking it funny how she hadn't noticed before, Anita began to wonder what caused the temperature to drop when she heard a sudden sound like a cloth lightly brushing across the floor. Though she couldn't see it, she knew it had come from the hallway. Fear seized her in a vice-like grip that threatened to crush the life out of her.

After what felt an eternity, Anita managed to take a breath, but it came in gulps as her body convulsed with fear. Somehow she summoned up as much of her courage as she could, "Who are you? What do you want?" She hoped to sound authoritative, but instead her query came out as a faint hiss. The hair on the back of her neck stood on end when a faint whisper of wind blew across her face. Too terrified to move, she stood motionless. Anita wanted to raise her hands to brush away the faint breeze, but she didn't dare. Anita knew any move on her part would let who, or what, was in her house know where she was. *But it already knows*, she thought. Despite the freezing cold, a bead of sweat ran down the side of her face. When it fell from her jowls it struck the wooden floor with the sound of a dropped marble. The tear had frozen solid as soon as it lost contact with her skin.

Anita's breath began to quicken and the pounding of her heart echoed in her ears. Any thought that the blackness was a thing of nature left her mind as her eyes failed to adjust to the lack of light.

She may as well have been blind, for all the good her eyes did her. The few seconds she'd been in the dark felt like hours, she wanted it to end.

"Just do what you came here to do!" The force of her scream surprised her; she hadn't expected more than a whisper to come out. The silence that followed was maddening. Why not just finish what had been started?



Anita always did what she'd been told to by the elders and her mother. For that, she'd been rewarded with the town of Follets when her mother moved on. Why then had such a terrible thing been sent to them? Why had it slaughtered so many of her children? She knew there was something there with her, but her fear kept her from doing anything to protect herself. Anita licked her lips, the fear she had fought to control had eaten away at her sanity and her body began to tremble. Like a wild animal that had been trapped, she could think of only one thing: escape. Turning away from the nameless figure she was certain stood before her, Anita leapt into the air. In less than a heartbeat, she transformed into a golden colored orb that hovered in the air. She tried to escape by rocketing through the air towards the window but the light was absorbed by the darkness. With a shriek of pain and terror, the orb disappeared along with the black shroud that had descended over the town.

The figure stood a foot away from Anita but made no move towards her. It had waited, for what it did not know but it was obedient

to the powers it had summoned. The powers told it that to finish it began the true power of the One had to be taken. Once the blackness took the light the figure's true form was shown. In that instant when the One had tried to flee, it had seen the true form of the figure. Too late, Anita realized she allowed her own destroyer to stay within the boundaries of her people's sanctuary. In seconds, her essence was drawn into the darkness and devoured, as her kind had done to countless others over the centuries.

When the darkness left, what stood in the doorway to Anita Bauman's kitchen was nothing more than an old woman. Eliza Wilkes had fulfilled her mission and returned balance between worlds. The natural world and unnatural were never meant to coexist. With the power of the other realms gone, her withered frame moved without the grace it had moments before as she turned away from the kitchen and moved towards the backdoor. Follets was no more, but soon others would move in and it would then be her duty to watch over them as she had always done. Perhaps they would choose a better name than Follets, the French word for Succubus.



Horror Movies as Morality Tales

By Jamie White

<http://www.jamiebmusings.webs.com>

For years, some people have looked at horror and other such genres as a lesser form of art. They believe these films are setting bad examples for children and must be kept from them at all costs. There are even some who, if given the opportunity, would keep everyone from watching horror movies and shows that deal with paranormal/supernatural topics as well.

What those who are opposed to them may not realize is, these same things they seek to censor are actually promoting some great values. Ones are that are sorely needed in today's reality show-obsessed culture that promotes "me" above all others. Let's look at the evidence...

Take *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, for example. Conservative groups were angry at the show for promoting witchcraft, demons, etc., overlooking the moral messages in each episode. The main characters, known as the Scooby Gang on the show, were teenagers who decide to take a stand and help out when they discover their new friend is sworn to save the world from evil.

Each week these characters risked their lives to make sure the world woke up the next day. Buffy even gave her own life willingly to stop an apocalypse once. What better message is there to send then this? When Willow gets involved with magic, she ignores the advice of the group's mentor and jumps too fast into her occult studies. She mocks Giles as being over-cautious and insists she knows exactly what she's doing. Years later, she became a victim of this power she craved and nearly destroyed the world. When Buffy decided to sleep with her vampire boyfriend, he turns into a psychotic monster due to a curse placed on him a long time ago that prevents him from really experiencing happiness. Year after year, the Scoobies worked to defeat evil and always won. Seems like a great message... if one looks beneath the surface.

The series *Tales from the Crypt* is a series full of moral lessons. In one episode, a husband who kills his wife's pets and stuffs them suffers the same fate when she discovers what he's done. A woman who kills her husband for the insurance money ends up falling victim to a deranged Santa on Christmas. Yet another episode features an extremely vain and greedy woman who agrees to a procedure that takes her beauty, leaving her old and wrinkled. She goes so far as to kill her boyfriend to get the money to buy her beauty back, but finds out she can't because the cops are on to her. She has to stay ugly to avoid going to jail. Bottom line? Bad people always get what's coming to them.

Slasher films are almost as good for this. The people who are selfish, into drugs, and other such activities

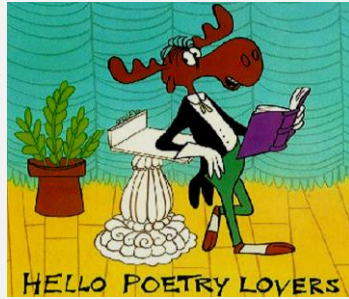
are usually the victims in these films. Only the hero and/or heroine (who have done none of these things) end up surviving the killing spree in the end. The movie *Jason X* even makes a very pointed joke about this. In one scene, the characters Jason is stalking use a hologram of several women asking if he likes drugs and sex to distract him. As soon as the questions are asked, the rage is clearly visible through the infamous hockey mask as he sets his sights on the "wicked" girls in the hologram, forgetting all about the real people he was stalking.

Another movie, *Scream*, has a self-proclaimed horror movie expert in it who lectures the others on this and similar other "rules" of the genre. *A Nightmare on Elm Street* is the same way. In the fourth film, one of the only characters to survive was the virginal and sweet Alice, a quiet girl who spends most of the movie trying to cope with an abusive parent and her increasing guilt over the loss of her friends.

So why is this genre considered to be bad for people and part of the corruption of today's youth? Because they contain material that some may find offensive. The people who carry on about the values these movies/shows are (possibly indirectly) promoting are not looking beyond the surface to see the symbolism in them and explain it to their sons and daughters. To me, that is the real problem with today's society: the inability to look beyond appearances and see what's really there. Maybe then, society would improve.



Portal Poetry Corner And a Haiku too!



The Veil Thins By Jamie White

Lanterns light the way
Strange creature takes to the streets
Mystery abounds

From Spirits of the Dead by Edgar Allan Poe

Be silent in that solitude,
Which is not loneliness — for then
The spirits of the dead, who stood
In life before thee, are again
In death around thee, and their will
Shall overshadow thee; be still.

It's Halloween by Jack Prelutsky

It's Halloween! It's Halloween!
The moon is full and bright
And we shall see what can't be seen
On any other night.
Skeletons and ghosts and ghouls,
Grinning goblins fighting duels,
Werewolves rising from their tombs,
Witches on their magic brooms.
In masks and gowns
we haunt the street
And knock on doors
for trick or treat.
Tonight we are the king and queen,
For oh tonight it's Halloween!

Healthy Halloween By Ana O. Cooper

Dark chocolate sells across the land
Trick or Treat is close at hand
Children come in search of food
They're coming to y'all's
neighborhood

And whosoever shall be found
That lets these hungry children
down
Must stand and face Ms. Obama's
spell
And rot inside a walnut shell

The sweet aroma's in the air
Of fruit, trail mix and crunchy
carrots
Celery sticks and healthy chips
And fruit juice boxes for kids to sip

And though you fight to eat what's
right
Your body starts to shiver
For there's no kid who can resist
Eating s'mores for dinner

The Moon Barbara Jean Kaufman

Oh, there you are
A pearl, round and beautiful
Shapes of circles in sliver
Our Florida moon rises in whites,
yellows, and purples
Movies you inspire
The famous Eclipse, Twilight sagas
and Moonstruck
The moon, like a big piece of pie!
That's Amore
Werewolf movies. Leon Chaney's
mood swings directed by the moon
The sun wakes us up.
Yet the moon makes us sleep.
People, animals and plants heal
from your spirit.
I just love to see your smile

**Witches Stew
by Gareth Lancaster**

Bubble, blubber, squirm and gloop,
Boiling broth of bat's tail soup.
Wobble, slobber, liquid goo,
Add the sole of one old shoe.
Spooky shadows dance around,
Of frogs and rats and snarling hounds.
Steam swirls rising to the roof,
Add one small ear and one old tooth.
Gnarly, scratchy, tickle and itch,
Stir round and round to make it rich.
Mushy, sticky, sizzle and stew,
They're making mischief just for you



The Writer's Group meetings are held the second Monday of every month in the second floor conference room from 6:00 – 7:30pm.

**Upcoming dates: Oct. 13,
Nov. 10, and Dec. 8.**

From picture books to novels, stop by and discuss your ideas. Submit your short story or poem to be published in the monthly Portal to Michael DiVitto Kelly at mkelly@broward.org.

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FEEDBACK CORNER

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