

BELLOWS OF THE BONE BOX



A Steampunk Anthology

edited by Gloria Bobrowicz

Bellows of the Bone Box

A Steampunk Anthology

Edited by Gloria Bobrowicz

Sirens Call Publications

Bellows of the Bone Box
A Steampunk Anthology

Copyright © 2013 Sirens Call Publications
www.sirensallpublications.com
Preview Edition

All rights reserved

Individual stories are the copyright of their respective authors

Artwork © Dark Angel Photography
Cover Design © Sirens Call Publications

All characters and events appearing in this work are fictitious. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

License Notes

This eBook is licensed for your personal enjoyment only. This eBook may not be resold or given away to other people. If you would like to share this book with another person, please purchase an additional copy for the recipient. Thank you for respecting the hard work of these authors.

Table of Contents

[The Blood Engine](#)

Kirk Jones

[Clockwork Doll](#)

Laura Brown

[The Frequency of Demons](#)

Vivian Caethe

[Jen](#)

Tarl Hoch

[Into the Ether](#)

Kate Monroe

[Chasing Rabbits](#)

Megan Dorei

[Edward Vincell of the 37th Platoon](#)

Alex Chase

[Disarmament](#)

Gavin Ireland

[Shred](#)

Brad Bass

[Rip Me A New One, Jack!](#)

Christopher Nigro

[Love Is For the Living](#)

O.M. Grey

[The Vampyre and the Clockwork Man](#)

Paul Boulet

[About the Authors](#)

The Blood Engine

Kirk Jones

Mr. Crowner peered into the dimly lit alleyway. "There's another one in there. A female." "Dead?" His partner, Todd, asked.

Crowner shook his head. "Can't say." He reached into his coat for his oversized flashlight, and pierced the semi darkness of the alley. "Dead. Incapacitated. Inebriated. Doesn't matter really. The fresher the better, of course."

"Easy for you to say. You're not the one dragging her back to the cart." Todd followed the light to a woman well past her prime, with yellowed teeth crowned by cracked lips. He reached down to feel for a pulse. "She's well enough." He lifted her to her feet and guided her to the back of Mr. Crowner's carriage. "That'll be it, then?"

Mr. Crowner nodded as he settled into his seat and took the reins. "Keep an eye out for others on our way back. You never know what you'll find on the streets this time of night."

Todd climbed into the seat beside his boss. The flashlight handed off to him provided some degree of comfort, but he was experienced enough now to know darkness afforded night dwellers confidence that even a modest light could not squelch. He and Crowner had become night dwellers, after all, harvesting the poor for Crowner's textile plant in town. While it wasn't necessarily an honest living, it was a living, and it paid well.

Todd watched the light emanating from the device in his hands bounce between the walls and walkways, occasionally dipping into the alleys. Little had changed since their excursion into the city's underbelly. The dark intersections had fallen silent, except one alive with throes of passion, or at least that's what Todd mistook the movements for when the light grazed two figures entwined on the ground. "Stop the carriage," he whispered. "Around the corner."

Crowner drew the reins as they turned off Mulberry, and the carriage crawled to a halt. "What is it?" he asked.

Todd stepped down, the small pistol he carried with him on Crowner's late-night excursions already in hand. "Two more bodies in the alleyway."

Crowner steadied the horses. "Make it quick," he whispered, waving Todd on. "We're skirting the clean part of town where folks are actually missed when they disappear."

Todd crept around the corner, keeping his back tight to the wall. He turned into the alleyway, raising flashlight and pistol simultaneously. "You two thought you'd have a little—"

He mustered only a squeak when the man atop turned, mouth agape, revealing a long set of fangs. His face was steeped in the blood of the woman below him, who now lay motionless. Todd's legs began to shake as he realized he had just watched someone's life being taken in one of the most brutal ways imaginable. Without thinking, he unloaded his weapon into the man, sending Crowner's horses into panic. They darted away from the corner with Todd scurrying as fast as he could not far behind...

Clockwork Doll

Laura Brown

At night, the Underground outshone the streets above. As daylight fled, gaslights glowed into life, yet could never vanquish the darkness on the streets of London. But the Underground... Oh! What a marvel! Its construction had been bought forward and completed earlier than expected... now a warren-like network of underground tunnels laced beneath London's streets and buildings, inhabited by a number of small, gleaming locomotives, more elegant and streamlined than their earth-bound predecessors.

They were works of art in their own right, engineered for efficiency and purpose, but crafted for beauty. Veronica had often admired their long bronze carriages, always glowing with their own gaslights and looking somewhat jewel-like when they smoothly came to a halt at the equally beautiful platforms.

For although this was underground, light was captured, reflected and re-gifted by walls of bright, burnished bronze and silver, and white marble floors. Had the lamps been of a harsher light, perhaps the effect would have been overly dazzling, but instead, commuters, travellers and visitors were welcomed into London's very heart and body by the warm glow of the sub-loco stations.

Tonight, Veronica was more grateful than ever for the light. Her short walk from the Kensington Library to the steps that slipped beneath ground-level had been fraught with anxiety and, by her own admission, paranoia. She had looked over her shoulder the whole way, startling at any new shadow or movement, not that there had been many. She had been somewhat alarmed to discover the station unmanned - only the automatic ticket-guard for company, which had punched a hole in her ticket mechanically and granted her access to the platform with a whirr of gears. As she took a seat on a platform bench and attempted to compose herself, she told herself that it wasn't altogether out of the ordinary for the station to be this quiet at this time of night. Veronica had been unfortunate, having been required to stay at the library far later than usual for an impromptu inventory imposed by the unsympathetic Head Librarian.

Really, it was quite improper to demand that a young woman such as Veronica stay so late and then return home with no chaperone in the middle of the night. But then, it was also beastly to expect her to do so with the... incident... only a few weeks behind her.

Veronica straightened her skirts and her hat and folded her hands neatly on her lap. Her thoughts began to stray to that awful night... oh Mr. Cromwell, her employer, was truly an awful man. She recalled his apathetic words and manner... *"A young lady such as you has no business in Whitechapel after all, Miss Dawson; you have only yourself to blame."*

The Frequency of Demons

Vivian Caethe

April 14th, 1903

Dear Mother,

My deepest apologies for neglecting to write for so long. It has been difficult for me to compose my thoughts clearly lately. But I feel as if I owe it to you to explain my near-disappearance for the past five years. At first I hoped that there would be no bad blood concerning the issue with Roger, but after that point I simply had no time to spare.

Before I begin to attempt to address more recent events, I must start at the matter of my employment, a topic which I have not discussed previously due to the respect I held for my employer and his desire for secrecy. Due to circumstances which I will reveal to you through the course of this missive, I now feel less constrained to conceal certain facts.

My hand trembles as I write this. I have been unable to even think about it coherently for the past weeks since the event. I think of this as a confessional, but it brings with it none of the comfort of redemption. Perhaps it is too late for repentance, or maybe forgiveness is not mine to receive. Even so, I feel compelled to finish this, to leave a record, or perhaps a warning.

I began working for Dr. Gideon five years ago. It seems strange to count it in a mere enumeration of years; the experiences and knowledge I have gained during that period of time exceed the count of days and months. I would not be surprised if they have aged me beyond the measure of time.

Those five years saw us through the turn of the century, a time during which many were predicting the end of the world, their proof in every movement and sigh of Nature and Society. I would venture to propose that such expectations have been accompanying the turn of every century since the beginning of time immemorial. However, in this case they may have been well founded, if somewhat premature. At least in the case of Dr. Gideon's last experiment.

I fear I am getting ahead of myself; perhaps it may still be too soon to compose my thoughts in a cogent fashion. Please permit me to attempt again.

It was a breezy spring morning when I first found myself at the door of Dr. Gideon's office. At the time it was located in central Rochester before he moved to a safer, more remote location. There had been a small sign in the window advertising employment and since at the time I was quite bereft of a means of support, I availed myself of the opportunity. Perhaps something had prompted me to the realization that this would not be a factory job. The demise of many at the hands of those unfortunate necessities of industrialization was enough to instill in me a desire for something better than my present situation provided.

Unlike some of his more extravagant colleagues, Dr. Gideon possessed an air of quiet reserve that disguised a frightening intelligence. When I first walked through the door, I found him seated quietly in the midst of an unruly collection of metal and wood...

Jen

Tarl Hoch

“Why a woman?”

I looked up as Jordan appeared out of nowhere and stepped up to the table where I was hunched over at work. He pushed his goggles back into his unruly blonde mane and squinted at the form that lay prone on my work bench. My gaze went back to the body as I continued to stitch lips of open flesh together now that the nerve and muscle work were finished.

“Why not?”

Jordan made a noise in his throat. He hated when I answered his questions with a question.

“That doesn't-”

My eyes met his from behind my goggles. “Because I felt like it. The flesh is easier to work with; the layers are far more accepting of the transmission of current and fluids.”

He placed his hands on his hips. “This isn't about Jenny is it?”

I hammered the end of the knife I had been working with into the wood of the table as I rose. Jordan took a step back, jumping as he hit the operating table behind him. I made a show of slowly peeling off my thick, black rubber gloves before answering him.

“This has nothing to do with Jenny. She ended our courtship, that's it. Done, over with.” I slapped the gloves on the table beside the knife. “Now, can I please get back to work? Finals are in a couple weeks and I really need to get this project finished before then.”

Seeing the way out I had planted in my statement, Jordan took it. “You really think this will work? I mean, no one in the Necromancy Department has ever attempted what you are trying to do.” He motioned behind him to the rows of tables and benches, some occupied with cadavers in various states of decay.

He was right. No one at the Miskatonic University's Department of Necromancy had ever tried this method of animation. Jordan recognized the varied problems with the procedure. Most of the staff and students relied on the use of the formula and electricity set forward by Victor Frankenstein. Others used, or at least tried to use, some of the more magical means found in any number of the texts in the vast library the university was known to have. Some were even using the new science of steam and clockwork, building hulking machines of brass and copper melded with necrotic flesh. Like Jordan for example.

But I had an advantage, one that was currently stuffed into my black medical bag.

Jordan knew the basics of what I was doing, but not the means. I hadn't wanted him to steal my project for his own. Thankfully his steam-augmented auto-animation technique was proving to be more of a challenge for him than I think he expected. Gorilla flesh was far less forgiving than human, though even I had to admit that the steam augments took well to the engorged musculature. The beast currently sat stinking up a table in a corner of the lab, a great sheet draped over its form...

Into The Ether

Kate Monroe

The *Aether* lurched dangerously to the starboard side as her captain wrenched at the wheel now spinning wildly through her calloused hands. Matilda Mathers swore loudly and shook the driving rain out of her face as the reality of the situation whirled through her mind.

It seemed that the race they had embarked upon would be the end of them. She had never known a storm like this one, not in all the fifteen years she had been sailing the seas. Her airship's vast, steam-powered engines were helpless in the face of the churning waves assaulting them. They had descended onto the sea to escape the vicious gale that had erupted from nowhere to devour them, but even the water held no respite.

The race was over, and Matilda and her ship's crew would pay the ultimate price for failure.

It had been hailed as the greatest race of all time. Traversing across land and sea alike to speed from London to New York, it was described in the papers as the perfect analogy for the progression from the old and tired world to the glorious new. The revolution in society that had freed a woman like her to take up position on an airship and roam the world had been symbolized by those very airships, and their inventor had laid down the challenge.

One hundred airships. Three and a half thousand miles. One winner, and a hundred dollars for every mile they flew; \$350,000 for the sole victor.

She never had been able to resist a challenge, especially one that came with such a fortune attached. As the only female captain in the tavern when the telegraphed announcement had come through, the thought of refusing the race had been unpalatable. Without even a second thought Matilda had gambled her life and those of her crew upon their success, eager to match their skill against the newer and more advanced airships that had filled the seas since the *Aether* and her ilk had led the way at the forefront of the steam revolution. The airships had been the flag bearers for the new world, and now it was time to see which of them would come to the fore.

The *Aether* had come so agonizingly close. Though they had never held the lead, they had constantly been part of the chasing pack and with little more than five hundred miles until they reached the coast of New York State, Matilda had been readying the crew and ship for the final push when the storm had struck.

Tossed around like nothing more than a toy in a bathtub, they had been blown badly off course in a matter of minutes. The storm had swelled out of nowhere, showing no regard for the bulk and imperiousness of the *Aether*. The smaller ships flying alongside them had been torn to pieces before their disbelieving eyes, but to try to help them would have been folly. Their priority had to be ensuring their own survival, even though the odds seemed to worsen with each passing second.

For now, though, they were still alive; and whilst there was life, there was hope...

Chasing Rabbits

Megan Dorei

Kale stares across the table at me. He meets my venomous glare without flinching. The incessant ticking of the Clocks around us flickers in and out of my ears like the beating of dragonfly wings.

We have come to an impasse. Kale will not back down and I will not give in. All previous feelings of camaraderie are gone. Gone like they never were.

"Emerson," he begins impatiently. I curl my lip at the name but remain silent. "This is a *business*."

"A well-oiled machine," I mutter, rolling my eyes to the side insolently.

"Yes," he snaps. "Nothing is personal. It's just business."

"Well, business reeks. Right down to its rotting bones." I cross my arms over my chest and stare into the blackness around us.

The only lights in the room are the ones that illuminate the Clocks and the single bulb that hangs over the table. How many times have I come to this pit of an office? How many late-night calls? How many Clocks stopped and replaced because of me?

Kale leans across the table, his eyes urgent. I watch him out of the corner of my eye but purposely keep my face turned to the side.

"Emerson. Corpo is preparing to eradicate you. They've already done the paperwork and—"

I snort. "*Paperwork*? They need paperwork to kill me?" I exclaim. I can't explain the sudden and irrational outrage in my chest but I make no attempt to quench it.

"Well, you *do* technically belong to them," Kale points out.

I slam my fist down on the table and point my finger sharply. Kale leans back, eyes wide with wariness. I see his eyes flicker to the belt where he keeps his knife.

"I do *not* belong to them," I hiss. In my head I hear...

Ali-Ali-Alice...

Alice, please...

...please li-li-listen...

Destery, so I shake my head, shutting my eyes tightly. His voice rattles into silence.

"There's no reason to get pissy," Kale says, snapping my eyes open. He is holding the knife, pointing the gleaming golden blade directly at my heart.

I laugh. "What are you going to do with that, Kale?" I ask. "I'm a drone, or have you forgotten so quickly where we both stand?"

The knife wavers ever so slightly. The Clocks document the heartbeat of hesitant silence as Kale stares at me, mouth parted by anxiety. I smile grimly at him.

"No," he responds slowly, retracting the knife and leaning back in his black leather chair. "Of course not."

Edward Vincell of the 37th Platoon

Alex Chase

"I told you, I'm an engineer, not a gunsmith," Edward sighed, glancing up at a poster of Armin Jenko before clamping the goggles back over his face. His bangs were plastered to his forehead with sweat; he was glad he'd taken off his cap. "Might I suggest equipping the proper safety attire? Unless, of course, you wish to go blind."

Ophelia snapped a mask on. "All I'm suggesting, Ed, is that your talents could end our voyage months ahead of schedule, if you're up to the challenge. You had to be aware that this wasn't merely an exploratory expedition. We're at war, and like it or not, you might have to build weapons. Maybe even use one."

He grunted and focused on the blinding light of his blowtorch for a few moments. There was something so precise, so pure, about the way he handled his tools that many felt he'd turned the craft into an art. Edward was in the process of constructing an enhanced thruster design that would utilize their aether supplies much more efficiently.

Quiet, by most standards, Edward Vincell was stationed aboard the foremost aerial vessel of The Associated Republic of Cordelli's army. The ARC, as most called it, formed after the assassination of Shane O'Harris, leader of the anti-communism movement, in 1953 by Soviet renegades. It was comprised of the countries of North America, certain portions of Europe, Greenland, Iceland and surviving Japanese that were living on islands in the Pacific Ocean. The name of their newly found society was adopted from the word 'cordial' for unknown reasons.

Ivan Novgorod, the Premier of Russia at the time, formally denounced these actions but utilized the international focus on political threats to secretly fund projects of a highly advanced scientific nature. In 1959, Russia announced the completion of a device that would allow others to harness aether, a mysterious substance of untold mechanical and cosmological power.

Novgorod perished in a test of aether-based weaponry, so the position of Premier of the Soviet Union had been filled by Roman Kosvenko. The new Premier declared he was creating an army that would utilize such highly destructive weaponry and was going to spread the glory of the mother country all over the world.

Now, in 1967, Edward was trying to keep his head out of the line of fire while serving in the thirty-seventh platoon. He looked up once more and wondered what prompted Armin Jenko, a scientist, to get involved with espionage and warfare.

"Edward? Hello?" Ophelia tapped him on the shoulder. The blowtorch clicked off.

"I'm not a gunsmith," he repeated cautiously. "I wouldn't dare to end the life of another human being."

"Yes you would!" She glared, "If it was a matter of life or death, you know you would want to live. You'd kill, if you had to."

Disarmament

Gavin Ireland

Not so long ago, the constant clip-clopping of the horse shoes on the cobbles would soothe and relax me. I had fallen asleep on occasion from the side to side rocking of the carriage as we sped through the dark city streets, but not this time. Everything was irritating me since those infernal mechanical lights had been installed in carriages. Too bright, too hot and too damn noisy. My landlady was installing them all over the house and it was just a matter of time before she put them in my room.

“You really hate them don’t you, sir?”

“Hmm? What are you talking about, Mills?”

“The mechanical lights, sir. You were glaring at them, clenching your fist and gritting your teeth.”

“Good observation, but no, I don’t hate the lights. I hate what they represent. The insidious replacement of everything good and natural with machines.”

“But, sir...”

“Quiet now, Mills, we’ll be there in a moment.”

The carriage drew into a side road, came to a sudden halt and jerked back and forth on its springs. I jumped out whilst Mills gathered himself. The area was closed off by a good number of constables and lit up as bright as day with those damned mechanical lights.

“Inspector. This way please. Over here.”

I heard the shout of the Sergeant over the general hubbub of the constables and in an instant the noise died away as nervous young men tried to watch me without being seen. A path through the cordon opened for me as I approached.

“He was found by a whore less than an hour ago sir. The same as the last two.”

I could see the body but the shadows, or should I say the lack of shadows, were all wrong.

“Boy. Get me an oil lamp.”

“We’ve a mechanical lamp ready for you sir.”

“Get me an oil lamp now, or find yourself a new job. Turn these ridiculous lights off; I’m blinded by their unnatural brilliance.”

The young constable dashed off to carry out my orders. They don’t understand my distrust of mechanical things and I accept they hate me for my temper, but they’ll learn or they’ll fail.

“A friendly tone has been known to produce good results.”

“I have no need of friends, Mills. What I do need, is people that will do as they’re told and not question or correct me.”

Silence again, apart from the nervous shuffling of boots on stone.

“What observations have you made so far, Sergeant?”

“Well sir. Like the last two...”

Shred

Brad Bass

Screaming by at lightning speed brings teardrops to my eyes.

Sometimes it is hard to breathe when wearing a disguise.

It is time to say your prayers. It's time for you to die.

There is nothing more to say, there is no reason why.

I closed the door behind me. The room was almost completely dark and smelled of rot. Thankfully, I had changed the filter in my mask. I checked the dial on my air mix. The only light that dared enter the room came through small finger holes in the stained curtain hanging over the large window. As I took a step, I felt a crunch. I looked down; beneath the scattered garbage and clothing, the floor was covered in dead insects. I had never been here before, but the scene was all too familiar. I scanned the room, then quickly crossed the space. My senses tingled with excitement. Could I have finally made it? Could it really be here? Anticipation made my heart beat faster. Once at the window, I flung the curtain aside allowing the light from the glowing neon to fill the room. In the air, thousands of flies could be seen. This apartment was so high up that even the air cars were far below me. It was the middle of the day but as usual, the sky was nearly black, the pollution alerts had been blaring for hours. Again, I glanced around; I was alone. In the corner of the room running from floor to ceiling were large green and black tubes glistening with sweat. The sound of rushing fluid could be heard emanating from them. Next to that, there was a small refrigeration unit with its door hanging open; a filthy sink with a shelf above it containing what looked like eating utensils, a couple plates, and two or three cups. On the floor lay a brown mattress. On the mattress was a large lump of dirty blankets. I carefully reached down and pulled the stiff fabric back to see what lay underneath. Just as he'd said, there was a corpse. It was in such a state of decay that I nearly vomited into my mask. Both of the wrists had been cut – an obvious suicide. I reached down and started to feel for what I had come here for. Clutched in its hand wasn't what I wanted, wasn't what I was told would be there.

I had spent most of my life savings paying off what I thought were the right people. *If this was a dead end...* My stomach tightened at the thought.

I wanted the Bone Box but instead I found a tattered piece of paper.

"What the fuck!" I shouted.

Severely disappointed, I had to pry the fingers apart to get at the document. In the dim light I could see that there were scribbles on the paper, but I couldn't tell what it said because it had been saturated in bodily fluids. *Damn it!* I would have to look at it later. Carefully, I stuck the crumpled scrap into my pants, then with gloved hands, I felt along the corpse for anything else that might be of value. There was nothing...

Rip Me A New One, Jack!

Christofer Nigro

Inspector Clive Aberline wasn't exactly happy with the fact that Scotland Yard insisted he call in the services of freelance sleuth Andre Dupin to deal with the case at hand, but his superiors insisted that the nightmarishly grim circumstances made it imperative. Aberline had to accept the fact that catching the lunatic responsible for the ghastly series of murders plaguing the Whitechapel area of New London was of paramount importance, and as such, matters of pride and intolerance had to be put aside for the greater good. This great city of London, filled with tall spires and hovering dirigibles that decorated the skyline, had few members of 'polite' society who cared about the fate of the 'ladies of the night', which made it all the more important that those who *did* care put every effort into catching the nefarious Ripper.

Aberline looked down at the butchered remains of a middle-aged working lady strewn across the width of a small alley. Despite all he had dealt with in his 22 years in service to the law, he had to force himself not to visibly cringe in the presence of Andre Dupin, a man whose help he desperately needed despite loathing the mere thought of his existence. He must tolerate the man for the good of the victims, he kept reminding himself.

Dupin walked up to where Aberline was standing, laid a hand on his shoulder, and looked down at the gruesome remains before them.

"It would appear that ghastly fellow literally ripped this poor toffer a new one, eh?" the younger detective flippantly observed.

Aberline smacked the man's hand off his shoulder, and shoved him hard. "I am not amused by what passes for a sense of levity from you, Dupin. Show some respect to this woman, considering the trials she doubtlessly endured in her line of work, and particularly the nightmare her final moments on this world must have constituted."

"Don't be so grim, old crusher. Your decades with the Yard seem to have made you cynical in your advancing age. Do not let my glib remarks cause you to doubt the sincerity of my intentions, nor mistake my way of dealing with the horrors we experience in our esteemed vocations as disrespect for the victims of this madman."

"Maybe I don't like your way of handling these horrors, Dupin. If not for your distinguished reputation and lineage in the solving of crimes, I would not abide your presence in my midst for even a second. Unless you have missed what is regularly said about you and your social antics on the Inter-Analytic Webstream, you would see that many are inclined to agree with my assessment of your character."

"You need to put less veracity on what those mindless wankers on the Inter-Analytic Webstream tend to say, old chap. Their comments are nothing less than a cesspool of invective about any given subject, or any particular individual..."

Love Is For the Living

O.M. Grey

Timo exhaled, watching the thick smoke drift from his parted lips and curl past his half-closed eyes until it mingled with the heavy cloud suspended just above all their heads. The periodic sound of coughing filled the otherwise quiet den, which was just the way Timo liked it as it left him with his thoughts. Ironic, since he came here to escape them, but once the opium took hold of his faculties, his thoughts became less troublesome and much more pleasant. Little else satisfied him as much as the feeling of the smoke entering his lungs, knowing that a sense of peace would soon follow, and then she would be with him again. His lips held the pipe which in turn held the magical black pea. The only thing he would rather have on his lips were hers.

But that was impossible.

Timo blinked back the tears and motioned to the young Chinese girl who had seemed to take a fancy to him, and her favors did not escape his notice. Ever since he first started coming to Master Guo's Opium Den shortly after Heather's death, Mai-Lien had paid him special attention, likely because he was kind to her. He treated her like a woman, not a servant. He had observed with some disgust how others would treat her and make jokes about her skin tone or the shape of her eyes, and Timo found such jesting intolerable. Under normal circumstances he would have defended the lady's honor, but as of late, his energy had dwindled to the point where even breathing seemed to take too much effort.

"Yes, Mister Timo," she said with downcast eyes.

"Another pea, Mai-Lien. That's such a beautiful name," he slurred. "What does it mean?"

"Beautiful lotus." A blush rose to Mai-Lien's cheeks. She kept her eyes away from meeting his by focusing on her red silk slippers that matched the gold-trimmed hanfu. Intricate braids held her long, black hair close to her head. Only two loose strands, one over each shoulder, fell onto the gold-embroidered silk.

"May I have another of your magical peas, my beautiful lotus?" Timo held out a fistful of coins toward Mai-Lien.

She made a quick movement like a curtsy and apologized, "So sorry, Mister Timo, but you already have three today. Three is limit, sir."

"Since when?"

"The opium make you do strange things. I concern for you, Mister Timo. Please just sleep, sir."

"Sleep? There is plenty of time for sleep later."

"Yes, sir," she replied, but she did not reach toward the silver tray full of opium peas.

"Have you ever been in love, Mai-Lien?"

Her eyes fluttered up and met his for the briefest moment, and he saw the heat therein, the desire he had seen in her before...

The Vampyre and the Clockwork Man

Paul Boulet

Nightmare spaces swell between the first flickers of waking thought and the underlying layers of the subconscious; like cancerous tumors and the clutter behind locked doors and the filth that slips beneath sewer drains. An interloper that accumulates in the tucked away recesses of unused crawlspaces and the eroding remains of forgotten purpose. If left unmolested, it can assume a heatless state, seemingly content to merely subsist. Left to fester on the surface of dark secrets; like Catholic guilt or undiverted self-loathing. It will only become active when provoked, stabbing up through the seams of consciousness and invading the waking mind. As when hunger stimulates salivation; the emergent ache a forewarning, pointing toward the inevitable. Addiction to sustenance; the constraint of physicality, the dread yet needful bane of existence. Running its course, dependency supplants the will to resist. It gnaws at the psyche and eventually begins its purposeful march toward longing. The kind of longing that's destined to become intolerable longing. Irresistible. Passing the thresholds of decided abstinence, desperation makes for the desperate acts of desperate men. It is the progenitor of motive, father of consumption, mother of innovation. The fundamental exception to all moral imperatives against which the conscious only poses pathetic arguments. Gnawing pangs of guilt tighten, making for a poor rival to the incontestable force of hunger. And yet, guilt sinks deeply into the self perceived weakness of dependency. No matter what the system of ethics, morality surely calls for defiance if remediation is impossible. Inadvertently impossible because of its own essence, by the nature of its being. The will can attempt to struggle, deny dependency as it may. Deny being. Deny self. Deceive self. But necessity ultimately overrules, either consume or expire. The will's failure is merely a matter of time. Moral success can only be measured in proportions; resisting longer than the last time or failing to resist as long. Failure to convince the self that resistance is becoming easier when the reverse is true. When all hope for remediation is abandoned, hope of absolution dies with it. Each failure to resist mounts upon another, after another, after another to unbearable weights. Ethics then dictate that existence is immoral. The wrong-doer should be punished by frequency and degrees per each wrongful act; an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a life for a life. The grand corollary of corporal punishment, and capital. Lacking a judge, jury or executioner, the responsibility falls solely to the self. Guilt summons the judge to court, conscious rallies the jurors and the will dons the black hood and hefts the axe. Prior to execution there's nothing but the ceaseless fixation on the tragedy of being, the swelling accumulation of guilt's oppression and the ever sinking depths of swelling hunger. Another term of resistance. The foreknowledge of inevitable failure.

Incandescent lights spark and warm like fanned embers. Startled, a skulking patch of nightmare space slips away, fleeing toward shadowy recesses at the heights of lofty steel arches. The wheel of a pressure hatch turns, breaking long held seals...

About the Authors

Brad Bass

Brad Bass is married, has three kids and lives in Milwaukie, Oregon. He has worked for the Oregon State Lottery since 1998. He loves writing, movies and is an avid runner. Brad has previously published *Ehlon World of Magic* and *The Guardian: An Angel Story*. He is currently working on his next novel and can be found on Twitter at @Brad_Bass or on Facebook at www.facebook.com/brad.bass.965.

Paul Boulet

When not crouched away in dark coffeehouses or jazz clubs, Paul productively contributes to society in the guise of a consultant and corporate serf, specializing in managing technology and software development projects. In sharp contrast, his restless imagination and background in literature and linguistics draws him to more creative pursuits. He currently shelters as an invading flatlander, hidden in plain sight along the trackless reaches of Southern Wisconsin with his wife and indeterminate number of house pets. His primary influences include Lovecraft, Herbert, Orwell, Faulkner, Pynchon, Coleridge, Tennyson, Baudelaire, Thucydides, Herodotus (of Halicarnassus) with an honorable mention to Sophocles without whom he would not know what to call the Sophoclean Hero. You can find him on Twitter at @BouletPaul, but quite frankly he's yet to tweet anything.

Laura E Brown

Laura E Brown is a writer and artist from Hampshire, England. A lover of literature and the arts from a young age, she also writes under the pen name 'Blackavar', and writes for online magazine, EGL Magazine. She has been writing since she could hold a pen, but since the summer of 2012 has become a fiction author and begun to live the dream. A self-proclaimed Goth, bookworm, geek and rabbit enthusiast, she loves all things strange and unusual.

Vivian Caethe

Ms. Caethe was introduced to speculative fiction at an early age by growing up in the Land of Enchantment. She writes on the side while sticking to her day job of telling people what to do and being mildly surprised when they comply. An avid tea connoisseur, she knits and cross stitches in her spare time. You can find Vivian online on Facebook at www.facebook.com/vivian.caethe, on Twitter at @VivianCaethe, and she blogs at eightofswords.tumblr.com.

Alex Chase

Alex Chase is a full-time student and coffee enthusiast who spends the majority of his waking hours wrapped up in his own head, even when in class. His short fiction has been featured in several Siren's Call Publication releases. When not scribbling about the latest killer, creature or catastrophe his mind concocts, he can be found reading or playing video games.

Megan Dorei

Megan Dorei, when not obsessively listening to music or dreaming of being a vigilante, is working on a plethora of stories that have yet to come to fruition. She is a recent high school graduate and does not yet attend college, choosing instead to focus on her writing. She was recently published in Elektrik Milk Bath Press' *Zombies for a Cure* collection and will soon have another story published in Less Than Three Press' *Kiss Me at Midnight* collection. She lives in McLouth, Kansas. Megan can be found on Facebook at www.facebook.com/MeganDorei and on Goodreads at www.goodreads.com/user/show/14137016-megan.

O.M.Grey

Nestled in the mountains of Northern California, Olivia M. Grey lives in the cobwebbed corners of her mind writing paranormal romance with a Steampunk twist. She dreams of the dark streets of London and the decadent deeds that occur after sunset. As an author of *Steamy Steampunk*, as well as a poet, blogger, podcaster, and speaker, Olivia focuses both her poetry and prose on alternative relationship lifestyles and deliciously dark matters of the heart and soul. Her work has been published in various anthologies and magazines like *Stories in the Ether*, *Steampunk Adventures*, *SNM Horror Magazine* and *How The West Was Wicked*.

Her premiere Steampunk BDSM erotica novel, *Avalon Revisited*, is an Amazon.com Gothic Romance bestseller. She also currently has two other titles available: *The Zombies of Mesmer*, a YA Steampunk Romance, *Caught in the Cogs: An Eclectic Collection* of short stories, love poetry, and relationship essays.

Ms. Grey, now a cover model for *Gearhearts Steampunk Glamour Revue* (above), has seen quite the upswing in popularity over the past few years. Her poem "New York Rain" not only won an award for best poem, but it also made the Bar None Group's Hall of Fame. Her short story "Dust on the Davenport," written for *Tales of the Archives*, as well as her bestselling *Steamy Steampunk* novel *Avalon Revisited*, won the 2012 *Steampunk Chronicle's* Reader's

Choice Award for best short story and best novel, respectively. Olivia was voted “Muse of the Fair” at the 2011 Steampunk World’s Fair and has enjoyed being a special literary guest at Steampunk Conventions, like Clockwork Con, Aetherfest, HRM Steampunk Symposium, Florida Steampunk Exhibition East, among many others.

Ms. Grey dons a tight corset, fluffy bustle, and a teeny-tiny top hat for fantasy and sex-positive conventions where she presents controversial topics, interacts with fans, and participates on panels discussing fiction, writing, Steampunk, mental illness and emotional insecurities, sexual health and safety, and relationship styles and tools, just to name a few. She loves to host tea parties, and she runs a delightful game of charades, Victorian style.

Ms. Grey is represented by the fabulous Louise Fury of the L. Perkins Agency. You can find Ms. Grey online on Twitter at @omgrey, on her blogs omgrey.wordpress.com and steampunkgrey.tumblr.com, on Facebook at www.facebook.com/omgrey and www.facebook.com/steampunkgrey, and on Goodreads at www.goodreads.com/author/show/3448455.O_M_Grey.

Tarl Hoch

Tarl Hoch hails from Calgary, Alberta, Canada where he spends a majority of his time writing horror, erotica, or whatever he can set his mind to. When not writing, he's reading anything he can, moving cats around the house and hiding from cowboys during the Calgary Stampede. His work can be found at FurPlanet and Knightwatch Press. His Twitter is @tarl_writer. His Blog, reviews, books and news can be found at his Goodreads under Tarl Hoch.

Gavin Ireland

Gavin is an ex-soldier, ex-helicopter engineer and family man who also tells tall tales. His interests include writing, walking and Lindy Hopping as well as maintaining a few websites. Influenced by H. P. Lovecraft, Edgar Allen Poe, Clive Barker, Dean Koontz and Stephen King, he has many more stories waiting to be told. Gavin can be found on Twitter at @gavinireland and on his website at www.gavinireland.co.uk.

Kirk Jones

Kirk Jones is an instructor of humanities for the State University of New York. His work has appeared in Amazing Stories of the Flying Spaghetti Monster, A Hacked-Up Holiday Massacre, New Tales of the Old Ones, Bust Down the Door & Eat All the Chickens, Unicorn Knife Fight,

Flashes in the Dark, and on Bizarro Central. Kirk's first book, "Uncle Sam's Carnival of Copulating Inanimals," was published by Eraserhead Press imprint NBAS in 2010. He also writes about all things weird, pop and retro on his blog: www.bizarrojones.com.

Kate Monroe

Kate Monroe is a red-headed author and editor who lives in a quiet and inspirational corner of southern England. She has penchants for chocolate, horror and loud guitars, and a fatal weakness for red wine.

Her interests in writing range from horror to erotica, taking in historical romance and tales of the paranormal on the way; whatever she has dreamed about the night before is liable to find its way onto the page in some form or another...

Kate can be found online on Facebook at www.facebook.com/kateserenmonroe or on her website: <http://kateserenmonroe.com>.

Christofer Nigro

Christofer Nigro is a life-long fan of the horror, sci-fi, fantasy, and pulp fiction genres, and has several websites on these topics, as well as others dealing in the interrelated realms of politics, sociology, and theology. He has short stories published in several anthologies dealing with the above genres, including three to date from Black Coat Press (TALES OF THE SHADOWMEN Volumes 8 & 9, and NIGHT OF THE NYCTALOPE); two to date from Sirens Call Publications (CARNAGE: AFTER THE END Volume 1 along with this anthology), as well as flash fiction in the October 2012 issue of The Sirens Call eZine; one to date from Scarlett River Press (RIGOROUS MORTIS: A MORTICIAN'S TALES); one to date from Pulp Empire (ALIENS AMONG US Volume 1); and one to date from Angelic Knights Press (NO PLACE LIKE HOME: TALES FROM A FRACTURED FUTURE). He is presently feverishly at work on a novel in the super-hero genre, CENTURION, which will be published by Metahuman Press. Christofer can be found online on Twitter at @ChristoferNigro, on his blog at thenorseking.wordpress.com. Christofer also maintains three websites at http://angelfire.com/ego/g_saga, <http://angelfire.com/zine3/warrenverse>, and <http://monstaah.angelfire.com>.