

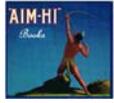
# The True-badour

A LITERARY NEWSLETTER

Vol. 2 – Issue 2

Summer 2017

June 2017



*The True-badour*

1542 Lakeside Dr. West  
Canyon Lake, Texas 78133

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**Billy James Wall** – St. Augustine, FL

**John Howard Hatfield** – Austin, TX

**Greg Walston** – San Antonio, TX

Describing and discussing the writing process through various genres, methods, and venues, for writers and readers alike.

(If you no longer wish to receive this newsletter, Unsubscribe by contacting [ernie.lee@live.com](mailto:ernie.lee@live.com).)

I am pleased to announce that **Aquasaurus** has been selected by the Texas Association of Authors as the Suspense/Fiction novel of 2017! That was quite an honor, and I am thrilled. I will be accepting the Award in Houston on July 29<sup>th</sup>.



In February I was honored by the Central Texas

Wing of the Commemorative Air Force with the Silver Magnolia



Blossom Award for the CAF. The award was for

my writing and video production work,

specifically on the C-45 airplane, Lone Star

Lady! This historic aircraft was fully restored.

February also saw Donna and I shoot a historical

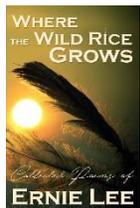
documentary for and with the Lindheimer

Master Naturalist program at Canyon Lake.

In March I was interviewed and had a photo-shoot for an upcoming issue of **Nancy O! Magazine** which was released in April. The cover was astronaut Charly Duke, and I was honored to be included in this issue. Donna and I attended the red-carpet event for the release of this issue on April 23<sup>rd</sup>.

We were in Houston the first weekend in April, but I had to hurry back to make a presentation to the Canyon Lake Methodist Men on Monday, April 3<sup>rd</sup>.

We had a great time at the San Antonio Book Festival April 8<sup>th</sup>. We sold out every copy of AQUASAURUS we took with us. I had to place a new order of books, which should arrive before we go to the Texas Library Conference on April 21<sup>st</sup>. At the SA Book Fest and the Library Conference I unveiled



the new book, **Where the Wild Rice Grows**. It is a collection of my poems that I have written over several years. Look for Where the Wild Rice Grows to be released as a 6-CD audio book. For a sneak preview of what this is going to sound like, you can search Where the Wild Rice Grows on [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com). The first volume is already available on iTunes, Pandora, Apple Music, ReverbNation, and several others.

Also in April, AQUASAURUS was selected by Dr. Vequist's post-graduates for the class project in marketing. This group of five students are developing marketing strategies for

AQUASAURUS and for Aim-Hi Publishing. You should be seeing some of the fruits of this work soon on the web-site at [www.Aim-HiBooks.com](http://www.Aim-HiBooks.com). I am thrilled and awed by this group of professionals.

After a wonderful trip to Hawaii in May, we attended the San Antonio Comi-Con again. What an event this was! If you have never been to a Comi-con in your area, I would highly recommend it. It is so much fun. We had a great turn-out, saw over 1,000 attendees, and sold a lot of books!

I want to thank everyone who has been so kind to support my writings. At the end of this issue, you will find the first serialized chapter of Aquasaurus. Thank you for your support and encouragement. None of this would have happened without you. Your inspiration means the world to me, and no words can express my gratitude. *The True-badour* at [ernie.lee@live.com](mailto:ernie.lee@live.com).

## Billy James Wall

### That Little Room

I'm looking for that little room in my heart  
Where smiles begin right from the start  
Where sunshine resides  
Where loving thought abide  
Where troubles go away  
Where sadness will not stay  
Where loved ones dwell  
Where I relax for a spell  
Where the birds sing  
Where I suspect not a thing  
Where daffodils bloom  
Where no monsters loom  
Where judgement does not linger  
Where I don't have to lift a finger  
Where, depending upon my mood  
The room expands and I won't be sued

Oh, just now I found that little room  
Where love rejoices for what and for whom  
Let me reside right here  
For a long while without fear  
Where will you find your little room?  
Where will you find flowers in bloom?  
A still and listening wind  
Will help you find  
That beautiful space  
Where troubles vanish without a trace

Billy James Wall / March 2017



## John Howard Hatfield

### The Mockingbird's Laugh

Just about dusk is the best time. That's when I like to catch him. He's one crazy dude! He's not the most colorful—just dull grey and dirty white. Nor is he very large. But, all things considered, he has the best laugh!

The Cardinals are the prettiest color. The Woodpeckers have the most distinct call—I can hear Woody-the-Woodpecker in every note—and that brings back memories of my youth. The Blue Jays cannot be mistaken for anything other than a Jay. And the Doves; what can anyone say for the mournful Doves? While all of them have their followings, I'd match my high limb tweeter to any of them when given a chance to shine.

He sits there, out at the end of a prominent limb and let's go with every song he knows—probably having picked up half of them just today. He usually starts with the Cardinal's chirping and moves on to every songbird in the neighborhood; leaving none of them out. Watching closely, you can see him rare back, open that beak and blast away. It's when he throws that head back and let's go that gets me the most. It's like he saying "Ha! I got ya! If you can do it, buddy, so can I." I think he's laughing at the rest of the songbird nation—yes, the jokes on them. That's his laugh and no other bird can match it—not one even comes close.

When he's finishes his 45 minute sonata, he hopes closer into the tree's thicket and roosts for the night.

I admire the guy so much that I often pretend to take on his persona, especially when I find myself in a crowd and even more especially when the crowd doesn't know much about me. Given the opportunity, I will tell my tales and lay it on as thick as possible—even thicker when I'm allowed to control the conversation.

I'll tell stories like "the Great Ping Pong Drop" or "Tommy's Moose" or "Two Shorts and a Long out of Nenana." Maybe even the one about the crash landing of an Air Force C-141 cargo plane that I was riding—that one always amazes and gets them asking (sometime begging) for more. The quirky characters I detail gives them a chuckle asking if that guys real or did that really happened—it did and there's plenty more that haven't been told yet. In fact, one I just told recently details a sort of practical joke that involved over a thousand players-along without them ever knowing they were drawn in.

Sometimes, when the congregation is somewhat younger and particularly inexperienced, I will embellish the facts, just enough to approach the outstanding and keep them on the edge, never knowing where the twists and turns will lead.

When I realize they are on the very edge of their seat, having waited until the exact right time, I'll add: "I just made that up." Now they wonder; what was true and what wasn't.

I stop then. There's no use in proceeding any further. The tide is set. The laughs have happened. Wait until the next gathering is always best and wham, right when they least expect it: "Didja hear the one bout..." or "Let me tell ya bout..." or maybe even "You aint' gonna believe this s%&t, but..." I've just Mockingbird Laughed 'em and I'm King—at least for the time being.

*John Howard Hatfield*

# WordShop

## FOLLOW THAT SQUIRL

Ahaa! You thought you caught me in a typo didn't you? Nope. I said "Squirrel" and I meant squirl! And if you are a writer, you should be following that particular Squirl also. What is it? It is a brand new app of amazing value to writers, novelists and poets.

Let me introduce you to one of the neatest new writer tools I recently found. A fellow writer told me about it at a recent book fair. Imagine if you are an avid book reader. You find yourself walking one day in old San Antonio – or any other interesting place you might live or visit. Suddenly, your cell phone beeps. You unlock the screen to read the message.

*"On this site much of San Antonio was partially destroyed by a major earthquake set off by Clint Marshall, in the award winning novel AQUASaurus by Ernie Lee  
[www.Aim-HiBooks.com](http://www.Aim-HiBooks.com)"*

In that little instant, someone you never knew, probably someone who has never read your book, now knows about you and your book. They can now seek more information, find other related landmarks, learn about you the author, and even find a link to order your book right on their cell phone.

And the best part? It is totally **FREE!** All you have to do is create an account, log on, and start loading the locations in your books. Right now the app is only available on *iPhone*, but I'm told an android version is in the works. But why wait? There are a lot of *iPhone* readers out there that can use it now.

Can you imagine the doors this little app will open? How many times have you wondered around and recognized a site you had read about where something happened in one of your favorite books? How many times have you crossed over that site and been totally unaware? With this little app, you can find all of your favorite sites, or learn about new ones you haven't even read about yet. This is really exciting news for an author seeking new readers.

Go to [www.squirl.co](http://www.squirl.co)



## Introducing: Greg Walston

Greg Walston is an audio book narrator with experience in multiple genres. Born and raised in northern California; moved to San Antonio, Texas with his wife in 2005. They do a lot of travelling in an RV and enjoy hiking, disc golf and geocaching. He began audio book narration on a part-time basis in 2013, and recently went full-time. Since then, there have been many projects that he voiced. It's difficult to pick one or two favorites, but one I particularly enjoyed was "Legend of the Dawn", an epic frontier trilogy following the life of a man from the time he was 18 until his sixties; over 20 hours of recorded book and 30+ different characters, accents, etc. Then there was the ghost story "The Man in the Window"; a biographical book on Mickey Mantle entitled "Inside and Outside the Lines", and "Dirty Darlings" about Jimmy Chagra, the drug lord from El Paso, TX; and a keep-you-up-at-night conspiracy theory book titled "Battle Hymn". He is certain that you don't know his name (yet), although there is a remote chance that you may have heard his voice. He has just completed a thriller similar to "Silence of the Lambs" called "Doll House" (freaky story) that will be out in a couple of weeks – see if you can figure out who The Jackal is! He is featured in many other titles in multiple genres, including an audio book that had over 40 different characters.

Audio books are all the rage these days, and becoming more popular every day. When you can't read a book, or can't take one with you, you can usually listen to one. Doctor's waiting room? In the gym? Driving? (Public Service Announcement: Don't fiddle with your device while driving) On that vacation and your books didn't fit into your suitcase? Plug in your earbuds and you're ready to go.

Some of the most popular books ever written, and many that are as yet unknown, are on audio. Everything from science fiction to historical novels; crime drama to biographies; children's books to adult romance; vampires and werewolves; are all available. Narrators run the gamut from young to old, male and female, "standard" American to Western, Southern, New York, and foreign accents, and just about any foreign language you can imagine. Whatever your preference, you'll probably be able to find an audio book that you would enjoy.

Greg Walston

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Email: [greg@gregwalston.com](mailto:greg@gregwalston.com)

Twitter: @misterw50



## POETRY TO MUSIC

I recently completed my first book of poetry called *Where the Wild Rice Grows*. I had a real good western voice actor read the poems with the intent on making an audio book, which I will still do in the near future. I was listening one day to the voice recording and thought how neat it would be to put some sound effects or perhaps some music to the poems. That is when I found this site.



**audioblocks**

[www.audioblocks.com](http://www.audioblocks.com) AudioBlocks was just what I needed to complete my project. It is a subscription based service that features thousands of music and sound effect clips that you can use royalty free, with

certain restrictions. Everything is there from sound effects, to music, to loops. Music creators post their short clips to the site for use by anyone who subscribes – sort of like creative commons. Features for members include unlimited downloads. The clips can be used even for commercial use including films, broadcast, podcasts, games, or practically any commercial use so long as substantial value is added to the clip. Substantial value could be consider a poem, story, video, pictures, or other audio. Unlike other audio content, you can post your finished product to YouTube without worry because you have a license to use the product. You are not allowed to use the clips to resell them or as a standalone file; it must be enhanced with added value content. The clips cannot be used in illegal ways, such as porn, harassment, invasion of privacy, or in ways that condone violence.

So, if you need some interesting music or sound effects to your web site, this would be your inexpensive answer. Subscription rates are reasonable and must be paid each year. But one good feature is that if you drop your subscription, you still may keep and use the clips you have already downloaded.

I can't wait for you to hear some of my new poems set to music and sound. I am planning on producing *Where the Wild Rice Grows* as a 6-cd set which can be sold individually or as a box set. I am almost completed the first volume and should be able to play samples for you soon on my web site at [www.Aim-hiBooks.com](http://www.Aim-hiBooks.com) or [www.ErnieLeePoetry.com](http://www.ErnieLeePoetry.com).

Tell me what you think!

## *Ernie's I-POD*



You can hear Bart Ambrose music on ReverbNation at <https://www.reverbnation.com/bartambrose>. My all-time favorite song from Bart is "Two Time Tomorrow".

This issue, I am proud to introduce you to the **Downhill Bluegrass Band**. I challenge you to listen to "Reckless Wind", "East of the Mountain", and "The Duke" then tell me where you think they live. You'll be surprised. You can hear their music at:

<https://www.reverbnation.com/downhillbluegrassband/songs>

While you are at it, take a listen to my very good friend **Jon Wolfe**! He is a world class entertainer from the dance halls and honkytonks across Texas and Oklahoma. Listen to my favorite, "The Only Time You Call", or "It All Happened in a Honkytonk." I think, like me, you will recognize the musical talents of this wonderful singer/songwriter!

<https://www.reverbnation.com/jonwolfecountry>

**Kenny Lee** is another good friend of mine, who can sing up a storm! Listen to "I Know What It's Like", or "On Nights Like These" which he co-wrote with James Floyd Richardson. Good listening. Kenny and I are not related, but I sure wish I could sing like that!!!

**Ernie Lee** can be heard at

[https://www.reverbnation.com/aimhimusic?profile\\_view\\_source=header\\_icon\\_nav](https://www.reverbnation.com/aimhimusic?profile_view_source=header_icon_nav)

And on MTV Artists page at: <http://www.mtv.com/artists/ernie-lee/>



## eBook Sales Continue to Drop?

*From an article by B. Alan Bourgeois, Texas Association of Authors:*

Last month, the London Book Festival shared a flurry of information about publisher's rights, the growth of book sales and the continued discussion of eBook sales dropping. While, the latter cannot be confirmed 100%, as the biggest eBook seller; Amazon, does not report its eBook sales to anyone other than their authors, no one can confirm that eBook sales are down.

If book sales are continuing to decrease, what does that mean for YOU, the author?

While Amazon continues to grow in its monopoly of book sales, that doesn't help you, the author, in any form. In fact, it hurts you, as many authors feel that the only way to sell books is through Amazon.

There are over 1 million authors selling on Amazon these days. With so many titles, it's a whirlwind of information that overwhelms any reader. This then leaves the author to either purchase Amazon's marketing programs and hope it helps them break out of the pack, or they can try to search for other tools and programs that help readers find them, such as Book Festivals, Social Media, Book Stores etc.

Texas Authors, Inc. continues to create new ways to help authors meet readers and increase opportunities for authors to sell books. BUT, all of these services and programs only work if the author is willing to invest the time and energy to market themselves and their books.

Many authors simply want to write and let someone else sell their books. That's great if you have the extra income to spend. A publicist or marketing expert can cost thousands of dollars and there is never a guarantee they will generate enough book sales to cover their cost plus earn you an income that allows you to continue to happily write.

The majority of serious authors, those we call **Authorpreneurs**, have learned that they must find every possible way to promote their books at the least expense. By doing this, it opens the door wide for those in the industry to sell you a service that may or may not work, authors can again wind up spending more money and time with little or no results.

Collaboration with fellow-authors who share their ideas and experience helps a great deal, and that is something that generally happens more freely and openly in meetings and events. In addition, finding out from the experts what has worked for them and how any author can tweak a

program or service to get the most from it is just as vital, and worth far more than one may expect.

TxAutors is here to help by providing many opportunities. This includes book festivals, bookstore events, and marketing programs. As we continue to grow in membership, we can continue to grow in opportunities and programs. We encourage every author to read the Author Updates, which we send out three times a week, then participate in programs that fit their needs. One such program that is gaining recognition and international support is our Authors Marketing Event. It is a weekend full of fun, meeting fellow authors and continuing education by attending seminars designed to help you! Now is the time to prepare yourself for a future life as an Authorpreneur and increase your ability to sell more books. Learn more here:

<http://Authors.Marketing>

[www.TxAutors.com](http://www.TxAutors.com)



### SWAMP DREAMS

The swamp is a place of the night.

Sulky, slothful, slovenly during the day,

With ragged reflections on rippled canvas,

It steams and vacillates and sleeps

In secret shrouded wet shadows.

The night transforms the lazy lethargic logs

Into lithe limber dancers of the deep,

Killers with grinning smiles speeding like  
submarines

Toward unsuspecting unwitting targets.

A cacophonous mix of dissenting opinion arises  
from trees

And banks as frogs and insects compete for  
center stage

Beneath an ivory cold crescent moon.

Flashes of light, cool yellows and greens,

Blink a top secret code to undisclosed agents of  
the night.

Warm bloods wandering in a cold blooded  
world.

Snakes slither in silt and slime

To taste the air with forked tongue.

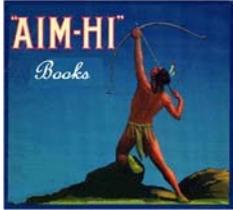
All of them, turtles, snakes, birds and fish,

Meet their end in a clash of jaws and crunch of  
bone.

*Ernie Lee, © 2017*

Have you a poem you would like to share in the *True-badour*?

Send it to Ernie at [bardoftheblanco@hotmail.com](mailto:bardoftheblanco@hotmail.com). We would love to help you share it with our readers.



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# WRITING IS GIVING

**Writing+Is+Giving** means that the simple act of writing is an act of giving. When we write something, we give information to someone, even if it is a question.

I have decided to **GIVE AWAY 2,016** copies of my book **AQUASAURUS** to Cancer Fighters; those who are fighting cancer now and who have survived a cancer fight in the past. **It is totally free.** All you have to do is follow these steps:

Go to [WWW.Aim-HiBooks.com](http://WWW.Aim-HiBooks.com)

Subscribe in the orange box on the web site.

Press the "Contact" button on top.

Send me a message with your name and e-mail address

Nominate someone (or yourself). I need their name, e-mail address, type of cancer and year (for my records only) and the format they need (mobi and pdf are the two methods available)

Hit send. They will receive a complete copy of my book in their in-box totally free.

As a cancer survivor myself, I want to reach out to those whose lives have been impacted by cancer.

Please help me accomplish this by nominating someone today. Maybe together we can brighten someone's day.

By: Ernie Lee



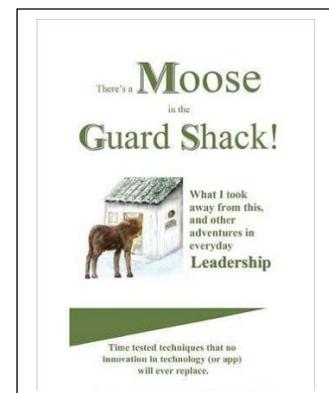
Title: There's a Moose in the Guard Shack! Author: John Howard Hatfield

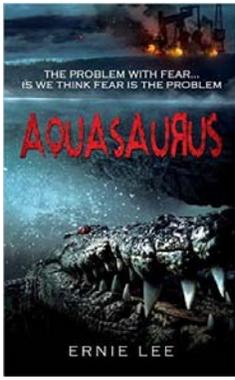
Genre: Business & Economics / Leadership

ISBN: 978-1-4958-0825-8

Publisher: Infinity Publishing

[http://www.amazon.com/Theres-Moose-Guard-Howard-Hatfield/dp/1495808254/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1462068844&sr=8-1&keywords=There%27s+a+moose+in+the+guard+shack](http://www.amazon.com/Theres-Moose-Guard-Howard-Hatfield/dp/1495808254/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1462068844&sr=8-1&keywords=There%27s+a+moose+in+the+guard+shack)





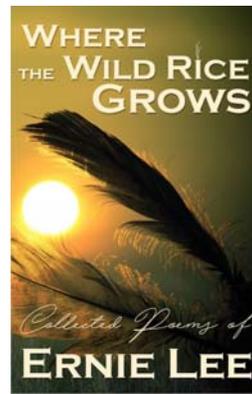
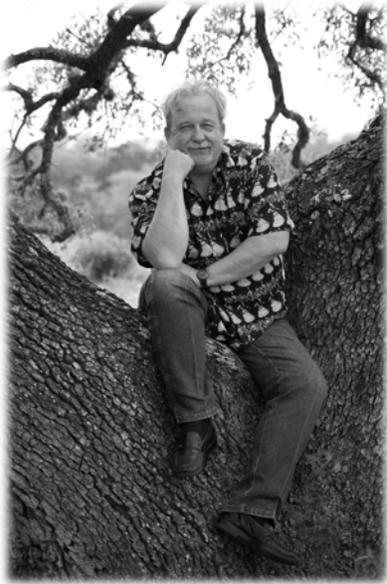
Title: *Aquasaurus*

Genre: Thriller / Adventure

ISBN: 978-09971284-2-0

Available on Amazon or at

[www.Aim-HiBooks.com](http://www.Aim-HiBooks.com)



Title: *Where the Wild Rice Grows*

The Collected Poems of Ernie Lee

Genre: Poetry

ISBN: 978-0-9971284-3-7

Available on Amazon or at

[www.Aim-HiBooks.com](http://www.Aim-HiBooks.com)

Soon to be available as a 6-CD audio set with words and music. Samples can be heard at iTunes, Apple Music, and several other outlets. For free listening Search "Where the Wild Rice Grows" on [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)

SUBSCRIBER BONUS: Chapter 1 of the award winning Novel *AQUASAURUS*

# AQUASAURUS

Chapter 1

© 2016, Ernie Lee

It is as dark as a tomb. It is so dark you cannot see your hand at the end of your arm. Dark is more than the absence of light, more than nothingness. Dark, in its final form, moves from perception to chilling reality. That indescribable, untouchable 'thing' you feel in the dark ... is the dark. You cannot touch it; it touches you. It touches you with cold icy fingers as cold as the dark side of the moon. Not just black, it is blacker than black. It presses in all around you and steals your breath. It squeezes you into something microscopic. It sucks all awareness into a void that seems empty and lifeless. If you opened a light in this dark, it would appear as the gleaming blade of a razor-sharp knife that slowly turns edgewise until it shrinks into a tiny pixel on a vast cosmic plasma screen before disappearing in the voluminous overwhelming dark.

Though it seems empty and lifeless, you know that it is not. You know with absolute certainty that you are not alone in this dark. You cannot see it, but it is there... stalking ... waiting. This is not the certainty you felt when you knew something lived in your closet that did not know how to open doors. Nor is it the certainty when you knew something lived beneath your bed. Those childish, irrational, illogical certainties have paled and receded with youth and time. This certainty does not recede; it advances. It breathes in the impervious dark. It moves with slow, sucking sounds. It nears. It breathes your air.

★

She had left the light on again which irritated Jesse Perrine to no end. He padded across the room, barefoot, to the bathroom. He had been seeing Rita for a little over a year now, and he seriously could not understand the obsession she had of always leaving a light on. At first, it was sexy and refreshing. Most women want the lights off when they made love. Not Rita! Sometimes she even drifted to sleep without turning off the lamp next to her bed. Jesse would invariably wake up in the middle of the night, harsh light interrupting his peaceful dreams, and would have to go all the way around the bed to turn the damn light off. It was a minor irritant, but it was constant. Every night!

And those sounds she made in her sleep! Almost like crying. Moans and sudden sharp breaths. One night it sounded like she had an air leak. She was huffing and puffing as if she were fighting to blow up a balloon, and was losing the battle. He half expected to wake up and find her flat as a pancake! Flat was one thing, Rita Martin was not. She had strong arms and legs of an athlete. She was toned and muscled except in places where she was supposed to be soft. All the good places. She was worth it, he decided. She was 'the one'. He just was not sure if he was 'the one' for her. If that meant he had to spend a lifetime getting up in the middle of the night to turn a light off, he guessed he would adjust to it in time. Right now, they didn't live together, so it didn't matter much. From the lights-on thing and the restless dreams, he knew something was bothering her. Something bad. Something deep she did not – or could not – discuss. He also knew better than to ask. Every time he mentioned it, she either denied anything was wrong, or changed the subject by launching into her favorite diversion – trying to convince him to transfer from Texas State to UTSA.

When he came out of the bathroom, she was sitting in the middle of the bed putting on her makeup. Music was playing on the clock radio; a recent hit song they both liked. Rita said "Morning, baby!" playfully leering at his half-zipped jeans. He looked down self-consciously and hiked them up. "Aw, you teaser!" she pouted. "You give me a little peek, and then cover up! Are you sure you aren't a male stripper?" she asked. The song 'I'm So Fancy' was playing on the radio, so Jesse playfully grabbed the decorative poste at the end of her bed and used it like a stripper pole. Jesse was no stripper, though he had the body of one. His moves were clumsy and comical, and Rita delighted in his impulsive antics. He was still dancing to 'Fancy' when the song ended and 'Shake It Off!' came on. Jesse stopped dancing and pretended to be upset the song had changed. "Damn! Just when I was halfway to Tokyo!"

"Shake it off, baby!" Rita encouraged. "Shake it off!"

Jesse gamely picked up a hairbrush from the bed and danced around singing the lyrics to the song about cruising and not being able to stop moving. Jesse, with his long black hair flying looked to Rita like a big black sheep dog! Rita screamed and jumped out of bed laughing hard and running toward the bathroom. "Stop! You're gonna make me pee!" Jesse was still singing and prancing around when she came out and stood in the doorway. She slowly shook her head and gave him a playful thumbs down. Jesse was unfazed, "Haters gonna hate, hate, hate..." he sang. Rita joined in, "Fakers gonna fake, fake, fake." They collapsed on the bed laughing. He wrapped her in his arms and kissed her. "You know I gotta go," he moaned into her neck. It was a mistake. He knew it as soon as it left his mouth.

"You don't have to – you want to." She wasn't laughing anymore.

"What do you mean? We talked about this over and over. It's Spring Break. You know I've had plans to go into Honey Creek cave for over a year," he reminded. "And, you have plans to go to Enchanted Rock! You've got to get Katie ready to go to Colorado this summer."

"I know. But I was holding out hope that you might give up the cave trip, and go with me. It's alright – don't worry about it. It's fine," she said quickly. Jesse knew when she said that, it was far from fine.

Desperate that they not part on a bad note he offered, "Look. When I get back next week, maybe we can ... talk about me transferring to UTSA next semester."

"Really? Baby!" She beamed and grabbed him; pulling him tight to her. Then she pushed him away with a suspicious look on her face. "You're not just saying that are you? You're serious?"

"Sure," he said. "But right now, I've got to go! I'll be late. Professor Morrison has already threatened to lock the classroom door! I can't be late again."

"If you moved to UTSA..." she began.

"Yeah, yeah, I know! We could sleep in and not have to fight traffic to get to school. You're right. But right now I've gotta go." He slipped into his shoes, pulled on a t-shirt, "I'll see you in a couple of days when we get back from the cave." He headed toward the door, picking up his backpack along the way. He looked back over his shoulder and gave her his most dazzling smile and a wink. She blew him a kiss, and then he was gone.

★

Clint Marshall stood with his thumbs hooked in his belt. He was not pleased. Under a blistering Texas sun, the soaring skeleton of an oilrig shimmered and played in the reflection on the lenses of his dark aviator glasses. His foreman, Hugh Shipmann, stood nearby kicking a scuffed boot against a piece of flakey limestone.

"Well, it ain't good enough," Clint barked.

Hugh squinted at his boss, "We're squeezing the lime for all it's worth, Hoss. Crew is spent. We been pumping fluids 16-7 for two weeks straight. Mamma Earth just won't give up the juice."

Clint unscrewed a bottle of water and took a drink, swishing the water around as if he had a bad taste in his mouth. He spat it out. “Well, we better figure out something. If the numbers don’t go up, we got big problems. The S-wave and SedLogs say the crude is down there. SpecA and mud logs both look good. Oil is in the hole. If we can’t pump it out, that’s on us. Where is Hootie?”

“Called out sick.”

“Called out sick? What the hell is that? You mean called ‘in’ sick?” Clint grumbled. “You Yankee boys drive me nuts! Sick from what? He better be bleeding, broke, or on fire!” Clint pulled a long draw on his water bottle.

“Said he had anal glaucoma,” Hugh grinned.

Clint interrupted his drink, tilting his head forward to avoid spilling on his starched shirt. The bottle made a popping sound as he pulled it away from his lips, and water dripped on his hand. “Anal what? What the hell is anal glaucoma?” he asked as he shook the water from his hand.

“Said he couldn’t see his ass coming to work today!” Hugh clinched his jaw and tried hard not to laugh.

Clint was not amused. “Well, you get his butt in here by 10 o’clock or he’s gonna see my boot fitting him for a monocle. I’m flyin’ down to Houston at two, and I better go with some answers; or a plan! We have to pull pipe on this job; we’re all out on the street.”

Hugh’s browed wrinkled. In his best Texan voice he said, “Well, we keep on keeping on and hope we break up whatever is down there blocking the flow.”

“Keepin’-on-keepin’-on ain’t getting it done! I’m thinking we need something extra,” Clint growled.

“What have you got in mind, Hoss?”

“I don’t know – somethin’! Maybe we need a new method – maybe Pawson’s,” Clint mused, almost to himself.

Hugh sucked his lips tight to his teeth to keep from smiling. It was no laughing matter. He fixed his boss’ eyes with a dead serious look and released the pressure on his lips with an audible snick. “Pawson’s hasn’t been approved,” he said, knowing Clint already knew.

“Well, I can’t think of a better well to do some field-testing on. Can you?”

“Yeah,” Hugh nodded. “One somewhere in South America!”

Clint turned and walked back to his truck. “Well, we ain’t in South America!” He flung what was left of his water bottle against the light cart on his way past. Water dripped off the side of the yellow machine. “Anal glaucoma!” he muttered to himself.

★

Professor Tom Morrison took a sip from his coffee cup and looked out at his students. God he hated teaching! He wanted to anywhere else but in a classroom. He hated kids almost as much as he hated teaching! Zombies! Drugged-out, fogged-out, burned-out, boozed-out, zoned-out zombies! Moreover, eight o’clock classes were the absolute worst! Later, when they went into the field for research in 100 plus degree heat they’d be grateful for an early class. But right now all they wanted to do was sleep, except for one; and she wanted to go to bed. Better watch out for that one, Tom thought. Trouble. Anyway, this was the last class before Spring Break. He would be free for a whole week. He could not wait to get away to the out back in the Florida ‘Glades, and no students to bother with! They would all be on the beach partying like zombies.

Tom launched into his Earth Sciences lesson plan. “Let’s talk today about something that threatens to have a lasting impact on global biological and environmental health, especially here in South Texas. The frickin’ oil business! Oops! I mean the **fracking** oil business.” He paused for their laughter.

Tom launched into the lecture. “Due to world-wide uber-dependence on fossilized fuels, demand for petroleum has increased exponentially. Here in America, volatile prices and the cost of importing oil have spurred new processes for getting oil from shale deposits unreachable only a few years past. Hydraulic fracturing – or hydro fracking – or just plain fracking, is one way to get at those sources of natural gas and petroleum. It can even be used to produce water, but it makes for extremely expensive water.” Tom explained shale sediments can hold large amounts of gas, water, and oil in tiny pores of the rock deep underground. “So does Limestone, but it is much harder to crack than shale. Drilling deep within the earth, the drillers inject a fluid mixture of water, sand, and chemicals into the well under high pressure. These chemicals and the pressure will weaken the shale rock and fracture it – thus the name. The fractures seep oil and gas into the well, which they pump to the surface. Old style oil wells were vertical, but fracking most often uses lines branching out horizontally through the field. Then gravity can help drain the loosened oil and gas into the well channel more efficiently.” Tom drew a picture on a white board illustrating his lecture as he talked.

“More oil here at home equals higher profits, more jobs for workers, lower cost to us at the pump for gasoline, and less dependency on volatile political systems abroad. So, what’s the problem?” he asked.

Tom explained over 600 chemicals go into the oil fracking fluid, all of them toxic; and some of them are potentially deadly. He went over the list which included formaldehyde, lead, mercury, hydrochloric acid, radium, uranium, to name a few – all hazardous, all pollutants, and some explosive. Tom talked about the carcinogens and toxic chemicals that, once released into the ground water, can become dangerous to large populations. Not only was

there the huge human risk, but the risks to animals and the environment were tremendous. The fracking method uses an extraordinary amount of water, which they haul to the oil well site in tanker trucks, putting pressure on supply, increasing the risk to traffic and public safety, and causing great damage to area roads and bridges. Some small South Texas communities simply cannot keep up with it.

In addition, a measurable increase of detectable tremors has occurred in recent years. Some suggest fracking might be contributing to the instability of underground geologic structures. Jesse's eyes came up, as he stopped reading the text on his cell phone and listened closely. Tom continued, "There have been more tremors in Texas these last two years alone than the previous one hundred." Tom interrupted his lecture and pointed his stir stick toward Jesse Perrine, the terminally late one, who had his hand in the air. "Mr. Perrine?" How refreshing. A zombie with a question.

"Is that just a localized effect? I mean, only around the drilling sites?"

"Only if you consider Texas and Oklahoma and every fracking state from here to Pennsylvania, local," Morrison answered. "Everywhere the technique is used an increase in earth movement and subsidence, including cave-ins and sink holes, have been detected. The environmental impact has been immeasurable. Vital habitat is being irreparably damaged. We may not know the true cost for years to come."

Tom ended his lecture by stating the oil and gas industry has long been fully aware of the dangers and the risks. But big oil, and big profits mean huge political contributions.

"The high price of oil makes it financially more attractive for oil companies to pump rather than work towards developing renewable sources of energy with less impact on the environment. Demand for wind and solar power energy has increased, but not enough to staunch the demand for petroleum produced energy. Texas now leads the nation in wind-produced electric energy, but it is not enough. Profits drive energy; and as long as the profit is in petroleum, the emphasis will remain on pumping. Despite the risks to public health, the damage to infrastructure and natural systems, the waste of already scarce water resources, the polluting spills, the huge number of industrial accidents, and injuries – including deaths, the oil drillers just shake it off!"

"Class dismissed. Wake up and get out of here! Enjoy your fracking Spring Break. See you next week!" he laughed.

★

Texas State University campus in San Marcos is idyllic. It is an awesome paradise of crystal-clear water, warm weather, leafy green trees, and blue-eyed blondes adorning every rock ledge bordering the slow moving river. People have lived around the nearby springs for 12,000 years. Deep beneath the campus, the aquifer bubbles, drips, and flows through limestone caves and natural limestone caverns. The limestone rock naturally filters the pure, transparent water, which feeds San Marcos Springs, Comal Springs further south, and an immeasurable number of other springs, streams, and rivers around the edges bordering the Texas hill country. The underground system is teeming with life. It is the subterranean home of thousands of aquatic and terrestrial animals. Salamanders, blind catfish, crayfish, darters, snakes, and all types of swimming animals thrive in the constant eighty-two degree water. Many connecting caverns, alternately dry or wet depending upon the water table, are also home to birds, gigantic rats, shrews, spiders, beetles, and millions of bats.

A connected system of underground pools, known as the Edwards Aquifer, wraps around the edge of the hill country. This vast aquifer runs some 250 miles from near Brackettville, through San Antonio, then northward toward Austin and Waco. It is unknown how large these subterranean systems are. Water monitors maintain test wells to measure the aquifer's rise and fall, which have never gone dry – even during the worst drought conditions. Some might compare the aquifer to a large underground lake. If the aquifer were on the surface, it might be an inland sea some three hundred miles long. Some scientists estimate it would be so large that it would have tides and waves. At the least, it would be a Texas-sized great lake.

Deep underground, wet walls glisten in the dampness, and water drips from the ceiling making unceasing echoes. There, in the deep, deep darkness – blacker than any night, a large alligator-like creature slides from a semi-dry ledge into the brackish water. The scaly reptile is slimy and moss colored, and reeks of fish and rotted meat. It is hungry. Hunting. Suspended, motionless in total darkness. Thousands of years of adaptation allow it to maneuver in the boundless darkness – much like the way night-vision technology works. It gathers and amplifies tiny fragments of ambient light and low spectrum infrared light. Combined with thermal imaging, like snakes use, the creature can "see" in total darkness. It floats with its eyes barely above the water line. The eyes and the bulla, which contain its sensory organs, are normally the only thing visible on the surface. Huge webbed, clawed feet provide balance and stability. The claws are long and as sharp as knives. A long, encrusted tail swings slowly from side to side giving it a slight forward motion, barely rippling the water. As it swims into the fresher water, hundreds of fish, detecting its presence, scurry away from the massive predator. The beast begins to emit a low purr. The sound is almost inaudible to humans. The animal becomes invisible to the fish. The reptile knows now only its movements can reveal its presence. The silvery fish swim back and surround the floating leviathan, unaware the creature is not a moss-covered rock. The small darters and minnows feed off its skin as they would on algae covered cave walls. It waits. The predator waits to feed – silently, motionless, undetectable – it waits to feed.

A dark cloud of bats, fifty feet wide, is coming through the channel toward their roost, which lies beyond the creature. They swirl and swoop along the glossy cave walls, using sonar to avoid collisions. Conditioned by eons of time, they know they will be able to “see” any potential threat in time to avoid disaster. They do not know of the stealth capabilities of the submerged beast whose low-pitched humming disrupts their sonar signals. The bats fly nearer and nearer over the concealed, undetected predator. They swirl and flit along cliff walls a hundred feet high, then dive steeply to skim the surface of the dark water while snagging mosquitoes and water bugs as they zoom past, breaking formation, feeding, then reforming into their cloudlike swarm. Closer and closer they come.

Exploding from the murky water, the predator’s crocodilian maw, gaping wide, engulfs the cloud of surprised bats. The jaws snare a huge segment of the moving cloud, fifteen feet wide, which disappears inside the creature’s massive mouth. Splashing back into the water the massive animal twists and turns, and churns the water, devouring hundreds of bats in huge snaps and chomps. The sounds of water roiling, wings flapping, and bones crunching fill the cavern. Gyration and turning in the water, the creature scrapes against ancient jagged limestone outcroppings, tearing a length of skin from its side, which hangs loosely and trails behind the left rear leg. It is an unnoticed minor wound to the animal. Merely a nick. In the melee, the small flap of skin peels off then floats and bobs along with pieces of wings and dozens of dead or dying bats. Some bats escape, flying through the huge jagged teeth, as the huge beast continues to chew and grind prey with huge snaps of its toothy jaws. Foamy, red-flicked water sloshes against the cavern walls in huge waves, washing from one side across to the other like in a gruesome bathtub.

The survivors regroup and fly onward to their roosts while the creature subsides into the deep, dark, unfathomable water. Resting now, an opaque flap of skin slowly slides down over the dead, yellow eyes. The low-pitched sonic hum ceases, and darter fish dash swim near in metallic flashes to peck at the bloody entrails hanging from the sides of the great smiling mouth. Echoes of dripping water are again the only sound. Fed now, it sleeps within the deep, dreadful, dark cavern.

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