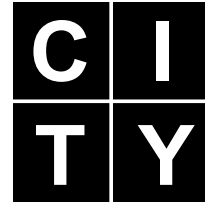


Issue 31 | Winter 2022

The broken



The horror! The horror!



**Resurrecting the Queen (too soon?)
Clutch your perils!
A murder mystery
Comfort in the darkness of night**

ISSN 1916-3304

The broken



Winter 2022 Issue 31

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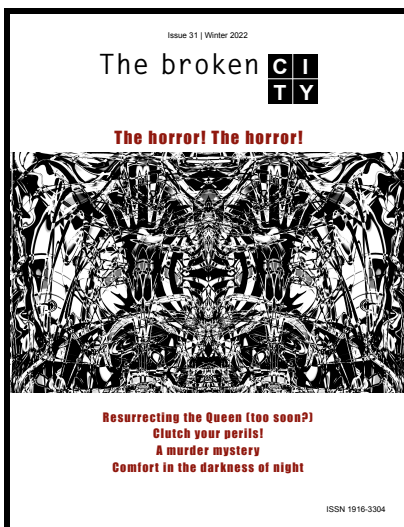
Correspondence:

thebrokencitymag@yahoo.com

On Twitter:

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Welcome to *The Broken City's* horror issue.

Let's see what's making all that noise in the deep dark woods, shall we? What's that? You have the same name as a murderer? A coincidence, surely. Is that a pentagram you're drawing?

Cover Illustration:

"In Praise of Nothingness" by **Edward Michael Supranowicz** (see page 7 for more)

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The Broken City is currently accepting submissions for its summer 2023 edition: **Dragons and wizards and elves, oh my!**

That's right, the magazine is running a fantasy issue: trolls; giants; slimes; knights; kingdoms at war; engaging in gory battles; D&D. If it could be in a fairy tale, we want to see it.

Send your poetry, fiction, essays, illustrations and photography to thebrokencitymag@yahoo.com.

Deadline is: May 1, 2023. Submitters will be contacted after that date, with news of acceptance or rejection.

there, a pet's ick, lowing *Vanessa Couto Johnson*

Let my clone have their therapy,

considering the loss of Second

Chance. Uncover memory of the Dolly
's hoist to handspinning and foot

glands. Let this cover you

-th as pluripotently as any pass

-ible rise. To be borne, chasing bound
-ary. The mitt does not. Exist in grip

anyway. The grooming tool catches

the strays. What is left is identical

to the starting line. All these tendons
waiting for the shutters to open

whatever else is bet

-ter to repeat. Baby the candy and stick the carrot.

Vanessa Couto Johnson (she/they) is the author of the full-length poetry books Pungent dins concentric (Tolsun Books, 2018) and forthcoming pH of Au (Parlor Press, Free Verse Editions Series 2022), as well as three poetry chapbooks. Most recently, Vanessa's poems have appeared in Landfill, Abandon Journal, Angel Rust, and Pine Hills Review.

i.e., b-tter *Vanessa Couto Johnson*

Clutch your perils

until they hatch: count
the doors lacing

the room: one lies,

another understands: the lobster
clasp holds well

beaded breath by weighted bangle:
dress four tubes

to chyme: smell
fear, refreshing taste
to look (at this)
much better.

Resurrecting The Queen

Charlie Robert

Draw the Pentagram.
With Salt.
Place Candles.
On the Cardinal Points.
This is Crucial.
Do Not Fail.
The Iron Gate is
Broken in Rust.
Headstones.
Sunken Earth.
Shadows.
Twisting in Pain.
Light a Fire on the Hilltop.
Put the Fields to Flame.
Prepare Thy Self.
She is Close.
Her Rotten Wood Bed.
Lips in Rictus.
Eyes like the Dolls she hides in her Attic.

Charlie Robert is a writer and poet living in Silicon Valley. His work has appeared in Milk and Cake Press, Iconoclast, NOMADartx, Rat's Ass Review, The Rye Whiskey Review, Synchronized Chaos, Sacred Chickens, Orchards Poetry Journal, Pikers Press and Jaspers Folly, and is forthcoming in others. Find him at: charlierobert.com

Murder Mystery

J. J. Steinfeld

She passed him a note
which he read slowly
with the apprehension
of the betrayed:
“A murderer has my name
nearly exact
except for a stylized spelling
of her first name,
I use *y*, she *i*.”

She was pretty enough
the light could have been better
he could have been more circumspect.

They went home in this poem
or, more accurately,
in a story caught in this poem
and after the expenditures
of passions and pasts
he asked her to spell her name slowly
with her hands on the table.

Poet/fiction writer/playwright J. J. Steinfeld lives on Prince Edward Island, where he is patiently waiting for Godot's arrival and a phone call from Kafka. While waiting, he has published 24 books, including A Visit to the Kafka Café (Poetry/Ekstasis Editions/2018), Gregor Samsa Was Never in The Beatles (Stories/Ekstasis Editions/2019), Morning Bafflement and Timeless Puzzlement (Poetry/Ekstasis Editions/2020), Somewhat Absurd, Somehow Existential (Poetry/Guernica Editions/2021), Acting on the Island (Stories/Pottersfield Press/2022), and As You Continue to Wait (Poetry/Ekstasis Editions/2022).

Dark Comfort

James B. Nicola

It comforts me, the darkness of the night.
It is the growth of darkness in the day
that scares me. There is something not quite right

in monumental ways as well as slight.
The coming tide's both continents away
and close by. Once, the darkness of the night

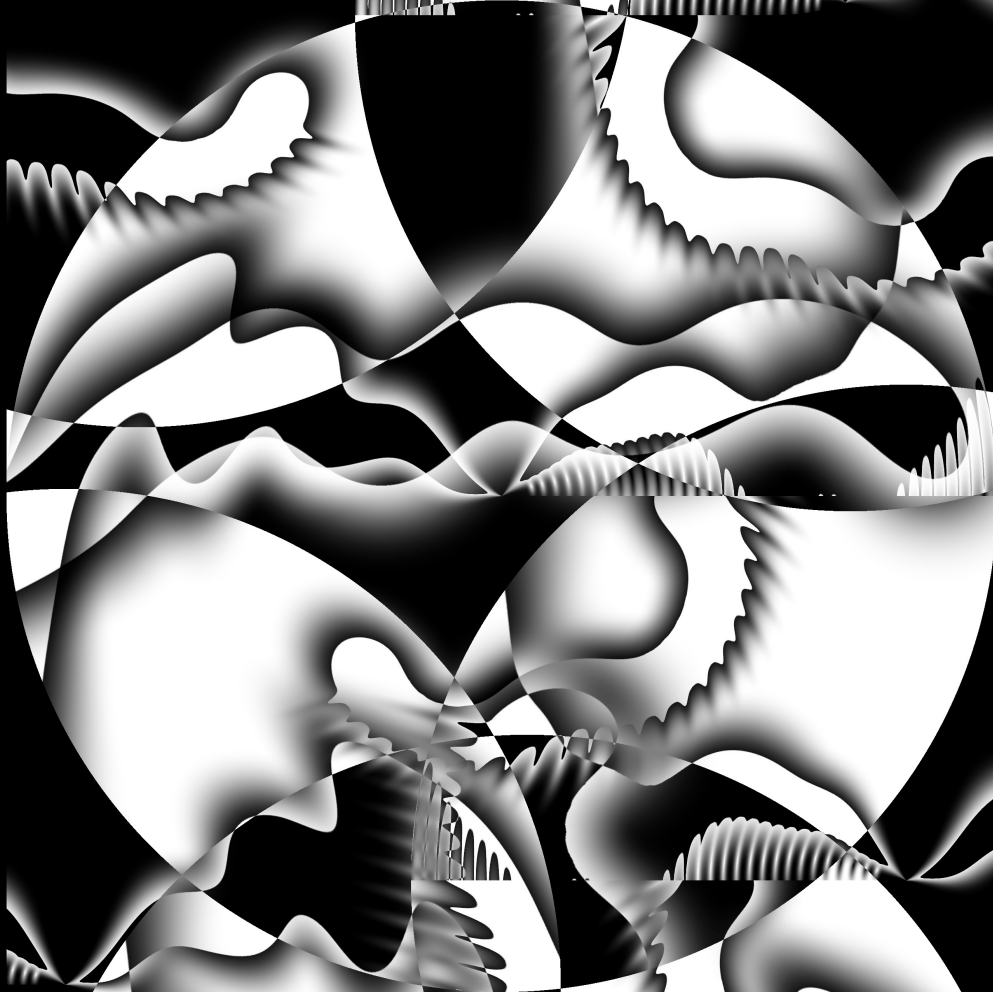
persuaded me that somewhere out of sight
was probably the safest place to play.
Those were my green years, when the world seemed right

and night skies were my blanket. Tucked in tight,
I'd see the stars, then close my eyes and pray.
The sequined firmament, the dark of night,

became my friend this way. Ghosts that would fright
were fictive; monsters, fun. But come the gray
of dawn-to-day the monsters of the right

so terrify with what they've done and might
do in broad daylight, how can we not say:
What comforts is the dark we know at night,
the day's new darkness so, so far from right?

James B. Nicola is a frequent contributor to The Broken City and author of nine full-length poetry collections (2014-23). His nonfiction book Playing the Audience won a Choice award. His poetry and prose have received a Dana Literary Award; two Willow Review awards; Storyteller's People's Choice award; plus one Best of Net, one Rhysling Award, and ten Pushcart nominations—for which he feels both stunned and grateful.



Windswept

Edward Michael Supranowicz

Edward Michael Supranowicz is the grandson of Irish and Russian/Ukrainian immigrants. He grew up on a small farm in Appalachia. He has a grad background in painting and printmaking. Some of his artwork has recently or will soon appear in Fish Food, Streetlight, Another Chicago Magazine, The Door Is A Jar, The Phoenix, and The Harvard Advocate. Edward is also a published poet who has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize multiple times.

Winter Nights

Ken Wetherington

On cold, winter nights, I hear her wailing when the wind curls through the ravine. She stalks through the bitter darkness of the Maine woods, restless and alone. She's desperate, but I don't fear her. I don't know what she wants.

Shortly before the holidays, I found the decimated carcass of a deer in a stand of birches. She's a skilled hunter and takes what she needs. What drives her to despair if not hunger? The cold? I don't think so. She prowls the nocturnal landscape in all kinds of weather.

She walks upright. I have seen her oversized footprints in the snow. She is tall. Bruised and broken branches betray her path. Her territory is expansive. Once, I came across her trail on the other side of the ridge.

The wolves and bears have mostly gone. She has claimed their domain. The deer are clueless, though, and the wild turkeys even more so. Rodents, birds, and other small mammals thrive. They are beneath her notice. She has upset nature's balance.

She has begun to visit my cabin at night. When I arise in the mornings, her hot, heavy scent lingers in the air. The cow in the barn snorts and stamps uneasily. The stack of firewood in the lean-to has been disturbed. What did I have that she wanted?

Lately, her misery has grown more urgent. Is she ailing? I don't think so. Her cries are of a soul in anguish, not of one in pain. What weighs on her? She is powerful, the queen of her realm. She answers to no one.

Last week, I could no longer take it. Snow had been falling since midday, but after dark, I bundled up, put on my boots, and went out. The yellow cast of my lantern encircled me, though I hardly needed it. The whiteness of the snow in contrast with the dark, bare tree trunks, revealed the landscape before me.

Up ahead I heard her, edging away and leaving a draft of warmth as I approached. A shyness or suspicion seemed to have come over her. Was I intruding on her privacy? She did not need to fear me.

Her path lay before me, and I pressed on, soon reaching the ravine. Movement on the far side drew my attention. She had halted, a dim shape too far away to be seen clearly. The ravine wasn't deep, perhaps ten or twelve feet but its sheerness gave me pause. She had either stepped across or leapt. The cleft would be nothing to her.

I searched for and found a place where the grade was not so severe and began to ease down the slope, still holding my lantern. At the bottom, I slipped on the surface of a frozen stream and wrenched my knee. I rose shakily and took a few feeble steps. Then I heard a snarl.

The glow of my lantern revealed a wolf, standing unsteadily a few feet away. The creature took a wobbly step toward me. Drool leaked from its jaws. The rabid animal lurched, and I backpedaled. The disease slowed the predator, but I had no chance. At the last

moment, a powerful presence swept through the ravine, and the wolf was gone.

The lantern had gone out, and I lay still for a moment, barely able to believe what had happened. Soon, though, the cold forced me to rise. My gimpy knee made climbing out of the ravine difficult. Finally, I managed to crawl out and limp back to my cabin just before sunrise. With my limited mobility, I stayed close to home for the next few days.

Meanwhile, her nocturnal screams grew louder, taking on an edge of physical pain as if a great ache wracked her body. Or had she sustained an injury? What could harm her? Surely not the wolf. It must be something else.

On a dark night, just before dawn, one final, piercing screech tore through the blackness and then silence. As the sky began to lighten, I rose from my bed and dressed warmly before venturing outside. My breath steamed in the stillness of the wintery air.

A new sound, a scratching, caught my ear. I turned toward the lean-to. Beneath the shelter on the ground next to the woodpile, lay a... a... well, I guess you could call it a child. Definitely a male, twice the size of a normal infant. His red, leathery skin and alert, probing eyes stunned me. He seemed impervious to the cold.

I took him in, bathed his hairless body, and wrapped him in a blanket. From a rubber glove I sliced off a finger, fastened it with a rubber band

around the neck of a milk bottle, and fed him. He drank greedily.

I am settling into my parental role. Each day, I become more attached to the little fellow. He watches me closely and gurgles with joy whenever I draw near. Soon, I will begin his education. Already, he has shown signs of being a quick learner.

One day, his mother will return to claim him. I bear her no blame for entrusting him to me. She has little time; her life is demanding. Eventually, though, she'll come for her son. Will I be able to give him up? I don't know. I hope we can resolve his custody amicably. We'll see...

Ken Wetherington lives in Durham, North Carolina. His story, "The Brothers Evanger," was First Runner-Up for the 2022 Harambee Literary Prize, and his story "Singapura" has been nominated for the 2023 Best American Short Stories anthology and for the Pushcart Prize XLVIII. Other stories have appeared in Ginosko Literary Journal, The Fable Online, Borrowed Solace: A Journal of Literary Ramblings, The Remington Review, Lowestoft Chronicle, and others. His first collection, Santa Abella and Other Stories was published in 2020. Website: kenwetherington.com / Twitter: @KenWetherington

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www.thebrokencitymag.com
thebrokencitymag@yahoo.com