

Evil Glasses



October 1, 2015

Edition 2

Plane Jumper

by Marshall Bowles

Donald was born on a Sunday in the summer. His parents had planned it well. There was no mad rush to the hospital. The epidural came right on time. His mother went through very little pain. Baby Donald popped out into the waiting arms of the doctor. A normal, easy birth to what seemed to be a normal, healthy boy.

But Donald was not normal. He had a gift. That's what his grandmother told him, for as long as he could remember. "Your gift is rare," she said when he was five years old. Donald was at her house and pulling weeds out of the flowerbed while grandmother swept the porch. She made him do chores whenever he visited her. "It's disappearing from this world. Everyone I know who had it is dead now, except you and me."

"Are you sure I have it?" Donald said.

"Yes, sweetie," his grandmother said. "Sensing the power in others is a small piece of the gift."

She made him promise to keep it a secret, which was hard for Donald. He desperately wanted to brag to his parents about how special he was supposed to be. He stood by his mother's side while she stirred vegetable soup in the big black pot, rocking back and forth on his feet. "Nana said I'm going to have adventures!" he wanted to say. "She says I can do stuff nobody else can." But he kept it to himself, the special secret just for him and his grandmother.

"They'll think you're crazy, Donald," his grandmother said. "No one will believe you if you tell them." She flipped through the channels on TV, skipping past the cartoons that Donald wanted to watch.

"Why?" Donald asked her. He laid on the shag carpet of the living room floor with a couch pillow under his chest.

"Because they don't understand," she said. She flipped to a nature show about bears. She stayed on that channel long enough for Donald to get excited, and then she changed channels again. "They can't see what I see, and what you will see when your gift is ready. People don't believe in what they can't see."

"But what about Jesus," Donald said. "They can't see him."

His grandmother laughed. She flipped to the news channel and stopped.

Donald stared off in the distance, ignoring the images playing on the television. He imagined the adventures he would go on. He would be the first person to explore places where no other humans had ever been.

Donald tossed a baseball with his father in the yard behind their two-story house. "Good catch," his father said. "Do it just like that in the game on Thursday." Donald tossed the ball back. He wondered if baseball existed in those other worlds. He made a mental note to ask his grandmother about it later.

"Nana, how will I know when I'm ready?" Donald said. He dipped a hard-boiled egg into a dish full of blue dye. The basket on the table was halfway full of the eggs he had finished.

"You'll just know," his grandmother said. She rinsed the soap off of a plate and put it on the drying rack. She reached into the soapy water in the sink and grabbed a coffee mug. "It will happen suddenly, and it will be different than anything you've ever felt before in your life."

"Will it be soon?" Donald said. He used tongs to roll the egg around in the bowl.

"I don't think so, honey," she said. "You're only eight. It happens when you become an adolescent. I was ten at my awakening, but boys tend to mature slower. So probably not until you're twelve or thirteen."

"Aw," Donald said. "That's forever."

His grandmother laughed. "If you want to do something," she said, "you can practice your

concentration exercises."

"Those are boring," Donald said.

"They're important," his grandmother said. "You'll need to be good at them to use your gift."

"Oh fine," Donald said. He sat down on the kitchen floor, crossed his legs, and closed his eyes. He slowed his breathing like his grandmother had taught him, and he tried his best to listen to his body. Donald had trouble understanding what his grandmother meant for him to do, but he tried the best he could.

Donald stared out the window at the pine trees swaying in the wind. He should have been focused on finishing his math assignment, like the rest of his classmates. They hunched over their desks, furiously scribbling down numbers. Donald wondered if trees were the same in other worlds.

"Donald!" Ms. Hemsworth said. "Quit daydreaming and do your work." Donald frowned and looked back at the paper on his desk.

"How can I come back and forth between here and those other places?" Donald said. His grandmother looked up from the tablecloth in her hands. The red thread stretched tight between the needle and the partially repaired rip in fabric.

"Donald, I've already told you a hundred times," she said. His grandmother was doing the thing where she pretended to be annoyed with Donald. He knew she was trying not to smile at him.

"Anything I tell you won't make sense. I have to show you."

Donald stood up from the table with the half-finished jigsaw puzzle, unmatched pieces spread out across the polished wood. He bounced over to his grandmother. "Then do it now," Donald said. "Go somewhere! I'll watch you, and maybe I will be able to see it."

His grandmother shook her head and set aside her sewing. She smiled softly. "You've watched me jump before."

"Pleeeeeease," Donald said. "I'm older now."

"All right, dear," she said. "But it won't do any good."

Donald held onto her hands. He could barely contain his excitement. Every time his grandmother made a jump, she would come back with fantastical stories. Each time was new and different. "Where are you going?" Donald said. "The fairy land? The world of flying giants?"

His grandmother tapped her chin with a gnarled finger. She was stronger than her gray hair and wrinkled skin made her appear. "Hm," she said. "What about the place with the purple crystals that sing?"

Donald shrugged. "Yeah, I guess so," he said. "That one is kind of boring."

"It wouldn't be boring if I took you there," she said. His grandmother looked at him for a long moment. She bit her lip, and Donald knew she did that when she was trying to make up her mind about something. "What if I bring something back with me? Something from that place?"

"Really?" Donald said.

"Yes," she said. "We can't keep it here for long, but I think a few minutes will be okay."

"Yes!" Donald said.

"Okay," his grandmother said. She laid back in her recliner, closed her eyes, and started taking slow, deep breaths. Donald could feel her heartbeat pulse through the soft skin of her hand. He tried to match her breathing, and he tried to feel her with his heart. He hoped he would sense some spark of energy when she jumped, and then he would be able to jump on his own.

Her body suddenly tensed, and her eyes opened wide. Donald expected this, because of the many times he had watched her jump in the past. Deep black pits of emptiness filled the place where her eyes should be. Looking into that darkness made Donald feel like he was looking down into an old well where it was impossible to see the bottom because there was no bottom.

Just as soon as it began, it ended. His grandmother's body relaxed. She blinked, and her eyes were back where they should be. She looked at Donald.

"Well?" she said. "Did you feel anything?"

"I think so," Donald said.

His grandmother laughed. "You wouldn't answer that way if you had." Donald pouted. "Don't you want to see what I brought back?"

Donald forgot about his disappointment. "Yes!" His grandmother pointed to the coffee table behind him. Donald whirled around. Right in the middle of the table was a large purple crystal. A soft light flickered in its center. Donald slowly stepped toward it. He reached out but stopped short. "Can I touch it?" he said.

"Yes, honey," his grandmother said. "It's safe."

Donald touched the crystal with his pointer finger. When he did, it hummed. Donald giggled. It reminded him of the sounds that the hummingbirds made while they fought over the feeder his parents put out in the summertime.

"Is it alive?" Donald said.

"Not in the way that you and I think of things being alive," his grandmother said. "But it has thoughts and feelings, so I'd say that's close enough."

"Can I keep it?" Donald said. "I won't show anyone, I promise. You know I'm good at keeping secrets."

"No," she said. Donald started to argue, but she cut him off. "It's not because I think you would tell anybody."

"Then why not?" Donald said.

"It doesn't belong in our world," his grandmother said. "You saw how I never went fully across to the other place, because my body stayed here the whole time."

His grandmother picked up the crystal from the table. Its hum was different when she touched it, deeper and slower. "I've never brought something across," she said, "but I wanted you to see something with your own eyes. Its body is here completely, and it doesn't belong."

Donald started to tear up, and his grandmother gently patted him on the head. "Don't cry sweetie," she said. "In a few years I'll take you where this crystal comes from. You and I will go together. I promise."

She leaned back in her recliner. Donald watched the crystal in her hands when she made the jump. One moment it was there, and the next it was gone. Vanished in the blink of an eye.

His grandmother opened her eyes and sat up in the chair. "Nana," Donald said. "How did you do that? You just sat here the whole time and didn't move."

"Because when I jump," she said, "I'm in both places at once."

Donald's grandmother died on a Sunday in the summer. It was his thirteenth birthday. She was driving her car to Donald's house, his birthday present neatly wrapped up in the trunk. A truck driver fell asleep at the wheel, crossed the center line, and hit the driver's side of her car at full speed. Donald was helping his mother clean the house when the police knocked on their door.

The church pews were full, forcing some of the men and women dressed in their mourning attire to stand against the walls. Donald sat in the front row, sandwiched between his parents. He had so far kept himself from crying in front of others, and he fought the tears back now. Donald wanted to leap out of his body, leap out of existence. Why was this happening? He ground his teeth to stop his lip from quivering. Why couldn't things go back to the way they were a few days before?

The priest stood at the podium, towering over the polished oak coffin where Donald's grandmother lay. The priest opened a massive Bible and read scripture, but to Donald the words were an unintelligible sound droning in the background. Donald started shaking, and his mother reached over to grip his hand tightly.

Donald looked down at his lap and tried not to cry. He squeezed his eyes tightly shut. He slowed his breathing. No matter how hard he tried, he could feel the tears rising up from his chest. He bit his lip and tried to force them down. Donald wanted to scream. Why did you leave me Nana?

Donald felt a draft of freezing cold air brush against his face. His mother was no longer holding

his hand, but he did not remember her letting go. He realized that the priest had stopped talking, and the room was unnaturally silent. There were hundreds of people at his grandmother's funeral, but they made no noise. Something was wrong.

Donald opened his eyes. He was in a church, but it was not the same church. The warm wooden walls were now pale concrete, stretching up high to a shadowy vaulted ceiling. There were no stained glass windows, but large clear windows holding back heavy gray mist. The pew on which Donald sat was burnt black wood.

The podium and the priest were gone. A flat concrete alter stood at the front of the chapel. Resting in the middle of the alter was a fleshy lump. Donald stared at it for a moment before his mind could understand the shape. It was a human eye the size of a watermelon.

The eye twitched. Tentacles extending from the back of the disembodied eye flopped like a fish out of water, in its last desperate moments of life. Donald gasped. Stale air filled his lungs, carrying the scent of a coffin buried deep underground.

Donald realized there were others in the pews with him, though no one close by. To his right, several feet away, sat a hunched figure covered completely in black. The woman wore a dress and a thick veil hung down over her face. No part of her body was visible. Even her hands were covered by black gloves. Her head tilted downward, so that she must have been staring at her lap through the veil.

Donald looked over his shoulder. Feminine figures almost identical to the one beside him sparsely filled the pews in the large sanctum. Every single one wore the same black clothing, and they were all the same height and build. Every single one of them stared at its own lap.

Donald heard a creaking sound from the front of the church. He jerked his head back around in time to see a large man enter the church through an arched doorway behind the alter. The man had to be at least seven feet tall, and he wore thick red robes that were long enough to drag along the floor. His face was covered by a mask that looked like a goat, except the mask split at the bridge of the nose down to the snout, much like a forked snake's tongue.

The man carried a dark red staff in one hand and long slender blade in the other. He approached the alter with his arms raised above his head and his head looking up to the ceiling. Donald was petrified. Something about the man in the robes terrified him so badly that he was too afraid to shiver.

The man stopped at the alter. The forked mouth of his mask started moving, and the creaking sound intensified. That was when Donald realized that the man was not a man, and it was not wearing a mask. The creaking sound was its voice.

The creature looked down at the disembodied eye on the alter in front of it. It gestured towards the eye with the weapons in its hands, and it spoke more of its unintelligible creaking speech. The creature raised its arms high and looked out across the black-clad congregation. That's when it noticed Donald.

The creature stopped speaking, clearly surprised to see Donald. For a long moment, Donald stared into those strange goat-like eyes. The creature's arms were frozen in the air, the wet nostrils on its forked snout quivering. Donald could not breathe.

The creature broke the silence with a scream that sounded like metal grating against metal. Donald felt like he was in his grandmother's car and the speeding freight truck was running over him. From the corner of his eye, Donald saw the black-clad woman closest to him raise its head. Donald turned toward her, and he could see the others in the congregation looking, all staring at him.

The woman closest to Donald raised her hands and pulled aside her veil. Donald's hands started shaking when he realized that this was not a woman – at least, not a human one – because she did not have a face. Its pale lumpy skin was shaped like a human head, but there were no eyes, nose, nor hair. A wide mouth stretched from ear to ear. The thing opened that mouth and shrieked, baring multiple rows of pointed teeth.

Donald tried to stand up, but he stumbled and fell flat on his face. His legs were paralyzed out of fear. He heard rustling fabric and could see the dress of the mouth-faced thing coming closer to him.

Donald started hyperventilating. He tried to get his hands under himself so that he could stand. The thing was almost on top of him, and he knew he would not get away. All he could hear was the sound of his own heart beating.

Donald closed his eyes and screamed. He felt hands grab his shoulders, and he screamed louder. The thing grabbing him flipped Donald over onto his back, and he heard it scream. "Donald! Donald!" It was his mother's voice.

Donald opened his eyes and looked up into his mother's face. Both of his parents were kneeling over him, and his mother was holding him tightly by the shoulders. He was lying on his back at the front of the church. The priest looked down on him from behind the pulpit.

Donald cried, his tears a mix of fear and relief. His father picked him up, and Donald buried his head in his father's chest. He sobbed into the wool suit coat as he was carried out of the church and gently placed in the back of the car. The ride home was silent.

His parents assumed that the episode at the church was anguish from his grandmother's death, and Donald did nothing to make them believe otherwise. They finally tucked him into bed and left him alone. The fear that he would get sucked back into another reality kept him up all night.

His next jump happened a few days later during history class. His teacher was talking about the Battle of the Bulge, and Donald was nodding off. It was his first day back at school since his grandmother died. The sleepless nights had been piling up, and Donald was having trouble focusing.

"The Germans moved their troops at night," Mr. Todd said. He ran his hand through his gray hair and became more animated as he spoke. The syllabus showed that they should be studying the Renaissance movement, but WWII was Mr. Todd's favorite subject. "The Allied forces were completely unaware of the advancing Germans, and they were completely surprised by the attack!"

Donald forced his eyes to stay open. He tried to focus his attention on Mr. Todd, who was waving his arms in the air and pacing across the front of the room. The words washed over Donald like a warm bath, and he could feel himself drifting back to sleep. His breathing slowed, his eyelids grew heavy, and his head nodded forward.

Donald jerked himself upright and opened his eyes. He was in a classroom, but it was not his classroom. A brick wall was the only view through the windows, but it let in enough pale light to illuminate the destroyed room. All the desks, including the one in which he sat, were old and rotting.

It looked like the building had burned long ago, and years of water damage and mildew slowly rotted the once pristine furniture. The warped chalkboard at the front of the classroom still showed remnants of some long ago lesson, in a language that Donald could not read. He thought it might be German. An upside-down crucifix hung on the wall above the board.

"No, no, no," Donald whispered. His body started shaking, and he grabbed the sides of his desktop to steady himself. The rotten damp wood squished in his grip and fell apart. He jumped out of the seat and rubbed his hands on his pants to clean off the slime. It left black streaks on the front of his jeans.

He started breathing quickly, and he could feel the tears welling up in his eyes. "Please," he said to the empty room, "I just want to go home." He slid out of the seat and onto the floor. "Nana, I need you," he said. There was no answer. Donald curled up into a ball and cried.

His stomach eventually growled. He had lost track of time, but it felt like he had been in the burnt room for hours. Exhaustion had replaced his fear, but he was worried that he was still in this place. He had hoped that he would just go back to his world all on his own.

Light still came in through the windows, but it was not as bright as it had been before. Donald needed to figure out how to return home, and he wanted to be out of this place before it got dark. He mustered up his strength, and he left the room.

Piles of moldy debris littered the hallway. Each pile was a child-sized lump of brownish-gray goo. They looked wet, and Donald did not want to know what would happen if he stepped on one. He carefully picked his way around the piles, only stepping on clear spots on the tile floor.

Long scorch marks marred the walls, and they looked strange to Donald. Each one was a groove dug into the wall, with burn marks extending out along the wall from the center. It did not look like what he expected fire damage to look like. They reminded Donald of scratches made by claws.

He came to a spot where he could not easily step onto another tile due to a cluster of moldy piles blocking his path. Donald spotted a clearing on the other side. He crouched down and leapt, but he landed short. One of his feet squished down into the middle of a pile. Something inside the pile crunched, and then it screamed.

Something wrapped around his foot, and Donald yanked his foot back. A small child's hand held onto his ankle. It was pulling him, trying to get his foot back under the moldy surface. Donald kicked free and screamed.

"Why did you hurt me?" said a voice. It was coming from inside the pile of mold. "Come play with me." The glob of mush quivered, and it slid an inch across the floor in Donald's direction.

Donald was on his feet and running. He leapt over pile after pile, terrified to touch another one. Every one of them was moving now, and they called out to Donald as he ran by. The things moved in slow, jerky motions, creeping along the floor like deformed slugs. Donald had a vision of himself lying on the floor and the things slowly crawling on top of him where they would force open his mouth and crawl inside. He ran faster.

Double doors at the end of the hallway were open to the outside. Donald sprinted down the last section of the hallway and out through the doors. He came out into a small courtyard paved in concrete. The sky was overcast, but it was much brighter outside than it had been in the building.

Donald looked back. The piles of mold crept up near the door, but they stopped short of coming into the light. He could hear the childlike voices calling out, "Come play with us." Donald hunched over and vomited the bile from his empty stomach.

He wiped his mouth on the back of his sleeve and stumbled away from the building, the voices fading away behind him. The brick walls of the school building twisted and turned, leading him on a winding path away from the entrance. Just as he was wondering if he had walked into a maze, the path opened up in front of him.

He was on top of a small barren hill, with the remnants of a city stretching out below him. Shells of bombed out buildings covered the landscape, with a few still intact buildings sprinkled in between. Giant tentacled shapes moved amongst the streets of the ruined city. They were creatures with a form that he could not recognize, but a primal part of Donald's mind knew they were dangerous.

Something scraped along the asphalt to Donald's right. He looked in that direction, and saw a rusted out car nestled against the side of the school building. The car door screeched open, and a person crawled out onto the ground. It could have been an old woman wearing a dress, except that its bald head was barely more than a skeleton. Thin gray skin stretched tight over the skull.

The woman looked up at him and smiled. She had no eyes and no teeth. Her nose had sunken into her face. She looked back at the ground and crawled faster toward Donald. He could hear her bony hands scraping against the asphalt. "Get away!" Donald yelled, but she just crawled faster.

She was getting closer. Donald turned to run, but his foot caught the lip of a pothole. He tripped and fell hard onto his side, knocking the wind out of his lungs. Stars danced in his vision, and he could not move. As the stars danced in front of his eyes, he screamed silently to himself. Run. I have to run!

Donald felt a hand close around his ankle.

He woke up in the school nurse's office. He tried to sit up, and the paper liner covering the bed crinkled under him. The nurse looked up from her desk, where she was filling out paperwork.

"Donald," she said. "You gave us a fright."

The jumps came randomly. Donald could not predict when they would happen, and he could not control them. There was no warning and no chance to get to a safe place before he jumped. The places he found himself were nothing like the worlds his grandmother had told him about. They were horrible, each one a hell worse than the last.

While he was playing video games in the living room on a Saturday afternoon, he jumped into a gigantic cavern that was packed with mountains of garbage. Reanimated human intestines crawled out from under the trash and tried to eat him.

During an afternoon walk in the park, Donald jumped into a WWII era B-17 in mid flight. The empty plane flew itself without a crew, dodging anti-aircraft fire launched from the mist-shrouded ground below. One of them hit the plane, ripping a hole in the side and caused the metal hull to bleed.

On a summer afternoon while swimming in his friend's pool, Donald jumped into a desert. The sun above gave off red light, and the sand dunes shifted even though there was no wind. A spider made of human bones tried to drag him under the sand.

Donald slowly stopped doing active things. He had to be aware of what he was doing at all times, in case he jumped. Just walking down the stairs made him anxious. The worst jump happened while he was riding his bike, and it ended with him in the hospital with a broken arm and a concussion. The doctors struggled to diagnose him, and the best they could come up with was epilepsy.

He tried to find the pattern in his jumps, desperate to discover how his power worked. As best he could tell, his life had to be in peril before he could return. This was because he had never jumped back until some monstrosity was actively trying to kill him. He could not work up the courage to test out his theory. If he was wrong, then his first test would be his last.

The years passed, and Donald slipped into his own corner of darkness. His parents sent him to a therapist for several months. The poor woman tried to help, but there was nothing she could do. The sessions ended because Donald's parents could not afford the cost.

His friends slipped away. The other kids did not want to talk to the weird brooding boy, and Donald made no effort to reach out to them. His life in the normal world slipped in a dull haze, broken by periods of madness where he fought to stay alive. He became an animal driven to survive by pure instinct.

It was a humid Sunday in the summer between Donald's sophomore and junior years of high school. Donald's mother had cooked meatloaf. She and his father were talking about the weather, and Donald silently picked at his food. The meatloaf reminded him of a wormlike creature he had encountered when he jumped the previous day. It had crawled out from under a television in an abandoned house and tried to eat him with its very human-looking teeth.

"Donald," his mother said. "There's a new youth group that has started meeting on weekends at the church. I talked to the priest, and he thinks you would fit in really well."

His parents looked at him with forced smiles on their faces. Donald was disgusted by them because they were able to live normal lives. They didn't understand. "Not interested," said Donald.

His mother frowned. "I think it would be good for you. Getting out and doing something social would make you feel better."

"No, it wouldn't," Donald said.

His father looked away and sighed. His mother leaned a little toward Donald. "You have to stop acting like this," she said. "You're wasting your life. What would your grandmother think?"

Donald threw his fork down. It clattered against his plate. "She wouldn't think anything," Donald said, "because she's fucking dead! And unless you can teach me how to control the jumps, then you're useless too."

Donald's mother looked scared. He had tried to tell them both about the jumps long ago. Just like his grandmother had warned him, they thought he was crazy. Donald hated them for not believing him. "We talked about this," his mother said.

"I'm not making it up!" Donald said. He jumped up from the table and ran upstairs to his room, ignoring the yells from his parents. He slammed his bedroom door and flung himself face down on his bed. He laid there for a long time, until his anger finally faded and the tears came. He cried himself to sleep.

He woke up in a hospital. The ceiling tiles were white, and a curtain hung by his side. He must

have hurt himself again because of a jump. He tried to remember what happened, but he did not remember jumping. The last thing he could recall was lying on his bed after the fight with his parents.

Donald sat up and realized that he was not lying in a hospital bed. He was sitting in a chair beside the bed. A small vase sat on a table between the bed and his chair, and all the flowers in it had wilted. Donald leaned forward to peer around the vase so that he could see the person lying asleep in the bed.

It was his grandmother.

Donald started shaking. Had he finally lost his mind? He felt normal, but what he saw in front of him could not be real. He stared hard at the woman lying in bed, thinking that at any moment she would evaporate and he would wake up.

Donald stepped up to the side of the bed and looked down at the woman. Everything about her was exactly what he remembered. Gray hair with a few dark strands still hanging onto youth. The laugh lines at the corner of her eyes were just part of the many wrinkles of her skin.

She must have sensed Donald's presence. She opened her blue eyes and looked up. "Nana?" Donald said. A single tear ran down his cheek.

His grandmother yelped in surprise. "What are you doing in my house?" she yelled. "Help! Help! I'm being robbed."

Donald stepped back out of instinct. This was not right. She looked the same and sounded the same, but something about her was different. He could not describe it, but the feeling was certain. This woman was not his grandmother.

A nurse whipped the curtain back. "What's going on in here?" the nurse said. She was a short stocky woman who gave off an air of strength.

"Officer," Donald's grandmother said. "Arrest this man. He's stealing from me."

The nurse rolled her eyes. She looked at Donald. "Who are you?" she said.

"This is my..." Donald said, looking down at the woman in the bed. "My grandma." He felt the lie in his stomach. This stupid woman was only an imitation of his real grandmother.

"Liar," the old woman said. "Filthy lying shit. I'll shoot you with my gun. Don't think I won't."

The nurse walked around the bed and grabbed Donald just above the elbow. "Don't you worry, Mrs. Harrison," she said. "I'll toss him in a cell and throw away the key. He won't break into your house again." She pulled Donald. He tried to resist, but the woman was stronger than she looked.

"And bring my red dress when you come back," his grandmother said. "I'm attending a party at the mayor's house tonight."

The nurse pulled Donald out of the room and down the hallway. She led him to a spot where the hall widened to make space for a small sitting area. A few chairs sat on a brown carpet, and tall windows took up the entire wall. "Give it a few minutes," the nurse said. "She needs time to calm down. Once she forgets what happened, you can go back in a try talking to her again."

"What?" Donald said.

"This is your first time visiting her in here?" the nurse said.

"I haven't seen her in years," Donald said.

The nurse put her hands on her hips. "When you're dealing with someone who has dementia, it's best if you humor them. You'll just confuse them otherwise, and make them upset." She crossed her arms. "Like what happened in there."

Donald felt woozy. He put his hand on the back of a chair to balance himself. The nurse grabbed him by his shoulders and steered him into the seat. "Now, promise me you'll wait thirty minutes before going back." She pointed to a clock on the wall. "I'll make her take her pills, and that should calm her down a bit."

"Yeah," Donald said.

The nurse nodded and said, "May you be blessed by the Starving Gods." She walked away.

The starving gods? Donald watched the nurse until she disappeared around a corner. The only

possible explanation was that he had jumped, but that seemed even more impossible than his fake grandmother in the other room. As many times as he had jumped, he had never, ever been to a place with normal human beings.

He looked around. The long clean hallway had polished floors and white walls, broken only by doors leading to rooms for patients. The clock in the sitting area had two hands and twelve numbers. The chair he sat in was made of wood and fake leather. There were no deformed monstrosities hiding in the corners waiting to eat him.

He glanced out of the window and saw it – the thing out of place. A giant metallic orb hung in the sky, suspended by nothing. He was sitting on one of the upper floors of the hospital, which put him almost level with the center of the orb. It floated in a clear space amongst skyscrapers, in a city that Donald could not recognize.

The orb was the size of a football stadium. The top half of its mirrored surface looked perfectly smooth, reflecting an image of the sky and buildings surrounding it. A dark red fluid streamed out of the bottom half, coming out of hidden pores and merging into large streams that traced the curved bottom half of the sphere.

A thick waterfall of fluid rained down from the very bottom of the orb. A large copper basin had been constructed on the ground below to collect the fluid, taking up an entire city block. People gathered around the edges, as small as ants from Donald's perspective because of the distance. He watched the people for a while, and it looked to him like they were worshipping the orb. Some of them seemed to be drinking from the basin.

Donald stared out the window until a half hour had passed. He stood up and walked slowly back to the room where he had woken up earlier. He hesitated outside of the door before he went into the room. The old woman was awake and watching the news on the television. She smiled when he came in. "Hello there," she said.

"You're not my grandmother," Donald said.

"That's nice," she said. "Remind me of your name again. I'm old and my memory isn't so good."

"It's Donald," he said. He forced his voice to be steady, but he could feel his stomach churning. Talking to this woman was making him angry. She did not deserve to look like his grandmother.

"Come in and have a seat," she said. She gestured to the chair beside the bed. "You don't have to stand there in the doorway all day."

Donald shoved his hands into his pockets, and walked over to the chair. He did not sit down. "This is a mirror of my world, isn't it?" Donald said.

The woman looked confused. "You need a mirror?"

"No," Donald said. "This place is so similar to my world that it has some of the same people in it." He pointed at the woman. "You're this world's version of my grandmother. Maybe there's even a copy of me out there somewhere."

The woman smiled politely and nodded. "That's nice," she said. Her gaze drifted to the television where the local weather report was playing.

"Hey," Donald said. The woman was transfixed by the television and did not look at him. "Hey lady!" He snapped his fingers in the air, and she looked over at him. "If you really are some kind of copy of my grandmother, then you should be able to jump between places too. Tell me how to control it."

She looked confused for a moment, then she smiled. "Hi there," she said. "What's your name again? I have trouble remembering names sometimes."

Donald leaned forward in his chair and placed his hands on the guard rail of her bed. "Listen, I need you to concentrate. Think back to when your memory was good. You had a gift, something powerful that only you knew how to use."

She squinted her eyes in a moment of confusion, and then she smiled again. "Herbert gave me a nice gift," she said. "He's my husband, Herbert. It was a beautiful blue bicycle. It had a little white

basket on the front, and I would ride and ride and ride..."

"Goddamn it!" Donald said as he pushed away from the bed and threw his hands in the air. He grabbed the vase with the dead flowers and threw it against the wall. It shattered, sending bits of glass flying across the room. "You're useless."

He stomped across the room and out of the open door. The moment he turned the corner into the hallway, everything shifted. Donald blinked while the world resolved itself. He was lying on the bed in his room and staring up at the ceiling. A flood of adrenaline pumped through his veins as the realization of what had happened dawned on him. He had jumped without his life being in danger.

Donald stood up and paced around the room. How had that happened? What was different this time compared to all the other times? He closed his eyes and concentrated, trying to latch onto any feeling inside his head that might be what had allowed him to jump.

He closed his eyes and sat down on the floor, forcing himself to take slow deep breaths. He looked inwards, doing the exercises that his grandmother had taught him as a child. He focused on his chest, searching for a trigger between each heartbeat. Nothing. He concentrated on his stomach, the base of his neck, and every recess of his brain that he could find. Donald stayed up all night trying to figure out the secret. Nothing worked.

His next jump was the following morning while his mother was giving him a ride to school, and it occurred against his will like all of the other jumps. He was stuck in a maze of hallways where the walls were made of seashells. A one-armed bear chased him, hobbling after him on its hind legs. It slashed at him with a rusty saw blade that it carried in its single front paw. He returned just in time for his mother to stop the car in front of his school.

The encounter with the mirror version of his grandmother had changed nothing, except Donald now knew that he could travel without his life being in danger. He just didn't know how. He could not stop thinking about her in that hospital bed, with the knowledge he needed locked up in her broken mind. If he could only get back to her.

"You could have at least said something," his mother said to his father. Donald sat in the backset and tried to ignore his parents arguing. "I don't care if it's true, she had no right to speak to us like that."

"Jesus, it's not like we're a normal fucking family," his father said. Donald noticed that his father was accelerating while he yelled. "You act like I'm not suffering through this too. I work to earn the money that pays for the psychologists and meds."

"Well it's a lot easier to come home, drink a beer, and watch sports." A little bit of spittle flew out of his mother's mouth while she yelled. "I'm the one who at least tries to put in some effort to have a relationship with our son."

Donald's father turned his whole body toward the passenger seat to yell at Donald's mother. His father was so caught up in the argument that he forgot that he was driving, and the car started drifting toward the side of the road. "Uh, Dad," Donald said, but his parents were too caught up in the fight to hear him.

"What am I supposed to do?" his Dad yelled. "I can't get through to him."

"Dad!" Donald yelled. "The road."

The front tire slipped off of the edge of the pavement and onto the dirt shoulder. Donald's father panicked and twisted the wheel hard. The tire reconnected with the pavement, but the SUV kept turning. Donald's father tried to straighten out the car. It was too late. They tipped and rolled, and Donald lost consciousness.

When Donald opened his eyes, he was in a hospital. The same hospital where months ago he had seen the woman who looked like his grandmother. He bolted upright. He was sitting in the chair, and the old woman was in the bed beside him.

He leapt to his feet and leaned over the bed. She was awake, and she yelped when she saw him. "Oh," she said, and patted her chest with her wrinkled hand. "You startled me."

"Do you remember me?" Donald said. He was breathing fast. "I was here before."

"Of course I do," she said and smiled. She reached out and patted his hand. "Just remind me what your name is again."

"I'm Donald," he said, not trying to hide the frustration in his voice. He dropped down into the chair beside the bed and rested his hands in his face.

"Young man," the lady said. "You could work on your manners." She smoothed out the wrinkles on the blanket covering her. "I'll tell Herbert that he won't be allowed to associate with you anymore if he wants to keep having sex."

"Gross," Donald said.

The lady looked around the room. "Where am I?" she said. "This doesn't look like my home." She whimpered softly for a while. Donald listened to her until she stopped. He grabbed a book from the beside table and flipped through it without reading. They were silent for a while.

"Hello," she said. Donald looked up, and she waved a feeble arm at him. "I didn't see you there. What is your name, young man?"

"I'm the president," Donald said. He ripped a random page out of the book and folded it into a paper airplane. "I've come to award you a medal for fighting in the war."

"Oh joy!" she said. She clapped her hands together. "I killed those Greens real good. They didn't know what was coming at them."

Donald shook his head. He tossed the paper plane, and it flew a few feet before crashing into the wall.

"You know," the lady said, "I had a secret weapon. I can go to these other places. Dark places. And I brought things back with me, and I let them take care of the Greens for me."

Donald dropped the book. "You can go to other places?"

"I can," she said, "but I haven't done it in years."

"Show me," Donald said. He stood up slowly and walked to her bedside. His hands were shaking.

"Oh my, I'm not sure that I can," she said and waved a dismissive hand in the air.

"Please try," Donald said. "I'd love to see it. You know," Donald lowered his voice to a whisper and leaned closer, "I can do it too."

She rolled her eyes, and he could tell that she did not believe him. "Oh, alright," she said. "Not that you will notice anything."

Donald nodded to give her encouragement. She laid her head back and closed her eyes, and her breathing slowed. Donald was focused on her with every part of his being. He could sense something... different.

The lady tensed, and her body started shaking. Deep within Donald's brain, hiding in the primal part below the conscious and the subconscious, a switch flipped. It felt like the twitch of a muscle that Donald never knew he had. So small and insignificant, it was no wonder that he had overlooked it during his meditation exercises. But now he knew exactly where it was.

The lady opened her eyes and smiled. "Did you see anything?"

Donald laughed. "I sure did, you old fuck!" he said. He kicked the torn book across the floor. "Thanks, and fuck off!" Donald saw the brief moment of outrage on her face before the world disappeared.

He jumped. He was standing atop a tower overlooking a forest of trees with pink leaves. Giant bats flew in a sky with two moons.

He jumped. He stood inside a large cavern. Stalactites made of gold stretched from the ceiling to the floor. Living jewelry crawled across the floor like bugs.

He jumped. He stood in the middle of a square in a modern city where the skyscrapers were made of cookies. Sentient gingerbread people walked the streets on their way to work.

He jumped again and again. The worlds flew by at a blinding pace. Now that he knew how it

worked, it was easy to control where he went. He just had to concentrate on a feeling, and he would jump to a place that embodied that mood. His years of jumping into nightmares had been a reflection of the anger he felt inside.

Donald fell to the ground laughing. He was exhausted from the effort of jumping so many times, but he felt better than he had in years. The weight had been lifted.

He sat up and looked around. He was in a small clearing surrounded by a lush forest, with towering trees providing a canopy high above. Bright green ferns and moss grew on the ground around him, but Donald could focus only on the purple crystals jutting out between the plants. He had seen one once before, so long ago.

Donald reached out and touched the tip of the closest crystal with his finger. It hummed the moment he touched it. The sound was soft and gentle. The vibrations flowed like water down Donald's arm and into his chest, where they swirled in a spiral inside his body.

He crawled closer to the clump of crystals and ran his hands across them. Each crystal's sounds blended with the rest like an orchestra in perfect harmony. He leaned his body against them, trying to get them to make as much sound as he could.

His smile faded away. Donald reluctantly let go of the crystals, and their songs faded away one by one. He walked to the center of the clearing and brushed himself off. He took a deep breath, closed his eyes, and jumped.

When he opened his eyes, he was standing back in the hospital room. "I'm sorry," he said. "I shouldn't have—" The bed was empty.

He ran to the side of the bed and lifted up the sheets, as if she might be hiding underneath. Donald was sure this was the same room in the same world he had been in earlier. He looked around and spotted the book from earlier. Someone had picked it up and placed it on the bedside table. He flipped it open and found the spot where he had ripped out a page.

"You're still here?" the nurse said. Donald almost dropped the book in surprise. She was standing in the doorway.

"Where is she?" Donald said.

"She's been taken to the Basin," the nurse said. She walked over to Donald and took the book out of his hands, being careful not to damage it further. "She may not be in her right mind, but even that doesn't excuse desecration of the Great Book."

"The basin?" Donald said. "What's that?"

The nurse looked at Donald like he had said the sky was made of cheese. "The Basin," she said, speaking slower and louder. "At the Bloodstar." She held the book in one hand and grabbed Donald with the other. She walked toward the door and pulled him behind her.

"You shouldn't feel too bad for her," the nurse said. "She didn't have many years left. And since her memory is so bad, the pain of the Suffering won't be as bad as it is on other sacrifices."

Donald looked at the book in the nurse's hands, noticing the cover for the first time. What he thought was a Bible was something much different. Embossed in gold leaf on the leather cover was an image of a humanoid skull. Its teeth were fangs, and instead of two eyes, it had one large eye in the forehead. The eye moved and looked at Donald.

"Her sacrifice will benefit us all," the nurse said as she pulled him out into the hallway. "The Starving Ones demand the flesh."

Donald ripped free of her grasp. He ignored her yells as he sprinted to the end of the hall. He paused at the windows farther down the hall, and looked at the giant floating orb. People still gathered around the edges of the giant copper bowl below the orb. The Basin.

Donald took the elevator. He sprinted through the drab lobby at the ground floor, and he burst through the front doors to hit the street running. His lungs burned, but he pushed himself to keep moving. He caught glimpses of the orb between buildings, making it seem like the thing grew larger as he approached.

He turned a corner, and the buildings gave way to the massive orb. Its imposing form hung unsupported in the air above Donald. He felt a vague sense of dread somewhere in his lower stomach. Donald gulped and looked away. He searched through the mass of people standing in the shadow of the orb, trying to spot the woman.

There were so many people. The crowd was larger now that Donald was a part of it. He moved closer toward the basin, dodging people. Some were walking toward the basin with him, and others were leaving. Many of the people leaving had streaks of the red fluid running down their chins from where they had drunk from the pool. Donald thought it looked like blood.

He climbed a set of steps and looked over the raised edge of the basin. Thick red fluid swirled and bubbled. The smell hit him, and he realized it actually was blood. A giant lake of blood, pouring out of the thing above.

A young boy came up beside Donald and leaned over the copper rim of the basin. He cupped his hand and dipped it into the blood. The boy brought his hand to his mouth and slurped. He smiled and yelled, "Praise the Starving Gods! My flesh is yours!"

Donald tried to ignore the boy. He looked out across the basin, and he noticed a platform that extended out over the pool. A group of people in silver uniforms stood on the edge of the platform where it connected to the side of the basin. They looked like soldiers, and the civilians kept their distance.

The line of soldiers parted, and a man was pushed through. The man stumbled and fell onto his knees. He stood up and tried to rush the soldiers, but they knocked him on his back. One of the soldiers pulled out a cattle prod and zapped the man. The man backed away, and the soldier stepped forward, herding the man out onto the platform.

As the man neared the end of the platform, Donald noticed a stream separate out from the rest of the falling blood. It solidified into a tendril and snaked down to the platform. The soldier looked up at the tendril, and he turned and sprinted back to the edge of the basin. The other man turned to look up just as the tendril touched him. The man's scream was cut short as a film of blood enveloped his body. He squirmed in a cocoon of blood before being lifted in the sky toward the orb.

The soldiers parted again, and they led the old woman who looked like Donald's grandmother onto the platform. Donald started running, pushing people out of his way. He knocked someone into the pool of blood, but he did not bother to look back. He kept his eyes on the soldier who was pointing toward the end of the platform and trying to convince the woman to walk out on it.

By the time Donald reached the edge of the platform, the soldier had convinced the woman to walk to the end of the platform. The soldier was already walking back to join the rest of the men at the edge. Donald shoved himself between two of the soldiers. They were focused on keeping people on the platform, so they were not prepared for Donald trying to get on it.

The one soldier still on the platform grabbed at Donald as he ran by, but Donald was able to dodge to the side. He stepped too far aside, causing one foot to slip off the side of the platform. Donald fell flat on his face, but luckily did not fall into the pool of blood.

Donald looked back over his shoulder. The soldier reached out to grab him, but the man froze and looked up into the air. The man forgot about Donald and turned to run back to the edge of the basin. Donald looked up. A tendril of blood was snaking down toward the woman. She was looking around in confusion, trying to figure out where she was.

Donald scrambled to his feet. He sprinted. The tendril was moving fast. It was almost to the woman. Donald reached out with his right arm and he leapt into the air. He closed his eyes and jumped.

He tumbled to the ground and skidded, uprooting the green moss. Donald rolled onto his back and spit the dirt out of his mouth. A shadow fell over him, and he looked up to see the old woman. "Who are you?" the woman said.

Donald let out a deep breath. "I'm Donald," he said as he stood up.

The woman looked around the clearing. The purple crystals stuck out between the bright green

plants. "This is such a pretty place," she said. She walked over to an old tree that had fallen long ago. "I need to sit for a bit," she said. "I'm very tired."

Donald walked to the log and sat down beside her. The woman touched a large crystal that grew out of the ground beside the log. It emitted a deep humming sound. "Oh," she said and jerked her hand away, but she was smiling. She turned to Donald and laughed. Donald smiled.

"I'm sorry," the woman said. "My memory isn't so good anymore. Can you tell me who you are again?"

Donald reached out and held her hand. "I'm Donald," he said. "I'm your grandson."

Sharkrilla
by Sara Lufrano

A large cargo truck sped down a jungle road. The only lights were from the dirty, dim headlights. The driver, a scientist named David, struggled to not hit small overgrowth that bled into the road.

The container on the back swayed even when the rest of the truck didn't.

"Don't do it you bastard!" David yelled at the rearview mirror. His lab coat was filthy and stained with old blood.

David fought the steering wheel as the weight in the back of the truck seemed to be driving. The truck was pushed to the side of the road into the brush. David yelled and with stiff arms and white knuckles got the truck back on the packed dirt.

"You fucking beast!" He yelled at the mirror again. "If you weren't worth more than your weight in gold, you shit! I would have killed you!"

Swaying as he drove he came up on a roadblock. People dressed in camouflage. David couldn't tell who were men and who were women. Their faces were painted a black and green and they had rifles in their arms, knives on their sides, ammunition belts strapped all over them. They looked like columns, all of them. Dangerous killer columns that, if necessary, would take out one block of the jungle at a time.

David kept the truck running as he got out.

"Good evening, Panthers." David removed his old, disgusting coat and draped it over his arm.

The cargo hold swayed and grunts and growls followed. The diesel engine was a faint hum compared to the sounds.

"You've got my money, yes?" David's said. His forehead and armpits heated up.

One of the Panthers came forward with a large black case. The Panther opened the case and started extending pieces inside. It was a remote satellite computer. The Panther typed in a few commands and looked at David.

David pulled out a satellite phone from his lab coat. He dialed. "Good Morning to you, Stacy, can you please check something for me? Of course." David smiled at the Panthers while thinking about his sweaty armpits. "Just looking for an account balance, and if it is what it should be split it through all of my accounts." He laughed. "Yes, yes, don't worry. Oh, and please book me a flight to Germany leaving tonight, my time. Thank you, Stacy. Bye." He hung up.

David held up the keys to the truck with a newly confident smile on his face. "May I have my motorcycle keys now?"

A Panther threw keys to the ground and pointed to the bike in the dark. David threw the keys to one of them, they worked together like a cell so it didn't matter which one got them.

"Be careful." David said while putting on his coat and walking to the bike. He mounted it but waited to start it. He watched the Panthers approach the truck with caution. They surrounded the truck. What was inside was silent. One opened the cab door to climb in and then the cargo box jolted to one side, a large dent bubbled. The group jumped and drew their weapons.

A Panther yelled a command to lower their weapons. David jump started the motorcycle and lifted it off its kickstand.

Another jolt shook the box and the metal burst open like a star being born. Hundreds of teeth and giant grey hands came from the hole. Someone opened fire and hit leaves, trees, and open sky. The hands ripped open the side as more erratic shots were fired.

David watched it come out and dart to the closest people. His heart thumped in his ears but he didn't pull down the throttle to leave.

Panthers screamed and yelled in a mix of terror, pain, and commands to stop defending themselves.

"Tranquilizers! Tranquilizers! Tranquilizers!" A Panther yelled.

The creature came from the dark and the noise, grabbed more people and seemed to stuff them into its teeth to silence them. Others were hit hard with another part of the monster and held down until it could get its teeth into them. It got as many people within reach and then looked at David.

David pulled down on the throttle and sped off into the jungle. The creature broke after him and barreled through the vines, ferns, and trees. David's heart felt as if it was foot in front of him and that it was working harder than the engine. He wanted to think about how this was the worst idea he'd ever had and question himself as to why he did it but the thoughts wouldn't form.

He couldn't even think about how dying would feel. He couldn't think of his partner, Liam, who would walk into the lab in the morning and find nothing but a broken lock.

The beast roared and ran, grabbed onto strong trees and swung itself closer to David.

David's mind sparked and he thought of a clearing he knew of very well. He took a hard left on a small path. The clearing quickly opened in front of him and he laid on the horn and started to scream and yell. From the clearing rose tens of gorillas all on high alert. They pounded their chests and ran to meet David and the to defend their territory.

They hooted and roared, stood on their feet and threw rocks as David slowed down to draw more of them out. The gorillas kept up their posture even as the creature barreled out of the jungle. The creature saw the gorillas and tried to stop but ended in a violent ball of hands, teeth, and tail. David sped away.

The gorillas quieted as the creature rose from the dirt. It shook dirt from its gills and adjusted its large jaw by flexing it open and closed. Rows and rows of razor teeth seemed to move like waves as it dropped its head to look at the black cluster of animals.

The gorillas started to posture for their territory again. The creature shunned and ran the other way.

David burst through his makeshift home's door and ran to the bathroom to throw up. He flushed and got up to wash his mouth.

"David."

David was startled and fell into the wall as he brought up his hands to fist fight. "Who's there?"

The person pulled the cord for the hallway light. It was Liam.

"Where is he, David?" Liam walked closer to David but stayed out of range from his fists.

"The jungle. Or dead."

Liam was older than David. He was wide shouldered and tall. He had a square face with a bump in his nose.

"You released him?" Liam's face looked calm but his light blue eyes grew dark with intensity as David's knuckles grew whiter and his palms became wet.

"I'm getting out of here, Liam. I'm done with you and this place! I've got enough money to run from you and the government for the rest of my life!" David sobbed as he yelled.

Liam brought up a gun and shot David in the shoulder. David fell and looked at his shoulder.

“Tranquilizer.” David said lazily.

“You’re not going anywhere until we get him back.” Liam said.

David lost consciousness and Liam put away the gun.

David woke up in the lab that borne the monster. He was in a chair with his wrists and ankles zip tied together. He mumbled as his eyes rolled.

Liam was sitting at a desk with a tablet in his hand. He looked at David after hearing him start mumbling. He held the tablet as he walked to David.

“He trusted you David.” Liam pointed to the tablet.

David made better sounds but still no words. Liam grabbed David’s bobbling head and made him look at the screen.

“You lured him into the truck! Where did you take him?” Liam shook David.

“Paaa...paaa...esss.”

Liam let David go and put the tablet down. He looked around the lab. It was messy and gross. Jars of chemicals everywhere and dried blood all over the walls, some of it was theirs but some of it was from the creature. The floors were covered in dirt.

They weren’t doctors, which the people on the island thought they were. They were scientists with a purpose. Or more like Liam’s purpose. David stopped believing in Liam’s cause sooner than he’d ever admitted to Liam but he hadn’t controlled his own decisions for a long time.

Liam ran his fingers through his greying, thick hair. “David, I’m trying not to get mad but it’s getting more difficult the longer you can’t talk. Pull yourself together and tell me where you took Sharkrilla.”

David was able to look to Liam. “Annnthhhaaaa....”

Liam walked back to David. “That’s not a word, David.” Liam picked up the tablet. The surveillance video kept playing. David was leading the creature out, signing with it as it followed.

David didn’t know about the extra cameras Liam had set up and his eyes glossed over with tears.

“Are you scared? Or are you worried about how disappointed I am in you? Or both?”

“Pppaaannthharrsss....”

Liam stared at David with unchanging eyes. David was able to focus on Liam. Liam took the tablet and slammed it against the side of David’s head. It didn’t hurt as much as it could have since he was still coming down from the large dosage of tranquilizer. Liam dropped the tablet and started hitting David with his fists.

“My work! My life! You sold him to the Panthers! You sold him!” Liam was repeating as he struck David.

Soon he lost energy and left David where he was, bloody but not feeling much.

“He kkkkilled tthhhemm allll...”

Liam sighed and dropped his head. “He’s just out there, then.”

David nodded.

Liam sighed. “He’ll come back for you and probably me because, why not? He’ll kill everyone on this island. And you know what David?” Liam walked to David and put his face right in David’s. “Since he can swim in the ocean he’s going to go far, far away from here and kill all of those people too.”

David closed his eyes in shame.

“We’re not a secret anymore.”

Liam went the hardwired phone and dialed a number.

“Commander Fillion, please.” Liam waited. “Commander. Yes. Please, to the lab.”

Liam hung up the phone and sat at his desk. “You killed my work, David. You killed Sharkrilla.”

Skarkrilla galloped through the brush and trees not knowing where he was or where to go. He was 10 feet tall if he stood straight up on his feet. His skin was that of a shark, his body was of a gorilla, with a tail that dragged on the dirt. It seemed as though his entire body was hard muscle. His head was shaped like a gorilla but his snout was a triangle with rows of teeth that he couldn’t hide. The gills under his arms and dorsal fin on his back were useless while on land.

He was outside for the first time in the cool night air. He rolled around in the dirt and climbed trees. He scanned the areas he was running through for water but there were only small streams so far. He ran along side them to find what they were feeding.

He watched the stream so intently he didn’t realize it lead off of a fifty-foot cliff until he was falling. He slammed into the dirt and rocks shoulder first. He lay there looking at the pool that the stream feed and his eyes closed as he stayed unmoving.

Back at the box truck the few live members of the Panthers were taking the guns and ammo from the dead and moving them under the overgrowth. The sun was coming up as they laid the last person under the large low leaves and moist ground.

One Panther, Dia, brought the group together. “When we find it shoot it, but not to kill. The boat is still set to take off tomorrow at zero six hundred.”

“We should wait for backup.”

“We don’t have time. We die here trying or the general kills us himself for failing.” Dia looked at the small group of soldiers she had left.

Commander Fillion slammed his hand on the desk. David was fully conscious and untied. Liam stood calmly.

“God damn you both! When I get on a boat at two in the morning I’m not expecting that you let the thing out!”

“I didn’t let it out, Fillion.” David defended himself.

“Shut the fuck up. Shut the fuck up. Don’t you say a fucking word to me.” Fillion put a finger in David’s face. His anger showing by his red neck. “You let it out.” Fillion turned to Liam. “And you want us to not kill it. You want us to capture it and bring it back?”

“Yes.” Liam said.

“And I say no. It dies out there and you two come back to base where this sort of shit doesn’t happen anymore.”

“Fillion, please. This is my life. Just capture him and he and I can be hidden away. But don’t kill him.”

Fillion got close to Liam. He felt bad for Liam. “That the Panthers know it exists is a problem that we can’t undo.” Fillion pointed to David. “I’m sorry he ruined this for you but we’re here to clean up this mess.”

Realization started to sink in with Liam. His life’s work was going to be destroyed.

Liam walked over to David who was sitting next to a soldier. Liam started punching a very unprepared David in the face. The soldier jumped and pulled Liam off of David but not before David had a bleeding lip and nose.

The soldier sat Liam down. "Sir?" He looked at Fillion.

"He's fine. I would do that same."

Liam held his head in his palms and began to cry. David held his shirt to his bleeding face.

Sharkrilla opened his eyes and stretched his jaw, displaying his rows of teeth. His eyes adjusted to the light and came into focus. There, just in front of him, was the clear pool. He dragged himself to the pool. Once at the edge he slipped in without a ripple and swam under the surface so only his dorsal fin showed.

He gave a thrust with his tail and ended up under the small waterfall. He climbed the slippery rocks a few feet up and let the water run over him.

He could process the air in salt water but not fresh water.

He dropped back down and swam for a bit longer before he left the pool to continue his way to the coast. He wanted salt water.

The science lab turned into an army outpost with guns, ammo, satellite computers, digital maps, trackers. There was a loud blip from one of the computers.

"Sir!"

Fillion went to the soldier. "We got him, boys. Suit up and let's roll out. He's on his way to Imperial Bay. And then to open water. If we go around the Golden Road we may be able to cut him off."

Liam grabbed Fillion before he left with his troops. "Please," Liam said.

"Better luck next time." Fillion said looking into Liam's eyes.

Fillion pulled Liam's hands from him and walked out the door.

They piled into their three jeeps and sped off to kill Sharkrilla.

Liam ran back to the supply room and grabbed all of the tranquilizers they had left.

"Liam?" David said.

He threw a rifle at David. "Get in the jeep. Hopefully having Sharkrilla go after you first gives me time to save him."

Fillion hung from the window of the moving jeep and held the binoculars up and watched the tree line. He saw the treetops shake as something large moved through them.

He looked to where the monster was projected to come out and saw seven black objects waiting on the beach.

"What the fuck is out there?" He asked the jeep.

"Sir," a soldier started, "the thermal scans show seven heat signatures on the beach."

Fillion looked plainly at the soldier. "I should have asked, why didn't you tell me that sooner?"

"Apologies, Sir."

"Can this piece of shit go any faster? Come on!" Fillion said.

The Panthers stood silently poised on the beach. The waves broke behind them and the water crept up the beach. Trees snapped and leaves rustled as if in a storm. A few of the gun barrels shook with the holder's fear.

"Hold!" Dia whispered loudly. "Hold."

From their left the jeep trudged onto the beach. All of the Panthers pointed their guns to the jeeps but did not pull the trigger.

Fillion and the soldiers exited the jeeps but stayed behind the doors for protection.

"We've got bigger guns here, Panthers." Fillion yelled to them.

“We don’t have issue with you Army man.” Dia yelled back.

Fillion smiled. “Oh thank God. I mean, we’ve never shot people that were trying to keep us from our objective.”

Dia knew that the seven of them wouldn’t have enough ammo to defend themselves against the soldiers and have enough for Sharkrilla.

“We will not interfere with what you are going to do.” Dia lowered her gun.

The other Panthers mumbled to themselves and gave side-glances to Dia while lowering their guns as well.

Just then Sharkrilla burst through the wall of green onto the beach. He kicked sand into the air with his movements and took a few rolls before noticing the group of people who met him.

Before Fillion could give an order soldiers were firing. The bullets either didn’t hit or only glanced Sharkrilla leaving cuts in his grey, thick skin.

Sharkrilla wailed at the shock and pain. He roared and opened and flexed his jaw. His tail swished and threw more sand in the air. He followed where the shots were coming from and launched himself at the jeeps. He landed on top of one burying the front of the jeep in the sand. He grabbed the two soldiers that were on either side and slammed them together over and over until their bodies were limp. He threw them at one of the other jeeps knocking over two more soldiers.

“Open fire!” Fillion officially yelled and they all began shooting again.

Sharkrilla jumped down from the jeep and used it to shield his large body the best he could. The soldier that still remained with the crushed jeep was paralyzed with fear. Sharkrilla picked him up with one hand and bit him almost in half. He spat out the bite and looked toward the soldiers.

The Panthers opened fire as well. They shot a mix of bullets and tranquilizers. The tranquilizers hit and fell away from Sharkrilla as if they were shooting pencils. The needles weren’t sharp enough to piece his dense, thick skin.

“Shoot the soldiers!” Dia yelled. The Panthers began shooting the soldiers and taking more strategic shots at Sharkrilla.

“Oh, hell no!” Fillion watched one of his soldiers fall to the sand with a dart hanging out of his shoulder. “Shoot everybody!” He yelled.

Fillion shot wildly with frustration in the direction of the Panthers. As he fired, a shadow fell over him. He looked up just in time to see the crushed jeep flying through the air at him. He and his other soldiers jumped to the sides before the crushed jeep landed on top of the other. Sand filled the air and Fillion covered his eyes and mouth. When it blew away and he lowered his arms he saw Sharkrilla where the jeep had been. His muscles bulging and his mouth hanging open as he panted.

Fillion, who hadn’t gotten a good look at Sharkrilla yet, thought how grotesque this thing was. So human like with a body that was a perfect mix of both deadly animals.

Sharkrilla took a heavy step forward sinking into the sand. Fillion couldn’t think of anything else that might have weighed as much as it. Sharkrilla dropped his fists into the sand and galloped toward them.

Fillion fired at Sharkrilla. His bullets buried themselves in his skin but the hybrid beast didn’t flinch at the pain any more. Sharkrilla jumped over the pile of jeeps and landed on two soldiers. He ground them into the sand with his feet and hands feeling their bones breaking and crumbling under their skin.

“Shit!” Fillion and his three remaining soldiers ran to the last remaining jeep. “Is the rocket launcher in this car?”

“Yes Sir.” The soldier said.

“Get it and shoot that fucking thing.” Fillion said.

The soldier that was sent to retrieve the launcher went down with a tranquilizer in his neck.

“Will you fucking quit it?” Fillion yelled at the Panthers.

Sharkrilla turned his attention to the Panthers. He ran over and snatched up the closest person. He bit the person’s head off and ground the bones in his teeth. Bullets were burying themselves in Sharkrilla’s skin. He picked up another person and dug his hands into their skin as if he was opening an orange.

Fillion went to get the rocket launcher himself. He loaded the rocket launcher and positioned himself with it on his shoulder. He followed Sharkrilla through the scope. Sharkrilla was pulling another person apart and ripping at them with his teeth when Fillion’s scope was blocked.

He looked up and saw David falling out of a jeep with Liam running to Sharkrilla.

“Liam!” Fillion yelled and chased after him.

Sharkrilla turned when he heard Liam’s name.

Liam and Sharkrilla locked eyes. Sharkrilla was covered in blood. His body heaved as he panted. His muscles were like steel cords under his skin.

Stop, Liam signed as he neared Sharkrilla. Please stop.

“Hold your fire!” Fillion yelled to his remaining troops.

All of the chaos stopped and Sharkrilla and Liam were in the eye of the storm.

I go to water, Sharkrilla signed.

You can’t.

Sharkrilla looked at the water that was three meters away. His body softened, his shoulder slumped, and his eyes were sad. He wouldn’t look Liam in the face.

You have to come back, Liam told him.

Sharkrilla’s true size was put into perspective beside Liam.

A single shot broke the silence and Sharkrilla and Liam looked toward the cause. David was shaking and squirming against a soldier who was trying to take away his rifle.

Sharkrilla threw his arms in the air and tightened his muscles again. He roared and took off toward David.

David screamed watching Sharkrilla run toward him. The soldier let him go.

Liam ran after Sharkrilla.

David ran as well but the sand kept him from moving quickly. Sharkrilla slammed his shoulder into David. David hit the ground hard, all the air leaving his lungs. David gasped. Sharkrilla hung over him.

“No, please.” David pleaded after catching a few breaths.

Sharkrilla lowered his teeth to David’s face and showed them; blood and skin were caught in the rows. David tried to crawl away but his body was like putty. Sharkrilla held him down.

There was a pop and Sharkrilla looked at his gills. A tranquilizer dart stuck out of the thin skin there. He looked past it and saw Liam lowering his gun.

“Liam!” David yelled.

Sharkrilla pulled out the dart. He turned back to David who continued to struggle. Sharkrilla casually picked David up with both hands and bit off his right arm.

David heard his bones crack and felt the cold inside his body. He felt lighter and saw his own blood and skin in Sharkrilla’s teeth. Sharkrilla shook him once like a rag doll and dropped

him. David couldn't move. He thought he was going to be hot soon. But he got colder and colder.

Sharkrilla ran and jumped into the water. Once the water was deep enough he was gone. "Well, fuck." Fillion said.

Fillion and one of his soldiers carried David into the lab. Liam knocked all of the jars and bottles off the metal table and they laid David down. Liam went right to sticking him with needles and fluids.

Liam rushed around getting knives and sutures, stitching needle and gauze.

"What can I help with?" Fillion asked following him.

"Take his clothes off." Liam said.

"All of them?" Fillion said.

"God damnit, Fillion! We're trying to save his life!" Liam said.

"Alright, alright." Fillion went to removing David's clothes.

His arm and shoulder were gone. His chest and face were covered in blood. Fillion took David's clothes off as if he was only drunk and getting him ready for bed.

Liam pushed Fillion out of the way before he could finish. Liam sprayed something on David's side that caused the blood to bubble. David didn't move.

"I think he's dead." Fillion said.

"He's not dead." Liam said with certainty.

"He probably wants to be."

Sharkrilla kept his arms close to his long body as his tail worked side to side. His gills filtered the water for him to breath so he never had to resurface. He went deep into the ocean, as deep as his body could handle and then headed back to the lighter blue of the semi deep salt water.

The water was cold and thick, tougher to swim in then his pool in the lab. Other creatures that he didn't know swam by him. He watched them but they seemed to not notice him or acted like they didn't.

Hunger struck him and as these creatures came by him he'd snatch them from the water like it was air. The first thing he captured was flat and had muscles that made it flutter in the water. He ate all of it except the long flat tail that was like a fencing sword.

He swam into a swarm of little fish. He kept his mouth open as he moved with the shimmering cloud of fish.

As he moved in circles with them they all the sudden split into two columns and he faced another shark. It was almost twice his size and bluish white. He held his hands out to make himself look bigger than he was. The other shark noticed him then.

It started to swim around him like a boxer in a ring. Sharkrilla hung in the middle watching it. It flicked its tail and darted toward Sharkrilla. He flapped his arms and kicked with his tail away from the giant shark. The shark came back at him quicker and hit Sharkrilla in the head with its tail. It stunned him and he floated there waiting for his senses to come back.

It came around again before Sharkrilla was able to clear his head. It bit onto his leg and pulled him. He roared but only bubbles came out. The air left his lungs and he felt like he was choking and drowning. His gills weren't processing the water.

He thrashed around in panic and the shark bit down on him harder breaking his thick skin. He bubbled again and went down and took hold of the shark on either side of its triangle-shaped head. He squeezed hard and was able to bend enough to sink his teeth into its head. He pulled and bit further down and pulled again until the shark let him go.

The shark was bleeding like he was. Their blood mixed in the water. Sharkrilla hadn't noticed that he was able to breathe again and went after the shark again. The shark swung its tail and was off into the deep dark part of the water. Sharkrilla chased but was unable to catch it before it was undetectable in the dark.

Sharkrilla swam back to the surface and treaded the water feeling the sting in his leg. He dipped back under and saw another shark, smaller, and then another. They started to swarm him and he knew why. He swam as fast as he could to the shore and came out on his one leg and arms.

He looked back at the ocean and snorted as he went back into the jungle, blood trailing behind him.

David's eyes fluttered. He heard Liam and Fillion talking but didn't know what they were saying. He thought his ears were full of water. When was I near water? He felt himself being slammed in the sand. Were they filled with sand? His bones, muscles, and tendons ripped from his body. Maybe they're filled with blood, he supposed.

He tried to move and say water but nothing happened.

Liam came over and said something. He couldn't hear it. Liam signed to him.

You shouldn't be awake. I'm putting you back under.

Okay, David thought. That will get the blood out.

"We're going back out to get him. And don't fuck it up this time." Fillion said to Liam.

"You'll never find him in the ocean." Liam said.

"It's called thermal sonar. I thought you were a scientist." Fillion said.

"I am."

Fillion acted like he didn't hear him. "My guys are headed down there now to meet the boats that are coming to pick us up."

"Can I try again to convince you not to kill him?" Liam said.

"No." Fillion said.

Liam hung his head.

Fillion's satellite phone rang. He answered it and okay was all he said. He put the phone down. "He's back on the island."

Liam gasped in surprise. "They saw him?"

"Yeah. The thermal scans showed him come up and go into the jungle."

"Take me with you!" Liam grabbed hold of the straps on Fillion's bulletproof vest.

"First." Fillion held his finger in Liam's face. "Get your hands off me."

Liam let him go.

"You're not coming with us. But if you get in our way again I'll shoot you myself." Fillion went to the front porch of the lab to wait for the car.

Sharkrilla made his way slowly and deeper into the jungle. Birds chirped and fluttered above him but no other animals showed themselves to him. His dark blood dripped from his leg. He stopped and tightly held the wound together to pause the bleeding.

As he grimaced at the pain, showing his teeth, a black gorilla showed itself. It didn't flinch when Sharkrilla turned to it and looked into its eyes. Another gorilla showed itself behind the first. Then another.

Sharkrilla stayed where he was in a mix of curiosity, instinct, and pain. More gorillas showed. The group followed as the leader went to Sharkrilla.

Sharkrilla signed to it. I half gorilla.

The gorilla didn't know what signing was but didn't take Sharkrilla's movements as threatening. It came up to him, hit its chest, baulked a bit and then walked past him. Sharkrilla watched it. After they all passed, the leader looked back to Sharkrilla and lifted its head in a motion that signaled for Sharkrilla to come with them. Sharkrilla got up and followed.

Fillion sat in the passenger seat of the jeep with his last remaining troops.

"Sir," one from the backseat started, "We're tracking it, a large group of smaller creatures, and a small vehicle at nine o'clock."

"Copy. And that's Liam. Fucking idiot."

The group continued on its mission.

Sharkrilla, once reaching the gorillas' territory, had to stay on the fringe. The alpha male did not like his presence. Even though he couldn't be with the other gorillas he felt better being near them while wounded.

Dia and the Panthers tracked Sharkrilla through the jungle and readied themselves. They watched the gorillas move between themselves and get closer and closer to Sharkrilla. Sharkrilla stayed at the distance he was allowed, keeping his eyes down to those that approached him.

"Fire on three. Remember, don't kill it," Dia said. "One, two, three."

Shots hit all around. Sharkrilla was hit on his arms, legs, sides. All glancing shots that cut his skin to look like he was showering in his own blood.

Gorillas were shot as well. They did not fare as well as Sharkrilla. They screamed and yelped as bullets tore through their bodies and heads. Most ran but those that ventured closest to Sharkrilla all were killed.

Sharkrilla stared at the dead. The Panthers were reloading their weapons. More bullets rang out. Sharkrilla was hit in his open wound from the shark bite. He threw his head back in pain and then looked to the line of sparks from the gun barrels.

He slammed his fists into the ground and roared, his teeth making sparkles of their own. He galloped to them, picked up near by rocks, and threw them at those that fired.

The Panthers all ducked but in that time Sharkrilla came close enough to tower over them, casting a dark shadow. He buried his teeth into a man's chest, blood splashed onto the closest people.

"Fire, fire, fire!" Dia yelled.

Sharkrilla reached out and was able to grab the gun barrel but was shot through the hand before he grabbed hold. He yanked the gun from the Panther and beat him to death with it.

Dia's eyes widened knowing that as the final two, she and her last Panther, they could not win. "Run!" She turned and ran into the jungle but her fellow did not make it.

Sharkrilla snatched his leg from under him, lifted him above his own head, and ripped him almost in half. Blood rained down mixing with his own. He roared in the direction Dia was headed and slammed the lifeless body parts into the dirt over and over again.

He turned to the gorillas that were gathered around their dead. His anger was overflowing as he watched the animals mourn.

Just then a jeep burst through the overgrowth followed closely by a motorcycle that Liam was driving.

Sharkrilla was surprised but without thinking rushed toward the jeep. He threw his body against it stopping it, before it was ready to break. Fillion and the last of his soldiers slammed forward against the dash and seats.

Liam dumped the motorcycle ten yards behind from the crash.

Sharkrilla shook his head clearing it of the fog the collision left him with.

“Sharkrilla!” Liam yelled.

Sharkrilla looked at Liam and stumbled toward him. Fillion and his men fell out of the jeep and opened fire. Sharkrilla was hit in the back repeatedly. He roared at the pain and dropped to his knees.

“Liam! I told you not to come out here!” Fillion yelled and aimed his gun to fire.

Liam ran toward Sharkrilla but was stopped short when bullets tore through his shoulder and knee.

“Oh shit!” Fillion yelled and looked to where the shot came from.

Sharkrilla’s eyes grew wide as Liam fell to the ground, blood pouring from his body.

Dia stood, arm out, holding her gun. “Sharkrilla!” She yelled.

Sharkrilla picked up and held Liam. Liam looked up at him. Blood soaked the left side of his body. Sharkrilla’s stared into Liam’s fading eyes.

You’re my creation, Liam signed with his good hand.

Sharkrilla nodded.

A bullet hit Sharkrilla in the shoulder. Sharkrilla looked over to Dia who fired the shot. “I will not shoot again if you come with me peacefully.”

“He can’t understand you, stupid!” Fillion yelled.

Dia quickly turned her gun to Fillion.

“Nope.” Fillion shot Dia between the eyes. She dropped like a bowling ball. “I told you we kill who we want, when we want.”

Fillion turned his gun toward Sharkrilla and opened fire. Sharkrilla’s anger flared again as he shielded Liam.

Liam looked up at Sharkrilla and signed, Kill them all.

Sharkrilla laid him down and darted to the right to get out of the line of fire. Fillion and his team were slow to adjust and Sharkrilla was barreling toward the jeep. He slammed his body against it and flipped it over, crushing one of the soldiers.

They continued to fired. Sharkrilla stood holding his muscles tight. The bullets seemed to bounce off of him.

Sharkrilla grabbed a soldier and crushed the man’s head in his good hand. The other soldier he bit into, taking most of his side and hip.

Fillion had started running before his last man was attacked. There should be a boat off the coast, he told himself as he ran. A boat with giant guns.

He reached the sand but just as he did he was bowled over. There was a knee in his back. Sharkrilla pushed him deeper into the sand as he lowered his mouth to Fillion’s ear. He snapped and Fillion yelped. Fillion squirmed and Sharkrilla let him up. He got up and ran straight to the water. Sharkrilla followed closely behind him and almost playfully clamped onto his arm with his teeth. In a smooth motion he took Fillion into the waves.

Sharkrilla took him under the surface. The same school of sharks was still in the area from before. The scent of the blood filled Sharkrilla and he knew the others in the water felt it as well.

Fillion was quickly losing air and violently struggled against Sharkrilla’s hold. He pulled and pulled, kicked his legs, threw slow punches to Sharkrilla’s nose. Sharkrilla, floating still in the flurry of bubbles Fillion made, let Fillion free from his teeth. Fillion flailed in his moment of freedom but soon Sharkrilla pinned Fillion’s arms against his sides.

Fillion's eyes fluttered as he took in salt water. Sharkrilla shook Fillion giving him one last jolt. Fillion focused his eyes on Sharkrilla. Sharkrilla bit off his head, cleanly and completely.

Sharkrilla let go of Fillion's body and it slowly fell down toward the other sharks. He swam to the surface and looked around. Open and empty as far as he could see.

David was carried on a stretcher to the small boat that was to take him back to home base. The Captain was there to meet him. He was hooked up to a morphine drip.

"Sir?" The Captain said loudly wanting to get David's attention.

David's head bobbed but he was able to focus for a bit.

"What happened?" The Captain asked.

"Sharkrilla killed everyone."

"You'll have to tell this story to the General when we dock."

David slipped into sleep again.

Sharkrilla shook the salt water from his body as he walked across the beach and into the jungle. He swung through trees and rolled through the over growth until he reached a clearing. Gorillas moved about and he sat and watched them.

Everyone he knew was gone. There was no one to talk to. He signed to the gorillas that came close but they did not respond.

He picked up the smell of the ocean as he watched the gorillas. No humans, he thought. Good.