

CREATIVE WRITING PORTFOLIO 2018

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The Last Dwarf Ranger (Dwarves of the World Anthology Excerpt)

Oscar was objectively poor at being a dwarf.

Dwarves, for reference, are stout, round-bellied creatures, most of whom sport long beards, flowing locks, and grisly battle-scars, that latter of which are generally obtained at weekly tavern brawls. One of the three founding races, the others being man-folk and elf-kin, dwarves most often reside in winding carved cities of stone under distant mountain ranges or very large rocks.

Oscar resided in the city of Ozark, the fourth-most impressive of the dwarf cities. The cities' famed tiered walls were all lined with tin, and dwarven pilgrims journeyed from across the realm to worship in its vaulted aluminum-plated temples. This tale is not concerned with Ozark, however. It is concerned with Oscar, who was downright no good at being what he was: a stout, round-bellied, black-bearded dwarf.

To understand why Oscar was so bad at being him, it is important to understand the requirements for general admittance into the society of dwarf kind.

First and foremost, a dwarf must be a dwarf. Dwarves are famously reclusive creatures who generally mistrust the other founding races (and most other dwarves as well, for that matter). No members from other races are allowed to reside in dwarf cities, with no exceptions being made for shorter-than-average man-folk; particularly gluttonous, lush, or hairy elves; or any number of gnomes or fairies cleverly assembled inside a dwarven waistcoat.

Second and secondmost, a dwarf must love stone. The old songs sing of the first dwarf, Rrork the Mighty, who immediately upon being birthed by the old gods felt his paunch grumble, looked about at the barren plains of first creation, shrugged, and proceeded to eat some rocks. All dwarves embrace this noble heritage.

Third and forthwith, a dwarf must love ale. The reason behind this rule was never recorded, and has since been lost to time. It is suspected that the First Council Of Arbitration was, as it now continues to be, usually quite drunk, and they probably just forgot.

Fourth and above all, a dwarf must never taste of the flesh of a fellow dwarf. This rule was briefly relaxed during the calamitous Drought of the Second Age, but was reinstated

swiftly thereafter to bolster the dwarven populace following the even more calamitous rediscovery that dwarves are, for the most part, quite delicious.

Fifth and finally, and even in forgetting all the rest, a dwarf must, *must*, wield an axe.

Battleaxes embody what dwarves consider to be the best qualities of their race:

craftsmanship, top-heaviness, pointy bits, and haphazard bludgeoning. To be axe-less for a dwarf is tantamount to heresy; quoting Grundel Gertschwater, the legendary axe-smith and pop-up shop proprietor, “There’s no pussy-footing around this one, folks. Wielding axes is just what dwarves do. Ten-percent off, this weekend only.”

The Onyx Statuette (Short Story Excerpt)

“Hey! You can’t just barge in here!”

My door swung open and two suited toughs dressed in hats and trench coats stepped coolly into my office, my secretary Barbara outside red-faced and shouting after them. A third stayed just outside the door. It was late. We were closed. I’d have to remind her what I was paying her for.

Heavy rain streaked the yellowed and cracked window behind me. A storm had been brewing since this afternoon, and waited until just a few moments ago to make its debut. My lights were out, save for the desk lamp that cast long shadows across the floor and helped to conceal the office’s disarray. Scattered papers, blurry pictures, paper plates with half-eaten order-in sandwiches from the lousy cafe down the street: the hallmarks of a case I’d cracked earlier that day. I’d got back from the docks some twenty minutes ago, and had been kicking off the night’s celebration, my prize safely stashed away and my big fat paycheck lined up for the morning. My hair — brown, matted — was down; my bra — red, push-up — was hanging over the chair across from me. The cheap vodka bottle in my right hand betrayed the coffee mug in my left.

The shorter of the two toughs stepped to the side and began kicking through some of the papers on the floor with interest. The taller one closed the office door. Written on the reverse side of the fogged glass were bold arching letters spelling out: Jack Livié: Private Detective. I’d painted them on myself.

“Suppose you fellas missed the sign out front,” I said, “We’re closed.”

They didn’t answer. Both had the typical ‘missing-link’ stature of mafioso wise guys. Their suits were at least two sizes too big, and even then still couldn’t conceal the awkward bulges of whatever heat they were hiding underneath. They were dripping wet too, and so pale it looked like they hadn’t seen the sun in months.

The lopsided ceiling fan limped around above us, threatening to quit with each pass it made. It had been that way for over a year, since I moved into this office. At first I considered replacing it, but it helped add to the ambiance. People expected that sort of grittiness when they went to a PD. Enough mess to show you cared more about the job than your health, but not so much that it looked like the real detective bit it months ago and you were just an enterprising squatter.

Data Recovery (Brave New Girls Anthology III Excerpt)

True to Mr. Perkins's word, while the laptop appeared to be in working order, none of the operations Lucille tried were able to return it to life. The best she could manage was getting the machine to power on and have the screen flicker before returning to black. With each failed attempt, her excitement grew. Unbeknownst to the nervous Mr. Perkins, this was exactly what Lucille had been waiting for.

"Do you mind if I bring this into the back room to take a closer look?" she asked breathlessly. "I may have to go through some files but it should only take a few minutes." The old man nodded warily and slumped himself down into one of the chairs in the shop's waiting area. Lucille didn't waste a second. Practically flying through the beaded curtain to the back room, she navigated the labyrinth of teetering computer towers and parts to her personal workstation. She plunked the laptop down on the table and took to collecting the necessary goods from around the room: a mass of cables here, an overloaded surge protector there, and a baseball batting helmet covered in coils, and a swirling cobweb of copper wire. She dropped it all onto the desk before her and got to work.

Plugs jammed into sockets, and live wires were twisted and capped, some sparking as she did so. Switches were flipped on consoles scattered around the room in what to anyone else would seem to be a random order. But not to Lucille. She'd had this project in the works for the past three years, and it was well past the time she put it through its paces. When she was finished, Mr. Perkins's old laptop looked as though it had been fully cocooned in copper webbing.

Taking a gummy from her pocket and rolling it in her teeth like cowboys did with their cigars in old Western movies, she sat down in the old leather office chair, placed the batting helmet on her head, and hit the last switch. A high-pitched electronic whine filled the air in an instant, and every hair on Lucille's body stood on end. Arcs of blue light leaped around the room between the various elements of her incredible machine. When the whine reached a crescendo, Lucille's vision began to blur, and with a triumphant laugh that sent her last gummy across the room, she fell limp in her chair.

The SkyTrain (The Vancouver Short Story Anthology Excerpt)

While in no way closer to believing what she was seeing, taking a second look confirmed it: the train was now climbing straight up into the sky! Equally confusing, despite the train now apparently travelling vertically, was that she was still able to sit comfortably in her seat as usual. The others on the train were similarly unaffected by the train's direction, ignoring entirely what gravity should have been doing, which was dropping them all into a writhing mass of humanity atop the train's back-most door.

Taking a deep breath, Rachel pinched herself hard three times, but to no avail. So she wasn't asleep. Probably. This certainly wasn't actually happening, though, so what was *really* going on?

Maybe someone had drugged her? Her mom had sent her an online article a few months ago about guys giving out drug-laced business cards to prey on women—could that have happened to her with this dubious transit pass? She certainly wasn't creative enough to have thought all this up on her own without the help of something strong.

Continuing its climb, the train now rose beyond even the highest skyscrapers in the city. The distant great silver orb of Science World below twinkled beneath the scarlet sunset sky, appearing no larger than a loonie at this height.

Or, another possibility, her thoughts continued, perhaps in her haste she'd tripped and fallen down the stairs at the station, and was currently in some life-or-death induced coma being rushed to the hospital, and everything she was seeing around her was just her hallucinating mind's interpretation of what was currently happening to her physical form?

The girl in the disco jacket was taking selfies now. Her face scrunched cutely this way and that, as she used her dirty-blonde hair as a faux moustache. Rachel didn't know why it irritated her so much to see the girl so calm under the current circumstances.

Or, maybe still, she considered, the train had crashed after all, and she was currently on her way towards some distant eternal white light?

Without any ceremony, the train ascended into the clouds and was at once shrouded in a swirling sea of grey and shadow. The woman who was knitting closed the window next to her to keep out the draft.

Upon review, Rachel found none of her reasoned explanations for her situation particularly satisfying, with the last of the lot seeming the least likely; she'd studied world religions at school and none of their holy texts had mentioned taking public transit to reach the afterlife.

The Concurrence (The Megan Survival Anthology Excerpt)

The third survivor was Stanley, Concurrence's resident robotics expert. Though temperamental and neurotic, he was brilliant. His skin was pale, his hair was dark, and he had tired, squinty eyes. He never combed, never shaved, and never purchased deodorant. All his life he preferred the company of machines to that of people, and those who knew him didn't mind in the slightest. His only companion was a skeletal prototype android of his own design, a hobby-project that the colonists let him bring along as one of the several eccentric clauses in his employment agreement- he even negotiated his own private lab in engineering to work on it.

During the crash, Stanley was thrown across the engineering bay, shattering three vertebrae on impact and paralyzing him from the waist down. Stubborn to the core, he accepted only minimal aid from Dr. Roberts. In the days following the crash, in the absence of a traditional wheelchair (not that it would have been much good on Megan terrain), he built his own. Using scrap from the crash site, Stanley mounted a seat and a series of straps around the torso of his android's frame, wired himself a makeshift controller, and effectively transformed his companion into a bipedal chair he could use to get around. The setup was hardly efficient, but far better than dragging himself everywhere or, God forbid, having to ask the others for help.

Stanley did not like Karin, and she did not particularly care for him. Starting with an argument at the beginning of the Concurrence's voyage where he dismissed her engineering expertise against his own robotics knowledge, the two had tried their best to avoid one another on the ship. Unfortunately, such separation simply was not possible following the crash. Dr. Roberts had to constantly defuse flare-ups between them, and he couldn't help but notice either that all of the fights seemed wholly instigated by Stanley one way or another. After every bout, Karin was always amazed at how well the doctor was able to keep his temper.

The fourth member of their group, while not technically a *survivor*, was a Series 2 Military Sentry Bot, nicknamed 'T' by the colonists due to its shape. T stood six-feet tall, was fully covered in black, two-inch armour plating, and looked akin to a refrigerator rolling around on a bed of miniature tank treads. The bot was equipped with an intelligence program that understood basic verbal commands and had a Gatling gun

mounted on either side of the chassis in place of arms. T was on loan to the colonists to assist their security detail as part of a publicity stunt on behalf of the bot's manufacturers, and as such was heavily plastered with promotional materials and advertisements. As if its appearance wasn't enough, T was also able to eject informational pamphlets detailing its capabilities and pricing on command.