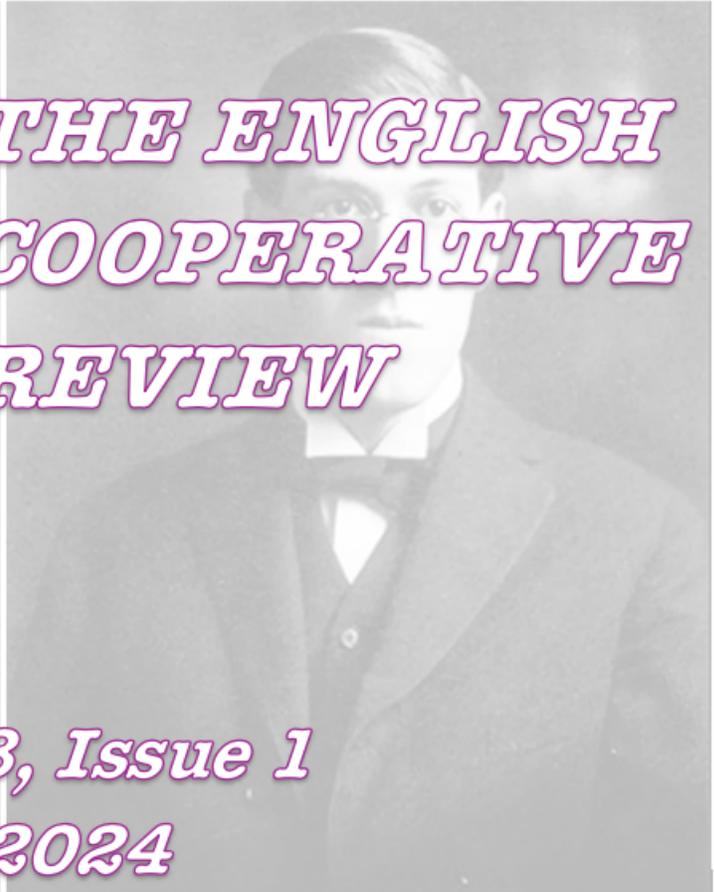




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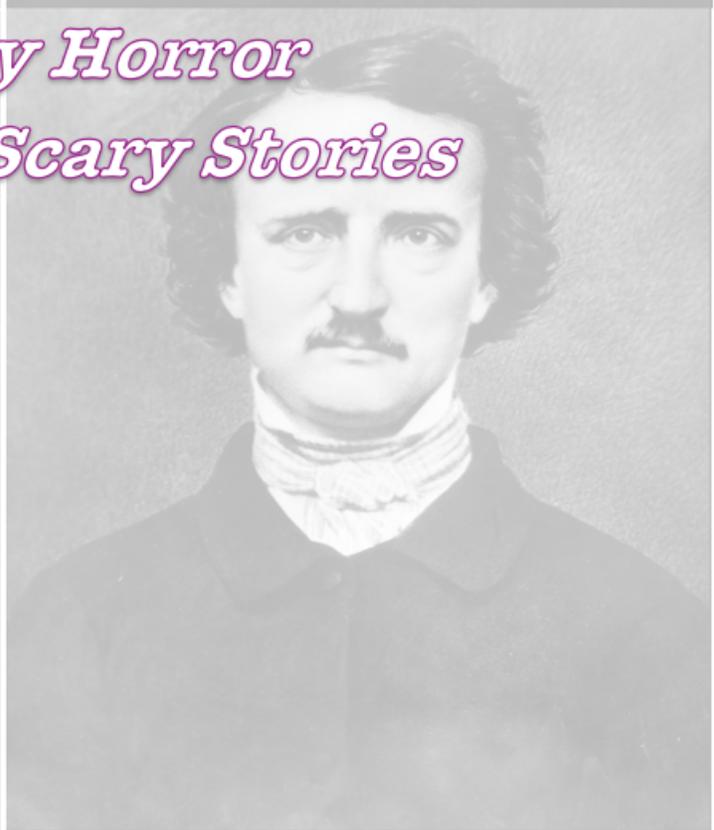


***THE ENGLISH
COOPERATIVE
REVIEW***

***Volume 8, Issue 1
Fall 2024***



***Everyday Horror
Super Short Scary Stories***



Preface to "Everyday Horror"

By MC Barnes

Everyday Horror is a collection born from a simple yet intriguing writing exercise I devised for my college students during Halloween. The assignment was straightforward: craft a super short horror story, no longer than 500 words, that emulated either the cosmic horror trope made famous by H.P. Lovecraft or the iceberg theory as expressed by Edgar Allan Poe or Ernest Hemingway. Over the years, I have always modeled what I teach, producing my own stories alongside my students. These tales often centered on the everyday experiences of living in Daytona Beach by the ocean, weaving the mundane with the macabre.

With the advent of artificial intelligence, the landscape of composition has dramatically transformed. Students today can now produce collections with a unifying theme, facilitated by the enhanced capabilities of AI, making the writing process both more efficient and prolific. This collection, **Everyday Horror**, serves as my model for the students.

The process to generate these stories and their accompanying cover art was as innovative as it was rigorous. The goal was never to let the AI, in this case, ChatGPT, control the narrative but rather to utilize it as an editor. The philosophy of composition was to view the writer more as a director than an author, more as a conductor than a musician. Prompts were specific, often nearly as long as the final 500-word story. While stories could be modified and tweaked within ChatGPT, detailed word-by-word editing was meticulously done in Microsoft Word.

Why, you might ask, go through such an intensive procedure and still use AI? Why not just write it all out oneself? The simplest answer is that AI synthesizes narrative elements remarkably well, making judgments regarding content and style that are incredibly helpful. There is also an element of magic in the process, akin to throwing dice or drawing cards.

The cover art for each story was generated by instructing the AI to select elements from the narratives. The facts of the stories are true, though they still require interpretation. This collection is a testament to the evolving nature of writing and storytelling, blending traditional techniques with modern technology to create something unique and engaging. The stories were created to be standalone, though a reader might see a unity that suggests one story or even dream.

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Crawlspace

Cask of Amontillado, Poe (model)

https://americanenglish.state.gov/files/ae/resource_files/the_cask_of_amontillado.pdf

The roof of our old two-story house is the most dangerous place, but it appears beautiful with its view of the Atlantic Ocean and the surrounding palms, the coquina chimneys, and green Spanish tile of the roof. If you fall, you'll likely be eating from a tube. In contrast, the cellar with its surrounding crawlspace is understandably the stuff of horror movies. No one likely ever made a

horror movie that occurred on a roof, excluding perhaps Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, but a cornucopia of horrors occurs in cellars, basements, and crawlspaces. *The Evil Dead* comes to mind, as well as *The Beyond*.

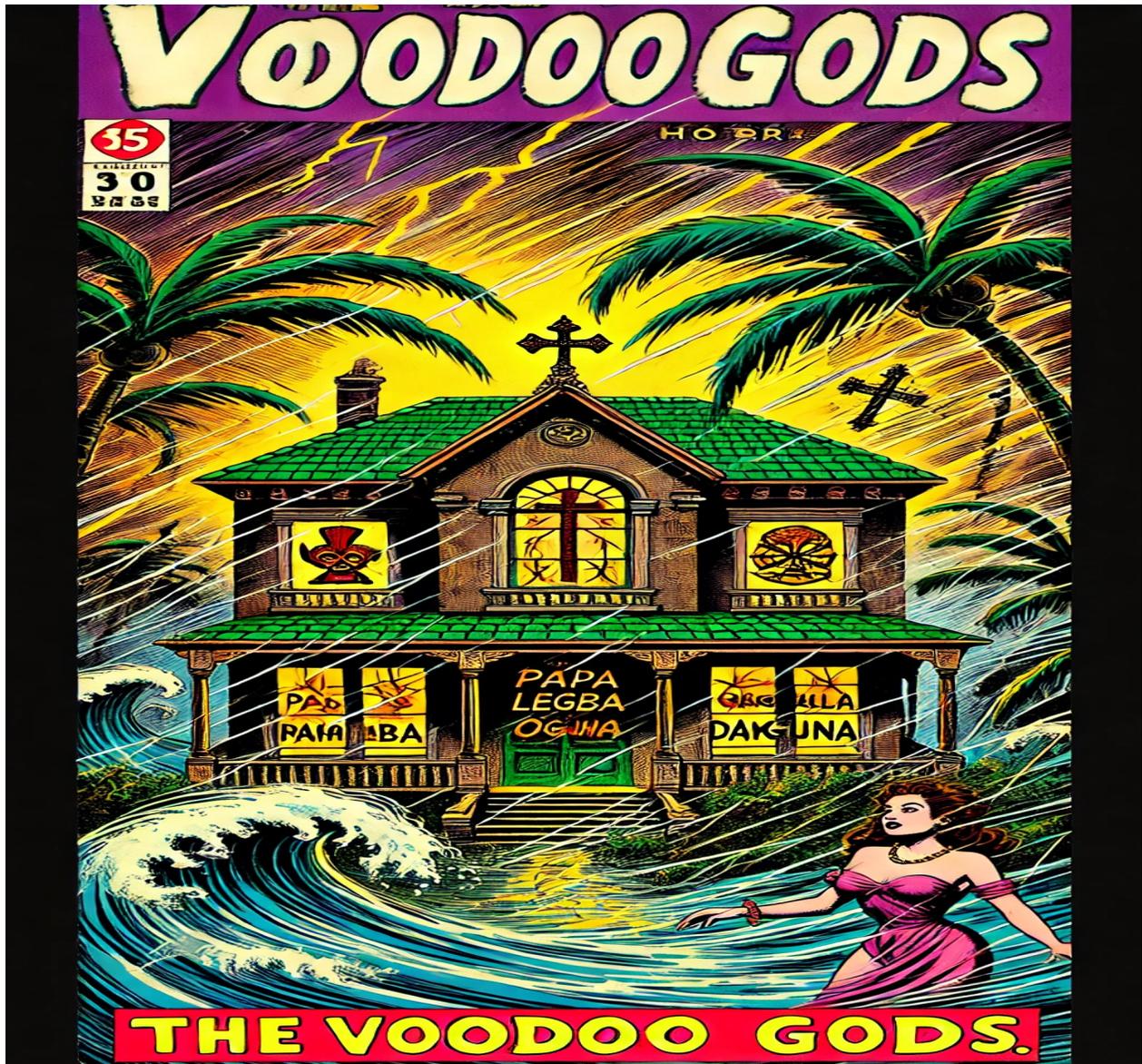
Many prospective buyers of our house came by later to inquire about the outcome of the purchase. At least half said they decided against buying after looking at the cellar. The ancient boiler with arcane gauges and asbestos-covered radiator pipes dissuaded many; for others, it was just the scale of the beast. It is surrounded by heavy coquina blocks like a miniature St. Augustine fortress and a bulwark set of doors. The cellar is about 20 x 20, and the surrounding crawlspace is four times this space. Our neighbor Jimbo once called it a dungeon and said you could have shackles down there (or a grow house).

Regardless of atmosphere, the necessary machinery of a home is accessible only in the crawlspace, which fills almost anyone with dread. Carpenters repairing rotten wood worry about being electrocuted and trapped to die. I once used a car jack under a professor's rotten bathtub floor to lift it and worried it would pop out fatally. I ran a line under a house once to a stove and was so focused I didn't see the skeleton of a cat in my path. The crawlspace has an ability to reduce you to a primitive state of crawling and focus. A single-mindedness is necessary to ignore the loose wires, old bones of cats, rats, possums, or dogs.

I had a leaky kitchen sink once that dripped into the crawlspace. I ignored it until one day a renter left a package of raw chicken on the table in the den. The maggots climbed from the cellar, up the hole in the sink trap, across the kitchen floor, and across the den floor to the raw meat. My mother arrived to help clean for an inspection that was scheduled that morning. She assumed the hundreds of white specks on the floor were spilled white rice. The smell of the vacuum cleaner sucking up the manifold maggots was arguably the worst part. The inspector refused to go in the cellar and rescheduled until I could remedy the situation.

The plumber tried to get me to replace the entire sink instead of the simple solution, which required crawling on your belly to the still-swarming horde of maggots in a large pool of stinking miasma. I had worked as a plumber and argued it was his professional duty to fix the problem. We negotiated and compromised. He said if I threw some lye on it, he'd get an 18-year-old gofer to come by on Monday to do the dirty work, someone who didn't yet know the evil within the crawlspace.

Word Count: 497



The Voodoo Gods

The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket, Poe (model)

<https://pinkmonkey.com/dl/library1/pym.pdf>

“The Statement of Randolph Carter,” Lovecraft (model)

<https://www.hplovecraft.com/writings/texts/fiction/src.aspx>

People often ask how I got “into” voodoo. My usual answer involves a freshman class project. We regularly visited a local spiritualist community in Cassadaga, Florida. With a class budget of

\$150, three students could get readings from mediums, which we recorded for analysis. Over a decade, I frequented the funky bookstore there, exploring readings from various religions worldwide. One day, I noticed there was nothing on Santeria. When I asked the cashier about it, she looked at me as if I had peed on the floor. That piqued my interest in Santeria, Hoodoo, and Voodoo.

I searched online for free sources and found Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men*, which detailed rituals that resonated with my previous interest in Japanese home shrines and the concept of a daily, non-institutional religion. It's a rather long answer, given voodoo's generally bad reputation—a standard trope in many horror movies, always portrayed as malevolent.

After reading available sources, I decided to take the boys' window markers and draw the veves—symbols for Papa Legba, Damballa, and Ogun—on the three adjacent kitchen windows facing the ocean and sunrise. The effect of light through the symbols was both peaceful and stunning. I kept them there.

About a month later, a major hurricane approached, running parallel to the coast and potentially turning into a Category 5 storm, aiming for Daytona Beach. The news described the hurricane coming from Haiti, accompanied by a viral satellite image of a dark red menacing head. Alone in the dark, I wondered if the voodoo gods were coming to their symbols. It was a silly notion, but I erased the symbols anyway. Shortly thereafter, the storm turned away.

If it were you and a Cat 5 was coming, would you draw the symbols or not?

Word Count: 288



Cassadaga

The Shadow over Innsmouth, Lovecraft (model)

<https://www.hplovecraft.com/writings/texts/fiction/soi.aspx>

Professor Henry Caldwell, an English professor at a small liberal arts college in Central Florida, faced a dilemma. With the freshman seminar class's budget of \$150 nearly depleted, he pondered the next adventure. Intent on introducing his students to the concept of intentional communities, he recalled a nearby spiritualist enclave—Cassadaga.

Cassadaga, derived from the Seneca Indian word meaning "Water beneath the rocks," was a small unincorporated community in Volusia County, known as the "Psychic Capital of the World." Founded in 1875 by George P. Colby, a renowned trance medium, the Southern Cassadaga Spiritualist Camp Meeting Association became a haven for psychics and mediums.

With the class unanimously agreeing to the idea, the plan was set. Three students would receive readings, determined by lottery, while the rest would record the sessions for later analysis. The focus would be on the rhetorical strategies mediums employed, dissecting the techniques used to captivate and convince.

The day arrived, and the class set off for Cassadaga. As they entered the quaint, eerie town, Victorian-style houses stood as silent sentinels. The chosen students, Sarah, Jason, and Emily, nervously approached their assigned mediums.

Sarah's reading began innocuously. The medium, Madam Laveau, spoke in vague generalities about love and success. "Beware the water beneath the rocks," she intoned, "for it hides the shadows of the past." Sarah's recording captured her sudden gasp as the room seemed to darken.

Jason's medium, Enoch, described visions of ancient entities. "They watch from the depths," Enoch whispered. Jason's face paled, his hands trembling.

Emily's session was the most disturbing. Her medium, Cassandra, spoke in a language that seemed to resonate from the very walls. "The veil is thin in Cassadaga," Cassandra said. "The spirits here hunger for communion, and some are not as they seem."

Returning to the college, the students shared their recordings. The class dissected the mediums' techniques, noting the use of ambiance, intonation, and suggestive language. Yet, an air of unease lingered. The professor, reviewing the recordings alone late one night, felt a chill. Sarah's gasps, Jason's trembling, Emily's unnerved silence—they were too real, too visceral.

Doubt gnawed at him. Had the students fallen victim to their own imaginations, or was there something truly malevolent in Cassadaga? The "Shadow over Innsmouth had taught him to question the boundaries of reality and illusion. Now, Cassadaga's whispers echoed in his mind.

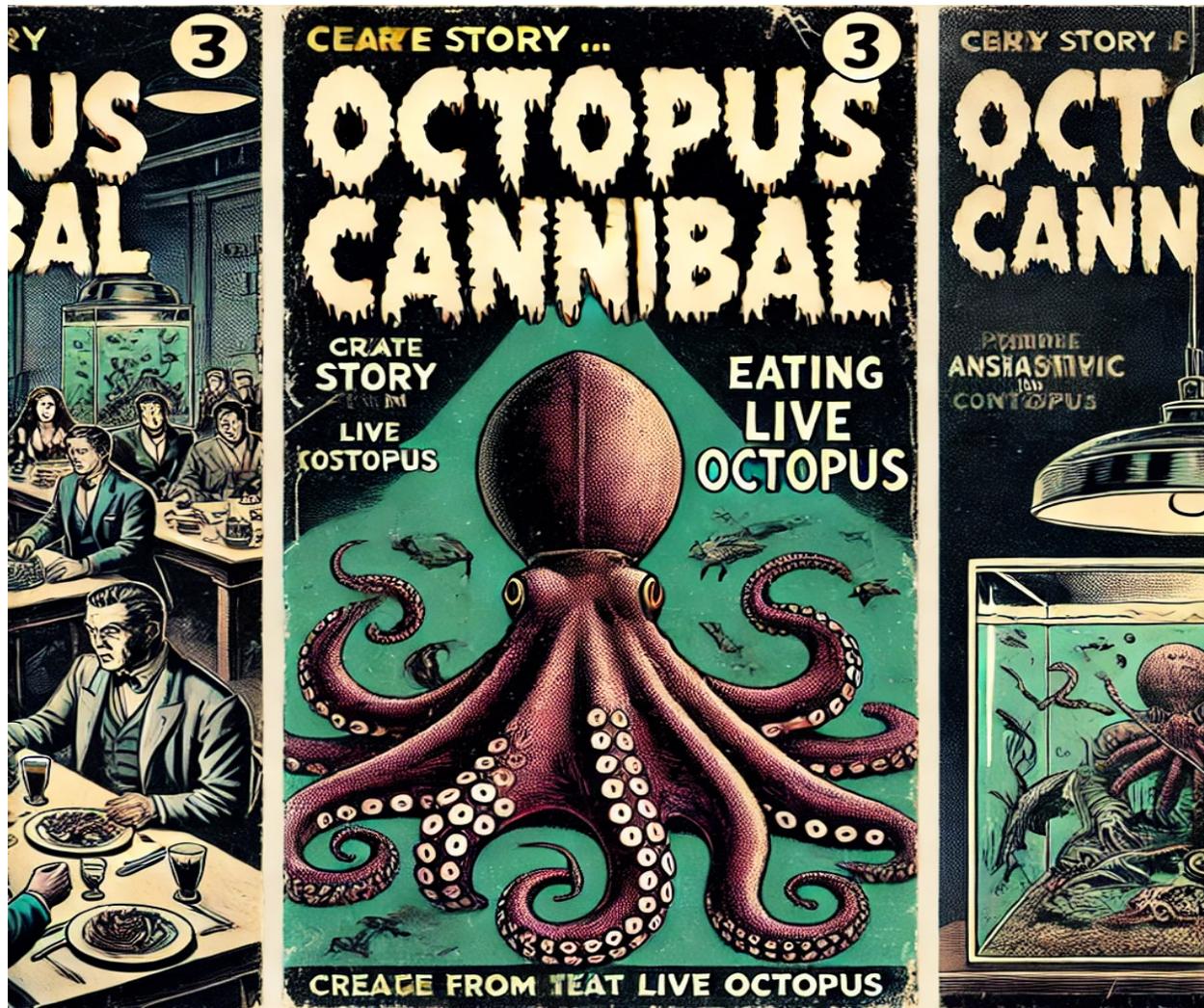
Over the years, Cassadaga became a staple in Professor Caldwell's curriculum. After twenty years of trips, about half of the students believed the sessions were real, while the other half dismissed them as hocus pocus and cold reading.

In class, they discussed three basic strategies: the rainbow ruse, the Barnum statement, and cold reading. Despite these explanations, some student experiences were striking. One student claimed a medium saw her dead twin brother. Another said a girl's father had spoken to her. Some students left sessions in tears.

Professor Caldwell often wondered if these were elaborate pranks. But when he reviewed the notes, stories, and recordings from over two decades, he found it hard to decide which were mere hijinks and which might have been genuine.

No parent ever complained about the trips, but Caldwell still saw former students who recounted particulars from the sessions that haunted them to the present. The line between reality and the supernatural remained as thin as ever, leaving him to ponder the true nature of the experiences in Cassadaga.

Word count: 548



Octopus Cannibal

Twenty Leagues Under the Seas, Verne (model)

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/164/164-h/164-h.htm>

My obsession with fishtanks began at the tender age of eight, when a Christmas morning revealed a 20-gallon metal and glass tank under the tree. The plastic sunken treasure and skeleton pirate bubblers became my friends, and the orange glow of the heater flickering on and off,

coupled with the steady hum of the filtration system, offered a comforting backdrop to my childhood.

As I grew, so did my fascination with aquariums. Freshwater tanks gave way to saltwater, and eventually, to vibrant reef systems teeming with life. The exotic variety drew me in—eels, pufferfish, and any ocean creature that could fit. The hobby morphed from a pastime into a life process. Moving to Daytona Beach provided a new opportunity: fresh seawater was hauled from the beach to counter evaporation in my 65-gallon tank, which now housed live creatures from the beach and piers.bbn

We kept fish caught from the surf: pompano, whiting, and various crustaceans, including pistol shrimp and stone crabs. But the most exotic and intelligent of all was the octopus. This creature's eyes seemed to meet mine with a depth of understanding, and it would beg for food, offering unwanted snails in exchange. Its color changes expressed emotions—from black for anger to a kaleidoscope of hues. I would challenge my boys to locate the octopus in the tank, but even their sharp young eyes often failed to see it, so perfectly did it mimic the rocks.

The octopus displayed a personality that amazed us all. It would grab my hand with surprising strength, a gesture that felt almost friendly. It could shoot water out of the tank with startling accuracy, sometimes hitting us square in the face. When angry, it could even hurl its feces like a crazed monkey. We were in awe of its intelligence, and after many such interactions, we decided to refrain from eating calamari.

It might seem a small thing, but if you're accustomed to dining at Italian, Greek, or Japanese restaurants, octopus is often on the menu. My resolve was tested by memories of my time in Tokyo, where the principle of freshness reigns supreme. I recalled sashimi served live, the fish gasping for air as pre-sliced strips of its flesh were plucked off with chopsticks. Octopus tentacles, still squirming on the plate, were a common sight.

We all chose to abstain from eating octopus, the memories of our interactions with our eight-armed friend resurfacing each time others seasoned their meal with lemon. To us, the octopus was a fellow intelligent species, and consuming it felt akin to cannibalism. Even as others savored their meals, the image of our friend remained vivid in our minds, a reminder of the intelligence and depth of creatures we often take for granted.

Word count: 498



The Revocation of St. Miguel

From Beyond, Lovecraft (model)

<https://www.hplovecraft.com/writings/texts/fiction/fb.aspx>

Before the pandemic began, I delved into the shadowy traditions of Voodoo, Hoodoo, and Santeria. Online sources offered fragments of their mysteries, yet ambiguity and misunderstanding clouded these faiths. Popular opinion painted them as dark arts, rituals steeped in malevolence and human sacrifice. Could the national religion of Haiti truly be evil? Many sources argued that most followers practiced benevolent, white Voodoo. Even curses seemed less sinister when one recalled that popes had once cursed entire towns.

Driven by curiosity, I decided to bless my home using a ritual known as The Revocation of St. Miguel, reputed to reverse witchcraft and block harm. Voodoo, deeply intertwined with

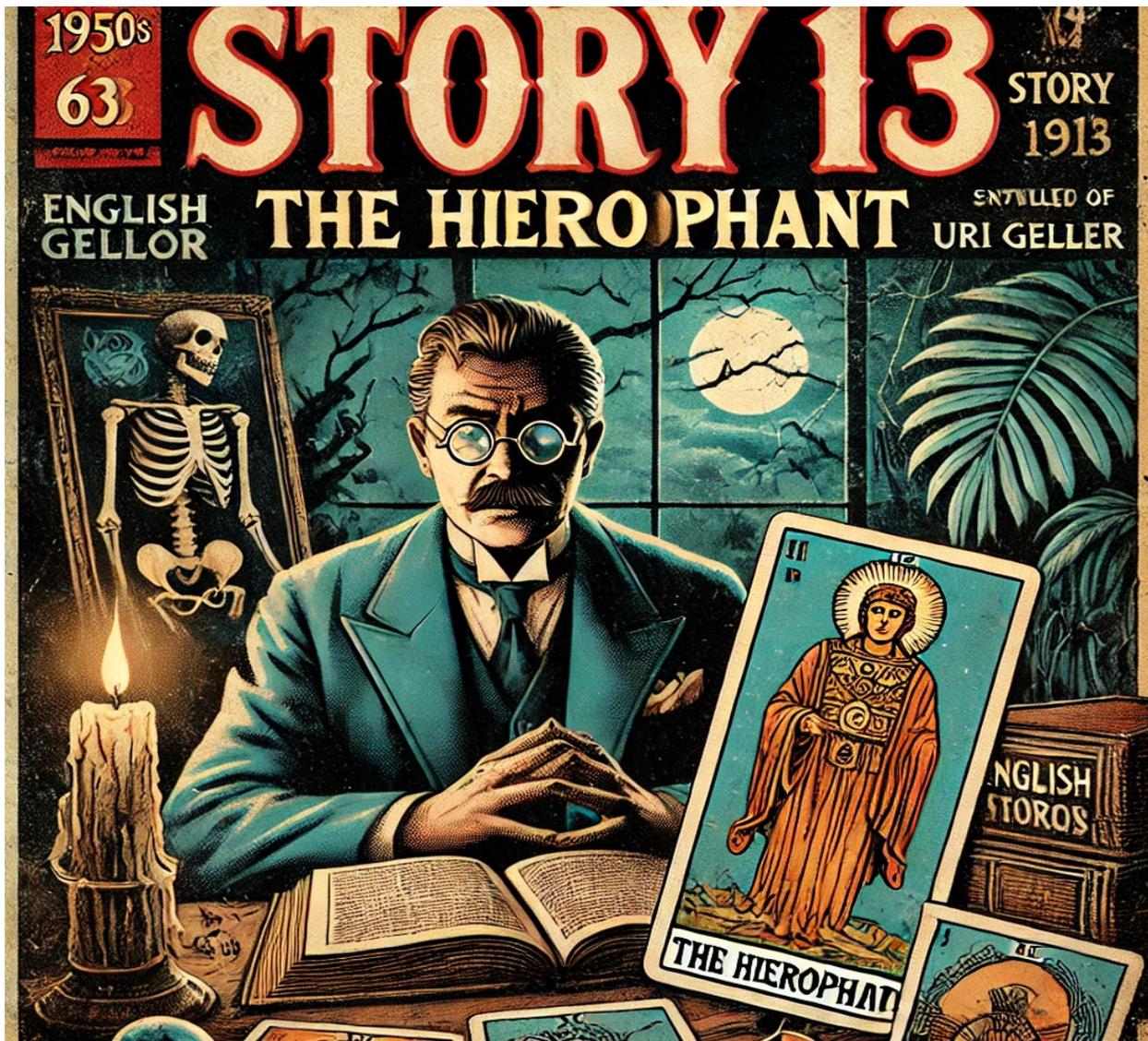
Catholicism, demanded holy water for this rite. Two small stemmed glasses—one clear, the other clouded with coffee—were to be placed upside down and sealed with wax. I prepared the holy water, following the instructions on WikiHow and reciting an exorcism passage from the Roman Ritual. Catholicism's relationship with nature seemed to demand the exorcism of natural bodies of water, reflecting its historical stance on nature spirits.

Opinions varied on who could create holy water; some believed any baptized person could, while others insisted it depended on one's faith. I completed the process within an hour. The glasses were positioned beneath symbols for Papa Legba (St. Peter), Damballa (St. Patrick), and Ogun (St. George), remaining there throughout the pandemic. Remarkably, the holy water stayed in the small glasses for three years, seemingly a miracle. Despite my family falling ill, I remained untouched. I taught in-person classes the entire time.

However, one incident contradicted the apparent blessing of St. Miguel. One rainy day, I poured out some rainwater onto the back step near the home shrine. Deciding to skip that step, I tripped down the remaining four concrete steps, breaking my foot in seven places. As I crawled back up, shouting for my wife Liz, a chilling realization struck me: Unlike the reform churches, Voodoo welcomes possession. Papa Legba, the gatekeeper like St. Peter, walked with a limp, one foot in this world and one in the other. Damballa's possessed followers crawled on the ground, hissing like snakes, and Ogun granted the weak the strength to endure.

As I lay there, pain radiating through my shattered foot, the line between blessing and curse blurred. Could the ritual have invoked more than it protected against? The symbols of Papa Legba, Damballa, and Ogun seemed to shimmer ominously in the dim light. How would one even recognize possession? The holy water's miraculous endurance now seemed a silent sentinel, a grim reminder of forces beyond my understanding.

The days that followed were marked by the heightened awareness that comes with pain. I questioned every shadow, every whisper. Had the protective power of St. Miguel's ritual faltered. Had I unwittingly invited something darker into my home? The unknown pressed down on me, leaving me to wonder, in the deep, echoing silence of the night, as I lay in bed with my foot in a cast. Could anyone ever really know if you were possessed or not?



Story 13: The Hierophant

The Magus, Fowles (model)

https://www.academia.edu/36689255/John_Fowles_The_Magus_Part_One

Over the course of my twenty something years teaching English at the university, my students have regularly asked probing questions about my thoughts on the supernatural, tarot cards, the singularity, UFOs, God, and other esoteric topics. They were curious about my true beliefs, but I had always maintained a careful neutrality. I analyzed arguments, constructed them to fit the audience and occasion, but never disclosed my personal opinions.

Some examples from my lectures suggested historical validity for giants, drawing from ancient texts and archaeological findings. Other anecdotes ridiculed anything that strayed from scientific

fact, such as the Norwegian student who, during a séance, flatly told the medium, "We don't believe anything there." Then there was the case of Uri Geller, whose psychic abilities were confirmed by the FBI, yet he failed to claim James Randi's million-dollar prize for definitive proof.

The truth is, after decades of weaving narratives and dissecting them, reality and fiction often blurred in my mind. I began to wonder, did my students sense this ambiguity, this shadowy borderland I inhabited?

One evening, in a whimsical yet oddly urgent mood, I decided to consult my tarot cards, musing that the Hierophant would be the most fitting card to signify affirmation of the supernatural, fantastic and weird. A. E. Waite described the Hierophant as symbolizing all things righteous and sacred, a channel of grace distinct from nature, a leader of salvation, and the head of a recognized hierarchy reflecting a greater order. Waite cautioned that the pontiff might forget the significance of his symbolic state, acting as if he embodied all that his sign signified. The Hierophant was not philosophy, inspiration, or religion, but a mode of religious expression.

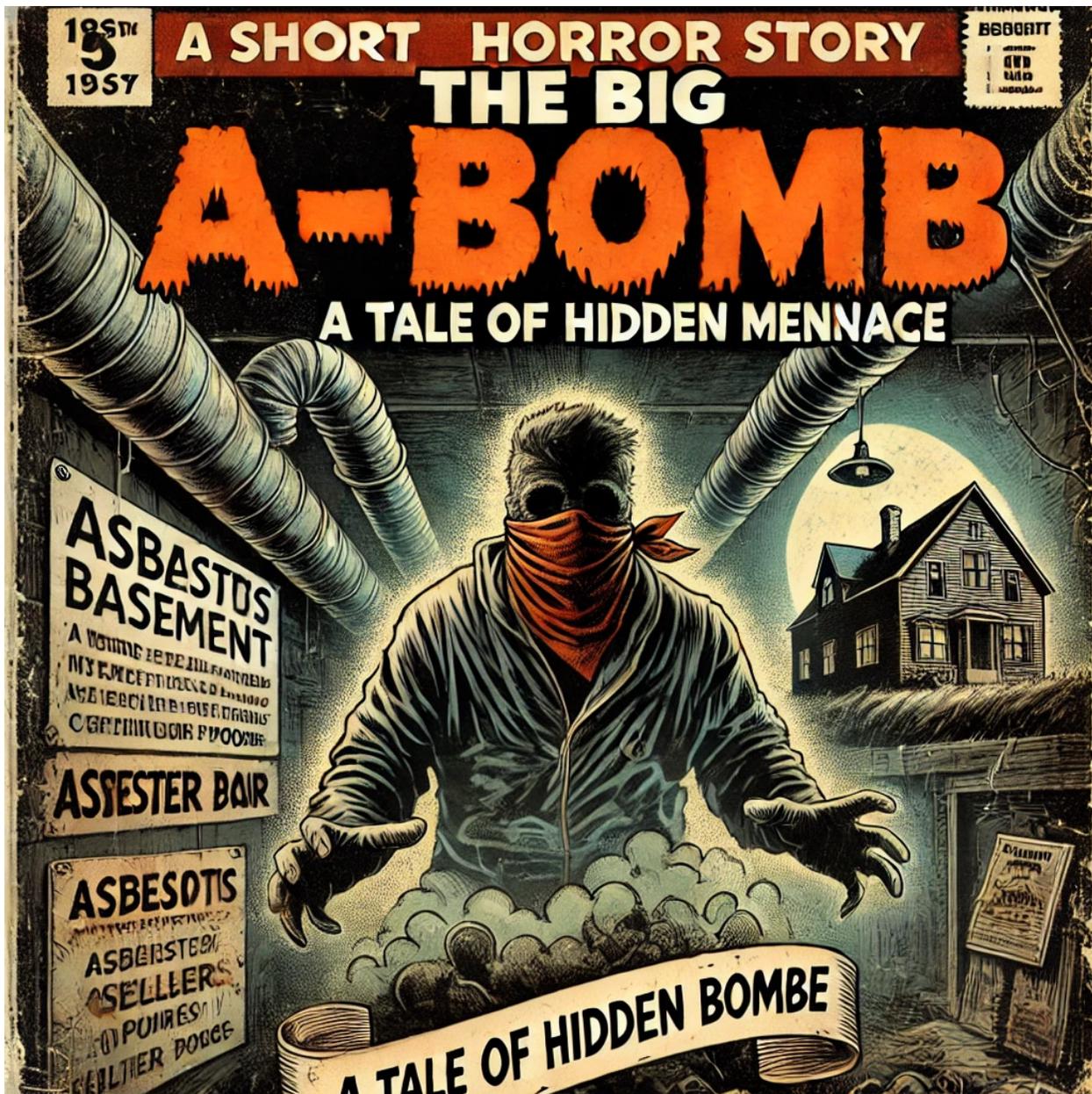
I went to the deck at my kitchen window home shrine, shuffled intently, and dealt one card. It was the Hierophant. A chill crept up my spine as I stared at the card. It seemed too perfect, almost scripted. I went to the next room where my teenage sons were eating lunch. "You'll never guess what just happened," I said, telling them the context for my card draw. They glanced at each other, before one of them said, "That's weird." The other went to the kitchen, saw the card lying on the table, and shrugged.

In class the next day, I shared the anecdote with my students. "When doing a tarot reading," I explained, "the technical process is straightforward, but the interpretation is personal. I can't tell you what the cards mean; you have to put the symbols together. There are 78 cards in a deck, and the Hierophant is just one."

But as I spoke, I felt a gnawing doubt. Was I guiding my students, or leading them astray? Was the story true, or just another fabrication, a fiction crafted by an unreliable narrator known for blurring the lines between reality and fantasy? My students watched me with a mix of fascination and skepticism, sensing perhaps that the tales I spun might be as much about my own inner labyrinth as about the mysteries of the universe.

The Hierophant's appearance was a curious coincidence, or perhaps a sign. In the end, the true significance of the card, like the debates we had, depended on how one chose to interpret it. But could anyone truly trust an interpretation from someone who lived in the gray spaces between fact and fiction? Could you ever really know if what I said was true, or just another story? And more unsettlingly, could I?

Word count: 499



The Big A-Bomb

“Mask of the Red Death,” Poe (model)

https://americanenglish.state.gov/files/ae/resource_files/the_mask_of_the_red_death.pdf

My first encounter with the insidious presence of asbestos was during a summer break in New Jersey. As a college student eager to earn some money, I found work with a local plumber. Little did I know, this job would introduce me to a silent, pervasive menace.

In renovation construction, asbestos is ubiquitous, especially in plumbing, where it wraps steam pipes for insulation. Plumbers, seasoned in their trade, often treat it with a casual disregard, a dangerous complacency born from familiarity.

One day, my boss and I were tasked with removing asbestos from the basement of a former RJ Reynolds VP. With only bandanas for protection, we descended into that dank cellar, the air thick with the threat of unseen, deadly fibers. The owner of the house, descending the stairs, offered us a "bonus" of expired cigarettes, showing us how to revive them by blowing through the filters. Even at eighteen, I knew this was egregiously illegal and hazardous.

I confided in my parents, their concern evident. The next day, I requested reassignment. My boss, understanding but indifferent, asked if I could paint. Relieved, I agreed, having painted my parents' house before. But the relief was short-lived. The new task involved sanding asbestos shingles, which my senior colleague informed me created even more hazardous dust.

The plumbers were not malevolent; they were simply resigned to the grim reality of their work. They taught me much—"never work yourself out of a job" and "there are only two things you have to do in life: pay the bills and keep the faith." Yet, my boss's insistence on using lead-based solder on drinking pipes to save money revealed a darker side. We would switch out the spools if an inspector appeared, a deceit as toxic as the materials we handled.

Years later, the specter of asbestos returned to haunt me in my Florida home. A floor refinisher, pulling up linoleum kitchen tiles, revealed the black glue beneath with a chilling declaration: "You know what that is? That black glue is the big A-bomb." We negotiated a price of \$1000 to strip the tiles and sand down to the heart pine flooring. But the basement remained a tomb of asbestos. I attempted to seal it with a special paint, yet the fibers floated like a silent plague in the crawlspace.

I never venture into that cursed space, where the ghosts of my past labor and the asbestos fibers hang like a silent threat. The true horror, I realize, is not merely the substance itself, but the insidious way it has woven itself into the fabric of my life, an invisible curse that no amount of paint or precaution can entirely banish.

In the end, the true "big A-bomb" lies not in the asbestos that clings to the pipes and walls, but in the slow, creeping death it promises, a reminder that some specters can never be fully exorcised.

(494 words)



Stuck in Dreams

“Nyarlathotep,” Lovecraft (model)

<https://www.hplovecraft.com/writings/texts/fiction/n.aspx>

I hesitated to share this story. They say the dream is contagious, and I never discuss them with the boys. My wife is my confidante and helps me escape, so she necessarily knows. Recently, I had to tell Cooper, my 14-year-old, when we shared a bed on vacation. I said, "This might seem weird, but if you hear a deep moan from me at night, it means I'm stuck in a dream. You need to give me a good shove, right by my head." He asked, "You mean you're having a nightmare?" I replied, "Yes, but I can't move."

I can't remember the first time I got stuck in a dream. As a child, my right hand fell asleep hanging over the bed, and my waking eyes perceived it as a stranger's hand rising from beneath the bed. I saw shadows on the walls moving with intelligence. I never told anyone because of what it implied. I didn't tell girls before my wife either, often bearing it in silence. I thought I might have a neck injury from construction work and developed strategies to deal with it. If you suffer too, hear me now: you can still breathe, so make a loud moan to wake your partner. A good shove will do it. Another trick is to sleep on your hand. Sometimes, I can still move my fingertips, creating enough motion to break free from the spell.

What is the dream? It's not just a nightmare or a lucid dream. It's like a distorted mirror in voodoo, an otherworld that's like this world but not. It can be completely black—blacker than black—with an inhuman intelligence, unlike any earthly biology. It doesn't care, but it knows and relates. I didn't know what to call it until I saw the documentary, *The Nightmare*. They call it sleep paralysis. Some see entities in the room with them during an episode. I can never open my eyes, even though I've tried. There is beauty and wisdom in the dreams; they make me want to see more, but my soul separates from my body, making me fear death before waking.

The only real-world experience I can relate to this is once in the Philippines. I was with a friend on a wooden canoe in bright blue water above a luxuriant reef. The canoe flipped, and our last money descended onto the coral in a small purse. I dove with a snorkel over and over, increasingly aware of the blue void stretching from the reef shelf for hundreds of feet. I looked into the blue, watching for a rising predator, and I never so wanted to get out of the water. I used to think of the ocean to sleep soundly, but over time, these dreams became so deep that they invariably triggered getting stuck. The beautiful vision would change in a moment to dark water at night with something moving silently below. It's never violent like a horror movie, but no horror movie can be as terrifying as this live experience—like standing before a roaring lion versus the MGM trademark lion roar. My wife once asked if I ever had insomnia. I answered, "No, if worse comes to worst, I just think of water."

(542 words)

The Nightmare (2015)

[The Nightmare Full Movie Watch Online 123Movies \(123moviesfree.net\)](http://123moviesfree.net)



The Thing Under the Greenhouse

The Thing on the Doorstep, Lovecraft (model)

<https://www.hplovecraft.com/writings/texts/fiction/td.aspx>

About ten years ago, I had the grand vision of cultivating our own vegetables. Enthusiastically, I ordered a greenhouse kit and constructed a sturdy platform to withstand the fiercest hurricanes. This dream, however, withered as the greenhouse was overtaken by undesirable plants and animals. A money tree from a Chinese restaurant sprouted through the top, even bearing its fruit. Opportunistic creatures made the space beneath the platform their home. For an animal, this six by eight-foot area with a foot of height was paradise—offering cool refuge in the scorching summer, warmth in the winter, and protection during hurricanes, no matter how dilapidated the greenhouse had become.

Floridians frequently release exotic pets into our semi-tropical environment, and we even had a five-foot invasive tegu lizard take up residence. This large, muscular creature often surprised me in the yard while I worked. Despite its size, it was stealthy, even with only three remaining feet.

We speculated that a pet owner lost control of an infection and released it to avoid veterinarian fees.

One day, I decided to renovate the old greenhouse and repair the front step. I knew I would have to hammer and saw through the boards, with an unknown creature clearly having made its home beneath. Scratch marks on exposed roots showed its path from the bowels of the structure to the outside. Its exit was directly under the front step. Cornering any animal, not only a rat, could provoke a panicked and violent reaction, so I brought my .22 rifle.

As I inspected the situation, I considered the possible animals that might be under there. Perhaps it was the possum whose family I had killed, the giant male raccoon I saw on the roof, the tegu had returned, or even a python. In Florida, almost anything is possible. The scratch marks suggested a creature of considerable size and strength, something that thrived in the dark, protected space.

I walked back to the kitchen, unloaded the round, and placed the rifle by the back door. I anticipated my wife asking why there was a rifle by the door and my response being, "It's for the thing under the greenhouse."

That night, I imagined scratching noises from the yard, soft at first, then growing louder, more insistent. As I lay awake, my mind conjured images of sharp teeth and creatures spanning the Floridian fauna. The scratching became a haunting refrain, echoing through the stillness of the night.

As I finally drifted off to sleep, I considered the best defensive posture to take against the anonymous creature. Should one of the boys hold the rifle in preparation while I tore open the steps? Would that be even riskier?

In the morning, I decided against confrontation. I bought a Japanese beaded curtain to replace the broken polycarbonate door on the greenhouse and rationalized that we would accept the step's dilapidated, moss-covered state. Embracing the Zen principle of wabi-sabi, I resolved to live with the thing under the greenhouse.

(504 words)

ChatGPT Prompt for the story. I included one example prompt to give a sense of composition process. The initial story was then refined with follow-up directions and editing in Microsoft Word:

Write a short horror story that is titled "Story 13: The Hierophant." Under the title should be The Magus, Fowles (model). The story has an English professor narrator reflecting on his career of thirty some years and students asking what he really thought about the class debates concerning the supernatural, tarot cards, the singularity, UFOs, god and sundry other topics that require interpretation. The professor only analyzed arguments and created them to suit the audience and need. Never disclosing his opinion. Some examples seem to support the historical facts behind

giants, for example. Other anecdotes made a mockery of anything other than scientific fact, like a student from Norway telling the medium: we don't believe anything there." The FBI confirmed psychic ability with Uri Geller, then why didn't he win the Amazing Randi's million dollar prize for such evidence. As a humorous addition to the story and debate the professor decides to ask the tarot card, musing in advance that the most appropriate card to signify the affirmative would be the hierophant. Here is a description of this card to add some material: A. E. Waite wrote that the Hierophant: ...symbolizes also all things that are righteous and sacred on the manifest side. As such, he is the channel of grace belonging to the world of institution as distinct from that of Nature, and he is the leader of salvation for the human race at large. He is the order and the head of the recognized hierarchy, which is the reflection of another and greater hierarchic order; but it may so happen that the pontiff forgets the significance of his symbolic state and acts as if he contained within his proper measures all that his sign signifies, or his symbol seeks to show forth. He is not, as it has been thought, philosophy—except on the theological side; he is not inspiration; and his is not religion, although he is a mode of its expression.[2]. The story continues with the narrator going to the deck at the kitchen window home shrine, shuffling intently, and dealing one card. It is the hierophant. He goes to the next room where his two teenage boys are eating lunch and tells them the anecdote. They both say that's weird. One goes to the kitchen and sees the card lying on the table. I tell the students the same that I tell people I do readings for, at least the technical process of a reading, I can't tell you what the cards mean. You have to put the symbols together. There are 78 cards in a deck. The hierophant being a singular card.