

fedpress

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THANK YOU

We would like to thank all contributors, editors, artists and readers because, without you, this issue would not be possible. A big thank you in particular to the new art team for taking on the role of creating this magazine. This issue is a testament to the hard work and dedication of many individuals and we hope you enjoy reading it.

Happy reading,
The FedPress team



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Letter from the editors

After a tumultuous 2020, we're so glad that students are ready to get back to contributing to FedPress.

The team has worked hard—producing content, copy-editing, creating art, compiling the magazine—and it's paid off with a fantastic publication right at the start of the school year. We'd like to thank everyone who contributed over the holidays, because without your commitment we wouldn't have been able to bring this issue to you.

This issue is definitely focused on the new year. We have articles on what studying this year will be like compared to others, on what new students are looking forward to, on how to use exercise to reach your full potential. We also have a number of short stories and we were particularly impressed with the skill of these.

We're optimistic this year. We're inspired this year. We're ready to say goodbye to the challenges of last year and tackle the new ones that will come our way.

Here's to an absolutely fantastic 2021.

—Laura and Chloe



BAKLAVA

by Jordyn Presley

He had hired two servants to care for him over the summer as he wrote his manuscript. He had rented out a place on the edge of a scenic but meaningless beach town, one that he could not even name. His two servants were related, cousins or brothers or something, and he had only hired them because they made a beautiful baklava.

As he sat in his office, eyes drooping under the weight of the words pouring out of him, the youngest one hurried in.

His dark hair was dishevelled, and his honey eyes glowed with mischief.

'Here is your midday baklava.'

They were men of little words and he appreciated it immensely. The house was large and airy, with the windows always open to let in the sea breeze. He only ever encountered the servants when they fed him baklava.

'Thank you,' he muttered, fingers working furiously at his keyboard. Each key made a different sound as he tapped, allowing him to craft music and story at the same time. Not that he cared for anything other than his work and baklava. Good baklava was hard to come by.

His fork glided through the pastry and he sighed as the flaky, sweet goodness coated his mouth. His second mouthful quickly followed the first, leaving him feeling giddy and giving him more inspiration for his work. His hands worked furiously, the words churning as he chewed the baklava. The sun had disappeared behind black clouds and rain was falling from the sky in a steady rhythm. He did not feel it, even as the water trickled over his hands, down into his keyboard and across his baklava.

'More baklava!'

His scream echoed throughout the hallways as rain hailed down upon the town, running through the windows and down the walls like tears. The servants huddled in the kitchen, laughing at the madness and chaos of the house.

They served an enormous slab of baklava onto the plate, hurrying to give it to the writer. He inhaled the entire thing, swelling up like a balloon.

He did not seem to notice as the servants laughed so hard that they started crying, gasping for air between chuckles. They sat on the floor, in the damp puddles caused by the storm, as the writer continued tapping away at his keyboard. He was swelling rapidly, fingers so thick that they could no longer tap the keys, skin expanding so wide that it was caught in the chair. He did not feel any discomfort and continued tapping and mumbling about his manuscript and baklava.

Soon he was rising into the air, computer left on the desk to be battered by the rain. The servants were laughing so much that they were clutching each other, watching the enormous man rise into the air, dropping baklava crumbs onto the floor. He rose so high that his head touched the roof, directing him towards the window and out into the storm.

'More baklava,' he screeched as he disappeared into the darkness. The last the two servants saw of him was the ridiculous tapping of his sausage fingers and his mouth frantically chewing invisible mouthfuls of baklava.

They left the house when the rain stopped, carrying their baklava and a glowing letter of recommendation for their next employer.





REVIEWS

Eric Alexandrakis - Loves a bitch

by Chloe Hopkins

This quirky spoken word album seems to have you hooked from the very first song, with lyrics like 'Who one day had said loves a bitch'. The description and rhyming take you on a journey that is quite unlike any other song or album I've personally ever encountered. As a preferred singer songwriter/pop music listener it was quite a different experience to encounter an album such as this. As you listen to the Avant-alternative travel concept, you can't help but imagine it as it plays. If you are looking for a piece of music to sweep you off your feet and into a possible wonderland unlike something you have ever experienced, then look no further. Do yourself a favour and step out of your comfort zone to appreciate not just a song or an album, but a musical work of art, as I did.

I rate this album 7.5/10. As my first dip into the genre it was a good taster, however, to fully experience and appreciate this album in further depth and understanding, I would recommend you be an avid listener of alternative music.



Gideon the Ninth review

by Laura Wilson

In her debut novel, *Gideon the Ninth*, Tamsyn Muir vivifies a galaxy full of characters whose lives revolve around death. The eponymous Gideon Nav slouches through a rotting castle where necromancers scheme for unlimited power, skeletons wait on her and her peers, and where automatic doors and firearms are antiquated weapons compared to her bitchin' two-handed longsword. Gideon has been coerced into standing in as the cavalier (sacred knight) for her worst enemy, Harrowhark Nonagesimus, who will grant Gideon's freedom so long as she helps Harrow become one of the Emperor Undying's right-hand, immortal servants, known as Lictors, of which there are only a handful left.

Gideon and Harrow live in the 10,000th year after the Resurrection, a mysterious event that the Emperor was responsible for and which enabled necromancy to be developed in a way that melds magic and science. The labyrinthine castle they are summoned to contains laboratories modern to us as readers and unspeakably ancient to the characters, an atmosphere that allows for rain (completely foreign to Gideon's experience on her home planet) and tests that violate possibility and morality in a world where the sanctity of death is nonexistent.

"Nonagesimus," [Gideon] said slowly, "the only job I'd do for you would be if you wanted someone to hold the sword as you fell on it. The only job I'd do for you would be if you wanted your ass kicked so hard, the Locked Tomb opened and a parade came out to sing, 'Lo! A destructed ass.' The only job I'd do would be if you wanted me to spot you while you backflipped off the top tier into Drearburh."

"That's three jobs," said Harrowhark.

"Die in a fire, Nonagesimus."

The chemistry between Gideon and Harrow is acidic. Their hatred is intimate. Their mission requires each of them to trust the other with her life and her soul. And there is more danger in their castle than completing gargantuan tests; someone or something is killing the necromancer and cavalier pairs off.

At different points I laughed inappropriately loudly, my heart seized in sympathy and I recoiled from skin-crawling depictions of truly original grotesqueries. I wanted to know everything about the hinted-at wider universe. I wanted more time with every supremely engaging character. I wanted to start doing push-ups so that I could be even a fraction more like Gideon (I did not start doing push-ups). I have never enjoyed a book more and I wait in great anticipation for the final book of the trilogy to be released next year.

By Ruby Sait

Everyone starting at Federation University this year is going to have a variety of emotions leading up to the commencement of their course; I know this because that's how I'm feeling at the moment.

I applied to study Professional Writing and Editing and I'm relieved that I got in as it's my way to work towards becoming a journalist. I'm nervous about moving onto campus because it's a different town, hours away from everything I'm used to. Plus, I'm eager to start my course as I love to learn and I enjoy writing. I'm mostly excited about the adventure I've started for myself and the people I'm going to meet.

These past few weeks I've been trying to pack and I can say it's not easy if you don't know anything about where you're moving to. One of the things I've done is research and ask others what to expect in Ballarat and one of the things I'm constantly getting told is that Ballarat is a cold but lovely place. I've additionally tried looking for restaurants that I might like to eat at and I now have a list of places to visit to find the best sushi and kebabs in town. Another thing I have done is look up the public transport for the bus route from where I'm staying to University, which helped alleviate some of the stress I was starting to feel.

Something else I found super helpful was talking to other first-years who are feeling the same way I am. In doing this I've talked to people who are living in the same accommodation as myself. This has also opened up more social connections and broken through that first barrier that is always there with strangers.

To get some insight on what other first years are thinking, I asked some of them what their goals are for the year. I got very similar responses from learning/trying new things to meeting new people wanting to make their University experience the best possible.

My goals for the year are relatively the same but I hope to have the chance to get published more and broaden my writing skills so that I'm able to successfully pursue journalism and possible Public Relations at the end of my degree.

As someone who graduated year 12 last year, I can already tell university is different from high school, which makes me even more excited about where this year will lead to and the adventures I'll go on.



NEW START

Student 1

What course are you studying?

I'm studying the Bachelor of Outdoor and Environmental Education

Why did you choose Federation University?

I chose Federation University because it offered me the best course that had everything I wanted. It also looked fun and inviting.

What goals do you have for the year?

My goal for this year is to try my best in my classes but to also enjoy my time at Uni and make some more friends.

What got you to pursue the course you're studying?

I really enjoyed my outdoor Ed class at school and knew that I wanted to do something in the outdoors educating others. I'm not sure what that is yet but as long as I enjoy what I'm doing in life I will be happy.

Where do you hope to be after you finish your course?

I hope to be travelling and educating about the environment or being an outdoor instructor of some sort.



My deep passion for theatre that I couldn't ignore. Nothing else seems 'right' for me other than the stage.

Where do you hope to be after you finish your course?

Hopefully acting or directing full time! It will be a long and arduous journey, as it's a competitive industry, but as long as I am involved in theatre I'll be fulfilled.

Any advice for year 12 students who are wanting to pursue the same career?

Listen to your heart. So many people will tell you that a career in the arts is not feasible. Reject their misleading sentiments and do what you know to be true for you.

Any advice for year 12 students who are wanting to pursue the same career?

Just go for it, no matter what other people say if you enjoy it do it because you don't want to be stuck working at a job you don't enjoy for the rest of your life!

Student 2

What course are you studying?

Bachelor of Performing Arts

Why did you choose Federation University?

I know of many people in the industry who are alumni of this course, and it seemed the perfect place to further my skills in the field. Additionally, I love the sense of community and friendless Fed exudes, which occasionally seems to be lacking at other unis.

What goals do you have for the year?

To learn as much as possible and form strong bonds with as many people as I can.

What got you to pursue the course you're studying?

Student 3

What course are you studying?

Sport physical and outdoor education.

Why did you choose Federation University?

They did the course I wanted to do, and a good teacher I know study a similar thing at Fed Uni.

What goals do you have for the year?

My goals are: meeting people, having fun, getting out more, drinking and partying.

What got you to pursue the course you're studying?

My Outdoor Ed teacher.

Where do you hope to be after you finish your course?

Teaching at a Christian school as an Outdoor Ed teacher

Any advice for year 12 students who are wanting to pursue the same career?

Read and know what you're getting into and understand the work that goes on behind the scenes.

STUDYIN



NG *in* 2021

How COVID-19 is affecting us

by LAURA WILSON

In 2019, studying at Federation University looked very different from the way it looked in 2020 and from the way it will look in 2021. In 2019, students attended tutorials and seminars on campus, studied in the library and ate in the Hub. Orientation activities ranged from scavenger hunts to pub crawls. Many students chose to live on campus and enjoyed all the benefits and challenges that came with this.

2020 was a difficult year in so many ways. From March, the very start of the Higher Ed semester, the Victorian government was urging non-essential services to transition online. Many students managed a week or two of in-person classes before we were asked to stay home, and those classes involved a lot of hand sanitiser and looking nervously at anyone who coughed. With those concerns, I found it a relief to get some distance and feel more assured of safety. I assumed it wouldn't be for long, as I think we all did.

Of course, online delivery extended to the entirety of Semester One, and then was extended again to cover the full year. There were some exceptions for students who required in-person activities and a very few continued to live on campus, but for the most part, we stayed at home and got used to the various apps that teachers used for their tutorials. In 2019, students might watch in exasperation as a teacher attempted to work a nonsensical projector. In 2020, students endured a litany of "can you hear me"s, connection problems and people talking over each other, then stopping, then both trying to talk at the same time again.

But Fed did everything they could to make the year as painless as possible. They kept us informed, sent frequent emails checking in and advising us on studying online,

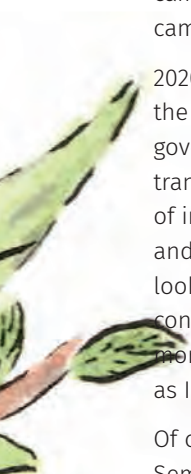
and gave us the option of keeping results from our GPAs. Teachers were understanding, made a lot of effort with the online stuff and were approachable about extensions. It wasn't a fun year, but we sure did get through it!

Now, in 2021, things aren't quite back to normal. For on-campus students, tutorials will be held on campus every second week and online on alternate weeks. Introductory classes and Intermediate/Advanced classes alternate so that there are fewer students on campus at any one time. Classes will be smaller, and I think we can expect to sit farther apart and use hand sanitiser a lot more. The library is still closed, but you can have books sent to you.

At the time of this writing, Victoria has had a successful snap isolation response to an outbreak. Community transmissions were smothered and we're about to ease back into COVID-normal. The vaccine has arrived in Australia and we're starting to see a way out. But that kind of snap-isolation may happen again and we all need to continue being cautious.

As with last year, Fed has services available to help cope with the bonkers state of the world right now. You might want to look at the mental health and financial support services in particular. Details on these can be found at <https://federation.edu.au/current-students/assistance-support-and-services/student-support-services/>.

If you become infected or suspect you are infected with COVID-19, call COVID-19 hotline on **(03) 5122 6300** (8:30 am to 5:00 pm) or if you've received confirmation that you are infected outside business hours, call the emergency phone number **1800 333 732**.



EXERCISE

The Unclaimed Miracle Hiding Within

Lauren Johnson

Exercise. We need it. Most need more of it. And all of us know it. Though other lifestyle recommendations are forever debated, exercise stands firm as the radiant pillar of health agreed upon by all. Bodies were made to move, groove, evolve and transform. These miraculous ‘machines’ are truly phenomenal powerhouses that gift us with immense joy, health and success when we treat them with the respect and joy of movement.

Imagine for a moment, a neatly packaged box with very simple use instructions—‘plug into one hour + of exercise per day’. Promises of feel-good, pain-relieving endorphins, mood-enhancing, pleasure-inducing neurotransmitters, heightened productivity, improved immunity, superior cognition, effective detoxification, deeper sleep, greater confidence, lowered risk of a multitude of diseases, improved mental health, a sculpted physique, reversal of aging, and radiant skin cover the box. You pick it up and read the fine print: ‘Many effects immediate. Lifetime shortens if the instruction manual is not followed. Plugging in is free. Compatible with any plug of your choice.’ Too good to be true, you scoff, yet the millions of rave reviews cannot be ignored.

Fortunately, your body is not boxed and, perhaps more importantly, you are not an Apple device with an exclusive new plug, rendering all others incompatible. Your plug today was yoga, tomorrow it’s freestyle, yesterday it was tennis at a friend’s place. You are free to roam and free to choose. Your battery need not ever die, and you feel marvellous. Those promises you read, indeed hold true. Now if, instead, you’re overdue for an exercise plug-in, let this little reminder of the ‘too good to be true’ wonder of the world whip you into gear.

As an ex-professional ballerina turned full-time student of biomedical science, I am all too aware of the great need for these daily ‘plug-ins’ and humbly reminded of the extraordinary power exercise holds. The 10-hour days of dancing, sweat, and wondrous endorphins are now long days fidgeting at the desk. The ballerina who once attempted to schedule in daily lazy time, now amusingly

attempts to schedule in ‘exercise’ for the first time in her life. It’s no longer incidental. It’s no longer part of the job description. But boy is it tough. Suddenly, I understand the struggle to slot exercise into a daily routine. I understand the back pain, neck aches, poor focus and stiff joints that come with the desk life. And, like an epiphanic lightbulb moment, I realise most humans have no idea just how incredible they were made to feel.

I want you to reach this epiphany as I have. I want you to taste the radiant health and success that enough movement brings. Research says sitting for more than three hours a day can cut two years off a person’s life expectancy, even if he or she exercises regularly.¹ We should be aiming for 45-60 + minutes of exercise per day for maximum effect.² Of course, to avoid the consecutive hours of stillness, we need to break this down into frequent movement breaks. There is no better time than in the ‘now’ of our remote learning ‘new normal’ reality to put this into gear. I’ve been known to whip out a few leg lifts and interpretive dances during lectures, cardio bursts before exams, squats as I’m waiting for the coffee to brew ... all at home of course. But I dream of the day we can do this on campus and have passers-by offer up a high five as they join in. Psychology is beautiful like that. When enough of us realise the benefits, such healthy habits draw people in like moths to a flame. It reminds me fondly of a plane trip I took to London. I spent much time at the back of the plane stretching, calf-rising, and doing some ballet ‘barre’. Soon I had many fellow passengers joining me!

Though we kept things low-key and small on that plane, many of these ballet movements, and indeed most exercise movements, are large and expansive. This expansive posture contrasts with the inward, closed posture of seated work. Research done at Harvard University has found these open postures are a natural response when one feels confident and powerful.³ Picture, the Olympian running across the finish line, arms reaching for the sky, chin lifted in powerful bliss. This holds true across the animal kingdom. Such expressions are universal and innate—those who are congenitally blind do it too.³ Impressively, the reverse has



also been found true: our bodies change our minds. The expansive 'power' postures bring on feelings of confidence and command, with measurable decreases in the stress hormone cortisol.³ In only two minutes, these hormonal changes configure the brain to be either assertive, confident and comfortable, or stress-reactive, and small, depending on posture.³ Equipped with this knowledge, you now know those larger-than-life interpretive dance breaks, morning sun salutations, and bounding lunch-time leaps to dunk that basketball is a more brilliant idea than you ever knew! Next time you're struggling with a bout of exam fear or assignment stress, try a 2-minute dose of expansive exercise to get that confidence flowing.

On the topic of flowing, let's discuss the next best thing—the 'jig'. Since transitioning to a life of study, I've found myself overcome by the jig. My struggles are not with learning the content, but with battling the jig that says move, Lauren! Run through the fields, work up a sweat, bend, twist, twirl, dance! My body remembers and craves the life it loved. It nudges me constantly. It knows what it needs, and when I refuse to listen, I pay the consequences. I believe we are all paying the consequences of too little movement, with most of us unaware due to the lack of experience with enough of it for the compare and contrast astonishment. Believe me, it's like observing a stick-figure drawing next to a Picasso masterpiece. You were made for the masterpiece life that exercise brings!

As irksome as it is, motivation is often the roadblock we all face. It wanes when we have an attitude of 'have to'. Can we, for a moment, shift our lens to an attitude of 'get to' and be awe-inspired at these intricate, complex, incredible bodies of ours as though we were unboxing that miracle product for the first time? We get to claim all those benefits promised on the box. We get to claim them for free. Moreover, these beautiful bodies mould and morph in response to daily input given—strength, flexibility, endurance, balance, coordination, power and speed all shifting to meet the demands placed. Much like the plasticity of our minds, our bodies are capable of transformation. And much like our minds, our bodies were made to be challenged.

So, here's to driving less and walking more, taking the stairs, leg lifts during long lectures, squats as the coffee brews, sun salutations between assignments, expansive 'power' movements before exams, star jumps during your procrastination of choice, Pilates to strengthen that core for a safe back, and avoiding three hours of non-movement like the plague.

Once you taste and experience a body well-loved and respected with enough exercise, I've no doubt you'll soon be filled with the 'jig' as I am. It'll nudge you when you need it, and you'll jump up with a beaming 'get to' attitude. You will see the Picasso and the stick-figure side by side, and you will choose Picasso with a resounding, yes! That epiphany will light up your life as you choose masterpiece for your life, health and success through the miracle of movement!

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RavenShield

by Kimberley Loats



Mabel stood in the makeshift arena within the gym, attempting to stand strong but trembling faintly. Ms Woods had click-clacked her way to the temporary grading desk, with the rest of the class eagerly awaiting the first battle of the exams to begin.

Mabel gripped a lanky wooden staff tightly; it had a glass globe on the tip that swirled with purple glints of magic, threatening to burst out of its polished cage. Her success relied on how she would utilise it during the exam against her foe.

Opposite her in the arena stood Casper Hart. The highest ranked witch in training, and the one with the worst temper. Mabel had grown up with the boy, and from kindergarten until now he had employed her as his personal punching bag. To make it worse, she had never beaten him in a one-on-one fight. He was relentless—his only goal was to win—but he didn't impress her in the slightest. His height was accentuated by his spiky golden hair that engulfed his head, mirroring his explosive and unpredictable personality. As Mabel chose a staff, Casper favoured a rapier that had a subtle orange glow as his weapon. In anticipation, his fiery eyes burned into her oceanic ones with ferocity; she knew he would not go easy on her during their battle.

Ashy-brown hair tangled itself around her shoulders as sweat prickled her nose, her heavy, round-rimmed glasses sliding towards its tip. Her lengthy legs shook nervously as her heart throbbed so heavily inside her ribcage; bystanders would be able hear it from a metre away.

By sleeping in and running late to school today—the most important day of her life—she was ordered to take her exam first by the head training teacher. Rowena Woods was a middle-aged witch with newly forming wrinkles and silver hair. She was on the good side of plump, her form like that of a garden gnome, wearing a sturdy brown dress and polished dark shoes, so small it looked as though she had hooves for feet. Most importantly, she had no room for slackers in her class.

Mabel recalled Ms Woods saying when she arrived a few minutes late, 'How do you expect to become a Warden and fight in the real world with this attitude?'. She wasn't wrong though. Without a clear pass today, she would never become a Warden.

Mabel clenched her jaw and stiffened her fist around her staff as she readied herself for the battle that was about to ensue. All her actions to become a Warden lead up to this moment; what if she failed and she had to leave her dreams behind? Would she allow Casper to beat her yet again? No. She would not be defeated easily.

Mabel was snapped out of her daydream by Ms Woods shouting, 'The winner will be declared when the other forfeits or cannot stand. Remember, the loser will be evicted from the Warden course. This isn't just training; this is your future. Use your magic and fight well. Begin.' She waved her angular fingers briskly.

Casper rushed into action right away, sprinting toward Mabel, taking her by surprise. As she prepared to block

his attack, his rapier launched an orange lightning bolt from its tip, headed in her direction. While attempting to evade the attack, the bolt wedged itself into her left shoulder, causing her to scream out in pain, releasing the scent of metallic blood into the air. She trembled like that of unsteady rungs on an even wobblier ladder.

With her better arm, wooden staff in hand, she aimed the globe at Casper and shot violet bursts toward him, one after another missing him as he hopped and jumped around the arena—he was fast.

Mabel knew Casper's fighting style was based primarily on heavy attacks and swift dodging, leaving his opponents no room to recover, and, as she predicted, the moment she ceased her purple bursts, he appeared in front of her, rapier raised. With no choice but to defend, Mabel lifted her staff above herself horizontally to block him, wincing at the throbbing in her arm. Casper had a wild, obsessive look in his flaring red eyes as a psychotic smile emerged.

'You'll never beat me Mabel! You're too weak!' he shouted, noting the fear in Mabel's eyes as his rapier sliced downwards in a fiery display of power.

The utter force of it snapped her staff in two and shattered the glass globe; purple glints of magic evaporating, lost forever. Injured and without a weapon, she was useless as she watched the pieces of her hope of becoming a Warden crumble by Casper's hand. Losing her magic meant she had failed. There was nothing she could do.

In that moment, he began to lift his weapon again. Mabel knelt on the cold floor, wheezing, feeling the sticky liquid flow from her shoulder. In the distance she heard Ms Woods shouting for Casper to stop, running towards them in slow motion. The rapier was approaching, its glow like a phoenix, its talons reaching for her with malicious intent. Instinctively, she raised her arms in a cross formation above her head—ignoring her shoulders heat—closing her eyes tightly, waiting for impact.

But it never came. As Mabel opened her eyes again, she was in disbelief as the room returned to normal speed. Casper laid unconscious on the other side of the gym. Surrounding her stood a purple spherical barrier with a ten-meter radius. Had this force knocked Casper back, and protected her in the process?

'What happened? How did I...?' Mabel gasped, glancing toward Ms Woods and her fellow classmates through the spectral violet wall, frozen in fear. Lowering her arms, the shield faded, and her vision blurred.

No one had known of a witch who could perform magic without a support item before. Mabel's only swirling thought as she collapsed onto the floor unconscious was, 'Did I win?'

They're Wonderful Lives

PART 2 by DJ Rout

CONTINUED FROM PART 1

We pulled up outside 'my' house, although in this timeline it wasn't my house because I'd never been born etc, etc. My lack of birth had its compensations, however. The brunette pruning the abundant roses along the front fence was certainly doing better justice to a pair of white shorts and a light blue T-shirt than I ever could.

I had no wallet.

"Where the hell is my wallet?" I yelled.

"Well, not there," said Clarence. "You don't have a wallet, because - "

"I have a phone, clothes, glasses, hat, and I've had a wallet every other bloody time you've taken me on one of these jaunts! Oh, wait. Here it is." It had fallen on the floor.

It was a bit slimmer than I like my wallets, but there were no cards inside, because yada yada, but there weren't even any cards without my name. There was, however, about a thousand dollars in cash. So, cash ownership wasn't contingent on my existence. Work with that, economic philosophers...

The cab drove off, happy enough with a forty-two-dollar tip, as the smallest note I had was a fifty, and what did I care about this alternate money?

"Good afternoon," I said to the pretty pruner.

"Good afternoon," she replied, somehow holding secateurs in a sexy way. She had a rural Canadian accent, very noticeable, like the people at number 23 had had where I had been born and barely made the rent every month. Though my 'real-life' neighbour hadn't looked this good.

"How can I help?" she said, looking over at Clarence.

I smiled at her for understanding this story I was going to make up before I'd started it.

"I thought I'd bring him by to see the old place," I said.

"Oh, you must be Mr Hall," she said.


"No, I'm Clarence," said Clarence.

"I thought he'd died," she stage-whispered to me.

"Oh, I did! 1782," he said more proudly than an angel should. "And he was never born!"

I just smiled. I was going to pat Clarence on the shoulder, but why overdo it? She got it.





She didn't bend over to trim the begonias behind her immediately, so I tipped my hat, wished her a good afternoon again and turned Clarence north.

"Come on up the church. They have a service on Wednesday evenings. No better place for divine guidance, I would've thought."

We could see the same old lake from the roundabout on Webster St and the corner café was unchanged. We walked up to the church the path more pothole than pavement, which meant my birth was insignificant there, too.

"So, where's that Canadian babe in my universe?" I said.

"Oh, I don't know. Canada, maybe?"

"So, my lack of birth does let her occupy the house," I said, "but there's no way the lack of my birth somehow affected her in Canada, meaning she came out here and now lives in my place. I'm just not that important."

"Ah, but a butterfly's wings flapping in London can cause a hurricane in Hong Kong."

"You know perfectly well that's crap!"

A phone somewhere 'dinged' with a text message. Clarence wriggled his shoulders.

"Oh," he said sadly. "Well, that was my last one. I guess you just don't affect that much."

"Nope," I said.

"You know, in this universe, Matthew Reilly wins the Booker Prize!"

"You're just baiting me," I said. "Good job, though."

We got to the church and I put five hundred in the poor box. We sat in one of the pews up the back. There was the usual shuffling and polite coughing up the front.

"So, you died in 1782," I said. "You never said that before. What of?"

"I don't know. I was coughing a lot. 'Flu? TB?"

"Makes sense. You know, have you ever considered going to a timeline where you were never born? Just to see, you know."

"Me? My life wasn't important!"

"You keep trying to tell me mine was," I had to point out.

"Well, I - "

"No sin in curiosity."

"No, I suppose not."

Nothing seemed to change, but then Clarence wasn't there, and I felt something weird around my arse. I pulled out my wallet - my cards were all there. I didn't check my phone, but of course it would be working now.

And the church bell rang, just once.



The Lonely Raven and Wolf



by Maddison Gill

In a land less forgiving, sometimes we must unify conflicting forces; the brain and the brute, the scavenger and the hunter, the all-seeing and the all-powerful. Though some might just call them Raven and Wolf.

It is winter, and snow has fallen onto all surfaces. The hungry wolf struggles to run. And if he cannot run, he cannot hunt. So, he walks alone ...

The lonely wolf cannot smell—nor hear his prey. The pale leafless trees provide little warmth or protection against the harsh winds. It pulls at his silvery fur—his large paws padding against the frozen dirt. Eventually, he will grow too tired, and he will fall to the thickened ground and never rise up again. This is what Wolf thinks when he sees Raven, her dark feathers diverging against cruel white snow. Death has long been associated with this creature, and Wolf's mother would often warn him never to look too far into their eyes, for if you did, you might never return.

Now it wasn't the cold winds which made him shiver, but the icy blue eyes of the dour bird. Little did Wolf know, Raven wanted not to be a messenger of death, but hope. You see, Raven had intelligence and could see far more than Wolf, for the knowledgeable bird had the sight of the skies.

And so, Raven began to speak, the screech of her voice clawing at Wolf's eardrums. 'I have come to help. I can see you are hungry; your brittle bones show themselves under your thinning skin.' Wolf tilted his head in confusion. 'I know what you think—for I can see all. But you mustn't worry ... I too am hungry, but I'm too small to hunt.'

Wolf spoke weakly against the roaring wind, "You say you

can see all ... so you must know where I can find food?"

'Very good, Wolf. Cleverness will help you.' She clicked her beak. 'You are correct. I can help you find your prey. But you must leave some for me.'

Wolf thought for a moment. It was a clever idea, yet a question plagued his mind, 'How do you know you can trust me, little one?' Raven knew just what to say, for she had heard the rumors of her kind, 'You wouldn't lie to a raven, would you? You know I can bring about your demise.' She continued her skillful persuasion, 'And you will need me in the future. Soon the entire ground will fill with hardened snow and ice.'

You won't be able to run even if you had the energy.' Raven looked down her beak at the thin wolf. 'There's some food in an open stretch just further through the woods. It's been dead for a day, but there's still meat on its bones. I can show you if you agree.'

Wolf felt the aching call of hunger pinch the walls of his empty stomach. 'I will agree. But you must promise to steer death away from me. I understand you are dear friends with the reaper of misery.'

Wolf was wrong of course, for Raven was just a bird. But she was smart. And the crafty bird could see Wolf's anxious eyes. So, she nodded her head.

'We must hurry.'

She rose effortlessly off the branch and towards the heavy wood, her wings whispering against the wind. Raven was quick to find the food, though it had been nearly frozen by the dense snow. Scavengers had picked most pieces apart, but Wolf made do.

Raven watched Wolf finish his meal from a cold pine branch in the distance. Afterwards, she led the way to an abandoned den.

Raven never got too close to Wolf. She rested on a large rock painted with rich moss nearby. Her croaky voice now calmed.

‘You will sleep here; I will watch over you as you rest.’

Wolf made comfort from the old, dry dirt. He spun a few times and dropped, allowing his heavy eyes to rest for the night. Wolf woke just as the sun had peaked over the mountain, its rays outlining the ground with speckled amber light. The day was warmer than yesterday, and Wolf howled into the sun as they scanned the area. Raven flew high above, watching the whitened land for both small and large prey. Wolf bragged that he could catch any type no matter how fast. And while Raven had her eyes, Wolf had his scent. He breathed in the prickly fragrance of pine, and the harsh, wet smell of dirt. Before she left, she had promised to sing him a song so that he would know where to find the creature.

Not long after, Wolf heard the familiar crackly tune of Raven’s song and began his run. His feet itched as he ran along the sharp ground. It didn’t bother him, however, as he could smell the fresh meal not too far away. He halted at the sight of Raven perched on a branch. She spoke quietly, ‘We must turn back. There is no food.’

Wolf shook his head. ‘I can smell it. Don’t lie.’

The sound of her furious shriek echoed around him, ‘Do not speak to me that way, stupid wolf. It is too dangerous.’

Her insults made Wolf angry. He barked and jumped and snapped at Raven, but she was too high.

She looked down at him, ‘Go ahead, Wolf. Find that food – but don’t say I didn’t warn you.’

Wolf’s pride was strong, and he let it overcome him. He was now only a vessel controlled by one emotion – an emotion that etched for him to show Raven that he was not stupid.

He ran into the clearing. The snow had melted and given way to patches of grass. By one of them stood a lonely deer. Wolf stalked from a distance and hid behind a fallen log in silence, though that silence was cut off by the cracking sound of breaking wood that frightened the deer away. He thought it was Raven, so he turned to snap at her. However, he felt a chill reach his spine as he looked upon two familiar red eyes. He had known this face once before—it was the face of Alpha.

A cruel grin curled Alpha’s mouth. ‘Well, well ...’ His heavy paws padded against the snow. Pack members surrounded Wolf in all directions. ‘It’s been too long; I’m surprised you aren’t dead.’ A cackle of laughter curled around him; his bones felt they would collapse at any moment. Alpha taunted, ‘We should fix that...’ He barked a signal of attack to the other wolves. Wolf growled as they stalked closer.

The wolves began nipping at his skin. Each pinch was getting worse until he felt the warm trickle of red intertwining with his fur. His blood moved like a river, flowing down his skin fast and unforgiving. The wolves did not stop, their bites getting harsher. Wolf felt fear he’d never experienced before. Small whimpers echoed from his mouth. I should have listened to Raven, he thought. He heard her song echo around him in memory. His whimpers were growing louder. The song sounded again, though this time right above him. Wolf’s muscles lost strength and he fell to the ground. His eyes drifted to the sky, where the sight of Raven shocked him.

She screeched and her voice felt like it shook the grounds, ‘Stupid wolves, I demand you stop!’ She cried out.

One of the wolves jumped back and tremored, ‘It’s death! She is our bane!’ The other wolves howled in horror.

Raven screeched again, ‘I spoke to death of your deeds. He doesn’t show mercy ...’ She began soaring through the skies towards the wolves. Many yelped and others whimpered. A howl emanated from Alpha, and fear brewed in his eyes. Wolf wanted to howl, but darkness started to fill his vision. He only glimpsed a small picture of running wolves before everything went dark.

Wolf’s eyes opened, the light of the sun warming his skin. He remained by the log. The snow below him had melted into a puddle under his warmth. His eyes drifted to his friend, who sat on the log.

‘Hello, Raven.’

She fluttered her wings, ‘Hello, Wolf. It’s good you aren’t dead—otherwise I’d have to survive on scraps.’

A smile reached his lips. ‘Will you forgive me, Raven?’

She smiled back, ‘Of course, my friend ...’

After a few minutes of silence, Wolf painfully followed Raven back to the den. An unstated bond of friendship was being tied between them and the remnants of its energy filled both Raven and Wolf with a warmth stronger than the sun. A pull heavier than the moon. An echo louder than time itself.









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