

HOBBO'S HEROES

ALIENATION SERIES: VOLUME 2



RYAN GRAY

Hobo's Heroes

by Ryan Gray

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H O B O ' S H E R O E S

“Sam, you still got that 5th of vodka?”

I reached inside my breast coat pocket and produced a small glass bottle, and handed it to my bro, Dev. The booze bottle was roughly $\frac{1}{3}$ full, or $\frac{2}{3}$ empty, depending on a man's mood. Today, I would take the win, and call it $\frac{1}{3}$ full, today was a good day. Not to sound nuts, the world around me was on fire, being shot up or already dead. Life as we knew it had completely changed forever, most likely for the worst. I didn't care. For the first in my life, I was a hero.

THE MAN BEHIND THE VAGRANT

I turned to my audience. “Now, since you're gonna bleed to death, cause I shot you, like 7 times. I think it's only fair, that I tell you why. Let me start from the beginning. Around here, I'm known as a bum. Not that I wanna sell myself short, as I am also a drug addict, an alcoholic and officially: a convicted felon. Oh, and did I mention, I also smoke?” I sat down next to him, pulled out a camel filter and lit up. This might take a while, about three smokes worth. “See it's funny, I get judged more for smoking than almost all the other bad decisions I made, anyways, back to the story: I live on the streets with my boy here, Dev.

A lighter-skinned African-American toting a skull cap and thin facial hair turned around in his wheelchair long enough to wave a hand, also donning a smoke, “Hey! S'up?” Before going back to stand guard against anyone else coming up from behind us in the alleyway.

“We've been together for 8 years. Now, when I say my “boy”, I don't mean he's my son, of course. I mean, duh, right?”

Do people still say that? Me and pop culture divorced about a decade ago.

Anyways, back to the story, Dev and me watch each other's backs. I need his clean face and one-legged self to make money. He lost the other leg in a motorcycle accident. I have all my limbs, I'm as strong as a bull, but as you can see, my face and neck are covered in tattoos and scars.

Ya gotta understand, what most folks don't realize is that begging is a matter of perception, persistence and, oh shoot, what is that other “p” word?

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Anyways, what's important is that begging is sales. Truth is, it's harder to say "no" to a guy missing a leg, with a clean face, than a well-built aging thug with an obvious past. So Dev makes most of the money, and I do most of the heavy lifting, which includes the occasional fistfight. I usually win, unless it's three to one, in that case, I do my best to give Dev time to roll, then I run like the wind, if I can. Only twice I've ended up in the emergency room, which wasn't all bad. I had a free dry bed, food, and hot coffee, nice, clean folks talking to me, even if it was their job...Oh! Don't forget the cherry on the top, I actually get an entire week of doing painkillers, legally! Yep, and all that on the great state of California's tab.

Now, just like all homeless in the great states of America, I never planned on taking up the roving ways of a bum. Best summed up, living on the streets is like this; a cop who was taking me to jail for petty theft once said, being a cop was a calling, you didn't find it, it found you. Well, being a bum is kinda the same, but different: You don't find it, it finds you...as a matter of fact, you don't see it coming, it's a giant sandpit, a drug addict usually topples into, headfirst.

I had a fairly normal childhood until I was about ten. That's when my folks divorced. Oh yeah, and my dad was a lazy drunk and my mom was smoking crack. I only fully understood what that did to my young brain when I was in rehab the second time. Of course, this was after my first stint in the state pen. I knew some guys whose dads were also drunks or their moms were also pill poppers, and they all said the same thing, "I ain't never, ever, gonna be a loser like my parents!"

Well, I never said what I would do, the fact is, that's always been my problem: I don't choose. I just go with the flow. So, I partied...in high school, A LOT, more and more and more. I dropped out of my senior year of high school, a full-blown pot-smoking, drunk, with no future, a dad on disability and mom in prison 'cause of the three-strikes law.

So, I went with the flow, started with auto mechanics, then a burger joint, then Al's Diner, a trash man, then my first arrest. My time at the burger joint caught up with me, well, more accurately, the unofficial bonuses I helped myself to from the cash register caught up with me. The judge said, jail time or the Army. So, I went with the flow: to the Army.

14 months later, after getting busted by the MPs -those are Army cops, by the way,- twice for fighting and once for dealing pills, I was caught outside the base, AWOL and drunk. I sobered up this time in the old historic Leavenworth

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military prison. I was dishonorably discharged 8 months later...and my life fell apart from there.

Eventually, like most wise homeless men and women, I realized that the East coast cities were tough to survive. They are hot and humid in the summer and more than one of us bums froze to death in the winter. So, I struck out for Hollywood! I was gonna be a star! Well, at least, I was gonna ask the movie and tv stars for money. That...and share their sunshine and beaches.

Huh! What a pipe dream...no-one's allowed to live on the beach! By the way, those beach cops are mean! Don't think it's their fault though, I think it's those tiny shorts those poor fellas are forced to wear. Those little hot pants would make anyone cranky.

Nowadays, me and Dev drift around Hollywood and L.A. doing what we can to survive and maybe have a little leftover to get drunk or high.

Ok, now that you have my back story, you understand why it's so incredible that a drunken, drug addict, scumbag like me became a...hero!"

LITTLE BLONDIE

"My heroic day of transformation started like all the others, on a Thursday.

Dev and I got to a really good sidewalk corner spot just after sun-up. Usually, we'd be targeting all the "suits" and "suitettes" starting work. However, being a holiday, we focused on the big box grocery store, nearby.

I was hanging about 30 feet behind Dev, as he began his best charming, help me, schtick. By all accounts, the money came in fast; the Holidays can be very, very good! We got some pocket change, which we never thumbed our nose at, but let's face it, the green paper's always better. One kid dropped a \$5, then a few more folks dropped \$1s, then a whale flipped us two \$10s...score! Must have been feeling guilty for cheating on his wife or missing his kid's school recital or something. No matter, we are always happy to be the recipient of such guilt offerings.

At about 11 am, just before it all went to hell, a pretty lady with a little toe-headed cutie of a girl approached our position on their way into the store. The woman's eyes were locked to her smartphone, paying more attention to a text conversation and social media alerts than her daughter. The tiny blonde drifted

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away from her and before I could react, the cute, miniature lady was standing right in front of me.

"Hello," she waved a pink gloved hand up at me as she craned her neck upward to make eye contact.

"Hi?" My answer kinda just popped out my mouth, but more like shock and a question.

"Why do you have drawings on your face?"

Wow, she's worse than the cops, I thought before answering, "Uhh...I guess cause I just like 'em."

She shrugged her shoulders, "Oh, ok...well, where are you going to dinner today, we are going to my grandma's, are you going to your grandma's?"

"Uhh, no 'lil missy, I'll, um, visit some friends." I lied.

Her smile had a soft innocence. She did not see me as a bum, or scary, just another person to talk to, "Well...Mom says that as long as you have someone to go to..."

"Genie, what are you doing! Get away from him!" The smartphone mom had to backtrack twenty feet when she realized that her little girl was no longer by her side.

She snatched up her daughter's arm and drugged her away from me, after shooting me her meanest momma bear warning, she scolded the little blonde, "Don't talk to strangers, especially... ."

I put my hands up in submission and quickly backed away, knowing exactly how this scene would end, if I failed to defuse it. Even though I hadn't done anything wrong, I really didn't feel like spending the night in the cells and leaving Dev alone. "I'm sorry, ma'am, she came up to me, I'm going, no need to worry."

The mom growled and muttered under her breath, and continued to berate the child on her way into the store, *mostly out of embarrassment and fear,* I mused to myself.

But that's when it all kicked off.

Like a social media bomb, every cell phone in the city rang or texted at the same time..."

THE BUST IN THE 'BURBS

“It was about a minute, but eventually, everyone in the grocery store parking lot had stopped and begun looking at their cell. Another ten seconds and all began asking one another if they had the same notification. A cop had just pulled into the grocery store lot, presumably for a lunch break, when a mob of about 15 suburbanites practically attacked him with demands for answers, as if the poor guy knew everything there was to know. I had to admit, I was getting down-right curious myself.

“Sam, what’s going on?” Dev demanded from his corner. I frowned and shrugged my shoulders.

Now, I’d seen group hysteria before; a couple of times a bunch of us have freaked out ‘cause we saw demons and sometimes specters appear when high, but the commonality was, WE WERE ALL HIGH! These folks hadn’t drunk anything or smoked up, much less hit some meth or dope. I’d never even heard of sane, normal folks from the ‘burbs act like this, much less seen it. It was really freak’n me out!

“Smash!” A fender bender popped as one driver rear-ended the other, right in front of poor Dev, giving him a start. The driver of the rear car jumped out, he was a big, scary, white dude, full of piss and vinegar, ready to fight. The other diver stepped from his car, a slightly built Afro-American man, but he seemed oblivious to anything else going on around him. Staring at his cell phone screen, he shook his head and repeated over and over, “Nah...this can’t be right, Nah... this can’t be right.” The road raging driver calmed down enough to look over his “opponent’s” shoulder. The big white boy’s face sank and turned white, “Is this for real?” He asked the little black man. “I mean, this is on CNN and Fox, don’t know...I mean...I don’t know.”

“Hey,” Dev shouted, “What’s going on, man? Help a brother out!”

“Aliens... .” Both men shouted just as I suddenly found myself staring into a burning white nothing and felt my body lift into the air.

INTO THE RUCKUS?

I awoke, into what I was convinced was a dream. The colors around me felt a little too filtered, like too much pastel. Maybe I hit my head and got caught in some crazy Sci-Fi dream.

Just up the street from me, three police cruisers were angled to provide cover in the street, and 5 officers with M4s, a Benelli Tactical shotgun and two with their sidearms, all fired a barrage of lead down the street.

I peered two blocks down the street, only to be met by blinding streaks of white light, shooting across my line of sight at the officers. The cops screamed for backup. Just when I was about to lay my head down to try and “go back to sleep” in hopes it would wake me up, I felt droplets of blood on the back of my head. I reached my right arm around to try and feel it but was met with a sharp pain in my shoulder, I had gashed it somehow in the fall. Looking at my own blood and feeling the familiar sensation of pain, reality set in: This was real!

A crashing sound and explosion erupted from the front entrance of the grocery store sending glass, shopping carts, and even a few employees' bodies flying into parked cars and fleeing customers. I struggled to my feet to face the threat. But as it emerged, I jumped back, and screamed an octave higher than I thought my diaphragm capable of, “What the hell?”

Yeah, from hell indeed!

An olive green, giant of a man, with what looked like spiked armor and some sort of tactical helmet, fired what I guessed was a laser canon. It blew apart a Ford pick up, instantly killing the man and woman inside. He then drew a sword that flashed a dark pink hue around its blade, turned and marched towards the cops firing line.

At that moment, I was still fairly confused and unsure of what to do. Now that I think about it, I was in so much shock, I completely forgot to check on what happened to Dev. That's when the creature noticed my new little friend. The little blonde and her mom were trapped, against a parked white Camry, right in the oncoming path of the spiked monster. He changed his direction to walk straight towards them. The mother whimpered and pleaded, praying to someone, anyone, with clasped hands around her baby girl. It was no use, the creature was unmoved and unfeeling. That's when it happened. For the first time in my life, I had the epiphany that has forever changed my life. I made a choice!

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I sprang into action, my long wiry legs pushing as fast as they could. Although the action took to no more than 3 seconds, it felt like an eternity. As I ran, my hand reached deep into my coat pocket, grasping the first thing I could find, a mostly empty vodka bottle. It would have to do. I slung it from the pocket, gripping the neck and smashed the butt end against a parking lot barrier and leaped through the air. The glass that remained on the bottom of the bottle, made up a time-honored, crude yet effective weapon called "glassing." The green monsters had his sword in the air, ready to strike at the little blonde and her mom, and didn't see me coming. I nailed him right in the nick of time. I shoulder charged the monster and thrust the vodka weapon into him like a jagged knife.

Both myself and the monster toppled into the rear of the white Camry and tumbled to the ground. I popped up, ready to go, my enemy stood...slowly, deliberately, and angrily. He towered over me. Keep in mind, I'm 6'2"! He was about 8 feet and at least 500lbs! At least I think it was a he, otherwise, they're some ugly women!

The entire parking lot of dazed customers watched breathlessly, unable to move, too shocked to help. On the road, the cops continued the fight, gunfire and laser blasts echoed in the background.

The monster slapped the side of his helmet a few times, but something must not have been working, because he tore it off with frustration. Uncovered, the giant sent gasps into the crowd around me. It was a reptile-guy...man...thing. It's as if a snake or crocodile head had been smashed atop the biggest dude you'd ever seen - ya probably don't understand just how terrifying and disturbing the freak was! Also, I observed, spikes protruded around its body, like armor. That made sense since my shoulder was screaming at me. I had paid the price against those spikes, one had snapped off its owner and remained embedded in my shoulder. I glared into the dark soulless eyes of the creature, yanked out the spike, and growled.

"Come on, let's finish it, coward!" I screamed.

The alien creature responded with little concern. He turned his neck slightly, revealing the damage I had done. Only the neck of the vodka bottle could be seen, the rest had buried itself into the neck of its intended target.

"Dang, son! I got you good, hahaha!" I mocked him, hoping I could at least unsettle his nerves. I had cut him deep, but not nearly enough a monster this size. I'd only succeeded in pissing it off!

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It snarled back at me with disdain, yanked the bottle from his thick, size 32 neck and hacked up gobs of blood, spitting crimson blobs onto the ground. Then it spoke, and as it did, a wave of nausea washed over my insides, "Now, you die!"

"Crap, it can speak, American" I mused out loud as I rushed him. He lumbered towards me, but I'm not dumb. I dodged right, planted a foot on top of the trunk of the Camry, and leaped high into the air. Now, you got to understand, I remembered something about reptiles from school...they generally have sensitive skulls. I hoped to find one or two smaller bones in the back of this alien-monster dude's head and really mess him up! otherwise, why the helmet? He's not wearing body armor anywhere else. I figured it's 'cause they're trying to protect something.

The alien swung a wide arching hook but missed me, I came down atop the back of his head with a hammer strike with all my weight and struck true. "*Crack.*" I felt a bone crunch under my hand as I awkwardly landed behind the reptilian.

The green monster screamed in pain, but turned suddenly and caught me with a massive backhand, lifting me off my feet. I was instantly showered with stars and blackness. A second later I regained consciousness in time to see a size 25 three-toed, green foot stomp towards my face...I rolled just in time, yet another monster foot attacked, I rolled again, and again, until a backward roll up gave me enough room to try to enter the fight again. That was short-lived. The alien timed my standing with an uppercut. That did me in.

I shook my head and coughed, but it was no use, my equilibrium was shot, energy spent and blood was dripping into my eyes, making it hard to see. A felt a massive paw grip me, the creature growled into my ear, "See, I will *always* win!"

Not having anything to lose, I let him know my interest was peaked, "Listen, I used to be a soldier, not a good one, mind you, but even I would never say 'I'd always win.' It's about the unit and the mission, it's about "we". If you ain't a soldier, then what are you?"

The reptile grinned rows of razor-sharp teeth at me and shot out a split, serpent-like tongue as it spoke, "The inevitable!" as it raised a clawed hand to finish me off.

"Oh," I mused, "That won't work."

It paused. "Oh, and why's that."

The creature was gullible, and that made me smile. "Today's a holiday, everyone has plans, so please come back on Monday, then we can talk."

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"Ahhh!" It screamed and thrust its claws at my throat.

"Yeeehaw!!!!" Out of nowhere, the quickest one-legged beast known to man flew in to save the day. Dev wielded a lead pipe and brought it down on the back of the alien's skull. It was enough to force his grip from my throat. The beast turned and swiped a massive scaled right arm at the one-legged man. Dev was ready for it. He leaped aboard the massive arm like a carnival ride and wrapped both arms and his one leg around the giant limb.

Now, what most folks don't know is that before Dev's motorcycle accident, he was an Olympic Judo team member, the guy can fight better one-on-one with no legs than most dudes can with both legs. Dev used his weight to whip the alien's arm between its own legs. This forced the reptile to awkwardly bend over. Its high center of gravity caused him to tip over his waistline and caught him off guard. The giant, green reptile toppled head over heels and bounced twice onto the blacktop. Dev pushed himself back up onto his one leg and hopped over until he could look down onto the alien's face, "That's right, sucker, don't mess with my boy!"

But the bad guy wasn't done, the creature swept Dev's foot out from under him and struck a claw at him from the ground hoping to land a quick kill shot. Dev was too fast, he blocked, pivoted and shimmed his body back and forth, dodging the massive claw strikes.

"Hey, catch!" I glanced left just in time to see little blondie's mom toss me the creature's huge, pink-hued sword.

I gripped it with both hands and charged the monster, "Hey, ugly!" I screamed, the alien turned to see my oncoming rush but it was too late.

When he saw I had his own weapon loaded up like a clean-up hitter for the Angels, his eyes went wide with fright and my face went wide with delight. "Noooo!" He screamed until my new stolen weapon found its mark across his whining mouth, slicing the top of his head clean off. "Yahhh, scumbag!" I replied.

Still gripping the alien's weapon, I reached down and yanked Dev to his foot. We wrapped our arms around each other into a quick bro-hug, then he hobbled over to his wheelchair as I looked over our kill with pride.

"I'm sorry." I turned to see blondie's mom staring at me, tears in her eyes. "I didn't know..."

I cut her off, "It's ok, none of us do, we don't even know ourselves, much less each other. I mean look at me, ma'am, I wouldn't trust me neither."

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Blondie ran up to me and held her arms up, I bent down, and her little arms gripped my ears and pulled my rough, hairy cheek into her face. It was only a quick kiss on the cheek, but for me, I might as well have been knighted by the Queen of England. “Her pale, blue eyes locked into mine, “My hero!”

A few seconds later, I came to my senses, scooped the little one up and handed her to her mom, “You two get going, me and Dev gots aliens to kill.”
“Go with God.”
“Good luck.”

“Now, I’ll probably never see those little ladies again, but I really don’t need to. The reason is ‘cause forever, me being knighted...”

“Ehemmm!” Dev cut me off mid-sentence by clearing his throat.

“Excuse me...OUR knighting as heroes.” I revised, “Will stay with us, forever.”

“We joined the cops, and a handful of retired military, willing to fight and die to give the rest of Los Angeles a chance to regroup and fight. That was 8 or 9 hours ago, most are dead now, but me and Dev, well, as I said, we are knighted, and until our work is complete, and all you crocodile heads are killed, we ain’t done...our quitting days are over!”

I peered down at the dark green, reptilian creature and dropped the butt of my third cigarette on its bleeding chest. Shallow, labored breaths and unfocused, glossy black eyes spelled the end for this alien intruder. That, and it even looked to be losing its disdain for us humans. I squatted down next to the dying being and gave the reptilian a cold broad smile. “So, that’s why I stopped to chat after me and Dev shot you like 7 times.”

“9!” Dev corrected me.

“Sorry, 9 times. In short - thanks! If it weren’t for you, I’d still be a miserable bum, with no respect, looking for his next fix. Instead, I have a purpose now... to kill as many of you ugly scumbags as I can before my luck runs out.” I raised myself to one knee, “So, thanks for dropping by my planet...” I pressed the Glock .45 against his flat scaled skull and winked at him, “...and good night,” and pulled the trigger. White matter, bone, and thick crimson blood splattered the red brick almost instantly upon pulling the trigger.

“Another one down, about a hundred thousand more to go!”

“Yep.” Dev agreed.

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I stuffed the pistol into my coat pocket, stood up and looked around. For the first time in my life, I had direction. "I wonder...where's the most trouble?" I mused aloud...and as if the war of the world answered my question directly, a massive explosion and gunfire erupted only a few blocks away.

"Ah, that way," Dev pointed with a devilish grin.

After Dev slid into his wheelchair he checked the action in a newly acquired M4, "Locked and loaded!"

"Copy!" I replied as I began pushing him hard and fast, straight towards danger. Overwhelming purpose catapulted us into almost certain death, yet we both laughed with glee, happier than ever.

Dev hollered over his shoulder at me, "Hey Sam, if this were a TV show, it'd be called, Hobo's Heroes!"

"Booyah," I hollered in response, "Booyah!"

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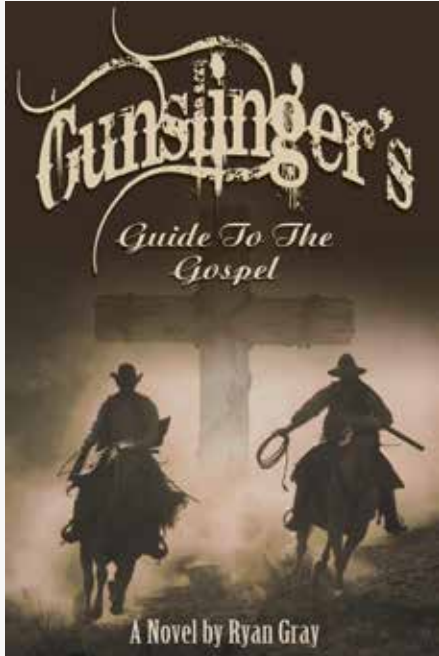
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GUNSLINGERS GUIDE TO THE GOSPEL

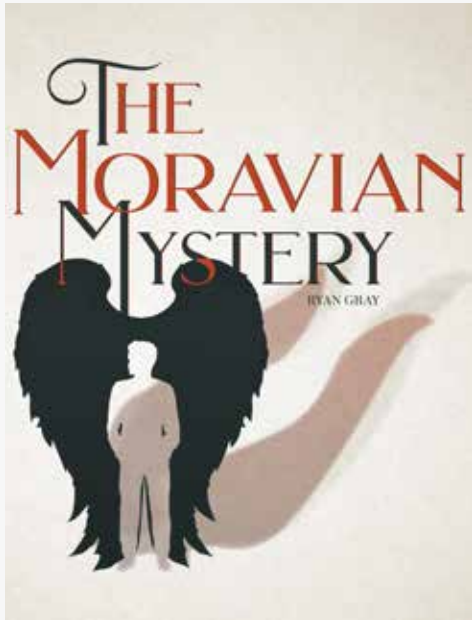


What if the right friendship could change your life forever? An aging gunfighter is about to find out.

Flint is an over-the-hill gunslinger in the old West: tough as nails and afraid of no one. He killed his first man before he could shave, has no family and few friends. He'll never attack innocents nor shoot a man in the back; so, compared to many hired gunman, he's actually a good person. However, after the past couple days, the gunslinger's world and way of thinking has been turned upside.

It all started when a wily mountain man, who throws a quick blade and is a crack shot with a rifle, invited the old gunfighter to ride with him. The rumor mill claims that if you tangle with "the Boy", you'll earn yourself permanent residence in boot hill. Surprisingly, the Boy offers Flint a partnership and something he secretly craved for since he was a small boy. The Gunslinger's Guide to the Gospel is a story of an unlikely partnership between two tough frontiersman. One willing to leave an old life behind to chase after the unknown in search of peace and forgiveness—the other, to share his secret of peace and forgiveness with anyone he meets.

THE MORAVIAN MYSTERY



A grieving, hungover detective is assigned to a mysterious attempted kidnapping case. An overworked single mom is the victim and only witness. Together, they stumble upon a truth both thought only existed in fairy tales.

Story Excerpt

Saul's jaw dropped slightly and he leaned back, he studied the other man's face. He looked like a different person. His eyes were clear, his teeth even looked healthier, not the usual rot left by smoking crack, and his smile had changed. It was warm and genuine. However, that is not what shocked Saul. Zac had the same brilliant glow, the glow he had

seen on Barney's church people.

The detective stood quickly, almost stumbling to the ground. He didn't understand what was going on but needed to space himself from it.

Saul stumbled out of a side door, into an alley. He leaned his back against a wall next to a dumpster and planted his hands on his knees, as he breathed short concentrated breaths trying to make sense of what was going on.

Suddenly, a loud baritone voice barked out, "Shut it! I don't want your excuses, only results, the boss had plans with that woman... and her boy. Now, she's found some protection, we're gonna have to start over with someone else."

No ways! I can't be hearing two thugs talk about Jennifer and some conspiracy for their boss, could I? I'm not that lucky! Saul thought. The detective was completely hidden behind the dumpster, so he could not see the origin of the voices.

The voices continued, "But, Shameless, I'm telling you. I didn't see them coming, and they had such power. There's been nothing like it around here in over a 100 years!"

Shameless? Must be the Irish mob or some stupid nickname. But what does the other yahoo know about what happened here a century ago? Saul pondered this as he slipped his Glock 22 from its holster. With his other hand, he texted his partner Bobby his location and to bring back up.

A massive thud interrupted his thoughts. "Lascivious, you know nothing of control or power. Stop your whining before I drag you by that long tongue of yours to the boss and he eats you alive!"

RALPH'S WAR



At Gettysburg, Ralph lost a piece of himself. The only place he'll look for it is at the bottom of a bottle. Just as the traumatized soldier sinks to his lowest, Ralph is faced with a choice – rejoin the fight or watch his cousin be gunned down in the street.

Story Excerpt

Ralph stared. The words stung worse than a bullwhip on a wet back. “Why are you saying this, Bill?” Ralph managed.

Bill exhaled and looked down at his feet, “Cause, I just want my friend back. But, don't rightly think he ever come back from the war.”

Like a youngster avoiding a whoopin, Ralph avoided eye contact by looking the opposite way, but was open enough to hear what his cuz had to say, “What do you mean by that?”

“Don't know, really, cept maybe you never left the war, cause you're afraid to fight the next one. Fact is, we all gotta fight one war after another. You might think your problems come from failing at the “Charge” or maybe you think your battle's with the bottle. Fact is, the greatest war there is, is in here.” Bill thumbed his chest with his fist and looked his pal in the eyes...”

PLANET Z: BITE OF LOVE



An allegory that I was inspired to write from my career as a non-profit social worker and Christian missionary. My intention was to challenge the reader to examine their lives and consider how they may give back to their community. Reaching out to individuals needing the same helping hand that they may have needed in their own lives. It further examines how in order to help others, we have to often give a ‘piece of ourselves’ in the process.

Story Excerpt

The year was 2179 and the place, Planet Z. The outbreak was originally thought to be a new malaria strain until it was proven that mosquitoes were not to blame. To put an exclamation point on how wrong the scientists were, the clinically dead reanimated and went on a terror spree, devouring anything and anyone in sight! Within a month, the police force and military fell to the infection. The cell phone towers and satellites went offline less than three months later. With communications dead, so was all hope of a cure. The world as we knew it, was gone.

Except in the heart of one man.

To him, the world was not gone, only lost. The first of the “Freed” had already been lost to time, but the story told was passed on to every Freed-man or woman...