

READING and WRITING in the

DARK

A space for a and Black authors

Our newsletter has grown into a **MAGAZINE**

Celebrating Two Fantastic Years!

Happy Birthday!

THIS MONTH:

We celebrate two big years of the Reading and Writing in the DARK Newsletter by getting, not one, not two, but **THREE** big previews of published and upcoming books!

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Heaven Mississippi Page 11

NOALAN CASTE Page 32

Book Review:
Y. Stokes introduces us to the power and secrets of the **BLOODLINE!**

Page 36

This issue presents a RaWitD Maze, but don't think we made this one easy for you!

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News and Information about Completed and Upcoming Projects and MORE!



JULY 2024 - Volume 1 / Number 1



MAGAZINE

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READING and WRITING in the DARK Newsletter
Vol. 1 No. 1
JULY 2024

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WELCOME BACK!

Hello everyone, and welcome to the TWO-YEAR ANNIVERSARY issue of the *Reading and Writing in the DARK Newsletter*. Well, actually, it is, and it isn't. The newsletter is now a full fledge MAGAZINE! I just couldn't justify calling it a newsletter anymore because of the amount of fantastic content it offers every month! But never fear, even though it is no longer a newsletter, it's still FREE and still MONTHLY! You will continue to get all the great perks you've come to expect from the newsletter, along with a few added surprises! And this month, to celebrate this milestone, I am including THREE story excerpts for you to check out! So, sit back and enjoy your first edition of the *Reading and Writing in the DARK MAGAZINE*! As always, if you want to contact me, just drop an email to: Feedback@iyapoyapa.com it's ALWAYS open! SEE YOU NEXT MONTH and THANK YOU FOR SUBSCRIBING TO MY MAGAZINE!

Iyapo Yapa



A Look Back and to the Future!

When I was growing up, everyone thought I wanted to be a cartoonist. That was natural. I was drawing all the time. As soon as I'd get home from school I'd start drawing and would literally draw the rest of the evening. I would draw every evening and practically all day on weekends. By the time I was fifteen years old I had built up quite the body of work. Unfortunately, it all went up in flames. Literally. And it was no accident. But that's a story for another day.

I have always wanted to be a writer more than anything else, and now I'm living that dream. That isn't to say it's not a struggle at times, but I'm doing something I love, which is writing my thoughts and telling stories. The first issue of my newsletter was published in July of 2022, the month before the publication of my first novel *MELANIN: A Novel* (which was released August 31, 2022). Soon another novel *And What of the CARGO?* and an anthology series *Paradigm VOID* quickly followed.

I still diligently published my newsletter each month and was determined to give my readers THE MOST! The first newsletter was six pages and consisted of links to my various works as well as information about when the ones that were still in the works were anticipated to be published. Fast forward two years and now my newsletter has become a magazine averaging forty to fifty pages per issue, complete with full chapters and extended excerpts from my works that have been released, and those that are coming soon. Each month there is either a crossword puzzle, word search or maze, (all of which can be downloaded and printed). There are articles, reviews, and links, links, LINKS galore to not only my own work, but the work of talented writers I've had the pleasure of coming into contact with. So, the future of the magazine is something I'm really looking forward to, I have a LOT of things I'll be adding for you, and I hope you enjoy it!

I'm pretty sure you will.

READING and WRITING in the DARK
A space for avid Black readers and Black authors

NEWSLETTER

THIS ISSUE:

IYAPO YAPA
MELANIN
A NOVEL

EVERYONE'S SALES!

IYAPO YAPA
Author of MELANIN: A NOVEL

"Melanin is an uncompromising and timely tale of speculative fiction, brimming with thought-provoking ideas and imaginative twists."

- Brandon Massey, award-winning author of *The Quiet Ones* and *Dark Corner*

And:
What do I think of the **WRITER'S LIFE?!**



And What of the CARGO? - Chapter 16 Excerpt

It was the perfect trip, and an awesome mixing of bucket list items.

Allen and Bianca Strodehammer were a very busy couple. Allen spent a few hours of his days behind a desk, and mostly on his cell phone, running “The Strodehammer Group”, a firm that assisted the men and women who truly controlled the world markets in—well—controlling the world markets. His wife Bianca spent many of her mornings as director of a help center in the heart of the city. The building where she did her charity work was in one of the most impoverished, crime ridden parts of the city, but every day when she arrived in her luxury vehicle and parked in the guarded parking lot—she would make her way to her office, dressed in outfits that cost more than many of the people she was ‘assisting’ would see in a year whether through first, second or third shift jobs (or a single person working a couple jobs), government assistance or all of the above. She was always escorted to and from her vehicle—even when she decided to do a long day and break for lunch—by no less than two armed guards, who also remained inside the center as she dispensed aid to the “less fortunate”.

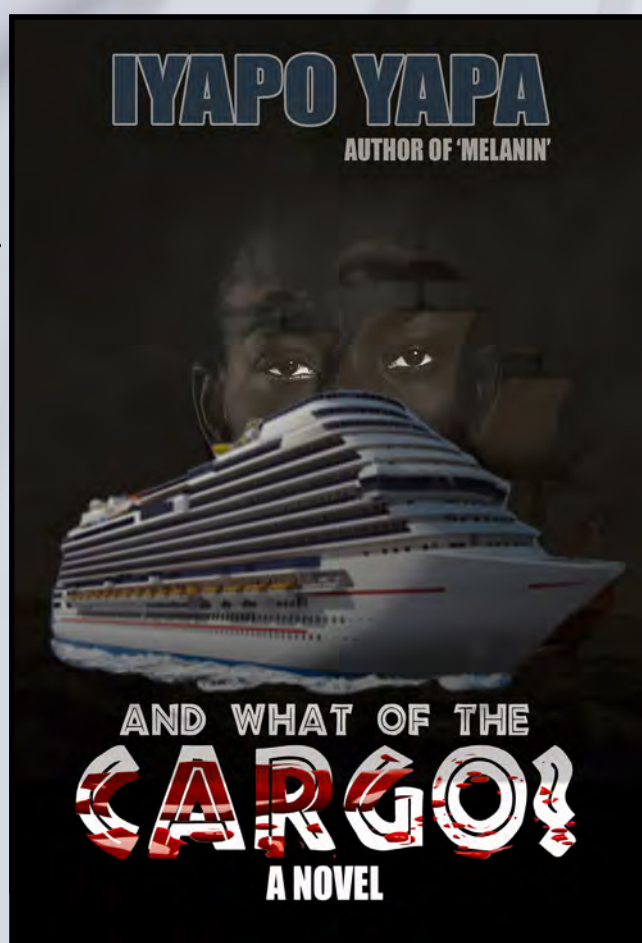
The “Center City Help, Health and Wellness Collective” was established to assist low-income families and individuals with food and clothing needs. They had an army of staff and volunteers who would assist them with the mountains of paperwork they needed to fill out for things like housing, medical care, job training and so on, to feed and maintain the governmental entities and bureaucracies

that was the reason for them being in their socio-economic positions in the first place (her husband’s company withstanding).

Bianca would sit in her office at her large desk, with proportionately large leather chair and do her thing—drawing no salary, but being in charge of the allocation of resources, that somehow—by pure coincidence her peers were sure—always managed in the end to benefit companies in which she and her husband had investments. Compared to the spaces in the rest of the structure, Bianca’s office was an oasis of beauty and tranquility, and populated by plants and decorative cabinets with knick knacks on every shelf. On the wall behind her hung framed honors and certificates of her accomplishments and accolades—degrees in

Sociology, and social services as well as several awards, both state and local, for community service and outreach. Beside one of her national awards for outreach was a photograph of President Lloyd himself presenting it to her and shaking her hand. One of several of the armed guards in the building was always stationed somewhere outside her office entrance. While ‘at work’ she would shift paperwork from one place to the other, and her job mostly consisted of figuring out what companies would get contracts to work with them when it came to food, clothing and so on—few people knew how profitable charity work could be.

She and her husband were taking what they felt was a well-deserved vacation. They were very relaxed on the ocean cruise to Norway to fulfill two of the things on their bucket list.





And What of the CARGO? - Chapter 16 Excerpt (continued)

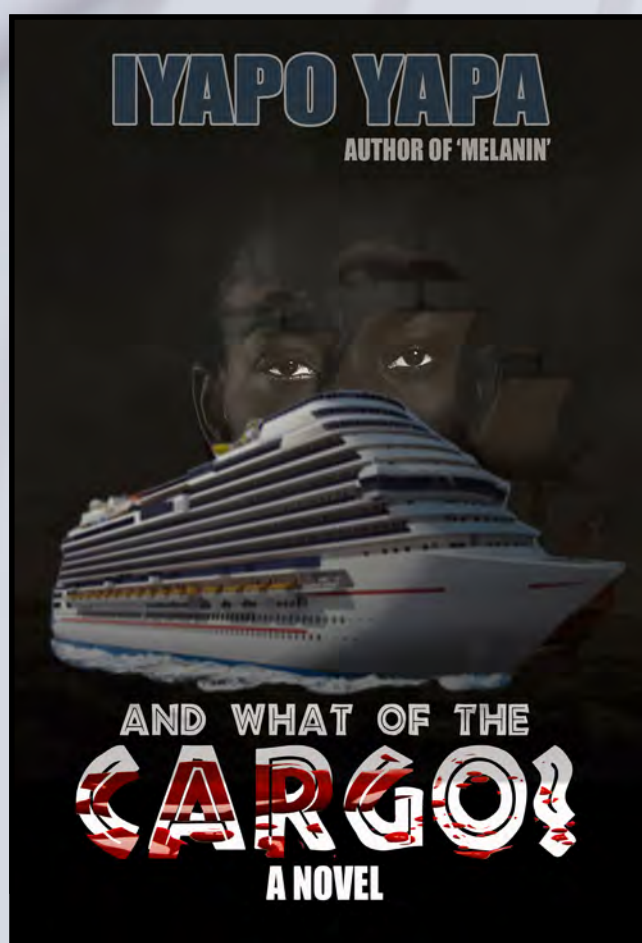
The couple watched from the deck of the ship and stood in awe of the natural spectacle many people would never get to experience in their lifetime and were frankly all the more unfortunate for not witnessing. They kissed under the evening sky, stared at the lights and then eventually went to their cabin suite, where they made love while still able to witness the atmospheric splendor from their cabin window.

The couple of course knew about the horrible massacres and bloodshed on other cruises. For now, the “Lights and Sights” cruises were the “Hawaiian Airlines” of the cruise industry. Lights and Sights never experience incident nor accident. They were never touched by the disease and food poisoning issues that in the past seemed to incessantly plague the cruise industry. And most importantly now, the massacres that brought nearly the entire cruise world to a standstill were unheard of on those cruises.

It seemed the majority of the issues were localized to the areas in the vicinity of what was once called the “middle passage”, or bluntly put, “slave routes”. These expeditions to Nordic countries were no where near those areas and thus deemed safe, the Lights and Sights cruise line never having had to interrupt a single voyage.

Allen and Bianca stood at the railing of the deck to the open sea, as well as a host of other eager eyed passengers who were present on the cruise because they could afford it, having made their fortunes, or owed their comfortable standards

of living, either directly or indirectly to the fact they were existing within a system that was constructed by and for them, to support, buttress and empower them, at the cost of another, which, if up to them, would forever remain trampled underfoot.



Bianca and her husband looked out at the waves in excitement and anticipation as they and all the other sightseers prepared to witness something they would be able to cross off their bucket lists. They had all gathered on the ship for the single purpose of sighting whales in the open sea, surfacing, blowing massive streams of air from their blowholes, frolicking in the water and ultimately jumping into the air and landing with a loud ‘whamp!’ and huge splash! She and the others with her couldn’t wait, even Allen would

have to admit this kind of sighting would really be something monumental to hold in memory—perhaps not on the level of the northern lights, but not far from it.

The tour guides informed the passengers that this was one of the most active times for whale watching in that part of the world and that, at their location on the ocean they would not be waiting very long to witness what it was they were waiting so enthusiastically to see.

The tour guides had not lied.

One by one the whales surfaced, and they were as massive and majestic as everyone had imagined—perhaps even more so. The crowd stood gawking, yelling, cheering and snapping picture after picture, video upon video of



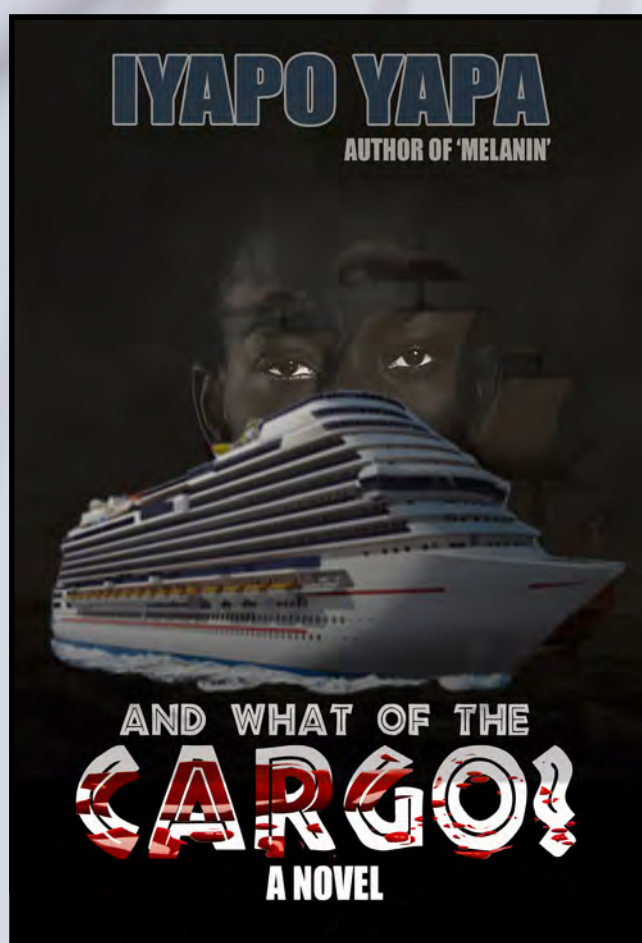
And What of the CARGO? - Chapter 16 Excerpt (continued)

the huge mammals as they swam just beneath the surface of the water, some of them obliging with long awaited leaps from the ocean to the applause and cheers of the crowd onboard the ship. Bianca was too excited and animated to take photos or shoot video—she was too busy jumping up and down, clapping her hands as if she were nine years old again witnessing an act at a carnival or circus that she found so exciting that she could not contain her glee.

The crewmen who were attending to other tasks indoors, listened to the clapping and cheers of the tourists, and as they did, some of them would look at each other and shake their heads, having witnessed the natural shows many times over themselves, they still found it nice, but they'd grown used to it, some even desensitized to it.

Tourists, they thought.

As a few of them prepared the dining room for the lunch buffet, the sounds of shouts and amazement became louder—much louder—loud enough that it made them stop what they were doing, and all look at each other. They were accustomed to hearing the sounds of the roars, but never before had they heard them so loudly—and as they listened closely there seemed to be more than joyful excitement and ovations, or rather, something had replaced it! The noise had become that of yells and screams—yells and screams that sounded like horror! There was some other clamor they could not make out, that was mixed with that of those of the unmistakable panic of whoever was on deck.



A group of senior crew members, stern looks on their faces, suddenly appeared and ran through the entrance of the dining area that led into the body of the ship. They hurried through the dining room without speaking to the staff and rushed out the other door that led to the

outer deck. Dropping what they were doing, most of the staff who were working in the dining room followed the crew, if for no other reason than to see what was going on outside. When they got there, crew members were running frantically up and down the deck attending to and assisting passengers who were either screaming uncontrollably or were stretched out on the deck not moving. Some passengers were trying to assist loved ones or strangers also. Many passengers were running, a couple of the dining area staff

who emerged from the doorway and onto the deck, immediately turned around and ran back inside, covering their ears and screaming, a few of them all the way back to their quarters, locking themselves in.

Allen and Bianca Strodehammer both lay sprawled out on the deck.

* * *

Tiffany sat at her computer working on reports she would be taking to the FBI the next morning, her handwritten Zahnokan book next to her, open wide as she looked back and forth at it, grabbed her pen and made notes in long hand on her legal notepad, then tapped her keyboard.

“Hey Tiff! Are you seeing this?!” came the voice of her husband Ricardo from downstairs.



And What of the CARGO? - Chapter 16 Excerpt (continued)

“Seeing what? I’m in my office working on these symbols!” she yelled back.

“Quick! Turn on the TV up there and tune it to RTCNN!”

Tiffany looked around on her desk for the remote control to the fifty five inch 4K monitor in her office, fumbling around for a moment, then realizing it was under the left flap of the open Zahnokan book, she lifted it, hastily picked up the remote then looking up at the screen saw it was already on and muted. “Why?! What’s happening now?! Another massacre?!” she shouted to her husband as she looked at the silent scene on the monitor.

“I’m not sure what this is! But whatever it is, you’re not gonna believe it! You got the TV on yet?!”

Since the start of the crisis, RTCNN (the Round The Clock News Network) was the only channel their televisions stayed tuned to, with the exception of ESPN during football season.

“It was already on!” Tiff called back. “All I’m seeing is a bunch of whales! There are a lot of them relatively... and they all seem to be, lined up and halfway out the water. I admit it’s odd looking, but not anything necessarily unnatural. I don’t see what it has to do with—”

“Are you listening to it?!”

“No! I have it muted. I’m up here trying to concentrate on these symbols up here!”

“Damn Tiff! Unmute the television!”

Tiffany pressed the mute button to unmute the monitor so she could listen to what her husband was so desperate for her to hear.

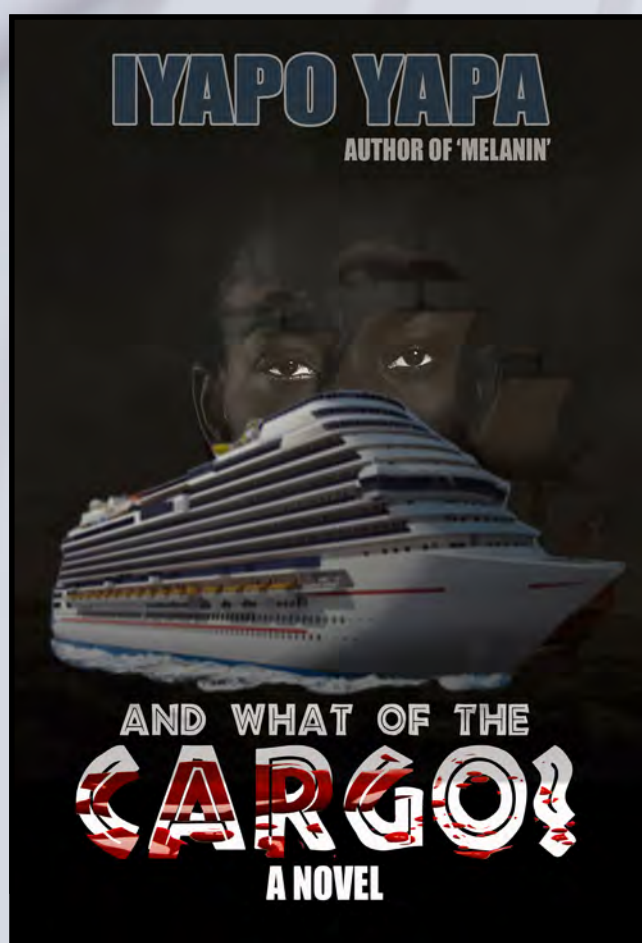
The sound of Ricardo’s footsteps could be heard running up the stairs and down the hall. He had watched the entire thing unfold on the downstairs television, but he wanted to come up and get Tiffany’s spin on it and talk about it. “I’ve never seen anything like this before Babe!” Ricardo exclaimed as he fast approached his wife’s office. He bolted inside, puffing from his run, and heard the sound of the monitor that was on the same wall as the door, then turned his head immediately to look at it as if afraid he might miss something, Ricardo went on,

“If this is real...” he continued, “then we’re definitely dealing with some Outer Limits shit now!” He then took a moment to shoot a glance at his wife, who had not spoken a word since he entered the room. “Right Tiffany?! Tiff? TIFFANY!”

* * *

The president sat and watched what had been presented to him on the screen, shaking his head and making a strange expression the man sitting silently with him couldn’t quite make out.

“Bullshit.” President Lloyd said as he waved a dismissive hand in the direction of the screen as the video continued to play in front of him. “General, you’re showing me videos from YouTube and TikTok for God’s sake.





And What of the CARGO? - Chapter 16 Excerpt (continued)

Look Lattimore, my kid can make better videos than this with free online malware infested special effects software.” He said to his leading general and military advisor.

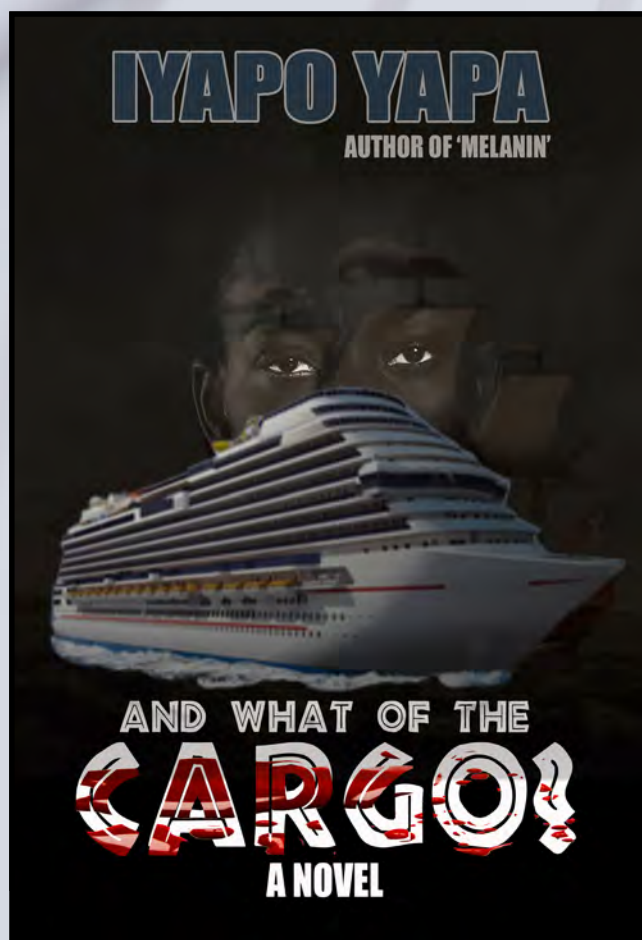
General Thomas Lattimore was a tall, very dark skinned Black man. Clean shaven, he still had all his teeth, though not perfectly straight; and all of his hair, a bit of it graying at the temples—the kind that society said made a man look ‘distinguished’ and a woman look ‘old’; and even with the grey he managed to look some fifteen to twenty years younger than his chronological age let on.

His body was in the condition of someone nearly half his age, due in large part to his vegetarian diet and a healthy lifestyle that included never missing a day without doing some kind of strenuous work out no matter what was going on in the world or his own life. He sat adjacent to the president, his legs crossed, looking oddly relaxed as he relayed the new world developments to Lloyd. Lattimore had survived two wars and several conflicts in his nearly fifty year career. There wasn’t much that shook him, including this. His calm cool demeanor, some therapists concluded, was a kind of PTSD that had turned inward on itself. In this form the disorder made him nearly impervious to the psychological repercussions of events that would strike fear or dread in the hearts and minds of the average person.

“Mr. President, I spoke personally with the captain of that cruise, and a few of his senior

crew members, and they say what we’re seeing here is one hundred percent authentic. They even have video footage from the ships own surveillance cameras that will substantiate theirs and the passenger’s claims.”

There was a ring on the president’s private phone line. He held up a finger to General Lattimore and answered. “Yes. Uh huh. Yes, I see. Are you certain? Alright, I’m doing it right now.” He hung up the phone and asked the General to tune the monitor to RTCNN.



Lattimore leaned over to the coffee table before him, picked up the remote and found the channel, where on screen was a breaking news broadcast, the news screen divided into six boxes, each showing different

scenes of basically the same thing—whales, killer whales, dolphins and porpoises, from what looked to be tropical climates, arctic climates and everything in between. These had high-definition video—much clearer than what they had just viewed on the social media sites—and with far better sound.

“...these are live scenes from around the world.” Came the voice of the reporter, “No one knows what to make of it. The world’s top scientists, oceanographers and zoologists are absolutely baffled. There is a lot of speculation that the events on the cruise ships and oil rigs are somehow related to this. There are some who are starting to claim this might be the end of the world. only confined to the vicinity of the middle passage.”

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And What of the CARGO? - Chapter 16 Excerpt (continued)

Lloyd leaned back in his overstuffed leather seat, mouth moving, but nothing coming out. "This—this thing with the whales is REAL?!" He finally managed, attempting to conceal the

fear in his voice but failing.

"Yes sir" Latimore said coolly, "and evidently, it's happening globally, this is no longer only confined to the vicinity of the middle passage."

There are now TWO And What of the CARGO? Trailers for you to watch!

The click on the image below to view.

Author

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AND WHAT OF THE CARGO? A NOVEL

BOOKS BY IYAPO YAPA



Trailer ONE

We were women, and we were men, Children all born to be free, Not made for ropes, and chains and pain. Our bodies spread throughout the sea.

Did anyone ask? Does anyone ask? Remember to ask.

What of the CARGO?

Trailer TWO

I'd like to say a big THANK YOU! To everyone who helped all three of my books to spend some time at number ONE on Amazon's BEST SELLERS list!



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Best Sellers in Black & African American Science Fiction

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Best Sellers in Black & African American Science Fiction

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UP FROM THE MUD!

UP FROM THE MUD!

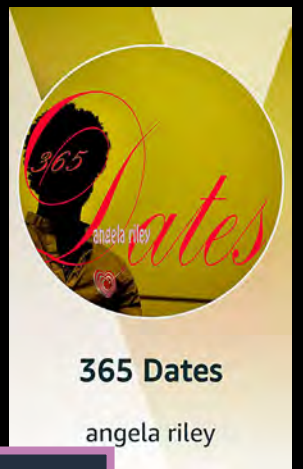
This issue: Meditations, Reflections, & Affirmations... following The HAPPY

CAN LOVE SET US FREE?



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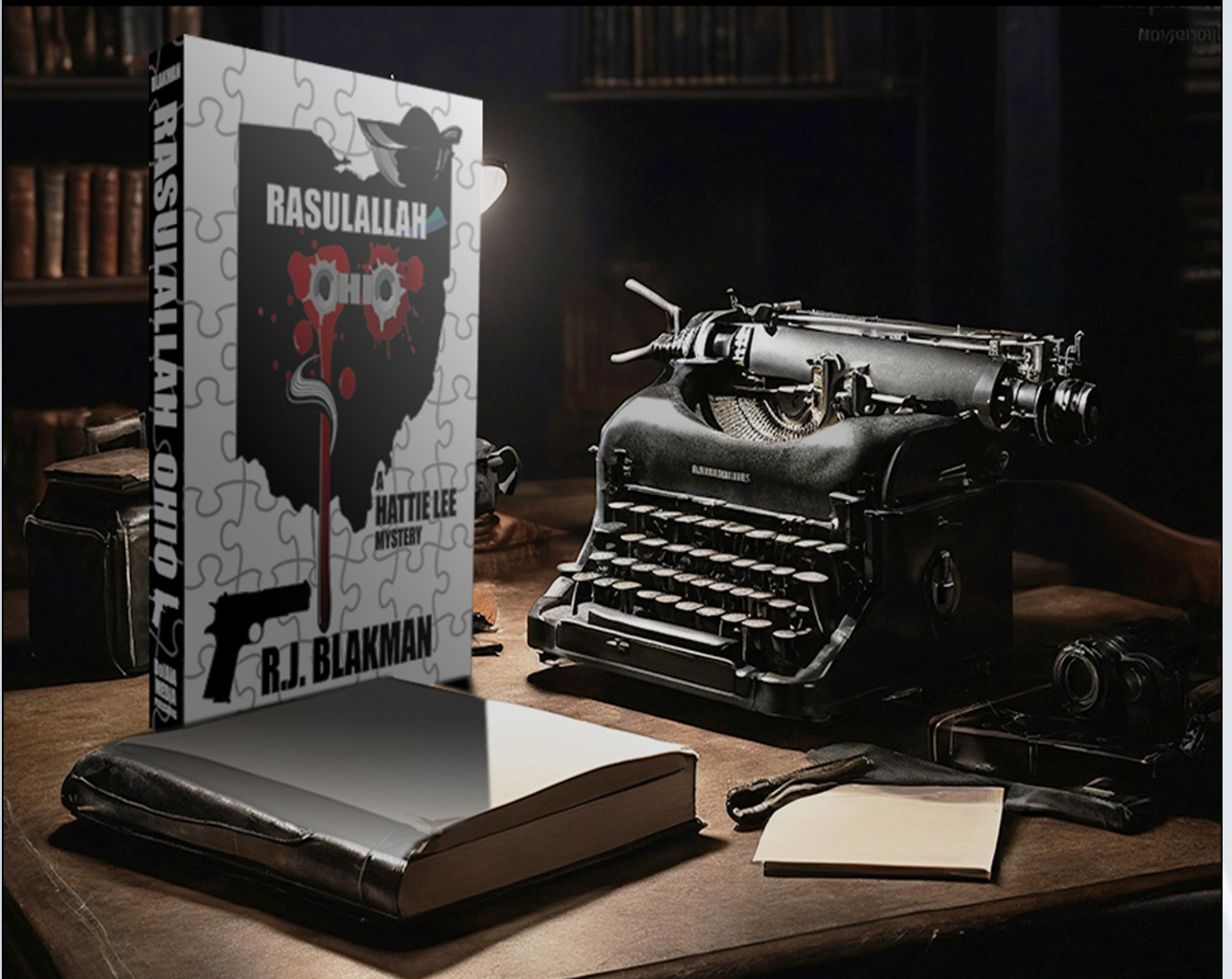
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1960s Ohio

Hattie Lee and her husband Benjamin were building a good life and preparing to start a family in a town that seemed like a dream come true. In a country unsafe for Black people sat Rasulallah, an oasis hidden in plain sight.

But one night.. within less than an hour... their dream became a nightmare!
And Hattie was determined to find out why!



From R.J. BLAKMAN, author of the highly anticipated urban fantasy *The Dragons of Harlem*, comes a mystery that will make you laugh, cry, get angry and keep you guessing until the very end!

RASULALLAH OHIO: A HATTIE LEE MYSTERY

Available for pre-order for \$3.99 at: <https://iyapoyapa.com/rusulallah-ohio.html>

or click the image above for the direct link.

(Also enjoy a sneak peek at the full second chapter exclusively on the website)

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IT IS TIME TO JOURNEY INTO THE **PARADIGM VOID** ONE STEP AT A TIME.

EACH SHORT STORY IS DIFFERENT. EACH ONE THOUGHT PROVOKING & MIND BENDING.
EACH ONE ONLY **A DOLLAR!** AVAILABLE RIGHT NOW ON: **amazon**



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Also, Keepin' it a BUCK series TWO: Stories from Further Journeys into the Paradigm VOID is out NOW!



Also remember:

ORAL TRADITION talking books are also coming soon! Click the image to the right to hear a sample, of one of our talking books. Yes, it's still in its VERY rough form as we experiment with getting it right, but the story is still fun as all get out! So give it a listen and let us know what you think!

You can send your thoughts to: comments@iyapoyapa.com

Heaven Mississippi: The Complete First Chapter

The sun burned Rayowa's¹ eyes.

This thing had never happened before that she could remember; the pain of seeing the sun. The sun was her friend—or at least it used to be. The sensation of this kind of pain caused her to wonder if everything in this strange land was so different—and painful, in comparison to her own beloved country.

She had been marched naked from a small, darkened room onto an auction block on which she stood in the glaring light of day. Before her were odd looking pale men who stared at her in a way that raised goose bumps on her arms (another sensation with which she had only recently become acquainted).

She looked out over the faces in the crowd whenever she could muster the nerve to avert her gaze from the wood of the podium – and could not tell if the pale skinned things were happy or angry.

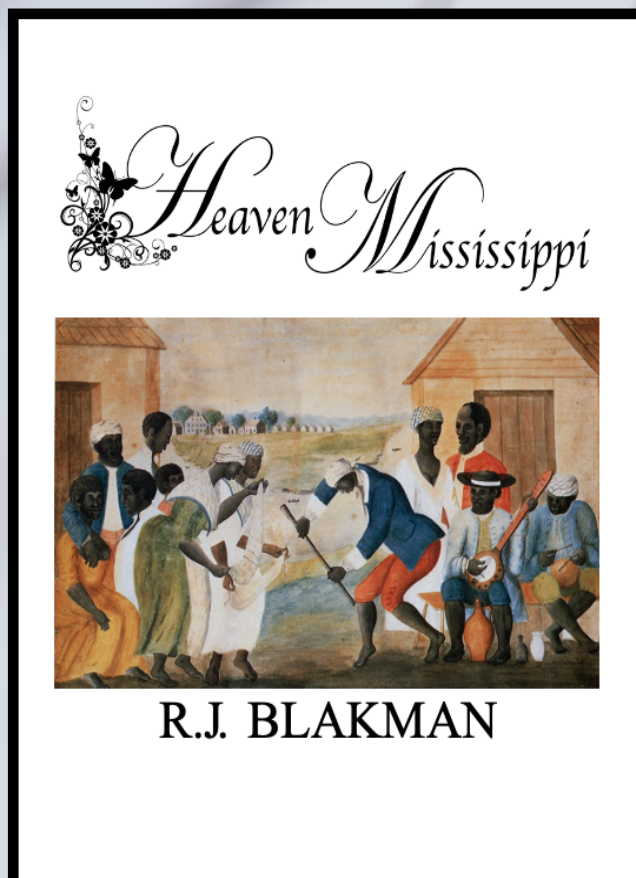
She had much difficulty reading the faces of these aliens for they all looked more or less alike to her, something about their paleness and pinkish tone that made them look sickly and unhealthy to her eye, and their expressions were

as unfamiliar to her as the peculiar language they spoke.

She stood naked beside men and boys to her left and other girls and women to her right who were likewise forced to bear all. Within her, for reasons unknown even to herself she felt shame for her nakedness. Yes, she was embarrassed, among the other girls and women, mildly. She felt far more degraded standing with the adult male captives, of course among those pale creatures before her, but most of all she felt shame

among the boys who were present – equally naked—equally humiliated and dehumanized. Perhaps there was something about them being closer to her own age that caused her to feel so. She didn't know, and ultimately, in light of the present situation, it didn't matter in the scheme of things.

There was a lot of noise and commotion when she was brought out followed by the other women and girl captives. Men and boys stood to her left, some already bought and paid for. Others awaited purchase. Rayowa did take note that when she was presented, the relatively quiet crowd who had only been uttering unfamiliar words, became animated in a way they hadn't been before the appearance of the females.



R.J. BLAKMAN

Heaven Mississippi: The Complete First Chapter (Cont.)

Rayowa wasn't quite certain what that even meant though instinctively she knew it was nothing good. She could see out of her periphery one of the pale men (she guessed it to be a man), using a stick to poke and prod one of her brothers on display.

After a bit of flight tapping with a short staff, and commands she was certain her kinsman could not understand any more than she or any of her fellow brethren, the pink man took by the upper arm, her fellow captive, who had now become a piece of merchandise like herself and pulled him forward on the platform.

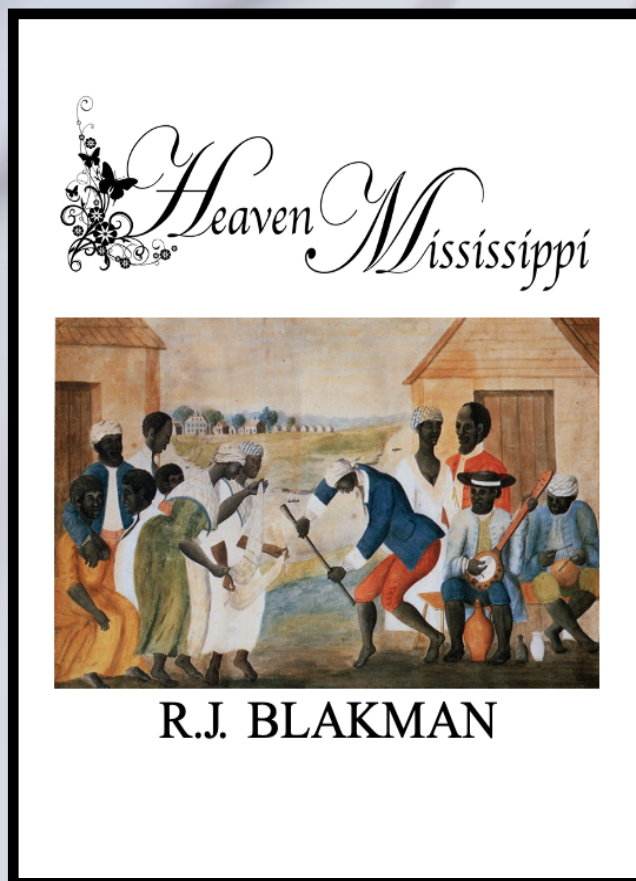
Now able to see him more fully Rayowa recognized the man as Abrafo¹, a warrior from her village. Strong, handsome and tall he was, with flawless sun darkened skin nearly as black as her own. He was built as a warrior – lean and muscular, serious of countenance, stern and no nonsense, but wise and gentle by nature. Some of the pale men stepped closer and seemed to be inspecting Adrafo in a way that barterers would appraise pottery, spears or livestock back in her home country. They stood, some walking around him, others waiting for him to be turned. Some even inspecting his teeth the way one would a horse. A couple of the men patted Adrafo's hind quarters—what Rayowa would in time come to know as the “arse”, something meant to ‘get moving’, or could have the characteristics of being ‘lazy’ or

‘dumb’ – a concept from the pink people that she was never quite able to wrap her mind around, (how could something for the purpose of sitting on be lazy or dumb?)

However, those were questions she would wrestle with after becoming more acquainted with the strange language of these... these... whatever they were.

For now, she listened to the alien gibberish and watched as her countrymen endured humiliation upon humiliation. She felt sorrow and outrage for the way Adrafo was being treated. This man she had seen challenge warriors from

other tribes, this man who several times led the hunt seeking food for the entire community, this man who had become one of the most respected teachers among the young boys in terms of transitioning from boyhood to manhood. He was now reduced to something less than an animal, and having dirty, seemingly soulless pale men inspecting his nakedness, touching him about the face and mouth, and putting their hands in places that should only have been reserved for his wife were he to marry. There was no mistaking the discomfort on the face of Adrafo as he was put on display and stripped of any humanity he was able to thinly hold on to. Rayowa gathered the courage to fully turn her head to see what was happening with Adrafo and was a little surprised to find several of the men and boys also looking.



Heaven Mississippi: The Complete First Chapter (Cont.)

While the creatures roughly turned the warrior to the right as they obviously had a discussion about him in their odd language, Adrapo looked up and his and Rayowa's eyes locked. It was apparent that he could see what could only be a kind of pity in her eyes, and she could see at first a definite contempt and defiance for the pink men and what they were doing to him.

Whether just because of having had enough of this indignity or seeing pity toward a once mighty warrior such as he in the eyes of a young girl, there was no mistaking the sudden look of contempt turn to one of anger. Perhaps the ghosts around him were unaware of what was happening, but Rayowa had seen that look before.

Years ago when she was much younger, she and her father were out walking and talking playfully when suddenly her father stopped and squeezed her hand hard enough that she felt the pain of it, but not so much that she needed to cry out. He quickly shushed her and whispered to her not to move. They stood still for a moment in the tall grass where, at eye level, she could see just the top of the landscape that was spread out before them, as well as the sky. The only thing she was able to completely see unobstructed was the face of her father which she recognized as having a deep concern mixed with a dose

of fear.

She was able to recognize fear upon him because it was something she had only experienced from him a couple times in his presence.

She remembered how her father, Mumba's hand had become suddenly cool and sweaty for seemingly no reason. But in a few short moments, after looking up and studying the face of her father, she could see that his head and eyes were un-moving, trained in only one direction. He was obviously looking at something at which he either could not or would

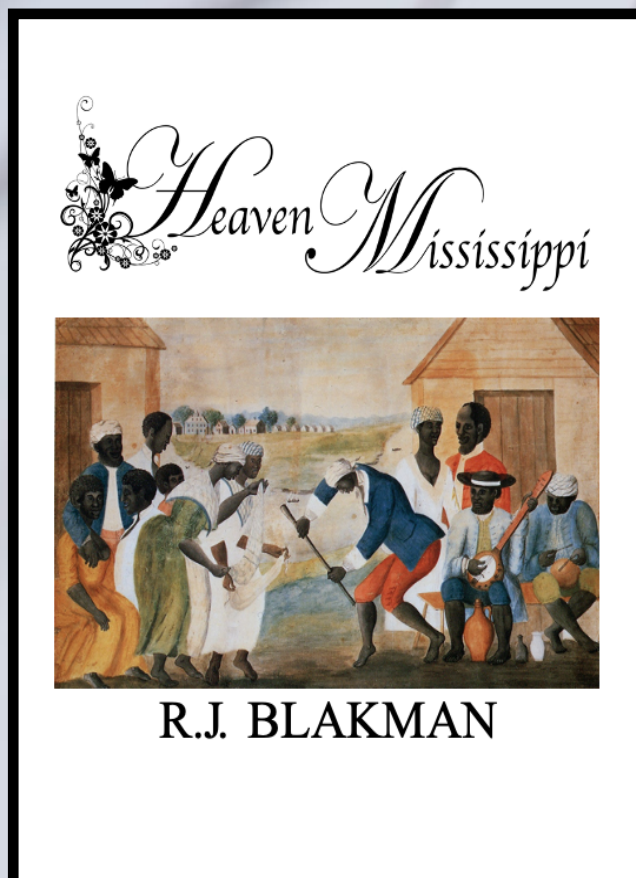
not avert his gaze. She slowly moved her head in the direction of where she perceived her father was staring, and as best she could, just over the top of the grass but still saw nothing.

At first.

But slowly—against the green of the gently wavering grass, she saw a faint hint of light brown, or tan. Initially it was not so obvious to her, but with each passing second it was apparent that the brown was moving toward them and becoming easier to identify.

A lion!

She and Mumba stood statue still even as it approached.



Heaven Mississippi: The Complete First Chapter (Cont.)

She was unsure what to do or what was going to happen. They had gone for this walk innocently enough, and her father had brought no weapon, and even if there were rocks to throw, it would be nearly impossible to spot any in the tall foliage.

Her only hope was her father, and she remembered the fear in his eyes. She remembered the fear in his eyes that is, until the second time she looked up to see his face and the fear and concern had been replaced by something else. Rayowa read it as anger. Perhaps it wasn't, perhaps it was something her mind couldn't grasp. All she did know was that what she saw was not fear.

In that moment, even when faced alone, with no weapon against a lion, her own apprehension evaporated, and she knew her father was prepared to do whatever it took to keep his precious daughter from harm.

“Lie down very slowly and quietly.” she remembered him saying as he loosened his grip on her hand, and she did as she was instructed. Mumba then whispered, when I say... crawl away as quickly as possible and then when you have made it several yards stand up and run as fast as you can back to the village and tell the men what has happened.”

With that, Rayowa knelt on hands and knees, waiting for her father to give her the signal. Even in that position, she was able to look back over her shoulder and

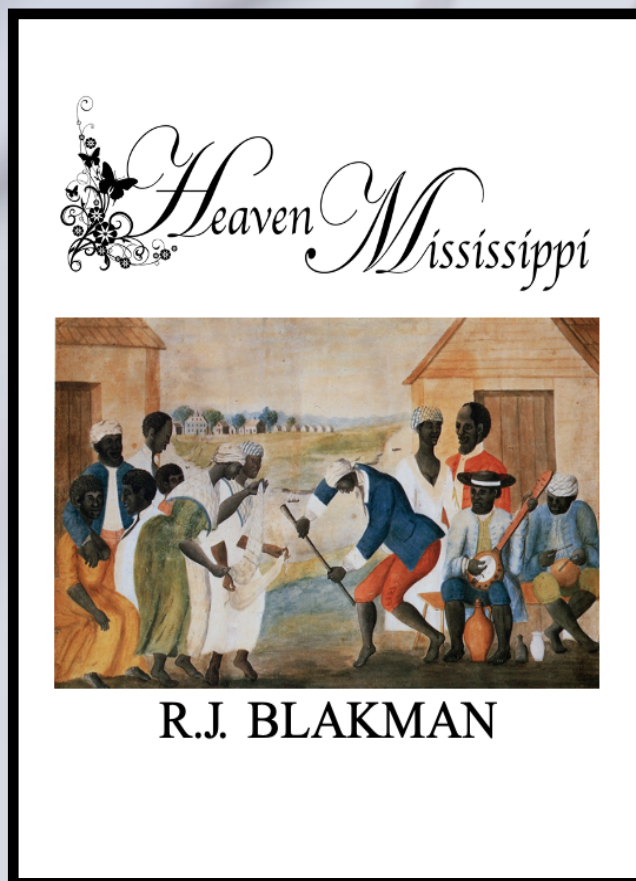
see through the tears which had formed the determination and fight in the eyes of this man whom was in this moment about to sacrifice his life to save hers.

“NOW! GO!” Mumba cried out suddenly, and with a few shuffles of her feet that produced no motion at all, Rayowa finally was able to build momentum and crawl through the grass, crouched in a way that would have been undetectable to any onlooker, or hopefully a stalking lion.

Simultaneously Mumba ran heroically in the direction of the huge cat that was intent upon making a meal of them.

Rayowa heard her father yelling and screaming. In her imagination, she could see him waving his arms and baring his teeth as he met the challenge from which only a miracle could have him emerge alive. She crawled for what seemed a lifetime, and then when she felt she was far enough away from the predator Rayowa stood up and started running in earnest. Her goal was to make it out of the tall grass and to the flat lands and finally into the tree line and jungle through which she would make it to her village to gather men for help.

The landscape was a blur from the tears streaming from her eyes and the thought of what had happened to her father, she single mindedly ran to reach the edge of the tall grass, which seemed so much farther than she had thought it would be given what she believed having been her initial location





Heaven Mississippi: The Complete First Chapter (Cont.)

within it when walking with her father.

Speeding up as best she could, from behind Rayowa heard sounds from the brush getting louder, gaining on her. For all her trying and the sacrifice of her father, she was not going to make it.

“Rayowa!”

She ran faster.

“Rayowa!”

She puffed and ran, not quite sure which way she was heading at that point but running as fast as she could none-the-less.

“Rayowa! Daughter! Stop running!”

Wait! Lions cannot speak!

“Rayowa... Stop!”

Rayowa stopped running and turned to see her beloved, great, warrior, king father, huffing and puffing behind her, smiling, nearly laughing.

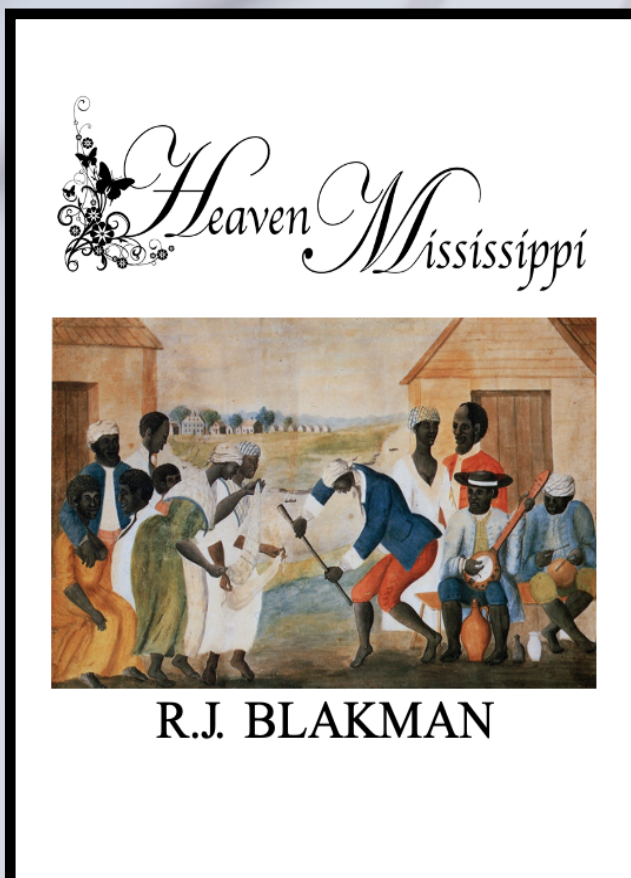
“Father!” She yelled running back to him and jumping up on him so hard and knocking him backward so fast that to an onlooker it would have seemed they both de-materialized into the surroundings.

They lay for a moment embracing, breathing hard, and her father laughing. “Daughter you must be possessed by the spirit of a gazelle!” He said. “I thought I might not catch up to you until you reached the village!”

They laughed for a moment, both from relief and joy and then stood up to and started on their walk back to their village.

“Father what happened?! Did you kill the lion?! How did you do it so quickly?!”

“No precious one, I did not kill the lion. After you went your way and I charged the lion, it was the lion who ran! Perhaps it was the first time his prey had challenged him, and he was in such disbelief he did not know what to do—but for whatever reason, it was I who had scared him! Nobody messes with my daughter I yelled to him!”



When they reached the village, they first went home and told the tale of what transpired on their walk. Kailua, Rayowa’s mother was skeptical of the story her husband and daughter presented to her, though both insisted vehemently that every word of it was true. She sat calmly grinding mill as they spun the yarn and at some points acted out what had happened, but Kailua could not be blamed for her doubts, it would not have been the first time the two of them had played such a joke on her.

They repeated their exciting story in several different ways, and still Rayowa’s mother sat grinding the mill, nodding and saying an unconvincing, “Alright, I believe you.” Just as they were about to give up on trying to convince her mother that Mumba was indeed one of the bravest men in the village,



Heaven Mississippi: The Complete First Chapter (Cont.)

a group of men walked up to the family of Rayowa. Some of the men carried shields, they all carried spears and were led by a visibly excited little boy.

“There they are!” the little boy yelled as the group walked toward them, “I thought they might have been eaten!”

“What are you talking about young man?” Mumba asked.

“I was out walking alone...” he began a little sheepishly, knowing that a boy his age was not supposed to venture so far away from the village on his own – but suddenly becoming very animated he continued, “I saw you! I saw the lion coming for you and then you ran toward the lion yelling and with no weapon in your hands!” The child said as he pointed to Rayowna’s father. “That is when I ran back here to get help!”

“That is right.” one of the men continued. “He said he saw you and your daughter being stalked by the lion and ran all the way back to the village to gather as many men as possible to come and help you, but then we thought we saw you come back to your hut so we stopped here first to be sure.”

“What is this?” Kailua said as she stopped her grinding and stood up slowly as if waking from a dream. “This thing really

happened?! You... you were telling me the truth?!”

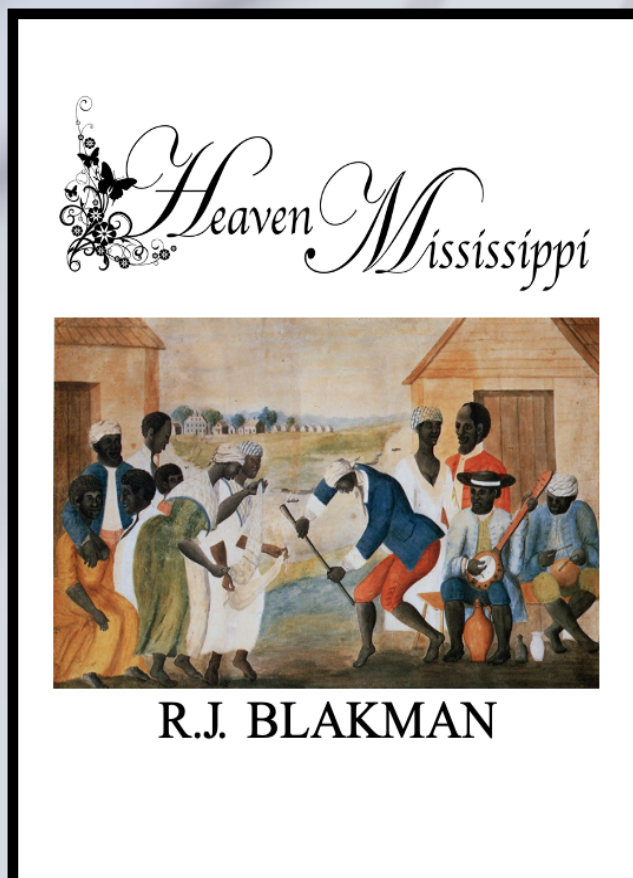
“Yes wife, we were trying to tell you.” Mumba said.

She ran to her husband and daughter, attempting to sidestep the mill she had been grinding and knocking it over anyway. She embraced both of them, kissing them and breaking into tears.

After that they proceeded to tell the people of the village what had happened and Mumba even led a hunting party out to track

down the lion and kill it because it was believed that Mumba and his daughter had encountered a rogue lion that had been killing members of a neighboring village and had now widened its territory. Any lion that stalked human beings and had acquired a taste for human blood would ever crave it and needed to be stopped. The hunt was successful and afterward, as a trophy, Mumba would wear one of the incisors of the lion around his neck.

As the years passed, of course the story grew and at some point as she remembers, the single lion became two, and then a pride, and Mumba The Brave killed one of them with his bare hands. She did not mind that the story had turned into legend with only the seeds of truth left to it—all she knew was that at first, though always



Heaven Mississippi: The Complete First Chapter (Cont.)

considered by all a good man, Mumba was not what one would have seen as a person of great stature among the people.

His heroism that day changed all that.

He was always highly honored and recognized for his act, and even though the story eventually was blown out of all reasonable proportion, she counted ALL as true because he did save her life at the risk of his own—and would have acted in exactly the same way even if it had truly been a full pride of hungry lions.

That was all that mattered to Rayowa.

She wished he was here now.

For all the stretching of that tale of heroism, the one thing that always remained as a constant in the mind of Rayowa was the look on Mumba's face before he charged the lion, and especially, the look in his eyes!

Now this was the same look she saw in the eyes of Adropo, and her own eyes widened and heart pounded as she anticipated what was about to happen.

“No!” Rayowa thought as if hoping to somehow telepathically speak to the man who she was sure would soon be dead were he to attack in this moment, “Don't do it... please don't do it! You can not win here right now! Live to fight another day!”

Suddenly, thankfully, the pale men almost

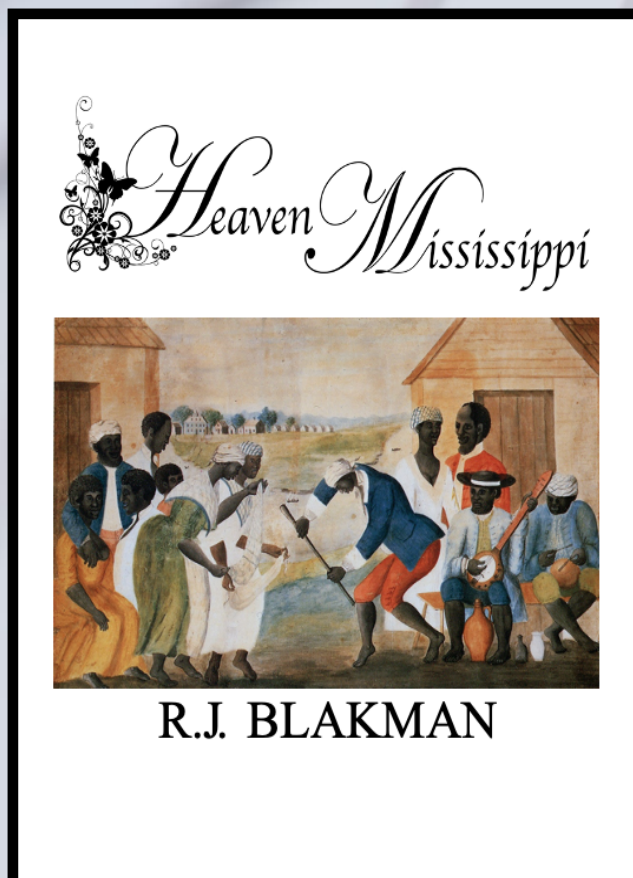
as one, stepped back to their original places among the other pale men who may or may not have been interested in Adropo, and just as quickly his continence fell back to the simmering contempt at which it had rested previously. The pale man who had pulled him forward tapped him a couple times with his stick, and then once again grabbed him by the arm to return him to his original position on the stand, what Rayowa would later learn was a thing called an “auction block”.

This time as the pink man attempted to maneuver the captured warrior back to his position, Adropo jerked loose his arm, stood

up straight and walked back to the spot at which he first stood. Doing so with as much dignity as the present circumstance would allow, which was very little, but within him meant a great deal.

One of the men in the crowd, upon seeing the actions of Adropo yelled, “Aye! That nigger has spirit!” whatever that meant, Rayowa could make out individual words, but she had no idea what they meant or what the sentence conveyed—though again—in time, she would sadly become all too well acquainted with the term ‘nigger’, and she would learn to despise it.

With Adropo back in his place, Rayowa once again faced forward and looked down at the wooden platform upon which she and the others stood.





Heaven Mississippi: The Complete First Chapter (Cont.)

She silently gave thanks to the ancestors for defusing the situation and helping Adropo to calm down so that he might live.

From the crowd she could hear the odd words and phrases once again coming from the pale man up front, along with an unfamiliar word coming from one man after the other in the crowd. First the man in front would say something, then some pink man in the crowd would say what seemed to be a single word. This continued for several minutes. Rayowa suspected what was happening, but had no real context for it, she had seen such things done in the marketplace, but never with people, so in her mind she was unable to reconcile that thought with what she had seen back then and was experiencing now.

The back and forth continued between the sickly looking pale men until it was only the pink man up front who was talking and looking around at the crowd before him. At one point Rayowa peeked again to her left and she saw the pink man raise his hand and motion toward Adropo. Immediately after doing that two men, one pink, and surprisingly a Black man who looked like he could have been one of her countrymen roughly took Adropo by his arms and pulled him from the platform. Adropo struggled and resisted, but the more he did the rougher the two men became with him.

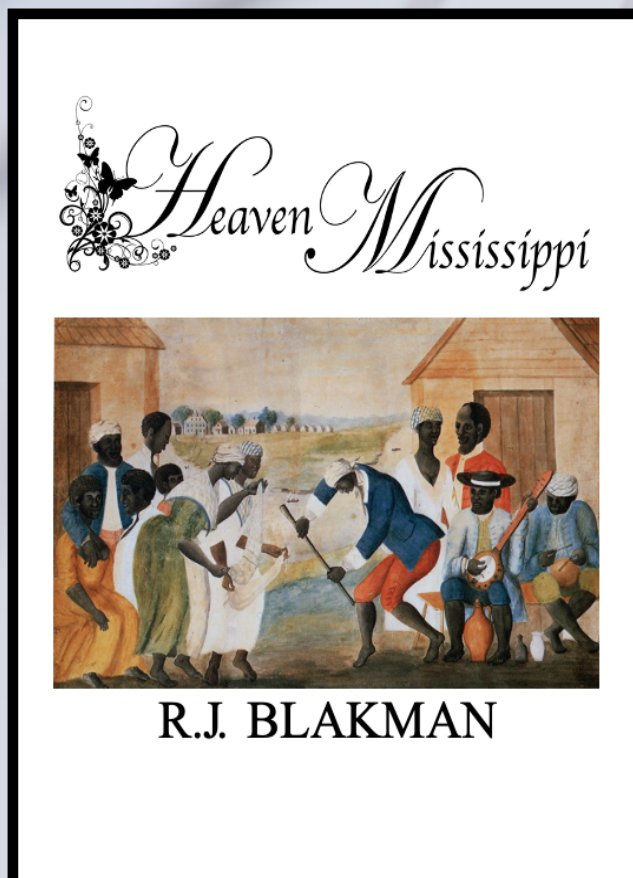
As Adropo struggled Rayowa whispered under her breath for him to please stop for

his own good. She understood why he was fighting, after all, the man was a warrior, but she also reasoned that the outcome was inevitable. He would be going with them either on his feet, or on his back. It wasn't as if amid his thrashing, Adropo's captors were going to say, "Alright, it's obvious you don't want to go with us, so we'll just let you go."

It would seem that Adropo may have had the same thought as suddenly he stopped resisting the manhandling of his captors and walked—once again with as much dignity as he could muster—back into the room out of which those who were slated to be sold had

been kept, and to rejoin those who had been sold. One of the pale men stepped over to Rayowa and gestured his arm in her direction while speaking in the language that for now, was undecipherable to her. The men at the gathering drew in close and a few of them stepped onto the stage on which she stood. She had seen enough of what had happened to the men before her to know what was about to ensue.

Rayowa closed her eyes and braced herself for whatever was coming. It wasn't long before she felt hands upon her—touching her in places both common and private. She felt her mouth being opened, and a couple times a thumb and index finger forced an eye open, causing her to look upon the grotesque face of one of her assailants. They were close to her—far too close. She could smell them. She could smell their clothes, their hair, their,



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Heaven Mississippi: The Complete First Chapter (Cont.)

breath, and all of it turned her stomach. Even those whose odor wasn't altogether unpleasant caused her to feel uneasy and nauseous. With that, the overriding thought in her mind was which of these strange creatures would ultimately be leaving with her, and for what purposes? None of which, Rayowa guessed, and guessed correctly, would be upright or honorable.

The surreal inspection continued for what seemed like an eternity as Rayowa suffered humiliation upon humiliation. Intellectually, she knew it had to end eventually, but in her spirit, the assault seemed as if it wasn't ever going to stop.

Not knowing what fate awaited her, she could only imagine that wherever she was going there would be more of the same—

and worse.

The touching, poking and examinations stopped as suddenly as they started. As Rayowa continued to stand in place, she could still feel the phantom touches of the men who had groped her. The men who had just violated her. Slowly the sensation began to pass, but Rayowa knew the effects of the violation on her mind and spirit would linger. The sun once again stung her eyes as she opened them to, thankfully, find herself alone on the podium save for the other items of human merchandise with whom she stood.

The sickly-looking pale men began raising

their hands and calling out. Some did not speak, but only raised a cane or some other handheld tool with which to signal.

“Fifty!”

“Seventy-five!”

Even without understanding them, Rayowa intuitively, knew she was being bid on just as were those before her who had been purchased and taken away. She continued to stand silent, head down, unwilling to make eye contact with any of the creatures before her.

The voices came louder and faster.

(A raise of a cane)

“Ninety five!”

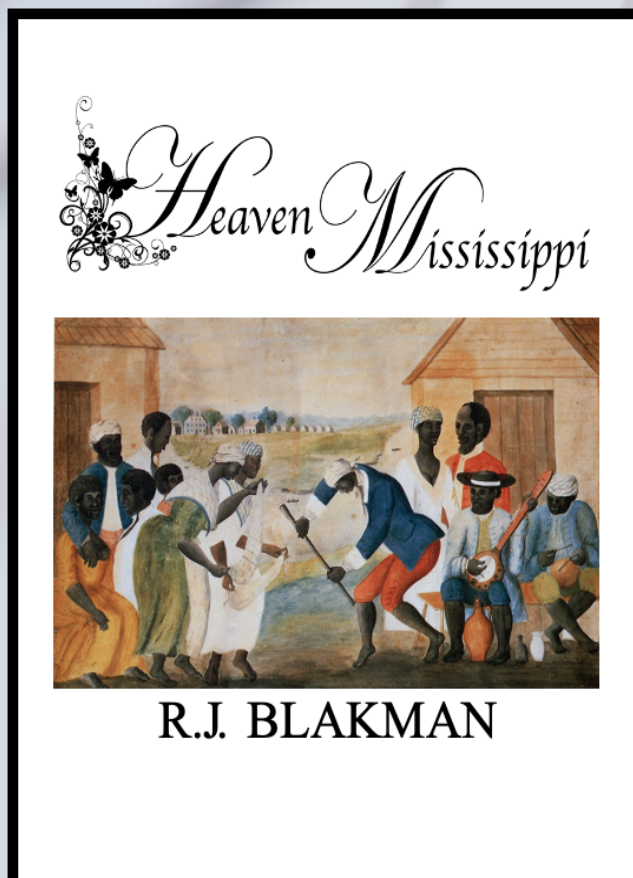
(The tipping of a hat.)

“One twenty-five!”

“One fifty!”

The voices stopped and the crowd became quiet.

“I have One hundred fifty dollars for this fine young female specimen. She'll be good for workin' the field, the house or both. And she's young! Just right for breedin'... and for some o' those cold winter nights. You gentlemen know what I'm talkin' about. So, do I hear one seventy-five?”



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Heaven Mississippi: The Complete First Chapter (Cont.)

“One seventy-five!” called out one of the entities at the front—a particularly grubby looking man who looked as if he couldn’t afford such a steep price, but those around him seemed to know he could.

“Two hundred dollars!” yelled someone to the right of the other person who just called out.

Everything became silent again.

“I have two hundred!” boomed the voice of the auctioneer, causing a couple of the naked Afrikans, including Rayowa to jump.

“Do I hear two twenty-five?!”

Silence.

One of the men beside the disheveled one elbowed him in the ribs and said, “Come on Johnny! Don’t tell me you’re gonna let a nice piece o’ horse flesh like this’un get away.”

“Price is too steep. I kin run down ta Miss. Clara’s place on a Saturday evenin’ an’ get what I need for three dollar.” The men laughed and turned their attention back to the auctioneer.

“Two hundred twenty-five dollars for this fine animal.” The auctioneer cautioned.

Silence.

“Two hundred dollars going once... two hundred going twice...”

“Three hundred dollars!”

The voice was deep and resonant. The one who had spoken was using the language of those Rayowa could not decipher, but the timbre of it was somehow different. She looked up slowly, to the back of the crowd, at a man sitting on a horse drawn wagon.

She noticed that oddly, none of the other men had turned around to look at whoever it was that seemed to cause the proceedings to

come to a halt.

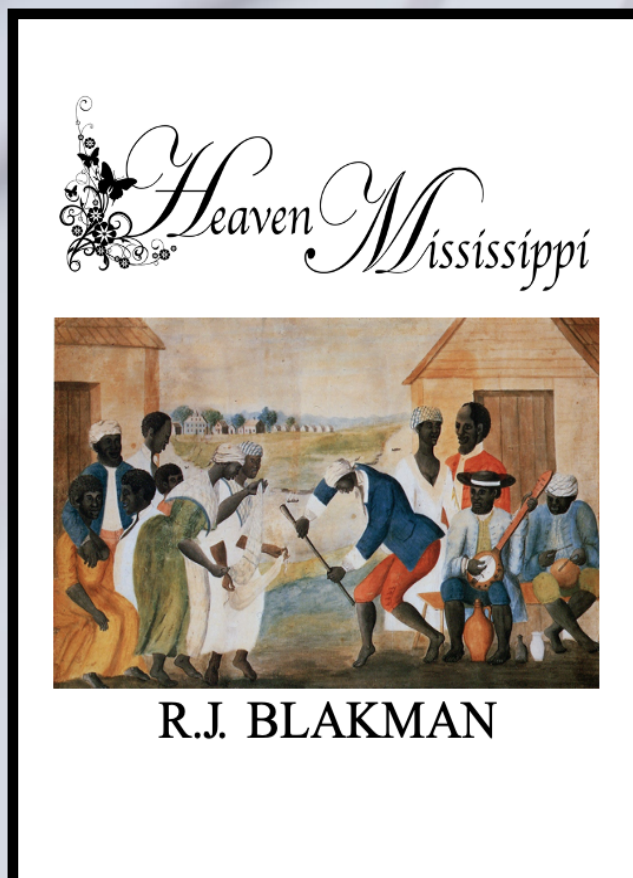
She was surprised to see a young Black man who was dressed in the garb of the men who were closer to the auction block, and in some ways, even more well-dressed.

“We have a bid for three hundred from Mister Trace Calhoun by proxy of his niggrah! Do I hear three twenty-five?!”

Silence.

“So, the bid is Three hundred dollars going once... going twice... sold to Trace Hawthorne for three hundred dollars!”

The bidding continued for a while longer as the Black man purchased three more slaves on the behalf of the plantation.





Heaven Mississippi: The Complete First Chapter (Cont.)

There were only a couple left, but Hawthorne had exhausted the plantation money and was easily outbid.

The auctioneer pointed his cane in the direction of the well-dressed negro sitting in the cart. “Alright Hawthorne,” he yelled, “that’s it! After these fine gentlemen complete the paperwork for their purchases, you can go in and take care of Mr. Calhoun’s and load his merchandise!”

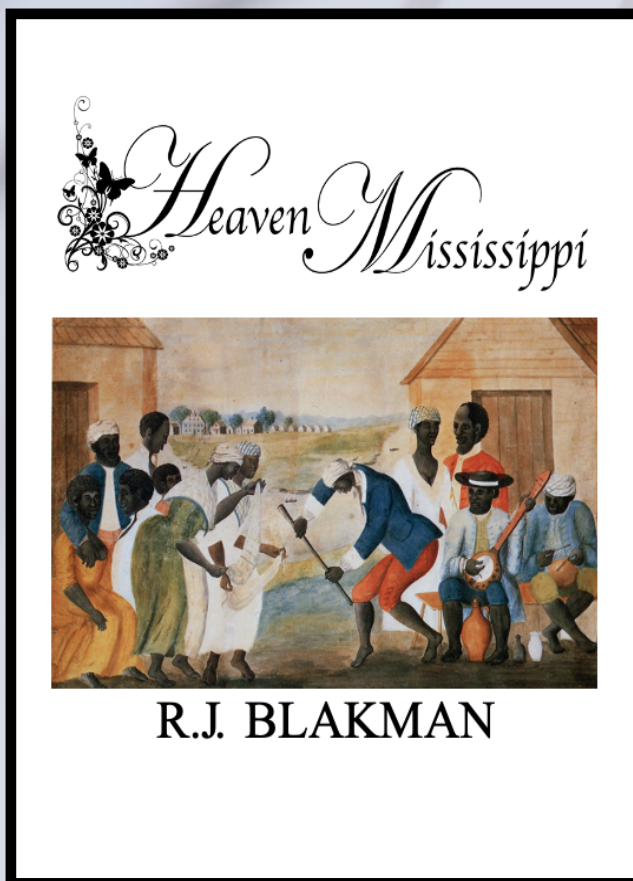
Even moving things along, it took nearly an hour waiting in the hot sun before all the white men had completed their business, and Hawthorne was allowed to enter the business office of the auction house. He stepped inside the space that was now empty except for the barrister, Franklin James, who took care of notating the purchases in a ledger, issuing, and signing the bills of sale along with separate receipts.

As Hawthorne walked up to the desk, he could see a chair sitting in front of it—the chair on which the white men would sit as they conducted their business and completed their paperwork.

He knew he dared not sit.

The closer Hawthorne got, the more he could make out Mr. James mumbling something about, That damn Calhoun getting special treatment because he was such a wealthy customer.

Hawthorne stood at the desk and handed Mr. James four slips. James adjusted the glasses he was looking over the top of and laid them out in front of him. “Two men, one boy, one woman.”



“Yessuh. That’s what we bought today.”

“Nine hundred eighty-eight dollars, plus seven dollars filing and handling. Nine hundred ninety-five.” He said dryly. “Plus, my personal handling fee, five dollars. That’ll make it an even thousand dollars.”

Hawthorne dug into his pouch and pulled out all the money he had on his person. He counted out a thousand dollars, leaving only twenty-five, and handed it to James.”

James snatched the money from Hawthorne’s hand and then recounted it. Annotating the money (less the five dollars), James then put the money in a cash box. “They may not teach you niggers to read and write worth a shit, but they sure as hell make sure you can count money.” The tone of Jame’s voice let Hawthorne know that what was just said was in no way intended as a complement.

James grabbed a stack of papers to his left, then took a quill pen and began furiously writing. As he completed each paper, he took a round stamp, inked it on a pad, then slammed it down on the bottom of each sheet as if the papers were an enemy.



Heaven Mississippi: The Complete First Chapter (Cont.)

Actually, the stamping was to be done at the end of the transaction, but it was late, and James was tired of the paperwork; not to mention the fact that he resented having to do paperwork for a purchase made by a nigger. It didn't matter if it was on behalf of his master. "Boy," James said coldly without looking up from his task, "Calhoun must have a hellava lot of trust in you to give you all this money and permission papers, and letting you pick out what slaves you're gonna buy for 'em."

"Yashah Mista James. Massa Trace say I's got da best eye fo' slaves he ever seen. I kain't ever compare ta no white man doe."

"You damn right you can't! And don't you never forget that boy." James said as he snatched the papers around more furiously, "I seen your type before." He then said, beginning to sound more annoyed than angry.

"First you niggers masters starts letting you run little errands for 'em, then move on ta bigger things, til finally, you're in town on your own, dressed like white men, carryin' money like white men, and biddin' on niggers like white men, instead of working in the fields sun up to sun down like you were made by the good lord to do. I don't like it, an' if it were up ta me Calhoun would have ta have his ass down here makin' his own decisions and purchases! I don't care how

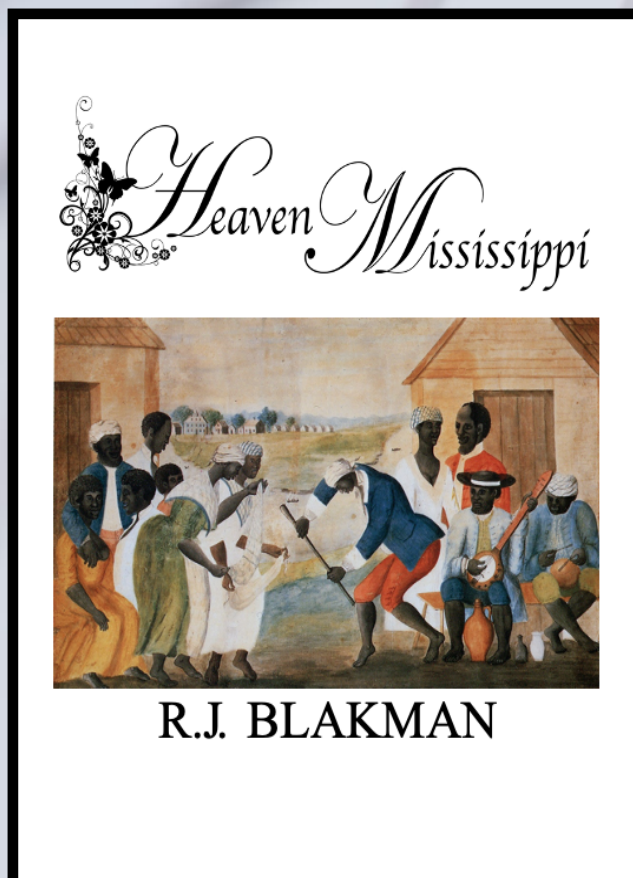
much money he has! Well... Me... I don't trust you. I don't trust niggers far as I can see you! Not one BIT!"

"Yessush. You right suh." Hawthorne said as humbly as he could as he paid for the new slaves and the barrister did the paperwork. When everything was in order, he turned the paper so that it was facing Hawthorne. "Put your master's stamp here... then put your damn X beside it like always."

"Yessuh."

Hawthorne lightly stamped each paper and marked them with an X (using a separate quill pen specifically designated for Hawthorne, the only Black man who was allowed to make such purchases), then he gently pushed the paper back over to the barrister.

"It's a good thing we run an upright and honest auction here." James said as he did one final check of the papers to make sure everything was in order. "If he was dealing with some unscrupulous characters, we could right anything on these papers and you wouldn't even know what you stamped and signed for your master." James shook his head in disgust, then roughly slid the papers back across his desk, causing a couple to slide off and float to the floor." Here are your copies. Make sure your master gets these." He said as Hawthorne quickly bent over to pick up the paperwork and receipts. "If he doesn't, we're not responsible, and may result in a loss of the property for Calhoun, and I'm



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Heaven Mississippi: The Complete First Chapter (Cont.)

a flogging for you.”

Hawthorne stood back up, straightened the papers, folded them a couple times and placed them in a pouch that hung by his hip. “Yessah Mista James. ‘Em’ma be double sho ta see to it Massah Trace gits ‘em.”

“Whether he does or doesn’t, it’s no matter to me. We have our money.” James looked out the window at the cart in which Hawthorne had come into town. “Your merchandise is loaded up.” He said curtly. “Now you can just go on and get your ass outta here.”

“Yessah. Thank you suh.”

* . * . *

As Hawthorne drove the horses and wagon down the bumpy dirt road Rayowa sat in back with the other three fellow captives. She observed the flora and fauna as it lazily passed them by, and despite herself, could not help but notice the natural beauty of it. She listened closely as, over the sound of the wagon wheels, she could hear unfamiliar birds and other wildlife.

In one of the trees, she saw something gray and black, a furry animal that seemed to have a mask on, or some kind of tribal design.

She’d never seen such a creature before and was fascinated by it. She continued to stare at it until the wagon took it beyond her view.

Hawthorne noticed over his shoulder that the young woman in the back was captivated by

the animal. “That there was a raccoon.” Said the Black man who sat up front steering the horses as he once again turned his attention fully back to the road. “We call’s em’ coons for short. Best not mess aroun’ with one of’ em ya see in the daylight. Coons is night creatures. You see one roamin’ around in the daytime, odds are they’s probably rabid.”

Rayowa had absolutely no idea what the Black man was talking about. She did recognize that his manner of speech was not the same as the pale men she had so far encountered. There was something familiar, yet at the same time, foreign about his speech. He sounded as if at any moment he could break

into a language that Rayowa might understand.

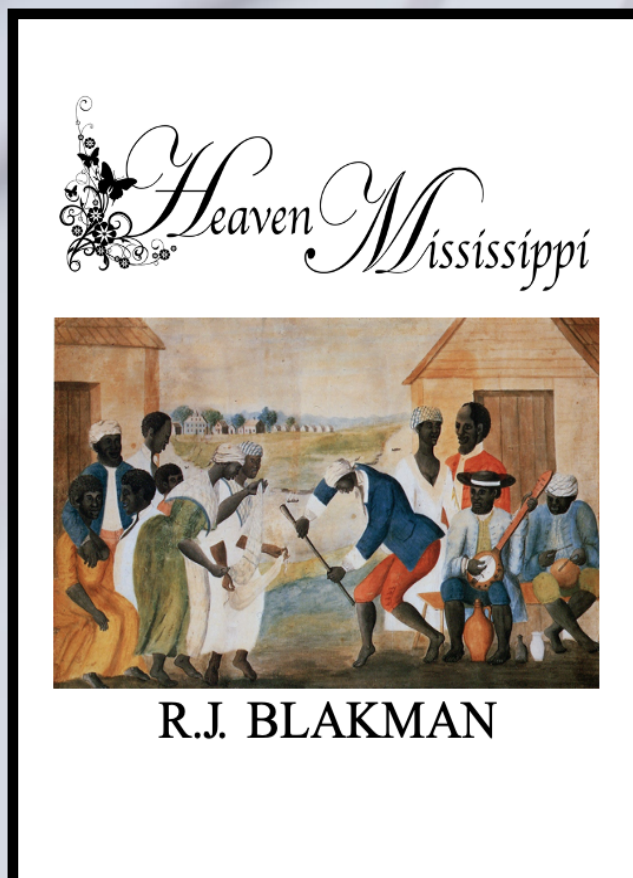
As they rode through the gates, Rayowa saw trees, flowers and bushes that rivaled the beauty of those in her native country. In the distance, on a small hill, she saw a structure like nothing she’d ever seen before. It looked vaguely like those from the town from wince they had just come, but different.

Brighter.

Somehow, less oppressive.

As she searched her mind, there were no words she could find to adequately describe it

. In front of the structure, there were, it seemed, children playing on the wide grassy area. At least they looked like children. As she scanned the environment, the one thing that was certain





Heaven Mississippi: The Complete First Chapter (Cont.)

This truly was an alien place.

The cart slowed to a stop and the man in front called out something as a bunch of Black women approached them. They all looked to be wearing the same kind of frock Rayowa had on.

“Alright. We have another group for you to get started.” Hawthorne said.

One of the women stood a few feet away from the cart and studied the faces and dispositions of the people on board. “I don’t know if I’ll ever get used to this.” One of the women said. Those poor people. They look so frightened and confused.”

“No more, Joan, than did any of the rest of us when we first arrived.” Hawthorne said. “But in time they’ll adjust, just as we all did. The important thing is that we were able to acquire more. I’m just sorry that we can’t get more, not that we can’t afford them, but we absolutely have to keep up appearances if this is going to continue being a successful enterprise. We can’t spend too much money or purchase too many at one time.”

“You’re right of course.” Said a slender but solidly built woman named Aphrodite as she stepped to the back of the wagon and motioned for the passengers to start stepping out.

“Is Cicero in the study working on the ledgers?” Hawthorne asked.

“Where else? At least that’s where he was the last time I saw him.” Aphrodite said. “If he’s not in there, check the library, that’s the only

other place he’d be.”

“That, madam is for a certainty. I need to get these receipts to him so I can eat. I had a little something this morning, but in my haste to attend the auction, neglected to take anything with me, so now I’m famished!”

“Yes... Helen mentioned something about you leaving without picking up a mid-day meal for the road. She knew you’d be starved when you got back, so I think she prepared something special for you.”

“Oh really?”

“Yes really. She started cooking about an hour after you left.”

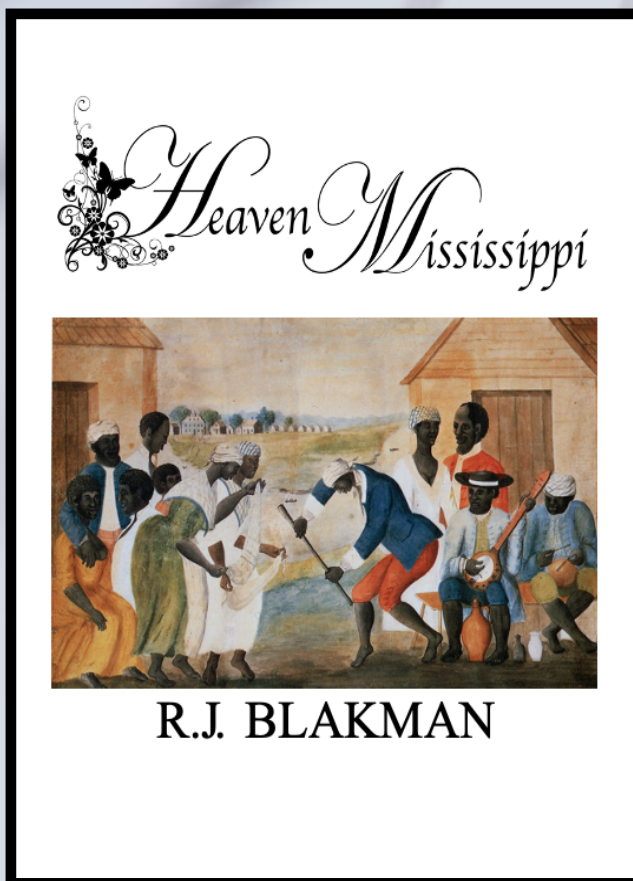
“Is that so? And just what gastronomic wonder did she prepare today?”

“That special dish she came up with that you like so much.”

A broad smile spread across the lips of the man who had just delivered the newcomers. “Paradiso ya Kondoo?!¹” He exclaimed.

“That’s it. And I understand she’s also preparing brussel sprouts with bacon and truffled mashed potatoes to go with it. With apple pie for dessert.”

The grin that was stretched across the face of Hawthorne Calhoun was now becoming painful. “Oh, Helen has just made this young... and very hungry... man, very happy!” he said.



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¹ Paradiso ya Kondoo is translated “Lamb Paradise” in Swahili.



Heaven Mississippi: The Complete First Chapter (Cont.)

“I’m sure.” Aphrodite said as she winked, “You’d best be careful Hawthorne, that young lady has designs on you.”

“Uh huh. And if she continues to cook as she does, she will likely get me.”

They laughed as Hawthorne turned to make a trek to the main house where he would be delivering the receipts and remaining cash, and then feasting on his favorite meal. “Alright Aphrodite,” he called out over his shoulder as he left, “I know you’re going to take good care of the newcomers. I’ll see you in a bit!”

Aphrodite put her hands on her hips and shook her head as she watched the man bounce off in the distance. She then turned her full attention back to the occupants in the cart. Becoming aware of her posture, she slowly changed the position of her arms to something she felt was nonthreatening or authoritative.

Aphrodite knew the anxious Black people in the back of the wagon would have no idea what she was saying, but she knew that they’d all need to become well acquainted with English. However, for now, her demeanor and actions toward them would have to give them context, and hopefully put them more at ease.

“Come on, step on down. It’s alright. No one’s going to hurt you.” She said gently and with a disarming smile. The group at the plantation had known well the ordeal these people had just suffered and the sense of dread that would be nearly impossible for them not to have been and presently were experiencing.

The permanent community of Black people on the plantation learned over time that for new arrivals it was more disarming to the new members of the plantation when they were greeted first by women.

From the time of their kidnap, through the ocean voyage and to the point of sale on the auction block, their tormentors had been heartless, soulless, barbaric men.

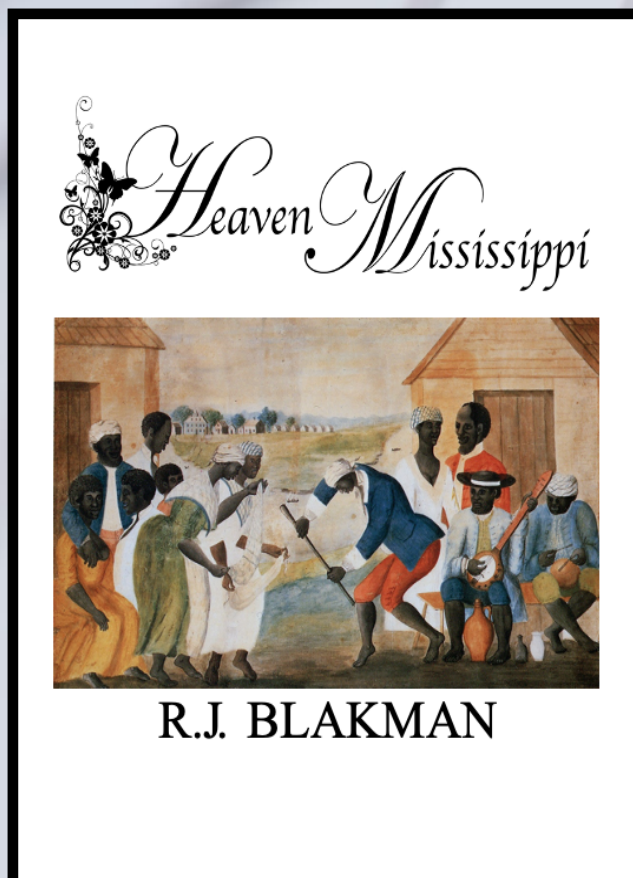
All aboard were reluctant to move, as Aphrodite singled out Rayowa and held a welcoming hand out to her. “Here Baby,” she said softly. “Take my hand and come on down here with me.” She then said, just as gently, “Yon kuko emellao tameh’ nossas

weighgo.” Which in essence meant the same thing. No one on board the cart was familiar with the language the woman had just spoken, nor could they have been. The language was Pahgma. An Amerikan Afrikan language that was a conglomeration of the native tongues of those held captive on the plantation.

Though the Pahgma was alien to the new arrivals, it was familiar to them and was unlike the harsh sounding gibberish spoken by the pale people.

Hesitantly Rayowa took the invited hand of the woman who was urging her to step forward and join the group on the ground. She stepped off the back of the wagon.

After seeing Rayowa step down, each of her fellow captives followed. Once down, they all looked around them. Rayowa looked down, almost afraid to make eye contact with the new



R.J. BLAKMAN



Heaven Mississippi: The Complete First Chapter (Cont.)

Aphrodite stood in front of her and gently placed her hands on Rayowa's cheeks. "Baby," she began, knowing the woman in front of her would not understand. "You don't need to hold your head low here. You never need to hold your head low here." She then stepped back and smiled widely and with an exaggerated gesture raised her arm and her chin to demonstrate. For the first time Rayowa and the three with her began to smile and held their heads up.

Then Aphrodite and the other women started walking toward what looked like a group of makeshift shelters. They all signaled for the four to follow them, which they did. They were lead to one of the larger of the structures and once there, Aphrodite walked inside, while the other women flanked the group of four and again signaled to them to follow her.

Once again, the two men, the woman and little boy followed.

Once inside they were greeted by an elderly Black woman named Addy. The woman wasn't dressed in a frock as were all the other Black women they had come in contact with. She wore a pick frilly dress that seemed out of place somehow. With the dress she wore a head wrap that was reminiscent of that which was worn by women in the various communities of their home continent. Addy walked over and stood before the little boy, and tenderly held him by both hands. The thick, but solid looking woman gently lead

him and the group over to a table as she said something none of them understood. She smiled and gestured to them to have a seat.

All four looked at each other. They did so in part because they recognized the gesture but weren't certain if she meant what it seemed she meant. Addy gave them a huge and gentile smile. "Go on... have a seat." She said, knowing full well that had no idea what she was saying, but hoping that her disarming movements and tone would put them help them understand.

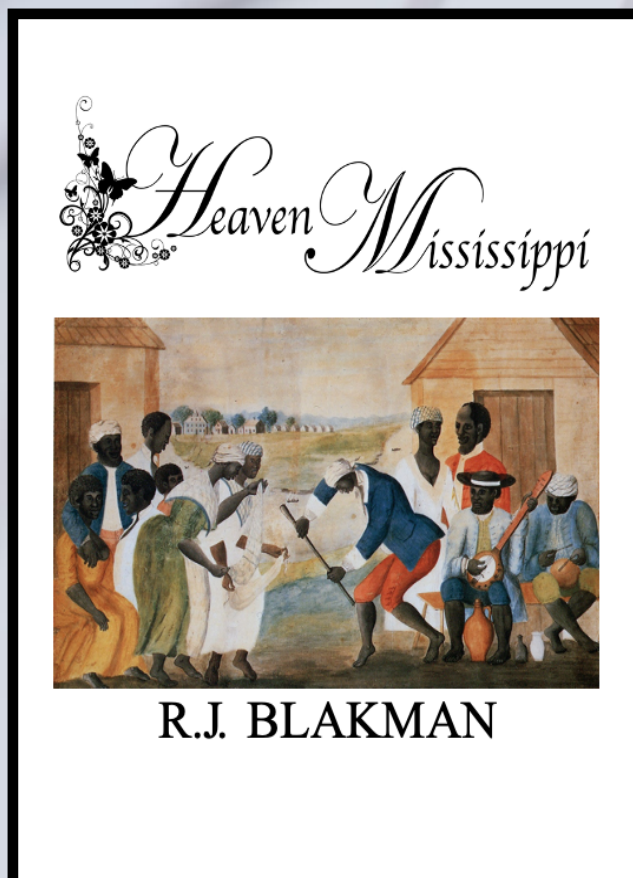
When still no one sat, Addy again took the little boy's hand and pulled the chair in

front of him away from the table. She then, again extended her arm and an open hand inviting him to sit.

Reluctantly, the little boy sat down. Addy gave him another huge smile, then looked at the rest of the group and slowly nodded her head. Each person sat.

After they were seated, two women came out of a back room carrying plates of food. The plates were sat before each of the new people. Rayowa looked at the food. It looked odd to her. She'd never seen anything that looked quite like it before, but it was hot and smelled delicious to her.

The meal consisted of a leg, thigh, and breast of fired chicken, mashed potatoes and gravy, corn on the cob, peas and diced carrots, and two fluffy butter biscuit.



R.J. BLAKMAN

Heaven Mississippi: The Complete First Chapter (Cont.)

The women went in turn back to the back room and a one of them again emerged carrying glasses of water. The other brought a tray with glasses of lemonade, which she sat before each seated person. None of the people at the table had seen glass before and sat wide eyed looking at it.

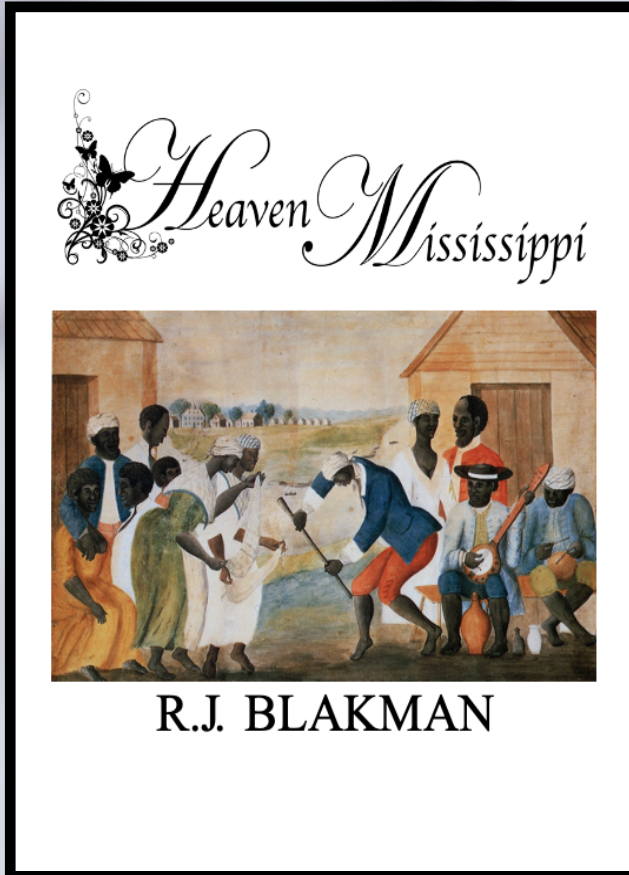
“Please... eat!” Addy said jovially.

The little boy who was seated by Rayowa looked at her and smiled a huge smile. The kind of sweet and happy, missing toothed smile that only a child can pull off. He then reached up to the table

and picked up the spook which sat beside his plate. He scooped up a dab of mashed potatoes and gravy and slowly, a little reluctantly, the child lifted the spoon to his nose. After taking a quick whiff, he took his first bite. Upon taking a few chews, he looked over to Addy and smiled again before going at his food with abandon.

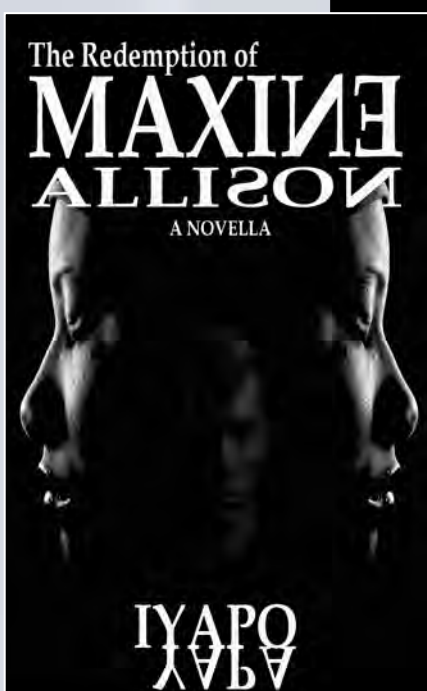
Eventually, everyone at the table was eating their fill. They had never tasted food like this before, but

the consensus was that they liked it—whatever it was—very much!



COMING SOON!

PRESENTLY IN THE EDITOR'S HANDS! (So don't look a ME!)



Is it BEST to DIVEST?

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Love, hate, secrets and deception abound in what is sure to be one of Iyapo Yapa's most mind bending and controversial books to date. Read *The Redemption of Maxine Allison* and find out why!

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R.J. BLAKMAN



R. J. Blakman is a mystery writer, a writer of non-fiction and an all-around truth seeker. Blackman tries to look at things on a deeper level and whatever he finds, he tends to write about it with no sugar coating.

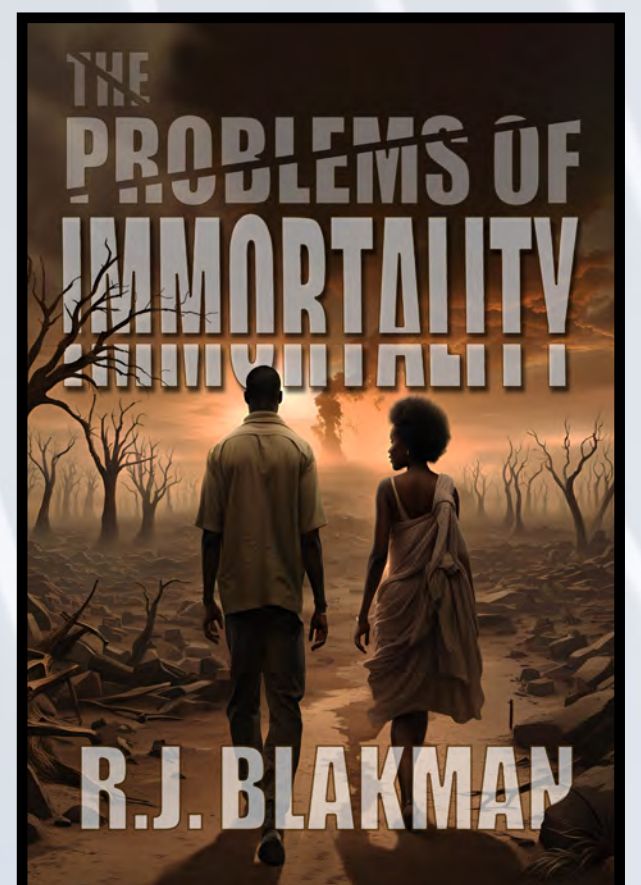
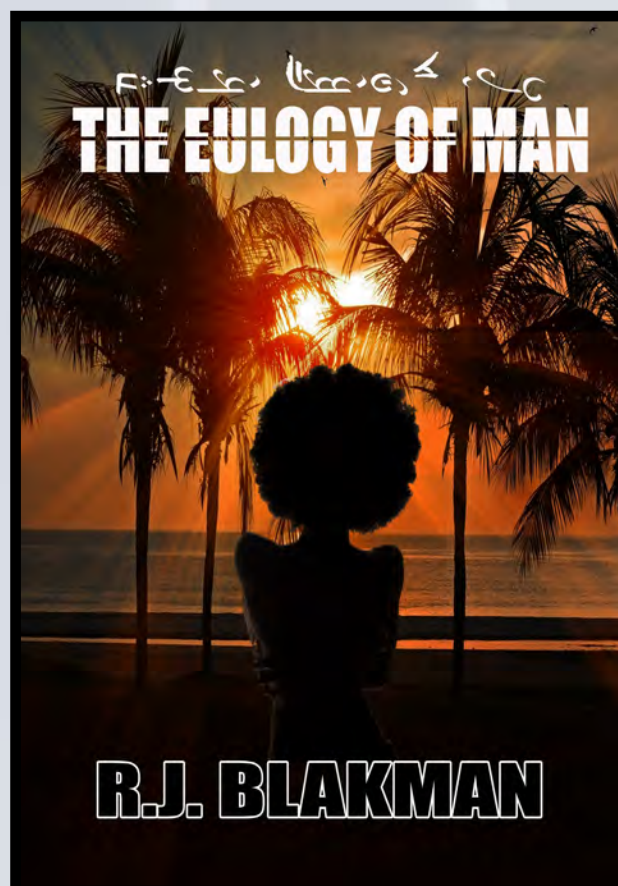
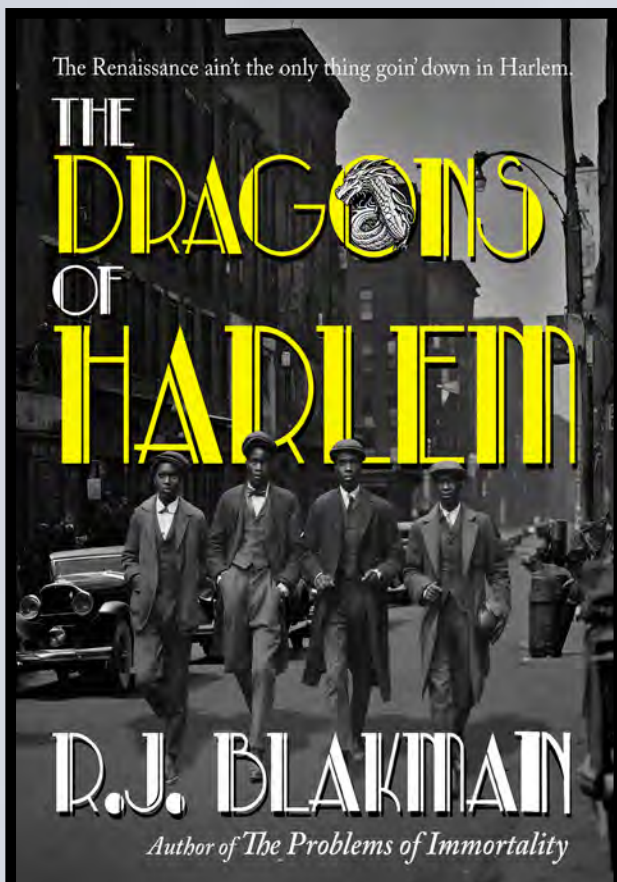
As a practice, Blakman seeks out truth and goes wherever that truth leads him, even if uncomfortable.

He tends to like working on more than one project at a time, so while he's hard at work on *RASULALLAH, OHIO* he is also working feverishly on his unique take on eternal life: *The Problems of Immortality*.

R.J. Blakman was born in Central America and had one sister. He currently lives in the place of his birth with his beautiful wife Maria. R.J. Blakman can be reached by email at: rjb@iyapoyapa.com



UPCOMING BOOKS BY R.J. BLAKMAN



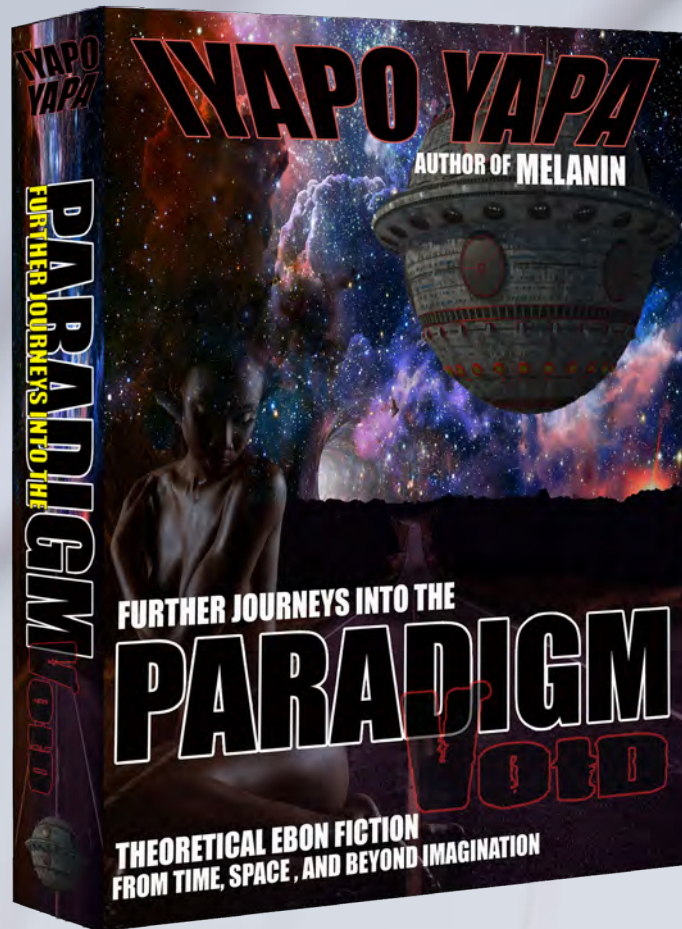
ENTERTAINING,
ENGROSSING,
THOUGHT PROVOKING!

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ARE YOU PREPARED TO JOURNEY BACK INTO THE VOID?!

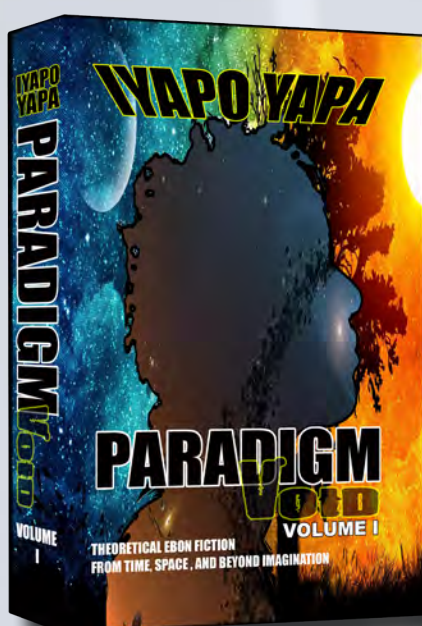


COMING SOON

The *Keepin' it a BUCK* series introduced readers to the *PARADIGM VOID*, a series of short stories in the genre of TEF: Theoretical Ebon Fiction, when everything is possible and anything can and does happen! Now it's time to journey back, and go even farther into the realm of the amazing, the unbelievable and the fantastic!

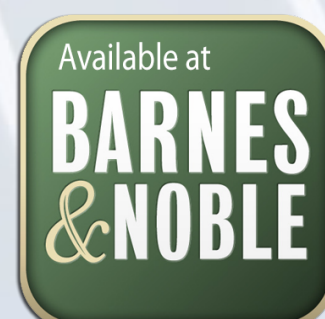
- What is life like for a person who is “unstuck” in time? One man gives his confessions.
- What if the universe, in an effort to balance itself started removing EVERYTHING that was of no use or value - to include some PEOPLE?!
 - Luxury isn't always what it seems, or is cracked up to be, as one newlywed couple learns first hand.
 - A comet is on a collision course with earth and there is no stopping it. One family decides to have one final family dinner together. And that's when the family secrets start coming out!

All this and MORE is coming to the new addition to the *Keepin' it a BUCK* series with, *Further Journey's into the PARADIGM VOID!*



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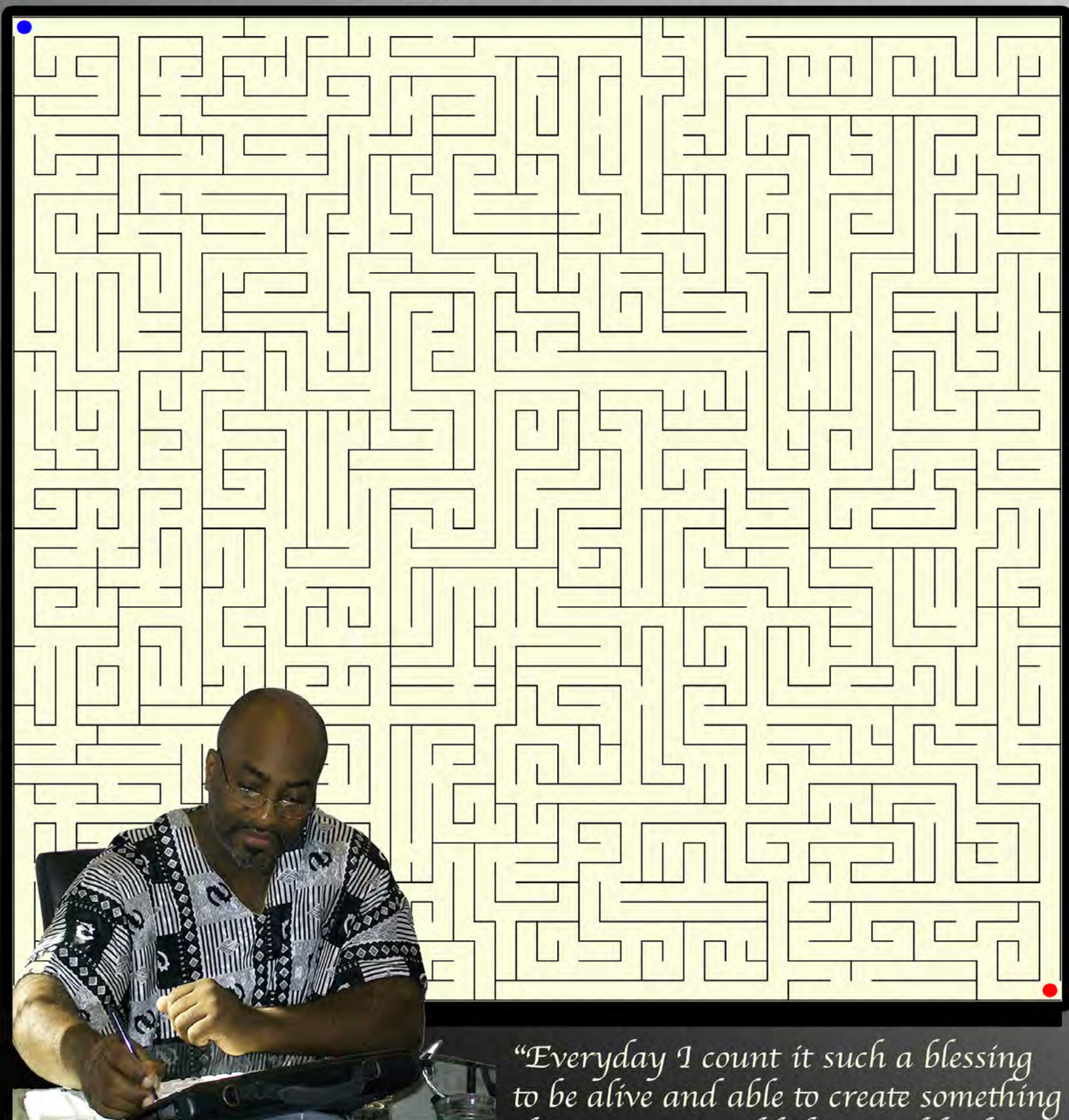
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Here is your July 2024 Maze!

Interesting how this is the LAST issue of the newsletter and the FIRST issue of the magazine at the same time isn't it? Well, when it comes to the puzzles, I've typically taken it pretty easy on everyone (or, relatively easy), but those days are over (sort of). This issue we're coming out the gate with a MAZE, but it isn't like the ones you could print out and give to the kiddies, this is a difficult one that should frustrate you, and hopefully give you enjoyment at the same time! As always, the solution to last month's puzzle is at the back of the magazine. HAVE FUN!

[CLICK ON THE IMAGE BELOW TO DOWNLOAD A PRINTABLE COPY OF THE PUZZLE!](#)

The July 2024 Maze!



“Everyday I count it such a blessing to be alive and able to create something that never existed before, and had I not created it... never would have been.”

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NOALN CASTE The Complete Prologue

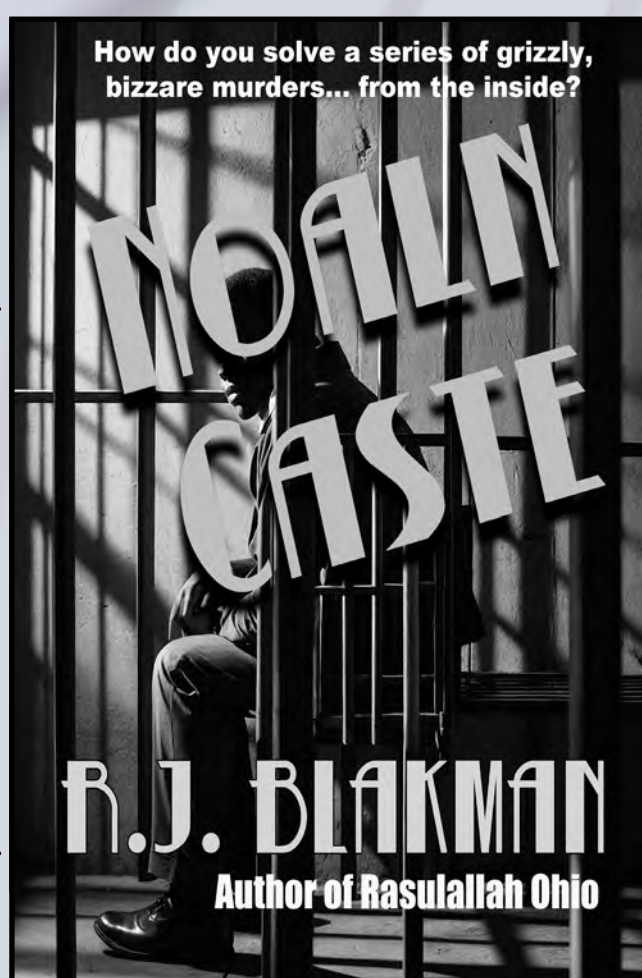
Noaln Caste held his clothes—his new clothes—clothes that had embroidered on them a number and not a name. There was also bedding. A white sheet and spread along with a cheap thin blanket that felt to be made of some kind of wool that Caste knew instinctively was going to irritate his deep brown skin and make him itch. On top of the folded cloth was a toothbrush, a tiny box containing powdered tooth paste which was a combination of baking soda and something else. He also received a bar of soap that was about the size of a bar in a cheap motel bathroom. The items he carried pushed against his naked body close to his midsection as he watched the bars slide lazily to the left. It was as if the steel bars were somehow bored and had long ago lost the excitement of welcoming new guests.

Been there. done that. Seen it already.

One of the prison guards, senior guard Kenneth Perkins, who had escorted Caste to his new digs, said nothing and merely raised his chin in the direction of the now open cell, motioning Caste to step inside. He walked in slowly and looked around—not that there was much to see.

The cell was sparse unsurprisingly and had an odor that was both unpleasant and unfamiliar. The space looked to be about sixty square feet by twenty-five to thirty square feet. According to American Correctional Association standards prison cells were to be a minimum of seventy square feet in single cell housing. At least 35 square feet of that space needed to be free of any fixtures or furnishings so the inmates could have at least some modicums of freedom of movement. Unfortunately, that

standard only applied to facilities accredited by that association. The ACA standard was not compulsory, so the owners and operators of Carlyle Prison, or what the inmates called, The Byrd House, neither cared to, nor sought to achieve that accreditation.



The cell looked sterile, but only in a pejorative way. It wasn't a clean type of sterility, as one would think of say, a hospital room. The sparseness and severe angles of the space created a claustrophobic feeling that went beyond the knowledge that there was no way out of it once the door closed. The walls were a dingy grey—a depressing, hopeless, melancholy, demoralizing grey. The lack of roundness within the room made it all the more depressing. It was as if the cells were designed in that way for

the express purpose of making the experience of being within it that much more miserable for its occupants. Against the far wall, next to the head (or foot) of the thinly matted bed, was a steel looking toilet (something he knew would take some getting used to, knowing that his bowel movements would no longer be private in sight, sound or odor) On the floor to the right of the toilet was a single roll of toilet paper. It wasn't new, and looked as if moisture from the floor may have soaked up into it, warping the paper, but having dried some time ago. In front of the toilet, a bare bone sink that looked as if it were made of the same steel that formed the toilet.

The barred door of the cell began to close behind Caste as slowly as it had opened. As it did, Caste put his uniforms and bedding on the top bunk.

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NOALN CASTE The Complete Prologue (continued)

He then turned to face the guards who were locking him away. The tall one was Robert O’Leary, the shorter of the two, but ranking officer was Perkins. O’Leary was an Irish Mick straight from central casting. He was tall and somewhat lanky but not gaunt, red haired, freckle faced and green eyed. He had a strong accent that made it difficult at times to know what he was saying. But even when not understanding, the cadence of his speech made anything he said, somehow interesting in the delivery. One would have no trouble whatsoever imagining this man drinking coffee with a wee bit of scotch or rum in it each morning before leaving for work.

Perkins was the senior of the two. The shorter of the two. He was stubby, but not pudgy and carried himself with all the airs of a man who had spent his childhood and young adult years being intimidated and getting his ass kicked by random boys and men.

And probably girls.

He was a crater faced little man who always looked as if he were squinting. His lips were virtually nonexistent and caused his mouth to be a straight line that looked as if it were drawn onto his face if he was standing in the right light. He was the kind of man who’s speech was typically filled with vulgarities, and the only time he wasn’t talking about “niggers” to degrade them, he was talking about sex. He was the kind of man who told at least a couple jokes a day during his shift, and would laugh along with his fellow guards.

Perkins had a full hearty laugh when he was

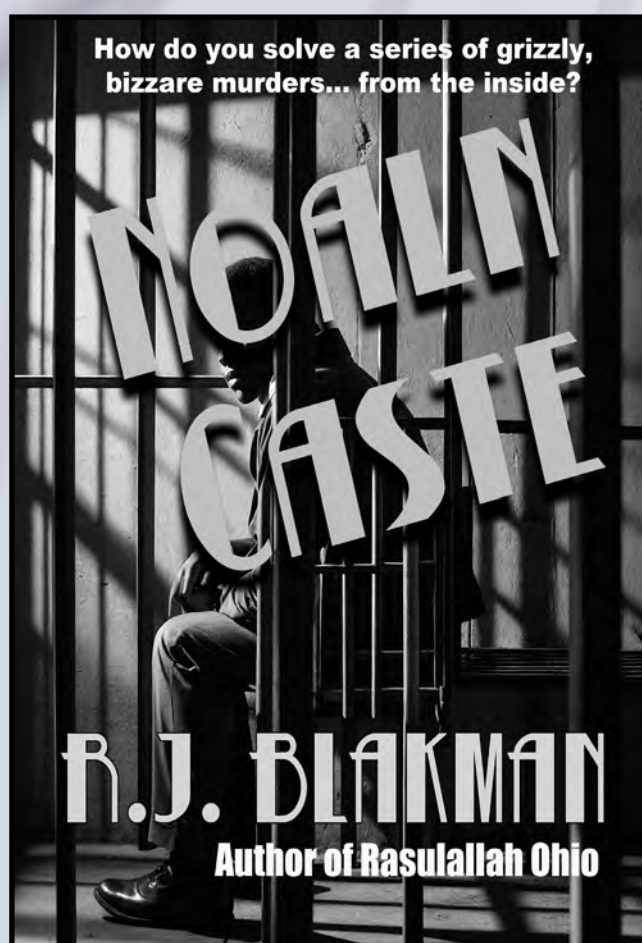
genuinely amused, but when he wasn’t, his laughter was hollow and joyless—even spiteful and cynical in a way. But to those who didn’t know him, they could scarcely tell the difference. He was married, or at least claimed to be. He wore a wedding ring, and there was no real reason to doubt his veracity on the claim, though no one—not even his colleagues—could say they’d ever met his wife. And among his friends at his workplace, even some of them would sometimes wonder just what kind of woman would be married to this man.

Perkins was an angry man, with an anger that came from deep within and radiated out from him. His resting expression was one where his nearly non-existent lips were always slightly agape and made him appear as if he were always about to

say something. For those who were students of body language—whether as a hobby, or as a course of study—it was all too apparent that Perkins had some deep-seated issues.

Not the least of which was fear.

Because of his fear and his small stature, Perkins of course determined years earlier that he would work his way into an occupation where he could take out every bit of his pinned-up frustrations, unresolved anger and present inability to adequately defend himself. He knew the only way to do that was to be part of a gang. But he was too afraid to attempt being part of anything belonging to the street, or a soldier within the structure of organized crime. There was too much of a chance that he could possibly find himself on his own and needing to fend for and/or defend himself alone.



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NOALN CASTE The Complete Prologue (continued)

Then there was always the chance that he could get caught and convicted and end up behind bars—a situation he knew would be untenable for him.

But there was one gang that would be ideal for him and his goals. They were widespread and had their own codes, and most of all he not only would have the power of his immediate “brothers” behind him, but he would also get a nice shiny badge, night stick and gun that had the authority of the state behind them, to be used at his dubious discretion.

He’d become a cop.

Oh, he would have to abide by rules of course, but these were rules, laws, rights etc. that were arbitrary at best. Especially when it came to darkies. Perkins gained that understanding from his experience of seeing the vaunted boys in blue and their application of the rules. He was young, but he was aware of what he was witnessing. The small man with the Napoleon complex knew he would basically have carte blanche once he earned his all-powerful shield. At long last, he would be well protected if he could become a member of this esteemed group.

Although Perkins knew himself to be a coward, (something he pushed deep down inside himself, and would never openly admit too), he worked past his feelings enough to complete the grueling eight weeks of police academy training.

That was his crucible.

He was afraid the entire time he trained, but he

refused to let it paralyze him. As far as Perkins was concerned, this was his one shot—his single opportunity to live his dream of making the lives of others a nightmare, as was done to him in his childhood. Ironically, he never seemed to take into account that those he most wanted to torment were of a different race than the people who actually made his life a living hell. When it came to exacting revenge, as he saw it, it was the niggers who were more worthy of his wrath than any white man or woman. Though no Black man had ever actually done anything to him or his.

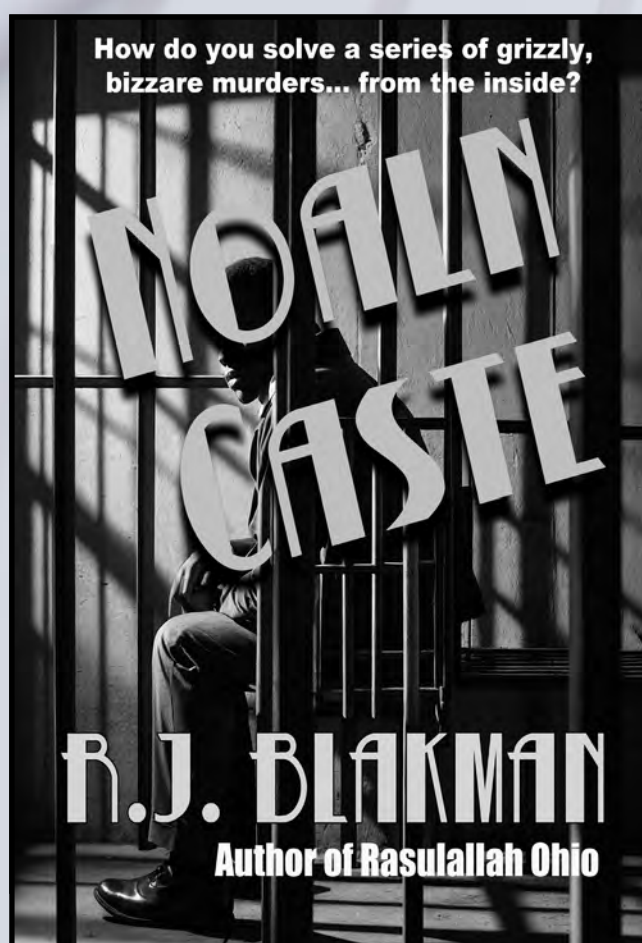
As to his knowledge of his cowardice, Perkins managed to suppress his overt spinelessness for the sake of finishing the academy. Knowing that after all was said and done, he would at long last be in the position of doling out pain and misery at will.

Along with the ability to gun down a few niggers with impunity if he was lucky.

Perkins graduated the police academy at the top of his class. He then became a beat cop for several years. Several years of terrorizing Black communities and having complaints filed that after the cops investigated themselves, they never found any wrongdoing on his part.

Perkins moved up the ranks quickly, due in no small part to the many busts and collars he racked up—many of which involved an accused Black man’s word against that of an upstanding, God fearing, faithful husband and decorated keeper of the peace.

There also always seemed to be a boatload of





NOALN CASTE The Complete Prologue (continued)

evidence that would mysteriously show up at crime scenes Perkins was investigating, when there was nothing initially.

In time, Perkins became a Sargent and road a desk for several years, then finally an opening came up at The Byrd House, and he knew it was time to grab the brass ring.

And the rest is history.

The cell door closed with a solid, but comically gentle clank. Perkins peered through the bars at the man who was now safely locked away inside. Through his perpetually squinted eyes, he stared at Caste as if the only reason he didn't throw away the key was because there was no key to throw.

"I don't care much ferniggers..." Perkins said jovially, "but I swear fo' almighty God. When I see one'a them spear chuckers behind a set o' bars, it jus' puts a smile on my face I caint wipe off."

His partner chuckled, "I know whatcha mean. But it ain't bein' about smilin' fer me. Seein' em like this makes me horny as hell. Makes me just wanna go home an' fook me old lady."

They both laughed as Caste walked over to the beds and sat down on the bottom bunk. He folded his hands and wrested his forearms on his thighs as he hunched over and looked at the cracking cement floor, noticing for the first time, small black pellets that could only be droppings from a mouse or a rat. For now, the bottom bunk was unoccupied, but Caste had little doubt it would remain that way for long.

"He looks lonely in there don't he?" O'Leary said.

"Yep. We're jus' gonna have ta find em' a playmate. What you think o' that boy!" Perkins said, seeking to get Caste's attention. Caste said nothing and continued looking at the floor as if nothing had been spoken. "Oh... you

onna them uppity niggers," Perkins continued. "we know who you are. You that so called private detective, used ta be a cop. Dropped outta the force cause you said you didn't like the way the coloreds was bein' treated in the streets and in the department. Well boy... you're ass took on the wrong case didn't ya. Now look at ya. In here behind a set o' steel bars, and you just like the rest o' these convicts in here... a piece o' shit!" So don't say nuthin'. Ain't no skin off my nose. But Shine, you best believe, this

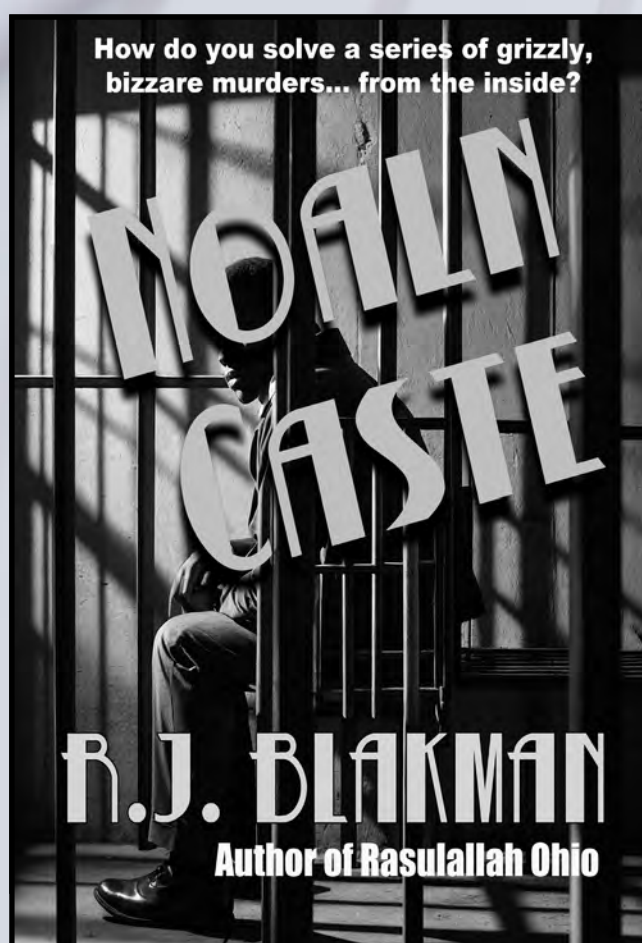
place got a way o' loosenin' up uppity nigger's mouths, an' makin' em open wide... if ya know what I mean."

Again both guards laughed. "Let's get the fuck outta here." Perkins said, "I got a card game and a ham sandwich I need ta get back to."

The guards turned and walked back down the corridor. They continued to talk and laugh, but Caste couldn't make out what they were saying as their voices faded in the distance.



Noaln Caste was a smart, streetwise army veteran, turned cop, turned private investigator until he was thrown in prison for a murder he didn't commit. Now an inmate at Cambridge Prison, one of the toughest prisons in the country, Caste finds himself having to solve brutal, bizarre, and unnatural murders as they happen within those walls, while he himself must fight to acclimate to his new environment and survive.



READING and WRITING in the

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Music to my ears: Did AI finally win me over?!

I'm not super old, but I'm old enough.

I'm not super old, but I'm old enough.

I'm old enough to remember when MIDI stood for "Musical Instrument Digital Interface". My first professional keyboard was a Casio CZ5000 synthesizer. I also had a Casio CZ1, a Suzuki keyboard (I can't remember the model of), a Korg drum computer (something in the TR series, but that's all I can remember), and a Casio SK_01 for sampling. Though the SK_01 was more of a toy, I was able to do some very interesting things with it.

That said, I watched digital and electronic music develop firsthand. Those were some very exciting times. I wrote my first songs using those keyboards, sampler, drum computer and a professional mixing board. It was a Tascam, but I can't remember the model. I was in Germany in the military during that time and was in a band called Force of Habit. We made some pretty good music and we each did solo stuff. When it was time to leave, my things were packed away by the military and shipped back to the U.S. Long story short, ALL my instruments and studio equipment ,I

painstakingly (monetarily) sacrificed to get, were stolen. Likely none of it even made it out the country.

I kept doing music as a hobby, but at some point, I stopped keeping up with the trends and the tech. So, imagine my surprise when I found out that you could take your lyrics, put them into an online app, and it would turn your lyrics into a song in the style you wanted, sung by your choice of a woman or man. I was very skeptical when I first tried it, but after I put in that first set of lyrics and heard the results, I was HOOKED! This particular AI platform is something I wasn't expecting at all. I typically push back against too much AI, though I have come around to seeing it as just another tool if used correctly. But this was absolutely MIND BLOWING! The knowledge that now I can dig out some of my old lyrics that I struggled with putting to music and having sung (because I can't sing!), is awesome to me.

Again. I'm not a big fan of AI, but I'm definitely a big fan of THIS. I write all the lyrics, NO assistance from AI and the AI sings EXACTLY what I write. A few times I had to go back and correct typos because as I said, the AI

sings EXACTLY what I write. To that end, I don't feel like I'm cheating like I would if I were using it to make art. (I NEVER claim AI art as something I "created", and I never EVER use AI to help me write. I don't know if I ever could. That would take all the joy out of it for me.)

But this?

To me it is tantamount to handing a composer and singer my lyrics and saying to them, "Can you write some music for this and sing it?" So, I take full credit for the lyrics. The AI gets the rest.

If you would like to hear some of my songs you can find them on TikTok and Instagram. There is, "Force Of Habit" and "No Matter Who I'm With," also a video for *And What of the CARGO?* that features "Kylah's Theme", with my words and lyrics.



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- What if the universe itself started taking measures to correct and bring balance to itself in terms of justice?
- What if time slowed down nearly to a stop ... but only for YOU?

These possibilities and more are examined in "PARADIGM VOID" a collection of ten short stories in the genre of **THEORETICAL EBON FICTION**.

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It began during the transatlantic slave trade... but it ends NOW!
AND WHAT OF THE CARGO? is a tale of love and hate, tears and triumph, suspense and horror that leads to an unimaginable conclusion.
And What of the CARGO?

An anthology of short stories in the realm of Theoretical Ehon Fiction from time, space and suspense beyond imagination.
STEP INTO THE MIND
PARADIGM

READING and WRITING in the

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BOOK REVIEW

Bloodline I & II (Samson & Delilah & Mail Ordeer Bride) By Y. Stokes

Sara Rubin, the owner of a seedy nightclub, has secrets that could turn the world upside down. With one foot in the underbelly of Philadelphia; and the other walking among the city's elites, an unforeseen event forces her out into the open. Max Clark, the anchor of Brynner News, is there to witness the whole event.

That's how author Y Stokes begins her rollercoaster ride of a tale about love, hate, betrayal, and power (in some unexpected forms). *Bloodline Book 1: Samson and Delilah* deals with secrets, both ancient and present day, along with jealousy on personal and professional levels. Each person we meet has their own motivations for the things they desire, and the singular focal point of it all is one Sara Rubin, who outwardly, seems to be a typical strong and successful businesswoman, but who conceals a most unusual secret.

All the characters find themselves unwittingly on a collision course that in the end, will leave them all changed. In *Bloodline Book 2: Mail Order Bride*, we are drawn further into the world of the scandal ridden Mayor Bradford (whom we met briefly in *Bloodline Book 1*). Like many mayors, Bradford has his eyes set on the governorship of Philadelphia. Before he can do that however, he must once again secure his position as mayor. One of the biggest problems Bradford faces is that he's caught in a loveless marriage, and through various turns of events, finds himself going to extreme measures to not only find his own form of happiness, but to enable himself to keep up appearances before the public as he continues his bid to remain in the mayor's seat. Bradford enlists the help of his friend and confidant Max Clark, and secures the aid of a reluctant Sara Rubin, who while assisting the mayor to the best of their abilities, simultaneously navigate their own increasingly complicated relationship.

The Bloodline series is a well written, intriguing, genre bending exploration of the world of power, politics, personalities—and prophecy. As you read (or listen) to this fantastic series, expect to be drawn in by the many layers of characterization, conflicts, mysteries, twists & turns. I would highly recommend this series (and any of the other works of Y Stokes), to any fan of intriguing stories with fresh concepts and relatable story telling.



The Bloodline series is available from YS Books and can be read or listened to as audio dramas. The audio dramas are spoken of course, but also include sound effects for emphasis as well as music tracks created by none other than Y Stokes (a violinist herself, who plays on one of my favorite tracks).

For the small price of two dollars, you are granted access to the Bloodline Book Series as well as other fantastic stories by Y Stokes. You can find her at:

ysbooks

@ysbooks1

<https://buymeacoffee.com/ysbooks>

and

buymeacoffee.com/ysbooks

or by clicking on the image of Y Stokes for her main [buymeacoffee](https://buymeacoffee.com/ysbooks) site, or the Bloodline image to be taken directly to the Bloodline series itself.

Bloodline Book 3 is coming soon!

About the AUTHOR

In her own words.



Y Stokes

Click the image above to visit Brandon Massey's website.

I wrote short stories as a pre-teen. It was something I'd like to do during my free time. Then life happened. I grew up, had to get a job. Before I knew it, I was a mom. The passion I had for storytelling slowly faded into the background of my life.

From 1995 through 2016 I owned and operated an IT company. My left brain was in heavy rotation for over 20 years while my right brain slept. I call that my hustle phase. But I quickly hit a wall. Working as an IT professional was what I did for money. It paid the bills, fed my child, and brought me a few things in the want category. But all things must come to an end.

I looked up in my early forties to an empty nest. The drive to hustle was almost unrecognizable. Then something strange happened. My right brain woke up and took over my dreams. I secretly wanted to write again, but I still had bills to pay, so a lifestyle change was a must.

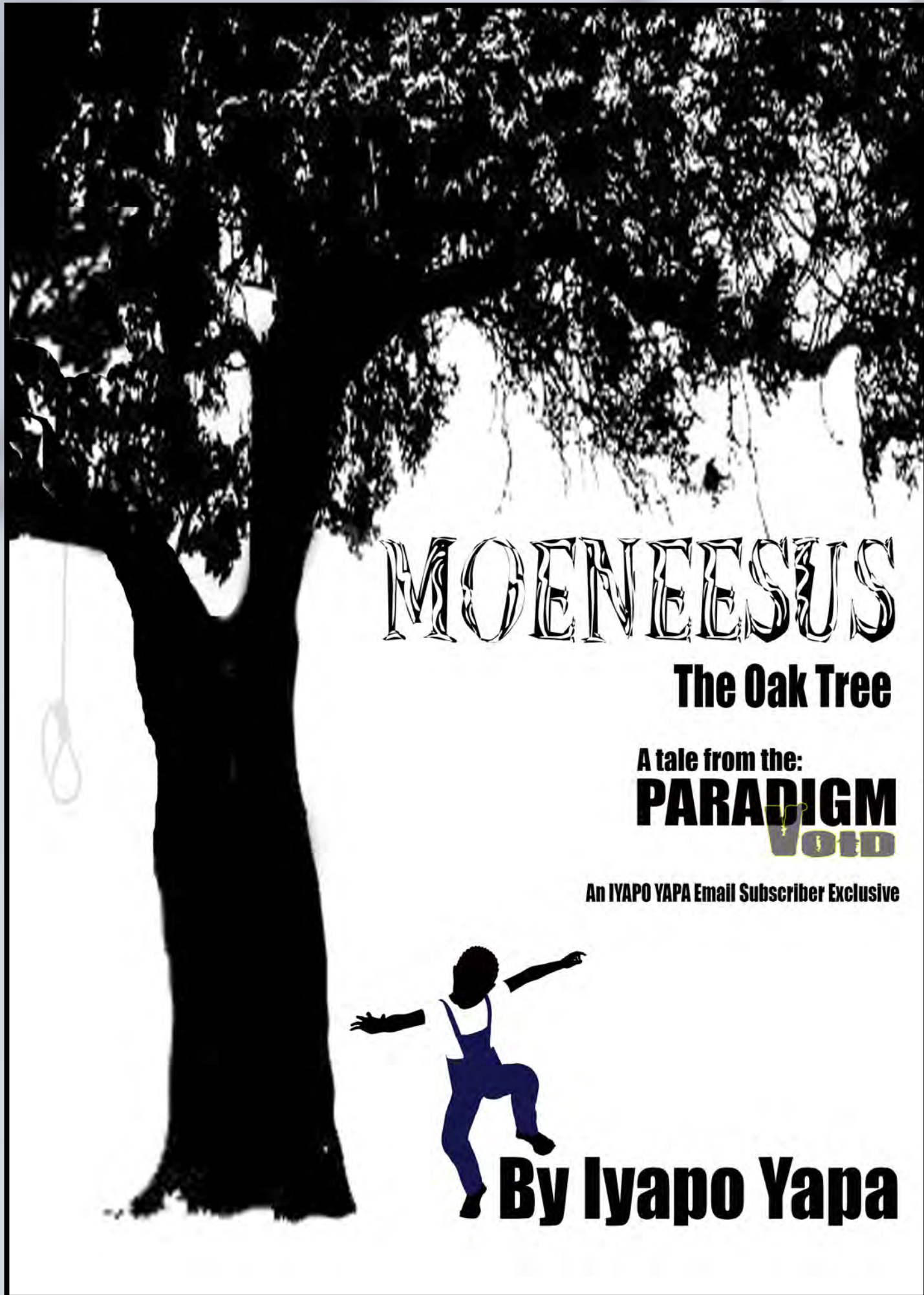
I flipped my life upside down and downsized. First, I sold the business. Then I sold my four-bedroom home and replaced it with a two-bedroom, off-grid trailer. The property sits on 1 acre of land, and I couldn't be happier. Gone are the days of water, gas, cable television, and sewage bills. I'm currently working on a solar setup, and then the electric bill will be gone too. Retiring at 45, I know, is unheard of; but I did it.

My stress levels decreased, and once again, during my free time, writing took over. I published the first book of the bloodline series at the end of 2016. And I haven't looked back. There are four books in the bloodline series, available for purchase today.

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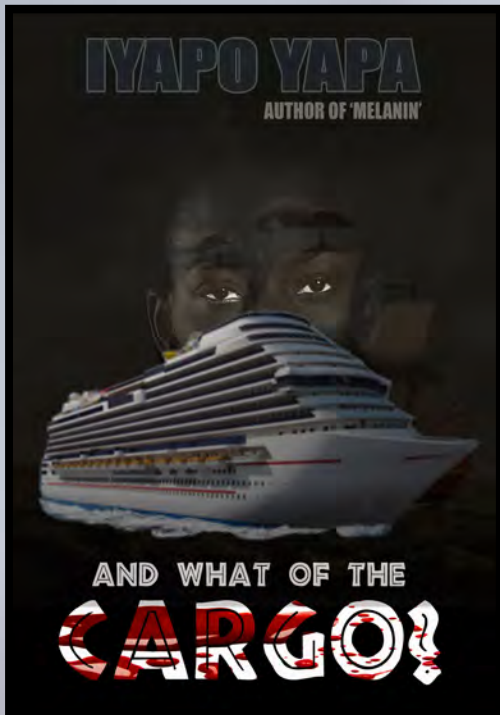


If you are a **READING AND WRITING IN THE DARK** subscriber and haven't read your free copy of **MOENEESUS THE OAK TREE**, what are you waiting for?! Relax and take some time to read a great story from the the **Paradigm VOID**! It may make you smile, it may make you cry, but either way, you are going to enjoy it.

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AVAILABLE NOW!

And What of the CARGO?

Buy it now on Amazon

“Kylah Mbaye of the Zahnoka people, lay as silently and still as she could, halfheartedly petitioning the ancestors that at least for one night she would not be spirited away and taken above deck to endure yet another in a procession of endless rapes. Another woman would have long ago given in to despair--but Kylah--in the face of such crushing odds against her and her people within the bowels of this floating nightmare, knew that eventually, this voyage would not end well... for her captors.” And so it began. AND WHAT OF THE CARGO? is a tale of love and hate, tears and triumph, suspense and horror that leads to an unimaginable conclusion.

“The Atlantic crossing, or “Middle Passage,” as it was called by European slavers, was notorious for the number of deaths incurred, averaging in the vicinity of 15-20%”

— Walter Rodney. How Europe Underdeveloped Africa

Much is rightly said and written about the enslavement and fates of Afrikans who were kidnapped from their homeland and transported to the Americas and other lands along the Middle Passage. Absent however is an expanded examination of the fate of those who did not make it through the journey. Whether victims of an inability to survive the unimaginable environment in which they were forced to occupy, or due to murders while attempting to revolt, or by simply jumping overboard, choosing death as a better alternative to chattel enslavement.

What of those ancestors in the depths of the oceans, and what of their souls and spirits. Or to put it bluntly—what of the CARGO?

What are readers saying about And What of the CARGO?

“This story is an exceptional horror tale of what happens when displaced restless souls whose spirits sought to exact restitution from those who prospered from their demise are ignored. The reunion and collaboration between the historical and modern families to bring about justice for their stolen legacy was gripping.”

- Amazon Review

“Mr. Yapa is one of the most imaginative writers out there. He handles controversial subject matter with grace and maturity. He offers powerful insight on one of the most important topics of our era: the Atlantic slave trade and modern-day racism. In this story there is retribution for evils - past and present. There is blood, dismemberment, horror, anger, rage, justice, hate, love, passion, politics, wealth, and finally reconciliation and peace. What a journey. I Loved it. And yes, it did scare me - It scared me a lot!”

- Gwen

“Yapa weaves another story this time interwoven with historical references. I was on my seat with every chapter. I don't want to give it away but....revenge is sweet when served dead. And I can't get over how different each of his offerings are. Read his Vella's and you'll see what I mean. Another great book by Iyapo Yapa. A must read!”

- Amazon review

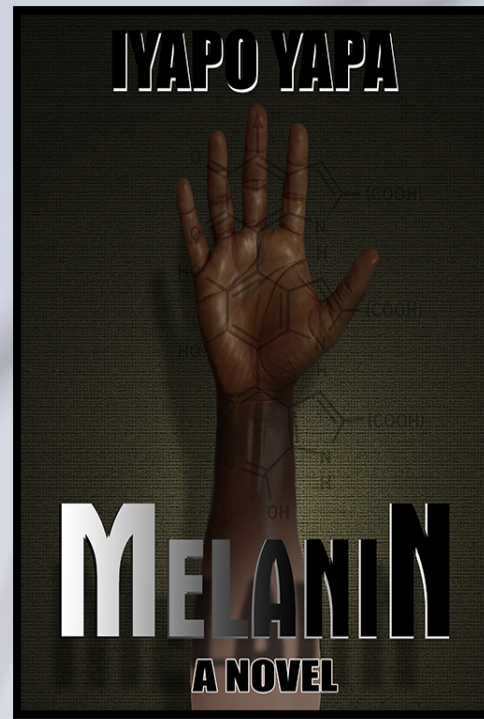
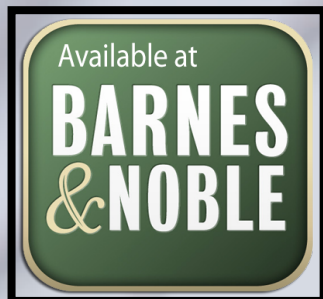
You can also read it for FREE if you have

Kindle Unlimited!

You don't need a Kindle to read it, you can download the free Kindle app from your Android Store or from the Apple Store and read Kindle content on your favorite devices!

Click Below For:

And What of the CARGO?



AVAILABLE NOW!

MELANIN: A NOVEL

Buy it now on Amazon

Due to a series of man-made radiological catastrophes, the non-Black population of the planet becomes susceptible to a highly virulent form of melanoma and has to choose between becoming Black (phenotypically and genetically), or almost certain death.

MELANIN: A NOVEL examines a world where Black people are realizing they are once again truly free. What does it mean for Black people to be back in their rightful place, after centuries of subjugation, marginalization and terror? What does it mean for Black people to no longer be under the boot of a system put (and kept) in place to use and keep using them?

Conversely, what happens to those who have only known control and dominance for centuries as the tide is turning? How do they react to the knowledge that they are powerless to stop the turning tide as the field becomes genuinely level, and the system of white supremacy utterly collapses around them?

On top of that, is a threat to the world at large that is so horrifying no one could have imagined it!

goodreads

What are readers saying about MELANIN: A NOVEL?

“Melanin is an uncompromising and timely tale of speculative fiction, brimming with thought-provoking ideas and imaginative twists.”

- Brandon Massey, award-winning author of *The Quiet Ones* and *Dark Corner*

“Iyapo Yapa has earned a place among the great science fiction writers with Melanin. The plot twists will keep you reading long after midnight. As well the imagery is captivating. Replicating the Black experience, you are drawn into the story as if you are there.”

- T.J. Riley, author of *The Path to Brightness*

“The whole world needs to read this book!”

- M.A.D.M. Precious, author of *Michelle's Story* and *Loving Betrayal*

“Every Black person needs to read this book!”

- Gwen B

“It was exciting! I stayed up a few nights wanting to see what was coming!”

- Ayoka B.

You can also read it for FREE if you have

Kindle Unlimited!

You don't need a Kindle to read it, you can download the free Kindle app from your Android Store or from the Apple Store and read Kindle content on your favorite devices!

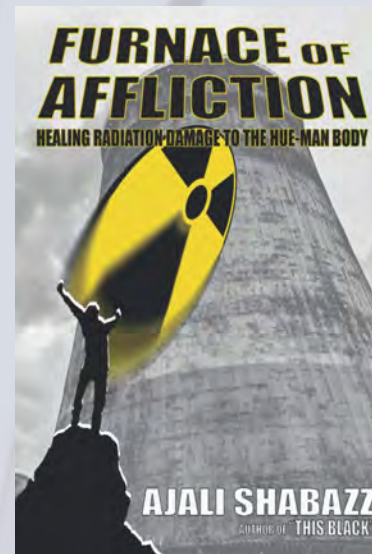
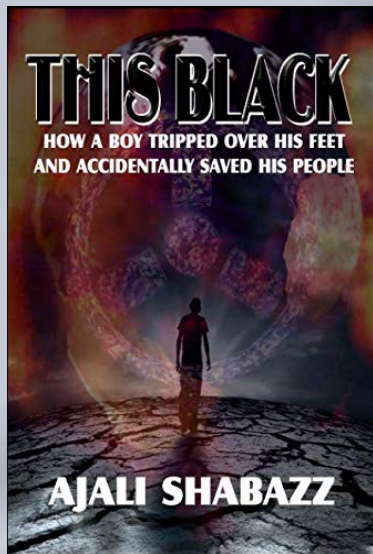
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Books by:

AJALI SHABAZZ



Author of: *This Black - This Black NATION* and *Furnace of Affliction!*
The Reading and Writing in the DARK Podcast Interview!

You don't want to miss this discussion with this new POWERFUL voice in
PRO BLACK FICTION in the genre of Theoretical Ebon Fiction, and Non Fiction!

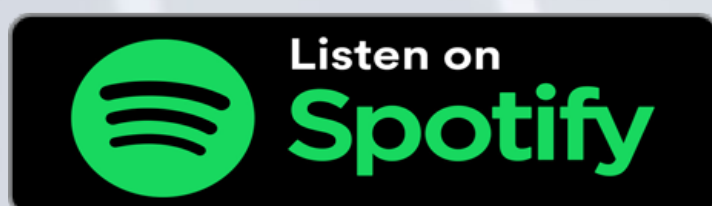
Listen to the interview on  by clicking the link below:

<https://www.spreaker.com/show/a-conversation-with-author-ajali-shabazz>



Did you know there is also a READING and WRITING in the DARK PODCAST?! Well there IS and you can tune in to it and listen just by clicking the block to the right.

You can also hear the READING and WRITING in the DARK podcast on:



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To We Idolize HOARDERS?

From IYAPO'S BLOG Wednesday May 29, 2024

Comedian Katt Williams, who I personally find to be challenging, (See my Blog Post: What Makes the Katt Williams Interview Problematic Wed. Jan 31, 2024 and the February 2024 issue of the Reading and Writing in the DARK Newsletter), but then, who ISN'T? Including myself), has said many times that the year 2024 was going to be the year when all lies would be revealed.

Corporations, governments, industries, and individuals seem hell bent on turning the man into a prophet. One of the most interesting features of these exposures and implosions is the fact that the majority (if not all), of these entities are exposing themselves!



I have been saying for years, though I readily admit that what I'm about to write is not a new thought, nor am I even one of the first people to say it, that some people have become so profoundly blinded by their own greed (whether for money, power, or something else), that they lose all control of themselves and objectivity. They become so focused on what it is they want or are trying to keep or maintain that in the end, how they keep or maintain it is no longer part of the equation for them (if it ever was). Lying, stealing, cheating, dishonesty, chicanery and the like become basically "the price of doing business" to them. It appears that with many, once someone has gotten what it was that they were always grasping for, then eventually they become addicted to it.

In terms of addiction, we look at the meth addict, or the sex addict, alcoholic or even smoker, and aside from how we may personally feel about their particular vice, on some level, we can understand it. When a person is caught within the web of an addiction the consequences of it are made

manifest. Whether those consequences are the decimation of their family, the loss of personal integrity, financial problems, deterioration and/or loss of material possessions or what have you.

But what about addictions that may not be as easy to detect?

My wife and I have watched many episodes of the television show Hoarders.

I would submit that individuals like Jeff Bezos, Mark Zuckerberg, Bill Gates, and their ilk, are all hoarders and caught up in an addiction. The same is true for many politicians.

Here I feel it is important to define terms.

What is a "hoarder"?

According to the Mayo Clinic:

Hoarding disorder is an ongoing difficulty throwing away or parting with possessions because you believe that you need to save them. You may experience distress at the thought of getting rid of the items. You gradually keep or gather a huge number of items, regardless of their actual value.

Hoarding often creates extremely cramped living conditions with only narrow pathways winding through stacks of clutter. Countertops, sinks, stoves, desks, stairways and all other surfaces are usually piled with stuff. You may not be able to use some areas for their intended purpose. For example, you may not be able to cook in the kitchen. When there's no more room inside your home, the clutter may spread to the garage, vehicles, yard, and other storage areas.

Hoarding ranges from mild to severe. In some cases, hoarding may not have much impact on your life,



To We Idolize HOARDERS? (Continued)

From IYAPO'S BLOG Wednesday May 29, 2024

while in other cases it seriously affects your daily functioning.

People with hoarding disorder may not see it as a problem, so getting them to take part in treatment can be challenging. But intensive treatment can help you understand how your beliefs and behaviors can be changed so that you can live a safer, more enjoyable life.

As we watch the hoarder live in filth and clutter, with vermin and roaches, would anyone in their right mind ask their advice about ANYTHING, let alone look at them with admiration?!

It appears, by this definition that hoarding, or the mentality of it, is the problem more than the actual psychology behind it. I don't fully agree with the author(s) of the article who focus on the consequences of hoarding in relationship to the availability of physical space. If that's the case, the question becomes, if one of these hoarders were given, say, twenty mansion sized houses, on two hundred acres of property on and in which to keep their things, would that mean they were no longer a hoarder?

Of course not. They'd still be a hoarder because they would still have the mentality of a hoarder.

I propose that hoarding is indeed a psychological dysfunction. However, it has little to nothing to do with physical space as much as it does a form of greed or need to be comforted by the possession of material items, or the feeling of a need to possess things and/or control something.

The reason we don't recognize the hoards or psychological dysfunction of the Jeff Bezos' or Elon Musk's as well as other billionaires and multi-millionaires is because their hoards take the form of luxury yachts, private planes, walk in closets that look like department stores, and opulent

mansions in several locations domestically and abroad, garages filled with various. Admittedly, there are legitimate collectors of assorted items who would not fall into the category of being hoarders, but at times, the line can be razor thin.

To the eye of the average person, all that opulence isn't perceived as a hoard. However, let's examine the mentality for a moment. Many families have two cars—three at the most. Typically, it is for practical purposes, since in today's world both people will need transportation to and from work and to take care of children if they have them, and so on. But what about someone who is alone, or even married, but has several cars? We're talking about a person of means who,

if they had zero cars, they'd have full and ready access to any mode of transportation they need, without any hassle or constraints. Why or why, then, do they have several mansions, with no less than five automobiles at each location?

Oh, but that's not a hoard.

The properties and items these wealthy people have is new and kept in good repair. It isn't an eye sore, broken down, useless and smelly.

Ok, let's take away from Michael Forbes, all his maintenance people, landscapers, hired servants, repair people etc. Then take everything he physically owns and put it into one of his mansions.

What is it now?

It is a hoard that is no longer able to be hidden behind opulence.

The mentality of hoarding isn't what concerns me as much as it is the mentality of those who are ready to criticize those who are hoarders on the bottom rungs of society but are unable to see it as they are blinded by the opulence of wealthy





To We Idolize HOARDERS?

From IYAPO'S BLOG Wednesday May 29, 2024

hoarders who are able to hide their addiction. One of the most devastating things about these rich hoarders is that part of their hoard consists also of human beings. This is one of the reasons they seek power and control of everything. They are not satisfied with all the things they own; all the money they have in the bank and their ability to do virtually anything they want at any time they want to do it. They want to mold societies and control people.

To turn people into something they own.

Now they are revealing themselves as the empty, inferiority complex ridden, vapid, hedonistic, self-centered, cynical people they are.

It is their money and hoards that they use to hide behind, but in every area, the cracks are beginning to show. As these individuals reveal themselves in a way that there is no longer any doubt about who they truly are. I am finding it important that we see clearly, them and their disfunctions. In doing so, it may help us take an honest look at ourselves to see that perhaps it is

problematic that we don't criticize the one and ten percenters, even as we attack and demean a person who is homeless and lacking the power to directly affect our lives one way or another.

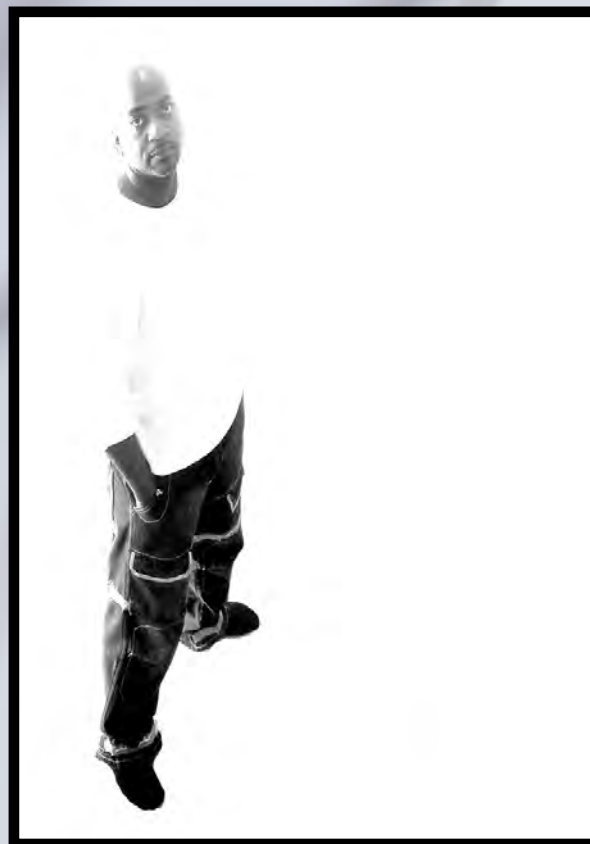
At the same time, we have little or no interest in pushing back against the wealthy or powerful for their tyranny and megalomania. Is it possible that the reasons we behave the way we do is because somewhere, deep down inside, as we look at the limos, clothes, jets, mansions and even in some cases, the spouses of the rich and powerful, we secretly aspire to BE them and thus, are reluctant to critique them?

They are not people to look up to just because their hoards may look appealing. The mentality is

the same as those living in filth who don't have the means and space to disguise it.

The best things in life are free. Cliché but true.

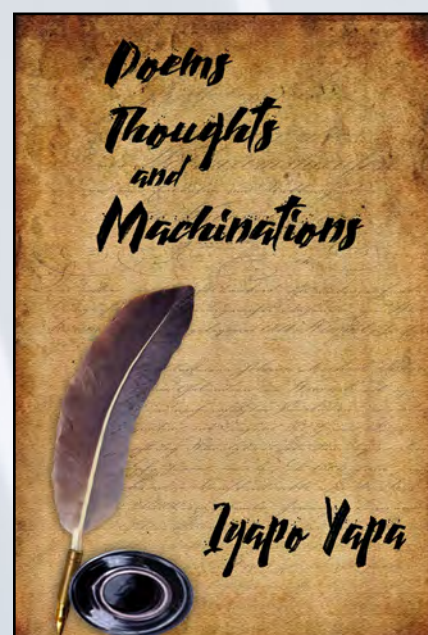
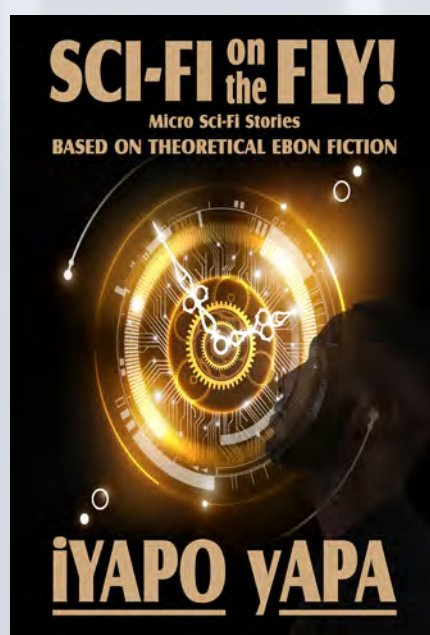
And as soon as we stop looking up to and worshiping these hoarders, the better off we'll be and able to see clearly the things that actually are important, like Yah, family, friends and our community.



[CLICK THE LOGO ABOVE TO VISIT MY BLOG](#)

Flash fiction is a genre of fiction, defined as a very short story. While there is no set word count that separates flash fiction from more traditional short stories, flash fiction stories can be as short as a few words (while short stories typically run for several pages). Flash fiction is also known as sudden fiction, short-short stories, micro-fiction, or micro-stories.

Got a few minutes or a good story? That's all you'll need.



The title says it all.

Sometimes I think all people wax poetic whether they write it down or not. For the most part I think everyone has times of reflection and seeking deeper meaning in things.

Here is where I write it down in verse and many times without traditional structure.

Always seeking.

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Could YOU survive?!

Five years ago, a cataclysm now known as THE COLLAPSE occurred. Dimensions merged with horrific results. It is now common to see creatures of myth, legend, and nightmare along with once long extinct animals populating the landscape. Carl, LaTanya and Lester, embark on a quest to find a lost book that can't change the madness of the new normal but may assist them and others in the now nearly impossible task of:

SURVIVING the WORST!

Click the image below to enter a world of action, adventure, science and horror on Kindle



Top reviews from the United States

Amazon Customer

★★★★★ **Cornucopia of Action, Sci-fi, Mystery, Horror and Heart palpatng suspense.**

Reviewed in the United States on November 5, 2022

I love the pace of Iyapo's stories. He is a true master story weaver. This story is a cornucopia full of action, sci-fi, mystery, horror and heart palpatng suspense. The way he transitions between dramatic and comical situations are remarkable. After the daring trio's exhausting battle with vampires, out manoeuvring alans and harpes, they make it home to a well deserved rest within the sanctuary of Hevan only to be disrupted by the the Versquake. How much WORSE can it get living in a unmanageable and unpredictable dimension?

Amazon Customer

★★★★★ **Best Zombies Ever**

Reviewed in the United States on November 1, 2022

Amazon took down my review of Melanin, so I hope this stays. This is not your ordinary Zombie tale. I haven't read such inventive horror in years. Yapa really knows how to weave a story to pull you in. I had to laugh at how much fun I was having while reading it. I would recommend this author in a heart beat because all of his writings are so good.

kindle vella

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ANIMATION & RELAXATION

Throughout my life I've learned to do a lot of things. Most of them have to do with something "artsy", like drawing, writing, playing music (including piano, guitar and my favorite, the harmonica). I also taught myself to build computers as well as use various kinds of software. I taught myself to juggle and to do tricks on a skateboard.

(Skateboarding is one of the things I PROFOUNDLY miss being able to do now that I'm older. My mind is willing, but body has a different plan.) I'm not bragging, personally, I don't feel that I do anything more than ANY other Black person can do, because that's just the way we are. And I mean that with all my heart.



or play any music, but I realized there was something I hadn't done in decades and would serve as a perfect distraction and means of relaxation.

ANIMATING!

Animating a cartoon (the old-fashioned way, by sitting down and DRAWING the darn thing), is tedious and time consuming—but for someone who likes to draw, it can be very relaxing if it is done just for the love of doing it. Some people knit and end up with a garment, I'm going to draw and end up with a cartoon. I'm very excited

What I AM saying is that I can't stand being bored, and typically all those things kept me from becoming bored. Now, as I do the things I do, I still find them very rewarding, but I don't necessarily find them relaxing. One day I was working on my writing and wanted to take a break. (A "break" meaning, perhaps a day or two away from it.) I didn't necessarily want to write

by the prospect and am looking forward to working on it little by little until I'm done. I'll keep you posted on the progress. In the meantime, you can click the image to see the opening reel. (Lil' Man is more of a place holder for timing. I'm not sure if the result is going to be a Lil' Man cartoon) but whatever it turns out to be, I anticipate the fun and relaxation of producing it!



Be sure to take some time to visit my website at:

<https://www.iyapoyapa.com> - or just click the image to the right!

There are a LOT of things to see and interact with! There are also a couple special surprises hidden in the site. They aren't marked, but if you take a little time to search for them, you'll defiantly be pleasantly surprised!



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So, who knew I was a cartoonist before I became a writer?

Take a minute to check out some of my work online at:

<https://iyapoyapa.com/cartoonist-illustrator.html>

or just click the image below and it will take you straight there!



Everybody needs a hobby!

Mine is playing and composing MUSIC!

For me, playing and composing is one of the most relaxing and fulfilling things I do with my spare time (when I HAVE

some spare time). You're welcome to check out some of

my songs at: <https://iyapoyapa.com/music.html> or

you know the deal... just click the link below. ENJOY!



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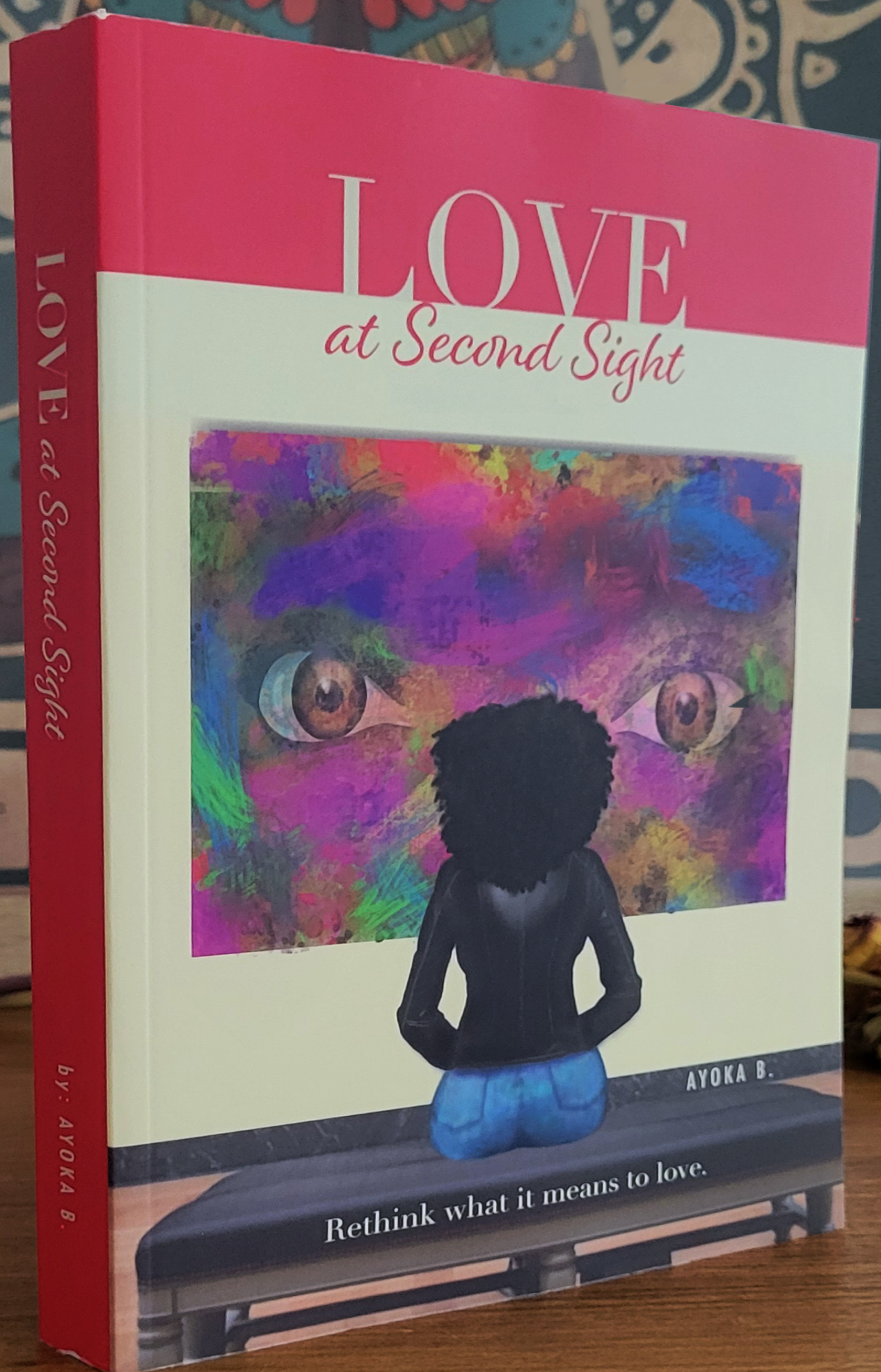
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LOVE AT SECOND SIGHT IS AVAILABLE NOW!

Shane's life is full... of poetry, motherhood, and friends. She is a Single Mom who is pensive, passionate, and generous and loves her family. Ambitious and hard-working, Shane is trying to carve her path. Enter Mike. He is talented, complicated, and guarded. Their undeniable connection changes their hearts and lives. A beautiful and layered story of artistry and love, this novel spans generations. Love At Second Sight will make you laugh, cry, and cheer and inspire you to rethink what it means to love.

This unputdownable book showcases descriptive prose that makes you reflect on your own relationships.



CLICK ON THE BOOK ABOVE TO VISIT AYOKA'S LINKTREE!



Alright, enough about ME!

Below are AWESOME stories on the KINDLE VELLA platform by some authors I know!

Just click the cover art to be transported to their stories!

And remember, the first THREE episodes are FREE to read!



I DeClaire Love

Angela Riley

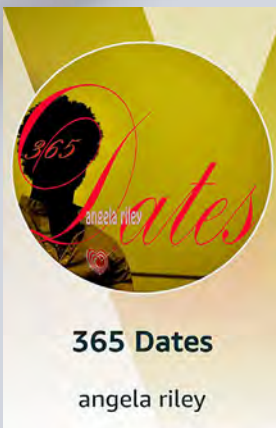
DeClaire and Tyrone meet and sparks fly. They fall in love with each other quick, fast, and in a hurry. It seems to good to be true. But is it? Is it safe to love? Are there any “good” rules when it comes to love? Do we have to fight for love? Are there always games being played when it comes to love? Is simple, sane, “old-fashioned” love out of style? CAN LOVE SET US FREE? *** New Episodes Weekly!



The Love X TamuTamu Agency

Angela Riley

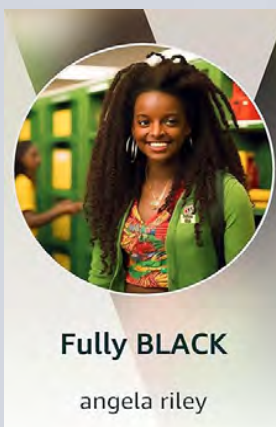
Love is natural but it ain't always easy. And Mama Tamu should know! She is a 91 year old match maker who has run “The Love X TamuTamu Agency” for FIFTY years. She has personally experienced and been a witness to all kinds of love. And, as she says, “Love is more than a notion!” Follow along as she stands up for and works to support and encourage the natural flow of Black Love.



365 Dates

Angela Riley

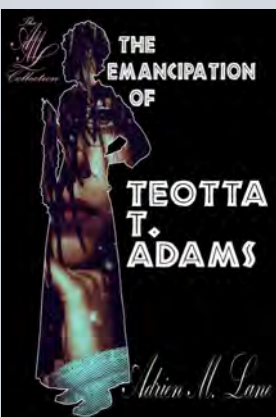
Single again, after my first divorce, one day I had a new thought: I WANT TO DATE. And... NOTHING. No one came knocking on my door to woo me. No one approached me when I was out wanting to court me. Nobody asked friends/family to be set up with me. Just crickets! So, thinking that maybe my goal was to vague--I want to date.--to make anything happen, I decided to pursue a HUGE goal of going on 365 dates. Not 3, 5, or 6 dates but three HUNDRED and SIXTY-FIVE dates. So...LET'S GO!



Fully BLACK

Angela Riley

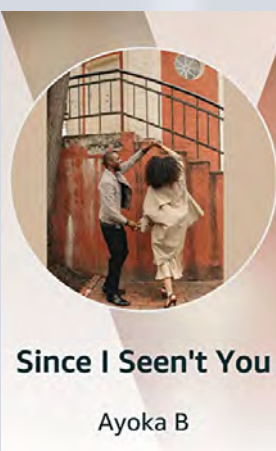
Because she is IN LOVE, talented dancer and homeschooled student Makena enrolls in the elite Fullson High to be closer to Marshall.



The Emancipation of Teotta T. Adams

Adrien M. Lane

Teotta T. Adams has it all, big house, nice car, fine clothes, and a private chef, one of the best in the world, and a successful husband. Yes, Teotta has everything. Everything except her FREEDOM! She spends her days in the lap of luxury, but inside she knows something's wrong. Her ‘husband’ is just this side of a stranger, and worse, Teotta knows even less about herself. When she finally discovers why, and the incredible truth behind it, she will long for the bliss of her lost ignorance.



Since I Seen't You

Ayoka B.

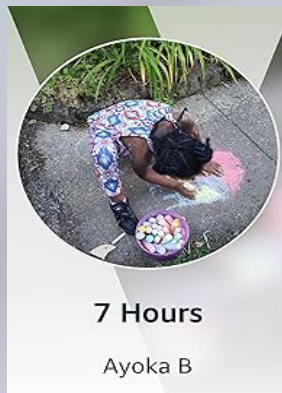
She and David met when they were 18. After a rough start, they build a friendship that would span decades: marriages, children, love and heartache. When they lose touch, she thought that she would never see him again, but she was wrong. Can men and women truly be just friends? Can their friendship withstand what life has in store?



The Match

Ayoka B.

Have you ever changed someone's life? I mean in a life and death sort of way. I opened a letter that I almost threw out, thinking it was junk mail; it said that I was a possible bone marrow match for someone! I couldn't even remember being tested. The letter asked me to contact them if I was still a willing donor... what would you do?



7 Hours

Ayoka B.

Time is precious so honor it. This is a peek at how our family was indelibly changed in the span of seven hours.



The Skin I'm In

Ayoka B.

As a child, the world outside of my safe life chipped away at my confidence and self-image. I was 18 before I liked what I saw in the mirror. Or at least I could actually look at my reflection and smile. Self-love and identity are frequently intertwined; they definitely were for me.



A'DICK'tion The Back Story

MADM Precious

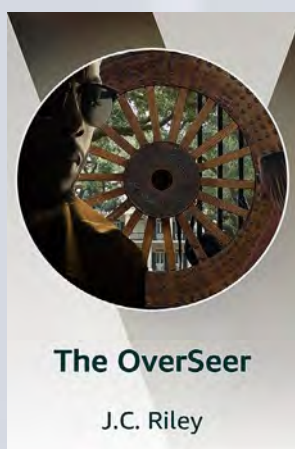
From Book 1: Sex addiction is a real thing; When Quincey finds out his wife is caught up in some things, can they save their marriage.



The Godchild Chronicles

J.C. Riley

War rocks the Planet Raosis! Ptahlon Anuku is drafted onto the Anti-Terror Detail & is under constant attack. With ties to both sides of the conflict, Ptahlon must choose a side in order to get him & his wife (fellow CDO Officer Raseem) safely off of Raosis. What will it take for Ptahlon & Raseem to escape in one piece? Who will they rely on to help bring their ambitions to a reality? And more importantly, what kind of sacrifice are they willing to make to achieve their ultimate goal?



The OverSeer

J.C. Riley

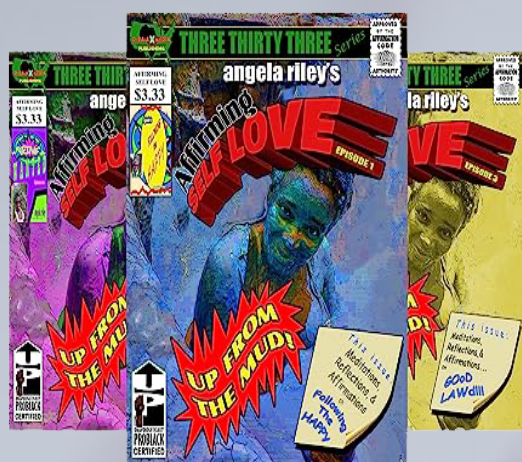
It's nice to be up high and seeing over things, right? Welcome to the world of THE OVERSEER. Strap yourself in because it's one heck of a ride!

ALSO AVAILABLE on AMAZON and OTHER PLATFORMS!

Below are stories and books by some authors I know! Just click the cover art to purchase their book.

READING and WRITING in the **DARIK**

A space for avid Black readers and Black authors

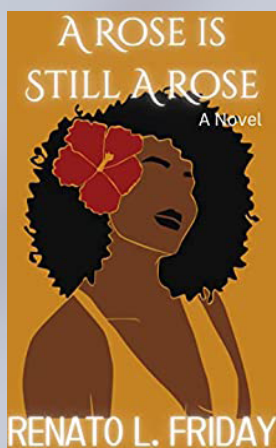


Affirming Self Love (Graphic Non-Fiction SERIES)

angela riley

SelfLOVE Meditation, Reflections, & AFFIRMATIONS Series...

With a new book released each month, this “Graphic Nonfiction” series is filled with love for BlackUs. Each episode opens with a short essay exploring a theme such as “Following the Happy” or “Plan & Reflect” and culminates with a dynamic collection of affirmation. You’ll have a beautiful time meditating and reflecting on the monthly theme as you AFFIRM Self Love.



A Rose is Still a Rose

Renato L. Friday

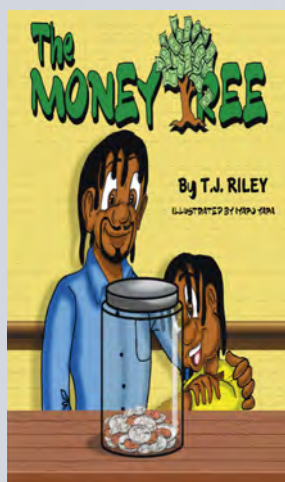
Rose thought life was going great: she was engaged, had a beautiful set of twin girls, a recent trade school graduate, and a new job right around the corner. Unfortunately, her fiancé, David, turned out to not be what she needed, and she chose to break things off. In the midst of her failing relationship, she met a man named Falcon, who ironically turns out to be her new boss. They quickly go from acquaintances to lovers, which opens up a fire pit of drama. Then comes Landon, a self-made millionaire, who is very humble about his accomplishments. He shows her all the things she was lacking while with David, and ultimately proposes. Naturally, Rose is scared to fall for Landon and accept his proposal due to David’s lies and Falcon’s toxic choices, but she takes a chance and allows Landon to love her the way she needs. Will her love for him forsake the feelings she’s still harboring for Falcon, or will she give into temptation?



Longing for the Night

Ms. KJ

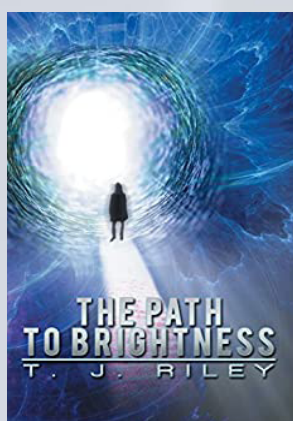
Inspired by the poem Goblin Market by Christina Rossetti, two young sisters face the trials and tribulations of the hood in this coming-of-age story about the harshness of living in South Central Los Angeles.



The Money Tree

T.J. Riley / Illustrated by Iyapo Yapa

Every child wants money to buy something, right? Our hero does too. But, his father has a surprise, a Money Tree. Join the fun journey to find out how to grow your own money tree.



THE PATH to BRIGHTNESS

T.J. Riley

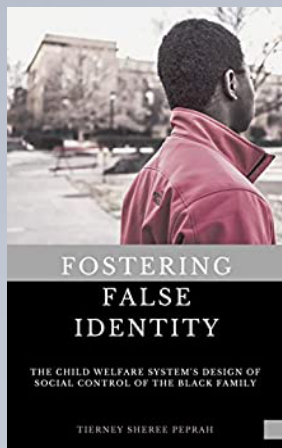
Fatima, a young woman, has a near-death experience. When she awakes from a coma and recovers, she has mystical powers. She begins to see auras and experiences life with her new abilities. For the clever character, Fatima, life is about to dramatically change. Follow Fatima’s journey as she tries to convince others of the astounding esoteric knowledge she has brought back from beyond the veil. However, there are some that wish to stop her from sharing an ancient secret. A secret that will change life on earth, forever.



LOVING BETRAYAL

MADM Precious

When Michelle met Michael, she thought that she found the love of her life. She was young and coming out of a bad marriage. A single parent of two children, she was scared, broke and had no self esteem. Michael seemed perfect, except for one little problem...



Fostering False Identity: The Child Welfare System's Design of Social Control of the Black Family
Tierney Peprah

THE ORGANISM OF RACISM IN THE UNITED STATES CRAFTS VARIOUS SYSTEMS MEANT TO ACHIEVE ONE OVERARCHING PURPOSE, that is to ensure that peoples and groups designated for an inferior existence pose little to no threat to the social structure of wealth and privilege that is propped up on their backs. These systems are allowed to exist, oftentimes unchallenged, by propagating dishonest descriptions of why these systems exist. Many people are without the proper means to challenge these systems, camouflaged as being charitable or in the public interest, for their unjust outcomes. In *Fostering False Identity*, the American child welfare system is explored as such a system. While the child welfare system is portrayed as a moral arbitrator in the abuse and neglect of children, in actuality this system was formulated for the specific purpose of regulating disenfranchised populations by removing children from those communities to assimilate them into White society. Thus assimilated, they are believed to pose minimal threat to the social order. *Fostering False Identity* will explore this phenomenon through a lens of Black liberation and self-determination of African families who are consistently victimized by this system.



Storm Over South Central
Charles L. Chatmon

The Storm has been unleashed, which means it's time to share what's inside the much anticipated anthology by author Charles L. Chatmon.

Chatmon, a refreshing voice in the world of modern poetry and author of *The Depths of My Soul* & *The Voices of South Central* returns with engaging short stories and thought provoking poems.

Read *Storm over South Central* and discover the thoughts he writes about in this volume filled with verses and tales of despair, stories of hope. It will also reveal a lot about American society – its strengths, its flaws and its people. This is a literary journey you will enjoy taking.



RELAY
Charles L. Chatmon

A high school track relay team is in the hunt for their ultimate goal. When tragedy strikes, the team bands together to capture a dream they've had since childhood. Totally within their grasp, they must come together as one to achieve the final victory. Along the way, they face personal challenges that threatens to derail their dreams - and their lives.

Explore the saga of the Appleton High School varsity track team as they compete to win a championship they have worked hard for - with difficulties along the way.



Here's a new stories for the newsletter - *Altamaha Beast* - Clive Sharp, an overworked steel mill employee with failing health is at the end of his tether, but there's an opportunity for him to cheat death. The adventure to save his life is filled with secrets and mysterious consequences. Yet, the price might just be too high.

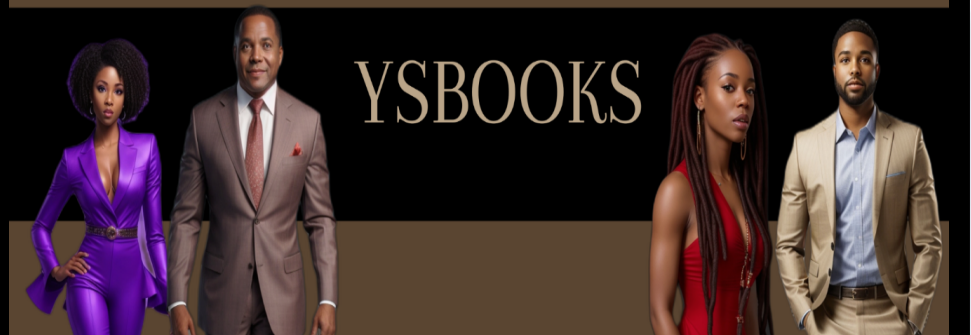
* * *

For even MORE fantastic FREE Audio Dramas by this author just click the image below! Buy her a cup of coffee while you're there!

CLICK THE IMAGE ABOVE TO LISTEN TO

Altamaha Beast

READ FOR FREE OR LISTEN TO THE AUDIO DRAMA!



READING and WRITING in the

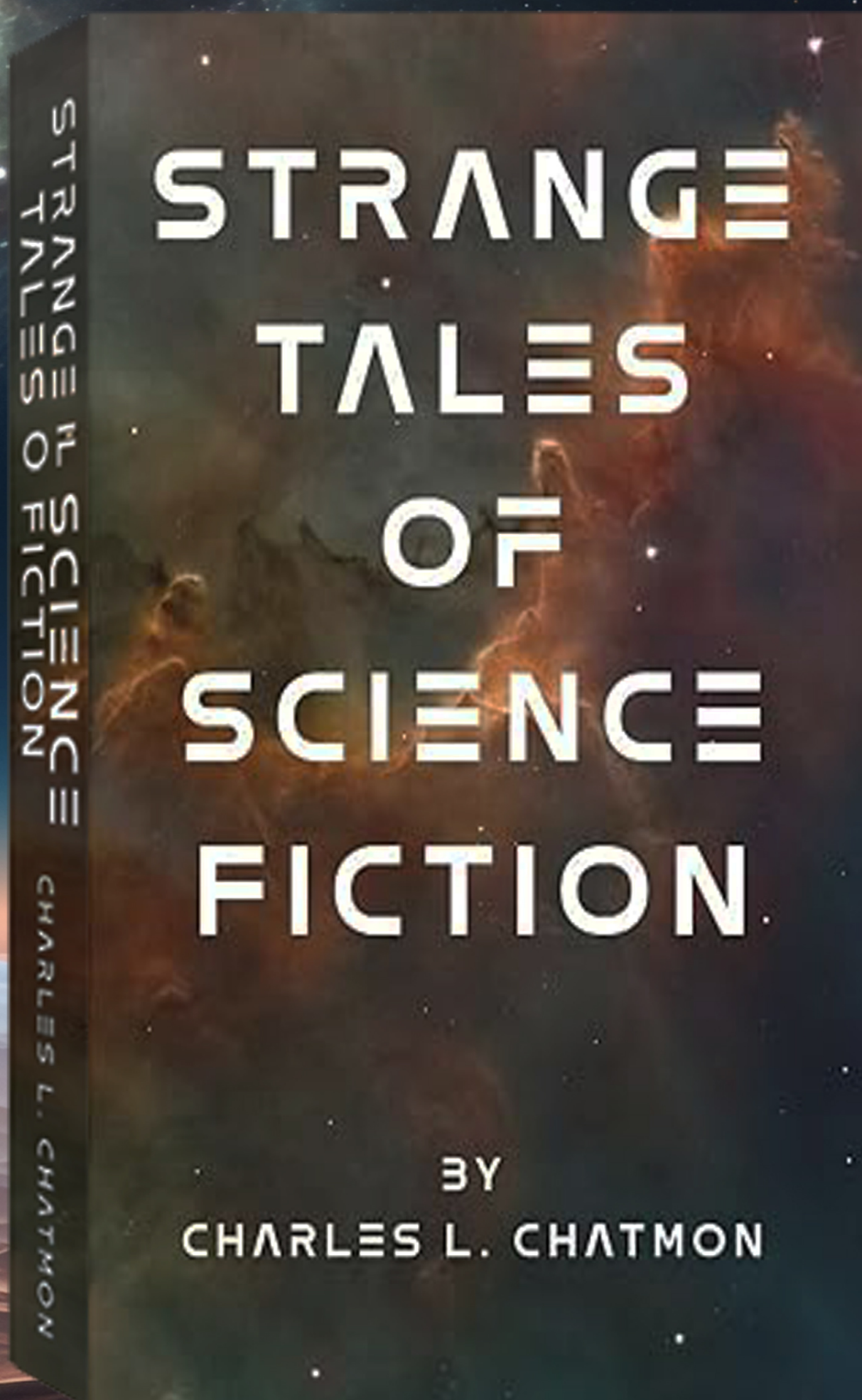
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A space for avid Black readers and Black authors

STRANGE TALES OF SCIENCE FICTION IS AVAILABLE NOW!

In this anthology of weird tales of sci-fi, you will discover:

Who would have thought an alien species of warriors would have the fight of their lives against an army from earth? What's going on behind the walls of a movie studio that looks suspicious? Why are two highway patrol officers chasing after a stranger escorted by a couple up the California coast? What is up with a man who suddenly turns invisible and how it changes his world - plus, who are the men from a corporation chasing after him?



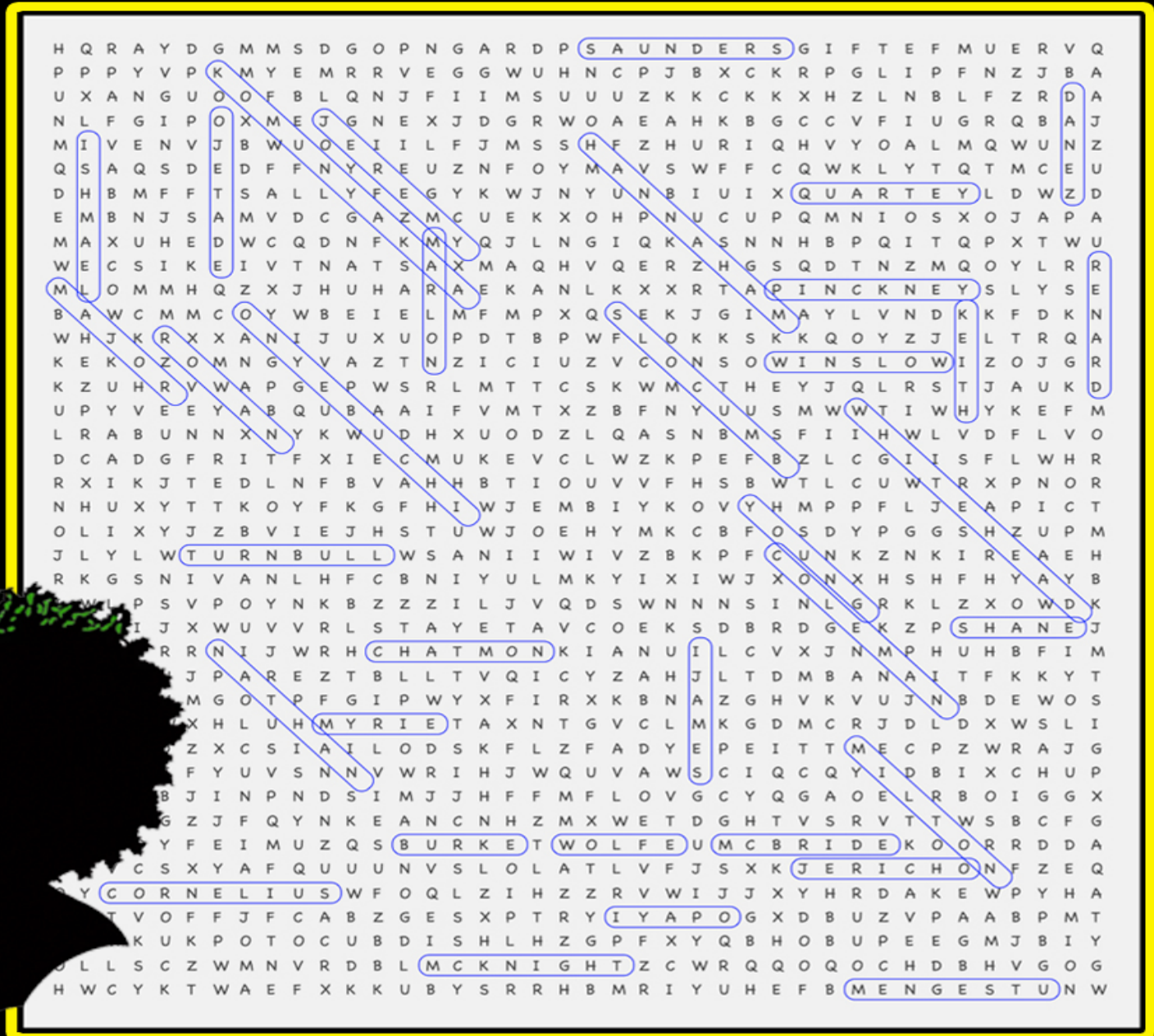
CLICK ON THE BOOK ABOVE TO PURCHASE ON AMAZON!

READING and WRITING in the
DARIK

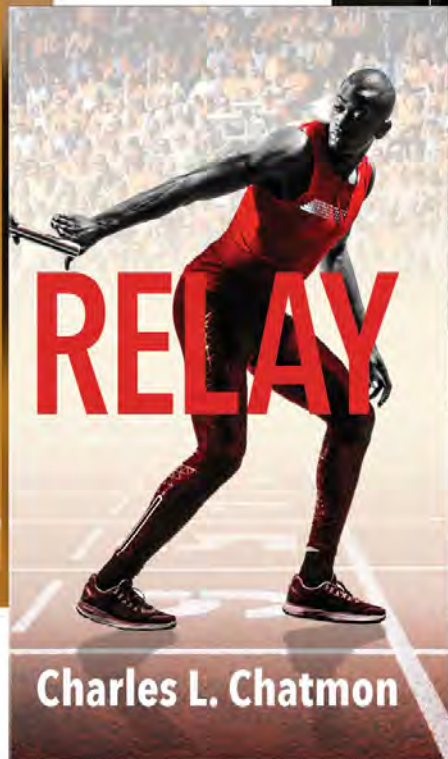
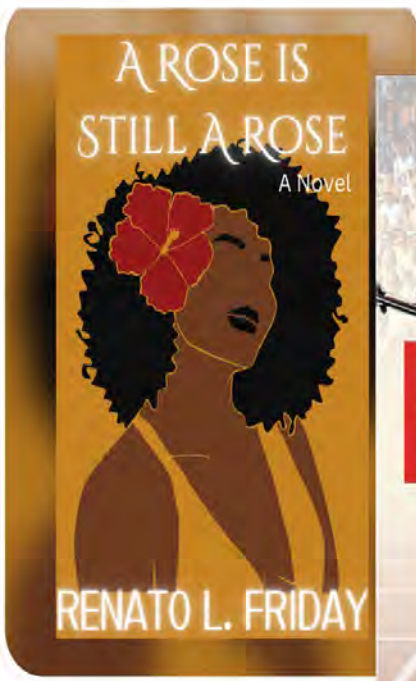
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HERE IS THE SOLUTION TO LAST MONTH'S PUZZLE!

BLACK MEN WHO WRITE!



June Wordsearch Solution



READING and WRITING in the

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IYAPO YAPA

Tales of the
MONKEY'S PAW



NOT EVERY WISH GRANTED MAKES DREAMS COME TRUE

BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR!



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ADVA MARS MARS



2024