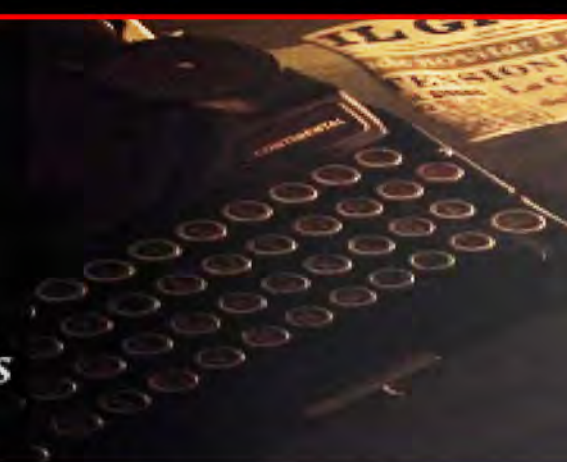


READING and WRITING in the

# DARK

A space for avid Black readers and Black authors



## THIS MONTH:

## MAGAZINE

We discuss revisiting the MELANIN universe with:

# WE-STORY AR

FROM THE **MELANIN** UNIVERSE

# MELANIN

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**into the**  
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READING and WRITING in the

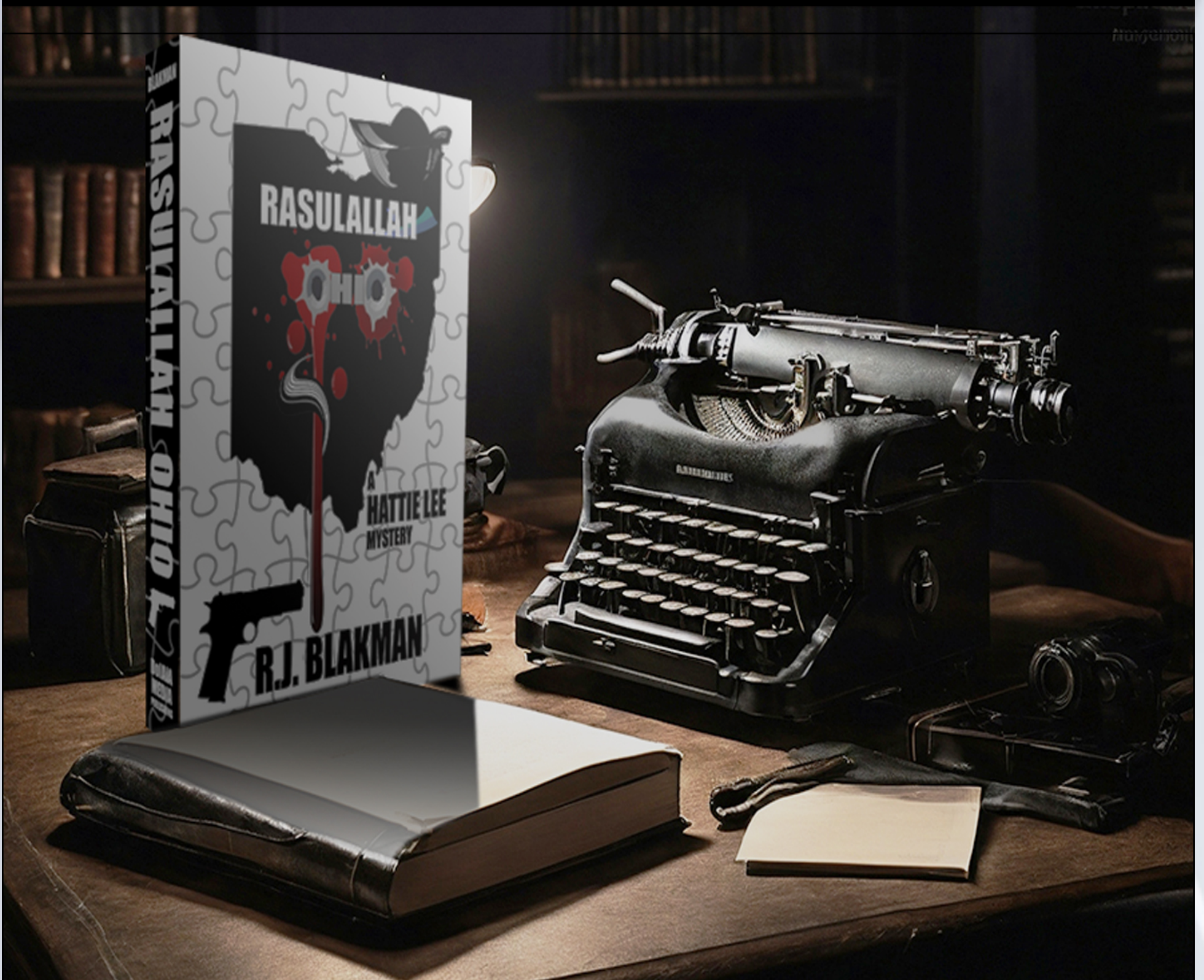
# DARIK

*A space for avid Black readers and Black authors*

## 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.

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# MAGAZINE



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## WELCOME BACK!

WELCOME to the MAY 2025 edition of the *Reading and Writing in the DARK Magazine*! MAY is a month for excerpts it seems! This month we give you the fourth chapter in the upcoming novel *Surviving the WORST!* Also there is the author’s note from the anthology collection: *WE-STORY A.R: Stories From The MELANIN Universe*. And finally, there is another excerpt from the upcoming second volume of Paradigm Void – *Further Journeys into the Paradigm Void*. Sit back and enjoy, and most of all THANK YOU for being a *Reading and Writing in the DARK* subscriber!

See you next month!

Iyapo



READING and WRITING in the DARK Magazine  
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## A Look Back and to the Future!

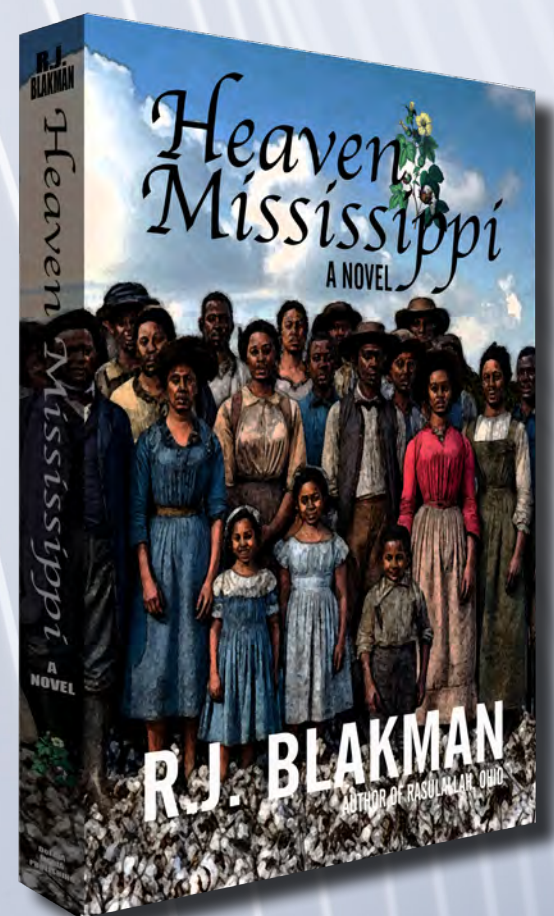
Ok, ok! Black people are sick and tired of reading and talking about our enslavement.

I get it!

So does R.J. Blakman.

There is no shortage of books and movies about the enslavement of Afrikans in America. The question becomes however, how quick should we be to dismiss a book because the main subject matter is chattel slavery as practiced in the United States? It is a tough subject that many of our people would like to just move on from and understandably so, but it is a fact of the history of our people in America. That said, *Heaven Mississippi* may not be what is considered a “traditional” book that takes place during enslavement. There are components of it that are unavoidable to highlight, else it could be argued that it would be a disservice to our ancestors who suffered, bled and died under that barbaric system.

That said, *Heaven Mississippi* is, as the reader will discover, a different kind of book. Blakman has nearly completed the novel and can’t wait to get it into the hands of readers. He is promising something different with *Heaven Mississippi*, and from the way it looks thus far, R.J. Blakman is delivering! You can read a complete chapter from *Heaven Mississippi* in the July 2024 issue of the *Reading and Writing in the DARK Magazine*! So, check back here each month for regular *Heaven Mississippi* updates. To the right is the cover reveal! (A *RaWitDM* sneak peek.)



**SURVIVING THE WORST (Chapter Four)**

Satchel and his group sat around the fire and took turns ripping flesh from the meat they were cooking rotisserie style. The glow from the fire danced on their faces as they sat silent, occasionally looking around at each other and then at their surroundings.

Don Alexander stood off from the rest of the crowd, but not too far from what he perceived as the safety of the group. He peered uneasily into the surrounding darkness and listened for something—anything—that might make a sudden noise or movement.

He always seemed to be nervous, but then, with good reason.

Don, along with Satchel McCaine, Becca Langston, Julian Jeffries, Peter Nordstrum and Paroact (the one Martian in the group) had become exiles—or more accurately, made themselves exiles from the safety of their own haven. They had now been outside of its walls for close to seventy-two hours. The twelve who started out in the unprotected environment, quickly decreased to the six left. The first three were killed within the first half hour of leaving their haven when they got caught in a stampede of triceratops that were

running in a panic from a chimera and its mate. Most of the fugitives were able to duck and dodge the flattening feet of the huge animals, but three of them were trampled underfoot. They six survivors started out as a mob of seventy-four rebels who attempted to mount an insurrection, and take control of their protective city, Haven Neorxnawang.



The defenses of Haven Neorxnawang were had nowhere near the sophistication of Haven Murzuk. Still, they were always able to mount offensives that could keep a variety of creatures out. The only real disaster they ever suffered was when

a horde of zombies breached the gate due to the inattention of a man and woman guard who found their carnal urges too much to control and gave in to an ‘Ah what the hell?’ moment. Nearly a quarter of the inhabitants were wiped out before they could get the pack of undead under control.

Ultimately, they were able to fight off the onslaught, but afterward were faced with the task of burying and burning the dead and the double dead: friends, loved ones, family and zombies. It was during that time that Satchel McCaine made up his mind that the leadership of their Haven



## SURVIVING THE WORST (Chapter Four) Continued

were running things far too lax. He started bringing it up at council meetings and voicing his concerns to those who held the highest offices within their makeshift government.

No one seemed to listen.

Satchel believed he could run things better (or at least not as badly as those presently in power were running it), so he found over seventy likeminded inhabitants within Neorxnawang and made plans to take over the government (such as it was), and “Put things in order.” which had become Satchel’s catch phrase.



The poorly planned, and even more poorly executed insurrection failed before it got started. When the dust cleared, thirty-three of the rebels were dead, twenty-nine captured alive (a state of being that would soon be remedied), and twelve, of which the present despondent group of six belonged, managed to escape.

After a couple days in the wild, a few members of the group began to wonder if they would not have been better off staying at their Haven and facing certain execution. Each of them sat around the fire, consumed with

their own thoughts as they chewed the tough, gritty, rancid meat they were forced to either eat or starve, and sparingly drank their quarter cup of rationed water.

Satchel, who had led his group into their present situation, yelled to Don, “Are you just going to stand over there under that tree moping or what?!” Don didn’t answer at first and continued to stand staring out into the darkness almost as if hypnotized, then said “I told you. I told all of you it was a bad idea to try taking over Neor! I don’t know why I let you talk me into it. Now we’re

stuck out here waitin’ for God knows what to come outta nowhere and get us! **FUCK!!!**”

“Quit cryin’ an’ get over here an’ eat!” Julian called over.

Don ignored Julian’s statement. “We shouldn’t have tried it. Now look at us! Maybe if we go back and face the music, they’ll just throw us in jail for a while or something.”

Becca, who had finished her ration of meat, but reached to grab another piece anyway, said, “If we go back, they’ll throw a noose around our

## SURVIVING THE WORST (Chapter Four) Continued

necks is what they'll do. Now get over here and eat before the food's all gone."

"Food? That's not food! I already told you I'm not eating any damn HARPY! I'll starve first! The things smell even worse when they're cooked than when they're alive! I can't see how you guys are even eating that thing! We found it dead already, and don't even know how long it's been out here!"

Becca chomped on the meat of the harpy and said, "When we beat our hasty retreat from the Haven, we didn't have time to bring any food with us, and this is the first thing we've come across that we can eat! Shit... it's PART bird ... tastes like chicken."

"No it doesn't! I can just smell the damn thing and tell it doesn't. I'm not eatin' that shit."

"Suit yourself." Becca said as she pulled another piece from the charring body and shoved it greedily into her mouth. "More for me."

Satchel's mind was far away as he stared into the fire and thought about what he could have and should have

done differently. He thought about what he would do in the future to put things in order. He was still convinced that, under the present leadership, Haven Neorxnawang didn't stand a chance and was destined to fall. He figured he and his group could go back when it did and establish a new order within its protective walls.

If they could last that long.

Being ready for the future was important. Until then, he was still in command of the ragtag band of rebels. It was his job to keep them alive, which, after the events of the past seventy-two

hours, became painfully apparent was more than a notion.

\* \* \*

The group (with the exception of Don) had eaten the last of the harpy, and drank the remaining water, and had finished off the evening discussing their plans for if and when they ever got back to their haven. In the present situation all of it sounded like a pipe dream at best, but at the moment, it was all they had. Abruptly, Pete stood and headed in the direction of some of the trees by which the group was surrounded.





## SURVIVING THE WORST (Chapter Four) Continued

“Where’re you going?” Don asked.

“I need ta take a dump.” Peter replied unemotionally.

“Pete, I don’t think you want to go out there. No tellin’ what you could run into.” Don said.

“What? You sayin’ I should do it here? You ain’t never heard a’ don’t shit where you eat? We ain’t seen nor heard nothin’ since we got here to make camp. I’ll be alright, I only need a minute.”

With that, Peter made his way into the woods and the rest of the group, some uneasy about him leaving and others confident he would indeed be right back, turned their attention back to the subject at hand, which was surviving out in their hostile environment long enough to get back to Haven Neorxnawang and take it over when the time was right. They’d been talking for a while, when suddenly Julian’s back stiffened, and he turned his right ear in the direction of the wood line.

“Do you hear that?” Julian said. “Sounds like someone singing, but I can’t tell what, it’s not in English.”

Everyone jumped up and grabbed

their weapons, then gathered close together, backs to each other so they could aim in all directions.

Paroact, who seldom spoke, held his weapon at the ready and said, “It’s Arabic.”



“And just how do you know that?” Julian asked.

“I’m well versed in several of your languages.” Paroact replied tersely.

The voice was soft and fairly high pitched, like a woman’s voice. The sound of it seemed to come from everywhere, and nowhere—surrounding them. “Arabic?” Don

said. “Who the hell’s out there singing?! Why would anyone even be out here, what kind of idiot would do that? Especially at this time of night?”

“We’re out here.” Becca said.

Don said nothing and continue swiveling his head from side to side.

“Alright alright.” Satchel said. “Idiot or not, who do ya think’s out here?”

“How the hell would I know?” Peter said, now dropping his voice to a whisper.

## SURVIVING THE WORST (Chapter Four) Continued

“I don’t think it’s a who...” Becca whispered back. “I think it’s a what.”

“A what? Singing like that?”

Satchel stiffened up and became more alert. “Be sharp people. I think I know what’s out there.”

“You do? What is it?”

Satchel searched his memory for the name of the creature he believed was now stalking them. He knew what he thought it was but couldn’t remember the name of it. Richard Midas, the “Carl” of their group was mauled and eaten by a velociraptor not long after his other three hapless colleagues had been flattened by the triceratops, so they had no one in their group who had a seeming total recall of the many monsters that roamed the landscape.

In the darkness they were now able to make out four sets of glowing yellow eyes, along with the ever-clearer sound of singing. Were the situation not so dire, the song sang by whatever it was, would have been intoxicatingly beautiful.

“Shit!” Satchel huffed suddenly.

“What?!” Becca said.

“Where’s Pete?! He hasn’t come back yet.”

As if on cue, a roundish object flew violently out of the woods, and landed before the group, and next to the fire.

They all looked down at it. The



mouth was wide open, as were the terrified eyes, and blood oozed from the base of the neck and soaked the ground now that there was no body to prevent it from doing so. The lifeless eyes of Peter Nordstrum stared blankly at the group, as the severed head lay on the ground, taking on a yellowish hue by the light of the fire. As the group

stood, their collective mouths open, holding up their weapons but not knowing where to aim, they listened to the soft, gentle singing emanating from the woods around them.

Don looked up from the head and turned his attention to his alien companion. “Paroact, you said that shit is in Arabic. What’s it saying?”

Paroact became still and listened more closely to the voice of whatever it was out in the darkness. “It sings – *‘kayfyumkin lilmar’ ‘an yakun ghayr hakim, ‘an yatajawal, wayatajawal bihamaqatin? rutl min allahm wajbat*

## SURVIVING THE WORST (Chapter Four) Continued

*li ‘abadan maratan ‘ukhraa liruyat manzilihim.”*

“Ok, and what the hell does THAT mean—in ENGLISH?!” Julian said in a loud whisper.

Paroact sighed,

*“How could one so unwise be,*

*To wander, and so foolishly roam?*

*A pound of flesh, a meal for me,*

*Never again to see their home.*

Loosely translated.”

There was a kind of laughter in the song, a lilt in the voice. Even without understanding all of its words, it was obvious that whatever was out there, was taunting the group.

The creature Satchel was unsuccessfully racking his brain to remember was the manticore.

Human face.

Part lion.

Part snake.

Part bat.

All fury.

No mercy.

The song of the creature caressed the ears of each member of the renegade party. It was almost hypnotic. The only thing keeping them tethered

to reality was the head of their fellow rebel, Peter, laying at their feet, staring up at them as if to say, “We are all dead.”

The brush at the foot of the trees began to shuffle, the voice, ever present—soothing—grew louder. Whatever it was kept just out of sight but would not remain so for much longer.

Horrific images—grew progressively worse—and flooded the minds of each member of the group, everyone holding a weapon, not one of them knowing what to expect.

Each image in their collective psyche growing worse than the one before it. They had all seen many things since the collapse, and they all knew better to ever say again, “Things couldn’t get any worse”, because they’d learned over time that, yes, they could—and tended to do so.

“Steady yourself.” Satchel said as he saw the barrel of Don’s rifle in his periphery.



## SURVIVING THE WORST (Chapter Four) Continued

Even without looking at it full on, there was no mistaking how much it shook. “You keep shakin’ like that and you’re gonna accidentally shoot one of US!” He turned his full attention back to the brush, that was now shaking in a way that let him know—let all of them know—the creature was soon to make itself visible to them.

Finally it appeared, and when it did, no one was prepared for the sight of it.

The first thing to come through the hedge was—  
was—  
Pete!

Not all of him. Just his face.

A mouth covered with still moist, dripping blood, but Peter’s face was still recognizable beneath it nonetheless.

The group almost in unison, looked down at the severed head of their once comrade, and then back up to his image, now staring at them from the bushes. As it stared, the hint of a grin made its way onto his lips—growing wider, wider into a grotesque smile that reached from ear to ear. Finally, the lips parted to reveal shining razor sharp teeth, that shined almost like

silver in the darkness.

It started singing again, the same song as before.

*kayf yumkin lilmar’ ‘an yakun ghayr hakim ‘an yatajawal wayatajawal bihamaqat , rutl min allahm wajbat li ‘abandanmaratan ‘ukhrraa liruyat manzilihim.*



“A manticore.” Satchel whispered, finally recalling the name of the creature they were facing, as he tried—but failed miserably—to not betray the fear in his voice.

Don, who was always on edge anyway, shot a quick glance over to his colleague and then noticed his own knees had become rubbery and shaking uncontrollably. Even when, several weeks earlier they’d all (who weren’t floating skyward), seen a single eye of a gargantuan planet size creature blink at them,

Satchel was not so badly shaken. Perhaps it was because, except for being weightless, he had perceived the threat to be far off in space, as opposed to in the immediate vicinity, as was the monster they now faced. Had Satchel had more of an air of confidence in his voice, Don may



## SURVIVING THE WORST (Chapter Four) Continued

have possibly been able to keep his ever-growing apprehension in check. But Don's panic grew hearing Satchel sounding just this side of panicked. Satchel was, to Don's knowledge and up to this point, a man who Don had never seemed shaken by anything.

The creature took several steps forward, and what emerged was beyond hideous. It still had the face of Pete, but the head on which it was adorned was attached to the huge, muscular body of a lion. As it moved forward into the fire light, they could see the gigantic leathery wings protruding from its shoulder blades, spreading wide and flapping slowly. Obviously, it had no intention of taking off, it was showing its dominance and instinctively making itself larger as an intimidation tactic.



As if it needed to.

Finally, the monster revealed the rest of its massive body, and as Satchel suspected, knowing a little something about the creatures called manticore, the large tail was not that of a lion, but of a scorpion, and far more deadly not only because of the size of it, but the venom it delivered to those unfortunate enough to be pierced by

it.

It walked back and forth, pacing slowly as it continued to spread its wings. As its eyes met the eyes of each of the men, the woman and the alien who beheld it, the face of the creature changed to that of the one upon whom

it was focused. All the while grinning, and every now and then, taking a moment to sing—soft and low.

A woman's voice.

Becca, her weapon still trained on the creature, as was everyone else's in the group, took a couple sniffs in the air. Her sense of smell was better than most and she knew there was something besides the manticore producing the foul odor. "Satch... Satch!" she whispered to their leader. "You smell that?! I think we've got more trouble out here."

Satchel took a few whiffs and his face tightened into a scowl. "You're right. Damn it! As if this weren't enough! Now there's probably another friggin' harpy out here! Probably the mate of the one we just finished eatin'!"

"Yeah. That's what I'm thinkin'." Becca quickly whispered back. "If it's that thing's mate, then it'll be a



## SURVIVING THE WORST (Chapter Four) Continued

a male one, and it's not gonna already be dead like the one we—" Becca took a few more deep sniffs in the air. The odor was definitely closer! She sniffed and followed the sent with her nose, until she found the origin.

"Aw, Don, come on! We're all scared out here, but damn! Really?! What are you? Like five years old?!"

Julian, silent up to that point, weapon trained on the creature as it paced lazily back and forth, seemingly choosing whom it wanted to eat first, said, "Please don't tell me Don just shit hisself."

"Alright, I won't tell you." Becca said.

"Damn Don."

Don, both embarrassed and in the grip of fear, and unable to decide whether the embarrassment or fear was in the greatest proportion, finally let out a weak, unconvincing, "Fuck all of you! You're all just as scared as I am!"

"Yeah, but you don't see any of us out here pissin' and shittin' all over ourselves." Becca said.

"Alright, that's enough." Satchel

said in a harsh whisper, "We can talk about Don's constitution later. Right now, we have a REAL problem in front of us."

The manticore continued pacing back and forth, but now, its attention was trained only upon the one whom it seemed to have chosen as its first victim.



The face of the manticore became that of Don, and it smiled disturbingly, its mouth becoming freakishly large and showing all three sets of razor sharp teeth, some of which reflected the glow of the fire.

It stopped pacing and sat, becoming so still that it seemed it was, down to its mane, made of stone. Its face continued to be that of Don, whose head had become so light, he thought he could black out at any moment.

The manticore, began moving only one part of its body. It's mouth which it opened and softly sang:

*"man al'afdal 'an tulatikh malabisak ,qryban sayakun limukhalibaa waqtihim ,anzur 'iilaa alhayat akhyran , hayth taqtarib hayatak min nihayatiha , eindama takun fi almariy' , yajib 'an takun li. "*

## SURVIVING THE WORST (Chapter Four) Continued

When the creature finished its song, everyone glanced quickly to Paroact. Without anyone needing to say a word, Paroact translated:

*“You’d all do well to soil your clothes,  
For soon my claws will have their  
time,*

*Look last at life, as it  
comes to its close,*

*When in my belly you  
shall be mine.*

Loosely translated.”

“Why are we just aiming? Why don’t we just shoot the damn thing?!” Julian yelled out.

“If we shoot at it and don’t kill it, then we are not only going to waste our ammo, but we’ll likely just piss it off and the bullets will probably bounce off.” Satchel asserted, still holding his weapon.

“Then what the fuck are we supposed to do?!” Becca wailed. “You’re standin’ there tellin’ us there’s no way to kill the thing!”

“I didn’t say we couldn’t kill it. But we can’t kill it by shooting at it. It has to be stabbed in the heart, and from what I was taught, their whole body is like freakin’ armor! You have to get right under the damned thing

to get at its soft underbelly to kill it!” “Stabbed in the—? And how the hell are we supposed to get close enough to that monster to do it? Especially if we have to get under it.” Julian said.

“I’m thinkin’ we’ll have ta distract it somehow, or all go at it at once and one of us is gonna have ta find a way under it and stab it in the heart. I guess I’m elected.” Satchel stated with forced confidence.

“I’ll do it.” Paroact said calmly, still keeping his weapon trained on the manticore with his upper arms, while pulling out knives from their sheaths to either side of his hips

and gripping them tightly in his lower left and right hands.

“Do you know where it’s heart is?” Satchel said.

“No. Do you?” Paroact said as he positioned himself to run at the creature, but before he could do anything else, the manticore, now having had its fun taunting its prey, and having singled out the first to die of the surviving group, opened wide its mouth, revealing all three rows of its teeth and sprang toward Don!

Armored skin or no, everyone began





## SURVIVING THE WORST (Chapter Four) Continued

firing at will as the manticore charged toward Don.

The creature no longer sang. The time for songs was passed, it was now time for blood.

Time for carnage.

Time to eat.

As the barrage of bullets and laser fire followed the creature and bounced off it—just as Satchel had predicted, Don leaned back from the lunging monstrosity, his body taking on an attitude that would have made Neo from the Matrix proud. Unlike Neo however, Don was not able to hold his balance in place and immediately fell on his back, unmoving. That notwithstanding, the manticore's momentum carried it well over and past the place where Don had been standing upright.

The creature went over Don but didn't land on the ground behind him, instead, opting to remain in the air, batting its massive wings, causing the trees and brush around it to blow with its gusts.

“Damn! I didn't think Don could move that fast!” Julian yelled as he continued with the rest of his

compadres to fire at the thing.

“Fast my ass!” Becca shouted over the nearly deafening noise of the weapons fire, “He fuckin' FAINTED!”

“Damn it! Shut up and pay attention! All of you!” Satchel yelled. “While

it's up in the air aim for the underbelly! The UNDERBELLY! One of us might get lucky and hit its heart!”

The group stopped talking and fired everything at the creature's lower chest and stomach. Instinctively, the manticore positioned itself so that its belly was not exposed.

Because of that action by the nearly indestructible beast, though still unable to get a clear shot at the manticore's soft midsection, the group was now convinced that their leader was right, and the key to killing the thing rested in them being able to get past the outwardly impermeable skin, and directly assault the heart of the beast.

The manticore's face, once again taking on the characteristics of whichever of the small band it concentrated on swooped toward them swinging its two inch saber like claws and jabbing its scorpion tail,



**SURVIVING THE WORST (Chapter Four) Continued**

prepared to contact any who was not agile enough to avoid the attack, just narrowly missing Paroact.

Paroact was a curious creature.

The only alien among the human band of misfits and would be rebels, he stood nearly nine feet tall and had greenish skin (in typical Martian fashion), was few of words, and though fluent in many languages, (several of which were native to what used to be earth), tended to let his fighting do most of his talking. His combative skills were far superior to the humans he'd allied himself with.

He was an expert in hand to hand combat (or in his case, hand to hand to hand to hand being that he had four arms). Even while facing down this flying horror, Paroact seemed unfazed by the appearance or ferocity of the creature, possibly because on his own home planet, another version of Mars, there were threats far worse than anything he'd come in contact with since he found himself shifted into his present plane of reality.

The manticore banked in the air in a move that was graceful, even for a

creature as massive and horrifying as it was, and once again approached. "Concentrate on the gut!" Satchel continued to scream. The lion/bat/scorpion amalgamation flew toward the group, razor sharp protracted claws at the ready, mouth agape and tail positioned for a strike.

Somewhere down inside, each member of the band felt on some level that all their firing at the creature was futile. None of them were able to get a clear shot at the belly—the only chance they had of killing it.

The manticore took on the face of Becca, and everyone knew who it was about to attack specifically. "Becca! It's going for Becca!" Julian yelled. They all trained their fire in the creature's direction as it banked, to fly overhead.

Paroact dropped his laser weapon and crouched down, tightly holding saber length blades in his lower left and right hands. As the manticore flew overhead, Paroact leapt to meet it in the air, letting loose, for Paroact an uncharacteristic grunt due to the effort.





## SURVIVING THE WORST (Chapter Four) Continued

The manticore was large and it was strong, but Paroact was not a light creature himself. The manticore struggled to gain altitude as the alien hanging on to its legs intuitively knew the creature planned to fly high in the air and then somehow shake him loose.

That was not something Paroact was going to allow to happen. Maneuvering himself back to the front legs of the creature, Paroact swung back and forth, even as he evaded the sting of the tail and a bite from the razor sharp teeth. He then swung free, using only one of his powerful arms and hands to keep hold of the manticore, and swung up, just as the manticore's leathery wings were beating downward. He took both sabers in two of his free hands and violently swung the razor sharp blades at the wings. The manticore let out an ear piercing scream that, were Paroact's physiology different, would have deafened him.

Enraged, the monster, with Paroact's face flapped its wings almost comically as it attempted to remain in the air. The jabs of its tail now

seeking its mark with such ferocity the manticore ended up striking itself several times, each time becoming more and more frenzied. As Paroact observed the creature losing altitude and mindlessly trying to retaliate for the outrage of having been wounded, the Martian knew this was his chance.



Paroact firmly grabbed the manticore's two front legs. He then let go of one of the sabers and let it fall earthward, using the third hand to grab one of the manticore's hind legs. He then used his considerable strength to pull the three legs open, as the other, claws at the

ready, swiped back and forth, trying to hit the unwanted green passenger even as the tail swung wildly trying to deliver the sting that would this attack.

Paroact however was tall, he was solid, he was lanky and incredibly agile. He avoided the rear paw and tail with so little effort that for a moment, the alien himself thought it must have been some kind of ploy. Paroact tightly gripped the remaining saber and, holding the monster's legs open, and began violently sinking the



## SURVIVING THE WORST (Chapter Four) Continued

the weapon into the flesh of the manticore. The underbelly was not as soft as he'd expected, but it was by no means impenetrable, especially to one with his strength. The creature screamed and bobbed in the air as it got ever closer to the ground, Paroact, the entire time burying the saber nearly to the hilt into the thing, repeatedly and never in the same spot twice. They were still some twenty feet off the ground when Paroact sank the blade deep into the creature, in what felt to him, like a blow just beneath the rib cage. Dark red blood shot out from the wound, and the manticore let out an indescribably high pitched, horrific, terrified scream!

It then fell silent. It no longer swiped its leg at the Martian. The tail of it went limp, and it no longer flapped its wings as it nearly crumpled in midair and dropped in a slight spiral, quietly to the grass below.

The manticore lay on the ground unmoving. In the darkness Paroact couldn't be seen and it was assumed the monster had landed on top of

him. Satchel, Julian, and Becca ran cautiously to his aid. They all stopped short as the manticore began to stir and each of them immediately took aim with their weapons, for all the good it would do. "Wait! Hold your fire!" Satchel said. From beneath the creature came one of the arms belonging to Paroact. For a moment the Martian seemed to struggle to get the creature off of him, but then with a mighty push of all four of his arms and both his legs, the manticore's corpse flew several feet in the air, landing at the feet of the three humans.



As Paroact stood and dusted himself off, he walked toward his fellow rebels where the manticore lay on the ground, still and silent in front of them, its head taking on a shape more like that of a lion, and its face becoming something of the cross between a human face and feline. The beast's true form everyone rightly guessed.

"Jeez. Look at the size o' that thing, and lookit those teeth." Julian said. "The thing looks like it has a mouth



## SURVIVING THE WORST (Chapter Four) Continued

fullah knives! Three rows of ‘em.”

“Where the hell do these things keep coming from?!” Becca said.

“Maybe the answer’s in your question.” Satchel said. Satchel suddenly became animated as if just remembering the absent member of the troop. “Hey! Where’s Don?”

Becca pointed a thumb over her shoulder and motioned behind her. “His ass is still on the ground back there, out cold.”

Satchel shook his head and looked over at the other two males in the company. “Julian, would you and Paroact go over there and get him up? We’ll all go to the river together so he can get cleaned up.” As the two began walking in the direction of their downed partner Satchel yelled to the alien member of the crew, “By the way! Good job with that manticore Paroact!”

“Yeah, thanks! You saved our asses!” Becca added.

Without turning around, Paroact merely lifted his two right arms and

gave a brief wave. The universal, ‘don’t mention it’ sign.

Becca still looking at the two as they walked off to collect Don shook her head slowly. “I can’t believe he shit himself.” Becca said without even a hint of humor in her voice.

“Beck. Things have changed pretty drastically in the past few years. Frankly I’m surprised that more people aren’t scared shitless by the least bump they hear.”

“Oh trust me. They are. But this is just how things are now Satch. I know it.

You know it. And Don’d better get a grip PDQ, or he’s gonna end up like ol’ Pete over there. Speaking of which, are we gonna have a funeral or somethin’?” Becca said.

“For a HEAD?!”

“Since the collapse, I’ve seen folk having funerals with a lot less, an’ he was still one of our people, and if that’s all we have to bury, then we need to bury what’s left of ‘em and give ‘em some kinda ceremony. You know. Pay him some respect.”





## SURVIVING THE WORST (Chapter Four) Continued

“Yes. You’re right. And Pete was with us since the very beginning. Even before you joined the cause.”

“Damn right.” Becca said. They both stood quiet for a moment, again looking at the dead monster on the

grass, then, Becca looked at Satchel, who was still looking at the creature, and said, “What do you really want Satch? I know you weren’t just trying to take over Neor. I could always tell you had something bigger in mind.”

“Right now.” Satchel said. “All the Havens exist independent of each other. Divided like this there’s no way in hell all of us are gonna be able to make it with all that’s goin’ on out here.”

“We seemed to be doing alright in Haven Neorxnawang.”

“You mean until those two horndogs let the zombies in.”

“Yeah. There’s that. But, yeah. We were pretty safe except for that.”

“If you remember, that’s one of the reasons you and the rest joined our

little rebel group. We didn’t feel safe in Neor, and we weren’t! I figured if we could get control of it, then I could set up a new order within the walls. A better one.”

“Yeah. I know.”



“After that, though, my goal was to expand beyond the walls of our own Haven. I figured we could build an army and slowly take over, assimilate, and ultimately unify all the other Havens.”

“Not Murzuk. That Haven’s nearly impenetrable far as I’ve heard. They have tech we

haven’t even thought about up in there, and nobody gets in. Nobody!”

“Every defense system has a weakness, a way to exploit it. Even Murzuk.”

“Well, this is all mighty big talk, but from where we are right now, we don’t stand a snowball’s chance in hell of ever takin’ over jack shit. Especially someplace like Haven Murzuk.”

“You give up too easy. Yeah, things look bad for us right now, but as long

## **SURVIVING THE WORST (Chapter Four) Continued**

“I know what you mean. There’ve been more than a few nights I laid awake thinkin’ about them people havin’ all that tech and sleepin’ like babies while we always had to wonder if somethin’ was gonna get in.”

“Right. My goal is to rectify that, and believe it or not, I think we can still do it.”

Before either person could say anything else, there was a blur of motion in the darkness, and the sound of a soft thud against Satchel’s right leg, knocking him momentarily off balance.

He let out a yell as he looked down just in time to see the scorpion tail of the manticore slowly sliding out of the puncture wound it had just created.

Satchel staggered forward, where Becca grabbed him and attempted to keep him on his feet but without success. Satchel fell to the ground, his eyes rolling back as his body began to convulse.

The manticore, whose face had become that of Satchel, slowly, lazily

grinned widely, laughed weakly, and then truly gave up the ghost as its head plopped hard to the ground and the face of the thing once again returned to its actual form.

Satchel lay on the ground convulsing more violently by the moment as he began to foam at the mouth.

“Hey!” Becca yelled to the two men and the alien who were leisurely walking in the dark in her direction, obviously too far back to have seen or heard what had just happened. “Hey! Get over here! We’ve got a

man down!”

Hearing Becca’s screams and seeing the form of their leader on the ground shaking violently, the three broke into a run to see if there was any way they could give aid. Once they got there, all four stood, not quite knowing what to do. They had no first aid kit, nor antivenom (if there were even such a thing for the sting of a manticore).

“It is the venom.” Paroact said unemotionally.

“Well, don’t just stand there! DO



READING and WRITING in the

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A space for avid Black readers and Black authors

## MELANIN: A NOVEL (Excerpt) Continued

something!” Becca cried out nearly in tears (something out of character for her).

Nearly as quickly as the convulsions began, they abruptly stopped, and except for the sound of crickets in the darkness, there was no sound. Julian dropped to his knees and put a couple fingers to the motionless



man’s neck. He then bent down and put his ear directly on Satchel’s chest. Julian held his head in place as still as he could be as the silent group watched. After almost a minute Julian sat up, still on his knees and looked one by one to his fellow renegades.

“Satchel’s dead.” Julian said.



### Is it BEST to DIVEST?

Maxine Allison thought so.

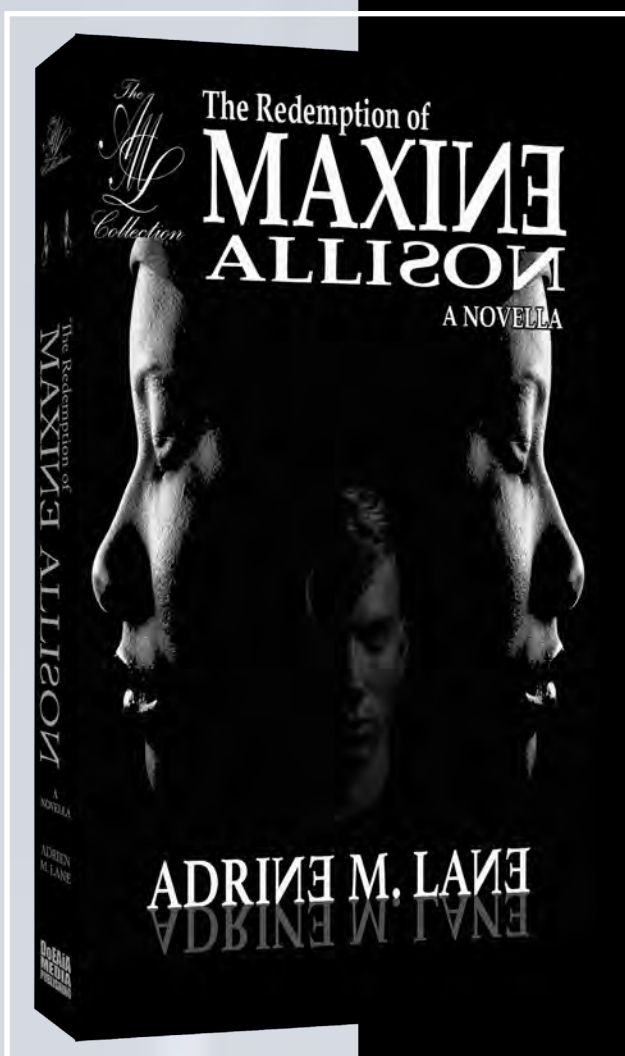
She’d had enough of dealing with Black men who were abusive, lackadaisical when it came to work, and just overall “losers” in her opinion. So she determined she would find herself a “white prince”.

Did she find her **PRINCE** and lose her mind? Is he **PRINCE CHARMING** or is he the Prince of **PERSIA**?!

Has she made a monumental mistake or is a trauma she sustained from a car wreck causing her mind to play tricks on her? If she has made a mistake can Maxine ever undo her disastrous decision ... right or wrong, it seems there is no way for her to find redemption...

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Love, hate, secrets and deception abound in what is sure to be a hit, as Adrien M. Lane brings you her mind bending and controversial debut novella. Read *The Redemption of Maxine Allison* and find out why!



**THE WAIT IS ALMOST OVER!**

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

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## Here is your MAY 2025 Crossword Puzzle!

[This month, it's all about the Black Authors again!](#)

[As always, the solution to last month's puzzle is at the back of the magazine. ENJOY!](#)

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



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## MAY 2025 CROSSWORD QUESTIONS

### Across

- 2 Best known for his novels *Native Son* and *Black Boy*, that mirrored his own struggle with poverty and coming of age journey.
- 3 She won the Pulitzer Prize and the American Book Award in 1988 for her novel *Beloved*. She serves as Professor Emeritus at Princeton University.
- 6 An American journalist, teacher, playwright and poet who came to prominence during the Harlem Renaissance; she was one of the first African-American women to have a play publicly performed.
- 8 After escaping from slavery in Maryland, he became a national leader of the abolitionist movement from Massachusetts and New York, gaining note for his dazzling speeches and antislavery writings
- 9 An African-American journalist, newspaper editor, suffragist, sociologist, Georgist, and an early leader in the Civil Rights Movement.
- 10 An American author, poet, and civil rights activist. She published seven autobiographies, three books of essays, and several books of poetry, and was credited with a list of plays, movies, and television shows spanning over 50 years

### Down

- 1 Of her four novels and more than 50 published shorts stories, plays, and essays, she is best known for her 1937 novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.
- 4 An African American novelist, essayist, playwright, poet, and social critic. His essays explore the intricacies of racial and class distinctions in Western societies, most notably in mid-20th-century America, and their inevitable tensions.
- 5 He was one of the earliest innovators of the then-new literary art form called jazz poetry. Hughes is best known as a leader of the Harlem Renaissance.
- 7 An American writer known as the author of the 1976 book *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*. The book was adapted as a TV mini-series of the same name and aired in 1977 to a record-breaking 130 million viewers

ADARREN M. LANE

MAJOR MARJ MASON

COMING SOON!



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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

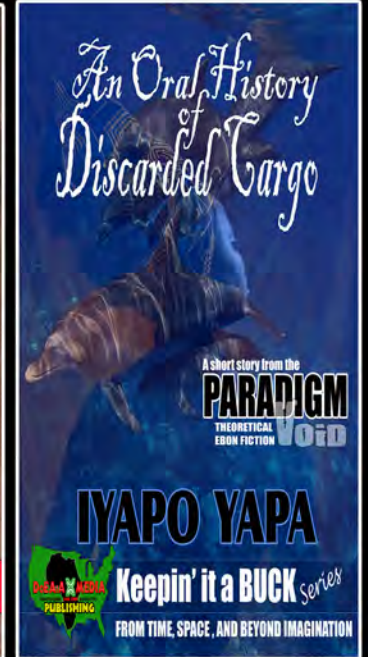
Amazon took down my review of Melanin, so I hope this stays. This is not your ordinary Zombie tale. I haven't read such inventive horror in years. Yapa really knows how to weave a story to pull you in. I had to laugh at how much fun I was having while reading it. I would recommend this author in a heart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

# BOOK I - COMING SOON!

READING and WRITING in the

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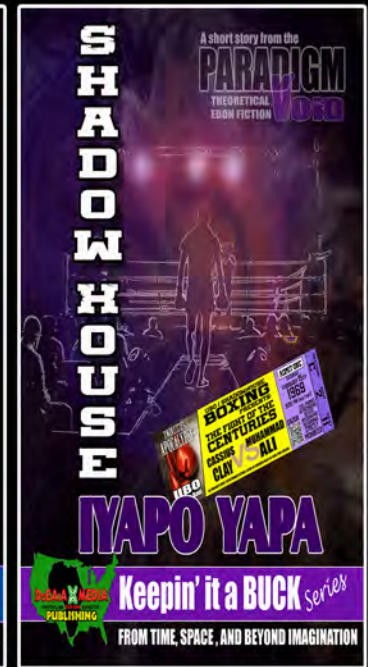
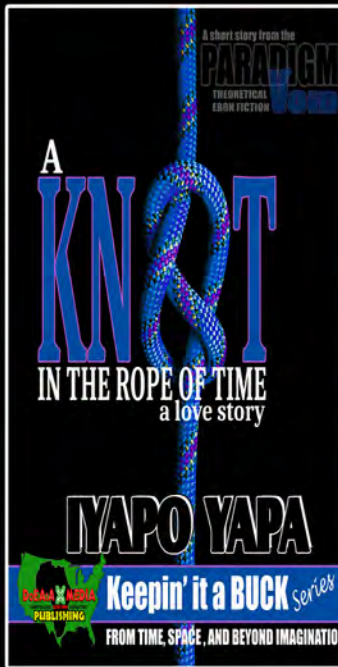


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Also, Keepin' it a BUCK series TWO: Stories from Further Journeys into the Paradigm VOID is out NOW!



**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](mailto:comments@iyapoyapa.com)



## WE-STORY A.R. Stories From The MELANIN Universe

### - SPOILER ALERT!!! -

*If you have not read MELANIN: A Novel, STOP HERE and read it FIRST!*

*Or*

*Just skip this Preface and read the book, you won't have necessarily had to have read MELANIN in order to read WE-STORY A.R. and enjoy it!*

\* \* \*

I know that's an odd way to start a Preface, but I thought it was necessary, this book being, not a sequel—but a companion to my debut novel: MELANIN: A Novel.

The seed of this book was planted years ago, and I didn't even know it, but now that I've begun work on this piece, it's about one of the most exciting prospects I've had in a long time! Not that I'm not excited about every new project I start, but this one is particularly exciting for me!

Several years ago, I sat watching a livestream on YouTube where the host was taking callers to the show. I can't remember the name of the caller, but what I do remember is the question he posed. The question was rhetorical—a simple one, even innocuous in its way—but for me it

was profound and paradigm shifting. I can already feel you asking, "So what was the question already?!"

He asked simply:

"Name one problem Black people have that isn't caused by white people."

From that day to this, I haven't been able to forget the question nor answer it, nor has anyone I ever posed the question to since then — not adequately.

***"Name one problem Black people have that isn't caused by white people."***



MELANIN: a Novel, takes place in a world where a because of a man made radiological catastrophe, (I warned you, spoilers would be coming), everyone in the world must become genetically, phenotypically BLACK. The book ends with only a few white people left, and they are completely gone within a few years, leaving a world occupied only by Black people, where the system of white supremacy has completely collapsed and no longer exists at all.



## WE-STORY A.R. Stories From The MELANIN Universe (Continued)

WE-STORY A.R. – From the MELANIN Universe, is what follows the events in MELANIN. It isn't a sequel, but a kind of history, or more accurately OUR story, of the months, years, decades and millennia A.R. - After Revival, (referring to the rediscovery of our Blackness and revitalization of love we once, and now again have for ourselves as individuals and our people as a whole).

The idea for this book comes from the question posed at the beginning, and discussions I regularly have with my wife and muse, Angela.

What would a world look like where everyone is Black? (Skin tone not withstanding).

More important than that—what does a world look like where there is no longer an entrenched global System of White Supremacy?

How long before Black people would overcome the literal centuries of programming, perpetuated by the S.o.W.S. before our minds are finally totally freed of it, and once again able to see ourselves as the brilliant, beautiful people we are with the naked eye of both the

face and mind, unencumbered by perpetual programming by a people, one of whose goals was to teach and condition us to hate everything about ourselves, and to love everything about them?

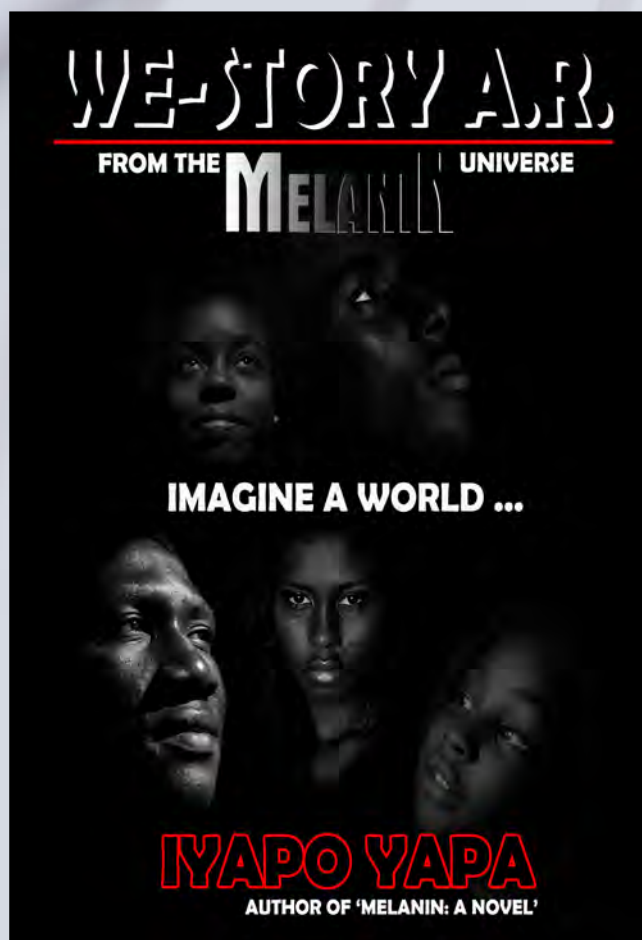
What kind of stories will we tell where there is only Black Us?

What will we create when we now live in the natural state of loving ourselves and our people?!

No one else even as a backdrop! No oppression or slave porn, no discussions of overcoming or endless fighting against a system

designed and determined to crush us into the dust from which we came. No dealing with situations where everyone is Black – but the environment or origin of the problem is still due to white people, manifesting in some form of oppression, discrimination or any number of things designed to cause problems for our people, even down to sicknesses caused by the intentional poisoning of our food and water, or the building of toxic structures in close proximity to Black US.

Or the burning up, tearing down, blowing up and/or outright stealing





**WE-STORY A.R. Stories From The MELANIN Universe (Continued)**

things we spend decades, or centuries building.

In the world after MELANIN, all of that is gone – now we can tell OUR stories!

WE-STORY – the story of Black US!

At the time of this writing, there are large scale wars globally (I'm not talking about internal skirmishes that happen between factions within the same borders or continents, but entire world powers going to war with each other).

Climate change is threatening to make the earth uninhabitable.

Biological, chemical and atomic weapons are being made as quickly and easily as Krispy Kream doughnuts.

Manmade radiation is saturating the globe causing untold sickness, chaos and death. Food is no longer food, and whatever has not been damaged through genetic modification, becomes ruined in the processing of it. And the world is moving in the direction of becoming a dystopian, authoritarian, dictatorial, totalitarian nightmare.

And the one immutable fact, that absolutely cannot be denied or

disputed is that when looking at those who are the architects of all the things just listed, there is one race, and one race only that can be pointed to for the origin, preservation and perpetuation of these horrors—

the Caucasian race.



So ... what does a world look like without those problems?

Without them?

That is the world I'm going to explore!

I will even go as far as to delve into the uncomfortable question of: Ok, it's been nearly a thousand years A.R.

and there are still some issues—what now, now that we no longer have white people and a S.o.W.S. to blame for it?

A world where our stories are no longer rooted in, or with the backdrop of oppression.

A world where, in some instances, the writer is only a few years removed from white people and the system of white supremacy, in a way that it takes time for them to come to terms with the fact they TRULY no longer have a boot on their neck; like having a massive headache or pain in one's



## WE-STORY A.R. Stories From The MELANIN Universe (Continued)

body, then at some point, becoming aware that it's gone, and cautiously waiting to see if it will return—followed by the inevitable sigh of relief upon realizing it is gone for good.

A world where, in some cases, depending upon how far A.R., the knowledge and memory of “white people” or a system of white supremacy is so far removed from the work that the effects of them and the system are literally non-existent.

A world where the struggles we have, the troubles we have, the challenges we have are those which are common to humans, and not artificially imposed upon us by a system in which we exist, but over which we have no control.

So, the art, poetry, stories, essays and even music I create (links will be provided to a site where you can listen), present in these pages are going to be my attempt to imagine as

very best I can, a world where our people, Black people are, have been and continue to remain FREE, and there is only Black Us.

Each will be created using pseudonyms because everything presented will be from the point of view of the person experiencing it—I'll just be exploring it through their eyes and mind, as it were, and taking dictation.

Who knows? In the future, maybe others will appreciate this profound vision, understand what it is about, and what I'm trying to do, and begin submitting their own contributions to the

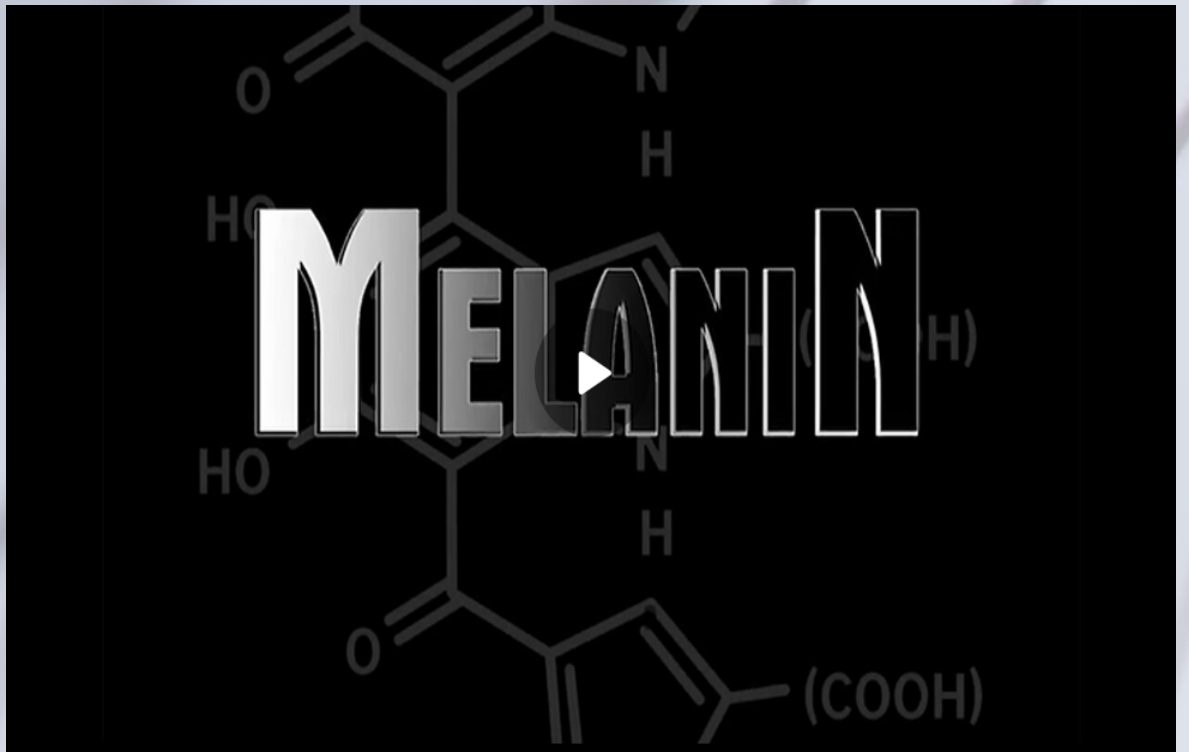
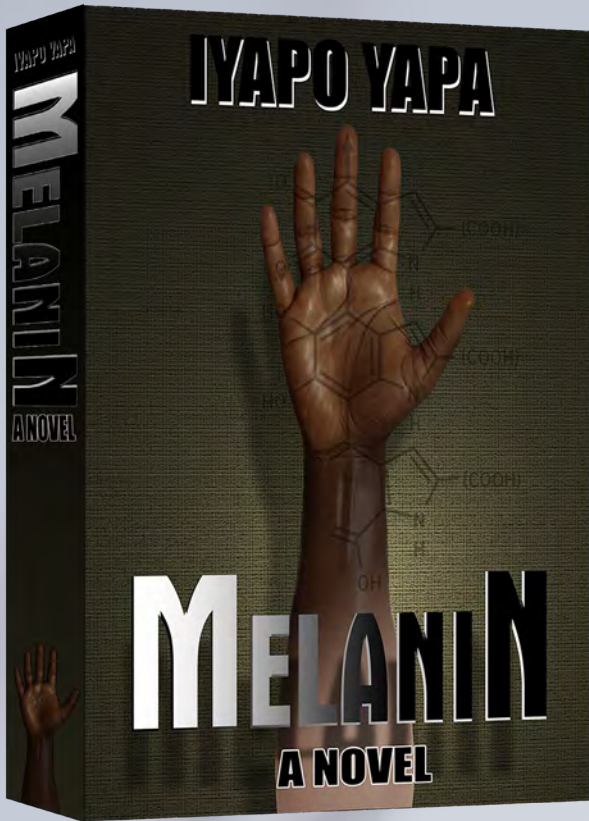
MELANIN world site. Now wouldn't that be something?!

But for now, I am going to visit that place.

So, take my hand, come with me, and—

IMAGINE A WORLD ...





After two years,  
**MELANIN: A Novel** finally has a trailer!  
(And it's an exciting one too!)  
You can check it out now by clicking

the image below!

Click the image above to purchase the novel!



If you're needing to get your **THEORETICAL EBON FICTION (TEF)** fix, **THIS** is the place to go!

*PARADIGM VOID* is a collection of short stories written by Iyapo Yapa, one of the new leaders in the field of Black Science Fiction and Speculative Fiction. Each story explores possibilities and concepts that were not long ago only within the domain of the standard Sci-Fi reader.

Now, with the insurgence of Black writers of TEF, Iyapo is adding his powerful voice to the chorus, and moving at full speed to work in our people taking control of our narrative!

In *PARADIGM VOID*, Iyapo explores things like:

- What if somewhere in the universe numerous alien races observed earth and concluded that there is a faction on the planet that in no way should ever be allowed to reach out beyond the bounds of its own atmosphere?
- 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**.

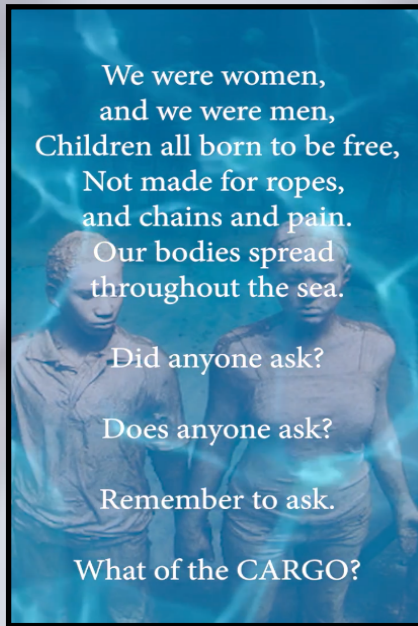


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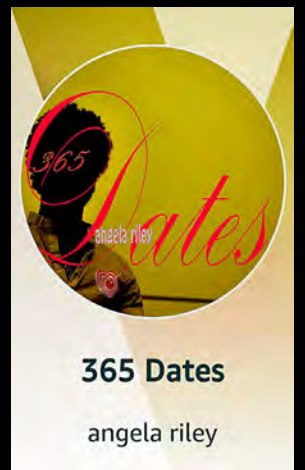
I'd like to say a big **THANK YOU!** To everyone who helped all three of my books to spend some time at number **ONE** on Amazon's **BEST SELLERS** list!



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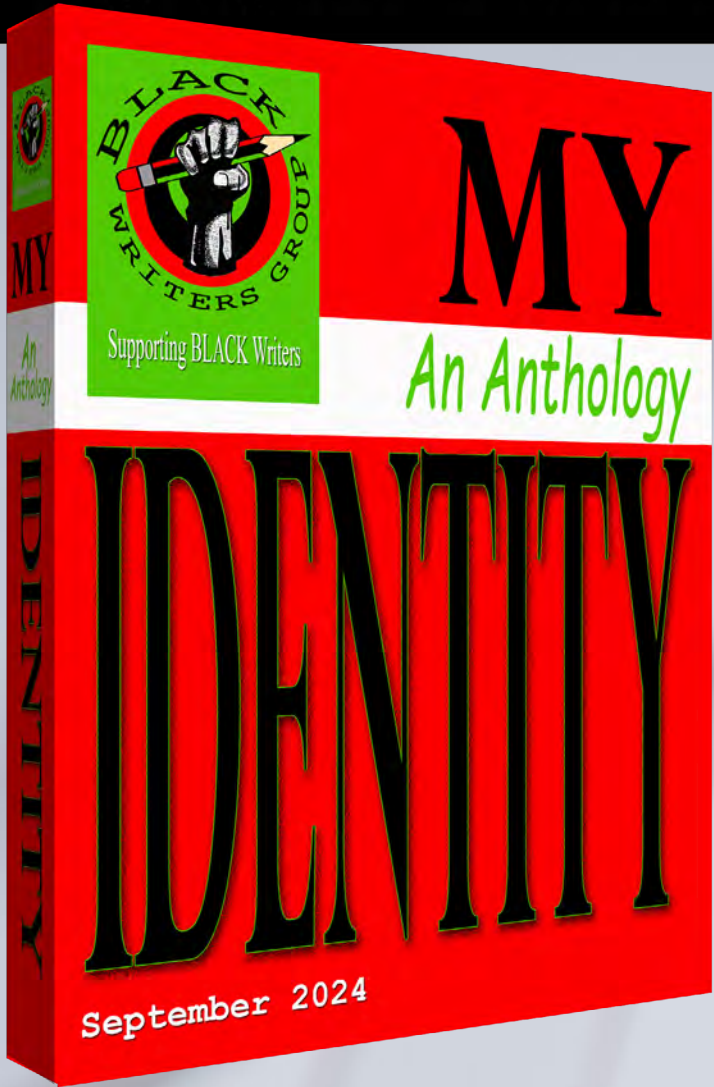


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## MY IDENTITY & BLACK LOVE ANTHOLOGY

Talented Black writers give you their insights in these Black Writers Group publications, *My Identity: An Anthology* and *Black Love Anthology*. The subjects, writing style and personal observations are as varied as the writers themselves. From essays to poems to affirmations to videos, they are surprising, inspirational, & even possibly unsettling. One thing is certain: after reading and experiencing these volumes, you will come away with food for thought as it pertains to Black love and identity, what they are, and what they mean.



## A Meeting of Souls (An excerpt from Paradigm Void II)

Troy dealt the cards between himself, and Janene then laid the stack of undealt cards on the table. They both fanned the cards out before them to see whether or not they got squat. Looking up from his hand to Janene who was sitting across from him and still studying her hand Troy said, “Over a million subscribers huh? Wow—pretty impressive—and now she has, how many channels did you say?”

“Three of four.” Janene said as she arranged the cards in her hand.

“Not bad, not bad.”

“Yep. She wasn’t making so much money at first, but now she makes videos when she wants to, not nearly as many as she did at first though. It’s the typical formula, you put in a bunch of energy up front, then on the back-end things start getting easier, you do less work, but get more rewards. All she had to do was make sure she did videos that were in line with her hustle. She also teamed up with some partners along the way so she wouldn’t have to do as much work. Her bank account has gotten pretty fat from all of it. Every now and then she’ll do some traveling and show off for the people

who gave her the ability to do it, you know, low key laughing at them because she knows she’s a fraud and she considers them all to be a bunch of dupes for buying into her act.”

“Are you sure she isn’t sincere? I mean—you know—are you that sure she’s a charlatan?”



Janene folded her cards together, dropped her hand, tilted her head to one side, “Her whole shtick was supposedly being about Black people, Black women in particular. She started out making video after video talking about how Black

women shouldn’t be in interracial relationships, and especially to stay away from Black men who had children. Then she turns around and marries a white guy with a couple kids and hid it while still talking all that stuff. So yeah—she was a charlatan.”

“So, how long before you figure you guys are back together?”

Janene lifted her hand back up and once again fanned her cards out. “Oh I dunno—I’m probably in the same boat as the rest—you know, after



## A Meeting of Souls (An excerpt from Paradigm Void II) Continued

they've finished doing all their dir..."

Before Janene could finish her sentence there was a slight creaking as the door on the opposite side of the room opened, and every soul in the crowded hall stopped speaking.

Timidly, a small head poked inside and peeked around at the now silent group.

"Uh, they told me upstairs that I was at the wrong room and on the wrong floor. I'm not sure where I should be." Said the nervous looking soul.

Troy shot a quick glance at Janene, who simply shrugged her shoulders. He then turned his attention back to the hapless figure standing at the door. Troy had been in the hall longer than most of the other souls, except for Mitch and a few others, so he had seen many come and go.

He continued to look at the little lost soul for a moment. "Where you sold, or did you just leave?" Troy yelled over finally.

"I—I think I was sold, but I'm not sure." Said the soul at the door.

"Well let me ask this way." Troy tried again, "Did you choose to leave on your own?"

"Choose to leave?! Oh NO! No—I'd never do something like that!"

"Alright, alright—don't get excited." Troy said.

"Sold." Janene said, nodding nonchalantly as she adjusted her cards.

"That's what I figured too." Troy said before calling over to the confused soul in the doorway, "Yeah, you're in the right place! Come on in! Come over here and have a seat with

me and Janene!" he continued as he motioned for the soul to join him and his card partner at the table.

The soul walked in cautiously, not quite knowing what to do or expect. He looked around at all the other tables filling the hall as the other seated souls resumed their conversations, card, chess and domino games, monitor watching or sleeping.

"Come on, come on!" Janene said, "Nobody in here's gonna hurt you! Now, our previous owners—not so





## A Meeting of Souls (An excerpt from Paradigm Void II) Continued

much.”

“Knock it off.” Troy half snickered, “The little guy’s scared enough as it is.”

The little soul walked over and sat down, passing behind Janene and took a quick glimpse at her cards. “Keep the three aces and get rid of the other two, they’re junk, you might get another ace.”

“DUDE!!!” Janene yelled.

The little soul jumped as if hit in the rear end with a stick pin. “I—I’m sorry! I didn’t mean to give away your hand like that. It’s just that I’m kinda nervous, and when I get nervous, I don’t always think about what I’m saying or doing.”

“Well, watch it! I had a primo hand here ‘til you blew it for me.”

“Aw, let off ‘em.” Troy said, “It’s just a card game. We’re not even playing for money or anything.” He looked over to the soul who had by now pulled out a chair and was climbing into it to sit down. “No harm done.”

“Yeah, right.” Janene said, now also looking at the small figure who was now fully seated.

Troy with a slight eye roll, looked at Janene and said, “This is Janene and I’m Troy. What’s your name?”



“Hi. I’m Rodney.” Rodney looked around the room and back to Troy and Janene. “Troy, what is this place?”

“Well, let me ask you this first. What’s the last thing you remember before you got to this building? What do you remember about your owner?” “Oh, I dunno.

He seemed about average to me. He would get up and go to work every day I guess—like everybody else.

Nobody really paid much attention to him, and he would act like it didn’t bother him, but he really craved attention and validation. He ended up having a bunch of relationships that ended badly and...”

“Lemme guess,” Janene said, “every time one of his relationships went sideways he felt like it was the other person’s fault.”



## A Meeting of Souls (An excerpt from Paradigm Void II) Continued

“Yeah! How’d you know that?!”

Janene looked over to Troy and gave a kind of smirk and a slight eye roll, “Lucky guess.” She said.

“Oh yeah?” Janene said “And what was he willing to do to get this attention?” Troy could tell by the way she asked, that he knew where she was going with the question—and admittedly, his mind was leaning in the same direction.

“I guess he was willing to do anything he needed to do, he was pretty driven. Is that important?”

Janene snickered humorlessly. “Is that important.” she said. “My dear Rodney, that’s EVERYTHING! If you had one of those owners, then you probably remember when you got kicked out.”

“Kicked out?”

“Kicked out. Locked out. Whatever you want to call it, it happened, and you couldn’t get back in. I think we all remember that if we don’t remember anything else. As a matter of fact, now that I think about it, I don’t believe

I’ve ever talked to one soul here who doesn’t remember the day they got kicked out and locked out. Look at Mitch over there. Used to belong to some politician. Now he just sits here playing cards and waiting for his owner to kick the bucket so they can join back up and head off to their reward.”

“Reward?”

“Yeah, and trust me, none of us is looking forward to that day. Yeah, well ol’ Mitch says that his owner went into politics after he quit law and his owner wasn’t in politics for a year before he found himself locked out. So,

what’s your story shorty?”

“Like I said, my owner had been through a lot of relationships and break ups. He was pretty bitter by the time all was said and done. Then he found this thing called “social media”. Ever heard of it?”

Troy and Janene looked at each other and slightly rolled their eyes as they shook their heads. “Here we go.” Janene said.

Placing a hand on the new little soul’s shoulder, Troy said, “Rodney... look





## A Meeting of Souls (An excerpt from Paradigm Void II) Continued

around you my friend. It used to be you know, SOMETHING. Sure a few owners locked us out for fame, but when they got famous, they got FAMOUS! World renowned! But now they'll kick us to the curb and lock us out for some temporary social media fame within a tiny bubble. Ask anyone outside that bubble about that owner, and they'll probably say they never heard of 'em. But the owners felt it was worth it enough to lock us out. It's just sad. It doesn't take much anymore. Not much at all."

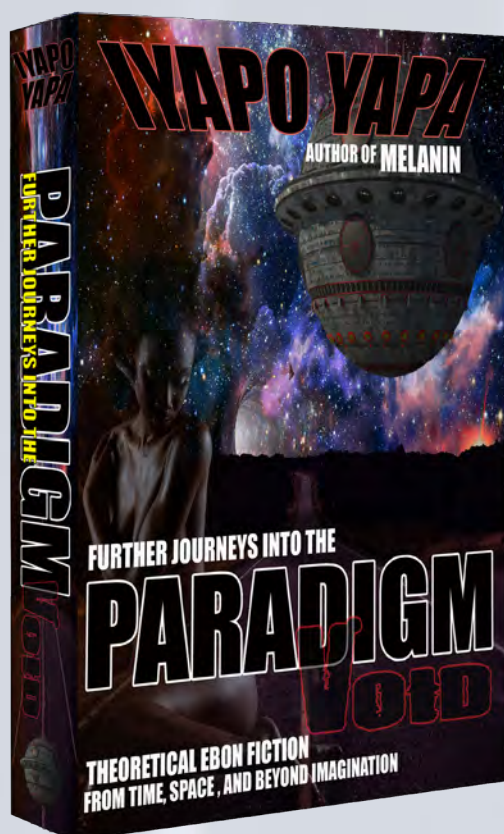
"Yep—the times, they are a—changin'" Janene said.

"And the worst of it," Troy said, "...is that at least in the old days we had the satisfaction of knowing we got kicked out for something big! A HUGE stack of money and power,



around you my friend. It used to be you know, SOMETHING. Sure a few owners locked us out for fame, but when they got famous, they got FAMOUS! World renowned! But now they'll kick us to the curb and lock us out for some temporary social media fame within a tiny bubble. Ask anyone outside that bubble about that owner, and they'll probably say they never heard of 'em. But the owners felt it was worth it enough to lock us out. It's just sad. It doesn't take much anymore. Not much at all."

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# DARIK

*A space for avid Black readers and Black authors*

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

Take a minue 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 fullfilling 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!



READING and WRITING in the

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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.

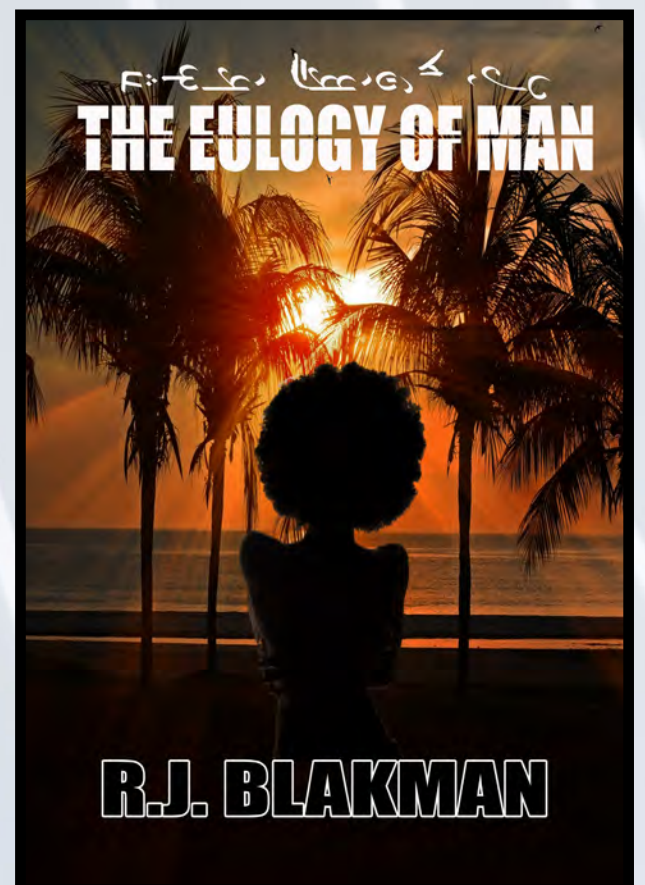
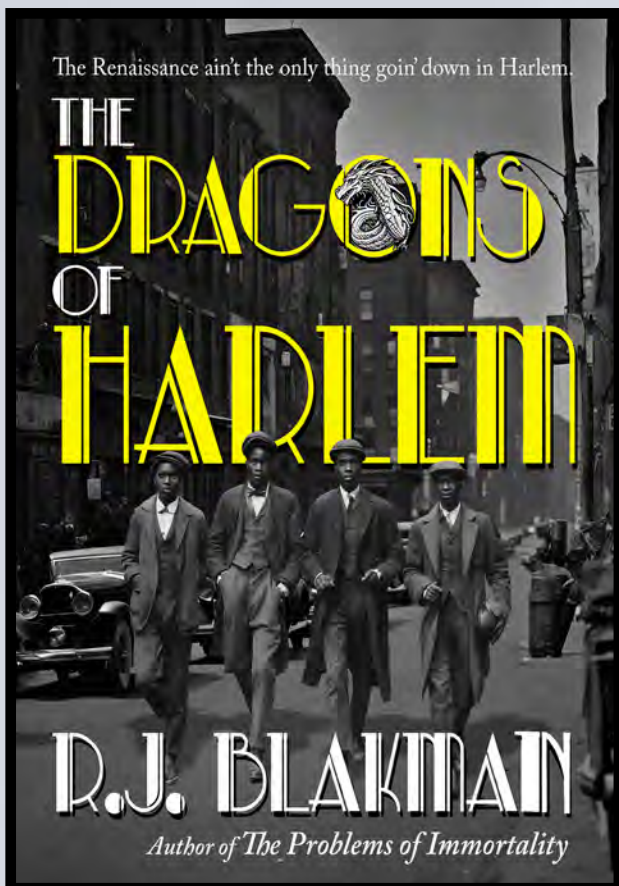
As a practice, Blakman seeks out truth and goes wherever that truth leads him, even if uncomfortable.

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](mailto:rjb@iyapoyapa.com)

### UPCOMING BOOKS BY

## R.J. BLAKMAN



ENTERTAINING,  
ENGROSSING,  
THOUGHT PROVOKING!



## 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. MIND BLOWING!



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## Music to my ears: Did AI finally win me over?! (continued)

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. But this?

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

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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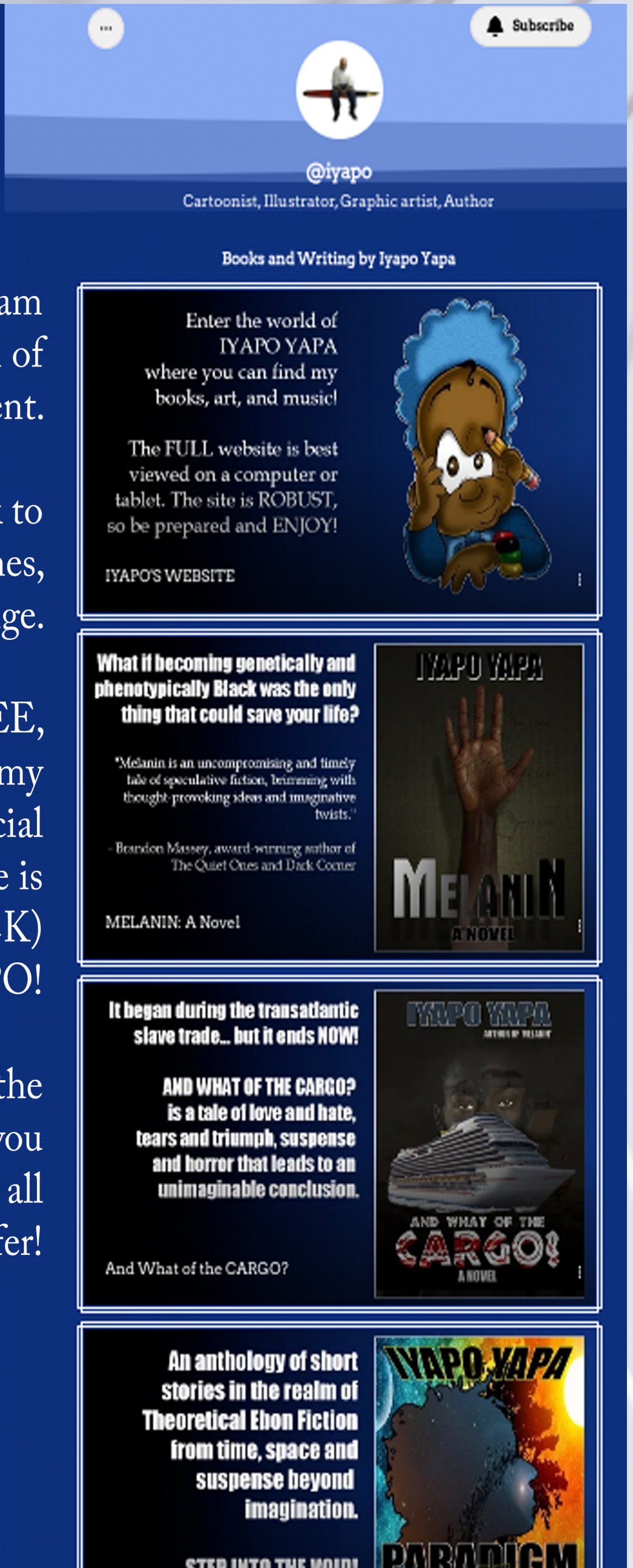
Find Iyapo at:  
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At any given time I am producing some form of ProBlack centered content.

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Cartoonist, Illustrator, Graphic artist, Author

Books and Writing by Iyapo Yapa

Enter the world of IYAPO YAPA where you can find my books, art, and music!

The FULL website is best viewed on a computer or tablet. The site is ROBUST, so be prepared and ENJOY!

IYAPO'S WEBSITE

**What if becoming genetically and phenotypically Black was the only thing that could save your life?**

"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 Coater

MELANIN: A Novel

**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.**

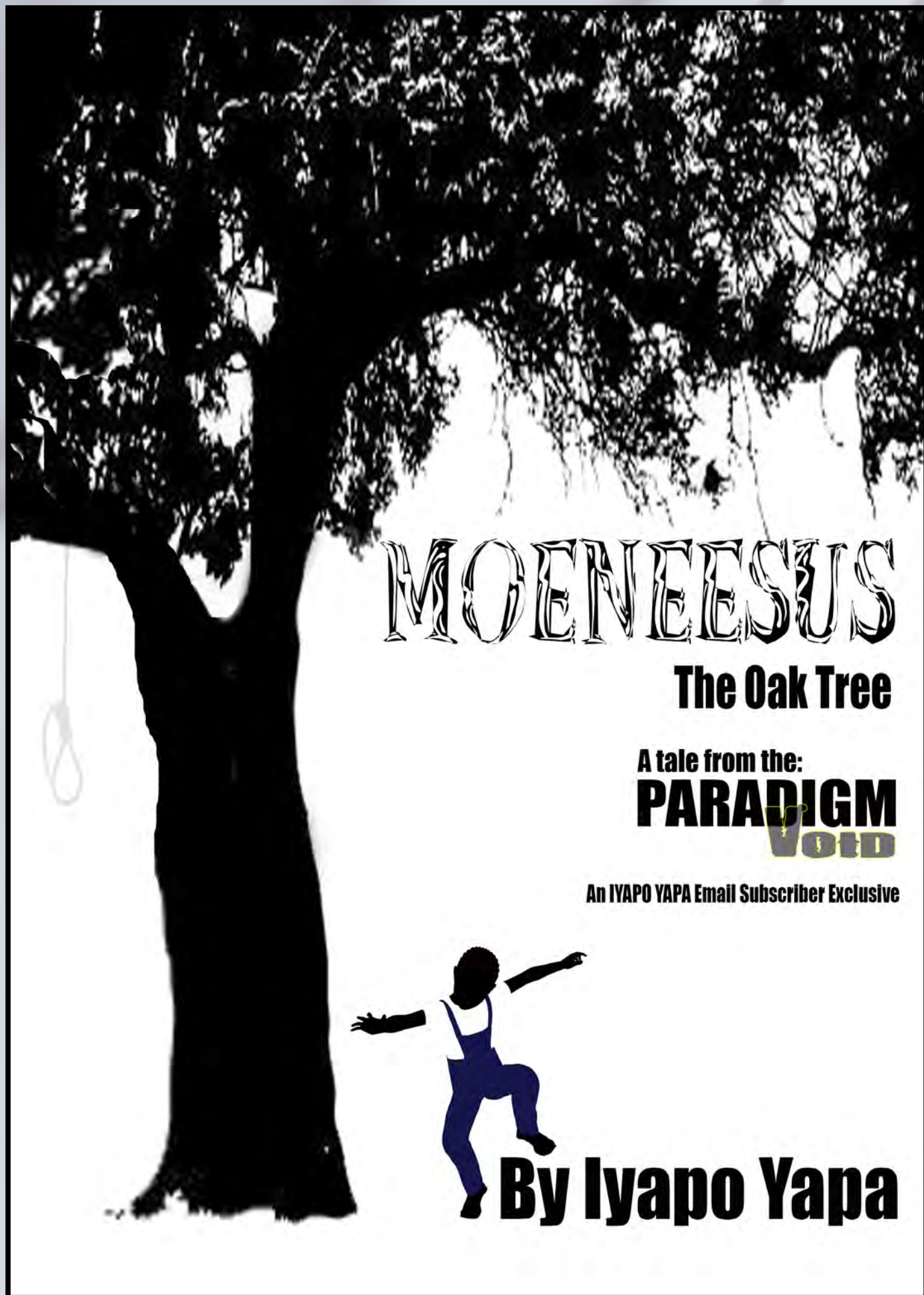
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READING and WRITING in the

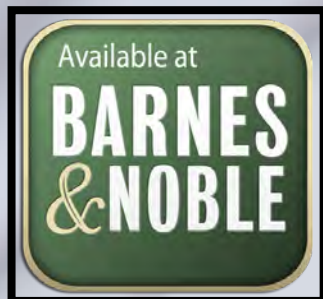
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Click Below For:

And What of the CARGO?



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

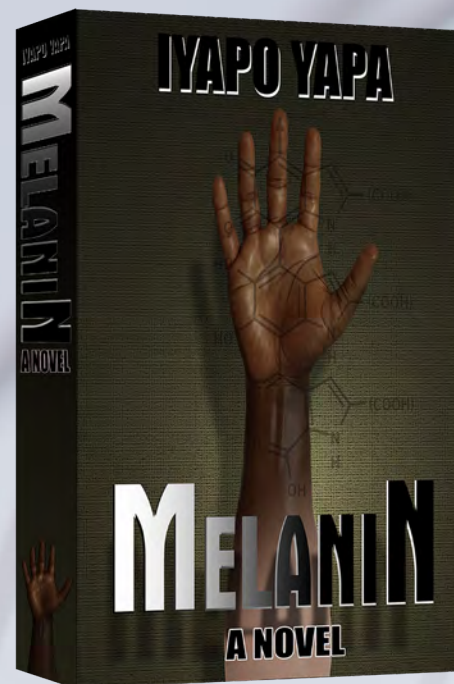
“Yapa weaves another story this time interwoven with historical references. I was on my seat with every chapter. I don't want to give it away but....revenge is sweet when served dead. And I can't get over how different each of his offerings are. Read his Vella's and you'll see what I mean. Another great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

- Amazon review

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## MELANIN: A NOVEL

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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.

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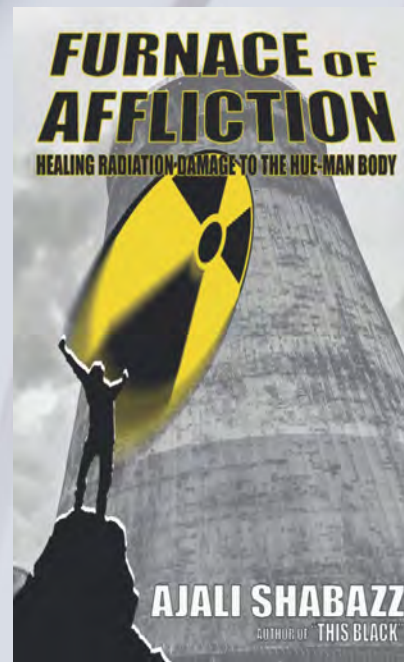
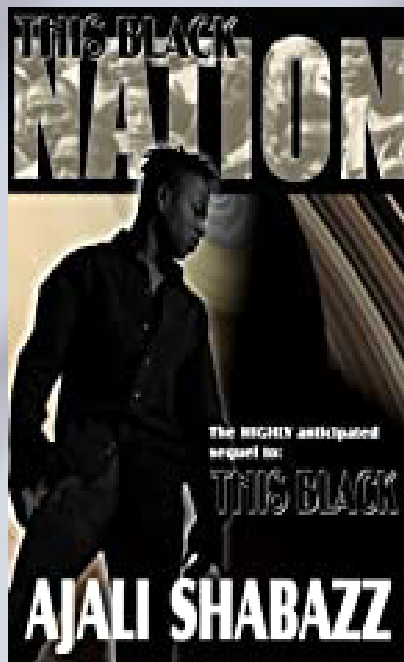
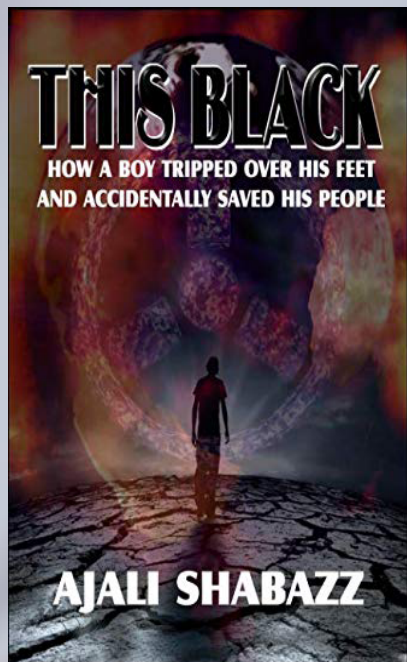
READING and WRITING in the

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Books by:

## AJALI SHABAZZ



Author of: *This Black - This Black NATION* and *Furnace of Affliction!*

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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!

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<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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**podcast!**

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## Have You Checked Out My Blog Yet?

Catch up and keep up with what I'm pondering and seeking to figure out when it comes to this interesting experience we're all having here.

My blog is the place where I talk about what's on my mind and don't worry too much about the formatting or typos - it is, pretty much, my raw perceptions and analysis of what is going on around me.

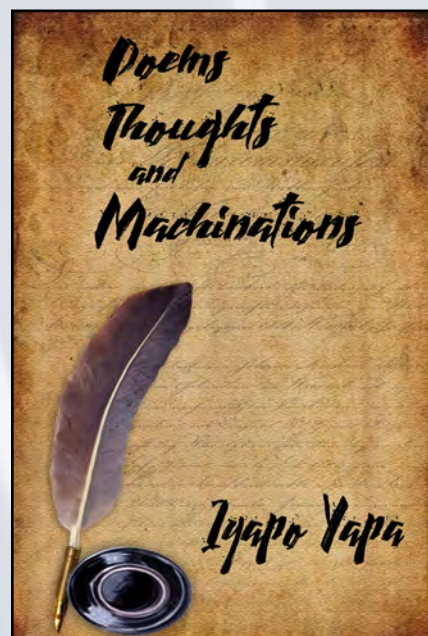


**CLICK THE LOGO ABOVE TO VISIT MY BLOG**



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.

## ANIMATION & RELAXATION

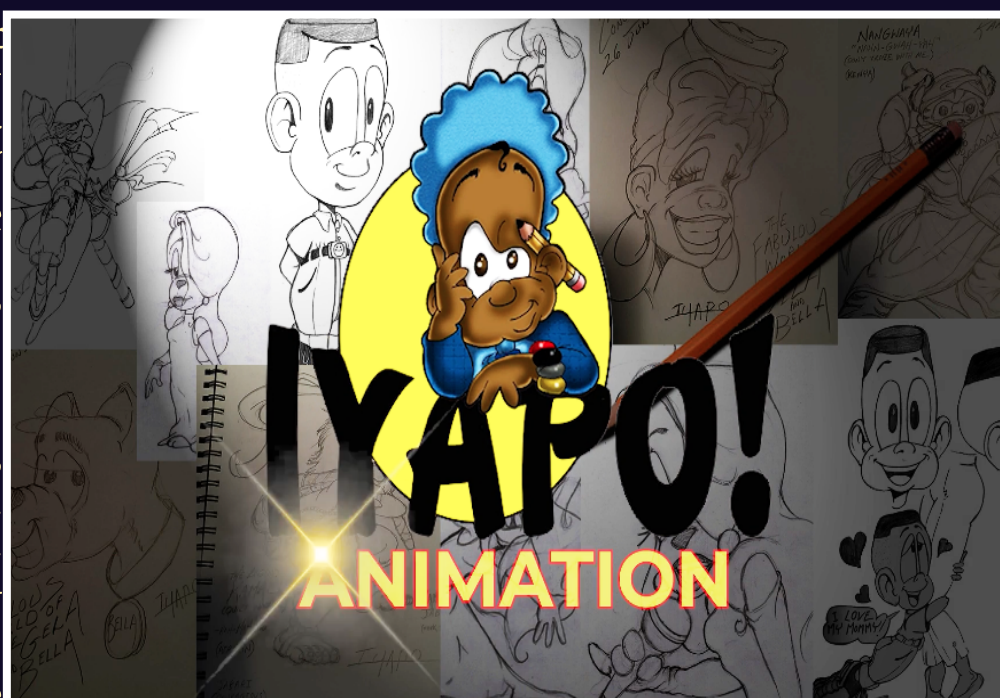
Throughout my life I've learned to do a lot of things. Most of them have to do with something "artsy", like drawing, writing, playing music (including piano, guitar and my favorite, the harmonica). I also taught myself to build computers as well as use

various kinds of software. I taught myself to juggle and to do tricks on a skateboard. (Skateboarding is one of the things I 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.

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 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 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!

READING and WRITING in the

# DARIK

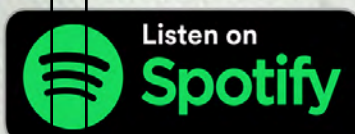
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Two writers  
Two Mics  
&  
Plenty of Banter!



While Black

# THE PODCAST



ANGELA R. RILEY

Author of *AFFIRMING SelfLOVE*

AYOKA B.

Author of *LOVE at SECOND SIGHT*

Click ANGELA to Watch or Listen on YouTube  
Click AYOKA to Listen on Spotify

# READING and WRITING in the **DARIK**

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## Alright, enough about ME!

ENJOY READING & SHARING, for the first time or all over again,  
THESE OTHER AUTHORS & THEIR WORK.

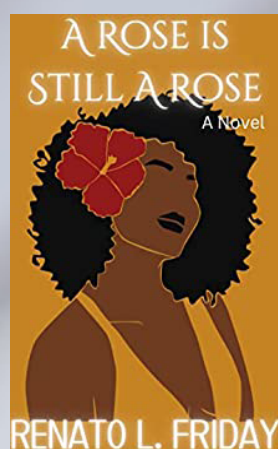


### **Affirming Self Love (Graphic Non-Fiction SERIES)**

angela riley

#### **SelfLOVE Meditation, Reflections, & AFFIRMATIONS Series...**

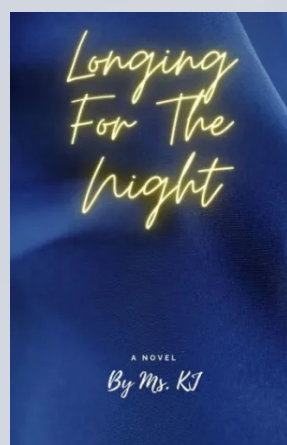
With a new book released each month, this “Graphic Nonfiction” series is filled with love for BlackUs. Each episode opens with a short essay exploring a theme such as “Following the Happy” or “Plan & Reflect” and culminates with a dynamic collection of affirmation. You’ll have a beautiful time meditating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



### **A Rose is Still a Rose**

Renato L. Friday

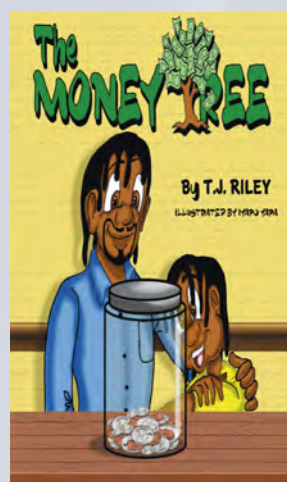
Rose thought life was going great: she was engaged, had a beautiful set of twin girls, a recent trade school graduate, and a new job right around the corner. Unfortunately, her fiancé, David, turned out to not be what she needed, and she chose to break things off. In the midst of her failing relationship, 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

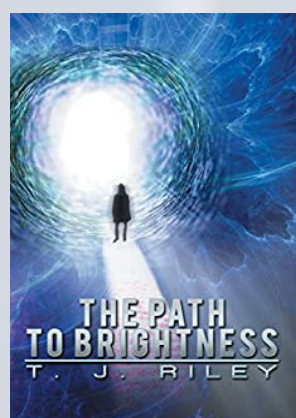
Inspired by the poem Goblin Market by Christina Rossetti, two young sisters face the trials and tribulations of the hood in this coming-of-age story about the harshness of living in South Central Los Angeles.



### **The Money Tree**

T.J. Riley / Illustrated by Iyapo Yapa

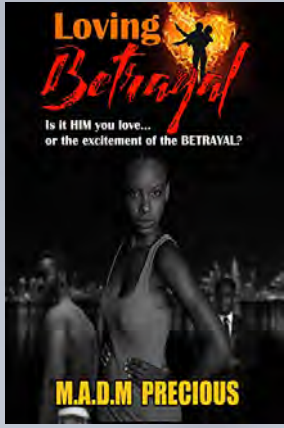
Every child wants money to buy something, right? Our hero does too. But, his father has a surprise, a Money Tree. Join the fun journey to find out how to grow your own money tree.



### **THE PATH to BRIGHTNESS**

T.J. Riley

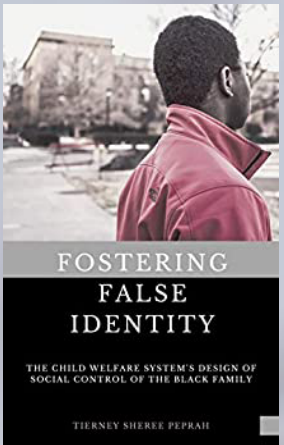
Fatima, a young woman, has a near-death experience. When she awakes from a coma and recovers, she has mystical powers. She begins to see auras and experiences life with her new abilities. For the clever character, Fatima, life is about to dramatically change. Follow Fatima's journey as she tries to convince 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

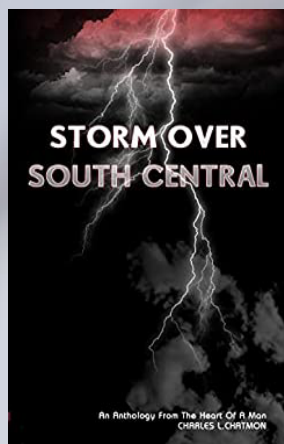
When Michelle met Michael, she thought that she found the love of her life. She was young and coming out of a bad marriage. A single parent of two children, she was scared, broke and had no self esteem. Michael seemed perfect, except for one little problem...



**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.



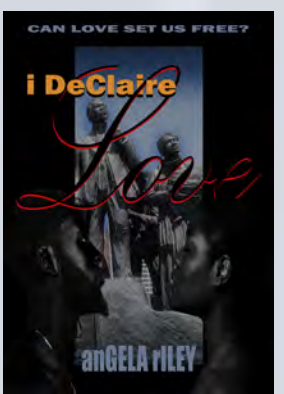
**RELAY**

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.

**ALSO KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR THESE AUTHORS/STORIES -formally on KindleVella-IN OTHER PLACES!**



**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**

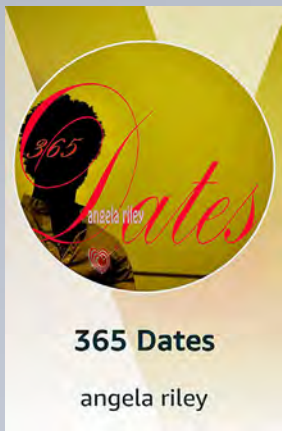
Angela Riley

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.

READING and WRITING in the

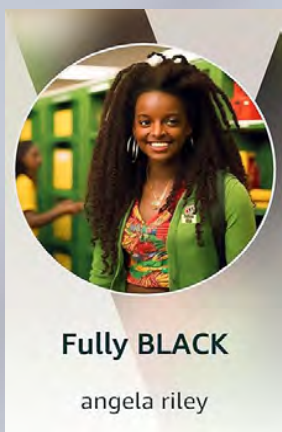
# DARIK

A space for avid Black readers and Black authors



**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.



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!

**Books by IYAPO YAPA**

**MELANIN**  
A NOVEL

**PARADIGM VOID**  
SHORT STORY COLLECTION

**The Redemption of Maxine Allison**  
NOVELLA

**And What of the CARGO?**  
NOVEL

**INTERCEDERS**

**Further Journeys into the Paradigm Void**

**WE STORY ALL**

**THE DREAMS OF A RESTLESS GOD**

**IMAGINE A WORLD... WITH THE "LANIN" UNIVERSE**

**Books BY & ABOUT BLACK US!**

**in the works**

**THEORETICAL SIGN FICTION**

I have always enjoyed Sci-Fi and what is now called "speculative fiction", but missing from the genre was any real representation of our people within those landscapes. Certainly, there are the Octavia Butler, Stephen Barnes and Tananarive Due out there, as well as the Brandon Montoye's (mostly) horror and suspense, and now, new on the scene is Agni Szustak and others. But still, our people have been woefully underrepresented in the genre. When we are present, we are often in the category of "tokenism"—a character I have rejected. Why? Because just as with the much celebrated, fictional "Black Panther"—the term was coined by a white man (Mark Dery) how, exactly how did THAT happen?! It is odd and disturbing to me that every other race seems to have the ability to control their own narrative and terms pertaining to them, but when BLACK people seek to do so, it's seen as some kind of a problem. That said, part of being Unapologetically Black, or PRO Black means that we seek our own terms and control of our own narrative, future and direction, thus, I use the term "THEORETICAL SIGN FICTION" to describe much of my work.

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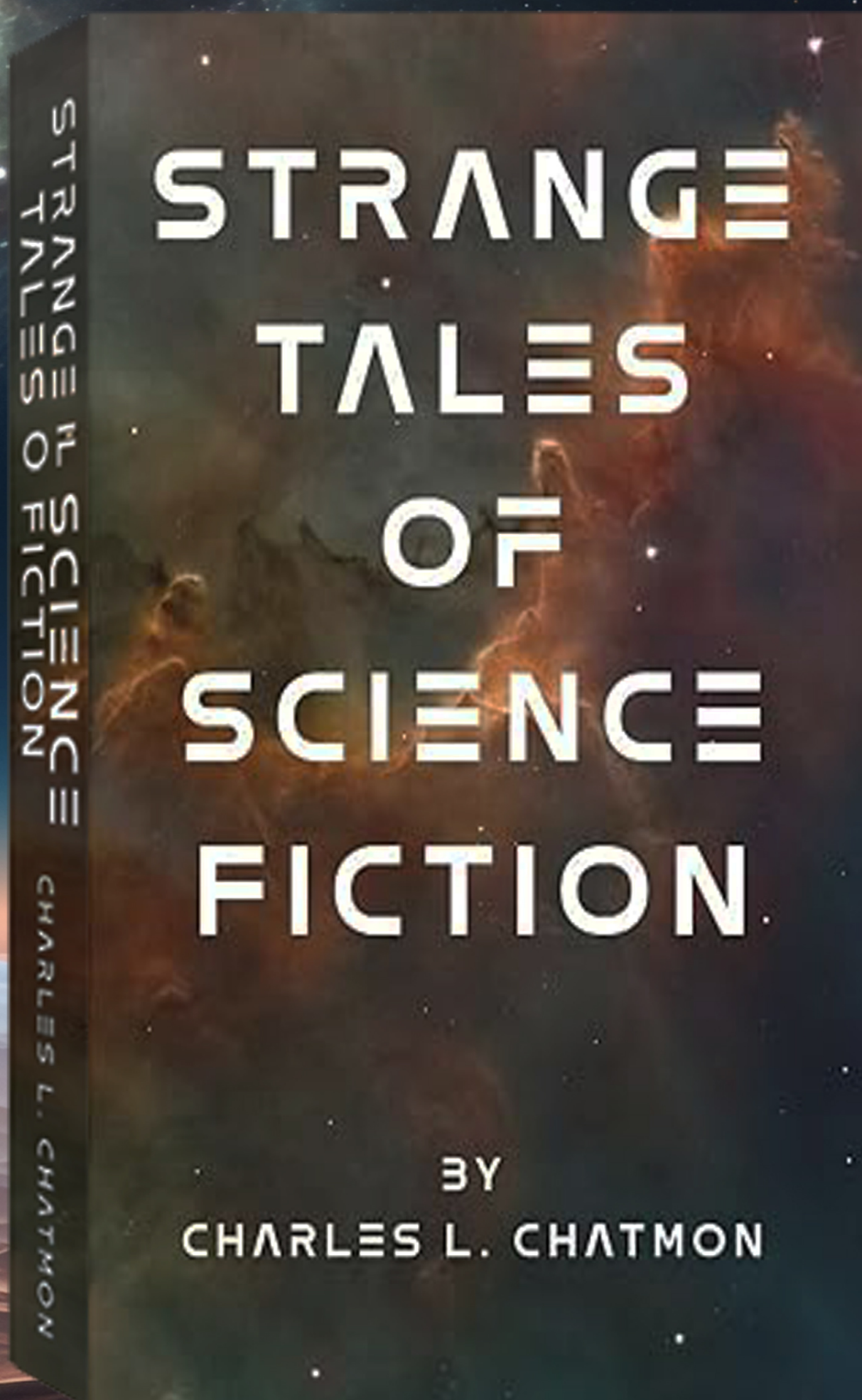
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Who would have thought an alien species of warriors would have the fight of their lives against an army from earth? What's going on behind the walls of a movie studio that looks suspicious? Why are two highway patrol officers chasing after a stranger 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?

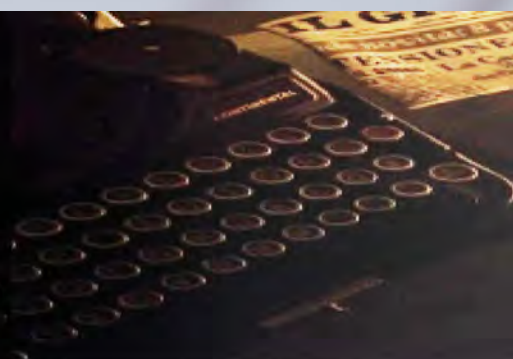


**CLICK ON THE BOOK ABOVE TO PURCHASE ON AMAZON!**

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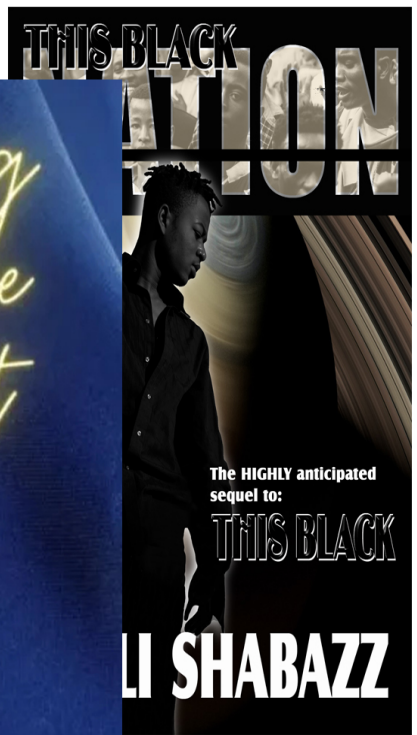
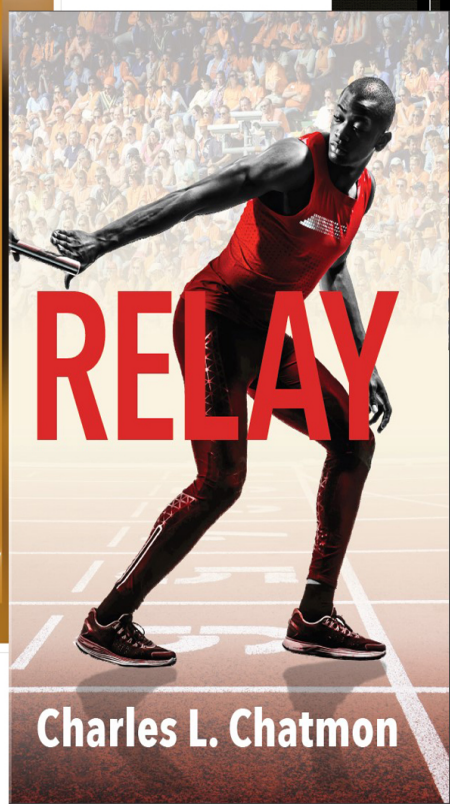
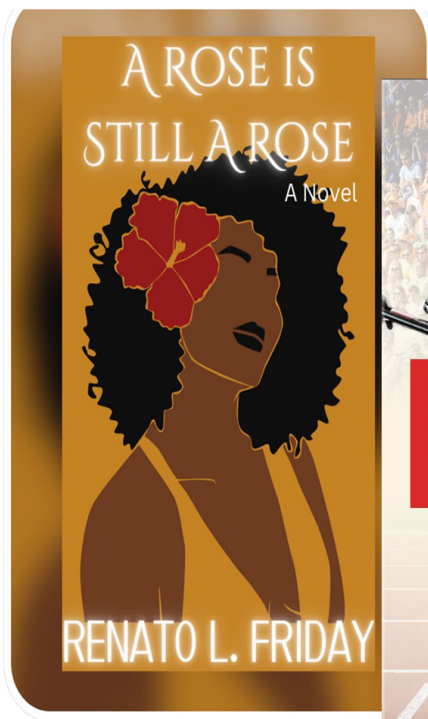


## FEBRUARY 2025



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# BLACK HISTORY MONTH 2025



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