

The truth is...we gather on the Third Monday of each month (except January and February where it is the fourth Monday) to practice our writing skills. We listen and share in each other's work. We are small in number and our commitment is strictly to produce and foster creativity among our members.

We started in July 1999 and consist of adults that enjoy writing memoirs, commentaries, essays, poems, and/or prose. Our simple method each month is to use a pre-selected word or phrase as the basis of a story, an idea, an opinion, a derivative of, or an implied essence of and write a document of no more than 1000 words (approximately 2 pages). We share our stories, comment, and in that way build up our writing skills through practice and presentation. The atmosphere is friendly and supportive, and the feedback is gentle.

Curious? Always wanted to try writing for fun, entertainment, or even profit? Come visit with us at any of our open meetings. Bring a sample of your work. Sit in and see what we do. If you like it, join us every month and become a member. Contact Nancy at nestewart@ameritech.net [for information.](#)

Original Works by Members of the Pen & Ink Writers' Group
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April 2024 Selection – Fling

Back to the Dark Age: Part 3
By Mark Moe

As Apocalypse exited his time chamber, he felt the familiar dry heat of the desert sun beating down on the walls of the pyramid. It never bothered him because, unlike humans, he does not have to worry about sunburn. When he had traversed outside, he pulled a small tracking device out of a pouch on his belt and started to scan for the unique isotope signatures of the other two stones. The scanner had a limited range of about three thousand miles radius but could at least point him in the right direction. The second stone's unique signature appeared not far from his location, but clearly in the middle of the ocean. He punched the coordinates into his teleporter, stepped through the shimmering doorway that appeared and vanished.

Almost instantaneously, a new doorway opened, and he found himself quickly sinking like a giant stone toward the bottom. Again, not being human meant not drowning, but he was not big on moving through water due to its annoying nature. A quick press on another button on his wrist allowed him to stop his quick descent and now thanks to his boot jets, he could float above the water. Apocalypse pulled the scanner out again to verify second gem coordinates and

it was indeed in the ocean right below his position. He shook his head and said, "What I would not give to have one of my Four Horsemen retrieve this gem instead of me." He touched the glowing blue button on his wrist and sank beneath the water. The scanner was leading him to an underwater cavern that had been long lost like the legendary Atlantis itself.

"It is not surprising that I would find one of the gems under water. That fool Celestial, Neptune probably had a temple dedicated to him with the gem in the center of it all. His temple must have been above water in the past," thought Apocalypse to himself.

As he continued, his insights proved correct because he found a massive set of descending stone stairs going underground to a caved-in entrance. "This should be fun," he said as he started to work on destroying the blockage at the entrance.

As Cyclops had predicted, it took a day for most of the crew to sober up. Once they left the port, they would have almost six hundred miles to reach Egypt not including a fair trek to locate the Pyramid of Apocalypse. It was all Nightcrawler's crew could do to reach speeds of twenty miles per hour. If they ran afoul of intemperate weather, the progress would be interminable in nature. Nightcrawler tied off the steering wheel and walked over to Cyclops standing near the bow of the boat. He saw his visor flashing red every couple of seconds. "Mein Freund Scott, what is bothering you? I know we were unable to use the X-jet in the past, but we will find a way to stop Apocalypse."

Cyclops turned and replied, "I wish I had your optimism, my young friend. Apocalypse was stopped in the second Dark Age that he created by all the heroes of the world. Now we are chasing an ancient mutant across the actual Dark Age with six mutants and thirty humans. We will be hard pressed to catch him. That is why the Professor wanted us to go to his pyramid to destroy his time travel capabilities first. He believes that Apocalypse would rather rule the modern world where he can enslave all the mutants and humanity not just humanity by itself."

"Ja, Apocalypse is a scary monster for certain, but he has not dealt with Captain Nightcrawler and his hearty, drunken pirates," Nightcrawler exclaimed.

The serious scowl on Cyclops's face turned into a smile and then to laughter. Thanks Kurt, I needed that," Cyclops responded.

"Kein Problem, Mein Freund," Nightcrawler replied as he teleported back to his position at the helm. The crew accepted that their captain and his friends have strange powers, but it was still unsettling. Kurt can only teleport short to medium distances and every time he does, there is the smell of brimstone as he travels almost instantaneously through another dimension to the new location that is within his eyesight.

Within a week of travel, Forge had turned his room into a portable lab and was trying to develop weapons for the inevitable confrontation with Apocalypse. Gambit and Rogue sat with Forge trying to offer encouragement and brainstorm ideas to help Forge with a direction for weapons they could use against Apocalypse, but they were not on the same level as Beast in terms of technical expertise. Forge turned to them while working on something else and said, "What if I design a belt that we can shoot onto Apocalypse to disrupt his time signature here in

the past and "fling" him back to the present. Then we could recruit all the heroes in the future to defeat him again.

Rogue responded, "Do y'all think he will stay still enough for you to shoot him with that belt? He stays still about as much as group of angry cats fighting during a rainstorm?"

Gambit added, "Mon Ami, I like this idea, but I have to agree with Rogue. That Apocalypse will not stay still for one and he is strong like Colossus as well. He will snap that belt like me biting into a beignet."

"I should work with a younger crowd of mutants. Maybe Sunspot and Nightcrawler would be better to bounce ideas off of instead of you two Southerners. I am trying to come up with ways to drain him of his power and do what Charles asked me to do, namely, trap him in the past. I thought it would be easier to force him back to the present, but if we do not destroy his time travel equipment, history will repeat itself again."

###

Final Fling **By Pauline Bastek**

I was patiently waiting at the door after having rung the bell several times. Patiently was the key word when visiting homebound church members as a home minister. I had prefaced my visit with a phone call as I was filling in for a fellow minister who was on vacation. Finally, the door handle jiggled and I was greeted by a smiling silver haired lady hanging on to her walker. She warmly greeted me and told me to come in and make myself comfortable. I did, telling her that Jenny, her regular visitor was on vacation as part of fulfilling her "Bucket List."

My hostess, who had told me to just call her, Dolly, laughed and said that she also had a bucket list but she and her fellow retirees called it their final fling. I told her that I would love to hear about it as the name alone sounded interesting, She laughed and asked me to bring her a glass of water as she had to take her pills. Getting her the water, I noticed how beautifully kept her home was. There was none of the clutter or stale odors that I had grown to associate with the home bound elderly. Taking the glass, she drank as she swallowed the pills.

I asked if she would like to join me in a reading from the Bible or perhaps she had a favorite prayer we could say before she received the Eucharist. She laughed and asked if I wouldn't rather hear about her final fling. I was so surprised that I simply said that I was there at her pleasure. Inwardly, I was getting curious about this silver-haired, Dolly, who seemed to have taken charge, as opposed to my ladies who sat and just waited for me to take charge of the visit.

Dolly related to me that after years of working as a civil servant, she and a few other retirees decided to make the civil service serve as its name implied. They had spent too many years seeing it benefit very unworthy and in many instances guilty parties, who went unpunished because they were in a position to manipulate the law to benefit themselves. Many, far too many,

people never received justice. They were well aware they couldn't right all the wrongs, but they could certainly begin to even some scores leaving the world a more equitable place.

They had two things in their favor, they were over 85 and they were technically very savvy due to their years at government computers. Being over 85 was critical as they knew that from their years at work, that it was the cut off age in investigative programming. It had thus been programmed in the beginning and not changed since. Thus anyone over 85 was automatically excluded from being a suspect in investigations. This had been brought to the attention of the higher echelon but laughingly dismissed. They couldn't imagine avengers being over 85. She cheerfully told me that their group grew slowly but they exacted justice on a continual basis.

I managed to ask how many final flingers there were and how long had they been involved. She said they kept the membership at a dozen which allowed them to stay under the radar and yet be able to continue with work a member left uncompleted due to their sudden departure.

She smiled at me as I sat in stunned silence and asked for me to join her in a reading from the old testament. I did but to this day I only remember that it was about justice of the eye for an eye variety.

She then asked if I could let myself out as she needed to take her usual nap. I walked out to my car and in a daze drove to a Starbucks. It was too early for a drink. By the time I finished my coffee and got home, I was laughing at myself for having taken her story of a final fling seriously.

A few days later I got a call from Dolly's regular minister, Jenny, to tell me she had passed on in her sleep after her 97th birthday dinner with her son. I went to the wake and giving my condolences to her son casually asked if any members of Dolly's final fling would be attending the funeral. He smiled and asked how I knew about the group as they were rather secretive about it. He hugged me and said that she must have really been fond of me to tell me about it. He doubted that any of them would be up to coming to the funeral, but a few just might attend the wake. He was always surprised to see that despite their years, they managed to be together to plan various outings.

Suddenly, I realized, looking at him that he had no idea of Dolly's group and anxiously left. Every time I read a death notice of a questionable nature I think a positive thought of a smiling silver-haired lady doling out justice as her final fling.

###

What Have I Done? **By Carol Karvon**

Had Amy given her impulsiveness more thought she might not have done anything about it. She realized now it was a momentary lapse in good judgement and put it out of her mind. But unfortunately, as the old saying goes, “hindsight is always perfect.”

Amy was almost ready to graduate college. She had already accepted her dream job. That job was nearly 200 miles away; away from her family and friends.

Sometimes, if she thought about it too long it made her sad.

Other times she realized how lucky she was to be young and have her future ahead of her.

But, she worried, too, that she was peaking too early and what did she have to look forward to if she already found her ideal job. She was driving herself crazy and needed to stop the insanity.

Everyone she cared about assured her that she wouldn't be so far away that they couldn't get together periodically, especially for holidays, or birthdays, or maybe other special occasions. It could work out. They'd just have to see.

Amy had always loved school and learning new things. She had excellent grades throughout all her school years. It wasn't easy and took hard work on her part. She always enjoyed the challenge of finding answers. So, she decided she had earned a reward for all her years of effort and hard work.

“I need to do something different,” she said to herself, “something I've never done before. I think I need some kind of fling. I think I need a shopping spree. That could be a once-in-a-lifetime fling.”

Amy had always been frugal; ever since she was a little girl. When her sisters and friends were spending their allowances, she saved her money and tried to spend wisely. With that in mind she started thinking perhaps she could throw caution to the wind just this once and treat herself to something special.

She started making lists of things she wanted but could never afford before. Since she lived at home with her parents any extra money had gone into school expenses. Her parents still supported her but were not affluent. She tried to help by paying for whatever she could on her own.

She thought about the best way to utilize her meager savings and get the most for her money. She debated mentally with herself taking both positive and negative sides. It had always been her way to solve an issue. Sometimes the right solution just popped into her head if she let it rest a while.

So, she told herself, she might treat herself to a new computer, for the new job, of course, when I go on my spree.

Or maybe a new phone would be a better choice. I could always access the internet and my e-mails on the phone.

There were so many things to choose from and a limited amount of money to use for her fling that Amy's head began to ache. Oh well she thought I don't have to decide right now. Tomorrow is another day.

The very next day a sale ad caught her attention and she rushed to the store and bought a new computer before she could second guess herself. But driving home with her purchase

buyer's remorse attacked her and she regretted making a rash purchase. That's when she realized her normally good judgement had suffered a momentary lapse and she would put it behind her.

###

A Senior Spring Fling By N. Stewart

I was volunteering at the Sunnyside Retirement Home and was asked to help with the spring mixer, being held on April 22nd. Two days before the event, we were hanging colored balloons from the ceiling and setting potted spring plants around the room at different heights. The center of the room was left empty to be used as a dance floor, patio table 4 tops were scattered around the perimeter. The tables were covered with yellow and white gingham cloth, on top were scattered spring green sequins, and the centerpieces were small gift-wrapped containers of miniature red, yellow, or pink roses. The room looked beautiful. As we opened the door to leave, several of the resident ladies were casually standing around, attempting to get a peek inside. We invited them to come and look, but they were embarrassed at being caught spying and quickly disappeared.

The Home had been a buzz for over a week in anticipation of the event. Everyone in the building was invited and even encouraged to attend. The "Old Timers" 4-piece band had been hired for the event. They were older, good-looking men that loved to play music and were back by popular demand. The residents loved to listen to and to sing along with the band members. No musical request was ever rejected. The band members were entertainers, mixing it up with the audience, clowning around with hats, and bringing a tear to the eye when the lead sang Irish ballads.

My volunteer job was to socialize with the residents. I was working on a Master's degree in social work and that service seemed to fit right in. I would sit with the residents and listen to them. All of them had an interesting life story to tell; some talked about traveling, some about their family, some about hardship, and some about joy. But this morning, the conversation was different. Everyone, men included were talking about the Spring Fling that was to take place that evening in the community room. The ladies were invested in telling me what they would wear for the event and asked how their hair and nails looked. One lady showed me her black polished nails and I must admit it was somewhat of a shock to see that on someone...so old. She continued by saying her granddaughter had thought it would go with her outfit for the Spring Fling and had done her nails. I understood then. The men didn't say much of anything except they were only going for the refreshments and perhaps as a second thought to listen to the music as well.

I was one of the greeters for the event. As the residents came in, I handed them a program and told each lady how lovely she looked. The men took the programs and walked immediately over to the food tables. It looked to be a full house. Delicious looking Hors d'oeuvres and mocktails were available, everyone helped themselves. Wait staff was on hand to help anyone

that couldn't carry their refreshments to a table or needed help in any way. The band was tuning up on stage. Gatherings formed and they settled themselves into place. The band opened with a Beattle's medley from the 60s, and the crowd began clapping and cheering. Some of the residents got up to dance, either individually or in pairs. Some brave men even ventured to ask a lady to dance. Most, however, watched. The band played for an hour and took a short break. The overall noise level subsided a little but the volume of chatter increased. Everyone was having a good time.

The band returned to playing. Once more they stopped but this time was to announce the king and the queen winners of the Spring Fling contest. Based on the voting results collected over the last week, Joan was elected as queen and Ben was elected as king. The audience applauded as a crown was place on each head. I overheard a few grumbles that someone or other should have won, but that is not unusual. The band played "*At Last*" and the king and queen awkwardly danced together. Those that could, joined to formed a slowly moving circle around the couple. With everyone remaining on the floor, the band paused for a one-two down beat and began playing "*The Twist*." Smiles broke as the audience swiveled their hips to the music and laughed at each other's attempt to be cool.

Later, the band called for the last dance and I could feel a little sigh coming from the residents. When the band stopped playing, all enthusiastically applauded, leading to one encore and then playing a second one of "Let me be your Teddy Bear." The band leader shouted "Good night all!" And, with the music ended, the lights came up and the party was over.

The director thanked all the people for attending the Sunnyside Retirement Home's Spring Fling, hoped everyone had a good time, and asked for a hand for the band. The residents complied. The gala event ended at 8:00 p.m. and the participates began to wander out of the room. I said good night to the residents as they left and handed each a take home goodie bag. The staff and personal caregivers waited outside the community room door to claim their person that needed special help in getting around.

Several groups were gathered in the hall, singing songs that they heard at the event, and chatting with friends and neighbors about it. Eventually everything quieted and all left for their respective apartments. It was time for me to leave also. With my heart filled with an evening of music and song, Elvis and I left the building.

###

"Moholy-Nagy: Future Present"
By J. Smetana

Hey man did you have a FLING with Aunt Judy when Jerry was in the 'Nam? Peaches, Jerry was never in the 'Nam. What are you talking about? Aunt Judy says you were lovey-dovey, lovey-dovey, lovey-dovey all the time. Well, it is true some people call me Maurice cause I speak of the pompitous of love.

###

Vampire Eyes **By Kelly Tansor**

Sideline Tavern is your typical hole-in-the-wall dive bar where...honestly, not much happens. Most people tend to end their nights here, not start them. Our clientele consists of older gentlemen having their after-dinner drink, or college boys having a nightcap. Other than that it's pretty quiet most of the time, and our regulars tend to keep to themselves.

So color me surprised when she came in.

She wore a pale blue shirt and a black pencil skirt down to her ankles, and she kept her long brown hair draped over her shoulders. She didn't have a ton of makeup or jewelry like most of the women who come in (not that we get a lot of women coming in here). She walked briskly and kept her eyes fixed to the barstool she sat down on. A few of the other patrons glanced at her before returning to their drinks, but she wouldn't look at any of them.

She raised her hand. "Excuse me," she said firmly.

I smiled and walked casually toward her. "Yes, what can I get you?"

"Vodka cranberry, please," she said, her eyes locked on mine. She pulled out her debit card. "I'll start a tab."

"Coming right up," I told her. The name on the card was Audrey. I began making her drink and kept an eye on her to be sure no one tried to harass her (I've been bartending a long time, so I've seen a few things). She sat stiffly as she scrolled on her phone. It was clear that she wasn't trying to get anyone's attention. Most of the regulars dressed casually and will talk to just about anyone, so she wasn't my typical customer.

I assumed she wanted to keep to herself, so I planned to just hand her the drink and leave her be. Instead, when I handed the drink to her, she then asked me, "So what's the weirdest thing you've seen at your job?"

"What?" I asked.

"I do this with all the bartenders I meet," she explained. "Bartenders always have interesting stories. Uber drivers, too. So tell me, what's something weird or crazy you've seen on the job?"

I smirked. "I'll be honest, nothing too crazy happens here. Aside from the occasional drunk guy that needs a ride home from his buddies, it's pretty chill."

Audrey raised her eyebrows. "That's a relief," she said before sipping her drink.

"Not looking for anything chaotic?" I asked, trying to make conversation. This girl barely looked comfortable in her own skin, so I tried to ease her tension.

"I've had enough chaos in my life," she said, throwing her hands out. "I've been trying to find a bar in the area that's, like, dark and quiet, so this fits the vibe." She quickly took a big gulp from her drink.

I looked up at the dim lights above us. "Well, you've certainly come to the right place. You know, I've never liked how dark it is here, but you get used to it."

"Please, I have eyes like a vampire," she said. "I'm so sensitive to lights. Too much fluorescent light or even sunlight will give me a migraine."

'Eyes like a vampire' was certainly a term I hadn't heard before. I tried to look at her eyes to verify, but it was too dark to make out the color. I leaned my elbows on the bar. "That's gotta suck," I said earnestly. "Well, I'm sorry it drove you to a dive like this."

“You’re not a very good salesperson, you know?” she said sarcastically. “And I’m fine with a dive like this. All the other bars around here are just crawling with creeps.”

“Well, I try to keep the creeps at bay,” I said proudly.

She went on. “God, all they want is a one-night stand or some quick, meaningless fling. I’m so sick of flings.” Her voice trailed off and she finished her drink. “One more, please.”

I took her empty glass. “Right away.”

Just then, one of my regulars, Ted, walked up to the bar and sat next to Audrey. “Hey, Jack,” he grunted, “would you mind shinin’ a light? I’m trying to see if this scratcher won anything.”

Audrey had shifted in her seat so she was sitting at an angle with her back turned to Ted. She had nothing to worry about, though, because Ted paid no mind to her. After handing Audrey her drink, I flashed my phone’s flashlight over Ted’s scratch-off lotto ticket. Ted carefully inspected his card. Out of my peripheral vision, I could see Audrey squinting her dark brown eyes (she wasn’t kidding about her eyes being sensitive). She still had her phone out in her hands, almost like she was pretending to still look at it. Her lock screen was still on.

Then my eyes were drawn to her right forearm. Toward the center was a small, curved scar, no longer than my fingernail. It looked fairly fresh.

“Gah, no winner,” said Ted, breaking me out of my concentration. He slammed his lotto card on the bar and turned toward the door. “Thanks, Jack. I’ll see ya tomorrow,” he said as he strolled out the door.

“You got it, man.” I turned off the flashlight. After Ted was outside, Audrey shifted in her seat again to sit straight. My eyes shifted toward her arm. She must have noticed because she started caressing her forearm where the scar was, keeping her eyes downcast.

“I apologize, miss,” I said quickly. “It just caught my eye. It’s none of my business.” I quickly turned away and started wiping down the bar, my way of showing her I would leave her alone.

We were both quiet. I couldn’t dare look in her direction again. Each second that passed filled me with more dread. I didn’t mean to make her feel uncomfortable, I’m not that kind of guy. Was she going to raise a fit? Storm out? Complain to my boss? Write a bad review?

“It was my ex.”

###

Bedtime Stories **By Vicki Elberfeld**

As a little girl I was afraid of the night - the darkness, the silence - afraid of falling asleep. I’d imagine the animals in my room, from two monkeys on my circus curtains to the stuffed creatures in my closet, staring at me all night long. One night I was horrified when a nightmarish, flaming, ten foot tall vacuum cleaner appeared and began slowly talking to me.

When I went to bed the following evening, I was terrified thinking of the monkeys on the curtains staring at me, the animals in the closet trying to stare at me, and the possible reappearance of the flaming, talking vacuum cleaner when Mother encouraged me to say my bedtime prayer. I hated that prayer beginning, “Now I lay me down to sleep” and ending, “Wake me with the morning light.”

"*Wake me...*" Clearly the issue was in some doubt.

Years later I encountered an older form of that prayer which ended "If I should *die* before I wake, I pray the Lord my *soul* to take." Mother used the cleaned up version, but it's not so easy to fool little girls. Anyway, that particular night I got no farther than, "Now I lay me..." before I burst into tears. Mom was confused by my cries, but it's not easy to fool mothers either, and she soon figured it out.

"You're afraid to die, aren't you?"

I nodded.

"Let's see, you're afraid one night you're going to just go to sleep and never wake up. Is that it?"

I nodded again and began crying even harder, but it was a relieved kind of cry, relieved that my mother understood and now she would make it all better. "Look, that prayer probably came from a time when people were unbelievably poor. They had no food for their little girls and no good doctors, maybe no doctors at all, and back then they died from horrible diseases like the plague."

"Mommy, what's a plague?"

"Well, there are many kinds of plagues. I was thinking of the kind where you get a high fever, vomiting, and sores all over your body."

"Mommy, what kinds of sores?"

"Well, they look like..." but when Mom looked into my eyes, she evidently saw something, something she didn't like, and refused to continue. Then she smiled and said, "You know how when you get sick I take you to the doctor and soon you're all better?"

I nodded, hopefully.

"Look, you're a very healthy little girl. I will always take good care of you. I promise. Death won't come for many, many, many years, not 'til you're old and gray like Mrs. Pavlik."

Mrs. Pavlik was my babysitter's mother. One night Mommy and Daddy took me to see her lying in her coffin. She lay really still and didn't move a muscle, not one; she didn't look good, kinda pale with way too much make-up. I was glad Mother helped me remember the only dead person I'd ever seen, for while I could easily imagine myself dead, it was impossible to imagine myself old and gray like Mrs. Pavlik.

My sleep was wonderful until Mom talked to Dad. He was worried about me and decided to talk with me too. Daddy never smiled, not once, when he read me this story about people who couldn't die; they'd live hundreds and hundreds of years and *still* they couldn't die. Their hair would turn white and fall out, their skin would turn dry and scaly and peel off, and their teeth would decay and hurt and smell real bad when they fell out. The book had a lot of big words, words I couldn't understand, and when Daddy saw me do what he called "fidgeting," he hurried up to finish with, "...this race of people could enjoy none of the pleasures of life. They lived in silence and darkness and pain, and hard as they prayed, death would not release them."

He then closed the book and said, “Now do you understand why death can be a good thing?”

My dad tried to be a good father; he didn't want me to be afraid of sleep, didn't want me to be afraid of death. And all his seriousness made me feel like a very important little girl. My dad was a very smart man, the smartest person I knew, and I believed he well understood the reasons and the need for death. Unfortunately, what he really didn't understand was little girls.