

"A soldier will fight long and hard for a bit of colored ribbon."~ Napoleon Bonaparte

A man with a beard and short dark hair, shirtless and wearing red and white striped briefs, stands on a sandy beach. He is holding a blue and yellow water gun, which is spraying water towards the left. In the background, there is a clear blue sky with a few small yellow and black objects flying in the upper left corner, and a calm blue ocean. The overall scene is bright and sunny.

**THE BLACK
AND
YELLOW**

**A STORY BY
WILLIAM
GENSBURGER**

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 Watch the thing flit around the backyard, checking out the nooks and small spaces to be found under the overhang before zipping off. Like a fighter jet coming in for carrier landing, it flies, a black and yellow blur with its carriage hanging low, dark stinger, dark as ink, like the hook of a fighter jet that grabs the deck wire stopping it from going off the edge of the carrier. This fighter won't be stopped.

Back again it passes my head, menacing because I have been taught that it is territorial and yet it does not care about my territory. As spring slipped into the summer heat and the onslaught of the damning insects proved insurmountable, I began to feel like the lone soldier holding the post after the platoon bugged out; always on the lookout for the attack that would be aimed my way, but never knowing where it would come from.

I fixated on its zigs and zags, my improvised

plastic weapon fully loaded, oozing excess toxins out of the nozzles that I had adapted for this hunt. I caught it in the gun sights, lightly moving, trying for that Mister Miyagi ballet of movements that would allow me to zen in on the kill; the thing had to land sometime.

Pulling hard on its ailerons it suddenly snapped upward in an illegitimate move from *Top Gun*-you know the one where crazy Tom Cruise pulls on the speed flaps and goes from hunted to hunter in under a second. The wasp should be screaming its own kudos by now, I consider, as it zips past my head for a return maneuver, testing out my reflexes. I am reeling from the disorientation of tracking it around the trim and focusing in through my bad-prescription glasses that leaves me wobbly as I snap around.

"I am human, bug," I hiss at it.

And then it stops dead, flattened on an empty and open space of stucco wall—for some stupid reason that only wasps understand. Does it know that I know? It waits and I zoom in for the shot that will end it all. My heart is pounding. I can taste the adrenalin priming my instincts for a swift death. Perhaps. . . .

Careful. Careful. Ignoring the ooze falling onto my open-toed flip-flops—it is a toxic vinegar,

baking powder, salt, creation of my own design—I am ready to kill now without affecting my children's health or my wife's flowers.

Still it waits, wings flat, no movement at all, and I aim, pump, load, pump, load, pump, load—trained for hours I have with this lightweight weapon of mass destruction that my kid loves. I can feel the pressure is now primed in the gun barrel and that it could not eject any faster or any stronger than at this one moment.

This is the moment.

I also know that after I pull the trigger I will need to keep holding it down as I rapid pump this baby to finish spurting its poison out until the territorial terrorist is soaked and down on the ground where my shoe will formally finish it off.

Across the street my neighbor uses a power hose, shooting directly at the spots where the wasps land and, like me, missing. Even when a direct hit takes place, the water does nothing. A few wing vibrations and they are good for flight again, conspiring to track the source of attack. You have to keep moving, never standing stationary so as to escape detection. They can tell where the shooter is. They can target and lock on while executing a multi-G lift and turn.

"Any luck?" the neighbor yells out. He's a lump of

a man, profusely sweating despite doing nothing more than holding a hose.

"Almost," I tell him. "I have one pinned down."

"Good luck," he says, wiping the sweat from his face with his fat hands. I turn away.

I'm ready. I suck in one final breath and pull the trigger, watch as a strong jet of foamy fluid shoots at my prey, missing by less than one wasp hair—an eternity of a distance—that allows the thing to launch off the wall at hypersonic speed toward its attacker. I dodge, flail, stinky fluid shooting off in all directions and splashing on my head as I trip my way backwards to safety.

I push forward again, pumping even more furiously; vile vinegary foam firing like laser beams, then cutting out in spurts as I wave it around for maximum coverage, missing at every shot. My arm hurts from the repetitive motion.

The wasp detours again, now in pursuit and aiming at me, determined to make a kill of its own. I back up a few more steps, still furiously pumping away, the wasp easily dodging every barrage. I am running low on toxin, know that one false move and the wasp will be upon me seeking vengeance for the hives I have already obliterated from my yard and overhangs; seeking vengeance like a Jihad-

in-progress, in revenge of its brethren lost in the battle.

It does not look promising for me and yet I am unable to give up. I've come too far, too embroiled in this war to surrender what little territory I have left. At the worst, I could always swing the weapon like a bat, I remind myself. I need a backup plan with just a few squirts left.

Finally, one of the squirts smacks the thing square on, and I can see it coated in my homemade ooze. It falters, tries to shake off the goo, forcing itself to fly at me, but fails as gravity drags it to the ground by my feet. I expect to hear the sound of dying engines whining in its death spiral, but the end is silent as it smacks head first into the concrete by my flip flops. Without hesitation I raise my foot and smear it across the ground.

"Game over. You-are-done." I let the weapon fall to my side, still in my grasp.

"Well done, you got it," the neighbor says peering over our common fence. "I've yet to make my first kill."

"You will," I mutter. "It takes training. You have to think like the enemy or you'll never survive." But I already know he will never survive. Despite my exhaustion, he is too out of shape for such a fight.

His size makes him an easy target, exhausting carbon dioxide like a Chinese factory belches smog.

Out of breath, now, and out of ammunition, I stand limp, my pumping arm throbbing at the joints, despite the victory at hand. I look down at the remnants of the wasp and know that I have succeeded. But at what cost? One enemy out of millions that will spend their lives in this war.

From the corner of my eye I see another figure flip by, and then another, their bodies hanging low as they scout my house in unison for a landing spot. Then even more of them as the first morning rays of the sun splinter over the backyard fence. Through the light I see even more closing in, just a few of the million wasps that will sooner or later succeed in making a hive that I will fail to find despite all the technology at my disposal, and all the effort at their destruction.

A sudden blast of water from the neighbor's hose scatters their formation as they take shelter away from the spray. I stare at him like the idiot he is, and begin to wonder whether he started this war with his amateur weapon, waving carelessly at the hives infesting his home. Did he send them all my way? Is this how I became embroiled in this war?

I think back to when it all began but cannot

remember the day when it first started; it seemed as though I have always been fighting this fight.

Was I destined to be defeated by a numbers game played by an enemy that cares little of my race, beliefs or even my right to exist? And is the neighbor just a subversive enhancing the wasp-squadron's ability to infiltrate my home? After all every crevice in my home is ripe for insertion; every opening, every eave a prime location. And all it took was a neighbor with a hose and a penchant for starting a war that I was determined to finish but couldn't.

"We should team up," the neighbor stupidly suggests. "We might be able to kill more of them."

I look at him incredulously. "You idiot," I want to say to him. You created this mess. Somewhere there is a queen and a super-hive and you have no idea the destruction that will follow. I had hoped that it was in his house and not my own; but there was no way I could know. Regardless, I would never join forces with him.

In the distance, through the stilled Spring air I could detect the fervent buzzing of a million gossamer wings vibrating furiously; wasp engines readying for the day's mission. The kill was just the dress rehearsal; the scout a false start, if you will.

The mother ship was coming in and there was no stopping it.

Perhaps my time was at hand. I had fought the good fight, done more than I needed, faced the enemy squarely, and, for a time, prevailed. What more could I ask for?

I dropped onto the nearest deck chair in defeat, allowed the weapon to slip from my hand and onto the floor in the hope that the encroaching force would not make an association with me and pass me by. It was a long shot, I knew and I waited like a real man would wait, feigning sleep, as the buzzing toward me grew louder and louder until I was engulfed.



AUTHOR NOTE: Thank you for reading this story. If you enjoyed it could you please do me a huge favor and leave a short, honest review on Amazon. You may do so by visiting <http://bit.ly/ReviewsWG> and clicking on the book cover. Thank you very much, I do appreciate it.



ENJOY A SAMPLE of my short story: **The First and Final Thing**, available now.

“*But man is not made for defeat. A man can be destroyed but not defeated.*” ~ Ernest Hemingway

DAMN THE FACT that he was six months past due, and fuck the fact that he had no one to bitch to; Simon Pratt didn't care anymore.

As he sat on a giant rock atop the mountains somewhere in southern Idaho, midway towards Salt Lake City, he realized he didn't even know the name of the area because he had no map never figuring he would need one.

He took a swig of water from the World War Two canteen he had brought with him--one of the few things he had brought to this paradise of emptiness.

And, aside from an open fisherman's vest he had purchased from Cabellas a few months earlier, which he wore with army shorts and some hiking boots, he wore nothing else. He had left it all behind.

Six bloody months late. This was him swearing to himself, no words, just the stabbing thoughts that could have had words except for the pointlessness of them.

He'd dropped about forty pounds out here, belly fat replaced by sinewed muscle, workable muscle, not the fancy six pack abs you would see in the men's magazines. He'd earned the muscle, a combination of climbing the mountains, living off the land, a diet rich in nuts and berries with only the meat he killed himself which wasn't very often since he was a lousy shot. And this was made worse by the crappy bow and arrow he had built after a few weeks in the bush; shooting the fucking thing wasn't skill; it was blind luck.

But then so too was the fact that six months later he was checking out the range, not just living a totally natural life, but a pain free one.

"Fuck you, Doctor Mark Peterson," he shouted out. "Goddamn doctors who can look you in the eye and tell you your life is ending. Nothing we can do. Your lab tests confirmed that it's now about quality of the remaining time you have. We figure a week or two, tops. Fuck you Doctor Mark Peterson," he shouted again, then defiantly thrust a middle finger

to the sky as though the doctor would get that message.

Pratt had given away almost ninety-million dollars once the tests had come back. He'd have no use for it; figured the rich lifestyle and rich food had created the disease. Likewise he did not want to burden those he would be leaving behind; an estranged son, Marcus, he had been too busy to spend time with, and an ex-wife Janice, who had put up with him for years before she realized she couldn't stand it anymore. He left them well off, no explanations other than the fact he was on a "Walkabout," a term he learned from the Australian Aboriginals from some movie whose name he could no longer recall. He knew there were Dingoes in there somewhere.

Old Aborigines wouldn't wait for their death passively; they would go out into the desert to die, releasing their loved ones of the burden. Clean. Neat. And he had always wanted to be more of an outdoorsman than his rich life had allowed. He had no skills in that regard, at least he didn't six months earlier when he drove his car to the base of the trail park at the mountain, and walked head-first onto the trail with only the canteen, a pocket knife his father had given him, and a paperback novel:

“Islands in The Stream” by Ernest Hemingway. He liked Hemingway, a rugged man's man with a great way with words in short, easy to chew sentences.

In the car he had left a note. It read: “Gone for a fucking walk. Won't be back. ~Simon Pratt.”

He thought Hemingway would have approved of that, but Hemingway had his booze, and his shotgun, and had used both, and Pratt had nothing, expecting he would be the dinner for a mountain lion in short order.

In hindsight, he would have brought some booze, at least something to enjoy. On the other hand, the total change of life had been welcoming, embracing, sustaining in more ways than the fact that he was still breathing. It had cured him.

His mind was clear and sharp. It had no tether to the business world of before; the bullshit friendships and slap-on-the-back accolades of conquests that involved digital numbers with no blood. The housekeeper, Sylvia, an illegal from Guatemala, bought the groceries, cleaned the house. He left her well off, at least well off enough to afford a good immigration lawyer. He never needed to go to the fridge, never washed the dinner dishes, never fed the fucking fish in the oversized, pretentious tank that caged them. He felt bad for the fish.

Since leaving it all behind him, he only had to consider his next meal, learn the signs of the animals in the woods with him, especially the ones that would eat him given a chance. He figured out that humans had reduced those to so few in number he had a better chance of running into an overweight duke out here than a mountain lion. To date he had encountered neither.

Tomorrow I will go down there, he mentally announced, pointing at the ravine below. There would be good pickings there, fruits, berries, certainly something small that would meet the arrow despite his lack of skill.

The sun was setting and he watched the sky turn to fire before fading, ever so slowly, the streaks thinning and a drab grey settling in. It was warm enough to sleep here—he wouldn't need a blanket or fire. This was his nightly routine; an early night and an early rise. There was something pure about it all.

And as consciousness left him, for the briefest of moments he thought how death must be like this. Perhaps I have already died, he pondered.

Then, before he knew it, daybreak brought a fresh breeze and a mass of clouds; thick puffy clouds that seemed to have been painted on the sky. He's only seen clouds like this in Idaho, a rapid, dramatic

unfolding of sky into clouds, into vapid lightning flashes with the occasional deep thunder rumble, only to clear back to a cloudless sky within a half hour. He thought of the old saying: “If you don’t like the weather, wait five minutes.”

He’d be safer in the ravine, and quickly made haste, watching, with his new insight, the huge bolts that seemed to dance across the entire face of the sky at once. Even the rain drops were huge, big dollops of water that smashed into him.

As he walked, he talked, both parts of a conversation, as though he was not alone.

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ENJOY A **SAMPLE** of my short story: **The Hollow Sky**, available now.

“Remember this, that very little is needed to make a happy life.”

- Marcus Aurelius

THERE WAS NO *SATORI*, which, for the Japanese, meant that there was no enlightenment.

From his cubicle, five up from the central walkway, Robert Yamato considered this fact. He had been a faithful employee since exiting school, trained by the corporation to suit their standards. This was the way it was in the world, the only expectation that a young boy could have; without the corporation there was no chance for a decent life.

He was surrounded by walls, one-hundred levels in height, seven feet in depth, and endless in length; pock-marked with cubicles--what they called *Ansich*, a word derived from German that meant "in-itself" or "self-contained."

Ansich was made of dura-plastic, stronger than concrete, yet lightweight and modular. Each cubicle extended the length of the human body, with many compartments build around the surface for storage of all the necessities of the body living within. This included the sleeping mat--rolled up during the day--small desk, a toilet seat that swung out from the side, and what few precious possessions the resident held; Robert Yamato only had a small wood carving of a sparrow. The wood had come from the disposal chute, having fallen to the floor unnoticed. He had whittled the sparrow over the last year, polished the wood with leftover oil from the meal tray that he had soaked in a small rag, secreted away.

He had never seen a sparrow but from paintings in the wall panels along the walkway below.

A bioluminescent panel above his head provided the lighting, and a thin roll-down cover sealed off the entrance hatch: the cliff-edge that overlooked the central walkway offered the only view, varied depending on the level from which it was viewed.

This was the world of Japanshu, a self-contained city, and there was none other quite like it. Robert Yamato was Japanshu born and raised, as his parents and grandparents had been before him, none of whom he had met. Once school age, along with all the other children, he attended residential school: ten-hour school days and a life within packed dormitories. Everyone worked. Even the children. That was the way. Work was the essence of value, he reminded himself.

Now, at age thirty-five, he was perched at the entrance hatch of his *Ansich*, work completed for the day, gazing out at the lines of the wall diminishing into the distance on all sides. There it was, he considered, perfection in architecture; certainly in accordance with the *Tao*; no beginning and no end.

The man in the next cubicle was likewise looking, glancing a cocked head toward Robert periodically, as if to catch his attention. Robert did not

know the man's name, only that, like a sparrow, he perched at the edge of his cubicle, and cocked his head as if to study him.

"It is a lovely day," the man said, after a bit. Robert nodded without looking back.

Beneath him, five levels down, a line of people were passing. From his vantage point he was close enough to see their heads. Some were full-headed, others balding; some in patches. That line, too, stretched into a virtual infinity, a perpetual single-file of humanity on their way to the feeding area, or simply out for exercise. There were no other reasons to leave *Ansich*. With a surplus of living beings, the need for social contact was limited strictly to the vid-screens in each cubicle. Even then, it was usually reserved strictly for business purposes.

Across from him, and to the left and right, the facing walls of cubicles offered the same vantage point. He could see others peering out, coming and going, like ants.

Here, there was no such thing as romance, or dating. There was no sex unless mandated by the corporation as the need for workers increased. Any urges one felt were either contained silently, or released manually, not unlike other bodily functions with specially built devices—masturbation units—

that served solely to relieve tensions, mute the drive for mating, or worse; dating.

He remembered a verse from Zen history:

*The body is like unto the Bodhi-tree
The mind is like the stand of a bright
mirror
Carefully we cleanse it hour-by-hour
Lest dust should fall upon it.*

HE ALLOWED HIMSELF A CONTROLLED BREATH, felt his agitation calmed for a moment. He always found his thoughts disquieting; questions of value, purpose, self-worth rising above the programming, above the conditioning that was always present. And of that he dared not speak; such folly was a waste of energy. There was no why, only Japanshu, work, duty, honor, nothing more. This should be enough for any man, he had been told upon his first day after schooling ended.

Beneath, he spotted a familiar face; his business associate from Tashami Electronics. She passed by without looking up; just one of many in that long

line of bodies moving. Nonetheless, the swellings within him were quite powerful and his eyes tracked her movement with a possessive compassion.

You were in my dreams last night, Miss Tashami, he thought, as his eyes followed her steady shuffle into the distance.

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THE BLACK and Yellow
by William Gensburger

Cover design: William Gensburger

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OTHER STORIES BY WILLIAM
GENSBURGER

• **The Hollow Sky:** In a dark and lonely world, where the individual has been relegated to a small cubicle among millions of cubicles within a corporate enclave, where the individual is no longer important, and where love is an inconsequential emotion, Robert Yamato must come face-to-face with his destiny, as foretold by a hexagram, and make the most difficult choice of his life.

• **The Cat Lived:** Jason Vargas is in conflict. His life is in turmoil, his marriage upside-down, and he feels like a stranger to his own life. Standing outside his house one night, he sees the future unfolding before him. The cat was dying, anyway. But then again, so was he.

• **The First and Final Thing:** Simon Pratt was supposed to be dead. At least that's what his doctor had told him. Diagnosed with end-stage terminal cancer, and a few weeks to live, Pratt decides to spare his family the agony of watching him wither away.

Armed only with a ragged copy of his favorite author's paperback novel, and a few things from his own father, Pratt ventures into the Idaho back country prepared to die quickly while immersed on some of the most beautiful country.

The only problem is . . . he doesn't die! Now what will he do?

"A solidly engaging tale and a testament to Hemingway." ~ Alex Perata (Verified reader)

• **Just a Little Death:** Returning to his old boarding school as a new housemaster, David Wilson must come to terms with a terrible truth about his past, that returns to haunt him as he assumes his new role.

Can he find his place in this new life without the past conflicting him? Can he be an effective housemaster to the students in his charge?

Will he survive the crisis that begins on day one, a test of his strength and compassion.

- **The Unfinished Man:** “It’s the other side of the superhero story . . . a fun study of humanity.” ~ Simon Fenton (Australia)

Fred Sampson is loyal husband, trusted worker, and manager of a clandestine, cleanup crew for the city's SUPERHEROES; you know, the ones that leave metal fragments, sticky string-like webs, and big holes EVERYWHERE!

Tirelessly they work to repair the damage caused by superhero battles. There’s no recognition, no accolades, even their families DON’T KNOW what they do! And while Fred’s tired of it, it’s a steady job that pays the bills.

Until a life changing event happens that could destroy his secret. Or set him FREE?

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