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Summary

“Iron Pen” is a writing contest that takes place entirely at the convention. At a scheduled panel time, participants are given one hour to write a 100-word short story based on a surprise prompt item. The entries are judged during the weekend and the winner announced after the convention. The winner is awarded a gift certificate to The Source Comics & Games.

Rules

- 1) Each contestant may submit only one entry.
- 2) All entries must be written within the scheduled hour.
- 3) All entries must be related to the prompt item in a clearly recognizable fashion.
- 4) All entries must be exactly 100 words, no more, no less. Hyphenated words or phrases will be counted as multiple words.
- 5) Entries may not exceed a PG13 rating.

2011 Statistics

Total Entries: 18

Judges: Heather, Carla, Holly, Marian

Prompt Item:



Winning Entry

"Stay the beast"

by John Bell

Fred thrust a lit match into the lamp - then paused. "I need a wick!"

The speaker crackled, "You have two minutes. Not seven days."

"This lamp has no wick!" Fred searched the lamp while flashing back to the instructions: ONLY THE LIGHT FROM THE LAMP WILL STAY THE BEAST THAT KILLS IN THE DARK.

"One minute" the speaker squawked.

Fred fumbled frantically. "THERE'S NO WICK!!!" he screamed.

Darkness fell, as did Fred. The beast picked up the lamp with bloody fingers. "Where is the beer?" it growled.

"Inside the base of the lamp," the speaker replied. "Your favorite. Bud Lite."

Other Entries

“So close”

by Robert Atendido

"Take this," she had said. "It will guide you in your quest." The Elder's words echo in my mind as I enter the glowing cavern. I hold the lantern high, letting it fill with the vapors that will light my way through the darkness beyond.

I feel my skin tingle as I pass the barrier into the labyrinth proper. Darkness closes about me, chilling me. I set the lantern upon the sloping ground and reach into my bag for the box of matches.

My heart freezes in my chest as I listen to the sound of the matchbox clattering away...

“The Undiscovered Tomb”

by Kevin Borchers

A skeleton; male. Scanner says bone size and density of 35-year-old. Candle lantern near right hand; brass. Scanner database identifies as Camden Manufacturing 1873-1896. Papers in leather satchel; Edward Mendell. Wooden spike six inches long in left side. Another trap; that makes seven. Everything in sevens in this tomb. 49 steps to wall. Removing stones. I cannot believe it! Magnificent treasure! Seven coffins each within the previous and more beautiful. The body perfectly preserved. This is it, my career is made! If Edward had been a touch forward he would be the discover and for me nothing.

“Harley's Errand”

by Nicole Everling

fanfiction for Batman

"Where is it?" Harley wondered. "He'll kill me if I don't bring it back!"

Harley Quinn crept through the dark hallways of Gotham Historical Society, sent to "borrow" an antique lamp. The alarms were laughably easy to disconnect.

Her puddin' was distracted, but not with the Bat. It was the Bat's new "distractions" - testosteroned muscle and a cat - that squeezed at Mr. J like an unwanted stepchild. Something about this junk was supposed to get Bat's attentions again. Harley wasn't sure she liked it; she enjoyed having Mr. J all to herself. But once puddin' got his mind on something...

Other Entries (cont.)

“The Bunker”

by Paul Franklin

Jerrod blew out the lantern. It was their last source of light.

Sixteen days underground in an empty bunker wore them down. Soon it wouldn't matter, Anna was so weak he had to her food and water.

The noises outside stopped several days ago. The attackers seemed to have gone away. For now.

"It might be safe," Jerrod whispered into the darkness.

"No. Remember last time," Anna answered.

They started with twenty people. Now it was just Jerrod and Anna.

"BAM!" The door shuddered.

"Turn it back on," Anna said, "they know we're here."

Jerrod reached out into the darkness.

“Shadows of Revelations”

by Kale Ganann

He turned the key, the light by turns dimming and brightening as he fiddled with the metal stub, trying to find the perfect level. The shadows leapt and played across the raised hieroglyphics, seeming to illustrate hidden messages and secret worlds. His eyes darted back and forth, feverously seeking the revelation he knew was kept within. Adjusting the lantern, the script before him shifted once again, bringing forth new and cryptic meanings in the play of light and dark across the wall. "Today," he thought for perhaps the thousandth time, "Today," as he continued to obscure his search for clarity.

“Summer”

by Lauren Ganann

It was a perfect moment. The first night of summer vacation and Sarah was sitting in her bestfriends backyard. Around her everyone else was talking, laughing, excited. No one was ready to leave, no curfew tonight and even though it was dark they could still see each other with the help of an old lantern. Sarah sat there for a moment. Sitting across from her was a boy who had just told her he thought she was cute.

Yes it was a perfect moment, but like many moments it was soon forgotten. Except sometimes it appeared again in Sarah's dreams.

Other Entries (cont.)

“The Genie in the Bottle”

by **Kate M.**

Phosphorescence oozed and gleamed against the scalloped glass, crept through the copper lattice top.

Mollie shivered and squeezed her eyes shut. Lifelight imprisoned soulglows.

The chant hugged her and crooned a lullaby like her dead mother.

We remember power. We remember civilization. We remember those who gift us hope.

They couldn't survive the subway warrens without guidance. No other safe place existed. Warmth settled in her bones. Fear fled.

Knowledge rose. Prophecies spilled from her lips. Safe walking, safe hunting, safe water.

Her eyes opened. Luminescence lit her bones and flesh while she dissolved.

Prisoned in light, her hope died.

“Containment of the Soul”

by **William March**

Johnathan tapped against the glass before him. What? He had fallen asleep, and now...

Answers came quickly, such as answers that raise a thousand more questions, questions of the nature of reality itself, can be deemed "answers."

The humongous hand lowered down, grasping the curved brass bar Johnathan now saw to be a handle.

The glass cage listed as it rose from the earth.

For the last time, Johnathan viewed the enormous shape below, a limp, lifeless figure he once deemed "Johnathan."

The Dream Lord smiled. One more light to show his path home. At least until he needed another.

“Blue Home”

by **Courtney Mohland**

It had been five years since she had seen her father leave, musket strapped to his back. She waited at the wall every sunset. The last of the gold had faded from the sky before she saw it, a small floating light on the horizon: an orange flame from a lamp. He promised to lead with light the color of her eyes, to remind him why he fought. It was the enemy. Her eyes caught beyond the orange, where a blue light crested the hill, followed by dozens more, a sea of azure light. He was home. They all were.

Other Entries (cont.)

“Lamp of Aurelius”

by Tania Richter

The night was silent, no stars shone.

Through the forest walked one Soul. In their hand they held a lamp. This lamp shone dully, producing little light. The Soul followed no path, not needing the lamp to light their way.

Out of the forest came an unearthly shriek, and before the Soul appeared a beast, darkness obscuring its form. Only its hungry purple eyes were visible.

The Soul, instead of fleeing, merely held up their lamp. From the lamp burst a dragon shining gold, to set upon the shrieking beast, rending the darkness.

It was then the lamp shone gold.

“The Darkened Journey”

by Steven Rouse

Walter Van Camp held his lantern out in front of him with one hand while wiping the sweat from his brow with the other. Beginning his return trip home after sunset was foolish. The townsfolk had warned him the woods were haunted but he had insisted anyways, saying his beloved Mabel was waiting for him. But then the footsteps began following him after the third mile. First slowly behind him but increasingly closer with every passing mile. He heard the final dash but wheeled too late, leaving him only time to scream. The lantern fell to the ground and shattered.

“Flickering Hope”

by Jonas Sollers

The flickering flame danced and sputtered inside Micah's old brass lamp. Around him the dank darkness of the raves attacked and receded in response to the dwindling kerosine's struggle to keep burning. For Micah, hope rose and fell with the fading flame. He knew the tunnel out was close by. It had to be. As he looked down at his pouch of cave moss, Micah prayed that he would find the tunnel. If he didn't the fever would take Elaine. Micah rounded another bend and again saw only terrible blackness. Suddenly, his foot slipped. The lantern fell, and hope died.

Other Entries (cont.)

“In the Lair of the Evil Genius”

by Tyler Tork

They'd planned to sneak in, but the gates stood open. They walked slowly, sweaty palms on blaster hilts, lanterns held high, past empty minion dormitories, still ranks of robots, huge dynamos silent under canvas covers.

She waited at the center, extending slim wrists with a little smile. They looked at each other. At darkened control panels. At her.

Sam snapped the manacles on. They led her through echoing hallways. "That smile," he muttered.

"I know. We'll come back with the team, see what she's done."

They led her out the gates. Behind them, the fortress shimmered, vanished. The smile deepened.

“Another Kind of Alternative History”

by David Waldorf

Michael questioned the script he was given. This was supposed to be an historical performance, but this was not the story of Paul Revere he remembered reading in school. First of all, it was taking place in Minnesota, far from Boston, Massachusetts. Secondly, instead of horses, they were riding Segways. These could be tolerated, he supposed, but since when was Paul Revere a Klingon? At least they got the lantern right, even if they only had one. Michael paged through the script, again wondering why this was happening at CON. Finally, he saw it:

"This script edited by Michelle Bachmann."

“The Hair of the Dog”

by Duck Washington

As Gabriel regained consciousness his head spun with pains of an evening of heavy drink. His right hand clasped onto a rustic and elaborate lantern filled with a strange irrodescent purple liquid, "Is this booze?" he asked. He'd been warned in the past to stay away from colored vodkas but the allure of witty science fiction themed liquors preyed heavily upon his inner nerd. "The hair of the dog" he thought as his lips caressed the metallic brim... Never imbibe the unknown. You just may be drinking a combination of glow stick fluid and radiator coolant from a costume prop.

Other Entries (cont.)

“The Seduction of Peter”

by Per Wiger

When I was young we had a house on the moors where I spent my summers in solitude and bliss. There was only one other house for miles around, seemingly abandoned, but, on nights when the fog roiled about us a lantern would appear on the porch, golden-red.

I remember that light well. Sinister, I thought it, hopeful sometimes but treacherous, as likely to send the unwary to their death as to draw them to safety. Watching.

As I light my own fog lantern, gnarled fingers creaking, I recall the night I trusted it, the great price I paid.

“Guiding Flame”

by Jason D. Wittman

She had been with the ship since it was built, guiding it with unerring accuracy, all from the safety of a lantern glass. A creature of light and flame, she bought her safety by performing this task, and by staying in what some called a prison. But the captain was not unkind to her. On calm nights, in his cabin, he would pour her a glass of red wine. She would dance on the blood-dark surface of the wine, consuming it like the flame she was, and become giddy. The captain would sit there for hours, just watching her.

End of entries for “Iron Pen” 2011.

This contest was hosted by Convergence Events, Inc.

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