

READING and WRITING in the

DARK

A space for avid Black readers and Black authors

NEWSLETTER

THIS MONTH:

R.J. Blakman isn't showing any sign of slowing down as he finds Fantasy in 1920's Harlem!

THE DRAGONS OF HARLEM

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THE COMPLETE PROLOGUE R.J. BLAKMAN

Reading and Writing in the DARK Newsletter subscriber exclusive, a FULL prologue of the upcoming novel! It's GOOD to be a subscriber!

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**News and Information about Completed
and Upcoming Projects and MORE!**



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NEWSLETTER



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WELCOME BACK!

Happy DECEMBER!

It's the end of the year and I'm still at it! I'm working on several projects at once (as I tend to do), and each project is more exciting than the next. I have short stories that are about to come out, not the least of which is the LONG AWAITED first installment of *Tales of the Monkey's Paw*! I'm also hard at work on the second Paradigm Void book, *Further Journeys into the Paradigm Void*. The first book is available to the public and I'm very proud to have published my third book! I will be following that up with *The Redemption of Maxine Allison: A Novella*—presently in its first round of editing. Also this month is a sneak peek at the prologue of *The Dragons of Harlem* by R.J. Blakman. (Yet another perk of being a subscriber to the newsletter). So, as I said at the beginning, there are big things coming up and I'm extremely excited to be bringing them to you and to get your feedback! Feedback@iyapoyapa.com is ALWAYS open! SEE YOU NEXT YEAR!

Iyapo Yapa



EVEN MORE R.J. BLAKMAN!

Alright! Last month the cover of this upcoming novel is plastered all over the Reading and Writing in the DARK newsletter, hailing the coming of R.J. Blakman with the prologue to *The Eulogy of Man!* (pictured to the right)

This month we get ANOTHER prologue from Mr. Blakman! This time it's Urban Fantasy at its best as we look at the Harlem Renaissance - with DRAGONS - in the upcoming fantasy book, *The Dragons of Harlem!*

Well... who IS R.J. Blakman?!

R.J. Blackman 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. Most of all, R.J. Blackman just happens to be... ME!

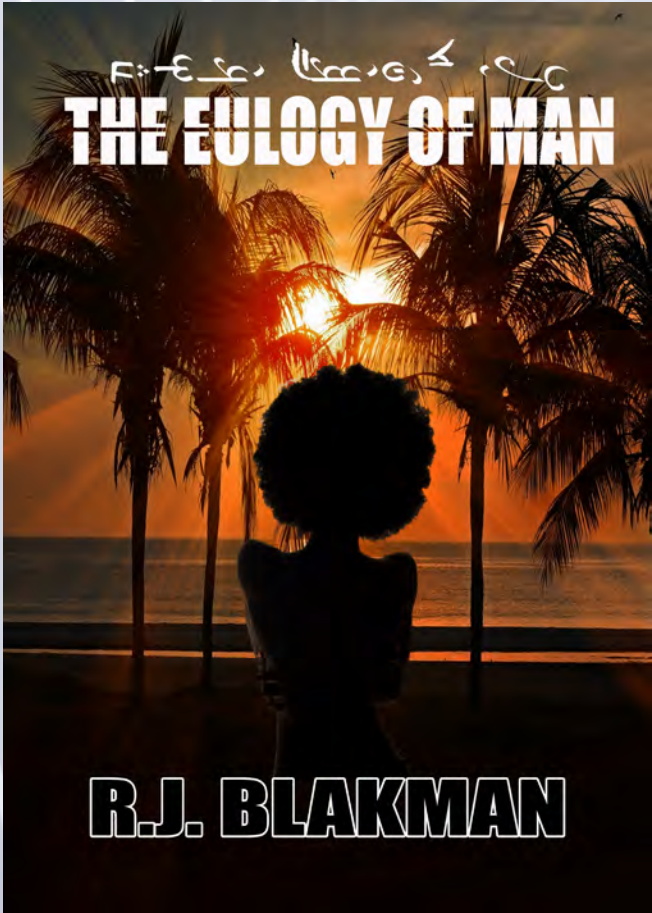
R.J. Blakman is one of the two pseudonyms I use when I want to write things that I think may not necessary line up with standard Iyapo Yapa fare. The views are pretty much the same, but R.J. may not be as heavy handed as I am. Then again, sometimes he might.

This issue gives you a glimpse into the world of R.J. Blakman and the way he writes and thinks. Sure, it will likely sound a lot like yours truly, but as you get into his work you are likely to start noticing some subtle differences in not only the writing style, but the world view - or more accurately, how Blakman approaches his world view.

Either way, I'm sure you will find his work entertaining and thought provoking and whenever you finish an R.J. Blakman work, I'm fairly sure you'll be glad you read it!

ONLY newsletter subscribers get to see these sneak peaks, so good for you! And THANK YOU!

What's that? I said I wrote under TWO pen names? Yes. Well, if you want to know what the other one is, you'll just have to poke around on my website: <http://www.iyapoyapa.com>. It's tucked hidden away in there as an Easter egg, and you 'll have to poke around to find it. There's a LOT going on my website, so you will be thoroughly entertained while you're looking around!



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Adventures in Writing: My NaNoWriMo Journey

NaNoWriMo stands for National Novel Writing Month, and it is what it sounds like. In the month of November, writers of all stripes are challenged to write a novel of at least fifty thousand words in thirty days. FYI: Depending on who you ask, a novel is anywhere from fifty thousand to a hundred ten thousand words and it could be more or less depending on the genre and the demands of the story.

I was brand new to NaNoWriMo—or so I thought. This year, my wife urged me to participate. Since I'm always working on projects, "Why not?" was my response. Imagine my surprise when I went in and set up my profile only to find that I already had one and have been a member of NaNoWriMo since October of 2018. I'd obviously signed up and forgotten all about the darned thing. I definitely had not met any of the NaNoWriMo challenges or posted any personal goals.

So, I had decided to participate in the 2023 writing challenge. I briefly skimmed the backlog of works that I had either begun and stalled, or that I was pretty far into already. Then I spent time exploring story ideas I had not really gotten started on yet but was looking forward to developing. In my perusal, one in particular stuck out: a story I call, *The Dragons of Harlem*. *Dragons* is an Urban Fantasy book that I'm writing under the pseudonym R.J. Blakman.

I had gotten the idea for *The Dragons of Harlem* sometime over the summer, and as I'm prone to do, as soon as I got the idea, I proceeded to create a cover for it. (Which you'll be able to see on each page of this month's complete prologue to the book). When I started the challenge, I registered the project. I'd actually already written about four or five pages on *Dragons* but I didn't count those pages in my challenge word/page count. I found a few writing buddies (mostly from the Black Writers Group), uploaded the cover of the book, my profile pic, and finally designed a header for my NaNoWriMo page. After that, I was off to the races!

At first, I started out writing around 1,667 words per day, the minimum daily word count needed to meet the 50,000 word quota. I was feeling pretty good about it, picking up badges—for logging my writing, for writing daily, meeting the daily goal—and such, and more importantly, seeing the story progress.

Admittedly, when I started, I didn't really have a solid direction for where *Dragons* was supposed to go. I had a kinda-sorta outline, and things I KNEW were going to happen in the story. So those were the things I started writing first. It was disjointed as all get out. The following is what I posted in the Black Writers Group I belong to, where I explain my process:

As most of you know by now, I am VERY interested in other writer's process. The ways we write. This morning I'd like to show a little bit about mine, and hopefully everyone will say something about theirs. Doesn't have to be a lot. I just think it's SO darn interesting. Well... for me, I'm presently writing "*The Dragons of Harlem*" (among other things). The photo shows my process for writing novels.

I have all these chapters where I know what the story is, and where it's going, but I write the chapters as I "feel like writing them". I have discovered about myself that I am definitely NOT a "linear writer".

I have twenty-six chapters written down on the index cards, with what is happening in those chapters. Each time I write a new chapter I add a new card. At some point, I will put them into a logical order so they are in proper sequence, THEN write in between to tie them together. (That's how I wrote *Melanin* and *Cargo*). Fun fact: I even do that within the chapters. I'll start out with the beginning of the chapter... possibly hit a wall, so I hit the space bar several times, so I know I need to add a "tie in", then I go straight to the middle or end of the chapter. (Sometimes I write the end of the chapter first, then jump back to the beginning or to the middle.) Have several projects I'm working on right now... and that is how I'm writing ALL of them. Sounds Chaotic I know. But it seems to work for me.

And my second post about it:

Ever walk into a room that was a mess, or saw someone's desk that was in complete chaos... but ask them for something and they knew EXACTLY where it was? Here is a look into the chaos of how I write.

This morning I arranged my note cards and put the chapters into the sequence that they happen in my book (*The Dragons of Harlem*). (In word, if you have created heading styles, you can just drag and drop them into the places you want)



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Adventures in Writing: My NaNoWriMo Journey (Continued)

Here is a link to a video on how to do that in case you don't know:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fUKIUvf7fnY>

I'm still working on the book, so ALL of these positions can shift... but this is the flow of the story thus far now. (The chapter number represents the order in which I WROTE them, the order they are in NOW shows how the sequence of events in the story happen... so, here ya go:

Prologue – 1-3-4-12-22-17-2-18-19-11-5-20-15-14-27-24-13-6-8-7-16-9-23-25-21-26-10

And as I write more and do the in-betweens to tie them together even this is SURE to shift.

Yeah, it seems a bit chaotic, but it works for me (at least so far).

Possibly this approach might work for others, but I wouldn't recommend it. Even I recognize the chaotic nature of it and how, depending upon one's orientation, their work could quickly and easily devolve into an incoherent, unorganized, disjointed MESS!

But it works for ME—so there's that.

Using that method, I was able to reach my goal of 50,000 words by November 15th cutting the time in half! I wasn't done with the novel, so I kept going. As of the date of this writing (November 29, 2023), I'm at 81,000 words and still moving forward. So, I will complete the challenge of writing for thirty days in a row, and reaching at least 50,000 words as of tomorrow, and I'm extremely glad for the experience! Especially

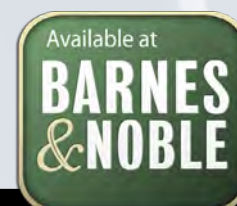
since I found out that NaNoWiMo is available all year round for writers to create and log their own personal challenges just for themselves. Plus, there are “camps” twice a year that are a cross between the big, public, popular November novel writing month challenge and personal challenges.

When I first made the challenge for The Dragons of Harlem, I didn't quite know how to navigate the site and set it up. I had set it up for the personal challenge (which can be done at any time during the year), but I wanted my NaNoWiMo badges and completion certificate. I found that I couldn't just change it from Personal to NaNoWiMo, I had to create a duplicate of the Dragons project so that I could keep the badges I'd earned AND get my certificate (and offers if I wanted them). That's why if you go to my page on NaNoWriMo or become a Buddie you'll see duplicate versions of the project. One with the winner's cup and one without.

Aside from that little hiccup, the experience has been a joy for me, and I can't thank my wife, Angela enough for urging me to take part! She has told me that as she sees me working so hard every day on the novel, that actually inspires her to do more writing! So my NaNoWriMo journey has been a bunch of WINS from start to finish for me!

This issue has the first raw rough unedited draft of the prologue to The Dragons of Harlem. Enjoy! And let me know what you think; comments@iyapoyapa.com is always open.

AVAILABLE NOW!
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TO THE RETAILER



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:

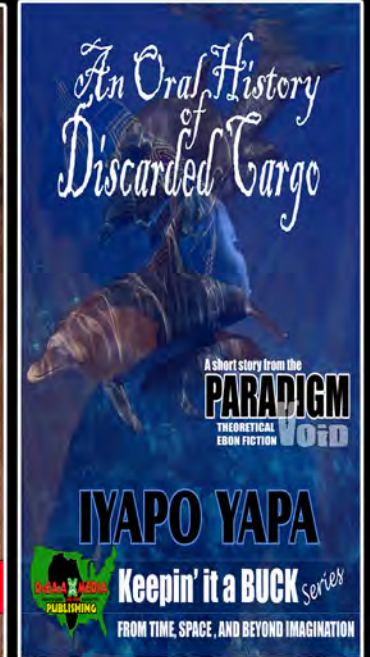
- What if somewhere in the universe numerous alien races observed earth and concluded that there is a faction on the planet that in no way should ever be allowed to reach out beyond the bounds of its own atmosphere?
- What if the universe itself started taking measures to correct and bring balance to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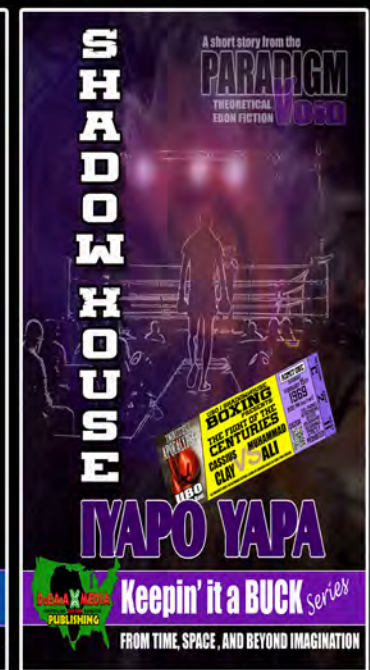
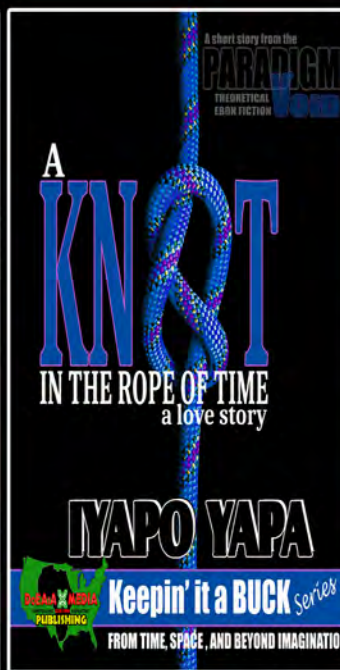


IT IS TIME TO JOURNEY INTO THE **PARADIGM VOID** ONE STEP AT A TIME.

EACH SHORT STORY IS DIFFERENT. EACH ONE THOUGHT PROVOKING & MIND BENDING.
EACH ONE ONLY **A DOLLAR!** AVAILABLE RIGHT NOW ON: [amazon](https://www.amazon.com)



Keepin' it a BUCK series



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 rough form, but the story is still fun as all get out! So give it a listen!

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Complete Prologue - The Dragons of Harlem

PROLOGUE

Louise Thompson squeezed between the large Christmas tree and the window and looked out the parted curtains. The outside front window was lit up around its frame with multi-colored Christmas lights—the only lights on the outside of the house—their home being one of the few private residences in the neighborhood to have them. She then finagled her position, as she slightly rocked the tree and the ornaments hanging on it into one where she could see the wall clock.

It was nearly eight and the sun had set a few hours prior. She clutched her collar with the hand she wasn't using to hold the curtain open and shook her head. "Where is that gal?! Jammina should have been home 'round five." Louise said, her voice just this side of trembling. She wasn't speaking to anyone specifically, just talking out loud, lost in her distress.

"Woman, close them curtains, you 'bout ta' knock down the tree." Her husband Mack said as he read the comic strips in the evening newspaper.

"I'm looking to see if our daughter is comin' up the street."

"Louise, please ma'am, get outta that windah. You gonna have Mrs. Anderson's husband comin' over here from cross the street agin' with his jaw tight, thinkin' I'm lookin' at his wife runnin' round in front o' their picture window half neckid for God an' everybody ta see."

"Where could she be Mack?!" Louise said, seemingly oblivious to her husband's request.

Jammina's alright, she probably jus' stopped to see that boyfriend of hers after she got off work. Don't get yourself all worked up, she'll be along."

"I don't know. You sure Mack? It ain't like Jammina not to come home first before goin' back out, or findin' some kinda way to check in and letting us know she's alright."

"I'm sure she's alright."

"Mack, I'm a little scared. You know they's been all that talk on the radio about negro girls and some negro boys disappearin'. Far as I know, ain't none of 'em ever showed back up yet.

"Honey, those disappearances been happenin' in Harlem. Deep in Harlem. We on the outskirts. I think we're pretty safe here."

"Then why is she so late coming home if there's nothing to be worried about?"

"Shit. Ever since she got mixed up with that Johnson boy, she's been doin' a lot of things that ain't like her. I just let it go cause we've known his family for years, and he seems like a nice enough sort. Even though I still keep an eye on 'em." Mack chuckled.

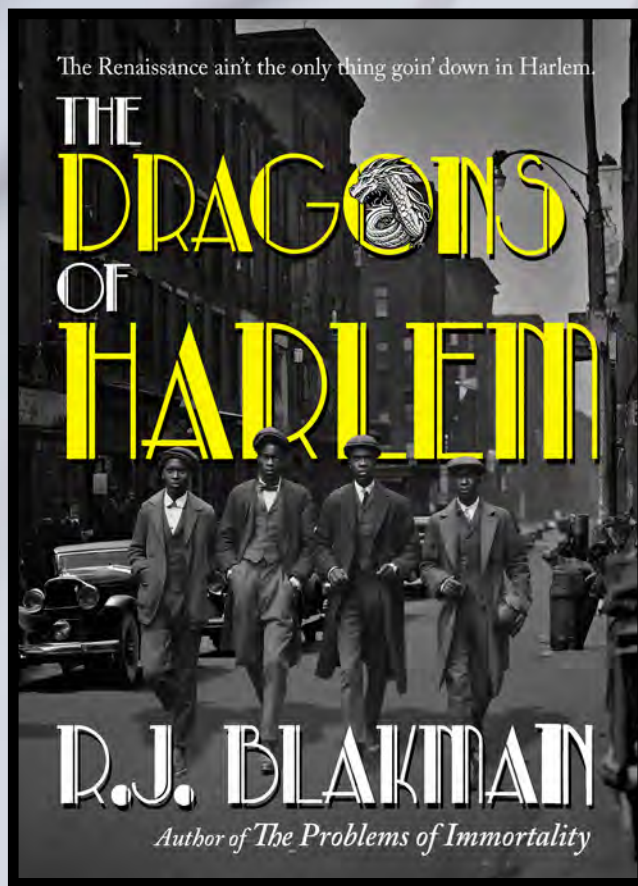
"Course I'm right. Now come one over here and have some sit down." Mack said to his wife as he patted his lap. "Them young folk ain't the only ones know how to pitch some woo."

"Mack Thompson, you a straight mess!" Louise said as she walked over to her husband, and he put down the newspaper he was reading so he could put his arms tightly around her full figure.

Louise Thompson was by all accounts a very large woman. Her skin was dark and smooth, and she liked to wear her hair high and curly like Hazel Scott. If Louise were a shorter woman, she would have been considered rounder and stouter, but her full nearly five-foot eleven frame and proportional curves gave her the appearance of being a lighter woman than she was. As she used to tell her girlfriends before she married Mack Thompson, "It's gonna take a lot o' man to love this woman."

Mack was definitely the man for the job.

Mack was a mason and would commute into New York city to work at construction sites. The kinds of labor he did were usually backbreaking or exceptionally dangerous jobs his white



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Complete Prologue - The Dragons of Harlem (Continued)

counterparts either didn't want to or refused to do (which Mack did for equal or substantially less pay). A lot of Black men refused to do the work because of the grueling nature of it, or the numerous dangers. The problem for them, however was neither of the two things, but the fact that when they were giving the tasks, they were either paid the same amount as their white counterparts who likewise refused to do the work, but were in no danger of losing their positions because of their refusal, or being ordered to do life threatening work and being paid less as they watched the white men on the sites doing standard jobs that, though also causing the white men to break a sweat, didn't even approach the demanding, dangerous nature of what they were doing for less pay in many cases.

When Black men would quit those jobs, they were tagged as being "lazy" or "not wanting to work." When the truth was that they would have been glad to do the work if their pay (and a little respect), were something closer to equal to what they were doing. Many Black men reasoned that they were not going to do work that in some cases could leave them dead, with no one to support their families, or at best, hurt or maimed for life, causing them to have to live and/or work the rest of their days in pain—if they even could work anymore—they would move on and take the longshot chance of finding a better situation.

Mack well knew the risks, but he made the decision, as did most Black men, to go out and make a living the best way he could with the skills he had. He had several close calls in he past that could have killed him, and one that happened before the met Louise left him with scars and with a limp, but he continued to work. He was honest and told her what happened, but after marrying her, Mack made it his business to never tell his

wife some of the dangerous positions he would be placed in when working at the construction sites, because there was nothing, she could do but worry about him while he was gone, so why do it? He did suffer one injury that took him out for a couple weeks.

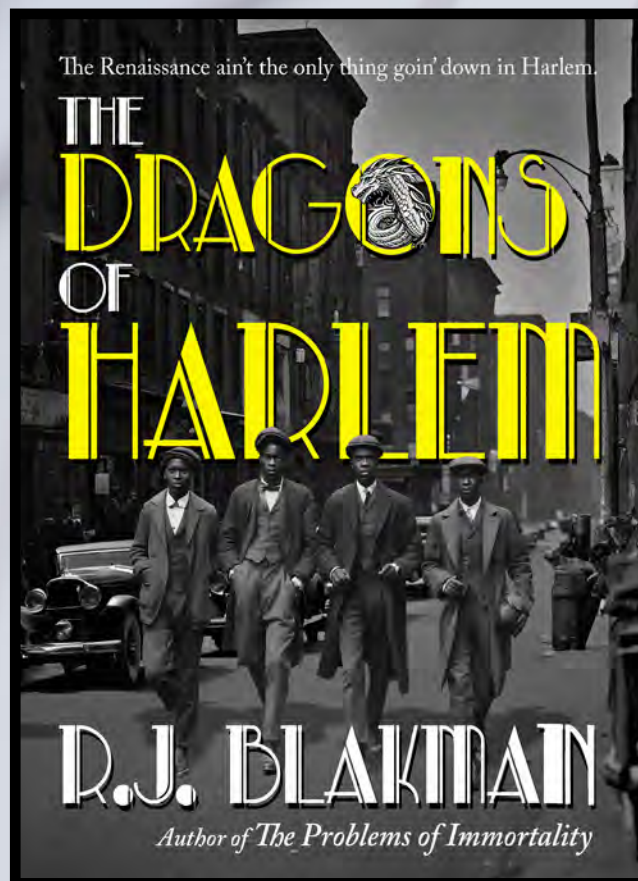
At that time, he was working in a foundry as a general laborer, and they worked with superheated ceramic tubs. The huge pots would come out of a furnace white hot, and the man at the mouth of the furnace (usually a white man who was supervising it), would grab the pot with a steel bar, he would then quickly toss it over to the other man who wore steel toed boots, jeans, a thick long-sleeved shirt, a thick asbestos apron and equally thick asbestos gloves. The man at that end did what was aptly

called "catching". Having caught the moderately heavy tub, the catcher was to then set them on a conveyer belt where they would move down a line until moderately cooled and finally drenched in water to set them.

The night Mack got injured he was working long shifts at the foundry, and it was late in the evening. He'd been catching all day with few breaks, and though he was a large, virile man, Mack was still just a man, and was tired mentally and physically. Catching required strength, alertness, and most of all timing.

Mack had a quickly fading amount of the first and diminished amounts of the second. On that night his timing was off, and he knew it, but it was less than a half hour before quitting time, so Mack pushed on through (not that he had a choice), and that's when it happened.

The throw was bad, Mack's timing was worse and though he managed to hold onto the tub for a few seconds as it jostled around in



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Complete Prologue - The Dragons of Harlem (Continued)

his hands and forearms—the white-hot ceramic thing made its way past the top of his long gloves and to his right upper forearm and bicep, immediately burning through his shirt and deep into his skin.

The sudden excruciating pain caused him to drop the tub, which shattered, causing a small piece of the still glowing hot ceramics to find its way into his boot, where it slid down and delivered nearly debilitating burns to his ankle and the side of his foot. He was sent to Outton General, a negro only hospital that had emergency staff at that time of night, but was on the other side of town, taking nearly an hour. There was a skeleton crew of two nurses and a resident, who tended to Mack's second degree burns to his arm, and the third degree burn to his ankle as best they could, then admitted him and had sent for a doctor, who took almost another hour to arrive. To their credit, the doctor and staff were genuinely caring and worked hard to see the best outcome for the patients there.

Mack remained in the hospital for over a week, until he was beginning to heal from his wounds, and was released with fresh replacement bandages, a bottle of witch hazel, and some medicated ointments. Mack's injuries left him with permanent scars and caused him to walk with a slight limp for the rest of his life.

He missed almost three weeks of work (a lot of which his foreman thought was milking his injuries—as he believed that negroes had higher pain thresholds and healed faster than white people with the same types of injuries). Mack of course, was not paid for the time he was in the hospital and healing and docked a dollar and thirty-three cents for the broken tub. He never returned to that job and was quickly labeled by his white co-workers as another one of those

negros that just didn't want to work.

Mack managed to find another job, one that had nothing to do with the casting of white-hot materials and took it upon himself to learn masonry.

The years of work in that field produced a man who was almost pure muscle. So, though his wife was tall for a woman and relatively heavy by some standards, she felt light as a feather to her husband whenever sitting on his lap, just as she was doing now.

They hugged and kissed a couple of times. "How you know Mrs. Anderson be runnin' round half naked?" Louise said playfully to her husband as she reared back, to look at his face while she still had her arms around his neck. "Huh?!

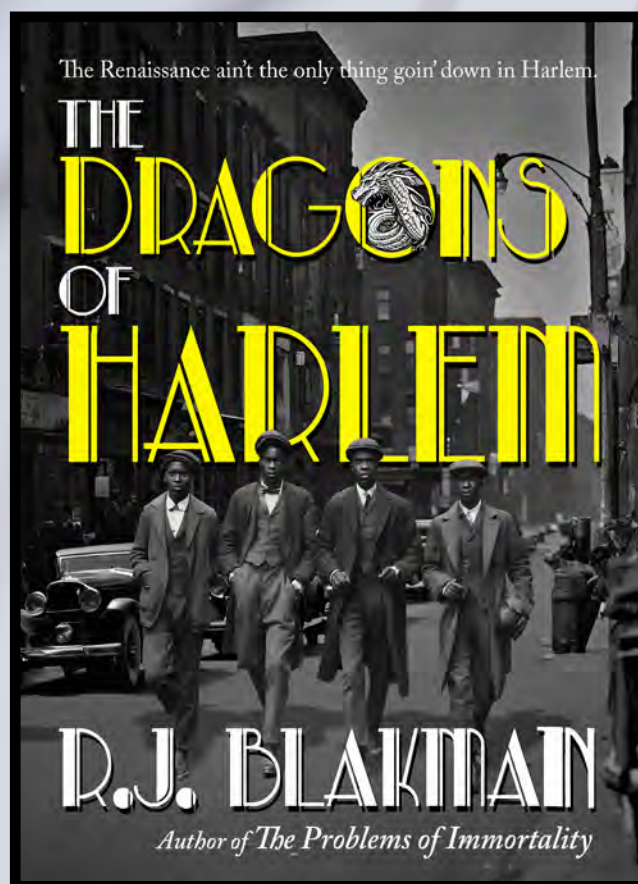
Uhhh... well, that's what I heard." Mack replied, purposely looking and sounding guilty. "Man, you ain't a bit o' good!" Louise said, and they both laughed as Louise planted several more kisses on the man's cheeks and nose.

Louise's smile slowly faded and again she began to look troubled. She looked at the wall clock.

It was a little more than a quarter after eight. "I'm sorry Mack. I'm worried about our baby. I hope she's over there at the Johnsons, but I'd feel so much better if I knew for sure."

Mack looked at the clock and then looked toward the small window by the front door and the staircase. It was good and dark outside. It wasn't like it was two or three in the morning. It wasn't even quite nine o'clock yet—but not far from it. Jamma was eighteen and had a job, even if, for now, she was still living with her parents.

"Alright Baby." Mack said with a smile that was meant to set his wife at ease. "You up for a walk?" The truth was that Mack had not realized



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Complete Prologue - *The Dragons of Harlem* (Continued)

until that moment how late it really was, and he too became concerned, though he kept it well hidden, so as not to make his wife even more worried and frazzled than she already was.

“A walk? At this time of the evening? A walk to where?”

“Well, the Johnsons only live a few blocks from here, and it’s a nice night. We can stroll on over there and find out what that fast ass daughter of yours is doin’”.

“OUR daughter is not fast!” Louise said, playing into her husband’s playful statement.

Mack just laughed.

The couple threw on heavy coats, scarves and gloves because the December air was cold that night. They stepped outside and stood on their porch looking back and forth down the dark, deserted street, hoping to see their daughter coming down the way to come safely back home.

They saw no one.

“Ok.” Mack said as he half turned and gave the doorknob a jiggle to make certain it was locked. He then turned to face the street and held out his right elbow for his wife to wrap her arm around. “Let’s go.”

They went down the sidewalk looking at the surroundings in the dark and commenting on how much the neighborhood was changing, and how fast. There were probably a good three times the number of new houses in the area as there were when the couple first married and moved there.

The air was crisp and cold—fresh smelling, and not uncomfortable because there was no breeze. They passed house after house, colorful Christmas bulbs glowing as they wrapped around the trees inside and stood proudly in front of the windows. There were wreaths hanging on all the doors and snowmen on the lawns of a couple. A few of the homes were lit up with outdoor Christmas lights. The Thompsons admired the creativity of some of their neighbors who couldn’t

yet afford lights for the outside but put together creative outdoor displays.

They looked from house to house, figuring out who they knew and who they didn’t know at all, in addition to those who fell in between.

Louise got her husband up to speed on all the major gossip that had circulated around the neighborhood. Mack didn’t really care for gossip, but damn, some of the stories his wife told him were juicy.

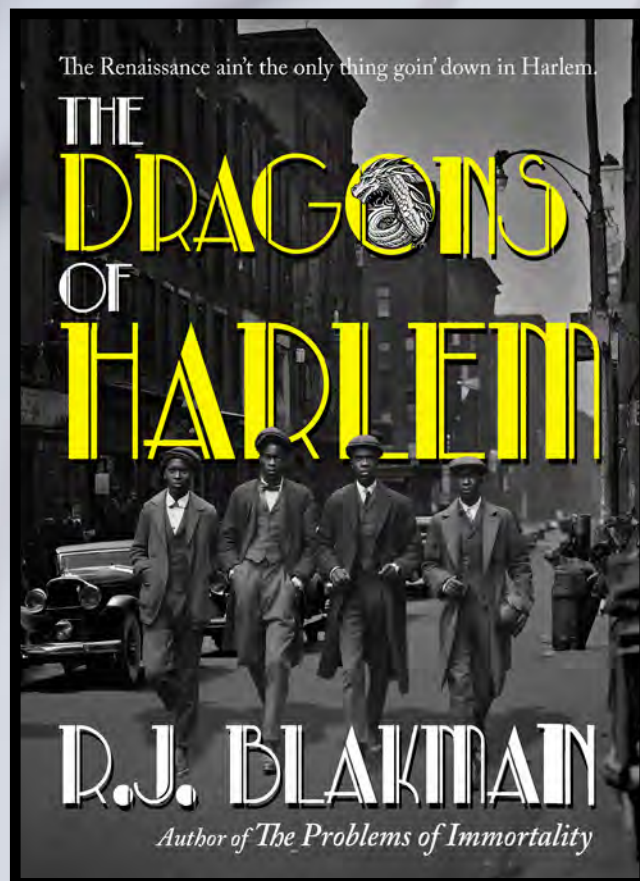
As they walked down the sidewalk, talking, laughing, reminiscing, making plans, Louise spotted a figure coming toward them. Living on the outskirts of Harlem, the couple typically felt safe walking around at night. There were always thieves and robbers about, but it was not as common as those not from their area made it out to be. Be that as it

may, Mack was no fool, nor was his wife. They were never the type to let their guard down unless they were absolutely certain there was no threat.

They continued to walk on, not really afraid of anything, but still cautious. Mack changed the position of his left arm so that he and his wife were now holding hands instead of walking arm in arm.

After doing that he put his free hand, first into his coat pocket to inconspicuously slip his glove off into it, then he took his hand back out and moved it into his baggy, but stylish pants pocket and wrapped it around the Colt 1911 he had concealed there. He felt the coldness of the metal, but it warmed very quickly with his hand on it. To any casual onlooker the couple would seem like any other, and the man with his hand in his pocket did not produce any kind of unusual bulge, so no one would have suspected that the man was at the ready to defend his wife and himself.

The darkness gave even more cover to the Thompsons, the periodic streetlights under which they strode notwithstanding. The shadowy



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Complete Prologue - The Dragons of Harlem (Continued)

figure approaching them was in silhouette, but the couple could make out that he was wearing a short coat and scarf, what looked like a wool hat, and his shoulders were hunched with his hands in his pockets. His gate was the standard walk of a man out in the cold who is trying to keep warm by walking briskly and keeping their limbs close to their body.

As the figure got closer, Louise caught a good glimpse of the face of the person when he walked under one of the streetlights.”

“Mack.” Louise said, slightly squeezing her husband’s hand. “That looks like Jessie Johnson coming toward us.”

“Jessie?” Mack squinted a little bit to help him see the figure, that was approaching them, but was now once again in silhouette.”

“That can’t be Jessie. Whoever it is, is by themselves. It that was Jessie, then Jamma would be with him.”

Louise said nothing. She knew what she saw. But to her husband’s point, it if was indeed the Johnson boy, then where was their daughter?! In that moment, Louise hoped against hope that she was mistaken.

All three figures continued to approach each other, then at one point, in the glow of the streetlight, there was no denying that it was Jessie Johnson, Jamma’s new boyfriend walking toward them.

Jessie waved and smiled a big smile that could even be seen from several paces away and in the dark. “Hey Mr. and Mrs. Thompson!” he exclaimed. “That IS you isn’t it?! Out for a walk this evening?” He continued as they all finally met up. “Hey Sir, Ma’am!” He said again as he stood right in front of his girlfriend’s parents.

“Jessie, where’s Jamma?” Louise said, unable to bring herself to swap pleasantries.

The young man looked at them oddly, the way a puppy might look at its owner if confused about

something. “Mister and Mrs. Thompson I was just on my way over to your house to see her.”

“And we were heading toward yours.” Louise said.

“Coming over to my house? Whatever for?” the confuse young man asked, not yet picking up on what was happening.

“We were walking over to your house because we thought Jamma was over there.”

“Jamma isn’t at home?” Jessie said, now mirroring the concern in Louise’s voice.

“Wait a minute.” Mack said. “You sayin’ Jamma ain’t at your house? Was she at least there earlier?!”

“No sir. Not all evening. She told me yesterday that she was going to stop by after work so I could walk her home. But I haven’t seen her. I was just headed to your house to make

sure she was alright.”

Louise’s eyes grew wide as she looked at her husband, unable to speak.

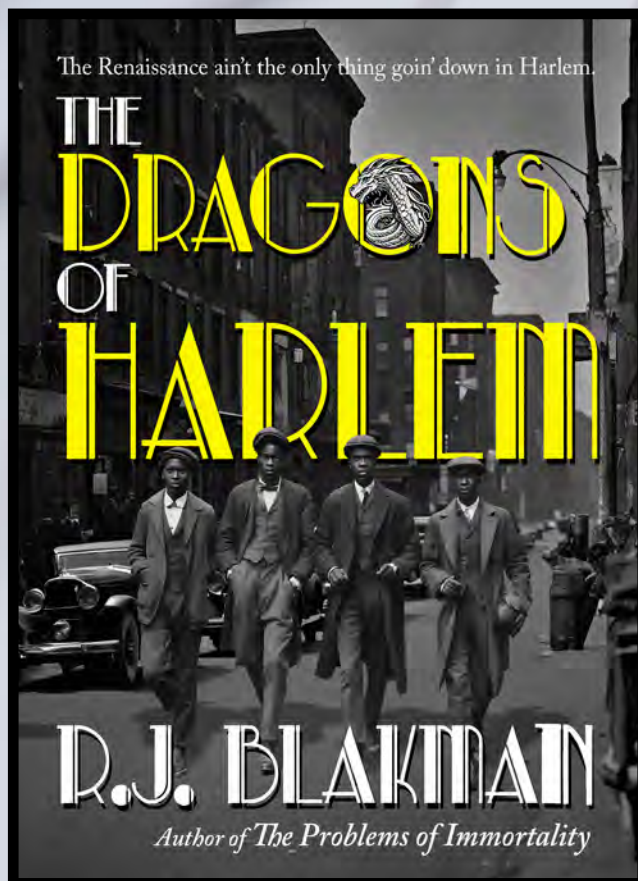
Mack looked again at the young man standing in front of him. “And you’re SURE Jamma didn’t already stop by your house and leave.” He said.

“Mr. Thompson, I’m sure as sure can be. I swear, I haven’t seen her since yesterday.”

Louise, having heard enough, and looking around at the darkness that surrounded them started crying. “Mack! Our baby’s gone!” she said through her tears.

“No. No, we don’t know that yet. We’re out here, and Jessies out here. She might be at home right now, wonderin’ where WE are.” He said, not quite believing it himself but holding on to that last thread of hope. “Come on. Let’s get back home so Jamma’s not over there thinkin’ we got kidnapped or somethin’”

Mack rolled his eyes and winced a little at the horrifically poor choice of words, and wished



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Complete Prologue - **The Dragons of Harlem** (Continued)

with all his heart he could have caught them in midair, shoved them back into his mouth and swallowed them. “Come on. Let’s get back to the house.” Mack said, trying not to give the two people with him too much time to ruminate on the foible he’d just made. You can come too if you want Jessie.”

“Thank you sir.” Jessie said. “I want to see she’s alright too.”

The three walked back down the sidewalk. They didn’t run but their pace was brisk. None of them spoke as they made their way back to the Thompson house, and hopefully Jammina.

They made a right into the chain link gate door and headed up the walkway to the house. The lights were on, but that didn’t say anything, Mack and Louise had left them on when they stepped out into the night to track down their daughter.

They got to the front door and Mack, attempting to conceal the fact his hands were shaking fumbled with the keys he’d just removed from his pocket and after fining the key to the front door, dropped the keyring before he could get it into the lock.

Jessie quickly bent down and grabbed them off the porch before Mack could even make a move to bend. “Here you go Sir.” Jessie said, every bit as anxious to get into the house and see the smiling face of his girlfriend and probably one day wife.

Mack again fumbled in the dark for the right key, and upon finding it, successfully put it into the lock and turned it to open the door. Louise, not meaning to be rude, but powered by adrenaline and hope, pushed past her husband, and started calling out for her daughter. “Jammina!” she

yelled.” Jammina! Are you home?!”

The older and younger man followed, both calling out Jammina’s name. Louise made her way up the stairs, stepping hard on each step and still calling out for her daughter. The two men remained downstairs, going from room to room, searching and calling, a part of each of them knowing that it was in vain.

Jessie didn’t completely know the layout of the Thompson’s house. He had only been there a few times, and when he did visit, he never got a grand tour of the place. So, he just went to every place he saw a room or a door. He eventually made his way down into the basement and hunted for a moment for his girlfriend.

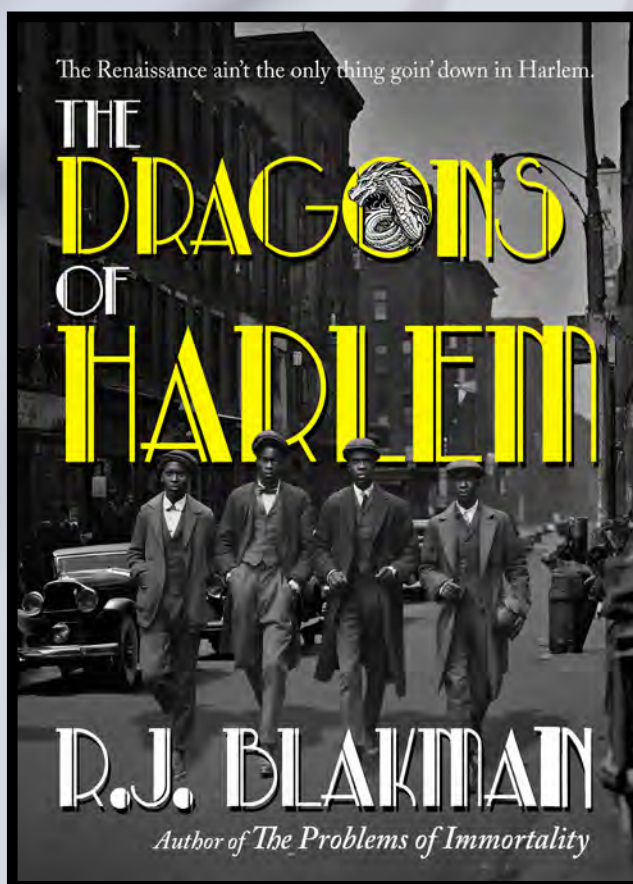
While in the basement he became aware of the fact that all the yelling upstairs had stopped.

“They found her!” he excitedly whispered to himself as he made his way back to the basement stairs and ran up them two at a time. He emerged from the cellar smiling and relieved as he made his way back into the living room where he heard noises.

He burst out and could not contain his excitement and began speaking before walking into the room. “Thank God!” he said through his big smile, “I’m glad we found you Jam Jam! I just knew you was he—”

Jessie stopped before finishing his sentence as he entered the living room. Jammina was not there. Only her parents stood near the bottom of the staircase, Mack holding his wife tightly as she soaked his chest and shoulder with tears, crying hard.

“Where’s our baby?!” she cried.



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Complete Prologue - *The Dragons of Harlem* (Continued)

* * *

Jammina's eyes fluttered open and she attempted to focus on something, anything so she could get some bearing on where she was. As her eyes opened fully, she immediately squinted as she fought through the discomfort of the light that now assaulted them. It wasn't a bright light, but bright enough to cause a noticeable soreness. The mild ache was replaced immediately by a feeling of disorientation, or more accurately, the disorientations she experienced upon waking grew quickly enough that it eclipsed any physical discomfort she felt.

And there was something else.

Jammina couldn't put her finger on it, but something felt different about where she was—something beyond just being in an unfamiliar place. There was something about the quality of the place—the feeling of it. Something about it wasn't right, something about it wasn't normal, but her mind was having difficulty reconciling it. She knew she wasn't dreaming, although what she was experiencing felt in a way like a dream.

A very detailed, lucid dream.

There was no doubt whatsoever Jammina was awake, but there was no shaking the feeling of not being connected to reality—not the reality she knew anyway.

Something was so different.

She was leaning against a wall that looked like it should have been wet, or at least moist, but was completely dry. The rest of the place was not much different. It was dry and stony. There was a window high up over her head on the same wall against which she'd been laying. She shook her head a little bit and eventually realized that

despite being in this enclosed space, surrounded by nothing even resembling anything soft, the air inside should have been thick and stale—at least that's what one would have thought. But it was quite the opposite. The air inside the space wasn't too hot nor cold, and smelled and felt quite pleasant, if Jammina was to be honest.

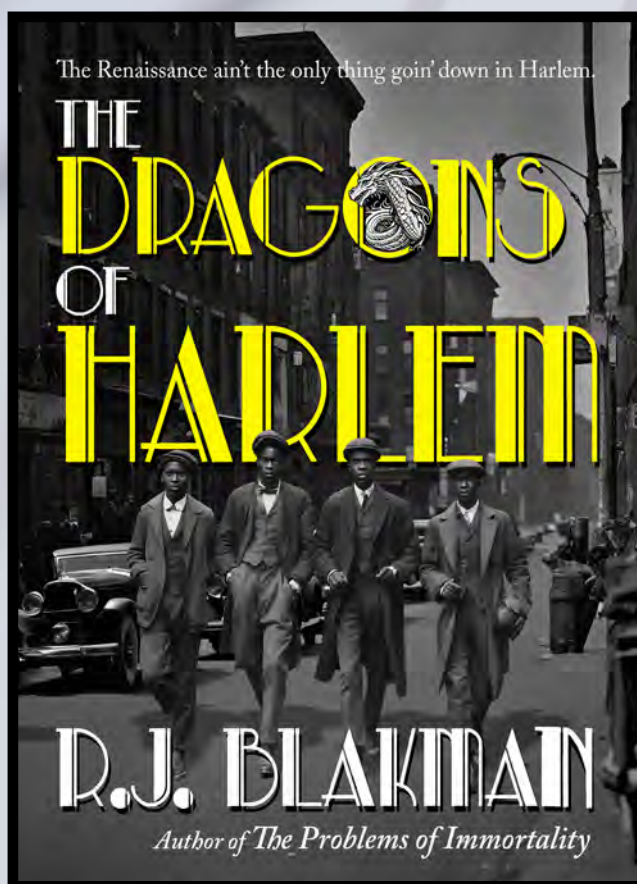
She stood so that she might clear her head more and get a better look around. When she got to her feet, things didn't look much different than they did while she was on the ground. It wasn't until that moment that she realized she was naked. She had felt no breeze, nor was the stone on which she lay and sat of any variance with her body temperature that would have alerted her that she was no longer clothed.

As she looked around trying her best to figure out where she was (how she'd gotten there had not yet had the chance to enter her mind).

She attempted to walk forward, and it was then she realized that there was a shackle around her right ankle. Jerking her head quickly to look at it, Jammina was immediately struck by the look of it. It wasn't some huge, gangly, unsightly rusted hunk of metal, secured by interlocking rings of equally ugly pieces of metal. This thing was silver and shined like sterling.

It was smooth, and for all appearances looked like a kind of huge wedding band. There was also a glow about it that did not come from the shining of any light onto the shackle. It glowed with an energy of its own.

She reached down to pull at the thing that was encumbering her movements and as she reached and closed her hands around it to grab hold and pull at it, her hands passed through the restraint as if there was nothing there.



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Complete Prologue - **The Dragons of Harlem** (Continued)

“What?” she whispered in a combination of shock and panic. She attempted several more times to grab hold of the shackle and got the same result each time. In her mind, she reasoned that if she couldn’t touch the things, then she should just as easily be able to pull her foot out of it, but whenever she pulled her leg in an attempt to free herself, the restraint not only held her in place, but caused her the same pain she would have felt if yanking her ankle around in an old rusty metal version of the yoke.

“It won’t do no good.” Said a voice from across the room.

Jammina quickly looked up and in the direction of something hidden in the shadows. Someone was in the room—the prison—with her.

She squinted and looked in the direction from which the voice had emanated, or at least her best guess, as the sound had echoed within the space.

In a dark corner she could hear someone, or something shifting around. She backed up a couple steps not knowing what manner of creature might be in this unfamiliar surreal environment. She continued back, slowly, until she was once again against the wall. Unable to retreat any farther, Jammina focused her concentration on figuring out what was on the other side of the room and hiding in the shadows.

She continued listening to the sound of the movement as best she could from her place far across, and then she noticed, as she looked down, what looked like shining silver. Jammina immediately guessed that who or whatever was across from her was shackled the same as she was.

Jammina, slightly shaking, remained silent as a figure finally emerged from the shadows.

It was a woman.

Another naked woman.

Another naked negro woman.

They stood and looked at each other for a moment, then Jammina’s face tensed, and her head tilted a little as a sense of recognition hit her.

The woman across from Jammina stood about five feet four inches tall with hair that looked like it was used to treatments but had not seen a hot comb or beauty salon in far too long. She carried herself on a petit frame and had firm breasts—young woman breasts, the kind that need no brassière to help them defy gravity. Jammina examined her face closely. She was a deep,

dark brown, with a full nose and lips and she had amber eyes as far as Jammina could make out at that distance.

Wait!

Amber eyes?!

“Glenda?” Jammina said energetically. “Glenda Henderson?”

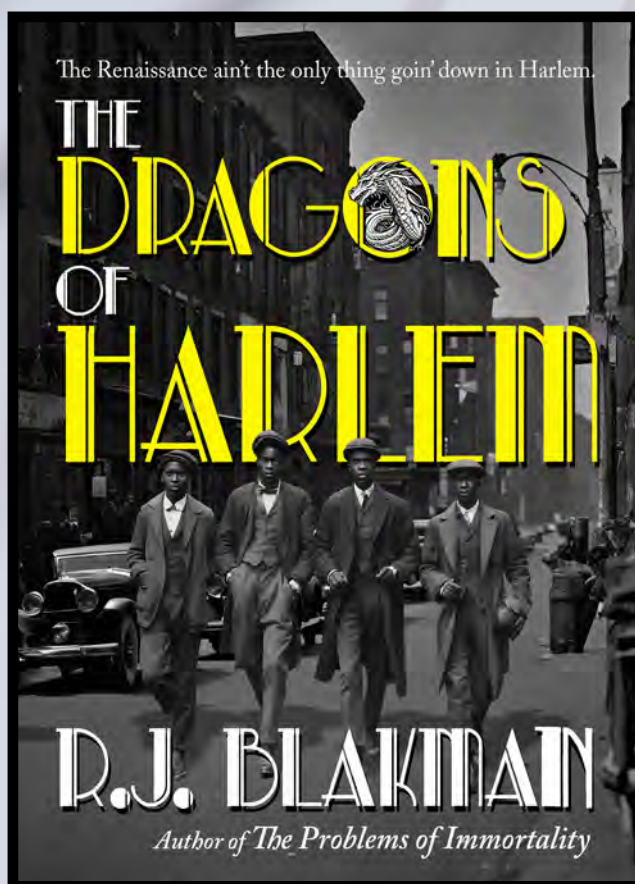
The girl in front of her looked surprised. “Who are you?” She said. Jammina couldn’t tell if the woman across from her was just surprised or if she was being curt.

“You **are** Glenda Henderson?” Jammina asked.

She looked Jammina up and down for a second, then said reluctantly, “Yes. I’m Glenda.”

“Glenda! You went missing from Harlem! Everyone was searching for you! Eventually we all thought you were... were...”

“No. I’m very much alive as you can see!”



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Complete Prologue - The Dragons of Harlem (Continued)

Jammina looked around her. “What is this place?! How did I get here? How did YOU get here?!” She said, firing questions at the young woman faster than she could answer, and not considering that Glenda might still processing the situation herself.

“How do you know me?!” Glenda asked, having a question or two herself.

“When you disappeared from Harlem your family searched for you day and night. A lot of good people from around the city searched also. I was one of them.” Jammina stopped speaking and hung her head, not wanting to say the next part to her.

“My parents! My fiancé! H-How are they doing? How are they holding up?!”

“They were all heartbroken at your disappearance as I’m sure you would know.”

“Yes. I knew they would be. My parents have to still be a mess, I’m their only child. My mother couldn’t have any more children after me.” Glenda hung her head now thinking about her parents again, something that, when she could, she attempted to block from her mind for a time. “A day doesn’t go by that I don’t think about them--OFTEN.” She looked back up at Jammina, “My fiancé Jordan. Do you know anything about him? How’s he taking all this? The thought of all of them still out there looking for me and not knowing what happened to me is almost more than I can stand!”

There was something about the way Glenda said what she said that made Jammina pause. She wanted to say something but didn’t quite know what to say or how to answer.

“I know they’re out there someplace searching and searching, trying to find me.”

Glenda said, “They’re probably out in the city looking right now! Oh, I hope they don’t end up going through all their money searching for me.”

Jammina continued to be silent. Trying to formulate exactly what to say and how to say it to the woman she was trapped with within the prison.

“How long ago exactly did you get abducted and brought to this place. I mean... about how long have you been here?” Jammina asked finally.

“I dunno. A few weeks... a month maybe. I lost track after about the second week, I think. Time seems to work kind of strange here.”

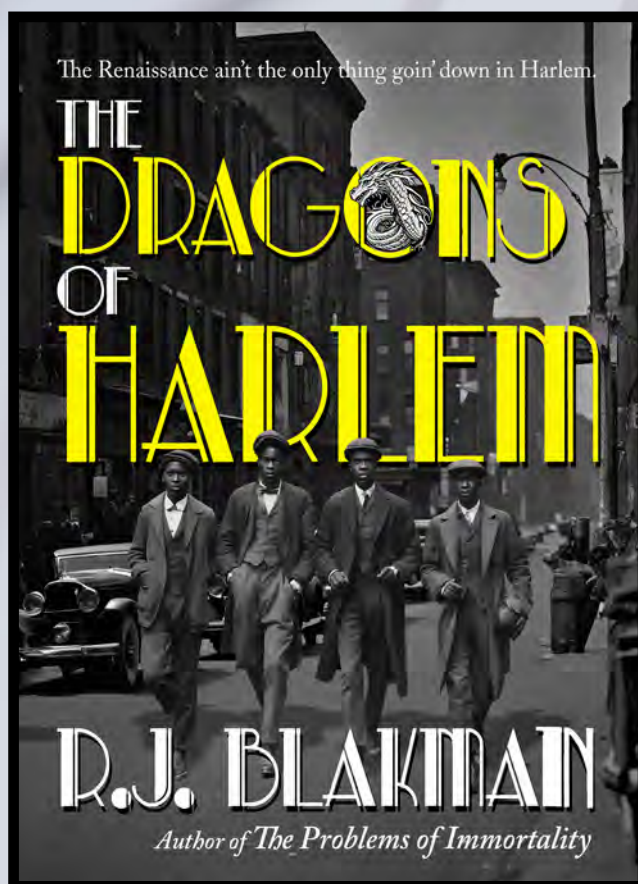
Jammina looked down at the floor and rubbed her chin. “A month?” she whispered more to herself than the woman

standing on the other side of the cell. She again looked up at the woman across from her and didn’t know what to say at that point.

How do you tell someone that for them, where they are, only a month has passed, but it has been almost three years where they came from? Glenda was right. Her parents had searched for her tirelessly for the first year and a half, and to the point of near financial collapse, just as she feared. but by the end of the second year everyone resolved that Glenda was likely dead.

A bodiless funeral was even held for the missing woman.

Jordan Knox, her fiancé likewise held out hope, but eventually, reluctantly moved on as well, having given up in the first year after the search. He had since found someone else, was married and had an eight-month-old son. The word through the grapevine was that he never truly got over Glenda, though he unquestionably had a reputation for being a hardworking, excellent husband, father and provider for his family.



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There was no need to tell the woman all that. The heaviness of knowing about the heartache of those who loved her would not be served any better by knowing the ache was still there, even likely for Knox, but that she had missed out on three years with them, and they had given up on ever seeing her again.

She would find all that out soon enough when they got back to where they belonged.

IF they got back to where they belonged.

“Glenda.” She called over, “My name is Jammina. Jammina Thompson. I just want you to know that there were... there ARE... a lot of people around to help and support them and your family and Jordan get a lot of support.”

“Thank you Jammina. Thank you so much. That’s so good to know. I lay here awake so many nights thinking about the absolute nightmare it had to be for my parents and for Jordan with me just seeming to them like I just disappeared into thin air.”

“Yes... it... it.. oh my God...” Jammina said as she covered her mouth with a trembling hand as for the first time since she came to consciousness she thought about her own parents and Jessie, the new love of her life. “Oh no.” she whispered.

Glenda could not completely make out the sounds of the woman from across the room, but she knew distress when she heard it and saw it.

“What’s the matter? You alright over there Jammina?” Glenda called over.

Jammina stood silent on the other side thinking the same thoughts that had tortured Glenda since her abduction. For the first time she started thinking about the fact that, regardless of where she was, she was captured and far away

from everything she knew and cared about.

And then there was the time.

She didn’t tell Glenda—wouldn’t tell Glenda, but wherever they were, as Glenda had unknowingly severely understated, time did work differently there. In her head Jammina attempted to do calculations and figure out how much time passed there, and how much time passed here—wherever here was. She guessed if she had only been unconscious for a day or so, then according to Glenda’s experience of this place, a month had passed where they came from... possibly two.

Jammina again looked around her and pulled her leg at the restraint that kept her from moving any farther into the cell. “Where are we?!” she

said to the woman across from her.

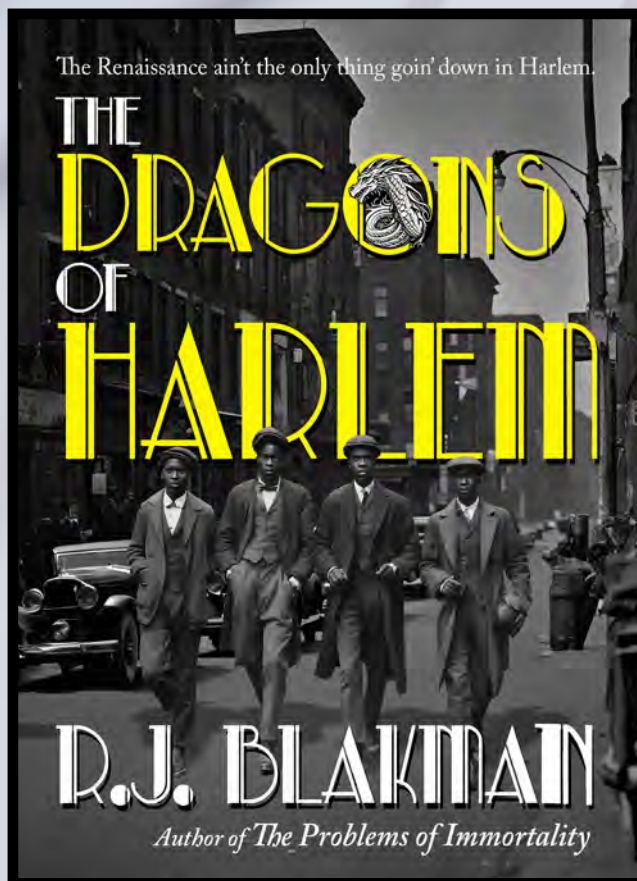
“If I told you, you wouldn’t believe me. You need to see for yourself.” Glenda called back.

“See what? I can’t see anything from in here except rocks!”

“The window! Look up and out the window if you can.”

Jammina turned around and backed away from the wall as much as the shackle would allow her. She stood, fortunately not needing to be on tip toe, and gazed out at the blue sky. What she saw was a sky that was bluer than any blue she’d ever seen in her life. “It’s beautiful.” She whispered in spite of herself. “That is the most beautiful sky I’ve ever seen Glenda, and it was the dead of winter where we came from, and it seems to be spring or summer here, but that doesn’t give me any clue to where I am.”

“It’s not the sky I want you to see. Just keep looking.”



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After a couple minutes, every now and then Jammina could see what, looked like some kind of birds, but unlike any birds she had ever seen. As she watched them flapping about high above them, one went flying by the window. Even though it was still far away, but considerably closer than the other figures Jammina had been seeing. It was then that she got the opportunity to see how massive they were. It went by so quickly and was so huge that Jammina let out a short scream and tried to back away, at which point the restraint prevented her from moving away as she had wanted to. It tightened and she fell backward.

“OW!” Jammina yelled as she hit the floor hard, but nearly without a sound due to the unforgiving nature of the stones.

“Be careful!” Glenda yelled, “You can’t forget you got that thing around your ankle.

“Wha-What was that?!” Jammina said, still on the floor and pointing up toward the window, her voice trembling and her doing not a single thing to conceal her shock and fear.

“It was a dragon.”

“A what?!”

“A dragon Jammina,” Glenda said matter of factly. “What you’re seein’ flyin’ around out there are dragons.”

Jammina sat on her butt for a couple minutes, then shakily made her way back to her feet.”

“What you saw was dragons.” Glenda said again as the woman turned back to face her. “You already know we aren’t in Harlem anymore. We’re way, way, WAY away from Harlem.”

“Dragons?! Glenda... where the hell are we?!”

Just as the other captive woman was about to speak, they heard the squeak of a turning knob, then the creak of a huge, solid wooden door opening. The door was at the top of a row of stone stairs that culminated in a platform at the very top. Atop the platform that led to the stairs stood a figure, not quite in silhouette, but dark, and wearing what looked to be a red robe trimmed in gold.

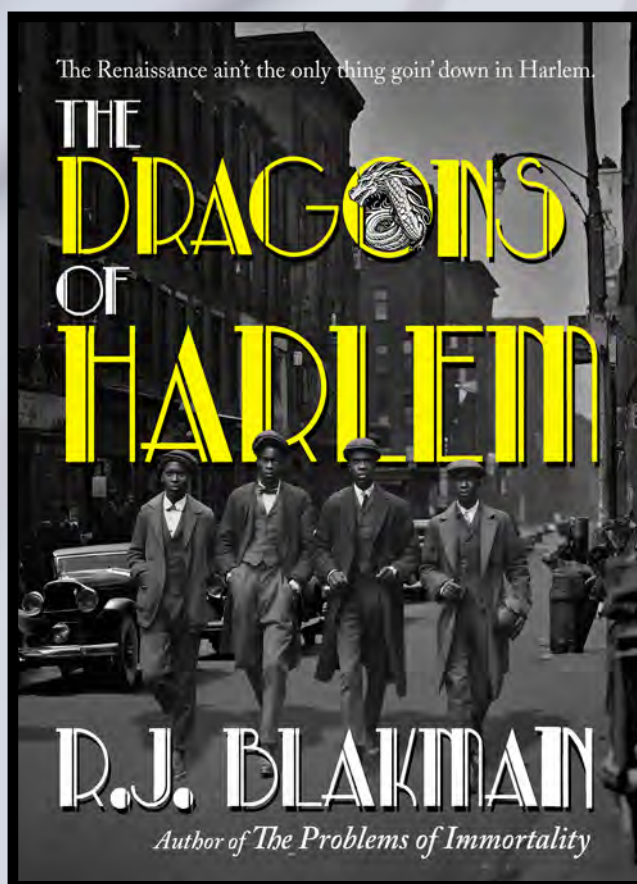
“Ah, I see my girls are becoming acquainted.” he said as he stepped through the door atop a flight of wide stone stairs. Upon reaching the bottom the figure walked past Glenda as if she were not there and made a slow trek over to Jammina. As he approached the woman, she was better able to get a good look at him.

He was tall and gaunt. He carried himself as if he was nobility—or at least perceived himself to be, and the paleness of his face and his high protruding cheekbones gave his head the appearance of a skull.

As he walked past the woman, Jammina opened her mouth as if she were about to say something and she could see behind the man coming toward her Glenda was vigorously shaking her head and waving her hands, signaling to Jammina to remain silent.

Not fully knowing the situation, Jammina immediately closed her mouth and said nothing.

“Very good.” The man said. “I am DiKasta. You will refer to me as LORD DiKasta, or Sir. By the way, your new friend, young Azalea back there, just gave you some very sage advice with her signals to you. She has been here in Barronhone for a little while, so she can educate you on how things work here. But there is ohhh, so much more to learn. Things you will both learn in your time here. Your new home.”



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“Barronhone?” Jammina whispered.

The man looked at her and without malice in his voice or any hint of anger or disapproval on his face said, politely. “You are new here and unfamiliar with our customs and the way of things. I will tell you only this once. When in the presence of a wizard or sorceress, you are to speak only when spoken to, and only in reference to what you have been spoken to about. Now that you have been apprised of this, you are subject to any laws or rules governing it. Am I understood?”

“Wizard?! What is this place?! Where am—”

When Jammina was seven years old, she fell from the high branch of a tree she’d climbed on a dare, breaking her arm in three places and nearly broke her ankle. She, at times, rested in the fact that she didn’t think any pain she would ever experience again in life could surpass it, so, in her mind, she was good for the rest of her life.

The present pain around her ankle radiating to her feet and up her leg was like nothing she’d ever experienced.

Jammina fell to the hard stone floor writing and screaming! The only tiny bit of solace for her being that she was able to wrap her hands directly around her ankle as they passed through the now brightly glowing ring that was the source of the agony.

It took a couple minutes for the pain to begin to wear off and the effects of the assault to fade. Jammina struggled to make her way to her feet as she looked up to the wizard, her eyes narrow with fury and hatred. “What the hell did you jus—”

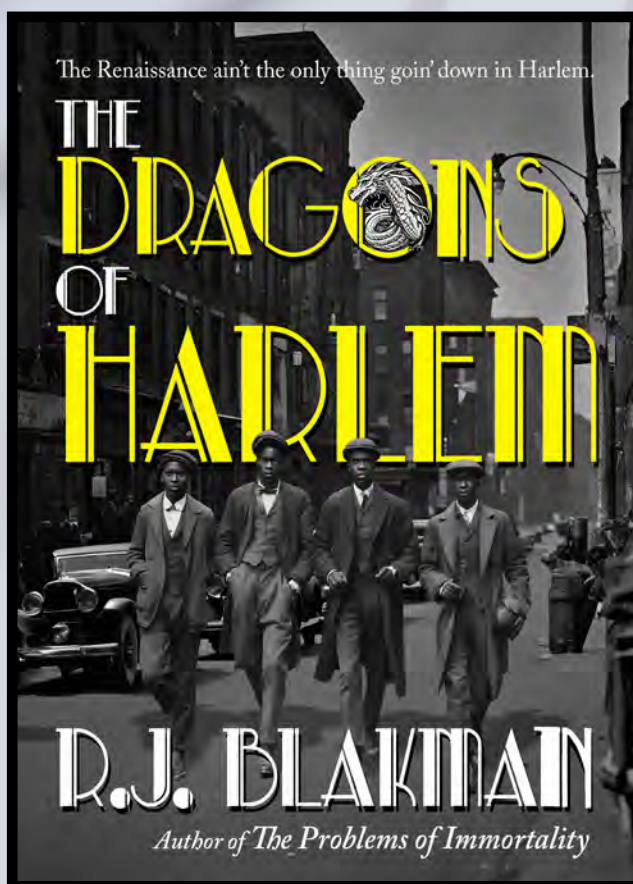
The restraint glowed, this time brighter than it had the first time and far more painfully

to Jammina’s senses than before, which was something that, had one asked her right before that happened if it was even possible. So intense was the pain that Jammina couldn’t even let out a scream or even grunts through her clenched teeth. She shook helplessly as her muscles tightened and violently spasmed. There was no reaching for her ankles this time as her arms bent at the elbows and fingers clenched as if she had claws. She could only quake as if being electrocuted by a high-tension wire.

After a few seconds it was over, and Jammina lay still and silent on the floor, once again unconscious. DiKasta looked at the naked form, soft and smooth against the hardness of the unforgiving floor of the cell and shook his head slowly from side to side as he let out an almost empathetic sigh. He then turned his attention to the woman’s ankle on which the restraint rested.

There was not even the hint of a mark or even a blemish.

He gave an almost imperceptible smile as he thought about how far the wizards of Barronhone had come. They had raised their magics to a level where they could create such spells in conjunction with physical matter, to produce restraints that would never leave any indication they had been deployed to the extent of extreme pain they delivered to the wearer. They had to have been the cleverest and highly trained wizards of the three realms. And this was only the beginning of the mystical secrets he and the council of wizards had planned to access and instruct to the other wizards of Barronhone. He took one more look at the shackle and again, congratulated himself and his kind for having created such a magic.



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Amazing. Shackles that restrained and subdued the wearer, delivering unimaginable pain if they were disobedient in any way the wizards defined disobedience, and the supreme art of it was that they left absolutely no marks.

None that were physical.

DiKasta looked up and began making gestures with his hands while speaking some kind of incantation. To the left of Jamminas unmoving body and about two feet from her, a table and chair slowly appeared. On it was what looked like a four-course meal fit for any five-star fine dining establishment. The gourmet meal included a decadent dessert of banana pudding—Jammina's favorite dessert. All of this with golden eating utensils and fine china. The only thing missing was a place setting in the middle of the table along with a candle in the middle of that.

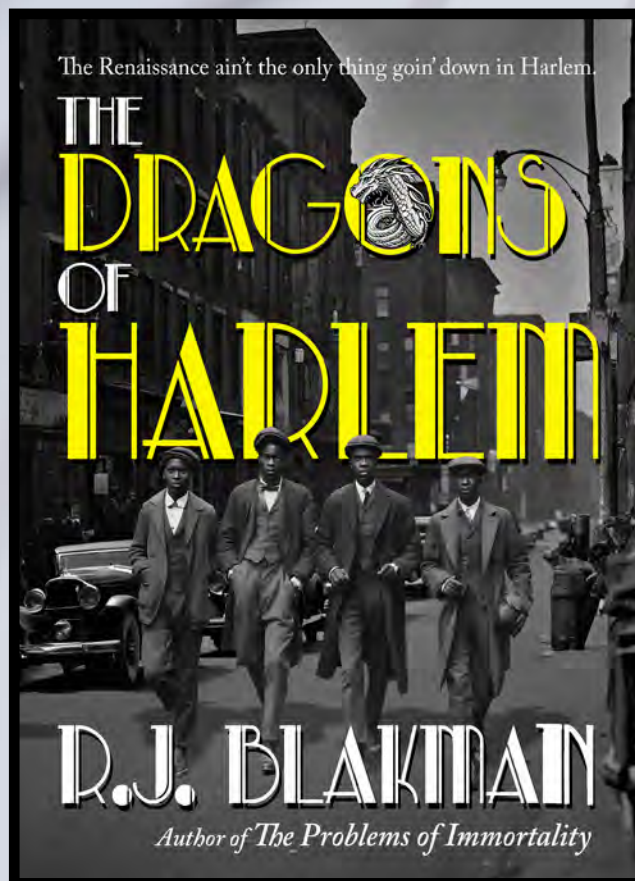
The Lord DiKasta satisfied that all was ready for the woman turned and walked over to Glenda. He repeated the gestures and hand signals, producing the same effect. A fine meal for his other captive.

“When she awakens tell her to eat. And as she eats... educate her. Enjoy your meal.” He said to the woman standing shackled in front of him.

“Yes Lord DiKasta.” Glenda, the woman DiKasta had named Azalea, said with a slight bow and no hint of fear or nervousness in her voice. “Thank you Sir.”

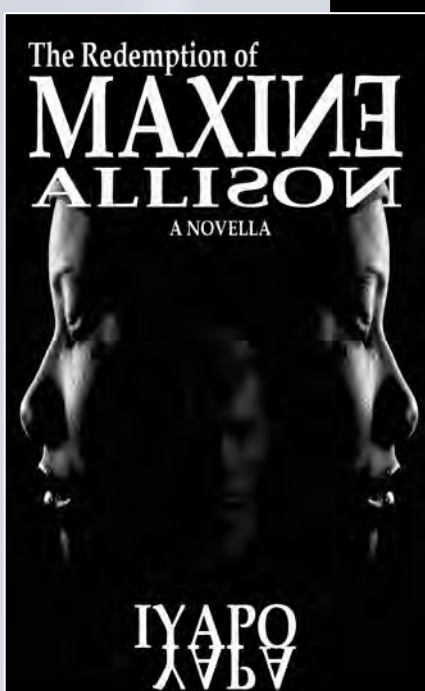
DiKasta walked slowly up the stairs, and upon reaching the door disappeared on the other side of it without looking back. When Glenda heard the echo of the door shut, she stood for a moment looking at the woman on the floor, knowing she would eventually wake, and no doubt be traumatized by what she'd just experienced. There would also equally remain the shock to her mental faculties—beyond the inevitable psychological damage of being kidnapped, spirited away from all she knew and loved, then tortured as she awaited what she had to know was a fate likely worse than dying.

Glenda looked up at the cell window high on the wall to the other side of her. She watched as a couple more dragons flew by, then back to the still unresponsive Jammina. A tear made its way down her cheek as she sighed. She then turned quietly to the banquet that was set out before her. She walked over, sat and took the cloth napkin that was waiting for her on the table, folded into a fancy standing design. She popped it unfolded, sat it across her lap, and began to eat.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

R.J. BLAKMAN



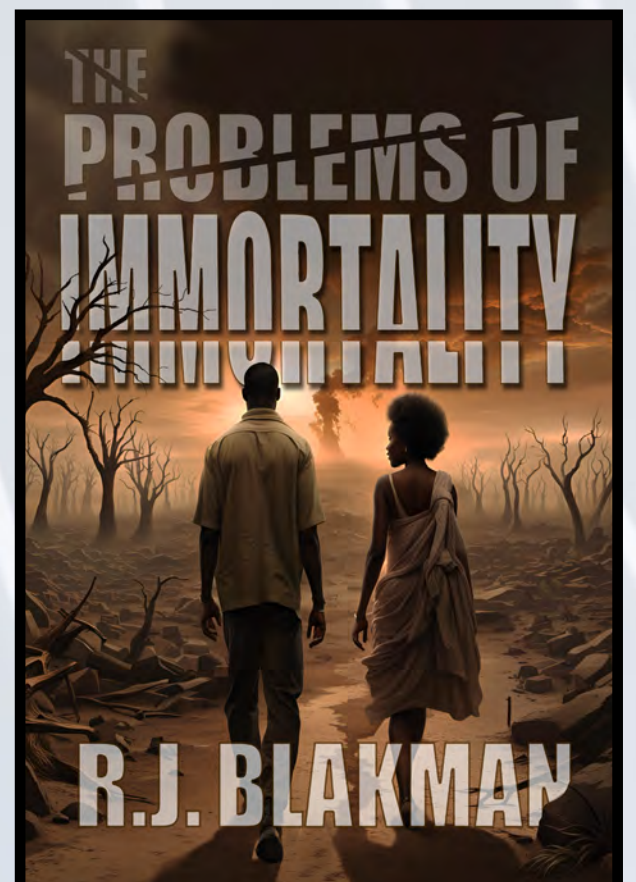
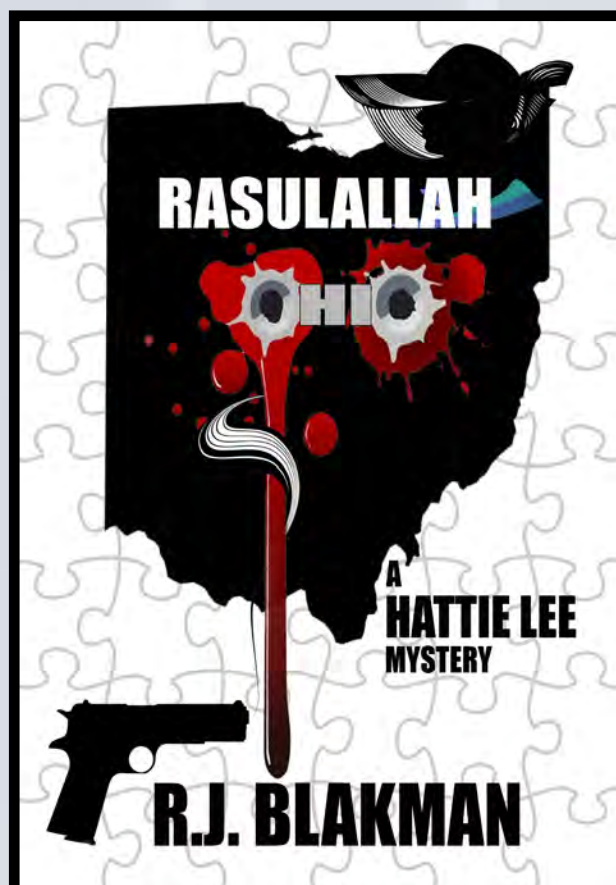
R. J. Blakman is a mystery writer, a writer of non-fiction and an all-around truth seeker. Blackman tries to look at things on a deeper level and whatever he finds, he tends to write about it with no sugar coating.

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

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

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

UPCOMING BOOKS BY R.J. BLAKMAN



ENTERTAINING,
ENGROSSING
THOUGHT PROVOKING!

READING and WRITING in the

DARK

A space for avid Black readers and Black authors

Author Spotlight: AYOKA B.

(Q&A Reprinted from the Black Writers Group Wolaba Newsletter - February 2022/Issue 4)

Ayoka B. is a talented writer and poet. Besides her elegant, introspective and deeply emotional poetry, she writes non-fiction stories, and fiction that is firmly grounded in reality.

Of late Ayoka has taken her first journey into the world of Romantic fiction with her upcoming novel: *Love at Second Sight!*

Ayoka has a strong and disciplined writing style that will appeal to just about any reader within just about any age group, though she primarily writes for adults and young adults. Ayoka's ability to place full strong characterization and vivid description into tight prose and an economy of words is a wonder to behold, and only adds to the enjoyment and thought provoking, image inducing, nature of her work.

Ayoka B. has been an integral regular member of the Black Writers Group Wolaba and dazzles not only with her writing, but with her commentary and critiques of the work of her fellow writers.

What follows is a Q&A from the February 2022, Issue 4 of the Black Writers Group Wolaba

1. Introduce YOU; give us some of the backstory. Any fun facts or unexpected twists in your personal story?

My name is Ayoka. I am a lover of creativity: art, music, books, dance, design. I am a Mother; I was a Single Mother for 21 years. I grew up in DC. I am the executive director of a non-profit, Empowering Single Moms, Inc., founded by my dear friend from college. Twist: I went to an elitist (1%) school from k-12 but I was raised by a mother who was active in the Civil Rights and PanAfrican movements and raised me with an Afrocentric mindset. I throw people off because of that dichotomy. I can move "easily" in both environments. I put easily in quotes because I don't like to be in the former environment but if I must, I know what to expect and how to deal with the uber wealthy and powerful.

2. What is your favorite genre to read? Has that changed? Who is your favorite author?

I don't have a favorite. That has changed somewhat because I'll read anything that keeps my attention. Most of the time, I read authors of color. My favorite was J. California Cooper for a long time. Current favorites include Caleb Azumah Nelson and Jodi Picoult.

3. Has your writing been published? If so, where? Where can we buy it? Where would you love to see your work published?

Almost... the novel is on the way. Next, I will work on publishing my poetry books; I'm figuring out my illustrations. All works will be self-published.

4. What writing project/s are you currently—or would you like to be—working on? Is there anyone with whom you would like to collaborate?

I'm working on my second novel, *The Bluff*. I also have a small, upcoming book for women which includes vignettes.

5. What are you reading now? Print or digital? Do you have a preference?

Creatures of Passage by Morowa Yejidé which is set in Anacostia, a section of Southeast Washington, DC where I grew up.

Print, definitely. I love books. I've read some digital especially during the pandemic but I prefer print hands down.

6. Do you have a writing process? What is (has been) your approach to writing?

I have no process. I write when I'm moved to do so.

7. What are some of the challenges you are facing now as a writer?

I haven't written anything in weeks. When I'm not inspired, I don't write; I won't force it.

8. Does writing energize or exhaust you? Neither?

It energizes me!!! So when I'm not writing, I'm not myself.

* * *

Ayoka is the author of four episodic stories on Kindle Vella: *Since I Seen't You - The Match - 7 Hours - The Skin I'm In*. Click on the image of Ayoka B. to visit her author section on Amazon where you will find all the titles.

Ayoka has also completed her first novel, *Love At Second Sight*. She is presently laying out the interior pages and has a designer working on the covers and spine. Want to know when the book drops? You can sign up on [Ayoka's site](#) and receive an extended sample. Also look for information in the Reading and Writing in the DARK newsletter!

You can also stay on top of what's happening with the novel by following Ayoka's *Love at Second Sight* Instagram page! Just click on the logo below to visit:

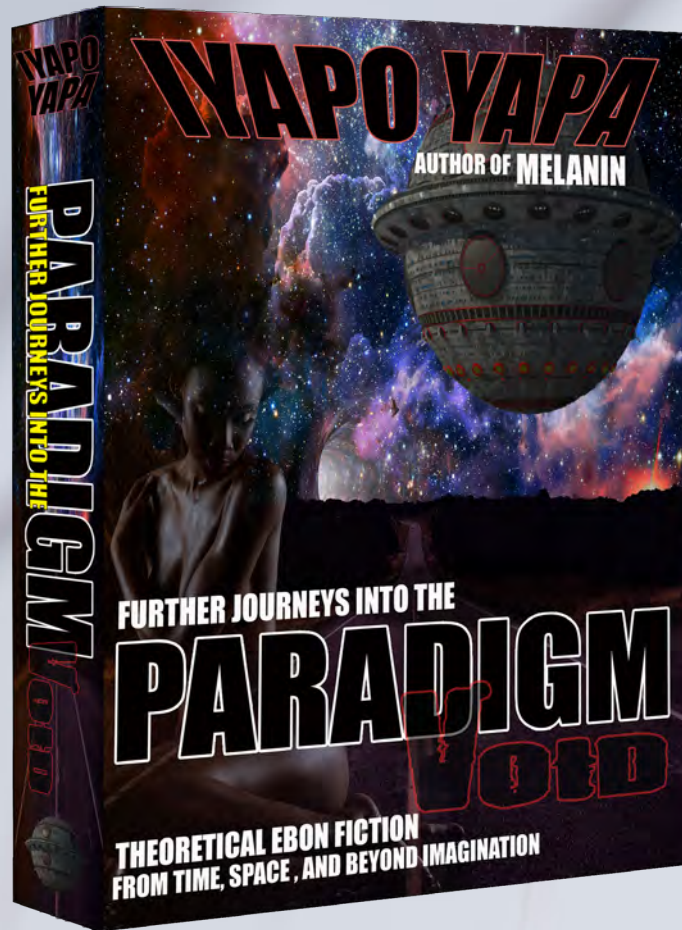


READING and WRITING in the

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ARE YOU PREPARED TO JOURNEY BACK INTO THE VOID?!



COMING SOON

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

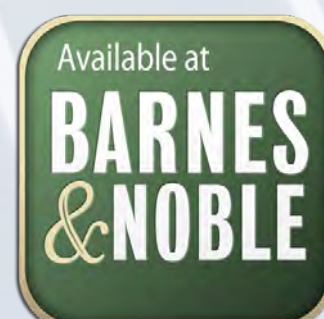
- What is life like for a person who is “unstuck” in time? One man gives his confessions.
- What if the universe, in an effort to balance itself started removing EVERYTHING that was of no use or value - to include some PEOPLE?!
 - Luxury isn't always what it seems, or is cracked up to be, as one newlywed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

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



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READING and WRITING in the

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December 2023 Word Search: Angela Rasulallah Riley

December is here! This month we have a WORD SEARCH! And this should be an EASY one! Every word pertains to last month's AUTHOR SPOTLIGHT writer. My beautiful, brilliant wife ANGELA! You will be able to find most of the answers in the November issue article, and the rest you can find by visiting Angela's author page on Amazon at the link below! As always, the answers to last month's puzzle are at the back of this issue and the answers to this month's crossword puzzle will appear next month. HAVE FUN!

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

ANGELA RILEY: BLACK LOVE/ROMANCE WRITER

J J B M W E C Q B G B F C Z K Z B A M R H C R J F F T K K W T Z W N P J R T O I
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G C A L I F O R N I A I J J O X Z E M F Z Z O M D Y K L N T F N U Q E H W V D U
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J G R Q H R U U O D Q I S Z G H Y K S M B B Y L H J J S S B I T P C B R H M R K
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C H O N Y G S E S P T K B W G B G B E P P S C I Y Y H A P T S D S B F I T E C L
R E G D E C L A I R E T P F R E S W K C B T U S Q G X I Y Z X W A U B U N T U Z
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O W A M T O U V M L J V X Q I S P I L L E D C X A G L U I H I S A
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P S W Q D R F M I N A N L D I C Z E O D E A C F P U F F E T O G B
H C I V J Q U B A R N A R D S N W O W D P W G Y N G U I Q D U K F
V Z Z C K R T E R R I N T E G R I T Y T P V T F F C D P V P



December 2023 WORD SEARCH!



[Click here to visit Angela's Amazon Author Page](#)

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DECEMBER WORD SEARCH PUZZLE BASED ON:

Author Spotlight: Angela Rasulallah Riley

YORK
WANTED
VELLA
INTEGRITY
HAPPY
LAWD
ALL
ASTROLOGY
CHANGE
DETROIT

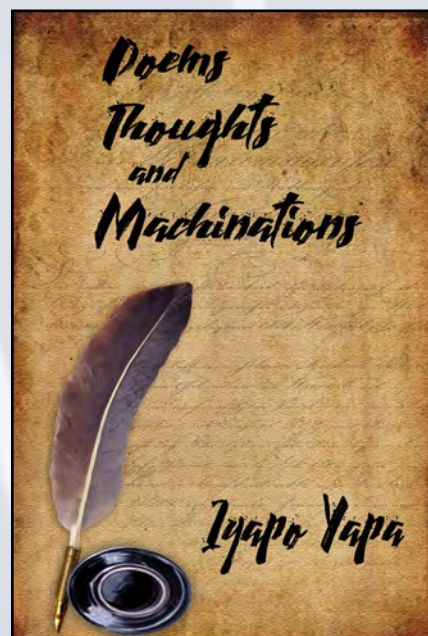
SPOTLIGHT
REFLECT
ROMANCE
UBUNTU
RASULALLAH
VIPASSANA
ACTING
PURPOSE
SPILLED
DECLAIRE

FULLY
DISARMING
GOOD
DATES
AFFIRMING
BARNARD
AGENCY
BLACK
DESIGNER
CALIFORNIA



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.

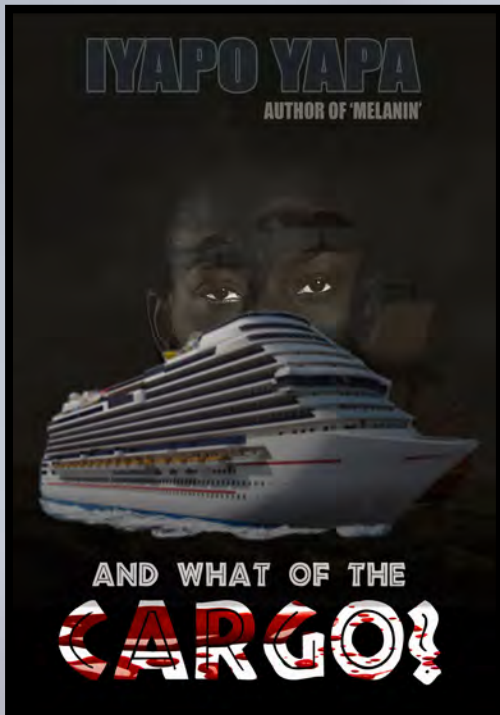
Here is where I write it down in verse and many times without traditional structure.

Always seeking.

READING and WRITING in the

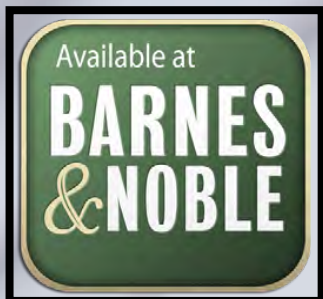
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And What of the CARGO?



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And What of the CARGO?

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“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

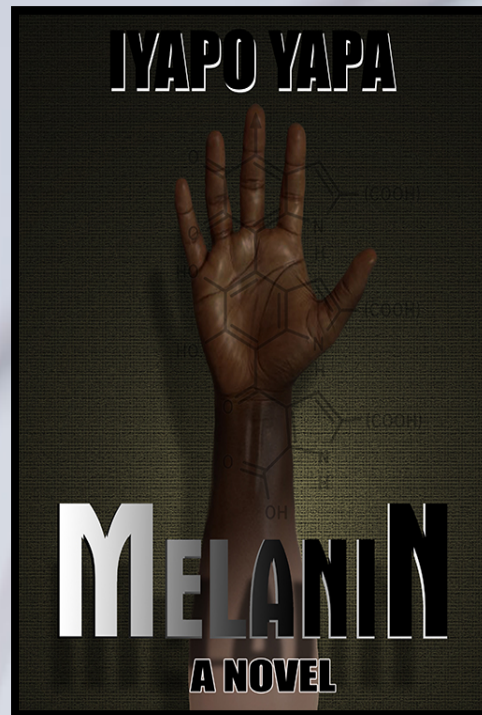
“Yapa weaves another story this time interwoven with historical references. I was on my seat with every chapter. I don't want to give it away but....revenge is sweet when served dead. And I can't get over how different each of his offerings are. Read his Vella's and you'll see what I mean. Another great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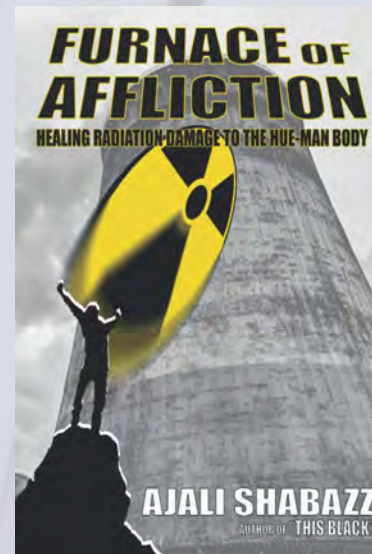
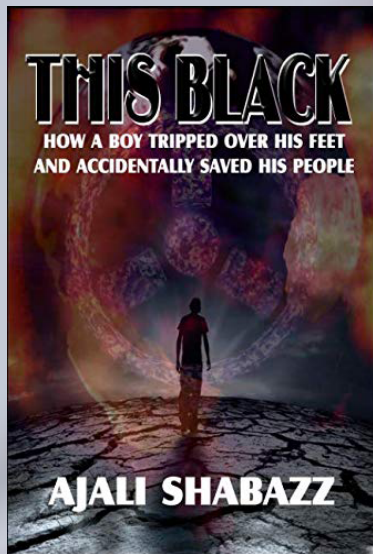
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Books by:

AJALI SHABAZZ



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

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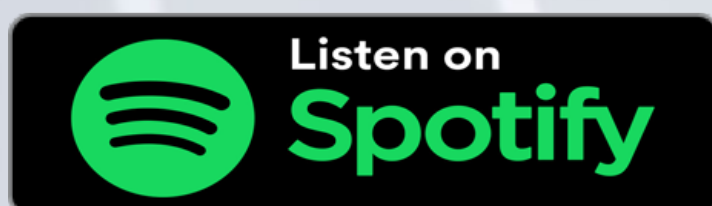
Listen to the interview on  by clicking the link below:

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



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

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



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MORE Bad Programming! Viruses, Malware and Spyware

From IYAPO'S BLOG Friday, 08 November 2022

This is something I sent to a wonderful, Sister Ma'at Speaks, and her husband Just Dewitt, and I felt it was worth also posting to my blog, so here it is as I posted it to them (without some of the extra stuff):

The purpose of viruses and malware is to install itself onto a computer (or network) without the knowledge and/or permission of the end user, to be destructive (or to hijack a computer at best) and/or to create "back doors" onto the system so the attacker can install new code any time they wish., Spyware is designed specifically to operate within a system and not be recognized by the system or the user.

Our minds work the same way I think.

Like a computer, from the moment we are born (and frankly, I believe even BEFORE we are born and, in the womb,), our people are taught and conditioned that we are nothing, we are the WORST people on the planet, that we have no culture and for many of us—that our history begins with enslavement (which it doesn't). And we are all to greater or lesser degrees, taught to hate ourselves and our people, or at MINIMUM, be taught to be ASHAMED to be Black. – to be WHO WE ARE.

The insidious part of this is that with viruses, malware and spyware, we can use our computers for YEARS, and then suddenly we'll start getting popups we've never seen before, or the computer will shut down, or freeze up at odd times, or the system will inexplicably start to slow down or exhibit other behaviors that we can't figure out. For many (especially in the early days of the PC), end users assumed there was something inherently wrong with the construction or

manufacture of the computer ITSELF, instead of some kind of rogue programming infecting it.

The insidious part of this is that with viruses, malware and spyware, we can use our computers for YEARS,

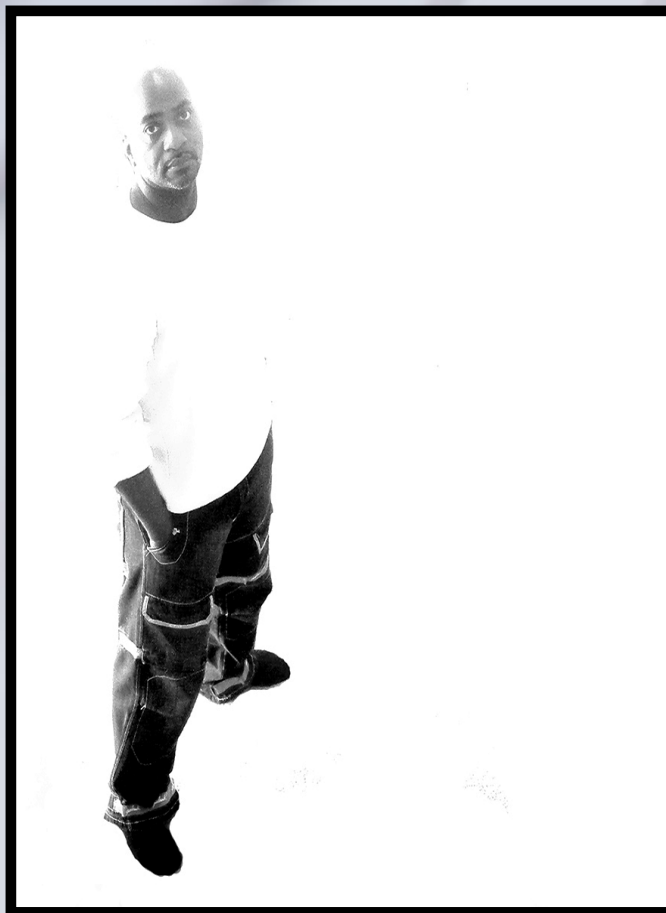
Many times anti-virus/malware/spyware software will either prevent the computer from getting it, or if it does, can give a warning about it, or quarantine it and eventually take steps to get rid of it.

Some of these malicious codes will give the IMPRESSION that it has been removed, but upon startup, REINSTALL onto the system,

and it will possibly take some programmer or other expert who is highly proficient in locating and irradiating the software from the system because it can be hidden within code that can only be REMOVED by OTHER code manually.

When our computers get infected, we get frustrated with the computer and I have actually seen videos of people who take their computers and either slam them against walls, or take a hammer to them, or throw them out windows because they are so enraged and frustrated that the computers are behaving the ways they are.

Why not be upset with the virus/malware/spyware itself (or better yet those who created and distributed it) and go slam THEM against the wall or throw THEM out the window?! Simple... we can't GET at THEM, and for the most part, they are nameless and faceless. But the COMPUTER is right there and an EASY focus for our wrath!



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MORE Bad Programming! Viruses, Malware and Spyware (Continued)

From IYAPO'S BLOG Friday, 08 November 2022

And so... OUT THE WINDOW IT GOES! And the thrower sticks their head out the window to get the satisfaction of seeing it shattered on the pavement into a million pieces!

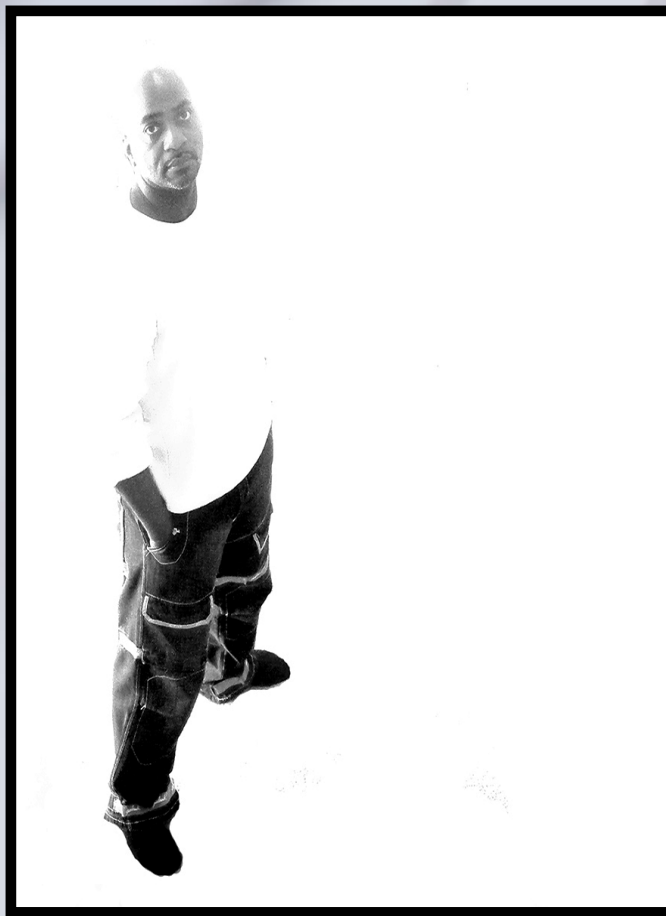
Never once considering that it is NOT the fault of the computer, or that were the computer NOT infected and affected by outside influences, it would be working perfectly and serve as a useful and valuable tool, thus having cheated themselves out of the helpfulness the computer may have given them had they cared to take the time to clean the drive or take it to someone who COULD.

And so, here we are.

We do not aim our rage and wrath toward the nameless, faceless people (and we KNOW who they are—and they ain't Black US). So, the long and short of it is that our people presently are dealing with a LOT of misplaced anger and frustration!

It's time to dig DEEPER and get to the ROOT of the problem, Start being angry with those who created and installed the programs SECRETLY and WITHOUT PERMISSION. Instead of

focusing on the VICTIMS of the programming. What do the victims need? A deep cleaning of the system, and in some cases a FULL erasure of all related drives and "clean" REINSTALLING of a legitimate OS.



And for the sake of intellectual honesty, I will admit that I have had some drives that have become SO corrupted that I have LITERALLY had to just get rid of the drives. That is also an unfortunate truth when it comes to our people, there ARE some of us who actually DO have manufacturer defects that would have caused them to behave in abhorrent ways even WITHOUT any malicious programming—but I submit that they are the exception and not the rule, and they

may need to be dealt with harshly. But that is in EXTREME cases, and as with when I had to get rid of my drives... there was NO JOY in it. And even when I did, I was not frustrated with the DRIVE ITSELF, but at whatever had CAUSED the issue with the drive.

I think our people would do well to recognize, understand and remember that.



IYAPO
NOBBE
IYAPO YAPA
BLOG

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MELANIN: A Novel NOW ON KINDLE UNLIMITED!

I know that my first novel has brought joy to those who have read it and been kind enough to take time to rate it and write reviews. AND *MELANIN* has been a ceaseless source of pride and joy for me. From the time I released *MELANIN: A Novel* it has only been available as soft cover, hard back and Kindle edition. It is my only work published through Amazon, that is not available on Kindle Unlimited.

UNTIL NOW!

To celebrate the One Year Anniversary of the publication of my debut novel, *MELANIN: A Novel* is now available on Kindle Unlimited! This means that if you have a Kindle (or any tablet or mobile device) you can (download and) open the free Kindle App and read about what hap-

pens in a world were becoming genetically and phenotypically Black is the difference between life and death.

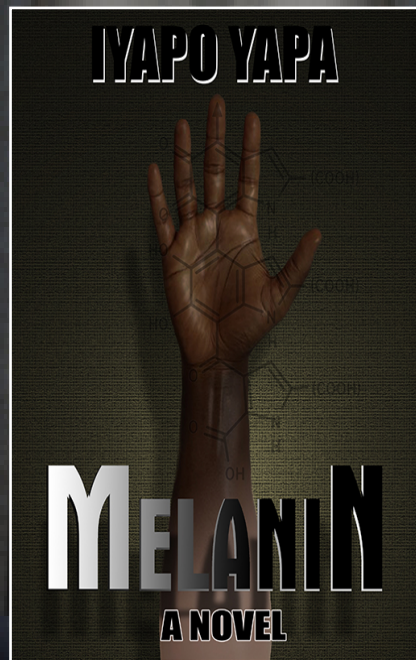
So, tell your family and tell your friends! Tell your neighbors and your colleagues! Tell your book clubs and your reading groups!

And remember you can still also get your copy of *MELANIN: A Novel*

as a soft cover or hard cover edition as well as purchasing it to add to your Kindle digital library!

I want to thank everyone for your support, well wishes and purchases! It means a lot to me to know my work is being read and appreciated! It is my goal to keep

bringing you the very best work I can produce!



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! Enter a world of action, adventure, science and horror on Kindle vella!

Click on the Kindle vella link below!



kindle vella



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!



READING and WRITING in the

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A space for avid Black readers and Black authors

Alright, enough about ME!

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

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

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



I DeClaire Love

Angela Riley

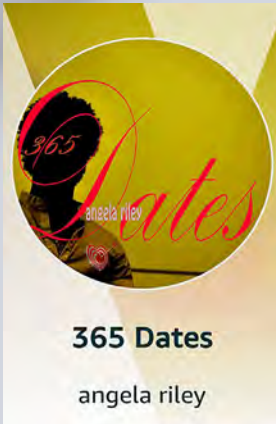
DeClaire and Tyrone meet and sparks fly. They fall in love with each other quick, fast, and in a hurry. It seems too good to be true. But is it? Is it safe to love? Are there any “good” rules when it comes to love? Do we have to fight for love? Are there always games being played when it comes to love?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



The Love X TamuTamu Agency

Angela Riley

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



365 Dates

Angela Riley

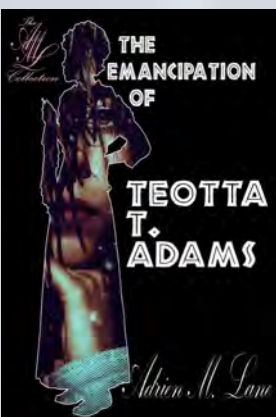
Single again, after my first divorce, one day I had a new thought: I WANT TO DATE. And... NOTHING. No one came knocking on my door to woo me. No one approached me when I was out wanting to court me. Nobody asked friends/family to be set up with me. Just crickets! So, thinking that maybe my goal was to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



Fully BLACK

Angela Riley

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



The Emancipation of Teotta T. Adams

Adrien M. Lane

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



Since I Seen't You

Ayoka B.

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

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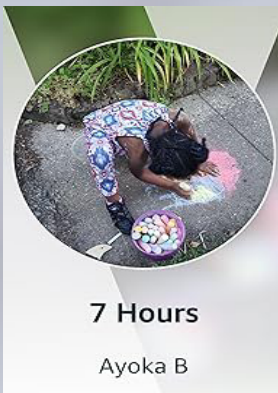
A space for avid Black readers and Black authors



The Match

Ayoka B.

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



7 Hours

Ayoka B.

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



The Skin I'm In

Ayoka B.

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



A'DICK'tion The Back Story

MADM Precious

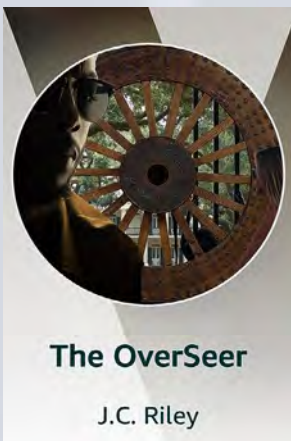
From Book 1: Sex addiction is a real thing; When Quincey finds out his wife is caught up in some things, can they save their marriage.



The Godchild Chronicles

J.C. Riley

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



The OverSeer

J.C. Riley

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

ALSO AVAILABLE on AMAZON and OTHER PLATFORMS!

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

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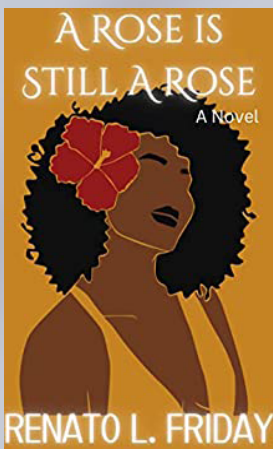


Affirming Self Love (Graphic Non-Fiction SERIES)

angela riley

SelfLOVE Meditation, Reflections, & AFFIRMATIONS Series...

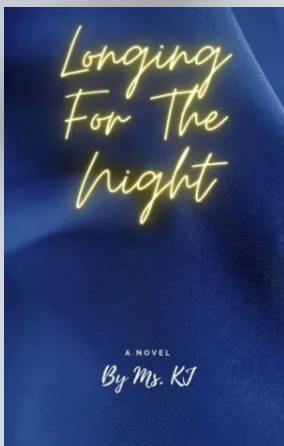
With a new book released each month, this “Graphic Nonfiction” series is filled with love for BlackUs. Each episode opens with a short essay exploring a theme such as “Following the Happy” or “Plan & Reflect” and culminates with a dynamic collection of affirmation. You’ll have a beautiful time meditating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



A Rose is Still a Rose

Renato L. Friday

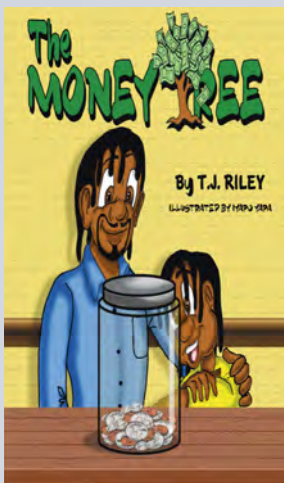
Rose thought life was going great: she was engaged, had a beautiful set of twin girls, a recent trade school graduate, and a new job right around the corner. Unfortunately, her fiancé, David, turned out to not be what she needed, and she chose to break things off. In the midst of her failing relationship,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

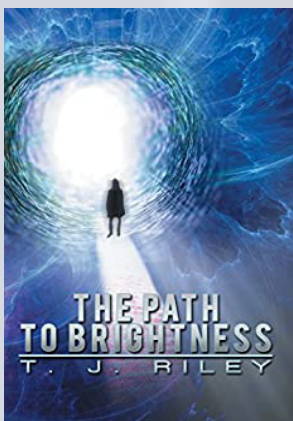
Inspired by the poem Goblin Market by Christina Rossetti, two young sisters face the trials and tribulations of the hood in this coming-of-age story about the harshness of living in South Central Los Angeles.



The Money Tree

T.J. Riley / Illustrated by Iyapo Yapa

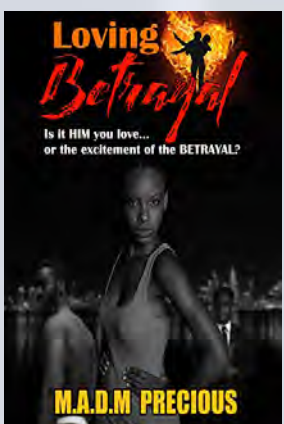
Every child wants money to buy something, right? Our hero does too. But, his father has a surprise, a Money Tree. Join the fun journey to find out how to grow your own money tree.



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

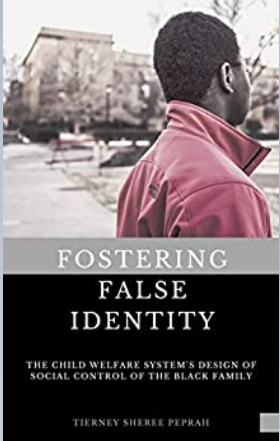
MADM Precious

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...

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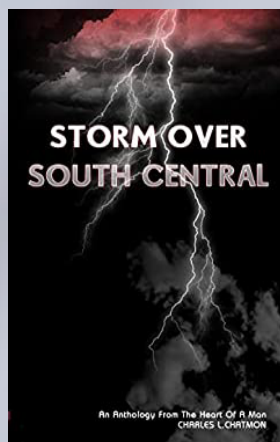
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Fostering False Identity: The Child Welfare System's Design of Social Control of the Black Family Tierney Peprah

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.

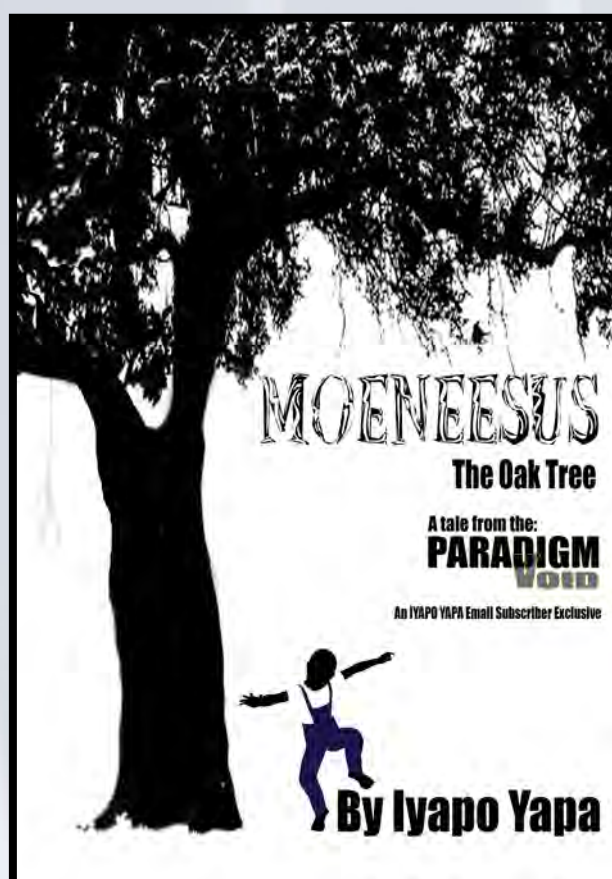


RELAY

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.



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

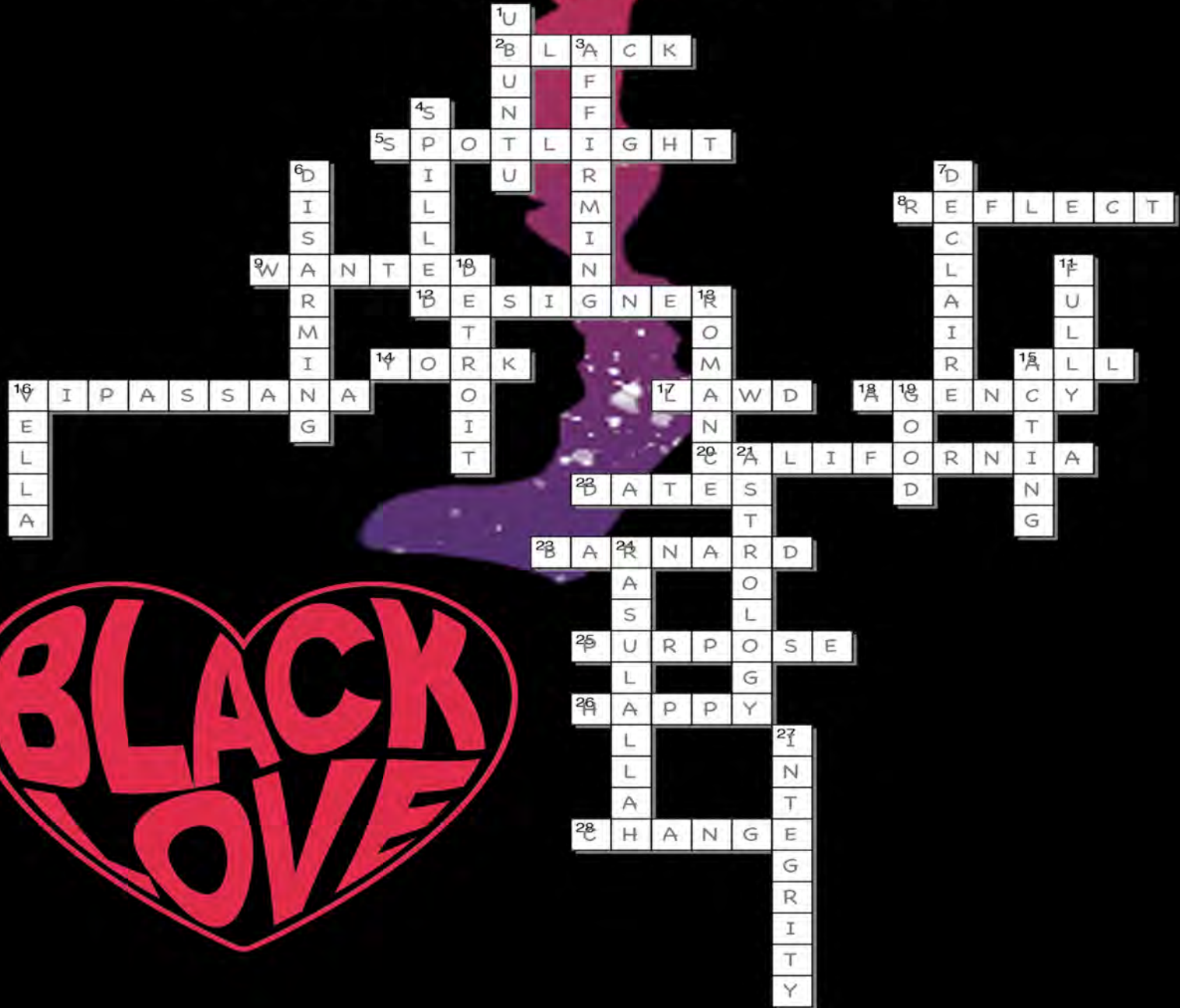
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HERE IS THE SOLUTION TO LAST MONTH'S CROSSWORD PUZZLE!

ANGELA RILEY: BLACK LOVE/ROMANCE WRITER ANSWER KEY



The Director

Benita, a desperate and out-of-work actress, had been selling her blood to stay afloat. Times were hard and getting worse until she agreed to star in a film by an unknown director named Danny West. He'd been producing mystery and horror flicks for years. Yet, no one knew it was just a front for his secret agenda.

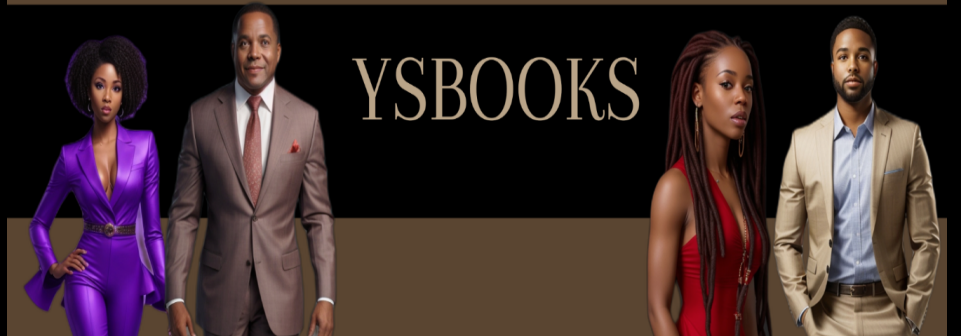
* * *

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

CLICK THE IMAGE ABOVE TO LISTEN TO

THE DIRECTOR

READ FOR FREE OR LISTEN TO THE AUDIO DRAMA!



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IYAPO YAPA

Tales of the
MONKEY'S PAW

NOT EVERY WISH GRANTED MAKES DREAMS COME TRUE

BE CAREFUL WHAT
YOU WISH FOR!



Keepin' it a BUCK *series*

SHORT STORIES of HORROR and SUSPENSE



BE SURE TO VISIT IYAPO YAPA ON THESE OTHER PLATFORMS!



MAJOR MARY

COMING 2024