

Exile

By Trey R. Barker

He knocks. Hard. Kimbo is visible through the dirty front window. Het bangs again, feels the radiating anger when Kimbo opens the door.

“Get outta here.”

“Kimbo, how are you--?”

“Get the hell outta here.”

“I just want to talk. Open the door.”

“Suck my ass.”

Het licks his teeth. “Still on parole?”

The angry line of Kimbo’s lips gives the answer.

“Open the door. I’m not asking again.” Het enters the apartment. Cramped and claustrophobic, but immaculately kept. “Got a drink?”

“Threaten me with prison and want a drink while you do it?” But Kimbo gets the drink.

Het knew he would. As long as Het swings memory like a heavy club, Kimbo will do what needs doing. Drinking, Het grimaces. “This the best you have?”

Kimbo’s jaw sets hard as soft stone. “Breaking my balls ‘cause I cain’t afford decent liquor?”

Het pulls a flask from his uniform. “We’ll drink mine, then.”

“Shit. Man pins on a badge then breaks the rules ‘cause he pinned on a badge.”

“Both broken our share of rules.”

“Ain’t ever said I was perfect.” Kimbo’s voice is quiet.

“Me either.”

“So what we got? Two imperfect bodies drinking hooch?” Kimbo snorts. “Ain’t interested. I’m trying to get back together. I got my wife and baby. I got a job.”

“Doing pretty well.”

“Yet here you stand.”

“Because we have history.”

“Had history.” Kimbo slams his drink down. It spills. “Gone when you cuffed me.”

Het nods, tacit acceptance. “Maybe. Do you ever wonder...what if we zigged...maybe...rather than zagged?”

Kimbo looks – pointedly – at the clock. “You got something on your conscience? Some bad thing you done? Looking for absolution?”

“Can you give it?”

Kimbo squares up to Het. “If I can give anything, it’s an ass beating.”

Time stops. Neither man breathes. It could end here, Het thinks, in this shitty apartment. Kimbo clenches hand to fist, but goes no further.

Het shakes his head. “You dealt that hand.”

“God dealt that hand, His regular bullshit.”

Het touches a picture on the TV. Kimbo's mother, before the cancer ate her. Hair in a playful ponytail. Lips wet and full of color. Eyes bright and alive. "So the cosmos is against you? You're the one who killed her."

Kimbo turns the picture face down. "God gave her cancer. He done the killing."

"Pillow was in your hand."

Kimbo grunts. "God, death, and tacos. How's that for fucked up?"

A heartbeat after Kimbo had put the pillow over her face, Officer Het had barged in, looking to take Kimbo for tacos. A dinner ritual since childhood.

"Prison smells exactly like the taco stand." Kimbo's hands shake. "Blood. Sweat. Piss. Shit. Don't know why it reminded me of overcooked meat and cheap cheese, but there it is. Swear to God it was the same stink."

"Kimbo, I--"

"Except the fear. Prison air's full'a fear. Like humidity down at the Gulf."

"I can imagine."

"Don't patronize me. Everything was black, Het. Sun shining or Kris coming for a conjugal or a picture of my baby. Didn't matter. Everything was black."

"Sunshine's here now, though, right? You're out. Got your wife and kid. Go get your jazz from Daddy? Coltrane and Miles?"

Kimbo's nods, his eyes brighter in the memory.

Het grins. "Wait, Clifford Brown is your favorite, right? Our 7th grade band teacher turned you on to him, right?"

There is a soft moment before the air sours. Kimbo clenches his jaw. "Long time ago and I'm getting sand in my boots. How long we gonna walk down memory lane? If you gonna bring my parole officer down, get her on the phone and let's get to getting."

"I'm sorry, that's not what I want. I just – I just wanted to see you."

"You've seen me."

Het hates the plea in his voice. "Wanted to try and...I don't know...make amends?"

"Amends? You were just doing your job, right? If that's the case, then there ain't nothing to atone for."

"Doing my job doesn't mean I don't hate it sometimes. I'm not a monster. I've always loved you."

"Bullshit."

Het touches the picture of Kimbo's daddy. "How is he?"

"What?" Kimbo turns that picture over, too. "He's...uh...fine."

"Had a stroke?"

"Two years. He's in a wheelchair now. Hard for him to talk but I understand him. Gets a work pension, a few bucks from Social Security, \$250 a month from some friend of his. Pays his bills, sits in his wheelchair. Waits to die."

"But now he's got his boy back and there's a granddaughter..."

"He cain't play."

"What?"

"My father can not play with his granddaughter."

Hot blood fills Het's face. "Sorry. Didn't think about that."

"Yeah."

"But he's proud, though, right? All you've been through and you got out clean. Just like when we were kids"

"Haven't been through anything. Was put through something. Your Mama wouldn't have no pride in what you done to me."

"True. She always loved you pretty hard. Maybe more than me."

Kimbo rolls his eyes. "Here we go. You were doing good. We was working a vibe, finding some good ground. Then boom! Poor, little lost boy. 'My life is so terrible.' Tough shit. You got a job and a pension and a couple of cars and a business and roof over your head. How goes the record store anyway? Lots of employees and meeting the mayor and governor and God knows who else? Turning into quite the little hometown businessman, ain't you?"

Het had prepared to be bludgeoned with a hulking anger. If I wield the past, he understands, I will get bloody. "All I'm saying is Mama wanted us to protect each other."

"Didn't work out too well."

"I tried to, I surely did."

Kimbo thrusts his hands out, mimicry of being cuffed. "By arresting me? Fucker didn't even have the balls to come when they bussed me to Huntsville. I spent five hours – scared to death – on that fucking bus, cutting my palms with my fingernails. Helluva protection job."

"And you'd have me do what?" Het's voice rises. It fills the apartment. "Damnit. I was supposed to ignore it? You killed her. I had to do something."

"She was already dead, Het, she just hadn't stopped breathing. How many times she ask for our .22? She wanted a bullet in the brain. Or to fall in the shower or something. She just wanted to be done."

"So you killed her."

"I helped her."

"By suffocating her with the pillow."

"Yeah, Het. I did what needed doing and then went to prison and spent a dime in protective custody."

Het frowns. This is news. "PC?" Het had tried to keep up, but time slipped away. The job, then the promotion. The record store with his wife. Inertia. "Why PC?"

"Seen a killing first month in." Kimbo shakes his head. "I was such a dumbass. I testified. How stupid was that? Between that and being a convicted Mama-killer, most of the mainline cons wanted me dead. So I spent my ten years in isolation. Twenty-three hours a day behind a locked door. Not a barred door. A barred door would've let me see the other men. Maybe talked to them. Solid door, six-inch by six-inch plastic window, and a chuck-hole. They shoved my food tray through that chuck hole. Usually it hit the floor. They didn't care. The guards didn't give a shit I ate or starved." His eyes grab Het violently. "I couldn't fix it, bitch. I couldn't fix my world back the way it used to be."

Het watches Kimbo lick a finger. Booze spill on him? Or maybe it's memories of the taco grease.

“Het, why you here?”

Het treads slowly. “It’s all going under. They’ve got me by the throat. They won’t let go.”

Kimbo laughs hard. “You been dramatic your whole life and here we sit, in my apartment with me just a few weeks outta prison and you want some pity ‘cause’a something you shouldn’t’a did.”

“No pity. A favor. The record store’s closing.”

Kimbo pauses. “Life is tough, I guess.”

“I’m drowning in debt. The store’s dying.”

“Well, the economy sucks. Close it up and move on.”

“It’s not the economy. I screwed the pooch. Two years ago it started going bad. I didn’t have the right inventory or my customers started downloading their music, I don’t know. Either way, there weren’t enough butts coming in. Got behind on some bills.” He shrugs. “Paid them on a credit card but I still didn’t have any customers and then I’m further behind so I got some credit card cash advances to cover the bills.”

Kimbo whistles. “Higher interest on cash advance.”

“Got behind on those cards so I got another one to pay them off and then... There just weren’t any customers. I got some payday loans and that cost me big so then I went back to the bank to pay off the paydays and then had to get a second mortgage.”

“Jesus, Het.”

“It happened so fast, Kimbo. It was like those trains when we were kids. Down at Industrial Loop? You remember? They’d screaming past and be gone in a flash.”

Kimbo grins and Het knows it’s pure nostalgia. “I loved those trains, but they were quick. They’d getcha.” Then he glares at Kimbo. “Ain’t you smarter than the trains?”

“Woke up one day staring at \$100,000 in debt. Or maybe more, I don’t really know. After awhile, I just quit paying attention. The thing is...I never told Janine. She knew something was up, but I don’t think she wanted to look too deeply. Tried to tell her a thousand times, but every time I looked in her eyes I just felt...I don’t know...ashamed and...so fucking stupid. So I kept it hidden and prayed something good would happen.”

“That’s ugly.” Kimbo takes a deep breath. “Don’t know what to tell you. Won’t be no hypocrite, though, won’t say I’m sorry. Nothing that happens to you can make me sorry. I hate that’s how things are, but I sat in the cut for a decade because of you.”

“Because of you.”

“Yeah, Het, I killed my mother. But you could have fucking walked away.” Kimbo waves the picture of his mother in Het’s face. “You knew it was the most merciful thing I could do and you could have let us be. Instead, you made your precious bust and got your promotion and I got nothing left. What happened to protecting each other?”

“Aren’t you putting it back together? Wife and baby and job?”

“Which is worth exactly what? I’ve got a great family but what can I do for them? I’m a convicted felon. I’m a murderer. Never gonna have a decent job. Spend the rest of my life working check to check and praying to God neither of them get sick or the brakes fail on the car. And if they do? What can I do?”

“Nothing.”

Kimbo’s anger is a white-hot second skin. “Damn straight. And you crybaby about how you screwed up and owe some money. I don’t give a shit. You don’t know pain.”

“Not saying it compares, but that pain is mine. Hurts worse every day. I wake up hoping for an aneurysm or a heart attack or maybe a car crash.” He hesitates. “Like your mother at the end. I get a good death and there’s insurance money. Janine can pay it off and start over.”

Cars roar on the streets. Hip-hop passes the apartment and stops down the block. It moves on and fades into the darkness. Drugs, both men know. Either dealing or checking on the corner boys.

“Never told her, huh?”

“And say what? I fucked up her life because I couldn’t admit my mistake?”

“I..I wish I could feel for you. We were friends. Thick and thin and the Dynamic Duo of Broad Street. Remember Old Lady Semple? Thought someone was breaking into her shed, stealing the gas outta her mower.”

“We sat in her bushes for three nights.” They both laugh and for a moment, Het believes they might be 10-years-old again.

“Never saw a thief.”

“My Mama kept bringing us cup cakes and milk and bologna sandwiches.”

Kimbo nods, his eyes those of a young kid. “I still hate bologna.”

“It’s good to hear you laugh, Kimbo.”

Kimbo nods. “Been a lot of it lately. Laugh like an idiot all the time. Kris says I’m giddy with freedom.”

“I missed that laugh. I missed you.”

“Never bothered to come see me.”

“I was...I was embarrassed, okay?” Kimbo pays more attention now, as Het had known he would. “Just like you when we were fourteen.”

Kimbo sniffs. “That was watching you sex up some girl. This was sending me to prison.”

Het touches a finger to the tattoo on his upper chest. A .22 pistol. Kimbo has one, too. They were 15-years old at the time. “I knew it wasn’t murder but I didn’t say a word.”

“No, you didn’t.”

“I couldn’t have changed anything.”

“You could have said it. That would’ve been enough for me.”

“I’m sorry, I really am.”

“I appreciate that.”

Kimbo’s face softens as a car pulls up outside. The headlights splash through the open door. Kris’ heels click on the sidewalk like the slow closing of handcuffs.

“Take a ride with me.” Het speaks quickly now. “I want to show you something. It won’t take long.”

Kimbo shakes his head. "I don't think so. I'm sorry we're ending cross, but it don't matter how long we talk about the old days, the new days ain't gonna change."

"One quick ride, Kimbo, I'll have you back before you know it."

"No."

"Talking about the old days, huh?" Kris' glare is explosive when she enters. "Kimbo, what's he doing here?"

"Kris, I was concerned. I wanted to see how you guys were--"

"Fuck your concern."

"You know, Het? You ain't got much subtle." Kimbo's face sags like his and Kris' worn couch. "Trying to seduce me with what we had."

Kris slaps Het. Hard. He flinches. "What'choo doing, Het? Killing him with his own childhood? Standing here and reeling out all the old stories? How long did it take you to get to Semple? Talk about the Playboy magazines? Damn you, Hetfield Brownlee. Can't you see?"

Het blinks, tries to look confused. "See what?"

"Those memories are dead." Her voice doesn't go high and hysterical. It becomes a low rumble that scares Het. "You killed them for him."

"I don't understand." Het retreats from her anger. She backs him against the wall. "All of his childhood was you, dumbass. And all of his prisonhood was you, too. They're the same damn thing. He can't remember one without being forced to remember the other."

Het ignores her. "Kimbo, please. Come with me. A quick goodbye and I'll never bother you again."

"He ain't going with you."

"Kris, please..." Kimbo stands between them. His head swivels back and forth as though on a pike.

"You ain't going with him."

Het takes a deep breath. "Yeah, he is." Het drops a glassine packet on the TV.

"What's that?" Kimbo's eyes follow the packet.

Kris' never leave Het. "Drugs? You brought drugs into my home?" She punches Het in the mouth, then punches again. Kimbo makes no move to stop her.

"Two grams." Het wipes the blood from his lips.

Impotence stains Kimbo's face. "You're a son of a bitch."

"I will leave this blast right the fuck here and call your PO. She'll be here in ten minutes and you'll be right the fuck back in prison. You only served 85 percent of the time. Want to do the last 15? Plus whatever the heroin gets you?"

"So I'm a brother but you got no problem with bogus drugs?"

"No problem at all."

"This is what you've become?"

"This is exactly what I've become."

There is a long silence. Kris stares at Het, then at Kimbo. Her face hardens. "You're going with him."

"No choice."

"Call the cops."

“I am the cops, Kris. I’m a decorated officer dealing with a convicted murderer.”

Kris spits in Het’s face. “You bring him back to me or I will kill you myself, prison be damned.”

After she slams the bedroom door behind her, Kimbo hesitates. “What’s going on? Don’t give me no bullshit about credit cards and payday loans.”

Het takes a deep breath. “Judas had a choice. He could have walked away from the entire mess.”

“Damn, you’re making my head hurt. The fuck does that mean? Judas couldn’t have walked away, he wanted the money.”

“He wanted the martyrdom. Christianity wouldn’t exist if he hadn’t betrayed Jesus.”

“So you’re who? Jesus or Judas?”

“I’m a tired cop who’s about to lose his house and get himself a jail cell because of his illegal gambling that didn’t help anyway. My point was that Judas had a choice. He chose to do something difficult so that something good could happen.”

“Getting a little foggy in here. You’re going to take me out and what...shoot me in the head? Do something difficult for the good of the world?”

Het puts his childhood smile in his eyes. “You are a decent man, Kimbo, and the world is a better place with you in it. Believe that or not. Either way, get in the car.”

“Or you’ll drop the H and make the call.”

“Yeah.”

“You are one world class motherfucker.”

“Yeah.”

Het opens the door for Kimbo, then turns the police radio off. “I tried to help Kris. Did you know that?”

“Yeah, and it pisses her off. That what got you in deep? Giving my wife a few bucks every month?”

“No. But while I was burning my life down, I tried to do something good for her and a couple others. Don’t touch anything.”

“Why?”

Het cranks the motor and heads out. “If this car ever gets stolen, eventually they’ll find it and the lab’ll detail it. They’ll come back with your prints, doesn’t matter how old they are, and you’ll be hauled in sure as shit.”

“If the car gets stolen?”

“It’s happened once already...a year ago. I got suspended for 30 days over it.”

“Stolen or did you try to sell it?”

Het snorts. “Good one.”

“Soothe yourself during your suspension with gambling?”

“And nose candy.”

Strip malls, with headache-inducing neon, march past. Nail salons and newsstands and liquor stores. It’s the same tacky-colored menagerie it was when they were kids.

“Horse?”

“And crystal.”

“Quite the cop, aren’t you?”

“No.”

“I go to prison and stay clean and sober, don’t even smoke, and out in the world, my main man is falling apart. Where we going?”

“Back to when you and I beat the world. Best time of my life. No responsibilities and no pressures; you and me, the Dynamic Duo of Broad Street.”

“Ain’t been the Dynamic Duo for a long time.”

“Can be again. For a few minutes, maybe the last minutes in the world, we can be the Duo again.”

“Het, what the fuck are you talking about? I cain’t understand a single word.”

Het absently fingers the shotgun locked in place above their heads.

“Sometimes I can’t, either.”

“Fucking Drama Queen.”

A few minutes later, Het parks behind an abandoned warehouse.

“Oh, Het, what’d you bring me here for?”

“We hid from the Mamas down here.” They climb from the car and Het takes a deep breath. “Smell that? That’s clean air...the air of memory.”

Kimbo chuckles. “Homeless boys and crack whores and a river full of dead fish is what it smells like.”

“Smells like our history. Remember those Playboys we found in the janitor’s room at school?” Kris had nearly untracked Het by angrily mentioning them. Het wanted their memory to be wrapped in the warmth of their teen years. “We hid them down here. Didn’t notice the stink then, did we? And what about our little .22?” He touches the tattoo again and this time Kimbo does as well. “Shooting cans and rats.”

Then Kimbo frowns. “I ain’t that kid anymore. I can smell the stink now.”

“But we can be kids again. We can remember what life smelled like before being grown up got in the way.” Het wipes his face. “For a few minutes, we can be who we were before I fucked everything up.”

“Jesus, Het, enough with the tears, it wasn’t like that. It wasn’t all your fault.”

“Yeah, it was. I could have walked away and none of this--”

“Stop it, okay? Just fucking stop.”

“Yeah, Kimbo, whatever you say.”

“Breeze smells like shit.”

“Your Daddy tell you I went to see him sometimes?”

“Once a month ‘til a couple years ago. Why?”

“Guilt, I’m sure. If I don’t come to take you for tacos, then I don’t see you killing her. I don’t take you to jail. He lost his entire family that night.”

“Yeah, he did. You ruined both our lives that night. Daddy says you were a good cop once upon a time.” Kimbo chuckles. “I knew you too well growing up, but he believes it, even now. He said so every damn day since I went up...and...son of a bitch.”

“What?”

Arc sodium street lamps light Kimbos’ face orange. “You sent him the money, didn’t you? Trying to buy some peace?”

“My demons aren’t so easily assuaged.” Het draws his weapon.

“Het, what’s--”

“Cans.” Het blasts a round, misses a bottle completely. “Like when we were kids.”

“Damnit, Het, stop it. Cain’t shoot out here.”

“Did it all the time growing up. Chill out, there’s nobody here. Come on, shoot a can. You’ll feel better.”

“I’m not shooting.”

Grinning, Het holds the gun out.

“No, I’m not...”

“It’s easy. Or don’t you have the balls?”

“I know it’s easy.” Kimbo snatches the gun away. “And one of my balls is bigger than both yours...least that’s what your girlfriends always told me. I just ain’t shot in about ten years.”

“Careful, Deadeye, this thing kicks more than that .22.”

Kimbo’s head is buzzing, Het can tell. His friend is slowly getting drunk on memories and this is where Het needs him. Kimbo aims absently. Shoots. The gun booms like a cannon.

Het laughs. “Can’t shoot to save your life. Once again, we see I am the better shot.”

“Eat my stiddy.” Kimbo fires twice more. Misses both times. “You gotta slow it down. Take a breath before you shoot, watch the end’a that gun, rather than the target. Get that front sight right over that can and...”

He fires and the bottle shatters.

“That’s the Kimbo I remember.” Het whoops. “Get that one.”

Kimbo shoots again. “Two for two. Damn, man, I forgot how much I love shooting.” Kimbo breathes hard. A sheen of sweat is on his brow. His grin is as large as the full moon. “This has been nice, but I gotta get back to Kris.”

Het holds his friend’s eyes tight. “You gotta take one more shot.”

“At what?”

Het licks his lips. “Me.”

This is where they’ve been heading. Het believes Kimbo has somehow known it. Het expected to see horror on Kimbo’s face. There is only an empty curiosity.

“A head shot. Shoot me in the chest and maybe the vest keeps me alive. Shoot me in the legs and they might find me before I bleed out.”

“Het...what the fuck do--”

“My police insurance is good. I’ve got double coverage for an on-duty death.”

“You crazy. That’s murder. Insurance fraud, too. Plus, it’s fucking crazy.”

“Insurance fraud? I could give a shit about that. Or murder. And crazy is the only thing I have left. Don’t you understand? I’m losing everything. No, Janine is losing everything and it’s my fuckmess.”

“I’m not a killer and there is some other way to fix this.”

“There is no other way. There is bankruptcy and that won’t matter when they find out about the gambling and the drugs and...”

“Het, where’d you get the candy?”

“...the bank is going to take everything and she’s not going to have--”

“Where’d you get the drugs?”

Het stares hard at Kimbo. “Evidence room.”

Kimbo nods as though he’d known it.

“The money, too. Twelve thousand cash, maybe fifteen large of drugs. I sold most of it but it wasn’t enough to cover the store. Kimbo, I need you to do this.”

“Ain’t killing you.”

“Goddamnit, Kimbo, I can’t run any faster. My feet are all cut up anyway. There is zero chance you’ll be caught. You didn’t touch anything in the car, right? There won’t be any prints on the gun, it’s a textured grip and you didn’t touch the magazine or the ammo. No one knows we’re here. I’m patrolling west side today.”

“That’s miles from here.”

“Yeah, it is.” Het tries to sound rational. “Look, I’ll call in a suspicious subject on the west side. By the time they find my car here, you’ll be home fucking Kris. And what they’ll find is a cop killed with his own weapon.”

“Het, I’m not--”

“I stole your life, goddamnit. Because I wanted the promotion. I took a shit all over you so I could climb that ladder.”

Kimbo backs away. “Don’t matter. I’m not a killer. I will always love you and I will always hate you but I’m no killer.”

“Yeah, you are, goddamnit, you are a killer. You murdered your mother.”

Het steps to Kimbo.

“Het, don’t. Please, don’t do this.”

“You are a killer. A cheap-ass typical black killer.” He chest bumps Kimbo and forces him back. “You went to prison and you have no life left...or don’t you remember? Your life is over. Kris might as well have left you and stirred your daughter with a coat hanger for all the life she’s going to have.”

“Het, don’t do this. You’re trying to piss me off so I’ll shoot.”

“Yes, goddamnit. I have to make good for Janine and you and Kris and your daughter. Do this and everyone can move on. Damnit, Kimbo, shoot.”

“No, Het, I’m not going to.”

Het shoves him to the ground. Grabs the mic clipped to his uniform.

“Central from 24-16. Suspicious subject in the alley.”

“Stop it, Het, this is crazy.”

- 24-16...location? -

“Central...I’m not...an alley. Central, the subject is under the influence...alcohol or drugs, I can’t tell. Male, Hispanic. Subject has--
Central...fight...central!”

Het smashes Kimbo’s hard in the nose. Blood explodes. Kimbo rolls over, waves his hands backward at Het.

“Damnit, Het, why’d you do that? I’m not going to--”

“Shoot, Kimbo. You wanted to fix the world. Fix it now.”

“I’m not going--”

Another punch as Kimbo stands. He doubles over.

“Shoot, damnit. Shoot!”

“Het, what’re...get back, damnit. No, I’m not going to!”

“Shoot! Shoot!”

“Get off me, Het. Get off me. Quit hitting me. Damnit, Het, don’t touch me. Fuck, Het, stop it.”

When the fun fires and Het moans, it sounds like a laugh. It fades quick, like thunder that might not have actually existed. Kimbo rolls Het off him. Most of the right side of Het’s head is gone.

“Shit. Shit! Het? Het?”

– 24-16...*what’s your status* –

“Het. Get up. Goddamnit, don’t you fucking die on me, you bastard. Get up. Het? Son of a bitch. I didn’t mean to shoot you, Het. Goddamnit, it was an accident. Het? Fuck! Het!”

– 24-16...*your status* –

“Shitshitshit...Het, get up, you cain’t die on me. Oh, man. Het, please, not like this.”

– 24-16...*status* –

Kimbo presses the mic. “Yeah...uh...he shot your guy...he shot Het...uh...Officer Brownlee. They were fighting...he took his gun and shot him.”

– *what...who is this* –

Kimbo kicks Het’s body. “Darnit, Het. This is not what I wanted.”

– 24-16...*status* –

“Son of a bitch. Fuck you, Het! You hear me? Fuck you!” He pulls his cell phone, punches in Kris’ number. “Kris, it’s me. Oh, God, Het is dead. What? No, we were shooting and he jumped on me. The gun went off. What? No, he’s dead, Kris. In the head...his...uh...right eye. Fuck, yeah, he’s dead. Yeah, I’m sure. What should I do? No, nobody knows. What? Seriously? I know fuck him but it ain’t right. I can’t just walk...all right. All right, goddamnit. I heard you. Yeah, I’m coming home.”

Trey R. Barker's short fiction has appeared more than 100 times since his first published story in 1994. He has written everything from crime to mystery, science fiction to horror, westerns to mainstream and even a bit of love poetry. He's published a novel, 2000 MILES TO OPEN ROAD, a short novel about the life of Edgar Allan Poe, a short collection, and a play for high school students. Having been a journalist on and off for more than a decade, he's published hundreds of non-fiction articles. Currently, he carries a badge for a Sheriff's Office in north-central Illinois, where he lives with his wife LuAnn and three Canine-Americans.