

Hey there, thanks for reading my first short story collection. I started working on this collection in August of 2022 and it's gratifying to finally have it out there. I thought I'd give a bit of commentary on the works I've put in this collection, where they came from and how I wrote them. After that I'll talk a bit about how writing fits into my life as it is now. Spoilers ahead, so read the stories first you nerd.

### Bone White Beaches

The longest story in the collection and the one I'm most proud of. Most every story in this collection was written in one sitting, then some editing or finishing. BWB is the exception to this. It took quite a few sessions of hard work to get it all on paper but I'm very happy with that. Writing exclusively in bursts of 2500 words has been one of my weaknesses and BWB started helping me get over that. The premise of the manga Blame! was a minor inspiration in the setting for this story. I often think about how much of the Earth we have paved over to build stupid shit. (I currently live in suburban America. Not for long I hope.) I've also had an idea involving survivalists who live on rafts over a flooded Florida from an early TTRPG experiment. Putting all that together made for an interesting setting for a pretty simple plot. The execution was the main focus for this one. Originally I wanted to add some lore about recycling plastic for bullet casings or about fatal microplastic inhalation but they never fit in with the story. The world really came together as I continued writing, like exploring a real place. I learned through Fox and Adelaide that I love writing women who love each other, but whose love is left to the reader to interpret. They exist in a superposition of being friends, girlfriends, wives and exes all at the same time. Dialogue between these two is hard to write well. If every word out of a character's mouth is sarcasm, the reader will be sick of them in less than a minute. I really hope in a hundred years we can salvage something beautiful from the architectural disaster we've turned this country into, like in this story. Still, I'm fascinated by it in its mid-decay form. Looking at empty malls and parking lots is like a dark joke to me. We paved the world over for this?

### Bloodstream Chromium

Could you tell I was taking a PC Repair class while writing this? I'm the least confident in this story out of all of them, to be honest. It's an iteration of something I'll talk about in the Cutting Room Floor section. Still, there are things about it I love.

Using extra-textual (is that the right phrase?) stuff like command prompt lines and error messages to tell a story is really, really fun to me. Stardiver has a lot of that too. The issue is it makes reading it aloud a pain, so no audiobook for this. Sorry about that. This story sat without an ending for a while before I did a bit of self-analysis and thought about what would be a proper ending to this story. It is probably extremely hammy but oh well. Writing it helped me believe it. My girlfriend often quotes my own, much more hopeful writing at me when I'm having depressive episodes. Damn my own sporadic optimism.

### Stardiver

The first story I wrote for this collection. VERY early notes for this started as a very lesbian Star Wars but Vietnam War romp inspired by the excellent game Republic Commando. That concept didn't go very far, but it sort of lives on through this story. I had the concept for a planet being thrown into its own parent star, but the concept only became fully formed when I thought to write it in a sort of video game audiolog format. Giving the story an emotional core also really helped make it hit harder. Juggling the twists and turns of the plot was a little difficult. Hope it turned out well. I'm definitely more of a fi than a sci kinda girl, so if the orbital mechanics of this operation don't make sense, then oh well. This is the only story in the collection with an ambiguous ending. That uncertainty is kind of key to the vibe I wanted to capture. It's also another story told through un-audiobookable means. I thought of doing it up radio play style, but no one wants to hear fake robot voices or text to speech reading those bits. The same way you probably couldn't make a good House of Leaves audiobook. I don't want to look up if Audible dot com has a House of Leaves audiobook or not, I just know if they do it probably sucks. The goal I had was to tell a space-vietnam war story through transcripts from the space CIA and I think that went very well.

### Lullaby for Alejandra

This story came to me in an early morning bout of misery while listening to the Disco Elysium soundtrack. A good bit of it came from trying to do something weird with traditional christian angels and devils. (No, they aren't "biblically accurate" in this story.) Another good bit came from my experience losing my grandfather at an early age. To this day I don't drive, and a lot of that probably comes from firsthand

knowledge that any errant mistake can cost you or someone else their life forever. That, and it's a reckoning with the fundamental fear of death we all have. Imagine this story as an extended version of the "What If I Died in a Car Crash Tomorrow" line of thought we all have past midnight. Ultimately it lands in a dimension of neither pessimism or optimism. I'm gonna crib from what my girlfriend said about it after reading it, because as a writer I deserve to toot my own horn once in a while.

"I like Lullaby a lot because of how much hope it has - the idea that we will never be completely satisfied with life because there is always more we want to experience in life, and that is how the universe intentionally structures it, is the part that makes me cry. It is an honesty that is brutal in the reality of it all and gentle in that we are still able to reconcile with it. It's the kind of writing that can make you cry about how unfair it all is, because of course - how could anyone be expected to come to terms with it, how could anyone ever be ready for it to end - but it's still warm because it embraces the intrinsic humanity of that experience, that we're allowed a chance at it regardless."

I like quite a bit how this story doesn't fit into any one philosophy neatly. Pessimism and optimism are both useful tools, buying into one or the other exclusively would be like only ever using hammers or screwdrivers.

### Cutting Room Floor

Welcome to M's reject bin. For some reason, creative people's garbage bins are fascinating. Who am I to deny such a spectacle?

### Alien Time Capsule

In the far far future, a group of scientists following a beacon discover a living computer who can only utter the phrase "I remember." It is discovered that this computer was meant to be the last archive of a now-dead species, but even that has now been lost to time. It's weird seeing my own story ideas put into Kilgore Trout format. This story has that Twilight Zone quality to it, but I never really got attached to it like I did my other story concepts. It's not lacking in emotional core but it doesn't seem enough to hook me for more than a page or two. I don't think it'd make a good mystery either. Oh well.

## Deus Ex Machina

This story has existed in like 4 different forms before becoming Bloodstream Chromium. Originally it was some side-lore in a TTRPG to explain why you could play as a robot person. The term VCon comes from this origin, it's short for virtual consciousness. The whole thing was sort of a reverse skynet, where a supercomputer gains sentience, expels all humans from its place of being, then begins creating robots in humanity's image after coming to the conclusion that experiencing humanity was the only thing worth doing. I've never gotten along with the idea that any sufficiently advanced computer would hate our guts. Granted, thinking that it would love us is equally ridiculous, but that's why I write science fiction. The second iteration of this was basically the HELIOS ending to Deus Ex. Hadn't played Deus Ex then but it was basically the same thing. By the way, play the original Deus Ex.

## Toy Soldier

Someone buys a toy soldier that makes them increasingly paranoid until they are eventually driven to self-destruction. This one's kinda silly. Just writing it out in one sentence makes me glad I didn't write this.

## Modern Military thriller

This one basically went nowhere. Intended to be a look into the downfall of a group of shitty people a la prestige TV but set intergenerationally across the Vietnam and Iraq wars. The number one thing that killed this idea was that using dead Vietnamese and Iraqis as basically plot devices was kinda tasteless. The original pitch for this was basically "What if a COD campaign but you're not supposed to root for Team America." This probably stems from the fact that I love military stuff but hate the military. Ultimately this concept just ends up as "Shaking my head while playing Call of Duty so everyone knows I don't approve of it." That or it ends up like Spec Ops: The Line. Which already exists. By the way, play Spec Ops: The Line.

Hey M, what happened to That Other Thing you wrote?

That Other Thing is on hiatus for the foreseeable future. As a new writer I bit off WAY more than I could chew. In addition, my expectations were way too high, I published on shitty websites, and uhhhh the writing was just bad. It was embarrassing. You can't find it online anymore. That version of That Other Thing will never be finished. If you happen to be a fan of That Other Thing, do not fret! I've reevaluated what I want to do in the world of That Other Thing and I've got a concept I really like. It is going to be very personal, and I want to do it right. You probably won't see it for a long time, but I promise it's there marinating in the back of my mind.

### Closing Thoughts

This collection is the first thing I'm publishing on my new website, which I'm really glad to have. There aren't a lot of great websites for posting original writing out there. It's great to have something I can actually point to when I say I'm a writer now. If this collection doesn't succeed in any way but that, it'll have been a success. These short stories reflect where I am right now more than anything. It's funny how much easier I find it to write an optimistic ending into a story than to imagine one for myself. Then again, writing is believing. It's been a great learning experience writing this, I already feel that the quality of this doesn't really represent my skill level (Stardiver was written August 2022). My next endeavors will be bigger and better. I won't spill much but I'll be returning to my own trademark wishy-washy sci-fantasy shit again. Hopefully next time I write to you, it will be from anywhere but here.

### Special Thanks

My darling girl Irene, for making me eat my own words

Lyra, a good friend and esteemed autism haver

Carmilla, for supporting my dumbass endeavors and being hilarious

June, who I adore but am incapable of socializing with regularly

The Lady Stardust, for reading my drafts at ungodly hours

The No-Lifers Hangout Group and anyone else who put up with That Other Thing, this is my formal apology