

BLACK BIRD

M A G A Z I N E

*Wake the
World*

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Created by Paige Rothfus and Moses Powell Eckstein

Cover Art: Vanja Borcic

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**For Questions or comments please email:
talkblackbird@gmail.com**

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Sensual. Fluid. Enticing. More often than not, those are the subconscious associations drawn to bellydancing.

Stemming from the misconception that its primary objective is to entertain men with contrived flexibilities of the female form, the general public's lack of knowledge of bellydance history underlies most societal stigmas against the art form.

The roots of bellydance span across the Middle East, over the Orient and into India. Originally, it developed as an art form that mothers would culturally pass on to their daughters, to help them prepare their bodies for the demands of child-birth.

The very nature of the dance reveals how it helps dancers become more in tune with their bodies. An elevated level of awareness of various sections of the body is required to create a fluidity of motion that births gracefulness.

The deplorable fact here is that this grace is so wilfully misconstrued, in the wake of the public eye. Naturally, people will tend to fall prey to what is portrayed with ample emphasis. How does the press commonly show off various talents of bellydancers?

Mainstream coverage of performances, and not to mention encouragement of cruder modes of audience appreciation, appears to have cultivated the habit of sexualizing performances.

While this particular proclivity has developed simply because sensuality of movement constitutes such a prominent feature of bellydance, the intense technical displays of bodily command in a solid performance fall away to the mere backdrop of attention.

This tendency also appears to have made it such that when, say, restaurant entertainment involves bellydance shows, the performers will be inclined to accentuate those most popular traits.

As a result, the integration of bellydancing into mainstream culture is causing the degradation of the art form to the very thing it should seek not to become: cheap, "sexy" entertainment.

Evidently, bellydance performers too have a hand in composing the contemporary image of what they do (after all, the media can only play off what they are given). In choosing how to present themselves, and the type of routine to perform, bellydancers (perhaps inadvertently) reveal not only their capability or competencies, but also, their potentially artistic aspirations for the performance.

Usually, the intended reaction to be elicited from the audience becomes clear within the first few minutes of a dance.

And what of the intricacies of the dance itself?

Base technique requires a layering of various types of movements, including some commonly known as "shimmies," "camel walk," "snake arms," "hip rolls," "undulations," and so on.

Watching a good performer closely can reveal the impressive simultaneity of two or more of those movements—each necessitating a basic, virtual dissociation of torso and the lower body, as well as the isolation of different body parts (such as the chest, or the waist) at different times.

Dancers and groups pioneering popular movements, such as tribal and gothic bellydance fusions, have managed to contribute exciting new musical flavours to the typical bellydance experience.

This often poses significant contrasts to the traditional darbouka sounds of the classical Egyptian form, and so on.

Hopefully, the amalgamation of these venues will be able to help usher the art of bellydance into an unprejudiced era of keenly aware and cross-cultural appreciation.

The Culture of Bellydance

Mimi Chakrabarty





Lillith Astaroth Portrait by Mark R.



Lillith is the lead singer for the band Sorrowseed and an Alternative Model. She has been an acquaintance of mine for a few years now, and she agreed to let me use her image in this semi realistic ink portrait.

Odin by Mark R.



Gazel the Stray Dog
Vagabond Log
By Gazel

February 2011, Stockholm, Sweden

This narrative finds me all the way back in Stockholm in February 2011, the starting point of all my vagabonding. Itineraries had no place in the blueprint I had initially visualized. It's difficult to say whether there was any determination in it, but the ambiguous aims I had set would have included escaping the media and represented figures, and discovering what actually existed in different places. Taking that into consideration, my updates will be the biased accounts of my own travel experiences, so if you ever find my updates too critical or unpleasant (especially when you are from the countries in question), please DO correct me.

I arrived in Stockholm on the 17th at night. My first impression of the city was a sense of its vast diversity. It felt like being in the States or the UK, or perhaps another one of those extremely cosmopolitan corners of the world. People in Stockholm seemed very open and customer-service-oriented. It was interesting that almost everyone I encountered who spoke in English had a British accent. What I had heard of the sophistication of Sweden rang very true for several aspects of local life, starting from service and traffic to waste management and deposit systems.

February 2011, Stockholm & Copenhagen

Some might say Sweden is not an ideal place when it comes to drinking. All the liquor shops close at 6:00 p.m. Beers are sold at Seven Eleven, but only ones with no more than 3.5% alcohol. If you actually go to the bar or clubs, they charge you 6 to 7 Euros or so for one bottle of beer. This is why I didn't bother exploring the nightlife on either of my two nights in Stockholm.

I later arrived in Copenhagen, around afternoon, only to find out it was not really my scene.

Everything was new, clean, flat and organized, all of which I found altogether monotonous.

Prices were as outrageous as they could be (even more expensive than in Sweden). Even a whopping 7 Euros was barely enough to get me a single meal. However, although I had been warned Copenhagen might be a rather unfriendly place, the people there generally seemed nice. Also, there were LOTS of cyclists on the roads; I was nearly run over by one of them!

All these are rather unfair opinions, I suppose, since my time there was so brief; I left Copenhagen the very next day. So the one day's observations turned out mostly negative (honestly, one of the most boring places I have ever been to), but maybe I'll go back some other time to take a closer look around.

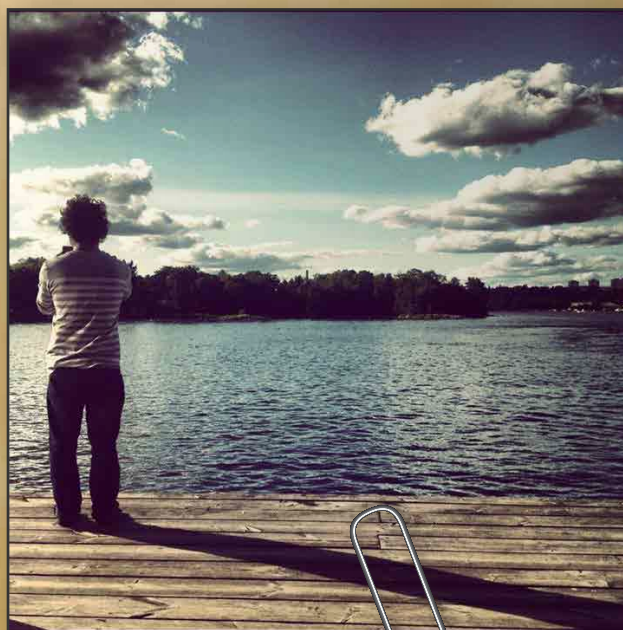
February 2011, Hanover, Germany

Random city to visit, I know. The only reason I went was to see my friend Stefan, whom I met in Australia about 3 years ago. (Well, that and maybe also the fact that the place's name sounds like "hangover").

I showed up at Stefan's doorstep without having let him know anything about my arrival. He came out after the second time I rang the bell and said something in German that sounded something like "What the fuck!" It took him a good 10 seconds to recognize me, because I had much shorter hair than I used to back in the day. I asked him if I could crash on his couch and was luckily welcomed with no hesitation. The surprise arrival was definitely a gamble, since there was no hostel in Hanover I could have gone to instead. I would have been really screwed if he had been away or something.

Anyway, so we caught up over a few beers, along with his girlfriend Renata, who lives in the same flat. (I knew her from back then as well.) Stefan took me to the bar he runs, called "Team Nordstadbrant," and offered me the special deal where I get unlimited free drinks while I'm in Hanover. I hung out for a couple of hours and finally left him at the bar, since he had to work till 2:00 a.m. When I got back to the flat, I drank some more with Renata, and we talked about the past 3 years, which ended up in our finishing an entire case of beer all by ourselves and smoking a certain substance as well.

I totally felt like I was in Germany when she offered me get ANOTHER full case of beer for the night. She made the cliché experience I had expected come to life. The next morning, I had a hangover while I was in Hanover, full-stop.



*Creatures
of the
Darkness*

Samuel John Claussen
samuelclaussenwriting@gmail.com

You find yourself surrounded by darkness. It doesn't matter what gender you are, what nation you swear allegiance to. Whatever seemed so important to you in our world makes no difference where you find yourself now. The only thing that matters now is that you're completely engulfed in the pitch black darkness one could only experience on a moonless night.

This darkness is so difficult for the human mind to grasp that it must use the memories you've stored away in the deepest corners of your soul to cope with it. All of those memories that you tried to hide, all of the misfortunes of your life come together to create a mere image of the darkness in which you find yourself now. Male or female, patriot or coward, neither can handle such an hour of night as this.

There's no sound. That's the worst part about this realm; it doesn't just blot out all matter of light, it takes away all sound as well. There are no voices of loved ones cheering you on as you complete a personal accomplishment, no screams from those who're angry with you for your failures, not even the faint sound of a whisper guiding you through your blindness. The only sound available to you is your own breathing; that and your stumbling footsteps as you stagger around trying to get your bearings.

You're not in a building or a room; that much you've discovered by now. If you were, wouldn't you have run into a wall by now? Wouldn't your hands have mistakenly grazed a bronze doorknob leading to your rescue? Wouldn't someone have turned the lights on by now, revealing that you're in no real danger, that all of society's comforts are still within your grasp? No, you're not in a building.

Perhaps you're in a dense forest. That would explain, to some extent, the terrible darkness. The thick collection of leaves would

“You try to avoid this thought, but the darkness knows your mind and exploits it.”

make it difficult for the moon's light to penetrate the forest floor, leaving you stranded and blind. But wouldn't you've ran into a tree by now? Wouldn't you've felt the chilled breeze of the autumn night rushing throughout the woods? Wouldn't you hear the chatter of unbeknownst beasts, declaring your unwelcome intrusion into their world? No, you're not in a forest.

Perhaps you're nowhere. Yes, that makes sense; you aren't any-

where at all. The place that you're at has no concept in our society, so they just call it “nowhere.” So if you are indeed “nowhere,” the next question that comes to mind is “are you the only one?”

Are others stumbling around in the dark, discovering their locations at the exact moment you are? Or maybe they're ahead of you, already finding a way out. Perhaps they fell to the ground behind you, giving up. Are you the first explorer of a new world, or are you just a visitor to an inhabited land? Then it dawns on you: if others are here, rushing throughout the darkness around you, are they friendly?

You try to avoid this thought, but the darkness knows your mind and exploits it. If others are here, they can't be your friends; they would've helped you by now. The only explanation for the presence of other beings in this world is that they're your enemies.

They're the ones that put you here. They're the ones that hushed all of the natural sounds of our world. They're the ones that are inches from your face, guiding you toward your terrible fate. They're the ones who turned out the lights. You reach out to push them away, but they glide from your trembling hands with ease. They could end it now, but they want to see you struggle. They want you to keep thinking

you're going to survive, that somebody will come to your rescue. And then they're going to kill you.

Panic sets in. The darkness around you seems to become a shade darker. You have to run; you have to get away from the beasts that torment you. Your feet begin to walk at a faster pace, and then you begin to sprint. Your breathing becomes louder, your feet pounding against the ground. They're faster than you, they're stronger than you. They're circling around you, trying to withhold their laughter in order to maintain the silence.

Finally, after what seems like miles upon miles of running, you fall to the ground in surrender. There's no use in going any further. You might be running in the wrong direction anyway, distancing yourself from rescue. You lie on the ground in defeat, wondering how many others have fallen in the exact spot you have, realizing in the same way that there is no hope.

And then, in the distance, there's a light.

The light, from our world's perspective, would be nothing more than a tiny spec of the constant light in our lives. We, no matter what time or place, always have some source of light.

But in this world, in this hell-like place of darkness, there'd never been any light before. It was the first of its kind, the most beautiful thing

to have ever existed. You struggle to your feet, your hand blocking the light from your virgin eyes.

Someone has opened the door. Someone has turned the lights on.

You begin to run toward the light, the panic evolving into hope. You're finally going to escape from this labyrinth and back to society. You're finally going to escape the beasts that pursue you. Everything would be back to normal, and it was just a short jog away.

However as you run, it dawns on you— is this light a good thing? How do you know that this world's light isn't any different from its darkness? How do you know that worse monsters won't be waiting for you to cross over, not allowing you to run back to the safety? How many others had seen the light? How many others had run toward it, thinking it would bring them back to their own individual worlds? How many others had the light tricked into believing they were saved, when in all actuality they were about to be enrolled in a world far worse than the darkness.

In the darkness, you can't see the beasts that torment you. You know they're there, inches away from you. But you cannot see them. You cannot see what type of beast they are, or if they're a beast at all. You aren't even sure if there are any monsters around you. Your imagination could just be playing games with you. You could be perfectly

safe. Why are you so worried, when you've seen no proof of monsters pursuing you? Why would there be? Are you really so important that something would go out of its way to hunt you?

In the light you can see these monsters. Everything is visible, nothing is left to doubt. You can see their drooling fangs, their blood-stained claws from the other fools who'd run towards the light. There is no reason to hide their existence; they're plain as day. The light leads to the truth, and that truth would kill you. Logically, it would be absolutely lethal to run to the light. The light leads to death, something others discovered far too late.

You stop running, and the light begins to fade. It's for the best; you're safer in the darkness. You know the darkness. You've been exploring it for what seems like years, and what little you do know about it is more than what you know about that foreign light.

You watch as the light begins to dwindle, the darkness closing in on the trap that'd been set for you. The darkness is saving you from it. It's destroying the trap the terrible creatures of the light had set for you. The light fully disappears, and you're completely engulfed in the darkness once more. It seems so much darker after experiencing the light.

You begin to realize your mistake as you sense the presence of

the beasts returning, mocking you with their silence. You run toward the area you believe the light was, sprinting toward that safety you'd taken for granted. It's too late: the light's gone, and along with it any hope of rescue.

You turn around and begin to explore the darkness in a different direction, your monsters following close behind. The darkness sets in, and you're no further than you were at the beginning of your quest. Just as before, it's only the beasts, you, and the darkness that inhabit this world.

But then you hear something. It's almost as groundbreaking as the light you could vaguely remember: footsteps. You hear the nervous steps of another being. It isn't a beast; you know by now that if there are monsters in the darkness, they're silent. You begin to walk toward the footsteps, a sense of joy rushing over you as you realize that you do have a companion in the darkness, that you're not alone.

The footsteps seem so foreign to you; they're the first footsteps you've heard since the light appeared. Why can't you hear your own footsteps? Why is it that your breath makes no sound? Perhaps you aren't walking at all, frozen in the darkness. Maybe you're dead, and this is all just some form of an afterlife. No matter what the explanation for your own silence is, you

know that these footsteps will lead to an escape from the darkness.

As you get close enough to reach out and touch the footsteps, they begin to run. The sound of this person's feet pound against the ground, running from you. You rush after them, trying to capture that chance of survival. But then, after what seems like a never-ending race, you see a light.

It's not the same light that'd been revealed to you, the light that seemed like a distant dream by now. Although it seems to look the same as yours, the warmth is different. The feeling it gives you is different. It wasn't designed for you, but for the one you pursue.

You saw the person that you had been chasing block the light from his eyes. He's a man, middle-aged. But as you discovered long ago, such things as gender or age don't matter in the darkness. He smiles at the light, standing up and running toward it. You do the same; if he can escape through the light, perhaps you can as well. Maybe you've been given a second chance.

As the two of you get closer, the light gets brighter and brighter until you can finally see. You look around to see the beasts of the darkness pursuing the man, but they don't pay any attention to you. They're too focused on the man, just as intently as you are.

As he approaches the light the man

looks back for the first time to see the beasts that pursue him and screams, the sound piercing into your mind. You try to scream from the pain his scream causes, but nothing except a slight whisper escapes. You fall to your knees in front of the light as the man steps through it, disappearing into its warmth. You look around to see thousands of monsters on their knees as well, shivering in pain from the scream.

They're as you imagined the beasts of the light would be. They have long fangs hanging from their mouths. They have terrible sharp claws on long, gangly fingers. The only difference between the creatures that you'd imagined and the ones you now see are that the skin of the latter is pale as death itself. They resemble what you become in the darkness.

But you have bigger things on your mind; the light is beginning to fade. You try to stand and run to it, but the pain that the scream had caused won't allow it. The light is disappearing at an alarming rate. As the darkness absorbs the last of the light you lower your hands to see the terrible claws that now extend from your long, gangly fingers.

The darkness closes in.









Vanja Borcic

Artist and Philosopher

At first glance Vanja Borcic didn't strike me as unusual. As an average late twenty-something Iowan with piercing brown eyes, I never would have guessed he had fled from Bosnia as a child and in the Midwest developed an insatiable passion for art and philosophy. Borcic was born in Bihac, Bosnia. His parents and family fled war-torn Bosnia in 1996 as refugees.

While growing up in Iowa, Borcic attended Hoover High School and then Grandview University for a bachelor's in Graphic Design and Fine Arts.

"I came from an artistic family," he admitted. Four of his uncles were artists, and as a young man he was surrounded by art. He would always draw on stuff, including the wall in his bedroom. When his parents discovered his passion for art, they encouraged him. His apartment and studio are filled with art acquired from his friends and his own baffling creations. His paintings featured eerie other-worlds overflowing with bright warm colors and alien creatures he called Soullinks.

"I like to make up stuff," he said about the Soullinks, describing them as "little white creatures." These little white creatures appeared frequently in his works as a unifying theme of many of the paintings. His work featured other strange animal hybrids, existing in their own alien other-worlds.

As I toured his basement studio, I discovered finished paintings, half-finished paintings, and just-started paintings lying on tables, chairs, and a sofa. Various tubes of paint, brushes, and spray bottles were strewn about the room in a fashion one might expect from an artist as prolific as Borcic. He sat down at a drum set in the corner of the basement and started playing a solo.

"I'm playing around," he said. "That's what artists do." He said he uses various techniques to bring his visions into being, including painting acrylic on wood and painting on paper pasted to wood. He used this technique commonly and added varnish over the top of the acrylic to give the final images a sharp and finished look.

For creative media, Borcic said he preferred acrylic, watercolor, and Verithin pencils. I was astounded by the minute detail he achieved in his pencil and watercolor drawings. He revealed a life-sized drawing of a woman's face that proved his mastery over the color pencil medium.

Some of Borcic's most impressive paintings were of women with beautifully crafted faces or full bodies in regal poses. He admitted that they were harder to sell, but he enjoyed the challenge of creating the images and expressing the natural beauty of women.

As the tour of the studio ended, Borcic brought me back upstairs to show me one of his favourite rifles. He said he supports the second amendment as he handed me the rifle to inspect.

Before saying goodbye, I asked him how he accomplishes his work and produces so many good paintings.

"I can feel what colors look good," he said.

Borcic's work has appeared in numerous art festivals, including Des Moines, Omaha, Kansas City, Minneapolis, Baltimore, Detroit, Columbus, and Chicago.

As I delved deeper into the man's art studio and past life I discovered a Bosnian refugee with an insatiable passion for art and philosophy.



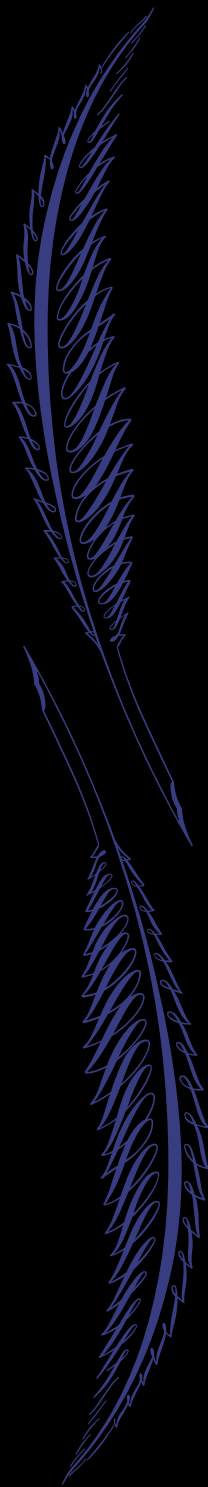
A Rose in Wonderland

Laura Godsafe

I tried to forget you but the wind whispered your name and leaves etched each letter across my window when I closed it, and tried to shut you out.

You once told me how others paint and draw and read but you press flowers in books to preserve them as they are in a particular moment in time. It was your version of photography, you said. I thought that was beautiful.

I promised myself I would preserve every letter you sent me in a similar fashion, and I kept my word. I kept each letter in a different book, a little like a treasure hunt we used to do when we were kids. Some of them were kept pristine, one of the first letters most likely. In others the ink has bled a little, the pages stiff from salty tears fallen many months ago. Some pages are crumpled, others brand new. I marked each letter received with my lips, to show you I had received it. I never told you this and I guess I'll never know if you knew. I hope you did. I was never any good with words so I replied the only way I knew how.



Your favourite book was Alice in Wonderland. I remember you telling me this at 2:43 a.m. I remember this because it was the night we camped out in your garden. We were freezing but had fairy lights and each other's bodies for warmth. You recalled quotes to me until I fell asleep and the following morning we spent in blankets with mug after mug of coffee watching the film over and over.

Your last letter stained the pages of your favourite book red. I printed it over and over, as if every press of my lips was on your skin, tracing every vein carefully, healing every blemish, pleading for you to come back. I did this for days but I don't suppose you heard. I stopped when my lips became bruised and the paper flimsy. I kept your book on the shelf above my bed so I could keep you with me always. I still wonder about you some days.

Once Upon a Time

Laura Godsafe

Your name is Lucy, and you're frozen in ice,
for as long as anybody could remember.

You prayed for a man to come close enough
to thaw you, to take tentative scrapes with
his hammer, to crack you open and lay your
pieces in front of him. You wanted to see the
sunlight again. But along came a cruel hunts-
man who had not a hammer but an axe and
he chopped too hard and too furiously and
you were splintered, flying through the air,
faster and faster.

Your name is Lucy, and all you wanted was to
be loved, for as long as you could remember.

But along came boys with clumsy hearts and
words to match, feeding you lines copied out
from pop songs. Their actions are foolish but
you trip over their words, they're still such a
catch. You wished to be happy, to have a head-
over-heels romance but how can you, when
you can foretell the ending so easily? You
finish your once-upon-a-time's with an abrupt
end, for the story reads the same each time.

His name was Harry, and all he wanted was
to feed you love. He'd crushed on you for a
long time, as long as anyone could remember.
But you locked his doors and threw away
the key and made your escape at last. He
screamed your name for 30 nights in a row
but your face was turned, sleeping on the pil-
low of another. You laughed your way down
the halls, such a pretty face, wide eyed smile.
You locked him up and built up walls then re-
coiled in anguish when he escaped through a
window and fled to the arms of a figure below.

Your name is Lucy, and all you wanted was to
be loved, for as long as you could remember.
But you forgot that words can be rewritten
and changed, and your story doesn't always
have to read the same.

The End.

Writers Are Always Up In The Middle Of The Night

Laura Godsafe

Writers are always up in the middle of the
night searching for the right combination of
words to string together like a melody with
chords. So forgive me if I disturb your sleep
but I honestly hope you understand when
I press a handwritten letter into your hand,
or sleepily mumble poetry under my breath
when I think you're lost to sleep.

Writers are always searching for their muse.

That one person that when they see them,
they can't resist taking out some paper and
scribbling furiously. The person that they just
have to think about in order to get inspira-
tion. The person that despite what ever
happens between them, they will always be so
grateful to, for helping them along the way.
Writers are difficult people to be with, they
come and go like British weather but they'll
always come back to you in the end. Once
you've entered the heart of a writer, you'll
never truly leave. They'll write about you after
you cease to speak and remember you for far
longer. They'll try to find the perfect words
to sum up this feeling but they know there
are no perfect words. It's the emotion poured
into them and the belief in them that makes
it magical. So they'll write about you. And
they won't stop until they're satisfied that
you believe it. And they'll keep trying much
longer than that.

Some things are far easily expressed on paper
than by voice.





Hummingbirds

Colored Pencil
by Gez Sullivan





**Your Work Could
Be Sold Here**

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