

# Awen

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## Wall Clock

By Howard F. Stein and Seth Allcorn

Time can be measured by the walls  
Closing in on living life.  
How much time is left?  
The walls, they move, ever so slowly at first.  
Unavoidable, inescapable, inevitable.  
The walls confine,  
Surround us everywhere, always present.  
They approach closer now; time is running out.

The walls box us in –  
Impossible to get out,  
Not over or around or through.  
No doors or friendly arches.

Life and imagination can  
Feel boxed in,  
No where to go,  
Nothing to do,  
Drains the life out of living life  
Imagination is lost to their  
Approaching surfaces.

What more can be said?  
I now hear the dirt falling upon my box.  
The walls are tight now;  
The pressure is great;  
The air is cool, dank, and dusty.  
Life can end in a box  
If imagination fails us.

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## Whiteboardings:

### Creating Collaborative Poetry in a Third Space

By Howard F. Stein and Seth Allcorn  
(Finishing Line Press)  
Available to order from [Amazon](https://www.amazon.com/)

## The Tommyknockers

By Mark Hudson

The Tommy knockers are ancient folklore  
The miners are who they're intended for.  
Mining is really an ancient profession,  
done because of men's greedy obsessions.  
The oldest origins of the superstitions,  
Comes from Rome, states the traditions.  
Those who crucified Christ were told  
to work in the mines searching for gold.  
And thus the legend of Tommy knockers was born,  
two feet tall, these green men were there to warn  
miners of caves that were about to cave in,  
or they'd create mischief with a big grin.  
They would take the miners for serious fools,  
stealing their food, and stealing their tools.  
The Cornish miners were the first,  
to come to the states and be cursed.  
By working the mines, and fearing these knockers,  
and people thought they were off their rockers,  
yelling at those grizzled gnomes,  
whose legend originally came from Rome.  
When they were good, they'd bring wealth,  
but when they were bad, they were bad for health.  
They were often blamed for what occurred,  
and in the mines, their echoes were heard.  
Often the miners thought that the dead,  
didn't want rocks to fall on their head.  
So they would warn them, all the miners would hear,  
and the little green men were something to fear.  
Sometimes they'd close the mines they were so scared,  
from all the ghost stories that everybody shared.  
But nowadays, modern education has made  
people and miners to not be so afraid.  
They still have a place in legend and lore,  
as miners seek diamonds, gold, and ore.  
The truth is, it's hard to believe in fairies,  
when the real world itself is much more scary.

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## Cats of Dark Corners

By Matthew Wilson

At night the cats come out  
Trotting to the writer's house  
Leaving dead mice and birds  
Like cairns to evil on his step.

Sometimes I see him working  
Looking out his window for inspiration  
Watching the yellow eyed cats  
Licking their whiskers in the moonlight.

I don't know if they're communicating  
Only that I have ceased to sneak there  
By day, night or any other hour  
Still the memory of the writer lingers.

Lately dead birds appear at my door  
Little gifts from the writer's familiars  
There are yellow eyes in the trees  
I think Lovecraft has found me out.

## Lily

By Diane Duff

I was shocked when I read the cards: 'To Jeff my darling Valentine,' said the first one and 'To my Darling Jeff, all my love, Lily,' said the message on the Christmas card.

My father had died suddenly, just a few months after Mum and I was sorting out his clothes, ready to take to the local charity shop. So it had been a surprise to find the cards in the drawer – almost as though they'd been kept hidden under the piles of socks and underwear.

Dad had never kept any cards. He claimed he didn't want to appear sentimental, so why had he kept those, or had he put them away for some reason and forgotten about them?

I looked at the cards again, Dad's name was Jeff, but who on earth was Lily? My mother was called Maureen Lesley, so they obviously hadn't been from her.

I didn't know anybody of that name, so I mentally went through the list of family members and friends – even long-lost cousins, but there were no Lilies, and as far as I knew, nor had any of my parents' work colleagues been called Lily.

Could they have known her in their youth, I wondered, perhaps before I was born, but they'd never mentioned her. And if that was the case, why had they kept her cards for so long? Mum and Dad had been devoted to each other and never had any secrets, or so I thought. It just didn't make sense.

I sat and thought, then it struck me, there was one possible explanation. Oh no, surely not... they loved each other too much! But, then, so had Lily also loved Dad, judging by the messages on the cards – and, the kisses.

To think Dad could have had another woman really upset me, no wonder he'd hidden the cards away. I knew Mum had never looked through his personal items and he'd tidied his cupboards himself, but if she'd found them, she'd have wanted to kill this Lily whoever she was. So, I put the cards on one side, ready to throw in the re-cycling bin. It was a blessing Mum never knew, and I tried to console myself with that.

When I met Annie I decided to tell her, in the forlorn hope that I was mistaken and that lady had been someone she knew. Perhaps she'd written those messages as a sort of joke or friendly gesture and there'd been nothing in it – I hoped so. Annie had known Mum since childhood and they were great friends.

She thought for a few minutes, then she said: "I think I may know who your mystery woman was, Jean."

"You do?"

"Did your mother ever use a nickname?"

"Not that I know of. Dad – and the rest of the family had always called her Maureen."

She smiled: "I remember your dad once telling me she'd admired a spray of lilies in a shop window. Then, during the conversation he'd accidentally referred to her as Lily and she said what a pretty name it was. So it's my guess that he'd called her Lily when they were alone, which was why she'd put that affectionate name on those cards."

Ends

## Anderson CMXLV

By SchiZ

Alone, I sleep without yr touch  
If only you were here  
To wrap yr body against mine  
I would walk away from the edge of the sea  
And never again have a thought of throwing myself  
Against the rocks and waves  
For yr touch gently sway me from destruction  
And yr mind and body  
Have an unbounded joy to explore  
With anew desire of life

## Rise and Shine

By Simon MacCulloch

The sea sucks the sun and the moon's face glows.  
(Whatever's there is pulsing, waiting.)  
A dead dreamer senses that the stars are right  
And starts to awaken in the seeping light  
Attuned to the channels where the star-slime flows  
And not procrastinating.

The sky turns green as the moon says 'cheese'.  
(Whatever's there is hungry, grumbling.)  
A leathery stretch and a cavernous yawn  
An eye opens, glares at the strange green dawn  
And then it's a hillock borne on wobbling knees  
And then it's a mountain stumbling.

The new-risen rocks form a moonlit road.  
(Whatever's signed is inauspicious.)  
It starts on its journey to the ocean shore  
But has scarce quit the shadow of its isle before  
It's gulped down the gullet of the moon-sized toad  
A sea food breakfast – delicious!

## My Beloved Skinny

By Celine Rose Mariotti

My beloved Skinny  
We miss you so,  
It was so hard to let you go,  
To say goodbye  
I still cry  
I think of you all the time,  
We talk about you,  
Our memories of you are very dear,  
You brought us joy and happiness,  
You were a wonderful father,  
We loved you so,  
I look at your pictures  
And I feel like any moment  
You will step right out of them  
And come have coffee with us,  
We'll watch TV,  
Discuss politics,  
Talk about the New York Giants,  
We'll all share stories,  
Laugh a lot too,  
How I wish that could be true,  
My beloved Skinny,  
I miss you so,  
It was so hard to let you go.

Send us your letters of comment!

# The Christmases in 2023

By David M. Smith

*With thanks to my friend Penny for one of the plot ideas.*

Audrey Christmas was having one of her tea parties.

"More tea?"

"Thank you," replied Mrs Frost.

"Well perhaps a little more cake," the Tooth Fairy suggested. "It's good for business."

"I've been worried", Audrey continued. "You know I come from England originally and I have been reading their newspapers. Can you believe that people in full time work still need to use food banks to survive? It's disgraceful."

"But we tried helping with food banks the other year and it just wasn't enough. My Jack says that sometimes there is no need for him to spread his patterns because the windows are frozen on the inside."

"What if Claus could deliver food with the Christmas presents?"

"Nice solution Mrs Frost. We should put it to him."

#

In the yard Claus was having his own problems. Outside the workshop was a crowd of elves holding a banner. One elf called Lycwich was haranguing the others.

"Better conditions and better pay," he cried. The message was repeated on the banner displayed.

"What better conditions?" Claus asked.

"It's to counter inflation," Lycwich cried.

"But inflation doesn't really effect you," Claus called back. "We provide all your food and living expenses. What more do you want?"

"Everyone is affected by inflation," he was told.

"Is the quality of the food not up to scratch?"

"No. Quality is fine."

"So what do you want?"

"Well we only get one holiday a year."

"Yes. Boxing day. Do you want more? Okay. Another holiday a year but it must be in the slack time."

A loud cheer from the crowd.

"Now. What about pay? You don't actually get any. Just an allowance on Boxing day"

"We want that doubling, not that there is anything much to spend it on out here."

"Okay," said Claus. "That's settled then. Back to work everyone."

"Claus, dear," Audrey spoke in her sweetest voice.

"We have an idea for you. Better bring the Head Elf and the Artisan Goblin with you."

#

The Head Elf stroke his beard.

"It isn't really practical," he told them. "The logistics would be horrendous and the admin in working out who might need what? Frightening."

"And, I think we would have to double crew," added the Artisan Goblin. "Plus the wear and tear on the sleigh."

"And, think of the embarrassing mistakes you could make. Caviar to some starving child or baked beans to the palace."

"Actually, I hear Camilla likes baked beans."

"That isn't the point!"

"You're all being very negative," Audrey told them. "Are you sure it isn't because the idea comes from a woman?"

"Certainly not!" said Claus emphatically, striking his foot on the ground.

"Well. You give us an alternative suggestion."

"Actually", the Artisan Goblin said. "I do have one. It is common knowledge thst the Tooth Fairy sneaks into children's houses and leaves sweets and sugar lumps."

"It's just good business practice," she replied.

"Well. She could do the same with food. No one is going to question unexpectedly finding tins of Spaghetti sauce or boxes of cornflakes in the back of a cupboard. Not if you are hungry."

"Good thinking," said Claus. "Problem solved. Tomorrow is Christmas Eve so load the sleigh."

#

Unfortunately next morning Audrey was woken by the sound of a coughing, sneezing Claus.

"Oh, dear," she said, "you had better be tested."

"But it can't be Covid! I haven't been anywhere."

"What about those reindeer herders you saw last week? Governments don't want to talk about it but Covid is everywhere and getting worse. Just read the scientific press."

"But I can't not deliver the presents."

"Well you certainly can't risk infecting children across the world."

The presents were delivered. Audrey, Mrs Frost and the Tooth Fairy did a magnificent job and it didn't take them much longer than Claus's usual team. What is more, no-one knew.

Personally, Audrey thought the false beard and the red coat were a bit unnecessary, but the Head Elf explained it was tradition and also in case any of the children woke.

When they got home they all had a hot chocolate drink to warm them and a very large gin cocktail each to warm them in other ways. Then, Audrey checked on Claus; he was sleeping like a baby.

*Ends*

## Heather, A Flower (Heath, *Calluna ericaceae*)

*By Howard F. Stein*

Lavender pink,  
Gentle pastel;  
Twigged slender stems,  
Petals in  
Crystalline symmetry –  
Carpet a meadow,  
Terrace a hill.

Deceptively hearty,  
This evergreen shrub,  
Bred to brave Scotland's  
Jagged terrain.  
Heather and heath –  
Lavender delicate,  
Lavender tough.

## The Life And Times Of Sheamus Android/ Machines And The Soul Of Nature

By Andrew Darlington

Sheamus Android lives by decades,  
in his teens he solves computational  
equations that baffle tech-head experts,  
in his twenties he plays saxophone  
in small groups of fierce intensity  
lured by the spectre of John Coltrane,  
in his thirties he's an artist who reconfigures  
space and time in a multiverse of dimensions  
with pigment and chromatic bursts of  
vivid storms bright with incandescence,  
he meditates through his forties  
aspiring to new levels of consciousness  
questing for the godhead in every particle,  
he writes a novel a year through his fifties  
crime detection, cheap pulp SF, erotica and  
the trilogy of a man who lives by decades,  
he travels the world through his sixties  
walking the length of the Americas,  
crossing archipelagos and oceans, up through  
Thailand and across Tibet, west to Iran and  
week by week across Mediterranean islands,  
he wakes into his seventies with partners of  
multiple sexes, discovers love, pain and new  
sensitivities in the three children he fathers,  
in his eighties he enters politics to end war  
and create a more egalitarian world,  
as yet he has no plans for  
his next three decades...

## Love's Request

By Howard F. Stein

I hand her  
A sheet of  
Blank white paper,  
Ask her to  
Look at it,  
Then to read  
Between the lines.

Puzzled, she replies:  
There are no lines,  
So, no lines  
To read between.

I reply:  
Precisely.

## The Poet

By Matthew Wilson

They locked him away for  
talking madness; how the Earth  
was flat, and men could make their  
fortune, writing speculative poetry.

## The Cold Man Comes...

By Cardinal Cox

A tall, grim Puritan rides into town  
Who believes he is ordained for this task  
His wrinkly face a mix of scowl and frown  
There are many questions he has to ask

Can he get a strawberry jam on white?  
Or fine-sliced ham with a mature cheese  
With a home-made mustard that is quite light  
Maybe some tangy autumn pickle please?

Crusty brown baton with a hard-boiled egg  
Or a salad that is all freshly made?  
Turkey? Brown and rich as carved from the leg  
Yes, every widow is rightly afraid

Sandwich Finder General is his name  
Winkling out cucumber with crusts his aim...

## The Haunting

By SchiZ

I saw you in the mirror  
Turned around and saw nothing  
I saw near the door  
But you disappeared into the night  
I wish you were here  
Lying next to me  
On a cold, autumn night

evil minds plotting  
no compassion nor morals  
flood of wickedness

By DJ Tyrer

## Dinosaurs

By Mark Hudson

A new dinosaur has been discovered,  
fossils and vertebra have been recovered.  
Fragments of teeth too have been unearthed,  
as scientists guess at the time it was birthed.  
They've labelled the dinosaur 'Siberian Titan',  
and the whole wide world they chose to enlighten.

## Green Fairy/Yellow Play

By DS Davidson

The madness said to be bestowed  
By imbibing the Green Fairy  
Is merely one-tenth, if that,  
Of the madness aid to be bestowed  
By reading the Yellow Play.