



SEARCH



SUMMER 2021

MAGAZINE

#HEROES





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Letter from the Editor



Superheroes are the best! I mean, that's the definition, right? We love to see them fly, fight crime, and generally save the world. Movies and comics abound with their exploits, but the label "superhero" is also thrown around to acknowledge the work of essential workers, doctors, single mothers, and more. Superheroes are the ones setting the broken world right again.

In our feature story this issue, Elliot Thorpe reflects on the human nature of superheroes. Alternately, Tim Reynolds has the power to make you smile as he recounts his not-so-super adventures. Take a break from tasks that feel like they take superhuman effort and imagine a trip to our spotlight city, Masterton, New Zealand. Even superheroes have alter egos that need to take out the trash, but you can be the hero at dinner by preparing our recipe for Raspberry Chipotle Chicken Salad. Need inspiration for your heroic feats? Enjoy Sumiko Saulson's article about the Netflix show, *Unknown Origins*.

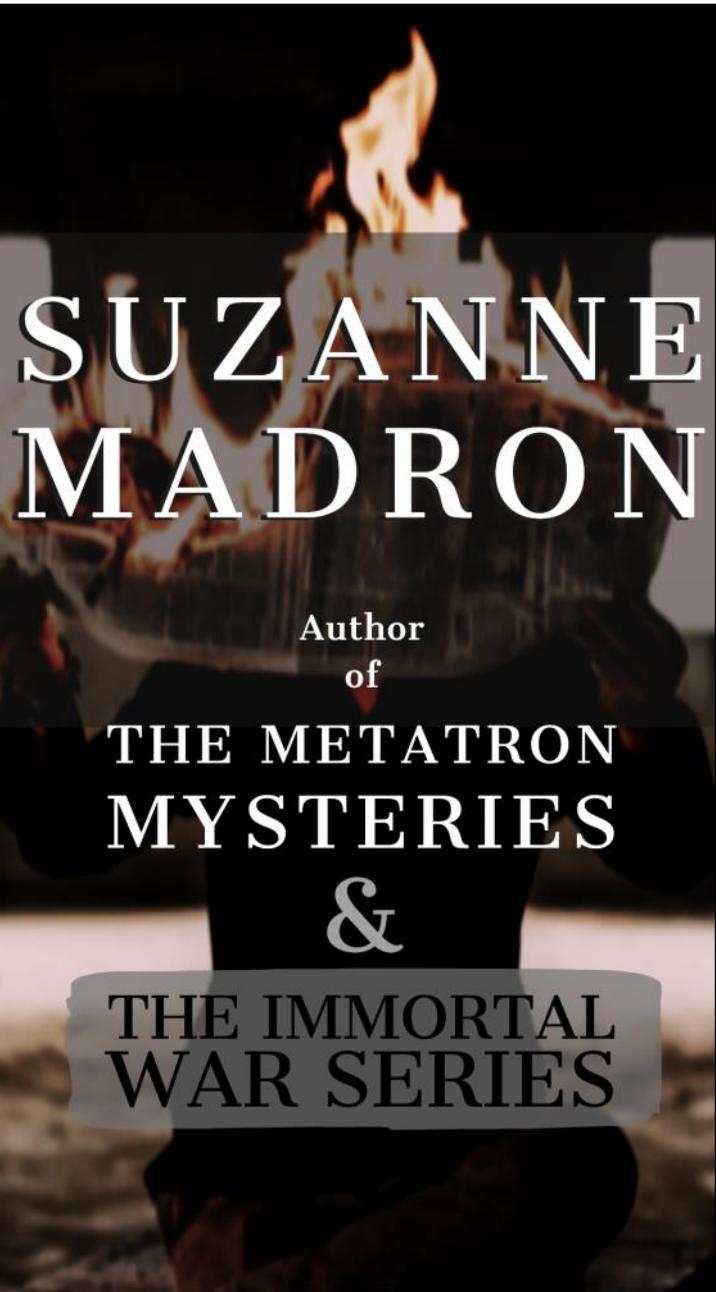
The days we get to help out a fellow human, save a distressed animal, or give a compliment, can make us feel more "super" than we did before. Let SEARCH inspire you to express the superhero in you.

Happy reading,

Heather Roulo / *Editorial Director*



FRONTLINERS ♥♥♥
Thank you



SUZANNE MADRON

Author
of

THE METATRON MYSTERIES

&

THE IMMORTAL WAR SERIES

When the demons are the
good guys, you know the
world has gone to hell.



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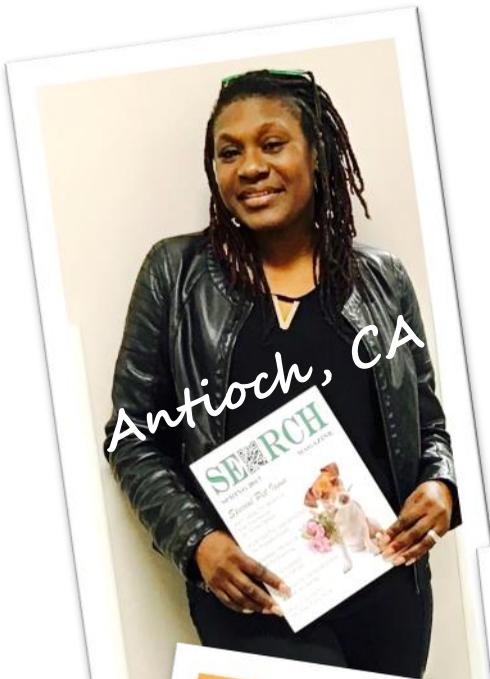
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Guatemala City - A Place of History

Guatemala is a small Central American country tucked in between the southern part of Mexico, the western part of Belize, and the northern parts of Honduras and El Salvador.

The capital city, Guatemala City, has a strong indigenous population that speaks twenty-three distinct Maya languages. My mother has family that lives in the capitol, and I've visited this city on and off for thirty years. Although I am familiar with various places, I always learn something new every time I go.

Let me give you some basics on the city first. It is home to one million people plus another three million in urban areas. It has a tropical climate, and the temperature is usually between seventy-two and eighty-two-degrees Fahrenheit. The rainy season is from May to October and let me tell it's no joke. I've seen it go from sunny to pouring buckets of rain, enough to flood the streets within five minutes.

If you go during this time of year, I strongly suggest taking an umbrella and raincoat.

Guatemala is a geothermally active country, being a part of the Circle of Fire, and like many locations located in the area, it is also prone to earthquakes. It has several active volcanoes, but as a welcome treat against all that bad news, there are various hot springs and baths available throughout the country. I highly recommend visiting one. My body felt good as new after my visit to one.

Traffic congestion is a serious issue. One of the scariest and hardest things to get used to is how people drive in the capitol. I wish I could provide you with a snippet of the video I took of morning rush hour traffic. It's not for the faint of heart. Think of the Indy 500 with regular cars and an ever-changing location. The city has several bus lines to take people to various parts of the capital's sixteen different zones or *zonas*. As someone who has been on the buses before, I wouldn't recommend them.

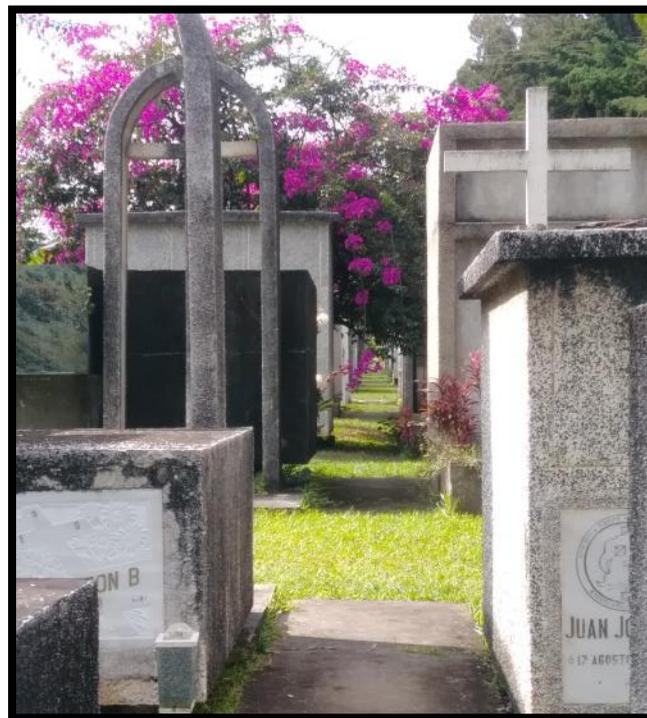
There tends to be a high crime rate on the busses, so I'd recommend taking a taxi to your destinations. They are cheap and abundant. I would like to break down a few of the zone highlights for you, points of interest.

Zone 1: The National Palace. *The Cathedral of Guatemala City*, the *National Library of Guatemala*, and *El Mercado Central* (the Central Market). You can view a lot of the exterior of the Palace, which is lovely. The Cathedral is a testament to Spanish architecture, and the inside of the Cathedral is just beautiful. My favorite place is *El Mercado Central*. It is full of anything you could imagine to buy. Everything from fresh produce to textiles, to jewelry to clothes, to toys-you name it, they got it.

Zone 10: *Museo Ixchel del Traje Indigena* (Museum of Indigenous Textiles and Clothing), and the *Museo Popol Vuh* (Mayan art museum). The textile museum is a whirlwind of color and history while working to conserve indigenous arts. *El Museo Popol Vuh* houses one of the largest collections of Mayan artifacts in the world. They have an extensive collection of pottery worth checking out if you're into ancient civilizations.



Zone 13: This will be your very first stop in the capital, the La Aurora International Airport. After a stop at customs, be prepared to be met with a multitude of people selling wares, offering various taxi and car services, and the usual crowd of friends and family waiting for loved ones to arrive. Once you leave the airport, there are various places to visit. Like most metropolitan centers, there is a mixture of commercial and independ-



ent businesses, all happily awaiting your business. On virtually every corner, you will find a small mom and pop shop, which is their equivalent of convenience store. Once you stock up on necessities, you can visit, *La Museo Arqueologia y Etnologia* (The Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology), *Museo Nacional de Arte Moderno*, (The National Museum of Modern Art), *Museo de los Ninos* (The Children's Museum), or *Museo Nacional de Historia Natural*, (The Natural History Museum).

While I haven't been to any of those yet, I have been to *Zoologico La Aurora* (The Aurora Zoo). I have complicated feelings regarding zoos, but that doesn't take away from the fun I had with my cousins the afternoon we went when I was a teenager. The zoo currently has the largest gardens in the city, with 287 species and more than 2100 animals in the entire collection.

No matter what you're into, Guatemala City has something for everyone, and though I've been there several times, there are always things left to explore at the end of the day. Pack up your sunscreen and your Foder's guide. Guatemala City is just waiting for you to pay them a visit. ■

GUATEMALA

#HEROES

BY KRISTIN BATTESTELLA

Many documents are free, but not all. Generally, you are entitled to all records free of charge. Thanks to the infamous among genealogists 1973 National Archive fire, however, some materials have been damaged. We received a letter stating that while my grandfather's records were not severely damaged by this fire, the papers were quite fragile. A \$50 handling fee was required for the archivist assigned to our request to do plate glass high resolution scans. Ultimately, it was a small price to pay for the incredibly detailed scans we received, charred fraying on the edge of the record book included.

Expect to wait. With today's instant websites and quick access, one may get impatient. However, it takes time for the National Personnel Center of Military Records to locate the files, copy the documents, and mail the materials even if you submit through online requests. We waited a month or so before receiving our fee letter, and then another month more before the large envelope arrived with fifty odd pages of handwritten daily logs, medical statements, merit bonuses, and pay records.

We live in an abstract digital world these days, making something about being able to see vintage penciled penmanship and calendar stamps amid the military abbreviations, famous dates, and historic battle names intimate and tangible.

Despite often wearing his army hats or flight jumpsuits when I was a child before his death in 1994, my grandfather was fairly soft spoken about his World War II service. Obtaining his records from the National Archive of Military Personnel via the Freedom of Information Act was a straightforward request, well worth the time and money to be able to learn of his accommodations and valor in such detail.

To begin discovering your family heroes with military records research using the Freedom of Information Act, visit <https://www.foia.gov/how-to.html>. ■

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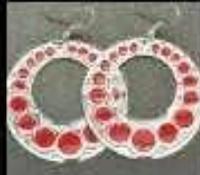


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Up in the sky! It's a bird! It's a plane! It's...my buddy Bruce in a cape jumping off his roof and breaking his arm! Oops.

Even after Bruce broke his arm, I wanted to be Superman. Or even Clark Kent, star reporter. I ended up being Jimmy Olsen, photographer. We all grew up wanting to be superheroes. I wanted to be Green Arrow and had the archery set and practiced in the front yard... until I shot an arrow in the air and it came down and hit the neighbor's car two houses away. I wanted to be Aquaman and swim the oceans with the whales and sharks using my perfect dolphin kick...except I sank like a stone and couldn't grow gills no matter how many fish sticks I ate. I dreamed of being The Flash...but couldn't outrun my own bullies so I sure wasn't saving anyone else.

My buddy Patrick and I wanted to be Spider-Men, but after climbing a very tall pinnacle of rock in the park, we couldn't get down. No sticky webs, no Spidey-jumps, just a rope...and Mr. McGregor talking us down one hand-hold at a time.

But I do have a superpower. It's LUCK.

When I did eventually jump off our roof, I tucked and rolled and didn't break any bones. When I made another attempt at being the web-slinger, I climbed the outside of the staff residence of the grand railway hotel the Banff Springs Hotel.

I did really well, scaling the protruding bricks like I'd been bitten by a radioactive squirrel. I got my fingertips on the third-floor window I was aiming for...but lost my grip and fell. My superpower kicked in, though, and my toes caught the next window sill, so I was able to twist and leap onto the hillside and walk away injury-free. Sadly, my friend Sandy tried the same thing a few months later—to the same window—but he missed that second-floor window sill with his toes and went straight down to break his leg. Gravity is his kryptonite. I eventually did get to fly when I jumped out of a plane at 3000 feet. Once my chute opened and I was gliding safely to the ground, I felt like Superman, turning this way and that way in the sky and nothing beneath my feet but two thousand feet of air.

The first real superhero was probably Harry Houdini, who performed impossible escapes and demonstrated superhuman abilities, so, yes, I once dreamed of being Houdini. I even went so far as to have my hands chained and locked together just before I was tossed off a high diving board into a fourteen-foot-deep pool. Remember my attempt above at being Aquaman in which I sank like a stone? With my hands chained I sank even faster. My superpower came to the rescue again and I escaped before I drowned, which is good because not too many superheroes escape AFTER they drown.

Eventually, I got a chance to be one of the greatest superheroes kids worship, Santa Claus. When you wear that red and white suit, the wig and the beard, and a child's eyes light up when they see you, you realize that the greatest superpower of all is making complete strangers smile. ■





Name: Lillian Csernica

Location: Santa Cruz, California

How has the last year dealing with COVID been for you?

On the one hand, it's been business as usual because my older boy is medically fragile. We're used to operating at a level just below hospital standards for an isolation room. On the other hand, I'm going a little crazy because I'm used to having a certain amount of alone time each day. Keeping both of my sons busy and entertained is a lot of work. It's difficult to have enough energy left over for writing.

SEARCH Magazine is a little unusual, in that we always run a column on autism to raise awareness. How did you come to write about autism for SEARCH Magazine?

Through the wonderful and talented Emerian Rich (*SEARCH Magazine's* original Editorial Director). She was kind enough to offer me the opportunity. I am so grateful. Writing about autism has helped me learn so much and be a better mother to both my boys.

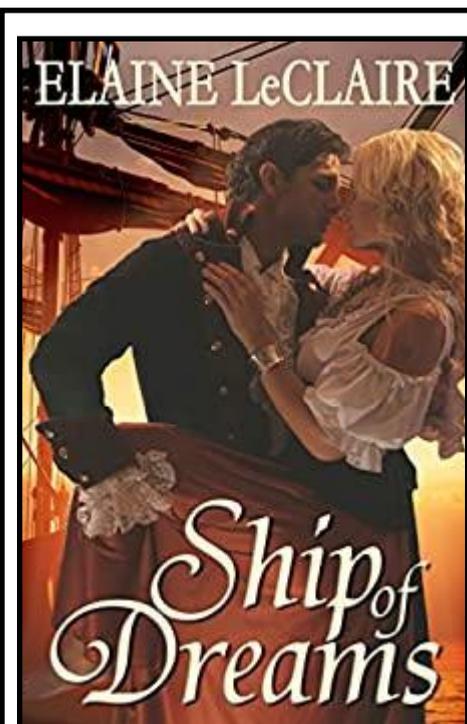
What else do you write?

Historical fiction in the genres of fantasy, romance, and steampunk. I collaborate on science fiction and fantasy stories with my best friend and partner in crime, Patricia H. MacEwen.



Do you have a hot tip for us?

The Dollar Tree is a godsend. Lots of craft supplies, plenty of spiral notebooks, ballpoints, and cheap munchies. When I need some retail therapy, I go there and indulge without spending a lot. Right now I'm working on a gnome garden with various dollhouse furniture and other fun items. ■



Master of his destiny, terror of the Caribbean, the pirate Black Angel is also elegant, charming and seductive.

En route to Jamaica to bring her brother news of their father's death, Lady Rosalind Hanshaw is captured by the Black Angel, a legendary French pirate who targets English shipping.

Torn between her loyalty to her homeland and her growing attraction to the one man she should hate above all others, Rosalind must decide whether the Black Angel is nothing more than a despicable pirate or if he holds the key to both her heart and her future. ■

Buy *Ship of Dreams* by Elaine LeClaire!





In writing a music column for this issue, I wondered what real-life heroes listen to for inspiration. After all, it's one thing to combat one virus for a few months until a vaccine arrives. It's quite another to combat several mutations of it while wondering if the vaccines produced will be effective, being short-staffed, lacking PPE, and acknowledging the fight as we surpass the one-year mark. What kind of music, if any, keeps them going? I put that exact question out there and here is what I discovered.

Let me start off by saying that in researching and gathering comments or interviews for this article, I have been awed by the humility of nearly everyone with whom I've spoken. The irony is that most frontline workers—from doctors and nurses, to those keeping the food supply going during lockdown, to lab technicians and grocery store cashiers—preferred to remain anonymous. Out of respect, I've included their professions with their song selections but omitted their names.

1. “God Bless the USA” by Lee Greenwood

Truck Driver

“I’m a local driver, but when so many things got in short supply and people started hoarding, I signed up to drive overland. It was a mixed bag as far as experiences go. Some states I could get drive-thru food but I couldn’t go inside to use the bathroom. Other states I could. Some places said I needed a mask. Others didn’t. People were scared and angry. When I had to remind myself what made me change to this kind of driving, I’d turn on, ‘God Bless the USA’ by Lee Greenwood.”

2. “Perfect” by Ed Sheeran

Emergency Room Nurse

“It wasn’t so much driving into work. Driving in, I’d just listen to silence. I knew the alarms and calls and non-stop wall of noise would hit me soon enough. When I needed music was when I came home from a twelve-hour shift. In the beginning, so many patients died. I had to remember there was life still happening and to be thankful that I had my husband. I would play ‘Perfect’ by Ed Sheeran while driving home because it was the song I walked to in my wedding.”

3. The Opera, *La Boheme*

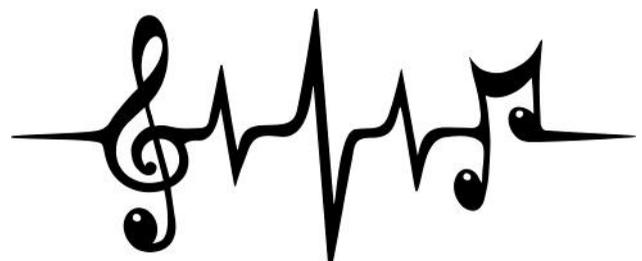
Hospital Resident

“Music from the opera *La Boheme* played as loud as my AirPods would go. When I was able to walk away for a few minutes, it was the only thing that cleared my head and drowned out whatever was happening. I didn’t understand what the words all meant, but the anguish and emotion was there. Those singers could scream at the top of their lungs. That’s what I felt like doing.”

4. “No Time to Die” by Billie Eilish

Grocery Store Manager

“It sounds terrible, but I found myself so angry and frustrated at times with the whole thing. Customers breaking the rules. Running out of things. Angry customers. Screaming kids. Billie Eilish’s ‘No Time to Die’ became my battle cry.”



5. “Can’t Touch This” by M.C. Hammer

Elementary School Teacher

“I tried to find ways to make my students laugh and stay engaged in the first weeks of lockdown. I was teaching them online from home. My co-teacher and I went to playgrounds, the store, the closed library and we made a video about not touching your face or door knobs or public surfaces to M.C. Hammer’s ‘Can’t Touch This.’ When the kids came back in the fall, masked, PPE, and shields between us, they all wanted to watch it again. I knew we’d done something good.”



6.

Soundtrack from “*Hang ‘Em High*”

Temperature Checker in a Clinic

“It’s probably proof I was crazy, but I listened to the soundtrack from *Hang ‘Em High*. It seems kinda ridiculous now that I think about it. I’d lost my waiter job. My student loans were due. If I didn’t find a job, I’d have to move to my parents. So, I took the first job I could get as a temperature checker at a clinic. I was scared the first day, to be honest, but I needed the money. Maybe I needed to pretend to be a bad a#* like Clint Eastwood.”

7. Hawaiian music by Don Ho, Iz, etc...

Nursing Home Activities Coordinator

“I’m the Activities Coordinator for a Nursing Home. Life for our residents is already challenging. Then, in the height of the pandemic, they sent COVID patients here. We knew it was a huge risk to all of us. Safety came in extreme isolation for our residents. One lady sticks out in my head. She had memory issues and often thought she was back in Hawaii where she’d spent much of her life. Instead of correcting her, I just started playing Hawaiian music for her. Don Ho, Iz, whatever I could find. It cheered us all up, residents and staff. For a little while each day, we all imagined we were on a beautiful, tropical island.” ■



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Many superheroes originated with comic books, graphic novels, and mangas, but they're not limited to superheroes alone. Check out these five detailed manga series with storylines for a variety of interests.

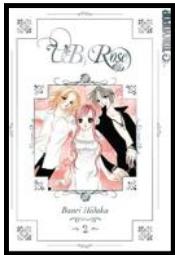
For the *Downton Abbey* fan: *Emma* by Kaoru Mori



From being a poor child in the worst conditions to being a well-respected maid in the Mölders' prestigious home, you'll follow Emma's life as a servant and feel right at home if you are a *Downton* fan. The only historical romance manga in existence to portray 1895 to such detail, it even has a companion guide called *Emma*

Victorian Guide which explains many of the unfamiliar and obscure historical references this meticulous author included in her books.

For the Fashionista: *V.B. Rose* by Banari Hidaka



Ageha accidentally injures her sister's wedding dress designer while visiting the store and, feeling bad, joins the crew to help get the dress done in time. The lead designer is a young businessman who has way too much on his shoulders as he tries to navigate his company through the competitive world of the fashion industry.

Ageha has some skills with the needle and eventually becomes a permanent member of the team as the owner finds her creations almost as fascinating as his own.

For the Mystery Reader: *Godchild* by Kaori Yuki



Earl Cain and his butler, Riff, solve crimes in this Victorian-era London series. With a decidedly gothic slant, this story is reminiscent of the Sherlock Holmes stories where a mystery is presented at the beginning of the tale and Cain and Riff sniff out the bad guy. Riff, being an ex-medical student, often helps through sniffing out poisons and noticing details only a medical man would.

Each book sews up the culprit and sentences the person to judgment.

Cain is called on to solve puzzles and stumbles into some situations that benefit from him being "at the right place at the right time."

For the Mystic: *The Tarot Café* by Sang Sun Park



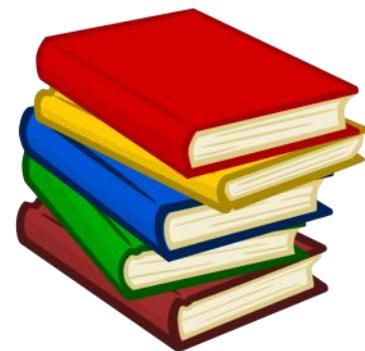
Pamela is an orphan and café owner who receives visits after midnight by people needing her help. They are beings that can't go to anyone else because they often have supernatural attributes that no one else would understand. She reads their cards during which they tell their tale. After the cards are read, she gives her advice and in return is given beads. These beads, it is believed, will complete a necklace that may unlock the secret of her own origin.

For the *Alice in Wonderland* fan: *Alice in the Country of Hearts* by Quin Rose



Expanding on Louis Carroll's premise of a human gal falling down a rabbit hole, this Alice has gone to a world where people's hearts are made of clocks and every character you love from the classic tale is present, but twisted. What I love most about this series is that the author seems to be a big

Alice fan, so if you are too, you'll dig all the details most readers won't catch. ■






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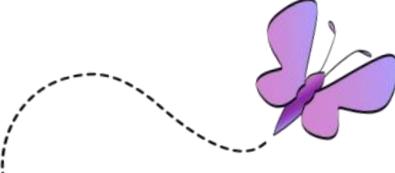
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Not All Superheroes Wear Capes



For the first time in my life, the planet seems so much smaller. I regularly sit at home in the south of England, having video calls with my producer in Knoxville.

We've done this for a good few years now. The conversations usually started with, "How are things in your part of the world?" The very fact that the geographical distance between us means nothing to an invisible enemy is very telling, and so our calls inevitably begin now with something not unlike, "So how are you coping?"

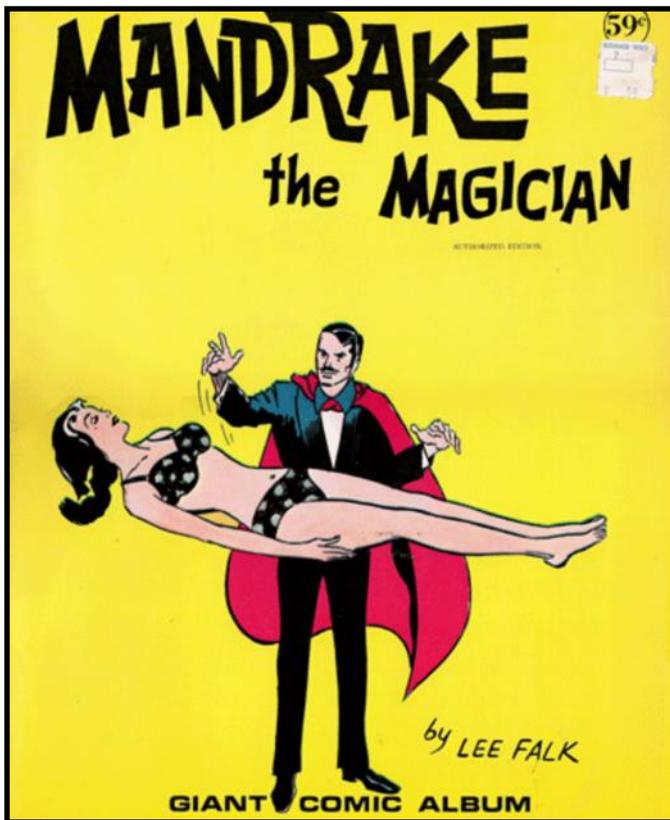
I have family in Australia, and dotted across the UK, too. All of us, everywhere, have been touched by the events of the last year or so. We all have a common ground.

We all have to live our lives the same to keep ourselves, our families, friends, and strangers safe and free from this pandemic. Never has the need for respect and understanding of others been so demanded of us. For many, that's a struggle. We've all seen the news footage of hordes of people worldwide who simply refuse to acknowledge social distancing measures or that there's even a pandemic, but for the majority, it's simply become part of our daily routines.

Everything is dominated by the pandemic. We can't escape reports about it, movies are already being made about it, and the effects it is having on the world around us cannot be avoided. There is light at the end of the tunnel. At the time of writing this article, steps are being made to vaccinate us all and bring this virus finally to its microscopic knees.

While governments work furiously to make that happen, we have existing among us living, breathing superheroes.

When we think of superheroes, inevitably tights, boots, and a cape usually spring to mind. The idea of a figure who can hold the leering clown-like bad guys at bay, spin the world backward on its axis to save us from devastation, and leap tall buildings in a single bound, seems—and is—far-fetched. The fictional superhero is part of our conscious need to tell stories that reveal the underbelly of society we don't want to be part of, to expose the gothic gruesomeness of our own natures, perhaps.



The character who is acknowledged universally as the very first comic book superhero was Mandrake, a mysterious magician who used hypnosis to thwart villains. Created by writer/theatre director Lee Falk in 1934, Mandrake superseded the first masked avenger, the Phantom, the “ghost who walks” clad in purple with glowing white eyes. Also stemming from Falk’s pulp fiction imagination, there was much in the Phantom’s fictional life that developed further into the cape-wearing shenanigans of later figures.

Superhero comics grew to huge prominence in the 1940s, mainly due to the shadow of World War II that loomed large.



People were looking for pure escapism and turned to comic books to see their favorite heroes in blatant propaganda tales.

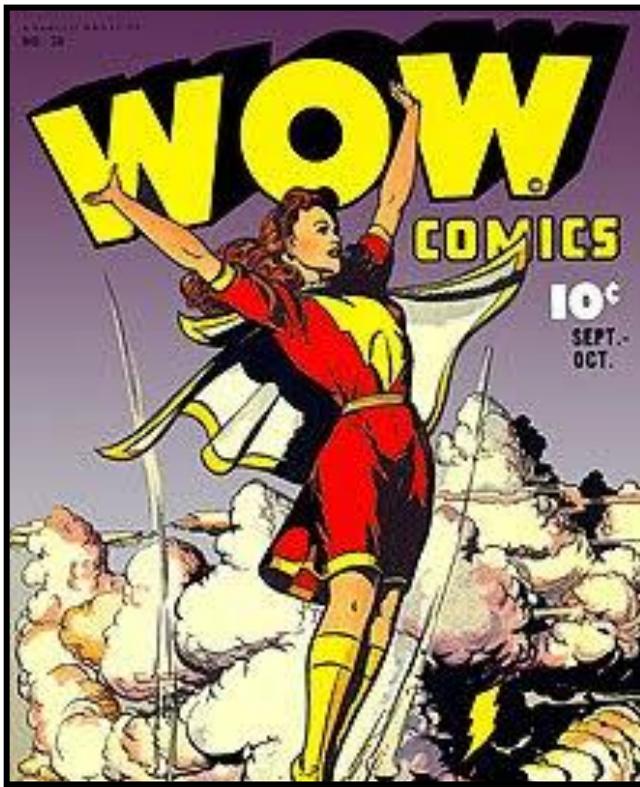
Caped wonders dressed as bats or with a big “S” on their chests. Mary Marvel and her successors all fought recognizable enemies, threats at the time that were prominent in the tabloids, news, and general “us versus them” sensibilities of our mutual past. As time and wars (both hot and cold) progressed and changed, so did the heroes. Superman was still number one and Batman, his ally, close behind but there was a glut of those who looked to knock these two giants from their thrones. None have truly succeeded but with the current spate of Marvel cinematic and streaming series, the mighty DC powerhouses need to stay fast and strong to keep their heads above water. The likes of Spider-Man, Captain Marvel, Thor, the Uncanny X-Men, Black Canary, and Squirrel Girl to name but a tiny few, are all worthy of their places as true heroes.

I mentioned earlier our need to find escapism. But does it go deeper than that?

Is there some subconscious desire for us to be heroes? After all, how many of us as kids played at being Superman or Wonder Woman or Shazam? We’d hook Mom’s tea towel down the neck of a T-shirt at the back with our hands in fists on hips and legs akimbo in a heroic pose. How many of us have walked out of the cinema after having seen Robert Downey Jr. swagger as Iron Man but knowing he loves us 3000, thinking to ourselves if only Tony Stark really existed?

Y’see, a hero isn’t all about toppling buildings or dragging gangsters by their collars to the nearest cop. It’s about humanity. A hero struggles with their burden.

Batman and Bruce Wayne, a ruthless nocturnal detective and a playboy billionaire, Superman and Clark Kent, a strange visitor from another planet and a man who just wants to fit in, and Stargirl and Courtney Whitmore, the holder of a cosmic staff and a kid who struggles with her parents' break-up are all like us (well, perhaps not the billionaire playboy!). There may be something about dressing up in a costume and donning a mask that allows us to think perhaps we, too, can save the world. Those who do attain the ability to truly save the world, however, don't wear capes or are from other far-off worlds.



They are like us. They are human. Desmond Doss was a conscientious objector during World War II. He saw active duty but refused to pick up a weapon. His treatment by his superiors was brutal but he stayed true to his convictions. Twice awarded the Bronze Star Medal, he single-handedly saved the lives of seventy-five men, those who had fallen under the guns and bombs of the enemy. His actions were genuinely heroic.

In 1955, a woman named Rosa Parks refused to give up a seat reserved for white passengers on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama. Her bravery in the face of such abhorrent racism led to her becoming an international icon against racial segregation. While she won the Presidential Medal of Freedom and the Congressional Gold

Medal, she insisted, even into her retirement, that there was still so much more to be done in the struggle for justice. Her humanity and heroism on that day in December sixty-six years ago still resonates throughout society. Her inability to accept the inhumanity toward others, by others is something we are still indeed struggling to overcome.

And so we come back to the biggest problem the world is facing right now. Those heroes wearing masks deserve every accolade, every praise, every ounce of our gratitude to help us through these dark times. The medics and paramedics signed up to be there when we need them, but I don't think I am speaking out of turn by saying I doubt any of them imagined it would be this hard, this demanding, or this overwhelming.

In the UK, every Thursday at eight in the evening, for just a few minutes, people stand at their front doors, on their front yards, and clap. Cars and trucks going by toot their horns.

It's to say thank you to those brave front-line medical teams who willingly put themselves at the mercy of COVID sufferers and are forced to make decisions about who to treat and who to not because there aren't enough beds or oxygen cylinders for everyone. Windows too all across the UK are adorned with rainbows painted by children to acknowledge, quietly, respectfully, those we have lost and those who are still desperately saving the rest of us. The world is full of heroes right now. It always has been. We need them more than ever. ■





Unlikely Duo Pursue Superhero Comic Serial Killer in Netflix's *Unknown Origins*

Unknown Origins, 2020 (*Orígenes Secretos*) on Netflix is a sort of a cop buddy comedy with a geeky twist.

Javier Rey stars as David Valentín, the stoic police officer with chiseled good looks. He is paired with Brays Efe as Jorge Elias, a chubby, laid-back superhero comic expert. Verónica Echegui rounds the central cast out as Norma, a cosplaying cop both Jorge and David are carrying a torch for. The script is based on a novel by David Galán Galindo, who shares screenwriting credits with Fernando Navarro. Both English language subtitles and dubs are available for the Spanish language program.

Taking place in 2019, before the pandemic, the film revolves around a mysterious serial killer who has been staging bodies in scenes based on comic books. Although it takes place in Madrid, the superhero comic book culture and references are so universal they could

easily show up in an American film. The movie starts out like a police procedural in which we follow handsome, muscular Detective David Valentín as he athletically trots up several flights of stairs, scarcely becoming winded. A salute to all that is manly (and hyper-masculine) he maintains his impossibly unaffected poise in the face of every brutal death.

Although most of the show is lighthearted, even amusing, the particularly gruesome methods of death are gut-wrenching. Just in case the audience missed how disgusting the torture and murder methods are when the body was discovered the coroner Bruguera, portrayed by Ernesto Alterio, pops in to describe them in cringe-inducing detail over the horrifyingly rendered corpse.



The juxtaposition of the buddy-comedy detective film tone of the macro story set up against the grisly body horror, reminded me of the TV show *Bones*. However, the murders in *Unknown* are much more disturbing in both execution and reveal, bringing to mind NBC's *Hannibal*.

In most ways his opposite, David Valentín's soon-to-be sidekick, Jorge Elias, is a portly young man with a grungy beard. He is usually dressed in a superhero shirt or outright cosplay garb. When we first meet him, he is taking care of his aging father, Cosme Elias, a retired cop who has cancer. Cosme happens to be David's mentor. Cosme and Jorge live together in a dingy old apartment. Soon after, we see Jorge at his job in the comic book store, where a delivery man who looks suspiciously like Stan Lee has him sign for a package. Much later we learn that this humble man owns the store.

Jorge Elias embodies the stereotypical comic book geek. He sits around his bedroom with headphones on, listening to trip-hop, and playing games. He collects action figures and his bed is covered in dirty clothes. He was beaten up by peers in high school and by his fallen hero cop older brother at home. The constant fat-shaming of Jorge, especially by David, starts to seem excessive. That combined with sexist behavior towards Norma, sometimes makes David less likable than he might be otherwise.

Early on, the film hastily attempts to dismantle myths about superhero fandoms using the Valentín character as a straight man. Norma explains to him that not all cosplayers are comic book fans. She's a fan of the cinematic universe.

A room full of cosplayers responds to David calling them losers by informing him of their respectable professions. A wealthy collector brags about how much disposable income he has to have to spend on comics.

As the detective and his side-kick work together, they uncover the fact that the killer is specifically creating superhero origin stories. The killer leaves behind a note saying "secret origin," which refers to a superhero backstory and inspired the title of the show. However, even this is a part of the overall trajectory of this movie as a brilliantly-imagined salute to the DC and Marvel Cinematic Universes. Even the unveiling of the true villain is a nod to the comic books. It also touches upon the complex question that haunts all of the machismo-possessing, swagger-filled, patriarchal protector heroes of those universes. Does the existence of the superhero create, inspire, and beget the supervillain, or is it the other way around? And then again, what and who is a hero? Is it the chisel-jawed, muscle-bound, traditionally masculine cop on the case? Perhaps it's the round-faced, smiling comic book store owner who quietly cares for his father, who is dying of cancer? Is it the often-overlooked woman, who puts the entire team together, but is rarely seen as more than a love interest? Is it the wise elder who was forced into retirement, yet still has the wits to be the first to break the case? Maybe, just maybe, it is all of them. ■



Spooky Writer's Planner

A writer's organization guide.

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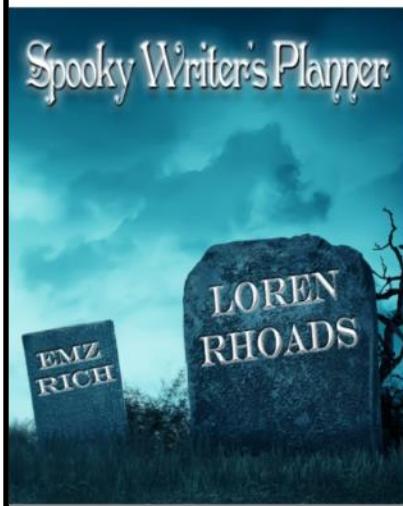
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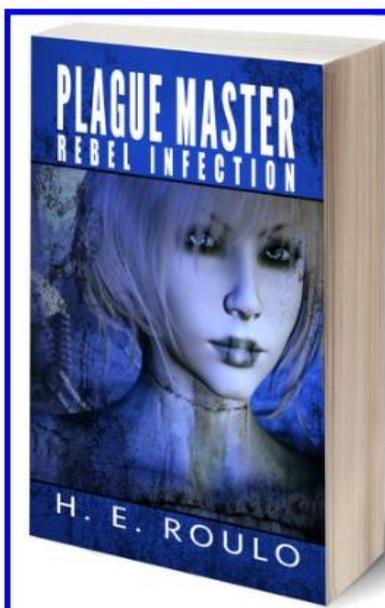


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PLAGUE MASTER: REBEL INFECTION

BY H.E. ROULO



Trevor's return from the zombie infection makes him unique. It also makes him dangerous.

He's a hero on his homeworld, celebrated for finding a vaccine against the zombie virus, but the ruling Founders don't trust him and his low origins. When the revolution comes, Trevor is caught in the middle.

Despite his homeworld's troubles, a message from a Plague Master forces Trevor to seek reinforcements. He hunts for Kristin, the woman he left behind, and an answer to why the vaccine is failing.

He and his friends must fight on space stations and worlds overtaken with infected to discover the terrible truth about his cure.

Raspberry Chipotle Chicken Salad



Finding the ideal summer salad is no small feat, but this one's a prime candidate. Our raspberry chipotle chicken is a little bit sweet and a little bit hot. When it's used to top off a fresh, crisp salad with caramelized onions, it is perfection.

Chipotle, pronounced *Chih-Poat-Lay*, is a ripe Jalapeño pepper, dried and smoked. Used by the Aztecs to preserve chilies, the smoking of jalapeños dates back centuries. Chipotle flavor, differing greatly from fresh jalapeños, has a unique flavor profile of dark chili, smoke, and earthy flavors. Chipotles in adobo sauce are rehydrated and canned with tomato sauce, onion, vinegar, garlic, and other spices. In our summer salad, these chipotles, combined with sweet raspberry preserves and caramelized sweet onions, add just the right touch of summer heat.

Ingredients - Salad

- *Green leaf lettuce
- *1 green bell pepper
- *1 radish
- *2 Roma tomatoes
- *2 to 4 green onions
- *1 sweet onion
- *2 tablespoons butter
- *1 tablespoon olive oil
- *Zesty Italian dressing

Ingredients - Chicken

- *1 large chicken breast
- *1/2 teaspoon smoked salt
- *1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
- *1/2 teaspoon fresh ground black pepper
- *1 tablespoon cream sherry
- *2 tablespoons olive oil

Ingredients - Glaze

- *7 ounce can of chipotle in adobo sauce
- *4 tablespoons raspberry preserves
- *2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar

Preparation - Salad

- *Cut or tear 8-10 leaves of lettuce into bite-size pieces.
- *Core the bell pepper and discard stem, membrane, and seeds. Slice bell pepper into 1/4-inch strips.
- *Cut the stem and root from the radish. Cut the radish top to bottom and slice into 1/8-inch half-rounds.
- *Cut the top of the Roma tomatoes to remove stems. Cut tomatoes lengthwise into 6 wedges.
- *Cut the roots from the green onions and remove the first layer of skin. Cut green onions into 1/2-inch diagonal slices.
- *Mix all the cut salad ingredients together. Set aside.
- *Cut the ends from the sweet onion and slice into 1/4-inch rounds.
- *Place the butter in a frypan over high heat and add 1 tablespoon olive oil and the sweet onion slices. Stir onions periodically to separate into individual rings and to prevent burning.
- *As the sweet onions begin to caramelize and turn brown, reduce heat incrementally to prevent burning. When onions are caramelized, soft, and brown, remove from heat and set aside.



Preparation - Chicken

- *Place one large chicken breast flat on a cutting board. Carefully cut the length of the chicken breast into two equally thick pieces.
- *Remove the chicken from the cutting board and place a large sheet of plastic wrap over the cutting board.
- *Place chicken pieces flat, side by side, onto the plastic wrap.
- *Fold the plastic wrap loosely over the chicken.
- *Using a meat mallet, pound wrapped chicken breast on both sides into a flat layer of mostly consistent thickness, taking care not to tear the plastic wrap.
- *In a flat-bottomed dish large enough to hold chicken pieces, add smoked salt, cumin, and black pepper.



- *Add cream sherry and olive oil to dish and mix marinade with a fork.
- *Remove plastic wrap and place chicken in the dish. Roll chicken in marinade until covered with oil and spices.
- *Let chicken marinade for 10-15 minutes, turning once.

Preparation - Glaze

- Be aware the chipotle peppers in adobo sauce will stain clothing and counters. Clean any spills immediately with soap and water.
- *Remove 1/2 of the chipotle peppers (with sauce) from can to a small bowl.
 - *Remove any stems from the peppers.
 - *Using the edge of a spoon, mash peppers in the bowl into small pieces.
 - *Add raspberry preserves, balsamic vinegar, and mashed chipotle to a small fry pan. Place on medium-high heat.
 - *Cook until reduced to 70% of the original volume. If necessary, reduce heat as you cook to prevent splattering or burning. Remove from heat and set glaze aside to cool.



Cook

If you prefer to use a grill to cook the chicken until it browns, cover the chicken with glaze and grill for a few minutes to set the glaze. But if grilling is not your best option, follow the instructions below to cook the chicken in the oven.

*Preheat the oven to 400 degrees.

*Lay the chicken pieces flat on a shallow roasting pan and place the pan in a pre-heated oven. Cook for 20-25 minutes until the chicken reaches 145 degrees.

*Turn the oven to "High Broil" and return the chicken to the oven, 5 to 6 inches from the broiling element. Cook for 3 minutes, allowing chicken to brown.

*Remove the chicken from the oven and brush both sides with glaze.

*Return the chicken to the oven broiler for 2-3 minutes until glaze sets but does not burn.

*Remove the chicken from the oven and allow the chicken to cool until safe to handle.

*Carefully transfer chicken to the cutting board. Using a knife and a fork, cut the chicken into 3/8-inch-wide strips.

Serve

*Stack salad, caramelized onions, and sliced chicken on each plate. Serve with a zesty Italian dressing. ■



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First, a caveat. This isn't a story about how I dropped a hundred pounds in a short amount of time through a lot of exercises, a total mind shift, and a few small miracles. It is a story of a lot of hard work and dedication, as any weight loss journey is.

My weight has always been a bit of a struggle. After having a kid and hitting middle age, it got harder to keep my weight down. At my heaviest, I was getting a lot of aches and pains I didn't use to have, all of them centered around where the weight fell the heaviest. I got winded walking up stairs and it was hard to run around with my son.

I had to do something about my climbing weight, so I started trying apps. I had some success, a few pounds down here and there but not much else. I didn't like the food restrictions and I rebelled. I'd lose some weight, crave sweets or pizza, and then I'd binge. I tried different apps. I finally found a combination of apps that works, and I got my family involved, too, because it's nearly impossible to lose weight when everyone

around you is eating all the unhealthy food you're craving.

I started in earnest in October of 2019 and I've lost roughly thirty pounds so far, with probably another twenty to go to fall into the healthy weight zone. The ripple effect has been interesting to see. My family has begun to eat healthier and my husband has been turning the basement into a workout room that we can all use. The biggest key to my success has been my love for and the support of my loved ones. ■



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Doctors, scientists, and parents are devoting much time and energy to finding out what causes autism. One fascinating aspect of the search is how closely some contributing factors resemble the sources of amazing superheroes' powers. Such powers arise from three conditions:

*Artificial, external sources like Tony Stark's Iron Man suit or the radioactive spider that bit Peter Parker.

*Exceptional human abilities such as genius-level IQ like Lex Luthor or having superior physical abilities like Daredevil and Green Arrow.

*Superhuman abilities characteristic of being aliens such as Superman or the Silver Surfer, gods like Thor, or nonhuman creatures such as Nightcrawler and Rocket Raccoon.

Environmental toxins, hazardous waste, and other pollutants are increasing dangers. In their paper, "Environmental risk factors for autism: an evidence-based review of systematic reviews and meta-analyses" authors Amirhossein Modabbernia, Eva Velthorst, and Abraham Reichenberg write, "The studies on toxic elements have been largely limited by their design, but there is enough evidence for the association between

some heavy metals (most important inorganic mercury and lead) and ASD that warrants further investigation."

Could the higher-functioning forms of autism be considered superpowers? Workplace studies show how valuable some autistic traits can be. "It seems obvious that people who are better at sustaining concentration, managing complexity, and paying attention to details can solve problems faster. That is exactly what JPMorgan Chase has discovered. JPMorgan Chase found compared to peers, the Autism at Work employees were forty-eight percent faster and as much as ninety-two percent more productive," writes Aron Mercer in his article "Is Autism A Superpower?"

Is it possible autism is more than just a biochemical and/or psychiatric condition? Does it arise from sources more spiritual and metaphysical? New Age thinking says yes, calling those people Indigo Children. The term achieved widespread popularity thanks to *The Indigo Children* written by Lee Carroll and Jan Tober. Indigos are intelligent, easily bored, dislike being confined by conventional rules of behavior, and have a talent for convincing their parents they are enlightened beings from other planets.

Retired professor of philosophy and skeptic Robert Todd Carroll notes that many of the commentators on the indigo phenomenon are of varying qualifications and expertise, and parents may prefer labeling their child an indigo as an alternative to a diagnosis that implies poor parenting, narcissistic parenting, damage, or mental illness. Autism and disability consultant Mitzi Waltz, a research associate at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, has considered the Indigo Child as a re-mythologizing of the biomedical category of autism—a return to the myth of the “changeling.”

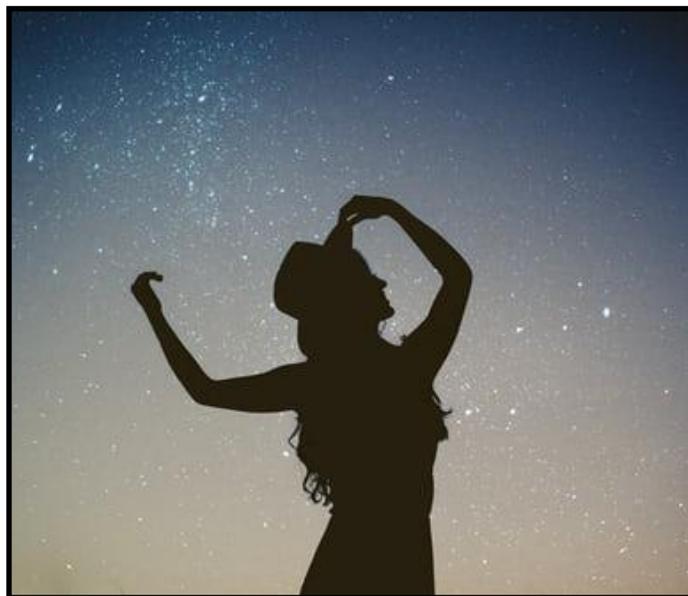
Up to the 19th Century, in rural areas of Western Europe people lived in fear of the fairies carrying off human babies and leaving an elf-child in their place. These “changelings” were most likely children whose healthy appearance lasted months or even years only to change overnight. Fairy changelings and Indigo Children can be seen as two sides of the same coin. In an agrarian culture where organized religion dominated public perception, frantic parents blamed the cruelty of evil spirits. Now, in the Digital Age, some parents want to believe



their children have special powers they can use to save the world. Either way, the impact on the children is dire, ranging from overmedicating them to getting no real medical diagnosis and no support services at all. Such drastic circumstances bring to mind the origin stories of supervillains.

People who prefer science to mysticism are looking into whether or not autism indicates progress toward human evolution. One such person is Adam Hunt, who asks, “Is Autism The Next Stage of Human Evolution?”

“Although there are no clear sources to turn to as canonical texts defending the pro-autism position, if there was such a text,” says Adam. “Its line



of argument would probably go something like this: autism evolved to provide specialist abilities, including improved rationality and improved memory. It is the driving force behind technological development over many thousands of years, and in particular is responsible for the revolutionary advances seen in the last few hundred years. Autistic minds show improvements upon the normal (or ‘neurotypical’) way of thinking in certain areas; those areas are exactly what we need more of as an advancing human race.”

These days many superheroes don't need secret identities. Aquaman is who he is all the time. Steve Rogers is Captain America 24/7. In the real world, autistic people are everywhere. The ICU nurse whose OCD comes in very handy for a detail-oriented job. The barista who can recite every fact about coffee. In his article “The Secret About ‘Why We Need Superheroes’ That Everybody Should Know,” John Sorensen writes, “Superheroes are here to inspire us and raise us up metaphorically. They are not here to replace us, or do the hard work of living for us. Each of us must find our own hero within our own values, mission and purpose in life if we wish to live a truly satisfying life.”

With support and understanding, autistic people can be their own heroes and change our world. ■





At the mountainous feet of the Wairarapa, in the southeast region of the North Island of New Zealand, sits the town of Masterton. It is home of the Golden Shears World Sheep Shearing Competition (a sport still trying to get a foothold in the summer Olympics), as well as native home to film director James Cameron and Nobel-winning scientist Maurice Wilkins, who discovered DNA.

While such a small place has made huge contributions to the world at large, what Masterton might be most famous for is its “tramping” as it is affectionately referred to in New Zealand, or what we Americans call hiking. The town of Masterton is the starting point for some of the best hiking in the world. When referencing a map, sections are divided into two areas, the Upper Hutt and the Lower Hutt. Some of the higher foothills have also been named as points of reference, the largest affectionately known as Jumbo. Hiking clubs offer day and weekend guided hikes.

While in Masterton, don't miss visiting Mt. Bruce, the local nature preserve and bird sanctuary.

The goal of the preserve is to breed native birds, particularly the most famous bird of New Zealand, the Kiwi bird whose populations once placed it on the endangered species list. Programs also aim at keeping invasive species in check by way of the most humane practices. Most notably, you can also sponsor a Kiwi bird while you're there. ■





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The Garden Is More Than Just the Gardener



It has been a wild year with a lot of changes and a lot of growth. A full growing season has come and gone with another one underway. While I have spent a good portion of my time focused mainly on the garden and the plants in it, I would be remiss if I failed to mention the help I had in bringing my vision into reality.

First, let's acknowledge the landscaping team, as they are the very foundation of the garden. Without them, I would not have been able to bring it to life nearly as well. Tony, my landscaper, saw my hand-drawn plans for the garden and we walked through the then-overgrown space. He could see what I had tried to do and came up with ideas for how to make the new garden plan happen. With each new segment of the garden, from the sidewalk-facing retaining walls to the gray stone raised beds, he kept me in the loop about everything his team discovered that could be potentially problematic for the plan or that might be something cool to add. They transplanted the trees and plants with the care they might have shown for their own plants, and for that, I cannot thank them enough.

In fact, the team returned not too long ago to see how the garden turned out after the planting and growth season and to see how the transplanted trees are doing.

We have also already begun working on a new project together that will bring some renovations and additions we did to the house into harmony with the garden design. They also have been helpful with back-filling the dirt in the beds now they have had a chance to settle and to add an extra level of stones to the center circle planter in the garden.

In addition to the landscaping crew, I had a lot of additional and too often overlooked help from insects and birds. Yes, I did plan the garden so it would attract a good blend of pollinators, not just bees but also certain wasps and ants. I intermingled lavender, rosemary, flower-of-an-hour, and a plethora of other plants near my tomatoes and squash and as a result, had the best crop I have had in over a decade. I even set up a bee house for the different types of bees. They earned it as the garden practically hummed with the buzz of their wings all year. The plan to keep them coming back this year is a successful blend of mint and lemon balm and a lot of native wildflowers I collected on my walks locally.

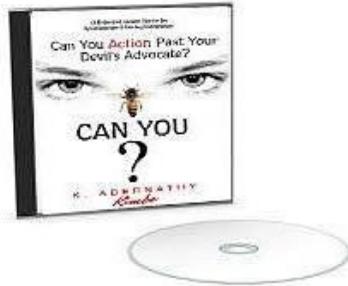
So, how do birds factor into this mix? They provided the garden with an amazing selection of "volunteer" plants that have established themselves here, and they keep me company when I work in the garden. This garden has become a community. ■



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HERO'S



Photo By: Jennifer Camp

Your call for duty was received.
 In this we could not believe
 The opportunity to serve
 would not be what you deserved.
 For there are not enough words
 Or the right thing to say,
 For your ultimate sacrifice
 That fateful day.
 Your time.
 Your dime.
 Your wife.
 Your life.
 Your soul.

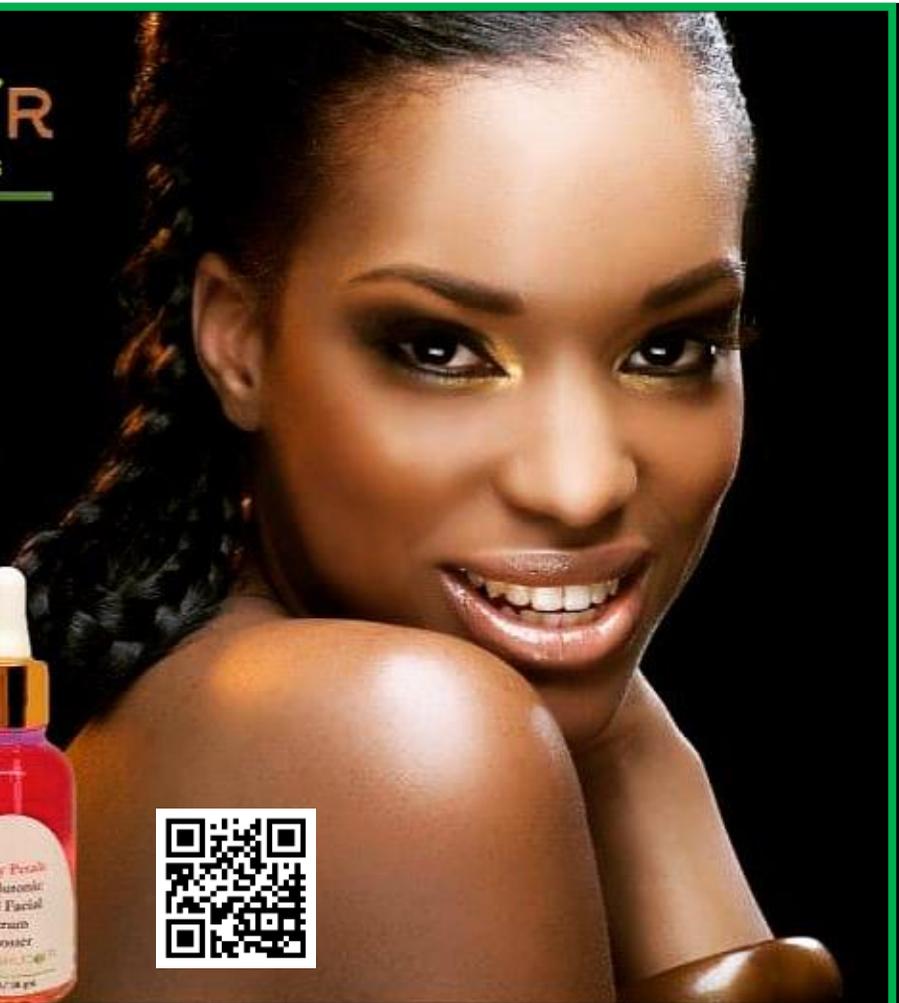
And the toll it has taken,
 The world now shaken,
 Gone but never forgotten.
 Living on in the memory
 Of friends and family,
 You will be. ■



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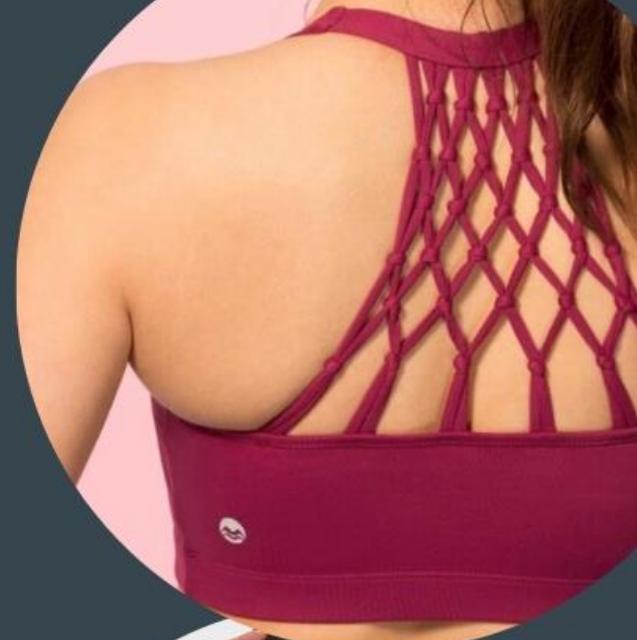
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