

—IN THE RED

by Charles Colyott

It comes in fits and spasms, erupting across the pages in droplets and sprays. Points intermingle into lines and curves. Lines and curves intertwine into symbols the mind transforms into sounds. Symbols gather and align, changing from sounds to ideas.

It is a kind of magic, really, when you stop to think about it. . .

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Everyone wants to know how it started. Well, it began like this—standing at the mail box, I opened the letter and read the short, form response. Sadly, it said, *Forizons Magazine* had to pass on my story.

I thought of the piece and ran through it in my mind; was the magic somehow incomplete? I closed my eyes and saw each word. Each part of the formula was whole—everything was correct and perfect.

It was a simple thing to crumple the paper. I threw it into the ditch by the mailbox and walked away. When someone's job is to pass judgment upon the work of others, they lose their own magic. I don't write for them. Their corporate mindsets and their soulless publications don't produce art. They smother it and kill it and dance around its grave.

They only buy what's safe. I know this. If they'd accepted it, that would only have proved my writing was shit.

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I did not tell Maureen. Her broken record nagging was feeble and tiresome long before it ever left her mouth.

There was no art in that woman at all. . .not back then, at least.

She sat there at her table, leaning over her new presentation with a rogue strand of hair in her eyes, her hands stained with smears of paint; I felt nothing but a sort of numb disgust.

Tomorrow she would roll up her clean lines and sanitized colors. She would slip the fruits of her labors in a cardboard tube. In time, it would be the backdrop for some corporate hack's mind control ad program to sell more toothpaste or detergent or—god forbid—feminine hygiene products.

The checks, she said, cashed just the same.

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And we're back to that again.

'Why won't you just talk to them?' she'd say.

'With practice you could write reams of ad copy in your sleep,' she'd say.

Ever wonder why they call it 'copy,' I'd say.

I am not a copier, I'd say.

I am a revolutionary.

I write from my soul.

'Your soul doesn't pay the bills,' she'd say.

And, right on schedule, she'd turn away, maybe knock some of her paint over for emphasis, and stomp off to the bed room.

I don't have to tell you that she slams the door, do I? You hear it in your head even though the words aren't there.

That's part of the magic.

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Years ago, on Maureen's advice, I joined a writer's group. She'd gotten the idea from some marketing book somewhere. Not only was it valuable to share and critique each other's work, she said, but it was a tool for promotion. As if sitting in the cafe of some chain store, once a month, circle-jerking with these morons was time well spent.

One of the first pearls of wisdom I received from them was 'Know your audience'. Looking around the group, I knew enough to know that this wasn't it—an obese, pink-haired old nag with a penchant for syrupy romance stories, an ill-kempt professor type with hair jutting out discordantly from his scalp and a shirt tail always just escaping the wooly prison of his giant fuzzy sweater (he wrote shitty, masturbatory poetry, of course), and a large-breasted soccer mom with twin interests in young adult fiction and our rumped professor's disheveled old cock.

Oh, and then there was Tim.

Tim was alright, I suppose, for a hack. He was the only one with the ability to put words together in ways that made other people care. Unfortunately, he'd used his powers to make a quick buck. It started with an article for a men's magazine—one of the ones where nubile young celebrities strip down to their bras and panties to plug their latest movies—and, after that sale, an agent took an interest in one of Tim's novellas.

I'd read the novella. Typical cookie-cutter genre shit. And of all the genres, it was horror. Such a waste of talent.

He said to me once, 'It's all a game—learn the rules and play.'

Easy enough for him to say. His game was money. He wrote what other people wanted to read and that's why he was on his way to the supermarket racks.

He'd found his audience, that's all. Never mind that his audience consisted of brain-dead teens, socially inept comic book collectors, and—worst of all—giggling little goth groupies that thought Tim was 'a cutie'.

I know my audience too, and they are the ones that read my words and understand. If only five people on earth truly ever get what it is that I do, that's four more than I would ever have believed. I don't take the easy way. I don't give people what they want to read. I give them what they need. The creation process is hard and