

# Yggdrasil

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Michael R. Collings

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PRIDE: SUPERBIA  
Also: Hubris, Arrogance, Vanity, Narcissism  
Planet: Sun  
Constellation: Gemini, Leo  
Punishment: Being broken on the wheel  
Symbols: Peacock, Lion, Horse  
Color: Violet

## Except....

When tolerance grows into creed—  
Stilted, stiff, and codified—  
And all involved perforce accede  
To rules that must not be denied,

It ceases to count as virtuous,  
Transforms instead to a thorny vice  
That twines and wanders, tortuous,  
Demands an unrelenting price.

“I tolerate all other thoughts,”  
One says, “Except...,” (“Aye, there’s the rub!”);  
For in that single word is wrought  
The block that acts as a painful stub;

Except negates the previous all,  
Reduces it to meaninglessness,  
Places an absolute in thrall,  
Provides a warrant to oppress.

Tolerate, in fact, implies  
“Allowing the disagreeable”;  
Once barriers begin to rise,  
The claim nears the contemptible.

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## A Good Deed

I did a good deed today.  
It truly was,  
A spontaneous, from-the-heart  
Act  
Without deliberation,  
Decided in the moment.

Then, the second thoughts:  
That was good of me,  
Wasn't it....,  
And yes, it was.  
I should be proud....,  
And there it was.

The subtle  
Blot.

Did I do the deed  
For itself?  
Or for the pleasant  
Glow,  
The knowing warmth,  
That only pride can give.

## Castle Dracul

The turret's shattered now;  
A hollow, ruined brow  
    Above the window's unforgiving eye.  
Broken arches crumble;  
Rough foundations rumble;  
    Ancient echoes hesitate...and die.  
The nimble dance of tourists' feet  
Awakens shadows where remotest ages meet.

Entry paid, they chatter,  
Babble on and blatter,  
    As if not caring on whose stones they tread;  
They poke and pry in corners,  
These silly, haughty scorners—  
    With every sound affront the safely dead;  
But hidden in their scoffing tones...  
A liquid, languid tremor chills them to their bones.

Yet none among the horde  
Would dare to slash the cord  
    That binds their fragile lives to certitudes;  
And none would dare confess  
They feel the constant press  
    Of darkness as it braids slow time and broods;  
Of distant moans of mortal pain  
That thread among the timeless stones—unheard, yet plain.

For though the turret's shattered,  
Its stones collapsed and scattered;  
    And silence tapestries through empty halls;  
The castle's not deserted  
Its evil not inverted—  
    Its owner has not truly left its walls,  
But waits, and plaits, his reprobation  
With the endless arrogance of countless generations.

GREED: AVARITIA

Also: Avarice, Covetousness, Aquisitiveness, Cupidity

Planet: Saturn

Constellation: Virgo, Aquarius

Punishment: Boiled alive in (expensive, luxurious) Oil

Symbols: Frog

Color: Yellow

### **Hoarders**

When she died, the not-so-grieving heirs  
Entered the house for the first time in a decade.  
Noisome boxes clogged the entrance stairs;  
Step by step, the nephews grew more afraid.

The living room was non-negotiable,  
Packed with antique furniture, worm-worn  
And worthless; stacked with battered marble tables;  
Piled with books, their swollen pages torn.

Room by room, the same. The attic door,  
Blocked by past cascades of rotted treasures;  
The basement, with its rusted locked—one more  
Denial of their hope for venial pleasures.

They sold out for the base price of the land;  
The wait had not repaid as they had planned.

## Dame Gothel

Not enough that rampion grew  
Where Dame Gothel laid her claim,  
Secure behind a garden wall,  
Its wilding impulse tamed.  
(Its common name, Rapunzel, gives  
The heroine her name.)

What mattered more was...it was hers,  
To do with as she willed—  
To watch its lovely flowers bloom  
From her chair beneath the sill,  
Or slice it up for salad stuff  
And eat till she was filled.

Then, one morning, a plant was gone!  
She shrieked in bitter rage—  
And set a trap the following night  
To pay the thief his wage;  
She ended up with an infant girl:  
A just exchange, she gauged.

The tower was strong and steep and tall,  
With neither door nor stair;  
There the girl lived on, alone—  
Dame Gothel would not share;  
The girl was hers and hers alone,  
Repayment she thought fair.

Years passed by, Rapunzel aged,  
Dame Gothel's greed increased;  
Till on the day Rapunzel lapsed,  
And Gothel's pleasure ceased—  
The girl announced her clothes were too tight;  
She wanted a new chemise.

Now, this Dame Gothel was no fool;  
She knew what her prisoner ate,  
And she knew there was only one reason why  
The girl could gain such weight—  
Quicker than that, she abandoned the girl  
And left her to her fate.

Then—Rapunzel was hers!—she set a trap,  
Something at which she excelled,

To punish the man who had stolen her treasure  
And send him on to Hell—  
He came, he climbed, he saw her face;  
She cackled, she cut, he fell!

That concluded the sad, sad tale,  
As far as Dame Gothel cared;  
She little reckoned where her victims went,  
If dead, or how they fared;  
Someone had poached on what was hers—  
And Dame Gothel never shared.

She went back to her rampion plot  
And reinforced the wall  
With broken glass along the top  
(Enchanted, to slice and maul)  
Draped her greed on a wounded heart,  
And wore it like a shawl.

The storytellers' versions claim  
That Rapuzel found her Prince,  
Wept two tears that restored his sight  
(A magical eye-wash rinse)—  
And with their twins lived happily...,  
But I am not convinced.

I think the twins, mature and grown,  
Sought Dame Gothel's house,  
Pulled off an enchantment of their own,  
Trapped her like a mouse,  
And buried her vinegar corpse in the plot  
Where her rampion roots could souse.

## The Shard

From the glitter-gleam of granite—  
Rock-scaffold of the planet,  
    By which Gaia's mysteries are warded;  
From the milky sheen of quartz  
Where gold flecks and disports  
    (Both true and fools', to tantalize the unguarded);  
From glassy mica's cleavage planes...  
She forms a monster to support her threatened reign.

Yet of her own she falters,  
Her rash decision alters,  
    Refuses to be blatantly this callous;  
She withdraws her essence,  
The Goodness of her presence,  
    From mica, quartz, and granite—leaving malice,  
Spiked and razored, tempered hard;  
She speaks her will. It is obeyed: "Release the Shard!"

Its footfalls clack like ice,  
Hiss-crackle...once, then twice—  
    And IT sets out, a vengeful pestilence,  
To decimate the greedy  
Who will not help the needy  
    Yet steal from good Gaia's innocence;  
One in ten will cringe and cower  
As IT gives unrelenting proof of ITS dark power.

IT thrusts ITS crystal blade  
Where seismic plates are laid  
    Like overlapping sheets of armored steel;  
IT twists...and earthquakes rumble,  
Man's feeble structures tumble,  
    And—like or not—earth's petty people kneel:  
One in ten expires in  
Raw agony amidst the harsh, soul-deafening din.

Their wails reach Her ears,  
Stir Mother-Earth to tears,  
    And yet She will not halt ITS dreadful toll;  
Fire, flood, and famine—  
IT spares not prince nor gamin  
    But—one in ten— IT plays ITS lawful role.  
The greed-bound children of the flesh  
Recover from each onslaught, embrace their sins afresh.

They hunger after gold  
That glisters in Her folds,  
    Ignoring treasures they might grow or make;  
Through droughts and epidemics,  
The Shard inflicts pandemics—  
    And good Gaia sorrows for their sake;  
But they persist in fatal errors:  
They choose to live among their self-exacted terrors.

And so, through Time, it goes—  
The children would depose  
    Their rightful Mother-Parent from Her throne;  
Those She craves to shelter  
Elect instead to welter  
    In blood and pain through choices of their own—  
And The Shard persists...a mortal peril  
To those who seek to make Gaia void and sterile.

LUST: LUXURIA  
Also: Lecherousness, Lasciviousness, Wantonness  
Planet: Venus  
Constellation: Scorpio, Libra  
Punishment: Smothered in Fire and Brimstone  
Symbols: Cow, Snake  
Color: Blue

### **Aripiprazole**

An antipsychotic, recommended in the treatment of bipolar disorder and as an additional treatment in major depression disorder.

At times, he longs for lust:  
Not sexual lust, no, just  
Anything to end  
The lassitude, to bend  
Ennui into a mighty  
Storm—a frenzied, flighty  
Dash across far stars  
Once flickering in his mind,  
Now blackened, cold, and blind,  
Murdered majesty...  
A mocking travesty  
Of what they once had been—

Or gaze into the grin  
Of a fang-hung creature out  
Of Time and Place, a gout  
Of spouting gore dripping  
From its maw, ripping  
Light and life from planets,  
Suns, and systems; granite  
Flesh and granite heart  
Unmoved by mankind's part  
In the endless cosmic game;  
Nor empathy nor shame  
To halt or hinder eldritch  
Fury...with a twitch  
And hitch to pitch  
Whole worlds into black wrath—

Or trace the bitter path,  
The spiral down and down,  
Until ambitions drown,  
Hope wilts, brown and sere,

And lust, before so near,  
Dwindles to a spark,  
A stark, eternal dark;  
Until mere thoughts of thoughts  
Form throbbing Gordian knots  
Aching to be severed,  
Freed from grieving, fevered  
Waking, desperate  
For momentary respite  
And obscuring sleep...  
Impervious, sweet sleep,  
The little death of sleep....

**A Short-Short Poem on Excuse-Making, Rationalization, and Self-Vindication; or, When the  
End Justifies the Means**

“The Heart wants what it wants - or else it does not care –“ Emily Dickinson,  
Letter to Mrs. Samuel Bowles, Spring, 1862

The heart wants what the heart wants.”—“Lake Placid,”\_1999

Lust  
Is just...  
If one must!

## Vampire

“Vampires are not beautiful, even if they look pretty. They’re not generous, they don’t protect, and they don’t care. They are parasites that take. They are the ultimate rapists, Sam, because they take breath and blood, hope and trust, beauty and life and all they give in return is pain, betrayal and death.”—Jonathan Maberry, “Goth Chicks” in Beneath the Skin.

The moon weeps blood. Clouds hide their swollen faces  
Lest they share complicity. It nears.  
Illicitly—as beast or man—it braces  
For the ascent. It smells her dreaming fears.

She murmurs in her sleep, already trying  
To forget phantasms that make her blood race cold...  
And hot. She lies burning, freezing, flying—  
Crying with inchoate loss...unsouled.

He mounts and penetrates. The act is done.  
A drop of blood remains. He smells it, tastes.  
Chooses in that breath to turn, to shun.  
He leaves. Slowly. No thought. No shame. No haste.

He has satisfied his lusts: Control...Power.  
She is left with tears, churning...sour.

ENVY: INVIDIA  
Also: Jealousy of Others  
Planet: Mercury  
Constellation: Sagittarius, Capricorn  
Punishment: Immersion in freezing Water  
Symbols: Dog  
Color: Green

## I Want

A neighbor boy, in the way-back-when,  
Invited us over one day  
To watch his brand-new T.V. set  
Before we went to play.

We watched ten minutes, then his mom  
Shooed us out-of-doors;  
We swung and swung on his giant swings  
While she swept pristine floors.

At the time, I thought, “What luck!  
“A swing, and T.V., too...”;  
Until there came his screams at night,  
And his bruises—black and blue.

A kid in high school had a car,  
A sporty, polished red;  
I dreamed each night about that car  
Before I went to bed.

I wanted it, with a want so deep  
It seemed a taste, a touch—  
In my short life, I’d never wanted  
Anything quite so much.

All that summer my spite increased;  
It steadily grew and bred—  
Until the night my friend went home  
And shot himself in the head.

Year after year, my eye would catch  
On some random thing or other;  
Something I’d want—some person resent—  
Until I’d seem to smother.

Each time, before my good sense fled,  
And envy ruled my soul,  
I'd discover a price those people paid  
That eventually claimed its toll.

Along the way, I've learned a truth,  
One with a curious twist:  
The people whom I envied most,  
Simply did not exist.

## The Envy of Demons

“The door is open, Benjamin. I am here. And now others will wake and feel my presence and they will remember the world of men and the pleasures of human flesh and they will join—”

—Christopher Golden, Ararat.

Ghost and ghoul and revenant,  
Demon...dybbuk...haunt—  
Beings dark, malevolent,  
Discorporate and gaunt;

They tremble in the dimmest regions,  
Hovering on fears;  
Talon-perch in countless legions  
With crooked smiles and sneers;

Waiting for the feast to start—  
The invitation spoken,  
Reckless mortals taking part...,  
Impedimenta broken;

And soon the floods of sense begin—  
Sheer physicality—  
The rush of heat through blood-drenched skin...,  
Impure Carnality!

The precious anguish of a slash  
That makes hot fluids spurt;  
The weeping wounds that make them gnash  
Their teeth in endless hurt;

The glut of touch and sight and taste  
That only bodies know,  
That human flesh-sacks scorn and waste,  
To spectral creatures' woe—

And, too, the joys of sound and smell,  
Through sullied apertures;  
Senses waken, cravings swell—,  
Ancient rage endures;

For the instant...to possess—  
Dark heart of every plan—  
A temple built of human flesh:  
Thus Demon envies Man.

## Dawn: A Minute Poem

That moment in fast-breaking day,  
    When rose and gray  
    Compete for rule  
    In fatal duel;  
When final stars bid slow farewell,  
    And fears compel  
    Me to my grave,  
    My coffin-cave—  
My ice-laced heart constricts with grief;  
    I curse the thief....  
    The Light!—the pain  
    Begins again....

GLUTTONY: GULA

Also: Thoughtlessness of Others

Planet: Jupiter

Constellation: Taurus

Punishment: Forced to eat Rats, Toads, and Snakes

Symbols: Pig

Color: Orange

### **The Happy Shopper**

(To the Tune: "The Happy Wanderer")

Wheat grows atop the Safeway shelves,  
And oats and corn and rice,  
In scores of different packagings,  
Each at a different price:

CHORUS: Gluttony, gluttony,  
Gluttony, gluttony-hee-hee-hee-hee-hee,  
Gluttony, gluttony,  
Each at a different price!

I take a dozen boxes home  
To meet each eater's taste;  
If we're not done before it stales,  
The rest goes in the waste:

CHORUS: Gluttony, gluttony,  
Gluttony, gluttony-hee-hee-hee-hee-hee,  
Gluttony, gluttony,  
The rest goes in the waste!

Each child might eat a bowl or four,  
But one's enough for me;  
It matters not my bowl's a quart—  
I empty it with glee:

CHORUS: Gluttony, gluttony,  
Gluttony, gluttony-hee-hee-hee-hee-hee,  
Gluttony, gluttony,  
I empty it with glee!

I never think of hungry mouths  
That live beyond my door;  
For sure, some kindly souls out there  
Will help the needy poor:

CHORUS: Gluttony, gluttony,  
Gluttony, gluttony-hee-hee-hee-hee,  
Gluttony, gluttony  
Will help the needy poor!

## Conspicuous Consumption

Up close, he seemed a walking cliché:  
Middle-aged, keen to maintain  
The image of pugnacious youth,  
Dressed to deny an obvious truth—  
Ostentatious silver keychain;  
Backward ballcap, worn to downplay

Incipient baldness; ear-rings and -stud  
Appropriately placed; black biker jacket,  
Club name announced in ornate script  
(Olde Englysshe, of course); nondescript  
Jeans neither faded nor torn—the packet  
Designed to hint at carnage, blood.

Insouciant, he ordered: black  
Coffees in to-go cups, three  
Sandwiches. Paid. Walked out.  
And climbed—no paradox or doubt—  
Into his shiny SUV,  
A brand-new, snow-white Cadillac.

## **Zombi Savane**

For Brett McBean and Mr. Joseph

They think that we crave B-R-A-I-N-S. Not true.  
Yes, recently at least, the movies  
Picture us as shuffling hordes who,  
Mindless, arms outstretched—Zombies—

Rise from graves with one desire:  
Ravage the living, crack skulls for brains  
Still warm with pulsing blood...dire  
Cannibals...but to what gain?

For we are zombis...captive souls  
Enslaved, serving our masters' breath.  
We crave, but do not know what toll  
Will earn us honest, lasting death—

The only taste to, by default,  
Release us: a single grain of salt.

WRATH: IRA  
Also: Anger, Fury, Rage  
Planet: Mars  
Constellation: Aries  
Punishment: Dismembered alive  
Symbols: Bear  
Color: Red

## Outrage

Today, the back-up button for  
Emotions seems to set  
Beyond the narrow bounds of common  
Human sentiment.

It's not enough to calmly speak,  
Or agree to disagree;  
No, it's now required that one  
Embrace a thought...or flee.

We have outgrown such simple sins  
As anger or red wrath;  
Now we must follow disagreement  
Further down the path.

Eventually, both sides attain  
To heightened rhetorics,  
And choose to spurn, repulse their foes—  
Exclusive categorics.

Instead of saying, "That's not right,"  
We make outrage our brief;  
"Where's the outrage!"—as common as was  
Clara's "Where's the beef!"<sup>1</sup>

It's just an error in English, though,  
Supported through long years,  
That makes the O-word so dramatic  
When it's hammered at our ears.

For outrage in its original  
Had little to do with rage;  
It comes from Latin through old French:  
Ultra-, outrer-age.

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<sup>1</sup> The punch line in a 1984 Wendy's commercial, featuring Clara Peller.

“Madder-than-mad” is our modern take  
On a word that means “beyond”;  
There’s nothing in it to specify  
The wrath of which we’re fond.

## Ineluctable

Beneath the precipice of dream,  
Light slows and Time expands;  
THAT WHICH IS abates to a gleam,  
And WHAT IS NOT commands.

The raven spreads four lustrous wings,  
Delectable and white;  
Each earth-bound step becomes a spring  
That catapults to flight.

Phantom iris bloom into black,  
With scents of succulent grapes;  
Vague IS NOT YET and NEVER HAS BEEN  
Transmute into crystalline shapes.

But what begins as a wondrous show  
Inverts with fancy's whim;  
And savage passions sidewise grow,  
Sinister and grim.

In an instant, pleasures fade,  
Raw fury—wild—appears;  
Voices shrill to slash, abrade,  
Agonize deaf ears.

Each person—almost the ones day treasures—  
Finds fault with every action;  
Becomes a monster of rage beyond measure,  
A caricatured abstraction.

Hearts pound—in dream as well as life—  
Breaths constrict and halt;  
Each shriek becomes an eldritch knife,  
Each blame a rigid vault.

Exhausted, replete, too weak for commands,  
With rest a waning gleam—  
Time slows...and Light, with Dawn, expands.  
In the aftermath of dream.

**An Essay on Wrath**  
For Jonathan Maberry and ‘Sam Hunter’

First to mind...perhaps...the savage beasts  
Of fang and maw and claw, that slash and feast  
On blood; the ravagers of wildest places:  
The jungle’s depths, the mountain’s vasty spaces;  
But here we miss, for Wrath requires more,  
An element that rip and tear ignore;  
For Wrath is not the bear traditions say,  
Nor brutal wolf, red-eyed, trapped, at bay;  
No, these are anger, fury...mindless states  
Where reflex rules, animal craft abates;  
The mental process languishes, stagnates.

True wrath demands deep thought, consideration  
Of the wrong that gave it life; causation  
Leads to punishment—no twining, twisting;  
No wasteful gestures; no futile public fisting  
In the air to denounce the offense. Instead,  
Cold dedication to revenge. Dread  
Left alone to rankle, suppurate,  
Becomes but preface to a crueler fate:  
The perpetrator of the harm must not  
Suspect—“For God’s sake, Montressor!”—that aught  
Is amiss...and thus true, solemn Wrath is wrought.

And yet...in this self-centric course, a change—  
A shift that alters punisher. A strange  
Transfiguration takes effect as reason  
Bows to raw emotion, spirit-treason:  
Man to beast...or, not quite so, to something  
In between, chimæric fusion; and brings  
The primal element—intelligence—  
Subject to a primal passion; and sense  
Gives way as Werebeast seizes power. Can  
Any fault the fictionists who span  
The gap, who understand that Wer means man?

SLOTH: TRISTITIA, ACEDIA

Also: Laziness, Apathy, Indolence

Planet: Moon

Constellation: Cancer, Pisces

Punishment: Being Thrown into an Eternal Snake Pit, Eternally Running

Symbols: Goat

Color: Light Blue

### **A Use of Love**

Sloth, of all the deadly sins,  
Is not a use of Love—  
Debased, abased, abused, perverse,  
He takes the clichéd Dove

And wrings its neck—or better yet  
He (yawn) ignores its flight,  
Does not note the pearl-grey wings,  
Considers it a blight

On his time-long search for ease,  
For apathetic rest;  
And even that, he does not love—  
By pure default, it's best.

## Tomorrow

Tomorrow I will wash the lawn,  
Mow the dirty car;  
Tomorrow I will sleep at dawn,  
Rise with evening's star.

Tomorrow I will heal the poor,  
Feed the lone, unwell;  
Tomorrow I will open my door  
To none that ring my bell.

Tomorrow I will visit the bare,  
Clothe the prisoner's back;  
Tomorrow I will shelter the fair  
Among those who husbands lack.

Tomorrow I will join the herd  
Of those who serve with aplomb;  
And it matters naught that my list is absurd,  
Since tomorrows never come.

## Darkness

Darkness lumbers slowly, slowly,  
Creeps in corners, seeps through spaces;  
Be they damned or be they holy  
Darkness skulks in lonely places.

Darkness feels no need to hurry,  
Never stalks in haste or flurry;  
Sluggishly it spreads its fingers,  
Finds its victims...savors, lingers.

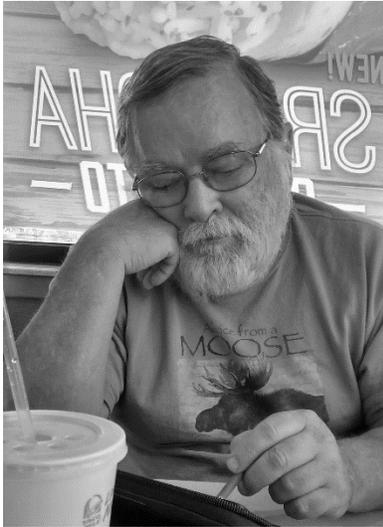
Darkness is no friend to vigor,  
But sinuous, insidious,  
Invades—as if fastidious;  
Despises being bound by rigor.

Darkness knows but soulless languor,  
Distanced from all sun-lit clangor.

# Post Scriptum

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MICHAEL R. COLLINGS, a three-time Bram Stoker Award® finalist, was recognized at the 2016 World Horror Convention as a GRAND MASTER OF HORROR. He is an internationally known educator, literary scholar and critic, poet, novelist, essayist, columnist, reviewer, and editor whose work over three decades—more than one hundred books and chapbooks and thousands of chapters, essays, reviews, and poems—has concentrated on science fiction, fantasy, and horror, emphasizing



the works of Stephen King, Orson Scott Card, C.S. Lewis, and others. His books for Starmont House, beginning in 1984, were among the earliest serious scholarly appraisals of King. His 1990 study of Card was the first book-length exploration of Card's fictions.

He has published more than two dozen volumes of poetry ranging from religious to mainstream to science fiction/fantasy and horror, including Naked to the Sun: Dark Visions of Apocalypse (1985, 2007); Dark Transformations: Deadly Visions of Change (1990, 2007); In the Void: Poems of Fantasy, Science Fiction, Myth, & Horror (2009); Som Certaine Sonets (2011); A Verse to Horrors: An Abecedar of Monsters and the Monstrous (2012), a Stoker® finalist; Taliesin: The Joseph Smith/King Arthur Sonets (2014); Corona Obscura (2016) a Stoker® finalist; Dark Designs: Forms and Fantasies—Speculative Poems (2016); White Noise (2016); The State of the disUnion (2016); Dear Emily, and Other Poems (2016); Many Waters: Poems of the Ordinary and the Outré (2017); and Indeterminate Rout: Birds—Real and Otherwise (2017).

He has published two discussions of writing, The Art and Craft of Poetry: Twenty Exercises toward Mastery (2009) and Chain of Evil: The JournalStone Guide to Writing Horror (2014).

He has served as Guest, Special Guest, and Guest of Honor at a number of cons, professional as well as fan-oriented, including Academic Guest of Honor at MythCon (Conference of the Mythopoeic Society), where he presented the Keynote Address on Orson Scott Card; Academic Guest of Honor at EnderCon, celebrating the novel's twenty-fifth anniversary; Special Guest at the Salt Lake Comic Con (2014); and three-time Academic Guest of Honor at the World Horror Con (2008, 2012, 2016).

He is a past Senior Publications Editor for JournalStone Publications, where several of the books he worked with went on to become Stoker® finalists; and his articles and reviews have appeared in both Hellnotes and the print-magazine Dark Discoveries. These and other writings are posted online at Collings Notes ([michaelrcollings.blogspot.com](http://michaelrcollings.blogspot.com)).

Retired as a professor emeritus of English after almost thirty years at Pepperdine University, where his courses included literature, composition, and creative writing, he lives in Idaho with his wife and number-one fan, Judi, and writes and writes and writes.

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