A Is For Awful, B Is For Blood,C Is For Creature, A Thing That Goes ThudAll stories begin

small, with a twist of fate.The teddy bear was a little dirty, a little frayed, and itsblack, button

eyes were a little loose. Someone hadlovingly stitched and patched its fuzzy, brown

sides,however, and it was well stuffed with straw. It lay on thefloor in a slick of blood, its long

muzzle pointing straightup at the ceiling.The sitting room of the Grey family was low and

cramped.A wood-burning stove stood in the corner, beside somebrightly colored number

blocks, a toy cutlass, and awooden train. A table, chairs, and various ornaments laybroken

or flung on their sides, and the yellow curtainswere torn. The room was even more cramped

with all themen in it, talking in tight, low voices above the muffledsobs from the back room.

Guild badges hung from chests,beneath grim, vengeful expressions. The air was

charged,like at a hanging. There was blood all over, but thosepresent wanted more.A tall

man entered, as rangy and grizzled as an oldmountain lion, and the voices hushed. Riding

spurs clinkedas he walked, and guns hung from his belt. He did not takehis hat off. He spoke

to a hefty man with a sergeant'sbadge, in a wilderness drawl that was soft andgentlemanly,

with just a hint of menace. "Your man in back.He got a name?""Grey, sir. Phineas

Grey.""Has he talked?"The sergeant glanced towards the back room. "Some ofthe men had

a go at him. Didn't say nothin' worthrepeatin', sir.""The neighbors, they hear anythin'?""If they

did--""--they ain't talkin'." Even behind his bushy, greymoustache, the man's expression told

what he thought ofthe neighbors."They're scared, sir," the sergeant said. This was

hisneighborhood, and he felt an odd compulsion to rise to itsdefense. "Proper scared. Been

a lot of sightings. Oddthings. Then this."The man looked at the sergeant for a while, his

eyeshidden under his hat. "Y'all know this part of town. Seenmany street kids hereabouts?

The Wee Malkies? The LittleSisters? Crooligans?""Not now you mention it, sir, no. Is that

important?"The man considered this for a long moment, then gesturedto the back room.

"Fetch our Mr. Phineas Grey to the cells.Mind he doesn't fall down any stairs on the way

there." Helooked around. "The victim?""Well, just…" The sergeant pointed over by the teddy

bear,and then at various other red, wet splashes around theroom. The man with the spurs

took a last look and left."Bleedin' Neverborn Hunters, thinkin' they're better'n us,"Sergeant

Kliegemann muttered, as he headed for themurderer in the back room. "This ain't got nothin'

to dowith him, anywise."Not long after, the sun came up, and the men all departed,leaving a

bruised, brooding emptiness in the house.Shadows came and went and came again as day

passedand night fell. Flies clustered around the darkening bloodin the silent rooms and

crawled on the teddy bear's fur,but the house stayed still and dead.And so things might have

remained. If fate had not lent ahand, the house would have been cleaned and strippedand

the teddy bear thrown away along with everythingelse. Things might have turned out very

differently indeedhad the rat not come along.Drawn by the blood-soaked straw, the rat

gnawed a hungryhole in the toy's side before picking it up in her jaws and

running back down into the sewers with her treat. Thesewers of Malifaux are home to things

much worse thanrats, and the sight of something raw and bloated eating anunwilling supper

frightened the rat into dropping the bearinto the foul water. It floated for a long time, passing

through unlit halls andold buried streets until a woman's hand closed over it andlifted it

clear."Ah," the Widow whispered in a voice like twigs on awindowpane, "you're perfect.

You've seen things." Fingersmore like knives gently stroked its button eyes.

"Theseremember, they do."Crooning softly over the sodden bear, the Widow skitteredup a

long flight of steps, through a trapdoor, and into theback of a long-closed shop. An old

spinning wheel and astool sat surrounded by a carpet of white bones. Shecleared a space

for the bear on the rotted floorboards bythe wheel, sliced a seam open with one of her

sharpfingers, and lowered her black bulk onto the stool, foldingher many legs underneath.

She opened her mouth, whichwas round and full of needles, and exhaled an inky, darkcloud

that she captured on the wheel and began to spininto a glistening black thread. She placed

the end of thethread into the seam she had opened and continued tospin.She was happy in

her work. It had taken her a long time togather all the precious material she needed for the

blackthread; many nights of clinging around eaves andwindows, sniffing for the scent of a

human child having anightmare. There were quite a lot of those in Malifaux. Herwhispers in

their ears would make the nightmares worse,and then she could open her round mouth filled

withneedles, open it wide, lean close and breathe deeply oftheir fear. It was sweetness to

her.The black thread began to fill the bear, and her sharpfingers worked fast, loosening the

stitches and letting thesodden fabric stretch. It grew larger and larger, impossiblyso. Still the

Widow exhaled the stolen terrors, and theblack thread ran on and on.Eventually the Widow

sighed and sat back, aching andweary, but pleased with her night's effort. The

floorboardscreaked, and dust fell from the cracked ceiling as the teddybear sat up, its

massive bulk filling the back room. The furwas torn here and there, but instead of straw,

what pokedout look more like bones and gristle. The button eyes hadsunk into the fabric and

vanished, leaving stark, black holeslike abandoned wells where something ancient

andhungry waited at the bottom. The soft, round hands splitas black shards of bone pushed

out to form wicked claws,and the stitched mouth opened to reveal a nightmaresmile of

swords.The Widow clapped in delight.Teddy was in a toy room, bright and full of joy. He saw

thewoman clapping, and he smiled and clapped too. She mustbe a mummy. They were

always kind and smiling. She waspleased with him, and he liked that. He played with

thetoys, while the mummy watched. After a while, his tummygot sore and rumbled. He cried,

and tried to eat the toys,but they were dry and crumbled to dust. The mummyopened a door.

At first he was a bit worried, but themummy told him that outside was a magic kingdom,

andhe was going to have a great adventure. Teddy likedadventures, and waved goodbye to

the mummy.The Widow watched as the great creature lumbered off,wrecking a path through

the deserted woollen shop andout into the empty lane beyond. She wiped a tear awayfrom

one of her many bulbous, white eyes. It was so hardto let them go.MMMD is for Doomed,

Sentenced To Die,E is for Endless, Death To DefyEach minute in the cells lasted forever,

but the days andweeks were stolen away as the appointed date drewnearer.The condemned

man's shouts and yells were louder andfiercer than any of the others, but the jailers were

deaf tocries of injustice. Even so, they were glad when PhineasGrey left. He had arrived pale

and shrinking, but thedarkness of the jail had brewed something black in his soul.Some said

it was his crime, eating him up. Others were not

so sure. In his last days, those who met his hollow gazeunder the lanky, brown curls chose

to sleep that night witha candle burning.The murderer was hanged for the crowd on a Friday.

Withhis last words, Phineas Grey promised them all justice, inthis life or the next.On

Saturday and Sunday, a cold rain fell as his body creakedon the Hanging Tree in a breeze

that few could feel, andthose who could chose not to speak of it.On Monday, the body was

gone.MMMF is for Fun, Toy Trains In a Station,G is for Grisly, A Nightmare CreationNot all

mummies were kind.Teddy had learned this first hand, several weeks into hisGreat

Adventure. To his delight he had found a toy trainset just like one he remembered--the night

porters of Creepwood Station had run screamingas the giant Neverborn creature appeared

out of the mistson the gas-lit platform--and had played with the brightly coloured trains for

awhile, rolling them up and down the track, while theirhappy faces puffed steam and

smoke--the accountant dragged his elderly mother from themangled wreckage of the sleeper

car, amid the screams ofthe dying, while the abomination hurled another carriageat them

along the tracks--and then he played hide and seek with the people inside--Rebecca knew

she had to stop her brother's teeth fromchattering, or the thing would find them both hidden

awayin the luggage compartment. So she wrung his neck. It stillfound her--until they all fell

asleep.But then a mummy turned up, with hair as black as coalunder a cowboy hat. Teddy

had run to play with her, butthis mummy did not want to play. This was an angrymummy,

with angry friends. Pistols cracked, and madeTeddy hurt. The black thread inside him tried to

stitch hisblood-soaked fur, but the onslaught of lead was more thaneven it could keep up

with.Frightened and confused, Teddy turned and ran.He blundered through dark alleyways

and down twist-backstreets and hidden closes, until all sounds of the angrymummy and her

bullies had gone. By the time he reachedan expanse of waste ground, where the moonlit

mist laylow like a patchwork quilt, he had quite forgotten abouther, and was keen to continue

his Great Adventure.He set off, the mist billowing around him like a ship's wake.He passed a

brightly painted wooden wagon, decoratedwith puppets, pirates and clowns, with colored

buntingstrung up on old washing lines, but no one was home. Hesniffed the air, and could

smell no one to play with, so hecarried on sailing through the Magic Mist to the KingdomOf

Adventure, while far above Master Moon and MistressLuna smiled down and whispered

secrets only braveTeddies should know.All was still and silent in the waste ground, until, that

was,something the size and shape of a small boy appeared,following Teddy through the

mist, its limbs clicking as itwalked.MMMH is for Hired, A Gun That Is PeerlessI is for Injured,

But Nonetheless FearlessThe woman sank slowly to her knees, pain etched on herface, as

blood ran from the wound in her side. Her brokenswords lay on the corpses in front of her,

her empty pistolson the corpses behind.

"Give it up, bitch," Scissors O'Doull sneered, stepping backand wiping her blood off his knife.

Louden and Smalls, histwo remaining companions gave a nervous laugh. "Lordknows, ah

don't mind hittin' wimmin, but ah try an' avoidkillin' 'em. 'Specially the pretty ones."The

woman said nothing, her head bowed, her facehidden behind long, red hair."It's Oriental Joe

we want," O'Doull said. He was pointingwith his knife at the man from the Three

Kingdomsstanding behind her, but O'Doull didn't move any closer.He had seen what the

woman could do – the evidence laycooling around her. "Step aside, an' we'll match whit

he'spayin' ye."With gritted teeth, the woman slowly drew a long, stilettoblade hidden in her

belt and dug the point into the cobblesto steady herself. She paused to draw breath, and

O'Doullseized the moment. Springing forward he kicked the bladeaway, and then jumped

back, a more bullish sneer on hisface. "That's whit ye call a last warnin'."The woman looked

over her shoulder at her employer, BaiJian. Her dark eyes pinned him to the iron gate he

stoodagainst. His meaty jowls trembled, and sweat stained hiscollar. He held up a hand,

spreading all five fingers.The woman shook her head.Bai Jian glanced at O'Doull and his

men, let out a whimperof fear and held up both hands. Ten fingers.The woman looked away.

Her hand reached into her boot,and came out holding a nail file. She dug the point into

thecobbles to steady herself.O'Doull started to laugh, but then she looked up at him,and his

laughter faded away into the night. His facehardened, and the knife came up. Louden and

Smallshefted their brickbats, and charged, yelling. Bai Jian hid hisface in his hands and

curled up into a small ball until thesounds of violence were over and the only scream was

thenight wind in the chimney tops.A rough hand grabbed his collar and pulled him to his

feet.He looked not into the leering face of Scissors O'Doull, butthe warlike face of the woman

he had retained to protecthim, a woman he knew only as Zephyr. Eyes like gunmetal,and a

countenance just as cold and hard, she wiped thenail file on the sleeve of her shirt and

tucked it away. Sheheld out a hand. "The deal was for ten hundred."Stunned, Bai Jian

handed over a neatly folded bundle ofhigh-value Guild Scrip. He could not take his eyes

offO'Doull. The man was still standing, his body shakingviolently. How could he still be

standing?"Tenextra."He paid, transfixed by O'Doull"Expenses," Zephyr said, swaying on her

feet, her voicecramped from the pain. "Broke my swords. That'll beanother two."Zian

paid."And I'm out of ammunition. Another two. Call it two fifty."To Zian's enormous relief,

O'Doull's body finally toppled,crumpling next to his own head. The blood spurting fromthe

stump slowed to a steady ooze. Zian paid again,without complaint.As she stepped away

over the pile of bodies, he called outafter her. "That small fortune you have. You can

doanything you want with it.""No, sir," Zephyr said, stopping to pick up her pistols. "It'snot

nearly enough."And she walked away, O'Doull's blood tattooed on hercheeks.MMMJ is for

Joke, A Trick That Is Cruel,K is for Kids, Who Should Be In SchoolThe lane behind the rows

of terraced, brick houses wasdark, cluttered with rubbish and shadows. Old bed

framesleaned against piles of moss-covered slates, and ash bins

overflowed beside reeking night pails. The cobbles weredangerously uneven, and in places,

sinkholes stank of thesewers below. The lane was home to rats, cats, and othertwo-legged

vermin."Hey, missus!" Callooh shouted, flinging another crackedtile to shatter a window of

the house he and his brotherhad targeted for that night's fun. "What'll ye do when theWee

Malkies come? Hey, missus! What'll ye do?"Lights flicked on, and Callooh snorted, ducking

downbehind the wall, crouching on a moldy mound of brokenboxes. He was almost invisible

in his filthy rags, and his skinwas dark with dirt and ash. He turned to elbow his

youngerbrother into action – the plan was to draw thehousekeeper's attention out the back,

and then hisbrother would nip round the front and nick the brass offtheir door, leaving the

traditional Wee Malkie calling-cardsteaming on their front step – but Kallay wasn't there. Allof

sudden, Callooh felt a shiver run down his back, and heremembered what the older Malkies

had said about goinginto this part of town. Boys and girls going missing. Theydidn't sound so

stupid, now.Then a pathetic, mewling noise made him peer down thelane, and there was

Kallay, his tiny frame almost buriedunder a sack. A sack that was moving."Whit ye got

there?" Callooh hissed, leaping down, allthought of warnings and Number 78B's brass

doorornaments flown at the sight of the bag. "Show us!"Kallay's face mirrored his brother's –

a mischievous smilein a dirt-smeared face surrounded by long, filthy hair thatmight have

been any color once upon a time. Both of themwore the black rag of the Wee Malkies

around their necks."Ah've only gone and found a sack of kittens, didn't ah?"he whispered,

eager to impress. "Ah reckon a few aredead, you know, but ah figure we can fling the rest

atwhitever poor eejit they lock up in the stocks in themornin'!"Then a sound that did not

belong in the lane made themboth freeze. It sounded like someone dropping canes ontothe

cobbles, over and over, and it was getting closer."Whit's that, Callooh?" His younger brother

backed off, thewhites of his eyes bright in the darkness. "Whit's that?""Ditch it!" Callooh

hissed. "Hide!" As his brother heavedthe sack into a garden, Callooh ducked behind some

rustedold pipes. Kallay joined him in a flash, wedging in tightagainst his older brother."Ah

don't like it--""Put a sock in it!" Callooh put his hand over his brother'smouth as the sound

grew louder. Trembling, he put his eyeup to a rust hole.It was hard to make anything out in

the dark, but what hecould see was small, like him, and fast, but moving allwrong. And there

were a lot of them. He caught glimpsesof colored cloth and enameled eyes. There was no

soundbut the soft clatter of wood on the cobbled lane, and heknew that if they spotted him or

Kallay, it was all over.Whatever they were, they were hunting.Callooh kept his hand where it

was long after they hadgone, until Kallay's tears had dried in the cold night air.Even when he

and his brother crawled out, sprinted downthe lane, and ran breathless back to Wee Malkies'

territory,he was convinced he could hear the tap-tap-tappingbehind him all the way.MMML is

for Lady, Gets Quite A Fright,M is for Master, Won't Outlive The NightTeddy liked the house.

The yellow curtains reminded ofhim of somewhere he once knew, and it had bright

marblecolumns at the front, like teeth. It smiled at him, so hewent in.The LaGrange family,

grain merchants with solid Guildconnections, returned later that night from the opera.None of

the servants were around. Everrard LaGrangecalled angrily at the back stair and rang the

bell, but noone appeared. Alarmed, he took his children to thedrawing room to get his

gunTeddy had found several people in the smiling house, butnone of them wanted to play,

so he had put most of themin the naughty box to teach them manners

Lady Isabelle LaGrange entered the kitchen, and her lookof fury turned to one of horror as

she saw the blood slickon the tiled floor. A thick pool of it led back to the cast ironoven in the

range. The door had been forced shut, and theparts of the servants' bodies that had not

fitted fully insidewere crushed around the edges. Hands, feet, and piecesshe could not

identify. There was always a low fire burningthrough the night, and the stench of cooked

flesh turnedher stomach. Then she heard her children screaming--but he had kept a few of

them with him to help him makenumber blocks. Teddy had always enjoyed number

blocks,but it had been hard to get these ones square. They werea bit mushy--The maids had

fainted on the drawing room floor whenthe nightmare creature had plucked the butler's head

cleanoff and started hammering it against the walls, forming itinto a crude cube of mashed

bone and brain. It had carvedwhat looked like numbers into the sides with one jaggedclaw,

before reaching for the maids--but red was a good color, and he hoped the family wholived

here would like them.They did not.Disappointed, Teddy showed them how to make

morenumber blocks, but when he had finished, there was noone left to play with.Outside the

drawing-room window, something smallwatched him play.MMMN is for Nightwatch, To

Guard Against Danger,O is for Outlook, To Watch For The Stranger"One of the clock, and

all's well," Sergeant Kliegemanncalled, feeling the rain trickle down the back of his neck.

Itsodding well was not all well, but every time he called out,as his deep voice echoed back to

him in the narrow streets,he felt as if he had company on his patrol. A welcomefeeling on a

night like this.It had not been a good spell for the Guild Guard, hereflected as he paced

down Ambergris Street, the lightfrom his lamp sweeping to and fro between the closedshops

on either side of him. The cut glass of the windowsflashed white as his lamp played over

them. His cap waspulled low and his collar raised against the incessantdrizzle.There had

been that unfortunate incident of themurderer going missing off the Hanging Tree twomonths

ago. They never had found the victim's body, ofcourse, but the blood in the Grey house had

beenenough for a conviction. Fortunately, that had beenpushed off the front pages by the

massacre atCreepwood Station. It had been released to the MalifauxDaily Record as a

points failure on the track. No survivorsmeant no one to contradict the official version. A

fewmore runaway kids than usual had been reported, butthen the LaGrange killings, right in

the heart of up-market Feverstone quadrant only a couple of weeks ago,had forced the Guild

to put more feet on the beat in theareas around there. Specifically, his feet, for the use

ofwhich he was unlikely to get overtime pay. Being asergeant was supposed to spare him

this nonsense, buthere he was.The only saving grace was that the gangs of street kidshad

been unusually quiet recently, but all that meantwas that the Guild would have a hard time

pinningtrouble on their frequent fights. And then, although Sergeant Kliegemann was not

keenon thinking about this alone at night, there had been thedeaths of more than a few Guild

Guard officers. No onewas calling them murders, because the morgue had said'heart attack'

in every case. Still, Sergeant Kliegemanncould not remember the last time a heart attack

hadcaused a man to rip his own ears off as he died.He shone the lamp beam over a patch of

red brick wallnext to Ormiston's butcher shop, where hand-printedbills curled in the rain.

Missing children were buriedunder rugs for sale, and snake-oil sleep remedies werepartially

obscured by brightly colored posters for thepuppet show out on the waste ground.He walked

on, swinging his lamp from side to side, thelight flashing in the leaded shop windows. And

then hecaught a glimpse of his own reflection in one of the

windows, and his thoughts fled, leaving only oneremaining – there is someone standing

behind me.Sergeant Kliegemann whirled, his pistol raised. The streetwas empty. He stood

for a long moment, watching andlistening – he had been Guard long enough to know

thatsome shadows should be jumped at. But the street heldonly him and the rain. The night

air felt much colder now– he let out his breath and it fogged around him. A whiffof decay

made his stomach rise. He glanced back at thewindow and his heart shrivelled in his chest –

there it wasagain, closer this time. A dark figure, the rain glistening onits bowed head. There

was something wrong with its neck.He spun back, crying out, but the emptiness of the

streetseemed to mock his fright.The rain grew heavier, hissing on the cobbled

street,summoning a knee-high spray. He looked back at the window, his pistol hand shaking.

Thefigure was still there, only a few feet away from him. Hecould almost reach out and touch

it. Then all sense leftSergeant Kliegemann as he realised its feet did not touchthe ground.

He screamed, dropped the lamp and ran.He ran as if in a nightmare, the shops on either

sidehemming him in, the hiss of the rain drowning out the slapof his boots on the stones and

the rasp of his breathing. Inmomentary pictures, each shop window he raced pastcontained

only him and the thing at his heels, both blurredby the rain. In every reflected instant, it

drifted closer andcloser no matter how fast he ran.A voice spoke, or it may have been just

the hissing of therain. "Jusss-tissss."Sergeant Kliegemann stumbled, cried out and fell

hard,skidding on the cobbles. His gun skipped away like a stoneon a pond, lost in the

dark.The street behind him was empty, but in the tall, rain-streaked window of a tailor's shop,

the dark figure floatedslowly closer.The rain hissed louder still, and it was all he could hear.

Noteven the drumming of his heart rose above it, and in thesound of the rain came the voice

again. "Jusss-tissss."The word was everywhere, carried on every drop of rain,in every

bouquet of spray, repeated over and over by acountless choir. Kliegemann cried out,

gripping his head,but nothing could keep the voices out.In the tailor's window, the figure

stooped over him. A ropehung from its broken neck, and long, curly hair hung heavyin the

rain. Eyes burned with the fires of damnation."I know you," Kliegemann gasped, but he could

not evenhear his own voice any longer. "It – it can't be!""Jusss-tissss," the rain hissed, and

Phineas Grey bent lowover Kliegemann and whispered secrets to him with hisdead, white

lips and black, swollen tongue.The morgue reported it as just another heart attack,although

the Guard surgeon choose not to comment onwhy the late sergeant might have torn off his

own ears.MMMP is for Plunder, Winnings Ill-Gotten,Q is for Quarrel, Needlessly Brought On

"Just give me my share, and I'll be on my way," the womansaid, indicating the paired leather

saddle bags stuffed withthe stolen Guild Scrip.Denver noticed that she protected her right

side andwondered if she had an old injury there. It certainly hadn'tslowed her up on the job,

however, and the way she haddispatched those Union enforcers had been cool, clinicaland

impressive. Now, she looked pale and exhausted, justlike the other four survivors of the raid

on the GalestoneMine salary wagon, gathered in the abandoned trappers'hut.Josiah Denver

had a mean, narrow face, with a tight mouthand a head that seemed to come to a point

under theslicked, black hair. Everyone but his mother thought hemaybe had some bayou

blood in him, and even some daysshe wasn't sure. No matter his expression, there was a

slyhint of gremlin in those sideways eyes. He looked aroundat his hired hands, and

wondered if he really wanted toshare the proceeds with them at all.

He held up a hand to the woman he knew only as Zephyr."In good time." He looked over at

Roake, who had taken amess of pellets to the face and was in a bad way. "Roake,it ain't

right what done happen to ya, but don't'cha thinky’all should've been watchin' that third

wagon?"Roake didn't look up. His voice was pained and slurred."That was Jann's

job."Denver nodded, glancing very briefly at Jann as the thick-necked Swede bridled at the

tarnishing of his name."Maybe it was, maybe it weren't,” Denver said, “but hetold me he had

to go help Ferris with the locks."Now it was Ferris' turn to stir, and he fixed Jann with a

coldstare. "Didn't need no help, didn't ask fer none."The woman buttoned up her docker's

coat, and said in alow voice that only Denver could hear, "It doesn't have togo down this

way."Denver just grinned. Sharing was for deadbeats andchildren. "Easy Ferris. Sounds like

you're calling Jann a liar."Had there been anyone outside the trappers hut amoment or so

later, they would have heard gunshots,maybe a half-dozen or so, the flashes creeping

through thecracks in the shuttered windows. They would have seen aman with shiny, black

hair come out the door, saddle bagsslung over his shoulder and a pistol in his hand. They

wouldhave seen him take a few paces, drop the pistol, and thenfall, dead. And they would

have seen a woman walk fromthe hut, pick up the saddle bags and head off down thetrail

towards the horses.It was a lot of money, Zephyr knew, but it wasn't yetenough.MMMR is for

Run, A Thing You Should Do,S is for Scared, Of Things You Bump IntoIt was too late to get

away.The lawman towered over Callooh and his brother. He hada face like the mountain

lions outside the MalifauxMuseum and riding spurs that clinked as he walked. Gunshung

from his belt, catching the light of the gas lampsbehind him."'Bout time I ran into yeh," he

said in a prairie drawl. "Youand yours've bin keepin' mighty quiet these past months.I reckon

you're gonna tell me what I wanna know."Callooh puffed his chest out but made sure his

littlebrother was standing between him and the lawman."Ah'm no tellin' you nuthin, bandy

legs. Wee Malkiesdinnae clipe. In't that so, Kallay?"The man looked at the older child for a

while, his eyes darkunder his hat. "Ain't half the words comin' out yer mouthmean a dang

thing to me, boy. Speak English, or I'll tan yerhide. There's things in the streets at night, got

y'all runnin'scared. I thought I had 'em, too, not a few moments ago.Posse of 'em, but they

up and gave me the slip." He smiled,but it was full of menace, and grabbed the knotted

ragaround Callooh's neck, twisting it tight in his big, glovedfist. "Then I got lucky and found

myself a pair of jokers."Tap-tap.Callooh froze, but the big lawman mistook the fear in

hisface, and carried on talking.Tap-tap-tap.Callooh couldn't see anything of the street past

the man'senormous frame. "Mister-" he began, and then thelawman stopped mid-sentence,

his mouth open.Callooh tried to pull away, but the lawman was holdinghim tight.

"Mister?"The man started to shake. A stick, with a sharpened tip,appeared inside his open

mouth and slowly pushed outbetween his teeth. Blood poured down the man's chin,and his

eyes rolled back into his head. His body jerkedviolently.Callooh's little brother screamed and

tried to run, butCallooh was still holding him and the lawman holdingCallooh. Then the stick

vanished with a sickening slurp, andthe lawman dropped like a stone.

There was not one, but a dozen of the things crowding thenarrow street. They were clad in

garish colors, stripes andchecks, some in jester's motley and one in the tricorn hatand black

garb of a privateer. All had limbs and faces ofwood, and they leapt on the body and hacked

at it withtheir sharp fingers.Callooh drew a broken-glass shiv and stabbed at the glovedhand

that still held him tight, and then froze as themarionette with the pirate costume raised its

carved,painted face towards him and his brother.Its fixed smile and blood-covered hands

were the lastthings Callooh saw.MMMT is for Torment, Secrets To Tell,U is for Undying, Dry

Whispers From HellPhineas Grey was dead. He had died on the Hanging Tree,three months

ago or more. All that was left was his fly-blown body, warmed only by the fires of

vengeance.He could barely remember anything of his life, and evenhis existence now

passed by in splinters of awareness,drifting through an endless night, dark fragments of

theman he had been, held together by pain and anger.His was the pain of the noose around

his neck, the painthat a man feels when all hope is truly gone. A pain thatnot even death had

eased.The noose tugged at him, and he went. To officers of theGuild Guard who had been

in the Grey house that night itpulled him, one by one. The whispers he had heardhanging on

the Tree blew through his dry, cracked lips,caressing them with corpse-breath. He did not

know whothey were or why he spoke to them, only that he must.The noose tugged, the fires

burned, and he must.He spoke to the men who had walked him to the Tree. Hespoke to the

men who had locked doors and turned keysuntil none were left who had wronged him, but

still, ittugged.He came to an alehouse, tumbledown and rank with deaddreams, and he

spoke to the men. None of them had beenthere that night, but his vengeance still burned all

ittouched, and he moved on.The fragments of Phineas Grey wept in their cold,

deadprison.Time passed, or none at all. It mattered not. He came to award, where the sick

lay. The soft, dry whispers beyondthe grave touched them all, taking everything they had

butleaving him only anger and pain.He came to a house. All within heard his tales, from

youngto old, but it mattered not. The noose tugged, and hemust.One cold night, he passed a

caravan on some wasteground. It was brightly colored, and beautiful to look at,but there was

nothing alive within to whisper his secretsto, and he carried on past. His shrivelled, putrid

eyes sawa small figure hastening away as the clouds hid the moon.The noose tugged in a

different direction, but whateverwas left of Phineas Grey recognized something in thatsmall,

running figure, and he drifted after it.MMMV is for Valuable, Things We Hold Dear,W is for

Wish, Heart's Desire SincereAlderman Abster Sinth awoke to see a pistol, and a face

heknew. His mouth was dry from sleep, and his teeth werein a glass jar beside his bed, so it

took a few attempts toget the name out. "Sheffir?" It was a question, and a curse."Alderman

Sinth," Zephyr replied, with a small nod. Herred hair was tied back under a black scarf. She

had a freshscar on her right cheek, but she was as beautiful as ever.She put the candlestick

down by Abster Sinth's bedsideand gestured with the pistol at the glass jar.

"Goodevening."Carefully, Abster Sinth plucked his teeth out of the jar andput them in his

mouth, working his jaws a few times until

they clicked into place. The movement let him shift thebedcovers enough that he managed

to slip his right armback under them. The mercenary he had hired at greatexpense two

weeks ago did not seem to notice. "TheLorimer brothers?"Her eyes never left his, and the

gun did not waver. "Dead."For a moment he felt a surge of vicious pleasure, and

thenswallowed. "I am surprised. I assumed they had offeredyou double to kill me.""They

did.""I see. But you killed them anyway.""I never walk away from a paying job. And I always

takepayment up front. You knew my terms when you hiredme.""I suppose that, once in your

life, you might considermaking an exception?" Abster Sinth's right hand movedvery carefully,

and very slowly, closing over the grip of thecustom, snub-nosed Peacekeeper he kept in a

hollow inhis mattress. "Double it again. I know you're desperate forthe money. Let me live.

The Lorimers are dead, no one willever know. Just walk away and let me live."Zephyr

lowered her gun to her side, and for a moment hisheart leapt, but then she spoke. "I can't do

that.""Money's no object, dammit!" He covered the sound ofthe hammer clicking back with

his raised voice. "Ten timeswhat they paid you!""No, I mean, you're already dead." Zephyr

said, at thesame time as Abster's finger tightened on the hair-trigger,and a hollow click

sounded, muffled by the bedclothes.Zephyr tapped the glass jar with the tip of her pistol,

andit rang softly. "Powdered bayou rose, applied to your falseteeth. It's painless, and quick.

And I took the firing pin outof your gun."Abster tried to pull the trigger again, but his hands

seemednumb and distant. "Curse you, woman!" he rasped. He fellback onto sheets that

were suddenly damp with sweat. "Ihope you choke on the damn money!" His breath

wasbecoming heavier, and the candle seemed to be dimming.But he still had riches, and

enemies he did not wantgloating at his funeral. "There's a list," he said. "In thedrawer by the

window, on the left. A list. And there's a safe.In the room. I can pay you now. Get the

list."Zephyr shook her head. "You're a spiteful old man, whenall's said and done, but with the

scrip from the Lorimers Ifinally have all I need. Your sons will have to continue yourpetty

feuds for you.""All you need?" Abster gasped. "I'm offering you a fortune!Who ever has all

they need?"Zephyr's face grew terrible, and Abster shrank further intothe bed. "I did, once.

Then a man murdered my son, Dylan.Dylan Grey. Maybe you've heard of him?"He could

barely see her anymore, and no matter how deephis breaths, his lungs barely filled. "That

was last year. Theyhanged him. On the Tree. Phineas Grey. I remember. Hewas – your

husband?"Her voice reached him across a vast and sluggish ocean."Zephyr Grey,

lady-at-arms, at your service. Oh, theyhanged dear Phineas, but they didn't hang the man

whokilled my son. Although, in truth, I hear he is no man at all.Puppetmaster, I have heard

him called. I really don't carewhat manner of creature he is, down in that caravan,putting on

his sick shows. What I do know is that he cameinto my home and took my beautiful Dylan –

tore his bodyapart and imprisoned his soul in a monster's plaything ofwood and string and

left my husband to hang for it. I cameback from a job Earthside and found my husband dead

andmy son gone, and I want them back. I want to hold themagain, more than anything in this

world!" Abster felt arough hand on his face, closing the eyes whose lids hecould no longer

move. "Now go to sleep, Alderman Sinth.Your money, the Lorimers' money – all of it is for

my family.I was told it would take a king's ransom, and that's exactlywhat I have. I am going

to get them both back."MMM

X is for X-Ray, To See What Is Hidden,Y is for Yell, But Escape Is ForbiddenTeddy was

disappointed. He had been looking for theHouse of Teddies and had run into one distraction

afteranother. It was fun to stop and play, but he really wantedto find the House of Teddies

that the little boy with the bigknife had mentioned. There was something about beingin a

house that made Teddy's stitches tingle, and if it hadyellow curtains that would be even

better. Yellow curtainsand a family would be best of all.A couple of times he had seen – or

thought he had seen –a small figure following him, but every time he turned itwas gone. He

was left with an impression of wooden limbsand strings, and a pirate hat. It seemed familiar,

for amoment, but then he would find something new andwonderful and get all excited and

his head was fuzzy at thebest of times.There had been the little girl in the blue dress. She

andTeddy had played for a while – the little girl had found adaddy wandering all alone in the

streets--Resolved Jones had spent an evening drowning hissorrows, and was full as a tick,

staggering from pillar topost trying to find a street he recognized. A girl child cameout of

nowhere, took his hand and spoke to him. Shelooked normal in all respects but one. The

wisps of smokecoming from her empty eye sockets sobered him up butquick, but by then it

was too late-and asked him if he wanted to play hide and seek. Teddyliked that game, and it

quickly got underway--Resolved Jones screamed as the girl plucked his eyes out.In

disbelief, he found he could still see through them, andwatched himself clutching his own

maimed face as the girlpopped his eyes into her own vacant sockets. "You shouldhide," she

said, and started counting back from twenty.Jones ran, and watched himself stagger away

around acorner--with Teddy carrying the little girl in the blue dress and hertelling him where

to go. The daddy wasn't very good athiding, but every time they found him crouched under

acart or in a doorway he would leap up--he had no idea where he was, and had tripped and

fallenso many times his clothes were torn and wet with blood,but then he would see himself

and know they had foundhim again – that girl and the monster she was riding on--and run off

again. This game was fun!outside a ruined posthouse, Resolved Jones turned hisankle on a

loose cobble and fell heavily, breaking throughrotten wooden slats over a buried coal pit. His

left leg andcollarbone shattered when he hit the bottom. He tried tobe quiet, but the pain

came out in whimpers he could notstop. Then he saw a loose cobble, and the broken slats

ofa pit, and knew they had found him again. The girl-thingjumped down the pit, and he

watched as she ate what wasleft of his faceThe little girl in the blue dress skipped away into

the night,and Teddy waved goodbye, another chapter in his GreatAdventure complete.In the

ruins of the posthouse, a pair of painted eyeswatched him go.MMMZ is for Zephyr, Bold,

Quick and Brave,Summoning Monsters, Her Family To SaveThe inventors-for-hire who had

built the device for Zephyr,Dr Oldish and his shrewish assistant Mr Lemon, had toldher it

would work best some place high, so she carried it,piece by piece, to the top of the north

towers onHurrycross Bridge. She was sweating freely on the thirdtrip up the narrow, winding

steps.It had cost her every cent of Guild scrip she had earned inthe four months since her

family had gone, and all theirsavings from before then. Dr Oldish had raised the cost atthe

last minute, but she'd been expecting that and hadnegotiated a six-chambered discount that

the good doctorhad been wise enough to accept.She finished assembling the device at

midnight, as thedamp on the wind finally turned into rain and lightning

flashed far off across the city. The device was about thesize of four large traveling trunks

stacked together. Mostof its innards were concealed behind polished woodenpanels, but

here and there copper coils or brass buttonsbroke the surface. On top, complicated

arrangements ofglowing glass tubes reflected in gleaming black ceramicinsulators. The

raindrops hitting them sizzled into vapor. Itlooked expensive, and impressive, but the real

cost lay inthe customized soulstones hidden within.Zephyr opened a wooden hatch on the

front."Resonances," Dr Oldish had said. "Something aethericallyattuned to both you and the

subjects." That meantpersonal belongings, and Zephyr placed her wedding ring– the one

thing she'd refused to pawn – in one hatch anda lock of her boy's hair in the other. Times

had been hardwhen Dylan was born, and she remembered repairing hisfavourite teddy

bear's stitches with some of his own hairto save on thread. The memory hardened inside

her, likeall the others. She flipped the switches in the sequence MrLemon had written down

for her, and waited in the rain.--the noose tugged, but this was stronger by far. PhineasGrey

turned and floated across the river. The rope aroundhis neck dangled down, drawing a wake

in the black waterbelow his feet--She did not have long to wait.The air grew cold, and

puddles iced over as her deadhusband's lolling head rose over the tower parapet. Hedrifted

up and over, towards the device, the wet ropearound his neck trailing on the stones. Fear

froze her, butonly for a moment. It was working, just as they had said itwould."Phineas," she

called. "Phineas, it is me."He turned towards her, and for a moment she thought shesaw

something alive in his dead, white eyes, but then thewhispering began, and he drifted over

the rooftop towardsher, ice crackling into being beneath him. Before thewhispers grew too

loud, she flipped the first master switchand the device hummed anew. A blue light from a

coiledtube pierced her husband through the breast, and hefloated in silence.--all strings led

to the Puppetmaster, but this string wasnew. New and taut like iron on a cold day. The other

stringssnapped, one by one, and Dylan Grey ran over the cobbleson wooden pegs, heading

for the bridge--She had only just flipped the switch when Zephyr'sinstincts told her to duck.

As she did so, a small bundle ofblack cloth and sticks hurtled over her head to land,skittering

and struggling to stand on the spreading ice.Painted eyes glared at her with a malevolence

that chilledher soul, even as carved fingers, black with dried blood,reached out for

her."Dylan!" she cried, one hand on the second master switch.Her mind rebelled at the

thought that this murderousmarionette could be her only son. It found its footing

andadvanced on her, but still she did not flip the switch."Dylan?" she begged, looking for

anything that mightremind her of her child. "It's mama!"The grasping hands were only inches

from her face whenshe flipped the master switch. The puppet stopped, heldup by a single

thread of blue light from Dr Oldish's device."Dylan," she whispered, raising a hand to the

marionette'spainted face. It twitched, once, then nothing. She gatheredher resolve and

began the final sequence of the device.--his stitches tingled as they had never done

before.Something powerful was tugging at them, and not eventhe black, nightmare thread

the Widow had placed withinhim could resist. Teddy reached the tower and started

toclimb--The device was rumbling and hissing like an old boiler, andshafts of blue light

lanced out into the rain-lashed night torival the approaching lightning. Zephyr stood back,

herheart in her throat, willing the device to work, looking fromit to her husband and son and

back again. She shouted atthe machine, cajoling and begging it to complete its task,but she

knew it was out of her hands now. Thunderrumbled as sparks flew, and she looked in

astonishmentas the noose around her husband's neck glowed blue,loosened and slid to the

stones. The puppet's woodenlimbs split, and layers of wood began to peel back. She hadnot

dared to hope, not once, not since she had found herhome cold and empty and her family

gone all those longmonths ago, but now she did.She did not notice the monstrous creature

heave itselfover the tower parapet behind her.

Teddy had once had button eyes, and those eyes had seenthings. Images flashed before

him; a house with yellowcurtains and toys on the floor; a man, a woman and achild. A family.

Not just any family – hisfamily. Somethingbad had happened to them, but here they were,

gatheredon top of this tower to greet him! They were all togetheragain. Teddy was

overjoyed! And – he noticed the hissing,chugging device beyond the mummy – they had

broughta toy to play with.He knew what he had to do. He had to take his family backto the

house with the yellow curtains. Everything wouldbe fine then. Teddy smiled – he would show

them what agood Teddy he was. He would carry the toy for them.Zephyr was sent sprawling

across the rooftop as themonster barged past her. Her anguished cry was lost in apeal of

thunder. It all happened so slowly. The creaturereached out two enormous claws, each

ragged talon blackas night, and plunged them deep into the device. Woodsplintered. A

pressurised container burst, and scraps ofbrass flew through the air. Sparks leapt from

raindrop toraindrop as the blue light spluttered and died. The hulkingcreature, its filthy fur

matted in the rain, turned towardsher, the innards of the machine cradled in its claws.

Eyeslike stab wounds looked at her, and it bared row after rowof vicious fangs. Zephyr

screamed in disbelief, and drewher sword and pistol.Something had gone wrong, Teddy

knew. The mummywas angry, angrier than he had ever seen her.Zephyr emptied her pistol

into the huge head, each shotripping tears in the sodden, patchy fur. Something blackboiled

beneath, dark and fearful. She leapt forward,slashing with her sword, but the nightmare thing

raisedits claws and blocked her blade. Then the thunder and herown cries faded away, and

she could hear only the hiss ofthe rain on the stones. There was a voice carried on therain, a

voice she knew well, and it spoke only one word."Jusss-tissss."She turned, aghast. The

thing that had been her husbandwas at her side, the stench of death overwhelming her,and

knives of ice drove into her mind. She tried to pushhim back, and then the marionette was on

her, clinging toher back and stabbing at her eyes with its sharp, littlefingersTeddy could not

understand what he had done wrong, butnow his whole family was angry. He had to do

something.Protecting her face with her pistol hand, Zephyr grabbedthe puppet and hurled it

into the undead body of herhusband, knocking them both back. She staggered back astep,

reeling from the wounds to her head and back andthe unrelenting whispers that poisoned

her mind. She fellto her knees.Teddy reached out to help the mummy stand. He lifted herto

her feet, and then realized he had made an awful,clumsy mistake.Zephyr gaped wordlessly,

gripping the black talons wherethey pierced her belly. The razor edges of the claws slicedher

hands open to the bone, and her body shook as onetalon grated against her spine. The

creature stared at her,smiling as blood welled in her mouth. She looked over ather son and

husband as her vision darkened. The rivenwood of the puppet's limbs was smoothing over

onceagain as the effects of the device faded. Her husband bentawkwardly and picked up the

fallen noose. He tightened itaround his broken neck with cold, dead fingers. Then theblack

talons slid out of her stomach, sawing against herbones, and she collapsed to her knees.

With a herculeaneffort she rose to her feet, and took a step towards herfamily, but she had

finally pushed her body to its limits, andshe fell one last time. She could not move, but the

rain feltcool on her face. The last thing she saw was threeabominations gathering around her

under a storm-bruisedsky.The mummy was sleeping on a red, red rug, and the daddyand

the boy stood over her. Teddy looked at the daddy'swhite, lifeless eyes and grey, sagging

skin. He looked at theboy's cruel, painted face and blood-stained hands. This wasnot what

he remembered. Not at all.--the noose tugged, and the thing that would never againbe

Phineas Grey felt the fires of vengeance kindle oncemore. A corpse, a nightmare, and a

wooden doll that nolonger sparked any memories in his rotten skull. There wasnothing here

to listen to the truths he must tell. TheHanged Man drifted away----the strings returned, one

by one, and the puppet that onlylooked like Dylan Grey felt them pulling him back to the

gaily painted caravan on the waste ground. The lumberingcreature took a step towards him.

The puppet had beenfollowing it for a long time, whenever the strings hadallowed him. It had

reminded him of a toy he had onceloved, but this blood-stained monster was nothing like

theteddy bear whose memory was fading fast. TheMarionette skittered off over the cobbles,

returning to histrue master--Teddy ran after him, but he was too slow, and a momentlater he

was alone on the top of the tower.He stood, trembling, his claws clenched. His stitches

ached,as if they were being pulled out one by one. It had all beena lie! The house, the yellow

curtains, the family. All of itwas a lie! He swung both great arms at the wreckage ofthe

device, sending fresh splinters of wood and brass outinto the storm. He would never play

with toys ever again!No one would! With a sky-splitting roar he brought fistslike hammers

down on the gutted remains, again andagain, smashing it to pieces. He would never be

friendswith anyone ever again! He ripped stones and tiles fromthe roof and hurled them into

the night, great inky streaksof black ooze running from his bullet-hole eyes. He hatedthem

all, everyone! Then he heaved the buckled frameover the parapet.Lightning flashed

overhead. A fissure of light touched thesoaring frame and Teddy gaped in wonder. A

thousandsparks burst into life in brilliant hues, crackling and fizzingin a kaleidoscope of

stars. Fireworks! Beautiful fireworks!It was the most magical thing he had ever seen.He

spread his arms as the incandescent motes drifteddown around him, twirling and swirling like

fairies in thenight. It seemed to go on forever, as if the stars above hadcome down to dance,

just for him, and he danced alongwith them, turning and whirling across the rooftop.

Wherethe stars touched him they tickled, and he laughed,spinning and swaying all the more.

When it was over, and the last of the twinkling fairies hadgone, he walked to the parapet and

looked out over thecity. The rain eased and stopped. The storm passed andfaded from

memory. Teddy smiled as he thought of all theexcitement and wonder that awaited him in his

MagicKingdom. This truly was the greatest of adventures.