

**Dark**

**Distortions**

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# Dark Distortions

Volume 1

First Edition Trade Paperback, December 2007

Anthology

Published by Scotopia Press, a Scotopic Endeavor.

4201 Edison Cir. Ste#1 Lincoln, Nebraska 68504 scotopia@gmail.com

www.scotopiapress.com

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V1/E1

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES.

ISBN 978-0-9778262-9-2

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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## the Exordium

**This** is the beginning. Dark Distortions was conceived by C.D. Allen and born as a name on a page and a few hopeful emails. The idea was lofty, we understood that it would be a great deal of work and a significant challenge. As we re-created the ideals of this anthology, crafted expectations into our own vision, Dark Distortions became an inevitability.

At the beginning, we were not fully cognizant of the amount of work that we had bitten off. We did not know that things left to handle themselves would often bite back. We were blissfully unaware of how over-whelmed we should have been. I am so grateful for that ignorance as it left us the incentive to begin. We learned from the process and from our authors during the first run of Dark Distortions.

We set out with the intent to create a new kind of anthology. First it was to be dark fiction, not specifically horror. It was more difficult to overcome our predilection for horror than we had anticipated. Thankfully, there were stories of great enough quality to remind us of our original intent. The second goal was to include a variance of fiction styles. We saw no reason for an anthology to include only short stories of a certain length—instead we sought literature of a certain distinction.

As we entered the editing phase, there were other challenges. Do we only accept the greatest of the works that require little effort? Or do we accept work that is in line with our vision and do what we can to help make the work the best possible? One of the editors considers herself sufficiently pretentious and thus we chose the latter. We hope you agree with these decisions as we hope to carry them on into future anthologies.

As we near the conclusion of the process, it must be said that the project could not have been completed without the patience, persistence and belief of the authors. Collectively they have done the lion's share of the work and have put up with all of the set-backs and time line changes associated with our exordium. So, for that, let's show them the appreciation they deserve and read on.



# Last Word

by Daniel L. Naden

“So I was born, did some stuff, then I died. You got a problem with that?”

The reporter did his best to keep his face neutral at the absurdity of the statement. Before him, the man in the lawn chair regarded him with an air of contempt.

“I . . . I just came to . . .” the reporter began.

“Oh now, don't go gettin' all offended,” the man interjected. “You're just like the others, askin' questions, tryin' to expose me, turn me into some kind of fraud or freak show for the evening edition. I don't need the likes o' you, staring down your nose at me through those fancy spectacles you keep thumbing back into place. I got things to do. So, I'll ask you just this once. You wanna hear the story? Do you *really* wanna hear the story? If not, you can just pack your shit and get outta here. You don't wanna be caught round these parts after dark.”

The reporter came here following a story that had been floating around the newsrooms of the city for a few months. An interesting, yet unbelievable story that somehow persisted despite the best efforts of other reporters to confirm or debunk it. He was between major assignments back at the paper, so he thought he'd try his luck at tracking down the story behind the rumors. A few phone calls, a little legwork: he found quite a few people who had heard *things*, but he couldn't find anyone who could point him in the right direction. So it was with some level of surprise when he arrived at work this morning to find a message waiting for him at his desk. The call had been taken by a temp secretary who neglected to get any more information than the time and place: *come alone to the Bottoms to meet the man behind the story*. No details, no guarantees. But at least it was a break.

Now, standing in front of the man, he ventured a look around. The sun was already hanging low in the sky, peeking between the smokestacks and abandoned warehouses of the Bottoms. Here and

there on the street, he could see small clumps of roughs hanging around, leaning against rusting cars or empty buildings, apparently minding their own business. But he knew better. The shadows and roughs would claim the streets long before the light was gone from the sky. He could leave now . . . perhaps . . . and could make it out with his skin, his wallet, and no story. Or he could stay, listen to the guy, take a few pics and maybe be out of here before things got too dangerous. He hoped that if he stayed, the man would probably provide him with some measure of safe conduct to leave. If he didn't, the reporter could be in a world of trouble. But it was an interesting story, one that he'd been lucky enough to land. Something of a coup for him in a newsroom full of its share of established journalists and backstabbing bastards. It was *his* story. He'd come this far—too close to back out now.

In front of him, the man sat in a lawn chair. They were outside what might have once been an apartment or office building, but was now empty and half-boarded up. He wondered vaguely if it was the man's current residence. Because the man was sitting, the reporter couldn't guess how tall he might be, but he was definitely a very large man: the flimsy aluminum chair was already dangling a couple of frayed straps and seemed on the verge of collapsing under his bulk. The man had the look of a blue collar laborer—an iron worker or maybe one of those guys who lugged around cargo on the docks—and his demeanor suggested he was someone who was used to spending his off-work time drinking and brawling. He was dressed in a dingy, faded Hawaiian shirt with a dark-blue bandanna tied around his neck. The overall effect of his attire was strange, incongruent to the man's gruff exterior, but the reporter wasn't fool enough to point it out.

"Okay," he said. "I want to hear your story. Couple of things . . ." He held up a pocket tape recorder in one hand and his camera in the other. "I'm going to need some pictures, of course and I record my interviews to help me keep track of what was said and make sure that I don't misquote you. Do you mind?"

The man gave him an odd look. For a moment, the reporter thought he was going to call it all off. Then he smiled a crooked smile that made him appear not just dangerous, but almost insane. "Fine with me," he said.



# thanks to . . .

**Dark Distortions** would not have been possible without the support of the following people. Boyd Harris at Cutting Block Press has offered extraordinary assistance and support to this project. To Dan Naden and Ralph Robert-Moore for assistance in ironing out contract issues as it was being created. To Steve Allen for technical support and patience throughout the process. Thanks to the authors for all of their support and patience as we learned the process. Thanks to Sherry Feese for catering services provided during crunch times. And finally, thanks to our friends, Carla E., Brandy Schwan, Mark Deloy, AJ Brown, Michael W., Dani Rae (happy birthday), Cameron S. and Tiff H. for bolstering spirits and all around support when the frustrations seemed overwhelming.

## **Dedication**

This tome is dedicated to our mothers. Thank you for bringing us into this terrible world.

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