



Figure 1: Tombstone

Source: Keller (2017)

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THE GOTHIC GUILD

An Interview

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The Gothic Guild

An Interview

Synopsis

A secret fictional organization now known as *The Gothic Guild* (Eastland 2018) was established in 12 BCE and is occupied, and run by, twelve grandmasters. A seat on the Guild is for life and only becomes available when a grandmaster moves on. The same day they depart, a search begins to find a new grandmaster. To fill the vacancy, prospective candidates must vie for the position using only their crafts in a three-tiered interview process, though the opportunity presented is not all it appears. Grandmasters put forward their questions and like *The Hunger Games* (Collins 2008), the interview is a blood sport fought with words.

Six masqueraders (Interviewees) are selected, but only one interests the grandmasters. Their selection must survive the first two rounds, but those who failed the first round can attempt to steal the prize through the comment system. No masquerader knows what the prize will be.

Background

On the thirty-first of July 2018, a Gothic Guild grandmaster moved on. After a suitable mourning period, a campaign was launched behind the scenes to find a worthy replacement. Eventually finding their preferred candidate, five more masqueraders are gifted the opportunity to prove their worth by defeating the grandmasters choice. A subtle advertising

campaign was set up and activated through the use of modern-day technologies and whispers about *Something is Coming* in 2018 (Eastland 2018), began.

Sigmund Freud insisted ‘technology is an extension of human beings, making us prosthetic gods’ (cited in Schirato & Webb 2004, p. 54). After Freud’s analysis Ernest Kapp said of new communication technology as being an ‘externalizing and extending (of) the human bodies circulatory or nervous systems’ (Ebersole 2001). By using available technologies, *The Gothic Guild* intends to become a world extension of the reader. It seeks to draw the audience in and makes them part of the process.

While the story is played out in the gothic fiction genre (Neugebauer 2013) through several first person point of views (POV) (Graham et al. 2014, pp. 106-109), it is my intent to look further into the role of magic realism in literature (Hart & Ouyang 2005). I propose to world create through the genre of interview (Lyon 1994, p. 75). Eventually the true motives of the Guild will be revealed and expose a surprise twist at its end.

How it will work

There will be three rounds in the interview process. In round one, three masqueraders will lose their place, but for added tension, they can fight to return by commenting creatively on those moving onto the second round of the interview. After the second, round two will lose their spot and the grandmasters will give their chosen masquerader unfettered access to prove their worth. Comments for round three will be deactivated.

Masqueraders operate without names. First round participants will be known only by a number divisible by three. The second-round participants will be referred to as a genre; fiction, nonfiction, and drama. And then there was one, V, but the only character known by name will be Gothiness.

The interview process of *The Gothic Guild* is experimental fiction (Armstrong 2014) composed in gothic fiction form (Neugebauer 2013). It will explore several sub-genres such as: magic realism (Bowers 2004), gothic horror (Tibbetts 2011), fantasy (Smith 1948), visionary fiction (Exangel 2016), new age (Column 2016) and science fiction (Huntington 1975).

Sometimes truth is darker than fiction

The Gothic Guild will be a multifaceted conversational interview (van Enk 2009) and encompass both 'form and social situations, framed and flexible' (van Enk 2009, p. 1266). Used in conjunction with the mode magic realism, 'the political, economic and cultural margins' (Hegerfeldt 2005, p. 2) will allow independency of urbanite creative and artistic values. Magic realism is a highly adaptive genre and works naturally with Marleen Barr's idea of genre fission (2000). A fission event is when two or more genres merge and go on to create new ways of considering art and its discourse emerges through new genres (Barr 2000).

Behind the scenes magic realism becomes the tapestry all other genres are woven through. Ellen Moer says it best, 'fantasy predominates over reality, the strange over the commonplace, and the supernatural over the natural, with one definite authorial intent: to scare' (Moer 1997, p. 77). Submissions by masqueraders should test the bounds of *their* limitations and those of the observers. An old-world charm, B grade horror, or even a cosy mystery the likes of Alfred Hitchcock should grace the pages of *The Gothic Guild* and like Hitchcock's silhouette (Corliss 1999), magic realism will be ever present but not always seen.

Charles Derry, author of *Dark Dreams 2.0* (2009) talks about Hitchcock and reveals the influence his stories had on his young life and into his future. Derry argues Hitchcock was the master of psychological thrillers and said, 'he is an unarguable *auteur* if there ever was one, he plays a vital role in the definition of a genre' (Derry 2009, p. 17). '*Psycho*, *The Birds*, *Rosemary's Baby*, and *Night of the Living Dead*' (Derry 2009, p. 2) are just a few psychological thrillers Derry holds in high regard.

Many stories make use of genre fission (Barr 2000) and the genre of visionary fiction (Exangel 2016) has a lot to offer for the fast emerging Indie scene (Washington 2015), but genre fission is a favorite. A fission event is an idea about a reaction between two or more genres to combine into one, such as faction (fan fiction) (Booth 2008), and breathes life into a combination of genres. Fritz Leiber, 'translates gothic horrors into the modern urban landscape and does it beautifully' (1977).

Experimental fiction (Armstrong 2014) will also adorn the tapestry of magic realism because its mode traverses the acts and actions of the author. In 1968 Roland Barthes argued in *Death of the Author* it was 'language that speaks, not the author' (1988, p. 3). Jean-Paul Satre's *Being and Nothingness* (1956) also discusses authorial identities. All these questions will be considered as each author, performed by one actor to produce nine characters, all with distinct voices, will create *The Gothic Guild*.

The new age genre (Column 2016) will play a part in the Guild although the term itself appears to conjure feelings of distaste. New age, and its savior, visionary fiction run as close to each other as any two genres could. They maintain the same standards of what is expected. Visionary fiction provides grace to the tired new age genre because it is able to work in conjunction with other genres. The term new age fiction conjures images of stagnation, a collection of small niche markets stewing in their own juices and not going anywhere. With A companion genre such as visionary fiction, it would help to breathe new life and meaning into the new age genre, making it exciting to explore.

The visionary fiction genre was created by Walidah Imarisha (2019) and is a term she developed to ‘help talk about fantastical writing that helps us imagine new just worlds’ (Exangel 2016). Behind the scenes of the Guild, visionary fiction plays out to mask the reveal at its end. Magic realism plays the largest role in the questions and answers provided by masqueraders. They will attempt to tinge their responses with an uneasiness and play well into the psychological portion of the artefact.

As I searched for one word to describe the many genre’s *The Gothic Guild* will use, I think the genre mode *Collateral Fiction* fits nicely with the Guilds story. It’s an attempt to use something to define the collateral damage for the collage of creativity the Guild will display. Nina Michelson discusses collage as genre and noted it dated back to 200 BCE (Michelson 2012), situating it as a mode early grandmaster could have practiced.

Each genre, whether it’s psychological, horror, fantasy, visionary, magic realism or new age, all work alongside each other without creating too much friction or corruption, although a few fission events might occur. The listed genres also have a common ancestor, gothic, and are able to tell the same story from different POVs. Those POVs have the ability to mesh together nicely as they meet.

The Gothic Guild is an interview. The grandmasters of the Guild are seeking a new being to fill the shoes of their friend. Masqueraders vie for a title and a prize they could not fathom. Like the physical battle for survival depicted in *The Hunger Games* (Collins 2008), the Guild will be based on the harsher side of realism. Magic realism will provide ‘a faithful representation of reality’ (Randolph 2016, slide 4), seen through the eyes of each masquerader.

Masqueraders will battle each other with words, images, audio or even video in an attempt to snatch the prize for themselves. No masquerader knows the identity of the others, no audience member will know the players, or what will happen next. The Guild has already chosen its preferred masquerader. The interview process is put in place to decide if their selection has the abilities, temperament, and mindfulness they deem worthy, to sit by their sides. Eighty years is a long time between bets and grandmasters are not beholden to the rules, only the masqueraders are. Will they attempt to affect the outcome for their own purposes?

The story uses several different writing modes and techniques such as collage (Michelson 2012), concrete poetry (Solt 1970), intertextuality (Schirato & Webb 2004, p. 91), epistolary (MacArthur 1990) and monologue (Miles 2017) to address the same interview questions from several first person POV narrators. MacArthur quotes Versini when she writes, ‘epistolary practice and courtesy are thus closely linked’ (MacArthur 1990). She includes the quote to establish the art of epistolary form and how the upper classes expressed life through letters.

For the first two rounds *The Gothic Guild* is an open, free-for-all contest and seeks to observe whether frequenters of the Internet community would become involved through the comments section. There will be an underlying theme behind the workings of the Guild. All the activities made available through the website will be deliberate and not placed on the site to merely world create.

The interview includes creative responses to short probing questions. Masqueraders are required to provide sophisticated answers to reflect on life, humanity, creation, and other

abstract and ideological thoughts and ideas as is understood by the masquerader according to their world view. Typical tropes such as: darkness, heroes and villains, the real and unreal will be used to write stories, make movies, recordings, pictures and the possibility of a masquerader trying their hand at an *hors d'oeuvre* graphic novel. What I mean by *hors d'oeuvre* is a two to four pane graphic flash fiction novel.

The Gothic Guild is two stories interwoven within the same universe I created in 2017 for *Jerrymanders* (Eastland 2017). One story, *Jerrymanders*, is played out in the open, but a link to the website will not be provided until the artefact has been completed. The other, is a more sinister story woven around the first to offer enough psychological uneasiness to keep an audience interested.

Each word throughout the story will be deliberate and will have been chosen to maintain fluidity and a level of ambiguity throughout. It begins with several POV's, but quickly reduces in number until only the chosen masquerader remains. Gothiness is the face of the Guilds public relations and is the event interviewer. Masqueraders are interviewee's and although an interview, the grandmasters already have their quarry in the mix. That masquerader will come to be known as V.

The Gothic Guild is an experiment in technology to establish several unique authorial positions, actions and investigations. Questions will appear innocuous and many will hold dual meanings. In the beginning there will be new age, mind, body, spirit, and ethereal themes in the form of short literary pieces. Once the herd is thinned, other forms of storytelling will emerge, but once there is only one masquerader, V, short fiction, faction or fact will be in short supply.

V will have to write a story using the nuances of consciousness expansion, spirituality, mysticism, and maybe, parapsychology? Their job will be to make the reader uncomfortable, fearful, tense, by using typical fantasy themes with thematic and conceptual ideas of gothicism. The story will interlace most modes of entertainment whether it's the unreal or the real.

What is the Gothic Guild?

In the year 12 BCE twelve individuals came together to form a secret group known only as *veritas scribæ* (Truth Scribes). Throughout the age's communication through words, hieroglyphs and religious orders began to flourish, but only for the elite. Only *they* were permitted to read and so the peoples of old were forbidden to learn, to read, or write, but the Guild refused to obey their laws.

The world evolved and the beings who lived, travelled, and visited it, learned the secret power of words, whether they be written, sung or read. The *veritas scribæ* played a part in gifting the power of words to every being with a desire for knowledge. As life evolved, knowledge flourished. With new ideas and creations, the Guild became known as *Custodes Mortuus mane* (Keepers of the Dead). Years became decades, decades became centuries and with each generation, grandmasters came and went. They brought knowledge with them and seeded the world to see it prosper and grow, until they moved on to make way for a new generation of beings.

With another passing of a generation and a new position becoming vacant, the *Custodes Mortuus mane* have reached out from the shadows and reinvented their organisation with a new name for a new era, *The Gothic Guild*. It began as a group of intellectuals, spiritual guides and multidimensional beings with an objective of observing the unobservable, to document those things skirting the edges of existence, and to always influence the natural evolution of the things that go bump in the night.

Members of the Guild have effected change in secret; first through the use of the spoken word; second through the written; and third through the open minds of audacious venturesome souls who traverse the expanse of the known and unknown. 'Divination or prophecy rests on the reading of signs and the interpretation of oracles and of the knowledge it yields is revealed knowledge a different mode of knowledge altogether from human knowledge based on observation and inference' (Olsen 1982, p. 29).

This is where the process of selection, dissection and elimination begins. Each masquerader is vetted without their knowledge. Their lives are dissected without interference and should they meet the grandmasters requirements, a personal invitation is composed with care to adapt to the ideals, thoughts and actions of each masquerader. Separately and carefully their love of their craft is woven throughout each word to draw them into the interview process, as they must go willingly. *The Gothic Guild* is not evil, nor is it good, it merely exists.

The first round of the process covers six different modes of short form literary delivery and establishes a standard that must be surpassed in the next round. The second round will focus on three different genres with the final round being the major body of work. The items used for the dissertation artefact will be the instructions and questions put forth by the grandmasters and nine short form creations. The short story by the final masquerader, V, will make up the final portion, the largest portion of the artefact.

Below are examples of the Guilds seal, invitation envelopes and a copy of one invitation type. Other invitations will be worded in much the same way, but address another facet of creativity, it might read for example, *The Gothic Guild of Technology*. The Guild will use what it needs to, to draw their chosen few into the interview.



Figure 2: Invitation envelope with broken wax seal

Source: OpenClipart-Vectors (2013)

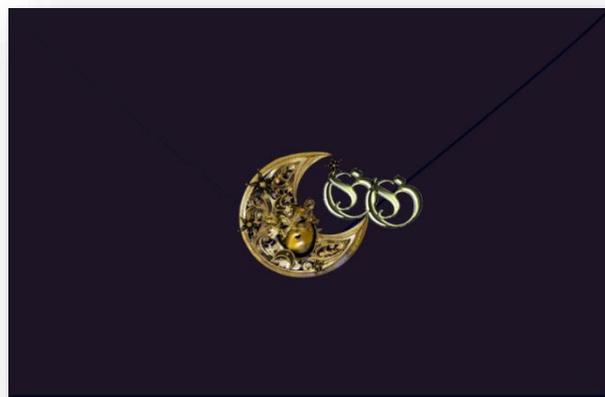


Figure 3: Signet that seals the envelope

Source: Gellinger (2019)

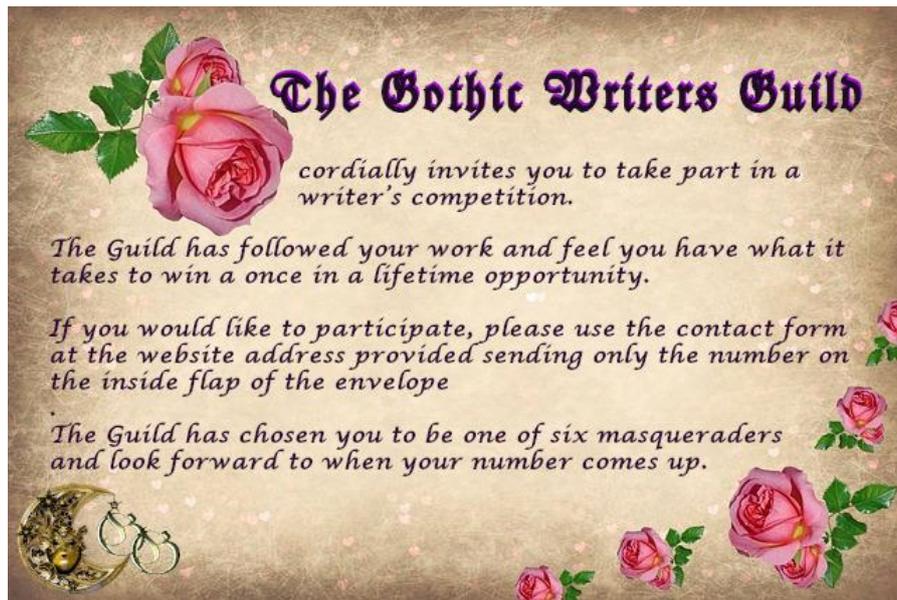


Figure 4: One type of invitation

Source: Mabel (2018)

I propose to world create using new technologies with existing modes, forms and tropes of the creative genres to present a fantasy story based in realism with a sense of the magic. I will create nine separate subgenre pieces before moving into the major story related through composition, photographic, audio, and or video formats, by masquerader V. I propose to deliver, through the lens of a gothic (horror) genre, a hint to the magic in realism through the instructions and writings by the grandmasters.

The interview will be set out as follows:

- The round one question by the grandmasters will begin, followed by the separate answers by the nine masqueraders.
- At the completion of round one, a new interview will begin for round two, with three masqueraders.

I intended to conclude each round to maintain flow and ease of understanding.

The one interview will encompass three. All will reveal a greater story at the end. The purpose of the artefact is to further research the genre, magic realism, by show as much as tell. Magic realism is a literary genre deserving of a thorough investigation. It is used by many indie creators but is rarely considered by those same creators as genre for publication. I propose to shine a light on the magic in realism by creating the real and highlighting the fantastical elements of the genre as a whole. Magic realism does not receive the spotlight it deserves. I hope to change that.

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