

Anasazi
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Published by J.R. Leckman at Smashwords

Front Cover Design: J.R. Leckman

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Pam opened up the front door of her home for the first time in over a week. Her plants had wilted slightly in the August heat and her house smelled of stale air and a filthy litter box.

“Welcome home,” she muttered to herself as she dragged her suitcase in, a weeks worth of mail under one arm.

One of the wheels on her suitcase was stuck, which resulted in a drag mark on her carpet. Genie, her orange tabby, put in a brief appearance before running away into the house. Pam tossed the mail onto the kitchen counter and pushed the button on her answering machine. She listened through all seven hang up calls and checked the caller id.

“Damn solicitors.” She deleted them.

Coming home from a trip always left Pam with mixed feelings. It was good to be home after such a long time. Easing back into the same boring pattern she referred to as her life, on the other hand...

Afternoon passed and transformed into evening. Pam passed most of it on her computer with a glass of wine, more accurately an old Big Gulp cup which could accommodate the whole bottle. After a sufficient amount of intoxication set in, she proceeded to open up her suitcase.

Her clothes were packed into a strange swirling pattern along the inner edges. She pulled at some t-shirts and cotton shorts until her prize lay unwrapped, looking very much like an egg in a nest of cloth. She lifted the black and white pot from its cradle and sighed.

Pam had spent most of her week investigating the ruins of Mesa Verde in south western Colorado. She had only visited the gift shop twice. The first time was for a niece who collected shot glasses (which Pam thought was ridiculously silly, seeing as the girl was eight) and the second time for a pot meant to be a re-creation of the black on white style pottery manufactured by the Anasazi, or Ancestral Puebloans if you cared about their feelings. That pot, purchased with her Visa card, had long ago seen a short trip over a deep canyon. The pot she held in her hands had a little price sticker stuck to its bottom, a precaution for just in case.

It was, after all, a felony to remove an artifact from a National Park.

She rotated the pot in her hand, admiring the craftsmanship and the artwork of the piece. The top of the pot had been sealed shut with what looked like a thick piece of leather. Leather ties had been run across the neck of the piece, giving it a drum like appearance. Pam tapped a finger on it experimentally, rejoicing in the solid beat that echoed off of her walls.

It had rained heavily in Mesa Verde for most of the week, way more than usual. In many of the ruins, pot fragments had appeared in the sand and gravel, exposed for the first time in maybe centuries. These only interested Pam so much. She would respectfully examine them and place them back where she found them.

This particular find had been far more exciting.

Pam had always been fascinated by archaeology. When she had attended college ten years ago, she had graduated with a major in English and a minor in Archaeology. Neither degree actually mattered since her parents were filthy rich, and she fully intended to sponge off of them until they died and she inherited it all.

It wasn't a bad thing, actually. She was a good daughter and a giving person, and if one of her books would ever sell, maybe she would make something of herself.

She thought back to the day she had seen the pot. She had been checking out the ruins on the Far View Sites, making her way through each one and taking tons of pictures. The hike up to Mummy Lake had yielded several little pottery shards along the trail. Getting up to Mummy Lake, she found a pair of Russians who took her picture in front of the Civil Engineering marker and set about exploring.

Careful not to disturb the ruins, she had descended the stairs to wander around the inside of the reservoir the Anasazi had built for themselves. Overgrown with grass and various vegetation, she tried to imagine what it was like all those years ago when the natives had come to this place for water everyday.

Towards the middle of the lake was a sandy patch of ground surrounded by green. Curious, she realized that it was something that could not be seen from the edge of the lake, due to the tall grass around it. Without thinking much about it, she snapped a picture.

The screen of her digital camera looked strange and washed out. Frowning, she tried to take another. Failing again, she snapped a picture of the rim of the lake. The little screen on her camera displayed the image just fine.

Curious, she walked closer to the bare patch to see if she had encountered some strange magnetic anomaly (she'd heard the word on television) and saw the curve of what could only be a giant pottery shard.

Excited, she scurried through the grass and knelt down. Thinking it was a piece the size of her hand, she attempted to pick it up only to discover that it was buried. Excited by the prospect of seeing a mostly intact piece of history, she had begun digging down into the ground. The earth beneath her fingers seemed to move willingly away from the fired clay and soon she pulled it free from the ground. Excitement at seeing an intact artifact soon gave way to indecision. Should she leave it and hope it was still there when she could bring someone back? Or should she take it with her?

The sound of a large group of people walking up the trail decided it for her.

Pam had scurried down a different trail, heading back to the parking area, intent on finding a ranger with the pot in her hands. It would be easy to show them the depression; it was the size of a volleyball.

Surprised to see nobody at the parking lot, she placed the pot carefully in the passengers well, wrapped in her jacket and a spare pair of jeans. She had hit a bump pulling out of the lot and heard something inside the jar rattle around much like beads.

Pulling into the Far View Terrace, it never crossed her mind why she was buying a similar sized pot. It still never crossed her mind when she pulled the sticker from it and stuck it to her prize, which was now nestled in a box between her clothing that had come with her purchase. Stopping on her way out of the park only to hurl her souvenir over a cliff, she was back in her hotel room shaking with excitement when it finally occurred to her what she had done.

Shame and guilt had caused the artifact to remain hidden away in her luggage until returning home.

Free of its confinement, she spun the pot in her hand, listening to the sound of something inside rolling around. It was probably a couple of pebbles, or maybe even some broken dirt clumps.

A week passed. Every night, Pam would sit down by her computer to write her first best seller only to find herself holding the pot between her fingers and drumming on the leather seal up top. Upon careful inspection one night, Pam saw that a symbol had once been painted on the leather, but was now too worn to make out. Tilting it in her hands, she could feel its mysterious contents shift as it rattled in the quiet of her office.

The pot had her mesmerized. Pam spent a lot of time each night debating whether she should open it or not. Each night, as she cradled it in her hands, she would stare at the leather lid, knowing that once removed it would never go back on. The leather had stretched and deformed over the years and would likely crack and tear when she pulled it off. Each night she would set it back on the shelf unopened and stumble to bed, unaware of the silent anticipation it would radiate throughout the evening hours.

* * *

She was naked. Or at least, she felt like she should be.

Standing along the tops of the cliff and gazing into the valley below, Pam realized through muddled thoughts that her state of dress really didn't matter. Sure enough, upon gazing down, she saw she was clad in nondescript clothing that weighed nothing. Her thoughts were slightly hazy as she stared down into the abandoned cliff dwellings below.

Time was distorted. She maneuvered through the different dig sites, random tidbits of knowledge flickering into her mind like sticky bumblebees. Her legs stretched like taffy as she crossed great ravines, her heart pounding in her chest as she called out to no one in particular.

The world briefly faded into darkness and Pam realized for just a moment that she was waking up. Calming herself, she slipped once again into the deep senseless realm of dreams.

Things solidified. Nondescript clothing became her yoga pants and a tank top. It was too hot for the sweat pants she usually wore. Walking barefoot through the rocks, Pam realized that her ears had become attuned to the steady beating of a drum.

The sound bounced around the cliff walls, echoing like whispers around her ears. Words from a lost language tickled her cheeks and she found herself drawn towards them.

Crossing the cliff tops, she could see fleeting shadow figures disappear into the brush and ancient homes. Turning her head, she saw one such figure stretch impossibly thin to squeeze through an opening the size of her fist. The spirits of the cliffs treated her as anathema, and she couldn't help but feel sad.

The drumming was louder now and she pushed her way through cornstalks. She realized that the stalks bent away from her and led her forward until she stood overlooking one of the larger sites. Her conscious mind reached through several layers of sleep and a name came to mind.

"Spruce Tree House." She spoke the words out loud and the cliff melted before her into set of stone stairs.

She walked forward, watching shadows peel away from her approach. As she walked into the ruins, she saw that the buildings were all intact, untouched by the ravages of time. In the middle of the site, the drumming sounds emanated from a hole in the ground. A ladder was propped through the hole and led down into a family ritual chamber known as a Kiva.

In real life, she had snapped several pictures from the inside of this structure. Here in the dream world, however, the Kiva felt like a giant heart pulsing with its own magical beat, running in cadence alongside that of the drum.

Her curiosity led her to the hole. She grabbed hold of the ladder at the entrance and descended.

The darkness surrounded her, chased away only by the single sliver of daylight that highlighted her journey downward. Even though she traveled only a few rungs, when she stepped away from the ladder, she saw that the room she was in stretched off forever into the dark depths of her own mind.

That single sliver of light illuminated a man adorned in fur and feathers. He sat there, his eyes closed and his mouth open, breathing the earthen air as he beat his hands on a tiny drum. In the infinite space below the ground, the beats travelled forever into the emptiness.

Pam stood transfixed. The light illuminated the shaman's face just right, casting eerie shadows into his mouth and beneath his eyes. She flinched when he opened his eyes, seeing her for the first time.

The beating of the drum ceased. Pam looked down to see that his hands were empty, the drum lost to the darkness.

He regarded her with an intense glare. The room was full of a heavy stillness that pressed into Pam's body so hard she fell to her knees, panting for air.

The shaman spoke words Pam didn't understand, muddy words that clumped and rolled off of his tongue in syllables that Pam couldn't place.

Staring deep into her eyes, the shaman held something up. Pam recognized it as the pot she had thrown into the ravine.

"Anasazi." It was the one word she understood. He tapped the pot meaningfully and then waved one hand into the darkness. Sounds of terror and sadness filled the air and Pam covered her ears to shut out the noise.

The shaman held the pot in her face and shook it with anger.

"Anasazi!" He shouted and cast the pot at her feet. She looked down and realized the ground was gone beneath her.

She fell away into the darkness, the narrow band of light receding from her vision until it became a solitary star.

Pam awoke under a heavy smothering weight. Panicked, she rolled out of bed, tearing at the thing covering her face.

Genie yowled as he was unceremoniously tossed from the bed and he disappeared around the corner, as if that was where he was heading all along.

* * *

Two months to the day had passed. Every night ended the same, with a rolling examination of the black and white pot, listening to the soft shuffling within. It was October now and the first big snowstorm of the year had hit. Sitting in her chair wearing an old oversized sweater from an ex boyfriend, she held the pot in her hands and gazed outside into the night sky.

In the last two months, things had begun to change for Pam. The guilt of her act had slowly begun gnawing away at her conscience. Frequent trips to the grocery store had grown further and further apart, as casual looks from other shoppers had begun to feel like pointed accusations. Her shopping hours were now in the early midmorning hours, away from prying eyes.

Avoiding phone calls from her few friends and family alike, her time at home was now spent with that cursed pot. Evenings were spent hypnotically tracing those damned black lines as they sunk into squares and blades of grass. Some nights it felt almost hot to the touch.

Her obsession was only further modified by the nightly dreams and the resulting lack of sleep. The Shaman appeared almost every night, hollering to her as if from a great distance away, always ending her dreams with the shout of "Anasazi!" Originally she had felt like he was admonishing her for the theft as well, as he would often be holding the replica pot she had purchased.

That wasn't all. Pam had also spent many nights dreaming about the ruins themselves. Something in the ruins was hunting her and her kinsman. Some nights would

have her waking up in cold sweats as she would peek into the darkness of a cliff dwelling and see a pair of silvery eyes shining back.

She had spent a little time on the phone with her therapist about it. Dr. Chotzky, an older gentleman who constantly chewed on peppermints, had suggested that the dreams came from her own guilt and resentment (of course). For the last three weeks, he had attempted to get her to give the pot back as an anonymous donation.

Something kept her from doing it. The only time she felt calm anymore was when she held it in her hands and rolled it around, listening to the mysterious contents shuffling around. She would often do this for hours, the hours she used to devote to writing.

Pam felt like the pot was an enigma wrapped in a mystery laying a sea of questions. Dr Chotzky told her that perhaps she was more in love with the possibility of what could be inside the pot than the actual contents.

Moving past the obsession was going to take work. Dr Chotzky had laid out a six month plan which ended with the return of the pot. The first step, as she had been told today, was to open it up and actually see what was inside.

Pam, in preparation, had gotten so drunk she could barely walk. Waiting to sober up, it was now almost one in the morning. Looking at Genie, who had just sauntered into the room with the smell of freshly used litter box, she sighed to herself.

The time for thinking it over was past. Holding the pot in her hands, she frowned and reached for the straps. Fear began to mount in her stomach and the back of her mind. She did her best to push it aside.

What if she opened it and a couple of river pebbles rolled out?

What if she opened it and found an ancient necklace of silver and turquoise?

Trembling, her hands began to pull at the leather knots around the outside of the pot. Standing the test of time, the knots became short work for her trembling fingers. Curious, Genie came to see what she was doing.

Pulling the last leather strip free, the lid was held in place only by the conformed strip of animal hide. Trying to be careful, she peeled the animal skin back to reveal the contents within. The leather cracked in places and split open like a paper cut across the opening.

Behind her, Genie let out a primal growl as darkness flooded the room.

In the darkness, Pam felt something brush past her face.

Startled, she dropped the pot.

Frantic, she dug through her pockets for her cell phone. Using the light from her display, she walked out to her garage and checked the breakers. Seeing they hadn't been tripped, she flipped them a few times anyway.

"Damn." Pam stumbled her way back inside and grabbed a flashlight from the kitchen. It was a big heavy Mag light, the kind you could hit somebody with over the head. Before she flipped it on, she looked outside and saw that the whole world had gone dark, the only light coming from somewhere outside her neighborhood.

"Shit." Hopefully the power would be back soon. Her home wouldn't keep warm for too long in this weather, and she hated being cold.

Walking back upstairs, she heard Genie growl somewhere in the darkness.

"Genie, come here." She patted her legs, pretending that it would somehow influence her cats' decision to keep her company. In the darkness, she heard another hiss and the scurrying of feet.

“Whatever.” It wasn’t worth it trying to understand the secret lives of cats. Back in her office, she shined her light on the floor. The pot had survived its fall and rolled under her desk.

Picking it up, she shined her light inside.

It was empty.

Puzzled, she climbed underneath the desk and shined the light around. Her search yielded no results.

Pam sat back in her chair and looked at the pot. She went over in her mind what had happened and began shining her light everywhere.

Where had its contents gone?

Expecting to see beads, jewelry, or even just dirt and stones, Pam was unsettled to see that nothing was on her carpet. She picked up the pot and rolled it in her hands. It remained uncharacteristically silent.

Pam stood up and circled her desk chair, giving the room another once over. She stepped down on something with her foot and froze as it cracked like a dry leaf under her skin.

“Fuck!” She lifted up her foot, expecting to see something old and priceless, broken by her stupid clumsiness.

Crumpled underneath her foot were the remains of a long dead spider the size of a mouse.

“Ew! Ew ew ew!” Pam felt revulsion travel through her body in distinct waves. It had landed on its back, its legs curled upwards characteristically. Its furry legs had broken off under her foot and when she stepped down again, she felt something crackle again under her skin.

“Yuck!” She ran through her home and stuck her foot in the bathtub. She ran hot water over it (luckily it was a gas heater) until her foot was a bright pink color.

Walking back to her office, she shined her light on the dead thing on the floor.

Of all the things she could have imagined, this was indeed the last. A dumb bug that had gotten sealed in a pot and left behind.

Frowning, she gave the spider a wide berth. She would vacuum it up when the power was back on.

Picking up the pot, she held it in her hands. Her therapist had been right. The soothing sounds of the pot had been a dead spider, tumbling end over end. Its previous appeal had completely vanished in her mind.

Six months was too long. She was going to package the thing up in the morning and mail it anonymously.

“Gross.” She shuddered to herself. She put the pot on her desk.

She stepped out into the hallway and froze. Somebody was whispering.

Somewhere in the house, she heard the sound of furniture shifting across hardwood floors. In the darkness, Genie screamed.

Stricken with fright, she remained motionless as she heard the movement begin in her living room and move towards the kitchen. The scrabbling of claws across her home was accompanied by the sounds of Genie howling like he was on fire.

Genie let out one long, final scream. It sounded almost human.

Pam stood there, frozen by terror and indecision. Her eyes lingered on the end of the dark hallway where the stairs started. Thinking she may have fallen asleep in her chair

again, she attempted to open her eyes and awake in her bed. Nothing happened. Whatever had just happened had been real.

“Genie?” Pam called into the darkness. The house remained silent as she stood and walked down the hallway. Coming down the stairs, she shined her light around, hoping to see the spooky reflection of Genie’s eyes in a dark corner.

Upon entry to the living room, she saw that her couch had been dragged about a foot from the wall. Two giant rips in the leather made her think of talons, talons that had hooked into the couch and pulled it from the wall.

Following the trail of furniture, she saw that her dining room table had been shifted and most of the chairs had been knocked to the floor, one broken apart. In the kitchen, everything on the counters had been thrown to the floor. Running her light across her cupboard tops, she stopped.

On one of the doors, she could see a pair of deep grooves in the wood about four inches apart. From where she stood, she could see a bloody claw that had gotten caught and ripped free stuck at about eye level. A fat smudge of blood was smeared down the oaken wood and beneath it; a clump of fur had fallen in a tiny pile.

Pulling her cell phone from her pocket, she dialed 911.

When the operator answered, Pam began to scream.

“Please, you have to send somebody, something is in my house!”

“Okay ma’am, please remain calm...”

“It ate my fucking cat!” Pam began sobbing as she backed herself into a corner. She reached out for a loose steak knife that had fallen free of its holder.

“Okay ma’am, what is your name and your address?”

Pam gave her information over the phone and was assured that an officer would be there as soon as possible, weather permitting. Pam cried quietly into the phone as the operator told her to go to a neighbor’s house and wait there.

Hanging up the phone, she sobbed for a few minutes. Something shifted in the house and Pam saw an orange blur shoot away from her beam of light.

“Genie?” She stuttered. Checking the stain on the cabinet door, she tried to rationalize what may have happened. Maybe Genie had fallen and hurt himself. If she left now, she wouldn’t forgive herself if Genie needed a vet.

She set down the knife on her table and began her search.

She walked through the house, softly calling his name. Twice, she saw his eyes reflected in the shadows before disappearing.

Walking into her bedroom, she shined the light on her cat. Genie sat on the bed, blood dripping from one paw.

“Genie, are you okay?” Walking across the room, she tucked the light between her legs and patted her knees. “Come here sweetie, let mommy look at your foot.”

Genie cocked his head sideways at an unnatural angle, a bulge in his neck sticking upwards. Standing up on his hind legs, his jaw stretched into a strange grin and Genie let out a chuckle. His skin began to crawl like a bag full of snakes.

“Jee...nee.” Her cat’s tongue rolled out of his mouth as he spoke.

Pam was already running down the hall when she heard the ripping sounds of carpet follow from behind. She ran down the stairs as she heard the Genie thing vault over the railing, landing in the room below.

Pulling her front door open, she ran out into the falling snow. Something behind her made a ripping noise and she was grabbed around the waist by something dark and bloody.

Pam was pulled back into the darkness of her home. She screamed, hoping somebody would hear her.

Scrabbling backwards on her hands and feet, the Mag light casting ominous shadows from the open doorway, she saw only a faint outline of her attacker. It tossed something down by her feet and Pam was horrified to see that all that was left of Genie was empty skin.

The thing moved towards her, all limbs and hair as it forced her body up against the wall. Breaking free, she ran to her kitchen, snatching up the knife from her kitchen table. The thing sauntered towards her as she stepped forward, stabbing at it.

Her hand was quickly enveloped. She struggled as it began to force itself into her body through every orifice. Inside, she could feel her body being pulled apart by a thousand hairy fingers and her vision began to fade to black as she was digested.

* * *

It stood up inside its freshly fallen prey. Looking around the dwelling, it chuckled softly to itself. It picked up what was left of the cat and tossed it deeper into the house. "Jee-nee." That's what the woman had called it. It had never seen a cat so small, not like the mountain lion it had lived in once.

Staring outside, it saw a new unfamiliar world. The homes were different now. It had watched the Pam human talk into a box. It had seen her cast fire from a tube.

It was snowing out. It regarded the snow with hatred. Water was poisonous to its existence, which was exactly how one of those wretched human youth had trapped it inside that pot to begin with. It had been tricked into pursuing the young man up the cliffs, too involved in feeding off of the human's terror to realize that a storm was brewing. Caught out in the rain, it had been forced to inhabit a spider hiding inside an abandoned clay pot by their reservoir. Ever fearful, the human had sealed it away and thrown it in the lake where it had gone dormant over the centuries.

The only reason it had been caught was it had gotten too greedy. Hunting the cliff dwellers had become too much like fun. It could empty out most of a dwelling overnight, making a meal of their bodies than feasting on the emotions of those who would inevitably come to discover its mutilated prey. It wasn't long before it had emptied out most of the canyon, and a last minute act of desperation had somehow locked it away.

After its capture, it could still feel their fear. Understanding this, those few left behind had left. It had howled in anger, its fragile body crumbling away as time passed.

It had only awoken recently, to the gentle sounds of drumming and to the movement of its prison causing its body to tumble in place. Never had it ever experienced such helplessness.

This time, it would be more careful.

Something made a knocking sound on the door.

The Pam-thing answered and apologized, using the memories it had eaten to speak with the policeman. The cat had knocked over furniture and scared her into a drunken, panicked phone call. Enduring a stern lecture, the Pam-thing watched as the policeman turned and left in something it had never seen before that humans called a car.

Smiling to itself in the darkness, it rubbed Pam's hands together in glee.

* * *

May 4th, 1889

Richard Wetherill stood up on the top of the Mesa, smiling down at the haul of goods he had brought back with him from the strange city he had discovered just before Christmas.

“Hey Charlie!” He waved at his friend. Charlie smiled up at him from the makeshift ladder they had built. The snow had made it hard for them to excavate the city. Now that the weather had warmed up, however, things were going much smoother. Today they had knocked down a wall to pull out a bunch of tools the people who had lived here had left behind, tools he would sell in town.

“Where’d the horses go?”

“Left them with Gaagii. He was acting all nervous when I said we were going down there.”

Richard looked around and saw the Navajo standing a healthy distance from the cliffs edge. Taking his apprehension for a fear of heights, Richard chuckled to himself. Gaagii was useful enough that he would likely hire him for at least a couple more trips.

As they finished loading up their horses, Charlie looked at Richard.

“Hey, you think he knows who used to live here?”

Richard shrugged. This was their first trip out with a red skin. Turning to Gaagii, he asked the man in his native tongue.

Gaagii stared out at the cliffs, a cold pit in his stomach. He had heard the elders speak of this place several times in their stories, of a beast that could walk among man wearing the skin of its prey.

“Anasazi.” It was their word for the abomination that had remained behind. It meant Ancient Enemy.

Gaagii swore right then to never come back to this cursed place.

Richard turned to Charlie and smiled, oblivious of Gaagii’s discomfort.

“Well, there you go.”

#

About the Author:

J.R. Leckman currently resides somewhere in Colorado with his wife and a house full of pets. He is currently pursuing a degree in physics, but still finds that writing is his first love. He hoped you enjoyed or hated this story enough to leave a highly opinionated review and looks forward to inviting you into another of his worlds very soon.

About the Story

The story is based solely off of a replica pot we purchased during our trip to Mesa Verde, Colorado (which is also pictured on the cover). The two men mentioned at the end of the story did discover the ruins of Mesa Verde. The story most commonly told is that when they asked one of their native guides (a Navajo Indian) who used to live there, the answer was "Anasazi." The word was used for decades by scholars, and eventually somebody realized it could be interpreted as "enemy ancestors," "ancient enemies," and many other negative terms in the Navajo tongue. Today, they are referred to as Ancestor Puebloans and nobody knows for certain why they all left. I recommend a visit to this historic location to anybody who will listen.

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