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# Blood on Vellum: Notes from the Apex Editor-in-Chief

*Lynne M. Thomas*

Winter is a challenging time. While I'm not a fan of being cold, I like the sense of renewal that comes with bracing winds and clean snow that covers up the yard work I neglected to complete from the fall. It feels like a clean slate. We shine our lights just a bit more brightly during this darkest time of the year. We gather together and share food, time, and warmth as best we can, as the weather does its utmost to make us feel isolated and alone.

This month's issue is a bit eclectic, but I think it illustrates feeling alone even when surrounded by people. We have an irreverent take on holiday SF/F films by E.E. Knight, and two stories that take on the notion of family from very different perspectives, one by Christopher Barzak and one from Michael Pevzner. This issue also includes a reprint of a haunting tale from Sarah Monette. Our poetry comes from F.J. Bergmann and Sandy Liebowitz. We've got a great interview with writer Jennifer Pelland, and a splendidly wintry cover by Galen Smith.

As we move into a new year, there are some minor tweaks that you will see for Apex. The first is that poetry is shifting to an occasional rather than a monthly feature. I am *exceedingly* picky about poetry, and I prefer to focus on publishing *only* the pieces that take my breath away.

We are also, after this issue, lowering our maximum word count for submissions to 5000 words from 7500. I tend to prefer leaner, tighter stories, and this will help us achieve that end.

Given that my background is in nonfiction editing, it should not come as much of a surprise that you will see additional nonfiction. We're including more interviews with writers whenever possible, as well as thoughtful, provocative essays on a wide range of topics.

I hope you enjoy the December issue of Apex.

# The 24 Hour Brother

*Christopher Barzak*

My little brother Joe grew up too fast for his own good. My mom was the first to see what we were in for. Soon after Joe's birth, when the nurse put him in her arms, the first thing he did, still pink and slimy, was smile the gummy, wry smile of a little old man.

"Joseph, Joe, my baby boy," said my mother, "we'll try our best if you will." She kissed his cheek and handed him back to the nurse, trying to keep herself from falling in love with someone who she realized, at their very first meeting, would only break her heart. The first sign was in that first smile: the old man Joe would soon become, the old man Joe would become too soon.

I was there for the birth, too. The midwife kept looking over her shoulder and saying, "Come look at this, Lewis! It's incredible!" but I shook my head. While Dad hovered over the bed with a video camera, I backed myself into a corner.

It was an important day, Joe's birthday. Fifteen years before, while my mother was giving birth to me, there'd been "complications." The doctor had told her it would be nearly impossible for her to have any more children. At Joe's birth, though, all that doctor could do was throw his hands in the air and look from nurse to midwife to mother, father, and finally to me. "It's a miracle!" he said. "It's a miracle, I'm sure!"

"Do you hear that, Lewis?" said my father. He paused in his recording of the event to look back at me in my corner. "A miracle. Come over and see your little brother."

For weeks my parents had been drilling me on the importance of being a big brother. I would be one of Joe's confidantes; I would be one of his guides. But I was frightened at the thought of all that responsibility. So when I saw Joe on his back, being weighed, waving his little limbs like an overturned insect, all my fears evaporated. I was able to smile for the first time in days. Face red and screaming, tiny body dimpled with white splotches, he looked so helpless that I knew right away I'd fill the shoes of a



big brother better than anyone. “Joe,” I whispered, stroking the backs of my fingers across his pasty cheek, “I’m your big brother. Lewis. Welcome home.”

“What a lovely sentiment, Lewis,” said my father. “Joe’s very lucky to have you for a brother.” He tousled my hair, hugged me to his shoulder, and lifted the recorder back up to his eye. “Smile,” he said when the nurse gave Joe to my mom, the cord no longer dangling. Mom grinned then—a blinking, reluctant grin, still holding strong to the secret of what she’d seen before the rest of us had had a chance to notice—and held Joe up in the crook of her arms.

That’s when we saw what Mom would tell us she’d already witnessed. Staring into the camera like an attention-starved movie star, Joe pulled back his lips to reveal a single tooth, perfectly white, rising out of the pale pink of his gums, like a tiny tombstone.

The tooth was not the only thing to tip us off about Joe, though. Not even an hour later we were chasing him through the hospital. He weaved through the legs of nurses and orderlies while my dad and I dodged the spinning bodies he left behind him. As he stumped and slapped his way down the hall bare-footed, the baby fat on his legs jiggling, he experimented with a mouthful of new consonants and vowels. An orderly pushed my mom in a wheelchair behind us, but refused to match the pace Joe had set. Mom put her hands over her face and cried to see Joe trying to leave when we already had so little time to get to know him. When we finally did catch him, he had climbed onto a chair and was stretching his arm up to press the down button at a bank of elevators. My father took hold of him then, but Joe only shrieked with laughter before he started to wriggle out of my father’s hands.

“This is all my fault,” my mother said later through the bathroom door of her room as she got dressed to leave the hospital. She knew the risks, the mix-ups in chromosomes courted by men and women of a certain age. But her tests had all come