

Prompt: The Skire Scoop

Question: *What was the most terrifying moment of your life?*

Submission: Writing

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*On the way to your workplace, you decide to pick up a copy of the Skire Scoop. Nothing beats the morning paper over a sip of hot coffee and a plain ol' donut, you think to yourself, as you thumb the news paper open and settle into your seat on the train.*

*The morning commute goes by so fast, but at least you have time for this.*

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*"What was the most terrifying moment of your life?"*

*Written and edited by: Scoop*

*Dictated and experienced by: Amaretto Amri*

Hello, dear readers!

Today's submission to the Skire Scoop was sent in to us by Mr. Amaretto 'Retto' Amri. You may know him as the proud owner of Afterglow, but today, he comes to us with an absolutely *harrowing* tale of terror.

I met with Mr. Amaretto as he locked up his pride and joy just last week. Hidden in the heart of our fair city, the bar owner's building is a popular hangout spot that the locals like to come and tie one on after a long day's work.

...And given the state of our world as of late, I'm sure you can all imagine just how busy the Afterglow has been.

Passing through the double doors, Mr. Amaretto—who insists I just call him 'Retto' for brevity's sake—quickly shuts them behind me and flips the 'We're Open!' sign posted at the window to its other end. A quick tug of a chain shuts down the neon light of the sign advertising the business' name out front.

He then ushers me past dozens of neatly packed away tables, upon each are stacked a handful of chairs. Past the empty stage that I could only surmise hosted a live band or two tonight, and towards an impressive bar. I don't have to wait for him to gesture to them before I'm hopping up on one of the empty barstools, recorder at the ready.

"You don't mind that I'll be recording this, I hope?" I go on to give a brief explanation that having the audio file of our conversation will make it easier for me when I get back to the office to write up the article.

"Of course not." Retto replies steadily, taking his customary place behind the bar. Behind him, there's an impressive collection of vintages. Wines, beers, even the harder stuff. There's machines that show dozens of different drink brands I've never even heard of, all within reach of him. The whole thing is displayed with inset lighting within the shelves that makes the glass bottles glow like stained glass behind him. "You can print whatever you'd like. You can even embellish the details, but I doubt you'll need much of that with me."

Retto smiles then, tall ears perked up and his tail gently swaying behind him. The guy is in what I could only assume is a uniform he assigned himself, being the owner of this place- a simple white button up shirt with the sleeves rolled up to his elbows and a rich purple vest. He's in a humanoid form at the moment, with pale skin and shoulder length hair that compliments the vest well.

He's standing openly and honestly, with a service smile that while *I* can tell is put on for show, right then and there I have no issue believing that he can get any of his customers to tell him anything. He just has that sort of vibe.

"I'll believe it when I hear it." My response is meant to be playful and disarming. It's supposed to put him at ease and yet Retto's expression just barely wavers from that smile. There's a tightness around his eyes that betray the fact that while this is a no-consequences exchange between us, the subject of the matter he's dredging up from memory is anything but light.

"So. You ready? You're aware of what this Scoop's all about this month, hm?"

In response, Retto huffs a quick chuckle and leans forward, hands resting palms down on the polished wooden bar. "Y'know, I'm actually a big fu—" Looks like he thinks the better of cursing here. "... A big fan. Not a long time reader myself but I pick up the Scoop whenever there's a new issue and the bar's not busy. I saw what the next one was about, and I knew I had to tell you my story."

"The Most Terrifying Moment of your life... I dunno, think you've got a good enough tale for me to put it on paper?"

Retto nods, still playing along with the banter even though I can tell he's trying to psych himself up for what he's about to tell me.

"So, this happened shortly after I saw one of those... goo monsters—"

"The ones that've been coming out of the ground lately, yeah?" I nod. "Yeah, I've heard of them, but I've never seen them personally."

"Be glad." Retto responds, his smile dropping for the first time since we got to the bar. "They're not friendly. And I don't want to sound like a cliche here, but you should count your lucky stars every day you don't have to remember what getting up close and personal to one is like."

I smile slightly, encouraging him to continue on. Retto makes a throat clearing noise and grabs a nearby towel. It looks like despite not wanting to be a cliche, he does what most bartenders do when they don't know what to do with their hands and starts cleaning his workspace.

"So, like I was saying..."

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Morning was well and truly underway by the time Retto had packed up a bag with all the essentials he'd need for his bugout plan. Simple necessities such as clothing for when he wanted to remain two-legged, and some supplies. He wasn't hurt, but he had a first aid kit just in case, as well as some chargers to keep his devices powered up.

The plan was simple. He'd booked a hotel room for a couple of days and from there, he would tap into his building's camera system (He paid extra for a proprietary connection for him personally. It was expensive but well worth the cost, especially now.) and make sure that whatever hellspawn it was that he'd encountered in the back alley had wandered off to terrorize some other poor bastard. It was a callous plan but he'd done his best to warn everyone he could via the Council connection in order to keep them away.

No one had ever seen these things before, so it stood to assume that no one knew exactly how to kill the fuckers yet.

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"Am I allowed to swear in these?"

"Oh, very much so. But if you go too overboard with it, I do retain the liberty of polishing your dialogue up some."

"Huh. Well, fair's fair."

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The fluorescent lights felt particularly cold and unwelcoming at the moment, as Retto stood in front of the door leading to the back alley. While he stood at an above average height when it came to human standards, (Ironically enough humans were the standard the city ordinances followed when it came to buildings given due to just how cleanly humankind split the differences when it came to species' size. Meaning it was easier and more cost effective to build around humans, who topped out at around six to seven feet over 99.9% of the time, versus say, Crooks— who could top over twelve. It also didn't preclude any limitations to building around for example, Gravents. The smallest of Skires.) he felt quite small in the face of the ominous metal door looming over him.

In his hands he held a length of synthetic rope- he got it from the storage area where he took it off a shipment of cocktail umbrellas-, nervously twisting it over and over like a worry stone. Eventually, Retto takes a knee and starts to wind the rope around the handle and a nearby shelving unit. The unit is sturdy enough, weighed down by hundreds of pounds of food and kitchen tools. It's made of metal and should at least serve as a good anchor... At least, good enough to dissuade anything but a particularly motivated monster.

He had to take some precautions. He was going to be away for the next couple days and he'd already texted his staff to take their breaks. The Afterglow would be left on its own, and he wasn't about to leave it open for monsters to just break in. Call him sentimental. Call him stupid. Call him overly protective of the last thing in his life he had that he could rightfully call his. But he wasn't half-assed in his efforts, at least.

Leaving the kitchens, Retto grabs his bugout bag and makes his way to the entrance... and yet something makes him pause. Something terrible.

There was the sound of breaking glass somewhere behind him, and the very thought causes ice to grow in his chest and make him freeze.

Despite his better judgment, Retto shoulders his bag and goes back to the kitchens. It doesn't take him long to figure out what happened then.

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“*The fucking window.*” Retto says, his hands balled up into fists against the bar. Looking past him at the door leading into the kitchens, I can just barely see that there’s actual caution tape in the room beyond the door, just barely visible via a porthole-style looking glass in said door.

“I secured the door but didn’t think to check the *massive fucking window on the left of it.*”

“What did you do next?”

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"Shit. Shit shit shi—" Retto repeated the curse under his breath, then over it. He couldn't help it. Panic had well and truly set in, and he had to leave, **now**. His best efforts, even now... All wasted.

Turning on his heel, Retto began a full sprint. Thoughts of getting out of here and away were at the forefront of his mind. It was here. Inside. It was looking for him--

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By now, Retto had stopped speaking, and he stayed quiet for a long while. You know that thousand yard stare that people get, when they're reliving something painful? Something traumatic? He looked just like that, staring past me. His mouth was tugged downwards, ears drooping.

"...Are you alright?" I ask. "We don't have to continue." Not ashamed to say that I felt a little regretful offering that. Retto had a great story, it would've sucked if we couldn't finish it this far in.

To his credit, Retto simply shakes his head, holding up a hand, indicating he needed a second. His other hand, I noticed he was cradling his shoulder.

"No. Just. Just gimme a sec."

By now, the bar had fully closed down. The staffers were hanging up their aprons, and some waved quick goodbyes as they grabbed their bags and made for the exit. Retto waved back, though he didn't look at them. His eye was solely focused on the wood grain of the bar beneath him. I gave him his moment and eventually, he picked up where he left off.

"I didn't get far."

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Retto only made it half a dozen steps before his fears were realized.

Like before, it moved too fast for him to react in time. Just as the CCCat passed the bar, the creature attacked.

It lashed out at him like a coiled snake, its ivory white maw finding his shoulder and sinking its fangs in as deep as it could.

"ACK!" The wind is torn from Retto's body as he's yanked up like a rag doll, all two hundred something pounds of him like a young child. He can't even scream as he's thrown around. In the chaos of it all, he tries and tries, again and again, to get a good look at exactly

what's happening, but it's useless. It's not until he can hear and feel his jacket tearing at the shoulder joint and giving way, sending him flying into the wall opposite the creature, does he finally get what he wants.

Stood in the corner, Retto realizes that it had just been the creature's head... that had moved. The rest of it was still in the other room. It was long, like a goddamn worm, and covered in thick, black ooze. What that noxious sludge didn't cover, there were what looked to be bone-like growths, scattered helter skelter all over this thing's body. He'd call it armor, but there wasn't enough of it. Just in key points, like what had grabbed him.

Retto lands on the floor in a crumpled heap, blood flowing freely from his shoulder. While the creature had mostly just crushed his body and simply torn through his clothing and bag strap, it was hard not to wince as he reached up and flinched as his fingers touched something sharp and hard, poking just a bit out of the skin of his shoulder. He gasps, gritting his teeth and trying to stand. He doesn't know what it is, but he finds the energy to as he watches the creature thrash about and toss his supplies all over the room.

Unfortunately, wrecking his things only proves to be a weak distraction, because the monster is quick to set eyes on him next. It emits a terrible screech before it starts to move, pushing itself along the floor less like a true animal and more like a wave— destruction incarnate headed right for him.

Throwing himself to the side in an impulsive maneuver, Retto just *barely* manages to dodge the monster's lunge. Thoughts of what he'd seen that very morning, of that poor person being attacked and... He couldn't continue to think for fear of freezing up again, and that would definitely cost him his life if so.

Before he can be attacked again, Retto manages to stagger to his feet and grab the leg of a nearby chair. With a heavy twist, he turns and hurls the piece of furniture at his assailant before taking off towards the exit. He can hear the sounds of it closing in and it's basically breathing down his neck as he practically flies through the threshold of his the bar exit and into the street.

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"It followed me onto the street." Retto recounts with a harrowed look in his eye.

"That's right, it made the news last week!" A passerby had even recorded Retto and several other panicked civilians fleeing the monster that day. It had made the local news and was unfortunately just one of many, many, *many* such encounters since.

"You're lucky to be alive."

"Lucky's understating it." Retto shakes his head with a weary sigh as he looks down. "It ate one person. I didn't see if it was able to take more before the authorities finally arrived and evacuated everyone..."

"So it was here...?" I look around at my surroundings. Aside from some missing tables and chairs, it was hard to fathom that the events Retto had spoken about happened at all.

"The wonders of good insurance." Straightening up, Retto tosses the rag he'd been fiddling with over his shoulder. "As soon as that creature was... dealt with, I was able to file the claim for property damage, and I beefed up the security. At the very least, I won't get caught off guard like that again."

"Now *that* is a terrifying tale, Mr. Amri."

"Enough to make it into your scoop?" The bartender's smile is back, and credit to him, it's like he hadn't just been pale as a sheet and talking about his demons just seconds ago.

"Hah! We'll see what my next stops tell me, but I think you've got a great shot..."

To that, Retto claps his hands once with a satisfied grin. Giving me a gesture that probably meant 'wait a second', he turns from me and within moments, is pouring me out a beer.

"If that's the case, then this one's on the house! Thanks for listening to me ramble."

—End—

Word count: 2,667 words