

The Auction by Michael Burns

“Lot 1401, sold to the gentleman in the fifth row!”

The crowd reeled under the smack of the gavel and parted as the man, both relieved and horrified, was led out the door behind the podium. The Auctioneer disappeared for a few moments, and returned just as the screams began. They were cut off sharply as he slipped the door closed. With a cough and a brush at his collar, he settled himself and began on the next item.

“Too expensive, not gruesome enough,” the man beside me said. “How much you got left?”

I looked down into my battered pouch, carefully counting the piddly amount of change and bills.

“Not much, only seven years and a few loose hours here and there.”

“Oof, good luck pal. Hope it’s worth it.”

The Auctioneer had finished his soliloquy and subsequent absence, returning with the final lot of the night. Clearing his throat, he began. “Now this piece is truly marvelous, Disemboweling by Feral Hyenas. Let’s begin the bidding at one year.”

It was perfect. The painful ones always were. No one ever spent that much on the true pain, opting instead for the ever popular bullet to the back of the brainpan. With my heart in my throat, I put everything I had into my bid and was rewarded with a blanket of silence followed by the crash of the gavel and the triumphant yell of its holder.

Tears burned in my eyes as they led me back, ripping all of my time from my hands. We went through a dark corridor that emerged into a brilliant white room. In a blur, they had me sign away my Life, initial here for benefactor, there for acceptance of execution, then stuffing the forms into the envelope with the cash. They pulled forward a monitor so I could see him as they deposited my years. With all of the bills placed into his account, I saw him rise from his hospital bed, a look of awe painting his face. He ran his hands along his body, marveling at its new found strength.

I cried and collapsed as they wheeled the screen away, leaving only a small, five-minute coin on my chest.

The hyenas cackle behind me.