

An Age of Monsters

William Taylor Jr.

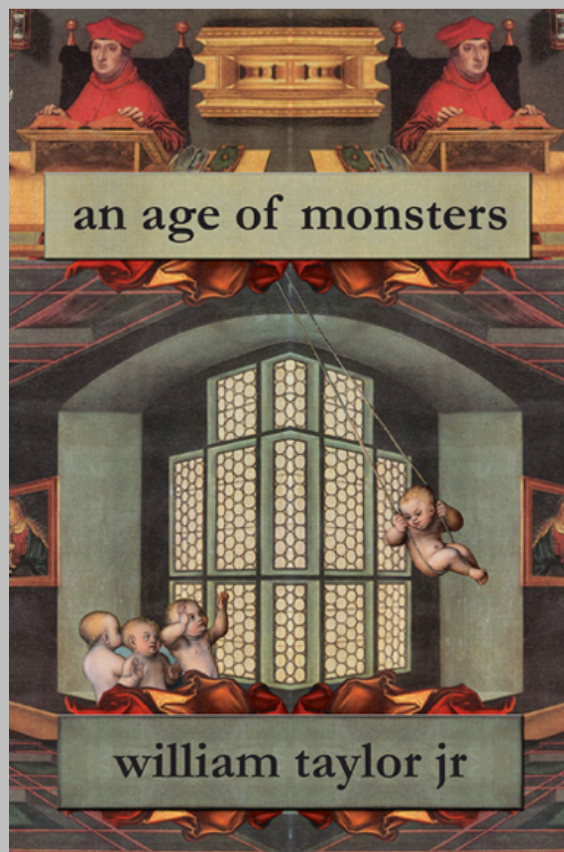
Epic Rites Press proudly announces the release of *An Age of Monsters* by William Taylor Jr. The book features short stories by Taylor and images by award winning photographer Julie Michelle – wrapped together in a dynamic exterior by Pablo Vision.

“What would you do if you were trapped in a cage? Hiss at the monsters outside, stained in your own piss and stink? And what would you dream about, should you get out? Maybe plot revenge on a lover. Maybe kill a man over four hundred dollars and a stupid insult. And what about all those other people on the outside: drunken clowns and murderous four year olds; wannabe artists and crazies in trains? Maybe, just maybe, when someone finally did open that door to let you out, you would just sniff the air, shake, then cower back into the farthest corner of your cell, listening to all the other prisoners, wailing and crying in theirs.”

– R L Raymond, *PigeonBike Press*

This is Tenderloin resident William Taylor Jr.'s first book of short stories. The collection consists of fifteen stories written from a wide variety of perspectives and subject matter. Taylor writes with extraordinary clarity and quickly draws the reader into his quirky world. The stories are carefully crafted but have a spontaneous, unpredictable feel to them.

The title *An Age of Monsters: Fictions, Partial Truths and a Half Remembered Dream* is an obvious acknowledgement that this is a work of fiction despite being inspired by Taylor's personal and artistic life. The “half remembered dream” is derived from the story “My



Hemingway Dream” in which the narrator, presumably Taylor, explains a dream in which he shares a drink with the great writer after a big punch up.

Some of the more interesting stories are the longer narratives which reveal how people react in times of crisis. Taylor is particularly effective at describing conflict, when emotions fray and relationships fuck up. In “Tuesday Morning at the Sad Motel” Taylor contrasts the easy going and existential Ben with the messed up and self indulgent Greta to explore the sadness inherent in their love. In “The Legend of Eddie and Lola” he traces with a wonderful sense of dramatic irony the desperation of a couple’s deluded desire to become famous. In “The Last Time I saw

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Greta” the narrator Ben travels to Hollywood to visit a childhood friend who is living with a lesbian. In all these stories, fuses blow and hell breaks out. Taylor describes this descent from reason in an exhilarating and highly entertaining way. His use of dialogue is sparse but always highly credible in helping to reveal the often hidden, volatile side of people.

Also fascinating are Taylor’s satirical portraits of the small press poetry community as he scathingly relates in “Lives of the Poets” Parts I and II. Poets and publishers alike are depicted as a bunch of pretentious, self interested assholes. The narrator Jeffery Robbins Jr. reels as the integrity of his work is mutilated through “selective editing.”

Taylor comfortably moves from first to third person. His male lead characters are usually laid back, passive characters who stoically accept the hand dealt them. They are characteristically unemployed in their late twenties who enjoy sitting around drinking and observing people and who are sketching the lives of the people they meet in their poetry and short stories. The females, on the other hand, are usually represented as irrational, self destructive and largely driven by impulse. They are strong and think they are in control – but typically have “crazed animal eyes” and who have a tendency of screwing up their daily lives.

Each story is preceded by a black and white photo by San Francisco photographer Julie Michelle. The photos range from the gritty realism of America’s past to photo-shopped conceptual art. I can’t recall seeing the extensive use of photos in a book of short stories previously so it gives a unique feel to the book.

William Taylor Jr. is a clever, natural born story teller who loves to describe people and relationships, especially when things don’t go according to plan. He writes with great humor and humanity and is unafraid to experiment with form or content. These stories about ordinary people are narrated in a simple, conversational style and express an honest truth which we would most certainly heed if we were predominately rational creatures.

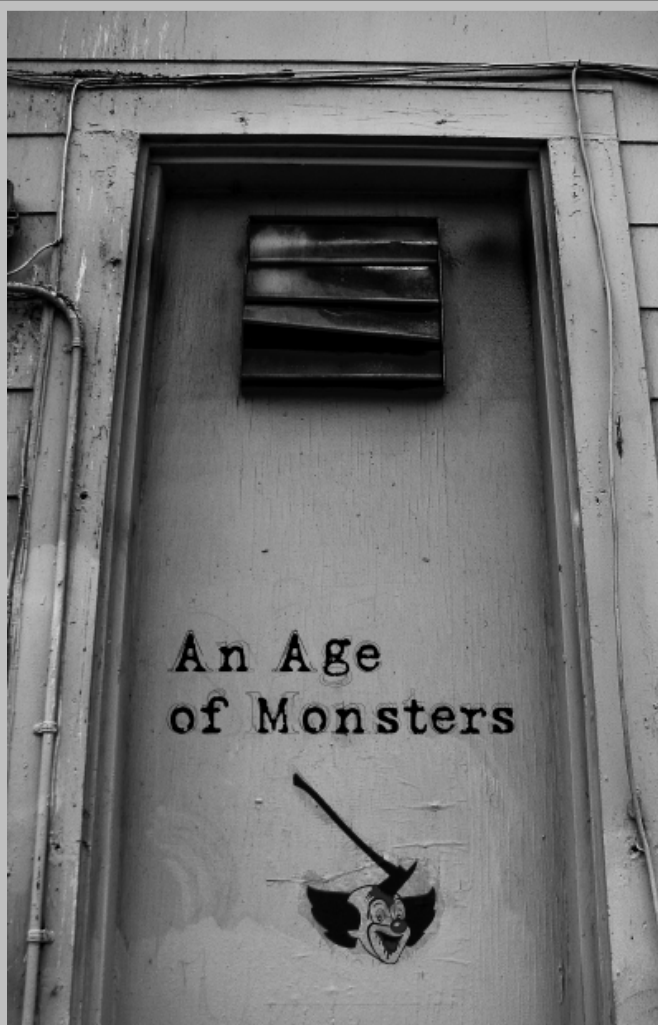
– George Anderson, *Bold Monkey*

“William Taylor Jr. is honest enough to say that sometimes things turn to shit and sometimes we really do deserve what we get, be it good or just fucking awful.”

– John Dorsey, author of *Sodomy Is A City In New Jersey*

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When asked what “An Age of Monsters” means and what he hopes his readers will take away from his newest collection of short stories, William Taylor Jr. responded:

“In the context of this collection of stories, the ‘Age of Monsters’ is the age of man; man being a monster in the sense that he is outside of nature, an aberration of sorts, out of place and at odds with the natural world. The underlying

energy that connects these stories is a sense of people, confused and damaged people, trying to get through the days as best they can. The stories tend to center on people and relationships that are damaged somehow. I think we’re all damaged to a degree, and we all deal with it differently. Most of the stories have elements of humor and sadness, much like life itself.

I find some kind of consolation or truth in the scenarios I choose to write about, the general absurdity of being human. To be alive is to be damaged. I guess I’d like people to take away the idea that it’s okay to be damaged, it’s all a part of everything. Embrace your inner fuck-up.”

In a recent interview with Charles P. Ries, when asked how he walks the line between pathos and hope, without falling subject to cliché, Taylor responded “In much of my work there is a certain mood or feeling I want to convey and I simply try to use the best words possible to do so. I don’t know how else to explain it. I do believe there is sadness in beauty and sometimes beauty in sadness. To quote Thomas Hardy, *If a way to the best there be, it exacts a full look at the worst.* Meaning, the dark aspects of life must be confronted and accepted before any real peace of mind or happiness can be achieved. A kind of peace must be made with the darkness.”

When asked about “beauty” and what it means in the context of *An Age of Monsters*, Taylor responded:

“It takes a certain kind of world-view to see the beauty in desperate people struggling against

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their random fates. It takes strength to face the the day again and again when there's no definable reason to. I see a beauty in this strength; this beautiful, useless battle against the darkness."

"This isn't writing... this is breathing fire through a straw."

– John Yamrus, author of *Can't Stop Now!*

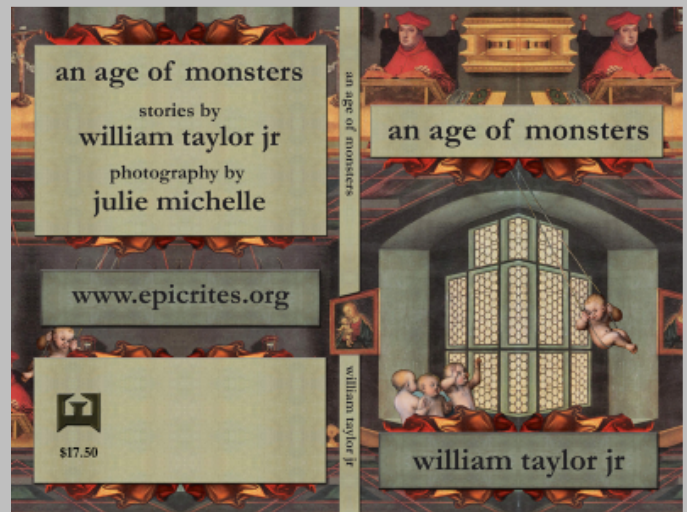
"William Taylor Jr. writes with guts and honesty, taking us into the minds of characters that are scary and oddly lovable at the same time. Taylor shows a side of San Francisco from a unique local perspective.

An Age of Monsters is an armchair travel guide to the feel of the people and communities where even some San Franciscans dare not venture."

– Tony DuShane, *Drinks With Tony*

"An Age of Monsters is comprised of stories that shine and sparkle with wry observations and vibrant characters. William Taylor Jr. writes prose like J.D. Salinger with a west coast sensibility. Although accessible, this collection is fraught with a strange tension that lends an aloof glamour to the understated tone. Like *Nine Stories*, this collection is written in the voice of a sad, wistful romantic resigned to the often brutally ugly reality of modern life. Underlying the romanticism is a rich sense of humor and irony. These are timeless stories sharp with multiple angles. They resonate."

– Misti Rainwater-Lites, author of *Expired Nickel Valentine*



Exterior by Pablo Vision

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