

Hortus Erie - 2025

Specimen No. 46 - Root Systems

Warning: Content may take root

Do not disturb the soil.

Observe with caution.

When the Landscape Starts Whispering

A reader's guide to the lyrical, folk,
and gothic horror of 2025.

Curated for the brave, the curious,
and the lovers of the dark.

Do not disturb the soil.
Observe with caution.



creeping dread

Pull up a chair and let's talk about the dark.

Welcome, fellow lovers of things that go bump in the night. If you're here, you already know that the best horror doesn't just scare you—it sinks into your bones. It lingers in the damp smell of autumn leaves and the strange shadows stretching across your bedroom wall.

This year, horror fiction is doing something extraordinary. It's slowing down. It's getting poetic. It's swapping cheap jump scares for gorgeous, creeping dread that forces us to look twice at the natural world around us.



field for roots returned from

Spicy odors



*Humans forking
dinner to have
only food.*



*More or less
hard to see
at night.*

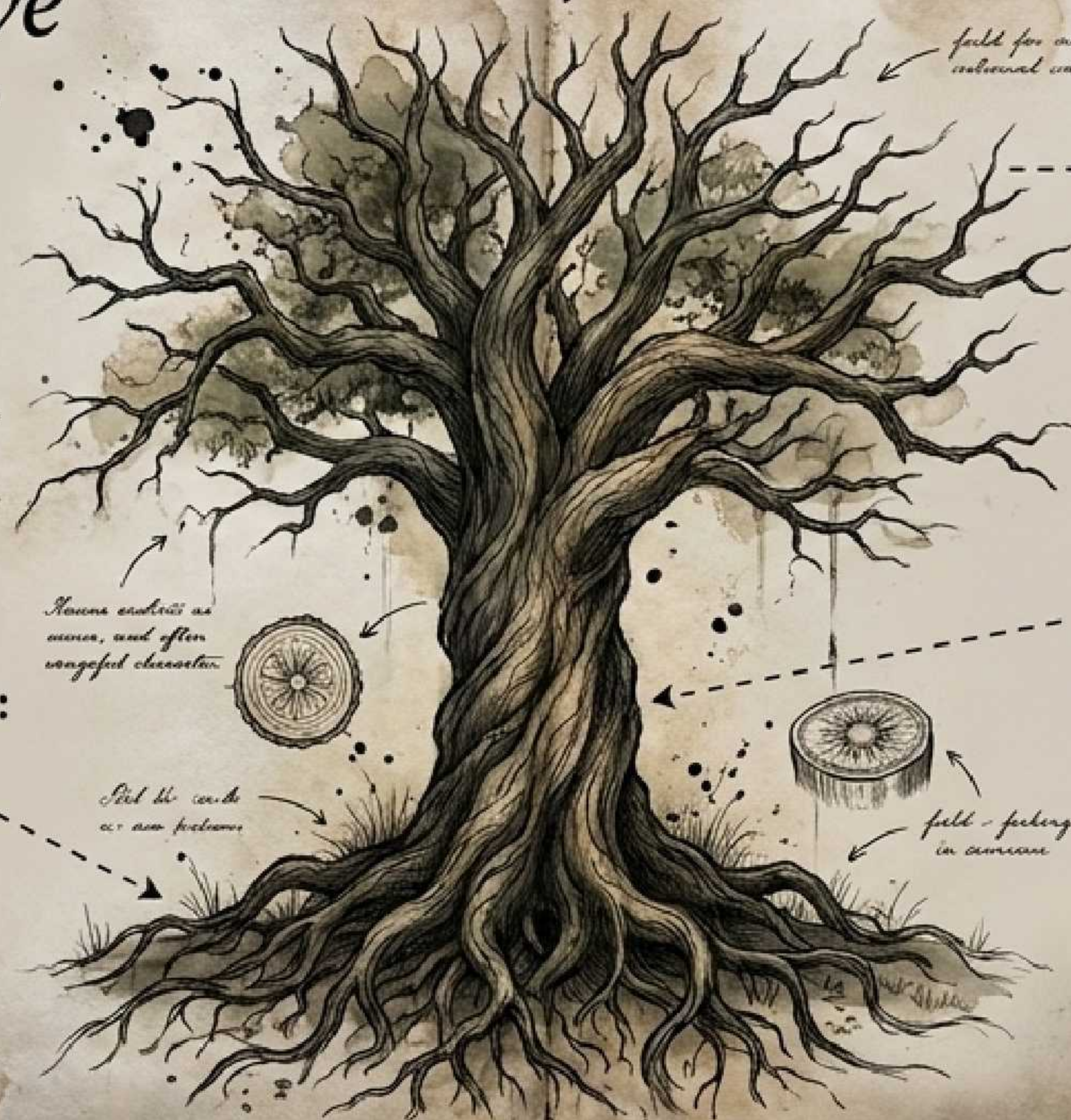
*field for roots
returned from*



Why We Crave Folk Horror

The Anatomy of Folk Horror

The Roots (Foundations):
Ancient traditions, buried histories, and profound isolation.



The Branches (Results):
Madness, visceral bodily transformations, and the realization that humanity is not in charge.







The Trunk (Setting):
The landscape acting as an active, breathing, and often vengeful character.

Folk horror resonates deeply today because it strips away our technology. It reminds us that beneath the concrete, the earth remembers everything—and sometimes, it demands a sacrifice.

A New Era of Dread Prioritizes Poetry Over Plot

We are witnessing a magnificent shift in dark fiction. Writers are elevating atmosphere over mechanics, crafting prose so succulent and rich you can practically taste the rot.

Comparative Analysis: Horror Evolution

Traditional Horror	2025 Lyrical Gothic
 <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Plot-driven survival- Logistical jump-scares- Nature functions as a spooky, passive backdrop- Goal: Defeat the monster  	<p><i>Shift to the Internal</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Atmosphere-driven interiority- Psychological and historical weight- Nature acts as a sentient, active entity- Goal: Survive the transformation   

Shift to the Internal

The Environment Wakes

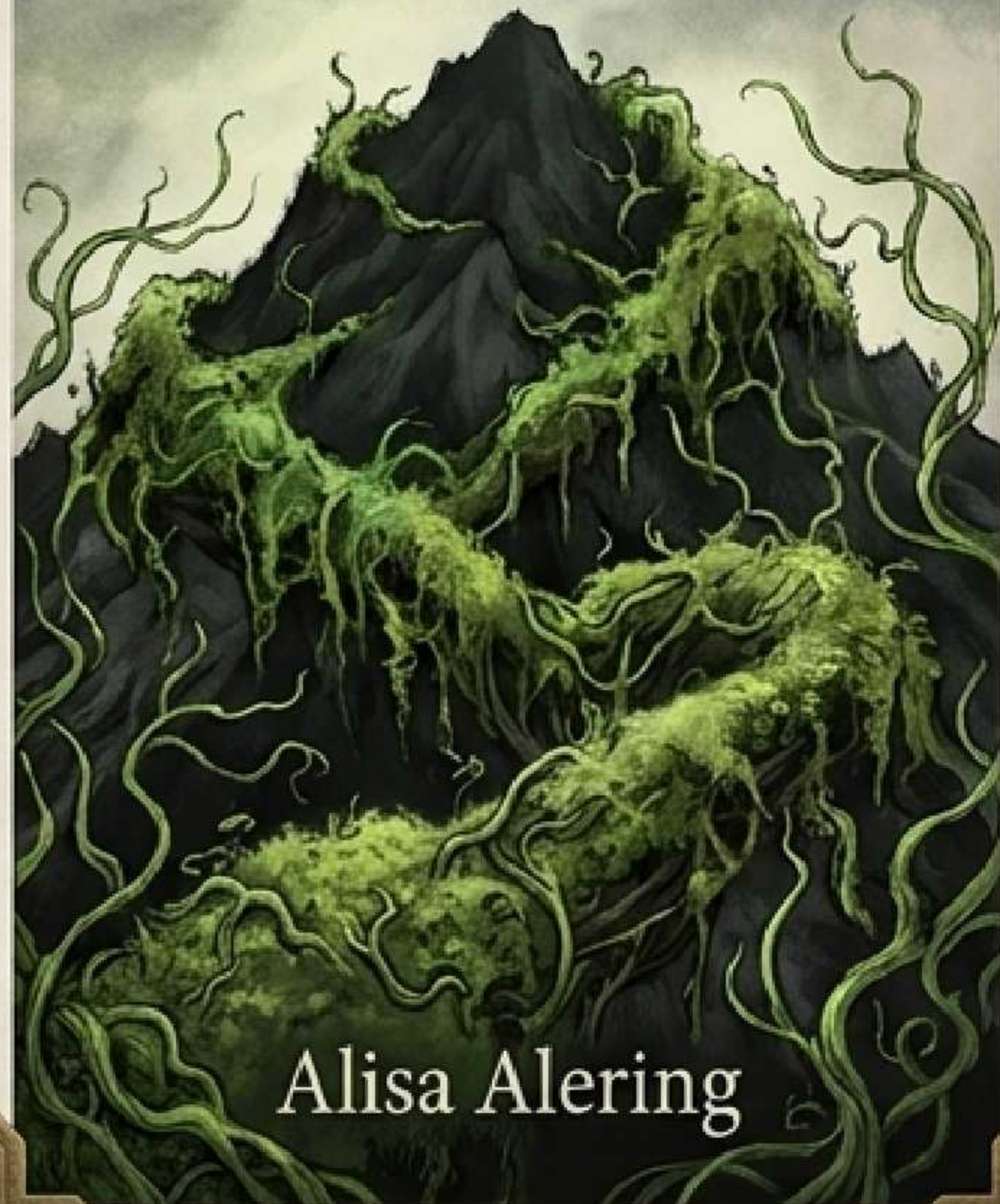


Part One: The Suffocating Woods & The Sentient Earth

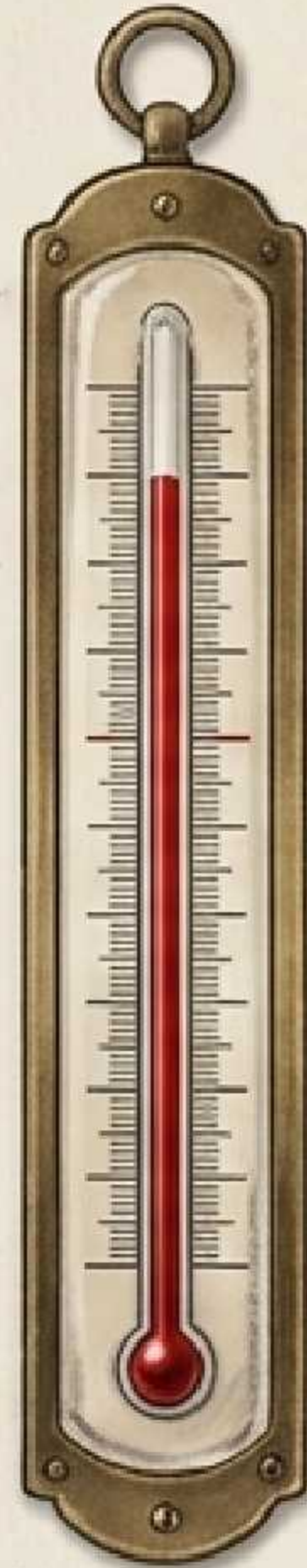
Where the roots dig deep, and family trees rot from the inside out.

A suffocating fever-dream of 1980s Appalachia.

Smothermoss



Alisa Alering



Atmospheric
Thermometer

← *Humidity*

← *Claustrophobia*

← *Appalachian
Magic*

The Atmosphere

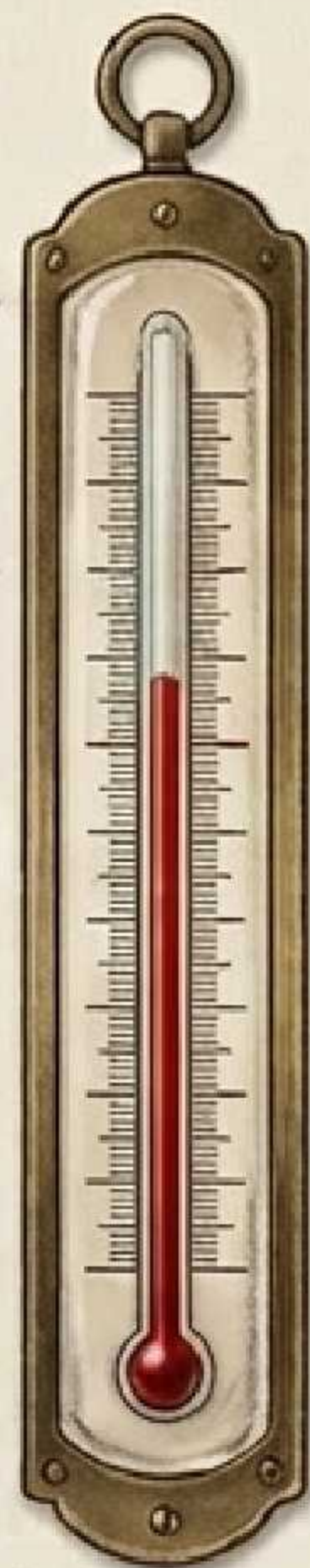
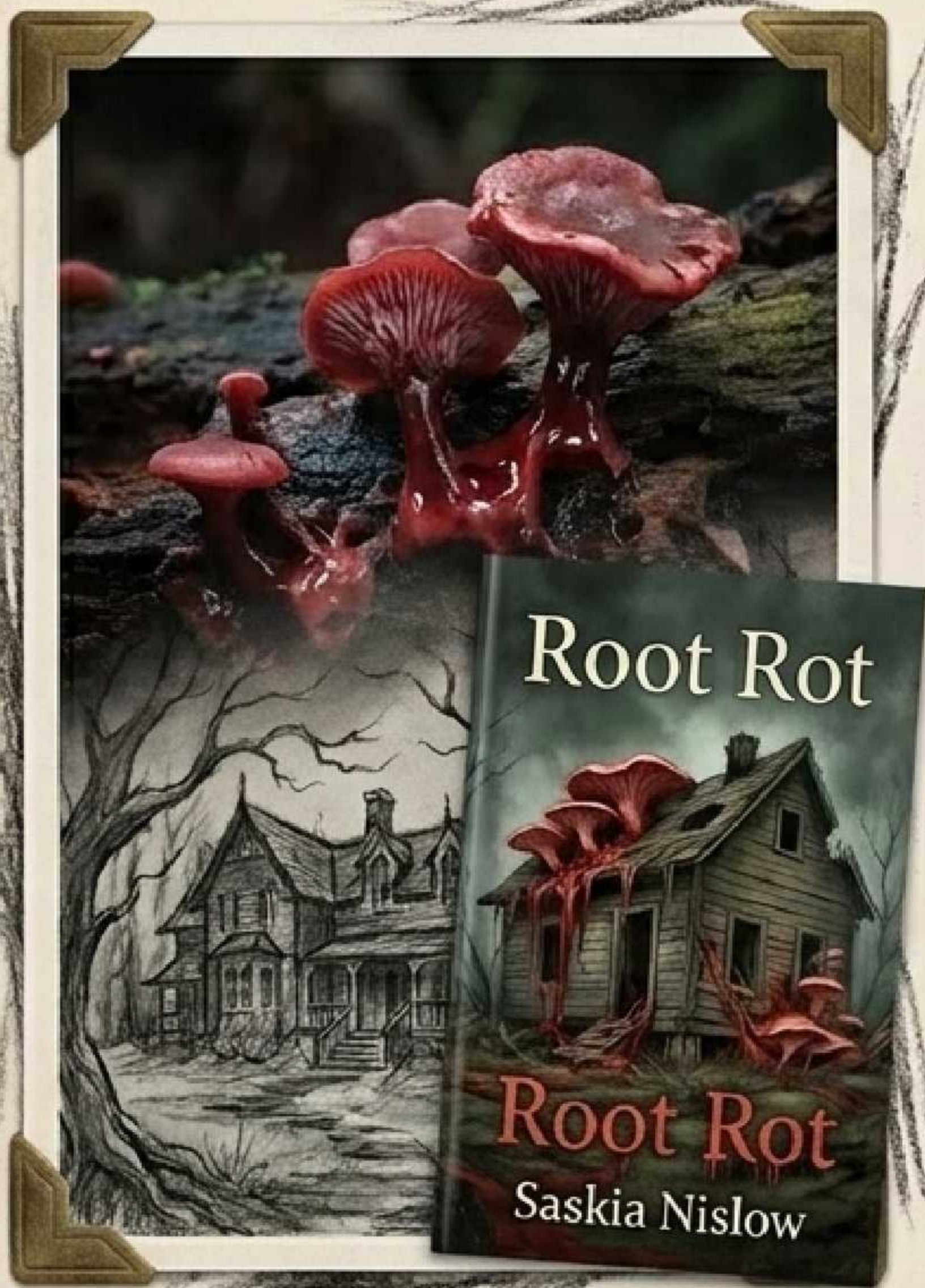
Imagine the thick, humid air of 1980s Appalachia. The scent of pine needles, the sticky heat of an endless summer, and the deeply unsettling feeling that the ancient mountain you live on is watching your every move.

The Plot

Half-sisters Sheila and Angie are surviving in ramshackle poverty when two hikers are brutally murdered nearby. While Sheila wrestles with the invisible ropes of family duty, young Angie consults a deck of handmade, semi-sentient tarot cards to hunt the killer.

*"A fever-dream of sisterhood
where the mountain is both the
predator and the protector."*

The uncanny valley of a family lake house vacation.



Atmospheric Thermometer

← *Dampness*

← *Sporror*

← *Childhood
Helplessness*

The Atmosphere

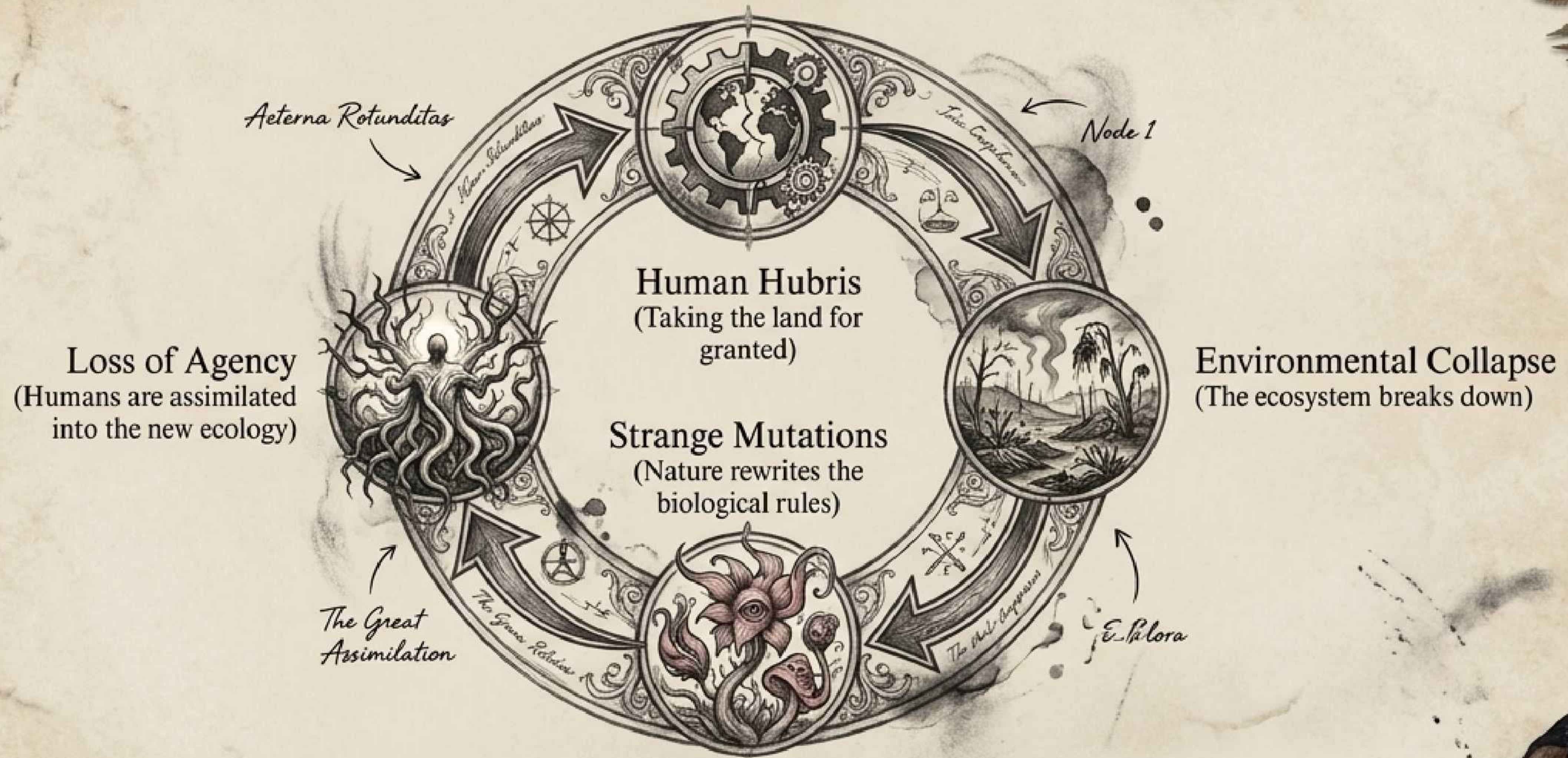
It smells like damp lake water, decaying leaves, and something vaguely metallic. Everything feels just a quarter-inch off from reality, creating a kaleidoscopic, drug-like haze of nostalgia twisted into grotesque nightmares.

The Plot


Nine unnamed children gather at their grandfather's ever-expanding lake house. Told entirely from their collective, eerie perspective, the kids witness terrifying mutations in the woods. Fungi ooze blood, faces droop, and the line between the children and the encroaching forest violently blurs.

*"Visceral body horror wrapped
in the terrifying helplessness
of childhood."*

The Inevitable Cycle of Ecological Dread



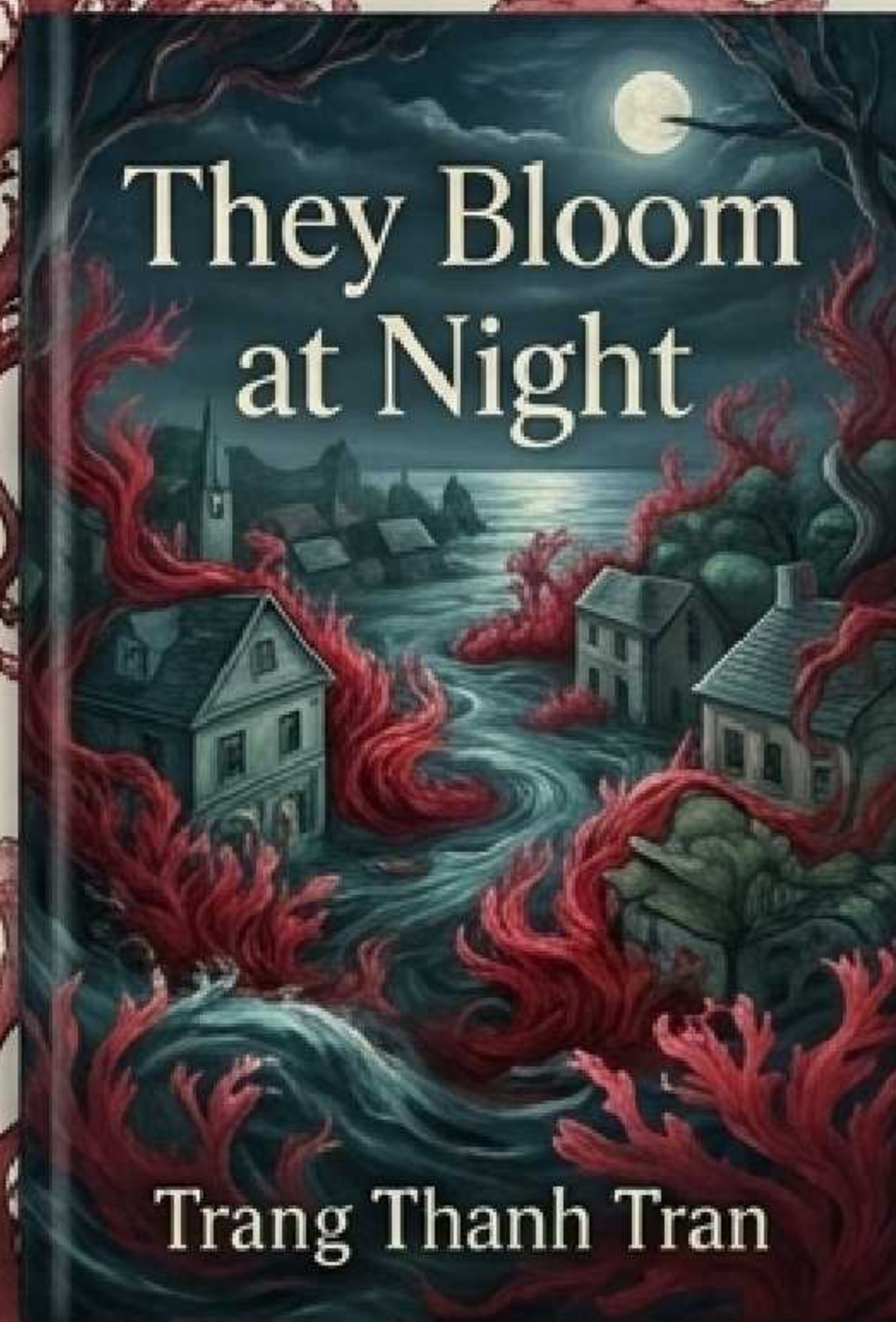
The terror in modern botanical horror isn't just that nature is fighting back—it's the profound realization that the planet is changing, and humanity is not invited to adapt.



Part Two: The Hungry Waters & The Briny Deep

Where the tide brings in secrets, and the coastline refuses to stay dead.

A flooded Louisiana town choked by red algae.



Briny Decay

*Monstrous
Metamorphosis*

Stormy Dread

The Atmosphere:

The air is thick with the stench of dead fish, salt foam, and rotting wood. A relentless, mutated red algae has choked the life out of a flooded town. It is an isolating, ruined world that feels profoundly, beautifully alive with dangerous new biology.

The Plot:

After a devastating hurricane, Noon and her mother scrape by hunting mutated wildlife. Paired with her corrupt boss's daughter, Covey, Noon hunts a massive creature in the waters—only to realize the monstrous itch beneath her own skin might be the biggest revelation of all.

"A gorgeous, gruesome ode to the monsters we must become to survive."



Part Three: The Bleeding Past & The Weight of Infinity

Where history refuses to be buried, and immortality is a curse, not a gift.

Rethinking the Immortal in Modern Gothic Literature

Forget the velvet capes. Today's authors have reclaimed the vampire as a profound vehicle for exploring our darkest collective histories and personal grief.

The Old Myth

Immortality as power and luxury. The narrative focus is on logistical survival, romanticized aristocrats, and how to pass endless time.

*Classic Trope:
The Byronic Anti-Hero*

*Focus:
Personal Power*



The 2025 Reality

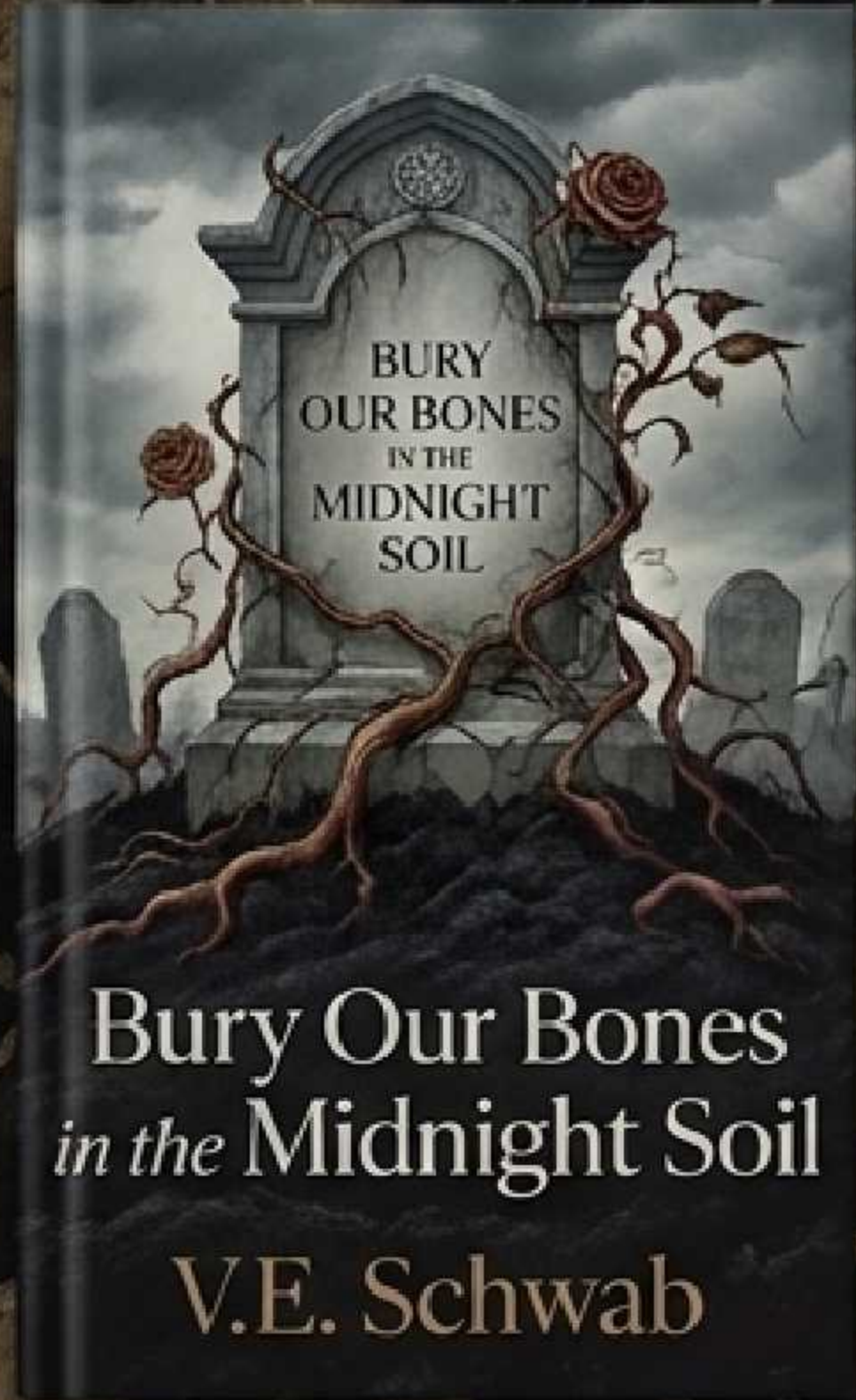
Immortality as a witness to atrocity. The narrative focus is on the crushing weight of memory, generational trauma, and the monster as a reflection of historical sins.

*Modern Lens:
The Burden of History*

*Focus: Collective
Memory & Trauma*



The unbearable luxury of infinite time.

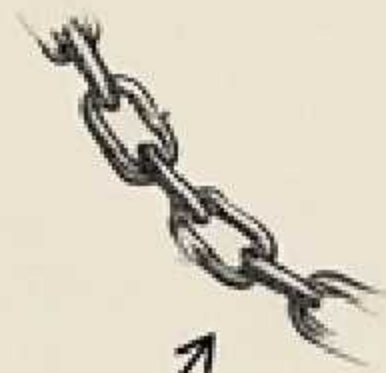


weeping willows



The Atmosphere

A tragic, sun-bleached melancholy hangs over every page. It feels like wandering through a decaying Southern Gothic cemetery at dusk—beautiful, heart-heavy, and thick with the scent of old dust and regret.



broken chains



arast heart cross.



Text Block 2

María, Charlotte, and Alice are bound together by a vampiric legacy spanning four centuries. Rather than a fast-paced thriller, this is an intimate, poetic autopsy of the human soul. They are immortal, but drowning in the grief, failure, and lost loves that eternity forces them to carry.

Therosphatrical drowning tendies



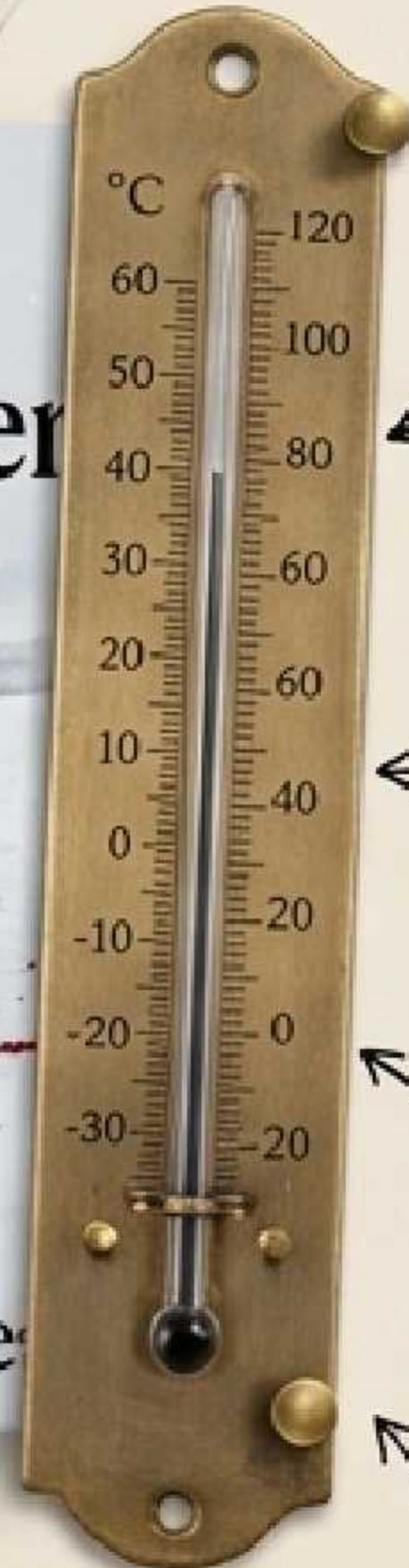
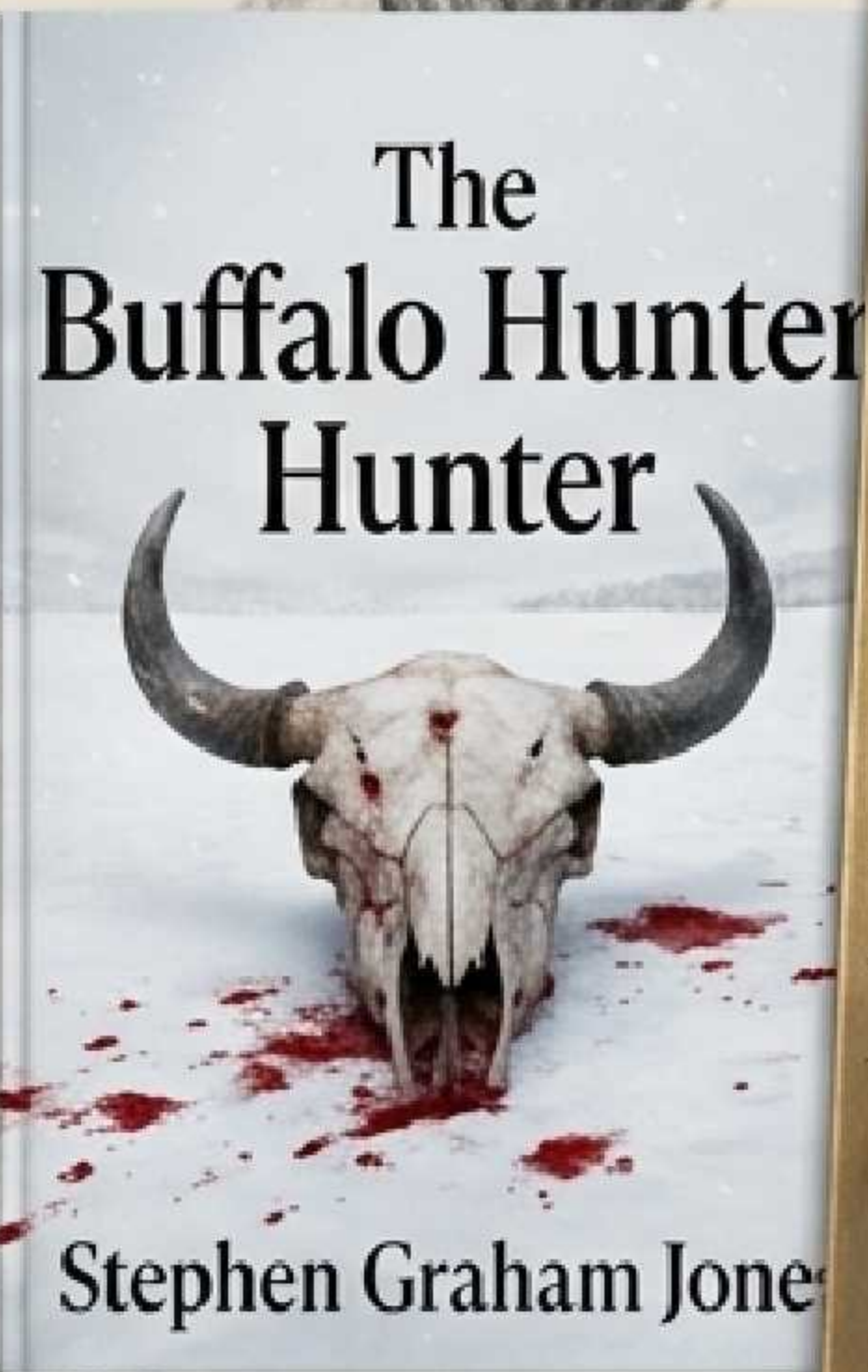
Sprawling Melancholy

Southern Gothic Rot

Heavy Grief

Atmospheric Thermometer

A visceral reckoning with America's darkest history.



Biting Cold

Feral Brutality

Righteous Rage

*Atmospheric
Etherometer*

The Atmosphere

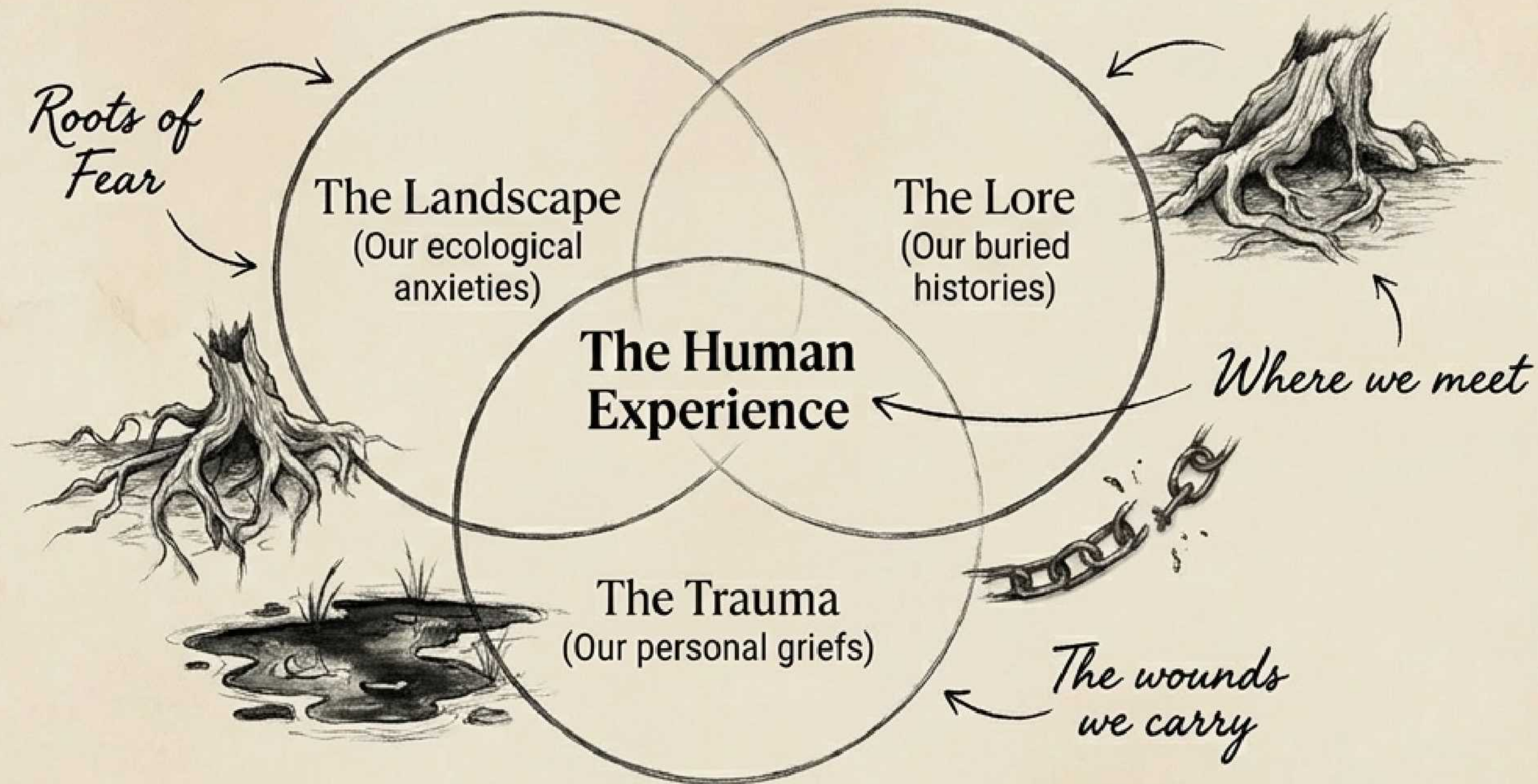
Raw, feral, and unapologetically brutal. The atmosphere is as sharp and biting as a Montana blizzard in 1870. It is steeped in the metallic tang of blood and the terrifying, cold silence of a history deliberately erased.

The Plot

Built around the 1912 confessions of Good Stab, a Blackfeet man cursed with vampirism. But the true horror isn't supernatural—it is the genocide of Indigenous peoples and the slaughter of the buffalo. Good Stab becomes a dark avenger seeking a bloody reckoning against the forces of American colonization.

"An unforgettable masterpiece that weaponizes the slasher instinct to reclaim a stolen past."

The Light We Find in the Shadows

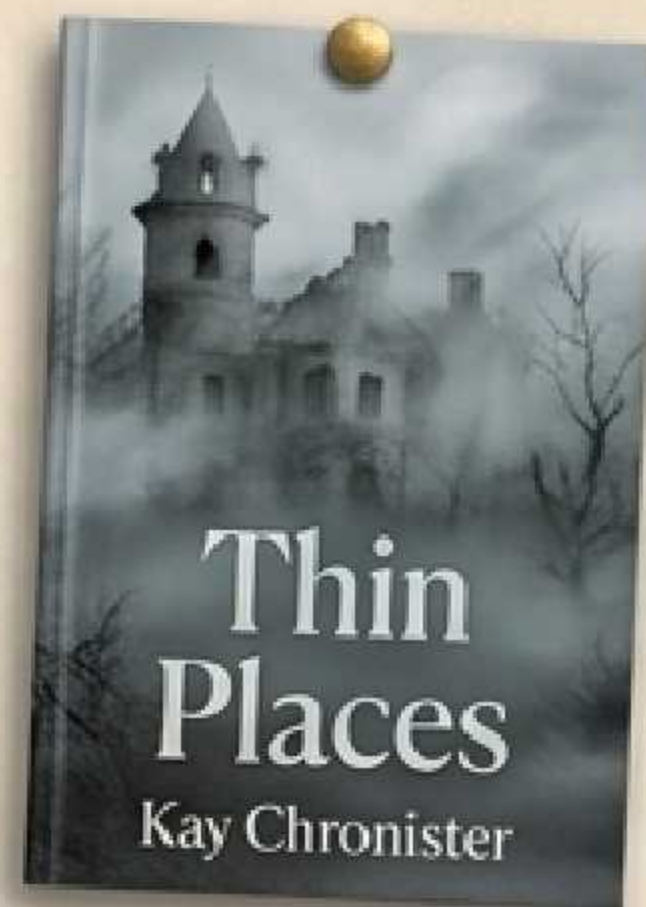


Why do we immerse ourselves in rotting roots, bloody waters, and cursed histories? Because the dark is the best place to see ourselves clearly. Through the lens of the monstrous, these authors create a safe space to explore the messy, beautiful reality of our deepest vulnerabilities.

Your Next Read, Curated by Atmosphere

For Foggy Nights & Ghostly Estates

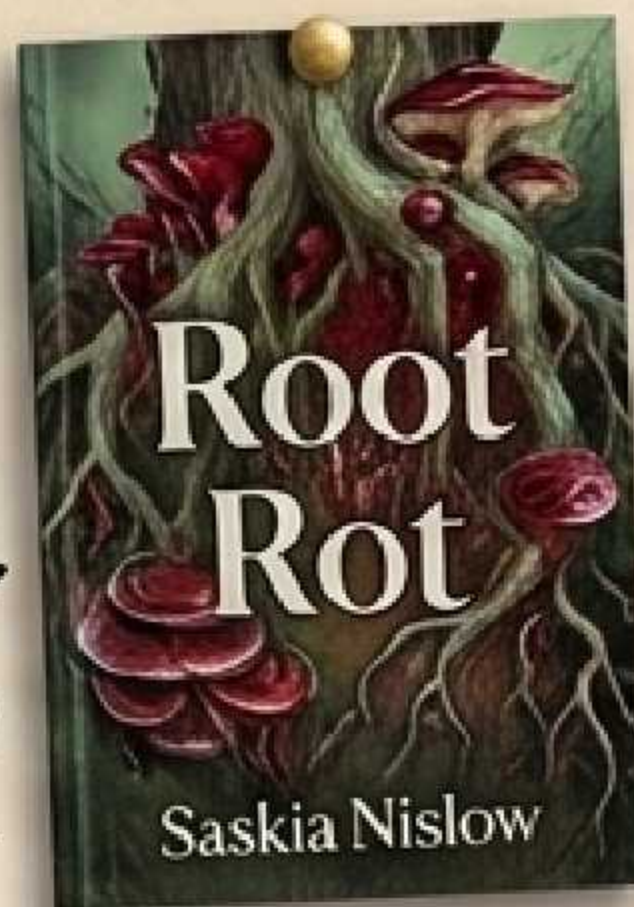
*Eerie
Glow*



*Mist &
Decay*

For Trippy, Weird-Woodland Dread

*Fungal
Growth*

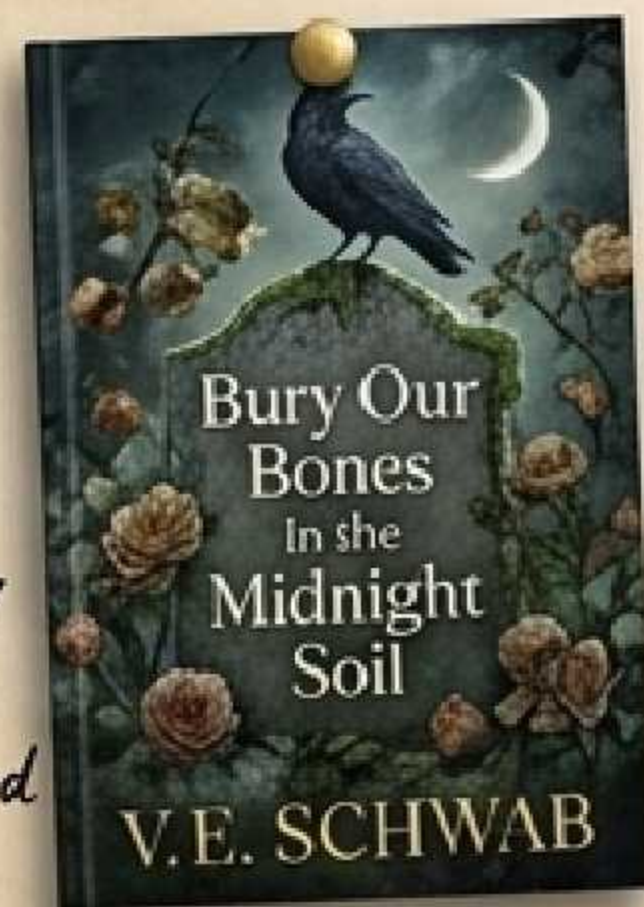


*Water-
logged*

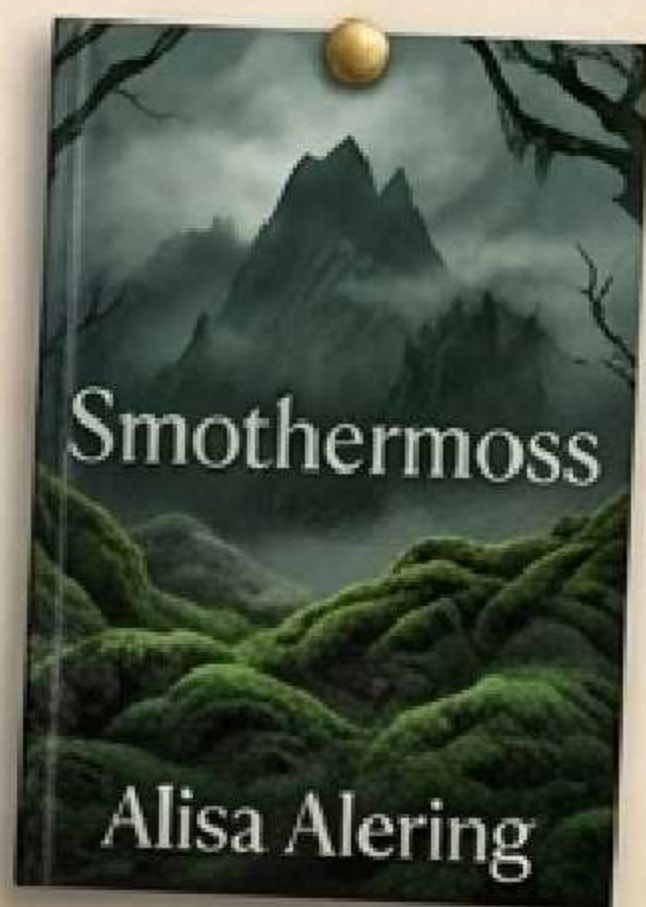


For Generational Secrets & Melancholy

*Graveyard
Secrets*

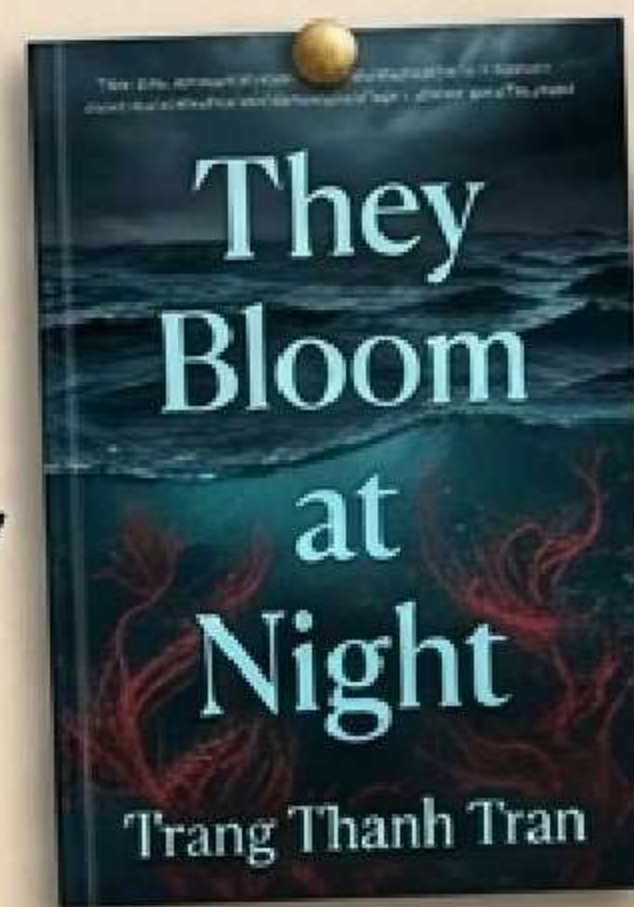


*Moss-
Covered*

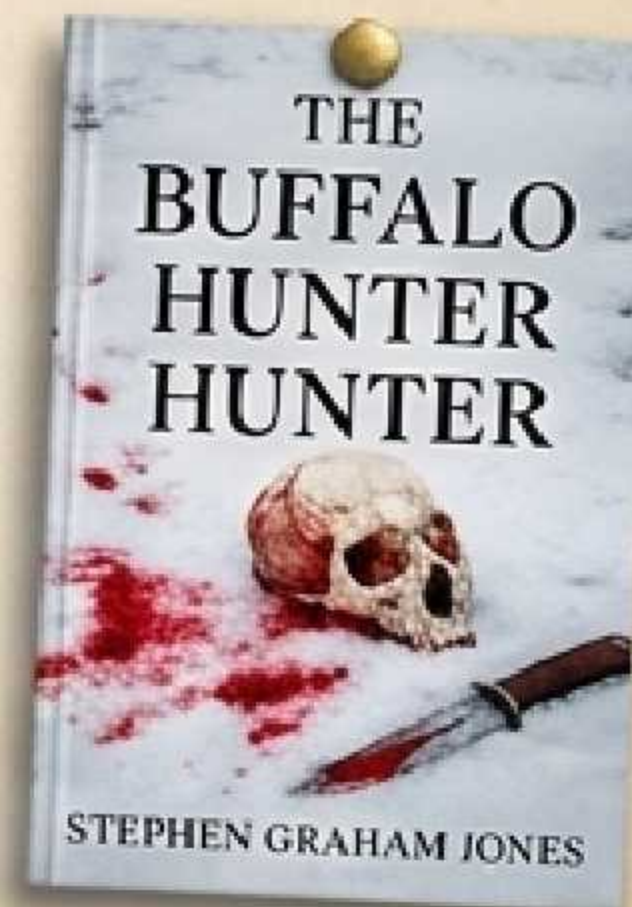


For Briny Air & Cathartic Rage

*Algal
Bloom*



*Blood &
Snow*





Happy Haunting.

May your autumn be dark, your tea be warm,
and your books be endlessly unsettling.

