



*"The Realm" is part of a collection of short stories entitled "Out the Window: Views from the Heights of Embarrassment, the Edge of Trouble and Other Well Known Locations." Ed Rau is a free-lance writer and practicing real estate broker in Sonoma County.*

My nostrils shriveled with the scent of fear in spite of the lingering fog. I ran my fingers through my thinning hair and checked my appearance in the reflection in the store front window before I threw open the door.

Without warning, the dreaded, "Gray!" stabbed my tympanic membranes with the force of alarm. Everyone seemed tuned and ready for it. There was no need to repeat the call. An Old One had arrived.

That scent of fear had been my own.

The natives of this territory, the sales people, seemed busy, some with other customers. A few looked startled and then returned their illustrious attention to their computer screens. Several unoccupied members of the sales staff scurried for cover, agitated and confused.

A blonde with a purple streak in her hair and a nose ring drank from a Red Bull can through a straw, with head erect and eyes hard. A young man covered with tattoos appeared to weigh the threat of my presence against a reason to dart into the shadows of the store room.

As I surveyed the landscape before me, I noticed pair of greater geeks nuzzling behind a stand of Jawbones. Nerds intermingled in a small diverse herd near the swamp of new smart phones in an obvious attempt to go unnoticed by the larger predators eyeing the international units. An aging dweeb hovered near the nerds trying to blend in but his bright white pocket

protector edged up out of his wrinkled shirt to betray him.

The sales people punched the keys of their iPhones and Blackberries seeming to be unaware of waiting customers.

The Blonde was texting now. I scanned the room to determine the recipient and found him in The Tattooed Man. From each of their distressed expressions, I could only guess what their messages delivered.

"ur trn ths time! :)"  
 "NW! I jst finishd /w the old dude /w the cane! :)"

"I had the crabby chick /w the hat! :)"

My eyes narrowed. I sensed resistance. Determined to succeed this day, I edged up to one of the counters and declared to a young fellow staring at a computer screen, "When you're finished there, I could use some help."

I'd caught him completely by surprise! His eyes flickered in my direction but he didn't appear to recognize my dialect. He went back to work on what suddenly took on the intensity and concentration of The Manhattan Project. I looked around for any sales person eager to make a sale. Not one set of eyes made contact.

The manager appeared at my elbow out of nowhere and smiled as she guided me toward the sign-in tablet on a bistro table off to the side of the room.

"Hello sir. Please sign the register and a salesperson will be right with you." She turned and glared at The Blonde with the purple streak in her hair.

The Blonde sauntered over to the register. She put her index finger tip on my name on the sign-in sheet and

## "The Realm"

Story and illustration  
by Ed Rau

inhaled deeply through her nose. With practiced innocence, she turned her back to me and called out toward the ceiling, "Mr. Buckhorn?"

I was leaning on the bistro table next to her and raised my index finger from the hand that held up my chin. "That would be me."

She looked startled and ready for Hollywood.

"Oh! Hi! Can I help you? I'm Katimba."

"Nice name."

"You can call me Katt." Her name badge said Katimba and I suspected that was the name her friends called her outside the province of management where names sometimes indicate freedom.

"I'm on the hunt for the Jabra Bluetooth Samsung Rogue today."

Her eyes groaned. "The Bluetooth is different from the Rogue."

I knew that but I'd hoped a bit of humor would make both of our days better, take the tension out of it. Her eyes shot poison darts at the manager and at The Tattooed Man. We began a long afternoon.

The salesperson next to Katimba was waiting on a pair of Grays. They were fighting over whose Bluetooth had not yet been charged. Their sales person with the name badge Raven, looked at Katimba with dark despair. Raven reached in her pocket and looked back at her customers.

Katimba sneaked a look at her Blackberry. They had texted. Raven's customers didn't even know. They were charging the man's Bluetooth.

I suspected what the message said and whispered, "It must be hard with the old ones," trying to separate myself from "The Old Ones."

"Yes, your generation is difficult; so many are just out of the realm."



*The Realm* Ed Rau 2010

My generation . . . out of the realm. Obviously, I was not passing as one of the cool ones. A low-grade fear scent returned to my nostrils.

"Do you want internet and email on here?" Katimba asked, holding out the Rogue.

I'd done a little homework and responded with some pride trying to save myself in Katimba's eyes, "Yes, and what texting programs do you have?"

"How much texting do you need?"

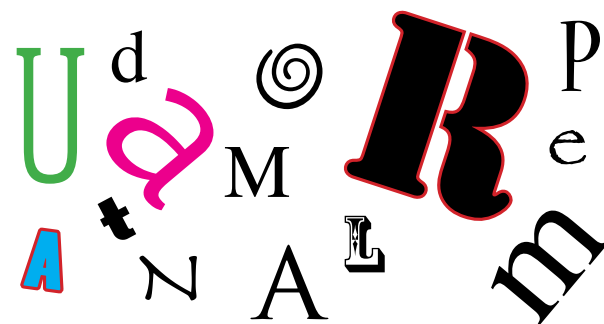
"You mean, uh, well, what

plans do you have?" I still pretended to be in the know, not like those old grays.

"The basic plan includes 100 texts a month, but unlimited texting is only \$4.95 a month," She looked up expectantly with the first genuine essence of friendliness of the afternoon.

"Uhhhhh, well let's just start out with the basic one."

Her smile vanished and was never seen again. And I knew my status when I'd entered the store had been confirmed . . . Out of the Realm!



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