



the BINDING

From Ancient Egypt he came ... to save the future



JOHN PARHAM

THE BINDING

VOLUME 1

By John Parham

Well, I just started the book so I can't give a full review but wow! I can't put it down. Polished writing style and characters are already well-developed and I've just started so I can't wait till the end! Ok, it's now 6 am and I've been up all night reading it! If you want an awesome book - The Binding is that. It's like John Grisham on sci-fi steroids. Can't wait to the sequel - those dang pelicans! ??

~Designer Annette

A very entertaining read. The plot was straightforward, but John's delightful characters really made the story. Just imagine conversing with a voodoo lady and a 5000 yr-old cat, both with the power to do amazing feats, including keeping me on the couch for a non-stop read. Haven't done that since "Papillon" many years ago.

~ Amazon Reader Buck

What a fun read! This book seems to have everything: action, adventure, sci-fi, comic relief, a bit of romance, and a complex plot with many characters, many layers, different settings (Egypt included) and even different time periods.

Readers will enjoy how the characters interact with each other, and they will especially like the magical cat that has a bit of a sarcastic side. It's a quick, fast-paced story that is sure to keep your attention.

Highly recommend!

~EditorNancy

Amazon ~ Eleven 5 Star Reviews



Indies Today Reviews ~ 4 Stars



John Parham Publisher

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events and locales are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

The Binding Volume 1

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For a little heaven and inspiration on a beach, please visit Camp Gulf RV Park: <https://www.campgulf.com/>



For Jimmy Parks 1961-2019

“Everything is going to be alright 🤘”





Dedicated to Mindy

Thank you for being my compass in life

When in the darkness of night

I can't see the light.





Prologue



KING KHUFU ROSE FROM his throne, parted the curtains to the royal tent and peered through the blowing sand. He stared at his greatest achievement: the Great Pyramid of Giza. His “stairway to heaven” stood hundreds of feet, and it would remain the tallest man-made construction in the world for thousands of years. The pyramid weighed millions of tons and had taken ten years to build. *But there is still one more thing to do*, he thought.

He focused on a female black cat with two crazy eyes. One glittered in gold and the other was a brilliant jade green. King Khufu found the black cat with the white star pattern on her forehead by his royal tent on the plains of Giza. The cat appeared to be in good shape, but she was tired and somehow, he felt she needed his help. He invited the cat into his tent and had some finely chopped meat and goat’s milk served to him.

King Khufu succeeded his father, Sneferu, as the second pharaoh of the Fourth Dynasty in twenty-fifth century BC. His goal had always been to build a stairway to the Heavens for Geb, the God of Earth, but his crude pyramid designs kept failing in the construction process. His workers, the Yoruba Tribe, struggled with placing the massive stone blocks. He felt overwhelmed with the task—that is, until his chance encounter and kindness to a wandering black cat.

His kindness to the cat was paid many times over because the telepathic cat could communicate with King Khufu. It soon became obvious the cat had tremendous power and was beyond mankind. Through the king, she taught the workers of the Yoruba Tribe how to levitate the immense stones and securely build the pyramid so it

would stand for ages. The king gave the cat a title and named her Bastet, the Protector of Pharaohs and the Mother of Fertility, for she had brought life to the pyramid.

Bastet had traveled with Starman Ra to planet Earth to build giant power generators. Their mission was to create them disguised as pyramids. She taught the king how to leverage Earth's harmonics and levitate the two million massive stone blocks required for the Great Pyramid. She explained to the king how to stack the blocks in a perfect North-South orientation. The King did not know the pyramid oriented to Bastet's home: Orion's Belt.

King Khufu thought Bastet was a gift from the gods. With her amazing powers, she took the thirty-year construction task and accomplished it in ten years. "Unbelievable. Thank you, Bastet," King Khufu said. He honored Bastet with a black onyx ring engraved with the likeness of a black cat with a white star pattern on her forehead. He told Bastet the ring had a special inscription to her; the king would wear it in tribute to his protector and friend.

King Khufu peered out of the royal tent and said, "Time to place the capstone, Bastet."

The polished capstone was the pyramidion sacred cap for the finished Great Pyramid. Polished to a sheen, it weighed several tons and required delicacy in its placement. Bastet looked up to the king then leaped from his silk cushion. She raised her head to behold the giant monument and thought, "We have attained our goal with the pyramid."

Bastet knew the capstone was required to bring life to the pyramid. She hunched lower, focusing on the polished capstone, and her body quivered. Her golden eye glowed and trembled. The ground shook and dust blew beneath the capstone.

Bastet levitated the capstone from the Great Plains toward the apex of the pyramid. With great precision, Bastet lowered the capstone and anchored it to the top. She projected an electrical energy

bolt toward the capstone and initialized it. Sparks and balls of fire bounced down the steeped sides of the Great Pyramid.

Bastet felt the harmonic vibrations of the pyramid begin. She never had the chance to communicate with Starman Ra that she had finished the project and the pyramid was active because she saw the Great Pyramid glow and vibrate. Then, an immense jolt of power knocked her unconscious and her world went forever black.



Chapter 1

The Plant Whisperer



JERRY RACED THROUGH the sugarcane stalks to escape the pack of wild dogs and screamed, “Uncle Jim, Uncle Jim, where are you? I need your help!”

Uncle Jim chuckled to himself and thought, *Jerry, my boy, run with your dreams. Uncle Jim is here to protect you.* Jerry leaped into the air to land in Uncle Jim’s arms, out of reach of the wild dogs. The dogs became a whisper in Jerry’s mind as Uncle Jim held him.

Jim was further down the road of life than he liked, but at 67, he was still a robust bull of a man with a full head of white hair. Perched on Uncle Jim’s shoulders, Jerry could see over all but the tallest sugarcane stalks.

“Let’s head to the pump house, Uncle Jim, and feed the fish in the pond,” Jerry urged.

“Why not, Captain? Hold on tight. Here we go,” Jim replied.

Jim McNutt, nicknamed Uncle Jim by Jerry’s family, came to the Lobell farm fifteen years ago. Pa Lobell, as family and friends called Paul Lobell, struggled with the Lobell Sugarcane Farm. If it had not been for his wife Martha’s optimistic belief in the farm, he would have given up long ago. Martha, or Ma Lobell as called by family and friends, was the one with the strong backbone that kept it going. When Pa felt defeated, she would lift him back up with her faith in the farm and encourage him to persevere.

Fifteen years ago, Pa had sat on his front porch, fretting about how Lobell Farms was struggling to produce sugarcane, when a

stranger had sauntered up to his porch—a huge man with a straw hat that flipped up in the back and dipped in the front.

“Mister, I am Jim McNutt from Russellville Arkansas, looking for a promising opportunity of employment in farming. Might you need such a person?” Jim had asked. “I worked for many years on the Gail Thorax farm near the Arkansas River and grew crops from the river bottoms. We more often than not had bumper crops. I’m not sure why, but I do have a knack for growing plants.”

“Well, Mr. McNutt, I may have an opportunity for you, but I don’t have a lot of funds to pay you,” Pa Lobell had replied.

“Mr. Lobell, if given the chance, I can help you set the market for sugarcane in Louisiana,” Jim said.

Pa Lobell replied, “I would have to see it to believe it, but at least you give me hope.” He did not want to lose the family farm to the bank.

Bumper crops more than covered the lean years when a drought or a hurricane caused damage. One day, Pa Lobell finally inquired, “How do you do it, Jim?”

Jim responded, “Mr. Lobell, have you ever heard of a horse whisperer?”

Pa Lobell replied, “Isn’t it someone who understands what a horse desires and needs?”

Jim explained, “Yes sir, as I understand it that is correct. Please don’t laugh or think I am crazy, but I’m a plant whisperer. Each year for vacation, I used to pull my trailer from Arkansas to Camp Gulf RV Park at Miramar Beach, Florida. This paradise on the Gulf Coast was my little slice of heaven. I’d park my trailer right next to the beach and wake each morning to the sun peeking above the horizon in brilliant orange. I’d watch the blazing ball sink back into the ocean, swallowed by gentle lapping waves,” Jim said.

He continued, “Camp Gulf RV Park had many wonderful workers, and some became my great friends. One friendship I established

was with Daniel Thibadeau. He told me he was the plant whisperer for the park; he kept the beautifully landscaped plants healthy and growing. I thought how I too was a plant whisperer.”

Jim lived in a small farm shack out by the pond where the life-giving waters of the Pearl River streamed to fulfill the promise of a bountiful pond reservoir. They pumped the waters corralled by the pond to the sugarcane fields.

When he first came to the farm, Jim had been immediately taken with Pa’s little baby boy, Jerry. “Mr. Lobell, may I come in to see Mister Jerry?” Jim had inquired. He entered the back room where a little baby Jerry lay in his crib. Jim asked: “Can I hold him? It’s been ages since I’ve held a baby.”

Pa Lobell answered, “Of course you can, Jim, and I think you will protect him.”

Jim, who had never married nor raised children, said, “Yes sir, I will protect him as long as I breathe.”

Jim picked up Jerry with his massive hands as if he were an egg that might crack if held too firmly. He held him in his hands and whispered, “Mister Jerry, we will have some fun raising sugarcane!”

Jim stared into his eyes; they were a deep, icy blue, like the deep blue underbelly of an iceberg. He was not sure why that image had flashed into his mind. When Jim looked closer into Jerry’s eyes, he noticed golden flecks around the irises. If anyone cared to look into Jim’s seemingly unremarkable brown eyes, they would see his eyes were ringed with gold too.

As Jim pondered Mister Jerry’s eyes, something drew him to his little arm. He had a small raspberry star on his arm that most folks assumed was a birthmark. Jim had the same star on his right back shoulder, except the star was not raspberry but purple. He laid Jerry back into the crib and said, “Mister Jerry, you will have a most interesting life, and old Jim will help navigate the path for you.”

Jerry was a good kid and followed his dad and Uncle Jim around the sugarcane fields doing what he could. He was most excited to see the big thrashing machines as they gobbled up the sugarcane.

Jim looked forward to Christmas, as did Pa Lobell, because it meant the end of crop harvesting. He searched for the sweet treats Ma Lobell made special for the Christmas holidays.

“Good evening, Mrs. Lobell, do you have any of that rum cake for old Mr. Jim?” he asked. He loved his sweets.

“I do Jim. You are welcome to stay for dinner, but I wrapped cake for you to take home.”

“Thanks but I had better get back to the pond before dark; the canes are begging for water,” Jim replied. Pa Lobell never understood what he said and never questioned him. Since Jim’s arrival at Lobell Farms, their crops were bountiful, setting the market price for sugarcane. That allowed him to hire extra help and buy new harvesting equipment.

Uncle Jim sensed from the canes, “We are being burned and need more water.” Jim determined they needed to slacken the fertilizer and water more. Jim had a powerful *binding*—the unique ability to communicate with plants or other species.

Uncle Jim and Pa Lobell sat on the porch at the end of a long day and sampled last year’s batch of sugarcane rum. Jerry ran up to the porch excited and said he had talked to a toad.

“What toad?” Uncle Jim asked.

“The one down by the stream,” Jerry said as he gasped for air. “Aunt Freda told me, ‘Eat a live toad each morning and nothing worse will happen the rest of the day.’”

“What has my crazy sister been telling you?” Pa Lobell asked.

Jerry explained he was having a bad day, and Aunt Freda told him, “Jerry, to never have a bad day again do this: Eat a live toad each morning and nothing worse will happen the rest of the day.” Jerry had decided a bad morning was better than eating a live toad.

Later that day, Uncle Jim brought Jerry over to his porch by the pond and set him on his knee. "Jerry," Jim said, "I'll let you in on a little secret. Can you guess how I grow such robust sugarcane?"

Jerry did not understand the question and said, "No, I can't, Uncle Jim."

He told Jerry "It's because plants speak to me, and I understand their needs. Some folks call this special communicating skill a *binding*, and I think you may have it too," Uncle Jim continued. "Have you ever looked into my eyes?" Jim asked.

"No," he replied.

"Look in my eyes; we have something in common. Tell me what it is." Jerry looked deep into Uncle Jim's eyes and at first, he saw nothing special. Jim's eyes were dark brown, and he wondered if Uncle Jim had lost it, but then he saw it.

"Uncle Jim, you have those little golden speckles around your eyes like I do!" Jerry said.

Jim removed his shirt and said, "Look at my right shoulder." He had a birthmark that was a purple star similar to the raspberry star on Jerry's arm.

"What does this mean Uncle Jim?"

"Jerry, my boy, I'm not sure, but it's something special. It's like Mother Nature gifted us with a special calling."

"I always had good luck at the Thorax Farm in Arkansas for growing plants, whatever they may be: soybeans, watermelons, squash, strawberries, you name it." Jim said "But I never understood plants until I first picked you up from the crib.

"There was a jolt, and we had a binding, I looked into your eyes, and seeing the raspberry star, I understood. We are alike, unique with special skills. I don't know what special skill you have now, but someday, it will show itself."

As the days grew into years, Jerry enrolled at Louisiana Tech and graduated with a degree in mechanical engineering. Lobell Farms

continued to prosper. It was hard for Jerry to leave the sugarcane farm and Uncle Jim, but it was time for him to leave the nest.

Jerry was heavy with sadness on his drive to Louisiana Tech in Ruston. Ma Lobell always doted over him and made sure his every need was taken care of. Pa Lobell worked hard to make the farm a success, and Jerry now understood why he needed to sample the previous year's sugarcane crop with his rum. Jerry never again sensed anything from a creature nor a toad and wondered later if it had ever happened at all.





Chapter 2

Jerry Falls into the Pit



JERRY LOOKED INTO THE flaming abyss and shouted, “Do you want me?”

He stared over the edge, balanced his life between heaven and hell and wondered if the abyss would be a better path for him. “Why not” Jerry said aloud to himself. At least it would be the end.

Jerry never recovered from his nasty divorce from his wife Darlene several years ago. He wondered if the pit in hell he dreamed about would end his torment. At the edge of the boiling cauldron, Jerry gave up the fight for his life.

Jerry screamed, “You win!” He leaned over the edge until he could lean no further. Now, gravity was the master of his fate. As he fell, he dug his fingers into the glowing walls that ripped off his fingernails. He fought for his life and tried to block the burning cinders from his eyes.

The fumes gave way to a loud ringing so loud it made his eardrums bleed.

Ring, ring, ring!

He faced the baleful burning eye and tried to muffle the ringing with his hands, but to no avail. He screamed and jerked upright in the bed. He was soaked in sweat.

Jerry squinted his eyes and gained focus. He realized the baleful eye was the sun shining through his whisper-thin curtains. “Just my luck to have a third-floor apartment with windows facing the morning sun,” he muttered.

“What the hell!” Jerry yelled a little louder than he intended. Jerry sat up and looked at the source of the ringing. The alarm clock was on a mission to save him from the burning abyss. Instead of slamming the alarm clock on the floor, Jerry pressed the stop button.

Jerry searched for his flip-flops and thought his apartment was better than the pits of hell in his dream, but not by a lot. He found his flip-flops and rose from the bed. Jerry mused that he was one of the few folks who put on flip-flops not to walk to the beach but to walk across the carpet.

He walked past his small refrigerator, a single sink and a two-burner hot plate and entered the bathroom. He brushed his teeth and looked at the cantankerous shower. It promised hot water, but it would usually turn demonic ice cold.

He stood, and the ringing began again. Jerry jumped up and looked down to see if the burning pit had returned. It was only the phone. He picked up the receiver and said loudly “What!”

“My car needs a new starter, and the estimate is \$500 to fix it. I need money,” Darlene stated matter-of-factly.

Jerry wondered if the pit to hell may not be so bad as compared to dealing with Darlene. The courts blessed Darlene with most of Jerry’s money and their house with all furnishings. So, she was now demanding more money, and he had to wear flip-flops to cross the worn carpet.

She had no intention of getting a job since Jerry was her bank. Darlene tapped him out, and he was broke with no hope of having any money for another apartment, a newer car, or even a vacation. He worked all day, every day, only to be dragged back down into the depths by Darlene.

All because he had too much scotch and fell in bed with another woman. He hadn’t meant to, it was just an accident. The court judge did not consider it an accident, and he was still paying for his little indiscretion. It was their fault he was in this predicament!

Jerry said okay and hung up the phone. “Good to hear from you too.”

Jerry wandered to the bathroom to take care of business. While he used the toilet, Jerry glanced over to the shower and wondered if it would be hot or cold today.

After a nice refreshing shower, Jerry was almost ready for work. He looked into the mirror, feeling dejected, and said, “Nothing else bad can happen the rest of the day.” He almost believed it.

Jerry stared into the mirror and remembered his old Aunt Freda. She gave him some advice long ago he never forgot, causing a little grin to sprout across his face. She said, “Jerry, eat a live toad the first thing in the morning and nothing worse will happen the rest of the day.”

He exited his apartment and headed down the stairs. He glimpsed under the bottom of the first stair landing and saw a large black cat with a white patch of hair on its forehead in the shape of a star.

“Great, this is all I need—a black cat to cross my path!” he said to himself. Jerry stepped off the last stair and almost tripped when the cat darted across his path.

“I don’t need this!” he yelled with a weak attempt to kick at the cat. Jerry had no animosity towards cats, but this was the wrong day to introduce oneself. After another halfhearted swing with his foot at the cat, he noticed a small medallion hanging from its collar.

The cat sprinted a few yards, stopped and looked back at him. Jerry noted the cat’s unusual eyes: the right eye was emerald green and the left eye was golden with sparkles. Captured by the cat’s eyes, they somehow seemed to relax him, and he felt the cat was trying to communicate with him. *On any other day this would seem strange*, Jerry thought.



Chapter 3

Two Beers, One Plate of Nachos



JERRY ALWAYS THOUGHT he needed one lucky break to get his life back on track. He would do anything to improve his luck—almost anything, unless it required doing something unscrupulous, dangerous or something requiring heavy lifting, Jerry was all in, boarding the good-luck train. All he needed was a lucky day, and he thought maybe this was it.

He pulled into the same parking space at InoDyne—far enough away from the business yet walkable for solitude. For the past several years he had entered the work entrance and passed the receptionist without a greeting.

Today, a little more bounce was in his step as he passed the receptionist. Jerry almost stumbled as he heard, “Good morning, Jerry.”

Sneaking a quick glance around to make sure she had spoken to him and not to some other Jerry, he stammered, “Good morning, Julie.”

“Wow,” Jerry whispered aloud, “this day is turning out great.” He thought about the day and reminisced about Aunt Freda and the black cat. *Okay, let’s hope for the best. Maybe my luck is changing for the better.*

Jerry strode down the hallway heading to the stairs that led to his small office in the basement. He arrived at 8:30 for his shift as usual. He opened the door and Bobby Diel, Vice President of Maintenance Facilities, was waiting for him.

"Hello," Jerry blurted out, somewhat surprised to see Bobby sitting in his chair. Jerry suddenly wondered if his job was on the line; why else would Bobby be there? But then again, his many years of dedication had to be worth something. Besides, he had resurrected dead HVAC systems when others had failed. He was the go-to man, so to speak.

Bobby asked, "Can you come to my office at 10:00 for a short meeting?"

"Sure", said Jerry somewhat startled.

"Good, I will see you at 10:00," Bobby confirmed, then gave Jerry's chair back to him.

Still my chair, at least for a while, Jerry thought. *I hope I'm not going to be fired. The day was just picking up steam after a rocky start, and I don't need it to derail now.*

Jerry arrived at Mr. Diel's office on the third floor at 10:00 and entered. A receptionist greeted Jerry and inquired his name. Jerry almost forgot his name, but stammered, "Jerry Lobell to see Mr. Diel as requested." He hoped to sound at least somewhat official. The receptionist asked Jerry to have a seat and she buzzed Mr. Diel.

Jerry thought, *I'm here but I've no clue why*. While he waited, Jerry perused magazines scattered about: *Helicopter World*, *Best Golf Course in America*, *Luxury Resorts International* and *Business Today*. There wasn't a darn thing on water-cooled HVAC systems, which were Jerry's specialty. He maintained InoDyne's cooling systems to fight the Louisiana summers and assumed they relegated that discussion to basements and not to the third-floor. Mr. Bobby Diel approached Jerry and apologized for keeping him waiting.

"Not a problem, Mr. Diel."

"Would you care for a cup of coffee?" Mr. Diel asked.

With the day clocking in at 10:15, he realized he hadn't had a cup yet. "Yes, black please," Jerry replied.

“Please follow me,” Mr. Diel said as the receptionist brought Jerry a cup of hot black coffee.

Feeling somewhat out of place, Jerry followed Mr. Diel to his corner office. It was large by all standards, especially when compared to his small office in the basement.

“Please, have a seat, Jerry,” offered Mr. Diel.

Jerry sat in a cushy elevator chair while Mr. Diel roosted in his plush office chair. With a view of New Orleans, it was quite the office.

“You may have been wondering why I asked you to meet with me today with such a short notice, for which I apologize. Jerry, we have been monitoring your work performance and have come to this conclusion,” proffered Mr. Diel.

Jerry thought he had gotten carried away with optimism today. After the horrible dream, a lousy call from his ex-wife, thinking of eating toads and stumbling across a black cat, he still felt optimistic, and it was only 10:30.

But optimism can be a fickle mistress—here today and gone tomorrow.

“Tom Jenkins is retiring today after thirty years as facility maintenance supervisor. After careful consideration of several qualified candidates across the industry, we believe our best candidate is right here at InoDyne,” Mr. Diel said. “What I am saying, Jerry, is we’d like for you to take over for Tom. We all agree InoDyne will be in most capable hands with you in this position. So, what do you say? Are you up for the job for supervisor of maintenance facilities?” asked Mr. Diel.

Jerry was so dumbfounded, all he could think of was asking a toad and a black cat what they thought. His mind was so wound up, he could not think straight.

“Yes, sir,” Jerry stammered. “I am your man and will not let you or InoDyne down.” Jerry was not sure that was his voice speaking, but held out hopes he did not sound like a complete idiot.

“Good,” replied Mr. Diel. “This was a big decision for us, and we felt comfortable your past performance at InoDyne would pay dividends for us, and for you too, Jerry. With this position comes a 25% pay raise and two weeks’ paid vacation. In addition, you will have full insurance with an office on the first-floor. Although, the vacation may not be that attractive to you, since we know you do not take them.”

Jerry was trying to think straight and gave up on any success in that endeavor. Mr. Diel was right about one thing: Jerry always worked extra hours to keep the boat afloat for him and Darlene. Taking vacations was above his pay grade. *God, I hope Mr. Diel does not have Darlene’s phone number. The last thing I want her to know is that I’ve received a pay raise. She would go buy a new car and saddle me with the payments.*

Jerry thanked Mr. Diel and shook his hand, maybe a little too robustly. He exited the third floor and headed to his office in the basement. He had forgotten Tom was retiring, and there had been rumors they would pick a new supervisor today. *So, that’s why the receptionist saw me and said good morning.*

At the end of the shift, Jerry for the last time, ascended the stairs to exit the building. He heard the receptionist say, “Have a good evening, sir.”

He turned around to make sure the greeting was for him and replied, “Thank you, you as well.”

Heading out to his familiar parking space, he realized his new position also came with a space in the lot near the building. *Now, all I have to do is put lipstick on the old Jerry Wagon and turn it into a Mercedes. Yeah right, it will thrill me just to have a new parking space.*

Pulling out of the lot, Jerry decided to celebrate with a beer at the Double Deuce on the way home. Most of his indiscretions manifested on the days he over imbibed that smoky nectar scotch. He more or less had abstained from alcohol lately, but today was the exception!

Maybe he'd even have a plate of nachos.

Double Deuce it was then. Jerry really should have abstained from drinking that day.



Chapter 4

Double Trouble at the Double Deuce



JERRY ENTERED THE DOUBLE Deuce parking lot and threw caution to the wind. He parked in front.

He entered and transitioned from bright sun to darkness, making it impossible to see anything other than the large bar. For a moment, Jerry thought he was staring into the flaming dark pit, but he knew it was only a trick of the mind.

He stumbled to the bar blinded from the sun. He looked up and down the bar for an empty stool and was in luck since there were about thirty.

The bartender slid over to Jerry and asked what he would like. *A lot of things*, thought Jerry, *but for now, I will settle for an ice cold Tecate*. It had been so long since he had a drink, he was not even sure he liked Tecate, but it had an alluring name and was from Mexico, so maybe it contained mescal.

“An ice cold Tecate, please,” Jerry replied.

The bartender set the beer down, asking Jerry, “Need anything else right now?”

“No, thanks.” He smiled at the bartender.

He sipped his beer and enjoyed every tantalizing drop. He spun on his stool to look around as the darkness lifted and light filtered in. Jerry took inventory with whom he was celebrating this special day.

He noticed a couple with a single candle burning over in the corner where daylight whimpered out. The filtered light could not compete with the white flame in their eyes. That flame was stoked by the

beers and martinis enjoyed as far as possible from their respective home.

The only other folks gracing the Double Deuce this day included an old, hunched-over man in for his daily dose of life. Further down the bar was a haggard middle-age man with a drooping mustache. Down from him, Jerry saw a large hulk of a man downing what he thought was vodka. *He was best left alone*, Jerry thought.

He drained the Tecate and thought the only thing to add to his day would be to order nachos; the greasier the better. "Barkeep," Jerry yelled to catch his attention while he leaned over the counter. He figured the barkeep didn't hear him because of his heavy workload.

"Barkeep," Jerry yelled the second time while he leaned over the bar. The barkeep resigned himself he had to wait on the idiot hovering over the edge before he fell over.

"What do you need?" the barkeep asked Jerry.

"I would like to order nachos; the greasier the better," Jerry responded.

The barkeep replied "My friend you are in luck. Our nachos are the greasiest in town, in the Parish and in the South."

Bless the barkeep's heart; he is having a bad day and should have eaten a toad this morning! Jerry thought to himself.

The nachos arrived, steaming hot with enough grease to elect a new mayor of New Orleans. Jerry said, "All right!"

With a self-satisfying grin, Jerry thought about the day's events and came to one simple conclusion: he was still dreaming. Reaching under the bar, Jerry pinched himself so hard a blood blister popped up, so he decided it was real. So he decided there was only one thing to do. "Barkeep, I'll have another Tecate."

He drained his Tecate and thought, *Damn, this hits the spot. I might have another for dessert.* He glanced up to the TV while a reporter was talking about a lost black cat owned by a local prominent businessman who was offering a huge reward of \$25,000 solid.

The reporter interviewed folks who had “the cat” proffered in the award. Someone instructed them to bring the cat to 689 Canal Street and to ask for Mr. Lazlo to confirm the cat’s identity to claim the reward. The reporter flashed a picture of a short-haired black cat with a white patch on his forehead.

Jerry noticed one of the cat rescuers was his ex-wife, and she was being interviewed by the reporter. She said she had the missing cat and would claim the reward. The reporter’s cameraman focused on her cat, which she said was a dead ringer for the missing cat.

The cat was dark gray with long hair without a star on her face. *Let’s see*, Jerry thought, *missing large black cat with short hair and prominent white star on its face. A “dead ringer,”* Jerry chuckled.

Before the reporter moved on to other cat rescuers, she asked her one last question. “What is your name?”

“Darlene,” she replied.

“What would you do with all the money?” the reporter asked.

She looked into the camera and replied, “Buy a new car; my worthless ex-husband won’t help me.”

Jerry momentarily turned hot enough to burn the nachos, then thought, *To hell with you, I know something you don’t!*

He drained the Tecate and ordered another to finish his nachos. *Stupid bitch, she has to know it is the wrong cat; color means something, even to cats.* Jerry simmered down and continued to watch the news report as the reporter once more gave the contact information for the reward.

“If found, please contact Mr. Lazlo at 504-369-1969 or come by with the cat for confirmation at 689 Canal Street.” Before moving on to another breaking story about a mugging beneath Interstate 10, the reporter had the cameraman take a close-up shot of the cat’s picture.

It was a large black cat with a white star on his face. It had a silver medallion hanging from its neck, and it had the most mesmerizing

eyes. The right eye was a brilliant emerald green and the left appeared to be metallic gold.

Jerry choked on his nachos and shouted, “Holy shit, I know where that cat is!”

Some things are best-kept secret, as the hulking presence at the end of the bar turned his attention to Jerry. He still blabbed about the cat to no one in particular but the proverbial cat was now out of the bag.

Mr. Mayhem at the end of the bar had feigned little interest in the reporter’s story, but he was paying rapt attention to every word, picture and amount being offered for the cat’s return.

Nikola knew he walked into this dump for a reason and Jerry just handed him the brass ring, poor schmuck. Now all he had to do was borrow a car from the limited inventory offered by Double Deuce patrons, follow Jerry and claim the prize he had been searching for the past two weeks.

Fifteen stools down from Jerry was Nikola, the harbinger of death and the ghost of mayhem. He was on a mission and it involved a large black cat with a white star. Jerry’s luck for the day just went south all the way to Mexico, which was where Jerry should have been at this moment.

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JOHN PARHAM WAS BORN in California in 1949, lived in Arkansas most of his life and now retired to the sunny beaches of Florida. He has been a cherry picker, welder and CEO of a computer technology company. And now an author.

He graduated with a BA in Journalism and has written the Cat Chronicles by Bastet Short Story Collection. One of the short stories, The Town That Dreaded Halloween, was selected and read on the 2018 Halloween Special Edition AIARWIP podcast.

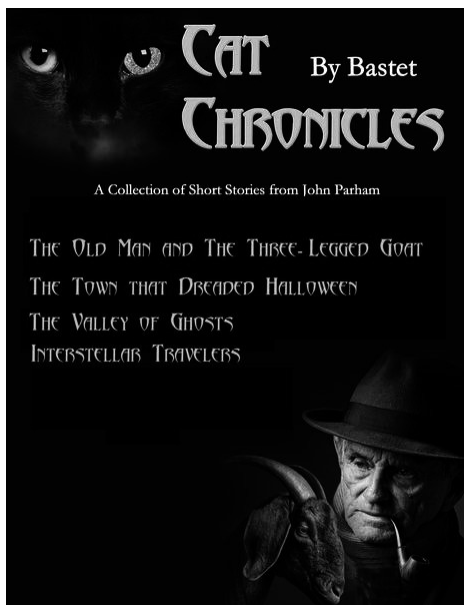
Married to Mindy for twenty-five years, they travel full time across the US in a motor home with two independent cats, Loco and Juno. Juno was the inspiration for Bastet and no Mindy is not an actual Voodoo Queen!

Oh, and for the past 50 years his nickname has been Crazy, we think it goes well with his stories!

For more information, please visit John at www.johnparhamauthor.com².

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