

Rebecca Snow

writing from inside the house...because the zombies are pounding on the doors

Search

[Home](#)

[Bio](#)

[Events](#)

[Isolation Tank](#)

[Publication Credits](#)

Adam Porkolab

Following in his grandfather's footsteps, **Adam Porkolab** ventured underground. Instead of mining, he descended to visit the Isolation Tank and answer a few questions



Why writing? What drew you to it? Why do you continue?

I was always fighting against something. For me, literature was synonymous with rebellion. My parents aren't readers or writers, and neither were my classmates. I was sixteen when I realized the best way to annoy everyone around me was to devour books and write my own stuff at the same time.

I'm an SF writer by necessity, through and through. I wanted to write literary fiction without a genre label, but Hungarian literary fiction is written by the same fifty people who read it, and they guard the entrance too. Hungarian SF works the same way, with a different fifty people. That's how I ended up

translating my Hungarian work into English. That was self-defense too: perhaps forty people have read my monograph and my Hungarian publications, half of them under duress. A single issue of an English-language magazine reaches an order of magnitude more readers.

If you were freezing to death and the only thing left to burn were the books in your library, what 5 books would you burn last? (And yes, everything else burnable has been burnt.)

I come from a mining family. My paternal grandfather worked underground in the coal mines of Nógrád, in northern Hungary. His workmates nicknamed him Kosztolányi, after the Hungarian writer, because he wrote their exam papers for them when they were qualifying as skilled miners. Keeping a fire going was a trade in our family, not an emergency, so I'll answer this as a professional.

My own old books go into the fire first. Three volumes, a cupboard full of juvenilia from which hubris kept me from cutting a single line. They'll give off plenty of heat, and nobody will miss a page.

The last ones left:

1. **Dezső Kosztolányi, *Kornél Esti*.** For the nickname that went down the mine with my grandfather.
2. **Hermann Hesse, *Siddhartha*.** It kept me thinking for hours and looking at everything around me differently for days.
3. **Daniel Keyes, *Flowers for Algernon*.** No other book has ever made me cry on a bus. And György Szepessy's Hungarian translation is superb. Glorious.
4. **Lem.** Because he can carry a joke all the way to where it stops being funny.
5. **Le Guin.** Because she's the only writer who has ever written an entire culture without making me feel like a tourist in it.

Mihály Babits's *Pilot Elza, or the Perfect Society* isn't on the list because I'm translating it into English, so I'll have the manuscript with me anyway. It only burns if I do.

What's the most challenging thing you've done (in life or in writing (your choice))?

Learning to write prose I could sell in another language when I can barely get a sentence out in that language in person. I read and write English at an advanced level, but when I have to speak, I get tongue-tied. I'm a person of the written word. I freeze in spoken interviews. My brain knows it should be thinking in English, but the words come out in Hungarian and I have to translate them back into English. Total mental chaos.

This was a practical decision, not an artistic one. The Hungarian market is small. If you write speculative fiction, sooner or later you switch languages, give up, or keep writing the same thing under a different title. And I've never been good with monotony. 😊 In my first year, submitting a manuscript felt like cooking in someone else's kitchen: everything's there, but you can't find the salt. Success came "instantly": it took sixty-eight rejections to get my first acceptance in English.

What's one word or phrase that drives you nuts? Why?

"Elevated horror."

As a linguist, I know what that adjective is doing. It doesn't praise the writing; it gives the reader a way to opt out of the excitement. It suggests navel-gazing stories that wander around inside someone's head. But good horror is good horror, whether it's set on an airplane or in a quiet, fogbound small town. To me, the phrase says horror is low by default, and this particular piece has managed to grab hold of something and pull itself up. Whoever uses it can't bring themselves to admit they had a good time.

There isn't even an established Hungarian translation, which says a lot. Here, horror has nothing to leave behind: it was never allowed into the living room. A few years ago it began appearing among the topics for some of the more adventurous advanced school-leaving exams and university courses, but even there it's mostly just Poe.

Do you have a favorite character you've created? If so, who is it and why?

Prescind Nidify from "Baby Shower," the very story in *Sinister Soirée*.

She's no hero. She's a newcomer from the city in a farming community where, once a year, they cull the mamelons that come down from the sky, and everyone knows the protocol except her. I like her because what drives the horror isn't her lack of courage but her lack of information. She doesn't know what to do, and the neighbors assume everyone knows.

There's a linguistic layer too: the Feddermans speak Yinzer, the Pittsburgh dialect, and she doesn't. For a Hungarian author, writing a Pittsburgh sociolect is roughly like playing the violin in gloves, but the misunderstanding lives exactly where it needs to. I'd like to say it came naturally thanks to the sociolinguistics I studied as a linguist, but it took a lot of research and reading. I originally wanted to use other dialects, then realized they all carried so many associations that using them would be risky. Nobody teaches you this either.

Creepiest place you've ever been? Has it appeared in your fiction? Why or Why not?

One evening in Szurdokpüspöki, in the Palóc region, I suddenly heard a funeral procession on the main street. I thought I was losing my mind, but it turned out there was a local legend about it. Other people had heard the phantom funeral procession too, with invisible women chanting litanies in the middle of the night. I still don't know what happened.

I'll write about it one day, but I'm still looking for the right story.

Another eerie thing ties directly into "Baby Shower." I grew up in a village named after a man who went to Hell. Tar, in Nógrád County. Its namesake was Lőrinc of Tar, a knight of King Sigismund's, who reached Ireland in 1411 and descended into a cave on an island in Lough Derg called St. Patrick's Purgatory. He came back and, in Dublin, dictated an account of what he had seen down there. It's one of the strangest surviving works of medieval Hungarian literature. Above the village stands the whitewashed Church of St. Michael, with its three-lobed plan, a form rare even across Europe. Beside it are a few stones from the old manor house. Excavations at the church uncovered human bones and a tomb slab bearing the Rátót coat of arms. We don't know for certain whether he's the one buried there.

And yes, it made it into my fiction, into this very story. In "Baby Shower," there's an old ruined church that offers protection, and local knowledge tied to a stone about how to maintain it. When I wrote it, I thought I was writing American folk horror. Only afterward did I look at where it had come from. My subconscious is a better director than I am.

What's the best rejection you've ever received?

In March 2026, C.M. Muller rejected a story for the *Nyctalocos* anthology and, in the same email, invited me to send it to one of his other publications, *Chthonic Matter Quarterly*. It was accepted that day. It's the only rejection I've managed to sell.

The runner-up is less uplifting, but funny. The same editor rejected three different stories of mine from three consecutive anthologies, each time for the same reason: he liked it, but it wasn't horror enough. Rats, wasps, spiders. By the third, I was submitting as though I had something to prove, which is exactly the attitude that guarantees your story won't be horror enough.

How did you get that scar?

Over the past ten years, I've picked up far more scars than I wanted. There were surgeries. The laparoscope was hard at work inside my abdomen. Gallbladder. Stomach.

And there were emotional scars too. After a fifteen-year break, I'm back to polishing my stories with a steadier hand. There are about two hundred of them now. It's not a normal day unless at least three rejections come in. I've been turned down three hundred and eighty-seven times so far this year, often politely, often for strange, baffling reasons. They still sting. They used to be bee stings; now they're mosquito bites. Maybe later they'll be flea bites, I don't know. But it still hurts.

What song would precede your entrance into a room if we all had personal soundtracks?

Depends on what I'm there to do.

If I'm programming, something repetitive and oddly melodic: "Every Single Day" by Benassi Bros. featuring Dhany, or "Love Is a Soldier" by Jan Wayne.

If I'm there to write or edit, something predictable and just interesting enough that I can listen to it for five hours straight. "Drift Away" by Dobie Gray, or anything by JJ Grey & Mofro.

If I'm just making an entrance, some hard-hitting metal. [Pantera](#). Please! 😊

Promote yourself and/or your writing.

"Baby Shower" appears in [Sinister Soirée: A Celebration Horror Anthology](#), edited by Cassandra O'Sullivan Sachar and published by Screaming Scorpion Press.

I live in Hungary and publish in two languages. In English, I write folk horror, bureaucratic science fiction, and literary weird fiction, much of it drawn from Palóc material: a dialect of northern Hungary and its accompanying, rather practical traditions surrounding the dead. My work published or

forthcoming this year includes pieces at Terrain.org, in the *Calendar of Fools* anthology, and in audio form at Mixtape Stories.

I'm a member of SFWA, by my own count the third of Hungarian origin and the first living in Hungary. Yesterday I was accepted into the Horror Writers Association too.

The full list and links are at adamporkolab.com. On [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#), I'm @adamporkolabauthor.

Final thoughts before you run screaming for your life?

Where I come from, hospitality is a procedure, not a courtesy. If someone knocks, you feed them before asking who they are. That custom didn't develop because Palóc villages were nice places, but because standing outside a door in the cold could kill you, and everyone knew they'd be the one standing there someday.

All my horror grows out of that one rule. In my stories, the terror almost always begins when someone comes in and is given a seat.

Thank you, Mr. Porkolab, for sharing your fiction with English readers. I hope you've enjoyed the hospitality of the tank and the finger sandwiches. Sorry about the bones. As long as the funeral procession you hear on the way out isn't your own, you should be ok.