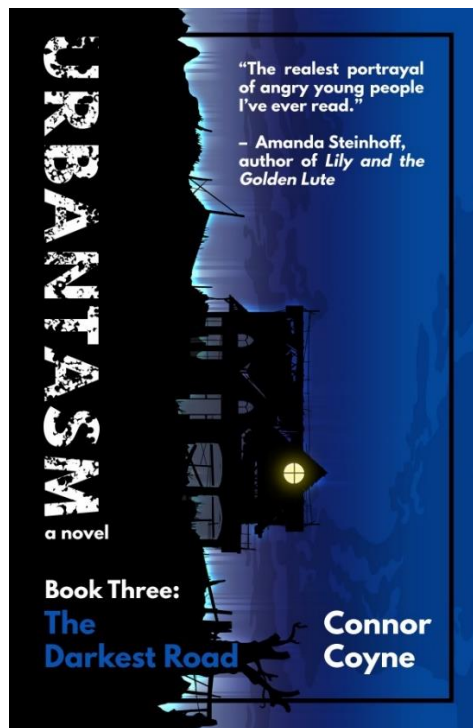


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**Book Three in the *Urbantasm* saga is
“an often gripping evocation of the throes of a struggling city.”**



Urbantasm, Book Three: The Darkest Road

By Connor Coyne

Urbantasm, Book Three: The Darkest Room, praised by *East Village Magazine* as “an often gripping evocation of the throes of a struggling city,” is a magical teen noir serial novel inspired by life in 1990s Flint, Michigan. (Gothic Funk Press, September 22, 2021, General Fiction, ISBN: 9780989920292, \$24.00, Trade Paperback, Book Three of Four in a Serial).

Gothic Funk Press, publisher of the *Urbantasm* series will be offering a free scavenger hunt the week of September 20-26. Participants can choose between a Flint-based list of items or a list of items to find in their own communities. Prizes totaling \$300, including signed copies of the

Urbantasm books, gift cards to Comma Bookstore and Social Hub, and other items, will be awarded to two winning teams. Participants are asked to register at <https://tinyurl.com/urbantasmscavhunt>

Junior high was hard. John Bridge has made and lost friends, experienced and forsaken love, and discovered his true passions. But after his harrowing experience on the roof of an abandoned hospital, John has decided to leave the past behind and plan for the future. Now he has new friends, a new girlfriend, and an exciting new goal: to get into college in Chicago and leave his hometown of Akawe forever.

But Akawe might not want to let John go. The city is full of ghosts called “urbantasms,” and they remind John of questions that he cannot easily escape: What happened to his abducted classmate Cora Braille? How does the Chalks street gang keep replenishing its stock of O-Sugar, a drug with seemingly magical properties? And why is his ex-girlfriend Lucy suddenly dating a gangbanger? Does it have anything to do with a man with a knife or some mysterious blue sunglasses?

John has a feeling that the dreadful answers to these questions might take him to a place that he does not want to go: a dark road in a forgotten corner of his dying city. Possibly the darkest road of all.

Excerpt:

The summer dusk gave way to interstitial twilight. There was no sense in riding an hour back home in the dark just to turn around and come back the next morning. Instead, my friends and I bummed our way back to Camp Jellystone, where we got to camp in tents on the gravel and weeds off of the RV lot for five dollars a night. We sat around a fire and drank pop while the older actors – our mentors – went through six-packs of beer and homilized on their atheist Bibles. They quoted SNL routines, Monty Python, GURPS, Cthulhu, and the Digital Underground until we were all too tired to see straight. We all said goodnight and made our way back to our tents. But my tent had flooded during the week, and inside I found dead earwigs floating in slow circles.

I didn't mind.

I was glad that this had happened.

I gathered up my sleeping bag, which Eddie had dropped off in the morning before heading back to Akawe, and stumbled back through the purple dark to Omara's tent.

"Knock knock," I said.

I heard her sigh. "You got your own tent, John."

"Not tonight," I said. "It's flooded. Will you let me stay here?"

"Fine," she said. "If this ever gets back to my dad, he'll murder you."

"I don't think he will. I don't think he'd murder a fly."

She didn't argue. She knew that I was right. She unzipped the tent and beckoned me inside.

In more than a year of going out, Omara and I hadn't had sex. We hadn't even been naked together. The driving thirst and curiosity that I had felt in seventh grade had been quenched by my confusing tumbles with Crystal. By my guilty nescience with Lucy. Still, here I was, sleeping bag in hand, stooped under the slope of the tent roof, wearing soccer shorts and a too-small t-shirt, and Omara stood before me, more stooped because she was taller than I was, her white panties and tank top bright against her dark skin. We unzipped our sleeping bags, made a bed between them, and lay down. Omara turned away from me, and I pressed into her back. I put my arm around her waist with my palm against her bare stomach. I could feel her shapes against mine, though there was still cloth between us.

"It was a long day today," she said.

"Uh-huh," I said.

"We'd better get some sleep. It's gonna be a long weekend. We got two more days to go. Then school. You know I got that job at the Olan Farm? It's gonna be almost like this. I mean, I guess I'll dress up like a milkmaid, like *The Little House on the Prairie* or something. But it'll be acting, you know?"

I sighed.

"I'm not tired," I said.

"Me neither," she said. And then, in a burst: "I can't stop thinking about that woman on your block. Who murdered her baby."

I pushed myself against her. I held my breath. I said, “I can’t think about that. I mean. There’s nothing I can do about that. It makes me sick, but what does that even accomplish?”

“But doesn’t it just stick with you? The idea of it? How awful it –”

“I don’t want it to, okay? Anyway, it’s far away. We’re here now. Let’s stay here.”

“We can’t stay here.” I felt the tenseness in Omara’s back.

“Yeah. But someday, we’ll leave Akawe for good. And anyway. We aren’t there now.”

“Aren’t you afraid your dad’s gonna lose his job?”

“My father? Yeah. He’s already driving two hours each day ever since they transferred him to Canton. Ever since that strike ended last year, it seems like X is closing everything fast as they can. You know? I mean, they closed the Benedict Main. Most of the Old Benedict. Probably RAN, too. ‘Course, my aunt says they were going to close them all anyway.”

Omara laughed. A slight untensing. “Sounds like you *have* thought about it.”

“I think about lots of things a lot. Some things I don’t want to think about and some things I do. I mean, I think about *you* a lot.”

I was trying to move toward her. In, you know, *ways*. But she wasn’t taking the bait.

“Aren’t you afraid they won’t be able to pay for college?”

She’d finally succeeded. Omara’s fears had become my fears.

“No,” I said. “I mean, my mother is working at that new job at XAI. And even if my father gets laid off, he’s got options. Right? Transfer to other plants. Stuff like that. What about you? Why are you worried? Didn’t your grandparents get you a savings bond or something?”

“Yeah. But I keep thinking someone’s gonna open a trapdoor beneath me or something. I guess ... I guess I keep thinking I’ll believe in college when I get there. And not before. It just seems a bad idea to get my hopes up, you know?”

“You don’t have to worry about it for a while. It’s still years off. I mean, we just have to keep working, don’t we? It’ll happen. We just need to be patient or some shit, you know?”

The wind buffeted the tent over our heads. I could hear low talking outside. Low chuckles. Through the tent wall, I could see the embers of the fire flickering faintly. Some of the older actors would be slouching in their folding chairs until the sky started to gray with dawn. That was still several hours away. I listened to it for a long, slow minute.

“I do worry,” I confided. “I worry that something will happen that I don’t expect, and I’ll get stuck. That I’ll fail a class, fail a test I need to pass ... and I won’t get into college in Chicago, or I won’t get into college anywhere. I worry that my parents are lying about everything, and they can’t pay for shit. I worry that I’m just being set up to fail. I even worry ...” I caught my breath. Saying this all out loud was *hard*. Trusting a human being was *hard*. But at least I wasn’t looking into her eyes. At least the darkness of a September tent wrapped us and kept our secrets from everyone else.

“I worry,” I whispered, “that you’ll go away to college in Chicago, and I’ll be stuck in Akawe, and I’ll never get out.”

I heard a deep breath from Omara. I felt her belly raise beneath my cupped palm. She had fallen asleep, and I was grateful.

About the Author:

Connor Coyne is a writer living and working in Flint, Michigan.

His first novel, *Hungry Rats*, has been hailed by Heartland prize-winner Jeffery Renard Allen as “an emotional and aesthetic tour de force.”

His second novel, *Shattering Glass*, has been praised by Gordon Young, author of *Teardown: Memoir of a Vanishing City* as “a hypnotic tale that is at once universal and otherworldly.”

His essay “Bathtime” is included in the Picador anthology *Voices from the Rust Belt*, edited by Anne Trubek.

Connor represented Flint’s 7th Ward as its artist-in-residence for the National Endowment for the Arts’ Our Town grant, through which artists engaged ward residents to produce creative work in service of the 2013 City of Flint Master Plan.

Connor’s work has been published in *Vox.com*, *Belt Magazine*, *Santa Clara Review*, and elsewhere. He lives with his wife, two daughters, and an adopted rabbit in Flint’s College Cultural Neighborhood (aka the East Village), less than a mile from the house where he grew up.

Learn more about Connor’s writing at ConnorCoyne.com

Novels By Connor Coyne

Urbantasm, Book One: The Dying City

“A novel of wonder and horror.” – William Shunn, author of *The Accidental Terrorist*

Urbantasm is a magical teen noir serial novel inspired by the author’s experiences growing up in and around Flint, Michigan. It won the 2019 Next Generation Indie Book Awards for Young New Adult Fiction.

Thirteen-year-old John Bridge’s plans include hooking up with an eighth-grade girl and becoming one of the most popular kids at Radcliffe Junior High, but when he steals a pair of strange blue sunglasses from a homeless person, it drops him into the middle of a gang war overwhelming the once-great Rust Belt town of Akawe.

John doesn’t understand why the sunglasses are such a big deal, but everything, it seems, is on the table. Perhaps he accidentally offended the Chalks, a white supremacist gang trying to expand across the city. Maybe the feud involves his friend Selby, whose father died under mysterious circumstances. It could even have something to do with O-Sugar, a homegrown drug with the seeming ability to distort space. On the night before school began, a group of teenagers took O-Sugar and leapt to their deaths from an abandoned hospital.

John struggles to untangle these mysteries while adjusting to his new school, even as his parents confront looming unemployment and as his city fractures and burns.

Hungry Rats

“An emotional and aesthetic tour de force.” – Heartland prize-winner Jeffery Renard Allen

“Rat Man, you out there?” you asked.

The Rat Man, a serial killer, is on the loose in Flint, Michigan, and nobody can stop him. Except you, Meredith Malady, a high-school girl with a dysfunctional family and a score to settle. Running away from home is the first step, but where will you stay? How will you survive? And what will you do when you meet the Rat Man face to face?

Shattering Glass

“A hypnotic tale that is at once universal and otherworldly.” – Gordon Young, author of *Teardown: Memoir of a Vanishing City*

Just when the whole world has written off the city of Arkaic, Michigan, billionaire A. Olan puts up funds for a new university in an abandoned psychiatric hospital. There, strange engines turn human memories into electrical power. Join students Samo, Monty, Ezzie, and Dunya as they study, work, flirt, explore, and battle powers of ancient evil. Will they survive their first year of college?