

THE LEMONDRILLA ANNUAL 2025



LEMONDRILLA

freshly squeezed screams by Adam Porkoláb

THE LEMONDRILLA ANNUAL 2025

Adam Porkoláb

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CONTENTS

HELLO WORLD! · September 27, 2025

WRITING A NOVEL IN THREE MONTHS: THE BRUTAL ALCHEMY OF DOUBT AND DISCIPLINE · September 28, 2025

THE CHAMELEON ON THE TREE: ON RECOGNITION, REJECTION, AND FINDING YOUR TRUE TERRAIN · October 13, 2025

THE PRICE OF SAVING: WHY I SWITCHED (BACK) TO WORD AS A WRITER · November 10, 2025

STEPHEN KING WANTS TO CONNECT (AND OTHER MODERN HORROR STORIES) · November 12, 2025

XENOMORPH IN THE DOLLHOUSE: THE ANATOMY OF A PUBLISHER'S IDENTITY CRISIS · November 29, 2025

HELLO WORLD!

SEPTEMBER 27, 2025



AI-generated illustration

Welcome to Lemondrilla

So yes — this is supposed to be the “Hello world!” post. But let’s be honest: the world isn’t always that friendly. Most of the time, it just says **NO** and slams the door.

That’s why I built this strange, citrus-soaked corner of the internet.

What is Lemondrilla?

It started as a Hungarian word-monster: *lemondás* (“resignation”) smashed against a gorilla. Half lemon, half beast. A grotesque mascot for rejection, failure, and the stubborn will to keep writing anyway.

Why am I here?

Because I’m a Hungarian writer and poet trying to carve out a voice internationally. I wanted a place to share not just successes, but the whole absurd process:

- the rejections,
- the near-misses,
- the pulp and the rage.

What can you expect?

- Grotesque reflections on writing and rejection.
- Updates from my own publishing journey (yes, including the shameful pile of rejection slips).
- Shameless self-promotion, because the beast insists on it.
- Maybe a laugh, maybe a bruise, maybe both.

Lemondrilla isn't about giving up. It's about squeezing every bitter fruit the world throws at me, and somehow making it into words.

So welcome. Grab a lemon, dodge a gorilla, and stay tuned.

When life gives you rejection... unleash the Lemondrilla.

First published at <https://lemondrilla.com/hello-world/>

WRITING A NOVEL IN THREE MONTHS: THE BRUTAL ALCHEMY OF DOUBT AND DISCIPLINE

SEPTEMBER 28, 2025



AI-generated illustration

September 28, 2025. 7:05 AM. I closed my laptop and stared at the word count: 102,333.

The final line of my novel—*Ördögszaltó* or Flip of Doom—hung in the dawn-lit room, vibrating like an overused nerve.

They never tell you what it *really* feels like to finish.

Not the Instagram self-congratulation, not the “another milestone!” LinkedIn dopamine shot,

but the silence after the last word—when the book is finally out of your system and you’re left,

somehow emptier and yet heavy as lead, staring at the shape your own obsessions took.

DAY ZERO: CONCEPTION AND MANIA

It started as a scrap of a thought, end of June.

A concept—half-remembered, stitched together from insomnia, a bad dream, and a line of dialogue I texted myself at 3:24 AM.

The kind of idea you half-expect to vanish if you look at it too hard.

I had no idea if it was a “novel.”

Most “novel ideas” aren’t. Most die in the notebook, or get torn apart by the daily grind.

But this one... this one gnawed at me.

PHASE ONE: DISCIPLINE AND MADNESS

Here’s the honest truth:

I have a full-time job, a family, a life.

But for three months, I lived *alongside* my life, not inside it.

Every day:

- 1000–3500 words before/after work, sometimes on breaks, sometimes while eating.
- Plotting in the shower, structuring scenes during insomnia.
- Whole weeks blurring into feverish stretches of writing and self-doubt.

There’s a madness to this process.

Not the Byronic “tortured artist” kind,

but a **cold, methodical, semi-psychotic self-negotiation:**

If I don’t finish this, I’ll never forgive myself. If I do, I’ll probably hate it anyway. But I have to do it.

THE DOUBT: YOU’RE NEVER “GOOD ENOUGH”

Let’s be honest.

At 50,000 words I was sure the book was trash.

At 75,000 I was convinced it was too long, too odd, too... “me.”

By 90,000 I thought,

maybe, if I rewrite every sentence, it’ll be mediocre enough to pass for something publishable.

Doubt is not a demon you defeat.

You learn to write with it hanging off your back, gnawing at your ear.

THE SECRET: STRUCTURE IS SALVATION

What got me through?

- Ruthless outlining.
- Obsessive tracking: chapters, word counts, sprints.

I never waited for the Muse.

The Muse is unreliable, probably drunk, and spends most of her time with more successful writers.

I wrote because I said I would.

Every day, until I had 30 chapters.

And then I wrote some more.

THE FINISH LINE: EMPTINESS, RELIEF, AND FEAR

When the final chapter was done, I felt... nothing.

Not joy, not pride—just a slow deflation.

I wandered around the apartment, brewed coffee, looked at my own hands as if they belonged to someone else.

Maybe I thought I'd feel “like a writer.”

But mostly I just felt tired, and a little scared.

Scared of re-reading it.

Scared of showing it to anyone.

Scared of how much of myself I'd left exposed on the page.

WHAT NOW?

Now the ritual begins:

- **Set it aside.** Don't touch the manuscript for a week.
- **Re-read with cold eyes.** Pretend someone else wrote it.
- **Ask for honest feedback** (from someone who won't coddle you).
- **Rewrite. Prune. Suffer.**
- And then—maybe—send it into the world, hoping someone, somewhere, will care.

THE TAKEAWAY: THERE'S NO MAGIC. ONLY WORK.

If you're reading this and you want to write a novel:

You can. But you'll have to live with the doubt. You'll have to show up every day, regardless of how you feel.

You'll have to let yourself become obsessed.

And at the end, you'll be relieved and empty and, hopefully, just a little proud.

I'm not sure if my book is any good.

But it's *done*—and for one silent Sunday morning, that's all that matters.

If you've finished a book—or tried, or failed, or are still wrestling with the beast—

leave a comment. Tell me how you survived.

We're all in this together,
alone.

.....

*#writinglife #authordoubt #noveldraft #writersof2025 #processnotproduct
#doubtanddiscipline*

First published at <https://lemondrilla.com/writing-a-novel-in-three-months-the-brutal-alchemy-of-doubt-and-discipline/>

THE CHAMELEON ON THE TREE: ON RECOGNITION, REJECTION, AND FINDING YOUR TRUE TERRAIN

OCTOBER 13, 2025



AI-generated illustration

It happened yesterday. An award ceremony for a national literary prize in Hungary, for which I was a finalist. The event was in a distant city, so I turned the whole trip into a romantic surprise for my wife: a day of sightseeing, a visit to a beautiful royal palace, a wonderful day that would culminate in what I hoped would be a moment of professional recognition. The signs had been encouraging, my hopes were high.

Then came the landing, and it was brutal. I won nothing. Not even an honorable mention. I threw the nameless commemorative sheet for the finalists into a trash can in front of the library. The feeling of being used as "filler," invited only to pad out the numbers, was humiliating. And listening to the winning entries, I didn't feel respect, but a growing sense of confusion and anger. It felt like medals were being awarded in a completely different sport than the one I had trained for.

So what do you do with an evening like that, with a gut punch of that magnitude? Especially when it's just the latest in a series of setbacks, coming at the end of a difficult period of job loss and family conflicts?

The answer, it turned out, was simple: you write. Or, at least, you share what you've written. The rest of the evening and the following day became a kind of feverish, cathartic inventory. The poems I had written over the past year came pouring out—love poems, theological hymns, historical elegies, angry invectives, and the purest poems of all, those written with my young son. A dialogue began, where the answer to external rejection was the complete unveiling of my inner world.

And in the midst of processing it all, an African proverb surfaced that put everything into perspective: *"No matter how fast a horse is, it cannot overtake a chameleon on a tree."*

<https://youtu.be/lyFEZytNpOY>

In that moment, I understood. I wasn't on my own turf. I was a chameleon trying to compete in a horse race. My poetry is about deep emotion, metaphysical sincerity, a fidelity to lived experience. The judges, it seemed, were on a different track: one that valued fashionable cynicism, deconstruction, and provocation. My poems weren't bad. The terrain was wrong.

But what is my tree? What is my true terrain, where the horse cannot even compete?

The last 24 hours answered that question as well. My tree is my family. My wife, to whom I still write love poems after 15 years. My son, from whose single, brilliant sentence ("Sometimes our life explodes, just not the cola.") an entire poem is born. My terrain is the quiet legacy of my grandfather, the "needle-prick on the time beneath the skin."

And my tree is the literary tradition I choose for myself. Not the one defined by today's trends, but my own artistic lineage. For me, as a Hungarian writer, that means the intellectual gravity and formal mastery of Mihály Babits; the stark, metaphysical faith of János Pilinszky, who found grace in suffering; and the raw, vulnerable honesty of Attila József. This is my home, my frame of reference.

Yesterday taught me something. External recognition, the prizes, the official literary scene—that's a horse race. You can enter, you can run, but victory depends on more than just speed. And if you don't win, it doesn't mean you're slow. It might just mean you were running on the wrong ground.

So what's the lesson for any writer who has ever felt this sting?

Find your own tree. Learn its every branch, every leaf, every hidden hollow. This is your world, your language, your truth. Write about what is there. And if one

day, on a different track, the horses win the race, remember this: on your terrain,
among your branches, you cannot be overtaken.

And that is the only thing that matters.

To show you what I'm talking about, here's a raw English version of my Hungarian poem. It's a direct translation, so some of the rhythm and imagery might still feel very Hungarian. The original has a tricky rhyme scheme, which I've skipped in this 'sense-and-logic' draft (I could have spent another week just on the rhymes, so... my bad!).

.....

Adam Porkolab: Imprint of Love (on my skin)

Fifteen years, and you are still on the storm-trains of my emotions.

Though I left my thoughts strewn about, in crumpled balls,

and even crumpled up time between the pillows,

drank coffee with your toothbrush when the little spoon grew cool

and shouted into the morning silence,

just to see you get, spellbound, annoyed.

Fifteen years, and you still tell me off – me, the shy giant teddy bear,

for leaving the door open,

but I always leave it open,

because I love the way I get your love in return,

the way you still look at me,

as if I were an unsolved mystery – a cyclone-shadow,

and not a man who forgets

in which drawer he keeps the dreams he gets lost in.

Fifteen years, and you are still the question

to which I want no answer: the raw homecoming.

The sentence I leave unfinished,

because I love to hear you: intricate kiss-tracings,

as you speak your words... and your face lights up.

Fifteen years, and you still steal my blanket,

as if pedaling in a bike show in your dream,

as if you want to possess my body in the night,

and I let you, plunder these moments in the poem of my body,

let you steal away my heat, my skin,

for the dawn brings it back to me anyway – on my goosebumps.

Fifteen years, and you still forget your kisses

under my collarbone, on my shoulder – the debtors of your lips.

You are there at the edge of breakfasts, on the doorknobs.

If you were to disappear, suddenly and for good,

your trace would surely remain on every object,

and I would follow your memory with my fingers on my mind's marshland,

as if learning love anew in Braille, in the grooves of sensation.

Fifteen years, and the confidence of your being is still visible,

the way you make it so that when you enter a room,

gravity changes around me.

How can it be that I still lean on you at the shaving mirror,

like a drunken star on the edge of the sky?

and you still catch my falls in the nest of your palms,

as if you don't see through this fog of distraction?

If another fifteen years, another thirty, another hundred,

another lifetime teasing all the kisses that have rolled away:

with the stolen last bites, the way you live through life,

with your gaze, which sears me through—

then I say:

let it be.

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THE PRICE OF SAVING: WHY I SWITCHED (BACK) TO WORD AS A WRITER

NOVEMBER 10, 2025



AI-generated illustration

Let's be honest: as writers, we love free things. A good pen, a found notebook, and, of course, free software. For years, I was (and I am) a devoted fan of LibreOffice (and OpenOffice before it). After all, what more could a writer need?

You can write in it. You can format. It understands the .docx format, it can save it, it can open it. On paper, it offers the same thing as its expensive, corporate sibling, Microsoft Word—only without costing a single penny.

I thought LibreOffice was enough. And for the semi-pro league it is.

But as the saying goes: no matter how good and free it is, **it will always have its downsides**. And on a professional path, those downsides are just big enough to trip you up.

The "Almost the Same" Illusion

The problem isn't that LibreOffice is a bad program (because it's not... it's surprisingly good). The problem is that it's **different**.

As long as you're working alone, writing for yourself, and at most printing a PDF at the end, it's perfect. But the moment you send a manuscript out—submit it to a competition, an editor, or a publisher—you step into a minefield of compatibility.

LibreOffice handles the .docx format like an interpreter. It understands the language, but it has a slight accent. Microsoft Word, on the other hand, is the native speaker.

And that "accent" is what ruins everything.

The Downsides I Didn't Expect

I thought formatting was formatting. Double-spaced, 12-point font, done. But when I first saw my own manuscript, which I had polished to perfection in LibreOffice, open in a genuine copy of Word, I was shocked.

- The paragraph spacing was "a little too big."
- Page breaks weren't where I expected them.
- Special characters sometimes fell apart.

These seem like minor things, but to an editor who sees dozens of manuscripts a day, it sends a message: "This file is faulty." Or even worse: "This writer doesn't even know the standards."

But the biggest downside is invisible until you run right into it:

1. **The Death of "Track Changes":** The publishing world lives and dies by this feature. It's how editors work. And the Track Changes feature in LibreOffice and Word are simply **not compatible** with each other. No matter if you save as .docx, the comments can shift, get lost, or become unreadable. The editor won't be able to work with your material.
2. **The Lost Trust:** If you send a file that looks "weird" the moment it's opened, you've already lost. Before they've read a single sentence, you've already caused a small technical problem, a moment of frustration. Why give them such an easy reason to set your writing aside?

The Real Cost of "Saving"

The realization was painful. In exchange for "free," I had sacrificed the most important thing: **guaranteed compatibility**. With LibreOffice, there will always be that doubt: "Will it look exactly like this on the other end?"

When you buy Microsoft Office, you're not just buying a word processor. You're buying **security**.

So, what did I do? I bought a "lifetime" Office 2021 key for my Mac. I got a little lucky: since everyone is chasing the newer Office 2024 or the 365 subscription, the 2021 version could be found for almost nothing during Black Friday.

It works perfectly, it's tied to my own Microsoft account, and it's legit.

The whole investment was 30 dollars. For thirty dollars, I bought **perfect peace of mind**. The knowledge that my manuscript will be *technically* perfect, and I will never again be rejected because of my formatting.

To me, that was worth it.

First published at <https://lemondrilla.com/the-price-of-saving-why-i-switched-back-to-word-as-a-writer/>

STEPHEN KING WANTS TO CONNECT (AND OTHER MODERN HORROR STORIES)

NOVEMBER 12, 2025



AI-generated illustration

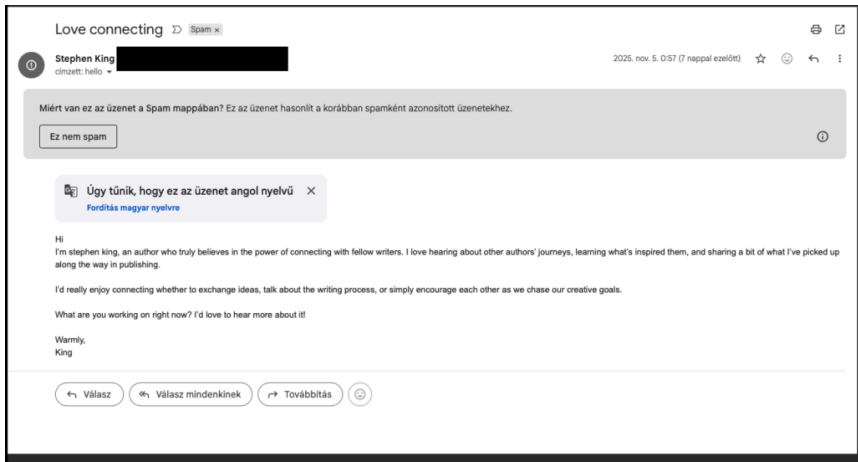
It finally happened.

After years of submitting stories to magazines that never open attachments and agents who vanish into polite vapor, **Stephen King himself** has reached out to me.

At least, that's what Gmail thought — right before shoving his message straight into Spam with a yellow warning:

"This message is similar to ones that were identified as spam."

You don't say. Next time, though, try Hemingway. He'd at least keep it under fifty words.



Stephen King wants to connect. So does my refrigerator.

The subject line read: **“Love connecting.”**

Because, of course, that’s how the King of Horror breaks the ice — with the same phrase used by life coaches, pyramid-scheme recruiters, and men who unironically end emails with “Warmly.”

Then came the masterpiece:

Hi. I’m stephen king, an author who truly believes in the power of connecting with fellow writers.

Lowercase *stephen*, lowercase *king*. The humility of a god who’s finally learned to type like a teenage influencer.

I’d really enjoy connecting whether to exchange ideas, talk about the writing process, or simply encourage each other as we chase our creative goals.

Beautiful. Poetic. The kind of line that makes you want to unplug your router and go live in the woods.

I almost wrote back:

Dear Mr. King,

I'm flattered. I've always wanted to co-write "Phish Cemetery."

But instead, I stared at that Gmail address and realized this is what horror truly is in 2025: not ghosts, not clowns in sewers, not undead pets. It's scammers in writer cosplay.

They come wearing the faces of our idols, whispering in fluent cliché: *"I love hearing about other authors' journeys."* You can almost hear the inspirational music swelling before the phishing link drops. So, to whoever wrote this — the algorithm, the grifter, or the bored demon haunting Google's free mail servers — thank you. You reminded me that *connection* has indeed become terrifying.

Of course, if the *real* Mr. King truly tried to reach me, I sincerely apologize.

Dear Mr. King (or perhaps his ghost in the machine),

Your email reached me from the dark tower of Gmail, and I must admit — it's creepier than Pet Sematary.

Best regards,

Adam

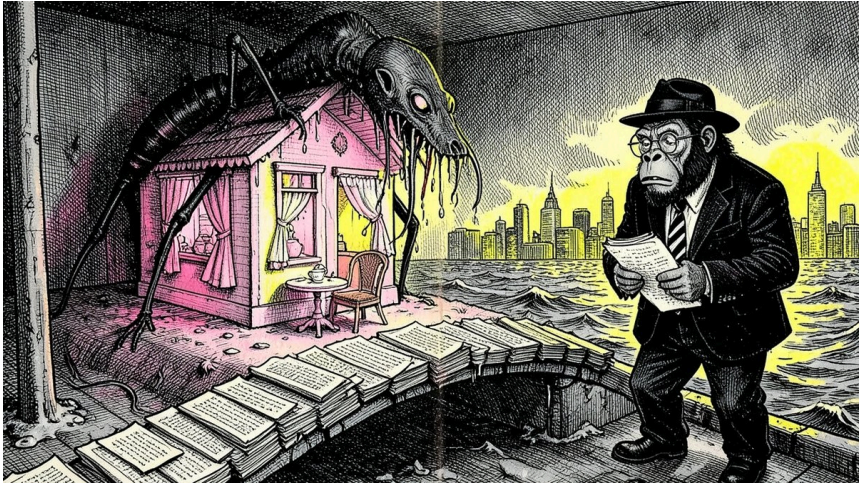
I'm looking forward to the next colleague's email.

I'll only be surprised if it's Douglas Adams this time. Imagine the laugh we'll have if it turns out Heaven exists — it's just stuck on dial-up.

First published at <https://lemondrilla.com/stephen-king-wants-to-connect-and-other-modern-horror-stories/>

XENOMORPH IN THE DOLLHOUSE: THE ANATOMY OF A PUBLISHER'S IDENTITY CRISIS

NOVEMBER 29, 2025



AI-generated illustration

WE CALL IT THE "LITTLE HUNGARIAN ABSURD." IT IS A SPECIFIC REGIONAL FLAVOR OF EXISTENCE WHERE GRAND, TRANSATLANTIC AMBITIONS COLLIDE WITH THE REALITY OF A BASEMENT STARTUP, USUALLY RESULTING IN A SITUATION THAT IS TRAGIC FOR THE PARTICIPANTS BUT HILARIOUS FOR THE OBSERVERS.

Recently, I had a front-row seat to a masterclass in this genre.

The protagonist is a newly formed publishing entity. Let's call them "**The Transatlantic Bridge**." Their pitch was seductive, almost philanthropic: they wanted to publish short stories rejected by Hungarian editors. No genre limits. No entry fees. A shining path from the grim Hungarian literary swamp to the glittering US market. They promised stories that were "shocking," "dynamic," and "too bold" for others to print.

I'm an "old swamp sailor." I know the drill. I have a dozen professional publications and a national manuscript award under my belt, but I also have stories that are too weird, too dark, or too... *something* for the conservative domestic market. So, I sent in two high-concept sci-fi stories.

Phase 1: The Emoji Diplomacy

The first red flag was the receipt confirmation. I didn't get a standard auto-reply. I didn't get a professional "Thank you." I got a "Like" reaction on my email. Yes. In Outlook.

It was the digital equivalent of a high-five from a bank teller. Later, I received a personal email from the Founder herself. It was sweet. It was encouraging. "I enjoyed both stories," she wrote. Sweet talk. I should have known better. Hope is the most dangerous narcotic in this industry.

Phase 2: The Panic Pivot

Then, the "Little Hungarian Absurd" kicked in. One day before the deadline, the Publisher had a public meltdown on social media. They suddenly realized that when you ask for "rejected manuscripts" without filters, you get... genres. Sci-fi. Horror. The stuff "high literature" turns its nose up at.

Panic ensued. "*We don't want sci-fi! It's not our profile!*" they cried, despite never having stated a profile before.

They wanted to cosplay a prestigious literary press—let's say, the Hungarian equivalent of The New Yorker or Gallimard—but without the budget, the history, or the editorial clarity. They wanted the prestige of Art, but they accidentally invited the Storytellers.

Phase 3: The Critique (Or: How to Kill Brain Cells)

But the real punchline was the "professional evaluation" I received after the inevitable rejection. It wasn't just a "no." It was a piece of unintentional performance art.

My first story, a grotesque dystopia, was reviewed by two invisible judges who apparently live in alternate dimensions.

- **Judge A:** "Dynamics: 5/5, Excellent, captivating."
- **Judge B:** "Dynamics: 2/5, Weak, boring at times." Thank you. This schizophrenia suggests that the jury meeting was less of a professional discussion and more of a coin toss in a dark room.

But the critique for my second story, a philosophical, non-violent, high-concept sci-fi about memory and failure, is one for the history books.

Under the section Copyediting/Content Issues, it was flagged for: "*Problematic content.*"

Where? In the paragraph discussing existential dread? Did the font size offend public morals? Or was the grammar too subversive?

And then, the sentence I will frame and hang on my wall. The ultimate feedback for a sci-fi story:

"It could be quite good sci-fi... but [the genre] ruins its timelessness."

Let that sink in. Sci-fi ruins timelessness.

Someone tell Orwell. Tell Bradbury. Tell Le Guin that they wasted their time, because setting a story in the future apparently puts an expiration date on its literary value. According to this "professional" opinion, 1984 stopped being relevant around 1985.

Phase 4: The Reveal (Welcome to the Dollhouse)

And then, the grand finale. At 3:45 AM this morning—because nothing says "world-class professional operation" like sending official press releases in the middle of the night—they revealed the Table of Contents.

Remember the pitch? *"Shocking."* *"Rejected works."* *"New voices."* My ass.

The reality? The anthology is titled *"On the Border of Hearts."* The selected stories have titles like *"Faithful Lilacs"*, *"Baby Powder"*, and my personal favorite: *"Aren't You Ashamed, Uncle Géza?"*. It's not an anthology of the rejected avant-garde. It's a collection of sentimental country anecdotes that you'd find in a parish newsletter. And the "new voices"? Out of the roughly 18 slots, 4 authors wrote nearly half the book (8 stories). So much for discovering a wide range of talent. It's not a competition; it's a dinner party.

The Xenomorph in the Dollhouse

Suddenly, I felt a wave of relief. My rejected story was a dark, bureaucratic dystopia where a poet beats himself to death in a facility called "The Happy Ending." Imagine placing that story between *"Faithful Lilacs"* and *"Baby Powder."* It wouldn't have been a publication. It would have been a crime scene. It would have been like releasing a Xenomorph into a Barbie Dollhouse.

Sure, it's memorable, but the screaming tends to ruin the tea party.

The Lesson

This is the essence of the "Little Hungarian Absurd." The desire to be elite and "literary" without doing the actual work. The belief that an incoherent Excel sheet counts as professional feedback, and that Uncle Géza constitutes a literary revolution.

I have unfollowed "The Transatlantic Bridge." I'm going back to international waters. It's cold there, and the competition is brutal, but at least when *Clarkesworld* or *Interzone* rejects me, they know that science fiction isn't a bug—it's a feature.

As for this publisher? Well, they named themselves after a mighty, historic European river. A bold choice. But they forgot one thing about big rivers: just because something flows and has a name, it doesn't mean it has depth. Sometimes, it's just a shallow stream carrying yesterday's debris, drifting aimlessly towards the sea.

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First published at <https://lemondrilla.com/xenomorph-in-the-dollhouse-the-anatomy-of-a-publishers-identity-crisis/>