



# Autumn in the Abyss

*John Claude Smith*

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When enigmatic poet Henry Coronado disappears six months after the New Year's Eve, 1959, Welcoming Chaos event, he takes with him a profound secret wrapped within the words of his poem, Autumn In The Abyss. Fifty years later, an ill man's research into Coronado's work and life reveals that poetry can indeed change the world, or leave it in ruins.

The Word is a living thing...and often with lethal intentions.

Reality is the strangest mirror...

"The stories in John Claude Smith's new collection take their characters to the limits of human experience, the places where our bodies come asunder in the face of the abyss. Positioning his stories in the seams of our cultural history, Smith chronicles the efforts of artists of all stripes poets, musicians, sculptors, filmmakers to break through our common experience to another, more essential one that is painted in blood. It's a quest that draws these artists into proximity with the serial-killer in the book's single and singular tale of a police detective's obsessive manhunt. Whether with pen or carving knife, Smith's characters will not stop until they have gone too far, into a space where revelation and terror are part of the same, vast thing." John Langan, author of *The Wide, Carnivorous Sky and Other Monstrous Geographies*

"These five emotionally complex tales ask, above all, what it means to be human in a tempestuous universe. What part of ourselves do we owe to the pursuit of goodness, especially if there's no apparent advantage to being good? How can we define ourselves in the absence of moral authority? Blurred lines of identity, the role of the artist, and the nature of temptation are explored in these stories of sacrifice and self-destruction. *Autumn in the Abyss* is another dark and captivating collection from a writer who isn't afraid to plumb the depths of our greatest and most dangerous desires." S.P. Miskowski, Shirley Jackson Award nominated author of *The Skillute Cycle*

"The best compliment for any artist is leaving the audience desperately wanting more. And that's exactly what John Claude Smith accomplishes with the tour de force of *Autumn in the Abyss*. The title novelette is a breathtaking exercise in dark fantasy a surreal, unabashedly literary, horrific mystery with a surprising, heartrending truth at its end. It's a tough act to follow, and yet the next four tales not only hold their own, but occasionally even up the ante. The novelette "Becoming Human" is a chilling mix of the serial killer genre and... something much more frightening. And three shorter tales all share a common gatekeeping character, as Smith explores some Night Gallery style places that are... just beyond the pale. Smart, creepy, unexpected ... these are stories from that nightmare zone that will stick with you long after midnight. Hell, these are stories that will haunt you beneath the bright sun at noon. This is one of the best collections I've read in years!" John Everson, Bram Stoker Award-Winning Author of *NightWhere* and *Violet Eyes*

"The Rhythmic flow of John's words instantly absorbs you into his world, bringing not only his words to life but the story as well." Joe Mynhardt, Crystal Lake Publishing

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