

# Christmas Trees are a Threat

They're pulling down the Christmas tree in the lobby where I work because "it might offend somebody".

If we sweep every cultural icon that "might offend somebody" under the rug, what will be left of our culture?

Unfortunately, it does little good to complain that pulling down a Christmas tree offends me.

Apparently, the offense caused by REMOVING cultural icons is acceptable if it alleviates the possible offense caused by DISPLAYING them.

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# There's Always a Little Truth

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A two-sentence story:

The clockwork beast lay before me, thanks to the advisements of one Mr. Carroll, burbling fluids from the hissing gash I cut through its infernal iron boiler. This Jabberwock would wreak no more havoc, but how many more were even now whiffling through the mysterious, flaming, eye-shaped portal in Tulgey Wood, and I in possession of the only Vorpal sword in existence?

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# Untitled

Brand names related to disposable toilet seat covers would also serve well in the bedding industry. I find this significant.

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## A Shambles

A two-sentence story inspired by the joy of seeing the sun after > 3 weeks of continually overcast skies:

The rain stopped and Rebekkah saw the sun for the first time since her wedding night. She heaved herself out of the earth and shambled off between the headstones to find a stream in which to wash the dirt from her ears and nose.

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## Uncle Cato

I won something! In a drawing held by the inimitable Jeanette Andromeda over at [HorrorMade](#), I won a choice of prizes, the most valuable and desirable of which, if you ask me, was a custom art piece by Jeanette herself. I asked her to please draw Uncle Cato, a character from my novel-in-progress, [The Last Tanuki](#), and sent her the passage where he shows up in the story and is described. Of course it is awesome! Here's the passage along with Jeanette's watercolor painting of her visualization of Cato (click it for a larger version):

*Aria intentionally passed through a couple of sparsely populated spaces on her way back to her apartment to be certain she wasn't being followed and arrived at her building without incident. She turned her key smoothly in the lock on her apartment door, pushed it open to slip inside, and then froze in her tracks on the threshold. Lying on her bed, propped up on one elbow, an ill-kempt tanuki in his 40's looked at her over the newspaper she had left there and which he had been mindlessly perusing.*

*"Hello, Aria," he said in a warm, nasally whine. Aria felt a shiver. For several long moments she could not find her voice, but just stood there, poised on the threshold between the danger within and the danger without, unsure if she should go forward or go back, and unsure which direction was which. The grimy tanuki in her bed waited patiently, a faint smile lighting his muzzle as the flickering candle light glistened in his splotchy, oily, black and brown pelt.*



Uncle Cato

*"Uncle Cato," Aria finally managed in a thick voice. "What are you doing here?"*

*Cato eased his hind paws off the bed and sat up. "Well, now, is that anyway to greet your old uncle?" he asked lightly and*

smiled broadly. "No hug at least?" One of his upper cuspids was missing along with a couple of incisors. The rest of his teeth looked as if they wanted to leave his mouth as well. In fact, the whole of his body gave the appearance of trying to fly apart and escape him, but was held tenuously together against its better judgment by the will of his equally disheveled mind. Tufts of fur stuck out here and there, larger than the rest, all of it pricked and matted by a greasy film that coated every visible part of him in a slimy sheen that reflected the lamp and window light dully. A chip in his right ear made it look ragged, and his dull, black eyes tried to reflect the light in the room but failed, adopting instead a matte finish like scarred stone. He stood and pointed at the gently flickering candle flame with a splintered claw.

"Quite a luxury, that," he smiled. "You must be doing well for yourself." He looked at her, still smiling. Aria didn't move.

"It was a gift," she said flatly, and then added, "You still haven't told me why you are here or how you got in."

He took a step closer, the same smile still entrenched on his muzzle as if his lips operated independently of his head and only knew one expression. It was a disturbing smile, not quite sincere, and not entirely natural, as though he were unsure of how to smile and was at just that moment trying to recall what to have his face do to make one.

He approached to within a couple of feet of her. His yellow and brown teeth stuck out at odd angles from under his absurd grinning. Aria felt her right hind paw stepping back into the hall and willed it to stop. Cato cocked his head slightly, his grin following, closed the distance to her, and reached up and around her with his dirty paws to take her into his embrace. Aria went numb as his arms wrapped around her and her snout was pressed into his filthy body. His fur smelled of rancid oils and fetid meat and whiskey, blood and death, and smoke.

*She gasped and yanked away, back across the threshold, retreating and pulling the door, but Cato deftly thrust up a paw and stopped the door dead in its motion and with the other caught her shoulder.*

*“Oh, no you don’t!” The creepy grin never left his face. “Not yet. Not if you want to live.” At that moment Aria was not certain she did, but the alligorian and the mephilian were still freshly lurking in her memory, and so she stopped, but did not return into the apartment.*

*“What do you want!” she demanded.*

Jeanette is a talented artist in many forms and media, and I highly recommend visiting her in all of her online presences:

- <http://horormade.com>
- [https://instagram.com/jeanette\\_art](https://instagram.com/jeanette_art)
- <https://www.facebook.com/HorrorMade>