



*"The pig tunnels were every bit as dreadful as she'd thought. They ran all over Rome, connecting with the sewers and the subways and half the basements in the Eternal City. And, of course, they were full of pigs."*

# May

Jay Lake lives in Portland, OR with his family and their books. In 2004 his stories will appear in over a dozen markets, including *Asimov's*, *Leviathan 4* and *Realms of Fantasy*. His collection *Greetings From Lake Wu* was a *Locus* Recommended book for 2003.

May is the month of Maia Maiestas, or Bona Dea, the goddess of spring. She is a woman's diety, and requires the sacrifice of a pregnant sow to ensure fertility and the growth of crops. And of course, a couple of old friends in this month's piece.

**B**y the flamen of Vulcan, I am *not* going down into the pig tunnels!" The old custodian's face was as red as his woolen uniform.

Fauna checked her watch. Did she have time to argue with this idiot? Not that she had much choice, unless she was going pig hunting herself. "Look, Janós. I'm meeting with a magistrate in ten minutes about the hunt team's upcoming trip to Nova Eboracum. *Then* I've got to address a convocation of students and parents. At the end of which we need to have that accurséd sow in place for the offertory." She reached out and tapped the custodian's chest. "On top of which, *I'm* the headmistress of Geminus High. Which means *I* don't go crawling into pig tunnels."

The old man's face was sour and pinched. "Sure, sure, you just burn a little myrtle and throw wine on the fire, then you're duty's done. Not me. I've got to fight the beggars off ever New Year, clean the blood sacrifices out of the hallway altars on exam days, not to mention the bathrooms —"

"Enough!" shouted Fauna. She couldn't fire Janós, he was a bondsman. And she couldn't afford his ill-will. Not if she wanted the school to run smoothly. "Give me the stinking pig-hook and unlock the trap door. I'll fetch the sow myself. Just do me a favor and let the office know to tell the magistrate I've been delayed."

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Big, stinking, smelly pigs with teeth and hooves and really bad tempers.

Fauna only had a pig-hook and tarred torch of twisted wheatstraw and dried sage. It smelled worse than the pigs, almost.

Pale porcine eyes gleamed in the darkness ahead, like mushrooms growing on graves. She had to stoop a little — this was one of the few times Fauna was thankful for her petite stature. "Here, piggie," she called. Somehow it only came out as a choked whisper. "Sow-eee."

How much did the school pay Janós?

Then a shoat scooted out of a side tunnel with a splash of muddy shit to trip her. Fauna landed flat in the muck, her torch tumbling away, though somehow she held on to the pig-hook.

There went her nice silk suit for the convocation speech.

"Greetings, daughter," said a voice. It carried on a breeze that stank of stale rooms and flowers gone to compost in copper vases.

Fauna slid the pig-hook before her, opening the jointed blades. "Mother?" she asked, playing along. Enough was enough.

The torch flared somewhere ahead of her, lighting the curved underbelly of a great pig much larger than the tunnel could possibly hold. "You are here beneath my earth, daughter. Are you come for the Maian sacrifice?"

Gods were the biggest pain in the ass since men had been invented. "Yes," Fauna said, allowing her voice to quaver. Then she jabbed upward with the pig-hook, catching the great sow belly. "So nice of you to offer."

As warm blood gushed along the tunnel floor, Fauna cursed her dry cleaning bills.

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