

## *A Modern Celt*

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### **Furious Fiction May 2019**

- Must contain the words maybe, mayhem, dismay, mayor and mayonnaise
- The first word must contain 11 letters
- Must have some running

Vibraphones and a theremin create a haunting tune that marks the festival's start. We made the right choice in sacrificing historical accuracy for these eerie instruments. They set the tone for the night ahead.

The song emerges from the village square, where the musicians are assembled in near-dark under the fruit market arches. It soars around the village: through the church and graveyard, past the high street shops and terraces, to the cottages at the far end. It's almost a keening: a call for villagers to farewell the old year, make peace with the dead, and seek protection for the year ahead.

Today is October 31, the end of the year for the ancient Celts. We're bringing back the feast of Samhain for the first time in 500 years. Maybe longer. Tonight we'll blur the boundaries between old and new, between living and dead. We're combining traditions and cultures to celebrate today's village.

My day job as mayor made me the easy choice to lead the festival, despite my protests about having no Celtic background and little historical understanding. I'm a new arrival here, with dark skin and brown eyes.

Tonight I'm in costume like the everyone else, so it's impossible to tell who's who. I'm a wild boar, with hairy snout and pointy teeth. My mask is pulled low, my vision narrow through the bore's eyes. I'm thankful my mask is new. I can't imagine what it was like for the ancients, wearing the head of a real animal.

The music is my cue. I run from house to house, opening windows to release spirits and checking the hearths are ready. I collect villagers in my wake, and before long we're a crowd sweeping through the village, all in costume, hollering and whooping. The music surrounds us.

In the village square we light the sacred bonfire and assemble the feast. Flames soon leap high into the sky. There's a communal sense of mayhem and abandon as we sway with the flames and repeat Celtic chants.

Each villager brings a sacrifice. The ancients brought tithes – precious animals and crops for their pagan gods. We modern Celts bring wooden animals, carved by our own hands.

With the sacrifices complete and the spirits appeased, it's time to feast. The pig has been roasting for hours, tantalising our senses and heightening our anticipation. I feel a twinge of dismay when I notice we're eating in the modern way. Instead of meat skewered on knives, we've got a buffet with white rolls, salad, brown sauce and mayonnaise.

As midnight approaches, we're ready for the final ritual. Village elders fill the special clay bowl with red coals from the bonfire. Then I enter each house, lighting the fire set ready in each hearth.

This sacred fire will protect the residents through winter, keeping us safe until spring returns. The spiritual among us will keep the same fire burning for many months. Others will douse it tonight in favour of their central heating.