

# Twelve Nightmares

A Short Tale of Madness and Despair

Christian Warren Freed

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### ACCLAIM FOR CHRISTIAN WARREN FREED

### HAMMERS IN THE WIND: BOOK I OF THE NORTHERN CRUSADE

"I love this book. This book hooked my attention on the first page and it was hard to put down. There is darkness in this book, you know something is going to happen so you keep reading to find out what. The author writes it so good, it's like you are there experiencing what the characters are. And I love it."

"I purchased this book to read to see if it would be suitable for my daughter to read. She is advanced in reading, but some books for kids older than her can be a little to much content wise. I think this one will work out great for her and she would enjoy it as much as I did. I'm glad I came across this book and can't wait to read the rest of the series."

### WHERE HAVE ALL THE ELVES GONE?

"This story is fresh and a little tongue-in-cheek, a nice fantasy change of pace with twists here and there that make you have to keep on turning the pages."

"Christian Warren Freed is a very gifted, well-spoken author and his story took me in from page 1. His descriptions of situations, momentary happenings and his vivid characters of the world within the story made my fantasy run wild. As a reader, I felt like being part of the carefully woven net of this book."

### THE DRAGON HUNTERS

"Excellently written. The author is able to really capture the stress, fear, and panic of life and death situations such as combat. Greatly looking forward to the next installment in the series!"

"Mr. Freed weaves the parts of this tale together smoothly, keeping the story moving at a good pace. He uses his own military background to paint powerful battle images and then he moves on. With only a little background, he makes the reader care about the members of the band - to worry about them and want them to do the 'right thing'. He adds depth to the characters through their actions and his dialogue is very realistic."

### ARMIES OF THE SILVER MAGE

"Armies of the Silver Mage was a great read...any fan of Lord of the Rings or Game of Thrones will love this book. I'm looking forward to next book."

"The book is almost an homage to the great classics like Sword of Shannara and the Lord of the Rings. The author has cleverly used his past military and combat experience to make the battle scenes more realistic."

# Other Books by Christian Warren Freed

### The Northern Crusade

Hammers in the Wind
Tides of Blood and Steel
A Whisper After Midnight
Empire of Bones
The Madness of Gods and Kings
Even Gods Must Fall

### The Histories of Malweir

Armies of the Silver Mage
The Dragon Hunters
Beyond the Edge of Dawn

### **Forgotten Gods**

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Anguish Once Possessed
Through Darkness Besieged
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Tomorrow's Demise: The Extinction Campaign

Tomorrow's Demise: Salvation

Coward's Truth: A Novel of the Heart Eternal\*

The Lazarus Men: A Lazarus Men Agenda

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### **Short Stories**

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### **Non-Fiction**

SO, You Want to Write a Book? + SO, You Wrote a Book. Now What? +

\*Forthcoming + Non-fiction



FOG clung to buildings and streets like a small child's blanket. A deep sense of foreboding gripped the small town as the curtain of night fell. Rumors circled of strange happenings in the deep dark, bodies found in mangled pieces. Shops closed early and anxious fathers waited downstairs in their favorite chairs with a shotgun just in case.

Preston Thewls had heard the rumors and just as quickly discounted them for some scare campaign by the constable. It was almost the turn of the twentieth century and people were filled with ideations and scares towards what the coming century might bring. For Preston, a licensed tax collector, they were naught but dry antics to make children do better in school and keep the population in line. He scoffed at the idea of some winged nightmare stalking the small town.

Everyone else had gone home for the day, allowing Preston the chance to finish his work in peace. The sun had already fallen behind the distant mountain tops by the time he blew out the desk lamp of his small office and gathered his jacket and hat. Preston locked the door and started to make his way home. He stifled a yawn. Tired, Preston absentmindedly stretched his back out as he walked. A long day behind a desk often left the middle-aged man with a sore back. Still, it was much better than having to do labor for a living.

The fog was particularly thick this night, pushing a chill strong enough to make him bundle up within his jacket. Preston shivered and turned down a side street so that he could get home faster. A bachelor, he never found the time for the nuances of romance or the warmth of a woman. Work drove Preston, work and the natural greed he'd been born with. That devotion had served him well. He'd soon have enough to retire and move away from this nothing town.

Hot wind blew across his face. A flutter of wings from the rooftops. Preston looked up and watched a single feather drift lazily down like falling snow. The surrounding shadows thickened, appearing darker, more ominous. A tingle of fear crept through his spine. Preston pulled down his hat and walked faster. A low growl menaced from the shadows. His heart pumped faster, harder. Two red lights, nothing more than pinpricks in the constricting darkness, blared back at him from the shadows. *Was that a face?* 

He walked faster, nearly breaking into a run. The shadows swirled. A nauseating smell rushed at him. He knew that smell. It was the aroma of death. Preston felt his heart freeze. What is happening? He tried to move, to run, to scream. Shadow edged closer. Sweat beaded on his brow. Every heartbeat was the sound of a drum sounding the call to march. Time slowed, and Preston felt the icy grasp of death inching closer around his nape. His vision narrowed to the point where the red lights were all he saw. Terror filled his soul. He began to whisper an old prayer half remembered from childhood.

Realization struck hard when it finally came. Those weren't red lights he was so mesmerized by. They were eyes. Eyes as black and hideous as all the demons from Hell's heart. Only now did he understand. The eyes blinked once before Preston felt a bone shattering impact.

II.

**Emerson** Sedgewick awoke with a start. His chest hurt. The youth, no more than twenty-two clutched his side, willed the pain away. He tossed the covers back and immediately regretted it. His bedroom was chillier than usual. Damned weather, he silently cursed. Emerson slid from the bed and went into the small, slightly dingy bathroom. He looked into the broken mirror with normally blue eyes now bloodshot and tired. Sleep hadn't been kind to him lately. He tossed and turned, often with violent images burned into his mind. Nightmares.

Emerson splashed water on his face and rubbed hard with both hands. He had close cropped blonde hair and a light bit of growth on his face. Women often complimented him on his deep blue eyes. Lightly muscled, he was right at six feet tall. He sighed. The sun wasn't even up yet. He was about to turn when he noticed dark spots on his ribs. Emerson looked down. His eyes widened in horror upon discovering his entire upper body was covered in ugly bruises.

"What in the...?" he gasped.

The mirror fogged over as a cold gust of wind smashed the bedroom window open. Darkness crept into the mirror. A face, but not quite. Emerson shivered from a combination of cold and sheer dread filling his apartment. The heavy click of horses marching down the cobblestone road seemed to match his heartbeat. Emerson stared into the mirror and saw the face of evil.

"My god."

The face laughed, deep and unnerving. "Not quite. I am the inner Hell of your mind. A source of torment and majesty far beyond human comprehension. I am death, the destroyer of souls. I," it paused, "am you."

Emerson shook his head. "No. No, no."

"You have no choice. This is a birth right, a gift. The crown prince of Hell has answered your pleas."

"You can't be real!" Emerson shouted and pounded a fist on the mirror. Shards of glass splashed onto the floor like so many drops of rain.

Clawed hands reached from the mirror to grab him by the throat. The demon leaned closer, its horned head entering the tiny bathroom. "Oh but I am real. You made me. All your foolish nightmares and child-like fears. Did you truly think we didn't listen all those empty, lonely nights when you dared to dream? I am everything the darkness in your heart desires."

Tears trickled from the corners of his eyes. Emerson struggled in the grasp, but the demon was much too powerful. A sinking inevitability wormed into his resolve. He weakened. Blackness swirled around, warming him while stealing his strength. Emerson passed out to the vile sound of a demon's laugh. The laughter pounded deeper than the crash of waves, fiercer than the distant storm approaching. He understood without a shadow of a doubt that the storm had indeed arrived. Evil had come to the banks of the Hudson River.

He didn't know what time it was when he awoke. The sounds of people going about their daily business on the street below his apartment suggested just past midday. Cold sweat veiled his face in a clammy muck. He blinked rapidly to clear his vision. Pieces of glass lay scattered around him. The demon! His heart began to beat faster. Was it all a dream? He frantically looked about, relaxing only upon finding the same boring things he was used to seeing over the last few years.

Emerson didn't fully understand what had happened to him. The stronger part of his mind wanted to rationalize that it couldn't be real. Phantasms and demons. Who would believe such a tale? Emerson struggled to push the memories from his mind. His very sanity balanced on it. The best thing, he decided, was to try and go about his daily routine. Perhaps that would restore some semblance of normalcy. It took him almost an hour to prepare for work. Even then his first few steps out of his apartment were shaky.

He felt random passersby were staring at him. Silently accusing him for what he had unleashed upon the world. Emerson felt hated, ostracized. His cheeks were sunken, his eyes withdrawn and hollow. He hadn't eaten much in days. His clothes were ill fit and bore an almost ragged appearance. He passed the local paper boy with an uneasy look. The youth stood on an upturned box and shouted the headlines. "Local tax collector latest victim in string of unsolved murders."

Emerson cringed. He reluctantly bought the paper and skimmed through the main article. To his horror, he learned yet another body had been discovered, brutally mutilated and tossed aside like old trash. That made the death toll ten since the beginning of summer. Thoughts of his confrontation with the mirror slowly ebbed into his mind. Why do I feel responsible? I didn't kill anyone, did I?

A criminal's anxiousness crept into his thoughts. Every eye suddenly focused on him. His every movement was being chronicled and reported. He was a monster. Guilty. Small beads of perspiration formed on his brow. Emerson did his best to maintain composure. Paranoia warred with his sanity. So focused on himself, he was almost run over by a horse drawn carriage, the driver cursing him as it went by. He felt his skin begin to itch. With great difficulty he pushed through the crowd, keeping his eyes down to avoid the piercing stares that seemed to sense what had taken control of his life. It was through great pain that he managed to get through the work day and hurry home. He had no intentions of speaking to anyone, leastwise not until he could figure out what was happening.

Halfway across town a police officer went about his beat. Sweat stains gathered under his arms, bleeding through the light blue fabric of his shirt. His night stick hung from his belt and a .45 was holstered on the opposite hip. Up until this year none of the small town's beat cops had carried fire arms. They hadn't needed to. He stifled a yawn just as a high-pitched scream broke the serenity of the waning day. Pigeons burst from their rooftop perch.

The officer hurried to where he believed the scream came from him. His instincts served him well, much to his regret. He rounded the corner to find a young woman with her head buried in the shoulder of an elderly gentleman. She was crying uncontrollably. The older man's face was drained of color. The officer looked down and felt his stomach rebel. A broken and torn body lay strewn across the width of the alley. A pungent smell curdled the air. Rats scurried away, back to their holes with small mouthfuls of decaying flesh. The officer vomited.

Doing his best to recover from the violence before him, the officer shifted through the remains. He hoped to find some evidence of who the victim was or who had committed this crime. Much to his dismay the only clue he found was a hole punched into a wooden door on the opposite of the alley. A hole punched by a human fist.

IV.

**Darkness** filled the room like the loving arms of a new mother. Silence dominated, drowning out the anger and bustle of the city. Emerson Sedgewick lay on his bed, immobile and unable to sleep. He felt the end drawing nearer, draining him of both youth and life. Devilish faces stared at him from the shadows. Hellfire burned just a bit brighter at the prospect of devouring his soul in an eternity of torment. Come to me, they beckoned.

He tried to close his eyes. Couldn't. Clawed hands reached out for him, hungry with anticipation. An evil face leered at him. Acidic drool escaped the fanged mouth. Emerson looked for some place to run, to hide. There was none to be found. The shadows parted just long enough for him to see the true horror of the face. Emerson screamed. What he saw was himself. He passed out with another scream.

V.

**Emerson** awoke with a sharp burning sensation in his right hand. He managed to crawl from his bed and open the curtain. Pale, but bright light practically blinded him. When his eyes finally adjusted he looked down with dismay at his hand. The skin was ripped and swollen. Bone showed through in several places. His whole hand was a nasty combination of purple and black. Emerson repressed the urge to vomit. Tiny black flies swarmed around him, eager for the taste of fresh blood.

He finally made it to the bathroom and did his best to clean and dress the wounds. Emerson was forced to stop several times because the pain was simply too much. He wasn't sure, but he swore he'd passed out once or twice during the process. The sun was already going down by the time he finished. It wasn't until he looked under the sink that he noticed the blood-stained kitchen knife wrapped in an old hand towel. He was confused. He didn't even own a knife. So

where had it come from? Questions unanswered, Emerson quietly closed the cupboard and returned to the living area of his apartment.

"Not another night," he whispered to the empty house. "I can't take another night of this."

Hissing laughter echoed back at him, so faint it was barely perceptible. New determination strengthened his resolve. He was determined not to go back to sleep. Emerson went to the kitchen and brewed a fresh pot of coffee. He smiled for the first time in days as the first taste of hot caffeine hit the back of his throat. There was no way the demon was going to return this night. He downed the first cup and poured another.

Emerson was proud of what he was doing, but the walls of sleep cannot be held off forever. His eyes started to lose focus. Dark haze crept in the corners of his vision. He fought to keep his head from snapping forward. The grip on his coffee cup loosened enough so that the ceramic mug shattered on the dirty tile floor. Coffee splashed everywhere. His head snapped back, frightened and unsure. His stomach churned. He felt hands crawling up through his intestines, into his stomach and to his throat.

Emerson gagged. He tried to vomit but couldn't. Thin whispers of smoke crept from his mouth until a massive cloud dominated the tiny apartment. Smoke? It couldn't be. The smoke flushed from his mouth, gradually taking the shape of Emerson's demon. Vile eyes stared back at him a moment before he lost consciousness.

VI.

**Emerson's** condition quickly deteriorated. His eyes remained bloodshot, burning. Insanity played with him. Every shadow was a new nightmare. Every gust of wind a demon's kiss inviting him to the torments of Hell. His nerves became frayed. He no longer went to work. A week's worth of stubble littered his face. Locked in his room, Emerson spent his days trying to forget and his nights trying to stay awake. He went and bought a used pistol. The cold metal soothed his fears.

His body finally succumbed to sleep. Again he felt the demon burst free, eager to begin the night's business. Long hours passed before Emerson awoke with a start. Panicked eyes scanned the squalor his apartment had become. Nothing. Emptiness reached out to soothe him. He hesitantly placed a hand upon his chest, searching for the demon, but felt nothing. His heart lacked the malice and disease that plagued him when the demon slept within. In a moment of blinding clarity Emerson knew what he had to do.

His heart raced. He knew there was scant precious time left before the demon returned to the corners of his soul. Emerson snatched up his jacket and hat and ran out the door. A thin smile cracked his chapped lips. It was the first smile he'd had in days, almost as if he had seen the first golden rays of sunlight for the very first time. Emerson ran faster, pushing and bumping his way through the meager pedestrians hurrying to get home lest they become the next victim. Unparalleled fear gripped the tiny town. No one wanted to die, yet no one had any inkling of the

true terror besieging them. No one but Emerson. He alone was the balance between salvation and damnation. It was a responsibility much too great for the youth.

Darkness covered the world. A darkness so pure the stars pierced the eternal veil in a demonstration of the eternal glory of the universe. Emerson took the time to watch the stars, enjoying their beauty one last time. The pain in his heart lessened, as if he could hear the angel choir beckoning him. His heart calmed. He knew peace. But it was a peace that could not last, not until he removed the demon from this world once and for all.

He finally reached his destination. His breath came in ragged gasps. He was out of shape, not that it mattered. Emerson knew the demon would soon be coming for him, coming to lay a feast of misery within him that he could not avoid. The cold stone steps invited him to sit, and he did. He discovered he was much more exhausted than he had thought. His will was all but gone; his life mere shambles of what it had the potential to become. None of that mattered.

Emerson cocked his pistol and whispered, "come and get me you bastard."

VII.

way, the demon heard the summons. Its massive head whipped about. Menacing eyes searched through the night until he found his target. The demon laughed. Never before had his host showed any sort of resistance to him. Nor would he ever again after this night. Tonight the demon decided it was time to take young Emerson Sedgewick to Hell. Massive wings lifted him from the ground and sped him across the sleeping town. The demon quickly found his prey. Emerson was sitting down. Sitting down on the steps of the town church. Anger swelled in the demon. How dare he? A church? Did he truly believe that a simple building with a cross carved in it would be power enough to stop a prince of Hell?

The demon landed to confront his host.

"What is this, boy? Have you suddenly found your nerve, here at the end?"

Emerson raised his pistol and fired three times. The rounds struck the demon in the chest. Blood so dark it looked black flew from the wounds, spattering the cobblestones. Steam escaped his body, but the demon did not fall. Emerson fired twice more and met the same results. The demon raged but came no closer.

"You cannot kill me, boy."

"I can, and I will," he replied. His voice was shaky, unsure.

The demon shook his mighty horned head. 'No. Poor, simple fool. You do not yet understand, do you? You do not understand the power unleashed from your own fears. Fears that have fed the evil of this world. What will you do once you fire the last bullet? You cannot run, you cannot hide. Your soul has been marked. Your heart burns bright with evil."

"Shut up!" Emerson screamed.

The demon took a step closer. "Listen to me, boy. You and I, we are the same. You created me from the black stain in your soul and the madness lurking in the corners of your mind. I did not kill those people, you did. I am nothing but a manifestation of your hidden malevolence."

Emerson began to cry. He shook his head in denial. "No, no, no. It can't be."

"Oh but it is. Look at your hands, the wounds on your body. How did you get all of those? It wasn't me. I only carried out your will. Listen to the whispers on the wind. Murderer. Remember the knife, the blood. The screams and pleas of grown men and women begging for their lives before you stole them for your own sickened sense of righteousness."

"I didn't kill anyone!" he shouted, but the words lacked conviction. Doubt crept in. he wasn't sure what to believe anymore. Could he have? Was it possible he had truly killed eleven people? Eleven people who might have been his friends or coworkers? Eleven innocent souls?

The demon saw that doubt and moved closer.

"It is time, Emerson."

He blinked the tears away. "Time for what?"

"To come home."

Emerson raised his pistol, the sole remaining shot chambered and ready. He pointed the snubbed barrel at the demon. His hand trembled. His arm lacked strength. Voices assailed him from the night. *Murderer*. *Killer*. His heart hurt. The way out seemed less bright than it had in his apartment. Doubt gnawed at him.

It took every measure of his weakening resolve, but Emerson finally stared back at his demon and whispered, "no."

Emerson Sedgewick gently pressed the barrel against his own chest. Like a lovers embrace, he warmed to the steel before closing his eyes a final time. The town clock chimed midnight off in the distance. A gunshot echoed from the church steps. And then there was only silence.

**END** 

OTHER BOOKS BY CHRISTIAN WARREN FREED



It is a troubled time, for the old gods are returning and they want the universe back...

Under the rigid guidance of the Conclave, the seven hundred known worlds carve out a new empire with the compassion and wisdom the gods once offered. But a terrible secret, known only to the most powerful, threatens to undo three millennia of progress. The gods are not dead at all. They merely sleep. And they are being hunted.

Senior Inquisitor Tolde Breed is sent to the planet Crimeat to investigate the escape of one of the deadliest beings in the history of the universe: Amongeratix, one of the fabled THREE, sons of the god-king. Tolde arrives on a world where heresy breeds insurrection and war is only a matter of time. Aided by Sister Abigail of the Order of Blood Witches, and a company of Prekhauten Guards, Tolde hurries to find Amongeratix and return him to Conclave custody before he can restart his reign of terror.

What he doesn't know is that the Three are already operating on Crimeat.

Read <u>Dreams of Winter</u> now and begin your journey into the realm of the Forgotten Gods.

# THE CHILDREN OF NEVER A WAR PRIESTS OF ANDRAK SAGA CHRIST. WARREN

The war priests of Andrak have protected the world from the encroaching darkness for generations. Stewards of the Purifying Flame, the priests stand upon their castle walls each year for 100 days. Along with the best fighters, soldiers, and adventurers from across the lands, they repulse the Omegri invasions.

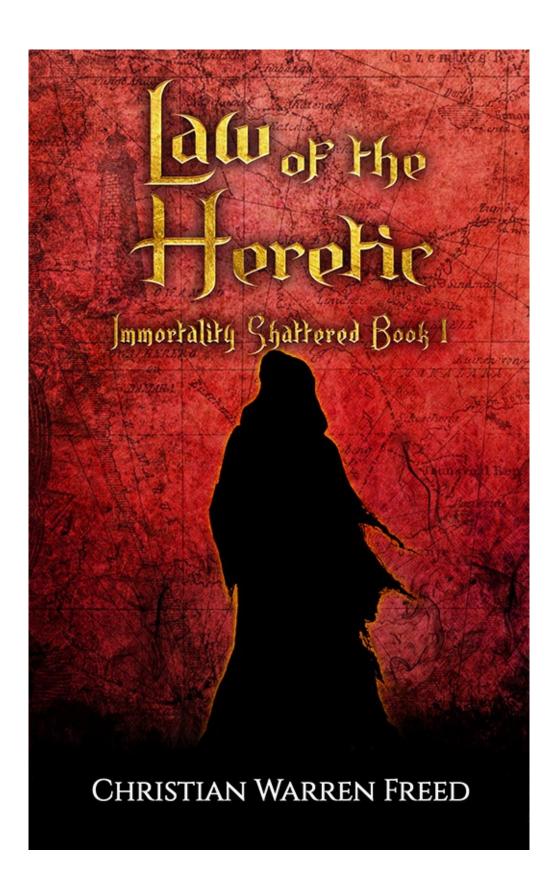
But their strength wanes and evil spreads.

Lizette awakens to a nightmare, for her daughter has been stolen during the night. When she goes to the Baron to petition aid, she learns that similar incidents are occurring across the duchy. Her daughter was just the beginning. Baron Einos of Fent is left with no choice but to summon the war priests.

Brother Quinlan is a haunted man. Last survivor of Castle Bendris, he now serves Andrak. Despite his flaws, the Lord General recognizes Quinlan as one of the best he has. Sending him to Fent is his best chance for finding the missing children and restoring order. Quinlan begins a quest that will tax his strength and threaten the foundations of his soul.

The Grey Wanderer stalks the lands, and where he goes, bad things follow. The dead rise and the Omegri launch a plan to stop time and overrun the world. The duchy of Fent is just the beginning.

The follow up to the L Ron Hubbard Writers of the Future award winning short: The Purifying Flame, the <u>Children of Never</u> is an all new novel set in a world of raw imagination. Get your copy today!



The Staff of Life has been lost for a thousand years. Imbued with the powers to dominate all life, the Staff can save or ruin the Free Lands. Many have sought out the Staff. All failed. Until now. Aron Kryte has served the Hierarchy for years. Honorable. Duty-driven, the young man has risen through the ranks of the venerable Golden Warriors. Born into this life, Aron patrols the Free Lands, maintaining the long peace. Little could he know that the world he knows is built upon lies. His quiet summer days are shattered when he is led into an ambush by the man whose brother he once killed.

Imelin is the last of his order. A powerful wizard and member of the High Council, he has ever harbored the secret desire for power. Darkness dwells in his heart. He defects from the Council and heads to the forsaken land of Suroc Tol, where an army of darklings await his command. With the creatures of legend under heel, Imelin can at last embark upon his quest to discover the Staff of Life and begin a war of attrition that will bring the Free Lands to their knees.

Events are set in motion that will change the Free Lands forever. War brews. The ancient elven fortress of Dol'ir is overrun by a timeless enemy, the survivors forced to flee. Traitors rise. Armies gather. Only a handful of men and women stand against the coming storm. It begins in Galdea, where an aging king is slowly losing control.

Law of the Heretic: Book One of Immortality Shattered.

Christian W. Freed was born in Buffalo, N.Y. more years ago than he would like to remember. After spending more than 20 years in the active duty US Army he has turned his talents to writing. Since retiring, he has gone on to publish more than 20 science fiction and fantasy novels as well as his combat memoirs from his time in Iraq and Afghanistan. His first book, Hammers in the Wind, has been the #1 free book on Kindle 4 times and he holds a fancy certificate from the L Ron Hubbard Writers of the Future Contest.

Passionate about history, he combines his knowledge of the past with modern military tactics to create an engaging, quasi-realistic world for the readers. He graduated from Campbell University with a degree in history and a Masters of Arts degree in Digital Communications from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He currently lives outside of Raleigh, N.C. and devotes his time to writing, his family, and their two Bernese Mountain Dogs. If you drive by you might just find him on the porch with a cigar in one hand and a pen in the other. You can find out more about his work by clicking on any one of the social media icons listed below. You can find out more about his work by following him on:

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