

*The
Wheels
Of
Fate
Monolith*©

A Dr. Shadows Story

by Teel James Glenn

This is an original short story and has
never appeared elsewhere.

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"Fate, is a wheel that turns each day"

-Old Salsa Saying

Prologue:

A truck pulled up and three men jumped from the back intent on his death. They came at him out of the darkness swinging machetes. Three of them with razor edged death aimed at his head.

He had no body armor or weapons. It was a hot August night and he was dressed in a t-shirt and shorts, out for a run around Gramercy Park. He felt his heart begin to pump with a wild rhythm and he calmed the pulse beats with age old techniques to keep his mind clear.

Three men cannot attack in a coordinated front, however, and so it was a wild swinging mass of steel and sinew that swarmed at him. He had the wrought iron fence of the park at his back so they came forward in a wide semi-circle. He pulled his sweat soaked shirt off and flung it in a damp ball into the face of one of the men, following it with a crippling sidekick to the man's knees.

He managed to grab the machete from the man as he fell but a second attacker cut him deeply on his left arm. He whirled and hacked the arm of the blades man clean off. The man dropped with a howl and was unconscious almost at once.

The third man flailed with no art but with a fury that drove him back.

The machetes clanged with sparks half a dozen times but he was, even wounded, in far better shape than the attacker and his speed was almost superhuman. The last attacker fell with a slashed throat.

Just then he heard the truck start up.

He turned to pursue the truck but a dark hand holding a gun was thrust out the cab window. The pistol exploded at him twice and stopped him.

The bullets slammed into his side just missing his heart by the merest chance of fate. The bullets spun him to the ground. Before he passed out he saw a grinning face in the driver's side view mirror.

***'I know that face,'* Dr. Shadows thought, then he was out cold.**

I.

The twilight sun washed orange around Anton Chadeaux and he seemed to be aflame. He was tall and with skin a pale grey color that in another might have been a sign of sickness but somehow in him was indication of the opposite. He seemed to glow within an inner fire as if the gods of old had animated a granite statue of one of their own. He had a handsome face cut from a rugged mold with eyes that mirrored the glow with an intensity magnified from within. He always felt that inner fire roar to a greater intensity when he neared the Harlem storefront Voodoo oum'phor of Mam'bo Rouge.

Chadeaux, whom the world called Dr. Shadows, remembered a phrase Mam'bo Rouge had often used, *'We are but objects in the river of fate.'* It was something she firmly believed in: Fate. He disliked the image of being mired in a preset web of circumstances like fly awaiting a spider.

Dr. Shadows smiled. The Abbot in the Salsa Monastery had spoken of the "Wheel of fate" so often that Anton felt like he had been hearing the same phrase his whole life, but could he find credence in it?

"A Bo, bo!" Dr. Shadows could hear the repeated shouts from inside. He felt his pulse race. Then he heard the strong voice of Mam'bo Rouge intone, "O Ve've,

voudon, **Bon die, o vela kountie**". The same heartbeat rhythm that filled him when the assassins had tried to take his life a week ago.

Inside Dr. Shadows was standing in a small foyer just outside the main voodoo temple, but between him and an inner curtained doorway was a huge Negro, almost Dr. Shadows' two-meter height and a hundred pounds heavier.

"No white's, man," the black said in thickly accented English. From behind the curtain the chanting continued: "**Danbhalah wedo kountie...**"

"I am here to see the Empress Rouge," Dr. Shadows said in French. Mam'bo Rouge had been a voodoo Empress, a Mam'bo, since before Dr. Shadows was born. It was she who had taught him French in Martinidad as a boy. She spoke almost no English.

"No whites," the man said with no room for doubt. "Go away!"

"I come with no disrespect," Dr. Shadows continued. "I know the Mam'bo and she knows me well." The guard failed to register the statement and moved forward menacingly. He was new to the congregation.

"Out!" The black made a grab for Dr. Shadows but the Grey Wolf was not there. He ducked and moved forward, behind the startled guard. Before the Martinidadian could react he was in a sleeper hold with the Granite Man applying pressure to the carotid artery on the man's neck. He quietly went to sleep.

"I'll check on you on my way out." Dr. Shadows said. He turned and parted the curtain. As Fate would have it a congregant happened to glance in the direction of the door at that moment and saw the Granite Man.

The chanting stopped. All eyes turned toward the entrance. The sudden silence was disturbing in the vacuum-like silence of the smoke filled temple. Dr. Shadows felt the combined stares of the fifty people in the oum'phor freeze him in the doorway. He tried to locate the Mam'bo in the flickering light but there were too many faces. He stepped forward to the low inner wall.

Two men near the door produced knives and moved toward Dr. Shadows. He seemed not to notice them and continued his visual search.

The two men had moved to almost within arms reach of him when he suddenly brought his own arms up to full extension on either side of him.

Both assailants stopped short and regarded the strange gesture.

Dr. Shadows' hands were empty and only inches from the knife wielder's faces. He looked right then left and back forward and he smiled. He snapped a finger and there was a sudden blinding flash of light from each hand as he detonated two tiny hidden Thermite flares. The two dropped their weapons and staggered back holding their eyes.

"Enough!" Mam'bo Rouge's strong voice cut through the crowd. She stepped from the shadows wrapped in white robes, wearing a dozen necklaces and carrying a rattle. She was tall and frail looking with grey hair piled beneath a yellow print turban. She regarded Dr. Shadows with a stern eye. When she spoke it was in French and in a manner of a formal address. "Why have you come here?"

"I come as a believer," Dr. Shadows replied as formally, "seeking the aid of the Loas, Mannman."

"And why do you seek the aid of the spirits?" the Mam'bo asked.

"A vengeance ceremony has been called down on me," he said. "By one from Martinidad." The Mam'bo looked shocked. "I wish to find the one who called the legion of Baron Samadhi to strike me." The Mam'bo regarded him for a moment.

"I have known this one for many years," she said, "I know him to respect and believe in our faith." There was a murmur from those watching. "I have never known him to ask the aid of the spirits, but Fate has guided the Loas to make their own choice in who to aid."

The worshipers murmured agreement. Mam'bo Rouge turned to face him and stepped closer to look up into his eyes.

It was a shock to him. She did not appear to be the woman he had come to regard as a second grandmother, it was a stern, responsible face and he realized it was the face of an Empress of Voodoo. She viewed him with the cool passionless eyes of one who believes very deeply in their religion. He kept his chiseled features stoic.

"What do you bring the Loas in tribute?" she inquired. Dr. Shadows held out his hands, palms up.

"Much," he said. He turned his hands palm down, snapped his fingers, and then turned them palm up again. Suddenly they were filled with silver dollars. The assembly

gaped in unison. Dr. Shadows, recalling his college career as a stage magician, suppressed a smile.

The granite 'illusionist' walked forward and kneeling, placed the coins carefully in a circle on the earth around the center post. His movements were slow and deliberately exaggerated for the sake of the audience. When all the coins were placed he leaned forward and kissed each coin with as solemn a genuflection as in any Christian service. The worshipers seemed impressed with his sincerity. Mam'bo Rouge smiled as if he were her own son.

Dr. Shadows rose to one knee after the final gesture of respect. He shifted his attention to the Mam'bo and received a shock. The woman was beginning to quiver and toss her head from side to side. Her turban came loose and her grey hair spilled out in a wild flood. The gourd rattle in her hand began to vibrate and soon sounded like a Tommy gun. Her whole body began to gyrate madly and she moaned.

It was a possession. The practitioners called it being "mounted by a Loa". It was a regular thing at ceremonies, a common thing almost. Dr. Shadows had not quite believed it could happen; was not sure it was happening.

The Mam'bo had ceased her gyrations and stood statue, still a few feet away from Dr. Shadows. She was staring directly at him and had struck a regal contra Pasto pose. The oum'phor was deathly quiet.

"You are a clever one," the old woman suddenly said. Dr. Shadows was stunned, for she spoke in a cultured French voice very unlike her own. "But not too clever for Charlotte." The Mam'bo walked toward him with the strong certain gait of a much younger woman. "Maistrese Erzulie and I have discussed you often, My Petite. And watched your passage in the realms of light and darkness."

One of the worshipers came forward with a glass of cream-colored beverage and offered it to the voudin. The 'possessed' Mam'bo dismissed the prelate with a haughty nod. She spoke between dainty sips, while Dr. Shadows remained frozen, overcome by the sight.

"We've watched over you from the start, My Petite," the old/young woman said, "there is power in you. Your leve nom is strong!" The possessed Mam'bo laughed. Dr. Shadows recalled the phrase-leve nom the spirit he had been named for. Baron Samandi

himself was the Lord of Shadows and with the number of times the Granite Man had faced death it was no surprise that his Leve nom would be that Loa.

"Oh how you hate him so," the woman said, "but you are a child to such things. The wheel of Fate turns and the forces around you can only smile at your innocence." The Loa in the woman smiled. "Ask what you will."

Dr. Shadows seized the opportunity. "I seek the aid of this assembly," he said in French, "to find this man, Gaston Dauphin." He produced several photos of the assassin from a jacket pocket and held them up for the benefit of the whole room. Then he dropped them, letting the glossies flutter to the dirt floor, around his feet. He turned back to the Mam'bo.

"And what have you for little Charlotte?" the priestess/spirit asked. Her eyes were so much like a young girl's eyes that Dr. Shadows knew at once what to do.

"Only these," he said and snapped his fingers. A bouquet of roses was suddenly in his hand. The embodied Loa smiled.

"My favorite," she said. "You are a charmer, Anton Chadeaux, a charmer of spirits and snakes alike." She took the roses from his hand and held them aloft. They suddenly burst into flame and were gone. "I go," she said then, "aid him," she whispered to the assembly. Then she smiled at Anton with the purest and most amused of maternal smiles.

Mam'bo Rouge's form began to shake and she mumble incoherently. All at once the woman standing before Dr. Shadows was a frail old woman again and he reached out to support her. The gourd rattle dropped to the earth beside the pile of ashes that had been the flowers.

"We will find the one you seek," the old woman whispered to him a weak voice, "but it is the work of the Loas, to be sure. The spirits are always with you." Dr. Shadows looked into her eyes for some sign it had been an act. He found none.

Later, by the Anton the train reached Union Square in lower Manhattan it seemed like a bizarre dream.

Maybe-it had been.

II.

The Combination Club was located on the upper edge of Chinatown, not far from Dr. Shadows' townhouse. It was a dark nightclub, dark enough for those who wished to be alone and with an exclusive enough clientele for those who didn't.

Dr. Shadows went straight to his usual table near the back. He thought back to what Mam'bo had said to him privately before he left the temple. "You should heed the words of the Loas. Everything you have seen has meaning and Fate will not be denied." Dr. Shadows had wanted to ask her if it was real; if she had made it happen or if the possession had happened to her, but he couldn't.

"Hi, Anton," Margarite Sancere's voice cut into Dr. Shadows' thoughts. "Sorry I'm late this time." The pretty artist was dressed in a cream-colored skirt suit and white shirt that set off her coffee colored skin. Her raven hair was swept back and captured under a tiny net cap.

"Hello," he said, rising to kiss her cheek. He stepped around the table and held the chair for her to sit. She made a delighted sound when he did and sat with exaggerated grace.

Margarite was delighted. "I'll have a steak then and a house red wine," she said. She looked closely at the Granite Man. She knew his moods well, having spent many summers on her home Island of Martinidad with the young Anton Chadeaux. "You must have a lot on your mind."

Dr. Shadows smiled, then his features darkened. "I was not able to make our lunch date last week because I was under Hoon's tender care: an attempt on my life was made not far from my town house."

She made a little startled sound. "I recognized one of the attackers," he continued, "the only one who survived the attack, and the one who got away. It was Gaston Dauphin." She stared at him incredulously.

"But why Anton?" She started to lean forward but the waiter appeared carrying

her wine. "You remember Gaston? " He asked. She nodded.

They both knew him. Dauphin was born in Martinidad not far from where Anton Chadeaux and his family came to spend their winters. He had a hard youth. Crime had been the simplest way out of the grinding poverty. He and his brother Jean-Paul had even tried armed robbery, once. They barged into the Chadeaux home and pointed a cheap hand gun at the young Chadeaux and demanded money. When the smith had refused Hector pulled the trigger, but the gun backfired and killed him. Gaston had been wounded. Anton-captured, and held for the police.

"I can only assume that because he went to jail because of me and it would seem it's given him reason to see me dead."

They noticed the waiter standing nervously beside their table. "Telephone, Dr. Shadows."

"I don't know how they always find me with phone calls, either," he said to her.

He took the phone and plugged it into the jack at the base of the table." Anton Chadeaux here." He said into the receiver. He listened intently for a moment then said in French, "Thank you, I will not forget this."

Margarite dropped her fork and sat expectantly. "It was a call from one of my contacts," he said.

"Oh, no you don't," she said. She stood up on tip-toe to face him almost eye to eye. "I'm coming with you."

"No."

"Yes," she picked up her wine glass and drained it. She pushed past him before he could object again. He just shrugged his shoulder and followed with a smile.

III.

According to Mam'bo Rouge's information the section of Queens that Dauphin had chosen to hide out in was Long Island City. It was mostly industrial, with a few

scattered "A" frame houses and the oddity of an apartment building among the patchwork of warehouses and shops.

"That's it up ahead," Dr. Shadows said after a few minutes. Dauphin's apartment building towered over the surrounding machine shops and a two story private home at five stories.

"I'll drive past," Dr. Shadows said, "and park on the next block." He drove a Shadows Foundation coupe. It inched passed the building because the street was torn up for roadwork. Piles of sand and stacks of pipes lined both sides of the street and narrowed the passage to one slim lane.

"Looks pretty dismal," Margarite said. Dr. Shadows nodded.

"What now?" She said.

Dr. Shadows looked thoughtful for a moment then shrugged. "The direct approach, I suppose." He put his arm around her waist and together they walked down the block.

The apartment that Dauphin had chosen was on the second floor in the front and apparently empty. Margarite acted as decoy and knocked loudly on the door. She received no answer.

"Nobody home," she shrugged in the direction of where Dr. Shadows had concealed himself. He detached himself from the shadows and joined her at the door. "I guess we just stake it out," she said with practiced nonchalance.

"'Stake it out'," he echoed. "I don't think that will be necessary, Nancy Drew." He reached in his jacket and produced two pairs of fine kid-leather gloves. "We wait inside." He produced a slim leather case to reveal a variety of lock picks and tension wrenches. There was a click and the door swung inward. "Viola`."

"A girl's not safe anywhere," she said. She walked passed him into the room with a suspicious eye on him. Dr. Shadows followed her in after checking to see the hall was clear. He closed the door behind them.

"Not very elegant." Margarite walked ahead into the living room.

"Stay by the door, Margarite, and listen," Dr. Shadows said, "warn me if anyone comes this way."

Dr. Shadows moved into the apartment with a pencil beam flashlight in his hand.

He used the light only for spot examinations. He made a quick search of the kitchen and bathroom. He examined the two bedrooms of the apartment. In one he found a .38 handgun and a vicious looking sugarcane knife. While he was searching the other, the front room, he happened to glance out the window and spotted three figures.

Gaston Dauphin and another Martinidadian were standing in front of the building talking with a preteen boy who pointed up at the building. Dr. Shadows ducked back from the window as both men glanced up.

"Margarite," he said, "get out of the building and meet me back where we left the car." Without waiting for a reply he threw open the window and in doing so revealed himself to Dauphin who took off running.

Margarite reacted to Dr. Shadows' strange order by racing into the bedroom just in time to see the Grey Wolf launch himself through the open window.

Dr. Shadows had aimed for and landed on a pick-up-truck-sized mound of sand. He was rolling to the ground in a mini-sandstorm when Margarite reached the window. At the same moment Dauphin's companion was almost upon Dr. Shadows, wielding a switch knife.

Dr. Shadows rolled to his feet in recover from the jump. The silver tooth of the knife thrust straight for the Granite Man's face. He threw himself back to the sand mound and kicked up hard to catch the knifeman under the armpit. It numbed the arm and the man dropped the blade.

The Grey Wolf was back on his feet and finished the man with a one-two-three combination that laid the knifeman out cold. As the man dropped Dr. Shadows jumped over him and sprinted toward the corner of the building after Dauphin.

"Be careful, Anton." Margarite whispered as Dr. Shadows disappeared into the darkness around the corner. Then she ran from the apartment.

The Granite Man found himself in a long dark corridor, scarcely a meter and a half wide. Ahead he could hear running steps, but all he could see was the shapes of the crates, bags and assorted debris that littered the alley. He slowed to a walk when the steps faded out and listened.

Dauphin could be behind any box, any garbage can with either gun or knife.

Dr. Shadows could hear the distant sounds of the expressway but it made him feel

as if he had stepped through a looking glass into some primitive world. The air of the cramped alley was fetid and damp. Rotting garbage, urine and an oil thick machine smell added to the miasma.

His side ached anew from his jump, but he buried the pain.. He came up to a T-shaped junction where the alley he was in joined a narrower alley at a right angle. Dr. Shadows paused and listened again for some clue to which way Dauphin had gone.

The Granite Man chose the right fork and inched along the wall, his eyes straining forward. Suddenly there was a roar from behind him.

Dr. Shadows whirled. Lights exploded down the left fork of the alley. The lights moved slowly toward him, and the revs increased.

Before he could have reached it, the small roadster that was moving down the alley like a hand slipped tightly in a glove had cut off his retreat back through the first alley.

"Now we *finish* it," the voice of Dauphin called from behind the lights. The alley filled with his faceless laughter. The car roared and leapt forward.

Dr. Shadows turned and ran. He had the car lights behind him now to illuminate the area ahead and he ran at full speed, jumping boxes, dodging garbage cans, ignoring the sharp pains in his side and arm, he could hear the car slamming the debris out of its way as it closed in behind him. He passed two heavy steel doors on his left and a fire escape on his right, but saw no way out of the narrow confines of the alley. The car plugged the alley like a cork in a bottle and he had no chance to dive aside.

His mind worked frantically to assess options while his body mechanically dodged debris. Behind him the car screeched to a halt and Dauphin honked the horn in triumph. Dr. Shadows immediately saw why.

The alley ended abruptly just at the edge of the headlight's illumination in a wall. Dr. Shadows turned to face the car.

"I might just let you live," the driver jeered, "if you ask politely." The engine raced. "Beg me!"

Dr. Shadows knew instantly what he had to do, and his already taxed body reacted like a trained athlete. He began to run straight at the car at full speed.

His mind clicked off the figures with mathematical precision:

'Five meters to the car.'

'Three seconds for Dauphin to react to the move and step on the gas.'

'Two seconds before the car hits me.'

By the time eight seconds had passed and the car was moving forward at him, Dr. Shadows had his small flashlight in his hand. In mid-stride, he leaped forward, his right leg supporting his weight and stepping onto the chrome bumper of the accelerating car. His left arm was extended above him and he pushed off from the car the moment he touched it. It was a ridiculously risky move; if his shin hit the hood it could snap the leg like a twig.

He had the incongruous image of Cretin bull jumpers in his mind as he reached for the fire escape above the car. His arm screamed in pain and he was sure he had opened the stitches.

As he jumped he slammed the flashlight downward with the movement of his jump while he was in mid-air. The tiny missile smashed into the windshield, shattering it.

Dr. Shadows caught the fire escape and swung his legs up to grab onto it. He managed to grab with his right hand just as the sports car, slammed with an explosive crash, into the wall-at forty miles per hour!

Epilogue:

Dr. Shadows dropped to the ground, stumbled and fell. He turned to look at the wreck. The roadster was wedged in the narrow end of the alley, crumpled against the brick wall. There was no room for the doors to open so Dauphin cut open the canvas top and struggled out like a chick breaking out of an egg.

The Granite Man had no chance to back away or draw his throwing knife, Ike, before the Martinidadian pointed a revolver at him. "Hold it there, Chadeaux." Dauphin ordered. He jumped down from the wreck keeping his gun trained on the Grey Wolf.

"What is this about, Dauphin?" Dr. Shadows said. He was calm, despite the ache in his side and arm. He knew his bullet proof tunic could handle the slugs from the revolver, provided the man was a good enough shot to hit him in center of mass. '*With my luck he'll aim high,*' he thought.

It was then he had a sudden image of the abbot in the monastery with the prayer wheel he used to pray with clutched in his hand saying "The wheel of life turns, my son. Be assured, no evil is forever and no good may rest on past achievements."

"My life," Dauphin screamed, "You ruined my life-I spent five years in prison because of you: my brother died because of you."

Dr. Shadows could not help himself, he laughed.

"Stop that!" Dauphin screamed. He waved the gun wildly.

"You ruined you own life, Gaston," The Granite Man said, "and your brother died in a tragic accident-a man makes his own life or ruins it." The smell of gasoline began to add to the other pungent odors in the narrow space of the alley. Dr. Shadows could see the steady drip of it from the gas tank below the twisted wreck.

"You and your kind always have that attitude," Dauphin said, "but you all had it handed to you." He pointed the revolver straight at the Granite Man's head and began to squeeze the trigger slowly.

Dr. Shadows found his eyes drawn to the slowly turning cylinder of the pistol '*Like the Abbott's prayer wheel,*' he thought. Then he looked past the man and saw the gasoline that was running from beneath the car to pool near his feet. He remembered the smell.

"Gaston *don't*, the gas-" He yelled just as the hammer fell on the bullet. There was a burst of flame, the impact of the slug off center of the Granite Man's chest that knocked him back and spun him around.

Behind him there was a sudden whoosh sound as the fumes trapped in the narrow space ignited and the night went white all around him. He was slammed to the ground by the concussion of the blast.

Dr. Shadows kept moving. He crawled through the shower of flaming debris, moving blindly, reduced to the animal level of survival motives. He lost touch with where he was and for a moment he was back in the of his parents plane, fire raging

about him and unable to move.

Then he was at the mouth of the alley and Margarite was bending over him, slapping out the small fires on his clothes. His hearing was gone, save for a peculiar ringing in his ears that sounded more like the pulse of primal rada drums. He pushed himself up on his elbows and said, "I'm alright." It was strange not to hear his own words.

Margarite said something only part of which he could lip read as "-it him?" She held Dr. Shadows' head her lap and he felt too weak to pull away.

"He's dead," Dr. Shadows said, "let's go home." He pushed himself to his feet and was forced to lean on Margarite to stay upright. He found himself liking the warmth of her, even against his blistered skin.

He limped down the alley and out onto the street. The flame shrouded image of Dauphin wavered in the still night air ahead of him. He leaned on the woman beside him and closed his eyes wondering at the road that had gotten him to be in that alley. How little separated him from the man who had died in that that fire. He felt his heart beating like a primal drum and he thought again about luck and the little miracle that each breath was.

It was almost enough to make you believe-in *fate*.

The End