

# BEHOLDER

## RYAN LA SALA

**My dearest reader,**

Don't look! Close your eyes. Not a word further, you hear me? Go—I don't know—collect seashells. Everyone loves seashells! Go do that!! . . . . . Well . . . you've ignored me. If you're going to look, let me at least bind this insidious bit of art in a frame.

Usually book ideas come to me all at once. Not Beholder. Just a sliver of this book snuck into me long ago. I could feel it in the back of my mind, nesting, plucking random things out of my eyes and up into its web. Things like: "The Yellow Wallpaper" by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and the tale of Typhoid Mary, and stories about pathologically wicked environments. Other, more personal things, too, like the long-game of overcoming grief that I began in *The Honeys*; the way my Greek family's superstitions around the evil eye echo through my OCD; the intrusive thoughts that flicker through my head when I see an oncoming train, or a deadly drop from atop a great height. And of course my love of interior design.

It's fitting that what brought it all together was a sickness that locked us all inside. During the pandemic lockdown, my big, wide world became just four walls in a tiny NYC apartment. Stir-crazy took on new meaning. I began to see things that weren't there. And, like many, I began countless projects to reshape my tiny environment. Make it more me. But I wondered, what if a designer went too far in expressing themselves on the walls around them? What if we followed our inspiration down too deep and awoke something horrific? What if we unleashed it through art?

It's possible. Art of any kind is a mirror. It just reflects deeper than the skin. I think this is why horror, an obvious mirror, is transfixing. In horror, we watch versions of ourselves contending with forces we all feel—oppression, invasion, exclusion, hopelessness—except in the sideways light of the mirror, these sometimes-amorphous forces are given form. And once made material, a monster might be conquered.

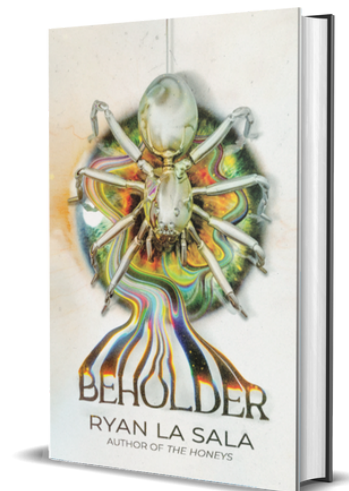
For me, my writing often reflects too much, showing me fears so deep in myself I find them impossible to look at directly. Still, I find myself wanting to . . . communicate with them. So I created Athan, and then I created . . . the other voice in this book. The one watching us back through the glass. The one that taunts us all, from within our own darkness.

If you go on—if you choose to look—know this: That voice is not you. Unseen, intangible evils simply require a form to hurt us. They might lurk behind our reflections. They might make themselves captivating. They may even make themselves beautiful, if it means our eyes will open wide enough to behold them.

So if you do look, just know: What you can see can see you. But what hurts you can also be hurt back. Mirrors work both ways, after all.

All my love,

**Ryan**



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