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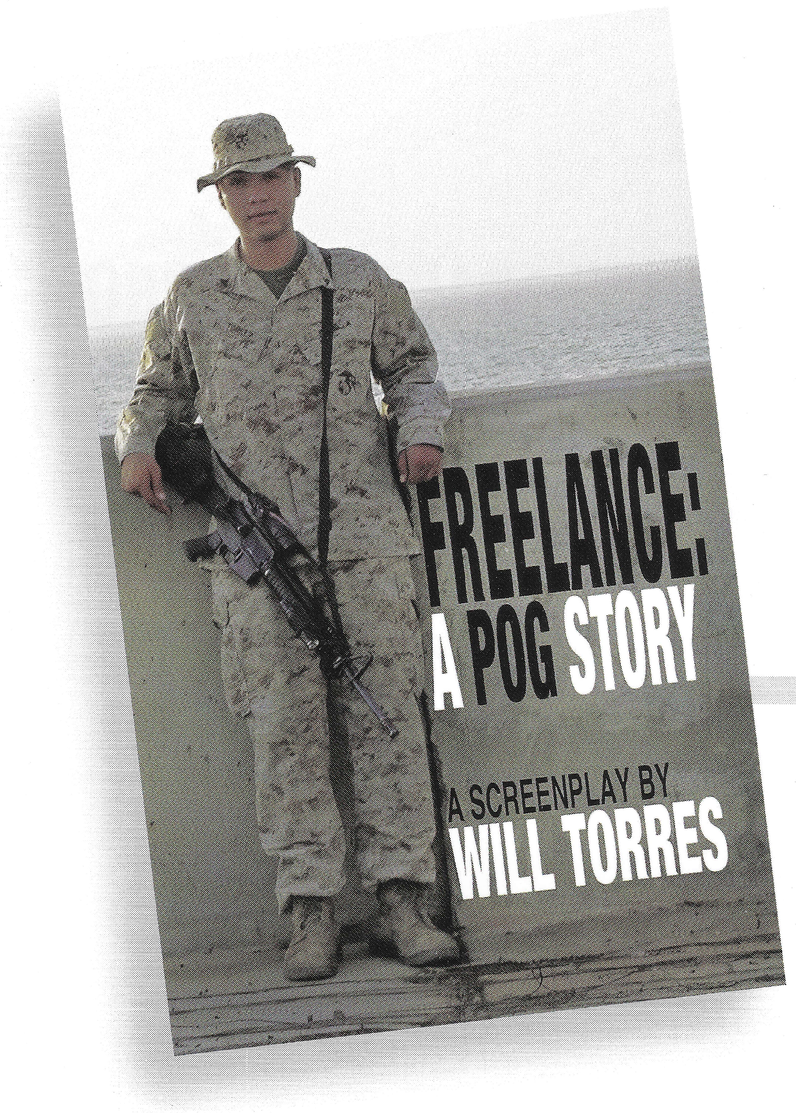
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FREELANCE: A POG STORY MY NIGHT WITH MUKAT POEMS FOR MENYIL

Will Torres

Self-published, 2017–2023, $7.99–$12.99

Reviewed by **Jeanne Ferris**

UP-AND-COMING AUTHOR WILL TORRES, A MEMBER OF THE TORRES MARTINEZ DESERT CAHUILLA INDIANS, GREW UP ON THE RESERVATION IN THERMAL. A decorated soldier, he served as a radio operator with the Third Battalion, Third Marines from 2003 to 2007. He participated in Operation Enduring Freedom in 2004 and Operation Iraqi Freedom from 2005 to 2006.

Freelance: A POG Story is Torres's first, soul-baring screenplay about his enduring friendship with his brothers-in-arms, a difficult reentry into society, and a diffidence toward his cultural heritage. "We were POGS," (Persons Other than Grunts) Will explains without apology, disclaimer, or trigger warnings.

When his former platoon sergeant committed suicide, resulting from PTSD, the truth of Will's own PTSD diagnosis, his mortality, and his young sons' future challenged his spiritual resolve and the will to stay healthy. On his Vietnam veteran father's advice, Will reaches out to his fellow Marines, helping him cope with the lasting side effects of providing vigilant security for the Explosive Ordnance Disposal Team. Mental health resources now recognize that warfare leaves collateral damage, including soldiers who served in non-infantry or essential support positions.

My Night With Mukat, Torres's second screenplay, introduces the Cahuilla entity Mukat, who warns Will that medicating his grief and anger with narcotics, opioids, and alcohol leads to a dark abyss where the malevolent Tahquitz lurked and feasted on lost souls. Not for the faint of heart, *My Night with Mukat* explores the eternal human struggle of good versus bad.

In recovery, Will seeks therapeutic tribal practices and the strength that comes from prayer. A couple of teeny-tiny inconsistencies pulled this reader out of the story, but only for an eyeblink—it's an easy continuity fix.

The raw profanity and caustic dialogue in both screenplays contrast dramatically with Torres's third book, *Poems for Menyil.* He pays poetic reverence to Menyil (the moon) by organizing her phases into chapters, starting with the new moon and moving through waxing crescent and so on. Within each phase, he extols the virtues of water, love, the journey to funerals, reflections on God, and the power of joy with ardent illustrative phrases.

An excerpt from "If Water Could Sing": "The waters know the truth, I imagine each vapor has a story to tell, of how Creator once ravaged the world with water, oh how frightening water can be, no king, no militia, and no amount of money could ever conquer water."

There is an apparent restorative effect exhibited in Mr. Torres's persuasive prose, and with his renewed observance of traditional Bird Songs, maybe creating an audio recording as a healing modality should be his fourth exposition?

A worthy endeavor: workshop these screenplays at Sundance Indigenous Program, imagineNative, or perhaps to the "new kid on the block," FNX—First Nations Experience, a California Native television station. Personally, I would happily pay to watch *My Night With Mukat* in Technicolor, IMAX, and projected sixty feet wide in Dolby Cinema.

Freelance: A POG Story, My Night with Mukat, and *Poems For Menyil* are available in paperback or Kindle editions through Amazon.