

# POLAR BOREALIS

Magazine of Canadian Speculative Fiction  
(Issue #3 – November/December 2016)



# POLAR BOREALIS MAGAZINE

Issue #3 – November/December 2016 (Vol.1#1.WN#3)

**Publisher/Editor:** R. Graeme Cameron

**Proofreader:** Steve Fahnestalk

POLAR BOREALIS is a Canadian semi-pro non-profit Science Fiction online PDF Magazine published by R. Graeme Cameron at least three times a year.

Distribution of this PDF Magazine is free, either by E-mail or via download.

POLAR BOREALIS buys First Publication (or Reprint) English Language World Serial Online (PDF) Internet Rights from Canadian Science Fiction Genre Authors, Poets and Artists.

Copyright belongs to the contributors by-lined, and no portion of this magazine may be reproduced without consent from the individual Author, Poet, or Artist.

POLAR BOREALIS offers the following Payment Rates:

Short Stories of three thousand words or less in length – one (1) cent a word.

Poem – \$10.00

Cover Illustration – \$40.00

Interior Illustration – \$20.00

Filler Illustration – \$5.00

To request to be added to the subscription list, ask questions, send letters of comment, or submit MS or art, contact Publisher & Editor R. Graeme Cameron at:

< [The Graeme](#) >

All contributors are paid before publication. Anyone interested in submitting a story, poem, or art work, and wants to check out rates and submission guidelines, or anyone interested in downloading current and/or back issues, please go to:

< <http://www.polarborealis.ca> >

ISSN 2369-9078 (Online)

Headings: **ENGRAVERS MT**

By-lines: *Monotype Corsiva*

Text: Bookman Old Style

Ad Text: Calibri

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 05) – EDITORIAL – R
- 07) – WE NEVER WENT TO MARS – by Karl Johanson  
*Not as if we ever needed to when you think about it.*
- 09) – A CELESTIAL VOICE – (Poem) by J.J. Steinfeld
- 10) – BIRDSEY – by L.L. Hill  
*What can you do about the weather?*
- 16) – ASTRONOMY – (Poem) by Kirsten Emmott
- 17) – THERMODEMONICS – by Robert Dawson  
*Bet you wish you'd paid more attention in science class.*
- 20) – CELEBRATION – (Poem) by Lisa Timpf
- 21) – CUDDLY ABOMINATIONS – by James A. Conan  
*Some pets are not worth petting.*
- 26) – CHRISTINA – (Poem) by Mary E. Choo
- 27) – THE ALL DAY SLINGERS – by Michael Donoghue  
*The public must be served.*
- 34) – THE GIST OF IT – (Poem) by Richard Stevenson
- 36) – MES CENTAINE – by Jonathan Cresswell-Jones  
*When memories are worth remembering.*
- 41) – SPINNER OF SINGULARITIES – (Poem) by Matt Moore
- 42) – TRIAL IN ERROR – by Holly Schofield  
*No wonder Justice is blindfolded.*
- 49) – GRIT – (Poem) by Marcie Lynn Tentchoff
- 50) – CONVERSATIONS WITH FOUR WALLS – Sylvia Son  
*What does an empty room contain?*
- 57) – THE OLD NEIGHBOURHOODS ON MARS – by J.J. Steinfeld  
*They don't build them like they used to. Or do they?*

- 62) – THE GHOST LOVERS – (Poem) by Kirsten Emmott
- 63) – FIZZ – by Joe Mahoney  
*The real meaning of life.*
- 67) – EQUATIONS – (Poem) by Mary E. Choo
- 68) – THE HOCKEY GAME – by Kellee Kranendonk  
*More than a national pastime.*
- 73) – CAMERA DRONE CAMP – by S. Kay  
*The future is never ours.*
- 74) – FOOLS FOR FERMI – by Ira Nayman  
*First contact is more difficult than you think.*
- 78) – A SECOND HELPING – (Poem) by Lisa Timpf
- 79) – AFTER THE FALL – by Michael John Bertrand  
*Disasters don't clean themselves.*
- 82) – IS PLUTO STILL A PLANET? – (Poem) by Richard Stevenson
- 84) – DYSON SPHERE – by William Squirrell  
*Life is faith and faith is life.*
- 91) – THE BLACKEST ART – by R. Graeme Cameron  
*Probably the worst hobby to have.*
- 100) – OLD SCI-FI FILMS – (Poem) by J.J. Steinfeld
- 101) – SAY GOODBYE TO THE OLD BEASTS – by Darren Ridgley  
*Some myths will surprise you.*
- 107) – IN TURING'S GARDEN – (Poem) by Eileen Kernaghan
- 108) – HUNCHSTER – by Matthew Hughes  
*Some guys have all the luck.*
- 114) – DARK WORLDS: AN ADVENTURE IN PUBLISHING – by G. W. Thomas
- 116) – LETTERS OF COMMENT
- 120) – ABOUT THE AUTHORS AND ARTISTS

## ART CREDITS

COVER – Michael D. Jackson

FOOLS FOR FERMI – G. W. Thomas

## EDITORIAL

This issue is much bigger than the previous one, and more expensive. So, I am giving notice that, starting next issue, I am abandoning my flat fee system (\$30 for stories between 3,000 and 2,000 words, for example) and switching to 1¢ a word between 3,000 words and 1,000 words, and a flat fee of \$10 below 1,000 words. This will save me a bit of money, which will make it easier to keep to my publishing schedule of 3 issues per year.

Another change contemplated; given that my original intention was to target beginning authors, and that the inclusion of reprints offered by well-known pros helped establish the zine's credentials such that I became inundated with submissions—not only was I hearing from writers I'd never heard of, I was receiving manuscripts from places I'd never heard of—I've decided to restrict submissions to original works never before published. No more reprints. This policy does not affect stories I've already tentatively accepted, just the ones coming in when I re-open the submissions window.

Not that reprints aren't delightful, I'm grateful for all the ones sent to me, but the number of submissions pouring in was so much beyond what I had originally anticipated I think I've reached the point where I really can print nothing but previously unpublished works, many of them first sales for their authors. Thus, of course, fulfilling my self-imposed mandate: to publish, promote, and celebrate the upcoming generation of Canadian SF&F authors and poets.

Will the quality of *Polar Borealis* suffer? I don't think so.

For one thing, some pros offer originals, despite my ludicrously low rates. The quality of their work helps set the standards beginners should think about.

As for what beginners submit, their work is often quite professional. And even if it isn't, I may still want to publish it.

I've already made clear I publish what I like. That can mean anything from a ripping good yarn to a truly disturbing horror story, from a piece of creative delirium not necessarily following grammatical rules to a formal poem, or even absolute nonsense which happens to catch my fancy.

In each and every case the story or poem will have something I want to bring to the reader's attention in the belief that it will be entertaining, intriguing, or, at the very least, interesting.

This raises certain questions. Will this material measure up to what professional editors demand? Will I accept stories that shouldn't be published? Will some contributors be condemned to be published in Polar Borealis and nowhere else? Will my idiosyncratic approach prevent beginners from learning what they need to know to become more competitive?

These questions were raised at several of the writers workshops I conducted at the recent VCON 41 convention. It was pointed out that my knowledge of basic grammar is dim at best (true). That I tend not to think through implications and consequently miss obvious plot holes (true). That I am sufficiently flawed as an editor as to miss obvious flaws (hmmm ... could be ...).

But I know what I like. I know what stops me dead and kicks me out of the story. I can spot certain types of logic flaws, some types of scientific mistakes. I can tell when a story isn't consistent to its premise. I can detect cardboard characters and situations. I can certainly spot anything boring.

What about clichés, you ask? Actually, I love clichés. Or rather, what I view as in interesting variation of a cliché.

As a matter of fact I do edit from time to time, cut out wordiness, point out inconsistencies, make suggestions, and in general follow the example of John W. Campbell as much as possible. He was always trying to get his writers to convert their stories to something more in line with what he wanted. Some stories I leave alone. Others I make radical suggestions. It all depends on the story.

Point is I do occasionally make an effort to guide writers into "improving" their submissions, but only in terms of what pleases me. Whether it makes them more saleable or not in the professionally competitive market I have no idea. I hope so.

As an editor, I do the best I can. The pros, of course, I don't need to worry about. They're already established. But the beginners contributing to Polar Borealis? I want them to outgrow me.

I think of Polar Borealis as a springboard for beginning authors diving into the professional pool for the first time. The whole point is for them to gain confidence and skill so that eventually they'll leave Polar Borealis behind and go on to greater things. That be my goal.

Cheers! The Graeme

# WE NEVER WENT TO MARS

*by Karl Johanson*

(Previously unpublished)

*Host:* Today on Talk Radio, we'll be speaking with Aaron Mumford, author of "Hoax of the Century."

*Aaron:* Thanks for having me on your show.

*Host:* Tell us a little about your book.

*Aaron:* We all know the story of how way back in 1966, 16 men flew a four thousand ton "Orion" spacecraft propelled by nuclear bombs. We were all taught that they orbited Mars, rendezvoused with Deimos, and brought rocks back to Earth.

*Host:* My father watched it on TV when it happening.

*Aaron:* The TV footage was all faked. The whole mission was faked.

*Host:* That's what you claim in your book. What we'd like is for you to tell our listeners *why* you think that.

*Aaron:* Well to start with, the whole idea is ridiculous. You can't propel a space ship by blowing up atomic bombs under it. The radiation would have killed the crew. The heat would have melted the ship. Hell, it would have vapourized it!

*Host:* Physicists like Freeman Dyson, Richard Feynmann, Stanislaw Ulam who designed it, all say it worked. You're saying that they're all liars and *you* know the truth. Is that it?

*Aaron:* They all feel guilty about working on the Manhattan project, so they believe this fairy tale about nuclear bombs to assuage their guilt.

*Host:* What about the photos?

*Aaron:* They're all faked, of course, like the TV recordings. Unmanned orbiters in the mid '70s got a digital photo of a face on Mars, and pyramids, in the Cydonia Region. All we see in the alleged Orion mission's high resolution film photos are rough hills.

*Host:* The Orion film photos were higher resolution than the digital images from the later orbiters. And speaking of photos, there's the images of the Orion on the bottom of the Pacific, right where the video shows it sinking 4 hours after splashdown.

*Aaron:* Those photos are of a sunken Trotsky class Russian sub, not a space craft!

*Host:* It doesn't look anything like a submarine, and there's no such thing as a Trotsky class submarine. That name is made up.

*Aaron:* Yeah, well the Russians would like us to *think* that. Plus, if we could go to Mars in 1966, how come we aren't doing it now?

*Host:* The electromagnetic pulses from the nuclear explosives play havoc with satellites. There were only a few satellites in 1966 when the Orion launched, but there's thousands of them in orbit now, so now there's no way to get an Orion launch approved.

*Aaron:* Electromagnetic pulses are a hoax as well.

*Host:* Oh, now you're arguing with basic physics. I was hoping you'd have something more substantial to discuss, but I'll have to let you go.

\*Music Riff\*

*Host:* Coming up next; a woman who's taught her pet duck to say "hello"!

-----

## **CREATIVE INK FESTIVAL COMING SOON!**

This celebration of multiple writing genres, aimed at publishers, editors, authors, and artists, as well as readers who dream of becoming such, will take place in the Vancouver, B.C. region from March 31<sup>st</sup> to April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2017. There will be pitch sessions, blue pencil sessions, lectures, panels, a banquet, and a dealers room. Renowned Historical Fantasy novelist Eileen Kernaghan is the Author Guest of Honour. The Graeme will give a talk on Polar Borealis and beginning writers.

For latest news go to < [Creative Ink Festival](#) >



## A CELESTIAL VOICE

*by J.J. Steinfeld*

(Originally published in *Carillon*, UK)

Another speculative poem  
as if I didn't have tasks to perform  
errands to run  
but I play with the wavering of the world:  
If everyone on earth  
in possession of language  
even a handful of words  
at the precise same moment  
writes a poem  
say 20 to 30 lines  
nothing long or elaborate  
topic provided  
by a celestial voice—  
not that you need to believe in celestial voices  
special effects being what they are—  
okay, the topic might be  
*the various ends of the world*  
or even, *the beginning of the world*  
or, *the refashioning of the world*  
then the world could finally end  
not in the flames of misfortune or retribution  
but in the embrace of saving imagination  
ready to awake over and over again.

# BIRDSEY

*by L.L. Hill*

(Previously unpublished)

Red, orange, and yellow of a massive spring storm filled Thorne's Doppler radar screen. She shifted focus out and included the small town of Birdsey, Alberta, less than four kilometers ahead. With a cross road, post office in the corner store, rec center, and library, it was laid out like many Canadian towns. The anemometer recorded a gust of 73km/hr as Thorne tapped the plunged barometer with a well-cut fingernail lined with grease.

In the commander's seat of the obsolete M1A1-Abrams, gutted and refurbished to chase tornadoes, Thorne, her head encased in a helmet, safety glasses, and earphones, sat in a steel cocoon that thrummed with a whirring engine, several radar screens, and recording devices. Layered in red lipstick, her thin lips pressed together as steel-blue eyes checked for aberrant readings on any gauges before moving closer to the storm.

Behind them was their flatbed transport and lab with Dr. Cohn squirreled up inside. His forecast had brought them to the region of Birdsey to chase the predicted storm. Thorne had heard that his chronic nervousness and facial tic stemmed from seeing a helicopter swallowed by a tornado that had descended from directly overhead. Flyboys always had short attention spans, she thought.

Flicking her focus between the radar and the view from her six surrounding periscopes, Thorne decided that they were ready to go. "Set, Pierre?" she asked her driver.

"Check on steering, engine, all clear," the Haitian immigrant replied. He insisted on an absolutely spotless cab.

"Jackson, keep the range adjusted as we approach," she directed her gunner.

"Yes, ma'am, adjusting range."

Thorne knew that the gunner had done so from the moment that the engine started, but she followed protocol anyway. The granddaughter of Jamaican immigrants, Jackson had hand-eye coordination seemingly second to none ... but not quite.

"Gill, set to load?"

"Yes, ma'am, set to load." A sullen undertone remained in his tone since the last range tests had condemned him to a loader's role.

Thorne felt Jackson turn to look across the gun at her. Thorne had earned her third stripe with a higher score on the range than Jackson's and maybe, just maybe, it was time to get a new gunner. Good thing too that the driver's cab was completely separate from the remainder of the tank as sparks of competition often spewed between Pierre and Jackson as if from a welding torch. However, Thorne had no time to brood about her crew. She had a storm to chase.

"Let's stay on this secondary road until the side road before Birdsey, Pierre." She liked to feel the tank accelerate as she gave the order and smiled as Pierre answered a hair after.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Let's see what we can learn from this storm." Thorne leaned forward, her thin face turning to and fro as she scoured monitors and gauges for data.

Nails trimmed down to the quick to prevent dirt buildup, Pierre gripped the bike handle and goosed the throttle. The padded tracks squeaked as they turned over the thin asphalt coat of the road. Near the speed of 60km/hr, they would be under the storm soon.

"Would you be ready to fire a test shot?" queried Dr. Cohn in Thorne's ear.

"Ready to fire," barked Thorne. Her Doppler image showed a purple core had bloomed in the multihued storm. "Altitude 5 kilometers, 13 degrees, range 3 kilometers."

Pierre brought the tank to a grinding halt beside a small sign that proclaimed "Birdsey 1km" as Jackson turned the turret to aim. A farmer in an old pickup stopped to watch, his jaw down as he petted a panting Border Collie. A blue fork of lightning speared down followed by a crack of thunder. Rain and hail danced on thick periscope glass as Thorne watched the green, purple, and black clouds roil.

Gill slid the ammunition hatch open and cracked the fuse cover of a standard sample shell. Like an anti-aircraft shell, he set the fuse to blow at an altitude of 5 kilometers and hefted it into the breech of the 120mm gun. Then he shifted breech cover shut and stepped back, arms rigid and stomach sucked in.

"Ready to fire," called Jackson.

"Fire when ready!"

"Fire!" The barrel recoiled into the tank as the casing cap clattered to the floor.

Loaded with data gathering plugs set in aerodynamic flowers made of ballistic bullet rubber, the shells exploded based on the pressure at a predetermined altitude. The plugs flew out to gather information on wind speed and direction as well as moisture and temperature. All of the information fed not only to Thorne but to Dr. Cohn.

As she watched the plugs circle in the various levels of the mammoth storm, Thorne wondered if knowing more about tornadoes did any good. Did it really matter if meteorologists knew a particular ratio of temperature, moisture, and chemistry spawned tornadoes of a specific speed and strength when they were powerless to stop the storm no matter how much they learned?

Dr. Cohn insisted that a shell he had designed, a shell filled with liquid nitrogen, be loaded into their tank today. He had a theory a storm could be broken up by a sudden, dramatic change in temperature. Other scientists objected, believed it would only increase nature's fury, and argued it should never be tried. Their spineless political bosses couldn't decide. Outside, a lightning thunder combination flashed and boomed.

"Data feed good. Ready to fire," directed Thorne.

Gill pirouetted another shell into the breech and snapped clear.

"Ready to fire," responded Jackson.

"Fire!" barked Thorne, spittle flying.

A small cough when compared to thunder, the gun spat another round to the same point to monitor for change. As plugs spewed out to collect data, a churning slate wedge spun out of the black and purple storm cloud.

"Is that a tornado?" asked Jackson.

"Hey, big one!" exclaimed Pierre as he looked through his periscope.

The radio crackled and Dr. Cohn spoke without taking a breath. "This storm has spawned a wedge tornado, a very, very powerful storm, looks like an F3 going to F4. Can you hit the wedge itself with three shells at ten, five and one kilometer?"

"Yes Dr. Cohn. Prepare to fire as requested," responded Thorne, feeling her pulse rate rise as her muscles tensed.

"Yes ma'am," replied Jackson. "Altitude 10, 5, and 1 kilometer, bearing 13 degrees, range 2.75 kilometers. Ready to fire."

Gill adjusted the fuse on the first shell and rammed it into the breech. "Ready to fire," snapped Gill.

"Fire!" declared Jackson, pressing the trigger.

In the resultant pall of smoke, Gill set the fuse on the second shell, loaded, waited till it was gone, then set a third shell's fuse, pushed it into the breech, then stepped back as Jackson shot it into the tornado. Even with hearing protection his ears were ringing.

"Good shots, second a little under 5k," Thorne said watching the shells flare open on the radar. "How are the readings on your end doctor?"

“Fine, spectacular even. Seems to be colder with less moisture at a higher altitude. I can’t see any unexpected or surprising results.” His truculent voice sounded like every student’s nightmare professor.

“As long as the readings are accurate they will be useful,” said Thorne. Pierre snickered.

“One thing to be aware of, the tornado is now moving towards us and the town.” Dr. Cohn could be heard rustling papers as he spoke. He always gave the impression he had concern for human welfare while engaged in his tornado research.

“The town is a little east of the storm’s most likely track and has been alerted, Dr. Cohn. You have updated Environment Canada with the recent strengthening?” Thorne guessed that the updates had been sent before the shells were fired.

“Sergeant Thorne, all required procedures have been carried out.” Dr. Cohn sneezed three times in a row. Thorne smiled as Pierre and Gill laughed.

“That is a massive tornado,” said Jackson. “I’m glad I’m in a tank.” Gill leaned over to look at her monitors blazing with cloud, rain, and lightning.

“Do you think it might be one to try your shell on, Dr. Cohn?” asked Gill.

“All tornadoes are one to try my shell on,” retorted the scientist. “Please fire a triple, triple at 12, 7, and 1 kilometer, bearing 10, 11, and 12 degrees, range 2 kilometers.” An unspoken admonition to be completely accurate was included in his tone.

“Ready to fire,” barked Thorne, relaxing with the activity.

Gill kicked casings’ caps aside and hauled a shell out, setting the fuse to blow at 12 kilometers. He whipped the shell into the breech and stood back. “Ready to fire.”

Jackson fired right away and Gill hustled to break his loading record. Two minutes and forty-five seconds later the sixth shell blasted towards the black, purple, and green monster. Now in an oven, Gill tried not to cough in the smoke filled cubby hole. Somehow, he had nicked a knuckle and was staring at it.

“How was that Dr.—” Thorne asked as a boom flashed purple light and all of the monitors shorted out. Harnessed in seats, Thorne, Jackson, and Pierre were turned to jelly by the charged air. In smoky silence, little light entered the periscopes to see by. Gill had been blown the short distance that he could be and now lay curled on the floor with his spent brass caps.

“Damn ...” Thorne pulled off the useless earpiece and microphone. She brushed a hand over her helmet to turn on a headlight thinking that only one thing had the power to do this. “Damage report on the lightning strike! Jackson,

you all right? Pierre, you still ready to dance with Nicole?” Burned copper and plastic odor filled the air as Thorne popped her harness free.

“Gill’s hurt,” said Jackson, puzzled at her brief regret that she did not lie where he did. She then wondered why her headlamp failed to turn on.

“Let’s get some air in,” Thorne said as she cracked her hatch seal. Rain whipped in and she dogged it down again. “How’s your hatch, Pierre?”

“The tornado is nearly on us; I have to keep it closed,” pleaded Pierre as Thorne’s hatch squealed shut.

“I’m going past you, Jackson,” said Thorne as she wriggled her slender frame through the padded access and past the breech down to Gill. She stretched to find that his pulse in his cold neck was erratic and rapid. She pulled out an emergency blanket and laid it over him. He could not be safely moved without back support.

In about two minutes an express train was going to run over them and then over Birdsey two minutes later. Dr. Cohn might be safer out of his mobile lab than in but for sure all of the data would be gone if the tornado wiped out the flat bed. Thorne slumped against the ammo storage hatch and coughed as she tried to breathe the particulate laden air. She heard Jackson try to cut herself free and Pierre cursing as he tried to check wiring.

Thorne thought about the pictures she had seen before volunteering: a doll with an eye and an arm missing, a twisted empty swing, a foundation bare of all but sewage pipes, vehicles crushed and upside down. Not even Dr. Cohn had the authority to fire his special shell. Yet no one had anticipated a communication-terminating lightning strike. Fortunately Thorne and her crew would probably survive as the tornado rolled over their derelict tank, but Dr. Cohn and Birdsey were about to die. A scientist with crucial knowledge about tornado development, not to mention a whole town, about to be wiped off the map.

The tank was shuddering as Thorne opened the ammo door and pulled out the nitrogen shell. Cold brass on her palms made her pause to wonder what difference one shell in the wrong place would make. Would she create a day-long monster tornado? Or generate a catastrophic storm spawning multiple tornados? Thorne slid the shell in and closed the breech. Was it the right thing to do, or was it wrong?

“F5, it must be F5,” muttered Pierre as he tried to start the tank.

Gears clunking, Thorne manually turned and aimed the turret and gun using one of her periscopes.

“Ready to fire,” she croaked as she crawled in next to Jackson.

“Fire at what?” asked Pierre.

“Fire.”

The whole tank shook when she fired at the black wall shaped by temperature and moisture into a hideous fiend. Like a toy held in a giant’s hand the tank shuddered. Then, like a steam train run out of coal, the tornado began to weaken. Stinging gusts of rain lashed out in resentment at the black-streaked steel walls of the tank.

Thorne thought about Birdsey when she cracked her hatch and inhaled moist air. She had just added nitrogen to soil as fertiliser, and surely the drenching rain was needed by the farms. Her good deed for the day. Now, finally, if he was still alive, maybe Dr. Cohn would actually crack a smile.

-----



**on spec**  
the canadian magazine of the fantastic

**Expect the unexpected.**

[www.onspec.ca](http://www.onspec.ca)

# ASTRONOMY

*by Kirsten Emmott*

(Previously unpublished)

Away, away on this strange world  
we have built our telescopes, and tonight  
as I promised I put my eye to one of them;

a huge thing to collect the light  
so scattered over the distances  
into a fuzzy lens, your home:  
you at home in the mountain observatory  
did the same.

Years of light-time make no difference:  
love is instantaneous:  
like the spark that jumped between our fingers  
when we met in the observatory  
our magnetism pulled us together  
and keeps us together, pulling across the space and time.

It leaps across catches up with the starlight  
that left each lens so long ago  
passes by in a wink of thought  
and sooner than the pulse wave reaches from  
our heart to our fingers' ends  
fills up the telescope pierces my eye enters my brain:  
"Hello, hello, my love,"  
and you hear:  
"My love, my love, hello:  
Twelve o'clock and all's well."



# THERMODEMONICS

by Robert Dawson

(Previously unpublished)

Curve by contorted curve, tongue between his teeth, Kevin copied the last sigil onto the grubby beige vinyl of his residence room floor. With an unsteady hand, he closed the loop.

Something huge appeared in the pentacle.

The dry-erase marker clattered to the floor. Kevin tried to get further away, but he tripped over a meter stick and landed sprawled on the floor.

“I come at your summons, mortal,” the apparition said, in a voice of ice and thunder.

Kevin slowly got to his feet, watching warily. If he had followed the instructions in the book correctly, this should be the demon Dantalion, a mighty Duke of Hell, learned in all arts and sciences, and awaiting his command.

Whatever it was, it towered above him, its head brushing the ceiling. The face—Kevin looked in queasy fascination—was more like a slideshow of human faces, male and female, each melting into the next. Its right hand held a heavy volume, bound in leather and iron bands, bigger than the dusty *CRC Handbooks* in the Chemical Engineering lab. The other hand rested, mimelike, against an invisible wall that seemed to rise from the edge of the pentacle. “Why do you call upon me?”

“I’m failing Thermo. I need it to graduate, and I’m already on academic probation. And Professor Grizzle promised an A+ and a case of beer to anybody in the class who could build a working perpetual motion machine.”

“Do you suppose he was serious?” There was mockery in the cold blue eyes.

“Well, he said it in front of the whole class, sir. I’ve got fifty witnesses. He can’t back out.”

“No, I suppose not.”

“And he’d said something about a demon earlier in the lecture.”

“Oh, *Maxwell’s* demon,” Dantalion said, in a tone that boded ill for the shade of James Clerk Maxwell.

“Yes, sir, that’s the one. I didn’t follow everything he said, but it was a microscopic demon that could operate a one-way door to let molecules into a chamber, and ...” The end of the sentence slunk away into silence. Whatever the being that he had summoned might be, it was no microscopic molecule-sorter.

“Anyhow, I looked in the Library, and this was all they had in.” He pointed to the facsimile-edition grimoire still open on the floor, weighted open with a programmable calculator. “Everything else was checked out. Can you help me?”

For a moment there was silence. Kevin bit his lip.

“No self-respecting demon would do such a thing in person,” said Dantalion. Its rheumy grey eyes blinked. “We have devices for such tasks. Differing in scale and purpose from what you describe, but the principle is the same. The high-energy particles enter the chamber, and the door will not let them leave again. The resulting pressure imbalance provides the energy to drive the machine. I can provide you with blueprints. Of course, under the terms of your pact with the professor, you must build it on your own.”

“I only got a C+ in Nanofabrication, sir.” It had been his best grade last term, but no need to mention that. “Could you possibly give me nanoprinter files as well? It would be a huge help.”

“I suppose I could do that.” Dantalion batted mascaraed lashes over violet irises. “Is that all?”

“Yes, sir. Ma’am? Thank you.” An instant later, the pentacle was empty, except for a blood-red memory stick. With a rag and a spray bottle of Windex, Kevin carefully scrubbed every trace of the lines and sigils off his floor before daring to pick up his prize.

\*\*\*

Three weeks later, in the small hours of a sleepless night, Kevin rolled his carpet aside and began to draw the diagram once more. When it was almost finished, he paused. Was this a good idea?

He looked at the heap of inert prototypes on his desk, a round dozen of them, in sizes ranging from sugarcube to breadbox, and none of them working. He didn’t seem to have much choice if he wanted to stay in Engineering. And anyhow, neither Dantalion nor the grimoire (he looked at the page again, very carefully) had said anything about any price to be paid. Nothing about souls, no contracts signed in blood. He took a deep breath and drew the final character. As before, Dantalion appeared, book in hand.

“What do you require now?” it demanded, irritably.

“The term ends in five days, sir, and I still can’t make the machine work properly.”

“I gave you the blueprints. I gave you the 3D printer files. I don’t see what the Hell else I can do. You have to be the one who builds it, after all.”

“I’m sorry, sir. I know you gave me the files, and I really appreciate that. But I’ve fabricated it, over and over, in all sorts of different materials, and checked all the measurements really carefully, and it never works.”

“What seems to be wrong?” Dantalion raised one elegantly-trimmed black eyebrow. As Kevin watched, the eyebrow and its mate grew red and bushy.

“Whatever scale I fab it at, whatever speed I run it at, and whatever the ambient temperature, the one-way valve always takes more energy to run than I can get back from it.”

“How unfortunate!” purred the demon. “Perhaps I should show you the prototype?”

“Could you? Please?”

Dantalion opened the book, and muttered a few words. Silently, instantly, a massive bronze door materialized in the bedroom wall, between the video screen and Winter Carnival poster that had been adjacent a moment before. It was framed by huge pillars, sculpted in strange and unpleasant designs.

The door stood slightly ajar: it was not clear what was on the other side, but the wisps of smoke that drifted through, reeking of brimstone, burning flesh and decay, suggested that it did not lead to the neighboring dorm room. Dantalion gestured. “After you.”

Ordinarily, Kevin might have been more cautious; but desperation and lack of sleep made him reckless. “You’re a lifesaver, sir!” he said. He grabbed his cellphone, his notebook, and a vernier gauge from his desk, then scampered through the doorway.

The bronze door clanged shut behind him with great finality. He turned: not even a crack marked its recent place. He screamed, and began to pound on the seamless wall; through the reeking smoke, he could see others doing the same.

Even Hell needs external energy sources.

-----

## **SF CANADA**

SF Canada was founded in 1989 as Canada’s National Association for Speculative Fiction Professionals, and was incorporated as SF Canada in 1992. “Speculative fiction” is understood by members to include science fiction, fantasy, horror and any other weird fiction that invokes a sense of wonder. SF Canada aims to promote the publishing and sale of works created, edited, and published by its members.

Interested in joining?

See < <http://www.sfcanada.org/> >

## CELEBRATION

*by Lisa Timpf*

(Previously unpublished)

out in the colonies  
some of us are  
so far from Earth  
we'd need directions to get there  
still we  
observe the same calendar and  
celebrate the same holidays  
as our ancestors

only differently

on Mars, for example,  
they wish for a Red Christmas  
and are seldom disappointed

on Titan,  
the New Year's Day horns  
tootle 29 times  
in a single trip around the sun

and on Degna,  
those hatched from embryos  
frozen back on Earth  
celebrate all men on  
Father's Day

somehow  
these celebrations  
keep our roots alive  
reminding us  
that once, we came from human stock,  
even though it's hard to tell  
these days  
just to look  
at us

# CUDDLY ABOMINATIONS

*by James A. Conan*

(Previously unpublished)

Doctor William Roberts was nervous. The focus group looked uneasy on the other side of what they saw as a small mirror. He was glad of the one-way glass, since it meant they couldn't see him taking long pulls from the flask in his lab-coat to steady himself. He wasn't sure how they'd react to his products. It hadn't been his idea, after all. He'd just done as the board had told him. He felt it stretched the boundaries of both scientific ethics and basic sanity, but had kept his mouth shut for fear of losing his pension. Three more years and he'd retire.

"They're getting antsy."

"Why?" asked Perkins, the Public Relations executive.

"Well, for one thing, your people didn't tell them what they'd be seeing here. And, frankly, if they had, I don't know who would have believed it and who would've just laughed at us. Did we have to have them bring their kids here on the first go-round?"

Perkins harrumphed, indignant. "They've been paid, right? The kids are our target market, Doctor. We can't lose sight of that—it's the whole reason we're here. Profit margins are lousy lately. We have to diversify somehow."

The PRE left the room and Roberts sighed. TransGen Industries was suffering, no doubt about that. They'd spent decades modifying animal genes to produce chickens that laid bigger eggs, cows that gave more milk, and fatter pigs. But these days people seemed to only want to eat organic, soy-based, gluten-free everything and TransGen's share prices had tumbled. The doctor took a look at the soundproof cages draped in white sheets which contained his work. He knew they'd gone too far. He took one last pull from his flask.

"All right, all right. We might as well get this over with."

He and his assistants wheeled the cages into the conference room where the parents and their children were gathered. Perkins was already making a speech.

"...and so, based on the popularity of designer breeds of dog in recent years, we've made it our goal to genetically engineer the best possible pets to suit your household's needs and requirements, and to cater to every family's tastes. Doctor?"

Roberts gulped back his anxiety. *Here goes nothing.* He lifted the curtain on Specimen A, the smallest cage. There was an intake of breath. Some of the parents

looked apprehensive but more were curious, and the children loved it. One little girl was overjoyed, shouting, “Mommy! I want to hold it!” Perkins beamed with satisfaction.

Specimen A had been the simplest of the hybrids to splice. Feline and cinereus DNA. “What is it?” Asked one of the fathers, shocked and fascinated at the same time.

“It’s a cross between a calico house cat and a koala,” said Perkins. It was small, about a foot from head to tail. Its ears and nose were enlarged and rounded, its eyes wide, and its tail stubby. The creature had feline forelimbs, but its hind legs were that of the koala. It sat up, tilted its head to the side, and cooed inquisitively at its audience. The doctor had enabled a small speaker on the cage, wanting the group to hear A’s heartwarming purr. Even the parents who had appeared unsure at first began to soften. Roberts had to admit it was cute. He felt that this sample showed the most promise, and for that reason it was a mistake to lead with it. He’d been overruled. He was glad the group liked it, but his apprehension intensified. *It’s all going to go downhill from here.*

“Moving on,” said Perkins, stepping toward the larger cage in the centre. “Which of you kids has a dog?” A few hands rose. “Haven’t you ever wished you could ride that dog like a horse?” There were nods, a few of them genuinely enthusiastic. “Well, now you can.”

He pulled the curtain on the largest of the cages and gave them a look at Specimen B. The splicing hadn’t gone so well on this one. Despite the lab’s recent advances, it had been tough to cross the DNA of a Labrador retriever and a Shetland pony. It had the fur coat and ears of a dog, but its legs ended in hooves rather than paws. The long, horsey nose and wispy tail just didn’t look healthy or natural.

When it realized it was being watched, it paced anxiously in a circle for a few moments, then retreated to the back of its cage, as far from the focus group as possible. It shook its head in a distinctly equine motion, and gave a small cough that might have been a nervous, half-hearted attempt at a bark or a neigh. Roberts suppressed a groan. This specimen had showed potential in the early stages, but was far too neurotic around people to make a decent pet.

The parents were now visibly losing their calm, giving each other nervous looks and pushing themselves back in their chairs. No doubt they found it hard to believe what they were seeing. “How is this possible?” asked one mother.

Roberts cleared his throat. “Recent advances in genetic hybridization made right here at TransGen. Almost by accident. I was trying to make a hairier pig, you

see, bacon and soft wool from the same animal.” He smiled jovially at what he'd thought was a pretty good joke. The parents didn't. Perkins shook his head in disdain, and Roberts moved on quickly. “Anyway. Our laboratory's proprietary splicing process allows us to combine the DNA of certain creatures almost completely, and to erase or rewrite those strands which are incompatible.”

“Is this even legal?” asked another of the fathers.

“Who cares about legal?” shouted another mother. “It's against God! C'mon, honey, we're leaving.” The woman grabbed her child and husband and headed for the door.

“Leave if you like,” said Perkins, “but keep in mind you signed an airtight nondisclosure agreement that took effect when you cashed our cheque.” She stopped and scowled at him for a moment, then she was gone.

“Moving on,” continued the PRE. “To answer your original question, sir, it is neither legal nor illegal. Genetic hybridization is so new a phenomenon as to be a non-entity in the eyes of the law. There are some very strong sanctions in place in this country about how we can and can't manipulate the human genome. Animal experimentation for scientific advancement, however, is still largely unregulated.”

The man who had spoken had wide eyes, and looked like he was trying hard not to lose his temper at Perkins. “So let me get this straight,” he said. “Your company now has the ability to combine and rewrite genes, pretty much at will?”

Perkins looked at Roberts, who answered. “To an extent, yes, that's right.”

“And instead of using this incredible scientific leap to try and help people, maybe cure some diseases, end some hereditary birth defects, you bring us this, this ...,” his voice rose as he stretched his arm out towards Specimen B, “dog and pony show?” There were chuckles from a few of the other parents. “I wasn't trying to be funny!” The man was up out of his seat now, yelling.

Roberts raised his palms in a calming, conciliatory gesture. “I'm afraid it's not that simple, sir. First and foremost, we aren't a medical laboratory. We modify the genes of commercial livestock and, hopefully, in the future, will continue from these prototypes to make designer pets. We don't have the facilities to safely experiment on humans.”

He gave Perkins a sideways glance. Thankfully, he took the cue. “And may I remind you, sir, of my point from a moment ago. Medical experimentation on human subjects would hardly be legal.”

Still far from calm, but regaining his composure, the man sat back down. “What's the point then? Look,” he turned to Roberts, “I may not be on your level, Doctor, but I'm a high school biology teacher. An advancement on this scale ...

you can't just want it to be used for this?" Specimen B gave a mournful snort, as if to underscore the man's point.

"Of course not," said Perkins. "It is our sincere hope that we'll be able to use these creations as more than house pets. They could be a very effective lobbying tool, to demonstrate the power that genetic engineering has to better people's lives." Roberts knew that Perkins was making this up as he went along. The board wasn't concerned with anything but rescuing a failing profit margin. Still, it was a good answer and there were nods from around the room. "Moving on. Doctor, if you will, please, lift the final curtain."

Roberts was nervous. The small cage, while still soundproof for the moment, had been rattling alarmingly on its pedestal. The doctor had a sinking feeling he knew why. No one else in the room had seemed to have noticed. *Here goes nothing*, he thought. He pulled back the curtain, and immediately there were screams of horror from adults and children alike. It was as he'd feared. The cage contained a litter, Specimens C through H, designed as hybrids of rabbit and fox DNA. They were about halfway in size between the former and the latter, with splotchy grey fur, long ears, and buck teeth. It wasn't their appearance that troubled the doctor. This particular transgenic combination had been decidedly unstable, and Roberts had warned Perkins and the Board that he might be unable to suppress some of the less desirable characteristics. He'd been right. Specimen C was mating, violently, with Specimen E. Specimen D was cannibalizing Specimen G. Specimens F and H seemed to be doing a little of both. Shrieks of animal lust and agony could be heard the second the sheet was removed. Perkins began to yell. "Kill the audio, damn it!"

The entire focus group bolted for the door within seconds.

"What's the matter with you guys?"

"I'm calling the police!"

"You people are monsters!"

"We're going to sue!"

And they were gone. Perkins seemed to shrink. His face red, he turned to Roberts. "What the hell. You promised me ..."

"I didn't promise you anything" groaned the Doctor, reaching once more for his flask. "I warned you this could happen and I told you we needed to take them back to formula. No one listened."

"Dammit!" Perkins strode over to the wall and touched a button on the intercom. "Sally, dear?"

"Yes, sir."



“Will you please call security and have them round up the rest of the focus group? They've probably scattered around the building by now. Have them shown to their cars, and remind them that they all signed nondisclosure agreements.”

“Right away, sir.” He took his finger off the button.

“Shall we scrap the project?” asked Roberts.

“Hell no. We're in too deep now. If this lab gets its funding pulled we'll never recover. We sink or swim together, Doctor.” He sighed. “Take them back to formula. All of them. And get rid of this batch.”

Roberts nodded, regretfully. “Yes, sir.”

Perkins headed for the door. “One more thing.”

“Yes?”

“That hairy pig thing you tried to joke about. Are we actually working on that?”

“No, sir.”

“Why the hell not? Seems like it could be a money-maker. We need to have something to show for this if it all goes pear-shaped in the end. Get cracking.” And with that he left.

Resigned to his failure, but not surprised by it, Roberts and his assistants wheeled the cages back into the anteroom laboratory. They began to prep the syringes, filling them with Somulose, a common animal euthanasia agent. “Drinks later, Bill?” asked one of the technicians, his voice sympathetic but resigned.

“Sure, Jerry. Gonna need one after this.”

“Not your fault, boss.”

Roberts reached into the cage containing Specimen A and gently stroked its neck. The creature rolled onto its back obligingly, purring in delight. Roberts stuck it with the syringe. He mused that it was probably for the best. Even the adorable Specimen A had been born sterile, like all the creations now receiving Somulose injections. They had been birthed by host mothers from the gene-dominant species, in A's case, a house cat implanted with a transgenically altered embryo. None could ever have bred, or existed naturally.

*Ah well, he thought stoically, as he pushed the plunger down, back to the old drawing board. Maybe they'll let me work on those self-cooking chickens again. If I can just get the combustible compounds in the bloodstream right ...*

-----

# CHRISTINA

*by Mary E. Choo*

(Originally published in ChiZine/Chiaroscuro  
Magazine #22 Oct/Dec 2004)

They came for you that night,  
rolled you down some dreary hall  
towards a room no one should see;  
outside, the sound of wind and dark carriages;  
on the sanatorium stair, one lantern,  
held carefully distant.

They left you, lifeless, on a narrow cot  
until the doctor, pressing and prodding,  
washed his superstitious hands and spoke  
of fatal sickness; the papers signed,  
he waved you, contagious, away.

During that final ride, still  
amidst the clatter of coffin and cart,  
you couldn't tell them how you journeyed here  
by railroad, of those last bitter years  
or your longing for home.

On this strange hill,  
where rain falls, indifferent on the dead,  
you are the vanished, steeped in moss;  
yet when dawn comes  
grey as winter churches,  
and night's lost legions howl,

for you, uncharted,  
the trains.

*(from Granny's Garden)*

## THE ALL DAY SLINGERS

*by Michael Donoghue*

(Previously unpublished)

Abraham—my connection or “connect” as I’ve learned to say—pulls out the wad of Trumps from his suit jacket.

“Where my money at? Here it at.” He waves the stack of dead Presidents. “Damn near 50 thousand. Not bad for 12 hours of slinging.”

It’s more than I earn in a typical month—and twice as much as I’ve spent promoting this documentary.

Turning my back on the hotel window to stop anyone from pinpointing our location, I blink twice under my wraparound iGlasses to start the live feed. “So, Abe,” I say for the benefit of my followers, “tell me about your business.”

“Bruv, Jackie, you broadcasting?”

I nod in slow motion to keep the feed stable. Normally I give my interviewees more warning before broadcasting, but Abraham’s iShades are so big and dark, he could pass for a blind man. His dark blue suit is as bland as they come. Abe is shorter than I am, so I slouch to be on his level for the camera’s sake.

He grins and says, “Friend, you never take those off, do you? Always watching, never part of the action. That’s your whole philosophy isn’t it?”

It’s a lucky guess, but this story is about him, not me. I shrug and tilt my head to the side, knowing the iGlasses will autocorrect the angle.

Despite the long day’s work, he seems energized. “You’re lucky, you found me at the right time. ‘Cause I’m getting out of the game. That’s why I’ve been cool with you hanging with me all day.” Abe double thumps his chest with a closed fist.

Yeah, and every gangster loves to be famous. What a bozo. But—I can use him. “What can you tell us about your occupation?”

He paces back and forth in the hotel room, as he talks. “My business? Bruv. I run my business tight! Ain’t nobody else running a service as real as mine. Talking about the ‘Big C’ being delivered to all four boroughs.”

He’s overly animated. Is it excitement, or is he just too jacked on his own product? Still, it makes for good viewing, and viewing drives revenue.

“I got me shift workers working twenty-four seven. I got me people who come from nothing, ‘cause they’re hungry. Like me.”

He brings his face right up to mine and leans in. His warm sugary-smelling breath buffets my face and for a moment I wonder if he’s going to head butt me. I

stay calm. My teenage years in the UK refugee camps taught me to never show fear. He pulls back, smiles, and resumes pacing before continuing.

“Before they built the New England Super Wall, I worked four years at a Chinese call centre in Detroit. Bet you didn’t know that, did ya? It was whack-ass. Big time. At the start, they dope you up on RossetaX so you can learn Mandarin in a few weeks. On the phone you gotta pretend ye’re from Guangdong. What little off-shift time ya got you spend watching Chinese soaps and crap to make it authentic. Only way to hit your satisfaction feedback quota. Yet, like everyone, after a year I owed the company more than I made. They chargin’ housing, food, loan payments for your language ‘training.’ Screw that. I got my own business now. My own crew. I got me six former pizza drivers, they know how to work. Know what I mean?”

His whole body is jittery, it’s like he can’t stop his hands and feet from moving. Soon the search bots will flag my story to the authorities and put it in a queue for human review. For once, I’m glad the room we’re in is a cookie cutter of every chain hotel in New York, Original America. Even the two oversized suitcases on the bed and the third on the floor isn’t so unusual. So far, his language has been careful, not naming his ‘product’ in full or showing it. When the authorities do try to find us, the blandness of the room should protect us. For a little while, at least.

For the thousandth time I wish I could afford a part-time assistant or a script-bot. Right now I’d love to add a live link to the segment I did on how thirty percent of Original Americans live in hotels. What a dud that was. Didn’t even generate enough traffic to pay for lunch. But that’s how I found Abe. And this? A story that undermines the religious foundations in this enclave of what used to be part of the USA? The audience will love it, and I love the traffic.

“I got two bike couriers, I even got a girl on foot. That’s not something you see in Original America very much. A girl with a job!” He laughs and then looks at me in a way that makes me uneasy. “Course, strictly speaking there’s nothing in the original constitution about woman not being able to work. They are persons after all. But most workers here? Be like you. White and male. But they’re also supposed to adhere to a strict interpretation of the original constitution and Old Testament. Only, even the true believers crave a little pick-me-up sometimes. Others, they get a little bit shaky because they didn’t get their morning fix. It’s eight pm and they need a little coke flow to help with the workflow? I got that shit covered.”

Okay, he’s said “coke,” that’s it. This story will be flagged and bumping up the queue, but my ratings will bump too. I give in and twitch to pull up my viewing

chart. Only two million, but growing fast. Still, I can't afford to be caught here if the police, Testament Support Authority or whomever shows up.

My dad's words come back to me, "Can't understand why you'd want to return to that place. We left America for a reason. But here's my advice. Don't tell anyone your parents were Democrats, and always follow the law. You go to jail there, in some places they won't let you out until you can recite The Book of Leviticus."

Abe sits on the edge of the bed, and I crouch as he drapes one arm over his luggage. "And my crew? Works hard. Faithfully, 12-hours shifts. This is my religion. That's for real. I got so big now, just banging out the calls. I got me that app," he taps the side of his iShades, "that GoogleBus use for passenger pick-up and drops. I used to do that shit in my head, but I'm too large now, too much going on. Say you got one guy who's coming with your product, he's getting five, eight calls on his way to you from other customers. This software works out the best route to take. So he can get all the drops in while maximizing his efuel economy behaviors. 'Naw mean?"

I nod to encourage him. Wow. I'm nervous, but I try not to show it. This is turning into ratings gold. The European market is so burnt out on the grotesque spectacle of squeaky-clean Original America. Their perfectly manicured lawns, polite dark suits, clean white shirts and close-cropped hair. But street documentaries about the underbelly? My forte. Showing the muck but never being a part of it. Viewing at 8 million and climbing. Good. The rush of that endorsement, giving people what they want, drives me as much if not more than the money. Which, if the story stays in the news cycle for fifteen more minutes, will earn me enough to pay for the whole overseas trip.

"We've got everything, friend. I mean everything. And everybody's doing it. You wouldn't believe who we supply." He shrugs himself off the bed and strides around the room, like an animal in a cramped cage.

I want to ask who Abe supplies, but he's on a roll, and I don't want to break that magic. I need to leech off him for as long as possible.

"Of course, pretty much none of this is illegal in your liberal-socialist Europe, is it?"

Now he wants an answer from me. Is that smugness? "No, do you think it should be?" Golden rule: never let yourself become the subject of the story. Always keep the focus on them.

"Whatever, friend, whatever. But you wouldn't catch me in those cafes in Amsterdam, London or Paris." Yes, it is smugness. Like he's proud this clave of the former United States is "moral" even though he's profiting from subverting the

system. How can I work this in? Wait for the end and raise it then? Yeah. Do it now and he might shut down. Okay, okay, think. What's a safe question? "Is Europe where your gear comes from? Can you talk about that?"

"Shit, I don't care. Everybody knows."

Everyone in America knows. Border security is such a common topic here it's boring. European and Asian viewers however—with a twitch of my cheek I interrogate my demographic viewership. Yes, 99.2% non-American. This shouldn't affect my ratings at all. "So, Europe? The Republic of California? The New Southern Confederation is locked up pretty tight, isn't it? With the William T. Anderson Big Barrier and exclusion zone. "

"Yeah, but there's ways. There's all kinds of ways to get shit from the South. Most of it, though," and he points to the luggage, "is from Canada. It gets droned over all three borders to a rendezvous, snatched, broken down and couriered."

"Like mules?" Viewing figures at 14 million and holding. Good, but this content deserves better. Still, two a.m. in London. I might pick up a few hundred thousand views tomorrow, but I'm not seeing any viral momentum towards the front-page.

"What? Donkeys? No, couriers. The big three. Purolator, UPS and Fed Ex. Fed Ex less now, they've started popping the lids. They're criminal, just take it. But most packages get here and we sit down, break it down, bundle and label it."

"So, Abe, what would happen if you are caught?" Should I send an anonymous message to the authorities? Filming during a raid would be a massive boost. But what would the consequences be? If I ended-up offline for a month my brand would take a hit. Plus, if they fined me—that would hurt. But I also might come out ahead, depending on the ratings. What would kill me, though, would be if they confiscated my gear. My livelihood. My very expensive livelihood.

Abe gives me an odd look and seems to carefully measure out his words as he replies, "Well, that's complex, you see. Most of this shit is illegal, but not in a big way." He stands by the bed, and drums his hands fast on the lid. "It's bylaws, FDA regs and shit. You know this, right?"

"Fill me in, I don't know the details." I do, but my viewers don't. And this isn't the time, nor is Abe bright enough, for me to give him a teachable moment on how to conduct an interview.

"Really? And I had you pegged as being born here. Let's be on the real, I figured your parents were Old-American atheists. Maybe they claimed refugee status in Europe after the Original America 'One Nation Under One God' Constitutional amendment? You've got a bit of that hungry look. But you're not

feeling that, huh? Maybe Florida, before the floods took it. Or am I right, right? Shit, you just want me to be explaining things for your foreign viewers.”

He cracks a wide smile that seems to fill the room and the screen, but it just makes me feel ill. He guessed right, but he’s still the idiot dealer walking a dangerous tightrope.

“Well, the biggest stick I face isn’t the laws, but the whack-ass society belief it’s immoral. Today, you gotta walk the straight and narrow path. Zero tolerance. You don’t keep to the spirit of the un-amended Constitution and the Old Testament, no reverend recommend. And without a clerical recommend you can’t get shit for a job, dog. That’s how it is in Original America society.”

The momentum has stopped and my total figures are starting to soften at 13 million. Those wasted few seconds he spent talking about me distracted people. Distraction bleeds viewers. My gut churns, I need a bump. Time to go nuclear.

“So Abe, are you against the Old Testament beliefs and the values in the original non-amended Constitution?” This will be my ratings gift. He’s got to say yes, how can he not? Given his job, what he does. If he’s leaving the business, he’s probably also leaving the country, so what does he care? He’ll be out of reach of the enforcers of this theocracy. It’s a few words, often heard outside of this geographical patch, but so rare within them. This is going to be my rating gold. This will shoot me to the top. This will pay bills for a year. I hold my breath.

“Against the literal interruption of the Word of God or what the Founding Fathers wrote? Fuck no! Without that I wouldn’t have a business. The Testament Support Authority is my savior.” Abe pats his suit where his money bulges. “Hallelujah! There’s nothing like making something forbidden to make it desirable.” And he winks, actually winks, at my iGlasses.

Crap. My body slumps into itself. Humor makes the audience laugh, but I can see it also punctuates their attention span. I’m down to 10 million. Let’s try my second best prime-time question. Nuts and bolts. “So, what’s your list of products? What exactly do you sell, Abe?”

He grins and grabs the zipper of the nearest suitcase, opening it like a jeweler might display a tray of engagement rings. “Ain’t nobody out there running a service like mine. I got it all. I got your Earl Grey, your Nescafe, your black tea, your green tea and even white tea. Bruv,” he slaps three foam-coated cans. “Got your Pepsi and Coke too, ‘course. Best seller.” Abe opens up his second case with a showman’s flair and runs his fingers over the glassy smooth curves of the distinctive shaped bottle inside. “This, is Mexican Coke. Made with real cane sugar. None of the fructose crap. Goes for \$100 a fluid ounce. But, for the real

connoisseur, looking for the biggest bang for their buck? Check this out.”

Abe gets down on his hands and knees beside the bed and from under it pulls out a square carbonfiber case. It’s similar to the one I store my iGlasses in, but much larger. He pops the latches and nestled in nanofoam are ten rod shapes. “This is some primo Red Bull. Shit like this is the bomb, friend, the bomb. Goes for \$500 a fluid ounce.”

Viewing figures at seven million and now holding. What he’s giving me now is good, this could have been the magic bump, but I’ve timed it wrong. I’m an idiot. Why didn’t I ask this earlier? How caffeine is seen not as a little disobedience in Original America, but as a springboard to disease, broken homes, immorality, disloyalty to God, physical death, and the death of Old America’s eternal interests? A steady seven million. It’s okay, stupid, stupid me. I’ve hemorrhaged too many viewers to regain the momentum now.

“This,” Abe pulls out one of the cans like he was removing a Swedish house’s nuclear fuel rod, “for my customers, for their money, this is like you doing a report on someone who says they disagree with the Old Testament and the unAmended Constitution. Pure gold.”

My eyebrows unintentionally rise, briefly taking the shot out of focus. “What do you mean?”

“What do you think I mean, dog? Just study it out. We’re both the same, you and me. We feed an audience. We meet a need. We’re both hungry, we’re both willing to go the extra mile.”

Maybe he’s right on some things, but I’ve always heeded my father’s advice, always obey the laws where you are. Be a watcher, not a participant. He’s a drug dealer, but I can’t tell him that. Golden rule...

“Only I figure I’m smarter than you. You’re already taking more risk for less profit. It don’t make sense. Shit, friend, first time I got get, they took away all my product, put a bad mark against my name. Second time, same and a million-dollar fine. Ha! Slap on the wrists is all. What does that mean to me? I can’t get a straight job. Boo-hoo. Damn, bruv, you get got doing what ya doing, and they’ll take away your spendy iGlasses. That’ll be the end for you. Doesn’t make sense is all.”

Is he right? He might be right. But ...

Abe stands beside me now and drapes an arm around my shoulder. “You might want to turn off your camera now. Besides,” he taps the sides of his iShades, “your viewing figures are down to four now. Much less and you’re going to be paying money for bandwidth that’s not touched.”



A slow blink cuts the feed.

“My crew,” Abe lets me go and shrugs, “they’re good; well, you’ve met them. Soldiers is all. They ain’t that smart. I need someone who knows the business of giving people what they desire, is willing to take risks, someone who can lead and maybe is a little hungry. My crew, they don’t understand the marketing strategy of creating and meeting consumer need.”

“I don’t understand.” I feel numb.

“I’ve been got twice, third time is jail tho. Naw mean? The system is fucked up. And the system ain’t got nothing to do with religion or Constitutional belief. What we’re living in now? This is a perversion of old doctrines used as a framework for societal control. Feel me? The people running this country don’t worship the cross any more than the flag. Their god is power and wealth. So, for me, it’s time to retire. You know, pass on the torch to someone else. That’s why I agreed to do your segment. Not so you could interview me, but so I could interview you. For a position. Chief Operations Officer. Or a franchise owner, or whatever you want to call it. I’m going to hand over my legacy—how it’s supposed to be done—to someone who can be on the real.”

Nothing he says is making any sense.

“Get that blank look off your face. Come on, you seen how I run. I know you seen the money. I’ve given you the floor plans. This isn’t hard. You sell your channel. It’s small, but it’s worth ten million for brand recognition. Your camera, couple of mill. Plus you must have some savings, your credit rating is good – I checked. Come up fifteen and pay me with a legit transfer. You take over, kickback 30 percent of your profit to me for time immemorial, and this shit is all yours.”

“I’m not like you.” I can’t be.

He laughs, a big laugh from deep down. “You’re like me, brother. You already spend all day slinging. Only for less money and more risk. You in?”

And, for the first time in a long while, I take my iGlasses off.

-----



CSFFA, the Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy Association, is the legally registered society responsible for the Aurora Awards, Canada’s equivalent of the Hugos. You can become a member for only \$10. This will entitle you to suggest nominees, select nominees, and vote for the winners in multiple categories for the 2017 awards. Check CSFFA out, including the latest news, updates, and newsletters:

at the < [Aurora Awards Website](#) >

## THE GIST OF IT

*by Richard Stevenson*

(Previously unpublished)

O.K., so here's the deal:  
we're a hybrid species  
who don't clean up our feces.

The E.T.s are givin' Sasquatch a lift  
from wormhole to wormhole  
and droppin' 'im off in wilderness spots.

We got chupacabras suckin' blood and slime,  
plesiosaurs tryin' to please us  
when they aren't givin' us the flipper.

We've got leprechauns, reptoids, greys  
doin' magic trips and time slips,  
flippin' around like fish on a dock.

We got saucers clockin' in  
at unfeasible speeds, carryin' untold  
species hither, thither, and yon –

or maybe they're just winkin' at us,  
playin' tiddly winks with other dimensions  
than the four we flounder in.

Ain't evil. Ain't no sin happenin'  
Ain't Satan pullin' another mask  
off Morrison's wall, walkin' down the hall...

It's just pop culture mythos.  
It don't give a toss if we get it  
or change or re-arrange it, eh, Bob?

Just jack in with an i-Poddy grin.  
If Mothman stops to mock you,  
give 'im a Bronx cheer. Yer clear...

Gotta lotta muckin' a lotta stalls  
before the aliens come up with a model  
of us that works, that's for sure!

Eventually, these alien dudes will  
invite us into some Intergalactic Federation.  
Won't be some pointy-eared logician takin' tickets.

What their mission is don't matter  
if we can't get from saucer to platter...  
We need more RAM, now, brown cow.

-----



Photo taken by Casey J. Wolf.

## MES CENTAINE

*by Jonathon Cresswell-Jones*

(Previously unpublished)

It is late evening twilight at the edge of the open field. Overhead, a bright dot slips across the wine-dark sky. It is part of the Trianon Planetary Orbital Defences raised by the high lords of Cordeba, who conquered us so long ago that only I among the four here can recall it.

Patrice helps me out of the groundcar, and Marie-Claire hands me my cane. In times past I could have come here alone; this year, I must instead have help from this stocky, blond lad and this wiry, fierce-eyed young girl.

There might be a camera nearby. They are everywhere, it seems. But if one sees us here, all they see are three youths and an elder in a field the old man owns—once owned—on an errand like a million others. Curfews are needless when cameras can see in the night as well as day, and when so many of our people must work three shifts to prop up the strained economy.

Luc remains sullenly in the car until Patrice leans in and nudges him; then he slaps the panel to engage the car's controls and hops out. We turn to the lush, softly waving field, and the car rolls away to where it is needed next, its machine intelligence steering it along the known lines of the roadway. Like our society under the Cordebans, for the car, what is not known is not real.

There are no war monuments on Trianon. There was no war, only a Liberation; war is not known in the official histories, and therefore, it is not real.

There are no war graves either. Those who fell defending Trianon do not exist, have never existed. Oh, the Cordebans rescued survivors from the battles, true. But they did not do this for charity; they wish to seem legitimate in the sight of other worlds whose indulgence they need. The dead were left to drift in space, or destroyed along with other debris when collision threatened. Their names have been erased from the military and government archives. They are unknown, they are unreal.

Our world's ownership was taken from us by conquest. It is hard, yes, but somehow it seems only fair in a harsh universe. To take our history, too, though – that is wrong.

Night comes quickly at these latitudes, but it is still light enough to see my companions. They are all so very young. Their faces show everything.

Marie-Claire was five when the Cordy trooper at the peaceful protest used his

stunner as a club instead of a “non-lethal riot-control device.” When she hears the Spanglish accent, or sees a Cordy uniform, all she really sees is the weapon’s stock as it breaks her mother’s jaw. If her rage does not consume her or drive her to a stupid mistake, it may make her a patriot yet.

Patrice is already a patriot at twelve Midsummers, or thinks he is. He knows what he fights against; and yet he is so focused on the impossible, beautiful goal of driving these occupiers from our world that he sometimes loses sight of what it is he would fight *for*.

Luc is the unknown. He is strong-willed enough to loathe the Cordebans who lie to him and swagger through his street, but that strength also bridles at the teachings of his own people as well. At least he has come here, if unwillingly.

They are not slaves as such, and they do not toil in mines or fields. (My own fields are still cropped by machines, although their yield now goes to feed useless Vassal mouths on Cordeba instead of being sold in markets.) To serve Cordeba, they must be educated at least to some extent. Their teachers sometimes try to slip a strand of truth into the massive lie they must braid. Teachers are the most carefully watched of all, though. The Cordebans know that if they prune and twist the sapling as it grows, they may shape the tree as they wish ... Now I turn to these three, and clear my throat, and try to shape something in my own small turn.

When the assault began –

–The Liberation, sneers Patrice.

Yes, so they call it. Did I fight then? No. These are not the times when a populace takes arms against another. Machines make the war, and the Cordebans had more and stronger of them; it was as simple as that. Without courage, without will, there would be no war, true; but it is the machines that win it. Not one in a hundred of us fought.

And after the planet fell, then was I a resistance fighter? Oh, you will find many who boast *they* were, although the closer they come to any who did fight, the less they speak, until they fall silent altogether. Few did. The Cordebans' ships controlled our skies, and the merest patrol who walked our streets could call down the wrath of gods against any attack. A sniper in a building died in its rubble. A mob was swept away like ... No. I did not fight then.

I fight now, but differently.

We should be gathered in our cities for this, all of us. But the cameras and computers would sound alarms as we formed groups, congregations, crowds. Mobs. That is how they would see us, our rulers. The journalists and Observers

from other worlds would nod sagely, as the stunners and sleep-gas cut us down and social order was maintained. There is blood shed when lives are taken, but there is none when beliefs are.

We should have books, records, proclamations. But there are none. When the occupation began, the data banks were wiped and filled with Cordeban propaganda, while tailored viruses hunted down “illicit information.” The pulse-of-electromagnetism—yes, so, from the battles. It ruined much of the civilian data storage, and they re-made what was left in their own image.

–Is this about the battles, then? asks Luc suddenly.

He is so nearly correct that I turn to him; his eyes still slip away from mine, though.

Not any battle, but one. The orbital fortress that controlled Trianon’s defences, their keystone, was known to us as Vimy. It held out against the entire invading task force for six days, while machine tore at machine and the skies blazed at night.

In the end, of course, it fell, and Trianon with it. Yet it could not *fall*. Instead, the terrible weapons that at last tore the fortress apart sent its fragments adrift in space forever. I do not understand these things, but they tell me that the cloud of debris follows its own path around our sun, and that once every six Midsummers it meets with our world’s path. In past times, people walked to graveyards to make their remembrances. We fly through ours. It comes to meet us like the comets of old.

Stars are appearing now, constellations Old Earth never knew, as though the cool evening wind is drifting them across the sky. The Seine first, as always; then the Legion’s scattered soldiers take their posts. More and more, the sky filling with them, unchanged from the years before Cordeba attacked and somehow comforting for that.

It is time.

I am ready. I lean on my cane two-handed; it will be tiring; still, I must stand to do this thing, not sit.

–There! cries Marie-Claire, and points. A needle-streak of light scribes the sky, only visible for a few moments. My voice is an old man’s croak at times, but now it is not my voice, it is Trianon’s, and it seems to ring out across the fields that will never receive their dead.

*Lucas Robert Case. Maintenance technician first class. Age twenty-four. Provence.*

It was six Midsummers ago that I last did this, yet the names are there, as

they will be until I join them. My companions' young, sharp eyes scan the sky.

–There!

*Valerie Chaffee. Logistics clerk. Age twenty-two. Petit-Trianon.*

Vimy had a garrison of one thousand nine hundred and forty-six. There were one hundred and twenty-four survivors that the Cordebans eventually returned to us. The rest are gone.

But one hundred of them are remembered here tonight, a name and a birthplace for each dart of light in the sky.

–There.

*Safwah Charikar. Sub-lieutenant. Age twenty-nine. New Brittany.*

Rock and ice, metal and plastic—even breath and bone. The Cordebans can seek out and stop large pieces, small chunks—indeed they must, to protect the craft that lift the wealth from Trianon's surface and haul it away to their worlds. But the dust of history still abides, and even a grain of metal striking the atmosphere is enough to mark a memory.

–There, and there!

*Marie Colville. Ordnance technician second class, age thirty-three. Seneciale.*

*Martin Colville, ordnance technician third class, age twenty-five, Seneciale.*

Two streaks not five seconds apart. How fitting. Marie joined the navy half to protect her younger brother, they said, and was alongside him at their end, and is alongside him now. When I first learned my hundred names, so many Midsummers ago, I sought out some of those who knew them and asked many questions, and so I know some of them almost as friends.

There are many of us across Trianon, each having memorized one hundred names of their own from a tattered scroll of paper long since gone. As night sweeps around the world, and the world itself sweeps through the dust, innocent errands are everywhere taking place, and a thousand young people, like my three here, look up at the sky, and they hear and know and *feel* their history.

–There.

*Philippe Richard Colville. Electronics technician second class. Age twenty-one.*

*Moncassin.* He was not related directly to the others; the Colville name came with the first colony ship, and so many carry it now.

It takes time. All things do. One, or two, or three glints each minute, over perhaps an hour. It is as well—am I a computer, to spout information in a torrent? But until the Cordebans learn to peer into every mind—God willing, they never will, *no one* ever will—they cannot erase this part of our heritage.

Time will do so, of course. I do not know how many more times I can do this—

perhaps this is the last. And so I watch their upturned faces, fading into the darkness, as they watch the sky ... There.

*Simone Marie Colville. Laser gunner. Age twenty-one. Seville.*

Patrice's features are set and still. This only reinforces his desire to drive away the Cordebans. Marie-Claire is weeping bitterly.

–I would burn them all like these meteors, she hisses. Her tears cloud her vision like her hate, and the other two must look for her.

Luc's face is unreadable. Still, it is he that I watch the most closely. There.  
*Toussaint Cote. Small craft pilot. Age thirty-eight. New Brittany.*

And so the names roll on, for a standard hour and more, until the sky is a velvet black save for the glow above New Brittany nearby, and the hundred, *my* hundred, are remembered. The streaks of light continue their march, and others must mark them now.

The hand light winks on, and our focus shifts dizzyingly, from eternity to a circle of trampled wheat and guttering shadows. My legs quiver and one hip burns, but I have not failed to complete the roll this time. Yet I look at my companion's faces and wonder, have I failed in another way? They must see: I cannot be certain of being here in another six Midsummers. It has always seemed wrong for me to ask, though.

Patrice thanks me, his voice that only broke last year steady in renewed determination. Then he turns away to key his comm and summon another ground car. Marie-Claire stares across the pitch-dark field that she cannot see, her hands working at her sides.

Luc's face is lowered toward the soil that I tilled for half my life, and his hand grips his neck. Then he raises his head to meet my eyes.

–Sir ... And for once, his tone carries the word as it was meant to be carried. –  
Could you teach me those names?

I will *not* embarrass him by embracing him. But how I would like to ... Yes, I shall. I shall.

Empires end, tyrannies fall. We cannot throw off the Cordebans ourselves, but we can preserve a part of what we are until they overreach themselves and *someone* crushes them.

Whoever you are, whenever you come, we will have our story to tell you.

-----



## SPINNER IN SINGULARITIES

*by Matt Moore*

(Previously unpublished)

Bring me a plenitude of stars  
And scatter them across my table top  
For I will assemble my worlds  
To set spinning in madly tumbling chaos

Let shadows play across these millions spheres  
And give rise to ancient gods  
Battling in unfathomable rivalries  
While beneath their gaze mortals work dusty soil

And we pranksters spin these cycles  
Of fiery birth and slow cooling death  
Out beyond the dark and cold abyss  
Playing our game without ever knowing its rules

And I will spill my stars anew  
To replay and rearrange  
Until others arise  
To take my place  
As makers of gods  
And myth

## TRIAL IN ERROR

*by Holly Schofield*

(Originally published in *Aurora Wolf*)

“You've got the wrong man!” I jumped to my feet in the prisoner’s box, feeling like the wronged innocent in every Western every made. The courthouse scene was accurate in every detail, right down to the wooden gavel clutched in the judge's fist—if you ignored that the judge was dusky purple, over two meters tall, and massed more than three Terrans.

“Silence, human!” The gavel banged down and the Patril judge frowned at me, flicking his orange tongue over his fangs.

The gallery, consisting of several dozen local Patrils and one lone smirking human, murmured in a deep rumble that was too low for my universal translator to pick up. The nearest Patril, a lumpy hat perched on one horn, sniggered. His bandana caught the drool nicely. Beside him, an old madam, her scarlet dress containing enough material to cover a blimp, snapped her beak in excitement. Next to her, a violet-colored Patril in a red-and-white gingham dress winked at me, her nictitating membrane catching the light. She was svelte and slender, in the way a garbage scow looks when it’s parked beside a transport ship, and I could tell she was ovulating by the sweat on her bony brow ridge.

“There's the real murderer!” I pointed dramatically across the courtroom to the only other Terran in the room—Wilmott, the mine foreman, seated complacently in the first row of the gallery. My hair brushed against my shoulders as I turned—being in stasis for eight standard years meant it was uncomfortably long.

Wilmott shook his head equally dramatically, his own shoulder-length brown hair tossing back and forth. His blue eyes seared into mine. It was almost like looking into a blurry mirror, except for the sneer on his face—right down to the similar cheekbones and narrow jaw. Sheer chance, but just my luck. If humans could barely tell us apart, how could Patrils?

\*\*\*

I’d staggered off the ship yesterday, the lone passenger debarking at this station at the wrong end of the galaxy. The Long Sleep drugs had still covered me like a warm fuzzy blanket when Wilmott had greeted me by pressing the handle of a mining blaster into my hand. I’d clutched at it while my fogged mind tried to recall from the vids if that was a typical Old West welcome. Seconds later, a posse

of Patrils swooped onto the landing pad, threw me over the back of a horse, and rushed me off to the county jail.

Okay, it wasn't a horse and it wasn't a county. But a jail is a jail on any planet. As a forensic accountant, I'd seen a few jails in my time. All from the other side of the locked door—until now.

I'd hardly scratched the sleep out of my hair the next day when a Patril, a star pinned to his brownish-purple hide, again threw me onto the back of the local horse-equivalent—a huge all-terrain vehicle that could fit several Terran rhinos—and hauled me down Main Street. It was my first glimpse of the little mining town, which existed only to harvest the iridium-flecked bones of Patrilia's extinct giant reptiles. Their current fad, or trend, or—as I thought of it—godawful silly mania, meant the Patrils had named the bone dust “Gohld”. I'd only had a chance to glimpse the huge pits and sluicing equipment that dominated the hills to the east of Main Street before I was hustled off the ATV and into the courthouse.

I smacked my head, trying to clear the cobwebs and focus on my trial. The judge's tiny yellow eyes had just finished glaring at me for my outburst. Patrils never did anything quickly.

“Your honor, I can prove it!” I had his attention, finally.

I'd skipped all but the first this-is-your-planet vids during Long Sleep and just cherry-picked the acclimatization suggestions, settling on watching the most interesting of the old 2D, twentieth-century Western “movies.” By the final year of travel, I'd branched off into whodunits and thrillers. They'd sure made some good vids back then.

I had to spell it out clearly to them. I gestured slowly. “The dead body before you has a hole in his chest, right?”

The unfortunate deceased human, who worked in the mining office and went by the even more unfortunate name of Flunky, lay before us in an ill-fitting black suit. The label marked “Exhibit A” stuck on his forehead, combined with the charred skin at his neck, did nothing to enhance his appearance.

“No, sirrah, I do not see that. I see many burn marks upon his carcass.” The judge peered nearsightedly at poor Flunky. “He was shot, need I remind you, with ‘Exhibit B’, the mining blaster. With *your* fingerprints on it!” He raised his gavel slowly, in sync with his brow ridge. He was about to render a verdict.

Patrils were an odd duck among the Alliance species. They latched on to a human cultural theme every few decades and converted their own reality to reflect it. Terran exobiologists called it “Patril Human Literally Executed Genre Mimicry” or PHLEGM for short. When the Terran mining company, Goodas Gohld Ltd,

negotiated rights, the Patrils had insisted on a clause that Terrans must abide by the local laws, whatever they might currently be. My contract with Goodas to investigate reported embezzlement held me to that as well, which hadn't seemed a problem at the time. A huge fee went a long way to justifying eight years of my life in Long Sleep.

Flunky must have found Wilmott cooking the books. Wilmott had shot him with his own gun, one of very few on the planet, then burned him with a common mining blaster. Framing me, a similar-featured Terran, had been Wilmott's final step.

"Humans are frailer than Patrils," I said, hastily. If only I could make the judge *listen* hastily. "We die from the smallest punctures, even a tiny bullet—"

"Self-deprecating criticism is not within the Code of the West, need I remind the prisoner." The judge curled a lip. The Code was here to stay. Until it changed, of course.

"What a pack of lies. He did it. Hang him!" Wilmott's voice rang out, echoed by his universal translator, and he jumped to his feet and waved his white hat. If this were a real western, it would have been black.

Wilmott's leather vest swung open, revealing a small handgun strapped to his waist. He started, quickly pulled his vest shut with both hands, and sat down.

"There's the six-shooter he used!" I yelled in desperation, pointing. "Did you all see it? He shot Flunky!"

Wilmott looked panicked and leapt for the door. He must have more faith in proper firearm forensics testing in this backwater than I did. And in the Patrils' reflexes. Most were still turning towards him, still in reaction to his shout.

I jumped out of the prisoner box and ran after him down the courthouse aisle, shedding the overly-large handcuffs as I ran. Good thing Patril wrists are as big as my thigh. I grabbed the mining blaster from the exhibit table as I dashed by and shoved it in my pants.

We both erupted on the empty, dusty Main Street. The Patrils would be just rising to their feet in the courthouse. Not the swiftest of folks, but they sure could operate a mine. The supplies of Gohld had tripled Goodas' fortunes, and Wilmott had wanted a piece of it. I was certain of that, now.

"You're the embezzler!" I yelled, as I followed him down Main Street, feeling dizzy. The sleep drugs should have left me by now. An odd double-shadow by the general store caught my eye and I remembered that Patrilia was in a binary system. Two suns, two shadows. My brain couldn't adjust.

A flock of cravens, black birds with sheepish looks, fled behind the saloon roof. My universal translator picked up their terrified calls of “Flee, flee.”

Wilmott stopped, framing himself perfectly under the clock tower at the end of the street. The clock flashed “12:00” over and over. Must need resetting or, oh duh, got it—the Patrils want it to be permanently high noon.

Wilmott smiled, his face shaded twice by his pale, wide-brimmed hat. He drew his gun, twirled it, and re-holstered it. The man must have watched almost as many vids as I had.

I hitched up my belt, the blaster having dragged my pants’ crotch almost to my knees, and paused several dozen meters from Wilmott. Now what? Twirling the heavy blaster might give me street cred but I didn't want to chance spraining a wrist.

Dozens of Patrils lumbered out the courthouse door and hunkered on the wooden sidewalks that bordered the street. I knew the Code of the West was about to be played out. Fittingly, a tumbleweed rattled past me in a sudden gritty gust of wind. A watching magenta-hued Patril, all leather coat and spurs, stepped to the side, letting it swoosh past and lodge itself against the saloon wall.

“I need a hat to do this right,” I called to the crowd. Stalling was all I could think to do.

The same violet-shaded Patril female who had winked at me in the courthouse tossed me a white Stetson. At closer look, her checkered dress was not gingham but some inappropriately-glossy fabric, borderline Taboo. I put the hat on and canted it down over my eyes. Might as well go out in style.

“Wilmott, you kill me and Alliance cops will come and get you,” I called.

“Yeah, in eight years or so,” he said, grinning. “By then, I’ll be *running* Goodas Gohld.”

“So you admit killing Flunky?”

“I admit nothing. I’m saying Flunky embezzled the funds and you blasted him. With your fingerprints on the blaster, it’s pretty cut and dried. Face it, jocko, you’re screwed.”

“Proper Old West lingo, gents, if you please.” The Judge waved a four-fingered hand from where he was perched on a horse trough. “Three ounces of Gohld in fines if you don’t.”

Wilmott twirled his gun twice more and grinned. He was enjoying this.

“If the blaster can kill a human, then why aren't you afraid?” I drew it slowly and pointed it at him. Darned thing was really heavy. It wavered wildly in my hands and the crowd snickered.

I braced it with both hands, aimed, and fired. A plume of dust arced out several meters in front and to the left of Wilmott. As I'd suspected, the beam was too wide and too weak to actually kill anyone.

"You couldn't hit a brown door," he said and chuckled.

"That's 'barn' door," I corrected. I'd been paying attention to the old vids. And to the section on botany in the planetary welcome vid as well. I edged closer to the tumbleweed and winked at the violet-colored girl. She watched with interest. Beside her, a wrinkled Patril in a flowered hat frowned and spat out through her horny beak, "Annabelle, you are pushing the boundaries once agin. Come away, girl."

Annabelle smiled and took a half-step closer to me, swaying her massive hips so hard her handbag knocked against the porch post. The elderly Patril's response was garbled by the universal translator but I figured I knew curse words when I heard them.

The Code of the West that the Patrils currently endorsed was all that remained of a prehistoric survival trait. The extinct reptiles, whose bones were now in such hot demand, had preyed on the ponderously-slow Patrils, hundreds of thousands of years ago. In defence, they had developed a chameleon-like mimicry of which little remained except an urge to copy other cultures as if they were their own. Since the famous incident a hundred years ago, when mimicking the sea slugs of Gliese 581g had caused thousands of Patrils to die in their bathtubs, they had chosen to work their way through the safer human sub-cultures. At least, the Old West scenario wasn't as bad as the last mimicry they'd done: everyone sporting big puffy hair and shoulder pads, chewing gum, and listening to a type of loud discordant music called "glam rock." I'd seen a news vid of it, a decade ago. Scary stuff.

\*\*\*

"Be a gentleman," I told Wilmott. "Give me a fighting chance. I'm going to prop the laser on the saloon porch and try again. Then it'll be your turn." Suiting my actions to my words, I stepped up on the boardwalk, smacked the cumbersome barrel down on the railing, and positioned my feet near the tumbleweed. The nearby Patrils nodded in agreement at my suggestion. They would defend to the death my right to apply the Code of the West. My death, that is.

"Just going to scratch my ankle," I said, carefully casual. "It's good luck in my Terran sub-sub-sub-culture." I reached a hand down, keeping my eyes on Wilmott. His hand twitched towards his gun but a rumble from the Patrils closest

to him made him replace his hand on his hip. I heard Annabelle's shiny dress rustle behind me and a piece of soft material touched my hand.

"Use this handkerchief," she whispered in a deep bass. "Your Terran skin bein' so delicate and all."

The elderly Patril fainted dead away and the other Patrils nearby stirred dangerously. Their reptilian hind-brains were telling them Annabelle's violation of the Code of the West endangered them all. I knew that the Old West scenario had been around long enough to be thoroughly entrenched in the watching Patrils, especially the older generation. Some exobiologists, in fact, believed the Patrils were overdue for a change to a different sub-culture.

I whispered my thanks. An ally in an unlikely place. How like a Western. I grabbed the tumbleweed in my cloth-wrapped hand and lobbed it towards Wilmott. It soared through the air and hit him in the chest. Just like the welcome vid had warned, it spontaneously combusted on impact. Flames burst and he smacked at his chest, dropped, and rolled frantically in the dust.

While the crowd cheered, the burly puce-colored Sheriff plodded over and hauled the singed-but-unhurt Wilmott to his feet. He pointed at Wilmott's hat, now appropriately blackened, and then called over to the Judge. "A sure sign that justice is done, eh?"

The judge nodded sagely and began tramping back to the courthouse.

This must be the point where I ride off into the sunset. I looked around for an ATV. As pseudo-horses, they were kept unlocked and keyed to anyone.

A scuffling noise behind me. "Let me go," Annabelle warbled, an octave or two below middle C. Her arm was in the grip of a deputy with a fake waxed mustache a half-meter wide.

"I charge you with violating current mimicry protocol, with Taboo Violation!" he said through mustache hairs that trembled like twigs in a breeze. The crowd gasped. The penalty, I knew from the welcome vid, was death.

The judge turned on a heel, which took several seconds, and lumbered closer. "Aiding and Abetting during a Shootout," he nodded, the capital letters evident. "Annabelle, dear, you've been walking a fine line lately. The handkerchief was over the top."

This *planet* was over the top.

I dashed past the lumbering Patrils to the nearest ATV, hollering for Annabelle to follow. I jumped in the driver's seat and held on as she wrenched free from the deputy and leaped in beside me. The vehicle rocked but didn't tip.

I barrelled the ATV through the angry mob and out of town. After a few kilometers, my heart rate slowed. One of the suns was just touching the horizon. I'd escaped into the setting sun. And a girl was beside me. Just like in the best vids. I adjusted my Stetson and gave a happy sigh.

Annabelle leaned towards me as I muscled the wheel down the rutted track, her buzzard breath hot on my earlobe. I tried not to inhale as I spoke. "Sorry for the rough ride. Don't know about you but my brains feel shaken!"

"Shaken? Not stirred?" She opened her handbag on her satiny lap and drew out an empty martini glass and a lethal-looking handgun: an anachronistic Walther PPK from 1955 Terra.

She waved them at me and her laugh shook the ATV like a ball of thunder.

I joined in, chuckling and shaking my head. The next fad wasn't overdue.

It was already here.

Annabelle snuggled closer, crushing me against the door and making me swerve all over the road.

"Well, my dear, there's no 'bond' strong enough to keep us on this planet any longer." I spied the spaceport in the distance and aimed the ATV straight toward it.

-----



The Club House is a fanzine review column, sometimes devoted to other SF&F topics, which appears almost every Friday in Amazing Stories Magazine online. The editor of Polar Borealis has written over 100 of the darn things since 2013. You can find them here:

<http://amazingstoriesmag.com/author/r-graeme-cameron/>

And the even more prolific Amazing Stories columnist Steve Fahnestalk can be found here:

<http://amazingstoriesmag.com/author/stevefah/>



## GRIT

*by Marcie Lynn Tentchoff*

(Previously unpublished)

They came back six months after,  
their ships descending from the sky  
in angry swarms. They ventured out,  
their breath held fast against  
the poisons of our atmosphere,  
their weapons raised to deal  
with any perceived threat.  
They checked the herds, and  
singled out their chosen few,  
those folk with their distended guts,  
imbedded with the strangers' sand --  
they slashed and tore,  
and claimed their pearls,  
and then, still swarm like,  
they were gone, and we were left  
behind to weep, and mourn  
for those they'd come to reap --  
then wait for the next crop to grow.

# CONVERSATIONS WITH FOUR WALLS

*by Sylvia Son*

(Previously unpublished)

The first thing that greeted the young woman every time she entered the foyer of the mansion was a wall sized portrait painting of Sir George Cashel looming over his manor with an aristocratic indifference. The artist had painted Cashel sitting in the library and dressed in his military uniform with his hand perched on his sword's pommel. Underneath the portrait was a plaque with the inscription:

“When there is no room in Heaven and in Hell, I will provide a place for the lost souls here.”

Daisy almost ruined the gravitas of the place by snorting at those words.

If he only knew how true that was, she thought miserably.

The afternoon shift supervisor looked down his watch just as the young woman walked over to the visiting booth. Yep. 9:45 am. Right on schedule. She always showed up just as he started his first floor checks. If his watch broke he could time his shift to her arrival.

“Morning, Daisy.”

“Morning, Andy.” She walked up to the desk and signed the visitor log.

“Going to see your parents again?”

“Uh huh.”

“Whelp,” he pushed himself off his chair. “I have to do my rounds now. Tell them I said, ‘hi’.”

“Will do,” she waved and walked to the stairs to the second floor of the west wing of the mansion.

Daisy jogged up the stairs to the second floor. She walked past each room, noting their doors were wide open. She barely glanced at the room that had streaks of bloody handprints on the wall, or the room that was lined from floor to ceiling with small irregularly shaped holes on the walls and if you stood too close small fingers would poke out and wiggle at you. After the fifth visit she barely reacted to them anymore. These rooms did not have what she was looking for.

Daisy had no problem finding where her parents were. It was the last one down the hall. Not a lot liked going to this section because of how crowded and noisy it was. But tenants like her parents didn't have much choice.

The day after Daisy's parents were finally buried in the ground, she thought she was free of them. Free of their judging and controlling. Totally free. Instead

she received a call.

“Hello?” she said.

“Hello, you don’t know me, but your parents want to speak to you.”

“Very funny; my parents are dead.”

“I know. They’re waiting for you at Cashel House. Don’t be late.” There was a long pause. “Invitation from Cashel House is voluntary and you don’t have to show up. But if you know what’s good for you, you will.”

Daisy hung up and didn’t bother to think about the call and tried to forget. They couldn’t make her. She caved in after the fifth call.

At first she walked briskly and purposefully but as she got closer she slowed down and then stopped a few feet from the door.

This was never easy for her. Every time she came she immediately regretted the experience because no matter what she did, they made her feel five again and her ability to speak for herself slipped away and she lost the battle before she could start.

Maybe it was for the best to turn around and leave and never come back. It would save herself a lot of heartache and pain.

No. She wasn’t going to let them do that to her again and win. She was an adult now and free from their hold. She was owed one last conversation, some closure, even though they seemed to want to drag this out longer than necessary. Taking a deep breath, she exhaled and lightly smacked herself in the face to focus her mind for the ordeal. They couldn’t hurt her anymore.

I can leave, she kept telling herself. I can leave and never come back. They can’t stop me this time.

She poked her head past the edge of the doorway. The room was exactly the way she remembered it. Empty. The eggshell white room was denuded of furniture and curtains. Any items that could be used to hit or strangle visitors had been taken away.

In spite of the emptiness a low hissing whisper filled the room in swirls and spirals. Daisy cleared her throat.

“Uh, hello there.”

The hissing stopped as soon as Daisy spoke, then made one last choke and sucked itself back into the walls and the room became completely soundless.

She dragged her feet through the door but her hand still clung to the frame with the tips of her fingers.

Keep moving, she thought. You can do this.

Even though the walls were painted all the same colour, they were different

from each other. The wall on the left, the west wall, was warm, almost hot, to the touch.

The wall on the right, the east wall, was smooth and slick, was like touching glass. And the wall of the south where the door was had a low vibration to the touch.

She moved to the north wall, no matter what time of day or season it was cold to the fingers, like touching a wall of pure ice covered in paint. She stood in front of the north wall. A small scratch blemished the pristine white. She spoke to the scratch.

“Hello, Mom. Dad. It’s me. I don’t know why I bother, but I’m here.”

The procedure usually took a few minutes to get going but these were her parents, unpredictable as always. This time they came straight to the point.

A tap and then a scratch and a pause from the other side of the wall.

Tap tap tap.

Tap.

Tap scratch tap tap.

Tap scratch tap tap

Scratch scratch scratch.

Scratch tap tap.

Daisy flipped open her book and quickly copied the taps and scratches and timed each pause that designated a new sequence. Then fifteen seconds of no new taps or scratches which indicated the “person” on the other side was finished. She turned to the first page and matched the sequence to the secret language.

Tap tap tap. (H)

Tap. (E)

Tap scratch tap tap. (L)

Tap scratch tap tap (L)

Scratch scratch scratch. (O)

Scratch tap tap. (D)

H-E-L-L-O-D.

Hellod?

What’s hellod? Oh. Hello, Daisy. Okay, that made more sense.

“Hello, back to you. I’m here just like you told the medium. And I’ve been coming here every day for the last six months. And it’s always hello and that’s it. So, what is it this time? What do you want? Are you even all right in there?”

Scratch tap scratch scratch.

Y.

Yes.

“Yes? Considering you’re dead. Is that Dad? Mom?”

Scratch scratch.

M.

Mother.

“Okay, how about Dad?”

Scratch scratch tap.

G.

“G? Good?”

Scratch tap scratch scratch.

“Okay, that’s good I guess. I—”

She was interrupted by another sequence of taps and scratches.

A pause then the sequence started all over again. And again. Then again.

Scratch tap tap.

Tap scratch.

Scratch tap.

Tap scratch.

D-A-N-A.

Daisy reread the words. “Dana? Who’s Dana? Is Dana talking now? What are you talking about?”

Scratch tap tap.

Tap scratch.

Scratch tap.

Tap scratch.

It was repeated a couple more times and then another sequence.

Scratch tap.

Tap tap.

Scratch tap.

Tap scratch.

Nina.

“Who is Nina?”

This time it was faster and sharper then punctuated with three taps and three scratches and then three more taps.

Daisy scanned the code and her eyes widened. S-O-S. She noticed all the walls seemed to reverberate with soft slappings.

“Wait, Dana. Is something wrong with my parents?”

The slow slaps of multiple fingers on hollow wood on every wall in the room

started to speed up until they became heavy strikes by clenched fists, the pounding getting louder and louder till the walls rattled and shook. She jammed her fingers into her ears but still she could feel the noise pounding against her chest and skull.

The vibrations grew more intense. Just when the banging seemed to dominate her senses to the point she was afraid her brains would dissolve into scrambled eggs, the pounding stopped.

Daisy opened one eye and slowly pulled her fingers from her ears. They were still ringing from blast and it took a couple of minutes for her hearing to normalize. Then all she could hear was a whisper of air in the room and the low hum of the fluorescent lights above her. She knocked on the wall.

“Mom? Dad? Are you still there?”

A series of soft tappings and scratches started up again, then became softer and fainter until Daisy had to press her ear against the wall to hear it anything at all.

One whole minute of silence and then, WHAM! Daisy was so startled she jumped away and fell to her knees. A silhouette of a hand had materialized on the wall and burned a permanent mark.

From the left. Tap tap tap.

From the right. Scratch scratch scratch.

From behind her. Tap tap tap.

They kept repeating the sequence over and over again.

Tap tap tap. Scratch scratch scratch. Tap tap tap.

Over and over again. She got up ran to the doors. She turned the handle and pulled the doorknob as hard as she could. It was stuck. The beings on the other side of the walls kept tapping and scratching.

“Stop it!” She screamed at the four walls.

The scratching and tappings were getting louder and louder.

“Stop it!” She ran to the East wall and kicked it.

“Stop it!” She ran to the West and then the South wall, kicked them both as hard as she could. Then she kicked at the North wall and kicked it again. The wall squealed. She didn’t pay attention. In between kicks she screamed. “Stop it! Stop it! Stop it!”

“What are you doing?”

Daisy stopped in mid-kick, and turned to see the door wide open. Andy stood on the sill, holding a small cudgel, caressing it.

“I said, what are you doing? Why are you bothering the tenants?”

“I was ...” This was hard to explain. She pointed at the walls which had fallen silent. “Oh come on!” She smacked at the wall in frustration.

“Hey!” Andy firmly but gently pulled her away from the wall. “No disturbing the tenants here. You know the rules. You come in. You talk. That’s it.” They were halfway out of the room.

“I was talking to my parents, and then they stopped speaking. I was having a perfectly normal conversation until they went away.”

Andy stopped dragging her to glance back at the room. “What? That’s not possible. All the tenants are accounted for.”

He left the room and returned with a clipboard. He ran his right hand along the wall. “All right now, head count.” He waited for the appropriate vibration response. Two minutes later he shrugged.

“All twenty-six accounted for.” He took his pen and ticked them on the clipboard.

“Let me see that.”

“Hey!”

Daisy’s hand shot out and ripped the clipboard from his hands and she scanned down the registry and searched for two names. “I don’t see them.”

“Who are you talking about? All names have been checked off. Everyone present.” He grabbed the clipboard back.

“Then where’s Dana?”

“Who?”

“And Nina?”

Andy’s clipboard almost slipped from his fingers and his face started to become pale. “There’s no Dana or Nina.”

“That’s not what they told me.”

“They? They said their names were Nina and Dana?”

“Yes, I’m not stupid. I was talking to my parents when they suddenly stopped and then those two tapped their names then sent an SOS. I think something is wrong with my parents.”

Daisy didn’t notice the groan from Andy. “Are you sure about that? Maybe you didn’t hear them correctly.” He moved to the doors. “Come on. Let’s discuss this outside.” He stepped out without waiting for Daisy to agree.

Somehow being left alone in the room with “them” and the sound of their clickings and scratches crept her out so much she didn’t waste a second and ran after him. “I know what S.O.S sounds like. Three taps. Three dashes. Three taps. I’m not that stupid. And you didn’t answer the question. Who are Dana and

Nina? They seem to think my parents are in trouble again.”

“They’re nobody,” he said. “Well, nobody important. Just go. We’ll sort this out and call you when it’s fixed.”

“But—”

He jabbed his finger in the direction of the stairs. “Just leave!” He was rougher than he intended. Which was unfortunate because he liked her but he didn’t need her to learn the truth.

“Fine,” She held her hands up in mock surrender. It wasn’t as if she cared. “But I’ll be back in couple of days and I plan to return with an expert.”

Andy pulled out his cell phone and tapped 3 on his contact list. “Hello? I know you don’t like being disturbed, but we have a DANA situation here. Also a NINA.”

The yelling began. Andy yanked the phone from his ear. When the noise finally lessened he resumed the conversation. “No, I’m not fooling around. I know what a DANA is. I’m not jumping to conclusions.”

DANA. Dead and not available.

“And also a NINA. Yes, a NINA. So, no, I’m not overreacting.”

He peeked back into the room. The sounds of knuckles tapping and nails clawing against the walls were still there.

“I think the room has reached peak capacity and they’re going to start to cannibalize each other and any unsuspecting visitors. We might need to build another room ASAP. I’ll meet you at the office.”

He walked down the hall as quickly as he could to escape the sounds of the taps and scratches in the room. Above all he tried to block the mental image of “them” huddled and compacted together behind the walls. He failed.

-----

### **HELP POLAR BOREALIS SURVIVE!**

*“When I was a teenager I decided I wanted to be a Science Fiction Writer. Fifty years later I’m a curmudgeonly pensioner who never sold a darn thing, not one novel, not one story.”*

Thus begins my **GoFundMe Campaign** message. Still need to raise money to cover the next couple of issues. If you like and enjoy this zine, please donate at:

< <https://www.gofundme.com/jwj3dzgc> >

Cheers! The Graeme



# THE OLD NEIGHBOURHOODS ON MARS

by J.J. Steinfeld

(Originally published in *Wicked Words Quarterly*, UK,  
and included in *Mars, Poetry and Fiction from the Red Planet*, UK)

## **Mars-Monitoring Station on Earth, August 21, 2120**

*“Life imitating art ... life imitating art ... life imitating art ...”*

“What in the universe is the commander talking about?” one of the Mars monitors, listening to the latest transmission from the *Bradbury III* expedition, asked his supervisor.

“Your guess is as good as mine,” the supervisor said, both head-shaking bafflement and deep concern in his comment.

“I stopped counting at fifty times. He just keeps saying those confusing words, over and over...”

## **The surface of Mars, August 21, 2120**

While the first two human missions to Mars—the *Bradbury* expedition in late 2115 and then the *Bradbury II* expedition in early 2118—had landed successfully on that planet, communications from both expeditions were lost within a week and never restored, the fate of both crews remaining a mystery. But success or failure, communication or non-communication, was of secondary concern, the desire to colonize Mars taking precedence over any exploratory impediments or unforeseen setbacks.

The *Bradbury III*, the most advanced spacecraft ever built on Earth, with its forty-person, international crew, landed on the surface of Mars on the last day of July, 2120, and the population of Earth, numbering fewer than a billion for the first time since early in the nineteenth century, celebrated for the third time in less than five years as a world holiday was declared even though the projections for population decline and environment degradation were growing bleaker by the day, had been since well before that momentous first human Mars mission. Most scientific projections were that by the middle of the twenty-second century the population of Earth would be fewer than a quarter-billion, and that was without factoring in even more deleterious conventional or nuclear warfare which only the most optimistic believed would cease. Population decline, drastic average life-expectancy reduction, and adverse human-habitat conditions on Earth had been deteriorating steadily since the end of the twenty-first century. The previous two

*Bradbury* spacecraft, certainly full of hope and enveloped with the marvels of technology, left too many questions about Mars colonization unanswered and unrealized. The third Mars mission, two-and-a-half years after the second, whether it was prayerful luck or miraculous science, at least as far as communications were concerned, which had gone on almost uninterrupted since landing, confirmed the viable prospects of colonization. The plans for more spacecraft and the colonization of Mars accelerated with the successful landing and preliminary favourable reports back to Earth, optimism fuelled with each Mars-inspired descriptive word and mind-stimulating transmitted picture.

Unfortunately, there was no trace of the first two spacecraft or their crews, not a single trace, even after three weeks of exploration using the most advanced technology and exploratory equipment. The biggest advance over the previous two Mars missions was in the portable breathing systems, now lighter and longer lasting, as were the space suits and fully-computerized helmets. A recent transmission from Earth indicated that the next Mars mission could be ready in a matter of weeks, with a crew of one hundred.

As celebrations on Earth continued and a new era of global cooperation seemed to have begun, wild speculation getting wilder on how many humans Mars could eventually accommodate and how many spaceships could be constructed within the next crucial decade, estimates ranging from 500 to 1000 passengers each, the crew of the third Mars expedition carried on their exploratory work, each day venturing farther from base, which had been named Green Town, in reference to the fictitious town in the novel *Dandelion Wine*, based on Ray Bradbury's hometown of Waukegan and the *Bradbury* III, like the first two Mars-destined spacecraft, named in honour of the venerated and prophetic author. Even though books were no longer printed on Earth, no books were more valuable or coveted than the old print editions of Bradbury books, especially *The Martian Chronicles*, *Dandelion Wine*, and *Fahrenheit 451*, regarded by many as literary bibles from a distant and strangely idealized time.

It was on the twenty-first day of exploration, when a fully-equipped seventeen-person group led by the expedition's commander sighted the first built structures, something no one had anticipated, science fiction stories and speculative Mars films notwithstanding. Nothing in the initial reports from the first two Mars expeditions had indicated any form of life or construction other than Earth-originated rockets and equipment from earlier robotic or human Mars missions.

“We have all read *The Martian Chronicles*,” the commander said, immediately thinking of the sixth story in that collection, “The Third Expedition,” then ordering no one to go near any structure, which were organized in clusters he thought of as strange neighbourhoods. How many times had he read or heard read that magnificent story, and felt he knew the characters Captain John Black, David Lustig the navigator, and Samuel Hinkston the archaeologist as friends. His parents, both agronomists who dedicated their lives in attempting to protect the Earth’s food supply from atmospheric contamination, had introduced him as a precocious child to Bradbury’s work, often using the great writer’s stories as bedtime reading. The last thing he remembered his father talking to him about before he died in a horrible house fire was *The Martian Chronicles*.

“Exactly like the house I grew up in,” youngest crew member said, and the other crew members voiced similar observations, but pointed at different houses. The common thread of their comments was references to Ray Bradbury’s book *The Martian Chronicles*, which all the crew members had read at one point of their lives and often enjoyed discussing at various times, having heard read on audio-systems or watched on video during their lengthy and intensive training for the Mars mission and during their long flight. In fact, the crew had brought along an old first edition of *The Martian Chronicles* in a capsule and had buried it not far from where the *Bradbury III* landed. It had been one of their first acts after disembarking, full of solemnity and reverence, as if placing any offering to the deities of interplanetary travel. All the crew members had spent time during the voyage reading and rereading on their electronic screens all of Bradbury’s work, in different languages depending on the crew member’s language of choice, as if Bradbury’s stories and word-pictures were necessary to making this Mars mission a success. Each crew member had her or his favourite story from *The Martian Chronicles*, and even during the most recent exploration the names and plots of stories were mentioned as spirit-warming or psyche-stimulating. The story titles “Rocket Summer ... Ylla ... The Summer Night ... The Tax Payer ... The Earth Men ... The Third Expedition ... And the Moon Be Still Bright ... The Settlers ... The Green Morning ...” sounding like fragments of a potent mantra. Until this sighting, despite a few minor problems with malfunctioning ground equipment, the mission and its initial over fifty tasks and scientific experiments were going smoothly, too smoothly the crew physician said with a punctuating laugh. “I have a hell of a lot more problems on Earth,” she joked.

The chief technical officer, seeing his childhood home where as a boy of twelve declared to his parents that he was going to be an astronaut and visit Mars,

pointed out that tomorrow, August 22, 2120, was the two-hundredth anniversary of Ray Bradbury's birth, yet others disputed his claim, offering different dates. This turned into a contest as to who knew the most about Bradbury's life and work, the commander acting as the quizmaster, ever attentive to the psychological states and needs of his crew members, repeatedly cautioning his crew members not to go any closer to the structures regardless of what they thought they represented.

"We don't want life imitating art," he said, pausing at the sound of the odd old-fashioned expression, attempting to sound calm and even jovial, knowing all too well the tragic outcome of that story. The second in command, whose twin brother had been on the first Mars expedition and he desperately hoped to find, pointed out that he was married on the hundredth anniversary of Bradbury's death, on June 5, 2112. His wife, also an astronaut, was back on the spacecraft, monitoring atmospheric and weather conditions on the planet. Another astronaut was born in Illinois, not far from Bradbury's Waukegan birthplace, and another in California, close to where Bradbury is buried, noting that the author's gravestone had the words "AUTHOR OF FAHRENHEIT 451" on it in capital letters. A Swedish crew member was pleased to make a connection to Bradbury's mother, who had come from Sweden to the United States. A Russian astronaut claimed that an ancestor of his in what used to be known as the USSR had worked on film adaptations of several Bradbury short stories for television. The communications officer from the United Kingdom, the oldest crew member at forty, went on about a cousin who had not only a successful line of clothing based on characters from Bradbury stories, but also a popular drinking-and-eating establishment called *The Dandelion Wine Pub*. One of the five crew members from an African country, was especially proud that his great-grandmother had written and illustrated a black graphic-novel version of *Dandelion Wine*, transforming 1928 small-town America into a 1998 African village. Not to be outdone, a Canadian astronaut boasted that his great-grandfather had translated into French both *The Martian Chronicles* and *Dandelion Wine*, winning literary prizes for the translations. The connections to Bradbury's life and work and death went on full throttle, even as all the crew members slowly moved toward the structures.

The commander repeated his "we don't want life imitating art" warning several times, each time more ominous and serious. Despite their commander ordering them back to the Green Town base, each crew member recklessly removed space suits and life-sustaining helmets, calling out that the air was like Earth's, or at least how they remembered the Earth's air and atmosphere

from their childhoods, and entered a structure. The commander thought he saw the house where his father had died in a fire but his mother and he as a teenager had somehow escaped, a house he hated. He heard his parents reading to him, from *The Martian Chronicles*, but he fought getting any closer to any of the built structures, his childhood house or any of the others.

Then the commander saw three men standing on the porch of a house, thinking they might be crew members from the *Bradbury* or the *Bradbury II* expeditions, but as he stepped closer, he heard them talking to each other, the names Black, Hinkston, and Lustig occurring prominently in the conversation. These men seemed as real as any of his crew members and he yelled at them that they were characters in a story, creations of Ray Bradbury's astonishing imagination in "The Third Expedition."

A few hours later, still unable to locate the missing crew members, or offer a rational explanation for their disappearance—going over and over the theories and possible explanations in "The Third Expedition," the commander remained baffled as to what had occurred—he confined the rest of the crew to the spacecraft. The commander filed a report that sixteen crew members had disappeared, and emphasizing the need for replacements from Earth as soon as the *Bradbury IV* was completed, neglected to mention that the loss of his crew was the same number as had perished in "The Third Expedition," his favourite *The Martian Chronicles*' story.

In the midst of making his next report, the commander suddenly remembered that "The Third Expedition" was originally published in 1948, with the title "Mars is Heaven!" His mother had told him that, or was it his father, he wasn't certain, but it felt important to pursue accuracy. He knew that if he returned to the site of the built structures he could find out the answer. He instructed the crew to monitor activity, especially at the coordinates of the built structures, and left the spacecraft alone, wanting to talk to his parents one last time, continuing to transmit to the Mars-monitoring station on Earth as he walked toward the site of the built structures, his voice increasing in desperation and urgency with each word-accompanying step on the Martian ground: "*Life imitating art ... life imitating art ... life imitating art ...*"

-----

## THE GHOST LOVER

*by Kirsten Emmott*

(Previously unpublished)

*She took him by the hand and she made him lie down  
She saw he was as cold as the clay  
She said my dear love  
If I only had my wish  
This long night would never turn to day.*

*– Child Ballad 248*

You left me long, long ago  
Before this world changed  
Under an expanding sun;  
Oceans spread over the forests  
Where once we walked,  
Now coral groves of bright flitting life;  
But the sun still grew, and the oceans rose up  
Into the clouds, and what life could not flee  
To the next circling planet  
Fell into the red giant,  
Then the fire took  
Even the bedrock, born in lava  
Till stone turned white-hot again  
joined the halo of fire;  
Then I knew, my dear,  
That we would soon be together  
Dancing atoms in forever's force field ...

*When will I see you again, sweetheart?  
When will I see you again?  
When little fishes fly  
And the seas they do run dry  
And the hard rocks do melt in the sun.*

# FIZZ

*by Joe Mahoney*

(Previously unpublished)

They came in the night, dressed in black, just as Archie was reaching into his fridge for a bottle of Fizz. He planned to bring the bottle and two glasses upstairs for himself and his wife, Rachel.

They got to him before he got the Fizz, airborne dispensers drugging him well before the intruders even entered the house. They carried Archie out in a sedative induced haze. Archie returned to his senses in an unfamiliar hover car, nonplussed at his new surroundings. The worst of it was, he hadn't even got to drink any of his Fizz.

He sure had craved a sip.

“What do you want?” he asked the two men book-ending him in the hover's backseat. “I don't have any money. I think maybe you got the wrong guy.”

One of Archie's abductors smiled, revealed a set of gleaming white teeth. “It's not your fortune we want, Archie. Just a few bucks here and there.”

The man's blue eyes sparkled beneath a head of beach boy blonde hair, his tan at odds with the snowflakes dappling the moonlight outside the hover. He looked like a walking advertisement for a product Archie had been hearing a lot about recently—something called The Vibe—some kind of genetic makeover promising eternal youth, or the next best thing.

Archie couldn't afford The Vibe and didn't want it even if he could, but he couldn't turn around without hearing or reading about it. Ever since its deregulation, the advertising industry had been getting way out of hand, the very air you breathed was thick with advertising, you couldn't flush your toilet without fresh new ads popping up in your toilet bowl. Archie blamed deregulation for that, and for the greatest problem he faced in life (his current abduction notwithstanding): A dearth of his favourite soft drink, Fizz.

The makers of Fizz were people of integrity. They marketed their product with restraint, believing that Fizz stood on its own merits, that blaring its name from the rooftops (which several more unscrupulous products did) was unnecessary.

Their integrity did them in. Shops no longer sold it, because no one bought it, except for Archie and his wife. Archie at least had had the foresight to see the end in store. He bought as much Fizz as he could afford and manage to warehouse. He figured he had enough for about eleven more weeks, if he rationed it properly.

He had trouble rationing it properly.

“What do you want?” Archie asked Beach Boy.

Suddenly he had an irrational fear: they were after his Fizz. It wasn't inconceivable. He himself envisioned a time when a lack of the bubbly stuff might drive him round the bend, but then, a kidnapping seemed a mite extreme just to obtain a recently obsolete soft drink.

“Understand you like Fizz,” Beach Boy said.

A chill ran up and down Archie's spine. “What?”

Beach Boy leaned forward. “Fzzzzzz,” he said in Archie's face. “What is it about that stuff, anyway?”

“You can't have it,” Archie said.

Beach Boy laughed. “We don't want your stupid Fizz. Nobody wants Fizz. Haven't you noticed? They don't sell it anymore.”

Archie waited.

Beach Boy leaned back. “So. What are ya gonna drink? What with Fizz off the shelves and all.”

This was a subject Archie had been giving a lot of thought. He had discussed it with Rachel ad nauseum, until she had to tell him that if he uttered another word on the matter she would divorce him. Archie had continued to ponder in private. There were only two soft drinks left on the market, and it had been a tough decision. But Archie had decided to go with the number two brand, Buzz, because he had a thing for underdogs. If Buzz ever became number one, maybe he'd switch.

But he wasn't about to tell Beach Boy that.

“Don't hurt Rachel,” he said.

“Ah yes,” Beach Boy said. “Married, three children, seven grandchildren. Pastor in a large church, popular preacher, lots of friends. Fifty-nine years old, aren't ya, Archie? Like to golf. Like to drink Fizz when you golf, dontcha? Don't worry, Archie, your wife's not the problem.

“You, Archie, are the problem.”

Archie felt the vehicle decelerate and lurch to a halt. His abductors led him through a parking garage into a small nondescript room with several chairs around a wooden table. Beach Boy took one of the chairs; he indicated for Archie to sit in the other. Beach Boy's fellow kidnapers remained standing. A short, squarish man entered, carrying three different coloured bottles and two glasses, which he placed on the table. The bottles were red, blue, and green.

“Go ahead, Archie,” Beach Boy said. “Pour yourself a drink.”



“What is it? Poison?”

Beach Boy laughed. “No, Archie, we need you alive. It’s not poison.”

To illustrate his sincerity, Beach Boy sampled each of the three bottles using one of the glasses.

He wiped his mouth afterward and said, “Your turn, Archie.”

“I’m not thirsty,” Archie said.

Beach Boy pointed to the red bottle. “This one’s Fizz.”

Archie drank. There was no turning down Fizz. When Archie finished, the short man produced a small handgun from an inside pocket and pointed it at Archie’s left knee.

“Now sample the rest,” Beach Boy said.

“I thought you wanted me alive.”

“A bullet in each kneecap and you’d be moaning but alive.”

Archie sampled the rest. He recognized the generic taste of the other two soft drink brands, but couldn’t tell which was which.

“Whatta ya think?”

“Are you trying to tell me that you kidnapped me for a taste test?”

“Not just any taste test, Archie boy. The single most important taste test of your life. Now. What did you think?”

“Well, that Fizz sure was good. Could I have some more?”

“Sure you can, Archie. You can have as much as you like, later. But first, what did you think of the other two?”

Everyone in the room leaned forward to hear what Archie would say. “The first one was flat, insipid. Tasteless, really. Yet sugary, with a bitter aftertaste—”

“That much we know already. What about the second one?”

Archie made a face. “Even worse.”

Beach Boy shook his head. “Archie, Archie, Archie. Wrong answer.”

Archie tried not to look at the short man with the handgun.

“Drink the Fizz, then,” Beach Boy said, surprising Archie. “If that’s what you really want.”

Something about Beach Boy’s tone made Archie balk. He told himself he didn’t really want any Fizz. Ah, but who was he kidding, he pretty much wanted Fizz all the time. He took hold of the entire bottle, didn’t even bother to pour a glass. Drank a big, wet slug of the stuff. Afterward he burped, and felt ... ill.

Nauseous.

Beach Boy held the bottle forth. “Go ahead Archie, have some more. Have all you like.”

Archie waved him away, weakly. “No, thank you.”

“Strap him in, boys.” Beach Boy smiled. “Expect we’re gonna be here awhile.”

\*\*\*

The following morning Archie remembered nothing, of course. He even felt quite spry. His wife Rachel was the first to notice something amiss.

“Archie! What are you doing with all that Fizz?”

“Had my fill of it,” he said. “Just can’t stomach the thought of drinking any more.”

“Huh!” said Rachel. “Who’d a thunk?”

Archie shrugged. “No point cluttering up the basement if I’m not gonna drink it, right? Thought I’d try out the number one brand, whaddayacallit... Slurp. Gotta be number one for a reason, right?”

If it involved cleaning out the basement Rachel wasn’t about to argue. In fact, the whole thing got her thinking. The basement really needed a good, thorough cleaning. She’d been hearing an awful lot about a new cleansing product lately, a little something called Glo & Shine; perhaps it was time to give it a try. She added the name to the shopping list on the fridge.

\*\*\*

They came in the night, dressed in black.

In the back seat of the hover car, the statuesque blonde leaned close. “So, Rachel.”

Rachel could smell mint toothpaste off the blonde’s breath. She recognized the brand; once, it had been her favourite. Now the mere thought of it made her want to retch.

“Heard you were thinking of doing some cleaning.” The blonde smiled, revealing a row of impossibly white teeth. “Have I got a product for you.”

-----

## EQUATIONS

*by Mary E. Choo*

(Originally published in *The Magazine of Speculative Poetry*, Spring 2001  
and was a finalist in the 2002 Aurora Award Best Short Form Work in English)

The light  
is a lean and persimmon fire,  
a crack that lingers on the backs of trees  
and slants their shapes like organ sounds  
along the street.

These brilliant notes diffuse,  
run lost among the crowds,  
the smells of cars, old wool  
and deep-fried fat;

their ghost soon haunts  
the winter roof tops,  
speaks in half-light,  
scores the patterns  
of the stars.

Beneath this glare  
the road ignites,  
resounds with ancient chords;  
I stumble, stretch my arms  
invent exquisite flight ...

I am the sum of a thousand suns,  
and in my blood all light persists;  
the night pulls free  
and music rises.

# THE HOCKEY GAME

by Kellee Kranendonk

(Originally published in *Voluted Tales*, June 2013)

Jayson Roland butterflies, catching the puck with his pads. Dropping it to the ice, he pulls his mask off and sets it on top of the net. He pushes his longish, wet hair away from his face, letting the cool rink air caress his skin. Practice is over and Ty Williams, team captain, skates up to him. “Good save, Roland. Let’s hit the showers.”

Squirting water from his water bottle over his face, Jayson nods. Good save, yes. But it could have been better. If only his goaltending skills were perfect ... He follows his captain to the dressing rooms.

\*\*\*

“Rum and cola,” says Jason to the bartender, settling down on a bar stool. “Uh, no, forget the rum. Just the cola.”

“Just the cola?” asks a female voice beside him.

Startled, Jayson turns toward her. He hadn’t seen a woman here a moment ago. Wondering for a moment if he’s losing his grip on reality, he wishes one of the guys had come along with him. The pretty red head smiles. Her brown eyes sparkle in the dim bar light. He stares into them, feeling as though she’s searching his soul. Finally, he shakes his head and grunts, “Yeah. Just a cola. Got a big game tomorrow night.”

“Well, that’s tomorrow, darlin’. This is tonight.”

The bartender hands him his pop. Jayson takes a long drink. “Yeah, well, I don’t want the butterflies in my gut to get drunk.”

The woman laughs. “First time in the playoffs?”

Jayson nods. “Yeah, my rookie year too. Tomorrow is *the* game, you know? I don’t want to do anything to mess it up. Man, I wish I could be a perfect goalie.”

“A goalie, huh?” The woman slides her upper torso along the bar toward him, bringing a slight scent of cherries. “You know, I can make your wish come true. The only thing I ask in return is that you give yourself completely to your true love.”

Jayson chuckles and glances at her. Once again he looks into her eyes. She tilts her head. For a moment Jayson feels as if he’s spinning. Images pull him inside his thoughts and he imagines himself standing in front of the net, stopping

puck after puck. He sees himself holding the Stanley Cup high in the air triumphantly.

Snapping back to reality, he pulls away from the woman and looks down into his glass. Did the bartender add the rum after all? His true love ... was she coming on to him?

Whatever might be in the drinks, the woman beside him probably had too much. Setting the glass down, Jayson gets up from his stool.

“Yeah, I’ll be sure to do that, right away,” he says in response to her offer.

Giving her a thumbs up, he walks away from the stranger at the bar. He hears her laugh.

\*\*\*

Skating back and forth in front of the net, Jayson roughs up the smooth ice surface.

The roaring crowd and the smell of ice invigorate him. At the other end of the rink, the opposing goalie stretches. For a brief moment, the face of the strange woman he’d met the other night flashes into his mind, pulsing with his heartbeat. He shakes his head to dispel the image, concentrating on centre ice and the beginning face-off.

Players on both teams skate hard and shoot often. Penalties are called but the puck never enters either net. When the buzzer goes, Jayson follows his team mates into the dressing room.

“Great game, Roland,” says Ty, “like you’re under some kind of spell.”

\*\*\*

Second period. Jayson dives, catches, stretches himself from one side of the net to the other, stopping shot after shot. When his team moves into the opposition’s zone, he gets a break. He sprays water on his face and watches as his team scores. The crowd roars, the players high five and toss their arms around each other’s shoulders.

The second goal his team gets isn’t as pretty as the first. The puck bounces in over the goalie’s shoulder, off the goal post. But it gives them a two-nothing lead. If they can keep it up for the next twenty-five minutes Lord Stanley’s Cup will be theirs.

\*\*\*

Neither team scores by the halfway mark of the third period. But Jayson knows that ten minutes is more than enough time to get scored on. As if in correspondence with his thoughts, an opposing player breaks away, racing toward

Jason. The crowd begins to chant: “Roland, Roland.” He bends, watching the player. Which way will he go?

The player dekes left, shoots right. Jayson reaches up with his glove hand. The puck slams into his catcher. Cheers thunder inside the arena. Sweat pours down his face as the referee blows the whistle.

In the final seconds, the opposing coach pulls the goalie. Six attackers on the ice. They force the play into the leading team’s zone. Jayson crouches. He doesn’t care if they score now, it doesn’t matter. A shut-out is nothing compared to the cup. But they don’t score. He makes the save and the buzzer blasts. The crowd goes wild. The players rejoice. They crowd around Jayson, shouting, laughing, and knocking him down.

When everyone finally composes themselves, they line up to shake hands with the losing team. Many of them congratulate him on both his team’s win and his shut-out. Their goalie grabs his hand. “You were great. Any advice you can give me for next year?”

Sure, thinks Jason. Look into the eyes of a strange woman. Startled at his own thought, he pushes it away and says, “Put everything you’ve got into your game. Don’t let anything else matter.”

\*\*\*

After the picture taking, champagne drinking and interviews are over, the celebrations spill out into the streets. In the clear, warm night air, Jayson suddenly struggles for breath.

“What’s wrong, Roland?” asks Ty.

Jayson can only shake his head. He massages his throat, trying to pull more air into his lungs. He slaps his chest.

“Are you having a heart attack?”

I’m only twenty years old, thinks Jayson, unable to say so. Again he shakes his head. He has no idea what’s wrong, only an uncontrollable desire to get back inside the arena. He turns and heads back.

“Where are you going?” Ty follows the goalie.

“Back in, “ gasps Jayson.

\*\*\*

Back inside, Jayson’s breathing returns to normal. Ty stares at him. “What’s going on?”

Jayson shakes his head. “I don’t know. I need to play.”

“What?” Ty strides alongside Jayson as he heads for the ice surface. “Did you drink too much champagne?”

Although Ty continues to chatter as they go, Jayson doesn't hear the words, only his captain's voice mumbling in the semi-dark. Finally, they reach the ice.

"Don't you want to be with the team? Are you on drugs?" Ty's voice becomes clear.

Jayson turns to him, momentarily confused. "No, I ..." Then he hears the laugh, hears her voice. Welcome home, sweetie."

Unseen arms embrace him. The smell of cherries surrounds him. Invisible lips kiss his.

"Hey, Roland. Where'd you go, man? If this is some kind of a joke, it's not funny. Jay, where are you?" Ty's voice sounds afraid, desperate. Something Jayson has never heard in his captain's voice before. Jayson pulls away from the woman. "I'm here."

"He can't hear you anymore, sweetie."

"Am I dead?"

"Oh no, darlin', you've only just begun to live."

As Ty turns and hurries away from the rink, Jayson feels himself being pulled—sucked—backwards. The silence of the darkened rink comes to life once more with frenzied fans. Amid the roar, he hears himself speaking.

"Put everything you've got into the game. Don't let anything else matter. Give yourself completely to the game."

That isn't what I said. Jayson tries to say the words, but before he can, he's sucked further back in time. Now he's back in his gear, back in the net. He glances up at the scoreboard.

Score: 2-0

Period: 3

Time Rem: 9:17

He's back in the game.

But this time it's different. The whistle blows and play at the other end of the rink stops. The referee has to go to the phone to get video replay confirmation.

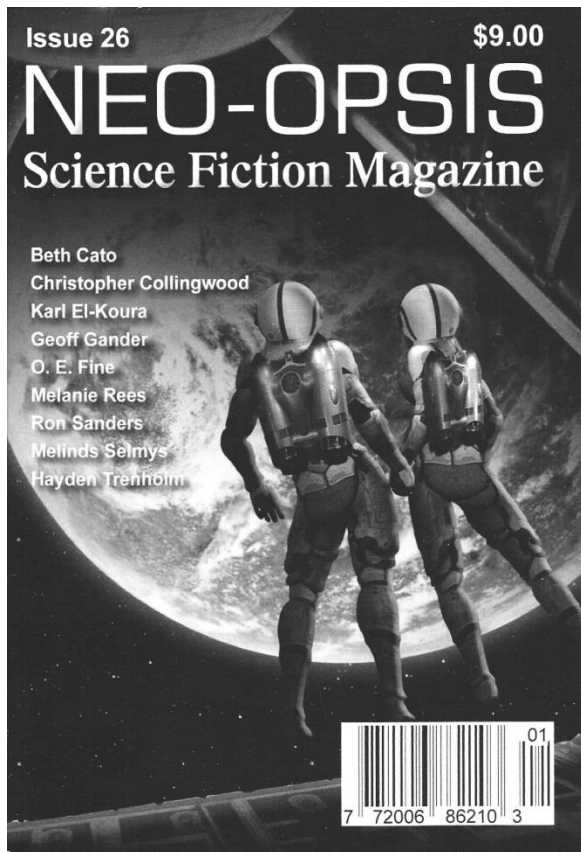
The red-haired woman appears in front of Jayson. She wraps one arm around his neck. With her free hand, she pulls his mask off, drops it, then wipes his sweaty hair away from his face. "This is what you wished for. No one can ever score on you, Jayson Roland."

"No," shouts Jayson, as realization dawns on him. How many ways can the game be played out, he wonders. The possibilities are infinite.

“Infinite,” she says, as if reading his mind. “Just think of all the delectable paths to victory, Jayson Roland.”

He turns to look at the woman to tell her she’s crazy. Her see-forever eyes look into his. She leans forward to kiss him. Jayson hears her voice inside his ear, inside his head. “And we’ll experience them all together, darlin’.” Her grip tightens, her breath hot. “I’m your true love. My name is Hockey.”

-----



A magazine of art, opinion, fact, and fiction like nothing you’ve read before. All kinds good stuff. A typical issue features 9 or 10 short stories, essays, and articles, a couple of poems, plus movie and TV reviews, convention reports, science news, and other nifty stuff of interest to fans of the SF&F genre in general and SF&F literature in particular.

Brought to you by the excellent husband and wife team of Editor Karl Johanson and Assistant Editor/Art Director Stephanie Johanson, both of whom were Guests of Honour at the recent VCON 41 SF&F convention in Surrey, B.C. (Sept 30-Oct 2, 2016).

Check it out at < [www.neo-opsis.ca](http://www.neo-opsis.ca) >

-----



# CAMERA DRONE CAMP

*by S. Kay*

(Previously unpublished)

Campers sing as a boat ferries them across a fjord. Ocean jellyfish rise to greet them, along Pacific Northwest rainforest shoreline.

At camp, kids scamper among cedars, with camera drones chasing close. Workshops teach video editing skills. Results go online for parents.

Live drone video of the kids' awakenings every morning when the cabin alarm rings is streamed to social media. Commenters can be snarky.

Culturally diverse, they eat jam and bannock for breakfast, and curry poutine for lunch. Half are gluten-free, 15% vegan.

Night rain during a summer heat wave brings campers out to the moon. They're not allowed to have fires, but the drones shine beams.

Two moons among stars confuse campers until they see a logo on the second, a hologram. They can't hear its concert music in the woods.

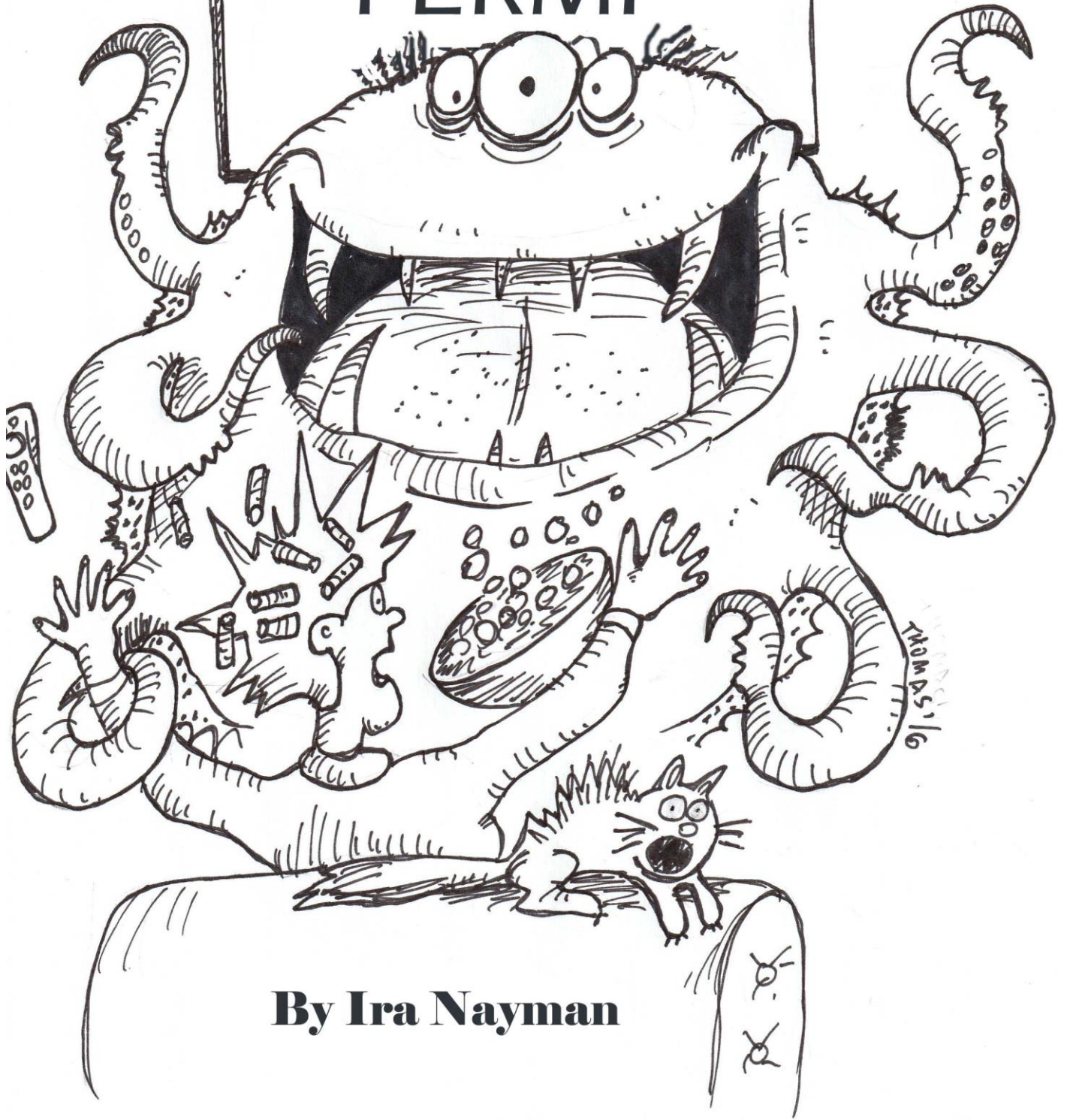
A trio of campers sings a pop song and they all join in the chorus. Not the one the real concertgoers can hear; this one is better.

The song is repeated for days, an earworm embedded for a lifetime in the young brains. A popular camp singer makes great memories.

Flying fried food, faux chicken tenders and fish sticks, delights diners until a food fight distracts. Drones break it up with sirens.

Their last hike is with brightly hand-painted nanodrones they made themselves, which they take home to show off to their families.

# FOOLS FOR FERMI



**By Ira Nayman**

(Previously unpublished)

Paula? PAULA! Hi. Yes. I'm sorry to interrupt your game show, but I think you'll find that this is more important than figuring out the missing letters—the phrase is “The eleven elven eleves waited for the leavened leavings,” by the way—obvious, really—so, if you'll just—again with the screaming? Yes, yes, I understand that a certain amount of ... freaking out is *de rigeur* in a situation like this, but **PAULA!** Yes, okay, I have tentacles, six eyes, three in front and three in back and hair down either side of my head—can we just take it as given that I'm not human and move on? ... Alien is such a ... cold word, don't you think? And, in any case, it's all relative—has it never occurred to you that, to me, you're the alien? Well, no, but—look, I'm just saying—you're not listen—LOOK! I only have nine minutes and 37 seconds! Perhaps when our races make proper contact, we'll have all the time in the world—either of our worlds—to debate the merits of loaded language. It doesn't help that you've made it abundantly clear that you perceive my voice as a melodic form of a metal chair scraping on a concrete floor—as if that's a bad thing. Has it never occurred to you that your voice sounds to me like a jubjub bird vomiting up streggl worms for its young? No, no, no, no—can we please just acknowledge the relativity issue and table it for another time? You want to what? Call your boyfriend the policeman? Go right ahead. No. Seriously. I insist ... You don't remember that the last time I was here, you told me the two of you weren't getting along, that, in fact, you had broken up with him over what you called “The Italian Watermelon Incident,” do you? So. Bit of an empty threat, there, wasn't—what? I'm sorry, I'm not familiar with that ter—oh. Nice language. Do you treat all your visitors this way? It's a wonder you have any friends at all! ... Well, yes, we have had this discussion before. Eleven times, as a matter of fact. This is the last chance I'll have to—but let's not get ahead of ourselves. I'm here to deliver a message: there are 7,136 distinct sentient races in the galaxy, and, at any given moment, at least seventeen are on Earth trying to make contact with human beings. We—what? No. Not like UFOs. What you call Unidentified Flying Objects are airplanes and weather balloons, with the occasional psychotic break just to make things a little more interesting. Now, we—they are so prevalent because human beings have wild imaginations! Believe me, once you've conducted one anal probe, the amount of new information you can learn from another drops off really quickly. Oh, and here's a news flash for you, Paula: non-human races talk amongst ourselves. It's true! So, once one of us has conducted the anal probe, all any of the others has to do is ask for the results. I've seen them. Not very interesting. Now, if I've dealt with—van Daniken hallucinated images in cave

paintings that weren't—OH, FOR GLOB'S SAKE, PAULA! YOU'VE GOT A REAL, LIVE HOLOGRAM OF AN ALIEN HOVERING RIGHT IN FRONT OF YOU, AND YOU INSIST UPON ARGUING ABOUT UFOS? ... Sorry. Sorry, but severe time constraints can make an Arbitron cranky. Yes, my people are the Arbitron from the planet Bar-B Tronq. You cannot pronounce my name properly without a second tongue, so you can call me ... Bob. ... I—I thought that was the custom? Oh, whatevs. Can we focus on what's important, here? As I was—YES! Yes. Thank you. That is the question I need to answer for you. So. If so many races are trying to contact Earthians, why don't any appear to have been successful? That is a matter of some speculation among us, let me tell you. Some of our best scholars think that, despite your scientific and artistic achievements, there is a ... hole ... empty space? Interstellar void in your imaginations. A big gap ... Oh, **that** offends you? Because, frankly, some of our scientists think that you're too stupid to recognize alien contact when it's right in front of your face—yes, yes, I know you have discovered Teflon. Yes, that is considered a great achievement among the advanced races of the galaxy. Still ... Well, no. My own theory is that Earthians don't seem to ... exist in time and space in a way that is conducive to communications with other races. No, that's not a backhanded insult about your intelligence—well, that would be your interpretation of—PAULA! Please! If you insist upon being offended by everything I say, we'll spend the whole nine minutes and 37 seconds bickering! If this was a sitcom, that would be hilarious, even without a laugh track. But, as it is ... okay, a couple of examples might help. The Flahrbinges of the Blah Dimension ... what can I tell you? That's how they perceive it. Actually, in Eastern Flahrbingian, Blah means a combination of radiant, spongy and a cross between a Shar Pei and a carbonated beverage. Very expressive, Eastern Flahrbingian is ... Nobody knows. The West Flahrbingians tend to keep to themselves. Anyway, they live three seconds to the right of everybody else in the galaxy. The result of this is that when they have tried to contact human beings in the past you couldn't see them, but you experienced contact as a sense of the immediate future. When they tried to talk to you for longer than three seconds, humans got the mistaken impression that they had already lived through whatever they were doing a moment before ... Exactly. *Déjà vu*. Not very helpful, I'm afraid—the Flahrbingians have thrown up their blaffdusters in frustration and lost hope of contact with Earthians. Then, there are the Grindal of Delpth Latitude. They are essentially sentient gas clouds that communicate through scents. Scents that, unfortunately, human beings find highly distasteful ... Oh, ha ha. Very droll. Yes, I suppose it can mean that the

person in the elevator who smelt it isn't always the person who dealt it. My, but that joke never gets old! Then there's the case of your grandfather. The one diagnosed with Alzheimer's ... Umm, no, he wasn't an alien. Why would you think—never mind. Not important. Do you remember how he used to mumble to himself, then point to an empty part of the room? Right. He was talking to a Spletzenmacher. They only seem to be able to communicate with human beings who have a heavy plaque build-up in their brains, people whose disease has progressed far enough that they could never communicate the experience to anybody else. Glob has a weird sense of humour ... Thank you. That is the second highly pertinent question you have asked—I knew my faith in you wasn't misplaced! It would appear that something about the way my image is being projected to you creates a condition in your brain that makes you forget everything we have talked about the moment I leave your sight ... Yes ... Yes ... No ... It probably doesn't rot your brain, but our scientists can't be entirely certain until—WELL, THAT'S WHY I'M LIMITED TO TWELVE CONTACTS, ISN'T IT? ... No, I'm not trying to kill—you what? Listen, *mon petit chou*, we come in peace. Yes, we do! No, really, we do! If we didn't come in peace ... well, you probably wouldn't see us coming at all. We're all about intergalactic trade and cultural exchange. That's right—cultural exchange. If we can figure out how to make this work, one of the first things we'll do is build a sports stadium on your planet. You don't seem to play snootzball on Earth, but we can teach you the basics ... your players will be handicapped with only the two eyes where they are in your heads, but I'm sure we can work some—NO, NOBODY DIES PLAYING SNOOTZBALL! ... And, anyway, if anybody has to worry about violence, it's us, not you. Yes, us. Don't try to deny it—I've seen *The Day the Earth Stood Still!* ... Well. I'm just about out of time, so let me come to the point: communications decay, some more rapidly than others, but they're never completely lost. Echoes of our attempts at contact persist. Earthians have started an organization—you may have heard of it? Fools for Fermi? Ring any bells? No? It's run by people who sense that something has happened, but don't know what. Perhaps with you pushing from the inside and us pushing from the outside, we can finally make contact. If you remember nothing from our dozen encounters, remember this: Fools for Fermi. What are you—in your dayplanner? Oik! Why didn't I think of—never mind ... Enrico Fermi. The physicist who—no, not Fair Me. Fermi. F-E-R ...

-----

## A SECOND HELPING

by Lisa Timpf

(Previously unpublished)

others watch, unblinking,  
as the tailless apes  
spin out into space  
as if despoiling one planet  
wasn't accomplishment enough

toward what new earth, they wonder  
will a human hand extend its grasp  
like a greedy child  
seeking a second helping  
of forbidden fruit

-----



**PULP LITERATURE** offers short stories, art, poetry, and comics you can't put down! Editors-in-Chief Melanie Anastasiou, Jennifer Landels and Susan Pieters believe carefully crafted quality writing does not have to be boring and empty of plot, and that literary fiction should be enraptured with a great story. We believe that popular fiction should be skilfully written, with a strong foundation of craft. We want the best of both literary worlds in one place, in one magazine. We are pulp, and we are literature.

We deliberately mix storytelling styles and blend genres in each issue to develop our palates with a variety of fiction, poetry, and comics. That's why we named our magazine the oxymoronic *Pulp Literature*. We want the fun times of a dime-store pulp paperback as well as quality literature. The best of both worlds, in one book—and for the price of a beer!

To inquire, submit MS, or purchase, go to:

< [www.pulpliterature.com](http://www.pulpliterature.com) >

## AFTER THE FALL

*by Michael John Bertrand*

*(This is a lampoon, a parody.)*

(Previously unpublished)

The giant ape didn't seem so menacing now that he lay dead and broken at the base of the Empire State Building. The New York City crowd, which had so recently been clamoring for the monster's blood, now stood around its corpse, stunned by the reality of it all.

A police lieutenant approached Carl Denham, the film director who had brought the beast to America in the first place, and said "Well, Denham, the airplanes got him."

"No, it wasn't the airplanes ...", replied Carl Denham. "... it was Beauty that killed the Beast."

The crowd nodded solemnly, and once more silence fell over the tragic scene.

That is, until a man at the back of the crowd said, "No, I'm pretty sure it was the airplanes."

A pause, and then the crowd nodded. That made more sense, really.

"Well, OK then," said Denham patiently. "It was Beauty, and the airplanes, that killed the Beast."

"Actually," said another man, "when you think about it, it was the bullets that killed it."

"You're right," said the first man. "The airplanes just got the guns close enough."

"It was Bullets, and Beauty, that killed the Beast ..." attempted Denham.

"I'm a lawyer," said a third person, somewhat self-importantly, "and I can assure you, no legal case could be made against the bullets, the gun, or the airplane. It was most definitely the pilots of the plane that killed the beast. I would stake my reputation on it."

"I don't know," said the first man. "I find it hard to believe that the small-caliber machine gun fire from an aero plane could do much damage to a creature of this size and mass."

"You're right!" said the second person excitedly. "I mean, proportionately, it would be like throwing pebbles at a full-grown man, wouldn't it?"

"Not even pebbles," said the first person. "Grit."



“So it was Grit, and Beauty, that killed ...” the director, Denham, doggedly began.

“No, no, the point is that the bullets could not have killed the beast,” said the lawyer. “At best, they were a contributing factor to the beast’s eventual fall from what is, one must admit, the tallest building in the world as of this date.”

“You're right!” agreed the first person. “Really, it was gravity that killed the Beast.”

“Well, um, let me hasten to add that from a legal standpoint, there is no difference between pushing someone and making them fall by, um, other means. It was still the pilots who killed the beast. Legally speaking,” said the lawyer.

“But that assumes the airplane's gun fire was the direct cause of the fall,” said the second person. “The two might have nothing to do with one another.”

“Yeah, maybe he just slipped!” said a boy from the crowd, with a giggle.

“Um, indeed, indeed,” said the lawyer. “Police experts would have to make the determination.”

“Okay, okay ...” sighed Denham, “... so it was gravity, with a possible assist from airplane gunfire, and Beauty, that killed the ...”

“Wait a minute ...” said a well-dressed little girl. “What did Beauty have to do with it?”

“Um, excuse me? I'm right here!” said Ann Darrow, the famous actress and recent ape abductee. “Did you miss the part where the giant ape grabbed me out of a window in the tallest building off the world, climbed to the top, and dangled me there in my underthings for the whole world to see? Because I don't know about you, but for me, that part was kind of important.”

“Well, sure, you were there,” said the girl. “But did the Beast even know you were there when he decided to climb the building?”

“Well, no,” replied Ann. “He just sort of ... picked me up along the way, I guess.” She glanced over at the giant ape’s body and gave it a look like, despite the tears she’d shed over its fate just minutes ago, she would like to give it a piece of her mind right about now.

“Right!” said the first person, eager to get back into the conversation. “And it’s not like it was your idea to bring the big guy here in the first place, let alone put it in front of the press when any moron should have been able to tell that flashbulbs would scare and enrage it ...”

As one, the crowd turned to look at Denham, who was looking decidedly uncomfortable and even somewhat hunted. He said, “Now look, people, let's not



make too many hasty conclusions here. The beast is my responsibility, and I say it was Beauty that killed the Beast ... all right?"

The crowd nodded uncomfortably, and the lawyer stepped up to Denham and said "As a member of the law firm who represents your business interests, sir, I have to strongly recommend you refrain from making any more comments that might expose you to further, um, *liability*."

"Uh, good thinking ... sir. In fact, I should ... probably just be going," said Denham, slowly backing towards the street while never taking his eyes on the assembled crowd

Suddenly he turned to the street and shouted "Taxi!" and, with his lawyer in tow, fled from the scene.

The first man who had spoken watched the taxi go, then turned back to the crowd and said "Look, I have no idea what really killed the Beast ... but it sure as hell wasn't Beauty."

The crowd all nodded firmly, especially Ann.

Once more, an awkward heavy silence fell, and it fell to the second man who had spoken to say the thought that was on everybody's mind.

"And who's going to clean all this up?"

As if to punctuate this point, the great beast's dying body emptied its bowels.

-----



**Lackington's Magazine** is an online magazine that publishes speculative fiction and art four times a year. We want to help widen the space for prose poetry. We're looking for *stylized* prose. Not inept purple prose, of course, but controlled and well-crafted wordsmithery that reflects the story, setting, theme, atmosphere, or philosophy it seeks to describe.

Stylized prose can be sparse and simple, diamond-cut like the writing of Ursula K. Le Guin. It can be sumptuous like the writing of Oscar Wilde. It can be epic, archaic, experimental, mythic, rhythmic, and it can be quiet and subtle, too. Story and character are indispensable, but so is wordcraft. We trade in aesthetics, so make us gasp with unexpected words and give us inventive voices, structures, and narratives. Many editors reject heavily stylized prose out of hand. We welcome it.

See < <https://lackingtons.com/> >

## IS PLUTO STILL A PLANET?

*by Richard Stevenson*

(Previously unpublished)

Is Pluto still a planet  
if only 4% of the membership  
of the International Astronomical Union  
got a chance to vote to can it?

Was ancient astronaut theorist  
Zaccariah Sitchen full of hot air?  
His sloppy research didn't put a dent in  
book sales, which have reached the stratosphere!

Is Vulcan just a passing bunch  
of tourist asteroids only visible  
when they stop to toss their litter  
between Mercury and the sun?

How about those classy Annunaki –  
reptoid folk from twelfth planet  
Nibiru? They created homo sapiens  
through genetic tinkering, by cracky!

Crashed in South Africa, seeded  
Sumeria with semi-sentient humans.  
Something to do while they were  
tryin' to scare up spare parts.

Poor E.T.s couldn't get home  
until they used us as slaves  
to get the gold out of the ground  
to fix their saucers, evil gnomes!

Back at work on Homo Sapiens III,  
visiting the planet again? Maybe divvying

up their swag with the Greys  
who need cow's blood and plasma?

Is God asleep at the switch  
while Sitchen's minions try to make  
something of monkeys Darwin would've dug?  
Who's runnin' the show? Cleanin' the cages?

If reptoids created us, you gotta  
ask the obvious questions: Why? What for?  
Maybe the kids were just playin'  
in radioactive sand boxes too long.

We're just Golem puppets  
with Chatty Cathy strings, eh?  
I say, God bless Sitchen, the IAU...  
Let's keep Pluto. Give 'im a little leash.

-----

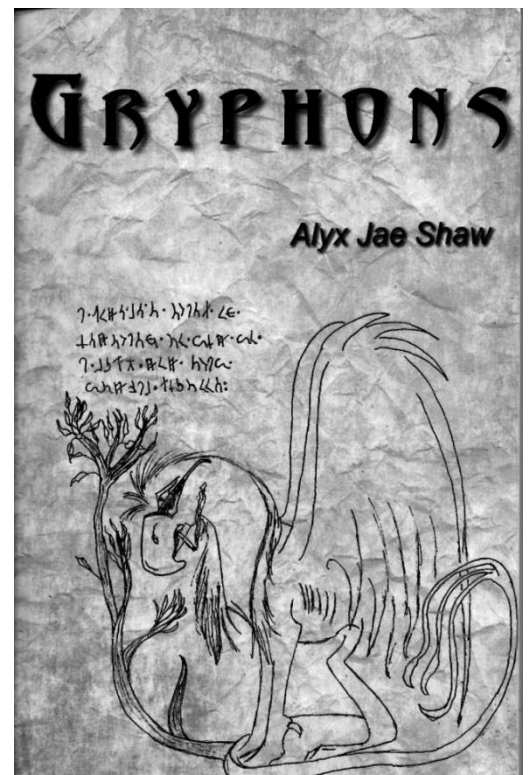
From Alyx Jae Shaw, the author of "A Strange Place in Time" trilogy, and "The Shroud Eaters," comes the YA novel "Gryphons" about aliens on a distant planet who love only one thing about Earth ... our Rock N Roll legacy.

"The Rolling Stones are not dead," said Czamkiar. "They've merely reached an age where it's no longer safe to move them, and a sneeze could prove catastrophic."

"In a galaxy, not too far away, there was rock. And metal and great music. There was also a civilization pulling itself up out of war and occupation. 'Gryphons' is Shaw's latest work and it drags you into a new world, skilfully creating realistic characters who you end up caring for, loving. This is a brilliant addition to the YA genre and you won't regret picking it up."

- Caz Mumin, the DJ Mumin Metal Radio Show

Available at Amazon.ca in Kindle, paperback and hardcover formats.



# DYSON SPHERE

*by William Squirrell*

(Previously unpublished)

They boiled out from the crevice and onto the lead-colored plain in their dozens. Segmented bodies coiled and uncoiled, glittering black in the blazing light, the thousand legs a whispering blur.

“Sibling; sibling; sibling,” they chattered. “Sibling; sibling; sibling.”

The expanse over which they flowed was crisscrossed with cracks, grooves, and craters. Most were shallow scratches and dents, but some were deep enough to provide a modicum of shelter from the constant blast of radiation, and a few punched right through the brittle crust into the moist, oxygen-rich darkness beyond. These had become vents from which billowed gas and vapor.

They could smell water; they could smell the funky exhalations of fungus and mold; they could smell the excreta of the creatures that feasted on such growths; they could smell all this and they were hungry; they were thirsty.

“This way: prey. This way: prey. This way: prey,” they chattered, and swept towards one of the steaming chasms. They poured over the lip, through the stinking gale, into the blackness, and were gone.

\*\*\*

The cleaned-out husk of their parent lay in the deserted canyon den. It was a delicate, translucent coil, hundreds of clawed feet still clinging to the surface. There was no wind here to shake it free, or sweep it into a corner, no water to wash it away, nothing left to be scavenged by hungry organisms. Eventually another would come along, reproductive fronds heavy with gestating progeny, and scuttle the feathery shell out into the open. The freed remains would fall gently towards the furnace of the sun, a cluster of shimmering petals – entirely void of value, drifting down into gravity’s well, into the center of the great sphere that was this world.

\*\*\*

They were hunting; two overlapping waves of them driving all manner of creeping crawling things out of the rank wet chaos of the fungal forest towards the dead end they knew lay at the end of the tunnel.

“Here; here; here,” they chattered to each other as they ran. “Here; here; here.”

The pleasure of synchronized control was intense. They rushed forward through the dark, a vortex that washed around and around the pipe, never quite at full speed: slowing down, sweeping wide, a sudden burst here, a balletic turn to cut off retreat there, the constant white hot burn of oxygen.

“Here; here; here,” came the chattering encouragement. “Soon; soon; soon.”

The kill, when they finally cornered the panicked mass, was explosive: mandibles passed through limbs and bodies like lightning strikes. There was no stopping to feed, just a careening dance from one victim to the next, twisting and spinning through a hurricane of shattered shells and vaporized organs until there was nothing left to kill.

\*\*\*

The swarm lay in tangled repose—it was impossible to tell where one sibling ended and the next began. One of them woke from the desert of its dreams, from the memory of heat and brightness, of the coiled parent, the memory of first awareness, of sibling chatter and movement fused together in a recollection of searing light, the memory of seeing a single squirming shadow cast onto the back of the cave.

“Siblings; parent; prey,” it chattered as it slipped back into sleep. “Siblings; parent; prey.”

\*\*\*

They brushed up against each other as they slithered about in the steamy darkness, microscopic hairs feeling the slightest change in air pressure and movement. The swarm twisted and turned like smoke. They split apart and merged, circled and surged, a chattering wave washing the tunnels and the caves clean of living detritus. And as they consumed they grew, and as they grew so did their hunger.

\*\*\*

“Here; here; here;” came the chattering out of the darkness. “Soon; soon; soon.”

The flying thing came careening down the tunnel, away from pursuit and into the trap. They leapt up from the floor, out from sides, and down from the ceiling: a fist clenching, a mouth closing. There was terror at losing contact with the surface, there was the joy of execution, of feeling your sinuous self uncoiling through the air, the pain of the concussive impact, the delight of fangs and claws sinking into flesh, the delicious spray of fluid and the squeals of agony.

\*\*\*

It became hard to find crevices and holes into which they could all fit. Little clusters of them separated from the mass. The occasional individual wandered off. It was dangerous to do so: there were flying things that would attack them, even some crawlers that posed a threat, and there was always the danger of another swarm. But chattering into the black air and hearing no response was pleasant after a lifetime of overstimulation, and to move independently of the swarm was uncanny and intriguing. Alone one could make decisions, shape desire. Alone one noticed things: the sound of running water, the strange phosphorescent patterns on the walls, the movement of the air towards the bigger tunnels, away from the source of running water, towards the sun.

\*\*\*

Five of them had broken off entirely from their siblings. The swarm no longer caught enough in a single hunt to satisfy all its members, and the fastest growing of their number were getting increasingly aggressive over the kills. They would rear up, flare their budding reproductive fronds and scream “Prey! Prey! Prey!” at smaller siblings.

For a while the five did well on their own: they found a flyer nest and feasted on the infants, slaughtering the parent when it returned with food for its young. From there they hunted the nearby tunnels clean. When the supply failed, they moved on, scrabbling from one fungal forest to the next, consuming whatever small crawlers they caught out unawares, but they were now too large to pursue them into their lairs and bolt holes, to dig out eggs and larva. They were always hungry, always bad tempered, always looking for more, and always moving away from darkness towards the light. They moved in and out of one of the great tubes as they searched for sustenance, watching the white pinpoint at the end of it grow slightly larger each time they moved, always following the wind as it rushed towards the sun, following it as its volume rose from a whisper to a wail to a roar. Sometimes they sang along.

“Sun; sun; sun!” they sang. “Parent; parent; parent!”

\*\*\*

Their forays onto the surface grew longer and longer. On an early venture into the blazing light they found a nest of infants in a shallow scrape, a squirming mass hollowing out the corpse of their parent. They swallowed mouthful after shrilling mouthful of them and then turned their attention to the inert bulk of the

parent. They tunneled into it, gorging until they collapsed exhausted in the muck, drifting between dreams, childhood recollection, and the satiated now.

\*\*\*

Their reproductive fronds flowered into purple corals and feathers which trailed along their mouths. They fought among themselves. The carnage of their gluttony, and the particular taste of their own species had triggered a host of associations and memories, flooded them with nostalgia. They thought of little more than how they once fed so endlessly and relentlessly on their parent. They thought of nothing but the taste of that meat. When they snapped and bit at each other it was rarely in play.

\*\*\*

Soon there were only two left; they had consumed their siblings, and were just beginning to starve again. The larger one was frequently overcome by hormonal floods. It would rage. Its fronds—coated with a sticky, malodorous sweat—burned and itched. It threw itself on the ground, screaming and moaning and twisting in great looping contortions, rubbing its belly raw. The smaller sibling scurried away, circling at a great distance, chattering to itself.

Eventually the repeated uproar attracted a large adult. The monster stormed over a ridge, hissing as it swept past the small juvenile cowering in a crack. The larger juvenile saw the threat at the last second and reared up screaming. The adult bowled it over, mandibles ripping open its belly, snaking around it a tight loop and tearing away with its clawed forelegs. Limbs, chunks of flesh, clouds of fluid, fell towards the sun in a sticky rain. The adult pinned the twitching remains to the surface and dragged its fronds through the muck and the guts, squirming and rolling about in the offal, rubbing the gore into its enflamed reproductive organs.

“Prey!” the adult screamed. “Prey! Prey! Prey!”

The smaller juvenile watched, chattering quietly to itself.

“Sibling,” it said. “Sibling; sibling; sibling.”

After the adult finished rolling about, it wandered off. The remaining juvenile crept out and fed on what was left; some tissue smeared here and there, a few legs still clinging to the rock.

“Sibling,” it chattered as it ate. “Sibling; sibling; sibling.”

\*\*\*

The juvenile followed the great beast, watching it attack and dismember another large adult, and then another, and another. After the victor writhed about in its victims and slithered off, the juvenile scavenged in the remains. By the third kill another juvenile was trailing along as well. The two circled the scraps, eyeing each other warily, hissing and chattering, "Prey! Prey! Prey!" before one would dart forward to grasp some fragment and scuttle off to safety. A third juvenile arrived in the train, and a fourth.

They lived like this for some time, until the adult disappeared into a crater. The little troop waited. The adult did not return, but hunger did. Still they waited. Finally, they turned on the smallest and killed it.

When the juvenile woke from its post-meal sleep its burning fronds glistened with stinking dew. It clawed and scratched at them, rubbed them roughly across the surface, but this brought no respite. The other juveniles fled the enraged screams, and it roared its frustration across the sun-soaked desert. It roared and roared, twisting and turning. It rampaged across the plain, tearing and ripping at the surface, looking for something forgiving to bury its face in, something soft and wet in which to sooth its engorged fronds.

\*\*\*

A scurry of movement caught its attention. Something scuttled into a crevasse. A faint chatter behind it brought its head around in time to catch another blur of movement. It reared up for a better view and suddenly there were juveniles everywhere, rushing at it from all sides in writhing, glistening packs. It sank its mandibles into the head of one and flung it towards the sun. Then it was overwhelmed and flung onto its back, a thousand claws held it tight against the hard surface, it could hear itself screaming, and see the twisting, turning shape of the juvenile it had thrown, receding into the light, vanishing into a point. They began shearing off its reproductive fronds and white sheets of blinding agony came crashing down on it.

\*\*\*

It woke in a cave, lying in its own damp mess, its head and jaws the quivering center of crippling pain.

"Sibling; sibling; sibling," something chattered and the juvenile swiveled its throbbing head. Another juvenile was curled up nearby watching, it uncoiled and slid over.



“Sibling; sibling; sibling,” it chattered and caressed the wounded creature’s head and back with a thousand feathery touches.

“Sibling; sibling; sibling.”

As the mutilated juvenile slipped back into sleep it saw that its cavemate too, had been shorn of its fronds, with nothing around its mandibles but a creased tangle of dark scars.

\*\*\*

It woke again and the cave was filled with juveniles, some dozing, some cleaning themselves, or their fellows, with gentle caresses. All were mutilated, all were sterile.

“Sibling; sibling; sibling,” they chattered.

The agony had subsided into a dull ache. The juvenile had been dreaming of its birth cave, of its birth siblings, the sun painting shadows onto the back wall. It was hungry but the rage was gone, the burning and the itch was gone, just the hunger remained.

“Hungry; hungry; hungry,” it chattered.

“Sun; parent; sibling,” came the reply. “Sun; parent; sibling.”

\*\*\*

From the rise one could look out over the plain and see tens of thousands of juveniles. They were flowing across it in rivers of shimmering black, all converging on a distant, swaying column that reached towards the sun, the end of it lost in a blaze of light and heat. Occasionally a whirlpool briefly disrupted the black flow, as a new juvenile was caught and sheared, or an adult killed, but then the tide swept on.

“Sibling; sibling; sibling,” was the chorus that echoed back and forth across the plain.

“Sun; parent; sibling,” an occasional refrain.

“Sibling; sibling; sibling,” the juvenile chattered and rushed down the hill.

“Sun; parent; sibling.”

\*\*\*

Hundreds of the juveniles died of starvation as they journeyed to the column. Their bodies lay untouched, uneaten, by the thousands who travelled on. Once in awhile one of the dying had the presence of mind to release its grip on the surface before it passed out, and it would fall, head over tail towards the sun. When this happened, the juveniles nearby would sing.

“Sun; parent; sibling. Sun; parent; sibling.”

As they approached the tower there were more and more bodies to navigate. The juveniles clambered over the remains of their fellows. It became apparent the surface that rose to meet the base of the column was composed entirely of corpses: generations of them, desiccated, pressed down into each other by the weight of countless pilgrims. The column, as well, was comprised of the tangled remains of previous climbers, each generation reaching a little closer to the sun than the last.

“Soon; soon; soon,” they chattered. “Sun; parent; sibling.”

The juveniles climbed as far as they could and found a place to die, locking their limbs and mandibles into an embrace with the dead. Most saw, as their last sight, the surface stretch out around them in its familiar flatness, disintegrating into haze. But some made it right out of the effluvia and the steam, to see the world as a gargantuan bowl. And they saw too, in the far distance, growing along the rising sides of the bowl, like the fungi in the tunnels, they saw other columns, hundreds of them, thousands, all reaching—like them—for the sun.

Yet the sun itself, even from the apex of their efforts, even from the greatest heights which they achieved, even from the very end of the world, the sun itself seemed no closer than when they were crawling around on the surface. The compulsion to let go at this realization was very great, and many did.

\*\*\*

They fell through airless space, twisting and turning, coiling and uncoiling, claws clenching and releasing. The bowl of the world rounded out into a titanic sphere as they fell, but they had eyes only for the white-hot disc of the sun.

“Sun: parent. Sun: parent,” they sang. “Sun: parent. Sun: parent.”

They fell in their millions, all singing, all dancing. As they fell they remembered the never-ending feast of infancy, the joy of play with their siblings, the thoughtlessness of pleasure; they remembered the radiance that washed over them in their caves and canyons and crevasses—the same radiance that washed over them now; they remembered the shadows dancing on the wall as their parent died. They twisted and turned and danced as they fell and fell and fell into the eternal furnace.

“Love,” they sang. “Love; love; love.”

-----

# THE BLACKEST ART

*by R. Graeme Cameron*

(Previously unpublished)

He walked straight up the path to the porch, disdainfully kicking aside the writhing tentacles exuding from the puff-balls on its uneven planks, and knocked forcefully on the rotting wood of the door. Something scratched and whispered on the other side. He sprang back as the door slowly opened.

A baldheaded man peered around, his red-rimmed watery eyes staring suspiciously. “Yes?” the man inquired, heavy jowls shaking as he spoke, sending rivulets of motion through the folds of fat underlying the glistening skin atop his head. “What do you want?”

“I’m McGregor Mathers. Are you Mr. Crowley?”

The man’s rubbery cheeks split wide in an obscene smile of relief. “Yes. Call me Al. I’m glad you came. I’m at my wit’s end. Don’t know what I would have done if I hadn’t come across your ad in the ‘Order of the Golden Dawn Tribune.’ Do come in.”

Mathers crossed himself as he stepped across the threshold. It was a routine precaution, but he saw at once how vital it was. The interior of the house was an absolute riot of rot, smut, fungus, toadstools, mildew, mushrooms and mold clinging to every surface with the tenacity of fungoid delirium. He was glad he had remembered to wear his knee-high leather boots.

Crowley shrugged despairingly. “You name it, I’ve got it. Worse than ever tonight.” Tears hung suspended from the thick bags under his eyes.

Sometimes a man pushed to the brink can be a source of ferocious strength, thought Mathers. Looks like we’ll need it.

“There’s a ghost, I believe. You’ve seen it?” he asked.

“Oh, yes.” A doleful expression crossed Crowley’s face. “It’s the shade of a woman. Shows up at the most disconcerting times, like when I’m in my bath scrubbing off the slime. Is she the source of the rot?”

“Probably. Could be a demon though. Ashtoreth maybe. Any other manifestations?”

Crowley scratched his pot belly gingerly. “Sometimes I look down and see messages written across the top of my stomach, can read them as easy as burning a witch. Always the same message. ‘Mary M. Mary M’ Oh God.’ What’s it mean?”

“It’s obvious. ‘Mary, Mother of God.’ Where’s your basement?”

“You don’t want to visit the basement,” stated Crowley with a shudder.

“But we must. Can’t do an exorcism in a penthouse. Got to get under the skin of Hades.”

Crowley shrugged resignedly, his fear wetting his forehead with perspiration. “I think you’ll find this basement deeper than you bargained for.”

He turned and led the way down a mold-encrusted hall to a stairwell coated in black rust. A moment’s hesitation, and he started down the steps, his shoulders hunched together as if to protect the back of his neck from his guest.

This is a frightened man, thought Mathers, exhibits all the wariness of a vampire at sunrise. Best be on my guard.

He paused at the foot of the stairs. He was in a stone-walled cellar ankle-deep in malignant green slime, as if a giant lime-sucking amoeba had splashed in from another dimension. When he took his first tentative steps across the hidden floor the slime heaved and billowed like an alien sea, then shot thick tendrils up the walls to drip from the worm-eaten planks of the ceiling. A curious, sickly sweet smell perfumed the dead air. Mathers felt his stomach churn. He fought back the nausea and set down his bulging sack at his feet.

“Quite obscene, some of it,” commented Crowley, pointing at the phallic globs of glistening slime drooping down.

Mathers’ eyes burned with anger. “She always did think poorly of my priapic performance,” he muttered darkly.

“She? The ghost?”

“Nothing, nothing,” said Mathers wearily. “Just thinking aloud. Got a shovel?”

Crowley splashed through the ocean of slime to the far wall and returned with a slime-besotted shovel. “Will this do?”

“Hope so,” replied Mathers, taking it from his hands. “Stand back, Al, the slime’s really gonna fly.” He leaned forward and set to work with a will. It was grim work, scooping up blobs of the living jelly and flinging it against the walls, but he derived a thin satisfaction from the knowledge that he was causing it pain, causing her pain. He redoubled his efforts. Soon he had cleared an area nearly fifteen feet square.

“Good enough,” he commented, dropping the shovel with a tired grin. “Now to prepare the ceremonial environment.”

Suddenly there came a sound like two slabs of wet flesh slapping together. A dozen meat cleavers materialized, their blades buried in the tips of the obscenities hanging from the ceiling.

“Hell’s Bells,” shouted Crowley, frantically pulling up his shirt and staring at his pot belly. Livid welts glowed an angry red. “Here it is again!”

“Mary M. murdered!” read the message.

Mathers snorted. “Typical female demon threat display. Ignore it. Don’t pay any attention to anything she says or does during the exorcism.”

“I have to stay?” whined Crowley, his eyes bugging out. “Why can’t I go?”

Mathers knelt down and began untying the soggy fastenings of his sack. “I need you to help define the psychic territory, or else I’ll not have the advantage of place.”

“But ... wouldn’t it be better ...”

“Keep calm. I know what I’m doing. I’ve memorized the Grimoire of Honorius.”

“Oh ... great ... that’s very reassuring.”

Mathers pulled a collapsed metal stand out of his sack, then sprang the legs apart, setting it down on the concrete floor next to the stairs.

“You sure you know how to do this?” inquired Crowley with a puzzled frown. “That doesn’t look traditional.”

“I can’t afford a proper altar as yet,” explained Mathers, “but no matter. THESE are the important elements.” So saying, he laid a white linen cloth over the table, then placed a copper chafing dish in the centre of the black pentagram embroidered on the cloth. Next he pulled out a length of iron chain and formed it into a circle around the pentagram. “Magnetized, you see, very important. Now I’m filling the dish with laurel and alder leaves to fuel the purest of sacred flames.”

“Interesting,” commented Crowley, distractedly clawing at his sore belly. “Just like in the movies.”

“And these,” added Mathers, drawing forth a large plastic bag filled with crumpled brown plant matter, “are vervain leaves. This is going to cost you a great deal. Damned hard to get this time of year.” He began to sprinkle bits of the vervain over the iron chain.

Red light flooded the room. Glowing letters spread along the wall, spelling out “Mary Mathers murdered! Avenge me!” A smell of sulphur filled the room even as the letters began to fade.

“Getting close! Not much time!” shouted Mathers, scrambling on all fours about the centre of the cleared space to draw a nine-foot circle with a lump of charcoal.

“Any relation? This Mary Mathers?” inquired Crowley quietly.

“My wife. What of it?”

“Dead, is she?”

“Dead and buried these four years. Never mind. The demon is just pretending to be her. Don’t worry about it.” Mathers completed the greater circle and began drawing a lesser eight-foot circle within.

“Murdered, was she?”

Mathers paused to glare at Crowley. “Certainly not. An accident.”

“Really? You sure?” insisted Crowley, an odd glint in his eyes.

“Meat cleaver fell on her. I wasn’t even home at the time. Got witnesses. Police were satisfied.”

Crowley waved his fat arms at the slime-drenched walls around them. “Then why—?”

“Because I’m the best exorcist alive. The demons of Hell are out to get me, that’s all.”

Crowley gently scratched his burning belly some more. “All very well for you, but why does she pick on me?”

“Shut up!” yelled Mathers. “You want to spoil the ceremony? To be sucked into the nethermost reaches of Hell?”

“Not especially.”

“Then keep quiet and stand in the centre of the circle. Be careful not to step on any of the lines.”

Crowley hopped into the circle to stand with his arms folded, morosely contemplating Mathers, a wounded expression on his jelly-like face.

Mathers strolled the perimeter of the circle strewing iron crosses, silver pentagrams and copper plates embossed with the names of power in the gap between the two lines composing the circle. Then he reversed direction and sprinkled vervain leaves over all the metal fetishes.

“You brought enough good luck charms,” grunted Crowley. “Do you own them or did you rent them?”

“I made them myself, with my own two hands.”

“I guess you’re professional enough,” conceded Crowley sourly.

“If not, we’re both doomed.”

Mathers waded through the advancing knee-deep slime to the altar by the stairs. He bent over the sacred chafing dish and lit the can of Sterno beneath it, then raced back to the security of the circle.

Blue smoke rose in lazy drifts, shriveling and blackening the unholy muck on the ceiling above. Crowley approved. He smiled, his petulance fading. “Now what?” he inquired.

Mathers turned to face the altar. "I'm going to trap her within the smoke and render her form visible."

"What do I do?"

"Keep quiet, sit down, hug your knees, and think happy thoughts."

Crowley, much sobered, complied. Mathers stood beside him, silent, arms crossed, chin resting on his chest, eyes closed, composing his emotions, seeking the proper mood to ensure victory. He felt the power build within. He smiled, and softly began chanting, his voice increasing in strength word by word till he was shrieking like an animal in pain.

"Oh, deep, dank, dark of the death,  
I charge thee by the triple-jawed Cerberus,  
I call your spirit from the vasty, nasty deep,  
Let fly your corporal soul, habit the smoke,  
Be chained to my will and harm me not,  
Mary Mathers! Mary Mathers! Obey! Obey! Obey!"

The smoke rising from the altar pulsed violently like an over-wrought steam engine, magically lending solidity to an emerging form, that of a woman with a sad expression pointing lugubriously at Mathers. "Murderer!" she hissed. "Murderer!"

Crowley began to rock back and forth on his haunches nervously. "I don't know ... maybe we should call it off."

"Never!" shouted Mathers, his gaze fixed on Mary.

"Free me! Free me!" screeched the apparition in the smoke. "Confess lest I haunt this world till all mortal men know you are the foul beast, the cruel beast, the bestial son of Satan!"

"This is the part I hate the most," admitted Mathers, hurriedly donning a robe of red silk. "Malicious slander, demonic slander, near impossible to endure."

Crowley's eyes lit up at the sight of the embroidery on the back of Mather's robe. "Ah, the authentic stuff. Hexagram within a circle. Weird lettering. What does it all mean?"

"The Double Seal of Solomon!" snarled Mathers. "Stop distracting me!"

The demon was screaming now, howling like a banshee.

"What will the neighbours think?" shouted Crowley.

"To Hell with the neighbours!" Mathers shouted back. "Got to do this right. No room left for mistakes. We're in too deep now."

He lit three black candle sticks and nudged them with his foot just outside the boundary of the protective circle. Carefully he strewed vervain leaves between them to form a sacred triangle. Next he pulled a red silk bundle from his nearly empty sack, tore the bundle apart, and lifted out an iron sword forged in the fire of sacrifice and quenched in holy water. Using the point, he drew an imaginary circle around Crowley and himself. This complete, he relaxed, sagging with relief. “Now I summon the Chief of Demons to remove Ashtoreth,” he explained.

“I am NOT Ashtoreth!” declared the creature imprisoned in the misting scent of burning laurel and alder leaves. “I am Mary, corpse of our love, foully murdered!”

“Liar!” retorted Mathers, dramatically swirling his red robe for Crowley’s benefit. “You must be Belial then, demon of lies!”

The image of the mist-witch wavered as she laughed scornfully. “Beloved husband!” she cried. “Forty times I have appeared, forty times I have informed a pious soul of your misdeeds—”

“And forty times I have thrust you back into Hell!” Mathers yelled triumphantly. “Forty times I have defeated you!”

“Forty times?” muttered Crowley. “Seems a bit much.”

“And forty times I will come again,” declared Mary. “Forty glimpses of Hell for you, my sweet, and forty—”

“Enough! Be quiet!” Mathers commanded. “Now be damned eternal by the mighty powers I summon!” He waved his sword about him and again began to chant.

“I conjure, bind, and charge thee,  
By all the names of power,  
By him who spake, by the dreadful joy,  
I constrain you to appear!”

He looked around expectantly. Nothing. Mary laughed.

Frowning, he stroked the air with vicious cuts of his magic sword, this time speaking in a grim voice booming with menace.

“I conjure, bind and charge thee,  
By all the names of power,  
Helim! Joth! Agla! Adonay!  
Tetragrammaton! Kadosh!



Sotou! Yod He Vau He! Eloy!  
Saboath! Elohim! Emanuel! Yah!  
By the real name of God!  
By the ineffable name!  
I command you to appear!

Again, nothing. Mathers was crestfallen. It worked last time. Why not this time?

“You left out Fred. And Bob,” muttered Crowley. “Try those names.”

“What?” asked Mathers dazedly. “What?”

“She’s toying with us,” said Crowley, rising to his feet to stare incredulously at the womanly form writhing in the smoke, his voice barely audible over the roaring of her hysterical laughter. “She’s too strong for us.”

Inspiration struck. “No, she isn’t!” shouted Mathers in sudden glee. “I’m going to use the Spell of Last Resort!”

With a desperate eagerness, he pulled the last of his implements from his sack: a second chafing dish, more iron wire, a black wooden box, a roll of parchment. Then he ran his sword through his left hand, drawing an ample supply of fresh blood in which he dipped his right index finger to write her name on the parchment as Crowley watched in nauseated astonishment. Next Mathers placed the parchment within the box and secured the lid with the wire. Dropping a big lump of vervain leaves into the chafing dish, he set it alight, then lifted the box with the point of his sword and held it suspended above the flame. He began yet another chant, his voice loud with anger.

“I conjure, bind, and charge thee,  
By all the names of power,  
By all the powers of Hell!  
Yog-Sothoth! Nyarlathotep!  
Tsathoggua! Azathoth! Cthulhu!  
Come corporally before my eyes,  
And abide awhile this place!  
Baalzebub Beelzebub!  
Baalzebub Beelzebub!  
I conjure, bind, and charge thee!  
And the word was made flesh!  
Fiat! Fiat! Fiat! Amen!

There came a blinding flash of cosmic light, Mary's shrieking laughter immediately drowned by the hideous, droning buzz of a buffalo-sized iridescent-winged fly materializing from beyond the terrestrial plane to land directly in front of the altar. It stamped about on hinged feet, agitated, till it turned its bulbous eyes on McGregor Mathers, their every facet reflecting his capering image.

"Bloody Heaven, not again!" moaned the gargantuan fly, manipulating its unspeakably loathsome mouthparts in a most remarkable fashion in order to simulate human speech.

"Take her away, old blowfly," said Mathers lightly with a wave of his hand, winking at Crowley as if everything was all right.

"Forty times I've done this for you," complained the monster fly. "I'm the Chief Pontiff of the Nether Regions! I don't have time for this petty stuff. Summon a lesser demon. Lilith maybe? Or Moloch? I'm so sick of doing your bidding."

"Maybe you better humour it," whispered Crowley.

Mathers shrugged. "I'm in command here. Beelzebub! Do as I decree! You have no choice!"

"But it is all so futile," whined the visibly irritated giant fly. "So purposeless. Basic souls no problem. All are welcome in Hell. But a ghost? An immaterialist whose soul is fixed in Purgatory? Every time I bring her down Lucifer slaps an injunction on me and I have to let her go. It's all so unfair. So mean."

"Do as I say."

"I hate you! I really hate you!" roared the Demon Pontiff, drumming his feet in frustration. "By the goat I hate you!"

"At your peril!" shouted Crowley, lunging forward to shove Mathers from the circle. Caught off guard, the exorcist gasped as he stumbled to his knees, then screamed in terror when Beelzebub snatched him up and pressed him close to its monstrous thorax.

"Ah, fresh carrion soul!" squealed Beelzebub. "This is more like it."

"Mercy!" shrieked McGregor Mathers. "Mercy! Have mercy!"

"Now you'll learn what it has been like for me!" yelled Mary.

Crowley smiled, folded his arms, and softly began singing:

"By the black pullet,  
Because thou hast granted our prayers,  
I hereby abjure thy corporal presence  
Without hateful result to I and mine.  
I command thee to depart in peace. Amen.

With one last despairing “Noooooo!” McGregor Mathers shrank into oblivion in the firm grip of the Lord of the Flies.

“Revenge! Revenge! I have my revenge!” shouted Mary, weeping flames of joy.

“One of the finer emotions,” commented Crowley, waddling out of the circle and going up to the Altar. “Let me set you free.” With one quick swipe of his pudgy hand he knocked the chafing dish to the floor.

The phantasm that was Mary Mathers whirled about the massive body of Al Crowley, caressing him with her mist. “My love, my love!” she cried. “I’m so lucky I chose your house for my latest haunting. We might never have met, never have fallen in love! Your plan worked! You are so wonderful! So beautiful!”

“Yes,” agreed Crowley, “I really am the best of Warlocks, am I not?” A ghastly, ghostly gleam lit his eyes. “Sometimes, just for fun, shall we conjure up your late husband? Or would that be too cruel?”

“Yes, it would,” giggled Mary. “Let’s do it EVERY day. No, TWICE a day.”

Crowley rolled his eyes. This was going to cost him a fortune in vervain leaves. Perhaps if he cut back on sacrificing virgins ...

-----

**UNNERVING MAGAZINE** is a brand new online Canadian website which pays 1¢ a word (just like Polar Borealis) for short story submissions of horror, dark science fiction (light), dark fantasy and dark literary. Generally leaning strongly toward horror over other genres. Sex, gore and violence are welcome in moderation (nothing gratuitous). The same goes for bizarro works, nothing too far gone (whatever that means). Please no hard science fiction, sword and sorcery fantasy, erotica, romance, humor that isn’t sinister or literary works that venture so far into experimental that they become nonsense.

Eddie Generous is the founder and editor. A former newspaper layout, designer and writer, Eddie has decided to take his working knowledge of a floundering industry and further saturate it with an additional quality publication.

Shawn Leslie Dixon is a writer and reader with a background in the newspaper industry with dozens of speculative fiction credits to his name. His novel Truro Trap was published in May 2016 by Black Rose. He assists with book reviews, columns, interviews and some of the website function.

RJ Richardson is an aspiring Canadian author residing in Ontario, with a love of all horror genres. He writes book reviews and features.

For more details, go to: < <http://www.unnervingmagazine.com/> >

## OLD SCI-FI FILMS

*by J.J. Steinfeld*

(Originally published in *Eye to the Telescope*, USA)

All the elderly man  
nearing a hundred now  
watched were old sci-fi films  
from the 1950s and 60s  
a collection of videos  
the envy of any film buff  
over and over, nothing else  
not sitcoms or the evening news  
his favourite *Plan 9 from Outer Space*  
for reasons beyond irony or sense  
claiming Bela Lugosi  
was a cherished friend.

The film-watching elderly man  
ate well and frequently  
though mainly whole-grain bread  
drank skim milk by the jug  
kept up his spirits  
by singing in a language  
no one in the seniors' home  
recognized  
waiting for them to land  
on the lawn of the seniors' home  
and take him back  
to a planet  
where age was irrelevant.

During each viewing  
he laughs several times  
describes the beauty  
of his childhood home  
its complexity and richness

and pointing at the common room's  
larger-than-life TV screen  
tells everyone in the room  
they got it all wrong  
not even close,  
those silly, silly Earthlings.

-----

## SAY GOODBYE TO THE OLD BEASTS

*by Darren Ridgley*

(Previously unpublished)

Every morning, I forget how cold it is. Back home, the bed and my sheets would stay warm, but not here in the tent. My body can never warm my sleeping roll or my blanket enough, and the bottom of the tent gets too much of a chill from the dirt beneath it. My teeth chatter. I slept in my coat and socks and it is still not enough.

Outside I can hear tata cooking breakfast. I rise off my sleeping roll and go out into the world, and it's colder than the tent, just a little. I put on my boots but my toes are already freezing. Tata is stirring something in a pan. I hope for a moment that it's meat—maybe he got up early and caught a fish, or found a rabbit in our snares—but it is only beans again. We will be out of them soon.

“Frank,” he waves me over to the fire. “Eat something, boy. We have a long day searching.”

He puts some beans in a bowl and gives me the bowl and a spoon.

“Tata, can I try some coffee today?”

Tata looks at the little coffee pot, which he has set aside. It is already made and I can smell it from the door of the tent.

“No, Frank. You're too young. Young boys need no help to wake up.”

I feel very tired. I look again at the coffee pot.

“Please, tata? Today is my birthday. I am ten now, and that's close to being a man.”

“Birthday?” he eyes the pot, and looks back at me. “Well, okay then. A present for my big son.”

I wait eagerly as he places a tin cup on a tree stump he is using as a table, and fills it for me. My birthday was three weeks ago but he forgot. Back then this search was still fun so I ignored it, but now I lie, for the coffee. It tastes terrible but is much hotter than the beans.

Another day of searching. One month we have been out here, searching. Searching and scrounging for food when our cans run out, finding a town to steal supplies because our money ran out long ago, and speaking only English. It’s only the two of us here so I don’t know why we can’t speak Polish, but tata says when we return, I must grow up as a Canadian boy, not a Pole, so we must work on my English. His is not always very good, though. I think mine is already better. At least he lets me use the old words for family. At least I can still say *tata* and *matka* and *babcia*.

For one month, he has taken me along on his “big hunt.” He says we are looking for the Sasquatch, here in the mountains, in British Columbia, far away from our house in Manitoba. We drove and drove for days to get here. I thought he was playing a game when he first told me, and I laughed. He became very upset. His magazines said Sasquatch lives in B.C., so we came to hunt him and kill him.

He says Sasquatch stole my matka away from us.

If he is telling the truth, then the hunt is a good one. Matka has been missing for a month and a half. I don’t know how tata found out Sasquatch took her, but he says he has his sources and seems very convinced. The Sasquatch could be real. In Poland, babcia always cautioned against going into the woods in case Leshy, the spirit of the forest, came for us. Babcia swore to me she saw him once, in the woods near her house. Sasquatch sounds a lot like Leshy.

After I finish the coffee, we pack up our campsite and start hiking again, always trying to go higher into the mountains when we can. Tata thinks the monster took matka high up, since its long legs and great strength would make climbing easy, and hard for anyone to chase. Every day, tata finds evidence of Sasquatch. Today it’s a path of broken tree branches, all in a row.

“Look, Frank,” Tata picks up a broken branch. “He is so big, so strong. He smashed through all these skinny trees, and didn’t go around. He is close.”

Later, he finds a big puddle that he says is a footprint. He says it is exactly like the photos in his magazines, but I do not know because I do not read them.

We walk most of the day in silence, because tata worries our talking will alert Sasquatch we are coming. But sometimes I have to talk, and have to hear him talk.

“Tata, why would Sasquatch take matka?”

“I tell you every day, Frank. I tell you every day,” His breath is ragged. He smokes too much and the climbing is hard. “And you still ask every day. The Sasquatch is half a man, and he is lonely out here in the woods. Like any man, he must want for a good woman, and your matka ... Your matka is a good woman. So he stole her from us. We have to get her.”

“We should tell the police. Or the Army.”

“Your matka needs to know her husband and son will come to get her. No police, Frank. No Army. They laugh at people who look for Sasquatch.”

“But why would he come so far? We are hundreds of miles from home. Why not find a good woman here?”

“There are no women better than your matka, Frank. We have to go get her.”

“Maybe she is gone. Maybe Sasquatch is Leshy, for Canada. Maybe he has fed her to Chort,” the name of Leshy’s demon ally leaves my mouth as a whisper. I am even more scared of Chort than Leshy. It worries me that they are friends.

“You’re a *stupid* boy sometimes. Leshy did not come here on a boat, like us. Leshy can’t swim in the ocean. Leshy is in Poland, in the woods near your babcia’s house, and Sasquatch is in Canada. Sasquatch doesn’t know Chort.”

I know I have gone too far when tata calls me stupid. He gets angry very quickly when I ask questions about Sasquatch, and matka, and why this has all happened. Every time, I see his eyes get wide and he starts looking everywhere but at me.

I stop to catch my breath. My legs are sore all over and I’m still cold. Fall is coming to an end and winter will be here soon. We did not pack warm coats.

“I need to stop, tata.”

“Not until the next ridge. We must—”

The twigs ahead of us crack under the weight of something and we hold our breath. I hope it is Sasquatch. I am scared of him but I want this to be over. We hide behind a tree while we wait for the thing to emerge. Tata gets his rifle ready. I am afraid to look, so I just watch him instead. His face is like stone, not happy or afraid, or angry. He looks down at me and shakes his head “no.”

“Just a deer,” his voice drips with disappointment.

“A deer?” I look around the tree and see the animal in the distance, rooting around in the leaves for something to eat. “Shoot it.”

“We must save our bullets.”

“For what, tata? How many bullets do we need to kill Sasquatch? We have had no meat in three days and I am sick of beans. Please.”

He looks down at me and frowns. He knows I am right. He points his gun at the deer and fires. I hear its body hit the leaves with a *thump*. He swears at me in the old tongue for making him use a bullet, and costing us hiking time so the deer can be drained and dressed. It will take the rest of the day.

I promise to go out “on patrol” for Sasquatch while he works, but really I just climb trees, throw rocks, and try to set traps for rabbits. He complains the whole time about how Sasquatch is getting away, that this is a stupid waste of time. But at nightfall, after the meat is cut apart, he eats venison until he is ready to burst. I do too.

That night I fall asleep quickly, happy to have my stomach full. When I dream, I am back at home. I’m in my room and I look out the window, down into the driveway, and I see matka there. She is talking to a man from our church. His name is Mike and he is like me: his parents came here when he was little and they did not pass on the old ways or the old tongue to him. I do not think he even knows about Leshy. He sounds just like a Canadian and is always very nice, especially to matka. Every time tata loses a job and money runs out, Mike comes by the house with ham and bread from his shop for us, and brings me and matka something sweet. I look at them in the driveway and they kiss, the way matka and tata used to do. I feel like I have seen this before.

When I wake up, tata is still sleeping. I go through his pack to see if he is hiding any sugar from me, so I can put it in my coffee, since I can drink that now. I look but there is no sugar. I find a crumpled up piece of paper that looks useless, but I see tata’s name written on it. I take it outside so I do not wake him as I uncrumple it. The cool air makes my skin ripple with goosebumps. A rabbit runs for its life into the woods, afraid I am a wolf. Little chunks of dirt fly up as its haunches launch it away from me.

It is matka’s handwriting. She writes in Polish, which I have not read in years, so it is hard and I do not know all the words. But I can understand most of it. I pick up things like *angry* and *tired* and *do not try to find me*. There is something about tata not working enough, and liking beer too much, and I see Mike’s name near the word *love* and tata’s name near the word *leaving*. I see my name the way they used to write it, *Frunak*, before the immigration man changed it on my form. It says something about me and Auntie Anna, who lives in a place called Moose Jaw, but I’m not sure what it is. I liked Auntie Anna. She always said I was the



strongest boy she ever saw and that she would keep me if matka and tata would give me to her. Finally, the letter says tata should just go away and leave us alone forever.

I hear tata groan. As he comes out of the tent I crumple the letter into a tight ball in my fist before he sees me with it. He staggers past me to do his business in the bushes and I rush back to his bag when he isn't looking. I stuff the letter back where I found it.

We have been here for one month and one day, looking for matka and Sasquatch in the mountains. I do not know if Sasquatch is here, but I know matka is not. Tata will never tell me that. Tata does not seem to know it is true himself anymore. Maybe it was easier, to think a monster took Sasquatch, instead of Mike.

Tata tells me we have to pack up camp and start hiking right away, to make up for the time we lost over the deer. I listen. There is still venison in my stomach and I don't feel hungry just yet.

After a long hike, we come to a steep part of the mountain and tata looks up at it without saying anything for a while.

"We cannot climb this, tata. We did not bring the right tools."

"We have our hands, Frank. We will use our hands to climb, like Sasquatch does."

He tells me to go up first. I tell him no, because I am scared of heights, but he does not listen. I start to climb but it is very hard.

"Don't worry, Frank, if you fall I'm right under, I'll catch you," he says.

"No, tata. I'm scared."

He grabs the front of my jacket and pulls me close. I can smell his sour breath as he growls through the beard he has grown out here.

"You *will* climb. You will not let Sasquatch get away with your matka. We do not lose her because of *you*. Do you want it to be all your fault she is gone?"

He shoves me toward the cliffside and I begin to climb. It is a very long way up and I am not that high off the ground, but it is enough to scare me. My hands shake as I reach for a ledge. I grab it but my mitten slips on some mud and I fall. I call for tata but he doesn't move fast enough and I fall on my back onto the leaves. All the air is knocked out of my lungs and it hurts more than anything. I shout out and he tries to shush me.

"No crying, Frank, you okay," he says. "You are a big man who drinks coffee, right? You okay."

I push myself off the leaves. They stick to the wool in my mittens and my hat. My muscles and bones hurt all over and there is snot on my face that is starting to freeze.

“No, tata, I am not okay. I am stuck in the woods looking for nothing and I hate you,” the words are easy to say because I am mad. “I hope Sasquatch feeds you to Chort.”

Tata gets angry and smacks me in the face. His hand is big and his fingers are thick, but his slap only makes me angrier. I make my hands into fists and begin pounding on him, hitting his eyes and nose and then his arms when he puts them up to protect himself. He slips on some mud and falls on his back.

“You stupid boy. I’ll teach you.” He begins to take his belt off to beat me. I grab a rock next to me and throw it at him. It hits him in the forehead and he lies flat on the ground, not moving. I worry I have killed him but when I put my ear to his mouth he is still breathing.

I realize there is no one around for many miles. It is cold and I cannot carry all of our gear by myself. I do not know how long tata will be asleep, or if he will ever wake up. I start to cry. I try to wipe the tears away from my face but I only end up smearing on the mud from my mitts.

It starts to get dark but it is too early for the sun to be going down. I look behind me and see nothing but a big shadow, shaped like a man. The man is taller and wider and hairier than even my uncle Tolek. He does not speak but when he breathes out through his mouth, the noise is so deep it makes my heart rumble.

I look down at tata, who is still asleep. I am all alone except for me and this thing.

“Okay, Leshy. You can take me. Please do not feed me to Chort.”

Leshy steps away from me a bit and more of the sun shines on him. His fur is dark brown and he has a big face with little, thoughtful eyes, like the orange monkeys I saw at a zoo once, when I was little. No, he does not look like Leshy, and he does not seem to know who Chort is.

“Sasquatch? Is it you?”

He does not say anything to that, either. I do not think Sasquatch can talk. There is a crunch of leaves and twigs from behind him and when I look, there is another, bigger Sasquatch with him, and two much tinier ones as big as me, but they act like little babies. They stick their arms out for the bigger one to pick them up. I think the bigger one might be their matka. I stick my arms up the same way. The Sasquatch who came to me bends down and puts his face right in front of

mine. I try to be brave enough not to pee. His face is as big as my whole body. He sniffs me a bit, and finally scoops me up in his big, long arm. Once he has me I notice he smells like sage. It reminds me of babcia's bean soup, and makes me feel better. The Sasquatch, his family and I start to go up the hill. We hear tata moan and the Sasquatch turns to look at him, and then looks at me. He points. He wants to know if I want to go back.

I look at tata. We are at the top of the hill he wanted me to climb earlier and he doesn't look up to find me. He looks from side to side and gets very worried. He sits in the mud, puts his face in his hands and doesn't move.

"No," I say to Sasquatch, shaking my head. "Tata cares more about people when they are gone."

Sasquatch seems to understand and we keep going. I curl up in his arms and fall asleep. He is warmer than a hundred blankets, so warm I even take my mittens off. He has already given me more comfort out here than tata ever tried to.

-----

## IN TURING'S GARDEN

*by Eileen Kernaghan*

(Originally published in *The Magazine of Speculative Poetry*, 1989)

these branches  
sprouting symmetries    like petals  
round the hearts of flowers

chimes in the quantum wind  
the harmonies  
of particles colliding

in dim undergrowth  
the stirring  
of vast ambiguous animals

# HUNCHSTER

*by Matthew Hughes*

(Originally published in *F&SF Magazine*)

You'd think I'd remember the kid's name, but I never could. One of those "J" names that suddenly got popular back in the eighties, Jared, or Jeremiah, might even have been Jedediah. Doesn't matter now. We mostly just called him "the kid in Lee's basement," except when he'd join us for Saturday night poker in Lee's garage. Then he liked us to call him "the Hunchster."

That was on account of the way he played. I mean, there are two ways to go with seven-card stud. You can either play the cards, look at what's in your hand and on the table, and figure the odds you'll get that fifth spade or that third queen. Or you can play the players, where you not only watch for the tells but read the personalities, so you know if a guy's got the balls to try running a bluff past you or if he's sharp enough to know when you're faking it with a busted straight.

The Hunchster, though, he had his own way of playing. He didn't look around the table at the cards, didn't look at the players. "I get hunches," he said, the first time I asked him what was going on. He was raking in another heap of nickels, dimes, and quarters from the middle of Lee's old formica-topped table out in the garage where we played most Saturday nights. We used to play in Lee's basement, until he put in the extra plumbing and started renting out the room.

If you're any kind of poker player, what I just put down here tells you something about Lee, and about the rest of us. We played for nickels, dimes and quarters because that's all we could afford. And the reason Lee let this kind of weird-looking stranger live in his house was because the kid got a disability check every month. His dependable rent made up for the tips Lee didn't get when he drove people from the bus depot out to the IncarcerCorp prison so they could visit their inmate relatives. Most of them couldn't really afford the taxi fare, but it was a long walk out of town and the bus only ran twice a day.

Mitch and I, we were better off than Lee, but only just. IncarcerCorp paid three bucks an hour over minimum wage. No benefits, but the work was full-time and you could live on the wages—just hope you never got sick. Also, a prison generates a lot of other jobs, even when the outfit that runs it is so cheap it makes the inmates do their own laundry and swamp out the cell blocks. So, all our wives worked part-time for minimum wage in the kitchens, in the in-house hospital—

again, no benefits—and our families had enough to get by on. Just enough to keep the town alive.

But at least we had jobs and could count on keeping them. After what had happened with United PressForm and the Breithertz Institute, that was a big deal. We used to tell each other, “At least nobody's going to put crime out of business.”

\*\*\*

Stan and Ron were the other regulars at the table Saturday nights. Sometimes, they brought Ron's friend Dooley. None of them had been taken on when IncarcerCorp held its big hiring fair, but they got jobs with a wholesaler that supplied the prison with everything from dungarees to macaroni. Stan and Dooley drove truck and Ron operated a forklift in the warehouse. Word was that IncarcerCorp and the wholesaler were both owned by the same investment syndicate that was headquartered in the Bahamas or somewhere. Nobody was a hundred percent sure, but so what? Paying the mortgage and sending the kids to school—that was what mattered.

Now, with me telling you all this, you're maybe thinking that my mind is wandering, why don't I follow through on where I started: the kid in Lee's basement and his peculiar way of playing poker? But it all ties in.

“You're saying you just play hunches?” I said, that first time, while he sorted the nickels, dimes and quarters into stacks and Stan dealt the first two down cards and one on deck for the next round.

He looked up at me. Actually, no—he never really looked *at* anybody. He'd look in your direction, sure, but never eye-to-eye. Instead he'd lock onto your nose, or your shoulder, or your forehead. And there was never anything to read in his eyes. He only used them for seeing.

“I am an intuitive,” he said. I remember the word because I used it right away, asking him, “What the heck is an intuitive?”

I should've known better. You asked this kid a question, you were going to get an answer. In spades. I didn't understand half of what he said, stuff about lateral connections and something that sounded like “snapses.” Then he was talking about a “brokers area,” which for a while I thought was somewhere around Corpus Cristi, except it turned out he was talking about some other place with a name like Corpus Clothes-um. Then he said they were parts of the brain, and his brain didn't work the way other people's did.

Lee told me later that the reason the kid got that monthly disability check was that he had a brain disease called Ass-burgers. I waited for the punchline, but he

said it was a real disease, though it wasn't catching. Wayne Breithertz, who'd brought the kid over when they were all packing to leave, told Lee about it. The kid was a little strange, but harmless. And he had nowhere else to go.

So we're back to the poker table. Stan dealt out the first three cards and said, "Hunchster, your bet," and just like that the kid stopped talking about brains. Right in the middle of a sentence. He picked up his hole cards, stared at them for a second then put them down. He didn't look at anybody or at any of the cards on deck. Just pushed a quarter out towards the antes. A quarter was the maximum bet until all the cards had been dealt.

"Hunch?" I said.

He didn't look at me, just kept his peculiar eyes on his hole cards. "Uh huh," he said.

I had a pair of sevens in the hole and a king showing, but I flipped the king over and shoved it and the sevens away from me. "Fold," I said.

\*\*\*

The kid was in Lee's basement because he got left behind when the Breithertz Institute folded. Wayne Breithertz was the nerdiest nerd our local high school ever produced. After eleventh grade he went off to some big college back east and next we heard of him he'd he turned into one of those ten-day tycoons who made a pile off the dot-com bubble. Old Wayne had come up with some bright idea that everybody thought was going to change the world.

Until it didn't.

But for a while the money was flowing, and he was our local hero because he came back home and bought up the old UPF factory. He spent about a half a gazillion dollars turning it into some kind of research center.

You may not know the name United PressForm. But turn over the tinfoil plate next time you take a frozen pie out of the freezer, or the tray that holds a tv dinner. You'll probably see UPF stamped into the bottom. Their plant on Becker Road used to supply half the pie-and-tv-dinner makers west of the Mississippi. Another UPF factory in New Jersey supplied most of the east. My old man signed on with the company in 1953 when he came home from Korea and spent his whole working life in that building. Most of our dads did. After high school, so did me and Lee and the rest of us. UPF provided half the jobs in town.

Until it didn't.

In 1995, the company packed up the whole shebang and moved to Nogales. That's when we found out our dads wouldn't be getting any more pension

checks—the directors had spent their money and everybody else’s. Nobody can tell me that wasn’t the bad news that brought on the heart attack and killed the old man.

But then Wayne came home, bought the vacant plant cheap and remade it into some kind of combination open-plan office and supergeek playground. He brought in some pretty strange people, of which the Hunchster was by no means the strangest. We didn’t know what all those newcomers were doing out there, but they had plenty of money to spend on everything from fancy coffees in paper cups to an even fancier condo development around a man-made lake that Wayne had dug out of what used to be pasture land south of town. And we all had jobs again, making sure the nerds stayed happy.

Until we didn’t.

In 2001, the stock market yanked the rug out from under the Breithertz Institute. Trucks rolled in and hauled away all the computers and video game machines to sell at ten cents on the dollar. The condos emptied out and stayed empty. Last I heard, Wayne was teaching business math at some community college in Wisconsin. His collection of geeks went to wherever geeks go. Except for the Hunchster, who moved into Lee’s basement along with a trunkload of electronic gear he’d built himself. Wayne said it would have just gone to the dump.

\*\*\*

Ask the kid what he was doing down there all day, you’d get an answer. Not that it made a whole lot of sense. He had some theory involving string. He was interested in “where new treenos went” and how they got there. “Temporary recapture,” I thought he said once.

“Temporary recapture of what?” I said. The words had caught my interest because it was a week after the IncarcerCorp job fair and I’d been accepted for training as a guard. They’d already broken ground for the main block.

“Not temporary,” he said, “*temporal*. Temporal recapture.”

As if that explained it all.

\*\*\*

Then came another Saturday night and we were setting up in the garage: beer and taco chips and salsa. Lee went to the door at the side of the house that led down to the basement and asked the kid if he was going to play. I heard him call a second time then he came into the garage and said, “He don’t answer.”

“He home?” I said.

“He’s always home.” He paused, then said, “Some weird noises down there.”

I was going to say, “What else is new?” but just then Ron came in and spoke over me, saying Dooley wasn’t coming. Five was not enough for a decent game. I said, “We need the kid.”

By now Lee had sat down and was breaking out the red, white and blue plastic chips. “So go get him,” he said.

I went out of the garage and over to the basement entrance, down a half dozen steps. The inner door was ajar. I rapped on it but got no answer. There was a combination humming-hissing sound coming from the basement suite, getting louder then softer, louder then softer. I pushed open the door.

The kid was sitting on a kitchen chair with his back to me, hunched over a table that was covered with all kinds of electronics and computer gear, connected by a mess of cables and wires. That’s where the humming and hissing were coming from. In front of him was a wide-screen monitor and he was staring into it while reaching out with one hand to a control panel of knobs and switches that was off to one side. He’d turn one knob then try another, his eyes never leaving the screen.

I moved up behind him. The image on the monitor was distorted and grainy. He reached for another knob and twiddled it, and suddenly the shot came into focus. The colors were washed out but I recognized it: Lee’s driveway, just outside, and the Ryder house across the street.

There was something funny about the picture, though it took me a few seconds to put my finger on it. Parked in front of the house was Jeff Ryder's old red El Camino, which he'd smashed up and sent to the wrecker’s sometime back in the early eighties.

“What is this?” I said.

The kid didn't turn. “What I’ve been working on. Temporal recapture.” He pointed to a readout at the bottom right corner of the screen. It said: *05-24-1981* followed by a clock that was running in hours, minutes, seconds, and tenths of a second. Running backwards. As I watched, Jeff came out of the house—he was walking backwards—but this was Jeff without a pot belly and with way more hair than when I'd seen him yesterday. He got into the El Camino. A few seconds later, it drove away, in reverse.

“What am I looking at?” I said.

He turned toward me, looked at my IncarcerCorp belt buckle. “The past.”

I took a deep breath. “A time machine?”

“But just for looking. Maybe hearing, too. I need to work on that.” He turned



back to the equipment, adjusted another knob, the screen blurred then cleared, and I was seeing a farmer's field. Now the readout said: *04-15-1902*. Into the frame, walking backwards, came a man, then a plow, then a mule. "I also need to miniaturize the components and work out a better power source. Then you could take it anywhere."

I felt a hollowness in my chest, like the time I was at a party and tried breathing helium. "You could take it any place and see what happened there, anytime in the past?"

"Maybe not anytime. Probably not back to dinosaur times." He twiddled the knob again. Now there was nothing but prairie. I didn't bother looking at the date. I was too busy thinking.

And what I was thinking was, *Jeez, not again.*

I went back to the garage. Mitch and Stan had shown up. I cracked a beer, drank half of it in one swallow, and said, "We got a problem."

\*\*\*

The kid must've had a hunch. He tried to barricade the door, but there were too many of us. Afterwards, when we were cleaning up, Mitch and Lee wanted to bust up the equipment and burn the notebooks.

"No," I said, "that would be wrong."

So when the time comes, we'll do what we agreed to do, sitting there at the poker table, after I'd told them what I'd seen. When all our kids are out of school and able to stand on their own feet, we'll bring the sheriff down to Lee's basement. We'll fire up the Hunchster's equipment and roll back the date to that Saturday night.

We'll be the first criminals caught by his invention. And we won't be the last. But eventually, the Hunchster will be remembered as the guy who put crime out of business. Along with IncarcerCorp. And our whole town.

And like I said, just before we poured the concrete over him, "At least nobody's gonna forget your name."

-----

# DARK WORLDS: AN ADVENTURE IN PUBLISHING

by G. W. Thomas

(Previously unpublished)

It is every *Weird Tales* fan's dream that someday someone will resurrect the "Unique Magazine." Some have tried in spirit, others in actual name. Donald A. Wollheim may have been the first to try with the *Avon Fantasy Reader* where he featured some of the best pieces from *Weird Tales*. Robert A. W. Lowndes did much the same with *The Magazine of Horror* and other titles in the 1960s. In the 1970s it was Leo Margulies with what are known as the California issues of *Weird Tales*, the first to reuse the name. In the 1980s, Lin Carter tried in paperback while Jones and Sutton did even better in England, with *Fantasy Tales*. And most recently, George Scithers and Darryl Schweitzer in 1988 with a Pulp-sized magazine called *Weird Tales ...* for a while. The most recent incarnation of the magazine seems quite far afield from the days of Jules de Grandin and Margaret Brundage. All have tried, and more or less failed.

Why is it so hard to do? Horror and Fantasy have moved on. Farnsworth Wright never had to contend with Tolkien or Stephen King or all the rest of the last seven decades since WT folded. We have to remember *Weird Tales* and all those old pulps were my grandfather's era. I wasn't born for a decade after they disappeared from the magazine racks. Despite this, people keep trying. People like myself.

My attempt was a PDF/ POD magazine called *Dark Worlds*. It ran for about five years, beginning with issue 1 in June 2008. The cover is an early painting by M. D. Jackson based on the story "In the Service of the All-Father" by C. J. Burch. The contents page looks just like an old *Weird Tales* TOC, even including the cheezy story recaps. The fiction inside was a combination of Sword & Sorcery, dark fantasy, Mystery, Weird Western, Cthulhu Mythos horror and Space Opera. From that list you can see I didn't just want to recreate *Weird Tales*, I also wanted to resurrect *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, *Black Mask*, *Western Action* and any number of other pulps. The writers included Pulpsters like Joel Jenkins, Joshua Reynolds, David Hardy, Michael Ehart, David Bain, J. F. Gonzalez and many others. It was a Pulp-lovers style fiction-fest, with illustrations for every story either by myself, M. D. Jackson or guest artists like Sam de Graff or Aaron Siddall.

The product was consistent if too widely-spread thematically. It won nominations for the Pulp Ark Award three years running. Never won, but I'm not complaining. One story, "The Tomb of the Amazon Queen" by Michael Ehart even won a nomination for the Harper's Pen Award in 2011. (We didn't win that one either.) We were well respected but sales were never brisk. Why? You can complain about niche markets and such but I lay the blame at the foot of the delivery system. The magazine was market priced but the cost of purchasing (postage, etc.) drove the full price to \$25.00 an issue. I only own one paper copy, that of Issue 1. Too expensive, and I get a discount. And when Kindle came along! Forget it. We were done. Paper Science Fiction magazines in general, were over. (If long-established *Starlog* can't even do it, what chance did we have?)

Am I bitter? Not really. We put out six lovingly illustrated issues. We even got to do some side projects like *Masters of Adventure*, public domain classics illustrated, and *Dark Worlds Adventures* #1. This one-and-only issue was the ultimate in Pulp simulacra, with Doc Savage style novella and back-up features. It failed to sell much at all. Why? (Hadn't we created the most awesomely Pulp product ever?) I guess it proved to be too new, combining classic public domain material with new stuff, all in a way that Guy Adams has since gone on to make very popular. I mean who doesn't want to read about the good guys taking on an army of Horlas? (See Guy de Maupassant if you don't get the reference.) What I learned from all this is, you can have a love of the old Pulp but you got to move forward too. You can't look back. There is no way to go back to the old days. And I see some really talented people moving on—with style. I've already mention Guy Adams with his Sherlock-H.G. Wells crossover. Kim Newman's Anno Dracula is another.

What would I do differently if I was going to try again today? First off, I'd talk myself out of trying to publish a paper magazine at all. Then I'd narrow my focus. Just a horror magazine, or just a Sword & Sorcery mag, or just Space Opera. It is too hard to find eclectics like myself that love all these genres. There is a reason why *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* doesn't publish horror. And why *Black Gate* didn't use Science Fiction. We exist in a categorized world of genre fiction, in a way that Farnsworth Wright and the writers of *Weird Tales* did not. At least, at first. Wright was able to include the first Sword & Sorcery tales of Robert E. Howard because they did contain some horror elements. Clark Ashton Smith and H. P. Lovecraft often danced over the lines between horror and SF. Edmond

Hamilton wrote all three for *WT*. He wrote 85 stories for the magazine, and not one was rejected. Such blurring of the lines is a no-go these days. The greats who could write all three, writers like Fritz Leiber, C. L. Moore, Henry Kuttner, Robert Bloch, Richard Matheson, they are a breed that is gone. Today writers specialize. Publishers specialize. Create a blog, a website, or at the very least a PDF only version of a pulp to be read on a Kindle or a tablet. Somehow, it's just not the same.

To this day, I catch myself dreaming of starting another one, either a POD or even just the old saddle-stapled chapbooks, of pulpy deliciousness. I imagine the fun of finding like-minded authors, editing those stories with their barbaric heroes and their occult detectives and the squamous squidgies and all the fun of drawing the illustrations in black and white. And then I sigh ... Can't be done for any reasonable budget. No money in it. Just a labour of love that nobody would see.

So, it will have to wait until I am little older. A little closer to the end when I won't care anymore. I'll get out the ink pens and the long-neck stapler and pay way too much for photocopying and postage. And for a short while I'll dwell back in a time when thrills and chills came on brown pulp paper and names like H. P. Lovecraft and Robert E. Howard were gold. It won't be any different than all those teens writing fan fiction. It will just be "old guy" fan fiction. (I mean isn't that really what August Derleth created with the Cthulhu Mythos?) No matter. I will be Farnsworth Wright, and HPL and REH and Clark Ashton Smith and Seabury Quinn and all those great artists (the bad ones too!) And I will be the audience too. I will be writing for myself and myself alone. And in the end, isn't that really what it is all about, anyway?

-----

## LETTERS OF COMMENT

-----

From: **Jim Pook** - (03 Jul 2016)

Congratulations on your 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Graeme! Looks great!

**The Graeme:** Thank you. We aims to please.

From: **J. Patrick Black** - (03 Jul 2016)

This is why I got into literature.

**The Graeme:** To evoke your sense of wonder?

-----

From: **Nina Munteanu** – (03 Jul 2016)

Yes, that's a good bunch of writers there ... Great stories too! Well done.

**The Graeme:** A lot of creativity out there in the muskeg.

-----

From: **Lesley Donaldson-Reid** – (03 Jul 2016)

Looks great!

**The Graeme:** Thank you.

-----

From: **Rhea Rose** – (04 Jul 2016)

Love the cover.

**The Graeme:** Me too. Eric Chu is a terrific artist.

-----

From: **Ron Friedman** – (06 Jul 2016)

I'm humbled and honoured to be published in such a prestigious company. Totally impressed.

**The Graeme:** Feel free to submit again when my submissions window opens circa late Spring. Always looking for more good stories.

-----

From: **Michael Donoghue** – (06 Jul 2016)

WOW! What a GREAT cover! I love it!!

And what an amazing line-up of talent you're showcasing!!! Impressive!

**The Graeme:** Trying to uncover as much talent as I can.

-----

From: **Eileen Kernaghan** – (09 Jul 2016)

Well done, Graeme!

**The Graeme:** Thank you. And thank you for supporting Polar Borealis.

-----

From: **Robert Runté** – (12 Jul 2016)

Been meaning to relay to you that commentary about you and PB has been very positive on SFCanada listserve. Authors seem to really appreciate what you are doing for community/building next generation of writers, and proud to have their stories in PB.

I'd send you a story myself, but the only thing I have that's within hailing distance of your 3000 word limit is a reprint from the first issue of On Spec (1989) but it's been posted on the web for years so really not worth considering.

Good luck with continuing PB. It seems to be very well received so far!

**The Graeme:** Providing a venue for beginning writers a worthy cause, I think. Loads of fun doing it.

Your "not worth considering" first short story I have read and intend to publish in #5 of PB next summer. I won't mention the title. Let the suspense build!

-----

From: **Dave Haren** – (14 Jul 2016)

Your latest epic is very nicely done. The lead off story has a nice tension between those who want change and those who fight to keep it all the same.

**The Graeme:** Very much like the inside of my head, actually.

From: **Joe Mahoney** – (16 July 2016)

I love the idea behind Polar Borealis. Kudos to you for making it happen. There's some buzz about it on the SF Canada listserve, which is where I found out about it.

**The Graeme:** And there'll be more buzz when your fellow authors have read *Fizz*.

-----

From: **Mario Lowther** – (01 Aug 2016)

A zine that supports, instructs and enlightens, with an editor who'll talk to you. Polar Borealis - Pretty Special.

**The Graeme:** Thank you. I try to help writers every way I can, even if it is on the strength of my invincible ignorance. My intentions are good.

That said, sometimes I'm pretty smart. Like accepting your story *Neptune Calling* for the upcoming special "Horror" issue in the spring. It will resonate with a lot of people in B.C. in particular. A good example of selecting a topical issue and running with it.

-----

From: **Archie Kubacki** – (08 Aug 2016)

How do I say how much I enjoyed reading the first two issues of Polar Borealis other than to mention it now. I enjoyed them ... completely.

The first book I ever read was Hal Clement's "Needle." It pricked my love of reading and I have been a junkie to reading hard and speculative fiction going on 54 and a half years. I figure that puts me in at bit over 2,5k books and short stories—maybe 3k—and that much reading, in my case as in yours, has etched an itch in me to write.

I want to write if for no other reason than to document some of the amazingly complete storied dreams I have. Polar Borealis is lighter fluid for my Zippo urge to write. Now if I can just thumb the striker wheel! I hope you keep going with your new publication! I certainly wish you and it success.

**The Graeme:** I hope to reopen my submissions window to Canadian writers in the late spring or early summer. You can always try me then.

-----

From: **William Squirrel** – (10 Aug 2016)

I just wanted to compliment you on your excellent project, especially the leg-up you are offering writers just starting to test the market. Keep up the good work.

**The Graeme:** It's my retirement hobby. As long as my health carries on I will keep publishing. Of course, I may inevitably experience some sort of mental decline—which should make my editorial choices all the more interesting!

-----

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS AND ARTISTS

### **Michael John Bertrand**

*After the Fall* is Michael's second story sale. He previously self-published the novel "*The Scrambled Man*" which is available on Amazon at < [The Scrambled Man](#) >.

-----

### **R. Graeme Cameron**

"The Graeme" has been active in SF Fandom for more than 40 years. He has won two Aurora Awards (Fan categories), and is currently Administrator of the Canadian Fanzine Fanac Awards (the 'Faneds'), now in its fifth year. Even worse, he has been the presenter of the genre-spoofing "Elron Awards" since 1989.

He is Chairman of the B.C. SF Association and sits on the board of four other Fannish organizations. He is the editor of numerous Fanzines, including the *Auroran Lights* newsletter on behalf of CSFFA, his personal zine *Space Cadet*, and his Canadian Speculative Fiction review-zine *OBIR Magazine*. His latest project is the semi-professional Speculative Fiction zine *Polar Borealis*.

In addition he writes a fanzine review column for *Amazing Stories Magazine*, and is the webmaster for the Canadian Science Fiction Fanzine Archive where he posts historical data in his guise as an active Fantiquarian. Is he crazy? Absolutely. Crazy about Science Fiction. At long last retired, now he can get down to his real purpose in life—promoting the Canadian SF&F genre. Heck of a hobby.

-----



## **Mary E. Choo**

Mary's poetry has appeared in a wide variety of magazines, anthologies, online and electronic publications, among them *ChiZine*, *Lone Star Stores*, *Dreams and Nightmares*, *Room* magazine and the anthology *Candle in the Attic Window*. Also, her chapbook *Dream Tribes* was on the preliminary ballot of the Bram Stoker Awards (poetry collection).

-----

## **James A. Conan**

James A. Conan is a 26-year-old writer and chef living in Toronto. He studied Politics and International Development at Trent University. His work has previously been accepted by the *Saturday Night Reader*, *Sci-Phi Journal*, and *Mad Scientist Journal*.

-----

## **Jonathan Cresswell-Jones**

Jonathan Cresswell-Jones lives and works in Toronto as a graphic designer, with short works published in *On Spec* and the anthology *Ring of Fire*.

-----

## **Robert Dawson**

Robert Dawson teaches mathematics at a Nova Scotia university. In his spare time he writes, fences, and hikes. His stories have appeared in *Nature Futures*, *AE*, *Perihelion*, and numerous other periodicals and anthologies. He is a graduate of the Sage Hill and Viable Paradise writing workshops."

-----

## **Michael Donoghue**

Michael Donoghue grew up in a small fishing village on the east coast of Nova Scotia. Currently, he mostly lives in his head, but resides in Vancouver. Michael works in healthcare, where he spends much of his time preoccupied with hand washing.

-----

## **Kirsten Emmott**

I live in Comox, BC where I work as a family doctor. I have published many poems, including a collection, *How Do You Feel?* (Sono Nis Press, 1992).

I am a contributor to the recent new edition of *In Fine Form*, a Canadian collection of specific form poetry:

<https://www.amazon.ca/Fine-Form-Canadian-Book-Poetry/dp/1927575486>

-----

## **L.L. Hill**

Laura's fiction has been published by Rosarium Publishing *The SEA is Ours*, *Third Flatiron Fire*, (Pushcart nomination,) *Deadman's Tome*, *Domain SF*, and others.

-----

## **Matthew Hughes**

Matthew Hughes writes science-fantasy and space opera, often in a Jack Vance mode. Booklist has called him Vance's "heir apparent."

His latest works are: *A Wizard's Henchman* (novel) and *Epiphanies* (novella), both from PS Publishing.

His short fiction has appeared in *Asimov's*, *F&SF*, *Postscripts*, *Lightspeed*, and *Interzone*, and bespoke anthologies including *Songs of the Dying Earth*, *Rogues*, *Old Mars*, and *Old Venus*, all edited by George R.R. Martin and Gardner Dozois.

He has won the Canadian equivalent of the Edgar, and been shortlisted for the Aurora, Nebula, Philip K. Dick, Endeavour (twice), A.E. Van Vogt, and Derringer Awards.

He is now self-publishing his backlist as ebooks and POD paperbacks at bookstore:

<http://www.matthewhughes.org/welcome-to-the-archonate-bookstore/>

He spent more than thirty years as one of Canada's leading speechwriters for political leaders and corporate executives. Since 2007, he has been traveling the world as an itinerant housesitter, has lived in twelve countries, and has no fixed address.

Web page: <http://www.matthewhughes.org>

-----

## **Michael D. Jackson**

I have been an artist, designer and an illustrator for many years. My work has appeared in *Art Scene International Magazine*, *ImagineFX Magazine*, *A Fly in Amber*, *Abandoned Towers*, *Flashing Swords*, *Outer Reaches Magazine*, *Realms Magazine* and on the covers of various anthologies from Pulpwork Press and Rage Machine Books among others.

I work in a digital medium, mostly with Corel Painter but also with Photoshop. Happily I am also handy with an ink pen and, of course, that old tested and true technology of the HB pencil and a scrap of paper.

Check out my art at: <http://www.prixaurorawards.ca/newsletter/>

-----

## **Karl Johanson**

Karl Johanson is the editor of *Neo-opsis Science Fiction Magazine*, which has won two Aurora Awards, and a former editor of the four time Aurora winning magazine *Under the Ozone Hole*. Karl's publication credits include work in *On Spec* magazine, *Sci Phi Journal*, *Monday Magazine*, *Perihelion*, *Stitches: The Magazine of Medical Humor* and the anthology *Here Be Monsters: 7*. As a writer / designer / tester of computer games, Karl has done work for North Star Games, Disney Interactive, and Sanctuary Woods Multimedia. Many of the games were science fiction or fantasy related.

-----

## **S. Kay**

S. Kay is a queer Canadian from Vancouver, BC. She is the author of *Reliant* (tNY.Press, 2015), an apocalypse in tweets, and *Joy* (Maudlin House, 2016), a novella about relentless rejection. Follow her on Twitter at @blueberrio.

-----

## **Eileen Kernaghan**

Eileen Kernaghan's poems, both mainstream and speculative, have appeared in a wide range of North American publications, from *PRISM international* and *The Antigone Review* to *Weird Tales*, *Dreams and Nightmares* and several of the *Tesseract* anthologies. Her speculative poetry collection *Tales from the Holograph Woods* was published in 2009 by Wattle & Daub Books.

Eileen has also published nine historical fantasy novels. In 2014 *Sophie, in Shadow* was shortlisted for the Sunburst Award for Canadian Literature of the Fantastic, and for the Sheila Egoff Prize for Children's Literature.

-----

### **Kellee Kranendonk**

Kellee Kranendonk lives smack-dab in the middle of two tiny villages in a little Maritime province with her husband, two (of three) kids, a dog, two Cockatiels and a bunch of chickens. She's the editor of *Youth Imagination* and has been published numerous times. Her most recent publications include flash pieces with Flash Fiction Press.

-----

### **Joe Mahoney**

I'm not a beginning writer; nor am I particularly successful. Somewhere in between. I've had some stuff on CBC Radio and I've sold some short stories to various magazines here and there. I've also recently sold a novel *A Time and a Place* to be published by Five Rivers Press in November of 2017.

-----

### **Matt Moore**

Matt Moore writes horror and dark science fiction. His short stories, poetry and columns have appeared in a variety of print, electronic and audio markets including *On Spec*, *Leading Edge*, *The Ottawa Citizen*, *Jamais Vu*, *The Drabblecast* and more. He's a five-time Aurora Award finalist, frequent panelist and presenter, and Co-Chair of the Ottawa Chiaroscuro Reading Series. His short story collection, *But It's Not The End And Other Lies*, will be published by ChiZine Publications in January 2018

-----

### **Ira Nayman**

Ira, who won the 2010 Jonathon Swift Satire Writing Contest, is a humour writer who stumbled into speculative fiction about a decade ago and decided to hang

around for a while. His main project is the *Alternate Reality News Service*, which sends reporters into other dimensions and has them write news articles about what they find there; *Futures in Mirror Are Closer Than They Appear*, the 7th book in the self-published *Alternate Reality* series, will be out some time in late 2016.

He has also written a series of novels featuring the Transdimensional Authority (which monitors and polices travel between dimensions) and the Time Agency (which monitors and polices travel in time). *It's Just the Chronosphere Unfolding as it Should*, the 4th book in the *Transdimensional Authority* series from Elsewhen Presss, will also be available in 2016.

creator, *Les Pages aux Folles* <http://www.lespagesauxfolles.ca>

"Shtay thrishty, my friednishes!" <http://www.facebook.com/ThrishtyFriednishes>

-----

### **Darren Ridgley**

Darren Ridgley is a journalist and emerging speculative fiction writer residing in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Born in southwestern Manitoba to Polish-Canadian and Newfoundlander families, he's prone to arguing loudly and bursting into song with little provocation. Intent on always broadening his horizons, he's attempted both stand-up comedy and amateur boxing in the past, and is still not sure which was more painful. His work has previously appeared in the *Fitting In: Historical Accounts of Paranormal Subcultures* anthology.

-----

### **Holly Schofield**

Holly Schofield's stories have appeared in many publications including *Lightspeed*, *Crossed Genres*, and *Tesseract*s.

For more of her work, see < [Holly Schofield](#) >.

-----

### **Sylvia Son**

I live in Mississauga, Ontario. My fiction has appeared in magazines like *Elements* and *Green's Magazine* and online with *Defenestration*. A couple of non-fiction articles

have appeared in *New Dreamhomes and Condominiums*. I have also written a commercial for the Children's Own Museum Auction, and a short screenplay that was screened at the Asian Short Film Festival. My novella *The Guest of Honour* made the shortlist for the Ken Klonsky 2014 Novella Contest for Quattro Books. I have a story in the anthology *Strangely Funny III* coming out in the Spring.

-----

### **William Squirrel**

I am a Canadian writer living in western Pennsylvania. My work has appeared in *AE: Canadian Science Fiction*, *Drabblecast*, *Daily Science Fiction* and other venues. More information can be found at [blindsquirrel.blogspot.com](http://blindsquirrel.blogspot.com). William Squirrel tweets @billsquirrel.

-----

### **J.J. Steinfeld**

Fiction writer, poet, and playwright J. J. Steinfeld lives on Prince Edward Island, where he is patiently waiting for Godot's arrival and a phone call from Kafka. While waiting, he has published seventeen books, including *Disturbing Identities* (Stories, Ekstasis Editions), *Should the Word Hell Be Capitalized?* (Stories, Gaspereau Press), *Would You Hide Me?* (Stories, Gaspereau Press), *An Affection for Precipices* (Poetry, Serengeti Press), *Misshapeness* (Poetry, Ekstasis Editions), *Word Burials* (Novel and Stories, Crossing Chaos Enigmatic Ink), *Identity Dreams and Memory Sounds* (Poetry, Ekstasis Editions), *Madhouses in Heaven, Castles in Hell* (Stories, Ekstasis Editions), and most recently *An Unauthorized Biography of Being* (110 Short Fictions Hovering Between the Absurd and the Existential, Ekstasis Editions). His short stories and poems have appeared in numerous anthologies and periodicals internationally, and over fifty of his one-act plays and a handful of full-length plays have been performed in Canada and the United States.

-----

### **Richard Stevenson**

I've recently retired from a thirty-year English and Creative Writing teaching gig at Lethbridge College in southern Alberta, Canada and have published thirty books, counting a forthcoming volume. My most recent books are two haikai collections

(haiku, senryu, tanka, kyoka, zappai, haibun and haikai sequences): *Fruit Wedge Moon* (Hidden Brook Press, 2015) and *The Heiligen Effect* (Ekstasis Editions, 2015).

My publications include three collections of light verse cryptid critter, monster, and alien poems: *Why Were All The Werewolves Men?* (Thistledown Press, 1994), *Nothing Definite Yeti* (Ekstasis Editions, 1999), and *Take Me To Your Leader!* (Bayeux Arts Inc. 2001).

---

### **Marcie Lynn Tentchoff**

Marcie Lynn Tentchoff is an Aurora Award winning poet/writer who lives on the west coast of Canada with her family and various animals, both domesticated and not. Her work has appeared in such magazines as *On Spec*, *Weird Tales*, *Talebones*, *Strange Horizons*, *Mythic Delirium*, *Aeon*, and *Illumen*, as well as in various anthologies and online publications. Marcie's first poetry collection, *Sometimes While Dreaming*, is available through Sam's Dot Publishing.

---

### **G.W. Thomas**

G.W. Thomas has appeared in over 400 different books, magazines, and podcasts including *Writers Digest*, *The Armchair Detective*, and *Pseudopod* website.

See [www.gwthomas.org](http://www.gwthomas.org)

---

### **Lisa Timpf**

Lisa Timpf is a freelance writer who lives in Simcoe, Ontario. Her work, including science fiction stories, poetry (contemporary and science fiction), and creative non-fiction, has appeared in a variety of venues, including *New Myths*, *More of Our Canada*, *Third Flatiron*, *Scifaikuest*, and *Chicken Soup for the Soul: My Very Good, Very Bad Dog*, and *Small Farm Canada*. A long time *Star Trek* fan, she enjoys reading science fiction and contemplating the stars.

## CONTENTS OF NEXT ISSUE (#4)

Special "Horror" issue scheduled to come out March/April 2017.

Contents will probably include:

*Dear Humans* – David Perlmutter

*Make Me a Monster* – Jon Gauthier

*Lovecraft's Legacy* (Poem) – by Marcie Tentchoff

*Wall of Eyes* (Story) – by William Lewis

*Heaven is the Hell of No Choices* (Poem) – by Matt Moore

*This Round on Me* (Story) – by Chris Campeau

*Symbiotes* (Story) – by Jeremy A. Cook

*The Truth* (Poem) – by Richard Stevenson

*The Man with No Face* (Story) – by Jordan King-Lacroix

*Dead Sea* (Story) – by Jonathan Cresswell-Jones

*To Have and to Hold* (Story) – by Tonya Liburd

*The Devil's Riddle* (Poem) – by Taral Wayne and Walt Wentz

*Neptune Calling* (Story) – by Mario Lowther

*Teemu* (Story) – by S.L. Dixon

*Tech Support* (Story) – by Blair Frison

*Lines Found in Nylarthotep's Notebook* (Poem) – by Marcie Tentchoff

*Captivities, or, Bela Lugosi, 2031* (Story) – by J.J. Steinfeld

*The Inventor* (Poem) – by Lisa Timpf

*Shadow Man* (Story) – by Matthew Hughes

*A Year in Solitary* (Story) – by Michael John Bertrand

*A Weekend at the Seaside* (Story) – by Betty Rocksteady

*Strange Ink* (Poem) – by Tonya Liburd

*Suitcase Baby* (Story) – by Vincent Sakowski

Issue #5, tentatively scheduled for July/August 2017, is also full, as far as short stories goes.

Probably I will re-open the short story submissions window before #5 is published. Perhaps in May. For how long? Long enough to get about 10-12 stories for #6.

Note that I am currently open to poetry submissions for issues #5 & #6.

Much will depend on the state of my finances.

Those of you who'd like to see Polar Borealis carry on please contribute to < <https://www.gofundme.com/jwj3dzgc> >. I can use all the patrons I can get!