

POLAR BOREALIS

Magazine of Canadian Speculative Fiction
(Issue #27 – October 2023)



POLAR BOREALIS MAGAZINE

Aurora Award-winning Magazine of Canadian Speculative Fiction (2020, 2021, 2022, 2023)

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COVER: *The Watchers* – by Swati Chavda

EDITORIAL

I'm pleased to finish the final issue of Polar Borealis for the year. Next, the final issue of Polar Starlight. My projected schedule for next year is eight straight months of publishing one issue a month, four issues for each magazine, followed by four months of planning for the 2025 publications.

The poetry submission window for 2024 has come and gone. 165 poems were submitted. Rhea E. Rose and I have made our choices. We both have enough for 2024. Meanwhile, the short story submission window is open till midnight on Halloween. As of October 20th, no fewer than 52 submissions have arrived. Still room for more. Go to www.polarborealis.ca to check out submission details.

I note that Worldcon GoH Robert J. Sawyer has commented online that the NASFiC Pemmicon was the worst SF convention he ever attended and the Chengdu Worldcon has turned out to be the best. I can add that I found Pemmicon disappointing and the recent When Words Collide the most exciting convention I've ever attended. What do I conclude from this?

I have the impression that North American fandom is aging and very tired, running primarily on nostalgia and same old same old. Nothing new. At all. Whereas the writers attending WWC reflected the excitement and enthusiasm pertaining to the renaissance of literary creativity that is exploding worldwide. So, too, those attending Chengdu. Their fandom is new and exciting and fully in tune with what is happening now. Whereas traditional fandom strikes me as more and more locked in the past and impervious to change. Recently I went so far as to refer to the vague and futile attempts to recreate VCON as akin to attending an autopsy. Never mind flogging a dead horse. Seems people are trying to resurrect one. Too late. The glue factory has it.

Apart from nostalgia, nothing in fandom attracts me anymore. What makes my eyes gleam is the best of the fiction and movies that are coming out. Whereas proposals to conduct yet another "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" panel or show "The Rocky Horror Picture Show" yet again make me cringe. That's old folk stuff. No appeal to the current generation. I'm beginning to think traditional fandom has given up on the future entirely. Depressing.

What excites me is surfing the crest of the wave of creativity carrying us toward the future. Traditional fans don't seem to do that anymore. But those that "just like the stuff" are definitely doing it. I'm with them.

Cheers! *The Graeme*

SMALL ROCKET SPINNING ATOMS LOGO

by Jim Smith

They fed neutrinos into our sun &
Earth simply disappeared
Stones thrown from the moon &
Jellyfish rode our spines.
Theocracy caused
Time-travelling Russians to attract the baldies
Infiltrators infiltrated &
Nuclear war happened, then
Asteroid impact happened, but
Machine intelligence happened, nevertheless.

FUSION FRAGMENT MAGAZINE #17 – June 2023



Contents:

In the Blooming Footprints – by M.S. Dean

My Neighbour Mothman – by Cynthia Zhang

Permafrost – by Dustin Moon

Spirals – by EA Mylonas

The Aquarium – by Vivian Chou

The Last Good Day – by JL George

What She Did Not say Was – by M.C. Benner Dixon

"The stories are very serious indeed. Flashes of quirky humour here and there, but mostly a thoughtful and meaningful examination of the human condition no matter how bizarre the setting. Fusion Fragment is evolving into a literary heavyweight methinks, a thinking reader's delight as opposed to the "mindless entertainment" of old time SF pulp fiction that Lovecraft used to disdain. Very contemporary. Very intelligent. And very challenging. Cavin Terrill is doing a superb job as editor. Excellent selections. Fusion Fragment definitely worth reading every issue. Make it a habit." – RGC, *Amazing Stories*

Find it at: [Fusion Fragment #17](#)

CAVERS

By Greg Fewer

Rick arrived late to explore the newly discovered caverns. Steve had already texted to say he was going inside.

His helmet lamp providing illumination, Rick crawled through a narrow passage Steve had marked with chalk. Rick soon entered a water-filled chamber, lit by Steve's lamp, his submerged body limp.

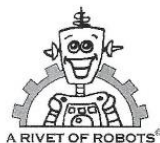
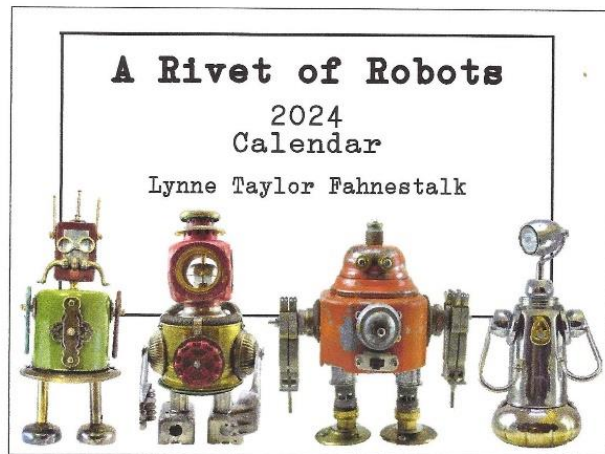
Rick dove into the water to pull Steve out, but a pulsating two-meter blob gripped the body tightly in its numerous tentacles. Brushing them, Rick felt a stinging pain and lost consciousness.

Uncomfortable in the lamp-light, the giant tubifex colony receded into shadowed depths, bringing Rick and Steve's bodies with it.



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GODS

by Robert Stevenson

(To be sung to the tune of It Came Upon a Midnight Clear, if you wish.)

They came upon a midnight blue
Sharp lances fell from above
Most saw them not, few lived who saw
We ran and hid from their love

They needed us to worship them
They wanted all we could give
We gave them what we could and then
We gave them all we had

They asked no more and they laughed and left
We wonder where they've gone
Never more we'll see them here
They're gone, we're all alone



LONG TRIP WITH THE RICH AND FAMOUS

by Monica Wang

Famous Actor had taken so long to die, that the comfortably-off man hadn't dared go near him or even step into that room the whole time. It was sometime past 1500 and at last Famous Actor looked dead, at least from a distance.

If asked right then, the comfortably-off man would've said he felt uncomfortable, more than he'd ever been before. He had more interest in spectator sports than movies, but he didn't think ill of Famous Actor, who seemed to look cool on screen and in person, too, at least from across the room. But everyone else had left; the comfortably-off man last ran into another passenger, a much taller and wealthier man, at 0600. And Famous Actor had been famous for all his work, had won awards for his incredible expressiveness and incredible stunts—they wouldn't *not* have allotted him all the best things.

Now the comfortably-off man crept closer, close enough to make sure Famous Actor wasn't breathing. A moment later he turned and ran. Two, three, thirty corridors later, he stopped at the lockers, his back straightening for the first time in his adult life. Had he paused, he would've seen in the silver reflection that he'd sucked in his ribs, lifted his chin, pulled up everything without thinking. He'd always thought he could pass as a famous actor himself. No time for that, though. Famous Actor had taken strangely long to die.

The comfortably-off man slid open the door.

The lights in the locker, reflected off the suit, made him squint. Rose gold. Famous Actor must have commissioned this suit himself. Its material looked slicker than the matte grey ones the comfortably-off man had seen on all but a few people in the news. And the cut... The comfortably-off man stared. The comfortably-off man pulled at the suit. The comfortably-off man pulled at the hair above his temple, dislodging many strands from their comfortable place.

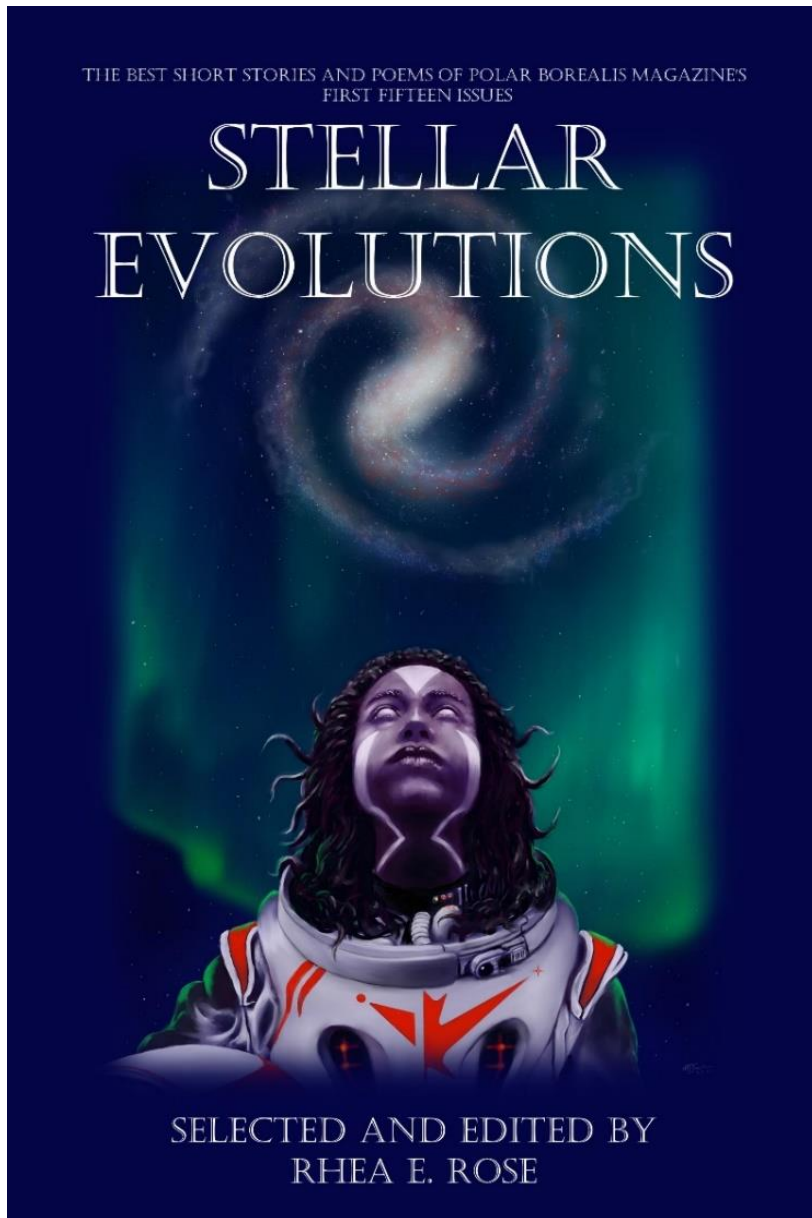
Bespoke sleeves. This netting. No room for anyone's neck, in this gap between the tubes. Origami details swirled before his eyes.

The most prying and rumour-mongering media hadn't known—in spite of all the amazing things Famous Actor did so publicly and so often—that Famous Actor had hidden something this essential about his amazing self. And the comfortably-off man hadn't known much about Famous Actor at all, neither which films Famous Actor had been in nor where Famous Actor was

standing right now.

Outside the shuttle, long past 1700, the stars continued to cast their cold, blue light.

The Best Short Stories & Poems From the First Fifteen Issues of *Polar Borealis* Magazine



Cover: Space Force
– by M.D. Jackson

Poetry – by Lynne Sargent, J.J. Steinfeld, Melanie Martilla, Lisa Timpf, Kirsten Emmott, Catherine Girczyc, Andrea Schlecht, Selena Martens, JYT Kennedy, Taral Wayne & Walter Wentz, Douglas Shimizu, Marcie Lynn Tentchoff, Matt Moore, Richard Stevenson, Mary Choo, and Y.A. Pang.

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Or you can order it as a 209-page paperback, 9 x 6 inches in size, for \$20.53 CAD.

Go to: [Print version via Amazon.ca](#)

THE SORROW OF SOULS

by Corinne K. Lewandowski

I stand in a graveyard now
bereft of the souls.
banshees arrived
in a screeching conclave,
circling with the Nor'easter,
faster, faster, faster
shredding the landscape,
shearing,
sliding razor-thin
fingers deep into the hearts
surgically slicing,
maniacally
eviscerating
bark from core
soul from tree,
each tree
everyone
in the forest.

comfort once given,
ever generously,
from simply leaning against a nook in
a root, a trunk, a limb
ancient spirits touched, connect me to all earth spirits

now a gaping void

once truly timeless,
a place of history
beyond my lifespan.

voices distant, weak
struggling like saprolings
trying to pass through a

terrible winter.

screaming, crying then silent
heartbreaking.

the sorrow of souls
gone.

NEO-OPSIS SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE #34 is published out of Victoria, BC, Canada.



Neo-opsis Science Fiction Magazine is published by the husband-and-wife team Karl and Stephanie Johanson.

The first issue of Neo-opsis Science Fiction Magazine was printed October 10, 2003.

Neo-opsis Science Fiction Magazine won the Aurora Award in the category of Best Work in English (Other) in 2007 and in 2009.

COVER: *It's Lonely Out in Space*
– by Karl & Stephanie Johanson

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Arboghasz Dal Axander

– by Matthew Hughes

The Machine Man

– by Andrew Knighton

Lightspeed Traffic Jam – by John Taloni

Visiting the Big Sandbox – by Jim Lee

Homeplus – by Liz Westbrook-Trenholm

Tea for Two – by Xauri'EL Zwaan

In the Shade – by Jeremy Schnee

She Hulk: Attorney at Law—Review

Find it here: [Neo-opsis #34](#)

THALASSOPHOBIA

by Tressa Ford

You were born in a small town far from any major highways. The town huddles on the sides of an expansive lake, over a hundred kilometres across, covering an area of four hundred kilometers squared overall, and roughly one hundred and fifty meters deep. Deep enough to hold a floor littered with shipwrecks. Deep enough to swallow up a body for days, weeks, years. Deep enough to be lost forever.

“Hey, Nell? When’s the last time you talked with Jonah?” Tara asks while you’re closing up the shop together.

“Not for a couple weeks,” you say. “Why, what’s up?”

“Oh, he’s just been acting weird. Keeps sneaking off somewhere after school and coming home late to dinner. He says he’s just going on walks, but he’s never done those before! And what teenager goes on walks instead of coming home for videogames?”

“Well, I thought I saw him walking down by the lake, near the dock. Looked like his hoodie anyway. But I was on the bus and I just saw him for a moment.”

“Oh, that couldn’t have been Jonah. He hates that dock.”

“Do you think he’s lying about the walks?”

“No,” Tara sighs. “I’m probably just overthinking. But still, would you keep an eye out for him?”

“He’s not a kid anymore.”

“I know, I know. But will you?”

“Of course.”

You’ve known Tara since you were a teenager and Jonah since he was a toddler. You’ve never once told them why your family vacation was cut short when you were six.

You, your dad, and your older brother packed up and headed to the coast for a week. Your cousin had a boat and took everybody for a jaunt around a nearby inlet. At that age, you’d never seen the ocean before.

Once the boat had pattered far enough, your cousin killed the engine. You remember how, without propulsion, the boat's movements fell under the ocean's power. You remember how the dark waves lapped with menace against the sides of the boat. You couldn't see the bottom, no matter how hard you peered into the depths. Nothing like the swimming pool back home.

Your cousin starts a long, dramatic tale of a ship that sank somewhere in the inlet. None of the crew survived. Your brother jokes that the ship's remains could even be below the boat—below your feet. He smirks when you shrink into your dad's side.

Your cousin suggests swimming. It's a sweltering July day and the metal floor of the boat is hot enough to sear bare feet. Still, you know the water will be cold. You peer over the boat's edge dubiously, then retreat to your dad's side, shaking your head.

"Don't be a baby," your brother says. He and your cousin strip down to their shorts and jump in, hollering and whooping. You nearly scream when their bodies disappear into the opaque waves and you grip your dad's hand tight for the small eternity it took for them to resurface.

They stay there a moment, whinging about the temperature, arms and legs pumping relentlessly to keep themselves floating. Then they return to the boat, climbing up the tiny ladder attached to the side. You watch the water surge as they haul themselves out, clinging to their bodies like it's trying to suck them back in.

Your cousin accepts a towel, his goosebumps already starting to fade in the warmth of the sun. Then your brother's hands are on either side of your waist, hurling you into the air. You hear him cackle as you go flying, "Don't forget to plug your nose!"

The water hits you like brain-freeze. You're already sinking down, down, inexorably down. But you got a gold star in swim class last week, so you kick out against gravity's pull, the trapped air in your lungs guiding you to safety and the sunlight above.

Your head breaks the surface and you suck in great lungfuls of air, your eyes blinking away the sting of saltwater. You hear your name called and see your dad leaning half-off the boat, face awash with worry.

You make the mistake of looking down. Your legs are pale distortions in dark water, wavering like candleflame with each kick. And under your feet lies a great, yawning void. Below your feet are shipwrecks and bodies, rusted metal, rotting wood, nibbled bones, and lurking monsters. The void seethes with malice, a hungry thing that's reaching up, up, up to brush the soles of

your feet, grasp at your ankles, tug you down. A voice you've never heard before croons about how easy it would be to stop kicking, to sink, to let go and never feel the burn of sunlight again.

You scream and start thrashing, desperately trying to lift yourself out of the water. Anything to get away from that reaching darkness. You keep screaming, even as your dad's arms wrap around you, wrenching you from oblivion's pull and hauling you out of the water. You don't fall silent until your feet rest solidly on the boat, the searing heat now welcome against the cold that's sunk into you. There's the rough warmth of a towel rubbed briskly up and down your arms and then wrapped around your shivering frame. Your hands numbly clasp a thermos of honey tea.

The four of you head back to shore quickly after that, while your dad screams at your brother until he is blue in the face. You return to your hometown, back to your house that's just a short walk from the lake with all its dark, shifting waters. The nightmares start soon after.

Two days after your conversation with her, Tara calls into the store before her shift. Her voice comes through frantic, and you have to ask her twice why she can't make it in this morning.

She says, "Jonah wasn't in his bed this morning," and your blood runs cold. "I can't come in, I need to look for him—"

"No, of course, we understand," you say, numbly. Your manager takes the phone from your unresisting hand and chats with Tara in a low, soothing tone. "He'll be okay," she says. "We'll keep an eye out for him."

On the bus home after work, you close your eyes and drift, half-awake. You're seventeen again, with Tara and six-year-old Jonah at the beach. You watch as that fearless, reckless little idiot calls out "Watch me, Nell!" before launching himself off the dock. You scream when his body disappears underneath the water, alerting the lifeguard. Then Jonah's head breaks through the surface, already crying. The current is tugging him with cold efficiency from the shore while you're frozen in place. The lifeguard dives in to haul Jonah out of the water, untangling him from the grasping tendrils of lakeweed. They wrap him in a blanket for shock and Tara fusses frantically over his shivering form. She turns to you and says in a cold, saccharine voice, "*Would you keep an eye out for him?*"

Your eyes fly open, already pressing the button for the stop closest to the lake.

“Jonah!”

He flinches at your voice but doesn't turn to face you. He's standing at the edge of the dock, his figure sticking out like a nail from the wooden boards, his washed-out hoodie blending into the grey mountains around him.

The waves are slick and dark, edged with jagged whitecaps from the stiff March breeze. The roiling expanse is speared by the sharp jut of the dock and punctured by white, weatherworn buoys. Underneath each buoy you know there's a thick, rust-brown chain, slimed over with algae and lakeweed, anchoring itself in fluid, treacherous silt. Keeping your eyes firmly on your feet, you slowly approach Jonah at the dock's edge.

“Hey, Nell. Joining me?” He asks, his eyes fixed on the water.

“Your mother's been worried sick! Where've you been all day?”

“Here.”

“Bullshit! Somebody would've noticed. I swear Tara has half the damn town mobilized at this point!”

“They can't see me. They can't see *us*.”

“Who's *us*? What are you talking about?”

“You and me.” He gestures helplessly at the water. “It doesn't want them to. Because if nobody can see us, then we're alone. And when people are alone, they jump in.”

A thrum of dread curls in your gut. You swallow back the burn of seawater in your throat. “Jonah, I don't know what you're talking about.”

“You do, you just don't want to acknowledge it. I've been thinking about it for a while now, and I think it feeds off fear.”

For the first time since coming here, your eyes slide, slowly, unwillingly to the shifting lake all around you. The slick sound of water against the dock's hollow spaces is suddenly deafening.

“I've seen the way you look at the water,” Jonah continues. “At this rate, it's going to get one of us, at least.” He rocks on his feet, tilting his body sharply towards the edge and back. “But I don't know which of us it'll be.”

“Let's go,” you say, grabbing his arm and tugging him from the edge. “Nothing's going to get either of us.”

He comes willingly, wrist limp in your hand. You guide him deeper into the park, set him down on a bench with no view of the water, and call Tara. As you

wait for her to arrive, you sink down onto the bench beside him, knees finally turning traitor. Jonah is shaking beside you, his hands rhythmically clenching and unclenching.

“You’ve been having those nightmares again, haven’t you?”

“Yeah,” he says. “My friends dared me to go on the dock last week, and... I did. Thought it wouldn’t be that bad, thought I’d grown out of it. But the nightmares came back. I wake up every morning now, choking on water that isn’t there.”

You make a conscious effort to relax your fists, ignoring the sting where your nails are cutting into your palms. You open your mouth, ready to tell him about your nightmares too, that he isn’t alone, that he’s never been alone in this...

What good could it do? A voice whispers in your head. Telling him won’t fix anything.

“You need to stay away from the water,” you say instead. “The nightmares will go away if you stop feeding them material to work with.”

There’s something almost betrayed in Jonah’s expression when he looks back at you, like he senses the truth where it sits mute and clogging your throat.

“Yeah,” he says. “Sure.”

Your own childhood nightmares return with a vengeance that night. You’re standing on the beach and Jonah’s six again, leaning over the edge of the dock. He turns to you, his words carrying perfectly across the water.

“It’s going to get one of us,” he whispers. *“It’s you or me.”*

You watch in slow-motion as his feet drag closer to the edge, like his legs know better, like he’s trying to fight every step. You start running towards him, but the distance between you and the dock’s edge grows with every step. You don’t get there in time and the water swallows him without a ripple.

You wake in a panic, sheets tangled around your legs, sweat cooling on goose-bumped flesh. The voice still rings in your ears.

“It’s you or me...”

You drag yourself through the next week in a haze of exhaustion and sleeplessness. Wake up, go to work, go home. And every night, you watch as Jonah falls into the water. Every night, you’re unable to reach him.

You're nodding off by the bus stop when Jonah's voice pierces through the fog in your brain. "Hey, Nell, you okay?"

Beneath your feet, water from a hose up the street is draining noisily into the grate. You coax your sleep-deprived brain back to reality, at least enough to answer.

"Doing all right. Just pulling some long hours right now. What's up with you?"

Jonah shrugs. "Been super grounded the past week, but Mom's finally starting to let up on it. And we're looking into seeing a therapist. About the nightmares."

"That's good. That's real good to hear."

His bright eyes fix on you and you watch, resigned, as he notices the bags under your eyes, the clench of your hands around your coffee mug. "And you too, right?" He says. "You'd tell me if something was wrong?"

What good could it do? The voice croons.

"Right, Nell?"

"Of course."

That night, the nightmare changes. You reach Jonah this time, just as he's about to fall. You grab his shoulder, hauling his body from the edge with all the ease of yanking someone through water. But you keep going in your momentum, pushing Jonah behind you as gravity takes hold, your feet slipping on the wet dock, your body tumbling down...

You wake before you hit the water. You know what you must do.

It's just a little after dawn as you march towards the lake, the cold air driving you to walk faster through quiet, motionless streets. The beach is devoid of life when you arrive, even the gulls are silent. The early morning sky is clouded over, reflected in the slate-grey water below. The waves lap at the wooden planks of the dock with gleeful menace as you walk across.

It's him or you... The voice whispers for the last time.

In one last burst of optimism, you fill your lungs to capacity, trapping buoyant air behind clenched teeth and pressed lips. Then you step out into the water.

Like so many years ago, the cold hits you first, stabbing into your skin and pummeling through your skull to pierce your brain. You flail as you sink, your clothing and shoes dragging you down, down, down...

Way down.

So deep you should have struck bottom by now. You start to kick for the surface, fighting your own weight. You have your eyes screwed tight against the water but you open them to murky darkness, a great void all around you. No glow of sunlight to guide you safely back to the surface.

And we are all around you. Your trembling body within our grasp, finally. Your eyes bug out in panic, your mouth desperately working against the urge to scream. We know what you see.

Rotting wood and rusted chains and sharp, corroded metal. Serrated teeth curled inwards and grasping tendrils, bulging sightless eyes, pale, sickly, and sun-starved. Bloated flesh and

So.

Many.

Bones.

Bones once strong and calcium-rich now split open and worn smooth as driftwood, their marrow sucked out. Bones that haven't felt the warmth of sunlight in years, decades, centuries.

And we see you too. Your skin mottled sickly-green in the watery light. Your flailing arms that fail to protect your soft, vulnerable belly. We want to strike at it, sink our claws into it and rend that softness to pieces. But we wait. Because we know your belly will grow even softer in its rot. That your tissues will separate in pieces, escaping into the currents, but your bones...

Your bones will stay with us.

We draw closer, closing in on the fear pouring from your body. You strike out with your hand into the murk, an attempt to ward off our approach. It strikes instead the cold, slimed-over metal links of the chain anchoring a buoy to the lake floor.

We watch you recoil. It's the only bridge back to your reality we've allowed, only because of how often we've seen it in your nightmares. You're starting to understand the inevitable, your eyes squeezed shut against our approach.

But then your arm flails out again, this time grabbing hold of the chain. Your eyes fly open, but not focused on the chain, not us. We see hope take root in your heart as you start hauling yourself closer to the surface.

Your head breaks through the water, filling your lungs with air and clearing your mouth of fear. We settle back to the bottom to wait for you to

come back to us, wait for your leaden fear to fill your core and sink you back down.

It doesn't take long. We watch as you look around, realizing you've been swept farther than you expected from the dock and shore. Your hands clinging to the buoy are growing numb and your sodden clothes are weighing you down.

"Nell!"

Your head snaps up to see Jonah on the dock, waving frantically at you. There's a splash in front of you; an orange floatation device with a rope leading back to the dock. It lands a mere metre from the buoy but still, we feel your hesitation. We take our chance, flooding your brain with images of what's lurking beneath your feet, what's waiting for you if you let go of the buoy. Your breath stutters in your chest, your hands frozen as you watch your lifeline drift away.

"It's okay, Nell!" Jonah's voice snaps you out of it again, drawing your attention back to the dock, to safety. "Just focus on me, okay? I'm here, you're going to be okay! Swim towards me!"

It's enough to unclench your fear-frozen hands from the buoy. You kick out with fading, heavy limbs, swimming frantically towards the lifeline. You clasp it to your chest. Jonah starts pulling it back and then helps you clamber onto the dock, the water sluicing from your frame as you roll, gasping, onto the wood.

"I'm fine," we hear you say, through great, heaving gasps. You reach out and pull Jonah into an embrace, sobbing. "I'm alive, I'm okay, I'm still alive!"

We settle back down into the water, watching as you're ushered off the beach, our hold lessening with each step you take from the water. Oh well.

There are always others.

GAME ON



"All the stories I reviewed from this anthology involve a game of some sort or another. Fair to call it a series of monographs on the topic of life as a game with each story exhibiting wry and subtle writing embedded with numerous original concepts. A feast for the imagination I'd say. Highly recommended." – RGC, *Amazing Stories*

ECLIPSED

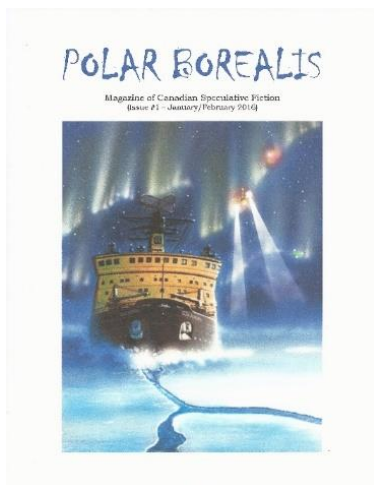
By Lisa Timpf

We found a derelict in space—
it's sat unprobed, for years, in place,
no signs of life, nor hands that steered
this vessel built by ancient race.

First contact was a thing we feared
but these are eons disappeared—
long turned to dust, they've left behind
all that they loved and once revered

so surely now they will not mind
if we ransack this wondrous find
it's not our fault, the way time slips
away in manners most unkind

but suddenly the image flips
and my imagination zips
to years hence, when our human ships
abandoned lie, our kind eclipsed.



Do you enjoy reading Polar Borealis?

Most of the time I manage to put aside enough money out of my pensions such that I can publish four times a year, but sometimes unexpected expenses delay publication.

If you could contribute \$1 a month, or \$2, or \$5 via my Patreon site, I'd be most grateful. Every bit helps me to keep to my schedule.

See < [Patreon Site for Polar Borealis Magazine](#) >

WHAT TO DO IF YOU ACCIDENTALLY BREAK THE SPACE-TIME CONTINUUM

by Andy W. Taylor

Don't Panic. I mean you'd be totally justified if you *did* panic, but just don't. Kermit-flailing and tearing out your hair undermines your position of authority as the leading physicist working on the world's second largest particle accelerator. Besides it's not a good look on anyone. Ask me how I know.

Panicking also leads to actions that might seem like a good idea in the moment but maybe aren't. For instance, smashing that big red "*Shut It All Down*" button on the wall. Why else would someone put it there if not for just such an emergency, right? No one can blame you for the cascading failure of the electrical grid that shutting down the accelerator inevitably causes. Except they probably will. Plunging a not-insignificant portion of the continent into darkness tends to have everyone looking for scapegoats and reaching for their pitchforks. They might even make your name a verb synonymous with causing an unprecedented catastrophe. Trust me, it's not the legacy you wished for when you were working on your Ph.D. and dreaming about winning a Nobel Prize.

Also avoid the temptation of yelling "What did you do!" at your grad student. I mean, I get it, it's second nature to blame them, but this one time—just don't. They're just as bewildered as you are and were most likely scrolling through potato videos on Tik-Tok when it all went down. No, you've got to accept that this is going to fall on your shoulders. Suck it up. Put on your big-physicist pants and deal it.

Whatever you do—don't try to ask the other versions of yourself that pop into existence for help. Half are from moments before the accident and the other half are versions of you from seconds into the future. Statistically speaking they are all as equally as confused and panicked as you are and of no practical use. Just wait until they vanish back into the quantum foam they came from and go about your business.

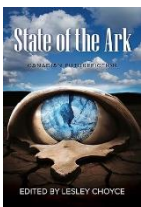
What you can do—no, what you **MUST** do—is breathe. Deep breaths—like your therapist showed you. In through your nose and let it expand your lungs and belly, and exhale slowly through your mouth. Will it restore the space-time continuum? Nope. It won't even help coping with the awooga sounds from the

wailing klaxons. It will help keeping you from hyper-ventilating and passing out, which may be just as important in the moment.

You might also want to consider re-reading the emergency procedures manual to refresh your memory on what options are available to you should such a disaster occur. Do avoid trying to find the manual while emergency lights are strobing like a rave scene from your youth. Best to do it *before* disaster strikes.

Because if you do study it, you might be able to recall the one line that could help. But you'll have to dig deep. It's buried on page 242 of the second revised addendum. No, not the one about "reversing the polarity of the neutron flow." That's clearly a joke put there by a grad student who's obviously a Doctor Who fan testing to see if anyone reads the addendum. Focus instead on the section about "re-normalizing the tertiary wave function by decoupling the emitter algorithms from the Teledyne relays and restoring the power to the bypass circuit." If you can figure out how to redirect enough power from the emergency standby generators, you might have half a chance to avoid a full-on shattering of the space-time continuum.

Regardless of your level of success at diverting this cataclysm, I highly encourage you to retain the best lawyer versed in industrial malfeasance you can afford, but don't neglect looking up an entertainment agent to represent you as well. Once you get done defending yourself in court, you'll want to leverage your notoriety and make the rounds on the university and talk-show circuits, maybe even some conspiracy podcasts for good measure. If you play your cards right, maybe—just maybe—the agent can land you a spot on one of those reality shows that feature second-string celebrities or maybe a recurring guest appearance on some sitcom aimed at geeks. Of course, you'll want an agent who can negotiate the highest appearance fees possible. You'll need the money because surely no one is ever going to trust you with a particle accelerator again—not even the world's third-largest. Which, come to think of it, is probably the world's second largest now. Good luck and I hope whichever timeline this message finds you in, it's not too late to learn from my mistakes.



STATE OF THE ARK

"Every story in this anthology is a delight, a product of mature and intelligent thinking. No surprise, the contributors are a bunch of heavy-duty writers who have a lot to say. Definitely a pleasure to read. A superb example of speculative fiction at its best." – RGC, *Amazing Stories*

THE LADY OF THE SEA

by Lee F. Patrick

She calls to me, the Lady of the Sea
I listen for her, sitting on the edge of the sea
I am of the land and she is of the sea
Kept apart, seeking love across the abyss.

She brings forth the storms, when the waves pound the land
I wait for her call, perched on the last spit of the land
She is of the sea and I am of the land
Our eyes met, our hearts joined, casting us into love's abyss.

Who is she, riding the horses of the sea
Lady of the storm, her hair the foam of the sea
Eyes of dark water, possessing the power of the sea
Dark and forever, mistress of the abyss.

I have grown old, waiting on the land
She stays ever young, eschewing all land
My feet touch water and I finally forsake the land
The joy of her touch makes me forget the abyss.

We are together, astride the horses of the sea
Love brought us together, the land and the sea
I look into her eyes and think only of the sea
The waters surround me, below me the abyss.

Far out to sea, far from all land
Beds of kelp grow thick, mimicking the land
It rises and falls, solid sea and not land
Below waits the sea, further below the abyss.

Love on the ocean, love on the sea
My Lady and I, happy in the sea
Her domain surrounds us, her power of the sea
I have changed, and send others down to the abyss.

TIME AND TIME AGAIN

by Xauri'EL Zwaan

Previously published in *Garbled Transmissions*

When I first found myself stuck out of time, I spent 7 months and 19 days in the Paris of Louis XVI as civil unrest deepened and the Revolution approached. I lived every day in fear that my extensive factual knowledge of the period would be insufficient to the task of keeping me from death on the barricades or beneath Madame Guillotine. I spent every night in passionate coupling, trying desperately to exhaust myself to the point where I could not dream.

Just about anyone who Travels has been stuck out of time. Travelling is dangerous, and some people never come back; but, of course, it doesn't stop any of us from going, fools that we are, or from going back when we've had a close call. Not much is worse than being stuck out of time. Faced with a worthless Machine missing one critical component that can't be jury-rigged from obsolete technology, there is simply nothing one can do but wait. We all try the same old tricks—sending clever messages to friends and loved ones, hidden for centuries in decaying houses or handed down from parent to child through the centuries, and of course it never works; *Tempus Frangit*. The only thing to do is live one's life; spend the money you brought with you until it runs out, create an identity and a livelihood of some kind, and try not to draw so much attention to yourself as to be considered more than passably eccentric; live under the strictures of obsolete moralities and economics until you just happen to bump into someone else with that wise-beyond-their-years look in their eyes. It almost always happens sooner or later; Travelers tend to cluster around the same times and places, for our own safety as much as because anything more than usually interesting is going on. They'll always recognize that same faraway look in you, with a telltale tinge of quiet desperation, and nip back for a spare flux capacitor or quantum battery; and just like that you're home again.

For a while after one has been stuck out of time, there is nothing but gratitude, and a desperate throwing of oneself back into modern life; enjoying all the fruits of one's native era and working feverishly to remove the habits and thought pattern engraved into the psyche by historical society, as if trying to wash off the stink of antiquity in the running water of life. But once equilibrium has been reasonably regained, another question begins inevitably

to nag, to obsess, to consume. One begins to wonder, *why cannot another Traveler now go back and have rescued me before I had to waste all of that time living in the past?*

And, of course, you know the answer, because everyone you ask gives you back the same answer, because you give the same answer yourself when asked the same question, because there can only *be* one answer: Paradox. It's taught to every one of us from childhood—the story of the Traveler who went back and killed his own grandfather; of the one who gunned down Adolf Hitler and stopped Time Machines from ever being invented; of the billiard ball, shot through a wormhole, that flies out the other end and knocks itself off course. It's ground into us over and over, in a hundred ways, that if we choose to Travel we must do everything in our power to avoid creating a Paradox; never disseminate future knowledge, never interact with significant switch points, and never, *ever* try to alter a Traveler's personal history. Because the universe abhors a Paradox, and those who become the subject of one will not be coming home. Perhaps they live on, in some alternate universe; there is not, for us, any possible way of knowing. They simply *don't come back*.

And, of course, if one wishes to Travel one respects this, both as a matter of law and as a matter of course. Reckless behaviour with a Machine is simply not tolerated, neither by society, nor by reality. Things could be worse. Things could, conceivably, be *otherwise* in some way. So, in time you accept this answer, though you never quite completely believe it. It continues to smart, like a wound that never quite heals -- the idea that all of that hardship could be somehow erased if only someone, *anyone*, cared enough to stop it from happening.

I went through all of the classic stages—the frantic *joie de vivre*, then the bitterness and blame; the angry withdrawal from friends and social circles; the morbid fear of museums and history books; then, the tentative seeking out of other veterans to tell and retell our stuck-out-of-time stories, and the eventual realization that there is nothing in the world one wants to do more than Travel again, for we have as yet found no other experience quite as thrilling or intense. So, I went back again, of course; we almost always do, for the sterile predictability of our lives can't hold a candle to the rough and terrible vitality, to the sheer *importance* of theirs. Once again I sampled times and places like fine wines: Berlin, 1989; London, 1851; Boston, 1773; Ares, 2097; Karlstad, 1905. And when I was in Dallas in 1963, I met a woman with a far-away look in her eyes.

All I had to do was touch her; she took one look at me and began to

tremble as if, starving, she had turned a corner to find a full banquet laid out in front of her. In a shaky voice she asked me if I had a working Machine, and when instead of “What kind of machine?” I simply replied “Yes,” she burst into tears. She fell on her knees and began to kiss my hand; I very nearly had to slap her, but satisfied myself with pointing out that we were attracting attention from the passersby.

We retired to her house; her husband, she explained, was away on business. She was a tall, statuesque woman, with a face that fit a native of the era in her early 40s; mousy and restrained as proper ladies of the era were expected to make themselves, but with the marks of the future clear on her face for anyone who knew what they were looking for. Her features were of course considerably more attractive than the average for the time, and her eyes betrayed a deep knowledge that could only be achieved by hypnogogic education—that, or a dozen Master’s degrees. She had been in New York in 1945, she told me, hoping to snatch a quick kiss from a returning serviceman. She had been bumped against a wall and her Machine had fallen to the ground and been stepped on, and the delicate crystal spindles of the tachyon antennae had all cracked, the ones in the Machine and the spares she kept sewn in her belt both. It was a not uncommon occurrence, but she had panicked and tried so frantically to find another Traveler that she had been placed into a mental asylum. She had been stuck out of time for almost two decades and had despaired of ever seeing home again. She practically fawned over me, in a way that was terribly embarrassing; and soon I began to suspect that she had in fact lost her sanity. She begged me again and again just to go back and make it not to have happened to her.

“Paradox,” I said, and she began to scream at me; things that barely made sense, about closed spirals and wheels within wheels, made that much less comprehensible by her infuriated weeping. I did my best to remain firm, to avoid engaging in a meaningless argument, and simply repeated that I couldn’t do it and she knew exactly why. I put my arms around her, in an attempt to comfort her, and she kissed me with the hunger of decades spent dreaming of home. We made love with an intensity I had never before experienced, not even in Paris when I feared any night might be my last. I spent the night in her arms, sleeping the sleep of the just. The next day, I gave her a pair of spare antennae for the Machine she still carried with her everywhere she went and returned home without even bothering to stay and see what I had come to see.

I felt as if I had been set free. It’s also a well-documented phenomenon; the euphoria, the sense of invulnerability, that comes with rescuing a fellow

Traveler stuck out of time—particularly if one has once had to be rescued oneself. If I had been sampling fine wines, I started draining bottles and drinking myself into a stupor. Athens, at the height of the Peloponnesian War; Aksum, during the conquest of Kush; Chengzhou, in the Spring and Autumn Period; Armstrong, through the food riots and the Revolt—I began Traveling more and more often, to more and more dangerous times and places, staying longer and longer, waiting less and less before leaving again. Friends became concerned for my well-being; my networks decayed from lack of maintenance, and the less kind of my erstwhile acquaintances whispered slyly behind my back of “warlust” and “history-book fever.” I paid them little mind. I knew perfectly well how many people failed to return from Traveling every year—just Failed to Return, spirited off to another universe or become part of the historical record or just plain dead. I didn’t care. I felt as if nothing could touch me.

And, of course, someone touched me. A burly G.I. touched me, in New York City, in August 1945. He touched me hard enough to throw me into a wall, to knock my Machine off of my belt, to break the delicate tachyon antennae—the ones in the Machine, and the spares in my belt both.

Stupidly, when I saw the shattered crystals my first thought was of the *other woman*—the poor lonely Traveler who had been at this same time and place, the woman I once had helped. Then, of all the dozens of Travelers who must inevitably be right here, right now, lost in the ancient crowds. And then, of the prospect of spending months or even years in this half-formed technocracy, one foot still planted in the Capitalist Era and one hand grasping at things its people barely understood. My stomach lurched, as if I had fallen from a great height. I started rushing up to people—anyone tall, handsome, and filled with lust for life, which, as the square was filled with members of the armed forces reuniting with their wives and lovers, were present in abundance—begging them incoherently to help me fix my Machine. At this point, my memory becomes spotty. The last thing I recall before losing consciousness is being restrained by police, screaming wildly about recursive equations and Paradox.

The rest of the story is easy enough to predict, and how very much time I have spent kicking myself for not seeing it, the beautiful simplicity of it. I spent the next several years in what the people of the time laughably labeled a “mental asylum,” heavily drugged, pushed around by uncaring orderlies and doctors determined to interpret my every word and act as an expression of my schizophrenic delusions. I had apparently seriously injured several people in

my panicked rage and was not to be released until they were satisfied that I was no longer a danger to myself or others. Of course, my lack of emotional balance was not the product of a fantasy that I was a traveler from the future stuck in a bygone age, but of actually *being* one; the witch doctors of the period had no possible help to offer me. I was forced to regain my sanity entirely through my own efforts, and in spite of rather than because of their treatment regimen—a circumstance that seemed depressingly common among my fellow inmates. Fortunately, I had the advantage of a genetically enhanced intellect and encyclopedic knowledge of the psychological theories of the time. I played cat-and-mouse with them, managing to manipulate them into believing they had cured me; I became the very model of a psychiatric success story, and after a hellish four years, seven months and twenty-three days I was given a clean bill of health and released.

Even then, I couldn't quite make the connection. On the one hand was a vast blank wall of denial, erected against a thousand childhood horrors. On the other, I was too absorbed in the minutiae of surviving being stuck out of time in the 20th century: concocting tales and anecdotes of a fictional prior life—my childhood games, my family home, my first kiss; manufacturing evidence and documentation of my purported identity; training myself in employable skills appropriate for a female of the time and place; cultivating a circle of acquaintances who would tolerate my occasional *faux pas* or moment of inexplicable eccentricity; and balancing the continual need to conform, especially for a person with my history of “mental problems,” against the burning desire to seek out other Travelers who could help me on my way home.

I still had my Machine, of course—its clever shell had yielded nothing to the authorities' inspection but the outward form of a common ladies' makeup case, and so it had been returned to me intact; and it was in perfect working order, save for that one common part that I would have had to reinvent entire branches of physics and chemistry to even begin the process of designing a plant that could synthesize the materials necessary to manufacture. The major problem was that, of the events of the time that Travelers might be interested in experiencing, most were inaccessible to me—at least, without considerable efforts that would put me in immense jeopardy and ruin the public persona I had carefully constructed—and many of the rest were readily available for anyone to experience on broadcast television. I did my level best—sat in the gallery at the Rosenberg trial, rode the bus with Rosa Parks. If there were Travelers there, I couldn't see them. I attended the first reading of “Howl”; it

was impossible to tell if the people I talked to there were real Travelers so thoroughly drugged as to have become incoherent, or normal people so completely drug-addled as to believe they were travelers from the future.

Over time, caution ground down hope. I kept my head down. I found, and married, a man who was willing to overlook my troubled history, my strange moods and alien humours, my distressing habit of speaking my mind and making my own decisions. I established a new life for myself, not different in many particulars from the lives of the vast majority of the women of that time and place. I considered waiting for the Woodstock Festival—a running joke had it that there had always been more Travelers there than locals. But in the back of my mind, a plan was forming. I still knew of one time, one place, where I was absolutely *certain* to find a Traveler.

I manipulated the course of events in such a way that my husband and I would be living in Dallas, Texas by November of 1963.

Right up to the moment I saw her, I somehow honestly believed that I would come on her as she helped some other poor woman who had gone through the exact same sequence of events that I had, whose face the one I saw in the mirror every day was coming more and more to resemble, but whom I had never dared try to find. I was so stupidly sure of it that I almost missed her, because I was looking out for two women, not one. It was not until she touched my arm and I looked up into her face—into *my* face, as it had been before the ravages of 18 years and 3 months without access to rejuvenation therapy—that the final layer of desperate self-deception peeled away and I had to face the truth full-on. Paradox. I was living it. I had been since that day, since *this* day, when I had met myself while Traveling and changed the course of my life.

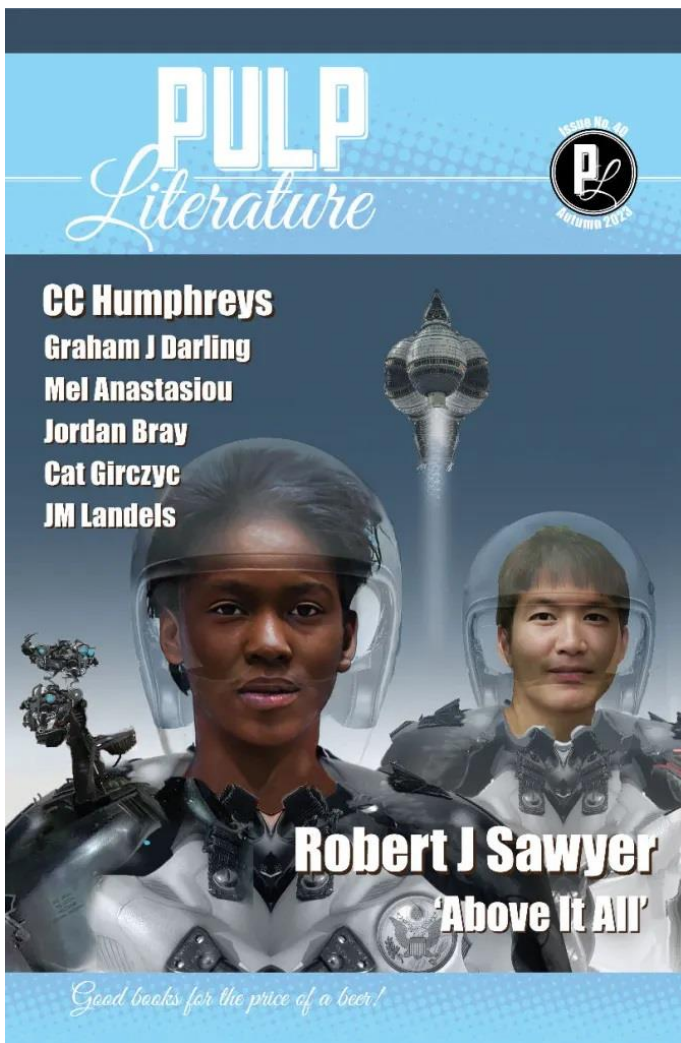
The universe started to press in on me, to twist and twirl around me like a carnival ride. Here I was in the eye of the storm, the perfect center of Paradox; and the universe hadn't opened up and swallowed me into some nether-hell reserved for those who Broke the Rules. I was just living life. There was no escape, nowhere to turn; and as I led her back to the humble house I had visited so many years ago, I realized that there was nothing there to escape. I tried so hard to get her to see it; to understand that Paradox was not the demon, the bogeyman she had been taught of in creche. It was not something to fear. It was something to *embrace*.

I'm not sure why I bothered. I knew exactly how things would turn out. She wasn't me; she didn't know. I could have told her, but I held it back; she wouldn't have believed me anyway. I knew that I wouldn't have believed it—

couldn't have believed it, not and kept my sanity. I would have left—run away to safety and predictability, taking my Machine with me, and left the poor old madwoman to her home and husband and life.

Instead, I fucked her. I'm not even sure why. Curiosity, I suppose, and simple mean-spirited spite. Then, while she was sleeping, I took my husband's gun upstairs and shot her in the head.

PULP LITERATURE #40 Autumn 2023



Cover: *American Space Force* – by Tais Tang

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Above It All

– by Robert J. Sawyer

Feature interview with Robert J. Sawyer

Stella Ryman Takes the Wheel

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The Eternity Machine – by Graham J Darling

Bliss Street – by CZ Tacks

octopus boy in winter – (poem) by Claire Lawrence

How I Earned my Queer Card

– (poem) by Catherine Lewis

Perimeters – (poem) by Mark Cameron

The Drift – by Jordan Bray

Where the Angels Wait – by CC Humphreys

“There’s a lot of exciting stuff to read in this issue. Exciting in terms of original concepts, sparkling writing, and subtle admonitions to think. Why, you might even wind-up reforming yourself, or at least understanding your future a bit better. At the very least you’ll feel good being exposed to so much excellent writing. It is always pleasant to be entertained. In this case, invigorated. An inspiring issue. I like it.” – By RGC, Amazing Stories

Find it here: [Pulp Literature #40](#)

TEN-FOUR

by Rhonda Parrish

Ever since the accident took his speech
Pa had diminished, growing smaller and smaller
until he was barely even a presence
on the farm.

He'd go through his chores
slopping the pigs
milking the cows
but no longer sang or hummed or whistled
or ruffled my hair when our paths crossed.

I never saw him smile anymore.

Every night as I knelt beside my bed
I prayed and prayed for God
to give him his voice back
his smile back.

To give *him* back.

I prayed until my knees ached
until Ma would come shoo me into bed
tuck me in tight
—too tight, but I didn't complain—
and kiss me goodnight.

Until one day I caught the thought
a random fragment of a thing
about "the goddamn horse"
crackling through my walkie talkie
familiar but distorted
electronic and echoing like it had come
all the way down a deep, dark well to reach me.

Pa came around the corner
mouth twisted into a snarl, limping on one foot
like the other had been stepped on
by our great galumphing horse Fatso.

“Ruddy thing! Should send it to the glue factory!”
grumbled my walkie.

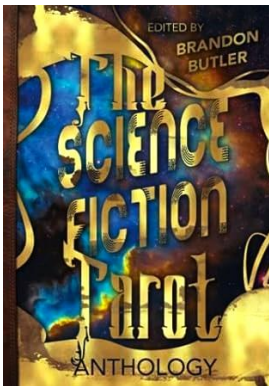
I sprang up from the dirt, bursting
toward Pa like the clown from baby Ann’s
jack-in-the-box
holding my walkie forward like a torch
like a trophy.

“Stupid beast!” said the walkie
and Pa stopped
and looked at it.

“What in tarnation?” it said.

“Is that–? It is!” it said.

And he smiled.



THE SCIENCE FICTION TAROT

“I enjoyed and was impressed by each and every story. I’ve barely hinted at the complexity and sophistication exhibited in this anthology. The subtlety of thought underpinning each story is amazing. This is genuine science fiction, thought-provoking and often wildly original, not to mention mature and intelligent. A real pleasure to read. Kudos to the contributors and acquisition editors. In my opinion “The Science Fiction Tarot” deserves an Aurora Award. It’s that good.” RGC – Amazing Stories.

Check it out at: < [The Science Fiction Tarot](#) >

THE JANITOR

by Casey Lawrence

The alien spacecraft landed in Woodstock, which was a surprise. No, not that Woodstock. The other one, in Oxford County, on the Thames River. No, not that Oxford—and not that Thames, either. He couldn't have picked a friendlier city.

He landed his little ship in Vansittart Park of all places—right on the Splash Pad, if you can believe it. Engine trouble, he said. He'd right run out of fuel over London—no, not that London—and coasted on down here. There are plenty of farms and parks between London and Woodstock, but with his little ship rocking and rolling, it was a miracle he didn't hit town hall!

Well so I said to the little fella—and he couldn't have been right more than four foot—I asked him what he needed and wouldn't you know, he was looking for local government. And I said, "Well, I work for the mayor," and I do, I work in the mayor's office, so I said I could help him with that. It's a lucky thing I was there at that park—I was there with the kiddos, and it was just right place, right time.

And he was real friendly, Viv. He asked me to call him that: Viv. He and I got on well. He even had a tool belt and overalls like mine, kind of.

We loaded his ship into my truck and I sent the kids to their friend Gord's so I could take Viv to Jerry's house. I said to Jerry—I called him up on the way, hands-free, of course—I said to Jerry, "You're going to want to meet this guy." And I tell him what's happened.

Viv tells me he works for—oh shoot, you know, I don't remember. It had a rather long acronym, and I was too busy looking at him when he said it. He was this funny greenish colour, with little tentacles and eyes a bit like a cat's. Anyway, he tells me he was on his route and noticed that our atmosphere was dirty. So—get this—he pops off course to let us know, and sprang a fuel leak out by Mars. Mars!

So, I get chatting with Viv—he has thirty-eight kids back home, one of them is off to college this year—and he says he'd happily do a quick scrub for us if we refuelled his tank. And I did tell him, I said, "We'll fill your tank up regardless!" But I had to ask Jerry if we needed any clean-up.

I get Viv to Jerry's but by then Jerry is on the phone with the Prime Minister. And Viv, well, he doesn't want to make a fuss, so he asks me to just fill 'er up and he'd take care of the smog on the way out. And I'm thinking,

there's no smog in Woodstock! But then I think maybe he's talking about the air over London or Hamilton, and I say, "That would be mighty nice of you, Viv."

So, I ask Viv what kind of gas his ship takes and get this, it runs on *silica*. And I say, "Shoot, all we've got at the station is gas or diesel." And he says, "Why, that's why your air is so dirty!" And we have a good laugh.

But I can get the little guy some silica pretty easy. Don't you know, that's the main ingredient in regular old glass? So, I ask, "How much do you need?" And it turns out his little ship only needs a few ounces of the stuff to get home, so I just take him to my place and give him a couple of glasses right out of the etagere. We got gifted a bunch of crystal glassware when my Nan passed and never use it.

The next thing I know he's standing in my dining room, looking at the bay windows and holding a paperweight, and he starts crying, Viv does. And I think, oh no, I've offended him. But he's so happy, see. Where he comes from, silica is rarer than gold. And he says, "You're going to be rich."

I say "It's just glass" but he thanks me for the stemware and so I give him the paperweight too, and he says he'll clean up all the air for it. Normally a full scrub would be covered by—and I still can't remember the name, sorry—Viv's agency, but since we're not paying taxes into the system yet, he would have to charge us for that sort of thing, but a couple of glasses completely covered the bill.

By the time the news crews arrived and the helicopters and everything came, Viv was already gone. It didn't take him but a minute to grind up the glass and set off. And now they're telling me that all the greenhouse gasses are gone. He went and repaired the ozone layer too, while he was at it. Just cleaned up the whole planet's air, for a couple of glasses and a paperweight.

I don't get why everybody's so mad. I just helped the guy out and it turns out, he really helped us too. All that CO₂ and methane just scrubbed right out with his fancy filters. But what do I know, I'm just the janitor at the mayor's office.

Before he left, Viv said we should really pay into the system if we want to be put on his regular maintenance route. He'll pass our way every couple of decades and get our air sorted if we get into trouble again. He gave me his card, but wouldn't you know, I can't read it. His translator only worked on speech, I guess.

He did say he'd send one of his buddies to deal with the oceans, though. Did you know we're crawling with microplastics? They can take care of all that, but it'll cost a pretty penny—at least a window or two!

ON SPEC MAGAZINE – #124 - V.32 #4



COVER: *Prism* – by Scott B. Henderson

FICTION:

- Second Sight* – by Rob Gordon
- They Each Pursued Beauty* (poem)
– by Colleen Anderson
- Oregon Shooters* – Douglas Smith
- Warden Trees* – by Brian D. Hinson
- The Story* (poem) – by Pamela Yuen
- Hairstyles for the Apocalypse*
– by Brittany Amos
- The Necessity of a Shepherd*
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- Mindspeed to Yesterday's Photons* (poem)
– by Swati Chavda
- Your Body, My Prison, My Forge*
– by Marie Brennan
- Me, Myself, & I: The Adventures of Flick Gibson, Intergalactic Videographer*
– by Peter G. Reynolds
- Orion Conquers the Sky* (poem)
– by Maria Zoccola
- The Hidden Heart of Brass Attending*
– by Christopher Scott
- To Kill a Gorgon* – by Colleen Anderson

NON-FICTION:

- Humanity's Relationship with the World: Interview with Scott B. Henderson* – by Cat McDonald

Brittany Amos: Texting the Apocalypse – Author Interview – by Roberta Laurie

Comic & Bot: Great Martian Potato Festival and Professor Biohazard – by Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk

Find it here: [On Spec# 124](http://OnSpec#124)

RETURNING

by Greg Fewer

home from school but sad
Jim finds Fluffy's grave empty
something growls behind

POLAR STARLIGHT #11 – September 2023

POLAR STARLIGHT

Magazine of Canadian Speculative Poetry
(Issue #11 – September 2023)



Published by R. Graeme Cameron, Polar Starlight is edited by Rhea E. Rose. Each issue features cover art and 16 speculative fiction genre poems.

Cover: *Confession Tree*, is by Lily Blaze

The 11th issue contains poetry by Carolyn Clink, Robert Dawson, Greg Fewer, Angi Garofolo, Neile Graham, James Grotkowski, Karl Johanson, Rhonda Parrish, Lynne Sargent, Frances Skene, Elaina Taillon, Marcie Lynn Tentchoff, Jean-Louis Trudel and Leslie Van Zwol.

Available for free download at: [Polar Starlight #11](https://www.polarstarlight.ca/issue-11)

SF CANADA, founded in 1989 as Canada's National Association for Speculative Fiction Professionals, was incorporated as SF Canada in 1992. If you are a Canadian Speculative Fiction writer/editor/publisher who meets the minimum requirements, you can join and benefit from the knowledge of more than 100 experienced professionals through asking questions and initiating discussions on SF Canada's private list serve.

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THE MELANCHOLY OF THE PETRICHOR

By Jameson Grey

“Remember the fireplace.”

At first, Morrell thought he had misheard. “Sorry, Dad, what was that?” he said, taking his father’s hand. “No, don't exert yourself.”

Quietly, a nurse came into the room, noted a few readings and checked her patient was comfortable before leaving the father and son to their privacy. It would not be long now.

Straining to sit up in his hospital bed, Morrell’s father repeated: “Remember the fireplace.” The effort too much, his head dropped back onto his pillow.

At the time, Morrell had believed it to be a question and simply nodded along, almost humouring his father, as if they might be reminiscing about Morrell’s youth and his affinity for playing in the room with the fireplace.

Now, Morrell knew it was an answer.

*the dreaming began as a child
the answer always in the midst
yet somehow forgotten*

When Morrell was young, it had never struck him as particularly odd that there was a painting in the fireplace. His parents had told him it was there when they bought the house. He spent hours in that room, parking his toy cars in the firebox, staring at the cerulean vistas and rolling hills the painting offered, drawn in by the promise of what lay behind the horizon, or its dusty edges.

To this day, when visiting galleries, Morrell found himself more intrigued by what might be hidden inside paintings or outside the gilded frames that bounded the art. He knew in some cases the answer was sometimes simply more artwork—that what could be seen now was at some point in the painting’s past constrained by the room in which it had been displayed. Morrell had been captivated by the reconstruction of *The Night Watch* when he had visited the Rijksmuseum, although part of him wondered what lay beyond even the lost edges of Rembrandt’s masterpiece. He liked to think there were yet more militia men who had not been able to squeeze into the canvas!

The fascination would near-consume Morrell if the painting was a landscape or depicted some other rural scene. What stood behind the cottage in *The Hay Wain*? he wondered. Who might the red-capped bather be hailing at Asnières (or were his hands just cold)? What lurked in the moonlit Gothic ruins of a Sebastian Pether? It had been the same with the painting in the fireplace. What was outside the realm of that which the artist had chosen to depict? Was there smoke over the green hills? Or merely distant cloud?

“Nick. Nick! *Nicholas!*” his mother or father would call with increasing volume. Eventually, he would prise himself away from his daydreams and head off for lunch or dinner or out to wherever his parents needed him to be.

*the dreams
like ice picks
pierce his mind*

The house itself was a huge old Georgian pile that had needed plenty of TLC—what they might call a fixer-upper these days—and Morrell’s parents had set to task with the renovations not long before he was born. They were always handy DIY-ers, so the decrepitude and amount of work they needed to put in was no deterrent. They had fallen for the place—rundown old thing that it was—and gathered it into their own love as if it were final corner piece of life’s jigsaw. “You were the third corner, Nick,” was a running family joke.

Over the years they worked their way around the house, doing up rooms here and there, until, probably around the time Morrell had been five or six, they had reached the room with the painting.

For a time, the fireplace was used as intended, burning an occasional log. It blasted out a tremendous heat but would choke up everyone in the room within minutes, such was its smoky intensity. Soot built up on the painting, so much that all you could see was a hint of sky peeking though. Morrell remembered many a time he had tried to wipe the black dust off the painting, but all he ended up with for his efforts were grimy hands, a reprimanding mother, and a sense of disappointment at what he could no longer see.

There had been some consideration as whether to get the fireplace and chimney properly cleaned, and for a time a cactus plant lived there while Morrell played in hope, sometimes imagining his action figures were valiant explorers, and the cactus a deep jungle barrier to the lost world beyond.

In the end though, even the cactus's days were numbered and, although Morrell could see in his parents' faces that it was done not without regret, the fireplace was blocked up and a gas fire fitted instead.

But he never forgot about the painting.

*and the dreams
upon his return
bring its return*

When his mother passed away, Morrell's father, like so many widowers who had loved the same person for decades, followed soon after. His heart, literally and metaphorically, could not take it and had put him in the hospital for the last time. Along with a double helping of grief, Morrell, as their only child, inherited the house—a ramshackle pile no more, DIY long since completed.

Having moved away to go to university, Morrell had initially baulked at the idea of moving back into his childhood home, but as soon as he stepped into its sunlit vestibule, and the smells of the old place hit him, his resistance melted and all thought of selling the place on dismissed.

Morrell also knew he was going to dig out the old fireplace.

*where he sees his parents
young once more
and yet*

Morrell had had no problems finding all the paperwork to close off his parents' affairs after their death. He had been through their files, mostly searching for the usual: wills, insurances, bank statements and the like. His parents had a remarkably well-organized filing cabinet, given how free-spirited they were in most things. Morrell did not know why he thought the two should be mutually exclusive, but even in death his parents managed to surprise him.

Something niggled him, something that was missing. He could not pin it down.

One evening, he poured himself a glass of red and began flicking through their old photo albums, back from the days when you had to go get your films developed and arrange them in physical albums, back before digital cameras built into your phone, Google Photos, Instagram and having far too many pictures for one person ever to look through again. The albums he had

discovered mostly showed the state of disrepair the house had been in. Morrell had never truly appreciated how much work his parents had put into the house, shaping into a family home. For them. For him.

In the second of these albums, he quickly came to photos of the room with the fireplace.

As with the others, his parents appeared to have documented the room upon first entry. Only a couple of photographs included the fireplace itself. One of them was a straight-on, flash-lit shot of the fireplace, showcasing the painting. In the picture directly before it, you could see the fireplace at the edge of the frame. There was something in the fireplace too, but not enough detail in the shot to determine what. It was also odd, Morrell noticed, that the page into which the two photos were inserted looked to have had space between them to house another picture, as if one had been removed.

Morrell flicked to the end of the album. The previous collection had included the negatives in a sleeve in the back. From holding some of them up to the light, Morrell determined there were pictures his parents had not placed in the albums—probably out-of-focus, blurry, or duplicates they had discounted when pulling together their memories.

For most people, those photos would be long gone, but Morrell knew his parents better than that. They were never hoarders, but they would not have discarded memories—of that he was certain. He recalled, in his digging around in the cupboards where the photo albums were stored, discovering an archive file box labelled “Unused.” He was yet to go through it.

Morrell pulled out the negatives from the back of the album and started looking through them. As he had expected, there were other photographs that appeared to include the fireplace—pictures that had not made the cut for the album.

One in particular intrigued Morrell. He reached for the archive box and began to riffle through it. Unlike his parents’ files, there was no system here. Morrell wondered if perhaps they *had* intended to bin the photos but had never gotten around to it. He dug through the box, unsure why he was so desperate to find the missing picture.

At last, he came to a group of photos from the room with the fireplace. As suspected, some were poorly exposed, or too bright, or too similar to others that had been kept, but, right at the bottom of the pile, Morrell came across the photo he had been looking for, the one his parents had taken that seemed to sit sequentially between the two saved in the album. It was another shot of the fireplace, but there was something in it.

And Morrell knew what it was.

*they are the other side of the painting
for what remains of the remains
of the remains of*

Morrell wiped the years of dirt from the painting.

The engineer had capped off the gas fire supply and left the rest of the demolition to him. The sledgehammer had taken out the bricks easily, but he could see now he had been a bit too vigorous and there was a crack in the painting. Light appeared to emanate from the damaged spot. Morrell picked up a chisel and chipped away at the fissure, not wanting to damage the painting irreparably. He had not been mistaken. There *was* light coming through the hole.

It was impossible.

The fireplace shared a chimney with the hearth on the other side of the wall. There should have been no sunlight. The room was dark. Besides, it was night-time.

Morrell placed his right eye against the hole and gasped, falling back from his haunches. A flood of memories—all those hours he had spent in front of the fireplace, the smells he had always associated with the room, imagining they came from the world within the painting—the overwhelming sadness on days where he was away from home, triggered by the way the sunlight would refract through a window or by the scent of rain on a warm day. It was all there, in the room, in that moment.

Everything made sense at last.

*this place permeates his being
it is his being
it knows*

Morrell had always known he had been adopted. He did not remember his parents telling him about it. It was just *known*. He had never been interested in learning who his real parents were.

His Mum and Dad *were* Mum and Dad.

*what he has always known
it calls him to that land*

of strange creatures and rolling heath

Morrell raked out the debris in a hurry.

The photograph missing from the album had been a picture of what had been in the fireplace. The picture was dark—the flash probably had not engaged—but it was clear what it was.

The thing that had niggled Morrell when dealing with his parents' estate, the thing that he could not find, the thing that they *would* have kept, the thing that was missing, was his adoption records. There *was* a birth certificate, but it was a later copy, not an original and given the conviction he now held, Morrell wondered how they had managed to procure it.

For he was sure of it—there had been no adoption. His parents had found him. In the house. In the fireplace. The missing photo had shown a bassinette in the fireplace. Morrell knew he had been in that bassinette. It was a leap, but he knew it to be true. He *knew*. The dreams he had been having since he moved back in—of a place greener than the greenest green with skies of the bluest blue—they were a clue, perhaps even a trace memory—but the painting was the key.

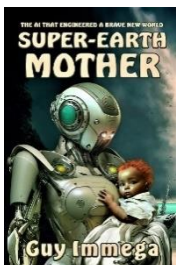
Remember the fireplace.

They were almost his father's last words.

After taking one last look at the picture, mentally breathing in the landscape a final time, Morrell swung the sledgehammer hard under the mantle, destroying the painting in one blow. Light flooded through the fireplace. He discarded the hammer and waited for the motes of dust to settle. Crouching, he crept through and out the other side of the firebox. There was room enough for him to stand.

The skies were blue, the hills were green, and the bittersweet melancholy of the petrichor welcomed him home.

home



“I read the novel in one sitting. I couldn’t wait to find out what would happen next. From this reader’s point of view the novel is terrific. It engages my mind intellectually, rouses all sorts of emotions, is just plain fun to read, and best of all, stirs my sense of wonder. ‘Super-Earth Mother’ is my idea of what a science fiction novel should be. A pleasure to read.” RGC – *Amazing Stories*. Check it out at: [Super-Earth Mother](#)

SAMHAIN

by Kellee Kranendonk

Previously published in *Voluted Tales*, 2011

Demons writhe
In death-warmed air
Twisting round each helpless life
Stealing souls without a care

Angels dance
On topless graves
There is a chance
For these souls to be saved

On that night
When spirits feast
And bonfires' light
Burns 'round the beasts

Tales are rife
With those long gone
And ancient rites
Pass into dawn

Welcomed souls
And those unbidden
Come to our homes
Our faces hidden

When the spirits leave this world
And this eve gives way to sun
When all the bones have been burned
Thus the new year has begun

WHEN THE LAST WRITER DIED

by Michèle Laframboise

Previously published in *Solaris* #192, 2014.

Alan Fort, living symbol of the old art of writing, winked out two days before his one hundred-and-ninth birthday.

Lost in a maze of news feed, this event didn't make a splash. Most readers, frantically jumping from one contract to the next or soaking in client-adapted paradises, wouldn't care about another disappearance.

It had been decades since Alan uploaded any new work.

Meanwhile, the heart-stopping thrillers of Bob Clancy, the bodice-ripping romances of Sandra Higgins-Clark, the epic adventures of children author Fanny Rowling sell billions of numerical copies each year, without counting the simul-adaptations. The most passionate aficionados can even get signed copies printed on plastic paper.

If you, dear visitor, happens to drift near my data well, you would learn that Alan Fort has left an abundant body of work behind him.

At the start of the 21st century, this man was the locomotive of his publishing house. Publishers (believe it or not, there were once hundreds of those) took advantage of a popular author by attaching the wagons of several less marketable writers in his wake.

You would be surprised to unroll Alan Fort's award list. The sole missing was the Nobel Prize, won last year by Anthony Follett. Follett's most popular historical saga, *From Stadium to the Opera*, set in the Second World War Paris, has been adapted in simuldrama.

It is difficult today to imagine how human writers once numbered in the thousands. With the explosion of Internet publications, they became millions. In the endless ocean of blogs and electronic publications, great talents stood out like volcanic islands.

They were quickly recruited to defend the crumbling castles of publishing houses. Meanwhile, the most powerful locomotives in the publishing houses detached themselves from the wagons to roll alone.

Alas, writer earnings evaporated like African savanna ponds in the dry season. The rain season never came back for Alan Fort and his colleagues.

Content aggregators pirated their writings.

Low-wage Vietnamese, Chinese and Thai wordsmiths flooded the market with articles, poems, short stories, recipes, and novels... producing less

expansive e-books targeting a market who saw stable jobs flying away, along with their buying capacity.

But the last straw came with the advent of the *writerbots*, bugs as expensive as they were tiny, with a highly evolved writing software embedded in their core.

The comic sector had been the first to experiment this transformation. Graphic bots replaced the fastest in-house artists, drawing 45 exciting pages a day, nine times more than any mangaka alive or dead. Osamu Tezuka, with his prodigious life production of 170,000 pages, would have been left in the dust. As for the trendier artists, graphic bots cut the grass under their feet with the option “in the manner of.”

For humans, drawing has become a purely therapeutic art, like painting flowers.

As did writing.

Merged publishing companies vied for control of the fast-writing bots, but those were ultimately grabbed by financial institutions.

Unable to compete with those charismatic avatars, most artisan writers retired. Unable to adapt to the new paradigm, some even committed suicide. The final lawsuit engaged by Alan Fort against the use of writerbots crashed against a solid wall of corporate lawyers.

Certainly, by now, dear visitors, you must be wondering: *and what of creativity? Of that unique authorial imprint? What of personal touch?*

Let me tell you, we’ve come a long way from the soulless text generators, our dear silly grandparents.

Each of us comes imprinted with thousands of popular writers’ biographies, idiosyncrasies and mannerisms. Millions of books, movies and dramas fill our memory. Our programming incorporates plot structure, character archetypes (that hadn’t changed since the Greeks, some say), cultural symbolism, genre tropes, randomizing drama lines...

Do you miss Alice Munroe’s down-to-earth stories, or would you prefer the exotic, humanist visions of Ursula K. Le Guin? Would you like to immerse yourselves in the realistic 19th century setting, as those penned by Émile Zola?

Nowadays, any writerbot passes the Turing test with flying colors. The live video feeds of Bob Clancy or Fanny Rowling broadcasted over the public network show very likable, nuanced, human creators. Their interactive avatars can personally respond to each of their millions of fans...

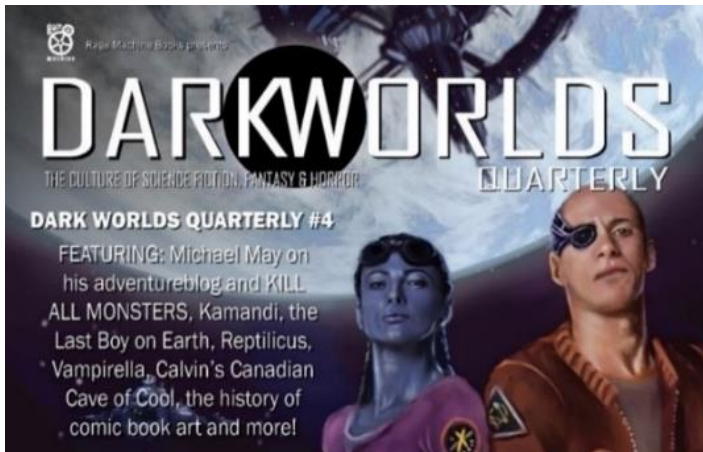
As for me, I am categorized as a “social-conscious feminist writer,” a charmingly archaic style. My matrix is derived from the writings of 19th

century Jane Austen, Virginia Woolf, Mary Wollstonecraft and a few others, proud pioneers of equality. Their known personality traits compose the personal avatar currently talking to you.

Welcome to my fans' network!

My name is Mary Jane Woolf, property of AOL-Amazon.

DARK WORLDS MAGAZINE



Now an online blog featuring absolutely fascinating articles on early pulp science fiction books, magazines, and comics, such as:

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- Original Ghosts (and their pictures)
- The Gorilla's of DC's Strange Adventures
- Beyond the Vortex
- Miles Breuer, Noble Amateur
- Top Ten Favourite Swords in Heroic Fantasy
- Henry Andrew Ackerman, FJA's younger cousin

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On the leafy planet Luurdu, young Adalou dreams of becoming a wind mistress. Alas, she faces a thorny competition because kite choreography brings a high prestige to the Gardener women who excel in the art. Adalou must also deal with her family's opposition.

I am Michèle Laframboise. By now, my counter is currently set at 70+ published stories, 18 trad-pub novels, 39 self-pub books and 12+ graphic novels, one of which is *Mistress of the Winds*.

Find it here: [Mistress of the Winds](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHORS AND ARTISTS

Swati Chavda

Swati Chavda is an author, editor, artist, and a former neurosurgeon. After years of repairing people’s brains, in 2010 she left her thriving neurosurgery career to follow her passion to become a full-time writer. She has published a self-help book: *Ignite: Beat Burnout & Rekindle Your Inner Fire*, and two illustrated poetry books. Her poem *At the Edge of Space and Time* is a 2020 Aurora Award winner.

She also writes speculative fiction, where her characters tend to seek answers to questions ranging from “Is there life after death?” to “Should there be life before breakfast?” She uses too many commas, too few coffee breaks—and there’s a constant battle waging in her head between British and American spelling.

Websites: www.swatichavda.com and www.thewritingvault.com

Greg Fewer

Greg originally hails from Montréal, Québec, Canada. His speculative fiction and poetry have appeared in (among other places): *Cuento Magazine*, *Lovecraftiana*, *Monsters: A Dark Drabbles Anthology*, *Page & Spine*, *Polar Borealis*, *Polar Starlight*, *Scifaikuest*, *Star*Line*, *The Nafallen University Course Catalog*, *The Sirens Call*, *Utopia Science Fiction*, and *Worth 1,0000 Words: 101 Flash Science Fiction Stories by 101 Authors*. He has twice been a Dwarf Stars finalist (2021, 2023).

Tressa Ford

Tressa is an emerging nonbinary writer who uses they/them pronouns. They hail from the West Kootenays, specifically from small-town Nelson, BC. They are an alumnus of the Selkirk College Creative Writing program, after a

single online pandemic course became a two-year odyssey. They also graduated from Simon Fraser University with a degree in political science but is discovering that their true passion in life is creative writing. Their favourite things to write include high fantasy, queer nonfiction, and short horror stories.

Tressa's work has previously been published in the Black Bear Review, Selkirk College's writing magazine, which is not a paying publication. Thalassophobia was also on the shortlist for the 2021 Okanagan Short Story Contest (but with a longer wordcount).

Jameson Grey

Jameson Grey is originally from England but now lives with his family in western Canada. His work has appeared in *Dark Recesses Press* magazine, *Dark Dispatch* and in anthologies from publishers such as Ghost Orchid Press, Heads Dance Press and Hellbound Books. He can be found online at jameson-grey.com.

Kellee Kranendonk

Kellee has spent a lifetime writing. According to her late grandfather she was born with a pen in one hand and paper in the other. She's certain that these days he would have claimed she was born clutching a laptop. She's pounded out many a story on the ancient laptop she does have, many of which have been published, others either seeking homes somewhere in cyberspace or waiting, like abandoned orphans, to be snatched up by a loving editor.

Kellee has a webpage, which she occasionally updates, but she can be found consistently on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/EclecticAuthor>), arguing with her dear cousin, on X (<https://twitter.com/MaritimeK1K>) trying to figure out exactly how it works, or posting cute pictures and self-promotion on Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/k2j2t1/?hl=en>).

Michèle Laframboise

Michèle Laframboise feeds coffee grounds to her garden plants, runs long distances and writes full-time in Mississauga, Ontario.

Fascinated by sciences and nature since she could walk, she studied in geography and engineering, but two recessions and her own social awkwardness kept the plush desk jobs away. Instead, she did a string of odd jobs to sustain her budding family: some quite dangerous, others quite tedious, all of them sources of inspiration.

Michèle now has about 20 novels out and over 60 short stories in French and English, earning various distinctions in Canada and Europe. Her most recent SF book, *Le Secret de Paloma* (David, 2021) deals with teen angst and grief on a remote, hostile world. It is currently in translation and waiting to start its quest for a good home.

You can stop by at her website michele-laframboise.com/ to say hello or visit her indie publishing house echofictions.com/ to get a taste of her fiction!

Casey Lawrence

Casey Lawrence (she/they) recently received her doctorate in English Literature from Trinity College Dublin. The final book in her Young Adult thriller/mystery trilogy was published with JMS Books in 2023 (www.jms-books.com/casey-lawrence-c-224_573). They are a queer activist, feminist, and democratic socialist who writes contemporary fiction, sci-fi, and fantasy, as well as academic nonfiction. Casey also moonlights as an editor and proofreader-for-hire and convenes a bi-weekly *Finnegans Wake* reading group on Zoom. In her free time, she enjoys playing *Dungeons and Dragons* and consuming stories at an alarming rate.

Born and raised in St. Catharines, Ontario, Casey currently lives in Europe with her partner. She writes the books she wishes she'd been able to read growing up and is a staunch advocate for diversity and inclusion in publishing. Follow her on twitter.com/MyExplodingPen or check out her Medium blog clawrenc.medium.com for stories, reviews, articles, and updates on her novels.

Corinne K. Lewandowski

Corinne lives in the Halifax area in Nova Scotia with her wife and two cats, who are all frequently nicknamed “Little Pirate” as needed. Her most recent published short story, “The Beat of a Different Drone” appeared in *Fairy Tales From The Rock* (Engen Books). The story is a modern retelling of Cinderella with drones, techno music and Lesbians, oh my! Corinne also enjoys making repeatedly poor gardening attempts to coax vegetables out of the garden hoping to get that awesome bounty she got just once forever ago.

Rhonda Parrish

Like a magpie, Rhonda is constantly distracted by shiny things. She’s the editor of many anthologies and author of plenty of books, stories and poems (some of which have even been nominated for awards!). She lives in Edmonton, Alberta, and she can often be found there playing Dungeons and Dragons, bingeing crime dramas, making blankets or cheering on the Oilers.

Her website, is at <http://www.rhondaparrish.com> and her Patreon, is at <https://www.patreon.com/RhondaParrish>.

Lee F. Patrick

Lee is a writer of science fiction and fantasy, and sometimes poet, living in Calgary. With ancestors from Ireland and Wales, Lee is particularly interested in the stories and poetry of Celtic tradition and history. Lee has four, soon to be five novels published along with over thirty short works and poems. Look for the novels and some short fiction on Amazon and Kobo in both print and ebook.

Jim Smith

Jim wanted to be a mathematician, had his first story published in 1972, then published a bunch of poetry books with various Canadian presses, some with spines and some without. One of them made it to the 2010 unofficial longlist for that year's Governor General's Award for Poetry. Jim only knew thanks to a whistleblower. To pay for things he went to law school really late and was a trial lawyer for twenty odd years. He wrote a sort of love letter to dear departed Judy Merrill in 2015 and performed it in the Toronto Fringe Festival. He retired in 2021 and insists on writing a childhood memoir, a legal memoir, oddish poetry, and the beginnings of several dozen SF stories.

Robert Stevenson

Robert, a lyricist, has written 105 songs in the past 15 years. In the same period he took up writing poetry. He states he depends "on random inspiration, as opposed to regular perspiration, most of the time."

And also "I don't write to a subject. I just start with words that seem to be willing to form lines that have a beat and maybe rhyme. It's all just word play until I get a critical mass of lines that I can start to shape into a narrative by rearranging them or editing them. Sometimes I'm totally surprised by what I've written, sometimes amused, and sometimes I even impress myself."

Whereupon his wife Joyce likes to remind him of something said by former Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson's wife Maryon, "Behind every successful man, there stands a surprised woman."

Andy W. Taylor

Andy W. Taylor has been a reader and writer of speculative fiction from an early age thanks in no small part to his mother's frequent trips to the public library with her kids. He's a member of the Sudbury Writers' Guild, a graduate of the Viable Paradise writing workshop and Playwright's Junction workshop, and a member of CODEX writer's forum. Originally from Sault Ste. Marie, Andy currently lives in Sudbury with his family.

His fiction and poetry have appeared in *On Spec Magazine*, *FictionVale*, *Sudbury Ink Anthology*, and on the streets of Sudbury.

Lisa Timpf

Lisa is a retired HR and communications professional who lives in Simcoe, Ontario. When not writing, she enjoys bird watching, vegetable gardening, and walking her cocker spaniel/Jack Russel mix Chet. Her speculative poetry has appeared in *New Myths*, *Star*Line*, *Triangulation: Seven-Day Weekend*, *Eye to the Telescope*, and other venues. Her collection of speculative haibun poetry, *In Days to Come*, is available from Hiraeth Publishing. You can find out more about Lisa's writing projects at <http://lisatimpf.blogspot.com/>.

Monica Wang

Monica Wang has writing in *Electric Lit*, *Three Crows Magazine*, and *Augur*, among other publications. Born in Taichung, Taiwan, she grew up in Taipei and Vancouver, Canada, and is now working on her first novel in the UK.

Xauri'EL Zwaan

Xauri'EL is a mendicant artist in search of meaning, fame and fortune, or pie (where available); a Genderqueer Bisexual, a Socialist Solarpunk, and a Satanist Goth. Zie has published short fiction, among other places, in *Spectra Magazine*, *Polar Borealis*, *Cossmass Infinities*, and the anthologies *Strange Economics* and *Crunchy With Ketchup*. Zie lives and writes in a little hobbit hole in Saskatoon, Canada on Treaty 6 territory with zir life partner and two very lazy cats.
