

POLAR BOREALIS

Magazine of Canadian Speculative Fiction
(Issue #6 – April/May 2018)



POLAR BOREALIS MAGAZINE

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EDITORIAL

Immediately after I've put this issue to bed I'll be spending a week reading through the twenty-six stories I've received to date for my current submissions window which closed March 31st. Still a week to go, so more may come in. Sometime during the first week of April I will begin notifying the submitting authors my decision concerning their contributions.

I have already given every story a cursory read-through and jotted down brief comments like "Pulp Sci-Fi: probably," "Academic Sci-Fi: maybe," "Old shaggy dog pulp: maybe," "Hard Sci-Fi: maybe," "Not genre till towards end but ultimately subversive: hmmm," "I don't get it, but worth publishing," "Interesting concept: definitely yes," "Pointless, but amusing: maybe," "A dark fantasy about Elvis: strong maybe," and "Cool idea: sure."

These are some of the positive comments. Negative comments I won't repeat here, but will expand on at length in rejection letters. Suffice to say I'm pretty confident I have enough good stories to fill the Summer issue and maybe a bit of spill-over into the Fall issue. By "good" stories I mean stories I like. The main thing I look for is an interesting theme or underlying concept. Then clear writing moving the story along without knocking the reader off the page. I particularly like telling bits of detail that bring the reality of the story to life in a few well-chosen words. Vivid characters, or offbeat characters, appeal to me. Stories that aren't quite stories are acceptable as vignettes or prose poems if I like what is being described. Even hoary clichés and antediluvian shaggy dog stories are welcome, if there's something new to them, an unexpected twist of some kind. I have eclectic tastes. Pretty sure my regular readers have come to understand this by now.

On the other hand, I tend to avoid angst like my creditors. Mainstream literature is full of addled self-doubting insecure characters upset over their lack of love-life or negative peer acceptance or ultimate doom and such-like. These are ordinary problems of everyday life. Not what I read SF&F for. I want to be entertained, amused, bemused and inspired. I want my sense of wonder stirred. Considering how the real world seems to be outstripping our nightmares of late I don't think that's too much to ask. Creative escapism suits me just fine. I publish what I like.

And yet, sometimes I publish stuff I wouldn't ordinarily seek out, but can't resist because the story is too good not to publish. In other words, I publish for a wider readership than myself. I figure that's what an editor does.

Cheers! *The Graeme*

STITCH WITCH

by Lynne Sargent

(Previously unpublished)

Each time I start again
I find the seam,
spread the fabric wide

match the pattern
with my eyes and my scissors,
carry on.

The needle is quiet
sometimes it sounds like a patter,
sometimes, a smear.

Once it was a carving
the whole story the length of a blade—
you have seen the greats who weave from stone,
do not tell me you never tried to touch that silk.

Once I climbed it,
all the way up to darn the hole I had forgotten
though I should not have trusted my weight
to a ripped and rent thing.

But I am an expert,
with needles sunk in my skin
and patterns writ on my eyelids;

watch me unravel,
and make anew.

TWELVE YEARS A DOG

by Edwin Tam

(Previously unpublished)

“Hey, Buddy, wanna walk?”

Buddy, my twelve-year-old terrier, looked at me the way he always does.

That expression, with the gentle eyes and smiling muzzle, that always brightened my day. Because I knew. It was love, and loyalty. The tail wag just confirmed it. No wonder dogs are man’s best friend. He’d started as the kids’ dog, but when you’re the one doing all the walking and feeding, pretty soon you become the one they follow. He was *my* Buddy.

My Buddy loved his walks. Always stopping, always sniffing at every tree, every post. They say a dog has such a keen sense of smell that it knows everything that has passed by the last few days by their scent. If we get a snapshot of the present with our eyes, dogs get a whole photo album of the week with their noses. The way he lingered, he was probably catching up with little doggie emoticons from the other dogs marking their territory. I just hoped he wasn’t catching anything else from poking his snout everywhere.

I slipped the leash on.

As we left, my wife yelled out her usual farewell: “Watch out for them coyotes!”

Coyotes, and their scat, had been spotted more frequently nearby in the last six months. Somebody even saw them dumpster diving at the local hospital. They’d dragged off our neighbours’ cat. They were getting smarter too. There were stories of them sending one coyote out to lure puppies away by pretending to play, then having the pack ambush them. Their den was probably in the botanical garden about ten blocks down. It was supposed to be fenced in, but they were getting out.

That night, our walk took us near there, the decision being made by where Buddy seemed to want to pull me. I wasn’t worried: coyotes were scared of humans.

It’s always more beautiful, more peaceful on night walks. We strolled by the fence around the grounds. The winds that day must have shifted some of the branches, because I spotted something I hadn’t noticed before. There was a broken section in the chain-link fence. Buddy saw it too, and tugged to investigate.

I felt the heft of the aluminum flashlight in my hands; pictured myself holding off a wild animal if I had to. We went through the opening, into a tunnel of foliage.

Ten steps later we came out right into a pack of coyotes.

You get a bunch of dogs in a room, they'll be all over the place, running and playing. These were different. They simply stood at attention. Like a gang, or soldiers. And stared at us with too much intelligence behind their eyes. Not like the ones I'd seen before. When they moved towards us, they moved as one.

Poor Buddy started jumping at them, tail wagging, thinking he could sniff at them the way he did the neighbourhood dogs.

"Buddy, come here," I said, yanking on the leash, trying to keep the fear out of my voice.

I got back, unhurt, but nobody seemed to care. All they kept asking was where Buddy was. I tried to explain, but they wouldn't listen. They tried to call the police.

They don't talk to me much these days. I've had a lot of time to think about those dumpster diving coyotes. It's not supposed to happen that organic and research waste gets mixed in with the regular hospital trash, but it does. It's not supposed to happen that viruses and retroviruses jump species, but they do. And it's not supposed to happen that the interspecies effects of infection can sometimes be positive, but it can. And dogs shouldn't pick up infections from sniffing a coyote's scat.

They want me to shut up about my crazy theories. But I can't. I can't forget that moment when I called Buddy back.

He'd stopped, turned around, and looked at me. The way he always did, the same gentle expression.

A guttural sound had come out of his throat, a strange moan I'd never heard before.

"FrReee. MeEEe."

NO ONE BELIEVED SHE WAS THAT OLD

by J.J. Steinfeld

(Previously published in *Trysts of Fate* (US))

She wrote 500 erotic poems
in 500 years
of toil and hiding
relentless in imagining
the cruel magic
of the sensual
she admitted there were
unscrupulous exchanges
with malformed versions
of the demonic
how else could she describe
the perfection of madness
no one believed
she was that old
not 500 years
or appreciated what she wrote
except one lonely-shaped man
who craved affection
as much as immortality
and was willing to write
anything for anyone
even a malformed
collector of souls
standing nearby
where one enters sleep.

THANK YOU PATREON SUPPORTERS OF POLAR BOREALIS!

The editor sincerely thanks Roxanne Barbour, Paul Alex Gray, Maria Haskins, Jenni Merrifield, Dr. Robert Runté, Katherine Wagner, Jean Weber, and Casey June Wolf for their ongoing active support via Patreon! Much appreciated! You help keep the presses rolling!

Anyone interested in joining them can do so at [Patreon](#)

THE GLOW AROUND MY HOUSE

by Karl Johanson

(Previously unpublished)

There's a vivid blue glowing spherical shield around my house and yard. Inside the house is the device that keeps me alive. Beyond the shield is black. Severe black. Most of the black is nothing, but some of the black is a singularity. A singularity massing billions of times that of the galaxy I was born in countless eons ago. Everything in the known universe all in one point, except for me, my house, and the damned device. And all I ever think about are the things I never said to her.

MARTIAN MIGRAINE PRESS ANNOUNCES TWO SUBMISSION WINDOWS

INNSMOUTHBREATHERS: Cautionary Fables of Mythos Fandom! We are looking for humorous stories of a certain kind of Cthulhu Mythos fan: the rabid Lovecraft *worshipper*, the defender of the outmoded and outclassed, the pulp reader for whom Weird Fiction peaked somewhere in the middle of the last century. We're looking for tales that pit Innsmouthbreathers against all manner of real and imagined horrors: Shoggoths with Social Justice agendas, politically active Deep Ones, and enlightened Mi-Go. Make them lovable, make them loathsome, make us feel their triumphs and defeats!

INNSMOUTHBREATHERS will be a *mostly* funny book. We're going for light-hearted ribbing here, a send-up, a roast. Stories that are outright mean and nasty won't play well within these pages. We're asking for yuks, but please don't feel you need to dial back the weird horror. Mix it up, thrill us, chill us, make us laugh at ourselves.

Submission period closes 31 July 2018. The anthology will be released in early October 2018. Details at our [SUBMISSIONS PAGE](#).

MONSTROUS OUTLINES will be an anthology of horror and weird fiction with a focus on the theme of *camouflage*: people, entities, monsters, gods, even *concepts*, that masquerade as things other than themselves. Predators in plain sight, deities on their down time, sublime extra-dimensional terrors slumming in 4D. We want to see stories of exceptionally well done camouflage, all the more baffling and frightening for its seamless nature. We're also interested in duplicates, doppelgangers, and shapeshifters. The seed story for this anthology will be Algernon Blackwood's classic tale, *The Willows*, a story of two worlds touching, of men meeting the unnamable through the medium of the nearest natural analogue, the titular willow trees.

Submission period closes 31 November 2018. The anthology will be released in trade paperback and electronic book formats in early March 2019.

SUBMISSIONS GUIDELINES may be found [here](#)

See <http://martianmigraine.com/>

WHAT WOULD THOMSON

by Lisa Timpf

(Previously unpublished)

The hovercraft glides over the
red oceans of our
new home as we map the subtle
contours of land
the water's edges

almost accustomed now
to the venomous flying snakes
hovering and hissing overhead and the
dinner-plate-sized dock spiders
that like to surprise an unwary hand
dipped over our vessel's silver side

I find myself wondering
what would Thomson make of this
untamed wilderness, these
gnarled purple trees, these
islands of truncated rock and
emerald skies

How would Moodie enjoy
roughing it in this
bush?

ALCHEMY AND ARTIFACTS (TESSERACTS TWENTY-TWO) is OPEN for submissions from January 15, 2018 - May 15, 2018.

It is an anthology of short fiction which examines the magic behind the history, the myths arising from the artifacts, the mysteries missed (or dismissed), but which lie at the root of world events. The editors want tales that explore laws magical as well as physical, the manipulation of reality in the past, resulting in the present. History, sorcery, alchemy, mystery. All with the sense of 'what if?'

For guidelines see: < [Tesseract 22](#) >

THE TURNING OF THE SEASON

by Helen Power

(Previously unpublished)

Snow descended upon the village like winter's army, bringing with it a cutting chill and the ferocious war cries of a bitter wind. Alanna helped her father to shutter and lock the windows as her mother tended to the fire. It was a winter night like any other, but for one terrible thing: Grandmother was missing.

Alanna reluctantly settled into her usual place at the scarred wooden table. Mother filled the bowls with a thick sludge she called mutton soup, but Alanna barely noticed, despite the growling in her stomach. Her eyes lingered on Grandmother's spot. It wasn't like her to be late. She lived in a cottage in the woods, just outside their village. Many of the villagers believed her mad for intentionally secluding herself from the rest of town, from safety. Alanna preferred to think her eccentric. Grandmother liked her privacy, but she loved her family. And she always came here to son's house for dinner. *Always.*

But the season had turned early this year, and with the snow came the winterwolves.

At that thought, a gut-wrenching howl punctured the silence. It sounded mere feet away from the front door.

"It's simply the wind," Mother said as she sat at the table.

It hadn't sounded like the wind.

Father had already begun to wolf down his meal. Without consideration, Alanna reached out and shoved him. "How can you eat? Grandmother is out there!"

A flash of rage crossed his face. "Bedevilled child! Don't be so insolent!"

Alanna pulled back, stunned. Born with a birth mark on her left cheekbone, the villagers had been cruel, mocking her and calling her "bedevilled." She could never marry because of this deformity. But her own *father* had never referred to her in this way before.

Oblivious to the pain he elicited, Father continued, "Your Grandmother knows better than to go out when there is freshly fallen snow."

"But—"

"I'll hear no more of it," Father said firmly. "Your Grandmother is at home. Safe."

Alanna glanced at her mother, but the older woman was carefully avoiding her eye.

Scowling, Alanna ate quickly, the mutton tasting like sand as it clawed its way down her throat. She helped clear the table and excused herself, muttering that she needed to get ahead in her reading. She locked her bedroom door behind her. She had no intention to read.

The loose floorboard near the window protested as she paced back and forth, mulling over her thoughts. Grandmother was the only person who did not treat her differently because of her birthmark. She showed her kindness in a world of cruelty. Alanna stopped midstride, the decision already made. Without further deliberation, she grabbed her cloak from its hook, clasping it tightly around her neck. She unlocked the shuttered window, careful not to let it make a sound.

Once outside, the wind circled her, tousling her hair, nuzzling her cheek, and whispering to her. The snow was already ankle deep. Alanna trudged down the path, sparing only a single glance back home. Beacons of light escaped the cracks in the shutters of windows that were otherwise dark.

Alanna pressed onward. The village streets were desolate at this hour. She needn't worry about being seen, at least not by her neighbours. At the edge of town, Alanna peered into the dark woods. Snow and ice plummeted from the heavens, and the world acquired an ethereal quality, as if everything was composed of delicate glass. Ahead, trees stooped under the weight of snow, their branches beckoning to her.

Alanna continued down the winding path through the wood. Engulfed in the shrill cries of the wind, she almost didn't hear it.

A twig cracked. Alanna spun around, peering into shadow. Immaculate white fur gleamed in the moonlight. Hollow eyes bore into her. Ten long seconds. Then, it was gone.

Alanna sprinted as quickly as she could on the silky ice. She reached the old stone cottage without any other encounters and pounded on the door.

"What on earth are you doing here, child?!" Grandmother scolded. "You *know* the risks!"

"Winter has fallen!" Alanna said desperately. "And you hadn't come for dinner. You live out here alone, and ..."

Grandmother waved away her concerns as she padlocked the door behind them.

Alanna examined her grandmother in the firelight. The old woman looked different. Her eyes were brighter. Her cheeks plumper. Her smile sharper.

“Grandmother you look awfully strange,” Alanna said.

“Do I?” Grandmother asked absently. She turned and approached the stove, grasping a wooden spoon and stirring the contents of a large black pot. A tantalizing aroma wafted toward Alanna.

She was still hungry, the mutton sludge sitting unsettled in the bottom of her aching stomach.

She inched forward. “Grandmother? I’m dreadfully hungry.”

“Well, you’re in luck, because dinner is ready.”

Alanna smiled, baring her teeth. “Yes, I suppose it is.”

Grandmother did not have a chance to turn around before Alanna was on her, teeth tearing into flesh. The howling wind outside the cottage was nothing compared to the screams within.

When she finished dinner, Alanna took a mop to the kitchen floor until it was pristine. She dragged the rest of Grandmother’s body outside and left it on the front step. The winterwolves were nothing more than scavengers and would obediently devour her leftovers. When the body was found in the morning, the villagers would assume that she was attacked on her way to her son’s house last night.

Alanna skipped down the path back towards town. The ferocious roar of the storm had died down to a mere whimper. Snow drifted in gentle flurries. A flush coloured Alanna’s cheeks, accentuating her bedevilled birthmark, and now that she had a full belly, she could take her time. She marvelled at the beauty of a snowflake that she caught in a single gloved hand. There was nothing quite like the turning of the season.

PULP LITERATURE CONTEST – THE MAGPIE AWARD FOR POETRY

Contest opened: March 1st, 2018

Deadline: April 15th, 2018

Winner notified: May 15th, 2018

Winner published in: Issue 20, Autumn 2018

Prize: \$500 CA

For contest guidelines see <http://pulpliterature.com/contests/>

DO THE FUNKY CRYPTID

by Richard Stevenson

(Previously unpublished)

Do the funky cryptid!
Go on! Juke jump and jive!
Monster mash with mama
And her Cryptid Critter Five!

Shuck and jive and boogie!
Go on! Get up! Hork up
That leaden purple loogie
Shake off yer hips and pride!

You got a selfie of a sasquatch,
A GIF of Betty Noir,
A sample of saucer lube goo
Well-stowed inside a jar.

The proof is in the pudding,
And the pudding's in the fridge.
Got an autopsy film of ET
From a crash on Freedom Ridge.

National Inquirer's yer squire;
You know they'll buy yer stuff.
Pay a pretty penny too.
You know that ain't no guff.

Get up! Go on! Get down!
Dance debt and duty free!
You've gotta Yowie hairball,
Gobs of globster ambergris!

Bigfoot Boogie! Flatfoot Shoogie!
Tattoo a bar code on yer butt,

Have 'em stuff yer pastry pie hole,
Feed yer diamond-collared mutt.

You've been aboard a flying saucer—
Brought back GIFs for wife and kids
Zipped 'em up before you tossed 'er,
Sent 'em off with You Tube vidz.

Got no money troubles, no, ma'am!
You can twist and boogaloo;
Duck walk and watusi too
Until they shuffle off with you.

Yeah! Do the funky cryptid!
Rock around the clock!
Twist and swim and frug till two;
Show the folks your chicken walk!

Sing, Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!
For lettin' me be my greedy s-e-l-f
I got to, got to, got to
Keep those Blu-Rays on the s-h-e-l-f.

Yeah! Do the cryptid critter,
Take your clients for a ride!
Hucklebuck and shimmy.
Tell yer wallet, "Open wide!"

SUPPORT POLAR BOREALIS!

I charge readers nothing to download this zine. Even the ads are placed for free. I pay my contributors out of my modest pension income. Happy to do it. Promoting Canadian SpecFic is a heck of a hobby. Great fun.

But I certainly wouldn't mind if readers chose to donate to my "cause" since that would help me publish more often.

You can do so either at < [GoFundMe](#) > or < [Patreon](#) >

PROPAGATION SPEED

by Jonathan Cresswell-Jones

(Previously unpublished)

“Expedition log, Captain Tyson recording. *Ahem*. Mission elapsed time, four months, nine days, four hours subjective; Greenwich time, thirty-six years, five months, seven days, eighteen hours. Six days since the crash, now.”

William “Buck” Tyson braced his palms against the console, rolling the chair back a notch. With the deck tilted nose-down five degrees, it was beginning to bug him. The variable-stance landing gear was scattered over the last two hundred meters of the furrow which the landing module had plowed in Beta Horensi IV—“New Noram”— a planet already given a name dumber than his own nickname, and that was plenty. Well, you took what you had to. It hadn’t been one of his best landings; but hell, they’d been a little rushed.

“Long term habitability evaluation of landing area nearly complete. Ell-Tee Dykstra to report on module inventory and flight capability; Surgeon Ell-Tee Myers to report on medical support and overall life expectancy for surviving crew. Or they will,” Buck added testily, “when they arrive. Meantime, I’m talking to a damn machine—*ahem*. Erase last.”

He shook his head, looked out the viewport at the canted horizon. Blue sky, open scrub, so much like Texas it hurt. Damn nice planet, and he’d gotten them down intact in a choice spot—a river delta, good land, an island about the size of, well, Texas. Not that he could’ve done it without Commander Hutchinson, who’d stayed aboard the ISM in orbit until it blew, and gotten sixteen away crammed into a LM meant for eight. She’d died a hero, and three others too; he’d make sure no one ever forgot that. Need to have a ceremony when the wreckage deorbited next year. Keep morale up, that was important.

None of them were going home for a long time—if ever.

Buck idly keyed the console, running the numbers again. Thirty-six light years; an eyeblink for them, propagating at lightspeed within the ISM’s roaring thunderbolt. The full thirty-six yards of Einstein-time back home, though. Grampa was gone by now; there was a recording in the ISM he’d never played. Even with NASAC’s best doctors, Gramma would be too, even by the time they’d been profiled to get back. And now—

“Medical Officer reporting, Captain.”

Buck jumped; the chair rolled forward again. He pushed it back. “Jesus, Myers, don’t sneak around.”

Albrecht Myers blinked from the hatchway. “I apologize, Captain. It is the footwear, you see.” He gestured down at the blue pouches that muffled his feet.

“D’you *have* to wear those?”

“Only outside the med bay. The gloves, always.” Meyers waved a clipboard in a blue hand.

“Well, sit down.” Buck watched the MO collapse into a jump seat. His high forehead shone. “You look like hell, Doc. Too many stims.”

“They are the same dosage that I prescribed for you, Captain. And if I may say so, you look like Hell yourself.”

Buck ran a hand through his crew cut, and grinned. “Yeah, but that’s on doctor’s orders. How come *you’re* taking ’em?”

“I wished to complete an evaluation as quickly as feasible, before other crew members removed vital components. They have been poking about in my med bay, Captain.” Myers drew himself up. “Touching things. They have been *outside*, in an unsecured environment, and they touch *my* instruments.”

“Hell, Doc, it won’t matter. We’re here for a long time, and the local germs’ll get to know us no matter what.”

“I suppose. But such rudeness, *hmpf*.”

Voices carried from outside the starboard viewport, where the tarp was rigged to further expand the LM’s deployed hab section. Buck caught “—*ove it, Dykstra!*” and a laugh. The junior lieutenant’s fussy Oxford accent had never played that well with the guys. Even the Canuck didn’t like him.

Dykstra himself appeared moments later. He unfolded the last jump seat and took it. Myers edged slightly away.

“Okay, Lieutenant, let’s hear it.”

“Sir. I’m still working up the details, but essentially, she won’t fly—ever again. That leaves us no way to salvage the ISM before it deorbits.”

“Okay.” Buck laced his fingers together atop the console. “Well, it’s no surprise.”

“And it gets worse, sir.”

“It’s not as habitable here as we thought?”

“No, no—everything continues to check out. We’ve found a gem, sir. But with the ISM gone, there’s no beacon for a follow-on mission to spot, so they’ll probably assume that we were lost during interstellar transit. If they set down somewhere else—well, it *is* an entire planet; there’s forty-six million square kilometers to look over, and our radios may not be working by then. They might leave before finding us. In that case, we could be looking at a delay of ...

about a hundred and forty-five years before the first colonization mission arrived and found us.”

“That would really stink,” said Buck quietly.

“Well, it’s very unlikely. Most probably, we’ll be rescued in seventy-two, seventy-three years.”

“If they send another scout at all,” said Buck. He nodded at Dykstra’s expression. “Yeah, I’ve been hearing—heard—rumors. Budget limits, and a scout’s damn near as costly as a colony ship, what with the drive. If we’ve vanished, they might just write us off and try to hurry up the prospects that they know about.”

“They wouldn’t. Ah, would they?”

Buck shrugged. “Survival of the fittest. That’s what the whole program’s about—who gets to kick off interstellar civilization. Us in Noram, or Brazil, or the IndoSinos. Eggs in baskets, old son, and who gets what is all up to the basket-weavers.”

“That’s always been my impression, sir,” said Dykstra.

“We must consider,” said Myers in a Voice of Doom, “the possibility that we are marooned in a permanent isolation. Free from any outside contamination. *Influence*, from any outside influence.” He blinked hard. “Moreover, that we may be the *only* remaining civilization of all.”

“Doctor Myers, what exactly—”

”He *means*,” said Buck heavily, “that away back home, we got nukes, they got nukes, all God’s chillun got nukes. As long as the colony projects keep people busy, well, maybe it’ll distract them, give them another way to compete. Even an *illusion* that Earth can be supported somehow by colonies. But if what happened to us happens to another scout, or two, or *all* of them ...”

“Earth’s nations may turn inward,” said Myers. “Lose hope. Press buttons.”

“Oh, God, a global war. Humanity wiped out.” Dykstra closed his eyes. He looked tired; probably needed a stim.

“There would be survivors. Remote areas. In mine shafts, perhaps.”

“And what kind of a world would they find when they came out?” Dykstra snarled.

Albrecht folded his gloved hands over his clipboard. “Not one as habitable as this one. And this is exactly my point.”

Buck blinked. “Huh? That’s a worst-case scenario, both for us and them. They’d never be able to come get us after something like—*that*.”

“Exactly my point. My estimate is that a global thermonuclear exchange would set back civilization on Earth by at least one thousand years. Earth itself will become ... somewhat less habitable. Therefore, despite Earth’s much larger surviving population base, New Noram’s population will grow more rapidly. A civilization founded here might—*would*—outpace Earth itself!”

“Your point has a lot of exactness. Are you *done* yet?”

“Please, Mister Dykstra, patience. Captain, I have concluded that it is our task to found that civilization—and that it is feasible. We must start at once.”

Dykstra’s grunt of laughter broke a silence. “Doc, you’ve missed one tiny thing. Sixteen crew members. Sixteen *male* crew members. The two *female* ones perished in the ISM. Am I getting through here? Houston, Houston, do you read?”

“And there you have it.” Buck let his accent thicken into a bitter drawl. “All steers, no cows—y’all got no herd in a while.”

“Do not allow your thinking to be so limited,” said Myers sharply. “Let me explain. After checking all equipment in the med bay, I have determined that the two autodocs, when disassembled and combined with several other medical and support system components, can be rebuilt as incubators—in effect, artificial wombs. They would be capable of bringing two human specimens to term simultaneously, with a cycle time of perhaps ten months. We *can* create a civilization, Captain. I believe that we must.”

“You’re talking about manufacturing human beings, Doctor,” said Dykstra slowly.

Myers shrugged. “No harm would be done. I prefer the term ‘augmentative reproduction’, actually. Why be squeamish? If we wish to propagate ourselves, this is our only option.”

“We’re not here to bloody well propagate ourselves. We’re here to scout for a colony of *normal* people to do that. In a *normal* way.”

“Really, Lieutenant. You seem uninterested in this matter. I believe that you do not have any children as yet?”

“What the hell’s *that*—”

Buck lifted a hand. “Hey, now. Leave that sort of thing out of this. Doc, could you restore the autodocs afterward, even one?”

“No. If you and I are watches, Captain, then they are watchmakers.” Myers smiled thinly. “In any case, I doubt the LM’s fusion plant will still be operational after the entire first generation has been produced. It will need to run virtually one hundred percent of the time.”

“What?” said Dykstra. “No way. We’re assuming a ten-percent duty cycle for the plant, in order to stretch it out to seventy-plus years. You’d burn it out in less than a decade. And with the autodocs gone too—bloody hell, you’d be killing us all! I’m thirty-six, the Captain’s forty-seven—you must be fifty! We need to survive until the follow-up gets here.”

“If it gets here,” muttered Buck.

“Of course it will. Sir. Seventy-three more years! None of us will make it past a hundred without that support. And he wants to take all of it apart to play Adam and Eve!”

“A necessary sacrifice for the greater good.”

“Oh, no. Sir, he’s mad—I didn’t sign on for this.”

Myers frowned. “You would prefer to spend a very long lifetime simply sitting here?”

“Damned right I would. There’s a whole planet to explore! That’s what we *came* here for in the first place. With the LM as a base, we can build sailing craft, probably *aircraft*, we can go practically anywhere we want. It’s hard luck, being marooned—but I want to finish the job I came to do.”

“He’s got a point, Doctor,” said Buck. “Dying of old age is no fun.”

“Ah. Yes. Fun.” Myers enunciated the word carefully. “I believe you will find, gentlemen, that fathering a whole new race of humanity is quite a lot of fun.”

“Oh,” said Dykstra.

“Oh,” said Buck.

“It is essential that the entire first wave, or generation, be created female. The incubators may fail at any time, you see, and we must have the maximum number of childbearing, ah, citizens. The second generation might be perhaps five males, fifteen more females. But that is all well down the road. In the shorter term, in order to create a numerous second generation, it will entirely be up to us to fertilize as many children as possible upon the first wave.”

“Oh.” Buck’s chair jolted him back to the immediate surroundings as it meandered forward. “I see. That’s going to go over just a bit better, then.”

“Splendid,” muttered Dykstra. “Work hard, die young, bail out of your mission, but you can retire to stud in twenty years, and—what’s the expression?—cop ’til you drop. Did I mention Adam and Eve? I should have said Adam and Eve, and Eve, and *Eve*, and let’s not forget Eve ...”

Buck rubbed his chin. “Twenty years, though.”

“In perhaps less time than that. Menarche may be induced at—”

“Hey, now ... nothing wrong, y’know. We have to have standards. Civilized ones. Eighteen years old, *minimum*. I may be pitchin’ from middle age, but I’m not about to throw any curve balls.”

“Not exactly, Captain. You will be, ah, sixty-five when the first specimens meet your standards.”

“Oh. Yeah, there’s that.” Buck pushed back, slapped both palms against his middle. Pretty good shape. Without an autdoc, he’d have to watch his weight, but people had lived to be sixtyish long before that kind of medical care, and *they* stayed fit. Sort of. “I’ll get by on charm and personality.”

“That may not be necessary, Captain. With such an imperative to reproduce, we should leave nothing to chance. It can be arranged.”

“You mean ... you’d make ’em all, um, particularly ... responsive?” Buck realized he was flushing.

“That would be ethically questionable—”

Dykstra snorted. “Even for you?”

“—technically difficult, and unnecessary. Such things are really a matter of conditioning. Indoctrination.”

“Traditions,” said Buck. He clapped his hands. “*Traditions*, old son. Hallowed beliefs ... or will be, in twenty years. We’ll write the books that way. Comp’ll go down long before then, so it’s a matter of what we give ’em. Stories. The noble sacrifice of childbirth. May-December romance flicks—poor Hutch, she liked those. Medals, I guess, like the Sovs did way back in dubba-dubba-two – ten kids and they get the ‘Heroine of New Noram’. What about legends? Mythology?”

Albrecht thought a moment. “The Greek gods come to mind. They gave up much to create humans, and often bred with them. Zeus, Apollo—everyone may choose. I myself would prefer Saturn, if it is in question.”

Dykstra was staring in open revulsion. Buck shrugged. “And what’s the best ... combination of pairings? For genetic diversity and so on?”

“There will be no restrictions. I will be able to match and slightly modify the subject DNA, so as to prevent any recessive reinforcement.”

“DNA?” Dykstra leaned forward. “*Whose* DNA?”

“Why, ours, of course. Unfortunately I have no samples from the deceased crew members. But there is more than enough variety among the sixteen remain—”

“Oh, *Jesus!*” The lieutenant visibly gagged. “Clone-daughters. You’re talking about us copping *our own daughters!* What kind of sick copping mind have you *got* in there?”

“There’s no call for that—Captain, please.”

Buck ran his tongue around his teeth. “Uck. Doctor, he’s kinda got a point there.”

“There will be no physical resemblance, or risk of inbreeding. It is simple to recombine the DNA.”

“But we’ll have raised them ourselves! Then, to go and ... I’m telling you, sir, this is sick. What would our families think?”

Buck closed his eyes. “Well, Lieutenant, mine won’t be thinking very much, seeing as they’ll all be dead before they can find out. And thank you for reminding me of that.”

“Sorry, sir. But we all knew the risks, they did too. We should stick to our duty, and not get any mad ideas about founding dynasties!”

“Duty,” said Myers, “is a strong word. Consider, Captain, your earlier remark on the ‘survival of the fittest’.”

“Oh, here it comes—the breeding program, the master race—”

“*Lieutenant.*”

“The fittest *societies*. We know that other nations are seeking to found colonies. We know little about their scouts, however—supposing that each one carries a ‘seed crew’ of mating pairs, who stay behind and begin the colonization process? With most of a century elapsed before the main colony ship arrives, that would produce a significant head start. If Earth were to be subjected to a nuclear exchange, then such a proto-settlement would mean a rival to our own efforts here! We could live out our long and healthy lives, play explorers to our hearts’ content, and behold—the next crew to land here is speaking Mandarin, and annexing us into the Celestial Empire!”

“Whooo,” said Buck. “Now, that’s a different spin on things. That’s what they used to call a propagation gap. Yeah, you put your finger on it, Doc. It’s a matter of duty. There’s nothing personal about this thing at all.”

Dykstra rose to stand very straight. “Sir, I tell you now, I want no part of this.”

“This isn’t a democracy, mister. Well—it *will* be, of course. That’s what this is all about. Democracy, freedom, our way of life. If we don’t do our part, and if everyone doesn’t do hers—theirs—then we’ll propagate slower than someone else, and we’ll lose. Thank you, Doctor.” He nodded to Myers. “You’ve given us a real fight to win.”

“Sir, *may I be dismissed?*”

“Yeah. Go round up everyone else, I got an announcement to make.”

Dykstra snapped a salute and stamped out downslope.

Buck shook his head slowly. “I don’t trust him, Doc. He’s all right—but he’s not going to be with us a hundred percent, either.”

“It is understandable. Others may react that way as well.”

“Yeah.” Buck levered himself slowly out of his chair, and in a flicker of irritation kicked it over with a clatter. He thumbed open a secure locker in the starboard bulkhead, lifted out a holstered sidearm, the twin to Commander Hutchinson’s. He was going to miss her very much; but they could always name a daught—that is, a new citizen after her. It was very unlikely he’d need the weapon today, or any day, other than as a badge of authority, but he checked it by habit; full charge, optics clear.

“Zeus, Father of Thunderbolts, wasn’t it? I kinda like that.”

VCON 42/Canvention 38 – October 12-14, 2018

Theme: British Invasion – British influence on Science Fiction and Fantasy.

Venue: Sheraton Vancouver Airport Hotel.

Location: Richmond, B.C.

Guests of Honour – TBA.

Features:

- Aurora awards banquet (Saturday evening ticketed event – Price TBD)
- Aurora awards ceremony (Post-banquet, free and open to the public)
- Panel Discussions and lectures with pros, experts and fans
- Interactive activities and hands-on making workshops
- Vendor Hall
- Art Show
- Table Top Gaming
- Console Gaming
- Costume Contest
- Live Shows
- Multi-author book launch (Friday evening)
- Saturday Evening Dance Cabaret
- Writers’ Workshops (Free for members to participate but pre-registration is required)
- KidCon Programming (Please note, due to changes in insurance requirements we can no longer offer a room where kids may be dropped off. However, we will be including programming aimed at children throughout each day.)

To register: go to <http://vcon.ca/participate/register/>

General Info: go to <http://vcon.ca/>

WASHDAY BLUES

(A SEA SHANTY)

by Colleen Anderson

(Previously unpublished)

Ah, yes, my dear, it's as we fear
while we sit here in the storm
we nurse our drinks and reminisce
sing songs and follow right along, for

The sirens moan and groan
and flip their tails in the foam
when it's washday blues

The tales we tell bring back hell
while the rain lashes our walls
we mix some grog and fiery rum
and toss it back in darkened shacks, for

The fearsome sharks on a lark
will gnash their teeth to cause a spark
when it's washday blues

We sing the songs all night long
against the crash and roar of waves
we kick up our feet and dance a jig
then yell, regale, and call for ale, for

The Viking lords with golden hoards
will drink their beer and bang their swords
when it's washday blues

Our clothes will dry and then we'll try
to board our ships and coast the waves
we sing the songs of pirate life
and in strong gales we'll hoist our sails, for

The pirate kings will dance and sing
divest a queen of all her rings
when it's washday blues

HOUSE OF BURNING TIRES

by Stewart Graham

(Previously unpublished)

Don't like the smell of rubber. Makes me vomit.

But when I'm down and out in a sodden world that spits acid rain in me face while I'm snoring, I can't afford to be picky about any smells punching past me nose. Besides, puking out bad food is good for me. Saves me life every time. Twice daily, in fact. I'll eat anything once it stops moving. Or even if it don't.

They stopped giving out food decades ago, so not much of a welfare state these days, is it? Not enough well and too much fare. Made that up I did. Been telling it to my friends for years. I gotta explain it over and over before they get it. Then they forget the getting. Tedious that is. Hardly worth the laughs. I should cut them out. Or just cut them. Don't need friends anyway. Good for nothing.

Well, maybe good for eating. Trouble is the cooking. I was never handy at watching the pot. Explains why people keep stealing it. Also why I like things raw. More juicy that way. Especially when wriggling.

So anyway, I'm sitting on a curb, in the sodding rain, munching on a toad—one of them free-drugstore-on-the-back toads—when this stumbling old geezer comes behind me and raps me sharply on the back of me head with a solid metal cane, a re-fashioned piece of rebar I think, and it hurts like hell.

"Sod off!" I yell, and then, stead of leaping up with fists flying, I sort of slowly ooze closer to the ground, my head all of a sudden hurting a thousand hells worse.

"Don't sod off," I whisper. "Get me an ambulance."

The old git grabs me by the ankles and drags me into a house made of rubber tires. So, no ambulance then.

Tires filled with concrete rubble, I suspect. Some kind of rubble. Solid construction that be. One odd thing: spikes poking out of the tires on the inside walls as well as the outside walls. Makes no sense to me.

Even more hateful, a sheet metal roof. Hell of a racket in the pouring rain. Hurts me much, that does. Offends me delicate ears.

"Me head hurts," I says.

"It's supposed to," wheezes the ancient sod. He claps his hands. A threesome of elderly harpies in dirty rags drift into the light of the fire. Funny

fire that, couple of rubber tires burning real sooty-like. Stinks to high heaven, or low purgatory, or whatever. I'd puke, but I hurt too much.

The old gals grab me and start stripping me clothes off. No thanks. Not in the mood for sex, not with me head bleeding. Can't seem to lift a finger to fight. Feels like I got hit by an electric shock. Thoughts still oozy.

"Water, please. Can I have some water?" It's pissing rain. They gotta have a gutter barrel somewhere.

"All you can drink," mutters the old man, sitting his rickety-self down on a throne made of tires. Clever idea that. No spikes though. Makes sense. More comfy that way.

They get me naked. Now they're tying me wrists and ankles. Guess they're a kinky lot.

"All you can drink," repeats the old fart. I notice he's picking at a scab beside his nose. No point really, what with his whole face covered in scabs. I swear he's giggling. Never occurred to me scabbing could be so much fun.

Then I see what he's getting at. The skin-cracked girls be wheeling a sorta cauldron on a tripod, a big mother made of dull black metal, iron maybe. They position it over the fire. I can see a bit of water slosh over the side as they give the pot a final push. The splash makes the fire hiss.

"For me?" I ask. Rather pointlessly, I think. Makes me feel right stupid.

"Damn straight! Roast beef tonight!"

Well, he be older than the hills. Gotta right to his fantasies, I guess. Pretty sure I won't taste nothing like roast beef. Boiled pork maybe.

Figure the old biddies could all be grandmas. They be surprisingly gentle lowering me into the water. Luke warm it is. Soon it'll be nice and warm. Me very own sauna. Then toasty warm.

After that? Don't care. Live for the moment I always say.

I start giggling, too. Sort of in chorus with the old man. Can't help it, cause I know I'm gonna leave everybody riddled with worms and other parasites. Serves them right.

Hmm, I wonder if they'll serve *me* right? They can choke on me as far as I care.

Bugger, but it's getting hot. Hope the toad kicks in.

A WINTER SNAKE

by Rhea Rose

(Previously unpublished)

A small backyard serpent
slips beneath Midgard's door,
across the cold stone floor,
seeking solace from
first frost.

Young Ouroboros,
sinuous, coiled, snakelet.
Winter's small pulse softly creeps,
dreams deeply of Earth's
blood-warm womb.

Across the cold stone floor
Winter's silent wyvern sleeps.

TYPHOON TIME by Ron S. Friedman



History professor, MARTIN RICHTER, travels back in time to 1938 aboard a Typhoon Class nuclear submarine led by a Holocaust survivor billionaire. Their goal—to prevent WWII at all costs. Martin has doubts about the mission. Will they create a new Holocaust to prevent another? Their plans fall apart when a saboteur steals a nuclear warhead and hands it over to the German War Navy.

RON S. FRIEDMAN is a Calgary Herald #1 bestselling author whose short stories have appeared in *Galaxy's Edge*, *Daily Science Fiction*, and in other magazines and anthologies. His story *GAME NOT OVER* was a Best Short Fiction finalist in the 2016 Aurora Awards, Canada's premier Science-Fiction and Fantasy awards. Ron co-edited three anthologies and he received ten Honorable Mentions in Writers of the Future Contest. Most of these stories can be found in *ESCAPE VELOCITY* short stories collection.

You can buy *Typhoon Time* [at Smashwords](#) or [at Amazon](#)

A BEAR AT THE FRIDGE

by Lorina Stephens

(Previously unpublished)

Perhaps the real question was whether she should just cut any attempt at logic, and go directly to a nervous breakdown. Maybe she should start shouting into the middle of this weird night. Or declaim the existence of spirits and guides, and what the hell was this bear—a grizzly no less—doing slurping Coke from her fridge. Standing up slurping Coke from her fridge. Smiling no less. Even offering some pretty interesting conversation, were she honest, around prodigious belching.

By now Ralph—that was his name, so he insisted—was on his sixth Coke, which was reasonable she supposed when she thought about it. He was, after all, a prodigious great beast of a bear, so six cans of brown fizz didn't seem so extreme.

Extreme? She was thinking about the ramifications and quantification of extreme when there was this—

She grabbed the tea towel hanging from the stove and held it up against herself, realized that wee pocket handkerchief of a tea towel wasn't going to do anything to cover boobs and crotch, and then wondered why she bothered because the bear—Ralph—wouldn't be concerned she was standing there gawping like some great beached fish, naked as new. She hung the towel over her shoulder. Seemed like a good thing to do.

Behind Ralph, the microwave displayed 3:31 in cool blue light. *Of the bloody AM!*

Maybe I'm hallucinating? Dreaming? Maybe I'm really still in bed.

“So the thing is,” Ralph said, “I'm getting kind of tired chasing you around in your dreams, so I figured I'd wake you up.” He shook that mammoth head and she wondered if that growl was laughter or something that meant she should turn around and make for the back door, which was closest, instead of standing there in the dimness of her kitchen, the glow of the open fridge door spilling out like a Colville painting across the tiles. Maybe she should run screaming into the night. What would Ellis and Petra think if she showed up at their front door at this hour? Naked? Burbled about bears, well one bear to be exact, drinking soft drinks in her kitchen.

Batshit crazy is what they'd think. Wonder if she'd spent too much time up in the woods alone chasing spirit guides. Or maybe was growing some hot stuff in her barn.

And then she thought: *But there aren't any grizzlies here!*

Not in Ontario, that was for sure. Certainly not up on the Bruce. Black bears sure.

And no bloody grizzlies discussing climate change in front of your fridge door!

Well, dream or no, what did this bear, this Ralph, want with her? Chasing her around in her dreams? Had she been dreaming of bears? Of grizzlies? And Coke? Seriously?

But then as she watched him leaning on the fridge door, she did remember vague images of bears, or a bear to be precise. A bear trying really hard to squeeze into the palm of her hand. Just the way a spirit guide might. She looked at her left hand, turned it palm up, felt it itching, looked back at up Ralph—why was it so easy to call him that?—and wondered how some talking ursine could shrink enough to fit into her hand. Or for that matter, how he could pass through skin and bone and muscle and stuff and get *inside* her.

She shuddered.

Ralph shook his head and whuffed again, his jaw wagging. She was sure that was laughter.

This was absurd. She backed away, out onto the porch, grabbed the throw on the old rocker and threw it around her shoulders. She thought maybe she should sit down. Her knees were by now yelling at her to do that, to bend over, to swim out of the greyness buzzing at the edges of her sight, but instead she leaned back, felt the hard spindles against her head, the cool zephyr coming down off the hills. Cricket song. The night. The sanity of this place.

And woke to sunlight, fragile and perfect, the dawn chorus in the woods.

There had been a bear. Called Ralph. Guzzling Coke in her kitchen. She laughed then, laughed at herself, and the absurdity of waking dreams, of chasing spirits and guides, rose up and let the throw drop back to the rocker, opened the screen door into the kitchen. And halted. There were empty cans all over the floor.

Did I do this?

Very likely. That could be the only rational explanation. She bent and gathered up the cans, tossed them in the recycling bin, checked the fridge and decided a trip into Lion's Head was what was required. A shower first. Then

breakfast in the village, scoop up some groceries, and head back. She needed to get out more. Needed to get outside of her head. That was what was needed.

Later, when she stood in the checkout, watching supplies being deposited into her bags, Ellis, who was punching at the cash register, had just extended an invitation to come and have supper with her and Petra.

“Ralph will be there too,” she said.

Ralph? Her heart kicked. She scratched the palm of her left hand, looked down at the red blotch there. A very bear-shaped blotch. “Ralph?”

Ellis laughed and nodded to the man standing in line behind her. Bearded. Mountain-man bearded. Sort of honey-brown bearded, dark eyes under winged eyebrows, and he whuffed a laugh.

“Ralph?” she said. Her mouth felt dry.

He winked. “Got under your skin already, I see.”

She looked back down at her palm, up at him. “You?—”

“Pretty much. Hey, whoever said spirit guides were easy?”

CAN*CON CONVENTION UPCOMING IN OCTOBER – <http://can-con.org/>

We’re very pleased to announce the dates for Can*Con 2018! We’ll be back at the Sheraton in downtown Ottawa on October 12-14. Mark your calendars!

We’re very happy with last year! We grew 40%, reaching 350 attendees (!), more than 10% of whom were students. We’re staying downtown partly to not only entice tourists to our beautiful city, but also to remain accessible to our local community. Most buses lead downtown, after all!

We’ve rented more space in the Sheraton, so we have a spiffy room upstairs. The new room is on the top floor, and we’ve updated our [accessibility policy](#) to reflect the new space. We ask that everyone familiarize themselves with this policy and our [conduct policy](#). These policies are part of what help us maintain a safe, inclusive and welcoming environment at our conference.

We’ve also secured a private space for agent and publisher pitches and the blue pencil café. This means we have a few more space in the vendors room, so hopefully this year we’ll be able to accommodate everyone who wants to [buy a table](#)!

The con suite will be bigger, too, with both attached bedrooms opened up for milling and chatting. We do need volunteers there and at other on-site locations, so please let us know if you’d be willing to [lend a hand at the convention](#). Even a couple of hours can really help us out! You’ll note that [registration prices](#) went up a bit this year, for the first time in several years. We didn’t increase student pricing, but we did increase our adult weekend prices, since costs in downtown Ottawa have been on the rise.

[Registration is already open](#), so go today to take advantage of our early bird rates! The Sheraton hotel block is also open, so you can also [book your hotel room](#). For those of you eager to get on programming, we’ll open up panelist applications soon.

THE COSMOS CHRONICLER

by Y. M. Pang

(Previously unpublished)

I am the world tethered to the sky.
I spin
around and around,
a blind-folded donkey
on the whims of a nameless master.

My hands are chained in a briar of roses.
My head encased in a crown of tears.
One step
outside
the road of stars
and I drown beneath a torrent of light,
an ocean of hydrogen and helium gas.

Leashed to a galaxy of endless red,
bathed in the glow of dying stars,
the tredecillion-joule supernovas
birthing mountains, rivers, life.
And black holes
jealous, ever-hungry
await, the fly-traps of outer space.

I trundle along in a carriage of light
past swollen bellies of weary red giants,
shedding their flesh to become
pinprick diamonds of white-bearded dwarfs.
And on my journey the chronicles I keep
as galaxies
blink
live
fade.

KITTENS CRAWLING

by Lena Ng

(Previously unpublished)

Gerald misted a fine spray of Windex over the glass surface and polished it with a soft, lint-free chamois. The curved surface of the glass gleamed, reflecting back Gerald's living room with its floral-patterned wallpaper and ballerina-pink, chintz drapes. "Aren't you the cutest little thing?" he asked, rubbing the glass until it squeaked. Two marble eyes of bright blue peered back at him from within its glass castle, looking up through lush eyelashes that floated and waved, moved by the gently rocking preserving fluid. "Yes, you are," he said, in a soothing coo, while rubbing at a particularly stubborn spot. "Yes, you are."

Its little paw was raised in a small gesture of greeting, as though it were waving "Salutations" while on the way to Pet Mart to pick up some treats. The hair of its orange fur swayed in a lilting, dreamy fashion, like strands of seaweed in the sea. The glass and its holding liquid magnified its tiny feline face so the marble eyes seemed bigger and more expressive. It had an expression of "Won't you just love me?"

The preservative solution kept the body looking fresh. The kitten seemed so alive, it could play with a ball of yarn in its underwater world.

Someone who didn't understand might have described the glass globe's contents as cutely grotesque. Or—more likely—just grotesque.

Gerald gently shook the glass globe. Small flakes of glitter floated around the kitten and settled on its orange-and-white striped fur, the layer of metallic flakes resembling a shiny, multi-coloured snowfall.

Gerald was particularly proud of this kitten. Its pose, its expression. "Junior" he called it. Everyone has their little hobbies, things to do in their free time that make life worth living. Some people play an instrument, such as the piano or guitar. Some people collect coins or stamps. Others dicker around for hours, putting together model trains or ships or airplanes.

Gerald liked ... preserving things. Not vegetables. Not fruit. Not cocktail onions or gherkins or strawberry-rhubarb jam or mango chutney. But small animals. Particularly kittens. Everyone would agree that kittens are cute. Gerald especially. So cute, he wanted them to remain kittens forever.

You may think Gerald is an animal-hater, considering the fate of his pets. But actually he loved them, with all the love his shrivelled heart could hold. He

loved them so much, he never wanted them to grow up. Gerald always thought his sense of love was so strong, he would never let something he loved leave.

Like his girlfriend, Sylvia. Sweet, lovely girl with long chestnut hair and from a good family. “Kitten,” he called her. She supposedly loved him back, that is until she opened his study door—the room he had expressly told her to leave alone—and found out about his hobby. Then there was crying and general unpleasantness.

But all that was history. Gerald pulled the trigger of the bottle and sprayed the next globe, a light blue mist settling onto the glass surface. He hummed “Zip-a-Dee-Doo-Dah” while he worked. Cuddles, a black-and-white tabby, sat with both paws together, ready for her next adventure catching caterpillars or butterflies. Snoodles, a short-haired Russian Blue, looked ready to pounce on a robin or a chipmunk. Tiny Tim, a gray, long-haired Persian, didn’t open its eyes, since it was having an eternal cat-nap, its body curled up as though it were in front of a fireplace in a cabin, instead of floating within a preservative solution and stuffed inside a glass ball. With his cloth, Gerald rubbed the globes in a gentle but thorough manner. Soon all the glass globes with his furry friends were shiny and polished.

“All done,” said Gerald, stepping back to admire his handy work, his broad, good-humoured face reflecting back at him in each of the twenty globes, proudly arranged to sit on the fireplace mantel and wall shelves and the buffet table. “Don’t you all look nice?” He spent another minute admiring. “Now for some breakfast.”

After he put away his cleaning supplies and cloths, as he entered the kitchen for toast and tea, Gerald heard a rumble. Like a large truck had driven by outside of his window.

The rumble started again.

This time more loudly and more violently. The plates in the kitchen rattled. The cups in the cupboard clacked. Gerald realized that his feet then his knees were shaking. The trembles moved up his body until his teeth clattered together.

The kitchen floor jolted beneath his feet. Gerald grabbed for the heavy kitchen table. The table’s legs rapped against the kitchen’s tile floor. Since there had never been an earthquake in his part of the country before, Gerald needed a minute to realize what was happening.

The next sound sent his heart racing. Gerald heard the sound of glass clinking, the noise coming from the living room. The tinkling of glass in a living

room full of globes which were knocking together. Then, as he hung onto the table, to his horror, he heard a sound that made his stomach drop.

A smash.

Oh no, no, no.

Then another. The tinkle of glass breaking. Then another thud and another. More panic-inducing sounds of glass shattering.

Please not all of them. No, no, no ...

After the ground stopped shaking, Gerald picked himself off the tiles, found his balance, and fled back into the living room.

Gerald's eyes watered with the burning smell of the preserving fluid. All the kittens lay on the floor, their glass globes cracked open like eggs spilling their furry yolks. Puddles of solution on the hardwood floor that he had just mopped yesterday, already bleaching away the varnish, leaving large patchy white spots. The kittens' little bodies scattered all over the living room floor like someone sprinkling rose petals.

With a sigh, Gerald opened the living room windows. His heart felt squeezed. All his painstaking work smashed. Slowly, the acrid smell started to dissipate. He retrieved two buckets and a mop. He let the solution soak into the mop head before squeezing, with gloved hands, the liquid into the bucket. With the other bucket in hand, he gingerly tip-toed around the living room, picking up his fallen friends and placing them with care into the pail.

"Are you ok, Snoodles?" Gerald asked. The kitten looked somewhat reproachful. It was still in the pouncing pose, but with its arched back, it looked like it could be hissing. "How are you doing, Cuddles?" Cuddles looked no worse for wear as it was deposited in the pail. But with the accident, its mouth had dropped open, looking to be in mid-yowl.

And there was something funny about Tiny Tim, the napping Persian kitten. Its long, gray hair could use a good brushing. Its body had unfolded from its sleeping pose and now looked contorted. There was something else though. Something unusual but subtle, subtle enough that it took Gerald a moment to grasp what was wrong.

Its eyes. Though the long hair covered them, Gerald realized they were open. But not wide open. Instead they were narrowed and hardened. And they seemed to stare at him with a loathing-filled look, following his every movement. A low sound seemed to come from the kitten's throat. Gerald stuck a pinky in his ear. That didn't help. If he didn't know better, Gerald would swear it was a growl.

Then a strange sound came from the pail, from the other kittens. Quietly at first. A buzzing sound which seemed to come from the back of the throat, soft yet menacing, then rising in volume until the sound became a collective kitten's yowl. A rallying cry.

Junior was the first to move. Its bedraggled, orange-furred face peered over the edge of the pail. It dragged himself up, the lips pulled back in a snarl. Its lovely fur, which had waved so peacefully in the solution, now looked matted and knotted. One of the marbles fell out of its eyes, rolled across the hardwood, and hid under the coffee table, leaving a gaping, green-tinged hole. Junior hissed, further baring pointed, small-but-horribly-sharp teeth. Gerald backed away. His heart banged against his chest, wanting to leap out and escape to somewhere stress-free, such as the Bahamas.

Slowly, Junior crawled out of the bucket. It moved with a herky-jerky movement, a spastic, crab-like crawl; all feline grace had fled the day it was forced to meet Jesus. When Gerald backed into a wall, he could only stare, mesmerized in fascinated horror. As soon as it was close enough, Junior, a frightful ball of feline fury, launched itself at Gerald's leg, teeth piercing through his khaki pants and into the skin with accompanying claws buried to the sheath. Gerald howled, kicking his legs and failing, looking like a crazed man tilting at windmills.

The other kittens followed suit, swarming like rampaging crabs out of the bucket. Teeth and claws. Hisses and yowls. Launching themselves with spring-loaded kitten savagery. Undead kittens digging their nails in his scalp, hanging from the fat in his back, biting with all their mighty might on his belly. Bright ribbons of claw marks criss-crossed his arms and legs; tiny teeth marks pin-cushioned his torso.

Sure, there might have been twenty of them. But they were only kittens, weighing less than a pound each. Gerald grabbed Cuddles around its middle. "Why you little—" He hurled Cuddles to the wall, its body making contact with a squelchy splat. Its brethren soon followed—Snoodles, Junior, Tiny Tim, Holly, Peter, and many others—becoming broken, sad, little bodies littering the living room floor.

After picking off all the kittens, Gerald stood panting. "Just you wait, after all I've done for you, you're all going back into your globes and—" Gerald had to think a bit about how he could threaten already dead kittens, "—and no TV for a week." From surveying the broken-bodied landscape, Gerald thought maybe they were punished enough.

Again Gerald picked up the pail and began to gather up the bodies. All the work ahead of him to re-create a world for each. This time with stronger, thicker glass.

After he picked up the last kitten, it started again. A low rumble. The ground began shaking. Gerald grabbed for the fireplace mantel. The rumbling continued, growing in sound and vibration. His legs tried to swing out from under him. Any remaining wall pictures that had survived the first rumbles came crashing to the floor. Gerald hung onto the mantel for several minutes until the earthquake tired itself out. There was a moment of stillness when the earth stopped quaking.

Then he heard it.

From the distance, a loud smash.

The crack of glass, louder and sharper than the tinkling of the kitten's globes. Almost as loud and almost as sharp as Sylvia's screams that had once echoed in his house. A smash that came from the basement.

Gerald stared at the door leading down to the basement. *Oh please, oh please, oh please, no.* At first there was an eerie silence. It was broken by a clumping, dragging sound. As one, all of the kittens' ears perked up. Gerald's heart beat super loudly but it couldn't drown out the slow, methodical thumping sound. Like the sound of something—someone—shambling up the bare wood of the basement stairs.

The wooden door leading to the basement slowly creaked open. A crouching, bent shape took form.

"Kitten?" said Gerald.

The shape tried to pull itself upward. It staggered forward then fell back to its knees. Its arms dragged its body across the floor, its elbows sticking outward, with the jerking movements of a figure too long curled up in a glass globe. It looked with marble eyes through stringy, wet, chestnut hair, long hair that had been previously floating peacefully in a large glass globe. The slack face looked as smooth as a doll's. A sickly pale, rubber mannequin come to life. Since it spent most of its time with its face squashed against the glass, its nose was somewhat bent. When it opened its mouth, a mouthful of solution dripped onto the floor. Another wave of liquid formaldehyde stink caused Gerald to wretch. He wiped the tears away from his burning eyes.

Although Sylvia had looked more attractive when alive, Gerald still had managed to preserve the essence of her good looks in suspended animation, forever dreaming in a murky sea of formaldehyde. But outside her globe, Sylvia's pickled skin looked somewhat green, the texture over-boiled and rind-

like. She splayed her limbs outward, and to Gerald's horror, she started to move with the scuttle of a human crab.

She made a noise from her mushy throat. At the sound, life seemed to return to his furry friends. Junior stretched and shook himself off. One by one, the other kittens followed suit. Gerald was surrounded by an army of the preserved.

He backed away from the girl-thing. The kittens rallied and stealthily approached, crawling on their wet bellies. Gerald pivoted from them and sprang towards the door, almost wrenching the wooden frame off its hinges. He bolted from the house into ... a snowstorm? In the middle of summer? Swirling flakes of snow spun around, the air so thick with it, it was spiralling around his body, as though ...

As though Gerald himself were encased in a snow globe. As though someone was playing with his snow globe, shaking it, causing earthquakes and blizzards with him and Sylvia and all his kittens trapped inside.

That strange thought disappeared as quickly as it appeared when Gerald felt sharp teeth sink into his ankle. He kicked off Snoodles, and as he tried to speed off, Gerald turned to see his pursuers. The kittens were close but it was the shambling frame in the back that horrified him the most. Against the howling wind and snow, he pushed his way across his large yard, as quickly as his stout legs could carry him. He could barely see through the billowing wall of white. He clutched at his frozen chest. *Please may I not have a heart attack.* Twenty more feet and he could barricade himself in the shed.

Or better yet ...

There were tools there. Hoes. Axes. Hatchets. A double-barreled shotgun. If it was a war they wanted ...

He would blast them back to Hell.

Ten feet to the shed door. Five feet. Just as Gerald stretched out for the door, the ground shook again. The wind whipped up and the blizzard lashed at him. He stumbled and fell, his knees scraping against the frozen ground before the air was slammed out of his chest. Gerald managed to flip over onto his back in time to see a mass of furry faces above him. With a united cry, Sylvia and the kittens launched themselves through the swirling storm.

"Daddy, look at this!" the child cried. The glass globe shone in the sunlight of a Sunday afternoon, held by a girl sitting cross-legged on her playroom floor. She had been playing with it all afternoon. She tilted the globe up and down

then swirled it in a circular motion, causing earthquakes and blizzards within its glass world, the white flakes spiralling around in the liquid.

As the snowflakes cleared, within the glass globe, Daddy saw two small figures lying face down. Not an ordinary snow globe scene. A peculiar sight—the shape of a man and a woman, their bodies covered in a heavy sprinkling of artificial snow, in a field of what looked to be furry daisies.



Neo-opsis Science Fiction Magazine is produced out of Victoria, BC, Canada.

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

Contents of issue 28:

Stories:

Dissonance, by Ron Friedman.

Hindsight by Hall Jameson.

Time Beasts by Barbara Davies.

Broken Dishes by J. Y. T. (Jennifer) Kennedy.

The Flight of the Osprey by Robert Dawson.

Wild Irish Rose by Julie Frost.

Fuchsia Thought by Corey J. White.

He Was So Old, by Lee Widener.

Poems:

Foreshadowing by Lisa Timpf.

More than Dreams Alone by John Grey.

See < [Neo-opsis Magazine](#) >

The cover of issue 28 is *Living in a Rock*, by Karl Johanson.

There is a write up on the 2017 convention [Tsukino Con](#) in Victoria, BC.

The Last Four Pages is the article *Women Leads in SF*, by Karl Johanson.

Next short story submissions window for Neo-opsis Magazine will open November, 2018.

THE GHOST IN MY LIFE

by Neile Graham

(Previously unpublished)

Climbing the stairs to the party
I emerge into a cloud—

it swirls around me, opaque
conversations buzz and hum.

I shift and step in my own time
slipping through veils of air

between trees time has stilled
and frozen. No one turns. No one

sees me. I should be distressed
but instead here enjoy the party

and the party. My party, my own
in between it all. Persephone,

her first breath in the world
of the sun before she rushes

into celebration. That peace.
I don't want it broken,

must break it myself, so this
is the moment when I step back

and put on my life again. Pin
my nametag on, pin on

my brave and social face.
Take one deep breath and speak.

then nothing and everything
is broken.

TRANSLATE *THIS*

by Craig H. Bowersby

(Previously unpublished)

Zeebuusz45-With-Enhanced-Reticulum was facing imminent mission failure.

His lower right movement pod was trapped painfully in the metal teeth of a forest clamp; and his precise mission parameters allowed no time for being captured in any device. But he still refused to send a distress call to the orbiting scout ship, as that would also spell instant career failure, which, for Zebuloids, was very, very unpleasant.

The plan had been simple: land in a secluded spot on the third planet from the system's sun; pick up selected plant and soil samples, and return immediately to space. Then he would bask in the glory of the first successful exploration to this curious and valuable planet. His data would provide the key to further exploration and justify the enormous expense of a thousand years of preparation. There was no telling when the next such mission could be mounted.

Zeebuusz45-With-Enhanced-Reticulum's specialty was his speed and skill with his reticulum. Sleek and responsive, his thin, strong reticulum outperformed all others, and he'd trained tirelessly. He could farbulate faster than an artificial farbulator; he could twazzul to a thousand twazzlerites. He was enormously proud of his top-level simulated mission results and his extreme efficiency—a highly valued trait on Zebulon. But here, on this alien planet, his efficiency had somehow faltered. He hadn't found the required plants immediately in this dark forest and he hadn't expected a metal trap to attack him only a few tentacle lengths from his landed disc-flyer. His tools couldn't dislodge the trap, and he couldn't yank it out, even though he'd thrashed so hard he'd bruised his interior gullet. If he somehow escaped he'd still be interrogated mercilessly by his superior, Zeebuusz43-With-Enhanced-Tentacles, and probably demoted to waste product sublimation. His flyer only sat a few large tentacles away, but he couldn't reach even that. Yet time was ovulating, and only ten micro units remained in the original plan.

Fortunately, none of his three major body components—his large round head, his larger round thorax and even larger abdomen—had been damaged, and if necessary, he would anesthetize his stumpy, captured pod, burn it right off, and then jump for the disc.

But he couldn't do that yet because the situation had got even worse—some alien creatures were approaching. He could smell them and hear them, and a light beam came from one of their reticulated appendages stabbing through the dark brush.

He cowered as the aliens closed in, snapping the branches and plants around them, and suddenly they appeared, about ten small reticula away. There were two of them, shadowy, upright figures. They stopped still, leaving the forest silent, except for their strange hissing.

Zeebuusz45-With-Enhanced-Reticulum sucked in his hydrogen hard through his skin. The aliens, at least, weren't wild animals. They appeared semi-sentient. Their shape indicated, roughly, upright quadrupeds. They had two lower articulated travel pods, or extensions, and two articulated upper extensions. They each had a working, rounded brain centre on top, although obscured by the darkness. They each had two ocular ports with glassy oculi. They had surprisingly few tentacles—if any. And they carried some manufactured objects. Both had a long thin metal device—possibly a weapon with a tubular section. The light device carried by the taller alien blinded the Zebuloid's four sensory orbs.

Aghast, Zeebuusz45-With-Enhanced-Reticulum swallowed hard down his slurry hole. He thought of puffing up his rough red skin to look bigger. But then he remembered his alien translator—the Trabuusslote. Thank the stars! The built-in electronic brain-wear, deep inside his puffy head, would save the Zebuloid day! The Advanced Ones on his planet had spent thousands of solar rotations developing such a device, and they had finally succeeded.

Trembling, Zeebuusz45-With-Enhanced-Reticulum flicked on his audio intake valve and waited eagerly to hear the aliens' communication. The two creatures uttered more hissing and growling. The Trabuusslote in its turn beeped non-committedly. Of course, no definitive exactitude existed with this kind of interface. They hadn't studied the planet long: indeed, their mission involved getting in and out quickly. Furthermore, bizarrely, this planet's language had over two hundred known variations. The Communication Corps held many samples of data but they'd tried only experimental constructions. Even context would be difficult. The Trabuusslote's task was enormous.

Finally, one of the creatures gasped out more sounds, and the Trabuusslote beeped earnestly in Zeebuusz45-With-Enhanced-Reticulum's brain. But the situation was dire, and he couldn't wait—efficiency was key. He willed the Trabuusslote into speed mode. It beeped more rapidly and the

translation came out: “Question—interrogative, regarding the reproductive capabilities of Zeebuusz45-With-Enhanced-Reticulum.”

The what??? asked Zeebuusz45-With-Enhanced-Reticulum to himself. The Trabuusslote just beeped, waiting.

Zeebuusz45-With-Enhanced-Reticulum panicked. He waved his reticulum up and down, cranking its two main joints back and forth, negatively. The taller alien shouted and the Trabuusslote translated quickly: “Question—interrogative, regarding the reproductive function of your reticulum.”

“Gaah!” said Zeebuusz45-With-Enhanced-Reticulum. He stepped back, causing a shooting pain in his pod. He instinctively released a spray of calming pheromones in a pink diaphanous cloud.

The aliens shouted and raised their tubes. The Trabuusslote said in his brain: “Question—interrogative, regarding the reproductive function of your pheromone.”

Zeebuusz45-With-Enhanced-Reticulum nodded up and down negatively. He phizzed out an answer of hisses and clicks through his orifice: “No, No! You should only reproduce among yourselves!”

The speaker under his head whined out a strange jumble, translating his words into the alien language.

The ocular and vocal orifices of the two aliens widened. Unfortunately, before the Zebuloid could add anything about peace, the two aliens raised their weapons, and apart from a loud noise and a flash, that was all Zeebuusz45-With-Enhanced-Reticulum ever heard or saw before his brain exploded; and the great Zebuloid mission ended, tragically. (And inefficiently).

PULP LITERATURE CONTEST – THE HUMMINGBIRD FLASH FICTION PRIZE

Contest opens: May 1st, 2018

Deadline: June 15th, 2018

Winner notified: July 15th, 2018

Winner published in: Issue 21, Winter 2019

Prize: \$300 CA

For contest guidelines see <http://pulpliterature.com/contests/>

FORGIVENESS

by Catherine Girczyc

(Previously unpublished)

Walking towards home on a new planet
A life-colored gem Earth Two
Under a too-bright Sun
Chinook winds thaw the snow,
we glimpse
an angel on the
mountain bluejay's wing
Turning her eyes sunward, smiling.
On the crunch slide spring snow
A healing breath from a river wind
Revives me and the waters of my life
Flow again,
Tomorrow, Scarlet, says the Shadow
And I nod.

PULP LITERATURE CONTEST – THE RAVEN SHORT STORY CONTEST

Contest opens: September 1st, 2018

Deadline: October 15th, 2018

Winner notified: November 15th, 2018

Winner published in: Issue 22, Spring 2019

Prize: \$300 CA

For contest guidelines see <http://pulpliterature.com/contests/>

PULP LITERATURE CONTEST – THE BUMBLE BEE FLASH FICTION CONTEST

Contest opens: January 1st, 2019

Deadline: February 15th, 2019

Winner notified: March 15th, 2019

Winner published in: Issue 23, Summer 2019

Prize: \$300 CA

For contest guidelines see <http://pulpliterature.com/contests/>

THE HEART FAIRY

by Judy McCrosky

(Previously unpublished)

This time it was true love. Leila lost her heart, utterly, completely, to Simon. She'd worn her heart on her sleeve for him, out where everybody could see, so she supposed it wasn't surprising that she'd lost it. She didn't like showing her emotions, but she'd set her heart on Simon and once that happened, there was no holding back. He was tall and broad-shouldered and his stomach, while not exactly flat, was kind of cute. His voice was deep and when he talked, Leila wanted to rest her head on his chest and listen to the rumble.

They both worked at the Public Library. Leila first noticed him shelving books. His lithe fingers went to each book on his cart without hesitation and he slid each into its slot with such decisiveness that her heart did a little flip-flop in her chest. For weeks she did nothing, just watched him—the way he stamped library cards with a masculine thump, the color of his hair like wheat at the end of a hot dry summer, the way he dealt with library patrons with brusque efficiency. Finally she decided to speak to him. With her heart in her mouth she approached the circulation desk where he sat.

“Look,” she said. “I found this cardiology textbook in the theology section. Can you imagine?”

“Maybe,” he said, “someone was studying the concept of a human being complete in both heart and soul.”

That was when she knew he was a man after her own heart.

But he wasn't, and that was the problem. He wasn't interested in her heart at all. They chatted a bit that day, telling humorous stories about mis-shelved books and kids who checked out fourteen Fear Street books and came back the next day for more. When Simon grew restless, looking past Leila, fidgeting with his ink pad, she

turned to go but then, gathering her courage, asked if he wanted to have coffee after work. He looked at her, his face expressionless, and nodded.

They only went out a few times. For coffee. To a movie. To Leila's house for dinner. She'd had big hopes for that night. Nothing happened. He ate the Coquilles St. Jacques and Fettuccini Alfredo she'd made, gave her a chaste kiss on the cheek when she pressed herself against him as he was putting on his coat, and left.

Being in love like this was no fun at all. She had a talk with Simon, determined to get at the heart of the matter.

"I gave my heart to you," she said. "I want it back."

He sneered, curling his magnificent chiseled lips. "I don't have it." He drew an X across his chest. "Cross my heart and hope to die."

"You do have it. I laid it at your feet."

"You give me heartburn."

"You have no heart," she said sadly.

If Simon didn't have it, then it must have been stolen. She still suspected he was the culprit, but he showed so little interest in her love that she couldn't see a motive. She went to the police station.

A bored policewoman sat behind a high counter looking at a computer. A constant stream of numbers and letters flowed across the screen, reflecting green and gray off her glasses.

"I want to report a theft," Leila said.

Without looking away from the screen the policewoman pulled a form from a stack beside her. "Fill this out."

Leila took the form and found a pen in her purse. Name, address, place of employment. Those questions were easy.

Description of lost object. I lost a muscular cone-shaped object, Leila wrote, about the size of a clenched fist. It has three layers, the epicardium, the myocardium, and the endocardium. Its chambers include two ventricles with thick muscular walls, which make up the bulk of the organ, and two atria with thin muscular walls.

Where was the stolen object taken from? Me.

Any signs of forced entry? No, she thought. I did this to myself. She left the question blank.

She returned the form to the policewoman who tossed it on the top of another big stack of paper. “We’ll be in touch,” the policewoman said. Her glasses dripped data.

The police report which came in the mail stated that Leila had taken inadequate precautions to safeguard her valuables. As a break-and-enter had not occurred, no crime had been committed. Case closed.

Clearly, the police would be of no help. If Leila was going to get her heart back she’d have to find it herself. Take heart, she told herself. You can do it. She looked for it everywhere—in the restaurant where she and Simon had drunk latte, in her kitchen where she’d prepared the dinner he’d said was exquisite. She looked in the bathroom where she’d cried until she was drained over how he was happy to drink coffee she bought and eat food she cooked but how he never showed one sign of warmth or interest in loving her. She looked in her bedroom, pulling down the covers to reveal the place she’d lain so many nights, her body weeping for want of his. She picked up her pillow and punched it, the pillow she’d hugged against her breasts while she dreamed of him.

Under her pillow was a shiny quarter and a note. Leila stared for a moment. The note said, “Thank you for the heart. What a big girl you are getting to be. Love, the Heart Fairy.”

Leila picked up the quarter and turned it over and over in her fingers. She picked up the note and read it again. She was surprised. When she was little, the Tooth Fairy never came when she lost a tooth. She was visited instead by the Tooth Troll who left a quarter, which was all right, but he also left notes which said things like, “You’re not losing your teeth fast enough. How am I supposed to stay in business? Get with it, girl, or next time I visit I’ll be bringing my pliers.”

She’d lost her heart and the Heart Fairy had come and taken it. Leila felt lighthearted, for the burden in her chest was gone.

She wondered what the Heart Fairy did with the hearts she collected. Was there a room somewhere, glowing soft and red, filled with pulsing hearts? Come to think of it, what did the Tooth Fairy do with all those teeth? Maybe she buried them for future archaeologists to find. Or perhaps she gave them to babies who needed an extra set once their baby teeth fell out. She didn’t wonder about the Tooth Troll. She knew what he did with the teeth he collected. He gave them to scary skeletons and sharks and other toothy creatures who populated nightmares.

Leila had no nightmares now. She had no dreams at all. Her sleep was dark and empty. She preferred it that way. When she saw Simon at work she felt nothing.

Simon, though, was acting strangely. Leila, sitting at the check-out desk, caught him looking at her several times, intently, as if he was trying to memorize her features by heart. Once or twice he fell into step beside her as she walked out to the parking lot after work, but she ignored him.

One day he approached as she shelved books. “Your fingers,” he said, “are beautiful when you shelve.”

“Thank you.” She slipped books into slots, concentrating on being decisive.

“I’ve got something to tell you,” Simon continued, “and I hope you’ll take it to heart. But I don’t want to talk here. Will you go out with me after work?”

She glanced at him and kept shelving. "I'm going out for coffee with David after work. He's buying." She pushed the book cart to the next row of shelves.

Simon followed her. "Leila. I'm trying to tell you I love you. I'm wearing my heart on my sleeve."

"Don't do that," she said. "It's not a safe place to keep it."

He took the book she was about to shelve and held her hands in his. "What happened? We were so happy. You've changed."

"I have." She pulled her hands out from between his. "You have, too." She cocked her head to one side and studied him. "You have a heart."

"Of course." He clasped his fist on his chest. "My heart strings sing when you are near."

"Stop."

"I want to take you to the heartland and build a cozy home for us to live in together."

She groaned. This was definitely a new Simon. "When did you have this change of heart?"

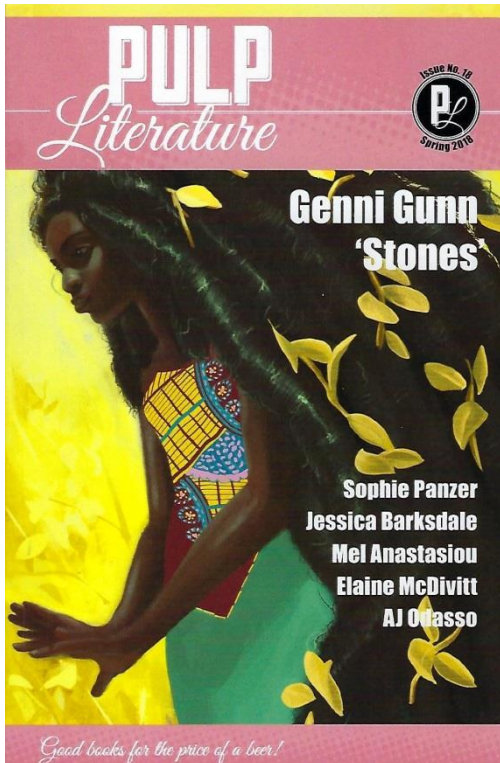
"A few nights ago. All I've been able to think of since then is you."

Leila froze as a sudden thought struck her. It hadn't been the Heart Fairy who'd ended up with her heart. It must have been the Heart Troll. He'd mugged the Heart Fairy as she headed home with her load of hearts, taking them to her red pulsing room. It was the Heart Fairy's fate to collect hearts, only to have them stolen by the Heart Troll.

The Heart Troll didn't keep the stolen hearts. He distributed them to heartless people.

She took Simon's hand and shook it. "Congratulations. I lost my heart and now you have it." She turned and walked briskly away. From somewhere dark and hot she heard a rumble of Troll laughter.

She headed towards the circulation desk, humming an old Neil Young song. She sat behind the desk, reached for a stack of due date cards, and stamped them one after another, losing herself in the rhythm of thud, thud, thud.



What do we want to read?

We love genre. Science Fiction, Fantasy, Mystery, History, Thriller or Chiller: we read it all, as long as it's well written.

We love literary fiction. Beautiful prose, soul-searching themes, and powerful and complex character development are all part of the stories we like.

We believe that genre fiction IS literary. Our goal is to publish writing that breaks out of the bookshelf boundaries, defies genre, surprises, and delights.

Our mandate

Rather than limit ourselves to a single genre or fiction format, we pick from two specific segments: exceptional emerging talent, and established writers and artists who wish to break out of their genre confines.

Pulp Literature magazine contains short stories, novellas, novel and graphic novel excerpts, illustrations and graphic shorts. Think of it as a wine-tasting ... or a pub crawl ... where you'll experience new flavours and rediscover old favourites.

Content of issue 18:

Cover: *Windseeker* by Akem.

Short stories:

Stones by Genni Gunn.

We Come Back Different by Aj Odassa.

The Commute by Sophie Panzer.

Bug in my Ear by Susan Pieters.

Stella AYMAN and the Mystery of the Mah-Jongg Box by Mel Anastasiou.

The Brightness of Things by Jessica Barksdale.

The SiWC Storyteller's Award by Michelle Barker.

The Tape by Elaine McDivitt.

Meggie by Kerry Craven.

Allaigna's Song by JM Landels.

Poetry:

Colour-Blind Son by Susan Alexander.

On a Dark Lake's Edge by Angela Rebrec.

See < [Pulp Literature Magazine](#) >

HUNTING AND GATHERING ON EARTH

by Melissa Yuan-Innes

(Previously published as an honourable mention in
The Binnacle: Eighth Annual Ultra-short Competition)

A pretty pair of meat
Dog-walk down the street,
Too deep in their bliss
To hear our hungry hiss.

My bellies rumble gas
At her delicious mass.
Her red-haired, bearded mate
Will add colour to our plate.

Let's flip and the winner
Gets both plus dog for dinner.
The loser licks the leavings
And seeks tomorrow's teething.

Zap them in their tracks!
Instant frozen snacks.
Now get the dog—oh, damn!
The TurboZap is jammed!

The dog stands and growls
Despite our fright'ning howls.
At last we fly away
In search of simpler prey.

COTTAGE BISTRO AUTHOR EVENTS

4470 Main Street, Vancouver, B.C. For info see <http://www.cottage-bistro.com/>

Well worth checking out. April events include Simon Fraser University student poetry readings, a book launch, Vancouver story slam, University of B.C. Creative Writing student readings, an Al Purdy celebration, and "Twisted Poets" presented by the Pandora Collective. Loads of fun!

SYMBIOTE

by Rachel Unger

(Previously unpublished)

It wasn't a large ship. There was only room for six—and that just barely, after all the genetic samples, cloning equipment, and supplies to get them to the colony planet. Weapons, but only small caliber.

They were going to save the species. That was the plan. Looking down at the messy crater that was what remained of Fielding's head, Jane mused that no one had expected she would save another species.

She'd been exposed to the parasites when she was young. At first, she'd woken confused—she'd been in the forest, and something had gone wrong. There had been a gentle interrogative about how she was feeling. When she'd answered, her parents had come into her bedroom, happy to find her awake after her injury. Jane's father casually asked to whom she was talking.

They made allowances for her "imaginary friend" after that. When asked, her internal companion called herself Octavia. Her parents even set Octavia a place at the table. Other such concessions lasted until grade school, by which time Jane had learned it was safer to answer Octavia by thought. They were limited-range telepaths, after all.

The telepathy had been useful during the testing to become a star pilot. All during her training leading up to that point, private organizations and governmental bodies had worked to combat "the parasite problem."

On the launch, some of the others had cried. Travis had been both jubilant and angry. "Goddamn parasites," he ranted. "We should be doing this because it's *time*, because we're capable of claiming a second world—now it's all polluted. I hope they rot in the hell they created. I hope they *starve*." Jane and Octavia said nothing. It was likely everyone except the six of them would starve—years of dedicating a planet's resources to eradicating the threat had failed. The parasites' breeding reservoir had never been found. Forests had burned, and farm fields, and the battle had raged on unabated. Eventually, it became clear that the only winning strategy was to get off-planet. "Winning" meant a small ship, piloted and crewed by the very best, taking genetic samples of everyone left behind and cloning equipment to populate a new world.

Over the first days of the mission, Jane had tried to carefully sound out the others.

While helping Vaughn run diagnostics on the navigation equipment—“What if they’re creatures like any other, with the same desires to live and prosper? What if they just want what we want?” Over a meal with Masters—“But what if they’re only reacting to our aggression? You’re a biologist. There must be other species that fight back when attacked.”

Masters had only blinked. “Even if that were true once, it’s pretty clear that they’re nothing but hostile now. You heard about New Buenos Aires, right?”

Jane felt her companion flinch, a motion she nearly duplicated. The city had been leveled between the rampaging of parasite-driven hosts and the army’s response. In the end, the government had doused the city with accelerants using crop dusters. They did it every hour until the river caught fire. Citizens and military greeted anyone that walked out of the ruins with flamethrowers. That blazing cordon was maintained up until the day the six of them had launched.

Jane kept trying. She thought she was being subtle until Vaughn snapped at her to stop being such a goddamn sympathizer. What was she, a parasite lover?

The question must have caught Travis’ attention, because not another twelve hours had passed before he began questioning her. “What were your motives for joining this team, anyway?” he asked at the next meal.

“Motives?” she’d replied blankly.

His smile was oily. He kept his gaze trained on her even as he took another forkful of MRE. “You seem to have some interesting beliefs about the parasites. It makes me wonder why you’re here at all.”

Jane shrugged. “This is important. We’re saving the species. And you have to admit, my chances here are better than they would have been staying.” Her wordless unease roused Octavia. Jane took a deliberate mouthful of stew.

“Because someone would have discovered you’re a host, you mean?”

The room had been quiet before, but it rang with the silence after. Jane chewed and swallowed, readying herself for an argument she’d hoped to have months later. Once they were on the planet, once they’d been working together and had built trust. “What the hell are you saying?” she’d asked, and that was when her companion screamed for her to jump left, NOW.

Jane tipped the chair over launching herself sideways, and the shot Travis had lined up under the table took Masters in the thigh instead. Jane hadn’t been aware that Travis had gone to the weapons locker, let alone come

prepared to kill her. Before Jane had rebounded from the wall, with Masters shrieking and doubled over to her right, Octavia spoke again.

Masters knew—he was sneaking up behind you to help Travis!

Who else? Jane demanded, dodging behind the biologist. The second shot wasn't long in coming.

“Get down, you idiot!” Travis thundered, and Masters started to slump.

As he did, Jane saw that Travis wasn't the only one armed. She yanked the gun free from where it stuck out of Masters' pocket, turning the biologist so he overbalanced and fell on the injured leg.

She got lucky with the shot. Travis dropped on the other side of the table. As he did so, Chalmers came pounding around the corner. Taking in the scene in one glance, she turned wide eyes to Jane.

“You monster,” she breathed.

Talk to her! Octavia demanded. *She was close to listening before!*

Jane drew breath to explain. When Chalmers' hands clenched into fists and she ran forward, Jane exhaled and shot Chalmers too. It took more than once to get the job done. When Masters rolled over and latched onto Jane's legs, she put a bullet into his head. Her hands shook so badly that she almost shot herself.

She managed to get to Travis and take his gun before Vaughn came into the room. Unlike Chalmers, he'd taken the time to find a weapon. He entered with it drawn.

Jane paused, lowering her gun. As mission lead, Vaughn was selected partially for his skill at deescalating stressful situations. She wished he'd gotten there sooner. “They—” she began, and he shot her. It spun her back and to the right, her shoulder in agony. Jane's companion wailed, and suddenly Jane's hands stabilized as though another set of hands had closed over hers.

“Can't we talk about this instead of firing guns *inside a spaceship?*” she shouted, and he drew a sight on her again.

He's not going to stop, Octavia whispered. *He thinks you're expendable and he can land the ship himself.* Jane dropped to the ground and managed to hit him, center mass.

Just like in training, Jane thought, and something like a whine or a giggle slipped out of her mouth. She slapped herself to stop it.

After, the silence closed in again. Jane crawled across the room to take Vaughn's gun. She put them in a pile and found the medical supplies.

Jane was panting and lightheaded by the time she had removed the bullet. Cleaning and bandaging the wound was only possible with her companion's help to steady her hands. Octavia shared her exhaustion, and tried to share solace. They were going to live. It was going to be okay. They'd get to the planet, as long as the gunfire hadn't disabled anything critical.

There was a quiet footstep. Fielding froze when her gaze and Jane's met across the room full of corpses.

"Are you going to try to kill me too?" Jane asked. Speaking each word was akin to dredging heavy stones out of the muck of her weariness.

"No," Fielding said in a soft, careful voice. Terror lay harshly on her features, stripping them down to the bone.

Yes, said Octavia.

Jane knew whom she believed.

"Then come help me figure out if we've destroyed anything on the ship," Jane said. Fielding was jumpy all the way to the bridge controls, settling only when they began to run diagnostics on each system.

Are you sure? Jane asked silently.

I don't want to die, her companion replied. Fielding didn't see it coming.

After, Jane couldn't stop shaking. She couldn't get warm. Staring down at Fielding's body, she made herself consider the practical. She could seed the corpses with the parasites she'd smuggled aboard in her one allowed item. The peanut butter had been enough to keep them alive until the colony world, but having five other sets of hands would be an asset.

And then, she thought, looking toward the stored cloning equipment, she'd make sure they started fresh on the new world. Symbiosis. Each clone would have a literal stake in making sure that both species survived.

"We're all in this together," Jane whispered. Octavia whispered back, *Yes.*

WHEN WORDS COLLIDE

August 10 – 12, 2018.

When Words Collide is an annual non-profit festival designed to bring readers and writers together in a celebration of the written word. Up to 10 tracks of programming, beginning at 1 PM on Friday and running through 5 PM Sunday, offer informational, educational, and social activities covering a wide spectrum of literature including Mystery, Science Fiction, Fantasy, Romance, Historical, Literary, Script-writing, Poetry, Comics, and Non-fiction. Roughly 650 readers, writers, editors, publishers, agents, and artists attend with over 200 presenters in our program.

The Delta Calgary South Hotel is located on Southland Drive in Calgary, Alberta.

See < [When Words Collide](#) >

BURNING ROSEMARY

by Karl Johanson

(Previously unpublished)

Smoke billowing into the room from the fireplace
fills the air with a scent that should be magical

Not the magic of epic fantasy
The castles,
the enchanted woods,
the faery dust
the Elves and their quests

Rather, the magic that makes the world brighter and more vivid
when you share a sensation with someone who matters

But I'm alone
the herb branches are all I have left to burn
and it's still February

HAYDEN TRENHOLM OFFERS EDITING SERVICE

As Managing Editor of Bundoran Press, I've edited more than 70 short stories in five anthologies and readied 12 novels for publication. As a mentor and teacher, I've worked with dozens of writers at all stages of their career, helping them shape their fiction and non-fiction and improve their writing. I spent 25 years writing research papers and editing a wide range of materials for senior bureaucrats and politicians, from speeches to articles and books.

I've published four novels of my own as well as nearly 30 short stories and have had several of my plays professionally produced on stage and radio. I've written numerous reports and articles on public policy.

My rates are competitive and generally comparable to industry standards. For each individual project, I provide an estimate of cost up front based on word count and the difficulty of the work. The more work the writer has done to prepare their final manuscript, the less they should expect to pay.

My services include substantive or structural editing of fiction (clarifying manuscripts for theme and structure), stylistic editing of non-fiction (for structure, clarity and language), and copy-editing of both fiction and non-fiction (grammar and other mechanics of style as well as consistency of content). I do not provide proof reading services.

Contact me at [Hayden Trenholm Editing](#)

THE WATER TOWER

by Kristin Janz

(Previously unpublished)

“What’s that building?” Tian asked.

When no one else spoke, I said, “Which building?” We could see several, through the wide, floor-to-ceiling window next to the sixth floor lunch table. “The one under construction, on the other side of the brook?”

The parking lot behind our facility, directly below us, abutted a long, narrow strip of conservation land, where shrubs and undergrowth surrounded a stream of questionable purity. Even more questionable, now that some developer was building another office park next to it.

“No, the one that’s always been there.” Tian gestured toward the window, into the distance. “On top of the hills. With trees around.”

The leafy suburbs stretching for miles beyond the construction site, beyond the highway, did rise slightly in elevation as one moved north and west. But “hills” was a generous description. We all squinted, trying to see.

“The round one?” Forest asked. “The one that looks like a classical Greek or Roman monument?” Like me, Forest was a lunch table regular. Most of our department ate downstairs in the cafeteria instead of bringing food from home, or at their desks. The lunch table was for those who wanted to socialize but felt no need to be seen doing so.

“Yes!” Tian nodded vigorously. “That one.”

I saw what he was talking about now, although I’d never noticed it before. “It looks like some kind of temple, with those columns going all the way around.”

“It’s a water tower.” Forest’s head was bent over his peanut butter and jelly sandwich, typical of the uninteresting lunches he brought. He was the only one not looking out the window. “Part of the municipal distribution system. They pump water up there and then it flows downhill to all the houses it supplies. That part’s gravity-based, so even if the power goes out, it takes several days to run out of water.”

“Oh.” Tian seemed disappointed to hear that it wasn’t anything more interesting.

I was a bit disappointed too. And because I had a mild crush on Forest, despite his boring lunches, I said, “Really? I thought you were going to tell us how it was actually the abandoned cult center of refugees from Atlantis.”

Forest and a couple others laughed, and the conversation moved on. However, when I glanced over at Forest once after that, he was staring at me, staring so intently that I started to feel uncomfortable.

Later that afternoon, I happened to look out the lab window into the hallway and saw Forest leaving my office, letting the door close behind him. He didn't look in my direction, although he had to know I was standing there with a direct line of sight to my office door. He walked away, hunched over a bit in that nerdy, slouching walk he had, headed for his own office or lab.

I found a folded sheet of lined paper on my desk, next to my keyboard. It had been torn out of the generic spiral notebooks our department secretary kept stocked in the supply cabinet, and was covered in writing in a cramped, dense hand.

The first line, addressed to me, read, "*It isn't a water tower, Violet.*"

It isn't a water tower, Violet. Not always.

I used to go walking in parks and nature preserves around here, at night. I would get lost, occasionally. One of those times, just before sunrise, it had been raining heavily, then stopped. Now it was drizzling. All my outer clothes were waterproof, but I kept having to take my glasses off and slip them up under my jacket to wipe them on my shirt.

Between night and day, rain and dry, standing by the edge of a stream with one foot in and the other out, I realized that I didn't recognize the place I now found myself. I didn't remember trees so tall, undergrowth so thick. I could still hear the hum of the city, a plane passing high overhead on its long approach to the airport, but as I moved away from the stream those sounds faded away and the wood was silent.

I walked among maple and hickory trees in the still, gray, pre-dawn, shouldering aside branches of sumac and elderberry, trampling through patches of raspberry and blackberry canes with white flowers. There was no animal life, no evidence even of insects or spiders. The only sounds were of my hiking boot soles cracking fallen twigs, of the branches I lifted brushing against others, of breezes through treetops high overhead.

Then I saw it through the trees ahead, rising from the crown of a hill. The water tower. I moved toward it. It was familiar; it would help me understand what was happening, where I was. The trees soon obscured it again, but I kept choosing my path wherever the land rose most steeply, heading for the summit where the water tower stood.

Strange trees began to mingle through the familiar: graceful, broad-leaved forms I'd never seen even in pictures. Ferns clustered around exposed roots, reaching up trunks. Fragrant flowers of white and pale pink drooped from branches; tiny green seed cones nestled among feather leaves.

The forest ended at the hill's summit. I emerged into the clearing. I stopped. The construction within the clearing could not be the water tower I knew. The size and round shape were the same, but between the decorative columns, arched doorways led into a dark interior. A garden surrounded the building, red brick paths radiating out as spokes from each doorway. No one appeared to have tended the garden in years. Tangles of vine spilled out of beds onto paths, yellow-flowered herbs poked up to widen the gaps between bricks. A small tree had sprung up in the middle of the path closest to me, near the clearing's edge.

I approached in silence. I entered the building, and found myself in a round, roofed courtyard much larger than it had appeared from outside. Some combination of my breathing and a gentle breeze from outside made the domed roof vibrate with a deep, barely perceptible hum. Like the garden, the courtyard showed signs of decay. The cracked stone fountain in the center had no wetness except what was all around, from the air, and the end of the flute played by the fountain's dancing faun figure had snapped off. Remnants of a mosaic clung to the ceiling, colors faded and the pattern impossible to pick out; when I took a step, fallen tiles cracked under my boots. The air smelled of old, damp stone; of dirt in an ancient cellar; of the moss growing out of crevices between the flagstones covering the ground.

"Hello?" My voice bounced around the ceiling vaults, louder than I'd expected. "Is anyone here?"

A moment of silence; then, behind me, a faint sound, like the hiss of a snake's belly on stone.

Heart hammering painfully in my chest, I turned around. A woman stood behind me, a woman in a white dress like those worn by classical statues in museums. A beautiful woman, only she carried her severed head on a gleaming silver platter held out in front of her, as if offering it to me. The bloodless stump of her neck glistened pink and red above her pale shoulders, but blood filled the platter to its brim. A large drop fell to splatter on the floor.

"Have you come to claim us?" the head asked, lips moving. The head had black hair dressed in elaborate curls pinned on top and at the sides, perfect white teeth, pink tongue and lips. Dirt showed under the nails of the hands holding the platter, and the fingertips were stained brown, like old blood.

I ran. Halfway across the courtyard my foot caught on a loose stone and I stumbled and fell, scraping my palms and knees. I scrambled back up and kept running, straight for the door in front of me that was farthest away from the one through which I—and the headless woman—must have entered. I knew there could be worse horrors waiting outside, but all I could think of was the hunger in the head's dark eyes.

I ran out across the threshold into the garden—and stopped. I wasn't in the garden. A large patch of newly-mown lawn, dotted with shrubs and small trees, stretched out in front of me. The lawn ended at the sidewalk alongside an ordinary city street. A blue Prius drove past. All the sounds of the city were back: the hum of cars near and distant, doors closing, the low drone of airplanes flying overhead. "All right, see you later!" a cheerful female voice called, and a moment later a male voice rumbled something inaudible in return.

I turned. I looked behind me. Had the Prius driver or anyone else seen me emerge from the tower? Because it was the water tower again, no door anywhere in sight and only slits of windows too narrow to climb through. Even those were all blocked off so that I couldn't see inside. The outer curved wall was smooth, gray stone surrounded by a chest-high layer of white-painted concrete. The columns that had been at ground level in the strange garden were now two or three stories overhead, small and pencil-like.

I should have been relieved by how easily I had made my escape. Instead, I walked around the tower twice. There was a door on the other side, a depressingly modern door, locked. I knocked, but no one answered.

Where had the garden disappeared to, the courtyard that was larger inside than out, the headless woman? I had interpreted the hunger in the head's eyes as a threat, but what if I was wrong? "*Have you come to claim us?*" Maybe she had wanted something else. I thought of how the garden lay untended, the courtyard in disrepair.

This part of the city was unfamiliar to me. I'd only ever seen the water tower from a distance. I walked downhill until I came to a street I recognized.

The garden and courtyard are lost to me now. I have tried to return. I've repeated the same late night walk under conditions similar and dissimilar. I waited until exactly one year had passed and attempted to duplicate my movements, as best as I could remember them. But it was clear that night one year later, clear and not raining, with an unmagically waxing gibbous moon. Did that make the difference? I don't know. I have never had another experience like that one, before or since, and who knows anything about these

matters? What happened to me is impossible and everyone who writes about such occurrences is making them up.

I can't help wondering if I was presented with a choice, in that woman's question. I didn't hear or see the choice, though, because I was afraid, and I ran. Is this how it happens, that the most important moments of one's life are missed because blind panic makes us incapable of hearing an invitation?

And this may be why I've told you my story.

I tried to avoid Forest after that. I considered taking my lunch downstairs to eat with the other young, single people from our department, but I was afraid that might provoke gossip. Forest and I were the only unmarried lunch table regulars, and we already endured tipsy queries about our relationship statuses when the department convened after work at the sports bar down the street. How would it look if I made a point of not being around him?

It wasn't that my crush on him went away, entirely. Even after the note, if he'd ever said to me, "Violet, do you want to get a drink after work today? Somewhere other than the bar down the street," I might have said yes. But I didn't know how to respond to the story about the impossible garden, about the water tower that was an enchanted courtyard, the headless woman. And should I be concerned that this overture that might have been romantic came with images of mutilated women dripping blood?

He seemed to want something from me, some deep level of understanding that I wasn't sure I could offer.

Once, at a company symposium in a different state, we ended up alone together for a few moments at a table in the hotel bar. He was drinking Miller Lite.

I tried to avoid eye contact, and I think he did, too. Finally, I said, "You know that story you showed me last year, the one about the water tower turning into some weird abandoned temple thing?" As if there had been other stories he'd shown me. As if the note hadn't been addressed to me. "It was really good. Do you write a lot of fiction?"

His eyes met mine. They were a blue so dark it was almost black.

"Sometimes. I read more than I write."

Was the look he gave me one of reproach, even betrayal? How could I know?

"Me too," I said. "Unless you count my lab notebook. Or patent applications."

He acknowledged the joke with a faint smile but didn't laugh. Soon our absent colleagues returned from the bathroom and the conversation returned to department gossip. Another biotech company was moving into the new office park on the other side of the conservation land. We traded unserious predictions of how their employees would train spy cameras on our labs to uncover trade secrets.

Tian came by and insisted on buying a round of drinks for everyone, even though he wasn't drinking himself. Forest declined the offer and got up from the table, indicating that Tian should take his seat. He said a general good-night to everyone, from which I felt oddly excluded. I watched him as he walked across the lobby, shoulders hunched forward, heading for the elevator and his room.

CREATIVE INK FESTIVAL – May 18 to 20, 2018

For detailed info go to <http://www.creativeinkfestival.com/index.html>

Venue: Delta Burnaby Hotel and Conference Centre, 4331 Dominion Street, Burnaby, B.C.

Presenters for this festival aimed at writers include Kevin Hearne (GoH), C.C. Humphreys (GoH), Eileen Kernaghan (GoH Emeriti), Mel Anastasiou, Donna Barker, Theresa S. Bazelli, Christel Bodenbender, Devon Boorman, R. Graeme Cameron, Brenda Carre, Jo-Anne Carson, Kristi Charish, Dwayne Clayden, Janine Cross, Choe Cocking, Mel Dawn, Linda DeMeulemeester, Adam Dreece, Claire Eamer, Neil Enock, Michael Fogal, Manny Frishberg, Tyner Gillies, Chadwick Ginther, Brian Hades, Kevin Harkness, Matt Hughes, Jim Jackson, Rissa Johnson, Randy McCharles, Tod McCoy, J.C. McKenzie, Trevor Melanson, Ellen Michelle, Joshua Pantalleresco, Rhonda Parrish, Kristene Perron, Wendy Phillips, Susan Pieters, Jonas Saul, Holly Schofield, T.G. Sheperd, Lisa Smedman, Jessica Steiner, Farida Somjee, Sadiq Somjee, Frank Talaber, Sylvia Taylor, Mark Teppo, Bevin Thomas, Michelle Vanderpol, Lisa Voisin, Katherine T. Wagner and others.

The festival will be a mix of what you'd find at a conference and a convention. There will be panels with several people discussing topics, single person presentations, and a banquet with keynote speech. There will also be readings by authors, displays by artists, an expo of people selling their goodies (books, art, etc), pitch ideas to editor sessions, Blue Pencil sessions where writers can get feedback on their writing from professionals, as well Kaffeeklatches where you get to sit down with one of our Guests of Honour to have coffee and chat in a more intimate setting (numbers will be limited to keep the groups small). Expect to come into a warm, welcoming and fun environment, while you learn more about your craft, network with people in the industry and make new connections!

The Graeme: "This is an exciting, high-energy, adrenalin-pumping, inspirational festival! Great fun!"

ALONG FOR THE RIDE

by Lisa Timpf

(Previously unpublished)

in my own garden
I've had cause to complain
about the tag-alongs, or worse,
the invaders brought deliberately
from another shore

the gypsy moths
a failed experiment
the subjects of which escaped;
the emerald ash-borers
hitching a ride
to emerge
with a forest-sized
appetite

purple loosestrife, zebra mussels,
sea lampreys, long-horned beetles—

surely when we spin out into space
we'll scrutinize our cargo
ensuring nothing slithers, scurries,
or drifts aboard
unauthorized
to ravage other planets

yet the universe enjoys a good laugh
as much as anyone
and as far as the rest
of the galaxy's concerned
humans
might just be
the next invasive species

CHOCOLATE MOUSSE

by Michelle Buchanan

(Previously unpublished)

She usually throws the gloves off after an hour, once they're soaked through. She has two pairs, after that she just goes at it with her bare hands. By then she's usually sweltering in the plastic suit anyways, so she needs to take something off. Her hands suffer for it. The welts go right up her arm. After work she washes them in the cold salty water. It helps. The government gives her a dollar thirty for every ten litre bucket she takes back to the dock. She can fill a bucket with chocolate mousse pretty quick, but the paddling back to the dock takes up much of the day as they can only fit ten buckets in the canoe per trip. Sometimes they only get in two trips, depending on where they've been sent. More often, especially in winter, they don't get any trips in, because the sea is so rough.

A government scientist once described the crude oil that drifts in from the sea and settles between the rocks as being hard on the surface, but like mousse once you crack into it. That's why everyone calls it mousse. Elsie and Molly added the chocolate part themselves, because it looks like chocolate, but also because they like to convince themselves that the odor, when they dig into it, is like the scent of burnt chocolate. Somehow it makes the acrid smell that gets stuck in their noses and permeates their hair and clothing, and all of their belongings, more bearable.

Out on the shores, when they're working, it is always quiet. There is only the sound of their shovels, the squeaky sound of their suits as they dig, and the lapping of the waves. Two or three times a day an airplane flies overhead, sometimes high above the clouds, other times swooping low and loud above them. Most days they spot a gull or two. In some bays, there are mussels, oysters, and barnacles, and long leafy strands of seaweed. Elsie says they used to eat the oysters and mussels along the coast here when her mother was a girl, but no one eats them anymore. The bays they work in are coves of speckled grey granite, sandy limestone, and black igneous rock, where the chocolate mousse collects.

On days when the sea is too rough for them to go out, Molly hikes over to one of the wide open beaches to look at the stones. There are so many shades, black, red, white, brown, and green, and sometimes sea glass. There's not as much plastic as there used to be. Elsie says it's because there are ships that

scoop the plastic up and recycle it now. Once, when Elsie was with her, they found a stone tool. It was bigger than their hands, made of a lightweight, translucent rock, and fashioned with strikes across the surface and along the edges, to make it sharp. Elsie stood holding it in the place they found it for a long time. “This is probably thousands of years old, Molly.” Molly nodded, appreciative, but Elsie’s brow furrowed. “People have lived here for thousands of years Molly, off the land, off what the sea provided.”

Gold light illuminates the river that feeds iridescent, orange-streaked water through the sandy delta beside the dock and out into the sea. They unload the canoe and stand for a moment to take a look at the tug passing by them. The barge it pulls is low, heavy in the water. It is full of petroleum products made from the crude oil extracted from sands north and east of here. The crude is piped to the refineries along the coast and shipped to the sprawling metropolis of Anchor City in Alaska. Inside the shed on the dock Elsie radios John for pick up. She uploads the geotagged photos she took of the buckets and logs in their total on the terminal.

Tomorrow is the day they get their supplies: black beans, oats, onions, corn oil, tea; and if they’ve had a good haul, which they did this month, a chocolate supplement bar for each of them. They’ve already put in their order, spending all that was owing to them, but they talk about it anyway as they strip off their outer layer and head into the shipping container to get out of the mist that settles on their hair and faces. They agree that the beans will be a good change from the lentils they’ve been eating for months. Half of the container acts as government storage for cleanup gear, the other half is where they live. They start up the stove to boil the last of their water from the cistern; they’ll get more of that delivered tomorrow too.

A thick fog folds in around the open door. Molly gazes out into the gray emptiness. They never close the door, no matter how bad the weather. They are afraid they might trap themselves inside, with no one around to let them out if they did. There are other cleaners like them scattered up and down the coast. Elsie knows some of them. She calls them their people. She means they are her relatives and friends who lived on this coast and inland along the rivers long before the oil companies came. She says they are Molly’s people too, but Molly can’t remember much about them; she’s been out on these rocks so long.

Molly remembers her father telling her that his people were from some place far away. Ms. Anderson, a teacher Molly had when she still went to school, told her she was different from Elsie, not only because her dad wasn’t

of this place, but because her mother was mixed too. “You’re only one quarter, or maybe less, maybe just one sixteenth,” she said. Ms. Anderson said that she was letting her know to make sure she was informed, so that she wouldn’t assume she had rights to the territory. She remembers nodding when Ms. Anderson said this, as though she understood, like there was sense or logic in it all, but she knew there wasn’t; all she’s ever known is this place, and how can you divide a person up into halves and quarters and one sixteenths? Not long after that conversation she got given this job anyway. John said they’ve been cracking down on people who aren’t numbered though, so maybe she won’t have it for long.

Their people, Elsie says, used to be called caretakers. A man, much older than Elsie, once came up from the south in a power boat driven by a government worker. He stepped on the dock, touched their heads, told them they were beautiful, and cried long tears that drifted down his cheeks. He told them about caretaking, how for generations it meant actually caring for the land, protecting it, not cleaning up the mess others left behind. He looked at their buckets, at their thin, welt-covered hands and left almost as soon as he arrived, tears still drifting down his cheeks. “His father was the chief,” Elsie said. “The chief was hit by a truck and left for dead on a back road one dark winter night. Some say it was because he’s the one who set the machines on fire, but I don’t think he did it.”

Sometimes on damp evenings like this, Elsie pulls out a threadbare woven blanket from the bottom fold of her foam mattress, slings it over her shoulders, and tells Molly stories about all sorts of wild animals Molly has never seen except in the books at school. “Why don’t you ever tell stories about elephants or tigers?”

“These ones I speak of were our neighbours,” Elsie says.

“Where are they now?” Molly asks, but Elsie never answers her. Tonight they sit in their government-issued sleeping bags on their mattresses, thinking about tomorrow and the delivery.

Molly wakes up in the morning, ravenous, but there is no water left for cooking or tea. They gear up and head out in the canoe right away to make time go faster before the delivery. On the beach they crack and dig the chocolate mousse, dropping it into the plastic buckets in shovelfuls. Molly imagines it to be real chocolate mousse, and before she knows what she has done, as though someone else were controlling her body, she brings a mounded shovelful to her mouth, and eats, and eats, forcing it in wretched smelly gulps down into her stomach, mouthful after mouthful after mouthful.

Elsie doesn't notice until it is too late. A lone gull flies above them as Molly lies on her back. She is calling, like the gull, something undecipherable to Elsie, a plea. The chocolate mousse covers Molly's lips and chin and the tip of her nose. It slides down into her hair and ears, and around the edges of her dark eyes. They hear the delivery boat arriving from out in the bay, the motor roaring, louder and louder as it approaches, sounding like the planes that rumble above them every day. Elsie is on her knees, shrieking. Molly's eyes pivot, from Elsie to the sea, to the gull still flying overhead, white and grey wings against a flat, grey, sky.



In 1989, a small group of Edmonton writers formed The Copper Pig Writers Society in order to fill a niche in Canada—a paying market for English SF.

SF with a uniquely Canadian Perspective.

After selling out our initial print run of a test issue filled with stories sent to us by invitation, we began receiving inquiries as to when the “next one” would appear. That was a very long time ago. Editors have come and gone, and we are proud that some of them have made significant contributions to Canada’s literary scene, by becoming novelists.

Our little quarterly journal, *On Spec* adheres to a strong mandate that has served us well over the years. We discover and showcase quality works by predominantly Canadian writers and artists, in the genre we call “Fantastic” literature. We foster the growth of emerging writers in this genre, by offering support and direction through constructive criticism, education, mentoring, and manuscript development. We try to publish as many new writers as possible, alongside works by established writers, and we also endeavour to support these writings with innovative cover art for every mind-bending and emotion-provoking issue!

We love to get to as many events as we can, and you can often find an *On Spec* table in the Dealer room of your regional or national convention (come by the table and say “Hi”). If you’re interested in having *On Spec* come to your event, please contact us at onspec@onspec.ca with the details.

Contents of issue 106:

Features new fiction from: Marissa Lingen & Alec Austin, Al Onia, James Van Pelt, Claude Lalumière, and Robert Runté.

Poetry from: Daniel Ausema.

Non-Fiction from: Madison Pilling, Vanessa Cardui, Timothy Reynolds, and Candas Jane Dorsey.

Cover art by Corey Lansdell

See < [On Spec Magazine](#) >

SKUNKA WARAK'IN

by Richard Stevenson

(Previously unpublished)

Ringdocus. Skunka Warak'in,
that's quite the schnozzola
you be packin'! Lotta nasty teeth!
Sloped back hyena/wolf chunka
the cryptid canine critter line

Oh, what a fate to be shot and stuffed,
leer frozen forever first in Sherwood's
grocery/museum in Henry Lake, Idaho.
From there? I dunno. East Rubber Boot, maybe,
mangy hide full of dust and mites

Maybe you'll show up again in
an episode of Storage Locker Wars—
end up in some guy's rumpus room,
or create a little ruckus on the Internet
when the successful bidder tries to score.

Ringdocus. Skunka Warak'in,
whatever DNA you be packin',
I hope we don't file you away
with a genus and species right away.
You'd look better with a chicken in yer mouth,

skedaddlin' back into the hills of Kentucky
or somewhere you might just get lucky,
find a mate, settle down and raise some kits.
How could the big poultry farms miss
a few chickens, a few eggs to get you started again?

FIFTY IS A MAGICAL NUMBER

Véronique Aglat

(Previously unpublished)

Maude let the body slide off her wheelbarrow and into the pit. She opened her bag and threw in a dead racoon, roadkill found on the road. It didn't add much, but why the hell not?

A strong odor of rotten eggs and burned flesh emanated from the hole, and she held a silk scarf over her nose before peeking over the edge. The racoon and dead body of the once-young stud were now upright, twitching around like puppets on strings. Other puppets poked them with hot irons.

Eternal life comes in many forms, but not all of them are pleasant.

That bastard belonged there. If he had treated an old woman with respect, he wouldn't have ended up in the anus of the world, damned for all eternity. Old people know what it's like to be young, but the opposite is not true. The young snicker at the old because they're slower or because they smell funny, and in Maude's book, those were capital offenses.

So far, she had "treated" forty-nine offenders.

Damned souls looked up at Maude with despair in their eyes, but they couldn't touch her. She waved at them from her perch, kneeling in the fresh grass, listening to the cicadas, and smiling a predatory grin. She spread her arms and it didn't take long. Their hate rose like a heat wave and she basked in it. She absorbed every ounce of anguish from them, and was hungry for more. She needed it as much as food and water now.

She leaned away, standing up with slightly more ease than when she dropped number Forty-eight, and considerably more ease than when she dropped number Thirty-eight. Her knees had stopped hurting at number Twenty-two, her back at number Thirty, and her breasts stopped flirting with her navel after number Thirty-two. She'd been thinking about fucking again. How delicious.

All right, maybe there weren't forty-nine capital offenses. Maybe the first one, Harold (a lovely man) who she dated for years (as much as an eighty-four years old woman can date), did not deserve that hole. In the nursing home, they were known as Harold and Maude, even if

he was older by a few years. One day he made a remark that pissed her off, and she had to find out if what the red man told her was true.

All the faces were just a blur now, vague milestones on her journey; Vigor “vivis” instead of rigor mortis. How she had hated that slow march to death.

She didn’t want to dwell on right and wrong anymore.

Her car was still at the curb. She got in and immediately headed towards downtown Montreal to find prey. It was three hours away, but the red man had told her that fifty was a magical number. At Fifty, something happened, and she was dying to know what.

Ha! Dying. She laughed out loud at her dark humor.

It was raining, and it meant the refuse of society—the drug addicts, the alcoholics, the leeches—would be huddled together at the Berri metro station. She would have to circle around, look for a stray and provoke him into saying something demeaning to her. It was the only way this murderous telekinesis power worked. Like the Hulk, she had to be angry.

The car’s engine sputtering interrupted her planning. It coughed some more and stopped. She rolled to the shoulder, cursing. *What now?* The car had less than 60,000 kilometers. The engine shouldn’t be stalling.

She knew very little about cars, but she found the hood lever, heard it clunk, and stepped out. She lifted the hood, marveling at how easy it was. Bending over the engine compartment, she could see nothing out of the ordinary. She risked touching a wire, it was very hot, too hot. As she straightened out, a fantastic explosion of stars on black velvety background hit her field of vision. The whole world went dark.

When she came to her senses, she felt pulses of pressure on her stomach at half second intervals, her arms weighed down by gravity. She opened her eyes and a rush of fresh pain flooded her consciousness.

All she saw was red. Red jacket, red pants, dark grass. She realized she was thrown over the shoulder of the red man. She fought against the mass, but the grip on her legs just became tighter. Maude made tight fists and pounded the hard back, but the compression around her legs became worse.

She squinted and looked around, her eyes adapting to the darkness. A fresh pang of panic surged and paralyzed her. A slight smell of rotten eggs lingered in the air.

“You will make a fine sacrifice, Maude,” said the devil.

“I didn’t get fifty! You have to let me get fifty!”

“You are number fifty. It’s a fifty for one deal. Just imagine the intensity of their hate when I toss you alive in that pit. I may double in power.”

Maude kicked, pounded, and punched where the kidneys of the red man should have been. She took a pin from her hair and attempted to stab the crimson creature, but the pin snapped.

With uncanny strength and speed, the devil pulled Maude forward and suspended her above the pit; tight, burning rings circling her ankles. The wave of hate rising from the puppets below gave Maude a boost. Tightening her abdominal muscles, Maude reached up to grab an arm, a nose, even just a button on the red jacket, but the devil opened his hands. She fell, head first, into the arms of her forty-nine victims.

The red man glowed like the sun for a second, seeming to grow. The stinking pit, a sulfuric sphincter, closed quickly. With silent steps the devil headed back to the car, on his way to find the next nursing home; the elderly were so easy to recruit.

DARK DRAGON PRESS OPENS SUBMISSION WINDOW

From April 1, 2018 to August 1, 2018.

CANADIAN DREADFUL will be an anthology of short stories between 2,500 and 10,000 words, each one set in one of the provinces or territories of Canada. We are looking for horror stories written by Canadians that employ elements of dark fantasy or magical realism. We welcome new authors and well experienced authors.

Dark Fantasy combines fantasy and horror and creates a suspenseful, dread-inducing mood for the reader. A movie like “Pan’s Labyrinth” is an excellent example of this genre. You are welcome to utilize the darker elements of fantasy so as long as the story takes place in the real world, not a mythical one.

Payment: Unfortunately, we are unable to provide a one-time, upfront fee for your story. We will be offering a royalty percentage. See <http://darkdragonpublishing.com/>

AN UNPUBLISHABLE SEQUEL TO THE END OF THE WORLD

by J.J. Steinfeld

(Previously published in *Illumen* (US))

It is a million years hence
from when it just happened
something like a lamentable B-movie
from the late 1950s or early 1960s
certainly not in memorable whimper
or big or little existential bang
not in anything definable or identifiable
nothing anticipated, imagined, or envisioned
apocalyptic or cataclysmic—it simply occurred
something nebulous between
a devious plan and a dark, dark joke
the slate, however, wiped clean as oblivion,
the cockroaches, of course,
hung on, concerned neither
with devious plans nor dark, dark jokes
no comprehension of endings
no comprehensible regrets
no diagnosable anxiety
or fear of non-existence
in other words, no nothing
worth writing home about
that is, if there had been anything left
resembling home or hearth
merely bystanders, so to speak,
to the end of the world
scurrying about as before
but caught in some sort
of evolutionary plan or joke
as evolving was in order
in a million years or so
as remarkable in intellect and aspirations
as those before the world ended

and a handful evolved
 into something like poets
 one of whom wrote a sequel
 to the end of the world
 but could not find a publisher
 who hadn't outlawed in strongest terms
 the language and words and sentiments
 used by those who had been there
 before the end of the world.



Once upon a time, a British bookseller named James Lackington made books affordable for nearly everyone. It was the late eighteenth century, literacy was on the rise, but books were still a luxury item for many Londoners. Lackington changed that by popularizing the cheap “remainder” and making a tidy profit for himself, in the bargain.

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

Stylized prose can be sparse and simple, diamond-cut like the writing of Ursula K. Le Guin. It can be sumptuous like the writing of Oscar Wilde. It can be epic, archaic, experimental, mythic, rhythmic, and it can be quiet and subtle, too. Story and character are indispensable, but so is wordcraft. We trade in aesthetics, so

make us gasp with unexpected words and give us inventive voices, structures, and narratives. Many editors reject heavily stylized prose out of hand. We welcome it.

Contents of issue 16:

Cover by Paula Arwen Owen

See < [Lackington's Magazine](#) >

Lamplighter's Eve, by Kate Dollarhyde

Original Order, by Natalie Ritter

A Summary of Menistarian Law, Composed for the Citizens of Olakia, in Response to Our Present Crisis by Dr. Clemons Indement, as received and translated by Joseph Tomaras

The Maiden's Path, by D.K. Latta

Yuck! Ogle, by N. Muma Alain

The Master of Hourglasses, by Alexandra Seidel

CELSIUS 233

By Robert Dawson

(Previously unpublished)

Middle Cove Consolidated High had dismissed at noon, and the last bus had rolled out of the snow-dusted parking lot. We gathered in the staff room for cookies, an unofficial glass of wine, and the Secret Santa gift swap.

Somebody handed a small rectangular parcel to Cory Hoffmann, the vice-principal. The room fell silent. Rumors had been circulating all week, and nobody wanted to miss Cory's reaction. He tore away the wrapping, revealing a paperback book, its cover lurid orange.

I held my breath.

It had started one Friday in October.

"I need some help in the library after school," Cory said. "Won't take long if everybody pitches in." The staff room fell silent.

Cory had only been vice-principal for two months, and it was clear he saw it as a step towards something bigger. He'd whip us into shape, the principal would notice and approve, and then the School Board would offer him the plum job that he deserved. In the meantime, his voluntary work-parties were getting tiresome.

"Installing more computers?" I asked.

"No, Fred, weeding shelves. There's a lot of stuff we need to get rid of. Stuff that doesn't belong in a school library."

"*Huckleberry Finn*?" Dahlia Chen, the English teacher, sighed. "*The Catcher In The Rye*? Have the Christian Decency League sent you another list?"

"Don't worry, Dahlia, I'm not going to touch your precious works of literature. It's the old science books. Some of them just shouldn't be in a school library."

"Creationism? Steady-state cosmology?"

"No, the Imperial system. All those old-fashioned unscientific units. Length in feet, mass in pounds—in the twenty-first century!"

"The pound is a unit of *force*, Corey," said Jamila Al-Din, the senior physics teacher. "Like the newton."

"Mass, force, it's still unscientific."

"Isaac Newton never used the metric system in his life."

“Only because it wasn't there,” Cory said, and stood up. “Anyhow, I want to see you all in the library at three-thirty. Many hands make light work!”

“Three-thirty? That doesn't sound very scientific. What's that in Universal Atomic Time?” asked Jamila.

Corey stalked out of the room.

Books covered the library tables; an untidy heap of printer-paper boxes sprawled on the floor.

“You can't get rid of all these!” said Jamila.

“They're totally out of date, and they contradict what we teach in class. Young minds need consistency.”

I picked up a Dover paperback edition of Darwin's *Origin of Species*. “There's been a mistake. You're not going to sell this? It's one of the classics of science!”

“Sell?” Cory said. “We're not *selling* them. They're outdated, bad for education: we're getting rid of them permanently. We'll take them out back and burn them. Quietly and respectfully, the way we teach our students to dispose of a worn-out flag.”

“This is ridiculous!” said the shop teacher. “The new woodworking textbook talks about five-centimeter-by-ten-centimeter studwood. Try asking for a length of *that* on a building site. They'd—” She stopped abruptly as a black-clad figure appeared from a study carrel: Jayden Steinhouse-Harris, in my Grade 11 biology class.

“Sorry, didn't know you were having a meeting,” he said. “I'll go do my English assignment somewhere else.”

The door closed. Stewart Blayre, the Culinary Arts teacher, was the next to speak. “My students tell me they have to learn to cook all over again if they want to use their family recipes.”

Cory grew red in the face. “We're here to guide the next generation as they educate themselves, not to drill them on out-of-date folklore!”

Dahlia picked a dog-eared paperback copy of *Fahrenheit 451* off the table. “I thought you said you weren't getting rid of literature?” she said quietly.

He took the book from her. “Only the most blatant cases. Not everything with units in, obviously. But on the cover?” He tapped the title with his finger.

“So what else are you getting rid of? Ezra Pound?” Dahlia asked. Somebody snickered.

“*The Courtship of Miles Standish?*” Stewart suggested. “*My Left Foot?*”

“Cut it out, people!” Cory said. “Let’s get this done and go home.”

I walked over and took the library copy of the Grade 10 biology textbook off the shelf. “Better get rid of this, too. I’ll have the kids turn their copies in tomorrow.”

“What do you mean? That’s the metric edition.”

“Oh, yeah?” I flipped through the pages. “‘Dinosaurs first appeared about 235 million years ago.’ The year isn’t an SI unit.”

“And the physics textbook uses minutes and hours,” said Jamila. “And temperatures in Celsius, not Kelvin. And liters.”

“Liters are SI,” said Cory weakly.

“The hell they are. Go look it up.” It was the first time I’d heard Jamila swear. Her lips were pale with anger.

“Well, they’re *defined* in terms of SI units.”

“So are feet and pounds. Since the nineteen-fifties.” She folded her arms defiantly.

The library door swung open, and a short woman bustled in with a mini-camcorder. A familiar face. A parent. Jayden’s mom.

“Hi there!” she said. “I’m Suzanne Harris from the City Light newsvlog. I heard there might be a story here.” She aimed the camera at Cory, who stood like a deer in car headlights, still holding the Bradbury novel.

Cory slowly shook his head. “No, Ms. Harris. No story.” He took a long shaky breath. “We’re just here to put a bunch of books back onto the shelves.” He picked up a few more volumes and studied their spine labels as if it was his first acquaintance with the Dewey Decimal System. We looked at each other, shrugged, and joined in.

The rumors were right. Somebody had given Cory a French translation of Bradbury’s novel. And, yes, it was called *Celsius 233*.

He finished unwrapping the book, poker-faced. Nobody else moved. Slowly, wordlessly, he scrunched the wrapping paper into a tight ball.

He grinned. “So, Jamila: what’s that in Kelvin?” he asked. Then he tossed the ball of paper across the room, an expert one-handed bank shot into the recycling bin.



ABOUT THE AUTHORS AND ARTISTS

Véronique Aglat

Believes that if you don't feel a sense of awe when looking at the night sky on a clear day, you are not really looking. She spent half her adult life pursuing careers that fit her like chastity belts. For about ten years now, she pays the bills by doing freelance translation work. She devotes the rest of her time to writing short stories for both adults and children. She lives in Montreal, Quebec, with her husband and their two sons.

Colleen Anderson

My poetry has been twice nominated for the Aurora Award, the Rhysling, and won second place in the Crucible and Rannu competitions. I have co-edited three anthologies. Some recent poems are in *Devolution Z*, *The Future Fire*, *Eternal Haunted Summer*, and *Heroic Fantasy Quarterly*. My speculative poetry collection *Ancient Tales, Grand Deaths and Past Lives* is available through Kelp Queen Press.

Craig H. Bowsby

I have published some recent short fiction. This includes one short story placed this year in the Megan Survival Anthology, entitled *Bota and the Swarm* which is part of the continuing Okal Rel science fiction series created by Lynda Williams. (Lynda's ten novel series was originally published by Edge Science Fiction). I also recently sold a short story entitled *One Day in Tom's Life, With Ice Cream*, to the science fiction magazine *Neo-Opsis*, in Victoria. The "Ice Cream" story will be coming out in their issue 30, in 2018.

Michelle Buchanan

Michelle Buchanan grew up in Nanaimo B.C., in the Friulian immigrant community of her step-father. Her mother is second generation Welsh/Cumbrian/Danish. Her family often ate what they grew and what the coast provided, venison, trout, smelts, herring, wild mushrooms, and dandelion greens. When she wrote *Chocolate Mousse*, Michelle had recently confirmed that her "Scotch" father also had indigenous ancestry (nation yet unknown). She is interested in the question, what is lost and never recovered by the colonization or industrialization of a place, and also, how do we set the groundwork for doing better, in this respect, for our environment and our collective communities, especially indigenous communities, in the future?

Michelle Buchanan's non-fiction writing has been published by *The Globe & Mail*, *The Georgia Straight*, *GardenWise Magazine*, *Times Colonist*, *Eat Magazine*, *Touchwood Editions*, and other publications. She is the author and publisher of *Rolling Up*, a collection of short fiction. *Chocolate Mousse* is her first science fiction piece to be published. She shares her time between Victoria and Quadra Island, B.C.

Jonathan Cresswell-Jones

Lives and works in Kingston, Ontario as a graphic designer, with short works published in *On Spec*, *Polar Borealis*, and the anthology *Ring of Fire*. He is co-author of the SF novel *Texas Front: Salient*, set in the *Great Martian War* series.

Catherine Girczyc

Currently, I'm working as a technical writer and writing prose, poetry & scripts. Two of my stories have won honorable mentions in the Writers of the Future contest in 2015.

Previously, I had some success as a television writer with fifteen produced TV scripts to my credit. I'm a two-time Canadian Aurora Science Fiction and Fantasy national award winner, for fan activities in the 90s: hosting an SF radio show, *The Ether Patrol*, and editing a fanzine called *Neology*.

Robert Dawson

Teaches mathematics at a Nova Scotian university. In his spare time he writes, fences, and hikes. His stories have appeared in *Nature Futures*, *AE*, *Perihelion*, and numerous other periodicals and anthologies. He is a graduate of the Sage Hill and Viable Paradise writing workshops.

Neile Graham

I heard of *Polar Borealis* through the SF Canada list. I am a Canadian writer who lives and works in Seattle, where I am workshop director for the Clarion West Writers Workshop for speculative fiction—work that I just won a World Fantasy Award for. My publications include three full-length print collections, most recently *Blood Memory*, and a CD, *She Says: Poems Selected & New*, and have poems in various on-line and print journals, including *Strange Horizons*, *Lady Churchill's Rosebud Wristlet*, and *Kaleidotrope*. Two new collections, *The Walk She Takes* and *Cedar and Stone*, are forthcoming in 2019.

Stewart Graham

Works full time in a furniture warehouse in Vancouver. Sometimes they let him drive a forklift. Just about the only time he gets to sit down on the job. Whenever he sleeps on the job they yell at him. Keeps him awake, that does. But mostly he fantasizes about being a writer. The fame. The acclaim. The groupies. You know the drill. Figured he'd give it a try. *House of Burning Tires* is his first sale.

Kristin Janz

Was born in Vancouver, and has since crossed the continent three times, ending up most recently in Boston, Massachusetts. She is a Clarion West graduate and Writers of the Future finalist whose fiction has appeared in *Escape Pod*, *Daily Science Fiction*, and *On Spec*. Along with her husband, Donald S. Crankshaw, she is also an editor of the online magazine *Mysterion* (<http://www.mysteriononline.com>), dedicated to publishing speculative fiction that explores Christian themes (although not exclusively from Christian perspectives). Her many distractions from writing include cooking, gardening (growing vegetables to cook with), mixing cocktails (like cooking, but with alcohol), and reading cookbooks.

The water tower in the story is real ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arlington_Reservoir_\(Arlington,_Massachusetts\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arlington_Reservoir_(Arlington,_Massachusetts))) and does look like a classical temple when seen from a distance with the lower part hidden by trees. The veracity of other details is left to the reader's imagination.

Karl Johanson

Is the editor of *Neo-opsis Science Fiction Magazine*, which has won two Aurora Awards, and a former editor of the four-time Aurora winning magazine *Under the Ozone Hole*. Karl's publication credits include work in *On Spec Magazine*, *Sci Phi Journal*, *Monday Magazine*, *Perihelion*, *Stitches: The Magazine of Medical Humour*, and the anthology *Here Be Monsters: 7*. As a writer/designer/tester of computer games, Karl has done work for North Star Games, Disney Interactive, and Sanctuary Woods Multimedia. Many of the games were science fiction or fantasy related.

Judy McCrosky

Judy McCrosky has worked as a psychologist, psychometrist, classical musician, and weaver. Finally, with a sigh of relief, she discovered writing. She is published in many genres, including science fiction, fantasy, romance, literary fiction, and non-fiction. She's had seven books published and her short stories have appeared in magazines and have been broadcast on CBC Radio. She designed and ran a Creative Writing program on Holland America Cruise Line's four-month Round the World cruise and gave a workshop on the creative process to employees of one the most creative companies in the world—Google. She lives in Saskatoon, has two adult children who don't live in Saskatoon, and two dogs who do.

Lena Ng

Lena Ng is a writer and poet from Toronto, Ontario. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in several anthologies and magazines including: *Just Desserts* (WolfSinger Publications, 2016), *World Unknown Review III* (Editor L.S. Engler, 2016), *Devolution Z* (Jan 2017 issue), *Monsters Among Us* (Bloody Kisses Press, 2017), *Polar Borealis Magazine* (July/Aug 2017 issue), *Gathering Storm Magazine Issue 2* (April 2017), *Gathering Storm Magazine Issue 4* (Aug 2017), *Antimattermag.com* (Oct 4, 2017), *The Quilliad Issue 9* (Oct 2017) and *Killing It Softly 2* (Digital Fiction Publishing Corp, October 2017). *Under an Autumn Moon* is her collection of horror/fantasy short stories. She is currently seeking a publisher for her first novel, *Darkness Beckons*, a gothic romance set in the Victorian era.

Jean-Pierre Normand

Jean-Pierre is a professional illustrator, specializing in science fiction and fantasy for the past 35 years. Over two hundred book and magazine covers featuring his work have been published in Canada and the United States. He generally works in ink and liquid acrylic, applied with brush and air-brush on illustration board or canvas.

His work has been shown at various conventions and other exhibits, winning several awards, notably the Aurora for artistic achievement in Canada in 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2001 and 2004. His work has been published in *Spectrum*, *the best in contemporary fantasy art*, and appeared on the covers of *Asimov's Science Fiction*, *Analog*, *On Spec* and *Science fiction Chronicle*. He worked on set-conception for the

movie *The Adventures of Pluto Nash* and designed machinery for the production *Océania*.

This cover painting previously published.

Y. M. Pang

Spent her childhood pacing around her grandfather's bedroom, yelling stories of magic, swords, and bears. Her work is forthcoming in Book Smugglers Publishing and *The Razor's Edge*. She dabbles in photography, listens to music in a multitude of languages, and often finds herself debating the merits of hermitism. Find her online at www.ympang.com or on twitter as @YMPangWriter.

Helen Power

Helen Power is a librarian, writer, and fridge magnet connoisseur living in Windsor, Ontario. In her spare time, she haunts deserted cemeteries, loses her heart to dashing thieves, and cracks tough cases, all from the comfort of her writing nook. You can find her detailed bio, book reviews, short stories, and other writing at www.helenpower.ca

Rhea Rose

Rhea has published many speculative fiction and poetry pieces in: *Evolve*, *Tesseract 1,2,6,9,10,17, 20*, *On Spec*, *Talebones*, *Northwest Passages*, *Masked Mosaic*, *Dead North* and *49th Parallels*. She has received honorable mentions in the Year's Best Horror Anthologies and was reprinted in *Christmas Forever* (edited by David Hartwell), twice made the preliminaries for the Nebula Award, and has been nominated for the Rhysling award. She edited a poetry collection for Edge Press and for many years hosted the Vancouver Science Fiction and Fantasy (VCON) Writers' workshops. She teaches Creative Writing and Drawing and Painting. Recent works include: *Cruising Glaciers* (49th Parallels), 'Gel Theta One (Tesseract 20), Poetry for Polar Borealis issues #1 and #6. Twice an Aurora Nominee, Rhea has an MFA in creative writing. Recently, she was elected as a member of the FLSS board for her home town's Arts and Culture umbrella where she introduces writers to Writing Wonder.

Lynne Sargent

Lynne Sargent is a writer and philosopher based in Hamilton, Ontario. When she is not writing you can find her performing circus with Steel the Sky Aerial Arts. You can find more of her poetry existent or forthcoming from *Strange Horizons*, *Wild Musette*, and *Lycan Valley Press*. She is a 2018 Rhysling award nominee.

J. J. Steinfeld

Fiction writer, poet, and playwright J. J. Steinfeld lives on Prince Edward Island, where he is patiently waiting for Godot's arrival and a phone call from Kafka. While waiting, he has published eighteen books, including *Would You Hide Me?* (Stories, Gaspereau Press, 2003), *Misshapenness* (Poetry, Ekstasis Editions, 2009), *Identity Dreams and Memory Sounds* (Poetry, Ekstasis Editions, 2014), *Madhouses in Heaven, Castles in Hell* (Stories, Ekstasis Editions, 2015), *An Unauthorized Biography of Being* (Stories, Ekstasis Editions, 2016), and *Absurdity, Woe Is Me, Glory Be* (Poetry, Guernica Editions, 2017). His short stories and poems have appeared in numerous periodicals and anthologies internationally, and over fifty of his one-act plays and a handful of full-length plays have been performed in Canada and the United States.

Lorina Stephens

I have had short fiction published in *On Spec*, *Strangers Among Us*, *Postscripts to Darkness*, *Neo-Opis*, *Stories of the Deluge*, and *Sword & Sorceress X*. I have had seven books published, both fiction and non-fiction, and for a time in my more energetic days, worked as a freelance writer for newspapers and periodicals, both regional and national.

These days I growl away in the loft-office of this grand old stone house, juggling administrative necessities in the glass business my husband and I operate, captain the publishing house Five Rivers Publishing, and sometimes even write, maybe paint. You can catch up with me at my personal website www.lorinastephens.com.

Richard Stevenson

Has recently retired from a thirty-year gig teaching Creative Writing and English for Lethbridge College. My two most recent books are *Rock, Scissors, Paper: The Clifford Olson Murders* (a long poem sequence forthcoming from Dreaming Big Publications, 2017) and *A Gaggle of Geese* (haiku, senryu, tanka, kyoka, zappai and haikai sequences from Alba Publishing in the U.K.)

Edwin Tam

I am Toronto-born, Montreal-raised, and Vancouver-employed in the health field for last two decades. I've enjoyed reading SF short stories most of my life (discovered Asimov and Clarke in high school), and have tried my hand at writing on and off for years. I've started on my quest to collect enough rejection slips to cover at least one wall (having been assured that this is a rite of passage for those in the field). I have had a single piece of flash fiction accepted at 365tomorrows.com, the non-paying SF flash fiction website.

Lisa Timpf

Is a freelance writer living in Simcoe, Ontario. Her writing has appeared in a variety of venues, including *Star*Line*, *The Martian Wave*, *Scifaikuest*, *New Myths*, and *Chicken Soup for the Soul: My Very Good, Very Bad Dog*.

Rachel Unger

Rachel is a Canadian writer living in California, where she learned that you always flip the rock sample over first to check for scorpions. When not writing, she spends way too much time riding her bicycle. Her fiction has been published or is forthcoming in *Disturbed Digest*, *Broadswords and Blasters*, *Devilfish Review* and *Unfading Daydream*. She is also one half of the Patreon project Brunch At The Fiction Buffet www.fictionbuffet.com

Melissa Yuan-Innes

I've sold my award-winning stories to Nature, Fireside Magazine, Writers of the Future, Weird Tales, the Aurora-winning anthology called *The Dragon and the Stars*, and *The Year's Best Dark Fantasy & Horror 2017 Edition*. As a mystery writer, I was shortlisted for the Derringer Award.

AFTERWORDS

By The Graeme

Because of financial constraints the next issue is tentatively scheduled for publication in August of 2018. It will be the usual eclectic mix. In theory it will be followed by at least one more issue this year sometime in the fall.

THE NEXT ISSUE

Is tentatively planned to contain the following stories:

“Just a Single Word” by Bernadette Gabay Dyer
“White Ghost Fur” by Eddie Generous
“Last Car on the Skytrain” by Stewart Graham
“Portrait of an Aging Woman” by Kristin Janz
“Dinosaur Bones” by Madison McSweeney
“The Heir” by Sheryl Normandeau
“Humanity” by Monica Sagle
“Transaction Declined” by Garth Spencer
“Where Many People Live” by Nicholas Stillman
“My Painted Woman” by Jean-Louis Trudel,
“Ninth Life” by Lisa Voisin, and
“Corridor” by Dean Wirth.

As well as the following poems:

“Learning to Run” by Colleen Anderson
“Scifaiku #1” by Roxanne Barbour

“Tinkle, Tinkle” by Gregg Chamberlain
“Of After” by Augustus Clark
“Dangerous Gods” by Catherine Girczyc,
“The God of Salt and Salutes” by Neile Graham
“Beasties” by Rhea Rose
“Dismembered” by Andrea Schlecht
“The Strangest Coincidence Imaginable” by J.J. Steinfeld
“Nearly Normal Ned” by Richard Stevenson
“History Waits to be Written” by Lisa Timpf,
“Moth Woman on a Dark Night” by Casey June Wolf, and
“ Nature’s Bounty” by Melissa Yuan-Innes.

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