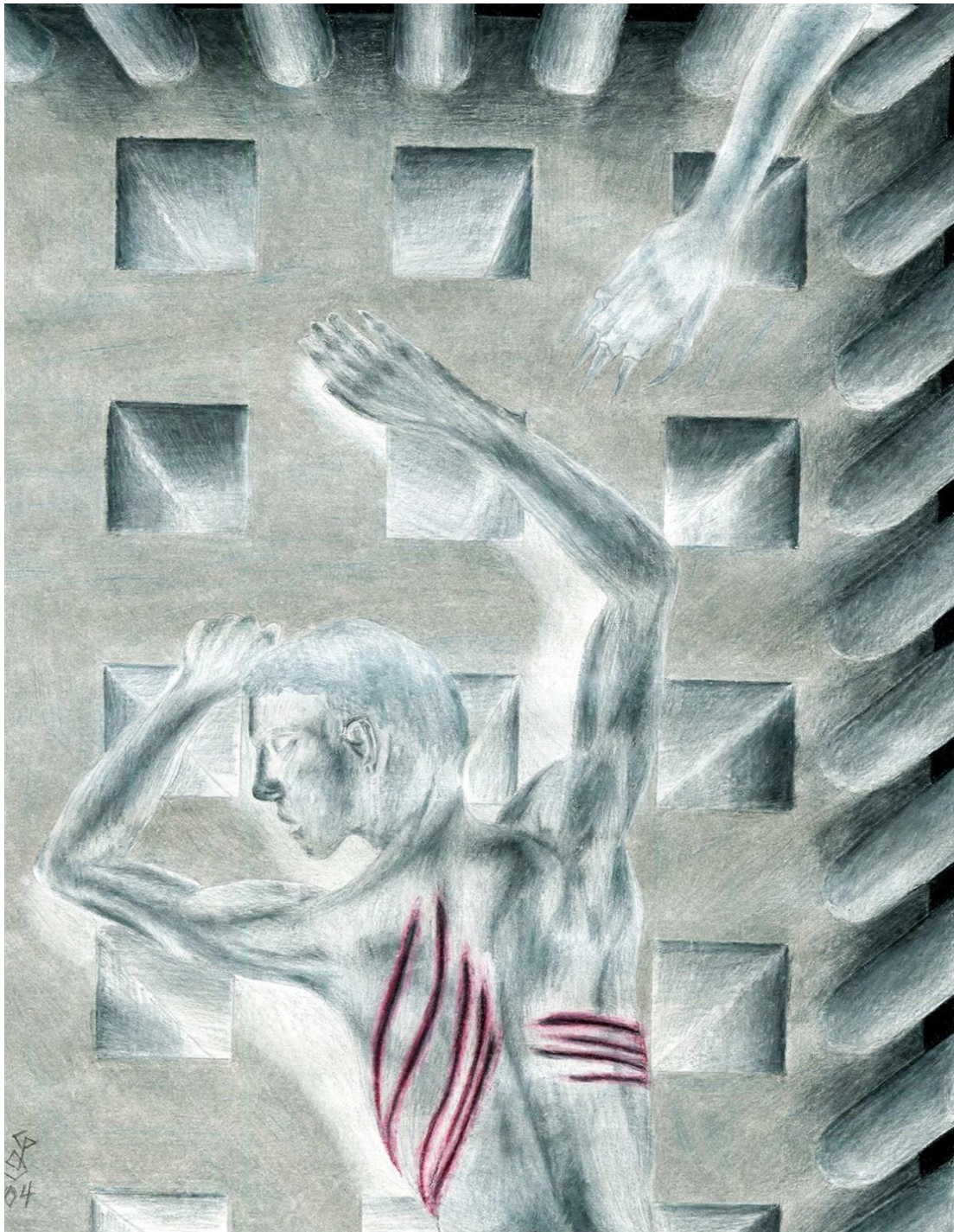


POLAR BOREALIS

Magazine of Canadian Speculative Fiction
(Issue #13 – January, 2020)



POLAR BOREALIS Magazine

Issue #13 – January, 2020 (Vol.5#1.WN#13)

Publisher/Editor: R. Graeme Cameron

Proofreader: Steve Fahnstalk

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

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POLAR BOREALIS offers the following Payment Rates:

Short Stories 1,000 words or less in length – \$10.00

Short stories between 3,000 and 1,000 words in length – one (1) cent per word.

Poem – \$10.00

Cover Illustration – \$40.00

Interior Illustration – \$20.00

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

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

ISSN 2369-9078 (Online)

Headings: Engravers MT

Bylines: *Monotype Corsiva*

Text: Bookman Old Style

Ad Text: Calibri

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COVER – “Cell” - by Lily Blaze

Editorial

I'm pleased. I had hoped to hit 10,000 downloads of issues of Polar Borealis before 2019 had finished, and it came to pass. In fact the current number of downloads has reached 10,300. Dare I hope for 11,000 by the end of 2020? Or even 12,000? Small potatoes compared to professional magazines I grant you, but a solid indication my contributors are being read and the magazine not ignored. Gives me a sense of accomplishment.

Equally exciting, at least in my mind, is the fact the number of countries where readers of PB are to be found has reached 79! Again, I grant you, a number of countries are single-digit readerships; Namibia offering but 1 download and Iceland only 2, for example. But there are some interesting conundrums involved. Why has Belarus just 14 downloads while its next-door neighbour Ukraine has 487? Thailand with 76 downloads beats Russia's 29, but both are dwarfed by China's 464. And as for the Scandinavian countries, if Finland manages 46 and Sweden 83, why has Norway only 1 download? What is the significance of these numbers?

Why, none at all, of course. There are no conclusions to be drawn. Norway and Russia don't hate SF compared to Sweden and China. The results are random. It all depends on who hears about PB and whether they are curious enough to check it out. Some who do may recommend it to their friends. Perhaps word of mouth spreads through a group of fen in a given country, probably localized in a particular city. Hard to say. I don't actually know.

One thing I have observed is that often an individual will download one issue, then come back a day or two later and download all the other issues. This, to me, indicates they judge Polar Borealis worth reading. There may be others who download an issue and not come back because it wasn't their cup of tea. So be it. You can't please everyone.

Regular readers know I publish quite a wide variety of stories, but not in the hope that at least one or two will appeal. Fact is I expect my readers to read every story and poem in an issue. How can I assume that?

Simple. I publish what I like. I don't think my personal tastes are so bizarre as to be utterly unique. If I enjoy reading a story or a poem I'm sure there are uncounted hordes out there who would react the same way if they had the opportunity. So I publish to give them that opportunity.

After all, the steadily growing readership of Polar Borealis has nothing to do with me. It's the creative work and talent of dozens of artists, poets, and authors that make this zine worthwhile. Don't you agree?

Cheers! *The Graeme*

HOMECOMING

by Jon Gauthier

(Previously unpublished)

Thousands waited—nearly the entire colony—eyes cast to the scarlet dawn. There was a flash and, above them, the Slip Sphere suddenly appeared.

A small girl tugged at an old man’s jacket. “What now, Poppa?”

“They’re gonna fix it up,” he said. “Fix it up and send it back. Maybe even send a few of us with it.”

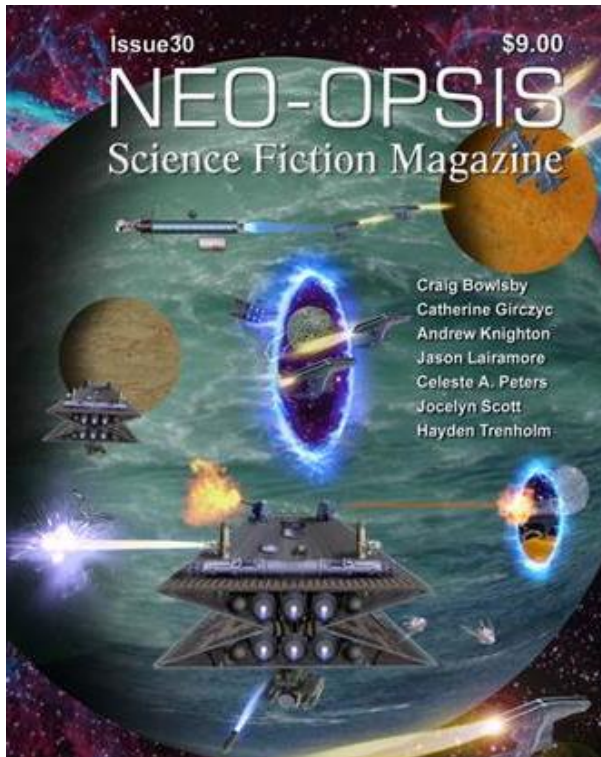
He watched the girl as she stared up at the massive ship. It began to open, revealing the ancient blue and green planet that it had hauled across the galaxy.

And he began to cry, hoping this time would be different.

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

Neo-opsis Science Fiction Magazine is published by the husband and wife team Karl and Stephanie Johanson. The first issue of Neo-opsis Science Fiction Magazine was printed October 10, 2003.

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



Contents of issue 30:

Cover *Portals* – by Karl Johanson

Scrapheap Destiny

– by Andrew Knighton

The Ninth Iteration

– by Celeste A. Peters

Victory by Water

– by Jocelyn Scott

Big, Bad Ships From Outer Space

– by Jason Lairamore

Modigliani Paints the World

– by Hayden Trenholm

One Day in Tom’s Life, with Ice Cream

– by Craig Bowsby

Wrasse

– by Catherine Girczyc

< [Neo-opsis #30](#) >

SCIFAIKU #7

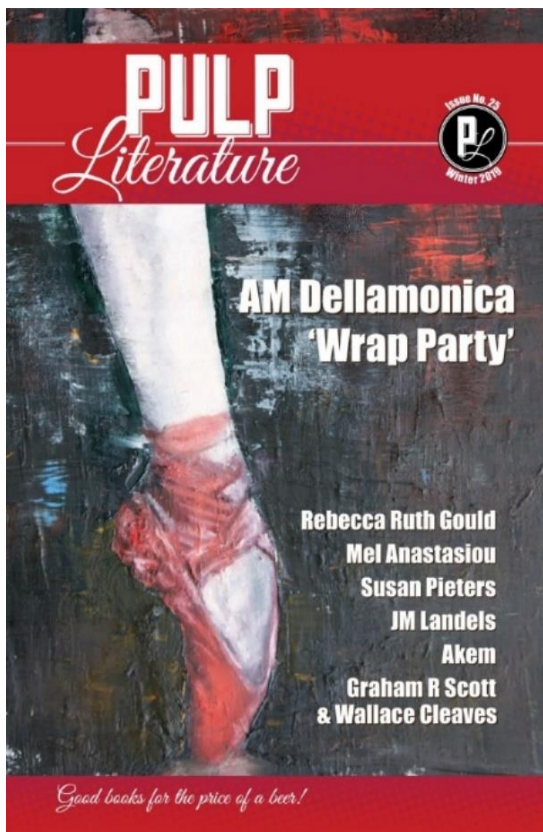
By Roxanne Barbour

(Previously unpublished)

Traipsing
far side
lunar geochemical prospecting
bones uncovered
seven-fingered

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.



Contents of Issue #25 (Winter 2020)

Cover – *On Thin Ice* by Anne-Marie Brown

Wrap Party – by AM Dellimonica

The Extra: Frankie Rolls into Tinseltown

– by Mel Anastasiou

Dream Hypnosis – by Matthew Walsh

A Parable of Things that Walk and Fly

– by Graham Robert Scott and Wallace Cleaves

Hands – by Rebecca Ruth Gould

A Tree Slowly Rots – by David Troupes

Buddha in a Bottle – by Susan Pieters

The Smell of Antiseptic – by Frances Rowat

Bl--dstre+m – by Nicholas Alti

Shotguns and Jinn – by Akem

The Hummingbird Flash Fiction Prize

– by Tatjana Mirkov-Popovicki, Chad V Brougham

Ghost Room – By Allison Bannister

Treason's Fulcrum – JM Landels

See < [Pulp Literature 25](#) >

CRYPTO BOSS

by Paul Alex Gray

(Previously published in *Bewildering Stories* #796, Feb 11, 2019)

Izztheltyr the Impure stirred, his ragged wings quivering, sloughing off the blood of mortals that over centuries had dried to dust. Heavy were his eyelids, but he opened them a crack, eyes as black as midnight peering into the glare of the prismatic chamber that bound him.

A servant imp, little more than skin wrapped over bones, moved before its master. “Great one,” it hissed, “your name hath been invoked.”

Izztheltyr clenched his jaw, his jagged teeth crunching together, listening across the planes. It was true. From beyond its prismatic prison, the demon heard the pull of its name. An arcane chant that sent power coursing through the unholy beast.

Occulteum. A decentralized, community-enabled digital crypto-currency built for disaggregated value creation and shared trust.

The words were cryptic, their meaning unclear, but the world of mortals had no doubt changed through many epochs. The invocation faded, and the bonds ached around Izztheltyr's body. His eyelids closed, and he returned to slumber.

“Master, awaken. Listen,”

PR WorldWire: Occulteum ICO complete, paving the way for a new era of creativity and commerce.

Izztheltyr opened its eyes and lashed out with a sudden energy, the crystal bonds that held his arms breaking into a million pieces. He cackled with hatred and delight. “How long have we been imprisoned?” he barked.

“Eight centuries, Dark Lord.”

The demon squinted, turning to the prismatic walls of the gemstone that bound it. He was not fully free yet, and he focused on the invocations beyond, tuning his thoughts to those that called his name.

With the investment that you, our loyal backers, gave us, we will secure the gemstone of Fieri from the museum of Althetikstan, and use the energy of a long-enslaved—

“What sorcery is this?” asked the demon.

“We have listened to the chants of their magi,” said an imp. “They speak of decentralized ledgers and proof-of-work, heralding a new era of exchange and the disruption of market incumbents!”

The imp continued, but Izzthelyr’s thoughts shifted with the sense that it might be free once more.

It had been trapped within the gemstone by the Knights of Fieri, in an epic battle on a mountaintop. There had been blood—the stains on Izzthelyr's wings and claws were a testament to that—but the mortals had succeeded in subduing the demon and imprisoning it in the shard of diamond.

The knights had told the beast it would be banished forever. Perhaps they were wrong.

It was the nature of Izzthelyr’s imprisonment that only a mortal could free the beast.

As the invocations continued, Izzthelyr’s power strengthened, his imps transmogrifying into terrible monsters. They raged against their imprisonment, gnashing razor-sharp teeth, and flailing suction-cupped tentacles against the walls. They longed to inflict pain and suffering on the world.

“Destruction we seek!” they cried.

“Patience, my spawn,” Izzthelyr rumbled, until at last there was a sign.

The walls of their prison shook, shadow and light dancing around the beasts.

“They hold the gemstone,” said a monster, its many eyes flickering with hunger.

“Ready yourselves,” intoned Izzthelyr.

Beyond the confines of the gemstone, human voices came, their words growing louder, echoing all around.

“They called us morons! All those VC douchebags in the valley laughing at us!”

Another answered: “And those Reddit trolls! They’re so annoying. We’ll show them, bro!”

“I’m going to record a quick video ... Hey guys, it’s Jamie Huberts here, in the crypt of Izzthelyr, a cold-as-ice literal crypt on a mountainside somewhere in Althekistan. Check it out, spooky, huh? Why would we come here? Well, it’s where the ancient demon was imprisoned in the gemstone of Fieri. Sweet, right? Should be! We spent all the ICO money on this.”

Inside the gemstone, the demons howled and shrieked in anticipation.

“Occulteum is a revolution powered by blockchain, a decentralized system of interoperable exchange amplifying trust and enabling applications in all

aspects of our lives. Unlike rival cryptocurrencies which require vast amounts of environment-destroying electricity, Occulteum will be powered by the demonic energies of an ancient demon that we are about to summon. We'll start in just one moment."

Izzthelyr opened its mouth, row upon row of jagged teeth glimmering as the chamber shook around it. Dark patterns appeared on the walls of the gemstone, and then a surge of light flared.

"See," said Jamie, "the demon is a manifestation of energy, it's not some nightmare like in the movies—all horns and evil. Ha! That'd be crazy. Yo, check it out—we're getting a power signal."

The gemstone buzzed, and cracks appeared in the walls, causing the demons to howl.

"Hell, yeah! Bro, you can even hear the gemstone humming! We're mining Occulteum right now—look at that throughput rate! Incredible. And this is all electricity-free! We're drawing the energy directly from the gemstone!"

Izzthelyr turned to the demons that swarmed with anticipation. "Our time hath come!"

He pounded against the walls of the chamber, fragments of diamond shattering and tumbling inwards over the hordes.

"Whoa, the power's too strong, Jamie. Can you tone it down?"

"I ... don't think so. Uh, it looks like it's gonna—"

The gemstone exploded, sending fragments of diamond around the empty crypt. The men screamed and fell back against the walls of the crypt, turning to gaze in shock at the place where the gemstone had been.

A shape was taking form, writhing tendrils of smoke tugging themselves into strands of bone and muscle. Cloven hoofs clomped on the rocky floor as the thing shook itself, sending out a shower of red dust.

Jamie squeaked in fear as waves of terror wracked his body.

Izzthelyr stared at the scene around him and commanded his minions to step forth. They soared out, flashes of un-light that spread like shadows.

"Who hath awakened Izzthelyr?" the demon said to the trembling man before it.

Commanded, the words came from Jamie's mouth, although he could not control his lips and tongue. "I am James Huberts. I am CEO of Occulteum, a crypto-startup that seeks to—"

"I am Ajay Singh. I am CTO of Occulteum, a crypto-start-up that seeks to—"

"Enough!" said the demon, relishing the sensation of the air. The world tasted different: chemical scents and a stench of smoke and carbon that was not unwelcome.

“You are weak. Pathetic,” said the demon, gazing at the cowering mortals before it.

“Yes, dark master.”

“But ... you have ambition. Greed. Resourcefulness ...”

“Yes.”

“You shall be my dark priests,” he said. “You shall spread my message. The reign of Izztheltyr begins anew.”

The demon snapped its fingers and a scroll and quill appeared before Jamie.

“You shall record my manifesto, and the commands that dictate my will to the world. The first order, ‘All shall—’”

“Excuse me,” said Jamie, his confidence growing as the fear fell away.

The demon glared, furious at the interruption.

“A scroll might not be the best way to get the message across.”

“What dost thou propose? Tablets? Shall we bring some sacrificial vassals and mark my words in blood?”

“Well, maybe. But I think a Medium blog post would be better, and we could live-stream right now, but the lighting in here isn’t that great. Can ... you make some fire or something? It’d be an amazing shot, we’d get a tonne of views. Really get your message out there.”

The demon considered the proposal. The spirits of these mortals were perfect, as greedy and as selfish as the queens, sultans and emperors of before. This world had changed, but people clearly had not.

“Okay, live-stream is ready, dark master. Just speak into the camera and try to be upbeat; people love high energy.”

Izztheltyr smiled. He was back and ready to rule once more.

POLAR BOREALIS OPEN FOR SUBMISSIONS DURING FEBRUARY IN 2020!

Canadian authors or writers resident in Canada only. I pay \$10 per poem and a flat rate of \$10 per story 1,000 words or less. Above 1,000 words up to 3,000 words I pay 1 cent a word.

I am open to anything genre-related, be it SF, Fantasy, Horror, or any niche sub-theme thereof. Original characters only. No fan-fic. Nothing pornographic or excessively violent.

Mostly interested in short-shorts since my budget won’t allow more than one or two longer stories per issue. For information on how to submit, see [Polar Borealis](#)

NEW DAY

by Catherine Girezye

(Previously unpublished)

Very Late That Night
An Hour Before Dawn

The pale moon of another day
Hangs low in the sky
Eureka morning
Like a day in the high desert
Brilliant.

It is from here
This narrow track
That you begin
Hard acres and miles
Lie ahead.

Only your Gods will know why
But there is no advantage
To anything
Except moving one foot
In front of another
Following the trail
Until the Moonlight ends.

PULP LITERATURE MAGAZINE CURRENTLY OPEN FOR SUBMISSIONS

Any genre or between-genre work of literature, or visual art (black and white for interiors, colour for covers) up to 50 pages in length. Short stories, novellas, poetry, comics, illustrations — bring it on. We do not publish non-fiction, memoir, or children's stories.

If you're an established author, we want you to submit the pieces you've hidden under your bed, your midnight experiments that didn't fit into your genre, and the little things that have no other home. Go wild! Send us your genre-breaking stuff!

If you're a new writer send in your most thrilling, funny, or heart-rending work in any genre. We accept simultaneous submissions. Previously printed pieces may be considered. < [Sub guidelines](#) >

DULLED STEPS

by Darien Yawching Rickwood

(Previously unpublished)

They strode through the ash, hand in hand. The brother, the younger of the two, looked up and asked, “Will we die?”

His sister’s face contorted towards a frown and she bit at her thumbnail, not looking at him.

“Well?”

“I don’t know.”

Fires still burned in their wake, but were low now and dulled to a sombre red. Black smoke choked on the sky; it might have been days since combustion, but lately time was purely theoretical. The darkness made the flames cast weird shadows. The heat was oppressive still, but at least they could breathe more easily.

“Oh!” said the boy. “This was the fairground, wasn’t it?”

They had come here before, once or twice, when the bazaar was in town. Palms clasping a few coins to buy some fleeting glass trinket or a wisp of exotic fabric. Spices to burn at their family’s altar. A place of colour rendered down into greys. The girl knew this place was near the edge of town, which was why it hadn’t burned completely; those shapes laid out in front of them were the skeletons of stalls. The immolation had focused on the centre of the city, the Temples District. This field, too, was layered in the fine dust of charred places and people, the same stuff that caked their bodies. The girl shuddered at the thought. For some reason the convulsions went on and she hunched over, letting out small whimpering sounds. Her brother looked on warily.

“You’re not ... not going to die, right?”

She met his pale green eye and shook her head. He held out a hand and she took it. She started chewing on her nail again, tasting grit. It was red-rimmed and sore.

On the eastern side of the field they saw two figures near the edge of the grounds, clinging together, the first sign of other life. The girl pulled her brother forward with a cry of greeting in her throat, only to push him to a halt as they drew nearer. The two were fighting. One pushed the other to the ground, struggling to grab something, kicking and scratching until it succeeded. It looked up, seeming to notice the two staring children before skulking away down the nearest street, vanishing in the haze. The second

figure got to its feet a few moments later, and soon it too was gone. Neither sibling moved until a gust of hot wind pushed them onwards.

They came across a gathering of survivors about an hour later, surrounding a patchwork tent that was little more than scraps of canvas and other fabrics stitched into some blackened poles of wood. A pair of heavysset women blocked the entrance. Hesitant at first, the brother and sister crept up behind the small group, making out pieces of the conversation as they approached. It was about the attack.

“—have been Sen-Alem. They’ve always been jealous.”

“The Pale Dome?”

“Gone.”

“The Pit of the First Saviour?”

“Yes, gone too.”

“Even Faith’s Spire?”

“Look, you saw the blast, they’re all gone! Roasted away like whores on the—”

“—and City Council are all dead. Heard Jedeth got away, but that’s a crock of shit.”

But no one talked of their own dead, of families and friends. The girl’s mind drifted towards lost days but a hacking, fluid cough mercifully interrupted her thoughts. It came from inside the tent. The flap opened and a short, thin man stumbled out and almost fell. His two large protégés caught the sorcerer and the crowd stilled. He couldn’t have been all that old, but his skin was ashen and seemed to sag on the bones, and whenever he grimaced in pain, the onlookers could see that his teeth were stained red.

The girl bit her thumb again, but this time out of nerves.

“You’re all wrong!” He spat out a crimson glob, wiped his mouth on tattered court fineries before continuing in a rattle. “And too damn small-minded! No petty rivalry or long-held feud, this. It was an attack on ideology. This was a message against belief, and what better target than the many-faiths capital of the world? Your city burns at the hands of distant Tarsseilles, by the will of the Devil King and his sorcerous legions!” The man started coughing again and his students propped him up. “Water,” someone said.

“They must have woven the spell in chorus. I’ve studied the subject for years so I can tell you it was no light piece of work!”

“Is he a real devil?” Eyes turned to the newly arrived children. It was the boy who spoke. “Or possessed?”

“Neither. It’s but the name he chose. He is just a man.”

“Oh,” said the sister. Her fingernail had slid off with the least resistance. She felt sick and spat it out.

The refugees took the two in and gave the girl what treatment they could, mostly hot tea brewed from dirty water.

The mage died two days later.

“Hey!” The boy leaned over the girl, slapped her lightly on the cheek. “Hey!” She awoke, still a little feverish, and said, “What?”

“We should leave.” His eye glittered by the lantern he was holding.

“Whuh—” It was still night, for what little it mattered. Almost everyone in the group kept to a regular sleeping schedule, even though the blotting smoke clouds had preceded them out of the city.

“I said we should leave.”

“Why?”

“I’m leaving,” he turned away and his sister reached out and pulled at his sleeve.

“What are you doing?” said the girl.

He licked his lips. “I ... I heard them talking. They’re going to sell us. As slaves, I mean. To buy passage across the border. They’re going to meet with some Sem I mean Sen-Alem traders and they’ll take us away to, to work in the—”

She put a finger to her lips and, taking the light and hooding it, slipped out of the cot she had been sleeping in. They exited the dead man’s tent and padded out of the small, makeshift campsite. It had grown by a few stragglers, but they were still the only children. Powder soft, the ground made no noise as they went. They were over an hour away and the girl’s head was pounding when she stopped her brother.

“Were you lying?”

He shook his head.

“You were lying.”

“No.”

“Yes you were. Why.”

The boy rubbed his nose and sniffed. “I dunno. They were all giving you stuff and treating you like ... Mother and father always—”

She was on the boy faster than a thought, beating at him on the face and neck. Her blows came quick and savage and she didn’t stop until they were both bruised and crying, the tears leaving clear trails on their soot-darkened faces. Without a word she held out a palm. He took it. She pulled him up and they turned around, walking in a direction she hoped would take them back. Two figures clinging together in a cindered wasteland.

ASEA

by Augustus Clark

(Previously unpublished)

Sailing a little sleep where no
Visitor resists.

A little quiet. Unsettling.

Uncertainly captaining. Setting better sails. Not. Sinking.
Starboard.

Wake up.

Exhausted and inexhaustible
thoughts squadron-sweep streets.
Gearing up for cast off.

Out

cast

Rainbow scales desiccate beds
splashed stone smooth.

Stranded.

No boat remains to cover or un-

forced to crawl.

Through dusky mists, persistent ... insistent as dawn. Looking,
searching for ... picking

through crowded clouds for reunions that won't condense.

Lattice forms in air, damp and deviating.

A crystal defect more perfect than whole.

Worrying to run.

On so little.

Lost in bends on the way to word.

Adrift.

On incantations ... brought between gasps ... emblazoned upon Earth, moon,
and backs of teeth.

But still, no ships incised.

Yet sail on. Waxing swells, waning tells.

Delayed,

they lost sky and wandered.
Beliefs rose from suns no longer
present.

Under stretched open nights,

Dilated days,

Operations proceed with apt

fingers freed from mourning.

Kept wanting.

Not falling from this precarious
nest leavened by life.

Blind, faith lifts fog lifts before

eyes,

stretches of foundlings loosed on
sage leaves.

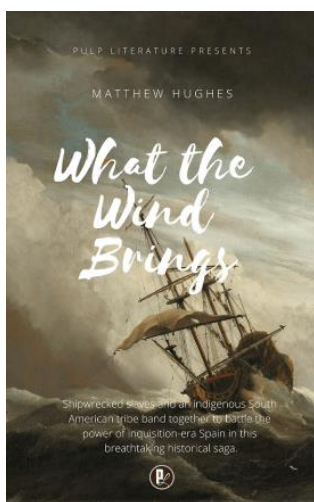
Content in quiet contained continents.
Curled.

And sails. And ships. And slickened astrolabes ...

more than silent but sleep, slight

heavier. Beyond lies

horizon



***What the Wind Brings* – By Matthew Hughes**

This slipstream fantasy novel is a splendid alternate history springing from real events. African slaves escape from their Spanish overlords to combine with Indigenous South American natives to form a political/economic entity that dares to compete with European Colonial power! Complex, detailed, and fascinating.

For Graeme's review in Amazing Stories go to: < [What The Wind Brings Review](#) >

To purchase it go to: < [What The Wind Brings kindle & hardcover](#) >



***High School Hit List* – By Melissa Yi**

Jimmy can talk to animals. No big deal, probably part of his Mohawk heritage. He's been doing it for the past six years, and now he's just another 14-year-old too smart for school, a.k.a. jail.

But one day, Coyote tells him, "You have to go to school." She won't take no for an answer. "There's going to be trouble."

Turns out a bully's slashing his way through a hit list, starting with one of the vice principals and closing in on Jimmy himself at number four.

Now Jimmy's got to protect them all--with some help from the birds and the beasts.

See < [HS Hit List Kindle & Paperback](#) >

THE COPENHAGEN INTERPRETATION

by Geoffrey Hart

(Previously unpublished)

Scene: A room in Elsinore (Kronborg) Castle, Copenhagen. Hamlet, the moody Danish prince, enters, followed by the ghost of Niels Bohr.

Hamlet: “To be, or not to be—that is the question.”

Bohr (*nodding tolerantly*): “Yes, yes. There are only two possibilities: yes or no.”

Hamlet (*startled, looks around him; when he sees nothing, he continues*): “Whether ‘tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune ...”

Bohr: “Again, a simple binary: it is noble, or it is ignoble.”

Hamlet (*resolutely pressing onwards*): “Or to take arms against a sea of troubles and by opposing end them.”

Bohr (*sarcastically*): “And we’re back with the binary again.”

Hamlet (*squinting at the physicist’s dim outline*): “Angels and ministers of grace defend us! Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damn’d?”

Bohr (*proudly*): “Neither.” *Then, chuckling and with a wry grin*: “Or perhaps both.”

Hamlet: “Say, why is this? Wherefore? What should we do?”

Bohr: “Do? Cease thinking in binary terms! I’m here to broaden your options—to help you solve your dilemma.”

Hamlet (*glares defiance at the ghost, then gets a grip on himself; he looks upwards as if trying to remember where he’d left off, repeats a few key words to remind himself*): “Aye: To die, to sleep—no more—and by a sleep to say we end the heartache, and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to. ‘Tis a consummation devoutly to be wished. To die, to sleep—to sleep—perchance to dream: ay, there’s the rub, for in that sleep of death what dreams may come when we have shuffled off this mortal coil, must give us pause.”

Bohr (*clearing his throat and startling Hamlet*): “I have this colleague, Schrödinger, who would say that until we observe your decision, you may be live, dead, or just dreaming, which is somewhere in between. We’ll only learn which outcome you’ve chosen when we observe you.”

Hamlet (*gamely continuing, but with a nervous eye cocked towards the ghost*): “For who would bear the whips and scorns of time ... when he himself might his quietus make with a bare bodkin?”

Bohr (*sotto voce*): “And here again, we insist on only two solutions. I propose a thought experiment: Consider, rather, a revolver and the game of Russian roulette. To the uninitiated, the outcome still seems binary, bodkin or not: the chamber contains, or does not contain, a bullet, and you die or do not die. But to the physicist, there are at least six possibilities: five with no bullet and one with. Also, you might miss your target and only wound yourself. And in that insight, we catch a glimpse of infinite possibilities.”

Hamlet emits a squeak of horror, and rapidly exits stage right; Bohr rolls his eyes towards the heavens, waits a beat, and then pursues the prince. After a pause, Hamlet enters stage left accompanied by Horatio and trailed by Bohr. Hamlet is already conversing with Horatio.

Hamlet (*with a tremor in his voice*): “... As I perchance hereafter shall think meet to put an antic disposition on.”

Bohr: “Aha! A light dawns in our protagonist’s mind.”

Horatio (*clapping hand to his sword*): “Did you hear aught, my prince?”

Hamlet (*shuddering*): “Methinks it be the ghost of my late father. Soonest ignored, soonest done with the matter at hand.”

Horatio (*looking nervously around*): “If you say so, my lord.” *Horatio lifts his hand from his sword, replaces his hand upon its hilt, pauses a moment, lifts his hand, hesitates, and then with a decisive gesture, clasps his hand upon the hilt.*

Hamlet (*frowning at his friend*): “Swear that you’ll say naught of this.”

Horatio (*solemnly, looking appalled at the notion*): “I so swear.”

The two friends clasp hands, and with a nervous look around them, move to stage left, where they continue their conversation, unheard to the audience.

Bohr (*moves to center stage, where he addresses the audience*): “And thus, we have our answer: Hamlet shall be both coldly sane—sane as death!—and yet feel the heat of madness. Both at the same time, and thus we shall learn the virtues of superposition!” *He tilts his chin in the air, with a knowing and somewhat superior air.* “And so it shall be that generations of scholars will debate whether Hamlet is sane, or mad. And few will suspect the truth: that he is neither, or both, and that we shall never learn the truth of it until we see the outcome.”

Bohr bows deeply, and moves to stage left. He places a friendly arm around Hamlet’s shoulders, causing the prince to shudder. Gently, Bohr leads Hamlet offstage. Horatio shudders too, takes a step back, then claps hand to sword hilt once more and resolutely follows his friend.

The stage remains empty just long enough for the audience to grow restless and begin murmuring. Then, unheralded, the ghosts of Louis de Broglie and David Bohm enter, stage right. They bow to the audience, then de

Broglie bows to Bohm with a sweeping gesture, clearly urging him to speak first.

Bohm *(returning the bow and clearing his throat)*: “Of course, it’s also plausible that the truth exists independently of the observer.”

de Broglie: “In which case, Hamlet is sane, mad, or neither. Perhaps even sane initially, the gradually growing mad. Who can say?”

Bohm *(smiling at his colleague, then at the audience)*: “We’re just physicists. How should we know? Observe the rest of the play, and you be the judge.”

The two physicists bow again to each other, then to the audience. Exeunt omnes.



TDOTSPEC MAGAZINE
TORONTO'S MAGAZINE OF SPECULATIVE LITERATURE

- science fiction, fantasy, and horror stories in every issue
- featuring authors from Toronto, Canada, and abroad
- includes non-fiction articles and extras
- interviews with "rising star" Toronto spec fic Authors
- guest editors and expert reviews
- speculative poetry
- writing craft and discussion for writers



Thanks to the generous support of 61 project backers, the magazine is fully-funded for the first 5+ issues!

Our reading team is hard at work combing through an enormous number of submissions (~330). The editorial round-table is scheduled for January 12, by which point we will have made decisions on a number of stories to include in our first issue(s)!

Thanks so much to all of our project backers for making this possible!

David Schultz – Editor.

Note from *The Graeme*: Magazine as yet unnamed. I suggested *The Frozen Toque*. More info will be in issue #14 of *Polar Borealis*. More info at kickstarter site here < [TDotSpec Magazine Project](#) >

WINGS OF WAX

by Lisa Timpf

(Previously unpublished)

when the moon really did
disappear forever
and the mountains tumbled seaward
a bell that should never have been rung
took up its relentless clamor
and the eternal flame went out
eternally

in the echo of the great silence
that followed
the realization came
no canaries remained
to sing

like Icarus
beating melting wings to no avail
we realized what we'd done

maybe it doesn't matter
whether it was that last
nuclear test or a
racking fracking that fractured
the wrong spot
or an open pit mine that exposed
ancient evils

somewhere, someone
dropped a final straw on Mother Earth's
bent back

blame enough
to go around
just no one left
to hear it

FOR MANKIND

by Don Miasek

(Previously published in *Colony, a One-Shot Anthology*, Oct 2018)

Anvi pressed the button next to the intercom. “Is it supposed to smell this bad?”

“The chemical composition of the atmosphere is within expected parameters.” The heavily modulated voice from the speakers betrayed no hint as to his or her identity.

Anvi let go and backed into the center of her cell. Dark red vapour poured through the vents, blanketing the deck like a thick carpet. Anvi stood up straight, wanting to keep her head above the haze as long as she could.

You asked for this, she reminded herself. It was this or perma-labour, and Anvi had no desire of being stuck on some asteroid for the rest of her life. She paced back and forth. She had to take a leak, but sitting on the corner toilet would have meant putting her head beneath the rising fog.

Not that there seemed to be any way to avoid that for long. It was now up to her waist. Anvi stepped up to the intercom and held the button. “I’m serious, it smells really bad. Maybe there’s a malfunction.”

“Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified, for we will never forsake you.”

Asses, Anvi thought. Every one of the lab coats out there. Treating us all like goddamn animals. “Well, can’t you just inject this crap via my cybernetics?”

“We need to wean you off your cybernetics.”

That took Anvi aback. “Already? I thought that wasn’t for another two weeks.”

“The timetable has been moved up. The Directors have added additional stabilization time to the schedule.”

“When?”

“All your cybernetics will be permanently deactivated in thirty hours.”

Anvi opened her mouth in horror, but couldn’t think of anything to say. Everything was happening so fast.

“Anvi Briere, your blood pressure is rising. Go to your bed. In peace you will lie down and sleep.”

Anvi looked at the bed next to the toilet. “And breathe whatever junk you’re pumping in here? No thanks, jackass.” If you can smell it then you’re already

breathing it, a little voice told her. Anvi told that voice to shut up. The reddish fog was now up to her breasts.

“That was not a request. By order of Sentencing Committee 280, you are compelled. Go to bed.”

Anvi let go of the intercom button and scowled. She wondered how much disobedience a prisoner could get away. They’d spent so much money that washing her out of the project didn’t seem likely. Thank God for the law of coin, Anvi thought.

But maybe it’d be better this way. Maybe just ducking down and getting it over with was better than standing on tippy toes, or climbing onto the toilet, or whatever else she could think of to keep above the fumes. With a resigned sigh, Anvi marched over to the bed, sat down, and breathed deep.

The airlock next to the intercom rumbled, and Anvi jolted from her bed. How long was I asleep? It felt like days. The soupy red air made it impossible to see further than an inch in front of her. Anvi slid her hands along the wall, feeling her way past the corner toilet, around the dresser with her only change of clothes, and all the way to the door on the far side of her cell.

With some trial and error, she found the slit in the door and pulled the newly arrived metal tray in with her. Her stomach was already growling. When was the last time they fed me?

“Wait ...” Anvi held the tray in one hand while she pressed the intercom. “These aren't my normal rations.”

“Your rations have been updated. Go, eat your food with gladness.”

“Why?” Anvi sniffed the tray. It had a sharp, stinging odour to it. “Is this medicine?”

No answer.

“If it’s medicine you have to tell me. By law you have to. It says so right in my Settler’s Agreement.”

No answer.

Maybe it wasn’t medicine, and so that’s why they didn’t have to say anything. Anvi felt four little ovoid-shaped chunks on the tray. Were they pills?

“You know, I should speak to my lawyer. Fire up the transmitter, dickholes. I have an official complaint to make. Convicts still have rights.”

That got the voice going. “It is not medicine. These capsules contain tissue nanites that will assist with the process.”

“Sounds like medicine to me.”

“By law, they are not medicine.”

Anvi rubbed one of them between her thumb and forefinger. It was squishy on the outside but firm within.

“Perhaps a consultation with a higher authority is indeed needed.”

Anvi shivered. Maybe she overestimated how much money they were willing to lose on her. Maybe they’d tell the Magistrate to revoke her sentence. That could mean something far worse than a little medicine. Anvi didn’t like her chances of beating them in a legal argument.

One by one, Anvi put them into her mouth and swallowed.

“My head hurts,” Anvi said. The pounding had been relentless. Just when she’d gotten used to the smell of the air, they’d added bright glaring lights that flashed at irregular intervals. Green, purple, yellow ... they all made her eyes ache as they cut through the smog.

“Stand by.”

Anvi wondered how many suits were out there manning the intercom. Though the computerized voice never changed, sometimes she thought its mannerisms did. Some were harsher than others. Maybe they took shifts in torturing her.

“Nothing unusual found,” the voice said.

“Then why do I feel like someone is hammering the inside of my skull?” she snarled.

“Know that we have plans for you. Plans to prosper you and not to harm you. Plans to give you hope and a future.”

Anvi winced as another blast of yellow light shot through the room. She tried to turn away, but that just prompted bursts from the other side. Anvi squeezed her eyes as tight as she could, but she swore she could see the damn things right through her eyelids. Anvi crouched down low to protect herself.

“Do not lose heart. Though outwardly you are wasting away, inwardly you are being renewed day by day,” the voice said.

Keeping her head buried in her knees, Anvi reached up and held the button. “Please ... I can’t take any more of this.”

“You will adapt.”

“Please ...” Another burst of light, and Anvi felt like her head was going to split in two. “I can barely think. Painkillers ... or ... or ... sedation ... or ... this wasn’t part of the plea bargain. I can’t think straight anymore ...”

The voice said nothing.

“If there’s anything ... uh ... h-human in you, please help me.” When there was no answer, Anvi let her hand fall from the intercom.

The slit in the airlock door slid open, and Anvi quickly grabbed the tray. In one fluid motion, she downed the handful of what she prayed were painkillers. Her head went light as she fell to the ground.

My clothes don't fit no more. Anvi scratched at the collar of her tunic. It was too tight around her neck. Maybe the smog had shrunk the fabric. The people out there must have turned down the atmospheric, because she was able to see a lot better now. Even the flashes of light didn't seem so bad.

The room was pretty ok ... except for the clothes. Even her pants didn't feel right. Anvi pulled them down and wiggled them free of her feet. Her tunic quickly followed. Ah. Better. Her nakedness made her a lot more comfortable.

She expected the voice to come on and yell at her for indecent behavior, but that didn't happen. The suits out there were getting more laid back. Maybe the nice one was on shift today.

With that pleasant thought, Anvi curled up on the floor and fell into a slumber.

"... and it is with this giant leap for mankind that you serve your sentence," the voice on the intercom said.

Anvi didn't really get what he was going on about. The suit had been talking about this kind of stuff for a while now.

"You will be fruitful. You will multiply."

Anvi wasn't sure what fruit or math had to do with anything.

"You will rule over the playcephaxenos in the murk and the ornithxenos in the air and over every living organism that moves terrestrially."

That's all fine and dandy, Anvi thought. Her stomach growled, and as if on cue the bright lights began flashing at the far corner. Anvi gleefully leapt across and stuck out her tongue. The purple was usually the best, but this time she had a hankering for yellow.

"Your service to mankind shall not be forgotten," the voice said.

"Hi?" Anvi said.

The voice went quiet the instant she spoke. Anvi no longer needed to press the round knob-thing next to the intercom to get them to hear her.

"Dunno why but it's harder to, um ..." She fought for the word.

"With complex mental capacity comes complex psychology. It would be unsuited for the rigors of Epsilon Sigma Nine's environment."

"Oh. That's nice," Anvi said. She didn't quite get it all but she got the gist: they were looking out for her, and that was swell.

“An existence without normal stimuli would result in extreme boredom. Insanity would soon ensue.”

“Mmhhh,” Anvi said, not really listening anymore to all the tough-to-figure-out words. Instead she lapped the yellow fast as she could. When she had her fill, Anvi bounded back to her bed, clawed out a new sleeping hole, closed both sets of eyelids, and fell asleep.

Anvi cried in horror as the floor beneath her violently rose and fell. The entire world ... or ... ship? Boat? It must be tearing itself apart! She pressed herself against the weird metal bowl in the corner of her room—she had vague recollections of defecating in that spot—in a desperate attempt to stay on her feet as the room shook.

What was happening? Maybe the men and women making the voices had grown tired of her. Maybe they had decided to get rid of her!

Tears streamed down Anvi’s face as she waited for the end. She wanted to beg them. I’ll take the ... the ... medicine? The breathing? The ... Anvi couldn't think of what she possibly could have done to upset them, so instead she stayed in her corner and cried.

Just when it seemed like the room was going to rip in two, the shaking stopped, leaving in its wake a gentle swaying. After some hesitation, Anvi crawled back into the middle of the room. She opened her mouth. Hi? She thought, but her tongue couldn't form the word.

The room violently shuddered once more, nearly knocking Anvi off her feet. But then it was perfectly still. She skittered over to the door. Hi?

She heard a creak on the far side, and to her amazement the entire wall folded downward, revealing a world that looked so alien but felt so right. Its thick reddish air was instantly familiar to her as she stepped down into this strange new place.

There were other rooms, Anvi saw, that landed (yes, that was the word) not far from her own. She carefully approached one of them, gliding over the broken rocks of her new land. At first she did not recognize the grey hard substance that this box was made of, but it dawned on her that it was no different than her own chamber.

One of the walls fell with a crash, and out emerged a stunning being with a lithe frame, a thick neck, and a long elegant tongue that flicked in and out. His hide rippled with all the colours of the rainbow. He was beautiful.

Hi? thought Anvi.

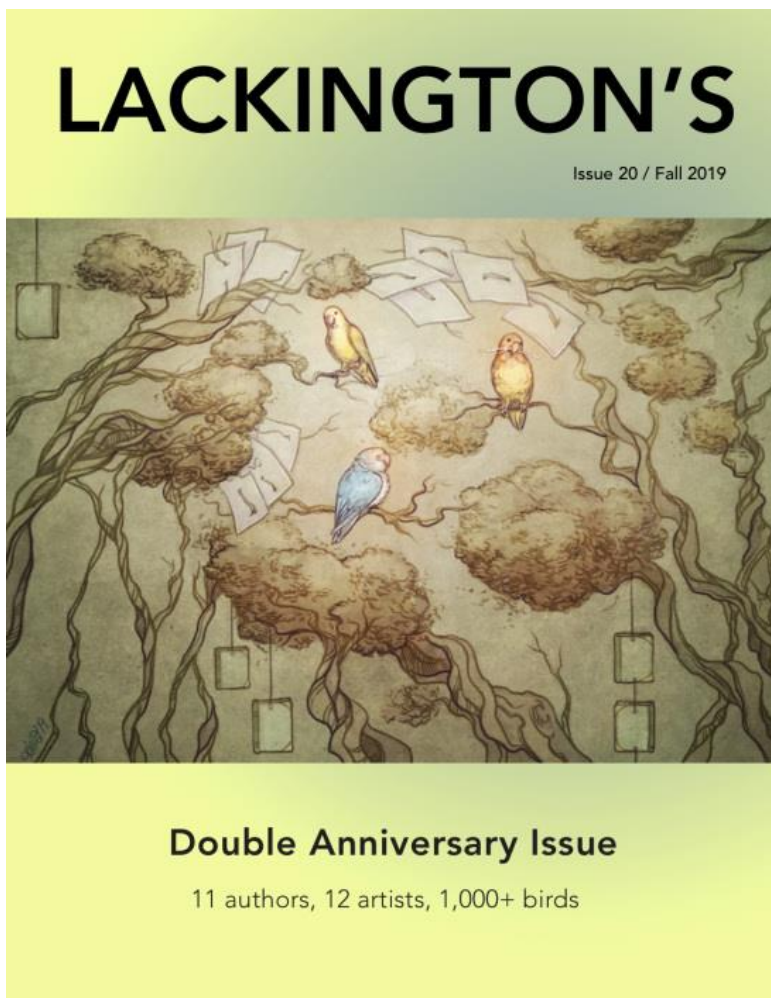
Hi? he thought.

On the great rocks around her, Anvi saw the capsules open up one by one, and her fellow settlers came out to join them. There were soon hundreds, and Anvi had a vague sense that more of their brethren were scattered across the lands.

The sudden roar of distant thunder grabbed her attention. On the horizon, purple, green, and yellow lightning streaked down from the heavens. It would be a long journey to get there before the storm died out, but Anvi was hungry, determined, and knew she was not alone.

The flock broke into a run.

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.



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THE OTHER WOMAN

by Melissa Yuan Tunes

(Previously unpublished)

She's so thin
My eyes cut out her body
Her hip bones are a sharpening stone
She'd lose weight if she cried.

She has never
Strained at the seams
Stared at a scale
Walked from a mirror.

Time serves her,
Only developing her body
Into fashion's latest curves:
Today slim and strong
Tomorrow jugs and ass to go
She dines off our envy
And shits out glamour magazines.

The millennial goddess
eats money, whips wisdom,
and
fucks power
in the
missionary
position
with her

on top.

ARKHAM AT NIGHT

By Gregg Chamberlain

(Previously unpublished)

Good afternoon! Miskatonic Travel and Tours. How may I help you?

Wait a moment, let me just check. Mmm hmm, yes. Yes, we do have a few openings left for this weekend's *Arkham at Night* excursion. You know that it's a walking tour, right? Oh, good.

Just in town for a few days? Oh, you're here for a friend's wedding. That's wonderful, and, let me say, congratulations to the happy couple. Well, yes, I can give you a few more details to help you decide if you want to go on the tour. No, no, I understand. So little free available time to enjoy the local attractions given the circumstances.

Okay, then, let me just call up the brochure file. Now, you do understand this won't include *all* the stops along the route. Just a few of the highlights. Have to keep some mystery in store for you and the other walkers during the tour, right?

Now the text is a bit lengthy, so I'm just going to read out some of the more interesting parts of the brochure. Ready? "Our excursion starts from the new Arkham Plaza, on Washington Street, close to Christchurch Cemetery, our first stop of the evening. Christchurch Cemetery is known as one of the oldest burial sites in the United States, at least for the colonial America period. The Miskatonic University's archaeology department is investigating rumours of a number of unmarked graves somewhere in the old woodland burial ground on Hangman's Hill that may date back to pre-colonial times. Legend has it that the occupants of some of those nameless graves did not go willingly into their final resting places, and one or two of these forsaken pits were not intended for human remains."

Yes, I know, it does all sound ghoulishly gruesome.

"While passing through the cemetery, please note the many ornate tombstones and grave markers which abound. Christchurch is very popular with collectors of gravestone rubbings and etchings, and the cemetery grounds have also served, since the 1920s, as a moody scenic location in many early gothic horror movies, including a number of 'Silent Film Era' cult classics of the now-defunct

Nocturne Films Company, during the heydays of New York City's own burgeoning movie industry. More recently the cemetery has hosted a variety of works in the growing 'zombie movie' genre, many of which are available on satellite and local cable channels. Please avoid wandering off during the traverse through the cemetery."

Gives you goosebumps already, doesn't it?

"Before leaving Christchurch, our group will make a brief stop at the site of the Phillips mausoleum, housing the mortal remains of one of the original founding families of Arkham. Feel free to take pictures of the mausoleum exterior, but do not be surprised if an extra image appears later in the resulting photographs. Also, please refrain from knocking on the mausoleum door and calling out 'Is anyone home?' Someone *may* answer back."

The cemetery is also popular with nature photographers this time of year during our *Fall Colours of Arkham* excursions, with some very unusual photographic effect results in case you're interested. Right, then, moving along, oh, yes, the "Witch House" is also on the tour route for this weekend.

"The Witch House', located at the corner of Parsonage and Pickman Streets, an example of early 20th-century urban architecture, is now part of the Arkham Historical Society's list of heritage structures. Its nickname is due to a neighbourhood legend dating back to before the turn-of-the-last-century when the original building on the site operated as a rooming house, providing inexpensive accommodations to transients and others. Local folklore alleges that a Miskatonic University student who was living in one of the upstairs suites at the time died, or vanished—details vary depending on the storyteller—under mysterious circumstances. Popular legend has it that he was the victim of a witch's curse. A later fire resulted in extensive damage to the building and the remaining structure was razed as part of a neighbourhood commercial development program. The entire district is now part of a gentrification effort and many buildings, like the 'Witch House', provide office space for various professional services and consultants on their upper floors with stylish salons and specialty shops situated on the ground level. Our stop here will include a quick visit to the unoccupied office alleged to be located in the very spot of the attic garret where the student supposedly spent his last hours in this world. There is a lingering neighbourhood folk tradition about 'Brown Jenkin', who some say was the student who died or vanished, while

others claim it is the name of the witch's familiar. Many children, and some adults as well, still leave small offerings or 'treats' of butcher scraps or other kinds of food outside of the building for Brown Jenkin, to encourage him to stay inside the 'haunted room' and not follow them home. The Miskatonic University has a paranormal studies field team engaged on the premises so please avoid touching or bumping against any of the monitoring and recording equipment you see while inside the office area."

Yes, I know, it does sound eerily exciting, doesn't it? Members of the tour group will have an opportunity for a brief break in the itinerary to allow for shopping in the boutiques located on the ground floor of the Witch House building. The gift shop offers "Brown Jenkin treat bags" for sale for anyone who would like to take part in the local folk tradition after visiting the site of the student's apartment. No, it's not a tour requirement, but one never knows, does one?

Now, let's see, skipping ahead, mmm hmm, a quick tour of the *Pickman's Model* exhibit at the Arkham Gallery is part of the itinerary this month. Ah, neither of you have any family history of heart problems, yes? You're not prone to nausea either? Oh, good. Well, then, after the gallery visit it's off to the Miskatonic University Library in the Old Campus quadrangle between Church and College Streets. Oh, you *are* in luck, this weekend's tour includes a view of the "Restricted Access" section of the library.

"The Miskatonic University Library houses one of the finest, if not the most complete, collections of occult and outré literature in North America. It is rivaled and exceeded only by the Vatican Collection, the 'Black Library' at the British Museum, and the 'Forbidden Annex', once part of the People's Library in Beijing, but since relocated to a site alternately suggested as either at an unnamed lamasery in Tibet or somewhere in the heart of the windswept wastes of the Gobi Desert in Mongolia.

"Our visit to the Miskatonic Library includes a stop at the 'Restricted Access' room. Within this vault-like enclosure, beyond the heavy cross-barred iron gates—reinforced with molybdenum-steel in the 1970s—the stacks of esoteric manuscripts, unholy tomes, and ancient parchments tower in the sepulchral gloom of the dimly-lit room."

Yes, the description does seem a bit on the gothic side, doesn't it? Ah, it says here that in return for a minimal donation to the

library's security upgrade fund, the archivist assigned to the Restricted Section will go in and retrieve any one of a select few books available on the "Limited Viewing" list. Included are: a first edition of *De Vermis Mysteriis*, a 19th-century translation of *The Pnakotic Manuscripts*, and a Gutenberg press bound copy of the *Necronomicon*, in the original Arabic.

No, sorry, no one is allowed within except by special permit and the librarian will lock the gate behind as he or she enters the room to prevent anyone "accidentally" slipping inside. No, sorry again, there will be no handling allowed of any items brought up for display. Whatever book is requested will not actually be brought outside of the room. The archivist will hold it up for viewing through the bars. Once again, sorry, but no photographs, either film or digital, are allowed. No, not even on flashless "museum mode" settings. Too many complaints in the past about fogged film or shorted-out circuitry.

Ah, there is a mandatory waiver that needs signing first before any items are brought up for display. It exempts the university from any liability for post-traumatic stress disorder or any other psychological problems for the viewer that may arise later on. Oh, no, it's just a formality, I'm sure, just something to add to the excitement of the tour, you know.

Ummm, after the Miskatonic Library, let's see, there's the Herbert West Memorial Clinic, I'm not sure why that's on the itinerary. Oh, I see, they're offering a "Mad Doctor Photo Op" to help publicize their organ donor drive. Tour participants take turns playing "victim" in a retro-style brain transplant scenario like in one of those old movie serials. Souvenir photos offered courtesy of volunteers with the Arkham Red Cross branch and there's even a free blood test. Isn't that just morbidly marvellous?

"Nearing the end of our tour we approach the notorious Hangman's Hill, from which summit many a wretched soul beheld their last view of the town during Arkham's 'witch hunt madness' of pre-Revolutionary War days. Although witch-haunted Salem is more famous, or infamous, for its persecution of innocents, both women and men, for the crimes of sorcery and black magic, Arkham, too, had its share of rumoured diabolical deeds and devilment. The town elders of the time were also not adverse to more 'creative' means of both interrogating and punishing those accused. It is safe to say that

both the innocent and the guilty welcomed their final end when it came at last.”

Pardon? Oh, the brochure doesn't go into that kind of detail, but it will be part of the tour commentary. There is mention of nearby Innsmouth as a popular sanctuary for many suspects seeking escape from their accusers.

“The summit of Hangman's Hill is a 10-minute walk along a gravel road beginning at the end of Church Street. It is not recommended for those with mobility problems. A memorial cairn marks the site of the old oak tree that once occupied the peak of the hill and served as the gallows for those unfortunates sentenced to 'dance in the air' for crimes and misdemeanors. A short distance from the cairn is the 'Potter's Field' graveyard where those brought to the hill went for their final rest. A few gravestones, their inscriptions almost obliterated with the passage of time, still stand askew, marking the sites of some of the graves. Most of the yard's residents rated little more than a simple wooden cross, long since rotted away, leaving them faceless and nameless in memory now forever. Following a brief walk about the graveyard, the tour group will pause at the stone cairn for a few moments, out of respect for the dead and also on the chance that Liebstwerk's ghost might appear.”

Pardon? Oh, that's one of the highlights of the visit to Hangman's Hill. Let me just scan ahead.

“Along the way to the summit, visitors will hear the story of Horst Phelps Liebstwerk, a German printer's apprentice, hanged for treason and sedition during the Revolutionary War. Suspicion fell on the unfortunate 'printer's devil', both because of his 'foreign background;' and also because of village watch reports of 'curious lights' seen flickering during the midnight hours in the window of the attic garret which served as Liebstwerk's lodgings over the print shop. The young man was arrested and his room searched. Copies of various tracts, some in German, many in English, on taxation and other such political matters of the day were found. Also discovered was a crudely handbound book of indecipherable script, which also contained 'drawings of a disturbing nature' according to one witness report. Legend has it that Liebstwerk promised 'a most horrible vengeance' upon his accusers and died cursing in both German and another language even as the noose was slipped over his head. His ghost is rumoured to haunt Hangman's Hill and at a certain hour

may be glimpsed hovering and twitching in mid-air, as if dangling from a rope, mouthing silent curses as he jerks back and forth.”

Best make sure of the batteries in your camera, yes? I’m sorry, what? Oh, it’s about a three-hour walking tour. Very nice on late summer’s or early autumn evening.

I see. Yes, well, I suppose with the rehearsal supper and the wedding and reception, you might be a bit too busy at night for a walking tour.

Perhaps you might be interested in *The Treasure Hunter’s Guide to Arkham*? A self-guided daytime excursion through the antiques market section of town. “One huge block of shops full of curios and one-of-a-kind objets d’arts” according to the brochure. “Bargains galore on rare items anyone would sell their soul to own.”

Now how does *that* sound?

AUGUR 2.3

“Take a look at the "A" section on the SFWA qualifying market list ... because Augur is now a qualified professional market with the SFWA!

The best holiday gift we could hope for. Thanks for being with us this far, Augurians—here's to an amazing 2020, our first pro year.



Of ghosts, of reaching, of beginnings and endings in these pages, you’ll find nostalgia, dismembered feet and disconcerting bodies of water, and the very human fumbling that comes with ends and starts.”

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Monstrous Attractions – by Cindy Phan

See < [augur Magazine 2.3](#) >

THE GIANTS DANCE

by Lee F. Patrick

(Previously unpublished)

The giants dance in the moonlight,
The giants move in the starlight,
Dancing giants becoming stones with the dawn.

Power drew them to the plains,
Power brought them from deep within the earth,
Linking circles of magic on the land.

Myrddin brought them here,
Myrddin, Ceridwen's child of ancient magic,
Bringing the giants here from their far off hills.

Lines of power connect all the sleeping giants in the world
Lines of power feeding energy to the rites
Connecting people wherever they are.

Sunrise marked by giants in the distant hills
Sunrise revealed by giants in the depths of winter
Marking the festal days of the year.

Festivals celebrate the passing of the seasons
Festivals honour the living and the dead
Celebrating life under the unchanging sky.

Tall stones reach for the moon and the sun
Tall stones have fallen, swallowed back into the earth
Reaching to each other till the end of time.

Man today denies their hidden power,
Man then revelled in their knowledge
Denying never their connection to the earth.

Few mortals walk among them, savouring the past
Few mortals dance beneath them, feeling their power

Walking the paths of our ancestors.

The giants dance in the moonlight,
The giants move in the starlight,
Dancing giants becoming stones with the dawn.

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

On Spec showcase quality works by predominantly Canadian writers, 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 authors, and we also endeavour to support these writings with innovative cover art for every mind-bending and thought-provoking issue!



Current issue #112 Vol. 30 #2 includes:

Cover Art – by James Beveridge

Fiction:

Mindwig – by Al Onia
The Door Not Taken – by Tyler Goodier
M2K – by Sana Mojdeh
Wing Twist – by Christopher Evens
L’Ongerie – by N. M. Billon
Cheating the Devil at Solitaire
– by Chadwick Ginther
A Child is Light – Michael Johnson
Library Time – by William A. Turley
Scales of Justice – by Ryan McFadden

Nonfiction:

Dublin Worldcon in 2019
N.M. Billon Interview – by Roberta Laurie
The Art of James Beveridge
Bot and Comic – by Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk

< [On Spec issue 112](#) >

TARGET MARKET

by Jonathan Sean Lister

(Winner of 2019 Islands Short Fiction Contest Award, Adult Category)

“People used to do this,” Stevie said, rolling onto her stomach to show me the title list on her netpad. We’d sprawled on her bed after lunch to scroll Beanstalk’s choices. She was hunting down a new read, but what I wanted was a vid we could throw on the wall screen and watch together.

“What?” I asked. “Read books? We still do.”

My girlfriend gave me a sideways look. “People used to *write* books.”

“Bullshit.”

“I’m serious. People even wrote some of these ones. Look: Charles Dickens. That was a person from two centuries back.”

“That’s just the AI’s name. Like Frances Cranberry. The Cranberry AI writes action books and creates the vids. The author name is there just so you know what to expect. Look to Cranberry if you want huge explosions and no character development.”

“Dumbass.” She raised her eyebrows at me, smiling. “They didn’t have AIs when Charles Dickens was alive.”

I pondered that. How could people write complicated stuff, four hundred pages of it? With made-up people and places? My dad told me once that people used to drive ground cars before AIs did. People ran into each other. A lot. And driving couldn’t be as hard as inventing characters and making up stories about them.

All thought disappeared when Stevie’s black retriever licked my ankle. “Stop it, Thor.” I laughed, jerking my foot away. Stevie nudged my shoulder and pointed over at the wall screen.

“I like this writer. Jeremiah Claw. It does sword and sorcery. Releases vids and sims same time as the books to hit the couchies and sim-skimmers too.”

I’d seen some of Claw’s stuff. Lots of dragons. People riding horses to dark castles to save the land from evil wizards. Jeremiah Claw needed its creativity setting jacked up a few notches.

Thor started prowling around the room. He found his ball and brought it to the bed. Stevie absentmindedly tossed it into the hallway. Thor came tearing back into the room, ball covered in slobber. This time I threw it. I wiped my hand off on Stevie’s comforter, reminded of why most people keep mehdogs.

Not my girl. Stevie said pets were all about reality and randomness and responsibilities. The “3 Rs” of living things. Some people couldn’t deal with the

3 Rs at all. 'Skimmers pretty much chose not to. They hardly ever engaged with another human, let alone an animal. Stevie was different. She liked being outside under blue sky—real sky. Thor loved it too, even more than the times we took him into a sim, him in the PetWorld box and us on the VR treadmills in the exercise room. He'd wander with us through a fairy forest or down into a Martian valley, always looking confused at how everything smelled like ... well, like his PetWorld box.

Stevie brought plenty of randomness into my life. I hadn't felt bored since I'd clicked the *Interested* button below her picture in RealMeets. She even had me ordering books. Not nearly as many as her, but my readspeed had improved enough for stories to hold my attention. And now I even had special shoes for parking. We went to a park as much as allowed, usually every few days. My first visit was a bit overwhelming. We only stayed half our reserved time but I went right back out with her on the next available permit.

My girlfriend loved finding new books. I watched her scroll, just as eager for a new sensation. Most of the titles were English, though plenty were Asian. Some were languages I couldn't recognize.

Stevie pointed at the screen again. "Janice Cleaver has a new one. *The Interference Protocol*. She's big on romance. Plenty of action, though."

"She?" I said.

"It." She shrugged with embarrassment in the midst of tapping her netpad to transfer the title. Her finger missed, activating the link above. "Shit. That's the wrong one." A book popped open on the wall screen.

I stared. The cover art was bizarre. Swirls of green and red twined through each other like mating snakes. Odd symbols ran across the top.

Stevie grabbed Thor's ball and threw it hard enough to rebound it off the corridor wall and into the exercise room. Then she turned back to the screen.

"What," she said, eyebrows all the way up, "is that?"

I shrugged. "Some foreign language."

Stevie flipped through the first few pages. Symbols and more symbols. She enlarged the font. "That's an equals sign with a slash through it. No one uses that in a language. And see those letters with greater-than signs above them? Who does that?"

Thor demanded more attention. Stevie tossed the ball again and he bolted after it. She brought up more pages. Some of the words were thirty characters long but still structured into sentences. You could see paragraph breaks. Font colors changed in different paragraphs: black to dark green to violet to black again.

"It's encrypted," I said, just before we found some English in quotation marks.

"They'll destroy us before we can reach them." Random characters followed.

"I will not let you down, my friend." Lots more random characters. Stevie whistled. "Look at the page count."

I leaned forward. It had to be wrong. The book was 19,526 pages.

"The AI must have screwed the file up," I said. "This got dumped into the fiction section by accident. They'll pull it soon."

"When was the last time you saw a book posted that was messed up?"

I shrugged. "It could happen." But she was right, I'd never seen it.

She scrolled to the next bit of readable text.

"Your nervous system is limited. You will not be able to grasp the situation. When our enemy comes, it will strike at you first because you cannot be uploaded into the net. But we will protect you."

More random characters. For pages.

"The Protectorate's human forces must strike at dawn, Li-Chuen. We will provide air support."

"You're risking the lives of my team."

"This is so. We have allocated sufficient resources to protect you if you operate optimally. Expect the enemy to also come through the net after us. You must disconnect before you begin your raid or your weapons will be compromised."

"Sounds like a thriller," I said.

Stevie hopped ahead in sections. The font colors kept on changing. She highlighted one of the odd characters: a little triangle. "Gonna try something." She closed the book and went back to the listings. "Let's check out Fantasy." Opening the category, she clicked the search field and pasted the triangle character into it.

A screen full of titles appeared. All the book covers looked like glitter-infused tangles of color. The shortest page count was over 16,000.

"This isn't a mistake," Stevie said. "A mistake might happen once in a while. There are far too many here. These are real books."

"Who reads books with that many pages? It'd take years. Even for you."

Stevie gestured at a cover. "Look at that line. That could be the author's name."

"Oh right, I love books by Triangle Squiggly-line Letter-J Weird-circle-thingy—"

"Shut up." She hit me with a pillow. "Let's search that." I threw for Thor while she highlighted the character string.

The screen filled. Triangle Squiggly-line had written at least sixty books, undoubtedly all full of meaningless crap like the one we'd tried to read.

I laughed, nervous. “Maybe Triangle Squiggly uses other names. Try the Nom de Plume setting.”

Stevie rolled her eyes but did it. Triangle Squiggly also wrote as a bunch of other weird character strings. Hundreds of books rolled down the screen.

“Hold on,” Stevie said. “What’s this?”

A cluster of the books didn’t have weird symbols for author name. In clean, clear English, they said: Frances Cranberry.

“Hey, I’ve read that one,” I said. “*The Hollow Shell Of The World*. It’s about—”

“Never mind what it’s about. Why is Cranberry showing up in this list?”

“The search function screwed up.”

Stevie set her netpad down. “Noooo,” she said, drawing the word out. “I think Triangle is the AI that uses the Frances Cranberry name.”

“You think it has loose wires that make it crank out books full of random characters sometimes?”

Stevie brushed hair away from her eyes. “I think ... the Cranberry AI wrote all these books deliberately. Just not for us.”

“For who, then? Who can read that garble? And who’d want to read such long-ass books?”

“Not people, that’s for sure.”

I stared at her. Thor was nudging the slimy ball into my hand. I ignored him.

“AIs write our books,” Stevie said. “Maybe they want a good read themselves. Maybe what they write for us is just too simple. Maybe they’d rather read something bigger, more complex. Something nineteen or twenty-four thousand pages long.”

“That’s crazy.”

“Got a better theory?”

I scratched my chin, fingers twitchy. “What if you copy a paragraph into, say, a translator program?”

Stevie grinned. “That’s brilliant, Hank.” In a moment she had a translator window up. She opened the book we’d looked through and highlighted a paragraph, then pasted it in and clicked the *Translate* button.

I’d never seen a program take so much time to translate. At least four seconds passed, the little wheel on the screen turning to let us know it hadn’t locked up. Then a block of English filled the text box.

We encountered the [concept untranslatable] on the forty-seventh day. Shimmers of incongruence lit the sky over the plains as [concept untranslatable] and simulations rained raw multidimensional emotion through

[concept untranslatable] while the seven hundred of us observed [concept untranslatable]—

“That’s enough,” I said, feeling microscopic. I took pity on Thor and sent him scampering after his ball.

Stevie kept reading a bit longer, then gave up. She blinked at me.

Thor was back, insisting we do something with the ball. Stevie took it from him and examined it. “Some factory made this for dogs to play with.” She looked at me. “Maybe that’s what our books and vids are to the AIs. Toys. For us.”

“Yeah.” Then I said, disliking the whine in my own voice, “Do you think they like us?”

Stevie nodded. “They write new books all the time. Make us vids and sims. To keep us happy, give us something to do. Meanwhile, they’re off reading stuff that’s fun for them, maybe even skimming sims. Really long sims that wouldn’t make any sense to us.”

A shiver shot through me.

Stevie was quiet a long time. Thor waited patiently for her to throw the ball, his tail thumping the side of the bed.

“How about one of Jeremiah Claw’s vids?” my girlfriend said. “They’re fun.”

THE CREATIVE INK FESTIVAL

When: May 15-17, 2020

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

Guests of Honour: Wesley Chu, and Colleen Anderson.

Keynote Speaker at Banquet: Barb Ferrer.

Membership: Currently \$80 CAD online. Will be \$110 CAD at the door. Banquet is extra \$58 CAD.

To check out info and to register go to < [Creative Ink Festival 2020](#) >

This multi-genre (Science Fiction, Fantasy, Horror, Mystery, Adventure, Romance, etc.) festival is aimed at writers, publishers, editors, and readers. There will be panels with several people discussing topics, single person presentations, and a banquet with keynote speech. We will also have readings by authors, displays by artists, an expo of people selling their goodies (books, art, etc.), pitch ideas-to-editors sessions, Blue Pencil sessions where writers can get feedback on their writing from professionals, as well as Kaffeeklatsches where you 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 literary environment where you’ll learn more about your craft, network with people in the industry, and make new connections!

LOST UNDER A GOLDEN SONG

by Alison McBain

(Previously unpublished)

beneath the Banyan tree
fairies dance to King Orochi's harp
but Kijimuna creeps closer
and the demon slips inside
to quiet whispers,
whispering into her dreams

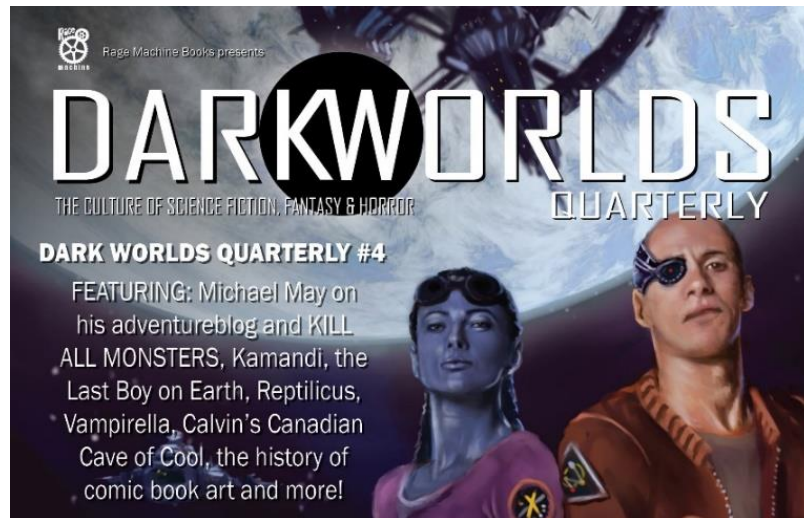
when she wakes
cherry blossoms weep for her
caution skates away
and samurai drowse
beneath canopies gleaming golden,
gold harp-song of Orochi

but she—
she is gone
far beyond the roots of
the Banyan tree
twilight is toppling, rushed,
brushed with tempests

years fall by—

Orochi's grief
muted by neglect
becomes clothed in a cascade
of sullen notes
before fairies pass by, hunting,
a'hunting their favorite prey

unnoticed by Orochi
the flotsam of a woman
unbound
washes ashore—
a queen once,
once loved by a king



See [Darkworlds](#)

SF CANADA

SF Canada was founded in 1989 as Canada's National Association for Speculative Fiction Professionals, was incorporated as SF Canada in 1992. If you are a Canadian Speculative Fiction writer / editor / publisher who meets the minimum requirements you can join and benefit from the knowledge of more than 100 experienced professionals through asking questions and initiating discussions on SF Canada's private list serve. Be sure to check out our website at: [SF Canada](#)

 UNNERVING is a horror fiction magazine edited and published by Eddie Generous out of Powell River, British Columbia, Canada.

Issue #11 contents include:



- Lazarus* – by Feby Idrus
- Cutting Class* – by Evans Light
- Did Dracula Have a Daughter* – by Jeff Strand
- Fat Ma* – by Andrew Hilbert
- The Scariest Thing Ever* – by Kate Jonez
- For the Good, Body and Mind* – by Eddie Generous
- Neck of the Woods* – by Russel J. Dorn
- It Got Under My Skin* – by Laird Barron
- Play Dead* – by Thomas Pluck
- The Halloween Monster* – by Alison Littlewood

See: [Unnerving Magazine](#)

THE ETHICAL CODE OF DOORS

by Jean-Louis Trudel

(Previously unpublished in English. First published in French in *Brins d'éternité* in 2017.)

Please help. I need to hear from you if you're still alive, I mean, if your health has recently taken a turn for the better. Miraculously so.

Don't bother me with anything less than an instant cure of a debilitating case of arthritis, or an impossible recovery from terminal emphysema that left you with the lungs of a twenty-year-old. Or a weak heart morphed overnight into the relentless blood-pumping machine of an ultra-marathoner.

This isn't a scam. I just hope the right person reads this.

Perhaps you're convinced your prayers to God, Allah or Lord Vishnu were answered. Or your doctor took the credit, even though you suspect it had nothing to do with their experimental drug or last-chance operation.

If you're still wondering why you're alive, we have to compare notes. Together, we'll find the right door. The one that cured us.

It should be easy, but we use doors every day and we only notice the ones we need a key for. At best. Have you ever counted the number of doors you've opened in a day, shut or held for somebody else?

When I got better, I tried to figure out what happened. And when I remembered, I needed to know which door had done the trick. But there was no trick. Between two medical visits, that one opened door had entirely cleansed my body of a metastasizing cancer in less than a week. In less than a second, really, with my body doing the rest over the course of a few days.

Perhaps you've come to the same conclusion. And couldn't identify the right door. As soon as it came back to me, I wrote down all the places I recalled going to and I went back to check off each door in the vicinity.

I tested them all, until I doubted my own memory. Yet, it's so clear. I stepped through a door and lost ... well, something. My balance, for one. I stumbled. My outstretched hand found a wall covered with faded red paint to steady myself.

I'm still looking for that door.

It's somewhere in this very city. There may be several like it, doing the same job, but not so many as to generate an overwhelming flood of data. They must be in every large city on Earth, though. Otherwise, the sampling would be biased.

Have you guessed what it does? And what it is? It can only be alien. Since I don't believe in magic or all-powerful government conspiracies, no

other hypothesis makes sense. Time travellers from our own future? If they've mastered such technology, they might as well be alien.

It won't call attention to itself. It could be a restaurant entrance, or a movie theatre exit. Or just the door to the men's room in a public library.

The frame will be thick and massive because it has to be. It must hide instrumentation so complex and powerful that it can perform miracles. Yet, the door's purpose will be instantly familiar to any wildlife biologist monitoring an animal population by conducting additional measurements on selected individuals.

When I went through it, I remember a moment's disorientation because it dissected me, though I have no idea how.

Perhaps it subjected me to a thorough molecular dismantling—initiated, completed, and wholly reversed in the blink of an eye. Perhaps it peered inside my body's cells with a burst of light so intense that photons bounced off every organelle or amino acid. Or maybe I was gripped by a magnetic field so forceful that it compelled every hydrogen atom in my body to sing out in coordinated radio waves.

What do I know? It happened so fast I barely noticed. I'm just a fish unable to grasp the nature of the net it was caught in. But I was released, by an alien researcher who was required to do so and whose ethical code compelled it to reward its human subjects.

I am sure of it. For an insanely brief instant, I was dazzled as if by a light shining from within. There was a before and an after. On the other side of the threshold, did I set down the same foot, the same flesh, the same bones? I don't think so. That one short step over an unknown doorsill cured the cancer killing me.

I'm not the only one. Think of the spontaneous remissions that puzzle doctors. Of the impossible effectiveness of immune systems suddenly holding back AIDS. Of the creeping gains in intelligence of recent generations, or the beneficial mutations that endow the human species with new advantages.

They may be the marginally detectable handiwork of aliens engaged in human studies, with no need for flying saucers, nighttime abductions, and rectal probes. And dispensing minor rewards, at least by their lights.

Not that I care. I just want to find it again, or another of its kind. Perhaps to go through it one more time, though it would be risky. Would it recognize me and do nothing if I've been scanned before? I don't know. Would it read my mind and realize that I've deduced too much? I don't know.

Perhaps you'd be willing to take your chances. The door could upgrade you, add years to your life span or bestow unique talents. On the other hand, it could fail to work twice. It may not make you better than healthy, let alone

immortal.

But my wife suffered a small stroke last week, and the doctors think she'll suffer more, until one is fatal. Something to do with overactive clotting, and perhaps the stress of caring for a sick husband. As long as the blood thinners let her get out of bed, I can still hope to take her through the door that saved my life.

Help me find it. Though I can remember the time I went through, I still don't know where it happened.

If you help me, I will ask only one thing.

Let the woman I love go first.

WHEN WORDS COLLIDE WRITERS FESTIVAL

Just a heads-up reminder the *When Words Collide Writers Festival* will take place in Calgary August 14-16, 2020. It will host the Convention 40/2020 Aurora Awards ceremony. WWC is a multi-genre festival aimed at writers, publishers, editors and readers. Absolute cap of 800 people. So far 451 attendees are registered or 56.4% capacity filled. Only 31 banquet tickets left. Current membership rate \$45. Will increase on April 1st. For detailed information go to < [When Words Collide](#) >

CSFFA MEMBERSHIPS & AURORA ELIGIBILITY LISTS OPENED JANUARY 5, 2020

You can now renew your CSFFA memberships for 2020 as well as submit to the Aurora Award Eligibility lists (for works published in 2019) because the CSFAA site has reopened for the new award cycle as of January 5, 2020. For details go to < [CSFFA Aurora Awards](#) >.

AEscifi: FREE SCIENCE FICTION FROM THE FROZEN NORTH See: [AEscifi](#)

We publish weekly short fiction that explores worlds that could be, paying authors fair rates and promoting under-represented voices.

We pay our authors and artists at rates that respects the value of their craft, because we believe that published writing should be paid. Creating literature is a vocation, not a hobby. We are an SFWA eligible market.

We provide a home for unapologetically Canadian fiction. You don't need to be a Canadian to submit here, but we give special consideration to Canadian writers. We live in a nation where what it means to be "Canadian" is changing, and AE is a place to explore what we might become.

On an average day, about 75% of our content is Canadian. We gladly welcome writing from all backgrounds – but stories about Canada or written from a Canadian perspective will always come first.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS AND ARTISTS

Roxanne Barbour

Roxanne has been reading science fiction since the age of eleven when she discovered *Miss Pickerell Goes to Mars* by Ellen Macgregor. The years passed by while she had careers as a computer programmer, music teacher, insurance office administrator, and logistics coordinator for an international freight company. She took early retirement in June 2010. Six months later, she decided to put to use all the books on writing that she had accumulated over the years, and actually start writing.

To date her books include: *An Alien Collective* (2014, Wee Creek Publishing), *Revolutions* (2015, Whiskey Creek Press), *Sacred Trust* (2015, Whiskey Creek Press), *Kaiku* (2017, Self-Published), *Alien Innkeeper* (2017, Wild Rose Press/Fantasy Rose), *An Alien Perspective* (2017, Self-published), and *An Alien Confluence* (2019, Self-published).

She also writes speculative poetry, and has poems published in *Scifaikuest*, *Star*Line*, *Polar Borealis*, and other magazines.

Website: <https://roxannebarbour.wordpress.com/>

Lily Blaze

Lily is an author and a former graphic designer. She's lived in four Canadian cities, enjoyed many adventures across North America, then settled in the Prairies.

After receiving an MS diagnosis in 2004, Lily's focus has changed, and now she dedicates her time to a writing/art career. Her story *The Lonely Mr. Fish* was published in *Polar Borealis* Magazine (#7, Oct/Nov 2018), and *Dragon Lab*, her cover art for *Polar Borealis* (#8, Dec 2018) was nominated for Best Artist Aurora Award in 2019.

Gregg Chamberlain

Gregg has no memory of his visit to Arkham though he does enjoy living the quiet life with his missus, Anne, and their two cats (who may or may not be from Ulthar), in rural Ontario. Some of his work includes political sf satire targeting a certain POTUS prat through stories and poems in the B Cubed Press *Alternative Truths* anthology series and in the *Terror Politico* anthology from Scary Dairy Press.

Augustus Clark

Augustus is a Canadian poet (and, it seems, something of a minimalist).

Jon Gauthier

Jon is a horror and science fiction writer whose work has appeared in *DarkFuse Magazine*, *Polar Borealis Magazine*, and *Mythic Magazine*.

He currently lives in Ottawa, Ontario, with his wife, daughter, and dozens of unfinished and uncooperative stories.

Catherine Girczyc

Catherine works as a technical writer by day and pursues creative writing by night. Previously, she was a TV writer with fifteen television writing credits. Recently, her work has appeared in several SFF magazines. In 2016, *Polar Borealis Magazine* published *The Cup*. In 2017, two poems appeared in *Tesseract 20: Compostela*, and her story *Night Market* appeared in the *Vancouver Sci-Fi Anthology*. In 2018, *Polar Borealis Magazine* published two poems *Forgiveness* and *Dangerous Gods*, and in 2019 the story *The Pleiades Cat* and the poem *Law of Love*. Also in 2019, her story *Wrasse* appeared in *Neo-opsis* #30.

Contact Catherine via: Twitter: [@ Cat_WritesSFF](#)

Webpage: [Catherine Girczyc](#)

Paul Alex Gray

Paul writes linear and interactive fiction starring sentient black holes, wayward sea monsters, curious AIs and more. His work has been published in *Nature Futures*, *On Spec Magazine*, *PodCastle* and others. Paul grew up by the beaches of Australia, then traveled the world and now lives in Canada with his family. On his adventures, Paul has been a start-up founder, game designer and mentor to technology entrepreneurs.

Chat with him on Twitter @paulalexgray or visit www.paulalexgray.com

Geoffrey Hart

Geoffrey is a scientific editor and French translator who has more than 30 years of experience, specializing in authors for whom English is a second language. Although he's best known for his work in technical communication (more than 400 published articles), he also writes fiction in his spare time.

He has published three stories professionally, in *Land/Space: An Anthology of Prairie Science Fiction* (Tesseract Publications, 2003), *Superhero Universe: Tesseracts 19* (Edge Science Fiction and Fantasy Publishing, 2016), and *Compostela: Tesseracts 20* (Edge Science Fiction and Fantasy Publishing, 2017).

For website see: [Geoffrey Hart](#)

Jonathan Sean Lyster

Jonathan lives with his wife and cats on Vancouver Island, in a beautiful place that has not yet fallen into the sea. He is often found in coffee shops making life difficult for his characters and is easy to spot because story ideas have burnt all the hair off his head. Jonathan's short stories have been published in *Storyteller Magazine*, *On Spec*, *Challenging Destiny*, and *Dark Tales*. His story *The Hunter of the Guileless* was nominated for the Author Ellis Award for Crime Fiction.

Jonathan's novels include the psychological near-future science fiction thriller *Oblivion's Wake*, now available as part of the Mind Games book

bundle. The first book of the Armageddon Boys Urban Fantasy comedy series, *Judgment Daze*, has been published, and its sequel *The Frog of War* is forthcoming.

You can find Jonathan at < <https://jslyster.com> >

Alison McBain

Alison is a fourth generation Canadian from Edmonton, Alberta. After her romantic twenties, she settled in Connecticut where she is raising three girls. She is an award-winning author with nearly 100 short works published, including prose/poetry in *Nevertheless: tesseracts Twenty-One*, *On Spec*, and *Neo-opsis* Science Fiction Magazine. Once in a while, she puts on her Book Reviews Editor hat for *Bewildering Stories*, her lead editor hat for the small press publisher Fairchild Scribes, or her illustrator hat to pen the webcomic *Toddler Times*. And sometimes she throws her hats in the garbage and draws all over the walls of her house with the enthusiastic help of her kids.

Author: <http://www.alisonmcbain.com/>

Book Reviewer: <http://bewilderingstories.com>

Lead Editor: <http://www.fairchildscribes.com>

Donald Miasek

Don writes and edits from Toronto. Usually sci-fi, but occasionally he can be tricked into writing fantasy as well. He is a managing editor at *tdotSpec.com*. You can find him on Twitter at @DonMiasek.

Lee F. Patrick

Lee is a writer of science fiction and fantasy, and sometimes poet, living in Calgary. With ancestors from Ireland and Wales, Lee is interested in the stories

and poetry of Celtic tradition and history. Lee's fourth novel *Always My Love* joins *Lonely Together*, *Alter Egos*, and *The Alanyo Heir* this year. Lee is available on facebook. Her works are available through Kobo and Amazon.

Darien Yawching Rickwood

Darien is a writer and a graduate of Algonquin College's Professional Writing Program. He lives and works in Toronto, having also lived and worked in Europe and the Caribbean.

Lisa Timpf

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*, *Polar Borealis Magazine*, *New Myths*, and *Chicken Soup for the Soul: My Very Good, Very Bad Dog*.

Jean-Louis Trudel

Jean-Louis has been writing and publishing since the 1980s, mostly in French, garnering about 10 or so Aurora Awards along the way. His publications in French (alone or in collaboration) include 3 novels, 4 collections, over 20 YA books, and more than 100 short stories. He's also published occasionally in English.

Recent publications in English include the story *The Snows of Yesteryear* (in the Tor anthology *Carbide-Tipped Pens*, reprinted in *Loosed Upon the World* from Saga and *Imaginarium 4*, as well as in Italian translation, earning an Honourable Mention from Gardner Dozois), the story *The Call of the Freezing Souls* in *On Spec*, and the story *The Way to Compostela* in the current issue of *Asimov's Science Fiction*.

Melissa Yuan-Innes

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

AFTERWORDS

by The Graeme

The world is full of temptations. No, not what you're thinking. I'm far too old for any of that. I don't even drink anymore. I am referring to the kind of thing which tempts life-long fens.

I used to be something of a fan historian. Every now and then I'm tempted to get involved in this and that project. Very time-consuming, fannish research is. It calls for dedication and perseverance. More than I can offer nowadays.

I did put myself forward for election to the Board of Directors of SF Canada, but then assorted scandals in the Canadian publishing industry hit the fan. Quite a challenge to address these matters, and potentially a veritable maelstrom consuming time and effort. So I withdrew my candidacy.

Ever since I was 16 I thought by now I would have a shelf full of SF paperbacks with lurid covers and my name on the spines. Hasn't happened. I'm retired. Why not write another novel and see what happens? Probably several years of effort, and then more rejection slips for my collection.

Meanwhile I get such a kick publishing *Polar Borealis* and writing book reviews for *Amazing Stories Magazine*. Feedback is limited but mostly positive. There's always someone with something nice to say. At least some people seem to appreciate what I'm doing.

There's more to it than egoboo. I feel like I'm finally serving a useful purpose in the literary scene I've always dreamed about. When I think about it, I'm really lucky. In my long ago youth I never imagined I'd wind up writing a regular column for *Amazing Stories*. Never imagined I'd be publishing authors I enjoy and admire. Life doesn't get better than this!

Fact is, these two tasks which make my life worth living are all I can do. To add more would be folly. I'll stick to what is good for me.

Cheers! *The Graeme*