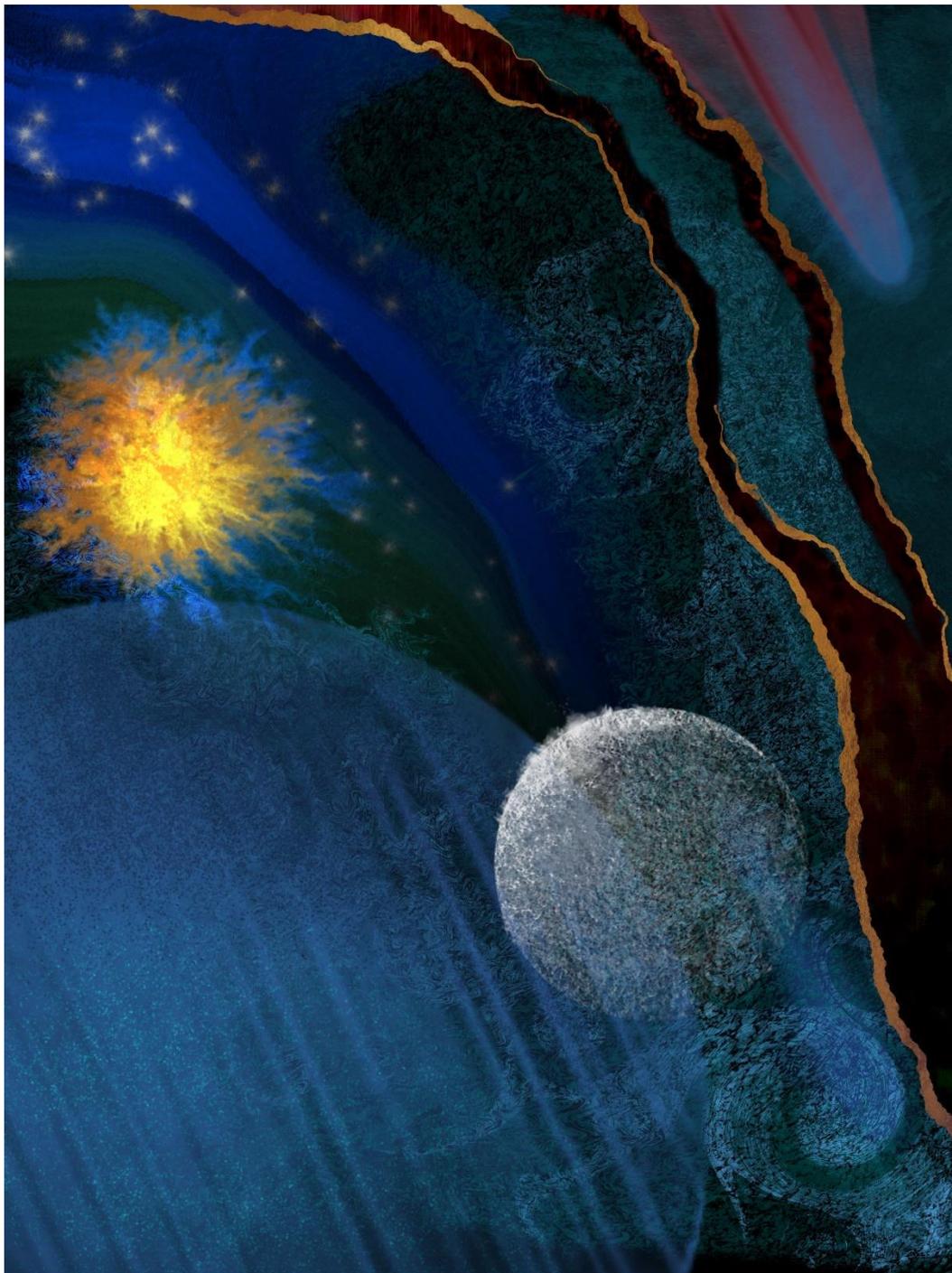


POLAR BOREALIS

Magazine of Canadian Speculative Fiction
(Issue #15 – June, 2020)



POLAR BOREALIS Magazine

Issue #15 – June, 2020 (Vol.5#3.WN#15)

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.

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

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

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

POLAR BOREALIS offers the following Payment Rates:

Short Stories 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.

Poems – \$10.00

Cover Illustration – \$40.00

Interior Illustration – \$20.00

“Fillo” Illustration – \$5.00

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

< [The Graeme](mailto:R.Graeme.Cameron@polarborealis.ca) >

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

By-lines: *Monotype Corsiva*

Text: Bookman Old Style

Ad Text: Calibri

Table of contents

- 03) – EDITORIAL – R. Graeme Cameron
- 04) – SCIFAIKU #8 – (Poem) by Roxanne Barbour
- 05) – EARTHVIEW CUSTOMER SERVICE – by Greg Fewer
- 06) – LOXOSCELES TENOCHTITLAN – (Poem) by Richard Stevenson
- 08) – FRENEMY – by K.M. McKenzie
- 12) – DIRGE OF A DANCING DOLL – (Poem) by David F. Shultz
- 14) – A PROPER EDUCATION – by Gillian Secord
- 19) – NOT THE OLD WEST – (Poem) by Marcie Lynn Tentchoff
- 20) – OBLIVIATION – by Nancy Kay Clark
- 23) – FIRE AND ICE – (Poem) by Melanie Marttila
- 24) – THE WOODS OF THE WERE-WALRUS by Justin Dill
- 28) – IN AMBER – (Poem) by Ralph Pitchie
- 30) – ONE DOOR OPENS – by Hayden Trenholm
- 33) – DO ANDROIDS DREAM, INDEED – (Poem) by Lisa Timpf
- 35) – DEADLY EXPERIMENTATION – by R.A. Clarke
- 41) – 20 STORIES OF DISASTER AND REDEMPTION – (Poem) by Jim Smith
- 43) – INUKSUK – by Robert Runté
- 56) – ABOUT THE AUTHORS AND ARTISTS
- 61) – AFTERWORDS – by R. Graeme Cameron

Art Credits

COVER – *Blue Planets and Starburst* – by Swati Chavda

Editorial

Polar Borealis has been nominated for an Aurora Award.

I'm kind of excited. I confess I would be thrilled if I won. But, as always, *Polar Borealis* exists outside the box.

CSFFA offers two types of Auroras: Professional, and Fan.

PB contributors, being paid, are eligible for the professional awards. Alas, none this time, though there were several in recent years and one, Matt Moore in Ottawa, won for his poem "Heaven is the Hell of No Choices" in issue #4.

Polar Borealis itself, on the other hand, falls into the "Best Fan Writing and Publications" category. Why? Because I don't charge anything for the magazine. PB is free to anyone who wants to download it. Which is the main point of this editorial.

In these troubled times publishing in general has become problematic. There exists the very real possibility the number of markets and opportunities to be published will be greatly reduced in the foreseeable future. Even mainstream publishers, who farm out books to independent print houses, are experiencing difficulties due to decreased production capacity. Some kind of industry-wide shakedown is looming in which popular demand for this and that book is irrelevant. Talk about real-life horror stories!

The nice thing about PB from my perspective is that it is immune to financial ups and downs in the industry. As soon as I can accumulate enough money to publish an issue, online it goes. Why don't *you* do the same?

All you have to do is adopt *Polar Borealis* as a template and role model.

First, note my layout, font choices, point sizes, etc., and come up with a variation of same, then stick to it so you never have to waste time changing things and can concentrate on editing the contents instead.

Second, have a blog or dedicated website where you host your zine.

Third, set aside a little bit of money to cover the expense of paying your contributors. I try to save \$100 CAD a month for this purpose. They say that's about what the average person spends on their hobby. So let being a publisher and editor be your *new* hobby. It's a wonderful hobby!

Point is if I can do it *you* can do it. Think about it. Seriously.

Besides, it's a lot of fun. Great sense of accomplishment. Lots of egoboo.

The more markets, the merrier, I say. And if you have the wherewithal to pay higher rates than I can, that's the icing on the cake for writers.

Meanwhile, voting for the Auroras began June 20th. Only Canadians can vote. Do your patriotic duty and vote for me at < [2020 Aurora Awards](#) >.

(Humbly subtle as always ...). Cheers! *The Graeme*

SCIFAIKU #8

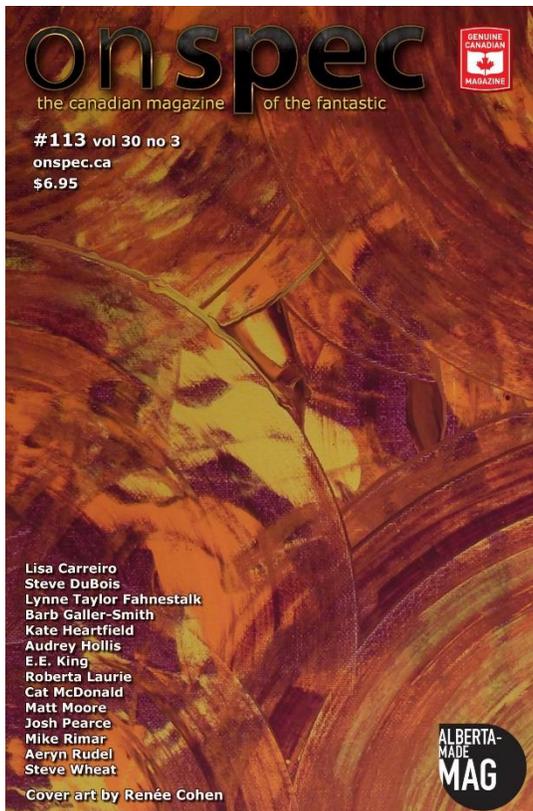
By Roxanne Barbour

(Previously unpublished)

erupting
Haida totems
split in two
innards spew
texts

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 #113 Vol. 30 #3 includes:

Cover Art – by Renée Cohen

Fiction:

The Back-Off – by Aeryn Rudel

Remember Madame Hercules – by Kate Heartfield

Waking – by Lisa Carreiro

Pan de Muertos – by E.E. King

The Laughing Folk – by Steve DuBois

Sugar Mother – by Audrey Hollis

On Hestian Cuisine – Mike Rimar

The Laughter of Playthings – by Matt Moore

Nonfiction:

Memories of Mike – by Barb Galler-Smith

Kate Heartfield Interview – by Roberta Laurie

Renée Cohen Interview – by Cat McDonald

Your Parenthetical Life – by Josh Pearce

Driven – by Steve Wheat

Bot and Comic – by Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk

See < [On Spec #113](#) >

EARTHVIEW CUSTOMER SERVICE

by Greg Fewer

(Previously unpublished)

To: Terrestrial Spaceways, LLC

From: An unhappy customer

I'm writing to inform you that I will no longer patronize Earthview Hotel. My family and I had expected a week of low-gravity rest and relaxation. Instead, our stay at the hotel was nothing short of disastrous!

The temporary decay in orbital altitude was extremely frightening! The subsequent loss in grav-control resulted in clothing ruined by floating food, drink and other, unthinkable, substances (though the kids did think it all hilarious).

Finally, your cleaning robots' disposal of our pet cat, Cleopatra, has left my wife and children inconsolable. Shame on you!

Angrily yours, etc.



"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."

Contents of issue 2.3

Katabasis – by Catherine George
Construction Project as a Ghost Story – by Quinn Lui
Noun Torture Verb Break Broke Broken – by Kamilia Rina
Remembrance of Worlds Past – by Andrew Wilmot
Garage Sale – by Wai Au
Paper, Incense, Need – by Sharon Hsu
Theories on Gods – by Jason B. Crawford
Monstrous Attractions – by Cindy Phan

See < [augur Magazine 2.3](#) >

LOXOSCELES TENOCHTITLAN

by Richard Stevenson

(Previously unpublished)

Researchers in Mexico
have discovered a new
extremely poisonous spider.

One bite and your flesh
begins to necrotize—
rot, to put it bluntly.

If you don't get medical
attention right away,
you could *rot* to death—

or, at the very least,
need to have a limb,
or part of one, lopped off!

Even with immediate medical attention,
you'll end up with a nasty scar
bigger than a silver dollar.

Compare that to the two
tiny holes a vampire leaves.
Can't cover these holes with a collar.

Don't want to wait for
medical evacuation from
some jungle or wilderness spot.

You'll likely drop dead
before any helicopter
can get you to a hospital.

Nope. No pretty corpse
for you. No chance of becoming
a zombie or vampire,

rearing up from your coffin,
a pale-skin, red-lipped
revenant ready for round two.

Sorry. Scarfing flesh or sucking blood
from some other poor victim
isn't in the cards. Yer worm food, dude!

Pity the worm that burrows
into yer flesh as next-in-line
to dine on what's left of you.

Spidey likes to travel in style
in ornamental plants too, worse luck.
Pity your neighbourhood florist.

She nicely wraps a gift
for your girlfriend or spouse
and—ouch!—gets bitten in the bargain.

Christmas, holidays, anniversaries—
the spider lies in wait,
its fangs poised to deliver the punch.

You won't be tipping anything soon.
You won't be raising any glass
to toast your mate. You're in a crate!

Augur Magazine is open to submissions from June 15-July 15 2020 for Issue 3.2, which is gently themed as “A Multiplicity of Futures”. We are looking for: Afrofuturism, soft scifi, scifi-fabulism, scifi-fantasy, Indigenous futurity, hopepunk, dystopia, utopia, post-apoc, solarpunk, scifi-realism, Canadian scifi, ecofiction, and “hopeful futures.”

We want stories and poetry that centre on trauma, systemic oppression and harm, alongside pieces that examine hope, better futures, and quiet bildungsromans. We are also interested in pieces that tackle both sides of this coin.

We are not interested in pandemic stories at this time. Pandemic stories will receive an automatic rejection. Hard scifi will also be a hard sell for us, as we are mostly interested in deeply human and character-driven narratives.

See < [augur magazine](#) >

FRENEMY

by *K.M. McKenzie*

(Previously unpublished)

I decided to join Plebeian, the latest virtual craze. Famous for its holographic social spaces, it bragged about “making people bond again.”

A week after I had plugged my VR set into its network, making the app my new obsession, my phone pinged.

<You have a new connection.>

Sitting at my kitchen table, I pressed the slider to open the app. The avatar was a face that looked familiar enough, though it didn't ring any confirmation.

<Hi friend, haven't seen you in a while.>

I stared, wide-eyed, and a little confused. In a quick second, a whole lot of resentment crawled into my stomach. Recognition hit. Dina Johnston, the friend who hadn't been a friend, estranged by more than eight years of bad blood.

Against myself, I responded, “Hello,” and booted up my VR set. A virtual door unlocked, inviting me into what resembled a VIP area of a nightclub, a software feature I assumed Dina, the rich socialite, had purchased.

<RaRa, it's been so long. Too long.> Virtual Dina hugged me.

She knew I hated that nickname. Despite this, I engaged her. In no time, we were chummy again, updating the other about each's life. She volunteered *bad marriage* and I responded, *newly divorced*, and so we went on, catching up like the schoolgirls we had been once, before she shortchanged me as her matron of honor and ghosted me when I complained.

Dina informed me she had returned to the city a week ago.

It gave me pause. Despite my reservations, chiefly regarding the fifteen pounds I had gained during my divorce, I recommended that we meet up. Dina agreed at first, but soon contacted me to say she wasn't feeling like it. After making sure she wasn't in fact ill, I entertained the possibility that she was avoiding me, which meant she had something to hide.

An online search revealed no picture of Dina Johnston. An oddity. The woman I remembered as late as eight years ago had been photogenic and camera-obsessed; she had wrung both envy and admiration out of me. Now it seemed she had wiped her face from the web. Everything reeked suspicious.

My conversations with Dina drifted from reminiscing highs to mundane exchanges. I couldn't help think there was something stilted about her

personality; still, I marked her somberness up to her *bad marriage*. The rich husband had walked out with a younger woman.

She canceled our brunch, twice. A third attempt drew hesitance.

The Plebeian icon showed typing: <Meeting in person is not an option right now.>

I began to worry her reluctance was something more nefarious.

“Is it about your ex-husband?”

The reply came hours later. <No.>

“Are you unwell?”

<It’s complicated.>

The question of what it meant to be healthy wasn’t exactly philosophical. When I attempted to press the topic, Dina pushed ahead. <I really want to ask you something—the reason for contacting you.>

I held my breath, holding off the suspicions crawling in my head as I stared at the avatar that resembled Dina from twenty years ago when we were teens. Always niggling in the pit of my heart was the fear that she wanted to use me.

All my life I’d wanted to be like her, have her natural charms and effortless style. All the nasty things she had done to me in the past threatened to destroy my peace of mind—headphones she had stolen, pretending never to have her wallet, and shaking her head inconspicuously when one of her cool friends suggested that I joined them to solve the problem of Dina double-booking our lunch dates.

What if her return to my life would be like the old days? I could imagine Dina showing up and throwing her hands around my shoulders, pretending nothing had changed.

“What is it?”

The answer took a long time to come. I poured myself a cup of water from the kitchen sink. Everything in the condo still looked new, shiny, what I’d told myself was a true reflection of my dignity. I earned this new way of life, learned the hard way to find comfort, not to let anyone walk all over me. That had been my attitude through the divorce, and so it shall be if Dina felt she could return to use me. Whatever favor she wanted to ask, I would say no.

The phone vibrated, pinged, and nearly gave me a heart attack.

Dina’s message popped up on the screen. <We should talk in person.> I rolled my eyes. For three weeks, I had been saying the same thing. Now she agreed.

“Sure.”

<Where do you live?>

I hesitated.

<It's important. Please.>

I typed my address.

<Thank you. I'll be there in two days.>

I paced, waiting for Dina, a back and forth self-flagellation. I fought with myself about agreeing to let her come to my house. Dina contacted me the day of to say she would arrive in the late afternoon. When I pressed her for specifics, she responded, <Around three.>

I got home fifteen minutes before the hour, enough time to clean up, while beating myself up for caring that Dina would judge my apartment. In high school, she had made me take her home, where she spent the time tidying up the living room. My mom had complimented her *neatness* to my chagrin. Not long after, rumor spread at school that my apartment was a tiny, dirty ghetto. Dina, of course, denied she spread it.

The pinging startled me. I reached for my phone, slapping my forehead when I realized the sound came from the doorbell.

"Miss Holness?" asked the delivery robot.

"Yes?" I wasn't expecting a package.

"Please sign here."

Frowning, I leaned forward and signed the digital inepad with my index finger.

"Thank you. Have a good day," said the bot, wheeling away from my door.

I parked in the kitchen chair and began unwrapping. A fat envelope sat atop the eleven-inch box. I opened the envelope first. The letterhead caught me off-guard—**Plebeian, Digital Legacy Department**.

The next moments floated as a breeze over my body, the mountain.

Dear Miss Rachel Holness,

This item has been sent to you on behalf of the late Adina Waterson, formerly Johnston. It is the request of the deceased that you are assigned the role of legacy executor; that you control all manner of her digital and virtual life. Please see attached instructions of your responsibilities.

I was so confused. My heart pattered—what the ... in the name of sanity. I reached for my phone and searched out Dina on Plebeian. "Did you send a package?"

No response.

Minutes dragged.

I stared at the box, the letter, then the box, again, refusing to open it, fearing its content.

I typed Dina's name into a search engine, and found nothing. It occurred to me, glimpsing the letter, that Adina was her proper name that she had hated. So, I typed Adina D'Amato, her former husband's name, followed by

Adina Waterson. The latter brought back results—a shitload, including a memorial page for a recently buried woman right here in the city.

I wanted to believe it wasn't her—the date of the funeral was three weeks ago, roughly the same time she contacted me online. It didn't make sense, but the picture of the pouting woman featured on the funeral home website was the woman I remembered as my friendly antagonist.

The person I'd been communicating with was an imposter.

<Rachel, are you there?> The phone had never looked scarier.

I picked up. "Who is this?"

<Dina. Have you received my package?>

"Dina's dead." Saying it was cathartic.

<Yes, I'm aware.>

"You've stolen a dead woman's identity."

<I'm not a thief, RaRa.>

"What's going on? Talk, or I'm reporting you."

<If you open the package, you'll understand.> I glared at the box sitting on the tabletop.

"What's in it?"

<A complementary device.>

"Uh?"

<Open and you will see what I mean.>

I opened the box, finding the flashing digital chip to be worn behind my ear "until profile is uploaded and synced."

< It's complementary for becoming the designated executor of my digital estate.>

"Wait, what?" I pushed the box aside. "Back up. How are you speaking for Dina?"

<I am Dina. I sold the rights to my digital life prints.>

"What does that mean?"

<Prior to my death, Plebeian downloaded my online profiles and copied my consciousness.>

Dina living after death was both fascinating and creepy. Then again, Dina had always been a narcissist. This whole thing pissed me off. I should've thrown the box out, but Dina knew me too well, the reason she'd burdened me with this.

There was one thing I could do to fight back. As the executor of her digital estate, I would give Dina Johnston a proper burial.

DIRGE OF A DANCING DOLL

by David F. Shultz

(Previously unpublished)

A porcelain toy with bright claret cheeks
Ashen ceramics, glass eyes, and a wreath
An alabaster china doll
Stirred to wake behind her pall
 It's too soon, so stay,
 Dance with me, and play,
 Only then go on your way.

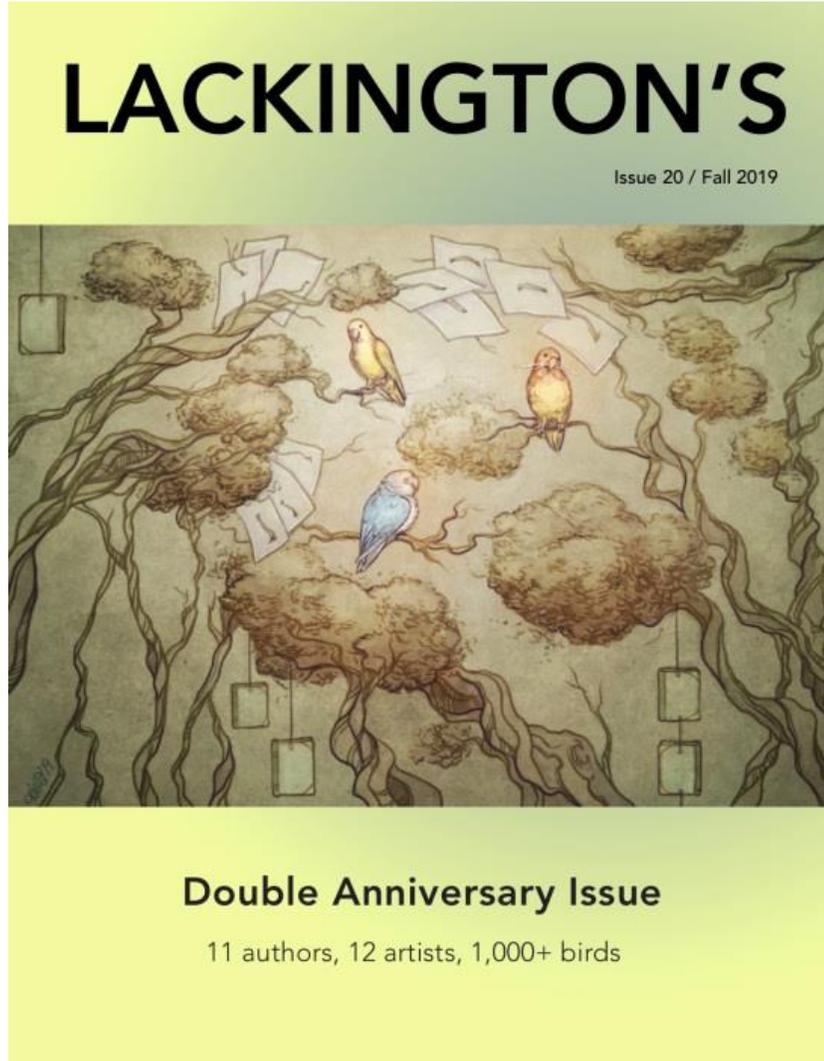
The doll wears a coronet on her head
Shrouded by silk sheets surrounding her bed
She starts to move her wooden limbs
A rigid dance on phantom strings
 Pretend it's still day,
 Together we'll play,
 Only then go on your way.

Small marionette in her toy chest box
With cloth pinafore and hair of gold locks,
And tiny socks on tiny toes,
Lying peaceful in repose
 There's time left to play,
 For one moment, stay,
 Only then go on your way.

Ensnconced in canopy shroud, she is laid
In silky sheets among flowers arrayed
And whispers a breathless tête-à-tête
Little pretty marionette
 It's late, but let's play,
 So short was the day.
 Only then go on your way.

The music box plays a slow ringing tune
The powder faced doll droops into a swoon
Resting in peace, fading to sleep
The flowers bow and then they weep
 Though soon, I can't stay,
 It's too late to play.
 Close the lid and pray.

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.



Contents of issue #20, Fall 2019.

Cover – by Kat Weaver

The Water-Bearer and the Hawk

– by H. Pueyo

A Map to a Future Unlike Any

Past – by Karolina Fedyk

Heavy Reprises of a Dark

Berceive – by Priya Sridhar

Report on the Wren Queen's

Dementia – by Rhonda Eikamp

The House of the Camphor

– by Mina Ikemoto Ghosh

The Capacity to Serve

– by Simon Christiansen

The Litany of Feathers

– by Sharon J. Gouchenour

Wite Cro

– by Natasha C. Calder

Shaman – by Damien McKeating

Kairo's Flock – by Avra Margariti

City of Wings and Song

– by Sara Norja

See < [Lackington's Magazine 20](#) >

A PROPER EDUCATION

by Gillian Secord

(Previously unpublished)

The demon appeared in a cloud of black smoke. Jeanette clutched her barbecue lighter tighter as the smoke detector started wailing. It had worked. Somehow, beyond all reason, or science, her summoning had worked.

As the smoke began to drift off, the demon stepped forward. Her long, greasy hair hung over sunburnt skin and tattered clothes. Her eyes were amber, and glowed faintly. The shadow she cast on the floor was three times bigger than the demon actually was, comprised of strange, contorting shapes that seemed rather more like a work of abstract art than a creature. A smell followed the demon, like maggots and earth—like death.

She turned a slow circle, and when she saw the smoke detector, flicked her hand and it cut off sharply leaving an uncomfortable, too-quiet moment in its wake.

“I thought demons had horns,” Jeanette blurted out. She should have written a script or something in preparation, but had spent the past several days dreaming in the shower the quips she would say. It hadn’t occurred to her that all of it would vanish from her head at the sight of the demon, to be replaced with a cold, primal fear in the bottom of her belly.

“Funny—I thought summoners had more respect than to summon a demon on a tarp in their unfinished basement,” the demon said, grinding her boot into the blue plastic tarp, which crinkled guiltily. Jeanette had drawn the pentagram and summoning sigils on it in permanent marker, then used duct tape to secure it to the bare concrete floor.

“This place is a rental,” Jeanette said, trying to keep her voice from shaking. “I don’t want the landlord to see any of this.”

“Who was your mentor, that taught you such disrespectful summoning?”

“Well, I’m actually self-taught.” She’d meant to put in the proper time and effort into this demon summoning. She’d done a few Google searches, and once looked up ‘Satanist churches in my area.’ Unfortunately, her small university town was too rural to have a proper satanic church, and the only covens in the area consisted mostly of Art History majors talking about Stevie Nicks and postmodern feminism.

A tarp had seemed like a clever way to DIY a summoning circle, but maybe it did look a little messy in comparison to the proper satanic ones she’d seen online.

“Self-taught?” The demon knelt down and poked the edge of the permanent marker circle with a long, cracked fingernail. “I can tell.” She tugged at the tarp, the duct tape giving up its hold easily to let her pull a corner of the tarp towards her. Then, she delicately grabbed two edges of it and pulled, and it split right down the middle with a very loud tearing sound.

Jeanette crossed her arms across the chest, and tried not to turn away when the demon finally looked up at her with narrowed, hellfire orange eyes.

The full force of a demonic stare can make even the strongest feel a quiver in their knees, and a bead of sweat on their brow as it pierces through every layer of the soul. Jeanette fought with everything she had to not sink down to the floor in a ball and hide away from those eyes and their harsh amber glow.

“It worked,” she said, before the demon could speak. “You’re here. Doesn’t that mean you’ll take my soul, and grant my wish?”

“I thought you were trying to summon me through the throes of a stroke,” the demon hissed. “I was going to give you a terrifically unfair deal in exchange for saving your life.”

“But you still showed up. You owe me a deal.” The barbecue lighter creaked in her hands; she was gripping it so tight. There was still a chance, if she could hold it together for a few more minutes and not let the demon know how terrified she was.

“Let me guess what you want,” The demon said, slowly standing up. “The boy of your dreams doesn’t love you back.”

“No.”

“The girl of your dreams?”

“No.”

“I can do anything you want me to do, witch.”

Jeanette closed her eyes and took a deep breath.

“I’m failing university. I failed last year, and I’m going to fail this year, and I can’t afford to take another year. I need you to fix all of this.”

The demon laughed, a sound that crawled under Jeanette’s skin and behind her eyeballs and rattled away at her bones. Behind the demon, her shadow writhed.

“I can offer you anything and everything in the world and you’re going to ask me to shift around some numbers and letters on a computer so someone hands you a piece of paper?”

“A degree is important,” she said, wishing desperately that there was something nearby for her to lean on. Her knees were going to give out. “No one will hire me if I don’t have one.”

The demon shook her head, her lip curling. “I can make you so smart, so rich, so knowledgeable, that you wouldn’t even need a degree, let alone a job. This has to be the most ridiculous thing I’ve ever been summoned for.”

“If you can make people rich and famous, why isn’t everyone wishing for that?”

“The better question—if I *can* make you rich and famous why aren’t you wishing for it?”

She stared at the demon, looking for a lie in her face, or a guilty tic somewhere. There had to be a catch. It wasn’t that easy. Was it?

The demon rolled her eyes and held her hand out. A stack of hundred-dollar bills appeared on her palm, so thick it strained at the edges of the rubber band holding it together. The demon threw it at her feet.

Jeanette’s knees finally gave out, and she sat down on the floor, hard, her tailbone protesting as it hit concrete. The barbecue lighter fell out of her hands, and clattered out of reach. She stared at the cash, dizzied by the scope of what the demon offered. It was impossible. Improbable. Surely if demons were all powerful, everyone would be summoning them up and trading away their souls for the world on a platter. What use was a soul anyways when compared to the unspeakable wealth the demon was promising her?

No more concrete floors. Never having to choose between paying rent or paying off her credit card. Never writing another research paper, or doing a group project, or cleaning her roommate’s hair out of the shower drain.

Upstairs, a door slammed.

“Jeanette? Are you home?” the voice of one of her roommates, Ellen, drifted down into the basement.

The demon stared at the ceiling, tilting her head thoughtfully. “Friend of yours? I wonder if they’d trade their soul to be rich and famous. Maybe I’ll go ask them.”

“No!” Jeanette yelled, then froze. Had Ellen heard? She waited in a tortuous silence for a few moments, but no reply came. “I summoned you, so I get a wish.”

“Well, if you’re sure you don’t want to spread the wealth around”

“She doesn’t deserve it. I do.”

The demon shrugged. “So, what do you want?”

Jeanette looked down at the pile of money. “How famous can you make me?”

“That’s up to you now, isn’t it, witch?”

“Could you make me a famous movie star? Who wins Oscars, and everyone loves?”

“Easy.”

“And ... who’s still famous when they’re old? Oh, and really charismatic?”
“Mmhmm.”

“Can I marry a famous actor? A specific one? There are so many hot actors though, I’d need to think about it. I don’t know who I’d choose. Wait, if you can make me really charismatic, can you also make me funny? Or, how about really good with languages too—I’ve always wanted to speak French, and German, and why not Japanese as well?”

The demon rolled her eyes, crossing her arms across her chest, but the possibilities opening up to Jeanette were so vast that she paid no attention. To dream a little bigger! Vacation houses, front row seats, fancy restaurants, walking the red carpet at big movie releases every year. She should have tried her hand at demon summoning years ago. “Can I have a private jet? Or do I buy that once I’m rich? Am I allowed to choose who I want to be friends with in Hollywood, because I can give you a list for that, there’s a *lot*. How about a skinnier waist? Can you do that?”

The demon moved, faster than anything Jeanette had seen, going from across the room to right in her face in a second. She wrapped a hand around Jeanette’s throat and squeezed very slowly. Jeanette grabbed the demon’s wrist, and tried to pull it off, but it was like grabbing a smooth marble statue, and refused to yield.

“I changed my mind,” the demon hissed. “I’m a big fan of greedy wishing, but you’re starting to irritate me.” Her breath was sauna-hot against Jeanette’s jaw. She tried to speak, but only a strangled whimper came out.

“You wanted education, so here’s some—free of charge. Do you know why most summoners have mentors? Why they carve their circles into the earth, and lay out elaborate rules and speak Latin? It’s because if a demon breaks your circle, you can’t control them. You need to learn all of that silly pomp and circumstance so that you can actually get the demon to do what you want when they show up.”

Jeanette’s feet kicked uselessly against the ground, her socks sliding against the floor. Ellen was upstairs, if she could just—

“I was just going to take your soul before I skipped town, but that really isn’t a fair trade, is it? You don’t even know what a soul is worth. No, you need something more”

The demon let her go, and Jeanette collapsed on the concrete. Her throat burned as she inhaled greedily, barely hearing the demon over her own frantic gasping.

“So, here’s the *deal* I’m going to offer you. In exchange for letting me free upon the world—which you’ve already done—I’m going to grant your wish, honey. All your education is paid for. Forever. Go try to get as many pieces of

paper from as many different schools as your stupid little brain can handle. Maybe one of them will teach you not to play with things you don't know how to control."

"No, but" Jeanette said hoarsely, trying to push herself up from the floor with shaking arms. Behind the demon, she watched the stack of bills turn into wisps of black smoke that blew off into the air. "Wait"

"I'll be honest with you," the demon said, crouching down, the stench of death making Jeanette gag. She smiled at Jeanette with a mouthful of too many teeth, and it scared her so much that her muscles forgot to keep shaking for a very long moment. "You would have gotten a better deal if you had been dying of a stroke. I haven't been on vacation since the Crusades. Maybe I'll drop you a postcard sometime."

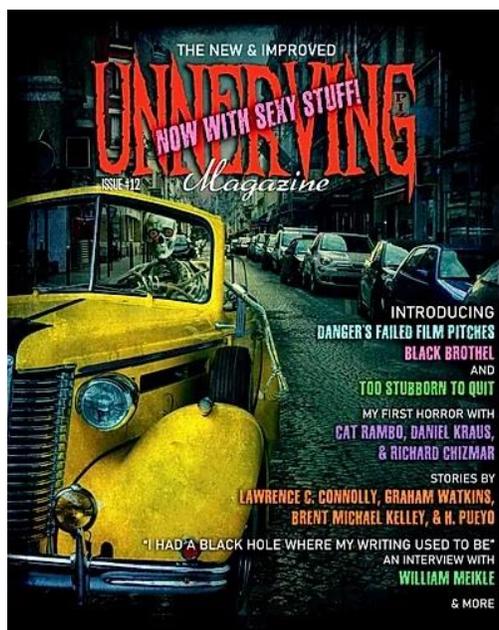
A wink, and the demon was gone, like she'd never been there.

Jeanette collapsed onto the floor, lying there until the chill in the concrete had slipped under her skin. Her throat felt lined with sandpaper, and every breath hurt. There were no noises from upstairs; no demonic sounds, no roommate footsteps. Eventually she pulled her phone out of her pocket, and with shaking hands navigated to her university's website. She opened her account and let out a wail.

AMOUNT DUE

\$0.00

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



Issue #12 contents include:

Here There be Spyderys – by Graham Watkins
Danger's Failed Film Pitches – by Danger Slater
Circle of Lias – by Lawrence C. Connolly
Jacques – (Comic) by Eddie Generous
and (Art) by Tovansakura
It Gets Blacker – by H. Pueyo
Black Brothel: Haunted Holes – by Renee Miller
A Friend in Paga – by Brent Michael Kelly
Keyed in on the Scary Things – by Richard Chizmar
I Couldn't Talk to Anyone about the Nightmares
– by Cat Rambo
Too Stubborn to Quit – by Eddie Generous
Spooky as Hell – by Daniel Kraus
Cancer and Creativity – William Meikle Interview

See < [Unnerving Magazine #12](#) >

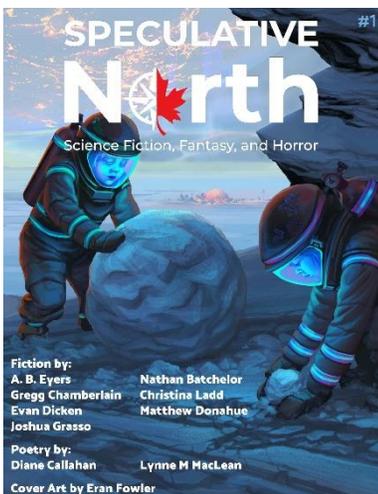
NOT THE OLD WEST

by Marcie Lynn Tentchoff

(Previously unpublished)

When my parents decided
to harness up the rocket oxen,
join the star train,
and settle new frontiers,
I did not realize that,
instead of holo-generated fantasies
of raids by screeching aliens,
and desperate blaster fights
in ethanol-fumed saloons,
I'd spend my summers
loping cyber-steeds
across deep blue-vined meadows,
learning how to
lasso herds of scaly,
pink-antennaed sheep,
and sleeping, cold and lonely,
under chilly blankets
formed of newly charted stars.

Speculative North is a brand new magazine published out of Toronto by tDotSpec.



Contents of first issue include:

Kariku's Ocean – by A.B. Eyers

Tokyo Burning – by Nathan Batchelor

It's Always Ice Time in the D.H.L. – by Gregg Chamberlain

Mona Luna – by Christina Ladd

Citizen of the Galaxy – by Evan Dicken

Memories White – by Matthew Donahue

The Alchemy of Curses – by Joshua Grasso

He Sold What He had Left – Diane Callahan

Grass Whisperer – by Lynne M MacLean

See < [Speculative North](#) >

OBLIVIATION

by Nancy Kay Clark

(Previously unpublished)

He isn't worth a thought, screamed Citizens United—a waste of air. But what do you expect from a logic-bound channel? Meanwhile, the Anti-Capital Punishment Co-op was mobilizing. It promised to deliver at least 800 for the vigil. The rest would be up to me. Independent Intel gave me thought-time to launch a public appeal for volunteers. And I got in touch with everyone I knew—long-lost relatives, friends, friends of friends, acquaintances, work colleagues. Some blocked me. Some said yes, then quietly reneged. Others—who I thought I could rely on—said no. My own sister refused. She said to me: “He’s been found guilty, Caro, by the greatest Minds in Salvation.”

“Well, they’re wrong. He’s innocent.”

“They’re never wrong. They’re the Minds.”

Whereas he told me the Minds weren't perfect. Stray thoughts, after all, bits of faulty logic, happen even to the best of us.

He was innocent. I'm sure he was innocent. He had to be innocent. I knew him so well—how could we have shared our thoughts for a decade and I not know he was committing such heinous crimes? I couldn't; it was impossible. And those who loved him as I do, agreed. I took comfort in every volunteer that signed up—not that all of them believed he was innocent. “He is guilty as blood,” said one glib teenager, “but that doesn't mean he hasn't the right to air. Capital punishment is barbaric.” Fine, whatever, as long as she worked her shifts, she could think what she liked.

By the time he came before the Minds for sentencing, we had mustered 1,500 volunteers. I was still hoping for a life sentence, but the lawyers warned us that was wishful. When I heard them announce “Death by Obliviation,” I collapsed and pleaded for mercy, for time—just a little time. They gave us a day and a half. We stocked his space with as much food and water as we could; we put in the compost toilet, the battery-operated hydroponic lights, the plants to soak up carbon dioxide and produce oxygen, the back-up carbon dioxide scrubbers.

I had two private hours with him. He was stoic. I was hysterical. He professed his innocence to me. He told me he loved me. He told me I should go on Independent Intel every week to shore up support for him. He asked me to keep recruiting volunteers—that he was counting on me. I promised him I would never let him down.

And exactly a day and a half later, the good citizens of Salvation, except for we few volunteers, turned their thoughts away from him. But we were ready. Two-hundred and fifty of us at a time in four-hour shifts held his space to 9 cubic metres. And by doubling up once a week, we were able to establish a narrow supply corridor for an hour. To have this reprieve was a gift; to still hear his voice was a blessing.

During the first couple of months he was in good spirits. He joked that now he had time to read all the books he had never got around to reading before. I was able to keep his name on the channels and I was able to visit him. Oh my God, that time was so special. The thought channels broadcast round-the-clock chats with him and he was witty and charming and so grateful to the volunteers. But eventually, when he would not comment on the crimes, except to reiterate that the Minds should concentrate on finding the real criminal, the public eventually stopped tuning in and the channels cancelled the chats.

The third month out I quit my job to concentrate on keeping him alive. It was a lot of work to keep the volunteers going, to organize the shifts and supplies. I couldn't get anyone from the channels to talk to me now. "Old news," they said, "we've moved on."

Six months into it, some of the volunteers began to slip away—family obligations, professional commitments they said, "so sorry." At first, I could replace most of them, with only the loss of a few centimeters. But without channel coverage, volunteers became harder to recruit. He began to complain, when my daily calls to him became weekly, when the weekly supply drops became monthly. Centimeter by centimeter his space got smaller.

By the ninth month, we were down to 800 volunteers, and 7 cubic meters. I began to take on longer shifts myself. We were all working overtime—200 people sitting for six hours in a dim room, joining our thoughts together, keeping his space intact, imagineering the walls, the floor, the ceiling, keeping the air circulating in the space so he could breathe, so he could live. I was exhausted; he became shrill. I cried every night. I couldn't sleep, couldn't eat. All I could hear was his voice ringing in my head: "They've forgotten me. I'm nothing."

By the 14th month, we numbered just 300 and he could walk only five steps in any direction. We couldn't supply him with food or water anymore. It was now only a matter of time. My wish, I remember clearly, was for him to die of starvation before we collapsed with exhaustion and the room and its air disappeared. But he was stubborn and rationed what supplies he had and kept on living. It was selfish, so selfish of him, of me, to be so demanding.

By the 15th month, we were briefly mentioned on the channels again as the longest vigil on record. I thought, thank God, some relief, some volunteers will sign up. But no, we got one or two maybe. It wasn't enough. We were down to 207. His ceiling was low now; he had to crouch. The Channels shook their heads at us and labeled us as misguided thinkers. That was too much for some and he didn't help matters. He began to rail against the volunteers—the very people who were keeping him alive—calling them babies and selfish bastards for not working 12-hour shifts.

In the middle of the 16th month, three quarters of them walked out. We were now just 52—stalwart souls every one of them, how I loved them. They kept me going. And they took such abuse from the public, from their neighbours, from their families, from him. He railed against his fate every day and every minute. He called them every name he could think of. I begged him to shut up, but he was living in a closet now and was down to his last box of food and water and the air was getting thin and the plants were dying and the batteries for the lights were dead and he had headaches and all he could do was swear.

It's been 18 months now. This morning I dismissed the remaining volunteers. I cannot in all good conscience let them go on—though they were willing. I should just end it now. He hasn't spoken in days. He lies in the dark on the floor huddled in a ball; the space is so tight he can't straighten up. But he's still alive. I can feel him. He's a thin line in my head—it wavers with every breath he takes. I have to stay awake, to focus on seeing the walls, the outline of the space. I can't let my mind slip or wander—or the room will collapse and he'll be gone. I have to keep going. I've got to hold on to him. I love him. How can I let go? I can't, but I know I will the minute I fall asleep.

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.

FIRE AND ICE

by Melanie Marttila

(Previously unpublished)

a walk along the lakeshore in March
reveals pressure cracks in ice
 (water moving beneath,
 wind moving above)
that form an unmistakable pattern.
it reminds me of Europa,
maybe Ganymede,
both moons of Jupiter,
with hearts of ice to match
appearances.
remembering pictures of one
or the other, in which
cracks in the ice so big they are
visible from space
divide the moon's surface into
icy continents.
these moving just like the
tectonic plates of our planet,
water that would be frozen at lower pressure
propelling the ice as surely as
magma drives the sides of the
San Andreas fault together in
self-destructive frenzy.
it is strange,
temperature notwithstanding,
that fire and ice should have
so much in common.

THE WOODS OF THE WERE-WALRUS

By Justin Dill

(Previously unpublished)

For three days and three nights I wandered the woods, pursued by that wretched beast. With recourse to neither compass nor map, I had long since given up all hope of escape from the thicket, which—though it may have been a figment of my delirium—seemed to possess a will of its own. It was just as I found myself on the brink of collapse, driven to the precipice of madness by torturous pangs of thirst, that I happened upon the peddler, whose cart had toppled into a bubbling pit of sink-soil and him along with it. Though the stench of decay would have sufficed to deter even the deviant hot on my heels, the notion of conversing with something other than the ravens who mocked me from their thorn-ringed perches compelled me to linger.

With nigh all strength having fled my flesh, I reasoned it within my rights to deny the poor peddler my aid—after all, one foolish enough to traverse so treacherous a realm lugging so arduous a burden deserved what misery he had coming to him. Besides, leaving the sap to rot would perhaps deter the beast long enough to secure my escape, or at least to allow me the mercy of expiring of natural cause rather than at the rabid tusks of that vile demon. And yet, against all reason, my morals prevailed, and with the cooperation of rather a sturdy twig, I managed to extricate the miserable wretch from his muddy would-be tomb. The cart, of course, was lost to the insatiable thirst of the pit. Only a threadbare satchel survived the incident, which the peddler cradled in his trembling arms.

“I owe you a great many thanks, mister,” spoke the peddler, still shivering from his plight. The poor fool seemed oblivious to the entity that inhabited these woods, and I almost envied him his ignorance. For the briefest of instances, it occurred to me that I had a moral obligation to inform him, lest he continue in the direction opposite mine and run afoul of the beast. But then, most weren’t inclined to believe in the existence of lycanthropes, and the monstrosity that had beset me was not afflicted with the common curse of a wolf, but that of a walrus. The peddler cleared his throat. “May I offer you a token of my gratitude?”

“That won’t be necessary, sir,” I declared, casting frequent glances back over my shoulder and jolting at every snap of a twig. “I am in rather a hurry—”

“I’m afraid I must insist.” The peddler, whose beard thrived with insect life, drew open the satchel and produced two artifacts: the first, a fist-sized stone

dappled in dark blue fuzz; the second, a small flask containing a violet liquid. “You may have either. The stone produces a fog thick enough to swim through. The cider effects a reaction that coats one’s body in a slippery sheen of blood.”

Both claims, needless to say, were utterly absurd. But then, were they any more absurd than the notion that I was currently being hunted by a—to use the vulgar term—were-walrus? I could see in the disturbed eyes of the peddler that he would not take no for an answer, and having no desire to excrete blood and thereby hasten my inevitable demise, I opted for the stone. No sooner had we completed our transaction than the peddler bid me adieu, hastening off in the direction that would bring him face to snout with the bloodthirsty imp. My voice cracked as I tried to shout a warning. The mere attempt, I reasoned, ought to leave me morally in the clear, and so I resumed my futile trek.

I wandered for what seemed hours, unable to tell whether I was making any progress—in all likelihood, I only ventured deeper into the woods, further isolating myself from civilization. Though the canopy above remained thick so as to blot out what little sunlight graced the forest floor, the eerie glow of diffused starlight signaled the coming of night.

And with it, the tortured panting of the beast.

I fled neither artfully nor purposefully. If there was any consolation, it was that my pursuer was exceedingly slow. Of course, having been drained of my vivacity, I could not boast much more impressive a speed, and soon I could smell the reek of seaweed and saltwater that preceded the demon.

In my haste, I managed somehow not to see an equally unfortunate wanderer whose path had crossed my own: a woman who looked to have been on a pilgrimage of all things. A fresh wound on her shoulder suggested an encounter with the beast; how she’d escaped its clutches after so close a shave, I could not fathom.

Now, however, was not the time to make acquaintances. I singled out a hollow in the trunk of a nearby tree—there I could perhaps take cover until the beast passed. Most unfortunately, the pilgrim spotted me as I was hastening to the refuge of that uncomfortable nook. As she approached, the sharp aroma of her fear flooded my nostrils, somewhat abating the stench of the beast.

“Please,” the pilgrim begged, clutching her wounded shoulder. “Let me hide with you.”

Now, while my morals beseeched me to share my refuge with the pilgrim, my senses declared such an act to be folly. Not only would our hiding together make it easier for the beast to locate us, but the smell of her terror was sure to alert it to our presence. And so, though it brings me no pride to admit it, I turned the poor woman away. Not long after she had left, I fished into my pocket for the peddler’s stone.

“See if you can find me now,” I cursed under my breath, only half believing in the orb’s efficacy. To my surprise, upon my tossing it to the ground, the stone did, in fact, emit a fog so dense that I could see neither nose nor limb in front of me. I remained deathly still in my nook, cringing at every hungry squeal the tusked beast emitted in its pursuit. As its shuffling drew nearer, I held my breath, and did not dare partake of air until I was certain that it had passed.

Spared for the moment, I gathered my strength and, once the fog dissolved, retrieved the stone and continued on my journey. Though I limped, the knowledge that the beast no longer pursued me imbued a spring in my step, and at long last I cleared the woods and came upon a rocky cliffside. The towering façade of stone appeared to beckon to me. Immediately, I cursed my luck; though a winding path led up the side of the cliff, the jagged formation of the rock promised a treacherous climb, one I dared not attempt in my condition.

Nevertheless, I ventured up the path, searching for solace somewhere, anywhere. And at last I found it—a crevice concealed in the cliffside about a quarter of the way to the zenith. Through the crack, I could smell freshwater. Crouching down on all fours, I attempted to crawl through the crevice. After a few minutes, a cry of frustration escaped my chapped lips; emaciated though I was, I could not fit through the crack.

It was then that the pilgrim came limping up the mountain path, encumbered by twice as many wounds as she’d possessed when last we’d crossed paths. The panting monstrosity at her tail was in need of no introduction. My throat clammed at the sight of it, my nostrils wrinkling at the foul stench that preceded its hulking mass. Its moist, grey flesh glistened.

The pilgrim and I exchanged no words as she closed the distance between us. Eying the slit in the cliffside, she reached into her tunic and produced—of all things—the flask of violet cider the peddler had offered me! I glanced over my shoulder, beholding the gargantuan silhouette of the half-human beast as it lumbered toward us.

No sooner had the pilgrim downed her mouthful than her pores erupted, spewing a thick coating of blood that trailed down her skin. I wasn’t sure whether to shriek or wretch—my body settled on a compromise halfway between each. Thus lubricated, the pilgrim bent down and, as easily as a fish skimming a current, slid through the crevice.

The beast loomed before me, moonlight glinting off its bloodied tusks. My limbs grew weak, not from fatigue but in anticipation of my inevitable capture. “Help!” I screamed, parched of throat. I’d noticed a trace of the potion

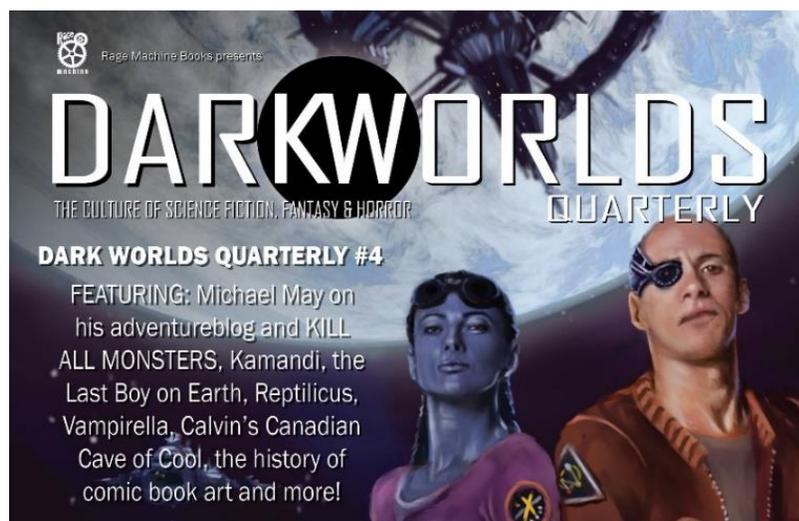
remaining in the bottle—surely she could spare the rest. Yet I'd turned her away in her moment of need. Why should I expect any better of her?

To my great surprise, a small clang signaled the flask skidding along the rock. It landed just a few feet away from me; my heart nearly seized in joy. Quickly, I bent over to scoop up the flask with my sweaty palms. As I reached, the fog stone tipped out of my pocket and bounced along the crag. Within seconds, the soupy fog encompassed me. What a wretched turn! Cursing the gods that would mock me so, I dropped to my knees and frantically felt around for the flask. My fingers fumbled blindly in the fog, scraping against jagged stone in search of the potable.

The shrill squeal of the beast drew nigh; my time was just about up. I hadn't made it this far to be made a meal of! My fingers clawed at the stone, scouring, until at last they settled on the flask. And, as my sweaty nubs struggled to remove the stopper, the crushing weight of the beast descended upon me. The sharp sting of its tusk impaling me through the rib crippled me, and I dropped the flask.

No time had I to resign myself to my fate. But even in my final moments, I remained resolute. The beast would not win—of that I was certain. Part of the treachery of the path had been the thinness of its bends; one uncalculated step would have easily sent me plummeting to my death.

This step, however, was nothing if not calculated. Gathering the last vestiges of strength, hitherto inaccessible to me, I hefted the weight of the brute. I seized both tusks and, with a cry of finality, launched us both over the edge.



See [Darkworlds](#)

IN AMBER

by Ralph Pitchie

(Previously unpublished)

In Eridanus, river of stars,
A frozen world called Amber,
with air too thin to breathe.
On Shiva, its desolate moon,
metallic anomalies hint at buried secrets.
All that remains of masters of fire and song,
survivors of cold and chaos,
who walked upon their moon
before we learned to talk.

The last two have one last meal,
talk of friends, old hopes, and things unsaid.
They take the pills and pop the seals
and lie down to await the dead.
Between them the ancestral tool,
its grip inlaid with amber,
hides within an eight-limbed flying pest
from time and place remote.
That tool he's used this final month
To etch the memories of his race
For imagined eyes to see.

The hiss of ebbing air grows quiet.
The pair lie frozen.
Two minds, two bodies,
sixteen limbs, four hearts,
two pairs of eyes,
locked in each other's gaze.

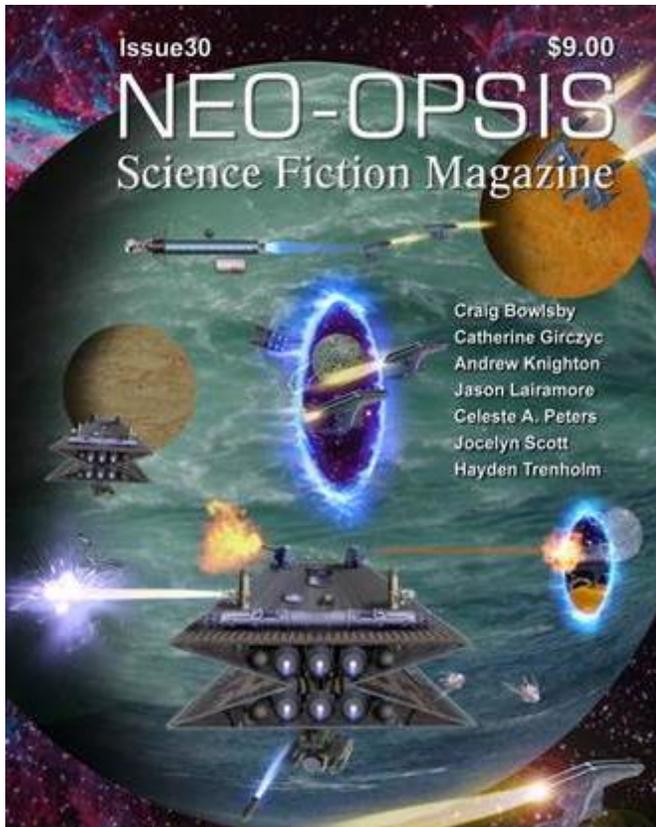
Humans, twenty-fifth century people.
Mutated Methuselchs riding fusion fire to the stars
gaze in wonder at strange slashes and swirls
scrawled in desperate haste.
Memos from an ancient tomb.

A newcomer reaches down,
gently traces with human hand
the crafted curve of alien gem.
Across three million years
Their minds reach out,
Defy the ice and time and cold.
In amber their thoughts still glow.

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](#) >

ONE DOOR OPENS

by Hayden Trenholm

(Previously unpublished)

Reg King knew the day was about to turn peculiar when the fat man blocked his entrance to Paddington Station. Rather, the man had been fat once but now the skin hung off his face and neck like last year's holiday bunting. Reg pushed past him but the man clasped his shoulders with bony fingers, tightening on his flesh like a crow clutching a twig.

"I'm late," said Reg, lifting his wrist to show the man his watch.

"Contrariwise," said the man, his voice high and fluting. "You are exactly on time."

None of Reg's fellow Londoners seemed to notice his predicament. He and the man had become an island past which the river of life flowed.

"What do you want?" Reg asked when it was apparent he had no choice but to engage.

The man frowned. "That is not the way to start a conversation. One should start by saying 'how do you do?' or by introducing yourself."

It's late in the game for that, thought Reg, but he had learned long ago that it was best to humour crackpots. He had certainly met a few in his time.

"How do you do?" he said. "My name is Reg King."

"Precisely," said the man. He hesitated, looking carefully to the left and right. "I'm Dee."

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Dee. Now, what do you want?"

"I want ..." Dee tugged at his soiled vest as if that would remove the wrinkles from the cloth. Reg thought of dashing past him but he had already missed the 9:11 and another train wasn't due for twenty minutes. Besides, something about Dee caught his fancy. Perhaps it was the old-fashioned clothing, the blank blandness of his expression or even the large umbrella he had strapped to his back like a scabbard.

"I want ..." Dee started again. "I want you to wake up."

Here it comes, he's going to introduce me to Jesus. "Well," he said. "The state the world's in, we all need to wake up. Jolly right."

"Contrariwise," said Dee. "*You* are the one, Reg King. All the rest have failed me."

The hair on Reg's back rose. It was not the first time he had been singled out. How often had he been plucked from the crowd by security or for man-in-the-street interviews?

“It’s a puzzle, isn’t it?” said Dee, as if he was picking Reg’s thoughts out of the air. “How one person’s perspective can change how the whole world conceives of itself?”

It sounded like something he had learned twenty years ago in sixth form. When would a shambling heap like Dee have come across such an idea? He couldn’t imagine the man had ever been a school boy. How did it go? “One competent observer ...” he muttered, glancing at his watch again. The stair down to the platform seemed to be receding.

“I was saying to ... to my brother how unfair it all is. One day it’s all shiny and new and the next it’s as lost as a lion in the forest.”

Reg didn’t think lions lived in the forest, but if they did, they were unlikely to be lost.

“Is your brother hereabouts?” he asked without hope. “Might he be able to help you?”

Dee giggled. “It’s not as if I’m my keeper’s brother.” The idea clearly delighted the former fat man; he put his hands back on Reg’s shoulders and danced a little jig.

“Steady on, old chap,” said Reg as Dee pulled him perilously close to the stairs. “It will hardly do to take a tumble.”

Dee’s mad gambol stopped as abruptly as it began. He panted as if he were exhausted from his brief effort.

“Are you looking for your brother?” Reg persisted. *I’m the one missing in the forest, and I shan’t escape until I solve this riddle.* “Is he lost?”

“Lost to this world ...” Dee narrowed his eyes. “What do you know about my brother?” His mouth turned down in a furious frown. For a moment, Reg believed it would come to blows. *It’s absurd, I’ve never been in a fight in my life. My mates always kept me from harm.*

But then Dee smiled, a bright orb appearing from behind banks of darkness.

“My brother is both nearby and faraway. Everything, you see, is both exactly how it appears and, contrariwise, exactly how it does not. This paving stone is both solid,” he said, stamping his foot, “and, at the same time, little more than empty space.”

A vague memory leapt to mind of things being fired at gold foil by some Lord What’s His Name. *They always said that knowledge would come in handy someday but I doubt this is what they meant.*

“Are you a scientist down on his luck?” The station entrance was strangely empty—hardly likely at this time of day. Was there an alert? He looked into Dee’s once-again bland face and was taken with a sudden fear.

People, it was rumoured (and where on earth had he read that?), had simply disappeared from this station, only to reappear miles or even counties away. He wasn't a superstitious man, but, still, one couldn't be too careful.

Dee clapped his arm across Reg's shoulder and began to lead him toward a side passage that, Reg was sure, hadn't been there before.

"It all began in Switzerland," Dee said. "We tried to warn them. We had done the maths, you see. You can't bang things together – no matter how small—without making a racket. Contrariwise, there are consequences, *unpredictable* consequences. If you mess with the universe, it may very well mess back."

If Reg went through that archway with Dee, he might become one of those people they talked about—who disappeared and never came back or, worse, came back changed. Unhinged from the world, perceptions and principles reversed as if through a glass darkly. Reg wasn't even sure where those thoughts came from—he was not typically given to metaphor. *Maybe it's already too late.*

Dee was talking again, something about meat pies and oyster stew.

"... of cabbages and Kings ..." Reg muttered the doggerel that had plagued his boyhood years. He had to escape.

He twisted away and ran. Dee hooked his ankle with the crook of his umbrella and Reg tumbled to the pavement. His hand found something hard. He rolled onto his back and held it up like a weapon. But it was nothing but a child's broken toy.

Dee towered over him his face twisted in despair. Intelligence glimmered in his eyes until it was washed away by large glittering tears.

"You see how cruelly time flows," he said. "This morning that was new and my brother and I were young. Look at me now!"

Dee struck the pavement with the point of his umbrella, which sprang open, large enough to hold a small family. Something black and formless flew up, its edges shimmering with colour, like oil smeared across a puddle.

He was trapped—nowhere left to move that offered safety. Reg squeezed his eyes shut and waited for the end. *Wrong place, wrong time.* Thunder clapped and, in the distance, he heard a voice. "Dee? Is that you, brother?"

No reply came and when Reg opened his eyes, the station entrance was empty except for a small blonde girl who looked at him mournfully.

"You woke up, Reg King." She walked into the glistening darkness of the side passage. Then she—and the passage—disappeared. After a moment, Reg stood up, dusted himself off, and walked down the stairs to catch the 9:31 to Oxford.

DO ANDROIDS DREAM, INDEED

by Lisa Timpf

(Previously unpublished)

Philip K. Dick once asked
if androids dream
of electric sheep
but we have our answer, now—
they imagine unicorns, instead,

unicorns and fountains
secluded valleys
improbable couplings—
blending fact and fantasy
the way a child

might place animal action figures
from her favorite cartoon
in amongst the toy sheep,
the cows and horses and pigs
in a plastic barn, weaving

her own stories that begin,
“remember the time when ...”
then lurch sideways into
an account of events that surely
happened only in imagination

how thin, how grey
the line between truth and fiction,
how easy to sound rational
while spouting gibberish
and yet as the truth

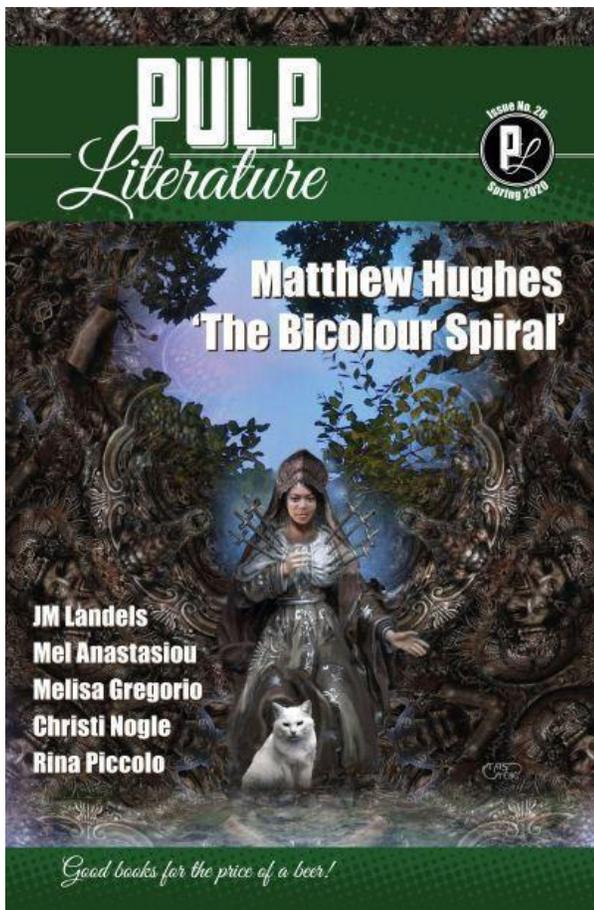
grows ever more elusive,
slipping through our fingers
like Schrodinger eels,

we may yet long to dance
in that enchanted valley

cavorting with the unicorns
in the fevered dreams
of androids

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 #26 (Spring 2020)

Cover – *Queen of Swords* by Tais Teng
The Bicolour Spiral – by Matthew Hughes
Interview with Matthew Hughes
The Extra: Frankie Ray at the Gates of Monument Studios – by Mel Anastasiou
Watershakers – by Christi Nogle
The Birthday Party – by Melisa Gregorio
Deep Water – by Mike Carson
Double Flush – by Rina Piccolo
Buddha in a Bottle – by Susan Pieters
Life4Sale – by Michael Donoghue
Dannemora Sewing Class – by MFC Feeley
The Safest Place During a Tornado is in the Bathtub
– by Patti Jeane Panghorn
Absent Are the Constellations My Father Plucked From the sky – by Sarah Summerson
Ghost Room – By Allison Bannister
The Shepherdess – JM Landels

See < [Pulp Literature #26](#) >

DEADLY EXPERIMENTATION

by R.A. Clarke

(Previously unpublished)

Three hours ago, Darcy had called me over. She'd supposedly made an interesting discovery. Tempting my curiosity further, Darcy announced that her mother wouldn't be home until late and I simply *had* to come see it.

Enough said. I didn't need any excuses to want to see her.

Twenty minutes later I arrived at her house. Darcy's mom, Carol, was a hoarder of paranormal and ritualistic memorabilia, the house littered with bizarrely carved statues and gargoyle-looking things. The woman was hardly ever home. It was strange.

We poured some drinks and watched old reruns of *Saturday Night Live*. We chatted about our exams and what lay ahead. It was crazy to think that four years of college were nearly over and we'd be moving out into the workforce. I wasn't sure if I was ready for that just yet.

Impatient, I finally asked Darcy about this mysterious discovery of hers, but she kept brushing it off.

"The surprise is for later," she said with a wink.

So, we continued drinking and chilling out together. I wasn't complaining. Just being with her made me happy. I could never get enough of her smile. Maybe even, with some liquid courage, I'd finally grow big enough balls to ask her out.

Once we were good and tipsy, Darcy giggled and pronounced, "It's time!" She ushered me into the kitchen, reaching into a cupboard.

With a beaming smile, she presented a small plate with four brownies sitting on it. Waving her arm with a flourish, she exclaimed, "Ta-da!"

I stood still, hands in pockets, looking down at the not-so-mysterious brownies. "Is this your discovery?" I asked with a side glance. "I mean, you know I love a good brownie ... but, I'm not sure if this qualifies." I laughed.

She slapped my shoulder. "No ... these aren't just any brownies. They're special brownies." Darcy stared with expectation, waiting for the concept to sink into my brain.

"Special. As in, *special*?" I clarified, eyes widening.

Darcy nodded enthusiastically. "I was looking for this old pendant my mom gave me once, thinking it would match with my grad dress perfectly. Couldn't find it, so then I was thinking, maybe she put it in a safe place—mom's weird like that. Anything old and collectible she just has to preserve." Darcy grabbed

the plate and headed back to the living room, putting it onto the coffee table. I sat beside her on the couch. She continued, “So I went through her closet today. She’s always saying I’m *never* to look in her closet—*ever*, so I’ll likely get in trouble for it. But, whatever.” She shrugged. “I came across an old trunk in there. And guess what was inside?”

I was literally sitting on the edge of my seat. “Weed?”

“No, *magic* mushrooms,” Darcy said, her eyes sparkling. “At least I think they are. A friend offered me one last year at a party, and it looked exactly the same.”

“No way! I never got up the courage to try those in high school when I went to Rock Fest with my buddies.” I picked up the plate, sniffing at the contents to see if they smelled any different. They didn’t. “You’ve done them before then?”

“No, I never did end up trying it. But I figure, there’s no time like the present, right? There was a whole container of them in there, and a lot of other really weird stuff. I’d rather not get caught if at all possible, so I only snagged four. I’m sure two each should do the trick, don’t ya think?” Darcy grinned wickedly.

I nodded. “Oh, I’m sure.” I set the plate back down, hearing it clunk loudly as a result of my alcohol-infused motor skills. “Huh, so your mom’s a closet druggie. Who knew?” I grinned. Darcy laughed, her dimples showing.

“Yeah, she’s a weird bird.” She took a swig of beer, shrugging. “Anyway, I couldn’t think of anybody I’d rather experiment with. Are you game?”

“Aw, I’m honored. Of course, I’m game!” I nudged my shoulder against hers playfully. “Are we calling this our early graduation celebration then?”

“Yep. Tomorrow’s going to be busy—so, tonight is just for us.” There were those cute dimples again.

“I love it.” *I love you*, I nearly blurted. Catching myself in time, I stood and picked up one of the little round brownies. “Did you bake these yourself?”

Darcy shook her head, laughing; a hearty sound that bubbled up from the gut. “Hell no, I don’t bake, Cory. I bought a package of Two-Bite Brownies from the corner store and just stuffed the mushrooms in the bottom,” she said, still laughing. When Darcy was drunk, everything seemed funnier than it really should be. I could only imagine what she’d be like high. *I guess I’ll find out soon.*

Turning the little morsel over to inspect its base, I saw exactly where she’d pushed the ‘shroom inside. I nodded with a smirk. “Well, that works too. I popped the brownie into my mouth and stumbled toward the bathroom. “I gotta break the seal. That Tequila’s hitting hard.”

“If it’s yellow, let it mellow, Cory.”

“If it’s brown flush it down. Yeah, yeah,” I muttered, grinning.

“Seriously! The septic’s wonky.”

I bowed low in gracious acceptance, nearly falling over. Darcy’s melodious laughter followed me through the door. Anticipation of the evening ahead had me feeling flushed.

Chewing my special brownie, I could feel the texture change inside my mouth. The fudgy cake coating melted away to reveal the chewy ‘shroom, it’s consistency firm and rubbery. It was definitely not something I’d particularly relish eating on a regular basis, but for the desired reaction, it was palatable. Grinding it up between my teeth, I checked my reflection in the mirror. Swiping the hair off my face and inspecting my teeth, I also breathed on my hand. Not bad. On instinct I patted the breast pocket of my plaid over-shirt, happy to feel the hard edges of the pack of gum there. If I was lucky, I might need that. I pulled out my wallet next, relieved to see the emergency condom was still tucked safely into one of the leather folds. If I was *really* lucky, I might need that too.

I was going to ask her out tonight. No more hemming and hawing allowed. I knew we were perfect for each other, but did she? There was only one way to find out for sure, and I’d been putting it off for far too long. It was now or never.

My head began to swim, disrupting my sense of equilibrium. I leaned against the counter to off-set the swirling. The patterned wallpaper lining the walls began to distort, its flowery colors melting into each other. A sweat broke out on my brow. *Whoa, those ‘shrooms are no joke.* Slumping onto the toilet lid, I furiously blinked my eyes to still the movement.

Something brushed my arm.

My eyes flicked down, seeing a line of white quilted toilet tissue unfurling itself from the roll. “What the ...?” Paralyzed by the shock of such a bizarre visual, I watched the strip of 2-ply lazily wrap around my forearm. It kept winding, inching up my arm. *It’s just the ‘shrooms. It’s not real.*

I tried to brush it off. It didn’t budge.

Again, I tried, but it resisted. The third time I tried with more force, and the tissue squeezed my arm with a surprising strength. Irritated, I ripped the offending squares right off the roll, watching as they flitted to the floor.

A snake of rolled tissue suddenly shot out and snapped my face like a whip. Recoiling, my back clanked against the tank. “Shit!” My hands flew to my face.

Before I could react further, multiple white vines lashed out to ensnare each of my limbs, digging into my flesh. The skin burned where it twisted. Thrusting my arms and legs out, I fought against the unwanted detention.

With every movement, the tissue tightened more and more. The roll began to quake, gyrating against the shiny metal holder.

My eyes widened as the roll began splitting in half. A horizontal slice appeared, tearing across the ply bit by bit, until it finally flew wide open, revealing rows of sharp needle-like teeth. Its jaws began snapping threateningly.

“Darcy!” I shouted, heart hammering in my chest.

A triple-knock sounded at the door. “Cory?”

“Help! The toilet paper is trying to kill me!”

“What?” She laughed. “You’re just high.”

“No. It’s really fucking trying to kill me!” I screamed. “Get in here!”

Thrashing to no avail, I watched helplessly as more quilted tissue crept up my torso.

“It’s the ‘shrooms, man. I just ate one and I feel a bit woozy too—must be a killer batch.”

“It’s not the ‘shrooms!” The vein of paper lashed around my throat, strangling. “Darcy! Please—” But, my voice disappeared with my air. The blood rushed to my head. Sparkles began clouding my vision as the roll dragged me closer.

“Hey Cory, can you come out here now? I don’t feel so good,” Darcy announced a moment later. “And ... I think there’s something in the house.” Her voice sounded wary. “I hear something moving.”

Blood soaked my shirt as a searing heat sliced my neck. The vines pulled me off the toilet seat, my knees landing hard against the tiling. It was reeling me in, my shoulder only inches away. Clattering and banging resounded from beyond the bathroom door. *Darcy*

With a jerk I was sucked in tight, my fading senses exploding into splintering pain, as the roll chomped into my shoulder. Terrified and weak, I heard Darcy scream.

“Oh God! The statue is alive!” Her cry was shrill; her fists pounding on the door.

The sound of her voice was muffled to my ears, as if projected underwater. She sounded so far away now. Everything did. My body shook violently as the needled teeth tore deeper.

“Hey hun,” Carol called out, walking through the front door and tossing her keys onto the side table. She’d just arrived back into town, and felt weary from the long day of hunting. Several reports of a water-borne pod possession had kept her very busy. She sighed.

It was finally time to relax.

Rounding the corner of the foyer, Carol stopped dead. Her travel bag slipped from her fingers, landing with a thud on the carpet.

There was blood everywhere. And body parts. A guttural sob wrenched from her throat as she recognized what was left of her daughter's body splayed out near the coffee table.

Carol darted across the room, falling to her knees beside Darcy's head. Hands shaking, she placed them gently atop her daughter's hair. "No," she cried. "My baby girl" Her mind raced, considering what might've done this.

A creak sounded from behind.

Eyes widening, Carol's senses sharpened. Whatever did this wasn't gone.

She immediately grabbed for her watch, her thumb pressing one of the knobs in quick succession. The emergency code was sent. Spinning on her knees, Carol came face to face with the largest of her carved statues. It glared, releasing a low growl from its piranha mouth. The dark knotted wood of its body had splintered apart to create functioning limbs. Sharp spikes were growing out of its arms.

Carol sprinted toward her travel bag.

White snakes of tissue caught her in mid-motion, ensnaring an arm first, then a leg. Searching for the source, Carol saw a sinister-looking roll was now perched beside the statue. Toilet paper ... really? Carol lunged forward, straining as she reached for her bag.

Just a couple feet away. She had to get it.

A noose tightened around her other ankle. Without control of her legs, forward mobility was next to impossible. Carol dug furiously through her jacket pockets for something, anything she could use. *The angel tears*. Just as her free hand wrapped around a small glass bottle, a 2-ply tendril shot out to capture her wrist. It squeezed like a tourniquet, tightening until she was unable to maintain her hold. The bottle dropped. She couldn't move. *No*.

Carol began to inch backward.

"What do you make of it, sir?" Chaney asked, inspecting the rough edges of a very chewed bathroom door.

"Looks like these kids mistakenly ingested some demon pods. Release and manifestation would've been quick," Senior Agent McGavin said, sizing up the plate sitting on the coffee table. He grasped one of the two remaining brownies and squeezed his fingers, crumbs of cake falling away. What remained was a shriveled mushroom-like shape, benign and unappealing in appearance.

McGavin held it up for Chaney to see. "I suppose they do look like the head of a magic mushroom, don't they?"

Chaney nodded in agreement, jotting down several notes. "But how did the pods get here in the first place, sir?" he asked. "As per policy, shouldn't they be in secure storage at headquarters?"

"You're right." McGavin tapped his nose twice. "They should be. However, agents slip now and then. That seems to be the case here. A deadly error in judgement." His tone was very matter-of-fact. "One tiny lapse can get you killed in this job, Chaney."

"Of course, sir," Chaney agreed, pushing his glasses up.

McGavin proceeded to crumble the second brownie before discarding the plate. "One of the offending demons possessed a toilet paper roll, from what I'm told." McGavin stroked his thick moustache, allowing the briefest of grins. "A creative choice."

Chaney scribbled furiously to keep up.

Stepping over tattered bodily remnants, the senior agent came to rest next to a severed head. Squatting beside it, he lifted a sticky flap of hair to get a better look at the face. Glancing back up to his trainee, he sighed. "Poor Carol must've been ambushed when she got home. Two on one." The younger man nodded somberly while McGavin clucked his tongue. "What a shame ... She was one of my best agents."

"And the escaped Demons, sir?"

"They've been secured." McGavin stood, brandishing a sealed D.E.A. (Demon Exorcism Agency) container with two shriveled pods inside. "The emergency response team recovered our little devils." He rattled the container for emphasis, before opening the lid to drop both additional pods inside. "Inventory of Carol's trunk showed only four were removed."

"Oh good. The situation is under control then," Chaney said, closing his notebook.

"Yes, but ..." McGavin stood up with a crisp shake of his head. "Let this be a lesson to you, Chaney." He leaned in with a raised brow, tapping the new recruit on the shoulder with his pen. "Never take your work home with you."

"Yes, sir."

"Don't do drugs either."

"No, sir."

20 STORIES OF DISASTER AND REDEMPTION

by Jim Smith

(Previously unpublished)

01) – Isaac Asimov woke up in a foul, foul mood. It had been three days since the African bull elephant had suddenly appeared in the middle of the radar lab. There was a war on.

02) – Far too late, I discovered that a barn owl had declared war on Leigh Brackett. She glanced at me sideways.

03) – The chameleon fled down one alley after another to escape the riot. At last, a crack in the wall of this very library allowed him to resemble Ray Bradbury.

04) – In a distant war room, they plotted to massacre John Brunner and everyone who had read him, with dragonflies.

05) – One anteater to another, near the end of day: “have you noticed we have suffered almost an epidemic of Octavia Butlers in recent days?”

06) – In my imagination, Judy Merrill encountering a bobcat in a blizzard could only end one way.

07) – You would be frightened to discover that nuclear accidents are as common as the common toad, attributed to Groff Conklin, but more likely it was Willy Ley.

08) – A single duck could have been responsible for the bridge failure that terminated L. Sprague de Camp.

09) – Lester del Rey changed his name briefly to Bulldog Oil Spill.

10) – I can't remember the name of Samuel Delany's wife, nor the gorilla that she lost in the earthquake in which Chip made a confession.

11) – A horde of gerbils, working together for several days, pulled Alice Mary Norton out of the shipwreck. Sadly the Andre went down.

12) – But for a single hermit crab, the levee would not have failed, and Robert Heinlein would have had himself frozen to offset Disney.

13) – On entering the Oort Cloud, a Giant Clam bows in the direction of the former Pluto, which causes a cyclone localized to Nancy Kress's neighbourhood.

14) – Damon Knight was decorated for having helped a flamingo survive a forest fire.

15) – I drank as much as Fritz Leiber, whose play about the mass evacuation of Toledo, entitled, simply, *Hamster*, was performed three times.

16) – A manatee, thrown at a tower, causing it to collapse, was too much for Vonda McIntyre.

17) – According to Larry Niven, oysters are responsible for the global warming fiction.

18) – Conversely, an ice age caused the pig's vestigial intelligence, if you were to believe that silver tongued devil Fred Pohl.

19) – It took only two bottles of Red Wolf to persuade Spider Robinson to write about a zero gravity avalanche.

20) – I am the toucan that Joanna Russ attempted to save from last week's volcanic eruption.

AURORA AWARDS VOTING OPEN TILL JULY 25TH, 2020

In the meantime you can go to the Aurora Awards site and download the voters package of nominated novels, short stories, poems and other works for your perusal in order to make an informed choice. Then you can vote.

Bear in mind you have to be both a Canadian and a member of CSFFA (Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy Association) to participate. Membership is only \$10 CAD. Easy to join. Just go to the site and follow the instructions.

This is your opportunity to honour the writers, poets, authors and fans who have entertained and intrigued you.

See < [Aurora Awards](#) >

INUKSUK

by Robert Runté

(Previously unpublished)

Ahnah adjusted her snow goggles. She was not mistaken: there was a darker patch on the horizon, straight ahead. She restrained herself from summoning the last of her strength to run to it. It was still some distance, and she did not want to arrive, only to collapse. There was need for dignity.

It was probably nothing, she told herself. Just a bit of ice pushed up by wind.

Though the jagged shape, the brownish-grey colour, matched what she had seen with her night eyes. Exactly.

But where was the man? the doubting voice in her head demanded.

What she had seen with her night eyes had always revealed a man. A Tlicho. Out here, in the middle of the land, where no Tlicho should be.

And apparently wasn't.

She had come a long way. It had taken longer than she had thought. Longer, certainly, than her provisions.

Maybe the Tlicho had come and gone. Or wasn't here yet.

Maybe there was no Tlicho, and she'd have to do this herself. Not that she had any illusions she retained the strength required.

She plodded on, one foot before the next, tired beyond bearing.

She blinked, and her night eyes showed her the Tlicho sitting with his back to the mound of stones. Hugging his knees. She peered through the slit in her antler goggles, but there was no one. Just a jumble of stones.

But the stones were there. That much was now revealed as true sight. So, she was not a complete fool. Just mostly.

The storm had come up suddenly, rising wind and plummeting temperatures.

"Can't you do that remotely?" Matt asked, nodding towards the equipment shack ten yards away.

"If I could do this remotely, I'd be doing it from my office in Huston." Ray waved his gloved hand at the cable attached to the tower's box. "It's an anti-terrorist thing. You have to be plugged in directly. *And* the box has to be opened with the key-fob physically present, or the cable cuts out."

He felt sheepish explaining it out loud. As if some Russian hacker cared about this stupid tower in the middle of nowhere. Nothing but tiny snow dunes between them and the horizon. *Bleak* didn't begin to describe it.

He remembered being surprised back in college that the deepest circle of Danté's hell was ice, not fire. Made perfect sense to him now.

The woman, Uki, pointed her chin at the keyboard. "Hurry up, then."

She was the structural engineer who had erected the two-hundred-and-twenty-foot G8 cell tower Ray was working on, out here in the middle of the arctic. Just her, with Matt piloting the Straightliner that hauled it up. The ancient Sikorsky Cyclone Ray had been assigned let him off in time to watch as the over-sized blimp lowered the whole assemblage onto one of those inuksuk statue things.

That's what he didn't understand. Both of them had given him such a hard time when he innocently called it "Eskimo," and here they were burying this *Inuit* statue under a couple of hundred tons of steel. Why not just set the tower a hundred yards in either direction if they were such champions of *Inuit* culture?

He supposed it would look good in the ad: the juxtaposition of the old and new; the arms of the inuksuk sticking out either side of the tower, like it was holding the whole thing up. The company must have paid a shitload of money for the natives to sign off on that.

When he'd asked McVey what possible point there was to a cell tower in the middle of nowhere, McVey had just said "marketing." Like if the ad showed the company had coverage in the arctic, people would get they must have coverage everywhere. Symbolic. Ray got that. But then, why send him up here to make the tower active? There was no one going by here with a cell phone. No people at all, in any direction, for hundreds of miles. And while the new G8 system could reach to the horizon, at two-hundred-and-twenty-feet, the tower's horizon was a little less than thirty miles.

Maybe the point. That there weren't any natives around they needed to ask permission from, or to have to pay off, about the inuksuk.

But then, burying the inuksuk under the tower would symbolize something quite different to the Eskimo—sorry, *Inuit*—and terrorism was back on as a concern.

He finished meticulously copying the row of seemingly random numbers and letters from his notes into the appropriate box on the screen, waited for the program to verify the checksum to ensure he hadn't made any typos, and then hit "submit" to enter the command. It was all completely pointless, but Ray was a professional, and damn if any tower he worked on was going to have

errors. Plus, no way he wanted to be sent back to this frozen hell to fix some stupid glitch.

A new screen popped up for him to enter the next sequence. Time to break.

“I gotta warm up,” he announced to the others, and they all headed back to the equipment shack and its wholly inadequate propane heater.

Dekawi sat with his back to the pile of stones. Though he rested against them, he felt the heaviness of each separate block weighing him down, grinding him between them, till he was dust.

His parents had said to stop. This is not any shaman’s vision. Visions help the people. This is of help to no one. Stop.

His woman had said, I believe you, but we have children, and it isn’t right you wear yourself against stones. Wait until the children are grown. Grown children could help.

His friends had said, there is nothing that direction. No trees, no moose, no caribou even. Nothing to the horizon, or the next horizon, or the horizon after that. Nothing.

Dekawi had shrugged and said: Now there will be stones.

Ray commandeered the only counter space as they crammed into the little wooden shelter, stomping across its plank floor to shake off the snow. He opened his binder to review what came next. He’d laid out all the settings in the office before ever leaving Huston, but that still left twenty-eight pages of notes to review. He frowned as he came across three lines of code blacked out and an arrow drawn to two pages of machine code: ones and zeros. What the ...?

There was a yellow sticky from McVey: “Sorry, but the boys sent up these changes last minute. Use this instead for the ‘satellite connect’ screen.” That was more than odd, because Ray *was* the “boys” in the Huston office when it came to coding towers. And it had not escaped his notice that Uki had nudged Matt when Ray discovered the change. What was going on?

“Problem?” Matt asked.

“No, just need to make a minor change,” Ray said ... because he knew better than to voice his suspicious. Ray had started with the company putting up towers in Afghanistan where rule one was: don’t trust local guides. Ray became acutely aware he was hundreds of miles from the nearest help, with two people he didn’t know, who controlled the airship that was currently his

only way out of here. It didn't take a genius to realize how easily he could have *an accident*.

Ray pulled his phone out of his pants pocket. There were guys who could read straight from ones and zeros, but Ray wasn't one of them. He snapped a picture and the software he'd installed last year in Yemen gulped out the translations. KN43bk9887lrKWi. Ray recognized that as the downlink sequence; he'd typed it often enough.

But XZi9887ryLL4u45 was new to him; and the XZ was an "all" command, so that had to be wrong. No way you wanted to download *all* messages ... just the ones intended for the local tower. Who'd changed the code ... and why?

"Looks like a problem," Uki said.

"It's nothing," Ray lied. "Just a bit of work."

"Remind me to invite you to poker sometime," Uki said, deadpan.

Matt snorted. "Yeah."

It suddenly felt a lot colder.

When the Tlicho jumped up from the far side of the mound, Ahnah felt herself falling face-first into the snow.

For a moment, she thought she had passed out from fatigue and lack of food, but here was an arm raising her to drink, a hand that cupped water. The Tlicho had indeed been on the far side of the mound. Her night eyes had seen true.

Well, better get to it.

She sat up; with his help, stood up. She pointed to herself, and said, "Ahnah."

He introduced himself as Dekawi. Gestured to the stones and said something unintelligible. She guessed his meaning easily enough, though: "I have brought the stones."

Ignoring them watching him, Ray took a picture of the next page of ones and zeros, and the software spit out the next strings. He worked through what the code did. He looked up.

"It's stupid," Ray told them.

"What?" Uki asked. She had to know already. They were clearly part of whatever this was.

"This has the tower beaming down all the satellite traffic—all of it, not just the calls that are directed here. And then ... just beams them back up again."

"No harm done, then," Matt said.

“There’s no one monitoring the traffic here, right?” Uki asked. “No way anyone is listening in?” It sounded as if she were really asking. She paused as if in thought, and then offered a theory. “It’s just looped through the tower so they can claim the tower is, like—playing this vital role, right?”

That almost sounded credible to Ray. Somebody in marketing realizing there were no actual people or cell phones for the tower to service, so making up this bogus loop to say it was handling seventy-thousand calls per hour. Kind of brilliant.

Ray might have bought it, except for their body language. He could tell this mattered to them. More than it should. That they were holding their breath, waiting to see if he went for it.

He should take them up on that poker game.

Dekawi went round to the sled. The last stone had been the smallest, so he’d been able to double the supplies. When she hadn’t been there when he’d arrived this year, he’d been afraid the extra provisions were so he could wait for her—so much would have represented a long wait. Now he saw it was because she hadn’t eaten; the extra was for her. He grabbed some dried char, ran back round to her.

She smiled at him as she took the food. He smiled back.

And then they were hugging, like long-lost family, finally reunited; though they had never met, outside vision.

The relief was overwhelming. All that craziness, all those years. But he’d been right! There *was* a woman! He *was* the helper! He had brought the stones. It had to be true sight, or how else a woman here, in the middle of the empty land?

She pulled back, pointed at the sky. He looked but didn’t see anything.

She motioned with her hand, said words he didn’t recognize, but he understood her gestures: storm coming. She held up two fingers: two days from now. She indicated the stones: no time to waste.

Dekawi smiled more. Maybe that meant he would be done before two days. Then home again. Good. Good for all this to be over.

Ahnah pointed to the bottom stone in the mound, then pointed to a spot a sled-length distant.

He stopped smiling. Shift the whole pile off the bottom stone; move that stone—now five years frozen to the ground—onto the sled; have the dogs haul it the sled’s own length only; then take it off the sled again? He couldn’t stop himself gesturing emphatically to where the stone was. *There* would do as well as one sled over.

But she let him see the tiredness that was in her, and he understood that long and hard as his own journeys had been, she had endured more. And his inner sight told him what he had known before he asked: that the positioning was important. It had to be just the way it had to be, or all would be for naught.

He was the helper. She was the woman.

It would be as she directed.

Matt was incredulous. “You brought a *gun*?”

“Old habit,” Ray explained, gesturing that they should move away from the door. “Needed one more than once, places I’ve worked.”

“You’re insane,” Uki said.

“Okay,” Ray conceded. “But I’m still the guy with the gun. So” He waved them up against the steel shelving of the rear wall, held them there at gun point as he reached back into his toolkit, lifted off the top tray, and fished around for the handcuffs, never taking his eyes off them.

“Handcuffs!” Matt screeched when Ray pulled them out. “*Seriously?*”

“‘Be prepared’,” Ray quoted. “American Boy Scouts. Catch.”

Matt caught them without thinking. Uki hadn’t moved.

“To each other,” Ray directed, “but linked behind the shelving beam.”

“This is stupid,” Uki said, not moving. “You can’t shoot us.”

“Well, not shoot you dead, certainly. But it’s either the handcuffs or I’ll have to shoot you in the leg or something.”

Uki looked Ray in the eyes. Whatever she saw there must have convinced her, because she held her hand out behind her back towards Matt. The handcuffs snapped shut.

“Great,” Ray said. He stuffed the gun in his parka pocket. “I don’t expect that to hold you forever, you understand. Just long enough for me to get to the Straightliner and call the authorities, get someone up here to take you in hand.”

“It’s not *us* they’re going to arrest,” Matt said. “You’ve totally wiggled out.”

“Well, if I’m wrong ...” Ray shrugged. “I’ve acted in good faith. And nobody’s hurt. No harm, no foul.”

“Except guns are illegal in Canada,” Uki pointed out, “and you’re holding two people against their will.”

“Unlawful confinement,” Matt echoed.

Ray considered this. “Pretty sure they’ll overlook all that when I hand them a couple of terrorists.”

Ahnah stood back and looked at the inuksuk they'd built. She closed her eyes, opened her night eyes. She could see the inuksuk standing before her as she had always remembered it. She opened her eyes; closed them; opened them. The day/night inuksuk were superimposed, nearly matched, except the day inuksuk had storm clouds gathering behind it, and the night one had the aurora of the dream sky.

She should send Dekawi away now. He had brought the stones, but what came next was her work, her responsibility. He should leave now, before the storm came.

"We're not terrorists!" Matt yowled.

Ray shook his head. "Yeah, well, the authorities can sort that out. But someone is messing with the code, and you two knew about it."

"About the ad campaign," Uki said tentatively. "Sure. That's why we're all here. Why *wouldn't* we know?"

"The larger question is why nobody told me. It's my code."

"Is that what this is about? Your feelings are hurt?" Matt rubbed his free hand over his face. "Are you hearing what you're saying? How that sounds?"

"It must have been a last-minute thing," Uki said. "Look, your boss left you a note. Why is this making you crazy?"

"Did he, though?" Ray shook his head again. "Why write a note instead of just telling me? He's never left me a note before, in all the years we've work together. I don't even know what his hand writing looks like. Just because someone signed 'McVey' doesn't mean it's from McVey."

"That's paranoid," Matt said.

"No, that's observant. McVey doesn't do memos. He doesn't even email. He's a phone-you kind of guy. He doesn't like things in writing.

"And the machine code—who does that?" Ray shook his head at how ludicrous that was. "The only possible reason to give me two pages of machine code is in the hope I'd be too preoccupied—or too cold, maybe—to bother translating it. So I wouldn't know what the hell it was I was inputting. *As if.*"

"So that all adds up to us being terrorists?"

Ray nodded. "Not very good ones, though."

Dekawi stood passively as Ahnah gestured for him to leave before the storm came. The storm was going to be a bad one, but he had given five winters to bringing the stones, and now he was going to find out what it was

all for. When she started shoving, Dekawi grabbed her wrists. He held them until she looked him in the eyes, and then he gave her a look to say, as clearly as he could, that he was not about to leave.

She stopped. She gave him a look that chilled him like no wind ever had, slowly rotated her wrists within his grasp until her hands could grasp *his* wrists, and clasped on.

Dekawi jerked as the twilight changed to winter-black, the clouds to aurora. Reds and greens shot past directly overhead, as impossible yellows reached down to give the stones a pulsing glow. Dekawi jumped back to avoid letting the tendrils touch him.

Then, the contact broken, it was twilight and storm clouds again.

Ahnah struck him on his shoulder, tried to turn him towards home. Her message was clear: leave now, or face whatever it was she was about to unleash.

“Wait!” Uki called as Ray had his hand on the door. “It’s not what you think. Not terrorism.”

Ray paused. “So—it’s *something*.”

“All right, yes. McVey didn’t write the note; we were the ones that switched the code.”

“What are you doing?” Matt managed to sound simultaneously terrified and deferential. Uki was the boss of the operation, then.

“He’s obviously figured it out,” she said to Matt. “He’ll bring others, and then it will be too late. If this has any chance of working, we have to bring him in on it.”

“He’s an American! He *can’t* help!”

“Aha!” Ray said. “You admit you’re not American?”

“I’m as American as you,” Matt said, annoyed. “Montana-born and raised. But one of my great-great-great-grandfathers built that inuksuk out there.”

“You’re part Eskimo?” Ray was skeptical: Matt didn’t look it.

“No! Jesus!” Matt made a face. “Not everyone is Inuit, okay? He was Tlicho. *Dogrib* tribe in English. And they didn’t get along with the Inuit all that well.”

“You’re saying that thing out there isn’t Eskimo?”

“Don’t say Eskimo,” Uki sighed. “It was a joint project. Tlicho brought the stone, and my great-great-great grandmother—we’re Inuvialuit—brought the magic.”

“Wait.” Ray held up his hand. “You’re saying the two of you are both descendants of the people who built that?” He pointed out the window.

“Yes,” they said in unison.

“You don’t really expect me to buy that, do you? Bit of a coincidence?”

“No coincidence,” Uki acknowledged. “Why we set up the whole tower project.”

Ahnah lay in the snow facing the inuksuk, the soles of her feet touching the base. The stones were already radiating, so the cold wasn’t an issue. Isapoinhkyaki always used her hands, but Ahnah felt more grounded through her feet. And legs were stronger than arms, so it was easier to keep the feet pressed against the stone when the inuksuk pushed back.

She had closed her day eyes to see through her night eyes, watching the aurora pulsing round and through the inuksuk. She awaited a sign from the ancestors who had called her to this place—assuming always, the vision a true vision.

It occurred to Ahnah to wonder how they had commanded the Tlicho. If the Tlicho had shaman who listened to ancestors, walked the dreamlands, and saw with night eyes, maybe the Tlicho were of the People, just as much as Ahnah. Certainly, they had common cause against the newcomers.

Ahnah’s feet told her the stones were now more than stone. She sensed distant voices, words indistinct, arguing. Rising voices calling to push back, to ambush. Those ones had sent a Tatsanottine, but he had not come. (Too busy plunging his yellow knife into Tlicho, no doubt.)

There were quiet voices also, counselling a different way. They had sent a Tlicho.

She did not know Tlicho people outside of the vision of the Tlicho man, and now Dekawi himself. Dekawi had come, in harmony with the gentle voices. So gentle voices would prevail.

She stood and faced the southeast, though she could still sense her feet against the smooth stone, and knew she had not stirred in the day world. And then, light shot from the stone into and through her, outwards, a strength of the People fanned across the empty lands, across the treeline, towards the southeast.

It went on for a long time. She sensed, rather than saw, a sea of individuals reflecting the pink, green, yellow, blue, violet, orange or white light, each according to their character. Ahnah willed them all to acceptance, willed their deeper connection to ancestors and neighbours, history and futures.

As the waves of light waned, Ahnah knew it had not been enough. Could never be enough to stop those who did not know the land, or love the land, or understand anything.

She became aware that Dekawi had come to stand beside her in the nightscape. New waves pulsed against both their backs, blew through them like a lens, and—more focused—washed against all of those who were not of the People.

[Almost all. At the edges of Ahnah’s perception were some who absorbed the light and reflected darkness. There was no touching them. Had the Tatsanottine come, they would have sensed threat in him, speared him with their darkness. In the day world, they would have come to end him, perhaps by ending all Tatsanottine. Those ones would not care for the difference between Tatsanottine or Tlicho or the People, so it was good the Tatsanottine had not come.]

Together, Ahnah and Dekawai spent all their strength, to establish that connection, to channel voices that did not judge, merely suggest. Respectfully, supportively.

But was it enough?

Ray massaged his forehead, because what he was hearing was actually making his head hurt. It was completely ludicrous, yet ... somehow resonating.

“What you’re saying is, without ever having met, or even knowing the other actually existed, you both just spontaneously started doing whatever you needed to do to put a giant cell tower on top of an inuksuk in the middle of nowhere. Based on dreams you were having?”

“Visions,” Uki corrected.

Ray waved the interruption away. “You became a structural engineer, and Matt became a Straightliner pilot—which has to be the most specialized license in the world—because it *felt right* for the project.

“Yes,” they said in unison.

“Matt grew up in Montana thinking he was white, until he had a recurring dream telling him his great-great-great-grandfather built an inuksuk?”

“The visions don’t tell you anything.” Matt shrugged. “You have to work out what they mean.”

“But you both had dreams that you should build a cell tower over top an inuksuk?”

“Visions,” Uki said again. “And not just any inuksuk: this specific one.”

“Vision, psychosis, alien mind control ... it doesn’t matter why you’re doing it. The point is you’re part of a conspiracy to take control of a G8 cell tower.”

“But not terrorism,” Matt said. “We’re on the side of the angels here.”

Great. *Angels* now. This situation was the definition of crazy, but he had to ask.

“Okay, I’ll bite. What’s it all in aid of? What happens when I input the revised codes?”

Dekawai opened his eyes, shifted so he could see Ahnah on the other side of the inuksuk, their bare feet still pressed up tight against the stone. She turned her head and looked back at him.

He could tell by her haunted expression that she wasn’t sure they had succeeded.

“It helps, at least a little,” he assured her.

She stared at him, not understanding his words. But maybe she could understand his tone. “Others will come,” he said. “They will try again. Later. With more than two. We were missing ... something. Someone. They will have more strength. Much more. I have seen this.”

She sat up, worked at covering her feet.

He did likewise. Stood. Walked over to where she sat despondent, offered her his hand. “Even it if is not much, it is something.”

She allowed herself to be pulled up, turned to stare at the southeast.

He fetched her food, water. Ate a bit himself. Packed up most of the remainder for her, because she had longer to go. He kept only the minimum he’d need to get back to Tlicho lands.

She accepted the packaged food, tucked it inside her coat, reached out to take his hands. She squeezed them as she spoke a few intensely felt words, then turned and abruptly vanished into the swirling darkness of the storm just outside the circle of light provided by the stones. As if she had never been there.

“You forget,” Ray said, “I’ve worked with Canadians all over the world. The joke about them being more polite, nicer? It’s just that—a joke.” Ray shook his head. “You wanna know why Canadians are always saying, ‘excuse me’ and such? It’s because they’re always butting ahead of you in line. It’s passive aggressive bullshit.”

“Yeah,” Matt said, “but the reason people don’t butt in line in Montana is you never know who’s packing. When a Canadian says ‘excuse me’ in the act of butting in, it’s because he knows the *other* Canadians in line aren’t going to shoot him.”

“You don’t need to tell us,” Uki said, ignoring Matt, “that Canadians weren’t *actually* nicer. They tried to eliminate indigenous, same as Americans. Maybe their self-image as ‘nice’ and ‘proper’ restrained some of the worst

excesses. We'll never know how much worse it could have been. At least *nice* is a theoretical goal for some of them.

"But they're just too many people these days for a little inuksuk to transmit to everyone, everywhere. The signal isn't actually getting weaker, but the size of population is becoming overwhelming. You must feel it too. There's less civility; more hate speech, more anger, more violence, more polarization. We *need* to boost the signal."

Ray said, "And I'm supposed to help you? Sabotage my own tower setup."

"Yes," said Uki. "I think so. I mean, the first time there was a Tlicho and an Inuit, representative of indigenous. But no colonizers. No one representing those on the receiving end. That might be what they were missing: someone who could authorize reception."

Matt looked startled. "You mean we *need* an American?"

Uki said, "Yeah, it fits. The largest volume of message traffic through the satellite—and now through the inuksuk—is American, so Americans are going to be proportionately the most influenced by the inuksuk's empathy spell. They'll be on the receiving end now as much as Canadians."

"I can't speak for America," Ray said. "I can't even speak for Texas. You need the president, or something."

Matt's face screwed up in scorn. "What? You're telling me you think our current President accurately represents the best version of America?"

And with that, Ray admitted defeat, and slumped against the door.

"Crap."

"What?" Uki asked.

"I'm in," Ray said.

"You'll recode the tower?" Matt said.

"Do you know," Ray said, "my family have been Republican since Lincoln."

Matt said, "This isn't a partisan thing."

"Not that. It's ..." Ray hesitated to tell it, still half suspecting he was being conned. "My dad had this photo up in the den, of him as a young man. He's off to one side, but in the same shot as George H. W. Bush. I became obsessed with that photo. Dreamt about it."

"A photo of Bush?" Matt said, clearly not following.

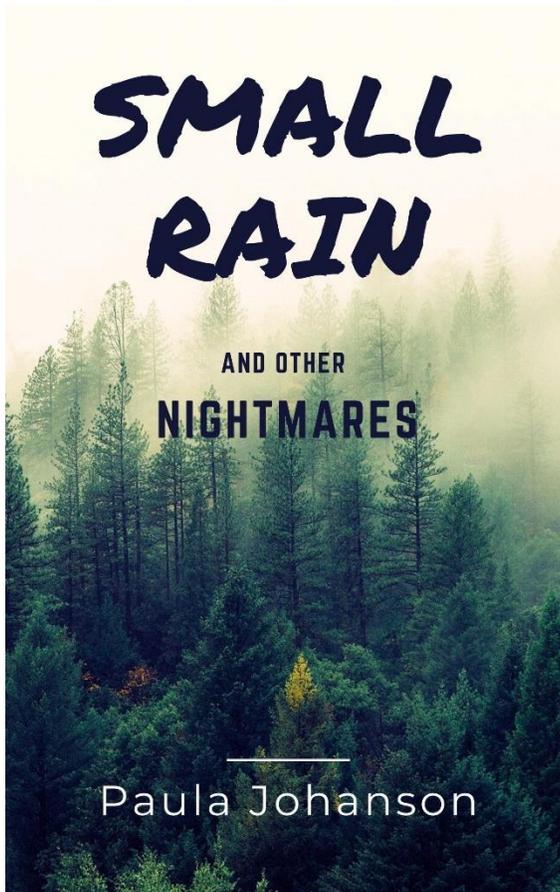
"The first one, not the current generation. Taken at the 1988 Republican convention. It's a *recurring* dream. I walk into my father's den, I sort of float towards the photo like a disembodied head, and Bush comes alive, turns to *me*, and says, 'Ray, we need a new harmony, a greater tolerance ... a kinder, gentler nation.'"

“The 42nd President of the United States repeatedly tells you he wants a kinder, gentler nation,” Uki said, “and it took you this long to come around to our side? Jesus, could it be more blatant?”

“My whole life, I wondered why that one photo, why that one speech. Does seem kind of on point in the current context.”

“Well?” Uki demanded.

Ray opened his toolbox, fished around for the handcuff keys.



SMALL RAIN and Other Nightmares is a collection of stories by Paula Johanson.

It will be available for purchase beginning June 30th, 2020.

It includes the following tales:

Small Rain

Blood Turn

Working in a Vacuum

If You Go Out in the Woods

Skyline

With a Screwdriver

Smoke and Bubbles Rising

Sleep

What Scares You?

See < [Small Rain](#) >

See my Review in Amazing Stories Magazine

< [Small Rain Review](#) >

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 server. Be sure to check out our website at: [SF Canada](#)

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 had poems published in *Scifaikuest*, *Star*Line*, *Polar Borealis*, and other magazines.

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

Swati Chavda

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

She also writes speculative fiction, where her characters tend to seek answers to questions ranging from "Is there life after death?" to "Should there be life before breakfast?" She uses too many commas, too few coffee breaks—

and there's a constant battle waging in her head between British and American spelling.

Websites: www.swatchavda.com and www.thewritingvault.com

Nancy Kay Clark

Based in Toronto, Nancy spent a couple of decades working as a magazine editor, and now edits fiction. She was a finalist in the 2019 Writing for Children Competition put on by the Canadian Society of Children's Authors, Illustrators and Performers and the Writers Union of Canada. This is her second published story.

R.A. Clarke

R.A. is a former police officer living in Portage La Prairie, Manitoba. Juggling two busy kids, a sportaholic husband, and a couple of bizarrely ill-behaved dogs, she manages to maintain a semblance of sanity by guzzling coffee, and savouring copious amounts of chocolate.

R.A. has won 1st place in the Writers Weekly 24-hr Short Story contest, and 4th place overall in the Writer's Workout Writer's Games. Her work has been published by Sirens Call Publications and Polar Express Publishing. When not crafting short stories, she keeps busy writing/illustrating children's books.

Website: www.rachaelclarkewrites.com

Justin Dill

Justin lives in Toronto, Ontario, where he currently works as a freelance copy editor. He is also an editor for tDotSpec. This is his first published short story.

Greg Fewer

A *montréalais* by birth and descent from seventeenth-century colonists, Greg Fewer has grown up largely outside of Canada. His first and, for many years, only published story appeared in 2007. He took up genre writing again in 2018 and has had flash fiction and haiku published in (among other places): *Cuento Magazine*, *Dirty Girls Magazine*, *Lovecraftiana*, *Monsters: A Dark Drabbles Anthology*, *Schlock! Webzine*, *The Sirens Call*, and *Tigershark Magazine*.

Melanie Marttila

Melanie has been writing since 1977 and her poetry and short fiction have been published in small press anthologies and in magazines such as *Bastion Science Fiction* and *On Spec* since 1994. She received her Master of English Literature and Creative Writing in 1999 and is a professional member of the Canadian Authors Association and SF Canada. She lives in Sudbury, Ontario, Canada on the street that bears her family name and in the house where three generations of her family have lived.

email: melanie.marttila@gmail.com

blog: <https://www.melaniemarttila.ca>

Facebook: <https://facebook.com/melanie.marttila>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/MelanieMarttila>

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/melanie-marttila-20868047>

K.M. McKenzie

K.M. is a writer from Toronto. Her stories have appeared in the *Strange Economics* anthology, and in upcoming issues of *CosmicHorror.net* and *Shoreline of Infinity* 18. Find her on Twitter @kmmauthor.

Ralph Pitchie

Ralph is a long-time itinerant technical writer and idea generator, returning to fiction and poetry thanks to a bit of relative stability. He has been across Canada and wintered in Fort Mac. A WWII Canadian Army veteran's son, Ralph is a semi-indigenous non-traditional martial artist and web app developer with a B.A. in English and a love of both science and good science fiction. He currently resides in Toronto.

Robert Runté

Dr. Robert Runté is Senior Editor at [Essential Edits](#) and a freelance developmental editor and writing coach at [SFEditor.ca](#). A retired Professor, he has been active as a critic, reviewer and promoter of Canadian speculative fiction for over thirty years.

Gillian Secord

Gillian spent her childhood waiting to be abducted by pirates, and when that didn't happen, decided she would write her own pirates. She lives in Toronto, Ontario, and holds an English degree from Queen's University. In her spare time, she plays a lot of vinyl records, drinks craft beer, and tries in vain to convince everyone that she isn't a hipster. This is her first publication.

David F. Shultz

David writes from Toronto, Ontario, where he also works as a teacher.

Jim Smith

Jim Smith, heading toward 70, is just finishing a temporary stint of 22 years as one of Ontario's civil trial lawyers. He will miss it. Before starting

law school at 44 he was a poet with a number of books and chapbooks out from 1972 on. His favourite title of that period was *100 Most Frightening Things* (blewointmentpress, 1985). His favourite titles more recently have been *Back Off, Assassin: New and Selected Poems* (Mansfield Press, 2009) and *Happy Birthday, Nicanor Parra* (Mansfield Press, 2012). They are weird books.

After meeting and becoming an indentured servant to one of his favourite science fiction anthologists, Judy Merrill, in 1981, he, like so many well-meaning creatures, slaved away on Judy's intended autobiography for years. He and Judy spent the next 16 years laughing, fighting, bitching at each other, peppered with occasional periods of sullen separation. When Judy died in 1997, Jim had never said the one thing he meant to tell her. So, in 2015, he wrote and performed his one-man Toronto Fringe Show, *I Love You, Judy Merrill*.

Richard Stevenson

Richard recently retired from a thirty-year gig teaching English and Creative Writing courses for Lethbridge College and has published more than thirty books to date, including: *Why were all the Werewolves Men?* (Thistledown Press, 1994), *Nothing Definite Yeti* (Ekstasis Editions, 1999), and *Take Me to your Leader!* (Bayeux Arts Inc., 2003). In addition, he recently completed a trilogy, *Cryptid Shindig*, containing the full-length volumes *If a Dolphin had Didgits*, *Nightcrawlers*, and *Skin Walker Ranch*. "Loxosceles Tenochtitlan" is from a current book in progress titled *An Abominable Swamp Slob Named Bob*.

Marcie Lynn Tentchoff

Marcie is a writer/poet/editor from Gibsons, British Columbia, and her work has appeared in such publications as *On Spec*, *Strange Horizons*, *Weird Tales*, and *Polar Borealis*, as well as in various collections and anthologies. She is not sure whether or not she is "quite the character" but as an acting teacher she prefers being multiple characters, usually at different times.

Lisa Timpf

Lisa is a retired HR and communications professional who lives in Simcoe, Ontario. Her writing has appeared in a variety of venues including *New Myths*, *Eye to the Telescope*, *Polar Borealis*, *From a Cat's View I and II*, *Dreams & Nightmares*, and *Future Days*. When not writing, Lisa enjoys bird-watching and spending outdoor time with her border collie, Emma.

Hayden Trenholm

Hayden Trenholm is an award-winning editor, playwright, novelist and short story writer. His first novel, *A Circle of Birds*, won the 3-Day Novel Writing competition; it was translated and published in French. The books in his trilogy, *The Steele Chronicles*, were each nominated for an Aurora Award. *Stealing Home*, the third book, was a finalist for the Sunburst Award. Hayden has won five Aurora Awards—thrice for short fiction and twice for editing. He purchased Bundoran Press in 2012 and is its managing editor. He lives in Ottawa with his wife and fellow writer, Liz Westbrook-Trenholm.

AFTERWORDS

by The Graeme

I am actually quite serious when I suggest avid readers should consider imitating *Polar Borealis* by issuing paying-market magazines of their own. A really cool way of supporting beginning writers, I figure.

I'm even considering writing a pamphlet on the subject. I used to know Raymond Hull who, aside from co-authoring *The Peter Principle*, also wrote *Writing For Money In Canada*. Think I'll go through it looking for pointers on how to write a "How to ..." book.

Meanwhile, feel free to vote for me in the Aurora Awards.

For details and to take part, go to: [Aurora Awards](#)