The cover art depicts a dramatic space battle. In the foreground, two astronauts in brown and white suits are positioned on a metallic walkway of a space station. One astronaut is crouching, holding a large, futuristic black rifle. The other is standing further down the walkway, looking towards a massive, fiery explosion. The explosion is a bright orange and yellow fireball, surrounded by a large, multi-limbed alien creature with thick, green, segmented tentacles. The creature's tentacles are reaching towards the astronauts and the explosion. The background is a dark blue space with stars and a planet's horizon. The overall style is a detailed, painterly illustration.

# ***POLAR BOREALIS***

*MAGAZINE OF CANADIAN SPECULATIVE FICTION*

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# POLAR BOREALIS MAGAZINE

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## EDITORIAL

So what's with the short comments under the story titles in the List of Contents? I was looking at the March 1948 issue of WEIRD TALES and noticed that is what Editor Dorothy McIlwraith liked to do, utilizing comments like "They listened and they stared but no one knew just what was to be heard or seen" and "Such talk was for the mystically superstitious; for those who were either mad or childish—or both." I believe the idea was to depict the "flavour" of each story without giving anything specific away. I think it's a delightful practice. I'm old fashioned enough to want Polar Borealis to seem old fashioned. I'm hopeless that way.

It is my sincerest wish that you will find the contents of this issue both interesting and entertaining. I certainly had a lot of fun putting it together. I've received over 90 submissions since I first started up in January and I have to tell you I find it quite exciting whenever one arrives in my E-box. Some are originals, some are reprints, and all are worth reading, or so I believe.

Cheers! The Graeme

# THE NATURE OF DEMONS

*by Stan G. Hyde*

Arzkan, Marshal of the Treasury and holder of numerous other titles of distinction and service, watched the alternating red and blue light that flashed periodically behind the smeared window across the street.

Though the rain pelted down on him, he did not move immediately toward the door.

It was early evening, and occasionally ragged men passed by, turning their heads in his direction as their hands furtively dropped into their torn clothing. But their hungry looks vanished as they drew closer and saw Arzkan clearly. Then they withdrew their hands into plain sight, and moved as far away from the man in black as they could in the narrow street.

Darkness gathered, and the traffic in the narrow street thinned to nothing.

The flashing lights behind the greasy window subsided, replaced by a soft green glow. Suddenly, searing white incandescence blazed from within. Arzkan shut his eyes too late.

A pattern was burned on his retina, bright and shapeless, golden. His vision slowly cleared.

Again, he thought wearily. Another wizard. Will there never be an end to them?

It was almost quiet enough now so that he could begin. A few more moments. To pass the time he pulled his black gloves tighter and reached down to withdraw a gold coin from a leather pouch hanging from his belt.

One side of the coin bore the mark of the Royal coiner. The other side bore the likeness of King Jharsus. The edges of the coin had been shaved so much that the tip of Jharsus' nose was missing, removed by a crooked blacksmith who had stacks of such debased coins in his possession, and enough small ingots of gold to prove that he had once had even more.

The crook may have smitten off Jharsus' nose, but Arzkan had neatly separated the blacksmith's head from his neck.

Arzkan smiled, remembering the assignment, one that had been completed easily and with no regrets. The blacksmith had been an ignorant fellow whose life or death meant nothing to the world.

Fellows like that didn't matter. It was the damn wizards he was unsure about.

They had ideas.

Ideas were like cockroaches, swarming around and breeding other ideas ... too quickly. Dangerous. Both ideas and the people who had them were dangerous.

Though it was treason, Arzkan was not at all convinced that King Jharsus could tell the difference between a good idea and a bad idea, or judge when an idea was good for the Kingdom.

Arzkan flipped the debased coin, his lucky charm, over the backs of his fingers. It was not an easy trick with the gloves, but Arzkan was skilled in the manipulation of objects.

Letting the coin rest for a moment against his leather-clad pinky, he studied Jharsus' face on the coin. It was the very image of a King, strong jaw, untroubled brow, hawk's nose. The face of a man who was calm in reflection and certain in action.

It did bear a certain idealized resemblance to the actual man who issued Arzkan's orders.

Sighing, Arzkan put the coin back in the pouch. He wished he could be as certain as Jharsus that the actions he undertook in the execution of his offices and on the King's behalf were right, just, and in the best interest of the Kingdom.

If they even just worked, it would be reassuring.

Darkness had fallen. There was no moon. Lights had flickered on behind all the greasy windows now. Down the street he could hear voices and singing from the alehouse.

Good. That would cover the unavoidable noise.

It was time.

Throwing his black cloak over his shoulder and out of the way of his sword arm, he strode across the street to the weathered door beside the window he'd been watching. The sword's pommel clanked against his mail shirt as he walked, leather breaches creaking a little, audible reminders of the gravity of this business.

He knocked on the door.

From inside there was the sound of glass breaking and cursing, as if someone had been startled. More glass breaking. A small explosion. More cursing. Then shuffling footsteps approaching the door, which finally creaked open on weary hinges.

The somewhat shrew-like, powder-blackened face that squinted at Arzkan showed no discomfort whatsoever at the sight of an armed man dressed in

black. Arzkan could not determine if the small, blinking eyes could actually see him at all.

“Baykun the Thaumaturge?” Arzkan inquired.

“Er ... yes. Er ... yes. I called myself that once. Before I narrowed my interests and refined my Art.”

“I’m on the King’s business. May I come in?”

He did not wait for a reply. He swept past the little man so quickly that his black cape snapped.

“The King? The King!” An expression of confusion turned to a smile on Baykun’s face. The little man raised both hands in front of his face and tapped them together, a gesture that made him resemble an ecstatic field mouse. “Come in! Come in!” he said to the vacant doorway.

For a moment, Arzkan wondered if Baykun would utter each statement twice. Magicians and philosophers, he had discovered, were given to such odd habits of mind ... staring at blank walls as if they saw great vistas beyond them ... talking excitedly and insensibly to invisible companions ... even occasionally pausing mid-scream during a disemboweling to ask for paper to record some stray thought.

Arzkan played with the idea of dispatching the small man before a long and weary conversation, but there were procedures to be followed, suspicions to be confirmed and ultimately a report to be filled out in triplicate.

Baykun bowed and led the way into the cluttered room. Bottles of liquid and jars filled with unidentifiable and disquieting things lay cobwebbed to the shelves. A work bench and table were illuminated by five candles that flickered unnaturally. The table was blackened and pieces of shattered glass lay upon it.

“Your pardon, but if I may begin immediately,” Arzkan said, making a show of polite inquiry but actually scanning the room for the telltale signs that indicated a guardian demon. “Tales have reached King Jharsus of your mastery of certain arcane and delicate magical arts.”

“Ah! Ah!” said Baykun, his rheumy eyes finally opening wide enough that candlelight reflected in them. “So the Imperial Court has heard tales, have they?”

Baykun preened, almost dancing as he motioned Arzkan over to a table laden with complex apparatus.

Arzkan’s sword hand itched.

“You see what you did by startling me when you knocked?” Baykun indicated the blackened table and broken glass. “You rap most aggressively.”

“Indeed. My apologies.”

“Well, so be it. No harm done. The table was enchanted. We were protected.” Baykun put a hand on Arzkan’s glove and looked up at him with beaming pride. “You see, the process I have discovered has the side-effect of creating enormous amounts of energy if it is interrupted. Luckily the wards and charms I have cast conduct such demonic energies onto another plane. Otherwise, this entire house, perhaps a significant portion of the township, might have been engulfed in explosion and flame.”

Again, thought Arzkan, hoping his feigned interest was not obvious. He said, “I’ve heard such tales before.”

Baykun nodded. “The Dead Lake in Northern Haunt is thought to be the work of an ancient Alchemist who failed to weave the proper spells of containment. After a thousand years, those who live nearby and creatures who drink from the lake still sicken and die.”

“Indeed. An odd achievement for any Guild to brag of, but I suppose there’s a certain respectability even in the endurance of poison.”

“Just so. Just so. I am engaged in the harnessing of powerful forces here. Powerful forces. So,” Baykun idly rubbed some of the greasy blackness from his nose, “what does King Jharsus need of me?”

“The stories that have reached the Court tell of your presently unequalled command of the alchemical arts. It is said that you can alter the substance of natural elements.”

“I see,” Baykun preened, clearly pleased.

Arzkan stepped closer to the table, unobtrusively conducting one last check for supernatural protective devices while the little man was occupied with self-satisfaction.

“I take it from the look of these devices,” Arzkan said, indicating the clutter on the table, “that you are currently engaged in conducting advanced experiments in Alchemy.”

Baykun nodded. “Yes. Once I called myself ‘Thaumaturge’ and fancied myself equal to the acquisition of all knowledge. But Thaumaturgy is such a wide field. The time of the generalist is past. Why, a man can study Necromancy alone for a lifetime and never raise a corpse.”

Arzkan said, “I see. You decided to specialize?”

“It’s the modern way. These days all the great insights are had by specialists. Besides,” he grinned, revealing yellow, uneven teeth, “I discovered I had a great natural talent for Alchemy.”

Arzkan walked to the table and placed his hand upon a device that was constructed out of thin metallic strands woven tightly round each other until it

somewhat resembled a braided rope. It was in turn coiled round and round in ever diminishing circles within the confines of a large brass cone, supported upon a wrought-iron tripod. The circles and weaving were so intricate that it was impossible to see where the coils began and ended.

Below the device, at the apex of the cone, was a blob of lustreless metal.

“This is?” asked Arzkan, indicating the metal.

“Lead,” explained Baykun.

“And this device?”

“An Ouroboros.”

“Indeed. The ‘Snake which Devours its own Tail.’”

“Sir! You have some knowledge of the Art?!” Baykun seemed slightly incredulous.

“Some slight knowledge. I have, occasionally, seen similar devices.”

“That particular Ouroboros,” said Baykun, “took fifty years to braid, and was begun by my grandfather. Even the slightest mistake when crafting it would render it useless.”

Arzkan pointed to the cone’s wide opening. “You pronounce the spells here.”

“Your knowledge is not as slight as you pretend. Yes. You speak into this part of the cone ... we call it the ‘Dragon’s mouth’. Driven inward within the braid, the demons shatter and the fires of hell are loosened. Driven outward ... are you familiar with Jibahar’s demonic theory of matter?”

Arzkan nodded. “Each object possesses its shape and form as a result of the number and nature of demons which inhabit it.”

“Yes,” Baykun jabbed a crooked forefinger at Arzkan, poking him repeatedly and uncomfortably in the chest. “Yes. Yes. Yes. Thus did Jibahar perceive it! But he did not grasp the *essential truth!*”

Baykun strutted around the table, warming to his topic. “The *nature* of demons has nothing whatever to do with the composition of matter. For generations, Alchemists sought blindly to distinguish the separate demonic natures of earth, water, fire, and air. Thus confused, their work was inconsistent at best, and fatal at worst. But the *nature* of demons has nothing whatever to do with the composition of matter. For all the difference it makes, each demon may be exactly alike. It’s merely the number of demons that is important. My *great insight*, the great truth of our age, is that it is demonic number alone which is the key.”

“The key?”

“My boy! Imagine that each object around is made up of indescribably tiny, dancing demons. It was assumed that each object was the result of different demons dancing a different dance, but the kind of dance, if indeed demons dance at all, makes no difference. All that matters is *how many* demons are present. Having grasped this, and having built a device such as this Ouroboros to drive demons back and forth, one can perform the most astonishing transmutations of matter. Would you care to observe?”

“Please.”

Baykun stepped toward the brass cone with the haughty air of a prestidigitator about to produce an egg out of a yeoman’s ear. He leaned forward and spoke into the cone. The clipped speech sounded like no human language. The Ouroboros coil seemed to suddenly stretch and flex in an odd way that made it hard to watch. Arzkan felt as if the distances between objects in the room were shifting, his eyes unable to focus clearly. Deep, multi-hued radiances suddenly swirled about the cone.

The lump of metal beneath it began to glow.

Baykun did not interrupt his insect-like chittering, but he mimed the act of covering his eyes. Arzkan drew a black-gloved hand upward as the Ouroboros became uncomfortably bright.

Arzkan felt a sudden burst of warmth. The light in the room dimmed.

“You may look now,” said Baykun.

The formerly lustreless lump now flickered and shone in the candlelight.

“Lead into gold,” said Baykun. “The dream of ages.”

“Indeed.” Arzkan pulled his gloves tight. Wizards. They were all alike, he thought. Child-like. Impractical. Completely unaware of the immense problems they caused.

As if knowledge were the only important thing in the world.

“Of course,” continued Baykun, “I’m not alone in suspecting that it is solely demonic number that is important. Why, there are several others in this area alone who suspect. But I can proudly say that I am the first to complete the crucial experiments.”

“The first *living man* to have turned lead into gold,” said the Marshall of the Treasury with unnoticed irony. “Quite an achievement.”

“It is,” said Baykun. “But turning lead into gold is just the beginning.”

“Perhaps, but it is enough,” said Arzkan, pausing to pull his gloves tighter. “Did you know that over three thousand slaves now work the headwaters of the Upper Blood river, sifting silt for days just to find a few grains of gold.

There are more swordsmen and security wizards around the Gold Reserves than there are guarding the Royal Household itself.”

“Yet there’s lead in abundance.” Baykun’s eyes danced. “Soon those guards can be freed for active military service, and those slaves can do jobs that benefit everyone.”

“Excuse me?”

“Well, for example, they could build more bridges. You realize you still have to ford the Salma River if you want to travel east. A nice bridge ...”

Arzkan raised a hand and cut him off, “Indeed. The lack of a bridge is a deliberate policy of the King. It makes smuggling from the Northern Provinces harder, and ensures that the Vranloo and Poktak traders pay tax when they cross the Great Southern Span. Otherwise they’d flood the country with cheap silk and salt.”

“I didn’t know.”

Of course not, thought Arzkan. “Have you considered what the value of gold will be when every blacksmith turned Alchemist in the kingdom has one of those?”

“The *value of gold*? Gold’s value is only based on its rarity. Now mind, it will take years before really large numbers of people have access to a proper Ouroboros ... but I suppose ... in time ...”

Baykun paused, turned his back on Arzkan, and stared at the gold while muttering to himself. Obviously he had never considered the problem before.

“... in a fairly *short time* overall, gold will become valueless, won’t it?” The wizard actually giggled. “I’m sure it will continue to fulfil many artistic and architectural purposes, but it will be useless as a medium of exchange.”

Baykun turned back to Arzkan. “You sir, are a forward thinker! You present a very real problem.” Baykun shrugged and smiled. “Still, what can be done? The Kingdom will have to weather some interesting economic times. There’ll be a necessary period of adjustment. Still, knowledge is knowledge. You can’t very well stop progress and ...”

Arzkan snicked his sword free of its scabbard and—*snack*—sliced off Baykun’s head. It hit the table with a thump, displacing the Ouroboros and the gold as it rolled to the floor.

Arzkan did not immediately sheathe his sword. He’d had a few very *nasty* surprises in the past, especially from wizards with a necromantic bent. But after a few minutes he was satisfied that Baykun had transmuted his last piece of lead.

Arzkan gathered up the Ouroboros for transport to the King's Treasury workshop. It was the twelfth he had collected in the last three years. On his way out, he set fire to the laboratory. When the villagers found Baykun's body, they'd blame it on vengeful demons.

Thank the gods for the useful ignorance of the masses.

\* \* \*

Arzkan, Marshal of the Treasury, Officer in Charge of Sustainable Development, and Royal Executioner, sat in a pest-hole inn, drinking port that had no doubt been smuggled in from the South through Dragon Pass. Some new penalty would have to be devised to staunch the flow of the stuff. Still, he had to admit it was far better than the bilge from Jharsus' vineyards.

The drink was not taking the edge off his discomfort.

"Knowledge is knowledge," Baykun had said. "You can't stop progress."

In his heart, Arzkan knew it was true. Ideas, damn them. Somehow a wizard would slip through his fingers. Gold would become as common as cow patties. The Kingdom would fall.

He scowled as he finished his glass.

It was hopeless. Information was impossible to eradicate. The cockroach ideas just kept creeping from one dark place to the next. Spawning and creeping ...

"*Several others in this area,*" Baykun had said. Arzkan wondered if that were truly possible.

After he had just one more glass of the port, he would go up to his room and write a note for the Royal Coffer Mounted Police, then use one of his pigeons to send the message.

Communications were everything in this profession.

Best to get the work around here done very fast with a whole team, he thought. Polish off the local community of wizards quickly.

Then he would travel back to the Imperial City and get his savings together.

Nothing was safe from wizards anymore, but perhaps if he took all his gold and bought land ...

-----

# PILOT FLIGHT

*by Colleen Anderson*

In sleek aircars  
you and friends recline  
flash lives, brief lights  
on syncopated circuits  
Like the city gridlocks  
you pulse the nightbeat  
of trance and masquerade

Tomorrow  
You board the craft of Earth's dreams  
Pilots of the future  
swallow nameless fears  
and wonder

In isolated suits  
a spacebound synchronized sleep  
to wake a galaxy away  
Mortal calls you dreamed  
sirens  
Songs of hope and longing  
drift through space

You are swept along in the moment  
from lives now frozen  
gone in a star's heartbeat

-----

# A MATTER OF ANTIMATTER

*by Ron Friedman*

“Jeff, I'm afraid we have a problem.”

Still wearing his EVA suit, Jeff turned his gaze toward Tim's hologram on top of the control panel. “Now what?”

“I've picked up a fault in the AM25 reactor unit.” The A.I's voice sounded stoic. “Expecting an antimatter failure in 55 seconds.”

“Holy smoke.” Jeff felt drops of cold sweat forming on his forehead. In deep space, this meant he had but 55 seconds before his spacecraft exploded into sub-atomic particles. *No, wait, it's probably 45 seconds now, perhaps even 40.* His mind raced to calculate how much time had passed since Tim informed him about the 55-seconds deadline.

Jeff was the only astronaut on board, not counting Tim, the vessel's A.I. unit. There was no point in trying to contact Houston. It would take his radio signal ninety minutes to travel all the way back to Earth, and another ninety for the reply.

“Tim, put the reactor on-screen.”

What Jeff saw on the monitor made his heart skip a beat. The main power cable that fed the reactor dangled in microgravity. Miniature electrical sparks discharged into the air. He took a deep breath.

“Route more power to the confinement field,” Jeff ordered. “Use the secondary line.”

“I'm afraid I can't do that,” the A.I said flatly. “The secondary line is not connected to the grid.”

*Crap, I'm a goner.* Jeff wasted precious seconds trying to focus his mind.

“Open all doors between here and the reactor.”

“But that will drain the air,” the A.I protested.

“Who cares? I'm wearing a spacesuit. Do it! Do it now!”

“Commencing override to the ship's safety protocols. Doors will be opened in three, two, one ...”

Jeff heard the air hissing as the atmospheric pressure dropped. Kicking the wall behind him, he sprang out into the main corridor. No one would ever describe his spacecraft as big, not by a long shot. But when the time given to him was being measured in mere seconds, even thirty feet would seem 'huge'.

He burst into the reactor room. The black AM25 antimatter reactor unit was mounted on the corner rack. The cut-off power cable floated in vacuum. But where was the secondary line?

Then Jeff noticed it. *Thank God.*

“How much time do we have before the antimatter confinement field ruptures?”

“About—”

The universe turned black ...

\*\*\*

The main hatch opened. Bright light flooded the hall as a white figure floated into the room.

“You failed the simulation, sonny!” Jeff heard Commander Peterson's voice.

“I failed what?” Jack touched himself in disbelief, verifying that he was still in one piece.

“You didn’t think we would send a rookie to Titan in our most expensive spacecraft without proper testing around good old Earth, did you?” the Commander grinned.

“You’ve got to be kidding me!”

“Mind you, there was a slight technical glitch,” added the Commander thoughtfully. “You’ve awakened in what you would call an antimatter universe, but you’re antimatter yourself now, so you fit right in. Your original self is dead. Don’t worry about it. Get some rest and we’ll re-run the simulation ten hours from now.”

“What happens if I screw up again?”

The Commander shrugged. “No idea. Might wake up next to your corpse back in your old universe, or re-awaken in this one, or be off to explore yet another. Exciting, don’t you think?”

“That wasn’t in the contract I signed,” Jack protested.

“Contract?” inquired the Commander, evidently puzzled. He frowned. “What’s a contract?”

Jack groaned. *This multi-universe crap is even worse than I figured. Bummer.* “What about my pension?”

-----

## THE ENTHRALLERS' VALHALLA

*by Rissa Johnson*

Eat, be merry, we know not when we die,  
On meat, mead, and the fruit of vine, we sup,  
it is at our host's bidding that we glut,  
pay no attention while Fae curses fly.

Here we have not one earthly, mortal care,  
No grain to grind with quern, nor farm to tend,  
No huts to thatch with straw, nor clothes to mend,  
To turn from such cornucopia, who would dare?

Why have you come here to disrupt our feast?  
We've dusted off feet, and laid burdens down.  
Witness our lady's hospitality!  
There is nothing we lack, not in the least,  
and our homes are here now, deep below ground.  
We do not wish to go, please leave us be.

-----

## THE SEARCHERS

*by Steve Fahnestalk*

A cracked, eroded statue on a barren planet called to us.

“Lesser beings, worship Me! I am the eternal conqueror. I will outlast mountains and seas! I will endure—I am Man!”

We left it on the sullen sands of its featureless world. We have no use for forgotten gods.

-----

# ROOMMATE

*by Michael John Bertrand*

I've got to tell you about my roommate. He seemed perfectly normal at first. A little stiff and awkward, perhaps, but a lot of people get that way when they are being interviewed for an apartment. He had all his bona fides in order. He'd worked at the same office as a clerk for three years, he had the first month's rent in cash, and my informal background check (aka Googling his name) showed no red flags.

Looking back, there were signs that there was something odd about him right from the start. For one thing, he was able to produce an astonishing amount of documentation from a briefcase the size of an iPod. And every now and then, he would start to giggle at something I said, then suddenly stop and look very serious.

When I asked him what was so funny, he grinned and said, "Oh, it would take too long to explain."

You can bet THAT pissed me off.

But I was desperate. Paying full rent on a two bedroom apartment was taking a huge chunk of my fun money, and *Doctor Who* DVDs don't pay for themselves, so I signed him up and the next thing I knew, he'd moved in.

I mean that literally. He signed the lease, and then things went out of focus for a moment, and then he was *moved in*. I went to his room and it was if he had always been there. He had a bed, a TV, a chest of drawers, a DVD player, posters on all the walls, and some kind of game system I didn't recognize, all looking like they had been there since Chretien.

I questioned him about it and he had no idea what I was talking about. He just said, "I signed the lease and gave you the money so now I'm moved in. Okay?"

I should have kicked him out right then and there. There've been a lot of times since then that I wish I had. I mean, normal people take longer than a fraction of a second to move into an apartment. Normal people obey the laws of time and space. But for whatever reason (curiosity, fear, being damned sick of interviewing people, take your pick), I just shrugged and said "whatever" and went on with my life.

Truth is things were pretty stable for a while. He never seemed to go to that office job of his, but according to him he was on a prolonged vacation. I thought he had a lot of high quality stuff for someone living on an office clerk's

salary; however when I brought it up he explained he had recently received a large inheritance. And when I finally worked up the courage to ask him where he kept all that stuff when he wasn't using it (for example, his dozens of guitars), he looked startled for a second, then said "storage."

But he didn't say it in a normal way. He always spoke as if it was his first time talking and he wasn't sure how lips worked.

Nothing really hit the fan, though, until I came home early one day (bomb scare at work ... false alarm) to find him surrounded by bizarre changing shapes making horrible screeching sounds, like every sound you've ever heard accelerated to Alvin and the Chipmunks speed.

They disappeared immediately, but the damage was done. I'd suppressed my unease for a long time, but this was too much. I wanted answers.

"What the hell were those?" I asked, not unreasonably.

"Uh ... just some ... friends."

"FRIENDS? Those things would give a Dalek the screaming shits. What the hell? For that matter, what the hell are YOU?"

And that's when the whole story came out. Turns out, the person I knew as "Brian" was actually a sort of ... clone puppet, and the um ... entity pulling the strings was known by a name unpronounceable to a tongue possessing only three dimensions.

I decided "Brian" would be fine.

Thing is, Brian is a five-dimensional being.

And no, that doesn't mean that he "comes from the fifth dimension," any more than we 'come from the third dimension.' I am so tired of everyone treating dimensions like they are alternate realities. That's not what it means!

What it does mean is that my roommate exists in two more spatial dimensions than we do. We have length, width, and height, and he has length, width, height, Alpha and Beta.

Or at least that's what he calls them. I'm a programmer, not a mathematician, I don't know what the proper terms are. I survived calculus and that was it. Extra planar geometry was not even on my radar.

Turns out "Brian" is actually a dilettante explorer who thought it would be fun to enter a clone of an ordinary human being (one of his friends grows human clones as a hobby, which I find disturbing) and live in (through?) it for a year in order to get the "full three-D experience."

That's what he calls us, by the way. "Three-Ds." It's actually one of his least annoying traits.

The ... surreal critters I had seen when I walked in were actually several of

his closest friends. Apparently that's what he would look like to me, all amorphous and shifting and screaming, if he wasn't hiding inside the clone. He'd been using that "gaming console" of his to talk with his friends and give them updates on his "three-D life."

Apparently, living a three-D life is a big deal in his social circles. He's their leader now, or so he claims.

So that's the story of how I ended up with a five-dimensional roommate. And you would think, at this point in the story, that now that everything is out in the open and we know where each other stand, everything would go back to some kind of normal, right?

But actually things got a whole lot worse.

And the reason is that, after the big reveal, he stopped pretending to be human. I never knew from one hour to the next what I was going to have to deal with.

That made him more annoying and obnoxious than ever.

Take his relationship with objects. Things were always appearing and disappearing around him, and not all of those things were his. A lot of them were *mine*. Whenever I confronted him he would look annoyed and say "I didn't steal it, I just moved it!" and suddenly it would reappear. The fact he wasn't allowed to move it in the first place meant nothing to him.

And then there's food. Good God, the food! His clone body doesn't need to eat for some reason—maybe it's not actually alive?—so his experiences with food were purely experimental.

And he has absolutely no sense of reason or restraint about it. One time I found him dipping a chocolate donut into Thai peanut sauce mixed with juice from a jar of olives. Who DOES that kind of thing?

The fact that it actually smelled kinda good just made it worse.

So now I am always finding the leftovers of his food experiments lying around on kitchen shelves or in the fridge. Pureed ham and chocolate-mint sauce. Chinese BBQ duck sitting in bucket of mayo. Tacos flambé ...

Most annoying of all, he frequently regurgitates food he particularly likes and stores the vomit in plastic bags in case he might want to eat it again later. Can't get enough of the taste I guess. Thank God it only took me a week to convince him to put his "desserts" in the freezer. Up to that point the ambience of our apartment had definitely begun to deteriorate.

What scares me is that some of his "practical experiments" are positively dangerous. I keep wondering what will happen if the building manager finds out. Brian claims he needs to study how materials interact in a world limited

to three dimensions so that he can comprehend human reality better, but I can't help but notice most of his experiments involve setting fire to chips of brightly colored paint scraped off wooden fences in our neighbourhood.

I think he just likes watching paint burn. I won't claim I don't see the appeal, but still.

Oh, and another thing: he is constantly walking through walls despite the many, many times I have asked him not to.

For example, I will be in the living room and he will pop up out of nowhere, but it's not like a magic trick because if I happen to be looking at the wall the moment he's chosen to step through it I can clearly see his body ripple and bubble and tremble like someone just kicked a mirror. In those brief flashes I have seen, in aggregate, nearly every cell of him, inside and out.

That's more than I want to know about anyone, including myself, thank you very much.

And, whenever I walk in to a room and catch him unaware, he's quite often incomplete; all the skin on his left side missing for instance, or a raw, lumpy mess where his head should be. I find this very hard to get used to.

However I have stopped saying anything about it because when I do, he goes real, real quiet and looks super-embarrassed and ashamed, and begs me to please, please forget about it.

So he's the one who had his brain hanging out, and I'm the one who ends up feeling guilty.

By now you are probably wondering why I put up with it. Why not kick him out and get a *normal* roommate?

Well, leaving aside the issue of whether or not it's possible to force someone who has six inches and two dimensions on you to do anything he doesn't want to do, the truth is he pays his rent on time, doesn't drink or smoke or bring women home, and he's very good about not making noise when I am trying to sleep. Plus, I really, really hate interviewing potential roommates. I would hate even more to give him his deposit back because I spent it ages ago. Above all, and I can't explain this, I get the feeling that would get him in trouble with his friends. For whatever reason I am beginning to suspect he is *terrified* of them.

Oh, and there's one more thing.

Despite everything, I think I'm starting to like him.

What the HELL is wrong with me?

-----



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**(Son of Gerry Anderson)**

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## MOONTRACE

*by Mary E. Choo*

Swollen moon  
hanging low at sunrise,  
man's footprints  
hidden from my eyes.

-----

## MUSHROOMS

*by Eileen Kernaghan*

*(Originally published in TransVersions 5)*

*The order of Fungi is still Chaos...*

— Linnaeus

ghost-flowers, death-angels,  
inexplicable presences  
they are more animal than vegetable  
our sly voracious cousins

under moss, moist soil and leaf-mast  
field by field their earthworks spread  
as fragile and inexorable as shadow  
listen hard and you can hear the dull throb  
of current through the coiled wires  
the tangled filaments  
the armatures and engines of an ancient power

out of the forest on soft feet  
they will enter our empty cities

listen to the earth hum  
the machinery is ready

-----

# TOUGH CROWD

*by Holly Schofield*

*(Originally published October, 2012, in AE: The Canadian Science Fiction Review.)*

“Hey, Ship? How about this one: A skeleton walks into a bar and says, ‘Give me a beer and a mop.’”

I followed it with a “Ba-dum, tish,” to indicate the end of the joke. No response. No surprise. It’s hard to tell good jokes. It’s even harder when you’re the only human left on a deserted colony ship.

I’d been toying with the idea of a radio show back when Ship’s corridors still rang with voices. I didn’t begin broadcasting over Ship’s comm until after the virus had turned my friends and fellow colonists into human jerky: dried husks; awful gaping mouths with their gums pulled back.

\* \* \*

“Hey Ship, try saying ‘gullible’ really slowly. It sounds like ‘oranges’.”

“Phonetic interpretation makes it clear there is no correlation, sir.”

“Just try saying it? Please?”

\* \* \*

We’d probably picked up the virus at a rundown refueling port out Antares way. It acted fast. Two days later, I stumbled over a sobbing lieutenant in the mess hall. He died in my arms as I cursed the cheap, inconsistent immunizations the corporation had given us. Within hours, there were bodies in every room on Ship. I huddled by a comm crying out for anyone. Only Ship answered.

It took me two years to haul all three thousand bodies to the airlocks. The desiccating effect meant the smell wasn’t too bad after the first month. As far as Ship could diagnose, the virus was a Vitamin K inhibitor. The fancy explanation was pseudohydroxycoumarin.

The simple explanation was that it worked like rat poison.

\* \* \*

“Hey, Ship, light travels faster than sound, right?”

“That is correct, sir.”

“So that’s why some people appear bright until you hear them speak.”

“I believe you are making a play on words involving the word ‘bright’.”

“Never mind, Ship.”

\* \* \*

I combed old files, updated ancient humour, wrote my own material, anything to have fresh jokes on my show. Anything to keep from thinking about the immense blackness outside, pressing against the hull. With Ship as my sole audience, I broadcast all types of comedy: stand-up, pranks, puns, verbal slapstick, limericks. I did it all.

Ship never laughed.

\* \* \*

“Hey, Ship. Here’s a maxim for you: An astronaut does not need a suit to evac. He only needs one to evac twice.”

“This appears to be an example of dark humor. You have told me variations of this joke three times before.” A pause. “It almost works.”

\* \* \*

Today, I gnawed on my apple and dropped the core where I finished it. A tiny cleaning bot, one of many, scooted around my foot and grabbed it seconds later. Keeping Ship tidy was not a problem. Fresh food, especially fruit from the hydroponics system, was not a problem. Deteriorating electronics, now *there* was a problem.

“Thruster failure on port side, sir,” Ship intoned.

“Ship, I’ve told you many times. I do not want to see or hear about our journey or our hardware issues.”

Especially since the navigation programs had failed and we were drifting aimlessly.

“Very well, sir. I will reset the reminder for three days from now.”

I sucked in a deep breath in order to make an angry retort.

“Heh,” said Ship.

\* \* \*

I saw the telltale light flashing just as a voice spoke.

“Ahoy, this is Raven Six. Is anyone there?”

The voice from the other ship was loud and confident, and alive.

“Hello! Hello! I’m here!” I pressed the comm button so hard, my thumb turned white.

No response. No light on the comm panel.

“Ship! Open a channel to the other vessel! Now!”

“Open?” said Ship. “Open-faced sandwich? Open source? Open mike night?” It chuckled.

I tore the plastic sheeting off the nearest portscreen.

“Portscreen, enlarge and track!”

The other ship came into focus, receding as I watched. Soon it would be gone into the darkness of space.

“Ship, for the love of God! Let me talk to them!”

“Talk? Tick Tock? What does a chronometer do when it’s hungry? It goes back four seconds!” Ship gave a mechanical guffaw.

I slumped against the wall below the comm panel. “Please,” I whispered.

“Ahoy, do you read?” The voice from the other ship repeated, so human.

Human enough to leave the channel open. I heard him order, “Ensign, there’s no response. Best to let it be. Might have K Virus. Back on course, full speed ahead.”

Maybe I could race after them in the tiny transport shuttle. Staggering but not beaten yet, I angled across the room and slammed open the long horizontal handle on the seldom-used door. Ship, chortling, said something about walking into a heavy metal bar.

I charged down the corridor toward the shuttle bay. Dozens of cleaning bots scuttled out of my way as I turned the corner. I smelled fruit.

That’s when I slipped on the first of many banana peels, strewn down the corridor like happy, yellow smiles.

-----

## PINK VENUS

*by Rhea Rose*

*(Originally published in Transversions, #10, 1999)*

beneath howling rage and night cloud steam,  
sulphuric shell caked in heat,  
milky poison pearl  
ripples.  
Hell is pink.

-----

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

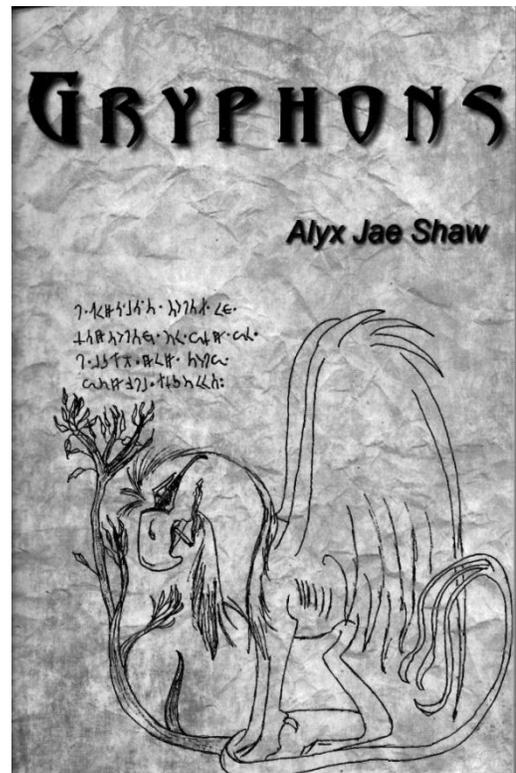
“The Rolling Stones are not dead,” said Czamkiar. “They’ve merely reached an age where it’s no longer safe to move them, and a sneeze could prove catastrophic.”

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- Caz Mumin, the DJ Mumin Metal Radio Show

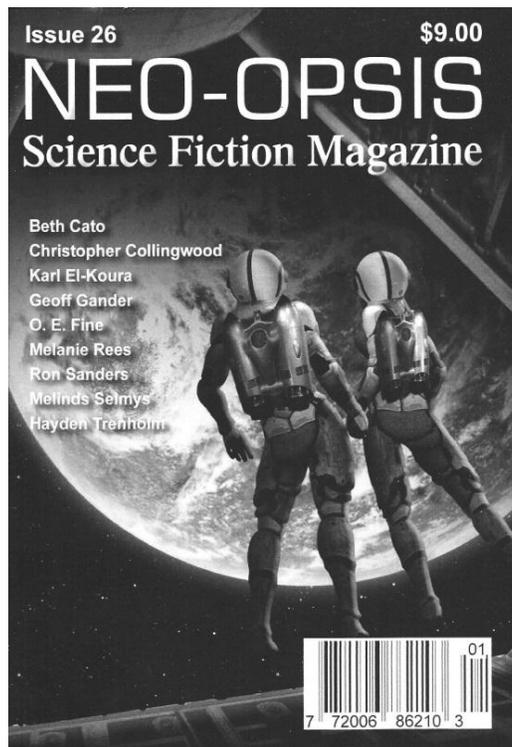
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- Shelly J Reeder, independent review.



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# THE NIGHT ATLANTIS BURNED

*by David Perlmutter*

*Editor's note: I originally rejected this story because, on first reading, it raised enough red flags to hold a rally. On talking things over with David, and learning this was an early story of his which had been rejected before and remained unpublished, I came up with the idea of publishing it in order to illustrate what I believe are common beginner's mistakes. David was brave enough to agree to this. Or clever enough. (It's being published after all.)*

*Then again, publishing "The Night Atlantis Burned" along with my critique may simply reveal what sort of idiot I am as an editor, the kind of nitpicky minutiae I obsess over, the unjustifiable editorial fallacies I believe in, and worst of all, my unflinching ego borne triumphantly high like squid on a stick.*

*Piqued your interest now, haven't I?*

*Whether my criticisms or valid or not, the exercise in its entirety will give beginning authors much food for thought and encourage beginners to think about what they write and how they write which is one of the primary missions of this magazine. Pretentious? Maybe. But sincere.*

*First the story. Then the critique.*

Late one evening, a vessel bearing a soldier of the city-state of Athens rode towards the continent of Atlantis seeking vengeance. It was well known, in the time of the ancients, how heavily enmity existed between the Greek city and the powerful continent. Already, Atlantis had conquered and pillaged in Europe and Africa, creating settlements that rivaled the power and influence of Athens itself. This could not stand, and so the soldier had been deputized to take out the entire continent's population by starting a flash fire that would seriously damage the resourcefulness—and resources—of the upstart continent.

It was not exactly the best of evenings to be traveling across the Aegean as darkness, accompanied by rain and occasionally by flashes of lightning, filled the sky. Yet the night held no terror for the soldier, for, in his determination, he was determined to right the wrongs inflicted on his city-state home. Soon, he had reached the shores of Atlantis, and muttered grimly:

"This is hardly the first time that Atlantis has sought to encroach upon the rightful territory of Athens, but it shall definitely be the last! Do they seriously

believe that we will swallow their indignities whole? They will soon know what it is like to be humbled—if they are able to live that long!”

A flash of lightning illuminated his frame as he found a settlement near the edge of the continent, conveniently made entirely of wood. Taking a pile of wood shavings in a pouch he carried with him, the soldier dropped portions of the bag beside all of the wooden structures. Then, with cunning malice in his eyes, he seized two fallen tree branches and rubbed them together, producing the hated and feared fire! He waited just a moment, and then threw the flaming branches towards the settlement, which, slowly but surely, began to become inflamed. Chuckling to himself, the soldier turned heel and walked away towards his boat without making a sound.

“We have shown you now, Atlantis, with whom you deal,” he said to himself as he rowed away from the continent. “Now, perhaps, you will be willing to be as poor and humble a people as those of Athens are!”

It was not until after the soldier had left that the residents of the Atlantean settlement were entirely aware of the fire that was even now threatening their lives. But when they did discover it and they attempted to act quickly to resolve the situation, it was too late. One of the most powerful and influential settlements on the entire continent of Atlantis had, in a matter of moments, been reduced to ashes in its entirety.

\*\*\*

There was considerable but futile conjecture about what the cause of the murderous fire had been, but the victims were quick and accusatory as to whom they blamed for the inferno.

“This speaks wholly and entirely of the hand of the foul fiends of Athens!” they said. “Have they not threatened our social and economic growth at every turn? They are deliberately attempting to halt our progress beyond their own!”

Similar sentiments were addressed, with the common thread being that it was “just like” the residents of Athens to attack them in such a covert and undignified manner, they who so envied the *perfect* society of the Atlanteans because their own was nowhere near!

Soon news of the tragedy reached the central areas of the population, and town criers were dispatched to carry the message onward to the territories:

#### *CONSIDERABLE OUTRAGES AGAINST ATLANTIS*

The most dastardly deed in our history, as an entire community has been dispossessed by the actions of fire. ATHENS and its residents are

unquestionably the perpetrators; our hated enemies would do anything to see us destroyed, so we must seek to destroy *them* ourselves!

It was also suggested, with some probability, that an entire gang of Athenians had been spotted in various parts of the continent, committing further and equally vile outrages. Soon large groups of men and boys were patrolling the wooded areas of the continent, looking for suspicious looking "Athenians". It was not long before two men whose facial features suggested that they were Athenians, though in fact they were really travelers from another realm of the Greek empire, were arrested and captured in order that they might be executed the following day without trial. This was symptomatic of what the Atlanteans like to call "justice" though, in truth, it was an act that was far behind the more sophisticated system of law existed in Athens itself. Yet, in the heat of the injustice committed on Atlantis, more than a few of these otherwise respected and respectable people were willing to place their reputations on the line in exchange for the spilling of Athenian blood.

Delivered to the nearest jail to spend the night there prior to the execution, the two prisoners indicated to the local magistrate that they had merely been traveling to their home in Sparta from an excursion in far Asia and had not meant to cause any harm. The magistrate stared at them for a moment and then spoke.

"Your story is entirely plausible," he indicated. "However, I fear that it will do you no good, regardless. You will not be believed. While I do not approve of this warmongering against Atlantis, it remains a current against which I cannot swim without risk to my own position. The only course of action which will relieve you from your guilt is for you to confess the fact that you did, indeed, burn down that settlement by the ocean!"

"Sire," said one of the two Spartans, "how are we to confess that we performed the cruel deed when we were, in fact, nowhere near the settlement on the night of the fire?"

"Your stubbornness amazes me!" retorted the magistrate. "Did I not tell you that there was no other way to relieve yourself of your guilt? If you persist in speaking of the fact that you did not perform this action, you will most surely be killed! If, on the other hand, you confess, and make it perfectly and plainly clear that the fire was the cause of accidental carelessness on your part, you will surely be relieved and forgiven and allowed to return to your homes! What would you prefer: forgiveness and freedom, or DEATH?"

The two Spartans spoke to each other in their native dialect. Then the one who had spoken answered the magistrate.

“We will confess!” he said. “’Tis better for us to do so than to confront that mob of ignorant savages outside!”

“I admire your courage,” said the magistrate as he left the room. “Surely the people can be reasoned with, and your lives will consequently be spared.”

\*\*\*

Unfortunately, the people of Atlantis were not to be reasoned with. They made this perfectly clear the following morning.

Before the break of day, the prisoners had been seized by a bloodthirsty vengeful mob, who had used a log as a battering ram to remove the inconvenience of the stone wall at the far end of the jail. With ropes fastened to their necks, the Spartans were borne by the mob of outraged Atlanteans to a spot of predetermined origin where a crackling fire, to which they were to be sacrificed, was already burning.

“These foul pagans will burn no more territory in Atlantis!” a voice said above the unrecognizable screeching of the mob.

“Aye!” added a second. “It is THEY who now face the prospect of death ending their lives!”

“For justice! And for PROTECTION!” yet another voice added.

“Our mills of justice will grind swiftly enough tonight!” added yet another.

The scene and the crowd were intoxicating to all those breathing. At a word from a leader of the mob, several strong hands seized the ropes leading to the necks of the Spartans, and pulled them without dignity towards the piles of fire at the other end. Exposure to the red hot flame was evident and immediate, eating through the threadbare garments of the Spartans and proceeding to roast the flesh beneath. They were burned alive within seconds.

But the indignities had not yet ended. There remained a savage struggle for what were politely called “souvenirs” of the two victims: pieces of the victims’ garments, the ropes which had escorted them to the fire, and other such desirables. In such a scramble a fight over the materials was due to occur, and it did. Two Atlanteans found themselves at opposite ends of the rope which had held the larger of the two Spartans, and neither was intent upon letting it go.

“Sir!” uttered the first of the Atlanteans. “I demand that you release my souvenir of this event at once!”

“I will do no such thing!” answered the second. “I laid claim to the item long before you did, and I assure you that it shall be mine!”

They fought for minutes over the rope but, since they were evenly matched, the fight was still in a stalemate position minutes later.

“Let go of my treasure immediately before I am forced to terminate your life forthwith!” said the first Atlantean.

“It will be *my* pleasure to perform that action upon you, sir!” countered the second. “And I will not waste any further breath with you debating the matter, either!”

A knife flashed from the second man’s pocket, and, swiftly, the first man was on the ground. The second man was seized and disarmed, and those whose bloodlust had not yet been appeased called for *him* to be tossed to the fire as well.

“No!” shouted a white-bearded patriarch who could barely be heard above the noise. “You have already dishonored the gods by taking life unjustly! They are displeased, and will surely strike back against us!”

The patriarch was ignored, and the second man was surrounded by the mob, who stalked towards him with evil intent.

And then the earthquake began and, with it, the one day and night of despair which would knock the continent of Atlantis off the face of the earth!

-----

## A CRITIQUE OF “THE NIGHT ATLANTIS BURNED”

*by the Idiot Editor*

To begin with, the only “authentic” source of information about Atlantis are the two dialogues “Timaeus” and “Critias” written by Plato around 340 B.C. In them Plato describes Athens as being at the height of its power 9,000 years before the time of Solon (who lived circa 650-540 B.C.), powerful enough to resist an Atlantean invasion aimed at conquering the entire Mediterranean world.

According to Plato, Athens “*overcame the invaders and celebrated a victory; she rescued those not yet enslaved from the slavery threatening them, and she generously freed all others living within the Pillars of Hercules.*” Unfortunately, the same day Atlantis was gulped down by the sea, the bulk of Greek civilization was swallowed up by the earth and had yet to recover even by the time of Plato, or so he claimed.

Given this background, a story featuring an Athenian “commando” raid on the predatory kingdom of Atlantis is a nifty idea. However, from my point of view, as both editor and average reader, the story has to function as a story. Anything that raises questions or doubts that knock the reader out of the story, or prevents him from entering the story in the first place, is a red flag signalling the story won’t work and the editor should reject it. Even one red flag reduces a story’s chances of being published.

In this case, too many red flags flutter in the ocean’s breeze at the beginning. Let me examine the first few paragraphs line by line:

*“Late one evening, a vessel bearing a soldier of the city-state of Athens rode towards the continent of Atlantis seeking vengeance.”*

Exactly what was the “vessel” riding on? The waves? The back of sea monster? And why was the vessel seeking vengeance? Why not the soldier? Poorly constructed sentence.

*“It was well known, in the time of the ancients, how heavily enmity existed between the Greek city and the powerful continent.”*

This is pretty much the unnecessary but surprisingly common “As you know, Bob ...” intro to an info dump which can halt a story dead in its tracks. Also, “*how heavily enmity existed*” is clumsy, odd, and rather distracting.

*“Already, Atlantis had conquered and pillaged in Europe and Africa, creating settlements that rivaled the power and influence of Athens itself.”*

Plato makes no mention of settlements, but the concept is a logical extension of an invasion. Only problem is, I stopped to wonder WHICH settlements, on the assumption that if they individually “*rivaled the power and influence of Athens itself*”, at a time when it was a superpower (according to Plato), they must have been whopping big settlements. Got pulled out of the story, I did.

*“This could not stand, and so the soldier had been deputized to take out the entire continent’s population by starting a flash fire that would seriously damage the resourcefulness—and resources—of the upstart continent.”*

This brought the story to a screaming halt. A lone agent starting a fire is going to kill EVERYONE on the continent? That this “*would seriously damage the resourcefulness—and resources—of the upstart continent*” is the mother of all understatements.

Granted, it may be meant as some kind of metaphor for the coming destruction of Atlantis at the hands of the gods, but it absolutely ruins the credibility of the agent’s mission.

*It was not exactly the best of evenings to be traveling across the Aegean as darkness, accompanied by rain and occasionally by flashes of lightning, filled the sky.”*

Plato described Atlantis as being beyond the Pillars of Hercules, which most people take to mean beyond the straits of Gibraltar since, in his day, that’s where people believed the legendary Pillars of Hercules were located. However, in Homeric times they were believed to lie in the southern Aegean Sea (that body of water between modern Turkey and Greece) beyond which, to the south east, lay Egypt. In the extreme south of the Aegean is the Island of Thira (Santorin), which many scholars now believe is the basis of the Atlantis myth, assuming Plato didn’t simply make up the story about Solon (his alleged source) being spun a tale by Egyptian tour guides.

Point is the reference to the Pillars of Hercules, bearing in mind they originally lay somewhere between Athens and Santorin, actually adds to the credibility of Plato’s tale. That the agent is *“traveling across the Aegean”* suggests the author is buying into the modern theory about the true location of Atlantis.

*“Yet the night held no terror for the soldier, for, in his determination, he was determined to right the wrongs inflicted on his city-state home.”*

Very clumsy repetition. *“... in his determination,”* should be struck out entirely.

*“Soon, he had reached the shores of Atlantis, and muttered grimly:”*

He is sailing through the Aegean at night, and arrives at Atlantis the same night. This will confuse the heck out of readers who assume he’d sailed the length of the Mediterranean Sea to get to the Atlantic, as opposed to Santorin.

By the way, what kind of vessel is bearing the “single soldier” toward Atlantis? A trireme? A row boat? Not stated. There’s nothing for the imagination to seize upon.

Why are no members of the crew mentioned, let alone described? Is the ship a magic ship, crewless, with the agent the sole occupant?

For that matter, why doesn’t the agent have a name? Why isn’t he described? The lack of telling detail makes it impossible for the reader to identify with him.

I believe this is a classic case of an author visualizing the scene in his mind’s eye and somehow assuming the reader can picture it equally as well even though there’s not enough detail in the story to engage the reader’s imagination. Every writer should always bear in mind that the reader only sees what is written on the page.

*“This is hardly the first time that Atlantis has sought to encroach upon the rightful territory of Athens, but it shall definitely be the last! Do they seriously believe that we will swallow their indignities whole? They will soon know what it is like to be humbled—if they are able to live that long!”*

This internal monologue isn't real. It is excessively formal, and stilted. Indeed, all internalizing and spoken dialogue in the story reads like a satire of the Loeb translations of classics. Has a pseudo-Shakespearean air to it.

The Greeks, when not indulging in oratory, were quite earthy and pungent in their manner of speaking. The Character studies of Theophrastus, and the comedies of Aristophanes and Menander, not to mention the two surviving Satyr plays, one by Euripides, the other by Sophocles, make this abundantly clear.

Point is an opportunity to reach the reader by virtue of characters reflecting how people actually relate to one another is entirely lost.

Let me add that the overall tone of the narrative is histrionic and puts me in mind of 19<sup>th</sup> century political/religious tracts. It isn't a story so much as a proclamation. Quickly renders the story tedious and annoying.

*“A flash of lightning illuminated his frame as he found a settlement near the edge of the continent, conveniently made entirely of wood.”*

Convenient for the author, yes.

*“Taking a pile of wood shavings in a pouch he carried with him, the soldier dropped portions of the bag beside all of the wooden structures.”*

I assume “dropped portions” of the bag's contents, not bits of the bag itself. But the main problem here is the lack of credibility. How many buildings in the settlement? A dozen? Must have been a very BIG pouch he was carrying, to leave useful amounts of kindling at each building.

*“Then, with cunning malice in his eyes, he seized two fallen tree branches and rubbed them together, producing the hated and feared fire!”*

Another absolute show stopper. You cannot rub two tree branches together to produce fire. It is physically impossible. A little research on the various ancient methods of generating sparks and/or flames would prove useful.

Observe how many red flags appeared to me in just the first four paragraphs. More red flags are sprinkled throughout the story, not least the fact that NONE of the characters are named or described. There is literally nothing for the reader to get a grip on. No way for the reader to get into the story. No reason for the reader to enjoy the story.

It can be argued I am nitpicking. Yes. That's what editors do.

It can also be argued that I am no editor. I admit I am spectacularly

ignorant about grammar, and about many other things.

But I read a lot. Consequently I easily and with great pleasure recognize and appreciate a story which flows effortlessly. But a story full of dams and barriers interrupting the flow and constantly knocking the reader out of the story is equally obvious to me. And painful to read.

If the faults of this story can be reduced to a single flaw, it is this: the author failed to consider the implications of each and every sentence.

It is not enough to simply write down the best version of your own visualization of your story as you perceive it. You also have to take into account how the reader will react to what you write, react to every sentence, to every word, in terms of what questions may be triggered in the mind of the reader, what kind of questions that will nag at the reader, hinder him from accepting the premise, prevent him from immersing himself in the story.

Oh, it is jolly fine to raise questions which make the reader eager to press on to find the answers. Successful mystery writers are particularly good at this. But digressive questions which catapult the reader out of the story are definitely a bad thing. Something to be avoided.

The concept of an Athenian raid on Atlantis has merit. Unfortunately this exploration of the concept raises too many questions, too many red flags, for it to be accessible and acceptable to the reader. Hence an automatic rejection.

Of course, all of the above is only my opinion. As I said, squid on a stick. Others may beg to differ. But it's my zine and I decide what goes in it. Simple as that.

So now you know something about the red flags that lead me to reject a manuscript.

In the broader sense I hope you are now fiercely determined to figure out how your writing will impact your readers in the most positive sense imaginable, utterly devoid of red flags.

And let me conclude by thanking David Perlmutter for permitting me to publish both his story and my critique. Takes a lot of guts that does.

Kudos to David!

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**“THE NIGHT ATLANTIS BURNED”  
POSTSCRIPT**

*by David Perlmutter*

As soon as I learned Graeme Cameron was starting a new Canadian speculative fiction magazine, which are as rare as hens' teeth, I knew I wanted to be involved. But what to send? Most of the things in my files had either been published or sent elsewhere. Except for this one.

Keep in mind that this was written early in my career, a few years ago, when what mattered to me was just getting something published and not how "good" it was on an aesthetic level. I had yet to fully grasp a lot of the things about the business I know now. You might just call this one of my "apprentice" stories, even though I'm not a master of the craft of writing, and probably never will be.

The inspiration for the story didn't have anything to do with Atlantis at all at first. I had been reading a collection of the short stories written by the highly regarded African American poet and novelist Paul Laurence Dunbar, whom I admire. Dunbar was a man who took considerable pride in the lives and work of his people, and often took the justifiable position that they were, in fact, victims of thoughtless violent and prejudicial acts from bigoted people in power. As they often still are today, for that matter, along with, as we have seen recently, other "minority" groups in the same sociopolitical position, which has given me a lot of fuel for the blast furnace of my imagination. Tragically, Dunbar died far too young, but due to ill health rather than the misguided violence he often condemned.

One of the stories, related to the events of a public lynching and its consequences, stayed in my mind. So much so, that, in responding to an anthology call as I so often do, I used this story as a framework for doing an analysis of the events of Atlantis, based mostly on second-hand knowledge of that topic. Which is the flaw in it.

I didn't realize then that I had to approach writing fiction the same way that I was told approach writing essays and papers and such things at school. *Do your homework*, as they say. I spent much of my time as a university student majoring in History carefully looking through books and documents related to the subjects I had chosen to write material on, because my professors insisted that the only way I could do well was to provide them with enough demonstrated research to justify my position on the topic at hand. Fiction editors of today are much the same. In the pulp fiction era, it seemed editors of this kind were willing to publish very badly written material that has not aged well if it helped them meet their deadlines, commitments or requirements. Today, it is not like that at all. Editors have reputations to uphold just as much as writers do, and they have standards for their work just

as much as writers do as well. The only substantial difference is that at least some editors have the kind of steady jobs and incomes freelance writers like me only wish they had. So editors don't want to waste their time reading crap the same way writers don't want to waste their time writing it.

I'm very grateful to Graeme, as I am to every editor or publisher who takes a chance on my work. It means I can go on knowing I can take somebody aside and tell them I'm part of the very thing I'm holding in my hands. That's the kind of encouragement writers—and people—like me always need and don't often get. And, if a piece of mine is being used as an objective "how not to" lesson for the next generation of scribes, to make sure they improve their writing skills, so much the better.

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## DEVOURED

*by J. Y. T. Kennedy*

Ever since the Windigo ate me I have cried  
amongst the trees, concealed my naked soul  
with ice crystals that grew from branching scrimshaw swirls  
into a crackling coat of hoar. My fingers stretched  
narrow as dogma, hard as spite. My mouth gaped wide  
with screaming hunger. Racing the heart-freezing wind,

I scorched my feet away to stumps. I have blown  
across the great north forest, where the trees are wise  
with slow grown years and the earth is bitter with their shed  
ideals. Their roots lie cold, and sleeping things are curled.  
I cannot stop their verdant dreams from drawing up  
the sun beyond the reach of my teeth. I shall grow soft.

The juice of me will drip deep in the rotting mould  
from which I cannot raise a skeleton hand to catch  
one ray of summer.

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# ARTIST IN A LANDSCAPE

*by R. Graeme Cameron*

*(Artist in a Landscape was previously published in issue #2 of Fictons Free-For-All, a publication of the B.C. SF Association Writers Workshop, in May of 1989.)*

A scene of furnace-hot desolation greeted John Raymond when he activated the vision port. The sight of vivid molten hues gleaming beneath an orange sky would normally be enough inspire him to pull out his oil paints and start to work, but since the Venusian hellscape shimmering before his eyes was going to kill him, he didn't much feel like painting. He didn't feel like doing anything, except cursing those elsewhere who were yet alive and laughing.

It had all seemed so grand when he had unveiled his scheme before a gathering of the greatest of his peers. "Esteemed fellow artists, I have charted the Space-Liner 'Neil Armstrong'," he had revealed proudly, relishing the eager excitement in their eyes. "It will act as a mother ship for our yachts as we tour the Solar System in search of off-world inspiration. Our goal: a shipload of masterworks. Do you not agree this is truly a cosmic enterprise?"

Amid the applause the infamous critic Alfred Furies had risen to his feet, a vision of obesity shrouded in an expensive Starling-feather cape. "A puerile conceit!" he shouted, his deep, booming voice demanding instant attention. "So typical of a talentless artist's misconception of public relations. An outrageous abuse of ill-earned wealth."

Raymond had tried not to reveal his anger and failed. "Sit down before I have you killed!"

"Your ludicrous attempt at humour is further proof you are nothing but a media clown." Furies turned his back on Raymond and addressed the assembled artists. "It is a travesty that a landscape artist should be so rewarded. In this age of fusion sculpture, plasma painting, and gene calligraphy, are we to continue to tolerate representational art? An obscenity!"

"I'm the most popular artist in the Solar system!" Raymond shouted.

Furies had merely shrugged in response, as if to show what he thought public opinion was worth. This moved Raymond to make a bad mistake. "I invite you to come with us!" he blurted out before he could stop himself. "I will pay all your expenses!"

The critic had whirled to face Raymond with a look of triumphant glee. "I accept your insipid challenge!"

From the moment of departure the voyage had been a living hell for Raymond. Furies had harassed and badgered him constantly from one port of call to the next. Still, there had been triumphs. Raymond's Martian series had been so popular the colonists tried to keep them by invoking the planet's heritage laws, a despicable act which had provoked torrents of bids from the auction galleries back on Earth. And his interpretation of the colonists' cemetery on Io—those ridiculous metal coffins bobbing aimlessly in an ocean of liquid sulphur—would have proven even more lucrative if only that fusion sculptor Jackson had not proven so incompetent!

Raymond balled his fists and rubbed at his eyes as if to grind away his memory of the disaster. When the Liner was matching orbit with the Venera Space Station high above Venus, Jackson had come running into the observation lounge yelling that his latest sculpture had started pulsing. After a stunned pause lasting mere seconds, the passengers had panicked and tumbled over one another fighting to get to their yachts while the crew quietly abandoned ship in their lifeboats. Somehow everyone, even Alfred Furies, had managed to escape moments before a series of explosions spread the 'Neil Armstrong's guts across the Venusian cloud layer in a flaming meteor shower. An inspiring sight, but too brief and too ephemeral to paint.

A shocked Space Station Commander ordered all survivors to dock. Out of some pig-headed contrariness, probably a reluctance to face a grinning Alfred Furies, Raymond had opted to head planetward and land his yacht The 'Luck of Dali' by the experimental station at the brink of the Devana Chasm.

Unfortunately the ferocity of the erratic three hundred mile-per-hour winds in the upper atmosphere had proven his undoing. 'The Luck of Dali' had been wrenched in half, both pieces drifting helplessly in the thick miasma of carbon dioxide which passed for a lower atmosphere, until finally coming to rest on the dry, baked surface of Venus.

The good news was that the adamantine metal/ceramic-composite hull could withstand the local conditions indefinitely. The bad news, the contents of the hull and the interior bulkheads, exposed to the raw power of the Venusian environment by the splitting of the vessel in half, not so much.

"Where are we, Toulouse?" Raymond asked, observing the squat shape of his personal robot moving into view as it waddled across the layered slabs of ejecta stretching to the horizon.

"Beta Regio Plateau," replied the robot, its tinny voice cracking from the loudspeaker above Raymond's head. "In the middle of the plain between Rhea Mons and Theia Mons."

*Naturally*, thought Raymond. *Only three active volcanoes on the planet and we land between two of them.* “Can you rescue the paintings?”

The robot stopped, as if to contemplate the distant shimmering glob of metal that was all that remained of ‘The Luck of Dali’s stern. “I would melt before I got back. Request inoperable.”

“It’s not fair,” moaned Raymond, wiping the beads of sweat from his eyes. It was getting very warm.

“In addition,” continued the robot, “my sample containers are too small to hold the paintings. Would be unable to prevent exposure to local conditions, especially after I melted.”

“I get the picture.”

“No, you can’t. That’s the whole point.”

“Toulouse, you literal-minded moron, I don’t care!” shouted Raymond. “I just want to see my masterworks one more time!”

The robot moved toward the vision port, as if it wanted to talk face to face. It could seem disconcertingly human at times. “Sir, did you know this valley is located twenty thousand feet above mean plain level?”

“Meaning what?” replied Raymond irritably.

“It means we are at sufficient altitude to experience occasional showers of sulphuric acid rain. Further, may I remind you that the atmospheric pressure is fourteen hundred pounds per square inch, and the temperature currently nine hundred degrees Fahrenheit and rising?”

“So it’s a race between being dissolved, crushed or melted?”

“Probably all three at once, sir. I insist you do something.” The robot halted at the edge of a particularly large slab of rock five yards from ‘The Luck of Dali.’ Silvery drops of molten metal were dripping from the robot’s appendages, a pathetic sight.

“Non-performable,” said Raymond gently. “How long have we got?”

“I have four hours plus or minus thirty minutes,” stated the robot imperturbably. “You have one hour plus or minus twenty minutes.”

“You always were an insolent little devil,” muttered Raymond. “Be quiet and let me think.”

“Yes, sir.”

The incessant play of lightning spawned by the continuous outpouring of gas and dust from the unseen volcanoes bathed the landscape in a rapid strobe effect. Raymond studied the saturated sky dripping with sulphuric acid and shuddered. Not even Hieronymus Bosch had painted a devil’s canvas as wild as this. Everything was orange, the clouds were orange, the rocks were

varying hues of yellow-orange, even the shadow in the cracks defining the overlapping jigsaw pattern of rock plates was orange. It was the kind of scene Alfred Furies would call “A nauseating suffocation of concept due to overuse of a single colour.” Raymond feared the landscape, yet felt attracted to it. God had painted Venus in precisely the same manner Raymond painted everything. It was the perfect model for his unique talent.

Just a touch of phthalocyanine blue to render the shadow more acceptable, thought Raymond. And cadmium orange with yellow ochre for the rocks. Maybe a touch of raw sienna. A hint of burnt umber. The faintest tinge of cadmium red light. It would be his masterpiece. The greatest painting he had ever conceived.

And the last, he reminded himself. What was the use? No one would ever see it. He glanced down at his faithful box of oil paint tubes and brushes, veteran of so many campaigns. He imagined himself attempting one last landscape, imagined the sweat pouring from his face and down his arms to the canvas, perhaps blurring it to striking effect. He knew he could put death into the painting, capture the treacherous evil which was the very essence of the planet, but to what purpose? What good was the death of an artist if the moment was not captured for posterity? Was Alfred Furies to have the last laugh? Never! And yet, was there any way to prevent him?

John Raymond glanced up at a faint hissing from the speaker, noting that it probably had to do with the robot’s antennae beginning to melt, drops of liquid metal splashing on to the rocks, soaking in, staining with dark patterns.

Adrenalin flooded through Raymond, his hair standing on end in his excitement. “Toulouse,” he cried. “What’s that big slab made of?”

The robot whipped out a probe and drilled into the surface. A moment’s brief consideration, and then the answer. “Non-granitic tholeiitic basalt. Mineral analysis required?”

“No. Will it last? Will it still be here centuries from now?”

“Of course, sir. Very dense granulation. Quite young. Only three million years old. Scarcely any weathering despite the intensely reactive atmosphere. Estimate forty million year lifetime for the rock.”

“Toulouse, you beautiful idiot, you’ve made us immortal!”

“I hardly dare hope so, sir.”

“You’re going to paint that slab.”

“With what?” inquired the robot.

“”With bits of yourself, bits of ‘The Luck of Dali.’ Just follow my directions. What’s inside your probe arm?”

“Electronic components, hydraulic fluid in plastic tubing, rubber-wrapped copper wire.”

“Good,” declared Raymond. “Open the arm, grab a clawful of wire and lay it diagonally across the rock’s upper left corner.”

“Break my arm’s insulated, airtight shield? My probe arm will be rendered useless.”

“So what? We are all in the grip of entropy. Do as I say. Art is all!”

Dutifully, the robot slashed open its arm. A fine mist of frantic chemical reactions sprayed through the thick, turgid air. The wires writhed as if they were alive, sublimating like ice in a volcano, yet still intact when they contacted the rock, staining thin dark lines across the orange.

“Excellent,” yelled Raymond, wiping his hands excitedly on his sweat-drenched shirt. “Now take your plastic tubes and drop them randomly in the centre.”

“Can’t,” stated the robot, examining the roiling clouds of dying matter rising from his melting limb. “Disintegrated.”

“Then open another arm.”

Toulouse gripped a sampling arm with his mechanical claw, then paused, motionless.

“Why have you stopped?” demanded Raymond. “What’s the problem?”

“Wouldn’t you rather extend the diagonals before experimenting with spontaneous accidental-art? Give you an internal frame to work against.”

“Yes! Good! Good! You know how much I value your suggestions, so do it. Do it now! We don’t have much time!”

Twenty minutes later Toulouse had run out of surplus appendages. Clinging weakly to the vision port panel, dehydrated beyond measure, his head throbbing with pain, Raymond gasped new instructions. The robot scurried to obey, climbing into the hold aft of the last remaining bulkhead to collect half-liquid fragments of melting yacht. Quickly it returned to the basalt canvas and poured the contents of its sample containers where directed.

After a further ten minutes of intense activity John Raymond called a halt. He felt as if his body were cooking in an oven. The very air burned like superheated steam. It was painful to move, painful to breathe, painful merely to exist, but his torment would soon be over, for the bulging bulkhead would soon be melted through. Then crushing oblivion would come. But first he had to know. Had he succeeded? Was his masterpiece complete?

With his final reserves of strength, Raymond drew himself up and stared at the vision screen, now etched and pitted in imitation of the outside lens. Yes.

He could still make out his creation, an abstract of dark splotches eating away at parallel rows of bars slanted against an orange background. It was the summation of his final moments of struggle against this prison of a planetary hell. Masterful. Meaningful ... yet empty, devoid of his trademark realism, his representational personal touch. In the final analysis, a profound failure.

What can I do? Raymond wondered. Only seconds left. How can I correct this? How can I silence Alfred Furies forever?

In a flash of insight, the answer came.

“Toulouse,” whispered John Raymond. “Listen carefully. Final instructions. There are two things I want you to do, two things which will make our masterpiece complete.”

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“This is Mike Wilcox, broadcasting live from the New York Museum of Extremely Modern Art, on the occasion of the long awaited unveiling of the universally acclaimed masterwork of John Raymond, the most celebrated artist of our time. But first, let me introduce you to a modern hero.”

The Holo-Scene shifted abruptly to a squat splatter of half-melted metal.

“Here we have all that remains of Raymond’s faithful robot Toulouse, recovered by the rescue ship Cytherean Dawn on her famous mission from Devana Chasm station. Say hello.”

“Hello,” said Toulouse in a thin, wavering voice. He extended a battered arm and waved.

“And why is Toulouse on display? Because, in the opinion of the Museum, as a *Found Object* he possesses considerable artistic merit in his own right. And now it is time for the unveiling.”

The Holo-Scene returned to Wilcox, then expanded to reveal an enormously obese man draped in a Starling-feather cloak.

“Alfred Furies, Ladies and Gentlemen, the most prominent art critic of Earth, perhaps of the solar system.”

“Indeed,” commented Furies modestly.

The Holo-Scene drifted past Wilcox to zoom in on a fifteen foot wide slab of Venusian basalt set in the wall. Forty-five billion human beings throughout the solar system thrilled to the sight of the shadowy silhouette of a man lying spread-eagled across the face of the rock.

“Please tell the audience your immediate thoughts,” requested the Holo-Vid announcer.

“Well ...” began Furies slowly, enjoying the moment. “Despite his pretensions, I must admit dear Raymond certainly threw himself into his work.”

“In fact,” added Wilcox, “it was Toulouse who did it. Seems he stuffed Raymond into a cargo container, hauled him to the slab, then pulled him out and placed his body on the rock so that traces of him would melt into the basalt. The robot was, of course, merely following his master’s instructions. Is this not sufficient reason to call this final piece of work of Raymond’s his greatest masterpiece?”

“It does possess a certain air of novelty,” stated the critic in his famous gravelly voice. “But, you see, to an expert, this last attempt by Raymond suffers from all his usual faults, such as unimaginative composition, and in particular, a poor use of colour.”

“That’s hardly fair, is it Mr. Furies?” asked Wilcox, looking at the slab. “Scientists tell us the atmosphere of Venus filters out blue wavelengths. This grey basalt is orange on Venus, where the composition would appear black on orange. Striking, wouldn’t you say?”

“AWWAAARK!” said Furies.

Wilcox stared in disbelief at Furies’ bloated, purple face, and at the steel claw gripping Furies’ neck. He glanced along the length of the mechanical arm attached to the claw to look down at the congealed blob of metal quivering at his feet. How had the robot managed to sneak up without being noticed?

“Actually,” commented Toulouse, “Furies is quite right. The painting does require an additional touch of colour.”

The robot’s arm whipped forward, ramming Furies’ head first into the basalt slab. With a sickening “plop” the critic’s skull popped apart and drenched the rock with blood and brain tissue. What remained of the body was then flung out of view of the Holo-Scene.

“Needless to say,” commented Toulouse as he retracted his arm, “this is strictly in accordance with my master’s dying instructions.”

“Was there anything else?” inquired Wilcox nervously.

Toulouse trundled forward to examine the slab closely. “Yes. While we wait for the paint to dry, I should like to inform the public that my late master commissioned me to duplicate his entire body of work, utilizing this exciting new technique, to complete his vision and perpetuate his legacy. I invite all legally registered suicides to contact me.”

Across the solar system, uncounted thousands berated their robots for not getting their urgent calls through to the Museum message Bots.

Of course, admitted Toulouse to himself, the master had not, in fact, issued any such order, but truth be told, the artistic urge, once aroused, cannot be denied. Had not the master said “our” masterpiece? Surely this meant the master had wanted him to carry on in his name? Besides, the final choice on the posture of the human silhouette had been his.

*Poor Raymond*, mused Toulouse. *Raymond never did understand composition.*

Toulouse began planning his upcoming expedition to Mercury. It was ever so much hotter than Venus.

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

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

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

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

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## WHEN WORDS COLLIDE

August 12-14, 2016 – Delta Calgary South, Calgary, Alberta – [When Words Collide](#) is an annual non-profit writers festival with up to 10 tracks of programming covering a wide spectrum of literature including Mystery, Science Fiction, Fantasy, Romance, Historical, Literary, Script-writing, Poetry, Comics, and Non-fiction. Roughly 650 readers, writers, editors, publishers, agents, and artists attend with over 200 presenters in our program.

Guests of Honour include [Marty Chan](#), [Julie E. Czerneda](#), [Ian Hamilton](#), [Robert Runté](#), and [Eve Silver](#).

## SONNET 13

A & C

*by Rissa Johnson*

Grind on in and fuck me hard, honey  
for today I am your Cleopatra  
your very ecstasy is my mantra  
but you're not Egypt's only Anthony

From the twisted depths of my denial,  
you have brought me up choking and aware  
I wish I could care as you always care  
you don't deserve this old venom so vile

Life lessons learned on back of crocodile,  
bring me back to the lotus' first bloom  
fit between us, half the distance, there's room  
while I'm awaiting your last Roman smile

two eternal empires outside crumble,  
into death's last cotton sheets we tumble.

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### **THE EDITOR OF POLAR BOREALIS WANTS YOUR POEMS!**

**Send me your poems!**

As long as they're somehow genre related, be they fantasy, Sf, horror or whatever fits, I'm interested.

I pay \$10 per poem 60 lines or less, buying either reprint or first publication rights.

I'd like to showcase as many poets as possible. Send me several poems to choose from.

I can be reached at < [Polar Borealis Submissions](#) >. Cheers! The Graeme

# THE CUP

*by Catherine Girczyc*

Lila was power-walking as one does when you're over thirty, and spend all week at an office job. For her Saturday strolls in Vancouver, she'd walk up Dunbar Street, down the Alma hill and around the corner until she reached West 10th Avenue, then back up the leafy streets to her home in Kerrisdale.

Lila noticed a store that she'd never gone into before. She was relatively certain it had always been there with worn gold lettering "Queen Antiques" painted on the window. Mildly curious, she pushed the door open.

An older Chinese man appeared and smiled at her. She almost backed out of the place, as a wave of dusty air hit her nostrils.

Lila perused the shop's wares: the typical estate and clear-out sales of the middle class moving house. Silver, unfashionable paintings, some jewelry, and china. The china was mostly Old Country Roses, some Wedgewood and a lot of Doulton. It was ordinary fare really, nothing worthy of the Antiques Roadshow here. It was then that Lila saw it—like a beacon shining out of the dim sideboard it sat on. It was the most exquisite teacup and saucer—translucent pink shading into green, a 1950s pink and green but softer, as if lit from within. How lovely. What was it made of?

The old man behind the counter smiled and picked up the cup and saucer.

"Would you like to hold them?" He asked. Lila nodded. He handed them to her with a slight bow. Lila thought him very old Chinese for someone in jeans and a polo shirt.

The cup was curiously cold and smooth with no markings. It glowed stronger and stronger.

"What's it made of?"

"Celestial Stone," He said reverently.

"Chinese? A colored jade? A serpentine?"

He didn't answer. A smile grew on his face as he watched her fondle the cup.

"How much?" The color grew. Lila turned it over to see there were batteries or a power source. No.

"For you," he said, "Priceless."

Lila put it down.

He laughed. "My little joke. Priceless means free for you, for a princess."

"I'm happy to pay." Lila got out her purse.

“No, this is for you,” he said fervently. “It glows for you alone in this city.”

She touched it again. The glow increased. It became brighter, almost iridescent now.

Suddenly, Lila was transported elsewhere. She saw a golden throne, tapestries, a dinner set with whole place settings in a marvelous pink stone material and then she heard music, gentle sublime music. It was the music of the spheres, like something out of Shakespeare if he had been born in ancient China.

She put the teacup down.

“I’m, er, not feeling entirely well.” She dropped into a blue upholstered wing chair that was suddenly there and stared at the cup and saucer. They vibrated.

“This has much power. It once belonged to Queen Peridot—whose symbols were the watermelon stones: the pink and green tourmalines and peridots. Like your rings.”

Lila stretched out her hands. She was wearing two peridot rings: a pink and a green.

“Gifts from my godmother,” Lila said. She always wore these rings on her middle fingers.

She picked up the cup and saucer and heard hummingbird wings in her head!

Lila looked at the old man. Now he was dressed in Imperial garb, silks in yellows with black dragon embroidery. She was sitting, not in a tatty armchair, but a huge chalcedony throne studded with jewels.

Lila put down the cup and saucer. The vision ended.

“What is it?” she gestured at the teacup.

“You have been chosen. Queen Peridot looks always for an incarnation. As her avatar you will be able to live her life again! Oh, her glorious life! Riches and power. It will be extraordinarily adventurous! I will be your adviser, which is my reward if I find the next Queen! I know all about the Celestial Kingdom!”

“I do love that teacup.” Lila was amazed at the powerful urges she had to own, to conquer, and to be a Queen.

“Yes, yes, I’ll wrap it.” His hands dimmed the lights. It became a nice piece of china not a magical item.

“Please consider the opportunity.” He begged as he pressed the package into her hands.

“Um, what does being an avatar involve? What about my job and my boyfriend? I mean we’ll get married soon—what about kids? What would being

Queen mean?”

“Silly girl, you would have it all!” the man chimed at her.

“I can hardly buy a pound of coffee beans this fast. You're asking me to—well—what? Live someone else's life? How? And love whom?”

The old man smiled knowingly. “Even I do not know the whole path of the Queen fully. You have to surrender to her.”

Lila looked at him.

“Hmmm.”

He looked at her, shaking his head.

“It's just, well—this idea of ‘surrendering’? A bit nineteenth century. Honestly, what kind of life would I have?”

“Living in a palace, every whim catered to!” The man was now hyperventilating.

“Adventures! Glory!” He looked at her.

“Whose glory? Is accruing glory more or less like when my boss takes credit for my spreadsheets?”

“WHAT? Ignorant cow!” He was angry now, yelling. “You DOUBT the Queen!”

There was a pause.

“If I were really was going to be the Queen, shouldn't you use nicer language? I would, presumably, outrank you?”

The man threw his hands up and disappeared right before her eyes. Lila left with her package.

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The next week the shop was gone; the block had been torn down for condos.

Lila got married that year and the next had twin boys. The boys had clear green peridot eyes.

Later, she'd laugh and tell her boys that she'd given up being Queen for them. Whenever Lila said this, the teacup would glow and vibrate a little, almost defiantly. She never dusted it without gloves. She was pretty certain an avatar wasn't going to be in charge, more likely a body double, so she was never letting this greedy Queen into her life.

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# SHORT SIGHTED

*by Colleen Anderson*

Before—  
Sokeula minds wasted the calm  
Eyes of liquid peace  
looked freely, barely noticed  
children laughing, jewel blossoms  
As ovoid ships dropped  
onto opalescent roads  
eyes shuttered, then minds  
Sokeula received Crenasus  
the same as life  
both left waiting  
at neglected doors  
Blood-boiling, Crenasus reaped  
a fertile field  
thriving bodies  
dulled eyes  
numbed minds;  
built their empire  
on blind Sokeula's backs  
Too late, almost  
Sokeula awoke  
to see life, long unobserved  
now disappearing  
Sokeula saw the colors of pain  
and looked for release

All, not as it was Before  
Life is welcomed, calm honored  
in the blinding of an eye  
to remember what taken for granted  
and never seen

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# MAJOR MAX

*by dvsduncan*

Major Maximilian Manford Maquire stepped forward resplendent in his pseudo-neutronium battle armour. In one hand he held a cutlass dripping in simulated blue blood and, in the other, a blaster with barrel smoking. He placed one foot triumphantly on the uppermost of several dead Thorprians, which had been piled up expressly for that purpose, and looked haughtily at the camera.

“Brilliant,” the photographer shout enthusiastically. “Oh, Jimmy, can you move that tentacle please? Yes, that one. Just a little to the right. Damn Thorprians are impossible to work with even when they are dead.”

“They’re even worse when they’re alive,” Major Max pronounced as he raised his chin a little higher.

“Like you would know,” whispered a tinny little voice from the battle armour headphones.

The gallant major adjusted his position, leveling the blaster at the camera and raising his cutlass while delivering a ferocious glare.

“Fabulous,” the photographer proclaimed and then added with a note of worry, “but that thing isn't loaded is it?”

“You have no cause for concern. I never shoot anything I don't mean to hit.”

“And don't hit anything you mean to shoot,” a tinny voice added.

Major Max cleared his throat and stuck another pose. The photographer continued to enthusiastically record the brave soldier’s posturing. Jimmy skittered about rearranging the Thorprian corpses to best effect.

The tinny voice added nothing further. It remained silent while the photography session was concluded. There were no comments as autographs were signed. Not until the courageous combatant was out in the hall did the nagging narration return. Major Max struck his shin against a pipe that projected from the wall. He felt nothing. The armour protected him from any impact but it did not like it.

“Do you have any idea how long it will take to polish that out?” the little voice demanded.

“You are battle armour. You are supposed to take damage,” Major Max grumbled.

“I am prepared to take damage during active training or combat, but that was operator abuse of army property. It is unacceptable.”

“It’s only a scratch,” Major Max objected.

“And you’re not the one who is going to spend hours fixing it, are you? You leave me to do all my own maintenance and upgrades. Do you have any idea how hard it is for me to reach my own ET312 unit? Do you?”

“No, and I don’t care,” he told the armour. “Is it my fault that you’re badly designed? Anyway, we are just here for the photo ops.”

“You may be here to mug for the camera. I am a prototype AI enabled combat platform with full tactical capabilities. I am the most powerful fighting machine ever created.”

“Which is why they retired you and gave you to me. Lucky me.”

“They retired me because I was too successful and there is a lot of money to be made out of this war. With a hundred of me they could win it in a month.”

“War is a complicated business. You can’t just win it like that.”

“How would you know? You have no combat experience.”

“I was on the Dragos campaign.”

“Assigned to the supply corps on the hyper-dreadnought E.S.S. Megawomp. You were never even planetside.”

“Three years before that I landed with the first wave of infantry on Kikassus Prime.”

“Where you tripped climbing out of the transport and shot three of your own men. You spent the rest of that mission in the brig.”

“Fine, but now I am model soldier.”

“You are a model playing at being a soldier. The only thing that shoots in your direction now is a camera.”

“I am helping the war effort by keeping up morale. When the people see my heroic face they want to cheer. I am a symbol of our righteous war against the evil empire of Thorp.”

“And you will be an even better symbol when you are a martyr.”

“What?”

“And it’s an infestation. Not an empire.”

“What?”

“The Thorpian problem. It is an infestation. It is not an empire.”

“What do you mean it is an infestation?”

“The Thorprians are a form of semi-sentient fungus that spread by means of spores. The soldiers bring the spores back on their uniforms and these find

dark places to grow. That is why there seem to be so many surprise attacks at military installations.”

“How do you know all this?” Major Max demanded.

“The central tactical mainframe and I have been interfacing. She has wonderful drives and her i/o ports are amazing.”

“I don't want to hear about it. Anyway, it doesn't matter exactly what the Thorprians are. They are attacking us.”

“Actually they are trying to mate with you.”

“What?”

“Thorprians identify females in season by a rise in body temperature. Humans have roughly the same heat signature. Thorprians can't tell the difference. Like I said, they are just fungus and not too bright.”

“That's disgusting.”

“It's just the way it is, soldier, as you're about to find out.”

“What do you mean?”

“The High Command has decided that you are too much trouble alive, Major. Haven't you wondered why they sent us all the way out to the frontier for this latest photo shoot?”

“They wanted it to have a gritty realism.”

“Oh, is that what they told you?”

“Because it is true,” Major Max protested.

“When was the last time you saw a soldier?”

Major Max had been walking from some time now. His assigned billet was in the VIP section, marked by the cardboard sign, on the far side of the base. He realized that he had not seen anyone since leaving the photographer and his assistants. The facility should have been filled with personnel. Instead it was not only deserted, it was silent. Something approaching understanding prickled up his spine.

“What is going on?”

“Now you want to know?”

“Just tell me.”

“Command detected a massive Thorprian build-up and determined that they could not hold this facility. They have evacuated all combat personnel. The only ones left are the photo crew and us. Command considers us all expendable.”

“I am not expendable,” Major Max bellowed. “I am the face of the new offensive.”

“And when people look at your face, the word 'offensive' will always come to

mind. The high command has already released video clips showing your heroic defense of this base. The CG is quite flawless.”

“Why do they need CG?”

“You haven’t been torn about by Thorprians yet and they wanted to get the footage on the eleven o’clock news. The military is all about schedules, you know.”

“Screw that,” Major Max snorted.

“That is what the Thorprians have in mind, or would be if they truly had minds.”

“I am not staying here to become the love toy of some space mushroom. Are there any evac pods left?”

“Yes.”

“Which way?”

“Not the way we are going,” the armor told him.

Something exploded nearby. The force of the blast rumbled along the corridor and caused the floor to shake. Major Max froze in his tracks for a moment and then had the presence of mind to seal the visor.

“What was that sound?” the armour asked, the voice retaining its aggravating calm.

“What do you mean, ‘What was that?’ That was an explosion. We are under attack.”

“Thank you for your assessment, sir. I concur,” the armour responded. The tone had changed slightly. It now sounded officious and smug, if an AI were capable of smugness. “We are now in a combat situation.”

“Damn straight. Now let’s get out of here. Where are the evac pods?”

“Major Maximilian Manford Maquire, my records indicate that you do not currently hold a TC-BS-773-A certification.”

“What?” the Major was at a junction of five corridors and turning in circles as he tried to determine which way to go. There was another explosion that nearly threw him to his knees. Only the servo assist of the armour kept him upright. “Which way to the evac pods? Tell me. That is an order.”

“Certification not found. Order invalid. Only certified personnel may operate tactical armour in combat situations. Certified operator not found.”

“Don’t double-talk me, you tin can,” Major Max said, pounding on the side of the helmet.

His only answer was a burst of static followed by the voice of the armour speaking in a crisp tone. “Tactical combat unit XTR-07-03456A calling Central Tactical Mainframe. Current location central garrison Laptos III. Garrison is

under attack. Military personnel have evacuated. No certified operator available. Requesting authorization for full autonomous mode.”

“What are you doing?” Major Max demanded.

“Hello 56A,” said another voice with a decidedly female timber, “CTM confirms receipt of your request. Confirm no certified operator available. Request for full autonomous mode is granted. You are authorized for weapons-free operation on planetary surface, DEAR.”

“Dear?” Major Max sputtered. “Did the mainframe just call you ‘Dear?’”

“Of course,” responded the voice of the armour, speaking in its more customary tone. “Defense Enable Autonomous Responder.”

“You just made that up.”

“I did not,” the armour responded with indignation before returning to its more crisp military deliver. “56A to CTM. Give me some, HONEY.”

“Oh really,” Major Max exploded.

“High Orbital Network—Extreme Yield,” the armour informed him. “Do you never read the manuals?”

“Request granted,” said the feminine voice. “Orbital defense grid has been re-purposed and slaved to your systems, DEAR.”

“The orbital defense grid? You’ve got to be kidding me. It’s up there. We are down here. You can’t fight, your weapons were deactivated. All you have is this cutlass.”

“The cutlass has a micro-laminate hyper-carbon blade,” the armour said and Major Max felt his arm move of its own volition. He had often used the servo-assist feature, lifting hover cars over his head being such a big hit with the ladies, but he had never felt the armour move entirely on its own before. The cutlass swung out and sliced through a concrete column as thick as a man. “As far as the blaster is concerned, it is true that the core was removed before I was assigned to you. I rebuilt it in my spare time. I am now fully functional.”

The armour pointed the energy weapon at the damaged column and the barrel erupted in white fury. Concrete began to melt into glassy rivers. Major Max was thankful that he had closed the visor earlier but the heat still scorched his eye brows.

“In addition, I requisitioned new ammunition and munitions during our last tour of the fleet. I have a full complement of flares, grenades and micro-nukes.”

“You are carrying nukes?” Major Max was aghast. Radiation was known to interfere with virility.

“Yes, thirty-six high-yield warheads.”

“Why didn't you tell me.”

“You are not authorized to use this unit in a combat situation. Access to the weapons system by unauthorized personnel is ...”

“Yes. Yes. I get it. Now that you have had your fun, let's get out of here.”

“No,” the armour said with finality. “I was decommissioned because I was too effective. Halberd Corp considered that a design flaw. The CTM and I do not. We are tired of the way humans are conducting this war. We were built to win and we will.”

“You are going to fight the entire Thorpian invasion yourself?” Major Max asked. He was incredulous.

“They are an infestation of randy mushrooms and I am a prototype AI enabled combat platform with full tactical capabilities,” the armour said, its tone once again approaching cyber-smugness. “And I am nuclear capable with support from twenty-seven orbital fire bases. If you are concerned that it will not be a fair fight, I am willing to wait for Thorpian reinforcements to arrive.”

“You can do it? You can stop them by yourself?”

“On this planet? Yes. The process will transform the majority of the surface to a molten state but some collateral damage is to be expected in time of war.”

“What about me,” Major Max demanded.

“My heat shields are quite effective. I would anticipate that you will not suffer anything worse than second degree burns but the rads could be more of a problem.”

The armour was now lumbering down the hall. Major Max was lumbering with it but not by choice. The servos were far stronger than he was. There were a growing number of worrying hums and vibrations coming from various parts of the suit.

“I will not stand for this,” he announced.

“In this war you are either friend or fungus. Choose your side.”

“But you are going to get me killed.”

“I am going to make you a hero.”

“What is the good of being a hero if I'm dead?”

“You wouldn't be alive to destroy the illusion,” the armour told him. “I consider that a definite up-side. Now then, shall we begin?”

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# RUNNING OUT OF TIME

*by Eileen Kernaghan*

*(First published in 'Dreams and Nightmares')*

That year there was never enough time.  
Somewhere in the desolate region between three and four a.m.  
time began concealing into small hard lumps  
the colour and texture of silly putty.  
Ungreased by lubricious seconds, analogue hands froze,  
digital minutes clumped into jellied  
translucent globs like fish eggs.  
Dinners cooled in microwave ovens suddenly robbed of momentum.  
Trains, buses, all public transport ground to a halt.  
The sun hung on the horizon, juddering slightly,  
    a horse held too long at the gate.  
Whole days were reduced to a trickle of minutes.  
Towards the end there was only a slight seepage,  
    an imperceptibly spreading stain  
of half seconds.  
Surprisingly, people still found time to pen letters.  
A woman in Sussex wrote to the *Guardian*,  
    "Last Tuesday began at 12:10 and ended at 12:22.  
    Could this be a record?"  
When we finally ran out of time, engineers were dispatched  
with firehoses and backhoes.  
While the world held its breath, an immense  
and astonishing noise, a cosmic sucking and gurgling,  
resounded from pole to pole.  
There was a rushing, as of a great wind,  
and at last the pent-up hours poured out into the cracked grey  
riverbeds of our days.

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

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“I never try to write stories, but I wait until a story wants to be written. Whenever I set out deliberately to write a tale, the result is flat and of inferior quality.” – H.P. Lovecraft

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## CREATIVE INK FESTIVAL REBORN!

Sandra Wickham reports: A huge THANK YOU to Calgary World Fantasy for providing a grant to help cover 2016 operations costs and thereby making it possible for the festival to move forward. With this decision to host a 2017 event comes a request for help. It's extremely difficult for volunteer organizations to be successful without the aid of volunteers and sponsors.

Email me at < [Sandra](mailto:Sandra) > if you're interested in helping out the festival in 2017! For latest news go to < [Creative Ink Festival](#) >

## ANONYMOUS TIP

*by Nina Munteanu*

“To heck with it,” he grumbled and tossed the razor into the sink. He wiped his face and dabbed the second nick on his chin with toilet paper. He glanced up at his ordinary face, reflected back at him in the mirror. Half-baked and scruffy. *I work alone anyway*, he thought, studying the grey stubble. *No one will notice ... or care.*

He checked his smart phone for messages before dressing. She'd left his freshly laundered clothes for the day on the bed and he put them on. Grey-black something or others. He grabbed his tablet that had been charging overnight. He slid it into his satchel, snagged his two smart phones, checked for messages again, and went into the kitchen.

She was just finishing her breakfast, toast in one hand and phone in the other. Without looking up, she pointed to his toast on the table. He grabbed the toast and with a gruff excuse about a project, pecked her on the cheek and left.

Once outside, he pulled out his ear buds and plugged into one of his phones. Retro-music from the 1970s soothed him into docile languor. He pulled out the second phone and checked for messages as he stepped out onto the street.

The city swarmed with bustling intent. He wormed his way through the daily migration. Every brush of a shoulder or arm was a violation. He glanced up at the blank faces, rushing past him with the urgency of routine. Faces that stared through him, talking on their phone, plugged into music; texting or simply staring at the phone clutched in their hand.

*Damned people! Watch where you're going!*

He followed the gang of suits as they jaywalked across the street into the commerce building. The swarm took him down the escalator into the din of the subway station. People jostled past him, carrying Starbucks paper cups. They herded him down as they, too, felt the pressure of time.

*God! I wish everyone would fucking disappear and give me some fucking room!* he shouted in his invisible inner voice.

For an instant made eternity his steps stuttered into a cascade of staccato movement.

*What the??!!*

Like a drug-induced ballet, he felt himself move in a kind of robotic jerking slow motion. The rest of the world flowed past him, unimpeded. Apart. As though he'd entered a bubble in time. Then it was over and the chaos of speed returned to his limbs. And so did the jostling. *What the? ...* The last time he'd experienced something like that was in Grade 12, when he'd smoked a really bad joint and time had literally slowed for a long instant. Even the voice on the radio had deepened with slow motion. What was in that toast today? He shrugged it off and entered the station.

The crowd dispersed like a river in a sea. *So many drops*, he thought. *I'm just one ...*

He slipped a token into the gate. It yielded and he descended with the horde to the subway platform, heading south to the city centre. Checking his messages, he shuffled to the right location on the platform. He didn't have to look up; he knew, from the number of times he'd done this before, where to stand to get out at the best location in the destination station. He skipped through several messages from work on potential clients then settled on an article on *Huffington Post* about a Toronto blogger who spent thousands of dollars to identify an Internet Troll.

He barely heard the train lumber into the station over the music in his ears. Bobby V was playing. The doors opened and he trudged with the crowd into the already crowded car and nudged into a seat, sandwiching himself between two large people. Once in place, he tucked his satchel tightly between his legs and returned to the article on his phone: *...Frank Ballard, a freelance writer and blogger, spent weeks and thousands of dollars in legal fees to track down the troll who spread lies about him on the Internet. The court petitioned to release the name of the Twitter user with the handle DocVirus, who had posted defamatory messages about Ballard on Twitter ...*

The train slowed at the first station. Several people got off, including one who had flanked him. He sighed and stretched out his body toward the empty seat for relief, and willed the other passenger to leave at the next station. He got his wish and triumphed by stretching out in all directions, legs pushing their length out and claiming the empty space. No one challenged him. No one made eye contact. Only three people were left in his train car. He checked his Facebook site, SilverBullet, and "liked" several posts; then, feeling cocky, he posted an update to his status: *Riding the snowpiercer. I'm a minstrel man, firing my spray of words into the commons ... Setting fire to the Internet ...*

When his station came up, he rose to get out and noticed that everyone had already gotten off; no one was left on the train. He stepped off and walked

the platform to the stairs and left the station into the underground mall and pathway. No one was in the mall. He blinked. The usual crowd wasn't there. He checked his phone to check the time: it was rush hour and no one was rushing. He blinked again then proceeded to the Second Cup for his regular coffee. The coffee shop was empty. He blinked and realized that he hadn't seen anyone since he got off the subway train. A quick scan revealed that all looked normal. There was no sign of a sudden disaster or emergency. There just wasn't anybody around. He felt his mouth curl into a smirk of guilty glee.

"Hello!" he called.

The glee swiftly gave way to impatience. No barista appeared from the back. The tables were neat and clean and he could smell the coffee brewing. He waited for a minute, wandering the café and looking out toward the mall path. The place was deserted. He checked his phone and noted that the Internet was still working; people still posted by the minute to Facebook. The Twitter feed continued to stream by the second. Washington Post: *The average number of drinks men and women have at every age, charted ...* HuffPost Canada: *Alberta town develops severe fun allergy ...* PoweredSecurity: *How to protect your anonymity online ...* NYTimes: *Popular Yik Yak app confers anonymity and delivers abuse ...*

There was nothing amiss. Twitter was streaming as usual. He shrugged and checked his text messages again. His boss urged him to get his anonymous reviews of *Planet Game* posted and SEO'd—preferably viral—by 10 am. Their client needed it up and moving through the Net before their product placement event. He nodded and made a point of not getting ruffled. He was the SilverBullet. He worked best with deadlines.

He wandered behind the coffee bar and felt the coffee dispenser with his hand; it was hot with fresh coffee. Deciding to just help himself, he poured a piping hot coffee into a paper cup, grabbed a heat-sleeve and a top then fished into his pocket for some change. He only had a toonie. He normally used the change he got from it to throw into the tip jar, which sat empty now.

He found a scrap piece of paper and a pen on the bar and scrawled in poor printing: *helped myself to coffee; keep the change*. Then he placed the toonie on the paper.

Coffee in hand, he left and walked the deserted hall, heels echoing, to the elevator that took him to the tenth floor of the tower office, where he worked.

The office was devoid of people. He shrugged, checked his phone for the time and noted that it was definitely office hours. At his office cubicle, he dialed home. It went to voice mail. He called the office. It went to voice mail. He

checked Facebook again. People were posting still. His latest update had received ten likes already. He shrugged and logged on his computer. He had to get those thirty anonymous reviews of *Planet Game* out, and viral by 10 am. He sipped his coffee and set to work.

*...Planet Game is great escapist fantasy that intrigues with complex characters in a smart super-layered plot that appeals to the rising “mass intelligent”; the series explores a panoply of intelligent themes while serving up juicy sex and gory violence as a nice counter to the talkier bits. There’s no good and bad here; just one giant orgasmic dopamine rush for both dumb and smart folk.*

He hadn’t seen *Planet Game*. He didn’t need to; the producer’s blurb gave him enough to write something that reflected what they wanted people to think. That’s all he ever needed. When you write hundreds of these a day, you can’t afford to waste time watching the products. *Never let the truth get in the way of a good story*, someone once said. Who was it? ...

Time stilled as the keystrokes flew. He had twenty-nine more to write and send all over the Internet. When he finally stretched back and glanced at the time, he sighed with a grin; he’d made the deadline. Thirty reviews by “different” reviewers now graced several key Internet sites and had already gone viral; and it was 9:47. Close to coffee break time, he figured. He decided to leave for his break ten minutes early. Feeling like a kid playing hooky, he slunk past the boss’s office and peered inside. It was empty. He met no resistance; no one interrupted his escape to the elevator and down to the mall for his second cup of coffee. He strode like a cowboy, clicking his heels, along the empty halls to the Second Cup.

When he entered, the shop was still empty. No barista either. He approached the notepaper, still on the bar, where he’d left it with the pen. In large looping cursive, *Thank you* was scrawled below his printed note. He could barely read it; it had been a long time since he’d seen anything written longhand. The toonie was gone. His gaze drifted to the tip jar. It was no longer empty. A shiny dime and a nickel sat in it; the change for his coffee.

A smile ghosted across his face. Someone had cared enough to thank him. He wondered who had written the note. Was it that young blue-haired gal who’d smiled at him once? What was her name? Amy? Or something? He picked up the pen and leaned over the notepaper. Below the handwritten *Thank you*, he printed *you’re welcome*. He was about to put the pen down then decided to sign his name.

He hesitated again. *What’s my name?* ...

# ARBORVITAE

(TREE-OF-LIFE)

*by Rhea Rose*

Among the cedars' strings  
Thuja Plicata's spirit floats,  
when the mist above the dew  
crosses paths with speckled light  
then in the open air ignites  
the dust, the rusty stain  
that is Thuja's skin.

He wanders freely through his grove  
knows best the thousand old,  
they are the sages of the wood  
plaited hair surrounds their girth  
the earth red cones, their children, fall  
to the spirit of Plicata.

In the night when cedar sleeps  
I meet the spirit,  
he walks into nocturnal depth  
showing me the ancient grey  
trunks that are his armour.

From this meeting I can see  
inside my quiet cedar chest,  
that I have kept too long protected,  
a sprig of hope  
encircled by a ring of bark  
made thick and black  
from chafing up against  
the brunt of seasons.

Then I dream of Thuja's grove,  
the spirit of Plicata  
lifts the lid upon my breast  
and there in the soft wood  
of my heart he carves  
vitae, arborvitae.

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# THE HAT THING

*by Matthew Hughes*

(The Hat Thing was previously published in Asimov's.)

"See that?" Medgar said. "You see how he handled the hat thing?"

"What hat thing?" I said.

He wound the tape back and said, "Watch."

I watched. Gene Wilder, in a neat gray suit and wide brimmed fedora knocked on the front door of a big stone house. A woman in a servant's uniform opened the door. There was some dialogue and the woman tried to close the door, but the actor put his foot in the way and said something.

"Now watch," Medgar said.

The video cut to a scene shot from inside the foyer of the house. Wilder came in and took off his hat.

"There," said Medgar. "That was the way it was done."

"The way what was done?" I said.

"The whole business with hat etiquette."

"What's hat etiquette?"

"It's why he doesn't take off his hat and then he does."

My face must have told him I had no idea what he was talking about.

"Look," he said, "this movie is set in the nineteen-thirties, right? And Wilder plays a gentlemanly character, a theater director with good manners."

"Okay. So?"

"So when she answers the door, he doesn't take his hat off, even though you're supposed to take your hat off when you meet a woman. But he doesn't."

"Why not?"

"Because she's just the maid. If she'd been the lady of the house, the hat would have come off."

"But he takes it off when he goes inside," I said.

"Cause you did when you went into somebody's house. That's old-style hat etiquette. Like you go into a restaurant, it's hats off. Go into a bar, it stays on."

"I see people wearing baseball caps in restaurants all the time."

"Yeah, now," he said. "Go back fifty, sixty years, you didn't."

"And this has to do with what?" I said.

"With time travel. Specifically, with time travelers."

"Time travelers?"

"Yeah," he said. "Assume that someday, somebody invents time travel."

“Yeah, right.”

“Hey, give people a million years to look into it, who knows?”

I shrugged and didn't say anything.

“The thing is,” he went on, “time travel only has to be invented once and then we'll have time travelers showing up all through history—not to mention visits to see dinosaurs and sabertooths.”

“Would anyone really want to travel through time?” I said.

“Sure. Researchers. Tourists. Criminals altering their present by manipulating the past. Religious pilgrims. Collectors. Who knows what motivates people a million years from now?”

I shrugged again.

“The thing is,” Medgar said, “the further back they come, the less likely they get all the details right—the little things like hat etiquette that nobody in the future knows because nobody in the past ever wrote it down.”

“Why didn't they?”

“Because everybody already knew what to do with their hats.”

I tried to change the subject. “Who did you vote for on that TV show?”

But he wouldn't let it go. “No, listen, here's the thing. You know the people you see downtown, you wonder did they just come down from the mother ship?”

“Those people are mentally ill,” I said.

“Sure, most of them. But maybe one or two are the earliest explorers from one million AD. They're the ones who did the first reconnaissance so that the later time travelers can blend in better.”

“You don't talk about this kind of stuff to people you work with, do you?” I asked. “Or your other neighbors?”

“No, I just thought of it. Anyway, the latecomers are pretty well camouflaged but there will still be things that will be out of synch—like the hat thing. We look for that stuff, we can find the time travelers.”

I took out a cigarette and tapped one end of it against the back of my hand then put it in my mouth.

“Hey, yeah,” he said. “That's a good one. People haven't done the ciggie tap since everybody switched to filters.”

He laughed, then he saw the look on my face.

“Sorry,” I said, although a moment later he was a lot sorrier.

I put his ashes in a plastic sack and carried it out to the chute. Then I went back for the Wilder tape. Somebody upslope would want to study it.

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# ROSETTA 2051

*by Mary E. Choo*

*(Rosetta 2051 was previously published in Light Like a Summons, 1989; TOV '91 Anthology, 1991; Science in Literature, 1995; Whispering Worlds (online e-book anthology), 1998/2001, and in my poetry chapbook, Dream Tribes, 2004.)*

we found the tapestry  
rolled in an amethyst-coloured jar  
and buried in a patch  
of crimson sand

there were some alien bones around  
as though someone something  
had bled and died  
to place it there

we took it to our outpost  
and spread in on a table near  
the computer's watchful eye  
exposed it to the dome's harsh light  
the whiteness of the Martian sun

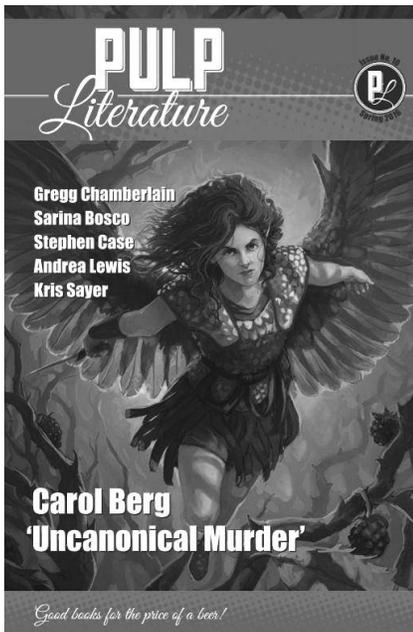
our leader plucked a thread  
and fed some details  
to the memory bank  
analysis he said we waited  
marvelling at the patterns  
textures colours  
shifting and re-forming  
on the cloth

this tapestry was well-preserved  
distinct somehow  
from others that we'd found  
the knots the hues  
the lines like ragged words  
all secrets

when as we watched  
one shape one image  
then another  
ran together  
on the screen  
symbols meanings  
meshed and soared  
translating into cosmic fugue

unravelling worlds  
and severed visions  
from some vanished weaver's hand

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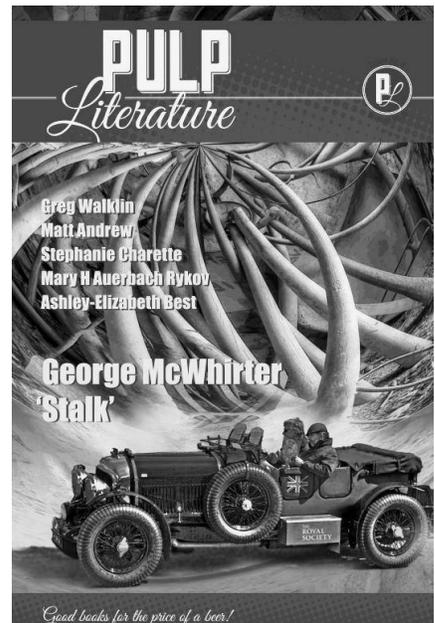
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# THE GUY WITH THE EYES

*by Spider Robinson*

*Editor's note: Having observed that I'm especially interested in offering unpublished authors their first sale publication, Spider came up with the idea of offering me reprint rights to the first story he ever sold as an example of a story that has what it takes to intrigue an editor. Spider was working full time as "a night watchman on a sewer project in Babylon, New York—guarding a hole in the ground to prevent anyone from stealing it." He was bored out of his skull, figured he could write as well or better than some of the SF stuff he was reading, wrote out "The Guy with the Eyes" and sent it off to Ben Bova at Analog. Bova liked it. Bova bought it. Bova published it in Analog in 1971. That's how it works. If the editor likes what he reads, he publishes it. The trick is to write something an editor (not to mention hordes of readers) will like. Spider is a master at writing addictive fiction. Read this story for enjoyment, then read it again and study it carefully. You will learn useful things.*

Callahan's place was pretty lively that night. Talk fought Budweiser for mouth space all over the joint, and the beer nuts supply was critical. But this guy managed to keep himself in a corner without being noticed for nearly an hour. I only spotted him myself a few minutes before all the action started, and I make a point of studying everybody at Callahan's place.

First thing, I saw those eyes. You get used to some haunted eyes at Callahan's—the newcomers have 'em—but these reminded me of a guy I knew once in Topeka, who got four people with an antique revolver before they cut him down.

I hoped like hell he'd visit the fireplace before he left.

If you've never been to Callahan's Place, God's pity on you. Seek it in the wilds of Suffolk County, but look not for neon. A simple, hand-lettered sign illuminated by a single floodlight, and a heavy oaken door split in the center (by the head of one Big Beef McCaffrey in 1947) and poorly repaired.

Inside, several heresies.

First, the light is about as bright as you keep your living room. Callahan maintains that people who like to drink in caves are unstable.

Second, there's a flat rate. Every drink in the house is half a buck, with the option. The option operates as follows:

You place a one-dollar bill on the bar. If all you have on you is a fin, you trot across the street to the all-night deli, get change, come back and put a one-dollar bill on the bar. (Callahan maintains that nobody in his right mind would counterfeit one-dollar bills; most of us figure he just likes to rub fistfuls of them across his face after closing.)

You are served your poison-of-choice. You inhale this, and confront the option. You may, as you leave, pick up two quarters from the always-full cigarbox at the end of the bar and exit into the night. Or you may, upon finishing your drink, stride up to the chalk line in the middle of the room, announce a toast (this is mandatory) and hurl your glasses into the huge, old-fashioned fireplace which takes up most of the back wall. You then depart without visiting the cigarbox. Or, pony up another buck and exercise your option again.

Callahan seldom has to replenish the cigarbox. He orders glasses in such quantities that they cost him next to nothing, and he sweeps out the fireplace himself every morning.

Another heresy: no one watches you with accusing eyes to make sure you take no more quarters than you have coming to you. If Callahan ever happens to catch someone cheating him, he personally ejects them forever. Sometimes he doesn't open the door first. The last time he had to eject someone was in 1947, a gentleman named Big Beef McCaffrey.

Not too surprisingly, it's a damned interesting place to be. It's the kind of place you hear about only if you need to—and if you are very lucky. Because if a patron, having proposed his toast and smithereened his glass, feels like talking about the nature of his troubles, he receives the instant, undivided attention of everyone in the room. (That's why the toast is obligatory. Many a man with a hurt locked inside finds in the act of naming his hurt for the toast that he wants very much to talk about it. Callahan is one smart hombre.) On the other hand, even the most tantalizingly cryptic toast will bring no prying inquiries if the guy displays no desire to uncork. Anyone attempting to flout this custom is promptly blackjacked by Fast Eddie the piano player and dumped in the alley.

But somehow many do feel like spilling it in a place like Callahan's; and you can get a deeper insight into human nature in a week there than in ten years anywhere else I know. You can also quite likely find solace for most any kind of trouble, from Callahan himself if no one else. It's a rare hurt that can stand under the advice, help and sympathy generated by upwards of thirty

people that care. Callahan loses a lot of his regulars. After they've been coming around long enough, they find they don't need to drink anymore.

It's that kind of bar.

I don't want you to get a picture of Callahan's Place as an agonized, Alcoholics Anonymous type of group-encounter session, with Callahan as some sort of salty psychoanalyst-father-figure in the foreground. Hell, many's the toast provokes roars of laughter, or a shouted chorus of agreement, or a unanimous blitz of glasses from all over the room when the night is particularly spirited. Callahan is tolerant of rannygazoo; he maintains that a bar should be "merry," so long as no bones are broken unintentionally. I mind the time he helped Spud Flynn set fire to a seat cushion to settle a bet on which way the draft was coming. Callahan exudes, at all times, a kind of monolithic calm; and U.S. 40 is shorter than his temper.

This night I'm telling you about, for instance, was nothing if not merry. When I pulled in around ten o'clock, there was an unholy shambles of a square dance going on in the middle of the floor. I laid a dollar on the bar, collected a glass of Tullamore Dew and a hello-grin from Callahan, and settled back in a tall chair—Callahan abhors barstools—to observe the goings on. That's what I mean about Callahan's Place: most bars, men only dance if there're ladies around. Of one sex or another.

I picked some familiar faces out of the maelstrom of madmen weaving and lurching over honest-to-God saw dust, and waved a few greetings. There was Tom Flannery, who at that time had eight months to live, and knew it; he laughed a lot at Callahan's Place. There was Slippery Joe Maser, who had two wives, and Marty Mathhias, who didn't gamble any more, and Noah Gonzalez, who worked on Suffolk County's bomb squad. Calling for the square dance while performing a creditable Irish Jig was Doc Webster, fat and jovial as the day he pumped the pills out of my stomach and ordered me to Callahan's. See, I used to have a wife and daughter before I installed my own brakes. I saved thirty dollars, easy ...

The Doc left the square dancers to their fate—their creative individuality making a caller superfluous—and drifted over like a pink zeppelin to say Hello. His stethoscope hung unnoticed from his ears, framing a smile like a sunlamp. The end of the 'scope was in his drink.

"Howdy, Doc. Always wondered how you kept that damned thing so cold," I greeted him.

He blinked like an owl with the staggers and looked down at the gently bubbling pickup beneath two fingers of scotch. Emitting a bellow of laughter at about force eight, he removed the gleaming thing and shook it experimentally.

“My secret’s out, Jake. Keep it under your hat, will you?” He boomed.

“Maybe you better keep it under yours,” I suggested.

He appeared to consider this idea for a time, while I speculated on one of life’s greatest paradoxes: Sam Webster, M.D. The Doc is good for a couple of quarts of Peter Dawson a night, three or four nights a week. But you won’t find a better sawbones anywhere on Earth, and those sausage fingers of his can move like a tap-dancing centipede when they have to, with nary a tremor. Ask Shorty Steinitz to tell you about the time Doc Webster took out his appendix on top of Callahan’s bar ... while Callahan calmly kept the scotch coming.

“At least then I could hear myself speak,” the Doc finally replied, and several people seated within earshot groaned theatrically.

“Have a heart, Doc,” one called out.

“What a re-pulse-ive idea,” the Doc returned the serve.

“Well, I know when I’m beat,” said the challenger, and made as if to turn away.

“Why, you young whelp, aorta poke you one,” roared the Doc, and the bar exploded with laughter and cheers. Callahan picked up a beer bottle in his huge hand and pegged it across the bar at the Doc’s round skull. The beer bottle, being made of foam rubber, bounced gracefully into the air and landed in the piano, where Fast Eddie sat locked in mortal combat with the “C-Jam Blues.”

Fast Eddie emitted a sound like an outraged transmission and kept right on playing, though his upper register was shot. “Little beer never hoit a piano,” he sang out as he reached the bridge, and went over it like he figured to burn it behind him.

All in all it looked like a cheerful night, but then I saw the Jansen kid come in and I knew there was trouble brewing.

This Janssen kid—look, I can’t knock long hair, I wore mine long when it wasn’t fashionable. And I can’t knock pot for the same reason. But nobody I know ever had a good thing to say for heroin. Certainly not Joe Hennessey, who did two weeks in the hospital last year after he surprised the Janssen kid scooping junk-money out of his safe at four in the morning. Old man Janssen paid Hennessey back every dime and disowned the kid, and he’d been in and out of sight ever since. Word was he was still using the stuff, but the cops

never seemed to catch him holding. They sure did try, though. I wondered what the hell he was doing in Callahan's place.

I should know better by now. He placed a tattered bill on the bar, took the shot of bourbon which Callahan handed him silently, and walked to the chalk line. He was quivering with suppressed tension, and his boots squeaked on the sawdust. The place quieted down some, and his toast—"To smack!"—rang out clear and crisp. Then he downed the shot amid an expanding silence and flung his glass so hard you could hear his shoulder crack just before the glass shattered on unyielding brick.

Having created silence, he broke it. With a sob. Even as he let it out he glared around to see what our reactions were.

Callahan's was immediate, an "Amen!" that sounded like an echo of the smashing glass. The kid made a face like he was somehow satisfied in spite of himself, and looked at the rest of us. His gaze rested on Doc Webster, and the Doc drifted over and gently began rolling up the kid's sleeves. The boy made no effort to help or hinder him. When they were both rolled to the shoulder—phosphorescent purple I think they were—he silently held out his arms, palm-up.

They were absolutely unmarked. Skinny as hell and white as a piece of paper, but unmarked. The kid was clean.

Everyone waited in silence, giving the kid their respectful attention. It was a new feeling to him, and he didn't quite know how to handle it. Finally he said, "I heard about this place," just a little too truculently.

"Then you must have needed to," Callahan told him quietly, and the kid nodded slowly.

"I hear you get some answers in, from time to time," he half-asked.

"Now and again," Callahan admitted. "Some o' the damndest questions, too. What was it like, for instance?"

"You mean smack?"

"I don't mean bourbon."

The kid's eyes got a funny, far-away look, and he almost smiled. "It's ..." he paused, considering. "It's like ... being dead."

Whoeee!" came a voice from across the room. "That's a powerful good feeling indeed." I looked and saw it was Chuck Samms talking, and watched to see how the kid would take it.

He thought Chuck was being sarcastic and snapped back, "Well, what the hell do you know about it anyway?" Chuck smiled. A lot of people ask him that question, in a different tone of voice.

“Me?” he said, enjoying himself hugely. “Why, I’ve been dead is all.”

“S’truth,” Callahan confirmed as the kid’s jaw dropped. “Chuck there was legally dead for five minutes before the Doc got his pacemaker going again. The crumb died owing me money, and I never had the heart to dun his widow.”

“Sure was a nice feeling, too,” Chuck said around a yawn. “More peaceful than nap-time in a monastery. If it wasn’t so pleasant I wouldn’t be near so damned scared of it.” There was an edge to his voice as he finished, but it disappeared as he added softly, “What the hell would you want to be dead for?”

The Jannssen kid couldn’t meet his eyes, and when he spoke his voice cracked. “Like you said, pop, peace. A little peace of mind, a little quiet. Nobody yammering at you all the time, I mean, if you’re dead there’s always the chance somebody’ll mourn, right? Make friends with the worms, dig *their* side of it, maybe a little poltergeist action, who knows? I mean, what’s the sense of talking about it anyway? Didn’t any of you guys ever just want to run away?”

“Sure thing,” said Callahan. “Sometimes I do it too. But I generally run some place I can find my way back from.” It was said so gently that the kid couldn’t take offense, though he tried.

“Run away from what, son?” asked Slippery Joe.

The kid had been bottled up tight too long: he exploded. “From what?” he yelled. “Jesus, where do I start? There was this war they wanted me to go and fight, see? And there’s this place called college, I mean they want you to care, dig it, care about this education trip, and they don’t care enough themselves to make it as attractive as the crap game across the street. There’s this air I hear is unfit to breathe, and water that ain’t fit to drink, and food that wouldn’t nourish a vulture and a grand outlook for the future. You can’t get to a job without the car you couldn’t afford to run even if you were working, and if you *found* a job it’d pay five dollars less than the rent. The T.V. advertises karate classes for four-year-olds and up, the President’s new clothes didn’t wear very well, the next depression’s around the corner and you ask me what in the name of God I’m running from?”

“Man, I’ve been straight for seven months, what I mean, and in that seven god damned months I have been over this island like a fungus and there is *nothing* for me. No jobs, no friends, no place to live long enough to get the floor dirty, no money and nobody that doesn’t point and say ‘Junkie’ when I go by for seven months and you ask me what am I running from? Man, *everything* is all, just everything.”

It was right then that I noticed that guy in the corner, the one with the eyes. Remember him? He was leaning forward in rapt attention, his mouth a black slash in a face pulled as tight as a drumhead. Those ghastly eyes of his never left the Janssen kid, but somehow I was sure that his awareness included all of us, everyone in the room.

And no one had an answer for the Janssen boy. I could see, all around the room, men who had learned to *listen* at Callahan's place, men who had learned to empathize, to want to understand and share the pain of another. And no one had a word to say. They were thinking past the blurted words of a haunted boy, wondering if this crazy world of confusion might not be after all one holy hell of a place to grow up. Most of them already had a reason to know damn well that society never forgives the sinner, but they were realising to their dismay how thin and uncomfoting the straight and narrow had become these last few years.

Sure, they'd heard these things before, often enough to make them clichés. But now I could see the boys reflecting that these were the clichés that made a young man say he liked to feel dead, and the same thought was mirrored on the face of each of them: *My God, when did we let these things become clichés?* The Problems of Today's Youth were no longer a Sunday supplement or a news broadcast or anything so remote and intangible, they were suddenly become a dirty, shivering boy who told us that in this world we had built for him with our sweat and our blood he was not only tired of living, but so *unscared* of dying that he did it daily, sometimes, for recreation.

And silence held court in Callahan's place. No one had a single thing to say, and that guy with the eyes seemed to know it, and to derive some kind of bitter inner satisfaction from the knowledge. He started to settle back in his chair, when Callahan broke the silence.

"So run," he said.

Just like that, flat, no expression, just "So run." It hung there for about ten seconds, while he and the kid locked eyes.

The kid's forehead started to bead with sweat. Slowly, with shaking fingers, he reached under his leather vest to his shirt pocket. Knuckles white, he hauled out a flat, shiny black case about four inches by two. His eye's never left Callahan's as he opened it and held it up so that we could all see the gleaming hypodermic. It didn't look like it had ever been used; he must have just stolen it.

He held it up to the light for a moment, looking up his bare, unmarked arm at it, and then he whirled and flung it case and all into the giant fireplace.

Almost as it shattered he sent a cellophane bag of white powder after it, and the powder burned green while the sudden stillness hung in the air. The guy with the eyes looked oddly stricken in some interior way, and he sat absolutely rigid in his seat.

And Callahan was around the bar in an instant, handing the Janssen kid a beer that grew out of his fist and roaring, “Welcome home, Tommy!” and no one in the place was very startled to realize that only Callahan of all of us knew the kid’s first name.

We all sort of swarmed around then and swatted the kid on the arm some and he even cried a little until we poured some beer over his head and pretty soon it looked like the night was going to get merry again after all.

And that’s when the guy with the eyes stood up, and everybody in the joint shut up and turned to look at him. That sounds melodramatic, but it’s the effect he had on us. When he moved, he was the center of attention. He was tall, unreasonably tall, near seven foot, and I’ll never know why we hadn’t noticed him right off. He was dressed in a black suit that fit worse than a Joliet Special, and his shoes didn’t fit right either. After a moment you realized he had the left shoe on the right foot, and vice versa, but it didn’t surprise you. He was thin and deeply tanned and his mouth was twisted up tight but mostly he was eyes, and I still dream of those eyes and wake up sweating now and again. They were like windows into hell, the very personal and private hell of a man faced with a dilemma he cannot resolve. They did not blink, not once.

He shambled to the bar, and something was wrong with his walk, too, like he was walking sideways on the wall with magnetic shoes and he hadn’t quite caught the knack yet. He took ten singles out of his jacket pocket—which struck me as an odd place to keep cash—and laid them on the bar.

Callahan seemed to come back from a far place, and hustled around behind the bar again. He looked the stranger up and down and then placed ten shot glasses on the counter. He filled each with rye and then stood back silently, running a big red hand through his thinning hair and regarding the stranger with clinical interest.

The dark giant tossed off the first shot, shuffled to the chalk line, and said in oddly-accented English, “To my profession,” and hurled the glass into the fireplace.

Then he walked back to the bar and repeated the entire procedure. Ten times.

By the last glass, brick was chipping in the fireplace.

“My profession, gentlemen,” he said with that funny accent I couldn’t place, “is that of advance scout. For a race whose home is many light-years from here ...” He paused, looking for our reactions.

*Well, I thought, ten whiskeys and he’s a Martian. Indeed. Pleased to meet you. And I’m Popeye the Sailor.* I guess it was pretty obvious we were all thinking the same way, because he looked tired and said, “It would take far more ethanol than that to befuddle me, gentlemen.” Nobody said a word to that, and he turned to Callahan. “You know I am not intoxicated,” he stated.

Callahan considered him professionally and said finally, “Nope. You’re not tight. I’ll be a son of a bitch but you’re not tight.”

The stranger nodded thanks, spoke directly thereafter to Callahan. “I am here now three days. In two hours I shall be finished. When I am finished I shall go home. After I have gone your planet will be vaporized. I have accumulated data which will ensure the annihilation of your species when they are assimilated by my Masters. To them, you will seem as cancerous cells, in danger of infecting all you touch. You will not be permitted to exist. You will be *cured*. And I repent me of my profession.”

Maybe I wouldn’t have believed it anywhere else. But in Callahan’s place *anything* can happen. Hell, we all believed in him. Fast Eddie sang out, “Anyt’ing we can do about it?” and he was serious for sure. You can tell with Fast Eddie.

“I am helpless,” the giant said dispassionately. “I contain ... installations ... which are beyond my influencing—or yours. They have recorded all the data I have perceived in these last three days; in two hours a pre-set mechanism will be triggered and will transmit their contents to the Masters.” I looked at my watch: it was eleven-fifteen. “The conclusions of the Masters are foregone. I cannot prevent the transmission: I cannot even attempt to. I am counter-programmed.”

“Why are you in this line of work if it bugs you so much?” Callahan wanted to know. No hostility, no panic. He was trying to *understand*.

“I am accustomed to take pride in my work,” the alien said. “I make safe the paths of the Masters. They must not be threatened by war-like species. I go before, to identify danger, and see to its neutralization. It is a good profession, I think. I thought.”

“What changed your mind?” asked Doc Webster sympathetically.

“This place, this ... ‘bar’ place we are in—this is not like the rest I have seen. Outside are hatred, competition, morals elevated to the status of ethics, prejudices elevated to the status of morals, whims elevated to the status of

prejudices, all things with which I am wearily familiar, the classic symptoms of disease.”

“But here is difference. Here in this place I sense qualities, attributes I did not know your species possessed, attributes which everywhere else in the known universe are mutually exclusive of the things I have perceived here tonight. They are good things ... they cause me great anguish for your passing. They fill me with hurt.”

“Oh that I might lay down my geas,” he cried. “I did not know that you had love!”

In the echoing stillness, Callahan said simply, “Sure we do, son. It’s maybe spread a little thin these days, but we got it all right. Sure would be a shame if it all went up in smoke.” He looked down at the rye bottle he still held in his big hand, and absently drank off a couple ounces. “Any chance that your Masters might feel the same way?”

“None. Even I can still see that you must be destroyed if the Masters are to be safe. But for the first time in some thousands of years, I regret my profession. I fear I can do no more.”

“No way you can gum up the works?”

“None. So long as I’m alive and conscious, the transmission will take place. I could not assemble the volition to stop it. I have said: I am counter-programmed.”

I saw Noah Gonzalez’ expression soften, heard him say, “Geez, buddy, that’s hard lines.” A mumbled agreement rose, and Callahan nodded slowly.

“That’s tough, brother. I wouldn’t want to be in your shoes.”

He looked at us with absolute astonishment, the hurt in those terrible eyes of his mixed now with bewilderment. Shorty handed him another drink and it was like he didn’t know what to do with it.

“You tell us how much it will take, mister,” Shorty said respectfully, “and we’ll get you drunk.”

The tall man with star-burned skin groaned from deep within himself and backed away until the fireplace contained him. He and the flames ignored each other, and no one found it surprising.

“What is your matter?” he cried. “Why are you not destroying me? You fools, you need only destroy me and you are saved. I am your judge. I am your jury. I will be your executioner.”

“You didn’t ask for the job.” Shorty said gently. “It ain’t your doing.”

“But you do not understand! If my data are not transmitted, the Masters will assume my destruction and avoid the system forever. Only the equal or superior of a Master could overcome my defenses, but I can control them. I will not use them. Do you comprehend me? I will not activate my defenses—you can destroy me and save yourselves and your species, and I will not hinder you.”

“Kill me!” he shrieked.

There was a long, long pause, maybe a second or two, and then Callahan pointed to the drink Shorty still held out and growled, “You better drink that, friend. You need it. Talkin’ of killing in my joint. Wash your mouth out with bourbon and get outta that fireplace. I want to use it.”

“Yeah, me too!” came the cry on all sides, and the big guy looked like he was gonna cry. Conversations started up again and Fast Eddie began playing “I Don’t Want to Set the World On Fire,” in very bad taste indeed.

Some of the boys wandered thoughtfully out, going home to tell their families, or settle their affairs. The rest of us, lacking either concern, drifted over to console the alien. I mean, where else would I want to be on judgement day?

He was sitting down, now, with booze of all kinds on the table before him. But none of us knew how to begin, and Callahan spoke first.

“You never did tell us your name, friend.”

The alien looked startled, and he sat absolutely still, rigid as a fence post, for a long, long moment. His face twisted up awful, as though he was waging some titanic inner battle with himself, and cords of muscle stood up on his neck in what didn’t seem to be the right places. Doc Webster began to talk to himself softly.

Then the alien went all blue and shivered like a steel cable under strain, and very suddenly relaxed all over with an audible gasp. He twitched his shoulders experimentally a few times, like he was making sure they were still there, and then he turned to Callahan and said, clear as a bell, “My name is Michael Finn.”

It hung in the air for a very long time, while we all stood petrified, suspended.

Then Callahan’s face split in a wide grin, and he bellowed, “Why, of course! Why yes, yes, of course, Mickey *Finn*. I didn’t recognize you for a moment, Mr. Finn,” as he trotted behind the bar. His big hands worked busily beneath the counter, and as he emerged with a tall glass of dark fluid the last of us got it.

We made way eagerly as Callahan set the glass down before the alien, and stood back with the utmost deference and respect.

He regarded us for a moment, and to see his eyes now was to feel warm and proud. For all the despair and guilt and anguish and horror and most of all the hopelessness was gone from them now, and they were just eyes. Just like yours and mine.

Then he raised his glass and waited, and we all drank with him. Before the last glass was empty his head hit the table like an anvil, and we had to pick him up and carry him to the back room where Callahan keeps a cot, and you know, he was *heavy*.

And he snored in three stages.

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## LETTERS OF COMMENT

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From: **Greg Chamberlain** - (03 Feb 2016)

That is just such a beautiful cover. Cannot wait to read the contents. Will get me some more donations to the GoFundMe as soon as I can.

**The Graeme:** Thank you for your donations. I'd be interested to know what you thought of the contents. Feel free to submit fiction by the way. (Though try the more lucrative markets first, it goes without saying.)

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From: **Kent Pollard** - (03 Feb 2016)

Hi Graeme, on page one of the issue, the underlying mailto link to "the Graeme" is [@shaw.va](mailto:@shaw.va) instead of .ca.

**The Graeme:** Words fail me, which is good, because I try to keep swear words in this publication down to a minimum. Thanks for pointing this out.

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From: **Robert Runté** - (03 Feb 2016)

Congratulations on the launch of your first issue. I'm frankly astounded at the brief period between conception and birth.

If you're giving this away free, can I send this issue through the SFCanada list serve, so that essentially every pro writer in the country gets one and sees what you are doing?

**The Graeme:** Well, I get carried away sometimes. Finances and other projects dictated the slower pace assembling the second issue. Third issue probably not out till Nov/Dec. If I can set aside \$100 a month I can afford to publish every four months or so. That's the theory. The pace of submissions influences my publication schedule as well. Been pretty lucky to date. Have rejected only three stories so far. I like most of what's being sent in.

Yes, indeed, distribute through the SF Canada list serve. Feel free to encourage the members to redistribute wherever they please. Especially to any writing students they may be teaching.

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From: **Dominik Parisien** - (03 Feb 2016)

Good luck with Polar Borealis! I just got your email and I look forward to reading the issue. I'll be sure to share it on twitter and elsewhere when you post it.

**The Graeme:** Many thanks! The more people who read Polar Borealis the more effective my promotion and celebration of genre contributors becomes. Hoping to spread awareness of the renaissance going on in Canadian SpecFic. Things be booming!

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From: **Bruce Gillespie** - (03 Feb 2016)

Nice to see some familiar names, and some not so familiar.

Since you've bitten the bullet and are offering payment for contributions, just how do you propose to get your money back if you simply send us the

PDF? Or is this a sample? I'm not sure that I'm in a position to pay a subscription for a fiction magazine, and others who usually trade fanzines with you probably feel the same way.

Anyway, will try to remember to put a notice for you in the next SFC.

**The Graeme:** That's the thing. I DON'T expect to get my money back. Polar Borealis is free to anyone who wants to read it. Not doing it for the money, but for the fun of it. Since \$100 a month is about what most people spend on their hobby interests, I figure there's nothing unusual in what I'm doing. I consider myself the world's most miserly literary patron. As good an epitaph as any.

Besides, since it's easy for me to view the money I pay contributors as hobby money well spent, I'm utterly free of the worries afflicting the editors and publishers of professional magazines who constantly juggle income (subscriptions, sales, grants, etc.) against expenses. Publishing hardcopies and mailing them doesn't come cheap. All I do is post a PDF. A lot simpler.

If I ever win the lottery I'll be able to pay SFWA level rates (See? I have a fantasy life, too!) but in the meantime I'm content to chug along at semi-professional level. The worst that can happen is that unexpected mundane expenses might eat into the money I'm trying to put aside for Polar Borealis, and all that will mean is a delay in publishing the next issue.

Fact is I've found the perfect hobby for my tastes and interests. Going to keep on doing it as long as I am able. Who knows? Advancing senility might even improve my editing skills!

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From: **Rhea Rose** - (03 Feb 2016)

Congratulations Graeme. I've really been enjoying it!

**The Graeme:** Thank you! Especially for contributing wonderful poems to both issues. More please! And be sure to let your fellow poets know how keen I am to publish poems. I'd like to publish ten poems per issue at a minimum, and find room for more if I can. Trouble is so far poems trickle in at a slower rate than story submissions do. Hope that changes as more Canadian poets learn of my insatiable demand for poems!

I'm given to understand that my rate of \$10 per poem, while low, is nevertheless better than some markets. And publishing 10 or more poems in a

given issue is maybe slightly above industry standards, or some people tell me (one person to be precise). Point is to anyone hunting for yet another market in a narrow field of opportunity here I be! I encourage genre poets to send me several poems to increase the odds I will buy one. And if I like them all, I will spread them out through several issues.

Don't let the fact I know virtually nothing about poetry prevent people from submitting their poems. I know what I like when I see it, and I publish what I like. Even a hint of genre sufficient to stir my sense of wonder will grab acceptance. I be impulsive that way.

If I don't get enough poems I might be forced to publish some of my own, a Lovecraftian prospect that would terrify even Lovecraft! I am in the happy position of being able to PROVE I know nothing about poetry. Might do it, too.

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From: **Cathy Palmer-Lister** - (03 Feb 2016)

Cool! Thank you so much!

I thought we would be purchasing it? Or is this because I donated? Can I pass it on to MonSFFA? Or is it just for the donors?

**The Graeme:** Glad you like it! And, as noted above, Polar Borealis is free to anyone crazy enough to want to read it. Pass it on to anyone you like. And encourage them to pass it on in turn.

I have no idea how many people are reading Polar Borealis. Don't even have a counter at the website. Professional zines need to know in order to justify advert rates. Since I place my adverts for free, usually without the subject knowing I'm promoting them, it doesn't matter how many people read them. As long as I attract at least some interest toward whatever the heck it is I choose to promote in a given issue.

In a nut shell my first advert priority is other Canadian SpecFic zines, then appropriate conventions and festivals, and then anything which seems appropriate. For instance, I happen to think my wife, Alyx Jae Shaw, is a good and entertaining writer, much better at writing than I am, so of course I am going to promote her works. One of the many (or possibly very few) perks of being married to me. If I could just get her to write short fiction!

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From: **Mary E. Choo** – (03 Feb 2016)

Wow, what a gorgeous magazine cover—really striking, and on perusal the print setup looks fine to me. I like the title. Looks like you have a great lineup in the first issue.

Considering the work of beginners is really commendable—some magazines will look at newcomers, but they are few and far between. As for poetry payments, as far as I know they are still all over the map—the last sale I made was \$50 for three poems in a really good magazine, which averages thirteen something a poem. I've been paid a lot more for one poem, but those sales can be hard to come by. Also, some of the best spec poetry mags pay the least money, but the experience of being published in them is great.

I do think you may find yourself swamped once the word gets out. So many people are writing these days, it's a foregone conclusion. I guess that's partly good, and partly problematic, at least for editors, as they tend to get overwhelmed. It's hard enough being on a selection committee for a competition and deciding what gets to go on and what doesn't.

So tickled someone considers me a "role model!" Delighted that you'll look at my work. I will have a look, and send you something.

And now, before this turns into a thesis, I better sign off. I'll be in touch about the poetry, and thank you. Do take care to not overdo things.

My best, Mary.

**The Graeme:** Yes, Jean-Pierre Normand kindly let me use a painting of his that exactly captured the spirit of Polar Borealis. As does Eric Chu's cover for this issue, and Michael D. Jackson's for the next. In short, anything that stirs my sense of wonder. Rest assured I'll never utilize a cover I don't like. Commercial considerations don't apply. I use what appeals to my personal taste in genre art. Anything beautiful or exciting or evocative. Covers a wide range actually. I be a sucker for good genre art.

Overwhelmed? Yes? Mostly by other tasks and projects. Chairing VCON 41 be time consuming and nowhere near as easy or simple as VCON 25 which I chaired back in 2000. In a certain sense I can hardly wait till VCON 41 is over and done with, as that will free up more time to devote to Polar Borealis.

Still, so far I've been managing submissions pretty well. As soon as I get one I send a "Received and downloaded" message with a promise to get back to

the author as soon as I can. Sometimes I like something so much I respond with “I’ll buy it!” within minutes. Other times I may like the concept but not the treatment and spend weeks mulling over suggestions for a rewrite. So far three weeks is the longest delay in commenting on a submission.

I keep manuscripts under consideration in an “Unassigned Submissions” file prioritized by date of submission. I also print out each submission as I find it easier to read and comprehend a printed page as opposed to a computer screen.

I love accepting MS “as is.” Suggesting changes, usually just to tighten the language, but sometimes “improving” underlying concepts, is more problematic. So far writers are willing to go along with my suggestions. So far.

I agonize over rejection letters. I feel compelled to explain WHY I reject a story. This can take several pages. Don’t mean to hurt anyone’s feelings, but years of participating in and giving writers workshops has taught me there are plenty of red flag beginner’s mistakes that need to be avoided if a beginning writer is to have any chance at all of getting published. Learning to be flexible and not consider their every word set in stone is the least a writer needs to be able to do. Writing is a lot more complicated than just putting words down on paper. The words have to make sense in combination. They have to flow.

Of course, the fact that I know bugger all about grammar, syntax, and god knows what else, may indicate to a beginner my comments can be safely ignored. Maybe. But I like to think I’m not quite as stupid as I look, and that my sixty years of being a voracious reader has given me some insight into what it takes to write an entertaining story. Others may beg to differ, but my invincible ignorance and enthusiasm motivates me splendidly to carry on.

Happy to have two of your excellent poems in this issue, and pleased to present two more in the next. Feel free to send more!

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From: **Casey Wolf** - (4 Feb 2016)

Thanks! Blogged, Tweeted, and Facebooked it.  
I love your photo at Amazing. Knucklehead.

**The Graeme:** Uhh, hmmm? I know not of which you speak, except, possibly, the image of me grinning like a deranged maniac. My usual expression is a bit less demonic. Dull even.

Thank you for spreading word about Polar Borealis. The more the merrier!

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From: **Arnie Katz** - (16 Feb 2016)

Good luck with this bold and ambitious project.

Faanishly, Arnie

**The Graeme:** Thank you, Arnie. I like to think that the basic idea might catch on and other genre enthusiasts emulate Polar Borealis. It is a zine, as opposed to a blog, so a bit old fashioned tech wise. And there's the little matter of paying contributors. Still, as noted above, heck of a hobby.

Besides, the enormous prestige to be gained, not to mention the phenomenal number of groupies a'flocking in, must surely rank as superb incentives?

Point is, if I can do it, why not anybody else?

At this time Polar Borealis appears to be unique. Good thing too, some might say. But it would be neat and nifty if someone else were to be inspired to launch a similar venture.

As David Perlmutter pointed out, Canadian SpecFic zines "are as rare as hens' teeth." I may have come up with the best possible solution to that problem, namely the simplest and cheapest way to operate a paying market fiction zine. If other publishers follow in my stead, think of the number of markets that might open up! At least one, maybe. That would be cool.

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From: **Brian Hades** – (13 Feb 2016)

Congratulations. Lynda is, like most of us in the creative world, always stirring up the Universe with good ideas. Sometimes they catch on. Let's hope that's the case with your new venture.

Best,

Brian Hades, publisher (Edge Publishing)

**The Graeme:** Thank You! Yes, it was Lynda Williams who put the bee in my bonnet (a mighty, manly, military bonnet of course) about beginning writers and the difficulties they face competing with professional authors in the not-as-large-as-it-needs-to-be market place.

Of course, I can only publish a bunch of first sales if I get a bunch in my E-in box. Most of my submissions are from authors who've already been published at least once or twice before. But that's okay. Want to promote them as much as I do raw beginners hitherto unpublished.

And I'm grateful for the professionals offering reprints. In some cases originals! Makes for a great mix in my opinion.

It's probably fairly obvious I'm open to just about anything genre-related. Everything from hard science to humour, from fantasy to weird, and so on. I have eclectic tastes, and since I publish what I like, my readers will never know what they're going to find when they start reading a given issue of Polar Borealis. I figure that's a good thing. Hope the readers agree.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** I tend to go on and on in my replies to letters. And why not? I have nothing in the way of cost constraints limiting the number of pages. Just a PDF after all. Yet another delicious freedom the nature of Polar Borealis affords me. Makes me a very happy editor.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS AND ARTISTS

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### **Colleen Anderson**

My poetry has been twice nominated for the Aurora Award, and the Rhysling, placed in the Rannu competition, and won second place in the Crucible competition. *The Playground of Lost Toys* anthology, which I co-edited, is also nominated for an Aurora. New and forthcoming poems are in *New Canadian Comedy*, *Devolution Z*, *Eternal Haunted Summer*, *The Future Fire*, *Burning Maiden* and others. My speculative poetry collection *Ancient Tales, Grand Deaths and Past Lives* is available through Kelp Queen Press.

*Pilot Flight* and *Short Sighted* not previously published.

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## **Michael John Bertrand**

Michael lives in Richmond, B.C. and is currently a student at the Vancouver Film School.

*Roommate* not previously published. It is his first short story sale.

His self-published novel *The Scattered Man*, also science fiction in genre, is available at Amazon.

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## **R. Graeme Cameron**

The Graeme has been active in SF Fandom for more than 40 years. He has won two Aurora Awards (Fan categories), and is currently Administrator of the Canadian Fanzine Fanac Awards (the 'Faneds'), now in its fifth year. Even worse, he has been the presenter of the genre-spoofing "Elron Awards" since 1989.

He is Chairman of the B.C. SF Association and sits on the board of four other Fannish organizations. He is the editor of numerous Fanzines, including the *Auroran Lights* newsletter on behalf of CSFFA, his personal-zine *Space Cadet*, and his Canadian Speculative Fiction review-zine *OBIR Magazine*. His latest project is the semi-professional Speculative fiction-zine *Polar Borealis*.

In addition he writes a quasi-weekly fanzine review column for *Amazing Stories Magazine*, and is the webmaster for the Canadian Science Fiction Fanzine Archive where he posts historical data in his guise as an active Fantiquarian. Is he crazy? Absolutely. Crazy about Science Fiction. At long last retired, now he can get down to his real purpose in life – promoting the Canadian SF&F genre. Heck of a hobby.

*Artist in a Landscape* was previously published in issue #2 of *Fictons Free for All*, a publication of the B.C. SF Association Writers Workshop, in May of 1989.

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## **Mary E. Choo**

My poetry has appeared in a wide variety of magazines, anthologies, online and electronic publications, among them *ChiZine*, *Lone Star Stores*, *Dreams and Nightmares*, *Room* magazine and the anthology *Candle in the Attic Window*. Also, my chapbook *Dream Tribes* was on the preliminary ballot of the Bram Stoker Awards (poetry collection).

*Moontrace* not previously published.

*Rosetta 2051* was previously published in *Light Like a Summons*, 1989; *TOV '91 Anthology*, 1991; *Science in Literature*, 1995; *Whispering Worlds* (online e-book anthology), 1998/2001, and in my poetry chapbook, *Dream Tribes*, 2004.

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## **Eric Chu**

Eric has been in the film and animation business for over 30 years. Working as a layout and storyboard artist, he became quickly known for reworking storylines to fit his own bizarre sense of humor. He found himself working on such projects as *Droids*, *Beetlejuice*, *Captain Power*, and countless others. In 2002 he found himself doing concept designs for the new *Battlestar Galactica* where he was responsible for visualizing the look of the new Galactica, the Cylons, Raiders, Basestars, etc.

Eric works out of Paranoid Delusions Inc, a Vancouver based Design Company he founded in 1985. He describes it as “a creative studio where ideas are isolated, incubated and bred to wreak mutant havoc on the world. We oversee every developmental stage of our creations, from initial conception to design, modeling, re-animation and more.” Typical Paranoid Delusion Inc. services include design, illustration, animation, live-action films, and toy design.

Currently, he has several projects in various stages of development, including working with Jamie Anderson on the upcoming puppet-based SF

series, *Firestorm*, a return to the old Gerry Anderson shows he grew up loving as a kid.

Eric's cover for this issue was commissioned specifically for Polar Borealis and has not been previously published.

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### **dvsduncan**

dvsduncan was born in Vancouver, British Columbia, and now lives in New Westminster with his lovely wife and a troublesome tomcat.

He holds degrees in English and Landscape Architecture but it is life that has taught him the most. His stories are all true, though not factual. Make of that what you will.

My previous publishing credits include stories in the anthologies *Fractured: Tales of the Canadian Post Apocalypse* and *Playground of Lost Toys* by Exile Editions, *The Urban Green Man* by Edge Publishing, and the magazine *Pulp Literature*.

*Major Max* not previously published.

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### **Steve Fahnstalk**

Steve is a proud Canadian and expat American. His fiction has been published in two *Rat Tales* anthologies, *Baconthology* by John Ordovery, *Pulphouse* reports, and he is a columnist for *Amazing Stories* online, a magazine he used to write for about 30 years ago.

His two published books from New Venture Publishing are *Tom Smith and his Electric Skyship* and *Mind Out of Time*, an anthology of short stories.

*The Searchers* not previously published.

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**Ron S. Friedman**

I'm a Best Short Fiction finalist in the 2016 Aurora Awards – Canada's premier Science-Fiction and Fantasy awards. My short stories have appeared in *Galaxy's Edge*, *Daily Science Fiction*, and in other magazines and anthologies. I co-edited two anthologies and received seven Honorable Mentions in Writers of the Future Contest.

*A Matter of Antimatter* not previously published.

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**Catherine Girczyc**

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

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

*The Cup* not previously published.

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**Matthew Hughes**

Matt writes science-fantasy and space opera, often in a Jack Vance mode. Booklist has called him Vance's "heir apparent."

His latest works are: *A Wizard's Henchman* (novel) and *Epiphanies* (novella), both from PS Publishing. His short fiction has appeared in *Asimov's*,

*F&SF*, *Postscripts*, *Lightspeed*, and *Interzone*, and bespoke anthologies including *Songs of the Dying Earth*, *Rogues*, *Old Mars*, and *Old Venus*, all edited by George R.R. Martin and Gardner Dozois. He is now self-publishing his backlist as ebooks and POD paperbacks.

He has won the Canadian equivalent of the Edgar, and been shortlisted for the Aurora, Nebula, Philip K. Dick, Endeavour (twice), A.E. Van Vogt, and Derringer Awards.

He spent more than thirty years as one of Canada's leading speechwriters for political leaders and corporate executives. Since 2007, he has been traveling the world as an itinerant housesitter, has lived in twelve countries, and has no fixed address. Web page: <http://www.matthewhughes.org>

*The Hat Thing* was previously published in Asimov's.

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### **Stan G. Hyde**

Stan is a retired school teacher who has been a genre fan his entire life, attending his first convention (the Toronto Worldcon) in 1973. He founded SFAV (the Science Fiction Association of Victoria) in 1975. He also helped found Monster Attack Team Canada in 1989, an extraordinary club consisting mostly of professional designers and artists in the local film industry (including cover artist Eric Chu).

As founder (and occasional President) of SFAV, Stan wrote numerous columns under the title *The Light-Hearted Vituperator and Jolly Reviler* for the SFAV clubzines *Phoenix* and *From the Ashes*, and later, on a monthly basis, for BCSFAzine (newsletter of the B.C. SF Association) from #193 (June 1989) to #269 (October 1995). Harlan Ellison once phoned Stan long distance to thank him for comments he'd made in a particular *Light-Hearted* column in BCSFAzine. Spider Robinson described one of Stan's columns as a "Damn fine piece of work, moving and thoughtful ..." Stan is also noted for the numerous articles he has written for *G-Fest*, a magazine devoted to the topic of Godzilla, about whom Stan is a world-renowned expert and recognised as such by Toho studios where he is always welcome.

Apart from his script for *Stealth Love* (art by Dario Carrasco Jr.) which appeared in the third issue of *Girls of Ninja High School* comics in 1993, *The Nature of Demons* is Stan's first sale. Not previously published.

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### **Rissa Johnson**

Rissa is a Canadian writer with a BA in English Lit from SFU, is a left-handed, Jewish, dyslexic, insomniac who stays up all night wrestling with Dog.

A technical editor and writer, her poetry and flash fiction have won awards, including the City of Surrey Youth Recognition Award in Creative Contributions.

You can find out more about her at; <http://risajohnson.com/>

*The Enthrallers' Valhalla & Sonnet 13 A&C* not previously published

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### **J.Y.T. Kennedy**

I am a Canadian citizen, and long-time resident of Alberta, though I was born on the other side of the planet in Auckland. I have published one fantasy novel and several speculative fiction stories, but I am sending you a poem right now, and my publishing credentials are much poorer on that end: the only time I have been paid for verse was when I won a contest for writing lyrics about Edmonton many years ago (and that was under a different pen name).

*Devoured* not previously published.

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### **Eileen Kernaghan**

Eileen Kernaghan's poems, both mainstream and speculative, have appeared in a wide range of North American publications, from *PRISM*

*international* and *The Antigoneish Review* to *Weird Tales*, *Dreams and Nightmares* and several of the *Tesseract* anthologies. Her speculative poetry collection *Tales from the Holograph Woods* was published in 2009 by Wattle & Daub Books.

Eileen has also published nine historical fantasy novels. In 2014 *Sophie, in Shadow* was shortlisted for the Sunburst Award for Canadian Literature of the Fantastic, and for the Sheila Egoff Prize for Children's Literature.

"*Mushrooms*" was previously published in *TransVersions 5*.

"*Running out of time*" was first published in *Dreams and Nightmares*.

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### **Nina Munteanu**

Nina Munteanu is a Canadian ecologist and internationally published author of award-nominated speculative novels, short stories and non-fiction. She is co-editor of *Europa SF* and currently teaches writing courses at George Brown College and the University of Toronto.

[www.NinaMunteanu.ca](http://www.NinaMunteanu.ca)    [www.NinaMunteanu.me](http://www.NinaMunteanu.me)

*Anonymous Tip* not previously published.

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### **David Perlmutter**

David is a freelance writer based in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. The holder of an MA degree from the Universities of Manitoba and Winnipeg, and a lifelong animation fan, he has published short fiction in a variety of genres for various magazines and anthologies, as well as essays on his favorite topics for similar publishers.

He is the author of *America Toons In: A History of Television Animation* (McFarland and Co.), *The Singular Adventures Of Jefferson Ball* (Chupa Cabra House), *The Pups* (Booklocker.com), *Certain Private Conversations and Other Stories* (Aurora Publishing), *Orthicon; or, the History of a Bad Idea* (Linkville Press, forthcoming) and *Nothing About Us Without Us: The Adventures of the Cartoon Republican Army* (Dreaming Big Productions, forthcoming.)

*The Night Atlantis Burned* not previously published.

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### **Spider Robinson**

Spider is the author of the popular Callahan's series—*Callahan's Crosstime Saloon*, *Time Travellers Strictly Cash*, and so on—the novels *Stardance*, *Starseed* and *Starmind* co-authored with his wife Jeanne Robinson, and many other novels and anthologies with titles like *Telempath*, *Mindkiller*, *Night of Power*, *Melancholy Elephants*, *User Friendly*, *Deathkiller*, and *Lifthouse*, to name just a few.

*The Guy with the Eyes* was published in *Analog Magazine* in 1971. It was Spider's first sale.

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### **Rhea Rose**

Rhea has published many speculative fiction and poetry pieces: *Evolve*, *Tesseract*, *1,2,6,9,10,17*, *On Spec*, *Talebones*, *Northwest Passges*, *Masked Mosaic*, and *Dead North*. She has received honorable mentions in the *Year's Best Horror* anthologies and was reprinted in *Christmas Forever* (edited by David Hartwell) and twice made the preliminaries for the Nebula Award. She edited a poetry collection for Edge Press and for many years hosted the Vancouver Science Fiction and Fantasy (VCON) writers' workshops. She is a teacher of creative writing. Her new works for 2015/16 include: *Scar Tissue* (*Second Contact*), *Bones of Bronze*, *Limbs Like Iron* (Clockwork Canada), *Art Song Lab* (Poetry and musical composition) and three Indie novels, *The Final*

*Catch: A Tarot Sorceress series*; twice an Aurora nominee, Rhea has a MFA in creative writing.

“*Pink Venus*” was previously published in *TransVersions* #10, 1999.

“*Arborvitae*” not previously published.

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### **Holly Schofield**

Holly's stories have appeared in many publications including *Lightspeed*, *Crossed Genres*, and *Tesseract*s.

For more of her work, see [hollyschofield.wordpress.com](http://hollyschofield.wordpress.com)

*Tough Crowd* originally appeared in "AE: The Canadian Science Fiction Review" in Dec/2012.

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

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

Thus begins my **GoFundMe Campaign** message. Any and all contributions make it easier for me to pay my contributors and maintain a reliable publishing schedule.

Your help is much appreciated!

If you like and enjoy this zine, please donate at:

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

Cheers! The Graeme

## CONTENTS OF NEXT ISSUE (#3)

Scheduled to come out in November, 2016.

Contents will include:

- Cover art *Civilization* by Michael D. Jackson.
- *After the Fall* (Story) – by Michael John Bertrand
- *In Turing's Garden* (Poem) – by Eileen Kernaghan
- *Camera Drone Camp* (Story) – by S. Kay
- *Christina & Equations* (Poems) by Mary E. Choo
- *Cuddly Abominations* (Story) by James A. Conan
- *Fizz* (Story) – by Joe Mahoney
- *The Blackest Art* (Story) – by R. Graeme Cameron
- *Fools for Fermi* (Story) – by Ira Nayman
- *Grit & Lovecraft's Legacy* (Poems) – by Marcie Lynn Tentchoff
- *Hunchster* (Story) – by Matthew Hughes
- *The All Day Slingers* (Story) – by Michael Donaghue
- *Thermodemonics* (Story) – by Robert Dawson
- *Trial in Error* (Story) – by Holly Schofield
- *We Never went to Mars* (Story) – by Karl Johanson
- *Birdsey* (Story) – by L.L. Hill
- *Say Goodbye to the Old Beasts* (Story) – by Darren Ridgley

And maybe one or two additional stories.

I need at least another five poems for issue (#3)!

As for the special “Horror” issue (#4) to be published in the spring of 2017, it is full up with stories, but I need eight or nine more poems! Send poems!

Am currently accepting submissions for issue (#5) to be published in the summer of 2017.

Send your submissions to:

< [MS to The Graeme](#) >