

POLAR BOREALIS

Magazine of Canadian Speculative Fiction
(Issue #9 – February/March 2019)



POLAR BOREALIS Magazine

Issue #9 – February/March 2019 (Vol.4#1.WN#9)

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Proofreader: Steve Fahnstalk

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

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

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

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

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Art Credits

COVER – Airship #1 by Akem

Editorial

I'm kind of excited. I feel I can attend the Creative Ink Festival in Burnaby (see ad on page 5) at the end of this month with my head held high because, gosh darn it, I've gone and published another issue of Polar Borealis! (This one. I assume you noticed.) Concrete proof, in other words, what with nine issues having been published so far, that PB isn't just a flash in the pan. (More like a slow burn, I guess.)

I have enough funds set aside to publish another issue in a couple of months time, and on the reasonable assumption I will be able to afford at least two more issues in the remainder of the year, I am opening a submissions window for the month of April. (See announcement on page 7.)

I don't know what it is like for editors of professional magazines (technically, at the rates I pay, Polar Borealis is deemed "semi-professional"), but I chortle with glee when I get submissions. I read them through from beginning to end before I even begin to think about flaws and corrections. I can do this because I generally get under 100 submissions per open window and am under no time pressure to reject as many as possible as quickly as possible.

There's always a fair number I know right away I've just got to publish, and surprisingly few that merit instant and absolute total rejection. The vast majority constitute a minor juggling act. Is this one salvageable? Can that one be improved? I hate to let a good story concept slip away just because the phrasing is a bit awkward in places or because the author hasn't quite accurately expressed what it is they want to say. Consequently, I like to work with authors if need be to polish things up a bit.

In truth the general quality of submissions is quite high. The major juggling act is struggling with the fact I can only afford to publish a small number and deciding which ones I accept and which I reject because I simply don't have room for them in the foreseeable future. That's when I struggle.

At the Creative Ink Festival I will be doing four "Blue Pencil" sessions Saturday morning where I critique the first 3 pages of short stories on first reading, and in the afternoon I'll be appearing on the panel "How Do Editors Think?" Katrina Archer, the moderator, intends to cover all the bases. I can't speak to the various methods employed by mainstream publishers, or even to what the professional magazines do with their slush piles these days, but if there is one topic I am absolutely the world's leading expert on, it's "What sells to Polar Borealis Magazine?"

Looking forward to seeing you at the Creative Ink festival!

LIFE FEEDS ON LIFE

by Xauri'EL Zwaan

(Previously unpublished)

The scientist trembled as it made its report. Its skin was blanched; it stank of horror, and withered into itself as it remembered what it had seen.

“I continued to observe the alien as it returned to its domicile. It was carrying several native juveniles in some sort of container. It had torn them from the Mother’s embrace, and they were still covered in nutrients; I could smell their cries of agony, and the stench of their fear. The alien pumped water over them, using a fibrous membrane to wash them thoroughly. Then it took up some sort of sharp-edged, metallic implement, and began to peel off their skins.”

Several of the bridge officers exclaimed their shock, rough scents mingling with that of the scientist’s clear disgust in chemical pandemonium. The Captain remained cold and odorless, restraining its emotions. “Continue,” it commanded.

The scientist spread its limbs, visibly forcing itself onward. “Once the alien was finished flaying the juveniles, it took up another sharp tool and cut them into pieces. There was a device, also formed from some inorganic substance, which produced great heat—enough to boil water within minutes. It dropped the pieces of their flesh into the water and ... oh, Mother.” spurts of pure grief and anguish interrupted its description. Some of the bridge crew were already comatose, seeking reflexively to block the images from their consciousness. The air had grown close and nauseating. The Captain itself was starting to wither, but demanded harshly, “Continue.”

The scientist could barely force the words from its orifices, but it somehow found the strength. “I fell into a coma for some time. When I regained consciousness, the alien and several others of its kind were in another part of the domicile. The scalded flesh of the juveniles was displayed on a broad surface fashioned from what I later identified as large pieces hewn from the body of an ancient, along with other unidentifiable substances and beakers of what my chemical samplers determined to be juice extracted from the pulp of crushed fetuses. The stench was revolting.” Even the Captain was clearly taken aback by this news; nearly the entire bridge crew had now become comatose. “They were using their inorganic tools to lift the pieces of flesh into the large orifices which they use to respire and to create their complex atmospheric vibrations. The hard, sharp surfaces within were crushing the

flesh of the juveniles, which was then suctioned into their bodies. I believe the only plausible conclusion is that they were consuming those juveniles, and using them as nutrients!” Unable to continue, the scientist lapsed into protective coma.

When the scientist, and the bridge crew, had regained consciousness, the Captain questioned it. “You claim that these alien beings are products of a weird technology? Organic, but shaped only by *natural* selection? With calcified skeletons, centralized neural organs, and circulating fluids?”

“All of this is true, sir.”

“And you have detected no kindred intelligence here? Only primitives, incapable of thought or language? We are completely alone?”

“As far as we can determine, sir.”

The Captain let out a heavy gust of stolid regret. “It may be that we could communicate with these things, make trade and treaty with them, but the final decision must rest with the collective; and I can already imagine how they will react when they smell this.”

When the war was over, everyone said it was Frank’s fault. He never could understand why; all he had done, while the aliens watched him, was cut up carrots from his garden.

Fortunately, everyone agreed the aliens tasted way better than Earth vegetables. Made the whole war worthwhile.

THE CREATIVE INK FESTIVAL IS UPON US!

When: March 29-31st, 2019

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

Guest of Honour: Kelly Armstrong

Keynote Speaker: Jonas Salk

Cost: \$100 at the door, and well worth it!

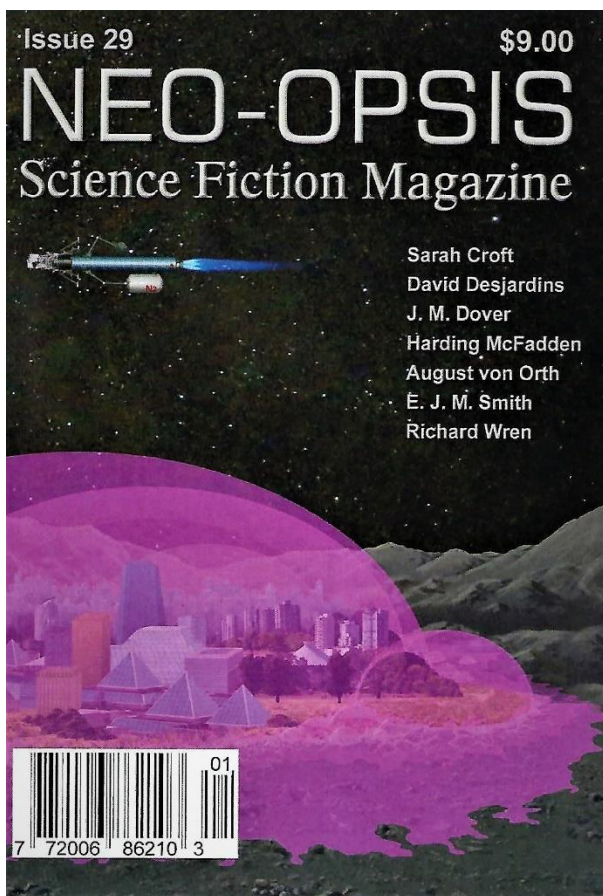
Wonderful things: Panels galore, single person presentations and lectures, a banquet with a keynote speech, author readings, artist displays, pitch sessions, blue pencil sessions, kaffeeklatsches, merchandise expo, and other goodies all aimed at aspiring writers eager to learn the tricks of the trade from experienced insiders. The level of enthusiasm and inspiration at the CIF is always extremely high. Everyone excited to enjoy a fantastic learning experience. Not to mention always great fun!

SCIFAIKU #3

By Roxanne Barbour

(Previously unpublished)

confirming
nuclear summer
unaccountable tree deaths



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

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

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

Contents of issue 29:

Fiction:

Mayathan Rainbows by Sarah Craft.

Dragon Creed by J.M. Dover.

King of the Belt by Richard Wren.

A Matter of Nurture by August von Orth.

Project Victoria by E.J.M. Smith.

Tammy Rock and the Turnkey Monkeyman by Harding McFadden.

Dragon by David Desjardins.

Editorial "Fine Tuning" by Karl Johanson.

Plus assorted movie reviews and an article about "Cobalt Weapons in the Movies" by Karl Johanson.

The cover of issue 29 is by Karl and Stephanie Johanson.

See: <http://www.neo-opsis.ca/>

Next short story submissions window for Neo-opsis Magazine will run May 15 to June 15, 2019.

JON CARVER OF BARZOOM, YOU MISUNDERSTOOD

by Graham J. Darling

(Previously published in *Sword & Mythos*, Innsmouth Free Press, 2014)

Jon Carver of Barzoon, you misunderstood.

The True Love whom you met in dreams was the goddess of this planet: pluripotent relict of a vanished race, marooned here eons before you ever were (do not doubt her love; she was made for love). Your crash-landing awakened her to purpose. The honeyed tongue she thrust between your lips divided to sample your every cell; while she cradled your broken body, you and she populated an empty world.

Its seas were modelled on your tears, and its bogs on your bile. The waving jungles you hacked through came from your hair; the vitreous plains you traversed, from your fingernails; the sluggoths you battled, from your own lymphocytes; the steeds you rode, from your heart. The warriors you led to blood and glory were your sons, working out their destiny; the princesses you rescued, your daughters; the Transfederation you built by the seat of your pants, already your family (have you not wondered why they all speak your tongue?).

The caecal dungeons in bone citadels you regularly woke in and escaped from, were hospital wards, where your eyes or limbs sliced in ivory swordplay were switched out; here they all are, mounted and healed, looking and waving at you, in the Museum of the Man.

The Darkened Lord against whom you strove is yourself, enthroned. We surrendered Brain-Priests are your own. Here is your crown. Please be seated. She'll be with you in a minute.

POLAR BOREALIS OPENING SUBMISSION WINDOW!

Open for submissions during the month of April, 2019. Canadian authors or writers resident in Canada only. I pay \$10 per poem and a flat rate of \$10 per story 1,000 words or less. Above 1,000 words up to 3,000 words I pay 1 cent a word.

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

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

DR. JEKYLL'S VOYAGE

by Diana Grant

(Previously unpublished)

young dr. jekyll, in his white lab coat,
sought sweet solace in his experiments.
oh, if only he could concoct a serum
for the line that went down every human heart
causing division between good and evil!

“more good,” he pleaded with the constellations
which shone light towards a portal. “this world needs more good!”

he was far more good than evil
when he entered the portal
but found a landscape so möbius and morbid:
tentacled humans
tangled up in sordid surrogate-blood clots,
unmerciful fanged speech
grating human potential,
and streams of blood
piling
in bodies
of water.

previous to dr. jekyll's trip,
someone had entered this world
and through intravenous drips,
implanted beta-amyloid plaques
into every human heart
causing far more evil than good.

dr. jekyll had become heir to it all.
oh, if only he could hide from it all!

crowned in pomegranate-scented thorns,
with everybody on their crippled knees before him.
not in worship to the newfound king,

but for straggling along in acutely bruised inner war-ships.

there were no emergency rooms,
no intensive care units.

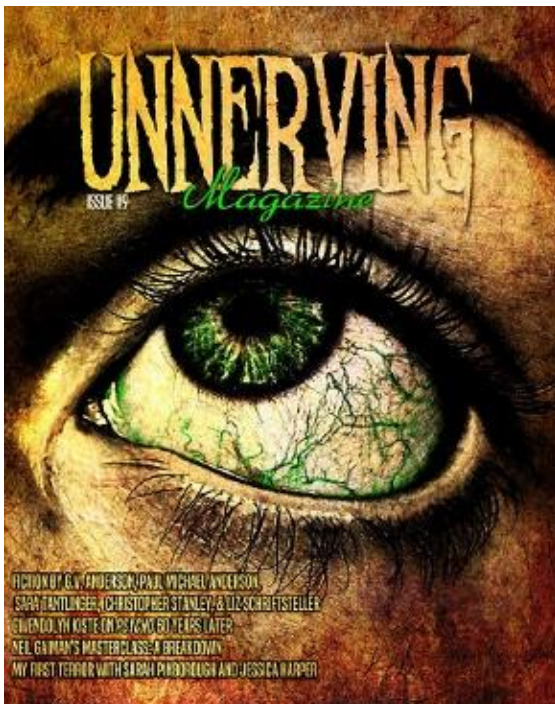
not even aloe could soothe the burning at the stake of
the good in every human's heart.

not even hawthorn berries could tonify
what were once the purest of hearts.

dejected and war-torn,
old wrinkled dr. jekyll returned back through the portal
and found himself in a black lab coat
dressed properly for the downcast occasion:

a funeral

for all of the casualties
that, unbeknownst to him,
had been his doing.



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

Issue #9 of Unnerving Magazine includes fiction by G.V. Anderson, Paul Michael Anderson, Christopher Stanley, Sara Tantlinger, and Liz Schriftsteller.

Gwendolyn Kiste digs into 60 years of Psycho.

Eddie Generous takes Neil Gaiman's MasterClass.

Sarah Pinborough (Cross Her Heart, Behind Her Eyes) and Jessica Harper (Suspiria, Phantom of the Paradise) talk first scares.

See: [Unnerving Magazine](#)

HARRY, HARRY, QUITE CONTRARY

by Ahmed A. Khan

(Previously unpublished)

Come nearer, dear boys and darling girls. Your very own storyteller, Kai Lung II, unrolls his mat and tells you a tale of wondrous deeds, intriguing wisdom and confusing morals.

Once upon a time, there was a young man named Harry. He was quite ordinary in every way imaginable. His looks, his intelligence, you name it. He had quite ordinary parents. He went to quite an ordinary school. At school, his teachers were ordinary. And so were his friends. In short—get the picture?—everything about him was ordinary. Except for one quality that he possessed. His one distinguishing feature was his contrariness. He had a curious habit of always trying to do just the opposite of what he was asked to do. At the time of his birth, the doctors tried their level best to deliver him but he would not emerge. In despair the doctors finally declared that a caesarian had become compulsory. Out popped Harry the very next minute.

One day, when he was a kid, his father told him to be truthful so he went to his mother and informed her that his father had kissed their maid. Mother had a big fight with father. It was all very interesting. The most interest thing about the incident was the insignificant fact that there never was any maid in their house.

When Harry was nine, his parents took him on a tour of Europe.

“Don’t go too far into the water, Harry,” his mother instructed him when they were at the Dover beach.

That day, Harry became famous for being the youngest boy to swim across the English Channel.

Another day, in his school, one of his teachers said that education was important in the current times and no good jobs could be had without proper education. Harry promptly quit school, ran away from home, joined a gang of juvenile delinquents and, at the age of twenty four, was elected as the president of the country—the youngest president the country ever had.

My dears and darlings, come closer and pay heed as I tell you about perhaps the final episode of Harry's colourful life.

One day, Harry became privy to the fact that it was impossible for a physical body to cross the speed of light. What did he do then? In his room, he started running in circles around his bed. Faster and faster he ran. Faster and faster and faster and faster ... and he neared the speed of light ... and he

crossed it ... and he vanished from our universe and popped into the tachyonic universe where no physical body can move slower than light.

Serves him right.



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

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

See: [On Spec Magazine](#)

Note: A submission window for short stories is still open through to March 31, 2019. Do not email. See web site for instructions, guidelines, etc.

Current issue #109 Vol29 #2 includes:

Fiction:

Sinkhole by Al Onia

When They Burned my Bones by Lee Chamney

Spirits' Price by Van Aaron Hughes

Death is a Blindfold by Rati Mchrota

Joyhound by Calder Hutchinson

Two from the Field, Two from the Hill by Geoffrey W. Cole

THE DC CHARGE OF THE LIGHT BRIGADE

by Tyler Omichinski

(Previously unpublished)

March like a gigue, never fatigue,
Half a league onward,
Marching in defiance of death,
Reaved the six hundred.
“Forward!” the steam whistles scream,
“Charge up the guns!” he said:
They were the valley of Death
Grieve for six hundred.

“Forward, the Light Brigade!”
Was there a man dismay’d?
Not for the soldier knew,
Their forms sunder’d
Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs to do, but never die:
Into the valley of Death
Reaved the six hundred.

Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon in front of them
Volley’d and thunder’d;
Storm’d at with shot and shell,
Still they marched on and well,
The very jaws of Death,
The gnashing mouth of Hell
Reaved that six hundred.

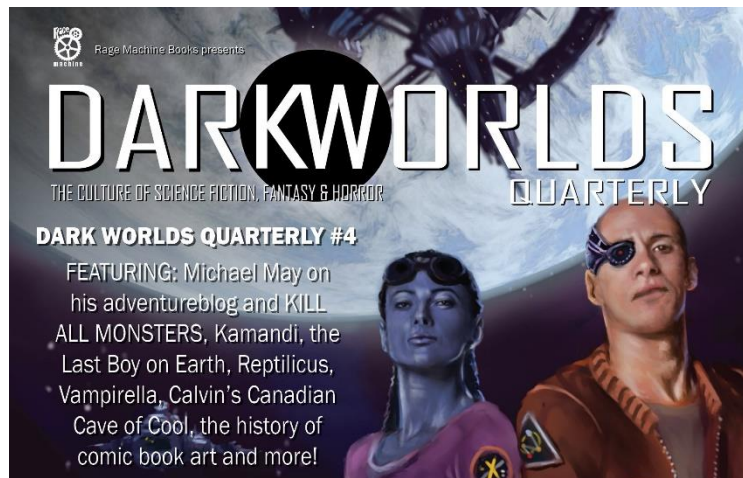
Flash’d their metal arms bare,
Flash’d as their empty eyes stare,
Sabring the gunners there,
Charging an army, while
All the world wonder’d:

Plunged in the battery-smoke
Right thro' the line they broke;
Like steam-powered Prussians,
Power'd each sabre stroke,
 Shatter'd and sunder'd.
Then they strode back up
 The whole six hundred.

Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon behind them
 Volley'd and thunder'd;
Storm drove their shot and shell,
Each would, could not be felled,
They that electricity swelled
Back thro' the jaws of Death,
Wrenched from the mouth of Hell,
All that was left of them,
 Rebuilt that six hundred.

When will their battle fade?
O the wild charge that bade
 Till the world sunder'd.
Honor them, and be afraid,
Honor the Brigade so decayed,
 That modal six hundred.

[Darkworlds](#)



THE INTERVIEW

by Robert Dawson

(Previously unpublished)

Tallalalala, de-de-dee! Mercedes Park makes mouthmusic as she showers. Today the day, today the day! She lathers, rinses, repeats, steps skinny from the san, and zips into her fresh-fabbed interview suit. She taps for an eggwrap, *tallala!*, and makes coffee, urgent not to spill on the sparkle-new clothes.

Dilli-dilli-dilli dah dah! Oh stinky, where those shoes? Printed only yesterday, where she *put* them? She searches her whole room, all four meters square, no time to lose, and haha! they overhidden by her raincoat. Snatch them up, *tallalah*, put them on. She out the door, she down the ellie, she gone, girl, gone.

Trip down the street to the trainstop. *Dilli-dilli-dilli-dilli zam!* People hear her trill, turn and smile, joysharing. Down the eskie, take the westbound, six stops, change for northbound.

She studied so long for this position, she knows she can do it. No more living on the minimoney, boring herself crazy, she thirty-one years old and it time for a change. She gonna be one of the workers, the ten percent, doing one of the jobs the bots can't do better. *Tallalala, tallala!*

Her trainstop. Up the eskie, up the ellie, zap bang into the heart of the officeplex. She keys thirty-seventh floor, checks her phone. Interview time in seven minutes, how she so late? She breathes slowly. Calm you, woman, calm you.

The ellie opens, and she steps out into huge glittery room, must be four by fifteen, nothing in it but shiny office doors. She finds the room number they gave her and waits outside.

It the minute, now, it the second. She beeps the door, taps the code they gave, they buzz her in, she steps through, very calm and proper. Woman there behind desk, eyebrows matching lips matching scarlet hair. Assistant, man about Mercedes' age with zippy tigerface tattoo, sits cornerwise holding his tab and stylus. Mercedes smiles. "Good morning, madam. I'm Mercedes Park. I've come to interview for the job that you advertised last week."

Scarlet eyebrows rise. "Please to meet you, Ms. Park. I'm Kelsi Kalakos, the hiring manager. This my assistant Adam Hassan." Mercedes nods to him, he nods back, smiles. Adam ultracute when he smiles, she thinks. Maybe get his commnumber somewhen, but not now.

“I see that you have been studying twentieth century speech,” says Ms. Kalakos. “Real good.”

Wrong vocab, Mercedes thinks, but this a job interview. You don’t get hired talkbacking the boss. “Yes, ma’am. I studied instructional videos for thirteen months. My friends say I’ve got it down pretty well.”

Ms. Kalakos points Mercedes to a chair. Mercedes sits, sparkleneat, hands on purse on knees.

Ms. Kalakos big-red-smiles. “Yes, I think you are talking it just about perfect. How about slang?”

“Hey, I’m right on top of that. You want somebody to shoot the breeze with the visitors, I’m your gal.” Oh stinky, she thinks, kickme kickme! Should have checked for decade first, find what Ms. Kalakos wanted. But Ms. Kalakos still smiling, red as cherry candy, so looks like no problem, got away with it smooth.

“Copascenic, babe,” says Ms. Kalakos. “Now, let’s talk about your technical skills. We can’t afford to train our people at the work. You’d be shocked how many applicants don’t take the list of qualifications in our advertisement serious.”

“I’ve done courses in industrial safety, emergency aid, workplace psychology, workplace harassment, social history, historical re-enactment, food science, and historical culinary arts.” Mercedes passes her tab. “My resumé.” Sent last week, they got it already. But a chance to look prepped.

Ms. Kalakos glances the rezzy. “You’ve never worked before?”

Oh stinky. The bossfight question. “No, madam. But the advertisement didn’t say that experience was necessary.”

“It did say it was an advantage, Ms. Park.”

“Yes, I understand that, madam.” Not looking so sparkle now, but she gotta get this. “May I ask—do you expect a lot of applicants with employment experience?”

Ms. Kalakos shakes her head. “Not many, and even fewer with the training for this position. Specially the language.”

Mercedes smiles, sparkle flash! “Then even if this would be my first job, I think I’m the person you’re looking for.”

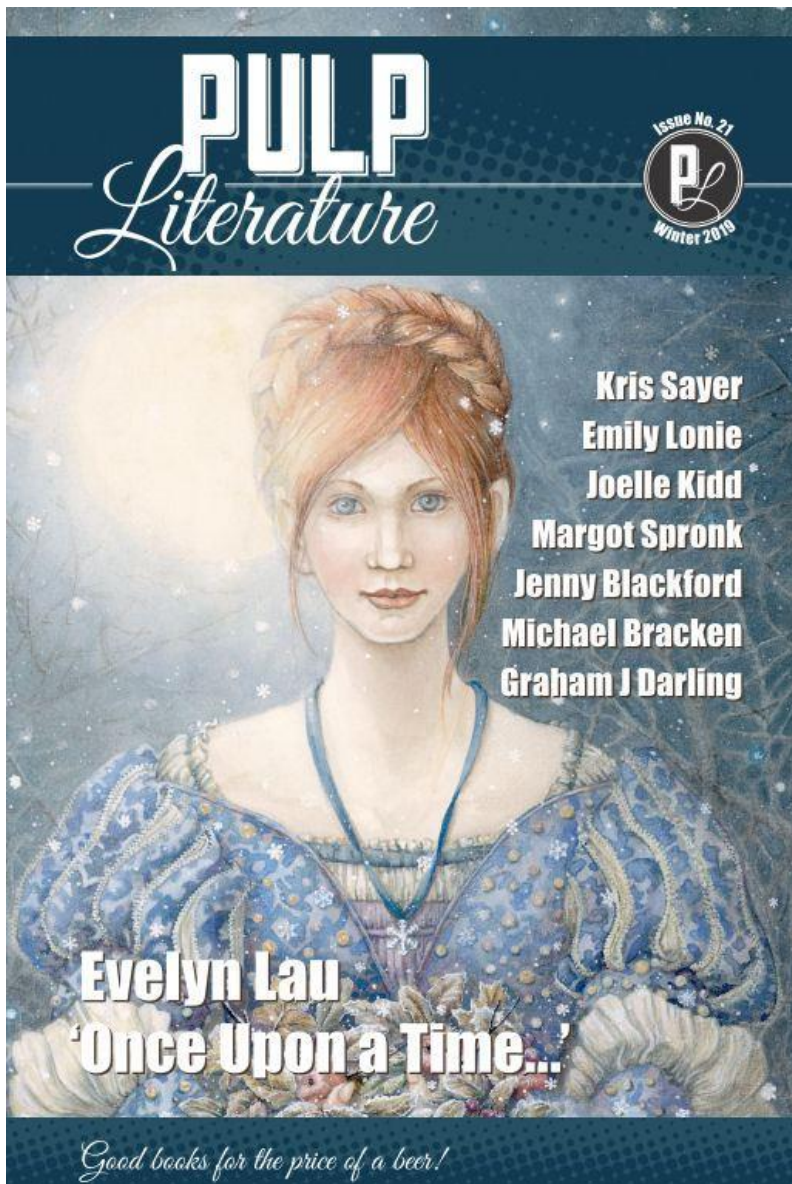
“Maybe.” She passes the tab to Adam; he copies, passes it back to Mercedes. “Your grades excellent, and you speak twentieth-century so well. So, okay. Position yours if you want it: historical re-enactor, culinary, grade C. Twenty hours per week. Pay fifty percent supplement to basic income. Review for promotion in one year. Can you start on Tuesday?”

“For real, Ms. Kalakos.” *Tallalalalala, de-de-dee!* her heart sings, and all she can do not to join in right out loud. Gonna be some honey on the

minimoney. And no more sitting home viewing vidcasts while the bots make the world go round. Hey, world! Heads up! Mercedes Park joining the party *now!*

“Wonderful! Any questions, Ms. Park?”

Biggest smile. “You want fries with that?”



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

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

Contents of issue #21 – Winter 2019 include:

The Mystery of the Forgotten Soldier by Mel Anastasiou

Echo/Narcissus by Joelle Kidd

The Golden Feather by Jenny Blackford

Rules of Salvage by Margot Spronk

A Pleasant Walk, A Pleasant Talk by Graham Darling

A Seed in Every Womb by Emily Lonie

The Fishmonger's Wife by Michael Bracken

Stonecold by Leslie Wibberly

The Angler by Nicholas Christian

Day Three by Robert Runte

Aria by JM Landels

Madame Sylvie's Three Rules for How to Speak for the Dead by Susan Pieters

Under Pale Flesh by Kris Sayer

See: [Pulp Literature Magazine](#)

TINKLE, TINKLE

by Gregg Chamberlain

(Previously unpublished)

(based on “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star”)

Tinkle, tinkle, test tubes crash
Plague germs spread when they smash.
Cross cancer cells with common cold
Mix in spores from alien mold.
When dead bodies resurrect
Blame it all on Virus X.

We are excited by writing that is difficult to classify—whether specifically speculative, substantially surreal, or slightly strange. We’re interested in realist pieces that verge on the dreamlike or surreal; speculative stories that are almost realist; and, on top of that, any form of literary fantasy/science fiction/speculative fiction. Augur makes room for writing from uncommon perspectives, and brings together the often disparate realms of literary and genre fiction.

In Augur Magazine you’ll find a mother’s journey to reclaim her daughter from the underworld; a voyage into a dragon to find a utopia; a post-apocalyptic search to rejuvenate a post-human population; and more!

See [Augur Magazine](#)



Contents of Issue 1.3

Some Small Changes — A note from the editors by Alex De Pompa and Kerrie Seljak-Byrne

One If By Sea by Eden Royce

Human Again by Rudolfo Serna

Herland by Rasiqra Revulva

On Caterpillars by Melinda Roy

Through by Victor Martins

How I Knew My Professor Was a Faerie In Disguise by Ada Hoffmann

Nightshade and Glorymorn by Tony Pi

Obeah Man by Sarah Ramdawar

Float by Janice Liu

It Seems As Though We Must Use Sometimes by Mary Germaine

Some Solace For Thy Woes by Premee Mohamed

PERSPECTIVES

by Geoffrey Hart

(Previously unpublished)

I pushed a marshmallow onto my stick, passed the bag to my left, and then moved the marshmallow just above the flames. It began slowly browning.

“The thing about life—and one of the reasons I take you kids on these trips—is that everything depends on your perspective. Nothing is black and white.” All at once, the marshmallow caught fire, hot caramel smell, so I pulled it from the flames, and blew on it until the fire went out. Then I popped it in my mouth, and as the charred crust broke, burning the roof of my mouth, my tongue was flooded with that sticky sugary goodness.

“Well, except maybe marshmallows if you don’t watch what you’re doing.” A few of the kids laughed, dutifully. I put the stick down, and watched the others toasting their marshmallows with more care. Warm light limned their faces, throwing back the darkness just a little. Lesson learned.

“Here’s an example of perspective,” I continued, and took off my wedding ring. “Look at it this way,” I held the ring perfectly vertical between thumb and forefinger, and rotated my arm so everyone could get a good look, “and it’s a perfect circle. Well, a little distorted, perhaps. Life and marriage will do that to your Platonic ideals.”

“Who was Plato?”

“Story for another time. Basically an ancient Greek who thought there might be abstract, absolute forms that lie behind the reality we see with our everyday eyes.”

“There are non-everyday eyes?”

I pointed at my own eyes. “Isn’t that obvious? So while this ring is an imperfect instance of a circle, somewhere behind it lies a perfect circle that defines what the ring should be. Okay, end of side-trip; back to the ring.” I rotated the ring slowly away from the vertical without lowering my arm. “You can see that as I rotate the ring, what once appeared circular now appears to be an ellipse.”

“Ooh! Ahhh!”

“Mock as you will, oh ye of little faith. But there’s an important principle here: nothing about the ring has changed, yet everything has changed. How can that be?”

“Sleight of hand,” someone shouted from the darkness beyond the circle of firelight. Another shouted back: “He palmed a different ring.”

I smiled. “No, I’m rubbish as a magician. But look at this: if I keep turning the ring,” which I did until it was horizontal, “you’re now looking at it edge on. What does it look like now?”

“A rectangle!”

“Precisely. Circles and ellipses are like brothers and sisters. Maybe cousins. Whatever. Basically, both are round. But a rectangle? Where the hell’d that come from?”

“His sleeve! His sleeve! He palmed it again!”

I glared in the general direction of the voice. “The point I’m trying to make, if you lot didn’t keep interrupting me, is that it all depends on how you look at things—on your *perspective*.” I placed the ring back on my finger.

“So that’s a simple, concrete example.” The bag had returned from its circuit around the campfire, so I impaled another marshmallow and held it in the flames. “Here’s one that’s more *metaphysical*.” As the marshmallow again caught fire, orange flame arose from the blackening skin. “For the ring, we had a metaphorical transformation: whatever the geometric shape, the ring was still a ring. But with the marshmallow, we see solid matter vanishing, even though you’ve probably learned that mass can neither be created nor destroyed, only changed in form.”

“That’s because it’s being oxidized: the sugar combines with oxygen to become carbon dioxide.”

“Right. From the *scientific* perspective. But as we’ve seen with the ring, there are different perspectives, with different insights.”

“Ooh! Ahh!” This time only one voice, and his heart wasn’t really in it.

“Anyway, what I’m getting at here is that even when things seem most certain, you should always retain a measure of skepticism. Sometimes if you adopt a different perspective, you’ll see something new that you wouldn’t have imagined was there before. That’s how science works: ‘stick with what you know’ works, but scientists should still keep their mind open for the unexpected.”

“What about those who don’t want to be scientists?”

“The same principle applies in real life. For instance,” I continued, dropping my now flaming stick into the fire, “think about the people you meet every day. Think about the other members of the troop. Which one of you is going to become a scientist some day?” A few tentative hands went up. “Did any of you guess that before I asked the question?” A few heads shook: *no*. “Okay, how about this one: Which of you is going to become a serial killer?” Nervous laughter; one hand lifted, and I smiled at him.

“You see my point. Now, the really tough question: Which of you would believe that *I* would become a serial killer?” I kept my face stony just long

enough for them to grow uneasy, then laughed, breaking the tension. “Me neither. But you never know, right? What’s that they always say about serial killers? *He seemed like such a nice man. Lots of girlfriends. Mind you, none of them ever seemed to leave after spending the night ...* From one perspective, *such a nice man*; from another, not so much.” More nervous laughter.

“So let’s carry this logic to its conclusion: What do you see when you look at *me*?”

“An adult who has nothing better to do with his life than entertain a bunch of bored kids?”

“Hah hah. Latrine duty for *you* tomorrow.” The laughter became a little more enthusiastic. “Let me answer that for you: a middle-aged man, not yet gone grey, who loves being out in the woods. From one perspective.”

“And from another?”

“Be creative! How do you know, for instance, that if I rotated just right, like the ring, you wouldn’t see me from a completely different perspective? That I wouldn’t turn into a slimy-green-drooling-child-eating creature from some weird-ass demon dimension?” I let the drool I’d been gathering for the last several sentences drip slowly from the corner of my mouth, and there was general laughter. And then, unnoticed, I palmed the plastic lobster claw I’d purchased at the dollar store and let it fall from my sleeve, dangling in the firelight. Their screams were enthusiastic and, for some, heartfelt. Darkness, the wind passing through the trees, and rustling noises here and there in the woods make for a powerful enhancement. But also, I’m not such a rubbish magician as I’d suggested.

I yawned widely, stretching. It had been a long day. “Time for us old folks to turn in for the night. Davey, you’re on fire duty. Make sure it’s well out, like I taught you. And everyone sleep well.”

I stepped away from the fire, just enough to be half visible outside the circle of light. “Just remember,” I noted, “how you look at things is important.” Then I stepped into the darkness and went to my tent, resolutely not looking behind me to see the source of the wet slithering noises coming from around the campfire.

SF CANADA

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DISMEMBERED

by Andrea Schlecht

(Previously unpublished)

I call his name.
The setting sun spotlights
the mural
moist red
on the front room wall,
splashes ooze
into animal shapes
like clouds
Bear dragon lion sheep eagle wolf
all components of his self,
then they drip
—bloodfall—
into a pool glistening
on the flagstone floor.

I call his name many times
and run from room to room
I find him
in the kitchen
in the bathroom
on the back porch
in the hallway
in the basement,
his head is in the oven
one arm is under the kitchen sink
fingers missing from the hand
the cookie jar is filled with fingers
and the other arm is in the bathtub
his legs turn up on the back porch
leaning against the railing
with the leaf rake
the trunk is in six parts
spread out between basement and hallway

his manhood is in the cedar chest
his heart, in the cold furnace, still throbs.

I heap all the parts on the kitchen table
begin to assemble them
then pause.

He is so much more than the sum of his parts
it terrifies me
made whole he
walks runs
speaks eats
drinks loves thinks
fights builds
cries kills
dreams.

Not yet,
I decide,
not yet.

AEscifi: FREE SCIENCE FICTION FROM THE FROZEN NORTH

See: [AEscifi](#)

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

A world where the Davos cabal catch a parasite that modifies their neurochemistry, changing cutthroat lords of industry into benevolent humanists? Done. A world where virus-infected smart fridges build a rudimentary sentience? Done. Where municipal policies use behavioural engineering and illegally harvested personal data to make cities tick? Done yesterday.

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

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

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

NINTH LIFE

By Lisa Voisin

(Previously unpublished)

I don't know how long it's been since last I slept. Day and night flow together in striations of light and darkness that have no beginning. No end.

An empty element on the kitchen stove glows an angry red, like a coiled snake. I must have turned on the wrong burner. Doing so feels hauntingly familiar. Didn't I make the same mistake yesterday? Or was it the day before?

I move the pot of water to cover the blazing element.

On the street outside, a man screams. Someone hollers for him to shut up. Yesterday, someone killed a waitress at a local restaurant in a murder-suicide. Apparently, the killer believed certain people had to die for The Sleeplessness to end, including himself.

I switch on the TV.

Most of the channels are rainbow emergency broadcast signals. Some are just static. A local station still plays news, but right now it's reruns of *The Simpsons*.

The Sleeplessness hit China first. It wiped out Europe and crossed North America within a week.

That was fifty-seven days ago.

Still, we do not sleep.

I'm settling down to eat when a tap on my door startles me. I jolt, spilling oatmeal on my T-shirt.

What if it's the man who screamed? In distress. Or, worse, insane?

Not everyone gets their shots.

The tap comes again, louder this time. "Jill—I mean Dr. Lewis." A woman's voice breaks with desperation. It's familiar. "*Please*. I need your help."

She knows me.

I used to run a veterinary clinic in Vancouver specializing in cat care. The cats started sleeping more and more, as though hibernating, with no symptomology other than the fact they never woke up. We were overrun with frantic owners trying to rouse their pets.

Now, it doesn't matter. Nobody has time to care for animals, not when their own lives are falling apart.

I scoop the oatmeal off my shirt, shove it in my mouth and place the bowl on the coffee table on my way to the door.

It's Eliza Beckworth, the owner of one of my patients. Her blonde hair is pulled back into a messy bun. Her eyeliner is jagged and blurry as though painted with shaky hands.

"Doctor. Thank goodness." She holds up a cat carrier. Weariness and terror pinch her cheeks. "It's Tin Tin. Can you see him?"

My years of training return and the sweet familiarity of my role washes over me. Tin Tin is a six-year-old burly male, strong and hearty for a Siamese.

"Come in."

Outside, the main streets are clogged with abandoned cars. Everyone's been ordered off the road to allow emergency vehicles the right of way. "Did you walk?" I ask. Eliza doesn't live in my neighborhood. The idea of her walking alone outside makes me uneasy.

"I rode my bike. There's an old trailer attached to the back."

"Good call." I lead her through my living room and am suddenly more aware of the signs of chaos in my own home. Old newspapers lie on the floor. Yesterday's dishes—all bowls of hard-crusting oatmeal—are piled on the end table.

I move a stack of books off the kitchen table and wipe it down with a rag. Hardly sanitary medical conditions, but it's the best I can do.

Tin Tin is normally the kind of cat that doesn't like coming to the vet and makes it known. Two months ago, at his routine checkup, his health was excellent.

Today, as we slide him out of his carrier, he doesn't stir or make a sound. His pulse beats slow and steady. *Just like the others.*

"He's been sleeping more. Yesterday, he got up for less than ten minutes." She sighs, tucking a stray lock of hair behind her ear. "At first, I was jealous." She flashes me a guilty look. "You know ... that he *could* sleep."

"Does he eat?" I could do a glucose test. The equipment's in the basement. Or did I leave it at the clinic?

Eliza presses her lips together and shakes her head. "Not for a few days."

Cat food is something I do have. I brought the clinic's supply home before the roads closed. People throughout the city are starving. If things don't improve, I may have to eat it myself.

"How long has he been like this?" I ask.

"Three weeks." Tears fill Eliza's eyes. "Can you help?"

At the clinic, those who slept that long were on their way out. "I can stave off dehydration and hypoglycemia intravenously. It might help." I hold up the box of tissues. She takes one.

I retrieve a bag of saline solution from the basement and attach an IV to Tin Tin, then check his vitals. Blood tests are only available in hospitals. But I know what's wrong with him.

Eliza takes a seat in my living room.

I sit on the leather chair across from her and wait. We do not speak. My living room wall undulates in time with the sound of her breathing. I press my fingers into my eyes. It's been 19 days since my bi-weekly anti-psychotic shot. Clearly, I'm due.

Once Tin Tin is hydrated, I ease him back into his carrier. He's asleep and purring. I help Eliza place the carrier into the bike trailer and watch her ride off. She'll be back in a few days, for another IV. There's no cure. We've only delayed the inevitable.

My own cat, Bruiser, a 17-year-old Cornish Rex, is also sleeping more. He was a gift from my ex-husband when I opened my practice after graduation. Bruiser outlasted our entire relationship, not to mention my career.

Has he woken up today?

While our clinic was overrun, the news reported feral cat populations radically declining. Big cats were affected too. Lions in zoos all over the world fell asleep in their cages. North American cougars all died of "natural causes," and South American jaguars all but disappeared. What's left of India's wild Bengal tiger population can be counted on one hand.

If I were religious, I'd say God was trying to smite these creatures.

Maybe He's trying to smite us too.

I sit beside Bruiser on the couch and stroke his rippled gray fur while he quakes and quivers through his dream state. I close my eyes, and a bloody, dark Hieronymus Bosch painting of a dream jolts me awake. I wipe the sweat from my skin. But as ugly and violent as the dream is, I ache with gratitude for it. At least I slept.

Long after dark, my phone rings. Eliza's voice is so tight and breathy between sobs I barely recognize it. Her despair cloys at me like damp moss on a building. Tin Tin is dead.

That despair is everywhere, along with the growing death toll.

On TV, the local news covers a story about people hallucinating, despite taking their anti-psychotic shots. A 32-year-old woman with no history of mental illness reports a three-hour conversation with a melting ghost. Similar conversations take place all over the city.

A semi filled with fresh milk drove into the ditch. The driver was killed by a hungry mob for trying to protect his haul.

According to a special interest story, we've never had so few cats. Local shelters report the last one being adopted a few months ago.

My mind aches. Even a four-year-old can see the correlation. There has to be a solution.

Later that night, I have a micro-dream. I am surrounded by cats of varying breeds and sizes, a large orange tabby with green eyes, a Siamese with a bent tail. They are dying, and with all my skills as a vet, there is nothing I can do about it. They call to me. At the front is Bruiser.

I start writing my dreams down, not wanting to forget. I know it's a code of some kind.

Or, perhaps, dreams are so rare I simply want to hold onto what it's like to have them.

It must be morning, because the sun rises behind a thick blanket of clouds. There's fur on the armrest beside me. Not Bruiser's. It's orange, like the tabby from my dream.

How is that possible?

I splash my face with cold water at the kitchen sink and head out to my back garden. I planted potatoes a few weeks ago and already have tiny green buds. My neighbor, Mimi Patterson, sits on her back patio slurping peaches from a can, while Sabbath, her black cat, leaps onto the table beside her.

I blink. The sight of a healthy feline is jarring.

Mimi's fleshy form is draped in a loose-fitting eyesore of purple and gold—something you'd see on a carnival fortune teller. Her greying brown hair, a mass of uncontrollable curls, falls over one eye.

"Hello Mimi." I nod toward Sabbath who struts around her. His tail is a high question mark. "He looks well."

She smiles and strokes his chin, cooing. "He thinks something in this can is for him."

"Does he have enough food?"

"He's been mousing." She drinks the last of the peach juice from its can and shrugs. "But we could always use more."

"Be right back." I head into the basement and retrieve a flat of canned food and a 10 pound bag of dry.

Have I fed my own cat? I consult the chart on the kitchen fridge I made after I last forgot to feed him. The checkbox beside "morning" is empty. I call Bruiser, but he doesn't rouse from his spot on the couch. His feet twitch in deep slumber.

I leave a can of food on the counter as a reminder to feed him once he wakes.

When I step outside, the clouds have broken. After being in the dark house, sunlight hurts my eyes. Squinting, I carry the food through Mimi's gate. She's left it unlocked. Not far away, a man sobs, a high, keening noise that makes me nervous to leave my door unlocked.

Mimi guides me through the glass doors into her kitchen, and I leave the food on a chair. Sabbath leaps onto the counter. She scolds him gently, scratching behind his ears. Mixed signals.

He is undoubtedly the healthiest cat I've seen in months.

Sabbath's eyes are clear and lucid. His lush, thick fur ripples in the filtered light. Even Bruiser's been slacking off on his grooming lately, like his owner. "How's he sleeping?"

"Excellent. He sleeps a good 13 to 15 hours a day. A bit more than me."

A *bit* more than her?

"You're sleeping?" I blink at her in disbelief. "How is that possible?"

"I sleep a good eight hours every night." Her bright, green eyes have no dark circles around them. Like her cat, Mimi is healthy and alert.

A wave of jealousy burns in my chest. I push it down. "What are you doing?"

"Nothing, Jill." She smiles down at her purring cat. "It's Sabbath who makes sure I get into the Dreamtime."

"Dreaming, you mean," I correct her.

"No. The Dreamtime." Her laughter is light and airy. "Where do you think people go when they dream?"

She has to be pulling my leg. "Into REM sleep."

"Jill, the sooner you realize that science doesn't have all the answers, the sooner I can help you."

I want to shrug off her scolding tone, but a chill drips down my back like melted ice. "What do you mean?"

She procures a small paper bag from the cupboard and hands it to me.

"Take this. You need to follow my directions exactly. They need your help."

"They?" I lick my dry lips and press them together. Maybe I've cracked and started to hallucinate. How long have I known Mimi? We've spoken before—haven't we? *Last week*. I think she's lived next door for years, but I can't remember. "The directions need my help?"

"No, Jill, the cats do."

The ritual Mimi gives me is absurd: surround my bed in a circle of salt, prepare the contents of the paper bag into a tea, then sit on the bed with Bruiser and drink it.

The tea looks and smells like something scraped out of a stable, with a hint of lime. I pour the boiling water into my cup and let it steep, cursing the desperation that makes me willing to try this. I take a hot shower, change into my pyjamas and let the concoction cool. Bruiser hasn't moved from the foot of my bed, as though he's expecting me.

I sit on the mattress, plug my nose, and guzzle the foul-tasting liquid.

My stomach writhes and jumps like I've swallowed a live ferret. I lie down, gasping. Bruiser leaps on my chest. I am so weak he feels like a bear.

He presses his wet nose into mine and huffs fishy-smelling breath. My eyes flutter shut, and I see him. He is huge and sinewy, more panther than house pet, and his purr rumbles through my chest like a growl. His amber-gold eyes pierce me, and the world around us dances with filaments of light. Every color swirls, forming shapes, becoming anything I focus on: a chair, a tree, a sunny afternoon.

"This is the Dreamtime," Bruiser says. "I've held it open for you as long as I can."

"Held what?" I don't even question the fact my cat is talking to me. His mouth doesn't move, but his words echo through my head, reverberating through my consciousness. *Am I hallucinating?*

"We don't have much time." Bruiser turns toward a rounded hole, shredded and grey around the edges like frayed cloth. "That's the doorway. My species holds it open for yours, but our time is done. We're crossing over. Now, it's your turn."

"My turn?" I'd give my head a shake, but my body is made of cement. "Stay awake in the Dreamtime," Bruiser says. "And keep the door open."

"Keep it open how?"

He presses a paw into my chest, extends his claws. "You must not look away. You must not awaken."

"For how long?"

"Time. It's not the same here."

That doesn't answer anything.

"You were good to me." He bumps his nose against mine. "This is all I can do."

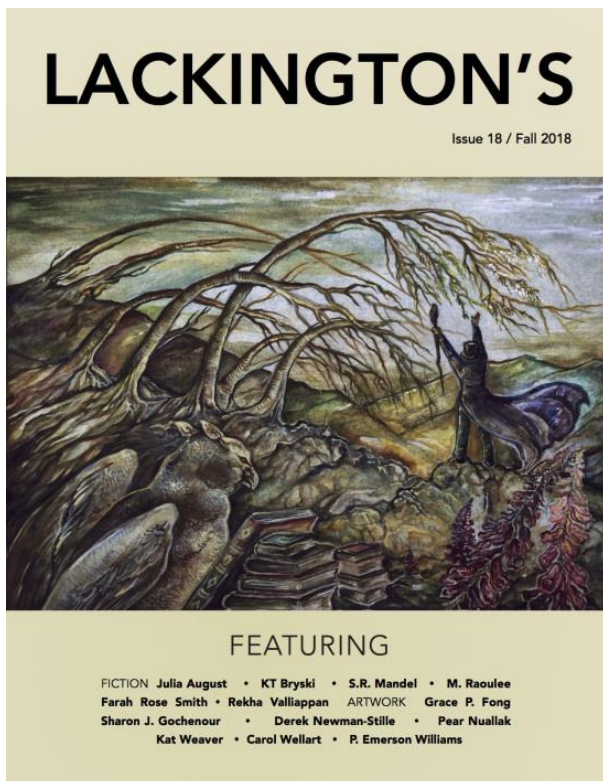
He leaps off my chest and his image fades, leaving me alone.

I don't know how long it's been since last I slept. Day and night flow together in striations of light and darkness that have no beginning. No end.

I am awake in the Dreamtime. Standing at a tattered window between our worlds. The other side erupts in vivid color. On my side is only darkness and death.

I must not cross, must not look away.

I wait for someone, anyone, to join me, but no one comes. All the cats are gone.



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

Enchantment is nigh! We've put together a "Magics" issue that nods to more than mere sorcery. Not surprisingly, witchcraft creeps into several issue 18 tales, and we've also included a story about myth and religion—the oldest magic of all, some might say. From a Dionysian planet to Classical Rome to theocratic US-Canada to parts known only in our imaginations, come find the gods and the birds and the rebels and the woven spells, forming spheres of love and violence.

Contents of issue #18 (Autumn 2018):

When the Vine Came by S.R. Mandel (Artwork by

Derek Newman-Stille)

Prima Fuit, Finis Erit by Julia August (Artwork by Pear Nuallak)

The Wytch-Byrd of the Nabryd-Keind by Farah Rose Smith (Artwork by Kat Weaver)

Collar for Captain Cormorant by Rekha Valliappan (Artwork by P. Emerson Williams)

Song of the Oliphant by KT Bryski (Artwork by Grace P. Fong)

Love Letters from Velveten by M. Raoulee (Artwork by Sharon J. Gochenour)

Cover art by Carol Wellart

See: [Lackington's Magazine](#)

Currently closed to submissions but will reopen in the summer of 2019 on the following theme: Lackington's wants to read your "Birds" tales. Do you have a story about soaring through the sky, about harbingers or omens, about feathered folk or folktale fodder? Birds are possibly the creatures we see most often day to day—we certainly tend to hear them. Help us put together an issue that demonstrates their range, colour, character, and wit, whether they preen themselves on Earth or someplace you've created.

LAW OF LOVE

by Catherine Girezye

(Previously unpublished)

My Doctor friend said
“Love is blocked by acts of extreme selfishness.”

Being a pagan at heart, my Shadow says:
“Love dies at this point
A scavenger god with a vulture face
Comes to the leftovers of the feast of Venus
And there is nothing left.”

Shadow knows this for true,
Having watched me,
Despite the many friends I have amongst ex-lovers
The selfishness—mine or his—garrotes love
And Venus never smiles twice the same,
No matter whose fault it was.



THE SAVORY STEW

by Robert Runte

(Previously unpublished)

As they rode across the border into Langdore, Dorian felt a deep anxiety he dare not reveal to his companions. The rocky terrain ahead was desolate and unwelcoming, the sense of gathering darkness palpable.

He knew it wasn't just his imagination: the denizens of this land would also know of the prophecy; would strive to block Dorian from fulfilling it.

Dorian glanced towards the sun, not yet below the horizon, but already partially obscured by the hoodoos that dominated the petrified landscape ahead. Best to stop for the night in what little forest remained to them, before penetrating deeper into that twilight, and the darkness it represented.

"We should make camp," Dorian announced to his companions.

"I like not these woods," Torline said for the umpteenth time. "I say we press onto Darville."

"Ha!" Gath snorted. "I stay at no Inn in Darville. Throats slit in our sleep—by the inn-keep himself, more like, than Dark Minions."

"Enough." Dorian pointed to an opening in the trees ahead. "We camp here for the night. 'Tis been a long, tough trek the three months getting here; the three days remaining will seem longer still. We start fresh in the morning."

The small band of heroes dismounted and went about the mundane chores of seeing to the horses, collecting water, gathering firewood, and laying out bedrolls. Less routine was the building of six campfires, one for each side of the Sacred Hexagon which Dorian laboriously laid out to encompass their entire campsite. There would be no sheebes or gadferets infiltrating their camp on his watch.

"Where's Friar Kolcan?" Dorian asked, mentally taking roll call as he lit the last of the six fires.

"Gone again," Steason—Dorian's Flagman—answered. "Said he'd seen some savory growing on the edge of the trail and went back to fetch it soon as you called for camp."

Dorian glanced up at the greying sky, estimated how long until full dark. If that fool friar didn't return soon, Dorian'd have to fetch him back. He poked at the fire he'd just lit to see if there was a branch suitable for use as a torch. "Someone start a cooking fire, then."

Stseason grabbed some of the kindling, took it to the ring of bedrolls at the center of the Sacred Hexagon and began setting up the tripod for the cooking pot.

Dorian turned to find Torlin facing him. "It's not too late to turn back."

Dorian shrugged. "No point coming this far, just to turn back."

"We can't succeed. Eight against an entire Empire of Evil."

Dorian regarded Torlin evenly. "Then we fail. But 'twill not be said that we did not try."

"'Tis a fool's errand," Torlin insisted. "We have no chance."

"And yet here you are," Dorian said. The others had quieted, obviously listening. "No one is forcing you forward."

"I am loyal enough. 'Tis not disloyal to question orders."

"I gave no order; nor begged you come, neither. You followed on your own persuasion."

Torlin turned away, kicked at a branch. "T'were supposed to argue with me when I declared it hopeless. 'Tweren't supposed to confirm the quest lost."

"Hardly lost." Dorian gestured toward Gath. "Have we not the Sword of a Thousand Cuts, which Gath won through glorious tournament? Have we not the Key-To-Every-Lock, which Hix, acquired besting the Magician Thorinson? Have we not the Veil of Inattention that Stseason took most righteously from the Flagman of the King of Northumberland? Have you yourself not brought hither the Shield of Mystery?"

Dorian clasped the shoulder of each man as he named him, moving himself though the group to place himself next his own saddle bags as he reached the climax of his speech. "And have I not solved the Ultimate Riddle to defeat the Troll of The Angk Bridge and won—" he paused momentarily to triumphantly pull the rod from his pack and thrust it the air, "—the Staff of Confusion!"

"But there're eight of us, and only five Wonders," Torlin complained. "I can't help feeling we've missed something on the long journey here."

The fat figure of Friar Kolcan stepped into the firelight from the shadows beyond the Sacred Hexagon. "Oh, count you not my humble person as one of the seven heroes," he said. "I am a mere Friar, who needs only his belief to succor him." He waved a handful of fresh-picked herbs above his head. "Unless, of course, you count savory as a Wonder."

"I have no doubt," Gath said, "that when the fate of the world is in the balance, yon handful of herbs will somehow tip the scales to our favour."

"It will have to be a different handful," the good Friar chuckled, "as these go in the stew."

“Fine. Seven of us and only five Wonders—*not* counting the savory stew. Should we retrace our steps to find what was missed?” Axel asked.

“Aye,” Yorgson agreed, “It’s not turning back if you’re on a side quest for a wee advantage.”

“Your fellowship is advantage enough,” Dorian replied, hoping to nip that bud before it could blossom into rout. “Come, let us sit to Friar’s savoury stew.”

“Let it be sung of us,” Steason said, following Dorian’s lead as any good Flagman would, “that we rode all day with neither pause nor hesitation, that we pressed our mission forward always, to the very limits of man and beast.”

Gath frowned. “I’d rather we were nay so frank about pushing the horses so far beyond what’s decent. I’ve been feeling a wee bit guilty about that as ’tis.”

“I think the ballad comes out all right if the minstrel will but refer to our stopping often for a savory stew,” Friar Kolcan said. “The listeners must know that foraging for the stew is the work of half the day, so a decent break for the horses.”

“In the retelling of the tale, can my horse be a white stallion?” Yorgson asked. “I was supposed to come on Frost, but my Da said ’tweren’t fair to family to take best horse, since I weren’t likely coming back, and gifted me with Old Gizzelle instead.”

“I cannot help but feel,” Axel said, not letting it go, “that there might have been something in that Tower in the Crooked Wood we passed a two-day back. I felt it calling me, as if I had some business there.”

“Then why left you the call unanswered?” Steason snapped.

“Didn’t want to leave group; and group would nay come with me. That’s how they nab you: one by one, second you go separate wandering.”

“Friar Kolcan goes off foraging by himself each day without misadventure,” Steason pointed out. “Why, his search for mushroom took him the whole day away, two nights ago.”

Friar Kolcan ducked his head modestly. “I like a bit of mushroom in the stew. And heroes need a hearty meal at end of day.”

“Then let me go there now to try my hand,” Axel said, speaking over Friar Kolcan. “The fate of the expedition may rest on what I find there.”

“Forward always,” Dorian insisted, ending the discussion. “Prophecy says the deed needs doing before the leaves fall in the Merkle Wood, and autumn draws close.”

An owl hooted three times, and then again.

“Be that a barn owl or burrow owl, do you think?” Steason asked, trying to change the topic.

“This could use a little something more,” Friar Kolcan said abruptly, tasting the stew. “I think I saw some savory just before dark. I’ll just run and fetch it.”

“I thought you had just showed us savory,” Steason said.

“Um, yes, but, uh—that was *summer* savory,” the good friar explained, edging towards the horses. “Summer savory goes nicely with the squirrel and rabbit, but as you have just reminded me, we have some mushroom left, and a bit of winter savory brings out the best in every kind of mushroom.”

Yorgson looked distracted. “You don’t think I let us all down with The-Lady-Near-The-Lake? I mean, was I supposed to win something from her we’re likely to need, do you think?”

“No, no,” said Dorian. “I’m sure The-Lady-Near-The-Lake is no part of prophecy.”

“It happens to every man sometimes,” Axle agreed. “And The Lake waters are frigid-cold this time of year. Give it no more mind.”

The owl hooted twice more, paused, then once again. As the sound of it faded, they became aware of a growing chittering all around them, less distant than on previous nights.

“Don’t worry,” Dorian reassured them. “Their like cannot breach the walls of the Sacred Hexagon.”

Friar Kolcan struggled up onto his horse by using a stump as a mounting-block, and nudged the beast away from the fires.

“What are you doing?” Dorian called, frustrated with the seeming inability of the group to stay together. “It’s not safe!”

The Friar waved amiably, brushing aside Dorian’s concern. “It is only a few lengths back along the road. A few moments only. You must taste my Winter Savory Stew!”

“It’s already too dark!” Dorian objected, but the good Friar had left the safety of the camp and was gone.

“Should I go after him?” Steason asked.

“No,” Dorian said. “We can’t risk you. Nor any one of us. We are the Seven Heroes of prophecy; he is but a friend.”

“Yet he is a friend,” Steason objected.

“And a Wondrous cook,” Gath said.

“I should be as sad as you to lose his savory stews,” Dorian said, “but ’tis only three days to the Thrown of Stones, and we can surely forego mushroom and herbs for so long as that.”

“What if the Friar has some role to play more as artifact than hero?” Axel asked. “What if he is the key to some puzzle or lock, knows some prayer or arcane knowledge that we have need of?”

“He is not yet lost,” Dorian ground out. “He has absented himself several hours each day before now without mishap.” Dorian massaged his forehead. The fool friar would be the death of him, with his daily disappearances.

“They’re getting closer though,” Axel said, obviously referring to the chittering. “Mayhap Friar does not appreciate the danger now of leaving the Sacred Hexagon.”

“He has his special faith,” Gath argued. “Tis his own Sacred Hexagon inside his heart that protects him. How else, these many months’ adventures, safe?”

“Those tests and trials were outside the borders of Langdore,” Torlin said. “Tis in the heart of darkness we dwell now.”

“He will return upon a moment with his winter savory and we shall all sit to sup with him,” Dorian asserted. “I fear your dark reflections mirror but the aura of this place, which makes old women of us all.” Dorian turned to Steason for support, but found the man lost in thought. “What shadows furor your brow, Flagman?”

Steason shook himself, as out of a trance. “Look you: the leaves shudder on the trees, but there is no whisper of wind to blow them.”

Dorian looked up and around the clearing to see that it was true.

“Aye,” said Gath, “and the shadows cast by yon rising moon dart farther than branch or leaf has right to move.”

“There’s something moving through the trees!” Yorgenson shouted warning.

“Look! Friar Kolcan comes!”

The fat Friar waddled towards them at best speed, his mount missing, but a handful of winter savory waving in his fist.

“Quickly,” he called as he panted his way towards the Sacred Hexagon, “Douse the fires! They mean to use them to fire the camp.”

“Draw your weapons!” Dorian shouted, reaching again for his own Staff of Confusion. “Protect the fires of the Sacred Hexagon! They cannot break through its magic!”

As the good Friar staggered past the closest fire, he fell to his knees and wheezed, “I heard them conspire: a fire wizard comes, to burn us, and needs only open flame to do his whim. Douse the fires!”

The chittering grew steadily closer, its cacophony deafening, the chitinous surface of their outer carapaces scraping plate on armoured plate, as the sword-wielding, man-sized beetles swarmed up to the Sacred Hexagon.

The heroes covered their ears against the sound, stumbling back as the beetle-warriors crawled atop one another, building up a wall completely encircling the camp, higher than any tree of the clearing. A few of the monsters

pushed forward off the top of the writhing heap, only to burst into flame as some portion of the doomed creature crossed the line of the Sacred Hexagon.

Suddenly, a portion of the beetle army pulled aside to create an archway through which came a darkly handsome prince and his men at arms in the black tabards of Langdore.

“I’m curious,” the man drawled, if indeed this were a man. “How did you expect to survive the onslaught of my Warriors once you ran out of kindling?”

“It is well known your unnatural armies cannot go about by day. We need only wait out the night, and then move towards the Throne of Stones, safe under the sun’s blessings, and safe again each night within the Sacred Hexagon drawn anew.”

The prince pursed his lips and nodded at the logic of the plan. “That might have worked, had you not crossed over into Langdore. The curse of which you speak was intended to limit our movement beyond our own borders. Never applied within Langdore itself.” He sighed heavily. “If I had known you relied on such flawed knowledge, I wouldn’t have bothered shadowing you these last several months.”

Dorian felt his stomach sink, but refused to give into despair. “You’ll pardon me if I and my band keep you waiting a night longer to test your claim to daylight movement?”

“Well, now I know you have no effective stratagem, I find my patience waning. Put out one of the Sacred Fires so that my army may take prisoners.”

“I hardly think so,” Dorian scoffed.

“I wasn’t talking to you,” the dark prince said.

Dorian whirled in time to see Friar Kolcan disrobe, throwing his monk’s habit over the nearest fire, smothering it. The wall of creatures on that side surged forward, their triumphant chittering hurting more than the sword points now pressed against the heroes’ backs.

Dorian steadfastly refused to be disheartened by the Friar’s stunning betrayal. “You underestimate us a little,” he told the prince. He raised the Staff of Confusion, striking a triumphant pose. “Now!” he shouted to his followers.

“I think not,” the prince said, unmoved as Dorian’s companions struggled to bring their Wonders to bear. “With Sargent Kolcan’s assistance, we’ve kept track of your petty adventures, made duplicates of all your little treasures, and replaced the originals with our useless replicas.”

Gath, who’d been holding the Sword of a Thousand Cuts above his head, loosened his grip experimentally so that the potent weapon swung down to strike against a Beetle Warrior. Instead of the Sword slicing through the armour to cut the Warrior into a thousand pieces, it bounced off, a slight dent showing on the edge of the blade.

Next to him, Steason stood with an elaborately embroidered cloth over his head, plain for all the world to see.

“But ...” Dorian felt himself adrift.

“Except the Staff of Confusion, of course. We made sure you acquired that early on, the Troll of Angk Bridge being a recent and loyal émigré of ours. Solved *Ultimate Riddle*, did you? That you found “When is a door not a door?” worthy of three-day’s hard thinking confirmed to us the staff’s effectiveness.”

“But ...” Dorian shook himself violently to free his mind from the confusion he felt. He concentrated all his will on his next move. “Then, let’s see how you like it!” He struck a heroic pose with the Staff yet again.

“You’re still under its thrall,” Kolcan said, now clad in the black mail and tabard of a sergeant of the prince’s guard.

“The Staff doesn’t work on us, obviously,” the prince explained. “The Staff works for the spell-caster who created it, and against the person holding it. It’s why you never thought to ask where Sargent Kolcan went when the owl’s call summoned him to us each day, or why he insisted on stopping every few leagues to make a savory stew. I mean, it was all pretty blatant.”

“Stopping to make stew is bloody stupid” Kolcan said. “Takes you thrice as long to get anywhere. Wedge of cheese and some hard biscuit what you want for a journey.”

Gath shook his head in disbelief. “I was convinced the Friar’s knowledge of herbs would be tipping point for our crusade.”

“And so ’twas,” Kolcan affirmed. “Only, you know, for our side.”

Dorian threw the Staff of Confusion at the prince, who merely stepped aside. An aide picked it up and carried it off.

Out of range of the Staff’s influence, Dorian suddenly saw it all: the meaninglessness of their journey given their failure to collect all the Wonders; that there shouldn’t have been an eighth member of their party; that stopping to make a savory stew every few leagues was absurd. That they had been doomed from the outset.

What he didn’t see, was a way out.

“Oh, cheer up,” the Black Prince said, slapping Dorian’s shoulder with false camaraderie. “I promise you most solemnly, that when I serve you to my Beetle-Warriors, they’ll make no stew of you!”

“But they appreciate a bit of savoury flavouring in the meat,” Kolcan beamed. “They’ll be most pleased with you lot.”

THE SAVORY STEW CONTEST!

writ satiric

by Robert Runte

Hopefully, it was obvious that “The Savory Stew” is satire. By my count, I worked in and/or undermined around thirty-five high fantasy clichés. It is a compilation of the most common clichés I see as an editor, but often find in published (particularly self-published) fantasy novels as well.

Here is a quiz to have you, the readers, compete to identify all the clichés and errors. The prize? I will provide the winner with a free edit of a fantasy or SF story (of <3000 words) they’re writing.

EDITOR THE GRAEME NOTES:

Submit your list of clichés to Robert at: [Dr. Robert Runte](#)

Deadline is the end of April.

The winner will not only receive a FREE edit from Robert, but will also be named in the next issue of Polar Borealis and their list published along with Robert’s “official” list.

To learn what Robert is all about as an editor, go to: [SF Editor](#)



Whether self-publishing or submitting to a publisher, you owe it to your work to ensure that it is as good as it can be *before* you put it out there. Have your manuscript professionally appraised by an objective professional specializing in SF&F. As a developmental editor, Dr. Runte provides feedback that not only improves your current manuscript, but also your writing / process for subsequent projects. Invest in your writing by investing in professional editing.

Dr. Robert Runte

ABOUT THE AUTHORS AND ARTISTS

Akem

Akem is a writer and illustrator. She is currently illustrating her first picture book called *Brown Sugar Babe* out in 2020.

Check out her work at www.akemiart.ca

Roxanne Barbour

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

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

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

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Gregg Chamberlain

Gregg lives in rural Ontario, with his missus, Anne, and their trio of cats, who claw to shreds any zombies which get between them and their food bowl. *Tinkle Tinkle* is part of a project, *A Zombie Garden of Verses*, featuring zombiefied versions of classic nursery rhymes and traditional campfire songs, with Gregg providing the lunatic text and award-winning B.C. artist, Lynne Fahnstalk providing exciting and entertaining illustrations. Selections of text from the project have appeared in other venues while the two creators seek a publisher for the complete work.

Graham J. Darling

Graham is a West coast writer whose story *Jon Carver of Barzoon* first appeared in the Innsmouth Free Press Lovecraftian anthology *Sword & Mythos* (edited by Silvia Moreno-Garcia and Paula R. Stiles) in 2014. Publisher's weekly called the story "outstanding."

A second story, *A Pleasant Walk, A Pleasant Talk*, was published in *Pulp Literature Magazine* issue #21, January 2019.

Another work of his fiction was awarded fourth prize in the National Fantasy Fan Federation (N3F) Short Story Contest.

Robert Dawson

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

Catherine Girczyc

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

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Diana Grant

Diana is a Toronto-based poet who works as a nutritionist. She enjoys cheerleading for soothing and healing plants, such as calendula and lavender. She is also an advocate for meowing at least once a day, for she believes the world is a better place when we meow. Try it and see what happens! (She's a big kid at heart.)

Her self-published poetry collection is titled *ares in gemini's moon* and is available on Amazon.

Geoffrey Hart

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

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

and *Compostela: Tesseract 20* (Edge Science Fiction and Fantasy Publishing, 2017).

For website see: [Geoffrey Hart](#)

Ahmed A. Khan

Ahmed is an Ontario writer whose works have appeared in various venues including *Boston Review*, *Strange Horizons*, *Interzone*, *Anotherealm*, *Riddled with Arrows*, *Murderous Intent*, etc. Some of his stories have been translated into other languages including German, Finnish, Greek, Croatian, and Urdu.

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Tyler Omichinski

Tyler is a writer, game designer, and comic shop manager in the wilds of Ontario. His previous works have been published in *The Norwegian American*, *Another Place*, and elsewhere. His writing received an Honorable Mention for the Writers of the Future Contest and projects he has worked on have been nominated for two Ennies.

He lives with his partner and a gargantuan black dog. Other work can be found at www.omichinski.com

Robert Runte

Dr. Robert Runte is a developmental editing/writing coach, a senior editor at [Essential Edits](#), a retired Professor (University of Lethbridge), a critic, reviewer and promoter of Canadian speculative fiction for over thirty years, and the winner of three Aurora Awards. See: [SF Editor](#)

Andrea Schlecht

Andrea is a retired archivist, dividing up her time with outdoor photography, writing, walks in the woods, reading, fires in the fireplace, movies at the local independent theatre, family, grandkids, and good friends. She has had poems and stories published in various venues, including *Chilling Tales of the Great White North: Tesseract 13* (Edge Science Fiction and Fantasy Publishing, 2009) and *Scifaikuest*.

Lisa Voisin

Lisa is an author and graduate of SFU's The Writer's Studio. Her young adult novel, *The Watcher*, published by Inkspell Publishing (2013) won the Chanticleer Grand Prize for Paranormal fiction.

She lives in Vancouver B.C., with her fiancé and their adorable cat, Popo, who has no intention of saving the world.

Xauri'EL Zwaan

Xauri'EL has published short fiction in *Spectra Magazine*, *Garbled Transmissions*, and *365Tomorrows*.

AFTERWORDS

by The Graeme

The Aurora Award eligibility lists can still be added to up to the end of March, and Nominations are already open. This is your opportunity to show your appreciation of your favourite genre writers, artists and fans. It only costs the annual fee of \$10, and for that you get to submit eligible items, nominate the ones you like and, later, vote. Well worth the fee in my opinion.

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