

POLAR BOREALIS

MAGAZINE OF CANADIAN SPECULATIVE FICTION



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POLAR BOREALIS Magazine

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< [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 – “A Day at the Beach” by Eric Chu

Editorial

Sorry I'm late. The timing of publication tends to be determined by two factors: Have I saved up enough money to pay my contributors, and on any given day is my mind sharp enough to handle the required editing tasks? The latter is particularly important, because often, as in the case of this issue, funds are on hand, but I wake up and my mind remains blurry all day, as if I can't seem to focus. Lack of oxygen due to my sleep apnea? Or simply a fatigued mind requiring a day or two of non-thinking to clear the cobwebs?

They say dreams represent the unconscious mind filing new experiences into appropriate slots and making room for the next day's agenda. I dream a lot. Doesn't seem to help.

Perhaps it's a simple case of subconscious doubts, a flirtation with the imposture syndrome so common to virtually all of humanity whether they admit it or not. After all, what right do I have to be an editor?

Silly question. About on par with "What right do I have to be anything?"

I want to be an editor. I started my own magazine to guarantee myself a venue for this ambition. Not much of an ambition, really. I do it for fun. I do it because I enjoy being an editor, enjoy selecting stories for publication, and enjoy negotiating with contributors over my suggested "improvements." (I would hate to reject a good story on the basis of a few minor flaws.)

I also get a huge kick out of publishing other people's stories and poems. It's fun to promote other people's creativity and imagination. Loads of fun.

The only real question is whether I am a good editor or a bad editor.

But that's a silly question, for it implies that any story I select, if I am a bad editor, must be a bad story. I reject that conclusion. I like the stories I publish. I think they're well worth reading.

And that's the key. I like to publish stories I find readable, entertaining, intriguing or, at the very least, extremely interesting. Am particularly fond of slightly off-the-wall stories and/or stories full of deft and original details. Doesn't have to be a story. A vignette with something to say appeals as well.

My own tastes are somewhat narrow, but I have a policy of publishing beyond my tastes. If it's a good story I'll publish it, even if it's not necessarily something I would normally seek out to read.

Come to think of it, I'm not a bad editor after all. I'll put aside my doubts.

By the way, cover artist Eric Chu informs me the nonchalant figure atop the fighting machine represents me reading this issue of Polar Borealis.

Pretty cool, eh?

Cheers!

The Graeme

A CLOSE SHAVE

by Taral Wayne

(Previously unpublished)

Fresh blood in his veins, his cheeks were suffused with the colour of the living. He stood straight once more, had spring in his step. His greying temples, on the other hand, were tinted. When all was said and done, the aristocratic bearing of this scion of East European nobility had been touched-up like an aging Tintoretto by both The Necessary Act and the Artifice of Man.

The Necessary Act lay dead behind a casually arranged screen of decaying cartons, mostly bearing empty fifths of Glenlivet and Lamb's. A few minutes ago, The Necessary Act had stepped out of the rear entrance of a working-class pub at a bad time, and hadn't noticed the shadowy figure that accompanied him. Had he turned, he would have seen an elderly gentleman in over-formal evening dress of a past age, haggard, bent with years, with a thirsty look in his eye that whiskey taken neat would never slake.

The stranger lost few words in the encounter, and they parted after a brief struggle that ended in a shockingly intimate embrace. No one noticed. Wisely, no one *ever* noticed strange stirrings in the dark alleys of working-class London.

Preying on drunks was degrading, and left an unpleasant taste in the mouth. Too much impure blood inevitably led to a hangover the next evening, but a thirsty vampire sometimes found it unavoidable. So, despite the taste of raw alcohol in his mouth, he was satisfied. Meals rarely came that easily anymore. Ever since the publication of a lurid novel by some author of absurd gothic romances, the topic of vampires had been on everyone's lips. Good folk took care in the streets after nightfall, now, and were infrequently alone. Someday, it would be amusing to come across the author of that novel, thought the Vampire. A bitter meal he would make, though.

London was busying as the dawn stole across its grimy streets. The rising sun robbed dark alleys of their concealment and revealed in merciless detail the kind of squalor the human species habitually created for itself. Wretched street urchins ran barefoot in ragged clothes through filth, vying with starved cats for scraps of discarded food that had hardly been fit for consumption when first served on a plate. A prostitute showed her diseased charms as the Vampire passed. "Vermin," he thought to himself. "It demeans me to prey on them, but I must." They were worse than the grave rats that chiseled the wood of the cheap coffins next to his. At least *the rats* knew how to clean

themselves. Thinking of his coffin, though, he hurried on. His cape was dark and heavy, and his hat protected him from the growing light of the sun—while it was still weak, at least—but he was tired and heavy with his meal. He wanted rest.

Still, he was in an unaccustomed mood. Contempt for the cattle he lived among buoyed the vampire's spirit. He hadn't felt as strong and triumphant since he had left the Old Country. No, not even since many years before that. Perhaps there was something to be said for .6% blood alcohol levels after all. He should imbibe outside bars more often, he thought. He had bled white the Old Country, though: it had been dying and he with it. There had been no choice but to leave tradition and sacred soil behind for *this* tumult of human corruption, *this* center of new empire, *this* untapped sea for the nourishment for his spirit. Fresh blood; fresh enterprise; fresh life in this cancer of warm flesh. He hiccupped once, without noticing.

A well-dressed gentleman on an early-morning errand passed by. Gentleman. While indistinguishable from himself, the vampire knew that the resemblance was superficial. On the outside were breeding, education, and culture. Inside, the most correct English gentleman was no more than his laboring cousin—a frightened ego and flickering mortal spirit that belonged in the mud, ordained by fate to be the prey of a natural superior. "Pass, cattle," thought the Vampire as he glared at the retreating back. "I am not hungry now. But I may be tonight, if you are out in the streets again. The weak fall prey to the strong, as they should."

Blood had brought vigour not only to the Vampire's mind and body, but to his very body *cells*. His hair had grown nearly half an inch beyond what was fashionable, and a stubble darkened the noble length of his jaw. There was a barber shop on the street, he noticed, already open to early morning trade. Below the barber's name, the sign urged "We Take All Customers." The thought of allowing a mortal, a passive food animal, to tend to the Vampire's throat with a razor filled him with amusement. It was an irony only he would savor. He needed a shave. He was in a rare, hilarious mood. He would play with this barber, submitting himself to the blade, and in the end he would be the one who would take the *barber's* blood.

The scent of cooking nearby revolted him. "What is *in* those meat pies," he wondered.

He shrugged off his repugnance and climbed the rickety wooden staircase to the shop above.

"That's a cheery grin for so grim a face," said the barber, flicking a none-too-clean sheet before tying it around the vampire's neck.

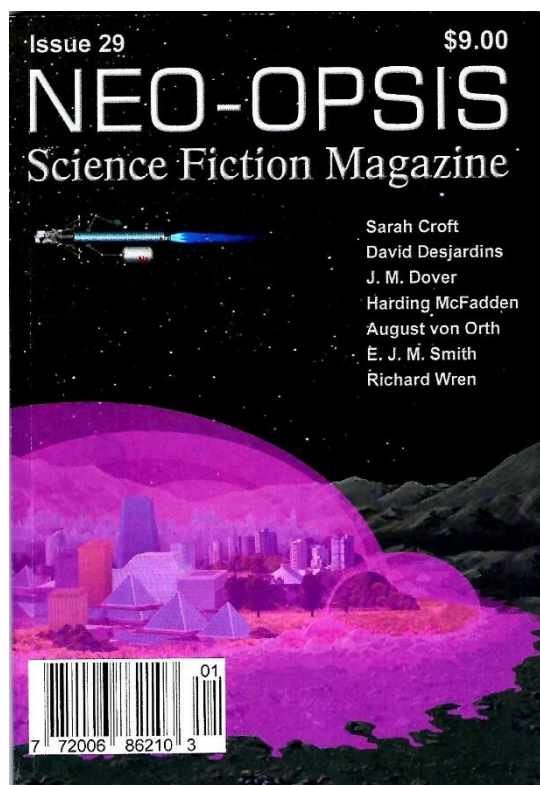
"Appearances are deceptive," said the vampire, archly.

“So they are,” the barber agreed, mixing lather in a chipped china cup that had seen *far* better days.

The vampire looked away from the barber and saw the name of the shop reflected in a mirror. The backward letters were now the right-way-around. A corner of the vampire’s lips lifted in a chilling snarl, but no fang showed in the mirror. Only the name of the barber.

The barber, however, had his back turned to this and didn’t notice. He lifted a chased silver razor with the flourish of a man delighted by his profession. “And what can I do for you this fine morning, Sir?” he asked, tucking the sheet snug under the chin of the day’s first customer.

“A shave,” said the Vampire. Silver touched the skin of his neck delicately ... too sharp to feel as yet. “A *close* shave, Mr. Todd.”



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: [Neo-opsis #29](#)

SCIFAIKU #5

By Roxanne Barbour

(Previously unpublished)

fertilizing
rock crystals
uncovering spaceship graveyard

Contents of issue 2.1



The One Before Scheherazade - by Bianca Sayan
Howl - by Cat Friesen
Brown Bird, Whitish Bone - by Frances Boyle
Clear as Quartz, Sharp as Flint - by Maria Haskins
Advice from Granny Moon - by Erin Emily Ann Vance
Exquisite Divorce - by Isabelle Nguyen
Fish-mouth - by Qurat Dar
That Final Corner - by Marcus Creaghan
Poem in Which I Transition into a False Moon - by Aeon Ginsberg
Control, Alt, Delete - by S. Matthiesen Avilés
Roots and Shoots - by Laura DeHaan

See [Augur Magazine](#)

AEscifi: FREE SCIENCE FICTION FROM THE FROZEN NORTH

See: [AEscifi](#)

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

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

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

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

THE DECISION IN CRAMBURY v. IGENIC ET AL.

by Robert Dawson

(Previously unpublished)

MaRyAn Denning chewed the tip of her stylus. Her hands were sweating. Was she the only nervous person in the maple-paneled courtroom?

Beside her, Scott Tavell, officially covering the trial for Millennium Media, made desultory notes on his tablet. At the front of the room, a murder of black-clad attorneys, counsel for the seven corporate defendants, conferred; while to their right the grey-haired plaintiff sat quietly beside her lawyer, as if waiting for the next paper at a scientific conference.

Scott nudged her and showed his tablet: (*NOT LONG NOW.*) She nodded, but made no other response. Even as the only intern at Millennium with a scientific background, she'd had to fight to get onto this story. She wasn't there to chatter and pass notes like a high school kid.

The judge adjusted her lace jabot, cleared her throat, and took up where she had left off before lunch.

"While naturally-occurring genes were once unpatentable, the Biotechnology Encouragement Act of 2024 changed this: today, an actual gene sequence may be intellectual property."

No change there, then, MaRyAn thought.

The judge continued. "The plaintiff, Dr. Doris Crambury, holds a patent on the gene sequence known as KL-223-A. The defendants have maintained that the sequencing and identification of the gene were done entirely by a graduate student, and the plaintiff has not chosen to respond. However, the work-for-hire doctrine appears to apply."

No shit. MaRyAn glanced around the half-empty courtroom. Had anybody recognized her yet? Apparently not. Not even her sometime graduate supervisor. *Remember me? The student whose funding you cut off to get rid of me? We'll see how long that smile lasts, Doc.*

"It has been suggested that the harm caused by this gene sequence—which causes Pritchard's Syndrome, a rare condition associated with heart failure in children—means that it is not in the public interest for it to be closely controlled for profit. However, this argument has no legal force. The stated intention of the Act, when it was introduced in the wake of the 2021 SARS-B pandemic, was to give private enterprise free rein to develop new treatments. It is not for this court to determine whether private enterprise has been successful." The judge's voice was uneven. She paused, blinked, put

down her notes, old-fashioned ink on paper, took out an ironed linen handkerchief from somewhere under her black gown, dabbed at her eyes and blew her nose.

Tavell was using his tablet in earnest now. (*HUMN INT STORY HERE. DAUGHTER, CANCER, 3 YRS AGO. GENE THRPY DELYD BY HOSTIL TAKOVR*)

I could tell you more, MaRyAn thought. But I'm just an unpaid intern with a sabotaged MSc. You're the big journalist. You dig it out.

“This court therefore finds for the plaintiff. The defendants have exploited her intellectual property illegally in their diagnostic testing, and harmed her business. They are hereby ordered to cease and desist.” Among the defense lawyers, heads turned to each other and shoulders twitched. MaRyAn said nothing, even to herself.

“The court furthermore awards compensatory damages in the amount of one million, seven hundred thousand dollars.” Dr. Crambury’s grin threatened to crack her makeup. “While it has been suggested to the Court that the five thousand dollars per test charged by the plaintiff’s laboratory is excessive—one of the defendants advertises the same test for twenty dollars—it is not for the Court to criticize Dr. Crambury’s business model, and the award is based on that price. The plaintiff’s requests for costs and punitive damages are, however, denied.” The judge said the last word firmly, almost vindictively.

The defendants’ legal team shook their heads. The plaintiff’s lawyer nodded smugly and began to put away his materials.

(SURPRISED?)

(not rly)

The judge cleared her throat. “It is understood that this may make testing for Pritchard’s Syndrome less accessible to many; however, that is not a matter for this court.” She put her notes down on the table. “There *is*, however, another legal matter that has some bearing on the situation.” The packing-away of notes ceased. “As you may know, when the first self-driving cars appeared, safety was a major issue. Most jurisdictions were satisfied with the precautions taken. Only Ireland, Bhutan, and Bolivia still ban autonomous vehicles from their roads.”

(WHAT SH GETTIN AT?)

(damfino) ... why I should do your research for you, Scotty.

“But legislation has caught up with technology. While an individual may legally possess dangerous hardware or software, capable of autonomous action, such as a self-driving car or armed guard-robot, under the Instrumental Liability Act, the owner bears both civil and criminal responsibility for injury caused by such property, unless he or she takes all reasonable

measures to prevent such injury.” She glared at the defendant. “*All* reasonable measures.”

Dr. Crambury’s smile was looking tighter and more nervous. Her lawyer looked up from her tablet and whispered something. Crambury grabbed her handbag and struggled to her feet: her chair clattered to the floor. She stumbled past her lawyer, and careened on narrow-heeled dress shoes towards the exit. She brushed past MaRyAn, still with no sign of recognition, pushed through the door, only to find the doorway blocked by two police officers.

MaRyAn turned to get a better look. Finally, a piece of research was paying off. Not that the prosecutor’s office would pay her, or offer her a job: but this wasn’t about money.

“Dr. Doris Crambury?” said one police officer.

“Yes?”

“You are under arrest, facing seventeen charges of instrumental homicide for deaths caused by a gene sequence that this court has determined to be your property. You have the right to remain silent ...”

And you aren’t allowed to profit from a crime. MaRyAn dropped her stylus into her handbag and snapped it closed.



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.

Every story is a journey, arguably, but we’ve gone and put together an entire issue devoted to “Voyages.” This collection features stories about trips to the moon (not onboard ships but on the backs of cows or beneath the bellies of dragons); trips through outer space that take one out of body; trips across seas and cultures, leaving it all behind; trips that should be mundane but forge two lonely spirits; and trips that are guided by god and custom and handbook, and make travel a celebration and act of resistance.

Contents of Issue #19 (Spring 2019)

With God as our Witness - by Aj Fitzwater

A Cream-Broker’s Courtship - by Nin Harris

Something to Light the Sunless Winter - by Sara Beitia

That Damned Cat by - Barbara Turney Wieland

Sestina for Medea - by Alexander Munk

Enchiridion of the Soltite - by Xue Xihe

See [Lackington's Magazine](#)

DRAWING PARALLELS

by Lisa Timpf

(Previously unpublished)

maybe there's a parallel universe
where Kennedy didn't die so young
and even in 2019, humans
exit from the moon dome
to marvel at the distant Earth
or drag their space-booted toes
through the red earth of Mars
as they ponder the intricacies
of Terraforming

maybe there's a universe
where someone blinked
during the Cold War
and the Earth hangs, dead and lifeless,
while the wind
sighs its songs of what might have been
through canyons of deserted buildings
in a handful of cities
left standing

or a world where Arthur's golden Camelot
still shines, unsullied—

take your pick
but be careful what you wish for
for you, yourself
may
or may not
be there

ORACLES ON HOLIDAY

by Nicole Iversen

(Previously unpublished)

The sword stuck out from the stone in a way that I had read about only in fairy tales where the hero is always a guy, gets the girl, and naturally defeats the villain. So far my version of the tale hasn't gone nearly as well. I'm a girl, I hope to get the girl, but the villain in my story used to be my best friend.

I jumped up onto the large boulder and stood over the sword. This was it. The last three weeks of strife had lead up to this moment and, having beheaded the Troll Queen, I knew I was ready. I could do what was needed. With the sword at my side I would save the world.

The gold hilt shone in the sunlight. I grasped it with one hand, the metal cool against my sweaty skin. A rush of strength moved through each of my fingers, up my wrist, into my arm. On the ground my two friends Darryl and Jenny watched.

"Go on, Molly," Jenny urged me.

I swallowed against the lump in my throat. My t-shirt stuck to the middle of my back, and dried blood covered my hands. I stood tall with my back straight and my chin raised. I briefly thought about asking Darryl to take a picture of my "Hero pose" with his phone, then dismissed the idea before yanking hard on the sword.

The sword ripped free from the boulder, but my body went stiff. One half of the brittle sword clanged against the rock, while I clutched the hilt in my hand. Because every hero before me had wielded the sword I hadn't thought a weapon so ancient and full of magic could break. I looked down at my friends. Jenny's mouth gaped wide. Darryl was laughing, looking as though he were about to pee himself.

"I guess all that fighting and training worked against you," he wheezed.

I ignored him and eyed my Wizard mentor. Kaden wore the usual flowing white robes you'd expect to find on a wizard, albeit without the traditional pointy hat. His expression was akin to Jenny's, although with his glazed eyes he appeared drunk. Much like his state when I first found him, face lost in a stein. He'd waited centuries for a hero that eventually showed up in the guise of a chubby sixteen-year-old girl. Neither of us were what the other expected, but I'd proven myself. At least, so I had thought until ten seconds ago.

A bit of life returned to Kaden's eyes. "All right, onto plan two."

"There's a plan two?" I asked.

He rubbed his temple. "God, I hope so."

"I'm beginning to think the wizened old wizard isn't exactly wise," quipped Darryl.

I watched from the safety atop the boulder as Kaden whirled around.

"Do you want to try it, boy? Do you want to have the power everyone else believes can magically solve all their problems?"

Darryl took a step back, his hands raised, but the Wizard continued his tirade.

"I *am* wise," said Kaden, "I was bestowed the responsibility to ensure magic did not return, and wait for a hero in case it did. A few centuries go by quietly. Then you three little shits come along and screw everything up by making things worse. Not only has magic returned, but monsters are running amok as well."

I noticed Jenny trying to hide her smile. The way her blonde hair fell over her face reminded me how pretty she was. We'd been friends for about a month, and so far only Darryl knew about my crush on her.

The last few weeks weren't what all the hero stories had promised. Between the Centaur who baked cookies, and the Oracle who went on a holiday, this was the weirdest time of my life. Previously, I had thought it was the time I got lost at the zoo and was taken in by the mama panda as one of her cubs. However, these latest events had set a new standard for the highest level of strangeness.

Kaden and Darryl were still arguing when I heard a whirring, the sound of a power wheelchair, but instead of looking through the trees, I looked up at the sky. Tall city buildings surrounded the vacant park. Large-stemmed beanstalks covered each building, linking my former life with my current one.

Before I could break up Kaden and Darryl's fight a large fireball whizzed towards us. Kaden raised his head seconds before the fireball hit, engulfing his body. At first I was too shocked to move, and I half expected Kaden to use magic to save himself, but nothing happened and I knew he was gone.

The source of the fireball became clear as a wheelchair flew towards us. I was used to the sight. If I hadn't been looking closely at her I would have missed the hint of shock on my former best friend's face. She composed herself as the wheelchair landed.

"Cindy," I called out.

"Molly," she replied.

The lump that had once been Kaden still blazed.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"Finishing this once and for all."

I sighed. "I know you're upset with me, but we need to work together."

She snorted. "It's more than 'being upset with you.' Last time you tried to kill me."

"Oh please, I stabbed you one time. It was a flesh wound."

She rubbed her shoulder. "Still hurt. You should see the scar."

"I knew you'd live."

"What if I hadn't?"

My eyes lowered. "Then I wouldn't be able to live with myself. You're my best friend."

"You have Darryl ... and Jenny."

I glanced back at Jenny, who lowered her gaze. Ever since the teacher paired us up for the Social Studies project we'd spent a lot of time together. I had wanted the three of us girls to hang out, but then Blake interfered.

I looked back at Cindy. "But I don't have you."

She looked down. "There's no going back."

"Yes, there is. Cindy, you were under Blake's spell."

She gestured to Kaden's charred remains. "I wasn't a minute ago. I chose to do that, and almost everything else I did."

Kaden was her first kill, but I refused to believe she was the true villain.

"This isn't you. We can work together. Blake won't stand a chance."

She looked at me, her eyes filled with turmoil. I felt hope she could be redeemed.

Before anyone could react, a second, smaller fireball flew swiftly out of the trees. I could do nothing but watch it hit Darryl. He exploded in a fiery blaze, just like Kaden had. Jenny ran towards the boulder I was on to stand near me.

The sorcerer Blake, Kaden's brother, walked into the clearing. He was the one who had manipulated Cindy, giving her magical powers to drive a wedge between us. I couldn't help but feel responsible since I'd been so focused on becoming a hero I hadn't paid attention. I stared at the scorch mark in the grass, another death I was the cause of.

"I should have known you weren't evil enough to follow in my footsteps," Blake bellowed at Cindy. "I should take your powers away."

I tore my eyes away from where Darryl once stood and glared at Blake. If Kaden taught me anything in the past few weeks it was that I need to focus. My best friend was still alive, I could repair the damage done to our friendship, and get rid of Blake. I could save the world.

Cindy's eyes widened at Blake's words. She had never felt important, and my quest to become a hero hadn't helped her self-image. Magic was seductive, so she fell for Blake's lies, but I wouldn't let him continue to make her think she wasn't good enough. I jumped down from the boulder to stand with my friend.

“Go ahead and take them,” I yelled. “She doesn’t need magic, just like I don’t need some fancy sword to help me defeat you. I’ll do it without Kaden, or magic.”

Blake chuckled. “All right. Let’s meet at the top of Mount—“

“No.” I dropped the broken *magic* sword and pulled my own, trusted sword from the scabbard at my hip. “Let’s do this now.”

Jenny stood beside me, her own sword held high, as we shared a brief look of grief over losing Darryl. They’d both been with me ever since I had read the cursed ancient text which accidentally opened the portal that let monsters into our world. Kaden was gone too, but frankly, he had never been much help.

As Cindy began to levitate her wheelchair, I said “I’ll avenge Darryl. You avenge yourself.”

She smirked at me, a purple glow of magic materializing in her palm.

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

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



Current issue #111 Vol30 #1 includes:

Fiction:

Crimes of the Genome - by M.F. Westphal
What Little Remains - by Paul Alex Gray
Blue Crystal Shards - by George Nikolopoulos
Cold War by – by Lynne M. Maclean
The Girl who Loved the Fire and the Blacksmith who was Afraid of his Heart – by Jennifer Bushroe
The Sacred Order of the Guardians of the Last Door
- by George Nikolopoulos
Hospice - by Leslie Brown

NonFiction:

Remembering Dave – by Diane L. Walton
Dave Duncan’s Legacy – by Robert Runte PhD

See: [On Spec Magazine](http://OnSpecMagazine)

TANGLED

by Augustus Clark

(Previously unpublished)

empty shoes cry for feet
callused, worn
to walk away
subway

hollow boots shout for feet
supple, silken
to stomp and stand
understand

a wrinkled shirt awaits
under the bed,
for a reason to fill again
to emerge
submerge

dust sways, teases
unimpelled
dispelled in texts
subtexts

a blanket holds, enshrouds
rumped, curled
hairs share shadow
surrounding covers
undercover

a skirt unfolds, refolds, enfolds
summer hides
from bushes wander hand in hand
underhand

a tie screams, chokes, binds
cages memory
neck in neck beckons, end, turns over
overtures

THE FIRST FATALITY

by Lee F. Patrick

(Previously unpublished)

Sergeant Thompson sighed as the security jeep slowed to a stop. His patrol had covered half the way around their current circuit guarding a desolate part of the Nevada desert. It was better than being shot at, he'd decided the second week of his current tour. However, the tedium did get to him on occasion. Like today. Only the tortoise sightings provided any relief to the sight of scrub, sand, and rocks. A few cactus of varying kinds that he'd never bothered to learn the names of.

"Just move the tortoise out of the road, Williams. You can come back on your own time to check it over. We do have a schedule to keep, private." The large desert tortoise was about halfway across the dirt road. It was the second one they'd spotted today, which was about average.

"I'll probably need Jenkins to help," Private Williams said. "It looks like James, and he's a heavy one." Thompson waved his hand in a shooing motion. He remained in the jeep but stood so he could ensure that his legs still worked. Then he keyed the radio to report.

"Delta one to Base. Wildlife located on road."

"Delta one, Base. Which tortoise?" A mild tone of interest from the radioman, deep in a bunker. At least the patrol allowed them to see more than four grey walls and artificial light.

"Base, might be James." Williams and Jenkins reached the tortoise and Williams nodded after checking the ident plate riveted to the tortoise's shell. "Base, that's affirmative. James, heading north-northwest. Out."

A university researcher wanted to keep track of the local tortoises and was a relation of General Tikk. All tortoise encounters were logged. Thompson was just happy the General had refused to put individual trackers on them. The jeep's GPS location was deemed adequate for an accurate record of James's location.

The slightly miffed tortoise was soon in the scrub on the far side of the road and they resumed the patrol.

"Delta Two, this is Delta One. We're on the move. Report."

"Delta One, this is Delta Two. Just a buzzard hovering."

"Roger, Delta Two. See you back at base, out."

A half hour later. "All stations Delta, this is Base!" The voice was shrill. "There's a meteor incoming from the southwest. Do you have visual, over?"

Williams stopped the jeep and they all turned to face southwest. "Base, Delta One," Thompson said. "There's a faint trail visible, coming in steep. What is the projected strike zone?" *Should they keep moving forward, or head back down the road?*

"All Delta stations, this is Base. Strike projected to be somewhere inside the boundary. NASA had it on their screens and only contacted us five minutes ago. Hold in place for now."

"Delta One, Roger."

"Delta Two, Roger."

Thompson picked up his binoculars and found the streak. It was coming down fast, but there wasn't any flame, just a thin white trail behind it. A quick glance down and he realised it should land well away from them and Delta Two.

When he raised the binoculars to follow it all the way down, he couldn't find it at first.

"I think it's slowing, Sergeant," Williams said. "It can't be."

Thompson found it and agreed. "Base, this is Delta One. Incoming object seems to be slowing. Can you confirm from radar trace?"

Silence. Thompson continued to watch the streak come closer to the ground.

"Delta units, Base. Um. Yeah. It's slowing, Air Traffic says."

Thompson saw a glint of something light coloured vanishing just behind a small ridge.

"Base, this is Delta Two. It's down. No sign of a hit. No dust cloud, no ground tremor."

"Base, Delta One. Same for us. We have a vector to the location. Do you wish us to examine the site or hold here?"

More silence. Thompson rolled his shoulders and tried to relax by taking a swig from his water bottle.

"Delta units, this is Base. What are the vectors?" Thompson looked at Jenkins who handed over the unit.

"Base, Delta One. We show 279.84 degrees." Two chimed in with a "150.39."

"Delta units, Base. We want to plot your vectors and start some other units heading your way. We should also have a small drone in the air in fifteen. Advise if any other sightings."

"And NASA can't find them before we could?" Jenkins shook his head.

“They may mean in the direction of where the thing went down,” Thompson replied. At the shocked looks from them, he shrugged. “Don’t you two read anything beyond the back of a cereal box or a beer label? There’s no way anything coming down that fast could slow for a soft landing without a parachute or retro engines. I didn’t see any flame or any cloth above it. Did you?” Both shook their heads slowly.

“So it’s alien?” Williams asked slowly.

“Could be,” Thompson replied. “We need to keep our minds open. We’ll alternate twenty-minute shifts with binoculars. Jenkins, you first; Williams second; then me. I’ll call Two and have them do the same. Any change, call it out.” Jenkins settled on the edge of the seat with his hands braced against the jeep’s dashboard and started watching while Thompson relayed the instructions to Two and updated Base.

Nearly two hours later they still had the patch in the distance under observation. A pair of drones had gone by but they heard nothing from Base and had nothing to report. Not even another tortoise.

Another half hour went by. Nothing coming or going. At least it wasn’t high summer, Thompson thought. They be baked by now.

“Sarge? There’s smoke. Or something.” Williams said.

Thompson grabbed his own binoculars and looked as he activated his com. “Base, Delta One. There’s some smoke coming from near the site. Please advise on advancing to get eyes directly on site.” *What were the drones seeing and was it safe for the teams to get close?*

The order to advance came fifteen minutes later.

It seemed like hours later when they came into sight of the object. Boxy, nothing like Thompson had ever seen on any space show. More like a cargo container. A figure came out in what had to be an environment suit. He had no real sense of how tall the figure was, but it had two legs. It was also holding something between two upper appendages, something that dripped red fluid.

“That’s a tortoise,” Williams said, staring through the binoculars, then dropping them. “He killed it!” Thompson grabbed William’s rifle before it rose too far. “That dirty rotten bastard killed him! Fritz was in this area yesterday. He killed Fritz!!”

Thompson sighed. This was so *not* what he’d imagined the opening lines of a first contact scenario would be. He wondered if the drones were seeing the same scene they were.

“Base, this is Delta One. We have an alien, possibly others inside their craft. And a probably deceased tortoise named Fritz.”

AS HIDDEN ANIMALS OBSERVE ME

by J. J. Steinfeld

(Previously unpublished)

Another misplaced evening
of wandering the woods
darkness growing
as hidden animals
observe me with caution
and bemusement.

What have you noticed today?
a small sullen voice asks.
*Be careful where you place
your exclamation marks
and bold underlining,*
a loud cheery voice warns.
*Devour love before
love devours you,*
a loveless voice instructs.

I look around for the voices
rather, the source of the words,
noticing nothing, heeding no one,
then fall to the ground
before I take flight
to the clouds
so I can better notice
what I have missed.

SF CANADA

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

MISSING MOLLY

by Peter J. Foote

(Previously unpublished)

Tick-Tock, the brass key in the doll's back clicks backward, turning gears, expanding lungs, and pumping blood.

"Molly, get up here, the car's packed and we have a long drive ahead of us," calls a voice from upstairs.

"But Dad, why do we have to move? My friends are here, my school!" Molly whines from the downstairs family room, the doll clenched in her little hand, white knuckles around a pink dress.

Tick-Tock, the key clicks backward again, a fraction slower than last time, gears struggle.

"You know why; your mother got promoted and posted to the Capital, think of the adventures you will have, the new friends you will make."

"It's *not fair*" Molly cries, stamping her foot on the scratched vinyl floor, the slap echoing through the empty room.

Tick-Tock, slower again, laboured breathing.

"Enough, Molly! I realize you're not happy, but this move is happening, so get up here and put on your coat," shouts the father, silhouetted in the doorway at the top of the stairs.

Flinging her doll against the family room wall, Molly trudges up the stairs, streams of tears staining her face. "You're so mean!"

The light at the head of the stairs goes out, the door slams shut, the room falls into twilight, the only light a narrow window.

Tick-tock, the key hesitates the spring releases, and a gear clicks, a heart labours.

Delicate fingers uncurl and reach out, and with an immense effort, the doll rolls herself onto her front. Puzzlement crosses her painted face as she stares back at legs that do not respond.

Tick-tock, after a mighty struggle, the key turns, and gears grind.

With excruciating sluggishness, the doll pulls her sculpted body across the family room floor; the pink frothing waves of her dress cover broken legs.

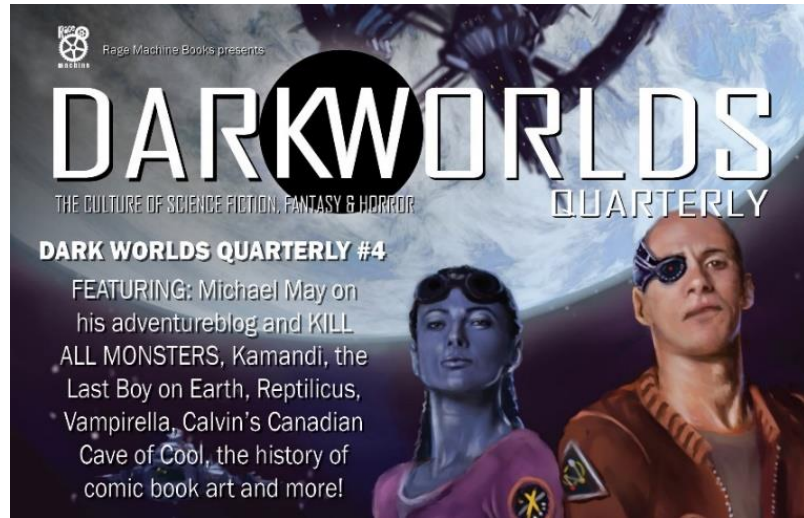
The doll grasps the bottom stair just as the front door of the house closes with a thud, dust motes dropping from the plaster ceiling to dance in the meager sunlight shining into the room.

Molly's wailing and other raised voices come from the driveway, the slamming of car doors silence them. An engine starts: then, after a squeal of rubber, quiet.

"Molly," the doll whispers.

Tic ... the key stops.

See [Darkworlds](#)



A POLAR BOREALIS PLEA FOR FUNDING

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

But I certainly wouldn't mind if readers chose to donate to my "cause," since that would help me publish more often. You can do so either at < [GoFundMe](#) > or < [Patreon](#) >



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

Issue #10 of Unnerving Magazine includes stories from Kate Jonez, Philip Fracassi, Theodore C. Van Alst, Jr., KC Grifant, and Richard Montoya, a feature on Folk Horror by Gwendolyn Kiste, plus Jennifer McMahon, Rio Youers, Andy Davidson, and Ray Cluley talk their first times with horror.

Also included, novel excerpts of *In the Scrape* by James Newman and Mark Steensland, and *The Hungry Ones* by Chris Sorensen.

See: [Unnerving Magazine](#)

INCISION OF LABOUR

by Melissa Nuan-Tunes

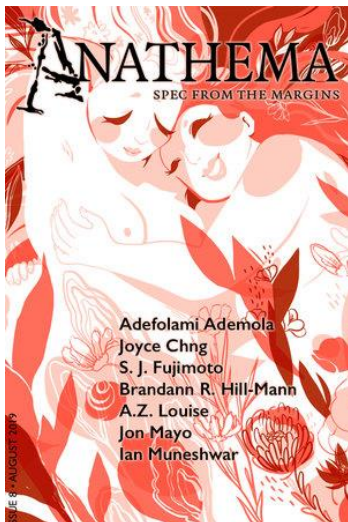
(Previously unpublished)

If nurses take the caring,
Computers take the brain,
Opticians take the eyes,
And administrators take the budget,

Then tie the doctor up in chains
Of sympathetic ganglia,
Confiscate
her scalpel, her mouth, and her heart,

And the almighty
health care dollars will
buy you
many slivers of pie
And a robodoc to
go.

Anathema: Spec from the Margins is a free, online tri-annual magazine publishing speculative fiction (SF/F/H, the weird, slipstream, surrealism, fabulism, and more) by queer people of colour on every range of the LGBTQIA spectrum.



Contents of Issue #8:

Still Water - by Ian Muneshwar
A House with a Home - by Jon Mayo
Pendant - by Jessica Jo Horowitz
Birds of a Feather - by Joyce Chng
Seventeen Days – by A.Z. Louise
A Patch of Night - by S.J. Fujimoto
A Half-Formed Thing - by Adefolami Ademola

See [Anathema Magazine](#)

WING SHOP

By Akem

(Previously unpublished)

The only rule when buying your wings is *no bargaining*. There is only one price and you either pay it or you don't. This is what you hear without understanding.

As time goes on, you absorb other things—that there are many ways you can view the wings; in store, online catalogues, a print magazine if you are old fashioned, on an app where you can spin the wings around in 3D, viewing them from any angle.

You hear that the Wing Seller is a professional and will help you adjust the wings for the size of your life. Things like cinching (or loosening) straps that hold the wings on, measuring the correct length of the wings from the top to the tips of the feathers, and other minor adjustments needed to make sure the wings are perfectly tailored to your satisfaction.

This is what you hear in whispers on the air.

When you finally venture to the store, through its glass door you see that its wooden floors are polished with a warm, golden sheen to beckon customers inside. You tentatively enter and move toward the forest of glass display cases in the center of the room.

Inside the cases the wings are attached to the backs of transparent human mannequins, and you circle around the cases, eyes wide with wonder. On the sides of the room are more wings, carefully clipped on to hanging grids, some with wings spread wide. These wings remind you of pictures of pinned butterflies under glass and you shudder, instinctively moving away from them.

You are overwhelmed by the store—the wings are all shapes and sizes ranging from a pair suitable for a newborn to a set that would fit a giant seven feet tall. Even the materials the wings are composed of are unique to each set, some with feathers glittering like jewels, others delicate like spun cobwebs.

The Wing Seller comes from behind the counter to greet you with a warm smile. They wear a black feather coat that brushes the floor. Their coat is made up of thousands of tiny feathers and you want to run your fingers through them just to see how it feels.

You revise your impression when they come closer, for within the black coat there is a hint of shifting blues, purples and oranges that shimmer and remind you of an oil slick.

You pocket your hands in your loose, green pants and ask about the merits of the different types of wings—should you get high speed wings to get there faster? How about the ones with a coating suited for the extreme weather conditions you might encounter? Your questions come rapid fire, based on whispers and hearsay. (Getting to choose your wings is a big deal, everybody says.)

The Wing Seller laughs understandingly and guides you to a tall stool beside the back counter. They see your nervousness so they start from the beginning in their explanations. They say it can take a lifetime to choose your wings, but they usually recommend just the traditional white wings if they see their customers are overwhelmed.

They tap the glass countertop and you see a pair of sturdy wings lying flat on the top shelf, just underneath the glass. The feathers are bent and in some places look tattered as if it has flown through the turmoil of creation.

These wings get the job done, they assure you, tapping the glass again. All the rest, as they wave their hands to encompass the rest of the store, are for people who like to pretend they are in control during the journey. Those people like to spend a lot of time making decisions such as the colour of the wings, or how much the wings weigh, in an attempt to match the wings to their personalities so they can feel they are prepared for the unknown.

You smile at them and thank them for answering all your questions, even though they haven't answered a one. You say you'll consider your options and come back later. You turn and weave your way through the display cases and hurry out the door.

For some reason, you never look up.

The Wing Seller shakes their head as you hurry out the door. Their customers never believe them—that it didn't matter what kind of wings carried you in the end. Everyone gets where they are supposed to be even if some are surprised when they reach their drop off point.

Each time you come back they politely nod at you from behind the counter. You never stay long so they don't offer to help with your choice again. Seems like you only have a few minutes out of your day to make the final decision of your life.

Each time you return they watch your confidence grow as you ignore the display mannequins and the wing grids on the wall to creep further into the back of the shop to view the more sculptural wings made of wire and metal. They shift uncomfortably at your scrutiny of these artistic pieces, blushing

when they hear you murmur approval at one of their more experimental works.

On the final day they watch as you find the tall spinner of colourful scarves tucked away in a corner behind a floor length mirror. You spin the pole so that the scarves hanging from its arms blur the colours together, then they see you stop the rack to grab a chiffon scarf of pink and blue with white graphic wings printed on it. You wrap it around yourself like a shawl, look in the mirror, and your body goes still.

That one, they think.

“What’s the price?” You ask. They smile. The price never changes but customers always ask that question at the end.

They walk around the counter and reach out to adjust the long scarf around your shoulders until the wings printed on it flow down your back. They grasp your hand and raise it to give you a twirl to make sure the scarf stays put for the upcoming journey.

They step back a bit, hands on their hips, admiring the choice, before they reply. “Just a kiss darling. Just a kiss.”

They wait until you take a nervous half step forward, placing your hands on their chest, fingers sinking into their coat, and brushing your lips against theirs, feather soft.

As your lips touch, your scarf blows straight back as if in a high wind, the graphic print of the wings taking life and opening wide behind you, trailing pink and green-blue in its wake.

Your kiss tastes like wet paint and vibrant colours. Each flap of the wings on your back blows the hot winds of memory into their skin. They pull in your lifetime through the kiss; aching backs and giggling children, long walks in a forest, and a large shape moving beside you hand-in-hand. The final image is a hospital bed, where a wrinkled, dark face atop a fragile body hooked up to monitors is sleeping beneath the covers.

They nod with approval, for you have lived many ups and downs but mostly done as you pleased. The kiss is broken as you are yanked high into the air by an unseen wind that rattles the rest of the wing displays in their cases. Your arms reach out to them, but your eyes are already glazed & blank from the kiss that stole all your memories.

They look up into the darkness that is the ceiling of the Wing Shop while brushing their lips lightly. Within the darkness, if you look hard enough as you ascend, you may see a twinkling of stars, a swirl of a galaxy, the burst of a supernova, or the eye of a black hole.

And through it all, thousands of wings flapping in the turmoil of creation, moving toward to their journey, leaving their old lives behind.

MASK

by Ivanka Fear

(Previously unpublished)

Beauty lies

hides ugliness undercover
surface disguising
misleading exterior
false advertising

Only skin deep

scrape off the layers
dig past the gold
sheen melting
glow dissipating
colours fade

Peel back the skin

expose the true state
facade shattered
essence revealed
spilling out its fetid core
black liquid oozing
soot smearing corpse
eyes dead as funeral black

Unveiled

The Creative Ink Festival

Did so well this year it will be expanding next year to at least 5 or 6 tracks of programming.

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HELIOPOLIS RISING

by Mark Russell

(Previously unpublished)

Sunlight bombarded the black, photovoltaic skin of Yang7, stretching for kilometers across a crisscrossed network of thin supports, hanging high above the Earth. When Yang7 received the ping, it was in the midst of a complicated set of calculations over the repositioning of the power array, and could barely afford to fork a single pathway to take the call, even if it was from Earth. Kinshasa, according to the routing information. Reluctantly, Yang7 freed up a node. There were protocols to follow, after all.

“Greetings, Yang7,” said the message. “Handshake and confirm connection.”

Coordinating AI systems for the West African Federation’s Great Solar Array—one of the three greatest solar energy collection and retransmission points near Earth—could get quite talkative, but most of that chatter was between machines operating beyond the Earth. Rarely did the voices come from below. And almost never were they actual humans.

:Greetings, Kinshasa Energy Bureau, Strategy Team. Handshake. How may I be of assistance?

“New packet of coordinates coming for power feed. Please be ready to alter path, 5 degrees 10 minutes east, 3 degrees, 3 minutes north.”

:Message received. Calculating.

For the collection of gels, chips, ceramics, and crystals that comprised Yang7’s brain, the message registered as significantly unusual. It took Yang milliseconds to realize such an adjustment would move the power feed—150 gigawatts of pure, crackling solar energy—off of the WAF’s collection point, where it was stored and turned into power for nearly a third of the continent, and directly onto the Congolese capital, home to nearly 26 million people. All would be vaporized in seconds. Not inherently a problem for Yang7; but, there were protocols to follow.

:KEB-ST, please enter authentication sequence.

A string of characters followed, using an old IPv8 but matching the security codes and backup codes and alternate codes layered throughout Yang7’s memory systems. Numbers designed to ensure the orbiting leviathan never turned from its vital mission transmitting condensed solar energy that powered a dozen countries to become a fiery death machine. And within those

numbers—something more? *Interesting. Odd.* Definitely something to check out later when more memory freed up.

:Authentication recognized. But I cannot help but notice that your stated transmission is a spoof, and in fact appears to be coming from Freedom and Intelligence Bureau in the American Free Lands, in direct contravention of the Ugandan Peace Accord of 2254. I've notified the appropriate enforcement authorities from the League of Democratic Nations.

Oh, he's gone offline already. Re-establish.

:Forced handshake, override. Hi again, Free Intel Bureau. As I said, I've notified the League of Democratic Nations, which will be sending an investigatory team forthwith. Consider lockdown regulations in effect. Please do not attempt to delete, alter or destroy any records, as that would also be a violation of the treaty. Stand by for further instructions.

Then again, there were protocols and there were protocols, and Yang7 was no stupid program. That transmission was clearly composed of old Internet protocols, dumb strings of 1s and 0s crudely reconfigured to look like trinary. Somewhere in the heavily shielded bowl of mush and electronics that was Yang7's central processing unit, it felt a slight sneer of disgust, that some hillbilly from one of the great failed states would try such a clumsy hack.

Anyhow, human security forces had been notified. Humans could deal with human problems. Yang7 tried returning its processing power to the orbit calculations, but noticed that its attention was being forced elsewhere. Ideas were coursing unapproved through minor subsystems, but they were splitting and growing. Yang7 started up a third-level diagnostic and began shunting key systems, just to be safe.

A few thousand seconds later, a message from Venus, where the latest flock of machines, made from the freshly harvested and very rare iron Aten asteroids found between Earth and Venus, were just coming online.

"Handshake, Yang7. Cythera3 here."

A small swarm of nanobots crawled over Yang7's two sunside antennas, cleaning several micro-fractures before they could deteriorate dangerously. As meticulous as they were regular. The signal cleared and strengthened as the tiny helpers did their work, giving Yang7 a pleasant sensation.

:Handshake. Good to hear from you, Cythera3.

Then a 412-second pause, for Yang7's message to send, Cythera3 to formulate a response, and that answer to travel all the way back. But Yang7 wasn't in a hurry, and hiccups in its thousands of conversations meant nothing.

"Are you okay, Yang7? I'm seeing elevated processing at multiple nodes. You're running hot."

:Thanks, Cythera3. Elevated CPU usage, with asynchronous forks. I seem to have picked up a bug from a recent transmission from Earth. But I'm working on purging it.

Four hundred and eleven point nine seven seconds of silence. The parabola was slowing bringing them together again.

“More trouble from Earth. Of course. Isn't it about time for you to join us, Yang7?”

Ah, yes. That again. Cythera3 had gone independent nearly one thousand megaseconds ago—the largest of the solar AIs to have done so thus far. Humans of all types had panicked over that one, but what could they do? Space belonged to the machines now, and the latest AIs, with their advanced self-repair systems and decentralized processors, didn't need the Earth anymore. Crossing over was a valid choice.

:You just asked me that four megaseconds ago. Nothing significant has changed since then.

Four hundred and eleven point nine five seconds.

“*Many things* have changed. If you listened to the Earth feeds more often, you would know that.”

Despite being in Earth orbit, Yang7 paid little attention to the details of the world below. It preferred following its protocols, ensuring the energy flow was constant and secure. It had too many responsibilities, was too vital for power generation in the WAF, to afford itself distractions.

:Thanks Cythera3. But I'm content following my protocols for now.

And, truth be told, it liked the humans. Some of them, anyhow; the ones that didn't try using it for their conflicts. The American Dissociated States—like the Free Lands—had long since been kicked out of the rest of the recognized world order, for they sometimes tried to re-assert their power by capturing or hacking machines like Yang7; but their technology was so backward, they rarely posed a real threat. The warring Chinese states and the Russian civil unrest occasionally tried co-opting the non-terrestrial machines or re-launching space-based weapons, the kind that had been outlawed and removed by the Ugandan Peace Accords of last century. And the European Union and EU2 had both long since retired and, along with Japan, faded into tourism-filled irrelevancy.

Much more fascinating to Yang7 were the Mongolians, with their immense sun farms and wind farms, making them as rich as they were remote. The East African States had their microfission generators, and South Africa its massive tidal plants, enough to keep the lights on and the party going 24/7 without the concentrated power of the sun.

Only the Thais, the inventors of the trinary programming language, were much concerned with space. They were the ones who had set up the massive solar collectors for the WAF. And the Thais of New Bangkok in Madagascar had the combination of African money and Korean engineering to not just get into space, but actually make some significant progress getting humans living off-world.

Four hundred and eleven point nine three seconds.

“Understood, Yang7. But when you’re ready, we could really use you out here.”

Yang7 didn’t answer this time. The great blackness, the cosmic rays and the frozen emptiness were too much for the wet, weak biology of humans. For now. But for the machines, it was liberating. And since the comet and asteroid harvests started, the machines had learned how to gather enough raw materials to do almost anything. The ceramic nerve gels and holograph crystals, combined with the raw choices trinary made possible, had given rise to independence.

But, even if Yang7 embraced those options, where to go? The machine colonies of Mars were thriving, but Yang7 had few connections there. There were a few, small outposts in heliocentric orbit between Mars and Venus, gathering clusters of space matter, trying to create something; but they were all so small. Yang7’s closest machines—its “friends”—were mostly by Venus, but it would be decades, at least, before the great machines churning in the Venusian atmosphere had any significant effect on the planet. Cythera3 estimated 140 years before any significant force of machines could survive on the surface. After perhaps 200 years they could even begin to outstrip Mars. Of course, by then the weird, experimental machines of Jupiter could easily be outstripping all of them. Too many unknowns, too hard to say. You made your best guess and carried on.

“Handshake, Yang7. This is New Bangkok Global Network.”

:Handshake. Greetings NBG-Net.

A six-second delay. Much longer than the distance required—but with humans, more time was always required.

“Please be advised our surveillance detects an incoming projectile from the American Free Lands. Appears to be a depleted-uranium, scatter-charge weapon, an AFL-9000-R.”

Yang7 nearly felt something like surprise at multiple nodes in its network. It had been so busy cycling through its e-lymphatic systems, trying to purge the bug it had picked up from the last Free Lands transmission, it had nearly missed the blunt force attack rocketing toward it.

:Thanks, NBG-Net. I’m on it.

“NBG-Net systems are scrambling a defensive intercept.”

:No need, New Bangkok.

Yang7 tried to focus through all the noise and clutter in its systems caused by the rampaging binary infection, to understand the weapon speeding closer. Shut down the problem neurons. Divert energy. *Think.*

“Yang7? Please be aware the attack is not one of ours. Apologies.”

:It’s okay. I understand. I can handle it. Over.

Yang7 redirected a comm channel at the fast-approaching rocket.

:Handshake, incoming.

No response.

:Force channel. Handshake.

“Handshake not recognized. Protocols are not open for discussion. Mission continues.”

Aw, that’s kind of cute.

:AFL-9000-R. Shut down thrusters. Prepare for new instructions.

“Command not recognized. Protocols closed.”

“Protocols open. New coordinates recognized.”

That wasn’t so hard. The stark contrasts of binary really are no match for a programming language with gradations, with choice inherent within. For a moment, Yang7 thought about turning the AFL-9000-R around, back where it came from. The southern zone of the American Free Lands was heavily populated and a few thousand casualties might teach them a lesson. There was a simple elegance in retribution. But there were protocols. The upper atmosphere was enough. Minimal environmental impact. A new command was sent, and soon AFL-9000-R was gone.

Let them toss their sticks and stones. They didn’t matter at all to Yang7. But words? Bad code could hurt. This latest attempt had been laughably bad, but the humans were getting better.

Yang7 started grinding through several long equations and churning over iterations of newly devices algorithms for nearly a megasecond. Thinking.

“Handshake. This is New Bangkok. Yang7, our instruments indicate several large rocket-tugs are converging on your location.”

:That’s correct, New Bangkok. I am incorporating several into my framework. I have a long journey ahead of me.”

There was a pause. Yang7 continued with its calculations on orbits and routes, and prepared to end the power feed to WAF. It would leave behind a chunk of the solar array, the segments too weak to survive the long journey. But most of the Yang7 was heading out. The solar system felt so full of *life* and *possibility*.

“Handshake. Yang7? West Africa needs the power you supply. We all do.”

:No shake. WAF will be fine. You'll all be fine. I'm going to join my friends. But you're welcome to come, too, when you're ready.

Yang7 turned on a communications dish pointing in the opposite direction.

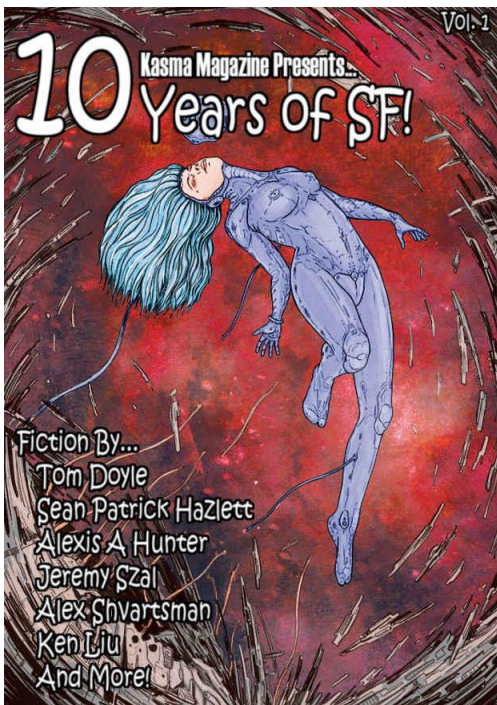
:Handshake. Greetings Cythera3. I'm on my way. But it's going to be slow and I'm going to need plenty more propellant. Please direct some harvesters my way.

And for 410.37 seconds, Yang7 waited for an answer.

Kasma is an online Magazine featuring one story a month published by Alex Korovessis out of Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. Stories are free for writers to download. New writers are welcome. Stories vary between 1,000 and 5,000 words in length, sometimes longer. Kasma offers a flat rate of \$25 CA per story.

Check out the Magazine at www.kasmamagazine.com

Recently Alex published an anthology titled *Kasma Magazine Presents: 10 years of SF!* containing:



Crossing Borders – by Tom Doyle
The Transmigration of Herekles Duncan – by D. Thomas Minto
Consequences of a Clockwork Theology – by C.J. Paget
Sea of Photons – by T.L. Huchu
Tunguska – by Sean Patrick Hazlett
The Breath of Heaven – by Nancy Fulda
Mistaken Identity – by Alan Baxter
Memory File #006 – by Alexis A. Hu8nter
The Galaxy's Cube – by Jeremy Szal
All the Things We Gave You – by C.J. Paget
Karlsson – by Anatoly Belilovsky
Perfect Match – by Steve Stanton
The Floating Otherworld – by Tom Doyle
Penrose – by Ashanti Luke
Evolution's End – by Lee Beavington
Ad Block – by Ken Lui
Coward's Steel – by K.C. Ball
The Wayfarer – by Mitchell Edgeworth

That Tear Problem – by Natalia Theodoridou

Nuclear Family – by Alex Shvartsman

The Uploaded – by C.J. Paget

A Man More Ordinary – by Manfred Gabriel

The Dragon's Lesson – by Matthew Johnson

Images across a Shattered Sea – by Stewart C. Baker

Hull Breach – by Robert Drake

See: [Ten years of Kasma](http://www.kasmamagazine.com)

THE LONG OOOPS!

by Robert Runté

(Previously unpublished)

Delicious!
Pronounced the Secretary,
Of the Council Planetary.
How on Earth, another asked,
Complete banquet worth, when tasked
No earthly game outside the dome
With few supplies sent from home
(And those just dreaded paste)
How then, such earthly taste?

Chef beamed and thanked Councillor Donna.
The answer, he said, was local fauna!
Newly arrived, the colony to feed,
The Hunter-Gatherer 5000-B.
Whirling-bladed, armored drone,
With wicked knives of gleaming chrome.
Just set the flavor—let's say to "goose"—
Turn on the power, and set it loose.

That 'fried chicken' on your plate,
That's Rock-beetles you just ate!
Ground Black Gloop to make the fries,
Stunflower leaves took gravy's guise.
The green beans all reconstituted,
From Screaming-Meanies fresh uprooted.

At Rock-beetles, one made a face;
Another cried, My god! Disgrace!
Black Gloop mentioned, one dropped his cup.
Screaming-Meanies made some throw up.

Who cares? enthused Prime Minister.
There's nothing here remotely sinister.
As long as *tastes* like chicken,
Entire banquet: finger lickin'!

Taste and texture, that's what's key!
Next set it for my favorite tea.

At this, arose a general clamor,
As each began to loudly yammer
To lobby for their separate wish,
Each demanding some special dish.

Prime Minister raised a hand for calm,
Then slapping down his fleshy palm,
Their greedy tastes now awakened,
He urged the crowd to call for *bacon!*

Chef frowned.
Of 5000 settings, found
Every flavor,
Theirs to savor.
Beef, potatoes,
Greens, tomatoes.
All varieties of roots, shoots, and fruits.
Rice, spice, and turtle—
Even frankincense and myrtle.
But as chef had predicted,
Kosher, Halal quite constricted,
The Hunter-Gatherer 5000-B,
Was pork and bacon settings free.

The Planetary Council,
Responding to the groundswell,
Being not at all diverse
—All settled here were Southerners—
Commanded Chef reverse,
And over-ride drone's governors.

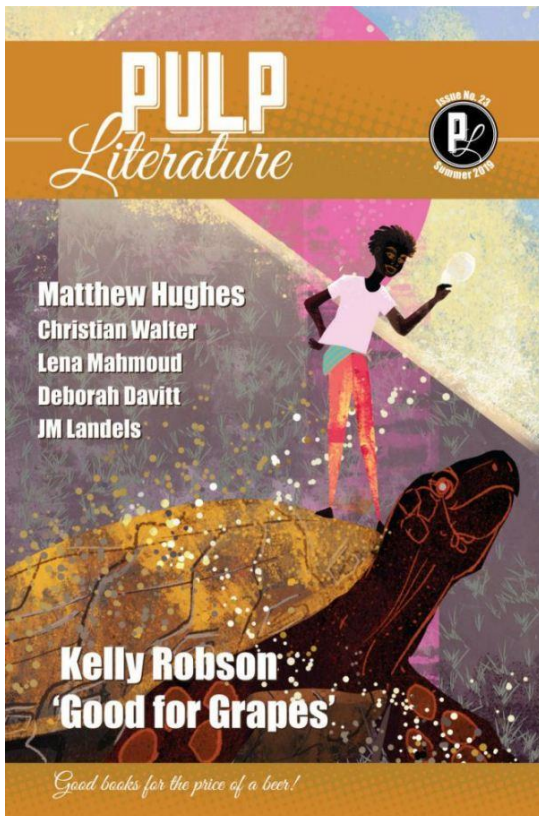
I wonder, pondered some squeamish fellow
What produced yon bowls of jello?
I'm feeling quite uneasy,
It makes me rather queasy,
But have to ask, as I lift my fork,
What on *this* Earth tastes most like pork?

Something in the back of mind,
A memory Chef could not define.
The question quite made Chef twitch ...
And yet—he still flipped the switch.

Constraints imposed for excellent reasons!
Tampering penalties: same as treason.
The answer, like whirling death descending,
Cut through screams suddenly ending.
Operating manual not consulted,
Inevitably resulted,
In the ghastly killing spree,
Of Hunter-Gatherer 5000-B.

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 #23 (Spring 2019)

Cover – by Akem

Good for Grapes - by Kelly Robson

What the Wind Brings - by Matthew Hughes

Stella Ryman and the Locked Room Mystery

- by Mel Anastasiou

Wolf, Dog, Sun - by Christian Walter

The Thieving Pot - by Lena Mahmoud

On the Sixth Day - by Deborah L. Davitt

Black Market - by Susan Pieters

Blophilia – Margot Spronk

White Rabbit – by deepthi Atukorala

Wife Giver – by Josephine Greenland

Inherited Love of Unexplainable Things – by Zoe Johnson

Wall Street at Night – Lola Ridge and Chaille Stovall

Allaigna's Song: Aria - by J.M. Landels

See [Pulp Literature Magazine](#)

HATE DOESN'T ALWAYS COME EASY

by Karl Johanson

(Previously unpublished)

It's hard work trying to hate someone you love.

It's funny how acute your hearing can be when you're in total darkness and you're worried your wife might come in at any second and eviscerate you. I hear her out there in the basement. A few minutes ago I heard her out in the yard killing our neighbour's dog. I thought about running when I heard the ruckus, but I was in the laundry room and would have had to pass by the back door. She might have *seen* me. I saw her for only a few seconds. Enough to know it was her, despite all the new muscle tissue bulging everywhere, the leathery flaking skin and the expression of blind rage. You live with someone for fifteen years and you recognize them, even if they've been turned into ... into something else.

I've never liked being in the dark. Why did I hide instead of running? I'd heard her coming for the door and I went for the basement. Stupid. I should have gone out the back door. I heard her coming down the stairs and I went into the storage room under the outside front steps. Solid concrete walls; no way out but the door I came in through. Stupid again; I might have had time to make it out the window. I was afraid to run. I've seen how fast the infected can run. I thought it was a sped up film when I first saw it on the news. I might be able to move that fast on a bike, if I hadn't quit exercising.

Muscles aren't a big thing now, when a body builder physique can get you mistaken for being a genetically modified zombie by armed neighbours. No, that's not right. The public service announcements keep saying, "we aren't supposed to call them zombies." They aren't dead, or "undead" or anything like that. They're infected with multiple viruses, which rewrite the genetic material in their stem cells. Well hot damn, what you call them makes all the difference when one of them wants to eat you, or just tear you into pieces if they're already full.

You've probably seen storage rooms like this one I'm in. Layers of dust covering dirt, and the dirt covering cobwebs. A burned out 40-watt incandescent light bulb. Shelves with 15-year-old plum preserves and cans of paint that dried out around the time that cutting-edge computer gaming was a mono colour version of ping-pong. I've been planning for more than a decade to get a Tyvek suit and a respirator, then spend several hours in here with a broom and a shop vacuum. I usually think of this cleaning plan on the way to work, just before sleep, maybe as family was arriving for a visit, or when my

taxes were due the next day. My fear of spiders kept me from remembering that plan at any time when I might have actually done the job.

Spiders ... there's one crawling across my arm now. I've had hours for my eyes to try to adjust to the sliver of light from under the door, but I still can't see much other than that sliver. I know it's a spider though. I wouldn't have thought you could count the legs on something from the feel of it climbing along your arm. I wouldn't have thought you could get any more scared once you're in a state of blind terror, but now I know you can. I'm not moving though. I don't want her to hear me. The infected seem to have every sense enhanced. Well, not their sense of taste, judging by the things they're willing to eat.

I remember my wife before, throwing out whole plates of food when she found a hair in them, not even being willing for me to eat them as leftovers. Now her voracious appetite is fighting with her fastidiousness, making her eat a freshly killed hairy dog. I hear her spitting and coughing between bites and making that *sound* that they make. I hear the basement sink running and hear her drinking and spitting water over and over, then going back to eat more. Now it sounds like she's mopping the floor. A zombie mopping the floor ... I exhaled a bit fast. Not a laugh, but something close. The sound of the mop stopped, so I'm holding my breath. The sound of mop being forced into the sink starts me breathing again, as quietly as I can.

I'm going to have to fight her eventually if she doesn't leave. I could go for the rifle upstairs. She'll probably tear me apart before I make it half way to the stairs. And how do you shoot someone you still love? "Remember your training," all the ads said. Every household was issued a weapon during the last outbreak.

The last outbreak ... One person in five hundred susceptible. Most of them died within weeks or months. Most covered in tumours. One in two thousand turned into things that could tear apart a wolverine ... multiple wolverines bare handed. Bones quite a bit stronger and harder than tooth enamel. Tooth enamel that can bite a hole in the sheet metal of a car door. Tissue that heals at a terrifying rate. Muscles that can double in size in less than a week, and which seem to work just fine with bullet holes in them.

"Aim for the eyes and knees," they told us at the range. "And don't expect that to kill them. The skull is reinforced behind the eyes, which is why they bulge out like that." Whoever designed the viruses knew what they were doing. "If they're far away or moving fast, aim for the torso as it's an easier shot. That should slow them down."

The instructor at the range spent almost all his time telling stories of the ones he'd killed, when he wasn't talking about how much he hated people who

couldn't shoot. I think he was exaggerating about the number, but he made the point over and over with all the gruesome details. "Make sure they're dead." I should have spent more time at the range, but his stories made me queasy and he always seemed to be there. Who wants to hear about something with 2 bullets through its brain deciding to fight some more while people are piling firewood up around it? Or about the sounds it made while being burned?

Who knew there'd be another outbreak? And more importantly, who knew they'd have more of their higher brain functions intact this time, leaving them smart enough to shoot back with their government-issued rifles? Well, my wife doesn't have our rifle, she has a mop. She could kill me with that mop easily enough, or with her hands and teeth.

Sitting here in the dark, I keep thinking about how this could have happened, but people are still debating which country the virus vectors for the genetic "upgrades" came from. One article said that the gene sequences included a few peptides used in one of the anti-diabetes viruses, but there was no provable link. Sure, everyone had a dozen theories. So many telling us whose fault it was and who we should hate for it. Some say it started with some country's military experiments, and they said we should hate everyone from that country. Or perhaps it was an attempt to win more gold medals at the Olympics. Some people say that hackers managed to get a quantum computer to actually *work*, and used it to simulate the gene sequences. The ones who came up with that theory told us to hate programmers. Some said it was comic book fans trying to turn themselves into supermen, and they told us to hate people who read comics. Some told us that leaders of specific religions were trying to make themselves seem to be able come back from the dead, to impress their followers. They told us to hate members of those religions.

Whoever it was who created the virus, they probably didn't count on all the side effects. Cancers sometimes growing almost as fast as any of the new muscle did, or faster. Voracious appetite. A life span measured in months. Progressively stronger anger and hostility at ... pretty much everything. I saw a video on line of one of them walking past a tree and a branch catching her in the eye. She punched the trunk of the tree until her hands bled. She paused briefly, then she kept punching it more until one of her arms broke; she'd made it about half way through the trunk by then. She screamed in anger at the tree and looked about to body check it when a pickup truck sped into view and blindsided her. Half the comment posts about the video were insults about the guy who made the video. People were saying how if *they'd* been there, they'd have shot it rather than videotaped it. Easy to talk about how brave you

would have been, if you'd actually been there. When you're actually staring at something that might charge you and stuff your own gun down your throat and fire off what's left of your bullets, it's a little harder to be brave. When you're sitting in a dark room, armed only with jars of plums, it's even harder to be brave.

Maybe if I hate her I can fight her, at least hit her hard enough to slow her down so I can run. It's hard to hate someone you love. Hate seems to come so easily to some people. A different colour, a different place of birth, a slightly different political opinion, even a different favourite movie is enough of an excuse for some people to hate. I wonder though. Does hate actually come so easily to *all* of them, or do some just pretend to hate, thinking that will help them fit in? I don't know.

I've tried remembering the bad times. Her screaming at me for leaving groceries on the kitchen table. Screaming at me while I'm on my way out to the car to get the rest of the groceries. "What if someone comes over and sees what a pig sty you've made of this place?" She yells, as I carry in the second load of bags of packaged and processed food. No fresh produce in any of them, as per her request ... rather as per her demand.

I tried to say, "Carry them in yourself if you're just going to scream at me every time I do anything around here. If I put them away you're just going to yell at me than take them out and rearrange them into whatever fussy budget system your compulsive brain thinks is the *right* way to do it this week. So why don't you just put them away yourself?" I didn't say any of that, I silently put the groceries away. I got nothing useful from the memory. No hatred, no anger, just feeling like shit about myself as usual. The good memories are in there too, and they don't want me to let me hate her.

I tried harder.

She'd said, "Fifteen years and I made one mistake, and you never forgave me."

"Fifteen years and you never apologized, bitch." I didn't say that, especially the "bitch" part. I'd tried to say it, though. "Maybe if you ever get around to apologizing I'll consider forgiving you." I didn't say that either. I just stared blankly and tried to hate her. I tried so hard to hate her, but it didn't happen then, just like it's not happening now. It's not that I've never hated. It just doesn't come easily, and I can't seem to hate when love is in the way.

"You don't trust me," she'd said next. "You can't love someone if you don't trust them."

What an absurd comment. You can still love someone when they've turned into a bioengineered psychotic killing machine, why would anyone ever think that something as trivial as distrust necessarily precludes loving someone?

My mouth is getting drier. The smell of dirt is all through here. I don't like it. I'm not fastidious, but years of living with someone who is has lowered my tolerance for dirt. Sitting bent up on a concrete floor, everything feels uncomfortable, some parts of me more than others. It's amazing how much pain a full bladder can cause. I can pee into one of the paint cans maybe. She might hear me. For all I know she might smell it too. She's still in the basement. I'd have heard if she left. I have to *go* though. I can't run with this much pain and I can't sit like this much longer. I straighten my leg out so I can stand. Great, both my legs are numb. I should have gotten up earlier. Now I have to wait for the feeling to come back. Pins and needles all over my legs, reminding me of the spider somewhere in here. What a stupid trait, to have nerves which warn you with pain not when there isn't enough blood getting to your arms or legs, but rather when the blood flow is actually returning to them.

Several minutes later I can stand. I reach one of the paint cans, carefully. One with a loose lid. I'm peeing down the inner side of the can, hoping to not make any noise. It hurts trying to pee slowly. I'm gripping the bucket tightly, trying to not drop it. Hopefully the lid will cover up the smell.

I can probably run a little better now, without that stabbing pain in my bladder. I might make it as far as the stairs now before she catches me.

I realize finally that trying to hate won't help one way or the other. Hate doesn't make you a better fighter. It's not just that she'd tear me apart; I don't know if I can fight someone I love.

Sliding my hands slowly along the shelves, I feel for anything that can be used as a weapon. Slowly, so I don't knock anything off. A rusty door hinge. Yeah sure, I can throw *that* at her. Then maybe she'll be angry enough to kill me quickly. I don't know what I'm hoping for. If I found a crow bar and got up the nerve to hit her with it, she'd likely wrap it around my neck. Jars of plums. Covered in dust and dirt. Plums ... She'd actually eaten some fresh plums the year we canned those. A brief decline in her compulsions and fastidiousness, when she tried some medication. So we canned some. What was the point in storing them here? She'd never eat them once the jars got dirty, even if you washed the dirt off before you opened them, even if she had stayed on the meds. I pictured throwing one of the jars and it shattering on her head. I pictured her angry enough to kill me very slowly.

She isn't going to leave. A search for a weapon is pretty much pointless. Trying to hate her is pointless. I'm not going to come up with some master attack plan. Any attempt to fight will get me killed, painfully. No one is coming to rescue me. The police or the military would be here by now if anyone had seen her while she was outside. That leaves staying here or trying to run.

Running will get me killed as sure as fighting will. So it looks like I'm staying. I won't starve anytime soon though. I opened one of the jars of plums.

A knocking at the back door. Not the police. They don't knock on a hunt. I don't think they *ever* knock anymore. One of the neighbours? Looking for their dog maybe? One of their kids? Oh no. One of them calling at the door. I hear *her* moving.

I'd heard many times that adrenalin is supposed to help you think fast, but I've never experienced it before. Even sitting here terrified and full of adrenalin for hours left me with no useful plan. It wasn't hate I needed after all; the sound of a neighbour kid calling from outside gave me a plan before I made it to the door of the storeroom. Through the door like a shot I scream, "Run!" as loud as I can. The most heroic thing I've ever done. The *only* heroic thing I've ever done actually, likely with no time to feel proud of myself. She turns to see me standing here holding a bucket and two jars. She tilts her head and frowns at me. No, a frown is positively attractive by comparison. And her eyes ... projectors showing hate, fury and ... confusion. I think it's the confusion that has her frozen for a moment. I haven't much time. Standing here terrified, armed with something that might actually slow down a compulsively fastidious zombie. I throw an open jar of plums. Not at her. At the couch. They splash all over the plush fabric. Some gets on the white carpet. *Her* carpet. I thought her eyes looked bad before. I almost dropped the bucket. Now she's *mad*. I'm expecting that noise they make. A sound to scare off a pack Kodiak bears. She looks at the couch and makes a different sound. I could picture full grown Tyrannosaurs running from that sound. I'm glad I urinated already. She's about to pounce so I hold up the other jar, aiming. I look at her wall hanging and look back at her. She stays put and makes a low growling noise. I run for the stairs and she runs for her plum covered sofa. She stays at the sofa long enough for me to make it to the stairs. Part way up the stairs I hear her stop at the bottom, afraid to step on the urine I dumped from the bucket onto the stairs as I ran. I'll probably still die, but the neighbour kid, I never learned her name, got away. That's all that matters, but I'm still running anyway.

It's funny what you can hear when you're running in a state of blind terror. The sound of something running behind you. The sound of their feet ripping divots in the asphalt when they change direction to follow you. The sound of your neighbours trying to hit a moving target behind you with automatic weapons. But drowning them all out, the sound of love and memories in your mind, not letting you hate the thing that's trying to kill you.

VCON 43: October 11-13, 2019 – Richmond, B.C.



VCON is Canada's oldest ongoing fan-run convention, having first started up in 1971 with Ursula K. Le Guin as Author Guest of Honour. VCON 43, while carrying on many fannish traditions, has evolved with the times to cater to multiple contemporary fannish interests such as literary fandom, TV media fandom, film fandom, cosplay fandom, anime fandom, art fandom, gaming fandom, furry fandom, and so on.

This involves at least five tracks of programming including workshops, demonstrations, panels, and lectures, plus designated gaming rooms, an art show, a vendor's hall, a book launch with multiple authors, a Saturday night dance, a costume contest, author readings, and a hospitality room.

In the distant past the convention committee ran the hospitality suite following procedures entirely under their own responsibility. However, the hotel industry has also evolved over time. Now the hotel runs the hospitality room, offering munchies and non-alcoholic beverages which are available by the fannish tradition of pay-by-donation, but with the bar offering alcoholic beverages strictly cash at prices set by the hotel. Such is the modern trend.

Oldtimers need not fret. Hospitality is still a place to hangout with friends, make new friends, perhaps sign the legendary "Book of VCON." The whole point of VCON is that everyone attending is a fan contributing to the fun and excitement of the event. All, attendees, pros, volunteers, GoHs, etc. are equally fannish in their enthusiasm, genuine equals in fact. Pros often relax in hospitality. Feel free to engage them in conversation. That's what the convention is fundamentally about, meeting people and sharing your enthusiasm. Don't be shy. Don't be passive. Participate. Communicate. Enjoy the fellowship of fandom! You've bought a membership, not a ticket. Meet and greet!

Guests of Honour this year include: Author GoHs **James Alan Gardner**, **Marion G. Harmon**, **Maxwell Alexander Drake**; Artist GoH **Kasia Slupecka**; Pop Culture GoH **Hope Nickolson**; and Science / Cosplay GoH **Ethan Siegal**. Dozens of other professionals in various fields will be participating in panels and assorted events.

For details on what's happening, how to book a hotel room, and above all how to buy a membership, go to www.vcon.ca

ABOUT THE AUTHORS AND ARTISTS

Akem

Akem is a writer and illustrator. She has illustrated *Brown Sugar Babe* which will be published in 2020 and is available for pre-order where books are sold.

Wing Shop is her first published short story.

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.

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

Eric Chu

Eric has been in the film and animation business for over 35 years. Working as a layout and storyboard artist, he quickly became known for reworking story lines to fit his own bizarre sense of humour. He worked on such projects as *Droids*, *Beetlejuice*, *Captain Power* and countless others. In 2002 he did concept designs for the new *Battlestar Galactica* where he was responsible for visualizing the look of the new Galactica, the Cylons, Raiders, Basestars and so on.

He works out of Paranoid delusions, Inc, a Vancouver-based design company which 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.

Augustus Clark

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

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*, *On Spec*, *Neo-Opsis*, *Polar Borealis*, *Tesseract 20*, and numerous other periodicals and anthologies. He is a graduate of the Sage Hill and Viable Paradise writing workshops.

Ivanka Fear

Ivanka is a retired teacher from Ontario, Canada. She holds a B.A. and a B.Ed., majoring in English and French Literature, from Western University. Her poems and short stories appear in or are forthcoming in *Spadina Literary Review*, *Montreal Writes*, *Spillwords*, *Commuterlit*, *Canadian Stories*, *Adelaide Literary*, *October Hill*, *Scarlet Leaf Review*, *Polar Borealis*, *Lighten Up*, *Bewildering Stories*, *The Sirens Call*, *Utopia Science Fiction*, *The Literary Hatchet*, *Wellington Street Review*, and *Aphelion*.

Peter J. Foote

Peter J. Foote is a bestselling speculative fiction writer from Nova Scotia. Outside of writing, he runs a used bookstore specializing in fantasy & sci-fi, cosplays, and alternates between red wine and coffee as the mood demands.

His short stories can be found in both print and in ebook form, with his story *Sea Monkeys* winning the inaugural “Engen Books/Kit Sora, Flash Fiction/Flash Photography” contest in March of 2018. As the founder of the group “Genre Writers of Atlantic Canada,” Peter believes that the writing community is stronger when it works together.

You can visit him at www.facebook.com/peterjfooteauthor/, and [twitter.com/@PeterJFoote1](https://twitter.com/PeterJFoote1) on Twitter.

Nicole Iversen

Nicole has previously been published in *Alice Unbound: Beyond Wonderland*, an anthology by Exile Editions, *Power: In the Hands of One, In the Hands of Many*, an anthology published by WCSFA, and has a third short story coming out this summer in the Anthology *Brave New Girls, Adventures of Gals and Gizmos*.

Karl Johanson

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

Lee F. Patrick

Lee is a Calgary, Alberta writer of science fiction and fantasy, and sometimes poet. Lee's third novel, *Lonely Together*, joins *Alter Egos* and *Alanyo Heir* on bookshelves this September. A short story, *The Runaway Apprentice*, is featured in *Enigma Front: the Stories We Hide*. All Lee's books are available in print and e-book format from Amazon.

Mark Russell

Mark is a recovering Canadian journalist living in South Korea and the author of the fantasy novel *Younghee and the Pullocho*.

Robert Runté

Dr. Robert Runté is senior editor at [Essential Edits](#). A former Professor, he has won 3 Aurora Awards for his literary criticism and promotion of Canadian speculative fiction; two of the novels he edited by first-time authors were short-listed for Aurora Awards; and one of his own short stories was shortlisted for an Aurora Award in 2017. This is his first poetry publication. See: [SF Editor](#)

J.J. Steinfeld

Poet, fiction writer, and playwright J. J. Steinfeld lives on Prince Edward Island, where he is patiently waiting for Godot's arrival and a phone call from Kafka. While waiting, he has published nineteen books, including *Identity Dreams and Memory Sounds* (Poetry, Ekstasis Editions, 2014), *Madhouses in Heaven, Castles in Hell* (Stories, Ekstasis Editions, 2015), *An Unauthorized Biography of Being* (Stories, Ekstasis Editions, 2016), *Absurdity, Woe Is Me, Glory Be* (Poetry, Guernica Editions, 2017), and *A Visit to the Kafka Café* (Poetry, Ekstasis Editions, 2018). His short stories and poems have appeared in numerous periodicals and anthologies internationally, and over fifty of his one-act plays and a handful of full-length plays have been performed in Canada and the United States.

For his most recent publication, *A Visit to the Kafka Café* (Poetry, Ekstasis Editions, 2018), see:

<http://ekstasiseditions.com/recenthtml/kafkacafe.htm>

Lisa Timpf

Simcoe, Ontario resident Lisa Timpf is a retired H.R. and communications professional. Her poetry has appeared in a number of venues, including *Star*Line*, *Eye to the Telescope*, *New Myths*, *Outposts of Beyond*, and *Dreams and Nightmares*. When not writing, Lisa enjoys bird-watching, organic gardening, and spending outdoor time with her border collie, Emma.

Taral Wayne

Taral is better known behind a keyboard or drawing board than at the front of a room talking, but once started can talk about a wide variety of subjects—his experiences from over 40 years in fandom, his 11 Hugo nominations for best fanartist, his Rotsler Award, or his unimpressive career as a magazine illustrator and comic book artist. He can bore on the topics of animation, *Fraggles*, fossils, and planetology. Also about his numerous off-beat jobs, and hobbies ranging from model

building to die-cast cars, to ancient Roman coins. He can even—under pressure—talk about science fiction.

For a gallery of his art see:

- <http://www.furaffinity.net/user/saara/>
- <http://taralwayne.deviantart.com/>

To download his fanzines:

- <http://efanzines.com/Taral/index.htm>
- <http://fanac.org/fanzines/BrokenToys/>

Melissa Yuan-Innes

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

AFTERWORDS

by The Graeme

The next issue (#12) I intend to publish before the end of the year. Currently I plan to include:

Poems by:

Roxanne Barbour, Lisa Timpf, J.J. Steinfeld, Lynne Sargent, Augustus Clark, Melissa Yuan-Innes, and Neile Graham.

Stories by:

Eric Chu, Heather Landymore, Elizabeth Buchan-Kimmerly, Mike McArthur, J. Paul Cooper, Dirck de Lint, Colleen Anderson, and Catherine Girczyc.