

# POLAR BOREALIS

Magazine of Canadian Speculative Fiction  
(Issue #12 – Nov/Dec 2019)



# POLAR BOREALIS Magazine

Issue #12 – Nov/Dec 2019 (Vol.4#4.WN#12)

**Publisher/Editor:** R. Graeme Cameron

**Proofreader:** Steve Fahnstalk

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

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Poem – \$10.00

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Interior Illustration – \$20.00

“Fillo” Illustration – \$5.00

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

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

All contributors are paid 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 – “Big Brother Bigger Than Ever” – by Gareth McGorman

## Editorial

Suddenly came to my senses and realized there was a good chance I wouldn't be able to publish this issue before the end of the year as I had originally intended. That won't do. No, sir! So I began scrambling.

Been so busy editing and laying the material out I've neglected my Christmas shopping. Too busy writing up contracts for the contributors, not to mention trying to pay as many of them as I can before publication.

Why the rush? Because if I succeed in publishing this online before the end of December all the contributors automatically become eligible to be nominated for the Aurora Awards for 2019 achievements. I would betray my mandate of promoting Canadian authors and artists if I failed to publish till the new year, in effect making everybody wait a full year till they could be nominated. Suspect they'd be a bit annoyed. Can't let that happen.

Anyway, as mentioned elsewhere this issue, the Aurora eligibility lists will be available beginning January 5<sup>th</sup>. Any work which meets the Award criteria can be placed in the appropriate category list. Doesn't mean they're nominated. Just means when the time comes to nominate people will be able to consult the lists to see who or what is eligible.

Nominations will come early next year, if only because the Awards ceremony itself will be in August. So, an accelerated program. The Awards will be presented at the When Words Collide Writers Festival in Calgary. I've already registered and booked my room. Hope to see you there!

Meanwhile, the last Aurora Awards ceremony, held in Ottawa at CanCon, was very good to me. I got inducted into the CSFFA Science Fiction Hall of Fame along with Eileen Kernaghan and Tanya Huff. Must admit I feel greatly honoured to be inducted, and in such good company too! Definitely made my day. In fact felt pretty good about it ever since.

Don't worry, my head's not too swelled. Plenty of ego-deflating events happen to me all the time, but it is rather nice to have a helium balloon of accomplishment tugging my situational awareness above mundane worries whenever I contemplate its shiny orb bobbing about at the end of its string. No matter what slings and arrows, etc., that balloon rises above the fray. I am most grateful for that.

Plus, I am closing in on my goal of reaching 10,000 downloads of Polar Borealis before the New Year. Current stats stand at 9,946 individual copies downloaded. Publishing this issue should carry me past this goal and ever onward, I be hoping.

Cheers! The Graeme

# THE GLADIATOR

*by Eric Chu*

(Previously unpublished)

There are no windows. The walls are cracked concrete, worn with countless hours of beatings, permeated with the stench of blood and sweat, and witness to unheard cries of pain and anguish.

The single caged light bulb flickers from the ceiling, casting a greasy yellow light over everything. Under it, is a man, naked and bruised, training with makeshift implements. Crude, but effective.

He is muscular, but not with the perfect body of an athlete. His arms are knotted with lumps, his back and chest quiver with determined exertion. His face is bruised and scratched, deeply wrinkled. His eyes are colourless. He stares through his imaginary opponent. This man has been through Hell.

The man's fists swipe the air, knuckles shredded and scarred. Clumsy, but fast. He is a flurry of spastic movement, kicking up dust as he trains.

He stops. Chest heaving with short hissing breaths. Sweat drips from his body. He simply stands in the middle of the room in silence. Unmoving.

*BZZZT!*

The magnetic lock to his cell door unlatches. The door swings inwards and hangs half open. At first, he just stares at the opening. Then, he moves to the doorway. He moves with a purpose. There is no fear ... he has trained for this.

The hallway is featureless save for a row of badly battered doors, similar to his own. From each one echoes sounds of training, grunting, sobbing ... He does not look.

The locker room door swings open automatically. The room is dark, almost black, but lit from behind with blue fluorescents. There are uniforms on hooks hanging on the wall, padding, straps. The man begins to suit up. The sleeves are oversized, the gloves are padded. Straps are tightened, zippers fastened. The uniform is bulky, like the ones used by Bomb Disposal Units. Whatever he is suiting up for, it's dangerous. The man picks up his headgear and places it over his head.

He gets up and walks out the room, back into the hallway, and into the garage.

His feet clank as he climbs into the back of a cube van and sits down.

The doors slam shut. There are no windows here either. He can hear the van making its way down streets and turning corners.

He begins breathing faster. It's all he can hear now.

The radio speaker crackles.

“This is dispatch. What’s your ETA?”

The Controller, sitting on the passenger side, picks up the handset.

“We are approaching the venue now.”

After a while, he can hear the sound of crowds. Chanting, and cheering. Like a sports event. The man begins to sweat. His eyes are wild with adrenaline. He is practically hyperventilating.

The mob outside is banging on the walls of the van. Their excitement is palpable.

“Thirty seconds to deployment,” the Controller reports.

The van stops.

“Five, four, three, two, one ... mark!”

The van doors open, the light is intensely blinding. When his eyes adjust, the man sees that the crowd is mostly children, screaming and yelling. The man exits the van, the harsh sunlight sparkles off his brightly colored outfit. Rainbows and buttons and fuzzy paws ...

It’s the happiest place on earth.

He wades through the crowd, waving and dancing. He barely makes it twelve feet. The children grab him and pull him to the ground. His arms flail uselessly as he drowns in the sea of excited toddlers.

“Man down! Man down!” the Controller shouts into the radio.

The man struggles to get up, and at first it seems like he can break free, his eternally happy bunny face breaks the surface ... then one large child tackles him around his waist and brings him down. He doesn’t resurface. The children attack, like ravenous animals, giggling and laughing.

The Controller is frantic.

“Disperse the crowd! Pull him out! Pull him out, dammit!”

Behind the roiling hoard, the smiling parents are enjoying themselves, cooing to their offspring and taking photos.

The Controller turns to the driver.

“Oh my God. They’re turning this way! Get out of here!”

The van engine turns over but won’t start. Glass breaks. Fire. Screams.

“Get out—”

-----

#### **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)

## SCIFAIKU #6

*By Roxanne Barbour*

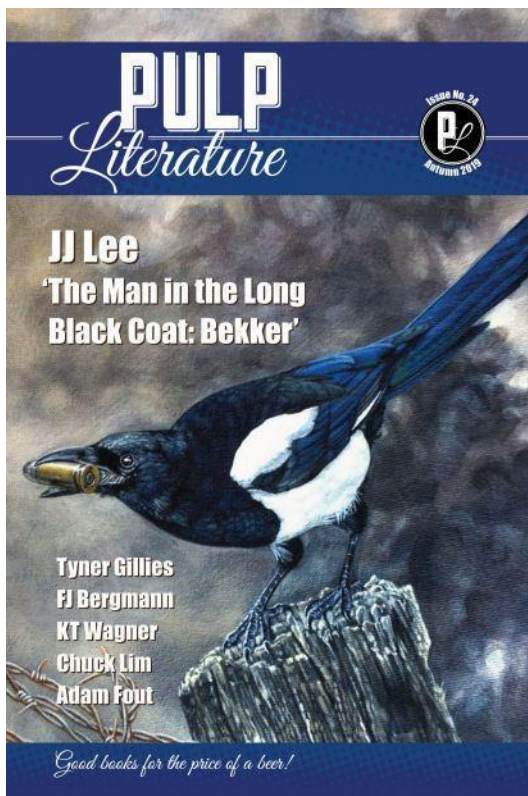
(Previously unpublished)

Martian housing expansion  
underground discovery  
roots  
climbing vines  
penetrate the dome

-----

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 #24 (Autumn 2019)

Cover – *Vimy* by Steve R. Gagnon

*The Man in the Long Black Coat: Bekker* – by JJ Lee

*The Extra: Frankie Goes to Hollywood* – by Mel Anastasiou

*The Lord of Lawn Ornaments* – by Tyner Gillies

*The Red Tiger* – by Chuck Lim

*The Map According to Me* – by Susan Pieters

*Yellow Paint* – by FJ Bergmann

*Cabin Fever* – by KT Wagner

*Black Glass* – by Adam Fout

*The Bumblebee's Daughter* – by Robin Malcolm

*The Shepherdess* – by JM Landels

*A Short History of Space Travel* – by Susan Haldane

*Whiskey Breath* – By Jack Waldheim

*The Last of the Iron Lungs* – Roxanna Bennett

*Interview with JJ Lee*

See < [Pulp Literature Magazine #24](#) >

# PINK HAIR

*by Quinlan Moss*

(Previously unpublished)

*This is it. This is the bar where I died.*

She hadn't given much thought to where she might die, but this bar definitely wasn't it. A bar, sure. She could see herself dying in a bar. She just hadn't pictured herself dying in a place that was so generic.

She stood beside the door, but just before the window so that no one inside could see her. The information she'd found in her last brief trip into the future, to steal a wedding band of all things, said she'd died in St. James' Bar & Grill at 131 Front Street East in Toronto at 2 p.m. on April 2, 2020. And this was the only St. James Bar & Grill.

She peered inside cautiously. She didn't think any good would come of her other self seeing her staring at her. Phew. She was still alive. Time travel wasn't an exact science. But there she was. Sitting at the bar. Not dead. She still had time. She caught a glimpse of her reflection as she moved back from the window. Skinny pale face. Dark eyes. Pink hair. Same as ever. And exactly the same as her other self sitting at the bar.

Next step. How to warn her other self that she would be dead soon if she didn't take immediate action. She could just walk in and tell her. Could all the warnings at PastFuture Recovery Limited be right? She wished she wasn't just an entry level thief in time with no particular skills. She liked to think of herself with a cool name. Time thief. A cool job. But if she had higher clearance at PastFuture Recovery Limited, she would probably know what would happen if she and her other self met. Sigh. Better not risk it. So she couldn't send her other self a message on her phone. Could she borrow someone's phone? Maybe a note would be better. Her other self would recognize the writing.

She found a pen in the bottom of her backpack and a fragment of loose-leaf left over from a trip back into the past. She wrote the note out carefully in block letters. She knew she was impatient. Her other self sitting at the bar might not read her note if it was scribbled or hard to read. She'd given some thought to the phrasing. She knew what it would take to get her other self to act.

**READ THIS AND ACT IMMEDIATELY. THIS IS NOT A JOKE. I AM FROM THE FUTURE. SOMEONE IN THIS BAR IS HERE TO KILL YOU. IF YOU DON'T LEAVE THE BAR NOW YOU WILL DIE.**



A tall, slightly overweight man with floppy sandy brown hair in a badly-fitted suit chose that moment to walk to the door of the bar, about to enter. She folded the note into two. “Could you pass this note to the woman sitting at the bar with pink hair? It’s my twin sister. It’s part of a game.” She handed the note to him. He smiled a little looking at the piece of paper. “Thanks, really appreciate it.” She wondered if he had ever written a note on paper. Probably not.

She watched him walk in and sit next to her other self. Her other self looked up when the man sat down and took out a book and laid it down on the bar between them. Why did her other self have a book? That was weird. Maybe it was the item she was there to steal? The man looked at the book. Maybe he’d never seen a book before either. Two anachronistic items in one day. Big day for him.

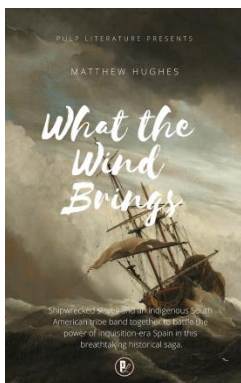
Then he opened the note and read it. Wait, why was he reading the note? Just give the note to her. Did she say to read it first? So annoying. He finished reading it, folded it again, and tucked it into the inside pocket of his suit jacket. This was really frustrating. She was pretty sure that was the only piece of paper she had with her. She was going to have to find more paper and right the note all over again. And find someone else to give it to her other self. Why couldn’t he just follow instructions?

Someone moved inside the bar. She looked inside to see what was going on. The man was reaching behind him to get something tucked away under his suit. He pulled out a gun with a silencer on it. Honestly, who uses a gun? The only reason she was even able to recognize that it was a gun with a silencer was from her trips to the past. Hadn’t he ever heard of a mindwipe? Oh no. He was pointing the gun at her other self.

*I wonder what will happen to my two bodies?*

And then he shot her in the head and she died.

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

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

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

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

# ONE AMONG MANY

*by Lisa Timpf*

(Previously unpublished)

It's simply one planet  
in a galaxy full of them

in other words  
no more or less significant  
than a grain of sand on a vast shoreline

not as big as a gas giant  
nor as showy as one of the ringed planets  
not as ore-rich as the asteroids  
not as warm as the tropical lands  
    though a sight more hospitable  
    than Betar IV's frozen worlds

gravity has a way of  
weighing you down, there,  
and, to be honest, it's not as well tended  
as the inner-system agrarian worlds

still, it's home  
and his heart can't help but sing  
whenever he sees the blue-green planet  
called the Earth  
growing larger  
in his viewscreen

-----

## **WHEN WORDS COLLIDE WRITERS FESTIVAL**

Just a heads-up reminder the *When Words Collide Writers Festival* will take place in Calgary August 14-16, 2020. It will host the Convention 40/2020 Aurora Awards ceremony. Multi-genre festival aimed at writers, publishers, editors and readers. Absolute cap of 800 people. So far 349 are registered or 43.6% capacity filled. Only 45 banquet tickets left. Current membership rate \$40. Will increase on January 1<sup>st</sup>. For detailed information go to < [When Words Collide](#) >

OCTOBER 1954

*by Elizabeth Buchan-Kimmerly*

(Previously unpublished)

The rain was blinding. Brooke had run ahead of Theresa and was at least a block away by now, invisible in the downpour.

Theresa wrapped her bare arms around herself. Her thin cotton dress, the bright orange flower print that made her so happy, plastered against her skinny body.

She caught a glimpse of her little sister's blue dress in another flash of lightning as Brooke crossed the road onto their street. Only a block more till they would be home and dry.

There had been some clouds in the sky when they returned to school after lunch. Mummy had been at work and Granpa Brascoupe had just said, "A little water never hurt no one. You'll be home before it breaks."

Granpa loved rain. He was probably outside singing one of his old songs. Maybe even dancing his slow heavy steps. Turn and turn and turn. Theresa hoped he was in the back yard. Mummy got mad at him for dancing out front.

None of the other kids at school had grandfathers living with them. Most of them only had their parents in Toronto. Some said their grandparents were in the Old Country. Theresa imagined that there were no children in the Old Country, only grandparents with strange talk and funny ideas. Not like the people on the television. *Life with Father* or *I Remember Mama*.

Granpa wasn't like anybody else. He refused to go to church and swore at Dr. Mustard when he made a pastoral call. He said the Army made him be a Canadian even though Theresa knew he was born near Algonquin Park. When the family drove in Daddy's new Studebaker all the way to Niagara Falls, he cried all the way back to Toronto. He said that Sir Adam Beck Public School was cursed because Beck had chained the falling water for the hydroelectric.

Brooke was out of sight in the storm again. She was probably dancing like Granpa. Turn and bow and turn. Every summer day she had gone down into the ravine to the creek with Granpa. Even when there were no other kids down there to play with, she would wade in the shallow water, catching tadpoles and minnows. Granpa could tickle fish, but Mummy wouldn't let him bring any home since they had built the sewage plant on the other side. Granpa was angry about the plant too.

Mummy was scared of everything. She didn't want the girls playing in the creek because they would get polio, like Donny up the block. She wouldn't take

them to visit friends with measles like everyone else, because they might get sick and die. And when Mrs. Rodgers next door told her how pretty her long black hair was, Mummy had cut it and permed it into tight waves. She wore long-sleeved dresses and picture hats if she had to go out in the sun in case her coppery skin darkened. Theresa often heard her arguing with Daddy when she was supposed to be asleep because she didn't want her father living with them. Then Daddy would say, "Well, he's not allowed back on the reservation. Where do you want him to go?"

Theresa caught up with Brooke who had taken off her socks and shoes and was knee deep in the ditch swirling with brown water. Her black bangs were plastered to her face.

"We've got to get home before Mummy," Theresa urged her. "She's gonna be mad if we're all wet."

"Granpa won't care," her little sister pouted. "He says the water loves me."

"Ditch water made your dress all muddy. You're gonna get spanked."

Brooke started up the wet grassy bank of the ditch, but slipped and was submerged in the fast water. She wriggled her way up, laughing and Theresa pulled her out. She slapped her little sister's arm hard. "You're supposed to mind me. Hold my hand."

At the house Granpa just laughed when he saw them. He took all their clothes and gave each a big towel to dry off with before allowing them out of the back hall. As they found clean panties and dresses, he made them tea with lots of sugar and a jam sandwich each. "The water loves you," he said. "Water loves all of us Brascoupé. Water is our totem. It's who we are."

The radio was playing CFRB and Wally Crouter told them the hurricane outside was the first ever recorded in Toronto. They drank their tea and settled in to watch Howdy Doody and Princess Summerfallwinterspring. Granpa didn't like the puppets. He went outside. They could hear his weird singing in the back yard. Theresa shuddered. She hoped he was not dancing his turn turn bow dance. The Rodgers boys would be horrible on the way to school tomorrow.

It had stopped raining when Mummy got home, but Daddy was late coming all the way from the Avro plant in Malton and the rain had started again when he arrived.

"You better stop doing them rain dances, Chief," he said. "Guess we got enough to do us for a year." He patted the chair beside him and Theresa climbed into his lap. Brooke cuddled up with Granpa and they watched the news on Channel Six and the news from Buffalo across the lake, fuzzy and broken on Channel Four.

After supper, the lights failed, but Daddy went downstairs and got the Coleman lamp they used for camping at Algonquin. Mummy told the children to get ready for bed. They were the only house with light. As they were saying their prayers, they heard Mrs. Hrapcyk from down the street asking if there was any way to heat her baby's bottle, and Daddy went to get the Coleman stove.

\*\*\*

Theresa woke very early. Brooke was not beside her in bed and she heard murmuring voices, Granpa's deep warm tones and Brooke's treble. Then the door, the front door, clicked shut. Confused and worried, she peeked out and saw Granpa and Brooke hand in hand heading down the street to the park and the creek.

She found her wellingtons and put on a cardigan over her pyjamas then followed them. The rain had stopped but the ditches were full of brown muddy water, roaring along beside the soaked grass. Theresa walked through the grey dawn light avoiding hundreds of earthworms who had found sanctuary from the water on the concrete sidewalk.

Theresa could hear Granpa now, and his walk had become a shuffling dance. Brooke was dancing beside him. They turned the corner and Theresa could hear their voices, bass and treble, singing in Granpa's weird language. When she reached the corner, they were out of sight. Westhead Drive was parallel to the ravine and the park entrance was half way up the block. Granpa was still singing.

She hurried to the park. There were eleven steps beside the driveway down to the parking lot level, then twenty three down to the park itself. She looked down the steps from the sidewalk. The parking lot was covered in shallow water, sloshing slowly against the bottom step. Through the gap the lower staircase made in the trees she could see nothing but water, brown with mud. As she stared at the swift flow a tree washed by, as big as Mr. Hargreaves' new Chevrolet, its roots higher than its branches. There was some sort of building too, maybe a shed or part of a house roof, and then a cow. Theresa had only seen a cow up close at the Ex. This one was black and white and its legs stuck straight up as it was washed past.

She could hear Granpa singing again. He was standing with Brooke on the bottom step, his arms raised. Then he bent down and spoke to the child. He picked her up and placed her on a higher step, turned and walked into the turgid water on the parking lot.

Theresa called out, "Granpa!" and Brooke looked back up at her. "I'll get him back," she said and stepped into the slow moving water.

Although Granpa was not even up to his knees, Brooke was waist high in the water. Theresa heard her laugh.

Granpa was swaying in his dance as he pushed through the water to the faster moving creek that filled the ravine. Brooke was trying to follow him, Theresa called out to her, “You mind me, Brooke, come back now!” but her sister did not hear over the noise of the rapid waters.

Granpa had reached the edge of the parking lot. Theresa could see the broken wooden post that had held the handrail. He stopped and sang louder.

The slow current in the parking lot was too much for Brooke and she fell into the water. Theresa called out, “Brooke! Granpa!” She dashed down the steps looking for her sister in the muddy water. Granpa was still singing to the waters. She grabbed what she thought was her sister’s dress but only got a handful of slimy water weed clinging to her hand. Her second try felt the same but when she pulled, Brooke’s black hair was in her grasp and she pulled her head above the water.

Granpa did not look back. He sang on, dancing turn turn bow turn, and stepped off into the swift current that filled the ravine. The water swirled around him, rising up to cover his waist, his shoulders.

As Theresa pulled Brooke, flailing and gasping, out of the water, Granpa sank and the water swirled up over him. Turn turn.

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## **THE CREATIVE INK FESTIVAL**

When: May 15-17, 2020

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

Guests of Honour: Wesley Chu, and Colleen Anderson.

Keynote Speaker at Banquet: Barb Ferrer.

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

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

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

## IN A SMALL EARTHBOUND ROOM

*by J. J. Steinfeld*

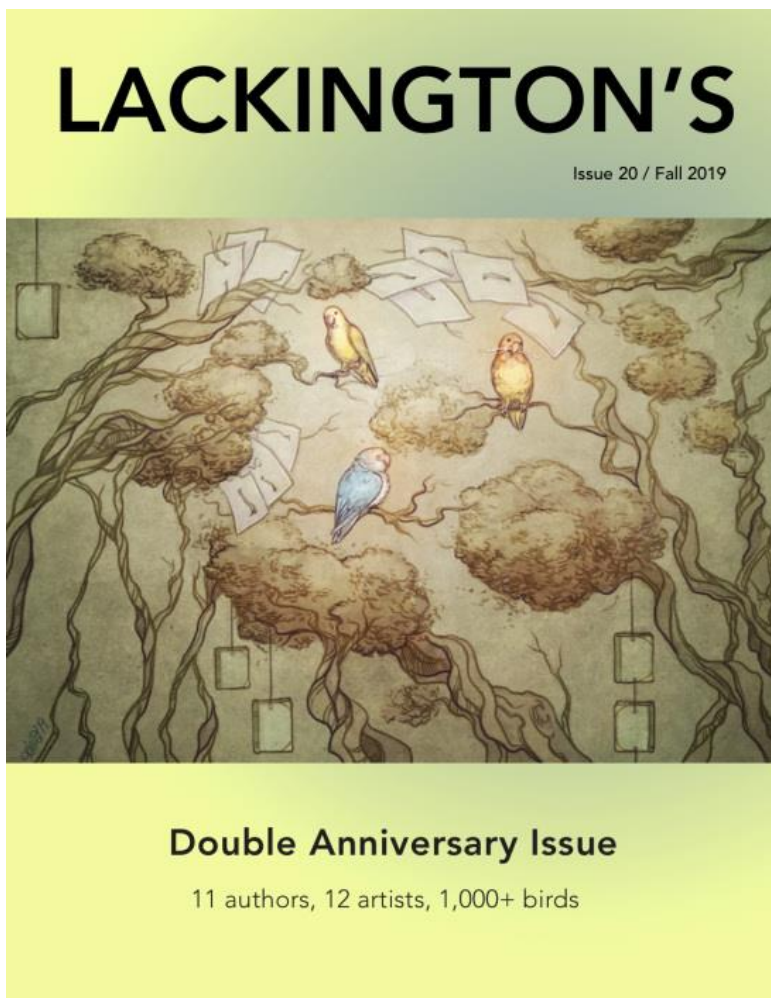
(Previously unpublished)

He was fortunate—or unfortunate—enough  
to be the first human contacted by a space traveller  
from a planet unpronounceable to the human  
and the way the space traveller pronounced *Earth*  
was no great elocution shakes.  
Walked unannounced into his small Earthbound room  
in a downtown rooming house in need of repair  
and a generous helping of divine intervention  
and the human smiled immediately  
even if it was a smile of fear beyond measure  
not that the space traveller comprehended smiling or fear  
but after the most momentous pause ever  
in the history of humankind  
they get into a staring match  
two bloodshot eyes to one eyelike orb  
and the human contemplates what to do next  
how to occupy the time—it is early afternoon—  
perhaps arm wrestle, if that is possible  
hands and biceps appear problematic  
teach the space traveller a game or two  
chess would be fine, you were once quite the player  
a thousand bottles of wine ago  
but you might lose right off the bat  
if the space traveller was smart enough  
to find you in your small Earthbound room  
of non-travelling and circumscribed dreams.  
You think, when the space traveller leaves,  
be sure to be a well-wisher, offer a smile without fear  
for the journey ahead is so much longer than your Earthly stay  
your thoughts of staring, arm wrestling, and chess swirl  
like thoughts of a long-ago wedding and long-departed friends.  
Eventually, the space traveller does leave,  
it is a week later, hard to believe or comprehend,  
seems like a few minutes, a life of broken time.

You go out into the street, for once, not in the least thirsty,  
start to tell your story in the most precise detail  
to anyone in sight, strollers and shoppers,  
a story no one will believe, not even your dear sister  
whom you haven't spoken to in five years and two months  
but you have been shamed and humiliated before  
and you will get on with your now historic life  
(arguably the most historic life imaginable  
if anyone would bother to argue with you).

-----

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-crafter wordsmithery that reflects the story, setting, theme, atmosphere, or philosophy it seeks to describe.



Contents of issue #20, Fall 2019.

- Cover – by Kat Weaver  
*The Water-Bearer and the Hawk*  
– by H. Pueyo  
*A Map to a Future Unlike Any Past*  
– by Karolina Fedyk  
*Heavy Reprises of a Dark Berceuse*  
– by Priya Sridhar  
*Report on the Wren Queen's  
Dementia*  
– by Rhonda Eikamp  
*The House of the Camphor*  
– by Mina Ikemoto Ghosh  
*The Capacity to Serve*  
– by Simon Christiansen  
*The Litany of Feathers*  
– by Sharon J. Gouchenour  
*Wite Cro*  
– by Natasha C. Calder  
*Shaman*  
– by Damien McKeating  
*Kairo's Flock*  
– by Avra Margariti  
*City of Wings and Song*  
– by Sara Norja



# OF DRAGONS AND GRANNIES

*by Mike McArthur*

(Previously unpublished)

Cora believed two things: that she was crazy and that dragons existed.

As a gigantic shadow flew over her deck and the sound of enormous wings reverberated through the air, she smiled. One belief confirmed, now to see if she was crazy enough to deal with a dragon.

She took up her walker and saw her unwelcome guest lazily land on her garden gnomes. The clay pitchforks of the gnomes could not pierce its scaly green hide, nor could the steel fence stop the dragon's claws from uprooting the tarragon and catnip. Cora hadn't expected the dragonwort to live up to its nickname, but the garden gnomes, a present from a lover long gone, were the last straw.

"Out of my yard, you hooligan!" Cora yelled. Her yell was ignored; the dragon too busy uprooting her daises.

Bob, her neighbor who often joked about her senility to the neighborhood, stepped out on to his porch with his usual morning coffee. He casually glanced into Cora's yard to see what the old lady was yelling about this time, stared for a moment, then dropped his coffee and ran inside.

Cora viewed the battlefield that was once her garden. Where the dragon walked crushed flower petals, broken stems and ruined efforts were left in his wake. Cora walked over to the cat dish and picked up her trusty broom, laid it upon her walker and advanced upon her foe.

The dragon noticed his opponent and lowered his head. He looked at Cora, giving her a steely gaze. For its trouble it got a broom smacked in its face. The bell on Cora's broom jangled a promise of victory. The dragon hissed out a breath which blew the old woman away from her walker onto the ground.

The dragon spread its wings, making sure to knock over the potted plants, and roared, "I, Lord Rahun, stand before you, Daughter Maltini, as I once stood before the eldest Maltini and all the ones since. I stand before you and judge your garden inadequate! For stealing my rose, I shall destroy all that you have grown!"

For, you see, hundreds of years ago Cora's great-great-great grandfather had stolen a rose from the dragon's hoard. It was the most beautiful rose anyone had ever seen, and he had given it to her great-great-great grandmother. Ever since, the family had tried to recreate that beautiful rose, the one that shone the deepest red, the one from the fairy tales. Perhaps Cora

should have felt a little guilty, but seeing the state of her formerly-award-winning garden eased her conscience.

Cora crawled to her broom and used it as a crutch to rise to her feet. The strength of the knights of old ran through her as she grabbed her trusty steed, her walker. Her knees cracked as she slowly approached the dragon, who was eyeing the rose bush with malignant intent. Cora slammed her broom against him. The blow was so strong that it made the flies buzzing in the summer heat dizzy. The blow was so skillful that all her ancestors would have cheered. The blow was so furious that the bell on the broom rang a second time in righteous indignation.

Despite all that the blow was simply ignored by the dragon, who had decided he had enough insolence for one day. He raised his claw and gently crushed the old lady down, snapping her broom in two. A malicious sneer went across his face as he felt her squirm underneath his foot.

By this time an audience had formed, children and adults from nearby houses who had come to see what the commotion was about. Some of the braver people made a move to help Cora but the dragon glared at them and they froze.

A small cough came from below his foot and the dragon looked down to see Cora brandishing the remains of her broom to hold the bell as high as possible. He snorted. "Why are you smiling? You have lost, Daughter Maltini!"

The old lady glared up at the dragon. "Because three rings means it's Mr. Mousey's dinner time." She shook the broom fragment to ring the small bell a third triumphant time.

Mr. Mousey, known to the local lady cats as the neighborhood tom, jumped onto the fence and surveyed the scene. Rahun's snout dropped open and he bowed his head, his enormous body quivering as the small cat approached.

In the realm of animals, each animal has a lord. For the sheep, it is dogs. For dogs, it is Man, and for dragons, it is cats. This is why cats walk around with a natural haughtiness. If you lorded over dragons, you wouldn't have a care in the world what you batted off the living room table.

The now humbled dragon carefully lifted his massive claw off Cora and gently placed it on the garden path, blocking the view of the ruined catnip. As Cora got up and leaned against her walker, Mr. Mousey narrowed his eyes and started to groom himself.

"She is under your protection? I did not know," Rahun pleaded, his eyes focused on the tomcat who was now swishing his tail.

Mr. Mousey ignored him, and the dragon grew nervous. Mr. Mousey walked closer, a bounce in his step and nose upturned, to survey the destroyed flower beds, his tail swishing again as he noticed the ruined catnip.

“Forgive me!” Rahun whimpered, backing further and further away until his large rump hit against Bob’s porch.

The old lady and her cat advanced towards him. The dragon shifted his gaze to Cora, still holding aloft her shattered broom with its bell, then back to Mr. Mousey, who was evidently getting ready to pounce. One paw was bad enough, two catastrophic, but all four paws with every claw extended, including the dreaded back claws? Too devastating to contemplate.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry!” Rahun cried as he leaped into the air, crushing Bob’s porch in the process.

“And stay out!” Cora yelled at the retreating monster. As she raised her broom in triumph more than ever she resembled one of the knights of old. A great victory had been won and yet, as she surveyed her ruined garden, she wondered at what cost. The dragonwort was shredded and the daisies would take months to grow back. But at least her precious rose bush had not been damaged.

Behind her, she heard the oddest sound, the sound of people clapping. Heard them laughing and cheering. She turned around and saw that the neighbors who usually called her Cora the Senile were celebrating her victory. Even Bob, now standing amid the crumpled wreckage of his porch, a wide grin on his face.

A small child grinned at her, adoration and respect in his eyes, and Cora was pleased. She looked down at Mr. Mousey who was observing the crowd with his normal, disinterested regal look. He always felt proud, but she could see from the twinkle in his eye that this time he felt an extra bit of pride, and deservedly so.

The crowd continued to holler and shout. Someone yelled a new nickname for her. The rest of them took up the chant so loudly even Rahun could hear it as he flew away.

Cora, bane of dragons!

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#### **CSFFA MEMBERSHIPS & AURORA ELIGIBILITY LISTS TO OPEN JANUARY 5, 2020**

You will be able to renew your CSFFA memberships for 2020 as well as submit to the Aurora Award Eligibility lists (for works published in 2019) when the CSFAA site reopens for the new award cycle, January 5, 2020. For details go to < [CSFFA Aurora Awards](#) > on that date.

# THUNDEROUS

*by Lynne Sargent*

(Previously unpublished)

Our sky parents quarrel:

they throw javelins of light,  
heave out meaty, mumbling insults.

You can feel malice in the wind,  
the kind that lodges children's clothing in trees  
and does not apologize when dinner is late  
or when your older sister is blown down the stairs.

Divorce is not a thing for rain and dancing atoms.

\*\*\*

Love, our might need not make us cruel—  
the smell of your skin is like the petrichor of the rain  
without the sorrow of the fight.

Tell me that the lightning we make will not sever limbs  
that the earthquake of the thunder will not leave chasms between us.

They have set a bad precedent,  
but we are not so helpless  
as gods.

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## **POLAR BOREALIS OPEN FOR SUBMISSIONS DURING FEBRUARY IN 2020!**

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

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

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

# HAROLD'S MUSE

*by J. Paul Cooper*

(Previously unpublished)

Harold sat across the desk from his publisher, his security guard uniform stuffed in the knapsack on the floor.

Mrs. Janson took off her reading glasses, closed her laptop.

"Harold," she began, "the reason I agreed to take you on as one of our authors was because the first manuscript you submitted was exceptionally well written."

"And I appreciate the opportunity," replied Harold, "I really do."

"I *was* convinced your crime series had great potential," she continued, "but if I am to publish your novels ...."

"Did you say, 'If I am to publish'?" Harold asked. "You *have* to publish my novels. I've already signed the contract, you've already given me an advance."

Mrs. Janson paused, allowing the room to become deadly silent. "I bought the rights to publish the first two books of a series based on the strength of the first manuscript. But, let me make this very clear; I am not obligated to print anything that I think is beneath the standards of this publishing house."

Harold lowered his voice, struggling to calm himself. "You just said you were impressed with the first manuscript."

The publisher pulled a copy of a manuscript from a drawer and dropped it on the desk. Harold could see the title of his second novel on the cover page. She pointed at it.

"There's no reason to publish the first book if the rest of the series is crap. What happened with the second novel? It's as if the creative side of your brain suddenly shut down."

"But I'm still writing!"

"And I'm still flushing your toilet," replied Mrs. Janson, "but that doesn't mean the quality of your shit has improved. Have you been drinking heavily or doing drugs?"

Harold stared at the floor. "No, nothing like that."

"Well, something is definitely wrong, Harold. I'd hate to see a brilliant writing career go off the track before it even begins."

Harold tried to grasp what was happening. He thought he had been invited downtown to discuss the marketing campaign for his first novel, and now it might not even be published. She had purchased the rights; it might be years before he could take it to another publisher.

“Please don’t give up on me, just because I’m having a dry spell. It happens to every writer, or so I’ve heard.”

Mrs. Janson slowly shook her head. “I probably shouldn’t be doing this, but I’m going to give you a second chance. Three months from now, or sooner, you’re going bring me a revision of the second novel. I don’t care if it’s an improved version, or a completely different story, as long as it equals or exceeds the quality of the first one. If it does, I will immediately send the first manuscript to our printers, and the second one four months later.”

“What happens if the second book doesn’t meet your expectations?”

Mrs. Janson’s pointed to a shredder in the corner of her office. “In that case, I won’t reply to your phone calls or e-mails. When the contract expires, you’ll be able to self-publish your books and sell them to family and friends, or at least, to the ones who feel sorry for you.”

\*\*\*

Harold walked three blocks to the nearest LRT station, and caught the first train back to northwest Calgary. Arriving at the last station, he boarded a bus that carried him to a stop near his parent’s house. He stopped just long enough to grab his laptop. When his mother asked him how the meeting had gone, he just replied “fine.”

He dreamed of owning his own car, but that was impossible while still paying off his student loan with the meagre earnings of a minimum wage job. His mother let him borrow her car, and after a short drive, he walked into his favourite coffee shop at the mall where he worked.

Harold bought an insanely overpriced sandwich, a piece of cake and their strongest brew. The owner claimed that if you spilled a cup of his coffee in the cemetery, you’d wake the dead. It was probably true. The young writer sat down at a corner table and flipped open the laptop.

“Hi, I’m Alicia.”

Harold looked up, perplexed by the sudden appearance of the woman sitting next to him. He was surprised he hadn’t noticed such a strikingly beautiful woman when she first approached. He was even more surprised that she bothered to talk to him. He hesitated for a moment, then replied, figuring he knew what was happening.

“You probably recognize my face from the mall, but I’m nobody famous. Just a security guard out of uniform on his day off. Sorry.”

Harold noticed that her necklace was silver, but he was sure it had been gold when she introduced herself.

Alicia pointed at the ring on his right hand. “A security guard with a degree.”

“My alumni ring,” replied Harold. “Bachelor of Arts. I graduated with a B.A. three years ago.”

The woman leaned closer. “You work as a security guard to pay the bills, but your real passion is writing.”

“Have you read one of my short stories?” asked Harold.

Alicia smiled. “I’ve read all of them.”

Harold glanced up at the florescent ceiling lights. It seemed to him her dress had changed colour from blue to red. Could it be an illusion caused by flickering lights?”

“Your dream,” she continued, “is to earn a living writing crime novels. You fantasise about going on book tours, teaching seminars at writing conferences, perhaps selling the film rights to your novels. I can make your dreams come true, Harold.”

Harold assumed her last comment had something to do with sex. At least, he hoped so. He raised his right eyebrow. “I’m sure you can make my dreams come true, babe.”

This time Harold knew he wasn’t observing an optical illusion, Alicia’s blue eyes flashed flame red. “Did you just call me ‘babe?’”

“No,” Harold replied, “of course not. I said something else, I mumble a lot.”

He looked down as his left hand suddenly planted itself firmly on the table. He watched as his right hand picked up the fork he had used for his cake and moved across his chest until it was directly above his left hand. As Alicia pointed down with her right index finger, he stabbed his left hand with the fork.

Harold stared at Alicia, suppressing a scream. “What just happened?”

“You’d be amazed at the power of my suggestion.”

Rubbing the back of his hand, Harold stared into space, talking to himself. “That figures. A beautiful woman sits next to me, so I say something stupid and ruin everything.”

As he glanced back at Alicia, he was startled to see her earrings disappear, and a tattoo of a quill pen appear of the side of her neck.

“Don’t be too hard on yourself,” replied Alicia, “everyone says things they regret. You’re a nice guy, just not my type.”

“I know, just a security guard, earning minimum wage.”

“Not that. Too skinny and pimply. Besides, you’re only a mortal. I’m interested in you because I happen to be your muse, Harold.”

“My muse?”

“That’s how I know your first novel was creative, inspired. The second novel is about exciting as a manual for ready-to-assemble garbage.”

Harold observed that Alicia's hair style had changed from buzzcut to shoulder-length. He looked around. "Am I on some reality television show that pranks people? I get distracted by my own thoughts and you change your wig or something whenever you notice I'm not paying attention?"

Alicia sighed. "Oh, get real. Let me prove what I am. In this mall there's a department store that sells washers and dryers. Wouldn't a washer be the ideal place to hide a murder victim's body parts?"

Harold's eyes lit up. "Oh yeah! I can just imagine seeing the body through the glass of the front-loading door, and the blood dripping down the side when it's opened."

"And what about the sunset last night?" Alicia asked. "You could write, 'The red light of the setting sun reflected off the wet blade of the serial killer's machete.'"

Harold nodded in agreement. "Mrs. Janson would absolutely love that line."

"The reason you didn't come up with these fantastic ideas is because I didn't point them out to you till now."

Harold watched as the eyes of his muse changed from blue to green. Finally, he was convinced. "So, what stopped you helping me? Did I do something wrong?"

Alicia shook her head. "It's not about what you have done wrong, it's what you haven't done at all. I'm tired of not getting credit for what I do. After all, I belong to a union. I deserve better."

"What union?"

"The International Guild of Muses," replied Alicia. "We have muses signed up in all countries and centuries, places like Canada, ancient Athens, Great Britain, Babylon, Mongolia, and France, for instance."

Harold raised his right eyebrow again. "I bet the French muses are really hot."

Alicia glared at him. "Really, Harold?"

Harold shrugged. "Sorry. I'm sorry. It just slipped out."

Alicia pointed a finger at his forehead. "Mr. Face, meet Mr. Table." Alicia pointed downward and Harold slammed his face onto the table.

Harold noticed a couple at a nearby table staring him. "I'm fine, just a muscle spasm," he said loudly.

He looked at Alicia. "Sooner or later, people are going to start wondering about that finger thing you do."

"They can't see me, Harold."

"Oh, I guess that makes sense."



“Do you want a concussion,” asked Alicia, “or are you going to stop with the stupid, sexist remarks?”

“Yes, I’ve definitely going to stop. I’ve learned my lesson. You were saying something about getting credit?”

“That’s right, when you finish a book, you must include ‘Inspired by my muse, Alicia.’”

“I can’t do that,” Harold replied.

“Sure you can. You’re the author, you can give credit to anyone you please. At the end of the first novel you thanked your cat Mittens.”

“Mittens helps me relax.”

“Would an international bestseller, insane royalty cheques, and interest from movie producers help you relax?”

Harold smiled. “Yeah, that would help me relax.”

“So, do we have an agreement?” asked Alicia.

Harold started typing. “I’m adding it to the introduction right now. But Mrs. Janson is already pissed off at me, so I’m not sure this will help.”

A gold bangle disappeared from Alicia’s right wrist and reappeared on her left wrist as she spoke. “You have nothing to worry about. With my help the second book will be twice as good as the first one. She won’t care if you thank your refrigerator, as long as you’re one of her authors.”

Harold watched Alicia as she stood up to leave. “Are you sure you can’t become involved with a mortal? We both like books, and it would definitely help my self-confidence if I had a girlfriend.”

“No, Harold. Absolutely not. Concentrate on your writing.”

Harold began typing furiously. It was good to feel the words flow freely as a new story took shape in his mind. It would begin with someone opening the door of a front-loading washing machine, only to discover a body chopped into a dozen pieces. Then it would switch to a scene bathed in the red light of the setting sun, with some of the light reflecting off the wet blade of a serial killer’s machete.

Just as Alicia was about to leave she paused by a young woman sitting near the entrance who was reading a murder mystery. Perhaps Harold was right. Having a girlfriend would help his self-confidence.

Alicia leaned close and whispered in her ear. “The guy in the corner is kind of cute. He’s always writing, so he probably loves books as much as you do. Go over and talk to him, you have nothing to lose.”

Cindy looked up from her novel, confused. Why hadn’t she ever talked to that guy in the corner? She shrugged her shoulders. “Here goes nothing.”

Harold stared at the woman sitting down next to him. He waited for her hair to change colour, or her earrings to disappear, but nothing changed.

“Hi, I’m Cindy.”

“I’m Harold.”

“What are you writing?” she asked.

“A crime novel. The second in a series.”

“Are they going to be published?”

Harold thought for a moment. “Definitely! Contract already signed!”

“I love crime novels.”

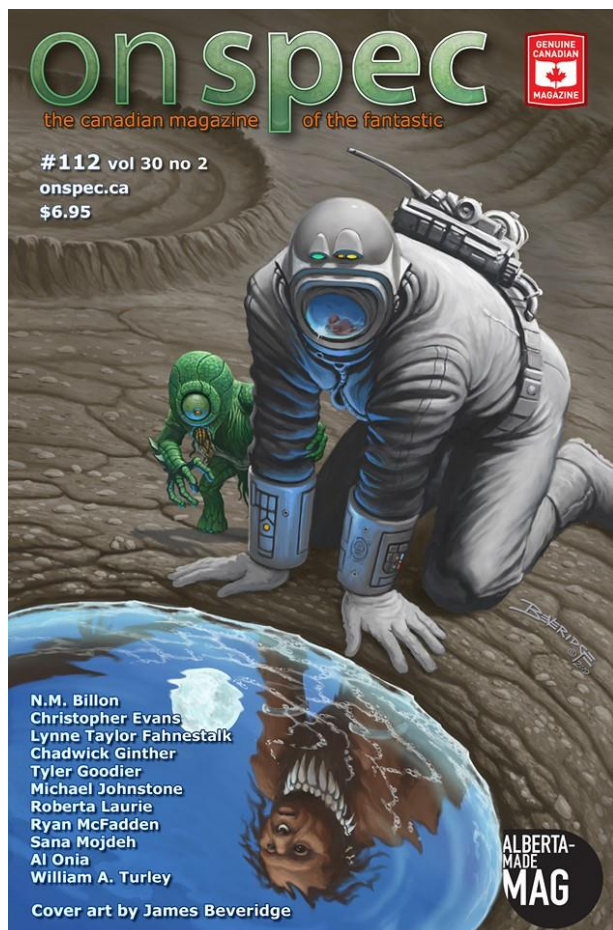
“Are you my first fan?” Harold asked.

Cindy smiled. “I might be.”

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

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



Current issue #112 Vol. 30 #2 includes:

Cover Art – by James Beveridge

Fiction:

*Mindwig* – by Al Onia

*The Door Not Taken* – by Tyler Goodier

*M2K* – by Sana Mojdeh

*Wing Twist* – by Christopher Evens

*L’Ongerie* – by N. M. Billon

*Cheating the Devil at Solitaire* – by Chadwick Ginther

*A Child is Light* – Michael Johnson

*Library Time* – by William A. Turley

*Scales of Justice* – by Ryan McFadden

Nonfiction:

Dublin Worldcon in 2019

N.M. Billon Interview – by Roberta Laurie

The Art of James Beveridge

Bot and Comic – by Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk

< [On Spec issue 112](#) >

## THAT'S WHY

*by Augustus Clark*

(Previously unpublished)

Because light preserves  
abandoned assonance

sadly memorize  
soundly eulogize

If I go dark, that's why.

undulate and allocate  
inundate and excruciate

Because pessimist infections  
bought but lost in transition  
persist and cover reunions denuded in  
inaction  
left in boughs un-birtherd  
inflect the pest  
innumerable digitation  
digests past, passes through,  
hollow dilated wholes  
delaying the late.

heavy penetration  
strips of desecration

If I go dark, that's why.

Because operations unstitch  
time's meetings twice  
opening stretched second  
centuries

If I go dark, that's why.

Because darkness feels close

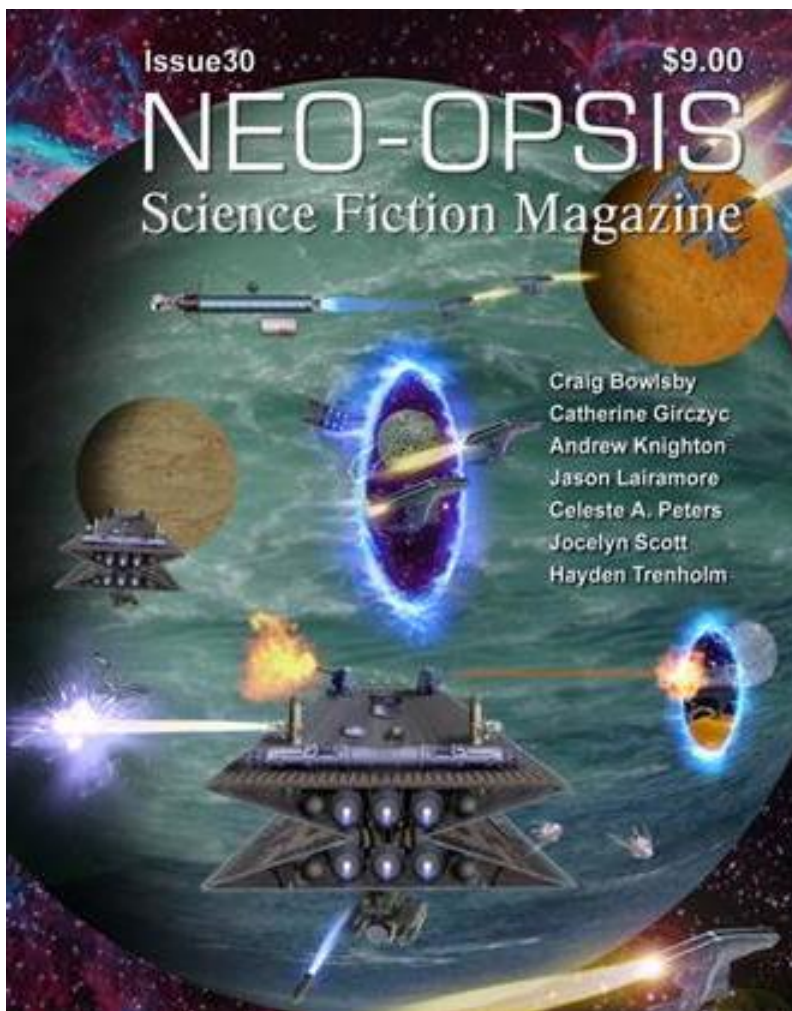
If I go dark, that's why.  
If I go dark, that's why.  
That's why if I go dark,  
That's why.

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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.

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Contents of issue 30:

Cover *Portals* – by Karl Johanson

*Scrapheap Destiny*  
– by Andrew Knighton

*The Ninth Iteration*  
– by Celeste A. Peters

*Victory by Water*  
– by Jocelyn Scott

*Big, Bad Ships From Outer Space*  
– by Jason Lairamore

*Modigliani Paints the World*  
– by Hayden Trenholm

*One Day in Tom's Life, with Ice Cream*  
– by Craig Bowsby

*Wrasse*  
– by Catherine Girczyc

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

## PRESERVE MY FONDEST MEMORIES

*By Dirck de Lint*

(Previously unpublished)

Nigel Pursley was a man of habit. He capped his inkwell within seconds of the same time each day, always sat in the second carriage on the Underground, collected the same newspaper on his walk from the station, and never failed to hear the clock striking half past seven as he stepped through the door of his home. The newspaper was always left in the parlour as he went to change for dinner, and when he returned to it after the evening meal, he did so seeking not novelty but confirmation that the world also went on its accustomed ways.

On an evening midway through the uncommonly damp August of 1902, Nigel found disappointment waiting for him below the fold.

“Good Heavens, Amanda,” he said to his wife, who sat on the opposite side of the unseasonably lit hearth in her own dainty chair, “the king is ....”

Nigel stopped just short of open treason, *run mad* poised to leap off his tongue. He cleared his throat, rattled the paper, and then in response to the anticipation he saw in Amanda’s eyes he pressed on.

“It’s all very well,” he said, “it’s a new century, after all, but to upend tradition like this ... and in the very face of his own mother’s example, too.”

Amanda sat, hands in her lap, the very picture of patience. Nigel realized that he had spoken somewhat at random, as if his wife could have known the context of his words. He rattled the paper again, closed his eyes to calm himself, and composed his thoughts.

“It says here,” he nodded to the paper, “that King Edward is not going to install Victoria beside Albert in the memorial niche at the palace.” Nigel paused, allowing his wife to absorb the words, then as she sat in shocked silence he added, “Not only that—he’s having the niche removed entirely. Poor old Prince Albert, trundled out of his place after all these years. If that’s the sort of ‘innovation’ we can expect from the new monarch ... well, I just don’t know.”

Amanda had no comment to offer as Nigel returned to his reading. After a moment, he called out, “Good Lord above!”

He peered over the paper, then dropped his eyes at the look of reproach he saw on his wife. “I’m sorry, dear,” he said, voice soft with contrition. “Sorry, children.”

Young Howard and little Tillie, absorbed respectively in a boys' adventure book and a doll, gave no sign of having noticed their father's outburst.

"Sorry," he said again, unbuttoning the collar of his shirt. "I wonder if that surgery His Majesty endured before the coronation didn't cause some subtle derangement. Listen: 'Those close to the king report him to be making preparation to have the remains of his parents installed in a mausoleum at Frogmore House.' Can you believe it?"

Stunned silence. The only sound for several seconds was the steady clunk from the long clock in the corner. Nigel looked about, saw Amanda and the children all frozen in place, apparently awaiting the next shocking revelation, and he realized that he had drawn too much of the outside world into this family sanctuary.

"I'm sure," he said, too conscious of forcing a smile, "that cooler heads will prevail."

He felt little confidence in his own words. Prince Albert's presence at court had been the accepted norm for the whole of Nigel's life, but the consort had been the royal fashion-setter, who had established what was now commonplace. Using the newspaper as concealment, Nigel glanced up at the photographs hanging over the mantelpiece.

The portrait of his own family, taken just last year, was flanked by much older images of his Granny Irene. In the left, she was kept steady for the camera by a set of iron supports, mostly invisible behind her. In the right, that same furniture kept her upright; her expression was far more serene, as she did not feel the pinch of the clamps on that occasion. Post-mortem portraiture had been the previous standard of familial regard for the deceased, before Victoria had decided she could not bear even that degree of separation from her beloved Albert. It was still as far as some families could go, the embalming process too expensive to allow the poor any more than a flat monochrome memory of the departed.

Nigel found his thoughts stumbling on that point. Thrift was a powerful force in the world, and if the king was turning his back on custom ... and Nigel found he could not characterize it as *immemorial* custom, even if it had been started before his own memory began. This was an uncomfortable thought for him. He could not picture a world so transformed as to banish the departed from their homes; women's fashions and steam engines may change in the course of a lifetime, but the morals of society should not.

A knock broke in on his thoughts. He lowered the paper and found the housekeeper standing in the hall.

"Yes, Mrs. Davies?"

“I’ve put the kitchen in order,” she said, her Welsh accent with its intimations of long ages past giving some comfort to his disordered nerves. “I hope to catch the ten o’clock train, if I may.”

Nigel rose, folding his paper and resting it as an extra antimacassar on the back of his chair. “Certainly, Mrs. Davies. If I can just ask you to help with ....”

“Of course, sir,” she said, responding to the inclination of his head before he had finished speaking, entering the parlour to open the bottom drawer of the small sideboard near the window. She drew out two folded sheets of light cotton. One she set on the love-seat, and with long-practiced movements unfurled the other, handing two corners to Nigel.

Master and housekeeper, holding the dust-cloth the way firemen stretch a Browder net between them, stepped sideways, one on either side of the children. They carefully lowered the sheet so it settled over the two youngsters without disturbing either their hair or the amusements the embalmers had set in their dear little hands.

The second smaller sheet was lowered with as much care over the unmoving form of Amanda. Mrs. Davies bobbed and departed, the thud of her boots diminishing until she passed out the back door, leaving the steady clock once again the only sound in the house.

Nigel took his paper from the back of the chair. “I’ll finish my reading upstairs,” he told the draped figures. “Sleep well, my darlings.”

On the stairs, he paused, one hand on the bannister, the knuckles pale with silent effort. He stood thus, motionless but for an almost imperceptible quiver of his lip, for half a minute, then he straightened his back and resumed his ascent. Not long after the bedroom door closed above, the weight of the long clock reached the bottom of the cabinet, and all movement in the parlour ceased.

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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.



# LIZARDESQUE

*by Melissa Yuan-Tunes*

(Previously unpublished)

Breathe through my skin.  
It's all I can do.  
The wind can't sweep out  
London's crater of smog.

mercury mounts  
tempers sweat  
asthmatics cyanose  
emphysema oldsters recall  
cigarette puffs with  
ejaculatory longing  
while oxygen tanks chain them to the earth.

Lucky bastards.  
Lungs, sweet viscera,  
cilia guards beating bravely  
nature's air freshener  
while I gasp through my skin and  
curse universal toxins.

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# FLIGHT

*by Colleen Anderson*

(Previously unpublished)

Cubes of emerald and ruby, diamond pips flashing, rattled across the marble table. The dice came to rest—a pair of sixes. Garuda laughed, clapping the king of Benares on the back. His laughter lit the room up as bright as the long days. King Rama laughed and motioned for the beaten gold cups to be refilled with mead. Servants robed in white held great palm leaf fans, stirring the still air. Garuda had given mortals gambling, infusing them with the joy and anticipation of chance. There was no better pastime than gaming and talking in the languid summer heat.

As the king told an anecdote about an elephant and a monkey, Garuda's attention shifted, and his radiance paled with the vision before him. Over the cup's rim, he stared at Queen Kaki as she entered the hall. She swayed, a sensual undulation of hips and arms, her black glossy hair a serpent down her back. The gold jewelry that embellished her limbs defined their perfection. She bent to talk to a musician and glanced up at Garuda.

The king rumbled something about enjoying the game with his good friend, but Garuda heard only deep thrumming within his hollow bones. The queen turned away, glancing once, smiling back at Garuda. His heart beat to her steps as she walked away.

Garuda let the king win, for a greater prize was in his sights. Perhaps it was a small recompense, for later that night he beat expansive wings until a storm filled the skies and wind tore the window screens. He stole Kaki from her husband. It was then that he brought the aspect of cheating to mortals as well.

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Garuda rubbed his great golden beak along the inside of Kaki's thigh. She stretched, a lustrous geography of warm brown skin, hills and valleys for his tongue to traverse. His crimson arms encircled her legs, dark wings spread beneath her. Their sweat mingled, perfuming his aerie for more than a week.

Kaki sighed, her body glistening. She grabbed hold of Garuda's great wings, staring up at him. Pulling him close, she stopped him. "Is it wrong for you to make love to a mortal woman?"

"No."

She stroked his feathered head. "Just no?"

“I am a god. I do as I wish.” His sleek body and taloned fingers slid along her amber flesh.

She murmured, “Should a god not set an example? Then, is it wrong for a woman to love a god this way?”

He raised his head and speared her with one golden eye. “What does it matter, if the love is pure?” he rumbled.

The sun slunk to its bed, leaving the long day’s heat to burnish them. Garuda’s light illumined the room, though tempered by his will. Kaki stretched, reached for him, then halted. “*Is* this love pure, or is it the lust of the forbidden—or of a new possession?”

She sent word barricades. Other women had never been so bold, acquiescing to his power and prowess. What was this puzzle?

He waved a red hand. “I am a god. I create and take away, as is my whim. But I am Garuda and do not often take away.” He entered her slowly, staring at her expressions. His talon wrapped within her ebony hair as he thrust harder, trying to obliterate the seeds she had planted, immersing himself in sensation. Yet, he *had* taken her away from her life and family, from a king who had trusted her abductor.

When Kaki cried out, quivering, Garuda pulled away, distant. She turned away, onto her side. She had not forgotten their conversation. “Am *I* but a possession?”

He did not like the doubt she laid within his thoughts. Was she some demon? A darkness uncurled in his soul. “I am a god and it is all mine.”

“You are the god associated with wisdom? Should you upset what order you have set in the world?”

He softly touched her thigh, arm, cheek. “Wisdom sometimes comes after, not before an event.” Was it only her exquisite beauty that had made him take her? “Why worry yourself with these questions? The moment is now.”

She sat, frowning, blue and red silk sheets spilling from her limbs. “Beyond now there is another moment. And another. All these moments count in the accumulation of one’s life and memories. My life is finite, and these moments matter more. Yours is not, but the summer will wane, the days will grow short. So I ask; is it wrong to love another man’s wife?”

Garuda frowned back. In the encroaching night he still glowed, if now somewhat subdued. “Perhaps, but is it not wrong to deny love’s call?”

Kaki shook her head and sadly smiled. “I have loved one man and gladly stayed with him. But I have now loved you, for how can a mortal woman not love a god? I told my husband I loved him more than the world. I will tell you the same, for at this moment it is true. But once it has happened, it can

happen again. The day will come when I will leave you just as the sun leaves to allow in the autumn.”

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Garuda boldly visited the saddened king to throw dice and to drink spicy mead. Kaki didn't appear of course, but the jovial bold song the court musician sang caught Garuda's ear. The skillful song spoke of a musician visiting a captive queen, secretly loving her as she hid him in an aerie.

Garuda understood too well. The musician had climbed mountains and stairs and stole Kaki's affections away while Garuda hunted.

Regret weighing him, he flew on divine wings and returned Kaki to her husband. When he set her down, Kaki strolled to Rama and kissed him deeply, then she turned and speared Garuda and the musician with her glare.

When she spoke, even Rama hushed. “You each wished to hold me close, as if I was yours alone. None of you asked what I wanted, or if I had a thought. I married my king by choice. You each spent time with me but I was never yours.”

Kaki laid her hand on her husband's shoulder.

Garuda never set foot in Benares again.

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Garuda perched upon his aerie's carved balustrade, surveying the soft clouds caressing the Himalayas. He watched over mortals in this vast realm, yet a mortal had taught him a lesson. “*Wisdom sometimes comes after, not before an event.*” Garuda's hollowness went deeper than his bones. He took flight, bleeding light, crying into the growing night.

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See [Augur Magazine](#)



# MARIAN OF SHERWOOD

*by Neile Graham*

(Previously unpublished)

It was his surprise at the blood on his hands  
that drew me.

His belief in the innocence of his weapons  
belief that

changing one thing could change it all.  
It's hard

not to love an outlaw, a man who believes  
as I do,

that you must stand for higher laws. No  
small thing

to hold secret war against the fawning men  
who argue

the rights of lords because they know  
which side

their bread is buttered and which side has  
no bread at all.

We thieve more than gold and grain to feed  
children orphaned

by soldiers. We steal keys to the jail that holds  
more than flesh,

more than bone. Our larcenous hands, guilty  
of savagery

a pure and violent hatred of the lies we live by,

strong and cold

enough to tear our lives apart, kill the lies in  
warm blood,

blood on our hands the colour of snow,  
of harrowing.

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See [Darkworlds](#)

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

Issue #11 contents include:

*Lazarus* – by Feby Idrus

*Cutting Class* – by Evans Light

*Did Dracula Have a Daughter* – by Jeff Strand

*Fat Ma* – by Andrew Hilbert

*The Scariest Thing Ever* – by Kate Jonez

*For the Good, Body and Mind* – by Eddie Generous

*Neck of the Woods* – by Russel J. Dorn

*It Got Under My Skin* – by Laird Barron

*Play Dead* – by Thomas Pluck

*The Halloween Monster* – by Alison Littlewood

See: [Unnerving Magazine](#)



# ABSINTHE KIND

*by Cat Girczyk*

(Previously unpublished)

It is August 1856, high in the Rocky Mountains. The place is swarming with people hungering for gold and silver. Marcel takes pictures of them with his huge ungainly camera. The miners appear astonished or small set against such a magnificent backdrop.

The miners go on out of the town, to push imported donkeys up to elevations and narrow ledges that only the desperate and the greedy breathe on. Marcel follows them up, capturing pictures of the hardworking men and their overloaded animals, high in the low-oxygen air seeking treasure. These aren't the stream-bottom-feeding placer guys but the ones looking for the motherlode, El Dorado.

But it isn't gold that I, as one of the time-flying Kinde, have been sent to steal. Marcel is a great artist, and his photographs were lost forever.

"What kind of Lady are you?" he once asked.

"An angel of time," I joked with the truth. He laughed.

I have the name Carmine, a saloon girl, for this mission, the last woman he photographed.

I know his probable future from a newspaper archive. Photo of a dead man emaciated and ruined by gut-rot booze. Headline: "*Photographer Dead Drunk*" drowned in a gully just outside town, his magnificent pictures lost to scavengers. Only one survived—the saloon girl on a velvet sofa who was not me had to have come after this visit.

He and I walk together down the split log boardwalk in the late afternoon air. The clouds shadow the mountains in dark navy and purple as if heavy vestments have covered them. Mine is a semi-religious mission, an homage to the gods of art. Massive evergreens loom smelling of fir and pine. One road leads into town, and another snakes out through a narrow and dangerous Pass at the bottom of a Glacier.

Ignoring my Proctor's warnings, I came again and now can smell the rotgut on my lover's breath and see the glazed eyes. How long has he? I can fly home anytime using our crystalline tech if, and only if, I don't bond too deeply here.

"You should have come sooner." He stubs his tobacco cigarette on a hitching post. It's been months by his reckoning.

"My job—the changes make it difficult." I want to explain the vagaries of lives like mine, memories like mine. Our technology made of ever-changing

crystalline light forms models how memories of Kinde like me work, but how can words? His words are ancient: pre-digital, pre-antibiotic, pre-Cataclysm.

“Stay, crazy Angel, see the sunset.” He wants to show me a good time. Part of his brain doesn’t believe me and never did. I am just another saloon girl with absinthe brain damage.

“For tonight.” I smile at him. If only he could travel too, but I cannot gift him with the ability for time flight. We travel in ways pre-Crux Century humans cannot. I am a flyer; even in my day, we are a rare genetic mutation. We inhabit the crystalline light that travels time. No one born before 1901 has ever been able to travel with us. More’s the pity.

He walks me through his hastily erected town. He wintered here, going out on photographing forays in the high cold when the weather was bright. He has some amazing pictures of the snow. The town has many tent houses, a few wood log buildings, and no electricity. The water comes from a stream off the glacier and tastes cold and sweet but probably contains a million dangerous bio-memes.

We turn male heads, as I am correctly outfitted for this expedition, in heavy layers of trashy saloon girl dress.

Once he finds me, my lover always has clothes for me, clothes he keeps: luxuriant silks, buckskin boots, lush velvet skirts, lace blouses, and a massive fur coat. He buys me things when he has money from photographing the prospectors, and he awaits my return.

How he trusts me and my return. He moves towns, but he won’t sell his most special pieces because he knows I will return until I finally purchase his hoard and whisk it away. I haven’t done it yet, in fact, I am lingering. I never know if he believes me, about the future.

My Proctor is angry with me about this man. We Kinde fight against the coming dark! How can I be worried about some doomed human lover? I always invent a reason to see Marcel, to ask if he will sell, to seek out his body, and this doubtless disturbs my task. I should long ago have been done and gone on to save some other precious art treasure from the past.

My love Marcel is the same man I visited a few weeks ago, and yet he is not. Time has changed him since then, added a suntan or burst a blood vessel, lengthened his curly bronze hair or caused his weathered face to smile less.

I come back in another body; my brain with its unusual ability to retain conflicting timelines makes me a flyer, one of the Kinde who may rebuild our future by visiting the past. Yet, how can we save all if we can never afford to care for any one person?

“You look Métis.” He says, looking at my newly made sturdy body and raven black hair. “Indian and French—I shall call you Gabrielle, not Carmine.”

“Oui, ça va. Gabrielle.” I respond in French.

He is a pure slow artist, while I am a quick change artist: new body, new time, new havoc and ultimately theft in the Mission's name.

“Do they change you just to see if I can still see it's you?”

“No, I must be in disguise. It's dangerous.”

He laughs and takes a swig of whiskey from a flask in his pocket. To him, I am a woman, not a fine art collector.

I tell him, “There could be stalkers; men in long black frock coats and six-guns and women with black ostrich feather plumes and derringers. Killers, sent from my time or those who seek to stop us, sent to kill me if my trespass is judged serious enough.”

Even my own would end me if my wildness threatened a true Mission of one of the more important Kinde. We are taught: “To fall in love with the past is to negate the hope of a better future.”

“We are all strangers in the wild west.” He smiles at me again.

“But I always know you, don't I?”

“It's a rare talent.” He has no idea how rare. Most pre-Crux humans miss a sense of us. We can see each other and do, once in a while, cross in the past. But they, mostly, cannot tell us from a stranger even if we were their lover or wife in another body.

After the Crux Century, humanity came out of a long Dark Age to emerge fundamentally different. Some of us can time travel, some of us can hear others' thoughts, but none of us can create original art—none of us. Not one human hears the Muses of old.

That effervescent craziness of the millennia before is gone. Lacking the shock of art, the beauty, the emotion of it, we crave it with the sharpest of lusts. So we steal from the ateliers and studios of the past, from the Marcells and the Renoirs.

“No, Marcel, you really do have a rare talent,” I say.

“That's what women are always telling me—it's a rare talent you have, Marcel!” He's made a joke now. I shake my lustrous long black locks at him.

“Men should never be complimented. There's a law.”

He smiles. We stand at the end of the town. There is a vista ahead of us: vast, unspoiled, rough but astonishing.

“I came here running,” he says, “From a woman.”

“Oh.” The air is cold, even in August at the higher elevations ice forms on the creeks.

“I like to be free.” He changes the subject. “See that ridge there, to the North? That's where my next climb is. I'll take my donkey and make camp there, then move up the slope each day for a picture.”



It seems strange to go so far to take a picture, only one good one per day, after a backbreaking climb with a pack and carrying equipment on a donkey.

“There will be magnifying cameras that could take that picture from here. Anyone could do it.”

“If everyone could take pictures, they would mostly be bad.”

I laugh and nod in agreement, but I shouldn’t be talking of the “future.”

He started a series on miners when he saw how curious I was about the backbreaking labor and the heavy machinery.

I am thankful for him. He can see me no matter my disguise. He is the eternal “Other” for me. Most traveler Kinde, while lusting after the art, disdain Pre-Crux humans. But I have found someone who loves me, no matter that I tell him I am here to steal his work, and put it on display in the sterile future—no matter that he thinks of me alternately as an angel, and an insane girl.

“Have you seen any unusual strangers?”

“Just one,” he grins, “I’d like to try to take her picture again, if I may?”

We walk to his rooms over the Store, where they allow him to have his studio. He places me on a burgundy velvet horsehair sofa, the most luxurious in the town. He tries to take my picture again.

“This won’t work,” I say. He ignores me, sets up his flash pot and places plates in the camera.

“This time could be the charm.”

Travelers don’t clutter up history books with their pictures. Unless the machinery of the future glitches, maybe then—but normally, no. Still, I continue with the posing to please him.

I only know I am happy for the moment, with my ruddy lover and his camera.

“Stay still, my beauty.” He works until he loses the light. He sighs then, and I relax.

The light is fading, yet it is beautiful. Magic hour. He smiles at me while his eyes, green and brown, fire with light. He is touching me, softly feeling my feet, clean and supple.

“You have the feet of a seventeen-year-old.” He cradles them in his long-fingered hands, kissing my legs and pulling up my skirt and pulling me to him.

He wants me, all of me, more of me, and I want him so very much that I cannot speak; only touch and kiss and open to him like a flower.

Divesting ourselves of many layers of clothing, we spend the night making love in his rooms, crying and laughing together. I thank the gods that his chosen poison hasn’t killed him yet.

“Tonight’s my last night,” I tell him when we are lying on his bed, feeling the warmth go from our bodies.

“It can’t be ...” he says.

“It is, Marcel.”

He is poetic now. “You know I never take a breath willingly, except, when you are here, my angel love.” He smiles again. He always has an offhand air, as if he’s saying words that he has almost forgotten, but knew by heart once.

I laugh. But then my throat catches. “My Proctor has forbidden me,” I say, suddenly afraid. In a parallel timeline, there was a small town saloon girl, with dark hair making love to him on this velvet sofa on this night. She ran off. The bad drinking came on him then, and drink was his only ladylove until it killed him.

“You’ll come again, and I’ll make love to you again, when your people change things.” He is sure now. He smiles at me then, startling, glorious and full of life. He is full of freckles and sunshine, and in the fading light, he glows. I wonder if I can protect him. He is so precious to me.

“It’s a miracle that you recall me through the last big change.”

“But you ...”

“But I would exist? No certainty of it, no.”

“We’ve had a good time, and I haven’t hurt you.” He is sanguine and picks up the ever-present bottle.

“Don’t drink that.” I begin falling into sin. “You don’t understand the future—I care for you—I’ll stay with you. I want to help you.” I get up on one elbow, stroking his back now.

“Women often do.” He is upset and reaches for the bottle on the table again.

“One of several optional timelines ...” I start, and then stop, feeling awkward, tears beginning. I can’t watch him destroy himself.

I blurt out “Either I stay, or I must leave you in the morning. Walk to the creek, take one last look at this town and never come back.”

He is shocked.

Was I the laughing woman who left him?

“But you’re my guardian angel—why would they make you give me up? We harm nothing and no one.”

In the last few years, he has traveled further and further into the West, and I have always found him. Not anymore. I must disappear, so my Proctor says.

“They would abandon you for this?” He gestures to the velvet sofa.

“Yes and no. Only because I feel too much for you, there were—will be lovers somewhere in this era that are connected to the most terrible incidents in human history. The Mission seeks to reverse those events. No one knows the identity of those lovers. They could be us.”

“No,” he says and pours me a shot glass full. I refuse. “Not us. We harm no man. I would know as I know you.” He believes in his reality, his feelings, but I can’t. I don’t trust my own heart and certainly not his.

What if the Crux Century started earlier, in the Rockies? What if Mission theory is wrong about it starting at the Civil War?

“Have we no choice? To my mind, you angels have an army way of thinking.” He is probing.

“I could stay with you.” My heart surges with the insanity of it. I’d be at the mercy of the Nineteenth Century. Mission medical nano-talismans protecting from disease, age and pregnancy would disappear.

“I love you!”

“I love you too,” he says, “But we both know I love the lady in the bottle.”

My staying will end my life as a Flyer. I love Marcel madly, crazily. It doesn't matter if I die sooner than normal if I can stop a great artist from a wasteful death.

“I will stay with you! You can be recognized in your time as the artist you are. We can live in a cabin in the woods or a brownstone in New York!” I’m full of foolish excitement. “You could escape!”

“Yeah?” he says, dubiously. “Escape what?”

“The alcohol. It *will* kill you.”

“I have never denied that I drink. Drinking is part of what I am.”

“No, it’s a disease! We cure it in our people. It’s simple enough to do. It’s all chemical.” I sound shrill and too modern.

“Somebody cured everyone of art, too, so you say.” He looks angrily at me. “Spirit love, Angel blessed, I can’t change.” He looks at me with that clear, honest vision that I fell for in the first place.

“You came and went like the angel you are. That's why I love you so.” He gets up and goes to the door. I know he’s going to the bootlegger’s tent to get another bottle.

Lights go out in my mind. A crashing pain felled my heart. My anger’s huge, sudden, with a fury I didn't know I had. He’s wrong about art and drinking, that poisonous fallacy that killed many great artists of these centuries. And he’s rejecting me!

“Then,” I heard my voice say, “Die as you're doomed to die—dead in a gully!” My voice rattles the one pane of decent glass in the place: “Dead of drink!”

He smiles sadly at the door. It occurs to me that I never checked his last meeting with the saloon girl. There is a sick feeling in my stomach. What if she is me?

“If that’s what was meant,” Marcel takes a breath, “Though I can’t be called religious, I’ll take my fate.” He goes to the door, and his voice softens. “I can’t be owned, not even by you, Angel.” Then he shut the door.

I flew, my Kind senses opened, and I fell into a travel trance. I went as far as fast as I could, but I couldn’t make myself leave the milieu entirely. Trapped by my emotions, I timed-myself away from the mountains, to tell the tale at saloons in San Francisco where they saw a crazy girl, drinking absinthe, wanting to go back or home, but suddenly having lost the ability to fly.

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Proctor Rure closed his eyes and leaned back in his ancient leather chair.

“Proctor, I have failed, more than ever before. If you hadn’t come to me in San Francisco, I would have been lost forever.”

“Oh my wayward lamb, how do we heal you before your next visitation?” His voice is calm.

“But the art, we lost it all—I never got it home. I can’t go! I have failed utterly.” Tears stream down my face.

“Failure teaches compassion,” the Proctor said.

We walk to the Mission Glass Pavilion in which our precious treasury is stored. It’s a velvety gray night, soft air covering me.

Proctor Rure opens the door. The gallery fills with light. Then I see the photographs! The vast panoramas of the mountains, the miners with their donkeys, the early logging operations, they’re all here! My head floods with emotions! Tears fall. I run in, and dance among them.

“How? Who?” I said, assuming someone after me had been more successful. My stay in the rehab ward wasn’t long, but I knew I’d been a saloon girl for years.

“By some miracle, they were with us all the time, in a mountain cavern, just unearthed by archeologists. They are not new.” The Proctor smiles at me and reads a dedication in spidery old script on the front of a photograph. “To My Angel: Whenever She Is.”

My heart stops.

“Your Marcel did it, himself.” The Proctor continued, “I looked again at the newspaper archives. He went on a bender, and sobered up, hoping his Angel would return. He never touched another drop. Humanity never ceases to surprise us.” Rure smiled.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS AND ARTISTS

### **Colleen Anderson**

Colleen's poetry has twice been nominated for the Aurora Award, the Rhysling, and won second place in the Crucible and Ranu competitions. She has edited and co-edited three anthologies. Some new and forthcoming poems are in *Polu Texni*, *Random Planets*, *Eternal Haunted Summer* and *Frozen Wavelets*. She will be guest of honour at the Creative Ink Festival in 2020.

[www.colleenanderson.wordpress.com](http://www.colleenanderson.wordpress.com)

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### **Roxanne Barbour**

Roxanne has been reading science fiction since the age of eleven when she discovered *Miss Pickereil 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/>

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### **Elizabeth Buchan-Kimmerly**

Elizabeth spent many years in the federal public service, but also worked in retail, selling everything from wood stoves to stamps. She has Ontario provincial certificates which allow her to install prefabricated chimneys and to

teach religion in public schools. She wrote a brochure on raising goats for Agriculture Canada in 1970. *October 1954* is her first fiction publication.

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### **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.

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### **Augustus Clark**

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

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### **J. Paul Cooper**

J. Paul has a Bachelor of Arts (Political Science) and is a member of the Writer’s Guild of Alberta and the Imaginative Fiction Writers Association. His short fiction, articles and essays have been published in magazines, online literary journals, and print anthologies. His self-published eBook *What if? A*

*Collection of Short Fiction*, is available through several online retailers, as well as Canadian and American libraries. J. Paul has also written unpublished screenplays.

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### **Dirck de Lint**

Dirck's work has appeared in *AE: The Canadian SF Review* and *Pseudopod*.

His website is <http://dirckwrites.wordpress.com>

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### **Catherine Girczyc**

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

Contact via: Twitter: @ Cat\_WritesSFF

Webpage: [Catherine Girczyc](#)

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### **Neile Graham**

Neile is a Canadian writer who lives and works in Seattle, where she is a workshop director for the Clarion West Writers Workshop for speculative fiction—work that won her a World Fantasy Award. Her publications include three full-length print collections, most recently *Blood Memory*, and a CD, *She Says: Poems Selected & New*, and has poems in various on-line and print journals, including *Strange Horizons*, *Lady Churchill's Rosebud Wristlet*, and *Kaleidotrope*. A new collections, *The Walk She Takes*, was published in 2019.

## **Mike McArthur**

Mike lives in the Okanagan, and when not fending off bills, he regularly takes part in obscure literary cage matches online. His work has also appeared at [www.everydayfiction.com](http://www.everydayfiction.com)

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## **Gareth McGorman**

Gareth is a scale modeller and photographer based in Toronto. He takes photos of hand painted figures to illustrate how their lives would be if they lived among us in the full-scale world.

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## **Quinlan Moss**

Quinlan was born and raised in Nova Scotia, and, as was customary in those parts, taught herself to ride on a donkey. As is the case for most east coasters who aim to be employed, she eventually ended up in Toronto. She works as a lawyer, dispensing niche advice that only large financial institutions can use (which makes her useless to any family members or friends who need help with their divorce).

*Pink Hair* is her first fiction sale.

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## **Lynne Sargent**

Lynne is a writer, aerialist, and philosophy Ph.D student at the University of Waterloo. She's been published in venues such as *Strange Horizons*, *Wild Musette* and *The Reckoning*, and was a 2018 Aurora Award Nominee. If you want to find out more and see pictures of her cats, follow her on

Twitter@SamLynneS.

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## **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 twenty 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), *A Visit to the Kafka Café* (Poetry, Ekstasis Editions, 2018), and *Gregor Samsa Was Never in The Beatles* (Stories, Ekstasis Editions, 2019). 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, *Gregor Samsa Was Never in The Beatles: Speculative Fictions New & Selected* (Ekstasis Editions, 2019), see:

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

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## **Lisa Timpf**

Lisa is a freelance writer living in Simcoe, Ontario. Her writing has appeared in a variety of venues, including *Star\*Line*, *The Martian Wave*, *Scifaikuest*, *New Myths*, and *Chicken Soup for the Soul: My Very Good, Very Bad Dog*.

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## **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.

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## AFTERWORDS

*by The Graeme*

This issue is set to go. For a one-man operation it is surprisingly quick and easy to accomplish, providing I ignore everything else in life and drink even more coffee than I did when I was at University over four decades ago. Coffee must be good for me. I like to think of it as an artificial IQ boost. It allows me to concentrate more and decide faster. I only wish I had used it in High School. Might have improved my grades.

Hmm, not as far-fetched as it sounds. Had a C+ average in High School. Then I discovered coffee. Got an A- average in University. Obviously coffee is responsible. No other explanation possible, or even conceivable. I owe everything to the magic chemical caffeine. There may be some other factors involved but I'm sure they're minor.

Wonder if I could achieve Einstein status by munching on chocolate-covered roasted coffee beans? Now there's a worthy scientific experiment!

Meanwhile I've set my sites on getting out the next issue in January. Pretty sure I can do it if I drink enough coffee. I've got all the material I need. My standard template awaits layout. Only takes me a day or two to write up contracts for the contributors and email them out. Usually get written confirmation of signing within 24 hours. Payment via PayPal or Interac requires a couple of days at most. Easy. The editing is the hard part, but if I drink enough coffee I can get that task done in minutes.

Mind you, my natural sloth and laziness often delays things for months. Coffee alone doesn't suffice. Just makes me a wide-awake slug. But if I drink coffee with grim determination, with fantastical purpose, I can do it! I know I can. I will!

And then ... and then ... I will open up for submissions in February. Rest assured my coffee consumption will peak as I peruse the submitted manuscripts. I read every submission from beginning to end. The "must-haves" get immediate confirmation. The "rejects" will wait a while, since I need time to build up the courage to explain why they're not quite suitable for Polar Borealis. The full power of my caffeine-boosted intellect will be unleashed on the "maybes" since I hate to reject a good story if all it needs is a bit of a rewrite. That's when I send people suggestions and begin the process of give-and-take till something mutually satisfying emerges.

Did I mention that publishing a magazine is loads of fun? It is, you know. Now go back to page 19 for details on how to submit in February, 2020.