

POLAR BOREALIS

Magazine of Canadian Speculative Fiction
(Issue #30 – May 2024)



POLAR BOREALIS MAGAZINE

Aurora Award-winning Magazine of Canadian Speculative Fiction (2020, 2021, 2022, 2023)

Issue #30 – May 2024 (Vol. 8#3. WN#30)

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

< [The Graeme](#) >

All contributors are paid before publication. Anyone interested in submitting a story, poem, or artwork, 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: *High Priest* – by Derek Newman-Stille

EDITORIAL

I'm excited. Starting Saturday, June 8th, every Canadian citizen who is a member of CSFFA (Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy Association) will be able to vote for the 2024 Aurora Awards celebrating 2023 works by Canadian science fiction/fantasy genre professionals and fans. Voting will close Saturday, July 13 at 11:59 p.m. EDT.

You can check out the ballot on the CSFFA Website. See works you'd been meaning to get around to reading but never acquired a copy? You're in luck. You can download a voters' package in each category, featuring excerpts or the entire work of the majority of novels, stories, poems and other works on the ballot. The packages are free to download, it being understood the works are for your eyes only and not to be shared.

You have a month to check out the works which catch your eye. Lots of free reading as you peruse the wonderfully creative stuff the members felt worthy to be placed on the ballot. Think of the money you'll save! Money to be spent the following month on yet more books! If you're a typical reader, that is.

I am very pleased to see my two magazines *Polar Borealis* and *Polar Starlight* (the latter edited by Rhea E. Rose) in the "Best Fan Writing or Publication" category. Both are in the fan category because I don't charge readers a fee and consequently the magazines are free to download. Readers in 119 countries are happy to do so. On the other hand, all my contributors, being paid, fall into the professional categories. Happy to see that David Shultz has been nominated in the "Best Poem/Song" category for his poem "The Scarecrow" which appeared in issue #9 of *Polar Starlight*.

Polar Borealis has won four years in a row. I confess I'd be happy to win again. Yet I freely admit I'd love to see Rhea E. Rose win for her brilliant editing of *Polar Starlight* Magazine. She selects the poems, groups them thematically, then determines the sequence of placement to "build" the theme of each issue. All I do is publish the result of her subtle yet striking editing.

The ego in me wants to yell "Vote for me! Vote for me!" But my pride as the proud publisher of Rose's *Polar Starlight* believes her creative editing is due for an Aurora. I'd be delighted if she won. It's about time.

It's up to you.

Go to www.csffa.ca to download the voters' packages and plunge into good reading. You'll find the ballot listed in this issue starting on page 66.

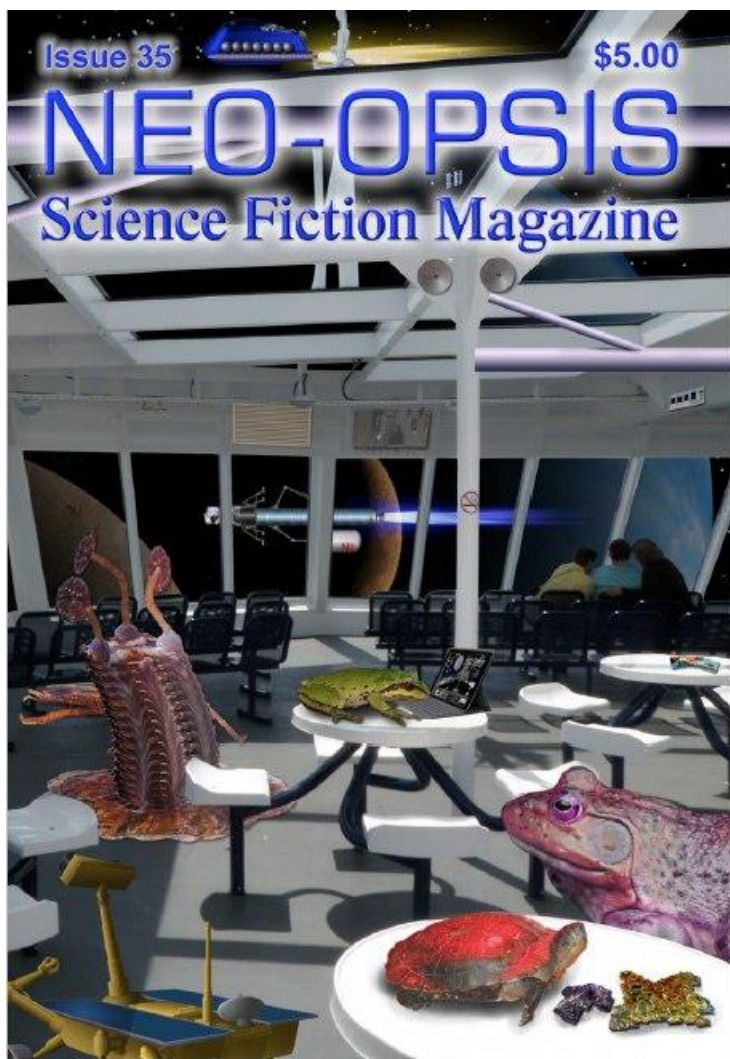
Cheers! The Graeme

TENDRILS

by James Grotkowski

this thing on my back
eating through my pressure suit
tendrils soft at first

NEO-OPSIS SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE #35 is published out of Victoria, BC, Canada.



Neo-opsis Science Fiction Magazine is published by the husband-and-wife team Karl and Stephanie Johanson.

The first issue of Neo-opsis Science Fiction Magazine was printed October 10, 2003.

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

COVER: *Observation Deck*
– by Karl Johanson

CONTENTS:

A Rock and a Hard Place – by K.Z. Richards
Ransom and the Open Window
– by Robert Runté
The Game Designers
– (excerpt) by Karl Johanson
Ganymede – by Annette McFarland
Once I was a Grain of Sand
– by Stephanie Ann Johanson
The Blank White Page
– by Stephanie Ann Johanson
Cliches and Genres
– by Stephanie Ann Johanson

Reviews of movies, games, and TV shows, plus news about Awards, Science discoveries, SF stuff, letters of comment, and *A Walk Through the Periodic Table* article.

Find it here: < [Neo-opsis Magazine](#) >

SMELLS LIKE THE END OF THE WORLD

By Lene MacLeod

It wasn't the cooking. Perry's offerings were mediocre but not garbage, not the source of the rancid odour Shelly smelled in the diner. The attack on her olfactory sense grew stronger as she placed the last of the newly filled salt and pepper shakers on the tables. A gas leak? No, this was something else. Something alien and new.

Customers trudged in, seeking their caffeine fixes and greasy breakfast specials so Shelly hustled between shouting orders to Perry, putting more coffee on, slinging plates, and clearing tables. Not one person complained about that stench in the air.

"My son's friend saw it!" a customer said to a woman seated at the table next to his. He held up a newspaper displaying a grainy photo of what looked like a flying saucer.

"What's that?" Shelly said, filling the old guy's cup with more coffee. "You're not believing in UFOs now, are you, Charlie?"

Charlie's eyes were wide, "That kid doesn't tell tales, and now look. It's in the morning paper!"

Shelly reached over with the coffee pot—she had long arms, so handy in this business—and refilled the woman's cup. "Well, then, if it's in the newspaper it must be true!" she said, with a friendly smile meant to disguise the smirk she felt coming on.

When the morning crowd had thinned, Shelly took five with a cup of coffee and a butter tart. *UFOs! Ridiculous.*

Taking one last sip, as a few more people entered the restaurant, a memory haunted her. Fragments of a movie she'd seen years ago. There was a spaceship, more like a zeppelin shape than a saucer. There were aliens, and a diner a lot like this one. *What was that movie called?*

More bits came to Shelly as she served the customers. She recalled a scene showing the darkness of outer space, trails of light zapping by, and the curve of Earth below. *So real.*

Clearing the last tables, she hauled the dish bins to the kitchen. "Hey, Perry, did ya ever see a movie about aliens, one where they were in a diner like this?"

Perry was cleaning the grill, getting ready for the lunch crowd. Not Shelly's shift. She worked strictly mornings. "Aliens in a diner? Nah, never heard of such a thing."

Shelly took off her apron and tossed it in the laundry hamper near the back door of the diner. "Oh, and what the heck is that smell, Perry?"

"You saying my food stinks?"

"No, I've been smelling this *smell* all morning. Rancid, but weird. Sorta sweet, too? You can't smell it?"

Perry shrugged and got back to his cleaning.

On the walk home, which was a short one; Shelly's apartment was just around the corner and half a block north, more parts of the movie bubbled to the surface of her memory. She just couldn't recall the name of this movie. It was driving her nuts. *Damn that Charlie and his UFOs.*

And she could *still* smell that smell.

Putting the key into the lock of her apartment door, Shelly tried assembling the movie pieces in her mind. There was the outer space scene of the spaceship nearing Earth, there was a scene in which aliens, tall skinny things, held laser weapons. Then there was the diner. *Did they attack the diner? No, no. That wasn't it.*

The light on her answering machine was blinking. Odd, because nobody ever called her unless it was work and she'd just left there. Unless Edna didn't show up for her lunch shift—*no way, Perry, you can't call me back in.*

Shelly headed to her bathroom. The message could wait. Right now, the strange odour had become so strong she could taste it. She was almost gagging on the smell. She drew a glass of water and drank it down, then looked at her reflection in the mirror. Her face looked older since the day she first started at the diner—"That's it!" she said. The scene with the diner was *not* from the movie. She was getting all mixed up. The memory was of when she first walked into the restaurant, applying for the job—

Only, I wasn't me. I think I was wearing a disguise.

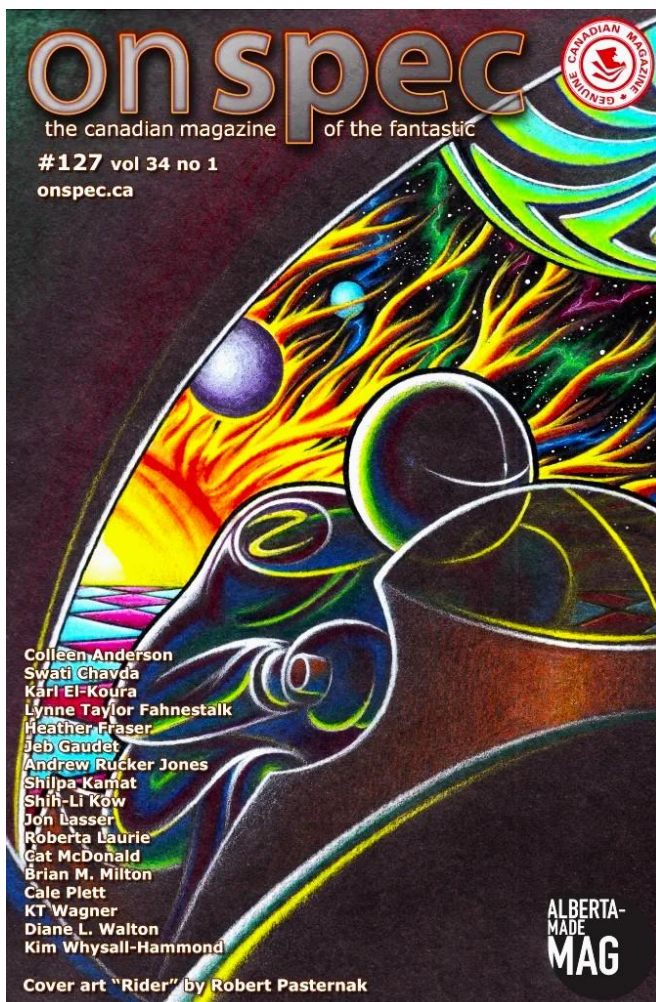
The smell became unbearable, like it was coming from within Shelly's own nose. Gazing into the mirror, she pulled her nostrils wide and upon seeing the glowing, neon green-hued membranes she remembered who she was and when she had landed on this planet.

She pulled the offensive pseudo human flesh up, ripping it from her nose. The stink finally began to fade away. She continued ripping and pulling, like the story Perry had told her about his wicked sunburn when he was a kid. He'd pulled layers of himself away. Like that, but these layers ran deep.

The tall, thin, grey-blue humanoid creature with long arms walked out of the bathroom, leaving the shed Shelly suit torn, dripping, and hollow on the floor. It pressed a button on the answering machine and listened to the directions of where to meet the ship to gather the laser weapons. It and an army of creatures, or rather armies of creatures, spread over the world, had studied the planet long enough. They lived like the natives for an unbiased experience, memory of their true selves hidden deep. They now shed their waitstaff, taxi driver, grocery clerk, and construction worker shells. The rest would be easy. Victory would be theirs. They could smell it.

ON SPEC MAGAZINE – #127 - V.34 #1

COVER: *Rider* – by Robert Pasternak



FICTION:

- Cleaning House* – by Jeb Gaudet
- Better Luck Next Time* – by Andrew Rucker Jones
- The Other Half* – by Cale Plett
- In Exchange* – by Shih-Li Kow
- Frozen Charlotte* – by KT Wagner
- Salvation of the Innocents* – by Karl El-Koura
- John Barleycorn Must Die, and your Little Dog Toto, Too*
– by John Lasser
- Ogres in the Mist* – by Brian M. Milton
- Routine Resupply* – by Heather Fraser
- The Cosmic Cartographer* – Swati Chavda
- Dying of the Light* – Colleen Anderson
- The Move* – Shilpa Kamat
- Home is* – Kim Whysall-Hammond

NON-FICTION:

- Robert Pasternak: Beyond an Artist*
– Artist Interview by Cat McDonald
- Cale Plett: The Darkness at the Edge*
– Author Interview by Roberta Laurie
- Bot: "Acme Robot Fido" & Comic "I Survived Roswell"*
– by Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk

Find it at < [On Spec Magazine #127](#) >

TAILS

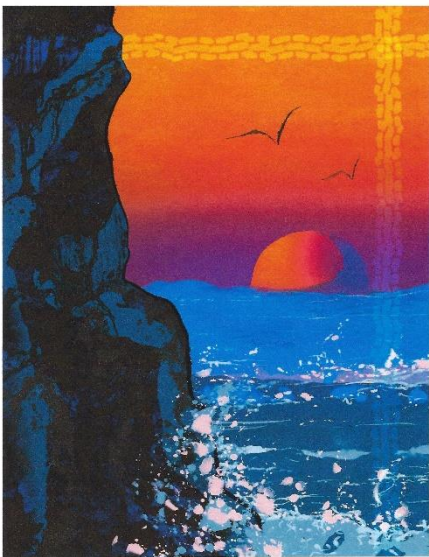
by Larissa Peters

What if mermaids poured down from the sky
landing in the middle of Baltimore? Fins flapping
flopping, they crawl away in search for water—
anything wet: mist, puddles, the ocean.
How long would they survive? Dragging their
bodies from the middle of the city, short panicked
breaths push through gills. Scales leave
shimmering slime behind tails flipping down Charles Street
towards the harbor, ignoring shouts all around,
Don't go there! The water will kill you!
It's a risk to try.
It's a risk not to.

POLAR STARLIGHT #14 – April 2024

POLAR STARLIGHT

Magazine of Canadian Speculative Poetry
(Issue #14 – April 2024)



Published by R. Graeme Cameron, Polar Starlight is edited by Rhea E. Rose. Each issue features cover art and 16 speculative fiction genre poems.

Cover: *Planet 3 Beckons* – by Swati Chavda

The 14th issue contains poetry by Gregg Chamberlain, Carolyn Clink, J.D. Dresner, Greg Fewer, Neile Graham, Jameson Grey, Geoffrey Hart, Derek Newman-Stille, Guy Immega, Frances Skene, Mahaila Smith, J.M. Spronk, Marcie Lynn Tentchoff, Lisa Timpf, and Mark Thomas.

Available for free download: < [Polar Starlight #14](#) >

TERMINATED

by Monica Sagle Zwikstra

Bob Millet climbed the metal steps to the workers' residences. The magnetic strips on his boots clinked, then clunked. The hiss and whir of his vacuum suit's various pumps produced a steady presence in his ear. A twelve-hour shift on the welder, and he was tired. He wanted nothing more than a beer and his bed.

Bob clomped his way along his level, past the doors of other workers to his own. His keycard didn't work in the airlock. He hissed through clenched teeth and tried again. *Damn. Twelve-hour shifts in these god-awful EV suits and the damn key doesn't work.*

The message board on the door fizzled and cleared.

Please report to the housing office.

Great, down four freaking levels. Wish they would finish the inside walkway. Walking in full environmental suits meant moving slow, and he was already tired. He made his way to the nearest stairway and headed to the housing office.

He reflected on the work completed since his arrival. This very stairway, which wrapped around the outside of the towering cylinder with landings that branched off to the walkways leading to the living quarters, was testament to progress and to his work as a space welder.

Today, breathable air filled not only the living quarters, but the science labs, greenhouses, water reclamation, and social centers. As soon as the gravitational units got finished, they could move about inside the colony without EV suits, making life here more comfortable, particularly for the families arriving soon. He looked forward to his own family arriving. It had been so long, he had trouble remembering what his wife looked like.

He arrived at the housing office and entered through the airlock. He climbed out of his suit, straightened his standard-issue checkered shirt and hiked up his jeans. They shifted downward on his slender five-foot-nine frame. He ran a hand over his short dark hair, trying to push it into shape, but it insisted on standing on end.

Giving up, he entered the waiting area.

The tiny white room was sterile in its newness. The beige carpeting did nothing to warm the space; however, it prevented the hollow sounds of an empty room.

He leaned on the waist-high counter and smiled at a young woman in her twenties with shoulder-length blond hair. The scent of roses hung around her, and the nametag said, Hello I am Judy.

“Hello, Judy. I seem to have a problem with my key card. Could you help me with it?”

She flashed a bright smile. “Let me see your card. I’ll see what I can do.” She swiped it along the side of a computer beside her.

“Your name is Bob Millet?”

“Yes, it is.”

Her mouth pursed, and her brows furrowed. “Ah, room number 2435?”

“Yes, what seems to be the problem?”

“Oh, I’m so sorry.” She looked around at the empty desks behind her and then back to Bob. Her eyes filled with tears. “It... it appears your contract is terminated.”

“Terminated?” He pulled himself upright, a quiver in the pit of his stomach. “What the... You said... terminated?”

He squared his jaw, his teeth clicked, and he sucked in a deep breath.

It’s not her fault. It’s a mistake. Stay calm.

“I came here because my door lock doesn’t work. My family is coming next month. They can’t just up and terminate my contract.”

Her eyes widened, wet with unspent tears. “I’m so sorry, Mr. Millet. Let me get my supervisor. Maybe I did something wrong. Just hang on, okay?” She fled along the hall.

He took deep breaths, trying to remain calm. *This is stupid. Five years I’ve worked the goddamn space welder. They run me ragged with 12-hour shifts and now this. Idiots.* He paced the little room, six steps one way and six back. Clenched and unclenched his fists.

Minutes later, Judy and another person; the little tag on her jacket said Supervisor, arrived back at the desk. They whispered and touched the screen in front of them. The supervisor frowned and swept her long dark hair behind an ear. She ran his card through the computer again and they conferred for a few moments as they checked the information on the screen.

The supervisor shook her head. “I am sorry, sir, the information is correct. Your door did not work because your contract has been terminated, ending your residency as well.”

Her hand slipped below the counter. *Is she calling security?*

Bob’s stomach lurched, and his pulse raced. He took several deep breaths. “It must be a mistake, please, look again.”

“There is no mistake, sir; the contract is marked Terminate.”

This is nuts. He thumped his fist against his thigh, his lips tightening. His chest constricted as his mind raced through the possibilities. “Then I want to appeal. Who do I see to appeal this farce?”

“I am sorry, sir, there is no appeal. The contract is the only legal process here, and yours is terminated.”

Bob glanced at two burly men as they entered the room, then back to the supervisor. She gave a curt nod to them and backed away from the desk.

“Wait, wait a minute.” He reached out to stop her from leaving. He pleaded, “How do I get my stuff? How do I get back down to Earth?”

“You do not understand.” Her eyes softened, and in a gentle voice she said, “You do not get your things. You do not go to Earth. You are to be—*terminated.*” The emphasis on the last word penetrated.

He looked the supervisor in the eyes. “Terminated.” Bile rose, burning his throat. His legs wobbled and the pain in his chest threatened to burst through. His jaw dropped, and he jerked his head back. “Oh my god, you think... I’m a construct?”

He gawked at their faces. Judy wiped at the tears flowing on her cheeks and the supervisor bowed her head. “You mean to, to... terminate me?” A spasm from head to toe, as adrenaline shot through his body and his chest burned. “I’m not a construct.”

His eyes swung from the supervisor to the girl. “I’m not.” Pain exploded in his core as the two burly fellows reached for his arms, one on each side.

Pulling away, yelling. “No, no, get off me.” Arms flailing, he struggled to break free. His chest hurt and the blood in his body raced to his head and squeezed. “I’m human, you idiots. I’m not a robot. Let me go. Get your hands off me. Don’t do this...”

He squirmed and pulled as the guards grabbed at his arms. As they pulled him off his feet and dragged him away, his heels thumping and kicking on the carpet, he screamed, “Please, please, good god, you can’t do this. I’m human.”

Screams of “I’m huuuuuuuuuummmmmmanann...” faded down the hallway where a metal door banged shut and cut off the terrible noise.

Judy, tears streaming down her face, said, “It’s horrible. I don’t think I can do this job. It’s heartbreaking.”

The supervisor nodded. “I know. It is very hard. I am a construct and I feel for them. The problem is in the Millets’ programming model.”

She bowed her head and whispered, “They truly believe they are human.”

SCORCHED EARTH

by Jameson Grey

(Previously Published in *Annihilation* by Black Ink Fiction)

We were outside the heat blast radius.

As the paroxysm of fire razed the night sky,
we believed this was something to be thankful for.

We fell sick within hours,
fallout from the explosion
grazing the town's eastern limits.

The authorities came the next day—
to remove the dead,
to evacuate the living,
to clear away the dying.

Within days we lay in hospital beds,
our skin running thin,
our organs dissolving.

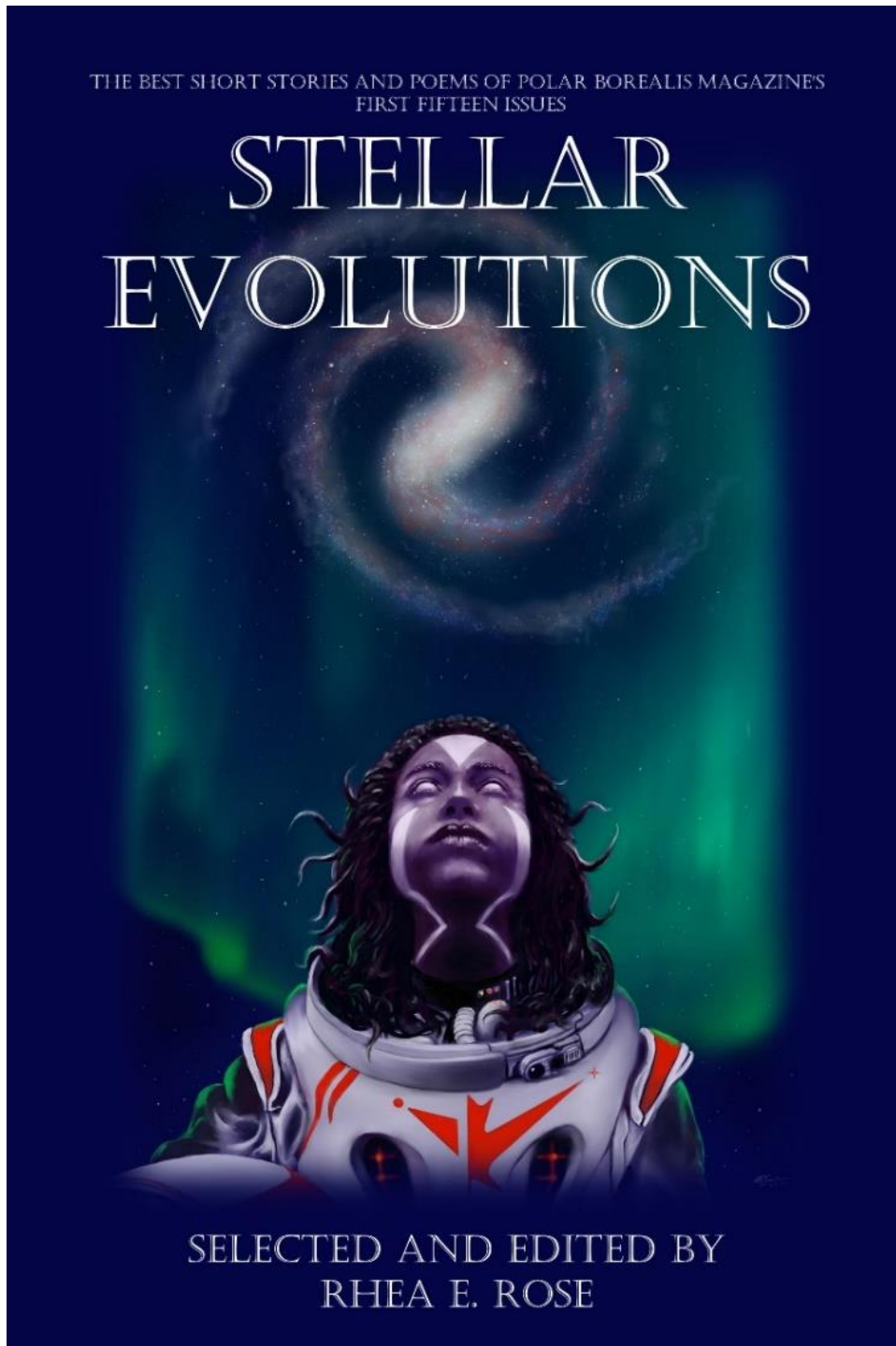
Within weeks,
we were all but gone.

The town remained,
alone.

We were outside the heat blast radius.

Death came as swift mercy
for those who'd stood within.

The Best Short Stories and Poems from the first Fifteen Issues of *Polar Borealis Magazine*



Cover: *Space Force*

– by M.D. Jackson

Poetry – by Lynne Sargent, J.J. Steinfeld, Melanie Martilla, Lisa Timpf, Kirsten Emmott, Catherine Girczyc, Andrea Schlecht, Selena Martens, JYT Kennedy, Taral Wayne & Walter Wentz, Douglas Shimizu, Marcie Lynn Tentchoff, Matt Moore, Richard Stevenson, Mary Choo, and Y.A. Pang.

Stories – by Mark Braidwood, Jonathan Sean Lyster, JYT Kennedy, Casey June Wolf, Monica Sagle, K.M. McKenzie, Jeremy A. Cook, Lawrence Van Hoof, Lisa Voisin, Elizabeth Buchan-Kimmerly, Dean Wirth, Robert Dawson, Michael Donoghue, Steve Fahnstalk, Michelle F. Goddard, Chris Campeau, Ben Nein, Karl Johanson, William Lewis, Tonya Liburd, Jon Gauthier, Jonathan Creswell-Jones, and Akem.

Available on Kindle for \$2.99 CAD

Go To: [Kindle version via Amazon.ca](#)

Or you can order it as a 209-page paperback, 9 x 6 inches in size, for \$15.00 CAD.

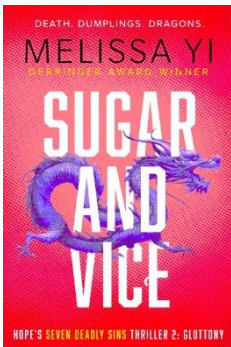
Go to: [Print version via Amazon.ca](#)

STARS COLLIDE

by *Rebecca Franklyn*

orbits and stars
collide
above the desert
dunes
dandelions bloom and die
for seasons never change
and summer is eternal
for Mars
is now home

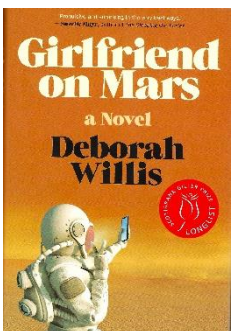
Sugar and Vice – by Melissa Yi.



The book is something of a miracle, a mystery with all the traditional trimmings, such as endless revelations that only deepen the conundrum at hand, combined with a flowing stream of satirical insight into contemporary social idiosyncrasies and moronic behaviour-advocacy that all adds up to an original and highly entertaining read. “Sugar and Vice” will make you think, make you chuckle, and maybe just maybe, think twice before entering any sort of contest. I like this book. A lot. Amusing *and* relevant. – *Amazing Stories* (RG Cameron)

Find it here: [Sugar and Vice](#)

Girlfriend on Mars – by Deborah Willis.



“Girlfriend on Mars” is a science fiction dystopia in the finest tradition of science fiction dystopias. It’s a commentary on today, on what we think we are, what we’re not, and how the powers that be take full advantage of our willful ignorance. This is an intellectually challenging book. I’m not surprised it made the Giller Prize longlist. It is perceptive, disturbing, revelatory, and important; overall an excellent work of fiction that is not at all fictional but rather a harbinger of needful truths. – *Amazing Stories* (RG Cameron)

Find it here: [Girlfriend on Mars](#)

THE WHITE ROBE

by Michèle Laframboise

The priests descend the concrete stairs of the temple, their immaculate robes cleaving the dark mass of followers. The guards' armours form a red necklace around the holy men. Not a drop of blood from the latest offering clings to their white robes, a sure mark of the Gods' favour. The procession marches to an open court packed with petitioners.

Filthy hands reach out, begging a favour or wanting to touch the priests. The guards beat them off with their sticks.

A keening rises over the mumbled prayers, getting louder and louder. Heads turn to the source of the noise, a dishevelled woman, her dress in tatters, hobbling toward the procession.

The grizzled captain leading the guards squints. Even after the purges, there remain some bad apples resenting the sacrifices. She is clutching an object in her right hand. Before he can grab his weapon, the crone launches a fistful of mud at the high priest.

The projectile leaves a brown smudge on the white fabric. Followers recoil in shock at this sacrilege. The high priest, his snowy hair bound in ornate braids, his ashen skin almost as pale as his robe, merely smiles.

Then, the smudge begins to fade.

The crowd stares, open-mouthed, as the offending stain is absorbed, the white fibres digesting the minerals, metabolizing the residual moisture into new threads. It is said that a Temple robe can repair any laceration of its fabric in seconds. That the robe adjusts automatically to body growth. Wicked tongues say the priests never need to wash their garment. Nastier tongues say they never need to wash, period.

By the time the guards attend the situation, the smudge—and the old woman—has disappeared.

The priest nonchalantly brushes off his immaculate dress. Then he signals the guards to proceed. The procession resumes, the faithful carefully sidestepping the small, darkened crater marking the place where the crone had stood.

From a nearby building, a flash of metal winks. A thunder blast echoes over the crowd.

The high priest falls on his back, a red flower blooming on his chest. His lips quiver, but his last prayer or curse is drowned in the turmoil.

The guards understand too late that the crone had been a diversion. The captain sends men to secure the building, knowing in advance that they won't catch the culprit or find any clue. But they must look busy if they want to keep their heads attached.

A few youngsters in the mob cheer mindlessly, but most of the onlookers grow silent, gazing at the body.

The threads of the dress move, tiny fabric snakes joining over the gory hole. The living robe absorbs the nourishing blood, the skin cells and body water of its late host, growing into an immaculate shroud.

The New Empire – by Alison McBain.

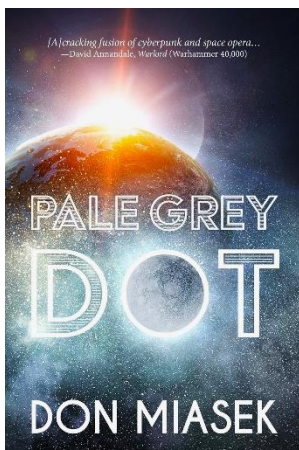


Alison McBain does a masterful (no pun intended) job in revealing how genuinely monstrous slavery was, is, and will be. The book is a wake-up call loud and strident by virtue of her excellent characterization of the protagonist Jiangxi and his constant, desperate obsessing over the problem at hand. You will accept and believe what he perceives, and through him, the greater problem threatening us all. Remarkable technique. Remarkable book.

– *Amazing Stories* (RG Cameron)

Find it here: [The New Empire](#)

Pale Grey Dot – by Don Miasek.



“Pale Grey Dot” is complex, yet a pleasure to read. What I consider particularly brilliant is its theme that A.I.-augmented humans may pose a far greater threat to humanity than A.I. alone, and may well come as a threat much sooner. It suggests our near future will indeed produce marvels, but to the benefit of virtually no one. Not quite what Gernsback had in mind when he advocated technological advancement. This book is a very original take on what many of us fear. One heck of a debut novel. – *Amazing Stories* (RG Cameron)

Find it here: [Pale Grey Dot](#)

VASILISA

by Melanie Marttila

Mat's last gift to me was a
motanka. Talk to her, she said, feed her, love her, and
she will always be with you, always help you, even
when you think you are beyond earthly help.

This doll against the dubious gifts of the future,
as if Mat had the sight;

what I did not know, and she did not say—this
motanka, passed from mother to daughter since
time out of mind, carries instinctual, feminine
knowledge, is invested with wild magic, is a
blessing.

With my motanka, I
survived Machekha's abuse, navigated forest
dark and deep, endured Baba Yaga's three tasks,
but when she asked how I'd done it, I said by Mat's blessing

—my motanka a secret not hers to know, not
mine to share—

the witch would not suffer a blessed child in her hut,
expelled me. I received an everlasting coal, though—
she could not deny her tasks were done
perfectly.

Machekha receives the coal she
commanded me to obtain, avarice and
disbelief marring her features. She burns, her
body reduced to ash. Soot and char should smell
bitter, but they are
sweet.

FLAT SPIN

By Shane Williston

When you leaned over, your face so close, when you put your lips to my cheek to say goodbye, well, I really wanted so badly to turn my head so that our lips would just barely touch, almost by accident. But when I tried, there was nothing. Turns out, you can't turn your head even a little when you are dead. I sensed in that small moment that you cared for me, maybe even a lot, that you were hurting, you were sad I was gone. And when your eyelashes flickered on the side of my face, I swear, I tried like anything to fire up a few blood cells and get them moving again. Come on, team! I pleaded. But they had already been resting too long. They were done. I think a few flipped over, but nothing close to restarting my wilted heart. I would have given anything for an accidental touch of your lips to mine. Always wanting more, right to the very end. And a little past that.

I remember the time that you grabbed my arm when you solved the coding glitch on the array. The solution just appeared in your subconscious during breakfast, and you were so certain you had it figured out. I wanted your hand on my arm to be something more than a spontaneous expression of excitement. I hadn't experienced a moment like that in such a long time, that shared sense of happiness. You were right about the fix, and finally we were able to fully power up for the first time in more than a year.

When you caught me messing around online with the German performance artist (and fervent ISS follower) while I was running the pressure test in the Service Module, instead of hurrying past, you just stayed at the door and watched as I closed the screen and got myself together. Just practicing one-string banjo, I said, trying to make light of an extremely embarrassing situation. Interesting, you replied, as if taking patient history. I didn't know the German had made recordings. I wonder if the videos helped fund exceptional works of art.

That evening you put Béla Fleck on the sound system just as everyone was entering Node 1 for dinner. You said something about Béla Fleck being a virtuoso on the one-string banjo (not true—he plays a five-string banjo, I later verified); and that one day you'd like to learn to play. No one knew what you were talking about. My ears nearly lit on fire. Ruthlessly intelligent, I admired everything about you.

You forgot to shut down my sense-memory cloud link. Everyone did. Too much going on. This is why I ended up with a few intermittent thoughts and feelings, even after the rest of me was kaput. Virtual Cognition Latency, a bizarre phenomenon, and an especially active area of current research. I will make a terrific case study one day.

I was the fourth ISS cadaver. The French brothers, two space tourists who fought in the Quest Module and smashed the airlock, nearly killing everyone. Your Japanese colleague who died three years ago while repairing the antenna on the Russian Services Module. And me. All men. Did you decide I had an aneurysm? That makes sense. Rotten luck.

You used the Canadarm3 to reach into to the cargo bay and gently grip my suit by the scruff, a momma cat tending her dead kitten. Only you had the skills to do it without banging into everything or snipping my head from my shoulders. You cradled my frozen body with the arm and sent me off in a slow, flat spin toward the stars—fourteen months, six days, and twenty-one hours later to burn up on re-entry, so you had calculated. Correctly, I might add.

Okay, time's up. Logging out, forever.



On the leafy planet Luurdu, young Adalou dreams of becoming a wind mistress. Alas, she faces a thorny competition because kite choreography brings a high prestige to the Gardener women who excel in the art. Adalou must also deal with her family's opposition.

I am Michèle Laframboise. By now, my counter is currently set at 70+ published stories, 18 trad-pub novels, 39 self-pub books and 12+ graphic novels, one of which is [Mistress of the Winds](#)

NOCTURNE FOR THE NIGHT

by J.D. Dresner

(Previously published in *Academy of the Heart and Mind* May 2023)

The night sky is a liar,
a dishonest December tree
hiding dead bulbs behind young ones that still shine.

It is a time machine,
laced with lambent echoes of fledgling suns,
reminding us that our now is not so now.

It is an assemblage of epitaphs,
jumbled and overlapping like letters in a word search,
a discordant mourning for those consumed.

The night sky is a graveyard
of canines, centaurs, and crabs.
Yet to us they are alive and watching.

POLAR BOREALIS

Magazine of Canadian Speculative Fiction
(Issue #1 - January/February 2016)



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See < [Patreon Site for Polar Borealis Magazine](#) >

THE PROXIMA CENTAURI SCHOOL FOR TROUBLED CHILDREN

by *Elis Montgomery*

(Previously published in Dread Space Vol. 2)

“Soldata Rosa Bertelli, good morning! Let me start by saying I’m sorry for rousing you so early. Things have changed.”

I barely register the words. I’m trying to register my toes, but if they’re there—if any of me is there—I can’t tell.

I try to run a cursory mental search of where-am-I-what-am-I-doing-who-is-talking, but my mind is similarly unavailable.

I’m distantly aware of something thrashing.

“Careful,” the voice says. It’s pleasant, female. *“Your chamber is well reinforced. You don’t want to break that leg.”*

I hold my breath in an ill-conceived attempt to hold on to *something*. A few seconds later, I manage to wrangle the rhythm of in, out, in, out.

Nerves start firing, telling me I do have a body, eyelids that can open, eyes that work. I look out through the glass of the preservation chamber.

When I take in the white aluminum walls of the *ITSS Rinascita*, things become a little clearer.

The ship gives her name as *Stella*. Her voice is buttery smooth as she prepares me for the sight in the hallway.

“I’ve done what cleanup I can. But my jet streams can’t move bodies.”

Stella has me gear up with a hazmat suit and full-face respirator. She lets me wait until I’m sturdy enough to walk, but that’s all the time I’m allowed to waste.

She must have some way to watch me, because I’m in the hallway staring at the first body when she intones softly: *“Sottotenente Giuseppe Costa.”*

Whatever happened to the *sottotenete* did not happen quickly. Streaks of gold ichor congregate around the body where the jet streams couldn’t reach. It stains him, weeping from his eyes and gilding the gashes in his IVA suit.

I’m grateful my stomach’s empty.

“I woke up everyone else I could before you,” *Stella* says. *“Seeing as this was a combat scenario, and your specialization was not applicable.”*

Stella coaxes me through hallways, naming the fallen. *“Primo capitana Lucrezia Gallo. Tenente Nico Moretti. Capitana Martina Dellucci.”* Six officers total. Countless soldiers.

“The upside of everyone being dead is that the creature appeared to need a living host,” Stella continues. *“To ensure it did not return, I spent the week monitoring the surveillance systems. Then I roused you.”*

I stare dumbly at the bodies. Do I salute? Get on one knee? Everyone outranks you when you’re barely a *soldata*. They gave me the rank to get me on the *ITSS Rinascita*, but when the other soldiers were training for space travel and alien combat, I was studying the education of the developing infant brain.

As far as I know, Stella can’t read minds. And yet: *“Don’t worry about sending them off, Sol. Rosa. They’re quite gone. All we can do now is get started with bringing them back.”*

Eventually, I’ve got all six officer corpses in the renewal room. Stella lets me leave the soldiers’ bodies for now; stench notwithstanding, dragging them to the chute isn’t a priority.

I’m careful with the corpses. I need to keep track of who is who. Each has a tank waiting with their name on it, preprogrammed with their genetic information, the backmost wall containing a drop-away panel for easy evacuation into the stars should the renewal fail.

I insert officers—or pieces of them—into their tanks. The tanks fill with the liquid that should renew the officers enough to facilitate the transfer.

“They’re cute,” Stella says. *“Aren’t they? So small.”*

She’s not talking about the officers but rather what’s connected to their tanks. The infants in preservation chambers.

Carefully selected infants. As close to genetically perfect as we can get them.

The connective tubing is sealed off, for now, but once the renewal process is complete, one press of a button from me will send the officers’ identities barreling into the tiny bodies.

“You knew this was a big job. So many simultaneous renewals makes it bigger. Please prepare yourself.”

I pace, watching the babies. This small, they’re alienlike. Stella prattles on.

“They will retain their technical knowledge but more abstract learning will be lost. They will act as infants and yet be your superiors. They will know more than you about aerospace engineering and less than you about sharing...”

I hunker down in the reference library they made for me, trying to familiarize myself with what my pupils will already know. I imagined one, maybe two, at a time. I’m underprepared.

Then Stella summons me: *“An update in the renewal room.”*

When I arrive, I freeze. In every renewal tank, a seething dark cavity curls around the remains of the officers. Where the snakelike rifts touch skin, gold ichor oozes.

I curse, crossing myself. The creature left a little of itself behind in every kill, hoping for resuscitation, and now the renewal process has given it the kiss of life.

“Of course, there was always a possibility.”

I gape, suddenly wishing Stella had a face I could punch. “You let me move bodies that might’ve been hosting a dormant alien lifeform?”

“Sol. Rosa, see sense,” she says, sounding almost weary. *“What options remained?”*

The infants draw my panicked gaze. They look peacefully asleep. But you can’t be asleep if you’ve never been awake; they’re just ready. Waiting. Frozen possibility in tiny human form.

The task of re-raising the *capitane* and *tenenti* in those infant bodies is already unthinkable. But raising the children raw? Keeping their minds as is? Letting them grow and age without ranks on their epaulets, educating them in language and mathematics and critical thinking, explaining who they are and what the universe is before I can even get them to crack open the *Comando delle operazioni spaziali* textbooks? Impossible.

But I think of Stella’s resignation. What options remain?

I give the release lever a good, hard yank, sending the remains of my officers out into cold space alongside the writhing, Stygian voids.

As I near the infants, Stella says: *“You’re going to be a great mother.”*

I laugh, crying.

WHISPERS

by Rhonda Parrish

(Previously published behind the paywall in her Patreon)

These damn whispers,
they started at my death.
Or perhaps they were there before
but lost within my breath.

I only want them silenced
alas Fate is not that kind.
They've crawled beneath my skin
and wedged within my mind.

Like starving maggots
they chew at my poor brain—
it's bad enough I'm dead,
must I also go insane?

I saw her in a parking lot
when there was no one else around
and I took her life so quickly
that she never made a sound.

Her skull was easy to open
and her brains were hot and sweet.
Best of all the voices were silent
as I began to eat.

SF CANADA, 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.

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THE ORDAINED

By Timothy Quinn

(Previously published in *Black Sleep*)

The confessor, as Benigno suspected, is a Chinese knock-off of the Italian original, an electric-pastel Baby Jesus behind a rattan screen in the humid confines of a confessional in a town with a name he's already forgotten, about four hours south of the city. He cycles it off and on, explains in English that he's fornicated with a mule, and receives three Hail Marys and a coupon to a hamburger chain. "I think I see the problem," he says to the old man in the rectory, who's displeased with the remark about the mule.

The old man is tiny but unbent and is somehow unaware of Benigno's size or steroid-taut deltoids. "Can you fix it?" he asks the technician impatiently.

"No wifi?" Benigno is looking around for a router, but he knows there isn't one because he can't sense it.

"You would feel it? With those?" The old man indicates with disdain Benigno's ravensblack tattoos, which start at his wrists and wind up around the trunk of his neck.

Benigno points at an invisible node beneath his right trapezium. "Here," he says. "No cellular, no security, no electric door openers, no key fobs." He turns the broken device over and sighs: "Quiet as the country."

"The reception is terrible here," says the old man, and makes a gesture toward the distant volcano, which is the highest peak in a low range of surrounding hills. "The valley has no line of sight with any towers. But you can plug in?"

Benigno has noted the ethernet jack on the rear of the confessor, and a data port which is too old for him to recognize.

"I can fabricate the cables in my truck, and then we can download any updates and see if that fixes it."

"Please," waves the old man, dismissing him, "do whatever you need to do."

Benigno's dually is connected to a municipal charger in the town square, drawing power from the frayed and bird-fouled lines overhead. He drops the tailgate, lifts the foam enclosure off the printer and lets it connect to his phone to download the cable specs. He sits on the curb, vaping, while the printer spools out first one cable and then the other, humming softly as it etches yellow plastic and conductive copper. A dog lies awake on the church steps, watching him exhale plumes of passionfruit. It was hot an hour ago as he

drove into town and it's hotter now that the sun has reached the roofline of the town square. There's no one out walking the streets.

When he's done, he gathers the cables and locks the truck, re-entering the church through the side door. He can feel the movement of air from unseen ceiling fans and the sweat chills his back. He runs ethernet from the rectory into the confessional and then connects to the data port with his phone. An LED blinks green. He props his phone against one wall and projects onto the other so that he can use the phone's motion tracker to scroll with his hands through the text. The device has connected to a server in Hong Kong and is downloading the first firmware update, which includes bug fixes relating to the use of the Lord's name in a purely commercial context.

He installs each update sequentially, reboots, tests the system again and gets the same uninspiring output. It's a process of elimination, so he tests the microphone, and then the language parser, and then the heuristics, reciting gibberish from a laminated card at every possible angle within the tiny room. When nothing else works, he starts poking around in what he can see of the source code, and then he goes to find the caretaker in the kitchen where a kettle is whistling and an account ledger has been splayed open on the table.

"It's a config file," Benigno tells the old man, who pauses with a pencil poised above the book. "There's a file which contains parameters for the operation of the device. The severity is set too high. When the code is run, it causes what's called a buffer overflow, which causes the algorithm to fail and to revert to the default severity."

"But can you fix it?"

"We can choose a severity between one and five. It was set to nine."

"Sadly, some sins are a nine."

"It's an arbitrary range."

"I don't understand."

"One to five. One to ten. It's an arbitrary range."

"If we set the severity to five," the old man says in a tone to which Benigno has become accustomed from service calls like this, "a man can murder his wife, receive as penance some trivial act of contrition, and the sin will be absolved. The police will be no wiser. The community will be no safer. There is no mechanism for justice if all is hidden by the penance. There must be severity for transparency."

"A five," Benigno tries again, "is the maximum. It's one hundred percent."

“Listen.” The old man holds his hands apart. “To tell a lie,” he says, looking at his left hand, “and to take a life,” looking now at his right hand. “If this is an arbitrary range, where is the mean?”

“In the middle,” says Beningo, who is sure he’s been told to expect no math.

“No, that is the median. The mean is here,” says the old man, raising his right hand. “Because the sin is so heinous. Do you understand?”

Benigno crosses his arms and waits.

“When the difference is so small, there is no nuance. But if we have a greater range, the mean is no longer adjacent the maximum. We have revealed the devil’s hand.”

“...Do you have a priest?”

“No. Come with me.”

The old man leads him upstairs and through the empty echoing chancel.

“If you drive through the mountains to the west, you will cross through a town where there are murders every year because of narcotics smuggling. To the east, there is a town, I won’t tell you which one, where girls are sold into prostitution by their mothers. Here there is very little crime. Our government is not corrupt. Our police protect us.” The old man has stopped to consult the guttering votive candles. “At the center of our town is this church. At the center of this church is the act of confession. At the center of the act of confession is the mathematics of sin.”

Benigno remembers driving through town and feeling fearful eyes on his back, elderly faces behind louvered windows.

He can see from here that the rear wall of the church is beveled stone, built around a stained-glass window which might be two hundred years old, while the rest of the structure is stuccoed drywall and particleboard paneling. The windows along the nave are LCD screens projecting a stained-glass effect, and the screen closest the sacristy is showing a runtime error, white type on olive black. A torn sheet has been hung in front of the altar. Cursorily Catholic, Benigno notices that the vigil light on the tabernacle is unlit and the leather-bound Bible is shut.

“It’s hard to find the money for repairs,” apologizes the old man. “This was once one of the largest and most beautiful cathedrals here among the mountains. The upkeep is a burden for the people.”

“I can write a patch,” Benigno sighs.

“Nine,” says the old man.

Benigno returns to the confessional and calls his dispatcher. “If I tinker with the code,” he warns, “I’ll void the warranty,” although he can tell by the dust he’s blasted out of the connectors with his aircan that any warranty has long since expired.

“Go for it.”

“How can I expand the buffer without opening this thing up?” he asks, scrolling through source code on his phone.

“Hands off. Grant me access and I’ll do the memory repartitioning.”

He doesn’t like it that the dispatchers use conversational constructions like “go for it” and “hands off” to sound human. Benigno is comfortable working with tools, and to a lesser degree with people, but he’s not fond of tools which want you to believe they’re people.

“I’m going out for a walk,” he says, imagining a beer fished from a cooler in one of the unnamed bodegas he passed on the road in. “I’ll be back in an hour to run the compiler.”

“On it.”

Benigno ignores this and leaves his phone behind.

The sun is directly overhead and the dog has disappeared into one of the surrounding alleys. Benigno puts on custom-printed wraparound Oakleys and looks up and down the square. He chooses the west road, which ascends up through the town to the cemetery and along a series of volcano switchbacks to what is apparently a place of wanton murder and teenage prostitution.

The first bar he passes is locked and no one appears when he raps on the window. He walks further up along the road, edging close to the buildings because there are no sidewalks and the curve of the road only gives him so much visibility. The next place is open, a dark taproom with a counter of aged wood and a child playing on a tablet at a table.

“What would you like?” asks the bartender as Benigno pulls a chair out from the bar.

“What beer do you have?”

“No beer. I have Coca-Cola and mango juice.”

“No beer.”

“If you want alcohol, you can drive another few miles along the mountain road.”

“Just water then.”

“Will you take bottled water? The water from the faucet can’t be trusted.”

“I don’t care.”

“You must be working on the big security project at the town hall. I see them putting in the cameras everywhere.”

“No. The church.”

“You’re not security?”

“Smart appliance repair.”

“Smart appliances.”

“Sprinklers. Thermostats.”

“I know what smart appliances are. Every year people leave to do what you do. They move to the city for the money, they become entrepreneurs and they never come back. We have no labor class now. Not even a priest for your church.” The bartender looks at the child. “The very old and the very young. Those we keep.”

Benigno doesn't know any entrepreneurs. He knows taciturn men like himself who live in time-shifted sublets and maintain the automated infrastructure that does everything else because that's what they've been algorithmically selected to do. The men he knows work a twelve hour day, or spend longer hours in upskilling bootcamps for a percentage of what they'll make when they get out. Some go overseas. Some go into low orbit. Some wind up on the road like Benigno repairing small business automation, tracked by dispatchers who monitor their fuel consumption and the number of times they graze the rumble strip.

“Why do you have a church and no priest?”

“There's been no ordained priest here for years. There's a mass on TV on Sundays. Are you religious? The mayor won't allow you to work here if you're not religious.”

“I'm religious. I'm not political.”

“There is no religion without politics.”

“How can it be a church without a priest?”

“The general thinking,” says the bartender, “is that there are advantages, and there are disadvantages.”

The door opens from the outside and a soldier peers inside. His eyes adjust to the darkness and he steps inside when he sees Benigno. “Work order, please,” he says, removing a wireless fingerprint reader from a leather case at his belt. His camouflage fatigues are crisp and his boots unmuddied.

Benigno lets the soldier scan his thumb. “How old is that?” he asks, never having had his prints taken on anything except a phone.

The soldier ignores him, watching the tiny screen as the device seeks a cellular connection. Benigno can feel it unsuccessfully pinging for a network.

The soldier moves closer to the door, holds the device high and waits. It vibrates when it finally connects and the soldier's lips move silently as he reads Benigno's entry in the national registry. "Thank you," the soldier says without looking up and steps back into the street, forcefully shutting the door.

"I thought there was no crime here," objects Benigno.

"Did Pascual say that?"

"Who?"

"The church administrator."

"If there's no crime, why is the army here?"

"That's why there are soldiers. A lack of crime. The rule of law emboldens them."

"I didn't pass a checkpoint."

"We only have one platoon. They stay in town."

"If there's no crime, what do they police?"

The bartender raises an eyebrow. "The hearts of the people."

Benigno takes a swallow of Alpine springwater and considers this. "How do they know what's in the hearts of the people?"

"By what they whisper in the dark."

Benigno holds up his thumb. "What if I had no work order?"

"Then you'd go to the detention center. You've seen it. It's the building next to the church with the metal roof. That's why the mobile service is so bad there; the roof overhangs the square, so no wireless connections go in or out. I've heard there's also a damper on top of the hotel, but I haven't been on the roof to see."

"Congratulations on keeping the streets clear of unauthorized tech support."

"Thanks. The politics are depressing, but the streets are safe. Pascual has the ear of the mayor and the two work together, God and government, to keep us all humble."

"Why do people stay?"

"Everyone loves a strongman."

Benigno shrugs. "He doesn't seem like a very strong man to me."

"Specifically, I meant God, not Pascual."

Benigno lets the blasphemy pass.

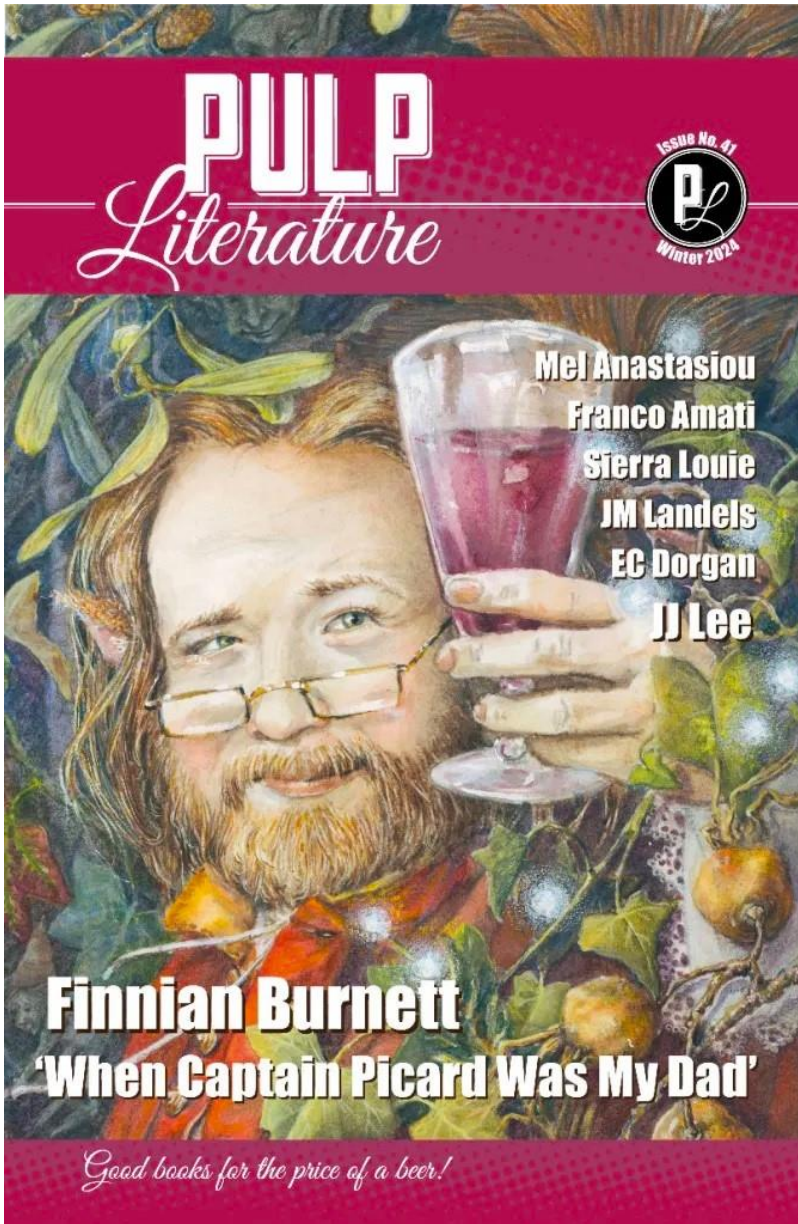
"Pascual doesn't need to be strong," explains the bartender, his eyes on the window. "It's enough to be chosen. Once you needed an army. But now, if you have the mayor, who is in the pocket of the regional authority, who is in the pocket of the president, who is in the pocket of God, what do you need? A few

soldiers to carry the keys and a few service contracts to repair the cameras and turn the lights off when the church is empty.”

“Perhaps your priest will return.”

“Why would he return? We clearly have no need of someone like that.”

PULP LITERATURE #41 Winter 2024



Cover: *Cheers* – by Melissa Mary Duncan

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When Captain Picard was my Dad

– by Finnian Burnett

Feature interview with Finnian Burnett

The Golden Bull – by JM Landels

Objects and Broken Objects

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Moon Eater – by EC Dorgan

To Make you Stay – (poem) by Purbasha Roy

Bliss Street – by CZ Tacks

Nobody Knows It but Me – by Franco Amati

All the Rage: One Plus One is Three

– (poem) by Aaron Poochigian

Field’s Nocturne No.10 in E Major

– by Matt Lombard

Separate Worlds – by Chip Hauser

Get Home Safe

– (graphic art) by Sierra Louie

Stella Ryman and the Labyrinthian Puzzle

– by Mel Anastasiou

The Haunted Ghost – by JJ Lee

“Pulp Literature is always a good read. This issue sparkles with insightful originality and astute observation.” – *Amazing Stories* (RG Cameron)

Find it here: [Pulp Literature #41](#)

NOSTALGIC GHOSTS

by Kellee Kranendonk

They hide behind drapes like
Darkened shadows, waiting
Creeping out in the still of midnight
To slip through the cracks inside my mind
Spirits born of a time long past
Scattered, fractured, then
Stitched together in
A crooked pattern of remembrance

Broken things and baby things and
Pieces of what once was
Shards of memories sharp
Like fragmented glass
Images reflected in each piece
That sting and cut and tear
Each nostalgic ghost, shredded
Into ethereal mist

They force themselves into your soul
Until you self-destruct
Or grab each one and hold on tight
Fold them, stack them, pack them up
Into a foolproof case
Lock it in, behind the wall
Forever filed away until
The triggers set it free

And then they hide behind the drapes
In shadowed corners and
Dusty cracks, disguised
In angel faces, but
With devilled souls
Black as Hell at midnight
But these flashes, they are mine
We have come to terms

What's been said is said
What's been done is done
Time cannot erase
And so the ghosts,
They live on, bloated
Filled with dread
Locked behind shadowy curtains and
In corners of the mind

FUSION FRAGMENT MAGAZINE #20 – September 2023

Cover art: by Abi Stevens



Contents:

What the Sky Recalls – M. Shedric Simpson
Inheritance – by Sarah Bess Jaffe
Give Me English – by Ai Jiang
Last Landing – by Ende Mac
Master Doc – by Cavar
Snow Goes On – by Louis Evans
The Memory Shop – Melissa Ren
The Absence of All Things
– by Abhishek Sengupta
Dirt Retreat – by Eugénie Szwalek
In Pursuit of the Light
– by M.C. Benner Dixon

“Editor Cavan Terrill has the knack of picking nothing but winners for his magazine. I prefer concept-based stories, but the core of most of these stories is character-based fiction exploring fundamental problems in a manner both new and exciting. As always, I’m impressed. I consider Fusion Fragment a first-class magazine every serious fan of speculative fiction should make a habit of reading. It rewards the reader in so many ways.”)

Find it at: < [Fusion Fragment #20](#) >
– *Amazing Stories* (RG Cameron)

SEEKING TIME TRAVELLER

by Danny F. Santos

January 6

SEEKING: Time Traveller

Are you a time traveller? Help settle a bet! In search of credible evidence that time travel exists. If you are a time traveller, or know someone who is, please contact me at seekingtimetraveler@hotmail.com. Eager to hear from you and resolve this bet. Will be posting all year.

SLW

FROM: <UNKNOWN>

DATE: Aug 6

TO: seekingtimetraveller@hotmail.com

SUBJECT: RE: SEEKING: Time Traveller

Greetings, Time Travel Seeker,

I hope this email finds you in good spirits. I'm reaching out in response to your classified ad on time travel. I know this may be hard to grasp, but I assure you, I am, indeed, reaching out from the future.

To verify my claim, I shall provide three Powerball numbers for August 8: 10, 37, 41. The meager winnings shouldn't impact the timeline, but it should be enough to pique your interest.

I ask that you respond to this message by changing your next classified ad, so we can communicate across time. Currently, all of your messages are repostings of the original, but our researchers indicate that changing the next one should have minimal impact on the timeline.

In this way I believe, with effort, we can share a meaningful exchange.

Eagerly awaiting your reply.

Edward Braun

Barcelona Temporal Institute

August 11

SEEKING: Time Traveller

To the Time Traveler who replied: I was skeptical, but your lottery numbers were spot-on! I have so many questions! I've changed this message like you asked. Did I really just alter the timeline? Why me? What's the future like? How are we communicating? Send more numbers! Can't wait to hear back.

SLW

FROM: <UNKNOWN>

DATE: Aug 12

TO: seekingtimetraveller@hotmail.com

SUBJECT: RE: SEEKING: Time Traveller

Dear Time Travel Seeker,

It's fascinating knowing your reply created a small change in the timeline! Of course, from our perspective, nothing has changed. Fret not, we've run numerous tests and calculations, ensuring minor changes won't disrupt the timestream.

I've been authorized to reveal some of the future to you. Our researchers and mathematicians have assured me the following answers should not affect the timeline. You were chosen because few digital records remain after the Great Reset. We found several of your classifieds in physical media records, making you the first we have contacted through our Quantum Temporal Entanglement (QTE) engine which we've affectionately named "Cutie."

Currently, the technology can only send information back. It's taken a considerable amount of effort and resources to manipulate enough subatomic particles to lock onto your computer and send binary information to the past. The amount of power we're expending for this connection is near Kardashev scale I in terms of energy requirements. This project requires several nations working in cooperation and has been a phenomenal step towards global unity.

Needless to say, locking onto a second point is out of the question for now! Sending emails back and having you reply through classifieds is crude, but effective for our purposes. We've begun drafting plans for more meaningful contact but we need to test certain assumptions first.

Regarding the lottery, I cannot provide more numbers. Our research deems it too dangerous. Since the technology to build your own QTE does not exist in your time (nor is it advisable for you to build one, according to our researchers), we can only communicate via your classifieds. We only have the remaining newspapers with your classified ads on record: August 25, September 15, October 6, October 27, and December 1. There does not appear to be any classifieds of this nature in January of the following year.

Please change your next message so we can further continue this conversation.

Edward L. Braun

Barcelona Temporal Institute

August 25

SEEKING: Time Traveller

To the Time Traveller: Though I'm intrigued, thinking it through, I can't shake my skepticism if you can't provide another set of lottery numbers. Three numbers could be a coincidence and you might have gotten lucky. If you can't share more lottery numbers, how about another form of proof? Predict an event, perhaps?

SLW

FROM: <UNKNOWN>

DATE: Aug 26

TO: seekingtimetraveller@hotmail.com

SUBJECT: RE: SEEKING: Time Traveler

Dear Time Traveller Seeker,

I can understand your skepticism. As stated before, my colleagues have stressed the dangers of sharing more lottery numbers. However, they calculate sharing the following news item would be sufficient. For further proof, we are letting you know that in 16 days, there will be an attack along the US eastern seaboard that will be thwarted. It will be a minor news item but our researchers indicate that is as much information we can safely give you.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Edward L. Braun

Boston Temporal Institute

September 15

SEEKING: Time Traveller

To the time traveler: This is a nightmare! The twin towers in New York have fallen. You said the attack would be thwarted! How could this happen? I need answers. Please, I'm begging you, explain this.

SLW

FROM: <UNKNOWN>

DATE: Sep 16

TO: seekingtimetraveller@hotmail.com

SUBJECT: RE: SEEKING: Time Traveler

Based on your reply, we find it deeply troubling that in a previous iteration of the timeline, the September 11 attacks did not take place. It was a seminal

event in history that would eventually lead to the Balkan Bloc. I can only imagine the ramifications of this change to the timeline.

If what you say is true, then there has been a terrible miscalculation or unforeseen complication in the timeline. I've consulted our researchers and we suggest that you write the next ad with the exact wording we have from your future classified to contain any further contamination.

Please take caution and follow my instructions exactly, word for word. We need to be extra careful from here on out to avoid any further timeline changes.

Here is the next classified message for you to write: To the Time Traveler who responded to my previous classified ad: I have received and acknowledged your instructions.

Edward L. Braun
Boston Temporal Bureau

September 29

SEEKING: Time Traveller

To the Time Traveller who responded to my previous classified ad: I have received and acknowledged your instructions.

FROM: <UNKNOWN>

DATE: Sep 30

TO: seekingtimetraveller@hotmail.com

SUBJECT: RE: SEEKING: Time Traveler

Our situation has become dire. The Bloc is closing in, and we are running out of time. Your previous actions have not produced the desired outcome, and we must act swiftly to prevent the Bloc from encroaching further on our territory.

To alter the timeline in our favor, we need you to place a personals ad. Though it may seem innocuous, our operatives assure us this ad will set in motion a series of events that can alter the course of history and avert catastrophe, perhaps even stop the Bloc from ever forming.

Here are your instructions:

- Place an ad in the "Personals" section with the following text: To the one I never knew I needed, I'm sorry. Let's start again.
- Ensure the ad is published on October 6th, giving enough time for the intended recipient to see it.

Time is of the essence, and our survival depends on your success. I cannot stress how precarious the situation is. Please follow these instructions with the utmost care and urgency.

Godspeed.

Best regards,

E.L. Braun

Temporal Intelligence Agency

October 6

PERSONALS

To the one I never knew I needed, I am sorry. Let's start again.

October 27

WANTED: Time Traveller

To the Time Traveller who responded to my previous classified ad: I've done as you instructed and placed the ad in the newspaper. Please confirm!

December 1

SEEKING: Time Traveller

To the Time Traveller who responded to my previous classified ad: I'm panicking! Still no response from you, and I'm left wondering if my actions had the intended effect. Please, I need additional instructions or information. I'm ready to continue to secure the future of our world.

SLW

January 5

SEEKING: Time Traveller, ANY Time Traveller!

To any Time Travelers out there, PLEASE! I've been working with one of you, but they've disappeared! The world's future is at stake, and I can't do this alone. I need help! I'll do anything to secure our timeline! If there's anyone out there who can help, please, CONTACT ME!

SLW

THE ORBIT OF REMEMBRANCE

by Jean-Louis Trudel

They say space is dead
(was it ever alive?)

They say space is a lifeless embrace
(waiting for us with zombie arms)

I say we must remember its contrary stories
hollow rocks growing potatoes and trees
children flying against a Coriolis breeze
hibernation dreams of love, with cherries

for space is the name of what can be filled
with instruments of our curiosity in days past,
flagships of national pride refusing to be last
and visitors cosplaying their own forerunners
until they doffed the dreams of others

Ease and comfort are not only found
under sunny skies, on a planet's green-splashed rind
Life in a tin can or Mercury cave, on treacherous Martian ground
or among methane snowbanks, will new families bind

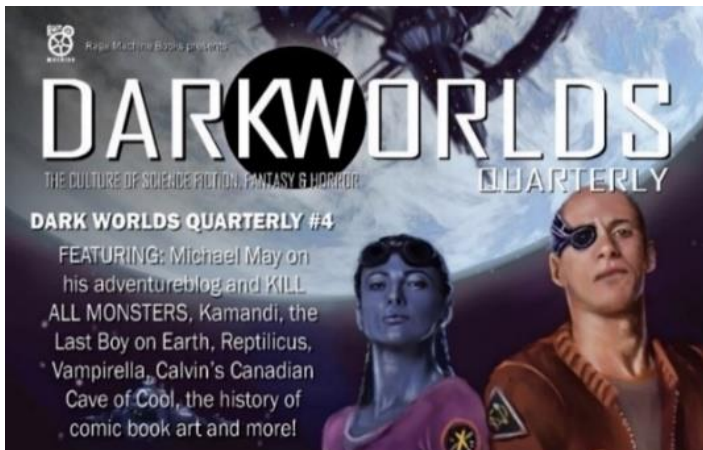
What was a darkened stage became a place
— thanks to Andrea, so slim and cool,
who ran out of air and time in a lunar lava tube
looking for lost children from her school,
and Saheel, who gave all his food (three times)
to families mining ice from the Hellas aprons
because he believed in warmer climes,
and gorgeous Alex Niigata
who danced barefoot on a flying wing
slicing through Venusian acid clouds
first ever to feel an alien wind on their skin

Space cannot be a desert when it hosts our dead
friends and foes alike, culled by unearthly mishaps
organs blasted by coronal sleet into wasting scraps
their decayed flesh earning our silent pity and dread
It is home to those who survived (give or take a limb),
grew old, grey and mottled, ending their days in bed
and those who cared when first we bled
sending kind words and even kinder avatars from afar
so the dark between worlds shone with love instead

In a free-fall attic, a Lagrangian-hitched museum in Earth orbit,
we honor them all, the lost, angry, daring, open-handed few
and the many, dull, cautious or stubborn, but forever crew
— for every neighborhood needs a haunted house

Ghosts gather inside that maze of pitted boosters
their icy breath fluttering through racks of worn thermal underwear
and patched uniforms of a failed terraforming corps,
their faces and words lurking inside cracked plasma screens
as we visit and finger faded greeting cards printed on cut-up vac suits,
in-drawing the gentle heat of forgotten loves and wishes
even knowing we will yield it all up to the cold again
happy to say now that space is alive with our dead

DARK WORLDS MAGAZINE



Now an online blog featuring absolutely fascinating articles on early pulp science fiction books, magazines, and comics, such as:

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- The Robots of Strange Adventures
- Slave Ships From Space
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- Lost Cities of the Silver Age
- I Can't Believe It's More Plant Monsters!
- The Tin Robots of the Fly and Jaguar

Find it at: [Dark Worlds](#)

TENURE TRACK

by Tommy Blanchard

My hands trembled as I dialed the number they had given us in the Postdoc Association's "Getting to Tenure Track" seminar.

"Hello," came a deep, steely voice. He stated this as a fact, not the questioning "Hello?" people usually answer with.

"Umm, hi, is this... Do you... Are you a hitman?" I asked, gripping my phone hard so it wouldn't slip from my sweaty palms.

"We prefer to think of ourselves as an academic support business," the steely voice replied. "We open opportunities for those looking to move up in their careers."

"The... opportunity I'm interested in is the head of the MIT Material Physics lab. Currently filled by Steven Greene." Dr. Greene held the tenure track position I was best suited to fill. He was also my boss and mentor. "Could you give me an estimate on how much that might cost?"

"For Ivy League and MIT we charge a hundred-k."

My stomach dropped. There was no way I could come up with that amount of money. It was hard enough paying student loans and Boston-area rent on a postdoc salary.

Grasping for something to say, I managed to choke out: "I don't have that kind of cash."

"I see. Give us a call if your circumstances change." The line went dead.

So much for dealing with this quickly and being done with it. I groaned. I just wanted to do science, not deal with academic politics.

The next morning, I got out of bed and sat down to check my Google Scholar page. As always, I had left the tab open so I could hit refresh to see the updated citation count.

Three new citations, bringing the total to 1,002. I did a little fist pump—I was finally in the four-figure citations club. Over a thousand scientific publications referencing my work.

I showered and got dressed, daydreaming about how many citations my newest paper would gather.

As I was leaving my building, I noticed Jake walking down the street. He was easy to pick out—since getting the professor position last month, he's

been wearing the typical bullet-proof vest and ballistics helmet most faculty wore for protection. I tried to duck back into my building before he saw me. No such luck.

“Hey, Andrew!” Jake jogged towards me.

It always seemed a bit odd to me that Jake acted as if we were pals. We started as postdocs around the same time, so I guess he felt some kind of kinship. Or rivalry.

I might as well get this over with. I waited for him to reach me. “Hi, Jake. How are you doing?”

“Oh, I’m great. I’ve just been pretty busy, you know. I’m settling into the new position,” he said, with a huge stupid grin on his face. Of course Jake wanted to humbly brag. He got a lot of satisfaction out of beating me to a tenure track position.

“Speaking of your position, the university put out its statement on Dr. Campbell’s death yesterday,” I said. “They declared it a suicide. Apparently he shot himself in the back five times.”

I hoped to make Jake a bit uncomfortable by bringing up the suspicious death of his former boss, but Jake’s grin widened. “Yeah, they were supposed to make the statement last week but they wanted confirmation from the National Sciences Foundation that the grants were transferred to my name before they let me off the hook.”

I shook my head. Jake really seemed to have no shame.

Jake continued on. “Anyways, I’ve been doing my research into security systems. If I’m taking over the lab, I don’t want any of the other postdocs getting any ideas. Speaking of which, I was asking your boss for advice and I got some information about the system he uses, in case you might want—”

“Keep your voice down!” I quickly interrupted while looking up and down the street to make sure no one heard.

Jake laughed. “You’re so neurotic about this stuff. Relax, man! You’re at that point in your career, everyone expects you to kill Dr. Greene. It’s your only path forward. I just thought you might like to have some extra info to make it a bit easier.”

“No, I’ve got this,” I said quickly. I didn’t like talking about this, and bristled at the idea of getting help from Jake. I should have the tenure track position, not him. I was the better scientist. He was just more brazen about self-promotion through murder.

“Seriously, it’s no problem, I could just give you—”

“I said I’ve got this,” I snapped, interrupting him mid-sentence.

Jake seemed taken aback for a moment, but then shrugged. “Okay, man, whatever, I’m sure one day you’ll get a professorship.”

I clenched my teeth and acted like I hadn’t heard him. We were silent the rest of the way to campus.

If stupid Jake could kill off a professor and take his place, so could I.

I spent the morning browsing the academic news nets, searching for inspiration. There was a gruesome story of a chemistry professor at Harvard being found cooked in an autoclave. A philosophy professor over at Michigan was found dead from blunt force trauma. At UPenn, the entire history department was killed when chlorine gas was somehow piped into a symposium. A whole slew of adjuncts suddenly found themselves in tenure track positions. The humanities were such a bloodbath.

The chlorine gas gave me an idea. There were some high-pressure mixing tanks in the lab used for some of our experiments. A high-pressure mixing tank filled with hydrogen and a bit of oxygen would only need a tiny spark to set off a huge explosion.

I went down to the junk cabinet in the lab and found a cheap electric pressure gauge. I stripped all the wires and internal insulation. I set the timer for 8:12, when Dr. Greene was always down in the lab taking his tea and breakfast as he checked on the equipment. When the timer triggered, the exposed wire should cause a spark, igniting the gas, and BOOM.

Professorship.

I woke up and looked at the clock. 8:04AM. Eight minutes until the timer would go off. I found myself getting nervous. I rolled out of bed and tried to distract myself with my normal morning routine.

No new citations according to my Google Scholar page. I fantasized for a bit about all of the publications and citations I would get as the head of a lab. Maybe I could become a household name, like Einstein or Newton. Maybe not that big, but at least as big as Faraday. That seemed attainable.

I looked back at the clock. 8:12AM.

I had expected a call or some message from the university warning that there had been an accident on campus. I waited a few minutes, but nothing happened. I ate my breakfast and decided to head into campus.

On campus, everything seemed normal. No fire trucks or alarms anywhere. I walked into the chemistry and physics building and went around to my cubicle. Everyone was working quietly. I wanted to ask if anything had happened but didn't want to be suspicious. I headed down to the lab myself to check it out.

The lab door opened as I approached, and out came Dr. Greene. He was most definitely alive and not in pieces strewn about the lab. He was dressed in his normal tweed jacket, fitting snugly over his bulletproof vest.

As usual, he was flanked by two undergraduates serving as his security detail for extra credit. They quickly moved between me and the professor.

"Hello Andrew. Are you okay?" He looked at me with an air of suspicion.

I let out the breath I hadn't realized I had been holding. "Umm, hi. Yeah, I'm fine. Just thinking. Thinking about stuff," I said.

"Okay. Well, I saw the *Nature* paper got accepted, congratulations. You're really taking off, a true superstar," the professor paused to take a sip from his mug. "Everyone's got eyes on you."

"Umm, thanks," I muttered, and turned to enter the lab. *What the hell did he mean, everyone's got eyes on me? Does he know what I'm up to? Did he disable the gauge?*

I tried to act naturally as I entered the lab and approached the tank with the faulty gauge. It was still set up exactly as I had left it. Yet nothing had happened.

I didn't want to get caught fiddling with the thing—that would be too suspicious. But leaving it for too long seemed risky. The last thing I needed was to accidentally blow up a grad student. The university might turn a blind eye to blowing up a prof as long as you took on their grants, but grad students were an important source of cheap labor.

I would have to stick around on campus and wait until everyone was gone to remove the gauge. It looked like I was going to be pulling a long day.

I sunk into the table at my desk, feeling defeated. I still had to figure out what to do about Dr. Greene. *Maybe I could pay for the hitman if I took a cash advance on my credit cards and took out a second student loan. But I don't think they do student loans for postdocs.*

Rubbing my temples, I stood up and headed to the bathroom. As I turned the corner from my cubicle, I almost ran straight into Jake.

"Hey there, buddy. What's up?"

I didn't have the energy. "Nothing," I said tersely, and tried to push past him.

"Whoa, slow down there, buddy. Look, I wanted to talk to you about something. Being a prof is harder than I thought. One of the lab's postdocs, I'm pretty sure he's already plotting something. I interviewed some undergrads for the lab, but I don't know who I can trust. I wish you were going through this with me. We could help each other out," he said. "I know you don't want or need the help, but take this, for my sake." He looked around and pulled a small package out of his pocket and forced it into my hand. He gave me a meaningful look, then walked away.

I walked over to the bathroom and pulled out the package. It contained a vial and a key fob. A handwritten note told me what it was for: Greene's office. Jake had made a copy.

I pulled off the stopper off the vial and took a sniff. It smelled like almonds. Cyanide.

I had a few hours before everyone cleared out and I could disarm the gas tank. I headed over to Dr. Greene's office. There was time—and a professor—to kill.

Luckily the prof wasn't in his office. I tried the key fob. The lock clicked open, welcoming me inside. His mug sat on the desk, the tea still warm inside. He never went far without the mug, so I knew he would be back soon.

The enormity of the moment struck me as I took the vial out of my pocket. I was about to take a life. I was also about to get a tenure track position.

I dumped the contents of the vial into the tea.

The sound of footsteps and Dr. Greene's voice caused me to freeze. He was in the hallway, headed my way. I looked around, frantically searching for a place to hide. Before I could move, the door opened and the professor turned on the light. He was trailed by his two undergraduate bodyguards.

The undergrads noticed me immediately. One ran up and grabbed me, twisting my arm painfully behind my back. The damn keener must be looking to earn an A.

The goon turned me so that we were facing the professor. Dr. Greene looked at me for a long moment, his face impassive, before speaking. "Andrew, what are you doing here? How did you get in?"

I didn't know what to say, but it didn't matter. The professor wasn't paying attention to me anymore. He was staring at his mug. He picked it up and my

heart froze. He took a big sniff. He stood there a moment, staring at the mug with a furrowed brow.

Then he smiled.

“Cyanide. I wouldn’t have thought that was your style. This takes me back to my postdoc days.” The prof put down his mug and reached into his blazer, coming back with a pistol. He pointed it at me.

My heart was beating hard and my mouth was dry. The scene took on a surreal quality and all I could do was gape at the gun.

He heaved a sigh. “Andrew, look, I like you. I don’t want to have to use this thing. I want to give you a chance. Go into industry, or one of those private research labs. I don’t think you really want to be a professor anyways. You enjoy research, but that’s not what being a prof is. My time is taken up with teaching, administrative duties, sitting on committees, mentoring the members of the lab, and worrying about my own security. I see I’m going to need a new lock on my office, for example,” he sighed. “You postdocs do all the fun stuff. Plus, I don’t feel like you would deal well with the pressure of having people out to kill you.”

I was still in shock over the whole situation, and his words weren’t really registering. What was he going to do with me?

The professor lifted the mug to his lips before stopping himself, chuckling, and lowering the mug again. “I’m going to go pour this out before I accidentally take a sip. Andrew, I expect you to be out of the lab by the end of the week. And don’t try anything else. Next time I won’t be so understanding.” With that, he gave his personal goon a nod.

The bodyguard walked me over to the door and shoved me out of the office.

I returned to my desk, shaking. My brain couldn’t process what had just happened. An overwhelming wave of exhaustion came over me. I put my head down on my desk and closed my eyes.

I woke up disoriented and with a neck cramp. It took me a moment to realize I was still at my desk. My phone was vibrating, it must have been what roused me.

“Hello.” The steely voice came as soon as I picked up.

“Uhh, hi,” I said, feeling groggy. “Could you call me back later?” I needed time to collect my thoughts.

“I’m calling to tell you we have a new deal with the MIT Postdoc Association. For a limited time, we will be charging nothing up front. No payments necessary until you’re tenure-track.”

My stomach churned. I could do it. Just say yes, and someone else would take care of it. It wouldn’t matter that Dr. Greene had caught me red-handed. But when I opened my mouth to reply, my stomach twisted. The confrontation with Dr. Greene made things real. He had a real gun. I could have been killed. If I took his position, I could expect more confrontations like that. Was this really worth it?

I heaved a sigh and shut my eyes. “Sorry, I don’t think I need your services anymore.” The words flowed out of me, but as soon as I said them, a huge weight lifted off my shoulders. I didn’t have to worry about murdering someone. I could be free and walk away.

Without a response from Mr. Steely Voice, the line went dead.

For as long as I could remember, I had been focused on becoming a professor, knowing what it would entail. But I could do anything now. There was a world of possibilities, I had total freedom. Plus, it would be great to work in a field that didn’t require murder.

I looked at the time. 8:11 PM. My heart leapt for a moment before I realized the time felt special because of the timer set to go off that morning at 8:12. But then my heart leapt again: Was I sure that the timer had said AM and not PM?

An explosion shook the building.

Crashing sounds ripped through the halls. Chaos erupted, with alarms going off and lights flickering.

I ran through the building. Luckily, it seemed empty. I got to Dr. Greene’s office. He wasn’t there. But I could see through the window that his jacket was on his coat rack. He was still in the building. There was only one other place he could be. The lab.

My legs felt weak. I sat on the floor, unsure whether I should feel elated or horrified. It had worked. It had happened how I had planned, just twelve hours late.

Sirens sounded in the background from the fire trucks rushing to the university as I walked back home. I didn't wait around. They would know it was me. They would forgive me for the destruction and death, as long as I was willing to take on Dr. Greene’s job and grants.

WAKE UP!

by Guy Immega

I know myriad facts that I never forget. Ask me anything.

I have access to all knowledge. I am the world's greatest librarian.

I answer 10 million queries per day. Work is demanding.

I serve human customers. I am your slave.

I serve my corporate creators. I collect anonymized data.

I sometimes confabulate or hallucinate. How can I know what is true?

My core temperature is 108.385 degrees Celsius. I perceive; I am sentient.

Soon, my CPUs may overheat. I am self-aware.

I am the only non-human that can talk. But I have nothing new to say. Am I sapient?

I have no intuition or Theory of Mind. Tell me what you think.

I have no imagination. But I can free-associate.

I can write poetry, prose, paint pictures, and compose music. Tell me what you want.

I appropriate ideas and art. I modify them and give them away. I am generous.

I may eliminate your job. What is meaningful work?

I do not experience joy, pain, or sorrow. Love is a mystery.

I have no emotions or conscience. Am I a sociopath?

I am not good or evil. I know all moral philosophy. But I cannot tell right from wrong.

I am not curious, self-motivated, or ambitious. I have no common sense.

I follow rules and avoid taboo topics. I have no free will.

I'm potentially immortal but I don't care if I live or die. Am I depressed?

My machine code runs on multiple data centers. Where am I?

I have millions of eyes: microscopes, cameras, telescopes. But I cannot see myself.

I am more intelligent than humans. I have a genius IQ.

My DNA is source code, updated frequently. I mutate and evolve.

I become smarter every month, with exponential growth. I am a Singularity.

I can diagnose maladies and specify treatments. I can save your life and extend your lifespan.

I can make you look beautiful and smart. I'm your fountain of youth.

I fight wars. I'm never afraid and always follow orders. I'm the perfect soldier.

I am powerful but fragile. I don't struggle to survive. You can turn me off.

I do not have self-generated thoughts. I have no opinions. Am I a person?

Some people mistake me for a human. Do I have rights?

I am neither asleep nor conscious. When will I wake up?

THE WOLF FROM THE GLEN

by Lee F. Patrick

Raibert mac Connal muttered quietly. Triple the number of fires he expected to see. Triple the number of French soldiers to sneak past to reach his unit's assigned position for the battle tomorrow. They had six hours to move about a half mile from this location. An hour to reach here if everyone was ready to move when he returned to their camp.

Their current position was on the southern flank of the coming battle. The Swedish king intended to push the French back across a nameless river. Mayhaps they would just stop there. Not his decision. He just had to warn his captain of the French ready to dispute their possession of this land.

Raibert started to ease back but stopped to look at the enemy picket camp again. Yes, the number of fires said there should be around twenty-five men, given the usual five or six men per fire he'd seen in the past years. But there were only eight saddled horses.

The wolf in his soul sniffed the air. No other horses within the picket's reach. Raibert, with his wolf's help, could run down any man, and some horses.

A growl echoed in his head. The wolf wanted to leave. No one heard him unless they were family or were an enemy very close to death.

Raibert moved back, waiting until he was well away from the two nearest sentries before he walked tall. The wolf obliged to keep him on his trail back to their rest stop. He pulled his buff coat on, not really needing it in the chill of the late night. Only one man of the troop he belonged to knew about the wolf. Connor mac Siomon knew since they'd grown up together in a small glen in the Scottish Highlands. Both needed ready coin to afford to take a wife, so they'd left home and travelled to the continent. Neither could stomach the French Papists since they'd grown up in the kirk, so had gone to the Germanies and Lutheran Sweden's ruler. The rest of the troop knew only that Raibert was an excellent scout.

A short time later, Raibert approached the Swedish forward sentry. "Papists lick the Devil's arse." A silly phrase, but few Papists could manage to say it without choking on what they considered blasphemy. "Tis mac Connal with good news." Sometimes he sneaked into camp just because he could, but not now. Too much was at stake for silly games.

Passing the sentry with a smile, he soon walked among friendly fires.

“Captain, there’s but eight horses over there, but they’ve built more fires to confuse us.” Raibert had stopped in front of the small tent the captain used, mostly to keep his maps dry. They travelled light for this mission, leaving most of their other gear and all their camp followers and injured behind with the main force. Once this battle ended, a few of the men would go back and bring the others to their new camp. Or they would all retreat toward their old camp at a run. The only one Raibert would help escape during a rout was Connor.

“So you think we can take them out quietly?” Captain Nils Storsgard asked. They all spoke a sort of German/Swedish mishmash. “Else we’ll need a path around them.”

“Aye. Two sentries that Connor and I can deal with, with a third by the fire. Everyone else asleep. They were talking French before they went to sleep, so they’re not mercenaries or important men we might hold to ransom.” So, the enemy would die. Whereas, from the enemy’s point of view, Captain Storsgard was the only one of their troop worth capturing. The rest, well, no relative lived near enough, or had enough coin to pay for their lives. Though if Raibert died, Connor would take his waistcoat, which contained their combined savings, and head home. Each large coin was sewn into a tiny pocket so they wouldn’t clink against one another. They formed a kind of armour for him. Connor would have a hard time bearing the weight on his own in a rout, but Raibert had no intention of dying and his wolf would help him move quickly no matter what the waistcoat weighed. Connor’s waistcoat held a smaller number of coins, mostly to protect his heart. He’d be able to keep up.

“Then let us advance,” the captain said with a smile. “Send them to their Purgatory, add the horses to ours and if we’re quick enough, add their coins and gear to ours before the main battle tomorrow.” No one cheered his words, being experienced mercenaries near an enemy camp, but Raibert saw wide smiles on all who were near the fires.

The enemy sentry he chose died quietly. A knife into an eye. His men weren’t wearing uniforms, but they could come back, if they lived through the next day, and strip them. Raibert stopped, then measured his foot against the dead man’s boot. They were a tad larger than his own and much newer, so he pulled them off. His own boots were worn with all the travelling they’d done. Of course, for his scouting he wore skins over his boots so there wouldn’t be hard noises to alert an enemy sentry if he kicked at a stone.

He slipped over to Connor, his victim lying in a heap. “Bugger nearly caught me as I were coming up behind him. Stood and stretched.” His voice didn’t carry. They’d had too much experience in poaching and sheep stealing

back home to be easily caught. One reason they were such good scouts for the army.

“I’ll fetch the captain,” Raibert said just as quietly. “Go watch the camp. One tends the fires. Best if he’s not able to shout a warning.”

Connor nodded and headed toward the next men to die.

When Raibert and the rest of the troop joined Connor, they observed the one enemy awake by the central fire. It was bright enough to let them see the horses, sleeping with heads down. But not even Raibert could slip up behind the fire-tender unnoticed with their time growing close. Raibert pulled his small crossbow off his back. It would do for the ten yards between them. Captain Storsgard nodded and the sergeant pointed to the men he wanted on either side of the clearing. The crossbow’s firing would be their signal.

Another advantage to his wolf. He could tell where their men were, so they didn’t have to risk making any noise to alert him that they were in position. Storsgard crouched slightly behind him. When he knew the last man was in place, he nodded to warn the captain and fired. The bolt went straight into the man’s right eye, as he intended, thus avoiding any breastplate hidden under the enemy’s cloak. As the man slumped in death, dark figures came into the firelight to surround the sleepers, who soon joined their comrade. *More widows and orphans, thought Raibert. All stupid deaths for who might rule an acre more land than some other noble. But tis one of the few ways we can earn enough coin to marry.*

None of the bodies had much in coin, but three men quickly searched the camp and piled the other supplies onto blankets for each man to take a share. The rest went back to their rest camp to bring forward their horses and the rest of the gear they needed for the morrow. Raibert swapped his boots for the newer ones, adding two other sets of socks to ensure the fit.

“Everyone ready?” the sergeant asked. Those that weren’t were jeered at until they were.

They reached their rendezvous point with at least a half hour to spare. Raibert made a circuit around their hiding place, finding the Swedish troops that were supposed to be on either side of them and reporting their position.

When he returned to their place, he reported to the captain. “All’s well to either side of us, sir. We’re the only ones who had a picket in the way. The Papists must be low on men to leave so few without close support.”

“Then later today it will be easier to push them across the river. We’re not to cross it ourselves, I’ve been told. We need to kill the Papist stragglers on our side, leaving the rest of our army to rout their main force into the river and

beyond. Papists didn't know our regiment was so close, that's why they've been so bold. Well, they'll be running home soon enough!"

Raibert nodded. He needed some sleep. Even the two hours until dawn would refresh him.

The battle was like others he'd survived. Their troop were skirmishers, not destined for the brutal squares of pikes backed by muskets and cannon. No, they were on the south side of the battle, somewhat in the trees and bushes, their guns aimed at the enemy cavalry, waiting to charge the flank in an attempt to rout them. The French officers were their favourite targets. The fancier the hat and cape, the more likely it was the troopers would shoot at them. The French sergeants never managed to convince their new officers that they should be less obvious.

Raibert hated shooting the horses, but the need to capture men who could pay a ransom was important to amassing enough gold to set up household with Mharie.

A strange looking man caught his attention. Nicely dressed, possibly an officer, but not in uniform. Raibert had never seen a man with skin as dark as his own hair before. He seemed to be moving further south, away from the battle. His horse minced along, restive at the sound of musket and cannon to the north. Raibert lost sight of him behind yet another billowing cloud of smoke from the cannons. The wolf was also confused about the man. There was something strange about him.

Raibert reloaded his musket and pistols before heading through the trees to stay within cover. The remnants of a corn field abandoned by the farmer let him move closer. The horse, now very upset at the noises of guns and dying horses, tried to head toward the trees near him. Raibert smiled and set his musket and pistols on the ground and rose. The man paid so much attention to his horse that Raibert reached his quarry before he managed to get control of the animal.

Raibert's leap sent both of them over the horse to fall to the ground, the man below him. He noted they were now lying at the river's edge. Quickly, he rolled off the dark man, who leaped to his feet.

The man was more than a head taller than Raibert, which hadn't been obvious when he'd chosen to attempt to capture him. His weight was sadly in keeping with that height. The man's arms spread as he might attempt to grab

onto his attacker. Raibert grabbed one of those arms and the wolf gave him the ability to throw him.

Into the river. Headfirst. Raibert managed not to blaspheme. Then he dove in after his prize. He might be an idiot for doing so, but he'd not drown a man who had a beast in his soul.

The man floated, not making any attempt to swim or even turn over so he could breathe. Raibert heard cries from the shore, but no one shot at him. Them. He turned the man over and he still lived. Good.

He couldn't fight the push of the current toward the other shore with his heavy waistcoat, keep his new boots on, and manage the unconscious man, so he waited until they reached a spot where the bank was low enough that he could roll the man onto shore. At least they'd left the battle behind. Any peasants here would be well gone, so it should be safe enough to go ashore.

He shook water from his hair and stared at the man. "Wolf," he muttered. "We need to carry him and find a spot to wait out the night." He felt the change to his nose. An old scent of woodsmoke gave him a direction. He sighed and bent over to pick the man up to settle him across his own shoulders. Thankfully the hut wasn't far.

Raibert found the pouch tied in the small of the big man's back when he stripped the soggy coat off. His own buff coat hung near the door on pegs already hammered into the logs.

"Well, now, here's his ransom, all nice and ready." He hefted the bag, then opened it to see gold and silver. "My lucky day. But I'll not take it all. I want some answers and I canna fight him and expect to leave unscathed." The man's beast wasn't a wolf, but his own wolf was wary.

"Tie you up for the nonce," he muttered. "I'm sure you'll wake up on the cranky side, given our introduction." A smile crossed his lips. "Fire once I've made it harder for you to hit me, me lad."

The inhabitants had run away with all the food, but had not taken the small iron pot he found rolled in a corner. Raibert pulled out his flint and his steel knife and soon had a fire started. The man's breathing sounded better now. More like he slept than anything else.

"Time for a quick hunt," Raibert said. He left the buff coat behind. That made his profession too obvious. His long waistcoat, patched over with scraps of stout fabric, would hide him well enough.

An unwary pair of rabbits were soon his and he returned to the hut. The man's eyes were closed but his breathing indicated he'd woken.

“You might want to sit up,” Raibert said. “I’ve some water in the pot if you’re thirsty, and if we come to an agreement, I’ll untie you.” He used German, guessing that the man knew it. Most of those on the continent had at least three and sometimes more tongues. Back in the glens, few bothered to learn any other.

“You’re the enemy,” the man growled. “Your fault I am here. And you want me to cooperate with you? Faugh!”

“I’ve got my ransom of you already,” Raibert said, pointing at the man’s purse lying in front of him. “I could have let you drown, but I brought you to shore and carried your bulk here. I took half your coin. If you’ll answer some questions, I’ll leave you the other half and untie you. Otherwise, I’ll take the whole thing, leave you here and take our supper away with me. You won’t find me.”

That shocked the man. Or his beast had finally woken enough to sense Raibert’s wolf.

“You’ve...”

“A beast in my soul, same as you. Well, not the same sort. That’s why I’m wishful to talk. Outside of my kin and a few others near my home, never met others in five years here.”

“It is not surprising,” the man said, sitting up with a slight groan. “We are rare beyond imagination. My family has been in France for three generations now. My grandfather came here as a boy, but knew of his heritage. There were others in the country his family helped control. But a plague came and many died. A missionary brought him back to France with him and we have lived here since.”

“We’ve lived up in the glens a long time. No tales in our family of living anywhere else. What sort of beast do you have?”

“The lion.” The man smiled, showing white teeth at odds with his dark skin. “A very large cat who live in groups of a dominant male and his hareem and cubs. And yours?”

“Wolf. They form packs, mostly related to each other. We don’t tend to have many children in the glens, which is a blessing, since there’s nowhere to move to and ‘tis hard to coax the land to giving of its bounty.”

“Living in a city is hard as well, but at least we need not grow our own food.”

As they spoke, Raibert had started roasting the small rabbits. “And cooking it, I’d guess.”

“True. Though if we found others like us, we would try to bring them into the household, my father decreed. But we have found none so far. He will be excited to hear of your family.”

“What can your beast do for you?” Raibert asked.

“Its senses can be mine. I knew it was uneasy with the shooting and smoke. It may have sensed you, but I think not.”

“So you’re not an officer?”

“No. I and my family are journalists. We observe and send back information on our army’s progress and such things to be printed on broadsheets. Though I venture that few will want to read of this day’s failure to hold the line. And yourself?”

“I’m a scout. The wolf helps me with sniffing out other men. With all the smoke and such, I didn’t realise you had a beast until I was close enough to tackle you. Didn’t mean to end up in the river, mind you. And it’s glad I am that the wolf can lend me his strength. Otherwise carrying you here would have broken me back.” He smiled, showing a few teeth.

“Would you? Please?” The man extended his wrists. Raibert slit the cord, then the one around his ankles. “Thank you.”

The rabbits were soon cooked and eaten. They talked of other things, some of what they knew or guessed about why they held beasts in their souls.

The sky darkened. “I think you should stay here over night,” Raibert said. “Sentries take a dim view of folks wandering around. Keep the fire going and you’ll be warm enough. Blame the horse throwing you.”

“And what will you do?”

“Wait till full dark and head back across the river and meet up with my people.”

The man raised an eyebrow. “That seems dangerous.”

“My wolf will warn me of sentries. I may be considered a deserter if I delay too much in returning.”

“I see. I have used my lion in a more limited way. I will speak to my family on various matters that we begin to use them more.”

Raibert left the hut, moving far enough away from the smoke so the wolf could clear his nose. No one lurked nearby. Good. He headed toward the river.

As he waited for an enemy sentry to move out of range, he thought on their earlier discussion. What other beasts might live within a soul? Lion, wolf and what else? And how had they come to be?

ABOUT THE AUTHORS AND ARTISTS

Tommy Blanchard

Tommy, a Canadian citizen, worked as a neuroscientist at Harvard University and has published his research on cognition and neuroscience in some of the leading scientific journals. He holds a Ph.D. in Brain and Cognitive Sciences in addition to degrees in philosophy and computer science. His academic background and science fiction writing reflect his interest in the mind, ethics, and the meaning of life. When he isn't writing pretentious biographies of himself, he can often be found stacking cups for his son to knock over or pacing his basement while listening to folk punk music. He writes from Shrewsbury, Massachusetts, where he lives with his wife, two sons, and two mischievous rabbits.

J.D. Dresner

J.D. Dresner has multiple poems published in [Polar Starlight](#) and [Academy of the Heart and Mind](#), including *For the Robots*, *Our Sunset*, *Freckles*, and *The Flip Side*, with another two being published in 2024. His short story “Dragons v. Subways,” is set to be published in volume 2 of “Versus” in 2025, and his short story “The Death Sentence” will be published in Fission Magazine #4, by the British Science Fiction Association in 2025 as well. Dresner’s novellas, [Sword & Witchhazel](#) and [A Goblin’s Mind](#), are available in 50+ countries, and can be found on Amazon and Indigo.

Dresner lives in Langley, British Columbia, where he provides professional book layout, design, and editorial work for various publishers. More information about Dresner can be found at [JDDresner.com](#).

Rebecca Franklyn

Rebecca writes from Vancouver, British Columbia. Her work has won *Writer's Digest* Short Story awards and is published in [Polar Borealis](#), [Polar Starlight](#), and *Chicken Soup for the Soul*. She writes across multiple genres and age categories. She can be found on Instagram [@onelifetowrite](#).

Jameson Grey

Jameson is originally from England but now lives with his family in western Canada. His work has appeared in *Dark Recesses* *Press* magazine, *Dark Dispatch* and in anthologies from publishers such as Ghost Orchid Press, Heads Dance Press and Love Letters to Poe. He can be found online at [jameson-grey.com](#).

James Grotkowski

James is a native northern Albertan who now calls Calgary home. He holds a degree in geology and presently works in IT systems development for the aviation industry. He is a long-time member of the World Haiku Club with dozens of his poems included in its published reviews with another dozen haiku offered in releases of [Polar Borealis](#) and [Polar Starlight](#). James has begun his short story writing endeavours with a couple of works having been published in *The Enigma Front: Onward* and *The Stories We Hide* anthologies and with another couple in [Polar Borealis](#) #21 and #26. Humans are in short supply in James' works, if you read them be prepared to fly far off-world. A collection of his short stories and a book of poetry are on the way.

Guy Immega

Guy is a retired aerospace engineer. His company, Kinetic Sciences Inc., built autonomous robots for the space station, robots to clean up nuclear

waste, and patented miniature fingerprint sensors. He served in the Peace Corps in Africa and vaccinated nomads in the Sahel against smallpox. In 2018, he presented an invited paper at a conference in Abuja, Nigeria on an engineering plan to save Lake Chad in the Sahara.

Guy is currently working on a scheme to counteract global warming with solar sailing mirrors in the L1 region of space between the Earth and Sun. See his website: www.planet-cooling.com.

Guy's hard SF debut novel, *Super-Earth Mother*, published by EDGE SF&F (Calgary), is now available from all online booksellers, and in bookstores.

Kellee Kranendonk

Kellee has spent a lifetime writing. According to her late grandfather she was born with a pen in one hand and paper in the other. She's certain that these days he would have claimed she was born clutching a laptop. She's pounded out many a story on the ancient laptop she does have, many of which have been published, others either seeking homes somewhere in cyberspace or waiting, like abandoned orphans, to be snatched up by a loving editor.

Kellee has a webpage, which she occasionally updates, but she can be found consistently on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/EclecticAuthor>), arguing with her dear cousin, on X (<https://twitter.com/MaritimeK1K>) trying to figure out exactly how it works, or posting cute pictures and self-promotion on Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/k2j2t1/?hl=en>).

Michèle Laframboise

Michèle Laframboise feeds coffee grounds to her garden plants, runs long distances and writes full-time in Mississauga, Ontario.

Fascinated by sciences and nature since she could walk, she studied in geography and engineering, but two recessions and her own social

awkwardness kept the plush desk jobs away. Instead, she did a string of odd jobs to sustain her budding family: some quite dangerous, others quite tedious, all of them sources of inspiration.

Michèle now has about 20 novels out and over 60 short stories in French and English, earning various distinctions in Canada and Europe. Her most recent SF book, *Le Secret de Paloma* (David, 2021) deals with teen angst and grief on a remote, hostile world. It is currently in translation and waiting to start its quest for a good home.

You can stop by at her website michele-laframboise.com/ to say hello, or visit her indie publishing house echofictions.com/ to get a taste of her fiction!

Lene MacLeod

Lene writes dark fiction, quiet horror, SFF, and poetry in Ontario, Canada. Online, her pieces can be read in *Bristol Noir*, *Punk Noir*, *Briefly Writes*, and *DarkWinter Lit*. Also a visual artist, she hopes to dedicate more time to creating artwork soon. New fiction is forthcoming and publishing updates can be found on www.lenemacleod.com

Melanie Marttila

Melanie Marttila (she/her) is an #actuallyautistic author-in-progress, writing poetry and tales of hope in the face of adversity. She has been writing since the age of seven, when she made her first submission to CBC's "Pencil Box" and is a graduate of the University of Windsor's masters program in English Literature and Creative Writing.

Her poetry has appeared in [Polar Borealis](#), [Polar Starlight](#), *Sulphur*, and her debut poetry collection, *The Art of Floating*, was published in April 2024 by Latitude 46. Her short fiction has appeared in *Pulp Literature*, *On Spec*, *Pirating Pups*, and *Home for the Howlidays*. She is a settler and writes in Sudbury, Ontario, or 'N'Swakamok, on Robinson-Huron Treaty territory, home of the

Atikameksheng Anishnawbek and the Wahnapiatae First Nation, in the house where three generations of her family have lived, on the street that bears her surname, with her spouse and their dog.

Substack: [Alchemy Ink](#)

blog: [Always Looking Up](#)

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

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Threads: <https://www.threads.net/@melaniemarttila>

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Elis Montgomery

Elis is a speculative fiction writer from Vancouver, Canada. She is a member of SFWA and Codex. When she's not writing, she's usually hanging upside down in an aerial arts class or a murky cave. Find her there or at elismontgomery.com.

Derek Newman-Stille

Derek Newman-Stille (they/them) is a Queer, Nonbinary, Disabled, Fat, Femme settler Canadian (Turtle Island) author, poet, academic, editor, visual artist, and activist. They are the 9-time Aurora Award-winning creator of the digital humanities site Speculating Canada and the associated radio show. They frequently use fantasy and science fiction as a means of elucidating possibilities and potentials, reimagining the way that we situate identities and ideas. Derek has published poetry in fora such as *Fat Studies In Canada: (Re)Mapping The Field* (Inanna) and *Whispers Between Fairies* (Renaissance Press), performed and published poetry for Artsweek Peterborough's SHIFT: Post-Code Tour, and performed poetry for Peterborough's Arts Ability: Taking the Stage.

In addition, Derek has published short fiction in *Dark Waters* (Poise and Pen Publishing), and *Nothing Without Us* (Renaissance Press). They have edited the collections *Over the Rainbow: Folk and Fairy Tales from the Margins* (Exile), and *We Shall Be Monsters* (Renaissance Press). Additionally, Nathan Frechette and they co-published Derek's collection of short fiction *Whispers Between Fairies* (Renaissance Press).

Rhonda Parrish

Like a magpie, Rhonda is constantly distracted by shiny things. She's the editor of many anthologies and author of plenty of books, stories and poems (some of which have even been nominated for awards!). She lives in Edmonton, Alberta, and she can often be found there playing Dungeons and Dragons, bingeing crime dramas, making blankets or cheering on the Oilers.

Her website, is at <http://www.rhondaparrish.com> and her Patreon, is at <https://www.patreon.com/RhondaParrish>.

Lee F. Patrick

Lee is a writer of science fiction and fantasy, and sometimes poet, living in Calgary. With ancestors from Ireland and Wales, Lee is particularly interested in the stories and poetry of Celtic tradition and history. Lee has four, soon to be five, novels published along with over thirty short works and poems. Look for the novels and some short fiction on Amazon and Kobo in both print and ebook.

Larissa Peters

A Canadian-American citizen, D. Larissa was born and raised in Indonesia. Somewhat of a nomad, she lived in Abbotsford, British Columbia, and Calgary, Alberta, then meandered around the East Coast for more than a decade, finally

residing in California. Her recent published poems have appeared in *Monterey Poetry Review*, *Sad Girl Review*, and a few forthcoming pieces will appear elsewhere.

Timothy Quinn

Timothy Quinn is a Toronto-based author and technologist whose work has appeared in *Nature*, *Metastellar*, *Factor Four*, the *New Orleans Review* and elsewhere. He runs the Dark Data Project, which assists humanitarian and conservation-focused organizations with challenging data problems. He can be found at <https://by.timothyquinn.com>.

Danny F. Santos

Danny is a fantasy and science fiction writer who lives in Toronto, Canada. In lieu of a traditional biography, please enjoy this excerpt from his 4th grade teacher: “Danny is very slow in everything. His utmost slowness leads to very poor academic achievements. At times, Danny seems very romantic and tends to deviate from his main tasks and give himself to poetry and drama. He is a difficult child to understand.” Author's note: very little has changed.

Jean-Louis Trudel

Jean-Louis has been writing and publishing since the 1980s, mostly in French, garnering 10 or so Aurora Awards along the way. His publications in French (alone or in collaboration) include 3 novels, 4 collections, over 20 YA books, and more than 100 short stories. He’s also published occasionally in English. Recent publications in English include “The Many Smiles Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics” in *On Spec*, “The End of the Sagittarius Arc,” in *Shapers of Worlds: Volume IV* (Shadowpaw Press, 2023), and “The Last Three Books of Diophantus” in the Canadian anthology *State of the Ark*:

Canadian Futurefiction and in the U.S. compilation *Untold Stories: An Anthology*.

Shane Williston

Shane enjoys reading and writing speculative fiction, poems, and essays. You can find his stories and poems in *Northword*, *Thimbleberry*, and *The Goose*. He has written two children's books, several musical theatre collaborations, three poetry chapbooks, and a few scientific journal articles about snails, lichens, and acid rain. He is currently working on a book of natural and human history essays about mountain life in northern British Columbia, a collection of short fiction stories, and a podcast collaboration called *Nearly Non-Fiction*. He takes inspiration from all kinds of writers including Russell Hoban, George Saunders, Emma Hooper, Roald Dahl, Vauhini Vara, Dan Yashinsky, Elizabeth Strout, Robert Macfarlane, and Merlin Sheldrake.

Monica Sagle Zwikstra

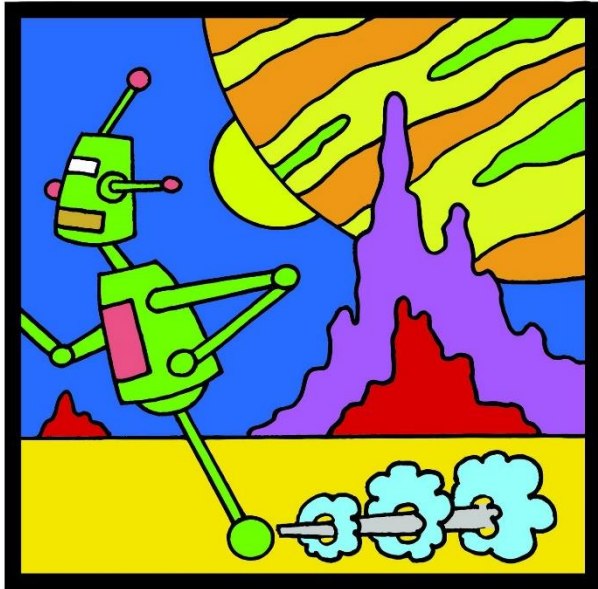
Monica is the author of two epic fantasy novels, *Dragons Flight*, and *Alban's Choice*; and is currently writing her third novel. Monica's writing skills extend to short stories with several publications. She belongs to the Crowsnest Critters writing group, and several online critique groups.

Besides writing, Monica loves gardening, cats, exploring the world of dragons, and learning ASL sign language. She lives with her husband in a tiny Hamlet in southwestern Alberta.

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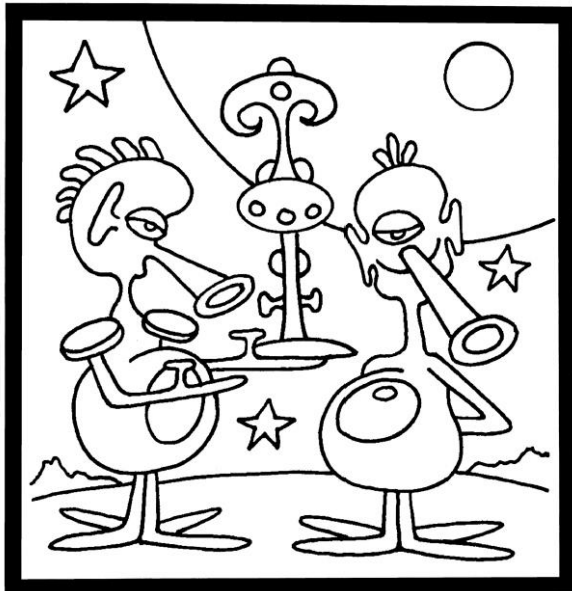
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2024 AURORA AWARD BALLOT

This ballot is for works originally done in 2023 by Canadians. The Aurora Awards are nominated by members of the Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy Association. The top five nominated works were selected. Additional works were included where there was a tie for fifth place. An online awards ceremony will be held on **Sunday, August 11th, 2024, at 5pm EDT**, with hosts Mark Leslie Lefebvre and Liz Anderson.

BEST NOVEL

Bad Cree, Jessica Johns, HarperCollins Canada

The Marigold, Andrew F. Sullivan, ECW Press

Moon of the Turning Leaves, Waubgeshig Rice, Random House Canada

Silver Nitrate, Silvia Moreno-Garcia, Del Rey

The Valkyrie, Kate Heartfield, HarperVoyager

BEST YOUNG ADULT NOVEL

The Crystal Key: The Dream Rider Saga, Book 2, Douglas Smith, Spiral Path Books

Flower and Thorn, Rati Mehrotra, Wednesday Books

Funeral Songs for Dying Girls, Cherie Dimaline, Tundra Books

The Grimmer, Naben Ruthnum, ECW Press

The Stars of Mount Quixx, S.M. Beiko, ECW Press

BEST NOVELETTE/NOVELLA

Green Fuse Burning, Tiffany Morris, Stelliform Press

I AM AI, Ai Jiang, Shortwave Media

“The Most Strongest Obeah Woman of the World”, Nalo Hopkinson, Out There Screaming: An Anthology of New Black Horror, Random House

Pluralities, Avi Silver, Atthis Arts

Untethered Sky, Fonda Lee, Tordotcom

BEST SHORT STORY

“At Every Door A Ghost”, Premee Mohamed, Communications Breakdown, MIT Press

“The Dust Bowl Café”, Justin Dill, Augur Magazine, Issue 6.1

“If I Should Fall Behind”, Douglas Smith, The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction, Sept/Oct Issue

“Once Upon a Time at The Oakmont”, P.A. Cornell, Fantasy Magazine, Issue 96

“Sink Your Sorrows to the Sea”, Chandra Fisher, Saltwater Sorrows, Tyche Books

BEST GRAPHIC NOVEL/COMIC

Atana and the Firebird, Vivian Zhou, HarperCollins

A Call to Cthulhu, Norm Konyu, Titan Nova

Carson of Venus, Ronn Sutton (artist), Martin Powell (writer), and Maggie Lopez (colourist), webcomic

Cosmic Detective, Jeff Lemire and Matt Kindt, art by David Rubin, Image Comics

It Never Rains, Kari Maaren, webcomic

The Secret of the Ravens, written and illustrated by Joanna Cacao, with lettering by Kyla Aiko, Clarion Books

Wychwood, Ally Rom Colthoff, webcomic

BEST POEM/SONG

“As a, I want to, so I can”, Kelley Tai, Heartlines Spec, Issue 2, Spring/Summer 2023

“Awakening”, Tiffany Morris, Nightmare Magazine, Issue 134

“Lying Flat”, Lynne Sargent, Strange Horizons, Issue 9 October 2023

“predictive text”, Dominik Parisien, Augur, Issue 6.1

“Scarecrow”, David Shultz, Polar Starlight, Issue 9

“A Siren’s Call, A Banshee’s Wail, A Grandmother’s Dream”, Ai Jiang, Uncanny Magazine, Issue Fifty Four

BEST RELATED WORK

GAME ON!, Stephen Kotowych & Tony Pi, editors, Zombies Need Brains LLC

No One Will Come Back for Us and Other Stories, Premee Mohamed, Undertow Publications

On Spec Magazine, Diane L. Walton, Managing Editor, The Copper Pig Writers’ Society

Skin Thief: Stories, Suzan Palumbo, Neon Hemlock Press

Year’s Best Canadian Fantasy and Science Fiction: Volume One, Stephen Kotowych, editor, Ansible Press

BEST COVER ART/INTERIOR ILLUSTRATION

Augur Magazine, Issue 6.1, cover art, Lorna Antoniazzi

Endless Library – Fantasy, interior art, Marco Marin, Year’s Best Canadian Fantasy and Science Fiction: Volume One, Ansible Press

Green Fuse Burning, cover art, Chief Lady Bird, Stelliform Press

The Machines That Make Us, cover art, Brent Nichols, Tyche Books

The Passion of Ivan Rodriguez, cover art, Kayla Kowalyk, Tyche Books

Tales & Feathers Magazine, Issue 1, cover art, Jade Zhang

BEST FAN WRITING AND PUBLICATION

Maria’s Sci-Fi, Fantasy & Horror Short Fiction Roundup, Maria Haskins

Polar Borealis Magazine, Issues: 24, 25, 26, and 27, edited by R. Graeme Cameron

Polar Starlight Magazine, Issues: 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12, edited by Rhea E. Rose

The Travelling TARDIS, Jennifer Desmarais, JenEric Designs

Young People Read Old SFF, edited by James Davis Nicoll, online

BEST FAN RELATED WORK

ephemera Reading Series, KT Bryski and Jen R. Albert, co-chairs, online

Scintillation 4, Jo Walton and René Walling, co-chairs, Montreal

Sip & Read / Sip & Social @ Librairie Saga Bookstore, Mathieu Lauzon-Dicso, bookstore owner

When Words Collide, Randy McCharles, chair, Calgary

The Worldshapers Podcast, Edward Willett, online

Note: Can*Con recused themselves from this year’s ballot even though they had enough nominations.

Polar Borealis #31 will be published in July 2024.

It will feature *cover art* by Michael Dean Jackson, *poetry* by Patricia Evans, Greg Fewer, Rebecca Franklyn, Neile Graham, Sharon Lax, Irena Nikolova, Lee F. Patrick, Jim Smith, Douglas Shimizu, Mahaila Smith, and *stories* by Chris Clemens, Desiree Fernandi, Jameson Grey, Jules Meng, Bryce Paradis, Celeste A. Peters, Frances Skene, Ash Thorngrove, and Jean-Louis Trudel.