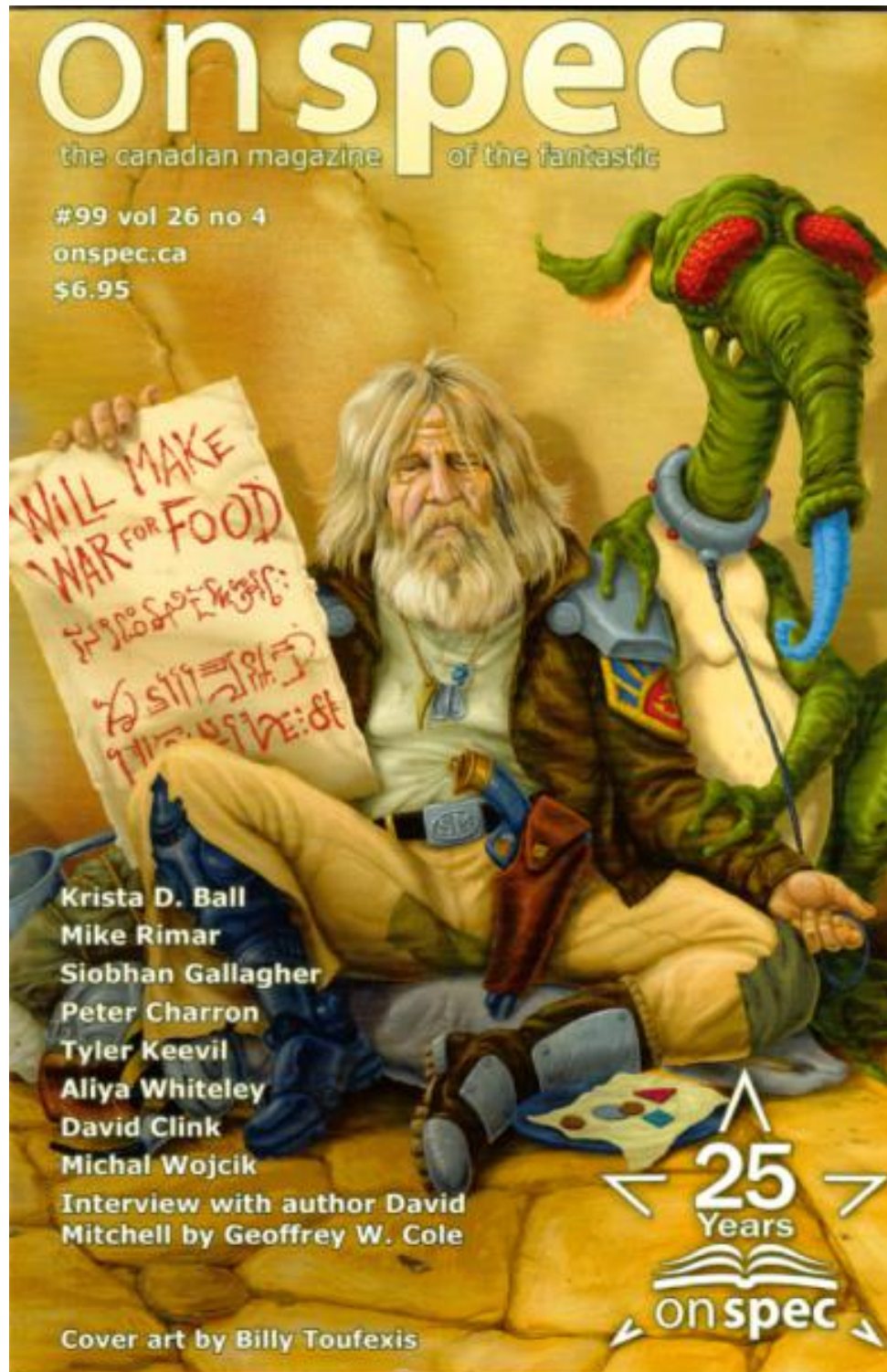


# OBIR MAGAZINE

The Occasional Biased & Ignorant Review Magazine of Canadian Speculative Fiction  
Dedicated to Promoting the Absurd Personal Literary Taste of R. Graeme Cameron  
(Issue # 3 – July 2015)



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

03 – EDITORIAL

06 – REVIEWS

## PERIODICALS

### ON SPEC MAGAZINE

- 06 – My Pink Galoshes – by *Krista D. Ball*
- 07 – Squatter’s Rights – by *Mike Rimar*
- 08 – Turnip Farmers are Heroes Too – by *Siobhan Gallagher*
- 08 – Demonic Intervention – by *Peter Charron*
- 08 – It’s In You To Give – by *Tyler Keevil*
- 08 – To The Farm – by *Aliya Whitely*
- 09 – Ink Skin – by *Michal Wojcik*

### BLACK TREACLE

- 09 – Shaping Destiny – by *Colleen Anderson*
- 09 – Re-Possession – by *Geoff Gander*
- 10 – The Bread Woman, Baked In Her Own Oven – by *David X. Wiggin*
- 10 – The Ones Your Mother Gives You – by *Dale L. Sproule*

## ANTHOLOGIES

### CASSEROLE DIPLOMACY (The Best of On Spec Magazine Anthology)

- 10 – Happy Eating on Ungath 3: A Model for Study – by *Jason Kapalka*
- 11 – Star-Seeing Night – *Alice Major*

### EXPIRATION DATE

- 11 – Sorry Seems to be the Hardest Word – by *Kelly Armstrong*
- 11 – Banshee – by *Daniel Sernine* (translation by *Sheryl Curtis*)

### IMAGINARIUM 3

- 12 – Rosary and Goldenstar – by *Jeff Ryman*
- 12 – Nahuales – by *Silvia Moreno-Garcia*

### MYTHOLOGICALLY TORQUED

- 13 – The Kelpie – by *Alyx J. Shaw*

### WASPS AT THE SPEED OF SOUND

- 14 – Lost Jenny – All stories by *Derryl Murphy*

14 – Island of the Moon

## SWORD & MYTHOS

15 – The Iron Hut – by *Maurice Broaddus*

15 – Jon Carver of Barzoon, You Misunderstood – by *Graham J. Darling*

## WRESTLING WITH GODS

16 – Mecha-Jesus – by *Derwin Mak*

16 – Come All Yee Faithful – by *Robert J. Sawyer*

## NOVELS

### AN ALIEN COLLECTIVE

17 – By *Roxanne Barbour*

### HEALER’S SWORD

18 – By *Lynda Williams*

## NONFICTION

### NORTHERN DREAMERS

21 – Lesley Choyce

22 – **TO BE REVIEWED NEXT ISSUE**

22 – **MISSILE MISSIVES** – Apoplectic expletives from: *Ranylt Richildis, Janice Shoults, Janice Ursel, Craig Russell, Robert Runté, Lynda Williams, Lloyd Penney, Dave Haren & Rodney Leighton.*

28 – **AFTERWORDS** – Final thoughts

---

## EDITORIAL

So far the lunch mobs, if any are forming, are not drawing attention to themselves. A number of people have indicated they actually approve of what I’m doing with OBIR. Wowzers! I had hoped for this kind of response, but hadn’t dared take it for granted. However, I have gone to great pains to indicate I’m just an abnormally ordinary sort of guy and may actually seem useful and interesting if people lower their expectations low enough, a subtle public relations campaign which may actually be working, contrary to the usual Madison Avenue technique.

(If you’re not old enough to understand the “Madison Avenue” reference, I suggest you go read some old Mad Magazines from the fifties and sixties. You still might not get it, but you’ll have a great time.)

At the creative Ink festival Lynda Williams and Jennifer Lott gave me hardcopies of their books. Roxanne Barbour mailed me hardcopies of two of her novels. Five Rivers Publishing emailed me five PDF novels, one of them an advance review copy. Bundran Press sent me two ARCs. EDGE Publishing has offered to do the same. And On Spec promises to email me PDFs of all future issues. With the money I don't have to spend on "freebies" I always have the option to go to White Dwarf Books, my favourite book store, and buy yet more books, albeit just a few. I don't seem to be lacking for material to review. Excellent! Makes me happy.

The above has been a name-dropping exercise designed to "shame" other authors and publishers into sending me free stuff. Not as crass as it sounds. A fixed pension income is no joke. But I really do want to critique as wide a variety of contemporary Canadian genre literature as humanly possible, and I definitely appreciate whatever people are willing to send me. I'm a slow reader, but will get around to everything eventually.

Incidentally, another thing which makes me happy is my newly launched website entirely devoted to OBIR Magazine which you can find here:

< <http://www.obirmagazine.ca> >

This is entirely due to the good will and profound tech skills of Australian Jean Weber (of "Weber Woman's Wrevenge" fame), my co-admin for the site. It's not that she's interested in any aspect of the genre anymore—though her 1980's fanzine was leading-edge innovative in its day—it so happens she's moved on to other things. However, she finds my ongoing cluelessness regarding computer skills and techniques so mind-bogglingly inept she can't resist the temptation to help me out. I'm very grateful to her.

One thing I did manage to do on my own was install a renaissance woodcut depicting a monk reading a book (no doubt the Bible, but it could be the only surviving partial manuscript of the Satyricon for all we know) as a background tile for the home page. It is black and white and very evocative, raising questions like "Why is his hair so stringy?" Never washed I guess.

For the header image I inserted a wonderful plague-era woodcut showing three animated corpses snatching three printers from their work. One of the hapless poor souls is caught in the midst of setting type, another printing, and the third grabbed as he sits behind a counter offering bound books for sale. The only problem is that the work in question is very "busy," and combined with the tile art looks very messy and confusing to the eye. Basically ruins the "look" of the home page.

However, I soon solved that problem. I took the original art file and coloured it pixel by pixel. Now the "demons" are bright red, the printers dressed in lime green, paper and books in bright yellow, the furniture in two hues of brown, all standing out against pale blue walls. The image as a whole really "pops" off the page and stands in striking contrast to the background art. I am very pleased with the result.

Some may question my use of lavender for the ceiling panels, and pink for the carpet, but hey, I didn't have time to search for a better colour from the hue wheel. I just used what was at hand. It works, I swear.

I spent hours and hours working on colourizing the piece and, most annoying of all, deleting the randomly scattered "garbage" pixels. Tired out my eyes. So I took a nap. You know how, when you're eyes are closed, you see scattered faint dots of light in ever-shifting patterns? I found myself gritting my teeth and furrowing my brow as I subconsciously attempted to focus on those dancing "pixels" and "delete" them. Made falling asleep a rather painful experience. Thank God I don't work with Microsoft Paint for a living. Would drive me insane.

By the way, for all you beginning writers out there (or beginning critics for that matter), I've added a page to my OBIR web site posting Bruce Sterling's "Workshop Lexicon" with some additional material from the "Online Writers Workshop." Absolutely invaluable stuff. Memorize and understand these words of wisdom and you'll know how NOT to write. Admittedly doesn't work for me if only because I easily forget things. But them with young and feral minds sharp as the jaws of a Great White, I figure this is just what you need.

I send this material to every participant in my VCON writers workshops. It is freeware you see, designed to be disseminated as widely as possible. Be sure to check it out, and share with others.

I've also posted lists of links to markets. Just a few so far, but I will expand them as time permits.

I also post a blog to the site now and again, with titles like "The Advantages of Losing One's Mind," and "The Critic as Demon." Basically commenting on the Canadian writing scene. You may find them amusing.

Incidentally, I had assumed "OBIR" was a unique acronym. Turns out I'm wrong. There's an online computer game, titled "Storm of Heroes," in which "the OBIR" is a weapon, specifically an "**O**beya **B**urst-fire **I**nfantry **R**ifle." I'll be darned. In my site blog I note the weapon is said to be "inaccurate at short range." Possible reflection on my critiquing skills? Nah.

### **Concerning review copies:**

I welcome Canadian publishers sending me PDFs of books (especially anthologies) or magazines for review purposes. Likewise Canadian authors, even if your story or book is published in another country.

Note that I won't be reviewing foreign authors unless their work is within a book or magazine published by a Canadian company. OBIR Magazine is dedicated to CANADIAN SpecFic.

PDFs can be sent to me at < [The Graeme](#) > I can't guarantee to review it in a timely manner, but I intend to make the effort.

I wouldn't send me a hardcopy if I were you, unless it fits within your advert budget. You might want to wait a while to see if OBIR generates any "buzz" or if it dies stillborn. No sense wasting money.

But if you absolutely insist, send your book or magazine to:

R. Graeme Cameron  
13315 104<sup>th</sup> Ave, Apt 72-G  
Surrey, B.C. Canada  
V3T 1V5

Once read, I'll pass it on to any local fan who wants to read it.

I prefer to think I'm going to have fun with OBIR. Hopefully my readers will too.

Please send me feedback! You can reach me at: < [The Graeme](#) >

Or my Twitter account: < [@rgraemecameron](#) >

And don't forget to check out my website < [Cdn. SF Zine Archive](#) > which is devoted to the history of Canadian SF Fandom and Fanzines!



## REVIEWS

### REVIEWING SYSTEM

- **Invigorating** = Really, really exciting. Eye-opening. Dance a jig time.
- **Great Fun** = Thoroughly enjoyed it. Ripping good yarn. Stimulating.
- **Entertaining** = Pleasing. Memorable. A good read. Worthwhile.
- **Interesting** = Something intriguing about it, but not enough to get me excited.
- **Not to my taste** = Doesn't appeal to me due to my personal prejudices.
- **Abysmal** = Waste of time for any number of reasons.

Note that with the exception of the “abysmal” rating my rating system doesn't judge works on their intrinsic merit so much as how they run up against my personal preferences and prejudices. Readers should bear this in mind. I could be dead wrong about everything!

As always, Canadian publishers, editors, artists and authors are identified, some marked for consideration of upcoming Aurora awards if the publication date is relevant.

Note that the term **(Cdn)** includes non-citizens living and working in Canada.

Also note that **(AAE 2016)** means Aurora Award Eligible in 2016.

---

## PERIODICALS

**ON SPEC** Magazine **(Cdn)** – #99, WN V.26#4 – (Winter 2014/2015) – **(AAE 2016)** – [On Spec Mag](#)

Edited by *Diane L. Walton* – **(Cdn: Edmonton, AB)** – **(AAE 2016)** – Cover by *Billy Toufexis* – **(Cdn – Montreal, Quebec)** – **(AAE 2016)**



This magazine and some of its stories are relevant for next year's Aurora Awards.

**My Pink Galoshes** – by *Krista D. Ball* **(Cdn – Edmonton, AB)** – **(AAE 2016)**

*Premise:* The cod is gone. The seals are gone. The whales have left. Nothing grows in an oily, barren Newfoundland. What's a young girl to do?

Help clean up, for one thing. Most everyone has been resettled in Labrador, but 15,000 “stubborn Newfies” live offshore on the “floating cities” which happen to be

decommissioned aircraft carriers donated by the Americans. The daily grind includes washing beach rocks and collecting the oil-contaminated dirt in the hope that someday somebody might figure out what to do with it. This is carrying stubbornness a little too far, don't you think? I mean, "Newfies" are famous for never giving up, but... I mean, really... Sisyphus had it easy compared to this.

*Rating: **Entertaining**.* It is a rather short story, but so filled with goofy optimism it carries the reader swiftly along. Maybe the "catastrophe" writers have it all wrong. Maybe people caught up in permanent, irrevocable disasters don't despair? Maybe people, out of emotional self-defense, develop a kind of gambling fever, always thinking "Okay, today was the usual hellish SNAFU, but tomorrow will be better?"

I don't think I've encountered this line of thought in disaster fiction before. Denial, yes. Mindless faith in the authorities somehow setting things right, yes. Seeking to exploit the situation for profit, of course. Assuming everybody is being punished for their sins, naturally. But being almost giddy with joy at facing up to what's required, even though the cause is obviously absolutely hopeless? I figure Krista has invented a brand new psychological phenomenon, an unexpected state of mind that, given the irrepressibility of human nature, rings true. Not bad for a quickie written during a lunch hour.

Whether you like the ending or not probably depends on your habitual mood, or sanity.

### **Squatter's Rights** – by **Mike Rimar** – (Cdn – Whitby, Ont) – (AAE 2016)

*Premise:* Automated machines have terraformed a distant planet into a new Earth. A gigantic colony ship stocked with thousands of frozen human colonists and gazillions of tons of supplies and equipment finally arrives and swings into orbit. Its newly thawed Captain is aghast to learn the planet is already occupied. Squatters!

This reads very much like a genre tale written in the forties or fifties, complete with the ancient trope of aliens speaking according to old radio and TV broadcasts they've intercepted. Take the following example:

*"Take it cool, Big Daddy." The alien creature's lips stretched wide, revealing two rows of very square teeth.* "I jazz your lingo. The handle is Gluberfest, Supreme Kahuna of Jillihow. Now, what's this jive about vacating the premises? That plan just isn't gonna fly, you dig?"

Possibly your lips are curling into an Elvis-style look of disdain. This isn't literary. It isn't even credible. Nobody ever, ever talked like that: not on this planet; not on any other.

I hurl a Simpson's character "Aha!" in your direction. When I was a kid I knew teenagers who talked like this, at least when their parents weren't around. At was all a game of one-upmanship to determine who had absorbed the most "legitimate" current slang. And I can tell you, based on my Mesoamerican history course, that lesser cultures often mimic the culture of distant, more powerful nations in order to enhance the prestige of the local ruler. An alien ruler talking like a weekend-hipster isn't as farfetched as you think. Social realism actually, sociologically speaking.

*Rating: **Great fun**.* But realism should be the last thing you're thinking about while reading this story. It's a wonderful blast from the past, concept-wise. Sheer, exuberant fun. The way the majority of SF lit used to be. (You can tell I keep rereading the genre pocket book collection I amassed in the 1960s.) So what if the denouement may be a bit dodgy, scientifically speaking. Who cares? The whole point of this story is to have fun reading it. I certainly did.

### **Turnip Farmers are Heroes Too** – by *Siobhan Gallagher*

*Premise:* A turnip farmer discovers five bandits have taken over his (somewhat medieval) village. They are a tad threatening. Seems they want treasure. He lets slip he's worried about the treasure buried among his turnips. The bandits' eyes light up. The very thing they're looking for. They insist he lead them to his farm.

The hero makes the point that turnip farmers put a lot more work into looking after turnips than the average hero does in maintaining his sword, and that consequently turnip farmers are arguably more useful to the security of a village community than any gaggle of hired cliché heroes in shining armour. Given what happens, I'm inclined to agree. Especially if the turnips have been grown properly.

*Rating: Great fun.* Got to admit, I was positively gleeful while reading this. Another blast from the past! An old-fashioned, highly entertaining bit of near-Lovecraftian whimsy. So what if the likes of Jean Paul Sartre would say "I don't get it." I'm all for writers aiming for the stars as far as subtle, inspiring metaphors go, and meaningful social commentary, not to mention convoluted use of a thesaurus, but sometimes readers just want to sit back and enjoy what they're reading. This one's a winner.

By the way, Sartre was a bit of an odd lad. I never gotten over the fact he once mused, prior to the war, over the question of whether Adolf Hitler was the philosopher king first predicted by Plato. After all, an actual artist had become ruler of a country, surely a slap in the face to the hated bourgeoisie everywhere. If you ask me, Sartre was a bit of a slap in the face himself. Be that as it may, no Sartre influence in this story. Good thing too.

### **Demonic Intervention** – by *Peter Charron*

*Premise:* Mabiralec is one of innumerable demons (disguised as human beings who more or less blend in among the odd "natural" people) inhabiting New York city. His purpose? Why, to plague mankind and lead them into temptation of course. Unfortunately he has become addicted to a certain kind of human crime so petty it is not even mentioned in the demonic lexicon. Ashamed, outraged, and finally devoid of patience, his fellow demons stage an intervention. Will it work?

*Rating: Great fun.* It's a very short story, but if you go with the premise it is definitely amusing. There's a certain demonic glee, even cheerfulness, in this tale of demons at odds with one another. I enjoyed it.

### **It's In You To Give** – by *Tyler Keevil* – (Cdn – now lives in Wales) – (AAE 2016)

*Premise:* A vampire doctor occasionally volunteers in a blood clinic. Sounds like a cliché, doesn't it? But he's experiencing a moral crisis and attempting to live without killing anyone. Then he discovers there's another vampire in town with no such qualms. He sets out to find him, and stop him.

The tale is very nicely done, with some unexpected plot twists and interesting characters. A refreshing new take on an old trope.

*Rating: Entertaining.* I'm not much of a fan of vampires (except for Bela Lugosi and Christopher Lee), but the concept and evolving plot of this story carried me along effortlessly. Original enough to please I find.

### **To The Farm** – by *Aliya Whitely*

*Premise:* What do you do with a boy who isn't a boy? His "parents" send him to live on a farm. He's eager to see the animals, but never does.



*Rating: **Interesting.*** We don't learn much about the threat facing the boy, but we do learn to identify with him, if only because his situation reflects some of our worst childhood fears, such as loneliness and a sense of abandonment. The boy himself may not feel these things, but his predicament is such that the reader automatically projects such emotions on to the character. I found this story subtly and powerfully disturbing, found it infinitely sad. I don't read to be sad. Frankly, this is the kind of story I normally avoid. Too intense.

You may read it and wonder what I'm talking about. I guess it stirred up too much of me in a very personal manner. Damn near made me cry. I ain't so tough.

**Ink Skin** – by *Michal Wojcik* – (Cdn) – (AAE 2016)

*Premise:* A brief encounter with a girl sketching in a park leaves the protagonist “infected” with an ever-expanding tattoo. His effort to find her again sees him drawn into another world partly of his own making where he is instructed to undertake a quest not necessarily to his advantage.

*Rating: **Interesting.*** I'm guessing this story is a metaphor for our natural tendency to reshape reality into an “unreality” we find more pleasing. It can also be seen as typical of tales where the writer isn't specific enough to make the setting “real” to the reader, but in this case it is vital to the point of the story, a “fault” converted into a legitimate technique in order to strengthen the impact of the story. Overall it is a surreal fantasy not quite to my taste, but I do find the technique and style intriguing.

**BLACK TREACLE** Magazine (Cdn) – #9 – (May 2015) – (AAE 2016) – [Find it here](#)



Edited by *A.P. Matlock* (Cdn – Cape Breton, N.S.)

**Shaping Destiny** – by *Colleen Anderson* – (Cdn – Vancouver Region, B.C.) – (AAE 2016)

*Premise:* Nerissa is a Gypsy fortuneteller who'd rather be neither, but unfortunately her “gift” is genuine, and she feels compelled to consult soap bubbles on behalf of clients. Trouble is usually three or four soap bubbles form, each one showing her a different future. She always tries to pick the “best” one for her client, but sometimes the several futures coalesce in disturbing and even fatal ways. Even worse, she has the growing belief her choice of future dictates the future, that her clients are her puppets.

One of her clients, guessing that she did in fact choose his future from several options, is dissatisfied with her original choice. He comes back. Not a good thing.

*Rating: **Entertaining.*** A difficult subject to tackle. Have not fortunetellers been done to death? But Colleen explores the moral difficulties facing a fortuneteller who is NOT a fraud, with all the complications and dangers which can result. Quite an original approach.

**Re-Possession** – by *Geoff Gander* – (Cdn – Ottawa, Ont) – (AAE 2016)

*Premise:* Vincenzo works as an accountant in a large, very profitable corporation. His ex-boyfriend Dean, killed in a car accident, is brought in to work as a data entry clerk. Employing zombies is a common practice. Don't even have to worry about minimum wages. Routine maintenance is all that is required. Replacing living workers with zombies is a growing business trend. The living are getting worried.

Turns out they should be. Dean manages, despite decreased brain capacity, to warn Vincenzo about what is actually going on. As always in the real world, knowing the truth does you more harm than good. Vincenzo is in a bit of a pickle.

*Rating: **Entertaining**.* Having spent several decades in corporate offices, I know damned well that the corporate ideal is either slaves or zombies. Unionized workers getting a living wage gets in the way of maximizing profits, and the modern trend is to return to the 1890s, the era of robber barons and subsistence level employment. Consequently this story speaks volumes to me. The plot is basic, but the concept is what grips. This story is more real and relevant than most people would want to admit. Scary stuff, kids.

### **The Bread Woman, Baked in Her Own Oven** – by **David X. Wiggin**

*Premise:* The dough lady is an enormously fat woman held in contempt by all her neighbours. All the local kids taunt her mercilessly. Then one kid discovers he likes to masturbate while fantasizing the dough lady is atop of him. Horrified and ashamed, he convinces his friends to swarm her house and force her into her oven.

*Rating: **Interesting**.* This is a bit like **Lord of the Flies**. Surprising how cruel kids can be, especially as a mob. The title is a bit of a giveaway, but I have to admit it's a catchy title. The consequences of the assault are maybe not what you would expect. The fact that she has an oven big enough to take her gigantic bulk indicates she knew this was her inevitable fate. I consider this story an unpleasant reminder of what human pack behaviour can be like. Violence with gusto far too human a condition. Disturbing.

### **The Ones Your Mother Gives You** – by **Dale L. Sproule** – (Cdn – Toronto, Ont) – (AAE 2016)

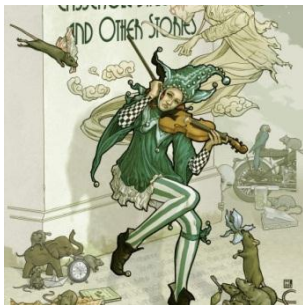
*Premise:* Eleven-year-old Luke suspects something is wrong when his mother tries to kill him. Then things get progressively worse every time she goes off her meds. Ultimately their relationship becomes rather close but definitely unsound and worrisome.

*Rating: **Interesting**.* I believe this story works as a horror fantasy, but that's the problem. It works too well. Most unsettling. Makes me uneasy. As a result I can't call it entertaining because I feel a bit threatened. Madness is always interesting, of course, but the logic of it can be frighteningly seductive. Another example of something not quite my cup of tea but well done.

---

## **ANTHOLOGIES**

### **CASSEROLE DIPLOMACY** – Tyche Books (2014) – (Cdn) – [Find it here](#)



Edited by **Marianne O. Nielsen** – (Cdn) & **Diane L. Walton** – (Cdn – Yukon)

#### **Contents:**

#### **Happy Eating on Ungrath 3** – by **Jason Kapalka** – (Cdn – Edmonton, Alberta)

*Premise:* A standardized franchise equipped with a standardized staff serving standardized food is opened on an isolated backwater planet. Unfortunately the franchise owner decides to experiment with local, fresh produce and non-standard ambience. Stern measures are taken.

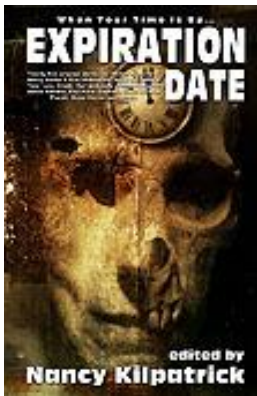
*Rating: **Entertaining**.* Granted, this is a light bit of froth spoofing the fast food industry, but I liked it. The hidden horror, it need hardly be pointed out, is that the idiotic policies of the “HappyFood” company are perilously close to the way fast food enterprises are actually run.

**Star-Seeing Night** – by *Alice Major* – (Cdn – Edmonton, Alberta)

*Premise:* In the near future a cloud-shrouded Earth guarantees being able to see the moon and the stars (should a rare rent open in the clouds) is a once-in-a-lifetime event, if that. Tonight the sky opens. A young girl, a young woman, and an old woman near death have individual reactions to what they see.

*Rating: **Entertaining**.* It’s a poem, quite a beautiful poem. Manages to convey the eternal majesty of the heavens despite the fact that not every viewer is lost in awe.

**EXPIRATION DATE** – Edge SF&F Publishing (2015) – (Cdn) – (AAE 2016) – [Find it here](#)



Edited by *Nancy Kilpatrick* – (Cdn – Montreal, Quebec) – (AAE 2016)

**Contents:**

**Sorry Seems to be the Hardest Word** – by *Kelly Armstrong* – (Cdn – Ontario) – (AAE 2016)

*Premise:* One of the worst problems confronting long-lived vampires (not quite as immortal as they wish) is that people they like, even other vampires, tend to kick the bucket before they do. Of course, ordinary mortals experience the same problem if they live long enough, but with vampires, mortals tend to wither and decay while the vampire is still in the bloom of youth. A bit depressing that. There are assorted solutions, some of which annoy other vampires, and vampires tend to hold grudges. Especially the guilty ones. Try getting a vampire to apologize. Just try.

*Rating: **Interesting**.* The consequences of a life unlived among mortals is worked out in some detail, as is the consequent petty bickering among vampires, but it is not a subject that fires my imagination. I’m afraid I’d be more interested in the petty games of one-upmanship played by sentient fungoids dangling from the ceiling of a weirdly uncave-like cave. Lovecraftian horror appeals to me far more than traditional vampirism. I can admire the complex revelations of relationship in this story, but the characters left me unmoved (unlike the characters in Keevil’s vampire tale reviewed above). Too classical perhaps. Not off-the-wall enough for my taste. But there is a certain “comedy of manners” aspect present that I know will appeal to many. I’m just not the sort to be included in the target audience. I’m too eclectic in my taste for some, and sometimes not eclectic enough. I is what I is. Sorry about that. See? I apologize easily. Sure proof I’m not a vampire. Maybe.

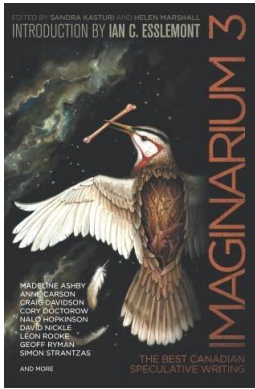
**Banshee** – by *Daniel Sernine* (translated by *Sheryl Curtis*) – (Cdn – Quebec) – (AAE 2016)

*Premise:* Ronald Keable heard the cry of a banshee just before his wife died in a tragic accident. Now he lives a life designed to prevent the incident from being repeated.

I know next to nothing about banshees. Here Daniel explains “*Irish or Scottish, Celtic in any case, banshees were spirits with female voices – reportedly heart-wrenching – who announced the imminent death of a loved one with their lamentations.*” Yes, what DO you do when you’ve heard one, and never want to hear it again? And can your ploy succeed?

**Rating: *Interesting*.** I was prepared to be entertained, but somehow the situation lacked drama and Keable didn't capture my attention, in part because he was described by another and I never got to see through his eyes. I ask myself, would I have liked this better if it had been written by Lovecraft? After all, **Pickman's Model**, one of my favourite stories of his, has a very similar aloof approach. But in this case, too aloof. If it had been written by Lovecraft I would have considered it one of his lesser works. I didn't find Keable interesting enough to engage my attention. Or perhaps it is because I had the vague expectation that a banshee was some sort of demonic monster and came away feeling disappointed. Not the first time my ignorance has spoiled something for me.

### **IMAGINARIUM 3** – ChiZine Publications (2015) – (Cdn) – (AAE 2016) – [Find it here](#)



Edited by **Ian C. Esslemont** – (Cdn born, now in Alaska) – (AAE 2016)

**Rosary and Goldenstar** – by **Jeff Ryman** – (Cdn born, now in UK) – (AAE 2016)

**Premise:** Two Danes, emissaries of the astronomer Tycho, led by a spy working for the Pope, visit the London house of Sir. John Dee, the Advisor Philosophical to Queen Elizabeth. Much ado about miscommunication in assorted languages. Another house guest, by name of Guillermaus Shakespeare, a former actor and a budding playwright of some note, trades pointed and witty jokes with the Dane named Rosary. Dee, very much impressed by Shakespeare's quick wit and the deeper thoughts submerged within his humour, makes him a most interesting offer. The purpose of the gathering, however, is to peer through Dee's telescope at the moon. What they see has vast political implications. Shakespeare's take is rather different.

**Rating: *Great fun*.** My knowledge of the era is a bit shaky, but even I can see this is a very playful alternative history which can be enjoyed even if you are more ignorant than I am (highly unlikely). The quick reference to it being perfectly safe for an Englishman to travel in Spain due to the excellent relations between the two countries is but one of many amusing variations on the "historical" truth. Skim read and you are liable to miss them.

The real strength of this story is that not only does it bring these Elizabethan characters to roaring life, it manages to convey a contemporary feel to them so that reader fully understands how cutting edge these "scientists" were in their day, and how innovative Shakespeare truly was. As Dee comments to him "*You write the history of tragic kings. This has not happened since the Greeks.*" Yes, a thoroughly modern man in his time, dangerously so.

The strength of the humour and debate in the dialogue is such that it could easily be turned into a short but nevertheless entertaining play. Shakespeare would approve. He'd enjoy it.

**Nahuales** – by **Silvia Moreno-Garcia** – (Cdn: Vancouver, B.C.) – (AAE 2016)

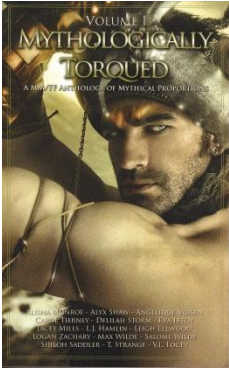
**Premise:** A young working girl (not THAT kind of working girl) in Mexico City notes three Nahuales hanging around the subway station she must use every day to get to work. Evidentially were-creatures: sometimes human; sometimes in the form of black dogs. Figures out of Mexican folklore, but not myths, something very real. She knows, because her grandmother slew one long ago. Now she may have to live up to her grandmother's reputation. Trouble is, there are three of the beasts, and they begin hunting.

**Rating: *Entertaining*.** Back around 1980 when I was attending UBC the playwright Tennessee Williams was writer in residence for a semester. I was taking numerous theatre courses and got to meet him on a number of

occasions, including a delightful lunch on the balcony of the faculty building. (Enough namedropping, though I could tell a few tales). Part of the deal was that the university theatre would stage a play he was working on, titled “The Red Devil Battery Sign,” which was about a doomed couple plagued by a gang of Hispanic teenagers who were so pack-like in nature they howled like wolves when closing for the kill.

My point is this short story by Silvia is a lot more convincing, more genuinely paranoiac, and stands by itself, with or without any metaphors you manage to conjure up. Mind you, William’s play was a work in progress, and may have approached one of his classic plays in its final form, but at that late stage in his life I seriously doubt it. Silvia’s story is much more satisfying.

## **MYTHOLOGICALLY TORQUED** – Torquere Press (2015) – [Find it here](#)



Edited by Deelyah Mullin.

### **The Kelpie** – by **Alyx J. Shaw** – (Cdn: Surrey, B.C.) – (AAE 2016)

*Premise:* Ian Colley, a promising academic taking time off to write a book, is stumbling across Bodin moor, quite drunk and quite upset because his lover, Dr. Phillip Anderson, a famed mythologist, has dumped him merely because the good Doctor’s wife is returning from Rome.

Ian comes across an amazingly powerful-looking black horse standing by Dozmary Pool. He takes for granted it’s a Kelpie, somewhat out of its normal haunts, eagerly offering him a ride so it can leap into the pool and drown him. That’s what Kelpies do. Lost in admiration, Ian politely declines the ride.

The Kelpie’s curiosity is piqued. *“Do you know my name?”*

*“Aye, that I do. Kelpie, most glorious of the shape-shifting fae, in my opinion.”*

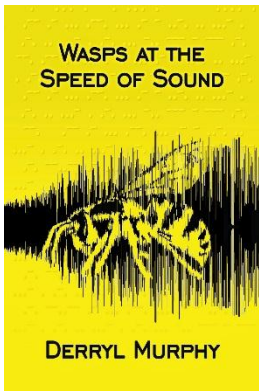
It is the beginning of a beautiful friendship. Unfortunately there’s the little matter of Phillip being pissed off and seeking revenge because Ian wrote a message for the wife written in indelible marker ink on the good Doctor’s bare back while he was unconscious. Not to mention the wife’s outrage. And the Doctor’s other lover. Under such circumstances it is difficult for a Kelpie and a mere mortal to maintain a healthy relationship. Especially when the police get involved. Something has to be done to set things right.

*Rating: Great fun.* Alyx’s writing style has been described by one reviewer as “literary heroin,” which I take to mean addictive as hell. Nothing stops the flow of the story; nothing forces the reader out of the story. Description, narrative, plot twists, and motivation are welded seamlessly into a delightful tale. There’s sex and violence, not uncommon things really, but there’s also wry and unexpected moments of humour reflecting the sanity of both Ian and the Kelpie.

Indeed, that is the greatest strength of the story. The Kelpie is portrayed in a matter-of-fact manner without any undue emphasis on it being what it is, a mythological creature. In this world, such beings are very real. Only man’s close-minded rejection of the old beliefs have driven them from sight. Respect the fae for what they are, and they will return. To your peril if you piss them off. So be nice. Live and let live. You might gain some very interesting friends. And lovers.

Oh, by the way, did you know that the Dwarf fae make lousy whiskey? The Kelpie knows this to be true.





**Contents:** All stories by *Derryl Murphy* – (Cdn – Saskatoon, Saskatchewan)

### **Lost Jenny**

*Premise:* A somewhat uncouth young chappie is enjoying watching the end of the world from an apartment tower roof, occasionally taking time off to trash some of the apartments just for fun. Seems aliens are dismantling the moon and smashing bits of continents (starting with California oddly enough) as a warning they'll get tough unless Earth hands over the female alien they're looking for. Unfortunately nobody knows who or what they're talking about.

Turns out our young thug already knows the alien, slightly, and on running into her again decides to help her. This will probably make the other aliens really mad. Things can only get worse.

*Rating: **Entertaining.*** You don't really think the end of the world will witness humanity either panicking or stoically confronting their fate with stiff upper lips do you? Fact is quite a few people will be rather content, even happy, as all the people who've been picking on them will be about to get theirs. You'd be amazed how many people would enjoy seeing the world they've learned to hate get smashed. They won't mind dying, as long as everyone else dies with them. In truth the protagonist seems to be rather invigorated by the impending collective fate. Appears to regard it as a great equalizer, which, of course, is exactly what death is.

Mind you, it is possible to face death with little more than idle curiosity. Back around the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis I asked my dad, a serving RCAF officer, what he would do if nuclear war broke out. "Well," he replied, "if I'm home I'll send you and your brother and your mom down into the basement, and then I'll go up on the roof and watch. Probably have time for a couple of shots of whiskey and at least one cigarette. Should be quite a show."

Point is the reaction of our "hero" to events is perfectly credible. Many people are liable to behave in exactly the same way during the end of the world. The kicker, itself equally credible, is that the destruction of the Earth and humanity is just collateral damage as far as the aliens are concerned. They have more important things on their mind. Which is but one of the reasons I hope we NEVER contact an advanced alien civilization. Nothing good can come of it. And if we are more advanced than they are, I pity the poor bastards.

### **Island of the Moon**

*Premise:* In the near future a TV journalist is driving through the Martian-style desert of Madagascar to reach one of the few remaining stands of trees in order to broadcast live the death of the last remaining Golden Lemur, a sickly beast monitored round the clock by biologists. So many animals have recently become extinct it has become a topic of some interest, and it is hoped actually capturing an extinction live on camera will be good for ratings.

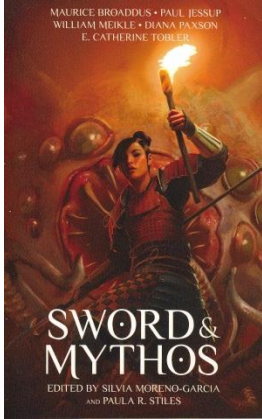
He is accompanied by one of three aliens who landed on Earth a decade earlier and have been wandering about ever since, studying humanity without explaining why. This one is keen on witnessing the extinction event. When it occurs the alien becomes, for the first time, quite talkative. Unfortunately.

*Rating: **Interesting.*** This story captures the sadness and depressing finality of extinction quite well. It is a warning of sorts, a lesson that is timely and pointed, but also futile because it is preaching to the converted. The people who actually hold the fate of the world in their hands won't be reading it. They're having far too much

fun manipulating humanity like so much wet cement to be shaped into a monument to their ego and ambition. We haven't got a chance, frankly.

But as one famous biologist (whose name I can't remember) once pointed out, the last member of a species doesn't know it is the last. It only knows that it is alone. The real torment and angst is in the minds of human observers. Question is: who or what will mourn our passing? And don't say the cockroaches. They don't care. Really. They don't. The little buggers.

## **SWORD & MYTHOS** – Innsmouth Free Press (2014) – (Cdn) – [Find it here](#)



Edited by *Silvia Moreno-Garcia* – (Cdn – Vancouver, B.C.) & *Paula R. Stiles*

### **Contents:**

#### **The Iron Hut** – by *Maurice Broaddus*

*Premise:* Dinga of the Nokia people is climbing a snow-capped mountain in order to slay it and win fame. Unfortunately nine Berbers show up intent on slaying him. But then his old Masai friend Naiteru shows up to even the odds. Redoubtable warriors you see. They press on and reach the mountain-sloped city of Kilwa Kivinje whose inhabitants are not happy to see them arrive. For one thing, malevolent forces within the mountain have them under a curse. For another, they are convinced Dinga is there to kill them all. He is affronted. He is there to save them. All he has to do is destroy the Old Ones lurking within the mountain. They rather doubt he will be successful, but have nothing to lose if they let him make the attempt. They are mistaken.

*Rating:* **Entertaining.** Shades of Lovecraftian mythos, but actually the story put me in mind of Howard's "Conan the Barbarian" novels. A tale of a lost and forbidden holy place, and a creepy one at that, but nothing a good sword properly handled can't resolve, or so Dinga thinks.

The story is framed by scenes set in modern times wherein archaeologists find evidence of these past events, evidence in the form of rather strange, impossible artifacts that defy reality. However I think the story would be better off without these scenes. They have no genuine functional purpose. Dinga's tale stands by itself. I figure the author made use of the framing device for tradition's sake. Not necessary.

#### **Jon Carver of Barzoon, You Misunderstood** – by *Graham J. Darling* – (Cdn – Vancouver, B.C.)

*Premise:* The true nature of Jon Carver's experience on Barzoon is revealed. That's it. If I say much more I'll risk my comments being longer than the story itself. It's a very short short.

*Rating:* **Entertaining.** At first I tried to interpret the story as a metaphor explaining the nature of the readership's relationship with the wish fulfillment fantasies of the sort largely invented by Edgar Rice Burroughs (original then, but the mother of all clichés now). Upon rereading I realized the story is actually rather Lovecraftian in a horrific way. Then I tried to see if the two concepts were somehow partnered, but that made my brain hurt and so I stopped.

Granted, I'm such a Lovecraft enthusiast. I tend to see Lovecraftian undertones everywhere (in my Kraft Dinner, for instance), but I think my interpretation is correct. The story is also a spoof of "John Carter of Mars" but to state the obvious is to state the obvious. Basically it is an entertaining piece of whimsy. I like it.



Edited by *Liana Kerzner* – (Cdn) & *Jerome Stueart* – (Cdn – Yukon)

**Contents:**

**Mecha-Jesus** – by *Derwin Mak* – (Cdn) – (AAE 2016)

This story is legitimately up for a 2015 Aurora award (the very first E version of the book released in December 2014) and I feel, as a member of the CSFFA board, that I can't review it for fear of "disturbing" the neutrality of the Aurora administration. We Board members must be perceived absolutely neutral so as not to influence any voters one way or the other.

On the other hand, the hard copy release of this book occurring in early 2015, all the stories within are eligible for the 2016 Auroras. I will review "Mecha-Jesus" after the 2015 winners are announced.

Yet I reviewed the stories in the current **On Spec**, and **Lackington's** last issue, and they are both up for Auroras this year. Yes, but in a generic overall "related work" category for the zine itself, as opposed to the stories within. Canadian zines are so few and rare I want to live up to my intention of reviewing their contents in turn as each zine comes out. It is the specific novels and/or short stories up for the Auroras I need to avoid reviewing (till after the winners are announced). That's the way I see it.

**Come All Yee Faithful** – by *Robert J. Sawyer* – (Cdn – Mississauga, Ontario) – (AAE 2016)

*Premise:* The sole Catholic Priest on Mars is ordered to investigate an apparent visitation by the Virgin Mary. There's a great deal at stake, not least the rejuvenation of a dying religion.

*Rating:* **Great fun.** Though I am not a Catholic, I am a sucker for SF tales wherein devout Catholics confront a phenomenon which threatens their core beliefs. Catholicism is a very complex creed.

On the one hand you have mere superstition as evidenced by the scene in a Fellini film where, a passing allied fighter having strafed a bus in the countryside, the survivors fall to their knees to praise a statue of the Virgin Mary which has begun to bleed. In fact the statue being transported conceals illegal moonshine which is now leaking because of several bullet holes in the plaster.

On the other hand you have the kind of sophisticated conundrum as exhibited by **A Case of Conscience**, a wonderful 1958 novel by James Blish, possibly his best, in which a Jesuit Priest is sent to examine a race of sentient reptiles dwelling on a newly discovered planet, a race apparently living in a state of grace without sin much as Adam and Eve did before the fall. Is this truly a manifestation of God's grace? Or a Satanic trap? It takes a Jesuit to figure things out and ponder the implications.

Fact is there is such a thing as "a Catholic sensibility." I once wrote a short story about a dying Pope, the last of a schismatic line, receiving a delegation of non-human Catholics from the continent of Australia. Several Catholics in the workshop asked if I were Catholic and were surprised to hear not. They felt I had captured the Catholic point of view quite convincingly, that my story exhibited a true Catholic sensibility. Possibly so.

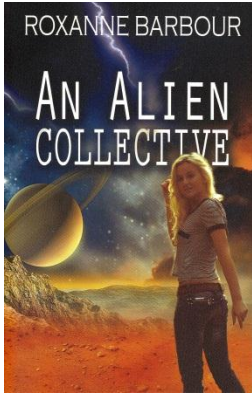
Point is the Catholic Priest in Sawyer's story is quite convincing, despite his doubts, maybe because of his doubts. The character "feels" Catholic to the reader. Seems quite genuine. In short, Sawyer achieves "a Catholic sensibility" superbly well. Good thing too. The story wouldn't ring true or be credible otherwise.

The ending of the story may or not please you, depending not so much on your faith or creed so much as which sort of ending your personal nature dictates you prefer. But it does work. The whole story works. I found it quite fascinating.

---

## NOVELS

**AN ALIEN COLLECTIVE** – Wee Creek Press (2014) – [Find it here](#)



By *Roxanne Barbour* – (Cdn – Burnaby, B.C.)

*Premise:* Eight human teenagers awaken on an alien world. As do three other teams of eight teenagers, all aliens, each team from a different planet. For all thirty-two kids, this is a first contact situation. Who brought them here? For what purpose? And what do they do when they begin to learn the answers?

Being my wise and sophisticated self, I expected something akin to **The Hunger Games**, or perhaps **Lord of the Flies**, or the Gorn episode in **Star Trek**. Perhaps something as drastic as Harry Harrison's **Deathworld** where even the grass is busting a gut to kill the human interlopers. But apart from one unexpected act of violence by an unseen animal, this planet is placid and benign. Had the teenagers awoken in the middle of Australia they would have been in infinitely greater danger.

We know their location is alien because the grass is purple and the sunsets are green. That's about it. Most description in the book is generic and far from concrete. The cookhouse is a cookhouse. It has dining tables. I think the building is made of wood. I would have liked more detail.

To be fair, the details don't matter. Everything is in the situation, the conundrum of their presence, which the teenagers attempt to resolve through a combination of exploration and quiet revolt against the daily printed instructions from their abductors. Bit by bit we learn that the rather stunted ecology of the planet—no birds of any sort, for instance—is evidently the product of a past catastrophe which is also probably responsible for the crumbled ruins they begin to find here and there, overgrown in the woods or buried deep within caves. What has this to do with them and their predicament? Possibly nothing. Possibly everything.

Of course, being teenagers, romance begins to blossom. There's talk of nothing being wrong with interracial relations. True enough. But interspecies between aliens? A bit tricky. How tricky? Well there's mention the bathroom facilities are multifunction so that all four races can use them easily. Are we talking a hodgepodge of nozzles and pumps and intakes that make zero gravity toilets aboard the International Space Station look simple? Or just a glorified outhouse? It is left to our imagination to visualize the level of sexual compatibility.

Probably very compatible. The aliens are humanoid, with very minor differences, like six-fingered hands, or mottled camouflage skin. All share very human concerns. They miss their parents. They worry about homework piling up back home. They wonder about how being abducted to an alien planet will affect their choice of careers.

Just when I was beginning to fantasize about running past the bunkhouses in the middle of the night tossing hand grenades through the open windows in order to get some action going, I began to clue in. I figured out whom the book is targeting.



This is a very gentle book, a soothing book, a very reassuring book. I think it is aimed at young teenage girls who are shy, unsure of themselves, and probably quite timid and unassertive in the face of bullies. They share the learning experience of Cyn-Tia Silverthorne, the appointed leader of the human team, as she puzzles out the situation and comes up ways and means to test the alien abductors, maintain morale, and prevent boredom from setting in (always a priority among teenagers). There are a few grumps who don't want to do chores, but eventually a spirit of camaraderie prevails, everyone draws closer together, so that they face the final revelations united and determined.

From what I remember of my teenage years, this is extremely unlikely, but the book isn't meant to be realistic (all realism is dystopian, alas), it is a kind of guide to getting a grip on oneself, becoming more capable, more adult, and just incidentally, how to handle puppy love.

Yep, a book for young girls just becoming teenagers would be my guess. Though a bit disconcerting some of them demand contraceptives from the alien abductors, so maybe the target audience is teenage girls in general.

I say girls because, to my 1950s-imprinted way of thinking, boys would demand a lot more action with emphasis on the problems rather than the solutions. Almost makes me think boys and girls really are different after all. But then, consider as a young boy I used to draw underground tunnels filled with frantic stick figures running through the torments of hell, or as my Grandfather used to say "What's wrong with this boy?" Possibly I was not your average little boy. Possibly I am not qualified to judge this self-help confidence-boosting fantasy for girls on the verge of becoming women. Possibly.

*Rating: **Interesting.*** I have to admit this sort of book is too quiet for my taste. Nevertheless I found myself wondering what was going on and what they would find in the woods. Always intrigued by any hint of alien artifacts showing up. Or monsters. Consequently the overall ambience of placidity was something of a disappointment. But I'm not relevant to the book. I'm not the target readership.

Psychologically I think the book is well designed for insecure girls, it would stir their imagination and allow them to fantasize about becoming self-confident and unafraid to be assertive, while at the same time not scaring them or frightening them with excessive violence or uneasy fears. You might call it a niche-market novel. It is published by Wee Creek Press which publishes books for very young children, middle grade, and YA works. I'm not sure precisely which category this book occupies, but I'm pretty certain the type of girl this book is aimed at would enjoy reading it. A worthy accomplishment for any author.

**HEALER'S SWORD** – Edge Science Fiction and Fantasy Publishing (2012) – [Find it here](#)



By **Lynda Williams** – (Cdn – Richmond, B.C.)

*Premise:* The Sevolite galaxy-spanning empire doesn't like change. Erien wants a science academy in a realm where the rulers prefer no one even knows science exists (far too objective and free-thinking you see). Horth wants to reform medicine practice in the battlefleet where the noble-born crews consider medical treatment beneath them. Ilse is tired of being pointed out she's only Blue Demish and besides, being a woman of rank, albeit not-good-enough rank, that she's shameless for insisting on knowing how to use a sword. Amel is tired of being treated like a sex god. Too much sex can be boring. But he's extremely high born and every woman wants him. And these are just some of the problems on the character's minds.



Or in other words a few clues that we are dealing with a complicated, fully realized society rather different from our own. I knew I was in for a tough time when I asked Lynda for a freebie sample of her Okal Rel Saga (my book-buying funds even more limited than my food-buying funds) and she pressed the seventh volume of the series (ten or twelve in all I think) into my eager hands.

Point is I've missed six volumes of revelation concerning background and character. Yes Lynda references the past, but as an author she'd be a fool to explain too much of what went on before. Wouldn't leave enough room to develop this volume. She had to take it on faith that by the time someone buys this book they've already read the first six. In theory anyone new to the saga should start with the beginning volume. That's the only way to be fair to both themselves and the saga as a whole. But not I, for I am automatically fully biased in incomprehensible ways. "Fair" isn't part of my lexicon. (You can tell I'm a critic.)

So, plunging headfirst into the novel lacking the appropriate background proved hard sledding at first. I mean, even if you know nothing about Sherlock Holmes, you can start reading one of the canon and feel comfortable because Victorian-era England is reassuringly familiar courtesy of countless movies and TV shows. But the Sevolite Empire? Had to start ransacking my meager knowledge of history to orient myself.

There is no one culture the Okal Rel culture resembles. Medieval Europe in some aspects. The Italian Renaissance. Medieval Japan. Even Victorian England. All adding up to one of the most rigidly self-imposed social orders I've ever come across. Normally not my cup of tea at all. Sets my teeth on edge. Had visions (again, as in **The Alien Collective**) of going berserk and hurling hand grenades in all directions, though this time to start the revolution. This realm needs a Lenin. Or a Groucho Marx. Extreme etiquette has that effect on me.

But that's the thing. The entire civilization is based on social etiquette, on rank determined by birth, by race, by clan, and to some degree, by talent. Here race is not racism. While spanning the stars humans have evolved away from each other in subtle ways which make one group more suitable for certain tasks than others. H.G. Wells implied the same for our future in his description of the Selenites in his **First Men in the Moon**, though there is nothing so extreme as that here, but there ARE subtleties involved everyone is constantly aware of.

Further, overall cultural homogenization is not encouraged in this society. There are no multiple-globe globalists here. Every given planet, every clan, every order has its set and subtly different way of life (albeit within a loose general framework spanning the empire as a whole) which no one is allowed to deviate away from, unless they think they can get away with it.

I think the core of what fascinates the aficionados of the Okal Rel Saga is that, appearances to the contrary, this is NOT some sort of mindless feudal order frozen in time. It's more like a pack of wolves with nothing to eat except each other. Possibly I exaggerate. (Although, come to think of it, that's an apt description of court life in the medieval period, or human organization of any kind, any boardroom for that matter.)

Think of it as a human version of **Tetris**. Practically everybody is scheming how to fall UP. But the interrelationships are so complex it is a matter of finding or creating the properly shaped niche you can fill before someone else does. Or perhaps it is more like the Fan Expo I attended. Crowd movement in the huckster section was so dense it became gridlocked. Only when one person moved could another, and another, then the next, and so on, only to generate a new gridlock until the next shuffle-round started up. Suspense and anticipation in this novel is built on the prospect of social-mobility forced, planned, or accidental, and it is all so subtle you really have to pay attention.

The funny thing is, indeed the source of much of the humour in this book, is that no one is as confident or socially secure as they pretend to be. Individuals must address each other by rank, employing the proper

greeting, the proper tone, the proper intonation, etc, but if, for whatever reason, you're unsure of your precise relationship, you break out in a sweat for fear of giving offence by choosing the wrong words or tones. Rather like two Japanese nobles unfamiliar with each other and unsure which of them should bow the lowest. Reputation is at stake. And worse. This is the kind of society where highborn bring their personal sword champions with them to private parties in case a minor slight results in a duel. Best to have substitutes do the fighting. Otherwise no one would live long enough to get any work done.

Mind you, there are ways of politely backing down without loss of face. Duels are rare, and usually only to the point of first blood drawn. Still, quite a nuisance in the daily scheme of things. Where's the humour? Well, in one case at a wedding jam-packed with serried ranks of highborns one poor chap is tasked with reciting from memory the genealogies of all assembled. A very important ritual matter, and one that could result in a massacre if he makes too many insulting mistakes. Pulls it off without a hitch. A miracle. Everyone impressed, and bemused. And somewhat disappointed. A few duels would have livened things up.

Personally, I think I'd rather fall on my own sword than endure living in so self-conscious a society. Like being a perpetual teenager. Too painful to contemplate. But for them as understands the game, as relishes the ability to seize the moment, life is positively gleeful and full of promise.

What of Ilse Martin, the Blue Demish sword fighter who's inherited an organization that's SUPPOSED to be run by a man? (Before you sneer, it wasn't that long ago women were forbidden lines of credit and required a male secretary to sign for them if, for example, they had inherited their deceased husband's company and were running it as the new CEO.) As Lynda wrote to me: *"Think of her as a middle-class, moderately eccentric heroine trying to make sense of innovations from the top by more radical royalty-types in a conservative, neo-feudal empire. Easy, right? :-)"*

Well, no, it isn't easy. Oh, easy enough for me, the deeper I delved into the book and slowly picked up on what was going on. But not easy for Ilse. Radicals, conservatives, kin and non-kin, virtually all are unlikely allies because their primary concern is their own future, not hers. Trying to firm up and improve her lot in life is like trying to grasp a litre of mercury with both hands. No simple task, and rather dangerous.

William Gibson was once asked how old a child had to be before they could understand his novels. Stupid question, but he gave a brilliant answer. "Old enough to understand betrayal."

Indeed. The plot is slow-moving at first, as everyone is jockeying for position and scouting out what others are up to. Major changes are being set-up, but not everything, hardly anything, is what it seems. Momentum builds. Then all hell breaks loose, because all human society is built on pretense, and when things get success-or-failure intense, everybody abandons the rules and goes for the jugular. Betrayal is mankind's favourite sport, and it is revealed in full glory in the fast-paced, nigh dizzying, conclusion of this volume.

**Rating: *Entertaining*.** At first I thought I wasn't going to like this book. Couldn't identify with the social order. Or the character's worries. Plus the complexity of it all grated on my nerves. But gradually, despite my ignorance of the explanatory revelations no doubt present in the previous volumes, I began to appreciate the challenges facing Ilse and many of the other characters. And began to wonder more and more what was actually going on and who was trying to screw whom (in the political sense – since the biological version was straightforward in its presentation, a way of relaxing from all the political scheming and jockeying for position you might say... social position that is), and how it was all going to wind up.

The immediate situation is satisfactorily resolved, or at least exposed and thwarted, but the main characters live on, no doubt to fresh complications, disasters and adventures. By the final page I had come to grasp why the fans of the Okal Rel Saga find it so addictive. It's still not quite my cup of tea, but for those anxious to

immerse themselves in a complex, highly detailed and imaginative fantasy world, this is as vivid as it gets. In fact I wouldn't be surprised if some fan's situational awareness is greater in Lynda's world than in their own.

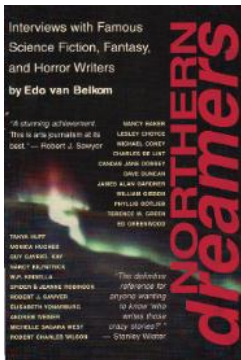
---

## NONFICTION

**NORTHERN DREAMERS** – Quarry Press (1998) – (Cdn – Kingston, Ontario) – No longer in print.

Edited by *Edo van Belkom* – (Cdn – Brampton, Ont)

### Lesley Choyce



In 1998 Choyce was a well-established figure in the Canadian SF&F genre, considered “*the most prominent writer of speculative fiction on Canada’s east coast.*” An American, he’d moved to Nova Scotia in 1978 where he established Pottersfield Press, which published **Visions From the Edge**, literally the second anthology of Canadian SpecFic (which he co-edited with John Bell) ever to appear. Later he published another SF anthology, **Ark of Ice**, which included authors like Margaret Atwood and Timothy Findley.

On his own he published mainstream adult and YA novels, but also a 1986 anthology of his own SF stories, **The Dream Auditor**, and most famously, his 1996 SF novel

**Trapdoor to Heaven**. Where did he intend his writing career to take him next?

Turns out he was a bit frustrated with the Canadian market for SF. For example, he wanted his SF novel to be displayed in the “*local author rack which is where you can sell books very well, whatever they happen to be about. But I couldn’t convince booksellers that it was mainstream fiction, so it never got onto that rack. It got spined into a massive wall of American science fiction... virtually got lost there and nobody bought it.*”

He believed that the main problem was that his genre fiction was SF combined with fantasy and nobody knew how to sell it, saying “*...if I had found more of a comfortable niche in [SF] I would have done more of it... I’ve been pretty much on the fringe and kind of had my own agenda that didn’t necessarily fit in with the commercial stuff... The whole world of science fiction is still a mystery to me in terms of categories and how you market that kind of stuff.*”

By this time he’d written and published forty books, but only four of them were even remotely associated with SF. The genre was contributing very little to his success as an author.

When asked by van Belkom if science fiction was close to his heart, Choyce replied “*It is, but it all goes back to limitations again... If I could find the right audience... I would probably write my brains out at science fiction, but I don’t think that’s going to happen.*”

He added “*I’d like to write a number of science fiction novels in the young adult area, but all the YA publishers I’ve dealt with have been reluctant to enter into that realm.*”

When asked if he had made the attempt to reach a bigger audience in the States, he replied “*I’ve made the attempt and I guess I pretty much failed.... American publishers suggest my writing is too parochial... too Nova Scotian or something...*”

So, that was the situation in 1998. What is the status of Lesley Choyce today?

He's doing very well indeed. Lives in a 200 year-old farmhouse in Lawrence town just above the beach overlooking the ocean. Teaches part time at Dalhousie University. Has written another 44 books, almost all YA novels dealing with teenage problems like bullying and snitching. Even wrote a YA life-advice non-fiction book titled **How to Fix your Head**. His book of poems **I'm Alive: I Believe in Everything** won the 2013 Atlantic Poetry Award. Another book was a finalist in the 2014 Governor General's Literary Award. His small publishing outfit Pottersfield Press has since published about 100 books, most dealing with Atlantic Canada history topics like legendary monsters and local war heroes. He is a prolific, award-winning writer and publisher. Definitely found his niche, I'd say.

Nothing to do with science fiction though. Oh, there was one YA SF novel, **Living Outside the Lines**, published in 2009, about a young lad contacted by a time traveler and offered some interesting choices, but I have the feeling Choyce wrote it for old time's sake, just to please himself as it were. Nothing since, apparently.

Is he a failure? Not at all! He dabbled in science fiction to critical acclaim but somehow never hit upon the right combination of publisher and marketing to achieve commercial success. This was a time when most Canadian genre authors, unable to interest mainstream Canadian publishers, and with few small press options available (unlike today), turned to American publishers for publication.

However, Choyce was evidently too "off-the-wall" to fit comfortably into any of the clearly defined readerships American publishers were targeting. They weren't interested. So he focused his creative energies on YA novels where he was already well established. A brilliant move, and very successful.

Lesson to be learned? 1998 a difficult time for Canadian genre authors to get published by Canadian publishers. Today that situation has eased, with many small press Canadian publishers churning out world-class science fiction and fantasy. On the other hand the entire publishing world is in turmoil, what with self-publishing all the rage, most of which doesn't sell at all. Big publishing houses more reluctant than ever to take on "new" writers it seems.

So I'd say the lesson for today is: define your market; find your publisher; cultivate your niche once you've found it, and cling to it like a limpet. With any luck you could wind up as successful in the SF&F genre as Choyce is in the YA novel field. Good Luck.

---

## **TO BE REVIEWED NEXT ISSUE**

Neo-opsis Magazine, more stories from assorted anthologies, and the following novels: **Adventures of Ivor** by *Dave Duncan*, **Disenchanted** by *Janet Ursel*, **Door in the Mountain** by *Caitlin Sweet*, **Goddess Gambit** by *Jim McPherson*, **Signal to Noise** by *Silvia Moreno-Garcia*, and **Tower in the Crooked Wood** by *Paula Johanson*.

At least two of the above novels I had intended to review for this issue, but I realized it would delay publication for at least another week or more. Enough. Let the July issue be unleashed!

---

## **MISSILE MISSIVES**

**From:** *RANYLT RICHILDIS*, editor of Lackington's Magazine – (June 14/2015)

Thanks for giving our authors' works such a comprehensive overview! OBIR Mag looks like a great project and we look forward to its future.

*(The Graeme – I'm hoping enough people will find it of interesting to merit my carrying on with it. Whether I can sustain a monthly publishing schedule is another question.)*

**From: JANICE SHOULTS**, Marketing and Events Director, Edge Publishing. – (June 15/2015)

Congratulations on getting your website up and running. It looks great. I wanted to make sure that you are ok with receiving pdf review copies. I would like to keep you in the loop as to what is happening with EDGE.

By the way, it is EDGE's 15 anniversary this year. Would you like to interview **Brian** as your first interview on OBIR and then we can promote it on our social media. Let me know what you think and I can set it up with him.

*(The Graeme – I'd love PDF review copies! The **Professor Challenger** anthology in particular, given my tastes. Any and all news welcome too, though will be directed into **Auroran Lights** as appropriate. OBIR is reserved for reviews.*

*As for interviewing Brian. Yes indeed! As soon as I can find the time to put a logical sequence together. Probably start with "So first of all, please tell me your Swiss bank account number..." and go on from there.)*

**From: JANET URSEL** – (June 16/2015)

As a follow-up to our conversation on Facebook, I'm sending you a PDF of my novel, **Disenchanted**, which is releasing **July 14** from Booktrope (imprint: Vox Dei Publishing). You can scout around any of the links in my signature to find out more about me, or I would be happy to answer questions.

And for what it's worth, I've been poking through your reviews and I like the tone. You say what you think straight out, but with humility and humour. But that's pretty much what I was expecting, with a title like that.

*(The Graeme – Thank you for the compliments. It is my intention to publish a review of **Disenchanted** in the August issue. I'm a slow-reader and often blindsided by my over-optimistic guestimation of how much time a task will take, but I'll do my best.)*

**From: CRAIG RUSSELL** – (June 16/2015)

May I have a review copy of my young adult fantasy novel, **Black Bottle Man**, sent to you for OBIR?

My publisher is Great Plains Publications. There's information about the novel on their website here: <http://www.greatplains.mb.ca/buy-books/black-bottle-man/>

*(The Graeme – Yeppers! I want to give my personal take on current AND past genre publications. After all, my underlying purpose is to promote Canadian authors and their works (as I do in **Auroran Lights**), and since in this day and age books tend to remain in print forever (i.e. available online as ebooks) "looking back" reviews are not pointless from the reviewee's point of view since they might encourage a few more sales. You never know. Worth doing methinks. Hope to review **Black Bottle Man** by the September issue.)*



**From:** *ROBERT RUNTÉ*, Editor, Five Rivers Publishing – (June 16/2015)

I'm sending you five more PDF's from Five Rivers.

**Indigo Time** has been out for a while, but it is one of my personal favourites; and **Tower in the Crooked Wood** is a current release.

Tower was previously published by Bundoran Press (which dropped its fantasy line under new ownership.) We always considered it an outstanding Canadian SF fantasy, blending various West-coast cultures into a story about community / individual responsibility that rises above the usual quest novel, so we felt it deserved to be kept in print. This edition is revised and expanded from the initial release: The director's cut, if you will. Great example of what Canadian fantasy is all about.

**Indigo Time** is a psychological thriller, though the cover doesn't really convey that. The story revolves around who has control of a genetically modified horse (thus the cover image) but there are so many levels to this novel that doesn't actually tell you anything. Blurs the lines between fantasy and SF, between SF and psychological mystery...actually, it's kind of its own category.

Next month, when the ARC is ready, I'll send you a copy of **Hawk**, a fantasy set in Wales as it falls to the English (as seen from the Welsh point of view).

**North by 2000+** is expanded edition of the very first short story collection ever marketed as Canadian science fiction and my all-time favourites. We've added the rest of *Hargreaves* short stories to make it a complete collection of his SF, and my essay explaining why it was such a landmark collection – so influential on everything that came after, those stories still stand up to day, though the predictions/tech is out of date – I recommend reading it as an alternate world where Canada becomes part of the US.

**Immunity to Strange Tales** is contemporary collection of stories by award-winning author *Susan Forest*. It speaks for itself. I heard her read at When Words Collide in Calgary and immediately offered to publish the collection.

**Wasps at the Speed of Sound** is by *Derryl Murphy*, an orphaned collection we couldn't bear to see go out of print. (He's best known for his novel, **Naipiers Bones**, from CZP. Fabulous novel – highly recommend you get ahold of a copy if you haven't already read it.)

Also, do you include Horror? We have a couple of horror collections by award-winning journalist *J. W. Schnarr* if you'd like to see those. (I don't get horror at all – *Lorina* was the editor on those. I have a lot of trouble getting my head around that J. W. is one of the nicest guys I've ever met, and yet this stuff comes out some dark recess of his brain. And he is like totally afraid of spiders. Spiders? Man, have you *read* your own stories? He uses the word 'catharsis' a lot.... :-)

I assume you're going to archive all you reviews online somewhere on that site? I'd love to see your site become the next one-stop shopping hub for reviews of Canadian SF. We really, *really* need that.

*(The Graeme – All of the above sound like great fun to read. So I have started reviewing Wasps this issue, and will probably begin reviewing the North by 2000+ anthology next issue, plus Tower in the Crooked Wood and The Adventures of Ivor. And eventually, all the other stuff you send me. Granted, by the time I get around to reviewing a particular item it may already have been out for some time, but at least it is further publicity.*

*And yes, I am following your suggestion and adding my reviews to my OBIR web site as individual articles.*

*That way, instead of downloading every issue and searching through them, the reader can look up a favourite author and read whatever reviews of their work I have written. Of course, if I haven't reviewed said authors yet, they won't be able to find the authors they have in mind. However, the more reviews I write, the more authors will be included. Eventually should prove a fair sampling.)*

**From: LYNDA WILLIAMS**, Publisher/Author Reality Skimming Press – (June 22/2015)

Congratulations on Obir Magazine #2. I'll share the **Hexed Hair** review with the author and illustrator. We've just received a new query about author Jennifer Lott branching out to another school from the three she has visited multiple times and are in process with draft illustrations for the next book in the series, called Spit Test. (Don't ask.)

It will be interesting to see how you make out with Part 7: **Healer's Sword** from the Okal Rel Saga, particularly if you haven't read the first six books in the series, or have read some but not others. People always ask me whether one can start with any book. And definitely some people find the whole series hard to get into with all the characters and subplots. Wishing Ilse Marin the power to captivate you.

*(**The Graeme** – I put mention of the Upcoming **Spit Test** in the Latest **Auroran Lights**, including the sketch of the proposed cover. I anticipate it will be as amusing as **Hexed Hair**.)*

***Healer's Sword**, as I explain in the review, was indeed difficult to get into initially, but I persevered and slowly, bit by bit, was sucked into this alternative realm to the point where my lack of knowledge concerning the six previous novels was no longer an issue; I was caught up in what was going on in THIS volume. Still probably good advice for "newbies" unfamiliar with your saga to start at the beginning, so their enthusiasm can grow organically, so to speak, but not strictly necessary. **Healer's Sword** works as a stand-alone novel. I assume they all do.)*

**From: LLOYD PENNEY**, the most renowned living letter-hack (highly esteemed fan term) – (June 23/2015)

Thank you for OBIR Magazine 2. There is always something to say re Cameronzines, and I will make the attempt to come up with something right now.

I had heard of **Lackington's Magazine**, but I have never seen an issue. Electronic zines are often difficult to find, even if there are directions on where to find them. Electronic SF zines need something like eFanzines.com to make them more visible, especially Canadian SF magazines.

Good to see **Tamara Vardomskaya** getting published. Hope her health is better. She is connected with the fanzine **Ecdysis**.

I have read some of the writing about the Puppies' mess about the Hugos. Glad I don't know more than I do. I know fandom and the Hugos have been political to some degree, but this level of politicization has been truly sad. Some might say it's become truly Republican in its attitude.

Did you get my letter on this first issue? Hope so. I may not have had much to say on it, or much positive, I can't remember.

I am so far behind with SF, I barely read it at all. So, you can imagine what I might say about Canadian SF. I should be reading it, but time and money just do not allow for it. At least, what you are doing is keeping Canadian SF in the light, and keeping it visible for those new readers who might like to know it's there.

I think I am done for now. I might have more to say on issue 3, so I will give it a try then, and see what happens.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

*(The Graeme – Well, of course, electronic magazines are hard to find if you've never heard of them. I hope to set this right. I provide links in my reviews and on my web site. I figure, once a Canadian fan has read an issue of any Canadian SF zine, they'll want to read all future issues. In my opinion, if a fan is serious about keeping track of contemporary Canadian SF published in Canada, then **Lackington's Magazine**, **On Spec Magazine**, **Neo-opsis Magazine**, and **Black Treacle Magazine** are essential "must read" publications. The bare minimum required to maintain the habit. Latching on to newly published anthologies featuring stories written specifically for the anthology very useful too. As is discovering Canadian authors you'd not previously heard of and vowing to read everything they've ever published. Actually, you won't live long enough to read "everything." That's how prolific the genre is today. Wonderful contrast to the way it used to be.)*

**[Found it! Here be the letter Lloyd sent in response to OBIR #1.]**

**From:** **LLOYD PENNEY** – May 26/2015)

Thanks for the first OBIR Magazine! Opinion is completely subjective, and sometimes we fail to remember that, especially in this age of extreme argument over the feeblest of disagreements, as seen in an awful lot of social media. So let's see what you've got opinions on, and perhaps I could share some of mine. Why not another fanzine? We both know people who will create one on the spot, and use as many titles as they can get away with.

Canadian SpecFic? Indeed, I should read more of it. But then, these days, I should be reading more SF, period. One can tell when one is writing specifically for a particular market with a particular twist, and the fungal market is it. Maybe this is me not being able to stretch my head around mushroom fiction, or thinking that it's simply too much.

The author names are familiar to one extent or another, but this doesn't mean that what they write will be good. Like above, there's too much of a stretch to accept fungal fiction. I know people here who enjoy magic mushrooms, and it's not my cuppa.

You were born in Barrie? You know I grew up in Orillia, just up Highway 11. Haven't been to either place in some time.

Well, the Aurora ballot is out! And congratulations to all of us for getting on it. We have hopes, and I hope Yvonne will get an award, whatever it might look like this time.

I am going to say thanks for this, and I wish I could have written more for the letter column. With luck, issue 2 will have something more for me.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

*(The Graeme – You don't have to stretch your head around mushroom fiction. It will stretch its head around you!*

*But seriously, I care not whether fiction is good or bad in the objective sense. I'm only interested in whether or not I find a given work entertaining, whether or not it appeals to me. And there's something about*

*mushrooms with malignant intent which pleases me. Mushrooms equipped with a sardonic sense of humour even more. And talk about fruiting bodies! We've got nothing on them. Or as my Grandfather used to say – as mentioned earlier – “What's wrong with this boy?” Quite a bit, actually, some would say.*

*Main thing is, I want science fiction to be fun... fun to read. Don't see the point otherwise.)*

**From: DAVE HAREN** – (June 25/2015)

I finally finished reading Obir2 from cover to cover and it was worth it.

I'm not sure of some of your opinions but that's not what they are for. There was a period when I noticed that all the writers I liked were girls who were head and shoulders above the rest of the field. Then it was Canadians and the transplants who were doing the good stuff. It seems to move around, probably because they inspire each other to excellence.

I'm thoroughly enjoying the Hugofuss mainly because both sides are wrong and that makes for amazing dramatics and name calling. We're about to go through something similar in USA politics most of the egregious nuts have their hats in the ring already. It looks like the Roman Empire in its heyday. We have a few cities in ruins and not much effort to fix them. Who knows maybe you will live long enough to tour the ruins of USA the remains of a once proud people.

However if Canadian publishing catches the SF bug you'll be touring your own moon base instead.

Sounds like Bertrand is serious about this stuff, and historically that's where all of it came from. The old zines are full of people who went on to do great things.

Warm Regards, Dave

*(The Graeme – You're not sure of my opinions? I'M not sure of my opinions. But it doesn't matter. They're only opinions.*

*“Canadians and the transplants” sounds like we are in league with alien mind-parasites from Outer Space. If we're not, we should be.*

*If you want tourists to be attracted to your contemporary ruins you should stop ruining the ruins. Tourists crave stability. A ruin needs to be stable and unlikely to crumble. Falling debris is bad for publicity. So enough already! Shore up what remains of Detroit and tourists and their money will roll in.*

*As for a Canadian Moonbase, not quite ready for that yet. Only once we've finally figured out how to permanently fix the springtime pot-holes in Ottawa streets will we become confident enough to seize the Moon. Or at least Point Roberts! – That be an old local Vancouver joke. Pay no attention.)*

**From: SCOTT R. JONES**, Publisher, Martian Migraine Press – (June 29/2015)

Thanks for this, it's a nice bit of news. Looking forward to reading the reviews!

As for who's-who in the Canuck department for the **Resonator** ToC, there's **Leeman Kessler** who you've already noted, as well as **Lyndsey Holder**, and of course myself (though feel free to pass my piece over in favour of the others, naturally).

Thanks Graeme! Sorry for the bit of delay getting a PDF to you; it's been one of those summers so far.

Scott

*(The Graeme – I will begin reviewing the stories in the **Resonator** anthology in the August issue, starting with the actual Lovecraft tale you lead off with. But is it Lovecraftian enough? So many people have written in his style since he passed away it is quite possible many a Lovecraft fiction fan, once they start reading his actual original fiction, may come away feeling a trifle disappointed. Interesting phenomenon if true.)*

**From: RODNEY LEIGHTON** – (June 30/2015)

About OBIR Magazine. I found it quite fun. I should point out, perhaps, that the word interesting is usually anathema in reviewing circles. I remember once I almost got bounced from my music reviewing gig for using that word too much. I do like your newly devised reviewing system; I suggest you replace interesting with intriguing. Such as I was intrigued that all reviews so far fell in 3 categories. Really? There wasn't one abysmal story in the entire anthology?!

Have fun with this.

Cheers, Rodney L

*(The Graeme – You found it fun. Excellent. I was hoping readers would react this way.*

*As for the word “interesting” being condemned in reviewing circles, this is not surprising. It can mean almost anything, and thus be construed as the tool of a lazy critic who has nothing concrete to say. However, the problem with replacing it with the word “intriguing” is that the latter is too strong a word for all occasions. I can find something interesting, yet not feel compelled to call it intriguing. “Interesting” is more flexible. Precisely what I mean by the term in a given example I hope to make clear in my written comments elaborating further. As long as I say “why” something is interesting I figure I can get away with it.*

*As for not finding anything worthy of being called abysmal. True. Everything I’ve read so far has been worth reading, if only from the author’s point of view. In a number of cases what I was reading was not the sort of thing I’m much interested in, but I was keen on figuring out what the author was up to and whom he was aiming his work at. Just because a work isn’t written with me in mind doesn’t mean it is bad. Just indicates I might not enjoy reading it.*

*On the other hand, have yet to award my highest accolade, the “Invigorating” category. Not sure what would trigger that. So far “Great Fun” has summed up everything I really, really liked. I guess “Invigorating” is reserved for what I really, really, **really** like! I’m guessing. At any rate, I’ll know it when I see it.)*

---

## AFTERWORDS

To sum up, I think this is the best issue yet, but I’m rather disappointed in myself for only finding the time to review a mere two novels. The actual writing a novel review is only slightly longer than the task of writing a short story review, but READING a novel takes me a heck of a lot longer than a short story. Meanwhile quite a backlog of novels has begun to build courtesy of assorted authors and publishers. Don’t want to let them, or my readers, down. Fortunately the remote for my TV in my den has died. More time for reading. Cheers all!