

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 # 4 – January 2016)



TABLE OF CONTENTS

03 – EDITORIAL

05 – REVIEWS

PERIODICALS

NEO-OPSIS MAGAZINE

07 – Panda-Mensional – by *Mary E. Lowd*

07 – Space Tagger – by *Daniel P. Swenson*

07 – New Kid – by *Guy L. Pace*

08 – Landing Day – by *Holly Schofield*

08 – License to Live – by *Nick Aires*

08 – RestFit™ – by *Ewan C. Forbes*

08 – When Every Song Reminds You of a Dead Universe – by *Karl Johanson*

09 – Occupational Hazards – by *Lorina Stephens*

ANTHOLOGIES

CASSEROLE DIPLOMACY (The Best of On Spec Magazine Anthology)

09 – The Reality War – by *Robert Boyczuk*

10 – Casserole Diplomacy – *Fiona Heath*

THE DRAGON AND THE STARS

10 – The Character of the Hound – by *Tony Pi*

11 – The Fortunes of Mr.s Yu – by *Charles Tan*

EXPIRATION DATE

11 – Riding Shotgun – by *Elaine Pascal*

11 – The Twenty Seven Club – by *J.M. Frey*

FUTURE LOVECRAFT

12 – In This Brief Interval – by *Ann K. Schwader*

12 – In the Hall of the Yellow King – by *Peter Rawlik*

13 – Inky, Blinky, Pinky, Nyarlathotep – by *Nick Mamatas*

IMAGINARIUM 3

13 – Trap-Weed – by *Gemma Files*

13 – A Tall Girl – by *Kim Goldberg*

14 – The Easthound – by *Nalo Hopkinson*

NEVERMORE!

14 – The Gold Bug Conundrum – by *Chelsea Quinn yarbrow*

15 – Streets of the Dead House – by *Robert Lopresti*

NORTH BY 2000+

15 – Dead to the World – all stories by *H.A. Hargreaves*

15 – Tangled Web

PROFESSOR CHALLENGER: NEW WORLDS, LOST PLACES

16 – Hind and Horn – by *Wendy N. Wagner*

16 – The Shug Monkey – by *Stephen Volk*

RESONATOR: NEW LOVECRAFTIAN TALES FROM BEYOND

17 – From Beyond – by *H.P. Lovecraft*

17 – IPO – by *Darrin Brightman*

SECOND CONTACTS

18 – The Susans Come Home – by *Barry King*

18 – Connoisseurs of the Eccentric – by *Jetse De Vries*

SWORD & MYTHOS

19 – Sun Sorrow – by *Paul Jessup*

19 – The Wood of Ephraim – by *Edward M. Erdelac*

WASPS AT THE SPEED OF SOUND

20 – Those Graves of Memory – All stories by *Derryl Murphy*

20 – Father Time

WRESTLING WITH GODS

21 – Mecha-Jesus – by *Derwin Mak*

21 – A Hex, With Bees – by *Tony Pi*

21 – The Queen in the Poplar Forest – by *S.L. Nickerson*

NOVELS

BLACK BOTTLE MAN

22 – By *Craig Russell*

GODDESS GAMBIT

23 – By *Jim McPherson*

SIGNAL TO NOISE

25 – By *Silvia Moreno-Garcia*

NONFICTION

NORTHERN DREAMERS

26 – Michael Coney

GUEST REVIEWS by *Gregg Chamberlain*

28 – **End of the Road** – by *Edo van Belkom*

28 – **Logorrhoea** – by *Hermine Robinson*

28 – **INTERVIEW WITH R. GRAEME CAMERON** – by *Lynda Williams*

30 – **ESSAY: LOVECRAFT OR BUST?** – by *R. Graeme Cameron*

31 – **MISSILE MISSIVES** – Apoplectic expletives from: *Rhea Rose, Lloyd Penney, & John Purcell.*

32 – **AFTERWORDS** – Announcing a new Canadian SF fiction zine. (Don't get too excited. I'm going to be the publisher and editor.)

EDITORIAL

Well, half a year late. I don't do things by halves you say? Apparently I do. Sigh.

Still, I think I've finally figured out a system to produce OBIR on a quarterly basis, and maybe more often than that. Get up my usual time circa 6:00 am. Have a bath. Get myself a cup of coffee. Stare off into space thinking about nothing in particular. Get a second cup of coffee. Grab an anthology (if hardcopy) or look it up on screen (if a PDF), read two stories, review them. Munch on some fruit and raw veggies while reading a couple of chapters in the next novel to review. Then give up. Tomorrow's another day. On to other projects.

I figure, if I manage to follow this routine most days, it won't take long to finish another issue and get it published. Maybe I can manage an issue every two months. That be my plan.

You will note that not everything reviewed is "hot off the press." That's because I want to draw your attention to good stuff (well, mostly good stuff) published two or three years back in addition to whatever is current. I believe everything I review is still available online should you want to purchase any novel or anthology I critique.

While I strive to explain the premise of each piece reviewed, I do consciously attempt to avoid spoilers that would give away too much of the plot or, even worse, betray the ending. If, despite my inarticulate efforts to describe my muddled thoughts re this or that piece of writing, you feel compelled to purchase the work and read it for yourself, huzzah! Absolutely Imperial! That be my cunning plan all along!

A goodly selection of stories I think, but only three novels reviewed. I hope to do better.

By the way, something new this issue. **Guest reviews.** I hope to make this a regular feature. Any Canadian author who cares (or dares) to review their Canadian peers is welcome to submit material. I'm pretty sure I'll run anything, even if it covers works I've already reviewed, subject only to space available and whether or not I deem the submission not in keeping with the spirit of this zine. Highly subjective interpretation is recommended, but not if it is vituperative or obscene. Humour and personal asides are welcome too. OBIR is not a paying market, but hey, if you want to rattle your peers and spur them to greater effort, this is the place to do it. Or, well, "a" place to do it. Somebody might even read it.

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.

If you wish to send me a hardcopy (which I find easier to read than computer screens), send your book or magazine to:

R. Graeme Cameron
13315 104th 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!

Above all, check out my OBIR website at < [OBIR Magazine](#) >

REVIEWS

REVIEWING SYSTEM (newly revised)

(Note: number of (*) = number of stars.)

- (5*) **Exhilarating** = Really, really exciting. Eye-opening. Dance a jig time.
- (4*) **Great Fun** = Thoroughly enjoyed it. Ripping good yarn. Stimulating.
- (3*) **Entertaining** = Pleasing. Memorable. A good read. Worthwhile.
- (2*) **Interesting** = Something intriguing about it, but not enough to get me excited.
- (1*) **Not to my taste** = Doesn't appeal to me due to my personal prejudices.

Note that 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

NEO-OPSIS Magazine **(Cdn)** – #25 – (Spring 2015) – **(AAE 2016)** – [Find it here](#)

Edited by **Karl Johanson** – **(Cdn: Victoria, B.C.)** – **(AAE 2016)**

Assistant Editor/Art Director **Stephanie Johanson** – **(Cdn: Victoria, B.C.)** – **(AAE 2016)**

Cover by **Karl & Stephanie Johanson** – **(AAE 2016)**

Contents:

Panda-Mensional – by **Mary E. Lowd** – (Eugene, Oregon, USA)

Premise: Turns out, if Pandas receive enough nutrients (“Having a carnivore’s digestive track and a vegetarian’s diet is a real bummer, I guess.”) they exhibit quantum spaceflight capabilities. Spaceships no longer need engines, just a cuddly Panda Bear eager to do a quantum jump from one planet to another. But what happens when a Panda turns moody?

Rating: (3*) **Entertaining** – A simple idea, a bit crazy, but rather fun and maybe not so improbable given future advances in genetic engineering. Perhaps this is the only way species will survive, if they become useful. Cheerfully optimistic and rather old-fashioned SF. Enjoyed it.

Space Tagger – by *Daniel P. Swenson* – (California, USA)

Premise: Bimmy is a young orphan girl in the care of her deceased father's former lover (who is not her mother) who happens to be the Captain of the space station they live in. Bimmy is perpetually rebellious, constantly scheming to avoid being tracked, and her greatest delight is going outside the space station to spray graffiti on its hull. She decides to "tag" a docked alien spacecraft. Bad idea.

Rating: (2*) **Interesting** – Given the premise, the story is well thought out and reminds me very much of the kind of 1950's juveniles I first imprinted on. Some details and characters are thrown in just for "flavour" and I don't mind a bit. It adds to the old-fashioned texture of the piece. However, I've always despised graffiti "artists" and question the use of spray paint (in a vacuum no less) in the far future. A personal tick, you might say, which pulls me out of the "reality" of the story. All the same, quite convincing as "vintage" SF. Definitely comes across as a blast from the past (possibly not the author's intention, but that's how it strikes me).

New Kid – by *Guy L. Pace* – (Spokane, Washington, USA))

Premise: Jack is a colony brat, in that his family travels from planet to planet where his father installs power plants, leaving Jack with the perpetual problem of going to new schools, meeting new kids, and running into the same type of bully over and over again.

Rating: (1*) **Not to my taste** – This is TOO old fashioned. It pretty much assumes High School on planetary colonies will be just like today's High Schools, and kids will be the kind of kids we are already familiar with. The only real SF element is a dangerous indigenous predator which the bully intends to make use of in a not-too-credible manner. Story comes to a formulaic, predictable conclusion it seems to me. SF element very weak. Oddly enough, reminds me of sports Basket Ball juveniles I read in my early teenage years. Didn't care much for them either.

Landing Day – by *Holly Schofield* – (Cdn – Westcoast/Prairies) – (AAE 2016)

Premise: A colony ship has been forced to land on Wilson 4, a silica rich planet with plenty of brilliant sparkly dust forever being whirled about by the ceaseless winds. Fortunately some unknown alien race had constructed numerous habitations long since abandoned. Less fortunately, the aliens had evidently been much taller than humans and the furniture is less than comfortable. Twelve year old Jenna finds everything uber-slick.

Rating: (3*) **Entertaining** – Not a story at all. More of a vignette. I like the fact the adults are disappointed, not what they had set off to find, but the youngsters have no problem adjusting. In fact, it could well be that the youngsters are the solution to all the problems these pioneers face. Definitely an other-world feel to the story, which is all to the good as far as Jenna is concerned. Makes one think the human race has a future.

License to Live – by *Nick Aires* – (Cdn – Vancouver, B.C.) – (AAE 2016)

Premise: Raphael, a spaceport rickshaw driver who went on a "squeegeeing the portholes" working spaceship-voyage vacation only to run into space pirates and evidence of collusion by a spaceship officer, spills the beans in a spaceport bar to a woman he's never met before. Complications ensue.

Rating: (3*) **Entertaining** – I enjoyed this piece even though it is laden with clichés going back half a century or more, bears a passing resemblance to a famous Star Wars bar scene, has a wee few questions unanswered (a working spaceship-voyage vacation to and from where?), and is obviously not meant to be taken

seriously. The resolution is tidy enough, albeit no more credible than the situation or the plot. What brings this alive for me, makes it fun to read, is its outrageous sense of glee. Feels like one of the more coherent “Rocky Jones, Space Ranger” TV episodes. Particularly impressed by the use of spiked helmets, spiked space helmets no less, which goes right back to Flash Gordon days. Deliberate homage to old-fashioned SF I figure, but with humour. It works for me.

RestFit™ – by *Ewan C. Forbes* – (Aberdeen, Scotland)

Premise: David Ansty craves excitement, so pays to have his mind removed from his body and placed in an artificial reality. You’ve seen this before, right? No, you haven’t. David isn’t the protagonist. Meet Ravid, a sniveling, poverty-ridden slum dweller who lands the job of a lifetime, being transmuted to David’s obese body for 2.5 hours a day to take it jogging and get it into shape, the real purpose underlying David’s “vacation.” When Ravid leaves David, another takes his place, and Ravid rests in his miserable slum till next day’s shift. Trouble is, taking in the beautiful surroundings of the pleasant city where David lives, Ravid becomes more and more reluctant to end his shift.

Rating: (3) Entertaining* – Just when I was beginning to think Karl had decreed this issue of Neo-opsis be “throwback-to-the-golden-age” themed, along comes this original take on an old trope. Yes, it’s reminiscent of works by Philip K. Dick and Robert Sheckley, but only in general terms. It is actually quite a refreshing outside-the-box approach to the premise. Ravid is a bit of a jerk, but that is entirely in keeping with his situation. Not a hero exactly, but someone one can identify with. I did question the resolution of his plan at first, but on thinking it through, decided it works for reasons implied though not stated. Clever story. Enjoyably different.

Where Every Song Reminds You of a Dead Universe – by *Karl Johanson*

– (Cdn – Victoria, B.C.) – (AAE 2016)

Premise: A pair of Jehovah witnesses (though not described as such) knock on a door and get the surprise of their life. (No, not Theodore Sturgeon in the nude. He liked to write in the nude, and whenever Jehovah Witnesses – or anybody else for that matter – came to the door, tended to answer the door fully unclad in order to discombobulate his visitors. This according to his wife during a panel at VCON 17 in 1989.) Nope, turns out the pair are confronted by an immortal who has seen the universe come and go multiple times, so their pitch to convert him to their religion in order to guarantee him immortality falls a little flat.

Rating: (5) Exhilarating* – This is the pick of the litter. There’s no action, and the ending is weak, but that doesn’t matter, as no ending is required. What makes this vignette thoroughly enjoyable is the enormous breadth of vision. I haven’t read anything like this since Stephen Baxter’s “The Time Ships” which was a continuation of H.G. Wells’ “The Time Machine.” In fact, I’ll go further and say this reminds me very much of Olaf Stapledon’s novels “Last And First Men” and “Star maker,” the first detailing the five billion year future of the human race, and the latter the future history of all intelligent species to the end of time. Not bad for a five page concept piece, and even better than Stapledon, because Karl keeps it focused on the personal. The title is quite literal by the way. Well done, Karl. All the other stories in this issue are worth reading for one reason or another, but this one blew me away. Evoked my sense of wonder you did. Powerful stuff.

Occupational Hazards – by *Lorina Stephens* – (Cdn – Ottawa, Ontario) – (AAE 2016)

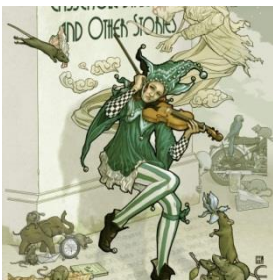
Premise: A possibly not-particularly-good artist, Eric Conner, is striving to finish his cover for a Canadian SF magazine. “This was career making. Well, okay, not career making, but certainly way up the ladder from his

rung.” Trouble is, the gnome he’s is creating on canvas has come alive and is not at all pleased at the way he is painting her lips.

Rating: (3) **Entertaining*** – Bit of a charmer this one. Everyone is familiar with the phenomenon of characters coming alive and writing themselves off in new directions against the author’s original intentions. Some novelists count on this. Never occurred to me artists’ might have the same problem. Certainly never occurred to me the problem could be matter-of-fact literal. What’s an artist to do? Why adapt of course. Never question inspiration, no matter what the source. Enjoyed this one.

ANTHOLOGIES (two stories at a time)

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



(Note: This is an anthology of stories which have appeared in ON SPEC Magazine.)

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

Contents:

The Reality War – by *Robert Boyczuk*– (Cdn – Toronto, Ontario)

Premise: Bertwold has won the bid to build a Royal Road. Trouble is, the King prefers magic, and Bertwold prefers machines. Bad enough the “limbs” of the machines have to be disguised as giant human arms and hands in order to placate the King; infinitely worse that some idiot has plopped a magic castle atop the pass the road needs to go through.

Miranda is annoyed her husband Poopsie dropped the castle far short of their destination, but she can hardly blame him. Every act of magic requires the sacrifice of a body part, and Poopsie is running out of limbs. Miranda has survived intact for centuries in her great beauty by virtue of getting her assorted lovers and husbands to work all the magic, but now disgusting human “bugs” are laying siege to the castle and she’s faced with the task of deciding what part of her she is willing to sacrifice in order to destroy the “bugs.”

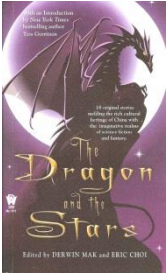
Rating: (4) **Great Fun*** – Obviously you just accept the premise and let the author run with it. That machines are easily defeated by magic, yet magic comes at such a great cost that a “reality war” is really a war of attrition, presents quite a conundrum. Strive too hard for victory and you lose everything. On the other hand, defeat will have the same effect. It doesn’t help that Bertwold and Miranda find each other very pretty. An interesting war. Loads of fun to read.

Casserole Diplomacy – by *Fiona Heath* – (Cdn – Waterloo, Ont)

Premise: Aliens drop by a backwoods Newfoundland home, knocking on the back door, which everyone knows is reserved for friends. Sixty year old Widower Edna welcomes them as strangers seeking her company and cooks them a darn good meal. A couple of “X-files” type Canadian Government agents snoop in but Edna drives them off with some shrill words. How dare someone question her right to exhibit traditional hospitality! The aliens enjoy the meal and take leave. Little does Edna know what she has set in motion.

Rating: (2*) Interesting – A slow, gentle tale; I’m not quite sure what to make of it. Much depends on the credibility of Edna as a Newfoundlander. Is your typical, somewhat isolated islander this phlegmatic in the face of the unusual? Is her life so ordered and ordinary that it encompasses the extraordinary without missing a beat? Or is there some subtle author intrusion here to render the story more credible than it deserves to be? I suppose I’d find the tale more realistic if Edna was offering her hospitality in order to spite her neighbours or as an exercise in gamesmanship, or because she’s hoping the aliens would overthrow the government, but then I’m kinda weird so that’s to be expected. I don’t normally take to slow and gentle in fiction. One nice thing about this tale though, it is rather pleasant to think a homey touch is all that’s needed to establish decent inter-planetary relations.

THE DRAGON AND THE STARS – Daw Books, Inc. (2010) – [Find it here](#)



Edited by **Derwin Mak (Cdn – Toronto, Ontario)** and **Eric Choi (Cdn – Toronto, Ontario)**

Contents:

The Character of the Hound – by **Tony Pi – (Cdn – Toronto, Ontario)**

Premise: Wu Fan is an expert in trebuchets who serves the Song Dynasty Yellow River Fleet. More importantly, he has a rare proverb tattooed on his back. Most important of all, he is good at solving riddles. Thus he is brought before the Spirit General (literally a commanding General possessed by the spirit of a deceased General greater than he) who commands him to allow the spirit of Quan Shen, the Hound, to possess his body. Together, in willing harmony, Wu Fan and Quan Shen will hunt down the thief who recently stole the Hetu, a sacred river chart with magical powers, presumably to sell it to the mighty Jin army massed on the far shore of the Yellow River. The Thief must be stopped before this happens. Alas, Quan Shen doesn’t like Wu Fan, and being entirely in control of Wu Fan’s body, represents a bit of a riddle in terms of achieving harmony. Wu fan is embarrassed. And worried.

Rating: (4*) Great Fun – First of all, I’m a sucker for anything historical that is new to me. Secondly the logic and feel of the underlying premise is totally outside my experience, so there is the delight of unfamiliar traditional Chinese cultural beliefs being piled atop a historical sensibility that is equally refreshing and revelatory. Given the premise, the story is utterly convincing. And very visual. In my mind’s eye I can see the events unfold as if projected on a screen, perhaps as part of a film anthology with, say, three separate supernatural episodes. I quite like this.

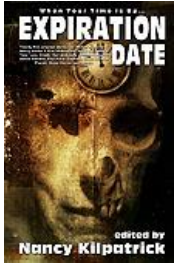
The Fortunes of Mrs. Yu – by **Charles Tan** – (Philippines)

Premise: It had been a splendid dinner at a splendid traditional Chinese restaurant, marred only by the presentation of fortune cookies, a westernized “Chinese” custom. The other ladies read theirs aloud. Mrs. Yu did not, could not, for it was blank, and white is the colour of death. She mumbled an old saying of Confucious to cover up, slipped a couple of fortune cookies into her purse, and broke them open on her way home. The two strips of white paper were also blank. Panicked, Mrs. Yu ordered a cheap meal at a fast food restaurant, ignored the food, and tore open the fortune cookie that came with it. It too was blank. Four blank strips of white paper. White = death. So does the number four. Mrs. Yu was beginning to feel very unfortunate.

Rating: (3*) Entertaining – I’ve always ignored the “fortunes” but rather like the taste and texture of Chinese fortune cookies. It never struck me that fortune cookies might bring bad fortune (proves I’m nowhere near as imaginative as I like to think – bit of a literal-minded twit actually) and the problem of how to cope with a “bad” fortune cookie is something I’ve never thought about. Usually I react to bad fortune by taking a twelve

hour nap and hoping I'll feel better when I wake up. Not one of the options Mrs. Yu considered however. Something more proactive needed. Her solution is rather elegant, and either triumphant or sad depending on what happens next or, more accurately, depending on what implications the reader assumes. One thing's for sure, I'll never take fortune cookies for granted again. But at least I know what to do.

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



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

Contents:

Riding Shotgun – by **Elaine Pascale** – (Cape Cod, USA)

Premise: As a small child Angela once saw a white wolf in the sky. In later years she couldn't find him in any book devoted to mythology because "Only the sky was big enough to hold him." In time she became an emergency medic "riding shotgun" in an ambulance with her partner Gary always doing the driving. Together they witnessed death in all its forms, and the occasional miracle. Then Angela began to notice a pattern.

Rating: (2*) **Interesting** – This is an original take on the character of Death itself, but somehow it didn't quite jell for me. The "how" and "what" is explained, but not the "why." Well written, and the assorted emergencies certainly vividly and emotively described, Elaine has a good eye for detail, but somehow the basic premise came across as rather arbitrary. Plus, the attitude and physical nature of Death seems at odds with his penchant for accountancy. I would have expected something more... spontaneous... more wild. But like I say, I'm a little weird in my expectations.

The Twenty Seven Club – by **J.M. Frey** – (Cdn – Toronto, Ontario) – (AAE 2016)

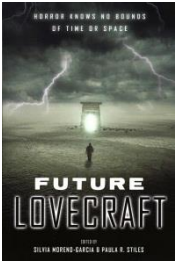
Premise: The main character, unnamed, is some sort of spectacularly successful rock star. Unfortunately he concerts, records and groupies all came at a price, a ten year contract with Terry, a Succubus of some sort, who has been feeding on his heightened creativity. Now he's worn out, a mere husk, and it is time for him to die. He declares the contract invalid.

Rating: (2*) **Interesting** – An interesting variation of a "deal with the Devil," being a minor sort of deal with a lesser demon, but one that rather neatly accounts for the occasional shooting star in the music world. There's some beautiful language hinting at the poetic reality of being a major rock star, in terms of its addictive nature, that sums up the experience in a manner more positive than I would have assumed, but of course it is contrasted by the bummer of being called to account and having to die young. An interesting story, but as rock stars have never been gods to me, doesn't resonate much.

The title puzzled me. I asked my wife, who is much more of a rock fan (especially QUEEN). She pointed out that many rock stars died at the age of twenty-seven; Joplin, Hendrix, Morrison, etc. I hadn't known that. NOW the title makes sense.

FUTURE LOVECRAFT – Prime Books (2012) – [Find it here](#)

Edited by **Silvia Moren-Garcia** (Cdn – Vancouver, B.C.) And **Paula R. Stiles** (Cdn?)



Contents:

In This Brief Interval – by *Ann K. Schwader* – (Colorado, USA)

Premise: A poem which explains “the Elder Night” because “Before our sun first sparkled, the stars turned right...”

Rating: (3*) **Entertaining** – A simple poem, somewhat repetitive, almost suitable for chanting (very useful, from a Lovecraftian point of view). It makes the point we are but humble, amazingly ephemeral creatures of no significance whatsoever when compared to the eons-old Elder Gods and their incomprehensible plans. The fact that “the stars turned right” is essentially meaningless, yet inspires an awkward feeling of dread, is perfectly compatible with Lovecraft’s writing techniques. Definitely fits the canon.

In the Hall of the Yellow King – by *Peter Rawlik* – (USA)

Premise: Erbert Ouest, ambassador for the Sepia Prince, has come to the court of the Yellow King which features sycophants from virtually every supernatural species Lovecraft ever mentioned, all of them living in fear of their dread monarch. “One might be tempted to call the thing that rested uneasily on the dais ‘humanoid,’ but such a classification would be giving it too much credit.” Erbert’s secret mission is to topple said monstrous king and replace him with something much better, or worse, depending on one’s scarcely human point of view.

Rating: (4*) **Great Fun** – The chief delight of this tale is that it is absolutely drenched with Lovecraft’s infamous, over-the-top detailed description of that which cannot be described. “...these features were merely an imitation, an attempt, by something that was not even an invertebrate, to mimic the flesh and bone structure of a woman. The result was surreal and terrifying...” If you’re thinking “How so, particularly?” you don’t get it, and probably never will. The Lovecraft style conjures up the menace of the undefined and unexplainable in a powerfully precise manner which focuses one’s mind and feelings on raw nightmare. Or to put it another way, you know that moment in a dream that you realize it’s all a dream and your fears are very silly and unjustified, yet you have the uncanny suspicion something unspeakable is following you and is now so close that attempting to turn your head to gaze upon your doom is an exercise in shuddering horror? Sure you do. Lovecraft speaks to the unconscious. Taking him literally is utterly beside the point. To them as loves and appreciates Lovecraft, this is a great story.

Inky, Blinky, Pinky, Nyarlathotep – by *Nick Mamatas* – (USA)

Premise: The Old Ones have succeeded in exterminating seven billion of those “idiot germ-things” (i.e. us) on an Earth newly cracked open and made more livable (nice and toasty) but have overlooked a waffle-sized spacecraft containing a billion human virtual souls which has managed to escape. Unfortunately for those aboard, voracious ghosts have manifested themselves and cannot be stopped, except possibly by a hitchhiker even more terrifying than the Old Ones themselves.

Rating: (2*) **Interesting** – The premise is kind of cool, but it relies on a gimmick so outrageously unrelated to the Lovecraft Canon that, once I realized what was going on, I was ripped right out of the story and unable to climb back in. Sure, it’s a clever, light-hearted spoof of some sort, but the gimmick absolutely killed the story for me, a gimmick which trumps plot and credibility beyond my capacity to tolerate. There are enough Lovecraftian touches and original concepts remaining to keep things interesting, but basically I can’t forgive the author for ruining what could have been a classic Lovecraftian tale. Humour is one thing, but this borders on

sacrilege. Yes, I know I should lighten up, but as a devout Lovecraft fan, presumably the target readership, I feel oddly betrayed. Not what the author intended, I'm sure.

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



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

Contents:

Trap-Weed – by **Gemma Files** – (Cdn – Toronto, Ontario) – (AAE 2016)

Premise: A Selkie is a Scottish creature that resembles and lives as a seal, unless it removes its pelt, whereupon it stands revealed as human. One such Selkie, name of Ciaran, driven far out to sea to exhaustion, awakens in human form aboard a Brig christened “Bitch of Hell” by its Captain Jerusalem Parry, who is something of a Warlock. Even more disconcerting, Ciaran was rescued by Mr. Dolomance, who is part human and mostly Great White Shark. Everyone on board, including the Selkie, is magically manipulated by Parry and completely under his sway. For one thing, Parry has Ciaran’s pelt, and has no intention of giving it back. It is a pirate ship of course, but Parry’s main obsession is not so much acquiring loot or fresh supplies as incorporating portions of captured ships into his Brig such that it grows in size with every capture. This because of a deadly curse laid upon him by one of his victims.

Rating: (4) Great Fun* – Now this is definitely my cup of tea. I particularly like Parry’s frequent additions to his Brig (surely grown to Galleon size by now), especially the multiple figureheads under the bow sprit, a concept I find amusing. Likewise Ciaran contemplating turning Mr. Dolomance into an ally despite the fact sharkie-boy would like to eat the Selkie. Rather sad, pathetic even, is Jerusalem Parry’s successful quest in defiance of his curse. The ending is a bit sad too, potentially, depending on what happens, but we’re not told as it is open-ended. Yes, the story might make you think of a movie series, but it’s more in the tradition of William Hope Hodgson’s “The Ghost Pirates” or “The Boats of the Glen Carrig.” I’m comfortable with the traditional supernatural elements and delighted with the original treatment accorded them. Great fun indeed!

A Tall Girl – by **Kim Goldberg** – (Cdn – Nanaimo, B.C.) – (AAE 2016)

Premise: A tall girl is walking along a beach doing something to make it more of a beach.

Rating: (2) Interesting* – It’s a sort of prose poem only one paragraph in length. Does conjure up the idea of a sprite or spirit responsible for a particular aspect of natural beauty. Not really something I can sink my teeth into. No monsters, for instance.

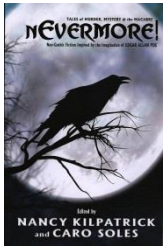
The Easthound – by **Nalo Hopkinson** – (Cdn – Living in California) – (AAE 2016)

Premise: Becoming an adult is a problem for some, but what happens when it becomes a problem for everyone? Your body gets hairier and hairier, you grow faster and larger than ever before, and you eat your loved ones and anyone else you catch before your surging hormones kill you. Definitely a worry for young teenagers scavenging in the ruins. They keep an eye on each other, in more ways than one.

Rating: (3) Entertaining* – Civilization, as you may have suspected on Welfare Wednesdays, can’t stand up to berserkers... or werewolves. Once people start eating each other, that’s it. Fortunately the afflicted die in a matter of hours. But always, the survivors are getting a day older each and every day. The youngsters cling together in small groups, or “warrens,” the better to defend themselves, but what if one of their own turns in the

middle of the night while everyone is asleep? The kids don't get much sleep. They play word games like Loup-de-lou to take their mind of their troubles, but since the very similar sounding "Loup Garou" is French for a type of werewolf, I strongly suspect it doesn't help much, especially with lines like "At night the Easthound howls, but only when there's no moon." Not a barrel of laughs, the life these kids lead. I suppose you could view the story as a metaphor exploring fear of puberty, but frankly, that's crazy talk, suitable only for certain types of critics. Methinks this be a creepy sort of fireside tale which delivers shivers and goosebumps, one that would leave kids wide-eyed and staring at their older siblings and parents once home from summer camp. Darn scary story.

NEVERMORE! – Edge SF&F Publishing (2015) – (Cdn) – (AAE 2016) – [Find it here](#)



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

Contents:

The Gold Bug Conundrum – by **Chelsey Quinn Yarbro** – (San Francisco, USA)

Premise: Video Game Designer Jeff Milton, extraordinarily filthy rich, has purchased an exceedingly derelict 1880s mansion on the ocean shore of an island off the coast of Florida. Jeff is examining the hideous old pile for the first time, accompanied by his brother-in-law Peregrine Rudolph who is worried Jeff's mad scheme to convert the mansion into a resort for the super-rich, even to the extent of dredging a special channel for cruise ships to anchor close at hand, is going to bankrupt him and make his wife, Rudolph's sister, rather miserable. And then there's that damned Poe connection.

Rating: (2*) **Interesting** – Actually, 99% of the story merits at least a "(3*) Entertaining" rating, in that creepy details build satisfactorily toward anticipation of something bizarre and awful overwhelming the intruders. They find a skull, for instance, an ordinary human skull, albeit one with an incredibly subtle difference suggesting it isn't actually human even though it looks like it is. Cool. As much Lovecraftian as it is Edgar Allan Poe-ish. But the ending is abrupt and sudden even by Lovecraft's standards. I was left thinking "That's it? That's all? Damn but I'm disappointed."

I assume there's a story by Poe titled "The Gold Bug" but it's not included in the only Poe anthology I possess, "The Science Fiction of Edgar Allan Poe" (Penguin, 1976), so I've not read it. No doubt if I was familiar with it "The Gold Bug Conundrum" would make more sense, maybe even the slammer-hammer of an ending would seem more appropriate, but I don't know.

Fact is 18.5 pages of atmospheric tension brought to an abrupt halt by a single sentence annoyed the heck out of me. But, I suppose that's just me, I guess.

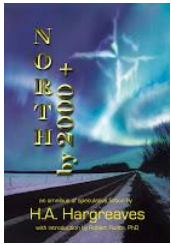
Street of the Dead House – by **Robert Lopresti** – (Pacific Northwest, USA)

Premise: As the title hints, this is Poe's "Murders in the Rue Morgue" redone from the ape's point of view, with information Poe forgot to mention, such as Jupiter being the result of an experiment by a certain Dr. Moriarty.

Rating: (3*) **Entertaining** – I don't normally find sad stories entertaining. This one has a sad beginning, a sad ending, and is sad all the way through. But what's a depressed, morose, highly intelligent Orang-Outang to do other than muse over how unfair life has been to him? He's about the right age, in ape years, to be the

equivalent of a teenager, so that explains everything. To say that he is misunderstood is putting it mildly. He has more than his share of rejection, more than you or I (hopefully), so it's a splendid technique for allowing the reader to identify with Jupiter while remaining at a safe distance. Subtle touches render the story convincing as a period piece. Consequently it is remarkably easy to accept the premise. Besides, don't we all consider ourselves reasonably decent individuals betrayed by good intentions inexplicably gone awry? Being covered in fur, weighing four or five hundred pounds, and gifted with the ability to use sign language in a mundane world where most people don't, makes it difficult to explain and justify one's actions. Fortunately, I do not speak from experience. A great classic retold well with many innovative tweaks. Sad, yet enjoyable.

NORTH BY 2000+ – Five Rivers Publishing (2011) – (Cdn) – [Find it here](#)



Edited by **Robert Runté** – (Cdn – Lethbridge, Alberta)

All stories by **H.A. Hargreaves**– (Cdn – Edmonton, Alberta?) (He was recently inducted into the CSFFA Hall of Fame at the 2015 Aurora Awards ceremony.)

Note: First edition was published in 1975. The first Canadian SF Anthology ever to appear.

Contents:

Dead to the World

Premise: Lamberth, Ontario, sometime in the twenty-first century. Joe Schlitz, a worker who does more than just punch buttons, is having a great time till his I.D. card no longer functions and he is unable to pay for anything, be it object or service. Worse, every time a robot checks his I.D. it informs him he is dead and would he please wait for the Morgue attendants. Though he doesn't know it, the master computer which runs Americanada has somehow slipped his punch card into the wrong slot and this is the source of his troubles.

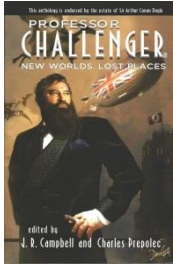
Rating: (4*) **Great fun**. Reminiscent of Philip K. Dick, and more than a little Kafkaesque, this tale of increasing frustration and growing danger resonates in part because it seems so prescient. The only thing missing is a series of phone calls to useless “experts” in India, though something nearly like that does place. Suffice to say, a problem with the ruling bureaucracy can only be made worse through consultation with said bureaucracy. What's a poor Prole to do? Turns out there's a rather elegant solution to the problem, and a liberating one at that. Bit of an eye-opener for them as used to kowtowing to authority figures.

Tangled Web

Premise: This takes place in the same world as the previous story. The master computer which runs Americanada has appointed Benjamin Scroop Spiritual Advisor to the inhabitants of Tundra City, a newly built mining camp near the shore of Hudson Bay, a camp nearly as sterile and vapid as the great cities further south, yet large enough to provide individuals with their own rooms as opposed to the crowded bunk bed norms the majority of the human race endures. All is not paradise, however, as regulations prevent a WC being installed in his room despite his rank, not to mention prohibiting him from ministering to his flock, or even bringing in sacramental wine. Add to this Tundra City is a hotbed of “Old” Canadians who resent everyone different from themselves as a hostile intrusion not to be tolerated. Scroop is one frustrated guy. Then a visiting Sikh religious leader of extreme international political importance ups and dies, and Scroop discovers that regulations prohibit either the disposal of the body or its storage. What to do?

Rating: (3*) Entertaining – Regulations covering every conceivable piece of minutiae of human activity give the false impression that people are somehow in control of their lives. All those in positions of authority, such as Scroop, know they are in fact quite helpless, and what passes for human interaction is mostly a game of one-upmanship wherein individuals seek to dominate their peers through clever manipulation of the regulations to achieve consequences never conceived by the master computer who framed them in the first place. In essence this is the task Scroop sets himself in order to properly dispose of the dead VIP. A Kafkaesque puzzle to be sure, one that all the other authorities are opposed to solving. Not what you would call an action-adventure story, yet gripping in its way, and ultimately subversive. Necessity is not utopian, not by a long shot, and Hargreaves is keen to point this out.

PROFESSOR CHALLENGER – Edge SF&F Publishing (2015) – (Cdn) – (AAE 2016) [Find it here](#)



Edited by **J.R. Campbell (Cdn) – (AAE 2016)?**
and **Charles Prepolec (Cdn – Calgary Alberta) – (AAE 2016)**

Contents:

Hind and Horn – by **Wendy N. Wagner** – (Oregon, USA)

Premise: Professor Challenger and Mr. Ellsworth, a specialist in ancient Irish language and symbolism, have been sent by the British museum to aid Dr. James Morran, a noted Irish amateur archaeologist, and his beautiful wife Saeve, in the excavation of a bog mummy and an accompanying hunting horn near the village of Seghmoin in County Kerry. The Morrans are convinced the symbols painted on the chest of the mummy will prove the well preserved body is that of Finn McCool, a legendary hero, and that the horn is the nearly-as-legendary Dord Fiann, McCool's hunting horn of magical power. Challenger dismisses the possibility, but Ellsworth is willing to examine the evidence. It turns out that the Morrans' enthusiasm has a curiously practical aspect to it.

Rating: (2*) Interesting – The story builds nicely, with Challenger's disdain for his scholarly companion evident to all, a pair of rather odd servants, and entirely too many Red Deer about the place at night. Something odd going on, and if not exactly evil, certainly very dangerous and not to be trifled with. Challenger's blunt and in-your-face approach to all problems and mysteries, not to mention obstacles, tends to exacerbate matters toward an unpleasant revelation of a threatening nature. Well and good, and I was eager and anxious to enjoy myself thoroughly as I read, but the ending of the story was a let-down, a real disappointment. Were the story the opening chapter of a novel, with promise of further chaos and mystery to come, it would have been perfectly acceptable. But as a story complete unto itself? Nope. Not only did the ending seem weak, it also struck me as being entirely out of character for Challenger. Up to the last couple of pages though, I quite enjoyed the story, but the ending didn't work for me, wasn't a satisfying resolution. You might react differently.

The Shug Monkey – by **Stephen Volk** – (British)

Premise: Edward Malone, who had accompanied Professor Challenger on their famous trip to the lost world, now seeks his help in tracking down the Shug Monkey, a bestial creature, possibly related to Black Shuck, Gallytrot, or Padfoot, spectral monsters all of past AND current legend in England, in order to put the public mind at ease. Challenger is skeptical, dismissing all the slight evidence, but astonished by one seemingly irrefutable eyewitness and so moved to investigate. Before he can begin, word comes of newly discovered evidence that will reveal the truth once and for all.

Rating: (4) Great Fun* – The tale has a Sherlock Holmes flavour to it, which is very appropriate given that Conan Doyle, the author of the original Challenger series, is most famous for his invention of that splendid detective. So the story of the Shug Monkey is in homage to both characters, methinks. As for the nature of the Shug Monkey, on final determination, the implications are far worse than the creature itself, which presents Challenger with a considerable conundrum. The fate of the human race may depend on his decision. This, to my mind, is a successful story with a satisfying ending. Nifty title, too.

RESONATOR: NEW LOVECRAFTIAN TALES FROM BEYOND

– Martian Migraine Press (2015) – (Cdn) – (AAE 2016) – [Find it here](#)



Edited by *Scott R. Jones* – (Cdn – Victoria, B.C.) – (AAE 2016)

Contents:

From Beyond – by *H.P. Lovecraft* – (USA)

Premise: The narrator's best friend, Crawford Tillinghast, has conceived the idea that man's senses are too puny to see the full spectrum of life around us, the sort of creatures which cats stare at and dogs howl away, but if the proper sort of electrical apparatus could be built, our rudimentary senses would awaken to witness reality in all its glory, and then... what exactly? Not necessarily a good thing when you think about it. The narrator has not seen Crawford for two months, and is rather nervous when requested to visit him to witness a demonstration of the perfected apparatus.

Rating: (5) Exhilarating* – No one is better at Lovecraftian tales than Lovecraft himself. It may be, not having read him in a while, that the excitement of rediscovery has knocked my critical acumen aside. No big deal. Lovecraft is immune to critiquing. As usual, he takes a simple, awesome premise and wrings every last drop of morbid dread out of it with a flood of non-descriptive description, or rather, curiously imprecise description emphasizing the growing threat, pulling the reader out of everyday reality and into the reality of nightmare which, as we all know, seems and feels far more real than the average day at the office. Some might deem this story a simple concept buried beneath a mountain of laughable and ignorant use of adjectives, a tale written by a man who didn't know how to write. That be his reputation as far as some individuals are concerned. I know better. And so do you. Or at least your subconscious knows. Scary stuff, kids. Great story.

IPO – by *Darrin Brightman* – (Salem, USA)

Premise: A descendent of Crawford Tillinghast, Lucinda, making use of technical papers found in family possession, becomes CEO of Resonation Inc., a company devoted to manufacturing radiation-free imaging equipment utilizing the incredibly advanced technology Crawford had developed before he died. The company signs a multi-billion dollar contract to replace the imaging equipment at every airport in the United States. Portland International Airport is the lucky recipient of the first installation. Passengers are thrilled not having to partially disrobe or empty their pockets. The machines are highly sensitive. The lines move fast. When the mass hallucinations begin they move even faster, in all directions. Then the government steps in and makes things worse, but only from the point of view of humanity as a whole.

Rating: (4) Great Fun* – This story lacks, let's say the deft use of language typical of the Lovecraft style, and tells the tale in a straightforward manner, which I like. Don't get me wrong, I love the Lovecraft technique, but when the premise is as strong and worrisome as this, not to mention amusing, and especially because it takes place in the contemporary world, simplicity and clarity serve well.

Come to think of it, Lovecraft's style works best when set no later than his own time because the credibility of his typical narrator can only be established if the reader believes the narrator has been educated in a more formal and ornate expression of language in keeping with, say, Victorian times. I wonder if his stories would suffer if someone were to translate them into modern language usage? Would make for an interesting anthology. I'd read it.

Anyway, IPO is an excellent example of a Lovecraftian tale told in a contemporary manner. There's no protagonist, or even any characters, so it's definitely an idea-driven piece, but fun to read all the same.

SECOND CONTACTS – Bundoran Books (2015) – (Cdn –) – (AAE 2016) – [Find it here](#)



Edited by **Michael Rimar** – (Cdn – Whitby, Ontario) – (AAE 2016)
and **Hayden Trenholm** – (Cdn – Ottawa, Ontario) – (AAE 2016)

Contents:

The Susans Come Home – by **Barry King** – (US/Cdn – Kingston, Ontario) – (AAE 2016)

Premise: Colonists stranded on a resource-poor planet keep to their walled colony, in part because none of them want to miss out on being rescued when the relief ships come, but mainly because they are afraid of the Susans, the descendants of one of the first colonists who adapted to the planet by switching to parthenogenesis as a mode of reproduction. No point in marrying a Susan. No matter how much love-making goes on, the child will be entirely a Susan. Colonists are afraid, if the two groups intermingle, that eventually there will be nothing but Susans. Since the colonists periodically attempt to exterminate the Susans, the latter are afraid too. This makes for uneasy trade relations, especially when young horny 'nist guys come out to offer a handful of potatoes for sex.

Rating: (3*) **Entertaining** – Every now and then I read a science fiction story that reminds me SF is supposed to encompass original concepts entirely dependent on credible scientific speculation. This is such a story. It also involves societal implications and an interesting protagonist. Bonus.

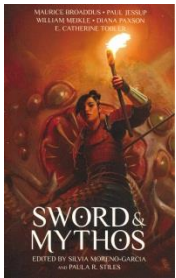
At worst, some SF today is fiction disguised as SF. Mostly though, it's original variations on well-worn themes. "The Susans Comes Home" is startlingly and refreshingly new to me and strikes me as quite original. Mind you, for all I know it's similar to this or that classic I've never gotten around to, but given what I have read over the last half century and more, this stands out as something different, something faithful to what SF is supposed to be. A quiet story in some ways, but an extremely interesting one.

Connoisseurs of the Eccentric – by **Jetse De Vries** – (Cdn?)

Premise: "...the search for extra-terrestrial intelligence ended when it received a clear, unencrypted message from the Moon, about the only place where Seti wasn't looking. The aliens... said they came in peace, looking for trade. They declared the Moon off-limits, while the rest of our solar system was open 'to explore as you see fit.'" And what trade, revolutionary technologies in exchange for... the bizarre. Governments and corporations are too rigid of mind to offer anything useful. But entrepreneurs like Afri Kamari obey no rules, go out of their way to offer eccentricity legitimate or otherwise and, for practical financial reasons, soon form a cooperative offering their cleverly-won alien technology directly to the public. The earth begins to heal. Society starts to progress. Life becomes easier. Then Afri comes up with something truly revolutionary. Even the aliens will be surprised.

Rating: (3*) Entertaining – I’m a sucker for any story that begins with a pair of anecdotes about Salvador Dali, presented, of course, to explain what it takes to be truly eccentric and bizarre, and gifted. The aliens don’t want the mundane. They don’t want practical. They want things, mostly concepts, so innovative and original, so off-the-wall and out-of-the-box, they themselves could never have conceived of them. Yet they are flexible of mind enough to appreciate them. We don’t know how or why, because the Moon is off-limits and the aliens refuse to communicate even a hint of what they look like or how they think. But their technology sure is useful. Unfortunately they reject 99% of what is offered to them. Now it’s 99.99%. Perhaps our creativity is approaching its limit, or their tastes are changing. As usual, it’s now or never for us humans. In a way the story reminds us to make the most of what comes our way because that’s all we have to work with. Fortunately the message is subtle, because the fun of this tale lies in our desperate attempts to be uniquely odd and our weirdly creative use of what we receive as a reward for our efforts. Is this the reality of contemporary life? If not, it should be.

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



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

Contents:

Sun Sorrow – by **Paul Jessup** – (USA)

Premise: Beyla and Mimas are refugees from Carcosa, a glorious city, now broiled and abandoned in the age of the cracked sun. They sailed to Xylos, but their ship caught fire as they entered port and many were lost. Beyla and Mimas jumped into the sea and swam ashore, losing most of their possessions and unable to afford their meager lodgings. Beyla seeks out a dead oracle, driven by memories of her father, executed long ago. Hopeless, Mimas sits at a table consulting his tarot cards over and over. Unable to pay the rent, they are driven out of the Inn. They join a procession of monks leaving Xylos for some place worse.

Rating: (2*) Interesting – This is a very poetic, dreamlike fantasy that shifts back and forth between shunned reality and horrible memory. I would deem this a literary tale with a bit too much angst for my taste. In fact it reminds me of any and all dreams, in that no matter how vivid the imagery, I can’t quite put my finger on what’s going on and what’s actually at stake. Call it a reverie which demands interpretation of the symbolism to reduce it to the literal. The dead rabbit’s head oracle with the human teeth, for instance. At a guess I’d say it represents her father but I’m not sure. It is certainly, like Mimas’ ceaseless questioning of the Tarot, a frustrating and useless attempt to determine the future, which seems pointless given the nature of the catastrophe which has overwhelmed the world. The sun grown too hot, I think. There is some very evocative description and some innovative and original concepts, but as a whole I find the story too vague.

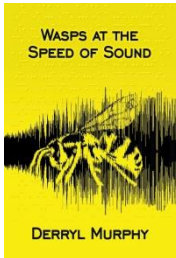
The Wood of Ephraim – by **Edward M. Erdelac** – (Los Angeles, California, USA)

Premise: In Gilead the Israelites under Prince Absalom have been defeated by Judean soldiers loyal to King David. The rebels have taken refuge in the wood of Ephraim. King David wants Absalom taken alive. Against the advice of the seer Eliam, who fears the presence of the Old Ones, General Joab orders his men to enter the wood. They find Prince Absalom caught in the branches of a tree... but something is not quite right.

Rating: (4*) Great Fun – Is this what is known as “a shaggy God story” where a bit of the Bible or a mythological tale is “explained” in a pseudoscientific manner to give it a “rational” origin? Nope. Not at all. Erdelac simply took 2 Samuel 18:8: “For the battle was there spread over the face of all the country; and the

forest devoured more people that day than the sword” and interpreted the verse literally, while justifying it with a completely irrational explanation. I’m a sucker for ancient history, and making it Lovecraftian is icing on the cake. Apparently Erdelac is known for his Judeo ethos/Cthulhu mythos Westerns. That’s a bit weird. Keep it simple. Lovecraft meets the Bible. That’s good enough for me.

WASPS AT THE SPEED OF SOUND – Five Rivers Publishing (2013) – (Cdn) – [Find it here](#)



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

Edited by **Lorina Stephens** – (Cdn – Ottawa, Ontario)

Contents:

Those Graves of Memory

Premise: Bryce is a human being, and a member of the Stewardship and Extinction Committee founded seven billion years earlier. Bryce is a charter member. There are seven others. Together they constitute what’s left of the human race. His drone (which preserves most of his memories, more than his brain is capable of handling) thinks it has found Earth, the original home world of mankind. It wasn’t easy. The last sentinel guarding it had gone insane and hidden it hundreds of millions of years ago. Being as old as it is, the Earth is a ball of rock as featureless as a billiard ball. Bruce amuses himself watching his drone build a facsimile of his birth neighbourhood out of solid rock while he waits for the rest of the committee to arrive. Sad, pathetic Earth. Once the others are present they’ll decide what to do with the poor old thing.

Rating: (3*) **Entertaining** – Another Stapledonesque story, though, apart from some ‘fresh’ memories installed by the drone, caught in a particular moment in time. It turns out there are physical solutions to being immortal, and unlike the protagonist in Karl Johanson’s story reviewed way above, there are no poignant memories brought on by unexpected reminders, unless your drone grants you access to its backup storage of your memories, and even that comes at a price, for you have to swap out recent “new” memories in order to make room for new “old” memories. Turns out the one’s flesh cauliflower isn’t as holistic and infinite in capacity as most SF writers assume, at least not over billions of years. Still, everybody still alive is in better shape than Old Earth, but for how much longer?

Father Time

Premise: The unnamed protagonist has a problem. His father is dying, and keeping bedside vigil is more than usually difficult because his father keeps dropping by to check on how things are going. His father being a time traveler you see. The main character has long hated his father for abandoning him as a child, but it’s all the more frustrating because his father periodically and unexpectedly pops in to apologize, and then he’s off again. Now his father is offering him family time, the opportunity to join him in his travels. All he has to do is die.

Rating: (2*) **Interesting**. This story is actually pretty good. My only problem is I find the ending confusing. I think I’ve figured out the complexity of it all but I’m not sure. Did I mention I get easily confused if things aren’t strictly linear? (Things in plots, things in life, things in mind, etc.) Probably part of the aging process, though I assume an exaggeration of something that has always been a part of me. I can be pretty sharp, but only when I know what I’m talking about. The rest of the time people confuse my vague, meandering focus with an equivalent state of mind. Come to think of it, they’re right. But at least I’m sharp enough to understand that. What’s the solution? Expand my mind? Further my education? Seek out new experiences? Nah. Too lazy. I’ll just stick with the tried and true. Now you know why the human race doesn’t progress as fast as you think it should. Still, that implies I’m a typical “everyman.” Consequently my critiques may have some value. Maybe.

– (Cdn) – (AAE 2016) – [Find it here](#)



Edited by **Liana Kerzner** – (Cdn) – (AAE 2016)
& **Jerome Stueart** – (Cdn – Yukon) – (AAE 2016)

Contents:

Mecha-Jesus – by **Derwin Mak** – (Cdn – Toronto, Ontario) – (Nominee, 2015 Aurora Awards, Best English Short Fiction), because of double publication dates, I believe still eligible – (AAE 2016)

Premise: In 1936 a Shinto Priest discovered the last will and testament of Jesus. This led in turn to the finding of his grave near the village of Shingo. None of the inhabitants are Christian, but they know a good tourist gimmick when they see one. At first they are content with building The Legend of Christ Museum, but after many decades Victor Robotics donates Mecha-Jesus, the most advanced android yet conceived, to enliven the village's annual Christ Festival. Father Xavier Ito has been sent by the Vatican to investigate. There are unexpected problems to endure.

Rating: (4*) **Great Fun** – This story of Mecha-Jesus has very little to do with Christians and a great deal to do with both the strengths and the weaknesses of Japanese adaptation to and adoption of concepts alien to their cultural point of view. In that sense I found the story thoroughly convincing. It puts me in mind of the famous “God-Jesus” toy robot for sale in Japan a number of years ago. Somehow you asked it questions about your future and it would give you answers. Quite popular I believe. Probably still commercially available. Some might assume this story is a joke at the expense of the fundamental basis of Christian faith, but it isn't. It's really an insight into how easy it is for one culture to misinterpret another. So imagine how difficult it will be to communicate with actual aliens when we meet. A bit of a warning this.

A Hex, With Bees – by **Tony Pi** – (Cdn – Toronto, Ont) – (Winner, 2015 Aurora Awards Best English Poem)

Premise: A poem to do with arousing the a sacred Bee Queen to retaliate against humanity for daring to slash and burn all that is good in nature.

Rating: (2*) **Interesting** – Beautiful imagery, but I don't get it. Bees have magical powers? The poem seems to be a call to nature-lovers to worship and arouse the ultimate Queen-Bee through chanting, burning incense, roasting and consuming the demon grubs, etc. in order to unleash her vengeful wrath, yet it is implied they themselves will suffer at least as much as the rest of humanity in consequence. Symbolism to indicate we're all screwed and it is our own fault? I knew that already. But don't mind me. I'm not much for symbolism. I prefer descriptive poetry evoking a mood or a moment, or both. In that sense this poem can be visualized as a scenario straight out of Sir Jame Frazer's “The Golden Bough.” A legitimate ritual poetically described. Pretty sure that's not what Tony had in mind, though. People like me are the despair of poets everywhere. Sorry.

The Queen in the Poplar Forest – by **S.L. Nickerson** – (Cdn – Living in Switzerland) – (AAE 2016)

Premise: The Queen in this fantasy is the daughter of a Goddess and a formidable huntress. Armed with but two spears and a shield she chases the legendary Bronze-Backed Bear reputed to possess magical healing powers into a cave. All she wants is his pelt, but first she has to kill him. Oddly, the spear she casts in the dark

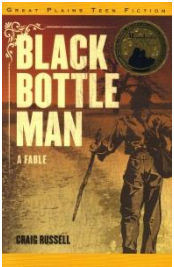
of the cave wounds a beast-man instead of a bear. Strange. She brings him back to her palace and sets out to domesticate him. Turns out he can speak, though, rather annoyingly, mostly in riddles. She determines to solve the puzzle of the man.

Rating: (3) **Entertaining*** – I know what you’re thinking, but you’re wrong, the story doesn’t end that way. Can’t really describe the plot any further, I’ll just say the ending took me pleasantly by surprise. And there are some details which amused me, such as the Queen’s Goddess Mother, inconveniently dead, animating a basalt statue of herself to complain that the red grapes carved from agate aren’t nearly as tasty as the green grapes fashioned out of jade. And then there’s the overly officious astrologer. Fun stuff.

NOVELS

BLACK BOTTLE MAN – Great Plains Teen Fiction (2012)

– (Cdn – Winnipeg, Manitoba) – [Find it here](#)



By *Craig Russell* – (Cdn – Brandon, Manitoba)

Premise: Two childless prairie-farm women resort to the “Black Bottle” and black magic signs to become pregnant. A few days later Mr. Scratch, “The Black Bottle man,” rides up to their farms to close the deal. He’ll have their souls, and those of their menfolk, unless they can come up with a champion to defeat him. That’s just for starters because, being rather bored, he likes to complicate his contracts as much as possible. So if he’s bored, why does he keep at his job and not call it quits? Turns out his true motivation is not something he can go back on.

Rating: (5) **Exhilarating***– I always enjoy being taken back into the past, and this novel jumps me back into my family’s past, for my Great Grandparents traveled to Alberta in the last of the Red River wagon trains before the railway began operating. In fact, my Great Granddad became the first stationmaster in Alberta (can’t remember where exactly, though as a kid I remember seeing his photo on display in a museum outside Calgary where an old locomotive was running and an old stationhouse, possibly his, had been re-erected from its original site).

For instance, this bit struck me forcibly:

“People today can hardly credit how much time it took back then just to keep body and soul together: split wood to feed the stove, to heat the water, to make the porridge, just to have breakfast. More physical effort went into making that bowl of cereal than most folks now expend in a full day at the office.”

This spoke to me, or rather it reminded me of the stories my Grandmother used to tell me about growing up on the Prairies. Granted, the beginning of this book takes place in the mid-twenties, but farm folk were still basically living pioneer style, and the coming Great Depression set modernization back on its heels for a long while. The “pioneer” past not as long ago as some people think.

And here’s a quote that practically brought tears to my eyes, for it brought my Great Grandmother, whom I never met, vividly to life:

“People’s bodies weren’t on display in those days the way they are now. Clothes covered everything save face and hands, even when the mercury climbed to a hundred or more. And as far as marital relations were concerned, there was many a man who never saw the bare body of a wife who gave him eight or ten children.”

My Grandmother always said her mother’s proudest boast was that no man had ever seen her naked, not her husband, not even her doctor. Yet she had numerous children (half a dozen I think). Different times.

Oh, and she lived to be more than a hundred. Credited a shot of brandy every night just before she went to bed. Hmmm, could be. But I digress.

One quote impacted me personally.

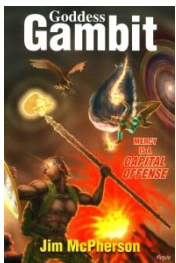
“Then a hot breath of wind would find its own tail and a dust devil would stir... he and his uncle would race, each trying to be the first to catch a piece of straw out of the spinning wind... most times Uncle Thompson won the race. He’d stand in the dust devil with his hair dancing and his eyes closed to keep the dirt out, reaching up to grasp a golden piece of straw.”

I thought I was *the only kid on earth* to ever catch a dust devil. Evidently not.

A hot summer day in Ottawa circa 1959. I was fooling around in an abandoned farm a block from my home. There was a low ridge of dried earth cutting across a field. Suddenly a dust devil materialized, slowly dancing the length of the dirt path atop the peak of the ridge. Acting on impulse, I raced forward as fast as my little legs would carry me and for ten or so glorious seconds I was running *inside* the gritty blast of the dust devil as it pranced along the ridge. My presence made no difference to the intensity of its whirling. I imagined that an observer would see me as the “Tasmanian Devil” of Warner Brother cartoon fame. Suddenly the dust devil darted to the right and dissipated when it struck some stagnant waste water, leaving me covered in grit and a memory that would last a lifetime.

To sum up, I really, really enjoyed this. Read it in one sitting. I don’t even like farms. The Prairies, apart from the Hoodoos and the dinosaur fossils, I find boring, but this novel awakened my nostalgia for my Great Grandparent’s life experiences, and both the premise and the plot I found utterly absorbing. Not bad for a YA novel!

GODDESS GAMBIT – Phantacea Publications (2012) – (Cdn – Vancouver, B.C.) – [Find it here](#)



By **James McPherson** – (Cdn – Vancouver, B.C.)

Premise: A spaceship taking off from Earth is somehow warped into a black featureless void containing but one object, a giant mouth with an eyeball for a tongue who, offended by the human intrusion, hurtles the ship into an alternative universe inhabited entirely by gods, demons and an assortment of supernatural entities who welcome humans into their midst for a variety of terrifying reasons.

Rating: (1*) **Not to my taste** – I made three attempts to get into “Goddess Gambit” and gave up around page 100. I am obviously not the target readership. Not even close.

The thing to bear in mind is that this is the third in a long series of novels (and graphic novels and web serials) all dealing with a variation of world mythology that is original to James’ imagination and creativity. Trouble is the information density is at a level I haven’t seen since I ploughed through Robert Graves’ “The

White Goddess.” A torrent of needful detail comes and goes so fast I can’t grasp it. Here are three paragraphs in a row to illustrate what I mean:

“She may be the Anthean Quarter Queen of Shenon, Witch Isle, but she was kidnapped long after birth by the daemon’s cousins, the feeorin of Crepuscle, and spent nearly the next thirty years of her life in Twilight’s fairyland. As such, as she’ll tell you herself, that makes her as much a Hellion as she is an Ant.

Going back into Headworld history, of the her-story genius, there was Helena Augusta, of Thryragon infamy, whose best friend and closest ally Volsanga was a Hellion Valkyrie. A thousand years later, as I was telling Al Centauri and Weird Ferd – Governor Niarchos – last Devaury in Aka Godbad City, the Trigregos Titaness throwback – your Sraddha’s Mama Melina – was both an Anthean Mother Superior, as in Nightingale, and a Hellion Matron Inferior, as in hellish.

Then there was Morgan Abyss, the Death’s Head Hellion, a solely Cabalarkon Master of Weir betwixt and between the two double-timing, initially Kanin City Masters of Weir. Finally, lest we forget, both our ever-fishifying friend Fisherwoman, Godbad’s ex-Queen Scylla, and Tsishah’s mother Morgianna are probably as much Hellions as they are Antheans – much more in Fish’s bait box and about dot-ditto in Morrigan Morg’s breath-basket.”

This kind of thing makes my head explode. I like the term “feeorin of Crepuscle,” and “Godbad” is a good name for a city, but what is Thryragon infamy? Why is Governor Niarchos called “Weird Ferd?” What the heck is a Cabalarkon Master? Too many questions. Too many uncertainties. Digression piled upon digression, as if the author is anxious to share ALL of his notes. Too much “tell” and not enough “show.” Everything too self-referential.

James has been writing and creating the setting and characters since 1977, and it may well be everyone familiar with his work has no more problem recognizing his characters and placing them in context than a Star Wars fan has trouble figuring out who Han Solo is. However someone plunging into the middle of the series, like myself, can’t even find the learning curve, let alone begin to climb it.

In his forward James states “The gods and goddesses, the demons and monsters, of ancient mythologies have been trivialized, their worship proscribed, and the entities themselves mostly confined to another realm.” This is a factual description of what the advent of Christianity meant for the older pagan religions. No one takes Zeus seriously anymore. But the underlying purpose of James’ Phantacea mythos is to chronicle the old Gods “ongoing striving for a return to paramountcy.” A powerful theme worthy of prolonged treatment.

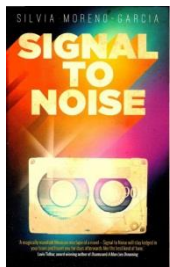
Unfortunately, while some of the deities are familiar, most are mere names, and info-dumps of genealogical data confuse rather than clarify. The plot, and scenes advancing the plot, are drowned in exposition. This weakens the theme, hides it from view.

An off-the-wall sense of humour is manifest on every page, sometimes in every paragraph. The first thing the God-Mouth-Eye shouts on spotting the Cosmic Express spaceship is “You pig-whumping, mechanical lollipop, look what you’ve done. Not only have you ripped my holy halo and pierced the forbidden zone, you’ve freed some of my jackass offspring as well. And after all that, you’re trying to get away. Well, puke on you. A little god-suck will teach you some manners... Bloody hell! You outer earthlings taste as lousy as you did six thousand years ago!”

Overall the humour reminds me of many an underground comic book I collected in my youth; irreverent, iconoclastic, and somewhat rude. Combine this with the verbiage and you get a kind of mad delirium sweeping the reader along, definitely a “trip” in hippie terms, almost psychedelic in its kaleidoscopic display.

In other words, “Goddess Gambit” is an acquired taste. Just not to my taste.

SIGNAL TO NOISE – Solaris/Rebellion Publishing (2015) – [Find it here](#)



By *Silvia Moreno-Garcia* – (Cdn – Vancouver, British Columbia)– (AAE 2016)

Premise: Being a teenager is bad enough, but being a teenager rejected and derided by all the cool teenagers is a torment from hell. Fortunately, three such loners (who know they are losers) find each other and form a close bond. Meche, the ordinary (hence ugly) girl with a brilliant mind and a passion for recorded music, Daniela, the overweight (hence ugly) romantic girl who wishes her life was more like a romance novel, and Sebastian, the tall and skinny (hence ugly) guy who likes to read and just wants to get laid, all have one thing in common, a desire to be accepted, admired and approved. Typical teenagers: over-sensitive, self-conscious, hard on themselves, and prone to second-guessing and wishful thinking. Not at all like us adults, no sir. Besides, adults never regret the turmoil of our youth, do we? We’re too mature for that. Right.

In 2009 Meche, who is earning a living in Norway, returns home to Mexico City for her father’s funeral. She’s okay with seeing Daniela again, but she’s dead set against running into Sebastian because she’s never forgiven him for what happened in 1988, the year she discovered the magic in music and the three of them set about casting spells to improve their lives. Ask any teenager. Something always goes wrong.

Rating: (4) Great Fun* – Well, not exactly fun, more like totally absorbing and hard to put down. I can’t recall ever reading anything as alert to the subtle nuances of a teenage mindset than this novel. It’s fair to say I identify with Sebastian. Perhaps unusual to say I also identify with Daniela, Meche, Meche’s parents, and darn near every other character in the book, as well as Mexico City itself. It was a sprawling monster when I visited in 1981. Can’t imagine what it was like later. Wait, yes I can, because the author conveys the tone of the city, and the characters, in small, incremental steps adding layer upon layer of complexity which makes the characters and the setting absolutely convincing regardless of whether the chapter in question is set in 1988 or 2009.

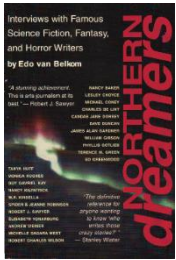
There’s a simple explanation. This is a novel. I mean, a novel novel, a literary novel in the proper sense, a novel with intense focus on subtleties of character, minor but telling details, and evocative, ever-shifting mood. More so than the average idea-driven genre novel.

In fact you could strip out the fantasy element entirely and it would still be a good read. But with the magic the book is a great read. I think because the character’s stumbling yet absurdly confident approach to learning how best to utilize their newfound power without bugging things up (which of course they do) amplifies and clarifies their struggle to fulfill their teenage longings beyond normal levels of obsession, perhaps to the point of what Salvador Dali used to call the paranoiac-critical method (which he applied to both painting and writing) wherein extraordinary and intense detail focuses one’s attention on the subject well beyond one’s normal sensory capabilities. And yet, for all that, this is a very subtle book. One that gets under your skin (at least, if you still remember what it was like to be a teenager.)

I have to confess I started reading out of a sense of duty. Silvia is a very important part of the Canadian Independent Publishing scene and considered a very good writer, so I figured I had to read this book, even though the basic premise is far removed from my normal reading tastes. I was reluctant to start reading, but soon found it near impossible to stop. Damn good book.

NONFICTION

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



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

Michael Coney – (2015 CSFFA Hall of Fame inductee)

I have to confess I am severely handicapped in discussing Michael Coney. I had virtually no contact with him in the years he attended he attended VCON, and the rare occasions when he hosted BCSFA meetings in his home on Vancouver Island I never went. Furthermore I never read any of his books because I spent a couple of decades refusing to read any SF&F. Partly because I didn't like the New Wave. (Little did I know he didn't either.) Too late to get to know him now. He passed away some time ago. I could google it, but I think I'll make a point of my ignorance to illustrate how futile regrets are. You either reach out to people or you don't. I had an opportunity, many opportunities to meet him and learn more about him, but apart from seeing him on a few VCON panels I made no effort. But then I've always been something of a loner, more comfortable in the presence of people I know well. Besides, it was decades into my adult life before I got over being shy. Silly of me I admit.

So what I think I'll do is go through van Belkom's interview with Coney with forensic intent, eager to see what evidence I can glean that will give me at least a glimpse of his character.

One of the first questions asked is why, after more than twenty years living in Canada, do many people still think of him as being a British writer? Exactly what constituted genuine Canadian writing was a burning question at the time. Michael wasn't sure what the correct explanation was. Maybe because he avoided contemporary slang and his writing came across as "mildly pedantic Standard English which people deem to be British."

Or could it be because, as he says, "The truth is I don't really know what a Canadian story is. When I wrote a series of stories for 'The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction' set on Vancouver Island I thought they were Canadian. But no: I was told they were British stories set in Canada."

Actually, I don't think the question was very meaningful for him. He didn't write because he was Canadian, he wrote because he was a writer. As he put it "It's the story that counts, and current political boundaries and cultures have little to do with science fiction, to my mind."

Well, yes and no. I would argue a Canadian writer should never, ever, set out to write a "Canadian" story. Just write a good story. Better yet, a great story. If it is fun to set it in Canada, so be it. But it isn't the setting that will make it Canadian. Nor the conscious mind of the author. It is the subconscious influence of living in Canada and experiencing Canada that will add Canadian sensitivities (if any) to the work. Want to be Canadian? Stop thinking about it. Just let it happen.

On a purely practical level restricting awards or a market to Canadian authors isn't some sort of (typically quiet) Canadian variety of insane nationalism, but simply an obvious method of focusing attention on individuals from a specific country without them being swamped by the sheer numbers of peers in the world at large. Darn good idea.

Yet I know individuals (Canadians, unfortunately) who froth at the mouth at the mere suggestion of recognizing Canadian authors or literature as such. They deny anything like that exists. The only legitimate

contest is the international arena on an individual basis. Being pronounced the best sf writer in the world is a goal worth pursuing. Being declared the best Canadian sf writer is a canard, a hoax, a pathetic lie, etc. etc. This is making a mountain out of a mole hill. They're utterly missing the point.

It is possible that such a thing as a California life style or point of view exists, at least in general terms. Popular media gives that impression. But a writers award restricted to California writers doesn't mean that California writers are necessarily a breed apart, it's just an award focused on California writers. All awards, even more narrowly focused ones, are equally valid awards. An award focused on Los Angeles writers. An award limited to Los Angeles High School writers. The best mark in a given Los Angeles High School Creative Writing class. Not EVERY award is illegitimate because it doesn't equal the Nobel Peace prize for literature. Give me a break.

In other words, defining Canadian writers as being Canadian writers is just as legitimate as defining writers as someone who writes, it just happens to be a subset which is very convenient when all you want to do is concentrate on that particular subset for whatever purpose you have in mind. And it can be a very useful purpose.

When Coney was asked why he seemed to be more popular in the UK than in North America he replied "Yes, my stuff goes over very well in the UK, but my biggest market has always been France. I don't think it has anything to do with my place of birth. It's simply that I established a name in those countries before I was published in North America, and when I *was* published in the States, I was lost among a few hundred other sf writers."

Exactly, when you're in the chorus on a big stage, it's hard to get noticed. But if you play a major part well in an "off-Broadway" production you might wind up being 'discovered' and invited to tread a larger stage. Okay, stupid analogy. But there are virtues and advantages to becoming well known within your own country and being recognized for that in other countries. I'm just saying.

Interestingly, Coney comments "I'd have given up writing long ago, if the PC hadn't been invented." Turns out he "used to find the typewriter incredibly tedious so I was reluctant to alter anything once it was down on paper." Now that he had acquired a computer "I can write my outline, expand it without having to retype, and shuffle the characters and events around till I've got them the way I want them." Consider yourself blessed to live in the modern age.

He also noted that he preferred writing SF to fantasy because "...for me, everything must have a rational explanation. Even my two Authurian novels were science fiction: I invented scientific explanations – albeit far-fetched – for every fantastic aspect of the myths. I have to do that, otherwise I'd be disbelieving my own stories while in the throes of writing them."

When asked about "some of the most interesting titles in SF. 'Friends come in Boxes,' 'The Jaws That Bite, the Claws that Catch,' etc. Coney had this to say: "They were dreamed up by Don Wollheim. He rejected my own titles every single time. And he was right of course... Since Don dropped me my titles went into decline – because subsequent publishers always used my original titles. I rather liked 'The Celestial Steam Locomotive' and 'Cat Katrina,' and possibly 'Fang The Gnome,' but as for others... Well, I could have done with some suggestions from dear old Don."

Publishers rejecting the author's title is still a very common event. Just one of the "practical" aspects of getting published by mainstream publishers. Of course, self-published authors face no such restrictions, but not necessarily to their advantage. There's still a place in the industry for the "dear old Don" sort of editor, and an author is lucky is that turns out to be the type of editor he is dealing with.

To sum up, I have the impression Coney wrote because he enjoyed writing. Can't think of a better reason.

GUEST REVIEWS

By *Gregg Chamberlain* – (Cdn – Ontario)

End of the Road – Stranger by Night anthology, part of the Hot Blood series, Jeff Gelb and Michael Garrett, editors, Pinnacle Books/Kensington Publishing Corp., New York City, NY, USA, 1995.

By *Edo van Belkom* – (Cdn – Brampton, Ontario)

The focus of the Hot Blood series is horror and sex, two of the basic driving forces in most fiction. Edo van Belkom's contribution to this volume of the series is a real shocker in every sense of the word. It reinforces the old adage about the risks involved with hitchhiking.

Logorrhoea – Every Day Fiction website, www.everydayfiction.com)

By *Hermine Robinson* – (Cdn – Alberta)

An intriguing idea, that literary forms can be ingested like alcohol, with similar sort of results when one overindulges. The trick with doing a story like this is finding and maintaining the balance of acceptable and believable whimsy without tipping the scales too far towards either stinking farce or pompous pretense. Robinson, an Albertan writer, does that nicely.

INTERVIEW WITH R. GRAEME CAMERON

by *Lynda Williams* – (Cdn – Vancouver, B.C.) – posted at Reality Skimming Press many months ago..

BIO:

R. Graeme Cameron has been active in SF Fandom for more than 40 years. He has won two Aurora Awards (Fan categories), and is currently Administrator of the Canadian Fanzine Fanac Awards (the 'Faneds'), now in its fourth year. Even worse, he has been the presenter of the genre-spoofing "Elron Awards" since 1989. He is Chairman of the B.C. SF Association and sits on the board of four other Fannish organizations. He is the editor of numerous Fanzines, including the "Auroran Lights" newsletter on behalf of CSFFA, his personal zine "Space Cadet" (shortlisted for the 2015 Auroras), and OBIR Magazine. In addition he writes a weekly fanzine review column (also nominated for the 2015 Auroras) for Amazing Stories Magazine, and is the webmaster for the Canadian Science Fiction Fanzine Archive where he posts historical data in his guise as an active Fantiqarian. Is he crazy? Absolutely. Crazy about Science Fiction. At long last retired, now he can get down to his real purpose in life – serving Canadian Fandom. Heck of a hobby.

INTERVIEW:

Q: Tell us about your review magazine OBIR. What is its mission? Who do you want to reach?

OBIR shares the mission of "Auroran Lights," to promote and celebrate the Canadian SF&F genre, though in OBIR's case the focus is narrowed to Canadian SF&F literature.

You see, I stopped reading science fiction when the NewWave came along (which is when Canadian SF began to emerge) because I preferred puzzling alien artifacts over internalized angst. Recently, on being given the mandate by CSFFA to promote genre professionals, I began reading again.

You may recall that twenty years ago virtually no Canadian publishers were interested in science fiction. Canadian authors had to go to foreign publishers to get their books out. So imagine how delighted I was to discover there are now numerous genre-specific small publishing houses in Canada, and, even more exciting, that the number of Canadian authors is growing exponentially.

It seems like only yesterday people were debating whether there even was such a thing as Canadian SF. Today the question is pointless. There's a veritable renaissance going on! I want to reach anyone and everyone who has not yet heard this.

Q: When did you have the idea for this review magazine?

It was a New Year's resolution. On researching genre publications to mention in "Auroran Lights" it struck me it all sounded intriguing and I began to read whatever I could find. Naturally I formed opinions about what I had read. It then occurred to me that sharing my opinions could be considered part of my mandate to promote the genre.

However, in my experience reviews in general tend to be too objective, in that they often purport to be the definitive verdict on the worth of an author and his work, an exercise in academic thinking as it were, which is basically the study of dead things. Most reviewers deliver autopsies. I want to do something different.

I have a Bachelor of Fine Arts and have taken courses such as "The Classical and Biblical Background to the Writings of D. H. Lawrence" so I am as capable of delivering deadly dull bromides as many another "educated" person. Fortunately I am weak of memory and somewhat scatterbrained, and consequently find it far more fun to explore literature from a purely personal and intensely subjective point of view.

Thus I created "OBIR," which stands for "The Occasional Biased and Ignorant Review." Written by me, published by me, so obviously I alone am to blame. Nothing to do with CSFFA. It's all my fault.

Q: Are there other review magazines that have inspired you?

Nope. Not a one. I don't like reading reviews. Ironical, eh?

Q: What are your favorite kinds of stories to review?

I prefer Science Fiction to Fantasy, and what Asimov used to call "plain glass window" writing where you see clearly what is being written about, as opposed to "stained glass window" writing where the story is hidden by clever artifice astonishing in its beauty. In other words, I enjoy a "ripping good yarn" more than I do a "literary" piece.

Q: How do you choose magazines and stories to review?

Whatever comes my way. I'm on a fixed pension income and can scarcely afford to buy everything I want to review. So I purchase some works, especially magazines, but hope to supplement my personal collection with hard copies or PDFs (especially advance review copies) sent to me by publishers and authors. Freebies eagerly sought. Everything I receive I will review eventually (I'm a slow reader and an even slower thinker).

Q: It is refreshing to see how open you are about your reviewing bias and, in the course of the reviews, poke at yourself and your own tastes and interests. The layers of your personality are revealed as we read the reviews. Did you realize you, in a way, are the central character/protagonist of the magazine itself?

Of course. It's all about creating a persona the reader finds amusing. For instance, back in the early 1990s when I was the editor for the BCSFA newsletter I referred to myself as the "God-Editor" whose ego knew no bounds. Had great fun with that. So did some of my readers, I imagine.

Point is a review should be entertaining in and of itself. I feel strongly about this. The reader may or may not go on to read the work reviewed, but if the review itself is dry and boring there's no incentive to read any further reviews. With my approach there's a certain morbid fascination on the part of the reader in discovering yet more evidence of precisely what sort of idiot I actually am. This is my (possibly unique) formula for establishing a successful magazine which people look forward to reading. Seems to work.

Q: What other projects are you currently working on?

The second issue of OBIR for one. Hope to publish every two months.

For another, for the first time in thirty years, I've started writing a Science Fiction novel. Last time I shopped one around Shelly Shapiro of Del Rey books rejected it, saying "We don't like your main character and we don't think anyone else will either."

Bit of a problem, that.

I like to think I've improved a tad since then.

ESSAY: LOVECRAFT OR BUST?

by *R. Graeme Cameron*

At the recent World Fantasy Convention it was announced that the Gahan Wilson designed bust of H.P. Lovecraft would no longer be the trophy of the World Fantasy Awards. The reason? Lovecraft's racism.

I'm a huge Lovecraft fan, but as his personal letters make clear, he was obsessively racist in an especially nasty way. Part of it, I think, is that he was employing his literary skill to bring out what many racists were thinking and believing (but had difficulty expressing) in a particularly striking and vivid manner.

So I'm saying while he was typical of several million Americans back in the day, he stands out because of his self-expression skills, and also because, I suspect, he was probably more obsessively racist than most because of his neurotic rejection of everything different and everything modern, thus rendering him an unusually spectacular example of a racist.

So it doesn't bother me his bust will no longer be in service, providing his literary output and legacy of influence remain respected, as they should be.

I happen to still like many of his other qualities, find his character overall rather endearing, but in regard to

his racial reviews consider him a complete and utter idiot who, if anything, deserves some pity for being so stupidly wrong. Any person with such intellect and brains should have been able to rise above such ignorant prejudice, but, alas, intelligence is no guarantee of intelligent, civilized viewpoint. Far from it. The higher the IQ, the easier it is to rationalize and justify even the most insane B.S. (which is what racism is, of course).

But here's my main point: everyone is talking about Lovecraft as if his racism is a thing of the past. It isn't. There are people running around today who are just as racist, if not more racist, than he ever was. I'm not talking about the neo-Nazi freaks or the Klan coneheads, I'm talking about "ordinary" people leading "ordinary" lives who assume their extreme racism is "normal."

Recently I was talking to a member of a significant minority which still experiences systemic racism. I was stunned to learn his idea of a joke was to suggest that overpopulation in Africa could be solved by exporting a Canadian winter to get rid of them. And as for who was behind all the world's problems, he said "Follow the money. It's the Israelites. They're Jewing us out of everything, our money, our rights, our future. Somebody ought to do something."

Nothing makes a KKK nut laugh louder than a member of one minority deriding another minority the way the Klan does.

And then, a decade ago, there's the older co-worker, a respected professional, who once said to me out of the blue "The only thing wrong with Hitler is that he didn't kill enough Jews."

Liberals (I'm one) tend to think modern times are more enlightened. True to an extent. But there's a lurking horror (very Lovecraftian) still lingering in the back of the minds of a kind of disgruntled, hateful silent minority, and God forbid it should ever be unleashed.

There's hidden racism everywhere, even where you least expect it, and it is vicious as hell.

For this reason, even though I quite like and admire Lovecraft for everything other than his insane racism, I am completely comfortable with his bust no longer serving as a "role model" trophy.

I cherish the man, I cherish his works, but his racism is something to be despised. Adopting a new trophy makes that point. Doesn't mean people should avoid reading him. We just need to avoid thinking like him.

MISSILE MISSIVES

From: *Rhea Rose*, Aurora-winning poet. (August 9th, 2015)

I am really enjoying OBIR. I like the summary of each story and novel. I like your rating system but can't remember it as I go through the reviews. What I mean is, I'm not sure if "Entertaining" is better than "Interesting" or "Great Fun," I have to scroll back each time to see where the rating is on your scale—lol—maybe put the scale in mini form beside each review or something like that. You are a crazy man. How do you find time for this??

(The Graeme – I was initially reluctant to assign “stars” for fear my readers think it a “good-to-bad” scale rather than my personal interest scale, but you convinced me it would help put my critiques in perspective. As for finding time for this, obviously I didn’t, for quite a while, but I think I’m getting the hang of it now.)

From: *Lloyd Penney*, Aurora Award-winning Letter of Comment writer. (13th August, 2015)

Got a lot of catching up to do again...I gave myself much of the past month off from letter writing, what with three conventions to go to in three weeks. Time to get off my sitting parts, and sit down to write again. Here are what I hope to be multiple comments on OBIR 3.

I have never been the literary person I have wanted to be, and that is usually through lack of money and time. I have seen very few issues of OnSpec, and that must go for many other SF magazines, like Neo-Opsis. Yes, I have time and money for conventions, but not for magazines. Where are my priorities?

I haven't heard of most of what you review, and of those few I have heard of, I have Northern Dreamers at home. I think Lesley Choyce is probably still surfing off the coast of Nova Scotia.

I would recommend an interview of some kind with Sandra Kasturi and Brett Savory, the award-winning couple behind ChiZine Press. Not like they need the coverage, but I do have the suspicion that like most things in this country, they may be better known outside its borders. That interview will really change things.

I will fold and send. It is a very quiet afternoon, so a fast letter is the best. Take care, I have another zine of yours in the hopper, and I will be getting to that just as soon as my typing fingers and wilting imagination can get to it. Take care, and see you then.

(The Graeme – I don’t know that interviewing the founders of ChiZine would “change things” but it is something I’d like to do at some point. I know I keep threatening Brian Hades of Edge Publishing with an interview but haven’t gotten around to it yet. I still run on fannish “soonest” time it seems, but my intentions are good... or so I want everyone to believe... hidden agenda... mutter, mutter...)

From: *John Purcell*, Fanned of “Askance.” (13th August, 2015)

OBIR #3 is reviewed in the latest issue of *Askance*, now posted on efanzines.com. I said good things about it there, so a quick summation here is that you cover a lot of ground, and I definitely appreciate your efforts. Well done, Graeme! You obviously care a lot about SF and F literature and fandom in Canada, and I do believe that is A Good Thing. Keep up the good work. If anything, OBIR clues me onto good books and writers that I should be aware of, for which I thank you.

(The Graeme – Ah, good. Attracting attention to these authors and their writings is the very thing I’m keen on. That and becoming Emperor of Canada as I’ve mentioned before. One out of two isn’t bad.)

AFTERWORDS

ANNOUNCING THE BIRTH OF “POLAR YITES!” MAGAZINE

“WTF?” you say? And well you might. To explain:

During the exciting course of a wide-ranging luncheon discussion with Lynda Williams, President of SF Canada and creator of the Okal Rel novels and universe, an idea that has been lurking in the recesses (or voids) in the back of my brain suddenly came together. Yes! I'll do it! Start publishing a fiction magazine devoted to inspiring and promoting beginning Canadian SF authors.

Ah, but what kind of magazine?

An amateur magazine, no problem. Many of you know that's the kind of thing, at least in fanzine format, that I can whip off at the drop of a hat regardless of whether anyone wants to read it or not. I'm funny that way.

But what good would that do beginning authors? Sure, some people would read it. But not many. It would serve no useful promotional purpose. Not really something worth adding to a resume of professional accomplishments, to put it mildly. More or less on par with sending a copy of your manuscript to your Aunt Myrtle in the hope of pleasing her. Sure, there might be some useful feedback, but it wouldn't represent a realistic step in your career. At best, a vehicle for self-expression and creativity (not such a bad thing in itself, but not enough if you would like to earn some peer recognition and maybe supplement your day-job income a little bit).

A pro-magazine on the other hand, featuring rates worthy of SFWA recognition, with glossy paper and excellent reproduction of complex and beautiful art in a hard-copy subscription or purchase option in addition to online presence, would be an excellent place to appear in print for the first time. And there really aren't all that many pro-magazines around, so such a new market would be most welcome and eagerly sought after.

Trouble is pro-magazines, because of rate scale alone, cost a significant amount of money to produce, and their financial status is generally precarious. Ad income and subscription income is less than guaranteed, and many publishers resort to kickstarter-style campaigns, non-profit status, and/or government grants to keep going, never with absolute certainty they will succeed in raising enough funds to carry on. Bit of a nightmare that. Not the sort of thing an old guy seeking as stress free a retirement as possible should even attempt.

Even worse, if you take in any money at all, be it direct sales, ad income, subscription income, or bribes offered by newcomers eager to get published, the government is going to want to know about it. Not just tax paperwork, but incorporation stuff, maybe non-profit regulations, all kinds of Kafkaesque foolery no sane person wants to deal with. Besides, I get easily confused just waking up in the morning. Government forms are right out as far as I'm concerned.

That leaves semi-pro. In my interpretation this is a paying-market magazine that doesn't cost anybody anything to read, that doesn't earn anything at all, but does constitute a legitimate "sale," just one not up to SFWA standards. At the very least this should result in a fair number of submissions, many worth publishing, not to mention greater interest on the part of readers since the zine would be a "serious" zine, a "genuine" zine, and not simply an old fart's fantasy brought to life for no worthwhile reason whatsoever.

How the heck can I afford to pay anybody anything? I live from pension cheque to pension cheque as it is, to the point where I had to stop spending \$100 a month on fun stuff (books, movies, posing naked on street corners handing out loonies to onlookers) because I couldn't afford it.

Ahh, but starting in August I should be getting old age security and maybe old age supplement. Most of that will go toward needful things I can't currently afford, but I'm hoping I'll be able to put money aside to cover at least two issues of "Polar Yites!" a year, and maybe three.

So, as currently envisioned, here's a FAQ concerning my proposed "Polar Yites!" Magazine.

Q) Who can submit?

- Canadian (must be Canadian – going to be a narrow-niche kind of zine) short story writer, poet, or artist.

Q) Will you consider stories by authors not yet published?

- ABSOLUTELY! I want to publish at least one or two per issue, maybe more. But it would also be nice to publish stories from experienced professionals to serve as inspirational examples of what to aspire to. People submitting MS. should indicate whether they've never been published or mention a couple of things already published so that I will know what's what.

Q) When can I submit?

- Not yet. Don't plan to publish first issue till January 2017. Will probably open to submissions Nov/Dec 2016 once other projects (like chairing VCON 41) are over and done with. Not to mention saving up some money so I can afford to pay people. (Not yet? Hmm. See below.)

Q) What are the pay rates?

- Short stories: one cent a word. \$10 for one thousand words or less. \$20 for two thousand words or less (but reasonably above one thousand). \$30 for three thousand words or less (but reasonably above two thousand). Not interested in any story over three thousand words in length.
- Poem (regardless of length): \$10
- Cover art consisting of black & white line illustration with maybe a bit of shading (so not too time-consuming for artists to create): \$40.
- Interior art (B&W line illustration) to illustrate a given story: \$15.
- Interior art (B&W line illustration) fillo: \$5.

Q) When do people get paid?

- On acceptance. (No point in waiting till publication. Not as if that will result in any income to cover costs.)

Q) How do people get paid?

- PayPal, preferably.

Q) What kind of rights involved?

- All I want to do is publish the item in a given issue of "Polar Yites!" and make it available online to anyone who wants to read it for however long I choose to host said issue. Meanwhile I want the author or artist to be free to sell it anywhere else they like whenever they like, be it in print form, audio, visual, cuneiform mud bricks, touchy-feely 4-d, or whatever. In other words, I don't want to hinder the authors or artists from earning further income or distributing their creation as widely as possible. The whole idea is to promote them and their work, after all. There must be some kind of accepted "rights" format that allows this. Must research.

Q) What will a typical issue consist of?

- Cover art, info page, editorial page, 6 or 7 stories depending on their length, 1 or 2 poems, some interior art, and a letter of comment column. Approximately 60 pages of stuff.

Q) How will it be distributed?

- As simply as possible. Given that I know absolutely nothing whatever about formatting MS for e-reading purposes and I'm too old and cranky to bother to learn, I'll do what I've always done, host PDF versions for people to open and save in their computer if they wish.

Q) Won't that limit distribution?

- Sure, but I won't be denying myself income. There isn't any. I figure word of mouth will eventually attract a decent number of readers despite my primitive method of publication.

Q) What do you get out of this?

- Not a deluge of kudos or praise, that's for sure. Not counting on it, anyway. Doing it for the sheer fun of doing it. I know some people may find that hard to comprehend. All I can say is wait till you are retired. Then you'll better be able to understand.

Q) Why in hell have you chosen the idiotic title "Polar Yites!" for your fiction magazine?

- In-joke. "Polar Lights" feels Canadian but somewhat trite. "Polar Yites!" is pure self-expression and conveys sense-of-wonder excitement, at least to me.
- You see, when I was an infant my first word wasn't "Moma" or "Poppa," it was "Yites!" I believe I was pointing at Christmas tree lights at the time. To this day any collection of brilliant colour lights makes me feel warm and comfortable. Even a gathering of emergency vehicles with blinking lights. Or a bunch of traffic lights at a busy intersection. Not as bad as Ed Wood Jr.'s obsession with Angora sweaters, but close. I like colour lights. A lot.
- So "Polar Yites!" it is.

AND NOW YET ANOTHER POINTLESS ANNOUNCEMENT:

"POLAR YITES!" MAGAZINE OPEN TO SUBMISSIONS

Just as I'm putting this issue to bed, and realizing I have some space left, it occurs to me I should put out a "proof of concept" issue of "Polar Yites!" to illustrate what I intend to do. This could kill the whole thing dead right away, and some might say that's what the concept deserves, but hey, I figure people might come onboard if they have an actual realization of my dream on hand. Could generate some momentum. Some interest.

Trouble is I'm pretty much flat broke till the OAS begins to roll in. But I've never let lack of money (or brains) inhibit my wishful thinking before. To misquote Churchill, "It costs nothing to think."

So here's the deal. Canadian authors, especially beginning Canadian authors, if you are at all intrigued by my crazy idea, send me a science fiction short story (three thousand words or less) in word format (not a PDF)

at my email address [The Graeme](#) and include “PY Sub” in the heading.

If I like it, I’ll put it aside for further consideration. If not suitable to my taste, I’ll let you know. Meanwhile, if you want to continue shopping it around elsewhere, be my guest. And even if I publish it in my “proof of concept” issue you’re still free to sell it anywhere else, just bear in mind appearance in my zine will, in the eyes of other publishers, constitute “first publication,” but whether that’s a good thing or a bad thing I have no idea.

As to what sort of thing I’m looking for, perusing my reviews in this issue of OBIR should give you a pretty good idea of what catches my eye. Quirky. Original. Off the wall. Humorous. Different. Neat and nifty.

What about the god-damned money? Right. Got to extend I.O.U.’s. Basically, as soon as I get enough material together, I’ll publish the zine online, and email it to anyone who wants it. And then, as soon as I can afford to, I’ll pay you. Probably toward the end of the year, say Nov/Dec. Earlier if possible. Future issues will not be published until everyone in them has already been paid.

The money isn’t much, of course, but it is a sale. Maybe your first. (Well, you’ve got to start somewhere.)

At this point in time I’m not ready to open wide for poetry and art submissions, but if any of the artists who know me are willing to send a cover piece, and any poet among the authors I know personally a poem or two, I will be grateful. Interior art illustrating particular stories I will probably commission if at all possible. (Considering how low my rates are I’m not sure anyone will be interested.)

Artists please remember I’m just interested in B&W line illustrations. Anything more complex would be great, but I really don’t think my ludicrously low rates would justify exploiting your talent to that extent. Besides, cover pieces of a consistent type would be useful in establishing a signature “look” for the magazine.

I should point out that covers will probably follow my usual fanzine pattern. A title header at the top, the art all of one piece below, both items separated and surrounded by white space (as per a typical cover of my “Auroran Lights” I do for CSFFA – reminds me, that’s my next big project this month – or this issue of OBIR). I grant you this method is not at all professional in appearance, but it is simple and easy for me to do, and still manages to showcase the art on display. Believe, there’s going to be nothing fancy about “Polar Yites!” at all, but I promise you it will be easy to read and easy to look at.

It will be interesting to see how many stories are submitted. Could be none. Could be more than I can handle. But as I understand it, the flood of manuscripts seeking the slush pile increases exponentially depending on the prestige of the publisher. Hmm, potential handicap that.

All I can say is, if you send me a story, and I like it, the “proof of concept” issue will contain it, and you’ll wind up with some pocket change eventually. Like a year from now. Still, someday you’ll be able to boast you were part of something small, which grew smaller, and eventually shriveled up and died. Well, worst case scenario. This could be the start of something. I won’t say what sort of something, but something.

I don’t expect people to be particularly excited. Let me be honest. I’m doing this for entirely selfish reasons. I’m doing this because I think it will be loads of fun to do, and in a world with increasingly worrisome headlines, the thought of submerging most of my situational awareness in a purely escapist enterprise has great appeal for me.

Above all, it enables me to come full circle. “Yites!” exclaimed the excited little kid. Let me point you out and shout “Yites! Yites!” It is your chance to shine.