

SIMULACRUM

A dark, atmospheric illustration of a hooded figure, possibly a Grim Reaper or a similar entity, holding a glowing sword. The figure is set against a background of fire and smoke, creating a dramatic and ominous scene. The overall color palette is dominated by dark greens, blacks, and oranges from the fire.

THE MAGAZINE OF SPECULATIVE TRANSFORMATION

**CORY DANIELLS -
HOW TO START YOUR
OWN WRITING GROUP**

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The Editor's Desk

Wow!

It's true – time sure flies when you're having fun. Alternatively, it also flies when you're working your proverbial you-know-what-off, not taking notice of how quickly those little arms on the clock are spinning. But as they say here in New Zealand, it's all good.

Yes, I have finally settled in the Land Of Gandalf, and can attest that it truly is as beautiful as it's been portrayed in that infamous film trilogy. It is also very cold, and as I am sitting here typing, I have to put my hands around the coffee mug to keep them from going numb. That, in turn, makes the coffee cold, which is, well, just disastrous, really.

So here we are, Simulacrum's very first birthday. I'm really amazed at, well, a lot of things. First and foremost, the support we have received. Not only from our subscribers, but also the wonderful artists and writers who have been part of our issues thus far. Thank you, thank you and oh – thank you.

A special thanks here also to my publisher, Doyle Wilmoth, who took over the previous issue while I was jet-setting from South Africa to NZ. He did a wonderful job. A better man for the task I could not have found.

I'm not going to say much here, because I think the contents of the issue speaks for itself. And who reads these boring editor letters anyway?

One last thing: if there are authors or artists you'd like us to know about, send us a message. Or if you just want to let us know who your favorites are, that'd be great too. Enlighten us.

Now dig in. With or without shovel – the choice is yours.

In The Forest Of Forgetting

Theodora Goss

When I was seventeen, my mother had breast cancer. She is a doctor, and used to being in a position of control. I don't think she took well to being a patient, controlled by other doctors or the disease itself. She didn't tell anyone about the diagnosis until after she came home from her mastectomy, and she seldom spoke of it afterward except to warn me that I might also have breast cancer, someday. This story is my way of imagining myself into that experience. And it's a fairy tale, of sorts. That's the way to write about something frightening, I think. It's what fairy tales are for.

She stood at the edge of the forest. She knew it was the edge because behind her the path disappeared into undergrowth. She could see rhododendrons, covered with flowers like cotton candy. There were bushes without flowers, which she could not name: *shrubus leafiana*. Ahead of her, the path was shadowed by oaks, poplars, maples with leaves like Canadian flags. In the shadow of the trees, the air was cool and smelled of toothpaste.

"Welcome," said the Witch. She was standing beneath an oak tree whose branches were covered with green acorns. The Witch was wearing a white coat. Around her neck was a silver chain, with a silver disk hanging from it. Just what a Witch should look like, she thought. It was comforting when things looked as they should. The forest, for instance.

"Where am I?" she asked.

"In the Forest of Forgetting," said the Witch. "Hence the forgetting. Let me check your heart."

"Why am I here?"

The Witch placed the silver disk on her chest. It felt cold against her bare skin. "Heart normal. You're here because you have lumps."

She looked down at her chest, where the silver disk had been placed. There they were, the only lumps she could see, above the slight bulge of her stomach.

"What's wrong with them?" They were small and a bit crooked, but they looked all right.

The Witch put her hands in her pockets. "Your lumps have metastasized. They must be removed."

"Well," she said. And again, "Well." Even in the stillness under the trees, which made her feel calm and a bit sleepy, this seemed unnecessarily repetitive. "How — "

"With this," said the Witch, pulling a silver wand from one pocket. It looked harmless enough. The Witch muttered something under her breath and waved her wand.

Before she had time to close her eyes or prepare herself for whatever might happen, two moths rose from her chest, white with flecks of gray on their wings. They fluttered along the path, looping and twisting around one another, as though making invisible macramé.

She looked down at her chest. The lumps were gone.

"That went quite well," said the Witch, replacing the wand in her pocket.

The moths fluttered upward, spiraling into the treetops until she could no longer see them. The clouds overhead were white and fluffy, like sheep. No, she thought. Like pillows, like unrolled toilet paper left in heaps on the floor. She liked creating unusual similes.

"Don't go too far into the forest," said the Witch. "You'll have to come back, eventually." The Witch began walking toward the rhododendrons and nameless bushes.

"Wait," she said. Something had been bothering her. She had almost forgotten it, watching the moths rise upward. "What is my name?"

The Witch turned back for a moment. Her silver disk winked in the shifting light under the trees. "Your name is Patient."

She looked down at the path: her feet were bare, and her toenails needed clipping. That didn't sound right at all. She wasn't particularly patient, was in fact generally impatient. She looked up, wanting to ask the Witch if she were certain, but the Witch was gone.

There was nothing to do but go farther into the forest. It was silent, except for the occasional rustle high among the treetops.

When she heard laughter, she looked up. In the branches of a laurel, spiders had woven their webs, like a giant game of cat's cradle. They were brown, and about the size of her hand.

"What sort of web? What web? What web?" The words came down to her in clacking sing-song, as though she were being questioned by a collection of sewing machines. One spider spun itself down from a branch and hung by its thread in front of her. "What web?" It went into paroxysms of laughter, shaking on its thread like a brown yo-yo.

She looked around her, trying to see what the spiders were laughing about, and saw that the path behind her was littered with brown string. She knelt down, picked up a handful, and suddenly realized what she was holding

"Not a web," she said to the spiders. "My hair. See?" She put her hand on her head. It was bare. Her arms and legs were bare. Even the place under her belly was bare. "It's fallen out. I won't have to buy shampoo or disposable razors." She said this to show it was probably for the best. Perhaps they believed her, because their laughter stopped and the dangling spider rose again to his branch. But she sat on the path and cried, wiping her eyes with a handful of hair.

When she was finished, she blew her nose on an oak leaf and went on. It was no use, she told herself, crying over spilt hair.

Perhaps she would grow a winter coat. Perhaps it would come in white, like an arctic hare's.

She was so focused on planning for winter, when her coat would come in and she would live on acorns, that she almost tripped over the coffin.

"Be careful," said the first Apprentice. He was dressed in a blue coat, and wore a blue showercap on his head. Around his neck was a silver chain, with a silver disk hanging from it.

"You'll trip over the Queen," said the second Apprentice, who was dressed just like him.

"If you tripped, she would blame us," said the third Apprentice. Her showercap was pushed back to show her bangs.

"Who?" she asked. "The Queen?" The Queen looked incapable of blaming anybody.

"The Witch. We're her Apprentices," said the Apprentices together. "Obviously," muttered the third Apprentice. She wondered if they had practiced beforehand.

"Let us check your heart," said the first Apprentice. All three came together and put their silver disks on her chest.

"Heart normal."

"Too slow."

"Too fast."

They glared at each other and began arguing among themselves.

She looked down at the Queen. The glass of the coffin was perfectly clear. Through it she could see the Queen's robe, a deep blue, and her blue turban. Her face was a little blue as well.

"She died of lumps," said the Apprentices.

"They metastasized."

"The Witch could not remove them in time."

"Magic is much more advanced, nowadays."

She put her hands on the coffin and, not knowing what else to do, tapped her fingers on the glass. Her cuticles were ragged. What would the Queen think?

"She left you gifts," said the Apprentices.

"A dress." It was made of paper, and tied in back. She could not reach the strings, so the first Apprentice tied it for her. She had never liked floral patterns, she thought, looking down at herself. But it would have to do until her winter coat came in.

"A mirror." The second Apprentice held it for her. She realized, with surprise, that she had no eyebrows. She should have expected that. It made her look surprised, which seemed appropriate.

The third Apprentice smiled and said, "You look a little like her, only not so blue."

She did, indeed, look a little like the Queen. "Thank you," she said. The Queen approved of politeness. "Did she, by any chance, leave me a name?" She did not want to seem ungrateful, but this was, after all, important to her. You needed a name, if someone was going to, for example, ask you to lunch. She had not eaten since breakfast, and she was beginning to feel hungry.

"Your name is Daughter," they said. "Now it's time to turn back."

"Why?" Surely she was too old for a name like Daughter.

They looked at each other, then muttered among themselves. "Because," they said decisively.

She frowned, wondering what it looked like without eyebrows, wondering if she should look in the mirror again to find out. Instead, she turned and walked farther along the path, deeper into the forest.

"Wait!" they shouted behind her.

"You're going too far!"

"Your heart can't take it!"

"Do you want to end up like the Queen?"

Eventually, it was silent again.

The forest began to grow darker. Maples and poplars were replaced by pines. Needles prickled her feet as she walked on the path. She tried to eat a pinecone, but it left her hands sticky and

tasted like gasoline. Not that she had tasted gasoline, but she imagined it would taste exactly like that. If she could wash her hands in the river —

"No one may cross the river," said the Knight.

"I don't want to cross. I just want to wash my hands and have a drink."

"No," said the Knight. Above the knees, he was dressed in a suit of armor. Below, he wore a pair of galoshes. "Ouyay aymay otnay inkdray oray ashway. Onay Oneway." He lifted his visor. His mustache looked like it had been cut with nail clippers. It was turning gray.

"Why?" It was the question she had been asking since she entered the forest.

The Knight looked puzzled. "I don't know. I think it's a rule or something." He had a nice voice. The Witch and her Apprentices had sounded like subway conductors. And the Queen hadn't spoken at all. "I think you're supposed to go back."

"That's just it," she said. "Who is you? I mean, who is me?" She sounded impatient, and she realized that she must be: hungry, tired, impatient. No one in this forest answered questions directly. Would anyone tell her what she wanted to know?

"Well," he said. He tugged at his mustache, although his armored hands were clumsy. "You like blackberry pie. You overwater houseplants, feed stray cats on the back porch, sleep

through your alarm clock." He began counting on his fingers. It must help him remember, she thought. "You write stories for children: *A Camembert Moon*, *Priscilla's Flying Pig*, *The Train to Nowhereton*. You complain about your knees, and you hate wearing glasses. Once, you went on a diet where you ate nothing but cucumbers for a week. You can't mend socks, play tennis, or sing. You hate scrubbing toilets." He reached ten and looked at her, fingers outspread. "How am I doing?"

"Well," she said. She did like blackberry pie, although she didn't need glasses. Her eyesight was perfectly clear. She could see, for instance, that the Knight had wrinkles under his eyes. They made him look rather handsome. "But what is my name?"

"I think," said the Knight, looking at his fingers as though trying to remember. "I think your name is Wife."

It was a nice name, whispery, like "wish" and "whinny" and "willow." It was the nicest name she had heard so far. But it wasn't quite right.

"I'm sorry," she said, because the Knight was looking at her with an anxious smile. She stepped into the river.

"Wait!" said the Knight.

The river was cold and clear and shallow. Although there were stepping stones, she walked on the muddy bottom, letting the water curl around her ankles, then around her knees. In the middle of the river, she bent down to wash her hands and frightened a brown fish under a rock. Once her hands were no

longer sticky, she drank from them and splashed water on her face, scattering drops of water on her paper dress.

"Won't you reconsider?" shouted the Knight. He was standing in the water, up to the buckles of his galoshes. She wondered if he would follow her into the river, but he did not. Perhaps, she thought, he was afraid that his armor would rust. Instead, he stood near the riverbank, arms held out like an airplane. He was standing there each time she turned back to look. Finally, the path bent and she could no longer see him.

Once, a family of squirrels scrambled down from an oak tree and asked for her autograph. The squirrel children had copies of *A Camembert Moon*. When she told them she had no pen, they brought her berries. She signed each one "With regards, Author." She wondered where they kept books, whether there were shelves in the oak tree. When she had signed copies for Jumpy, Squirmy, Tailless, Nuthunter, and Squawk, they shared their dinner with her: an acorn mash that would have made a good meal, if she had been a squirrel. She was still hungry, although less hungry than before.

Finally, the trees grew farther apart. She saw undergrowth, including a bush with berries. They looked like the berries the squirrels had used for ink. She wondered if they were safe to eat, and thought of trying a few. Surely if they were poisonous she would feel sick or throw up. A few would not kill her. But she was too nervous to try.

The trees ended at the edge of a meadow filled with Queen Anne's lace, poppies, cornflowers. And beyond the meadow –

"Are you going to the mountains?" asked the Princess. She wore pajamas with feet and a necklace of paperclips.

Was she? They were blue with pines, and probably farther away than they appeared.

"Look at what I have," said the Princess. She was holding a wicker cage. In it were two moths, white with gray markings on their wings.

"I wondered where they had gone," she said. She was sorry, now, to have lost them. They were pretty, like sheets of newspaper turned into kites.

"I'll give them water in the teacups my dolls use. Do you know my dolls?"

"No," she said. It was an important question: was she going to the mountains?

"Their names are Octavia, because she only has eight toes, and Puddle. Because you know." The Princess raised her hand to her mouth, as though speaking through a trumpet. "She's just a baby."

"Do you like making dresses for your dolls?" she asked the Princess.

"Yes," said the Princess. "I make them from leaves and toilet paper."

"If you help me untie it," she said, "you can have my dress." It had been itching for some time, and anyway she would not need it in the mountains. When the strings were untied, she slipped the dress off and handed it to the Princess.

Someone was moving in the meadow, someone in a blue coat, with a blue shower cap on his head. He was holding an enormous butterfly net. And another someone, and another.

"We'll catch her!" shouted the Apprentices, jumping and turning as though chasing enormous butterflies.

"She shouldn't have crossed the river!"

"Her heart can't take the strain!"

"But we'll catch her here, never worry!"

Had she made her final decision? Was she going to the mountains? The Apprentices began stalking away from each other, like detectives.

"You're good at names, aren't you?" she said to the Princess.

The Princess nodded. "I once named seventeen caterpillars. They were named one, two, three, four, five, and so on, up to seventeen."

"What would you name me?" Every few minutes, one Apprentice would run up to another, shouting "Boo!" and making the other jump. The mountains looked mysterious and inviting.

The Princess considered. "I think I would name you Mother."

"An excellent name." But not her name, not quite. She would find her name in the mountains. It would be unexpected and inevitable, a name she could never have imagined, like Rumpelstiltskin. In the mountains she would learn about berries. Her winter coat would come in.

She leaned down and kissed the Princess, then put one hand on the wicker cage. "Goodbye," she said. "Take good care of them. I think they once belonged to the Queen."

She stepped into the sunlight. It was warm on her body. Bees circled around her, visiting the Queen Anne's lace. The Apprentices were stalking away from each other, butterfly nets raised and fluttering in the breeze. She hoped they would not notice her.

She held out her hands so they brushed the tops of the grasses, and started across the meadow.

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Theodora Goss' first short story collection, *The Rose in Twelve Petals & Other Stories*, was recently published by Small Beer Press as part of its prestigious chapbook series. Her stories have appeared in magazines and anthologies such as *Realms of Fantasy*, *Polyphony*, *Alchemy*, and *Lady Churchill's Rosebud Wristlet*, as well as online at *Strange Horizons* and *Fantastic Metropolis*. Several have been reprinted in Year's Best anthologies.

(For full bio, see interview on pg. 36)

The Kitchen a.k.a Death Of A Salesman II

D. Harlan Wilson

I was re-reading Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* one night, preparing to teach it the next day in an Introduction to Literature course at Davenport University this past summer. I fell asleep and had a dream about making breakfast with Willie Loman. We had pop tarts and talked about Nietzsche's mustache. That's it. Not very detailed, but enough to serve as a source of extrapolation for my unreal narrative.

There was a kitchen growing out of a salesman's back.

Cupboards, counters, appliances, a stainless steel sink – the whole shebang. It grew there one night while he was dreaming of mushroom omelets. In the dream he had been cooking four of them simultaneously when the omelets leaped out of their pans and began to dance around the stove's foremost grill without the slightest provocation . . .

He had tried to purge the kitchen from himself by shaving it, waxing it, electrolysizing it, but nothing worked. Every time he got rid of it, it grew back faster, with larger appliances and more counter space.

It was getting so he couldn't call on his customers in person anymore. Whenever he left the house, people would sneak up on him and try to raid his refrigerator or cook pasta on his stove.

Staying at home wasn't much better. The kitchen there was small and rundown. His wife preferred to use the kitchen on his back, claiming, "If you'd bring home the bacon, I wouldn't have to fry it on your backside." It was true. He was a lousy salesman, and he had no choice but to allow his wife to use him to prepare meals at her leisure.

As punishment for being lousy, his wife cooked the same meal every meal: Chicken Cordon Blah.

"We're sick of eating the same old horseshit!" hollered the salesman's three small children. Lack of diversity had elicited dirty mouths in them. It had also elicited a metabolic change: except for variations in height, each child now resembled a miniature, deflated version of Winston Churchill, complete with bald head, monocle and smoldering cigar.

Something had to be done. Not only was the kitchen jeopardizing the functionality of his profession and the well-being of his family, it was giving him scoliosis.

He decided to jump off of a building.

Before climbing to its roof, he visited his family and said, "Goodbye, folks. I hate you." He also visited his boss and said, "Goodbye, sir. I hate you."

Later, as he stood on the roof's ledge, he said, "Goodbye, self. I hate you, too. I liked you once. Before you became . . . impure."

Despite the heavy weight of the kitchen on his back, he was able to lift a stiff leg into the air and hold it there for a moment before tipping forward like a toy soldier that's been flicked in the back of the head.

Nothing exited his open mouth as he fell face first into the sidewalk. Not a word, not a scream, not a flailing tongue . . .

His body broke on impact, shattering to pieces as if it was made of glass. It also broke the fall of the kitchen, which landed sunny side up. The cupboard door beneath the sink splintered, a few wine glasses cracked, the refrigerator light burst, but for the most part it was all right. The onlookers who had observed the salesman's suicide smiled at this piece of good fortune, and they were careful not step on the pieces of the salesman as they lined up in front of the kitchen, waiting patiently for their turn to prepare a meal at their leisure . . .

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D. Harlan Wilson has published over 100 stories in magazines, journals and anthologies throughout the world. He is the author of *The Kafka Effekt*, *Irrealities*, *4 Ellipses* and *Stranger on the Loose*; and his next book, *Pseudo-City*, is due out in 2005. Currently he teaches writing at Albion College in Michigan. For more information on Wilson and his work, visit his official website at <http://www.dharlanwilson.com>

The Temporary

Catherine Lundoff

I wrote "The Temporary" back when I was working as a clerical temporary at a large corporation which shall remain nameless. I had so little to do that I actually wrote the first draft at work between tasks and conversations with my co-workers.

It was on the afternoon of the fifth day that Mildred first noticed it, though the day was like any other until then. She signed in at the front desk, wandered down the brown on brown on brown halls — carpet, walls and columns all in different shades, of course — and walked to her cubicle with its gray metal desk, set off by maroon dividers from all of the other cubicles with their metal desks.

She sat down before the computer enthroned in the midst of the gray plain and turned it on. Then she watched the spiraling documents scroll past, adding numbers, changing numbers, waiting, hoping for the new office manager to notice her. He had the handsome, craggy features and the fierce disposition of the hero in *Love's Tender Mauling*, or whatever that romance that she picked up at the drugstore was called. Watching his strong hands, sans wedding band, glide over a keyboard never failed to make a cool shiver creep up her spine.

In fact, she spent so much time watching his hands that she seldom watched her own. Not that it mattered. She could do this

job with her eyes closed, and frequently did. What set this job apart from the others was that she didn't notice the changes until the fifth day because she was distracted.

Things had gone as they usually went. Her co-workers greeted her when she arrived, then ignored her. They were, after all, permanent, the weight of their benefits and responsibilities giving them a substance that she knew she lacked. Not intrinsically, of course, but rather in the sense of having a denser way of viewing the world. That need to work overtime to meet deadlines. The financial burdens of mortgage, children, unemployed relatives, the press of the job market. All these things separated her from them, the grasshopper from the working ants.

Then, too, the office environment itself conspired to make her discovery more difficult. Fluorescent track lights flickered over flickering computer screens, causing the barren off-white walls of the data entry room to gleam sullenly. The nubbly river of dirty carpet snaked along to disappear under black and pink and beige low and high-heeled pairs of pumps, carefully tucked under each CompatibleBack™ chair. The few windows were visible only on route to the bathrooms and the lunch room where Mildred went her solitary way each day. She seldom eyed the stunning vista of parking lot that they exposed, concentrating as she was on getting to the microwave before anyone else. Not, in short, an atmosphere calculated to encourage self-awareness.

Even so, Mildred did notice eventually. She was typing away when she had a sudden urge to take her hands from the keyboard

and stretch them. Her left hand, with its well manicured nails coated in pink pearlescent polish, seemed to fade, grim institutional carpeting visible through it for a moment. She blinked, shaking her mousy brown head with its fashionable bob to clear her eyes. She hadn't just seen that happen. That was all there was to it. When she looked at her hand again, she couldn't see the carpet anymore. It still looked a bit translucent, though. More iron, she decided. That would fix her right up.

She went back to typing and longing. Nothing untoward occurred until she was on her way back from the lunch room after spending a solitary, but pleasant lunch reading *Grasp Me Tender* (she paid no attention to the titles of these books anyway). The office manager had returned early and was gazing earnestly at his monitor. She fluttered her eyelashes as she walked past and greeted him, but she couldn't help but notice that when he glanced up, he seemed to see right through her.

Ah well, she thought. Story of my life. The good looking ones are all unavailable or disinterested for whatever reason, not like in the books. In *those* stories, she would have been Mildred the governess, or Mildred the paid companion, the quiet and unassuming, yet alluring heroine who draws our hero's grim, dark gaze. He would have treated her cruelly (not unlike the office manager, she reflected), until his true feelings for her overcame him. Together they would solve the mystery of what had happened to his supposedly deceased wife or to Mad Old Uncle Charlie. Then they would get married and go on to happily

raise the children from his first marriage along with their own. Then, well...did you have to go on living in those old manor houses, she wondered. They sounded so uncomfortable, cold and dank and filled with deceased or crazed relatives.

That was when it happened again. A glance downward showed the outline of gray carpet where her right foot should have been, sheathed in its regulation black pump. I will not panic, she thought. It's just work related stress. That's it. I've just stared at the screen for too long. She closed her eyes, then reopened them slowly. Her foot was back, or most of it anyway.

She took a deep breath and tried to concentrate on the screen again. She had heard of spontaneous combustion, but never spontaneous erasure. If she hadn't heard of it, then it probably wasn't happening, she thought hopefully. Peering covertly around indicated that her coworkers seemed oblivious to her condition as they continued typing away, making surreptitious personal phone calls, and staring at their own maroon walls.

But then they always seemed like that to her. Like worker bees in a great hive while she flitted along on the outside. She had always liked to think of herself as a free spirit. That must be why she could almost see through her right leg now. Those ethereal qualities, kept buried too long, were bubbling up to the surface. Still, she was worried.

She wondered if any of the romantic heroines, the governesses, companions, former nuns and so forth ever vanished into thin air. She was fairly sure that they didn't; after all, how could Prince

Charming find you if he couldn't see you? This would just have to stop. She exerted herself to concentrate on making her feet visible once more. There was her future to think of.

At that same time, she noticed that it didn't hurt or even feel uncomfortable. She could still feel her leg when she put her hand on it. It just seemed, well, less present than it had before. She pondered her options.

When she stopped to think about it, it occurred to her that invisibility could come in handy. At most temp jobs, no one would know the difference anyway, at least not if she learned to control it. She imagined her invisible hand pinching the office manager's cute, gym-toned butt. When she smiled, she noticed her leg came back, but only for a few moments. Then it began again.

It was a slow and steady process inching gradually up into her lap. She wondered what, if anything, she should do about it. Drawing the office manager's attention to her vanishing corporeality didn't seem particularly useful. Could a hospital treat a vanishing patient? She watched her legs as though hypnotized. She tried smiling again to see if that would work. It didn't.

She could still see her outline glowing against the carpet. What would happen if it disappeared? Would she see that white light dying people always talked about on television? Why her anyway? She had never thought of herself as someone who had mystical experiences. Or even interesting ones, most of the time.

She tried to imagine the headline on *The Star*: "Temp dissolves at computer." But, no, "temp" sounded too undignified. "Data entry technician," now that was better. But would it even be in the tabloid headlines? Maybe she should yell "I see Elvis!" Seeing Elvis, then vanishing would surely give her a moment of fame. After all, what was the point of disappearing if you couldn't be famous for it?

The process had gone on without her, continuing gradually up her torso. She raised the glowing outline of her hand, now all that she could see of herself, and touched the monitor. She thought that it would show her something, though she wasn't sure exactly what. Her hand passed through the screen and into the components beyond, and she felt a sense of flowing energy, almost like a shock. She made a decision.

Lack of a physical body was bound to get her fired anyway, so she dragged her hand from the computer and stood, kicking her pumps off. She had never really liked them, even though they had been on sale. In fact, none of her clothes felt right. It was time to get rid of them. She slipped off the sensible tan suit jacket and skirt. Her plain gold earrings and watch, the blouse with the ruffles that seemed so feminine when she bought it, the lacy underwear, all went one right after the other. She was fairly certain that anyone watching would have only seen a glowing outline, nothing distinct. Glancing at the pile of clothes, it made her smile to see that they had become clearly visible once again. That would wake them up.

She stretched, feeling light and powerful. What to do next? She walked in that slow, sensuous way, hips swinging from side to side, that she always attributed to movie stars, toward the unsuspecting office manager. She ran her fingers through his curly black locks, but he only glanced up at the air conditioning vent in annoyance.

Perhaps she wouldn't try to bring him with her after all. She had only toyed with the idea for a few moments, anyway; he was awfully peevish. She had a moment of uncertainty about what to do next, then it struck her.

She pushed past him and put both hands inside his monitor, then her arms. Feeling reckless in the glowing rush of the circuitry, she dove in, the office manager now only a vague regret. There was a shout of "Dammit! We've lost another one. Have the agency send someone out."

Then Mildred was flying on lines of information, crackling connections, electrical current. She flowed along, wondering if others had gone there before her.

All this was hers now.

This was her last human conscious thought. It ebbed out into the computer's memory and appeared on each monitor in the office as she melded into the LAN, causing the office manager to curse loudly about computer viruses.

Mildred moved on, becoming less Mildred all the time. Sparks flew from the monitors as she explored the LAN, spelling her name on each in a different font, just for the fun of it. Frightened

permanents buzzed away from their monitors in trepidation, fully aware of Mildred for the first time that week, as with a final spark, the last of her surged joyously out onto the Net.

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The Hrath That Fell From The Skies

Philip Reyth

The Hrath That Fell From The Skies is my second poem/story. With this piece, I wanted to write a poem on an alien invasion of Earth in the vein of *Beowulf* & *Sir Galahad* & *The Green Knight*, an epic telling of a story as a Bard would recite it. I may be wrong, but I have not seen anyone else do this other than the two I have mentioned, at least not in the last twenty years.

My life fades as I remember when the Hrath had come to Earth. Like death

They fell down from the sky, burning with atmospheric friction,
They burned with more than friction, they burned with lust for conquest.

We were little more than insects to them, much like ants and termites
That plagued their new planet. Infesting their newfound food and resources.

They thought of us as termites in our great cities that the Hrath
Thought of as mass bivouac's swarming with vermin. Like infested scabs.

Great War machines came to level the city scabs and exterminate
The infestation. Our appearance and existence repulsed them,
causing some of them

To vomit fiery spew. Hrath tactics of war was nonexistent. They
were more like

Interstellar exterminators. They were very business like and professional. Moving from

World to world. Their work was very methodical and succinct.

They came

In our summer. The Hrath obviously liked hotter temperatures, they moved around the

Earth from city to city in its hottest season. They dispatched every organized

Uprising as they would with any large bug problem. With more machines and cruelty.

Spreading mass destruction on our feeble attempts to survive and live.

We as a world were on the verge of becoming a star faring race.

Maybe that is why

They came. Maybe it was to stop the infestation of the galaxy by us scattering

To the stars. To stop us from spreading like fleas to other worlds. Or maybe they

Were afraid of us as more than just insects. Maybe we had the capabilities

As humans to destroy them. Because, they appeared to us as horrible Demons

That stirred our inherent fear of God and devils. People came in droves,

Filling churches in the cities that have not been annihilated yet.

Holding their

Last shred of humanity. Holding on to each other, grasping at life, any life.

The nations that were building starships moved their facilities to Antarctica

Continuing to build frantically, desperately. Survivors were loaded

On ships before they were even finished casting off. Final inspections were made

During the pre-jump calculations. The Hrath armada converged on the fleeing

Starships, some had fallen to destruction, but most had lived through the nightmare and

Made it out to the stars. In hope to restore our lives and civilization. To rebuild

Civilization and to forget the horror of imminent eradication. Their faces and actions

Still haunt us. But, humans have a will to live. To overcome trauma and go on.

We rebuilt our civilization in the Alpha Draconis system on the third planet.

We named it Bellerophon after the Greek hero who slew the
Chimaera

A monster that was held to be unconquerable. Like the alien
invaders the Hrath

That also could breathe out fire like the Chimaera. We who had
survived

Have rebuilt civilization, living in our ships. Manufacturing and
terra-forming our

New home. But, it was one step above exile. A prototype drive
ship

Was built in orbit. It was assembled in a portable dry-dock and
starship building yard.

The robot construction crews worked round the clock both in orbit
as well as

Planet-side. There was hope and determination with us on
Bellerophon. We all felt like

Heroes who could slay the invaders and rid them from the
universe, so no one

Will suffer our same fate. The universe needs a hero to destroy The
Chimaera's in the

Galaxy. We the people of Earth will not go quietly. Or be lost in
the darkness.

We will go on, united against a common foe. And hope in time that
we would exact

Our revenge on our destroyers and vindicate the human race.
Meting out justice.

Through the years we have encountered other races from the stars
that had met

The same fate at the hands of the Hrath. We helped each other,
shared our
Technologies and organized a systematic eradication of the Hrath.
Some of us felt

As if we were the same as them by doing this. What else could we
do?

The remnant of the galaxy was on the verge of complete
annihilation. The reptilian

Orn, the humanoid Vharinx, the aquatic Zinj and we from Earth,
all exiled

Together. Trying to save ourselves from extinction and unite to
commit genocide.

The means to an end is utter madness, however necessary. It has
been twelve
Years since we have left our mother world. The armada is ready; the
Earth is the nearest

Planet that was invaded by the Hrath. And there is where we will
start our mission,
No matter how much it leaves a bitter taste in some of our mouths.
To conquer our

Conqueror's. To slay the Chimaera. To face our demons. To quell our enemies.

To take back our home world. May we with one swift stroke, sever the head of the beast.

May the Gods grant victory over our enemies, vindicate our races. Without mercy.

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Philip Reyth is from Tucson, Arizona. Loves the desert and the mountains, but not the million population. He now resides in the High Sierras in Nevada near Lake Tahoe with his beautiful wife and two boys, oh, and their cat Shalom. He would never forgive us if we forget him. The small town and slower pace of life allow him to concentrate on his sole passion of writing. He is now working at publishing his works. He appears in Revelation Magazine 1:3, Revolution SF appearing next to legendary writer Michael Moorcock (This he is very excited about.) Also, in The latest 'Political Anthology' from *The Pedestal Magazine*, *Distant Worlds*, *SCIFAIKUEST Magazine's* first annual issue, *Nth Degree Magazine* #11, *Aphelion Webzine* and forth coming in *Dawn Sky Webzine* and *Crossroads Magic* in January. You can visit his home page here:

<http://www.webspawner.com/users/preythlordravenn/index.html>

Ballet Slippers And The Defeat Of Amnesty International

Kimberly Nguyen

I started this story in a biology lecture first semester freshman year in an attempt to stay awake at a point in the semester shortly before the second midterm. I continued it in a chemistry lecture directly after, inspired by my best friend Cindy and the indentations in her well loved flip flops, as well as the reading from an Asian American history text.

I woke up in August after falling asleep in the heat with my clothes on and realized that my flip flops had grown into my feet. My feet were bathing in the radiation cast from the open window, and at first I thought the layers of dirt mixed with sweat had affixed my sandals to my skin, something not unlike a foam Chia Pet. I went to the bathroom and tried to soap my flip flops off and left squeaking water on linoleum with juniper breeze scented feet and the cleanest green slippers ever. They used to be blue.

I went back to my room and examined my left foot closely. My skin had grafted itself to the thin wedge of green foam. I wiggled my toes, and they squished comfortably in the groove of my year old footprints. I attempted to pry my flip flops off, first with a crowbar and later with a pulley and lever I found in my little brother's deserted Lego kit. My parents were gone, spending time in Cambodia with their own parents, who were frail and old.

They had taken my little brother with them, and the house stood large and empty as I ran from room to room.

I rode my bike to the first day of classes at Los Angeles City College and tried to commit the surroundings to memory as I took the wrong turns and wandered down unfamiliar streets and buildings. Running to class, my steps flopped pleasantly even while I waited, listening for the flips that never came. I stood in the hallway outside the lecture hall with my back against the wall, waiting for the doors to open, and watched the students introduce themselves. I took a seat in the center of the middle row and listened to the chatter of new acquaintances as I silently examined the room with wide eyes.

In chemistry, we learned about ionic and covalent bonding in molecules. I raised a foot above my head in the lecture hall and asked the professor to determine the bonding in my flip flops. He was old and cheery. His voice cracked and squeaked, and he told me, "The molecules in your feet are enamored with the molecules in your flip flops."

"Is the feeling mutual?" I worried.

"It appears that the love is not unrequited," he giggled. I thanked him and went home. I sat in my still unfamiliar bedroom, trying to read the first chapter of *Anna Karenina*, assigned in Russian literature.

Unfocused, I wandered into my parents' bedroom and crawled into their un-lived-in bed. The walls were distractingly bare, and white squares remained where the former owners' paintings and framed photographs had hung. My parents had left shortly after we finished moving a month earlier; I had graduated from high school three semesters early and received my GED, and they trusted me to take care of myself until their return at the end of the semester. I fell asleep watching an episode of *Maury* with irrational parents sending their adolescents to Teen Boot Camp. In my dreams, I pierced my tongue and wore black while suburban mothers in the audience told me I was a slut. The house was dark when I woke up, and I ate dinner, a baked potato, in the kitchen while I tried to call my best friend a thousand miles away. Her phone was off, and I left a message on her voice mail while I flipped through the reading.

Days went by, and my feet sunk deeper into the groove of my footprints. They squished and sighed, "Mmm." My toenail polish chipped, and I carefully removed it with a cotton swab. I rubbed my cuticles with an orange stick and scraped the gum I accidentally picked up from a secluded section of the lecture hall from the bottom of my soles. I wanted them to be happy together. My dad called home, and we spoke long distance. He thought my mom was feeling better. The stress of assimilation in America had finally taken its toll on her when my parents left for Cambodia.

Feeling abandoned, I listened to my dad lecture in Khmer, and I felt guilty and annoyed with both of us as I played Solitaire on

the computer, clicking and dragging my cursor across the screen as I ignored him. My dad made sure I was healthy and eating and hung up to tend to my little brother.

October came, and the temperatures dropped to sixty. I stopped going to my classes, except for chemistry, and dropped Russian literature. The reading was frustrating, and the silence at home was deafening and made me feel terribly alone. I kept the television and radio on when I went to sleep. My feet turned purple in the cold, and my nails turned blue. I pulled softball socks up to my knees and painted secondhand galoshes pink with yellow spots. After flopping around the empty house with softball duck feet, I went to class, a streak of pink and yellow dancing between the spokes on the wheels of my bike. I watched high school students drive to class and remembered my last day of classes with relief mixed with melancholy and regret.

At the end of the first semester of my junior year, my father told me that my mom was sick. He explained calmly and infuriatingly that we had to move to California, where a larger Cambodian, not to mention Asian, community lived than in Nebraska, because she was sick and stressed out. He didn't say crazy. I had already completed most of my credits for graduation when I decided to withdraw from high school and left without explaining my reasons to my teachers or friends. My parents insisted that I not shame the family, so I stayed home, locked in my room and avoiding my friends, ashamed of myself without

understanding why. I ignored my mother at home until my guilt overcame me, when I finally, uselessly, tried to take care of her. She wouldn't let me feed her, because she thought I wanted to poison her. When I left the room, I could hear her talking to herself and the empty space she thought was her daughter. She didn't know me.

In chemistry, my lab partner examined an exothermic reaction as I took notes and doodles in our lab book. He leaned across the table and tapped the bridge of my safety goggles. I wrinkled my nose. "Jamie," he whispered, "come to homecoming with me." The ferric chloride released heat in the deionized water, and I smiled.

I wore a green dress to match my slippers. As I dressed, I found a striped green knit scarf at the bottom of my closet and twined it around my neck. He knocked on my door and slipped a white flower on my wrist. "I used to watch you run to class in those flip flops," he smiled.

"I'm very attached," I winked and took his elbow.

He drove me home that night and kissed me by the front door. His hair was gracefully curly and thick in my fingers. He was sweaty and exuberant, yet somehow fresh with his youthful strength and confidence. I leaned my head on the wood and wished I could determine his molecular formula and keep it written on the palm of my hand with permanent ink. My molecules danced with his fingers.

My father called home that night and began to tell me how much better my mother was feeling lately and that I should expect them home by Christmas, and maybe even Thanksgiving. I interrupted him and said, quietly tentative with growing strength as I restrained my tears, "Why did you leave me, Daddy? Why didn't you want to take care of me?" My voice cracked as I paused and sobbed, finally unable to constrain myself, "Why didn't you want me?"

I could only hear a faint static humming before the line went dead. I crawled into bed and cried until I fell asleep. Later that night, my dad sent an email apologizing, because a storm had knocked the phone lines out.

I woke up the morning after homecoming and fell out of bed, twisting my right ankle and breaking the strap on my flip flop. I cried out in pain and hobbled downstairs, gingerly stepping. I slipped on the third step despite my caution, and my flip flop slid off, immobile on the stairwell. I examined it carefully for the first time in three months. The indentation of my footprint was a sickly purple, blue, and yellow bruise. My foot turned pale and whimpered. Once downstairs, I pulled the green scarf from a pile of clothing on the couch and wrapped it around my neck, tying the injured flip flop securely to one end. I found tape in my softball bag and carefully set my ankle before limping to chemistry in strangely uneven galoshes. That day my feet found no joy in splashing though puddles.

After lecture, I asked my professor to examine my injured sole. He sadly told me that the intermolecular forces between my foot and slipper had grown weak, and my flip flop was broken beyond repair. The next day, I showed up for history and introduced myself to the students in my discussion section for the first time.

I kept my right flip flop tied to the left end of my scarf throughout Thanksgiving and a chemistry midterm. My left foot remained blissfully entranced with its mate while my right foot became withdrawn and solitary in its pink and yellow spotted galosh and ankle sock. My family came home in time for Thanksgiving, and even though I welcomed them and spoke naturally, I felt strange and alone. I kept my flip flop hidden, and my father continued to worry about my mother and her therapy as well as my baby brother. My mother was always strangely alert and cheerful as a result of the medication she had to take, and she tried to talk to me as we watched *Friends* on syndicated television. I opened my mouth to speak, and, exasperated, I silently ignored her, feeling angry, hateful, and annoyed. As Christmas approached, the color in my foot began to return, and I noticed it blush pink as I examined a new friend's shoe magazines from Japan. My right foot turned faint everyday before rain.

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Kimberly Nguyen (<http://www.xanga.com/uhkiwi>) is a second year student at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles and misses family in San Jose. She enjoys watching *America's Next Top Model* and the OC as well as reading about bad television on *Television Without Pity*. Although she is technically a PMED student, she is taking English classes, because she secretly adores epic poetry and English literature. She hopes to meet Aimee Bender on campus and often does not recognize famous people in her midst. She is currently listening to *Interpol*, *Bjork*, *Mogwai*, the *Dead Kennedys*, the *Buzzcocks*, *Britney Spears*, and the *Elementary Penguins* and working at Doheny Memorial Library in order to save money to spend on food for her boyfriend and couture from sample sales.

K.C. And The Sunshine World

K.C. Antonis & A.R. Yngve

I really can't reveal that much without spoiling the story—and if you read it, you will understand my reluctance to talk about it. But: the story refers to research into human perception that takes place today. For more information on this research, visit the homepage of scientist Metod Saniga: <http://www.astro.sk/~msaniga/> The cutting edge of science is my foremost inspiration.

CO-AUTHOR'S FOREWORD:

In 2004, I got the rare opportunity to visit my cousin K.C., who was then undergoing treatment at a psychiatric hospital in the country of X.

K.C. Antonis (not his real name) suffers from schizophrenia with frequent bouts of catatonia. I met K.C. in our childhood, before his illness became serious. Even back then, his behavior was erratic. I recall the time when K.C. saw a drawing I had made, and he liked it so much that I gave it to him. K.C. was very grateful. But only the next day, I found the same drawing lying around, with numerous tears and cuts in it - as if K.C. had tried to destroy it in a fit of rage. It hurt and confused me then, and I took it as an act of malice. Our friendship deteriorated from that point.

Much later I learned of K.C.'s illness and hospitalization, and I understood that he was not always in control of himself. And

gradually he faded from my memory.

Skip forward to the spring of 2004: K.C.'s mother invites me to her home in the city of Y. Then, as if she had planned it all along, she asks me to come along and visit K.C. at the hospital.

Of course I find her request unsettling, and try to make up an excuse not to go... but when she said that K.C. explicitly asked to see me, I got curious. Deep down, I still carried a question I needed to resolve. "Why did K.C. ruin my drawing that he liked so much?"

Another factor was my recent study of new research into schizophrenia, which I wanted to discuss with K.C. I thought it might interest him, perhaps help him - and I wanted to test the new theories about schizoid behavior.

I met K.C. in the hospital, and brought along a tape-recorder and a notepad. K.C. was fairly lucid most of the time, though the medication often made him slow to respond. He agreed to let me record and write down our conversations, and we met twice. Each visit lasted several hours.

The following account is my attempt to present what K.C. told me in a coherent, shortened form.

Please note that the *sequence* of his statements did not always match the sequence of this text. At times he spoke sentences in such a jumbled sequence, I had to puzzle them back into order afterwards.

This text is published with the permission of K.C.'s mother.

THE FIRST MEETING

Hello, A.R. Wait. Hello, A.R. Damn. Stuck again. Stuck again!
What? What? Damn it, sit still!

Here I try to calm him down, and I explain my errand. I keep very still. His head swings wildly, and he seems to search with his eyes for me, even though I'm sitting right in front of him. Finally, he calms down enough to hear me out.

Interesting. Tell me more.

I explain to him the new research, and I produce a drawing to explain how distorted perception might alter his view of time and space. He eyes the drawing with great concentration for a whole minute, and goes catatonic. After a few minutes, I move to leave. But with a seemingly tremendous effort, K.C. moves and gestures at me to stay. I return to my chair.

A.R., listen. Listen. Things freeze on me all the time. I... can't always see things flow... like they ought to. You keep going in circles. Everyone, I mean. Stops, goes back a few moments, repeats. Is it that way for you too? No. Just me. And sometimes the world has its picture taken. It happened just now. You became part of the big picture. Everything became a big photograph. And I'm inside it.

But it doesn't last all day. When the photo starts moving again, I get nervous, because I don't know what I'll see next. Sometimes, things go back to the way they should be. Things happen once,

instead of several times.

And sometimes... the spaghetti comes. Crawls all over me. The whole world turns into living, moving spaghetti. It's been that way for years. I can't tell how much time passes when the spaghetti comes.

Wait. Don't go spaghetti on me now! KEEP STILL! Become a photo! A photo! I prefer the photo world. Things repeat or stand still, but I can handle that. I can feel it now, how the spaghetti is just waiting to sneak up on me. Can you see it? No, of course you can't. I must be an important person, if I'm the only one who can see the spaghetti.

I ask him about that childhood incident with my drawing.

My mother always told me I was just dreaming things. She told me I was like you. You're a dreamer like me, she says. I could sense it in your drawings, sometimes. Your drawings scared me. They jumped up at me, and the lines turned weird. I tried to fix your drawings, cut off the spaghetti before it came out of the paper. No, I like your drawings.

I explain to K.C. that the "spaghetti" he talks about may have a scientific explanation: it could be the regular world, only seen from a different dimensional angle. I make another drawing, and show him how three-dimensional spacetime may appear to a two-dimensional being. He freezes up again for exactly two minutes. Then he starts to weep. I offer him a paper towel.

You're making fun of me! Did the doctor tell you to come here and test me? I know what he wants me to say! He tells me there is

no Spaghetti World. He can't explain. He's stupid. They give me pills, but they don't work. The pills don't make Spaghetti World or Photo World go away... the pills just make me feel drunk, so I can't do anything or care about anything... it sucks! So don't make fun of me!

I ask him if he can draw "Spaghetti World" and "Photo World" for me.

I can't draw, A.R.... you know that! You can draw. I tried to draw what I saw, but it doesn't show on paper. The paper is too flat. When everything becomes a photo, and I make a drawing, it's just a flat image on a flat image, it doesn't show what I see.

And the spaghetti, I don't know how to draw it. It changes shape all the time. Sometimes it helps when I do something. I do... something, and the spaghetti goes away.

I suggest to him that he should try to think of Spaghetti World, Photo World and the normal world as the same reality seen from different perspectives. Photo World could be when he sees only two dimensions, and the third dimension is either outside his view, or part of how he senses time.

Spaghetti World would then be his view at a "tilted" angle, when he can see a three-dimensional cross-section of both space and time. The "spaghetti," I propose, is simply the view of how the world and things in it stretch through time and space, like spaghetti strands. Finally, it seems he starts to understand.

I don't know, A.R., are you crazy? You can't see what I see, and you come here and you think you know what it's like? Walk a

mile in my shoes. You try and be rational when everything keeps changing all the time, and everyone says you're imagining things! But they are real! I don't know if you've told me about this "new research" many times, or did I dream that too.

I ask him to describe other sensations during his "attacks". What does he hear, smell and feel?

Things smell the same. Almost. Some things smell wrong. The sounds are weird. When I see Photo World, I hear voices on top of voices, sounds repeat themselves. It's pretty annoying, but I can use ear plugs or hold my ears. That helps a lot.

THE SECOND MEETING

I suggest that I stay with him during one of his "Spaghetti World" fits, and try to guide him through it.

Okay. I'll do as you say. I will close my eyes, hold your hand, and wait until Spaghetti World comes, and keep holding your hand no matter what happens.

Damn... is that you, A.R.? I can't see you, but I can feel your hand. Is that your hand? It looks like... how can that be your hand? It's spaghetti wrapped around my hand. Okay, move your hand. Oh, no. No, I'm okay. Shake my hand again.

All right... let me think... if that thing is your hand, seen from another angle... then that other thing... is you. And that over there

is this room. I will try to move now. One step.

Oh God. Don't let go of my hand. I can't see the floor. The floor is all wrong when I move. You're changing shape. You're... stretched into this bundle of strings... it goes off into the distance... and I'm talking to you again. We're having two conversations. No wait, the other one was... when? Two days ago? Okay. Help me... that means, I can see several moments at the same time. That's what I'm seeing now.

K.C. laughs, and smiles. Not an insane laughter. The smile is a happy one. He looks at me, and past me, and becomes serious. He speaks slower, and repeats himself, and occasionally talks very fast.

I'm so scared of being crazy. The worst part is that no one believes you. And you don't know what to believe. It starts to make sense now. Spaghetti World is time. I'm looking into the past. You're like an infinite row of flat paper cut-outs, lined up and glued together into one long, winding thing.

And Photo World is when I move that other way, and one direction drops out of view. That's when I think time stops, for a few moments, and repeats. But... I just realized something. What if I could move my body in time? Do you think I could walk in time?

No, maybe not. It looks like a very long way to go. I don't think I can get very far on foot.

So what good is this "affliction"? Tell me, if you're so damn smart: how am I going to keep a job, have friends... when I keep sliding in and out of the normal view of everything? What kind of

life is that supposed to be?

We take a pause.

After the pause, I suggest to him that if he had pursued an artistic career, he might have had a creative outlet for his visions. He ought to try and paint his experiences, or perhaps use computer graphics instead of pen and brush.

I'm not smart like you. I'm just an ordinary guy with screwed-up senses. Do I have to be a bloody genius to live with this condition? I can't use it for anything. I can't drive a car. When I sat in a car, and suddenly I entered Photo World, it looked really weird – all that traffic pressed flat, all the cars overlapping each other.

If... I have an idea. If I can see into the past, even though the view is all messed up and looks like spaghetti, at least I can see which parts of the mess stick together in the distance. When you held my hand, I could see the spaghetti that was you and me, connecting.

Let's say I was a policeman, a detective. If I looked at a dead person, and I was in Spaghetti World, I could just follow the spaghetti of the dead man with my eyes, until I saw the point where that person connected with the spaghetti of whoever killed him. And then, if I could learn to recognize the shape of the killer when he looked normal... his profile maybe. I could become a detective. Like those psychics who help the police find leads.

I suggest to K.C. that maybe the "psychics" have his ability but are unaware of it. We both laugh at the idea, but I'm not sure if I'm being

serious or just kidding.

This is so great. Finally things make sense. I'm not afraid of the spaghetti anymore. I can hear things at several points in time at once, and it's not just voices in my mind. I know what it is, and it's not dangerous.

I want to get out of here, A.R. I want to learn to live with this. I want it to become useful. No, I can't go around telling people what I see. But I can use it. Maybe even my Photo World is useful somehow. The thing is, I don't have to be afraid of it. It's just a change of perception.

Damn, I wish you could stick around. The other patients aren't much fun to be with. Okay. I'll pretend not to see the things. I'll lie to the doctor if I have to. Just so I'll get out of here. I never hurt anyone, you know. Some of the patients here have hurt people. I wonder what they saw, that made them violent. Maybe they thought they saw monsters or something. Or they just got scared.

That's the key, I guess: when you're too scared to think, nothing makes sense. You can't let the weird things scare you. Just accept that the world looks weird when you turn your eyes that way... or this way.

I ask him if he can teach me to shift my angle of perception like he does. He laughs.

But I don't know how I do it! It's like... like I get thrown off balance. You know, like those toys that you put on the floor, and they wobble, but they don't fall... that's me. It takes just a small push, and I start to wobble between Spaghetti World and Photo

World.

Talk to the doctor, will you? Tell him I'm better now. Tell them... that I'm seeing things differently. No, I mean it.

He makes a longer pause, and slowly turns around.

Just now I understood something. I'm like the wobbling toy. But if I make a counter-wobble, not with my body, but with my mind... then the view shifts back into place. I can control the wobbling. I can decide if I want to see things flat, or in the time direction, or the normal view... or I can push until I see something I've only seen a few times, very briefly. If I push *with* the wobble, I can tilt my view *outside* of the things.

There's a fourth view. It's very different, but it's always nice. Very bright. And there's sort of an infinite network of circular things, going in all directions. Everything hangs together in this view. All time, all space, everyone in it.

I think I'll call it Sunshine World. It's nice to know that it's always there, and I can visit it whenever I want.

Thank you so much for coming here. I'll repay you one day. I can feel it.

K.C. and I never met again. I returned home, and waited for him to get in touch.

I received a message from K.C.'s mother. She was happy: K.C. had improved so much in a short time, his doctor had agreed to let him come home. I wrote back and gave her the advice not to

treat him like a child. It would take him some time to adapt to life in the "normal" world, but he wanted to become a functioning citizen and not live confined in her house. If he wanted to move among people, it would probably be healthy for him. She seemed to accept my advice.

And now I'd like to have told you that my cousin solved a murder case with his amazing time-viewing talent. I wish I could have told you he's found happiness and new friends. I wish I could say he found God in hyperspace...

I wish he were alive.

Only a few days after his release from hospital, K.C. Antonis was run over by a truck as he tried to cross the street. According to an eyewitness I spoke to over the phone, K.C. had stopped in the middle of the street, then walked one step backwards, then one step forward again, and so on - as if he was stuck in a loop.

My guess is that K.C. had finally learned how to move about in the time direction. Too bad he could only move a second at a time... and that's not much help when you're in Photo World, and you can't see traffic come rushing at you because all the cars look flat.

So why did he ask to see me in the first place? Could he remember the future during some of his fits, his "wobbles"?

I didn't go to the funeral. Because I'm a coward, and I couldn't face his grieving mother after the bad advice I gave her. I did ask K.C.'s mother, in an e-mail, if he left behind any letters or messages for me.

He left behind a single drawing. She sent it by mail. I'm looking at it now. It was drawn by a clumsy hand, with yellow and orange crayons. But I can see what he tried to show me.

It's a picture of Sunshine World. Circular structures interlocking without end. And weaved into the infinite structure, like one of those movie posters where small pictures form a larger image, is unmistakably his face.

And yet...when I turn the drawing and look at it from another angle, the face changes into another person. I shift the angle somewhat, and another face emerges. And another, and another...

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A.R.Yngve, writer-artist, was born in Sweden in 1969. He has published comics and short fiction since the 1990s, and his debut novel *Terra Hexa* was released in Sweden in 2004 by publisher Wela Fantasy (<http://www.welaforlag.se>). A collection of his short fiction, *The Face In the Door And Other Stories*, will be released by CyberPulp Books in the near future. Read more of his fiction on his homepage: <http://yngve.bravehost.com>

How To Start Your Own Writing Group

Cory Daniells

What can a writers group do for you?

Writing is an isolated venture. A group can sympathize with your rejections, rejoice with your sales, share market news and writing tips, and develop a mutual critiquing skills which will help you learn the craft of writing. So you're keen to write and you want to meet like-minded people? If there isn't a local group or one that specializes in your genre, start one.

How to establish promote and nurse a writing group.

First you need to ask yourself a few questions.

1. How serious are you about writing?

If you want to develop your craft you'll need a group that is serious about critiquing. Having your work critiqued for the first time can be a frightening experience without the skills to filter the feedback. Critiquing should be done in a supportive, constructive environment. It should help you bring out the best in your story.

It should leave you feeling positive and ready to rework the manuscript. Once you are published you have to accept direction from your editor, analyse why the changes are needed and devise a way to make those changes to give the results the editor wants. The critiquing skills you learn with your group will help prepare you for this.

2. Do you want a genre specific writing group?

Maybe your passion is writing for children or maybe you devour horror books and that's where you want to aim your stories. Or perhaps you are happy just to belong to a writing group where you can explore your creative urges and maybe, in a couple of years you'll find a genre you want to concentrate on. If you are interested in genre specific writing there are groups already established who may be able to give you some tips. (See contact details at end of article). If you are interested in general writing then this leaves membership of your new group wide open. Now that you know what sort of writing group you want to form and how serious you want it to be, you need to advertise to find like minded people.

How to Promote a Writing Group.

- * Contact the local community newspaper. They might do a short article.
- * Put up a notice at the library, secondhand/new book shop.

- * The state writer's center can run a notice in their magazine.
- * Contact the local community radio. They can mention it in community news. Do they have a Writing program? Once the group is ongoing your spokespersons can talk about the group and their goals.

You've gathered half a dozen interested people, now where are you going to hold your meetings?

Most libraries have meeting rooms and will let you meet there without charge. This is a nice, neutral and central place to meet where you have access to resource material such as technical books on aspects of writing and the Australian Writers Market Place (or the SA equivalent).

Now you have the people and the place, but what are you going to do when your group meets for the first time?

You could call the state writers centre and ask if there is an experienced tutor who can run a workshop on how to establish a writing group. This is what happened in Emerald, Queensland, with what later became the Central Highlands Writing group, (a general writing, regional group).

A proactive and forward thinking librarian at the Emerald library applied for a grant to cover the costs of flying in tutor and paying them to run a workshop. The tutor covered, where to meet, when, and for how long, how to set goals and network, how to meet

visiting authors, how to bring in tutors to run workshops, group dynamics, appointing different people to chair the meetings and getting everyone to participate. The tutor also covered how to sustain a group's enthusiasm with the newsletter, using it to keep in contact, remind people of the meeting and technical exercises and promote the group. The tutor led a group critique session so that the writers had hands-on experience with critiquing which they could apply in future. And the tutor set basic exercises on the craft of writing which covered the first year of the writing group's life.

Once the Central Highlands Writing Group was established they followed through by hiring tutors to run workshops on specific aspects of the writing craft such as How to Write a Short Story. And they set group goals, e.g. producing an anthology.

The VISION writing group, based in Brisbane, Queensland, is a good example of a genre specific group, in this case speculative fiction. Once you get a few people together you will find they have skills which can benefit the group. Someone will have desktop publishing skills and be able to produce a newsletter. (Where possible it is cheaper to send out an Ezine than a newsletter that has to be photocopied and posted). Someone will have the skills to set up a web page for the group to help promote it. The VISION Ezine now goes out to approx 250 people around Australia, including publishers and other writing groups.

Like the Central Highlands Writing group, the VISION group have produced their own anthology based on stories they critiqued within the group. They attend specific movies and events like the Brisbane Writers Festival together, and have run a Book Reading Club where they analyzed recent releases.

VISION have taken their vision one step further. Their momentum formed Fantastic Queensland, a proactive lobby group whose long term aim is to create employment opportunities for Australian writers, especially writers of specific. Fantastic Queensland organizes events, workshops, conventions, and other opportunities for writers to learn, work, and commercialize their material. By starting Fantastic Queensland, Vision is working to make Queensland an internationally recognized center for specific across the media. Two of VISION's founding members have made three book international sales, and many of its members are making regular short story sales.

So you see a writing group can take you a long way but it can also provide more. To quote Scott Robinson, spokesperson for VISION 'I was looking for a people who understood speculative fiction (as opposed to thinking it was something to be found only on late night TV) and could help improve my writing on all levels – from structure and punctuation to plot and character.

Vision has exceeded my expectations from the very beginning.

The technical lessons I have learned from more experience writers have been great but the friendship and support I have found in the group has turned out to be even more valuable.' For information on genre specific groups based in Australia see below:

Children's Writing - Horizons

Contact person - Sharon Norris
 Email: horizonswriters@optusnet.com.au.
 Telephone (07) 3208 9826 or 0401 153 100.

Science Fiction, Horror & Fantasy - VISION

Contact person - Scott Robinson
 email s_robinson@comcen.com.au
 Web site www.visionwriters.org
 Postal address - 2/33 Wallace St, Chermside 4032

Romance Writers of Australia

email secretary@romanceaustralia.com
 Web site www.romanceaustralia.com
 Telephone 03 9305 4280
 Postal address RWA Po Box37 Sommerton Vic 3062

Mystery - Crime Writers QLD

Contact person - Pat Noad or Garret Russell
 email crimewritersq@powerup.com.au
 Postal address - PO Box 200 Holland park, QLD 4121
 Web site www.cwpp.slq.qld.gov.au/crimewriters
 Telephone 07 3397 0431

Cory Daniells lives by the bay in Brisbane with her husband and six children. She is published internationally in both adult and children's fiction with her trilogy *The Shadow Kingdom* appearing in Australia, the US and Germany. She runs the EnVision 5 day specific workshop for novel length writers, and is on the committee to organize the Australian national Spec Fic convention in 2006. In her spare time she learns Aikido and Iaido, the art of the Samurai sword.

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genre?

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professionals and
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'What I found most
useful was the
almost immediate
one-on-one
critiques. The
original manuscript
comments put me on
track, and the daily
sessions with the
tutor kept me
there. It was
practically like
having an editor
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www.fantasticqueensland.com

Where? Brisbane, Australia When? July 2005

Applications open January 2005

visit the website or email us envision@sf-envision.com

Featured Author Interview

Theodora Goss

Theodora Goss' first short story collection, *The Rose in Twelve Petals & Other Stories*, was recently published by Small Beer Press as part of its prestigious chapbook series. Her stories have appeared in magazines and anthologies such as *Realms of Fantasy*, *Polyphony*, *Alchemy*, and *Lady Churchill's Rosebud Wristlet*, as well as online at *Strange Horizons* and *Fantastic Metropolis*. Several have been reprinted in Year's Best anthologies: "The Rose in Twelve Petals" in *The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror: Sixteenth Annual Collection*, "Lily, With Clouds" in *The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror: Seventeenth Annual Collection*, and "Professor Berkowitz Stands on the Threshold" in *Year's Best Fantasy 4*. She has published poetry in both genre and mainstream magazines, and recently won a Rhysling Award for speculative poetry. Goss was born in Budapest, Hungary. Her family moved to the United States when she was seven years old, and she grew up in the Washington, D.C., area. After majoring in English literature, she went on to law school and the practice of law, but returned to school to study English literature at the graduate level. She is currently working on her doctorate. She lives in Boston with her husband, eight-month-old daughter, and, of course, cats.

Is writing something that has always been with you?

It has, actually. I don't remember a time when I didn't write. I still have my first serious attempt at a novel, written when I was around fourteen. It's called *Milo and Amura*. Milo is an astronaut who volunteers to test the first functioning time machine. But between the time that he leaves and the time that he is supposed to arrive, the earth passes into a part of space where the laws of causality don't apply. It does this regularly, passing from Probability space into Improbability, although its last passage

through Improbability took place so long ago that we remember it only as mythology. (Can you tell I wasn't destined to become a physics major?) When Milo steps out of his time machine, he meets Amura, bathing in a Victorian tub in the middle of a garden. She has long, curling pink hair, in which butterflies like to nest. The rest of the novel describes their travels through a land transformed by Improbability. I never got past the first few chapters, which is a lesson really: that causality is necessary to narrative. It's hard to write a story without cause and effect! But yes, I've been writing for as long as I can remember.

Why the Fantasy genre? What about it is particularly appealing to you?

Writing fantasy isn't at all a conscious decision on my part, so I'm not sure "appealing" is the right word. It seems to me that the fundamental truths of our world can best, or most appropriately, be expressed through fantasy. Or perhaps that's the way I can best express them. I don't know why. Perhaps it has to do with my background, all the moving around we did when I was a child, all the displacement. When you keep moving around, all the places you've left come to seem imaginary, like fantasy lands. Hungary, where I lived until I was five, seemed that way especially, I think because, the political situation being what it was, we couldn't go back. At the time, it seemed lost forever. When I write about Hungary, it's never the country as it is, but always an imaginary version of it, the Hungary I learned about through my mother's

stories. Although it's not difficult to think of a country as imaginary when one of its cultural heroes is Attila the Hun!

Do you get struck by sudden inspiration in which you write large chunks – even a whole story?

Yes! Absolutely. I've stayed up entire nights before, writing a story. Nighttime is such a good time to write, because when everyone's asleep, you're effectively alone. "Sleeping with Bears," which appeared on the *Strange Horizons* website, was written in one chunk. So was "In the Forest of Forgetting." The problem with writing an entire story is that I always write the first draft by hand, so my hand gets very tired! And I forget to eat, so I get very hungry.

What have been some of the highlights of your writing career so far?

It hasn't been a career for very long. My first published story, "The Rose in Twelve Petals," appeared in 2002. So every new experience has been a highlight: attending workshops (Odyssey and Clarion), going to conventions (particularly speaking on panels and giving readings, both of which I enjoy), and of course seeing stories in print. The most recent highlight has been seeing my chapbook, *The Rose in Twelve Petals & Other Stories*, which just came out from Small Beer Press. It has a beautiful cover illustration by Charles Vess. My family didn't believe in writing as a career; I was supposed to be a doctor or lawyer. I was a good

daughter, I went to law school and practiced law. It took me a long time to escape from that life. So everything that happens, every story I publish, is a sort of gift.

You've recently become a mother; how has this experience changed the way you view life? Has it changed the way you write at all?

It's certainly changed the way I write! I can no longer write whenever I want to. I now have to schedule writing, which is difficult for me. I'm better at writing when that first line comes than at sitting down and telling it that I'm ready. It's also made me want to tell more children's stories, although at this point my daughter would rather chew the covers of books than read them. How has it changed the way I view life? It's made me more afraid. Life is terrible and beautiful, in about equal measure, but I used to be rather good at ignoring all that, living inside myself, comfortable and safe. You can't do that when you have a child. Suddenly, everything seems terribly real: the nightly news, for instance. You're confronted with the possibility of loss and death. At the same time, my daughter is the most beautiful thing I've ever seen. Watching her learn (to sit up for instance, which she learned just this week) is like watching life unfold, like a flower opening or a bird trying its wings for the first time. I think my sense of timelessness is gone forever.

Ever had an idea that seemed impossible to put to paper?

Certainly, at least an idea that seemed impossible to write about at a particular time. I have many stories that I've started, but that just wouldn't get written. Usually it's because I've gotten something wrong: the point of view (which is often difficult to find), the voice (either mine or a character's), even the tense. Sometimes it comes to me, why a story didn't work, and I can go back and finish it. Have I ever had an idea that seemed absolutely impossible to write about, under any circumstances? I don't think so. I'd be interested to know what sort of idea would be so inexpressible.

Are there certain themes that you see weaved throughout your work – things that you maybe only notice in hindsight are there?

Imprisonment: characters who are trapped, either by their families or their social circumstances. Illness. My mother had cancer when I was seventeen, and I've been trying to understand it since. And I suppose death. Steve Pasechnick, the editor of *Alchemy*, once told me that I significantly increased the body count in his magazine. But also the possibility of escape, from all of those things and from the tedium of daily life. I'm afraid this makes me sound like a depressing person, which I hope isn't the case.

Do you have a routine/ritual that you normally stick to when writing?

I write in notebooks from Bob Slate's, a stationer's in Cambridge, which means traveling for an hour on the subway for writing paper. I use a Pilot Precise Rolling Ball pen, extra fine, with black ink. I used to type in WordPerfect 5.1, the best word-processing program ever created, but have recently and reluctantly gone to a more recent version. So I have ritual implements, of sorts. But I don't have a ritual. I can write anywhere and at any time, as long as I'm not worried about interruptions. And anyone who interrupts me had better beware.

Do you still consider yourself a reader first, and a writer second? What influence do you think your particular reading experiences have had on your own work?

I think every writer is a reader first, because if you're the sort of person who wants to write, you're also the sort of person who's learned about life through books. When I write, I'm responding to all the books that I've read, which have taught me both how to use words and how to think about the world. I don't think there's a way to escape from your reading. Even reacting against a particular book is responding to it. My mother had an excellent philosophy about books: I was allowed to read anything I wanted. Our public library shelved Willa Cather next to Barbara Cartland, and I remember taking both home, since they both looked interesting. I was omnivorous. In college, I turned in a paper on the *Táin Bó Cuailnge* and went back to my dorm room to read "The Call of Cthulhu." I read cereal boxes, if I couldn't read

anything else. How has that influenced me? It's made me want to write all sorts of stories, all differently. It's made me not worry about whether a story is fantasy or realism, high literature or popular fiction. Let the critics worry about that. It's given me a tendency to combine and complicate, like rewriting the history of England in "The Rose in Twelve Petals," which wasn't at all what I originally intended. But when the idea came, I thought, why not? That's also something I learned at Clarion: let the story be as complicated as it wants to.

How do you feel about the current state of the Fantasy genre?

Where do you see it going in the next couple of years?

What a difficult question. I think Fantasy is going to become less separate from mainstream literature than it has been, less Fantasy as a genre and more fantasy with a small f, one way among many of understanding the world. I see this happening in mainstream literature, in writers like Margaret Atwood and Alice Hoffman, and in Fantasy (the genre), among younger writers like Kelly Link and Jeff Vandermeer. Convergence and crossover: that's what I think we'll see. And I think it's an excellent development, for both Fantasy and the mainstream. Mainstream literature's allegiance to realism potentially limits what it can express: that's the danger of writing in the mainstream. Fantasy has its own danger: that what you write will lack relevance will exist purely in the bubble of genre conventions, without meaning outside it. On one hand, you get short stories about people going to the supermarket; on the

other, you get trilogies in which every character could have come out of a Dungeons and Dragons manual. That seems like an exaggeration, but I've read both! If you're writing fantasy, I think this is an exciting time. The rise of the small press, both in magazine and book publishing, allows writers to be more experimental with some expectation that their stories will be published. At the same time, fantasy is being marketed to a larger, and more mainstream, audience, which means more respectability for fantasy writers, and more possibility that they will be able to cross from one genre to the other, or combine genres in their writing. I hope this answer doesn't sound too confusing. I'm trying to describe the different things I see happening in the various worlds of publishing, and among writers I've talked with, and it's not exactly easy to describe. Also, I could be wrong; forecasting trends is notoriously difficult. But I feel positive about the current state of Fantasy with a capital F, and even more positive about the evolving state of fantasy literature, broadly defined. Wiping sweat from her brow, she says, I hope that at least begins to answer your question . . .

What treasures have you found in secondhand bookstores?

Goodness. All sorts of things. (And some rather nice cats.) But the best things to find in secondhand bookstores, I think, are sources for research. I once bought a *Boston Cooking-School Cookbook*, published in 1906, for two dollars (it says so inside the cover). If I write about a character from the nineteenth century, I know what

that character might have eaten, how she might have prepared it, and most importantly how she might have felt about food. I have a copy of *The Growth of European Civilization*, published in 1938, that I bought for four dollars and fifty cents. The last chapter is about the World War, and the author's hope that the world will never have to endure another war like it. He had no idea what was about to happen to European civilization. It's difficult to read without feeling a sense of despair. A contemporary book about the period between the World Wars couldn't give you that sense, I think, or show you in such an immediate way the fragile optimism of that period. But I've also found the sorts of classics that no one seems to read anymore, and that can only be found only in secondhand bookstores or academic libraries, like the collected works of Ruskin.

What are you reading at the moment?

Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norell, like everyone else! I've only just started, but I've always liked Susanna Clarke's short stories, and I'm looking forward to reading her novel. And I love books with footnotes.

What were you doing when you heard that your prose-poem, *Octavia is Lost in the Hall of Masks* had won the Rhysling Award for speculative poetry?

Sitting in front of the computer, with my daughter on my lap! She likes to pretend that she's typing, and has done all sorts of things

that I don't know how to do, like change settings, simply by moving her fingers. And she likes to chew on the mouse. She gets very upset when I take it away from her. Honestly, I don't think I've gotten over the strangeness of winning the Rhysling. I tend to be somewhat confident as a writer of prose, and not at all confident as a poet, so it seems almost impossible that a poem of mine should have won (although it is a poem in prose!). One thing, an important thing, I see happening in Fantasy as a genre is increased attention to poetry. Hopefully, I'll be part of that movement . . .

Do you entertain any thoughts about writing material in other genres?

Occasionally, I have them over for cocktails. Seriously, I don't think of my writing in terms of genres, except when I submit a story. I think my writing tends to draw from different genres, so it's more a matter of finding an editor who is willing to accept what I've written. I think I started publishing at exactly the right time, when magazines and anthologies like *Polyphony* and *Alchemy* were starting to appear, and *Lady Churchill's Rosebud Wristlet* was making a name for itself. Otherwise, I don't know where I would have sent stories that had elements of the fantastic but didn't fit within the current definition of fantasy. I don't think I want to write *in* another genre, but I'd like to write at its edge. To incorporate mystery, for example . . . It would be challenging to write at the edge between fantasy and a genre that depends,

fundamentally, on realism (the laws of physics as they really are) and rational analysis.

What would you like your epitaph to read?

First, Theodora Goss. Then, 1968-2068. And the actual epitaph: whatever my husband and daughter choose to write!

Featured Artist

Aleksí Briclot

Vital Stats

Age: 26

Country: France

Training: I've got something like a General Certificate of Education in applied art (to industry). Then I've studied graphism, graphic design, ads and typography 2 years in the same school.

Lycée de la

communication Alain Colas, Nevers, France.

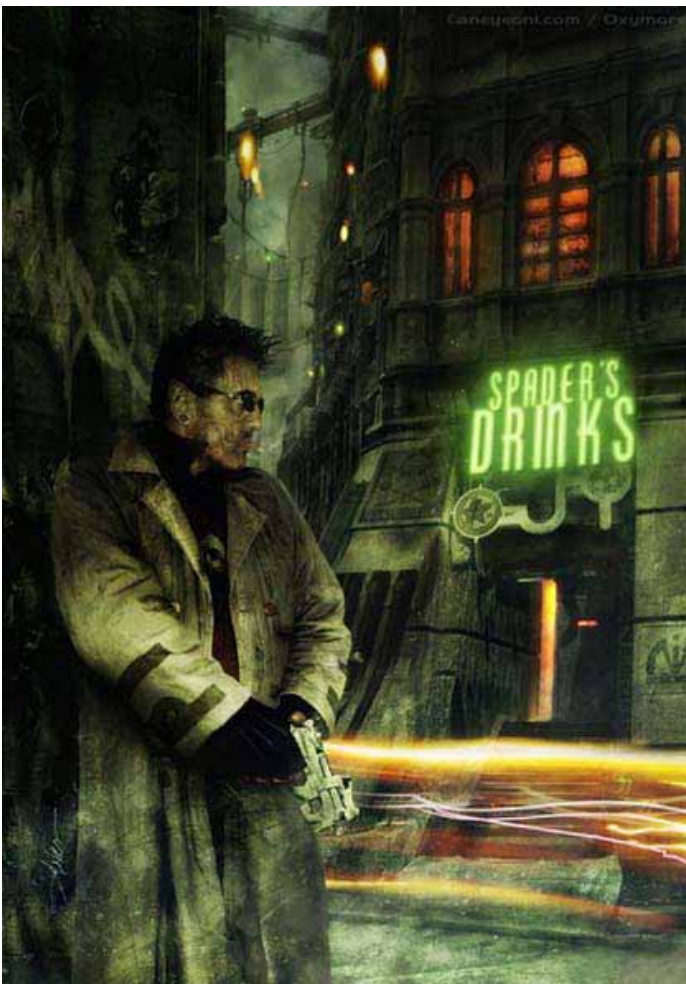


Medium: Digital / Mixed media / Traditional.

Influences: Too much... I'm impressed and influenced by a lot of artists in really different fields: illustrators, photographers, graphic designers, movie directors, comic artists and writers... But there are too many to name them all. I'm always discovering new exciting things and artists, just looking around me, on the web, in books...

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How long have you been working as a professional illustrator?

I began professionally when I was 21, just one year after having finished my art school studies. It was not really brilliant in those days. Before that, I studied in an art school focused on visual communication: graphic design,

typography, layout...It wasn't really linked to figurative drawings and paintings and even less with illustration and comic-books field but I've learned so many things that have proven priceless for me today: a really strong open-minded way to look at and to do art. Maybe one of the most important things I've learned was that the thoughts must dictate the form and not the opposite. If you have something to express, choose the best way, the best rendering to do it. It's a saying that I still find really interesting and exciting. I try to do justice to it as soon as I can. After my studies, I began to search for a job. I was dreaming about earning my living with drawing, practicing a lot for myself but it didn't seem plausible (or I figured that it would be too hard and my skills level was not good enough). I was trying to work in publicity agencies but then I discovered in a role-playing-game-convention that for each videogame, they need a concept artist. It seems obvious now but it was a true revelation to me back then. I applied to a videogame company and almost immediately got my first job. It was a great experience, a historical game about the Egyptian world and the first step of my art journey. I carried on in the videogame industry, learned a lot, did a lot of RPG illustrations and book covers, became better, worked in other videogame companies and then a lot of other works and was asked to do my first comic book. Then others freelance commissioned works arrived naturally and regularly.

How did you come to be involved in comics, specifically the *Spawn* series?

A long story, but it turned out quite easily and naturally. I first met Alex Nikolavitch (the writer of the *Spawn* story), Jeff Porcherot (who did the plot and who's actually in charge of the *Spawn* series French translation and adaptation) and the Semic (the publisher of *Spawn* in France) Editor-in-Chief Thierry Mornet a long time ago.

At this time, we weren't working in the comic-book field. Time had passed, we were all following our own path. I'd begun working professionally then. They called me for the comic-book adaptation of the big videogame *Alone in the Dark 4*. They were already thinking of a very special project about *Spawn* and due to our previous successful



collaboration on the adaptation, a common professional confidence, and my taste for dark art they called me again. Then

Todd MacFarlane looked at the story and the art samples and gave his agreement for the project. He came to France for the 2003 Angoulême International Comics Festival (he was the Angoulême's Guest of Honour during its 30th festival) and announced the new Spawn Graphic Novel called *Spawn: Simony*. For me, comic books need a really different approach than illustration or concept art. You're dealing with storytelling and development. Illustration is the opposite, a synthesis. I felt in love with comics early and for the past two years, I've been strongly passionate about storytelling, how to tell a story, how to create emotions. I look at mangas, comics and probably more at some of my others loves: movies.

Tell us about your creative process – where do you find inspiration and ideas for a new drawing?

Everywhere I can find something interesting or stimulating. I've got a really good visual memory and I record a lot of things in my mind. I think my inspiration comes from all of this, mixed with my own sensibility, my state of mind when I create a new piece. It also comes from the specific art pitch and sometimes from the discussion I have with the clients. For my current videogame project, I'm working with a friend, Benjamin Carré who's an awesome artist. I've learned a lot from him, and share thoughts and ideas with him and the rest of the development team and the results are therefore always better. This guy is also working on

book covers and comic books and we always discuss with each other our different works.

Do you prefer working in traditional mediums like oils as opposed to computer art?

I love the raw and fresh feeling you have when you use traditional tools and techniques. All the little accidents that give strength, personality and warmth in the art pieces. It's really important also to practice this a lot but currently, I really prefer the digital tool, the one that gives me the opportunity to put my ideas and visions "on paper" the faster and the better way. It's a magical tool. You can't cease to discover and try new things. You can mix your pencils or paintings with photographs, 3D elements, scanned (with sellotape, paintings effects, other drawings...), erase some parts, resize some others, add effects, manage typography and graphic design...It's boundless. It's all yours to choose the best renderings and the most interesting way to express and show what you have to show. The rest comes from your own sensibility, creativity and feeling (not the smaller part!!!).

How would you describe your work – thematically, and in terms of style?

Maybe the basis of my work could be presented as fantastic illustrations with a strong taste for dark things. But it's restrictive because my works for videogames, book covers and comic books are really different and for each project (even in the illustration field) I try to choose the best rendering or feeling, I change my technique so I'm not a only-one-style artist. As I was explaining before, I also love to use mixed media, photographs, graphic design and typography... It depends of the subject.



Which artists have influenced your work the most?

They are too numerous!!! But if I had to name some of them, I would talk about different artistic fields: photography and graphic design (Witkin, Floria Sigismondi, Gottfried Helnwein, Dirk Rudolph, Oliver Vaughan, Stefan Sagmeister, Brent Ashe), comic book artists (Adam Hugues, Travis Charest, Terrada, Jae Lee, Tomm Cocker, Alex Maleev, Bryan Hitch, Ashley Wood, Benoît Springer, Naoki Urasawa).

Two artists are for me maybe above all of them in my own pantheon: Dave McKean and Phil Hale. There's a lot of really extraordinary artists: Jon Foster, Kevin Llewellyn, Nirasawa, James Jean, Nicolas "Sparth" Bouvier, Bengal and some others that I personally know and with whom I'm really proud to share: Benjamin Carré, Jean-Sébastien Rossbach... And I forget the movies directors...I could fill a whole page with names...Really...

Would you encourage other artists who want to illustrate professionally to make a career out of it?

It can be hard. Some say you need luck but I don't think it's true. There are a lot of really different paths. One for each artist. You have to find your own. When it's successful, it's priceless. I sometimes feel very lucky to earn my living by doing the thing I like the most (sometimes not, but it had become less and less frequent).

All I think is that you need a lot of energy and the keyword is perseverance! Try to be constant and don't avoid the difficulties and hard work. Try as hard as you can to do the best you can each time, (remember, the public don't care if you are sick or your client or pitch sucks, all they can see is the result) and try to deal at best with the different constraints each projects had. By doing something you don't want normally to do, you will maybe learn more. Sometimes don't think too much about the fear of failing, sometimes stop asking too much questions, dive into the "doing-

process", finish it and then, later you could look back at your work, with a very critic eye and see what was successful and what wasn't. And then learn from it.

Try to keep the fun as much as you can.



Do you have any interesting projects in the pipeline you'd like to tell us about?

I'm currently finishing concept arts for a big horror-action videogame title for the *Darkworks* company. It looks actually really good and the atmosphere is really impressive. It will be a hit.

I've never work before on some videogame project as exciting. I probably did my best work to date on it. I'm

working with a friend and an awesome artist (Benjamin Carré) and we have a lot of wonderful times, not only with painting creatures, characters and sets but maybe more with all our brainstorm. That's intellectually thrilling. I can't wait to see the game finished and released. Then I can show my artworks.

I'm also finishing another French comic book about the Arthurian mythology for the publisher *Soleil*. I'm only doing pencils and

inks on it. I've just finished some Magic cards too (but I also can't show them now) and I'm waiting for the next ones. And the bigger project is certainly my next Spawn graphic novel. The last one, *Spawn: Simony* was a top selling comic book and for the new one, I'm also writing some parts and added a lot of ideas. The story looks better. I've also had a lot of true exciting brainstorm times and now I'm trying to do the best storytelling and art I can. I hope it will be as good as my illustration stuff.

Five things every aspiring artist must know:

- 1 – Perseverance: the key word!! Work hard.
- 2 – Stay really open-minded. Be always really critical with your work. Sometimes it's painful but it's the only way to progress. And an artist who's not asking himself questions anymore is no more a real artist.
- 3 – Focus on where do you really want to go. What do you want to do? Stay linked with your childhood dreams and try to reach them.
- 4 – Be professional. With your art quality, your clients, the schedule...
- 5- Try to have fun as much as you can. Enjoy your successes. Feed your soul for these moments (I know I'm personally not doing it enough) because it's a part of how you live your life. If the art process is always painful, some results deserve enjoyments.

Poetry

Kristine Ong Muslim

GENTLE ATROPHY

Shriveling
Inside a little
Baby-doll dress

A costume of sorts
For a picnic
And not for this, not

On this bed where specters
Gather and hover
As they wait for your passing

And lull you to sleep
Until you fade
Your face imprinted on the pillow.

WORDPROCESSOR

The cursor blinks maddeningly,
An enigma of black and white,
Across an empty screen.

There are thoughts left unwritten,
Unsaid, flashing to and fro, that
Cannot be contained into the white space

Where I type the words that give them life,
Delete and cut them when they do not
Live up to what they ought to signify.

I watch the cursor tonight, jostling
 Its merry way along the white screen
 To leave a trail of words so brilliant
 They sketch sensations no story has ever stirred.

I observe the moving cursor in awe,
 Reading the many words it leaves on the screen,
 My fingers trembling
 With trepidation and excitement on my lap.

IN A DOGGY BAG

Green is the color of nightmares
 Where you spew out fluttering dead
 Butterflies and shriveled husks
 Of half-eaten meat, unrecognizable
 Except for their stench.

You are mad because you are alone
 Living in a sack with nothing to do
 Except to paint landscapes of nightmares
 On rotten canvasses of your choice.

They knew about your drawings.
 How can they not recognize the
 Nightmares you hang in their minds
 While they sleep.

You gripe and grovel, madness coursing

At each waking hour where you seek out
 And sketch nightmares
 To haunt the lonely
 To hound the proud
 To consume the restless
 And to feed the hungry.
 You seem lovely, indeed,

In a vision of you in a mirror.
How great you have grown...

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Kristine Ong Muslim has been published in several speculative and mainstream magazines, which include *Star*Line*, *Kenoma*, *The Fifth Di...*, *The Martian Wave*, *Crossroads Magic*, *Between Kisses*, *Revelation*, *Jupiter SF*, *Electric Velocipede*, and *The Dream Zone*. Some of her works will also be included in future issues of *Dreams and Nightmares*, *Wicked Hollow*, *Penumbric*, *Flesh and Blood*, *Midnight Street*, *The Dark Krypt*, *Seasons in the Night*, *Night to Dawn*, *Trunk Stories*, and many others. Two upcoming Cyber Pulp anthologies will contain her stories.

Featured Editor Interview

Carina Gonzales – Assistant Editor - *Realms Of Fantasy*

Carina Gonzalez was bred, born, and raised in central New Jersey and currently resides in Hamilton, NJ close to Trenton. The mundane bill-paying part of her days is spent at NJEA headquarters where she helps teachers retire. When not in 9 - 5 mode she divides her time between Rivenwood, (her medieval reenactment household of The Markland Medieval Mercenary Militia), performing with the Boheme Opera of NJ, playing AD&D, rock-climbing, ruling as Prince of Toronto in the Vampire the Masquerade game she attends, and of course wading through the Realms of Fantasy slush. She hopes to one day start her own magazine and make it the kind of publication to which authors flock and dreams are made.

How did you come to be Assistant Editor at Realms of Fantasy?

Because I have a natural knack for noticing errors. I graduated from college in 2001 at only 21 years of age with a BA in English Literature from TCNJ and a thesis of Ursula K. LeGuin's science fiction under my belt. I knew I wanted to work in genre, so as soon as I got out, I started submitting my resume! I went online, found all of the genre magazines I could get my hands on and contacted them via email. I received no's from all of them, including Realms of Fantasy. This was the beginning of a small panic because I couldn't find a job. This was harder than I thought it would be. In addition, I soon realized that becoming a genre editor might not be what I wanted. I hate cities. And most of the big names are snuggled in NY or thereabouts. I realized moving to NY for an editorial position would leave me bankrupt due to

the cost of living in a city, ostracized from everything and everyone I knew, and generally create such a state of miserable existence I didn't want to seriously consider it anymore. So I started temping at various corporate locations, like new grads do. I received a call at my temp job that Realms' current reader was leaving and was I still interested. Shawna and I scheduled an interview for 9/11/01...

I woke up bright and early on 9/11 since Rumson is about an hour and half from me, and I didn't want to be late. I had stayed at my parent's house the night before because, at the time, I didn't own a printer. I figured I would print out a couple extra copies of my resume and be on my way. Of course their printer stopped working the morning of the biggest interview I had been thus far able to muster. Glad I woke up early! It was time to call in a favor from the librarian of my old high school. She was more than happy to oblige the abuse of their printer for a couple of sheets, especially given the field of the interview. I thanked her profusely, hopped in my beat-up old car, and listened to the radio in shock with the rest of the world as the first tower fell. I stopped at home first, to see if my parents were listening to the same thing. To see if this was some sort of sick joke. We watched the second tower fall on national television as a family. I wasn't sure if I should still go to the interview. The world didn't exactly know what was happening, and neither did I. I went to the interview anyway. How's that for dedication? But by the time I got there

neither I nor Shawna felt completely comfortable doing a full interview while people were crying on their lawns, sirens were wailing, and every channel was on rinse and repeat. She gave me some manuscripts; I think only around 10, and told me to read them and come back and tell her what I thought of them.

I went home and read each story from beginning to end twice taking detailed notes as to what I thought was good or bad. I practically wrote a term paper. I came back for the second interview and before I could really get started Shawna cut me off with a little laugh. In a nutshell she explained that I needn't go into that much detail. That I shouldn't burden myself with "why" all the time but just to ask myself, "Did you like it?" I felt like I was being tested. Like there had to be something more to it than that, so I didn't answer. I just stared at her. So she repeated again, "Did you like it?" I told her no. And she said that was all she needed to know.

She also informed me that the position had changed. I had applied for a paid position entitled Assistant Editor. The higher ups decided, after the last reader left, to change the position to a voluntary one with no title in particular. Shawna said she would like me for the job, but that I had to understand from here on out I would not be paid. She paid me out of pocket for that first session, and I've been there ever since. I had already fallen in love with the work so quitting the job because it was unpaid didn't

appeal to me. In any issue of Realms of Fantasy you will see my name under Editorial Intern, since it is an unpaid position. I call myself Assistant Editor, Slush Editor, First Reader – it doesn't really matter. I know what I do.

So I went back to temping. I landed a job that yielded enough for me to buy a house at the age of 23 and, with the help of Realms, now have another job that fulfills all of my genre needs and supplies a huge learning experience. You know you've found what you love to do if not getting paid for it doesn't bother you all that much.

What elements do you look for in a story-what makes you sit up and take notice?

This is a difficult question because I quite frankly see more that I DON'T like than what I DO like. So I will attempt answering the question by approaching from the other direction in saying what makes me fall out of the chair and want to gouge my eyes out with a brooch instead of what makes me sit up and take notice.

I know any author reading this is going to have their eyes glued to the page because I get asked this all the time, so I'll try to be as detailed as possible. Vague doesn't help them.

I'll begin with the formatting elements because they're easiest to explain, and are more important than you'd think. You can judge

a book a bit by its cover. Besides adhering to our editorial guidelines, there are a few other automatic points an author can get in presentation. Titles should NOT be a synopsis. They should entice and nothing more. And the story shouldn't be preceded by two pages of quotes from somebody else. I'm here to read YOUR story. I'm glad someone else inspired you, but make it short, ok? Archaic-sounding language is another no-no. "Stories of old" sound the way they do because they were actually written "of old," not because they wish to inspire nostalgia in their audience. Very, very few people do it well, so I would advise avoiding it. It's your job to convey the atmosphere and mood you want using our own language.

If at-a-glance an author has already bypassed these common pitfalls, the sitting up and taking notice has potential. A story grabs my attention if the tale is well told. What does that mean? It means the author isn't trying too hard by using 15 short sentences to convey haste. Trust me, it only conveys annoyance. It means the beginning of every new plot point doesn't use the phrase "all of a sudden." It means there's a logical progression of events where the point of view isn't constantly changing. I really think that it's 75% package, 25% gift. How you tell your story is more important than the story itself. If it's told correctly, a dragon about to snatch an infant from a mother's arms can be as enrapturing as watching the first leaf of autumn fall to the pavement. Big things, small packages, and the like. I'm looking for the best storytellers

and in this business they are usually the best writers. I'm not talking grammar, punctuation and spelling. I'm talking about common sense chronology, connection to the audience, realistic reactions, and an undeniable invitation to be a part of their world. It's difficult to explain what Legos make that picture. I would have to work with each story and author individually to tell them how to achieve that goal. But that deadly combination is what makes me put down my pen, move over the rejection forms, put my feet on the desk, lean back, and enjoy a great story.

And I'm sure I've confused all of you yet again. *laugh* Contact me and I would be glad to explain this to anyone further.

What are some of the most thought-provoking themes you've seen explored in contemporary Speculative fiction? Is there anything specific you would like to see more of?

Again, I see more cliché deplorable themes than I do thought provoking, but I will try to answer the question. If you look at the story you've just written, and look at what inspired that story, and they look like siblings, it probably falls into the cliché category. We all know that there is technically no such thing as an original story. The archetypes available are actually smaller in number than you'd think. But you can at least try! I'm done with assassins, elves, princesses and dragons, humorous Satans, evil stepmothers and sisters, pet dragons, and vampires. I understand why we love these stories. They are classics and should be

revered as such. But instead of flattering them by imitating them, revere them by keeping the genre alive and growing. Create anew! If we keep producing the same stories over and over again, no one is going to want to read them because they're too predictable.

I would like to see more originality, as impossible of a request as that may seem. Go back to the beginning. Remind yourself why all of those first great stories were written. They were morals, they were oral history, and they were mythology to explain the misunderstood. Look at your world today and question it. Technically we understand the precipitation cycle, but why does snow really fall? Where do socks really go when they don't come out of the dryer? To paraphrase LeGuin, science fiction and fantasy are the modern man's mythology. The difference is we're continuing to question what we may already have the answers to.

I also would like to see more incorporations of fantasy into modern life. Again, those old stories are old to us, but they were present day to their first audiences. There is plenty going on outside of your own car window if you just look. You don't necessarily have to look back.

And finally I would like to see stories inspired by different cultures. Most of our favorite stories are Celtic-derived or somewhere thereabouts. I profusely apologize to historians and

anthropologists everywhere, but I am neither, so I'm sure I'm using the incorrect terminology. I think you will understand what I mean though. Elves, fairies, gnomes, orcs, leprechauns, selkie, dragons and, unicorns all have very western tethers, or at least those are the settings of choice for these very common characters. For example, off the top of my head, try exploring Chinese dragons or kirin, Japanese unicorns. Try some aboriginal mythology, African shamanism, or Eskimo superstitions. I don't know the details of these because I rarely if ever bump into stories from these or other cultures, but you taste my dish.

"Write about winter in the summer. Describe Norway as Ibsen did, from a desk in Italy; describe Dublin as James Joyce did, from a desk in Paris. Willa Cather wrote her prairie novels in New York City; Mark Twain wrote Huckleberry Finn in Hartford, Connecticut. Recently, scholars learned that Walt Whitman rarely left his room." – Annie Dillard "The Writing Life." I have heard the phrase "write what you know" and I agree with it wholeheartedly. But I think many authors confuse it with "write only what you know." If my authors did that, the fantasy genre would roll over and die. The human condition, the changing of the seasons, the fact that gravity tends to pull down – these are things we know. And that which we know can be woven into the new and unexplored. That quilt is what makes the frontier familiar because you are using what you know as the entrance to new worlds.

Which Editors have you learned the most from, and how has this influenced your own editing technique?

I'm afraid I haven't really learned anything from any other editors because I never really speak to any other editors. Nor do I have any kind of known technique, per say. If I have a method, and someone has named it, then I apologize for using their method without giving them credit.

The only other editor I speak to on a somewhat regular basis is John Joseph Adams from F&SF. His position there is similar to mine and it's wonderful to get confirmation from him every once in a while that I am indeed not insane. He gets me through those tough times when authors lash back, when the enormity of the slush gets to me, and other editor-related relief he provides.

I know I'm going to get railed for saying this, but most of what I've heard about other editors is actually fairly negative. From interactions with authors, and from their reactions to my choices, I have gleaned this unfortunate view of anti-social, computer phobic, elitist editors who rule the magazine world with an iron fist. I'm sure there are people as I've described out there somewhere, but their polar opposites are out there too. Perhaps they're just not making as much noise? Editors are as eclectic as any other category of peoples and I'm sure these descriptions are a result of venting. But either way, their image isn't so well

projected and I've tried to mold my editorial philosophy to accommodate authors' needs. If this has resulted in my philosophy being described as different from that of most editors, so be it.

How do you, personally, define Fantasy?

Fantasy is fiction that involves the unexplained. It doesn't always try to provide answers, but if it chooses to explain the unexplained, it does so without a technological answer.

It's simple, but doesn't sound that way. Magic potions vs. chemistry. Magic Missiles vs. photon torpedoes. Lycanthropy vs. genetic manipulation. If you created the dimensional portal by experimenting and expanding on the thesis you wrote involving known theories on wormholes and folding, it isn't fantasy. You are explaining the unexplained by using known science and/or fact, even if you have to tight wire a bit through the advanced side of astrophysics. If the dimensional portal was created by taking the "dimension portal vial" off the shelf and pouring it onto the floor, it is fantasy.

Some excellent stories that show this fine line are by Sharon Shin and Anne McCaffrey, respectively. Forgive me for spoiling either series if you so choose to read them, but in Shin's Samaria series and McCaffrey's Pern series we see two cultures that seem to be primarily fantasy. Much of both stories go by wherein you are

sure you are reading fantasy. Lo and behold the second and third books of the series come out and all of a sudden there is this unmistakable science fiction element that re-explains the world you were just a part of and rocks its foundation. You suddenly see everything in a different light, to be perfectly cliché.

What are your pet peeves, editorially?

Aw geez, this might take a while.

Tape-o-mania: It's very difficult to read a manuscript whose every seam has been triple-taped shut. I understand there's a fear about having an envelope open in transit, but if I can't get into the manuscript with your everyday letter opener, then the only way I can get in is with scissors! And that usually results in cut up SASE's and stories with missing corners. So go easy with the scotch, ok?

Glued SASE: An envelope goes through quite a bit before it gets to me, including varying temperatures. I appreciate it every time somebody adheres to guidelines and includes a SASE, but it's very frustrating when the SASE has adhered to itself. Try and put a piece of paper between the flap of the SASE and the body. Your cover letter is perfect for that function. Otherwise I have to use a letter opener to open your SASE, put in the correspondence, and then seal it shut with tape and what little manipulation of the force I have.

Contact info hunt: Our guidelines state, "Your name, address, and phone number should appear on the first page of the text, not on a cover sheet, as cover sheets can easily get separated from the rest of the ms." Some authors don't only ignore this rule, but ignore it rather creatively and with purpose, much like an Easter egg hunt. I shouldn't have to go to different pages to retrieve the information. I've had manuscripts where the name is on a title page and never seen again, the word count is at the end, the email is hand written at the bottom of the fifth page, and the address is on a label that was used to hold all of the pages together like a paper clip! Please keep it all together and legible!

Phenomenal, cosmic, powers! Ittie-bittie, living space: Some authors, for some reason, jam their 8,000 word story into a #10 sized envelope. When friction and thus heat is applied to written material, the ink eventually smudges. So at every crease the story is gone. Please use an envelope appropriate to the size of your story.

SASE vs. E: It's called a Self Addressed Stamped Envelope for a reason. Some manuscripts arrive with just a blank envelope. No stamp, no address. Just an E. I'm still completely confused with that one...

No word count: It's pretty self-explanatory. I get a 40-paged story with no word count and we have a 10,000 word limit. I'd really

hate to get into a story, waste my time reading the whole thing, and then have to reject it because it's too long.

Smells: This is a personal pet peeve and I know that many of you can't do a thing about it, but be careful where you put your manuscript or what you are doing when you put your manuscript in the envelope. Paper holds smells VERY well and I've gotten manuscripts smelling like cigarette smoke, animals, perfume, chocolate, Doritos, and French fries. There are also a list of smells I'm not going to mention in print. Use your imagination. Most of the time, it just gives me a connection to the author, because the smells of their home have literally been delivered with their stories. But sometimes it makes me sick. I'm unfortunately allergic to almost everything I can fit in my nose and so opening a manuscript that smells like a cigarette results in an instant sinus headache and me sneezing all over your work. It's not an automatic dismissal, but it definitely doesn't put me in the best of moods to read. I'm sure I'm not the only editor who would prefer that the 400 something manuscripts sitting next to them be scent free.

Many of the other pet peeves I have I've mentioned as part of an earlier question. Titles that are a synopsis, constantly changing tenses, changing POV's, 2 pages of italics, quotes, and excerpts preceding your story, run-on sentences, attempting archaic

speech, using once upon a time, 15 3-word sentences in succession, etc.

Names that are impossible to pronounce are really annoying too. Who wrote the rule that if it's fantasy the name must use seventeen vowels, a guttural stop, and a silent p?

Same goes with the name of the city, world, etc. I applaud those of you who are linguistic fans. I personally LOVE names and think it's wonderful when I find a sly etymological connection somewhere. But there needs to be a balance between originality and running out of saliva.

Where do you think short fiction will fit in the fiction market in the foreseeable future?

I'll be honest in that I have no idea how to really answer this question. I didn't think that it was having a problem fitting in as it was. Fiction always has, and I believe, always will have a definite following. If you're asking do I think it will become more popular – I don't believe so particularly.

What advice would you give to anyone trying to break into the Speculative writing market today?

Research. Talk to every author and/or editor you can get your hands on. Even if they yell at you for it. Ask questions. Join a critique group. Join several if you have the time to responsibly

contribute. Browse online for statistics on average rejections per acceptance, magazine personalities, and support groups. Send out everything you can, even if you aren't crazy about it. That one time you may receive some important bit of feedback you wouldn't have otherwise. Treat rejections as mile markers, not as demotions. They are an unfortunate impersonal part of the business. Be friendly. A lot of names flash across my desk. Steady submitting, email correspondence, and/or online presence familiarizes myself with certain names. Having an editor or accomplished author know your name is an in to personal advice, extra help, and out of the way favors. Don't stop writing. And most importantly, DON'T GIVE UP!

Do you think the success of the Lord of the Rings films will have any significant influence on how many genre movies Hollywood will produce?

I'm no movie expert, so I did a little research to answer this question. Here are the top 25 highest grossing films of all time. The statistics speak for themselves. Titanic, Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope, Shrek 2, E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial, Star Wars: Episode 1 – The Phantom Menace, Spider-Man, The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King, Spider-Man 2, The Passion of the Christ, Jurassic Park, The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers, Finding Nemo, Forrest Gump, The Lion King, Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone, The Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Ring, Star Wars: Episode II Attack – of the Clones, Star Wars:

Episode VI – Return of the Jedi, Independence Day, Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl, The Sixth Sense, Star Wars: Episode V – The Empire Strikes Back, Home Alone, The Matrix Reloaded, and Shrek. 84% or 21 of the top 25 grossing movies of all time were science fiction or fantasy, with almost a 50-50 split. 12 of those 21 genre movies were made in 2001 or later, which is when the LOTR saga began. The numbers have spoken ladies and gentlemen.

LOTR was a product of all of the genre's struggling predecessors. And with that product we have tipped the scales. LOTR has officially given a helping hand to the name fantasy and pulled it out of the B movie category. Now when people see a unicorn or a dragon they're not going to automatically change the channel. And since science fiction and fantasy are still often grouped together, despite the definitive differences, science fiction has been pulled up right along with it. Television series like Angel, Buffy, Xena, Hercules, Charmed, Andromeda, and Smallville wouldn't have lasted as long without the public support that LOTR built, and they definitely wouldn't have been shown anywhere but the Sci-Fi Channel before now. Audiences would have sneered at the incredible abilities exhibited in Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon, and Hero without the lesson that suspending disbelief is now expected. We've proven to audiences that Harry Potter is a hit, and is very real in that he deals with many of the same everyday problems all people have gone

through at one point or another. We've shown them the reality and truth for which fantasy is a living metaphor. And I think they want more.

Another reason for the explosion of this genre in today's movie content is technology. It was rather hard 20 years ago to film magic and other fantastic intangibles because you couldn't just pay them and ask them to please exit stage left. We've got the technology to personify these great myths and that supplies the demand for bigger, better, faster, and louder. Special effects sell! Even the most ardent fantasy hater would agree that when the balrog walked out onto that ledge to face Gandalf it was an amazing sight! Just take a peek at the tons of extras that come along with the LOTR DVD'S. Fantasy needs the latest in technology to make it work, and car chases and explosions just don't do it anymore! Audiences want to feel the tongues of medusa's snakes on their cheeks, feel the heat from the wings of the phoenix, and freeze under the glare of the basilisk. There are only so many ways you can blow up a house. Fantasy is a limitless resource of special effects.

So, I think this trend will definitely continue. I love the fact that I now have choices when I go to the movie theatre. There are usually several genre movies playing at the same time and I sometimes don't even catch it in time.

What are your five all-time favorite Fantasy books?

I can't really say what my top BOOKS are because the story tends to be incomplete without the others in the series. But here are my favorite stories, no matter how many stories they encompass.

Ursula K. LeGuin - *Earthsea*

David Coe - *Lon Toblin Chronicle*

C.S. Lewis - *The Chronicles of Narnia*

Jane Yolen - *Pit Dragon Trilogy*

Five all-time favorite Fantasy films?

This was a much easier question to answer.

Legend

The Dark Crystal

The Last Unicorn

Lady Hawke

LOTR Trilogy

How far will you go to get a 'possible' story into 'publishable'?

Do you consider yourself a hands-on Editor, or do you prefer to let an author work at a story themselves?

If I think a story should be published, I'll do everything I can, but I won't go far enough to jeopardize my job or anything. *laugh* I've had stories submitted to me that I absolutely adored that Shawna didn't agree. I've worked personally with those authors

giving my opinion of re-writes, alterations they could make, etc. In the end, all they can do is resubmit, and if I still love the story, all I can do is resend it to Shawna. I have gone as far as giving my personal quoted recommendation to be used wherever else the person submits that particular story. I've also emailed editors giving them a heads up that a story I really liked is coming their way. If I think the story is amazing, I honestly don't care where it gets published, I just want to see it get out there!

I am definitely a hands-on editor and wish I could spend all day trying to help each individual author get through the slush. I won't sit there and tell them to put a conjunction in that sentence, or a transition there, but I will tell them what's wrong. I will provide examples of what's good and do my best to explain my points.

Unfortunately, since this is not my full time job, I don't have the time to do all of that. So my feedback is usually a bit vague and brusque. I hate that, but I can't make response times worse than they already are. Either way, I am always willing to spend plenty of time emailing authors the answers to their every question. I want them to know I'm as approachable as they come and care so much about this genre.

How big an influence do you think the small presses and independent publications have in terms of what people read- and what others think is publishable?

I have to say I unfortunately don't think small presses or independent publications are very widely read at all. The mainstream reader sticks to novels. If it's not found in your basic Borders, Barnes & Noble, or on the best seller list it just doesn't always get the attention it deserves. I personally have only seen *Realms of Fantasy* in main stream book sellers once, I believe. And I always look!

I'll admit that I'm guilty of the same. I of course read the stories that come in through the slush, but beyond that my focus is on novels as well. I can tell you my reasons for such, but I can't speak for the public at large. My name is Carina, and I have a series addiction. It's an unfortunate disease that has hit the main stream and has forced authors to try and stretch their stories into a series, thereby including as many books as one can write in a lifetime. This has resulted in MANY a bad series where it has become obvious the plot resembles Swiss cheese, but the author keeps plowing on because readers will flock to get that next book. I like to think I'm not one of these people, but there is a marked appeal in the familiarity associated with a world so in depth it takes 10 books to appropriately capture it all. Short stories can work much the same for me, but they have to all exist in the same world.

LeGuin has 80 some odd short stories, every one of which I've read, and many of which occur in the same world. Again, that familiarity comes calling us back. Short fiction, in general, doesn't tend to follow this trend, and has less of a word count to tell a story in comparison. I'm not saying immersion in a short story is impossible. I'm just saying that it is harder to achieve than in a novel and this may be a reason why they don't have much influence.

Personally, my tenure at Realms of Fantasy has drastically changed my perception of what is or is not publishable. I am now officially a genre snob! I now choose my next book in the exact same way I choose stories from the slush. I read the first paragraph. If the story isn't good enough or told well enough to snag me right away, I'm not interested in the rest of the novel. I don't care if it picks up later, I want to be intrigued right away. This has made my reading list shorter and shorter but has forced me to go book by book searching for that wonderful combination. Unless someone were in my position, where they had to constantly evaluate what makes good fantasy, I don't see how short fiction could specifically affect what others think is publishable.

What's the best thing about your job?

The paperclips. No, I'm only kidding. Though I do have quite a collection now from all over the world. In all seriousness the best

thing about my job is the authors. I love figuring out new ways to help them by making the website more informative, the slush process more bearable, and encouraging them. They are what this is all about and I do my best to make sure they know I'm not just another bad guy.

The other great thing about my job is the learning experience I'm getting from the inside out. It's no secret that I would one day like to start my own magazine. A full-time job, a lack of spendable equity, and the family I will most probably be starting in the near to moderate future prevents that right now, but it's still my dream. And the contacts I've accrued here, the friends I've made, and the research tools I've found are invaluable! I will continue tapping them and slowly learning and growing with the genre so that in 20 years or so I'll blow them away!

VISIT REALMS OF FANTASY AT

<http://www.rofmagazine.com/>

Submission Guidelines

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Simulacrum: The Magazine Of Speculative Transformation

www.specficworld.com/simulacrum.html

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Needs: Fiction\Poetry\Artwork - most speculative genres (H/F/SF/MR).
(Quiet, gothic horror as opposed to gore and violence.)

Will look at articles, reviews and interviews on request.

Pays in copies and one year subscription to the magazine. Format - pdf.

Fiction - between 1000 and 8000 words.

Aim of the magazine is to expose new talent in writing and artwork alongside established writers. No fan fiction. Professionally formatted manuscripts only, please.

Established and new artists\writers welcome. Prefers snail mail subs, although email subs will be accepted in MS Word .doc/rtf. file format. Please scan attachments for viruses before sending. For further information, please contact me at the email address above.