

OBIR MAGAZINE

The Occasional Biased & Ignorant Review Magazine of Canadian Speculative Fiction
Dedicated to Promoting the Absurd Personal Literary Taste of R. Graeme Cameron
(Issue # 2 – May/June 2015)

LACKINGTON'S

Issue 6 / Spring 2015



FEATURING

FICTION: Michael Cisco • Steven Earnshaw • Rhonda Eikamp
L.S. Johnson • Dominik Parisien • David K. Yeh ARTWORK
Carrion House • Galen Dara • Likhain • Gregory St. John
Cherry Valance • Kat Weaver • Tomasz Wieja

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EDITORIAL

The first issue was released to mixed reviews. I chose not to include the negative ones in the letter of comment section. After all, death threats aren’t very interesting, so why inflict them on my readers?

The first issue was meant as a “proof of concept” issue. It mostly consisted of reviews of the entire **Fungi** anthology and showcased twenty-three different authors. Since they were all writing to the same theme, Lovecraftian Fungi horror, readers who happen not to like that sort of thing found my reviews hard going. A bit monotonous perhaps, but not to me. I love that kind of stuff.

I think the solution is to feature a few stories from several anthologies in each OBIR, thus guaranteeing a diversity of both writers and themes in which readers are bound to find something to their taste. Of course it will take several issues of OBIR to run through the entire contents of each anthology, but I don’t mind. (My readers may have a different opinion.)

Naturally I was not able to make a start on my anthology program for this issue. Truth is reading and writing is harder than it looks, especially if you are foolish enough to harness your brain to the task (strictly speaking not absolutely necessary, especially for critics, since one’s gut feeling is the most reliable judgmental tool on hand). But there is no point in letting one’s achievements outstrip one’s ambition. An impossible task is a worthwhile task. Aim high I always say. (If I could just get my readers to lower their expectations as low as possible—then I’ll be cooking!)

Fortunately I am beginning to receive a fair amount of material. For instance, at the recent Creative Ink Festival in Burnaby, being short of funds till my next pension cheque, I asked publishers if they were willing to give me review copies gratis, and wound up with five books in addition to the three freebies every attendee got in their membership bag. Fantastic!

Which conjures up visions of some works not being reviewed in a timely fashion due to whatever backlog builds up. Now, it so happens, many small Canadian publishing houses being world class, their anthologies are not restricted to Canadian authors. Indeed, some publish entire novels by foreign authors, and anthologies with a mix of both local and foreign authors. Proof positive that the SpecFic publishing industry in Canada has “grown-up.”

Since my self-imposed mandate is to promote and celebrate the Canadian SF&F genre, I will focus on Canadian authors, making them my priority for review. Consequently foreign authors in Canadian anthologies will be a lesser priority, but since my mandate includes Canadian publishers and their products, I will include foreign authors appearing in Canadian anthologies, or even entire novels, as time and space permits.

The exception being Canadian magazines. I will always review every contributor in such. My intent being to convince people to buy them, to take out subscriptions, and thus keep SpecFic Magazines alive and flourishing. (The magazine business always more financially precarious than book publishers, though the latter might deny it. Survival a tough struggle for any publisher.)

Not every anthology or magazine identifies the nationality or home base of every author. This may mean I miss Canadian authors, assigning them too low a priority. To combat this I've started assembling a card file. And yes, I do mean CARDS! Good old 5 inch by 3 inch cardboard cards stored alphabetically in a card bin. I listed 40 authors and ran out of cards. Intend to get more. Figure I'll need at least a thousand. There be a lot of authors out there!

Come to think of it, I guess I'll do the same for magazines and publishers. And artists. Poets...

Why not cram it all into a computer file? Lot easier to flip through cards. Less eyestrain. Plus wonderfully tactile. I prefer hard copy books and magazines for the same reasons.

Concerning review copies:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

REVIEWS

REVIEWING SYSTEM

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

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

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

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

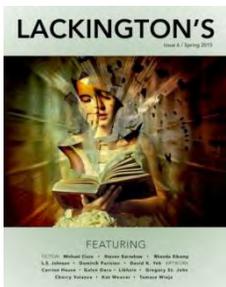
Also note that **(AAE 2016)** means Aurora Award Eligible in 2016.

PERIODICALS

LACKINGTON'S Magazine **(Cdn)** – (Spring 2015) – **(AAE 2016)** – [Find it here](#)

Edited by *Ranylt Richilis* – **(Cdn)** – **(AAE 2016)** – Cover by *Tomasz Wieja*

Editor *Ranylt* states the following:



“**Lackington's** is an online magazine that publishes speculative fiction and art four times a year. We want to help widen the space for prose poetry. We're looking for stylized prose. Not inept purple prose, of course, but controlled and well-crafted wordsmithery that reflects the story, setting, theme, atmosphere, or philosophy it seeks to describe.

Stylized prose can be sparse and simple, diamond-cut like the writing of Ursula K. Le Guin. It can be sumptuous like the writing of Oscar Wilde. It can be epic, archaic,

experimental, mythic, rhythmic, and it can be quiet and subtle, too. Story and character are indispensable, but so is wordcraft. We trade in aesthetics, so make us gasp with unexpected words and give us inventive voices, structures, and narratives. Many editors reject heavily stylized prose out of hand. We welcome it.

So: If you write conventional, transparent prose — the kind that dominates the marketplace — we'll turn your story away. This is no reflection on the quality of your language or the story as a whole. We may even love your work. It just doesn't fit the scope of this project."

Well, this is certainly a red flag to me. Don't get me wrong. I like the occasional bit of surrealism, and am perfectly willing to dive into a bit of 19th century prose for the sake of atmosphere and a good story, but I do tend to prefer what Asimov referred to (and praised) as the plain glass school of writing. Stained glass is pretty and often stunning, but I like to look through a window without having my view blocked. Symbolism, allegory, and similar critters sometimes destroy a story, especially if I don't get what the author wants me to get, which happens often enough. In short, stylized prose is normally something I have to be dragged kicking and screaming to contemplate. Literary I ain't.

That said, sometimes I surprise myself. Plus, I'm not anywhere as stupid as I look. So what the hell.

Contents:

The Whale of Penian Tork – by *Stephen Earnshaw*

Art by *Cherry Valance* (Cdn – Ottawa, Ontario) – (AAE 2016)

Premise: Six Byzantine followers of Simon, the hermit who lives atop a column, voyage to Patagonia in search of the Whale of Penian Tork.

At least, that's what I hoped at first. Thought I was being promised a sort of Byzantine Moby Dick tale. It is in a way. But not the way I want it. Some jarring intrusions and anomalies indicate this is taking place in relatively modern times in some sort of alternate universe. Except it isn't taking place in ANY universe. As the editor puts it "*readers can't tell where this tale will take them—it's written for the inner explorer.*"

Not *my* inner explorer.

Ranylt states that it "*is precisely the sort of tale I hoped to showcase when I launched **Lackington's**: experimental in form, oblique in idea, and not necessarily reverent towards its ancient allusions.*"

That's a good description. I think it's the "oblique in idea" aspect that turns me off. But then, no one has ever mistaken me for Jean Paul Sartre (thank god).

Is there ANYTHING in this story which appeals to me? Some wry humour, good description, and interesting turn of words make for a pleasant read. I just can't get at the core meaning. I sense a satire of sorts on people who think they can handle the task of government better than any bureaucrat, and who also view pure ideals as more practical than flexibility of mind, but I'm not sure.

*Rating: **Not to my taste.*** Or to put it another way, far too literary for my taste. I just don't understand it. I don't get it. The fault may be entirely mine. Your reaction may be more positive.

Spider Moves the World – by *Dominik Parisien* – (Cdn) – (AAE 2016) – art by *Galen Dara*

Premise: A man near death, alone in the desert, is rescued by a caravan of giant spiders.

Okay, THIS I liked. Surreal fantasy, I assume. The premise is simple and easy to accept. After that everything flows from the premise, in that an accumulation of detail observed by the man reveals the complexities and sophistication of spiders on a journey. Their mode of life is internally consistent and credible, and becomes the norm, leading the man to question his own values.

What's it about? Bugged if I know. A metaphor for life's purpose and questioning the meaning of it all I suppose. Point is I found this more accessible than the first story, possibly because it strikes me as more linear and coherent in structure. I just enjoyed being carried along with the man, learning at the same pace he did.

Rating: Entertaining. If my "Moby Dick" expectations were disappointed in the first tale, this story reminds me of the travels of Marco Polo for some reason and feels oddly familiar and reassuring. Rather enjoyed it.

The Selkie – by *David K. Yeh* – (Cdn – Toronto, Ontario) – (AAE 2016) – art by *Carrion House*

Premise: A supernatural being is tasked with delivering an Enigma Code machine to the Allies so that they might win the war. Unfortunately he is captured by a boatload of Nazis who have a powerful shaman in their thrall.

This works surprisingly well, not least because a bunch of "master race" types with a fetish for Nordic mythology run up against the real thing and find their misconceptions somewhat wanting. Turns out the old religion not so easily harnessed to the will of those less than worthy.

Rating: Entertaining. Granted, the premise is farfetched and somewhat off-the-wall, but it carries through with great enthusiasm. Reads like a superior piece of pulp fiction war adventure from the past.

Ambergris, or The Sea-Sacrifice – by *Rhonda Eikamp* – art by *Likhain*

Premise: Sanderval, an old fisherman, loses his wife when she gives birth. Her last request is that he take their daughter, also dying, to the Nacreous Palace (a castle-sized conch shell) to be restored to health. There she is cured, but also transformed, in that her eyes display the sea and her voice the sound of the waves. He names her Ambergris. She has a lot of growing up to do. So does he.

Rating: Interesting. There's a lot of beautiful imagery I quite like. However, without a doubt it is not a straightforward story so much as a fairytale symbolic of something or other. Haven't quite figured it out. Possibly a reminder that the wonder and purity of nature is infinitely more powerful than the petty but evil complications of man. In a way, the story is an exercise in nostalgia for what nature used to be like before man got his grubby paws on everything. Little bit of wistful thinking involved too.

Littoral Drift – by *L.S. Johnson* – art by *Gregory St. John*

Premise: An elderly woman who almost regrets living as long as she has because the world has changed so much since her youth contemplate staking a blue "live forever" pill that will freeze her in her current physical status. She talks her grandnephew David into taking her to the beach, something she used to greatly enjoy doing with her husband decades earlier.

The future is conveyed with subtle brushstrokes. David likes to read poetry books from her small personal library because poetry is no longer taught in school, or even published. He has a devil of a time buying a small pail and shovel she wants to take to the beach, if only because no one goes to the polluted beaches anymore and the only beach pails and shovels to be found are sold by street vendors selling obsolete junk.

Another bit of subtlety: you may have a crooked spine but the blue pill will prevent it from getting worse. Even better, the pill will give you the energy of a twenty-year-old. The catch is you will still feel whatever pains you were prone to before you took the pill. Pros and cons. The woman prefers her choices to be made by circumstance. She goes to the beach hoping for a sign. She gets one.

*Rating: **Entertaining.*** In the sense that the story is quite good. Nothing much happens, mostly a musing over past memories and their meaning in light of time slipping away, but done with a melancholic touch that appeals to me. I, too, have lived most of my life, and also regret certain changes in the world that have come to be. I sympathize and empathize with the main character, and feel her intense longing for the better days in past and for something better in the future. The story is simultaneously sad and joyous. Like life.

Unlanguage (excerpt) – by *Michael Cisco* – art by *Kat Weaver*

Premise: This is a workbook in which one or more students (and possibly other types of people) records their daily experiences as vividly as they can, interspersed with commentary or explanatory notes on their writing as interpreted as examples of unlanguage in action, or something.

When I first read this I felt it was a satire on the academic approach to the study of language, a bit of whimsy that would make Samuel R. Delaney chuckle. Certainly my first reading left me all at sea, albeit amused.

So I went back to Ranylt's introduction and reread the following (the fact that I needed to shows you what a short attention span and/or memory I have. Remember, I'm pretty much the average reader, or perhaps something less than the majority of readers—though far be it for me to suggest you should cater to people like me. Write what you will and leave it to the readers and critics to figure you out. All part of the fun):

“When I think seas, I think also of abstract things that engulf us, such as ideas and language—things we swim and sometimes drown in, as the Post-Modernists have long held. It was important to me to include stories about this vexing sort of ocean. To this end, I'm delighted that novelist Michael Cisco has offered Lackington's the opening passage of his unpublished meta-novel, UNLANGUAGE (you can read another section in Postscripts to Darkness Volume 5). His piece washes over readers even as it pulls them into its currents; one has a sense of being lost in a great expanse while enjoying a navigator's unsettling moment of discovery. The magnificent UNLANGUAGE is a work for language-lovers and language-cynics, and I'm one of many who hope to see the full novel in print soon.”

“Lost in a great expanse” pretty well sums up my feelings. What is one to make of the following sample:

“Science, and any objective discipline for that matter, wants univocality, which means it wants to produce meaning with maximum generality. Polyvocality is an alternative to univocality, but not its opposite; avocality, which is the utterance of exactly no one—no person at all, speaking—is the thing that stands equally opposed to both. Avocality is impossible and is the mode of impossible expressions, which take the form of apparitions in the interstices of univocal or polyvocal expressions.”

I find this hysterically funny. If it were a lecture I'd be in the audience shouting “Pull the other one!”

(All things considered it is rather amazing I came out of university with the equivalent of an “A” average.)

Here’s another passage I find humorous, where it is explained that the “unlanguage of unknowing” has many names:

“...which include: *lingua obscura, enigmatica, oraculo, youming yuyan (language of the quiet depths), lugh al lughz (language of riddles), bhasa sammudha (bewildering language), confusion, phantasmagoria, parabolica, evesdropia.*”

Without a doubt, Michael is playing with the English language with an enthusiasm and cheekiness akin to that of James Joyce (whom I also thought a cheerful lad with a wild sense of humour).

As well, the author comes up with some very amusing characters, like the “*doomed ascetics... They lived in a cabin in the woods, mummies blearily gazing down from the rafters and burrows dug under the ground, and they ran miles every day. Miles and miles. Every day. Miles and miles. Chanting into dawn and into dusk.*”

A metaphor for academic scholars may haps?

*Rating: **Entertaining.*** I haven’t got a clue if any of the gibberish about language is meant to be taken seriously—I doubt it—but it is all a rather clever construct, a sort of thought experiment, deconstructing and reassembling one’s thoughts about the use of language which is, after all, not something one normally thinks about (or at least I don’t).

There’s some quite vivid and surreal description in the manuscript bits (as opposed to the notes) of an almost cinematic quality which I find strangely pleasing and intriguing.

Overall I think the complete work could turn out to be quite an important work, something new on the scene. A truly original tweaking of the concept of both novel and language. The fact that I consider it a laugh riot shouldn’t dissuade you from reading it should it ever be published in full. In fact, I think it should make you want to read it all the more. Best intellectual humour I’ve come across in a long time.

BLACK TREACLE Magazine (Cdn) – (December 2014) – [Find it here](#)

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

Seven Heart Beats – by **Josh Renolds**



Premise: Old Isaac Clay had a run-in with one of them Raven Mockers and now he lies a’ dying. His wife Jolene wants to stay with him till the end, but hard-bitten hoodoo man John Bass makes her leave the bedroom cause he knows what’s a’ coming. He sits in wait. Isaac’s may not be the only life about to end.

An old-fashioned horror tale, would be mislabeling to call it Lovecraftian, reminds me more of the Appalachian folklore tales of Silver John the Balladeer by Manly Wade Wellman. Feels right somehow. Feels authentic.

At any rate very good and atmospheric description makes a story about a guy sitting in a chair beside a relative’s deathbed very suspenseful and worrisome. Waiting for the Grim Reaper is bad enough, but that something else even worse may show up is definitely chilling. In the alleged last words of Generalissimo Franco “I didn’t know it would be so hard to die.”

Death is easy. It's the dying that everyone fears. Especially this kind of dying.

*Rating: **Great Fun.*** A relatively simple tale with a nasty mood. Kinda difficult for the reader to choose whom to identify with: Isaac or Ben? Neither is in for an easy time of it. Be the perfect story to read by candlelight in a rented summer cottage. I dares ya to snuff the candle and go to bed in the dark. I dares ya. And be sure to leave the window open.

The Sorcerer's Apprentice – by *David Annanadale* – (Cdn – Manitoba)

Premise: a promising assistant Professor is doing his best to climb the ivory tower to guaranteed tenure, but has come up against that formidable beast “publish or perish.” Trouble is he doesn't have an original thought in his head. He flees to the Richelieu site of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris in search of inspiration. He does find an ancient book to inspire him, but also its possessive owner. There's a high price to be paid for success, and an even higher price once success is achieved.

Maybe because of its Paris setting, I am reminded of Edgar Allan Poe and his “Murders in the Rue Morgue.” Certainly the language is as elegant and detailed as Poe's. It's a very 19th century sort of tale, which is quite fitting to the subject. The horror element in this story strikes me as original, as I have not come across this particular brand of “connection” between a “master” and an “acolyte” before. If you think *your* boss is demanding...

*Rating: **Entertaining.*** On the one hand, this is an old fashioned horror story, which is part of its charm, but on the other hand serves as a very modern metaphor for the relationship between an author and his readers. Creeps me out it does.

Moth Belly Blues – by *Sean Moreland* – (Cdn – Ottawa)

Premise: A thirteen-year-old girl becomes host to several parasitic caterpillars. This is bad enough, but the resulting storm flutter of moths within her belly makes matters worse, especially since no one, not even her parents, believes her. Worst of all, she infects her first love with a simple kiss. Guilt and remorse and fear of going insane as more and more people shun her are more than a young girl should have to bear. And then things get really bad... really, really bad.

I had a hard time reading this. And not because the premise is absurd. It is a horror story after all, and the reader must always accept the basic premise if a story is to work. First law of reading. Trouble is it works all too well, at least for me.. For most of my life I suffered from an insect phobia so strong I couldn't stay in a room if so much as a fly or an ant was present. Grew out of it (possibly because of the horrors I met in the jungles of Central America while touring ruins in 1981—Canadian bugs innocuous in comparison), but this story threatens to revive my phobia in all its idiotic glory.

Probably much worse for a woman to read, as it focuses on the kind of fears and feelings the onset of puberty can bring to a girl transforming into a woman. In fact the girl in question consciously equates her moth infestation with all the “other” symptoms of puberty. Rather frightening that. I'm guessing the whole story can be taken as a metaphor for sexual awakening and all the associated doubts and fears and hesitations, but the damned amazing thing is the story works as a straightforward horror story. If you accept the premise, the entire tale is logical and consistent within itself. It works. And it scared the bejesus out of me.

*Rating: **Entertaining.*** I want to say “not to my taste” because I hate risking my dormant phobia reviving, but I found it a powerful tale that left me feeling distinctly uneasy. Mark of a successful horror story.

Acrobatic Duality – by *Tamara Vardomskaya* – (Cdn – Toronto) – [Find it here](#)

Premise: Competing world class gymnasts perform 3 types of exercises: Balance, Dynamic and Combined, each with their own characteristics.

Couldn't pick a topic I am less interested in, but Tamara writes about it from an insider's knowledge (it seems) and keeps me intrigued throughout. Kim and Alana are better at teamwork than any other pair, for a truly unique reason they depend on but do not understand, a reason SF genre-related and very much a puzzle. They don't know if they dare question their talent, but are increasingly afraid not to.

Rating: Entertaining. This is a classic example of a good premise not fully explained yet so clearly delineated in its consequences that you care for those affected and wonder what is going to happen. The writing is sparse and efficient, very much like the gymnast routines it describes, yet beautiful to behold (again, like a really good gymnast routine). A model of clear and precise writing AND storytelling.

Interesting to note this was Tamara's first professional sale, written while she attended the 2014 Clarion Writers workshop and sold BEFORE the workshop was finished. Off to a good start I'd say.

BENEATH CEASELESS SKIES Magazine

The Metamorphosis of Narcissus – by *Tamara Vardomskaya*– (Cdn – Toronto) – [Find it here](#)

Premise: A model willingly surrenders herself to the whims of a cruel and narcissistic artist whose state-of-the-art methods (beyond today's technology) not only questions but threatens to destroy the traditional meaning and purpose of art.

I am very much reminded of Salvador Dali and his muse Gala, whose "divine" unity of inspiration was the perfect vehicle for Dali's insanely self-centred but highly gifted vision of the hidden symbolism latent in the world enveloping him. A more personal approach to art can scarcely be imagined. The artist Avardi and his muse Oinhoa are very similar and are probably based on the character of Gala-Dali (as Dali often signed himself).

However, they are mere backdrop to the protagonist, a female dancer (we never learn her name, and neither does Avardi) who, recruited by Oinhoa, willingly submerges her identity in order to BE art rather than merely serve art. But, it turns out, self-sacrifice in the name of art pales before the sacrifices demanded by war.

Rating: Interesting. Very much a glimpse into the mindset of someone who takes art way too seriously. It captures both the pretense and the fanaticism of those involved with art for art's sake, though in this particular instance, in a curiously prosaic and practical manner. Disturbingly realistic, methinks, in spirit. The writing, on the other hand, in its description, from time to time approaches the surreal in order to convey both the mood and the setting proper to Avardi's grand vision. This combination, realism and surrealism, is blended quite well. A neat trick. It works.

My only problem is I have no sympathy or empathy for the model. She strikes me as an idiot. But then, while I'm a huge fan of Salvador Dali, I think people who take him seriously are idiots too. Certainly he never took himself seriously. He had nothing but contempt for people who did, and was always quick to take

advantage of them. This story an interesting and convincing case study of the type of “born-victim” individual that so-called “genius” artists often attract.

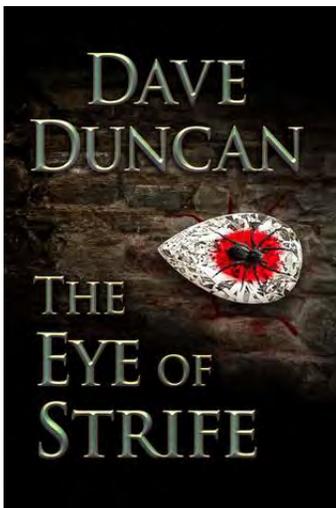
ANTHOLOGIES

As noted in the editorial, none this issue. But I’m working on it! Something next issue. Always something.

NOVELS

THE EYE OF STRIFE – Five Rivers Publishing (2015) – [Find it here](#)

By *Dave Duncan* – (Cdn – Victoria, B.C.) – (AAE 2016)



Premise: The spectacularly barbaric barbarian Quarn rips out his battle-damaged right eye and shoves in a kind of red gemstone eye-substitute proffered by the great Father God. His followers consider this a rather decent omen and help him win the battle and go on to win a great empire. His heirs expand the empire further at the expense of their right eyes. Eventually the red eye is lost. Eventually the empire is also lost, reduced to a small kingdom. More than a thousand years after Quarn, the High Priest of the Father God gathers a group of likely suspects in the God’s ruined temple in a bid to find out the fate of the Eye of Strife. Does it still exist? And if it does, where can it be found?

I don’t read much fantasy, and the names of characters in the works I have read are often distancing, tending to make me stop, to briefly pull out of the story and question the need for a name like that. Quarn I can accept, and Kulf and Mona, as they are easy to keep in mind. Cuialfil sounds vaguely correct, in early dark age terms. Likewise Iliana. But Eamsoalie? Mostraliob Shal? Strikes me as meaningless, a stringing together of letters in a random manner just for the sake of something new, though not necessarily pronounceable. If you are going to do that, at least add something the reader can grasp, as in Thorthrup the Craven. I like that one. It was my secret name for myself for a while when I was a kid. Don’t ask.

But I soon caught on Dave was just being playful. And Dave exhibits a very dry wit when he’s being playful. For example:

“The only real clue we had was that Poanir’s son Juanian remembered Wolma’s brother-in-law the jade trader being called something like Nupoguyld Wab.”

“He was sure about the Wab, not the rest of it.”

By this point in the book I had already learned to look upon each new introduced character’s name as a kind of amusing game along the lines of what had Dave come up with this time? Oddly enough, viewing them this way allowed me to utilize them as names and not as full stops. Perhaps, with his vast experience in writing fantasy, Dave had hit upon this method to transcend the traditional difficulty of uncomfortably unfamiliar names slowing the reader down. By making a game of it, the reader hurries on to see what outrageously monikered character shows up next. Rather brilliant that.

As for the religion underlying the premise, the cult of the Father God is paramount. The legend and the visions experienced by many of the “pilgrims” in their various adventures would seem to argue that he and his counterpart, the Great Mother, are very real and present in this world. However, the Father God is worshipped under three guises: Skamp, the trickster God who can’t be trusted; Strife, the “let’s get what we want with extreme violence” battle God, and Smugg, the aging, wise, and cynical manipulator God. Turns out, no matter which of the Father “trinity” you swear allegiance to and serve, the divine bastard is liable to let you down whenever he feels like it. Seems religious faith and loyalty, no matter how sincere, can cost you big time when you least expect it. Very difficult serving difficult Gods. More Dave Duncan playfulness.

Each “pilgrim” present at the Temple of the Father God tells their tale in turn, which put me very much in mind of Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales. Lends to the legitimate dark age/medieval tone of the book. All the stories, and characters, are interrelated of course. And what didn’t occur to me till later in the book, some of the “pilgrims” are lying, or at least hiding relevant information, not to mention trying to make themselves look good despite their bad luck and/or general incompetence. Still, you come away with a vivid impression of a world where you can’t really trust anyone and staying at home or venturing to travel are equally dangerous. (Well, yes, the modern world is rather like that too, but not nearly as entertaining as Dave’s fictional world.)

One thing about the book I particularly appreciated, as someone who loves archaeology, are the numerous “nifty touches” concerning the ruins of the monuments built at the height of the empire. By the time of this tale, virtually all the ancient monuments have been robbed of their statues (metal ones melted down, marble ones converted to lime), their dressed stone facings removed for reuse elsewhere, untended walls left to crumble, and so on. Even the great Temple, still in use, is in a bit of a shambles. For one thing, it’s main chamber 40 feet wide and 450 feet long, nobody, not even its architect, ever figured out how to roof it. Even at the height of its glory it was exposed to the elements 24/7. So now, at the time of this novel, the walls still stand, but are uneven and topped with trees and other luxuriant growth. Very cool. A pleasing image. And quite realistic, in terms of what actually happens when a civilization can no longer afford to upkeep its monuments.

And then there’s the problem of Divine retribution. Even the ruins get involved, in that one of the characters decides to take a leak into a harmless-looking clump of bushes that just happens to be growing atop (and hiding from view) a fallen statue of the Father God. Watch where you point that thing! An act of sacrilege in the course of relieving a full bladder. Seems Gods resent this sort of behaviour. Rather clever bit of unexpected bad luck, I thought. Actions have consequences. Always. Even innocent ones. Good point, Dave.

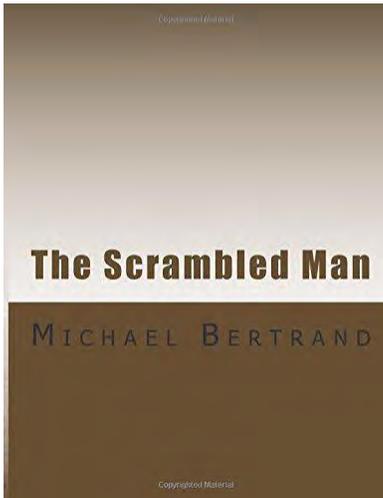
*Rating: **Great Fun.*** I guess I was in the mood for some rip-roaring fantasy adventure Conan style. It is an easy read in that nothing disrupts the flow of the narrative. Nothing pulls you out of the story. The shamelessly selfish medieval sense of honour infuses all the characters, places, and events with a refreshing credibility. It’s a fictional world that feels very real, and very weird. I like it a lot. Thoroughly enjoyed this book.

THE SCRAMBLED MAN – Self-published via Amazon (2015) – [Find it here](#)

By *Michael John Bertrand* – (Cdn – Richmond, B.C.) – (AAE 2016)

Premise: Thanks to Inventor Roland Banks and his United Teleline Corporation, teleport stations are becoming ubiquitous throughout the Earth, and more and more people are using them. However many still don’t trust the new technology, especially when somebody materializes as a blob of tissue so randomized even the DNA is scrambled. Investigator Adam Eden, the world’s first genetically perfect man, needs to identify the victim and come up with a credible explanation for what happened to ensure it will never happen again. Public confidence in the new technology is at risk. Not to mention human lives. A solution to the problem must be found!

Michael is a prolific blogger, and last year set himself the task of writing a million words. He succeeded, and this novel, his first, is one of the results of that effort. As typical of most first novels, it has a number of flaws that would have been flagged in any workshop I've ever attended or presented, and a number of strengths and virtues that show signs of great promise.



Flaws first. I feel a couple of plot points are introduced later than they should have been, which weakens their credibility, and that there's not enough description of settings to create a firm sense of place for the various locations the characters find themselves. A tad too many characters actually. Conflating some of them would have aided the flow of the plot methinks. However, since this is a published work rather than a work in progress, being nitpicky over minor potential improvements is pointless. All that is relevant to potential readers are the positive aspects which make the book worth reading.

First of all, the identity of "The Scrambled Man" took me by surprise. Not what I was anticipating. Well done, Michael. And secondly, discovering who was scrambled does not resolve the problem, in fact it raises the stakes and makes the problem much, much worse. Rather clever that.

I also enjoyed the occasional "neat touches," like the fact that aircraft are mere hobby toys since all commercial cargo and passenger traffic is now strictly monopolized by UT Corporation, or the incident with the Teleport Station "official greeter" who gets so annoyed with an "anti-telly" protester he shoves him into a teleport booth to get rid of him. Said teleporte consequently becomes convinced he's been transformed into a mere replica without a soul, much to his group's propaganda advantage. And then there's the growing frustration of an investigator who teleports to another city to interview the leader of said protest group, only to be completely ignored because the guy refuses to talk to "dead people." Michael doesn't just use teleportation as a "gimmick," he explores the possible implications and impact on people's daily lives.

Another thing that struck me is that Michael manages to reveal the selfish motivations underlying all his characters, both major and minor. Everyone has a purpose, an agenda, an angle, a pet peeve, or even an obsession. This is something beginning writers often leave out, to their detriment, since place-holder characters are frequently off-putting to readers. Michael has successfully avoided this problem.

And successfully captured the mindset of prominent public figures who find it ridiculously easy to cover up a potential catastrophe since they identify the concept of "the public good" with themselves and not the ignorant members of the public who do NOT need to know and are in fact better off not knowing. The complacent "we know best" attitude of the powers-that-be comes across quite well.

*Rating: **Entertaining.*** "The Scrambled Man" is a fast-paced who-done-it that would not be out-of-place on stage or as a radio show. Michael firmly believes "Science Fiction is the literature of ideas" and what you get are onion layers of concepts peeled off one after the other till the truth is revealed. The book, despite the teleportation angle, is not hard science but more of a detective adventure mystery, and as such, a lot of fun.

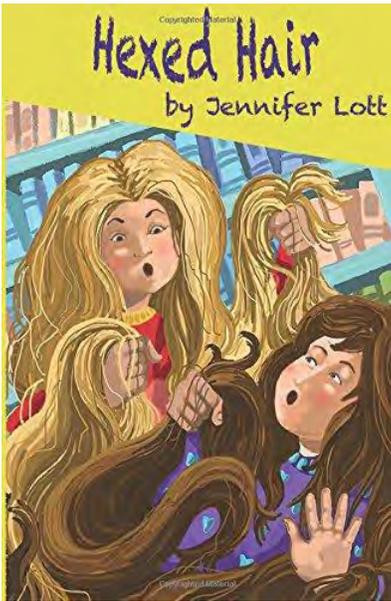
Disclaimer: Michael and I have known each other for years. We're both members of the B.C. SF Association. So naturally the review is biased in his favour, but really only in accordance with my policy concerning first time authors. Rather than "workshop" an already published book or story, I consider it far more useful to list strengths and virtues and thus encourage both potential readers and the writer himself at one and the same time. Onwards and upwards the universal motto I say.

Besides, I enjoyed the book, which outweighs any minor teething aspects to the writing as far as I'm concerned. A lot of potential shown. I quite look forward to his next novel. (You are planning one, aren't you Michael?)

By the by, I ordered the print-on-demand hard copy from Amazon. I expected to receive a pocketbook. Instead what came in the mail was an 8&1/2 inch by 11 inch soft cover about 90 pages thick. Are all print-on-demand books in this format? I have no idea. It does make for easy reading though, the font being a good size and a decent amount of white space to rest the eyes. Looks good.

HEXED HAIR – Reality Skimming press (2014) – (Cdn – Burnaby, B.C.) – [Find it here](#)

By *Jennifer Lott* – (Cdn – New Westminster, B.C.)



Note: being a young children's book (as opposed to a YA novel), this doesn't fit any Aurora category. Nevertheless it is worth noting because it is Canadian and genre.

Premise: Two eight-year-old sisters lose their hair. They blame their older sister, whom they know to be a witch. They steal a spell from her computer to set things right. Doesn't work. The situation gets out of hand. Who knew hair could be so powerful?

I am possibly the last person on Earth to judge a children's book aimed at young girls. But I do have an older brother I grew up with, and the attitudes and frustrations of these young girls are reassuringly familiar, as are their psychological attempts to manipulate each other and the rest of the family. I think anyone who has any memories at all of their childhood can easily identify with these mischievous characters. Very true to life, and consequently a very accessible tale.

There's a fair amount of situational humour which enhances the escalating "problem," and some subtle touches like the mother's habit of hiding under table to get some quiet reading done (which leads one to suspect the little girl she once was still dwells somewhere within her adult form).

Doriano Strologo contributes about 20 illustrations scattered unobtrusively throughout the book which are relatively simple yet capture the moment perfectly. They feel like the sort of influential illustrations that linger in one's memory even as an adult.

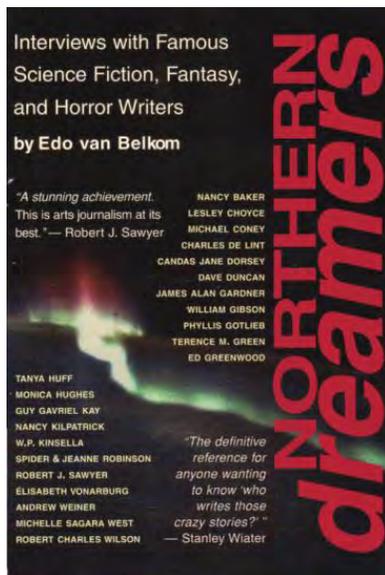
Rating: Great fun. To me the delightful combination of the illustrations and the prose in this children's book are the sort of childhood experience never to be fully forgotten, one eagerly sought after in one's old age as a rejuvenating bit of nostalgia. I think it is quite good.

Mind you, if I had written it I would probably have added a portal to the netherworld, possibly a few demons, an alien invasion, and maybe an earthquake, but that's just me. Probably just as well I don't write children's books.

NONFICTION

NORTHERN DREAMERS – Quarry Press (1998) – (Cdn – Kingston, Ontario) – [Find it here](#)

Edited by *Edo van Belkom* – (Cdn)



I like beginnings. Especially since I have no idea how to be a successful author, but I do readily identify with anyone wanting to be an author and first starting out trying to become an author. Hence the fascination of a book like this. The title says it all, as far as I'm concerned.

Edo van Belkom interviewed 22 Canadian SF&F authors at a very unusual time in the genre's history. Only twenty years earlier fans, critics and scholars were arguing whether there even was such a thing as Canadian science fiction, in part because there simply weren't that many writers in the field. Consequently some argued the very concept of Canadian SF&F as a separate entity apart from American SpecFic was an absurd manifestation of burgeoning Canadian nationalism, an illusion as it were. Ah, the good old Canadian inferiority complex, you can always depend on it.

By 1998, as the book amply demonstrates, there were plenty of authors in Canada who were either very good indeed or at least showed signs of great promise. Oddly, the majority of the writers interviewed for this book were not born in Canada but had settled in Canada. Aha! They don't count! Foreign interlopers!

Of course it is very un-Canadian to say something like that. For most of my life we've been proud of being a multicultural society (as opposed to the American concept of the melting pot), yet here's the thing, living in Canada is a very seductive experience. In that sense our beloved country may be the greatest succubus of all time. Slowly, imperceptibly, without realizing it, all are drawn into the placid calm of being Canadian, very firmly and irrevocably Canadian. What does it mean to be Canadian? Nobody in Canada knows. We just are what we are, or, if coming from elsewhere, what we become. Frightening, isn't it?

Point is all the writers in Northern Dreamers, even those born and raised elsewhere, possess a distinctively Canadian tone and voice. What evidence do I have for this assertion? My gut feeling and the strength of my opinion. Granted, neither worked very well for my term papers at university—professors expected actual evidence cited for some picky reason—but in the real world, where my views are totally ignored by damn near everybody, I find personal conviction quite sufficient to back up my theories.

So, assuming Canadian writers actually reflect the Canadian point of view—whatever the heck that is—1998 marks a very particular point in time for the Canadian SF&F genre. Writers have grown up, but not the publishing industry, as Edo explains in his introduction:

"The immense success of these individuals is even more impressive when one considers the lack of regard speculative fiction is given in Canada. Despite the obvious talent within its borders, there is not one major Canadian publishing company with a commitment to science fiction, fantasy, or horror; the media has been accused of being dispassionate and ill-informed; and critics have been accused of reviewing books that they believe Canadians should read, instead of reviewing the books that Canadians do read. These factors, taken together, make it clear why, almost exclusively, the writers in this book have been forced to publish outside of the country with such American publishers as Tor and DAW."

Sound familiar? Traces of these practices still exist today. Hardly surprising, considering how much bigger the American market is. Yet we live in a kind of Canadian renaissance era, with homegrown publishers devoted to SpecFic popping up all over the country. Many are so prestigious (if not necessarily wildly financially successful) that they routinely receive submissions from American authors. Canadian publishers have become world-market class. It is becoming harder and harder to defend our national inferiority complex. Who knows? We may be on the verge of a tipping point. World domination may be just around the corner. Something to look forward to. Probably immensely profitable.

But I digress. I thought I'd peruse the interviews, reporting on them one at a time, looking for what I consider to be interesting stuff, like beginnings, and comments on the state of the genre in 1998, and predictions for the future (our present).

After all, we can't tell how far we've come unless we note where we once were.

Nancy Baker

Nancy in 1998: Published her first story **The Party Over There** in Rod Serling's Twilight Zone Magazine in 1988. Later published three vampire novels, **The Night Inside**, **Blood and Chrysanthemums**, and **A Terrible Beauty**, in 1993, 1994, and 1996 respectively.

Nancy today: Works as a business Manager for a large Canadian Magazine. She has published a collection of short stories title **Discovering Japan**, and a fourth novel, **Cold Hillside**, the latter put out by CZP in the fall of 2014. [Find it here](#)

Turns out Nancy didn't quite fit the situation described by Edo in that all three of her novels were published in Canada by Penguin Canada. Jolly good. Remarkably (since the myth is "Don't do that!" if you want to sell outside the country) the first two novels are set in Toronto, and possibly the third has a Canadian setting as well.

When asked "*What is it about vampires that drew you toward them?*" Nancy replied:

"I had an idea involving vampires and a way to approach vampires that I didn't think I'd seen before... And I never, in all the years I was writing it, realized that vampire fiction was becoming so popular. It wasn't really until the end when I was thinking of selling it that I realized that every second book on the shelf was a vampire novel. Then I thought, I'm never going to sell this thing because it'll be over by the time I get there."

I had forgotten that the fad for vampire novels stretched back so far. She needn't have worried. There's always room for more in a popular subgenre, particularly when your contribution is a fresh take on the topic, something refreshingly original. And that's how her novels struck both readers and critics. Excellent!

A lesson for beginning writers to learn. Don't worry about what's on the shelf. Write what you want to write. Write true to yourself. Don't follow stock formula and current expectations. Don't cater to anybody. Cater to yourself. Be as original as you can. Something new and something good is always welcome.

Another topic Edo brought up had to do with some men's dislike of strong female characters. Nancy had this to say:

"I would hope that men reading genre fiction have gotten over that. So much of science fiction and fantasy is being written by women, so much of it has strong female characters, that if you were to say I don't want to read that stuff you'd be cutting yourself off from a lot of really good work that's being written today."

This stated 17 years ago! Gamergate and the Sad Puppies Hugo fiasco show that one segment of male SF&F fandom hasn't learned a damn thing, and they've become a very vocal minority indeed, frantically attempting to turn the clock back to the "good old days" when the few women published in the genre mostly masqueraded as male authors. I'd like to think that it is the last gasp of the clueless but unfortunately society doesn't always progress, sometimes it backslides, and that seems to be all the rage these days. Here's hoping Nancy's statement ultimately turns out to be something more than wishful thinking.

And as for beginnings? Originally Nancy was into the Toronto night club scene and garage bands. She was herself a musician, but that didn't seem to be panning out career-wise, so she began writing short fiction utilizing elements of her Toronto "underground" experience. Persistence paid off, and a number of stories were sold. Next she turned to her first novel, intending to shop it around the US paperback market. But fate has a funny way of intervening.

Turns out, while attending a University of Toronto Writers workshop, Cynthia Good, then editor of Penguin Canada, was one of the speakers and happened to mention they were thinking of publishing horror. Eight months later, the book being finished, Nancy wrote Cynthia, mentioned the workshop, and asked if Penguin would be interested in seeing her manuscript. They were. They liked it. They published it.

Just goes to show, you may think you have your future vaguely planned out, but sometimes, when you least expect it, opportunity reaches out and grabs you. Let it. Embrace it. Don't wait for something "better." It may not come again. A first publication is something you can build on. A tentative foundation.

I'll give you an example of an opportunity rejected. Over thirty years ago I wrote a story about the man who killed (or at least caused the death of) the Aztec Emperor Montezuma (one of his own people). Friend of mine was good buddies with an editor in New York City. Told me "I know for a fact this is precisely the sort of thing he's looking for! Let me send it to him with a covering letter!"

Not a sure thing of course, but a possibility. However I turned my friend down. I felt the story needed revising. I was taking a course in Mesoamerican studies at the time and wanted to work on the story some more to get the details historically accurate. Guess I wanted to please my Professor. Never did get it reworked. I think I still have it. In my closet maybe. Unpublished.

Now it may have been poorly written (with me always a good probability), but maybe, just maybe, the unnamed New York editor would have found it intriguing enough to suggest ways and means of improving it. I'll never know, because I rejected the opportunity to send it. See what I mean? Oh well.

Next issue: the Lesley Choyce interview.

[TO BE REVIEWED NEXT ISSUE](#)

On **Spec Magazine** #99 with stories by *Krista D. Ball*, *Mike Rimar*, *Siobhan Gallagher*, *Peter Charron*, *Tyler Keevil*, *Aliya Whiteley*, and *Michael Wojcik*.

Another **Black Treacle Magazine**, #9, with stories by *Colleen Anderson*, *Geoff Gander*, *David X. Wiggin*, and *Dale L. Sproule*.

Adventures of Ivor by *Dave Duncan*, being an omnibus edition of three of Ivor's YA adventures: **The Runner And The Wizard**, **The Runner And The Saint**, and **The Runner And The Kelpie**.

Healer's Sword by *Lynda Williams*, the seventh book in the Okal Rel Saga.

An Alien Collective by *Roxanne Barbour*, a YA novel.

A few short stories from several anthologies, namely: **Sword & Mythos**, **Expiration Date**, and **Wrestling With Gods**.

And maybe all kinds other goodies, or maybe none of the above. Depends what I have time for. The two magazines are my priority. I promise at least their stories.

MISSILE MISSIVES

From: *Silvia Moreno-Garcia* – (April 21/2015)

Thanks for taking the time to look at Fungi. I appreciate it.

(The Graeme – I always take the time to look at fungi. Fascinating stuff. But seriously, the Fungi anthology was irresistible to me. No way could I not buy it. I've been a Lovecraft fan for most of my life. Any fiction even remotely inspired by Lovecraft is a thrill for me. My "discovery" of your Innsmouth Free Press publishing house quite exciting in itself. I have four other of your press's anthologies to read, and will undoubtedly acquire more as time goes on. This be the advantage of being a specialty publisher. Just as a reader who hits upon a favourite author tends to read everything that author has written, so will a reader like myself focus on publishers who put out precisely the kind of work I like to read. Call it brand loyalty. It exists. Publishers take note, though I'm sure you have already. Not every reader is passive. Some of us be quite enthusiastic.)

From: *Matthew Hughes* – (April 21/2015)

The episode in **Lightspeed** is the penultimate chapter of a serialized novel, parts of which extend from novels and stories I've been publishing for fifteen years or under the general rubric of "**the Archonate**." So, yeah, a little bit like diving into the deep end.

But I'm glad it interested you and thank you for the review.

Cheers, Matt

(The Graeme – The "I" in OBIR stands for the level of ignorance I've built up over nearly three decades of ignoring contemporary SpecFic in favour of books on history, archaeology, and sundry other topics, apart from the occasional nostalgic dip into the SF&F pocket book collection I amassed in the 1960s and 1970s.

*But having received a mandate from CSFFA to promote the Canadian SF&F genre in the pages of **Auroran Lights**, and thus researching what publishers and authors exist today, I was astonished to learn just how much there is. Suddenly it occurred to me "Gee, I should start reading this stuff. Seems like I've been missing out on a whole bunch of goodies."*

So I'm a bit like a baby taking first steps around a house discovering rooms I never knew existed. It's also a bit like being handed a cornucopia and being told to help yourself to what is pouring out. A perpetual opening of Christmas presents under the tree, so to speak.

Consequently I bring an enthusiasm and glee to the reviewing task perhaps long absent in more jaded critics, possibly allowing me a fresh insight, or at least something a little bit different from the accepted norm developed by other critics who have been at it for years. The fact that I have no idea what I'm talking about adds a certain zing to my reviews, methinks.

*On the other hand, being ignorant of how the genre has evolved in Canada over the past few decades makes it difficult for me to understand context. This may or may not be an advantage. For example, I reviewed your chapter **A Face of Black Iron** as if it were a stand-alone piece (though guessing it was not) which allowed me to concentrate on it rather than indulge in comparisons with previous chapters. Probably a good thing.*

*At any rate, my review represented the viewpoint of someone new to **the Archonate** reacting to a portion of it in a spontaneous manner. This may possibly tempt other readers unfamiliar with your work to seek it out, and once found, lock on to it in the SF&F tradition of discovering a favourite author and remaining loyal from then on. It's the vital "first contact exposure" which can trigger this, and that's what OBIR is all about.)*

From: Robert J. Sawyer – (April 21/2015)

Looks good to me, Graeme! Good luck with it!

Rob

*(**The Graeme** – Thank you, Rob. And thank you for your unstinting encouragement for my various crazy schemes to promote the genre. I know you know how much of an amateur I really am, yet you give me thumbs up support every time. I appreciate this, believe me.*

Methinks it may be because we have at least one thing in common, a gleeful instinct to celebrate the genre we love. In my case it was dormant for a long while apart from my media and traditional fandom interests, but now, like the Kraken, I have awakened. Hopefully no one will blame you for this unprecedented disaster!)

From: Bruce Gillespie – (April 21/2015)

You certainly review a whole lot of stuff I've never heard of. In fact, almost the only author I've heard of is Jeff Vandermeer. But this sort of magazine is very much needed.

Best wishes, Bruce Gillespie

*(**The Graeme** – I should point out that Bruce lives in Australia, so it is perhaps not too surprising he is unfamiliar with Canadian publishers and authors. Thank you, Bruce, for saying OBIR is "needed." If I can help spread the word, not only in Canada, but in far off exotic climes like Australia and its myriad killer flora and fauna (we Canucks only have to worry about Polar Bears, Grizzlies, Wolverines, six-foot long Mosquitos and flesh-eating Black Flies), then I will have accomplished what I set out to do. Got to get the word out!*

Of course, I am somewhat limited in what I have time to read and write about, but I never intended OBIR to be a comprehensive survey of what is currently available. Instead I sample here and there, exclaiming over certain flavours, trusting my readers to consider sampling the buffet themselves. This way we all get fed, even though we don't necessarily share the same tastes.)

From: Steve Davidson – (April 21/2015)

OBIR is truly unique Graeme.

Though the subject (Lovecraftian fungi) still leaves me completely uninterested, the reviews are insightful and entertaining, making OBIR well worth the read.

I just never got the whole eldritch horror thing (horror in general really doesn't do it for me) How can we trust anything that comes from a milieu that supposedly induces insanity? For all we know, nothing happened at all, and if something did happen, one feverish nightmare is just as good - or meaningless - as any other.

I like my horror more real world - like getting that invoice from the attorney.

(The Graeme – *Thank you for your comments. I started off with Lovecraftian horror, in part because I'm addicted to it, but also because it was one of the few modern SF&F anthologies I own. Since I have limited funds, I can't suddenly amass a huge modern library. On the other hand, I should be able to afford at least one magazine and one anthology per month, maybe a novel as well, and that is probably the limit of the pace I can set writing reviews anyway.*

But I'm glad to see, despite the subject not being to your taste, that you found the reviews worth reading. That is the sort of reaction I was hoping for. A review in and of itself isn't enough methinks. One way or another it has to be entertaining, and since I don't want to build a reputation for negative criticism, as some critics are wont to do, I'll settle for the "gimmick" of publically struggling to understand what any given story is actually all about.

I can only get better at this, because I have the built-in advantage of increasing senility and more pronounced memory loss as I age, so my attempt to comprehend what the authors are actually getting at should prove more and more entertaining as time goes on. With any luck my readers will discover OBIR to be so morbidly fascinating they will develop an addiction to it. That's one way to acquire a loyal readership!)

From: Graham J. Darling – (April 21/2015)

Enjoyed your reviews and rating system.

If you enjoyed **Fungi**, you might like **Sword & Mythos**, from the same Canadian publisher (Innsmouth Free Press) and co-editor (Silvia Moreno-Garcia).

(The Graeme – *Yep, got it! Will start reviewing next issue.)*

I note you summarized the lost classic **A Strange Manuscript Found In A Copper Cylinder**, but gave it no rating. Was it so uncategorizable?

(The Graeme – *I was rushing to get out the first issue before I lost faith in the idea of producing it in the first place (I hate second thoughts, don't you?) and so I just plugged it in "as is" from its previous appearance in Auroran Lights. Felt it important to let Canadian Genre fans learn of its existence if unaware of it.*

*But to answer your question, I'd rate it as **entertaining**, as long as the reader bears in mind it is authentic 19th century prose and not exactly fast paced.)*

Here is one reader who "will be waiting with bated breath to find out what [you're] going to review next".

(The Graeme: *Well, your short story Jon Carver of Barzoon, You Misunderstood, for one.*)

-GrayJay

From: *Dave Haren* – (April 22/2015)

I liked Obir now we'll see if you are going to sustain your volume of opinions. I happen to like your methods and read all of your stuff.

For me the essence of Lovecraft has always been the shatter of belief in the previous cultural version in the face of discovered evidence. He lived in a time when this was almost a daily occurrence. You can see this at work these days as the mimetic cultural underpinnings of culture are being challenged and the old versions are mounting a last ditch action to retain some scraps of the out-moded religious crap.

The sky is not a bowl with holes where heavens light shines through. The interior of the earth is not a fiery oven of punishment for deluded evolved ape. Those were simple and easy and gave you surety and a sense of belonging to the way things are.

Once you started taking these apart with scientific facts, the tendency to consider that your sanity was being assaulted could be easily written about. H P hit that as a formula and it resonated with the audience. Every generation is going to have to struggle with this problem until they can discard the ideas of certainty and closure. Just because we want them to exist will not bring us certainty but the old ideas are not going to die without a bitter fight.

If you're afraid of change H P L has your emo state pegged perfectly. He was quite unique at the time but has survived when most of his contemporary authors have disappeared into well-deserved obscurity.

Today's most dangerous are the cultists with armies and navies because they want to control what people believe.

Any way great issue, looking forward to the next.

Warm Regards, Dave

(The Graeme – H.P.L. not only resisted change, he resisted what had already happened. He much preferred earlier centuries. This is part of his charm. Anyone who consistently referred to himself as “the old gentleman” even when he was young cannot be said to belong to the hip generation of his day. He was cool nonetheless, though.)

From: *Diane Walton* – (April 25/2015)

Great idea! I enjoy your rating scale.

(The Graeme – It's mostly harmless and purely personal. Should earn me a reputation of some kind or another. Great fun for me, at least.)

From: *John Purcell* – (April 25/2015)

Graeme, I agree with your wife. You, sir, are crazy. Another fracking fanzine? Why do you feel the need to replace Chris Garcia as the energizer bunny of fanzine fandom? I thought we had done well to survive an

onslaught of Garcia zines, but to get broadsided by a slew of Canadian fanzines - a welcome development, I must admit - from the same editor is, well, nuts. So I am going to ask you the same question I once asked Chris: when the hell do you sleep?

(The Graeme – While I'm writing, or so some suspect.)

Anyway, some quick thoughts on the debut issue of **Occasionally Biased and Ignorant Review Magazine of Canadian Speculative Fiction**. First off, great title. It says it all.

My main takeaway is that there are a lot of fine writers of speculative and fantasy fiction in Canada, which makes sense to me given how long your winters can be. With all that time on their hands, might as well write stories. What else are you people going to do besides play hockey and have sex? Oh, yeah. Start up new fanzines. I forgot.

Overall, I am a sucker for a good Lovecraftian tale, too, and think they are very hard to write. Your story rating scale is probably something I'd use if I had your kind of time on my hands. Yes, I am doing a fair amount of reading fiction again, which is always good, but most of my writing these days is more on the creative side: I've been doing more serious fiction and poetry writing - and playing music again - over the past six-seven months, and getting some projects completed and sent out. No definite hits yet, but my beta-readers tell me I've been improving, so that's a positive sign. But yeah, I think having a rating scale like "Invigorating-great fun-entertaining-interesting-not to my taste-abysmal" works well for a project like **OBIR**. It looks like your general consensus about **Fungi** is that it's a good collection: only five stories received "Not to my taste" ratings, with all the rest being "interesting" or better. I may have to acquire this volume.

(The Graeme – Yep. Well worth reading!)

I have also been reading **Lightspeed** magazine, and finding its contents a bit on the moderate "meh" scale of things. (This seems to be my personal rating scale: degrees of meh-ness.) I get the same reaction from stories in **Clarkeworld**, **Interzone**, and **Black Light**, which I regularly peruse. Many stories just don't seem that good to me, or Just Aren't Quite There Yet, if you know what I mean. Stories these days seem to be a real hit-or-miss proposition since the reader may or may not care for the genre, subject matter, narrative style, or any combination thereof. On top of it all, there is so much being published these days that it is damned hard to keep current on the field. Maybe **OBIR** can help sort the wheat from the chaff. We shall see how it goes.

(The Graeme – In that I'm flinging opinions about in all directions I guess it can be said I'm throwing everything up into the air. Something should separate out. Not sure what exactly.)

So good luck with your latest plunge into fanzine-publishing madness. I await word from your wife regarding your pending committal to Vancouver's premier sanitarium. If you need someone to act as a character witness, don't ask me since I'd probably side with your wife.

All the best, John Purcell

From: *Lynda Williams* – (April 26/2015)

All reviews are biased and ignorant from SOMEONE's point of view. And books need reviews! Rock on!

(The Graeme – True, but I work so hard at being biased and ignorant I must stand out from the crowd.)

From: *Linda Demeulemeester* – (April 27/2015)

Good luck with your review magazine!! Very impressive.

Nice to say hi at Creative Ink.

(The Graeme – was good to see you. Hoping you'll be open to participating in the VCON Writers workshops again this year? Always a pleasure.)

From: *Robert Runté* – (May 5/2015)

Can I send you a couple of ARC (advance review copies) of two of Dave Duncan books for review in OBIR? They are in PDF format (with the word 'proof' overlaid as a watermark) so I would understand if you aren't interested in reading on your computer/kobo or whatever.

(The Graeme – Absolutely! One down, one to go. PDFs are best. Got nothing to handle the other stuff.)

But I really like the idea of a Canadian review zine. About time we had one!

Like the first issue--to be honest, I didn't know half the names in here, that's how out of touch I've been come with what's out there. Even the names I knew from SFC etc I hadn't necessarily read, so really appreciate some indication whether they are any good. I was able to get a pretty good feel for what each piece was like from your review. Much appreciated.

(The Graeme – My intention is to convey the essence of each story without giving too much away.)

One thing you might think of including in OBIR (which I have seen in some other review zines) is a list of books on your 'to be reviewed' or 'up next' shelf so people know what has come into you as current releases, even if you haven't got around to reading it just yet. That also encourages people to send you copies, even if they don't always get reviewed (as opposed to just disappearing into a black hole).

Another thing I might suggest is that you have some sort of internal division between periodicals and books; and between current releases and 'classics'. Maybe have one 'classic' per issue?

Good stuff Graeme.

Robert

(The Graeme – You'll note have incorporated many of your excellent suggestions.)

AFTERWORDS

The nice thing about putting out my own review zine is I am beholden to no one. Get to be my own boss. I can be eccentric as I like. Easy to do. Just be myself. Perfect freedom.

Within days or possibly within hours there will be, thanks to the good will and high tech skills of Jean Weber (of **Weber Woman's Wrevenge** fame), a web site devoted to OBIR Magazine. Stay tuned.