

November 25th, 2023

Issue 4 | Water

SciFanSat

The Monthly E-Zine for Science Fiction, Fantasy, and More!



Featuring

Scott Leminski	Drip Drip	Drip (Short Story)
Alan Vincent Michaels	Odysseus Anew	(Poetry)
That Burnt Writer	Untitled	(Micro Fiction)
Brent Streeter	The Cliffs	(Flash Fiction)
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Poetry

by A. A. Rubin

The waters of Titan are frozen,
Gone are the waters of Mars—
The waters of Earth have risen,
Beneath the heat of its star;

On a deep, dark, distant planet—
In the ocean, cells start to form—
For when life on one world is extinguished,
On another, it always is born.

Find the Author

[Amazon | Into That Darkness Peering](#)
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Odysseus Anew

by Alan Vincent Michaels

upon the bow of my sailing ship
I feel the roiling waves within me
titanium and carbon keep us
from Death's Fate on this alien sea

how I long to feel the ocean mist
cold and sharp upon my naked face
yet, to abandon my gold lifesuit
means staying forever in this place

I gaze at green and crimson waters
and ponder on life beneath the swells
though we came to make this world our home
we're thwarted by a beast here that dwells

its song calls to me across the waves
is it fish, imp, or siren I hear?
I have no Circe to still my urge
to dive beneath these waters I fear

my companions sense my eagerness
and bind their captain to the main mast
soon I shall break free like the others
but who will remain to save the last?

END

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Who Needs Paradise...

by Isabella du Lac

Oh, how the wind did blow
hot and cold upon fortunes' dreams
to be at the gates of Paradise
with insufficient means.

Borne on the wings of a carrion crow
across the water, I did go.

Deep beneath the waves of azure
sirens practised their allure.

Strong I stayed and pure
but five and sixpence
and a pocket full of rye
to open the doors of Paradise, you sigh.

Turning back, I heed the siren's call
deep beneath the water turning blue,
...I fall.



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by John Love

water shapeshifting
on it's rundown to the sea

gurgling along brook
round boulder and stone

gathering energy
as it forms into a stream

gushing over precipice
as downward it falls

into a mighty river
it gathers more friends

laying down silt
upon alluvial plains

split into fingers
as delta it forms

upon reaching ocean
it shapeshifts again

it rises in clouds
and will fall down as rain

on Luna a child
with binocular eyes

and watches in wonder
another blue planet sunrise

as water shapeshifting
on it's rundown to the sea . . .

~jdeXpressions~

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Micro Fiction

by nancyd_writes

Those idiots thought they had to blast off to another planet to find a safe place to live... after they were the ones that destroyed the surface!

We took to the oceans with the help of the animals there, and now we are free.
Only took a generation to grow gills...



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Love Unrequited

by Alan Vincent Michaels

Rising high above their watery abode, their eyestalks searched for the *Other*—the *Human*—who had come from a distant star. On the iridescent horizon, above the darkening clouds and ocean swells, they found the fiery trail swirling behind a spherical craft. Their life was changed forever by the *Human* and the shared adventures and sensations. Past *Others* floated through their new memories, but separation from *this Human*—*this perfect companion*—had wounded them as none had done before. After the craft's fire faded into the heavens, they wept softly, retracting their eyestalks and sinking slowly into the amethyst-hued waters.

END

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by That Burnt Writer

I dream of the songs of ancients, filtered through crystalline hearts. Of a distant salvation, an ambition that none of us can hope to achieve.

This blade, with its embedded two hydrogen atoms fused with a single oxygen, is my pathway to an eternal paradise. It echoes bright notes, hinting at lost melodies. Fragmented harmonies are shattered to the wind, as I carve my way through the latest inferior species we've encountered.

And yet.

Privately, I am wracked with doubt. Should we be learning, not destroying?

I am a soldier.

I have my holy orders.

I heft the weapon again.

Find the Author

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by Voima Oy

My uncle discovered the island, the black cliffs rising out of the sea. It's a land of opportunity, he said. We need to move beyond the water. Mutation is the way! My brother followed him.

My grandmother was not convinced. She preferred the quiet life of the shallows, the light on the coral reefs.

I too tried to make my way on the new land, but I missed the sparkling waves.



Flash Fiction

The Cliffs

by Brent Streeter

There is a myth in our tiny village. One that stretches back generations about the nearby cliffs. Their sheer heights were a constant, ominous reminder.

The myth spoke of a young man that climbed to the cliffs' precipice and stood upon the edge of oblivion. There, he heard the ancient gods calling out to him, while the waves crashed and churned far below. Their call was clear against the howling gales that threatened to tear him from his fragile perch, casting him down to his doom. He felt a powerful yearning and leapt. The gods caught him in a warm embrace. Nobody saw him again. Over the years, some tried to reenact the myth. They never made it far. Their deaths only deepened the dark myth.

To me, and others my age, the myth was a deterrent our parents used to chastise us. And so, children being children, we often tested our resolve against the heights, despite the scoldings and beatings we received each week.

As we grew older, we finally saw the dangers of our little trials of *courage*. We drifted away from the enticing cliffs one by one, choosing instead to focus on the paths laid out for us by the village. I was the last to turn away, yet each night I stared at the night-shrouded cliffs and wondered whether there ever was any truth to the myth.

It was on such a night, as I stared into the darkness, that I met her. She approached from behind, her footsteps light and muffled by the soft sand and gentle lapping tide. I did not know she was there until her voice called my name. Startled, I spun around, the cliffs' mesmerising spell broken momentarily. I felt a new spell cast upon me as I stared into her dazzling, star-lit eyes. Our meeting that night had kindled a flame within us, and we were inseparable. But even with her beside me, thoughts of the cliffs still wormed their way into my mind and there they festered like an infected wound. I felt torn; stay with her or attempt the climb. My soul was in endless turmoil. Even as my love for her grew, so did the ravenous hunger to uncover the truth of the myth.

One night, I awoke in a cold sweat. My skin was clammy, and I shuddered at the slightest breeze. I detached myself from the bedding and I crept out of the room. The cool night air smelt of salt drifting off the surf. I inhaled deeply and glanced up at the cliffs that bathed in the pale wash of moonlight. An abrupt urge overwhelmed me, stripping my mind of all thoughts but one.

I need to know.

I walked until the cliffs rose before me, eclipsing the night sky. I placed my hand upon an all-too-familiar section of the cliff face. It felt warm to my touch, and a sense of nostalgia rolled over me. My grip on the jutting piece tightened. My free hand took its place beside its partner. I closed my eyes and inhaled deeply, and on the exhale, began my ascent.

The climb was tedious and my limbs pleaded and yearned for rest, but I endured and kept my course. I found precarious holds only revealed to me by the moon's light. It was as if even the moon urged me on.

Crack.

The rock beneath me gave way, and I lost my footing. My arms screamed in protest as my body dangled at a dizzying height while my feet scrambled for new footing. Blood pounded in my ears, and my vision blurred. I could feel my fingers slipping. My feet found traction. I sighed in relief and resumed my journey.

I do not remember how much time passed by as I clawed my way up those deadly cliffs. It felt like an eternity. And then I saw it. The summit.

Suddenly, a howling gale swelled and buffeted me, threatening to tear me from the cliff. I hunkered against the torrent, digging my nails into the rough stone. The howling ceased, and I scrambled up over the cliff's edge, rolling over onto its flat surface.

I remained there for a time, gulping for air like a beached fish. My limbs felt like lead and my head rang with the pounding of my heart. Staring up at the dazzling stars high above me, a single thought came to mind.

I've done it.

As my racing heart slowed and the pounding in my ears subsided, I caught the faintest voice on the wind. I calmed my ragged breath and cocked my head, trying to make sense of

the voice. It grew louder, clearer. I propped up onto my elbows and glanced toward its source. I could only describe what I heard as a melody befitting the heavens, calling for me to join it. The tune caressed my mind, and I could feel the tormented years of ignorance slipping away. Peace descended upon me, blanketing me in the soft embrace of a lover.

I rose to greet it.

The wind roared as I strode to the precipice and stared out across the horizon. The melody intensified, tugging at my soul. I desperately wished to join it. It was the only thing that made sense in my mind. The only thought that was permitted as the melody reached its crescendo. I looked down at the tumultuous sea, and at its centre I saw a fleck of light glinting in the darkness. It was there that the voice emanated.

Ah, such warmth hummed from there. Who could refuse this sweet call?

I stepped off the edge.

As I plummeted down towards those inky depths, the sweet voice changed its tune. In its place, a horror emerged. A hideous creature given shape. It reached up to me with writhing tentacles. Its gaze enthralled me, and I realised I was just a mere speck in its existence. I fell to my doom.

I am a fool.

Find the Author

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Hidden in Depths

by Alex Minns

I registered nothing at first. My whole system was overwhelmed, a sensory overload. Then it all seemed to hit me at once: the icy cold wrapped round me and chilling my very core, the pressure on my chest felt like it was going to implode and explode at the same time but oddly the one that scared me the most was how it looked.

All the colours were wrong, my hands looked vaguely green as my arms drifted upwards. The light coming down from the surface sparkled white, but it wasn't strong enough to reach where I was falling to. I was sinking fast.

The water around me seemed to crackle. They sensed prey in the water and were being called from miles away. The first ones arrived in seconds, swimming around me as I sank. They seemed human like me, but I knew looks could be deceiving. Confusion clouded their eyes as their mouths twisted into snarls. Rows of jagged teeth stuck out in a threatening manner. Long gone were the beautiful faces and seductive voices they used at the surface to lure mortals to their doom. Instead, I was faced with the countenances of demons.

My descent slowed as we reached the floor of the river. My feet planted on the bed and the water spirits held their distance. A few bubbles leaked from my mouth. I could slow my breathing, but I would still need air soon.

'What magic is this?' The nearest spirit hissed, the sounds travelling through the water to my ears. If I opened my mouth, I would drown so I just smiled. More of the creatures had gathered around me, but they were not the only things. My hands pushed against the weight of the water, my sleeves pulling the opposite way. The current rocked my body as fish and other creatures swam past my eyes, unperturbed by the standoff before them.

'We did not call you to us.' Another creature, this one with long hair that looked blue under the water swam closer to my face. Its eyes narrowed as it tried to get a sense of me. They had not called to me, nor lured me to this watery grave. But they had so many others.

I had only intended on passing through the town when I heard of their plight. The water spirits number had swelled, and their need fun and games increased. They cared not for guilt or innocence; any who strayed too close to the water were drawn to their doom. Children had been encouraged away from their game at the water's edge, fisherman had plunged down of their own volition when drawn by these sirens and the town was getting desperate.

With my hands upturned, I summoned my will and sent out a call to those lurking behind. They were nearby, too scared to approach, too wary of the creatures that had killed them. But with my encouragement the ghosts of their victims came forth. Their spectral pallor only deepened by the water but as I sent out my will their images settled.

The water spirits had paid them no heed, unconcerned by the watery poltergeists. But now, as they formed a ring around the creatures, they began to take note. I closed my eyes and called out, drawing on the power of the earth from the bed at my feet. I willed my strength to the ghosts, giving them the chance to break free. The ghosts began to glow, Gaia's power flowing through them. Old and young, men and women, all buoyed by the magic of the earth. They drifted forwards. The water spirits circled, trying to find a route away but the ghosts had surrounded them. The creatures lashed out with hideous talons, clawing at nothing but water. Their strikes passed through the ghosts but as the ghosts passed through the creatures, I heard the screams of the sirens.

As ghost touched spirit, the power burned through them. The creatures were dispersed into nothingness. I closed my eyes, tasting metal at the back of my mouth as the pressure of their screams proved too much.

I felt myself lift, rising against the water. As I opened my eyes, I saw ghosts on either side, pulling me upwards and not a moment too soon.

We emerged on the river's edge, into the shock of daylight. I dropped to one knee as I gasped in blessed air. I gave silent thanks to Gaia before standing to face shocked onlookers. I knew they could see the ghosts gathering behind me, still fortified with power.

'You did it?' The spokesman of the town dared not step forward as he spoke. 'You truly do have magical powers.' He bowed his head in gratitude, but his voice betrayed his true fear and unease.

The townsfolk had been desperate indeed. And when they had heard of a witch in their presence, they knew what could be done. Alas, they had not been desperate enough to enlist my services proper.

'I would have helped with no payment.' My voice was hoarse. Too long without air had turned it to fire. 'You only needed to ask.' The townspeople said nothing. They were too busy staring at the ghosts who were increasing in number. Those that had been trapped for decades and more were now free of their watery hell. A hell that the man in front of me had nearly condemned me to as he drugged me and threw me to the river. I had heard him speak as he tossed me like a discarded sack. 'Witches cannot drown, so let her deal with our problem. And if she lies, and is not, then let her punishment sate the creatures below for now.'

'We were afraid.' He still refused to step forward. As my anger bristled, the ghosts behind me grew agitated.

'You needn't have been. But now..?' The ghosts rushed forwards.

Find the Author

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Words Writ in Water

by Alan Vincent Michaels

The daylight fades rapidly and the coming long, cold night gives me pause. I shiver, pulling my cloak tighter about my shoulders.

Will I survive the night—*this time*?

Old and *feeble* were how my companions described me, but I have outlived them all. Survival *is* the sweetest, but the loneliest, revenge.

I feel so *terribly* alone, except—

Except, for my students. Yes, my *remarkable* students.

I reflect on how my tech and the comfort of the lifepods have long since failed. My data recorders and computers deteriorated years ago, never to be used again or even repaired, because I simply do not know how.

Yet, my rustic life is *exponentially* better than trying to survive in the ruins of Earth's great cities. Beasts still roam the streets, rabid and sick with parasites. More importantly, there is no water or food there to sustain me or any wood to burn.

I strike my flint against a metal strip to start my storytelling fire.

After the fire is burning well enough, I clear my throat and lean back against the trunk of the tallest oak tree for many kilometers around.

I watch as my students arrive from beyond the gloom to hear my stories.

The flickering flames focus my attention on their faces and how pensive they seem, but I know they are afraid I will leave them too soon.

I have told them so many stories over the years. I wonder how many stories they will fully remember after I am gone.

My students cannot read or write, yet, but thanks to humanity's god-like, genetic triumphs, we can converse in a subset of my language, and they can memorize and recite long verbal passages perfectly. I truly hope their language abilities blossom someday. And in their still uncertain, far-flung future, I hope they create their own written language, too.

Over the last several years, I extolled the many virtues of recording their words for their children and their children's children to hear *and* read. They say they will do their best, but it is a genetic uncertainty I cannot control.

I am *proud of* and so *grateful for* my students, but I feel their reluctance. They also fear they will forget what I have told them.

There is still so much more of humanity's history for me to convey to them, and I know my time with them is almost at its end. I try to impart many different types of stories, so there is context and they have a mechanism for remembering:

Telling stories.

Sharing memories.

Conveying knowledge.

Re-telling stories.

Re-sharing memories.

Re-conveying knowledge.

Over.

And.

Over.

Repetition is the key!

This is how humanity's ancestors lived, huddled in caves, listening to their elders, shamans, and their parents tell stories of events and peoples from long ago and from the morning's hunt.

It is like those ancient times—again.

History never repeats exactly, but it usually rhymes and it can be instructive.

I wonder what the Earth will be like after I die, and I wonder which of my students will be Earth's next storytellers. I hope more than one of my students carry on the story of the human race.

Humanity has *a grand story*, one worth remembering, but *nothing* is guaranteed.

"In the beginning, God—" I say.

“Heard it!” cries Rat.

“Recite it?” I ask.

“In the beginning,” says Rat. He pauses, then continues in his comforting, sonorous tone. “God created the Heaven and the Earth. And the Earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep.”

“Perfect,” I say, smiling. “Repetition works for you.”

Rat bows his head. Rat is my favorite and he relishes in that fact.

“What about the snake, apple story?” asks Snake. “I like snakes.”

“I know you do. Recite it.”

“I ask for other,” replies Snake. “Dog and Bear much gooder than me—compared to me.”

“You’ll get there,” I say. “I have faith in all of you.”

Beggars cannot be choosers, it was once said.

I must play the cards I am dealt, it was also once said.

I look at each of their faces and it still surprises me how *inquisitive*—how *human-like*—they seem, although most of their genetic characteristics were retained in the process of uplifting their species.

For better or for worse, my students are Earth’s storytellers now, and—their friends and their children—their audiences.

All of humanity has ascended to the stars, heeding different siren songs, leaving their birthplace behind, ignoring their past, and yearning for something—*shiny* and *new*.

Now, only I remain to pass on our stories to Earth’s meek inheritors, and I pray their words do not fade into the nothingness of time—like words writ in water.

End

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Miracle Water

by mchyl

KC spotted him in the back corner of the dumpling bar. A slim figure tapping his fingers on the table, fidgety feet twitching underneath. His face was sallow, a limp moustache trailed fine straggles of hair around cracked lips. She knew it was him from the way his eyes flickered to her and away again. She strode towards him, squeezing past the little tables filled with after work diners downing cold beer and pork dumplings. A servebot beeped a tune behind her, and she turned to see the trundling machine loaded with bowls of steaming noodles.

“Can I take your order?” It asked.

“Bring me a beer.” She said and continued towards him.

KC pushed her shoulders back as she approached and hardened her gaze. She did not want to look weak now. She wore a black jacket and faux steel pants, and her dark hair was slicked down to her scalp. She had applied tonight’s warpaint with crimson ferocity. She hoped he wouldn’t see past the armour to the desperation beneath.

When she arrived at the table, he gestured at the stool across from him, not even bothering to look up from the screen hovering near his chest.

“You’re Mo.” KC pulled the stool out and straddled it. She placed her arms on the table and leaned forward into his space. *Look at me.* He lifted a finger but continued staring at his feed. KC thought she saw his mouth lift in a smirk. Anger burst from her like a bullet. She slammed her hands on the table and snarled, “Look at me damnit! I don’t have time for your power trip.”

She counted 20 seconds before he swiped his screen close and eyed her with a sinuous smile. Up close, his skin was peeling and flaky, KC had to stop herself from cringing back.

“Do you have it?” She asked.

With languid amusement he reached into a pocket and pulled out a square bottle the size of his palm. KC suppressed a gasp. He did have it. She stared at the container, and strove with all her will to remain impassive, her face cold as a mask. The bottle was sealed tightly with a poly-fibre cork, and through crystalline glass, she saw a clear liquid with a greenish tinge. Bright lights from the busy street outside flashed neon over the glass surface. He held the bottle up and gave it a slight shake, liquid sloshed gently inside.

“The miraculous waters of Ganymede. Mined from beneath ten miles of icy crust. A few drops will fix just about any broken cell in the human body.” He spoke with a surprising melodic tilt.

KC fought to contain her joy. Hope was within her grasp.

“I’ll need to test it first.” *Please, please be real. Please don’t be a scam.*

He sneered at her, but took out a little dropper. He uncorked the bottle and drew out a drop. Heart pounding, she offered the back of a hand to him and watched as the droplet splashed onto her skin. She rubbed the water over her hand and felt it immediately. A tingling warmth that seeped down into her bones. Within seconds, her normally stiff fingers were flexing with ease. KC inhaled deeply. This was it. This would save Jassy. She looked at him and nodded. She was ready for the payment.

“As agreed, five years of neural commitment.” She tried not to think of the future, what her life would be like.

“Ah well, there’s been a change in the terms of sale.” He almost looked guilty. KC stared at him.

“What do you mean?”

“We’re not getting a shipment in from Ganymede for another year or two. This water’s hard to come by, y’know.”

“What. Do you mean?” She repeated, her words dropping like blocks of ice.

Mo waved the bottle at her, an emerald shimmer catching her eye before it disappeared back into the depths of his pocket.

“Ten years,” He said, “We need ten years now.”

“No...!” KC rocked back in shock. The chatter of the people around her seemed to rise to a piercing shriek, and she struggled to breathe. She sat there frozen, staring at his thin lips and his cold eyes. Her future, her plans, dwindled into darkness. Ten years would mean she’d

lose a large chunk of her life sitting in a room with wires attached to her head. Ten years spent slaving her brain to a server farm, her neural connections used to process the world's voracious hunger for data. The extra time she had bought for Jassy, precious time meant for them, had been snatched away. It was as if he had reached into her chest and shredded her heart to pieces. The pain was unbearable. She didn't know what to do.

The servebot rolled up and placed her beer on the table. KC reached out, grabbed the pot and gulped the whole thing down. Bitter tears stung her eyes. When she slammed the empty glass in front of her, she had made her decision. She had no choice really. Her baby girl was sick with a rare degenerative disease. The only treatment was the healing water discovered on an alien moon, now being transported back to Earth at enormous expense. Only the rich could afford it. Only the rich and those who were desperate enough to make deals with slavers and smugglers.

She glared at Mo with hatred. *Scum.*

"We have a long list of clients waiting if you're not interested." He drawled. KC wanted to reach across and hurt him. She wanted to inflict all the pain raging inside of her and pulp that self-satisfied face in.

"I'll do it." She said, forcing the words out, "Give it to me."

He smiled, and opened up a contract.

With a wiggle of a finger, KC signed her life away.

Find the Author

[X | mchyl](#)



Life becomes death

by That Burnt Writer

The transition to atmosphere is the aspect of this I least enjoy.

I ensure the crash-restraints are fastened properly and secure my plasma rifle before closing my eyes. Similar rituals are going on around me, some sitting in quiet contemplation, others laughing and joking to ease the tension of going into a potential confrontation without, as usual, enough intel.

We'd been mobilized twenty minutes after the last surface transmission. Ordinarily, this wouldn't have been anything to worry about; after all, the immense cloud formation that covered the scientific research ship's LZ had been flagged up early, analyzed, and rated as a Category Three with potential electrical interference. Concomitant loss of comms was expected for up to twelve hours.

We'd all heard the last broadcast from the surface as part of the briefing though. The usual chatter, jokes, handover, and wishes of good luck, followed by promises to get in touch after the storm had passed.

Then the screaming had started.

The silence that followed couldn't erase the memory of the Chief Scientist's invocations to Gods long forgotten, or the background noise of civilians in panic and trying to escape.

So here we are, tooled up, exoskeletal armor ready, in a dropship about to go planetside and into the vision of Hell that is currently obscuring any line of sight to the *Charles Darwin XIII*. My stomach lurches as we hit, and others mutter curses or prayers under their breath as the viewports show acres of grey punctuated by occasional lightning.

The pilot's trying to keep us steady, but it must be pretty bad, we're being thrown around all over the place. It's hard not to vomit, and not for the first time I wonder whether there was an alternate career path I could have followed that was a little less intense. I wouldn't miss the adrenaline rush of debarking under adverse conditions for anything though.

We're descending fast now, jinking and turning, and I can feel the effects of the planet's gravity kick in. The HUD built into my combat helmet is showing altitude from the surface, and I glance at the readings just as they blink and cut out. I can hear the pilot swearing from here without the comm channel, so it must have happened up front too, and now he's flying blind.

We slow our descent, and spend a few tense moments before suddenly levelling out. We're in the clear, and the screens come back to life.

"Alright, ladies and gentlemen," comes the pilot's voice over the comm. "We're in the eye of the storm, systems are back up, and we're around fifteen hundred clicks from the LZ. We'll be in visual range in sixty-three seconds, so please set your seat backs to the upright position and stow any luggage in the overhead compartments."

No one's been on a commercial flight for centuries, but it's a joke used by pretty much every flyboy in the fleet, and the groan he receives in response is as much a part of that ritual as the announcement.

We've just finished a final weapons check when we pass over where the scientist's ship was last seen. The pilot's left the comm open, and all we hear is a whispered "holy shit" which snaps our heads up.

"Commander," he says, switching to my private comm channel. "You'd better come look at this."

I make my way to the cockpit and look at the readouts. Where the *Charles Darwin* had once been, there's a small puddle of what looks like molten metal and... that's it.

"Take us in," I say. "Carefully."

There's a gentle nudge as we land and, almost immediately we have boots on the ground, standard defensive formation Alpha. Everyone's on high alert, spooked.

"We've got seven minutes before the other side of the storm comes in," the pilot says, "and I want to be out of here before then."

I stride to the back of the ship and down the ramp, boots on alien soil for the first time in what must be a decade. A few spots of rain are starting to fall, and I take some comfort from that. The spectrographic analysis showed that it was pretty much H₂O, the same as back on Earth, albeit with a few extra unusual trace elements. That's what the *Darwin* was

investigating, exotic chemicals. I don't pretend to understand the science, but it's why we stopped the fleet here. A Goldilocks-zone planet with native almost-water is always worth checking out.

My comm pings, one of the men on the perimeter.

"Commander," he says, "the rain. It's... moving."

"Clarify," I reply.

"It's landing and forming puddles, Sir, but the puddles are moving toward us. It's on my suit as well, Sir, and I..."

He stands, shaking himself to try to get the coalescing liquid off, and then lets out a scream as whatever it is that landed on him slices through his suit in several places, severing limbs.

I watch, horrified, as it overruns him and he liquidises, leaving nothing behind, all in a few short moments.

"Back on the dropship, NOW," I call over the general comm frequency as the shower starts to get heavier, and the hull on our transport begins to drip and run. "Emergency evac."

I make it to the ramp as others start to yell, and glance over my shoulder just in time to see the last of the squadron dissolve. I sprint through the ship to the pilot, who is looking defeated, desolate.

"What?"

"Engines gone. Eaten. We're dead."

"Shit. Give me the comm and a broadcast channel."

"Sir."

On the battle cruiser, this last message will act as my final testimony.

*"Blackened Fortress Actual, this is dropship Invasive Dawn. Do not send further personnel, repeat do NOT send further personnel. Enemy encountered. Water on this planet appears sentient and hostile, repeat, Water is senti... ***static***".*

My last act is to pray to a god I don't believe in before I become one with eternity.

Find the Author

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Noitcelfer | reflection

by Jaime Bree

We took to the caves when war came. The small amount of intel we had sent us there. It made me uneasy moving through a set of claustrophobic tunnels, some much smaller than I'd have liked. It was intensely cold. Battery-powered torches, handed to us on entry and a backpack of minimal supplies thrown at every third person, was the routine until the hundred or so of us were inside. The only natural light, which had already turned a pale red, was filtered from our lives as they soldered a metal sheet over the entrance. That flame warmed us briefly and blinded us for minutes after it had gone out. We blinked the blur from our eyes and followed the torches ahead of us.

Rumour had always permeated into Folklore. We were told stories as children of 'Worlds in the Water'. So many explorers throughout history had set out to find them, in the depths of our seas, in our lakes and rivers but nothing was ever discovered and many lies were told. The best one, a teenager who never returned after stepping into a puddle.

Lies and conspiracies. Stories told by our parents with the intention of making it clear these were just tales. Drilled into us that anyone who thought them true was crazy, a tin-foil-hat wearer, a madman ostracised by friends and family. So, we laughed away these stories, made them bigger, more exaggerated until no one in their right mind could ever believe them.

Imagine our surprise when the hints began to permeate into conversation that maybe there'd been a cover-up, maybe the stories weren't so unbelievable and that searching in the depths of vast waters may have been a distraction from where these worlds really were.

We weren't told much, only that there was an exit through the twelve miles of tunnels and that we would be greeted on the other side. Our mission, as we traversed these dark, damp crevices was to look for anything unusual in the water. A waterfall or a single drip might be important. This was our intel and it was pathetic. There was water everywhere in here. Dripping from the walls in rhythmic, monotonous tones, deafening waterfalls, masking exit holes that more than likely provided a shortcut out, if only we could have got through without drowning. Alongside the path we walked on, was a channel of water, no more than two inches deep. Nothing could hide in there. You could touch the bottom just by sticking your finger in and getting wet up to your wrist. We shone our now flickering torches into it and saw nothing but our own reflections.

When the rumbling started, we knew our time was up. The explosions on the outside, crumbled the rocks on the inside, dust mixed with moisture stuck to our skin. Almost everyone ran towards the 'greeting' point, but we still had miles to go. We'd never make it that far before the whole cave collapsed. Still, in panic, blind to the truth that faced us, they ran.

I didn't.

I stopped and took a breath. I knew this was it. Did I want to die here?

No. I really didn't.

I decided, in that moment, to go back, hoping the soldered door had been dislodged, and try my luck in the real world, what was left of it. I shook my light and shone its failing beam back down the tunnel we'd just come through and that's when I saw it.

The reflection.

The water we'd waded through in our hurry to get this over and done with had settled. We'd missed it before, concealed in the recesses behind us. There in all its majestic glory, a city, exposed in two inches of water revealed itself. Stone buildings, high steeples, pointed rooftops, a futuristic world sat quietly and patiently to be entered.

Another rumble rocked the cave, this time forming cracks within the infrastructure and along the floors. Ripples blurred what I'd seen, but I knew it was there.

I etched the name 'Noitcelfer', onto the nearest wall. A city discovered in redirection. A city discovered in a reflection. Maybe, just maybe after the dust settled, people would find its name and see what I saw. I knew I couldn't go on. I couldn't go back. So, I took a leap of faith and stepped into the water.

It turns out the puddle story wasn't that far from the truth.



Find the Author

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Short Story

Drip Drip Drip

by Scott Leminski

“What’s this?” Tina Lynch pointed at the email taped above the sink.

“I’ve put a requisition in for that thing.” Josh Williams thrust his mug toward the sink, sloshing tea on the floor.

Tina handed Josh a paper towel to dry his hand. “You know there are greater priorities than a leaky tap in a coffee room.”

“I’m determined to complete my predeparture list before I go. By the way, the request for your new chair has been approved.”

“No way. You’re the best.” Tina, Mission Control’s astrogeologist, high fived the flight engineer.

“You know, I bet it’d look good in your office.”

Josh laughed. “I may need to hold a lottery for that.”

“Tell me where to get tickets,” Tina replied, watching Josh move the tap to stop the drip.

“These the numbers?” Mission Director Bev Kinsella, touched a bound stack of papers on the flight theorist’s, Brian Smiley’s, desk.

“Yes, sir. Tripled checked plus one. It’s a damn theory, but the numbers are telling me it’ll work.”

“Then I can inform the penny counters we’re good to go?”

“It’s in Safety Systems hands now. And the weather’s.”

“I’ll check with the Met O forecast for the next launch window and see about Safety’s sign-off.”

“Suzor and Williams will be happy to finally get out of Quarantine. They’ve been there for ten weeks now.”

“Call it an extended mission simulation. They haven’t gotten sick of each other according to surveys.”

“Not those two. All the numbers say they’re both top tier professionals.”

Kinsella tapped the stack of papers. “Numbers don’t always give the full picture. Williams has his quirk about the water system.”

The Flight Theorist laughed. “I was sure he was going to recommend Maintenance for a commendation.”

“For replacing a washer. He cc’d me when the ticket was closed.” Bev leaned in closer, and whispered, “Don’t tell him, but I had his pet faucet tacked to the pre-flight check.”

“Seriously?”

“Seriously.”

“Good one, sir.”

#

Science Officer, Doctor Marie Suzor, tapped the last flashing button aboard Atern 1. “ECLSS final check: Pass.”

“Check complete.” Williams added his voice and thumb prints to the report.

“Confirmed. Capsule check is complete. Mission Control, final onboard check is complete. Atern 1 is primed to go.”

“Acknowledged, Atern 1.” Kinsella’s hand moved away from the no-go key as she spoke into a microphone.

One final check. “CRm 10.3 status?”

A camera hovered over Tina’s shoulder. She twitched, contemplating if a multi-billion dollar launch would truly be aborted over a leaky faucet.

Tina opened the tap fully then slowly closed it, pushing it when she felt the squishy rebound at the end.

A single drop formed on the faucet.

Tina wiped it away.

After five seconds, another drop formed.

Tina wiped away three more drops and waited a full thirty seconds before reporting, "CRm 10.3, H2O Sys: Check. Within normal parameters."

"Acknowledged." Tina could hear the laugh in Josh's voice.

"Confirm. All systems check."

One after another, each Mission Control flight station gave a green to go. Atern 1 auto-launch sequence continued unabated.

Valerie Moore voiced the countdown starting at T minus 10 and ending with: "Ignition . . . and . . . liftoff."

She continued to announce each flight event in a calm, emotionless manner up and until Atern 1 vectored toward the Laura Moffett Quanta Array's in lunar orbit.

Her voice warbled with excitement. "LMQA activated. Full power in 120 seconds."

"Telemetry indicates Atern 1 is on track for LMQA passage in 143 seconds."

An audible tone rang through Mission Control.

"Alpha beacon ping received." The first in a string of nine hyperspace relay beacons sounded it had cycled from standby and sent a wake-up call up the line.

Bev Kinsella removed her hand from the LMQA emergency shutdown console when Atern 1 crossed the 40 second threshold. No Earthly signal could divert history.

Valerie's announcement of "LMQA at full power." brought a smattering of clapping.

"LMQA passage in 10 seconds, 9, 8," began Valerie Moore, her voice being the only sound recorded in Mission Control for a full 12 seconds, when her historic words, "Humankind has taken its first long step from the precipice of our galaxy. Fair winds, Atern 1." were drowned out by loud cheering and clapping.

Over the next 73 hours, at uneven intervals, the HRB reported Atern 1's passage by the first six beacons. Four days stretched to seven, one week to three, nine beacons sent their ID pings through the LMQA and nothing more.

#

"Still nothing?" Bev Kinsella questioned on her arrival at Mission Control. She had long switched from her usual greeting of, "Anything?"

"Still negative, sir. Not even static."

"The beacons?"

"All HRBs are operating nominally," the signals officer, Euan O'Reilly, said, pointing to the paper event recorder.

Tina was so happy that she felt she might vomit.

Her mug split apart when it hit the floor, splashing coffee on her pants.

She gazed down at the spreading liquid and screamed, "They're alive!"

Disregarding the mess, she knelt before the coffee room sink and opened the tap until a thin, steady stream flowed from the faucet. Slowly, very slowly, she shut the tap, stopping when the water came out as drops.

"There!" Tina pointed excitedly at the water.

"What?"

Tina turned to see a crowd behind her, Director Kinsella pushing her way to the forefront.

"Proof. You have to slow the water to see it. See." Tina's finger moved with the flow.

Bev Kinsella knelt beside the astrogeologist, preparing to comfort her. "I don't see anything."

"Watch. There and there." Tina's finger moved fast. "Drop. No drop. Drop. No drop. Drop, drop. And watch, there are bigger gaps." Tina slackened the flow further. "There. See?"

Director Kinsella shuffled aside, opening a space for the signals officer. "Do you see it?"

Euan set his phone to record. "Does anyone have anything we can use for contrast?"

Someone held a black notebook between the sink and water. "How's that?"

"Good."

"Can you hold your finger four or five centimetres below the faucet?"

Tina positioned her hand to the left of the stream. "There?"

"A little closer. Good. Hold."

Valerie Moore began narrating the activity by Tina's finger. "Drop. No Drop. Drop. No drop – long. Drop. Drop."

"Would you call that three no drops?"

“Approximate.”

“There’s another long-no-drop.”

The notebook was substituted with another having a white ruler taped to it. “Use this to measure the gaps.”

“Well done, Brian.” The director gave a quick smile and a thumbs up to Brian Smiley before turning back to observe the faucet.

“Is it something?” Valerie asked, hoping the impossible could be found in a dripping faucet, while another took up the narration. Faint hope was still hope.

Euan adjusted the water, increasing and decreasing the water flow. “There’s definitely something happening. I don’t know what it means.”

Tina averred, “It means that they’re alive. At least Josh Williams is. Only he would think of something like this.”

“If that is so, where is he? Where do the missing drops go?” questioned Smiley.

“Valid questions. We need answers. We need solutions. We need to know what this means, if it means anything. Nothing is to get out until we know.” The director turned, making eye contact with each person crowded into the coffee room. “I’m ordering an immediate lockdown of the facility. Say nothing.”

Euan spoke up, “I’ll start analyzing the video on my phone, if Brian could film this properly.”

“On it. I’ll get the equipment and stream it directly to the server.”

“Amaya and I can check other sinks in the building,” Tina spoke out, volunteering herself and Signals Analyst Amaya Acosta.

“It’s definitely a message, sir.” Euan handed a photoroll to Director Kinsella. “It’s from Williams.”

“Are you certain?”

“Right here. See this combination? ‘JW’ It’s Morse code. Acosta, here, figured it out.” He stretched an arm out to Amaya Acosta, who nodded along with Brian Smiley.

“What?” Kinsella ran a finger below the images of water drops labelled: ‘J | W’.

“An obsolete code. It was one of William’s hobbies. One no-drop is a dot. Three means a dash.”

“And, two drops mean a space.”

“Exactly.”

The flight theorist, Brian Smiley, closed the Director’s door.

“Have you decoded the rest of the message?”

“Well.” Amaya hugged herself. “We aren’t sure if it’s complete. But we do know that this pattern repeats itself every time we’re in LMQA alignment. And, faucets throughout the facility are affected, not just in CRm 10.3. We’ve checked and recorded the same pattern.”

“Well?”

“Well, we haven’t put it by Linguistics yet for interpretation, or asked any of the other ground stations to verify our results. We came directly to you when we discovered this much. It could mean anything.”

As Euan spoke Amaya and Brian unfurled and pinned the photoroll to a wall.

Bev Kinsella read aloud the message, moving her finger beneath the row of water drops, as the others mouthed the memorized words. “JW THEY KNOW OF US ATERN 1 SHOWED THEM”

Find the Author

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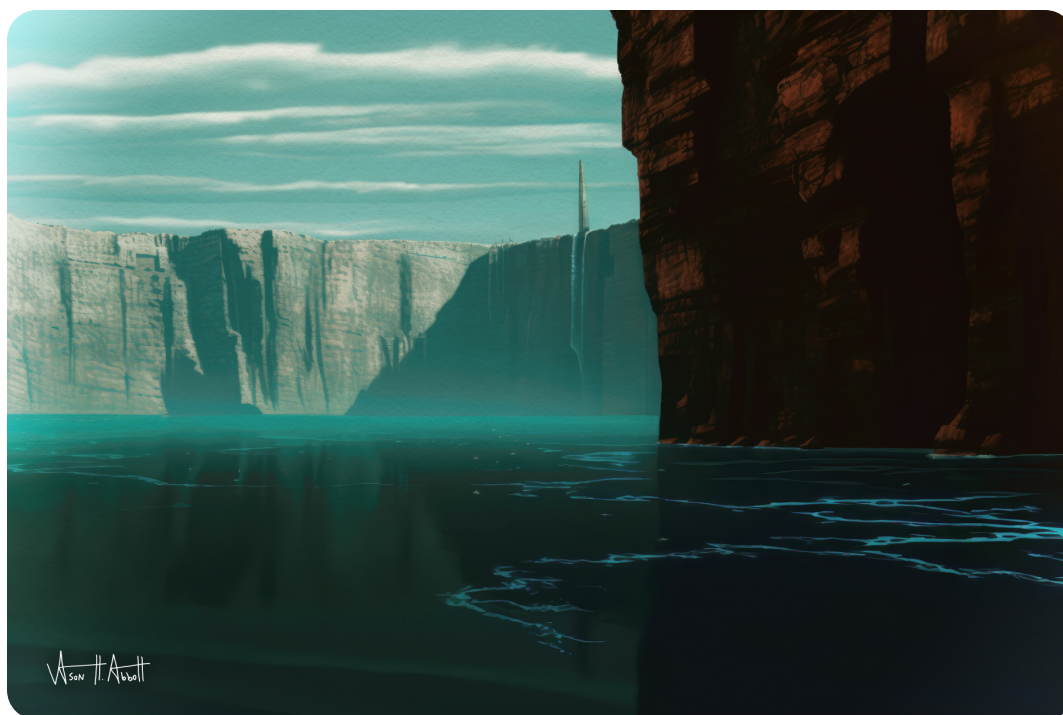
Serial

Shadow of the Black Tower

by Jason H. Abbott

“Before I speak my tale, my queen, you must know this: That long before the rise of Aeola began our Age and kingdoms spread across the world — before the empire of Mnar and the doom of fabled Sarnath, before the oceans drank the gleaming cities, and indeed long before the first stone of Atlantis was laid — there were strange aeons bereft of men. That beneath a mantle of stars of which our ignorance is a blessing, there once strode great old ones and elder things within now nameless cities...”

—Scythea, Chronicler of Agamenaë



Chapter Three: The Lake of the Tower

Skalos stumbled on red rocks and dirt, regaining his footing many paces behind the others. Despite the roar of the waterfalls growing stronger as they approached the tower, the landscape remained parched and dry. Sandals coated in terracotta dust, the thin man walked with careful, labored steps bent under the heavy burden of coiled ropes he'd borne for the past hour.

Exhausted, he focused on Addala.

Ahead of him by a dozen feet, she kept pace with Tetree holding the shading pole angled above her mistress to shield her from the harsh morning sun. Even beneath the concealment of her black robe, he saw Addala's arms quiver with spasms to keep its shaft aloft.

Unseen, trailing behind, he grimaced at the sight. The weight upon him then seemed a little lighter. His steps a little faster.

The trek began to follow alongside the sheer drop of a cliff to the left of them. Sometimes unnervingly too close when the scholar tripped and tottered. Korr glanced at him lagging farther and farther away, and waved the others to a halt. The warrior dropped the thick bundle of rope slung over his shoulder. He then gulped down a swig from his waterskin, waiting for Skalos to catch up.

Reaching the others in the party, huffing and catching his breath, the Agamenaean joined them in looking over the precipice.

A cerulean lake two thousand feet below the cliff's edge filled a rough, circular crater that stretched for miles.

"Kronn's beard," Korr swore. "Why is such an oasis in the desert shunned?"

"It is impressive," Tetree said, patting dust from her shawl. Her same hand gave a dismissing wave to her slave a moment later. "You may rest."

Freed from her task, Addala's exhausted arms almost dropped the pole. Instead, its butt thudded on the ground. She leaned against it for support as Skalos spoke.

"It's claimed that it's cursed," he said, between huffs. "The few who travel here say its waters are hard to reach and foul to drink. That those who explore the lake never return. They blame the god of the tower."

"I can imagine much of that to be true," Tetree said. "I'm doubtful that even we have enough rope to lower a bucket down and use it as a well."

"What's its name?" the barbarian asked, handing his waterskin to her.

"Do you know, Scribe?" she added.

He caught his breath some more, looking down upon the still, blue waters reflecting the cloudless sky. "The Mnaric fragments annotate it as *The Sunken Basin*. The Euronic map notes it simply as *The Lake of the Tower*."

Korr watched his pale lover drink. "What gibberish do the black savages like Belay call it?"

Addala lowered her hood and joined the lean man in peering past the edge beside him. A sheer ring of cliffside loomed above the water far below in bands of red and ochre strata. To describe it as a depression, a crater, or even a pit did not capture its anomalous nature. It was more as if some tremendous blow had punched a hole into the flat plain of desert grasslands around them. A sunken wound and scar in the landscape.

"Belay would not tell me," Skalos said. "He said to speak its name risks angering the god in the tower. That I'd be safer not knowing it at all."

Tetree finished drinking and licked wet lips at Korr. "What were the tribesman's legends of this place?"

His gaze dipped back down to the basin. A crescent shadow cast by morning sunlight and the crater's eastern cliffs covered the lake below. "Their tales say demons lived here long before gods made men."

He squinted, and Addala followed his peering to spot dark, amorphous shapes under the still water. Her eyes spied the same gaps and straight lines the encumbered scholar did: Drowned, phantom traces that caused her to draw a sudden breath, noticing a pattern reminiscent of sprawling districts and streets.

"They say the demons warred with a terrible god," Skalos said, turning to Addala beside him. "That he and his star-spawned children destroyed their city in a single night of cataclysm. That the tower is all that remains."

Tetree corked the waterskin and handed it back to Korr. "Then they say no more than I already knew."

The swordsman refastened the container to his broad belt. "What of the raiders that lair near here, and their treasures? Did that coward at least tell you more of them?"

Hunched, he nodded to the Borean. "Belay shared much about them. They were of the Zadii: A people from the reed shores of the vast lake Zad. It is said to have the breadth of a sea far south of here, and feeds the river flowing past the tower."

"Deadly warriors?" Korr asked.

"Yes, and cannibals, as he told it."

"Man-eaters, eh?"

"They came here several generations ago and began raiding Belay's nomadic people, and trade passing through the Shaell. The tribe took to worshiping the god that lairs here along with the strange gods they brought with them. His stories echo those of captive sacrifices and offerings of gold I've read elsewhere."

Korr smirked, placing a hand over his sword's pommel. "They sound like a challenge, but no match for my steel."

"They were no match for the god of the tower," Skalos said. "Belay said they angered it, and it devoured the Zadii to their last member. They had captured his grandfather as a boy the day it happened, to be sacrificed. Ironically, he was the only one to survive and tell the tale."

Tetree spoke while Korr's smirk faltered. "Did he see it, Scribe? Did his grandfather give details of the god?"

He shook his head. “He wouldn’t speak of it to anyone, and flew into fits when dogged about it.”

The witch studied the lake. “A pity. I will not recount what the Books of Beaten Iron had to say of this place so close to it. Because, despite our guide’s trepidation, Belay is prudent in his reluctance to share true names.”

“To know a name is to touch its power, even to control its bearer,” she continued, scrutinizing the tower to the east. “But there can be danger when you speak a name, too. Of bringing attention, awakening, or wrath. Still, the lore is sparse and vague about what awaits us. While I suspect I’ve guessed its nature, and how to thwart it, nevertheless when I scry the tower all I see is shadow. I would pay a price to foresee what lairs there for certain.”

She turned to her lover. “We’ve rested enough.”

Korr lifted his weighty bundle, the muscular man showing no sign of strain from his shoulders and arms. Silent as he started down the trail again, Tetree snapped her fingers following him. “Come, Nameless, don’t be lax with my shade.”

Addala fought her beckon with effort for a moment to raise her hood. Then with shaking hands she obeyed Tetree’s command to lift the pole. Her eyes met Skalos’ as she left, her glance filled with imprisoned resistance, and his with sympathy. Bent under his burden, he placed one labored step before another to keep pace behind her.

They walked in silence and dust blown by the occasional wind.

Stooped and unable to hoist his head high, Skalos instead focused on the path immediately in front of him. On the hem of Addala’s robe stained with red powder sweeping near the ground.

Her back to him, she winced hearing his every cough, groan, and stumble. But as the minutes passed, the roar of the twin waterfalls became a constant sound of thunder. Her ability to hear him drowned amid its muting of many other, lesser noises.

The drone of water pounding along its two-thousand-foot cascade to the lake below filled their ears as bare earth gave way to brown vegetation.

Breathing heavy, yet keeping up better than previously, Skalos rounded the last of the scattered boulders they had wound their way through. Eyes scanning the change in environment, he entered the veldt bordering the river and lowered a hand to skim its grass.

Before them lay the tower; tall and unnatural. A spire of civilization at odds with the plains of ochre encompassing the massive pit it guarded. The shunned structure brooded a quarter mile distant, taking up half of a shallow island forking the surrounding rapids. Only a narrow band of earth separated the tower’s northern face from a precipitous drop into the crater stretching for miles beyond it. And over this edge spilled the river pronged by the island’s defiance, forming paired waterfalls past cyclopean masonry standing since time immemorial.

Find the Author

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Blue Boar Press



SciFanSat News



Alan Vincent Michaels

for their works

Shadows & Light People



About SciFanSat

SciFanSat is a monthly e-Zine of science fiction, fantasy and more! We are open to fictional prose and poetry that shelters with the range of speculative fiction genres.

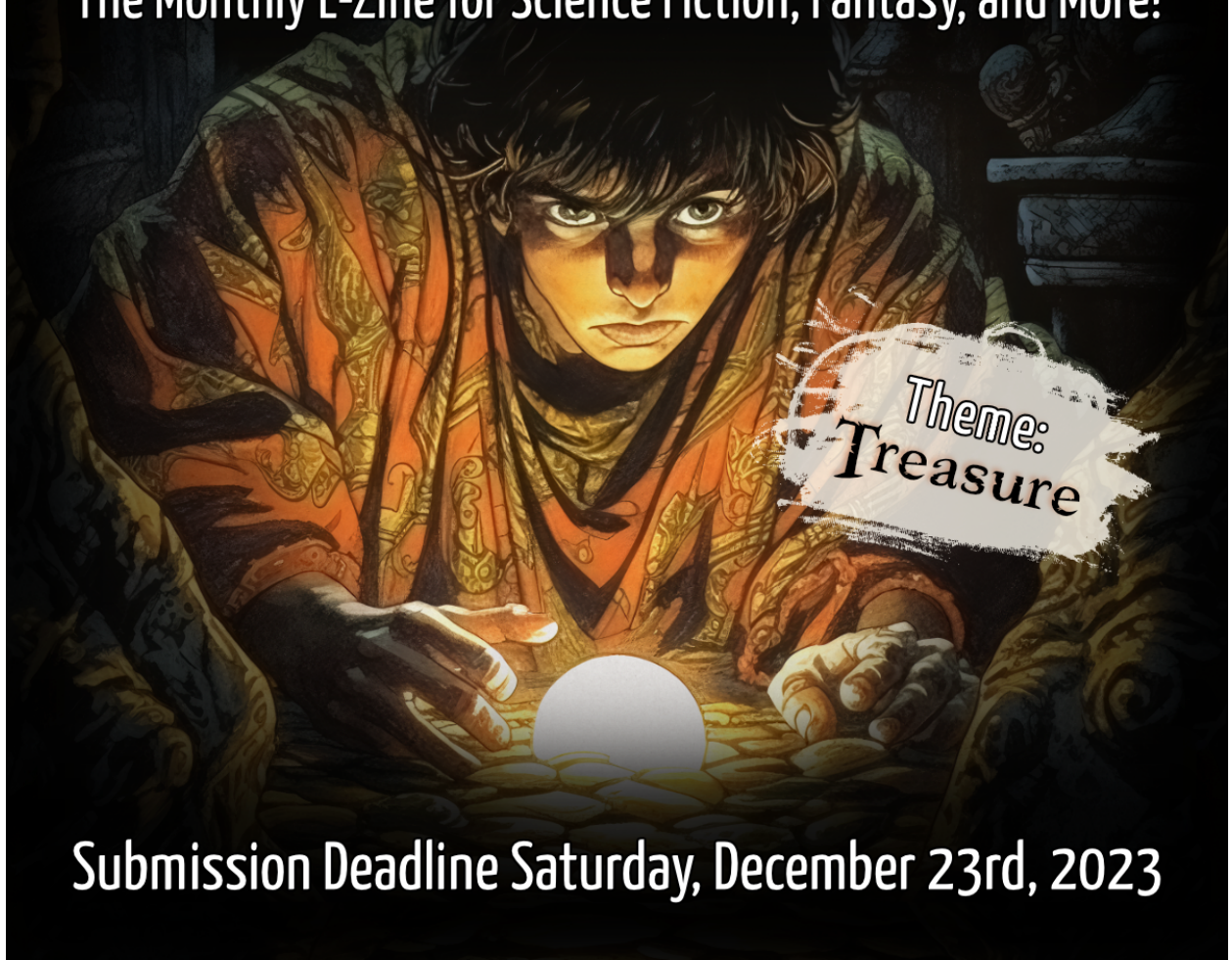
Full guidelines can be found on our submissions page, but in a nutshell, we are looking for and will accept poetry of 500 words and under, and prose in the following categories: Micro Fiction (100 words and under), Flash Fiction (101 to 1,000 words), and Short Stories (1,001 to 7,500 words). Each issue has a theme, and submissions for that month are encouraged to include or at least allude to it. Authors may submit multiple pieces to the same issue up to a total of 5,000 words. If a writer submits only one piece to an issue, the word count limit is extended to 7,500 words.

SciFanSat publishes on the last Saturday of every month. [Submissions](#) for the next issue open the moment the [current issue](#) publishes, and remain open until midnight on the next-to-last Saturday of the month.

Issue 5 Prompt

SciFansat

The Monthly E-Zine for Science Fiction, Fantasy, and More!



Theme:
Treasure

Submission Deadline Saturday, December 23rd, 2023

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