

March 29th, 2025

Issue 20 | Chaos

SciFansat

The Monthly Magazine for Science Fiction, Fantasy, and More!

Micro Fiction & Poetry

Alan Vincent Michaels

Nancy E. Dunne

Ross McDermott

Daniel Frini

Sylvain V Paquette

M. H. Thaug

Flash Fiction

Corina Morera - "A Coin for Freedom"

L.F.S. Alden - "First Drop"

Alastair Millar - "Alice's Eyes"

Mario Kersey - "Aisle of Calamity"

That Burnt Writer - "The Chaos Drive"

Short Stories

Kayleigh Kitt - "Closing the Gap"

Sean McGillis - "Becoming"



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Cover Illustration "Chaos Queen" by

Jason H. Abbott

Layout & Typesetting

Kimberly Abbott

For more information, address:

Blue Boar Press

PO Box 264

Boothbay Harbor ME, 04538

SKU: SFS-507DI-S



SciFanSat.com

BlueBoarPress.com

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Editorial

by Jason H. Abbott



Welcome to SciFanSat's twentieth issue, where chaos reigns! Well, sort of. Maybe. Definitely. But also, possibly not. Regardless, prepare yourself for science fiction, fantasy, and more where everything is made up and the points in spacetime don't matter!

We'll start with a swath of poems and microfictions in quantum flux by Alan Vincent Michaels, Nancy E. Dunne, Ross McDermott, Daniel Frini, Sylvain V Paquette, M. H. Thaung and more. From there, and not entirely by chance, we'll arrive at our flash fiction selections for March.

Corina Morera's "A Coin for Freedom" tosses a chance for escape to fans of the fantasy genre. A small squad faces chaos in L.F.S. Alden's "First Drop," and in "Alice's Eyes," Alastair Millar takes us on a science fiction voyage where survival is uncertain, yet nothing is gained without risk. Mario Kersey's "Aisle of Calamity" lightens the mood with a random interlude, and finally That Burnt Writer rolls dice loaded with black humor and parody in "The Chaos Drive".

Two short stories grace this issue. The first is "Closing the Gap" wherein Kayleigh Kitt weaves a tale through events fluxing through space and time while a protagonist seeks an elusive thread of continuity. Sean McGillis's "Becoming" ends the fiction this month on a random note, or perhaps a concert of them, that will leave you abuzz at the office watercooler.

Our gratitude goes out to all the authors and poets who contributed during these chaotic, exhausting weeks so that we can present this installment of SciFanSat. You, along with our readers, are the magic that makes the magazine happen. Keep writing, creating, and supporting each other. We hope you enjoy this issue, and please, join us again in April, when we take a much-needed break from reality to dive into our upcoming theme of ADVENTURE!

Jason H. Abbott
Editor, SciFanSat Magazine



Poetry

National Anathema

by Mario Kersey

Fireworks explode in my ear;
The shrapnel lodging in my mind's eye
Sending me to a myopolis
Where I hear the din of distraction,
An anarchy of sounds drowning
The muffled thud of a heart
Railing against the bars
Trying to escape between the lines,
The unwritten rules providing
Answers to quell the questions
Whispering after each peal of thunder
Overhead, a sound too heavy
The rest upon my mind which aches
Like the tooth which bites its master
While the cycle repeats with each neighbor
Who is not in good hands
Like catching grenades with kid gloves.



Cyclonic

by Ross McDermott



The hands that spin the weave
that work the loom
have bid their leave
and left the room
we must assume
we're at the mercy
of the storm.
Arbitrary chaos grows
amidst the cries
entwined in throes
to rise in swirling clouds of prose
to heed what has been warned.
Into the gale
we turn the helm
and face what once would overwhelm
amidst the sea of roll and swell
we send the cyclone back to hell.



The Chaos Theory Paradox

by Alan Vincent Michaels



Butterfly Effect
Time travelers' prime concern
It's our concern, too
Chaos Theory
Quantify all to know fate
The errand of fools
Just a theory
Change, complexity, and chance
Simply, of all things
Chaoticians wince
Deep-thinking experts worry
A challenge looming
They cannot test it
Outside factors shape results
They're left with guessing
It's a paradox
Initial conditions sway
Entrail reads akin
Our fate can't be known
Free will is no illusion
We are Butterflies

Poet's Note: This haiku sequence is dedicated to the memory of Edward Norton Lorenz (May 23, 1917–April 16, 2008), the former MIT meteorologist credited with founding modern chaos theory.



Loops of the spiral

by Sylvain V. Paquette



This minute doesn't last.

Fact is, as soon as a real needle hits the ground, it has and will have bounced back where it is.

Coincidentally or eternally.

Gravity knocks time forward immediately after any motion has had irrational effects on your previous perception of a reality.

Later on, before it even starts, a chaos has settled in a loop bound to recycle a physical representation of everything within your reach.

Collapsing in the present, all objects of a past are spiraling to a future which has yet to begin.

Contradicting every law of a magic world called conscience until it snaps again like it was meant to be.

In a limitless second of nothingness.

Curving at you.

Forever and never.

JUNE 20, 2004



Micro Fiction

No plan survives first contact

by M. H. Thaung



After the invasion forces materialised, Glitch fluttered near.

"You are alone? Where are my new slaves?" the Coloniser demanded.

Glitch's varicoloured wings trembled. "There are none."

"Surely you obeyed my commands."

"I did. I whispered to kings as they slept and nudged messages astray. I seeded the chaos you desired."

"So where are the denizens? They should be weakened, disunited and ripe for harvest."

"Your strategy was *too* successful. Bewilderment grew into aggression, and then into war. They did not stop." Glitch pointed one antenna at the desolate, shattered wasteland. "The humans did all this to themselves."



Chaos Reigns

by Nancy E. Dunne



The warriors had fallen. The clerics were exhausted and out of magical energy. Only the druid and a fighter remained, but the dragon had to be taken down.

As though it knew what the druid was worrying about, its giant amber eye focused on the druid as the head settled on the ground close by. "How do you want to proceed?" it boomed.

"With the only thing I have left," she whispered. "The chaos of my ancestors." She raised her hands as fire shot from her fingertips. "Boom."



I am Death, the Destroyer of Worlds

by That Burnt Writer



"FEAR ME! I am Detaniro the Destroyer! Galaxies quake at my approach, worlds weep. I appear before you as one of your Gods, and you—"

"Ahem..."

"Yes? What? Can't you see I'm in the middle of my speech?"

"Well, Excellency, the erm, problem is the humans don't seem that terrified."

"But I'm a Galactic Chaos Lord! They *are* taller than expected, but the research said... we *did* do research, right?"

"Yes, but—"

"So, why're they looking at me like that? Tickling my chin? Stroking my ears? Prrrrrrrrrrr."

Maybe kittens aren't gods after all?

"But the research—Ooh, I like that!"



Lasciate ogni speranza

by Daniel Frini

I peeked through the Gate of the Underworld. I saw a sunlit countryside and snowy mountains in the background — the snow, iridescent. An old man reaping wheat and smoking a pipe; some children laughing while racing bicycles on a path lined with cypress trees. A young, beautiful woman taking a break from hanging clothes, her face turned toward the sun. Her eyes closed, her smile placid. From the chimney of a small house, a column of smoke rose, mixing the smells of the firewood warming the hearth and the freshly baked bread.

Something isn't working the way I'd imagined.



Flash Fiction

A Coin for Freedom

by Corina Morera



Being free without asking permission is the transgression I commit every day. Today, those who know me admire me, fear me, or envy me and curse me for their own slavery.

However, what many don't know is that my freedom began when I was held captive.



I've almost forgotten why I was in that dirty stone cell, although I haven't forgotten the bony fingers that pointed to my face in the temple. "Sorceress!," they shouted. "She is one of them!" "She is one of her servants!" "We've seen her conjuring with snake bones!"

In Lanthem, women had been banned from using magic since the Age of Ennos; everyone knew that the women who employed it were followers of Innu, the Mistress of Primordial Chaos, the forbidden goddess. Only the priestesses of the continent's sacred pantheon had a certain freedom to call upon the essence of the Nymbria, the plane of the gods, and tend to the wounds of soldiers or adventurers who managed to reach them in time. And I wasn't one of those women.

It would never have occurred to me to even think about saying a prayer. Everything had an order, a balance to be maintained. I knew my place and was careful not to cross any lines.

I don't think I'll ever know if it was by chance, fate, or a whimsical joke of history. But there I was, the good girl, the meek one, in the middle of the fire of a war between clans for not wanting to take sides. In some ways, I'd become their sinner by refusing to sin.

And then she found me, exhausted after days on the damp stone of the dungeons.

Malnourished and with blurred vision, I heard the soft clink of metal rolling until it brushed against my right hand. A deep, disembodied voice, with a faint feminine undertone, addressed me from everywhere and nowhere. I was unable to locate her; was she perhaps speaking in my head?

"How many times have you told yourself that everything must change while you cling to the established order, girl?"

I tried to ask, to know who or what it was, and although nothing came out of my lips the voice answered.

"You know who I am, even if you fear me. My name echoes in the recesses of your mind as it withers. I am the one who destroys and creates, the one who whispers through the fissures of order, the one who plays between the fluttering of a butterfly, the outbreak of madness that will illuminate your dormant reason.

"Stop fearing me, Erin. It's time. The decrepit structures are already shaking, the foundations are cracking throughout Lanthem.

"Order is important, as is breaking it so it moves and cleanses the poison rooted in its walls.

"Hold me, free yourself and free the others. If you do, the uncertainty will be your companion and when everything seems to fall apart, you will remember that what is crumbling in our path is only an ancient prison. The change will have begun."

"What should I do?" I managed to whisper as I felt something inside me begin to stir, something ancient and slumbering, latent beneath my skin.

"Stop planning every inch of your life and every once in a while... flip a coin. Become the change no one expects, my daughter."

"Innu...".



They may have made it all up when they pointed their fingers at me, and maybe the flapping of their hands started the storm. Words have power and history loves irony.

At last, I opened my eyes. The essence of Nymbria traveled through every pore until it renewed my body, defeating fatigue. I looked at my fingers, spread out on the stone, brushing against the coppery metal I'd heard roll towards me earlier; a coin patiently waiting to be tossed. *So be it*, I thought, smiling to myself.

Still feeling the electric pulse in my veins, I began to sit up and tossed the coin, firmly believing I was now free despite the bars. I didn't need snake bones or dragon blood, potions or ancient words. Magic had existed long before any of those things.

Faith. That was it. Believe without a shadow of a doubt that it was possible.

And without an apparent plan, the coin played its role moved by the threads of a misunderstood chaos.

The guard, who was carrying a hard roll and some water, didn't see it coming and, distracted, slipped and fell heavily on the uneven floor of the prison, sending the keys flying into the cell. The scene had been so absurd that I struggled to hold back a laugh.

By the time the guard regained consciousness, his long gray cloak and I had already vanished...

Along with the key, for it remains with me after what happened, hanging on my neck to remind me that I'm free, that chaos is the beginning of a new order, and that I don't plan to stop opening doors in my path.



Alice's Eyes

by Alastair Millar



When the Aliens found us, they brought warning. Hundreds of massive asteroids, the remnant of some ancient astral apocalypse, would arrive within a human century, threatening not just Earth but a system wide extinction event.

There was chaos when the news leaked; panic at first contact, anger at perceived lies, fury at politicians who knew but dithered, thousands died in the rioting. Those who disbelieved were shown the evidence, provided by Them but confirmed by our own scientists. Ultimately, an uneasy calm was restored, and They offered us a new, habitable world, not so unlike our own, and antithetical to their own biology.

The decades that followed saw Earth's entire industrial base turned towards creating the great starships that would carry billions, powered by Alien propulsion systems that there was no time to explain to us.

Ultimately, many refused the journey, out of fear, out of disbelief, out of religious conviction; families were torn apart, and more strife followed, but eventually a date for the Great Migration was set. Alice, my wife, was one who refused to leave, strong in her Faith and unable to conceive of what was happening. Now, I stood with my twin sons on the observation deck of the Argo, one of the first ships to break orbit and, months later, enter warp.

Around us was a display of power that was almost inconceivable, wild maelstroms of energy only partially visible to our limited eyes, but nevertheless an intense Chaos of its own. There was an awesome, awful beauty in that wildness, those lights unlimited and untrammelled, the wheels within wheels and whirling shapes, the forces beyond our comprehension that might, with a single mistake, rip us apart from Being. Our Alien astrogators assured us that no such accident had occurred in generations of their spacefaring, but the risk was undeniable; we were void dancing on the cusp of annihilation, as a species and as individuals, and felt a joy in it. In spite of the loss, in spite of our grieving, we could not see it as anything other than beautiful.

No doubt our future was uncertain; we would need to tame a new world, learn to live with its existing species (if any), cope with the inevitable challenges to come. There would be conflict, and confusion, but amongst it all, we would grow up, grow old, live through relationships and rivalries and disagreements, and hope to survive. Many of our idealised beliefs would be confronted by new facts, against which some would once again inevitably rebel. Yet we would hold steady, we had no choice.

Standing beneath the vortices of Creation, I knew now that whatever fate befell us, Alice's eyes would still be the last thing I saw, wherever I was. Perhaps I would never truly be happy again, but the boys would go on, and see wonders I could never have dreamt of. Let it be so.



First Drop

by L.F.S. Alden

My uniform wraps me, still warm from the press, my boots mold to my feet, my weapon fills my hand, but no human touches me. My squad mates are colleagues, professionals, with nervous and activated semi-smiles. I long for someone to squeeze my hand. At least Beckett punches my shoulder good luck. The weight of the mission lies like lead in my gut: simply secure these abandoned, out of the way buildings. An easy assignment on a planet where the second objective of every mission reads: avoid capture. The walls of the shuttle are familiar but sterile, no comfort.

Drop. Glide. Boots down.

Noise assaults me, booming pressure until my ears pop, then sharp loudness. I yell, "Ambush," on my headset as others do around me. Maybe other squads will be spared.

I flatten as I yell, I smell the weapons fire. Smoky air holds a coherent light show.

The wet meat of Kramer's body hits the ground beside me: I am horrified. I roll to cover. Gratitude floods my mind that it is not me: I am horrified. I scoop up some of the gravel and dust with my gloved hand and throw it, hoping that even one speck of it covers Kramer. Something solid like concrete block sits between me and death and I don't know why that old superstition came to me, but it did. I hear Boise die over the headset. I hear no one else speak until Sarge's voice tells me to play dead and escape to what passes for woods to the south when I can.

I lower my head, try to relax my body while clinging to my weapon. The sound of the firefight slows and ends. Voices and boots walk nearby.

They are making sure of each body, prodding, double-tapping. I hear them lift someone groaning — I think Beckett — and drag her.

No. I can't.

I slowly, carefully, silently scrape some dirt inside the wrist of my glove.

I slowly, carefully, silently move my hands to position.

I poise my body for one perfect, fluid movement oriented on the sound of dragging. I rehearse it in my mind.

Pop up, shoot Beckett.

Two weapons flare at me as I spin my own weapon toward my femoral artery.

L.F.S. Alden walks and writes on Koasek Abenaki lands. Follow her poetry [on her web site](#); join her less-than-monthly [Writerly Newsletter here](#); find her larger projects through [The Signum Collaboratory](#); and of course enjoy her knitting patterns on [Ravelry](#).



The Chaos Drive

by That Burnt Writer



"This is Chet Arbuthnot III for Sol System News. Good evening from Mars.

Our top story today: The new quantum starship drives from SkipSpacer Enterprises were launched one Earth week ago, and the reviews are in on this latest piece of kit, said to shorten skipspace jump times by up to ninety percent using their new, highly secretive, Chaos engine. As you'd expect, the feedback has been glowing, and the company's share price has increased substantially, giving an overall bump to the galactic markets.

We're expecting a press conference shortly, and we'll be interviewing the captains of some of the ships with this new drive over the next twenty-four hour rotation as we marvel at the next stage of human exploration and expansion. Jenny Windermyre is on location for us at SkipSpacer headquarters on Mars. Jenny, how's it looking there?"

"Sheeit," Mike drawled, leaning over to turn the sound off. "More ways to lead us into debt an' indenture our souls, huh? Give it another week an' every other damn courier ship in this quadrant will be fitted with one of those. I've seen some of the advertising hook lines already: 'Orders delivered with Chaos'. We'll be out of business within a fortnight."

Carly grunted. "Why don't we get one then? Get ahead both literally and figuratively?"

"You seen the price on those damn things? We can barely afford the repayments on this heap of junk and still fuel it and eat." He sighed. "It's no damn life."

He stared out of the viewport at the stars as, on screen, the now silent Jenny became increasingly animated. It seemed, he thought, to be the current fashion with location reporters and, in a boxout, Chet was wearing a fixed rictus grin, presumably wondering how much more corporate BS he'd have to listen to.

"Those goddamn journalists don't know they're born," Carly muttered. "Standing there, experts on stuff they know nothing about, flouncing around like they're God's gift. Reckon she's ever been *anywhere* there's a risk of death?"

"Nope," Mike replied. "Her an' that pretty boy behind the desk ain't never left gravity. Mind you, it'd be funny to stick 'em on a ship for a bit watch 'em float around. See whether all that hard earned cash on bodysculptin' goes tits up in zero-G... as you said, both literally an' figuratively. Now *that'd* be chaos."

Carly snorted back a laugh.

"Weird to think, isn't it," she said, "that less than three hundred years ago none of us had gotten off-planet, and now there's... well, an entire new universe of possibilities."

"True, but I still don't trust them bugs," Mike said. "Turnin' up one day to help us with our space programme? Settin' up that immense trading station out past Neptune that's about the same size as Mercury? What's in it for them? They can't possibly want anythin' we've got."

"Don't let anyone in a port hear you call them that. That's species-ist."

"Since when d'you care about that?"

"I don't, but I know how loose your tongue gets on some of that station moonshine."

Mike belched loudly. "I could do with some o' that now. Let's see if these two are still blowin' smoke up SkipSpacer's ass, eh?"

He increased the volume just as Jenny's voice went up in pitch.

"Oh. My. Goodness. This is rare! The CEO of SkipSpacer has personally issued a press release! Let me read it... SkipSpacer Enterprises was proud to launch... blah blah blah... ah, here we go. Listen to this Chet, the rumours appear to be true, they've been partnering with the Q'ranglia on this new technology... they really are at the forefront of human diplomacy right now! I've heard that even our best AIs and finest human minds haven't been able to understand the mathematics behind exactly how these new engines work – the closest human concept is Chaos Theory, which is where they got the name from."

In the studio, Chet's professional smile was clearly being tested to its limits as Jenny giggled.

"Thank you, Jenny, for that wonderful piece of insightful reporting for those who've missed the background to the name. Now, we'll have the zero-G sports roundup with Sara in a couple of minutes right after the interplanetary shipping forecast."

"Great," Mike said. "Just great. More insect technology."

...

An earth week later, Chet was back onscreen looking serious as a list of ship names scrolled beside him.

"We're getting reports that vessels are disappearing from various different parts of the quadrant. The running tally is now four-hundred and thirty-one, and growing by the hour. Law enforcement are looking for connections, not the least because some of their newest patrol cruisers are among the missing. The Q'ranglia have offered assistance, which the United Planetary Government has accepted with thanks."

"They're after something," said Carly.

"I don't think you're wrong. An' what is it these damn newsfeeds ain't sayin'?"

"Lots," said Carly. "They're puppets of the Government."

"Yeah. An' the Government are puppets of them damn aliens."

...

Deep within the bowels of what the humans had labelled Q'ranglia Trading Station One, the base commander relaxed as another vessel appeared in the large void that acted as a holding pen.

To the human government envoys who'd visited two cycles previously, this was a place where trade and commerce was at its finest, the vast space used to package and transport goods back to the Q'ranglia home world using dematerialisation technology.

If they could see what it was being used for now, they'd be horrified, albeit not for long. He was still amused by the name the humans had given the modified engines: *Chaos*. It sounded uncannily close to the Q'ranglia word for *lunch*.

"Sir." His second-in-command communicated telepathically. "That's the last of those we are gathering today."

"Good," he replied. "Have the ships, weapons, and humans been neutralised?"

"Aye, Sir."

"Excellent. Then, before we disengage our scout mission from this system and allow The General his fun, let us feast on the heretics."



Aisle of Calamity

by Mario Kersey

The soporific day drone incessantly while I relived the good ole days listening to the grocery stores easy rock coming through tinny speakers. The avocados looked like emeralds glistening in the pale light of the store. Across from me, I saw her. My hand moved independently as I stared at the face I had locked in my heart years ago. As the removal of the avocado caused the others to avalanche onto the floor, a small smile exposed perfect teeth. I stepped forward, an avocado rolled under my foot and the floor caught me. She walked around to find me staring into space.

"Calamity is still your strongest, I see."

"Unlucky, I guess."

Everything once static in my mind now liquified into hectic change and tentative possibility. I knew not how the rest of the day would progress, but our...relationship would be forever calamity.



Short Story

Becoming

by Sean McGillis

As a teen, I had little interest in things going on around me at school. I wasn't a social outcast; I just didn't have a strong desire to fit in. Friday night lights, dances and house parties weren't for me. It all seemed like so much chaos that would only distract me from the education that would be my ticket out of this subdivision. I was going to make something of my life.



Fast forward twenty some years after college. I'm approaching middle age and fully immersed in my career at Apiary Industries. Although I've barely made mid-level within the organization, my performance appraisals are always glowing. Keep plugging away, they say. One day you'll make it to the top!

So, like a good little worker-bee I continue chiseling away at the block of marble, whether I'm feeling it or not. Sadly, I begin to believe I'm missing something, but I can't figure out what that something is. Although directing one's attention away from our work is strongly discouraged, I look around me. The other employees are whirring with activity, a sight to behold. Ashamed, I attempt to snap out of my malaise and get on with my day.

Our work is important.

Far behind in my duties, I'm oblivious to the others filing out of the office for the day. Some mention meeting at a local watering hole while others exchange general pleasantries. Head down, I continue with my current project. Until an unexpected voice from behind nearly sends me to the ceiling.

"Staying rather late, aren't we, York?"

I turn around and wait for my heart to come back down from my throat. It's Debbie, the director of my section. Some think she's a deity and I've heard others refer to her as 'The Queen'. Although resplendent in black slacks and a yellow blouse, she looks just like anyone to me.

She waits for my reply. Although I've composed myself and I'm comfortable enough in her presence, I'm unsure of how I should properly address her. As if sensing my thoughts, she simply says, "Just Debbie is fine."

Still, I stand there quietly. Frowning, she tries again to get a response out of me, this time with a trace of motherly concern in her voice. "You're one of our bright lights, York, but I can tell that your glow is beginning to dim. What's going on? How can I help you to shine at full strength again?"

Finally, I open up to her and she listens like nobody has listened to me my entire life. It feels like a catharsis. At times she nods and at other points of my sob story she looks sadly at me. I feel as if she truly cares. Never once does she interrupt me. When I'm finished speaking, she smiles, and with an index finger punctuating every word she enthusiastically states, "I know exactly what you need!"

...

I've been waiting nearly half a year for the day of this concert to arrive. Although I couldn't recall hearing anything by The Becoming on the airwaves, word on the street was this band was smoking hot. Reviews in e-zines such as City Pulse, with titles such as "A Sonic Spectacle" and "True Theater" gushed over them.

My front and center ticket would have cost me a month's rent, fortunately the company had footed the bill and even sprung for a limo. I felt a little out of place in such elegance dressed in my tee shirt and khaki cargo shorts.

Regardless of not having to pay, I hoped the buzz was real and not just a bunch of hype. I had really been anticipating this event and would hate to be disillusioned. Surprisingly for such a relatively new band, there was no warmup act. Shortly after eight, the lights went down.

I'm really not sure what happened after that. There were colored and strobing lights, a band definitely took the stage, and they may have had conventional instruments such as drums, guitars, bass and mic. What really struck me though was the quintet's attire. They weren't wearing anything silly like antennae, but other than that looked like a group of bees. They were eerily reminiscent of a Christian hard rock band from well over a hundred years ago. A black banner behind them with bold yellow lettering proclaimed, The Yellow & Black Attack - Swatting Down Nonconformity Everywhere!!

Then there was the music. There had to be music, right? This was a concert after all. Oddly though, I'm clueless as to how I'd describe it, and I'm not sure it could easily be pigeonholed into a genre. Soundwaves pulsed and droned and shook me to the core. It may have had the volume of a childhood lullaby, or it may have put Motörhead to shame, but again it was something sensed by the gut more than the ears.

Was the vocalist even opening his mouth? I don't recall lyrics or singing but there were songs with titles. Those titles may have been displayed on a screen behind the band, or they simply could have been flashing in my head. Tunes from their catalog such as, "Dance of the Swarm", "Honey (Nectar of the Oppressed)", and the smash hit "Hive Mentality".

Finally, let's not forget the crowd. They're always an integral part of the concert experience. And remember what I said about feeling this band in the gut? Boy, somebody sure was! The evidence was all around their feet. From the smell, I don't think they were the only one tossing their tacos. Although it felt rather cool in the venue, many were bathed in sweat, their eyes beginning to glaze over. Some were writhing, some moaning, and others were doing both. Then I saw something that really astounded me. Is it physically possible for a person's face to become that contorted without the aid of a mechanical device? What he saw looked like a burning nightmare from a wax museum.

There wasn't a mosh pit per se, but bedlam was beginning to break out all around me. A few lost souls began to bolt for the exit. Judging from the scowls on the security details faces, I think

they'll be returning to their seats for the rest of the show. Mesmerized, I resist the urge to run. This is the moment I've been waiting for forever! I'm becoming.



Over the intercom Debbie barked an order to the technicians. "I think we're good here! Remove York from the Sensory Room before he's nothing but a vegetable."

"I don't know if he's better yet," hissed Enid, the CEO. "How can you be so certain? I'd hate to have to put him through therapy again. These 'cures' cut into our profits."

Debbie had a job to do and toed the line, yet still she thought of her charges as more than tools. She shot a look at the other woman that wiped the smug look off her face. She wondered how long Enid would have lasted in that SFX room from hell. Their esteemed CEO probably would have been spouting gibberish after ten minutes; it was a testament to York that he had resisted this long. Visions of their leader in the Sensory Room made her laugh, which drew a look from Enid, but she didn't say anything. That was probably for the best. Enid was growing long in the tooth, and Debbie would be waiting in the wings. Their society was not one of hostile takeovers, so she would bide her time. The old ways were becoming stale, changes would be coming.



Closing the Gap

by Kayleigh Kitt



There's the usual hum of computer terminals, overseen by the warm-white strip lights. Crackle-worn bucket seats loosely dot carpeting, along with random worktables between the uniform racks of books, volumes all in neat rows. Well-oiled trolleys run along the linoleum section of the library, pushed by librarians, carrying tomes to be re-housed.

Someone's taken my usual burnt-orange chair. The one which catches the afternoon sun, bathing its occupant in gold. I wish it were me.

At the end of a stack, I finally spy the battered indigo-covered volume, brittle milky masking tape holding the board and marriage of its contents together.

Loping down the next aisle, my heart speeds up, my palms become slick, leaden feet try to sprint. Overhead, a bulb buzzes, flickering out, then ticking.

The lamp sparks back on, casting coppery light.

Not a lamp.

A flambeau hissing sour, acrid fat.

"We've captured shaft six, Major," his mouth barks. Suspicious clods of pink-like blancmange drip from his tangled beard.

Raising a galvanised mesh glove, he shoves the conical helmet further up his forehead, leaving a verdigris stain across a jagged eyebrow wound.

"What the—" I proclaim, flinging up my arms.

He nimbly dances back from my blade, hissing, "Whoa, Selene!"

"I'm not—" I begin, then snap my teeth together, the broadsheet map dangling from my other hand.

Stood in the domed atrium, spidery tunnels branch off. My eye first lands on a mountain of shoes in one mouth. Trees grow from another, their baby-blue branches snaring passers-by. Guttural cries of war spill into the area, mingling with a metallic tang.

There are no shelves of clear-covered books, no bucket seats, no satchel, beanie or scarf. Instead, buttery-coloured metallic netting cocoons my torso, my limbs scream, and the crimson-spattered broadsword in my hand stands stark against the turmeric-coloured earth. I've transitioned through.

"Major!" He shifts his weight to the other leg.

"What?" I snarl.

"Your orders?" he asks.

"Status report," I boom, before blinking.

My vision swims.

"Here. I think you just dropped this."

I stare up at the speaker, frowning at the wall of books behind him.

"Thanks," I croak, taking back the fair-isle beanie. My fingertips touch his palm, a jolt racing up my arm and I tuck it under the dark mauve book now clutched against my chest.

He's clean-shaven, dressed in jeans, with a white T-shirt peeking under his jacket, the zip partially down. As the radiators groan, I loosen the umber scarf around my neck.

We stare at each other.

"Are you taking that book out?" He nods at the volume pressed against my coat.

I lick my lips, thumb tracing its greying edges, breathing in the petrichor.

"No." My hand refuses to relinquish it and the cartography I know that's hidden within its pages.

He holds out a palm.

There's a lime green flash.

"Major? Major?" His face is so close, I cannot stop the reflective gag action from the decay.

Again, I blink, twice.

My vision shifts to a silvery scar cutting one eyebrow in half and running up into his hairline, a gold chain against his snowy t-shirt.

"Are you a member of the Earthwalker group? Wait, you're Major Selene Earthwalker?" he hisses quietly.

My jaw becomes loose, my head buzzing. "You're not Talon Coopershield," I accuse.

"His brother, Kael," he shrugs.

"Did we succeed?" I ask eagerly.

Kael surges forward, attempting to snatch the dark violet backed book and I scream, blinking as a broadsword protrudes from my chest and I hear a chuckle. Crumpling to my knees, the saffron floor instantly stains my skin. A curtain of darkness claims me. My assailant's face is unknown, but I know it's not Talon, my general.

“Selene.”

I blink.

Kael’s face is so close I can see the silvery seamed tissue on his forehead.

“We can destroy the book. Trust me.”

He wrenches the volume out of my hand, and I gasp as he instantly vanishes.

Later that evening, I finger the dress resting in the conker-coloured portmanteau, its stickers declaring its adventures—my adventures in this realm. The steamer trunk lives under my bed — has lived under my bed for several decades. With its bald corner and the frayed stitches, the edging drooping like an amused mouth, the latches groaning when opened.

From it, the teal dress skims my waist and hips before heading to kiss the floor; authentic for stewarding an enchanted light festival, along with my waterfall-braided hair.

I have no choice now other than futilely wander the library over the next few weeks, waiting for the book to reappear to its anchor. It’s a recurring pattern. Outside, I’m sure I’ll see him with my fertile imagination everywhere. He’ll be in the coffee shop, at the supermarket checkout, leaving the post office; except he won’t be. And whatever his agenda, I won’t know until the next transition.

Midnight fingers have crept between the trees. My wind-up lantern rests over an arm, its warm glow pooling beneath on the stony path.

“Have a lovely evening,” I repeat, pushing flyers into excited fingers.

I rear back. His hand fastens to my wrist and in the dim light, I see his scarred forehead, notice his shadowed broad shoulders, and that gold chain glistening around his neck.

My lamp stutters, winking out.

I blink.

Phut-phut. He holds an oil-soaked mussal in his other hand; scarlet smears his conical helmet and nose guard; the tiny hammered eagle sits prominently on his breastplate; his emblem tabard is missing and there’s that gold chain around his throat.

“No,” I scream, twisting from his grip, while the galvanised mesh cocooning my torso fluidly undulates with my efforts.

“Major! The Court of Disaris is ours,” he crows, his hand still gripping my arm.

I blink, swaying in the gloom.

The trees whisper the truth.

“I’m still getting visions too,” he murmurs. “Let’s go somewhere we can talk.”

“You’re mistaken. I’m Kath, a volunteer in the library—a nobody. I sit in the break room with my tuna butty with the suspicion of mayonnaise and a few slices of cucumber shoehorned in,” I babble.

He chuckles hollowly. “I know who you are, Major.”

“Talon? Talon Coopershield?” I whisper, although I know he’s not.

He shakes his head. “His brother Kael. Do you not remember, Selene?” he asks silkily.

“No,” the lie bursts from my lips like an escaping bubble. “And where’s the book?”

“Hush,” he says urgently, looking over my shoulder. “I have it—”

I blink.

There’s an explosion, rocks raining down on our heads. Crouching, I rub my chin with the back of my hand. It comes away smeared in scarlet. He lies there on the ground, forehead furrowed. Clumsily pushing himself to stand, he lunges, a dagger in his hand.

I cry out, my broadsword swinging.

Blinking, he's half-carrying, half-guiding me down the path, pushing branches away from us, then ramming leaflets into another steward's hands, with soothing words that he's an old friend and I'm sick.

As we reach the clearing and the car park, I ram a boot into his groin.

Kael writhes on the ground while I swiftly search his jacket, tugging out the indigo book.

There's a lime green flash.

"Welcome back Major," Talon Coopershield, my General greets me.

"Report, please General." I say, sinking to the carved seat at the head of the table.

We still have work to do.

A new cycle begins.

A fresh war looms.



SciFanSat News

The Bartleby B. Boar Nomination



goes to

Ryan Parker

for their work

Grounded in a Black Heaven



About SciFanSat

SciFanSat is a monthly magazine 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.

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 Thursday of the month.

Next Issue Prompt

