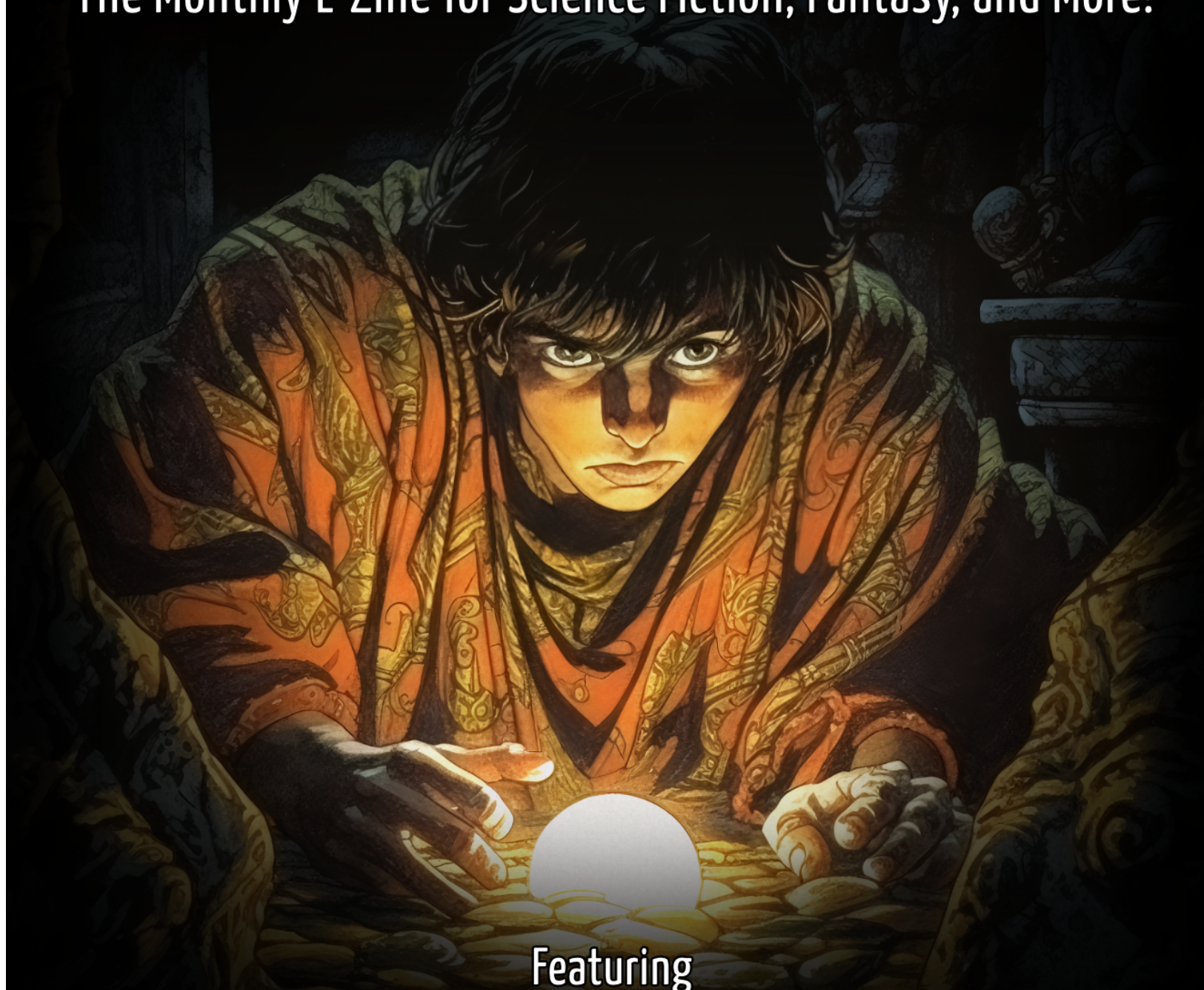


December 30th, 2023

Issue 5 | Treasure

SciFanSat

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



Featuring

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Cover Illustration "Vox of the Sphinx" by
Jason H. Abbott

Layout & Typesetting
Kimberly Abbott

For more information, address:

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Editorial

First, a major round of thanks to the authors who found time to submit pieces for this December issue of SciFanSat! The last weeks of the year are crowded with events that don't make it easy to find the solitude to write, let alone polish and submit finished drafts. For those of you with the fortune or planning that allowed you to share your words with us for our last issue of 2023, you have our hearty gratitude!

Next year, our December release will be a special "Best Of" issue featuring the prior eleven months' worth of submissions that garnered prestigious *Bartleby B. Boar Awards*. Not only will this highlight the winners in a retrospective of the finest the magazine offered in 2024, but it will also offer a break during this time of year packed with so many holidays and vacations. We will update our publishing agreement for next year to reflect this.

For your dauntless editor and producer duo of SciFanSat, this December has been busy and sometimes challenging. As an update for those who knew or did not, my wife Kim — the half of the team that formats, designs, and codes each issue besides assistant editing — had major surgery at the end of November. She is recovering well, but her recovery time, medical follow-ups, and necessitated reduced activity had an expected impact on our creative output. To those restraints, whisk in a mix of normal holiday plans and shenanigans, then add a severe storm that left us without power and a broken furnace in winter's chill thereafter. It certainly was a month with a lot to navigate!

The situation forced me to hold off on submitting the next installment of *Shadow of the Black Tower* to this month's issue for lack of time to finish the draft. The serial will return in January's SciFanSat. I regret having to do that, but as December unfolded with unforeseen complications requiring most of my time to resolve, it was proven to be a wise decision.

But at no point did we regret having an issue of SciFanSat to set up during this last week of 2023. Putting together the magazine has been a transformative experience for my wife and I, and we look forward to it. We love doing it for the community. You are fantastic writers. We are honored to support you and that you share your time and work with us. In less than a year, we've gone from a microfiction writing event to a monthly publication. In the six weeks between issues one and two, Kim stunned me by building an online infrastructure from scratch that improved the SciFanSat experience exponentially. It is amazing to see how my idea became a reality so quickly with her and I working together alongside the commitment from this community.

As we enter 2024, SciFanSat is going strong. The future is bright!

-Jason H. Abbott



Poetry

My Voice Is Dust

by Alan Vincent Michaels

I stare longingly at the diamond
Its luminescence, mesmerizing
A surfeit of wafting smoke

I loathe this stone demon
Its gaze fills me with utter dread
Dark rubied, searing eyes

I sense my rewards await
Its impious remains, my final challenge
Stygian, arcane treasures—soon mine!

I watch the diamond brighten
Its master's desires command me
My hands reach out, hesitantly

I stroke the jewel's glowing facets
Its white fire pulsates along my arms
My eyes close—my world unravels

I open crystalline eyes, seeing anew
A young man stands before me
He smiles and walks away

I try desperately to scream
My voice is dust
My heart is filled with stone



Find the Author

AlanMichaels.com

[Instagram | @alanvmichaels](https://www.instagram.com/alanvmichaels)



X

by Alan Vincent Michaels

X marks the spot

An ancient map held in my ruined hands
Parchment frayed and tortured with age
Acquired from a mumbling savant

I had come in search of treasures
Riches beyond any calculation—I had hoped
Truth transforms my euphoria into misery
I stare at the ground—shame spiraling within me

All my years of fruitless searching
Guided by dreams—the winds of exploration
Now, surrounded by a torrid emptiness
Burnt rocks, glassy scorpions—my only witnesses

No pyramids beneath an engulfing desert
No statues to long dead, nameless gods
No gold discs that summon the Sun to rise again
No emeralds, rubies, or diamonds

Only...sand...

A colossal X carved into weathered rock
A miniature X twin on my map
You Are Here symbols on mall directories
Dance between my thoughts of failure

Wherever you go, there you are!
I never needed a map to know that
I trudge across shifting sands to the X
My sight swirls into a kaleidoscopic fury

Suddenly, I am in my home garden at twilight
My children run to hug me—peals of delight
My wife smiles, her eyes brim with words
Welcome home, my love

The riches of my life were always here
My true *Pot of Gold* at the *Rainbow's End*
I smile and pick up my youngest daughter
Yes, my love, I am home



WOMBO dream.ai & Motionleap effects

Composited by Alan Vincent Michaels

Find the Author

AlanMichaels.com

[Instagram | @alanvmichaels](https://www.instagram.com/alanvmichaels)



Micro Fiction

The Treasure of the Dragon Fumante

by Voima Oy

There is a island rising out of the sea. Looking down on the green hills is a volcano called Fumante— the Smoking One. Years ago, it was active, raining ash down on the fields and houses. Now, it sleeps, mostly. Sometimes, there is rumbling, and a smoke ring floating lazily among the clouds.

Look, look, we say, you can see her shadow in the clouds. You can see the pebbles of volcanic glass smoothed by the waves. We gather them, make jewelry with them. We call them dragon's tears, the treasure of the dragon Fumante.



Indifference

by Valery Dion

“It’s time, my lord,” squealed Ker Conius. “Set the town alight with your glory!”

Lord Bayne belched, and scratched a meaty thigh. He settled his cushioned bottom into his ergonomic throne.

“Even if the ungrateful wretches don’t deserve it,” Lord Bayne snapped. “Complain, complain, all those mud eaters know how to do!”

“But my lord,” sputtered Conius, “the lumen’s light grants a cycle of hope and plenty. Surely my lord wants our colony to thrive?”

“Sounds like a “you”problem Conius,” shrugged Lord Bayne, “besides, I sleep better when it’s dark.”

Find the Author

[X | @ValeryKaye](#)



Adventure

by Kimberly Abbott

"Let's go!" she said, taking his hand.

"How do you know it's even still there? And the cave, at night Jen?"

"Once we're inside, the cave is always dark silly, we'll bring flashlights."

John looks at Jennifer reluctantly, "why'd we have to find that old treasure map at freaking midnight?", he whines.

"This is going to be awesome!", Jen exclaims, as she pulls the chain to the attic light.

The room goes dark, and adventure begins.



Flash Fiction

The Orphanage

by Brent Streeter

Pan trudged through the heavy snow that blanketed the abandoned street. His bare feet burnt from the frigid ice. In his hands he clutched the meager sum of coins he'd made begging in the town square. It wasn't much, but to him, it was a lifeline.

The abandoned orphanage's ugly red-brick front loomed up ahead. He reached its worn front door and rapped twice, paused and rapped again. There was a lull before Pan heard the beam that secured it slide away. It creaked open just wide enough for him to slip inside. The doorkeeper, a child no older than Pan, eyed him before sliding the beam back and settling down in a nook for the next child.

Pan ignored the glare and pushed deeper into the dilapidated building, with its bare peeling plastered walls. He passed clusters of grimy children speaking in hushed whispers, while huddled together for warmth. Hollow, sunken eyes trailed after him. In one corner, a fight broke out. The fighters snarled and hissed at each other like feral animals.

Pan stopped in front of a large pair of immaculate oak doors. He glanced down at the coins he held, took a deep breath, and gave a sharp knock.

"Enter," came a muffled voice from within.

Pan pushed open the doors and felt warmth engulf him. He stood in the open doorway, surprised by the stark contrast between this secluded room and the rest of the building. To say the room was lavish was an understatement. It seemed like someone had moved everything valuable that had once graced the entire building to this room. A fire blazed in a hearth, the source of the sudden warmth, and lounging on armchairs befitting a noble's manor were the eldest of the orphanage thieves, its leaders.

Cruel eyes regarded Pan as he stepped into the room and shut the door. The youngest, looking to prove his worth, sprung to his feet and swaggered over, with thumbs thrust into his trousers' waistline and shoulders hunched forward. An oily smirk exposed blackened teeth. The boy circled Pan.

"Wha' you got for us, Sport?" He glanced back at the others. The oldest nodded in approval. "Betta be somefing real good."

Pan's knees trembled, but he stood his ground. "Got the day's earnings I does."

The boy stopped in front of Pan and rocked back on his heels. "Hear tha', Gents? This 'un's got us some coin."

The others snickered and snorted, their eyes never leaving Pan.

"Well, let's see then." The boy gestured. "Cough it up, we ain't got all night."

Pan unclenched his fist, revealing the coins.

The boy whistled. "Well, I'll be. Tha's the saddest excuse for a begging haul ever to grace these here halls. Wha' ya fink, Gents?"

The others scoffed and jabbed at each other, nodding.

"Not nearly enough to cover the night's boarding fees."

The boy tried to snatch the coins from Pan's hand, but he was faster and pulled away.

"What about my cut?"

Silence fell over the room.

"Your cut?" The boy grabbed Pan by his clothes and shoved him up against the doors. "You don' get a cut."

"But the code says—" Pan cried.

The boy snarled. "We made the code and we get the final say." He held out his hand. "Now, hand over the coin."

"No."

The boy's cheeks flushed an angry red. "What did ya say?"

"I... I said no!"

"Ah, thought I heard right."

The others rose from their seats.

"There's one option left, then." The boy said and punched Pan hard in the gut before throwing him to the ground where the others joined in the beating.

Pan remained silent throughout, clutching the coins fiercely.

“That’s enough,” the oldest said. “Throw him in the *hole*. Come tomorrow, he’ll wish he hadn’t shorted us.”

Hands hauled up Pan, barely conscious, and dragged him out of the room, across the crowded hallway that watched in silence, and finally threw him into the hole—a small space beneath the floorboards.

Pan looked up in defiance as the floorboards were slotted and then nailed back into place, sealing him in darkness. He found the *hole* near impossible to move about in and his body ached from the beating. Unable to hold his bravado any longer, he cried himself to sleep in the cold, dark confines of his prison.

He was not sure how long he had slept before the shrieks of terror and chilling screams woke him. Seized by panic, he cried out for help and pleaded to be released, but nobody came. The harsh truth dawned on him; he was going to die in this *hole*.

Just as that sickly dread was settling in, the orphanage fell silent. Pan cocked his ears, trying to listen, when a loud heavy clop like a horse’s hoof thudded down near his prison. With a sudden ferocity, the floorboards were ripped away and Pan peered up at a horrifying creature. It felt like his heart had crawled into his throat.

Black shaggy fur hung from its frame in thick, matted clumps. Two long horns extended from its goat-like face, curling back on themselves. Its legs ended in cloven hooves that scorched the wood it stood on. In one gnarled hand, it held a birdcage that was filled with swirling vapour. In the other, it held a birch rod.

Pan cowered beneath its heavy gaze, and then it spoke in a voice as old as the world.

“You have been judged on this winter’s night and I leave you with the greatest treasure of all. I leave you with your soul.”

It turned from Pan and, without another word, vanished.

Pan waited for what seemed an eternity before he stole a glance beyond the *hole*. Bodies lay sprawled on the wooden floor, faces pale and eyes vacant. Amongst them, those that had been spared stood shaken and weeping.

Pan knew he would never forget this night of living dread.

Find the Author

[CreativeScrolls](#)
[Instagram | @creative_scrolls](#)



If only

by That Burnt Writer

If only.

Those two words have haunted human history.

If only we'd helped each other instead of stoking divisions. *If only* we'd not twisted the words of Gods to satisfy the ambitions of Man. *If only* we'd pooled human knowledge instead of closely guarding secrets. *If only* we'd been more careful with our resources.

My own personal *if only* moment centred around what the AI reliably informed us was Christmas Eve 5037 AD. We'd given up worshiping that particular deity millennia ago, but the tradition of giving each other gifts and celebrating with lights, noise and food in the darkest nights of winter had somehow persisted, even though we were now amongst the stars and winter wasn't really a thing any more except in holo-chambers.

We were prospecting a little-known and mostly unmapped area of the outskirts of the Milky Way. The Captain called it the outhouse, but we didn't get the joke. Probably something historical, she loved her history.

Probes that had previously passed through had found nothing of interest or value, so the mega-corporations had moved on, assuming this was dead space. There were still some pickings for independent traders like us though, enough to refuel both the ship and the crew for the next voyage, but only if you got lucky and the pirates didn't catch you. That was why, when we'd registered our flight plan, we'd dropped out halfway through our hyperspace jump to chart our real course. There was nothing within five light years.

If only we'd not discovered that rock. We'd nearly passed it by, but something had piqued the Captain's interest after the sensors pinged back with traces of one of the rarer elements.

"There might be enough there," she'd said, "to give us a shorter trip this time." That had convinced everyone to go look. We all wanted an easy payday, to spend a few extra precious hours having R&R on one of the waystations where you'd get anything for the right price in some of the dingier pods. Illicit alcohol, chemical boosters, bionics, sexual experimentation of the kind that is banned in thirty systems...

Anyway, we'd circled this asteroid whilst the sensors ran more detailed scans, and had gathered round to read the results. When it lit up like one of those legendary Christmas trees, everyone was silent for a moment before erupting into joy.

"This," the Captain said, slapping me heartily on the back, "this'll make us rich." She'd got the food processors to whip up something alcoholic, even though they weren't supposed to be able to. Ah, the joys of an aftermarket patching.

The next few hours were hard work though, prepping the collectors and mining equipment ready for deployment. Whilst that was going on, I ran a diagnostic on the weapons systems. Last thing we wanted was someone sneaking up on us and taking this prize from under our noses.

Finally, everything was ready, the kit was launched, and we watched as small clouds of dust showed the impact of their landings. Immediately, streams of data started coming through and the realisation hit us. This wasn't just a goldmine – another weird anachronism from the days when we were confined to one planet – this was the absolute jackpot, treasure beyond our wildest dreams. We'd never have to work again.

"It's... it's ninety-seven percent pure dislium," someone whispered. It was true. Underneath the accreted layers of space dust, this was the rarest element in any quadrant, let alone this one. Spoken of in almost hushed tones by manufacturers, this amount could power the entire combined set of human fleets for the next million years and then some. We'd be unstoppable as a species.

"Slow down," the captain ordered the drones. "We need to reflect carefully on our next steps. We could take traces back of this, but if we carry all of it, we'll have the biggest bounty on our heads in history."

Damn, she was right. I glanced back at one of the screens and caught my breath.

"Ma'am..." I stuttered.

"What?"

“L... look.”

Everyone’s gaze followed my outstretched finger. On one of the drone’s cameras, something was moving. It was almost as if the rock itself had come to life, arching up and over before snuffing out all of the feeds one by one as each of the machines went offline.

“Diagnostic, now,” she snapped and we leapt to our stations, only to find that they were scrolling lines of garbage text.

“I’m down!”

“Me too!”

“Same here!”

We plunged into darkness, and you could hear the ship’s reactor core powering down.

“*Shit*. Was that life support?”

I didn’t want to die out here.

One single screen came back to life, a flashing cursor. That wasn’t good – the last time anyone had seen that was in the last major overhaul.

Then... words.

“SUCH A PRIMITIVE LANGUAGE.”

You could hear the intake of breath. Suddenly everything was back online, sirens blasting as the rock seemed to almost unfold before us on the main viewport. The inside of it glowed a gentle orange and it seemed to expand toward us.

“YOU WILL BE PRESERVED IN THE ARCHIVE.”

“Ma’am, systems offline, we’re being drawn in.”

“All weapons, fire!” the Captain screamed, but it was too late, we’d be caught in the blast. I triggered them anyway, but nothing happened. The glow enveloped us, and we transcended.

- - -

Our perception of the universe is far greater.

We understand the historical Gods were merely higher consciousnesses toying with us.

Dislium is rare because it powers interdimensional gateways – we know that now.

I guess being in The Archive isn’t too bad. They have curiosity in our existence in the same way that people used to pin insects to examine them, although we’re not dead. Weirdly, there is no pain.

Another species is approaching the gateway. We don’t know this one, but soon we will be able to study them in detail.

The Archive is everything and we? We are now gods.

Find the Author

[X | @ThatBurntWriter](#)



Short Story

A Death, a Fortuitous Alliance and an Unexpected Outcome

by Isabella du Lac

The cinnabar dusk streaked across the sky
cloaking the world in a red glow.
Like a sinner seeking absolution
the Tribold General named Norpak bent his head.
Knowing he was about to die
he sought diversion but
the blood of departed heroes
was not enough to assuage his thirst and
proved only a momentary distraction as
a trillion marching feet trod upon his body,
judged him shoddy; lacking in humanity,
just a grease monkey full of profanity.
Choking on his bile, sliding on the slag heap of ambition
he changed position and sank further into the pile.
Eyes watched him in his death throes,
then arms turned his face to Hell.

Norpak screamed and threw the covers off his bed. Drenched in sweat he dashed a hand across his eyes, and up across his oily black hair.

“Come here, Paynode,” he screeched at the bent white-haired old man stumbling about at the far side of the room. “What are you doing lurking over there? Bring me some wine and be quick about it.”

Paynode shambled slowly over to his master’s side and handed him a small tankard full to the brim, Norpak gulped it down, slurped and spilt most of it on his person. With speech, slightly slurred, he slumped back down onto his bed and barked at Paynode to bring him another drink.

“Sorry Master, that’s the last of the purple flame from Vincusa,” said Paynode, bowing and hiding his face with his arm, as if expecting a blow from his master.

Norpak struggled to a standing position. He pushed his feet into his shoes but they just would not fit him this evening. He gave up trying and threw them at Paynode instead, hitting him in the face. “Do I have to do everything myself? Bring me my gown; some shoes that fit and my keys. I will go and raid the cellars, you useless old man.”

With Paynode’s help, Norpak finished dressing. His servant kept a wary eye on him in the mirror.

“Well, what are you gawking at Paynode? I can see you with your beady eyes sneaking around and watching me all the time.”

“Nothing, Master, sorry if I offended you,” Paynode mumbled as he crept away.

Norpak stuck out his hand and pulled the old man towards him. “Oh, no, you don’t, I haven’t finished with you yet.”

The cane felt like a hot iron on his back. Paynode screamed in agony as the blows descended. With a last kick from his master, as he left the room, his servant fell to the floor writhing in pain his breath coming in jagged gulps.

Silence descended, shrouding the room in a strange stillness. Paynode lay where he had fallen for some time, waiting for his breathing to return to normal, finally unfolding from his foetal position.

“Hello I hope you are not too badly wounded, we have places to go,” said a soft melodious voice, coming from the direction of the balcony. Amuletto jumped nimbly down from his exalted position on the roof and made his way into the room, moving at a leisurely pace until he stood above Paynode who was still on the floor but had returned to his foetal position. Amuletto removed his hat and threw it on Norpak’s bed.

“Don’t hurt me, don’t hurt Paynode, I’m just a poor old servant.”

“Let me introduce myself, I am Amuletto of the Farangi. I am not here to rob you, or to hurt you, but to save you. Don’t get me wrong I have come here in search of treasure, that is true, but you are the treasure I seek.” said Amuletto, settling himself down on the floor next to Paynode.

“I don’t need no saving, I ain’t worth nothing, and you had better be gone before the master gets back, he’ll be here any minute now,” said Paynode, shooing him away, and flapping his arms around Amuletto’s face, as though he was about to box his ears.

“Ah!” said Amuletto. “But he won’t be coming back, will he? You put enough Thallium in his wine to sink a battleship, didn’t you, Paynode, or should I say Goldanno the DreamWeaver?”

The old man’s already pale face lost the rest of its colour. His sunken eyes faded further into his skull. “I am sure I don’t know what you are talking about,” he said, glaring at Amuletto.

“Listen to me DreamWeaver, you are needed elsewhere. It is time you came home. Though I admire your one-person revenge operation and how you are taking out the enemy one by one, I am afraid it is doomed. However, if there were many of us working together, the odds would increase giving us a greater chance of success,” Amuletto held his hand out to Paynode.

The old man remained obstinately close-mouthed; shrugging his shoulders in dismissal, ignoring Amuletto’s outstretched hand.

“What do you think they are going to do when they find Norpak’s body?” Amuletto raised an eyebrow at Paynode, who shook his head.

“What, no comment?” said Amuletto. “OK, I’ll answer that question. They are going to give everyone who had contact with your master a flick with a Lie Zoomer. No one can evade a Zoomer, unless... unless...”

The old man’s lined and wrinkled face, stayed still as a statue, no emotion registered; nothing disturbed his features. Amuletto stood up, ran his fingers through his messy long black hair and began to pace about the room. He laughed.

“So, so...,” said Amuletto, a sly grin on his face as he stared at Paynode. “You are a real find, aren’t you? You can outwit a Zoomer, what a good man to have onside. I grow fonder of you as our friendship progresses.”

Paynode grunted and rolled his eyes, which were rapidly changing colour from grey to clear blue. Amuletto watched fascinated as the wrinkled face before him lost its lines and baggy nature, rapidly reforming into a roughly handsome man of approximately thirty-five to forty years old, with long brown wavy hair and a twinkle in his eyes.

“Pleased to meet you Amuletto,” said Paynode. “You are correct in your assumption that I am also known as Goldanno the DreamWeaver, master of disguises and other skills as you have seen.” He bent a knee and bowed with a flourish.

Amuletto grinned, “Likewise, I am sure,” he said. “I take it that you have decided to throw in your lot with the Farangi and come away with me.”

Paynode bowed again, “I am at your service, but first you must help me with this treasure trove of ill-gotten gains,” he said, placing his finger on a tiny indentation on the picture of Norpak hanging on the wall.

Sashaying silently on well-oiled wheels out popped a large ornate chest. Sprinkled with precious gemstones it sparkled and popped, splashing the room with all the colours of the rainbow.

Author Bio

Isabella is a #vss365 addict and member of the Twitter (X) Writing Community, she has co-authored 'Mirror Images in Palmistry and Tarot' with long time friend Gary Markwick. Her latest book, 'The Turn of a Card' - a murder mystery, featuring DCI Jackson Fife, is at the editing stage.

[Facebook | Isabella du Lac](#)
[X | @IsabelladuLac1](#)



Eyes of Eener

by Mario Kersey

The microscopic fungi had died after a week on an abandoned web line clothed in the dust from months of neglect on my part. Molly thought I was a slob for not removing it, but I had been focusing my optics on it when I was distracted with stress or a slow day as that Wednesday had been. Sure, I could have tapped into literally a hundred news feeds simultaneously becoming delirious with the input, but I'm not an info junkie. No, I'm a woman with simple tastes and staring at an arachnid's failed housing project that caught the day's last rays of sunlight was relaxing until a knock at the door paused my serenity.

I adjusted my eyes back to normal visual acuity. Being in a funk made me less hospitable, but the cash flow had been stagnant, so I needed to answer the door. I looked around at the mess on the floor. Maybe Molly was right about me. I stopped assessing the office before I forgot about the knock at the door. Waiting outside my door was an unusual customer. It was Oscar Cornel, a self-styled guru of the esoteric. Many considered him a fraud, but enough believed in his "teachings" to keep him well paid. He was flanked by two men built like vaults and just as stoic.

"Are you the famed relic hunter, Diana Brock."

"'Famed' may be a little strong, but yes, I am a relic hunter of sorts."

"Your modesty is admirable. I don't find many people like that in my line of work." I barely noticed his hand flick the air signaling his men to wait outside. "May I enter?"

I allowed him entry. He made himself comfortable in the chair I placed in front of my desk. I planted myself behind said desk. I could see myself reflected in the wide frame shades he wore. It was dusk; he didn't need the shades, but who was I to judge. "What type of recovery do you need?"

"Sight."

"Excuse me?"

He returned a friendly smile to my question. "Yes, I need you to travel to Raina-07 to retrieve the eyes of Eener."

"Wasn't Eener a cult leader?"

"Now, you're not one who believes everything the press puts out for clicks, are you?"

"I'm downloading reputable news sites now." My mind flooded with the data as my microprocessors sorted the information I needed.

"That's hardly necessary." He hissed.

"Well, I like getting my facts straight."

"And what did you learn?"

"Eener sacrificed everyone on a generation ship he brought to earth twenty years ago. He had gotten just beyond the before the U.N. Stellar Squad caught him. The U.N. decided to let the ship orbit the moon as a permanent memorial."

Cornel had been leaning in my direction but leaned back almost resigned to my perceived rejection. "You're not going to help me?"

"It's hallowed ground now."

"A tourist attraction. Multiple flights a day. Did your research tell you that?"

It did, but I wasn't keen on going to a memorial sight. It reeked of grave robbing, but I did need the money.

"You are the best that money can buy, Ms. Brock. I am aware of others, but none with your reputation." He paused as if he had an ace to play. He removed his shades. "This is my reason for going. I believe the Eener's eyes will give me my sight."

Both his eye sockets were dark pits on the landscape of his face. As I looked closer the darkness of the sockets had been coated in makeup. This was a recent event. There were plenty of ocular procedures he could have used to regain his sight, but these injuries were self-inflicted, and he wanted some alien eyes instead of human ones. This didn't feel right.

"Well, Ms. Brock?"

"I'll do it."

"I have one stipulation, Ms. Brock."

“Which is?”

“I come with you.”

“No. You are too well known. We would get mobbed at the gate before ever leaving earth.”

He straightened in the seat. “I have my ways of disguise for that very reason. It would be quite simple.”

I’ve always hated when someone told me how easy a job would be because it usually wasn’t. I rarely allowed a client on a trip. This one could get hairy. Still, the cash incentive. Molly was being kind by not asking for her next paycheck. I knew the money demand for this would set me up for a while. “Make sure I barely recognize you.”

“I shall.” He placed his thumb on the pay pad on my desk. A dollar amount, three times what I charge, was deposited into my account. “If the eyes are viable, you will get another deposit.” He stood up, put his shade where they could do the most good for me and left.

Something didn’t feel right about this case, but I would do it just like any other job and see it to the end.

It took a week to get everything in order. I would meet Cornel at the space port. A disciple of Cornel met me at the gate. We would not fly the commercial shuttle like the other tourists. Cornel had a private shuttle ready for us. He stood in the doorway of his shuttle with a ravenous smile that stretched from ear to ear.

“Hello, Ms. Brock. I hope you like the accommodations.”

“Not what I was expecting.”

“You didn’t want to attract attention, so I obliged.”

“Well, let’s get going. My equipment—

“Will be loaded properly.”

It took less time than I expected. Cornel was in another part of the shuttle meditating. None of his people spoke a word to me during the trip up to the memorial, and they kept their distance. I just looked at the schematics of Raina-07. I wondered if any changes had been made. They never found the eyes of Eener when they boarded the ship to attempt his apprehension. So many followers died before the Stellar Squad arrived. The gullibility of humans knows no bounds. Every visitor from another isn’t a nice guest, but Eener did stay on earth for a decade before taking his followers for a ride.

Upon arriving near the ship, I was struck at the immense scale of the structure. We weren’t going to the regular docking site like the tourist ships. Our shuttle landed on the top of the vessel. That was not what my schematics said. Cornel entered my cabin in his regalia as if he were prepared for some ritual.

“Mr. Cornel this is not the way.”

“Oh, but it is.” He handed me actual paper with schematics I didn’t have.

“What are these?”

“The truth.”

“My schematics are fake?”

“After a fashion. Where we are going has been erased from any public records. The governments conspired to hide evidence of Eener as a precaution for his followers for trying to resurrect him or contact any of its species. Some who still believe in Eener gave me the schematics.”

“So, why am I here?”

“Legitimacy.”

Great. He used me to make his made scheme sane. “I don’t like this.”

“I’m certain there are some jobs you took for the money not for affability.”

One of his men approached. “We have docked, High One.”

Cornel looked at me with those shades on. “Shall we go?”

We suited up to disembark into the black hole darkness of this hidden space of the ship. The light from our suits disappeared down a corridor. I followed Cornel since I didn’t have reliable data anymore. He led the way like he knew the place. The corridor stretched interminably until we reached a door. Cornel paused in front of it. He placed his hands on the left-hand side of the door. Irised open with a subtle hiss. Cornel turned to me, “Ladies first.”

“How kind.” I didn’t know if the place was booby trapped or not. I tossed in one of my mini drones to scan the place. It was clear. We entered.

His followers had tiny scanners probing the walls. Cornel felt his way around the room and halted when he felt a painting on the wall. If he had tear ducts, I would have sworn he was trying to cry. "It's still here."

"What?"

"The painting I made for him."

"You're one of them?"

"I was fifteen. My mom had betrothed herself to him."

"Why all the secrecy?"

"It's how great change begins. You don't see it until it has you."

"We found it, High One."

The followers came to him with a small box. They opened it, shining their lights on it. Within the box, I saw two gelatinous blobs quivering. The blobs turned away from the light in the direction of Cornel.

"I sense them. You have done well." They brought the box closer to him. The blobs seemed to move close to his hand as he grabbed one and placed it in his eye socket. He did the same with other one. Cornel seemed to feel pain, but he did not even whimper.

"The second coming is at hand. I see the way clearly!"

The eyes were too large for his face, but they did function. They continued to quiver as he spoke. His face was complete. It seemed to glow.

I knew life was imperiled by a madman before me. Fortunately, I had given an old friend at the U.N. some intel about my client. My signal had been sent the moment we disembarked. I smuggled my gun in just in case the cavalry didn't arrive on time. "I can't let you do that, Mr. Cornel."

He looked at me with his quivering eyes. "You can't stop me or my master."

"Your master is dead."

"He's right here. Don't you see?"

His men circled around me as I fired at Cornel. My shot hit an eye. He screamed. His men lost interest in me to attend to him. I ran as fast as I could in that heavy suit. The corridor was already filled with armed soldiers.

"Where's the target?"

"Back there. Be careful he has friends."

I made my way out onto the surface of the ship. I collapsed to my knees thinking about what might have been. It was the outcome I could hope for, and Molly could stay employed with me. I won't, however, do it for the money again.

Find the Author

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Open Letter

From Mchyl

Dear Jason, Kim and fellow writers

I didn't have the time to write a piece for SciFanSat this month and probably won't make it next month as well, as holiday "busyness" has taken over. But I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Jason and Kim for giving us the opportunity to share our writings here.

I've enjoyed dreaming up stories to the themes and reading everyone's amazing pieces each month. It's a highlight of my Sunday morning (here in Australia) to click on the link and escape for awhile.

So thank you Jason and Kim! Also wishing everyone a wonderful holidays :)

By the way, it strikes me this is a good space for longer discussion about all things sci-fi / fantasy if anyone's interested? I'm mainly science fiction focused and have just finished Sue Burke's *Semiosis and Transcendence*. Really enjoyed its exploration of intelligence in plant life and the cultural evolution of future societies. I have also been bingeing on podcasts and have loved *Wolf 359*, *Girl in Space* and *Midnight Burger*. Anyone have other recommendations for books or podcasts? Would love to hear from others here.

Best wishes to all!

MC

Editorial Reply

From Jason

Thank you Mchyl! I touched on the "busyness" of December and the challenge of writing at this time of year in this issue's editorial, and how it is an honor to serve the writing community with this magazine. Thank you for your support and participation in SciFanSat!

An aspect of the fantasy and science fiction magazines of yesteryear, often overlooked, is that they were spaces where writers could connect with other authors in addition to readers. This came in private correspondences facilitated by the magazines, or in public exchanges inside their printed letters and editorial pages. We created the "Open Letters" and "Community Announcement" pages as set features in SciFanSat to emulate those functions within our own magazine. It is our hope that the letters section will facilitate mature and thoughtful discussion relevant to the writing community, speculative fiction authors, and fans. I believe there is merit in composed and slow discussion of topics presented in the essay format a letters section provides, and it is a needed contrast to the quick and pithy style favored by current online culture. There is merit also in a format where irrelevant pop-up commentators, harassers, and spammers don't sour and clutter the dialogues.

*So, emphatically, **yes**: Our letters pages are absolutely a friendly space and forum for long discussions of all things sci-fi and fantasy!*



SciFanSat News



Mchyl

for their work

Miracle Water



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 6 Prompt

SciFanSat

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

Theme:
Symbol

Submission Deadline Saturday, January 20th, 2024

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