

OG's Speculative Fiction

Issue #7



Poetry by Kristine Ong Muslim
Lindsey Duncan
Karen Romanko

Stories by L. Christopher DelGuercio
Angeline Hawkes

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July

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G. W. Thomas Cover Art:
Swamp Girl

G. W. Thomas lives in British Columbia, Canada and is a man of many talents. He has appeared in over 350 different books, magazines and ezines including The Writer, Writer's Digest, Black October Magazine and Contact.

You can find more from him at www.gwthomas.org.



Publisher, Seth Crossman

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Editor's Letter

In this issue we decided to focus on poetry.

I can't help but feel that poetry is becoming something of a lost art these days. In this technological era, the world is changing the scope of media. Words are no longer scratched across bits of paper to be sent through the post. Writers take their laptops with them to the coffeehouse rather than a pad of paper and a pen to the riverside. Boys and girls text each other and beam bytes of songs to express their love, rather than whispering lines of poetry or slipping them a few words on a note. People no longer stand in line on the curb waiting for the newspaper or go to the bookstore to buy their favorite author's serial. Everything is electronic these days, the news, our letters, our libraries, even our TV and movies, and that is not necessarily a bad thing. But in the shift to electronic communication, poetry has gotten lost along the way.

I had a professor at Hamilton, my first college, who lived and breathed poetry. He had fled the Soviet Union when he was younger, while they still ruled their people with an iron fist. As a boy, he consumed precious lines of poetry, reveling in the freedom of expression and startling images. He was a short man, but taught like he was ten feet tall. His voice was loud and gravelly, like a boat sliding onto a rocky shore. I remember him asking me several times, "What does that line mean?" as we read poems. I would study the indicated line, running the words over my tongue like a piece of candy, trying to figure out the meaning. When I thought I had come up with significant symbolism, I would offer it. His eyes were large behind his glasses and his thick mustache frowned at me even if he didn't. He would reply with some tart, "Couldn't the poet just be trying to talk about the beauty of a simple red wagon!"

At my second college, Indiana Wesleyan University, I had a professor who loved poetry too. I thought I did, and I thought I wrote some pretty good lines. But after taking a few of her classes, I realized I was just putting pretty words together and trying to make them mean something. But there was another girl in that class, one who wrote poetry like some people write text messages these days. Her name was Susanna and she wrote poetry with such emotional intensity that it brought tears to people's eyes. I would listen with more than a little envy most times. She went on to win the Brittingham Prize for Poetry with her first book, *Jagged With Love*.

I say all of that to stress that poetry still has meaning in our lives. It expresses what we are sometimes unable to express with talking, and carries

us on journeys that we would miss otherwise. It is evocative, and thoughtful, and uplifting, and emotionally stirring.

And if we study its veins, we learn more about the craft of writing. We can learn how important word choice is. For example, “We drifted down to the river like fireflies on a hot summer night, without a care about tomorrow.” This line has a lot more meaning and weight than “We went down to the river.” Drifted suggests a certain carefree, unburdened attitude. Fireflies suggests brevity, but also momentary brilliance. The word tomorrow relates to the future, and hints at a change. The river symbolizes a certain hunger for that change, and a deepness to life that the speaker hasn’t quite stepped into yet. If this poem is about a group of three girlfriends, one of whom marries at eighteen because she is pregnant, the prettiest one who disappears a year later, and the third girl who moves away to the big city shortly after all this happens, then that whole line takes on added emotional weight. You don’t get all that from “We went down to the river.”

Poetry still has a place in our lives, we just need to get it back there. That is why we are highlighting it in this issue, the first issue of our second year, and the first issue of every year hereafter. We believe that poetry has an important place in the world of science fiction and fantasy writing, just as spaceships and aliens and fairies and dragons do. We selected two science fiction poems and one fantasy poem, and hope that you enjoy them.

–SC



Death of Time

Kristine Ong Muslim

Kristine Ong Muslim is our favorite poet from the Philippines. Her stories and poems have appeared or are forthcoming in many places. These include Coyote Wild, The Fifth Di..., Not One of Us, Spinning Whorl, Sybil's Garage, and Tales of the Talisman. This is her second publication with us.

Death of Time

Tiptoeing, he approaches
the clockmaster's ticking heart
floating inside the jar

on a shelf crammed with dead objects,
husks of event-spaces,
souls of infants not yet born,
and parcels of dream elements--
all twitching to let out.

He fumbles with the lid,
and the liquid inside sloshes.
He catches a whiff of the seasons
upon opening the jar.

There's the tartness of spring,
the sun-slivens of summer,
the musty odor of fall,
the mists of winter.

He fishes the heart out,
hears the screams of the clockmaster
in the next room,
decides,
then lets the heart go.

A soft clink as it touches the floor.
Something gives way,
and he, too, feels it inside him.

Man Farm

By L. Christopher DelGuercio

L. Christopher DelGuercio lives outside of Syracuse, New York with his wife, Melissa. He has appeared in Quantum Muse, Allegory and will appear in the October issue of Kaleidotrope, as well as Ballista and the horror anthology, Tabloid Purposes IV. He was also accorded special recognition for a story in L. Ron Hubbard's Writers of the Future Contest for the last quarter of 2006 and the first quarter of 2007.

I can still remember the day I got a man farm. My father brought it home one day after work. He knew I was a curious kid and, though a little young, I was uncommonly responsible. Dad helped me set it up. We fitted together its rectangular frame, screwed it to the base, and slid the pellucid walls into place. It was pretty good sized for a man farm, almost as big as the ones my friends had. It took up the corner of my desk and I had to relocate my pencil can inside one of the drawers, but I hardly minded. We filled the farm with soft soil from the yard, plenty of water, and fresh greenery.

“Where will they live?” I asked my father.

“Anyplace—men adapt well. They have a pitifully short life span, but they can thrive almost anywhere, given the right environment—even on other animals, the way terramites do. Except they don't do any harm.”

I was awestruck. My father loved to surprise me with tidbits of cool nastiness like that. He knew everything.

“In the farm, they'll start out living in the crevices of stones, then, they'll build their own homes. When they run out of space aboveground, they'll start to burrow. Men are good burrowers,” he said.

The kit came with a pouch of dried organisms that could be added to the farm to create an ecosystem. Now, I'd never heard of an ecosystem, but all these critters looked to be good for decoration if nothing else. Dad had brought thousands of men home with him in a small white paper box, their pale bodies wriggling and rippling like living sand. I scooped some out and hesitantly placed them on my hand.

“It's okay, they won't bite you,” he told me. “They're far too small to even realize where they are.”

Watching through the magnifying glass, I could see them scurrying to stand on their two tiny leg stalks. I wasn't surprised at all that they kept falling over.

“Look how funny they are, Dad.”

They were far smaller and less hairy than the men teeming in the yard during the spring and summertime. My father told me these men were smarter than those and would make for a much more interesting farm. I put some more on the back of my hand.

“They’re kinda cold,” I said.

“They’re not like us at all. They’re actually quite delicate. That farm will need a lot of attention or it’ll die out. Do you think you can care for them all?”

“Yes, I love them,” I said.

It was a good man farm.

Dad and I spent that whole day setting it up. Years later, it’s still one of the fondest memories I carry with me of my father. I decided to keep the man farm on my desk because it was nearer to the window. The next few weeks I watched in amazement as the farm grew from small groups huddled around sparks of fire to villages of men with homes and roads and vehicles. My father made sure to get some female men, too. Unless you knew what to look for, they appeared to be the same as the males. They would nest inside their dens until barely visible pink baby men would squirt out from inside them, one at a time.

It was a very good man farm.

The little men worked tirelessly and they used every speck I’d placed in their world to the advantage of the colony. They could be tender creatures but, as their numbers increased and the space inside the farm grew scarce, the men would choose sides, take up arms, and stage fierce battles. I found them to be fairly entertaining tactical affairs when viewed with the naked eye, but horrifically grisly under my magnifying lens. On a few rare occasions, when I simply could not stand the sight of the carnage, I would stop them and punish the ones I found fault with.

At bedtime, I watched over them by pale nightlight from my top bunk. If they ever needed anything, I would get it for them. I felt like they understood that, even though I knew better.

I loved the man farm. My brother Denny, however, thought it was queer, and he reminded me repeatedly. He said it was his duty as an older brother. Denny had a pet Golden Tiago spider that was the envy of every neighborhood boy and the nightmare of every neighborhood girl (and more than a few of the boys).

One wet afternoon, Denny and I got into a fight over nothing in particular while playing cards on the living room floor. I love my brother dearly but, to this day, we still can’t play a game with each other without a fracas ensuing and our mother being called eventually. Being smaller and

weaker, I used the only effective weapon I had in my arsenal—unsparing fraternal

razzing: I reminded him that Mom and Dad were secretly hoping for a girl when he was born; I teased him about how poorly he did in school and how much brighter I was than him when he was my age; I made fun of his crimson adolescent complexion and the cowlicks that sprouted awkwardly on top of his head and it was no wonder that Jenny Kempler didn't like him. Ouch!

I'd crossed a forbidden line, even for little brothers. Denny proceeded to bloody up my nose and I proceeded to hit the waterworks once I got within earshot of my parents. Mom and Dad heard me crying and saw my bloody nose. They grounded Denny for a month.

"It's not fair—you always take the baby's side!"

He offered up his objection with all the earnestness of someone falsely convicted trying to bring to light the injustice. It was a tactic known to every kid: when you can't beat the rap, try to inject a hint of doubt into their minds, it may bear fruit. He stomped away to the bedroom to begin serving his time. Dead man walking! I wanted to call out, but I thought it was unbecoming of the victim.

When I went up to bed that night, the room was black. I fingered the wall for the nightlight and switched it on. Denny was in bed, pretending to be asleep. In the muted darkness, I caught sight of the man farm. It had been knocked over on the desktop and I rushed to stand it back upright. The soil had been shaken around and the landscape inside the farm had reshaped; what had once been level ground was now scattered everywhere, creating towering mounds and low gorges. Through the cross-section of the case I could see the dead men, frozen within the dirt. Not the way they buried their own, just below the surface, but lost deep beneath. I tried not to cry but found my eyes glazing. The charade now over, Denny watched me suffer with a wide, tight-lipped grin.

My brother would pay.

I promptly told my parents what Denny had done. My father shook his head. "What are we going to do with that one?" he asked my mother.

She stopped her knitting and placed it in her lap. "I told you a month is an awful long time, John. We've never seen fit to ground him that long before. Don't you think three weeks would've been plenty?"

My father put his hands under his chin the way he always did when he was thinking hard and screwed his face into a pensive, fleshy knot.

"Maybe," he said, "But Denny's old enough. We should expect more out of him." Mom replied, "He's still just a boy."

My father had grown up quickly. Grandpa died when he was fifteen and he had to take care of Grandma and Auntie Cas by himself. My mother had four older brothers and sometimes I think she remembered what it was like to be a boy more than my father did.

“All right, I’ll talk to Denny tomorrow,” my father said with a note of concession in his voice.

Wait, what was happening here? I wondered, watching the exchange. If I thought that telling on my brother would result in a lesser sentence, I would’ve just kept my mouth shut. For crying out loud, what do I bother coming to you people for?

My brother now only had three weeks punishment, but it didn’t improve his mood any. I’d snitched on him twice—in one day! Let the tortures of the damned begin: the glares he’d give me from his side of the table all through dinner until my stomach started to ache as if under some voodoo curse; then, when we were shut up alone in our bedroom and I expected his worst, he would ignore me completely. He was a master of psychological warfare.

A few days later, I came home from school and Denny was sitting at the kitchen table, stuffing himself with candy vines no more than an hour before dinner. He looked right at me. He knew I couldn’t rat him out again to our parents; I had passed my quota. My tattling had reached that invisible ceiling, that nebulous gray area that all astute kids recognized could push you from ‘loyal informant’ to ‘whiny nuisance’ with one too many squeals.

He made it seem like he was trying to hide his smile, but I knew he wanted me to see it. His school let out earlier than mine, Mom had to run to the store, and Dad wouldn’t be home from work until later. Denny had been left alone in the house with the farm.

I bounded up the staircase and threw open the door to my bedroom. Inspecting the man farm I found, to my great relief, nothing seemed out of sorts. Within its walls, there was evidence that the men had begun to rebuild and were adjusting well to the new topography.

Then I saw the thing.

In the corner, nestled beside a clump of forest, was Denny’s Golden Tiago spider, with its thick, striped legs curled underneath its body. It was feeding itself contentedly on a living pile of men it had netted within its web strings, dipping its incarnadine fangs down into the writhing mass, its plump abdomen engorged. The majority of the men were fighting to detach their bodies from the death thread with little success; for others, there was simply no fight left in them. They hung helpless, screaming their soundless screams while the Tiago drank their insides.

I became incensed.

I took out the sharpest pencil I could find from my drawer, unlatched the door on top of the farm, and stuck the pencil through the fat midsection of the spider. Then I lifted it and planted the impaled monster upside down in the soil, its legs still churning the air.

Soon, the rest of the men came out from hiding inside their caves and underground tunnels. They hastily freed the survivors and surrounded the creature. At the base of the pencil, the men set off small fires that merged and climbed the wooden pike, engulfing the arachnid. Its lifeless carcass spit and wilted under the sway of the flames. I left it there for Denny to see knowing he wouldn't dare tell on me for fear he would have to explain how his Tiago got in the man farm to begin with.

Without doubt, Denny would retaliate. He was still confined to our room for another two weeks and I couldn't be there every second. I could transplant the farm to another room of the house, but Denny would find it eventually. The men needed protection; they hadn't done anything wrong. They deserved a peaceful life where they could look up to a bright blue sky, free from my brother's retribution. If I wanted to save the men, I had to do something. Something drastic.

I had an idea.

I wasn't positive it would work, but if it did, it was one sure way to keep the men out of Denny's reach. There would be no school the next day, so I decided to execute my plan that night.

I spirited a man from off the top of the highest mound of the farm. I held it in my palm and spoke as quietly as I could so as not to damage its ears with the thunderous booming that my voice must have been to it, whispering the same instructions to the man over and over and over even though I had no reason to believe it would understand me. Finally, I placed the man back atop the mountain and waited all afternoon for it to rejoin the colony. All that was left now was the arrival of nightfall.

That evening I stayed up late, pinching myself to keep awake and praying that my brother would fall to sleep quickly. When I heard his familiar snuffling beneath me, I knew that he had. Still, I waited. It was well past midnight before I alighted from my perch, tippy-toed to my desk, and secured the farm in my hands. I brought it to the edge of my brother's bed and opened the top, carefully lying it down on the mattress. Then I slid Denny's covers down to his waist.

Nothing happened for a long while and I began to worry. Then, warily at first, the men of the farm came out from their homes and forged toward the opening. Their exodus, stalled briefly by the folds of the bedsheet, continued once I'd carved a pathway for them with my finger. The men acted exactly as my voice had instructed them. They faithfully left the

safety of the farm and crossed the badlands, climbing to the edges of the covers, where Denny's body and the sheets met. Some spilled over and disappeared beneath the linens, the rest fanned out over Denny's bare back. The mass of men hung there over him like a cumulonimbus cloud, then, slowly dissipated into a thinly-spread mist. Finally, the dark patch faded into nothingness, leaving only the faint roiling of opaque, cerulean skin. A moment later, that ceased as well.

Men are good burrowers. My father's words echoed in my head.

The next morning I slept in. The instant I awoke I plunged my head down over the side of the bunk. Denny was gone. I rushed downstairs to find my brother sitting at the kitchen table with my parents, his head buried in his breakfast.

"Good morning." I sat down next to Denny and gave his elbow a nudge. "How do you feel?"

He lifted his face a few inches from the plate. "Leave me alone."

"Dennis, be nice to your brother now," Mom demanded.

"But Ma, he's bugging—"

"Denny," Dad cautioned with a low growl.

My brother slumped in his chair, frowning.

"How do you feel today?" I asked again.

Though it seemed to cause my brother actual physical anguish to address me against his will, he finally acquiesced. "I'm fine . . . except I itch." He motioned to a spot at the very center of his back, rubbing it against the chair as he spoke.

"Let me see it," Mom said. With her good eyes, she examined the network of large pores that covered Denny's dorsal region. "It looks irritated—dirty, too. What have you been doing, Denny, rolling around in the yard?"

"No," he replied quizzically (My brother clearly struggled with the notion that some questions were never meant to be answered.).

Mom completed her diagnosis. "It's just a little raw. You might have scraped it, or it could just be sunburned. Don't scratch at it, sweetie, let it scale over."

"Yeah, don't scratch it," I blurted. Everyone's head swiveled my way and shot me funny looks, but, looking to Denny, I played it off, "It's better if you just leave it alone, that's all I'm saying."

Again with the looks.

I put my arm around my brother. "What? Can't a guy show a little concern for his big bro?" I asked.

Denny was speechless. I'm not sure if it was out of surprise, if he was still mad at me, or because he figured out it was a rhetorical question.

Whatever the reason, he turned his attention back to my mother, who was swabbing his back with a wash cloth. “I won’t touch it,” he promised. “I can’t even reach it with my tail.”

“Well, then, it’s a good thing,” my mother said.

And with that, to my great delight, the family went back to eating breakfast with no further discussion on the subject. Denny slid his forked tongue across the plate, sublimely ignorant in his role as my newest man farm, and lapped up the last uneaten portions of his meal.

“Dad, I think I’m going to get rid of that farm,” I said.

“What’s wrong? I thought you loved it.”

“I dunno. I’m getting tired of taking care of it, that’s all. It’s a big responsibility.”

Dad looked somewhat bewildered.

“All right then, I’ll get rid of it later this afternoon.”

“Oh, no, that’s okay,” I told him. “I took care of it already. I found a spot nearby where they can’t do any harm.”

I knew I had to let the men go, but knowing didn’t make it easy for me. I dropped my head and licked at my plate with a hidden dolor locked away in my gut, wondering if the men of the farm would ever remember my face, or my voice, or that I existed at all.



The First Roses of Fall

By Lindsey Duncan

Lindsey Duncan is a student at Indiana University's School of Continuing Studies, working on a degree in the anthropology of human belief systems. She mixes her talents at writing with being a professional Celtic harp performer. This poem comes from her feeling that music and language are inextricably linked.

The First Roses of Fall

Life falls from first frost
Four roses stand, free as stars
Flare fire that lasts

Secret retreat for
Frail heroes of the forest
And silver-winged fey.

On the rose stage
They perform aerial tales
And soft arias.

Forest fails; snow drifts
The roses at first resist
The trial of frost.

Three roses falter;
Whispering fairies flee to
The last fall fire.

When that rose withers,
Fairies go to sleep and dream
Of first spring roses.

The Regenwurmlager Diary

By Angeline Hawkes

Angeline Hawkes received a B.A. in Composite English Language Arts in 1991 from Texas A&M, Commerce, where she was named 2007 Alumni Ambassador for the Literature Department. Angeline's collection, The Commandments, received a 2006 Bram Stoker Award nomination. Her newest fantasy series is entitled: Tales of the Barbarian Kabar of El Hazzar. Carnifex Press published Then Comes the Child, a novella, co-written with her husband Christopher Fulbright in September 2006. This tale delves into the what-if horror of World War II.

Near the city of Miedzyrzecz in Poland, the Nazis built a mysterious underground series of tunnels and fortified bunkers. Over the course of World War II, the majority of the local Jewish population disappeared into these tunnels never to be seen or heard from again. Little is known about the labyrinth except that it is powered by an unknown source and connected by a transportation system. Occupying Russian troops discovered numerous well-camouflaged entrances, and scientists theorized that the lakes surrounding the complex might also hold secret hatches into the complex.

Many innocent civilians disappeared into the vast jaws of the Regenwurmlager and too many questions existed to leave the tunnels uninvestigated. Shaky intelligence reported that the Nazis were developing an A bomb in laboratories within the Regenwurmlager. The local people also documented strange happenings around the tunnels.

As soon as Poland was under Russian control, these reports terrified world leaders enough to instigate an investigation. Dr. Nicholas Bunter, a British operative and research scientist documenting the atrocities committed by the Nazis, was assigned, in a joint Allied mission, to explore the Regenwurmlager. His mission was to complete a general search of the complex, documenting his discoveries so that a team of qualified personnel could be sent in at a later date to complete further investigation and a possible dismantling of the Regenwurmlager. While in the tunnels, he kept a journal of all that he encountered. This is that journal.

February 16, 1945

Checked into a small inn located in Miedzyrzecz. Nice people. Had a plate of sausages and locally made beer. They don't have much, but what they have, they shared. The town has been destroyed in areas as a result of

the German occupation. Some buildings were spared only because the Nazis commandeered them. Checked my supplies. Not sure what I'll run into. Germans call the place Regenwurmlager, or Earthworm Lair. Unsure of electrical status, have plenty of flashlight batteries and a couple of safes of matches. Place that deep in the ground must be dark [50 meters]. Mixed emotions. Elation at the possibility of new technology, but the unknown makes me fearful. As far as I know, I'm the only person other than Nazis and forced laborers to travel into the tunnels. So many rumors have circulated about what the Nazis were doing in the tunnels, the atrocities, and the mysteries. Better I sleep now and start early. NB

February 17, 1945

Traveled to tunnels via the forest, on foot. The Russians seem to have their hands full maintaining the discipline of their troops and haven't had much time to devote to me. The tunnels are unguarded and I went in alone. The population has been so depleted by the Nazis that there aren't many people to guard against. The area is beautiful with forests and lakes, but isolated. Quite a difference from my city life. Liberating, really—this feeling of aloneness.

Once in the tunnels, I walked for hours. I've a partial blueprint to use as a map. It records a system of tunnels that stop abruptly in the middle of nowhere. It's a very amateurish blueprint. The measurements are estimates and not precise. Everything about this place is based on speculation.

So far, have found evidence of a lighting system and a sort of waste disposal. Will follow these pipes closely as I delve deeper. I'm told that the tunnels are connected by an underground railway system. Have yet to cross any evidence of this. Ate for the night and will retire to conserve flashlight batteries. NB

February 18, 1945

Day of discoveries! I'm in an undocumented section of tunnels. A few hours ago the straight tunnel broke into several corridors, some are mapped, others aren't. I took "the road not taken," adding to the blueprint as I've gone along.

The tunnel continued straight and then suddenly, rooms sprouted from both sides of the corridor like a dormitory. On a whim, I pulled the chain connected to a metal-caged bulb, in the center of the ceiling, and was surprised when light filled the concrete room. This part of the tunnel doesn't appear to have been inhabited. I thought, perhaps, systems wouldn't be

functional. Mainly storage rooms here—metal furniture and office paraphernalia. Lots of crates. One room contains crated guns and ammunitions. I was struck by the unlocked doors. Down this deep in the tunnels there must have been no need. Only authorized personnel.

I made lists of things I encountered. One room is full of Nazi uniforms and one is loaded with nonperishable food.

Further, I came across dormitory style rooms each with six sets of bunk beds, table and chairs and a small kitchenette arrangement. The cooking unit operates on paraffin. I pinched some coffee and canned stew from the boxes and warmed it on the cooking unit. I operated by the light of the cooking flame alone, as I was afraid of attracting attention. I'm not entirely convinced that I'm alone down here. The system is so complicated that I believe it would be possible for people, possibly Nazis, to be in hiding here. The silence plays tricks on your eyes and mind. I feel like I'm being watched, or even followed, but I haven't seen or heard anything but the water dripping from a few pipes. The stew and coffee were an unexpected treat. NB

February 19, 1945

Today I'm deeper into the Regenwurlager. Tracks are everywhere giving evidence to the subway system. Twice today I heard footsteps behind me. It must be the echo of my own steps—unsettling nevertheless. I can't shake the foreboding feeling that someone's watching me—or perhaps watching over the tunnels—but I tell myself it's just the darkness and this unnerving silence. I'll never complain about anything being too loud again.

More concrete steps descend to a lower level. I'll take one of the staircases tomorrow. They're not on the blueprint, so I'm drawing them in as I go. I mark where I've been on the walls with yellow chalk. It's easy to get confused. Everything looks the same.

I've moved out of the "residential" sector and have entered an industrial center. Various forms of machinery line rooms and there's evidence of repair operations. I've found a control box that I believe is part of the power system. I'm excited over the prospect of discovering what's keeping the electricity running. It's sporadic, so the entire system must not be functioning. Any system electrifying this complex, deep underground, is worth looking into. The theory is that the Nazis have a water-based system fed by one of the local lakes or rivers. I should come across it at some point. I don't anticipate discovering that tomorrow, as I'm descending into the belly of the tunnels and feel these levels too deep to access a ground level water source. I won't extensively explore, just get an idea of what the lower

level is used for. Tired. Eyes fuzzy. Most of where I ventured today was without power and had to rely on flashlight. Strained the eyes. NB

February 20, 1945

Fourth day. The air is stale but flows from an unknown outer source. I explored the lower level and found trains. They're lined up on the tracks. I also had a close encounter. I opened a door to a supply room and when I was about to enter I dropped my flashlight. It rolled to the center of the room. Suddenly, there was a flash of light and a grenade went off. I was propelled backwards by the blast, but the concrete walls took the impact. I was thrown into a puddle of dried oil. The intelligence reports of booby traps in the tunnels are true. I'm thankful I dropped my flashlight. Of course, this cuts down on my light source. Dropped one flashlight through a pipe system, and I busted the bulb in another. I'm down to two flashlights, but plenty of matches. I was lucky to escape with a few bruises.

Upon ascending the stairs to the tunnel above me, I found the door jammed. It took a few hours of sweat and panic, but I finally opened it. Not sure how it shut. Hinges were stiff and moved only with pressure and there's no wind to slam a steel door of that weight. I'm camped in a maintenance shaft off the center of the tracks, built a small fire out of this and that from the tunnel. After today's incident, I'll be less likely to explore the rooms. Why would the Nazis booby trap rooms in tunnels thought inaccessible by anyone but their own personnel? Intriguing and strange. NB

February 21, 1945

Exhausted. Covered more ground as I stuck to the straight tunnel, following the tracks, hoping to hit the power source.

Lights flickered constantly. I jumped every time the lights came on. Heard more footsteps. I believe there are actually soldiers still here, maybe hiding from the Russians? Maybe one or two patrolling? If so, I'm bound to run into someone. Worst experience yet was coming across a large kiln. From the articles I found in a storage room (I didn't enter; surveyed from the doorway) the Jewish slave laborers who built this deep mystery stayed here with it. I'm certain the oven was used to dispose of the Jews in the same manner that the Nazis are reported by intelligence sources to be employing in detention camps. I prayed. My God is also the God of the Jews.

After this gruesome discovery, I came to a courtyard. Benches and tables arranged plants. A recreational area. Ate dinner at one of the concrete

tables before traveling on. Followed a thicker cable hoping it would lead to the power source. Ended up with another control box. Frustrating.

Later on, while preparing to sleep, my blueprint in its cylinder rolled into a metal trap in the floor. I really don't understand how it got there. I was off in a restroom and when I returned the cylinder was gone. I panicked, searched the area. Spotted it at the bottom of the drain-like trap. Tried to retrieve it. The iron grate won't budge. I can't fit through the narrow opening. Couldn't find anything to reach the cylinder. I have a partial map that I drew earlier, but it only shows where I've already been, so I'm traveling blind now. Sticking to this straight tunnel from now on. That's the plan. I'm still disturbed by the loss of the blueprint, but being exhausted I'm going to sleep. NB

February 22, 1945

Awoke to find the lights on and humming. A loud whirl emanated from the tunnel. Decided to run towards the sound before the electricity turned off. Didn't secure the flaps on my pack and lost a lot of smaller supplies like pens and matches. The matches disturbed me the most. I'm hoping to find replacements. I still have one flashlight. Strange thing about this place, these items also rolled or fell into the strange side drains. Tunnels built on an incline? The illusion is that the tunnel is flat and straight, but without a level I couldn't say. Explains the tendency for things to roll into these damn drain-like structures.

In certain tunnels there are no tracks. Maybe they only use the rail system for transporting industrial materials?

Still feel someone's watching me, lurking. Stopped and listened. The only sound was far off dripping water. The isolation gets to me. I can't imagine it would be any better even if I were here with a company of soldiers. Whatever the hell Hitler was doing here is still a mystery!

I've come across military supplies, and living quarters. Standard supplies such as towels and soap neatly wrapped in paper stacked in straight piles on the shelves. The paper work I've acquired consists of inventory lists; registries, duty rosters, rosters with German names and serial numbers, but nothing gives clues to what they were doing. I know little more than I did when I first started. Tired. Going to bed. NB

February 23, 1945, 2 am

Writing under my jacket, with flashlight. Someone's nearby. Too close. Moving around in a room approximately two doors away. Door closed. Heard voices. It's more than one person. Must turn off lights. NB

8 am

No sleep. Listening. Whoever I heard earlier is still there or has slipped into the shadows unheard. I now know the footsteps and the feeling of being watched are tied to my mysterious visitors. They know I'm here. I don't know if they realize how close I was last night, or if they knew, and didn't care. Going to explore the room. I have a knife. Pray I need not use it. NB

Noon

The door was unlocked. The tunnel outside is dark. Instinctively, I reached and felt for a switch, and finding one, I switched it. Light illuminated the room in a blaze. Maybe I shouldn't have taken that risk, but if I'm to die, I'd rather not do it in the dark.

Much to my horror, what I saw made me jump against the wall. Sitting around a metal table were the skeletons of six individuals with bits of leathery skin clinging to the bones, clad in Nazi uniforms. I've never witnessed anything so horrible in my life! The six skulls stared at one another with hollow eyes. I don't know how they died. It seems they were having a meeting. Were they dead before being placed around the table? Did they die while at table? I removed documents from their bony hands and read them. Documentation of scientific experiments of grisly natures. Scientific experiments using Jews as guinea pigs. It seems the oven I discovered earlier was used for destroying the slave laborers—it also rid the scientists of unsuccessful test subjects.

An age-reversal formula is discussed in the papers. All of the documents are in German. Something called Number Three is discussed. The Nazis tried to find an anti-aging serum. Ludicrous! The whole Fountain of Youth concept gone awry! What a wild goose chase! They injected test subjects with all sorts of concoctions.

The thought of those six uniformed skeletons holding their dead conference from hell disturbs me. I took the documents, turned off the light, and read in the tunnel by the beam of my flashlight. What were the voices I heard? What were they looking for? All documents had been left, until I collected them. Nothing else in the room was disturbed. The thought has occurred to me that the owners of the voices were verifying that nothing has been disturbed. Having found what I believe I've come for, I've decided to trek to the surface and out of Regenwurlager—the skeletal meeting has

heightened my fears and I don't like creeping around in the dark with someone down here.

7 pm

Am hiding in a storage closet. The voices returned. Unable to make out the individuals before I dashed into this closet. They're outside the door, not far, I can hear them.

They're speaking German. They're looking for me. Called me der Eindringling, "the intruder". They've discovered that I took the documents from the conference room and aren't pleased.

9 pm

Oh, my god! Am trying to catch my breath. While hiding in the closet, I encountered something. I don't know what it was! I was trying to remain as quiet as I could and tried to squirm my way further back into the closet—when I felt it. Something cold, wet, the smell of age and dust filled my nostrils. I turned and flashed the corner with my flashlight. To my horror, two milky eyes lured in a leathery skull right before my face! The thing resembled the skeletons around the table, but this one was still alive! My fear of discovery abated somewhat when I observed that the creature was missing the lower jaw, and had been secured to a board of some sort and propped in the corner. It could neither speak nor move. Raspy gasps for air came from the ragged creature. My heart nearly exploded with fright. The voices faded. I opened the door a crack. No power now in this section of the tunnel. Good for me. I could see they had flashlights too, and by the faint light made out uniforms. I pushed open the door quietly and, in my stockings, ran through the tunnel the way I came, and ducked into another empty room.

I've studied the papers. The Nazis moved from testing Jews to using their own soldiers as test subjects. They concluded that the experiments weren't working due to imperfect test subjects. They decided the serum needed to be tested on pure, superior beings. Everyone was injected, even the scientists. They must be damn sure of what they're sticking in those soldiers' arms if they're sticking themselves too. Doesn't look like anyone had a choice. The first batch was a disaster. Wait.

I can no longer hear the searchers. I'm going to move again. I feel I'm too close to them. I must get away.

10 pm

Back again. Hiding in a different room. Moved farther through the tunnel. Have followed my marks on the walls but some look unfamiliar and

I'm not sure I left them. Feel like I'm being led astray, but too afraid to deviate from my marked trail—could get me lost. Saw a Nazi looking for me. Old, shrunken, skin tightly drawn on his skull. He was hideous. Must be the result of the experiments. From what I can conclude, these men's bodies aged rapidly, but they continue living. Could their bodies go on living after they die? Maybe the six guys in the conference room didn't get the serum. I don't know. It's horrifying. The creature in the closet didn't have a uniform on. Looked like pajamas. Maybe hospital clothes? The Nazi that came close was definitely very old looking. He looked like an old man but he stepped quickly. There are more of them. I don't know where they're living. The tunnels are so extensive.

It's colder now. The air is heavy with moisture and the sound of running water is louder. I'm wondering if I'm near the supposed water-generated power source. Would explain the increased moisture in the air and damp, cold feeling. NB

February 24, 1945

Still in the room. Can't stay here. Quick note. Opened a trunk at the end of a bed and found another creature! Looked like a mummy. But, when I shone the light in its face, the crinkled, papery eyelids popped open and white orbs wobbled around and stared at me! It stretched out a skeletal arm toward me. I shut the locker and locked it. What the hell? I had to keep myself from screaming! Why's it in a trunk? It made no sound. It just reached for me and wobbled those watery blue eyes. Can't stay here. God! What is this place? I'm beginning to think I've descended into the bowels of Hell!

Sometime during the night

I've managed to move. They're still looking for me, but I stay a few steps ahead. They search at the same time as if on a schedule. The marks I left are gone, either I've taken a wrong turn or they've erased them from the walls. I'm staying straight hoping to hit the tunnel leading outside. There were more of them during the last search. More each time. I saw one up close. Looked as young as me. They're looking for me with guns and I'm not about to be taken into the bowels of this lair. God knows what these monsters are!

Later

Came out on a balcony overlooking an open area. Hundreds of men, if I can call them that, all in Nazi uniforms, all shrunken, leathery, like walking mummies or skin-clad skeletons standing in rows. I held my breath afraid to breathe, afraid they'd hear me. The sound of blood pumping in my ears was so loud that I was sure they'd hear it. And then, the rows of men turned and marched through a tunnel. I'm huddled in a corner behind a crate of god knows what. I'm further from the exit to the outside. I don't know where I am. I prefer the protection that the darkness offered and hope to find a dark tunnel again soon. Who are these disfigured soldiers? So many questions with so few answers. Must find a way out. NB

February 25, 1945

Was able to find a dark tunnel. Making progress towards the way I came, I believe. Hope to find an exit that'll take me to the surface. The soldiers are closer. They're only steps away, but each time a silent signal is given and they return to wherever it is they return to. They narrowly miss me each time. Afraid my luck will run out. I must get out. Flashlight is growing dim. Lost my pack. Only have diary, documents from the conference room, flashlight and jacket. I heard the soldiers discussing my pack. My name rolled from their tongues thickly. After they identified me, the intruder, they searched with renewed purpose.

Passed another oven. This one larger and operating. The heat was a welcome thing; I've been so cold. I hid close enough to benefit from the warmth, but far enough away not to be burnt. One of the monsters came lumbering near, pulling a folded tarp. Hiding in the shadows, I watched as the thing pulled from the tarp severed, dried out limbs. One by one the monster shoved the leathery appendages into the fire. At last it came to torsos and skulls. The thing shoved those in as well. The flames gust from the oven's opening, as I stifled my gasps of horror. It shuffled away trailing the empty tarp behind.

After warming myself I quickly found the darkness again. I think that I'm going in the right direction. I'm hoping by tomorrow I'll find an exit. I'll keep walking; will rest once I'm out. Will sleep for days once I get back to Miedzyrzecz. My room awaits me! And a warm fire! I'm anxious to get the hell out of here. I must go; I hear the voices. They're close.

Post Script

Dr. Nicholas Bunter was never seen nor heard from again. In 1946, the Russians mounted a search, but the tunnels turned up nothing that hinted

at Bunter's fate. Nothing out of the ordinary was documented during the search. The following year, two Polish teenagers went into the tunnels to leave their mark on the concrete walls of the Regenwurmlager—instead they returned with Dr. Nicholas Bunter's diary and a few tattered papers. The articles were wrapped in a jacket, stuck in a drain. The teens turned the documents over to local authorities. No entry was made beyond February 25, 1945.



'53 Unbound

By Karen A. Romanko

Karen Romanko has seen over one hundred of her poems and short stories published in venues such as Strange Horizons, Ideomancer, Lone Star Stories, The Pedestal Magazine, Dreams and Nightmares, and Full Unit Hookup. Her first poetry collection, Raven's Runes: Equations in Time, was released by Sam's Dot Publishing in 2004. She also edits and publishes the speculative fiction and mystery e-zine Raven Electrick.

'53 Unbound**

1953 has come undone
Temporal shrinks are at his side

Stalin rests in Red planet dust—
Ole 5-3 has got some style

Watson and Crick are at the Creation
Kinsey studies medieval monks

Elvis tries out for Vienna Boys' Choir
Yeager's burning chariot ruts

Sir Hillary haunts King Solomon's mines
Lucy births li'l Desi in Pompeii

1953 has come unbound,
and Time, codependent, is frayed

** Major events of 1953 included the death of Soviet leader Josef Stalin, the discovery of DNA's structure by Watson and Crick, publication of Kinsey's study on female sexual behavior, Elvis Presley's first demo, Chuck Yeager's speed record in the X-1, Sir Edmund Hillary's conquering of Mount Everest, and the debut of TV Guide with Lucille Ball and her newborn son on the cover.

