

101 Fiction

Issue 4

June 2014

Welcome to issue 4.

And a hot and fiery issue it is. Hopefully herald to a glorious hot summer, though possibly a summer with fewer dragons than you'll find here. Possibly.

The themes for this issue were *summer* and *dragons*, and you'll find one or both present in every little tale. Which goes some way to explaining the heat coming off these pages. You're about to read sixteen sizzling tales from thirteen talented writers, running a whole range of genres.

Nathan Alling Long kicks things off, looking from spring to summer. A hot summer, perfect for Judy Harper's hot couple. There's no respite as Odessa Cole breathes fire, and Rhonda Eikamp's Sigh just fans the flames. Perfect conditions for Patrice Sarath's S'warm.

Shenoa Carroll-Bradd has a lesson for us, before R.S. Bohn takes us for a maiden flight. Then Alex Brightsmith leads us into the desert, right up to John Xero's Volcano. Chris White's Predator is a dragon of a more modern kind, and Julia Reynolds pulls us further forward with her futuristic wonder, her Terra-Drake.

R.S. Bohn jumps us into another world, complete with its own customs, and dragons. John Xero's Quest brings us to world not quite our own, while Matthew Czarnowski's dragon is all too real. Christina Im brings a shiver despite the heat, then Chris White gets the fires going again and leaves us dreaming of colder days.

Thanks for being here. Thanks for being a part of a little 'zine with big ideas.

Read. Absorb. Enjoy.

Spring

by Nathan Alling Long

You talk of fairy tales, back when dragons roamed.

“Where do you think they went?” I ask, but you don’t know.

There’s not much time left for us, so I decide I should tell you.

“They’re still here,” I say. “We just aren’t good at seeing them. Look at that range of hills: a dragon’s back. That volcano: its head, its nostrils.”

“But it doesn’t move,” you say.

“It moves,” I explain. “We’re too fast-paced now to see it. Soon, the planet will be warm enough and they’ll all awaken. It will be their world then.”

“When?” you ask.

“Summer.”

Author bio: Nathan Alling Long grew up in a log cabin in rural Maryland and travelled around the world before settling in Philadelphia, PA, where he writes, bakes bread, and teaches. His work has appeared in over fifty journals and anthologies, some of which can be found at his website: <https://blogs.stockton.edu/longn/>

Cremation?

by Judy Harper

Phil flipped a match. Its head touched the blistering sidewalk, burst into flame.

"Cool," she said. "Lemonade?"

"Thanks." The chilled liquid slid down his parched throat. His eyes slid over her. Moist golden-brown skin, curly auburn hair, body radiating sultry heat.

"Folks away?"

"Sick. Heat stroke. Bad summer for them."

Standing barefoot on the burning concrete, she smiled, extended her hand.

"But good for us."

Mesmerized by her smouldering eyes, he clasped her hand, stood, screamed as her exhaled fire enveloped them.

They rose together on leathery wings, talons entwined, leaving a single pile of ash on the steaming sidewalk.

Author bio: Judy Harper has been writing almost as long as she has been talking... and that's a long time. As a technical writer and e-learning designer, she wrote in the mainstream to help people get work done, generating 25 years' worth of instructional manuals, reference books, user guides, and web content. Now, in semi-retirement, she writes on the edge, creating short stories and inspirational articles to help readers experience life from different perspectives. Her obligatory novel is, of course, in progress.

Breathe

by Odessa Cole

“Dragon’s breath,” Granny called it, the searing west wind that shrivelled the garden by May. She pointed at the sun, low and red. “His child.”

“Let’s go kill it!” Tommy said. *Stupid*. But I went.

Struggling over steep hills, past dead houses. Softened asphalt dragged my feet, hot air burned my lungs. The dragon’s breath dried sweat to salt.

“There!” His voice croaked from the hilltop. I peered into the painful wind. Flames ate the downed city. No dragon: only fire, glowing stone, jagged buildings’ remains.

“New York?”

Granny pressed damp cloths on my burned face. “Was.”

“Dragon’s child, now.”

Author bio: Environmental scientist Odessa Cole writes science fiction in New Mexico.

Sigh

by Rhonda Eikamp

A hot gust scoots her hair. The anthropologist glances toward the window, quill poised over her letter home. Dragon's Sigh, the Melahrians call these winds.

Dearest, I am among barbarians, she writes, thinking of her fiancé in cooler climes, who believe a simple breeze is a promise from their lizard god that He will return.

And yet shouts rise from below. Trembles, earthquake-sized. Darkness falls. Another sigh slaps her, fiery. Staring out, she sees the sky's become a maw. With fangs. She leaps up screaming, hair already burning. Sees her letter curling black, the last words she wrote.

I love

Author bio: Rhonda Eikamp lives in Germany, but is originally from Texas, where summers do get hot enough to set your hair on fire. Stories of hers have appeared or are forthcoming in Daily Science Fiction, Lightspeed, Lady Churchill's Rosebud Wristlet and The Journal of Unlikely Cartography. Catch her blog at <http://writinginthe strangeloop.wordpress.com/>.

S'warm

by Patrice Sarath

"Whatcha waiting for?" the kid asked, wrinkling her freckled, sunburnt nose.

"Dragons," the old man said, shading his eyes against the glare on the drought-baked Tennessee badlands.

"Ain't no such thing," the kid said.

"Girl," the old man said. "You watch."

The Smoky Mountain ridgeline shifted, turned on its side. Soil, blistered trees, rock slid down into the valley, uncovering dirt-crusting scales, a jagged spine, first one articulated wing, then another. A second mountain slid, a third, and soon they heard the beat of vast and distant wings.

"Dragons sure do love them some global warming," the old man said.

Author bio: Patrice Sarath is a novelist and short story writer in Austin, Texas. You can find out more about her work at www.patricesarath.com

Lesson

by Shenoa Carroll-Bradd

"Two wizards began to duel. One called forth a dragon, the other, a cloud of bees.

"The dragon exhaled, sending half the swarm to the ground in a hail of sizzled wings and ashen abdomens.

"The survivors landed on the beast and crawled into the tiny chinks between his scales, stinging where his claws could not reach.

"The dragon scorched his own hide trying to kill the pests, until he swelled up, smouldering, and collapsed.

"The bees won the day, my son. Can you tell me why?"

"Because cunning and persistence beat brute strength?"

"Precisely. Now, back to your studies."

Author bio: Shenoa lives in Southern California and writes whatever catches her fancy, from fantasy to horror and erotica.

Say hi @ShenoaSays or visit <http://www.sbcfiction.net> for more info.

Flight

by R.S. Bohn

Unicorns prefer a maiden's touch, and suffer no other. The villagers tie young women to a tree in the forest on the night before their wedding, and some mornings find them slumped against their binds, gored through. They pat the young men's shoulders sympathetically.

The dragon prefers his unicorns roasted rare, and his young men crispy, with blackened skulls. A young woman clever enough to escape her ropes, however, he'll allow to climb a leathery wing – maiden or not.

Then, with a furnace beneath their legs, the women ride into the dawn sky, their village nothing but shadows behind them.

Author bio: RS lives in Detroit, where they aim for a zombie theme park. She thinks one already exists in her head. Admission is free:

<http://rsbohn.blogspot.com>

Unpursued

by Alex Brightsmith

Nobody followed us, not even the athletic young priest who had so nearly caught us.

It was weeks before we allowed ourselves to trust to that appearance, and we frittered away our waning energy on sentry duty as we waited out the heat of the day, and wasted the cool relief of the short nights jumping at shadows.

It was only when we found the skeleton that we understood. We trudged past the long form, stared at the great horned head, bleached white by the unremitting sun. Why pursue us? We had fled into a desert that killed even dragons.

Author bio: Alex Brightsmith was born and raised in Bedfordshire and defies anyone who was not to place it on a map. Bedfordshire is so obscure even its own residents struggle to agree which region it belongs to, and its legacies have been a resistance to categorisation and a lasting fondness for sprouts.

Alex has published two character-driven contemporary thrillers featuring traceuse, thief and potential government agent Kathryn Blake, but is also readily distracted by flash fiction in a range of genres and by the development of an epic fantasy set around the Khyran provinces and the Tormaben plains.

Profligate examples of Alex's work and can be found at www.alexbrightsmith.wordpress.com.

Volcano

by John Xero

Gerret knelt before the mountain.

He drew an ornate dagger from his robes. Its bone handle was scaled, the hooked blade etched with silvery flames. Possessing it was breaking the New Law. But he was Mu'radi; he was old people.

He raised the dagger.

Summer's sun glinted from the blade as he plunged it into his chest.

The New Law was just words, and words can mean anything, or nothing. The Mu'radi god was fire, purity, truth.

The ground shook and the mountain roared, spewing flame from its lips. As Gerret's vision dimmed, he saw the mountain spread its wings.

Author bio: John Xero loves words. They can mean anything, or nothing, or everything. Put the right ones together, in just the right way, and magic happens.

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Predator

by Chris White

High above the terracotta earth, adrift on the rolling cloud-seas, a dragon waits.

High on gossamer wings it waits, invisible.

Scatter your protective talismans, your pretty trinkets of glass, hide in the shadows. Burn your votive offerings unto him – a mountain of rubber set aflame, a pillar of midnight.

High above the clouds it waits, an Angel of Death, with wings of steel.

With talons of blazing metal to rend the flesh.

Thirsting, unquenchable.

Target acquired.

In a world of serene unknowable silence a Predator lurks, watching its prey.

In an eruption of violence, the Predator drone strikes, spitting fire.

Author bio: Chris White is an author living in Brisbane, Australia. His words have been published both as ones and zeros and as ink on dead wood. More of them can be found on his blog: <http://chriswhitewrites.com>.

Terra-Drake

by Julia Reynolds

Summer landed the shuttle on the empty planet's icy equator. "Good luck with that worthless ice-ball," the Explorers' Union had said.

Summer smiled. Then she drank a cup of tea. Then she woke the Terraform Drake.

He growled, uncoiling a titanium tail. His blood ran liquid nitrogen and his fusion heart throbbed with the power of a star. She'd raised him from an egg she designed herself.

She sang him a code-sonnet, last minute instructions. Terra-Drake launched himself.

Five years later he returned, Summer's dragon, spent and victorious. He napped while she sat in sunshine and sang another code-sonnet, sleepy-shutdown.

Author bio: Julia Reynolds is a writer in Austin, Texas. She is an alumna of the Viable Paradise Writing Workshop and a member of the Cryptopolis writing group.

Jump

by R.S. Bohn

They'll be jumping the broom this July, all the couples who survived the spring. There's been a bit of rearrangement; Courtney'll be jumping with Marc, Tom with Rachel. Always happens after spring, this reshuffling of hearts.

As if hearts have anything to do with it! It's fire and claw, and the bone-deep need to procreate, that's what tenders change.

Mountain dragons descend in March, April. They come hungry, go back up sated. And the broom-jumpers wait for July to divvy themselves anew.

November? That's when we go up, and we go there hungry.

And slake our grief on dragon hide.

Author bio: RS lives in Detroit, where they aim for a zombie theme park. She thinks one already exists in her head. Admission is free:

<http://rsbohn.blogspot.com>

Quest

by John Xero

Charlie was obsessed with the dragons. She pored over photos, freeze-framed videos, searching for something.

Something I could never understand.

We went to the caves, the mountains, wherever there were sightings. The real tourist traps.

Then she found the hardcore message boards. The serious dragon chasers. The nerds collating data and running simulations. Their dragon algorithm.

That summer they made a prediction, and we drove to the dales.

I was bored. I stayed in the car. Missed everything.

But I saw the footage. Filmed from flameproof hides.

She thought she was one of them. They thought she made pretty bait.

Author bio: John Xero chases dragons all the time. Dragons called stories. They're powerful beasties and difficult to capture in all their magnificence. But he'll keep trying, and sharpening his weapons, and one day he'll nail a big one. And that will only be the beginning.
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Danny

by Matthew Czarnowski

The day we met Danny Fletcher, he told us a dragon lived under Maycomb Avenue. "That's what started the fire that killed Bobby Brennan."

"No way," we said. Everyone knew that crazy Mrs. Brennan burned the place down with cigarettes and vodka.

That summer, he said the dragon lived in his house. His dad grounded him a week for lying.

He showed up one day, left eye swollen shut, two teeth missing.

"Dragon do that?" We laughed. He didn't.

That was the last time we saw Danny alive. The cops arrested his dad. Guess Danny was right about that dragon.

Author bio: While writing is his passion, Matthew also spends a lot of his time learning survival skills in preparation for the zombie apocalypse. He currently teaches English in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Christening

by Christina Im

Death told me her name.

I kept it, because she will bring me to my knees someday. I was born halfway into the coffin, dearest, where none can touch me but her.

It was more a word than a name, a word that would shatter my skull if she didn't whisper. A farewell. It lives, now that I've heard it, in that secret shuddering space between the crook of my neck and my windpipe.

She will collect me soon.

Summer solstice, she said. Her shadow will grace our porch. Her first breath will stop my heart, even as you tremble.

Author bio: Christina Im is an aspirant wordsmith and a believer in madness. She received a gold and silver medal in the 2014 Scholastic Art and Writing Awards, and her work has appeared in several publications, including Hoglepot, Foxglove Hymnal, and The Plum Collection. Christina can be visited online at clocksandcages.flavors.me.

Dreams

by Chris White

Grey storm clouds gather, a black armada that promises no rain. Helicopters grasshopper-leap above the searching fingers of flame, their red and gold carapaces glittering like jewelled bugs; their belly loads of water will never quench the fire's thirst.

Summer rages, unchecked, while we dream of winter.

A dream, a prayer, a memory.

We dream: winter rains falling, frost blanketing the forest, now burnt black.

Ash.

Black and grey.

An alien world beneath the sunrise, the trees blackened stumps, skeletons.

An eerie silence falls.

Then we hear the whisper of flames, burning beneath the bark.

We dream of winter's rain.

Author bio: Chris White is an author living in Brisbane, Australia. His words have been published both as ones and zeros and as ink on dead wood. More of them can be found on his blog: <http://chriswhitewrites.com>.

Thanks for reading.

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