

Strange Horizons

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Editor: Susan Marie Groppi (Editor-In-Chief)

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Web Address: www.strangehorizons.com

What they publish: Poetry, flash fiction, short story, novelette, nonfiction

Submission Guidelines: Fiction accepted up to 9,000 words, however, 5,000 words or fewer increases chances of publishing. E-submissions only – see guidelines online. No simultaneous submissions, no unsolicited reprints (including anything published on web site with public access). No multiple fiction submissions allowed. Pay rate is five cents per word with a minimum of \$50 payout. This market is considered a professional market by the Science Fiction & Fantasy Writers of America.

Description of Publication: Looking for good speculative fiction. This means the story must have a science-fiction, fantasy, or speculative-fiction aspect. Special attention given to stories that focus on settings, characters, and cultures that are underrepresented in speculative fiction. Nuanced political issues, diverse perspectives and backgrounds appreciated. Not interested in horror, stories that explain phenomena in great detail, stories with twist endings, and stories seen too often – a complete list of which may be found on the web site. Any sex, violence, profanity or other adult themes should be artistically justified, i.e. it logically falls within the character's actions or thoughts. Updated every Monday.

Prose Per Issue/Amount Published Annually: 50 – 66%, 2 pieces each week.

Prose Review:

Ms. Liberty Gets A Haircut by Cat Rambo is a plainspoken fantasy story told in the third person. Four superheroines (Ms. Liberty, an android; X, a shapeshifter; Kilroy, an alien; and Dr. Arcane, a sorceress) eat pizza and decide to bring on new members into their group. They interview several dozen candidates and choose three new members: Zanycat, a girl with gizmos, martial arts prowess, and genius; Rocketwoman, an armored woman from the future; and Sphinx, a sexy, exotic woman whose powers aren't discussed at length. Built by her creators as a sex object (able to achieve orgasm in under 3.2 seconds), Ms. Liberty is programmed to be horny and to fight crime, but she was also given free will, so she is extremely conflicted. She wonders about love, about what makes a person female and whether she can change her programming or find common ground with it. She fights her programming, fights wanting sex throughout the story, choosing instead to write romance novels. Finally, by the end of the story, she goes to get a haircut, cutting away her wavy, Stepford Wives-esque hair and getting something "short and easily manageable." She realizes who she is with this action, that she does have free will.

This story was new, edgy, and offered a unique look at superheroes, sexuality, and what it means to be a woman. The writing was frank and honest, the characters were believable and laughably human at times, and the villains were comically stereotypical. The author not only makes fun of the superhero genre with this piece, she also provides a poignant commentary on the female superhero – namely, that most (if not all) are shown as sex objects: "She fights because someone wanted a sexy version of Captain America. Because someone thought the country was worth having someone else fight for. Because a woman looks sexy in spandex facing down a flame-fisted villain." The story was interesting in that it didn't have any specific timeline for a plot, but instead the plot seemed to focus on Ms. Liberty figuring herself out. We get the sense that there's a lot more going on both behind the scenes and

even right in front of our faces, which adds layers of depth to this world, but we really only see what the writer is concerned with telling us about: Ms. Liberty.

And Their Lips Rang with the Sun by Amal El-Mohtar is a plainspoken fantasy story told in the second person. The reader, a traveler through these parts, is sitting down to tea with an old woman who tells a story of a day when the sun did not rise because one of the sun-temple women, Lam, one of the women with bells on her lips (used to call up the sun each morning), fell in love and snuck off one night to find a man she had traded glances with. She finds him, a man with a voice like a flute (one of the shunned moon cultists), and they make love well into the night, sleeping away the hours until well after the moon had gone down. They awake to a world filled with fear, where everyone in the city is crying and praying and shooting flaming arrows, because the dance (to keep the sun and moon rising as expected) has not been completed by the temple maidens; the sun has not come up. Lam leaps up, completes the dance and returns to the sun temple, never again allowed to see her lover. She is with child and eventually gives birth to a boy. This child is whisked away from her before she can see him, and is taken to the father. After calling the sun up the next day, she goes in search of the father but does not find him. Many years later, after training her own replacement and giving the bells from her lips to the new maiden's, she goes in search of her son once more, only to return to the city without finding him. By the end of the story we learn that the old woman telling the story is, in fact, the maiden from her story. She asks for the name of the reader and realizes that the person she has been telling this story to is actually her long-lost son.

This is a brilliant story. It is written with such creativity – a second person narrative, written with a clearly defined narrator speaking to another clearly defined character, the “you,” whose voice we never read. The entire story is written with so much attention to the senses: “Had cinnamon been ground into their skin, they could not have been more brown, more fragrant, more beloved of the wine-bright sky.” Reading through it, one can taste the cinnamon and hear their voices and feel the sun on your skin, see it glinting off the golden bells of the beautiful girls as they dance and worship the mother sun. The use of story within a story is well done, especially as it is a tale we've heard time and time again and yet, even so, it plays on the heartstrings. There is a beautiful, lyrical connection that is made with this piece, one that resonates long after reading it.

Rating: 5. They don't publish more than 8 – 10 pieces of fiction per month, many of the authors have been published before and they pay professionally.