

Title of Magazine: Lightspeed    Issue: August 2011 (vol.2, is.8)

Chief Editor: John Joseph Adams

Web Address: <http://www.lightspeedmagazine.com/>

What they publish: Science fiction

Submission Guidelines:

Original science fiction stories (no fantasy) of 1500-7500 words. Stories of 5000 words or less are preferred. The magazine also publishes two reprints per issue. Payment for original fiction is 5cents/word, on acceptance, for reprinted fiction – 1 cent/word. Sexual themes and stories with strong sexual content are acceptable, but the magazine is not a market for erotica. Fan-fiction or media-based fiction are not accepted. No simultaneous or multiple submissions, no submissions for a period of seven days after previous rejection. *Lightspeed* is a SFWA-qualifying market, which means publication in it makes the writer eligible for becoming a member of Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America.

Description of Publications:

The magazine is proud to have been nominated to multiple prestigious science fiction awards, such as Hugo or Nebula, as well as its award-winning authors. However, their declared mission is discovering good emerging writers, for whom publication in *Lightspeed* magazine may be the first step on their way to awards. The magazine is relatively young but very well established, because it started as an expansion of *Fantasy* magazine (<http://www.fantasy-magazine.com>). Since the magazine is relatively young, right now competition is pretty high and most of the contributors of original stories are experienced writers, but it is possible that in a year or so the situation may change in favor of emerging writers. The quality of writing is high but achievable for Columbia Fiction Writing seniors. Design and production quality are very high, the magazine is free to read on the Web, the site has average 40,000 page views a month, with 20,000 unique visitors. Submissions are accepted all year round, most rejections are sent out within two business days, while stories being seriously considered may be held for up to two weeks.

Prose per Issue: 2 original stories and 2 reprints per issue, 24 original stories and 24 reprints a year. Acceptance number: 0.015%.

Prose Reviews:

*Defenders* by Will McIntosh is a plain spoken science fiction story in an exotic setting. Lila is a subjective third person narrator who is an ambassador, sent to Australia to contact isolated civilization of so called Defenders, intelligent robots who were created by human engineers in haste to fight alien invasion. Nobody in the embassy has any idea of how Australia looks now, twenty eight years after the invasion was repealed and the Defenders settled down in Australia. Lila, to boot, is haunted by traumatic memories of the past, when she as a child became a witness of her father's death by the hands of the invaders. As soon as ambassadors arrive to Australia, they witness almost surreal changes: Defenders simply copied human architecture and even their culture, but changed the size to fit their large bodies; to make things more terrifying, Luyten invaders weren't all killed by the Defenders, but instead made their slaves. The picture becomes even scarier when the ambassadors take part in a number of ceremonies, in which they witness inadequate and aggressive nature of Defenders' behavior. Several ambassadors die a terrible death without Defenders even realizing the cost of a single life. Finally, it becomes clear that the robots are expecting their human creators to let them live among them in some of the most important regions of the world, which most probably will end up with mankind becoming Defenders' slaves the same way the aliens have. It's then that Lila is

being secretly approached by a telepathic alien, who might have been the one who killed Lila's father. He explains that the aliens are willing to help humans to overthrow the robots, but the war must be started now, when the Defenders are unprepared. Finally, Lila overcomes her hatred to the Luyten, and soon the war starts. To make it up to her, the alien who killed her father brings her to a shelter at the cost of his life.

The strongest side of the story is that it is terrifying without being too graphic. McIntosh excellently exploits so called effect of uncanny valley, when a robot's behavior becomes scary rather than attractive, when it starts copying human behavior with small odd twists. Because of it by the end of the story the reader finds himself feeling more sympathy to the deformed aliens who are at least able to feel empathy to humans and each other. I give the story another credit for not borrowing overused visual references of aliens and robots from mass-culture. Nowhere else I've ever read a description of a bio-engineered tripod with a face that looks like an Easter Island statue, playing *Richard II* on the stage. Nowhere else I've ever come across a scene where a five-legged monster is carrying a woman to the shelter in one of its multiple randomly placed apertures. And all these, mind you, are told in proper English and, strangely enough, with good sense of taste: "She pulled off her shoes, leaned one palm against the Luyten's marbled skin. It was thick and warm, and gave under her hand like a soufflé. She inserted a foot into the thing's mouth. It felt moist, warm bordering on hot. Her leg sunk to the thigh, lubricated by slime. Still steadying herself with one hand she swung her other leg up and in, unable to suppress mewls of disgust as she sunk to the waist. The muscles around her spasmed—tight, loose, tight again." I don't even have complaints about the cliff-hanger ending, since the story is not about who won the war but about the importance of empathy and understanding. Sadly enough, McIntosh failed to add more cross-references, scenes or allusions that would underline this, or any other, subtext, because the storyline takes over the message.

*Nonstop to Portales* by Connie Willis is plain spoken metafiction story in a domestic setting. John is a subjective first person narrator, an inventor who visits a small town in New Mexico hoping to sell some of his equipment and joins a tourist bus trip to pass the time. The trip is dedicated to a little-known science fiction writer Jack Williamson, and Jack finds it terribly boring, but nobody in the bus complains and seems fascinated by what John considers quite uninspiring. Finally, John comes to a conclusion that he happened to meet not ordinary tourists but time travelers from the future where all Jack Williamson's speculative inventions came true. It inspires John to continue his inventor's career in this godforsaken land of empty highways and broke store owners.

The story is smooth but terribly wordy. Willis wanted to show how terribly bored and apathetic her character is, and how inspiring, on the contrast, science fiction may be, but she ended up with lulling the reader instead. Willis' sense of self-critique shows itself up in John's aimless pastime: "I drove back through town, looking for someplace to eat. McDonald's, Taco Bell, Burger King. There's nothing wrong with fast food, except that it's fast. I needed a place where it took half an hour to get a menu and another twenty minutes before they took your order". This paragraph would be just enough to show how depressed and bored her character is, but Willis dedicates three such paragraphs in a row to depict John's not-so-fascinating adventures. The same problem exists in the narration in every scene: dialogues, the bus trip, later discoveries John makes; instead of pushing the story forward, Willis takes her time and in many details tells every unimportant thing that John did during the day. The story terribly lacks catchy scenes or charismatic characters, plus the fantastic assumption doesn't find any serious proof in the text. If only every unusual and poorly organized sightseeing trip could be explained by time travelling, we'd be living in a world much more interesting than the one that we know.

Rating: 8. The magazine is a very good place to be published in for many reasons: money, respect, audience and membership in SFWA. The level of competition is very high, but the benefits of being published in such a place are worth submitting, especially since the level of writing looks quite achievable.