

# Theaker's Quarterly Fiction

A Magazine Report by Justin Bostian  
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## Fact Sheet

**Print/Online Publication:** Theaker's Quarterly Review

**Web Address:** <http://theakersquarterly.blogspot.com/>

**Email:** [theakers@silveragebooks.com](mailto:theakers@silveragebooks.com)

**Founded:** 2004

**Editors:** Stephen Theaker and John Greenwood

**Frequency:** Quarterly

**Circulation:** Estimated 2000 downloads per issue plus small print runs.

**What They Publish:** Hard science fiction, soft science fiction, fantasy, heroic fantasy, dark fantasy, humorous fantasy, slipstream, magic realism, horror and terror stories are all welcome at Theaker's. Book, movie and television reviews, related to the same genres and written by the editors, are also regularly published.

**Submission Guidelines:** Submissions should be sent to [theakers@silveragebooks.com](mailto:theakers@silveragebooks.com). Lengths range from flash to novella, 1000 to 40,000 words.

**Simultaneous Submissions:** No

**Reading Period:** Year Round

**Average Response Time:** 38 days, closer to 65 for accepted material

**Contributor Payment:** None

**Cost:** \$5-\$6 for print issues, free PDF, Kindle and epub versions

**Not For Profit:** Yes

**CLMP:** No

## **Why I Chose Theaker's Quarterly Review**

There aren't too many respectable genre magazine being published today, so when I stumbled across Theaker's Quarterly Review on Duotrope, I was rather excited. After downloading and reading through several issues I was struck by the quality of the published stories and the dedication to the craft exhibited by the editors. They're non-profit, self deprecating and extremely humble while providing some of the most compelling and well-written short science fiction, horror and fantasies stories being published today. The entire magazine demonstrates a refreshingly pleasant attitude towards the genres they love and the writers they work with, and their approachability for emerging writers lead me to choose Theaker's for my magazine report.

### Issue Comparison

	<b>Issue 30</b>	<b>Issue 31</b>	<b>Issue 33</b>
<b>Writers Male:Female</b>	6:1	2:6	5:0
<b>Protagonists Male:Female</b>	6:1	6:1	5:0
<b>POV 1<sup>st</sup>:2<sup>nd</sup>:3<sup>rd</sup></b>	2:0:5	4:0:4	2:0:3
<b>Writer's Credits* Book:Magazine:First</b>	2:4:0	1:5:2	2:3:0

\*Contributors publishing history not fully known

TQF historically publishes more men than women, but there is by no means a discriminatory attitude held by the publishers. I think that the male-favoring ratio is mostly due to the primary demographic of the genres TQF publishes.

There is a fairly even balance of 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> person perspective published in TQF, with 2<sup>nd</sup> being completely unrepresented in the issues I have read.

TQF maintains an attitude that is friendly and helpful towards emerging writers, but many of their contributors have been published elsewhere. When it comes down to a writer's history, there is no favor given to established contributors. Decisions are made based on the strength of the work.

## Story Reviews

### Issue 30

*Citadel 99* by Michael Canfield is a plainspoken fantasy story in an exotic setting. Molyk, a young refugee from a war-torn country, is sent as a spy to learn the weaknesses of an invading force that is sweeping the land. Sympathetic to the boy's physical deformity, a missing eye that is hidden with a crude patch, a high-ranking officer in the invading force takes the boy under his wing and, in his own fearsome way, helps the boy out of a precarious situation. Despite the boy's pleas, the invading force rides towards the last remaining stronghold, Citadel 99, and under the fire of the city's fearsome guns the officer considers his love for the battlefield and the thunderous chaos it brings.

Canfield doesn't give away this mysterious world, he only lets bits and pieces of its history and metaphysical properties, something akin to a parallel universe or an afterlife, slip through the denizens' conversations. This leads the reader to discover the world through dialogue and Molyk's thoughts, and it's an exciting way to delve in to a new environment. The harsh conditions of the invading camp and the brutality of the horde is disturbing, but when the officer explains the purpose of the violence, the ritual and primitive mentality that reveres such berserker attitudes is reminiscent of real-world history and the ancient forces that ravaged ancient Europe. There's a sympathetic feeling that comes from the end of the story, when the reader passes from shock and disgust to understanding. The real strength in the story, which is full of fantasy and science fiction elements that feel fresh and interesting, is the human emotion felt when the monstrous and cruel invading army is in their element, respecting their enemies' fighting spirit even as they're being torn apart by their guns.

*One Case of Flash: Another Chimera Tale* by K.J. Hannah Greenburg is a plainspoken fantasy tale in a domestic setting. Doris, a young writer who is primarily concerned with scholarly essays, is set to wed Wilson, the boorish son of a psychologist named Dr. Maurice Hichkins. A young chimera named Charles has taken up residency in Doris' mailbox, and he is sympathetic to her emotional distress at the thought of marrying Wilson. While lying in wait for Wilson in a grove of trees, young Charles is surprised by Dr. Hichkins, who hopes to capture and psychologically treat the fledgling creature. Charles doesn't like the sound of that and proceeds to badly burn Dr. Hichkins.

The story is short enough to be considered flash fiction and written in an interesting and sparse fashion. There's no internal thought, no dialogue, just straightforward presentation of the events. The sentences are reminiscent of an essay, which plays well with the protagonist's affection for the form. The mythical elements are unexplained and presented in a matter-of-fact way that lends itself well to magical realism. Charles, the young chimera, is never physically described to the reader. In traditional mythology, a chimera is a fire-breathing lion-like monster with a snake for a tail and the head of a goat rising from its' back. The image of a baby lion/snake/goat/flamethrower monster snuggling up with letters is funny and a little adorable. The story ends a bit too soon, never getting past Charles immolating Dr. Hichkins, but in the

short span that we're allowed to see into the characters lives there's a definite sense of attachment to be found, especially in Charles. I'd like Greenburg to give us more of this world, more of the lighthearted magical realism that she presents in *Another Chimera Tale*, but if this is all I can get then I'll gladly take it.

### Issue 31

*Little Yellow Bird* by Alex Smith is a plain spoken horror story set in a rural mining town. Sherrif Brady, a US Army veteran formerly stationed in the mountains of Afghanistan, is plagued by domestic disturbance calls from a former love whose husband is abusive. Upon exploring the man's makeshift apartment-shed, he discovers a tunnel linked to the towns mines where the man is being used as an incubator for the eggs of a strange race of underground creatures. After destroying the underground lair and narrowly escaping with his life, he chooses to tell the now-widowed Beverly, who he still has feelings for, that her husband is probably on a bender. The two sit close together and both hope, to themselves, that he never comes back.

The story is full of strong imagery, painting the scenery with a dark and ominous palette and foreshadowing the unsettling events that occur. Through vivid descriptions of the environment, such as "The high branches swayed in the dawdling wind, their water-gorged leaves blotting out the sunlight and leaving a sallow gloom...", Smith turns the landscape itself into a character, effectively heightening the tension. Sherrif Brady suffers from a mild case of post-traumatic stress disorder, and the close, stuffy descriptions of the mine tunnels and Afghani caves make the reader feel just as uncomfortable and vulnerable as the protagonist. The entire story is well written and, while it doesn't necessarily deviate from a fairly typical horror style, the ending avoids the creepy ambiguity of many such horror plots and instead leaves the reader with a satisfying, almost hopeful conclusion.

*Friendly* by David Tallerman is a science fiction story set on an alien home planet. A human diplomat, intent on discovering whether or not the tentacle-covered Xoob species is fit for trade and interaction with the descendants of planet Earth, attends a sort of alien Superbowl. He is concerned that the race is altogether too passive and highbrow to have a successful relationship with the historically violent and aggressive homo sapiens, until the losers of the match are ritually dismembered by the roaring crowd of fans. Their act of wanton aggression and thirst for a sporting event that allows them to work out their primal, warlike urges convinces that diplomat of their compatibility, opening the route of peaceful trade and cohabitation between the two wildly different, yet strikingly similar, species.

Tallerman writes from the perspective of the unnamed human diplomat, keeping the majority of the story inside the character's thoughts. With this extremely close 1<sup>st</sup> person writing, he explores the diplomat's anxiety's over the Human-Xoob relations and his difficulty communicating with the slug/octopus/seal-like beings. He assigns them arbitrary names and personifies them as male and female, when in reality he's fully aware of their asexuality and lack of a distinct individual presence. His humorous opinions and social faux pas are clever and not

unlike those between the different cultures of our own species. He also hints at a large amount of human history that hasn't happened yet, including a fiasco with another alien race that ended up on the wrong end of human aggression, and, as a result, "...their home world still glows on dark nights". Tallerman has created a light and almost facetious future of human expansion, industry and trade, then cut out the majority of the detail to place us firmly in the future-present, directly into the life of a man to whom none of this is really unbelievable. The story is on the short side, concisely running through a compelling and entertaining bit of science fiction.

### Issue 33

*Nose Trek* by Steve Redwood is a plainspoken story in a domestic setting with some fantastic, strange occurrences. Mr. Jenkins, the vicar of a local church, expresses some disturbingly honest opinions from the pulpit during one church service. After being hospitalized, it's discovered that he has a case, possibly the first recorded, of "Reverse Pinocchio Syndrome", which causes his nose to grow when he speaks the honest truth. After lengthy explanation of the process of Mr. Jenkins nasal growth, things take a turn when one nostril collapses into the other and a black hole is formed inside of his nasal passages. A crew of scientists, shrunk to miniature size along with their high-tech spaceship, set off on an expedition into the man's nose to discover the Ultimate Truth inside of his tiny galaxy. After a tremendous sneeze propels them from the parallel space-time vortex in Mr. Jenkins face, the ship crashes against a large crucifix hanging on the wall opposite his hospital bed. All is lost and no one seems care.

Of all of the stories I've read in Theaker's, this is certainly the funniest. Full of dry British humor and nerdy wit, Redwood paints a comical scene in nearly every sentence. Mr. Jenkins wife rises from a church pew with indignant rage, "...like the Balrog scenting Wizard blood." The ending, too, is funny, in a sad and very clever sort of way. After discovering the Ultimate Truth, ready to appease the masses with proof or disproof of God and the meaning of life, all knowledge is lost with a single sneeze.

*NON* by Douglas J. Ogurek is a science fiction story set in an exotic location. In a futuristic environment ruled by sensory enhancements and media-driven entertainment, a young man named Choyce Pline is given the opportunity of a lifetime. The opportunity to to play a new gilm (somewhat akin to a playable movie, a "game-film") called NON, and winning this game would propel him to a level of fame that would allow him to create and perform his visionary dance. Knowing that his dance could change lives and become a revered and unforgettable work of art, he accepts the challenge and must compete with two other players, a successful gilm-maker called Moore and a fringe dweller named Cureton. They are led through a swamp, far from their high-tech cities, to play the game. As eight bells toll on their trek to the heart of the swamp, towards the strange building where the game of NON will be held, each of the three contestants are tempted from their path. The creator of NON, a mysterious woman named Medley, observes them "as one watches kittens", smiling and offering cryptic advice and poetic verse. First Cureton, then Moore, are tempted from the path to NON in a way specific to their personalities, and at the door of the game, Choyce himself thanks Medley for the opportunity and turns away to help Cureton save a small group of dying tadpoles. He walks away, giving up his dreams of success, fame and everlasting recognition, to save a handful of tiny, nearly

insignificant creatures. As he scoops them from the water, the final bell rings and the game begins and ends with no players in the building. A sign appears in the swamp, proclaiming that Choyce, having avoided the temptation of the game itself in favor of his own moral values, has won NON.

Ogurek has created a fantastic piece of writing that is both utterly confusing and, at times, unreadable, but manages to lock the reader in its hold and tell a compelling human story. The prose isn't just hard to get through; it's nearly all an invention of the writer. Words like "gilm" and "flestume" are ever-present in both the dialogue and the external descriptions. The reader is placed firmly in a completely invented futuristic world where the very words we use have evolved and taken on new meanings, been mingled with techno-speak and binary equations. At first, it feels thick and tedious as you're forced to learn the fictionalized evolution of the English language, but as the story goes on I found that I became accustomed to the strange speech. The meaning of nearly everything has to be discovered from context clues and a healthy dose of imagination, but once it all clicks together the magnificent scope of the piece is almost overwhelming. The fact that all of it is created just to tell a fairly standard story of personal sacrifice and the virtue that it brings. I can't recommend this story enough to anyone with a healthy interest in science fiction or experimental writing. If Ogurek created this insanely ambitious world and the language that its populous uses solely to tell this short story, I commend him, but I sincerely hope that there's more, much more, for me to explore.

## Interview with Stephen Theaker

Justin Bostian: As the editor and namesake of Theaker's Quarterly Fiction, what are your editorial responsibilities? How is the workload shared between yourself and co-editor John Greenwood? As a follow-up, how awesome is it to see such consistently fantastic writing appearing in a magazine with your name on the cover?

Stephen Theaker: Up until the last year, I did pretty much everything on the magazine: reading submissions, editing, typesetting, proofreading, and so on. Recently John has read nearly all submissions. I'm embarrassed to see my name on the cover, to be honest. It's so egotistical. But I have to admit it's worked out well – it's very Googlable.

Justin Bostian: With Theaker's Quarterly Fiction, your work with Dark Horizons and your involvement with the British Fantasy Awards, you've got your fingers in a lot of literary pies. What's a day in the life of a busy editor like? How do you find time for it all? Any noticeable toll on your sanity?

Stephen Theaker: I've been working from home for about a decade now, so that's ten years of not having to travel to work and back - that gives you a fair amount of extra time to get things done. It also means I'm not half as worn out in the evenings as would be usual. (The downside is that I'm barely socialised nowadays.)

Things snowballed badly with the British Fantasy Society; I went in a very short period from editing Dark Horizons to also filling in as chair, awards administrator, short story competition administrator, webmaster, forums moderator, special publications editor, Facebook admin and convention secretary. Nuts, really, but I felt a responsibility to keep it all going. It seemed important at the time.

It was a very exciting period, but it did take a toll. My family certainly missed me at weekends and at breakfast, and there's a lot of stuff around the house that really needs fixing. My approach for the near future will be to do fewer things, but to work on doing them better.

Justin Bostian: What are the challenges you face when publishing a genre fiction magazine in the current literary market?

Stephen Theaker: The biggest challenges I see other magazines struggling with making a profit, and attracting readers sufficient to support the magazine. By establishing the magazine on a strictly non-profit, non-paying, non-spending basis we've sidestepped all of that. Whether we've had one reader or a thousand has never had any impact on the viability of the project – although

one benefit of having more readers has been more submissions, and that has resulted in a better magazine.

Our biggest challenge has generally been to find artwork. In the early days I had great fun doing the art myself, but once we began to get proper contributors it felt disrespectful to spoil their stories with my scribbles. We've now got a regular cover artist, Howard Watts, which is wonderful, but we've done without interior art for a couple of years now.

Over the last couple of years the challenge was keeping the magazine going while the British Fantasy Society sucked up so much of my time. We just about managed it, but I did consider putting TQF on hold a couple of times.

Justin Bostian: Out of the three main genres of fiction that you publish, which is your personal favorite? Which receives the most submissions? The least?

Stephen Theaker: We receive lots of horror, not so much fantasy. My tastes are rather split - I love action-driven sf and fantasy, but also very odd, writerly works. One benefit of our approach is that we don't have to consider whether anyone would want to read the material we publish; all that matters is whether we think it's worth publishing.

Justin Bostian: Most of the contributors have been published elsewhere and a few even have novels available. How does a writer's publishing history affect their consideration for Theaker's? Do you consider Theaker's to be a friendly market for emerging writers?

Stephen Theaker: An interesting publishing history doesn't make a huge difference to us – because we're not trying to sell the magazine, recognisable names don't have the usual value. We just go by the story. If someone's been published in cool places, or if it's by someone we know socially, it makes us sadder to reject it, but that's about as far as it goes.

I think we are a very approachable publication for new writers. For one thing the number of submissions we receive is a fraction of what even semi-pro publications receive, so the odds are always in the favour of a good story. We also give feedback on stories rejected, where requested, which can have benefits for the beginning writer.

Justin Bostian: In issue #33, you published a story by Douglas Ogurek called NON. It's full of made up words and unfamiliar phrases and more than a little bit challenging to read. What was the editing process like for this piece? How did it compare to your standard editing process, what you go through for a piece that's NOT so "out there"?

Stephen Theaker: When I began reading NON, I was at first put off by the apparently

nonsensical language, but what I realised after a few pages was that they weren't just random words, each was a neologism that described something new in this future world. Some of those words – eg. pivort, uncleused – have gone on to become a part of my mental vocabulary.

With stories accepted for TQF I tend to edit very lightly. We reject stories we feel are so flawed as to require a great deal of work, even if they are interesting in other ways. We don't have the time to supervise rewrites. I don't have an ideal story in mind that I want to shape each submission into: I want to help the writer produce the story he or she wanted. My job is just to help them avoid mistakes and infelicities.

Some writers are unhappy to have stories rejected because of problems with punctuation, spelling or grammar, feeling that those things can be tidied up later on. But experience has led me to develop a theory of leaves and cracks: when you clear up the leaves, you often find cracked paving stones underneath. A writer who is careless about surface details is often careless too with structure and logic.

Justin Bostian: We, as writing students, are constantly torn on the subject of e-books and online publishing through e-readers. As an independent publisher, what are your views on the Kindle, Sony Reader and other electronic publishing platforms?

Stephen Theaker: Mass market paperbacks are probably on their last legs. Print won't die completely, but will become increasingly the preserve of collectables and gifts. As an independent publisher, the Kindle is fantastic. As far as distribution goes, it puts us on an absolutely level playing field with large publishers, and gives us a huge advantage on price. Personally, I've little time for paper books any more – other than for review, I've only read a couple in the two years. The less you read them, the more annoying they become.

Justin Bostian: How did reviews come to play such a large part in Theaker's? A lot of time and effort is spent on them, and very few literary magazines, especially genre fiction, include reviews. Are they a labor of love or do they spring from a specific demand from your audience?

Stephen Theaker: In the early days it just felt like it was something a magazine should have (although perhaps I should note here that many of our early reviews were of entirely fictional books and films). After joining Goodreads I got into the habit of reviewing everything I read, and I slowly became more serious about it. Having a review section is essentially a nice way of leveraging an activity I'm doing anyway - reading all the time – for the benefit of the magazine.

It's certainly easier to make an impact publishing reviews than publishing fiction, especially reviewing small press books, because as you say there are so few venues that do. Posting the reviews on our blog has taken that up to another level, with lots of writers and publishers linking

back to our reviews.

Justin Bostian: What advice can you give to emerging writers who are interested in genre fiction? How about students interested in the publishing industry?

Stephen Theaker: I don't know if I'm qualified to give advice to emerging writers... Perhaps to not get too hung up in the idea of making a living from your writing. That's a fantastic and achievable goal, but if you don't manage right away, don't let that make you give up on your writing. Philip Jose Farmer had some good advice: find a spouse who'll support you while you write. The more time you spend writing, the more likely you are to be successful. One other bit of advice: don't have a go at editors or reviewers on Facebook (or Twitter, or your blog) if they've given your work the thumbs-down. Chances are, you've added them to your friends list and forgotten they're there, and if they're not, someone who knows them will be. Or if not, there will be another reviewer or editor on there who notes that you're one to be wary of in future.

To students interested in publishing, certain things are always likely to be useful: an understanding of literature and language, of course, and a bit of economics or business studies. A basic understanding of html and being able to touch-type won't hurt at all. I'd recommend learning a bit about risk management: a big part of working in publishing is making sure you have systems in place to stop things going wrong. Learn to love checklists. Also, learn to manage your inbox and your tasks. Publishing involves a multitude of tiny, time-sensitive tasks clustered around large projects, and hundreds of emails. Never let a word go by without finding out what it means. If in doubt, check it out. Treat writers with respect at all times, but when proofreading assume they are idiots.