



# Weird Tales

Zachary Hornback  
Magazine Report  
Fall 2009

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<sup>1</sup> Image courtesy of [WeirdTales.net](http://WeirdTales.net)

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## Fact Sheet

**Print Magazine:** Weird Tales

**Publisher:** Wildside Press

**Web Address:** [www.weirdtales.net](http://www.weirdtales.net)

**Address:** Weird Tales Fiction Submissions  
P.O. Box 38190  
Tallahassee, FL 32315

**E-mail Address:** [weirdtales@gmail.com](mailto:weirdtales@gmail.com)

**Founded:** 1923

**Awards:** Hugo Award: Best Semiprozine 2009

**Current Editors:** Stephen Segal, Ann VanderMeer

**Frequency:** Varies; generally 6 issues per year

**What They Publish:** Flash fiction, short stories – “the unique, fantastic & bizarre”

**Description of Publication:** Began in 1923, this was the first magazine catering exclusively to works of the dark and fantastic. They live up to their name, seeking to bring readers all that is weird and unsettling, stories that are strange and original with a proclivity to the dark side. They really like dark fantasy: pieces that push the envelope, are unique and original, or are new and unusual approaches to traditional stories.

**Submission Guidelines:** Short stories may be 10,000 words or fewer; nothing larger should be submitted without a query letter first. Both hardcopy and e-mail submissions accepted. Hardcopy submissions should include an SASE, e-mail submissions should be in standard manuscript format. First North American Serial Rights required. Cover letters are appreciated but not required.

**Reading Period:** Open for submissions

**Simultaneous Submissions:** Yes

**Multiple Submissions:** No

**Average Response Time:** 2-3 months

**Contributor Payment:** Professional Pay, 3-4 cents per word.

**Cost:** Individual Issue: \$7. Subscription: \$20-28.

## **Why I Chose *Weird Tales***

I saw my first issue of *Weird Tales* in the Fantasy Writing Workshop class offered here at Columbia. One of the issues was a required text for the class, and throughout the semester we would regularly refer to the stories contained within that glossy cover as we learned about what makes the best fantasy stories. The magazine was beautiful and easy to read, it appealed to me on an artistic and creative level and also on an intellectual level. The magazine, I would learn, housed some of the best writing in the fantasy genre.

It was all downhill from there. I got a subscription for myself, and I even got one for a friend as a Christmas gift. My magazine grew ragged and worn from the number of times I would pick it up and flip through it. It stayed in my mind as a goal to work towards: I want to see my own work in there someday, included among some of the greatest authors I've ever read.

### Comparison of Issues Over Time

	Fall 2009	Spring 2009	Nov/Dec 2008	Sept/Oct 2008
Writers Male:Female	4:2	6:0	9:2	5:2
Protagonists Male:Female:Unclear	4:1:1	4:1:1	6:2:3	6:1:0
POV 1 <sup>st</sup> :2 <sup>nd</sup> :3 <sup>rd</sup>	3:1:2	2:0:4	8:0:3	2:0:5
Writers' Credits Book:Magazine:First	2:3:1	3:2:1	4:5:0	3:3:0

It's said that many of the writers in the fantasy genre are men, and this table seems to speak to that. There also seems to be a strong trend for male protagonists. After speaking with Ann VanderMeer, the fiction editor for the magazine, I can say with confidence that these trends are not purposeful; that is to say, she doesn't look at the gender of the character or the writer when choosing a piece. Ann made it very clear in her interview that she publishes work based on one thing: the story. If the story is powerful, if it moves you from beginning to end and satisfies the other criteria of *Weird Tales* than she'll choose it. She also spoke about publishing emerging writers, which may not seem to show in the table above, but it must be noted that, to an eighty-year-old magazine, "emerging writer" may refer to someone who has only broken in to the fantasy writing world within the last ten years. As to the point-of-view of many of the stories, all I can offer is that perhaps it is more fun to write in first person, where you reveal things to your audience only as your character discovers them.

## Story Reviews

### Fall 2009 Issue

*The House That Smith Built*, by Simon King, is a second person narrative in an exotic setting. The narrator begins by asking the reader to walk with him, and so begins a journey to a very strange house. Noises are heard not too far away, and the house is crumbling. When the narrator walks the reader inside the crumbling house, the source of the noise is discovered. There, in one of the broken down rooms, an old man with a shotgun stands, shooting at intervals. He shoots at the corpse of a young man hanging from the rafters of the room, around whose feet a young woman clings and screams after every explosive shot. Last we see an old woman standing next to the old man, watching silently. The narrator then shares with us the story of the old man and his wife, the old woman, and the day that the old woman found him in the field lying with the young woman. The old man gets up, but behind him on the grass a twenty-year-old version of himself is born, and the young woman lies with him. As she does, the house crumbles. The old man runs for his shotgun, and shoots the young man. The young woman screams and holds on to her young lover, who, after a time, begins to breathe again, and the house begins to crumble again. The old man shoots the young man, the young woman holds the young man to heal him, and the old woman watches and waits, knowing someday her husband will run out of bullets and the house will begin crumbling once more.

This story is amazing. The loving beauty with which the repeating scene inside the crumbling house is described is just breathtaking in its solace and honesty. The author knows he doesn't have time to describe every little detail, he's not trying to paint an intricate picture, instead he knows it will appear differently for everyone, which is why he starts off the entire piece with, "Time is short, so forgive me if I censure those images I deem gratuitous and fat." He takes the reader off on a walk, beginning it in fog and then shaping images to slowly appear. The entire reading is ethereal because of this; it is otherworldly and dream-like. His fantasy elements are clear, the young man who is produced to the old man's shame in lying with the young woman; the same young man who lives and is healed every time the young woman lies with him. The entire piece is a beautiful lament of lechery and how it affects those involved. The author does a great job of showing us just enough: "This woman, she is both young and beautiful, and since the fog is too thick for you to see her, and since her beauty will distract too much in describing, assign to her what aesthetic qualities you will; free me to leave her for a while." That quote is a great example of how the writing really works to help the reader get involved in the story and in the emotions associated with the characters. Overall, a wonderful piece.

*The Men in the Water*, by Zdravka Evtimova, is a first person, plainspoken narrative in an exotic setting. The Drugan is an asteroid where all convicts are sent to live. It is a large asteroid, with the interesting phenomenon of being edible. The land tastes different in different places, ranging South and East and West up to the shores of the Ocean. The narrator meets a beautiful woman named Ocea with whom he falls in love; she is the first one to tell him of the dangers of the ocean and of the advertisement man. Anyone who touches the water from the ocean is changed into water himself, and flows into the water from the ocean. The advertisement man comes once every eon in search of the water with the men in it. After a time, Ocea leaves him, and the narrator sets out on a quest to collect jars of water, one each with every man from the asteroid in them. All the men that are left are fat and lay on the ground simply shoving the land into their mouths. They are each too busy eating to notice when he dips one of their fingers into the water he'd collected in a jar. By the end of the story, after he has collected enough jars full of water to build four walls of a structure, he sees the Ocea again, who informs him that she is the advertisement man. This is the last thing he experiences before she touches him with the water and he is pulled into a jar.

This story is strange and wonderful. It succeeds in immersing the reader in a wonderful world where men can be transformed into water and kept in jars. From the first few lines, “They dipped their fingers into the transparent jar full of water and the water took them... The water dissolved him and remained transparent, pure and quiet in its clean vessel.” The world is made real to the disbelievers in the way the author narrates his protagonist’s eating habits – from prying the blue soil up with a knife to finally just scooping it out with his mouth. The prose is simple and to the point, giving us a good idea that the narrator is a rather uncomplicated man, “I often wondered what would happen if you drank the water in which a man had been dissolved. I wouldn’t do that. I wouldn’t honestly.” However, I don’t think it’s really too difficult for the reader to guess that this woman who has been on the Asteroid for two eons is the same person as the “advertisement man” who comes every eon. The story has a good pace, drawing you in from the first line and keeping you entertained and focused on what it’s all about: the ocean with the water that dissolves men.

### Spring 2009 Issue

*Weiroot*, by Jeffrey Ford, is a plainspoken, first person story told in an old world setting. Weiroot, “a strange and cantankerous entity outside of society, the Man Who Escaped Hell,” finds a tiny purple baby in a fallen star. He adopts the alien baby and describes their life together. Father and grown son, both strange in different ways, sit down together as Weiroot divulges his past.

This is a perfect example of the strange and odd things one can find in this publication. The story is solid, and the structure is strange and adds so much to the character. The story, flowing from one page to the next, does not have paragraph breaks, but, rather, is written in one long paragraph, like a lengthy, musing thought. The piece offers up just enough of the narrator to really make the reader curious, but no more. Instead of telling us too much about any character, we’re shown a relationship that’s easy to identify with, even though it catalogues a man who escaped from hell and his purple alien son. It perfectly captures the thrills of parenthood (“Then a kiss to that purple brow and you lean back in your rocker and rock beneath the stars from whence he came, closing your eyes and falling into a dream of the future.”) and the bad times as well (“He’ll stamp and howl like a fox in a leg trap and pass through the walls a hundred times, for this will be one of his powers, and you’ll patiently catch him and put him back and tell him NO!”) In this way, despite the extreme oddities of the old man and the youthful alien son, it is easy to empathize with the characters.

*The Garbacologist*, by Jeff Johnson, is a third person, plainspoken story in an exotic setting. An odd garbacologist, Turner, digs through the trash that clutters his world, seeking the best tokens. Hopes and aspirations, little blue marbles of possibility, even prayers litter the streets of a world where only a few can see them, and those that do are the garbacologists. The garbage starts disappearing, most likely having to do with a strange hellish truck that chases Turner at one point. Having no one else to go to, Turner meets with a rival garbacologist, Fullman. Fullman eats everything without discrimination, a human garbage disposal, and sneers at the way Turner only mouths the dreams and personality traits of the garbage he finds. After informing him that they are the only two left, Fullman ingests one of his own lost aspirations, which changes him dramatically and he begins to expel all the garbage he ingested over the years. Before he is finished, however, the black truck comes, and Turner only just manages to get away. The story ends with Turner heading back to his old house and getting rid of all the precious litter he’d found over the years before eating one of his own aspirations.

This story calls for a huge suspension of disbelief, but delivers right down to the end. It is wonderfully colorful and quirky, “Give up singing and a tooth flute might fall from your sleeve. Sicken of violent crime and you might lose an 11<sup>th</sup> knuckle bone made of metal... Kill yourself and a suicide bunny will hop out of the box where your personal belongings were thoughtfully

condensed.” This whimsical quality, however, does not diminish the weight of the story in the least. It retains a dramatic and powerful dynamic throughout with striking imagery and good storytelling, like in the description of the hell truck and the way in which his tokens react to it: “A dim red light glowed in the interior of the cab, silhouetting a figure inside. The enormous engine revved once, vomiting black diesel smoke from twin upright exhaust columns. The cigarette case in Turner’s pocket chattered like a set of wind-up teeth.”

### **Nov/Dec 2008 Issue**

*How to Play With Dolls*, by Matthew Cheney, is a third person, plainspoken story in a domestic setting. Jenny’s father makes a decadent dollhouse for her, a three-story mansion. He gives it to her when she turns seven and she promptly declares it an insane asylum and ties up her dolls in straight jackets and dictates how they should live their lives there. Jenny takes it so seriously, afraid that the dolls will stage a revolt and not trusting any of them to watch over the others while they (and she) sleeps. Her father sees this and disappears once more into his workshop. One night as Jenny sits beside her dollhouse asylum weeping, he returns with beautiful, intricate miniature hot air balloons, with which the dolls escape and fly to her bed to greet her and hug her when she goes to bed.

This is an adorable story. It meshes the reality of how serious children can be about playing with something in a way you’d never expect: “Jenny thanked him and kissed him and told him she had always wanted an asylum for her dolls.” The little girl is odd but not so odd as to be unbelievable. Her father works most of the magic in this story, aided by the brave little dolls, who only remain insane as long as they are in the asylum. It shows the magic of a father getting involved in his daughter’s life, even in her imaginary one, working to help her find peace with the world around her and see the beauty in life, “They flew to the paradise of Jenny’s bed, where they waited until she returned one night, the asylum having been abandoned, and they embraced her in their tiny arms and sang ancient songs in lost languages while she slept.” This is a sweet, charming little bedtime story that manages to, at the same time, capture the spirit of the magazine.

*Wendigo*, by Micaela Morrissette, is a third person, plainspoken narrative in a domestic setting. A woman lives alone in an apartment and it seems she is ill, there is something wrong with her skin and her hunger. Her regular dinner companion comes over one night and they dine together on one of his fingers. It becomes clear that she is being groomed into the perfect cannibal. At one point, after flirting with a coworker over several days, they go out together and after taking him home and making love to him, she slices off a patch of skin while he sleeps and tastes him. After a while, she begins dining on herself, drawing out blood and drinking it, savoring the taste of her own flesh, and the flesh of her companion. They go to the dinner party of a good friend and the reader learns that the greatest honor is to be shared with everyone – literally. The good friend is served, roasted, as the main course of the meal. Later, she offers herself to be the main course in another banquet. To prove herself, and make the meat taste perfect, she is kept chained in a bedroom of the mansion in which these feasts take place. Her companion comes and he tells her that something is wrong, and the other people are acting crazy. She cannot get loose from the chain that holds her there, so she chews through her own ankle (enjoying it quite a bit) and binds the stump before leaving.

This is a disturbing tale that is a modern day application of the Native American myth of the wendigo, creatures that were said to eat humans and cannibalize each other, and the myth that someone could be transformed into a wendigo, trained to eat and enjoy human flesh. The description in this piece is what makes it stand out – it’s clear that the author put an exhaustive amount of thought into what precisely each and every bite tastes like, feels like, smells like and how it all makes his character feel: “She swallowed the black soup: thin, sour broth swimming with clots

that trailed delicate filaments.” The writing is realistic and gritty while at the same time lyrical and beautiful. This story stayed with me long after I’d read it, not only because the content was so horrifying and disgusting to me, but because the prose was gorgeous and generous to the characters. The entire story revolved around this gathering of intimates’ preoccupation with the many delicate flavors and combinations found in food, in another person as food. Said one character, “He wasn’t tasty, you know, my baby boy. He was raw, immature, flaccid, an inharmonic composition. But now I think I can taste him in our host, completed, ripened. A small fresh note, like a pocket of lavender snuggled in among the fat of the flank here.” If anything, this is the anti-bedtime story, the one that will keep you lying awake, staring at your ceiling in abject horror at the thought of someone doing that to anyone else – and knowing exactly how it tastes, how it feels in your mouth; all because of the poetic descriptions offered by the author.

## Interview with Editor Ann VanderMeer

**Zachary Hornback:** One of my favorite things about *Weird Tales* is the glossy cover and all the beautiful artwork that's involved with this magazine. How much input do you have when it comes to choosing the art?

**Ann VanderMeer:** Oh yes, I love it. Stephen [the editorial and creative director] is just awesome in the art that he picks, these covers are just gorgeous. I don't have much input in choosing the artist, but if I come across something cool I might show it to Stephen. That's one of the things that I miss from when I was doing my own magazine, *The Silver Web*. It was an art and fiction magazine and I spent a lot of time working on the art. I don't do any of that now, Stephen does it all, and I do miss that. At the same time, everything that he's picked and everyone that he's found, I think are magnificent.

**ZH:** I noticed there were only two issues published so far this year. How has the economy affected *Weird Tales* and what are your plans for the future?

**AV:** Wildside publishes *Weird Tales* and it went through a lot of changes last year and this past year they sold off some of their lines and closed down some of their other magazines but their focus has always been *Weird Tales*. Next year I do have a publishing schedule for four issues. I've already been given the publishing schedule by Stephen of my deadlines, so there are going to be four issues next year, god willing. You know the economy, things are picking up, things are getting better, my publisher is doing much better financially, so, we're hoping.

**ZH:** More and more it seems we are going into an electronic age – with e-book readers and online publications and whatnot. How is *Weird Tales* adapting to this?

**AV:** I believe we will be offering current issues for the e-book and the Kindle. The other thing that we'll be doing, going into the electronic age, is on the website. We've got these one-minute weird tale videos, and the goal is to do a new one every week. I am still reading for that and I do have quite a few in the queue, it's just a matter of getting them out there. But that's just one of the things – it's like a value ad to the magazine, because a lot of people are used to getting their everything from the internet.

**ZH:** Yeah, it seems like anyone can just get online and publish their own magazine these days.

**AV:** When I first started publishing a magazine, back in the late 80's early 90's, that's what a lot of people were doing, when desktop publishing became prevalent. They had their little computers and their printers and they were able to do it themselves, and that was a wonderful thing. There were all kinds of things coming out, and most of it was crap, but some of it was quite good. I look back on it now and I think, "Wow, I can't believe how good this was," and I think you're seeing that same thing now. A lot of independent publishers are actually coming up against the major publishers because their print runs are very close. A company like Wildside or Tachyon or Nightshade Books is publishing the same print run for some of their books as the major publishers are, like Random House or Harper Collins. I think it's a time when you're going to see a lot more independent publishers get bigger because they're willing to take risks and the New York houses are a lot more conservative.

**ZH:** Are there any plans for *Weird Tales* to be offered online in the future?

**AV:** Yes, I think we are going to start doing more of that. This year was kind of a "maintain" year. Next year is going to be more about rebuilding and revamping and refocusing on different things. We have already gotten a huge amount of positive feedback because of the changes that we've made

and I attribute a lot of that to Stephen. He changed the whole design and focus of the magazine, and he and I have had many conversations about where he wanted it to go, what his vision was, and how the fiction fits into that. These are things that made me realize, this is where I want to be, that I wanted to work with him. Because he and I, we're on the same wavelength. I would turn in an issue and he would sit down and call me and say, "I read through the entire issue and I can't believe how awesome it is." So I know he likes what I'm doing. Clearly we must be doing something right because in the 85, 86 years that *Weird Tales* has been around, this is the first time we ever won a Hugo<sup>2</sup>. First time even nominated! And we won in a category that, for the past 27 years, another magazine won. So we broke their winning streak of 27 years, we must be doing something right.

**ZH:** How would plans to publish more fiction online affect the amount of fiction or length of fiction you'd be publishing?

**AV:** Well. I don't know if it's going to so much affect the amount of fiction, but the fiction that you're going to see online is going to be shorter. My fear is that, if things move to such a degree that all the fiction is online or most of the fiction is online, then there won't be a place for someone's novella or their 8,000-word story. If you take a look at the online magazines that are out there, most of them are looking for stuff that's under 5,000 words, and in some cases under 3,000 words, because people aren't going to sit and read it off their screens for a long a period of time. That's my only concern, that the fiction becomes shorter and shorter and there's no room there for the longer pieces. That's a disappointment to me – I have to turn down some stuff that's just too long for me to publish, and I don't know where to tell people to send it. The other thing is that with all the online magazines, their turnaround is so quick that writers are getting used to someone buying a story from them and within three months it's published. Because of that, I have a lot of writers coming to me who don't have experience, who get upset if their story's not out in three months. I don't like to sit on a story for too long, I like to have a story published within a year of buying it. Also, Wildside Press pays upon acceptance, the writer gets paid when I buy the story. We're very conscious of taking care of our writers. We pay upon acceptance not upon publication and that was a change from what it was previously.

**ZH:** The September-October 2008 issue of *Weird Tales* was composed of international authors, many of whose works had to be translated. How did you go about getting those stories – did you solicit the authors or send out a general request for submissions?

**AV:** My husband and I have taken a lot of overseas trips and met with other editors and publishers in other countries, and it just seemed like a good idea because one of the things I was seeing in these other countries was that if you walked into a bookstore, like in the Czech Republic or in Portugal or even Romania, you find in the science fiction and fantasy section the same names. There would be the same names you always see here in America, the American or British names: Neil Gaiman and Stephen King, authors like them. I knew there was more out there, but those were the top names in all the countries that we went to. Then, what happened was, my predecessors in *Weird Tales* were not allowing e-mail submissions and as soon as *Weird Tales* opened up to email submissions, I got a deluge of a lot of submissions from overseas. I realized that I was getting some really good ones, and I thought, "You know what? Maybe I should just do a whole issue that's devoted to international authors." After I made that decision and told Stephen about it, I went out and solicited some people. I have a lot of editorial friends in other countries and I asked my editor in the Czech Republic for submissions and he sent me a bunch of stuff. The big problem with all of this was the translation, because oftentimes it costs more to translate the story than it does to buy it originally. Some of the stories that I bought were already translated when they came to me, but

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<sup>2</sup> The Hugo Awards, given out by the World Science Fiction Society, are science fiction's most prestigious award.

others had to be paid for – someone has to pay for the translation, whether it's the writer or the publisher. So, finances always play a really big part in getting really good translations.

**ZH:** “The Buzzard,” by Eric Red, is a great example of low fantasy. What drew you to that story?

**AV:** Well, Eric had been sending me a lot of stories, and a lot of them just didn't fit what I was doing with *Weird Tales*, but that particular one I thought was quite interesting because it was a struggle between this man and this bird. I found it to be fantastical in the way that he was putting all these aspects onto this bird that may or may not have been true, you know. I mean, do buzzards really have that ability to just go after somebody like that and have revenge feelings? To me, that was the fantastic aspect of this whole thing, and it was totally unbelievable. I really wanted to get a story from him because I just love his stuff so much and that one just seemed to work.

**ZH:** Another piece, “Weiroot,” by Jeffrey Ford, has no paragraph breaks and subject matter that borders on science fiction. Why did you choose to publish this story?

**AV:** It's a father-son story, but it's so much more than that. The thing that I love about Jeff Ford's work is the way he paints the relationships and they're usually father-son. That's one of his core strengths, if you read any of his work, you see that's a common theme that goes through it. But he's always able to bring something new to that. That particular issue of *Weird Tales* is pretty weird, it's got a lot of bizarre stories. I have a friend who's 80 years old and she doesn't read a lot of weird stuff, she reads mostly normal fiction, and I gave her a copy of that issue, and that was her favorite story. She loved that story. If someone who doesn't read fantasy or science fiction can read a story like that and get it – that's awesome. Now she might want to read some more stuff like that.

**ZH:** Did you have any reservations reading and editing that particular piece, especially regarding the lack of paragraph breaks?

**AV:** No, because it was kind of like a stream of consciousness thing. Normally if I get a story like that, one without paragraph breaks, then I know someone doesn't know what the heck they're doing. But it was a very short piece and that's why it worked because, again, in short fiction you have to choose every single word perfectly to make it work, especially the shorter the piece is, and Jeff is a master at that.

**ZH:** With regards to form and length, what type of fiction do you prefer to publish, flash fiction or short stories?

**AV:** It's really difficult to say, because in some respects it's much more difficult to write a really good piece of flash fiction, because you have to choose every single word carefully. Going along with that, in my opinion it's more difficult to write a short story than it is to write a novel. This is because when you have something at a longer length, like at novel length, you have all kinds of space and it doesn't matter if you make a few mistakes because you've got a whole novel. But with a short story, those mistakes show if you screw it up. If you get bogged down somewhere in your short story, people will just stop reading and move on, but with a novel people are more forgiving and they'll keep going.

**ZH:** Which do you prefer, physical submissions or email submissions?

**AV:** They're just different. I'll sit down and work on physical submissions when I can't look at a screen any longer, because at the end of a long day, you just don't want to be looking at a computer screen. I can actually take the physical submissions to a park and sit down and read there and that's also nice. The other thing is, when I have a story that I've read all the way through and I like, one that I'm going to consider seriously, I'll put it on my maybe pile. I actually print it out and I read it again in hard copy rather than off the screen. I can't really read a long story off the screen more than a couple of pages anyway, and I want to be able to give the writer the proper attention so I'll

print it out. The email is great, especially for the stories that you're not going to take – which is about 90% of them. I know most writers out there would rather have a quick response. I'm very behind right now and I'm working really hard to get back up to speed. I'm about, almost to the end of August. I'm hoping to get through August and get through September with my next week of reading. That's almost a thousand manuscripts that I've got right now.

**ZH:** It's often said that editors tend to know, within the first few paragraphs, if they're going to accept a piece of writing. I was just wondering if this is true for you and what your own unabridged reading process is?

**AV:** That's true. You can pretty much tell in the beginning if it's the type of story you're going to like. This isn't necessarily because it's poorly written, although sometimes you can tell in the first paragraph or two that it's poorly written, but you can tell if it's a common thing, the same type of story as a lot of others. What happens is, I read the story and I see if it pulls me all the way through to the end. After I've read it, if I think it's a really cool story, I'll set it aside and then I'll read it again. This is because sometimes I'll finish a story and think it's really cool but if, an hour later, I've forgotten it, then it's not for me. Sometimes, in the initial reading of something, I think it's really unique and wonderful, but if it's forgettable? There are too many good things out there. So, I always put it aside for a second reading and see how things hold up, and then sometimes I'll read it a third time if I'm not sure. I also have other people who will help me out, who will give a story a reading to make sure that it's going to be right for my audience. When I'm reading it, I'm also thinking in terms of what I already have in inventory. Sometimes if I have a story that's too similar to it, I won't take it for that reason. But I'll try to see if there's another place that that person can place that story. I'll also see if the story fits into another theme that I can do something with, like I did with the international issue.

**ZH:** I heard that you don't consider a writer's previous credentials when reading through their story. Is this true? Do you even read the cover letter first or do you just jump right into the story and read the cover letter after you're done?

**AV:** I glance at the cover letter, but if someone is giving me a list of their credits – and some people will give me three pages – I don't care. But, sometimes I'll read something in their cover letter that tells me a little about them, and that's nice. Other times the cover letter tells me everything about the story and I don't need to read the story. [laughter] That can be a good thing or a bad thing depending on your point of view.

**ZH:** How so?

**AV:** Well, if it's a bad story it saves me from having to read it. For the writer that's probably a bad thing, they probably want me to read it anyway, but if they tell me it's another one of those husband-wife revenge stories, I can tell you right away that I'm not interested. I don't care how well written it is. I tell people about that and they still say, "Oh, but this one is different." Doesn't matter.

**ZH:** What are some examples of stories that you see too much of, or never want to see again?

**AV:** With my *Weird Tales* submissions, I have a lot of common things constantly coming to me, the same types of stories. And I have certain things I just don't like. For instance, I don't like stories that start with someone waking up in the morning. A lot of writers make that mistake, they think the story starts when you wake up in the morning and let me tell you something, that's not when the story starts, all that stuff is boring. Another common theme that I see a lot: a man and a woman are driving together in a car somewhere and there's a problem with their relationship, and whatever the destination is, something's going to happen to them, either to the man or to the woman. I see that constantly. I also see another common theme of: a woman comes home from work, or a man comes home from work, and their spouse is there at home and there's a problem in their

relationship and someone's going to have something happen to them. Here's a theme I saw twenty years ago that I still see today: Someone walks into a bar and meets someone and one of them turns out to be something else, a werewolf or a vampire or a this or a that. And it's just two people meeting in a bar. That is one of the most common themes and I can't believe that after twenty years I am still seeing it. These are all very common, you'd be surprised at how many of them I see. So, if I can tell that's where the story is going, I'm totally not interested.

**ZH:** On that note, what kinds of stories would you like to see more of?

**AV:** Well like I said earlier, I'm actually right now looking for the fun, quirky, clever weirdness with a dark edge. *Weird Tales* has always been more on the dark side, so I'm not looking for retellings of fairy tales or sword and sorcery or space opera. There are plenty of great magazines that do publish that kind of stuff. That's not what *Weird Tales* is. But I am looking for quirky and weird, and fun. I have plenty of really dark stuff too, there's always going to be room for the dark stories that really scare you, but I also want there to be some fun.

**ZH:** Do you ever run into editorial disputes with your authors?

**AV:** Nope. I'm not going to take a story that needs a lot of work, for the main reason that I don't have enough time. There aren't enough hours in the day for me to spend that much time with a writer on their story. So if it needs a lot of work, I'm going to pass on it. I might even tell the writer, "This is a great story but it falls apart for me here and I just can't." If I can't trust them to give me the best that they can, then why would I buy a story from them? My philosophy is, the writer always has the final line edit. Most of the edits that I would make on a story are usually pretty minor, and if I do have to do something a little bit more, I work in concert with the writer to make sure that everything is what they want. I'm not going to tell a writer to make changes or else, that's just not in my philosophy.

**ZH:** Are there editorial disputes with other editors, and, if so, how do you resolve them?

**AV:** I am the only fiction editor. I have Stephen, my boss, who hired me to read fiction. Occasionally I'll pass a story by him that I am not sure about. For instance, I came across a story that I thought was brilliant but it was really very intense, it was probably too harsh for *Weird Tales*. I passed it to Stephen to see his take on it, and of course he was horrified by it, because it was extreme horror. But I still thought it was a brilliant story, so I ended up taking that story for the *New Weird Anthology* that I did, the only original piece in an all reprint anthology. That particular writer ended up sending me another story, which I did publish. I mean, it was still extreme and I sent it to Stephen and he still didn't love it, but, you know.

**ZH:** What is too intense for *Weird Tales*? What does "too intense" mean in terms of the magazine?

**AV:** It really depends on the story itself. I don't want to publish something that has an overly graphic/violent rape scene or something like that. That just doesn't appeal to me. Certain things like that, like torturing children, there are just certain things that are not what *Weird Tales* is. There are those kinds of magazines out there and that's fine for them, but I just feel that there's more to really good fiction than those types of things.

**ZH:** I've read stories about dollhouses in the same issue as stories with cannibalistic spirits. How do you choose the editorial mix for each magazine?

**AV:** I think it's important to have that diversity in every single issue, otherwise it's going to be boring. I don't think that people want to read the same old stuff, so that's why I look for all different kinds of things and try to mix it up. When you're sitting down and reading an issue, you might not really understand how this story moves into that one, but there is something that's going to pull you through the whole issue. I order the stories specifically for that reason, I want you to start off one

way and then come out the other end, but I don't want anyone to get the bends in between. There is a method to my madness, and I do put things together in a specific way. When I put together the lineup for my first issue of *Weird Tales*, as I sat down and I read through all the stories in a row, I thought, "Oh my god these stories are really depressing." But by that time I'd already made these decisions, so it was just going to have to be that way. I kept that thought in the back of my mind though, that I didn't want everything that I take to be such a downer. I wanted stories that would give you more variety so you have some ups and downs and not just everything being depressing. So, one of the things you're going to see in the coming issues is a lot more fun. Weird still, but fun weird.

**ZH:** A lot of the fiction that I read in the magazine seemed, to me, to be really smart stuff. I even had to look up a few words that I didn't know. This is something that you've chosen the work to show?

**AV:** Yeah, I think so, because I consider my readers to be smart. I consider them readers that want to have something that's challenging and at the same time fun. I mean, you don't always want to read serious stuff, but you want to be able to read something that's going to entertain you and take you someplace new.

**ZH:** You mentioned the magazine you previously worked on, *The Silver Web*, which published speculative, surrealist fiction. How did working on that connect with your work at *Weird Tales*?

**AV:** I wanted to make sure that *Weird Tales* and *The Silver Web* were two different magazines. *Weird Tales* needs appeals to a much broader audience than I think *The Silver Web* did. I thought *The Silver Web* was really focused on interesting things that appealed to a smaller segment of the population. They're two totally different audiences, although I do see that there's an overlap. The thing about *Weird Tales* is that we want to focus on bringing the next generation of people into the reading and the writing. I think you can see that in what we've done, with the look of it and the focus of the fiction as well. Also, a lot of the fiction that I'm buying is from new writers. There aren't very many print magazines that you're going to see that.

**ZH:** So you really do all this without any help?

**AV:** Nope. I have a couple people that will help me out as far as when I'm not sure about a story, they'll give me their opinions. But I don't have first readers. So, to all the writers out there, I am seeing everything. Just so you all know! I'm seeing everything. [laughter]

**ZH:** Have you considered taking on interns or anything?

**AV:** Well, I've been offered that before, but the thing is that I work on a lot of other projects besides *Weird Tales*, and you never know when something is going to come up in my inbox at *Weird Tales* that is actually better for another project I'm working on. No intern is going to know that. Also, after doing this for a while, I've developed relationships with people even if I don't take their stories.

**ZH:** Okay, but, in addition to *Weird Tales* you also have a full time job at a computer company and you have other projects you're working on. How do you manage to stay sane?!

**AV:** I just love doing it! I love to read, and what I love to read the most is fiction. I was telling you about that "maybe" pile where I print out all the stories that I'm giving serious consideration. I travel a lot, and what I really love to do is print them out take them with me on the plane. I can sit there with no distractions, no computers, no one asking me to do crap for them, and I can just read fiction. I just love it.

**ZH:** I know that you've been working on several other projects lately. Can you take a minute to talk about one of those?

**AV:** Yes, my husband and I have been working on a book called *The Kosher Guide to Imaginary Animals*. It comes out in February, and I'm actually working with my publishers to work on some PR right now. They've asked me to make up some recipes, little recipe cards for Cthulu and stuff like that, so I've been having a lot of fun writing up recipes. This is just for promotion, it's not for the actual book. I think it's a lot of fun.

**ZH:** What advice can you give to writing students?

**AV:** My main advice for writing students is to keep writing. Write, and don't make excuses, don't stop writing. Also, read widely, not just in your genre. When you send your stories out, don't be depressed if they come back. Don't automatically assume that if they came back it's because there's something wrong with it, sometimes that's not the case. Don't make editing changes to stories that people tell you to make, unless you believe it's the right thing to do. It's your story and it has to be in your heart. If it's not your story, then that's going to come true on the page. I can't tell you how many times I've read stories where I got to a certain point in the story and something rang false, and I went back to the writer and they told me that their writing group told them to rewrite that part. I can tell when it's not from the heart. So, be true to your heart and just keep writing.