

OUR SLIGHTLY SPOOKY ISSUE

Welcome to our annual slightly spooky issue. The fall double issue is always long in the making. Throughout the year, we see stories that land a little outside *Asimov's*, admittedly rather soft, parameters. While we do publish one or two stories in each issue that could be called fantasy, surreal fiction, or slipstream, our focus is primarily on science fiction. Of course I get a lot of traditional science fiction story submissions, but I see a lot of uncanny submissions, too. The average issue of *Asimov's* rarely features ghosts, witches, or werewolves, so during the year I tend to set aside many of my favorite out-ré tales while I wait to lay out the October/November issue.

Such stories didn't start appearing in *Asimov's* under my tenure. When he was editor of the magazine, Gardner Dozois and I edited a long-running theme anthology series for Ace Books. All the stories were taken from the pages of *Asimov's Science Fiction* magazine. While the series included books like *Isaac Asimov's Robots* and *Isaac Asimov's Solar System*, it also featured collections of stories about *Ghosts*, *Halloween*, *Camelot*, and *Werewolves*. Indeed, our all-time best selling book in the series was *Isaac Asimov's Vampires*.

We haven't seen as many vampire stories lately, but ghosts and werewolves continue to put in strong appearances. Authors tell me they set their sights on a spot in the special spooky issue, which means that I end up with a lot of fine material to choose from. The issue gives me an opportunity to broaden the definition of what constitutes an "*Asimov's*" story. It's hard to imagine publishing a tale concerning a troll in this magazine, but that's exactly what happened when Eleanor Arnason's Icelandic story about "My Husband Steinn" showed up in 2011. I was glad to have the chance to share that delightful tale with *Asimov's* readers.

My first issues as editor of the magazine began appearing in 2005, and my first October/November issue was the last issue to contain stories that were purchased by Gardner. These included two that made use of magic: Jay Lake's eerie "Dark Flowers, Inverse Moon" and Nisi Shawl's brutal "Cruel Sistah." One of my own acquisitions was the cover story by M. Bennardo. In this spine-tingling tale, a father takes his children to a zoo that houses ghosts and banshees. The issue also had a sprinkling of poems about werewolves, harpies, and monsters.

Subsequent years have brought more stories with magical or mystical explanations, such as Alan Smale's 2012 "The Mongolian Book of the Dead," Gregory Frost's 2013 "No Others Are Genuine," and Rick Wilber's 2015 "Walking to Boston." The devil puts in an appearance in Sheila Finch's 2013 "A Very Small Dispensation" and Jane Yolen's 2014 poem "Fiddler at Midnight," while witches can be found in Daryl Gregory's 2015 "Begone," Joel Richards' 2014 tale about "The Witch of Truckee," as well as Sandra Lindow's 2009 poem "The Hedge Witch's Upgrade" and Ruth Berman's 2011 poem "Being One with Your Broom." There are werewolves in Tim McDonald's 2014 "New Trick," and additional werewolf poems over the years by William John Watkins, Greg Beatty, and Bruce Boston.

I'm not a big fan of stories about zombies and mummies, but October/November gives me the room to cram in cute poems on those subjects, too. 2008 brought us Mike Allen's "The Return of the Zombie Teen Angst" and we found room for Peter Simon's "Three Sumerian Mummies" in 2012. Frankenstein and allusions to Frankenstein have also been popular with our October/November poets and storytellers. In 2013,

both Dominica Phetteplace's poem "Neanderthal Frankenstein" and Jack O'Brien's "The Monster's Sonnet" evoked Mary Shelley's creature as did David Livingstone Clink's 2007 poem "Frankenstein Vs The Flying Squirrels" and Will McIntosh's 2010 story "Frankenstein, Frankenstein."

On the other hand, ghosts stories do appeal to me, whether the ghosts are real, metaphorical, or have science fictional explanations. Stories that have fallen into these categories include Christopher Barzak's 2009 story "The Ghost Hunter's Beautiful Daughter," Kristine Kathryn Rusch's 2010 novella "Becoming One with the Ghosts," and Will Ludwigsen's 2012 novelette "The Ghost Factory." 2015 saw the publication of Sandra McDonald's haunting tale about "The Adjunct Professor's Guide to Life After Death" and "My Time on Earth"—Ian Creasey's perfect yarn for a campfire evening.

The master of the October/November story is most likely Kit Reed. Kit's sardonic tales often start off cheerfully, but rarely end well for the main characters. It can be hard to pin down the nature of a Kit Reed story. Monsters, murderous dads, and cut-throat authors lurk. They terrorize and yet they're funny. Stories can be science fiction masked as horror or mainstream sliding into surrealism. This ambiguity makes them perfect for our eerie fall issue.

Stories in the October/November issue can be disturbing and frightening. They can also be charming and humorous. We call it the "slightly spooky" issue because while some stories can be terrifying, it's not a special "horror" issue. SF will always be well represented—though some of those stories may be among the scariest. We aren't going to compete with *The Walking Dead*, but as long as it's fiction, it's fun to be a little bit fearful.

The latest issue of *Asimov's* continues our fall tradition and will help put you in the mood for Halloween. Find a safe spot to read the magazine and be prepared for folklore and fantasy, demons and ghosts, and aliens who go bump in the night.