

**non-fiction**

# THE POWER OF SPECULATIVE FICTION TO OFFER HOPE.

---

EDITORIAL BY LAREINA ABBOTT

I was a huge fan of the *Little House on the Prairie* book series by Laura Ingalls Wilder when I was little. Intrepid settlers battling the elements, each other, and Indians on their way to family purity. Stories have a way of telling us the right way to be, and this, for my eight-year-old self, was the right way to be: adventurous, tough, white. Imagine my surprise when I found out that I was the Indian, that I was Métis; suddenly I wasn't the right way to be, just by the happenstance of my ancestry. I was on the other side, the shameful side, and there was no way around it. The only way to redeem myself was to be relentlessly white. I embraced my British ancestry on my dad's side and became a hopeless anglophile. It didn't matter that we picked berries, skinned elk, went hunting, played fiddle, and jiggled the nights away. I was most definitely in love with the Brits, that's where it was at, that's where it was cool to be. I travelled through Britain, swooned over castles and schools built with stone, and perhaps even envisioned myself marrying a snarky gentleman with an accent, eating scones and tea and shopping at Harrod's.

Eventually, I came back to myself. Being an anglophile did not explain to me the parts of me that longed for a kitchen party, it did not explain to me my sense of humour or the way that I looked. No-one in Britain looked like me. The first time I walked into a room of all Métis people I was shocked at the similarity. Like it or not, these were my people.

We hear a lot these days about how people that are not white, or male, or cis, never “saw themselves” in media. It’s a story that is being told over and over, now that the floodgates have opened. These stories come from the grief of repression. All of us have grief, but the ability to heal it through story for some has been limited. Imagine how profound these stories are to those who pen them. Equity, Truth, Reconciliation, of these the first is Truth, admitting the past so that we can move forward. When I found out the truth about the silencing of the Métis people, I reacted with grief and anger, and then I started writing, because truth is hard to read in non-fiction, unless it’s titillating. I am not interested in writing poverty-porn.

When someone says to me that my culture ceases to exist in my family after me because of percentages, I can feel hopeless. Does my culture and way of life really end with me? I don’t think so. While the reality is depressing with abuse, genocide and manipulation, the power of speculative fiction is that I can step aside from the stark overarching truth—to offer a deeper truth, the power of connection and culture, the power of hope. Speculative fiction can offer me a different future for what others see for me and can even offer me a different past. We can step out of the timeline that we have been placed on. Circumvent the shame that was meant to change us and make our way forward with hope.

N.K. Jemisin’s *Broken Earth* series is a good example of a speculative fiction series that talks about real world prejudices in an alternative world setting. The books ask us about the cost to all of us of racism and of suppression. The *Predator* series movie *Prey* written by Patrick Aison and Dan Trachtenberg offers an alternative history for Indigenous people at the time when trappers began to cross North America, one that puts forward the theory that all cultures are mentally advanced, and can adapt, and have meaningful and modern technology. In children’s fiction, *The Marrow Thieves* by Cherie Dimaline, written in Alberta at the Banff Centre for the Arts, tells an amazing story of survival where Indigenous people are hunted for their dreams. *Pet* by Akwaeke Emezi, is about a black trans girl who finds out what monsters really are, and asks the question of “How do you save the world from monsters if no one will admit they exist?” The best thing about all these books is that they are great stories first. As John Truby

tells us in *The Anatomy of Story*, the goal is to write something that can change your life. Ambitious, I know, but why not? Why not go for it with your writing and say something that really means something?

For all the writers reading this, can you write about cultures other than your own? If we only wrote about ourselves, our stories would be narrow. Nisi Shawl and Cynthia Ward's book *Writing the Other* gives us tips on how to respectfully write from other points of view. Neil Gaiman in *American Gods* took on the plight of the American people (I'm being tongue-in-cheek here), despite being a Brit. Isabelle Allende, the Spanish speaking queen of magical realism, wrote a story of an eighteenth-century Haitian slave in *Island Beneath the Sea*. The key is respect and research.

The greatness of speculative fiction is that it can offer new perspectives in a non-accusational way, to open the minds of others, and to help us understand ourselves. We all have the right to say our truth, and hopefully create spectacular stories in the meantime.

Neil Gaiman said in his online Masterclass that we are using memorable lies to communicate truths. Let us make our lies truly and fantastically memorable so that someday they might lead us to hopeful futures.

### **Welcome New Staff and Farewell to Those Leaving**

We are most happy to welcome Lareina Abbott, Cheryl Merkel and Jade Mah-Veirling to the On Spec Editorial Team. They will have their work cut out for them! And thanks to our departing Barry Hammond, Barb Geiger and Michaela Ritchie for all their contribution.

### **In this issue:**

Ken Macklin is an artist whose work used to be very well-known by people who attended western Canadian SF conventions in the early 80s, such as NonCon and VCon. We followed his career over those ensuing years and were thrilled to finally reach out to Ken and acquire the rights to use one of his delightful works for an *On Spec* cover.

We're pleased to see a return by old friend Liz Westbrook-Trenholm, with her story "Botman's Tale". Alex Langer, author of "Sins Between Man and His Fellow" featured in On Spec #119, returns

with a new tale, “Fire Flows Downhill” about a group of patriots on a quest to save their country. As usual, *On Spec* is always happy to introduce new-to-us writers to our audience. We hope you enjoy Andrea Bernard’s delightful “I’ll Have My Toast With Jam, Please”. In “The Yellow House”, author Jonathan Lenore Kastin gives a small taste of creepy that we’re sure you will savour. In David Tallerman’s “Compassion Fatigue” we see what happens to a healer after their work is done. “Acceptance” from E.A. Mylonas, plays with the concept of Time. In “Loaner Bodies” by Aaron Perry, aliens are borrowing humans for a while and kindly replacing them with clones. In Arinn Dembo’s “Quirks”, we see how a strange friendship evolves between two of the Hunted as they search for a safe refuge from persecution. Judy Helfrich’s emotional work, “Blister” explores how powerfully grief can sometimes manifest. New poetry from Melissa Yuan-Innes and Thomas Mixon, along with cartoon and a new Bot from Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk, add up to an entertaining issue. ■

**In Upcoming Issues:** Look for new fiction from authors such as Nicole Luiken, Robert Runté, Aeryn Rudel, Steve Vernon, and Louis Evans, with poetry by Angela Acosta, DJ Tyrer, and others

## **Speculative North** **Science Fiction, Fantasy, and** **Horror**

*Speculative North* is dedicated to the celebration, promotion, and enjoyment of speculative literature in its various forms.

Our mission is to foster a community of diverse voices in speculative literature, to create an enduring virtual space for readers and writers, and to promote the growth and flourishing of the speculative literature community.

All back issues are free for download from  
[www.tdotsspec.com](http://www.tdotsspec.com)

