

Issue 32 | Summer 2023

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Dragons and wizards and elves, oh my!

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The broken



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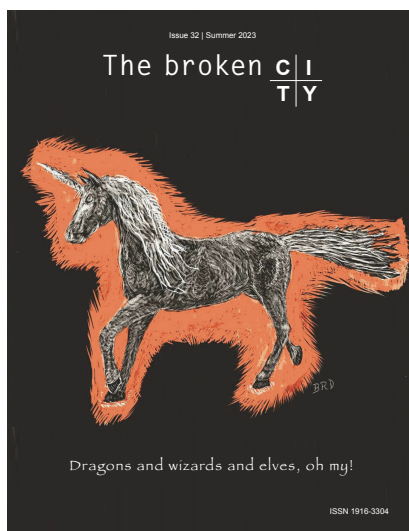
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In this issue:



Welcome to *The Broken City's* fantasy issue.

Enter our gauntlet of bridge trolls and elves. Ever considered therapy for your dragon? Anything's worth a fire-breathing shot. Seeing miniature horses? Keep that to yourself.

Cover Illustration:

"The Unicorn" by **Branwen Rhiannon Drew** (see page 13 for more and page 12 for art contributor bios)



The Broken City is currently accepting submissions for its winter 2023 edition: **Silver and other screens.**

That's right, the magazine is running an issue on cinema. We want to hear about movies and filmmaking, from the biggest screen to the smallest—tales of the watched or the watcher.

Send your poetry, fiction, essays, illustrations and photography to thebrokencitymag@yahoo.com.

Deadline is: November 30, 2023. Submitters will be contacted after that date, with news of acceptance or rejection.

Jeannine Hall Gailey
Self-Portrait as Fairy Tale: The White Doe

Who's locked in a tower during the day,
to avoid light. The technical term now
is "solar urticaria." Means you can't enjoy
the first warm spring day without a hat or sunscreen,
can't ever walk on the sunny side of the street,
carry an umbrella to every beach.
Can't wear a bikini or enjoy a walk in a slip dress.
You move away from your home under bluer skies,
to embrace the clouds—Knoxville, Paris, London,
eventually settle in Seattle, land of coffee and vampires.
(You are also allergic to garlic. Draw your own
conclusions.) But at fifty, isn't there a girlish pleasure
to being told how young you still look, how the passport
government clerk didn't believe your birth year?
How the prince never once asked your name, your age,
your proof of birth? You are not sunproof,
nor arrow-proof. You have to watch the weather
for solar flares, for leaks in the ozone layers,
for sunscreens poisoning the solar reef or your
own immune system. You have to watch the woods.
Believe me, on this blue earth,
it is almost impossible to avoid the sun.
Roaming at night in the shadows, a white doe
with eyes that only focus in moonlight.

Jeannine Hall Gailey is a writer with multiple sclerosis who served as the 2nd Poet Laureate of Redmond, Washington. She's the author of six books of poetry including Field Guide to the End of the World, winner of the Moon City Book Prize, and Flare, Corona from BOA Editions. Her work appeared in The American Poetry Review, Salon, Ploughshares, and Poetry. Her website is www.webbish6.com. Twitter and Instagram: @webbish6.



Juan Páez

The Long Ago

Salvatore Difulco

Talking to the earth, hello now.
Where are the wilds we watched
in documentaries? What happened
to the lush green, the burning blue?

We broke it down and still failed
to make it work for us—we don't
like the horizon anymore, it puzzles
the children, horrifies the old folks.

We take it in stride, like locusts,
like fires, like forgotten floods.
But we do not take it in stride.
We stand like monks in quagmires.

We know it is summer, we think
it is summer, though no blue and fiery
yellow differentiate this season
from the last one, or the next.

We welcome all fictions to blow off
the dread that our histories inspire:
we rode horses into bloody sunsets,
incurred the heat of dragon fire.

Bridge Troll

Salvatore Difalco

Who would love to see you fail?
Your ogre friends, for sure.
Your fairy buddies, always.
Mushroom heads who hate your sobriety.
People from the East, who hate
your Westernness and your tolls.

Nightmares belong to folks who
close their eyes before allowing
the wizard's *digestif* to finish its task.
No one said to smash a still life's
worth of fruits and nuts and game
just before hitting the sack.

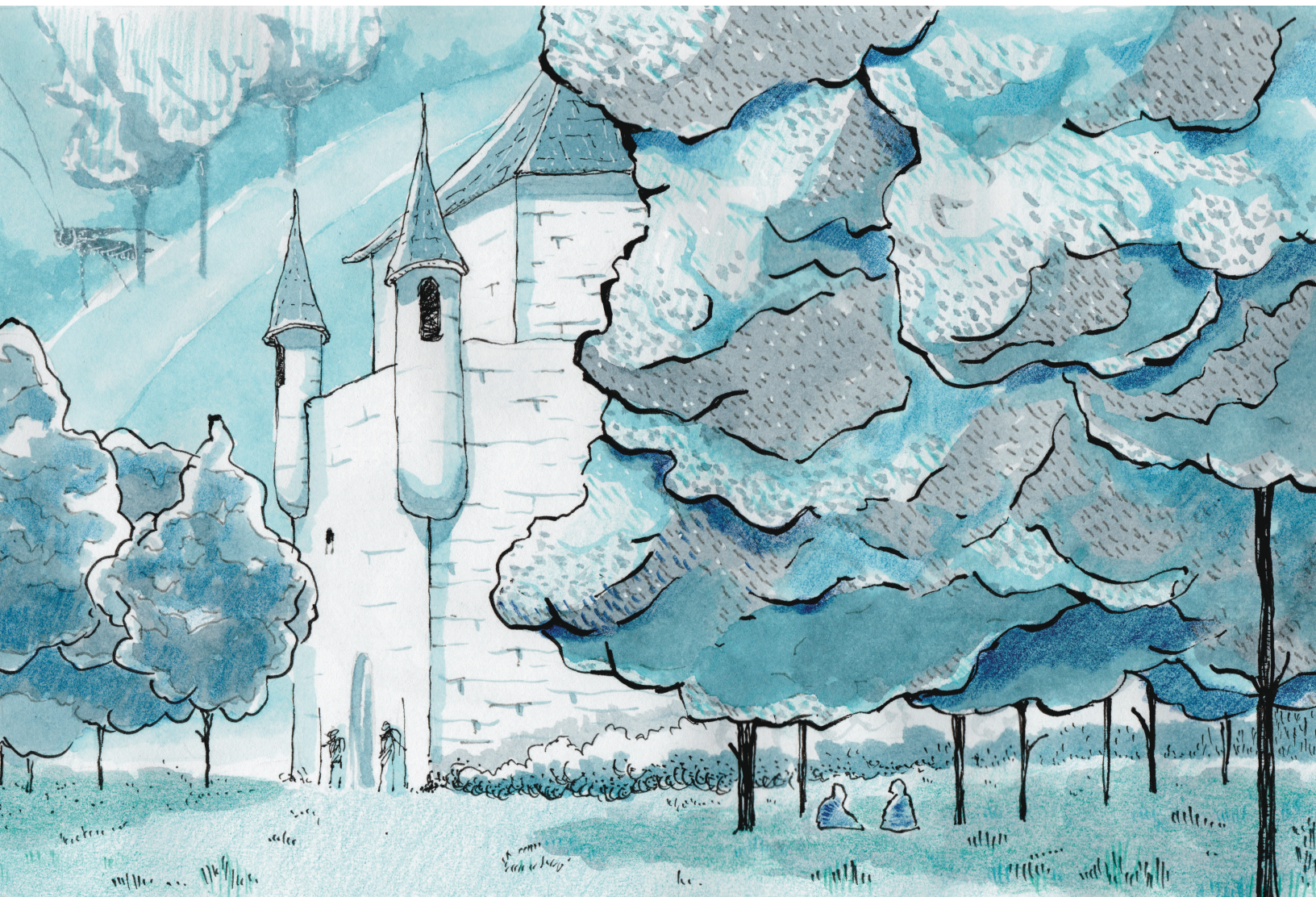
Stubbornness will set back even
kings and hardy bridge trolls
when their subjects see that
a drafty castle is no place
to raise a family, even a troll one.
Don't be duped by the view.

People stand around like oak trees
waiting for their acorns to fall
or for someone to set foot on the bridge,
or for you to fail at whatever
you attempt in this life, provided
that you give it a monster's effort.

Salvatore Difalco is a Sicilian Canadian poet and short story writer currently residing in Toronto. He is the author of five small press books, including the illustrated microfiction collection The Mountie At Niagara Falls (Anvil Press). Recent work appears in RHINO Poetry, Third Wednesday and Heavy Feather Review.



"Rococo Troll"
Janis Butler Holm



Juan Páez

The Elves Come Back

Gina Hietpas

The Elves of Affliction are pranking again
pull fevers out of the pickle barrel
drip the brine on your lips
dare you lick your own demise—
ferment you into a revision
past and future dimensions fused—
the defenders strapped your arms
with salt and iron elixirs then ask
Do you want to be resuscitated?
the essential question as the banshee sirens wail.
Flashing ruby lights, carry you across dark water
I beg you, remember Rabbit stands upright
in the stony niche, looks north toward the long road
nose a-twitch to every whiff of change
skilled in evasive action finds redemption
in the briar patch. The road is littered
with snares, the wind whispers,
Come home. Come home.

*Gina Hietpas lives at the edge of the woods
in a far west corner of the United States. Her
poetry collection TERRAIN was a finalist for the
Washington State Book Awards in poetry. While it
is difficult to discern the Fae Folk in a culture which
no longer believes, she is certain they are part of her
rural environment, particularly when they poke her
with ideas for poems.*

The Pooka

Gina Hietpas

Sucked into a whirlwind and spun across dark waters, I was dropped into the halls of a strange hospital, a hive of human drama. The first thing I met was a miniature horse. Like all patients, it was wearing one of those green hospital gowns with tiny geometric print and matching pajama bottoms. You know, the kind they give you so your rear end is not exposed when you're doing laps past the nurses' station. It was not pushing an IV pole. Neither was I since I was not a patient—this was not a medical hallucination. I could hear the hooves clop-clop on the linoleum, see startled looks on other people's faces. It was in the middle of the day so it couldn't be a nightmare. At least it wasn't a dreaming nightmare. Yes, I was stressed, negotiating a hospital maze in a foreign city, my beloved captive in some surgical suite. Anxiety makes me jittery and I'd been up for the last twenty hours. Trying to be friendly, I inquired of the creature why it was in the hospital. It whinnied softly and looked at me with restraint, as if to say, *it really is intrusive to ask that kind of question*. Embarrassed, I kept quiet until our walk ended at the bank of elevators. The door slid open, the tiny horse stepped inside and moved politely to the back making room for others. Watching the doors close, I wondered, *how will it push the button for the right floor? Have I really been talking to a horse? Can I ask has anyone seen a horse dressed as a patient? No, I'll end up on the psych floor*. I kept my mouth shut. Sat down, willed the surgeon to appear with uplifting news. My mind a sleepless blur, I couldn't tell anyone. Not even after I saw it again the next day. This time dressed in a white nurse's uniform complete with one of those little winged hats. It lifted its lip in a half-sided smile, winked and vanished.

Lighting the Torch

Kevin Hopson

"Have you ever killed anyone?" Dr. Riverflow asked, sitting across from Hirador.

The red dragon had come close on numerous occasions. His temper and rash thinking often got the best of him. Still, even if he had killed someone, it was no one's business but his own.

Shifting on the bale of hay and doing his best to avoid the question, Hirador inspected his surroundings. Various shades of cherry-colored brick rested beneath his feet, stretching from one end of the building to the other. Every few yards, brick columns of the same color popped up on both sides, supporting massive wood beams that ran the length of the walkway.

A vaulted ceiling, one with intricate wood carvings, contained symbols that Hirador could not decipher. Sunlight crept between the gaps in the panels, helping to illuminate the large space. Hirador turned his attention to the stable doors on his right. Then he glanced to his left. More stable doors, but all of the stalls appeared to be empty.

"Is there a problem?" Riverflow said. "You seem pre-occupied."

"You live here?"

She shook her head. "I'm sure you saw the cottage on your way in. This is my workplace."

Hirador exhaled, the air from his nostrils fanning the woman's lengthy blonde locks. "It's not very cozy."

"I'm not in the business of running a lodge."

"But surely your patients..." Hirador bit his tongue, disliking that last word. "Clients," he clarified. "I'm sure they're more conducive to opening up when the environment is right."

Riverflow sighed. "Unfortunately, my clients are diverse. Some days I have to accommodate a hill giant. Other days a gnome. It's why I use this barn."

Hirador nodded.

"Would you like to answer my question?" she said.

"Not particularly." As confident and intimidating as Hirador could be, Riverflow's cold stare still made him uneasy. If she'd dealt with hill giants before, he could certainly understand the woman's rough exterior.

Riverflow eased back in her chair. "I'm not here to judge you, but honesty is an integral part of the process. It's

the only way I can help you manage your anger.”

“And you truly believe you’re capable of being impartial?”

“Of course.” Riverflow’s brow furrowed. “You don’t agree?”

“Humans and dragons have a troubled history. As a result, we don’t have the best of relationships.”

“I have no problems with dragons.”

“An easy thing to say but a much harder statement to prove.”

Riverflow sat upright. “Do you ever have arguments with Tulvir or Mianth?”

The question caught him off guard. His brother, Tulvir, and sister, Mianth, were just outside.

“All siblings have disagreements,” Hirador finally said.

“Precisely. Whether they’re related or not, dragons feud with one another. It’s no different with my race or any other. You think a dragon would be better suited to assist you?”

Hirador shrugged.

“I get paid for results,” Riverflow said. “If I had an ulterior motive, it wouldn’t be good for business.”

Hirador let those words sink in. Riverflow actually made sense, and he was satisfied with the doctor’s response, but he wasn’t about to admit that to her.

“Since you’re reluctant to answer my initial question,” Riverflow continued, “perhaps I can ask you something else.”

“Do what you wish.”

Riverflow relaxed in her chair again. “We’ve all done things we regret. Myself included. What’s something you’ve done that you wish you could take back?”

Hirador cocked his head back and pondered. He’d done plenty of things that many would deem unnecessary or even shameful. Whether he regretted those actions was another matter. One encounter did come to mind, though. It might not qualify, but it was close enough.

“My siblings and I ran into a dwarf during one of our journeys several years ago,” Hirador said.

“Does this dwarf have a name?”

“Everyone has a name.”

“What was his or her name?”

“It was a male.”

“And?”

“Why is his name relevant?”

“It makes you more accountable. It will help in releasing your burden.”

Hirador looked around the room, attempting to stall as much as he could. “Modrad,” he said.

“And what did you do to Modrad?”

He recalled the incident in his head. It seemed innocent enough to him, but Hirador knew the doctor would think otherwise. Modrad had proven to be a good companion at times, but he was too much like Hirador. Tenacious, independent, and self-assured. Those traits caused the two to clash on occasion.

“I singed his beard,” Hirador conceded.

Riverflow’s lips parted, and she cleared her throat.

“And how did you feel afterward?”

“Amused.”

“Later on,” she clarified. “When you had time to contemplate your actions.”

“There were consequences.”

“So, you ultimately felt guilt for what you did?”

“I wouldn’t call it guilt.”

“What then?”

“Disappointment.”

Riverflow smiled. “Good. Now we’re getting somewhere. Can you elaborate?”

“Modrad had a knack for hunting snow hares. When we allowed him to join our group, he offered to do it on a daily basis. Food was scarce at the time, so who was I to say no? Anyway, I remember eating them three or four at a time. They were absolutely delicious. Have you ever had the pleasure, doctor?”

She shook her head. “I haven’t.”

“You should try them. You’d probably want to cook them first. Being human and all. Personally, I prefer them raw. They have the most amazing flavor and—”

“I’m sorry. What does this have to do with anything?”

“After I scorched his beard, he refused to hunt them for us. I’m sure you can imagine my disappointment.”

Riverflow couldn’t muster a response. She lowered her head, burying it in her hands.

Hirador noticed something. “What is that?”

The doctor parted her hands and looked up. “What?”

“On the stable door over there.”

Riverflow followed his gaze. She turned her head and glanced over her shoulder. “A dragonfly?”

"That's what I feared."

"Now you have issues with dragonflies?"

"I don't care for them."

"Why?"

"The same reason humans don't care for spiders."

Riverflow opened her mouth, but Hirador cut her off before she could speak. "And who gave them that name, anyway? It's an insult to dragons. They're nothing like us."

Hirador felt a burning in his belly, and his chest expanded.

"What are you doing?" Riverflow stuttered.

Hirador glanced in her direction, watching as Riverflow's eyes swelled with fear. Then he turned his attention to the real target, releasing a power deep inside of him.

#

Mianth and Tulvir were waiting outside, both of them

wide-eyed and alert as Hirador exited the barn.

"What happened in there?" Mianth asked. "I heard a scream."

Hirador coughed, and smoke shot out of his nostrils and mouth. "I believe our session is over."

"You didn't—"

"No," he said, interrupting his sister. "I didn't dispose of her, but the doctor is a little unsettled."

"No doubt due to you," Tulvir said.

Hirador grinned, but Tulvir didn't return the gesture.

"It wasn't my fault," Hirador claimed. Then he shrugged. "Not entirely, at least. You know how I am around dragonflies."

"A dragonfly?" Tulvir said. "In there?"

Hirador nodded.

Tulvir shivered in disgust. "I despise those things."

"My sentiments exactly."

Kevin Hopson has dabbled in many genres over the years. A few of his stories have been contest/award winners, and Kevin's work has appeared in more than twenty anthologies. You can learn more about Kevin at www.kmhops.com.

Art Contributors

Branwen Rhiannon Drew is an award-winning artist and poet. She lives in Rome, NY on the edge of the Mohawk River and the foothills of the Adirondacks. Branwen works in various mediums with scratchboard being her favorite. Her artwork ranges from fantasy to realist. Her poetry can be found at branwendrew.substack.com. Branwen's artwork is available for purchase in various formats at pixels.com/profiles/branwen-drew. She is currently working on an illustrated collection of poems about birds.

Janis Butler Holm served as Associate Editor for *Wide Angle*, the film journal, and currently works as a writer and editor in sunny Los Angeles. Her prose, poems, art, and performance pieces have appeared in small-press, national, and international magazines. Her plays have been produced in the U.S., Canada, Russia, and the U.K.

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"The Griffon"
Branwen Rhiannon Drew



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