

Issue 33 | Winter 2023

The broken | | | |---|---| | C | I | | T | Y |

SILVER AND OTHER SCREENS

Astoria Oregon, home of the Goonies...

A film about fillet of sole...

A Kerouacian quest for authenticity...

Grace Kelly coming on to Jimmy Stewart!

The broken



Winter 2023 Issue 33

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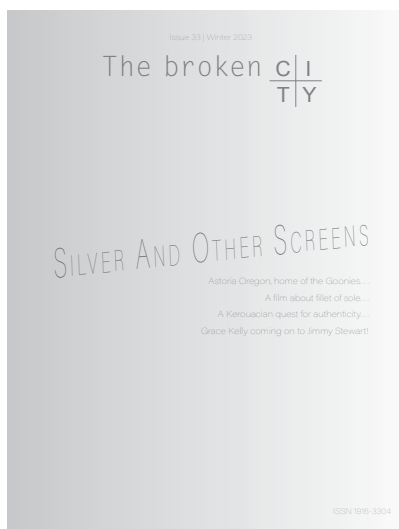
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Welcome to *The Broken City's* issue on cinema.

Prepare yourself for an avalanche of picturesque poetry. Rated: highly unlikely to land you in the stranded survivor role of a disaster film.

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The Broken City is currently accepting submissions for its summer 2024 edition: **DIY**.

That's right, readers, it's a Do It Yourself issue. No, you don't need to make the magazine for us—we want to hear about crafts, construction, repairs, destruction, recipes, art and inventions.

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

Deadline is: June 1, 2024. Submitters will be contacted after that date, with news of acceptance or rejection.

Cinema Scope

Allen Ashley

Step right this way, folks,
a true wonder of the age:
moving pictures.
That could be you on the train,
or tied to the tracks
waiting for a glossy-haired
hero to bring release
silently.

Flicker, flicker, image, image
moves into continuous flow
and the stark chiaroscuro
of Nosferatu's shadow
as he ascends the stairs.
Call to me, Maria,
my robot metropolitan
mistress and goddess.

Crackly sound supersedes live piano;
wars are fought, love triumphs;
we're taken to the perfect small town,
delivered a Christmas that is always white,
crooned over, swept into dreamland,
dancing the light that is a solid solitary beam
illuminating the falling dust
and yet creates the fantastic—
a golden age in mostly monochrome.

The lion roars inside his laurel wreath cage,
pins Technicolor spaceships against Chesley Bonestell skies—
a sense of limitless potential,
a communal experience of shock, awe and wonder,
huge scope and giant close-ups.

Brawny bronze hunk caresses a golden gong.
Walt has now left the building
but always there are pictures,
pictures.
Hearts full, we stand for the anthem
or scoot for the exit.

Allen Ashley's work recently appeared online in Sein und Werden, The World of Myth, Lothlorien Poetry Journal and Green Ink Poetry. His atom punk chapbook Journey to the Centre of the Onion was published by Eibonvale Press UK in September 2023.

"Cinema Scope" was previously published in the British Fantasy Society magazine BFS Horizons.

Grandpa, May You Burn in Hell

Kevin Grauke

after Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory

for smoking your pipe in bed for twenty years, happy to be coddled by your broken daughter and her boy, and for preferring cabbage water to any meal requiring your labor...

for dancing in your nightshirt and claiming in a song the ticket as your own, having suddenly found strength now that your grandson, twinkling and triumphant, has brought it home on the happiest day of his life...

for prodding him to ignore the small print and sign away his rights, telling him how he has nothing to lose, even with decades of life still ahead, just so that you can eat your old gray tummy's fill of gumdrops, jelly beans and taffy...

for ignoring warnings not to taste the fizzy elixir (especially just after that girl turned into a giant berry in need of juicing) and nearly sending your grandson to his death in the hungry, whirring blades of a factory fan...

for lashing out at the very man who warned you not to drink the magical concoction, calling him a crook and a cheat and a swindler—words that describe only you, you bastard.

Yes, may you burn in Hell, Grandpa, until Hell has nothing left of you to burn, but first you must fall, Grandpa,

fall

from the elevator-ship as it rockets skyward

fall flailing and wailing and wishing for that comfy bed once again

all the way down to the town below

where you will splatter

a jolly

gooey

lollipop

red.

Kevin Grauke has published work in such places as The Threepenny Review, The Southern Review, Quarterly West, Ninth Letter, and Cimarron Review. He's the author of the short story collection Shadows of Men (Queen's Ferry Press) and winner of the Steven Turner Award from the Texas Institute of Letters. He lives in Philadelphia.

If I'm in a Film about Fillet of Sole

Donna J. Gelagotis Lee

after a quote by Federico Fellini

The fish is no longer flap-flap-flapping,
but skinned and boned and splayed
open. Yet it looks good to you. You like
the way it's so moist on the tongue.

You don't want to think about the hook,
now that you are going to eat. Because look at
what happened to me. I'm glad you took the time
to prepare, didn't rush all of that. Look!

How delectable I seem, although it's really
no longer me. I'd like to think that I swam away
when you weren't looking, that you only think
you are having me tonight. But there

is some sort of fish heaven, because I'm flying
around up here in a school of flying fish. It's
really great. I got a glimpse of you though
as you closed your eyes, brought me to your lips.

Donna J. Gelagotis Lee is the author of two award-winning collections, Intersection on Neptune (The Poetry Press of Press Americana, 2019), winner of the Prize Americana for Poetry 2018, and On the Altar of Greece (Gival Press, 2006), winner of the 2005 Gival Press Poetry Award, and recipient of a 2007 Eric Hoffer Book Award: Notable for Art Category. Her poetry has appeared in numerous journals internationally, including The Dalhousie Review, Existere — Journal of Arts and Literature, Feminist Studies, The Massachusetts Review, and Vallum: contemporary poetry. Her website is www.donnajgelagotislee.com.

Wings of Desire

Lana Hechtman Ayers

after the film by Wim Wenders

The Angels are suave & severe in their perfect
Burberry trenches, favoring altitude and silence.

All they do is witness.
As if that could ever be enough.

Poetry passes through them, inert as argon.
Attitude is a poor substitute for empathy.

Let them whisper all they want.
All I ever hear is shadow.

What's the point of sending photogenic
Angels to spy on us humans?

If God wants to know something,
let her come herself, crack open the sky.

If God were Nick Cave, the world
would rhyme with orange.

If God were a trapeze artist, we'd all
be graceful and look good in tutus.

One thing's for sure, no Angel was ever
as cool as Peter Falk in a rumpled raincoat.

Lana Hechtman Ayers has shepherded over a hundred poetry volumes into print in her role as managing editor for three small presses. Her work appears in Escape Into Life, Rattle, The London Reader, Peregrine, The MacGuffin, and elsewhere. Lana's ninth collection, The Autobiography of Rain, is forthcoming from Fernwood Press. Her favorite color is the swirl of van Gogh's The Starry Night. Say hello at LanaAyers.com.

The Maltese Falcon

Carla Sarett

Everything I had to do is done.

So I invent pointless chores—sort t-shirts by color,
date spice jars, organize drawers of cancelled
checks and misplaced sympathy notes. I find
a lone postcard of a sunlit turquoise cove.

Malta's lovely this summer, a friend (now a stranger)
wrote in 1990; curious, the things we save.

My mind drifts to the seven temples of Malta:
stone parades of goats, goddess with pleated skirt.
I once swam where the two seas meet,
I once felt delicious warm water. In under a day,
I might have flown to Valetta. Now I walk
in dank air and soiled neon, through the streets
of *The Maltese Falcon*. On Stockton, two-bit thieves
chased down a fake relic of the Holy Orders.

The stuff that dreams are made of, Bogart said
as Sam Spade, after he turned his beautiful
lover in, he learned how to stop wanting
what is gone.

*"The Maltese Falcon" was previously published in
Whimsical Poet and the chapbook Woman on the
Run (Sarett, Alien Buddha).*

September is When It Began

Carla Sarett

Steinway pianos fall out of tune, and rusted cars
languish under the Golden Gate Bridge. Drugstores hawk
pills for every sort of gloom, like *D.O.A.* and *Failed Detour*
or when in stock, *Dawn Sorrow*. Coffee turns
Midwestern bitter. Hotels advertise, "No Suicides Here."
No one is safe with Weldon Kees at large in San Francisco
with *Vertigo* newly restored. I am soaking in watery Madeleine—
her sublime white coat, her phosphorescent Hitchcock hair.
Then Weldon leans over and says, the writers stole her name
from Poe, and can I put him up, he knows I've had more
than my share of dead men. But he reeks of his wife's musty
nightgowns and seaweed, and face it, I should stop writing noir.
Well, he sighs and looks around for an emergency exit.
So I pull Weldon close, and I say, *don't you dare*.

(The title is first line from Weldon Kees' "The Coming of the Plague.")

*Carla Sarett is the author of a full-length poetry collection, She Has
Visions (Main Street Rag, 2022) and two chapbooks, Woman on the
Run (Alien Buddha, 2023) and My Family Was Like a Russian Novel
(Plan B, 2023). New poems are forthcoming in Potomac Review,
Moon Park Review, Stonecoast Review, Rust and Moth and The
Nassau Review. She earned her PhD from University of Pennsylvania
and is based in San Francisco.*

After We Have Said Goodbye

Cynthia Pratt

To Scott Spence on His Way
To Astoria Oregon,
Home of the *Goonies*

As you drive away, notice the rain on the car glass,
how it schools near the edge of your vision. Notice the
cedars, their branches heavy as a gill net,
glistening with their catch, how they dip toward

your car as it eases by. If these trees were fishermen,
pulling hard against their boughs, the net made of needles,
line taut, then slack when that fish yanks loose,
they would say the best ones get away.

This is what you leave, not all dampness and drips,
all musky evergreens, driving home late and tired,
but rather, sun coming out, and raindrops
letting go from branches as they shake free of a limb,

bark crunching into your back as you lean
against a tree watching the extra innings of
high school baseball practices, or those hard
bleachers filled with parents cheering at

football or basketball games, those nights
when you stayed late at work, but left with the
satisfaction of a project well done and everyone,
including constituents, happy.

Your car now points south to new adventures,
to fishing boats offshore, charters waiting for you
to try your hand at reeling in chinook, the foghorn
signaling anglers home. It is the Coast Guard in the bay,

passing by a dew-damp window as you drink
wine with family and new friends.
When you become settled in Astoria,
order salmon, burn evergreen candles,

look out that window and listen for seagulls. Watch TV.
Think about the history of this ocean-side city,
the Astoria Column, that hilltop monument looming
above you with murals and bird's-eye views.

During your spare time, search for Austrian
glass beads and falconry bells once traded with
Native Americans. But you must look also for that
map with the *Goonies* as your guide.

Of course, by now you know that Astoria is the oldest
city in Oregon, established in 1811, named after
John Jacob Astor, whose fur trading company
founded Fort Astoria. Still, Astoria almost burned

down, because of the timber piers that comprised
most of your future city, including under sidewalks.
Spend time in the Columbia River Maritime Museum
to see how the past revived itself to what is now the present.

So I will end these words knowing Astoria
under your new leadership will be
wiser, but will still make you smile at the
idiosyncrasies of this area, and just so you know

we all are crossing our fingers that someone
will cast you in one of their movie remakes
of *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles IV*,
as a replacement for Corey Feldman as Donatello

because as we all know, Donatello is the smartest, and
usually the gentlest of those turtles. We all will be watching,
and laughing, but also remembering your 23 years,
because yes, we will miss you.

Cynthia Pratt's poems have appeared in Feminist Theology Poetry, Blue Heron Review, The Writing Disorder, Last Stanza Press, Sing the Salmon Home anthology (Empty Bowl Press, 2023) and other publications. Her manuscript, Celestial Drift, was published in 2016. Cynthia was a Lacey Councilmember for 12 years and the Deputy Mayor for the last 8, her term ending 2021. She is Poet Laureate of Lacey as of 2022. She loves jazz and blues. Website: Cynthia-Pratt-Poet.net.

Seattle International Film Festival: 15 Screens, 12 Days

Alison Jennings

Escaping the last of the unjust—erratic keeper
of lost causes—living is easy with eyes closed.

I could be May in the summer, sensuous leading
lady, or a study of natural sciences, enigmatic
still life with Japanese dog and amazing catfish.

JIMI: All is by my side—show me the world!

Dear White People, you reply:
Say nothing; just write. Life is a butterfly's dream,
vibrating our senses on a receding future wave.

Be like Walesa, Man of Hope, aware and alive,
who endured a collision of worlds old and new—
a personal Calvary—to earn a place in Heaven.

Postcard from Berlin

Alison Jennings

When I saw the postcard from Berlin, Bruno, I knew
you hadn't perished, though you'd shed your wings,
no longer free from that tick-tocking of life's clock.

As an angel, you'd glided through monochromatic
streets, comforting the lost and lonely with your
presence, invisible except to children and the dying.

Then, after also seeing joy and wonder, you asked
God to be mortal, to embrace our sensual story—
experience soft kisses, pungent coffee, loud laughs.

But after casting off the bronze armor of immortality,
you'd learned the physical realm was overflowing
with other feelings and with danger—anger, sorrow,
unhappiness, bloodcurdling fear, aching loss, crime.

Perhaps—like Calypso—your earthbound lover
was a potent goddess, defying death and reviving
eternity, if you (unlike Odysseus) stuck around.

You relinquished heaven for our human circus;
is it better than your prior painless existence
in the sky? Are you happy, as the postcard says?

I found home. It has happened one time, and therefore forever.

*(Bruno Ganz played an angel longing for mortality in Wim
Wenders' film Wings of Desire.)*

*Alison Jennings is a Seattle-based poet who worked as a
journalist, accountant, and teacher before returning to poetry.
Since then, she's had 100 poems published—including a mini-
chapbook—in numerous places, such as Amethyst Review,
Cathexis Northwest Press, Meat for Tea, Mslexia, Poetic
Sun, Red Door, Society of Classical Poets, Sonic Boom, Stone
Poetry, and The Raw Art Review. She has also won 3rd Place/
Honorable Mention or been a semi-finalist in several contests.
Website: sites.google.com/view/airandfirepoet/home.*

NEXT ON DATELINE: *DEATH at the SWAN AND HOOP*

Diane Kendig

Thomas Keats, father of the future-famous John Keats, was found dead at midnight in 1804 in the yard of the “Swan and Hoop,” the livery stable at 83 Murgate in London where he’d worked as a hostler before inheriting it from the owners, his in-laws, the Jennings, parents of his wife, the former Frances Jennings. His demise occurred somewhere around midnight, declared caused by a fall from his horse sliding on the hard rain that also fell that evening.

After the break: Hold your horses

But hold your horses: John, a skilled rider, had already arrived home after a long trip to visit his sons John and George, ages 8 and 10, in boarding school. In the many years since, the boys have grown to men. George left for America where he has shady dealings and debt. John remained in England, first studying to be a doctor, an occupation he has resigned from for poetry. As a poet, his pronouncements on the case beg interpretation.

After the break: John Keats’ remarks lead Dateline to ask about Frances Jennings Keats.

In later decades Keats’ remarks on his mother and on a famous Shakespearean character, lead Dateline to ask, where was Frances Jennings Keats on that dark night so long ago?

First, we ask who was Frances Jennings Keats? At an early age, she declared she must and would have a husband, and by 19, she married the handsome 20-year-old Thomas. Patrimony being what it was, it meant that he, not she, would inherit her father’s business.

But soon, she had four children, so maybe she was busy with them and could never attend to the livery while Thomas thrived at the business anyhow. Still, she packed off her two oldest to boarding school, the one Thomas had gone to that tragic day to see his children. Surely that gave Frances more time for her affairs.

And just where was Frances the night of her husband’s death? No one knows. We do know within two months she married a much younger man, “a little month,” as Hamlet once said of his mother’s marriage so soon after his father’s death that she had not yet broken in the shoes she wore to the funeral.

Frances left with him, leaving all four children with her mother, their grandmother Alice who raised them. So could that be what John meant when he said as an adult, “I never had a mother,” because Frances died of TB eight years later. Or did he mean, like Hamlet, to disown her, saying once, “[I always felt an affinity with Hamlet.]”

After the Break: Cover-up

So suspicions abound, certainly for the young poet, who himself died of TB like his erstwhile Mum, and for us today, no DNA, no fibers, no horse hairs nor camera footage. As for the “Swan and Hoop,” no sign of it here, no livery now at 83 Murgate. Just a pub named “The Globe.” Care to come in and have a shandy with me?

Diane Kendig’s recent poetry collections are Woman with a Fan: On Maria Blanchard (Shanti Arts) and Prison Terms (Main Street), and she co-edited the anthology In the Company of Russell Atkins (Red Giant). For eighteen years, she directed creative writing at the University of Findlay, including a prison writing program. Now back home in Canton, Ohio, Kendig curates “Read + Write: 30 Days of Poetry,” to 7,000 subscribers for the Cuyahoga County Public Library. dianekendig.com

Hothouse Lovers

Carol Despeaux Fawcett

Since we're not yet lovers in this world, let us meet
in the movie world of *Practical Magic*. You'd be the deputy
in jeans and a blue flannel shirt that highlights your one green
eye and one blue. Obviously, I'd be the witch.

You knock and I let you in, trailing an armful of evening primrose.
You follow me to the hothouse—if only I had one like this in real life—
white-painted French doors and windows, rows of medicinal herbs,
mounds of organic humus—I'd plant chamomile, lemon balm, calendula.

You've come to question me about past lovers—specifically
that bad man who's gone missing. You've heard rumors in town—
hexes, spells gone wrong, my pied-piper persona that draws in
children and men—and how some of those men go missing.

But you know how small towns are—a bit of beauty, a smile,
and suddenly I'm the wicked witch who fattens children for breakfast,
who lures men to gingerbread deaths. When really, I'm the maiden in a white,
flowing dress tapered to emphasize my slim waist.

You ask if I'm really a witch. I say I like to cook, make bath salts,
lotions, potions (called tinctures now) but I do not meddle in other lives—
no love spells, no voodoo dolls. I'm careful with my karma. I tuck
purple-petaled echinacea, red center like exotic fruit, into your shirt pocket.

You bend to smell its aroma but keep your eyes on mine—then we fall
into one of those slow-motion movie moments—a tentative, shaky kiss—
breath rising and falling, inhaling each other, exhaling
lifetimes of longing in our make-believe existence
since we're not yet lovers—not in this world.

Carol Despeaux Fawcett lives in the Pacific Northwest and earned her MFA degree from Goddard College. She is an award-winning poet published in 34 Orchard, Isele Magazine, Birdhouse Magazine, Dreich Magazine, Out There Literary Magazine, Santa Fe Literary Review, and other journals. Her memoir and poetry won first place in the Pacific Northwest Writer's Contest. Her first book of poems is The Dragon and The Dragonfly and her website is www.cdfawcett.com. FB & IG: @caroldespeauxfawcett.

Closed Caption

Cynthia Gallaher

~ Onomatopoeia

from super-hero comics,
I can almost hear every

“POW!” “BIFF” “KA-BOOM!”

every

“SMASH” “CRASH”

of fist and metal

“RIP”

of torn costumes

through its multi-colored series of panels.

~ I set my dramas now to

“CLOSED-CAPTION”

along with lowered volume
as not to disturb
the sound sensitive.

~ Who could otherwise detect

every

“SNIFF” and “SCOFF?”

Here, I visually hear them loudly.

Never sure until now
that the soundtrack to a scene held

“OMINOUS MUSIC”

so I ready myself
for unexpected action onscreen.

~ Does the

“GRINDING”

of the Zamboni
foreshadow defeat
on the ice?

Does

“INDISTINCT CHATTER”
“DISTANT BELLS RINGING”

and

a “STAMMER” mid-sentence

lead to the unraveling of the protagonist?

~ Without

“CLOSED-CAPTION”

I'd resort once more to passive TV viewer,

Continued next page

but now, I peer briefly into the writer's mind
through cues that fly before me,

feel more clearly suspense
they built into their story,

not only through dialog
and camera,

but also through every unheard

"PLANE ENGINE ABOVE"
"REPRESSED COUGH"
"RESIGNED SIGH"

and even

"SILENCE"
"MORE SILENCE"
"EXTENDED SILENCE"
of the script

before the

"DEAFENING EXPLOSION."

Cynthia Gallaher, a Chicago USA-based poet, is author of four poetry collections, including Epicurean Ecstasy: More Poems About Food, Drink, Herbs and Spices, and three chapbooks, including Drenched. Her award-winning nonfiction/memoir/creativity guide is Frugal Poets' Guide to Life: How to Live a Poetic Life, Even If You Aren't a Poet.

Hollywood Endings

R. A. Allen

Eager neophyte
on a Kerouacian quest for authenticity,
while thumbing from Tucson to Vegas,
is picked up by a Falstaffian Hell's Angel on
chemo.

Beers & peyote later, decked out in MAGA hats,
they mind-meld beneath the ancient starry
dynamo.

Like Thelma & Louise they drive over a cliff.
Like James Dean they perish in a head-on.
Like Leroy Shuhardt they drown in a damp
arroyo.

Borne aloft by animal spirits, they enter the
scenery
of the kingdom of heaven—
birds among the clouds,
drones among the birds.

Room Tone

R. A. Allen

*The recorded "silence" of a room on a film
location during which no dialogue is spoken.*

I went back to the old place to pick up a few things
before the movers got there. It was so quiet.
The stairway that was once our happy hill
to Bedfordshire could have now led up
to a corridor in a mausoleum. Too quiet.
It wasn't the hushed tranquility of snowfall
in a forest, but it wasn't like white noise either—
which could set you barking.
No, it was more like white space in a poem,
but less pretentious.
In short, it was its own thing.

In the library-cum-bar, the cast & crew
were patiently motionless. Some stood smirking
in mid-gesture. Others had stopped just short
of rolling their eyes. Like Brando, they remained
in character, even while wearing cloaks of silent invisibility.

I had been intimate with them all—sometimes in affection
and sometimes in opposition but always with wit.
Now they were waiting for me,
as their oneiric auteur, to say *that's a cut on room tone*,
so we could move on to our final scene.

R. A. Allen has published in the New York Quarterly, B O D Y, The Penn Review, RHINO, The Los Angeles Review, RockPaperPoem, Nixes Mate, and elsewhere. His poems have been nominated for a Best of the Net and two Pushcarts. He lives in Memphis, Tennessee, a city of light and sound. bodyliterature.com/2020/02/17/r-a-allen/

Almost Like

James B. Nicola

The almost actors almost acted out
their almost acted almost acting scene.
The other almost actors in the room
applauded, almost. It was almost like
real acting (almost). Then the almost scene
was shot and spliced into an almost film,
an almost movie almost like a movie
from the time when they made movies like real movies.
The almost audience almost acted like
they almost even enjoyed the almost film.
The almost critics almost praised it, and
the masses found enough to understand,
in the age when painters almost paint, and
writers almost write, readers almost
read, and the almost entire generation
feels almost like we are almost alive.

James B. Nicola's eight full-length poetry collections include Stage to Page: Poems from the Theater (featuring the present poem) and, more recently, Fires of Heaven, Turns & Twists, and Natural Tendencies. His nonfiction book Playing the Audience won a Choice award. A Yale graduate and returning contributor, he has received a Dana Literary Award, two Willow Review awards, one Best of Net, one Rhysling, and eleven Pushcart nominations—for which he feels stunned and grateful.

Cinéma Vérité

Judith Waller Carroll

Every movie we saw together
that summer so many years ago
told the same story: a sad-eyed woman,
a flawed, but handsome, man,
a love that was doomed
but so beautifully played out
I longed for it to last forever.
Each time the tragic heroine said goodbye
I could tell from the catch in her throat
she really meant stay. It might just as well
have been our brief romance
unreeling in the projection room upstairs,
the film finally flickering and disconnecting,
the theater going dark.

Judith Waller Carroll is the author of Ordinary Splendor (MoonPath Press 2022) and What You Saw and Still Remember, a runner-up for the 2017 Main Street Rag Poetry Award. Her chapbook The Consolation of Roses won the 2015 Astounding Beauty Ruffian Press Poetry Prize. She has been featured on Verse Daily and The Writer's Almanac, published in numerous journals and anthologies, and nominated for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net. She blogs at inanotherdress.wordpress.com.

Rear Window

John Davis

Late summer and flying ants
are shedding their wings, crawling under
cedar shingles to gnaw away at wood
much of the winter, to slowly splinter
the house into darkspace,

but why care when Grace Kelly
is coming on to Jimmy Stewart.
Hell, I'd break both of his legs,
in *Rear Window*, shove him to a
peeping Tom death just to touch

the air where she walks—Grace, a magnolia
with so much lust she dazes the sun.
Black dress and pearls. She leans in
and I freeze frame on her forehead
find the grace that is Grace

in the silent sound of her skin.
Let winter come with its cold mold,
its termites and ants. Let me glance
at Grace—her chin and red lips—find
warmth in the blue heat of her eyes.

John Davis is a polio survivor and the author of Gigs and The Reservist. His work has appeared in Deep Wild Journal, DMQ Review, Iron Horse Literary Review and on Terrain.org. He lives on an island in the Salish Sea and performs in several bands.

WHAT A DISASTER!

The Shame of Loving the Disaster Genre

B.A. Midgley

I blame Ernest Borgnine.

Back in 1972 I watched him and Gene Hackman alpha-male themselves through an upside-down cruise ship in *The Poseidon Adventure*, trying to save a handful of New Year's revelers from the swelling waters of the Atlantic. The frantic desire to make it out of the capsized vessel, interspersed with dramatic—and sometimes cheesy—dialogue, along with the occasional shot of an overturned toilet or barber chair, all while dressed in New Year's regalia, was mind-blowing for my 13-year-old brain. All this drama swirling about in the middle of the ocean launched a tidal wave of what is still my guilty pleasure: the disaster film.

The 1970's had their fair share of celluloid catastrophes. Producers loved plunking Hollywood stars in the middle of earthquakes, doomed airplanes and towering infernos, just so the masses could queue up and see how Paul Newman, Charlton Heston or Faye Dunaway would “get out of this one.” Pass the popcorn and say a prayer. The next 90 minutes were gonna be good.

For a kid growing up in squeaky-clean suburbia, these disasters were as fictional as intergalactic battles, Godzilla or King Kong. How the human spirit—or a grimed-up Shelly Winters—could endure nature's wrath was enough to keep my eyes firmly fixed to the big screen.

For me, disasters don't have to be explosive or Hindenburg-sized. They can be a simple tête-à-tête with a shark à la *Jaws*, or the intimate terror that consumes two people left behind by a tour boat in *Open Water*. Or, the underrated *Backcountry*, from 2014, where fright is done Canadian-style as a couple gets lost in the woods and becomes prey for a bear with attitude... and an appetite. Sure, explosions are intense, but hearing a bear snuffle around your flimsy tent is cold terror.

To this day, I'm still enthralled with film versions of avalanches, shipwrecks, plane crashes and perfect storms. My first cinematic look at a twister was *The Wizard of Oz*, with its airborne house, green witch, and flying monkeys. Sure, that film was brilliant, but seeing seemingly real storms onscreen

in 1996's *Twister* was so much better. And yes, I realize those tornadoes were largely produced in an edit room, but c'mon, those flying cows were a lot more realistic than Oz's monkeys.

Of course, many disasters are based on real events, the granddaddy of 'em all being *Titanic*, starring that most daunting of villains, the monstrous iceberg, ruining the trip for all those 1912 passengers. Add in a bit of creative license with Jack and Rose and that contentious floating door, and you've got yourself a classic.

Mountains, the yin to an iceberg's yang, have also been a majestic backdrop for many an adventure story. Whether crashing in the snow-capped Andes like that rugby team in *Alive* (based on real events) or taking a fictional turn with a similar crash in *The Grey*, where Liam Neeson battles the Arctic, frostbite and wolves, survival in the mountains is scary good. And it doesn't have to be a dramatic crash. All those folks who deliberately trek up Mount Everest to plant a flag atop its frozen peak have had a few movies made from their experiences, one of my faves being 2015's *Everest*.

I like to think of these flicks as more about survival than disaster. And it doesn't matter if the story is borne out of nature's fury or an inept architect looking for a shortcut to get a luxury tower or vessel finished by deadline. Whether on land, sea, or air, I am enthralled. Even when the backdrop is in space—like Sandra Bullock hopelessly untethered in *Gravity*—it's both harrowing and an indulgence to watch folks make it through.

Most of the disaster films from the 1970s are downright laughable when watched today. *Airport 1975* has all the ingredients for its inevitable parodies: the ill passenger in need of a transplant, the singing nun, and of course, the screaming stewardess, the latter played by Karen Black who needs her boyfriend to be transported into the plane in mid-air. Watching it recently, it's much more of a comedy than a drama.

That said, it can be a little unsettling to watch some disaster movies with my 2023 eyes. Almost all the far-fetched catastrophes that kept audiences entertained over the years

have come to fruition, and sometimes it almost feels inappropriate to watch. In my lifetime, I've seen the tragic, real-life effects of tsunamis, hurricanes, airplane crashes, and yes, towering infernos.

But, as long as Hollywood keeps churning out the drama, I can't help but succumb to this guilty pleasure again and again. I recently watched *Open Water 2: Adrift* on TV. It featured a mishmash of hot-bodied friends who find themselves stranded in the ocean beside their big-ass yacht because the bonehead showoff forgot to put the ladder down. Okay, so it wasn't *Citizen Kane*, but it was a good-enough little timewaster... just one of those films that kinda made me feel ashamed for spending time watching it when I could've been doing something productive.

What made it even worse were the suggestions I received after watching that timewaster. One recommenda-

tion was a movie called *Frozen*. Not the Disney flick. No, this was an obscure film made a few years before that, with a story about three friends stranded on a ski lift for days while wolves prowl below. Yeesh, I thought. Do they really think I'll watch just anything?

Well, a few days later I watched an unknown actor mourn his broken leg after jumping from the ski lift. Sorry if I spoiled that for anyone. I think we could all see that coming.

After watching that, I thought, Okay, I'm done with disaster for a while.

And then came my next recommendation: "Perhaps you'd be interested in *247 Degrees Fahrenheit* about 3 friends trapped in a sauna." No, I didn't hit Play. I decided to ditch these movies for a while.

And then I watched *Survivor* instead.

Where's Ernest Borgnine when you need him?

Betty Midgley is a worn-out retiree/mom who plans to supplement her pension with lucrative earnings from online writing. Er, I mean she plans to do it for the prestige. Okay, okay, she's going to jot down witticisms occasionally and see where it goes. She resides in the GTA and is not on any social media.

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