



SUMMER 2024 EDITION

As people across the U.S. are roasting in the incredible heat of 2024, whether under the heat dome in the south and northeast or in the searing deserts of the southwest, many are seeking relief with some AC, a cool drink, and a speculative fiction book. Because who wants to work in this heat?

And just as many people are reading, we spec fic authors are furiously writing, and several of our members have good news to share this quarter. Some of that news is the result of our Submission Slammers, which are introduced in an article by Paul Martz. Member J.K. Washer provides a review of the popular Netflix movie *Damsel*, and member R.C. Beckett—one of our technical gurus—explains the benefits of using WebP images. And, we are happy to have everyone meet our spotlight member for summer: Elaine Clark.

In This Newsletter...

- Meet our Member: Elaine Clark
- Submission Slammers by Paul Martz
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- Embracing WebP Images by R.C. Beckett

MEET OUR MEMBER

Elaine Clark



Elaine Clark is a native of New Mexico where she has lived all but eight months of her life. Reading was a joy she discovered from the yearly Christmas present books she received as a child from her Uncle Jim and Aunt Leah who were both librarians.

Influences

The first book she remembers having an impact on her was *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeleine L'Engle. It was one of those beloved presents sent to her when she was about ten years old. The escapades of Meg saving her brother Charles Wallace in that first adventure, as well as in *A Wind in the Door* and *A Swiftly Tilting Planet*, set Elaine on the road to being an avid reader.

The next major influence on Elaine came in the form of Isaac Asimov's robot series (*The Caves of Steel*, *The Naked Sun*, *The Robots of Dawn*, and *Robots and Empire*) as well as the Foundation Series (*Foundation*, *Foundation and Empire*, *Second Foundation*, *Foundation's Edge*, and *Foundation and Earth*) that she found on the shelves of her local library when she was in high school. Her father took one look at the books she was reading and said, "Oh, that science fiction nonsense."

Sprinkle in all the writings by Ursula K. Le Guin and you have the foundation upon which Elaine's imagination is built. Elaine thinks she's read everything Le Guin has penned but there may be one or two that she missed. That can be remedied.

Well, and then there is Tolkein (*The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Silmarillion*, etc.), C.S. Lewis (in particular the Narnia series), *Le Morte d'Arthur* by Thomas Malory, *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night* translated by Richard Francis Burton (not the actor), and so on. All these voices, and more, swim around in her head creating a lot of havoc. She had to become a mathematician in self-defense!

Writing

As for becoming a writer, back when Elaine was an undergraduate, she needed to pick an elective so signed up for a beginning creative writing class (this was the semester after she took the Science Fiction Literature class). All the prose she put on page was so awful she decided fiction writing was just not in the stars for her.

She went off to study some computer science and then some numerical analysis, and then some algebra (not the high school kind, the abstract kind), and a bit of topology and then ended up teaching math to Freshmen and Sophomores for the better part of thirty years.

Writing kept knocking on the door, so in between teaching and being a mom, she signed up for a graduate level creative writing class (three semesters in a row!) and finally began to learn the craft.

She's been working on her Twin Planet series for about twenty years now. Not all the time, but in spurts and stops, and hopes to finish all eight (the number planned) books in the series before she has to go into an assisted living facility. Now that she's retired from teaching, maybe she can actually achieve this goal.

Publications

- "A Tea Story," short story to appear in *Punk Noir Magazine*, July 2024.
- "Ha Akedah," short story published in *Little Wolf #8* a student zine associated with the *Manzano Mountain Review*, online literary magazine published by UNM-Valencia, Los Lunas, New Mexico, April 2018 (now out of print).
- "A Tangled Weave: Book One in the Twin Planet Series," novel published through CreateSpace by Twin Planet Interactive, December 2013.
- "Carnage on the Exam Room Floor," a short story in the *Las Cruces Poets and Writers Magazine*, Las Cruces, New Mexico, July 2008 (now out of print).

SHORT FICTION BOOST



Submission Slammers

by Paul Martz

I write short stories. The investment is light, the turnaround is fast, and with every story, I feel my writing improves. While many members of Speculative Fiction Writers are developing novel-length manuscripts, short stories provide an excellent creative break. It might be just what you need to get unblocked.

To support authors writing short form, a few of us have informally joined forces to simultaneously submit to the same publication, podcast, anthology, or online magazine. Call us the Submission Slammers.

Our de facto leader is Kelly Sanford. When Kelly's not writing spine-chilling horror or organizing our workshops, she's constantly on the lookout for publication opportunities. Many of our members have had success with short form. "It is a good way to put a published feather in your cap," according to Kelly.

Origins

Submission slamming grew organically from Kelly's Wednesday evening Writers Helping Writers workshops. After Marc Guillotte brought in "Aspics of Death" for feedback, it was accepted for publication in *Tasteful, Cannibal Stories to End World Hunger*, an anthology from *The Horror Tree*. Congrats, Marc!

Buoyed by Marc's success, our klatch decided to slam the *Writer's Co-Op Rabbit Hole Anthology*. Three of us met the April 30 submission deadline. Regrettably, none of our stories were accepted—a shutout.

Never Give Up

Often, editors reject perfectly good stories because they aren't what a particular editor is looking for. The most positive way to view a rejection is as an opportunity to submit at a more suitable publication. Consequently, my rejected-and-revised entry is currently being considered at another market.

Submitting is a numbers game. The more you submit, the more likely you are to succeed. That's the strength of submission slamming. More slammers increases our chance of success. When we succeed, we can celebrate together.

Finish Line

Success came with our second slam target, *Punk Noir Magazine*, an online literary and arts press seeking flash fiction less than 200 words with a theme of “Limbo.” Their submission window opened June 1 and closed after they had accepted 50 stories. That put the pressure on us to write fast and submit early.

Like all Speculative Fiction writers, the Submission Slammers are a supportive bunch. We reviewed each other’s work via email to ensure we were able to submit ASAP. It was a busy June 1 as our drafts and edits filled each other’s inboxes. Kind of nice to know you’re not alone, that your fellow members are right there at the keyboard with you, even if on the other side of the continent. And it was enlightening to observe how we all had vastly different takes on the “Limbo” theme.

Celebration

I’m thrilled to report that two of our submissions were accepted for publication —“A Tea Story” by Elaine Clark and my story, “Limbo Rock.” This success wouldn’t have happened without a group of like-minded, publication-focused slammers working together to hone and tighten each other’s stories.

Conclusion

Submission slamming is a great way to combat isolation and rejection. Our small group encourages and pushes us. When we get rejections, we share a laugh and help each other find other markets. More slammers means more fun—and better odds. But even one acceptance is a call for all to celebrate.

Our next slam target? It’s anyone’s guess.

--**Paul Martz** is a prizewinning speculative fiction author, technology blogger, and former punk rock drummer. His work is published or forthcoming at *Uncharted Magazine*, *Amazing Stories*, *Creepy Podcast*, and *Punk Noir Magazine*.

MEMBER NEWS

The Speculative Fiction Writers Association has had a tremendous quarter with nine members publishing 14 stories or novels in various publications and websites, with some members having multiple stories accepted..



In Winter 2019, **Nancy Pica Renken** wrote a flash fiction story inspired by a prompt in the WritersWeekly 24-Hour Short Story Contest and received an Honorable Mention. Since, the story “Kiss of the Cailleach Bheur” has found a home in Volume 7, Issue 1 of *Night Picnic Journal* by Night Picnic Press.



Paul Martz’s award-winning short story “Dr. Harriet Hartfeld’s Home for Aging Als” has been accepted for publication in the iconic magazine *Amazing Stories*.



Mike Strickland has a short story included in *Programmed Hearts - An Anthology of Robots Finding Feeling*.



Marc Guillotte's "Aspics of Death" has been selected for publication in *Tasteful: Cannibal Stories to End World Hunger*, a charity anthology with proceeds going to Philabundance, a nonprofit whose mission is "leading the fight against hunger."



James R.D. Hilton, a science fiction author from small-town Alberta, has self-published his debut novel, *Into the Known Universe: A Cosmic Love Story, Kinda*, through FriesenPress.



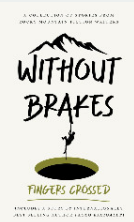
Mike Strickland has a Star Wars parody called "Coming to Disney+: 10 More Star Wars Spinoffs Based on Characters We Don't Care About" published on the humor website Robot Butt.



Paul Martz has his short story "A Dark Engraving" accepted for presentation on Creepy Podcast.



Mike Strickland has a climate fiction story accepted to Issue #5 of *LitShark Magazine*.



Jeff Jaskot has his short story "Rightsizing" included in the climate anthology *Without Brakes: Fingers Crossed* (Rocky Mountain Fiction Writers Anthologies): <https://a.co/d/d7HEYRE>, edited by the group's own **Linda Ditchkus** and **Paul Martz** and now available for purchase.



Danaeka Scrimshaw and **Paul Martz** have their respective stories "The Fae Game" and "The Blackest Ink" awarded Honorable Mention by Writing to Be Read and included in its upcoming *Dark Fiction* publication.



Elaine Clark and **Paul Martz** have their respective 200-word flash fiction stories "A Tea Story" and "Limbo Rock" accepted to the Punk Noir anthology *Limbo*.



Kenton Erwin has his short story "What if It's Something?" published in the anthology *Mobius Blvd: Stories from the Byway Between Reality and Dream*.

MOVIE REVIEW



***Damsel* on Netflix**

Reviewed by J.K. Washer

Warning: Contains Spoilers

The Setup

Actress Millie Bobby Brown, as the titular heroine Elodie, lives in an impoverished country with her non-royal family. She narrates the movie, and describes herself as a damsel in distress who cannot depend on a knight in shining armor, and must rescue herself from imminent peril.

Elodie's first scenes include chopping wood and dragging branches back to their humble home with her younger sister Floria for company. Their country is in ruin, her father, the leader of her county, desperate to help his people.

An unexpected offer of gold for Elodie's hand in marriage to a royal prince leads her father to accept, and the family travels by ship to a distant country which initially looks prosperous but hides dark secrets.

The Plot Thickens

Once the wedding has finished, a blood-mingling ceremony in the mountains reveals the queen (actress Robin Wright) evil, the prince-groom weak. This queen is no Princess Buttercup gone bad; she has a centuries-old agreement with the angry resident dragon to sacrifice three of royal blood each generation.

During the performance of the blood ceremony, Elodie has gained royal blood. The prince throws Elodie over the edge of a cliff in the cave to complete one-third of the sacrifice.

The Strong Female Lead

Elodie realizes after fruitless running through dark tunnels, crying and calling for help, that no one is going to rescue her. The dragon communicates with her while it pursues her, possibly telepathic, and as she survives each fiery encounter, it begins to respect her as a worthy adversary.

Thanks to the names of previous victims on a cave wall, Elodie finds that this wedding and sacrifice ritual has been going on for a long time. The dragon telepathically reveals that her anger is against those of royal blood who destroyed her three daughters, last of their kind.

The mingling of royal blood with Elodie's after the wedding makes the dragon believe that Elodie is royalty, yet the queen has developed this charade to ensure sacrifices are always commoners who marry the current prince.

Attempted Rescue

Elodie's guilt-ridden father comes back to try and save her from her fate. The dragon strikes him down, but the distraction helps her escape the cave. The dragon comes in pursuit but can't find her.

Her stepmother (actress Angela Bassett) meets Elodie on the plains near the cave when her father does not return. The queen has taken Elodie's sister Floria, since Elodie is still alive and has not fulfilled the sacrifice.

Elodie sends her stepmother back to prepare their ship for departure, and returns to the horrors of the cave to rescue her sister. This time, Elodie knows the cave's maze, the map, and ways to survive the dragon.

The Truth Revealed

Her bravery leads to the ultimate plot twist, breaking the royal chain of dishonor. The theme is "girl power—empowerment." The women of the film (Elodie, her sister and stepmother) are all stronger than the male counterparts (her father and the groom-prince.)

The moral seems to be that strength within one's self can surmount obstacles, that waiting for the prince to rescue you in real life can be a dicey proposition, translation: rescue yourself, honey.

Personal Take

I enjoyed the movie, but had difficulty believing Elodie was unhurt after being thrown over a cliff. The subsequent scenes learning to survive in the cave seemed to last forever with dodgy pacing, but after Elodie's father shows up to rescue her, the film moves along again.

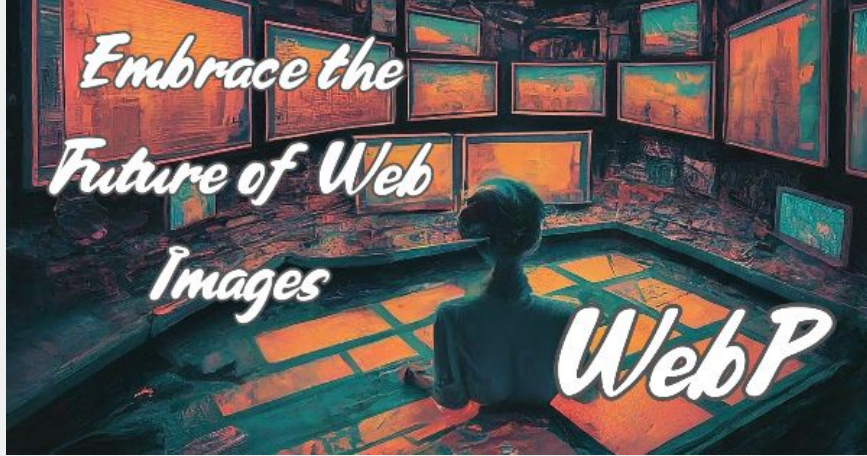
The dragon's CGI wasn't as good as I hoped, but I did empathize with the mother dragon's grief, which generated the royal trickery and the loss of many young women over generations.

Millie Bobby Brown is a talented actress who carried this movie on her shoulders. She excelled in *Stranger Things* and *Enola Holmes*, and does not disappoint here.

I would recommend it as entertaining fare, with some familiar good actors from the past in lead roles. Oh, and the ending is yet another plot twist, and priceless.

--**J.K. Washer** has been writing in a sandbox in her corner of the universe since 1990. She cut her teeth on Asimov, Bradbury, Clarke, Heinlein and McCaffrey. She writes epic science fiction set after an Ark Ship crashes on a planet in spite of the prior claim of another world, setting off decades of conflict.

ON OUR WEBSITE



New Image Type Could Improve Your Blog

By R.C. Beckett

Recently, the Technology Committee found our website was not receiving very high ratings for usability. After some investigation, the culprit was slow-loading. In other words, a visitor to our website had to wait a couple of seconds for the landing page to display. That delay was killing our ratings.

It's hard to believe (not really) that web surfers are impatient and will only wait a second. We changed to the new and faster WebP images and our ratings improved dramatically. It's a good idea for your website too.

Read the full post at: <https://specificwriters.com/embrace-the-future-of-web-images>

Thanks For Reading!

If you want to know more about the Speculative Fiction Writers Association, read our blog full of articles on writing and critiquing, or learn about our members, please visit us at <https://specificwriters.com>

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