

*The Dark Magazine* Issue #5 - August 2014

Reviewed by Charlie Harmon

Editors: Jack Fisher and Sean Wallace

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Web Address: [thedarkmagazine.com](http://thedarkmagazine.com)

What they publish: genre fiction between 1,000 and 5,000 words.

Submission Guidelines: Submissions should be emailed to [thedarkmagazine@gmail.com](mailto:thedarkmagazine@gmail.com), the story attached (in "proper manuscript format"--they aren't more specific than that) as a .doc and with a short bio in the body of the message. They're looking for magical realism, dark fantasy and science fiction, and surrealist stories, though they try to be open-minded: "Try us with fiction that falls outside of 'regular' categories." No graphic violence or mainstream fantasy/sci-fi. No simultaneous/multiple submissions/reprints. They pay \$0.03/word up to 5,000 words.

Description of Publication: This is a quarterly, online, semi-pro genre magazine with a dark sensibility. It's \$2.99 an issue and available in a variety of digital formats, including Kindle, Nook, and Apple. Issue 5 had stories by one professional (though not a household name) and three unknowns, and a random sampling of the earlier issues yielded all writers with only a few minor credits. I read the Kindle version, which is put together well, has a cover by a professional artist, and is, as far as I could tell, typo-free (which is becoming more and more of a rarity these days).

Prose per issue: They publish four stories per issue, sixteen stories per year.

Prose Reviews:

"When Swords Had Names" by Stephen Graham Jones is a plain spoken dark fantasy story set in a timeless fantasy setting. The subjective first person narrator, who has deserted his military post and is on the run, nearly starves to death in an unfamiliar forest, only to be saved by a group of wealthy foreign hunters. They feed him a cut of unfamiliar but delicious meat and have moved on by the time he awakens in the morning. He quickly realizes that what he ate was the "Third Meat," harvested from the middle section of a murdered centaur, not quite animal and not quite human, and also that the meat is supernaturally addictive and that he would do anything for more. Over the next few weeks he tracks the hunting party, reasoning that they'll lead him to more "horse men" and telling himself that he just wants one more taste. When he finds them, the centaurs have turned the tables and are torturing the men to death. Hopes dashed, the narrator talks himself out of a suicide charge and stumbles upon a nearby clearing where two centaur children are waiting. After a brief struggle between his morality and that supernatural hunger, he kneels and smiles to lure them closer.

The narrator's voice is simple and straightforward, but also wry and thoughtful. The story opens with what seems to be a heartfelt tribute to the art of war--for example, "Some men are born soldiers..."--which comes to an abrupt halt with, "Me, I *ran*." It seems fast-paced, even as the narrator spends a good portion of it alone in the woods, probably because he's always on the move, first fleeing his post and responsibilities (and the men who'd like to hang him for it) and then chasing one more taste of that incredible meat. The "third meat" seems an entirely original (and yet obvious) idea, and the final moral dilemma--potentially a cliché: "I'm not going to kill and eat these horse *children*, am I?"--is made so much more interesting when the narrator gives in to that darker impulse. I thought this story was very well done.

"Not the Grand Duke's Dancer" by Emily B. Cataneo is a plain spoken dark fantasy story in a slightly surreal historical setting. Marina, a deceased Russian ballet dancer and the Grand Duke's former lover, is a subjective first person narrator, pulled from her grave by the distraught Grand Duke. Over her unheard objections, he takes her to several spiritualists, one of whom is able to restore a semblance of life to her withered corpse. At a monastery, a deal with the devil to restore living flesh to her body goes awry when Marina tells the Devil she'd rather go to the Underworld. Once there, told that she'll work as the devil's chambermaid, she takes his crown, declaring herself the Queen of the Underworld and starting a dance company. On opening night she finds herself unconsciously scanning the crowd for the Grand Duke and wonders if she'll always be his dancer after all.

The opening line: "I'm teaching earthworms how to dance ballet when the Grand Duke comes to steal me from Petrograd," hooked me immediately, especially when I realized it was to be taken literally. The narrator's voice is straightforward, letting the oddness of the situation and the setting keep the reader's interest. It's tragic, in that Marina spends most of the story powerless and protesting the Grand Duke's designs for her and yet when she becomes the devil, one of the most powerful beings in creation, she realizes that she doesn't get to choose whether she's the Grand Duke's dancer. It's also comic, though most of the humor comes from a quietly absurd, deadpan tone. Another well done story.

Rating: 7. Most of their stories are by relative unknowns, but also of good quality. I would be proud to have my work appear here, and \$0.03/word, while still a semi-professional rate, might mean less competition. On the other hand, the bar is set pretty high, and that, plus publishing only sixteen stories a year, is why they're listed as one of Duotrope's "25 Most Challenging" markets. They generally respond within a few days, though, so I would put them down as a longshot for that first round of submitting. Probably a quick rejection, but you never know.