Afternoon Discoveries: October 31, 2026

Speculative, Hybrid, Experimental, Short, & Flash Fiction

AMONG THE LETTERS
OCT 31, 2026 • PAID



Speculative, Hybrid, Experimental, Short, & Flash Fiction

Halloween falls on a Saturday this year, so today's speculative and flash fiction leans gently toward the uncanny. A witch keeps watch over a drowned zoo full of ghosts, a widow rations her stories for a husband who returns each night, and a reaper loses an argument with a dying scientist. In the paid section, two Canadian writers visit a Toronto museum and catalogue a set of

golden wandering bones. The back shelf brings flash craft, a horror review, and three ghost stories from long ago. None of them should keep you up too late.

All links in today's edition were checked against the linked publication, magazine, or publisher page on October 31, 2026.

Featured Discovery

Waking the Dead Zoo - Lane Robins

Amber Barrow has spent five years of graduate research, and most of her grant money, on a single night inside a flooded, abandoned zoo. Its keeper, a witch named Rina Conroy, greets her still dressed for a costume party, while the ghost of a reticulated python coils in the rafters. After sundown, ghostly flamingos wade and gibbons whoop as Rina bends time for Amber's recordings. Amber has not been honest about why she came, and her real reason waits deeper inside. This story from Translunar Travelers Lounge is eerie, tender, and joyful.

Read "Waking the Dead Zoo" at Translunar Travelers Lounge

The Discovery Desk

Tomorrow Night - Marie Brennan

Every evening, a widow tidies away supper and waits for her husband's ghost to settle into his favourite chair by the fire. She tells him the family news with the skill of a practised storyteller, timing each tale with great care. When the church bells toll midnight, he fades, always just before the story ends. Each night she promises herself that tomorrow she will finish one and let him go. Marie Brennan, a Hugo Award winner, fits a whole marriage into this tiny ghost story from Small Wonders.

Read "Tomorrow Night" at Small Wonders

Family Drama Never Dies - Momoko Uno

The narrator of this comic flash is Grim, a reaper running late on a crowded night. Heavenly Resources has asked Grim to hide the scythe because it looks too intimidating. Kimberly, a cancer researcher, hovers above her hospital bed at five minutes to midnight and must choose between the light and her life. Grim summons twelve squabbling ancestors to help her decide, and they split their vote six to six. Momoko Uno wrote this lively story for an October flash contest and shared it on her Substack, Peach Girl Propaganda.

Read "Family Drama Never Dies" at Peach Girl Propaganda

You Have to Follow the Rules - Ada Hoffmann

Annalee arrives at her first fan convention dressed as a stormtrooper, and the crowds and noise soon overwhelm her. Her mother keeps urging her to make friends, while Annalee notices things the grown-ups cannot, such as doors marked DO NOT ENTER in the ceiling and floor. A quiet

girl in a Jedi cloak, with white eyes and flowers in her hair, begins passing her notes about the rules of another world. Ada Hoffmann, an autistic self-advocate, writes Annalee with real warmth. This Strange Horizons story is a fairy tale for anyone who has felt out of place.

Read “You Have to Follow the Rules” at Strange Horizons

Field Marks - Nerissa Nelson

Librarians first notice a goldfinch missing from a 1956 field guide, then find 464 bird illustrations cut cleanly from forty-two volumes. The thief removes only waterfowl, shorebirds, gulls, and finches, and leaves delicate pencil sketches of two mountain peaks behind. Told in the collective voice of the library staff, this flash piece from Fractured Lit turns a theft into a quiet mystery. Nerissa Nelson, herself a faculty librarian in Wisconsin, lets the ending unfold as gently as a reshelved book. It is a small, strange, and lovely read.

Read “Field Marks” at Fractured Lit

Thank you for spending some time with this afternoon’s edition. Below this point are six more speculative and flash stories, three pieces on craft and criticism, and three special recommendations from the back shelf.

Special Recommendations can be found near the bottom of the article.

More From the Discovery Desk

In the Stillness of Bone and Sea - KT Bryski

One summer, eight-year-old Megan spends her days at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, where her father works the admissions desk. Her best friend is the mosasaur in the Hall of Paleontology, a fossil that talks to her and promises to teach her how to be a mosasaur. Meanwhile, her fourteen-year-old sister, Rachel, is quietly starving herself, and the family is coming apart. Canadian author KT Bryski tells the story from adulthood, years after a move to Ottawa. This piece from Lackington's carries a content warning for disordered eating, and it is beautifully done.

Read "In the Stillness of Bone and Sea" at Lackington's

An Atlas of Wandering Bones - Kaitlin Tremblay

Kaitlin Tremblay builds this story as a catalogue, an atlas of human bones that existed long before there were humans. Whenever the wandering bones are wounded, gold grows in the damage, and so they are almost impossible to destroy. Entries trace a collarbone in a tropical forest, a sternum lost off the coast of Atlantis, and a set of Teeth found on a Romanian farm. Something, the atlas warns, is hunting them. Tremblay, who co-edited an anthology of Canadian monster stories, offers a hybrid piece from Lackington's that is part folklore and part field guide.

Read "An Atlas of Wandering Bones" at Lackington's

Uncanny Jack - Susan Palwick

Everyone thinks the uncanny folk steal children, the narrator says, though they steal adults too. Her husband, Jack, was once a funny engineer and a great dancer, and now a changeling shuffles about in his body in a memory care unit. She visits almost every day, offers kindness to the stranger who replaced him, and searches for a way into the uncanny place. Susan Palwick, who has worked as a hospital chaplain and a social worker, writes about dementia with deep tenderness. This Lightspeed Magazine story borrows an old myth and finds something new in it.

Read “Uncanny Jack” at Lightspeed Magazine

Five Stages of Shedding a Skin - Audrey Zhou

In Ming’s village, women keep disappearing, and the men call it kidnapping. Her friend Xuemei goes looking for a man called the Tailor, who is rumoured to make new skins, and never returns in any form Ming recognizes. Married young and tired of a life decided for her, Ming soon follows. Audrey Zhou arranges the story in five parts named for the five stages of grief, from denial to acceptance. This reprint in Small Wonders is a strange, hopeful fable about becoming someone new.

Read “Five Stages of Shedding a Skin” at Small Wonders

Streetlights - Lo Corliss

Under a streetlight in a rainstorm, the narrator meets the ghost of a woman they once loved, her face blurred by the downpour. The rain feels wrong for this city, where showers are usually steady and gentle, like an old friend. She points toward the intersection where five lights meet, then smiles, though her hands tremble. Lo Corliss wrote this short

ghost story for Emerald City Ghosts, a Substack magazine of ghost and paranormal fiction. It is brief, misty, and quietly sad.

Read “Streetlights” at Emerald City Ghosts

Little Brother™ - Bruce Holland Rogers

Peter has wanted a Little Brother™ for three Christmases in a row, and this year one is waiting among the presents. The toy babbles, toddles, and knocks down every block tower Peter builds. It also has a button at the back of its neck that switches it off, though it can still see, hear, and feel. When Peter threatens to hide his new brother somewhere dark, his mother’s response is unforgettable. Bruce Holland Rogers wrote very short stories long before flash fiction had a name, and this Strange Horizons classic shows why.

Read “Little Brother™” at Strange Horizons

Beyond the First Shelf

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10 Hands-On Tips For Writing Flash Fiction - Maria Haskins

Maria Haskins, a Swedish-Canadian writer who lives outside Vancouver, loves flash as both a reader and a writer. In this guest post for the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers Association, she offers ten tips and

insists that they are not rules. She suggests letting a title do some worldbuilding, trimming the cast, and telling a story through letters, lists, or text messages. She also explains how a good twist hides in plain sight. Readers who enjoyed today's shorter pieces will see many of her ideas at work.

Read "10 Hands-On Tips For Writing Flash Fiction" at SFWA

From the Library of Jurgen Leitner by Premee Mohamed with Jonathan Sims - Luna Gray

Before the horror podcast The Magnus Archives begins, a private library of cursed books has already been destroyed. A new novel credited to Canadian writer Premee Mohamed, Jonathan Sims, and Rusty Quill tells that library's story, and Luna Gray reviews it for Strange Horizons. Gray admires how the book turns horror into a workplace, with progress meetings, filed reports, and tea after every death. One cursed volume contains only the word DIG. The review is sharp and witty, and it makes a fine guide for horror readers this Halloween.

Read "From the Library of Jurgen Leitner" at Strange Horizons

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The Wondrous Nature of Existence: A Conversation with Michael Swanwick - Arley Sorg with Michael Swanwick

Michael Swanwick has won five Hugo Awards and published well over 150 short stories. In this Clarkesworld conversation with Arley Sorg, he explains why losing his first two Nebula nominations was a stroke of luck. He describes a simple routine of breakfast, office, and writing, plus a file of forty to fifty unfinished stories he can always return to. On days

without willpower, he holds a devil stone given to him by a Siberian shaman. The interview is warm, funny, and full of practical wisdom.

Read “A Conversation with Michael Swanwick” at Clarkesworld Magazine

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Special Recommendations

The Ghost-Ship - Richard Middleton

According to the man telling this tale at the inn, Fairfield, a village near the Portsmouth Road, is the ghostiest place in all England. After a great storm in the spring of 1897, a ghost ship lands in the landlord’s turnip field, captained by the pirate Bartholomew Roberts. Soon his rum is flowing, and the village ghosts are carousing every night. Richard Middleton’s comic fantasy gave its name to his 1912 collection, which Arthur Machen praised in the preface. It remains one of the funniest ghost stories in English.

Read “The Ghost-Ship” at Project Gutenberg

The Story of the Inexperienced Ghost - H. G. Wells

At the Mermaid Club, after a day of golf, Clayton tells his friends about the ghost he cornered in the long passage the night before. It was no terrifying spirit, only a weak, nervous young man who had forgotten the

secret passes that would let him leave. Clayton spent an hour helping him remember the gestures. His sceptical friends then urge him to perform the passes himself. H. G. Wells published this playful and unsettling story in 1902, and its final scene still lands with a chill.

Read “The Story of the Inexperienced Ghost” at Wikisource

The Mezzotint - M. R. James

Mr. Williams, who collects topographical pictures for a university museum, receives a dull mezzotint of a manor house from a London dealer. The price seems far too high for a print with no figures in it. Over the next day, however, a figure appears on the lawn, and each time Williams and his friends look again, it has moved closer to the house. M. R. James first published this story in Ghost Stories of an Antiquary in 1904. It is a perfect read for a dark Halloween evening.

Read “The Mezzotint” at Wikisource

Thank you for spending part of your day among the letters with us.

Many of today’s stories are about what lingers after loss. A widow keeps a ghost talking, a wife searches the uncanny place for her husband, and a grown woman returns to a museum that no longer feels magical. Others turn the season playful, with a reaper on a deadline and a pirate ship in a turnip field. Good speculative fiction lets us look at grief and fear from a safe distance. We hope a few of these pieces keep you company this Halloween weekend.

I hope one of today’s pieces gives you somewhere worth staying for a while.

Take care!