Afternoon Discoveries: November 3, 2026

Science Fiction & Fantasy

AMONG THE LETTERS
NOV 03, 2026 • PAID



Science Fiction & Fantasy

Today's stories keep asking who we become when someone else could take our place. A daughter learns to tell her mother apart from a dozen eager copies, a refugee hears voices in her fever, and a small goddess waits for her shadow to come home. The poems drift through starlight, bloodlines, and a guide to cooking faery. The back shelf brings a founding essay of science fiction criticism, a look at community labs, and a fresh visit to a classic. The

specials sail with Dunsany, sparkle with Wilde, and peer through a very strange lens.

All links in today's edition were checked against the linked publication, magazine, or publisher page on November 3, 2026.

Featured Discovery

Twenty-Two Steps to Become Us - Hannah Yang

Jolene's mother has a dozen Learners, copies that follow her around until they look and talk like her. They play Candy Crush on her couch, wear her red puffer vests, and chime in with the things she would say. Jolene insists on code words like rambutan so she can tell which one is really her mother. When her workplace orders every staff member to train a Learner, she begins teaching a Jolene Two. Hannah Yang turns a sharp idea about work and replacement into a warm, aching story about a mother and daughter finding their way back to each other.

Read "Twenty-Two Steps to Become Us" at Clarkesworld

The Discovery Desk

How to Come Back to Yourself - Audrey Zhou

Lilin is a small divinity living at the edge of a forest, and her only tie to the divine is a shadow-self with a mind of its own. That shadow has gone quiet, and with it the prophecies she once gave the village. Then a young man named Jun arrives with golden eyes, a favour owed to Granny Yao, and a request for a planting-season prophecy. He shifts into a fox, a bird, or a snake as spring warms. Audrey Zhou writes gently about losing a gift and finding your way back to it at your own pace.

Read “How to Come Back to Yourself” at PodCastle

Twenty-Nine Days Before Remaking the World - Mimi Mondal

Salt is twenty-one, a street vagrant from Rachtown, walking east with the refugees after a great wave from the Shrouded Ocean razed her city. Beside her walks Rainfall, an elegant man she began calling husband when the camp officers wrote down their paperwork. On the thirteenth day, Salt catches code fever, and a ringing in her ears becomes a voice she first takes for God. The voice turns out to be echoes of people, speaking languages she has never learned. Mimi Mondal, a pioneer of Dalit Futurism, gives this story of love, displacement, and destiny its first appearance in English.

Read “Twenty-Nine Days Before Remaking the World” at Clarkesworld

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starship aubade - Rebecca Uhlman

An aubade is a dawn song for lovers parting at daybreak, and Rebecca Uhlman sets hers aboard a starship far from any sun. The speaker

remembers yellow light on the skin while the engines whine like cicadas in summer heat. Stars streak past the glass like rain, and the walls are as sturdy as love and as thick as longing. The poem asks what morning means when it arrives without blueness, colour, or voice. Its closing questions are quiet and hopeful, and they stay with you long after the last line.

Read “starship aubade” at Uncanny Magazine

Untangled - Katherine Garrison

In this short prose poem, a group of women go fishing inside themselves, casting their lines for whatever they seek in the deep. What they pull up is a tangled mess of filaments, all the rumours and constraints that have weighed on them for years. Freed from their corsets, they skip down to the river and plunge in. Little silver fish clean away what no longer serves them, leaving scars shiny and new. Katherine Garrison, a chef and baker in rural Wales, makes release feel strange, physical, and joyful in very few words.

Read “Untangled” at Small Wonders

Thank you for spending some time with this afternoon’s edition. Below this point are six more stories and poems, two essays and a review about the genre, and three special recommendations from the back shelf.

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

More From the Discovery Desk

Five Accounts of the Story-Woman - Diana Dima

A carnival tent holds a woman whose skin is covered in moving words, and each visitor reads something different there. Diana Dima, a writer living in Canada, tells her story through people who meet her across a lifetime, from a curious teenager to a lover who sees their own story crawling up her neck. Each account reveals more about the teller than about the story-woman herself. The people who love her want her words to be about them, and some grow frightening in their wanting. This is a haunting fantasy about being read rather than known.

Read “Five Accounts of the Story-Woman” at Diabolical Plots

Thirteen Swords That Made a Prince: Highlights from the Arms & Armory Collection - Sharang Biswas

This story takes the form of a museum guide to thirteen swords from the life of Prince Nizar, a celebrated early ruler of an imagined Hindustan. The first is a sword-shaped stick he carried at four, and the rest trace his schooling, his battles, and his reign. Between the polite curatorial notes, the careful reader spots witchcraft, rumours of giant snakes, and a jasmine pommel that hints at a hidden love. Sharang Biswas lets the official record tell one story while the objects quietly tell another. The final entry lands with lovely, understated grace.

Read “Thirteen Swords That Made a Prince” at Strange Horizons

Notes on the Identification and Preparation of Faery for Human Consumption - Courtney Floyd

Written as a series of footnotes to a foraging guide, this poem offers advice on identifying and cooking faery for the human table. The tone is calm and practical, recommending insect-like specimens for beginners and a gentle blanching to remove lingering glamours. Beneath the dark joke sits a world where squid and octopus have vanished from warming seas. Courtney Floyd, a poet and novelist with a doctorate in nineteenth-century British literature, brings a wry, allusive wit to every note. Readers should know the page carries a content warning for animal cruelty.

Read “Notes on the Identification and Preparation of Faery for Human Consumption” at Strange Horizons

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The Body As Archive - Joely Williams

Scientists say the bones hold everything, and Joely Williams carries that idea into a quiet poem about inheritance. The speaker imagines DNA as library stacks, each gene a catalogue card filed under a surname that changed at a border. Salt water sits in the marrow, and every ancestor who survived the crossing is filed somewhere in the heart. The body answers requests for these records slowly, though it always holds. Williams, an Afro-Boricua poet from the South Bronx, also shares a short note on how the poem came together.

Read “The Body As Archive” at Abyss & Apex

Cloud Breaker - David McGillveray

Soldiers of the Grand Western Enlightenment roll into the village of Naizan in a black staff car, and young Anyela watches from the branches of a great tree. Beside her sits Oda, an imp with green eyes and leafy ears. Pada Sassos, keeper of the village Thanking House, meets the officers in his patched green robe and claims to be a wizard. What follows is a tense standoff between rifles and an older, rooted kind of magic. David McGillveray, born in Edinburgh, builds to an ending that feels earned and deeply satisfying.

Read “Cloud Breaker” at Abyss & Apex

Sammy - Raúl Gonzálvez del Águila

A city ranger is assigned a new partner, and Sammy turns out to be a polite giant cockroach in a wide-brimmed hat and long overcoat. Their job involves consecrating old walls, and the ranger, short on time and patience, expects little from the rookie. When Sammy’s antennae find a strange knotted symbol carved into a brick, the work becomes something far larger. Raúl Gonzálvez del Águila, an award-winning Spanish writer, blends grit, wonder, and an unlikely friendship. The final pages carry a surprising and moving tenderness.

Read “Sammy” at Abyss & Apex

Beyond the First Shelf

Estrangement and Cognition - Darko Suvin

Few essays have shaped how readers talk about science fiction as much as this one. Darko Suvin argues that the genre is a literature of cognitive estrangement, showing us a world unlike our own that still asks to be understood through reason. He sets science fiction apart from myth, folk tale, and fantasy, and traces its long roots through utopias and imaginary voyages. Strange Horizons reprinted the author's preferred 1979 text, with a postscript added in 2014. It is demanding reading, though it rewards anyone curious about why the genre works.

Read "Estrangement and Cognition" at Strange Horizons

Building a Better World Through Participatory Science - W. L. Bolm

W. L. Bolm begins with Mary Shelley and the long shadow Victor Frankenstein casts over how fiction pictures scientists. The essay then turns to community labs, places like Counter Culture Labs where anyone can pursue a question and projects like Open Insulin take shape. Bolm sets these real spaces beside stories by Ruthanna Emrys, Cory Doctorow, and Naomi Kritzer, where ordinary people help build a better world. The result is a hopeful argument for participation over despair. It makes a fine companion for anyone tired of dystopia.

Read "Building a Better World Through Participatory Science" at Clarkesworld

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The Stars My Destination by Alfred Bester - Paul March-Russell

Strange Horizons opens its new Vintage SFF Reviews column with a fresh look at Alfred Bester's The Stars My Destination. Paul March-Russell begins with the pulp magazines where Bester learned his trade and the cultured editors who worked within their limits. He then follows Gully, the hero whose tattooed tiger mask makes him a kind of living palimpsest. The review shows how Bester's allusions, including a nod to Oscar Wilde, lift the novel far beyond its pulp origins. It is a lively invitation to revisit a classic, or to read it for the first time.

Read "The Stars My Destination by Alfred Bester" at Strange Horizons

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Special Recommendations

Idle Days on the Yann - Lord Dunsany

A traveller boards the Bird of the River and sails down the Yann, a dream river that flows past wondrous cities toward the sea. The sailors pray to their many gods each evening, and the captain shares stories of the lands along the banks. Each port, from Mandaroon to Astahahn to Perdóndaris, seems stranger and more beautiful than the last. Lord Dunsany published this tale in 1910, and it shaped generations of fantasy writers who came after him. Its gentle melancholy makes it a perfect afternoon voyage.

Read "Idle Days on the Yann" at Wikisource

The Remarkable Rocket - Oscar Wilde

The King's son is to be married, and the royal fireworks are set out in the palace garden for the celebration. Among them is a Rocket of tremendous vanity, who lectures the Squib, the Roman Candle, and the Catherine Wheel about his own importance. His pride leads to tears, a damp fuse, and a long fall from grace. Oscar Wilde fills this fairy tale with sly comedy and a final image that is both funny and sad. It remains one of the sharpest stories ever written about self-regard.

Read "The Remarkable Rocket" at Wikisource

The Diamond Lens - Fitz-James O'Brien

Linley is obsessed with building the perfect microscope, and he will do anything to see deeper than any scientist before him. With help from a spiritualist medium who claims to channel Leeuwenhoek, he learns that the answer lies in a flawless diamond. Through his new lens he finds a tiny world inside a drop of water, and in it a creature of impossible beauty he names Animula. Fitz-James O'Brien published the story in 1858, and it is often counted among the earliest works of American science fiction. Its ending is eerie and unforgettable.

Read "The Diamond Lens" at Wikisource

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

Today's writers keep wondering what makes a self worth keeping. A mother and daughter sweep up broken pottery together, a goddess waits for her shadow, and a tree stands firm against soldiers. The classics remind us that wonder can live in a river, a firework, or a single drop of water. We hope one of these pieces stays with you through the week.

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

Take care!