

Editor's Note: This issue is shorter than usual, mostly because of conflicting obligations of various staff members (including myself). Lots of new additions to our website are in progress and will appear next month. Our amazingly energetic Director, Mary Ann, is busy promoting the SLF at WorldCon, and we hope that she and the rest of you there are having a great time.

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Alison Smith: background for "The Specialist"
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* Fountain Award Winner Alison Smith:

"I've always been fascinated by tuberculosis. It's a rather disgusting and highly contagious disease. Nonetheless, in the fiction of the nineteenth century, people are always rushing about kissing tubercular young ladies. So I thought, if we can make TB sexy, then we ought to be able to make just about any illness compelling. Yet sickness languishes on the back shelves of great literary topics. And our ideas about it remain undeveloped. There are the romantic consumptives, the noble cancer patients, and then there are neat deaths. I started kicking around the idea of chronic illness as a subject for a story in 1994. I wanted to write about the isolation of chronic illness, the unnamable quality of it, about how it quietly alters the trajectory of a life. Then I came across a gynecological study that reported ten percent of females experience unexplained pelvic pain. And no one talks about it. Soon Alice arrived in my mind, with a constant ache in her nether regions.

"It took eight years to write "The Specialist." When I got up to the part where the Fourth Man's wife is on a dogsled in the Yukon leading the search party for her husband I stalled out. I had written myself into a corner, a cold snowy, sparsely populated corner. So I set the story aside (for good, I thought) and wrote my first book, a memoir titled Name All the Animals. I

finished it while in residence at The Virginia Center for the Creative Arts in May of 2002. I met a writer there named Laurie Foos. Her first novel, Ex Utero, is about a woman who loses her uterus at the mall. It's a thrilling ride of a book and Laurie delivers it in spare, deadpan prose. Reading Ex Utero gave me courage. I pulled out "The Specialist." I finished the story that week.

"I was certain that no one would ever publish the piece. A dark quest story about a woman and her troubled vagina? No editor was going to go near that. But I was wrong. The lovely editors at McSweeney's picked it up right away. And then it was optioned for film. And then the kind judges at the Speculative Fiction Foundation have blessed it with the very first Fountain Award. I am stunned by the spectrum of people who can relate to Alice's story. And I am quite honored to accept the Fountain Award, on Alice's behalf."

A.S.

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*Older Writers Grant:

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SPECULATIVE LITERATURE FOUNDATION ANNOUNCES OLDER WRITERS GRANT

The Speculative Literature Foundation (SLF) is pleased to announce its first Older Writers Grant of \$750. The grant is available to any writer of speculative literature of 50 years or older at the time of application who is just beginning to work professionally in the field. There are no restrictions on the use of the grant money.

The grant will be awarded by a committee of SLF staff members on the basis of interest and merit. Applicants are asked to submit a brief autobiographical statement, a writing sample, and a bibliography. For full details on how to apply for the grant, please see the SLF web site:

<http://www.speculativeliterature.org/Awards/SLFOlderWriters.php>, or email olderwriters@speclit.org.

Applications must be received by December 31st 2004.

The successful applicant will be announced on January 15th 2005.

The Older Writers Grant is generously sponsored in its entirety by Centric Advertising

(<http://www.centric.com/>).

Newsletter information:

Suggestions, comments, and information to be included in the Newsletter may be sent to Editor David Lunde at news@speculativeliterature.org. If you do not wish to continue receiving the newsletter, write to the same address with "unsubscribe" in the subject line-be sure to include your name.

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