Afternoon Discoveries: November 17, 2026

Science Fiction & Fantasy

AMONG THE LETTERS
NOV 17, 2026 · PAID



Science Fiction & Fantasy

A cottage garden holds every flower except the rose, and a girl who loves an honest mother decides to dig anyway. Today's science fiction and fantasy also follows a retired physicist and his first true friend, a hive mind outvoted in an escape pod, and a monk who sails for a darkened moon. In the paid section, a Canadian wanderer comes home to a silenced city, and two sisters keep company with dangerous books. The back shelf brings a conversation about a Prague Spring novel, a sharp look at Transformers, and three classic wonders.

All links in today's edition were checked against the linked publication, magazine, or publisher page on November 17, 2026.

Featured Discovery

Thorns and All - Sophia Zhao

Greta lives with Mama in a cottage where a cherry tree bears fruit through winter. Mama answers nearly every question honestly, yet she will not explain why her favourite hat is missing its rose. The prettiest flowers bear the sharpest of thorns, she says, and some things ought to remain buried. Greta digs anyway, and a wild rose rises with a vision of a love that did not stay gentle. Sophia Zhao, whose debut novel Sleeping Beasts is forthcoming from Orbit, lets Mama wash the dirt from her hands and say she need not bloom or shed her thorns.

Read “Thorns and All” at Small Wonders

The Discovery Desk

Charlie and the Theory of Everything - Deborah Sale-Butler

A shimmer on a spiderweb in a retired physicist's office becomes Kelly, the teacher's assistant who once helped a frustrated fifth grader finish a papier-mâché solar system. Charlie Williams has not seen that easy smile in more than seventy years, and Kelly still looks as he did on the playground. They talk of Hamlet, of entanglement, and of why a ghost would appear in this particular room. Deborah Sale-Butler, in this free story at Amazing Stories, writes the reunion with warmth and quiet curiosity. The last look toward the sofa is both a discovery and a farewell.

Read "Charlie and the Theory of Everything" at Amazing Stories

---

Hive Rules - Gregory Lomasney

Five votes go one way, and seventeen trillion go the other, because Zal, a psychically linked hive sharing the escape pod, is counted as many legal individuals. The crew has days to wait for rescue in a space too small for privacy, and Simmons doubts the voting system can bear it. Trillby, the adjudicator, will not throw out the rules, so Simmons looks for a procedure that might still be fair. Gregory Lomasney, a new writer from the Irish countryside, makes this Escape Pod original his first published story. The roll call that follows is funny and satisfying.

Read "Hive Rules" at Escape Pod

A True and Faithful Chronicle of the Anglo-Saxon Voyage to the Moon in the Year of Our Lord 1261 - Jordon Jones

When the moon stays dark longer than usual, the tides turn strange, and children are born with clouds in their eyes. A monk on Insula Sacra joins warriors and Wyrdsmiths on the rune-carved ship Æthelwyrc, asked to record a voyage told in pagan songs. Years later, as Abbot Cælin, he begs the Council of Vienne not to crusade against those who helped bring light back to the moon. Jordon Jones, a writer from Warrington, marks his first professional publication with this chronicle. It is a tale of faith enlarged by travel, and of a silence he now regrets.

Read “A True and Faithful Chronicle of the Anglo-Saxon Voyage to the Moon in the Year of Our Lord 1261” at Beneath Ceaseless Skies

---

The Sea Child - Justin Wesley Ferguson

Gerda lives alone in the house that once belonged to her son, still hearing little boys in the settling walls two years after the loss. On the anniversary she walks to the shoreline, sure the day has come to go, and finds a girl in the surf with sea-green eyes. Cili stays for a time, then wades out and dives until only a foot flashes and she is gone. Justin Wesley Ferguson, who lives in Kansas with his husky Phoenix, makes this his first professional sale. Gerda’s last whisper to the water is a bargain the tide does not answer.

Read “The Sea Child” at Beneath Ceaseless Skies

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

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

More From the Discovery Desk

Aspect of the Moth - Jonathan Olfert

The prairie crickets are silent around Palako, First City of the Five Deserts, because the siege has eaten even them. A wanderer slips back through a broken wall toward the caves, where the truest blue can still be gathered, and remembers a grandmother’s tale of Irretu the moth. Churchmen hold the dye districts, and they would wring the returned sorcerer dry if they could. Jonathan Olfert, who comes from Alberta and has been featured in Year’s Best Canadian Fantasy and Science Fiction, lets her paint herself in colour and walk out unmasked. The last line is a dare into sunlight.

Read “Aspect of the Moth” at Beneath Ceaseless Skies

Do-Over - Charles Wilkerson

An alarm pulls Meghan Simmons, a professor, from sleep in the middle of the night, and her handheld reports a contaminated sample. The campus is empty when she reaches the lab, except for a man on a bench who decides he likes Ward. He is a neural map transmitted into her experiment from a future in which surviving machines try to stave off extinction. Charles Wilkerson, in this free story at Amazing Stories, lets her look at a twin separated by a gulf of time before she decides what to do. The sun is up before the question settles.

Read “Do-Over” at Amazing Stories

Final Harvest - Christine Lucas

A daughter returns home to harvest her mother's body, laying out knives and jars while still bracing for a voice that used to count every fault. Silverbells, unexpected as song, rise from the throat, and a bloombane fungus curls around them, a parasite that thrives on old tears. She nearly quits, nearly asks a colleague to lie and say that something loving bloomed there, then decides she will finish the work. Christine Lucas, a retired Air Force officer and a queer, neurodivergent writer, first published this in Flash Fiction Online. The childhood house is left behind.

Read "Final Harvest" at Small Wonders

The Books / The Sisters / The Books - D. Matthew Urban

Charlotte is ten when she first sees a tiny face through a hospital window and wishes her baby sister had been called Emily. Lily grows up smaller and more easily tired than Charlotte thinks she should be, and a grandfather later carries her far from home. Books keep the sisters talking even when years come between them, until a library fire leaves charred pages and a few unburnt sheets bright as bone. D. Matthew Urban writes this strange story of kinship and dangerous reading. It is a bookish magic that does not promise to be safe.

Read "The Books / The Sisters / The Books" at GigaNotoSaurus

Pools - A.J.C. London

There was a before of flags and gleaming suits, then a rocket, a destination, and a crash onto a planet of red dust and purple wind. Three suns blind the speaker at the edge of a quicksilver pool, while

burnt metal smolders in the distance and things still explode. Each descent into the water may be a drowning, a dream, or another version of the same fall. A.J.C. London, in this free story at Amazing Stories, writes these possible endings as a lyric rather than a plot. The last images keep sliding, as if the pool itself were still deciding.

Read “Pools” at Amazing Stories

After the End - Donna Shanley

On a wind-stripped hill, jagged stones still bear the scorched traces of last wishes, though the people who carved them are gone. The Witness, which they once used for fruit, timber, and fire, draws up their bones and wears that grey-white stuff as bark. Then a rhythm gathers in the sap, a bump splits on a bough, and a five-part bloom unfurls like a hand. Donna Shanley, who lives in Vancouver, where she can sometimes see mountains, writes a brief, uncanny afterlife for the world they failed to imagine. After the end, the story says, comes the endlessness of possibility.

Read “After the End” at MetaStellar

Beyond the First Shelf

Anatomy of a Novel: A Conversation with J.M. Sidorova - Arley Sorg with J.M. Sidorova

Arley Sorg talks with J.M. Sidorova about The Witch of Prague, which layers magic over the Prague Spring of 1968. Sidorova, born in Moscow and later a molecular biologist in Seattle, describes a quiet heroine named Alica who can be terrified and still step forward. The conversation turns to her research, from radio broadcasts after the tanks arrived to a fictional twin of the Unicorn Tapestries. She also looks back on Clarion West and her earlier novel The Age of Ice. It is a generous anatomy of how a historical fantasy finds its shape.

Read “Anatomy of a Novel: A Conversation with J.M. Sidorova” at Clarkesworld

---

Gender Is a Constructicon: Transformers as an Allegory of Queer Liberation - Amanda Wakaruk and Olav Rokne

Amanda Wakaruk and Olav Rokne, Hugo-finalist fanzine editors from Western Canada, take Transformers seriously as a story about mutable form. A robot who is also a yellow Volkswagen, they argue, is not a lesser version of himself, and that looseness has long given gender-diverse readers a place to think. The essay moves from Judith Butler to Bumblebee, then to later films that traded that play for spectacle. Wakaruk is an academic librarian, and Rokne works in public relations, and both write as fans as well as critics. The last turn on more than meets the eye is earned.

Read “Gender Is a Constructicon: Transformers as an Allegory of Queer Liberation” at Uncanny Magazine

---

So Wrong It’s Right - Yoon Ha Lee

For two decades Yoon Ha Lee has complained about a character in Shamanic Princess who flies with red hair curved into wings. The design looks unworkable, and yet it is the one image that has stayed, while the rest of the cast has faded. From that memory the essay turns to other odd choices in fiction, including a loved line in David Feintuch's space opera Fisherman's Hope. Lee, writing in Uncanny, makes a craft argument out of irritation that finally admitted the bizarre thing was doing its job. It is a funny lesson in why the wrong detail sometimes lasts.

Read "So Wrong It's Right" at Uncanny Magazine

Special Recommendations

The Crystal Egg - H. G. Wells

In a shabby little shop of curios, Mr. Cave comes into possession of a crystal egg that, under the right light, becomes a window onto another world. What he sees there is Mars, with its own movements and watchers, rendered with the cool attention Wells was also bringing to The War of the Worlds. The story first appeared in The New Review in May 1897, and it still works by looking hard rather than rushing to explain. It is an enduring piece of scientific romance, and a classic worth reading slowly, with egg and planet held up to the light.

Read "The Crystal Egg" at Wikisource

The Light Princess - George MacDonald

A princess is cursed at her christening so that gravity will not hold her, and she floats through the palace like a laugh that will not sit down. The court tries weights, lectures, and worry, while she remains airy, merry, and difficult to keep on the ground. In time a prince arrives, and the tale turns from a joke about weight toward a deeper question of what love will take on. George MacDonald's fairy story is tender, odd, and funnier than later solemn retellings sometimes allow. It remains one of the best invitations into his invented worlds.

Read "The Light Princess" at Wikisource

The Last of the Dragons - Edith Nesbit

Dragons were once as common as motor-omnibuses, Nesbit says, and almost as dangerous, until princes thinned them to a single live dragon left in England. The princess does not care to be rescued, and the prince is not eager to slay. What follows is a cheerful rearrangement of the old script, in which kindness and good sense do more than the sword. Edith Nesbit published the tale in 1925, and its voice still sounds like a knowing adult telling the truth to children. It is a delight to close the afternoon on friendly terms with a dragon.

Read "The Last of the Dragons" at Wikisource

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

Many of today's stories test what we owe one another, from a garden at dawn to a vote counted in an escape pod. Others look up, toward a moon that went dark and a future that still wants saving. New work and old favourites share

the same table here. We hope a few of these pages keep you company this Tuesday.

Take care!