



## Apex Magazine Issue 56 (January 2014)

*Sigrid Ellis (Editor) , Ursula Vernon (Contributor) , Gene O'Neill (Contributor) , Pat Cadigan (Contributor) , Jess Nevins (Contributor)*

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Apex Magazine is a monthly science fiction, fantasy, and horror magazine featuring original, mind-bending short fiction from many of the top pros of the field. New issues are released on the first Tuesday of every month.

We are a 2013 Hugo Award nominee for Best Semiprozine!

## FICTION

Pale Skin, Gray Eyes by Gene O'Neill

Jackalope Wives by Ursula Vernon

Dispatches from the Revolution by Pat Cadigan

## NONFICTION

Women in Pre-1947 Chinese and Indian Horror Fiction and Film by Jess Nevins

Interview with Gene O'Neill

Interview with incoming Editor-in-Chief Sigrid Ellis

Resolute: Notes from the Editor-in-Chief by Sigrid Ellis

Cover art by Emma Rios.

Edited by Sigrid Ellis.

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## From Reader Review Apex Magazine Issue 56 (January 2014) for online ebook

**Elena May says**

*“Be cruel or be kind, but don’t be both”*

Prequel to the brilliant *The Tomato Thief*. A beautiful, myth-like short story of kindness, taking responsibility, and doing what’s right in spite of the sacrifices.

If you, like me, are not very familiar with North American folklore and don’t know what a jackalope is, it’s this:

Sweet, but strong and dangerous. And that’s exactly what this tale is! *Jackalope Wives* draws inspiration from Native American folklore – shape-shifters, rattlesnakes, ravens, coyotes. The story packs so much emotion within its short length.

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**Sr3yas says**

**Nebula Award for Best Short Story 2014**

*Jackalope wives* is set in a unique world where mythologies are not myths, but very much real as you and me. What makes it stand out of them all is the touch of a magical authenticity which is rare when you infuse myth with the real world.

The story is absolutely perfect! I am delighted that this story won Nebula in 2014 and Its sequel, *Tomato Thief* won Hugo for best Novelette in 2017. I hope for more!

Read it ----->here

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**Tadiana ☆Night Owl? says**

When the sun goes down and the moon comes up, the jackalope wives take off their rabbit skins and dance in the moonlight to the notes of wild music. ("And now you will ask me about the musicians that played for the jackalope wives. Well, if you can find a place where they’ve been dancing, you might see something like sidewinder tracks in the dust, and more than that I cannot tell you. The desert chews its secrets right down to the bone.") But, so the story goes, if a man steals a jackalope wife's rabbit skin and burns it, the jackalope wife will stay in human form and he can keep her.

Grandma Harken's moody, semi-magical grandson tries to do this, but loses his nerve when the girl screams in pain and gives her half-burnt rabbit skin back to her. When she puts it on, she's not only got severe burns but is caught between her two shapes, human and jackalope. It's up to Granny Harken to try to fix the mess her grandson has created.

I loved Vernon's writing in this:

The Patterned Man stared at her, unblinking. The ravens laughed to themselves at the bottom of the wash. Then he dipped his head and bowed to Grandma Harken and a rattlesnake as long as a man slithered away into the evening.

Grandma Harken (love the implications of her name!) is great: she's impatient and abrupt, but also caring (though she tries to hide it with her grumpy comments) and insightful. This story is enjoyable not only on the surface, but on deeper levels, as it explores themes of selfishness, sacrifice, and respect for the ways of nature, among other things.

This is a fantastic short story, evocative of Native American legends, and the winner of the 2014 Nebula award. Seriously, go read this if you have any love for fantasy.

Free online at Apex Magazine.

Art credit: Sarah Petkus.

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## **Melanie says**

You can read this for free: [Here from Apex Magazine!](#)

Good Lord, this story was so close to perfect! I absolutely loved and adored it. Twist and turns throughout, with a perfect ending, all wrapped up in such a short tale. This story is about jackalope rabbits, which can turn into very beautiful women, who love to dance the night away. Many men desire to make them their wives, and by stealing the rabbit coats they shed while dancing, but by doing so you will also be trapping them into not being able to shift back into their rabbit forms. Some very cruel men burn their skins, while forcing them to be humans forever.

I read this in [The New Voices of Fantasy!](#)

[Blog](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Tumblr](#) | [Instagram](#) | [Youtube](#) | [Twitch](#)

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## **Nataliya says**

*"It's different when you got a choice."*

This story is perfect. I have no other words for it - it's simply perfect. It takes only a few minutes to read, and yet in those few pages it easily achieves everything that it possibly can. It's incredibly atmospheric, lyrical, full of vivid imagery and told in a fairy-tale cadence and yet concise and complete and saying so much while

saying little.

The legend is old and familiar. Find a magically beautiful changeling, trick her to stay with you, forcibly separate her from everything that was *hers* and make her *yours*, turn love into possession to fulfill your heart's desire. **Because the point of the stories, quests and legends is getting what you want, isn't it?**

*"So the young man with the touch of magic watched the jackalope wife dancing and you know as well as I do what young men dream about. We will be charitable. She danced a little apart from her fellows, as he walked a little apart from his.*

*Perhaps he thought she might understand him. Perhaps he found her as interesting as the girls found him.*

*Perhaps we shouldn't always get what we think we want."*

In a North American desert at half-moon young men watch jackalope wives dance - the part-jackrabbit part-antelope creatures that shed their skins for the night of dancing in the moonlight when they appear as the beautiful, alluring, breathtaking women. And as it always happens, one of the young men - the broody one with a touch of magic - wants, *needs*, to make one of them his own, to own and possess his heart's desire.

*"Now, it happened there was a young man in town who had a touch of magic on him. It had come down to him on his mother's side, as happens now and again, and it was worse than useless.*

*A little magic is worse than none, for it draws the wrong sort of attention."*

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*"This sort of thing happens often enough, even with boys as mortal as dirt. There's always one who learned how to brood early and often, and always girls who think they can heal him.*

*Eventually the girls learn better."*

Everyone knows what to do - grab her changeling skin and burn it, tying her to the world of humans, giving her no choice but to stay with you.

*"She was beautiful," he said. As if it were a reason.*

*As if it mattered.*

*As if it had ever mattered.*

**But what do you do if it's not that easy? If something goes terribly wrong?**

*"Of course it hurts her!" yelled Grandma. "You think you can have your skin and your freedom burned away in front of you and not scream? Sweet mother Mary, boy, think about what you're doing! Be cruel or be kind, but don't be both, because now you've made a mess you can't clean up in a hurry.*

But forget the careless selfish young man. Forget the jackalope wife whose desires do not matter to him. They are in the story but it's not *their* story. It is the story of **Grandma Harken, the one who picks up the**

**pieces, the one who does not let love cloud her judgment, the one who has no illusions about the way the world works.** The one who to me is a spiritual cousin of Pratchett's Granny Weatherwax.

The one who knows the price and knows that it must be paid.

*"You get over what you can't have faster that you get over what you could. And we shouldn't always get what we think we want."*

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It's a wonderful, wonderful story, fully deserving its Nebula win (and would have deserved a Hugo win if the world had been fair).

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Read it for yourself here:

<http://www.apex-magazine.com/jackalop...>

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### **Annet says**

I'm getting the hang of short stories. To the point. Sharp. Powerful. A gust of story, a twist,.. and then it's over.

This one, intriguing, mysterious. A fairy tale. A fantasy story.

Thanks for the goodreads friends who led me there.

You can read it here.

<http://www.apex-magazine.com/jackalop...>

Yes, enjoyed it. 3.5+ review.

And hey, there's a sequel: The Tomato Thief. Already feel like reading it but will keep it as a treat.... for the right moment....

<http://www.apex-magazine.com/the-toma...>

*"You get over what you can't have faster that you get over what you could. And we shouldn't always get what we think we want."*

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### **Alina says**

*Jackalope Wives by Ursula Vernon*

Simply gorgeous!

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### **A.M. says**

An award winning short story you can read here:

<http://www.apex-magazine.com/jackalop...>

On rare nights, the jackalope wives dance around a fire in the desert. Men watch them, but they can't catch

them. But men always watch what they can't catch.

Now, it happened there was a young man in town who had a touch of magic on him. It had come down to him on his mother's side, as happens now and again, and it was worse than useless.

A little magic is worse than none, for it draws the wrong sort of attention. It gave this young man feverish eyes and made him sullen.

And all the girls love him. Yeah... I'd believe that.

He's so sure of himself that he thinks he can catch a jackalope wife. And everyone knows that you have to burn their skin to keep them from changing back. But he messes it up, and he goes to the only person he thinks can help him, his Grandma Harken.

"Of course it hurts her!" yelled Grandma. "You think you can have your skin and your freedom burned away in front of you and not scream? Sweet mother Mary, boy, think about what you're doing! Be cruel or be kind, but don't be both, because now you've made a mess you can't clean up in a hurry."

Hmmm... now how does she know that?

\*\*\*

I read the stories out of order \*rolls eyes at self\* (see where it says number 2, AM?)

I had never heard of a jackalope but it is a mythical animal of North American folklore described as a jackrabbit with antelope horns.

It's only 5,000 words but Ursula Vernon manages to fit more world building in here than some full fantasy novels I've read.

Of course there's a journey, of course there's a price. And the Father of Rabbits sounds wonderful. (and is clearly an old lover.)

"It was easier that way," she said. "You get over what you can't have faster that you get over what you could. And we shouldn't always get what we think we want."

I really like Grandma Harken. I like the way family comes first for her. The way she's willing to make a sacrifice for another woman she doesn't even know; especially one who is young and at the start of her life.

That resonates.

5 dancing jackalope stars

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## **Athena says**

The moon came up and the sun went down. The moonbeams went shattering down to the ground and the jackalope wives took off their skins and danced.

They danced like young deer pawing the ground, they danced like devils let out of hell for the evening. They swung their hips and pranced and drank their fill of cactus-fruit wine.



5 stars? Yeah, so when I like things I really, REALLY like them (and it also won the Nebula for best short story in 2014). Good stuff.

*Jackalope Wives* is a gorgeously rich, evocative piece of short fiction from Ursula Vernon (aka T. Kingfisher), a sorceress who strips the English language down to bleached bone and weaves a net of it to capture enchanted readers.

I'm from sidehill-gouger\* and jackalope country: for me now the dance of the wives is every bit as real as the jackalopes and gougers themselves .

### **Read for free at: Jackalope Wives**

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\*Sidehill-gougers are shy, shy critters, sorta cattle-like, but their legs are waaaay longer on one side than the other so they stay on the hillsides and make two trails instead of one when they move around, and they have to circle the hill instead of just turning around if they go too far one way. That's why western hillsides have layers of skinny trails from bottom to top - now you know!

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### **karen says**

*"She was beautiful," he said. As if it were a reason.*

*As if it mattered.*

*As if it had ever mattered.*

tadiana recommended this to me as being *reminiscent of Leigh Bardugo's shorts but with a Native American twist.*

which is how you get my attention.

and that is absolutely the perfect description of this story: it has all the dark glittering fabulism of those bardugo shorts i love so much\* while still feeling like a classic fairytale; a perfect blend of modern and traditional sensibilities shot through with beauty and regret and fairytale tropes.

and of course "fairytale tropes" are never limited to the fantasy realm - there's always a kernel of something that resonates and bleeds into the real world; in this case, issues of sexuality and consent, kindness and duty.

and sacrifice. what would a fairytale be without sacrifice?

this is a spin on the celtic selkie tale. i don't know enough about native american mythology to determine whether it's an adaptation of an existing, analogous story or the author's own cultural transplant. instead of the selkie's woman/seal mashup, in which the creature can be captured and claimed as a wife by a man who steals her discarded sealskin while she bathes, this is about women who transform into jackalopes (or vice versa?), and a man who believes he's been given the go-ahead to woo-by-skin-theft a particularly beautiful and energetic jackalope wife as she dances by the firelight with others of her kind.

this sense of entitlement comes from his having some magic in his blood, and the irresistibility-to-women he has always experienced as a result:

*A little magic is worse than none, for it draws the wrong sort of attention. It gave this young man feverish eyes and made him sullen...He was tall and slim and had dark hair and young women found him fascinating.*

*This sort of thing happens often enough, even with boys as mortal as dirt. There's always one who learned how to brood early and often, and always girls who think they can heal him.*

but his confidence leads him to make a tragic miscalculation with this jackalope wife; his panic and lack of resolve results in a suffering beyond his ability to process, let alone heal. he runs to grandma harken, whose knowledge and competence in magic and the healing arts are unparalleled, and whose familial affection for the boy, *Pretty and useless and charming when he set out to be*, does not prevent her from being horrified at what he has done, cursing his *goddamn pity* before she takes matters into her own hands:

*"Be cruel or be kind, but don't be both, because now you've made a mess you can't clean up in a hurry."*

it's a story full of arresting imagery, hinting at a larger mythology:

*And now you will ask me about the musicians that played for the jackalope wives. Well, if you can find a place where they've been dancing, you might see something like sidewinder tracks in the dust, and more than that I cannot tell you. The desert chews its secrets right down to the bone.*

and a fantastic character in grandma harken (who features in another story i have yet to read: The Tomato Thief) and whose sympathetic but matter-of-fact delivery of hard truths:

*"He'll kill you," the old woman said. "Or cure you. Or maybe both. You don't have to do it. This is the bit where you get a choice. But when it's over, you'll be all the way something, even if it's just all the way dead."*

and down-to-earth resigned fatalism:

*"It was easier that way," she said. "You get over what you **can't** have faster than you get over what you **could**. And we shouldn't always get what we think we want."*

make her a fascinating character, even before we learn all her juicy backstory, and boy do i need more more more about this backstory.

i loved this story every bit as much as a bardugo short,\*\* and i can't wait for tadiana to find more hidden freebie gems on the internet for me to devour.

read it for yourself here:

<http://www.apex-magazine.com/jackalop...>

\*don't know what i'm talking about?? they are here! they are free!! they are excellent!!!

the witch of duva

the too-clever fox

little knife

\*\* still don't know what i'm talking about??? see \*, silly!

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## **Jess ✨Harbinger of Blood-Soaked Rainbows✨ says**

When I saw two of my friends, Tadiana and karen read this and gave it five stars, I knew I needed to jump on board. And I am so happy I did!

*You get over what you can't have faster than you get over what you could. And we shouldn't always get what we think we want.*

This is a gorgeous short story dripping with beautiful prose, traces of magic, and Native American folklore. Vernon certainly has a way with words. Her story kept me glued to it the entire time. I loved her creativity, her subtle use of the mystical, and her ability to think outside the box.

The jackalope wives are mystical creatures who shed their rabbit skins in the evening and dance in the desert to wild music. The human boys from the town covet them and want to make them their own, but it is very difficult to do so. If a boy finds the shedded skin of a dancing jackalope wife, he must pitch it in the fire and the jackalope wife will be his. But the price of owning a wild thing is very steep, and the consequences are something not every boy can bear.

*"But it sounded like it was hurting her!" he shot back. "You weren't there! She screamed like a dying rabbit!"*

*"Of course it hurts her!" yelled Grandma. "You think you can have your skin and your freedom burned away in front of you and not scream? Sweet mother Mary, boy, think about what you're doing! Be cruel or be kind, but don't be both, because now you've made a mess you can't clean up in a hurry."*

Grandma Harken is awakened to her grandson one evening who comes to her door with a captured jackalope wife in his arms. He couldn't commit to burning the skin and gave it to her half charred which caused her to shift and become a mutant caught between two forms. The poor thing is in misery, and Grandma Harken, though tough and dutiful isn't completely heartless and cannot end the poor creature's life. After seeing her suffer, Grandma Harken knows she must turn the jackalope wife over to the mysteries of the desert and let fate take its turn with her.

This story was haunting and beautiful and luscious and I wish it were longer. You can read it for free here: <http://www.apex-magazine.com/jackalop...>

**4.5 stars**

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**Ivonne Rovira says**

Thank you, Nataliya, for your recommendation of this wonderful story. Ursula Vernon's "Jackalope Wives" is a science-fiction short story for people who think they don't like science fiction. I cannot do this short story justice, but for a fine review, read Nataliya's take here.

You can read Nebula Award-winning "Jackalope Wives" here, or, better yet, listen to the podcast reading here.

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**Lynn says**

Great story.....read it online: <http://www.apex-magazine.com/jackalop...>

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**Althea Ann says**

A 'selkie story' set in the southwest. This story manages to do something rare: it takes a familiar folktale/myth, gives us a truly authentic-feeling rendition, and adds something truly new (and significant), and something unexpected. Beautiful, and sad.

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**Miriam says**

<http://www.apex-magazine.com/jackalop...>

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