



L. RON HUBBARD PRESENTS WRITERS OF THE FUTURE

VOLUME 42 DISCUSSION GUIDE

“Form 14B: Application for Certification of Consciousness Transfer (Post-Mortem)”

by Thomas K. Slee

Cameron is dead. His lawyer insists it's not the end of the world. Just sign here, and you'll be loaded into a new body in no time . . .

“Saffron and Marigolds”

by Kathleen Powell

Caring for a giant, cheese-loving dragon was never the plan, but a mild-mannered baker must find his courage—challenging the volatile king of the fairy underworld.

1. Cameron’s online persona, “Caveman,” is different from the person revealed in his final moments. What does the story suggest about the difference between public image and private reality?
 2. The story raises questions about whether technology can preserve a person’s identity. What do you think is most essential to a person’s identity?
 3. The story presents new technology that changes the way people think about life and death. What ethical questions might arise from such technology?
-
1. Arthur describes himself as an ordinary person, yet he takes on the responsibility of caring for the dragon Wantley and trying to free him. What motivates Arthur to act despite his fears and limitations?
 2. Arthur uses his baking to influence the fairies and confront the Greene King. What does the story suggest about the power of ordinary human skills compared to magic or physical strength?
 3. Menura believes that fairies must repay debts no matter the cost. How does this idea of obligation affect the choices she makes in the story?

“Bloom Decay”

by Elina Kumra

When a surveillance architect discovers a street artist the algorithms can't predict, small rebellions begin accumulating toward something the system is already too late to stop.

1. Theodore works for Renaissance, a system that measures and optimizes nearly every aspect of human life. What does the story suggest about the benefits and dangers of a society built on constant data collection?
2. Dr. Zhang believes Renaissance is targeting certain patterns of thought and creativity. What does the story suggest about the value of independent thinking in society?
3. The resistance group does not seek to destroy Renaissance but to create alternatives outside its control. Why might the author emphasize creation rather than revolution?

“Artistic Presentation”

by L. Ron Hubbard

This timeless essay challenges creators to reject the lure of the “easy way” and instead pursue the most effective way—where care, effort, and responsibility define true professionalism in any art.

1. Hubbard advises artists to decide first what effect they want to create before choosing the easiest way to achieve it. How might this principle apply to writing, art, or other creative work?
2. Hubbard writes that artistic presentation “always succeeds to the degree that it is done *well*.” What do you think it means to do creative work “well”?
3. The article concludes that artists should choose the most effective method even when it requires more effort. Can you think of an example where doing something the harder way produced a better result?

“Space Can”

by L. Ron Hubbard

Lieutenant Carter bets everything on the courage of his little “space can” to save the fleet by storming the enemy’s heavy ship mid-battle.

1. The destroyer *Menace* is sent alone on a mission that should have required an entire flotilla. What does the story suggest about duty and responsibility in wartime?
2. The story describes the *Menace* almost as if it were a living being with its own personality. How does this personification affect your understanding of the ship and its crew?
3. The story emphasizes naval tradition and honor, including the idea of never “striking colors” or retreating. Do you think such traditions are necessary or outdated? Explain your answer.

“Shell Game”

by Zach Poulter

*After waking at a crime scene
with blood on his hands,
a detective races to expose
the body-hopping entity using
him as a “shell”—before it
uses him to strike again.*

1. Rojzik struggles to understand whether his actions are truly his own or the result of being “jumped.” What does the story suggest about personal responsibility when someone’s choices may be influenced or controlled by others?
2. The travelers move from body to body, treating humans as temporary “shells.” How does this idea change the way you think about identity and individuality in the story?
3. Adonis values ordinary human experiences and relationships. Why do you think these experiences remain meaningful even to a near-immortal being?
4. The story ends with the suggestion that only a small number of travelers remain. How does this idea affect your understanding of the travelers’ long struggle for survival and dominance? What would you do with this power?

“Canary”

by Brenda Posey

*When a reclusive Arkansas
homesteader experiences
missing time, her only hope
for solving the mystery of
a world gone wrong is a
boy who shouldn’t exist.*

1. Reverie believes that humans inevitably destroy the worlds they inhabit. Do you agree with her view of human nature? Why or why not?
2. Mason and his people see themselves as rescuers who are trying to preserve humanity. Do you think what they are doing is right?
3. The story’s title refers to a “canary,” traditionally used to detect danger in a coal mine. In what ways does Reverie serve as a canary in the story?
4. Reverie is offered the chance to help rebuild human civilization, but she refuses. Do you think she made the right decision? What would you have chosen in her place?

“The Triceratops Effect”

by S. J. Stevenson

Tasked with faking the asteroid strike that smothered the dinosaurs, a frazzled time-agent must risk paradox and punishment to save the last triceratops.

1. The story presents history as something shaped by human mistakes and attempts to fix them. How does this idea change the way you think about the past?
2. The narrator often uses humor and sarcasm, even when dealing with tragic events. How does this tone affect your understanding of the story and its serious themes?
3. The narrator says that “just because nothing really matters in the end, that doesn’t mean nothing matters now.” What do you think this statement means? How does it relate to the narrator’s choices?
4. The narrator risks punishment in order to save Gary, the last triceratops, by sending him into the past. Why do you think saving one animal matters so much to him, even when the extinction event will still occur?

“Collaborations”

by Larry Niven

Through stories of friendships, feuds, and famous partnerships, Larry Niven explores how collaboration can rescue stalled ideas, sharpen craft, and spark entirely new worlds.

1. Niven describes collaborations that began through friendship, professional connections, or shared interests. How do you think personal relationships affect creative work?
2. The article suggests that collaborators can help each other overcome creative blocks. How might working with another person improve creativity or productivity?
3. Niven recommends giving a collaborator a stalled or unfinished story as a way to test working together. Why might this be a useful approach?

“Skinny-Shins”

by Orson Scott Card

A pair of Antarctic researchers uncover an evolutionary detour that defies accepted science—evidence pointing to a dragon living in the Andes.

1. The aliens have improved human life by curing diseases and stabilizing the environment, yet they keep important secrets. Which of their behaviors or explanations did you find the most surprising or amusing?
2. Sigmund and Rho accept some very surprising discoveries with remarkable calm. How do you think you would react if you learned the same things?
3. The story mixes serious science with playful speculation. Which ideas in the story felt most believable, and which felt the most imaginative.

“A Ready-Made Bubble of Light”

by Thomas R. Eggenberger

Seb has spent his career stopping time to save people from deadly disasters. But when a flawless rescue ends with inexplicable deaths, he risks everything to find out why.

“Thickly”

by Dorothy de Kok

Desperate to become visible, Nomsa follows a trend promising instant beauty—only to face the horrifying truth that her new, improved self may not leave room for the old one.

“Ghost Dog”

by Mark McWaters

When an unseen creature stalks his home, a man must protect his small dog from a supernatural predator determined to force its way inside—and claim a living host.

1. The timer team works carefully to save the crash victims, yet their efforts unintentionally contribute to the deaths. What does the story suggest about the limits of technology and expertise?
 2. Mercer keeps her discoveries secret even though they could help many people. Under what circumstances, if any, do you think it is justified to keep important scientific knowledge hidden?
 3. The story raises the possibility that attempts to control time may ultimately make the world less predictable and less safe. How does this idea affect your view of advanced technology and scientific progress?
-
1. Nomsa begins taking Thickly because she wants to be more visible and confident. What does the story suggest about the human desire to be seen and valued by others?
 2. Different people in the community interpret Thickly in different ways—as a blessing, a danger, or a form of liberation. Which interpretation do you find most convincing, and why?
 3. The story connects physical transformation with social success and opportunity. What does this suggest about the relationship between appearance and power?
-
1. Mark initially tries to explain the strange events in ordinary ways. Why do you think people often look for logical explanations before accepting the possibility of something supernatural?
 2. Francie explains that the Visitor is drawn to the bond between Mark and Bentley. What does the story suggest about the emotional connection between people and their pets?
 3. The spirits of Mark’s former dogs return to protect Bentley. How does this moment change the emotional tone of the story?

“The Creator’s Journey”

by Brian C. Hailes

Part memoir, part roadmap, a reflection on what it really takes to turn passion into a lifelong, professional craft.

“Dragon Visits”

by Nina Kiriki Hoffman

When dragons materialize, drawn to a boy’s violin playing, their gentle presence feels like a comforting echo of the mother he’s lost.

“In Living Color”

by Michael T. Kuester

*A man who can step into pictures uses his gift to solve crimes, balancing horror-filled photos with sanctuary inside Monet’s *Water Lilies*—until one investigation turns personal.*

1. The author emphasizes the importance of practice and persistence. Why do you think mastery in art requires so much time and effort?
 2. Hailes discusses the impact of new technologies such as AI on the art world. What opportunities and challenges do new technologies create for artists? Why might originality be important in creative work?
 3. The article emphasizes that an artist’s journey is about growth and development rather than a single success. Why might long-term improvement be more important than individual achievements?
-
1. Music plays an important role in Martin’s experience of grief. How does playing the violin help him express feelings he cannot put into words?
 2. Some of the dragons Martin sees are also visible to other people. Do you think the dragons are real, imaginary, or symbolic? What evidence in the story supports your interpretation?
 3. Martin associates the dragons with his mother and begins to feel that she is “not all the way gone.” What does the story suggest about memory and the ways people remain present after death?
-
1. August finds peace and escape in Impressionist paintings, especially Monet’s *Water Lilies*. Why do you think art is so important to him? What does it provide that the real world does not?
 2. The killer believes strong human emotions are “noise” that must be silenced, while August believes those emotions give life meaning. Which view do you agree with more, and why?
 3. When August forces the killer to experience the memories and emotions of his victims, do you think his actions are justified? Why or why not?
 4. Both August and the killer are Talents, yet they use their abilities in very different ways. What does the story suggest about how power or talent can be used for good or evil?

“As Long as You Both Shall Live”

by Mike Strickland

When a clinical trial goes wrong, a woman is left stranded in virtual reality. The man who loves her must navigate corporate secrecy to keep their fragile relationship alive.

1. Sam and Kumiko’s relationship develops more easily in the virtual world than in real life. Why do you think people sometimes find it easier to connect in virtual spaces than face to face?
2. After Kumiko’s physical death, her consciousness continues to exist in the virtual environment. Do you think Kumiko should be considered alive? Why or why not?
3. The story raises questions about identity and personhood. What makes someone a person: their physical body, their memories, their personality, or something else?

“A Girl and Her Dragon: A Life in Four Parts”

by Joseph Sidari

Across decades, a girl grows into a journalist, activist, and outlaw—with a lifelong devotion to return a captive dragon to the sky.

1. The story is told through scrapbook entries, letters, tweets, and articles. How does this format affect your understanding of Stephanie and Ash? Would the story feel different if told in a traditional narrative style?
2. Many people believe Ash is dangerous, while Stephanie believes he is gentle and misunderstood. Why do you think people fear creatures—or people—that are different from themselves?
3. Stephanie’s dedication to Ash sometimes conflicts with her career and personal relationships. Do you think her devotion is admirable, unhealthy, or both? Why?
4. Throughout the story, Ash becomes a symbol to different groups—scientists, politicians, activists, and children. What does Ash represent to you.

**For more information on Writers of the Future
visit www.WritersoftheFuture.com**