



**The Nightflyer**  
**Trinity Term 2023**



## **Note from Oli Jones, Editor**

Welcome to the Trinity 2023 edition of the Nightflyer, thanks for picking it up!

It has taken I while but I'm glad to have gotten this too you in print! The Nightflyer is a cool part of OURPGSoc and I've enjoyed my time bringing it to life (of course, my efforts are small compared to those of the contributors!). I'm looking forward to seeing what Sophia does with it next year.

This is a shorter issue, but I think it gets across the diversity of what Nightflyer contributions can be. We have poem, something I've not seen before in the zine but would love to see more of, fan art for a society game and a oneshot, an evocative piece of fic that I enjoyed despite not having played the relevant game, and an article co-written by a character. I hope something here inspires more Nightflyer contributors to pick up a pen, keyboard or graphics tablet for the next issue!

Thanks above all to the contributors:

Liana Warren, Konstantine Borbély-Soproni, Sophia de Medeiros, Josie Paton, Oli Jones and The Mistress of Fun.

# Woven Worlds

Liana Warren and Konstantine Borbély-Soproni

Over and over, I'm fascinated

By how real it is:

Our shared fictions,

Our community mythologies.

A story is just ink on a page,

A voice and a picture.

But it exists, in spiralling multiplicities,

Everyone's version their own form of truth.

Isn't that insane?

I could never say it doesn't exist,

Because every so often, we weave it anew

And live in it for moments at a time.

# Dr Evangeline Chevalier

*Art for Brainwave – Society Game Summer 2022*

Sophia de Medeiros



# The Memory of a Rose

*Fic for Ad Nauseam – Society Game TT 2022*

Josie Paton

Three years later.

Opularia set the teapot down, letting it start the process of slowly brewing. Florianus had told her that this blend was one of her favourites. He'd kindly provided several boxes of it on one of his more recent visits. She could feel his heart break each time she took a sip, unable to fully hide that it tasted bitter and metallic to her. She ran her fingers over the chipped glaze on the lid of the pot, watching it yellow under her fingers. She tried to remember what it had looked like when it was new, but she couldn't form the image in her mind. Had the painted flowers always been wilted and dying? It was hard to believe, but it was all she could remember.

She turned away from the teapot, not wanting to be subjected to its ugliness anymore. She looked instead at the plain wall. The paint was discoloured and peeling, but it was easier to look at than any of the wallpaper or paintings that had been there before. It was too painful to continue seeing how terrible they were, images constantly warped into horrifying scenes. She couldn't escape the feeling of her mind betraying her, tricking her into seeing things that couldn't have been there,

her memories slipping away whenever she tried to right the wrong. What she remembered didn't line up with what she felt, and she was slowly starting to wonder if perhaps her mind was simply failing her. She knew she must have been somewhere before this place, this rotting corpse of a home, but the memories of corridors and furniture twisted together in her mind until she could no longer separate them. She remembered her house, but it didn't feel familiar to her.

She tried to think further back. Not to her house, her true home, but to what came before it. Laughter and parties and joy. When she strained, she could almost remember a tune. She tried to catch it, let it rise in her throat to leave her lips. She started to hum the first few notes. She had a moment, a flash, of memory. A ballroom, almost two decades ago, when she'd not yet become Opularia. When she'd simply been Grace Denir.

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"If I dance one second more my feet will fall off!" Erolette protested, leaning back into a chair covered in embroidered scenes of fields and forests.

“Then let them.” Grace said. “Better to be footless than heartless, which is what you must be if you can possibly sit still through this music. It is bad enough to have been abandoned by my sisters tonight, I cannot abide by being abandoned by my friends as well.”

“Always so dramatic. Besides, we’ve been hearing this music for hours. Even the heart grows tired with too much repetition.”

“They are certainly not repetitive. You’re not listening closely enough.”

“I can’t see how you could possibly have the energy to keep dancing. You’ve barely left the floor since we got here, have you even eaten?”

“I haven’t the time to waste on the food, there is far too much to enjoy. What’s the point of you having all that magic if you won’t even use it to give yourself the feet to dance until sunrise?”

“For goodness sake, I’ll dance with you.” Iskyron said, setting aside their drink and taking Grace’s hand. “You may need to lead, I’m unfamiliar with this piece.”

“Certainly. A pleasure to escort someone who might actually appreciate artistic endeavour.” Grace sent a pointed look over to Erolette before moving back into the dance floor.

The room was splendid, beautifully decorated with gilded candlesticks and flowers dusted with some sort of reflective powder. The walls were covered in moving paintings depicting scenes it was likely the occupants had never seen in person: expanses of sand dunes, the deep foliage of a jungle, and even bright fields of ice and snow. The ceiling was reflective, more like an undisturbed pool than a mirror, and the dancers could look up to see the ever-changing swirl of gowns and robes.

There were tables laden with food dotted around the room, as well as many places to sit and eat. At this time of night, many of them were filled with people discussing who knows what. Their chatter covered the music until the pair managed to find a spot close to the orchestra. Grace raised her arm, letting Iskyron match her stance and join from wrist to ankle. They started to move together, Grace marking the tempo and guiding them in which steps to take next.

“It really is markedly impressive that you still dance so fluidly after this many hours.” Iskyron said.

“I’m not the dancer of my family.” Grace said. “I merely appreciate the interplay between movement and music, as they each guide each other.”

“Each other? Surely the music guides the dance.”

“For this piece, perhaps. But what do you think the composer was imagining when they took ink to paper to create? Certainly not a room of statuesque figures not moving a finger.” Grace moved back for a moment, allowing Iskyron to spin around and rejoin her. “They imagined dancing. As such, dance guides the music.”

“Do you always speak in poetry?” Iskyron asked. “I thought stories were your sister’s strength.”

“Stories, narratives, yes.” Grace said, ducking under Iskyron’s arm to turn, noting the specific way her skirt drifted around her. “But imagery? I believe that may be where I am finding my niche. And what is poetry, but a painting formed of words?”

“I see I will need to prepare myself more thoroughly for when we next dance.” They looked over Grace’s shoulder for a moment. “Although it looks like I may already have competition for when the next song starts.”

Grace raised an eyebrow, not looking right away. However, as she and Iskyron clasped hands and switched places, she let her eyes sweep over the crowd for a second, grinning as she recognised the pair that met hers. She didn’t break step, but she did give a quick nod before returning her focus to her partner.

“That is Omorfia.” She said, dropping her voice just a little. Iskyron’s eyebrows went up, glancing over again.

“Truly? That’s Omorfia? Why is she staring at you? I mean no offence, but even a shining star such as yourself is unlikely to catch the gaze of someone like her. She’s been near royalty in the Sanctuary for the last sixty years.”

The woman watching them certainly didn’t look over sixty, although it would be wrong to say she looked young. She was surrounded by younger mages, and she clearly held wisdom and experience over all of them. She was their mentor, teacher, whatever one would call it. She nurtured the best magical artistic talent the Sanctuary had to offer. She appeared to be sat perfectly still, but Grace, looking closely enough, could see her long fingers moving just slightly over her cane to the rhythm of the music. She was resplendent, perfection, more of an artwork than a woman. And her gaze remained focussed on Grace and Iskyron as they danced.

“She’s not waiting for a dance.” Grace said, her voice loaded with conspiracy. “She’s waiting for an audition.”

“An audition? Here?” Iskyron looked over once more, just a hint of panic in their eyes.



“Not here, no. But soon. I wrote her a letter, informing her of my position. I have no idea when my Rapture will happen, and I am tired of waiting. I don’t want to sit still preparing for the day I will finally have access to magic. I want to create; I want my art to be known across the city. I’m done with anticipation. I am an artist.”

Grace looked over the students here tonight. She knew some of them, was even friendly with a few. There was Pinakas, whose moving paintings adorned several of the panels of this very ballroom, and who had once held Grace’s hand as they ran through the city square, leaving behind them a mural of colour and lights on the central fountain. There was Cantilena, who created living instruments that sat playing beautiful music in quiet corners of houses across the city, and who had once attempted to teach Grace to pluck out a tune before they agreed it was easier to sing it. And there was her newest student, Florianus. He was rapt in conversation with the others. Soon his works would also be adorning the halls of ballrooms like this. And Grace, in her heart, believed that so would hers. Magic or no, she would be among them.

“So you asked to audition for her without magic? How? Her students are the greatest creators in the city, possibly in the world.” Iskyron asked, clearly choosing their words carefully, trying not to offend while

offering a voice of reality. “How can you create like them?”

“I can’t.” Grace said, but she held her head high in defiance. “I can create like me. Some of them received their Raptures so early they barely learnt to hold a paintbrush or strike a harpsichord. They rely on their magic to create and are thus limited by what magic will allow them. My work is created within the realms of physical possibility, yes, but it means I have developed a basis of fundamental skill beyond that of most of those students over there. An appreciation of how the strokes and movement of creation can be manipulated into true beauty using only a paintbrush on a canvas rather than a reliance on the spectacle of magic. And under her I could learn perfection.” Grace took the opportunity in a turn in their dance to cast a glance to Omorfia for barely a second. “And when I finally do Rapture, when I have the threads of reality at my fingertips, I will be able to create a spectacle the likes of which the Sanctuary could never forget.”

When she looked back to Iskyron they were smiling. She searched their face to see if they were mocking her, but they shook their head a little.

“If this is the passion you demonstrated in your letter to Omorfia, then she would have to be a braver person than me to turn you down.”

The music came to a close, and Grace held her dress to curtsey, receiving one in return from Iskyron. They both took a moment to applaud the orchestra before the beginning notes of the next piece began to be plucked out. Grace moved to take Iskyron's hand again but frowned as they didn't return to gesture.

"Don't say you're abandoning me too."

"Not at all. But I do believe there is another suitor on their way." Iskyron smiled over Grace's shoulder. Grace turned, to see a soft smiling face approaching her.

"Would you give me the honour of this dance?" Florianus asked, holding out his hand to her.

Grace took a moment to look at Iskyron, who was already backing away in the direction of the rest of their friends with an encouraging smile.

"I'd be delighted," She said, placing her hand in his. The rhythm of the music solidified, and they started to move, easily falling into step with each other. The distance between them closed, Grace could now appreciate a floral motif running through Florianus' outfit, finished off with a flower tucked behind his ear.

"I noticed you glancing our way. I must warn you that Omorfia moves to no one's schedule but her own."

"So you know of my intent to audition?" Grace raised an eyebrow. "I hadn't taken Omorfia for a gossip."

"Not gossip. Debate." Florianus said. Grace noticed a slight change in his movement, their steps becoming a little larger as she matched him. "Such an interesting proposal deserved discussion among those you'd be sharing your tutelage with."

"And how did the discussion go?" Grace tried to keep her tone even, pressing down the tinge of desperation that threatened to break her cool composure.

"I would hate to ruin the surprise." Florianus said, but he did not in turn try to suppress the knowing smile on his face. "Your audition will need to impress her, just as with any other candidate. But – and this is coming only from myself – that letter in itself was a rather impressive statement."

"I appreciate the sentiment." Grace said, feeling a soft swell of pride in her chest as she returned his smile. "And how have you found learning under Omorfia?"

"She is certainly demanding; she expects perfection and will not let us produce anything less." His smile did not drop as he said it. He suddenly moved in a series of steps unusual for the piece being performed, but it only took a few seconds for Opularia to see the genius in the choice, following easily and picking up her skirt to flourish as he sent her into a turn. As she did, the hem of her

dress blossomed into delicate flowers in a series of colour perfectly complementing the material. As the flowers reached full size the petals exploded out, accentuating the apex of her spin in a colourful shower.

As she stopped turning and returned to Florianus, his grin was matched by the one on her face. Grace cast her gaze over him quickly but didn't see a visible cost for his magic. His value must be in something less obvious. "But she will certainly make you into the best version of yourself that you could be."

Grace knew his display had drawn the attention of several onlookers. She straightened her back and took an off step to switch their places and take the lead. She expanded on his unusual step, dragging one of her satin shoes through a few off the longer steps and alternately raising and dipping the hem of her skirt. As the music drew to a close, some of those clapping in the crowd were facing the two of them rather than the orchestra.

"I should have guessed you were a skilled dancer." Florianus said, offering her a bow.

"I'm more of an artist." Grace said. She looked up, gesturing for Florianus to do the same. The reflective ceiling showed the now-still dancers awaiting the beginning of the next piece dotted around the dance floor. And across the centre of the floor were lines of bright flower

petals, brushed into place with a shoe or the hem of a dress, in the shape of a blooming rose, with the two of them stood at the heart. "I had a feeling you'd enjoy a floral motif."

She looked back down to meet his gaze. He looked at her with a warmth in his eyes that felt like the beginning of something beautiful. She let her eyes move across to the woman sat behind him, catching Omorfia's gaze also raised to the ceiling, and perhaps even the hint of a rise to the edge of her mouth.

"While I would hate to destroy your piece, would you want another dance?" Florianus asked, bringing her attention back. The orchestra were settling back, readying themselves.

"Sometimes beauty is found in the fragile, only emphasised by the inevitability of destruction." Grace said, taking his hand. "This piece was only for those who saw it. Like a real rose it cannot last forever. Don't you think we owe it to the art to destroy it?"

They returned to their positions, and Grace watched Florianus search her for something he couldn't quite seem to pin down.

"I think we do. And, I must say, I am excited to see what we create next."

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The hummed tune became discordant, notes falling flat and

turning the melody into something harsh and unpleasant. Opularia stopped, taking a breath as the memory of the song faded and twisted into something ugly.

While the memory of that place was warped in her mind, the memory of the feeling was not. The joy and excitement held true, all these years later. Which is why Opularia knew that the horrid room and the twisted art and the untuned music must not have been real. For her to have such happiness, she must have been surrounded by beauty, she just couldn't remember it. Her mind had turned against her and she couldn't understand why.

Her mind turned to the rest of that night. Of the sun rising, walking through the streets with her friends. She stared at the peeling paint, as she began to relive the one memory she had retained that she was certain was untouched, unchanged, perfectly true in its image. The memory of returning home to find it gone. To find a smouldering shell where her house, her family should have been. Every image she remembered twisted into something fouler than before, but no corruption could sour this memory beyond the truth of it.

She blinked her eyes, tears blurring her vision for a moment. She took a breath. She would not be weak. She would not back down. Her mind may be failing, her perception of reality breaking, but she would persevere.

Just as she always had. She would survive.

She turned back to the teapot. The wilted flowers were losing their petals now. Was that how it had looked before? She couldn't remember. She began to pour the tea, trying to piece together in her mind how Florianus had said it was supposed to taste. Roses and hibiscus and bergamot. She couldn't remember what those tasted like, but perhaps just the memory of the way he talked to her about it would make it sweet enough. She raised the cup to her lips, ready to let the bitter taste wash over her tongue.

She paused.

The memory of the ballroom, of dancing with Florianus for the first time, it had felt wrong for the reasons most of her memories felt wrong. It was unpleasant and disjointed in a way she didn't feel was accurate. But it was also different. There was something in it that felt right, in a way it hadn't before. Something that felt true.

She remembered the explosion of flowers from her dress.

She remembered Florianus using magic.

She remembered magic.

The cup shattered on the ground, but she didn't hear it. Memories flooded back to her as some dam in her mind broke. Things that felt true

and pure and filled with the reality that magic existed. The images were fleeting under her gaze, twisting away from her if she looked too long, but for the first time in years she remembered why. She remembered becoming an archmage, she remembered creating this city, her city. She remembered what she sacrificed to create the perfect home she would never leave. She remembered it all, and a power that had been lurking under her skin, dormant for years for a reason she did not yet know, that power rushed forward, demanding to be used.

The cup reformed and was whole again. The flowers on the teapot bloomed once more. The paint on the walls smoothed and became covered in beautiful motifs and images. Opularia knew something

was missing, magic was supposed to have a cost, but for this moment that cost did not seem to be coming from her. She let it spread through the house, transforming the broken and distasteful into something once again beautiful.

She knew it was temporary. She knew eventually it would all rot and decay and once again become ugly, that all beauty she saw would inevitably be destroyed. She knew this was the curse she had taken on to create her city in her one and only wish. But for this moment she allowed herself relief. She allowed herself beauty. In the sanctuary of her house, her prison, she felt for a fleeting moment that she could finally breathe once more.

# Mary Sue

*Fic for Mary Sue – Oneshot*

Konstantine Borbély-Soproni



# Games and Characters as Constructs

*A ficticle*

## Oli Jones and The Mistress of Fun

*This article exists because I wanted to fill out this issue with another long form piece. Eventually it gained a life of its own.*

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A roleplaying game is a story told by a group of people for their own entertainment. The fact that author and audience are one is an important and exploitable part of the RPGs nature which can be overlooked. Having such a niche audience means we can tailor our games to our whims as we play. We can bend the world, metaphysic and characters for aesthetic or convenience. Games and characters can lean on OC circumstances in ways only we could understand, because only we will ever have to enjoy them.

Examples of my treatment of games as constructs exist in games I've run. The poorly defined, IC ignored border of Citropolis – a narrative boundary purely to keep the happenings of the game in the scope of the city – is one from Origin Story. The premise of Dollhouse is another. I think the clearest example, however, is from a character I played

in a non-OURPGSoc game. It's also a convenient example, because I can safely assume most of the readership haven't played.

Aisha was a character in a DnD campaign. Unfortunately, her time adventuring was miserable, often in ways I hadn't OC anticipated. Eventually she left the party of her own volition, deciding she was better suited for a quiet life.

This was not the original plan for Aisha. At game start she was infected with an alien parasite which would slowly kill her, something I'd discussed with the GM and tied closely to her initial themes of death and ephemerality. In play, though, I wasn't enjoying her suffering – especially after a string of characters with beautiful but bleak endings – so I spoke to the GM and we magicked the parasite away. Shortly after, she left the game. I soon rolled up a new character who I enjoyed playing much more. I told the group a nice eternity Aisha had gotten between sessions.

Already I'd argue I made the right decision. No one except me and the GM ever knew about the parasite. Some hints were dropped, which

were now inconsistencies, but it why would I value the consistency of an ephemeral narrative told to (and by) a small group of people over my own enjoyment of it?

It was more than that, though. On its own I think Aisha's story was a pretty good one. The idea of a character deciding the path they set out on wasn't worth the hurt feels subversive and empowering, if I do say so myself. When looked at in the OC context, though, it becomes so much more meaningful (to me at least, and my thesis is that's what matters here). Aisha's choice to leave was mirrored in my choice to remove the parasite. We stepped away from the pain of what we once wanted together. This marriage of theme across the IC/OC divide is vital to my understanding of Aisha's story, and the reason she's one of my favourite characters.

I could leave this thinkpiece here, compile the issue and send it off to the printers. I haven't even started saying what I set out to discuss yet, though, so allow me to take a sharp turn – softened only by this interlude – into a related but distinctly different direction.

Once one starts thinking of games in this way, as tools for entertainment, it's irresistibly tempting to twist them. If games can respond to our OC circumstance, how literal can that response be? One starts making games about games that lean on, or breaking through, The 4th Wall. (In

fact this is a self-fuelling fire. It was through 4th wall breaking games I first considered the malleability of RPGs as a construct at all).

One scenario I've enjoyed thinking about is how characters would react to being confronted with the truth of their own existence as, well, characters. Would they take it well? Would they like me? Would the truth be unimaginable torment, as any notion of free will slipped away?

**How very thought provoking. Are you feeling qualified to answer?**

Ah yes. I was wondering when you'd show up. Or at least, our readers were.

**Very droll. I suppose I'll introduce myself, then. Hello darlings! I am the Mistress of Fun. Perhaps we've met before. If not never mind, all you need to know is that I am the character Oli blessed with total understanding of her existence as a character at the moment of her conception.**

**So how does it feel, to know exactly what I am? Well I can't complain. I'm being quite literal. I can't, unless you let me.**

I'm doing my best to play you as authentically as possible. I always do – it's integral to your concept that you're allowed to interact OC and IC on equal level. Please go ahead.

**I'm charmed, darling. Well, since I've known what I am forever, it's**



rather hard to compare to the darkness most characters stumble around in. Knowing has its perks. Godlike status in the IC realm softens the blow. I enjoy the games. To be fully acknowledged IC and OC is a unique position I do get a rush out of.

Sometimes I wonder, though. Do I really enjoy it, or just know I can't do anything different? My purpose is baked into my very name! The Mistress of Fun. There to facilitate an enjoyable evening for all those joining us OC. Do I really have any more agency than any character? Even this wondering, is it just a product of your own OC musing, Oli?

I don't know. I suppose it is in a sense, but I don't find that satisfying.

Let's go back to Aisha. She had a hard life, didn't she? And yet in your musings you only ever talked about your pain in playing her, not her pain directly. Did you feel sorry for her?

I mean, my discomfort partially came from sympathy for her. It was rooted in that. But I've played lots of characters who did find a tragic ending. Their story was one of suffering all the while. If I said I was opposed to my characters suffering I would clearly be lying, because some of my favourite stories were horrible for those involved.

This comes back to my original point. The games – and the characters –

are constructs. Purely for our entertainment. We should feel free to mould them into whatever shape we find pleasing. If we start adding any moral constraint on behalf of IC beings who never truly feel for themselves, what's the point?

**That's rather cold.**

It's rather necessary for this whole arrangement.

**When you imagine your characters finding out who they are, does it bring you any pain? The ones who'd really hate it, I mean. The ones who would hate you.**

Yes. I'd never tell them. I've hurt them enough. I don't regret it, but I don't want to ... torture them beyond what their existence requires.

**Because it would make you uncomfortable.**

Because I do love my characters. I suppose that's what's missing from this whole article. Roleplaying games aren't just incredibly powerful, personal and resilient storytelling tools. They facilitate a very special connection between player and character.

I've had, and I know I'm not alone, characters who have changed my life. They've taught me things about myself, showed me how I'm feeling, been a window into who I could be. I can't make being a character any easier but I cherish all of you.

**How very moving! And now that you've gotten out what you want to say, I suppose I'm meant to tell you I agree, it's beautiful and I couldn't be happier with the situation?**

I guess I was envisioning something like that. I'm not going to write you accepting it if you don't want me to, though. That feels wrong.

I'm only having this conversation with you because of how real you are to me. Maybe that's the point I wanted to make. Sometimes a character exists to fill a specific role. But then they get a life of their own. They start doing things because that's what they would do, regardless of what I wanted, and that's beautiful too.

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**Did you say what you wanted to say?**

I think so. It didn't shake out quite how I expected.

**Shall we go again?**

No, let's leave it at that.



