

# Interview with Richard Thomas about Gamut

written by Peter Tieryas | February 1, 2016



There's a new player in the literary field. *Gamut* is coming and will be edited by one of the busiest people in writing, [Richard Thomas](#). Thomas is the author of seven books (his last two are the awesome *Disintegration* and *Breaker* from Random House Alibi), has over a hundred published short stories, is a columnist at LitReactor, and is Editor-in-Chief at Dark House Press. Irvine Welsh, author of *Trainspotting*, says: "*Gamut* will be cool, and it will be out there, right on the edges of fiction. I can't wait." *Gamut* will include stories in "fantasy, science fiction, horror, neo-noir, crime, magical realism, transgressive, Southern gothic, and literary—anything done with innovation, heart and emotion." Their [kickstarter launches today](#) and Richard took some time to talk with Entropy about the magazine.

**Entropy: You're an incredible novelist, a great editor, and are one of the most supportive literary citizens in the field. What drew you to starting a magazine? What is *Gamut's* origin story and how do you juggle between so many different roles?**

**RT:** Thanks, Peter, you're too kind. This industry—the writing, editing, teaching and publishing—I love all of it, it's something I'm passionate about, it's the most fulfilling work I've ever done. I've wanted to start a magazine for a long time, 10-15 years I think, but every time I tried to crunch the numbers I couldn't get it to work. The printing and shipping costs just killed it every time. Then two things changed—the evolution of websites like Kickstarter, raising startup capital via patrons and online supporters, and the idea of a fiction magazine online. Those two key components are what got me thinking, "This might actually work." Add to that eight years of writing, four anthologies that I edited, and running Dark House Press for three years now, and that experience gives me the confidence to take a run at something crazy like this. I also see a lot more people reading fiction online, at places like Tor and Nightmare, for example. I think there is a demand for thoughtful, edgy fiction, and if we can provide the right content, then I think people will subscribe to *Gamut*. It also helps to see the anthologies I edited get some recognition—whether it's winning awards, making

the Bram Stoker ballot, getting nominations, or individual stories ending up in Best of the Year anthologies—that validates what I’m doing, helps me to believe in my personal aesthetic. Juggling it all is tricky, and I’m constantly re-evaluating my career, asking myself, “Am I having fun?” and “Is this compensation enough?” and “Where should I spend my time?” I’m not getting any younger, you know.

**Entropy: What is your vision for Gamut and how do you hope to differentiate it from some of the other journals out there?**

**RT:** I think it has a lot to do with genre, and the intersection of different voices. Since the very first AWP conference that I went to in NYC, I kept hearing people talk about the place where genre and literary fiction met, listening to authors such as Stephen Graham Jones and Brian Evenson talk about these subjects, supporting genre in all of its many flavors, talking about how to innovate, elevate, and write fresh stories. At Gamut, we’re not looking to publish “classic” anything—whether that’s fantasy, science fiction, and horror—or noir, mystery and Southern gothic. We seek out transgressive fiction, magical realism, and neo-noir—we’re looking for new ways to write across a wide range of genres. I want new mythologies, new creatures, new perspectives, from a wide range of people, embracing the global stories that are being told, the voices that aren’t getting the recognition they deserve. All with literary prose—lyrical, thoughtful, insightful stories (and poetry). I have immense respect for what Ellen Datlow is doing, for example. I study her, just like I study the authors I’ve already mentioned, every voice in the Best Horror of the Year. I have to see what’s being done, what’s successful, what’s innovative—as an author, as an editor, as a teacher, and as a publisher. It’s so exciting! The first time I read a story by Livia Llewellyn, wow, she just blew me away, so that every time her name popped up in an anthology, or magazine, I made sure to read it. The same could be said for Damien Angelica Walters. Or other authors that are just now emerging, breaking out. But I don’t love every story in every anthology, I have my own aesthetic—and that’s always subjective isn’t it?

**Entropy: Is it mainly just fiction, or other areas as well you will be taking submissions?**

**RT:** We’ll have three columnists that will provide essays and interviews, as well as a bit of humor, in Keith Rawson, Max Booth, and RK Arceneaux. Our second stretch goal is Stripped: A Memoir by Jacklyn Dre Marceau, one of the most talented writers in my MFA program—a hypnotic read, heartbreaking and alluring. And we’ll have poetry as well, Heather Foster heading that up, another very talented author and poet. And we’ll publish non-fiction, too, working with a wide range of freelance writers. We’ll start off with solicited work, and then open the door to submissions later in 2016, if we make our goal. And don’t get me started on the art—Luke Spooner commissioned to do original drawings for every story we publish, and supporting art from George C. Cotronis, Daniele Serra, and Bob Crum, with Jennifer Moore contributing photography.



**Entropy:** What do you foresee as some of the biggest challenges you'll face in the first year?

**RT:** The website is something that keeps me awake at night, but my personal philosophy is to hire talented people and then get out of the way. The biggest concern right now is reaching our base goal, so we can fund this project. Beyond that, I would LOVE for us to make our stretch goals, because that will give us the freedom to do so much more. I'm working on other ways to raise money after this Kickstarter is over, talking to some people at The Music Box theater here in Chicago about screening Blade Runner, and maybe doing an A24 Retrospective, since they're doing such great work these days (Under the Skin, Enemy, Ex Machina, and the upcoming The Witch.) One thing

I'm NOT concerned about is the quality of fiction we'll be getting. I've already got a list going of the excellent stories I want to reprint, and I'm confident that the original fiction will be amazing. These are the authors that inspire me, that surprise me, that entertain me—I know they will do great things. The first year will be exciting, lots of original artwork, and new fiction every week (ideally, new work posted every DAY).

**Entropy: If the Kickstarter is successful, where do you hope Gamut will be in a year? Five years?**

**RT:** My goal is for Gamut to be an important part of the landscape, to compliment all of the excellent magazines and websites that are already out there—in addition to Tor and Nightmare, places such as F&SF, Clarkesworld, Apex. The Dark, Cemetery Dance, Shock Totem, Shimmer, etc. I want us to be a destination, someplace you stop by every day, every Monday the new fiction we publish something you look forward to—stories that thrill you. I'd like to see our authors get more exposure, sign book deals, get nominations, end up in the Best of the Year anthologies. I want to grow and expand, add more scholarship to what we're doing (the first stretch goal is indeed two scholarships) and be a presence in genre and literary fiction. And I'd like to help discover new voices, to give confidence to authors that are just now finding their way, writing weird fiction, dark stories that they aren't sure about, that scare them, then make them nervous—but are in reality, touching, haunting and powerful stories that we need to read.

**Entropy: What is it about the authors you solicited, like Stephen Graham Jones, Laird Barron, Brian Evenson, Usman T. Malik, Matt Bell, Damien Angelica Walters, that make them a good fit for Gamut?**

**RT:** Great question. The first thing I think when I look at all of those names is that they're all doing innovative work. The second thing I think of is that they're writing fiction that is also familiar enough that we can find a way in. All of these authors have heart in their stories, we care about their characters—they make me cry all the time, they make me stop to catch my breath, they make me go upstairs to check on my kids, and then they make me go back to the computer to try and pen my own stories, inspired by what I've read. They have found that sweet spot between genre and literary fiction—entertaining stories that have you rapidly flipping the pages, hungry with anticipation, told in lyrical, layered voices that carry strong imagery, philosophy, and emotion. You never read one of their stories and think, "I've seen that a million times." You also don't think, "Well that was weird, but I don't get it?" They show you the way, and it may not be easy to find at times, but it's there, you just have to slow down and listen, give the story your full attention, really sit in that narrative for a bit, and be one with the story.

**Entropy: How important is finding new voices for Gamut?**

**RT:** It's very important to me. It wasn't that long ago that I was just getting started, about eight years ago. If it wasn't for somebody like Craig Clevenger encouraging me to send out my story, "Stillness" it never would have ended up in Shivers VI alongside Stephen King and Peter Straub. And if

it wasn't for editors like Brian Freeman and publishers like Richard Chizmar, being OPEN to an unknown like me, I never would have gotten in, right? That's part of what's so exciting about being an editor and publisher. I got submissions for Exigencies from tons of authors I didn't know, and they blew me away. I see students in my classes at LitReactor or at the University of Iowa, who are just starting to gain confidence, some even putting it all together while in my class, the lessons over days, weeks, finally adding up to an epiphany that brings clarity to the process. That's so exciting! In the last three months I've reached out to several authors in my Short Story Mechanics class and said, "Hey, um, you know...that story you just wrote? I'd love to see it at Gamut. I think it's brilliant." I had one author on social media reach out to me, asking me about Gamut, if she could submit (I mean, I've had DOZENS of people do this) and I gave her my standard, "We'll open up to new submissions later in 2016," line, because the pre-Kickstarter roster was about set, and I just couldn't commit to any more people. But then we started talking, and her influences, her POV, her attitude, I decided to read some of her work, and it was amazing, exactly the kind of work I want at Gamut. So I read more, and more, and thought, "Dammit, Gamut, I have to get her involved." (Yes, I talk to myself. Don't act so surprised.) So she is! And I'm as excited about her work as I am about anybody else. Do I care about who has 5,000 Twitter followers and who is a recluse? SURE! Of course, I do. That all helps. Just like a great bio helps, an author with six books, and tons of stories, awards and recognition—that all helps to build an audience, a network, a fan base. BUT, it's never the only reason to sign an author. Never. It's primarily about the work, the writing, and the voice.

### **Entropy: Why would you say NO to a story versus accepting it?**

**RT:** That's tricky. As I said earlier, it's subjective, right? I accepted a story for one of my anthologies that got passed over by a lot of great magazines. I loved it IMMEDIATELY. It was poetic, it was compelling, it was unnerving. And I just found out it'll be in an upcoming Best of the Year anthology, which just thrills me to no end. I know the author had lost a bit of faith in the story, but I loved it from the first paragraph. I say NO when there is no hook, when there is no resolution. I say NO when it's too familiar, doesn't do anything original. I say NO when it's the same monsters, the same plot, the same mythology, the same setting. And I for sure have some pet peeves, personal quirks that drive me nuts—opening with dialogue, using FUCK 100 times, telling vs. showing, bad grammar, awkward sentences, characters that I don't care about—all of that. I will reject after reading the first line, first paragraph, first page, even after reading it five times, the entire story. I had some excellent submissions to Exigencies that I passed on because they weren't a good fit, and that's an honest response, a fair response when editors say that. I had, for some reason, like ten stories that centered around cameras and photography. After I took TWO, I said, "Well, no more camera stories." I just couldn't do it. But what I like more is saying YES. Saying YES to a setting I've never seen before, a culture that is different to me, a story that surprises me, a voice that hypnotizes me with lyrical passages, dense sensory details, and layered characters that I love (or hate), the emotions bubbling to the surface. If you can make me cry, make me laugh, make me gasp, make me say, "Damn, that was intense," you're

probably in. At the heart of what I'm doing with Gamut, and in my own writing, it's about the story—I want to be told a great story, I want the world to slip away, I want you to share a secret with me, bare some personal tragedy or triumph, and let me share in the passion and power and fulfillment. Right now, it feels like a golden age for dark fiction, and I want you all to be a part of it, at Gamut.