



The National Fantasy Fan

Cras ad Stellae — Tomorrow to the Stars

Volume 77 Number 6

June 2018

N3FFUS

National Fantasy Fan Federation Speculative Fiction Awards

The Ballot is on Page 11.
The Nominees are:

Best novel

L.E. Modesitt—Assassin's Price
Chris Nuttall—The Zero Equation
Cedar Sanderson—Tanager's Fledglings
Ryk Spoor—Princess Holy Aura

Best shorter work

And Then There Were N-One--Sarah Pinsker
The Secret Life of Bots--Suzanne Palmer.
In the Shade of the Pixie Tree--Rodello Santos
Utopia LOL--Jamie Wahls

Best book editor

Toni Weisskopf—Baen
Sheila Gilbert—Daw

Best fanzine

Ionisphere
MT Void
Tightbeam

Best Blog

The Bar bar.baen.com
MadGeniusClub.com
The ChrisHanger chrishanger.wordpress.com

Films

Thor: Ragnarok

Guardians of the Galaxy 2

Best TV show

Legends of Tomorrow
Supergirl

Best anime

The Ancient Magus' Bride
Devilman: Crybaby
The Eccentric Family
Kino's Journey

Best graphic art publication

Hawkeye
Jean Grey
Shade the Changing Girl

Reviews of Anime Nominees

From Jessi Silver S1E1.com

The Ancient Magus' Bride

Chise is a teenage girl with a special affinity towards the world's natural magic and the creatures that inhabit it. However, as an orphan with no family and no options to continue her current path, her powers have since become a curse. Forced by necessity into making a choice with implications to her own freedom, Chise turns herself in to an underground auction house to be sold to the highest bidder. She's sold to Elias Ainsworth, an enigmatic English mage with the intention to make Chise both his apprentice, as well as his bride.



This issue is divided among Neffies, Club Activities,
Letters of Comment, Sercon, and Reviews
Art: Angela K Scott...2, 6



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Many New Volunteers are needed: Electronic Publication
 Support, Convention Hospitality, Outreach, Correspondence,
 Films... Support the N3F. Volunteer Now!



“Unicorn and Maid”...Angela K Scott

The Ancient Magus’ Bride deftly manages to capture the beauty and danger of Western traditional magical practices (specifically English magic and fairy mythology), as well as the ambiguity of the romantic(?) relationship between Chise and Elias, while also telling a story that celebrates the power of transformation through the building of self-worth. Through their shared experiences as individuals with both considerable power and damaged self-awareness, the characters learn and grow providing a satisfying and beautiful story despite the series’ open-ended conclusion. The power dynamics in the central character relationship will rightly concern many viewers, but it’s the characters’ management of this relationship and specifically Chise’s demand that Elias achieve some measure of emotional maturity that speaks well to this series’ ability to handle that particular obstacle.

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Join or Renew

We offer four different memberships. Memberships with TNFF via paper mail are \$18; memberships with TNFF via email are \$6. All other zines are email only. Additional memberships at the address of a current member are \$4. Public memberships are free. Send payments to N3F, POB 1925, Mountain View CA 94042. Pay online at N3F.org. Our PayPal contact is treasurer@n3f.org Send phillies@4liberty.net your email address for a public membership.

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Devilman: Crybaby

Millennia ago, cruel demons ruled the Earth. With the rise of humanity (and some intervention from God itself) these terrible creatures entered a long period of hibernation. In modern-day Japan, teenager Akira Fudo is just an average, sensitive boy who lives with his friend Miki's family and enjoys being a member of the school track team. However, with the flamboyant return of his old friend Ryo Asuka, Akira is drawn into a terrifying underworld where the ancient demons are beginning to awaken. Ryo convinces him that, due to his pure heart, Akira is a perfect candidate to combine his body with the spirit of a demon, thus allowing him to defend humanity against the demon onslaught. But an unsettling reality begins to emerge – the demons may be motivated by more than just a desire to dominate, and Ryo may be more than just another teenage boy.

Based on the classic (and nearly 50-years-old) manga by Go Nagai, Devilman: Crybaby adapts the Devilman story in its entirety for the first time while expanding on Nagai's anti-war message and adding in a powerful look at the position of the "other" in modern society. Director Masaaki Yuasa's quirky style and talent for depicting some of humanity's crude behaviors is an excellent fit for this series, which utilizes intense violence and sexuality to tell a story that is unexpectedly grounded in its message of love's ability to overcome base instincts and repeatedly destructive behavior. Absolutely not for the faint-of-heart, there is much to be enjoyed here by those who can tolerate the show's more horrifying aspects.

The Eccentric Family

Kyoto, Japan is a magical place where Tanuki (raccoon-like mammals), Tengu (crow-like spirits), and human beings live together in a tenuous and quirky balance. The Shimogamo family are one of many Tanuki families that reside in the city. Their reputation as tricksters is unmatched but following the tragic death of their patriarch (who was boiled in a pot and eaten by a group of humans), the four Shimogamo brothers and their mother have been left with only their sense of loss and the task of picking up the pieces. Yasaburo, the third of four Shimogamo brothers, seems to be the most unaffected of the siblings and prides himself on leading a foolish life (the ultimate goal of any tanuki worth his fluff). But as a put-upon middle child, it often falls to Yasaburo to maintain family order, help resolve conflicts, and ensure that his clan manages to avoid the looming threat of the hot-pot.

The first season of the show, which was broadcast in 2013, dealt directly with some of the after-effects of Souichiro Shimogamo's death and their family's conflict with Benten, a terrifying human woman with the powers of a Tengu. The second season from 2017 examines even more complicated familial ties and expands on many of the relationships between Tengu, Tanuki, and humans. The stories run the gamut from entitled sons, love and marriage, familial betrayal, and

recovery from PTSD. Oh, and did I mention that the series is also an excellent comedy? With its magical setting and its ability to dig deep into relationships that, despite being between creatures with magical transformative abilities, can resonate even with mundane humans such as ourselves, The Eccentric Family's "family-fantasy" narrative is exceptional among modern anime.

Kino's Journey: The Beautiful World

Kino is a world traveler. Atop a motorrad (a motorcycle with a mind of its own), Kino goes from country to country, spending no more than three days in each place. Every country is unique unto itself. Some of them have incredibly strict laws, some are almost lawless, and some have cultural differences so extreme that they leave Kino perplexed. But each place speaks to the horrors and the wonders of what humanity is capable of, and Kino has come to accept the beauty in that fact.

The Kino's Journey novels were previously adapted into an anime series several years ago, and this more modern take on these well-regarded tales may not necessarily appeal to fans who fell in love with the original adaptation (and felt that it was sufficient). However, many of the stories in this anthology series have a timeless feeling to them and speak so deeply to many of humanity's talents and faults, that fans new to the franchise (as well as old fans who can take this version on its own merits) will likely find a lot of powerful storytelling within. Visually-striking, morally-ambiguous, and overall thought-provoking, this fantasy series is a great example of what speculative fiction does best; it provides us a window through which we can examine ourselves in a new way.

Kaymar Award

Nominations are hereby called for the Kaymar Award. Send your nominations to Jon Swartz jon_swartz@hotmail.com
12115 Missel Thrush Court, Austin TX 78750

The Kaymar Award is given in April or so every year, supposedly because the N3F was organized in the month of April. The selection is made by a committee, consisting of previous winners who are still in the club, from nominations submitted by members. The award, unlike other awards in fandom, can be awarded only once. It is not given for talent or for popularity, but for work — work for the benefit of the club and its members. The award is a memorial to K. Martin Carlson [1904-1986], who originated, maintained, and financed it for 25 years. Carlson was a long-time N3F member who held many positions in the club, including club historian. He went by the fan name of Kaymar.

Elections

Elections are coming! To be eligible to run for President or one of the five members of the Directorate, your dues must be paid through the end of 2019. To run, please Renew Now!

Treasury

\$2,997.47 (April 30, 2018)
 + 24.00 PayPal Dues
 + 0.00 Cash Dues
 + 36.00 Check Dues
 + 0.00 Money Order Dues
 - 1.29 PayPal Fees
 - 0.00 Banking Fee
 - 0.00 Postage

\$3,056.18 (June 7, 2018)

New, Renewed, & Reinstated Members & Info Updates

Renewed:

#16 - Patsy Williams-King - Regular- Exp 3/31/2019
 #17 - Dorothy Kurtz - Electronic - Exp 5/31/2019
 #21 - Jeff Redmond - Regular- Exp 12/31/2019
 #204 - Michael Simon - Regular - Exp 3/31/2019

New:

#246 - Jessica Silver - Regular - Exp 6/30/2018
 BDay: Nov. 27
 IRL: Operations Supervisor, Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis
 Interests: Art, Blogging, Cartooning, cartoons, and animation, Conventions and clubs, DVDs and videos, Games and video games, Online activities, Reviewing
 Fan Since: Since elementary school, about 25 years
 Fanac since: About 20 years
 Clubs: Manga Anime Society at the University of Minnesota
 Cons: Anime Detour, CONvergence, Marscon, Anime Fusion, Anime Iowa, Anime Central, Furry Migration, A-Kon.
 Genres: Primarily the anime/manga type
 N3F Interest: Writing for club publications

Current Members Updating Info:

#191 - John Thiel - Regular
 New email: kinethiel@mymetronet.net

Expired/Expiring Renew Now!!

Expired in April
 #212 - Jay Hardy
 #213 - Anne Guglik

Expired in May
 #216 - Jeff Pritchard

Expiring in June
 #217 - Lawrence Dagstine
 #219 - Christopher Flatt
 #218 - Joseph P. Martino
 #32 - Ray F. Nelson
 #159 - Steven Roberts
 #221 - Michael Saler

Member Status Changes

#141 - Logan Masterson - Deceased

Anime/Comics/Manga Bureau

Kevin Trainor writes:

By now everyone knows Jessi Silver has come aboard as editor of the revived Mangaverse, and I have been beating the bushes to find people to write about anime and manga for her. There's a series on Amazon Prime that I've been watching as time permits, The Garden of Sinners (which caught my attention through a Fate/Grand Order tie-in) and I am thinking of starting Kabaneri of the Iron Fortress. As for membership efforts, I was unable to attend Balticon due to unexpected financial issues, so all I've been doing is reaching out to people through social media, which seems to be bringing in a trickle of new folks. I've suggested to George that we may want to adopt a philosophy of "Slow fandom for fast times," which some of you will recognize as a riff on the motto of the new wave/electronic/world music program From the Hearts of Space. A lot of fandom these days seems to go on through social media, which tends to encourage hot takes and quick reactions instead of sober assessment and informed opinion, whereas I think that through TNFF, N'APA and our other zines, we give people a chance to stop and think about science fiction, fantasy, and the subculture it's inspired over these last 70+ years.

Art

We may all be grateful to Jose Sanchez for sending us his murals as covers for N3F zines.

Birthday Card Bureau

Birthday cards sent: 6
 Renewal letters sent: 6
 —Laurraine Tutihasi

Fan History and Research Bureau

I'm getting along well with my new partner in the bureau, Jon Swartz, and have eleven NFFF members whom I'm trying to contact and make a serious effort to get into the bureau. They seem to be members with good qualifications for this kind of bureau work. Efanazines finally got all three issues of Origin displayed, along with the other NFFF zines that were delayed, though there was quite a bit of confusion about it for a while. It seems the new bureau is getting nicely off the ground.—John Thiel

Fan-Pro Coordinating Bureau

Both the April and the June issue of Ionisphere are now on display at efanazines and I was finally able to inform the Asimov Facebook Group about the interview with Sheila Williams. Tightbeam and TNFF are also now on display there. As you can see, a lot of coordinating going on there.—John Thiel, bureau chief

Franking Service

We continue to fulfill an original purpose of the N3F, now 77 years old, by circulating fanzines to the membership. If you publish a fanzine, please contact us about having your zines distributed, at no charge to you, to our membership. phillies@4liberty.net

Membership Recruitment Bureau

The directors are currently considering placing an advertisement in the upcoming first issue of the resurrected Amazing Stories. At this time the President has expressed interest, two directors favor it, one director shows a strong interest in it, and two directors are not so interested but have not voted no; one says he will let it ride; the other did not cast a no vote either. The ad if printed might place the N3F on the SF map better.—John Thiel

We are now up to 60 dues-paying members, and 157 public members. Our zines also go to seven archival sites.

Round Robins

What is a Round Robin?

Round Robins are discussion lists. They are a way of connecting with people who have similar interests. Traditional round robins are sent through the mail. Each round robin consists of a packet of letters from its members - which is mailed from member to member. As each member gets the packet, they read all the letters, then remove their own previous letter, write a new one, and send the packet on to the next member.

The N3F offers two kinds of Round Robins; traditional - where members send letters in the mail, and electronic - where members send letters by email. Both kinds are fun and informative and a good way to meet other members and to discuss topics of mutual interest.

If you want to join a Postal Round Robin contact - Patricia Williams-King, 755 Glen View Drive, Nashville, TN 37206

Electronic Round Robins

We need at least 3 members to start an ERR. Following is the list of current ERR and the number of members in each one:

Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror in TV, Movies and Books - 3 members

Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror Artists - 2 members - ONLY 1 MORE MEMBER NEEDED

Writers and Their Works - Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror - 1 member

Japanese Anime - 1 member

Fairy Tales and Folklore - 2 members

The following Round Robins have 0 members each.

The Marvel Universe
DC Superheroes and Villains
Cartoons and Cartooning
Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror Video Games
Comics and Graphic Novels

A Round Robin needs at least 3 members to start rounding. Please help these members by joining one of the above Round Robins.

If you see an ERR you would like to join please contact [Judy Carroll AutumnSeas8012@yahoo.com](mailto:JudyCarrollAutumnSeas8012@yahoo.com)

Welcommittee

The purpose of the Welcommittee is to welcome new members to the club. A letter is sent, by email or postal mail, to new members informing them of club activities they may be interested in joining. Those members with email addresses are also sent attachments to the current TNFF and other publications the N3F has to offer.

Wanted: Someone to help send greetings to new members.

If you would like to help welcome new members to this wonderful club please contact:

[Judy Carroll AutumnSeas8012@yahoo.com](mailto:JudyCarrollAutumnSeas8012@yahoo.com)

Writers Exchange

The Writers Exchange is for anyone interested in writing. If you have a story you would like read and commented on, or if you just want the excitement of reading unpublished work, then the Writers Exchange is here for you. Published or unpublished - all are welcome. You may join as a writer, a reader or both.

“A writer is a person who cares what words mean, what they say, how they say it. Writers know words are their way towards truth and freedom, and so they use them with care, with thought, with fear, with delight. By using words well they strengthen their souls. Story-tellers and poets spend their lives learning that skill and art of using words well. And their words make the souls of their readers stronger, brighter, deeper.”

— Ursula K. Le Guin

The Writers Exchange is for anyone who has an interest in writing. If you are looking for someone to read your work, or if you would like to read the work of others, contact [Judy Carroll. Autumnseas@yahoo.com](mailto:JudyCarrollAutumnSeas8012@yahoo.com)

Letters of Comment

Dear Neffers:

Many thanks for the May TNFF, and while it is a beautiful, warm day outside, I shall attempt a fast letter of comment, so start rooting for me, here goes.

I am no anime or manga fan, but we just came off one of our best vending conventions in our own history, and it was at an anime convention, Anime North in Toronto. I hope a publication like Mangaverse will attract the legion of anime fans out there. Perhaps I can let the fans here know about it, to help get it going, once it appears. Anime North's population every year is about 30,000, and it's still not the biggest convention out there, so who knows how many eyes might land on it.

I had heard of Hyman Tiger,, but I certainly have at least one Curt Siodmak novel on my shelves, and even though I am not close to those shelves right now, it is probably Donovan's Brain. Based on the figures provided, he was about 98 years old when he died, as written, and he seemed to be quite the pioneer in SF writing and motion pictures and television.

My letter... I must wonder if there are any steampunk fans in the N3F; I hope there are, and a discussion area would interesting to read. I have been toying with the idea of a steampunk zine just lately, and I wonder if I can do so, given the lack of graphics software I have. If only I could get my hands on the disks for QuarkXPress 5, for I do have a lot of graphic jobs done on that software platform, and I could do quite a bit with it.

Corflu was a good time for many, and it was good to see many fanzine fans from around the world, and here at home. It was held in Toronto, and I think attendance was shy of 100. The next one will be in the Washington, DC area.

I think this may be all I can do at the moment. I did receive the N3F disk, and many thanks, and further checking shows me that I have already responded to Tightbeam 286. Thanks for this current issue, and I will keep an eye out for more issues to come.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.



“Where Dragons Fly”...Angela K Scott

Sercon

Neglected Genre Authors:

Frank Gruber

by

Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D.

N3F Historian

“The Fantastic Stories of Frank Gruber”

Early in his writing career Frank Gruber (1904 -1969) was somewhat critical of science fiction (or pseudoscience, as he then called it) – and of some of the writers who wrote it. For example, he once described Edmond Hamilton (identified as “J. Hamilton Edwards” in his anecdote) as having “buck teeth as big as those of Clement Atlee's son-in-law.” [See Note after Conclusions] Yet, to make a living, Gruber himself wrote just about every type of fiction and non-fiction, including a few stories that can only be described as SF or fantasy.

Gruber knew many writers and editors and was good friends with several of them. Among the ones who wrote SF/fantasy were L. Ron Hubbard, Leo Margulies, Mort Weisinger, Cornell Woolrich, F. Orlin Tremaine, Norvell Page, Richard Sale, Lester Dent, Walter Gibson, Fred MacIsaac, Otis Adelbert Kline, and Arthur J. Burks. It was Burks who told him that the life of a pulp writer was seven years. Gruber has reported that Burks said: “At the end of seven years you've got to go on to better writing, or go downhill.”

Gruber Pseudonyms

Gruber wrote a lot. When he had more than one story in the same issue of a magazine, or when he was writing about a particular character he had created, he used pseudonyms. Some of the bylines he used were Stephen Acre, Richard B. Allworth, Charles K. Boston, Norman H. Brandon, San Brant, Jackson Cole, Ralph Conger, W. R. Conkling, George Irwin, William Goggin, Tom Gunn, Stewart N. Halsey, Lois Howard, A. L. Kerman, Oscar K. Livermore, Lois Mahood, Arthur McBride, Mathew Morris, Ralph Powers, William B. Rainey, John F. Ryder, C. K. M. Scanlon, Grant Stockbridge, and John K. Vedders. Avid pulp magazine readers will recognize several of these names.

Gruber On His Own Writing

In 1967 Gruber wrote: “I have written western stories, mysteries, fantasy and science fiction. I have produced love stories and spicy stories. I have turned out reams of Sunday School stories, I have written virtually every type of writing that is published today and some that is no longer being published.” At the time he wrote this – at age 63 -- he had published roughly four hundred stories, fifty-four novels, sixty-five movie screenplays, about 100 TV scripts, and more than 150 articles.

Stories in Genre Magazines/Books

Operator #5

“The Coffin That Went to Sea” (October 1935 issue/as by Capt. John Vedders)

Weird Tales

“The Golden Chalice” (July 1940 issue)
 “The Book of the Dead” (November 1941)
 “The Gun” (July 1942)
 “The Thirteenth Floor” (January 1949)

Avon Fantasy Reader

“The Gun” (reprinted in issue #7, 1948)

The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction

“The Thirteenth Floor” (reprinted in March 1955 issue)
 “Piece of Eight” (November 1955)

Boris Karloff's Favorite Horror Stories

“The Thirteenth Floor” (reprinted in the 1965 edition)

Detective Story Magazine #9

“The Phantom Model T” (1990)

The Pulp Jungle (1967)

In his autobiography, *The Pulp Jungle*, Gruber mentioned by name many of the pulp magazines for which he wrote. Included were such well-known pulps as *The Shadow*, *The Spider*, *Dr. Yen Sin*, and *The Mysterious Wu Fang*. I don't know if any of his stories in these magazines were SF/fantasy; but I suspect most of them were similar to his Captain John Vedders stories for *Operator #5*: adventure/spy stories with some fantastic elements.

The Pulp Jungle is one of the most entertaining books I have ever read. If one has an interest in the pulps, and/or what a struggling writer who wrote for them went through in the early 1930s, I recommend this book highly. I have read it several times. I have also bought at least three copies of it; I keep loaning it to people who don't return it. Almost every time I picked it up and glanced through it, looking for an incident I only half-remembered, I found myself reading the entire book yet again! His summary of the writing he did on a Remington portable from August, 1932 through June, 1934 almost brings tears to my eyes every time I read it.

Mundane Writing

Early in his writing career Gruber wrote on just about every topic that offered a chance of being sold, no matter how small the pay. Late in his career he concentrated on detective and western stories because he found more (and better) paying markets for stories in these genres. Nevertheless, he also found time to write a biography of Zane Grey – whose westerns he admired -- and a short biography/bibliography of Horatio Alger, Jr., who had had a role in Gruber's becoming a professional writer.

As a youngster, Gruber read many of the dime novels of the period, including those by Alger. He later confessed that

Alger's Luke Walton, the Chicago Newsboy set him on the path to becoming a writer. At the time he read Alger's story Gruber lived in Chicago, was nine years old, and was himself a newsboy! He also read many of the “story papers” that preceded the dime novels. In 1955 Gruber was a member of the club that publishes the fanzine *Dime Novel Round-Up*, described as “a monthly magazine devoted to the collecting, preservation and literature of the old-time dime and nickel novels, libraries, and popular story papers.”

Many of Gruber's stories were later made into movies and/or TV programs. He also wrote quite a few original screenplays. Among them were the following:

Motion Picture Screenplays:

“Terror by Night” (1946) and “Dressed to Kill” (1946) [Sherlock Holmes films starring Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce]
 “Bulldog Drummond at Bay” (1947)
 “Northern Pursuit” (1943)
 “The Mask of Dimitrios” (1944)
 “Johnny Angel” (1945)
 “The Great Missouri Raid” (1951)
 “Warpath” (1951)
 “The Denver and Rio Grande” (1952)
 “Hurricane Smith” (1952)

Television Work:

“Lawman” (1958)
 “Shotgun Slade” (seventy-eight 30-minute episodes, 1959-1961) [created/produced by Gruber]
 “The Texan” (1958-1960) [created by Gruber]
 “Tales of Wells Fargo” (1957-1962) [created by Gruber]
 Conclusions

Gruber is remembered today primarily for his westerns and mysteries. Yet, his genre fiction, though quite small in comparison to his other work, did not go completely unrecognized. For example, by 1967 he said that one of his fantasies, “The Thirteenth Floor,” had been reprinted in eighteen different anthologies and – at that time -- was one of the selections in a high school English Reader published by Harper & Row. Despite this claim, however, I was able to find only the two reprints listed above.

Note: Ironically, he and Hamilton both had stories in the November 1941 issue of *Weird Tales*, the issue that featured the famous Hannes Bok cover of a skeleton writing at a desk – and both Gruber and Hamilton had their names displayed on the cover. Other writers with stories in this issue were Mindret Lord, Alonzo Deen Cole, Henry Kuttner, August Derleth, and Manly Wade Wellman. Quite an issue!

Bibliography

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N3F Founding Members:

Charles Beling

by

Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D.

N3F Historian

Charles A. Beling was an early science fiction (SF) fan who lived near Westwood, New Jersey, before World War II. He published a fanzine he titled *Fan-atic*.

According to *The Fanzine Index*, *Fan-atic* was published for a half-dozen issues during 1941.

Westwood was a small town of approximately 5,000 residents that was famous in fandom for the several prominent fans and professionals who lived there during the 1930s - 1940s.

In addition to Beling, the residents included the genre writer Joseph J. Millard (introduced to SF fandom by author/editor Ray Palmer); the prolific SF/fantasy author Manly Wade Wellman and his wife, horror author Frances Garfield; the former Canadian fan Roderick Gaetz; the former British fan Roy Plotkin, and the young Westwood fan Gerry de la Ree, later known in fandom as a genre book and magazine dealer. Many of these fans were involved in the founding and running of the Westwood SF club, *The Solariods*.

The clubzine of *The Solariods* was titled *Sun Spots*, and was published during the decade of the 1940s. Gerry de la Ree was one of the fanzine's editors.

In addition, of course, Charles A. Beling was one of the sixty-four charter members of our club, *The National Fantasy Fan Federation* (N3F), in 1941.

Sources: *The Fanzine Index*, *All Our Yesterdays*, *Fancylopedia 3*, *ISFDB*, and other Internet sites.

Rocket Stack Rank Reviews

RocketStackRank.com

Reviews from Greg Hullender

Meat And Salt And Sparks, by Rich Larson

Story illustration by Scott Bakal

Great Characters in a Great Setting

(SF Mystery) An enhanced chimp and her human partner investigate an apparently pointless murder committed by a woman who was under remote control from an unknown source. (7,373 words; Time: 24m)

"Meat And Salt And Sparks," by Rich Larson [bio] (edited by Ellen Datlow), published on June 6, 2018 by Tor.com. Mini-Review (click to view--possible spoilers)

Pro: The mystery is solved, and, by the end of the story, justice is done.

But there's a deeper story here—the story of how Cu came to feel she really had a place in human society. At the start, she's so alienated from her coworkers that she doesn't even like to come in to the office. At the end, she's inviting her partner to her apartment for breakfast. The symbolism of her cleaning the place so it'll look nice for him parallels the way she cleaned the apartment before her disastrous meeting with her mother, and it shows that she sees Huxley as her family now.

The dramatic meeting with Baby introduces a nice moment of tension. I was prepared for another smart chimp or even a trick to capture Cu for experiments, so the AI took me by surprise. I find this type of AI unrealistic in general, but the circumstance that it finds no reason to exist does ring true. More importantly, it holds a mirror up to Cu, and she's forced to face the question of whether she herself has a reason to exist. She holds the gun to her head in her apartment, contemplates ending it all, and the tablet interrupts her. She focuses on the words "Need backup," which remind her she's not really alone. Not if she doesn't want to be. And that's enough. Touching and satisfying.

The little bits of technology were very realistic. The echoboy/girl technology is something we could almost do today, minus the neural link. Likewise the dress where the flowers change form based on a person's mood.

Cu herself seemed realistic too, provided you bought the "what-if" regarding the uplift of her brain. Her inability to speak except through signs or typing on a keyboard makes sense too. When I was a computational linguistics graduate student, we learned that the human vocal apparatus is a marvel that sets us apart just as much as an elephant's trunk does, so it's realistic that the researchers didn't try to duplicate it.

Con: Cu doesn't actually solve the mystery. She's ready to give up when Baby contacts her and explains it all to her.

The emergent AI is not reasonable. The notion that an intelligence could arise at random online is at least as bad as the idea that atomic testing could produce Godzilla. The idea that it needed a virus to erase itself didn't make much sense either.

Artificial Condition, by Martha Wells

Cover illustration by Jaime Jones

Review by Rich Larson

Great characters, great action, interesting setting

(SF Adventure; Murderbot Diaries) Murderbot heads to the Ravi-Hyral Mining Facility to learn the truth about why it went rogue and killed its own clients many years ago. (32,446 words; Time: 1h:48m)

You should read "All Systems Red" before reading this novella. See related articles on Tor.com.

"Artificial Condition," by Martha Wells [bio] (edited by Lee Harris), published on May 8, 2018 by Tor.com.

Pro: Murderbot comes to RaviHyral seeking absolution. It finds it, in a way, learning that it wasn't the cause of the massacre nor did it really do all the damage the company said it did; it was simply the sole surviving SecUnit, so they blamed it for everything. And it partially atones by freeing the sexbot—also a sole survivor, from a group that selflessly put themselves in harms way trying to stop the massacre and save lives.

The strongest emotional moment in the story is when Murderbot thinks through its reasons for wanting to free the sexbot. That it wants to honor the sacrifice of a group even more lowly than SecUnits. A group who made the ultimate sacrifice and did the right thing in a universe where not many do the right thing even when there's little or no cost to it. Murderbot has a sense of honor that most humans only wish we had.

Murderbot's dialogues with ART help develop its character further. Murderbot doesn't like ART because ART forces it to confront uncomfortable truths it would rather not think about. It's a real pleasure watching Murderbot gradually gain a grudging respect for ART and then seeing them work together. It's also nice to see that, powerful as they are, Murderbot and ART both have limits. Murderbot can't hack every system in existence, and the ones it can hack require time and effort. ART is far more powerful than Murderbot, but it's also much less human, and often comes across as childlike. It's also nice to see that ART can't escape its own programming. Murderbot, being part organic, can.

The hapless young people trying to get their data back make for a nice foil. They're 100% human, almost helpless, but respectful and polite: very worth clients for Murderbot to be protecting, and we cheer whenever it does something for them.

Con: Tlacey is a cardboard villain, and in the story's climax, she's dispatched too easily.

The reason I recommend against reading this novella without reading "All Systems Red" first is that the first novella develops Murderbot's character to the point where we care about it a lot and really want to see it succeed. This story doesn't have a lot of dependence on the events that went before, but it hugely depends on us already having warm feelings for the protagonist.

Review: Lion Loose by James H Schmitz

Ok, actual review time. I've been on a James H Schmitz kick. I found a bunch of his work free on Amazon and grabbed it, some short stories, some short novels, for my kindle. Which is what I read when I'm falling asleep. The novel I went through the last week was Lion Loose, a quintessentially Schmitz tale, with a beautiful young woman in some distress, a young man secretly working for the side of Good, and a weird alien creature that may or may not be a threat. Lion Loose is set on a once-glamorous space station, a sort of mega-casino in space, slowly falling into disrepair and disrepute, but still populated. Reetal, the aforementioned lovely and deadly young lady, has discovered a plot to blow it up. She calls on Quillan, believing him to be shady as her, but with a heart of gold. They conspire to defeat the gang.

Click on cover to find a free book...

The interesting twist here, as it so often is in Schmitz' tales, is the alien. I won't give too much away, but I do enjoy his stories, since the first one I'd ever read as a girl about Telzey and TT, her telepathic cat. If you're looking for light, classic science fiction, enjoyable read with characters who are a little gritty by never malicious (well, the villains can be quite so...) then Schmitz is a reliable go-to.

I'll try to read something more challenging for next week. But no promises.

Oh – I really liked this one. A lot of fun. Much more psychological than action, but still. ...Cedar Sanderson

Review: After the Blast by TL Knighton

I picked up After the Blast, a novelette by TL Knighton, for a couple of reasons. I almost didn't for one big reason. There are stories and themes we all get tired of after reading them over and over and over again... don't get me started on vampires. Post-apocalypse fiction is one that has been done to death.

And along came this charming little tale to prove me wrong. Well, okay, I found it charming. Which isn't to say that it's sweetness and light, because it's not. I was a bit concerned that the 'change' he referred to in the blurb for the hero would be some sort of gamma radiation mutation.. but no. This is much more a story of growth. Growth of the main character, from office drone to hero. A real hero, someone to inspire hope and courage and to model duty and honor. I loved this, since I see it all too rarely.

I liked it a lot. The beginning was a little rough, for a couple of pages. I can chalk this up to a beginning writer, because he hit his stride after that, and gave me a tale I didn't have to work for, something I treasure these days. I am really looking forward to what comes next from this author. I'd love to see him take this and expand it. Much like I hear on many of my short works, I'm going to say... there could be more. Because we readers, we're greedy that way. Feed us a character we can like, and a world we can imagine, and we want to stay in it. ...Cedar Sanderson

Gourmet Bureau
Column by Cedar Sanderson
Larry Correia...Cioppino

I'd first asked Larry Correia if he'd be willing to take part in this series of foodie book blogs when I saw him at LTUE this spring, and his eyes lit up. "I love food!" he told me, and then he had to hurry off to another panel. I was busy too – that is a fantastic symposium, BTW, I highly recommend it to writers – and I had enough on the list at the time not to hunt him down and corner him. I hate to bother a busy man, so I left it a while before reaching out. He came back to me and suggested that I talk to his wife, because while he loves food, he's not a cook. Since I have a deep admiration for his wife, and enjoy the lovely photos of food she shares (like me, she not only cooks, but shoots food) I was delighted when she sent me photos and the names of one of Larry's favorite meals.

Fennel has a tough 'core' you will want to remove. I saved the delicate fronds to use as garnish.

The wonderful thing about this series has been getting to cook from author's cultural backgrounds. A surprising amount of the good authors I know are not from standard, stereotypical upbringings, and it's been a diverse set of recipes and dishes to cook. Larry Correia, like Sarah Hoyt, is of Portuguese lineage, and that is where this recipe stems from. Cioppino is a classic seafood stew, with a little bit of everything in it, I'm given to understand. Whatever came in from the ocean that day...

Tip for reducing fish to nice even chunks: cut it while still partly frozen. A heavy, sharp kitchen knife will handle this easily.

While you're contemplating all the bounty of the sea, I suggest you take a look at the rather impressive library of work Correia has written. Given the salty, savory nature of this stew, either *Hard Magic* or *Monster Hunter International* would be very appropriate. I will warn you that if you enjoy hard-driving action, intriguing characters, and fast-moving plots, you'll need to set a timer so you don't burn anything! For something a bit different, you might try listening to a story, instead, with this audio-only short set in the Grimnoir world: *Murder on the Orient Elite*.

Now that you have gathered the denizens of the deep you plan to incorporate into the stew, and have your reading material on hand for the waiting periods, let's get started. I'm in Ohio, a landlocked state far from the eldritch shrieks of seagulls, so I settled for frozen rather than fresh: whole cuttlefish, mussels, and tilapia fillets. You could use any firm-fleshed whitefish in this recipe, and clams, squid, octopus, shrimp... you name it, they probably threw it in the pot. When I was a girl with my grandmother teaching me how to beachcomb and find wild edibles, we would have added gooseneck barnacles or whelk to it.

Sauteing the vegetables to get their flavor going before adding liquids.

Cioppino: Seafood Stew

Ingredients

- 1 bottle dry red wine
- olive oil
- 1 bulb fennel, sliced, reserve fronds and discard 'core'
- 3-4 shallots, roughly chopped
- 5-6 cloves of garlic
- handful of fresh oregano
- 1 tbsp cumin
- 1 lb cuttlefish, cleaned (or octopus, or squid...)
- 1 can diced tomatoes
- 2 c fish or vegetable stock
- 3 tender potatoes, diced
- 2 whitefish fillets (about a pound)
- 1 lb clams or mussels
- salt and pepper to taste

Instructions

In a medium saucepan over medium heat, reduce the wine by about two-thirds.

In a large, heavy saucepan or skillet over medium high heat, heat the oil. Sauté the shallots, garlic, and then the fennel until it is slightly softened.

Add the cumin and oregano, stir, and allow to stay on heat for a moment.

Put the reduced wine in with the vegetables, then the diced tomatoes and stock. Add the frozen cuttlefish (if you are using fresh octopus or squid, sauté them for a few minutes with the vegetables before adding the liquids).

Bring up to a boil and add the potatoes, then reduce heat to allow a simmer. Allow to simmer for 45 minutes.

Add the fish and clams or mussels and cook, covering the pot, for ten to fifteen minutes until the shellfish have all opened and the fish is opaque. Taste, season, and serve with fresh crusty bread.

This recipe yielded a large pot of lovely, savory, salty stew. It was delicious. The fennel, if you aren't familiar with it, has an anisey, liquoricey scent but that disappears on cooking in this, leaving a nice sweetness that plays well against the reduced wine acidity. I'm told it's even better on the second day, so I am looking forward to leftovers!

The completed Cioppino, a full-flavored stew in a relatively short cooking time. The mussels could be added without shells, of course, but I like the way it looks.



2018 Ballot

This is the 2018 Neffy Ballot. Dues-paying members may vote. Public members who want to vote need to pay their dues first. You are welcome to return this ballot, to submit a paper letter, or to email me your votes.

Papermail should be sent to George Phillies, 48 Hancock Hill Drive, Worcester, MA 01609. Email goes to phillies@4liberty.net.

Instructions: Give your best choice 5 points, your second choice 4 points, your third choice three points, and so on. You may leave gaps, so that you give your first choice 3 points and your second choice 1 point. You may not give more than one choice for an award the same number of points, so you may not give all four novel entries 5 points.

Best novel

L.E. Modesitt—Assassin's Price
 Chris Nuttall—The Zero Equation
 Cedar Sanderson—Tanager's Fledglings
 Ryk Spoor—Princess Holy Aura
 No Award

Best shorter work

And Then There Were N-One--Sarah Pinsker
 The Secret Life of Bots--Suzanne Palmer.
 In the Shade of the Pixie Tree--Rodello Santos
 Utopia LOL--Jamie Wahls
 No award

Best book editor

Toni Weiskopf—Baen
 Sheila Gilbert—Daw
 No Award

Best Film

Thor: Ragnarok
 Guardians of the Galaxy 2
 No Award

Best fanzine

Ionisphere
 MT Void
 Tightbeam
 No Award

Best Blog

The Bar bar.baen.com
 MadGeniusClub.com
 The ChrisHanger chrishanger.wordpress.com
 No Award

Best TV show

Legends of Tomorrow
 Supergirl
 No Award

Best anime

The Ancient Magus Bride
 Devilman: Crybaby
 The Eccentric Family
 Kino's Journey
 No Award

Best graphic art publication

Hawkeye
 Jean Grey
 Shade the Changing Girl
 No Award

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Behold! Courtesy Cedar
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