

Tightbeam 303

December 2019



Feline Magic by Angela K. Scott

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Regular short fiction reviewers. Greg Hullender and Eric Wong publish at RocketStackRank.com.

Cedar Sanderson’s reviews and other interesting articles appear on her site www.cedarwrites.wordpress.com/ and its culinary extension

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Table of Contents

Art

- Front ... Feline Magic by Angela K. Scott
- 29 ... Purple Gothic Angel by Angela K. Scott
- Back ... Mandalorian Rum Sleg by Jose Sanchez

Editorial

- 4 ... George Phillies

Letters

- 4 ... Lloyd Penney
- 5 ... Bob Jennings

Anime

- 7 ... Carole & Tuesday ... Review by Jessi Silver

Authors

- 9 ... An Interview with J.F. Holmes, by Tamara Wilhite
- 10 ... An Interview with Mike Baron, by Tamara Wilhite

Novels

- 12 ... The Snow Child by Eowyn Ivey ... Review by Tom Feller

Sercon

- 14 ... Jack Williamson Bio-Bibliography by Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D. N3F Historian

Short Stories

- 18 ... The Menace from Farside by Ian McDonald ... Review from Greg Hullender and Eric Wong
- 19 ... Knit Three, Save Four, by Marie Vibbert ... Review by Greg Hullender and Eric Wong
- 19 ... Hopelessness and Helplessness ... Analysis by Chris Nuttall
- 21 ... Straight Outta Tombstone by David Boop (Editor) ... Review by Pat Patterson
- 23 ... The Forbidden Thoughts Anthology ... Review by Jim McCoy

Food of Famous Authors

- 27 ... Pepper Steak by Anita Young ... Review and Cooking by Cedar Sanderson

Editorial

We reach another issue of Tightbeam, the all-topics genzine of the National Fantasy Fan Federation. We have fine letters, anime, novel, and short fiction reviews, an interview, SerCon review for the long-lived science fiction writer Jack Williamson, Food from Famous Authors, and fine artwork from Angela K. Scott and Jose Sanchez.

To some extent modern cultural disputes intrude into fannish activities. We have a pair of articles in which you can hear those disputes echoing one way or the other in the distance.

We continue to welcome reviews and articles from all members. Letters of Comment are especially welcome.

Letters

Dear George and Jon:

Falling behind again, so I have two issues 300 and 301. At least, that's the file names. Now to see what's inside both.

300... Well, it says 300 on the front (congratulations on that!), but says 299 on the second page. I checked my files, and it is indeed issue 300, a landmark. I wish there was something more I could comment on here, with so much anime and so many books I have not seen. However, I have a tape (yup, a VHS tape that needs to be transferred) of what might be called pre-code cartoons. There are many cartoons that are so racist, you wouldn't dare broadcast them today, but they were great entertainment for previous generations. There were also equally racist cartoons from the time of World War II, cartoons that brought down the Axis forces, but kept the kiddies at home entertained, and plugging for the Allies. I don't see any of the cartoons I have, but they are mostly Warner Brothers cartoons, with Bugs Bunny being his usual outrageous self.

The Moira Greyland book looks most interesting. I know many fans who are gay themselves, and I would think those who shop at both our local SF and gay book stores would enjoy this. It also might clear up some assumptions about Marion Zimmer Bradley and the Breendoggle. This book would shine some light on a fannish episode not even the fanhistorians like to talk about.

301... I remember Life After People as well. With the way we are ruining our climate, let's hope this doesn't become a documentary.

The first novel up for review does indeed look interesting, a combination of Sherlock Holmes and the Cthulhu Mythos. I wish I could get my hands on this book, and see if I could really Buy the Bit. At least, the attempt is made.

I am pleased to be able to say that we met both of the de Camps some years ago when they came to Toronto for an Ad Astra. Wonderful folks, and both so well read and friendly. One cherished possession is a copy of the Science Fiction Handbook, Revised (Owlswick Press,

1975), autographed by the both of them, dated 6/14/94. I wonder if such a handbook could be written today, and how much from the De Camp book would carry on through to that next edition.

My eyes are already coming together...it's not that late! Maybe I am thinking a little bit about the chicken Korma recipe...no matter, it is time to fold it up, and say thank you. I have a lot of zines to reply to, so I should get with it with them, too. See you soon.

Yours,
Lloyd Penney

Hi George

The latest issue of Tightbeam, #302 was filled with interesting things.

I echo Gary Labowitz's comments about inter-library loans. It is possible to get a whole world of unique books on loan thru your local library. I am at the point where I generally prefer to read a book checked out from the library rather than spend money to buy new SF/fantasy volumes. For me it's a matter of space rather than the cost; my house is filled to the overflowing with books, comics, magazines, graphic novels, dime novels, OTRadio shows, old movie serials, to the point where I don't need much more stuff coming into this place, especially new books that I will probably only read the one time.

Recently I started doing some research on a project, and I discovered that being a regular library patron of print books has its benefit, at least in my home town. The librarian couldn't find any of the new titles I was looking for thru inter-library loan, so she allocated some of the library funds, and purchased the four books direct. I am sure a couple of those volumes will be read by other people, but the other two are specialized indeed. Besides myself I think the only other people who will want them will be people from other locations, probably even other states. I was impressed, and needless to say, very grateful. Apparently the bulk of the town's library users fall into three main categories---Moms checking out picture books for the small kiddies, women reading the romance titles, and people who check out the very extensive selection of DVD videos. People like me who read books, especially genre books and out of the ordinary stuff, apparently get noticed, and get special services. But I never expected that the service would be so special that the library would specifically buy the new books titles I was looking for.

I especially enjoyed the two anime reviews Jessi Silver provided this time round. "Lost In Space" sounds like an excellent series, one that I intend to place on my need-to-borrow list. I have several friends who are deeply into Japanese anime, always trying to get me interested in new stuff, so if they have it I can probably see it in the near future.

"Blade of the Immortal" is a series I've heard about for many years now. In fact a few role playing scenarios, and at least two American comic book series have been based on the original Japanese anime series. I paid attention to the role playing adventures, which are heavy on mythical monsters and vicious bandits, but never read any of the comic books (a simple situation of too much stuff out there to keep up with), so I was interested in seeing how Ms Silver would review the original animation series.

Yeah, it is very violent. That seems to be the point; that crime and revenge both exert a heavy price from the people who participate in those actions; also that violence very often begets still more violence, which frequently escalates as long as the survivors can manage to stay alive. There are probably some great moral lessons there, but I think at this point in the human evolutionary cycle, we are too used to casual violence to even bother drawing any moral conclusions from a series that exploits the very qualities it tries to warn against.

I also appreciate Pat Patterson's recommendation for the two Invasion books by J.F. Holmes. Holmes is an author I have only encountered relatively recently. I admire the detailed plotting involved in his novels, but I have not even heard about this new duo of titles before. I'll add them to my Must Read list.

I read a bit of Chris Nuttall's analysis of the society of the Harry Potter series. It seems like a well thought-out essay, but I happen to be one of the few people on the planet who has no interest in the Harry Potter series. I read several volumes some years back, but I was not particularly impressed, and passed on the rest. This article should be a guaranteed conversation starter for those who are involved with the series tho.

I found his examination of the classic short story "Cold Equations" to be much more intriguing. This was a very well thought out article that looked at the story from many different perspectives. To be honest, I am pretty much unaware of the people Nuttall says are still harping on the structure of the story even after all these years, that somehow or the other the young woman, Marilyn should/could/must have been saved.

My understanding is that when Tom Godwin originally wrote the story he kept trying to come up with ways to save her, to make the story have a happy ending, but John Campbell recognized the point of the premise and kept rejecting his contrived rabbit-from-the-hat solutions, pointing out again and again that the setup he had created was inviolate.

It seems to me, as a purely personal opinion, that, controversial as the story was and still remains after all these years, the logic is concrete and there are no other solutions possible. As Chris notes, the small vessel on which Marilyn stowed away was essentially an emergency vehicle never intended for extensive or wide ranging space travel. The people nowadays who continue to complain that there should have been some way out, that the people who made the space travel rules that led to this tragic situation are soulless robber barons, that something, anything could be done, or at least that since Marilyn had to die, that therefore the space company should be held responsible and sued into oblivion by her family, all of this and more, are conjectures of people who are living in a dreamer's universe.

Unfortunately there is a lot of that going around these days. Vast portions of the population in the western world, particularly the USA seem to believe that they are the center of the universe, that their viewpoints, their ideas, their welfare, are the most important thing on the planet, therefore that the world must bend to their will, and that includes basic reality, just because they want things to be that way. This is the kind of magic thinking that fuels many of the current problems in our everyday world. Magical thinking is a common personality wrinkle for small children, even for some teenagers, but when this mindset extends to adults multiple problems will invariably result.

The bad news for these folks is that reality does not agree with this viewpoint. People who

drive drunk often lose control of their vehicles and have serious accidents, or die. Assuming that texting while driving may be dangerous for some people, but not for them, often leads to the same situations. Ignoring clear danger warning signs can and will lead to accident or death. Wishing for something and believing that you deserve it and therefore the universe must grant your wish doesn't work. Just ask all the people who bought all the losing tickets in last week's PowerBall lottery.

I find it more disturbing that people are still whining about the reality of the story's setup, and continue to complain about the way it was handled sixty-five years after it was published. Bitching, screaming, name calling, and blame-assigning does not change reality. "Cold Equations" is a story that easily stands the test of time. It remains a lesson in logic that people should listen to and learn from.

I enjoyed the rest of the issue, but nothing calls up any additional comments. This was an all round excellent issue, with a near perfect balance of articles, reviews, and commentary. Once again the cooking section went by me (I've given up trying to cook any of the stuff Ms. Sanderson concocts), but I still enjoyed reading her natter as she discussed things leading up to preparing the meal.

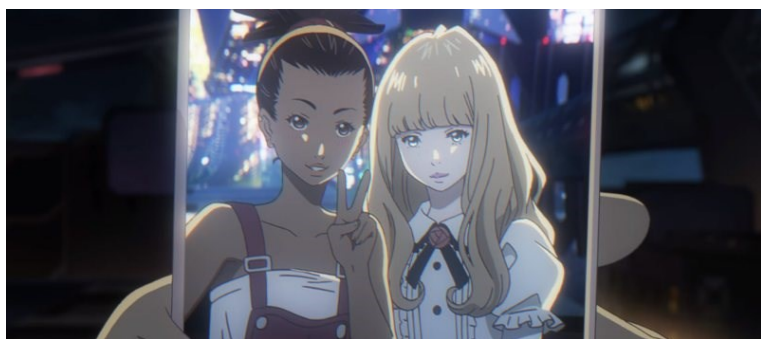
Good stuff. Keep up the good work.
---Bob Jennings

Anime

Carole & Tuesday
Review by Jessi Silver

Note: This post contains some spoilers for the series through episode 12.

This past weekend I got the opportunity to speak at GalaxyCon, a multi-media fandom convention in my hometown. We capped off our weekend presenting "Shiny New Anime," a panel where my husband and I share thoughts about and clips of some of our favorite anime from the past year (on a roughly 12-month rolling scale... sometimes stuff a little bit older sneaks in there if it has a second season or we missed it the first time around). In the lead-up to a convention, I generally try to catch up and finish at least some of the series on my plate; my general viewing habits aren't that great, and while I'm sure I'd get more done if I kept up with anime on a weekly basis, the reality is that aside from a few shows where being caught-up is pretty necessary (Attack on Titan comes to mind), I tend to watch anime in multi-episode chunks after-the-fact.



The series I chose to focus on prior to Galaxy-Con was *Carole & Tuesday*, for a couple of reasons. First, I've been watching other bloggers talk about it for months now, but due to it being in Netflix limbo in the United States I haven't had the opportunity to watch along with them (that's a lie... I know full well how

to “find it” before its official release, I just choose not to). Secondly, it’s had a fandom presence in the US that far preceded its availability. I attended Anime Central back in mid-May this year, and there was plenty of fan art for the series available in Artists’ Alley (I even bought a couple of cute character buttons despite not having seen the series at all. I had faith). In any case, its weird release schedule caused problems for my typical review process, but I assumed that I would probably enjoy the series knowing what little information I knew, so I took a day and watched what was available.



As the story of two characters with different backgrounds finding commonality in music, I’ve really enjoyed it so far. There’s a scene in the first episode where Carole, on her keyboard, and Tuesday, tentatively strumming her guitar, engage in a dialog of sorts, taking Carole’s melody and joining it with Tuesday’s lyrics to form something broader and more beautiful. There’s no traditional dialog in the scene once the girls start playing, and yet you can tell that there’s a sort of back-and-forth conversation between the two as they interject their own musical elements into the mix.

I tried to find info on the fan artist who did the work to the left since I didn’t grab a business card, but wasn’t able to – if you know the artist please tell me!

Considering the setting of the series, where most music is written and produced with the aid or intervention of AI rather than organically through human trial-and-error, the fact that these two characters – who meet by chance and have very different backgrounds – manage to have such a profoundly similar musical philosophy is something rare and powerful. I think there’s a temptation to call it too “convenient,” because the relationship just sort of happens without many roadblocks, as if the two were fated to be together, but I consider that a negligible complaint.

I mistakenly started reading some reviews of the series on MAL (not that MAL reviews are inherently terrible, but there are always some people who seem to see the platform as an opportunity to get hyperbolic with their vitriol) and noticed some blunt criticism of the character development, or more accurately the lack thereof, (not an angle that I agree with at this point). It’s true that there’s very little conflict between the two main characters – Carole willingly opens her home to Tuesday and shares what few material possessions she has with her, while Tuesday seems to have very few preconceived notions about Carole’s underprivileged upbringing considering her own sheltered life to that point. Everything is pretty hunky-dory from the start. I don’t necessarily agree that conflict is a marker of interesting relationships, though. When I look at my own close relationships there are always a few disagreements, but rarely the sort of passionate, fiery arguments that some people seem to think are a requirement for a “healthy” relationship (to be honest, when people get into screaming arguments on a regular basis, I tend to see that as pretty unhealthy). To me, communication is key no matter what one’s relationship “style” is; the form that communication happens to take isn’t as important as the fact that it exists. These discussions needn’t be overt, either.

There are a few elements of the show that do bother me, and I feel like they’ve been glossed-over somewhat (or I’m just reading reactions in the wrong places). Like many pieces of modern media it seems to have a dubious relationship with genders, sexes, and sexualities that fall out-



side the realm of cisgender/heterosexual people. Angela, a child actress who hopes to break into music and who serves as a foil for Carole and Tuesday's organic approach to songwriting, is managed by her mother, Dahlia. Dahlia is the typical stereotype of a "stage mom" – someone whose own ambitions went unfulfilled and who then attempts to relive them through their child. Another character attempts to trap Dahlia in a "gotcha" moment, revealing them as a "hermaphrodite." Not only is that terminology out-of-date and offensive, it's not

entirely clear what it's describing – is Dahlia intersex? A MtF Transgender person? Is the writer conflating biology with gender expression? It's hard to say and the show doesn't do a great job of explaining why this aspect of the character is even important beyond trying to somehow vilify her further (she's also shown to be a violent abuser via flashback, further pushing a stereotype that individuals on the diverse gender spectrum are further predisposed to violence or emotional instability).

There's also a sub-plot during which Tuesday becomes the target of a stalker – a co-contestant on "American Idol" style singing competition that features in the back half of this set of episodes. The stalker character, a person of non-binary gender (though they're mostly referred to as female by others), becomes obsessed with Tuesday and attacks her when their feelings go unreciprocated. As a depiction of the dynamic between a stalker and their victim, the storyline is excellent – it truly showcases the mentality and the emotional consequences from that type of situation. However, choosing to make the stalker someone outside the typical gender binary was a bad move and just manages to add to harmful stereotypes.

When the series is focused on Carole, Tuesday, and their several close companions, it's sublime. I honestly love stories about female-female friendships (and possibly more?) that demonstrate the strength of these types of relationships. The music they construct with one-another is also very good, and it's a pleasure to hear the various musical motifs that weave their way through the episodes. My hope is that, as the series reaches its actual climax in the second half, that it spends more of its time on what it does best rather than mishandling its attempts at gender diversity. Honestly, there's a lot to love in the first half and I've really enjoyed it, but when I feel like I have to warn people about several character elements it becomes really difficult to broadly recommend it for its good traits alone.

Due to its weird local release schedule, I don't have a first impression of this series. However, if you're looking for something similar Anime Feminist has a pretty good reaction to the first episode. I wouldn't be surprised, however, if the site features more discussion of some of the issues I've laid-out here in the future.

Authors

An Interview with J.F. Holmes and Tamara Wilhite

I had the pleasure of interviewing J.F. Holmes, author of quite a bit of military science fiction. For example, his "*Invasion*" series asks what happens if Ender of "*Ender's Game*" lost.

Tamara Wilhite: How did your military career impact your science fiction writing, aside from

leading you to write so many military scifi stories and novels?

J.F. Holmes: It gave me a pretty good understanding of what makes small units tick, the interactions of people when faced with a stressful moment such as combat, and how people's personalities effect each other.

Tamara Wilhite: I know "*Freehold Resistance*", the next book in the Freehold series, contains one of your short stories. How many works have you written with Michael Williamson?

J.F. Holmes: I have a story in "*Forged in Blood*" and the next Freehold anthology after that.

Tamara Wilhite: Can you tell me about the Joint Task Force 13 stories or books?

J.F. Holmes: Sure! JTF 13 was derived from a short story in our Spring Anthology. The concept was that there is an elite Special Operations Unit, based out of US Marine Corps, that has been fighting supernatural on the battlefield since 1777. "*Origins*" covers six different time periods, from the Revolution to the Global War on Terror. We will be releasing full novels every few months, set in different time periods by different authors.

Tamara Wilhite: You have a variety of stories in various military science fiction anthologies like "*We Dare*", a short story collection on augmented humanity. What else have you written?

J.F. Holmes: Ten books in my post – apocalyptic series "*Irregular Scout Team One*", three books in the "*Invasion*" series, and a half a dozen others, ranging from fantasy to space opera. Two have been finalists for Dragon Awards.

Tamara Wilhite: What are you working on now?

J.F. Holmes: Book eleven of *Irregular Scout Team One*, as well as being CEO of Cannon Publishing.

Tamara Wilhite: Is there anything you'd like to add?

J.F. Holmes: Always looking for new authors for Cannon Publishing! My works can be found here: www.amazon.com/author/jfholmes www.cannonpublishing.us

An Interview with Mike Baron and Tamara Wilhite

Mike Baron has probably written or drawn something you've read, even if you weren't aware of his contribution. He's been contributing to superhero comics and science fiction series for years. I had the opportunity to interview this prolific writer and graphic artist.

Tamara Wilhite: What was your contribution to the Star Wars Thrawn Trilogy?

Mike Baron: I adapted Timothy Zahn's best-selling series, beginning with *Heir to the Empire*. Dark Horse teamed me with Olivier Vatine and Fred Blanchard, and if you haven't seen the art, you should check it out. Probably the most stunning Star Wars comic ever. I also did the next two books. None of the language is mine. It's all Tim's. Marvel has taken over the franchise and



Art Courtesy of Mike Baron

rereleased these books.

Tamara Wilhite: How many Star Wars comics or novels have you done?

Mike Baron: There were eighteen comics in the Zahn series, and then I contributed to some of the Rogue Squadron books. But I'm just a pimple on Star Wars' ass.

Tamara Wilhite: Your novel "*Banshees*" managed to get reviewed by *Publishers Weekly*. A literal death metal band. Do you consider it to be a horror novel?

Mike Baron: Yes. It's a sprawling horror novel in the tradition of *The Stand* or *They Thirst*, but I found my own territory. I don't choose my stories, they choose me. The death metal and heavy metal bands cried out for their own legend.

Tamara Wilhite: Just the cover of your new novel "*Florida Man*" is hilarious. What is "*Florida Man*" about?

Mike Baron: Gary Duba's having a bad day. There's a snake in his toilet, a rabid raccoon in the yard, and his girl Krystal's in jail for getting naked at a Waffle House and licking the manager.

Gary's a redneck living in a trailer by the swamp. But he's got dreams, big dreams. Every time he tries to get ahead, fate deals him a low blow. But then he gets lucky...

With his best friend, Floyd, Gary sets out to sell his prized Barry Bonds rookie card to raise the five hundred needed for bail. But things always find a way of getting out of hand.

I drew a lot on real Florida Man stories and invented some of my own. I always chose the most outlandish scenario to land Gary in as much trouble as possible. It's got bad decisions, cocaine, pythons, alligators, drinking, and bad sex.

Tamara Wilhite: What is the "*Sons of Privilege*" series about?

Mike Baron: Josh Pratt never knew his mother, and would have been better off if he'd never known his father, who abandoned him at a truck stop. The closest thing to family Josh ever had was a motorcycle club, or "gang." Josh ended up doing time in prison, where he found Jesus, or maybe Jesus found him. Anyway, by the grace of God and a little bit of luck, Josh was pardoned. Now he's a private investigator, but it's not as glamorous as it sounds. He mostly serves papers for a lawyer. Then he gets a series of interesting jobs, each worse than the rest.

Tamara Wilhite: There's "*Sons of Privilege*", a standalone book about Nazi biker zombies and

at least one other biker series. What led you to write about bikers so much?

Mike Baron: *Helmet Head* is my novel about Nazi Biker Zombies. I'm a lifelong biker. I started riding in South Dakota before I knew any better. John D. MacDonald is my inspiration, in particular, the Travis McGee series. Josh Pratt follows in the footsteps of Travis, Philip Marlowe, Jack Reacher, and all the other loners who stand with one foot in society and the other outside the law. He's the guy you turn to when there are no other options. The Biker books contain no supernatural element. *Sons of Privilege* is about the Smiley Face killings. Popular college athletes found drowned after a night of drinking, with a smiley face painted on a nearby wall. The FBI investigated these cases for years.

Tamara Wilhite: The Kickstarter fundraiser for *Q-Ball* was successful. What is *Q-Ball* about?

Mike Baron: Detroit homeboy Curtis Ball joined the Merchant Marine and ended up managing a warehouse in Manila. Curtis wanted only two things out of life: to see the world and study Kali/Escrima. But when a pack of tuxedoed sharks muscle their way into his warehouse, Curtis learns the hard way that it's not always smart to mind your own business. Sometimes you have to spill some guts to spill your guts.

Q-Ball is a five issue series. My partner Barry McClain is finishing off the third issue now. I'm throwing in a couple of pages to show the art.

Tamara Wilhite: Aside from *Q-Ball*, what are you working on?

Mike Baron: My seventh Biker novel, *Unfortunate Son*, will be out December 11, 2019. Josh comes home to find his worthless father inside his house, fleeing a vindictive gangster.

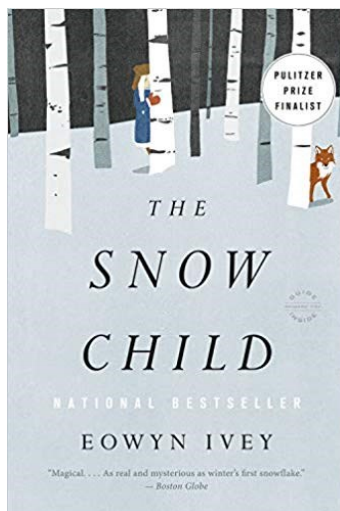
Tamara Wilhite: Is there anything you'd like to add?

Mike Baron: It took me thirty years to learn how to write a novel, but when I got it, I got it. I have three rules. One: my job is to entertain. Two: show, don't tell. Three: Be original. I have finished a Nexus novel that will be released by Dark Horse next year, and I'm working on a Badger novel. After that, I am doing a Florida Man 2, and making notes for the eighth Biker novel. Also working on some secret comic projects.

Novels

The Snow Child by Eowyn Ivey— Review by Tom Feller

An important part of the Superman story is that Jonathan and Martha Kent were a middle-aged (in the earliest versions even elderly) farming couple who were childless when they witnessed a spaceship landing on their farm carrying the baby Kal-El. Likewise, Jack and Mabel were a middle-aged childless couple in 1920 when, instead of waiting for a spaceship to land, Mabel persuades her husband to sell their Pennsylvania farm, which had been in his family for generations, and move to the Wolverine River area of Alaska. As homesteaders,



they were barely making it when, during the first snow of their second winter there, they decide to have a little fun for a change and make a snowman. They decide their snowman is on the small side, so they decorate it as a girl. The following morning the “snow girl” is gone, but they start to see glimpses of a young, blonde-haired girl running in the woods with a red fox for a companion. Eventually, they make friends with the girl, who calls herself Faina. She never actually lives with the couple, if only because their cabin is too warm for her, but she comes and goes as she pleases. When the snow melts in the spring, Faina goes away but returns every year for several years during the first snow of each winter.

Meanwhile, Jack and Mabel make friends with George and Esther Benson, fellow homesteaders who have three sons. When Jack suffers a major injury in the middle of planting season, the youngest son, Garrett, comes to live with them to help with the farm, and they eventually make him their heir. Garrett is an avid hunter, trapper, and fisherman who eventually meets Faina, and they fall in love.

Mabel was the daughter of a literature professor who had told her the story of Snegurochka (variously translated as *The Snow Child*, *Little Daughter of the Snow*, or *The Snow Maiden*), a Russian fairy tale about a middle-aged childless couple who make a snow girl who comes to life and becomes their daughter. He possessed an illustrated Russian-language version of the story. This novel is loosely based on that fairy tale, but the author never reveals whether it is a work of magical realism or not. Jack discovers a body that Faina says was her father, a drunken gold prospector, and believes that Faina simply has exceptionally strong winter and wilderness survival skills. On the other hand, Faina cannot survive a hot environment, even a warm cabin, which would indicate that she is a faerie, which Mabel believes, and no one can explain how she developed her skills. I agree with Mabel, but whichever way you decide to go, this is a lovely story with beautiful descriptions, although rather slow moving.

White Magic Academy by Emily Martha Sorensen Review by Chris Nuttall

Emily Martha Sorensen is quite good at writing books and webcomics that have a habit of subverting our expectations, often in ways that seem unpredictable in foresight and practically inevitable in hindsight. Indeed, *Black Magic Academy* is more of a fairy tale story than a plain and simple magic school story. It starts out as the former and shifts smoothly to the latter. *White Magic Academy* switches the setting to the titular academy and changes the main character from Mildred, a good witch in a family of wicked witches, to her death-enemy Rulisa, a good witch who really doesn't want to be good.

Rulisa is ... odd, by any reasonable definition. On one hand, she's prickly, obnoxious, somewhat bigoted and misandrist and obsessed with proving herself (to the point where she's prepared to provoke a feud between two schools to boost her status). On the other, she's willing to risk everything for her friends and family (to the point that she gets expelled for doing a bad deed with good motivations), surprisingly brave and smart enough to question the fundamentals of her society. Mildred wanted to get out, although it took her some time to realise it; Rulisa really wants to fit in. And yet, she can't.



The story starts with her being expelled from yet another school for destroying a priceless artefact (on the grounds that the magic used to make it could be a major threat to both her father and her fiancé). Word has gotten around and no other school for wicked witches will take her, forcing her to attend White Magic Academy instead. Humiliated, Rulisa swears she'll make her new school the equal of her old one, a task she finds rather difficult when she discovers that the school is very different (and that Mildred is also a student there.) She learns, almost despite herself, and discovers that her tutors didn't tell her everything. And then she finds herself targeted by assassins, sent by her old school.

In some ways, White Magic Academy is more traditional than Black Magic Academy. There is more of a focus on schooling and education, rather than leaving the school halfway through the story. In others, it explores aspects of their society that weren't covered in the prequel. There's a good reason why witches have the maturity of thirteen-year-old girls (including her father, who gives me the same sort of negative vibes as Fred and George Weasley), ranging from a willingness to act like hormonal idiots to carrying jokes and pranks well into 'not funny' territory. And being told they have to kill their death-enemies or risk being killed in turn. Rulisa grows up, a lot, as she realises just how much was left out of the books she was forced to read at her former school.

And where Black Magic Academy can be said to be about Mildred finding her place, White Magic Academy can be said to be about Rulisa growing into a mature young woman.

Overall, the book is light reading, but extremely fun. And clean – Rulisa is engaged to her boyfriend (their society practices betrothals, probably because of the lack of maturity), but they share nothing more than a few kisses throughout the story. I would recommend it to both young and old readers, without hesitation.

You can find Emily's website here: <http://www.emilymarthasorensen.com/>

SerCon

Jack Williamson Bio-Bibliography

by

Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D.

N3F Historian

John Stewart Williamson (April 29, 1908 -- November 10, 2006), who wrote as Jack Williamson, was a science fiction (SF) fan and later writer, sometimes called the Dean of Science Fiction after the death of Robert Heinlein. Early in his career Williamson used the pseudonyms Will Stewart and Nils O. Sonderland.

Williamson was born in Bisbee, Arizona Territory, and spent his early childhood in western Texas. In search of greener pastures, his farming family migrated to rural New Mexico in a horse-



drawn covered wagon in 1915. The farming was also difficult there and the family turned to ranching, which Williamson's extended family does to this day. Williamson served as a weather forecaster in the Army Air Corps during World War II.

As a young man, he discovered *Amazing Stories* after answering an ad for a free issue. He began to write his own fiction as a teenager and sold his first story to *Amazing Stories* at age 20: his "The Metal Man" was published in the December, 1928 issue. During the next year three more of his stories were published in the pulps *Science Wonder Stories* and *Air Wonder Stories*. He also published "The Girl from Mars" (written with Miles J. Breuer) as *Science Fiction Series #1*.

His work during this early period was heavily influenced by genre author A. Merritt, who had written several popular science-fantasy novels. Noting the Merritt influence, SF author/critic Algis Budrys described Williamson's "The Metal Man" as "a story full of memorable images."

By the 1930s Williamson was an established genre author, and the teenaged Isaac Asimov was thrilled to receive a postcard from Williamson, whom he idolized, that congratulated him on his first published story and offered "welcome to the ranks." Williamson remained a regular contributor to the SF pulps, but did not achieve financial success as a writer until many years later.

Education/Academic Life

Williamson received his Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts degrees in English in the 1950s from Eastern New Mexico University (ENMU) in Portales, NM (near the Texas panhandle), and joined the faculty of ENMU in 1960.

Williamson earned a Ph.D. in 1964 at The University of Colorado in Boulder, Colorado, writing his dissertation on the early work of H. G. Wells.

Marriage and Family

Williamson married a young divorced woman with children, Blanche Slaten Harp ("practical and down-to-earth"), who had a son and daughter when she was only a teenager. They had known each other in high school, but had not dated then. They raised her children, but did not have any children of their own. He later credited Blanche with helping him with his writing.

Representative SF/Fantasy Works

The Girl from Mars (1930) [with Miles J. Breuer]
 The Green Girl (1930)
 Golden Blood (1933)
 Xandulu (1934)
 The Blue Spot (1935)
 Islands of the Sun (1935)
 Reign of Wizardry (1940)
 Darker Than You Think (1948)

The Humanoids (1949)
 Seetee Shock (1949) [as by Will Stewart]
 Seetee Ship (1951) [as by Will Stewart]
 Dragon's Island (1951)
 Undersea Trilogy (1954 – 1958) [3 novels with Frederik Pohl]
 Star Bridge (1955) [with James Gunn]
 The Dome Around America (1955) [aka Gateway to Paradise]
 The Trial of Terra (1962)
 Starchild Trilogy (1964 – 1969) [3 novels with Pohl]
 Bright New Universe (1967)
 Trapped in Space (1968)
 The Moon Children (1972)
 The Power of Blackness (1975)
 Saga of Cuckoo (1975, 1983) [2 novels with Pohl]
 Brother to Demons, Brother to Gods (1979)
 Manseed (1982)
 Lifeburst (1984)
 Firechild (1986)
 Land's End (1988) [with Pohl]
 Mazeway (1990)
 The Singers of Time (1991) [with Pohl]
 The Silicon Dagger (1999)
 Terraforming Earth (2001)
 The Stonehenge Gate (2005)

Comic Strip

Williamson and artist Lee Elias created the SF comic strip *Beyond Mars*. The Sunday strip ran in New York's Daily News from February 17, 1952 until May 13, 1955 -- initially as a full tabloid page and, near the end, as a half tab. It was set in the same universe as Williamson's novels *Seetee Ship* and *Seetee Shock*.

Awards/Honors

World Fantasy Lifetime Achievement Award, 1994.

Hugo Awards for SF/Fantasy works (2 nominations; 2 wins):

1985: *Wonder's Child: My Life in Science Fiction* - nonfiction book, winner.

2001: "The Ultimate Earth" (Analog, 12/2000) - novella, winner.

Nebula Awards for SF/Fantasy works (1 nomination; 1 win):

2002: "The Ultimate Earth" (Analog, 12/2000) - novella, winner.

John W. Campbell Memorial Award (2 nominations, 1 win):

2000: The Silicon Dagger - honorable mention.

2002: Terraforming Earth - winner (tie).

Retro Hugo Award Nominations

For SF/Fantasy works 50 years past (3 nominations):

- 2014: *The Legion of Time* (novel, nomination).
 2016: “The Reign of Wizardry” (Unknown, March - May 1940) [novel, nomination].
 2016: “Darker Than You Think” (Unknown, December 1940) [novelette, nomination].

Williamson was inducted into the First Fandom Hall of Fame in 1968; and the SFWA named him its second Grand Master of Science Fiction (after Robert Heinlein), in 1976. In addition, the Horror Writers Association conferred its Bram Stoker Award for Lifetime Achievement on Williamson in 1998, and the World Horror Convention elected him a Grand Master in 2004.

His autobiography, *Wonder's Child: My Life in Science Fiction*, was published in 1984.

He continued to write as a nonagenarian and won both Hugo and Nebula awards during the last decade of his life, by far the oldest writer to win these awards. Thus, he is known today for having published SF stories in nine different decades.

Conclusions

The Oxford English Dictionary credits Williamson with inventing the terms “genetic engineering” (in his *Dragon's Island*) and “terraforming” (in his *Seetee Ship*, as by Will Stewart). In addition, his novel *Darker Than You Think* was a landmark speculation on the topic of shape-changing.

Throughout his writing career, Williamson suffered at times from writer’s block, which partly accounts for his work with co-authors.

My SF-reading friends and I liked most of Williamson’s stories, especially his *The Humanoids* – that we bought in the Simon & Schuster edition in 1949. We loved it when “With Folded Hands,” the story on which this novel was based, was broadcast on radio’s *Dimension X* in 1950.

References

- Clute, John & Peter Nicholls (eds.). *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*. London: Orbit, 1993.
- Currey, L. W. *Science Fiction and Fantasy Authors*. Boston, MA: G. K. Hall, 1979.
- Eshbach, Lloyd Arthur (ed.). *Of Worlds Beyond*. Chicago, IL: Advent, 1964.
- Hauptmann, Richard A. *The Works of Jack Williamson: An Annotated Bibliography and Guide*. Framingham, MA: NESFA Press, 1997.

Note: In addition to the above works, various Internet sites were consulted.

Short Stories

The Menace from Farside by Ian McDonald Review from Greg Hullender and Eric Wong



(Hard SF Adventure; Luna) A teenage girl from a very non-traditional lunar family leads her siblings on a dangerous adventure to see the first footprint on the moon. (32,317 words; Time: 1h:47m)

This story has a bit of a slow start, but there's plenty of fun and excitement once the kids get out onto the lunar surface. This is a good way to get into the author's Luna series, which includes a number of novels and short stories, because this story is a prequel and pretty much stands alone. See related articles on Tor.com.

"The Menace from Farside," by Ian McDonald, published on November 12, 2019 by Tor Publishing.

Pro: The best part of this story is the increasingly dangerous adventure that starts once the kids get out of the airlock and onto the surface. From that point to the end, it's lots of tension and lots of excitement.

In the process, we get to know all four characters reasonably well, although obviously this is Cariad's story, in which she grows up a lot. (However, judging from the framing story where she talks to the robotic therapist, she's still not all that mature.) She doesn't just want an adventure; she wants to establish her dominance over the rest of her siblings. By the end, she does seem to see that that was the wrong thing to do, and she sees her siblings in a different light.

Kobe seems to be a high-functioning autistic guy, and his real joy is knowing and sharing technical details, but he loves Cariad (like a sister), and will do anything for her.

Cariad's jealousy of Sidibe almost seems rooted in the fact that Sidibe is much more mature than she is. She's the closest thing they have to an adult on their team, and she saves them more than once. She's the "menace" in the title—a menace to Cariad. In fact, the title of this novella is an homage to "The Menace from Earth," by Robert A. Heinlein, in which a teen girl on the moon who likes to fly in the low gravity deals with the "threat" posed by a woman visiting from Earth with whom she's sure her "boyfriend" (who doesn't know he's her boyfriend) has become infatuated.

Jair is probably the least well-developed character, although it helps to know that "neko" is Japanese for "cat." For whatever reason, Jair wants to be a cat, or at least be as much like one as possible.

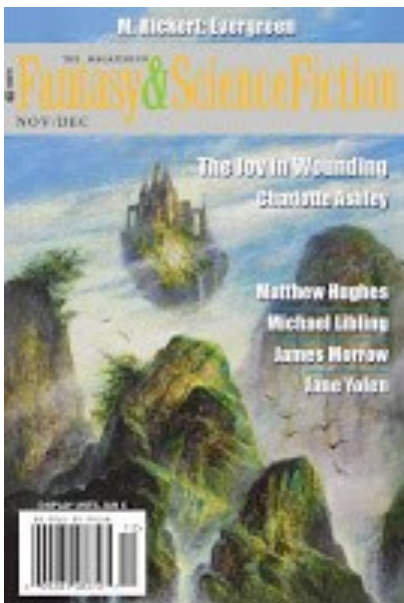
Another big delight is the well-thought-out setting. In the process of the adventure, we learn a lot about the lunar infrastructure and we get at least some idea of just how different the lunar society is from anything on Earth.

Note: From the other books, we know that the “sa” in “sasuit” stands for “Surface Activity.”

Con: The biggest weakness is the slow takeoff. The first quarter of the book is filled with Cariad’s rather petty concerns, even as it lays the foundation for the trip they’re about to take. I’m not sure the framing story (with the robot therapist) adds much either.

A small nit is that I think 2089 is about a hundred years too soon to expect to have this kind of infrastructure on the moon.

Knit Three, Save Four, by Marie Vibbert Review by Greg Hullender and Eric Wong



A Four Stars tale: Well tied-together (SF Thriller) A stowaway works with the crew to try to save the vessel, but all she’s really good at is knitting. (5,197 words; Time: 17m)

Pro: I’m going to call this a hard-sf story, even though it’s about knitting. Mouth has a technical skill, and the whole story is about how she uses that skill to save everyone on the ship.

Extra fun is Mouth’s interactions with the rest of the crew, particularly Shirly. And Chen the robot is great comic relief.

Finally, the ending has a nice emotional punch to it.

Just for reference, the actual surface area of the ship is about 2500 m², assuming it really is a prolate spheroid of length 24 m and max radius 10 m. I’ll leave it to someone else to compute just how coarse the weave had to be for 2500 m of cable to cover the ship.

Con: The problem is a little contrived. It’s hard to believe there wouldn’t be any rescue procedure for a circumstance like this one. And if you don’t know knitting, parts of it drag.

Hopelessness and Helplessness Analysis by Chris Nuttall

There are times when I have a reaction to something without knowing precisely why I have a reaction. It’s always frustrating to think that I don’t like something without knowing precisely why I don’t like it. And one of those things is Rachel Swirsky’s short story; If You Were a Dinosaur, My Love. I didn’t like it and I honestly don’t know why it won an award – it certainly isn’t speculative fiction – but I couldn’t put my finger on why I didn’t like it.

The story is extremely emotional – and it is good at conveying that emotion. I felt for both of the main characters, neither of whom deserved to undergo either real or spiritual torment. It’s the mark of a good author to get someone into the head of a character and Rachel Swirsky manages that very well. Indeed, I have never read anything else by her, but I will certainly look

it up when I have the chance.

But I still don't like the story. It wasn't until today that I understood why.

It's hopeless. The main characters have no hope.

From my point of view, the narrator is engaging in a pointless revenge fantasy, combined with wishful thinking. If her lover had been a dinosaur, he would certainly not have been attacked by the thugs who put him into a coma. If ...

But he isn't a dinosaur. And he's still in a coma.

I was bullied at school, badly and relentlessly. Yes, I know what it's like to feel helpless. I know what it's like to wish for super-strength or something else that would allow you to beat up your tormentors or otherwise take control of your life ... and then to go back, time and time again, to reality, where the truth is you're defenceless. With that in mind, I understand precisely what is going through the narrator's mind. If her lover was stronger, if he was better able to defend himself, the story might have had a very different ending. But he wasn't and it didn't.

If the story had been one where the victim learns how to fight back effectively and does so, it would have been a far better story. An uplifting version of the tale where someone turns the tables on the bullies would be far more thrilling. Or, perhaps, one where the narrator sets out to take revenge ... maybe she becomes a crime-fighter, or a policewoman, or a lawyer ... it would have been a far more satisfying story and it wouldn't have been so hopeless. At the very least, even an ultimately doomed attempt to punish the thugs responsible for the attack would have made a better story.

There is a place for doom and gloom in speculative fiction, but I think it's all about hope. Hope that the human race can overcome difficulties and take to the stars, where we belong. Even a story as seemingly apocalyptic as *Dies The Fire* and its sequels (S. M. Stirling) is ultimately about the human race overcoming its new limitations and rebuilding a viable civilisation. Or *The Magic Goes Away* (Larry Niven), which is a thinly-veiled analogy for oil shortages, has hope. There may no longer be magic, but humanity will go on and overcome. Human ingenuity will take us far further than the naysayers ever deemed possible.

A story that features the last survivors dying out, perhaps one cannibalising the remainder, is not a hopeful story. There is a reason *The Screwfly Solution* is a horror story. No matter what happens, there is no hope.

And there is none in *If You Were a Dinosaur, My Love* either.

(The Blue Lantern Ring of Hope)

It is my belief that we, the human race, are destined to go to the stars. Yes, we have problems; yes, we will overcome these problems. Our lives today are far better, on any number of counts, than the lives of our ancestors, even those who lived a mere 100 years ago. Our lives in the future will be better still, once we go into space for good. Stories that show humanity rising to the challenge and overcoming our problems – be they on a small or large scale – echo down the ages because they speak to the greatness inherent in the human soul. We're humanity! We may

make mistakes, we may be knocked down, but we get up again and keep going.

Uplifting stories will always be better, always be remembered longer, than stories that wallow in doom and gloom.

SF and speculative fiction isn't the only place to find uplifting stories. A story about a young man overcoming racism, or a young woman overcoming sexism, or a homosexual overcoming homophobia might also be uplifting. Someone struggling against the limits of their society or a story about someone suffering a serious injury or illness, yet picking up and carrying on with their lives ... yes, that would be uplifting. There would be hope.

And isn't that what we all need?

Hopelessness will destroy us. The spiritual lassitude, the helplessness, of the narrator of *You Were a Dinosaur, My Love* is corrosive, weakening her ability to resist, let alone forge a new path or take control of her destiny. Resistance is not only futile to her, it is inconceivable. She thinks of herself – and her lover – as nothing more than the helpless victims of fate. In truth, they were beaten a long time before her lover ever ran into a bunch of thugs.

This says a great deal about the West today. We spent 50 years trapped in the shadow of nuclear war, a war that would destroy both sides. We were scared and we allowed that fear to hold us prisoner. Now, facing a far lesser challenge, we find it hard to stick up for ourselves, to raise a hand in our own defence. We spend more time coming up with excuses for the enemies of civilisation than we do plotting ways to fight them.

We lack hope.

FDR was quite right. The only thing we should really fear is fear itself ...

... Because fear leads to hopelessness, and hopelessness leads to death.

Straight Outta Tombstone

by David Boop (Editor), Larry Correia, Maurice Broadus,

Sarah A. Hoyt, Alan Dean Foster, Kevin J. Anderson,

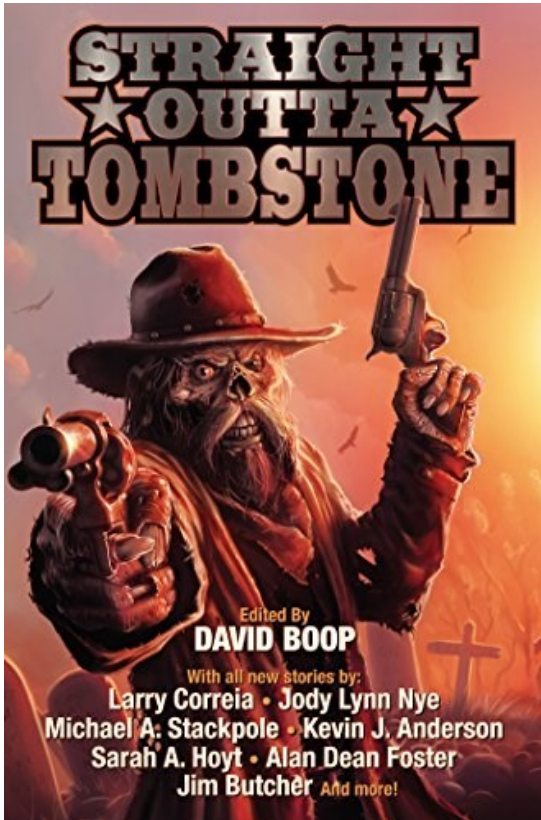
Naomi Brett Rourke, Julie Campbell...

Review by Pat Patterson

BUBBA SHACKLEFORD'S PROFESSIONAL MONSTER KILLERS by Larry Correia. Ever since Owen got to throw his boss out of the window, his fans have been clamoring for more. And, by going into the past, we can get a LOT more Monster Hunter stories. Some things stay the same: not all monsters are evil; chicks with guns are WAY cool; and NOBODY ever said "Dang, why did I bring all this ammunition?" Oh, yeah, and the government is mental.

TROUBLE IN AN HOURGLASS by Jody Lynn Nye. Well, her name isn't REALLY trouble. Beauty may, perhaps, be only skin deep, but mischief goes right down to the bone. Mom tends bar with a shotgun, daddy builds time machines in the shed.

THE BUFFALO HUNTERS by Sam Knight. What do you get when you go hunting buffalo with a giant Russian count and his daughter? Well, you get buffalo, for one thing. Not much



sport to it, but this sort of thing really happened. In this case, though, it's not the buffalo that are the biggest threat.

THE SIXTH WORLD by Robert E. Vardeman. This story combines mad scientists, native spook stuff, and little grey men. The most sympathetic character gets killed first, but he was sort of a wimp.

EASY MONEY by Phil Foglio. Nasty, nasty man writes a story with a punchline at the end. It's a HECK of a good cowboy story, too.

THE WICKED WILD by Nicole Givens Kurtz. This could ALMOST not be a Wild West story, but it's the wicked ways of the Wild West that make the people possible. Umm, I didn't mean to do that much alliteration. Anyway, bad guys used to be able to get away with stuff until they got shot. Or something.

CHANCE CORRIGAN AND THE LORD OF THE UNDERWORLD by Michael A. Stackpole. Nicely steam-punk in nature, a classic tale of the poor & downtrodden being taken advantage of by the owners of the mine.

THE GREATEST GUNS IN THE GALAXY by Bryan Thomas Schmidt & Ken Scholes. After the Big Shoot-Out, there's always some kid who thinks he has to prove himself. Usually, the story ends with a pimply 15-year-old staring up at a blue sky. Sometimes it ends in zombies. Or not.

DANCE OF BONES by Maurice Broaddus. When you take a man's money, you do the job he hired you to do. And if that means you have to do a little extra? Well, that's a risk you take.

DRY GULCH DRAGON by Sarah A. Hoyt. Would you want your sister to marry a dragon? There's really NOTHING I can say about that concept without the risk of offending a brother-in-law. Really. I've got some responses, but I think I may have gone a bit far already.

THE TREEFOLD PROBLEM by Alan Dean Foster. Mad Amos Malone and his trusty steed, Worthless, are not the sort you want to aggravate. Amos walks into a foreclosure situation, and, well, they just blow the competition away.

FOUNTAINS OF BLOOD by David Lee Summers. It's rather a creepy title, but I don't know what I'd come up with to replace it. A hired gun goes beyond the necessary minimums to provide true service to the man who hired him; and there are vampires, and a bodacious lady marshal who rides a motorcycle called Wolf.

HIGH MIDNIGHT by Kevin J. Anderson. The Shamblin' Zombie Private Eye encounters the ethics of the Wild West through time travel. Sort of.

COYOTE by Naomi Brett Rourke. This particular story has just as much non-natural events as

the others, but it reads truer. Some of the other stories NEED a volume like this in order to exist; this one doesn't. The story of the old man and his granddaughter could appear anywhere from *Boy's Life* to *Playboy* to *Good Housekeeping*. Maybe not *Popular Mechanics*.

THE KEY by Peter J. Wacks. Sorry. Didn't get this one. It has lots of famous people in it, though. And there is whiskey involved.

A FISTFUL OF WARLOCKS by Jim Butcher. Everybody said Wyatt Earp was a tough lawman. He says, in this story, that he can't leave just because the bad guys want him to, or pretty soon everybody will be pushing him. Seems like a good philosophy for a Wild West lawman to have.

The Forbidden Thoughts Anthology Review by Jim McCoy

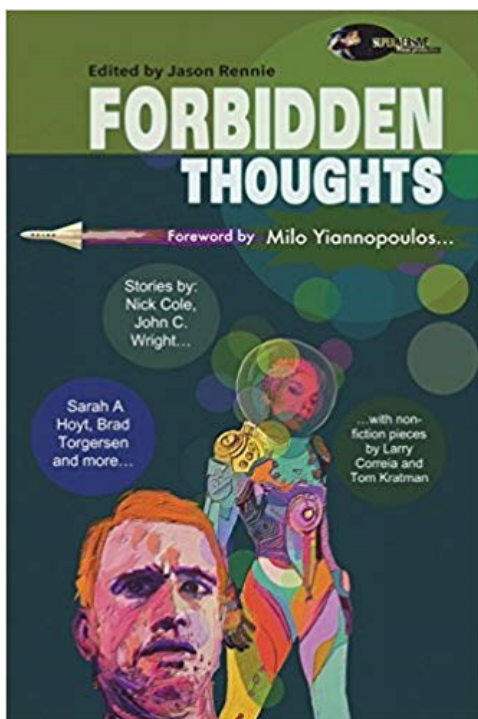
So it's Triggering Day. I felt like writing a book review. There are a bunch of books on my phone, paper books in my room, a bunch more on my Nook and a library down the street, but only one seems to fit on a day like today. The *Forbidden Thoughts* anthology seems to be the only fitting book to review on a day like today. Seriously. There is literally (and no, I don't mean "figuratively" I literally mean literally) no better SF/F book to review on the day Trump gets inaugurated than the one with an introduction by Milo Yiannopoulos. Milo was his biggest celebrity endorser, right? And, of course, Trump IS the candidate who said all the things we're not allowed to say, so *Forbidden Thoughts* on Inauguration Day it is.

The book starts with the aforementioned introduction by Milo and I have to say something here. Milo comes out with ideas for a number of stories. This irks me to no end. Hey Milo, here's a suggestion. If you want to see a particular story idea come to life WRITE THE DAMN THING!! Bro, you write like a champion. I'm not the world's biggest Breitbart fan but I've read some of your stuff. So just do us all a favor: Bring Milo's take on fiction into the world for all to

see. It'll sell. You'll make money. We'll all enjoy it. And hey, the Left won't let you speak. They'd rather riot than allow someone with a different belief system appear in public. You've got time to write fiction when your appearances get cancelled. He does bring up some interesting points about the state of science fiction and fantasy as well. I'm really not doing him justice here. It annoyed me though.

Following the introduction is a "The Razor Blade of Approval" by Ben Zwicky. I won't spend much time here. It's a decent poem but it's rather short and I'm not really a poetry guy. It gets its point across and it's like maybe three hundred words long. I'm not really sure how to review something that short.

"Safe Space Suit" is the next story. It brings up a point that would surely get Nick Cole branded as a horrible person by the left if he hadn't been branded as such already after he published *CTRL, ALT Revolt!* Cole tells a thoroughly entertaining tale from the point of view of a mission commander who just killed his crew by



putting the wrong person in charge of piloting a spacecraft because REPRESENTATION!!!! Watching this guy sweat as his career falls apart around him is epic and also does a lot to highlight the way SJWs eat their own when the mood strikes. I enjoyed this one a lot. Cole creates wonderful characters and this is one story that definitely did not disappoint in that regard.

The spacesuit in "Safe Space Suit" is also a treat, as it likes to whisper politically correct sweet nothings in your ear while you're in trouble and possibly dying. It's like a constant hashtag stream read out loud to characters in need of emotional support liberal style. I was laughing my ass off.

"Auto America" is the story of a man who gets stopped by a malfunctioning police robot on the way to work. You can feel the MC's frustration at dealing with a situation that he shouldn't have to. This one is really short, but it's a treat.

"A Place for Everyone" shows the folly of "balanced representation" while simultaneously highlighting government corruption. It's as awesome as it is funny... and frustrating. The ending is epic. Seriously. This one was worth the price of the anthology all by itself.

Up next was "The Code". This one was every bit as horrifying as anything else I've seen. Laws have been passed that regulate contact on a date to the point where a man has to speak a specific script to his date (and have her agree in another script) to avoid rape charges if he accidentally touches her. Women abound who love to trap men into touching them before they agree just so to see the men hauled off by the police. Our hero spends his date sweating about what's going to happen to him. The amount of tension Matthew Ward manages to build in a story this short is staggering. Kudos to him.

What happens when history has "progressed" to the point where the truth can be hidden? What happens when everyone is forced to hide their own chosen "genders", because it might offend someone else by causing them to consider their own? Oh, and what happens when a weapon wielding barbarian wanders into town to read the true history? That's a good question. Joshua Young answers it in "History of the World Gone By." He does a damn good job too.

"The Social Construct" is the story of a child that was created as a toy and had several sex changes to suit the tastes of his parents. It makes sense, right? Change the plumbing, raise the kid to be an >insert gender here< and you're all set. If you change your mind while the child is still a baby just change the environment and the gender will change, right? It's an interesting question, and, given that there are already cases of people getting sex changes for their young children, it's topical. It's also a horrifying look into a possible future. Read at your own risk. You'll enjoy the story, but you might feel a little twitchy afterward. I know I did.

Have you heard of Post Birth Abortion? A.M. Freeman has and, in "At the Edge of Detachment" she spins a tale of an injured child who isn't sure if he'll see tomorrow because he's an inconvenience to his mother and she can legally have him euthanized since he hasn't reached the age of thirteen, at which he would be considered an actual human being with rights. PBA has seriously been suggested by a pair of bio-ethicists. They claim they weren't really trying to propose an actual law to allow this when they suggested it. That may or may not be true. What is true is that I was late getting back to my lunch at work because I couldn't put this story down. Speaking of may or not be true; there are unconfirmed reports that someone put "The Social Construct" and "At the Edge of Detachment" did it deliberately to cause nightmares. Granted,

they're mainly unconfirmed because I just made them up, but that's my story and I'm stickin' to it.

Up next is "A History of Sad Puppies" by Larry Correia and "Whence Puppydom?" by Brad Torgersen. They create a break from the fiction and give us a chance to read some of Larry Correia's blog posts. The guy is an epic blogger, so if you can only read one blog, read mine. But if you can only read two blogs read his...right after you read mine. Torgersen's addition is a reaction to the No Awarding of several categories.

Ray Blank follows this and his "If You Were a Hamburger My Love" had me in stitches. I was once ordered to read "If You Were a Dinosaur My Love" for penance after a misstep in a Facebook group I am part of and it was terrible. Blank's parody is actually entertaining though, mainly because Dinosaur was not. Some lighthearted fun was precisely what was needed at this point.

"Imagine" is a story based on the song of the same title by John Lennon and the Left's current attitude toward Christianity. I've read a bunch of these types of stories lately and they all register as eerie and way too possible. Pierce Oka does a good job with this one.

"Graduation Day" is the story of a man who is watching his daughter by sperm donation graduate and get her job assignment. It turns out that he has also been charged with raping her mother by impregnating her - with sperm that have been donated to a sperm bank- without asking her permission first. This one was well written but seemed just a bit too "out there" for me. I couldn't quite suspend disbelief far enough to overcome the reaction that a woman would press charges for rape over sperm she had paid for. YMMV.

Speaking of Brad Torgersen his story comes next. "Hymns of the Mothers" is chilling and haunting. It's an awesome story though and someone very dear to me points out that there needs to be a follow up novel to this. She's right. (Don't tell her I admitted that in public. There is no reason to give her a swelled head.) In a world where lytes (women) hate and use trogs (men) for reproductive purposes and heavy lifting one lyte finds herself interested in a trog as a *GASP* actual person. She also finds out where babies come from and what lytes and trogs do when they think no one is watching. So here's the deal if you read this, Mr. Torgersen: Write the book. I'll guarantee you that I'll buy two copies; one for me and one for her. See! You're practically rich already!

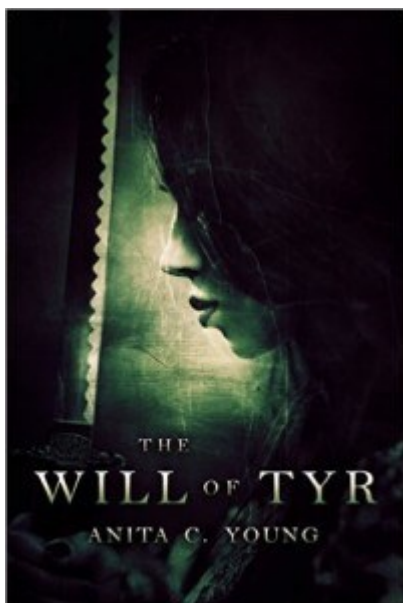
John C Wright's "By His Cockle Hat and Staff" is epic but it's TOO DAMN SHORT. Ok, I'll grant you that it's one of the longer entries of the anthology, but this is too good of a story with too rich of an environment and too much backstory to be confined to a short. Seriously. This one story could easily have been a novel. There is potential here for a never-ending series of books. The story itself is about a society of leftists who discover alternate timelines and decide to turn all other timelines into their own perfect version of history. Seriously, take this idea and these two characters fighting against it and the battles would be awesome dipped in awesome sauce on a stick. And yes, I know it's a story in an anthology and he was probably limited as to how much space he could take up but dammit, it's my bloggie and I'll whine if I want to.

Tom Kratman's "The Rules of Racism" came next. It's not a story. It's not entertainment. It should be required reading for anyone who wants to talk racial politics in the United States in the twenty-first century. 'Nuff said.

Food of Famous Authors

Pepper Steak by Anita Young

Review and Cooking by Cedar Sanderson



I've done a husband-wife pairing before, with Sarah and Dan Hoyt. But it took me altogether too long to realize that although I'd gotten a recipe from James Young, I hadn't talked with his lovely wife Anita about her books and food yet. For the meal, I'm making her Pepper Steak, and we're recommending her Paranormal Thriller series to you, the latest of them being *The Will of Tyr*. She writes a psychological, character driven book, one that will appeal to paranormal romance readers. For such a dark story as she can twist, she likes bright food!

Since I knew there would be the green of scallions, I chose a red and a yellow sweet pepper to get the most color possible in this dish. Food doesn't always have to be about brown.

Before you stir-fry, you will want to have everything prepped and ready, once the pan is hot and the action starts, there is no dilly-dallying around.

One of my readers was kind enough to send me a packet of Sichuan Pepper Powder to try. Be careful, he cautioned, it's potent! Start with just a pinch. My pinch may be smaller than his, we could taste it but there was no heat. Next time I'll try two or three pinches.

In the hot wok, fry the vegetables, white part of scallions, ginger and garlic first, then when they are barely tender, remove them to a bowl.

Fry the meat in portions, adding a little oil, then about half the meat, keeping the marinade in the bowl until the end, when you put everything back in the wok and pour the marinade over, cooking until it thickens into a gravy.

This came out very well, served with sticky rice. The First Reader commented that it needed more spice. Next time I'll be less timid with the pepper powder.

Pepper steak

Ingredients

Sauce/Marinade:

1/2 c soy sauce

2/3 c water

1/4 c rice wine vinegar

1 tbsp honey

2 tbsp corn starch

Pepper to taste

Meat and Veg:

1 1/2 lb thinly sliced steak (I used london broil, but any cheap cut will do)
2-3 tbsp peanut oil (or canola, you need an oil with a high smoke point)
2-3 sweet peppers
bunch of scallions
1/4 cup chopped ginger
5-6 garlic cloves

Instructions

Whisk together the sauce ingredients in a bowl, toss the meat in it to coat. If you will be marinating overnight, put this mixture into a large ziploc and in the fridge. Otherwise just give it a stir every few minutes while you prep the rest of the meal.

In the rice cooker, put two cups of short-grain rice (I like Nishiki) and three cups of water. Set to white rice and leave it.

Prep the vegetables, putting the thinly-sliced sweet peppers and white part of the scallions in one container, and the green tops in another. They cook at different rates, so you won't add the greens until the very last stage. Finely mince the garlic and ginger.

Heat your wok over med-high heat until it is very hot. Carefully add a tablespoon of oil, then toss in the garlic and ginger. Stir once or twice, then add the rest of the peppers and onion mixture. Don't let the garlic and ginger burn. Stir fry until the peppers are barely tender (they will be cooked more later) and pour them from the wok into a bowl.

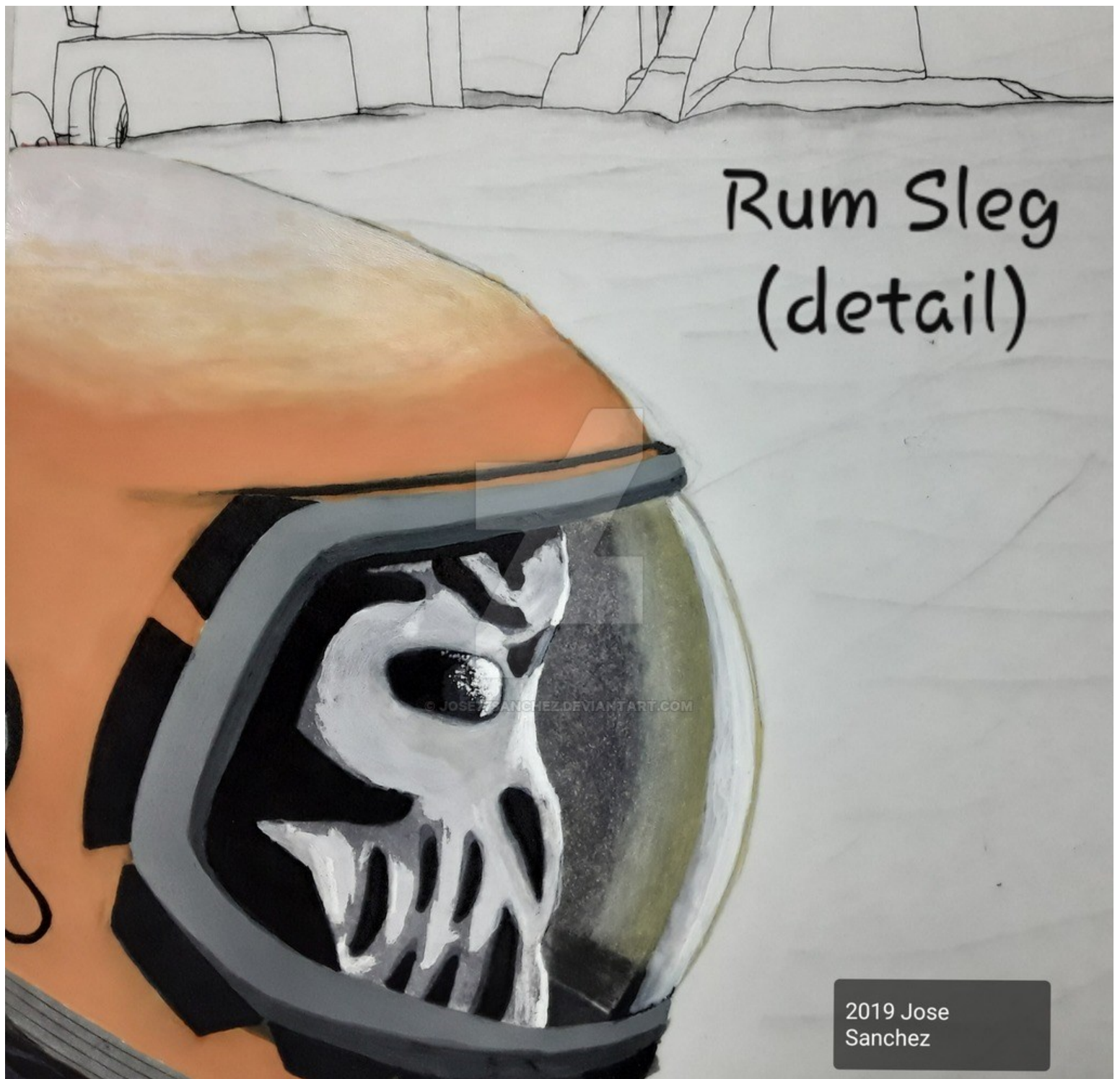
Add another tablespoon of oil, letting the temp come back up until it almost starts to smoke, then with a slotted spoon to allow the sauce to escape, add about half the meat to the wok. Stir-fry until browned, then add to the bowl with the veg.

Add another tablespoon of oil, stir-fry the remaining meat, and then pour the contents of the bowl into the wok. Add the sauce and allow to simmer, stirring gently, until it thickens. Fold in the green onion tops and serve.





Purple Gothic Angel by Angela K. Scott



Mandalorian Rum Sleg by Jose Sanchez