The N3F
Review of Books
Incorporating Prose Bono

Professor George Phillies, D.Sc., Editor
April 2021

Fiction

Prose Bono

Continued, over

Literary Criticism

FINIS ... 38

Editorial

We continue to look for more reviewers. We have a fine group of people writing for us, but as time goes on, interests change, time for writing changes, so that long-time reviewers gradually will tend to need to be replaced by new reviewers. Your support in our search for reviewers will be most helpful.

~~~~~~~~~~

The N3F Review of Books is published by the National Fantasy Fan Federation, PO Box 143, Tonopah NV 89049 and is distributed for free to N3F Members and archival sites. Editor: George Phillies, 48 Hancock Hill Drive, Worcester MA 01609, phillies@4liberty.net. In most issues superb proofreading support was provided by Jean Lamb. Most of our lead reviewers have blogs or web sites. Some of them link from their reviews on the internet to Amazon. If you buy at Amazon.com via their web pages, they get a modest financial reward. Some of us also write novels. Our lead reviewers are:

Declan Finn http://www.declanfinn.com

Jason P. Hunt http://SciFi4Me.com http://SciFi4Me.tv

Mindy Hunt: http://SciFi4Me.com http://SciFi4Me.tv

Patrick Ijima-Washburn http://patokon.com

Jagi Lamplighter http://SuperversiveSF.com

Jim McCoy http://JimbosSFFreviews.blogspot.com

Chris Nuttall http://ChrisHanger.wordpress.com

Pat Patterson http://Habakkuk21.blogspot.com

George Phillies http://books-by-george.com

Jeffrey Redmond's writings also appear in the N3F zines Origins and Ionisphere

Cedar Sanderson http://www.CedarWrites.com

Thomas E. Simmons http://homasesimmons.com

Tamara Wilhite also appears at http://LibertyIslandmag.com

To join the N3F: http://N3F.org./join. Submit articles to the editor, George Phillies, phillies@4liberty.net as text files, MSWORD files, or .odt files. The N3F claims no ownership on published submissions beyond the nonexclusive right to distribute the Review and its articles in all formats, including archival sites.
~~~~~~~~~~

Fiction

Architects of Memory by Karen Osborne
Review by Sam Lubell

A crew of space salvage workers with their own secrets may hold the key to ending a war with a never-seen alien race in this debut space adventure.

One of the fun but confusing aspects of science fiction world-building is that many novels throw the reader into a new universe and slowly reveal the background and backstory. Instead of having characters explain things to each other, the much-derided "As you know Bob...", or starting a chapter with a quote from the *Encyclopedia Galactica* or the works of Princess Irulan, modern novels trust the reader will keep reading through the strange situations until the key concepts are introduced and the setting makes sense. This is what happens in *Architects of Memory*, a debut novel by Karen Osborne set in a corporate-dominated universe where indentured laborers work in space to earn citizenship and first contact with the alien Vai has resulted in a war that has killed millions.

The book has two viewpoint characters. Ashlan "Ash" Jackson is a pilot on the cargo spaceship *Twenty-Five*. She is indentured to Aurora Intersystems, a big step up from her position as a miner for a different company. When she works off her seven-year indenture, by earning bounties for recovering salvage from spaceships partially destroyed in the war with the alien Vai, she will gain citizenship. But before then, any medical care will increase the length of her indenture and a major illness will cause Aurora to kick her out. So Ash hides the fact that she has contracted celestium madness, even though it causes hallucinations, impairs her coordination, and shakes her hands, which makes her a danger to her crewmates. She is attracted to Captain Kate Keller, the other viewpoint character, and the two are in the early stages of a relationship.

The book begins with Ash salvaging an alien weapon, whose loss may have caused the Vai to retreat from a major battle with the humans. This may be a crucial turning point in the war with the mysterious Vai, who, as far as Ash knows, have never been seen by any human. But it is so valuable that one of the crew turns traitor, selling their secrets and allowing mercenaries from another corporation to capture the *Twenty-Five*. Ash and Natalie, the only soldier, fake their deaths and flee to the *London*, the ship they were salvaging. Meanwhile, Captain Keller, who eventually realizes that the traitor has removed her control codes, tries to recapture her ship or, failing that, destroy it with the occupiers still on it.

Ash and Keller have separate adventures for most of the book not knowing that the other is still alive. In the course of the novel, they find out that another member of the crew was keeping secrets, and learn the truth behind Ash's illness, the Vai, and the war.

There is lots of action in the book, but the real plot is the slow revelation of the elaborate backstory behind the action. The characterization of the main characters is well done. Readers understand how Ash's own personal history influences her actions. We do not learn as much about Captain Keller but she too has a consistent, clearly drawn personality.

The book is mostly well written, especially considering that this is a first novel, although there are a

few places where more clarity would have helped. I think the captain (or Aurora) should have done a better job vetting the crew members and it was sometimes hard to track how the secondary characters who were left in one place got to the next place where they rejoined the plot. Due to the complexities of the background, this book may benefit from a second reading.

The sequel, *Engines of Oblivion*, comes out on February 9, 2021. The sequel will focus more on Natalie who was a secondary character in this book.

Readers who like mysteries, conspiracies, and characters keeping secrets will enjoy *Architects of Memory*. However, readers who are not used to the conventions of modern SF may find the initial chapters confusing since not everything is explained at the beginning. Readers who have the patience to trust the author and figure things out as they go will find the book worthwhile.

Aries' Red Sky by James Young
Review by Jim McCoy
http://JimbosSFFreviews.blogspot.com

So, what happens when two groups of humanity that have been separated by so many years and so much distance that they're unaware of each other's existence come into contact with one another? What if one group thought their territory was being invaded by aliens? How would the other group react? If you're not sure (or maybe if you just want to read a good story) ask James L. Young. I'm sure he'll smile and sell you a copy of Aries' Red Sky. He promotes his stuff at cons all the time, so I've got to believe he'll have a copy handy. It's worth the price too.

And let's face it. I know it's the holiday season, but pretty soon that'll be over. Your options will be to paint the walls or read a book and you JUST GOT that gift certificate. So I'm here to tell you how to spend that gift certificate and a few hours of your time and why. And you should spend that time and money on Aries' Red Sky. Keep reading, and I'll tell you why.

Aries' Red Sky is the best kind of Military Science Fiction: It was written by a real veteran, in this case a West Point graduate, so it's got a real military feeling to it. Mil-SF, when written by non-veterans often has one of two flaws: Either the people play second fiddle to the weaponry or they're all just a bunch of paper cutout asshole warmongers. Young, predictably enough for a veteran, gets it. Members of the military are really real people with real people problems, thoughts and emotions. It shows in his work. Yes, his characters have a "proper military bearing" but they also have moments when they're just like anyone else.

But that's not to say that the hardware gets short shrift. Young's warships are built to make war and have all of the fancy little doodads that make them better at it. Aries' Red Sky is a war story plain and simple. It takes place in space, so technology is needed and it's there. There is a bit of a conflict between design philosophies and that makes sense too. Anyone who has studied naval warfare during the Twentieth Century can certainly tell you all about the battles between battleship admirals and carrier admirals fought in planning rooms worldwide. It makes sense that different navies would build differently in centuries to come as well.

Speaking of philosophy, the two sides on this war find themselves with very different philosophies. There had to have been a temptation to make one side of the philosophical debate the good guys and the other the bad guys but Young avoids that. Don't get me wrong. Anyone who follows this blog

knows that I love heroic heroes and villainous villains. Sometimes though, wars are fought by people just doing their job. That really is the case in Aries' Red Sky. There are times when the two sides in the war see each other's actions as barbaric but at the end of the day, the characters are doing what's right according to what they've always believed. It's an interesting dichotomy. A lot of the tension in the book comes from philosophical differences and it just works.

Aries' Red Sky is also a work of Space Opera. You get all of the romance your little heart desires. If some of it ends up in a bunk, well... These are adults and I did mention something about people being people earlier, right? I once heard a Navy veteran talk about "friggin' in the riggin'." And, while there is obviously no rigging used in space, the phrase does seem to fit here. It's not just sex though and that's an important difference. There is romance here.

It sometimes amazes me how little Mil-SF authors skip over other real people things like time with family. Listen, we all know that members of the military frequently get deployed and can't see their family like they want to. The fact remains that I've never met, talked to, or heard of a member of the military who doesn't like to see their family whenever duty allows. Young included that in here and it's good to see.

Of course, in any war story there need to be fight scenes and Young is a master. The space battles in this thing are epic. There's plenty of boom-boom and bang-bang to keep that atavistic streak of yours going. We get both fleet engagements and marines in action, so it's varied enough to keep things interesting too. It's not pretty. Every one of the combat sequences in Aries' Red Sky is graphic in the extreme. This is good. Bad things happen in war and they should be given full their full weight in fiction. That much being said, if you're like that one chick I dated back in the Nineties who almost passed out at the mere thought of blood, maybe you should try watching House Hunters or something and leave the action and suspense to the people who can handle it. As for me, I'll be over here watching things explode.

I'm guessing that Young has read some actual military history. There is a lot going on in Aries' Red Sky that works in a historical setting but not so much in the here and now. That said, it works in an interstellar setting as well. I'm not making sense. Let me try it this way. In the real world, Planet Earth in 1814 the Battle of New Orleans was fought. It was the last battle in the War of 1812. It was also fought after the war had ended. How is that possible? It's possible because the Treaty of Ghent (that's the one that ended the war) was signed overseas and word hadn't reached the North American Continent in general or the city of New Orleans in particular in time to stop it. American General Andrew Jackson (yes that Andrew Jackson) and British General Sir Edward Pakenham were fighting what could have been a vital battle without orders because they had no way to receive any. Aries' Red Sky is the first in a trilogy and I'm wondering how that's going to affect the story moving forward. I can't wait to find out.

Bottom Line: 4.75 out of 5 Dropped Rocks.

Artemis by Andy Weir
Review by Sam Lubell

Author Andy Weir faced a problem. His first book *The Martian* became a phenomenon that inspired an excellent movie. So how could he follow that up? His solution was to write a book whose main character, Jazz Bashara, is a petty criminal, a smuggler who, while being exceptional smart, is also incredibly lazy who has wasted her every opportunity. This seems a long way from clean-cut all-American astronaut Mark Watney. At the same time, *Artemis*, named for only city on the moon, emphasizes engineering with lots of technical details and even a struggle to survive on the lunar surface that will make the

book attractive to fans of *The Martian.*

Essentially *Artemis* is a caper book. It opens with an exciting scene in which the narrator, Jazz, has an air leak in her spacesuit, which she bought used, and barely makes it to the airlock. As a result she fails the test to join the EVA Guild, a requirement to lead groups of tourists on the lunar surface. This sets a pattern for the book, Jazz messes up and resorts to something even more dangerous, illegal, or both, to get out of it. Jazz makes most of her money by smuggling in goods thanks to a pen-pal on Earth. When she delivers cigars to Trond, a billionaire living on the moon because the gravity is easier on his crippled daughter, the businessman offers her a million slugs if she can wreck Sanchez Aluminum's harvesters so he could buy the company. Although just a smuggler, not a saboteur, Jazz agrees.

Though complex engineering and a great deal of creativity, Jazz manages to wreck three of the four, not enough to fulfill the contract but enough to get Sanchez's mob owners to kill Trond and send an assassin after her. So Jazz has to figure out what is really going on, survive being chased by both an assassin and the moon's only cop, and perform an even bigger act of sabotage, one that risks killing everyone on the moon.

Weir has thought a lot about the conditions of working-class people on the moon. If there are to be tourists and engineers building things requiring zero gravity, there will have to be cleaning and porting. Jazz is so poor that she lives in a "capsule domicile," about the size of a coffin, eats "gunk" made of algae, and dreams of being rich enough to have her own condo with its own bathroom and shower.

Jazz is an interesting character. Everyone keeps telling her that she has wasted her potential. Her pen pal even writes, "I would give anything to be as smart as you. But I'm not. That's okay. I work hard instead, and you're lazy as hell." Even Jazz recognizes this failing. "…there's no one I hate more than teenage Jazz Bashara. That stupid bitch made every bad decision a stupid bitch could make. She's responsible for where I am today." Still, she does have ethics. She won't break a deal. When she lies to the head of security, he offers her money to tell the truth, knowing "You'll lie all day if we're just talking. But if I pay for the truth, that makes it a business deal. And a Bashara never reneges on a deal." She also is good in a crisis and better at making true friends than she realizes.

Ultimately, *Artemis* is not up to the standards of *The Martian*. The author is a bit too heavy-handed with the idea that Jazz is a mixed-up failure and sometimes allows the technical details to slow the plot. But it is good enough to show that *The Martian* was not a fluke. I look forward to Weir's next book.

Autonomous: A Novel by Annalee Newitz
Review by Sam Lubell

Autonomous: A Novel by Annalee Newitz is a novel about freedom and autonomy in both obvious and non-obvious ways. Certainly both robots and human slaves have issues with being autonomous. But so do other humans in a future where drugs can cause people to become addicted to their work. And people's autonomy is affected by their own prejudice and assumptions.

Autonomous is structured as an extended chase. Jack Chen is a drug pirate, "the Robin Hood of the anti-patent movement" who recently cloned Zacuity, a productivity drug. When people start dying from being unable to quit working, she fears she made an error in her copying, but instead discovers the problem is built into the drug. She is being chased by Eliasz, a military agent, and his robot Paladin. The robot is confused by Eliasz's emotional response to it; at times attracted to it and at other times refusing to acknowledge it. Ultimately, it deduces that Eliasz sees it as male but has been socialized to resist

male-male sexual relations. The solution is to convince Eliasz that it is female. Since Paladin's type of robots have a human brain, only used for facial recognition, Eliasz becomes obsessed with finding out information about the brain's former human.

Meanwhile Jack has resolved to bring down the drug company that invented Zacuity by proving that it broke the law. When Threezed, a slave Jack rescued, discovers an autonomous medical robot working with a Zacuity patient, he convinces her to join Jack who gets her a job in Jack's former lab, ironically the type of work Jack had wanted to do at that same lab.

So, while Jack, Med, and Threezed develop a cure, Eliasz and Paladin follow clues to track them down, while working on their own relationship.

Autonomous has the action of a police chase thriller but the speculation and ideas of a hard science fiction novel. This book deserves the attention it has been receiving. Recommended.

Black and White by Mark Wandrey
Review by Pat Patterson
http://Habakkuk21.blogspot.com

Excellent representational cover art, courtesy of Brenda Mihalko and Ricky Ryan.

I became a dedicated science fiction fan sometime before I was 10 years old (which was in 1963). Part of that was due to the fact that the Cold War was running rather hot at the time, and programs like the wildly popular Twilight Zone used space themes to examine all of the cultural deficits we struggled under. The space race was in full swing, and television sets were delivered to our classrooms so we could watch the earliest astronauts launch. Someone had the wisdom to get me started on the Tom Swift series of books, with all those extravagant themes. And, by the time I discovered Heinlein's "Have Spacesuit, Will Travel" in the sixth or seventh grade, I was forever hooked.

So, blessings on Mark Wandrey, because he has taken out the too-adult aspects of the standard (and excellent) Four Horsemen Universe books and produced the first of a series of YA books in that universe.

And it works!

Note: it's not namby-pamby, sweet-as-sugar, nothing ever happens in Bubble Land reading. Terry, the protagonist, 10 years old at the start of the book, has some REAL LIFE bad things happen to him. The worst is that his parents have a nasty divorce, and there are continued hostile actions after that. This is, unfortunately, something that the YA audience is familiar with. He also is grilled by unsympathetic bureaucrats, which MAY have happened to a kid who is placed in contact with the system. And, he has to deal with the enforced loss of the only life he has ever known.

The specific circumstances, which involve escaping on a spacecraft, are admittedly not the everyday fare of your average middle schooler. But that's okay; the characters are sympathetically portrayed, and Wandrey does an excellent job of showing the conflicts Terry experiences as his life is disrupted. We see that he has support, and we see the limits of that support.

Whereas exploding spaceships and flowing guts are a much-desired aspect of the adult books in the universe, the goriest parts are absent here. There is SOME essential story-advancing violence, and it's

nothing that I would forbid my two young teens from reading, and likely is far surpassed in the shoot-em-up games 14-year-old Kenneth plays. Appropriate adolescent-puberty-sexual feelings and tensions are tastefully presented, instead of ignored, as was the case in books written in the 1950s and 1960s.

It's a tough age to write about, and that is complicated by the fact that it's a tough TIME to be that age. Terry has to escape his near-idyllic life in Hawaii, spend time in space, then adapt to an underwater environment under kilometers of ice. In addition to the social support he has, he is also something of a natural when it comes to complex programming, which allows him to make some money on the side. He is also fortunate in his selection of friends and mentors, including the obligatory SEAL character. (Always gotta be a SEAL somewhere.)

It's very well executed, and though it is pitched to the YA audience, this senior adult found it to be enjoyable reading. Highly recommend.

Citizen of the Galaxy by Robert A. Heinlein
Review by Chris Nuttall
http://ChrisHanger.wordpress.com

Long before space travel, when we hadn't even filled up Terra, there used to be dirtside frontiers. Every time new territory was found, you always got three phenomena: traders ranging out ahead and taking their chances, outlaws preying on the honest men — and a traffic in slaves. It happens the same way today, when we're pushing through space instead of across oceans and prairies. Frontier traders are adventurers taking great risks for great profits. Outlaws, whether hill bands or sea pirates or the raiders in space, crop up in any area not under police protection. Both are temporary. But slavery is another matter — the most vicious habit humans fall into and the hardest to break. It starts up in every new land and it's terribly hard to root out. After a culture falls ill of it, it gets rooted in the economic system and laws, in men's habits and attitudes. You abolish it; you drive it underground — there it lurks, ready to spring up again, in the minds of people who think it is their 'natural' right to own other people. You can't reason with them; you can kill them but you can't change their minds.

-Citizen of the Galaxy

Robert A. Heinlein hated slavery.

It is odd, given just how many times he was lambasted on charges of racism, to realise just how deeply this shines through his work. The Puppet Masters, Logic of Empire, Farnham's Freehold, Time Enough for Love … Heinlein changed his mind many times on many issues, but never on this. Slavery was, as he saw it, a great evil and he spared no words in railing against it, detailing in great detail the horrors inflicted on both the slaves and their masters. I suspect this earned him very few friends in Dixie. Slavery was long gone by the time Heinlein was born, but the myth of the Lost Cause – and happiness in slavery – was still going strong.

And, in Citizen of the Galaxy, Heinlein puts forward his strongest argument against slavery and the slave trade.

Citizen of the Galaxy is probably best divided into four sections. In the first, a young boy – Thorby – is purchased as a slave by Baslim the Cripple, a beggar on a vaguely Islamic world and taught the trade of begging for food and money. As he grows older, he slowly comes to realise that there is more to Baslim than appears, a realisation that comes just before his 'father' is arrested by the secret police and brutally

hanged. Fortunately, Baslim is owed a great debt by the Free Traders – a society of interstellar merchants – and Thorby is taken onboard one of their ships before he can be hanged too.

This kicks off the second part of the story, as Thorby – aided by an interstellar anthropologist – is adopted into the Free Traders and starts carving out a place amongst them. It's a difficult task, made harder by the fact their society is both highly restrictive and extremely secretive about what the rules actually are. Thorby starts to fit in, only to discover that the Traders – and his second adopted father – intend to pass him on to his next place as soon as possible. And so … Thorby joins the Terran Hegemony Guard as an enlisted spacer. This eventually leads to Thorby's true identity being revealed.

Thorby, it seems, is none other than the long-lost heir to one of the largest interstellar shipping corporations in space. This would seem like good news, except Thorby finds himself grappling with his uncle for control – he may own the company, but his uncle controls it – and has to mount what is, in effect, a legal insurrection to get what is his by birthright. With the help of Leda, a distant cousin, he ends the book in control of the company, slowly trying to clean the slavers out of the business … and ruefully aware that, in some ways, he's just as much a slave to the company as he was to his first owners. But at least he can do something that might, eventually, put matters to rights.

Although Citizen of the Galaxy is generally regarded as one of Heinlein's juvenile books, it is very different from the others. It is, at base, the story of a young man who moves from society to society, barely having a chance to learn the ropes before he is forcibly moved to the next. (Thorby apparently has very little agency in his life, a piece of fridge brilliance I missed on the first read-through.) Beneath it, it is also the story of four very different societies; the slave culture of the Nine Worlds, the Free Traders, the Guards and the Corporation. As Thorby grows older, he becomes more aware of the strengths and weaknesses of all four – and, in their own way, how they both empower and restrict their people.

This includes a certain mixture of both open and covert slavery. The Nine Worlds is as open and honest about its true nature as the slaveowners of Dixie; slaves are traded openly, regularly abused and have no right of appeal. An escaped slave will be tracked down and mutilated, if caught. The Free Traders, by contrast, are both the freest society in space and the least free. Their freedom in space is bought by a regimented social system that trades women from ship to ship and cares little for individual freedom. Heinlein paints a curious picture of a society that is both led by women – I think it's the only example of a matriarchy in Heinlein's works – and terrifyingly oppressive to women. And men don't have it much better. The Guard is a standard military organisation, with the great redeeming point that every man is a volunteer; the Corporation (and the world of the mega-rich on Earth) is both immensely luxurious and just as trapped by social norms as the Nine Worlds.

Indeed, the further Thorby travels from the Nine Worlds, the harder it is to convince people that he was once a slave. A crewman on his ship is the first to question him, openly challenging his story, but he is far from the worst. People on Earth simply don't believe the stories about slavery and, when his grandparents realise what he was doing to survive, they are inclined to see him as letting the side down … rather than accepting that Thorby was lucky not to have to do something much worse to survive. Part of the reason that such horrors endure is that people simply don't believe they exist. It is a problem that has an uneasy resonance in our society.

Thorby himself is an odd duck. He is clever, but in some ways he is more of an idiot savant than a genuinely brilliant person. (That said, he has moments of remarkable insight into some characters, most notably his uncle.) Like most of the other Heinlein heroes of the juvenile books, he knows nothing about sex (possibly because his mentor steered him away from emotional entanglements) and doesn't understand the girls making passes at him or why his body is responding to them; unlike the others, he

is at least allowed to feel attraction to the girls. He sometimes needs to have things explained to him that should be immediately obvious. I'm tempted to declare that he's autistic.

The other characters are a curious mix of stock and strikingly unusual. Baslim seems nothing more than a beggar at first, with his true nature as an interstellar spy only revealed in hindsight. The Free Traders and the Guard are, in many ways, stock characters, although – as always when Heinlein uses stock characters – they are drawn from life. And Thorby's Uncle is, in many ways, both; he's a ruthless businessman, but he isn't actually evil. (I was expecting him to be the evil mastermind; apparently not.) Even Thorby concedes that his uncle has a point – it isn't remotely fair that his uncle should have worked hard for power and position, only to have everything thrown into doubt and eventually lost by sheer random chance. Why should he want to surrender control to Thorby?

As always, the book has drawn accusations of sexism. That is a difficult charge to sustain, although there may be some meat to it. The Nine Worlds puts women in one box, the Free Traders puts them in a slightly better box, the Guard appears to be male-only (to the point where Thorby wryly notes that the corps missed an excellent recruit in Leda) and Earth may put women in a box. Leda's uncle is quite dismissive of her, not entirely without reason; it is not to Thorby's credit that he echoes this attitude at the end of the book. If you like Thorby, and Heinlein goes out of his way to make Thorby likable, Leda is a heroine; if you're not so impressed with Thorby, you might wonder if Leda really did the right thing. Arguably, she didn't.

The book, like Starman Jones, features women trying to hide their intellect from men. (For once, the main character notices this even if he doesn't understand why.) It's an odd point and, justifiably, has drawn fire from critics. That said, there is a logic to it – as I will discuss later – that Heinlein probably couldn't bring out in the pages of a juvenile. An intelligent woman isn't a bad thing, as far as most men are concerned, but a woman – or anyone, really – who lords it over a man is. Men want to be comfortable with their wives, not feeling constantly challenged or put down. The instinctive male response to a challenge is to see a threat, not a potential partner. This isn't a point many people want to hear – and it is often deliberately misinterpreted – but it is often true.

Citizen of the Galaxy is more honest about sex and attraction than any of the other juveniles, as I have mentioned above, although it is still remarkably clean. Thorby's sheer lack of sexual knowledge strikes me as a little unrealistic, for someone who was brought up in a slave society. But then, as someone who knew that people could be bought and sold, he might be leery of allowing himself to develop too many attachments.

Overall, Citizen of the Galaxy is certainly the most unusual of Heinlein's juvenile books and, like most of them, it has aged fairly well. It presents the horrors of slavery in a manner youngsters can understand, without details that might turn off their parents; it shows how different societies can have different ideas of right and wrong (and how one society can seem natural and right to insiders while also horrific and evil to outsiders); it shows how people who are insulated from horror can pretend it doesn't exist and, perhaps most importantly of all in an era of instant gratification, that not everything can be solved instantly. Ignore the poor science, please: Citizen of the Galaxy is a book worth reading.

Clockwork, Curses, and Coal: Steampunk and Gaslamp Fairy Tales
Edited by Rhonda Parrish.
Review by Robert Runté
http://SFeditor.ca

Rhonda Parrish is perhaps Canada's best known and most prolific speculative fiction anthologist. By my count, this is her twenty-fourth themed volume and possibly her best yet. Clockwork, Curses and Coal (released March 2) is a mashup of Steampunk, Victorian/Edwardian era settings, and fairy tales. That may sound like an odd genre mix, but Parrish makes it work.

The opening story, Christina Ruth Johnson's "The Iron Revolution" for example, completely validates Parrish's vision. A mashup of not one, not two, but three fairy tales set in a steampunk version of the 1851 Great Exhibition, it's a delight. An engaging "find the changeling" mystery, it kept me guessing and made me an instant fan of steampunk fairy tales.

What I like most about Parrish, though, is not just her high standards and imaginative themes, but her ability to attract a diverse group of new voices that represent a full range of what speculative fiction has to offer. While she includes at least a few established and award-winning writers in each volume, Parrish has a knack for recognizing the next big talent and giving them space to breathe within her various anthology series. These new voices naturally bring diverse interpretations, diverse settings, and a wide variety of genre backgrounds to Parrish's anthologies.

Four of the authors here, for example, reinterpret fairy tales to provide a feminist critique of Victorian--and, of course, our own--society: "Sappho and Erinna" by Lex T. Lindsay is a queer retelling of one of my favorites fairy tales as a mystery steampunk adventure; "A Future of Towers Made" by Beth Cato gives a feminist twist to Rapunzel; "Necromancy" by Melissa Bode is a chilling metaphor for those obsessed with controlling their daughters; and Sarah Van Goethem's "A Bird Girl in the Dark of Night" seconds that condemnation of bad parenting.

Several of the stories could be loosely categorized as horror. In addition to "Necromancy" and "A Bird Girl in the Dark of Night" (which are both wonderfully disturbing), Reese Hogan's "The Balance of Memory" uses a bit of Mary Shelley to mash up a familiar fairy tale into a steampunk ghost story, while Brian Trent's "Checkmate" disembowels Alice in Wonderland (with a touch of Egyptian Styx) to give us steampunk-superhero combat.

The collection's tendency towards horror is nicely balanced by adventure romps, such as the aforementioned "Iron Revolution" and "Sappho and Erinna", Wendy Nikel's "Blood and Clockwork" and M. L. D. Curelas's "Coach Girl". Alethea Kontis's "The Giant and the Unicorn" is positively cuddly.

While the majority of stories are set in England, Diana Hurlbut's "Divine Spark" immerses the reader in an America both steampunk and darkly familiar, it's revival movements, racism, and misplaced religiosity playing out against a backdrop of mechanized murder. Laur VanArendonk Baugh's "Ningyo" is set in a steampunk and haunted Japan. "Father Worm" is set outside of any familiar time or space, and is undoubtedly the weirdest piece in the collection, but I'm glad it found its home here.

Out of the thirteen stories, there was only one I did not care for. I felt Joseph Halden's "Clockwork Tea" a little heavy-handed, the fairy tale connection a little forced, but kudos to Parrish for including a

post-colonial tale highlighting a nasty bit of British history with which most readers will be previously unfamiliar.

Otherwise, the stories all sing, a surprisingly high proportion for any anthology, and especially one catering to such a wide range of sensibilities. If you do buy and enjoy the range of short fiction in this steampunk-fairy anthology, I can equally recommend the other volumes in Parrish's astonishing output.

Clockwork, Curses, and Coal is published by WorldWeaver Press 2021

The Conductors by Nicole Glover
Review by Jason P Hunt

When I read the description of this book, I was intrigued. Post-Civil War, helping slaves and ex-slaves to safety and freedom. And magic. For me, I think of historical magic stories and I think of Europe, not my own back yard, especially during a period I tend to enjoy learning about. I thought to myself, why not?

I'm glad I did.

The Conductors is Nicole Glover's debut novel. I found it fun, suspenseful, and charming (no pun intended).

The story takes place in Philadelphia after the war is over and the slaves are given their freedom. Hetty and Benjy Rhodes are former slaves who have escaped and made their way north, helping others along the way. Hetty is very skilled in constellation magic, using the celestial beings as her guards or weapons. Benjy also knows magic but is not as skilled as his wife. Together they help with the Underground Railroad, finding others' loved ones, and solving crime mysteries. When the two of them stumble across a friend mysteriously murdered and surrounded in a cloud of dark magic, they start down a path that leads them to discover more about their inner circle than they thought they already knew.

Normally I'm not a huge fan of the last five to six pages of a book revealing why whoever did it did it part, but with this I was okay with it. I think it was because I was not ready to leave Hetty and Benjy. The character building Glover has put into them and their relationship with each other and their circle of friends is good. She has enough detail without it becoming overwhelming. Plus, the history of each of them as slaves, making them who they are today. And real complications that sometimes are overlooked. The path to freedom is not as "romanticized" as some stories may make. Glover reminds the reader of this. Love and loss and reconnections.

This drives the overall story. When the reader finds out the "who dun it and why," you almost want to feel sorry…almost. And the bad person is surprising. Glover weaves so many theories together that you become lost in them. There were times I thought I knew where she was going…just to find out I didn't.

Plus, the magic. Different spells named for constellations producing different visual effects of who or what they represent, guarding and protecting the characters. Who are slaves and ex-slaves. It seems counteractive to the stories they would tell about witchcraft or voodoo and secrets. The magic in this story is very open and used as another way for their owners to justify some of the cruelty, in their own magical way.

If this is the start of Nicole Glover's career as a writer, I look forward to what else she has ahead. I would even like to see more stories in this period. It could be a fun universe mixing genre into this period of history. Her storytelling seems effortless and well thought out. She left no stories unfinished.

I'm sad I have finished the book, but I will keep my eye out to see what Nicole Glover comes out with next.

Death Cult by Declan Finn
Review by Jim McCoy
http://JimbosSFFreviews.blogspot.com

Ladies and Gentlemen (and you in the back) I present to you a plot synopsis of Declan Finn's Latest Book, Death Cult.

Hi
OOF!
OUCH!
Dude, don't
He did?
Really?
That sounds like it hurt.
That had to have hurt
Them again
I'm not sure that's physically possible
I KNOW that's NOT physically possible
COOL!
HOT!
The End!

You may all now return to your regularly scheduled lives.

Kidding!

And honestly, I don't think I've quite done it justice. There is a slight chance that I'm oversimplifying a bit. The book is after all, quite a bit longer than that so called synopsis. It's worth reading every word though, because Death Cult kicks ass.

In Hell Spawn Saint Tommy fought a demon. It was ugly. There was lots of fighting and many people died to death. It was quite horrifying. I loved the book, but I was a bit worried. Don't get me wrong. Finn is a good author. But when you're writing Christian fiction and you go up against a demon, what comes next? I mean, I didn't see Finn bringing Satan himself to Earth for a straight up rumble, although I'd buy that book. The threats need to get bigger if you're going to keep it entertaining. So what do you do and who do you do it with? You fight a death cult. (No, that's not a spoiler. It's the title of the stinking book.) It works. It's deadly dangerous and definitely something that most Christians in general, and Catholics in particular, would find themselves at odds with.

I will say this much: Some of the symbolism in this book is both funny and a little blatant. I'm thinking of one thing in particular which I'm not going to mention. It makes massive amounts of sense. It's pretty gross. It's kind of funny in a sick sort of way because of how well it fits. I enjoyed it and it works but

it's pretty hard to miss.

Finn has built his world very well. We're treated to some old friends and some new acquaintances and they all fit together nicely. I really like it when a book stays true to the universe it is written in. Death Cult does so nicely. The internal logic is consistent, the characters stay true to their own motivations. I don't mean that the book is predictable because it's not. There is, however, a difference between logical and predictable and Finn has found his groove here.

Having said that, it's worth mentioning that not every saint was Mother Theresa. I mean Saint George slew the dragon and the Catholic faith has seen its share of fights as well as saints that were involved in them. Tommy is no exception. Yes, he's a nice guy when he can be. That doesn't mean he's always a nice guy. My pastor (who admittedly is not Catholic) just did a sermon a few weeks ago about the sixth commandment and talked about how it's not wrong to kill in the defense of life. Trust me when I tell you that Tommy has plenty of reasons to fight God would approve of all of them.

In a way, part of the reason I think I liked this book so much is because Finn picked a villain that made sense in the context of that selfsame commandment. The villain is the kind of person you just want to slap and can't. They are evil personified (and I'm guessing that's intentional) and hide behind a facade of providing a useful service. They really boil my butt. It did me heart well to see Tommy after them.

Finn has always (or at least as long as I've been reading his work) been able to write an awesome action sequence and Death Cult gave him a chance to show off his skills. You start to feel bad for Tommy after awhile because of all the crap he is going through but that doesn't mean it's not fun to "watch". I will say that I have no intention of ever getting on Finn's bad side though. It would appear to be a bad idea. If he can conceive of violence at this level, he might just be able to get the drop on me. That would be a bad thing.

The politics in this book work for me. I have no trouble seeing a liberal mayor cover for an unmitigated evil within his city if it fits his ideology. Finn does a good job of displaying things in a way that would not please the mainstream media but fits with the beliefs of roughly half the country. It is presented in a manner consistent with religion (his main character is a saint in the making after all) but without being overly preachy. There are conversations I've had with family members that cover some of the same subjects. I'd like to get some of them to read Death Cult specifically, but since they don't really do horror… UGH

Let's face it though. Family or not, if you can't enjoy a Declan Finn book you pretty much suck at life and your opinion doesn't really matter. Seriously, you all need to read this book right now. I'll wait to finish the review. Hie thee off to Amazon and purchase the thing. The link is down there somewhere. Okay, okay. If you haven't bought the first book, Hell Spawn then I'll wait for you to get back after buying both of them. Go ahead.

Back now? Did you put your credit card number in right? Actually, I don't really care as long as you didn't use mine. I bought the Indiegogo with the ARC and the autographed copy so yeah... I dished out the loot already.

Ok, so maybe I talked a bit of trash there, but this is a really good book and I'm seriously looking forward to number three. I think he announced a title, but if so, I'm pretty sure I forgot what it was going to be. That's okay though. I'm gonna read it anyway.

Bottom Line: 4.75 out of 5 Hail Marys

The Demon Headmaster Series by Gillian Cross
Review by Chris Nuttall
http://ChrisHanger.wordpress.com

"I think the Headmaster is a marvellous man and this is the best school I've ever been to".

The Demon Headmaster and its sequels (five successors, one reboot) are not magic school stories in the classic sense, unlike Harry Potter or Schooled in Magic. There is one magician – or a mutant, depending on how you look at it – and a handful of people who have strange abilities of their own, but they don't go to magic school and (apart from the titular character himself) have no real control over their abilities. And yet, I have chosen to review the books … because, in a way, they were amongst my favourites when I was a little boy.

The Demon Headmaster starts with Dinah Glass, a young genius-level orphan, being fostered by the Hunters and starting life at a brand-new school. The school, however, is creepy; the children are incredibly well-behaved; they recite the same rote phrases whenever they're asked about the school; and the headmaster himself is a deeply sinister figure. And, after Dinah meets the headmaster for the first time, she finds herself reciting the same rote phrases herself. She simply cannot stop herself. She eventually realises that the headmaster has hypnotised the entire school.

Unlike Dinah herself, her foster brothers – and a handful of friends – have a certain immunity to the hypnosis. This has made them pariahs in the school, but also forced them to band together to resist the headmaster. Together, they figure out that the headmaster intends to make his students win a TV contest, giving him the chance to make a speech to the entire country (this made more sense when the books were written, when there were only a handful of TV channels in Britain) and put everyone under his spell. Thankfully, through a combination of luck and bravery, Dinah and her friends manage to defeat the headmaster and force him to leave the school.

This doesn't stop him from coming back, of course. In The Prime Minister's Brain, the headmaster intends to hack the government's computer and hypnotise the Prime Minster himself. In The Revenge of the Demon Headmaster, easily the least of the series, he intends to use hypnotised holidaymakers to produce junk and take over the world; in The Demon Headmaster Strikes Again he's messing around with genetic engineering; in The Demon Headmaster Takes Over he's duelling a supercomputer to take over the internet and, in Facing the Demon Headmaster, he's made it deadly personal in devising a plot to take out Dinah herself. (Apparently, kidnapping and hypnotising her at leisure was too straightforward a scheme for him.) From these unpromising beginnings, Gillian Cross wove a nightmarish vision that kept me awake at nights.

The heart of the stories lies in the relationship between Dinah, her adopted siblings, and the rest of their little group. Dinah herself is very shy, when she first meets them; she is incredibly smart, smarter than even the headmaster himself, but she doesn't use her intellect to lord it over them. She also has the weakness of being vulnerable to the headmaster's power, unlike the others. It's interesting to see how she manages to work around it to challenge the headmaster himself. In many ways, Dinah was the first true female heroine I liked.

The other characters are somewhat less well-defined (Dinah herself is the majority viewpoint character), but they have their moments. Her foster-brothers are decent people, once they warm up to her; her friends (some of whom don't appear in every book) help fill in the holes in her story. The only weak

characters are her foster-parents, who don't seem to have a major role in the series. But then, adults rarely do in child-centred books.

But the core of the series lies in the headmaster himself. A nameless figure (as far as we know), so pale that some people speculated that he's a vampire, with a tendency to devise madcap schemes to take over and reorganise the world. An adult would recognise that his early plans were utter madness, even in those days; a child wouldn't see the weaknesses and believe, in earnest, that the headmaster could succeed. Indeed, most of his plans have a solid core of logic to them (his plan in The Revenge of the Demon Headmaster does not, which is probably why it was never adapted into a TV series) and they grow more terrifying as the series progresses. His plan in Facing the Demon Headmaster has a healthy dose of adult fear mixed in, although – as I noted above – there were plenty of simpler ways to remove Dinah from the gameboard that didn't rely on her following a predictable path. And, in the end, random chance plays a major role in his defeats. This may be fridge brilliance, as randomness and disorderliness is the one thing the headmaster cannot abide.

In some ways, the headmaster himself is underused in the books. He is a constant presence in The Demon Headmaster, but his involvement in the later books is often concealed as the plot moves along until the main characters encounter him in person. Dinah and her friends really should start to suspect his involvement earlier, particularly when they encounter people reciting rote phrases whenever they're asked delicate questions. It does sometimes become a plot point – his namelessness becomes a problem in one book – but otherwise it becomes a little odd as the series develops. Dinah never seems to go seeking out the headmaster until he's impinged on her life.

It cannot be denied that the books read somewhat dated, today. The TV show that is the core of the headmaster's plan in the first book would not be so universally beloved today, when viewer figures are more spread out over hundreds of possible channels (to say nothing of the internet). Technology advances in the books at pace with our world; Dinah doesn't have a mobile phone in the first books, even though it would have solved the plot, but she owns one in Facing the Demon Headmaster. It's easy to see the books as a glimpse into another world, one now surprisingly alien to us. And yet, it's also easy to see ways the headmaster could turn the modern world to his advantage. What could he do with social media?

And yet, most of them still manage to hit the sweet spots. They have kid heroes who are not (particularly) annoying, who have strengths and weaknesses … they have moments of humour that appeal to both kids and adults … the solutions are logical, by and large, with a mixture of elements that make sense. And also, some moments of sadness that are a reflection of the real world. Dinah's hope that she might have finally located her biological father in Facing the Demon Headmaster becomes a tearjerker when we discover that it's part of the headmaster's plot.

I was disappointed, I must admit, with the reboot of the series. Perhaps it was the simple fact that I have outgrown the series long ago – perhaps it was that I had no investment in the new characters – but I simply didn't like Total Control. It was too … childish. Dinah appealed to me – I had a lot in common with her when I was a boy – in a way that the main characters of Total Control did not.

The BBC took the original books and worked them into a remarkably good – for its era – series on television, with Terrence Hardiman as The Demon Headmaster and Frances Amey as Dinah Glass/Hunter. In hindsight, it suffers from many of the same flaws as other child-led storylines; the main characters, being children, are not always very convincing actors and the adults come across as either grossly irresponsible (because it is harder to forget that the children are children when you see them on TV) or stu-

pid. The Headmaster himself, by contrast, doesn't have anything like as many issues – he's genuinely creepy, made worse by the fact that (unlike many of the books) the headmaster is a visible figure from the start and the series spends as much time following him as it does the kids. And it avoided many of the main weaknesses of modern-day shows for children. There are no fight scenes that are obviously contrived.

Overall, I enjoyed these books when I was part of the target audience (young children, early teens). And that, I think, allows me to count them as a success.

The Devil You Know Edited by R.J. Carter
Review by Jason P. Hunt

Satan. Lucifer. First of the Fallen. Old Scratch. The Devil is known by many names, and he dwells in the pages of countless stories. And scripture gives us plenty of warning to avoid him. But the forbidden is always tempting, and these tales of encounters with the Devil serve to reinforce just how things can go wrong. Sometimes there are tears. Sometimes, there are bodies.

The Devil You Know is a collection of twenty short stories all featuring various encounters with people from all walks of life in all sorts of circumstances. It's this broad mix of protagonists and situations that serve to remind us that the Devil can appear in any setting and can cause problems for anyone. Modern parables can teach lessons just as much as parables from ancient times.

It's a good mix of protagonists, too. None of them are pure as the wind-driven snow. There are people caught by circumstance, and there are people who are just awful. Some innocents, and some not-so-innocent. Some are more likeable than others, which allows for a variety in how the Devil enters the story. At times he's smooth and conniving. Sometimes he's sneaky. At all times, he's very clearly up to no good.

And sometimes he doesn't quite get what he wants.

Notable among the collection: "Not a Saint" by Jared Baker. It's a twist on the traditional Christmas story, with a new reason why parents want their kids to be asleep. And "The Night Before Christmas" will take on a new layer of meaning for you. It's an inventive use of tradition, turning everything inside out on just how "Saint Nick" operates.

I also enjoyed "The Devil & The Details" by Henry Vogel, in which ol' Scratch gets quite a bit more than he bargained for. "A Night at Satan's Palace" by Damascu Mincemeyer is also worth a mention. It closes out the book with a Sin City tale that could only happen in Vegas.

The only story that didn't work was "I Don't Eat Children" by Michael W. Clark. It felt like pieces of this story were missing. It was disjointed and confusing. The plot jumps from scene to scene with exposition and character development left for the reader to fill in the gaps with broad leaps of imagination.

I like that the book doesn't glorify Satan, doesn't give him any kind of sympathy. He's the villain. He's the Bad Guy. And everyone knows it. He's generally not even the hero of his own story. He knows what his role is to be in the world, and some of these stories lean into that pretty well, while others twist it up a little and approach the First of the Fallen with a little unexpected sideways characterization. Overall, it's a nice blend of thriller, suspense, supernatural, and horror. Well worth the time.

The Elder King by Lars Walker
Review by Pat Patterson
http://Habakkuk21.blogspot.com

Take Major Mythic Story; kick it HARD in the nose; and then...DANCE! (while you can)

On the off chance that you HAVEN'T read Lars Walker until now, you are in for a treat. When “The Elder King” became available on March 14, I murmured “HOORAY!” The only reason I was that restrained is because of the overwhelming backlog of reviews I owe, of excellent books written by excellent writers. I really did NOT want to disrupt my queue! However, I downloaded the book, and then let my affection and Need to Read take over.

Sometime in the past year, my youngest bio-son, Moose, submitted his DNA for analysis. My family is reportedly come out of Scotland, but Moose showed some significant Scandinavian genes. After contemplation, the solution occurred to me: VIKINGS!

Nasty, filthy, church-burning, slave-taking, child-stealing, woman-raping, priest-killing VIKINGS! The way I read it, at some point, they had raided Scotland, and left a forced genetic heritage behind. Oh, those vile Vikings! However, it occurred to me that I have no way of knowing what the story TRULY is. Maybe we should consider that our family was able to encourage the famed warriors, workers, and fishermen to join our clan. Or, perhaps, it might be more true to say that Moose and I are Vikings. I really don't know and am not sure I ever will.

However, here is what I DO believe: whether you take the classic line, which is that Vikings were the scourge of the seas and coast, OR you take the point-of-view of some of the modern fantasist historians, who say the Vikings were merely peaceful traders; if you take an extreme position, you are going to miss the truth about what these people did.

And Walker does an EXCELLENT job of bringing that to life.

He does so through the eyes of a young Irish lad, who was taken in a slave raid, and pretended to be a priest, in order to seek better conditions. As it happened, the thing imagined became the thing fulfilled, and young Ailill has truly become God's priest to the folk he lives among, most especially to Erling Skalggsson, the local ruler.

The story is a delightful mix of the natural and the supernatural. Fights, harvests, hunger and feasts, power struggles, and young people who want to get off somewhere private and fool around, all form an integral part of the story. Walker has the gift of making the far-away and long-ago seem as reasonable as making a list to cut the grass and have the tires rotated on the truck. We feel the crunch of the frosty ground, and we smell the rich aroma of the pork juice running down the arm of our dinner companion.

You MUST understand, though, that this isn't a mundane story. It's the story about cataclysmic actions in heavenly places, to include other-worldly interventions in the daily lives of EVERYBODY, not just priests and kings.

It's also a good thought-piece on how people can impose their own perspective on divine truths. As I was reading this, at some point I reflected back on the scene from Monty Python's “Life of Brian,” where Brian is running away from Jerusalem, followed by the crowd who want to claim him as the

Messiah, and he loses a shoe. May not be EXACTLY the same principle behind Manichaeism or Arianism, but I wouldn't bet big against it.

An outstanding, entertaining, engaging, and even informative book. I have but ONE criticism, and that's not a book criticism: The nasty thing that the old guy with one eye did to the priest? That's the nastiest thing ever.

Expedition to Earth by Tim the Idahoan
Review by Pat Patterson
http://Habakkuk21.blogspot.com

In my Amazon review of this book, I stated that this might have been something that C S Lewis would have written, if he had been an engineer. It's a pretty bold claim to say that it's something C. S. Lewis might have written, but I believe I can justify that claim.

Peter Graves is a young man living on the Moon, with not much to look forward to. All contact with the Earth ceased after WW III in 2098 seemed to wipe the planet clean of humans. It's now 2310, and the Moon colonies have managed to scrape out a bare existence; however, there aren't sufficient resources to support drones.

Peter is not, quite, a drone. He has a high level of technical proficiency, and his work ethic is praised by all he has contact with. However, the typical lunar career in the 24th century involves alliance with a major corporation; this, Graves has not done. He is a loner; his parents were killed when he was five years old. A family living in his dormitory took care of him, and their son, born with a severe speech impediment, has been his only friend. Loners aren't really a luxury that Lunar colonies on the edge can afford.

However, a goal for the past two centuries has been to mount an expedition to Earth and find out if there is anything left. It's the only aspect of lunar life that Graves feels offers any adventure, and when it is announced that the expedition is about to be mounted, he applies. His tech skills outweigh his social deficits, and he is selected. Without apprehension or regret, he boards the Terra 1, and launches for Earth.

Things don't go as planned. They never do, but for the lunar explorers, even the idea of weather is alien. I'll not go further in exploring the story line, because to do so would bring on the possibility of spoilers.

I now want to attempt to justify my statement about this being a C S Lewis-type book. In the Space Trilogy, the character Ransom sets forth to try to repair damage done on Mars and then Venus by visitors from Earth. What is compelling is NOT the descriptions of the residents of Mars or Venus, but the spiritual journey undertaken by the man Ransom. He is forced to take on physical danger, in order to prevent planetary destruction. These struggles are immense, but it is the resolve he needs to set his hand to the task that is the greater struggle.

Unlike Lewis, author Tim the Idahoan does have extensive knowledge about the way things work and is a bit of an inventor. It's almost comical to see the way that Graves attacks engineering problems; what comes across to me is the methodology of Mighty Tim as he embarks on another build of a firearm or a stool for rednecks. However, that is NOT the essence of the struggle that Graves has to surmount.

Instead, we see the proficient loner on the Moon at the beginning of the story, as a person who believes that he has no need of anything beyond himself. That's evident in the way he has failed to form personal attachments, and with his blunt rejection of the offer of spiritual guidance by the chaplain following a near-fatal accident. Over the course of his adventures on Earth, he is forced to reach out to others for help, and to see himself as a part of a whole, rather than an island. He has begun to look for meaning in something other than the mastery of another engineering problem. I can't explore this any further without spoilers, but I do want to say that the primary value I found in this first novel is the story of Graves' spiritual journey.

A final note: Lewis writes characters who are given names with significance. Notably, Ransom is made to be a ransom for the fates of the planets he visits, in order to avoid another Fall. I wonder if The Idahoan is doing something similar, here? Peter Graves: the first association is with the late actor, but I'm inclined to look deeper. Could it be that “Graves” references the place where the dead are, and that we see that the character is dead inside? And “Peter” derives from the Greek word for “rock” or “stone;” could The Idahoan play multiple word games with us here, with the rock in front of the tomb?

We shall leave that as an exercise for the reader.

Magic for Liars by Sarah Gailey
Review by Sam Lubell

At first glance *Magic for Liars* may seem like a Harry Potter-inspired magic school book except with a murder mystery. In reality it is a character study of Ivy Gable, Private Investigator. Ivy’s sister has magic and teaches in the school so when the school’s headmaster wanted an outsider to investigate the mysterious death of a teacher, after the magic cops called it an accidental death due to magical experimentation, she turns to Ivy as an investigator who already knows about magic. But Ivy barely graduated high school and mostly investigates cheating spouses. She lives up to the worst stereotypes of hard-boiled, hard drinking P.I.s (think Jessica Jones without the superpowers.) And she has not seen her sister in years

But in the process of investigating this case, she winds up living at the school (in the dead teacher’s apartment) and pretending to be part of the magic world, even dating another teacher, while getting to know her sister. She deals with the anger and jealousy she still feels towards her sister and gets a taste of what her life could have been if she had had magic like her sister does.

Of course, this is also a high school story and the author has the headmaster makes the point that even though this is a school of magic “at the end of the day, we’re just a high school.” of Gailey creates believable pictures of the students and the teachers. One boy is convinced that family prophecy makes him the Chosen One who will save the world of magic. A girl uses her powers to influence teachers and create a clique of ‘friends’ who obey her out of fear of the rumors she can start. And there’s the ‘cool’ teacher and the teacher who is full of himself.

At the same time, this is a murder mystery and Ivy does investigate by talking to students and faculty. Gradually, Ivy learns that her sister had been in a relationship with the dead teacher and may have lied about her whereabouts at the time of the death.

Both mystery fans and readers of magic school books will enjoy *Magic for Liars* as long as they recognize that this is a character-driven novel rather than a novel of plot.

The Midnight Sun by Tim C. Taylor
Review by Pat Patterson
http://Habakkuk21.blogspot.com

A long time ago in a place far, far away, or, more specifically around Christmas of 2016, if memory is correct, in New York City (CHORUS: “NEW YORK CITY!!???), the aliens landed.

They didn't want to eat us, which was good, but they did seek to have us join the Galactic Union. We were eligible, because Voyager One had exited the solar system, making us Official Intergalactic Travelers, also known as 'bait' to the Galactic traders.

They did not wish to exchange cultures, they did not wish to learn from us. However, they were willing to provide us with some astoundingly amazing technology, in exchange for huge amounts of valuable raw materials. It was the end of civilization as we knew it, on Earth. Anything they had was better than everything we had; they knew it, we knew it, and that was the end. Until they found out we knew how to fight.

And it wasn't until we started doing so and proving how good we are at the art of war, that we discovered that we might just be Galacticose Intolerant. (and I don't know who originated that term, but I like it. I MIGHT have come up with it myself, but I still like it.)

The Midnight Sun Free Company, headed by sisters Captain Blue and Major Sun, has come into possession of two ANCIENT, as in WAY before everything we know about on Earth, giant fighting robots called Raknar. And other people either want them, or don't want Midnight Sun to own them. Battle is joined, the Raknar are lost. Things ensue.

Complications include :
A semi-feud between the sisters, and
A prohibited sexual relationship between Major Sun and Man of Mystery & enlisted Midnight Sun mercenary Saisho Branco
The NATURE of Branco's mystery
The relationship between a giant spider and a weasel, who happen to be bonded companion-fighters
The treachery of a not-so-ethical mercenary company seemingly bent on revenge
and most of all: The DEEP, dark secrets behind...everything.

Okay, this one has LOTS of good action, LOTS of really creepy monsters, LOTS of treachery, and LOTS AND LOTS of entities at war with themselves. You don't HAVE to have read anything else in the universe to enjoy this one, but why deny yourself life's simple pleasures?

Get it and read it. A couple of times.

Mississippi Roll
edited by George R.R. Martin and Melinda Snodgrass
Review by Sam Lubell

Shared Universes were once fairly common in science fiction/fantasy. In a shared universe, multiple authors write in the same setting, sharing characters so that a story by one author can have appearances by characters created by the other authors. Almost a decade after Robert Asprin originated this concept with *Thieves' World* in 1978, George R.R. Martin turned a superhero role-playing game he ran for his author friends into the *Wild Cards* story anthology (1987). This series is still ongoing, with 26 volumes, long after *Thieves' World* and other shared universes have ended. Perhaps there is something about superheroes that makes them especially suited for this shared storytelling as most comic book heroes are part of long-running shared universes.

Many of the books in the *Wild Cards* series are "braided novels" in which a group of related short stories is interwoven into a reading experience much like a novel with multiple characters that jump from storyline to storyline. *Mississippi Roll* is not quite a full braided novel as only one story is broken up and used to form the backbone onto which the other stories, complete, are attached. Still, this works well, giving context to the stories, which do share characters.

The premise behind the *Wild Cards* universe is that in 1946, aliens used Earth to test a virus that left 90% of the infected dead, turned 9% of the infected into jokers (the term used for victims with disfigurements, frequently grotesque), and the lucky 1%, the aces, have superpowers. Most of the books in the series have focused on the aces, but the last three books have featured the jokers, a few of whom reappear in *Mississippi Roll*.

This book is also a bit of a change in tone. While the previous book, *High Stakes*, was very dark, *Mississippi Roll* is much lighter. Most of the book takes place onboard the *Natchez*, one of the last of the true steamboats on the Mississippi. The backbone story, "In the Shadow of Tall Stacks" by Stephen Leigh, tells how the boat is haunted by its former captain, Wilbur Leathers, who was exposed to the virus in 1946, but did not show any signs of being infected until 1951 when he seemingly died in a fight with a moneylender, only to rise again as a steam-powered ghost. He is unable to leave the *Natchez* and can communicate with others and manifest a ghostly form, only when he absorbs steam. So he becomes quite worried in October 2016 when he learns that the boat's new owners are planning on removing the boilers and mooring the boat to turn it into a floating entertainment center. Meanwhile, the current captain is using the *Natchez* to secretly transport a band of refugee jokers to sanctuary cities along its route.

The other stories tell tales of the crew, passengers, refugees, and others on the boat. "Wingless Angel" by John Jos. Miller, featuring series regulars Billy Ray and the Midnight Angel, sets up the refugee plotline and deals with Angel's post-traumatic stress after the events of *High Stakes*. "A Break in the Small Time" by Carrie Vaughn, one of my favorite stories in the book, tells how Andrew, an ace who uses his power of generating illusions in his singing act, gets a taste of what it means to be a hero, only to find out that people prefer him as an entertainer. Cherie Priest's "Death on the Water" tells how Leo Storgman, former Jokertown cop turned private investigator, looks into an insurance case of a singer who died on board the boat. He is helped (sort of) by a team of ghost hunters. Kevin Andrew Murphy, in "Find the Lady" tells how Roger Washburn, a fake joker who uses stage magic, gets involved with the refugees. His raven is my favorite character in the book. "Under the Arch" by David D. Levine features Jack, "an ugly old Cajun bartender" whose growing attraction to Timur, one of the refugees, and

the budding relationship of two young refugees, and the disapproval of the girl's father, causes him to expose his own secret Wild Card power. Ultimately, the book ends with all the subplots, and the fate of Wilbur and the *Natchez*, nicely resolved.

Mississippi Roll shows that a superhero story does not need to be about saving the world, or even a city, to be interesting. Although the book is part of a long series, it stands alone very well. Most of the characters are original to this volume and enough of the *Wild Cards* premise is given that a new reader should be able to follow these adventures without missing anything.
Readers who like superheroes (and others with special powers) done with more sophistication than in most comic books will enjoy *Mississippi Roll*. Those who are apprehensive about starting a 26-volume series will find this an approachable jumping-on point. This is a fun adventure that touches on political issues, most notably the refugee crisis, without letting the politics overwhelm the story.

Noir Fatale edited by Larry Correia and Kacey Ezell
Review by Pat Patterson
http://Habakkuk21.blogspot.com

Noir Fatale: if the title doesn't hook you, you probably weren't paying attention. It is fortunate for me that Good Girls are attracted to Bad Boys; that's how the Motorcycle White Boy, aka Redneck Biker, became a permanent fixture in the life of the Church Lady, aka my gift-from-God, happily-ever-after trophy wife Vanessa, the elegant, foxy, praying black grandmother of Woodstock, GA. Flip the genders: is the opposite true as well? Do Nice Boys fall for Bad Girls? I have not a clue, never having been a Nice Boy. I suspect, though, that whether Naughty of Nice, there is something of danger, need to be rescued, sweetness of lips, with the outside hope of being shot, stabbed, or poisoned that does give these noir fatales something to work with.

MAJOR kudos to Sarah A Hoyt on the cover. She has captured a representative of the genre in the act of...something.

Kacey's Introduction & Larry's Introduction. Long, long ago, when I was first discovering the excitement of STORY (!), I always skipped the prefatory material. It took about twenty more years for me to discover that there was often some VERY interesting and important things going on in those ignored sections. Today, I love them! Particularly when, as in this case, we are given a peek backstage, and get an understanding about How It Works. Don't miss these!

Ain't No Sunshine by Michael J. Ferguson and Christopher L. Smith. Slade and Collier are tough, hard-nosed PI types, not out of place in the 1930s Los Angeles setting, but in this little twister, they are in space. Slade's a bit of a techno-phobe, much to the amusement of others. Their business is (just) scraping by. Under those circumstances, you can't AFFORD to do much pro bono work. However, when an old flame, now one of the most powerful women in the habitat, dies under mysterious circumstances, penniless techno-phobes are on the job. Side characters include a second old flame, and a little sister-type. Remember the little sister in 'The Big Sleep?' The one who kept biting her thumb?

Recruiting Exercise by David Weber. Sometimes, when I read David Weber's work, I want to grab up a couple of history books and re-examine the entire section of Western Civ that dealt with the various insanities that visited France in the 18th & 19th centuries. However, I just don't like the French very much- sorry – and so I haven't done that. This particular story deals with a young woman, starving, and

with food and medicine withheld from her ailing brother, who decides to prostitute herself in order to get the things the utterly corrupt bureaucrats are holding back.

Spoils of War by Kacey Ezell. One day, Kacey Ezell is going to write a bad story. Maybe. From the evidence I've seen so far, though, that day is likely to come after the sun burns out. This gem sits on layer upon layer; the mysterious woman; the gent she seeks out for assistance, a war-time friend of her brother; and what WAS her brother up to, anyway? An evil, wicked Bad Man sends gunsels. And she has found the man of her dreams, and desires nothing more than to run away with him, and just be Joe and Betty Grumble; and Ezell writes in such a way that WE want this for her as well, and we are so very, very glad when it is finally in her grasp...
Apropos of nothing at all, did you know the most famous painting in the world wasn't really THAT famous until it was stolen? And that it's painted on wood, not canvas?

The Privileges of Violence by Steve Diamond Consider: Russia during the darkest days of consolidation of the Soviet Union; secret police everywhere; rebellions internal, and foreign intervention always possible. Therefore, the terror police were perhaps the most active and effective part of the entire country. Did I mention the monsters? Because there are monsters. With secrets. More twists and turns in this one than in the Runaway Mine Car at Six Flags, and I believe it captures the same bleakness of spirit that Orwell painted into '1984.'

A Goddess in Red by Griffin Barber. We use the term 'goddess' to describe a woman who takes our breath away with her beauty. This one is beautiful, and she can CERTAINLY take your breath away, but she also has some pretty creepy powers. She gets involved in a plot, and you have to wonder: what's in it for her? Is this just boredom setting in? Read it with the lights on. In every room. And a German Shepherd at your feet while you clutch a cat and a Browning Hi-Power close.

Kuro by Hinkley Correia. After reading this, I became curious as to the identity of Hinkley Correia, and her relationship to Larry. One thing I can say is this: the inclusion of this story in the collection owes NOTHING to nepotism. Great characters, GREAT story. Lots of depth and wear your seat belt. Japanese freaky ghosts, and a significant serving of what life is like for the Japanese salaryman. Well done!

Sweet Seduction by Laurell K. Hamilton. I read this story while I was in the hospital, on a clear liquid diet. I wanted all of the cupcakes described in the book, and if they had been available, I just MIGHT have broken the rules. Now aside from that, it's a GREAT detective story, and a very nicely done social commentary as well. But I must have the address of that bakery, do you hear?

A String of Pearls by Alistair Kimble. Alistair has the credentials to write devastatingly fascinating detective fiction. However, none of that is evident here. I hated this story, which is obscure, internal, and boring. If you like internal dialogue from a protagonist who never gets to the point, you'll love this. I grew tired of internal dialogue that skirted the issue of what was really going on and resolved that this one must be DEFENESTRATED.

Honey Fall by Sarah A. Hoyt. The last story in which I didn't care what was going on is followed by a story in which the protagonist doesn't know what is going on. We don't either, BUT we can see that there is a clear path that will take her, and us, there. Taking place in post-war, magic-infused world, a deliciously lovely little tale of the damsel in distress, and the distress of those who wish to harm or help.

Three Kates by Mike Massa. I had the great privilege of living in what was then West Germany for two and a half years, and I worked closely with a man who was a veteran of the Wehrmacht, and a woman

who was a veteran of the Luftwaffe. Therefore, I know from experience that not all Germans were Nazis, nor evil, nor anything of the sort. It had to be different during the actual conflict, even without the addition of magical themes this story brings us. Our protagonist is a German agent, sent on a mission to discover certain items of power. His crisis of conscience is NOT easily resolved, and is, in fact, perhaps even aggravated by the intervention of three lovely ladies with their own agenda.

Worth the Scars of Dying by Patrick M. Tracy. Evidently, story length is of great importance to me, even if I can't define it. What starts out as a simple case of a damsel in distress, seeking assistance from an innkeeper who transforms into a beast, soon devolves into a story that seems interminable. So, I terminated it. Perhaps you will find a different outcome.

The Frost Queen by Robert Buettner. If someone had told me that Robert Buettner, cited as one of Heinlein's heirs, author of (among others) the Orphan series, was going to write a sweet YA adventure story about heroism, sacrifice, and falling in love, I would have murmured politely and changed the topic of conversation. BUT HE DID! It's a lovely little story; I think he gets all of the characters down perfectly. Along the way, he tosses in enough references to tension between the Earth dwellers and those on the Moon that we get it, we really do. I pass his house (sort of) every time I go Papa-sit three of my grands, and I'll wave a little more sweetly from this point on. (Not to be stalkerish: I DON'T know where his house is. I just know which exit off the highway it is.)

Bombshell by Larry Correia. If Correia didn't invent a couple of genres, he certainly made them come alive to new generations. My youngest son, the Moose, is a dedicated Monster Hunter and is enormously proud of the fact that he ran into Larry at a DragonCon. But in this delightful little tale, instead of sticking with mainstream Grimnoir-type special talents, he uses a cop with ZERO talent to solve crime, in spite of the specials. It's a great story, and, as is the case with so many others in this volume, keeps you on your toes.

All in all: despite the two stories I chose to dump, it's WELL worth your time. I found this fascinating; I don't know if it can be replicated, but I, for one, would love to see more.

And I want those cupcakes, too.

The Puppet Masters by Robert A. Heinlein
Review by Chris Nuttall
http://ChrisHanger.wordpress.com

The Puppet Masters is unusual, in my lifetime exploration of Heinlein’s works, in being the only adult novel of Heinlein’s that I was able to read as a child. Part of this, I suspect, is because The Puppet Masters is also more pulpy than Starship Troopers or Stranger in a Strange Land; it includes literary aspects, but Heinlein doesn’t allow them to overshadow the plot. There is enough excitement to thrill my young mind and ensure I didn’t get bored when Heinlein started sermonizing.

It also scared hell out of me.

Heinlein was not the most emotional of writers – strong emotions were something he tried to avoid, I think (witness how mild Revolt in 2100 is compared to The Handmaid’s Tale) – but The Puppet Masters manages to touch on a very primal human fear, that of losing complete control and perhaps, even finding happiness in slavery. Where Citizen of the Galaxy presents slavery as brutal, The Puppet Mas-

ters suggests it can be seductive. Why not let someone else do your thinking for you? Heinlein had a very clear answer to that question, but we'll get to that in a moment.

The Puppet Masters is centered on an American secret agent – 'Sam' – who, working with the enigmatic 'Old Man' and 'Mary,' is sent to investigate a report of a flying saucer landing in the United States, a landing that was subsequently called a hoax. The Old Man – we later find out that he's actually Sam's father – doesn't believe it. The agent who saw the original craft was no bungler. Poking around, they discover a number of people who are seemingly dead inside – and, when they take one captive, they discover that he is being 'ridden' by an alien entity. The flying saucer was no hoax. Earth is being invaded by aliens from Titan and there's no time to lose.

Unfortunately, the Old Man finds it hard to convince the President – or anyone – that the alien threat is actually real. This nearly leads to disaster when the alien – the Slug – escapes, after managing to hitch a ride on Sam. Sam finds himself in a state of perfect bliss, never once questioning his role as the slave … until he is freed. And then he reacts with utter horror to his experiences.

Eventually, after some antics in Congress, the Slugs are revealed … but it's too late to keep them from occupying a large chunk of the United States. The best anyone can do is keep a quarantine around the area and force the entire population to walk around naked, or as close to it as possible. (Even that isn't enough, as the Slugs are apparently capable of riding animals as well as humans.) Sam and Mary get married (the romance is the weakest part of the book, although it is clear that they're close to equals), only to have their honeymoon interrupted by an alien intruder. It seems that the end is just a matter of time. However, the Old Man has a trick up his sleeve. Mary was the last survivor of a fringe colony on Venus and her repressed memories may reveal a way to beat the Slugs. To Sam's horror, she volunteers to have the memories recovered.

They discover, perhaps in a deliberate tip of the hat to The War of the Worlds, that a host who becomes ill will kill the Slug. The only solution is to infect everyone in the occupied zone, a desperate gamble that claims the life of the Old Man. And the book ends with the heroes setting off to Titan intent on wreaking revenge.

Like Revolt in 2100, The Puppet Masters is told in first-person. It's an interesting choice, although it forces Sam to take a break from the action to tell us what happened on a wider scale. It works better than it did in Revolt, at least partly because Heinlein matured as a writer. The characters are more real, the action comfortably both small and large scale; indeed, The Puppet Masters codified a number of alien invasion tropes that are depressingly common today.

Sam is also a better character than Lyle, without quite the naive uncertainty of the older character. He's brave and resourceful and survives becoming an unwilling host (it's made clear that others don't always survive.) He's also hard-headed, reckless and given to bellowing like a bull when his wife's safety is involved. Mary doesn't become that much less interesting after they get married, although she is clearly traumatised by her brief possession during their honeymoon (in a manner akin to Sam); Sam still moves from seeing her as an equal, to some extent, to a subordinate housewife. It isn't clear what she thinks of this.

The Puppet Masters is also set in a future that never was. Humanity has a space program, there are colonies (and aliens) on Venus and there are flying cars; apparently, there was also a Third World War at some point, which ended inconclusively. That said, it's easy enough to envisage their USA as ours, perhaps slightly less so. Heinlein got a lot of things right, and they shine through his writing, but he also got a lot of things wrong.

Pulpy or not, The Puppet Masters manages to touch on a number of issues that were of vital importance during Heinlein's day – and, perhaps, even more important now. One issue concerns control of communications, an odd echo of the present-day issues with the internet and social media. Heinlein didn't postulate anything more advanced than video phones and televisions, but he demonstrated that whoever controls the media and communications controls the country. The Slugs use it to keep people in the occupied zones unaware of the danger until far too late. In our world, the Left's takeover of Hollywood and Silicon Valley is not good for democracy even if you're a leftist yourself.

Linked to this is the fundamental refusal to believe in a threat, one that may seem out of this world, until it is almost too late. Pre-9/11, hijacked airliners used as cruise missiles were the stuff of thrillers; post-9/11, they were very real threats. As Sam notes, the Slugs could have been stopped in their tracks very quickly if immediate measures had been taken. Instead, humanity finds itself pushed to the brink of defeat. The persistent refusal to believe that yes, there are people who want to kill us, who hate us merely for existing, is a greater danger than naked force. Later, when we do grasp it, we run the risk of paranoia and mob rule. Once social trust is lost, either directly or indirectly, our society runs the risk of collapsing into ever-smaller tribes who are constantly warring with each other.

But perhaps most importantly of all is the slavery. Heinlein does not pull any punches when describing the horrors of being turned into a puppet. The Slugs are terrible masters – they don't even think to make Sam wash while he's their slave – and resistance is literally unthinkable. There are collaborators, but they're people the Slugs have ridden and know to be reliable. Indeed, the Slugs – like the USSR's communists – are nothing more than parasites, literally riding on the back of the working man. (Sam even wonders what difference, if any, the Slugs would make in Russia.) The Slugs offer peace, but it comes at a terrible price. They're such bad masters that they work their hosts to death and then move on. I don't know how true it is that Social Justice has ruined Marvel and the NFL, but putting causes ahead of profits is self-defeating in the long run. Putting your life in someone else's hands is very dangerous, if only because their interests may not align with yours.

The Puppet Masters carries a simple message; free men must be prepared to fight to maintain that freedom, rather than allow themselves to be lulled into slow surrender. The West has made that mistake time and time again, most notably in 1938; freedom is not free and we have forgotten that. We have grown used to the idea of quick and decisive victories, neither of which have ever truly materialised. Don't rely on the government. Get the facts, think for yourself, then make up your own mind … and get used to the idea that there is no perfect solution. Human history is practically made of problems caused by the solution to the last set of problems.

In many ways, The Puppet Masters reads as an odd cross between James Bond (both as a secret agent and in the father-son relationship between M and Bond) and some of John Wyndham's books, most notably The Kraken Wakes and The Midwich Cuckoos. It has its flaws – the relationship between Sam and the Old Man reads a little wonky at first, as if Heinlein wasn't intending to make them actually related at first – but it is still a very strong read.

And, if you happen to like alien invasion stories, you might be surprised by how many of them started here.

Ready Player One by Ernest Cline
Review by Jim McCoy
http://JimbosSFFreviews.blogspot.com

(Author's note: I am honor bound to pre-acknowledge the fact that none of what I'm about to reference in the following paragraph has any historical value whatsoever. Ok, with the possible exceptions of two WW II Flicks, those being Tora, Tora, Tora and Midway.)

I never thought we'd reach this point. I grew up watching movies and TV shows set in the past. You may think you know a fan of westerns but until you've met my grandpa and my dad, you really haven't met one. You may think you know someone who likes World War II flicks, but until you've sat down on a weekend with myself, my father and some popcorn popped in a pan on the stove, you really don't. I'm still wondering why guys like my Uncle Bob who served in Korea never got their movies, but different blog/different day. Later came the Vietnam flicks. For some reason though, I never thought my generation would get their chance. I thought that 80s nostalgia would never happen. Well, I guess I need to apologize. Ernest Cline's Ready Player One had me soaking in my childhood. It felt great.

Something I've noticed a lot of lately is the inclusion of the internet in stories. I'm a big fan of this. I don't mean just for googling or checking Facebook. I mean epic battles online, like in Nick Coles CTRL, ALT, Revolt! reviewed here (and I really need to review Soda Pop Soldier too.) or in Cline's Ready Player One. Not only is it entertaining as all get out, but it makes business sense too. There are legions of gamers out there and this is something that's perfect for them. Seriously. I'm neither a fan nor a supporter of identity politics but I can't deny that it's cool to read a story about someone like me. I'm a gamer. When I read about other gamers, it makes me happy. It entertains me. That's the whole point of escapism, right?

The kids in the book are after a prize; the world's most immense fortune. The greatest game designer in history (James Halliday) has designed an alternative environment online, the Oasis. He charges only a quarter to buy into the environment and does not charge a subscription fee. He does, however charge for certain things online (online goods and space for people who want to create separate environments within his environment for example). When he passes due to old age, he leaves his fortune including control of his shares in the company that controls the Oasis to the person who can solve his puzzle and complete the accompanying requirements. It's not easy but many people become enthralled with the search.

The Oasis eventually takes more and more of the time of the world to the point that many people only participate in society through the Oasis. Some (but not all) schools are conducted there. There are stores and a currency, which is listed as being the most stable currency in use. It goes so far that our hero, Wade Watts votes in the elections in the Oasis, but skips voting on real world politicians because the real-world politics don't affect his life as much as the representatives that are in charge of the Oasis. In the context of the story that actually makes sense.

The part about this book that really makes it fun is the nostalgia though. Ready Player One is a celebration of all of the stuff I remember from when I was a kid. The early video games are here. (Ok, maybe just maybe it would have been more fun with more Intellivision because that's what I owned but I didn't write it, so it makes sense that it wasn't going to be perfect for me personally) Eighties music is here. Eighties movies are here. I don't want to reveal too much because a lot of the nostalgia is essential to the plot but dude, it's everywhere. The kids in the book (and this is a Young Adult novel) are experts in Eighties culture because they have to be. The clues left to solving the mystery are based on Halliday's

80s pop culture obsession. A lot of the time in the book is kids discussing the same stuff I grew up loving. They're honestly better than me at most of the games I grew up playing, but then again nobody ever gave me a fortune for my performance either.

Ultrasensitive right-wing readers may not enjoy this book. The Big Bad is a corporation bent on taking over the Oasis and increasing their profits. There is a surprise gender/race bend at one point in the book. It makes sense in a way, but if you're a right-winger that is as easy to offend as the average social justice bully, you're going to get all butthurt over this one. I personally won't feel any sympathy for you, especially since the social entry in the book makes sense in context, adds to the story and isn't overly preachy. Your mileage may vary but don't come whining to me if it does. This is a good story with a lot of action and entertaining characters. What little bit of leftism is included in the book does nothing to diminish it to anyone other than the whiner type.

Ready Player One is a celebration. It is a celebration of the Eighties. It is a celebration of gaming. It is a celebration of the courage of a small group of people set against a huge opponent. It is a celebration of the indomitable human spirit. It is a celebration of people who are willing to come together to fight the establishment. It is a celebration of asskickery. That is fitting because Ready Player One kicks ass.

Bottom Line: 5.0 out of 5 Stars

Stellar Evolutions: The Best Stories and Poems of Polar Borealis Magazine's First Fifteen Issues —Selected by Rhea E. Rose
Review by Robert Runte

http://SFeditor.ca

"Best of" reprint anthologies are a good way to get a sense of what's happening in a field, and this one is particularly interesting for three reasons: First, Graeme Cameron's Polar Borealis publishes only Canadian speculative fiction, which arguably has a slightly different sensibility than the American or British versions of the genre. In selecting the best from PB, Rhea Rose has also ended up with a broad cross-section of the Canadian genre. There are several straight-up horror stories here, a couple of post-apocalyptic tales, some traditional science fiction, some modern fantasy, romance, and cats. In short, something for everyone.

Second, although both the magazine and this collection include some established writers, Cameron's main focus is on getting new voices into print, so this is a quick way to identify the interesting newcomers in the Canadian genre. The quality within any collection invariably varies, but there aren't any real lemons in this one. Most entries are at least interesting and some are real gems. Jonathan Sean Lyster's "Target Market", for example, is perfectly crafted: a simple idea revealed through a quiet domestic scene you thought was about something else. Other writers could do well to study the structure here, and adapt it for their own use. My favorite stories are "Jabber" a tidy little horror tale by Steve Fahnestalk (a name perhaps familiar from his online column for Amazing); Chris Campeau's even darker horror, "This Round's on Me"; and "Hate Doesn't Always Come Easy" a clever piece on relationships, love and hate with zombies by Neo-Opsis editor, Karl Johanson. "Wing Shop" also stands out for being one of the very few second-person stories I ever encountered that actually works. "Wing Shop" is what all those other annoying second-person stories were striving for, but did not achieve.

Third, the prose selections are alternated with poetry. This is a pleasant surprise because poetry is usually under-represented in SF collections (if present at all) and this is a chance to see what's out there. For example, one could hardly call Richard Stevenson an emerging writer (he has over thirty traditionally-published books of poetry, last time I checked) but he is virtually unknown in speculative fiction circles, even though a lot of his poetry utilizes SF motifs (e.g., his Why Were All the Werewolves Men? collection). Unless you subscribe to something like Eye to the Telescope, the chances of stumbling across speculative poetry are pretty random, and I find a lot of the poetry in university literary journals either hopelessly pretentious or painfully sophomoric—sometimes both simultaneously. In contrast, all the poetry here is accessible to even the most literal-minded or poetry-phobic, and some are great fun, like Taral Wayne and Walt Wentz's "The devil's Riddle". My favorite, though, is J. J. Steinfeld's "In a Small Earthbound Room", a self-contained first contact story.

Of course, you could just read all fifteen issues of Polar Borealis¬¬¬¬—because there are a lot more where these stories and poems came from—but Rhea Rose has complied an excellent, balanced selection that shines a light on some very promising new writers.

Voices of the Fall edited by John Ringo and Gary Poole
Review by Pat Patterson
http://Habakkuk21.blogspot.com

I discovered John Ringo partway through the Legacy of the Aldenata series. I was so taken by it, that I planned my own Posleen defense tale, where a lone middle school counselor bravely stands off anthrophagic croco-centaurs. Alas, I was just too late to make that happen. But I sure could have jumped into THIS playground with both feet!

I didn't, though: it's really HARD to write good stories! That didn't stop these folks, who have written some great bits for us to chew on. Not a cull in the bunch!

Foreword — Gary Poole. Worth spending a few minutes to read, because Poole identifies one of the central beliefs of Human Wave literature: humans are resilient. We've all seen it happen on a local level, if we cared to look, and even in a civilization-ending catastrophe like the Black Tide, resiliency remains.

Starry, Starry Night — John Ringo. Living a long time is no guarantee that you'll become a legend. But, even if you are measly little smidge of a man, if you do the next right thing, and keep on doing the next right thing; no matter what your motivation; then, you might actually deserve the title.

Spectrum — Mike Massa. Enoch is NOT Forrest Gump. Forrest Gump was what used to be called an idiot savant. Enoch is just an idiot. But even an idiot can learn to do a few things right, and that can make all the difference in the world.

Storming the Tower of Babel — Sarah Hoyt. Have you lost hope? Don't have a reason to go on? Then you are very, very close to the experience the protagonists are having. But having someone depend on you; someone who cannot make it alone? That is the sort of thing that puts meaning back into our existence, whether we want it to or not.

Return to Mayberry — Rob Hampson. In one of the earliest disaster-scenario books I read (maybe around 1978 or so), it was said that the key to survive a nuclear attack was to IMMEDIATELY move to

a rural area, and start building a support structure out there. Well, I've lived in a rural area, and I'm not sure but what I wouldn't just rather get blasted to smithereens. However, this story demonstrates the strength of that argument.

It Just Might Matter in the End — Travis S. Taylor. The last survivors on the ground at NASA. The last humans, probably, to go into space for the next few centuries. What does it matter if a few more people die? BILLIONS have died, and what tech is left is mangled to the point that walkie-talkies are being used. But a console jockey has got to jockey. Because it's important.

Inhale to the King, Baby! — Michael Z. Williamson. Guns AND butter, not guns OR butter. But maybe instead of butter, you have tons of pot. Still better have the guns, though.

Ham Sandwich — Jody Lynn Nye. A LONG time ago, even before MY time, short wave radio was king. I think there was a merit badge available in that. My dad told me stories of wandering the waves, picking up call signs from all over, and getting contact cards in the mail. After the collapse, the old equipment comes back out, and a new community builds.

The Downeasters — Brendan DuBois. The costs of survival don't stop after the initial eruption of plague. An isolated island community has missed the disease itself, but they NEED the supplies only found on the mainland in order to keep going. And it's going to cost a great deal to make that happen.

The Species as Big as the Ritz — Robert Buettner. Against his own interests, a spook chooses to do a final duty. In doing so, he loses touch with the only human warmth he has ever found. But he is bound to do his duty, and that duty is determined by others. Until it isn't.

The Cat Hunters — Dave Freer. The eco-systems of small islands between Antarctica and Australia are delicately balanced, and introduction of a new species can utterly wreck the balance. Hence, hunters are hired to go kill cats, who have displaced pre0existing species. Their job is important, but they are treated with contempt by many of the scientific staff, who are utterly dependent on their work. Then, the end of the world comes. Who wins? Smarties? Or Shooters?

Alpha Gamers — Griffin Barber. Any structure can serve as a focal point for civilization to rebuild, after it all comes tumbling down. All it requires is people with a common purpose. And if gamers aren't purposeful, then the word has no meaning.

True Faith and Allegiance — Michael Gants. In other books in the series, we learn that ONE of the places where there are concentrations of healthy people is aboard submarines. Nuclear power plants can go a long time on the material stored on board. However, maintenance STILL has to be done, and mistakes happen. And when a sub is on its own, and breaks down, it's the loneliest place in the world.

The Killer Awoke — John Birmingham. A spook wakes up in a hospital emergency room, surrounded by social justice warriors. She is there on a hugely important mission. And then, the bottom drops out, and what once was hugely important is now a trivial detail.

What the Wind Brings
by Matthew Hughes
Review by Robert Runte

http://SFeditor.ca

As an SF critic, I am well acquainted with Matt Hughes' canon of SF&F. He has published over eighty short stories and is regularly featured in the prestigious Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction; he has nearly thirty traditionally-published novels and collections; is frequently described as the literary heir of the great American SF writer, Jack Vance; and comes recommended by the likes of George R. R. Martin. His writing is characterized by inventive world-building and engaging narratives of unusual protagonists: autistic superheroes, professional duelists, master criminals, Sherlockian detectives, and wizards of varying competency and duplicity. Underlying everything is a sly humour and the mastery of drole dialogue seldom matched within the genre. I have unfailingly recommended Hughes and have frequently referred to him as a national treasure.

What the Wind Brings is nothing like any of that.

Had I not already known, I might never have recognized this historical novel (based on an actual incident in 16th century Ecuador) as something by Matt Hughes. A serious literary work set in a real time and place, What the Wind Brings is almost the opposite of Hughes' style of darkly comic SF.

I am not suggesting that this is some ponderously-written literary tome that only an English professor could love. Far from it! This is just as much a page-turner as any of Hughes' previous works, the action even more gripping because it was real. Indeed, I have never had so much trouble tearing myself away from a Hughes' novel.

No, the contrast is simply that while Matt Hughes usually writes delightful escapist fare, Matthew Hughes' writing is compelling, multi-layered, and profoundly satisfying.

The story follows the survivors of a shipwreck as they try to rebuild their lives as part of a multi-racial community in the midst of the Spanish conquests. There are three viewpoint characters: a local shaman whose journey through the spirit world makes What the Wind Brings a work of magic realism; the adopted son of a Spanish nobleman who cannot escape his black heritage; and a monk who has come to the Spanish colonies to elude the Inquisition. The differing worldviews of the three viewpoint characters are as alien to each other as any first-contact SF novel, but more fully developed because the characters are based on real individuals from actual cultures.

.

Opposing our protagonists are a ruthless conquistador—backed by the entire oppressive apparatus of the Spanish crown—on the one side, and the paranoid leader of escaped black slaves on the other. The clash of cultures and personalities is freighted with the accumulated weight of history but is simultaneously a deeply insightful analysis of the psychology of leadership. The interactions between conflicting personalities is as crucial as their conflicting ideologies, and trying to guess which ideas and which individuals will triumph is edge-of-seat reading.

Whereas Hughes' SF has always been wildly creative, What the Wind Brings has clearly been researched down to the smallest historical detail. You can reach out and touch the jungle undergrowth, the planks of the sailing ships, or the plaster walls of the monastery. Unlike other many of the other historical novels I have encountered, none of this description intrudes on the narrative but is instead fully

integrated within the action. You see the ship or the jungle or monastery because the viewpoint character happens to be looking at it, not because Hughes has stopped the narrative for an extended essay on 16th century ship-building or Spanish politics.

What makes this an outstanding Canadian novel is that Hughes brings a multicultural sensibility to his research that paints each of the competing cultures in its own terms so that the reader gets a sense of what it means to be of that people. For example, most people hold the stereotype that the slave trade kidnapped ignorant hunter-gathers from their jungle huts and dragged them over the ocean to civilization, but what we have here is a nobleman and his officers, every bit as sophisticated as the Spanish, but sold into slavery because they lost the battle to hold their city. Similarly, Hughes understands that not everyone within a culture fits comfortably there. The monk is a fully developed individual, with his own beliefs, motivations and character, not a mere stereotypical representative of a hierarchical, monolithic church. The scenes with the shaman (the only character written in the first person) make it clear that although the elders value the shaman's vision and healing, they do not acknowledge their gender. Each of the characters is a fully realized individual, just as each of their worldviews is faithfully depicted as complex and internally consistent. The interplay between all these elements creates wheels within wheels that makes for compelling reading.

Matthew Hughes regards this novel as his magnum opus, and he's not wrong. The twenty-five years spent writing it was clearly worth it. I refuse to say his other twenty-plus novels were mere practice for this one—because I love those as I love, say, the novels of P. G. Wodehouse—but you need to understand that as Matthew Hughes bursts on the literary scene as an overnight sensation, Matt Hughes paid those dues in full.

Prose Bono

Pretty In Pink
by Jagi Lamplighter Wright
http://SuperversiveSF.com

I am taking an online writing course this month with Writing Instructor Extraordinaire Margie Lawson. When she is not writing/teaching, Margie Lawson is a psychologist who works as a therapist, so she really gets to see people express the full range of human emotions. At work, Margie notices the physical actions and gestures that accompany strong emotional reactions. In her writing courses, she shares these observations with her students.

The classes are great fun and include a number of published writers. A number of Margie's previous students have gone on to hit the Bestseller's List. So, she knows of what she teaches.

I am finding the class to be both great fun and really hard. Several times, I have literally had to pace around holding my head, it was so difficult…but the end result was worth the agony. Even John, who was not in favor of me taking the class, thought my "After" excerpts were pretty good. (His exact words were: "In each case, the 'after' is not just better, it is much better, like it was written by a different writer. ")

So, I thought today I would say a few words about one of the many interesting points we are learning about in this class: Visceral Reactions.

One of the great revelations that Margie has brought to my attention is the power of including the POV character's visceral reactions. In Margie's EDITS system, she assigns colors to certain aspects of writing to help authors track what they are and are not including in their manuscript. The color assigned to visceral reactions is Pink.

By visceral reactions, we mean involuntary responses. "Her breath caught in her throat." "Her heart hammered like a hungry woodpecker." "Her knees knocked together." "She swallowed." These are the involuntary reactions we all have to moments of heightened emotion: sudden happiness, fear, terror, sad news, etc. They are the ways we feel these high emotion moments in our body.

A POV (Point-of-View) character's visceral reaction has a different effect on the reader than the reaction of some other character. The reader associates with the POV character (in a good book, anyway). So, when the POV reports that her heart skipped a beat, or his head throbbed. We feel this…and it helps lock down the related emotion in our imaginations.

Now, you may ask: Why is this important?

As readers, we assume that emotional reactions are a given. We read. Stuff is on the page. We react to it. Right?
Not exactly. When I first started writing, I often wrote in a rather screenplay like fashion, just saying what happened and leaving the rest up to the reader. Well…I soon found out that it was my job, not the readers job, to indicate the desired reaction to the event of a story. Otherwise, the reader often had the wrong reaction.

I will pause for a brief example:

The giant spider climbed over the wall. Eight enormous eyes glinted in the moonlight.

Filbo's heart grew cold in his chest. He pressed a hand against his throat. If Perry and Mippin had not been waiting on the far side, relying upon him, he would have turned back then and there.

The giant spider climbed over the wall. Eight enormous eyes glinted in the moonlight.

"This'll be a cinch!" Indiana Dundee laughed in his charming accent. His grin widened as he felt that heady rush of adrenaline that accompanied the hunt. "For Arachne Gigantua we recommend a size seven net."

The giant spider climbed over the wall. Eight enormous eyes glinted in the moonlight.

Tears welled up in her eyes, "Oh Arachne! You're okay! You lived!"

As a beginning writer, I thought that the description of the spider was enough to inspire fear. But people can have myriad reactions to any event. When my main character did not react with fear to what was happening, neither did my reader. (This is not to say that an author cannot write a scene where the POV is not scared, but the reader is…but that takes more finesse.)

What Margie's Empowering Character's Emotion class brings out is that the number one most effective way to communicate emotional reactions to the reader is through the visceral reaction of the Point-of-

View character. When we read these involuntary responses, we tend to experience them, too…and we associate them in our mind with certain emotions.

If we read that a character had butterflies in his stomach we often feel a momentarily ghostly flutter ourselves, as we remember what that is like. We remember moments when we were in front of a crowd or had to make a confession. Those subconscious associations with the visceral reaction get channeled into our reaction to the scene in the book. It makes it that much more vivid, that much more real.

One does not want a lot of pink in one's manuscript. Too much, and it stops having the desired effect. The reader pulls away.

It's like the difference between the shock when a quiet person suddenly yells, and when a loud person yells. The quiet person gets our attention. The loud people are soon tuned out. (Take it from a mom.)

Too much and the reader balks. Not enough and they do not engage, but just right and all your food will be eaten by Goldilocks…er, I mean, and the Reader can have a vivid and enjoyable experience reading your book.

So, what we want is little dabs of pink here and there…just enough to keep the reader on the edge of his seat.
And now, I breathe a huge sigh of relief and go back to my class assignments. (Notice the pink!)

For anyone who is interested in learning more, Margie Lawson's lectures can be purchased directly for the cost of something like $20. The one I am taking is Empowering Characters Emotions. The online courses are the same lectures with interaction, both with her and other students, which really helps. (This particular course I am taking has 150 people in it!) Information about when these are given is available on her website here.

Literary Criticism

An Interview with Alaric Naudé by Tamara Wilhoit

http://LibertyIslandmag.com

I first got to know Alaric Naudé well when we had a discussion regarding Sapir-Whorf theory, something I discussed in my article "Books You Didn't Realize Represented the Sapir-Whorf Theory". Alaric Naudé is an expert on Asian languages. He's also the Head Professor of English Department at Suwon Science College in South Korea. I interviewed him after his first non-fiction book "The Babylon Cypher: Why Everything Is Language and Language Is Everything" came out.

Tamara Wilhite: I know you're fluent in Korean. What other languages do you speak?

Alaric Naudé: Well, I am an ethnic Boer so I speak Afrikaans and I also understand Dutch and speak it with a colloquial heavy accent. I grew up in Kwa-Zulu Natal which is part of the Zulu Kingdom, growing up all my friends spoke Zulu so I did too but unfortunately I have lost a lot due to disuse. Learning languages is an addictive pastime. When I immigrated to Australia I fell in love with Mandarin and Cantonese, my Mandarin is enough to get me by although I do think my writing is better than my speaking. Due to my volunteer work I have been exposed to Arabic so I speak…broken Arabic….mostly broken.

Tamara Wilhite: We've discussed Sapir-Whorf theory elsewhere. Can you explain it for our audience here?

Alaric Naudé: The Sapir-Whorf theory was developed by Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf, it is also called Whorfianism but I do not like that term very much due to the negative connotations that comes with so many of the "isms". A better way of describing it would be linguistic relativity.

Basically, it states that the cognition of speakers or their view of the world will be shaped by the structure of the language they speak. It is a theory I think deserves more attention because there is a great deal of empirical evidence that supports it. Even the ways that words are constructed show a difference in thinking patterns and many bilingual or multilingual persons' report "multiple personalities" that change as they speak different languages. This suggests that there is a deep and as yet not fully understood link between the patterns in cognition and the patterns found in language.

There has been some contention over specific examples used to express the workings of Sapir-Whorf theory namely the Hopi language, however, despite criticism the mechanisms claimed by Sapir-Whorf theory can quickly be realized when one attempts to translate concepts that exist in one language but not in the target language. This phenomenon extends even into dialects of the same language, thinking patterns that exist as expressions of both culture and language differ greatly even between English speaking countries.

Tamara Wilhite: You've written papers and participated in conferences on neurolinguistics. To what degree do you think altering word choice and censoring language actually affects human thought?

Alaric Naudé: I think word choice is a very important area of manipulation. In every extremist ideology we see a push to redefine words and change meanings to suit a cause. That does not mean that semantic shifts do not happen naturally, they do. It does however typically take at least one generation for changes to take place organically and some languages we see such changes are minimal even over centuries.

The problem is that artificial changes create artificial results, the checks and balances required are not present. We only have to look at Nazi Germany to see how reclassification of language can very rapidly lead to very bad results. Take for example the redefinition of racism as being only a system of power and oppression. This unfortunately exonerates the individual from their personal prejudice towards other races, meaning that it removes both personal accountability and also the ability for self-reflection. This is a very slippery slope when it comes to justifying potentially harmful behavior. It doesn't matter what the ideology is, if it controls the individual's understanding of definitions, by extension it controls their very perception of reality.

Tamara Wilhite: And what is your book "The Babylon Cypher: Why Everything Is Language and Language Is Everything" about?

Alaric Naudé: Well in many ways the book is exactly about what we have been discussing, namely language and control. I attempt in layman's terms to layout the history of language and development of written language and how it holds meaning. It discusses language acquisition in children and the pre-programmed steps that babies go through even at the pre-natal stages where language is being absorbed. Language learning is a process that continues from the womb to the tomb.

I also talk about how languages have been used very early in human history to exert dominance and control thus creating hierarchies but also how languages impact on hierarchies. Propaganda is examined and historical patterns in language engineering is compared with what we see happening now, specifically it debunks ideas put across by Robin DiAngelo and Ibram Kendi by understanding the mechanism

behind their writing styles.

Tamara Wilhite: What led you to write the book?

Alaric Naudé: A lot of the contents was from when I was writing my PhD dissertation. I found that there was a distinct pattern in how languages became "prestige" or "vulgar" that is to say, the language forms used by elites and those used by the common people. It started to make me wonder on how far this could be controlled and made me look into the many policies that surround language use.

After discussing these with many academics who shared similar observations and being encouraged by readers of my blog to write a book, I finally thought that I should. Actually, after reading work by Jordan Peterson, Gad Saad, Janice Fiamengo, Christopher Paslay, Erec Smith and many others, I saw very well argued ideas and observations but there was a linguistic element missing that I felt needed to be addressed.

My basic aim is for people to understand how language works, to protect their minds from unwholesome influences that seek to polarize and indoctrinate them especially the strong propaganda we see being put out so unashamedly in the mainstream media. Jordan Peterson has a message in his book "Go clean your room", my message would be "reflect on why you have a dirty room".

Tamara Wilhite: Some of your work blurs the line between science and science fiction. Your paper Ghost in the Shell: Discussing the Future of Language Teaching comes to mind.

Alaric Naudé: Science fiction for me has always been an attempt at explaining the possibilities that potentially exist, an exploration of what could be. Sometimes sci-fi makes very accurate predictions, for example the episode of Doctor Who in 1977 called "The Face of Evil" predicted the fake news controversy we have today, the same TV show also predicted smartwatches and people being glued to their Televisions. I have made several predictions concerning how technology will become more central to learning, this corona situation seems to have proven my assumptions to be correct.

However, I do think machines have a very long way to go in understanding the nuance of human language, because so much more is involved than merely the semantics in grammar or vocabulary. I think that whether someone is in the hard sciences or in the social sciences there needs to be some open mindedness for inspiration and a healthy fear of what could go wrong, which comes about in that blurred line between science and science fiction.

Tamara Wilhite: You do a mix of language education and translation. What is the most interesting thing you've ever translated?

Alaric Naudé: Interesting question, most translation is really run of the mill stuff like cosmetics or technology or basic tourism information. There are things however that can be very challenging. I was given a job where I was asked to translate extensive information on an area of Korea that was the heartland of the Silla Dynasty which reigned from about 57BC to 935AD. It was an immensely difficult task, many of the words are not found in everyday Korean and many Korean speakers do not even know what the objects being spoken about are. For some words, I had to look at the ancient Hanja that they were taken from to get the meaning of the words then construct an appropriate English equivalent because it simply doesn't exist in English - or in any other language for that matter.

To illustrate one such word was a "type of ancient ornate lotus shaped interlocking roof tiles", quite a mouthful but about as close to the original as possible. It is not without irony that this type of unique culturally specific language brings us back to the Sapir-Whorf theory.

Tamara Wilhite: I'm more involved in science fiction, horror, fantasy and technology. Thus I'm more familiar with mainstream cartoons like "Avatar" or the potential reboot of "Battlestar Galactica". But I'm aware of the cultural underpinning of these works. What anime, cartoons, or books like "The Three Body Problem" would serve as a good introduction of South Korean or other Pacific Rim cultures to the Western audience?

Alaric Naudé: I think a film that is science fiction but that has a very realistic feel is the film "Okja" which is the story of a genetically modified super pig which is given to a farmer. The animal is highly intelligent and becomes the pet of a young Korean girl. At some point the company wants their creation back and is willing to do anything and get rid of anyone in their way to do so.

In Korea, large companies are both loved and feared with the ethical behavior of some being strongly questioned both in the sense of their behavior as well as the technology that they are willing to use. This film sheds light on animal rights and corporate greed but also shows unique glimpses of Korean life especially the countryside and mountains which are truly picturesque and calming. This film follows a more benevolent tone than a similar film, "The Host", where the unethical behavior of a large company dumping chemicals illegally leads to the creation of a mutated fish-creature that lives in the Han River.

Tamara Wilhite: On the flipside, what are some popular misconceptions about Asian cultures that we have because of the content that has gone mainstream?

Alaric Naudé: Just like Asians develop a very romanticized view of the West through film and media, the same happens for Westerners who develop a romanticized view of Asia. Take for example anime and manga which is called man-hwa in Korean.

Comic books are generally viewed as being for children and not really for adults although this is changing with the advent of Webtoons, which deal with topics that are more of interest to working age people. In Korea being interested in comic books as an adult will get you called an "otaku" which is a nerd or geek but the same won't happen for webtoons which are popular with everyone from university age students to office workers.

Also because there is a stylized presentation of Westerners in Asian media and film there is the misconception that just coming to Asia as a Westerner will make one highly desirable but this is not the case. Asian cultures deal with social hierarchies and the saving of face so they avoid confrontation which Westerners may confuse with approval.

Personally I think about 50% of what is going on in a story whether it be anime or normal films is being lost on the Western audience merely because of the vast cultural gap. For example, it may be something in the background that is giving additional information such as a bowl of rice with chopsticks stuck in it or other very culturally specific nuance that the translation cannot properly convey.

Tamara Wilhite: We've already discussed your first book. What else are you working on?

Alaric Naudé: Ah ha! Spoilers! Well, I have been asked to write a chapter on education in east Asia for a book on global economics, so there's that. I do have plans in the pipeline for a book on either a concise history of slavery or the gender pay gap.

Something else I am looking at is compiling a book that contains the thoughts of some modern academics or scholars that are taking a more measured approach in their attempts to understand social or scientific phenomena, so that would be a collaborative work.

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

Alaric Naudé: Well, I hope that my book is able to help people in their self-reflection and to take a step back to analyze how much they have already been affected by propaganda without knowing it but also to gain an interest in learning about other cultures and especially learning another language.

Tamara Wilhite: Thank you for speaking with me.

~ Finis ~