

The R3F
Review of Books
Incorporating Prose Bono
Professor George Phillips, D.Sc., Editor
September 2022

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~FINIS~

Editorial

Perhaps a month will not be skipped. This turned out to be an unusually full issue, the list of reviewed works extending for two full pages.

We thank A. C. Cargill for permission to reprint her article on editing. You can see the original at <https://mewe.com/i/accargill>



The N3F Review of Books Incorporating Prose Bono 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 our reviewers' web pages, they get a modest financial reward. Some of us also write novels. Please buy them. Our lead reviewers are:

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FICTION

A Desolation Called Peace by Arkady Martine Review by Perry Middlemiss

This 2021 novel is the second book in the Teixcalaan series by this author. It won the 2022 Locus Award for Best SF Novel, and it is also a finalist for the 2022 Hugo Award for Best Novel. Before you even start on this 500-page novel you need to have read the first in this series, *A Memory Called Empire*. At the end of the first book, Ambassador Mahit Dzmare had helped the Empire transition from one old Emperor to the next only to discover the presence of an alien armada on the Empire's boundary. This novel deals directly with that alien menace: the initial attacks, the defeats, the victories, and the attempts to bring the war to a quick and satisfactory conclusion. Again, Dzmare and her implanted memory tech come to the fore.

This book is not quite as good as the first, which is probably because the world setup is not as fresh as before—by necessity of course. The first 100 pages here are going to be something of a battle to get through; at least they were for me. After that, the action and forward motion of the plot starts to pick up and the book improves immensely. This is the second book on this year's Hugo list dealing with "first contact," which is interesting. I suspect this novel will do very well at Hugo time.

I've only recently discovered that these two volumes were originally conceived of as a duology and that no third or subsequent volumes are planned. That's a pity, as I think there are still a number of questions left hanging at the end of this second volume. That's not something I say very often. (This review was previously published in slightly different form in the ANZAPA apazine *Perryscope* #24.)

All the Myriad Ways by Larry Niven Review by Perry Middlemiss

This 1971 edition is an early collection of Larry Niven's short fiction, including some early timeline Known Space stories and others, ranging from sf ("Becalmed in Hell") to fantasy ("Not Long Before the End"). Among the other stories here, "The Jigsaw Man" was nominated for a Nebula Award and "Inconstant Moon" won the Hugo for Best Novelette in 1972. Also included are the speculative nonfiction pieces, "Man of Steel, Woman of Kleenex" riffing on Superman's love life, "The Theory and Practice of Time Travel," and "Exercise in Speculation: The Theory and Practice of Teleportation." This collection gives the reader a good idea of what Niven was up to in the late 1960s and early 1970s. While the stories might not all be top level, they are all at least interesting and worth reading. (This review was previously published in slightly different form in the ANZAPA apazine *Perryscope* #24.)

All the Sounds of Fear by Harlan Ellison Review by Perry Middlemiss

This 1971 collection of Harlan Ellison's stories, ranging from 1956 through to 1967, includes his award-winning stories "I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream" and "'Repent, Harlequin!' said the Ticktockman." All of the stories deal with the themes of alienation and oppression, either by external forces—

governments or society—or by the stories’ protagonists themselves. Most of them were originally published in the various sf magazines of the period, other than the title story, which first appeared in The Saint Detective Magazine. It’s very easy, and also very interesting, to see the author’s progression from the earlier, standard sf stories to his later award winners. (This review was previously published in slightly different form in the ANZAPA apazine Perryscope #24.)

The Book Club by J.H. Nadler Review by Jason P. Hunt <http://SciFi4Me.com>

In the interest of full disclosure, I should share that J.H. Nadler and his wife Laura have both contributed to SciFi4Me in the past with their coverage of various festivals and screening events in the New York area.

Having gotten that out of the way, I can say that Nadler’s debut novel is a pretty good yarn.

The basic premise: there’s magic in the world, and throughout history, the power to wield magic rested with women, until men decided that women were too emotional and the magic needed to be restrained by putting it all into books. Now, as I got further into the story, this particular plot element struck me as being... problematic, let’s say? Because when you paint with such a broad brush, you run the risk of alienating the reader. More on this point in a bit.

Alexandra is our fish out of water, unable to hear or experience magic, and yet she’s the center of the efforts both sides are taking in order to gain control over it. It’s not quite a “chosen one” scenario, but it has pieces of that combined with a “hero’s journey” where Alex has to learn about not only her heritage, but the lengths to which factions will go to control her in order to ultimately control magic. And like every coming-of-age story, there’s also the requisite amount of pain that comes with the loss of innocence. To quote the Dread Pirate Roberts, “Life is pain.”

The story is told completely from Alex’s point of view, which means there’s no omnipotent narrator and we discover things as she does. From her wanderings with her twin cousins to the first time she learns about her family history, everything is a revelation, and some details are more welcome than others, as far as Alex is concerned. Without getting too deep into spoiler territory, Alex has experiences that change her from a naïve teenager to a more self-assured young woman through the efforts of the Book Club, a coven of witches organized by Alex’s Aunt Heather. Although it makes sense within the context of the story, it strikes me that everyone starts looking to Alex for leadership a little too quickly, which leans into the “Chosen One” element but does it at the expense of Aunt Heather’s character arc.

The Book Club certainly has its mix of personalities as well, the standout being Abby, who’s the only one of the group that can’t really access magic. She’s dedicated to protecting Alex, and her personality is such that I can see her driving a truck or tending a biker bar. Rough around the edges, but deep-down caring about everyone around her. If Alien’s Ellen Ripley was a sidekick, I imagine she’d be a lot like Abby.

The idea that women owned magic once upon a time pretty much tracks with the idea that most fantasy stories have an audience that skews female, with the more emotional and romanticized stories. I expect the same to be the case with The Book Club, and that’s where I get to my one main critique: none of

the men in the story have any redeeming qualities. They're all driven by motivations that come at the expense of the women in the story, and it's that underlying misandry that almost but not quite pushed me out of several scenes. The only male character who escapes this — although not entirely — is young cousin Billy, who becomes more than what he seems the longer you get into the book. Even Alex's father has questionable methods when it comes to fulfilling a plan regarding Alex and her destiny.

Matthew, the main villain of the piece, is appropriately malevolent, and for some reason I pictured Angus Scrimm's Tall Man from *Phantasm II* when he shows up in the book. His actions are driven by his belief that he's saving the world, saving magic, by constraining it to various books collecting spells and incantations. But the methods he employs to capture those spells are enough to turn your stomach if you think about it long enough. Which is, I guess, the point of his character. Even if he's right, he's wrong in the way he goes about achieving his goals.

The only other quibble I have is with the first chapter, as it was difficult to tell who was where. The geography of the location — Alex's childhood home — felt a little bigger on the inside. But past that, I had no trouble following the action.

Complaints aside, overall the characters are pretty well fleshed out, and as Alex encounters her journey, she acquires layers that build her maturity levels in a way that's both consistent with the narrative and doesn't build her up as a "Mary Sue" type that suddenly has all of the answers and all the power at the end. Because she doesn't, and *The Book Club* is clearly setting up a bigger conflict to come in the remainder of the trilogy.

One twist on a trope that I appreciated: the idea that twins have some kind of special ascendancy in fantasy is a trope that dates back to early mythologies from around the world, and it's good to see it turned slightly on its ear here. The importance of twins comes into play, but not in the way you might think, and I found it a clever use of the trope without diving into the more well-worn aspects of it.

The story is paced just right; not too rushed, not drawn out. It flows with the needs of the scene, so it doesn't feel like Nadler put a clock or a page count to when a certain thing has to happen. When the story needs are there, the pace gets deliberate without getting bogged down, and that can sometimes be a tricky thing to navigate and keep the reader's attention. Nadler does that pretty fluidly here.

I quite enjoyed *The Book Club*. The character arcs, the mix of personalities, and the narrative are all fresh takes on familiar elements. Each chapter leads into the next with the right amount of "tune in next week" tension that you get from the old movie serials. The story flows well, and I found myself reading through this rather quickly once I got a few chapters in. I'm looking forward to reading the next installment, *The Between*, which implies where we're going next, given the context. And that should prove to be a suitably dark Act II in the trilogy.

The Butlerian Jihad
by Kevin J. Anderson and Brian Herbert
Review by Graham Bradley
<https://upstreamreviews.substack.com>

Frank Herbert's DUNE is the best-selling sci-fi novel ever. He penned six books in the series while he was alive and had a seventh in the oven before he died. A few decades would pass before his son Brian would lead the charge to create more books in the Dune series, and with the help of prolific author Kevin J. Anderson, he did just that. THE BUTLERIAN JIHAD is the first of many collaborations between the two men that expand Frank Herbert's legendary saga.

The story

The eponymous jihad is an event often referred to by Frank Herbert in the Dune novels, but only with a hint of a whisper, explaining why mankind outlawed artificial intelligence in the future.

This is because they had thinking machines in the past, and the machines pulled a Skynet, wiping out millions of people. It cost many lives and entire worlds to end the machines' rule, and the event was called the Butlerian Jihad. This book is the story of that event.

The characters

Fans of DUNE will recognize some familiar house names right off the bat, like Xavier Harkonnen, Vorian Atreides, and Serena Butler. It was really cool to see what these houses were like 10,000 years before Paul Atreides stepped on Arrakis; Xavier is a rugged warrior with connections to the nobility, while Vorian is a test-tube baby descended from one of the first "cymeks"—human brains transplanted into robotic bodies so they'd live forever.

As the story unfolded, I loved seeing the origins of the conflict between the Harkonnen and Atreides houses. While it doesn't explode outright, the smallest seed is there, and you begin to understand what could have made these two men dislike each other, resulting in a rivalry that would span centuries and many planets.

It's epic, it's heartbreaking, and it was very well done. Nailing the characters made the rest of the story a cakewalk.

The world

Despite the time difference from DUNE, this is still the same solar system, just not with the imperial government... at least not yet. Interplanetary space travel is normal, Earth is the known cradle of humanity, the "thinking machines" have synchronized several worlds under their rule, and Arrakis is just some distant desert planet with a bunch of Buddhist/Islamic refugees hanging out on the sand.

The seeds of the future are there, and we get to watch them sprout.

The politics

This is less a political book and more of a wartime book. While it doesn't ask the same kind of big philosophical questions that Herbert did in the 60s, it does still present big ideas and prompt you to think

about things you might not have considered before.

Content warning

A few sensual lead-ins, but you don't follow the characters into the bedroom for it. Xavier and Serena are horny on main; however it actually plays into certain events in the story. Also, as a central turning point in the story, there's a pretty horrific infanticide. No language.

Who is it for?

Fans of DUNE, and fans of sci-fi.

Why read it?

This is the biggest reason: it's a prequel that honors what came before it, written by a couple of guys who didn't create the original. They cared about the canon, and they cared about making something good. With all the defacing that goes on around properties like Star Trek, Star Wars, Marvel comics, and more, it was such a breath of fresh air to read an expanded timeline novel in a property that was actually good.

Children of Blood and Bone by Tomi Adeyemi

Review by Chris Nuttall

<http://ChrisHanger.wordpress.com>

I should note, at the start, that Children of Blood and Bone is written in a curious style. The author has used first-person, immediate tense ("I walk down the street") and – for some reason – used three separate POV characters. I'm not sure why she did it, because – while it does lend the text a certain degree of immediacy – it also makes the first few characters harder to follow. Things smooth out as the book progresses, I concede, but there were a couple of times I nearly put the book aside and gave up. Thankfully, I kept reading. I'm glad I did, because Children of Blood and Bone is a very good read.

There was magic once, in a land called Orisha. The magicians – the maji clans – were divided into a number of different subgroups, each one possessing a different magic. But, one terrible day, the magic went away ... and King Saran struck, slaughtering the magicians as they reeled from the loss of their powers. The only survivors were the children, the ones too young to come into their powers. They were allowed to live but kept under close supervision. All hope of rebuilding, and destroying the king's tyranny, seems lost.

However, when a mysterious scroll with the power to reawaken magic surfaces – and hints of other artefacts come into view – all this may change. A trio of characters – Zélie, the daughter of a former maji; Tzain, her brother; Princess Amari, who runs away and joins Zélie after King Saran killed one of Amari's friends for possessing magic – set out to recover the other artefacts and perform a ritual that will bring magic back. They are pursued by Crown Prince Inan, who is himself secretly a maji. They go through hell – and a great deal of personal development – before they finally perform the ritual, although it is clear that the story is far from over (and a sequel is due out later this year).

In some ways, Children of Blood and Bone reminds me of The Age of Misrule. The main characters have to search the land for a handful of artefacts, all the while avoiding attention from the bad guys.

This isn't easy, of course, and there are a lot of similarities between the two books. However, there is more than enough to *Children of Blood and Bone* for it to stand on its own.

The author's worldbuilding is very good. It captures the flavour of an alternate Africa very well, resting comfortably – as it does – in African myth. The book shifts from place to place, each one strikingly different ... from each other as well as the world we know. This is not – thankfully – Wakanda. The country is presented to us as a very human land, with glories as well as horrors. Some of these are deeply personal, from the curse of growing up under a tyrant's rule to the pleasure of indulging in minor rebellion. There is much to like – and admire – here.

She also manages to give her three main characters life, crafting them as three-dimensional flawed people rather than archetypes or one-dimensional Mary Sues. Zélie is both an action girl and a deconstruction of an action girl, with a headstrong nature that tends to get her into trouble as much as it saves her life. (The book is aware of this, as is Zélie herself.) Amari, by contrast, starts life as a passive character who grows into a heroine. The two girls have a tendency to clash at first, a moment of realism in a genre where most questing parties trust each other from the start.

Crown Prince Inan is a far more conflicted character, one who constantly – and confusingly – changes his mind. He's trying to catch the heroes – no, he's trying to join them – no, he's trying to catch them again ... his viewpoint keeps shifting as he gets new information, driven by both self-loathing – he's a magician, which in his mind makes him a monster – and a growing love for Zélie. It is sometimes hard to follow him, at least in part because the character himself is unsure of what he wants to do. He spends the entire book torn between his father and his own nature, unclear on what the truth actually is.

I'm not sure, to be honest, if that was the writer's intention. On the surface, King Saran is a monster. There is ample evidence of his monstrosity. It cannot be denied. But, at the same time, he charges that the maji were monsters themselves, beings of supernatural powers that destroyed country after country before he found out how to break their powers and crush them. It's curious that he didn't slaughter their children as well as the adults. And when we see flickers of the once-great magic, it's easy to see why muggles might have been scared of them. Zélie sees her dead mother as a heroine; others, perhaps with reason, might think otherwise. And even if they were, what about their children? The kids have grown up powerless and abused. What will they do when they get their powers back?

There's no good answer to these questions. We – our society – hasn't found any good answers either.

The book touches – very lightly – on racism, although barely more than enough to remind us that all of the characters are black. Amari's mother tries to lighten her skin, apparently out of fear that Amari's dark skin is a hint that her mother cheated on her father, but she's the only one who seems to care. (Amari's father may be displeased with her, even before she runs away, but there's no hint it's because of her skin.) Inan doesn't seem to feel any loathing or disgust at his attraction to Zélie, something that would be odd for a dyed-in-the-wool racist.

Children of Blood and Bone is on firmer ground as an indictment of classism. The contrast between the lives of Zélie and Tzain, who grew up poor and powerless, and the royal family is striking – and Zélie doesn't hesitate to rub Amari's nose in it. There are all sorts of little moments that illustrate how hard it can be to climb up the social ladder – and how such a society breeds prejudices of its own. Tzain refuses to believe that Inan might genuinely be falling in love with his sister, charging that all Tzain wants is to have sex with her. We know he's wrong, because we see Inan's point of view, but he isn't being unreasonable. It's difficult for the characters to work together because they are blinded by their own fears.

The author herself draws a line between Children of Blood and Bone and police brutality in the United States. In some ways, this weakens the book. (Thankfully, she put it in the afterword.) The blunt truth is that the book's society is nothing like America, at least as far as I can tell from my vantage point on the far side of the pond, and – as I noted above – it raises the question of who is genuinely in the right? (Or, more likely, who is unable to take their boot off the underclass's neck for fear that the underclass will spring up and tear their former oppressors apart? The problem with defusing a ticking time bomb is that even trying might set off the explosion.)

That said, the only real problem lies with the narrative style. It is sometimes hard to keep track of the POV character, which leads to some odd moments; one character's observations on a given event are different to another character's observations. I'm not a great fan of mixing and matching first-person POVs, although – as the book picks up speed – the problems tend to smooth themselves out. By the time the book reaches the conclusion, things are moving along nicely.

Overall, I enjoyed the book. It has good – and nicely-flawed – characters, an interesting background that is both different and understandable, a definite hint that things are a little more nuanced than either side would care to admit and, perhaps most importantly of all, a complete story that leaves plenty of room for a sequel. I await this author's next book with interest.

The Dragon Proofed House by L.E. Henderson

Review by Jim McCoy

<http://JimbosSFFreviews.blogspot.com>

Ya know, I've read a lot of books over the years. Fiction, non-fiction, totally fictitious crap that claimed to be non-fiction, etc. Many of them have been books that I read having been told that they would make me think. In the case of some of the non-fiction that was true. Very rarely has the fiction. I think this book changed that for me in a weird sort of way.

L. E. Henderson's book, The Dragon Proofed House: Book 3 of the Torn Curtains Series asks a question. I'm not sure it's intended to, but it does. (Queue that Venn Diagram) Seriously. At what point would life get so bad that an individual would voluntarily enter the Matrix and forget everything about life that came before? How bad does it get before someone WANTS to give their entire life up to gaming?

Don't get me wrong. I'm not here to insult people who game. Today is my day off work. I've already spent several hours playing World of Warcraft. After I write this review, I'm going to play some more WoW. Then I'm going to call my girlfriend. Then I'm going to play more WoW. Then I'll fall asleep to The Walking Dead. I love gaming.

This is different. After all, I'm doing my laundry, writing a post and calling the little woman today. The main character of the story, Christine, has made a choice that is only marginally different than suicide. For all intents and purposes, she has chosen to sink her life so far into a game named Mirror Mountain Valley that she is unable to remember anything that came before her life there. She has no ambitions for anything after she logs out. As a matter of fact, it appears that she has no way to log out at all.

That leads to a second question, and it's one that we all faced in high school: How far is a person ready to go to be popular? How much will an individual sell themselves out to get someone else to like them? The Dragon Proofed House is a thinking person's book.

I find myself surprised at how much I actually enjoyed *The Dragon Proofed House*. It's certainly not my typical fare. Don't get me wrong. It was a good time. It was just... different. There are no explosions here. For that matter, there is no real violence of any kind. There is certainly some social intrigue, but nothing like the political maneuvering that would be familiar to a fan of the *Battletech* novels. Despite all of that, it's still a really good story.

I couldn't help but root for Christine throughout the book. If you like the underdog, you'll love her too. Despite the trials and tribulations the game sends her way, she's bound and determined to do everything she can to help herself. If she finds that things don't always go the way she wants them to, well, we've all been there. She doesn't give up. She doesn't give over to whining and trying to wish herself to success.

And that was a welcome surprise, because the first few pages gave me a Bella-like feeling. Fortunately, that goes away quickly. Henderson seems to have succeeded where Stephanie Meyers failed. I would still urge the reader to give *The Dragon Proofed House* about five or ten pages to get going. Once Christine picks herself up and starts working toward a goal things become a lot more fun and interesting.

At the end of the day, I think that what makes *The Dragon Proofed House* work is that almost everything in the book is familiar in one way or another. Christine is a person who has been through a lot but so have I. She has to fight every day to make things better for herself. So do I. Probably the paradox of her character though, is that she never gives up.

I say that because she already gave up once or she wouldn't be in the game and we wouldn't have a story. Yet, once she has made her decision to enter the game (which we never actually see "on stage") she fights to get to the endgame and stay there. And that is a fight with which I am intimately familiar.

The game plays like a virtual reality version of *The Sims*, except that everything constantly falls apart. At its heart though, *Mirror Mountain Valley* is a game about building a really cool house and interacting with your neighbors. Money comes to the player in the form of compliment credits which can be used to either repair or improve a player's house. Compliment credits are generally given by people who like a house. It's a vicious cycle which, in its way, is comparable to some things that real world MMORPG players go through.

I kind of wish that *The Dragon Proofed House* were available in Dead Tree Format, because I'd love to give a copy to my daughter, who doesn't have a tablet and can't take pictures on her phone half the time because the memory is so full. I'd like to get her take on it. Don't get me wrong, I'm a man and I enjoyed it. I'm just saying that this is something I think she probably should read and would enjoy. As a seventh grader, she's headed into the time in her life when she'll be facing the popularity question pretty soon and I like the way that Henderson handled that.

Christine fights to fit the tastes of others and is left dealing with the consequences of changing her personality to match someone else's. I don't want to go into too many spoilers but it's about what I expected. That's something I'd like both of my kids to think about before she decides to work too hard to fit in.

Seriously. As an adult you can enjoy this book. If you know any youngsters who would actually read it (and I know some kids aren't going to read anything no matter what.) you need to get them a copy of *The Dragon Proofed House* and talk to them about what's in there. As a guy with a history degree, I don't often consider non-scholarly work to be important, but I'm going to make an exception here. I

think this one is worth their time not just for the entertainment value (which is there in spades) but for what they can learn vicariously.

Bottom Line: 4.5 out of 5 Rosebushes

Dangerous Visions #1 edited by Harlan Ellison Review by Heath Row <http://N3F.org>

The 1969 Berkley anthology *Dangerous Visions #1* (Berkley, 1969) was edited by Harlan Ellison. While I enjoyed the first few stories, I didn't take notes or write about them as I read. Apparently, I'd also read three-fourths of Philip Jose Farmer's story "Riders of the Purple Wage" before drifting off and over to another book or other stories. So I finished the piece. I don't recommend abandoning the story partway, as I did, and I'm sure I'd have enjoyed the ending more if I'd read it in closer proximity to the beginning. Regardless, it's an effective story about inspiring relatives, the black sheep of families, societal expectations, rebellion, crime, and pranks.

Echoing a recent conversation at Westercon, in his Afterword, Farmer writes, "I'm strangely indifferent about getting a man onto the Moon. ... I've been increasingly interested in, and worried over, terrestrial problems." The story is largely inspired by the Triple Revolution, a memorandum sent to President Lyndon B. Johnson and others in 1964 by the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions. The report addressed the cybernetic revolution and automation, the mutually assured destruction offered by nuclear weapons, and human rights. Given the current state of the world and American politics, the Triple Revolution still seems relevant—and perhaps worth returning to. The full text of the report is available online.

"The Malley System" introduced me to the writing of Miriam Allen deFord, who was 81 at the time of its publication in this paperback. Ellison's introduction to the story touches on some of her fiction-writing highlights, but her history becomes even more interesting if you do additional research. Before embarking on her fiction writing, deFord wrote for leftist periodicals such as the *Federated Press Bulletin*, *The Liberator*, and *The Masses* in the 1920s. She wrote a nonfiction book *Bellamy's Looking Backward* in 1944 and the essay "Charles Fort: Infant Terrible of Science" in 1954. She is best known for her mysteries and science fiction.

The story in this anthology is reminiscent of Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*, which was first published in 1962, so it might have been an influence. Regardless, the story recounts a handful of extremely violent, deviant crimes—including the rape of a child, the killing of a drug addict, the murder of a spouse, the abuse of an extraterrestrial, and cannibalism—before two characters discuss Malley's System: Violent criminals relive their final crime before apprehension daily as part of their prison sentence. The story is surprisingly candid in its portrayal of the relived crimes, and it's interesting to think about it being written by an elderly woman—what might the rest of her writing be like?

Robert Bloch's "A Toy for Juliette" is a sequel of sorts to his 1943 short story, "Yours Truly, Jack the Ripper." In the introduction, Ellison discusses what he terms "literary feedback," or unconscious plagiarism—the writing of a story clearly inspired by or reminiscent of another piece of writing. In the story, Jack the Ripper is brought into the future, ostensibly as a potential victim for a young, beautiful female artisanal killer, the granddaughter of his abductor. In this case, the expectant killer is surprised by the wherewithal of her intended victim.

Bloch, in turn, writes the introduction to Ellison's own sequel to that sequel, "The Prowler in the City at the Edge of the World." Abducted to an antiseptic city of the future, Jack the Ripper finds himself on the loose. Encouraged by Juliette's grandfather, he embarks on what he thinks is a killing spree without risk of capture, deeming the citizens of the future to be hapless and helpless before his blades. To his surprise, he learns that some evil—some moral lassitude—exceeds even his own.

It took Ellison more than a year to write the story, and he did ample research to prepare for the piece, developing his own theory on who Jack the Ripper actually was. He also comments on how some stories can't be written or completed until a writer changes, develops, or otherwise grows as a writer—or as a person. "[A] 'writer's slump' might very well not be a slump at all but a transitional period. A plateau period in which his style, his views and his interests might be altering." Even though I'm not as intrigued by the identity or practices of Jack the Ripper as Bloch and Ellison seem to have been, I appreciated the literary feedback between and across the stories.

Finally, Brian W. Aldiss's "The Night That All Time Broke Out" posits the concept of a time gas that can be used for localized time travel: your living room can be at one time, the hallway at another, and your bedroom another still. It offered an interesting variant to the usual all-or-nothing approach to time travel but doesn't end well for the society employing it. Similar to the rape scene in "The Malley System" above, there's a passage focusing on underage lovemaking: "[D]ial back to when you were twelve," Aldiss writes. "You must have been very sexy in your preteens... ." I'm not sure that would fly in today's cultural currents.

This anthology isn't even the entire volume of *Dangerous Visions*, just eight of its more than 30 stories. But it's a good survey of Ellison's vision for the overall anthology, as well as his taste in fiction. As a paperback, it's a manageable read, perhaps more easily read in sequence than the longer work—making *Dangerous Visions*, as well as *Dangerous Visions #1*, a book to dip into occasionally to sample, explore, and process the potential trends of the time. (This review was previously published in slightly different form in the APA-L apazine *Telegraphs & Tar Pits #23* and LASFAPA apazine *Faculae & Filigree #15*.)

Elder Race by Adrian Tchaikovsky Review by Perry Middlemiss

This 2021 book was a finalist for the 2022 Hugo Award for Best Novella. Sometime in the distant past Earth spread out across the galaxy colonizing a large number of habitable planets. Then, those new colonies were abandoned as the home planet fell into economic collapse. But Earth rose up again and sent out emissaries to these colonies to observe and document their development without interfering in any way.

On the unnamed world of this novella, Lynesse Fourth Daughter has come to the tower of the last remaining emissary, Nyrgoth, seeking his help to expel a demon that is wreaking havoc in the nearby lands. A few generations previously, Nyrgoth had helped an ancestor of Lynesse's and left behind a promise that he would help her line if requested, so now he is compelled to interfere. The novella is told in alternating points-of-view between Lynesee and Nyrgoth, and one of the strengths of the work is the very different way the two see the world: one, from a background of a medieval society, in terms of superstition and magic; and the other in terms of science. This is a good example of Adrian Tchaikovsky's work, exploring issues of communication between species, while also telling an interesting story. (This review was previously published in slightly different form in the ANZAPA apazine *Perryscope #23*.)

Hail Mary Project by Andy Weir Review by Perry Middlemiss

This 2021 novel was a finalist for the 2022 Hugo Award for Best Novel and winner of the Goodreads Choice Award for Best SF Novel of 2021. Andy Weir's third novel is another sf puzzle-solving work, this time set in interstellar space. Ryland Grace wakes up in a room with no idea of who or where he is. In the room with him are a robot who keeps asking him questions and two mummified corpses. It transpires that he is in a spaceship, far from Earth—and the two corpses are the other members of his crew. Everything about Grace and the spaceship is a puzzle which he sets out to solve in classic Weir “science the shit out of it” mode. Once he remembers who he is, via a series of flashbacks to his earlier life on Earth—a technique the author uses a lot—and the robots let him out of his room, he discovers he is in the Tau Ceti solar system and within a few hundred kilometers of an alien vessel. Grace slowly remembers that he is there to investigate the origins of the Astrophage, a virus-like alien life form that has infiltrated our own solar system, and is gradually “eating” our sun.

In order to work out what is happening and come up with a solution to the imminent death of our sun and the extermination of all life on Earth, Grace has to form an alliance with the alien on the other ship and work on solving more problems than seem humanly possible. This is at once a first contact story, scientific puzzle, buddy comedy, and space opera all rolled into one, and—if you turn off some of your major critical senses—is a page turner and a lot of fun. Just don't dig too deeply into some of the authorial choices and decisions. Some of them are a bit wobbly. (This review was previously published in slightly different form in the ANZAPA apazine Perryscope #23.)

If It Bleeds by Stephen King Review by Jon D. Swartz, N3F Historian jon_swartz@hotmail.com

This 2022 Pocket Books collection of four of King's previously unpublished stories contains the following unrelated novellas: Mr. Harrigan's Phone, The Life of Chuck, If It Bleeds, and Rat.

Mr. Harrigan's Phone--

Essentially a ghost story, a young boy named Craig gets a part-time job working for the elderly Mr. Harrigan, a retired billionaire. Mr. Harrigan gives Craig cheap lottery tickets for the major holidays each year; and one year one of them turns out to be a \$3,000.00 winning ticket. Using some of the money he won, Craig buys Mr. Harrigan a cell phone to thank him. Craig and Mr. Harrigan become friends, but Craig is warned that, while Mr. Harrigan is usually fair with other people, he can be vindictive when crossed.

After Mr. Harrigan dies, Craig leaves the cell phone in his casket. Later, he leaves a voice mail on Mr. Harrigan's phone about a bully. The bully is then found to have committed suicide. At this point, Craig decides not to use the old phone with Mr. Harrigan's number and switches to a newer model.

Years later, after a drunk driver responsible for the death of one of Craig's teachers receives a light sentence, Craig calls Mr. Harrigan's old phone again, leaving a voice mail about the incident. The drunk driver is then found to have committed suicide; following this event, Craig throws his old phone away.

The Life of Chuck--

The story of Chuck is told in three acts but told in reverse order.

In Act III: “Thanks, Chuck,” Marty drives home and sees a billboard showing an accountant sitting at a desk; underneath it says ‘39 Great Years! Thanks, Chuck’ as the world Marty knows appears to be slowly vanishing. That evening as Marty visits his ex-wife, Felicia, he notices Chuck’s image appearing everywhere. Later, in a hospital, Chuck is dying surrounded by his family.

In Act II: “Buskers,” Chuck sees a drummer busking in the street and starts dancing. A young girl begins dancing with Chuck, and an applauding crowd surrounds them. Later that day, Chucks suffers a severe headache.

In Act I: “I Contain Multitudes,” orphan Chuck is brought up by his paternal grandparents, where his love of dancing develops. His grandparents always kept the cupola in their house locked; but eventually Chuck unlocks the room, goes in, and there sees himself dying.

If It Bleeds --

Holly Gibney of the Finders Keepers Detective Agency sees footage of a school bombing on TV. She suspects that there is something odd about the reporter Ondowsky, who was first on the scene and concludes that he may be an “outsider.” Holly makes contact with a retired policeman who tells her that he believes the reporter feeds on the fear from traumatic emotions and perhaps is causing some of these events himself. He and Holly decide that Ondowsky must be stopped, and she and some of her friends work together to stop him.

Holly is one of King's recurring characters, having appeared in his Bill Hodges trilogy and also in his *The Outsider*. In an Author’s Note at the end of the book, King tells how he came to write the stories in this collection, and also states that he loves the Holly character.

Rat --

Teacher and writer Drew Larson has published several short stories, including one notable one, but has been unable to complete a novel. Then he gets the inspiration to write a Western and is determined to complete it. He moves to an isolated family cabin and begins to write; but then the weather turns bad, he gets sick, and finds he can no longer write.

While ill, Drew begins to hallucinate about talking with a wounded rat -- one he saved instead of killing it – that appears in the cabin. He and the rat strike a Faustian-like bargain: the rat offers to get rid of Drew’s writer's block in exchange for the death of one of his friends, his former department head who is dying of pancreatic cancer. Thinking that his imagination is getting the best of him, Drew agrees, in part because his friend is dying anyway. Finally, when the storm clears, Drew returns home to his family and completes his novel.

His novel is successful, and his friend with cancer recovers. But then, the friend and his wife are both killed in an automobile accident! At the end of the story, the rat appears again to Drew and takes credit for finishing the novel.

All four stories are entertaining, but I liked Rat best of all. Internet sources report that three of these four stories have already been optioned for film adaptations.

Imaginary Friends by Arlene F. Marks Reviewed by Robert Runté

<http://SFeditor.ca>

Arlene F. Marks is the author of the six books in the Sic Transit Terra series (with more to come), a couple of standalone novels, and a surprising number of textbooks on writing. Her first short story collection, *Imaginary Friends*, has just been released from Brian Lag publishing, an up-and-coming small press based in Ontario. Traditionally published collections like this one are rare because it is an industry truism that single-author collections don't sell, unless by the biggest names in the genre or the hottest new authors. Marks is no newcomer and probably not yet a household name, but she is that good.

My favourite story in the collection is, "Candle", about a Rabbi dealing with loss. It not only provides a brief sample of the Sic Transit Terra universe, but it's also Marks at her best. Love, grief, faith, bureaucracy, space colonies, the Angle of Death . . . and underneath it all, Marks' unquenchable sense of hope, the sense that life finds a way if only we are up for the challenge. Her ability to make even minor characters real to me with just a single line or action is on full display in this one: so much character stuffed into so few words. This will be a story I'll return to again and again whenever I am stuck writing my own secondary characters, because this is how it's done.

Similarly, "Comfort Food", "The Witch in the 'Hood", and "Bemused" all share the same quiet optimism as "Candle". Life is hard, sometimes tragic, but we just have to step up and get through it. "Comfort Food" is particularly charming: comfort food indeed.

"Freudian Slip" is a straightforward feminist take on suburbia, with maybe just enough of a nod to horror to qualify the story for inclusion in this speculative fiction collection. "Business is Business" is Marks' take on the 'deal with the devil' story; "Double Back" is her rather ingenious contribution to the time travel genre; "The Best Defense" is her first contact story, and "Maury and Shred Go Ballistic" is a spinoff from two of the minor characters in one of her novels. Together, Marks hits all the main sub-genres of speculative fiction covered.

That last third of the collection is taken up by "Manua's Children" and is fully worth the price of admission on its own. This novella of farming on a colony world is homey, charming, and oozing Marks' underlying optimism. There is a mystery to be solved, friends to be rescued, and terrifying secrets to be uncovered, yet every scene still manages to somehow to feel warm and comforting. Every scene—even the nightmare ones—are so infused with the love the characters have for each other that the story is more cozy mystery than horror.

Underlying the setting, plot, and ultimately even the characterization, is a completely brilliant SF concept, one I've never come across before in over fifty years of reading in the genre. A completely new idea in SF is as rare as a student essay with an original take on *Macbeth*: it happens occasionally, but the author is therefore to be treasured. Marks' asks, "what if X happened in the middle of Y". (Sorry, I have a strict "no spoiler" policy, so that is as clear as I am prepared to make it—but a close parallel would be Langelaan taking the popular idea of teleportation and asking "what if a fly got in"? "The Fly" is one of modern speculative fiction's most famous works, with five film adaptations, an opera, and hundreds of references in popular culture. Marks' own novella is clearly worth at least one movie and there's an entire subgenre embedded in this concept for other writers to take up and give their own slant. The first editor reading this review to steal Mark's basic what if as a prompt is guaranteed a winning anthology or themed SF magazine issue.

My only quibble with this anthology is Marks having given in to the expectation for author introductions. Introductions are always a mistake, because either they contain spoilers (No! Bad author!) or they say a lot of nothing to avoid containing spoilers. Commentary should always be moved to after each story, where the story can be meaningfully discussed without compromising the readers' initial experience. Marks' introductions are a fifty-fifty mix of spoilers (especially annoying for the novella—what was she thinking?!) and filler, so I advise readers to play it safe and avoid them until after. What was wanted was brief gossip about each story immediately afterward, and a concluding, more in-depth essay about her purpose in writing, her writing process, her view of the genre, and so on, to round out the collect at the very end.

Notwithstanding that one very minor caution, I recommend *Imaginary Friends* to you, both for itself and as an introduction to a Canadian author who deserves to be much better known.

Lisey's Story by Stephen King Review by Perry Middlemiss

This 2006 book was winner of the 2006 Bram Stoker Award for Best Novel. Lisey Landon is the widow of the famous novelist Scott Landon, who died two years before the start of this novel. Lisey has finally gotten around to beginning the process of clearing out her husband's study after she has been hounded by a number of academics eager to discover if Landon left behind any finished or unfinished manuscripts. She has turned them all away, but one day someone shows up who isn't so much interested in Landon's work as in exerting power and control over her. He attacks her and threatens further assaults if she doesn't hand over the documents. Lisey reflects on her marriage and slowly comes to realize that her husband had many long-term problems founded in his childhood. She also discovers that he would escape to a fantasy world to deal with them and then finds herself also able to travel to that same world to help solve her own problems.

This isn't one of King's best works: it's long and slow, the supernatural element doesn't appear for quite some way into the novel, and the pacing is all over the place. (This review was previously published in slightly different form in the ANZAPA apazine *Perryscope* #24.)

Me, Myself, and Bob by Phil Vischer Review by Pat Patterson

In the late 1990s, my family met Phil Vischer and his company, Big Idea, through Veggie Tales, The children's ministry at our church was putting together a performance, and my youngest son, then about eight years old, had to learn the following line:

"I'm sorry that I scared you when you saw me on TV."

I'm not sure, but I THINK he was picked to say that line because he has always been the biggest kid in his class, and his role was that of Frankencelery, aka Phil Winklestein of Toledo, Ohio. So: big character should be played by a big kid.

It did not go to my son's strengths.

Still, we rehearsed the line over and over, and when the time came for him to pop up and speak, he had a smile on his face. And nobody threw stones.

Next thing you know, we were all marching around the house, singing “God is Bigger than the Boogie Man!” to the dog; and we were happy with that. We bought the videos, we bought the cassette tapes, and we learned the words to Silly Songs. We even performed one of them at a family reunion. In fact, I adapted “The Water Buffalo Song” to introduce my middle school to the concept of student conflict managers.

“Everybody’s got a peace-keeping crew
To help you when you’re feeling blue,
When you don’t know just what to do
Everybody’s got a peace-keeping crew!”

Time passed, and life went on. My kids sort of aged-out of Veggie Tales videos, but we were always happy when the characters popped up again. When “Jonah” hit the big screen, I was delighted, and we went to see it, but I wasn’t really FOLLOWING what was happening with Big Idea.

And so, I was taken by surprise, when I read a May 2004 article in Christianity Today titled “Running Out of Miracles.” I discovered that Big Idea had over-expanded in developing “Jonah,” and as a result, the company collapsed. The part of the article that stayed with me was the last bit, in which Phil Vischer explains to his son the significance of the collapse of Big Idea. The article ends with the statement of hope “There are a million ways to do it” (tell people about God).

What I retained, though, perhaps because my youngest son was not much older than Phil’s, was the emotional gut-punch of telling your child that your dream, your creation, was just gone.

And that part of my life crawled off into a cave and whimpered.

17 years later: one of my oldest friends tells me of this podcast he has discovered, taking very seriously some terrific challenges facing the Christian church. It turns out that it’s none other than: PHIL VISCHER! I start listening, and quickly become FASCINATED with the combination of humor and deep theology. Eventually, I discover Vischer has written THIS book. So, I get it, and read it, and that whimpering part of me comes out of the cave.

Yes, the book DOES provide interesting bits about Phil’s background, including his amazing forebears, and how he got in trouble in Bible college. It also describes the way technology and talent combined to permit the birth of Veggie Tales. However, the part of the book that has greatest value, to me personally, AND to anyone who wants to turn creativity into a career, is his detailed analysis of how it all went wrong. In brutally simplest terms, it was a conflict of vision with marketing, and a lack of management over all.

It’s a very poignant story. Like the article in Christianity Today, it ends with hope. HOWEVER! It also ends 15 years ago. That was long before he started the podcast I’ve been immersed in for the past couple of months, and it doesn’t reference a number of creative products he has put forward since then. Not all of them worked! Know this, though: Phil Vischer is still plugging away on one or more of the million ways to tell people about God.

Metaphysical Machines/Maquinas Metafisicas
by Heinzy Cruz
Review by Heath Row

While in Mexico City, I procured this ebook, Eternal Books' 2016 bilingual collection of short stories by Mexican author Heinzy Cruz, also a cartoonist and musician. I found my way to the book because Luis G. Abbadie contributed the foreword, "Down the Double Spiral Staircase or, the Machine in the Ghost."

In that foreword, Abbadie cites H.P. Lovecraft, who is apparently quite popular in Mexico, situating both artists in the genre of weird fiction. Abbadie's commentary sets up the seven stories by Cruz—offered in English in sequence, and then again in Spanish—considering the plasticity of reality and belief, the value of dream and perception, and the imaginary boundaries between the fantastic and the mundane. He also comments on the collection's bilingual nature: "[L]anguage defines reality," he writes. "[E]ach version of this book is in itself a differently hued reality... ."

Cruz takes a slightly different approach to storytelling than Abbadie does in his collection, offering a more loosely structured narrative style. "The Underground Artist," told in the first person, shares the story of a filmmaker who's willing to go to any lengths to make a transgressive movie. "Metaphysical Machines" features a Donald Trump-like politician named Bachawsky who closes the borders of a country and builds mile-high walls. While the first story was more splatterpunk, this piece draws on sf—specifically quantum physics—as scientists involved in a top-secret project develop metaphysical machines to guard the borders. "[A]nother primordial component was thought. ... [T]his was the universe thinking itself alive." The machines, melded with human subjects, begin to replicate, altering the state of the universe.

"Third Book from the Sun" involves mathematics and a notebook left behind by a dead friend; that story also draws on quantum physics—and the idea that thought forms matter and reality. "A Man Chasing His Nightmare" is also told in the first person—a stylistic tendency of Cruz's—and mentions Robert Bloch's "The Shambler from the Stars." In that piece, nightmare invades the narrator's waking life, and life falls to pieces. "Fractal Chaos," also told in the first person, takes the form of dated journal entries. "[S]cience is also built on a belief system. ... Does our belief in science also define us as a society? ... I wonder if belief systems could bring themselves to life." While somewhat wide ranging, the story's primary focal point is on the idea of a chronovore, someone or something that eats time. (That reminded me of the energy vampire in *What We Do in the Shadows*.)

The story "Ghost Cult" is one of the better stories in the collection. After the beating of a teenage girl, she embarks on a string of murders, artistically positioning their bodies after death. She seeks revenge against the boys who harmed her, inspiring a death cult, as well as copycat murders. And the final story, "Eclipse," focuses on an amulet that joins with its wearer's body.

While less polished and rewarding as Abbadie's writing, the collection is still worth pursuing, especially if you're interested in weird fiction and adjacent styles, dream, esoteric spiritualism, and the New Thought movement. (This review was previously published in slightly different form in the APA-L apazine *Telegraphs & Tar Pits* #29.)

Other Rhodes by Sarah A. Hoyt
Review by Pat Patterson

I'm slow. I get there eventually, but I'm slow.

The cover of "Other Rhodes" CLEARLY designates this as "Rhodes 1." You'd think that I would know that this is first of a series, right? And yet, somewhere after the first half of the novel, I'm doing a frantic-bookworm plea: "Oh, this would make for a WONDERFUL series! I hope she has a series set up! This HAS to be a series!"

Well, duh. It's first in a series. Therefore, always assuming that the Beautiful-But-Evil Space Princess doesn't turn her hand to some other endeavor, we have delight ahead.

Delight, that is, for those who enjoy such delicacies as the Hard-Boiled Detective, Nero Wolfe, Mickey Spillane, Sherlock Holmes, Damon Runyon, and Robert Parker. You know; like that, but different. Because, all that IN S-P-A-A-C-E!!!

A Professor of Literature who read the above paragraph would immediately foam at the mouth, exclaiming "THOSE ARE ALL DIFFERENT! You can't lump them into one category!" Well, I just did, and the category was "Written Stuff I Enjoy." So there.

A silly/dumb/gorgeous secretary. Except she's NOT silly or dumb (she is gorgeous); except she IS silly and dumb (or, at least ignorant) in the beginning. She's a hothouse flower, you see. You've heard of gilding the lily, meaning that you put needless decoration on something that doesn't need it? Well, her maiden name is Lilly Gilding. By her own admission, her early education taught her how to dance and look pretty. In that condition, she married Joe Aster (thus acquiring ANOTHER flower name), a private investigator totally unsuitable for a young lady of her status. Her super-wealthy father responded by cutting her off from support, perhaps hoping to bring her to her senses.

It actually worked, though not in a way Daddy had anticipated, and not in a way Lilly recognized. Forced into the world of work, Lilly became part of Joe's investigative operation. Silly and dumb people can't do what she did, and I can only suppose it was because she had never been allowed to overcome challenges that she fails to appreciate all she accomplishes: "merely" a receptionist, she masters typing and accounting, and gets her Investigator license. She becomes an integral part of Joe's work. All of that, without realizing that she has become far more than ornamental.

That's the ignorance that is her greatest limitation.

Joe has patterned his practice on a popular series of detective stories. Even their home base/space ship is christened "West 35th Street," after the locale of the stories. These are presented as immersive experiences ("mersi") featuring fictional and flawed detective Nick Rhodes and drop-dead-gorgeous partner Stella D'Or.

Joe loves them; Lilly does not. However, when Joe shows up transformed and incapacitated, the silly/dumb Lilly realizes that the solution lies in the mersi story.

And she takes appropriate action. Excitement and intrigue ensue. The foundation for a series is laid!

Apropos of nothing, the real West 35th Street in New York is home of the Church of the Incarnation, celebrating the appearance of the Divine in another form. But that is a topic for the Professor of Literature.

Don't ignore the glorious cover art. It's almost photo-realism and would make a GREAT wall poster.

The Past is Red by Catherynne M. Valente Review by Perry Middlemiss

Catherynne Valente wrote her first story about Tetley Abednego, "The Future is Blue", in 2016. That story won the Theodore Sturgeon Award in 2017 and has been included as the first part of this 2021 novella, which continues the adventures of Tetley a decade later on a far-future Earth, devastated by climate change, where she is a citizen of Garbage Town, a human settlement built on the Great Pacific Garbage Patch.

Tetley now lives on a small boat off the patch, seemingly isolated from the rest of her community, for reasons explained in the earlier work. During the course of her story, she discovers a strange object from the distant past that finally starts to fill in the background history of this world. Tetley is a much more tragic figure here than earlier, which indicates her development as a character and the writer's development of her world.

I wasn't as enamored of this novella as I was with the original story, though I suspect the opposite will be true of most readers. (This review was previously published in slightly different form in the ANZA-PA apazine Perryscope #24.)

Penance by Paula Richey Review by Declan Finn <http://www.declanfinn.com>

The Artful Dodger with superpowers, working for Fagin-as-super-villain.

The story

The "Prime" (The world's version of someone with powers) is Penance Copper. At 17, she's been on the streets for most of her life. She's been raised by a street thug named Acid her entire life. Then the day comes that Acid asks her to take out a local hero named Justice.

That's the last straw.

Unfortunately, this last mission from Acid leads Penance in the middle of an interstellar invasion by Kail— a supply sergeant from another planet. His men need food and they need water. And the nearest planet to raid? Earth. And they have a place full of food and water. It's called a "football stadium," and there's a game on, so there are plenty of hostages.

Penance is the only one who can get inside.

Hilarity ensues.

This story was just so well told, I breezed through more than half of it in a single night. Good plotting, action, and character. It's all well put together.

The characters

Penance is interesting. Because she's the Artful Dodger with superpowers, working for Fagin-as-super-villain. She's a character that has to think about using her superpowers--like used her electromagnetic powers and abilities to copy anything with an RFID chip (electronic keys, alarm system codes), or her plasma abilities to cook microwave popcorn in her hand. Also, the ability to shock someone back to life, something I want more electricity-based heroes to do (I think Endgame may have been one of the few times someone tried it). Paula even highlights how Penance can have these powers without cooking herself.

She's also stronger than the average bear (a literal bear). And she's Southern...By the time we get a quarter of the way through the book, Penance sounds and looks like Rogue, with additional powers that feel like "What if Jubilee was useful."

And yet, Penance isn't so overpowered that she overcomes anything that gets in her way. At least four times in the book she gets her ass kicked fairly thoroughly--once by simple science.

With Kail, our alien, it's interesting that his story could be easily summed up as "the quartermaster needed some lousy supplies," but boy, does that spiral. Seeing things through his eyes tells the reader more about his planet, his culture, and him, more easily than a chapter-long data-dump on societies. And the culture clash is as effective as Crocodile Dundee, if sometimes less funny.

Not to mention that limiting the POV to these two main characters highlights just how much one knows about the other, that even the other isn't aware of about themselves....

Yes, I think that sentence made sense. Honest.

And I like that Kail, as supply sergeant, makes his own clothing. And bookshelves.

And the nicest thing? Kail even thinks like an alien.

The world

Separating out the world building from the characters and the story required a crowbar in this instance. There are no data dumps here. There are no exposition paragraphs. There isn't even a chapter where Kail regales Penance with the exact nature of their cultural and societal differences.

And it's unnecessary. Paula Richey spent the entire book worldbuilding. It's shown in almost every interaction between the two, and their actions and thought processes throughout the novel.

If David Weber could do this in his novels, they'd be at least 20% shorter.

The impressive thing is that Penance created and explained an entire alien civilization with stopping to spell out how it worked. And it works like Ming the Merciless learned to make an entire generation put themselves in debt and be in chains forever. Paula does a great job of making an unrepentant SOB you just want to see have a stake rammed through his heart.

And, at the same time, Penance spells out a lot of life on the streets for Heroes Unleashed. Every time I expect them to go bigger, they manage to do a lot with very little. Paula manages to take one element and write a good chunk of the book around it.

There are also at least two threads that tie Penance back to the original Heroes Fall book.

Not to mention that I enjoyed having the alien invasion spun by the Men in Black as "he's a new supervillain. Nothing to see here." Seriously, if John Ringo did the politics of superpowers, this would be the series he lifted it from.

Not to mention that Paula has a grasp of technology no one points out. For example, "your invisibility suit is nice, but what happens if it's really dusty?"

The politics

There is only one way there is a political angle to this novel. Penance is reading a Bible throughout, because she's trying to learn about this Jesus person. I think that along will turn off certain readers. And we all know some of them, don't we?

Imagine if "Christian Fiction" only started having conversations about Jesus at natural points in the story.... like if an alien asked questions.

Why read it?

Penance was just plain fun. I can usually tell what writing tricks are executed when. "This is the data dump. This is act one finale. This is how they slip in backstory." Not here. It's all smooth and effortless and makes writing look easy. Why couldn't I have written like this when I started?

And yes, this is labeled "YA." How? Why? Aside from the age of the characters, I can't really tell you. There is no egregious violence, or sex, or foul language. (And nothing in the entire series has been as bad as the icicle in Die Hard 2, not even John Wick's pencil.)

And, as one reviewer said of Narnia, "This is too good for children."

Anyway, this book is fun, it's awesome, and you should buy it.

The Seance by John Harwood Review by Perry Middlemiss

With one foot firmly planted in superstition and folklore, and the other striding out towards science and enlightenment, the Victorian era is the perfect setting for the gothic or horror genres. The 18th and 19th centuries had seen advances in the physical, biological, and mathematical sciences, but those had scarcely had any impact upon the general public until the invention in the 1870s of the incandescent light bulb, and the development of the long-life version by Thomas Edison in 1880. The use of electricity rapidly expanded over the following decades and it is interesting to contemplate the reactions of people when they first came into contact with it. It must have seemed incomprehensible—a force that could provide heat and light, yet which could also kill and injure in ways that would have appeared almost magical.

Little wonder, then, that people attempting to come to grips with the new “magic” might turn to old “magic” to define or make sense of it. John Harwood's second novel, 2022's *The Seance*, sits directly in this time period—the late 19th century—when science was making inroads into everyday life, and yet superstition and fear still held sway.

The novel deals with mistaken or lost identity, inheritance and sudden death, deserted, crumbling mansions, and dark, forbidding woods. All of the classic ingredients of a gothic story that leans in the direction of horror.

Constance Langton has spent the past few years of her life attending her widowed mother—who has been pining for a younger daughter who died—and who later commits suicide. Constance is troubled by the part she played in her mother's attempts to contact the dead girl via paranormal means, and feels partly responsible for all that has occurred.

In 1889, she learns that a distant cousin has left her a crumbling mansion in Suffolk. Her lawyer, John Montague, presents her with a bundle of papers that detail the lead-up to some shocking events that took place in the hall some 20 years previously. The papers are the personal accounts of Montague himself and Eleanor Unwin, whose story seems to bear a resemblance to Constance's own.

The story is complicated and requires close attention, but it is just as much the evocative writing as the plot that holds our interest.

“Monks Wood came upon us with no warning, looming like a black wave out of the mist as we passed from grey daylight into near-darkness beneath the firs. The rushing of the wind ceased, and there was only the muffled rumble of the wheels, the scrape of branches along the carriage, and the occasional gush of water from the foliage above. Shadowy outlines of tree trunks slid by, so close I could have touched them. The knot in my stomach tightened still further as the minutes dragged by, until the light returned as abruptly as it had gone.”

Emotional and manipulative? Of course. And so it should be. A very distinct part of the gothic tradition lies in the manipulation of the reader's and characters' emotions, leading both along twists and turns, down blind alleys and into scary dark corners. Don't forget that the Victorian era also spawned the classic detective fiction of Arthur Conan Doyle and Edgar Allan Poe. It was all manipulative, and all the better for it. Harwood knows what he is doing here: He'll spook you a bit, and seem to deceive you with sleight of hand from time to time, but you always have the feeling you are in safe hands and that you won't be left hanging over a pit, suspended only by a slowly fraying rope.

Two years ago, we were lucky enough to read another Australian gothic novel, *The Resurrectionist* by James Bradley. That was a gem, and so is this. John Harwood's previous novel, *The Ghost Writer*, won the Best First Novel Award at the International Horror Guild Awards. While I was sure this would be in contention for the main award, time proved that I was very wrong in my assessment of this novel's international prize-winning chances. Regardless, it did pick up the home-grown 2008 Aurealis Award for Best Horror Novel. (This review was previously published in slightly different form in the ANZAPA apazine *Perryscope* #24.)

Semper Paratus: An Anthology of the Apocalypse
edited by Jamie Ibson and Chris Kennedy
Review by Pat Patterson

All of these stories take place after The End Of The World As We Know It (TEOTWAWKI; I think I got that acronym right). No particular cause was stipulated for the writers, so we get a blend: some are from futures already established, such as Chris Woods' "This Fallen World" universe; while others are brand new disasters. However, fear not; these cloudy worlds all come with some semblance of a silver lining.

THE DAUGHTER, by Chris Kennedy. Set in "This Fallen World." One of the distinguishing marks of TFW is that the technology existed, prior to the fall, to imprint an entire personality onto/into a subject. While the imprinted subject may need to develop some muscles, all of the reflexes and knowledge that were in the imprint are transferred over. However, only one personality can be dominant at a time. That means that as long as the imprint is in control, the original is (more or less) dormant. The plot, characterization, and action of this story are well-developed. However, we are given something else to think about, and we might be thinking about it for a long time: what are the ethics of keeping a subordinate from suffering?

RESPAWN, by Robert E. Hampson. Any right-thinking resident of the South knows that Waffle Houses are rightly the center of culture and goodness and may very well be the center of the universe. Well, portals, at least; or, they are in this story, even if given an alternative title. When an active playing character gets killed, they are returned to existence in these blessed locations, where there is always a refill for your coffee. Everything else in the universe might vary, though. So be careful.

BOB, FROM LOS ANGELES, by Brent Roeder. Soren Kierkegaard wrote "Purity of heart is to will one thing." If that is true, then Bob, from Los Angeles, has the purest heart imaginable. Don't expect him to engage in much idle chatter, but if a job needs to be done? Bob is your man.

NOR WAR'S QUICK FIRE, by Rob Howell. A person with great wealth arranges to have a small contingent of employees be evacuated to the fledgling colony on Mars, just as war spasms on Earth. It's amazing how many different perspectives can be held in a group of intelligent people. What's more amazing is that some perspectives are subject to change.

WHY 2K, by Jon R. Osborne. Now, THIS is the apocalypse we were promised! What if the prep to eliminate the fallout from using only two digits to record the year hadn't worked, and all the doom and gloom about Y2K had been realized? That's what THIS story is about; it's about time!

THE FALLOW FIELDS, PART I, by Jason Cordova, and THE FALLOW FIELDS, PART II, by Christopher L Smith. Confession: I was so caught up in the story, that I kept reading, and didn't realize until NOW that parts I & II were written by different authors. I suppose an accomplished reviewer would notice the stylistic changes, and have something clever to say about that, but THIS reviewer was simply engrossed in the adventure.

I don't know how much chaos reigned in the land that became the Soviet Union during consolidation after the Bolshevik revolution, but I do know that the US military was involved in two separate campaigns, North Russia and Siberia, in the post WWI period. To that chaos, add a zombie apocalypse, and then follow the crew of a tank as they fight their way through the worst that can come at them.

THE RESERVOIR, by Kevin Fritz Fotovich. First Contact didn't go so well, and big rocks got dropped on our heads. It didn't take much to disrupt nearly everything. Still, a determined people can rebuild, particularly when the former enemies can lend help. Other people are determined as well, though.

WARLORD, by Christopher Woods. Books have been written about the exploits of Matthew Kade, deservedly so. The imprinting of personalities went somewhat wrong with him, in the same sense that the Atlantic Ocean is somewhat damp. Somehow, he has managed to find a way that all of his many personalities can get along. He really hates people who keep slaves. And he is always on the lookout for new talent.

TEN BREATHS, by Marisa Wolf. Don't think that magic will prevent the world from ending. It will just end in a different way, with different options. Still, resolute people can fight back. In this universe, the darkness is on the way, and the people must prepare to fight, and to endure.

MOMENTS, by Kevin Ikenberry. It's bad enough that the world ends. However, when the world ends just after the worst night of your life, you don't get an opportunity to make up for a momentary failure. And that turns what SHOULD be a moment, into an eternity. Maybe another moment will come; but don't bet on it.

YOU HAVE TO GO OUT, by Philip Wohlrab. Here's the deal: in the Army, you can catch your breath during peacetime. Yes, there is still training, and it is demanding, and people can die in accidents, but at least, in peacetime, nobody is actually shooting at you. So, there's that. HOWEVER, in the Coast Guard, the enemy is the sea, and the sea NEVER is willing to sign a peace treaty. And it doesn't make any difference to the Coast Guard if people are shooting at you or not; they still have to do their job, and that means going out.

EIGHT OUNCES A DAY, by Kevin Steverson. In the aftermath of an engineered extinction event, protein is hard to come by; the terrorists did their sums wrong and killed the animals as well as the people. Still, some survive, including a janitor at Kennesaw State University. Too bad their mascot is an owl; a turkey would have been more convenient.

WRAITH, by Marie Whittaker. Fairly soon after the wraiths appear and start eating people, June Bug discovers that salt will kill them dead. It's not until much later that things get really weird.

DUST TO DUST, by Jamie Ibson. The most intriguing aspect (among the many delights) of this story is that the reason for the apocalypse is not revealed, until it shows up as a part of the Final Answer. Until then, we start with a near-standard tale of the Old West, with a pleasing young lady from Back East arriving to take ownership of the family estate. However, she is no tinhorn, not a shrinking violet who must rely on the protection of strong-but-silent, etc. From Western, we shift to a mystery, complete with strangers acting strange, and clues to be found. It's really a great story, and one that could easily fill the pages of a novel.

The Shadowed Sun by NK Jemisin

Review by Chris Nuttall

<http://ChrisHanger.wordpress.com>

“But this is not mere rudeness that we speak of, Prince; this is murder and torture. Some things are wrong in the eyes of all peoples—”

“That isn’t true.”

One of the most important things I have noted, over the years, is this: a person who demands respect doesn’t deserve it. Respect is earned, not given. Those who deserve respect – for ability, for achievement, for success – will have it. Those who demand respect as their due will get resentment instead.

In many ways, *The Shadowed Sun* brings that to mind.

At the climax of *The Killing Moon*, Nijiri – a young man/fanatic – told Ambassador Sunandi that Gujaareh would accept occupation, provided she was treated with respect. It struck me as odd at the time, if only because Gujaareh does not deserve respect. Indeed, most of the nuance of *The Killing Moon* is strikingly lacking from *The Shadowed Sun*. Gujaareh is painted as a deeply corrupt society, one that was turning monstrous even before the invasion and occupation. Sunandi herself is perhaps the only truly decent character in the book. It’s hard to feel liking for anyone else, with the possible exception of Hanani.

It is actually quite hard to summarise the book. It is roughly ten years after *The Killing Moon*, ten years since the occupation began. But all is not well. Hanani, the first female Sharer (magical healer), is trying to earn her spurs, while powerful factions plot to overthrow the occupiers ... allying themselves with Wanahomen, the last survivor of the previous Crown Prince’s family. Wanahomen himself, in turn, has made allies amongst the barbarian tribesmen of the desert, promising them great rewards if they help him recover his family’s throne. If these are meant to be the good guys, something is deeply wrong. Tiaanet, the daughter of one of the plotters, is frequently raped by her own father; indeed, she has been treated so badly that she has simply stopped caring about anything.

The plot is driven by the combined twists of the uprising against the occupation and the spread of a nightmare plague, a curse that spreads from dreamer to dreamer and eventually threatens to bring down the entire city. Matters come to a head as the uprising begins, even as the rebellion itself fragments. In many ways, everyone loses; Sunandi gets kicked out of the city, Hanani loses her chance to practice magic (and her idealism), Tiaanet eventually kills her own father, but at the cost of losing her daughter ... who is revealed to be the source of the nightmare plague.

Like before, the worldbuilding is very good. Gujaareh itself comes to life, a brimming city of wonder slowly falling into darkness. Jemisin does a good job of contrasting the city-folk with the barbarians, refusing to shy away from the simple fact that the barbarians are barbaric; Hanani’s horror is our horror. Indeed, in some ways, she succeeds too well. It is hard to feel any sort of liking for Wanahomen and his allies. They’re monsters, at least by our standards. Indeed, in some ways, the plot is a deconstruction. The ‘noble savage’ we might expect to see does not grace the pages of *The Shadowed Sun*.

The magic system is also expanded, in manners both logical and sensible. The refusal to take women into the priesthood actually makes sense, if only because the priests are forbidden to have children

(ensuring that the dreaming gift is passed down through the female line alone) while the darker side of the system is clearly visible. There is a great deal of material here for future stories.

The book falls down, however, when it comes to characters. Wanahomen starts life as an ass, not to put too fine a point on it. He doesn't seem to realise that anything is wrong when he is introduced to Tiaanet; indeed, he seems determined to marry her, at least until the real romance begins. There's no acknowledgement of what happens after he learns the truth about Tiaanet.

Hanani, on the other hand, is a far more sympathetic character, if only because we've seen 'first woman in a male sphere' before and we know the tropes. And even she is a deconstruction, because she is used as a pawn by her (male) superiors and forced to question pretty much everything about her society. She fragments, first recoiling in horror from her new life and then seeking out something new for herself. The romance between Wanahomen and Hanani doesn't read right to me, although it may sort itself out in time. It's also easy to feel sorry for Tiaanet, although she doesn't seem to make any attempt to escape (or report) her father. She's an oddly passive character right up until the end.

Jemisin also deconstructs the city's concept of treating women as queens. Hanani is shocking, to the locals, because she's actually trying to work for a living. (They have some problems getting their heads around Sunandi, rather than her husband, being in charge of the occupation force.) And yet, as Tiaanet shows, there's a fine line between putting women on a pedestal and keeping them under control. Tiaanet is horrifically abused, treated more as an object than a living person; indeed, she acts more like an object than anything else. The city's women have prestige, but not power.

Like I said above, Sunandi herself is perhaps the only truly decent character in the book, although she is torn between the need for peace in Gujaareh and the demands of her superiors, who (being several thousand miles away) think she is too tolerant of local misbehaviour. In some ways, they are right. Sunandi is careful not to push too hard, at least until she is overruled by her superiors, but – at the same time – she is showing weakness. It's never easy to find a balance between tolerance and firmness, as we learnt in both Iraq and Afghanistan. At the same time, there remains the fundamental point that Gujaareh does not deserve respect. It's notable that the only person, at least before the climax, who expresses horror at Tiaanet's treatment is one of the 'evil occupying soldiers.'

The Shadowed Sun does hit on some of the fundamental truths of the human condition. On a greater level, it considers the problems when one culture – with a concept of what constitutes acceptable behaviour – is forced to interact with another culture, with a very different concept of what is tolerable. Jemisin neatly illustrates the problems with both repression and tolerance, with firmness and political correctness (in this case, a refusal to accept that some cultures are different.) And it considers the legacy of the past, from the isolation of Gujaareh (for good reason, it turns out) to the consequences of the failed war and invasion. The characters cannot get over the past, but neither can we.

And, on a more personal level, it also illustrates how hard it can be to break out of our personal hells. Hanani, like Ehiru before her, is unwilling to admit that the priesthood may be deeply corrupt, to the point where it is willing to break its most sacred laws for power and control. Wanahomen wants to reclaim his family's throne, even though it means allying himself with monsters – both in and out of the city – when he would probably be happier simply walking away. And the city itself, given a chance at a better life, is backsliding rapidly into the morass that nearly destroyed it in the previous book. By the time the book is over, everyone is badly scarred.

Overall, my feelings are pretty mixed. The worldbuilding is great. Jemisin makes the city come alive. There are a lot of great ideas within the text. The characters are very human, but – at the same time – it is hard to see them as likable. And the book is as much a deconstruction as anything else. It is an interesting read, and I would recommend it to anyone who likes epic fantasy, but it has its limits.

Sleepless Hollow by Graham Bradley

Review by Michael Gallagher

<https://upstreamreviews.substack.com>

Bradley successfully blends occult detective, buddy comedy and action in this fun read that's perfect for getting into the Halloween spirit.

August is a month that gets a tough rap: no holidays, back to school shopping and the lingering dol-drum that summer's end is on the horizon. However, if you change your perspective and think of it as pre-Fall, then it reminds you that it's the perfect time to start drawing up that Halloween season reading list! Let me help you with a great starter — Graham Bradley's *Sleepless Hollow*.

The paperback is also an absolute steal at just \$7.99!

The Story

The early American Gothic masterpiece *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* follows the life of superstitious schoolteacher Ichabod Crane as he attempts to settle into the post-Revolutionary War settlement of Tarry Town, New York as a schoolmaster. While a lanky and plain man, he quickly ingratiates himself to the locals, making himself useful with odd jobs and “carrying the whole budget of local gossip” of the local women. Being knowledgeable in much folklore, he is a favorite among the children, whom he can captivate with dark and foreboding tales.

While he's well-liked by many, the one true person that matters to him is the beautiful Katrina Van Tassel, daughter of a wealthy farmer. However, Ichabod, a Yankee and an outsider, finds himself with stiff competition from the town rowdy and local Uberchad Abraham Van Brunt, who also seeks to woo the lovely Katrina. When Ichabod's proposal is rebuffed one night at a harvest festival, he rides home crestfallen late at night along a dark and foreboding road. It is here he crosses paths with the legendary Headless Horseman, the vengeful ghost of a long-dead Hessian rider, who pursues Crane into the night. The next morning, Crane's horse is found, but no trace of him, with his fate after his meeting with the Hessian left unanswered.

The story put the quaint little real-world town of Sleepy Hollow, NY on the map, and tourists visit the place in droves every Halloween season. However, as the title of Bradley's work might imply, something strange is happening this Halloween in Sleepy Hollow; all of a sudden, nobody in the town is able to sleep. This gets the notice of a ghost named Silas Proctor, a soldier in the Spectral Forces, an enforcement body beyond the veil of the living that essentially serves as a military, complete with its own stifling chain of command and choking bureaucracy. Yes, you see ghosts roam all over the place, mostly shuffling mindlessly and harmlessly in the places they once knew. But a few, like him, have more agency, and are even able to interact with those with the gift to see them (like our barista protagonist Josie). He's noticed that the stringy lines of glowing energy that flow upwards to the night sky while people dream are weak, and knows something's up, but can't quite tell what. He's bound to the spectral realm, tasked with policing the little areas of town he's able to haunt, but equipped with weaponry and tech to handle most mischievous spirits that get any ideas about bothering the “morties”.

Josie, who relishes the chance to use her gift to prove that ghosts are real and subsequently punch a ticket out of town to fame and greener pastures, is on cordial terms with several of the late locals, and often gets pulled into various schemes to help the spectrals resolve unfinished business. But Halloween's right around the corner, and Silas knows that all this strangeness can't mean anything good; sure

enough, he eventually uncovers a plot being laid by a long-banished adversary to unleash thousands of spirits into this plane; and given that an original manuscript of *A History of New England Witchcraft*, a tome said to hold the key to resurrection, sits on display in Josie's mom's coffee shop, it's up to them and a few enlisted friends to stop an army of vengeful spirits, including that of Ichabod Crane and the Headless Horseman themselves, from once again wreaking havoc in Sleepy Hollow.

The characters

One thing Bradley really excels at is writing his characters colorfully and uniquely. Our main protagonist is Josie, a twentysomething local girl who's tight with her family and helps out at her mom's coffee shop. She has the ability to not only see but talk to and even touch the local spirits that roam her hometown. In this sense she lends the story a bit of a lighter take on the occult detective genre. Her hometown is painted as a charming upstate hamlet that almost reminded me of Star's Hollow, complete with squabbling rivalries between her mom and the uppity members of the DAR. Josie has a good heart and is eager to help her friends. She's likeable and compassionate, and while her conscription into the fight against the spectral army being awakened is a rough one, she proves a willing ally with a great deal of heart.

Josie is balanced by Silas Proctor, the SpecForce agent who's been assigned to Sleepy Hollow for the last two hundred or so years. He knows that if his higher-ups get wind of Josie's ability to see spectres, they'd enlist her whether she wanted to or not, something that involves wiping her memories and worse. He's sympathetic to her dreams, but also gruff and protective, and will go to great lengths (like tampering with her ghost-hunting footage, much to her despair) to try to protect her. He takes his role very seriously, and has a history with John Crowe, a brilliant scientific mind with more ambition than ethics.

John Crowe, an inventor, once worked alongside Silas to develop the Morpheus Engine, a system that could harvest human brainwaves for energy to open the barrier between the world of the living and the higher planes. Deemed too dangerous to continue, Crowe was shut down. But he's as patient as he is devious, and he's been working in the shadows, growing in power and his ability to manipulate the physical world; Bradley really introduces a cunning and worthy adversary in Crowe, and while I'm a sucker for a friends-turned-rivals trope, this one really does a good job of establishing his threat to our heroes.

Kay is one of the few registered mortal freelance ghost hunters that Silas can call on to help with the growing ghost horde threat. She reminded me of Sarah Connor, if she were a wine aunt instead of a protective mother. Though she starts out as an opportunist, looking to get the insane bounty on Crowe's head, she eventually warms to Josie, she's loyal to Silas, and she's got a heart of gold.

And of course, it wouldn't be a Sleepy Hollow story without Crane and the Hessian, both of whom not only appear but are major fixtures; however, Bradley puts a very unique dynamic between the two that I don't want to spoil; I'll only say his iteration of Crane is no longer the timid, unsure milksop we know him from the original legend.

The World

Bradley's Sleepy Hollow comes alive with all the charm of the real-world town. Living in upstate New York myself, I can attest the vast swath of the state north of Albany is beautiful, especially as the leaves turning all along the Adirondacks and Hudson Valley are in glorious full swing. Small town rivalries and melodrama pepper the slowly simmering anger of a populace that, while functional, is wrestling

with the stresses of sleep deprivation. When the fit hits the shan, it feels almost like an adventure night at a Halloween Theme Park (and I mean that in the best way) - Sleepy Hollow at Halloween is teeming with decorations, costumed visitors and a tinge of danger and mischief in the crisp air. It's the perfect place to have a ghost-horde driven action-horror movie breaking out in the middle of it.

The Politics

None.

Content Warning

None. There's plenty of gunplay, crashes and the occasional death (one early scene with John Crowe wherein he shows off his ability to possess a body, also shows that his leaving said body kills his host), most of the violence is squarely action oriented. The language is clean, there's no sex. This is PG-13 at its best.

Who's it for?

Anyone who's looking for something that's big on action but squeamish about bloodcurdling horror should check this out, in addition to any Sleepy Hollow fans out there. Bradley's done his homework and treats the literary legacy and history of the region and the book with the respect it deserves.

Why read it?

Once summer is on the wane, I tend to drop my going TBR pile and indulge in some more supernatural offerings that start out light and fun and descend into darkness that matches the waning safety and warmth of the sunlight. If light and fun is your thing, with absolute heaps of atmosphere and character, this is your book.

Songs That the Astral Crickets Shall Sing

by Luis G. Abbadie

Review by Heath Row

<http://N3F.org>

This 2021 Leif Erikson Ediciones collection of 11 stories by Abbadie, who blogs at <https://al-azrad.blogspot.com>, is available as an ebook. The Mexican writer focuses primarily on horror literature, paganism, "paramythology," and pseudo-bibliography—including fantasy stories. Abbadie is a fan of the Cthulhu Mythos and much of his writing, particularly in this collection, falls along those lines. In the end piece, "About the Stories," he discusses the risks of pastiche, commenting that much of Cthulhu Mythos fiction is "not only derivative but cross[es] the line into fan fiction." Regardless, most if not all of these stories is Cthulhu Mythos-inspired fiction and borderline pastiche, even if experimental.

And it's good! I'd read more Abbadie if more were available in English. Of the stories, my favorites include "Songs That the Astral Crickets Shall Sing," which cites Aleister Crowley and Jack Parsons (and owes a debt to Robert W. Chambers) while focusing on a maddening extrasensory perception; "R'lyeh, the Ship in the Storm," which is dedicated to Lin Carter and concentrates on an artistic allegory for the Xothic cycle of legends; "Pilgrimage to Sentinel Hill," which details a return to Dunwich and

features a wonderful—and foreboding—covered bridge; and “The Day the Earth Was to Be Cleared,” which offers a bit of humor.

Written over the last two decades, many of the stories were previously published in periodicals such as *Laberinto*, *Luvina*, *Nuestra Joya*, and *Soy Hombre y Duro Poco!* While the collective behind *Laberinto* eventually published Mexico’s first roleplaying game, *Laberinto* (which also focuses on anime and manga), its literary activities as a group have ended.

That said, Abbadie wrote the foreword to the Guadalupe Cruz’s 2016 *Metaphysical Machines/Máquinas Metafísicas*. You can read a review of that collection above. (This review was previously published in slightly different form in the APA-L apazine *Telegraphs & Tar Pits* #27.)

A Spindle Splintered by Alix E. Harrow **Review by Perry Middlemiss**

This 2021 book was a finalist for the 2022 Hugo and Locus Awards for Best Novella. This novella is another story which re-imagines a classic fairy tale, in this case *Sleeping Beauty*, and imbues it with a modern sensibility and style. Zinnia Gray is dying; she has an incurable disease which threatens to kill her before she is 22. On her 21st birthday, her best friend Charm throws a *Sleeping Beauty*-themed party in an old tower, complete with spinning wheel.

Zinnia pricks her finger on the needle and is dragged through a portal, into a foreign world, by Primrose, a fairy tale princess about to suffer the *Sleeping Beauty* treatment. Together, they work to save Primrose from the curse and to return Zinnia to her own world. Told with Alix Harrow’s signature style that is funny, romantic, dark, and insightful, this is the first in a proposed series of novellas. One to watch. (This review was previously published in slightly different form in the ANZAPA apazine *Periscope* #23.)

NON-FICTION

The Life & Art of Dave Cockrum by Glen Cadigan

Review by Heath Row

<http://N3F.org>

This 2022 TwoMorrows book caught my eye during a recent visit to the local comic book shop—Culver City is blessed to have several relatively good shops near my home: Pulp Fiction, which is where I go most often; The Comic Bug; and Dreamworld Comics. I was drawn to the book less because of Dave Cockrum, per se; even though he's done excellent work (art as well as character development) for DC, Marvel, and other comic publishers, I didn't necessarily connect his name with his work—even though I have some of his creator-owned work, as well.

What intrigued me about the book was Cockrum's connection to and involvement in fandom—throughout his career. An early reader of Looney Tunes and Merrie Melodies (his parents bought him a subscription), Boy Crime Fighter, Captain Marvel, Black Knight, and other comics, he began drawing as a child. In college, with the advent of Marvel Comics, he became a letterhack. "When Marvel first came on the scene, there was a time when I wrote a letter to every Marvel book, every month," Cockrum recalled. "Then I realized that it was too much work and I would write one letter that would address all of the books."

Cockrum's letters of comment were published in Fantastic Four, Avengers, Marvel Super-Heroes, Action Comics, Atom, Green Lantern, and Justice League of America—as well as Doom Patrol, to which he wrote in the voice of Elasti-Girl advocating for a new uniform design. He started submitting costume designs—even earning a cover credit for Son of Vulcan—and corresponded with other fans who wrote him in response to his letters.

An early fan of Star Trek, Cockrum soon found his way to the world of fanzines, where he developed a name as a fan artist in titles such as Yancy Street Gazette, Fantastic Fanzine, Enterprise Monthly, Comicology, and Star-Studded Comics. He also contributed to Barsoomian, ERB-Dom, and Etcetera. Cockrum also designed model kits for Aurora and contributed illustrations to sf magazines such as Amazing Science Fiction and Fantastic Stories.

His first professional comics work was in Warren magazines such as Vampirella, Creepy, and Eerie, and Cockrum embarked on a meaningful career with stints on The Legion of Super-Heroes, The X-Men (for which he created the Starjammers and much of the X team when it was rekindled in the 1970s, including Nightcrawler). He returned to his ties to Edgar Rice Burroughs fandom with a stint on John Carter, Warlord of Mars—and to Star Trek fandom with the adaptation of Star Trek: The Motion Picture and nine issues of Star Trek.

What comes around goes around!

Later in his career, Cockrum turned to his own work—The Futurians, a team book of his own creation—as well as an unapproved T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents relaunch, a Blackhawks-like team called Skywolf, Elvira comics, and Sousearchers and Company. Meanwhile, he developed diabetes, experienced a number of health issues, and unfortunately died too soon in 2006.

Cockrum's story is a perfect fan-to-professional progression that includes letter columns, fanzines, and professional work focusing on properties he loved as a fan. At the end of his life, fan and supporters mobilized to raise funds to pay his healthcare costs—and lobbied for Marvel to better support a former employee who had created so much wonder for readers. I recommend the book to comic book readers, fan of Cockrum's work—and fan of all stripes for the LOC, fanzine, and other fandom aspects. It's all here, in the life and art of Dave Cockrum. (This review was previously published in slightly different form in the APA-L apazine Telegraphs & Tar Pits #30.)

The Story of Batman by Charles Lee Jackson II Review by Heath Row

<http://N3F.org>

This slim 2015 PageTurner ebook written by Charles Lee Jackson II offers a brief survey of the comic book character Batman through all of its transmedia incarnations over the decades: “the comics, the serials, and beyond,” as Jackson says. Beginning with National Comics' Detective Comics and Batman's first appearance—inspired by the Shadow, Zorro, and the Scarlet Pimpernel—Jackson addresses noteworthy aspects of the character and others in the comic.

He then takes a look at the Columbia Pictures Corporation's Batman serials, describing the plotlines and casting in depth and detail, as well as their adaptation of the comic books' approach to the character. Jackson makes multiple connections to other serials and movies of the era, and touches on a failed radio program.

After several chapters discussing the film serials, Jackson turns his attention to the television show—and how it connected to the comics of the time. He considers the TV program and the related feature film, again addressing the cast and adjacent projects. The ebook ends with a chapter on the animated series and more recent movie and TV offshoots, including Gotham. A detailed filmography and bibliography (including Jim Harmon and Donald F. Glut's *The Great Movie Serials*) are also featured.

Jackson's survey is brief but wide ranging and mostly focuses on the cinematic legacy of the serials, which is noteworthy—a great introduction. His comments and perspective on the original comic stories and serials are enjoyable additions to a history that mostly centers on the comics and later movies. (This review was previously published in slightly different form in the APA-L apazine Telegraphs & Tar Pits #30.)

The Story of Superman by Charles Lee Jackson II Review by Heath Row

<http://N3F.org>

This 2016 PageTurner ebook is relatively similar to Jackson's title focusing on Batman (reviewed above). Drawing on material previously published in *Extra Added Attractions*, the volume addresses the history of the comic books, Fleischer cartoons, radio program, serials, feature film and TV show, and more recent movies, cartoons, and TV shows. A gallery of related images and references are also included. It's awesome how the comics and more recent options are almost an afterthought. (This review was previously published in slightly different form in the APA-L apazine Telegraphs & Tar Pits #30.)

What Is Dungeons and Dragons?
by John Butterfield, Philip Parker, and David Honigmann
Review by Heath Row

<http://N3F.org>

This 1984 mass-market paperback published by Warner was a delightful find, as well as a charming—if slightly befuddling—read. Originally published in England two years prior, the book was written by three teenagers attending the boarding school Eton College. At the time of its initial publication, the authors had been playing Dungeons & Dragons for five years and had started the “Strat. Soc.”—a school club—to play the game with other students and friends. What a windfall this book project must have been to such students—even if they didn’t make a bunch of money on the book deal. Certainly a bit of egoboo for such young writers.

The book actually answers the question of its title on the cover: “A fantastic game of magic and sorcery! The fastest growing game in the Western World!” And Warner Books considered the book a game book rather than a broader pop culture title, promoting additional books in the end pages, including Games for the Superintelligent, The New York Times Crossword Puzzle Dictionary, and M.A.S.H. Trivia: The Unofficial Quiz Book. Dungeons & Dragons, while growing, wasn’t the cultural force it is today.

Inside the pages of the book, the authors divided writing duties by section, “[r]ather than write every word by committee.” The book is organized in chapters that concentrate on an orientation to role-playing games, character generation, dungeon design, adventures, the Dungeon Master, figures and other accessories (including magazines and modules), computers, and other role-playing games and genres—offering a snapshot of role-playing games’ early days. That said, the book largely draws on the then-available Basic and Expert sets of Dungeons & Dragons, as well as Advanced Dungeons & Dragons as its foundation, appropriate given the book’s title.

Examples of gameplay are offered in prose, and one section pairs a narrative telling of gameplay with a description of the game mechanics behind the scenes on facing pages. A sample character sheet is included, as well as a playable mini-module, “The Shrine of Kollchap,” which I hope to DM for a group some day, perhaps using Old School Essentials, if not one of the original systems. (Additional characters might be able to be recreated given details and statistics sprinkled throughout the text.)

I was particularly interested in the survey of the early-1980s role-playing game industry. The book nods to the game’s emergence from miniature wargaming and mentions fantasy miniatures rules such as TSR’s Swords and Spells and tabletop games including Asgard’s Reaper and Skytrex’s Middle Earth. The use of miniatures—and a comparison of different scales—is also addressed. Additional role-playing games of the time include Aftermath, Boot Hill, Bunnies and Burrows, Chivalry and Sorcery, DragonQuest, Empire of the Petal Throne, En Garde!, The Fantasy Trip, Gamma World, Gangster!, Metamorphosis Alpha, The Morrow Project, RuneQuest, Skull and Crossbones, Space Opera, Starships and Spacemen, Superhero 2044, Top Secret, Traveller, Tunnels and Trolls, Universe, Villains and Vigilantes, and others—as well as adjacent board games. At the time, the authors estimated that there were more than 50 role-playing systems available.

When discussing modules available for DM use, the book touches on TSR’s modules, as well as those offered by Judges Guild, such as Caverns of Thracia, Mines of Custalcon, and Survival of the Fittest. The authors also focus on available magazines, showing a clear preference for White Dwarf while men-

tioning *Dragon* as “[p]rinted in America ... [and] more expensive than *White Dwarf*.” Additional magazines mentioned include *Military Modelling* (which incorporated *Battle*), *Ares* (the house magazine for *DragonQuest*), *The Journal of the Traveller’s Aid Society*, *Sorcerer’s Apprentice* (*Tunnels and Trolls*), and *Different Worlds* (*RuneQuest*).

Their treatment of fanzines is relatively dismissive, while citing British fanzines *The Beholder*, *DragonLords*, and *The Stormlord* as the best of the bunch. The authors suggest that fanzine fiction is generally bad and that with fanzines, “you have to take the rough with the smooth, and there is usually a lot of rough. ... Fewer publications might improve quality, because all the good articles would tend to accumulate in the remaining fanzines.” Resonating with the discussion of fiction in magazines and fanzines, the book ends with a Bibliography of recommended fantasy literature and adjacent genres—similar to Gary Gygax’s Appendix N.

The book was a very fun read, particularly as a historical artifact of interest to this long-time role-playing game enthusiast. (I’ve been playing since 1983, so I started playing about when this book came out; I was a little younger than the authors.) But its existence intrigues me. I’m not sure why someone would have bought this book then—instead of one of the existing games on the market, perhaps even D&D itself. Throughout the book, the authors discuss prices, even comparing prices, and at \$2.95, the book was less expensive than the D&D Basic Set or the AD&D Players Handbook—but you could play neither game, nor any of the others mentioned, after reading it.

It was an opportunistic title, capitalizing on growing public attention toward the game—and role-playing games in general—similar to third-party Rubiks Cube or how to play Pokemon books. I’m also curious why a British book had to be reprinted in the United States—rather than turning to an author or authors closer to home. Role-playing game-oriented amateur press association *Alarums and Excursions* launched in 1975 and *The Wild Hunt* was founded in 1979, so there was already a culture of writing about role-playing games in the States. Meanwhile, the fanzine *The Oracle* started publication in 1982. The book’s origin in the United Kingdom isn’t problematic—mostly evident in the authors’ preference for *White Dwarf* and its neglect of American fanzines entirely—but the importation is a Curiosity.

I wonder if the authors are still around—and if they still huck dice. (This review was previously published in slightly different form in my blog *Media Diet* and the APA-L apazine *Telegraphs & Tar Pits* #28.)

LITERARY CRITICISM

The 2022 Hugos: How I Voted and Why

By Tom Feller

Novels

Project Hail Mary by Andy Weir—

This is the author's second book after his triumphant *The Martian*, and I am glad to say that he is back in form. I liked this one even better than his first book and much better than *Artemis*, his second. It is even a true science fiction novel as opposed to *The Martian*, which some critics have argued is just a techno-thriller set in the near future. The movie rights to this novel have already been sold, but I fear it may be too cerebral for Hollywood. My only criticism I have is that many of the problems the main character has to solve seem to exist just to show how smart the author is.

The novel features two highly original alien species. The first is a microscopic unicellular entity called the "astrophage" that lives on the surface of the sun, travels through space, uses the carbon dioxide on Venus to reproduce, and then returns to the sun. It is an intrusive species that is absorbing the energy of the sun and thereby endangering life on Earth. The second is an intelligent species from 40 Eridani that resemble spiders and breathe ammonia. They are being endangered by the same species.

The main character is Ryland Grace, a once promising molecular biologist whose trouble with academic politics caused him to become a middle school science teacher. The novel starts with him awakening from a medically induced coma on a space ship approaching Tau Ceti. He is the only survivor of a three-person crew sent there to investigate why it is the only sun in nearby interstellar space that appears to be unaffected by the astrophage. He suffers from amnesia, and his story prior to his departure is told in flashbacks as he recovers his memories. It turns out that he was a reluctant hero, and he was neither the first nor the second choice of the authorities' selecting personnel for the mission. He has only partially recovered his memories before meeting the alien he names Rocky, who also turns out to be the only survivor of his mission to save his planet. Their effort to communicate is one of the best parts of the book.

One of the joys of this novel is that it is both original and old-fashioned at the same time. It is original in its concept of aliens, but old-fashioned in that the solutions to the problems the competent protagonist faces are solvable. It is definitely in the tradition of Clarke, Asimov, and Heinlein and has already won awards from the Amazon and Good Reads web sites. I ranked it second for Best Novel, but the other voters must have found it too old fashioned because they ranked it #6.

The Galaxy, and the Ground Within by Becky Chambers—

The fourth novel in the author's Hugo Award-winning *Wayfarers* series borrows a plot device that is normally found only in mainstream fiction, films, or television shows. The setup is that a group of travelers, strangers at the beginning of the story, find themselves stranded together, usually because of a weather event. By the end of the story, if they haven't killed each other, they become friends. In this novel, three interstellar travelers, each in their own ship, but none of them human, stop at a refueling

station called Five Hop One Stop. It is located under a dome on Gora, a lifeless planet with a thin atmosphere that is basically just a glorified truck stop. Gora orbits a star in a system that is the intersection of wormholes, the method of faster-than-light travel in the Galactic Commons, as the characters call it. Five Hop One Stop is operated by Ouloo and her offspring Tupo (Tupo has not declared its gender yet) who are of the Laru species. They are furry mammals, and the Ouloo carried Tupo in a pouch for a time. Since their customers are only expected to be on the planet for a few hours, they offer only a few amenities like snacks and a bathhouse. Her visitors are the artistic Roveg, a multi-leg Quelin, Pei, a lizard-like Aelun, and Speaker, an Akarak. Ouloo, Tula, Roveg, and Pei are all oxygen breathers, but Speaker breathes methane, so she has to wear an environmental suit whenever she leaves her ship. An accident knocks out the planet's communication satellite grid, so all flights are grounded. By the end of the story, the reader gets to know all the characters and their species, although Pei has appeared in at least one of the previous novels, and they get to know each other. The only event worth mentioning is that Tupo has an accident, and a human doctor makes a house call. According to the author, it will be the last book in this series, but it is sufficiently open-ended that the author could come back to it sometime in the future. All the novels stand alone, but I would recommend reading one of the others before starting this one. I ranked it #3, but the other voters made it their fourth choice.

A Master of Djinn by P. Djeli Clark—

This is the third story and first full-length novel in the author's alternate history/fantasy/steampunk Dead Djinn series. Its premise is that in 1872 the Sudanese mystic and inventor Al-Jahiz opened a portal between our world and the one where the djinn reside and then disappeared. The ultimate result was the expulsion of the British from Egypt and India and the rest of the European colonizers from much of Africa. The novel is set in an alternate 1912 Cairo, and the major powers of Europe are close to going to war. Egypt, now a great power, is hosting a summit in the hope of avoiding one.

The story is structured as a murder mystery, and it opens with the mass murder of 24 members of a secret society. It is called the Hermetic Brotherhood of Al-Jahiz and composed mostly of British expatriates. The perpetrator is someone claiming to be Al-Jahiz, and he or she can command djinns and ghuils and is promoting resurrection against the existing Egyptian government. The lead detective is Fatma, a female investigator for the Ministry of Alchemy, Enchantments, and Supernatural Entities, and she is saddled with a junior investigator named Hadia, also a woman. Fatma also has a Nubian girlfriend, Sitti, who helps with the investigation and is my favorite character in the book, because she keeps popping up at the most inappropriate times. The mystery part left something to be desired, because I guessed the identity of the Al-Jahiz imposter before Fatma did. However, the action scenes are excellent, and the world of angels and other supernatural creatures the author has built is fascinating. It is hard to put down when you reach the last 50 pages. I ranked it #4, but the other voters liked it a little bit more and ranked it #3. It was the Nebula Award winner for Best Novel.

A Desolation Called Peace by Arkady Martine—

This is the sequel to the Hugo Award-winning *A Memory Called Empire* and is set in the far future when humanity has expanded to the stars. The title comes from a line from Tacitus in which he quotes a Celt describing Roman conquest as "where they make a desert, they call it peace". This sequel takes place a few months after the events of the first novel, mostly in the Teixcalaan Empire, which finds itself at war with an unknown alien species that is at least its technological equal. Nine Hibiscus is a kind of fleet admiral with six task forces under her, and her second in command is Twenty Cicadas. (All Teixcalaani first names are numbers, reflecting that their standard form of reproduction is cloning.) She has been so successful and is so popular with her troops that there are some at the imperial headquarters, called Palace-Earth, who would not mind if she failed. The heir to the throne is a precocious

eleven-year-old boy named Eight Antidote. He is given the run of both the palace and the defense ministry. Sometimes he helps Hibiscus and sometimes he interferes.

Mahir Dzmare is the ambassador from an independent space station called Lsel. However, she has been recalled and is in trouble with her superiors. She has an implant of the memories and personality of her predecessor as ambassador, Yskandr Aghavn, and, at times, feels schizophrenic. When she was on Earth, she became good friends with Three Seagrass, an official with the Information Ministry. When Nine Hibiscus requests a negotiator from the agency, Seagrass seizes the opportunity to volunteer. On her way to the fleet, she stops at Lsel and picks up Dzmare, who is relieved to escape her homeworld before she has a fatal “accident”. They eventually become lovers.

Meanwhile, the war is going badly for the empire so when the opportunity to negotiate with the aliens arrives, they jump at the chance. The aliens are humanoid, although their hands are more like claws, but their language is almost incomprehensible. This part of the story is reminiscent of Ted Chiang’s *The Story of Your Life*, aka the film *Arrival*. Dzmare, Seagrass, and Cicada are actually making progress in figuring out how to communicate when a scout ship discovers the location of the home planet of the aliens. The empire possesses a weapon called a “shatterbomb”, which is capable of destroying an entire planet, much like the Death Star destroying Alderaan in *Star Wars*. The dilemma facing Hibiscus and her superiors is whether to end the war quickly with this weapon or to let negotiations play out. It is further complicated by a task force commander who is overly eager to use the weapon. The resolution of this dilemma is well written, and the book overall quite fascinating. More books in this series are planned. It was my first choice for Best Novel, and, for the first time since 2015, the other voters agreed with me.

Light From Uncommon Stars by Ryka Aoki—

About 50 years ago, I took a student tour of Berlin and had the privilege of attending a concert of the Berliner Philharmonic orchestra. After I remarked to a companion that all the musicians were male (and white, of course), an Asian woman walked on the stage as the violin soloist. One of the main characters in this novel, Shizuka Satomi, also a female Asian violinist, had soloed with the same orchestra about fifty years prior to the events of this novel. However, she was not as successful as the violinist in my time line and stopped performing. Fifty years later, she is a world-famous violin teacher. However, after the Berlin concert she sold her soul to the devil for reasons that are not revealed until almost the end of the book. She then made a deal that if she provides the souls of seven violin geniuses, she can keep her own soul. So far, she has delivered six and has about a year left on her contract to get the seventh. By accident, she hears a musical prodigy in a park in Southern California. That musician, Katrina Nguyen, is a transgender (male to female) homeless teenage runaway who loves to play the violin.

The primary villain is a demon named Tremon Phillippe who passes for human, although he is so ugly that people compare him to a toad. Also, close observers can see that he has more than the usual number of teeth. He loves both music and food, so he enjoys his time on Earth. There is also a sub-plot concerning a violin repair technician named Lucy Matia that is poorly integrated with the rest of the story.

When Satomi pops into a doughnut shop to use the ladies room, she meets Lan Tran, the store’s proprietor. They immediately hit it off, but fairly early in the book Tran reveals to Satomi that she and her family are really aliens from another planet seeking refuge from an interstellar war. Their science and technology is about on the level of *Star Trek*. Mixing genres like this has become rather commonplace,

but I don't think the author pulls it off. The transitions between the two types of stories are rather abrupt, the plot depends heavily on coincidence, and the ending was too slick for my taste. Furthermore, there are long discussions of music and food that really could have been cut out. I ranked it #6 out of six, but enough of the other voters liked it well enough for it to finish second.

She Who Became the Sun by Shelley Parker-Chan—

This historical fantasy is loosely based on the life of the Hongwu Emperor of China in the 14th Century, founder of the Ming dynasty. Since my knowledge of Chinese history is rather limited, the plot twists were a surprise to me. I knew that for at least a century China was ruled by the Mongols, including Kubla Khan, but did not know the story of their overthrow or even that they were called the Yuan dynasty. The main premise of this novel is that Zhu Yuanzhang, the peasant boy who rose to become emperor, was really a girl. The name given to her by her parents is never revealed to the reader, and her brief physical description emphasizes that she is rather ugly. Her village is afflicted by drought for four years, her father is killed by bandits, and her brother Zhu Chongba dies of starvation. She then assumes his identity and applies to become a monk at a nearby Buddhist monastery. She is accepted as a novice, fools all but one person in the monastery into believing she is a boy, learns reading as well as other skills, and has just been initiated as a monk when disaster strikes. The eunuch General Ouyang, not himself a Mongol, destroys the monastery in retaliation for an insult he suffered there years previously. He becomes Zhu's primary antagonist, and he is purely the creation of the author. Although he serves them, he has his own grudge against the Mongols, which is complicated by his love for Esen, the son of a regional Mongolian ruler.

Once again homeless, Zhu makes her way to the headquarters of the Red Turbans, who are openly rebelling against the Mongols. They follow the Radiant Prince, who is controlled by the prime minister. Still masquerading as a man, she is conscripted into military service and has such an outstanding string of successes that she rises to the pinnacle of power. She also takes a wife, Ma Ziuying, the daughter of a general killed in service to the Red Turbans. She keeps Zhu's secret and serves as her adviser.

My only objection to this well written debut novel, a kind of Chinese version of Game of Thrones, is that the fantasy elements are minimal, even the accurate prediction of a fortune teller. Zhu can see ghosts, for instance, but they have little influence over the story. The Radiant Prince can truly remember all of his reincarnations, has a real Mandate from Heaven, and also sees ghosts. However, these elements are not central to the story. The Dragon Awards classified it as an alternate history, but it is more in the tradition of secret histories to me. I ranked it #5, and the other voters agreed with me.

Novellas

Across the Green Grass Fields by Seanan McGuire—

The premise of the author's Wayward Children series, which was the winner in Best Series category, is that the world is full of portals, such as rabbit holes, looking glasses, or wardrobes, to other worlds. In this installment, the sixth in the series, ten-year-old Regan Lewis, a new character to the series, finds a door in a tree after having a fight with her supposed best friend. She opens the door to a world called "Hoofland", because all the people and animals have hooves. She immediately spots a unicorn that is being herded by a female centaur, who speaks to her. The centaur, Regan learns, is named Pansy, and she takes Regan home with her. This home is a longhouse where a group of female centaurs are raising a herd of unicorns for their meat and hides. They take Regan in, and she becomes best friends with young centaur named Chicory. Humans, Regan learns, only appear in this world when some important historical change is about to take place. At the end of the summer, the centaurs and their unicorns trav-

el to “The Fair”, where they will be able to sell their surplus unicorns, buy manufactured goods, and mate with the male centaurs. Afterward, they plan to present her to Queen Kagami. At the Fair, Regan survives a kidnapping attempt by a faun and a minotaur and learns that the queen wants her captured dead or alive. The centaurs then flee to the woods in the northern part of the land where they live for five years. In the meantime, Chicory grows to maturity while Regan learns centaur folk medicine, woodcraft, and archery and becomes quite the tomboy. However, the queen’s spies eventually learn where they are, so Regan sets out on a quest to confront the queen. Along the way, she is assisted by a talking kelpie, a kind of carnivorous horse, and a talking peryton, a sort of winged deer. Unfortunately, the ending is disappointing when compared with the rest of the story, and it is one of the weaker ones in the series. The other voters and I agreed on this one and ranked it #5.

Elder Race by Adrian Tchaikovsky—

When I first saw the title to this novel, I thought it would be some kind of Lovecraft pastiche. While it has some images that could have come out of Lovecraft, the tone is more in line with Arthur C. Clarke. It is set in the far future on a distant planet known as Sophos 4. It was originally colonized during humanity’s first wave of migration to the stars. However, the colony lost contact with the Earth and any memories of the home world, and the technology has descended to medieval levels. The culture is matriarchal, and Lynesse, aka Lyn, the fourth daughter of a queen, is one of the two point-of-view characters. In humanity’s second wave of travels to the stars, the planet was visited by a team of anthropologists, but they were recalled to Earth. One of them, Nyr Illim Tevitch, stayed behind and became the other point-of-view character. Because of the technology he possesses, he is considered a sorcerer and is known as Nyrgoth the Elder. Since he often reminds himself that he is an “Anthropologist Second Class”, he sometimes reminded me of Clarence in *It’s a Wonderful Life*.

The story begins when Lyn and her companion Esha Free Mark knock on the door of Nyr’s “castle”, where he lies in a state of suspended animation and is tended by robots. He has not heard from the Earth in over 300 years and suspects that he will never hear from it again which depresses him. Decades previously, he had fallen in love with Lyn’s great-grandmother Astresse when he helped her defeat a “monster”, really a runaway piece of equipment leftover from the original colonists, despite a “Prime Directive” forbidding him from getting involved with the locals. Now there is a “demon” menacing the countryside, and Lyn is seeking his help. He agrees, and they have a series of adventures with chapters alternating between the two points of view before finally encountering the “demon”. They have difficulty communicating with each other, not only because of language differences but also from completely different ways of viewing the world. Nyr’s chapters feel like science fiction, for instance, and Lyn’s like fantasy. Another barrier is that Nyr is seven feet tall with electronic implants that look like horns, which intimidates Lyn. It is a very enjoyable story and even funny at times. It is also a much better execution of genre mixing than *Light From Uncommon Stars*. I ranked it #1 in this category, but the other voters did not like it quite as much and ranked it second.

Fireheart Tiger by Alette de Bodard—

This is another story featuring a matriarchal culture, and the main character, Thanh, is the third daughter of the empress of a country called Binh Hai. It is set in a fantasy world loosely based on pre-colonial Viet Nam. When she was twelve Thanh was sent to Yosolis in Ephteria, loosely based on China, as a hostage. During her ten-year stay, she barely survived a fire that destroyed the imperial palace and became the lover of Eldris, the crown princess. Upon her return, she became an advisor to her mother on foreign policy. Then a delegation from Ephteria arrived that included Eldris and her female general Phareana. Among the Ephterian demands are more privileges for their people in Binh Hai. Moreover, Eldris proposes marriage between herself and Thanh. This is complicated by Thanh’s dis-

cover of Giang, someone Thanh thought was a servant girl in Yosolis who saved her from that fire. It turns out that Giang is a fire elemental in love with Thanh, and she followed her home. She has to negotiate between her two suitors as well as work to preserve her country's independence. Beautifully yet efficiently written with few wasted words, it is a lovely story. I ranked it #3, but the other voters must not have liked because they ranked it #6.

The Past is Red by Catherynne M. Valente—

The notion that the planet's polar ice caps might melt and cover all the land masses is an old one, already old when Kevin Costner made his ill-fated 1995 *Waterworld* movie. It's a dubious premise, because the polar ice caps don't contain that much water, but I've read lots of good stories with dubious premises so that did not bother me. In this story, the author's expansion of her 2016 novelette "The Future is Blue", the only unflooded land is the summit of what is presumably Mount Everest. The narrator is Tetley Abednego, a 29-year-old woman who lives on a pontoon boat attached to what was originally called the Great Pacific Garbage Patch. It has been made habitable and renamed Garbagetown. Neighborhoods include Candle Hole, Scrap Metal Alley, Electric City, where they have electricity, Matchstick Hill, Hypodermic Cove, and Pill Hill, made from discarded prescription bottles. One of her acquaintances hunts feral cats for their meat. Tetley tells the story of her life in a series of out-of-order flashbacks.

The infant mortality rate is so high in this society that people do not get permanent names until they are at least ten years old. At that age, they are sent out and choose their own names depending on something they find or experience. Tetley's came from a tea bag cover that she found. Her possessions include an Oscar the Grouch backpack, a portable solar powered DVD player containing a disk of Cheers episodes, and the prototype of a talking personal assistant that she names Mister. It recharges by contact with a human body. She is surprisingly optimistic about her life, even after the death of the love of her life, Goodnight Moon. Some reviewers have compared her to *Candide*, and the author has admitted to Voltaire's influence.

The author's language is very rich, and Tetley is one of the most interesting narrators I've encountered in a long time. However, one of the sub-plots is that Mister is able to communicate with satellites still orbiting the Earth and through one of them contact a human settlement on Mars. Tetley is then able to have real-time conversations with Olivia, a girl who lives there. There is no communications lag, which is, of course, a scientific error that should have been caught by an editor. This was enough that I ranked it #6, but the other voters did not consider it important and ranked it #3.

A Psalm for the Wild-Built by Becky Chambers—

The problem with utopias is that stories have to have conflicts. The author of this story set in a "green" utopia called Panga finds conflict inside the psyche of one of the residents, Sibling Dex. Born into a loving family, they have spent their adult life as a "garden monk", that is, working as a gardener at a monastery in Panga's only city, where all the buildings are made of biodegradable material. (The author uses "they" rather than he or she for Dex.) Then they have a mid-life crisis in which they changed their occupation to "traveling tea monk". This means that they travel via a pedal vehicle to the villages that surround the city where they brew and serve tea while listening to people tell them their troubles. After a few years, Dex decides to leave civilization and enter the wilderness, which is forbidden, to seek out an abandoned hermitage and find crickets, which do not live inside the bounds of civilized land. They almost immediately meet a robot named Splendid Speckled Mosschap, who itself is on a quest to find out what humans need. Mosschap is "wild-built", because its parts are taken from robots who broke down and had to be disassembled. Centuries previously during what they call the "Factory

Age”, robots had become sentient and left the land of the humans. Mosschap asks permission to accompany Dex, and Dex reluctantly agrees. Along the way, they have conversations about society, history, ecology, and philosophy. It is beautifully written in the style of a philosophical dialogue and supposed to be the first story in a series called “Monk and Robot”. I liked it well enough to rank it #2, but the other voters liked it even more and made it the winner in this category.

A Spindle Splintered by Alix E. Harrow—

We are all familiar with the story of Sleeping Beauty, especially the 1959 Disney version, but I doubt whether any of us are as obsessed with it as the main character in this story, Zinnia Gray. She suffers from Generalized Roseville Malady, a fictional disease caused by an industrialized accident. None of the victims has ever lived to the age of 22, which is why she earned an anthropology degree specializing in folklore from Ohio University in seven semesters. For her 21st birthday, her best friend Charm (short for Charmaine) Baldwin holds a Sleeping Beauty party in a tower of an abandoned prison. There is even a spinning wheel, and Zinnia intentionally pricks her finger on the spindle, which sends her into a parallel universe where the Sleeping Beauty story is taking place.

In this version of the story, Sleeping Beauty’s first name is Primrose, and she is drop dead gorgeous. Zinnia stops Primrose from pricking her finger and finds that her cell phone still works and can text Charm, although she has to be cautious about battery life as there is no way to recharge it. Primrose and Zinnia make common cause to free Primrose from her curse and for Zinnia to return to her home universe. Along the way, Zinnia meets Primrose’s parents, her Prince Charming, who turns out to be not so charming, and the witch who put Primrose under a curse, although the witch considers it a blessing because it will get Primrose out of a bad marriage. Zinnia, Charm, and Primrose turn out to be very compelling characters, and the story an entertaining one. It is supposed to be the first in a series of retelling of old fairy tales called Fractured Fables. I ranked it #4, and the other voters agreed with me.

Novelettes

Bots of the Lost Ark by Suzanne Palmer—

This is the sequel to the Hugo Award-winning “The Secret Life of Bots” featuring Bot 9, a diminutive work robot who reminded me of the title character in Thomas Disch’s “The Brave Little Toaster”, and Ship, an artificial intelligence running a spaceship. They survived the suicide mission in the previous story but at the price of Ship’s ability to travel faster-than-light. The human crew were put in suspended animation and Bot 9 deactivated, and Ship has been traveling for 68 years at sub-light speeds. During the trip, Ship combined small robots into agglomerations, aka “gloms”, so that they could take the places of the human crew members. Unfortunately, they have become rebellious. Meanwhile, Ship is approaching Ysir space, and the Ysirs have a phobia about artificial intelligence, so Ship has to wake up at least one of the crew members to take command and persuade the Ysirs to NOT blow them to bits. Consequently, Ship reactivates Bot 9 to help accomplish this while avoiding the gloms. This is a delightful story. Both the other voters and I agreed and ranked it #1.

Colors of the Immortal Palette by Caroline M. Yoachim—

The main character of this story is a half-French half-Japanese woman whose mother came from Nagasaki. She becomes an artist’s model in an alternate late 19th Century under the name Mari, short for Mariko. The main deviation from our world is that immortal undead people openly walk among us, but instead of blood, they steal the life force of the people close to them. The most famous painting that

features Mari is done by one of them. They become lovers, and the artist eventually turns her into one of the undead as well. Mari has ambitions about becoming a painter herself, and she is successful, although it takes decades. She moves to the United States and marries an African-American man. Although she herself cannot conceive a baby, they adopt mixed race children and have a good life. This is a beautiful story that I ranked #2, but the other voters #3.

L'Esprit de L'Escalier by Catherynne M. Valente—

What if Orpheus was successful in rescuing Eurydice from the underworld? In this story, Orpheus is a modern-day rock star and Eurydice is the beautiful daughter of an even bigger singing star. The only problem is the Eurydice is still dead when she returns to our world. Orpheus has to take care of her, including giving her baths, keeping her warm, and in general just trying to keep her body from decomposing. Obviously, this was NOT what he was expecting. This is a nice cautionary tale about being careful what you wish for. I ranked it #3, but the other voters did not like it as much and ranked it #5.

O2 Arena by Oghenechovwe Donald Ekpeki—

There have been many stories about young men and women needing money and doing some sort of prize fighting to earn it. Rocky is a good example. There are also stories about arena fights to the death, such as ones set in ancient Rome. This story is set in 2030 Nigeria in which climate change has caused the plankton in the oceans to die, thereby reducing the ocean's oxygen generation. The air has gotten so bad that oxygen credits have become the universal form of money. The narrator is a law student, and his best friend is another student, Ovoke, who has ovarian cancer. He needs money for tuition and to help Ovoke with her medical bills, so he participates in cage fights, which do not appear to have any rules and are fights to the death. While the description of the world in 2030 is interesting and the characters sympathetic, the story itself was not original enough for me to rank it higher than #4. The other voters liked it even less and ranked it #6 out of six. Yet, it won the Nebula Award in this category.

That Story Isn't the Story by John Wiswell—

Anton, the main character, is the minion of Mr. Bird, a kind of vampire who lives in a poorly lit house with black out shades. Anton has bleeding bites on his thighs when he makes his escape with the help of his friend Grigorii, who, with Grigorii's roommate Luis, take him in. Luis and Grigorii work odd jobs to pay the rent on their little house, and eventually Anton feels he has to go out and get a job. Unfortunately, Mr. Bird and his other minions find him, but ultimately do nothing. Bird's other minions eventually leave him, and he fades away. There is not much of a plot, but the atmosphere the author creates is very effective. I ranked it #6 out of six, but the other voters liked it well enough to rank it #4.

Unseelie Brothers, Ltd. By Fran Wilde—

My wife and I have seen Bridgerton, a series on Netflix that centers on the London social scene of the Regency period. One of the plot points is for young women to get the right dresses to attract the right kind of young men, and a dressmaker is a major character. This story also focuses on that point, although the time and place is modern day New York. Sara Sebastian and her cousin Rie are fashion design students when the magical dress shop of the Unseelie Brother shows up at one location one day and another one the next. When they visit the shop, they discover that it produces magical dresses that guarantee that the wearer will find the love of their life. Their mothers wore dresses from that shop decades earlier and that happened to them. However, Sara's father had no money, while Rie's mother

found a rich man. Sara impresses the proprietors so much that she is invited to design dresses for the shop. This is a good coming-of-age story, but it was just not as good as the others, so I ranked it #5. The other voters liked it a lot more and ranked it #2.

Short Story

Mr. Death by Alix E. Harrow—

In the 1998 Nicholas Cage-Meg Ryan film *City of Angels*, Cage plays an angel who escorts the souls of deceased to the next level of existence. Sam Grayson, the main character in this story, is something similar, although they are called “reapers”. They wear suits rather than shrouds and carry briefcases rather scythes. He was recruited by the Archangel Raz shortly after he died from lung cancer and found that reapers can interact with the material world. (Sam believes that reports of poltergeists are caused by careless reapers.) For instance, Sam took a photo of his three-year-old son, who died in an automobile accident 15 years previously, with him. Sam turns out to be good at his job, successfully escorting 221 deceased souls, before Raz gives him his toughest assignment so far: a two-year-old boy. Lawrence, the son of working-class parents who live in a trailer, has an undiagnosed heart condition and reminds Sam of his own son. When Sam visits Lawrence less than 24 hours before his impending demise, Lawrence can see him, which is unusual. Lawrence does not appear to be sick, and Sam breaks a rule by playing catch with him when he is left alone, leading his parents to believe that Lawrence has an imaginary friend. This, however, was a minor rule compared to the one Sam breaks next. Just as Lawrence is suffering a normally fatal heart attack during his sleep, Sam administers CPR and keeps him alive. Of course, there are consequences. This is a beautiful story about death and parental love. Both the other voters and I ranked it #2.

Proof by Induction by Jose Pablo Iriate—

My wife and I have pre-paid our major funeral expenses such as the mausoleum space, the coffins, and the embalming fees. In the future described in this story, there is also a service that hospitals provide called a CODA, which is a digital snapshot of a person’s memories at the time of their death, which can be accessed via a virtual reality interface. This gives the bereaved one last chance to say good-bye as well as to ask questions about the locations of wills, life insurance policies, etc. The main character of this story, Paulie Gifford, uses the CODA to consult his father, who had been a retired math professor, on mathematical problems. Gifford is a math professor up for tenure and needs an important discovery to ensure it. This story explores their father and son relationship, which was never a good one. Paulie also has to navigate his relationships with his wife Gina and daughter Maddie. I thought this was the best story in this category, but the other voters only ranked it #4.

The Sin of America by Catherynne M. Valente—

This story is set in a family restaurant called the Blue Bison Diner and Souvenir Shoppe outside of Sheridan, Wyoming, and the main character is Ruby Rose Martineau who is eating a meal. Her parents run a butterfly farm, but she left home to become a dancer. She did not make it as a dancer, had a short marriage, had one child who died from a birth defect, and another with a film producer. Her waitress is Emeline, who is pregnant by her married boss Herbert James Gage. It is an outrageously large meal, but one fitting for the one person in the United States selected by lottery to die for the sins of the rest of us. The author has an excellent literary style, but the story seemed derivative of Shirley Jackson’s “The Lottery”. The other voters and I ranked it #5.

Tangles by Seanan McGuire—

One of the two main characters of this story set in the Magic: The Gathering card game universe is Wrenn. She is a dryad, a magical being who inhabits trees who can walk. She has just left her sixth tree, whom she called Six, because it wanted to put down roots, and is looking for a suitable new tree. Not just any tree will do, but she has the problem that she has a short time window before she dies. Unfortunately, she has been spotted by the locals, who call her a “white witch”, and they are trying to hunt her down. Teferi, a visiting mage, participates in the hunt, but gets separated from the others before finding her. Then he ends up actually helping her. It is a nice story, but hardly Hugo worthy. The other voters and I ranked it six out of six.

Unknown Number by Blue Neustifter—

The concept of the multi-verse has been in the news lately, especially with the recent Spiderman and Dr. Strange movies. This story, which was originally published on Twitter of all places, explores what happens when the inhabitant of one universe contacts her counterpart in another via text messaging, and they compare notes about how their lives diverged. The one making contact is an unnamed physicist who has proven the existence of the multi-verse. His counterpart is a version of himself who became a computer programmer but is healthier psychologically. She even changed genders and is now known as Gabrielle. It is a very interesting exploration of gender identity and the “path not taken” concept. I ranked it #4, but the other voters liked it a little more and ranked it #3.

Where Oaken Hearts Do Gather by Sarah Pinsker—

This story consists of posts on an interactive web site called LyricSplainer about an eponymous folk song “Where Oaken Hearts Do Gather”. The author has created a fictional folk song about two lovers that originated sometime in the 18th Century and includes different versions of the 20 verses as they evolved over time. The participants on the site are each individual personalities, but the reader will figure out the true nature of the song long before these people will, if ever. One of the participants, Henry Martyn, is even making a film about the song and may have tracked down the village in England named Gall where it might have originated, and a gift shop manager named Jenny who might have some insight into it. An academic, Dr. Mark Rydell, also identified Gall as a possible origin, but he disappeared about 20 years previously. It is a good horror story written in the style of Internet forum, and it won the Nebula. I ranked it #3, but the other voters liked it so much that they made it the winner.

Lodestar Award for Young Adult Novel (Not a Hugo)

I was only able to read two of the finalists before the voting deadline, and neither one was the winner.

Chaos on Catnet by Naomi Kritzer—

The author has previously won a Hugo for the first story in this series, “Cat Pictures Please”, and a Lodestar for the first novel in the series, *Catfishing on Catnet*. The new novel picks up shortly after the previous novel ends, and both are set in a near future that features driverless cars. The main characters are CheshireCat, a truly sentient artificial intelligence secretly lurking on the Internet that loves cat pictures and videos; Steph, a teenage girl who, along with a few other cat lovers, knows Cheshire Cat’s secret; and Nell, another teenage girl whose mother is missing. Steph and Nell meet at a charter school in Minneapolis and, both being new girls, bond with each other. Steph’s mother is a genius computer programmer who until recently, along with Steph, has been on the run from her abusive husband, now

in jail. Her parents are divorced, Nell's mother is in a fundamentalist Christian whose sect is called the Abiding Remnant while her father is in a polyamorous relationship with two women. They all live together with one of the women's lesbian lovers. Molly's best friend Glenys has also disappeared, and, with CheshireCat's help, their efforts to find her drive much of the plot. Steph also gets involved the Mischief Elves, a Pokemon-GO style web site that gives its members assignments while Nell is involved with the Catacombs, a similar site for fundamentalist Christians. Both sites come to resemble the club in the film *Fight Club* more and more as the novel goes on. They eventually learn that both are operated by an AI similar to Cheshire Cat that has been created by Rajiv, a former associate of Steph's mother. He is a nihilist seeking to destroy the modern world. This novel was very hard to put down, and I ranked it #1. The other voters did not like it quite so much and ranked it #3.

Victories Greater Than Death by Charlie Jane Anders—

In her afterword, the author mentioned that when she was a teenager, she fantasized that she was really an alien in disguise as a way of coping with not fitting in. The narrator of this story is also a teenage girl who does not fit in with her high school classmates, but she really is an alien in disguise. Her mother was unable to conceive, so someone came to her with the offer of implanting a fetus. This fetus was really the clone of an important, purple-skinned space warrior, who they later learn is named Thaoh Argentian, with her DNA modified to make her look human. The aliens had also made of a copy of the warrior's memories to be restored when the girl, named Tina Mains, reaches adulthood.

In *Star Trek*, there was a species called "The Seeders", because they seeded the DNA of humans on planets through the galaxy. This was a way of explaining why they encountered so many humanoids in the TV episodes and movies. (The real reason was that they could only rarely afford to show truly alien aliens.) In this novel, the first in a trilogy, they have "The Shapers", a species who intervened in planetary development to promote the rise of humanoids and suppress the rise of non-humanoids, even to the point of genocide. For instance, they were responsible for the asteroid that killed the dinosaurs.

Tina, whose mother has revealed her heritage to her, is eagerly awaiting the day when the aliens come for her, because she is a misfit in high school. Her best friend Rachael, a fat artistic introvert who may be autistic, opted for home schooling as a way of avoiding the bullies and "mean girls". Tina already has dreams and visions of aliens, especially a skull-faced one who she later learns is called Marrant and is the novel's principal villain. Then one day, an alien tries to assassinate her, but she and Rachael are rescued by another alien named Yatto the Monthaa and taken aboard the spaceship *Indomitable*, which is crewed by a wide range of humanoid aliens who use a universal translator device embedded in their uniforms. (There are so many that it is hard to keep track of them.) Tina and Rachael learn that the Royal Fleet, the military arm of the Firmament, an interstellar civilization, is in the middle of a civil war. The breakaway faction, called the Compassion, want to continue the Shapers' program of promoting humanoids and suppressing non-humanoids, while the leaders of the Firmament want to integrate the non-humanoids into their civilization.

The aliens immediately attempt to restore Argentian's memories, but are only partially successful. They are unable to restore her personal memories, which means that Tina remains Tina, but do restore all her technical and historical knowledge. For instance, she can look at a piece of machinery and immediately identify it, explain its function, and what it is made of. She is immediately put into a training program so that she can get up to speed.

The *Indomitable* is under crewed, so Rachael takes a job as a medical assistant and suggests that they recruit crew members from the Earth's population. It turns out that the Firmament already had a pro-

gram in place to identify the best and brightest humans in the form of a cell phone app. Soon a gamer from Mumbai, a physicist from Cambridge, a Chinese musician, and a Brazilian hacker, all teenagers, join them. They are incorporated into the crew and go off to have adventures, culminating in a show down with Marrant. This fast-paced novel is a lot of fun, and I ranked it #2. Like the other young adult novel, the other voters did not share my enthusiasm and ranked it #4.

Conclusion

Unlike other years, this year my opinions were more in step with the other Hugo Award voters. The winners in both the Novel and Novelette categories were also my first choices, and the winner for Novella was my second and for Short Story my third. I must be getting smarter.

PROSE BONO

How To Anthology: Part 1

by Cedar Sanderson

<http://www.CedarWrites.com>

I'd intended to write this up last week, on the heels of having edited, published, and illustrated a best-selling anthology. I'm glad I didn't, since I was part of a panel of authors and anthologists on Thursday over on Live! from the Blanket Fort. The panel didn't fully stay on topic (when do we ever?) but it did give me more of an idea of what should be covered in this post. Or should I say, a brief introductory post of what ought to be a whole series but I probably won't do that just now and here... Dangit, my hands wore out so yes, there will be a short series

Not just best new release... although we still have that tag two weeks in. Best seller in its category, which we held for days.

How Not to Shoot Fish is the third anthology, technically fourth, I've published under Sanderley Studios. I've edited three and been publisher for four. There will be another volume of the hunting anthology out at the end of the month of September, titled The Deer Shot Back, which will make five. Because I've been fielding questions about 'how to...' I figured I'd talk about what I've done that has worked (or hasn't) with the caveat that I am not really an anthologist, nor do I intend to keep doing these. I'll leave that up to Raconteur Press. However, I do think that there is a market for short fiction, and anthologies are a great way to set up not only cross-pollination of fanbases for the authors involved, but they don't have to be loss leaders for those authors. You can write for an anthology and get paid. I know this to be true now, based on my own experiences as an author, and as the publisher of anthologies.

The first step of creating and running an anthology is to consider the long tail of royalties. You can choose two routes here: handle the royalty accounting, taxes, and so forth on your own, every month or quarterly. Or, you can hand off that part to Chuck over at PubShare, and worry more about the other steps of anthologizing. As you might guess from my phrasing, I did the latter. I couldn't have done this without that service to handle the money end, I know my own limitations and I simply haven't enough spoons to do bookkeeping for 40-60 authors in addition to myself. Yes, Chuck takes 10% (and cheap at that) and it's another layer between you and the distributors. I assure you, you can still make sure your

authors get paid. For one thing, you aren't going to set your ebook prices lower than 4.99 (not for an anthology you aren't!) so you'll be well within the 70% royalty band at Amazon...

The second thing you'll want to do is some market research. Do you have a large enough audience to support an anthology? Do the authors who are committing stories to the anthology? Collectively? Sometimes it can be hard to tell, and you have to just experiment, which is what I did with the hunting anthology. I was in a unique position to be able to afford to do that. Was there an audience for non-fiction hunting tales largely written by fiction authors, seasoned hunters, and raconteurs? Turns out, there was. We've sold over 180 copies in the first two weeks, and that doesn't count the 'soft' copies of Kindle Unlimited readthroughs. You won't want to just plunge into an experiment, though. But on the other hand, don't expect the moon on the first launch. Do your due diligence. Which brings me to...

Craft a strong call for stories, with a set deadline, and put this somewhere people can find it easily. One of the things that can founder an anthology, and both Raconteur Press and I ran into this bit of choppy water while navigating our way to anthologies, is not getting enough submissions to begin with. I have found that if I have a call, clearly defined, with a deadline, I'll likely be looking at most of the stories subbed right at the deadline, but that's far better than having a vague timeline where the stories got put off by authors until 'what do you mean, it's already been published?!' Also, having an easily shareable link will enable good buzz about the submission call, being able to share it on social media and in writing groups, and will reduce you the publisher's workload in having to answer the same set of questions over and over. I'd also say that if you want to maximize your story submissions, don't make the theme of the anthology overly specific. Leave some room for the authors to be creative and I think you'll be pleased at the results.

Along with that call, which should inspire writers to sit down and start typing while giggling madly... ahem. You'll also want to make your submission guidelines crystal clear: where are you expecting them to send the completed story? What format should they use? How will you contact them to accept that magnificent tale? When can they expect to hear from you? Protip for authors: Include all your contact information in the story manuscript. All of it! Name, penname, email, story title should all be on the cover sheet, and if you don't, you may wind up with a ghost rejection due to the publisher not knowing who the heck sent that story in. Every publisher is going to have slightly different requirements for formatting, but you can't go too wrong if you look at the Baen submission guidelines (fonts, spacing, so forth).

You will want to draft a contract that you'll be signing alongside your authors. There are some templates out there, but rule of thumb in this as in all things – keep it simple. If you can run it by an IP lawyer, do so, but don't bother with any other kind of lawyer. For anthologies, I see a one-year exclusivity clause for that story most often. If it's a shared world, you'll want to retain the rights to the things that make your world unique, but don't go too broad with this, authors will shy off (rightly!) if they feel that writing a short for you will strangle their ability to write elsewhere. The contract should lay out things like the copyright, the manner of payment and frequency, the author's name in publication, the title of the publication, and so forth.

Finally, you'll want to be ready to deal with submissions. Oddly enough, most folks have much more trouble with rejections than they do acceptances, fancy that! It's not easy to tell an author 'sorry, but your story doesn't fit...' and sometimes that is what you have to do. Keep it brief, professional, and resist the urge to explain. Definitely never make derogatory comments about the work, much less the author themselves. This isn't a moment for drama. If the author is unprofessional enough to protest a rejection, don't engage. Simply keep to the 'didn't fit' and move on. Most of the time, that's not going to be a problem. Rejections happen, and seasoned authors will understand that you aren't rejecting

them, it's honestly the story didn't fit a theme, wasn't going to work in the space, and they will move on with life.

Once you have accepted the stories you plan to use in the anthology (roughly 12-15, rule of thumb, but if you're working with long shorts of 10 K words you might not want more than 8, and if you're taking super-shorts like I did with the hunting tales, you might wind up with 20. A number I do not recommend!) you must let the authors know ASAP. I've had more than one submission where I wasn't sure I'd been accepted until the book released. Don't do that to your authors! Send out the acceptance, the contract, and I have a how-to sheet for PubShare I send with my initial packet, to get newbies off and running.

Editing. Here's where we start the hard work, and you'll note how far down the checklist this is! Editing includes setting up the overall flow of the volume. Which story sets the tone? Put that one first. Which is the strongest story? Put that one last. Which is the strongest pull? Put that one in to prop up the middle. I'm not going to get into structural editing (I don't, as an anthologist. I do copy edits, but if the story needs a lot of structure work, I'm going to pass on it and send a rejection, as I don't have the time or skills for it) here. I also start thinking about marketing while I am setting up the volume, and I'm not going to start the volume with an unknown author. The readers will often pick up the anthology based on the names on the front cover, and you'll want to sprinkle those names through the volume to entice the reader into discovering new authors they will also enjoy.

And my hands are giving out (I know, I need to be writing more!) so I'm going to finish this up next week. Please ask questions in the comments and I can address those next week, when I start diving into the publishing and marketing aspects of anthologies from both an author and now publisher's perspective.

Work vs. Writing by Becky Jones

<http://ornerydragon.com/>

Yesterday and today I have been trying to get a start on my syllabi for the fall semester as well as keep up with the writing I really want to do. A colleague turned me on to the Pomodoro method. (<https://lifehacker.com/productivity-101-a-primer-to-the-pomodoro-technique-1598992730>) Basically, you work on something, one task, for 25 minutes. Then you take a couple minute break. I get up and walk around, pace around the circle in the office hallway, walk up and down the house, whatever. Every four Pomodoros (about 2 hours), you take about a half hour break. The idea is that you let things float around in your head and get better insights to whatever you're working on. It really is amazing. I'm far more productive when I spend my day on the Pomodoro method. Plus, it reminds you to take a break and get up from your chair, so you don't atrophy.

When it comes to dividing my attention between a syllabus and a book, I find it very useful. I do two Pomodors on the syllabus (that includes reading the book, going over notes for assignments, creating assignments, watching videos, anything to do with class prep), then two on the book. This means that I actually get in several hours of productive work. Fan-freaking-tastic! Productivity! Yay!

Seriously, though, I am a world-class procrastinator, and this method really does seem to insure that I can avoid that snake pit. Well, as long as I stay away from Facebook....I am working hard on this book and the series. I also have ideas for another series and several short stories. I'm working on them. I will get things sold. I know it. I do wish I could keep going without the looming semester. On the other

hand, the semester and its schedule and stresses will require me to be more organized and more productive in a shorter period of time. This is a good thing.

In the meantime, I keep Pomodoro-ing along getting the edits done and the next one written.

Go tackle the week!

Style vs. Knowledge

A. C. Cargill

<https://accargillauthor.wordpress.com/>

I recently tried to read a new novel where the author had avoided using quotation marks. After reading about half a chapter, I stopped. Trying to figure out what was conversation versus text was giving me a headache and distracting from the story. Possibly, the author didn't know how to use quotation marks. That would be very sad since he teaches creative writing at a university.

Lack of knowledge would be no excuse anyway in these days of sites like Grammarly.com. I have noticed, though, that such mistakes in punctuation as well as in grammar are common in newly published books.

Possibly, the author thought that not using quotation marks was "cool" – his own "style." While having a writing style is certainly a positive attribute for any author, this came across as annoying and isn't what's meant by writing style. To some extent, the reader has to be kept in mind. Just as authors of children's books, YA books, steamy romance, etc., have to keep their readers in mind with their choice of vocabulary and explanation of ideas and concepts, so must someone writing a murder mystery (which this book was) aimed at adults.

Also, I had to wonder what the book editor was thinking. Did he or she suggest this? If so, that's disappointing. Or on the contrary did the editor try to talk the author into using quotation marks? In which case, the author not listening to this good advice is disappointing.

A lot of this laxness has come about through social media and cell phone texting. Punctuation is haphazard or totally lacking. But frankly, in a short text message or post on sites like MeWe, GETTR, or Clouhub, it makes little difference. In a ninety-thousand-word novel (average length), however, it's sheer torture. To you authors and editors, I say on behalf of readers, "Have pity!"

Please check out my novels. And thanks for reading.

~Finis~