

NESFA®'S REGIONAL SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION

BOSKONE® 58

FEBRUARY 12-14, 2021

VIRTUAL CONVENTION

NESFA'S REGIONAL SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION

BOSKONE® 59

FEBRUARY 18-20, 2022

BOSTON WESTIN WATERFRONT HOTEL

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Sara Felix



NESFA WELCOMES YOU TO

BOSKONE® 58

February 12–14, 2021
Virtual Convention

Guest of Honor

Joe Ambercrombie

Special Guest

Sheree Renée Thomas

Official Artist

Julie Dillon

Musical Guest

Marc Gunn

Hal Clement Science Speaker

Mike Brotherton

Hal Clement Science Speaker

Christian Ready

NESFA Press Guest

Ursula Vernon

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Guest of Honor), Kim Stanley Robinson (Boskone 57 Guest of Honor)

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WELCOME TO VIRTUAL BOSKONE 58!

WHILE I WISH we could have gathered in person, there is something wonderful about gathering virtually this year. We have seen friends from across the globe registering to attend, spanning the United States, Canada, and Europe - with some logging in from as far away as Australia!

It is wonderful and heartwarming to know that Boskone 58 will be welcoming so many people and that none of them will be having travel snafus due to the snow storm rolling into the New England area this week. (I think this is the definition of turning lemons into lemonade!) As we all settle in to enjoy the convention, I thank you for coming and for sharing your weekend with us. I also acknowledge the hard work that our volunteers have put into making Boskone possible. We had to upend our normal committee structure when we went virtual and dozens upon dozens of people came forward to volunteer their time and talent to turn Boskone into a virtual event that I think you will love. Our entire community has truly come together to bring Boskone home.

Please take a moment to enjoy reading the Boskone 58 Souvenir Book. It's a great way to get to know this year's guests. We've also added some extra content for you to enjoy, including a short story by Carlos Hernandez. "Origins" was originally published in *The Grimm Future*, the anthology I edited for Boskone the last time I was chair. Since I loved this story, I reached out to Carlos to ask if we could include it in this year's Souvenir Book and he graciously agreed. (Thank you, Carlos!) I hope you enjoy the story, the convention, and hanging out with each other online as we settle in for a weekend of fun, discussions, and good cheer!

Erin Underwood

Boskone 58, Chair

February 9, 2021

Boskone 58 Policies

Policies

Boskone takes the issue of member conduct seriously. If you have questions, please be sure to read our Code of Conduct for more information.

Boskone Code of Conduct

Be respectful and courteous toward others. We expect you to understand that even though this is an online convention, “no” means no. Harassment of any kind, from intimidation to verbal abuse to illegal behavior will not be tolerated. This policy applies to your interactions with everybody. We also expect you to refrain from illegal, destructive, and hazardous conduct.

Violation of this policy can result in action by the con committee ranging from warnings, to having your membership revoked with no refund, to permanent banning. Action by the convention in no way precludes the injured individual from pursuing whatever remedies, civil or criminal, as they see fit.

If you feel you are being harassed, please let the Con Chair or a NESFA Officer know. If necessary, please ask a Committee member to find one of those people for you. You will be treated with respect and your concerns will be taken seriously. All names involved will be kept confidential to the extent possible, but any accused person has the right to know enough details to be able to defend himself, herself or themselves.

Please note that other behaviors, including but not limited to destruction of the virtual con space, can also result in the actions described above.

Boskone is a members only event and the con committee reserves the right to determine who may be a member.

Weapons Policy: While virtual weapons do exist, we expect you to refrain from illegal, destructive, and hazardous conduct that harm others.

Accessibility at Boskone

Boskone is committed to providing an inclusive environment for all of our members. We value our members with visible and invisible disabilities, and we will do our best to accommodate requests for special assistance when possible.

Virtual Boskone 58 will include*:

- AI captioning for most programming, including panels, presentations, and discussion groups
- Recordings for most of our panels and presentations with closed-captioning
- Audio-only engagement
- Low-sensory virtual spaces
- Social opportunities that do not require cameras, microphones, or speakers
- Accessibility best practice documentation shared with presenters
- Intentionally planned breaks

*Including but not limited to as we continue to evaluate access needs

Please contact us at access@boskone.org with questions. We will work with you to the best of our ability to make the conference accessible.

About NESFA

WHAT IS NESFA? The New England Science Fiction Association is the parent organization for Boskone and NESFA Press. The members are all volunteers who love science fiction. NESFA was founded in 1967 to pursue SF-related projects and to schmooze. Our ethic can best be summed up by “have fun doing work you like.” We are passionate about SF and enjoy talking about and doing things to share our interest with the world. We have about four hundred members (mostly subscribing members) from all over the world. Anyone interested can join NESFA as a subscribing member by paying the annual dues of \$20.

MEETINGS: COVID-19 has changed our ability to meet in person. However, we gather in zoom every Wednesday evening for general discussions, there are also reading and writing groups meeting on zoom and we still meet one Sunday afternoon each month for general NESFA business. For a full listing of regular activities, please visit the NESFA calendar at <https://www.nesfa.org/events/>.

AWARDS WE GIVE: NESFA sponsors two annual awards: the Edward E. Smith Memorial Award for Imaginative Fiction (the Skylark) and the Jack Gaughan Award for best emerging artist. Additional information about the awards as well as historical list of winners is included in the Boskone Souvenir Book and current year winners are announced at Boskone, during the Awards Ceremony on Saturday.

NESFA PRESS: NESFA Press publishes the Boskone Guest of Honor books, some Worldcon Guest of Honor books, some fannish books, and the NESFA's Choice series — which reprints previously out-of-print works of classic SF. Please visit the NESFA Press website anytime or stop by the NESFA Sales table in the Dealers Room and check out the numerous volumes in this acclaimed series.

CLUBHOUSE & LIBRARY: The NESFA clubhouse is located at 504 Medford Street, Somerville, MA (phone 617-625-2311), just off Broadway near Magoun Square. The clubhouse also houses NESFA's library of thousands of science fiction books, a great reference collection, and an extensive run of SF magazines and fanzines. NESFA members may check out any item in the library.

For more information, please visit our website at www.nesfa.org, email us at info@nesfa.org

TAKE TO THE STARS

CHICON 8

THE 80TH WORLD SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION

2022

2012

1952

1982

1940

1962

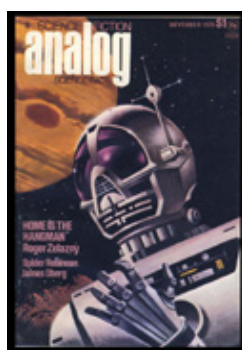
2000

1991



chicon.org

BEN BOVA, A MEMORIAL



BEN BOVA (1932-2020) WAS ONE of the founders of the Boston Science Fiction Society (BSFS). This was one of the precursors of New England Science Fiction Association (NESFA)—another precursor was the MIT Science Fiction Society (MITSFS), which is still going strong). Although not a founder of the NESFA, Ben was an early joiner and often attended meetings. In our early days, Ben Bova was the B of our ABC pro writers along with Isaac Asimov and Hal Clement. As you can imagine, this made for lively meetings.

Ben worked at Avco Everett in Marketing. Of course, he also wrote science fiction. Following the death of John W. Campbell, Jr., he became editor of *Analog* in 1972 and successfully edited it—winning 5 Hugos Awards—until 1978 when he left to become editor at *Omni*. He also won the Best Editor Hugo in 1979 for his work at *Omni*. He was nominated twice (1978 & 1980) for Best Professional Editor for his work at *Omni*, once for Best Short Story (1971 “Brillo” with Harlan Ellison), and once for Best Related Work (*Space*

Travel with Anthony R. Lewis). He won numerous other awards including NESFA’s Skylark Award, presented at in 1974 at Boskone 11.

During his time at *Omni*, he was science advisor for the science fiction TV series *The Starlost*. He became disenchanted with the direction of the series (as did Harlan Ellison) and this resulted in a humorous satirical novel *The Starcrossed*. One of the scenes of this novel takes place at a NESFA meeting and features very thinly disguised members Suford Lewis and Joe Ross.

He was Guest of Honor at Boskone 14 in 1977; NESFA Press produced *Viewpoint*, a book of his *Analog* editorials. He was Author Guest of Honor at the 2000 Worldcon (Chicon 2000). Ben also served as President of SFWA and of the National Space Society.

In 2020, Ben Bova passed away due to covid-19 complications. The year 2020 was a most unpleasant year, and we will miss our friend and the many others who are no longer with us.

BOSKONE 58 IN MEMORIAM

An incomplete list of friends and community members who have passed away since our last convention, covering 2020 and 2021. Sorted chronologically.

Photo by Greg Rakozy

Author **Earl Staggs** died on January 3. Primarily a mystery author, some of Staggs' work, such as *Memory of a Murder* included science fictional elements.

Author and editor **Mike Resnick** (b.1942) died on January 9. Resnick is the five-time Hugo Award winning author of *Kirinyaga*, *Santiago*, and *Ivory*. He has also edited numerous anthologies of short stories, through which he mentored many newer authors. Most recently, he served as the editor of *Galaxy's Edge* magazine. Resnick was also one of the founding members of ISFiC, the organization that runs Windycon in Chicago.

Carol Serling (b.1929) died on January 9. Serling was married to Rod Serling, who created *The Twilight Zone*. In 1981, she launched *The Twilight Zone Magazine* and served as editor through 1989. She also licensed Serling's image and name for television projects and Disney's *Twilight Zone Tower*

of Terror.

Fan artist and Hugo winner **Steve Stiles** (b.1943) died on January 11 following a battle with cancer. In addition to his fan art, Stiles also drew comics for Marvel and underground publishers. He was first nominated for the Hugo in 1967 and finally won in 2016.

Author **Christopher Tolkien** (b.1924) died on January 15. Not only did Tolkien draw the maps for *The Lord of the Rings*, but following his father's death, he edited *The Silmarillion* as well as *Unfinished Tales*, the multi-volume *The History of Middle Earth*, and other works by his father.

Comedian **Terry Jones** (b.1942) died on January 21 after suffering from dementia. Jones was a member of Monty Python and directed their films *Monty Python's Holy Grail* and *Life of Brian*, in which he played various roles, as well. Jones also made documentaries on medieval life and the barbarian invasions

of Europe and he wrote the novelization of Douglas Adams's *Starship Titanic*.

Author **Mary Higgins Clark** (b.1927) died on January 31. Best known as a suspense novelist, her novels *The Anastasia Syndrome*, *Before I Say Good-Bye*, and *Two Little Girls in Blue* have genre elements.

Author **Paul Barnett** (b.1949) died on February 3. Barnett also published as **John Grant**. In addition to writing the Lone Wolf novels with Joe Dever, and several of his own novels, he co-edited the *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* with John Clute. He won Hugo Awards for both the *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* and *The Chesley Awards for Science Fiction and Fantasy Art: A Retrospective*.

Fan and author **Earl Kemp** (b.1929) died on February 6. Kemp was active in fandom and chaired Chicon III, the 1961 Worldcon and edited *The Proceedings: Chicago III*. He won the Hugo Award for Best Fanzine in 1961 for

Who Killed Science Fiction. His career as a writer was linked to William Hamling and Greenleaf Classics.

Actor **Orson Bean** (b. **Dallas Burrows**, 1928) was struck by a car and killed on February 7. Bean appeared in *Being John Malkovich*, *InnerSpace*, and voiced Frodo and Bilbo Baggins in the animated versions of *The Hobbit* and *The Return of the King*.

Boston area fan **Ben Bishop** (b. 1961) died on February 16. Bishop's fanac mostly revolved around his attendance at Arisia.

Game designer **Daniel Palter** (b. 1950) died on February 17. Palter was the owner of West End Games and was the publisher of *Star Wars: The Role Playing Game*, which helped expand the *Star Wars* brand after the release of *Return of the Jedi*. He later founded Final Sword Productions, where he was developing games based on the works of David Weber and S.M. Stirling.

Author **Charles Portis** (b. 1933) died on February 17 after suffering from Alzheimer's disease. Best known for the western *True Grit*, Portis wrote the science fiction novel *Masters of Atlantis* in 1985.

German author **Ror Wolf** (b. **Richard Wolf**, 1932) died on February 17. Wolf wrote the novel *Die Vorzüge der Dunkelheit* and also published a short story and poem. Most of his writing was not genre and he also published under the pseudonym **Raouk Tranchirer**.

Fan **Elyse Rosenstein** (b. 1950) died on February 20. Rosenstein was one of the organizers of the first Star Trek convention, held in New York in 1972. She went on to run Nova Enterprises with her husband, Steve, selling *Star Trek* related materials. She chaired the 1983 Lunacon and was named an honorary Lunarian.

Author **Clive Cussler** (b. 1931) died on February 25. Cussler wrote the Dirk Pitt novels and used his money and celebrity to further oceanographic exploration. His best known work, *Raise the Titanic!* Was turned into a film in 1980.

Scientist **Freeman Dyson** (b. 1923) died on February 28. A theoretical physicist and mathematician, Dyson's concept of a sphere around a sun inspired numerous science fiction stories and novels.

Fan **Frank Lunney** (b. 1952) died on February 28. Lunney was a best fanzine Hugo nominee in 1970 for editing *Beabohema*, which he published from 1968 to 1971. He later published the fanzine *Syndrome* on an occa-

sional schedule.

New York fan **Ariel Makepeace Julianne Winterbreuke** (b.c. 1954) was found dead on March 8. Winterbreuke, who was also known as **Abby**, **I Abra Cini**, and **Ariel Cini**, was a contributor to APA-NYU, a filker, artist, and performer. She wrote the *Touching Land's Dance* trilogy and was one of the first trans people in fandom. She once appeared on the *\$10,000 Pyramid*, partnered with William Shatner.

Astronaut **Al Worden** (b. 1932) died on March 18. Worden was the command module pilot on Apollo 15. On the return to earth, Worden performed the first deep space EVA. Worden detailed his experiences in the book *Falling to Earth*.

Game designer **Brian J. Blume** (b. 1950) died on March 27 of Lewy Body Dementia and Parkinson's disease. Blume designed the game *Boot Hill* and wrote the *AD&D Rogues Gallery*.

Artist and author **Tomie dePaola** (b. 1934) died on March 30, a week after suffering from a fall. DePaola was the author and illustrator of the *Strega Nona* series as well as numerous other books. DePaola has won the Caldecott Medal and the Newbery Medal.

Author **Jerrold Mundis** (b. 1941) died on April 5 from COVID-19. Mundis published "Bad Tommy" as **Eric Corder** before using his own names. His horror novels, starting with *Echo in a Dark Wood* were published with the pseudonym **Julia Withers**.

Fan **JoAnn Wood** died on April 5. Wood was the founder of the Connecticut Valley SF Society and an early member of NESFA. She was on the bid committee for 7 in '77 and Hawaii in 1981. Her husband, Ed Wood, was one of the founders of Advent:Publishers.

Children's author **Jean Little** (b. 1932) died on April 6. Although Little wrote numerous books and stories, only a couple of them, "Without Beth" and *Once Upon a Golden Apple* are of genre interest.

Editor **Keith Ferrell** (b. 1953) died on April 11. Ferrell wrote the biography *H.G. Wells: Citizen of the Future* and later became the Editor-in-Chief of *OMNI* magazine.

Boston fan **Stacy Mandell** (b.) died on April 12. Mandell became active in fandom and con-running at Stony Brook in 1977. She served as the president of the Science Fiction Forum and ran the soft-sculpture business Sleeping Dragon. She ran the Masquerade Green Room at Arisia as well.

Author and editor **Joseph S. Pulver, Sr.**

(b. 1955) died on April 24. Pulver edited the anthologies *The Grimscribe's Puppets* and *Cassilda's Songs: Tales Inspired by Robert W. Chambers' King in Yellow Mythos*.

Chinese author **Ye Yonglie** (b. 1940) died on May 15. Ye began publishing science fiction in 1978 with *Xiao Lington Manyou Weilai*, and became known as one of the country's foremost science popularizers. He was most active prior to 2000.

Academic **Marshall B. Tymn** (b. 1937) died on May 24. Tymn was the founder of the Instructors of Science Fiction in Higher Education and published numerous academic works, including *A Director of Science Fiction and Fantasy Publishing Houses and Book Dealers*, *The Teacher's Guide to Science Fiction*, and *The Celebration of the Fantastic*. In 1990, he received the Pilgrim Award from SFRA.

Comic editor **Dennis O'Neill** (1939) died on June 11. O'Neill worked on *Green Arrow*, *Green Lantern*, and *Batman*, creating the characters Ra's al Ghul and Talia al Ghul. He also served as editor in chief of DC Comics.

French author **Jean Raspail** (b. 1925) died on June 14. Raspail wrote the novel *Le camp des saints* which is an anti-immigration novel embraced by the white supremacy movement. He also wrote the novel *Sire*, about the reinstallation of the French monarchy.

Actor **Ian Holm** (b. 1931) died on June 19. Holm portrayed Frodo Baggins for the BBC adaptation of *The Hobbit* and later played Bilbo in the *Lord of the Rings* films. He also played the android Ash in *Alien*. Other genre films included *The Fifth Element*, *Ratatouille*, *Brazil*, and *Time Bandits*.

Author **Carlos Ruiz Zafón** (b. 1964) died on June 19. Zafón was the author of *The Shadow of the Wind*.

Author **Dean Ing** (b. 1931) died on June 21. Ing's first story was published in 1955, but he really began writing in the late 1970s. His first novel *Soft Targets*, appeared in 1979 and in the mid-80s, he completed five of Mack Reynolds manuscripts after Reynolds died. His story "Devil You Don't Know" was a nominee for the Hugo and Nebula Award.

Author **Wendy Cooling** (b. 1941) died on June 23. Cooling established literacy programs in England and also wrote numerous childrens books in the *Quids for Kids* series, including *Aliens to Earth* and *Weird and Wonderful*.

Author **Kathleen Duey** (b. 1950) died on June 26. Duey began publishing in 1991 with *Double-Yuck Magic* and published several YA

novels over the years, including the *Unicorn's Secret* series, the *Faeries' Promise* series and the *Resurrection of Magic* series.

Artist **Jim Holloway** died on June 28. Holloway worked on interior illustrations for TSR's *Dungeons and Dragons* books and did the cover art for several of their games. He was the original artist for *Paranoia* and also worked for Pacesetter and Sovereign Press.

Author **Kurt Mitchell** (b.19) died on July 1. A freelance author, Mitchell self-published more than an dozen comics, graphic novels and anthologies. Prior to turning to self-publishing, he worked in videogame development.

Author **Brad Watson** (b.1955) died on July 8. Watson's genre work included the short story "Water Dog: A Ghost Story." He also published the collection *Last Days of the Dog-Men: Stories*.

Critic **Gary William Crawford** (b.1953) died on July 9. Crawford founded Gothic Press and published *Gothic* magazine. He wrote several non-fiction studies, including *Ramsey Campbell, K/ Sheridan Le Fanu: A Bio-Bibliography*, and *Robert Aickman: An Introduction*, as well as several short stories.

Author **Joanna Cole** (b.1944) died on July 12. Cole was a children's book author who created *The Magic School Bus* series.

Author **Susan Sizemore** (b.1951) died on July 20. Sizemore began writing *Star Trek* fan fiction and eventually began writing romance novels. Her debut novel, *Wings of the Storm* was a time-travel romance novel and she soon began writing tie-in novels for *Forever Knight*. She was active in SCA as Sibeol the Sinister.

Author **Brian N. Ball** (b.1932) died on July 23. Ball wrote *Singularity Station*, *The Regiments of Night*, and *The Venomous Serpent*, as well as the Timepiece series. Ball also edited the YA anthology *Tales of Science Fiction*.

Author **Gillian White** (b.1945) died on July 24. White began writing works of genre interested with 1990's *The Plague Stone*. Other novels include *Unhallowed Ground*, *The Crow Biddy*, and *Veil of Darkness*.

Fan **Ro Nagey** (b.1953) died on July 27. Nagey chaired the Ann Arbor Relax-I-Con and the first two ConFusions. Nagey worked at the bookstore Cloak and Rocket and founded the Stilyagi Air Corps. She was also the Secret Handgrip Fandom. Nagey served as Guest of Honor at ConFusion 14 and Ad Astra II.

Roberta Pournelle (b.**Roberta Isdell**, 1936) died on August 2. Pournelle married author Jerry Pournelle in 1969

Susan Ellison (b.**Susan Toth**) died on August 2. The wife of Harlan Ellison, she published the short story "Man of Many Parts: in 1973 and published the "Through the Lens" series of essays in from the late 1980s through the mid 1990s.

Author **Pete Hamill** (b.1935) died on August 4. Hamill's novels *Forever* and *Snow in August* have fantasy elements, as does his short story "From the Lake."

Russian author **Andrei Moscovit** (b.**Igor Markovich Efrimov**, 1937) died on August 12. Moscovit's science fiction included the novel *The Judgment Day Archives* and he founded Hermitage Publishers.

Chicago author **PJ. Beese** (b.1946) died on August 13. Beese was the author of the novel *The Guardsman* with Todd Cameron Hamilton and the two wrote two additional short stories together. Although their novel was nominated for the Hugo, there were claims of ballot stuffing and the work did not appear on the final ballot.

Author **Elaine Moss** (b.**Elaine Levy**, 1924) died in August. Moss was a children's librarian, book reviewer, and writer. She wrote an introduction to *A Wrinkle in Time* and a children's adaptation of *Gulliver's Travels*.

Author **Randall Kenan** (b.1963) died on August 28. Kenan frequently wove supernatural elements into his novels like *A Visitation of Spirits* and his short stories.

Author **Thomas RP Mielke** (b.1940) died on August 31. Mielke began publishing science fiction in 1960 with *Enterprise Twilight*, which he wrote using the name **Mike Parnell**, one of many pseudonyms. With Rolf W. Liersch, he wrote *The Terranauts* series. He has won the Kurd-Laßwitz-Preis, the German Science Fiction Prize, and the Germany Fantasy Prize.

Actress **Diana Rigg** (b.1938) died on September 10. Rigg portrayed Emma Peel on *The Avengers* and James Bond's wife, Teresa di Vincenzo, in *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*. More recently, she played Olenna Tyrell in *Game of Thrones*.

Filk publisher **Bob Larent** (b.) died on September 14. Larent was the founder of Wail Songs, one of the first commercial filk labels, which also published the filk songbook *Save the Wails*. He founded the filk con Consonance and the Interfilk fan fund. He was inducted into the filk hall of fame in 1996.

Author **Terry Goodkind** (b.1948) died on September 17. Goodkind wrote the novel *Wizard's First Rule* and the other novels in the

Sword of Truth universe. Goodkind also recently had published three novellas in the Angela Constantine series.

Author **John J. Myers** (b.1941) died on September 24. Myers collaborated with Gary K. Wolf on the novel *Space Vulture*. The also collaborated on a short story for which Myers used the pseudonym **Jehane Baptiste** because he was unsure of how the Vatican would view an archbishop publishing science fiction.

Fan **Lindy Laurent** (b.**Lindy Sears**, 1956), committed suicide on September 25. Laurent was responsible for brining filk guests to Balticon and served as a chair for Conterpoint 1993. She was married to filk publisher Bob Laurent and worked with him on Wail Songs.

Author **Chris Meadows** (b.1973) died on October 14 from cardiac arrest, a week after he was hit by a driver while biking. Meadows was active in the e-publishing field and had a strong influence on the way e-publishing takes place and was a strong proponent of DRM-free publishing.

Author **Jill Paton Walsh** (b.1937) died on October 18. Paton Walsh published the novels *A Chance Child* and *Torch* and a handful of genre short stories among her works.

Game designer **Len Lakofka** (b.1944) died on October 22. Lakofka played the character Leomund in early *Dungeons & Dragons* games and helped Gary Gygax with game design elements. He eventually wrote a column for *Dragon* and became the first non-TSR employee to write official AD&D material.

Author **Dick Lupoff** (b.1935) died on October 22. Lupoff wrote the novel *Circumpolar!* and its sequel, as well as several stand alone novels and numerous short stories. Along with his wife, Pat, he won a Hugo for Best Fanzine for *Xero* and published *The Best of Xero*, collecting many articles for the zine. He was nominated for the Nebula three times and the Hugo five times.

Author **Rachel Caine** (b.1962) died on October 31. Caine published several young adult series, included the Great Library and the Morganville Vampires, which was turned into a film. She published under several additional pseudonyms, included in **Roxanne Conrad**, **Roxanne Longsreer**, and **Julie Fortune** and collaborated with Ann Aguirre on the Honor novels.

Actor **Sean Connery** (b.1930) died on October 31. Best known for playing the first

James Bond in films, Connery's genre work has included *Time Bandits*, *Highlander*, *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, *Dragonheart*, *Meteor*, and *Robin and Marion*. He won an Oscar for his role in *The Untouchables*.

Author **Debra Doyle** (b.1952) died on October 31. Doyle co-wrote with her husband Jim Macdonald. Over the years, the two wrote the Wizard Apprentice series, the Bad Blood trilogy, the Mageworld series, a two-volume alternate history series, and several works under various house names. Doyle received the Mythopoeic Award in 1992.

Artist **Jael** (b. **Jael Ashton**, 1937) died on November 17. Jael became a professional artist in 1958 and earned an art degree in 1973, teaching art in Utah and Nevada before moving to New York and focusing on science fiction art beginning in 1986. She painted numerous covers for Baen and DAW as well as the first cover for ISFiC Press. Her sf/f work ceased in 2004.

Author **Hayford Peirce** (b.1942) died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound on November 19. Peirce was the author of *Napoleon Disentimed* and *The Thirteenth Mistral*. He published many humorous stories in *Analog*, beginning with *Mail Supremacy* in 1975. His wife was found dead from a gunshot wound the same day as Peirce died.

Japanese author **Yasumi Kobayashi** (b.1962) died from cancer on November 23. His short story "The Man Who Watched the Sea" received the Hayakawa Award for best short story in 1998. He was twice nominated for the Seiun Award for best short story as well as the Galaxy Award (China) for best foreign author.

Actor **David Prowse** (b.1935) died on November 28. Prowse is most famous for wearing Darth Vader's suit in the original *Star Wars* trilogy. He also appeared in *The*

Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy television series as Hotblack Desiato's bodyguard, in *Jabberwocky*, and in *A Clockwork Orange*. He played an android in *The Tomorrow People* and a minotaur in *Doctor Who*.

Author **Ben Bova** (b.1932) died from COVID-19 related pneumonia on November 29. A six-time Hugo winner, he served as the editor of *Analog* following John W. Campbell's death and later was the editorial director of *Omni*. Bova published numerous hard science fiction novels, notably the 26 volume "Grand Tour" series looking at the various planets in our solar system and the Orion series about an eternal hero. Bova served two terms as the President of SFWA and was President Emeritus of the National Space Society. He was the Author Guest of Honor at Chicon 2000.

Tolkien scholar **Richard C. West** (b.1944) died on November 29 from COVID-19. West helped found the Tolkien Society of the University of Wisconsin and later edited *Tolkien Criticism: An Annotated Checklist*. He was the founding editor of the Tolkien zine *Orcrist*.

Author **Phyllis Eisenstein** (b.1946) died on December 7. Eisenstein began publishing short fiction in collaboration with her husband in 1971, but she quickly developed her solo career. She was a two-time Hugo and three-time Nebula nominee. Her collection *Born to Exile* won the coveted Balrog Award in its inaugural year.

Author **Dave Galanter** (b.1969) died of cancer on December 12. Galanter, frequently in collaboration with Greg Brodeur, published several works, usually set in the *Star Trek* continuum. His novels included *Foreign Foes* and *Maximum Warp*. He also wrote short stories in the universe.

Actor **Jeremy Bulloch** (b.1945) died on December 17. Bulloch portrayed Boba Fett in *The Empire Strikes Back* and *The Return of the Jedi* and as Captain Colton in *Revenge of the*

Sith. He also appeared in two *Doctor Who* serials, "The Space Museum" and "The Time Warrior."

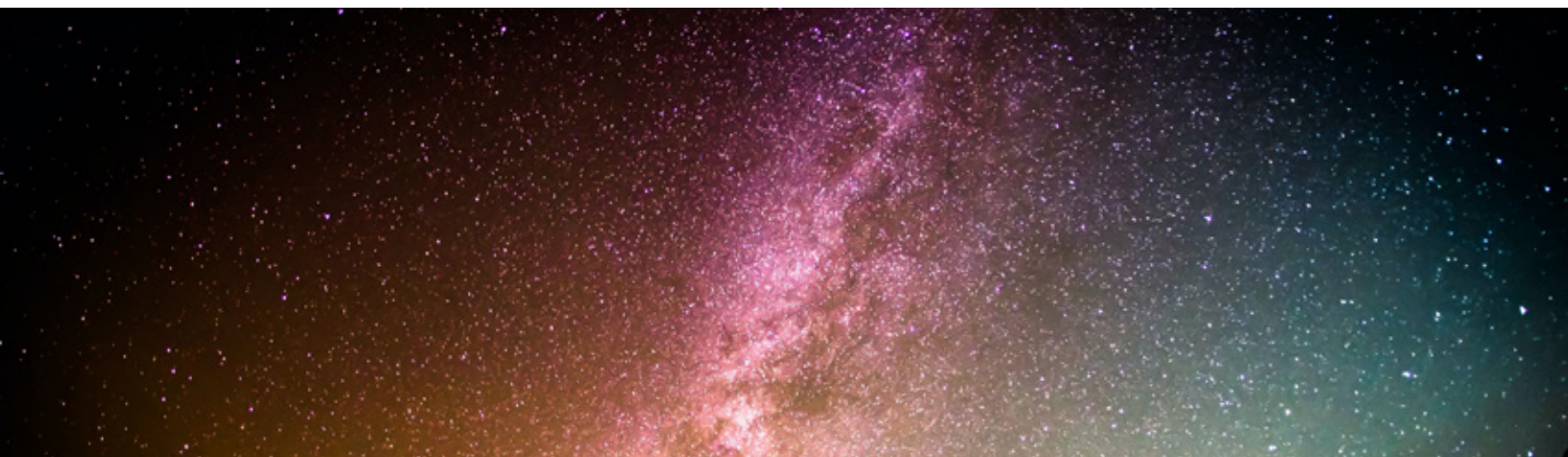
Author **James E. Gunn** (b.1923) died on December 23. Gunn, who founded the Center for the Study of Science Fiction and the Campbell Conference, began publishing science fiction in 1949 with "Communications," under the byline Edwin James. His first novel was published in 1955, *Star Bridge*, a collaboration with Jack Williamson. He was named a Grand Master by SFWA in 2007, was inducted into the Science Fiction Hall of Fame in 2015, and was a Worldcon Guest of Honor in 2016. He won the Hugo Award for *Isaac Asimov: The Foundations of Science Fiction* and was nominated for the Nabula for his novelette "The Listeners," which was later expanded into a novel.

Author **Guy N. Smith** (b.1939) died on December 24. Smith published his first horror novel, *Werewolf by Moonlight* in 1974. Subsequent novels included *Night of the Crabs* and the *Sabat* and *Deathbell* series. His novels had a pulp sensibility to them.

Author **David Britton** (b.1945) died on December 29. Britton got his start in fanzines and went on to write the Lord Horror books. In the early 70s, he ran the bookshop The House on the Borderland, in Manchester. One of the co-founders of Savoy Books with Michael Butterworth, he also guest edited issues of *New Worlds* and *Weird Fantasy*.

Author **Anton Strout** (b.1970) died on December 30. Strout wrote the Simon Canderous series, beginning with *Dead to Me* in 2008. His first story, "The Lady in Red" appeared the year before. He was the host of the Once & Future Podcast.

Many thanks to Steven Silver for this year's In Memoriam list



A WORD ABOUT JOE AMBERCROMBIE



Gillian Redfearn has been Joe Abercrombie's editor for fifteen years, while working for the Victor Gollancz imprint and progressing from newest cog to slightly rusty cog in the publishing machine. She splits her time between London, England, and New Hampshire, New England. You can find Gillian on Twitter.

By Gillian Redfearn

Dear Boskone attendee, spare a moment and allow me to introduce you to the incomparable Joe Abercrombie, @LordGrimdark himself. He is rightly renowned for his fantasy novels which brought hitherto unimagined levels of cynicism, grubby realism and wit to the genre.



He is the creator of famed characters including the beserker Logen Ninefingers, crippled torturer Sand dan Glokta, and vengeful warrior Monza Murcatto . . . and he most recently penned a new best-selling trilogy, with *A Little Hatred* and *The Trouble with Peace* delivering the opening sallies in a trio of riot, rebellion and war.

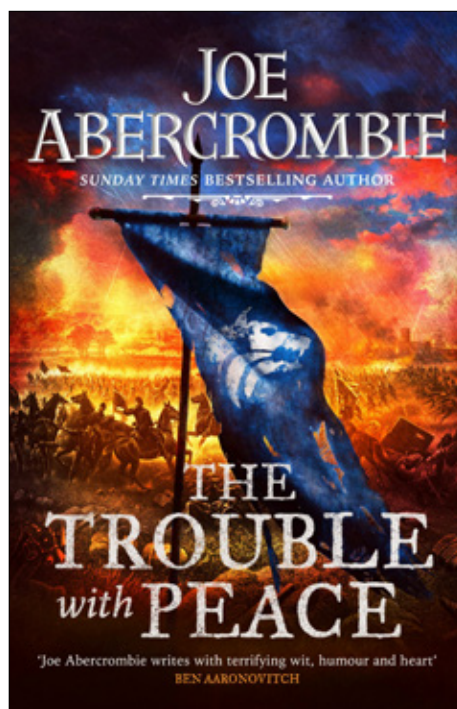
BUT DON'T LET ANY OF that put you off. More importantly: Joe is a Top Bloke.

Back in the mists of time, in 2003, Joe Abercrombie was not quite the name to conjure with that he is today. Working in a Post-Production TV company, he was a force to be reckoned with when it came to making tea, running errands, and surviving minimum-wage life in London. Is this where the cunning, ambition and drive for success in his novels comes from? Perhaps, as within two years he said goodbye to his tea-making duties and reached the lofty heights of freelance film editor, applying his skill, determination and keen eye for detail to music videos, concerts and award shows. I like to think he enjoyed keeping someone else gainfully employed making *him* tea.

It was at about this point that I had the good fortune to meet Joe. I'd just been gainfully employed as junior tea-maker at the publishing imprint Gollancz, and was already giddy with the power. Joe had far surpassed that level in his day job, but by night he was a writer who had been working on fresh



characters, a gritty world and a story that kept the tropes he loved and reversed the ones he didn't, for almost a decade. He was a novel and a half into *The First Law* trilogy, and he'd



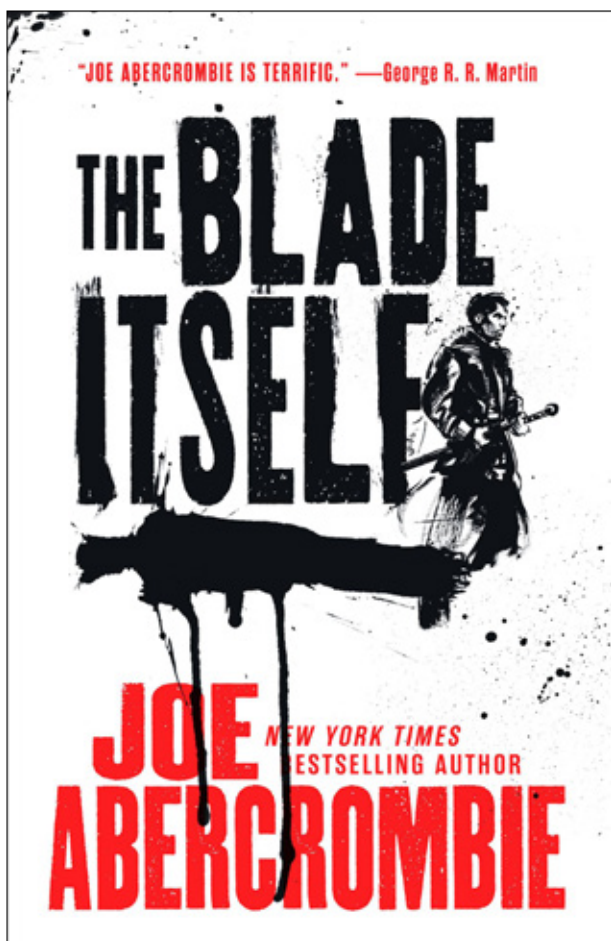
been turned down by every agent who would consider representing a fantasy novel in the country. Joe's days as a writer were starting to look numbered . . . until his writing career was saved by a friend, and a chance encounter.

This friend was also breaking into publishing and had been dispatched to a three-day copyediting course designed to drill the bare minimum of copyediting techniques into its slightly-unwilling attendees. He was there from the children's publishing industry, I was there from Gollancz, and after we'd introduced ourselves around the lunch table, he uttered the words which strike fear into every editor's heart: *I have a friend who's writing a fantasy novel*. It's enough to put an editor off their lunch, and if you don't believe me then I suggest you sneak up on an unsuspecting one and try it. Particularly if you like the look of their sandwich. But I was new to publishing, and didn't know that this was a Terrible Thing, so

I passed on the contact details for a few agents, and my email address . . . and a few days later I got an email from Joe Abercrombie. And then the manuscript for *The Blade Itself*.

The rest is history, you would think. The book is a masterpiece, our fantasy-writing underdog has landed on his feet, the mighty publishing industry gears will grind away and do their work! Well . . . not so much. He had indeed bagged a contract, but Joe was working with one of the smallest and newest cogs within it at a time when MySpace and internet forums ruled the internet. Back in the day, our promotional postcard with the cover on it was deemed extravagant and 'overhyped' the book(!). But the little cogs turned, and then the bigger cogs turned, and the book sold . . . and then the second sold more and was issued in a few other countries . . . and with one achievement after another Joe Abercrombie became an overnight bestselling sensation with his fifth novel, *The Heroes*. Along the way he gradually stopped being a film editor, though he still makes a mean cup of tea.

But none of this is very useful if you happen to bump into Joe Abercrombie in a bar



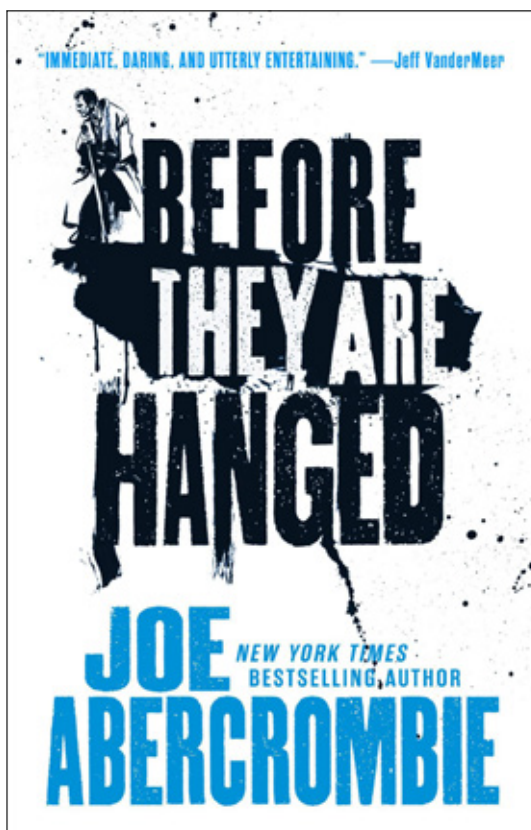
(physical or virtual) at Boskone 2021, so let's get to the good stuff. What's Lord Grimdark actually like? Well, he likes whiskey, especially the peaty and nearly undrinkable ones (Ardbeg, I'm looking at you). He predominantly reads non-fiction, for research and inspiration, has excellent taste in games (Red Dead Redemption, The Witcher, The Last of Us), is drawn to big, bold ideas, and occasionally keeps chickens. This last, I have come to understand, is one of man's greatest challenges, requiring the construction of ever more elaborate and devious hen houses, coops and cages, to keep said hens in, and foxes and badgers out. I expect it to be the basis of a new bestselling novel soon: our hero's mission to craft one perfect omelette and keep three hapless hens alive. It has enough tension and drama to put the blood-thirstiest reader on the edge of their seat.

Abercrombie has a degree in psychology which, along with his



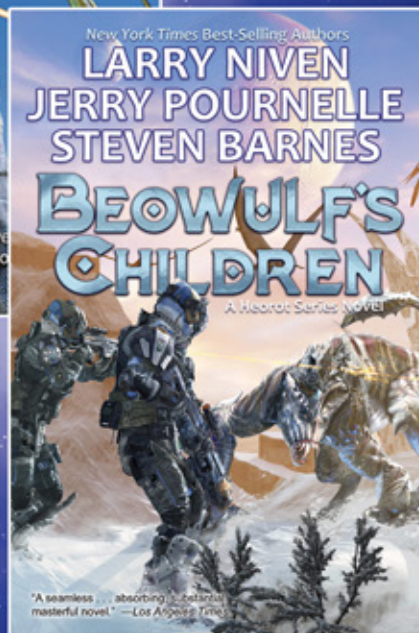
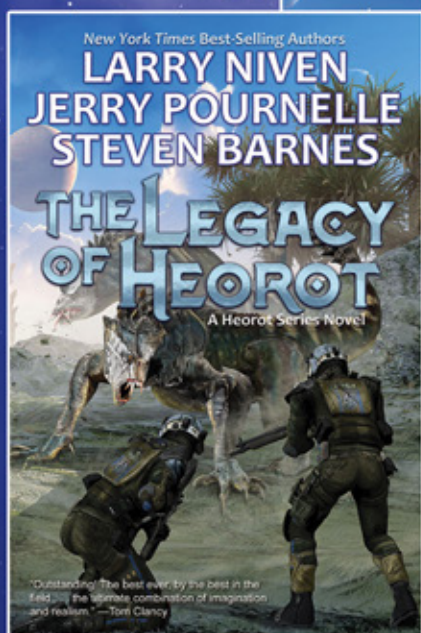
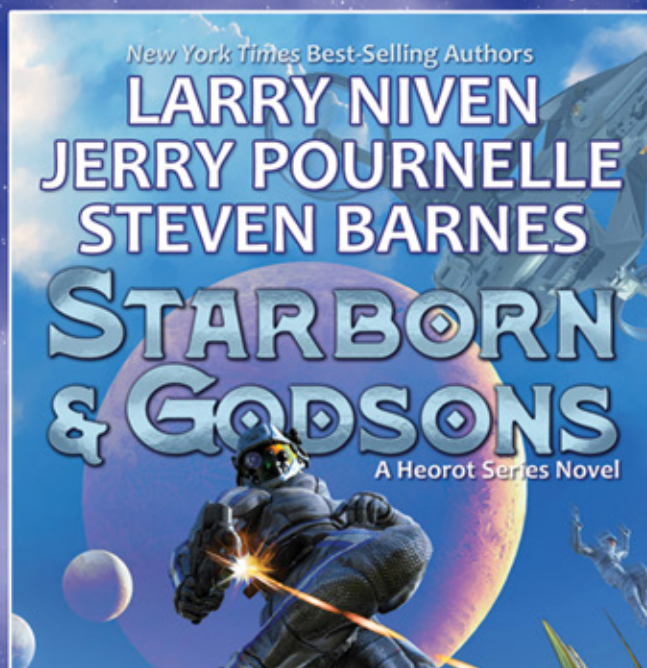
quick wit, and sharp, strategic mind, provides his characters with their satisfying emotional complexity and makes Joe himself tremendously good company, with a trademark tendency towards tongue-in-cheek statements of his own brilliance—which are undermined by the good humoured gleam in his eye, and the fact that he is, in fact, brilliant.

The journey from much-rejected debut to bestselling author and beyond has so far spanned fifteen years, eleven novels, and a collection of short stories. There's another novel already in the pipeline, and there's bound to be a few more after that, too. So say a few things for Joe Abercrombie, say he still has an underdog's determination, a twist in his tales, just a drop of water in his whiskey and some damn fine stories to tell, on the page and off...



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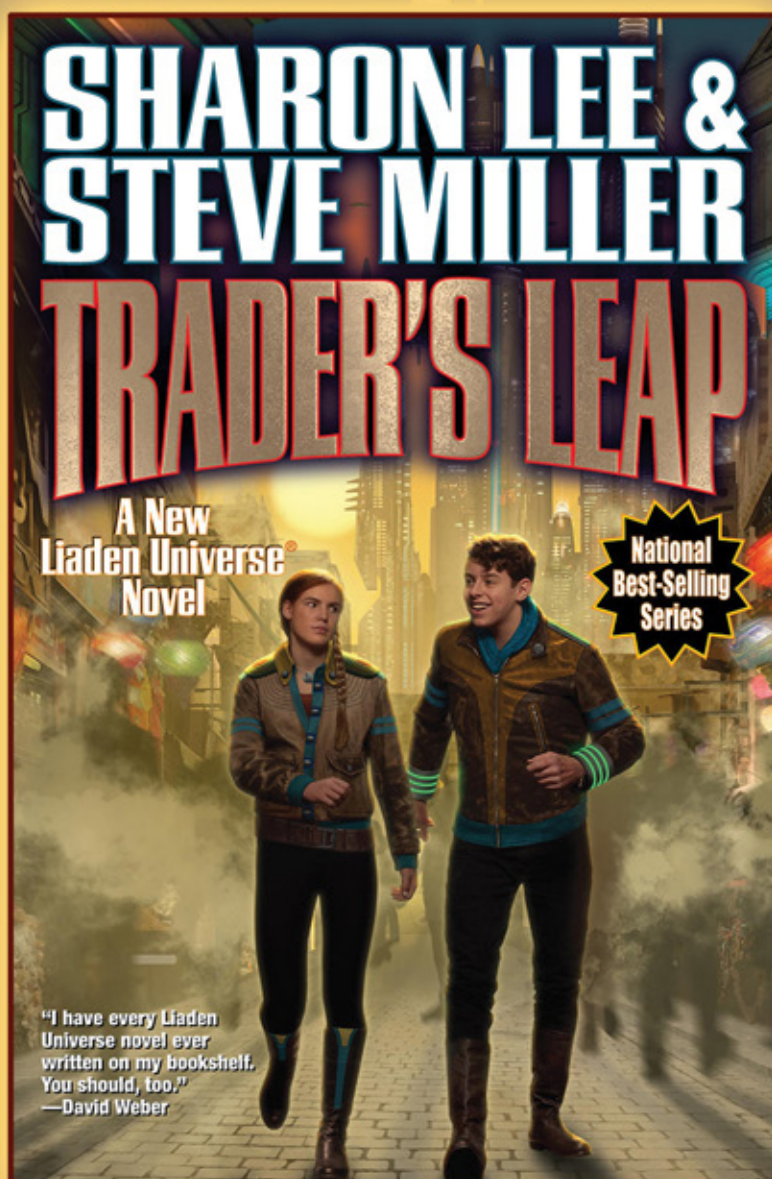
—Publishers Weekly, starred review



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JULIE DILLON



Since childhood, Julie has always had multiple creative outlets of some variety, including drawing, writing, music, pottery, cooking, knitting, and various other crafts. She was always either making a mess of art supplies, putting on plays with her friends in the garage, plinking out songs on her piano, creating worlds and stories, and generally just making as many things as she could. As she grew older, she slowly gravitated towards art and illustration, in part because she could create a story with a compelling image instead of having to actually write one. And unlike music, it could be practiced quietly without pestering the neighbors. As she entered high school, much of her free time was spent drawing, from fanart of her favorite video games to illustrations of her original characters.

WHEN JULIE FIRST STARTED COLLEGE,

she had planned to pursue a career in computer science with art as a hobby, which seemed very sensible. A few years into the program, she realized that her heart wasn't in it, so she took the plunge and began studying art full time, even though she worried that working in a creative field was considered more of a financial risk. She finished a bachelor's degree in Fine Art at Sacramento State University, but got her real artistic training from a few cherry-picked classes at the Academy of Art University in San Francisco and Watts Atelier in Encinitas, CA, as well as online workshops and classes. After feeling more confident in her drawing and painting skills, she started seeking freelance work in 2006. It took half a year of job-hunting to start getting freelance gigs, but she eventually found some traction in doing artwork for tabletop RPG books and magazines. She's been working as a full time freelance illustrator since then, building her career one job at a time. Over the years, she's worked for clients like Tor Books, Simon & Schuster, and Wizards of the Coast, and has earned three Hugo Awards for Best Professional Artist, as well as numerous other industry awards.

Julie likes to create art that is bold, colorful and ultimately positive in its outlook, ranging from dreamlike scenes of abstracted magic, to more structured illustrations focusing on visual storytelling and narrative. Her subject matter has leaned towards science fiction and fantasy, but lately she's been shifting more into themes of nature and mythology. She knows there is always room to improve and more to learn, and still works steadily to keep challenging herself artistically, and is excited to see where her art will take her next.

Julie currently lives in Northwest Oregon, where the misty green landscapes are a welcome change from her former life in the hot and dry scrubland of Northern California. When she isn't working on new artwork, she's busy working in her garden, babysitting her cats, or going hiking in the beautiful Pacific Northwest. You can find her work at her INPRNT shop or on Patreon.







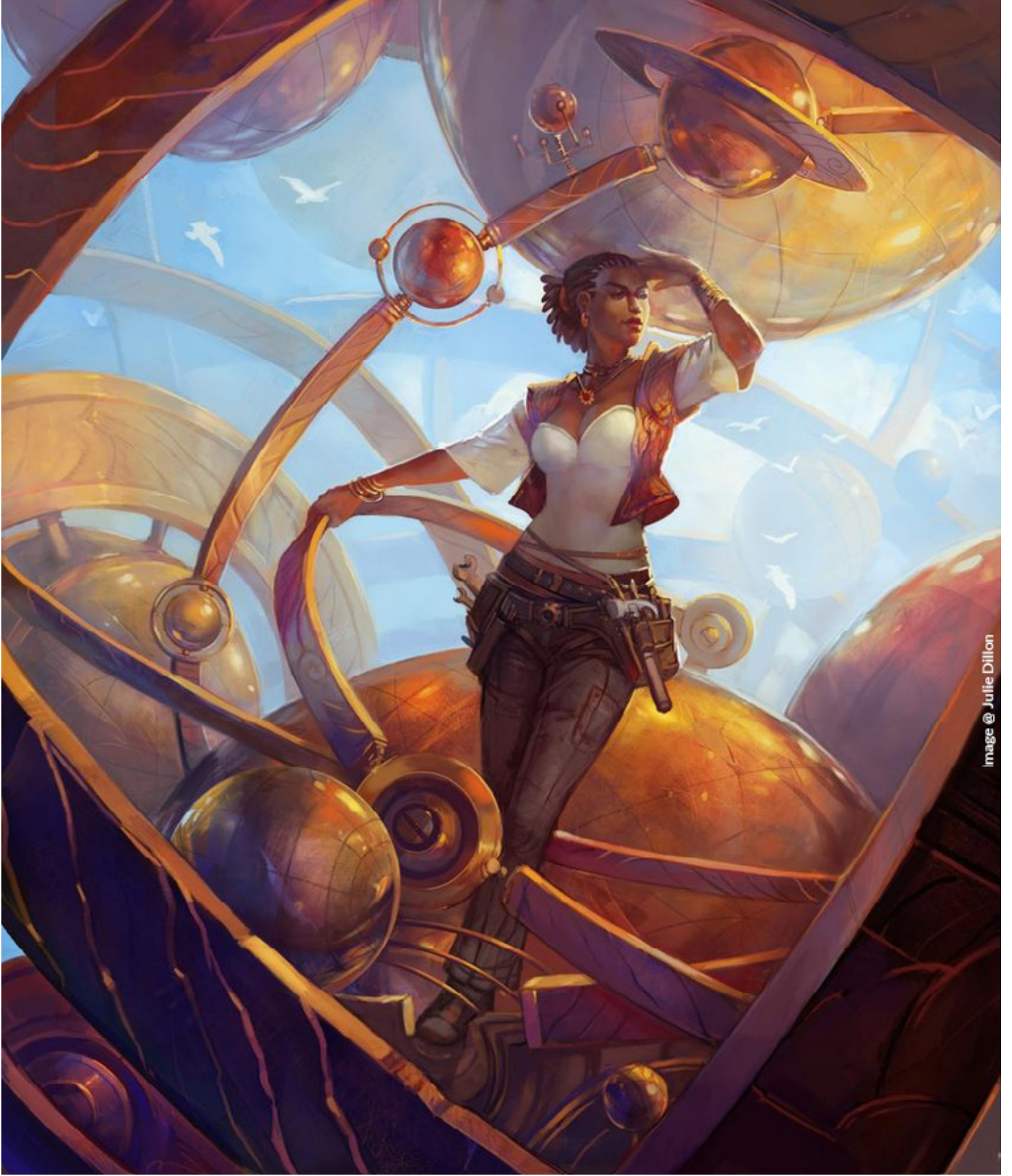




Image @ Julie Dillon





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PRAISE SONG FOR SHEREE RENÉE THOMAS

By Andrea Hairston and Pan Morigan

Sheree Renée Thomas is a blues poet, an afro-futurist tall-tale teller, a jazz artist! She's a speculatin' conjure woman, riffing on the here and now, recovering the lost then and there, and casting spells to reveal the new and undiscovered. She knows that all our words matter, that with our words we make the joy, the truth, the world.

WE FIRST MET SHEREE IN Seattle in 1999 during Clarion West. Wild legends abounded of folks meeting kindred spirits, future spouses, and friends-for-life at the famed boot camp for SF&F writers. And twenty-one years later, we are living that legend, still sharing spirit, still writing like our lives and everybody's lives depend on the words we conjure, and still getting in good trouble together from New York City to Northampton, MA and Memphis, Tennessee, from Madison, Wisconsin to Hog Hammock on Sapelo Island, Georgia. We have been there as Sheree guided three children through the minefields of adolescence and young adulthood. We have lost two dear friends from our five-woman writing group that started at Clarion West. We have celebrated books written, anthologies edited, and concerts produced. And now we cheer as Sheree tours the world speaking on Afro-futurism and Black Speculative Arts and becomes the editor of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*.

Our friend Sheree is a visionary who knows how to get stuff done, who knows how to carve a way out of no way to the future we want, not the dystopia we fear. She edited anthologies of fiction from the African Diaspora, *Dark Matter I* and *Dark Matter II*, and changed the sf & f landscape. With these anthologies she made the invisible visible. She gathered scattered minds and hearts and conjured a forceful resilient community. So, if you really want to know some speculative fiction history and see how we all got to the glorious moment we are living now, you have to read *Dark Matter I* and *Dark Matter II*. And while you're at it, check out Sheree's reviews, blog posts, articles, and the publications she's edited: *Anansi: Fiction of the African Diaspora*, *Apex Magazine*, *Strange Horizons*, and *Obsidian: Literature & Arts in the African Diaspora*. See her drop wisdom on a panel at Wiscon, Readercon, World Fantasy, World Con, and Boskone and delight in her generous spirit, wry sense of humor and intellectual prowess. Sheree has eyes in the front, back, and side of her head. No exaggeration! She has one of the widest views of anyone we know and a whip-smart sensibility to match the breadth of her perception.

Let's talk about Sheree's short fiction and poetry collected in *Shotgun Lullabies*, *Sleeping Under the Tree of Life*, and

Nine Bar Blues. Sheree is a magician of the short form! Nobody has language like hers. She captures the idiom of everyday drylongso folks, the poetry from street corners and back porches. Sheree regales us with the word power of Black southern folk culture and future seeing. A passionate scholar, an insatiable reader, and an intrepid traveler to the Middle East, India, Germany, and Africa, she riffs on the multi-dimensions of her cultural roots and beyond.

Sheree is fluent in Global Music History, Literature, and Art; Memphian Folk Wisdom, African Diasporic Visual Arts, and African American Oral Traditions; also Mississippi River Tales and Fish Stories, Detective Yarns, Golem Fables, Haint Legends, and Horror Films like *Ganga* and *Hess*. She's a Daughter of the Dust pouring libation to Julie Dash, Zora Neale Hurston, W. E. B. Dubois, Arthur Flowers, and Octavia Butler.

Sheree engages Black emotion, history, intellect, and creativity, to explore our humanity. In her poems and stories, the specific details and nuances of Black humanity become a portal to universal experience.

If you want to travel to other minds, planets, dimensions
If you want to listen in on haints and ancestors speaking history's truth

and sharing recipes, spells, secret evocations, prayers, songs, and curses

If you want to be rearranged, reframed, reclaimed
and all the way remade

Then read Sheree's short fiction

Sheree is global and local, to the moon and back. Every one of her stories is a treasure box filled with jewels, spices, herbs, magic rocks, intoxicants, blood, thorns, rage, roses, a multitude of voices that holla, incant, sing, and scream. She turns poetry into short stories and short stories into poetry.

Andrea says, "A story from *Nine Bar Blues*, "Madame and the Map," took my mind apart. The ships have come to shore and brought apocalypse, but we have survived."

Pan says, "Grass Dreaming Tree gave me a portal to hopes I thought I'd lost making me believe again in the power of wild creativity."

Prepare to be amazed. Sheree Renée Thomas will make you all believers again.



Pan Morigan is a vocalist, composer, performer, and author of surrealist fiction. She was raised around the Great Lakes whose stormy weather networks are a primary influence on her arts. Hear her music at panmorigan.com. *Trouble the Waters*, an anthology she edited with Sheree Renée Thomas and Troy Wiggins, is forthcoming with Third Man Books.

Andrea Hairston is a playwright, novelist, and scholar. Novels include: *Master of Poisons* (Tor.com), *Will Do Magic For Small Change*, New York Times Editor's pick, and *Redwood and Wildfire*, an Otherwise Award winner. She bikes at night year round, meeting bears, multi-legged creatures of light and breath, and the occasional shooting star.

MIKE BROTHERTON



©John Gilbey

By Jay O'Connell

WHEN YOU GROW UP READING SF you find yourself wondering about the science.

How true is the science in this fiction? How up-to-date? How logical and likely is the extrapolation? SF fans who remember the genre pre-Star Wars recall only two categories of speculative fiction; SF and Fantasy. What wasn't printed on the spine was SFs two styles, hard and soft. Some of the hard SF was by people with PhDs after their names. The softer sociological stuff was written by everyone else.

So imagine my delight when after my acceptance at Clarion West in 1994 I discovered one of my fellow students would be an honest-to-God astronomer. Having no actual scientists in my life, I spent the flight to the west coast wondering what might an astronomer be like? Smart, certainly. Stoic, maybe? Calm. Perhaps a bit on the humorless side.

Maybe a tiny bit boring.

That guy didn't show up, instead we got Mike Brotherton,

who is none of those things, except the smart part.

I see online that Mike graduated cum laude from Rice University in 1990 with a degree in electrical engineering, doing his graduate work at the University of Texas at Austin, where he specialized in Quasars. That last part I'd remembered.

Actual goddamn Quasars, impossibly distant in space and time, the brightest things in the sky, active galactic nuclei harboring supermassive, star-shredding black holes surrounded by vast and ever-so-shiny accretion disks. When I started reading SF they had no goddamn idea what these things really were. They were only sure of the shiny part. Now we know so much more.

Because of scientists like Mike Brotherton.

These huge faraway ultra-powerful things formed the core of his academic career, but lurking beneath this scientific goodness? Yeah. He was always a SF fan, big time. One of us. Because this is one of the things SF does. This is one of the things SF is for. Stories that act as a gateway drug to the heavier stuff: practicing actual science.

Googling "Scientists and Science Fiction" turns up some interesting stats, journal articles and literary commentary on the relationship between scientists and fiction. Many begin by spitting in the genre's face (Muggles gonna muggle; hater's gonna hate.). To summarize these articles, boil them down to numbers, to a fact, a majority, that means more than half, of scientists and technicians read extensively in the genre, and again, as with Mike, Science Fiction is the genre that those advanced degrees most often write.

In a time when the broader culture seems ambivalent about science, knowledge, thinking, facts, science fiction isn't. Or at least, it doesn't have to be.

Because orbiting the ravening black hole of hard science swirls the accretion disk of SF of all levels of hardness. As we discovered in our six weeks together, Mike and I shared a book, a background, a point of view. You know what I mean. Science matters. The universe is governed by universal laws we can discover, with hard work and reason. Facts are true. That sort of thing. Science Fiction celebrates these things rather than taking them for granted.

This point of view is controversial of course, not only now



Jay O'Connell is a writer, artist, activist, human living in Cambridge, MA with his wife, two kids, two cats, and eight zillion books. Jay returned to fiction in 2012 with a bunch of shorts and novellas in *Asimov's*, *F&SF*, *Interzone*, *Analog*, and other places, fulfilling a lifelong dream. He blogs about his social media addiction and the creative process at jayoconnell.com. He thanks, profusely, his family and writing workshops for their love and support.

but throughout human history. So, people like us, people of this book, created a literature around humanism, around reason, logic, extrapolation, about looking into the future. Because we know, that is where we are all headed. Where we will all live the rest of our lives.

Reading through a list of his favorite books I find everyone is somewhere on my list as well. The stories he would write in our six weeks together had an edge to them. I recall him holed up in his room hard at work, cackling with joy blasting Iron Butterfly's "In a gadda Da Vida." His work in those six weeks was edgy, sharp, and fascinating.

Mike would go on to sell a pair of hard SF novels to TOR; both character driven and astronomy rich, *Star Dragon* and *Spider Star*, and then edit several anthologies of hard science fiction, *Diamonds in the Sky*, astronomy themed, and *Scientists Write Science Fiction*, whose title is self-explanatory.

These works combined with his science cred formed the launch pad for his next venture. Launch Pad—you'll see what I did there—a weeklong crash-course in astronomy for SF writers. It's a serious program which has been supported by NASA, the National Science Foundation, and SFWA, the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America. Launch Pad's list of attendees reads like a contemporary SF Who's Who.

Returning to SF eighteen years after our Clarion, I found myself, to my astonishment, publishing in the field's top markets, Asimovs, F&SF and Analog... but my SF was always on the softer side. Launch Pad was a godsend, a chance to see Mike again, and to learn from him and his partners in thought crime: Christian Ready and Andrea Schwartz.

Launch Pad gave me context for the hodgepodge of factoids I'd soaked up over decades of reading the NYT science section and *Discover* magazine. You know,

those stories that mention that while we used to believe this, now we think that, and what the hell is really going on with dark matter, dark energy, the Big Bang, life, the universe, and everything.

Mike reordered my universe, the real one, upgrading my Rube Goldberg cosmology. He also helped me with the long period rouge comet in my novella *Of All Possible Worlds*, lending the story a truly nauseating apocalyptic verisimilitude.

Mike and I disagree about only a few things. I am fascinated by unexplained UFO sightings. Not in a brains falling out way, but in the Jacques Vallée agnostic sociological WTF kind of way. Mike, the astronomer, knows better—there aren't any little green men, or gray ones, visiting Earth in impossible FTL vehicles.

But he isn't sure about Bigfoot.

With groups of intrepid crypto-zoologists, the astronomer has overnighted in tree top blinds. They haunt Big Foot (feet?) hot-spots, peering through the same night vision goggles he pressed into my hands at Launch Pad. Through those goggles, I gaped at the great galaxy of Andromeda shining just above the horizon on the rooftop at the university of Wyoming. It is a revelation I will carry with me to the day I die.

Breathtaking. Astonishing, shining bright in the shifted spectrum of the goggles. Fantastic, but real. Andromeda, our nearest galactic neighbor, a shining vortex three times the apparent size of Earth's moon. Andromeda due to collide with our galaxy in a scant four point five billion years. Andromeda, evoking the spiral galaxy swirling at the end of *The Empire Strikes Back*.

This impossible thing, hanging in my night sky all along, plainly visible now that Mike Brotherton had pressed this gizmo into my hands, taught me where to look and, more importantly, how to see.



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CHRISTIAN READY



By Rob Staeger

IT'S SOMETIME IN THE EARLY 90s, and Christian Ready is walking out of the Claridge Casino & Hotel in Atlantic City, New Jersey. After spending some time at the blackjack tables, he has a little extra money in his pocket, and a little extra spring in his step. He makes his way through the lobby, and he's jostled by an older gentleman coming in off the street. Chris looks him in the eye and says, "Wrong pocket, friend." And like magic, the would-be pickpocket vanishes as quickly as he appeared, making an about-face and discreetly hauling ass down Indiana Avenue.

That's the kind of confidence my friend Chris is known for. That's the kind of calm he projects. He was being robbed—on a day when he'd just had a windfall, in a year when neither of us had too many spare nickels to rub together—and he just dismisses the guy. *You lose. Better luck next time, friend.*

I've known Chris since middle school, and I can tell you this: things did not come easy for him. Some kids are prodigies in school, somehow instinctively mastering math and

science like they were cribbing notes from Pythagoras.

That wasn't Chris. Chris has talent and smarts out the wazoo—I'm assured that is the proper medical term—but it all came from study and effort. The mastery of the facts that he presents in his classes at Towson University and his terrific Launch Pad Astronomy videos comes from a genuine interest and love for the material. Like a black hole, it pulled him in.

This is the point where Chris would politely tell me that my metaphor vastly oversimplifies the effects of a black hole. And chances are, in his explanation he'd give me a detail that would make my metaphor even better and wiser. But I'm writing this without his input, so I'm at sea without a sextant here. Bear with me.

What I'm trying to say is, it's all the effort Chris put forth to learn—the struggles with math, and, frankly, the indifferent shrugs of some of his instructors—that makes him such a great teacher. Some people take a rocket ship to understanding. Chris walked until he could run, and ran until he could fly. So he knows every step of the way, and he has the patience to point out all the landmarks.

The magician Penn Jillette once said (and I'm paraphrasing here) that the secret to a successful magic trick is to devote so much more time, money, and practice to doing it than anyone sane could even imagine. It's effort that creates the illusion of effortlessness.

Maybe that's just the nature of all knowledge. It's certainly that way with astronomy, a field that has wrestled against instinct from day one. (And a good thing, too, or else we'd never have gotten past the whole Flat Earth thing.)

But there's one more thing you should know about my friend Chris. He's calmly, confidently funny as hell. This is easy to miss.

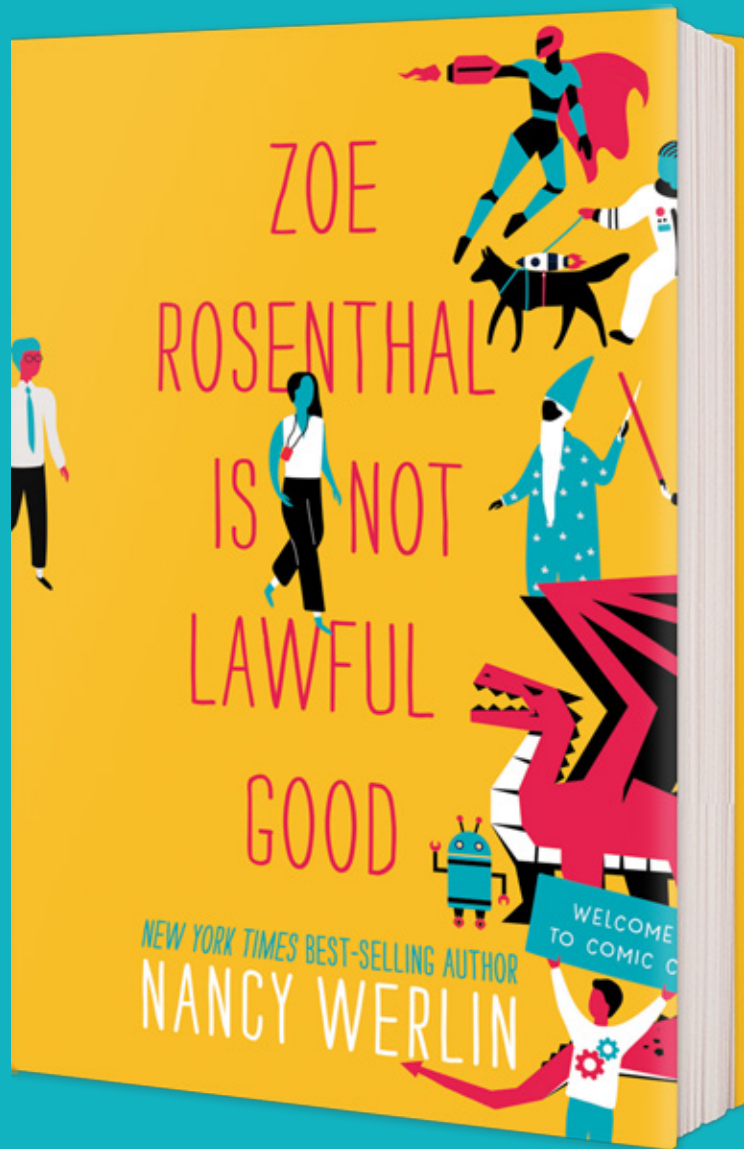
Okay, maybe that doesn't sound like a compliment, but I mean it as one. Chris's wit is saltine dry. He witnesses absurdity, and, as if it were a casino pickpocket, he gives it the barest tilt of the head—just enough to lampshade it and make you burst out laughing. For those paying attention, he's Spock's arched eyebrow.

And if Chris is talking, it's always worth paying attention. The dude knows a lot.



Rob Staeger is a writer, editor, gadabout, ne'er-do-well, and bon vivant. He lives and idles in New Jersey, but his heart keeps returning to New Orleans.

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URSULA VERNON



By K.B. Spangler

THERE'S NO ONE WAY TO garden. Combining plants and dirt should be a straightforward process, but once you throw a gardener in there, simplicity goes to hell. As a gardener, Ursula Vernon is pragmatic. Ask her to talk about butterflies, and her top ten list of butterfly facts might include how they are objectively beautiful creatures. *Might*. Their benefits as pollinators would be up there, as would their sex preferences and...the...poop...thing. Seriously, ask her. It's good for at least an hour because butterflies are weird animals, and it'll take her at least that long to explain why.

You'd think that a gardener would appreciate butterflies for their appearance alone. They're all but living flowers, extra specks of beauty moving within the plants. I'm a gardener myself, and that's why I like them! Ursula, though? She's just happy they exist. She establishes a habitat for them, the butterflies do their thing, and sometimes she tweets about discovering a new species of caterpillar.

Same for bees. Same for beetles. Same for frogs and newts, grubs and worms, and all other manner of creepy-crawlies. If it's not a species of invasive pest, it's welcome in her garden.

Except for slugs. Nobody who keeps hosta will tolerate slugs. Again, pragmatism.

All of her characters have this same pragmatic streak. In some, as with Ursula herself, it's less of a streak and more of a thorough nose-to-toes paint job. Her characters have goals, and these goals are all fundamentally pragmatic: you clean out your step-grandfather's house; you survive your unwanted husband; you set off to fetch the clouds. Each step they take is driven by these ever-so-logical goals...and then the earth twists beneath them, and the Weirdness Vortex of their worlds kicks in and sucks them down.

What, you aren't familiar with the Weirdness Vortex? I'll go ahead and spoil the trauma—no. Sorry. *Surprise*. I meant that I'll spoil the surprise. You need to know that Ursula is one of those people who summons strangeness. You've met people like her before, I'm sure, those folks at parties who

always have a good story about That One Time When That One Thing Happened and it all seems a little too surreal to be believed. In Ursula, those stories are not only true but magnified to a seemingly impossible degree, to the point where you aren't sure how someone hasn't died.

Anyone who suggests that pragmatism is similar to predictability has never met someone who gets sucked up by the Weirdness Vortex on the regular. There's a difference between never keeping a level head in a crisis and never experiencing one at all. If, for example, you happened to be working with someone to remove frogs from an abandoned pool, and if, for example, you happened to get stuck in the slime and began to get sucked down, down, down into a truly dreadful clinging muck, you would want that someone to coolly look around, locate an old garden hose, haul you out, and then use the same hose to blast the mud off of you.

There are different ways to appreciate butterflies, and there's no singular concept of pragmatism. Throw a pragmatic character into the Weirdness Vortex, and they'll get tossed around until they find a path. But they will find a path. That's the core of pragmatism, after all, putting one foot in front of the other until you've found your way out.

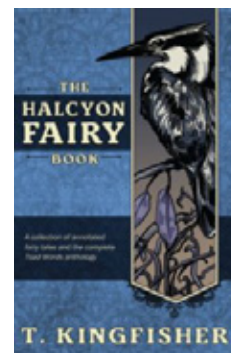
Oh, and the dog lives. You can't find your way out of the woods without your dog. That's just good sense.

(Alright, you caught me. Sometimes Ursula's pragmatism gives way to the heart.)

(Just a little.)



K.B. Spangler lives in North Carolina with her husband and two completely awful dogs. They live in the decaying house of a dead poet. She is the author and artist of the webcomic, *A Girl and Her Fed*, and author of novels and short stories. All projects include themes of privacy, politics, technology, civil liberties, the human experience, and how the lines between these blur like the dickens.



Ursula Vernon's latest book, [The Halcyon Fairy Book](#), is available from NESFA Press.



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MARC, WHERE'S YOUR TROUSERS?

An appreciation of Marc Gunn



Keith R.A. DeCandido is an author, editor, musician, critic, martial artist, and recovering podcaster. His latest novels are a couple of collaborations, the science fiction novel *To Hell and Regroup* with David Sherman and the thriller *Animal* with Dr. Munish K. Batra, with the urban fantasy *Feat of Clay* and the epic fantasy *Phoenix Precinct* due in 2021. He has been a performer with the parody band Boogie Knights since 2006. Find out less at DeCandido.net.



by *Keith R.A. DeCandido*

ONE OF THE THINGS I'VE noticed in my career as a science fiction/fantasy author who attends lots of conventions is that I have a hard time remembering when, exactly, I met people.

In the case of Marc Gunn, it almost had to be either I-Con (a Long Island, New York convention held on a university campus that sadly no longer exists—the con, that is, not the university, the university's fine) or Dragon Con when he was one half of the Brobdingnagian Bards. But I can't really say for sure. Like so many of the wonderful people I've met at conventions, it just feels like Marc was always there.

As a musician myself with the parody band Boogie Knights, I've been on the same list of musical and/or folk guests as Marc (both with and without the Bards) many times since I joined the Knights in 2006. I remember being impressed with these two guys, who looked like your standard Celtic folkie types in kilts, one carrying an autoharp, the other a recorder, and singing lyrics, not about winning a bonnie lass or having drinks with your lads, but rather *Firefly* and *Lord of the Rings* and other nerdy subjects.

Not that the songs about romance and boozing it up aren't there, too. What's great about Marc's *oeuvre* is how effortlessly

he moves from the traditional Irish ballad to the nerdy goofiness that has been the hallmark of filk-singing since the mid-20th century. And it's especially delightful when he tackles geeky subjects that don't match the visual look. I mean, a guy in a kilt doing music about J.R.R. Tolkien isn't exactly a stretch—but *Firefly*? *Star Wars*? *Star Trek*? *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*? Less expected, and all the more delightful for that.

It helps that Marc is a great musician. The autoharp isn't what one generally associates with guys who wander about from gig to gig with a single instrument—the acoustic guitar or something with a keyboard is far more common—but Marc doesn't just make it work, he makes it magnificent. He manages to do more with an autoharp than many bands can do with a whole set of instruments.

One of my favorite moments with the Bards was at the aforementioned I-Con convention. Among the many cool things I-Con did was have a cabaret, where various musical guests (and some other guests who had musical talent—as an example, Tim Russ, who played Tuvok on *Star Trek: Voyager*, did a

set one year) play a few songs. My band, Boogie Knights, were on the bill, as were the Bards, and they played one of our songs, "Exclamations" (a parody of the *Schoolhouse Rock* number "Interjections"), which they covered on their album *Brobdignagian Fairy Tales*. We were in the audience, of course, and we ran up on stage and backed them up.

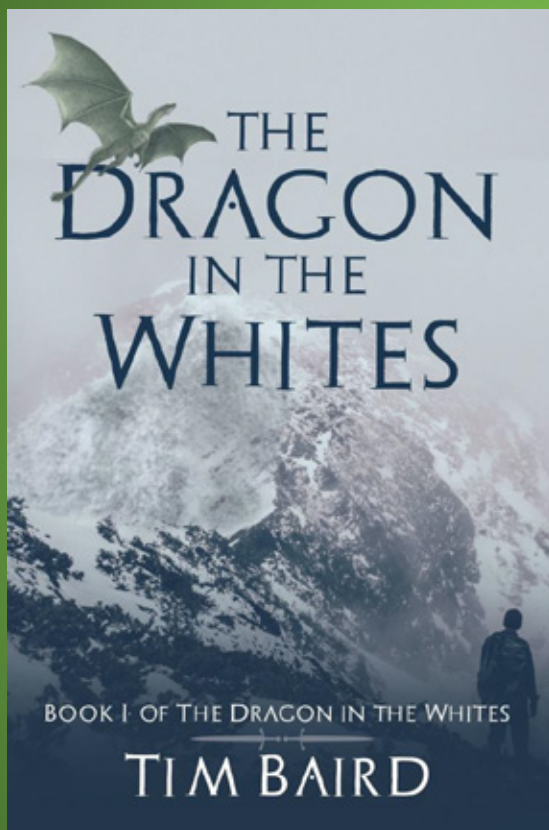
We Boogie Knights would return the favor on our 2013 album *Wasted Days and Wasted Nights*. One of the Bards' standards, which remained one of Marc's standards when the Bards split in 2008 and he went solo, is the silly song, "Donald, Where's Your Trousers?" Because the Knights do parodies pretty much exclusively, we couldn't just cover it, we had to do our own version: "No Trousers," which we thought of as Donald's response to the question posed in the title of the original. I played recorder on that one, too, which was delightful.

My all-time favorite moment with Marc, though, was the time we surprised the hell out of him. He was doing a tour of various Irish pubs across the country in the early 2010s, and he hit one place that was in the

neighborhood where my wife and I lived in New York City. So we showed up, and the look on his face was priceless. He had not expected to see a familiar face from the land of science fiction conventions to show up at one of his many stops at traditional Irish pubs. It was a glorious set, one which primarily focused on his more standard Celtic stuff, though there was lots of fun to be had as well. (I'm pretty sure he did "Donald, Where's Your Trousers?" for one thing.)

The best thing about a Marc Gunn concert is that he brings an infectious joy to the proceedings. More than anything else, he's having fun on that stage, and that fun extends to everyone watching him. He has a beautiful singing voice, ideally suited to the Celtic melodies he plays, his skill with the autoharp is superb, and he has an excellent stage presence that makes you feel like you're having a casual drink in a wood-paneled Irish pub even if you're in a ballroom at a hotel somewhere. Plus, he looks fantastic in the kilt...

Enjoy Marc's work, and hey, maybe check out one of his eight million podcasts on various subjects. You'll be glad you did.

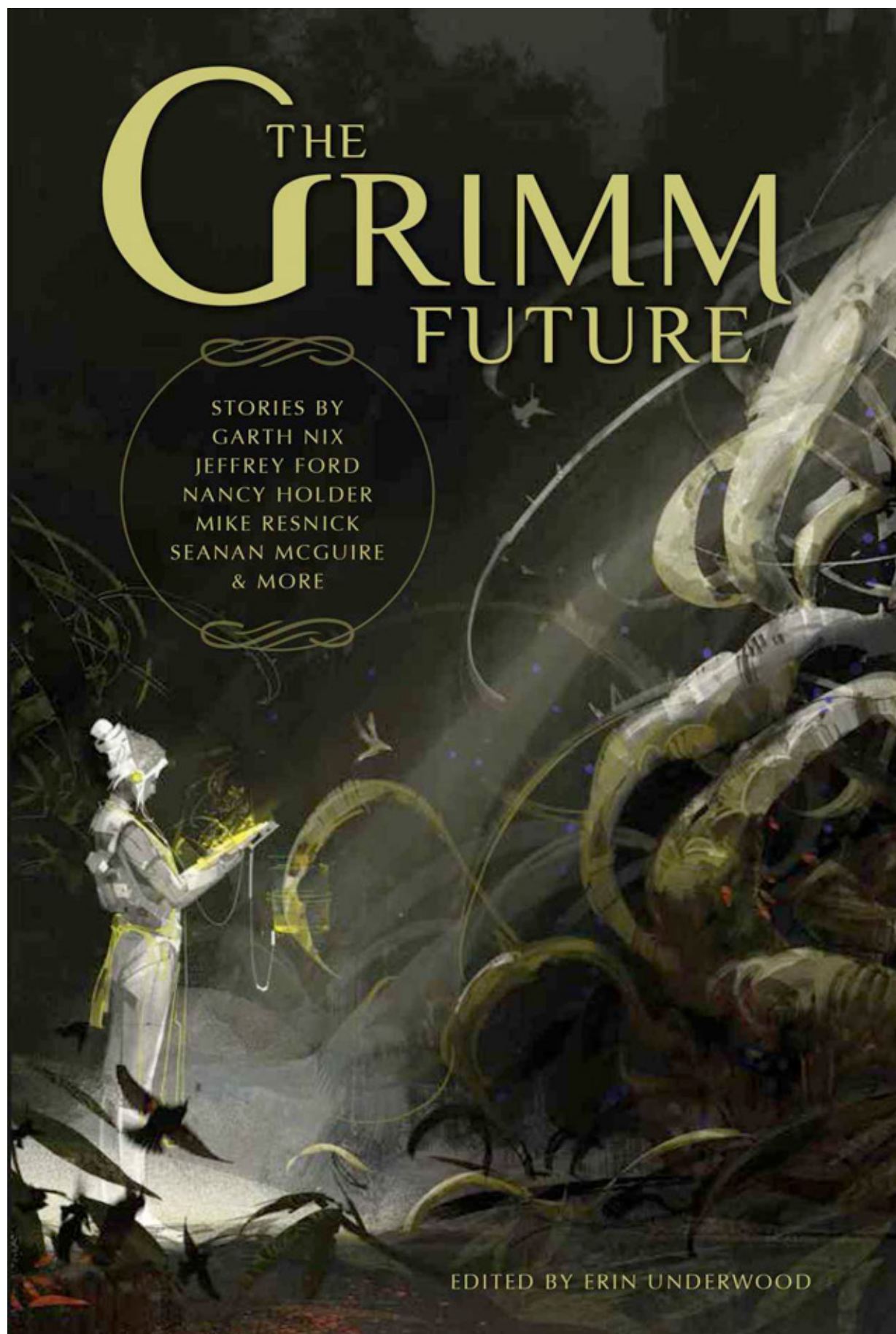


Tim Baird, Fantasy & SF author of 'The Dragon in the Whites' series.



**Have fun at Boskone 58, stay safe,
and keep reading!**

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ORIGINS

By Carlos Hernandez

I AM STARVING. PERFORMING MIRACLES for you — manifesting money from the air; deconstructing diseases; repairing broken bodies, imbalanced minds — costs me energy, and entropy nickel-and-dimes my soul day by day. So my hunger never leaves me, only grows. And there is no food for me here; I have foresworn eating anyone else. I am resigned to die.

But I do not expect to die anytime soon; I am, for now at least, the only god here; there is no one here to kill me. I will yet last tens of thousands of Earth years. And before I am spent, I intend to transform the Moon into, by human standards at least, heaven.

...

Agnethe loves God. Not me; her god is an ancient vitaphage from Earth. There she is now, kneeling in the front pew at the Church of Thaddeus the Forgotten. It is mid-afternoon, a time when everyone who can is working. She gave up her shift to a jobless man named Asad, who needed money badly. She does not want to use much energy — calories are hard to come by these days — so she is praying rosaries until sundown. Decades dangle from her fingers.

Thaddeus the Forgotten is an uncomfortable church: there used to be cushions, but they kept being stolen; it is cold, because heating is expensive on the Moon, and because no other bodies are there to help warm it. But it is easily the most beautiful place in Origin City. Through the cupola you see the Earth, huge and effulgent. It fills the church with otherworldly light.

But it is the exception; beauty on the Moon is usually prohibitively expensive. Tabernacle, monsternace, altar, pews, cross: all are printed natively here from processed regolith that over time leaks fine, sharp dust. The pews have whisk-brooms and pans for sweeping it off the kneelers, lest worshippers rise from them with perforated pant legs, bloodied knees.

But those brooms mostly go unused these days. The laity now imitate Agnethe, who sits in the first pew every Sunday and kneels heedlessly upon the regolith. On one momentous Sunday they saw her rise to take Communion with two round bloodstains on the pant legs of her white, standard-issue jumpsuit. When it was her turn and she extended her tongue for the flesh of God, the priest, Father Fugit, asked her if she was all right.

Only then did she notice her knees. She answered with

an airy smile that she was fine. She did not realize she was bleeding; she had been focused on the Miracle. She laughed at her own silliness.

Father Fugit did not laugh, nor did the laity. Quite the contrary: now the entire congregation of the Church of Thaddeus the Forgotten — ten bleeds from their knees for their sacrament.

...

You will not have the technology to discover my home solar system for eons yet. But my people know you. Yours is the only other planet we have found with life so far. Our supercluster seems to be life-poor.

My people? We have language, we have art, we have laws, we have history stretching back to almost the birth of the galaxy.

We do not have bodies as you know bodies. You have not yet named the state of matter that constitutes us. Imagine an intelligent mountain that can take any shape it wishes — a cluster of faint lights over a bog; a tusked boar-god 300 feet tall; a single, doughty whip-poor-will, or perhaps just its song; an electromagnetic field — and you begin to imagine us.

Like you, we feel small and abandoned in a universe of mindless physics. We ride our planet through a pageant of stars, ignorant and reverential. We cannot define qualia either.

We live and die and fear death. We live longer than you, but time is always short when you know life will end.

...

Agnethe lives in Origin City, population 2,700. It is not a city in the Earth sense, as there is no endemic government on the Moon. The city is privately owned by 23 corporations who only semi-cooperate with one another.

From a distance it looks like a hamster course. Habitation modules for living and commerce are linked like PVC pipes; there are power plants and recycling centers and printing facilities and helium refineries; there are “docks” where bus-sized lunakhods wait to ferry workers to the mines and rovers arrive with metals and rocks and regolith. Urine is recycled into water, feces into a porridge of diminishing nutritional returns. Power from the sun is plentiful, but energy is a monopoly on the Moon and therefore scarce.

Everyone living on the Moon is poor. The owners, the bosses, the HR vice-presidents and advertising executives all live on Earth. It is almost exclusively miners who actually live and work in Origin City. They came to the Moon lured

by job ads that promised wealth and offworld adventure. But their wages barely cover the cost of living in space. There are uniforms to buy, equipment to rent, insurance workers must by law purchase. The workers are paid in the local money, “origins.” It has no value on Earth.

Once miners can no longer work—not “if” but “once,” for even if they are not injured on the job, eventually they will lose too much muscle mass in the Moon’s weak gravity to be productive—they become almost instantly destitute. The wise ones use their insurance settlements to purchase a one-way ticket planetside. If the settlement is enough to cover it.

Those that do not or cannot run out of money soon enough, and with their constitutions ruined, they have few prospects to earn more. They dine on charity shit-paste when it is offered, but it is offered too infrequently for most metabolisms. Most days they subsist on their body’s own fat and organs until they have eaten themselves out of life.

Agnethe is a miner, too. But she is new to the job. She ran Origin City’s health clinic until a few months ago: what the locals call the “animal shelter.” Because if you have to stay more than a week, goes the joke, they put you down.

• • •

My crime was vitaphagy. Like you, we need food for sustenance. Unlike you, our only food is each other. Reproduction was food production for most of our history.

But recently—within the last 700,000 years—we as a people have decided that consumption is an unforgivable wrongness. That eating is evil.

This new morality coincided with the discovery of other life in the supercluster. Specifically, of you.

We learned how frighteningly fragile life on Earth is. You are unalterably locked into unaccommodating, inflexible bodies. You are so particular about your needs—only this small range of temperatures, only that abundance of air, all of this water and gravity and countless other fussy nutritional needs—that, from our perspective, you seem almost petulant about life. If you cannot stay alive in exactly the way you demand your environment to be, you die. It is positively bratty.

We, by contrast, live for eons, and even if we never eat even once during our lifetimes, we can reproduce hundreds of times before we die of starvation. We are a resilient, macrobian, proliferant species. How little we appreciated our good fortune.

But once we had perspective, destroying other life to sustain life became morally repulsive: and suddenly, the most detestable of crimes.

The punishment? Execution was impossible without being hypocritical. So, we decided on the next best option: the “slow execution.” We would exile vitaphages.

To Earth.

That itself is a grand hypocrisy, of course. What did we think would happen when we sent all the vitaphages to the same planet? “We are not forcing them to eat each other,”

we told ourselves. “That’s their choice. The evil is on them.”

We share this trait with you: we can make rationalizations sound palatable.

Once exiled, the vitaphages of course cannibalized one another, as predicted. But the thing no one could have guessed is that they would become your elves and duendes, your nightmares realized and your miracles manifest, your every god and every evil spirit.

• • •

As the lunar day ends, Agnethe leaves the Church of Thaddeus the Forgotten. She emerges from the doors of the simple church into a passageway. Its temperature is in the single digits. Since they are communal, the corporations are supposed to share the cost of heating them. So they are always inhospitably cold.

Agnethe heads left, toward the market. She rubs her crossed arms as she walks, bites down to stop her teeth from chattering. And then, with a spark of joy, she remembers the tube of paste the priest gave her. She pulls it from a pocket and, with gusto, rips it open with her teeth.

As she walks, she sees Virgil sitting against the wall. He reminds her—I have heard her whisper as much—of her father, when he was dying. The gauntness, the stiffness of movement, the same confused lights dancing in his pupils.

“Hi, Virgil,” she says cheerily as she nears. “Please, I’m so hungry!” Virgil answers.

She notes two empty tubes of paste wrung flat and lying next to Virgil. “What would any of us do without Father Fugit?” she says aloud, before smiling and giving him hers.

He notes with wide and grateful eyes that the end has already been bitten open. He shows Agnethe his razed gums before sucking on the tube blissfully, looking at her with great yellow mooneyes.

Since he did not say grace, Agnethe says “May God bless it for you” before heading once more for the market.

• • •

I abhorred vitaphages with all the sanctimony of the rest of my people until I became one. No, even now. We forgive ourselves crimes for which we condemn anyone else.

As I entered the twilight of my life—my home is a rogue planet and has no sun, but I adore your turns of phrase—I grew hungry. I fought the hunger, as my people said I should, for as long as I could. But my hunger ate me first. Then, I simply became the vessel for its desires.

Late in my life, when I should have been making preparations for my dissolution, I instead made a child. Specifically, to consume it.

Imagine filling a bathtub with water. (The water here is the matter of which our bodies are made. It is unavailable in the Milky Way.) You sit in the tub for awhile, and when you exit, you leave in the water a bit of your ghost. That the water is now a living thing, haunted by your afterimage, and your own child. This is how my people reproduce.

My child was a knowing, ready thing when it was born,



Photo by Paweł Czerwiński

capable as a newborn shark, carrying the information I had accumulated in my life, able immediately to contribute as a member of our culture. But because it was newly made, it was sleepy and languorous, trusting of its parent's love.

I absorbed it into me, ghost and all. Its life turned to silence within me, and its matter joined my matter. And I was utterly sated. I never would have confessed if I had not been discovered. But mine was a notably different body: more massive, capable, aware. I failed to hide my newfound vitality from others. It is hard to hide the lust for life when, after long absence, you rediscover it.

I was accused, charged, interrogated, found guilty. They shoved me through a one-way wormhole and dumped me on Earth.

...

It is dim and growing dimmer in the market as day becomes night. The market is warmer than most public places in Origin City: the self-service shops are manned by robots who leak electricity all day long, and for much of the day the place is full of bodies emitting heat. But warmer is not necessarily warm. Any thermometer would show it is, at best, less cold than the halls.

Nevertheless, when she enters the market Agnethe feels as though she is wrapped in a sudden zephyr. She smiles, exhales with relief.

The robot salesclerk at The Armstrong Equipment Rental Emporium is malfunctioning, can no longer move. The shop owner back on Earth has not seen enough of a decline in sales, however, to warrant repairing it. It therefore has not been fixed. So it cannot force Agnethe out of the shop after closing time; it can only repeat, all night long, "The Armstrong Equipment Rental Emporium is closed. Please complete your final purchase and exit the shop." After a while she does not hear it anymore and falls asleep inside a large storage bin, the kind miners rent to haul moon rocks. She wears a medical mask from her days as a physician's assistant to prevent herself from inhaling too much particulate regolith.

She wakes a few hours later—curled like a fetus inside her storage bin, finally warm—to sounds of despair coming from somewhere outside the store. A man's voice. She rises

to investigate.

The market's deserted, but there is plenty of light, thanks to the vending machines. Agnethe follows the voice, eyeing the food dispensers peevishly—she could blow ten-days' salary on a single meal here—to its source.

He is not someone Agnethe recognizes; he must be newly home- less. He is young and by Moon standards well-fed. He wears, as she does, the white, standard-issue jumpsuit, the standard-issue boots. No hat.

He crawls along the floor, mumbling, searching for something. "It was right here," he keeps repeating. That, and profanities.

Agnethe approaches him, making sure to step loudly so that he hears her coming. "Did you lose something?" she asks.

The man turns to face her. His eyes are confused, his eyebrows angry, his mouth agape and wary. But then his face releases its fear—Agnethe has that effect on people—and says, "My water bottle. I just had it! Water's so expensive, but the bottle too?"

After a sigh, he says to her, "I'm Hari, by the way." He gets up from hands and knees. It takes him a few moments to rise; he has, as they say in Origin City, "the weakness."

Hari extends his hand. "I lost my job. I'm saving every origin from now on. I don't suppose you know where I can get some food cheap?" "The Church of Thaddeus the Forgotten," Agnethe says immediately, shaking his hand. He is weaker than he looks. "Ask for Father Fugit. He might have food tomorrow. He'll give it to you for free, but if you pay a little he can feed others too." "Do you have to be a member?"

"No."

"Really? I'm surprised they don't try to convert you." "They don't. Where's your hat?"

After a rueful pause: "Sold it."

"Don't sell this one," Agnethe says and places her standard-issue hat on his head. His neck is infirm. "May God bless it for you."

After a moment he removes the hat and, smiling, holds it out to her. "I couldn't. You'll freeze."

"You'll freeze."

Hari, bewildered, laughs. "Why should you freeze and I live?" "Because you can't catch me!" she says and takes off at a run.

• • •

I do not know how exactly it happened. I know only through the rumors and titillating hearsay I enjoyed, along with all my kind, when incomplete reports came back from Earth for those hundreds of thousands of years. But the exiled vitaphages set themselves up as your world's supernature.

They seemed to have conflicting motives. Some wanted to help you evolve, gave you advice, made crops grow when nature did not cooperate, answered your questions with abstruse prophecies that they then did their damndest to realize. Others killed you out of malice, or played pranks on you as a kind of malign entertainment. Those became your kappas, your Coyotes, your poltergeists, your soucouyants, your will-o'-the-wisps. Still others revealed themselves to you and accepted your worship. They could disintegrate and materialize any of the four mundane states of matter as easily as you can exhale; could kill life, burn cities, and perhaps most importantly, battle the other gods. The vitaphage you called Moloch demanded human sacrifice of you, but it protected you, too. It ate many enemy gods before it itself was eaten.

A gigantomachy spanning ages ensued. Gods feasted on gods until only a few remained. From your perspective, over time magic dwindled in the world. The vitaphages, once so vocal, once so involved in your fate, spoke less often to you. The Age of Miracles passed. The few vitaphages who survived—the strongest, most merciless, most cunning—hunt for gods to devour to this day.

This is why when I came to Earth, I expected I would be killed almost instantly. I could try to consume others myself. I would try, I knew suddenly; I would fight with all the savagery and deception I could muster.

But ultimately, what was the point? What kind of a life was it to constantly fear ambush, to be friendless and

ostracized, banished from everything I have known and loved, and my only recourse to commit, without surcease, the crime that had ruined what remained of my life?

Perhaps I should kill myself. I could ejaculate all the matter I control at once with a single thought. I spent years on Earth gathering the courage to do so.

At first I made myself as invisible as possible to the predator gods who would make a meal of me, and that meant hiding from humanity as well. But over time I could not help but learn about human civilization. You were much more evolved than anyone back home knew. I had never dreamed before my exile that you had settled your moon...

Your moon!

Suddenly I had cause for hope. I surrounded an outbound rocket—I could have flown there, but doing so would have cost me a great deal of energy, significantly shortening my life—and rode it all the way to Origin City.

• • •

Agnethe is running toward the Incubators.

The habitation modules of failed business ventures are moved to the west side of Origin City until they can be sold or repurposed. But they serve a purpose now. The homeless of Origin City squat in those habitation modules, dark and unventilated though they may be. They sleep together in piles for warmth. Sometimes they share food, sometimes they steal food, sometimes they fight over food. Their fights are grim caricatures of battle; they are shakingly weak, all of them, and getting weaker. They know it.

Hari reminded Agnethe that today was the last day of the month.

The day when layoffs happen.

Agnethe reaches the passage to the Incubators. There used to be an airlock door here, but it was torn off its hinges to let a little air and heat pass into the Incubators. A crooked

sign that reads “No Trespassing” hangs by one screw. The darkness beyond is impenetrable.

Cautiously, always keeping a guiding hand against a wall, Agnethe picks her way into the Incubators in search of the newly bereft.

Agnethe knows the Incubators as well as anyone, but they change as habitation modules come and go, and the darkness and cold make it hard to remember anything. It is all too easy to get lost.

“Cold.”

That one word stops Agnethe midstep, there in the perpetual tenebrae of the Incubators. She cocks her head. Heaving breaths, castanetting teeth, hands beating arms for warmth. She moves toward the sound.

“Stay back,” she hears, a woman’s voice, throaty with cold, rasping with phlegm. “You’ll catch it.”

Catch what? Ah: the woman must have shown signs of sickness. A contagion could wipe out the entire population of not only the Incubators, but all of Origin City. She would be banished.

Agnethe moves carelessly toward the woman, calling, “It’s much more likely you have hypothermia than anything infectious. My name is Agnethe. I am from the Origin City Outreach Initiative.”

“What’s that?” calls the woman.

“We help people in need. Oh, sorry!” says Agnethe cheerfully, apologizing for running into the woman, who is huddled on the floor.

There is something about Agnethe that makes people think the best of her. Though she just more or less kicked this woman, the woman is warming to her. “It’s okay,” she says, wary but wondering. “I never heard of the Origin City Outreach Initiative.”

“It’s new. Did you lose your job today?” “Months ago. Then I got sick.”

Agnethe kneels next to her. She holds out her hands. “Take my hands,” she says. “What’s your name?”

“Elsa,” says the woman. Eyes already are abysmal radiation detectors, and in the Incubators they are almost useless. Yet despite the gelid darkness, Elsa’s hands find Agnethe’s unerringly.

Agnethe gasps. From her reaction, those hands must be corpse cold. “You need to get warm right now,” says Agnethe.

The woman begins to protest, but Agnethe stands and pulls her up by those hands. “Go to the marketplace and find the Armstrong Equipment Rental Emporium. Crawl into a bin and ignore the robot. You’ll be warm in no time.”

The woman stares at the place where Agnethe’s face must be. She has many things to say at once—her mouth is moving, formulating—and she has trouble deciding where to start. Finally, she settles on: “They’ll quarantine me.”

Agnethe sighs. Elsa’s right: and Agnethe knows all too well that quarantine is worse than homelessness. She had worked for months as the only non-robot employee at the “animal shelter.” She had little say in anyone’s care. Actuaries on Earth decided when treatment was merited, when euthanasia. Agnethe followed their orders, felt she was powerless

to do otherwise. Even when that meant assisting her father’s suicide.

Then one night—this is among Agnethe’s most vivid and relentless memories—God came to her in a dream in the form of Father Fugit and told her she was a monster, but that even her sins would be forgiven.

She quit the “animal shelter” the next morning and started mining. Agnethe holds both of Elsa’s hands tightly. Hers are warming; Agnethe’s are getting colder. “Okay,” Agnethe says. Then, after one more reassuring squeeze, she lets the woman’s hands go and begins to undress.

Elsa cannot see Agnethe, but she hears the zipper. “What are you doing?”

“You need more clothes,” says Agnethe. She starts to take off her jumpsuit, realizes she forgot to remove her boots, laughs, removes her boots, then finishes removing her jumpsuit. She is in the darkness of the frozen-air Incubators, choosing to give Elsa, a woman she has just met, the last protection she has against the cold in the hopes that it will prolong Elsa’s sickly, actuarially unlikely life. She believes in a god that a vitaphage invented long ago. Almost certainly that vitaphage is dead by now. It may have intended good or ill or amoral entertainment for itself; I do not know. Whatever it intended, Agnethe believes in its message, or at least the message that its worshippers have collaged over thousands of years into a scripture. The end result is she is more or less committing suicide for the sake of a sick woman she just met and who will probably die soon even after this intercession.

It is fascinating.

Elsa allows herself to be dressed; Agnethe has that effect on people. She removes Elsa’s boots and dresses her in her jumpsuit, first one leg, then the other, then the arms, then zip, Elsa’s in. She puts Elsa’s boots back on, then her own, then stands.

Elsa faces Agnethe, grabs both of her bony shoulders. “There is no such thing as the Origin City Outreach Initiative, is there.”

“No.”

“Thank you,” she says and embraces Agnethe. “I am warmer already. Eat with me, and then I’ll give it back to you.”

“No. Keep it. Father Fugit will get me another.”

Elsa pauses a long time. Her body language, invisible to humans in this blackness, tells the world she knows she should not keep the jumpsuit. But she says, “Eat with me, at least.”

“I can’t. It’s too cold. I will check on you tomorrow.”

“Thank you again,” Elsa calls after her. But Agnethe has disappeared entirely, like a kindly spirit who, having done its good deed, vanishes until the next time it is needed.

• • •

But Agnethe is no spirit. She very much has a body. And that body is cold. She is moving dangerously slowly.

She has almost two hours yet before the Armstrong



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Equipment Rental Emporium will reopen for business. It would be enough time to sleep a little, and more importantly, to warm herself.

But cold enervates her muscles, stultifies her mind. She walks hunched and stumbling, head bowed. The only thing keeping her upright is her worry. Over and over she whispers: "How will you go to church, Agnethe? How can you go to church now?"

It takes me a while to figure out what she means; I am still new to humans, their bodies. But finally I understand: she is naked. She cannot go to church naked.

That really should not be her first concern, however, now that she has fallen down.

She will freeze to death soon if she does not get up. She knows this, so she begins to pray. "I am unshriven," she whispers to a vita- phage who, even if it is still alive, is on a different planet. "I can't die unshriven!"

The idea inspires her to struggle mightily to rise. But her quivering muscles fail her. She falls, hard, splays out on the burningly cold floor. Weeping now, she says no, no, no between draughts of air that only cause her to lose heat more quickly. In a hoarse voice she calls, "Elsa!" but Elsa is too far to hear.

Then, in a softer, wet voice, she says, "Forgive my sins, father." I do not know if she means her god or her actual father.

And there is no way to ask her. She dies.

• • •

I was terrified of being discovered. The more I exerted myself, the more energy I expended, the more I would make my presence known to the other vitaphages, and the more of a target I would become. The Moon was a gift, a way to escape a barbaric fate. I would not squander it.

So, I vowed when I came to the Moon not to behave like a god or ghost or uncanny force. I did not want attention from creatures who could not understand me. I would stay quiet. I might have to starve to death, but at least I would be no other vitaphage's meal.

• • •

There is no way to ask whether she meant her father or her Father. But I grow curious. I surround her, enter her.

Agnethe's pneuma is gone, but the machinery of her life is all in working order: muscles, circulation, digestion, brain. The only thing missing is her qualia. But I can restart the machine without it.

The first thing I feel is her hunger. Agnethe was at least as starved as I am. Yet she gave away food and did not take it when it was offered. My entire being concentrates into one lone thought: there are no other vitaphages here. They cannot detect me from Earth; I am utterly safe from detection here. There was no reason, therefore, not to save Agnethe. None except irrational fear. An overwrought sense of self-preservation.

In that instant, hunger loses its power over me. Hunger

is smaller than the whole of me, for the first time since I ate my child. I am able to think again.

Agnethe's mind, dead as it is, remains a library of her thoughts and logic and memory. At once I know it in its entirety, the way you can see the entirety of a dimensionless point in space. Such despair; such a death drive. But it is also a succinct guide for actionable goodness. Computer code for the procedures of altruism. It is beautiful.

I stand Agnethe up. I am her soul now. I heat her body through, cure it and repair it, fill her muscles with power. I open and close her hands. I use the eyes and ears and nose of her body, taste her mouth with her tongue. I feel the cold killing her skin cells, so I create an aura of warmth around her. Then, remembering that nudity will not do in human society, I materialize a white, warm jumpsuit over her body.

I smile. It fills me with pleasure to make Agnethe's body smile. "Agnethe," I say aloud, "if you were me, what would you do?"

She would pull atoms from the air and reshape them into food and water. She would warm and light Origin City. She would heal the sick. She would pull origins from the sky and let them fall like stars among Originators until money became meaningless. She would summon palaces from the regolith. She would grant universal comfort, succor, freedom. As a start.

"Okay," I tell dead Agnethe, using her own mouth. I will do these things. Until the gods consume me or I starve.

The End

About the Author

By day, Carlos Hernandez is an Associate Professor of English at CUNY, with appointments at BMCC and the Graduate Center, where he focuses on creative writing, science fiction, Latin@ Studies and game-based learning/procedural narrative. He the author of over thirty works of short fiction, poetry, and drama (mostly SFF), and his collection of short stories, *The Assimilated Cuban's Guide to Quantum Santeria*, is available from Rosarium Publishing beginning January 2016.

The Star-Talers

*By The Brothers Grimm,
Tale #153, alternate title: The Star Money*

There was once on a time a little girl whose father and mother were dead, and she was so poor that she no longer had any little room to live in, or bed to sleep in, and at last she had nothing else but the clothes she was wearing and a little bit of bread in her hand which some charitable soul had given her. She was, however, good and pious. And as she was thus forsaken by all the world, she went forth into the open country, trusting in the good God.

Then a poor man met her, who said, "Ah, give me something to eat, I am so hungry!"

She reached him the whole of her piece of bread, and said, "May God bless it to thy use," and went onwards.

Then came a child who moaned and said, "My head is so cold, give me something to cover it with." So she took off her hood and gave it to him; and when she had walked a little farther, she met another child who had no jacket and was frozen with cold. Then she gave it her own; and a little farther on one begged for a frock, and she gave away that also.

At length she got into a forest and it had already become dark, and there came yet another child, and asked for a little shirt, and the good little girl thought to herself, "It is a dark

night and no one sees thee, thou canst very well give thy little shirt away," and took it off, and gave away that also.

And as she so stood, and had not one single thing left, suddenly some stars from heaven fell down, and they were nothing else but hard smooth pieces of money, and although she had just given her little shirt away, she had a new one which was of the very finest linen. Then she gathered together the money into this, and was rich all the days of her life.

The End

BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO BLACK SCIFI/FANTASY/ HORROR PART II*

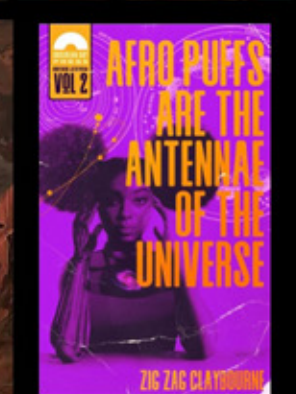
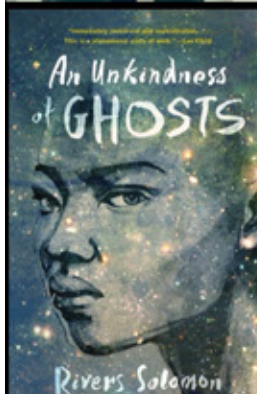
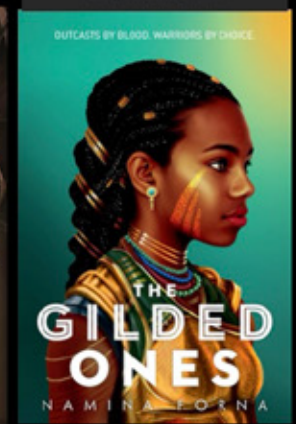
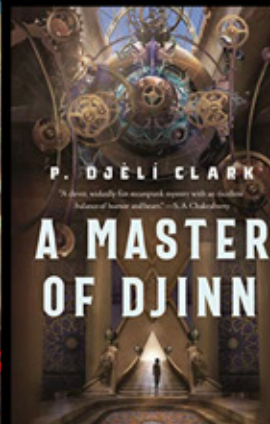
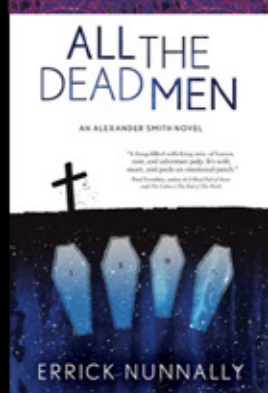
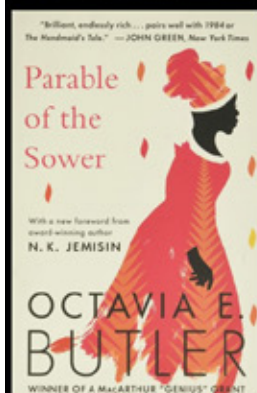
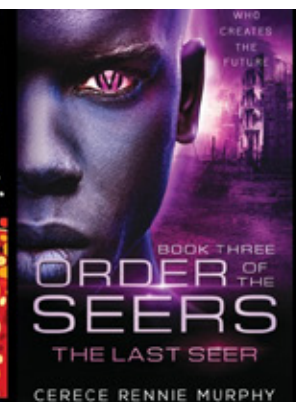
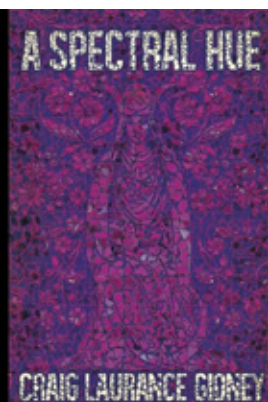
By Gerald L. Coleman

Every time I see a list of black science-fiction & fantasy “you should be reading” it’s always the same three or four names. There are so many more great black authors than that.

A WHILE BACK, I CREATED the first beginner’s guide to black science fiction & fantasy in answer to two realities. First, I kept hearing people say they wanted to read scifi & fantasy by black authors but they didn’t know where to find any. Huh? Yeah, that was troubling and puzzling to me. Are you even looking? That’s what I thought to myself. Because we are out here in these streets, lol. We are legion. All you have to do is look. The second, I kept seeing were these “lists”

of “must-read” scifi & fantasy with the same three or four names on them. It was like that Hollywood thing where they seem to only have room for one black actor—you know, Denzel is in every movie where they need a black actor, and then it’s Don Cheadle, and then Chadwick Boseman... you get the picture. It’s as if the broader culture doesn’t want to make any assessment beyond the superficial... (This article is continued online*)

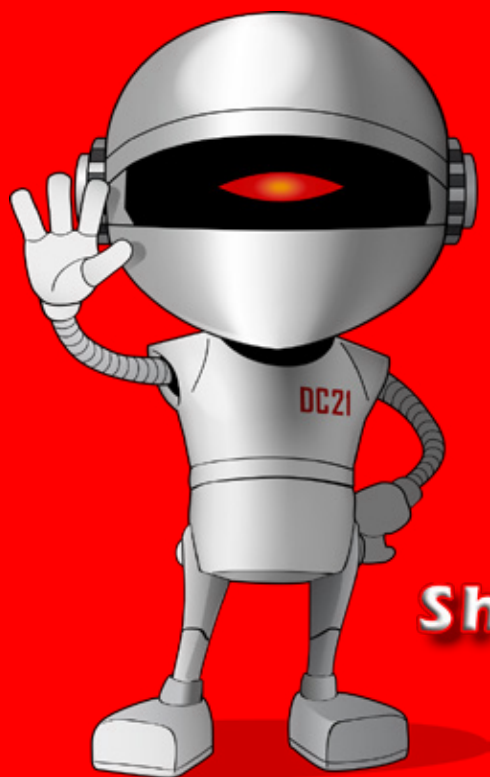
*For the full post, visit geraldcoleman.com/post/beginner-s-guide-to-black-scifi-fantasy-horror-part-ii
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