

Tightbeam 289

September 2018



Future Topic
Re-Imagining

Tightbeam 289

Welcome to Tightbeam, now under new Interim Editorship. The Interim Editor is George Phillis phillies@4liberty.net 48Hancock Hill Drive, Worcester, MA 01609. This is your zine. Please contribute articles and Letters of Comment.

For the material in this issue, we must be thankful to our contributors.

The Front Cover's Supergirls are by Sarah Leuver <comickergirl@gmail.com>. Ms. Leuver runs the fantastic ComickerGirl site www.comickergirl.tumblr.com/ with far more superheroine-related art than can readily be imagined..

Anime Reviews are courtesy Jessi Silver and her site www.s1e1.com Ms. Silver writes of her site "S1E1 is primarily an outlet for views and reviews on Japanese animated media, and occasionally video games and other entertainment."

Fiction reviews are courtesy Pat Patterson and Cedar Sanderson. Pat Patterson's reviews appear on his FaceBook site www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100000144650845 and also on GoodReads and Amazon.com. Cedar Sanderson's reviews and other interesting articles appear on her site www.cedarwrites.wordpress.com/ and its culinary extension cedarwrites.com/eat-this-while-you-read-that/

Our lead contributing artists are Angela K. Scott and Cedar Sanderson.

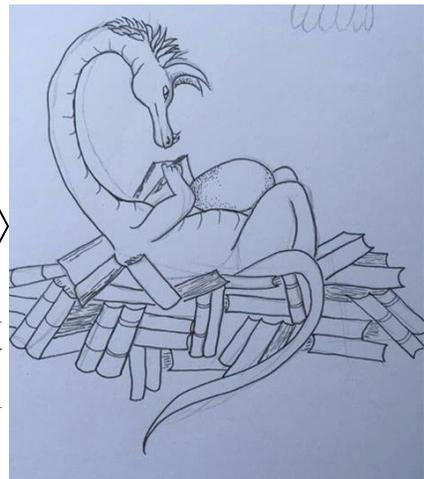
We thank N3F Historian Jon Swartz for his SerCon contribution, Eric Jamborsky for his film contribution, and RocketStackRank for the short story review.

Novel opening chapters are contributions of the individual authors. If you are an N3F member and have a recently published novel, wither Tightbeam or El-dritch Science will be happy to run its opening chapter as an appetizer.



← Baby Dragon
by
Angela K Scott

Book →
Hoarding
Dragon
by
Cedar Sanderson



Editorial

Under New Management

Welcome to this, issue 289 of Tightbeam, now approaching its 60th year of publication.

Tightbeam is focused on reviews, fan politics, art, and discussion. We cover anime, fiction, films, food, and more. We are delighted to take Letters of Comment. We have SerCon (Serious Constructive) articles. We'd like to report on fan politics. For this issue, we have snippets...opening chapters of books by N3F members.

Our Front Cover, with character drawings by Sarah Leuver, proposes a topic for discussion for a future issue—Re-Imagining. In the September TNFF, Judy Carroll's Writer's Bureau report discusses the idea that there are few new ideas and many old ideas. What makes an author great is taking old ideas and re-imagining them in new ways, so that the reader is aware of the trope but delights in what has been done with it. My editorial interest is essays on re-imagining, reviews that stress the re-imagining approach to creating plot, character, and description, and of course re-imagining of my proposed topic.

In this issue, Jessi Silver gives us one review and an introspective. What you see is a microscopic fraction of her writing output for August, and there are other months in the year. Cedar Sanderson reviews a very unusual Military SF novel, told from the perspective of a prisoner of war from the Chaplain's Corps.

DragonCon gives multiple awards for novels, with little time between the nomination ballot and the voting deadline. As reviewer Pat Patterson emphasizes, these nominees are all highly select and worth reading, so we will publish his reviews, one category at a time, over this and future issues.

Note our history of films, a recipe with photograph in honor of Schlock Mercenary, a SerCon historical study of Philip Wylie, Letters of Comment, and finally a snippet, a short section of a newly published novel by Neffer Janie Lamb.

For the Back Cover, we thank John Thiel.

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Anime Reviews

Frankenstein Family

Review by Jessi Silver, her website being www.S1E1.com

実験品家族

~クリーチャーズ・ファミリー・デイズ~



Tanisu's parents are mad scientists who live outside of normal society. They locked up their own children up on an isolated island and did experiments on them in secret, turning Tanisu's older brother and three older sisters into strange creatures. One day, their parents were arrested, and the siblings were moved to another island by the welfare office. The trouble is that none of the siblings except Tanisu know how to interact in modern day society... – Crunchyroll

Streaming: Crunchyroll

Episodes: 12

Episode Summary: Tanisu's older siblings are all the result of their mad scientist parents' experimentation. They have special forms and abilities that distinguish them from normal humans, but they know very little about how to interact with society. Tanisu's distinguishing factor is that he's smart and kind, and he wants for his family to be able to live among others. As the only sibling without mutant abilities, he takes it upon himself to reintegrate them all while their parents are serving time for turning them all into scientific guinea pigs.

When the ingredients for their dinner are ruined, Tanisu suggests that they all go out to eat; a big deal when most of the family is unfamiliar with common social etiquette and can't always agree on what to have for dinner in the first place.

As they sit down to dim-sum, their various alterations are on full display. Transformation, photosynthesis, predatory tendencies... these things don't mesh well with the polite restaurant atmosphere. The other patrons begin to chatter and make remarks and Tanisu becomes more and more upset with his family. It's only after he has an outburst that his siblings realize how important being out in public is to Tanisu, and they work to use chopsticks, clean up their table manners, and keep their abilities in check. Integrating into society might be an uphill battle, but they are beginning to take the first steps.

Impressions: This series technically debuted in the Spring (outside the US) and it's getting pretty close to the Autumn anime debut season, so I split the difference and decided to lump it in with the Summer anime. While I think many anime fans have some complaints about anime not being simulcast in a timely manner, personally I appreciate the fact that Crunchyroll (and other services) will continue to add to their catalog as they can. And really, do you actually have time to watch 30-60 series week-by-week as they're broadcast? Speaking for myself, that answer is "no."

I've written before about the rising popularity of international anime co-productions; I can say with complete authority that I know very little about the ins-and-outs, reasons, and mechanisms of these productions, but the fact that they're becoming more prevalent likely speaks to several different factors in animation production. While I highly doubt there's any shortage of Japanese manga or light novels to adapt into animated form, there are definitely some overused storytelling trends among them and I suppose production committees start to see diminished returns by the time they hit isekai series number 127. I've actually noticed this phenomenon in another of my hobbies – lolita fashion.

As the fashion became popular in the West over the span of many years, Japanese brand dress releases were always the most coveted. They were expensive, often difficult-to-get, and featured quality materials and construction. I always felt that there was an element of copycat-ism to Japanese releases, though. If one brand released a certain print motif (chocolate, for example), variations on that became a trend for a while. Cutlery prints were popular, there have always been a lot of floral prints, and "old school" styles (solid colors with contrasting details and lace) continue to feature in brand releases to this day. There are always sailor-themed lolita dresses released in the summer time. It's not that these prints were or are bad, but they do start to blend together after a while. The last several years, though, have shown a rise in the variety and availability of lolita fashion from worldwide indie brands, and brands from places like China, Hong-Kong, and Korea. They've taken the shape and general aesthetic of lolita fashion from Japan and incorporated many new and fresh ideas, from prints that feature unusual items or themes (jellyfish, bread, and I even own a Chinese dress that incorporated Egyptian iconography) to sub-styles that mimic traditional Chinese clothing. This isn't to disparage the Japanese brands – they continue to do good work and their output was and is foundational to the fashion. But sometimes a fresh perspective is required to inject

some vitality into an art form that has gotten a bit stuck in its ways.

In the case of *Frankenstein Family*, the typical Japanese anime format and style has been coupled with a setting that has a distinct Taiwanese flavor, thanks to its primarily Taiwanese (I think?) production staff. The character designs and animation style are all what one would expect from a Japanese anime; it's in the small details, like the architecture, foods, and customs (such as when Tanisu taps his first two fingers on the table when his waiter is pouring the tea), that the series reveals its origins.

Content-wise, I think this first episode is an intriguing and somewhat uncomfortable (not in the bad way) blend of tones. Because the siblings are all socially-untested and display a wide array of different abilities and traits that distinguish them from typical humans, there are lots of opportunities to demonstrate just how atypical their situation is. I think my favorite character is Snow, the older brother who can transform himself into a dog. The results are as you would expect – he's comically food-motivated, and he's very much a lovable, clumsy ding-dong with a good heart. Spider-sis Aisley is constantly on the prowl for prey. Ashise is half-plant and would rather bask



in the sun than eat human food. And nothing is a surprise to Suishi, who has psychic powers. This odd blend of characters provides many comedic moments throughout the episode, but there's always an undercurrent of sadness and it crops up fairly often and unexpectedly.

Honestly, the siblings' situation is pretty horrific. Their mad scientist parents used them as experimental subjects, fiddling with their genetics to provide them with traits that make it incredibly difficult for them to get along in any sort of social context. They were kept isolated from others and then abandoned when the parents were

(rightfully) sent to jail. Tanisu occupies an odd position in this mess, being the only child who wasn't the target of his parent's special brand of bad parenting, though it's clear that he's absolutely experiencing emotional after-effects of the experience. I think that's one of the most effective parts of this episode; the sadness and horror creeps in unexpectedly, casting a pall over the characters' everyday lives. I liken it to my experience of depression, which lurks in the background of my life until something seemingly innocuous (or, honestly, sometimes nothing at all) triggers it and it becomes a shadow that saps color from the world.

This is perhaps what's special about the final scene, where the siblings walk together as the sun sets in a rainbow of colors. Life has been needlessly dark for them, and they had little to no choice in the matter (to some extent they don't even seem to realize that what happened to them was wrong). But there's some hope that, now that their situation has changed, perhaps there's some new light to be found in the world. Many parts of the episode have a watercolor washed-out feel to them; most of these moments are asides or references to memories or past events. But this final scene in particular has a definite Makoto Shinkai influence, its magical-realism providing emphasis to what might be to come.

While the anime portion itself is actually pretty good, it comprises only one part of the episode's run time. The rest is taken up by a couple of in-real-life voice actor segments that don't really add much (I know there are some fans who enjoy that sort of thing, but they don't really interest me). There's also a really awkward part of the conversation during which one of the actresses insists multiple times that, if she could be anything she wanted, she would want to be a boy. I'm not sure if she's genuinely indicating that she would want to change genders, or if it's a sentiment that's just kind of lost-in-translation, but there's a lot of time spent on it and I didn't really know how I should react. I think the series would be better served by sticking to the in-anime segments and leaving the voice-actor stuff out, but I might be in the minority. I also didn't watch another episode to see whether it carries through or not, so it might be a one-shot issue.

While this has all the hallmarks of a typical slice-of-life series with some fantasy elements sprinkled in for fun, it also has a certain freshness that I believe is due to its multi-cultural origins. These types of productions haven't always been that successful, but I have noticed that they're on the path to getting better and I think this series looks and feels fairly competent and distinct.

Pros: The show has a good visual style and uses color well. The blend of slice-of-life comedy and darker moments replicates the feeling of depression well.

Cons: The voice actor segments don't add much to the episode.

Grade: B-

My Favorite Female Anime Character
Introspective by Jessi Silver, her web site being www.S1E1.com

One of the aspects of anime that has always appealed to me is its tendency to feature women. Most anime have at least a few female characters among the cast, and there are many anime in which the main players are only women. That isn't to say that anime series like this aren't sometimes largely problematic in some way (*sigh*), since anime casts full of cute girls are often created by and for an assumed straight/male audience and don't necessarily portray girls' and women's lives in a realistic way, but as an anime fan I've always felt that women in anime have been at least somewhat more variable in role and personality than a lot of the other Western cartoons and TV shows that I'd been watching as a kid and teen. And when your'e hungry for something, you tend to accept things that are flawed and tough to chew.

As many girls and women as there are in anime, I find that there aren't so many that I feel drawn to identify with. Part of that is probably due to the oft-mentioned disconnect in age that I have with most anime protagonists, regardless of gender. I'm in my mid-thirties, and while I still feel young in my mundane day-to-day life, as a consumer of anime I'm very aware of the fact that I'm participating in a fandom that skews young and focuses on entertainment made primarily for teens and people in their early twenties. Anime itself continues to be entertaining, but I find that many aspects of it don't directly apply to me. There's also the fact that, despite being variable in personality, in many cases the female characters in anime aren't fleshed-out in a way that makes them believable as people. Whether they're just side/supporting characters or characters in anime series that rely on a lot of moé characterization shortcuts (neither of which I consider by default to be a "bad" thing, but definitely not interesting unless some additional effort is made), it's difficult to care much about someone who's just "functional" instead of "central." Nevertheless, with so much anime being made every year, I still manage to find myself with some decent characters to admire.



Some of the answers to this prompt that came the easiest to me were examples of characters who I can relate to on an everyday sort of level and who operate in situations that are drawn from reality. Women who are tasked with keeping up on managing a career, friendships, a home, and maybe even a love life, are some of the characters who often ring truest to me. I don't know how many people have seen the show since it's not available officially around these parts (yet! It was recently licensed), but *Hataraki Man*, with its story about several women working in an office setting, really speaks to me now that I'm a legitimate grown-up with a job (or so people tell me). The protagonist, Hiroko, is hard-working, intelligent, and passionate about her

work at a magazine publishing company, and I have to give her kudos for being conscious of (though not necessarily attentive to) her desires for a sexual life. The truth is, though, that in order to be taken seriously as a writer and editor she often has to put in double the effort of her male counterparts while receiving less than her fair share of the credit. The priority she places on her career also causes a lot of strain in her relationship with her boyfriend, a construction foreman who also puts in long hours and has his own expectations about the balance in their relationship. It's become very trendy to talk about having a "work-life balance" (whether that's really possible is still up for debate), and I think Hiroko's situation really reflects some realistic challenges in trying to achieve that. *Retsuko* from *Aggressive Retsuko* is a more recent take on a similar concept, though *Retsuko*, as an average, entry-level employee, feels like someone whose situation is much more attainable and relateable. She's also exposed to much more overt sexism as she goes about her daily responsibilities – luckily not something I have to deal with very often, but definitely something I worry about all the same.

Aoi Miyamori of *Shirobako* exists as sort of a sunnier counterpart to the others above; her work is no less stressful, and in fact with the added unpredictability of the anime industry her job as a production staff member is probably even more ridiculously stressful than the others in many ways. Her interactions with others, though, tend to operate under the assumption that enough "ganbaru" attitude and willingness to see tasks through to the end is ultimately all that's usually needed to come out ahead. It's not entirely realistic, but I recognize and admire Miyamori's ability to work in an industry that she loves to help create entertainment that speaks to people. Going even further into the fandom side of things are the women from *Wotakoi* who, while reticent to display their "geek cred" overtly in their workplace, manage to maintain some semblance of a professional life while still placing a priority on the hobbies that help define their sense of self. I'm not quite as shy about letting my coworkers know about my investment in anime fandom, but I admire the characters' ability to balance those aspects of their lives all the same.

I also got to thinking about specific character traits that I'm drawn to or might sympathize with, even if I'm not currently in the same situation as the character in question. As zany of a show as *Nichijou* is, I actually find a



couple of the characters to be surprisingly grounded in reality. My favorite character in the series is Mio Naganohara, who plays the role of the straight man most of the time (especially when paired with Yuuko – a legitimate goofball). Mio is studious and fairly serious as one would expect of her character type. But she has an inner life that I’ve always thought was intriguing and funny. She nurses a crush on the school rich kid and draws BL manga in her spare time (both secrets that she’d prefer to keep on the down-low). I don’t know that I’d compare myself to Mio directly, but I see in her that desire many of us have to keep certain aspects of ourselves private and to maintain some semblance of

normalcy with people we don’t know to be “safe.”

Years ago I probably would have named Kino from *Kino’s Journey* as a favorite, but now that my understanding of gender is a little bit different, I feel like that might be disingenuous; many years ago Kino’s birth sex was treated almost like a juicy secret, but now I think that thinking of them as a “girl” or “woman” misunderstands the nuance of gender identity as reflected in the depiction of their character. I do still admire their independence, skill set, and strength, and think that there is a part of myself that wishes I could have spent some time alone as a younger adult just traveling and figuring myself out and being comfortable in my own skin. When I think of Kino, I think of a certain type of freedom that many of us may wish for but most of us don’t get the opportunity to experience. It’s sort of a melancholy feeling, but one which also lets me fantasize about future possibilities in a way that’s still inspiring for me.

If I’m being asked to pick just one character, though, I think I’d go for something a bit unorthodox. Many, many years ago (I’m almost positive I was still in school), a friend of mine asked their LiveJournal followers (ha!) to make guesses on a whole list of personal likes and dislikes. Those kinds of quizzes and profiles were really popular back then, especially since LiveJournal was much more conducive to having comment threads than some of the more modern blogging and micro-blogging platforms. In any case, one of the questions asked what we thought the person’s favorite character was in their favorite anime. The anime was easy – *Revolutionary Girl Utena*. The favorite character turned out to be more of a challenge. I guessed Utena herself; the character’s sense of justice, challenging of gender roles, and overall strong and memorable personality traits just seemed to me to be the most “correct” answer. However, it wasn’t the correct answer – my friend had chosen *Anthy Himemiya*, the quiet character, the apparent “damsel in distress” that gets shuffled around from partner to partner as part of series’ duel “game.” It took me many years before I understood why my friend would choose one character over what I thought at the time was a more obvious choice. While their reason might be completely different from mine, I began to see in *Anthy* pieces of myself, and her story began to stand out as the more important narrative component of the series.

For those not familiar with *Utena*, be warned that the anime series doesn’t make a whole lot of sense in brief, so apologies to those who haven’t watched it. It’s the story of a school in which members of the student council fight fencing duels to own the “Rose Bride,” a girl who appears to have little say in her own situation and who suffers some amount of abuse from her classmates. Enter Utena, a tomboy who’s made her way to Ohtori Academy in particular in pursuit of a prince she met as a young girl. Utena has taken the concept of the “prince” and constructed a persona that embodies those ideals. Seeing *Anthy* endure abuse triggers Utena’s sense of justice and causes her to get involved in the duel game despite being an outsider. Utena “wins” *Anthy* and the two develop a relationship that isn’t just friendship and maybe not necessarily only love either;



Utena starts to care for *Anthy* and doesn’t want to see her get tossed around as some prize to be won and lost. As much as *Anthy* appears to be playing into her role, her facade eventually starts to show cracks. Eventually Utena enters into a relationship with *Anthy*’s older brother, *Akio*, which quickly becomes serious; Utena believes that he may be the prince whom she has sought for so long. *Anthy* becomes jealous because her life has been defined in great part (for good or ill) by her relationship to (and with) her brother. Though the relationship is harmful, to abandon it is more frightening to her, and *Anthy* ultimately betrays Utena. It’s only then that Utena is able to pierce *Anthy*’s emotional defenses and, however briefly, truly reach her. Once the spell is broken, *Anthy* leaves in search of the young woman who helped rescue her from herself.

The show uses lots of fairy tale imagery to discuss big concepts like gender presentation (and specifically things like toxic masculinity), but what has specifically stuck with me over the years and especially after I’ve come to know myself much better, is that it’s very much *Anthy*’s story and hers is a story that so many people, specifi-

cally many women, have experienced. Anthy is sexually abused by her brother and labeled a witch because of it; rather than being understood as the victim of a clear power-imbalance, she's scorned for "bewitching" a man thought to be representative of the male ideal. This twisting of the truth is ever-present in our own lives – whenever there's some news about a famous man accused of rape, abuse, or other act in which someone is made a victim, there are always a chorus of voices ready to humiliate the accuser and to blame them for "fame-whoring" or attempted extortion. This may have changed to some extent; while there are still plenty of people willing to say horrible things about victims, there are also many people willing to stand up and defend them and believe their stories. Unfortunately, as I've discovered, #MeToo is a much easier pill for folks to swallow when the alleged abuser is someone famous and distant; things become much muddier when your abuser is someone who's known personally by those around you. Anthy's brother is well-known and beloved at Ohtori Academy; even Utena is drawn in by his charms. It's no surprise that Akio always has his share of cronies and hangers-on while Anthy is left with almost no support.

This aspect of Anthy's character rings very true for me because I've unfortunately been on the receiving end of various forms of abuse. While I don't like to make a habit of talking about that part of my personal life very much, it informs a lot of my writing and the way in which I interpret the things that I watch. There were points during which a previous relationship was falling apart that I needed to share some of its negative aspects, if only to provide enough detail that maybe people would understand what I was going through. To say the word "abuse" is to somehow acknowledge some personal failing, at least that's how it often seems; I failed to realize how poorly I was being treated, or, more accurately, I failed to realize that I was worth much more than my abuser wanted me to believe. It wasn't long after I said the a-word that an acquaintance came out of the woodwork to email me directly about it; they spent time and energy invalidating my feelings and my experience, because how dare I say something bad about a person who helped obliterate my self-esteem and was now trying to garner sympathy for themselves? These things are often the most hurtful emotional consequences of telling one's story – some people are so unwilling to believe that they could have aided and abetted an abuser, that they'd rather accuse the abused person of lying or manipulation. I know this because I've done it, too; when society teaches you to disbelieve women, sometimes it feels like you're earning patriarchy brownie points (and thus gaining some measure of safety) by participating in it. Being an accuser means potentially becoming a pariah (or being labeled a witch); without a support network, it's easy to lose a sense of your self-worth.

I don't think Revolutionary Girl Utena would be as great a series, though, if it didn't allow Anthy to achieve some sort of resolution. While I think there's some initial confusion when Utena, for all her bleeding, sweating effort, is unable to pull Anthy all the way out of her metaphorical coffin, Anthy's story ends (or really, begins) in a way that feels much more genuine than if she had been rescued by the "prince." Though Utena is gone (and may have never actually existed... that's one aspect of the show that will likely be debated for years to come), her presence managed to accomplish what it needed to. Dressed in a new outfit with her hair let down, Anthy gives Akio the finger and finally sets foot outside the school grounds to begin her journey. It's interesting to think about how deeply one can fall into despair. For days on end it can be a struggle to even get out of bed. Then, suddenly, maybe it's not quite so difficult anymore. The storm starts to pass. Making the choice to keep living is easier.

I think there's a misconception about heroism. We think that, to rescue someone, we have to manually pull them from the brink of death and yank them back into the light. To many, being a hero isn't about talking things out or setting a good example, it's about "taking action." I think that Anthy's story is a tale of actual heroism that I can personally relate to. For all her desire to be a "prince," Utena's swordplay and posturing doesn't really amount to very much. It's Utena's friendship and dedication that finally reaches Anthy's heart, and Anthy makes the choice to rescue herself and disengage from her abuser's delusional stage play (or, if you prefer the movie version, Utena serves as the vehicle but it's Anthy who puts the key in the ignition!). Anthy likely had the strength within her all along, but abuse is like a fog; sometimes it's nothing more than a change in the wind's direction that allows one to see clearly. I don't know that I can point to one thing and say "this is what saved me," and to be honest I still suffer from after-effects from my situation years after the fact. But I have friends and family and people who never let me believe that I was worthless, and at some point their words started to reach me.

Anthy is a favorite character of mine, not due to her personality or things that are outwardly-expressed through the course of the anime, but more as a symbol of what she represents. I know firsthand that people's cruelty can feel like the stabs and slices of a thousand sharp swords. I know how it feels to look around a room and sense that the people there are jeering and judging my every move. I can even describe the sensation of being okay with the prospect of just not wanting to wake up anymore. It's empty, gray, and dull; it's like withdrawing into a coffin of one's own making. Thankfully, though, I also know how it feels to see a ray of light and muster just enough energy to follow it back out of the tunnel. Not everyone is so lucky, but I've had the advantage of being exposed to potent examples in both my real life and through anime and other media. Anthy Himemiya happens to be a particularly strong and poignant example.

I'd be interested to know what girls and women in anime have inspired you. How has your life been affected by the characters that ring truest in your heart? I hope maybe you'll feel up to answering this prompt as well.

Fiction Reviews

One review from Cedar Sanderson. We then turn to Pat Patterson's reviews of the 2018 nominees for the Dragon Award for novels. The Dragon novel awards have a fair number of novel categories. We start in this issue with Military SF.

The Chaplain's War by Brad Torgerson a Review by Cedar Sanderson



To my dismay, I discovered when a reader brought it to my attention that this was one of the posts that fell into the 'blog hole' when I switched browsers. It's definitely a book worth reading, so again, I commend it to your attention...

I have been working on this book since... longer than I care to think about. And it's a good book. So what took me so long? Well, I bought it in paper. Yeah, I know, most people buy books in paper, what gives? Long story short – and I think I've told the long story before – I'm in the habit of reading ebooks over paper for about a decade now.

I tried sticking this book in my bag and pulling it out to read in stray minutes like I do ebooks on my phone or tablet. It didn't work. Not for the bulkiness of trade paperback size, although that was a factor. No, it was more that this was a book which demanded my full attention. I've had very little to give of that this semester. Until last night. I was halfway through the book, I sat down, and I finished it. It was glorious.

The Chaplain's War, if I must make a short comparison, is like Heinlein's Starship Troopers. It's half philosophy, and half soldier training, for similar motivations. Like Rico, Harry lives on a world threatened by aliens. Like Rico, Harry joins up for a war against bug-like aliens. he suffers through training unlike anything in his life previously, makes friends, and then watches them die.

Unlike Heinlein's shorter novel, Torgerson interweaves his hero's training in the past with the present-tense story of the interaction with the aliens, and the crisis of faith the Chaplain's assistant is having after long years as a prisoner of war. It is handled delicately. There is no proselytizing in Torgerson's writing. It is, simply, an exploration of faith itself. If we are not the center of the Universe, and after our death, nothing, then we are forced to consider those who live around us. This is central to The Chaplain's War. The mantid aliens have no faith, only themselves, in a semi-automated existence that forbids them even companionship in ways humans would understand. Because of this, they relentlessly crush any sentient races they come across. They are the center of the Universe, and others are competition alone.

The humans in Torgerson's book are not saints. They suffer, they falter, they doubt. But in their earnest seeking, they convey to the curious aliens that the Universe may just be larger than only one race needs.

If you are looking for a philosophical throwback to the days when Science Fiction explored the really big stories of 'what is human?' then you will enjoy this book. Although the two threads are not close at first, they do merge by the end of the book, and they are both needed for the full tale. Yes, you could skip through and just read the present-day story of the aliens, the Chaplain, and Adanaho, but why? Enjoy, savor, and finally, put it down with your mind full of dreams and hope and a small spark of faith in humanity.

Pat Patterson on His Dragon Reviews

For the 'Best Science Fiction Novel' category, I was able to get 4 out of 6 finalists.

'Best Fantasy Novel (Including Paranormal)' category, 5 of 6.

'Best Alternate History Novel' category, 4 of 6.

(For Military Science Fiction Novels, he reviewed 5 out of 6.)

No conclusions should be drawn about the 6 novels I couldn't obtain. I contacted all of the authors, with a single exception, but it's likely that my signal got lost in all the noise that the Dragon Award and good book sales generates. Therefore, if you have the chance to read one of the books I didn't review, take it. It's probably a good book.

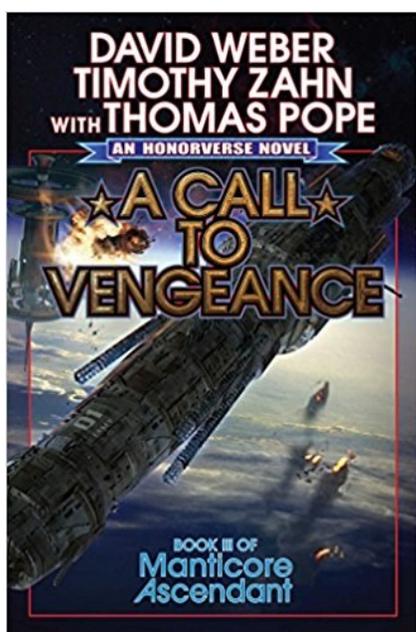
The only author I did NOT attempt to contact was Brandon Sanderson, who wrote 'Oathbringer;' and the rea-

son I didn't make the attempt is because that book was described as massive and 'epic,' and I just couldn't see giving a disproportionate amount of time reading even a great book, when I was under a deadline.

As a reminder, I started this series as soon as word of the Finalists came to me in the form of a ballot, which was August 8. So, I had 23 days in which to get these read and reviewed. I originally had planned to include the 'Best Young Adult / Middle Grade Novel' category as well, which would have meant a total of 30 possibilities, but I quickly discovered that none of the books in that category were available to me through my usual sources, and decided not to try to make contact with any of those authors/publishers.

There were 8 books in the categories I did select which required me to contact authors and request a review copy, and 3 of those complied. Baen Books provided me with 4 books; the remainder I got through Kindle Unlimited.

A Call To Vengeance
by David Weber, Timothy Zahn, and Thomas Pope
Review: by Pat Patterson



A brief and inadequate review. Now, only PART of the reason for the shortcomings of this review is due to my mental state at 9 PM on Friday night after a three week reading & reviewing marathon. The other part is that this book, like many others on the list, is a single installment in a series. However, unlike the other finalists, the three volume series is only a small part of the overall body of work in the Honor Harrington/Manticore universe. It's a bit of a numbing experience to try to do justice to a single patch in the quilt.

That isn't meant to be a criticism of the book. It's well-written, good characters, good story; all the things you want to find when you pick up a space opera, with a sufficient quantity of exploding spaceships. The ONLY way in which the book suffers from being a part of such an extensive library is that the cast of characters is....massive. I include in 'characters' not only people, but factions, governments, and entire systems. They are so developed in the OTHER parts of the body of work, that they have to be included to some extent in any installment that isn't specifically limited to a specific individual or incident; for example, the treecat-human relationship. That can be, and was, executed with very little reference to the outside world. In a novel of this type, though, those well-developed entities must appear, and it can be overwhelming, unless you have made it a point to read everything in this universe. And speaking of: Lt. Travis Long is a young man of proficient skills, as well as the ability to have flashes of insight that can make the difference in a battle. He does NOT have the ability to keep his mouth shut when people with power and influence

are being stupid, and that gets him into trouble. Fortunately for him, his talents have been noticed by people who are a bit above the ordinary political games, and he is given the opportunity to develop some additional sets of skills (as in: espionage).

Elizabeth had the misfortune to be born a royal, but because she had an older brother who bore children, she was able to do things other than be an aristocrat. That didn't last. It's rather amazing just how far the reach of her commitments to her people goes.

And meanwhile, everyone in the entire planetary system has been placed on notice that their lives and security are nothing more than dust in the wind, when repeated attacks by unknown forces bring every defect in their naval defenses to light, in the worst way possible.

Conclusions and comments. I had a VERY strange experience as I started to read this work: I felt like I was sinking into a relaxing pool of water, and letting all my weary muscles get a rest. I really wasn't expecting that; yes, I have greatly enjoyed stories in this universe before, but I wouldn't claim to be a devotee. However, I just KNEW I was going to enjoy reading the book, that it wasn't in ANY sense going to be a struggle. Thus, I can highly recommend that you read this, BUT:

BUT, you really shouldn't make this the FIRST book you read. Certainly, you should read the first two entries in this mini-series; to get the full impact, read a LOT more of the installments in the Manticore story.

And that raises the question, for me at least, of whether or not this book, ON ITS' OWN MERITS, deserves selection as the BEST military sci-fi novel. I think that's going to have to be a personal decision, since I'm not aware of any criteria that recommend OR exclude it from consideration.

Final thought: Earlier in this series, I mentioned Rob Howell in the context of providing hypertext links to the wiki supporting his work. Once again, I really have occasion to recommend that approach. It takes a while to be able to learn who the good guys are, and who the bad guys are, and I'm NOT referring to various political parties

within a government; I'm talking about the guys driving the ships. While that would have to be managed carefully to avoid spoilers, it seems to me that providing links to an Order of Battle would be relatively easy. So, when I say to myself, "Who in the heck is THIS guy?" I can click on his name, and find out. It really doesn't even have to be as complex and as elegant as what Rob is doing; if you can insert footnotes, why CAN'T you provide a scorecard? Eh. Maybe it's not a big deal. If it is, it will happen.

Price of Freedom
by Craig Martelle and Michael Anderle.
Review by Pat Patterson



Several of the books I reviewed were part of a series, going as deep as #8, I believe. "Price of Freedom" is number three in the series, and I suppose it was inevitable that this was going to happen: I had problems with continuity.

The authors took pains to keep that from happening, with an exhaustive cast of characters listed in the front of the book. Alas, that wasn't enough for me. Your mileage may vary.

An utterly inadequate book review. The defects in this review are completely due to my inability to grasp the Big Picture of the story arc. Incidents are described clearly, dialogue is usually informative and snarky, with pleasing references to ever-popular cult movies such as Monty Python's *Quest For the Holy Grail*, and I understood the significance SOMEWHAT of the main battle, but I really didn't know how it all fit together. So:

A dimensional rift exists on a planet far out on the frontier of known space (that's NOT the Niven Known Space!), and monsters are coming in. The Bad Company goes in to wipe out the monsters, rescue the inhabitants, and gain access to a portable power plant technology that will revolutionize warfare, communications, and pretty much everything else.

Meanwhile, one of the sentient computers is going to night school to become more advanced. The resident Mad Genius is a bit miffed at being told what to do, and hundreds of liberated prisoners housed nearby go nuts when they see a woman.

Yeah. Not much of a review, was it? Don't get me wrong: I ENJOYED reading the book. It's just that in this particular case, THIS reader wasn't able to make sense of how all the characters interacted, and where the story came from, and where it was going. The humor and pathos of duct-taping a sentient German Shepherd face-to-muzzle with a team leader was not lost on me, nor were the other japes and jams; I just never knew, when a particular person/event entered the picture, if that was unusual, or something everyone expected to happen.

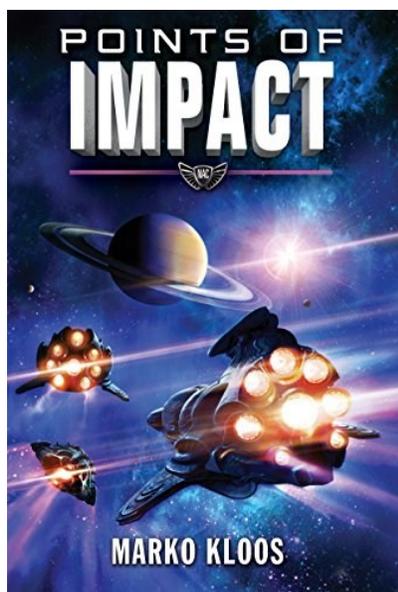
Conclusion. While the writing was entertaining, I suffered from lack of story. If you have been reading the series, everything is likely to make sense, and therefore, you might see this as the perfect candidate for the Dragon Award for Best Military Sci Fi. I can't support that choice, because it's just TOO dependent on prior work to stand on its' own. I have no idea as to how popular this series is, and if there is a huge population out there which was waiting breathlessly for this installment, it might cop the award.

Points of Impact
by Marko Kloos
Review by Pat Patterson

Preliminary Comment: about Marko Kloos. It's only been five years since Marko Kloos EXPLODED onto the Military SF scene, with 'Terms of Enlistment.' He followed that up the following year with the equally bodacious 'Lines of Departure.' That novel was the VERY FIRST indie novel (47 North is an Amazon publishing imprint) to be a finalist for a Hugo Award, in 2015.

Again, alas. Kloos chose to withdraw his novel from nomination. I reviewed 'Terms of Enlistment', and his stated reasons for withdrawing 'Lines of Departure' in this blog post. It wasn't the last of the Bad Things that happened related to that particular award, but it was one of the very first that drew public attention. Happily, he did NOT stop writing, and "Points of Impact" is #6 in his 'Frontlines' series. Other works may be found at his website. I'm including the link here, because I HAD to include the background graphic of beer-drinking dachshunds in a flying saucer, which was created by one Erica Hildebrand, a person with whom I was previously unfamiliar.

A minor review of the book. Captain Andrew Grayson has seen too many things that give him nightmares. Like many young men, he found a way out of abject poverty through joining the military, and has been successful



in his career. Promoted from the ranks due to merit, he now is a captain, commanding a small detachment of what we would call Forward Air Controllers, troops who observe the fall of ordnance from beyond the front lines. He is also tasked with leading a team of rescue specialists, who go into hostile or otherwise dangerous territory and bring out wounded or trapped personnel. However, that team is lead by another officer-specialist, leaving the observers to Grayson.

He is currently in combat against the aliens referred to as 'Lankies,' giants with far superior technology and no inclination to communicate. The war will apparently end when one side is completely exterminated. However, he has also been in combat against other humans, both on the Earth and in space.

These are his worst memories, and he holds a special grudge against a faction of the military that was involved in an aborted rebellion, after the Lankies appeared to be winning. To his dismay, they were given pardons, with the exception of the very top leadership.

He has lost troops in combat, and carries the weight of that with him constantly. His stresses are aggravated by the fact that he believes much of the damage his last command took was avoidable, had he only been given a proper mission brief.

Mitigating his loss is his marriage to Halley, who entered service at the same time he did, and is one of the very few survivors of that unit. Although they have been married for nearly the entire ten years of their service, they have only been able to be together a total of six months, much of that on leave taken jointly. Humanity appears to be losing; but then, Grayson gets orders for a new type of warship....

Something Marko Kloos does as well, if not better, than anybody else. There is a LOT of story contained in Books 2-5 in this series, and I haven't read them (yet). However, Marko has a gift for telling the SIGNIFICANT parts of that story through the way that it impacts the character today. No, we don't know what window the sniper bullet came through (for example). But if that sniper attack is significant to the character TODAY, we find out about it, through his reactions. It ISN'T history; it's present day environment. And in listening to Grayson talk, and seeing how he reacts, we are introduced to the significant issues. And there is none of this 'bar-story-to-new-recruit' technique to pass it along, either.

I'm not gonna tell you the entire story, but the OUCH part of this is so personally significant, that I HAVE to comment on it. If you want to avoid exposure to what I regard as the highest point and the lowest point of the story, stop here.

Significant issues. Nobody really knows how far a person can go before they break; it's all been 'test until destruction,' pretty much. Whatever that point is, Grayson feels pretty close to it.

Big, big plus: Grayson decides on his own, after one particular flare-up, to seek help. Without doing the kind of dithering we are all too accustomed to, he makes an appointment with the doc, and keeps it. Furthermore, in the big, big plus category, he actually TAKES the medication the doc prescribes for him, and it makes him feel better. However, he does not divulge this information to another veteran of his training days, because he believes she will react with disdain.

This is a big, big plus because it treats the issue of PTSD seriously, and because it models the best way for one afflicted to improve their condition. I don't see NEARLY enough of this kind of writing. Michael Z. Williamson comes close, but his Freehold Universe is SUCH a divergence from our world that it's hard to see how his solutions could be applied. Grayson's world, on the other hand, IS our world, with time and circumstances added in.

Big, big minus: The doc Grayson reports to is fresh out of medical school, with plans to go into pediatrics. So: WHAT IN THE HECK IS SHE DOING ON THAT EXPENSIVE, IMPORTANT SHIP? Why would the staffers go through all the trouble of building the most fantastic ship EVER, and put the most experienced and proficient crews on board, and then give them a @#%\$^&*%^ rookie as a counselor/doc? Veterans with PTSD need to talk to VETERANS. They have such a disconnect from the civilian (Kloos talks about this, in another context) that communication seems to be an insurmountable obstacle.

WITH REASON! Because, after he has VALIANTLY spilled his guts to Miss Newly, she then gives him some really crappy advice: take these pills, and get out of the military while you can. Now, the 'take these pills' part is right on. Pharmaceuticals can make the difference between isolation and misery, and gradually re-engaging with friends and family. But 'get out of the military while you can?' NO, dangit, he just TOLD you how disconnected he feels from civilian life! He needs to walk and talk and learn with people who have been there, and he just is NOT going to be able to do that if he gets put out on the street.

An apology. Please understand that if my criticism above is overly harsh, it's really NOT a criticism of the story; it's a criticism of reality. I'm not saying Kloos made an error in his writing; I'm saying that the military does stupid stuff, JUST AS KLOOS DESCRIBES IT.

This is personal for me. It is not my story to tell, but it is, at least in part, my story. And I have seen the system fail to take care of the wounded warrior; it's almost as if they want them to go away after they used them up. And the only help seems to come from other wounded warriors.

Yes, this book is rightfully chosen as a finalist for the 2018 Dragon Award.

Legend
by Christopher Woods
Review by Pat Patterson



I obtained this book through the Kindle Unlimited program.

"Legend" is an expansion of a character in a short story in the Four Horseman Universe collection "For A Fistful of Credits." Under normal circumstances, I would re-read that short story to provide background for a review, but in this case, "Legend" is at the TOP of my reading list, and I have all 10 of my KU slots occupied. Alas, the best I could do is go back and read my review of the story, and that was really no help.

Not needed, at any rate, because everything you need to know is contained in this volume. Martin Quincy doesn't really WANT to be a merc, even though he is very, very good at what he does. He also doesn't want to command a merc company. Nobody seems to care.

He is NOT one of those guys you run into who are full of stories: "No kidding, there I was, all alone on the Plain, with nothing but a gnawed antelope thighbone...." His defect runs the other way. He much prefers to stay in the background when there is no active fighting going on, so he dislikes it when OTHERS tell his war stories. And many of those stories exist, too, because he most decidedly does NOT stay in the background when it drops into the pot.

Along the way, he picks up what may be regarded as Boon Companions; mercs who share his approach to the ethics of warfare. They like being on the side of the Good Guys; that isn't always apparent at the beginning of their

contracts, in the earliest days of Earth mercs, but the wisdom gathered by participating in a number of battles finely hones his sense for the team he wants to play for. That isn't always a good move, either financially or in terms of personal survival, but it's the path he chooses, and his team goes where he goes.

Even if one of them only does it so he can kill Martin when the time is right.

I have two objections to make, and one of them is slightly ridiculous.

Slightly ridiculous objection: sex with aliens? Nah. Ain't never gonna happen. Human sexual response is primarily determined EARLY in life. Now, PERHAPS the resemblance of one of the species to a sexualized cartoon characters of the mid-80's is a factor here, but otherwise, I'm not buying it. That's ridiculous, because how you gonna have a modern hero without a romance, and I've already accepted 10 other impossible things, but I still don't buy the concept.

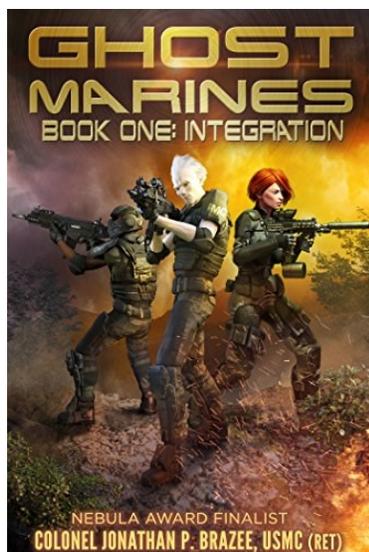
The second objection I have is to the lack of place/time designations in the story. The book is laid out in a series of flash-forwards / flash-backwards, and it was a little bit difficult to keep up with where certain events took place in the story. This one may also be slightly ridiculous, because I tend to skip past those labels as I read, but if they are THERE, then at least I can refer back to them if I get confused. I wish that there were clear cues: '10 years earlier, on Planet Yeep....'

Having said that, I devoured the entire book as fast as I could. It was delicious. I have been a fan of Christopher Woods work for a year or two, and my one regret is that he wasn't able to put a Checkers hamburger joint on Planet Karma. The Greek diner will have to do.

The banter between Martin and his buddies is delightful. Lots of running gags, loads of snark. You'll love it.

Ghost Marines: Integration
by Jonathan P. Brazee
Review by Pat Patterson

It works GREAT as a straight up, pure fiction book. The reliance is not on gadgets, but on the stuff that men are made of. As such, if you think of Captains Courageous or Starship Troopers, and think of the path those characters followed, then you'll see where this book derives its' main strength.



What that strength CARRIES, however, is a bigger burden: the story of the admission into all ranks of the military of blacks. While the author's experience is as a marine, and mine in the army, the problems of going from an all-white service (the marines), or a service which refused to allow blacks to serve in combat roles (the army), to full integration are remarkably similar.

He addresses the institutional resistance to the integration of services. At the highest level, the last person to hold the title of 'Secretary of War' was relieved and forced to retire, due to his refusal to proceed with the ordered desegregation. He also addresses the well-intentioned meddling on the part of political figures, which never works well, and often brings results exactly the opposite of what was intended.

The greatest struggle, however, was that taking place in the squad bays. Individual troops HAD to be able to trust the person they were fighting next to, and some simply couldn't make the accommodation. Those who could, however, found fellowship in an identity that transcended all lesser forms. It's not as simple as saying 'they are all green to me;' because there is much more to a trooper than the uniform. Brazee uses the spice that wyntonsin flavor their food with to make that point. No, they AREN'T all the same. It's the job of the people running

the show to determine what matters, and what doesn't.

The young main character never loses his first impression formed of the Imperial Marines, as they descend on his village to rescue his people from slavers. Without that image, he might never have been able to make it through the wretched treatment he often received. However, he DOES make it through, and we have the hope that future generations of desolate children will find an armed rescuer there to assure them of safety.

Short Stories
Inscribed on Dark Water
by Gregor Hartmann
A RocketStackRank review

Five-Star — Good characters, Cool Setting, Great Story

Pro: Olani simply wants to get something worthwhile out of her internship. She's been terribly disappointed at what they stuck her with, but she's worked hard regardless, hoping for the best. Right off the bat, that makes her admirable. And, despite that, she may have made a valuable discovery.

Tessa has a colorful past, and even she doesn't think she has much of a future. She's a consummate survivor, but she likes Olani and genuinely wants her to succeed. All of her advice for her is well-intentioned, even if the religious bits are unwelcome.

Mingzhen has rational goals, even if she's slimy. First, she wants to find out the facts about the refinery. Second, she'd like to fool around with the cute intern. She efficiently combines both of these ideas. Her advice to Olani isn't ill-intentioned, but it's definitely self-serving.

A good bit of the fun of the story (and the tension) revolves around whom Olani should believe (if anyone) and what decisions would lead her to a job that would take full advantage of her abilities.

What's gratifying about the ending is not just that her strategy looks likely to succeed, but that if it does, she will have earned it. Her lubrication idea is something that, given her background, she plausibly could have come up with, and the negative info about Mingzhen is something that might well get the General Manager's attention, particularly at a time when the GM is likely looking for leverage. And it's touching that she's willing to go to Tessa's meeting, even though she doesn't believe, simply because she knows it will mean a lot to Tessa. Olani really is a genuinely good person, and it's heart warming to think she'll succeed.

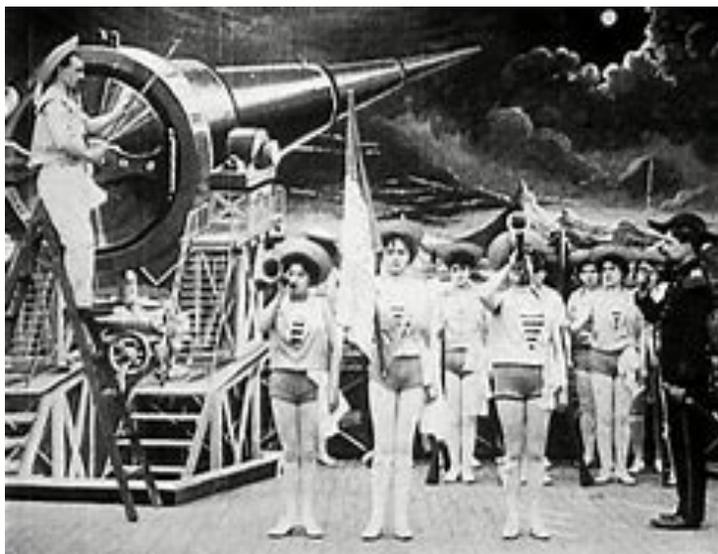
The setting is interesting too, even though we don't get a lot of details in this particular story. I appreciated the fact that the science was spot-on for the most part, and it amused me that on Zephyr you could get shut down for taking CO2 out of the atmosphere.

Con: Olani hasn't actually tested her idea; it might not work. If Mingzhen has been so blatant about her misuse of funds, it's a surprise that no one caught her before.

About RocketStackRank.com. The authors write: Greg Hullender and Eric Wong have been together almost 20 years. We're technical guys, long-time SF readers who like to read stories and rate them for each other. This blog simply shares what we've been doing privately for years. Rocket Stack Rank is our retirement project. We're doing this for fun; the site is not monetized in any way whatsoever, nor do we think it ever will be.

Films

The Earliest SF Films and Georges Melies From the N3F Film Bureau Review by Eric Jamborsky



Science Fiction and Fantasy films have become among the most popular over the past few decades. Budgets are bigger, the audience is larger, and, frankly, they are hard to avoid. But this was not always the case and it is good to take a look at the beginning over a century ago. A digression here. The idea of SF and F movies being around that long still gives me pause. After all, when I first saw Bela Lugosi in DRACULA the movie was around 34 years old. Time flies when you get old.

According to H. Bruce Franklin, The term "science fiction" was used first in 1851 (in Chapter 10 of William Wilson's A Little Earnest Book upon a Great Old Subject): "Science-Fiction, in which the revealed truths of Science may be given interwoven with a pleasing story which

may itself be poetical and true." But the term Scientific Romances was used more often, on up into the pulp era of the early 20th Century. "Scientific romance is an archaic term for the genre of fiction now commonly known as science fiction. The term originated in the 1850s to describe both fiction and elements of scientific writing, but has since come to refer to the science fiction of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, primarily that of Jules Verne, H.G. Wells and Arthur Conan Doyle." Then along came publisher Hugo Gernsback who was a long time fan of the genre. In 1923 he devoted an issue of Science and Invention to what he called Scientific Fiction. In 1926 he introduced a new magazine, Amazing Stories to what he now called Scientifiction. Withing a few years the earlier term Science Fiction returned and has been with us ever since.

Some of the earliest films that could be regarded as Fantasy, or Fantastic (with a touch of SF) were created by Georges Melies (1861-1938), a magician, theater owner, and showman in Paris, France. On 28 December 1895, Méliès attended a special private demonstration of the Lumière brothers' cinematograph, given for owners of Parisian houses of spectacle. After his attempts to purchase one of their machines failed (the brothers hoped to create a monopoly) Melies eventually built his own projector and camera. Between 1896 and 1913 Melies made over 500 films, most of which are now lost. These were not just black and white; many were hand colored. All of the films were short, many presenting magic acts, dancing, or Vaudeville style programs. They were shown between live acts in his theater.

Through trial and error, and the use of principles of Magic, Melies developed different forms of special effects, many of which were soon copied by Edison and others. Jumping ahead in 1902 Melies made A Trip To the Moon, loosely based on Jules Verne's novel From the Earth To the Moon, with hints of H. G. Wells tossed in. Forget science; dancers from the Follies Bergere crewed the giant cannon that launched the intrepid band into space.

Financial difficulties and the outbreak of the First World War brought an end to his film career and Melies spent many of his later years selling toys and candy in a small shop. Fortunately there was a rediscovery and new appreciation for his work during his lifetime.

You can find many of his surviving films, including A Trip To the Moon on YouTube. I heartily recommend watching these and gain a glimpse into some of the earliest Fantastic Films. Also, watch the Martin Scorsese film Hugo. Georges Melies is a major character in the film and there are sequences showing a behind the scenes look at the Magic of Melies.

Next time we will take a brief look at Edison and his contribution to the genre.

Eric Jamborsky
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Food

Schlock Mercenary in the Kitchen

Cooking Report by Cedar Sanderson

Howard Tayler was good enough to give me several suggestions for cooking from the schlockiverse. There is a lot of food in the fifteen years of the daily Schlock Mercenary, and it was fun to figure out just which one I was going to do. I didn't have time to do a whole feast, as I was planning to attend LTUE and finally meet Howard in person (and hopefully not fangirl at him). Below are the suggestions by Howard, and then by other fans, and finally, the recipe!

1) Saladupas. (Salad + Zupa) This is a soup & salad. I based it on a cold soup I had 26 years ago. Ice-cold vinegar & water, with lettuce, pickles, and other stuff. Russian, I think. Variants would be sweet, or lemony, or whatever. Better find that Russian recipe first, though.

2) Maple-bacon churros. I suspect this is a churro with a maple glaze and sizzling crumbled bacon. YMMV.

3) Pretzelcoat! (the name appeared in a billboard) serves "authentic Mayan blue corn pretzels" under a mole sauce. I think a regular baked, soft pretzel under a mole negro (cocoa-based mole) would be a good start. From there, try making pretzels with corn-meal in the recipe, and try a mole amarillo or mole almendras as a topping or dipping sauce. Those will even look like mustard!

I eventually settled on the Bacon-infused Churros from the October 28th 2014 strip, as being quirky, relatively easy to tweak an existing recipe, and, well, bacon!



Bacon Infused Churros

- 1 cup water
- 1 tbsp white sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 tbsp vegetable oil
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- Zest of one orange, grated
- 1/4 c very crispy (almost dry) cooked bacon
- 2 quarts oil for frying
- 1/2 cup white sugar, or to taste
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- brown paper lunch sack

Begin to heat the oil. I used a cast iron dutch oven for my frying. I added 3-4 tbsp bacon grease to the canola oil I started with. Boil the water with the sugar, salt, and oil, and zest. Whisk in the flour in small portions, and add the bacon with the last portion.

While the dough is hot, you could either use two spoons to make small portions, or you can pipe it into the oil in finger-length portions. Allow to fry until golden brown, then remove to a draining rack. Once you have the fresh portions in the oil, you can put the now slightly cooler churros in the brown paper sack with the sugar and cinnamon, then shake to coat.

Eat. They don't last well, the ones we left overnight were not crispy any longer, but when fresh they are fluffy inside, crispy out, and the bacon is a lovely salty balance with the sugar crystals on the outside, and the touch of citrus really added something. The First Reader was dubious at first, and then announced this recipe is another we will do again, although he would prefer less orange zest, not being a big citrus fan.

All in all, a fun, simple recipe, and perhaps I will attempt others another time!

Bonus Recipe! Owalkwik

I have not attempted this, this is the brain child of Kevin Crowley, who offered it as an addition to the recipe round-up. Schlock's drug of choice...

- 2lbs Powdered milk.
- 2lbs Coffee Creamer
- 1lb Cocoa
- 1lb Sugar.
- 1lb Malted milk powder
- 1/4 cup Cinnamon
- 1/4 cup nutmeg
- 1 TBSP cayenne

Throw it in a 5 gallon pail. Seal tightly. Shake, Rock, Roll till mixed. wait 10 minutes for the dust to settle. The dust is explosive.. Add water to taste. I typically use 1 part mix to 4 parts water.

SerCon

The Science Fiction of Philip Wylie

by

Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D.

N3F Historian

Philip Gordon Wylie (1902-1971), popular American writer of the 1930s-1950s, wrote hundreds of short stories, articles, serials, syndicated newspaper columns, works of social criticism, screenplays, philosophical treatises on man and society, poems, and novels. He was born in Beverly, Massachusetts, the son of Presbyterian minister Edmund Melville Wylie and the former Edna Edwards, a novelist who died when he was five years old. He attended Princeton during 1920-1923, and his papers currently reside there in the Princeton Department of Rare Books and Special Collections.

After college Wylie worked in Hollywood, was an editor at Farrar & Rinehart, served on the Dade County Florida Defense Council, and was a director of the Lerner Marine Laboratory. At one time he was also a special advisor to the chairman of the Joint Committee for Atomic Energy. Among his score of published novels were a baker's dozen of science fiction/fantasy books, two of them written in collaboration with his friend Edwin Balmer. He and Balmer also collaborated on some mundane books, including *Five Fatal Words* (1932), *The Golden Hoard* (1934), and *The Shield of Silence* (1936). [See Note after Bibliography]

SF/Fantasy Books

Gladiator (Knopf, 1930)

A classic superman story, it is generally accepted as being one of the inspirations for Superman. Hugo Danner is a physical superman (but with only normal intelligence) because of a chemical injection his scientist father had given his mother during her pregnancy. Usually listed as Wylie's third novel, it was actually the first he wrote under his own name. The novel was bought by Knopf in 1927 but held for three years until Wylie's work was better known.

The Murderer Invisible (Farrar and Rinehart, 1931)

A man discovers the secret of invisibility and sets out to rule the world. Universal Studios bought the film rights, after they had bought and planned to film H. G. Wells' *The Invisible Man*. The resulting film, released in 1933, owed as much to Wylie's book as it did to the 1897 classic by Wells.

The Savage Gentleman (Farrar and Rinehart, 1932)

The wealthy owner of a chain of newspapers takes his infant son to an uncharted island in the Pacific, where he plans to raise him away from civilization's corrupting influences. The island contains the remains of an ancient civilization and some types of animals that evolution forgot. The son grows into a physical and mental giant. Rescued from the island by a Scandinavian freighter, he returns to civilization to find himself heir to his father's vast fortune. The estate lawyer refers to him as a Tarzan! Some popular culture authorities say this book inspired the creation of the pulp character Doc Savage.

When Worlds Collide (Stokes, 1933/originally published as a serial in *Blue Book*, beginning in September 1932)

Two roving planets enter our Solar System and destroy the Earth. The remnants of humanity rush to build rockets and escape to one of the new worlds. Some popular culture experts feel the plot of this book was the inspiration for *Flash Gordon*. The novel was bought for filming in 1933 but not made until 1951, when George Pal turned it into an award-winning film. Apparently Balmer supplied the plot, but Wylie wrote every word of the book that he and Balmer originally had titled *These Shall Not Die*.

After *Worlds Collide* (Stokes, 1934/originally published as a serial in *Blue Book*, beginning in November 1933)

The sequel to *When Worlds Collide*, telling of the colonization of the new planet and conflicts among the different parties of humans. Again, Balmer supplied the plot while Wylie wrote the book. Balmer outlined a plot for a third novel in this series, but Wylie did not approve of the science Balmer proposed to use in telling the story and refused to write the book.

Night Unto Night (Farrar and Rinehart, 1944)

An epileptic scientist gets involved with two women. One woman is the focal point of supernatural phenomenon, which expand to involve the scientist; in addition, a ghost is seeking to reveal a secret involving the second woman. There are two genre stories embedded in the book, "The Snibbs Phenomenon" and "The Cypher Phenomenon." In the first, Martian men quietly invade Earth; in the incomplete second story, a gigolo wakes up one morn-

ing and discovers that his feet don't match. Wylie referred to the brief stories he inserted in some of his novels as "allegories for changes of mood." This novel was made into a movie released in 1949, starring Ronald Reagan and Viveca Lindfors.

The Smuggled Atom Bomb (The Saturday Evening Post serial, 1948/published as part of Three To Be Read, 1951)

Parts of an atomic bomb are smuggled into the United States by Russian agents in an attempt to blow up New York, but a young man uncovers the plot. I read the 1959 Avon paperback of this book in one sitting while visiting my grandmother, who was hospitalized at the time in Houston.

The Disappearance (Rinehart, 1951)

Wylie was accused by many of being misogynistic because of his *Generation of Vipers* (1942), in which he coined the term "momism" to describe the tendency of Americans to sacralize motherhood. Mothers wrote him that America would be better off if women ran the country. Perhaps to answer these women he wrote this novel. An unexplained "cosmic blink" splits humanity along gender lines into two divergent timelines. The creation of a world, in which men must get along without women, and vice versa, gave him the opportunity to expound on the psychology of sex and his social philosophy regarding human needs. This book was optioned by Warner Brothers with George Pal as producer, and was in pre-production planning in 1980. When Pal died, the project was canceled.

Tomorrow (Rinehart, 1954)

Russia attacks the United States. A city with good civil defense is contrasted with a city that is not prepared for such an attack. A one-hour radio dramatization of the story, narrated by Orson Welles, was broadcast October 17, 1956, and it was also made into a 1983 TV movie, *The Day After*, starring Jason Robards.

The Answer (Rinehart, 1956/originally published in The Saturday Evening Post in 1955)

Both the Americans and the Russians kill an angel during H-bomb tests. The Russians fear that their atheism and belief in communism is threatened and determine to obliterate the angel's body with a second explosion. The Americans discover a golden book brought by their angel which contains the same short message written in many languages: "Love one another."

Triumph (Doubleday, 1963)

A world war begins with a Russian invasion of Yugoslavia, which had recently voted to become a Western ally. When the Russians attack the United States, a wealthy industrialist invites his guests and fleeing passersby to join him in his enormous, lavishly appointed fallout shelter deep in the ground. A first strike destroys 65 percent of American missiles, but the rest are used to retaliate against Russia. Then America is attacked by one thousand Russian weapons, which destroy all major cities. A year later, surviving submarines on both sides destroy the last remnants of each other's military power, ending the threat that the Russians will rule the Southern Hemisphere through nuclear blackmail.

Los Angeles: A.D. 2017 (Popular Library, 1971)

This book was a novelization of a TV play that appeared on "The Name of the Game" on NBC-TV (the debut of Steven Spielberg as a director). The story tells of a future government run as a corporation, with regional vice presidents, none of whom will take responsibility for an unfolding tragedy for fear of reducing profits.

The End of the Dream (Doubleday, 1972)

This story tells of the death of the Earth by pollution. John Brunner's own warning about the effects of pollution, *The Sheep Look Up*, was published the same year, and he provided an introduction to this posthumous warning of Wylie's.

Wylie's Short SF

Finnley Wren (1934), an early autobiographical novel, while not SF, has two SF stories embedded in it: "An Epistle to the Thessalonians" and "Epistle to the Galatians." The former, which was reprinted in the December 1950 issue of *World's Beyond*, involved a giant who appeared from space, demolished New York City, and departed as enigmatically as he had arrived; the latter, aimed at racism, told of a scientist who discovered a drug that was a preventative for all known diseases of mankind – at a cost of only three-tenths of a cent per person – but found that no one would take the drug because it turned the user green.

"Blunder" was Wylie's statement of the necessity for open communication in science. The story originally appeared in the January 12, 1946 issue of *Collier's* and told how the world was blown apart by an atomic accident. Set in approximately 1974, New England and Central Europe have been destroyed in a limited nuclear war called the "short war" -- which began when the United States was hit by a sneak attack on Christmas Eve. The cold war continues, but seems quite irrelevant to the major event of the story: the destruction of the Earth by accident. Norwegian scientists, attempting to use a "bismuth fission" bomb to generate a natural atomic energy pile in a volcanic formation unknowingly set off a chain reaction -- which in "slightly less than one nineteenth of a second" splits the planet open and Earth is transformed into a small sun which swallows the moon.

“Jungle Journey” told of an expedition in Southeast Asia that discovers, among carnivorous plants, an ancient spaceship abandoned by explorers from another world. The scientists learn from manuscripts left behind that the aliens plan to return that very year to determine whether humanity has abandoned its violent ways. If it has not, and has the technology to threaten other worlds, it will be exterminated! The world, alarmed, hastens to reform itself before the aliens arrive. The story appeared in the December 1958 issue of Jack London’s *Adventure Magazine*. Wylie’s original title was “Strange Language.”

“The Paradise Crater” was written early in 1945 on order for *American Magazine*. The story was set in 1965 and described a post-WWII attempt by a band of die-hard Nazis to conquer the world with a deadly new weapon -- an atomic bomb made from uranium-237. The story was rejected by *American Magazine* as being too fantastic. Wylie’s agent then sent the story to *Blue Book*, which, in turn, sent it to Washington, D.C., for approval. While SF magazines were exempt, other publications were required to censor any material felt to involve national security. Washington suggested that *Blue Book* not publish the story, Central Intelligence contacted Wylie’s agent, and special government agents were sent to deal with Wylie, who had already been placed under house arrest in a Westbury, Connecticut hotel. It has been reported that a Major from Army Intelligence showed up and told Wylie he was prepared to kill him in order to prevent a security leak. Wylie, who had been doing public relations work for the government on the B-29 bomber, urged that his dossier in Washington be checked. This was done, and Wylie was cleared. Four months later the atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, *Blue Book* asked to have the story back, and it was published in their October, 1945 issue.

Writing for the Movies

Wylie began writing movie screenplays in 1933 with *Murders in the Zoo* [original story and dialogue continuity by Wylie and Seton I. Miller]. His other screenplays included *King of the Jungle* (1933), starring Buster Crabb; *The Island of Lost Souls* (1933), starring Charles Laughton; *The Gladiator* (1938), made as a comedy starring Joe E. Brown; *Charlie Chan in Reno* (1939), starring Sidney Toler as Chan and based on Wylie’s story “Death Makes a Decree”; *Night Unto Night* (1949), and *When Worlds Collide* (1952) [with Balmer].

Use of Pseudonyms

Despite all the writing he did over the years, Wylie did not use a pseudonym on any of his published work, save one book. In 1930 he used the pseudonym of Leatrice Homesley on a mundane novel, *Blondy’s Boy Friend*. I have no idea why he wrote this novel under a pseudonym, but I’ll bet the story behind his reason for doing so is an interesting one.

Philip Wylie and Me

I first became aware of Wylie’s science fiction when I read “Blunder” in the Bantam paperback anthology, *A Shot in the Dark* (1950), edited by Judith Merrill. I then read *Gladiator*; and in 1951, my friends and I saw the George Pal movie, *When Worlds Collide* -- with the wonderful Chesley Bonestell landscapes. I then read both *When Worlds Collide* and its sequel, *After Worlds Collide*, and found myself hooked on Wylie’s writing. I started collecting his books, both fiction and nonfiction. My older brother George was a “Crunch and Des” fan, he and I both loved fishing, and he introduced me to this Wylie series (100+ stories) in *The Saturday Evening Post*. Later, it was another plus when I discovered that Wylie was a disciple of Carl Jung’s psychology. As a psychology student, I found Jung’s ideas much more interesting than Freud’s. I was also fond of the many sayings Wylie coined over the years. One of my favorites: “If liberty has any meaning, it means freedom to improve.”

Some Conclusions

What can be concluded about the SF/fantasy of Wylie? Certainly, he was an innovator. If it is true, as some claim, that his stories inspired the creations of such cultural icons as Superman, Flash Gordon, and Doc Savage, then popular culture enthusiasts owe him a lot. Some critics have even speculated that Wylie’s “Crunch and Des” stories influenced John D. MacDonald’s later “Travis McGee” mysteries.

Wylie’s lifelong goal seems to have been to entertain the widest possible audience, and, while doing so, educate them about the dangers of their own foolishness.

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Tuck, Donald H. (ed.). The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction and Fantasy, Volume 2, 1978.

Note: Edwin Balmer (1883-1959) was an American editor and author. At one time he was editor of Redbook Magazine, the sister magazine of Blue Book. He graduated from Northwestern University in 1902 and received a master's degree from Harvard in 1903. His solo mundane books ran from Waylaid by Wireless (1909) to In His Hands (1954). He wrote several stories with William MacHarg, his brother-in-law, some of them appearing in Amazing Stories and Amazing Detective Tales. Balmer also wrote plays and, beginning in 1924, screenplays for movies. Balmer helped create (with artist Marvin Bradley) Speed Spaulding, an unusually grim SF comic strip that was partially based on the "Worlds Collide" series. The strip began appearing in daily and Sunday newspapers early in 1940 and was reprinted in the comic book Famous Funnies (serialized, beginning in July 1940 with issue #72).

Letters of Comment

Hello, George and Bob. It's a shame to hear about Tightbeam. I understand the frustration of a fanned getting nearly no response to the publication he or she worked hard on to create. Everyone wants a response to their work, no matter what kind.

I do what I do because I believe that every good fanzine deserves some response. Then again, what I do goes back to the 1930s and onwards.

Bob, I do have issue 287 of Tightbeam, and I do plan to respond, as soon as time allows. I know what to do when it comes to receiving a fanzine, and I suspect few others do. What's needed is a small, mini-publication specifically directed at each member, with fast lessons on what to do when you receive a fanzine. The first ones I received, I didn't know until people told me what was needed, people like Mike Glicksohn. I can't draw a straight line, and sometimes, the idea of fannish writing escapes me, so that's why I wound up in the local.

Teach them all what to do, and then ask them whole-hearted for their support and response. If no one still will respond, then you know what you have to do. I would hate to see this fanzine go away, but if no one (except me, as you say, a non-member) is responding to it. Bob is spinning his wheels.

Lloyd Penney

Congratulations to the Life Member and the Kaymar Award winner. Cedar Sanderson seems like a good person to have won the award. Jon Swartz certainly shows a long and variegated history.

Seeing the complaints he has about membership inattention to TIGHTBEAM, I wonder if Bob Jennings guessed he would be voted best fanzine in the same issue. I hope that vote cheers him up, and I'm making a note to LoC every issue of Tightbeam, and I hope Lloyd Penney continues to do so. Bob knows by now that Tightbeam has a caring membership, but still, those LoCs need to come in, and I hope others will be sending him responses.

Regarding that same matter, I've done this letter of comment for TNFF and will continue to do so to help support membership response activity there.

-John Thiel

Re: Tightbeam

When I originally revived TB, The goal was to have it be an outlet for fan creativity. If people wanted to write LOCs, fine. But we are in the 21st Century - it's easier to email or chat someone up on Facebook than to wait a month for a response. So, under my editorship, I searched for reviews, fiction, non fiction, fan fiction and fan art to fill the pages. But each editor has her or his own personality, so it evolves as the baton passes.

...David Speakman

I read Tightbeam and TNFF...and almost never comment. They strike me as "service" zines more than "fanzines." They give the club news and notes and updates -- vital info. They also have nifty stuff like recipes, reviews, and so on, but these are more to be enjoyed passively than commented upon. I don't think the zines should be discontinued.

...Jefferson Swycaffer

I have enjoyed Tightbeam, and have to agree with Jefferson - the lack of LOC should not be construed as a lack of interest. Unless Bob would be happy to get a LOC that consists solely of the acronym RAEBNC... I do want to expand on my response to Bob's complaint about the lack of LoC for TIGHTBEAM...it seems to me that in any organization, there are a small number of leaders or doers, and a lot of people that tag along because they agree with where the leaders are taking the organization, and/or with what the doers are doing. They may not say much,

if anything, but I think it is wrong to assume that they are apathetic or uninterested.

...Kevin Trainor

Not enough interest or responses in the N3F to what is being produced?

Perhaps a "problem" is too many different publications, and not enough readers. Perhaps a "solution" could be combining publications, such as making one a part of a larger one.

If printed copies cost too much money, then all must be online from now on. It is the 21st Century, after all. But regardless, Bob needs to remain as an editor. He's the finest I've ever had "polishing" my articles.

There's always a quarterly option, instead of bi-monthly, too. The N3F has endured and survived for quite a few decades now. It will continue doing so. Talented and creative people donate their time and energies, and keep it going, especially on Facebook and the website of the Internet here in our modern era.

...Jeff Redmond

Tightbeam 288 — this is a lovely issue with the color images and articles. I like that Odo in Star Trek is a European nobleman. Thanx to the Editor for the good work in Tightbeam.

N'APA is way cool. I like the artwork. I'm glad I'm on the list to get it. I'll send some of my sf drawings soon. I'm in Denmark for 6 more weeks, and then back to New York Upper Manhattan. Summer is over here, and it's rain and cold again. The danes still sit outside and drink their beer.

I like it in the n3f, and Tightbeam and others are fun to read. I don't read all in them, but do like the news and art. Jeff Redmond is a author of sci fi books, and writes good reviews and stories. I like his Area 51 and Roswell articles. I want to send in some fantasy art I've made. I like it in the n3f. Nice people and fun.

luv, Lisa Gabriella

From our President:

The Franson Award, originally called the N3F President's Award, was renamed in honor of long-time Neffer Donald Franson. This award started because past N3F Presidents wanted to give a show of appreciation to people. The Award symbolizes significant contributions of time or other resources to our Federation.

Several years ago, we needed a new Editor for Tightbeam. Long-time Worcester area fan and Editor of genzine Fadeaway rose to the occasion. He gave us 15 beautiful, thick, enjoyable issues of Tightbeam. For his contribution to the N3F, fen will be forever grateful.

As your President, it is my pleasure and honor to give the Franson Award for service to the N3F to long-time fan Bob Jennings. Congratulations to Bob Jennings! Thank you, Bob, for your fine work on behalf of the N3F.

Snippets

THE DRAGON'S PEARL A Sample Chapter from Jean Lamb For the complete book

<https://www.amazon.com/Dragons-Pearl-Tameron-Dragon-Book-ebook/dp/B07GNVPDM7/>

Chapter 1

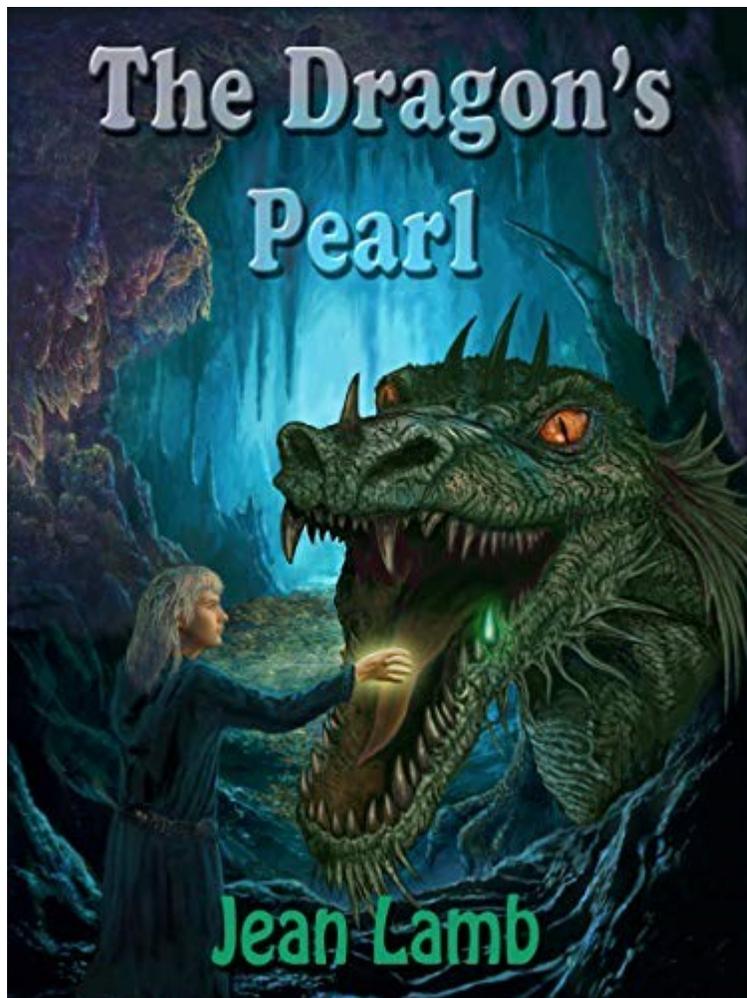
Hauk's Journal

Very funny, Prophet. I volunteered to clear out the traps to avoid the feast that marks the beginning of Your wanderings, and a half-starved stranger falls down at my fireside. On the very day no stranger can be refused, of course.

He seems harmless enough. I can't understand a word he says, though I tried what I knew of the tongue of Athlath on him. I wonder where he's from? But I won't kick him out—I don't think he could go on much longer. He didn't snatch at his dinner, but I could tell it's been some time since he ate well. The pony he brought with him is in better shape than he is!

Just what I wanted at my age, another burden. Well, I'll take him into town and see what the priest nearest the inn makes of him. He won't be my problem for very long.

Tameron dayn Sidian was trapped in the tunnels. His pony Mujuk was dead, and his armor was too heavy for him to carry alone. Even his sword felt heavy as he stumbled through the darkness. The Earth Giant had offered him sanctuary and let him escape from Fiallyn Mor, but he was still imprisoned below. Oh, Lord and Lady, he was so tired!



He tripped on rough stone and fell. He cried out as he hit the rocky surface, but after a moment tried to push himself back up to his feet. He hadn't come so far only to give up now! Then his arms collapsed, and he fell again. A few tears of despair leaked down his face. He wanted to live so much!

"It's all right, Tam. You can rest now."

He heard the voice of Coris Mimm, his father's friend. Tameron wanted to believe him—he was so tired and hungry. He found himself lifted and carried back down the tunnel by one of Stine's men, while another held a torch. They were suddenly past the Giant and in the secret chamber underneath the Guardian's holy chapel on Neyarmie Isle. His father, his red hair streaked with white, stood in the bedchamber, while Lady Kiliane lay naked on the bed itself. His father told the men to hold him, and then poured something from a red cup down his throat. Tam screamed and fought, but had no choice...

He woke up. The man bending over him wasn't Mimm or anyone else he knew—his beard was nearly as grizzled as Scholar Tayn's, but he had weather-roughened skin darker than his father's but lighter than Mimm's. His eyes were a warm brown, though, like Randor's, and Tam couldn't be afraid of those. *Hauk*, he thought. *His name is Hauk.*

He rubbed his eyes and nodded at the stranger who had welcomed him to his fire and given him some bread to eat. After all he'd done to escape from Fiallyn Mor, it still felt odd to realize he'd done it. Unless this was some bizarre plot to make him relax his guard...no, he wouldn't have woken up here if that was true.

Tameron wished he could speak to the older man let him know how much this kindness meant to him. *I should find one of the shirts in my pack and pull off one of the buttons*, he thought. He sat up and rummaged through his saddlebags. Nothing was missing.

Then he scrambled to his feet in panic. Hauk had packed his bedroll already and was now trying to douse the fire. Stine, his father's arms-mistress, would have chewed him out if she knew how deeply he'd slept in strange country. Yet here he was, safe and with all his goods. Surely the Lord and Lady had guided him here. "Good morning," he said in greeting, and hoped his manner showed Hauk that he meant well. He owed so much to this man—he couldn't have gone much further.

The older man smiled and gave him half of a small loaf of bread and said a few words. Tam didn't understand, but he took the food and bowed to his benefactor. He tried to chew it slowly, since he didn't know how far he was from where he could buy or find more, but it went fast. He tended to Mujuk afterwards. The pony's eyes were less sunken than he thought they were the day before, while she held her head a little higher. After he made sure she drank her fill of water—there was no lack of that here—he bundled up his gear and loaded the pony with what he could not carry. He'd wait till she had more to eat before putting all his belongings on her.

Tameron glanced around. It was early, and deep shadows still ran from the east. The sun shone from just above a high mountain, and the land slumped away lower to the west. The trees were thick and choked with underbrush. Anyone could hide in them, which he wasn't used to. The forest he knew was much more open. He didn't know of any country like this. *I must really be Outside!* Few mages, let alone people like him, ever traveled beyond the invisible wall of force that kept his country safe.

He turned his face away from the other man when he realized that he would never see Randor or Stine again. He grieved for a moment, then put it aside. At least the commander would never have to lead an army to hunt him down. His terrible vision could have come true if he had stayed. It was still a wrench to lose the people he loved. And Father...he didn't know what to think.

Tam splashed a little water on his face and hands despite the cold. He must smell horrible, and he longed for a bath. Hawk finished putting out the fire, and put some of his own baggage on Mujuk, though Tam could see he was careful about it. Then the older man pointed to things and named them. *Fire, water, horse, snow, tree...* Tameron repeated the words as he touched the same things. He pointed to himself and gave his name as just *Tam*.

Hawk walked to the west as the sky lightened. Judging by the freshness of the bread, his rescuer hadn't been away from a village or town more than a few days. Tam led the pony and hoped to find shelter. Randor's old boots leaked, and his feet felt half-frozen from the snow and icy mud. Along the way he stripped greenery from trees and bushes that already had some and kept it for Mujuk's fodder. Hawk sang something as they went. Tam felt uneasy, though it was probably safe to make so much noise. They were close to a stream, so the sound of the water might cover what they made.

Hawk stopped, and bent down to examine a trap made of wood and strips of rawhide near the edge of the water. It held a long-footed furry beast he had never seen before. The older man bled it out and put it in a game bag, no doubt to be cleaned later. Then the older man put something that smelled horrible on the trap from a small bottle. Tameron wished they could stop and roast it now—the bread had been good, but not enough.

They walked further alongside the brook, which was frozen over in shallow places on the side, but flowed in the middle. Tam began to spot the snares once he knew what he was looking for. Some were empty, but several held more of the furry animals Hawk called *lithorn*. One held a fat bird which nearly flew off before Hawk twisted its neck, and he received a nasty peck in the process. All seemed in good condition for this late in winter. Tam remembered the starved animals he'd brought down near Dorena's cabin before he'd been rescued.

One game bag was full. Hawk tied it to the load on the pony, and began to fill another. It was nearly noon, and Tam was tired. Mujuk's head drooped and the grazing was poor, though she gladly ate what Tam gave her. How was he going to ask to stop without words. "Hawk—" he said, and then pointed at the pony. The other man frowned, and then said something. Tam had no idea what he meant, but understood when Hawk pointed at the next trap and held up one finger.

A couple of men suddenly appeared out of the thick brush away from the stream. Tameron drew his sword and stood between them and the pony, but waited, in case they were the other man's friends. They drew their own weapons and moved towards Tam, Hawk, and the pony.

The older man, who was on his right, shouted at them and went for the small hunting bow he had tied onto Mujuk. Tam reached down and threw a snowball at the man on his left with his off-hand, and then lunged at the one on his right. *I wish I had a shield!* He circled around to keep them both in view to give Hawk time to find his arrows and aim, and stayed out his rescuer's line of sight.

The one on the right parried Tam's thrust, and then leaped forward at him. Tameron raised his blade and twisted it under his foe's arm to plunge the tip into his ribs. His attacker crumpled and his sword only cut the cloth on Tam's cloak.

He pulled his weapon out quickly, and turned to see how Hawk was doing. By that time, the older man had his bow out and an arrow flew. It missed, but the second man must have seen he couldn't follow up his advantage, as he turned and fled back into the woods. Hawk's second arrow disappeared right along with him, but Tam didn't hear anyone falling or crying out. He wearily began to follow, but stopped when Hawk shook his head. At least that gesture meant the same thing here as it did at home.

He leaned against a tree, exhausted. He almost felt like throwing up the way he had the first time he'd killed someone. Tam sat down and cleaned his sword with snow, damp grass, and the edge of his victim's cloak. His hands shook as he removed the blood. He missed the sheath twice when he tried to put his blade away, finally managed it, and then began shivering and couldn't stop.

Hawk set his bow down and calmly began going through the dead man's clothing and goods. He grumbled to himself, which probably meant he hadn't found much, though he put a small pouch into his own cloak pocket.

Tam reminded himself that the other man was only exercising the winner's right—Stine had divided things up for the soldiers of her own company the one time he had gone on patrol with them, though he hadn't needed anything from the pile back then. She would laugh if she saw how weak he was now.

He barely caught the boots when Hawk tossed them to him. They were far too narrow for the older man's broad feet, but might fit him. He pretended it didn't bother him as he pulled off one of Randor's boots and tried the other one on. Not only was it the right size, but it was in far better shape than the ones he wore now. He shouldn't complain, though. Without the old pair he never would have been able to walk this far.

At least there wasn't any blood on them. He put both boots on, though it was clear that he hadn't changed his stockings in far too long. He pointed at them, then held his nose. Hawk laughed. Tam stood up and brought the pony back from where she had fled during the brief fight, though she shied at the blood. He spent a few minutes calming the beast. "It's all right, Mujuk, nobody's going to hurt you." Then Tameron put Randor's boots on the load. No sense throwing them away. They could be repaired.

Hawk took the cloak from the dead man, but left the rest of his clothes on him. *He must not be that poor,* Tam thought. *Dorena would have stripped the body bare when we were still in the cabin, the way she did me when*

I dropped into their laps.

The other man gestured for them to move on, and his words had a gentle tone to them. Tam sighed, and realized he was still hungry even after what had happened. He led the pony along the edge of the stream. He didn't like leaving the body where it was, but was too tired to insist on burying it.

Hauk called a halt once they went past three more traps, all bare. The man who had run probably had the *lithorn* with him, if he and his partner had already emptied them. Tam was glad to sit down, after he loosened the tack on Mujuk and found a spot that didn't have any snow on it for her to graze on.

Then the other man came over and pulled a few strips of dried meat and a wrinkled apple out of his own pack and divided it between them. Tam bit into the meat, and nearly gagged at the amount of salt on it. At home, such food was dried or magically preserved. When on patrol, Stine kept the salt and handed out a few bits to each soldier every few days. Marysa had brought some home from the inn when he'd lived in the cabin, but that was all Dorena and her family had while he'd stayed with them. He wished he could be with them now. For that matter, he wished he'd killed that Fire mage, married Marsya, and that only her father had come home, instead of having her son's father along with him. His rescuer here must be rich to have so much salt in his travel rations.

The sun moved past the summit of the sky and into the west, as far as Tam could tell with the forest so thick. They started walking. Tameron tried to keep on watch in case the second thief tried to attack them again, but he was so tired he was glad they had stopped looking for traps. They passed a few small cabins. The trees began to thin and the sun shone brightly. There were fewer snow drifts piled away from the stream, and they weren't so high as the ones further into the woods. Wagon ruts appeared in their path and showed dirt at their bottoms.

Tam continued to lead the pony as he followed Hauk across a narrow bridge, and they approached a tall wooden palisade with sharpened tops. The land was cleared of brush and trees for over a bowshot away from the walls. Tameron nodded. He'd seen such precautions taken in his land, too.

Two men in leather armor and sheathed swords stood at a gate and spoke with an old woman who drove a wagon full of firewood already split. She gave the guards a small bundle of the wood and went through into the town.

Hauk went in front and spoke with the guards, who seemed to know him. They laughed at whatever he said, so that was all right, and accepted one of the *lithorn* they'd found in the traps. Tam didn't know what to do when the men looked at him and the pony. He didn't want to show that he had too much to these people—maybe if he had a shirt without any buttons, they would take it without asking too many questions. Not that he could answer them anyway. Then Hauk began talking again, and pointed at the boots on Tam's feet. One man's eyebrows went up high, and he waved them on through the gate.

I'm glad of that, Tam thought. *If they saw everything I had, they might call me a thief, and I would have no way to prove anything was mine.* Maybe it hadn't been such a good idea to lug his good armor all this way, never mind the necklace or the jewels on his best shirt.

They stopped for a moment in a town square just inside the wall. Hauk waved his hand all around, and said, "*Sitat*". Tam hoped that meant the name of the town. The houses had peaked roofs like the ones in Lochil, though it was warm enough that snow had fallen off many of them, and lay in heaps between each building. His eyes hurt from the dazzling glare, and the contrast between it and the many shadows as the sun was beginning to set. He muttered the different words Hauk told him along the way, and hoped he didn't get them jumbled up.

They stopped in front of a brightly-painted house with a tankard and a lion painted on the door. Several chimneys above it spouted smoke. Hauk led him and Mujuk around back to the stables. Tam and Hauk unloaded the pony once they found an empty stall. Tam fetched hay and water for the little beast after rubbing it down a bit. He stored his gear in a back corner of the stall for now. Then he helped take the full game bags to the kitchen.

The cook, a stout, middle-aged woman like the one in the Guardian's castle, chattered too fast for Tam to catch anything she said, till Hauk spoke to her. She looked at Tam oddly, but pointed to herself and said, "Almalan."

Tam pointed to himself and just said, "Tamron" rather than go through the full name. The fewer people who knew him by it, the better. Then the cook smiled, put the *lithorn* and other dead beasts in a bin to be dealt with, and motioned for them to leave.

Tam didn't want to. Everything smelled so wonderful, especially the fresh bread on a big tray over the stove. It looked as soft and white as the kind served to the Protector himself. Hauk plucked at his sleeve, but the woman caught him staring at it. She laughed and set out a plate with a small loaf and a lump of butter. Hauk shrugged and left the room. Tam was afraid to be without his protector, but hunger won. As he ate, a small, red-faced boy who reminded him of Jorry came in and helped himself to some bread and butter, too. Tameron didn't mind, even when the child sneezed right in his face. The cook ruffled the boy's hair and put down a small pie with fruit in it to share.

When he was done, Tam bowed over Almalan's hand and thanked her. It was only good manners, and it made her smile, though she also wrinkled her nose at his smell. He didn't know where there were any baths, but decided he needed to find out. Even if he had only a basin of water, he could do *something* about his travel stains.

He found Hauk in the taproom with some ale in front of him. Tameron walked up to him, mimed scrubbing all over, and then waited. His rescuer nodded briskly, and stood up from his seat near the hearth. Tam followed him through a hallway, to a room where a crone was taking down clothes from a rack near another fireplace. "Wait!" Tam said, and then went to the stables for his saddle bags. He had a few clean clothes left, or at least ones he hadn't worn for a while. While there, he pulled a button off one of his better shirts—it should be worth *something* here.

He returned and followed Hauk to a back room where a large stone cistern sat with water in it that steamed, plus there was a crock of more heating up on a nearby stove next to a table that had rags and something in a dish which Tam hoped was soap. The old woman in charge of it held out two empty buckets to him. He thought he remembered where the well was, and took them as Hauk started undressing. Once he had the water, he knocked on the door to the room which was now closed. He hoped the noise that Hauk made said he could come in, and did so. His friend was soaking in the tub, but pointed to him and mimed washing *first*, at least that was how Tameron understood his gestures. Well, that was reasonable enough. The old woman was gone, but Tam poured the hot water from the crock into the cistern, and then filled it from one of the buckets he'd brought in. He took a rag with some soap and washed from the head down. He was appalled at how much dirt showed up on the cloth he used. Well, it couldn't be helped. He was careful to turn his back as he undressed, not knowing what might offend, and put his dirty clothing a significant distance from Hauk's.

At last he was ready to soak, and by that time Hauk was out and had partially dressed. Tam was afraid that he wasn't clean enough to get in, but the older man forcefully gestured at him to do so. It felt wonderful to soak. His feet stung, but they would be all right once he had clean stockings on them.

Hauk scooped up his dirty clothing and put them in a pile and then left. Tam sighed in contentment, though he wasn't quite sure what he should do with his much filthier things. *I should burn some of it*, he thought. Maybe just the socks... well, if they could be washed, it would be better to have a spare set.

It was a wonderful luxury to dry off in front of the stove and put on something clean. Both his shirt and his trousers were too short for him, but his boots and his cloak would cover most of that. Then the old woman came into the room, and talked to him. When she realized he didn't understand her, she mimed shaving and then brought out a razor that could have been used in battle. Tam gulped, and kneeled to let her wipe his face with some soap and then scrape his face with her deadly weapon. He didn't think he really had enough, but thanked her profusely. He wished he had a coin to give her. Well, he would find her once he had some and make sure she didn't lose by letting him bathe here. He did pick up all the cloths that had been used and put them into the bag she pointed to. She made a face as she looked at his used clothing—he almost felt like giving her the jeweled button if she was going to deal with those—but he packed them up instead. He wouldn't inflict them on her till he had some money to give her for cleaning them. She sighed, and smiled a little bit when he bowed over her hand anyway.

Once back in the stables, he stuffed the clothing away and searched the bags in case he had any coins from home that he'd remembered to bring. No—just the buttons on his shirts and the gems on the necklace. Well, Hauk should be able to help him turn what he had into the money they used here. While he was there, though, he scooped out some grain for Mujuk and refilled the trough.

It was dark out and his eyes were dazzled by the light of the taproom. He ran his hand through his hair, which was longer than he was used to—perhaps the old woman would trim it for him once he had some money.

The main room of the inn was about half full. He didn't want to make a display of his gift to Hauk, or attract thieves who might think he had more. Tam shrugged. He'd heard lots of stories about Outsiders, but doubted all of them were true. Still, people were people and he should be careful. He went into the shadows for a moment, took a pinch of dust, and put it on the jeweled button in his cloak pocket. Then he sat down next to his friend. A pretty girl with light brown hair brought food and ale. Tam smiled at her, though Hauk didn't look nearly so cheerful. Well, the jewel ought to remedy that.

He couldn't believe the place was rich enough to have a dish of salt on every table. He tasted the meat and bread first before he added any. They didn't need it. The ale was smooth and tasted strong, so he drank it carefully. Hauk looked a bit dismayed when Tam cleaned his plate and gestured for more. Tameron waited till everyone seemed busy, and then placed the disguised gem near the older man's platter. "This is in return for all the help you've given me," Tam said in his own language.

Hauk looked down at it, brushed it with a damp finger, and then casually put it in his own pouch as if it was only a common stone. His eyes betrayed excitement for a just a moment, though.

Nobody else seemed to notice what they did. Tam decided to watch the serving girl who brought him more food—she was pretty, and she let her ankles show just a bit. Given the weather, they were clothed in dark woolen stockings disappearing into underbreeches, but he remembered what Marysa's had looked like without anything at all. And not just ankles. The serving-girl's skirts flared briefly as she turned to avoid beer being spilled by a careless patron.

Then a dark-haired young woman with a sprinkling of freckles on her light skin smiled boldly at him. She wore a red earring, and Tam wondered if her jewelry meant anything special. He'd better not do anything, in case it

meant she was allowed to have her brother beat him if she didn't like it.

As Tameron worked on his second helping, Hauk rapped sharply on the table with the handle of his eating-knife. Everyone turned to look at the stocky older man as he spoke. Tam wiped his mouth on his sleeve as Hauk pointed at him. Nobody seemed upset, or anything, and a few of the people smiled. One man frowned slightly, and Tam tried to remember who he was, in case he was a friend of one of the thieves. It would probably be some time before he could explain to Hauk about that, but maybe the other man had seen it, too. He had learned to watch faces closely while helping the Guardian to give justice in Lochil.

Hauk gestured at Tam to stand up on the bench, said a few more things and pointed at the boots that Tameron now wore. A very old man who wore a strip of blue cloth around his shoulders came forward and lay a small, plump purse on the table by Tam's plate and said something in a soft voice. Tameron stepped back down on the floor and bowed. A few people cheered, while everyone else stared at him as if they expected him to make a speech.

He sighed. He thought he was done with that sort of thing. "I know you don't understand me," he said in his own tongue. "I thank you for your kindness to a stranger, but I'm not anyone special." *At least not here!* "I was glad to help Hauk against the thieves. I hope that I am welcome here."

A man in an orange cap looked at him and smiled. Tameron wondered if he should have said anything all, and sat down.

Everyone began talking at once. Jarrett had been right, Outsiders really did sound like frogs strangling. He relaxed. Perhaps he was too fearful. After all, who from Fiallyn Mor would find him here? If he had gone through the Anchor Pool in the west, he might have to worry, but surely not in this town.

As he cleaned his plate for the second time, he said new words quietly to himself. The sooner he learned how to speak here, the sooner he could be on his own. He caught a few sounds in the babble around him, and hoped he understood them correctly. He promised himself that he would gain a few terms each day, and by that build up a treasure-chest of language.

He opened the purse after finishing his ale. It had some large copper coins, a few small silver ones, and a couple of scraps of paper with writing on them. Tameron had no idea what any of them were worth. It must be a reward for the dead thief, though he still wished he and Hauk had been able to keep the second one from running away. *I'll find out eventually how much he was worth*, he thought, and stuffed the purse into his cloak pocket.

Tam felt tired, and the ale had gone to his head. He mimed putting his head on a pillow, pointed upstairs first, and then to the stables, and tried to look bewildered. Well, that wasn't hard. He *was* that confused. Hauk nodded, led him upstairs to a dark, chilly room with a single bed, and then left. Tameron started the fire from a few coals left in the hearth with the wood stacked nearby.

He noticed a long, pale garment on top of Hauk's pack. It must be some sort of night-garb, and probably belonged to the other man. In Fiallyn Mor, he'd worn his skin to bed like everyone else, except in Dorena's cabin where everyone went to bed fully clothed because of the cold. This land must be different. He would wear his clothes for tonight and find out where to acquire the proper night-gear tomorrow.

The bed looked barely wide enough for Hauk, let alone two people, so he made up a pallet for himself with a blanket from the bed and his cloak for a pillow placed near the hearth. He fell asleep quickly—being clean and with a full belly was something he'd learned to appreciate. He woke up briefly when Hauk nearly tripped over him, but this tiny cubicle was still better than his luxurious chambers in either Kelemath or Lochil.

He awoke early from the ale, though the room was beginning to lighten. Hauk never twitched as Tam used the pot, though he thought the noise was enough to awaken anybody. The fire was cold and so was the room. Once he blew on the coals and added enough kindling to restart it, he was fully awake. He wrapped himself in his cloak and went downstairs.

The kitchen was already busy. The cook tended her little boy, who was wrapped up in a quilt in a chair near the cookstove. She looked at her son anxiously. Tam noticed the wood-rack by the stove was nearly empty, while a couple of buckets stood ready. He pointed at them, and then at himself, and the woman nodded wearily. First, he fetched water from the well in back, and then brought in a few armloads of wood already cut up and filled the rack. Almalan—yes, that was her name—smiled at him. He was glad she didn't mind. Tam thought about splitting some of the larger pieces of wood but didn't know if it was too early. People might not like being awakened just because he was up.

Almalan bent down to lift the boy, probably to take him to bed since the child looked half-asleep. Tam held out his arms with a smile. The cook nodded and let him take the boy as she led him to her own room. The boy weighed little more than Jorry had, even with the thick quilt wrapped around him. Tameron slipped the child under the covers of a truckle bed in the corner and tucked him in. *Oh, blessed Lord and Lady, if only I could have stayed with Marysa and her son!* Unfortunately, that became impossible the moment that Jorry's father had showed up.

He tried hard to let none of that show. It wasn't the fault of anyone here that he wasn't a father any more. Perhaps someday he would be a husband and father again. He bowed to the cook and started to walk off, but she tugged at his sleeve and took him back to the kitchen. She sat him down and brought him a platter so full he doubt-

ed he could eat it all. Before he started, though, he had her give him the words for each thing on it—eggs, meat, butter, toasted bread that had a different word than just bread, ale, plate, and so on. He mumbled the right word to himself for each thing as he ate it. He smiled broadly when he finished and handed her the plate, though he wished he knew how to thank her better.

By that time, others wanted their breakfasts. Tam went to tend to Mujuk. He gave the beast more hay and water, and then groomed the pony thoroughly. The poor thing was skin and bones, but her eyes were brighter than yesterday. He had lost weight, too, though not as much as she had. He was also happy that he kept down all the food that he'd eaten. Maybe Hauk being sparing with his along the way back had been a favor.

Mujuk nuzzled his arm in silent gratitude. Yes, this was much better than the tunnel! Tam looked around and a boy not much younger than he was ran out and gabbled something at him. "I can help with your chores," he said, not expecting to be understood, and then mimed pitching hay and mucking out. The boy grinned, and gave him a fork to work with. It wasn't hard to figure out what he needed to do. He was happy to see so much fodder still in storage this late in the season. The other boy cleaned the stables with a much-used broom and did a good job of it as far as Tam could tell.

Once done, Tam shook hands, and realized he'd better clean up a little bit before going back into the inn. He fetched his dirty clothing from his pack and decided the old woman who ran the bath would like to see the color of his coins before dealing with them.

He found her, though he could tell she wasn't pleased with the smell of his gear. He silently negotiated with her, and when she wanted more than two coppers for the work, he pointed to the water buckets and somehow came to agreement that he would bring in four full buckets on top of the coins and call it good. Tam felt extremely frustrated at having to act out everything. The old woman, whose name was Den Larla, or something like that, took pity on him and gave him names for the bath, water, and soap. He stole a small bit of it and used it to clean his hands in the well water as he fetched it for the bath.

He didn't worry about what would happen to his clothes—if any of them survived washing, he would be happy with that, as they didn't have any jewels or gold-thread embroidery on them. Once he'd brought the water in, it was nearly noon, and he was pleased to go back to the inn's taproom to eat. Hauk was there, and the older man tried to talk to him. Tam recognized only a few words, but replied, "*Feed horses, buckets of water for bath,*" or at least he hoped that was what he said.

Judging by the other man's grin, that might not have been what he actually said. So Tam mimed pitching hay with the fork, and then holding buckets and filling them at the well. He even acted out dumping the buckets into the crock and stone bath basin. "Ah," Hauk said back.

After the dinner of thick brown soup, bread, and cheese, followed by a dish of stewed preserved apples, which Tam was delighted to see, he wanted to go to sleep. But when things were quieter and people went about their business, he went into the kitchen and helped the cook with her little boy again. He resolved to drop by at night, if he could, so the poor woman could sleep, since it was not possible for her do so in the daytime unless he knew more about her business than she did.

He did what he could to help, and blessed Dorena for teaching him as much as she could. He could knead dough, and didn't mind getting flour on his clothes—it would brush off, and smelled better than he had just a day ago. Tam was annoyed at how quickly he tired, though. Finally, the cook dismissed him.

Hauk found him in the stable where Tam was checking on Mujuk again. Tameron tried to explain that his travel clothing was being washed and that the cook's boy was sick, but was very much afraid that he had said the cook's boy was being washed and that his clothing was sick. Hauk seemed to understand him eventually, and laughed. He pointed towards his own travel gear and flashed a couple of fingers. Then he gave Tam some more coins, probably from the sale of the gem or from Hauk's own store, with the gem to be sold later.

The next two days were much the same. The old woman handed back his much cleaner clothes, and indicated that his cloak desperately needed the same treatment the next morning. Tam agreed, and thought exercise should keep him warm enough while fetching water and wood for the cook. Going to the stables didn't keep him outside, and it wasn't too cold inside the place anyway. He spent several hours for the next two nights helping watch Kefan, Almalan's son, though he dozed off once and then woke up from an embarrassing dream where he and the cook were in the barn together the way that he and Marysa had been. But it didn't bother him to help her son drink something hot and hold him on his lap near the fire so he would sweat. The boy whined about his rash itching, but Tam distracted him by singing a song, if only so the child would laugh about how off-key he was.

Once the boy began to sweat, Tam gave the boy some more hot tea, helped Kefan use the pot, and then put him to bed again. Almalan barely stirred when he did that, but she made sure he had plenty to eat during the day, so he didn't mind missing a little sleep.

The next day, the old woman brought his cloak back, and Tam was glad to have it, though it was just a little bit damp yet. A couple of days later, Hauk indicated that they would be going out again, and for three days this time. He seemed glad that Tam wanted to go with him, and seemed even happier when Tam indicated Mujuk would go, too. No doubt Hauk could haul a lot more back to the inn with the pony to help carry gear.

Tam went to the kitchen, and with a combination of sign language and words he knew were probably wrong, let Almalan know that they would be out cleaning traps again for three days. Her boy was better now, at least better enough to complain about staying in bed, so he didn't think she would mind their departure too much. The cook set out a lot for the two of them. Once it was packed on Mujuk, Tameron gathered fodder from the store in the barn and bundled it up on top of the two blanket rolls Hauk took from a shelf in the stable. Besides, spring was coming and the pony would likely find more grazing as the snow began to melt.

They went out early in the morning from the same gate they had used before. Tam waved at the guards when Hauk did, too, but stayed silent as the older man had told him to be. Maybe the people of this town didn't like strangers, but Tam wasn't sure. Still, it was best to do as he was told till he knew more.

This time, though, they went due north instead of east. Tam didn't see any houses or cabins like the ones he'd noticed in the forest to the east. Hauk set the pace and direction, and Tam didn't have any trouble keeping up for the first hour or so, but was surprised to feel so tired before it was noon. Mujuk slowed her pace, too. Hauk looked concerned, and halted often. He taught Tam more of the language as they went, including how to ask for a rest.

They checked the traps once they reached a small stream north of the city. Perhaps the ones they passed along the way belonged to other people, even though some of them were full. No one seemed to be on the narrow paths north of the town, either. The ground didn't look different from in the east. He struggled to ask Hauk why, and the older man struggled to tell him the reason. Maybe the weather was too bad in winter for people here to stay, though Tam knew that Dorena's cabin was in a worse spot than in this area.

He kept an eye out in case the second thief, or just another one, was around. Hauk shrugged and mimed sleeping, and then smiled, like this ground was safe for some reason. Tam didn't mind hearing that, but decided he'd still keep watch. People had invaded sanctuaries before in histories he had read about Outside when he was still Scholar Tayn's student.

As they walked and stopped to check traps, he murmured words to himself. "*Water, bread, stop, go, butter, one, two, three...*" and so on. His heart grew lighter as the day wore on. This was much easier than worrying about life or death the way he had in Fiallyn Mor. No lessons, no sword drills, no trying to be what he could never be to please the Protector...and knowing nothing would work, and only Dever Tower waited for him if he should ever return.

Suddenly, Hauk seized his crossbow, levered in a bolt, and loosed it. Tam immediately stopped and drew his sword. He then felt embarrassed when Hauk retrieved a fat bird. That was a good shot! Too bad the other man had missed the other thief, but Tam's mouth watered when he thought of how that bird would taste roasted over a fire. He resheathed his blade and felt only a little bit embarrassed.

They stopped at noon to eat but didn't start a fire. The bread was still quite fresh, while the butter and preserves on it tasted wonderful. It was so much better than scrabbling in the tunnels, or hoping there would be enough food left after Dorena and her family ate in their cabin. The salt meat was a little overwhelming again, along with the unfamiliar spices, but he enjoyed the ale they had to wash the taste down.

The rest of the day was much the same, though Tam tried to figure out how to ask Hauk if he could practice with the crossbow. He was more familiar with a standard bow, but had seen a crossbow once or twice before. Stine had told them that it had advantages, but a good eye was necessary for both, and one could loose an arrow much faster and for longer distances with a normal longbow than with its mechanical counterpart. He knew he was sorely out of practice with either kind, and his sight was good enough to do well if only he didn't rely on his sword as much.

That night they stayed in a lean-to. Tam had a slight headache, but ignored it—he had camped in far worse conditions, and there were more than enough branches to place around the gaps in the makeshift building to keep the wind out. The fire they lit that night offered comfort and kept the small space more than warm enough, especially since he and Hauk were forced to sleep close together.

The next morning went well enough. The food began tasting odd, though he knew that it was fine. One day old was nothing when it came to bread the way that Almalan baked it, and he doubted the preserves had gone off, judging by the way that Hauk devoured them. Tam knew he had to eat, though, and made sure to drink lots of water. Perhaps he had caught some stomach trouble from the spices in the preserved meat. This last winter, Dorena had ground some musty grain for bread, thinking it was good enough, and they had all puked for a day or so till the poison was out of them. He didn't have the tea that Dorena had made to get them to throw up, but at this rate he wouldn't need it.

The day wore on, and the brighter light in these thinner trees to the north of the town began to bother him. No doubt he'd spent much too long in the tunnel and his eyes had yet to adjust, considering that Sitat was often shadowed by the overhangs of the houses that leaned into the street. He almost wished he would throw up and get this over with. Hauk began glancing at him anxiously, but Tam smiled back at him. The traps were often empty, which saved them time, and he could tell they were beginning to circle back towards the town. He'd be all right once the sun went behind some clouds.

His headache was better after that, though he didn't like the look of the clouds. Hauk didn't either, judging by his expression. Tam wished there were houses or cabins around, he would rather stay in one tonight. The melted snow began to freeze and make their footing awkward as the wind began to whip up, and a few flakes spun in the air around them. Hauk led them off the trail to a thicker part of the forest—that was sensible enough.

They stopped under a huge old tree that seemed made for sheltering travelers, and it already had a fire-ring beneath it where the bracken had been cleared away. Tam began to shiver, though he was certain it wasn't *that* cold, and he was wearing his thickest cloak and travel clothing beneath it. He unloaded the pony anyway, with Hauk's help, though his gloved hands shook. Some firewood was already piled up near the fire-ring of stones, but Tam tried to gather more, as well as bracken for kindling. He brought extra when he saw that Mujuk liked it as well as she did the fodder he'd brought. There wasn't a stream nearby to fill a bucket for the pony, but maybe the grazing would be damp enough to ease her thirst.

Then Hauk patted him on the shoulder and pointed to a spot by the fire. "*Sit,*" the older man said. Tam didn't mind, though he hated not doing his fair share of the work. Nothing tasted good now, except for some of the preserves thinned out by warm water heated on their makeshift hearth. That went down all right, and didn't seem to bother his stomach.

He dozed off, though he couldn't find a comfortable spot. He was vaguely aware when Hauk put a blanket over him and helped him ease into a position where he wouldn't roll into the fire by accident. Late that night, Tam felt where Mujuk was lying down next to him...that was pretty good, actually.

Then he woke up all the way with a terrible headache this time. His hand flew up to shield his eyes from the light of the embers of the fire. *It's not very bright, it shouldn't hurt that much...*

Hauk said something, but Tam couldn't remember what his words meant. He coughed a little bit, and said "*Water...*"

He felt better once he'd drunk some, though he had to hold the little leather cup with both hands. Mujuk stood again, and looked mildly curious. Tam slowly got up and reached out to the pony for balance. "*Go?*" he said out loud, though his voice sounded raspy. He wished he was home again, though he didn't know where that was any more. He would give anything to see Randor or Stine again, or even Coris Mimn.

Hauk offered him some food. Tam shook his head, but even that hurt. He'd been sick before, but never quite like this, and never without people he knew around him.

The other man put him back to bed. Tameron drifted in and out of uneasy sleep. Once he awoke and Hauk was gone. He had both blankets on, though. That wasn't right, how was Hauk going to sleep? Then he drifted off again.

At first the dream seemed so real that he thought he was awake again. He felt much better and walked away from camp to take a leak. The sky glowed with stars and the brilliant light of the full moon, though he vaguely realized that the trees around their campsite blocked a clear view of the Elements' realm. But he was still happy he saw such beauty. "*Blessed Lady of the night, shine Your grace on me!*" Suddenly he realized that he was standing by the fire, and Hauk lay down asleep by it...and so did he, while Mujuk had her head down. The ground glittered with frost, though there hadn't been any here when they had set up camp.

Then he felt terribly alone as Hauk and the pony vanished. Yet the stars seemed so close that he almost felt he could reach out and touch them. "*...when all others are gone, we still remain...*" whispered a host of quiet voices in his mind. The pole star, *his* star, blazed up so brightly that it swallowed him. He felt as if he swam in the heart of the light with no pain, or perhaps flying—his arms felt like wings now, as he soared up into the light.

Suddenly he dropped back into darkness—at least, it seemed like darkness to him, even though rays of sunlight filtered down through the trees into their camp. Hauk shook his shoulder, and had a look of terror on his face.

Tam felt better than he had in the night. His blankets were soaked with sweat, and he was glad they were going to be back in town by tonight, or so he hoped. It was so frustrating not being to talk to anybody! He sat up and drank more water with preserves in it.

The dream began to fade from his mind as he slowly stood up and helped to pack the pony. He silently promised Mujuk all the grain the pony could eat once they were back at the inn. He felt achy in his joints, and his headache was beginning to come back, but knew that going back into town was the best thing he could do. The air felt thick and he had to force himself to move in it.

Hauk packed up the pony and said something in an urgent tone. Tam nodded wearily. The sooner they began, the better.

They trudged along towards Sitat. Tam had to stop to rest more than he liked. He tried to make it to the next trap in the line that they were checking before he had to sit down, but leaned on Mujuk more as the day wore on. He noticed how her head drooped as the day wore on, though. At their next stop, he looked around in the brush for something fallen he could use as a walking stick. Hauk seemed to realize what he needed, and helped to trim the long, stout branch so Tam could lean on it instead of the pony.

Tam worried about their pace. At this rate, it would be nightfall before they made it to the town gates.

What if they were closed when it became dark? Tameron began to push himself harder. Hauk cleared traps and dumped anything they caught in the game bag without taking time to re-scent them, and occasionally skipped one altogether.

It began to rain. Each drop had ice in it—Tam would almost rather be snowed on than feel the painful cold drops down the back of his neck. He shook with chill, but knew it would be hard to set a fire going in this weather to heat something warm. Then Hauk stopped for a bit, rummaged in his pack, and brought out a flask which he had Tam drink from.

Tam coughed, but the fire the drink brought felt good. They began to walk again, and Hauk helped him along with one arm and held the pony's lead with the other. Hauk kept talking to him, though Tameron understood only a few words. He already knew they had to hurry as the sky darkened, and with him being a stranger, he might not be let in at all if the guards thought he was sick.

They finally saw the lights of the town. Tam glanced up to the sky, and only a little light remained to the west. He had an idea, and rummaged through *his* pack. He pulled out one of his spare socks, and tied it around his left ankle. Then he found a small stone and wedged into the bottom of his boot. He gamely pretended to limp along.

Hauk grinned for a moment, and then pointed to the gate again. Tam remembered one of his lessons from Stine, his father's arms-mistress. "*Don't be too ready to call on the last of your strength. There's always a cost. But sometimes if you don't, you're dead anyway.*". Her dry, gruff voice echoed in his memory.

He chanted the little song to himself that he had learned worked for him to trigger what he had in reserve. That helped less than he thought. Then he pretended to himself that he was back in the labyrinth again, and he must make his way to the Giant's Sanctuary beneath Neyarmie Isle before the others found him, or die.

He stepped forward as if all his father's soldiers were behind him. For a moment or two, Hauk could barely keep up with him despite Tam's fake limp.

After nearly half a mile, he weakened again. The older man patted his shoulder, and then rushed ahead to shout at the guards on the gate. Tam tried to smile and wave at all of them as Hauk shouted and pointed at him, as if this was an ordinary day and he had turned his ankle wrong.

He had only the pony to brace him, and she was clearly tired, too. It wasn't far, though. Tam called out something and hoped they thought only the distance made him unintelligible. He pointed at his foot and the stick. If they let Hauk through and left him out... would he make it through the night? Maybe... he stopped for a moment, pulled out one of the beasts they'd trapped today, and waved it at them. The slowly-closing panels of the gate slowed, then stopped.

Tam did his chant again. There wasn't much left for him to draw on. It was just enough to keep him walking towards the gate while leading Mujuk. Then he pretended to collapse, though not much acting went into it, as if he couldn't stay on a bad foot any longer.

Hauk and one of the guards came back and helped him through the gate. Tam nodded his thanks, tried not to cough, and limped gamely along as the guards watched him. He let Hauk do all the talking for him.

At last they were inside the town. The guards departed to the gatehouse where no doubt a warm fire and something to drink awaited them. Tam let Hauk help him down the street and grimly tried to stay upright till the street before the gate was empty.

How odd... Tameron heard the cry of the great white owl of the north, as he had before. The sound filled his ears as he fell...

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