

TIGHTBEAM

#268

Nov. 2013

The Springboard of Ideas

INSIDE:

New Fiction

Lawrence R. Dagstine

Jeannie Warner

Reviews

Art!



deevad.deviantart.com

TIGHTBEAM

The Springboard of Ideas

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WE'VE SEARCHED DOZENS OF THESE FLOOR TILES FOR SEVERAL COMMON TYPES OF PHEROMONE TRAILS.

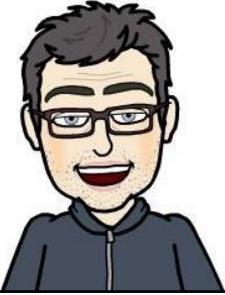
IF THERE WERE INTELLIGENT LIFE UP THERE, WE WOULD HAVE SEEN ITS MESSAGES BY NOW.



THE WORLD'S FIRST ANT COLONY TO ACHIEVE SENTIENCE CALLS OFF THE SEARCH FOR US.

Tightbeam (Hyperspace Tightbeam), No. 268, November 2013, ISSN 2329-4809. Published by The National Fantasy Fan Federation. A one-year subscription is \$18 in the United States and its possessions, payable in advance in U.S. funds. This issue was started Oct. 15, 2013, and completed on Oct. 20, 2013. The editor was David Speakman. The editor of the next issue is, again, David Speakman. Submissions may be emailed to him at cabal@n3fmail.com or via U.S. mail to: David Speakman, PO Box 1925, Mountain View CA 94042. All opinions herein are those of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of other members of N3F except as noted. **Submission deadline for the next issue of Tightbeam is December 15, 2013.** This non-commercial zine is published through volunteer effort.

Editor's Notes



All the leaves are brown...

As a kid in Indiana, I loved autumn for a few reasons: Yes, hard frosts kill off annoying pollen, but mostly it is the beginning of the holiday season that begins with Halloween (candy!) and moves into Thanksgiving (pie!) and Holi-

day TV specials (*Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer!*), then, finally, Christmas (presents! Two weeks of no school!).

But, as an adult, added to all of that, this time of year usually involves reflections and gauging expenses as we look back on the year and our assembled accomplishments and failures and look into our bank accounts to see just how giving we can afford to be this year.

It's a melancholy time for sweets and for bittersweets.

In that spirit, I present this issue of *Tightbeam*, the final issue of 2013. The art and fiction within this issue were chosen to reflect this seasonal theme of looking inward while acting outward.

The first original story of fiction is *Starship Hanoi*, by **Lawrence R. Dagstine**, a space-based reflection of humanity and what parts of our culture that inertia will drag along as we travel beyond our homeworld and into the stars. This is the author's first such appearance in our pages.

Our second story of original fiction this month is from **Jeannie Warner**, who wrote the very popular *Nursery Rhymes* in TB #266. She's back with *The Dark Between the Stars*, a reflective piece on how breaking terrestrial bonds affects an individual's sense of place in the universe.

Also in this issue: Book reviews by **Lee & JJ MacFadden** & **R-Laurraine Tutihasi** and movie reviews by me.

Keep getting your geek on,
David Speakman

ART CREDITS

Nick Deligaris
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2, 27

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1, 3, 8, 10, 11

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Robin Wouters
19, 20



Cover Art: "Watcher"
by David Revoy

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N3F Forum: Letters of Comment

The following letters of comment are correspondences received for both N3F publications, Tightbeam and TNFF, before October 16, 2013. All editing of correspondence is kept to a minimum - limited chiefly to the insertion of name callouts to alert readers to whom a section of the letter is addressed. Please email comments to:

cabal@n3fmail.com

2013.07.21

Ned Brooks

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TB #266: What a great "Alice" cover! The fiction was good too. The comic strip was the wrong end of the cow for me - I guess the art was supposed to be impressionistic, but it looked more like bad art that had been badly printed.

*(The cover was by up-and-coming artist David Revoy—he produced it as a entry into a contest a while back, then added it to his dis-cards pile afterward. I'm all for recycling, especially for something as excellent as that. Speaking of recycling, the strip you did not care for was a reprint of a mimeographed comic from 30 decades ago from the late **David Heath, Jr.** it's the last that I know of from him. —ed.)*

2013.07.21

Kent McDaniel

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Oh, man, in my last LOC, did I really write **Roger E. Gilbert**? Wow, unbelievable. The artist to whom I was referring is **Robert E. Gilbert**. Anyway, as I wrote, he was a popular fan artist from the Fifties through the Seventies, who died in 1993. Ten years after his death a huge trove of paintings and drawings by him surfaced, which a gallery in Alabama bought at auction, and which have only begun to really sell in the last year. Again, I have an article on

him posted at my

blog: www.kentmcdanielwrites.wordpress.com.

Other than my typo, I enjoyed the issue, with the review section being the issue's highlight for me. A wide selection of reviews, well written, with excellent layout.

David Speakman: I see you liked *Man of Steel*, David, and I've seen other good reviews of the movie written by people whose opinions I respect. Myself, I didn't care for it. I think it would've benefitted from cutting a minimum of thirty minutes from it, most of which should be from the interminable fight scenes. The Spectacle To Plot Ratio in the movie was way too high for my tastes. Fight scenes lose their impact and become tedious when they're so numerous and so looong. I'd think even adolescent boys might have thought it was all too much, but then again, probably not. The actors performed well when they were allowed to actually act, but their efforts were often lost in the shuffle.

*(I liked MoS. I am *not* a huge Superman fan to begin with ... and it was very loud and violent—but I was there, anyway, chewing up lots of popcorn and enjoying every minute of what I consider a great summer flick.—ed.)*

2013.08.16

Lloyd Penney

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Dear Neffers: Many thanks for issue 266 of Tightbeam, and it is finally time to make come comments on the issue at hand. A great Alice cover... it's like Oz in that so much creativity comes out of it.

Looking at the table of contents, you've now got a larger selection of locs. Good! Communication is at the heart of every letter of comment that a fanzine receives. More letters, everybody; it can be your newest N3F activity, but you should know that it is among the oldest of fan

activities. I hope the new digest size will work out...I will still get the .pdf version, but I expect that there are postage benefits.

(Yes, mailing costs about half as much as before.—ed.)

The fiction is great fun, too. *Nursery Rhymes* and *Darrell's Fault*, both interesting with a bit of a *Twilight Zone* tinge to them. There are so many specialized interests that could use the book treatment that **Jon Swartz** and **Lawrence Lowery** did for the Buck Rogers Big Little books. It may be the only way to encapsulate the interest for the ages, once the fandom itself may have moved on. I think it's a vital part of timebinding, and recording the history of fandom.

This may be a little short, but it's the communication that counts. Many thanks for this issue, and I'll be looking for more as time goes on.

(I agree wholeheartedly that documenting fanac is essential if we do not want this knowledge to be lost in the ages like the great works at Alexandria.—ed.)



2013.09.16

Sarah Harder

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(This recipe was submitted for last issue, but fell through the crack, It's included here as a LoC- ed.)

Fresh Flesh Zombie Spread

(Hot Artichoke & Cheese Spread)

1 can (14oz) artichoke hearts, drained & chopped
1 c. mayonnaise
1/2 c. grated Parmesan cheese
4 oz. (1 cup packed) shredded Swiss cheese
1 tsp. lemon juice
1/4 tsp. salt
1/4 tsp. pepper

Preheat oven to 300 degrees. Mix all ingredients together. Place in a buttered, small baking dish. Cover with foil. Bake 40 minutes (or 10 minutes in a microwave oven at 70% power).

Serve with crackers or bread for dipping.
Makes 8 servings.

2013.09.23

Gary Labowitz

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To the fans of N3F: A little advice based on a true memoir.

I was thinking the other day. About Fandom. I do my thinking on a regularly schedule part of each month, with the topic to be thought about selected from the current events or personal experience of the day my thinking is due. This happened last month when I received an e-mail with Tightbeam attached.

I've always had a unexplainable fondness for Tightbeam. I think it may be because I read so many of them back in the days when I was typing them on stencils. This Tightbeam struck me a couple of ways.

Firstly, it had a short novella in it from ... me! That was odd. I only remember loc's in the Tightbeams I was associated with; with, perhaps, some vague rambling about current Fandom and N3F tragedies, which were pretty common. Perhaps they still are. (Did you notice the clever use of "with with" in that last sentence. I enjoy that sort of word play.)

Secondly, it was only July 21, and it was the August issue. This struck me as odd, and backward. All the issues I remember came out in the month (or months) following the date on the

zine. That was the norm. So, perhaps something new has been going on while I wasn't looking. Or maybe, just maybe, I have hit a time warp. I suppose I'll start noticing that I'm paying my bills before they are due. That would be odder still.

Such ran my thinking. But it didn't stop there. I sank into a stupor of thinking about fans I had known, and became suddenly interested in knowing what happened to them. (Oh, Darrell filled me in on a number of them at a lunch we had together, but you don't really think I would have paid attention to him, especial while I was eating. I was just too overloaded with sensual data to process the facts which came thick and fast from him.)

So I did the next best thing ... Google. Googling is a wonderful invention. You type in names and find out that you have outlived most of your contemporaries. Perhaps they are not contemporaries anymore since they have reached a new status that I haven't managed yet. At some point in time we will become contemporaries again. Or maybe we will be decontemporaries, or something. Is there even a word for that concept? A good editor might know (Darrell?).

I was actually shocked at how many persons I could picture in my mind were no longer vital and sending loc's to Tightbeam. I guess you could say they have nothing more to say about Fandom. Yes, that would be it. Of course, I no longer have anything to say about Fandom either, since it's all a mystery to me. Who are these people, and what do they want?

That only leaves me with one option. Now, instead of being up to date and topical, I can only give advice. So here I go. "Be nice to me. You never know when I might come in handy."

Now, this advice doesn't just pop up out of nowhere, like planetary dust (and I might well ask, "Where does planetary dust come from?") but I won't. I think Ben Bova, or maybe Asi-

mov, came up with some answer that I have long forgotten. I only remember Ike saying once, "We are made of the dust of stars..." and then his voice trailed off. But he never said where they came from. Probably nuclear fusion, or something.)

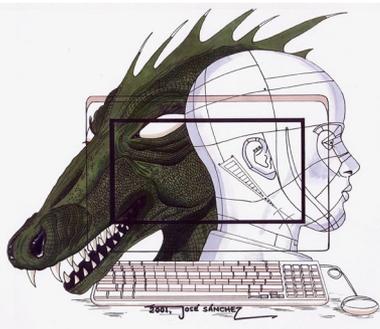
BTW, the above is a rather long parenthetical thought, don't you think? No extra charge.

Anyway, the nice advice to be nice came from somewhere, namely a remembrance I had while thinking about fans I knew and grew with. (Another aside: does anyone say "fen" anymore?)

The particular remembrance took place at a convention long ago and far away. I truly don't remember what and where it was, but it could have been in New York and could have been a Worldcon. Or maybe it was in Philadelphia, but I doubt it. It still could have been a Worldcon, of course. (Maybe it was in St. Louis.) Anyway, I was kicking around from place to place with **Andy Porter**. We were just "slumming" you know, from room to room. (And that sentence reminds me of a crazy event at a SFWA gathering; remind me some time and I'll tell you about that one.) Well,

m'ladies and sirs, Andy and I wandered into the N3F hospitality suite. There was a usual gaggle of fans (fen?) sitting around, some on chairs, some on the floor. And they were chatting away. It sounded like they were discussing science fiction (does anyone call it "stf" anymore?). We, having just arrived stood there looking and listening. I think it went through my head that **Janie Lamb** would amble up at any moment and greet us. I seem to recall she was good that way.

At that point, an old gentleman (we gave him the benefit of the doubt) wandered in alone to the same venue. He came in from another door, I recall, and Andy and I looked at him and he looked at us. Most of the fans (fen?) glanced up at him, too. We got the common impression that they weren't feeling very hospitable to



some old geezer that just stood there inside the doorway staring at them. He did look a little odd, with a stack of magazines under his arm. A moment or two passed, and then the fans (fen?) turned back to their discussion of whatever. The old man glanced over at us, nodded, turned, and left.

At that point Andy turned to me and said, “Well, that may be their last chance to have met and talked with John W. Campbell, Jr.” And as fate would have it, I think it was.

The moral is, of course, “Be nice to me. You never know when I might come in handy.”

*(This is, perhaps, my favorite LoC in my relatively short tenure as Official Editor of N3F. I can answer a few procedural questions. The August issue was, indeed, earlier than normal. With the wonders of modern technology, a complete zine can be edited and printed in a weekend. So, a submission deadline on the 15th means there is no problem getting an issue done, printed and in the mail by the 30th. I promised folks I would try to have all issues in the mail by the first week of the dated month. But, I had a conflict with the end of July—so I moved my schedule up by 2 weeks—hence the early August issue. As for the format change in Tightbeam—that was *all* my doing. True, TB started in 1960 as a letterzine—and by the mid-1980s when I first joined N3F, the LoCs had the zine at 36+ pages every other month. It was a vital tool for fen/fans to communicate with one another. Then, one day, about 10 years later, email arrived—and the utilitarian purpose of letterzines became obsolete. Eventually, Tightbeam stopped publishing as a separate zine for lack of content and was included in a quarterly TNFF as a lettercol. I promised myself that I would be editor one day and resurrect Tightbeam. [be careful what you ask for] And, upon being named OE, I quickly realized that a letterzine would have—at most 4 pages [including copious long-winded notes by me]. Then, I remembered what else was included in the letterzines of yore: everything from reviews, to comics, to recipes, and the occasional short story. N3F has always had an ability to attract writers and fannish makers of every stripe. So, I*

thought that the new Tightbeam should be genzine—with a literary zine focus on being a venue for amateur and fan-made art, fiction and essays. So, that’s what I have for you. I hope you like it. And—I promise that the Letters of Comment will still be here.—ed.)

2013.09.28

Angela Myers

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TB #267: I'm not much of a cook (note the conspicuous absence of recipes contributed by moi) but I found several in here I'm going to have to try! (Quick and easy? Chicken, cola and ketchup make teriyaki sauce? I'm on that like a duck on a June bug!)

(Yeah, that recipe raised more than one eyebrow in my house. Please let me know how it turns out. I can tell you that the other recipe that calls for cola—the Space Debris Cake—is really delicious, if weird to make.—ed.)

2013.10.04

David Amato #367-665

MCI-H

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David Speakman: I wrote you one time a while back, and I asked to be added to the Fanzine Appreciation Society. The listing in the latest N3F (*TNFF 72.5*) doesn't show my name. I would like to be added, please. I think my letter may have been in with the drawing I sent, in a manila envelope.

(Yep, you did—and I do not know why I didn't add you last ish. Hmm. Likely dain bramage from too many SFTV series marathons. You will be listed in the Dec. ish —ed.)

I thought that **David Saavedras'** cover art was outstanding on the latest N3F, by the way.

(He actually did that as fan art for a video game, believe it our not. That said, I believe that I need to re-think the title page of the TNFFs, being that the N3F logo tends to overpower the zine's actual name: The National Fantasy Fan. ... Hrm...—ed.)

Original Fiction

Lawrence R. Dagstine



The wet season was supposed to be approaching, and the city was hot and humid and absolutely stifling. At times we found ourselves in the path of the solar flares. In addition to that, three days a week the androids cut the power, plunging Hanoi into a soporific, heat-soaked darkness. Even the ancient paddle fans stopped turning. All energy remained in the rockets, which surrounded every side of this once magnificent city, now floating millions of miles above an inferno of a world we know only in pictures and, for the old citizens, through memory.

Half the population of Hanoi—now better known as the Vietnam Life Cycle—took this as just another indication of the inefficiency of the Vietnamese government, replacing humans with machines, refusing help from neighboring starships like the U.S. or China. An entirely new wave of communists couldn't even provide enough fusion or old-fashioned electricity to keep the city going. They insisted that they did not possess the reserves. The other half of the population believed just as firmly that the androids were programmed a certain way, that it was a way of punishing them for being on the wrong side centuries earlier. I figured there was a little truth in both theories.

I had waited until we were far enough away from the sun's rays. The inferno died down from a broil to a boil before I went out. There was oxygen meters every two blocks, boxes that

read numbers. The numbers read 68. Stable. As I headed back toward the hotel the streetlights came on, casting weak puddles of light at irregular intervals. I used to think traffic aboard the Starship New York was bad, until I was leaving for the molecular tramway at Beijing, where the traffic stops completely, sometimes for hours on end, often to let the old people and district sellers sort themselves out. Hanoi, it could be said, with its strict laws of recycling and use of ancient vehicles, added a whole other dimension to interspatial traffic. Not that it was crazy or congested as New York; it was just more lethal.

There were about two-dozen or so working traffic lights in Hanoi, only a few discernible traffic cops, and millions of 21st century Hondas with upgrades all going at warp speed. Very rarely the traffic stopped for pedestrians. You had to plunge into the midst of that mayhem and hope it changed its pattern and weaved around you as you worked your way across. Most of the time it worked, but it was frightening. Factor in a few hundred thousand bicycles and cyclos, women with pole baskets and rice jugs, and a few horse-drawn carts and you had traffic that was not only uncontrolled but uncontrollable.

For me it was an accident waiting to happen. Unfortunately, I could see it coming—and was powerless to stop it. I was on my way back one day from sightseeing in a gray-bearded man's

cyclo. He was pedaling leisurely along what was once Ham Nghi Street, in the homestretch, en route to the hotel. Ahead of us another cyclo driver was likewise pedaling methodically down the street. I saw one of his cheap rubber thongs fall off and float to the ground. I saw that driver ahead of us give a jerk, then wheel over to go back and retrieve it. That sent my cyclo into an invasive action, which sent us directly into the path of a speeding Honda that had come up barreling behind us. It crashed smack into my cyclo and sped off down the street. There was a confusing jumble, and I heard a loud cr-a-a-a-ack! as something hard hit the pavement.

It was my head.

The next thing I knew, I was being helped to my feet. Blood was running down my face and spilling onto my dress. I could dimly hear a roaring sound, and the way my ears were ringing I figured it was my brains splashing onto the street. Then I realized the entire neighborhood had turned out. At first there was fear in their eyes, then they started shouting and yelling at one another. After all, there was an American on their starship! And she was bleeding! All over the street! I wondered if all this hoopla was because of the androids who watched from sentry-like towers above.

The two cyclo drivers were a little bloodied. The gray-bearded one had cut his toe; the other driver had a gash on his leg. They, too, were also frozen with horror. They stood there gaping. Meanwhile, the other passenger was trying to chase down some ducks that had slipped out of her grip when we all went down together, and I was rummaging in my bag for a rag. A woman from a nearby shop came rushing through the crowd with a long armload of cotton, which she held out to me. We bowed to each other, and I could have sworn I saw one of the androids peeking out from the doorway of her shop. I remember wondering just what she and her family would sleep on that night, since I obviously now had their sleeping mat stuck to my head. I had certainly provided just the break needed in an otherwise dull and ordinary day, because by this time the crowd was enor-

mous.

There were whispers among the neighbors and they were forced to make a decision: the American woman will go to the hospital. I kicked and screamed and protested, but my benefactors would have none of it. My self-appointed Florence Nightingale changed the mattress on my head, and we all shoved off to the nearest emergency room. Our group included the other cyclo driver and his passenger, who by this time had rounded up all her ducks. There was nothing wrong with her, but she cheerfully insisted on accompanying us, obviously not wanting to miss a minute of fun. But I had the feeling she was forced to come with us, and that I was being watched.

We arrived at the emergency room—two cyclo drivers, a woman with an armload of ducks, my own personal medical technician, a small delegation of eyewitnesses and oh, yes—me. The hospital staff was astounded, but as comical as it all seemed they swung into action. As for the hospital itself, it was old and quiet and dark. In fact, there was not a light on in the whole place except one, but the lack of power—or “recycling”, as the androids called it—only served to give it a cool atmosphere. Long exterior corridors embraced the inner workings of the hospital: the examination rooms, wards, supply rooms, operating rooms spoke of another century. The floors were tiled and mildew crept up the walls, where hospitals on other starships were advanced and made of the newer alloys. I was ushered into an examination room, where members of my entourage took turns giving the doctor a spirited account of my immediate medical history.

“Just out of curiosity,” I asked the woman from the shop when they finally finished telling the doctor in their native language what happened, “what did you tell them?”

“Others don’t know,” she said. “I tell him you fall down, tourist go boom, much blood.” That seemed to cover it.

The first thing the doctor in charge of my case did was assure me that the water he was using to clean up the dried blood and cotton stuck to my head was distilled. It came from a

special faucet and box on the wall. Like much of the energy in Hanoi, the androids controlled the precipitation and water supply. If the starship needed rain, only the androids would provide the rain. If the starship needed drinking water, only the androids provided drinking water. I wondered what all this recycling was for. Then I noticed the doctor's gloves he put on came from what appeared to be a miniature clothes rack standing on a table over in the corner, only instead of coats and hats, it was festooned with rubber gloves. Then I realized—first with shock, then with dismay and, finally, with sadness—the hospital's examination gloves were not disposable. They had been washed. They were stuck on that rack to be dried and reused.

Thankfully, I didn't require any stitches. It was just your basic head wound that bled like crazy. As for medicine, I dug around my bag and came up with a tube of Mercurochrome. At first, there was a look of awe. Then there was a rush of medical personnel when they saw it. Likewise for the painkillers, the topical antiseptic, the dissolvable antibiotics and bandages that were also floating around in there. They saw I traveled light, but tourists are certainly well stocked in case of an emergency. Finally I took out a small pen-shaped booster shot to plant inside my arm. This would surely prevent infection.

"No!" the doctor said. He held his hand up to a small metallic device in his ear. It wasn't a hearing aid. "I get in trouble. It is regulation we give you clean shot."

"I understand," I said, "but everybody carries these around these days. It prevents viruses, cleanses the body, and protects the cells from—"

"No. In Hanoi we give you preventive medicine." This doctor was very serious about it. He held his hand up to his ear again. "I have right shot. I must give you. It won't hurt."

"Well, all right. If you say it'll work. I mean what harm could—" By the time I tried finishing my sentence he had stuck an inoculation laser into my neck. "Oww!"

"Sorry. You get better now. Wound clear up

faster."

I grabbed my neck. "If you say so."

The inoculation laser was just one of very few things I had seen on my trip to the Starship Hanoi that was of this time period.

Then he just said to lay back and relax for a while. I could even close my eyes if I wanted to. My vision was blurry, but I felt too weak to complain about it. As I turned my head to the right the other cyclo passenger had misplaced one duck, but someone cornered it in another examination room across the hall. I was nice and relaxed. As my entourage prepared to leave, the doctor whispered in my ear, "Never get sick in Hanoi." Then he paused and held my head, gently putting it down on the table. "I give you mild sedative. Think nice thoughts, like big forest or pretty stream."

All life was going on outside: cars, cyclos, people. I could hear it, but I could not see it. I could not see the Earth or feel the trees, because there was no more Earth. No more trees.

A moment later I was asleep.

When I woke up, I did not remember much. I looked around and saw that I was in a small



white room. The overhead lights were dim and far off. My eyesight had also returned to normal. Everything in the room was old and scratched or bent or battered in some way. But it was oddly comforting, too. The women doctors were reassuring as they calmly went about their business of bringing new babies into this universe. It was only then that I realized I stumbled into some kind of maternity ward.

"You okay?" a doctor asked anxiously. "You look dizzy." She came over and put her hands solicitously on my shoulder. She had left a woman in mid-push, over on a nearby delivery table.

I assured her I was fine. But I couldn't help myself. The more this woman pushed, the more I wheezed and whistled. The more she grunted and groaned, the more I panted and sucked in air and blew it out again. I was making so much noise that even the pregnant woman raised her head and looked at me with a puzzled look on her face.

Finally things reached their normal crescendo. There was a last-minute hustle and bustle, a piercing shout, and then some excited confusion. There was a general air of jubilation in the room as the doctor held up a brand new baby boy, who proceeded to yell and turn red. I was as excited as everyone else at the sight of the mother's ecstatic face and that tiny baby boy. And as I took one last look at them—and at all the blood and all those other precious bodily fluids—I felt my own stomach and fainted dead away on the floor.

The next thing I knew, I was being helped to my feet by an army of concerned healthcare professionals. It was very important that I was all right—crucial! As my eyes focused, I could see the boy's mother. She was stranded, alone and abandoned on that delivery cart. She held a



newborn baby in one arm, and with the other she was holding herself up so she could look at me. Her eyes spoke apologetically. She had a look of absolute disbelief on her face. The doctors were propping me up on a stool in the corner, leaving the mother and her newborn to fend for themselves. All that was important was me.

One of the pediatricians gave me some water and offered to take me on a tour of the neonatal unit. The crowd of nurses and doctors dispersed, and with a flick of her arm she was gesturing to a large room overflowing with premature infants. They were lying in incuba-

tors that looked as if they belonged in a museum.

“Look at those incubators,” I cried angrily. “They’re two hundred years old. I have remedial technology and equipment much greater than this back home!” Energy was being preserved, I was told. Some of those premature newborns lay two and three to an incubator, stacked there like tiny dolls in a child’s playroom. There was only one light on, and most of the incubators weren’t even plugged into a generator. They appeared to be there simply as storage bins. I looked more closely at those tiny, wizened infants. Their I.D. tags were little pieces of cloth tied to their birdlike wrists, their names scratched in with pens. They were all wearing paper towels instead of dissolvable diapers. The environment was archaic and crude. I counted at least fifty babies in that premature nursery, while across the hall, in intensive care, there were at least a hundred more. I was told there were a few others down the hall.

I was both appalled and moved by what I was seeing, but after my trip to Hanoi, I couldn’t wait to get back to my hotel, pack, and transport out of there. “Why are there so many preemies?” I asked.

“We have terrible problems here in Hanoi.” By this time we were sitting downstairs, drinking good old-fashioned tea. “The androids salvage the necessary resources and won’t let us advance. They are up to something which they say is for the good of the starship. We have no choice but to believe them. The starship is broke. These women are so uneducated and so poor, they don’t get the proper care when they’re pregnant, so their babies are born early. Most women don’t even know to ask for hospitalization or care. And of course”—she shrugged—“there are drugs and prostitution. Some things never change.”

“Yes,” I nodded, “some things never do.”

Early 23rd century Hanoi, for all its reeducation facilities, never stamped out drug abuse or prostitution. Detox centers were unheard of, just as it was unheard of to ask for permission when it came to abundant amounts of water or

electricity or fuel. A rocket-powered chunk of a city with no funding and no help from outside the Life Cycle. And as the doctor further explained, malnutrition and undernutrition. Abysmal prenatal care and lack of funds throughout the cycle meant thousands of premature infants flooded hospitals that were not equipped to deal with them.

Often they picked up more than malnutrition or drug addictions. In a city cruising amongst the stars that hadn't even stamped out polio, where human life was usually taken for granted, where people still died of tuberculosis and malaria, I wondered what happen next. I shut my eyes. I couldn't even imagine the pain and suffering. I could have blamed it on manmade machines watching and salvaging from above, refusing to share what belonged to the people, but for now I blamed it on overpopulation.

I visited the mother and her baby the next day, just before I was ready to leave Hanoi and just before they were to be discharged. There was reason to celebrate. They had applied for documentation to leave the starship and it was ready. They were all just waiting to be put on a molecular transport like myself. All so this healthy newborn of hers would grow up on one of the many American starships.

"We thank you so much, Mama," the mother said as I helped the pediatrician load them into a cyclo. Then the mother held up her baby.

"We call him your name," she insisted. Oh, my God, I thought. Is this poor boy going to arrive aboard a new starship with a name like Miriam?

"We call him My, for short."

My. Well, I was certainly relieved. And puzzled. I allowed as how that was a very pretty name, but still I was confused.

"Him name My. It mean 'American.'"

Yes, it was a very pretty name.

The sponsors would meet them at the gateway and help them through those first few weeks in their new starship: finding a state to live, enrolling in language and technology-training courses, maybe finding entry-level work aboard a station.

It was time for me to leave. Sometimes you

feel it in your bones. Sometimes you smell it in the processed air. I could see it: the cyclos were disappearing. Or just about.

In Hanoi they have a philosophy; we often have only attitude. Aboard this starship I saw strength of will and the grace of spirit that allowed people to continue to celebrate the most precious belief of all—life. Perhaps that was why the androids were necessary and functioned the way they did. Preservation.

I began to look homeward. That really made me stop dead in my tracks and think about these people. I could only imagine the complicated and uncertain future the Starship Hanoi would face as it marked its path across the universe.

THE AUTHOR

As a child, Lawrence Dagstine read only the finest science fiction authors and knew only two horror authors, Stephen King and Clive Barker. Then, in 2004, he discovered Charles Grant's anthologies (followed by F. Paul Wilson, Mort Castle, Hugh B. Cave, and many others), and his slow transition to the dark side took place. He still writes in many genres, and since the late 90s he has had hundreds of short stories appear in the small presses. He has appeared multiple times in such publications as *Jupiter*, *Tales of the Talisman*, *Nova Science Fiction*, *OG's Speculative Fiction*, *Atomjack*, *Steampunk Tales*, *Withersin*, *The Willows* and *Aoife's Kiss*. His older works include *Visitation Rights* (Damnation Books) and the collection *Fresh Blood* (Sam's Dot Publishing). His Ebooks and novellas include *A Child Weeps in Moscow*, *The King of Trumpeters*, *Family Reunion*, and he has recently been contracted for two collections. He collects and reviews video games, loves historical non-fiction, and watches *Doctor Who* and *The Walking Dead*. You can visit him at: www.lawrencedagstine.com

RE: The Review Section

Unless otherwise indicated, the reviews editor compiles and writes the review section. Members of the N3F are invited and encouraged to submit reviews, preferably by email, although postal mail will be accepted. If you send a review by email and do not hear back within a reasonable length of time, please write to check on its status. Publishers: We are especially interested in receiving new books to consider for review. **Heath Row, P.O. Box 372, Culver City, CA 90232; kalel@well.com.**

Editor: **Heath Row (HR)**. Contributors: **Lee and J.J. MacFadden (LJMJ)**, **David Speakman (DS)**, and **R-Laurraine Tutihasi (RLT)**.

Books

7G by **Debbie Kump**
(World Castle Publishing, 2011)

This is a science fiction novel geared toward young adults. I wouldn't recommend it for anyone younger because it deals with issues of life and death. The main characters are in college or just starting out their careers.

Alyssa Kensington has joined the Navy after high school and has been assigned to a submarine that is testing some equipment. Erik Weber is a college sophomore. In the book's near-future setting, technological innovations work through lenses worn directly over the eye. Software is downloaded automatically from a central broadcasting point. The people in the book's universe don't seem to have heard of beta testing, but, of course, beta testing is no guarantee. A fatal programming glitch in the latest release



of the operating software has dire consequences that our two lead characters must deal with. It's an exciting and gripping story. The novel screams for a sequel, and I hope one is forthcoming. (RLT)

Chicory Up by **Irene Radford**
(DAW, 2012)

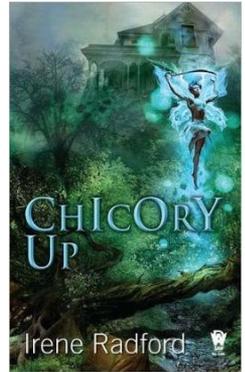
We usually enjoy books from DAW, and we usually like books about the fey folk. But we were disappointed in this book.

The pixies in this book are meant to help kids get through adolescence, the hardest time in their lives. However, pixies are starting to fight each other rather than help children, even though there hasn't

been a war amongst pixies for as long as anyone can remember. Pixie marriage treaties ensure peace; all marriage treaties between the valley and ridge tribes have been broken, forming a rift between the pixies.

There are also human characters in the story, some of which are aware of the pixies. Mabel Gardiner, a dispatcher for the police station, has pixies spying on people so that she always knows what's going on in the town. Then there's Thistle, who used to be a pixie but is now human, having been exiled from the pixies. Haywood Wheatland is half faery and half pixie, and he's causing all manner of trouble.

The plot of *Chicory Up* might be interesting, but we were too distracted by the immature writing to really notice. It's a bit hard to follow, and we found that we weren't really interested in what happened to the characters. We were unimpressed. (LJMJ)



***Discount Armageddon*, by Seanan McGuire**
(DAW, 2012)

The first in a new series by the author of the October Daye novels, *Discount Armageddon* is a new take on urban fantasy.

Verity Price is part of a family of cryptozoologists—people who study and protect humanity from creatures whose existence has yet to be proven by science: “monsters” such as yeti and dragons (although dragons are said to be extinct).

Verity has a job waitressing at Dave's Fish and Strips to pay the rent—but she really wants to be a ballroom dancer. Officially, she's in New York to document and assist the city's cryptid community.

And she's doing fine at that—until another cryptozoologist shows up. His name is Dominic DeLuca, and he's part of the Covenant, a group who believe that all cryptids should be destroyed. Verity's family broke from the Covenant generations ago and have been hiding from them ever since.

Then someone starts killing cryptids—and it isn't Dominic. Add to that the fact that there might be a dragon under the city, and you have a recipe for disaster, especially as Verity and Dominic start to fall for each other.

Apart from the cool fight scenes in this book, there's a lot of information on the various cryptids Verity meets, as well as a lot of humor—particularly where the Aeslin mice are concerned. There's a group of them living in Verity's apartment, and they thrive on rituals and shouting 'Hail!' at every opportunity. Note: strong language and sexual situations. (LJMM)

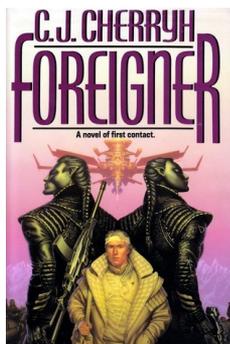
***Foreigner*, by C.J. Cherryh**
(DAW, 1994)

The first in a long-running series about Bren Cameron, a human translator on an alien world, *Foreigner* hits the ground running. It

begins with an assassination attempt on Bren, and only gets more interesting from there as Bren is shuffled off to a remote and quite ancient dwelling where no human has ever set foot.

In this book, we are introduced to several key characters who will return again and again throughout the series, among them Tabini, Bren's superior and the leader of the Western Association of the atevi; Banichi and Jago, Bren and Tabini's security (read: trained assassins); and wily Ilisidi, Tabini's grandmother.

The action is paralleled by rich characterization and a well-developed alien culture and world. Few writers can create the vivid universes that C.J. Cherryh is capable of creating, and her work truly shines in this novel. The angle of seeing the atevi through the eyes of the only human allowed on that side of the strait is a clever one, and added to that is the unusual job Bren has as translator between the atevi and the human population on the island of Mospheira. Note: mild language. (LJMM)



***The Iron King*, by Julie Kagawa**
(Harlequin Teen, 2010)

This book is the first in a series about a teenage girl named Meghan Chase, whose 4-and-a-half year old brother, Ethan, is kidnapped by the fey and replaced with a changeling. Meghan, along with her best friend, Robbie (who is not what he seems) sets out to find her lost brother, travelling to Faeryland, also known as Nevernever.

Along the way, Meghan travels through the treacherous Wyldwood, which is disappearing



due to human disbelief. She also meets Grimal-kin, a Cait Sidhe who comes to her aid in return for an unnamed favour. It is dangerous, Meghan learns, to owe the fey anything . . .

There are two Courts of fey: the Seelie and Unseelie. The Seelie are the Summer Court and are ruled by King Oberon and Queen Titania. The Unseelie are the Winter Court and are ruled by Queen Mab. Mab's youngest son, Ash, has hunted Meghan, but the two of them are attracted to each other.

Then Meghan discovers there's a third Court of fey, the Iron Fey, and things really start to get interesting. This promises to be a good series, and the idea of the Iron Fey is intriguing and unusual, bringing the world of Faery into the modern age. (LJJM)

***Let Them Eat Stake*, by Sarah Zettel**
(Signet, 2012)

This is the second in a series about chef Charlotte Caine and her Manhattan restaurant, Night-life. Charlotte caters to both “daybloods” (humans) and “nightbloods” (vampires). Human herself, she's dating Brendan Maddox, a warlock, and is interested in vampire Anatole Sevarin.

But Charlotte's love life isn't the only thing that's complicated. She's catering the first witch-vampire wedding she's ever heard of, and her executive chef, Oscar, is not only refusing to work for the wedding, he won't let any of his staff work for the wedding, either.

Then Oscar is discovered dead. Charlotte takes it upon herself to find out who's responsible, and puts herself in harm's way in the process. She is sure of one thing: The possession of a certain powerful artifact may be at the heart of what's going on.

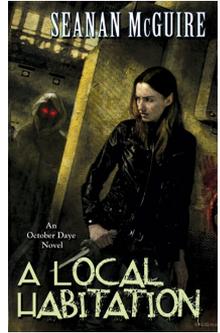
This is a good book, and we look forward to trying the rest of the series. There's some humor, and the characters are interesting; what's



more, the combination of vampires and chefs is an unusual pairing for a mystery. (LJJM)

***A Local Habitation*, by Seanan McGuire**
(DAW, 2010)

The second in the *October Daye* series, *A Local Habitation* finds October “Toby” Daye on what she considers a milk run: going to Tamed Lightning (a fae county) to find out why her liege's niece, January, isn't returning his calls. Toby takes with her Quentin, a page, so he can learn from her.



But the pair soon find out that the milk run isn't as simple—or as harmless—as all that. There's a murder at Tamed Lightning soon after they arrive, and it isn't the first.

No one's talking, however. It takes some time for Toby to even find January, and even she acts like she's hiding something. To complicate matters further, January doesn't trust that Toby is whom she says she is. Her phone calls to her uncle, she says, have never been returned.

Still more unsettling is the fact that neither Toby nor Quentin are able to read the dead's blood. As Daoine Sidhe, they should be able to gather memories from it by tasting it, but they get nothing. And the night-haunts, who normally take away the bodies of dead fae, aren't taking these.

This is a good mystery with fascinating characters and McGuire's fluid storytelling. The fae in this series are based on real legends but have McGuire's stamp all over them. (LJJM)

***The Wild Ways*, by Tanya Huff**
(DAW, 2011)

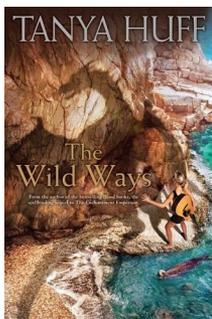
Charlie Gale is part of the Gale family, whose members can alter reality with the charms they weave. Charlie is a rare Wild Power, the extent of whose powers are as yet unrealized. She's wild in other ways, too; she has

sex with her married cousin, Allie, and travels between worlds.

When Charlie finds out a selkie rookery is endangered, she sets out to help, with the aid of Jack, a 14-year-old Dragon Prince who's finding it hard to be a normal teenage boy. But helping the selkies isn't going to be easy; Charlie's Auntie Catherine, another Wild Power, is against them.

The second in a series, *The Wild Ways* can be enjoyed without having read the first book—but we wouldn't recommend it. Huff doesn't explain certain things, at least not to our satisfaction, and one would hope she explains them more fully in the first installment, *The Enchantment Emporium*. Still, this proved an entertaining read, and you might do well to pick up the first one just to have more of Huff's writing to read.

One thing we liked about this book in particular was the use of selkies as a focal point in the plot; selkies are seldom, if ever, used in modern fiction, and Huff's take on them suits the old legends. Note: strong language. (LJMJ)



film. Still, it is well worth a rental or on Netflix as a Saturday afternoon flick when there is nothing else to do. (DS)

***Apartment 1303* (2012)**

[R] *Language, Violence*
Bad acting. Bad direction. Not scary. Huge plot holes. Bad film. This is a haunted house story set in an urban apartment complex. Every single person in this film either overacts or acts badly—except for Cory Sevier, who plays the boyfriend of the first victim. The main star of the movie is Mischa Barton, who plays troubled, underemployed Lara Slate, daughter of pop star, Janet Slate, played by an overacting Rebecca De Mornay. The main flaw with this movie is Barton—who cannot act her way out of a paper bag. I was actually cheering for the ghost to kill her by the end of this film. Not recommended. (DS)



Movies

***After Earth* (2013)**

[PG-13] *Disturbing Images*

Starring Will Smith and his son, Jaden, in 100 minutes of daddy issues. Aside from that, the concept is interesting, if uninspired. Set in a post-apocalyptic Earth that is not hospitable to human life, a man and his son crash land and need to find a way to survive. Almost every part of this film is top-notch, from the sets to the special effects. But it suffers from a lack of soul. Jaden did not inherit his father's gravitas or ability to carry a



***Extracted* (2012)**

[R] *Language*

I love finding low-budget films with great writing and acting. The premise of this film is that a scientist, played by Sasha Roiz (*Grimm*, *Caprica*), develops a technology that allows two people to synch—with one being an observer who can go into and share another person's memories—and display those observations on a computer monitor for all to see. In a test case, using the technology on a murder suspect who claims to be innocent, something goes terribly wrong (of course) and the scientist is stuck in the brain of the convict, leaving his own body in a coma, and he must find a way out. The writing is excellent, the acting is flawless, and, despite the low budget, the special effects are pretty darn good, too. I highly recommend this film. (DS)



***Insidious* (2010)**

[PG-13] *Frightening images*

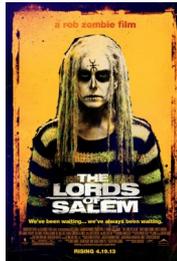
I resisted watching this film for a long time because it just looked bad. But, based on the rave reviews of my niece, I relented and watched it. I am glad I did. I love a good ghost story—if it is good with no predictable cliché crutches. And this one fit the bill. It manages to be moody and scary without being disgusting. The story revolves around a family whose little boy is haunted and as the onion layers peel back, the haunting is deeper than first appearances suggest. The actors, especially Patrick Wilson, Rose Byrne, Barbara Hershey, and Lin Shaye give honest performances with no clichés in sight. (DS)



***Lords of Salem* (2012)**

[R] *Violent sexual content; graphic nudity; Language; Drug use*

Rocker-turned-horror-director Rob Zombie attempts to make an art film. It is more of a messy conceit than art. The director's wife, Sheri Moon Zombie, plays Heidi Hawthorne, a local DJ who is haunted by a mysterious recording in a small New England town with a dark history of satanic witchcraft as a series of deaths strike women who are descendants of the original settlers. The premise is interesting; the execution is infuriating. By the end of the film, I was convinced that the entire movie was made solely so that the director could film one scene of an anti-Madonna standing on a pile of dead, naked women. Not recommended. (DS)



***Oblivion* (2013)**

[PG-13] *Action violence, , Language*

What we learn in the first few minutes of the movie: After humanity wins war with an alien race, Tom Cruise is on a mission with a

partner to harvest resources from a dying, inhospitable Earth to supply the human colony on Titan. After he crashes on the planet, he finds out the world is not what it seems. This film is nicely shot and well directed. But it's a big shaggy dog tale of a movie that is not resolved in a satisfying way in the third act. This is only for Tom Cruise or Morgan Freeman fans. Every else, I recommend seeing the 2009 film, *Moon*, starring Sam Rockwell and directed by Duncan Jones. It is close to being the same story—but it is done much better. *Oblivion*, however is not recommended. (DS)



***Pacific Rim* (2013)**

[PG-13] *Intense action; Violence*

This movie, co-written and directed by Guillermo del Toro, is a piece of cinematic genre history because it is the first big budget mecha movie. I did not see it in the theaters. Instead, I waited until it was available to be viewed at home. I have many friends who saw it and really like this film, so I gave it a try. The good news is that it was not as bad as I thought it would be. The dialogue was pretty good and some of the supporting actors were superb (along with some great cameos). The story is set in the near future where Earth is being invaded via an interdimensional portal located deep in the Pacific. This was a decent action film with decent character development. That said, the story was weighed down with a few lazy clichés and a predictable love story ending. But if the idea of watching people climb into big fighting robots and using those robots to kill monsters that come out of the sea to attack cities (a la *Godzilla*) does not appeal to you, then you will not like this film. That said, compared to any of the *Transformers* movies, this is freaking

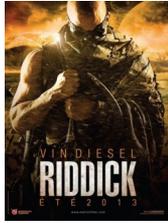


Shakespeare. It is recommended as a popcorn movie. (DS)

Riddick (2013)

[R] *Strong violence; Language; Sexual Content*

A decent boy and his dog space opera action adventure ruined by blatant sexually violent misogynistic dialogue that was so bad, I half-expected that the screenplay was written by the staff of *The Onion*. About 30 minutes into this film, I decided it was a comedy and laughed my way through it until the end. So, the end verdict is that this was either a brilliant commentary on the appalling way women are treated in modern science fiction and action movies, or it was just atrociously bad. I think it was just bad. Not recommended unless you are a fan of so-bad-it's-funny movies. (DS)



This is the End (2013)

[R] *Crude, Sexual Content; Pervasive drug use; Language; Violence*

Is this the best Hollywood satire, end-of-the-world gross-out stoner comedy ever made? Yes. Then again, it is the only one. Believe it or not, the idea of this film started out as a sequel to the murder-caper stoner comedy, *Pineapple Express*, starring Seth Rogen, James Franco, Danny McBride, and Craig Robinson. I can only imagine that the guys got together, smoked a bowl and decided, instead to make a buddy comedy, where they all play themselves and skewer the fake culture of Los Angeles and how fame turns otherwise decent folks into A-List a-holes. All the celebrities in this film play themselves—well, a heightened characterized version of themselves. There is slapstick blood, gore, and lots of drug use. The special effects are decent and the direction and editing is tight. But multiple generational references that are



essential for the viewer to be “in” on the joke probably means there is little here for people born before 1970, unless they are pop culture junkies and are potheads. (DS)

Twixt (2011)

[R] *Bloody violence*

This was one of the most pleasant surprises I’ve had in a while. A witch and ghost horror-comedy story written and directed by Francis Ford Coppola. I say this is a must-view for writers. A down-on-his-luck writer travels to a small town to hawk his pulp novel gothic horror romance books and finds inspiration for his next novel in the wicked little town. Superb performances by Val Kilmer, Bruce Dern, Elle Fanning, and Ben Chaplin (as the spirit of Edgar Allen Poe). A wonderful little film that is surprisingly refreshing. (DS)



World War Z (2013)

[PG-13] *Intense frightening zombie scenes*

Brad Pitt vs. fast zombies. Inspired by the novel of the same name. Brad Pitt plays a Heinlein-esque scientist-as-hero U.N. investigator in what appears to be a prequel to the novel. Many parts of this movie are good. This is probably a film that horror fans who do not like zombie films can stomach. Some of the flaws are in the science, but you just have to turn off your critical brain functions and go along for the ride—it is a rollercoaster of a film. The direction and acting are top notch, as is the pace. This film is not a horror classic, but it is a solid effort and worth the time if you do not mind the violence, gore, and a near-sexual assault. (DS)





It is cold in the halls of basalt, drifting through space; especially near the heart of the vessel with tons of rock between separating me from the light waves exploding out of the stars. There are days when nothing warms my hands, leaving them aching. Or are they nights? It is all one in deep space. That's what the fools of the Church never understood. There is no day. No night. Only space. Anything else is clinging to dirt and rocks, denying our birthright of expanding sentience in the stars.

I was once married to the times and seasons, fighting endlessly to regulate myself to the turn of a new planet, of a new assignment on a new world. The space lag could last for days, of adjusting from a shipboard schedule into whatever passed for light and darkness exchanges on the colony worlds. Weeks on a binary system destroyed my sleep schedule until I adjusted to the rhythm of it. I never thought of it then as being unnatural, of the notion that we held our own internal timekeepers within us and our own rhythms of sleeping and waking. Breath and heat, borrowed from the universe to return to it one day.

Now it is simple. There is then, and there is

now. I live in the now. And in what will be.

I reach the nerve center of our vessel; a demi-bowl overhead arching many paces across, with thin red veins in the rock. Sparks drift from my fingers as I summon lights, a spilling glow answering from crystals embedded into the walls and ceiling. A silver pool rests in the center, and I settle down beside it.

With a wave of my hand, the water starts to glow and I pull into vision the stars outside our vessel. Beneath my fingers, ripples form into stars, a nearby nebula, bright colors vibrant against the black of space. I smile, and dip my fingers into the water over the brightest of the colors, concentrating. There is power in the creation of new stars, the very creation of matter in the end an energy exchange. Bits of dark matter drift along and between the more measurable kind – the ship is sensitive to their gravitational pull. We absorb dark energy in a more accelerated fashion than the universal timeline had intended, and the ship's heart hums with pleasure in response to the influx.

A prickling along the edge of my awareness lifts my fingers out of the pool. A nebula is merely a small snack, after all. We are on our way to a nearby system's suns, a binary with only four planetary bodies. Lots of detritus

though – I can feel the ship shuffling off the asteroid tide along the remote edge of the system's orbital pull. As we feed from the dark energy, my feet warm slightly and everything feels more solid. I cannot help the smile of pleasure that touches my lips.

There is a ship maintaining a Roesler orbit around space between the two suns, a science vessel by the feel of its energy signature in the wake. They use some of the earliest compression engines for the small hisses maintaining their orbit, and with a surge of effort I can taste the flavor of the atmosphere where they last filled up. More nitrogen, less methane. Human then.

I stand up, the water dripping from my fingertips and turning to red sparks to be shaken off. My robes shift and fall into place with the movement to swirl over the flow. Their softness and pattern is vanity, but it brings another faint, wry smile. Two smiles in one day. I grow less rusty at the gesture with practice and anticipation. With a wave the light panels shine a little brighter, lighting the dome from twilight to vivid light.



«*You still cannot see in the dark?*» comes the voice in a mental echo through the room, sounding richly amused as the lights go out unbidden, leaving me in the silent darkness. My fist tightens, rises to sketch an arcane gesture. Red flames flicker in its wake, hanging there in the air. But the lights stay out.

«*There is no such thing as darkness*», I snap back with false bravado, turning to stalk out of the room in search of more warmth than the reflection chamber provides. An intimation of

laughter shivers through my skull, as memory is sent to haunt me and I flee to the halls beyond.

§§§

Silence. Dim light. A pen scratches across a white sheet of vellum, marring a page with words.

"Man grows in power. From our first stumbling out of caves on Earth to the awakening of possibility through jump gates and individual potential, man has grown and adapted to suit his environment. We have become more, our minds expanding, our faculties and abilities awakening with our exploration of the universe. Perhaps it is the very function of the jump gates left behind for us to develop into something else, something that fits with the rest of the universe as yet unmet. But have we thought that perhaps it is those very shining beacons of energy that have brought the challenges of growing darkness? Not just ours; any race that found and was awakened into power through the use of the alien technology?"

"From the first creature huddling in a cave, striking a flint to make heat and light to stave off the cold and darkness, the darkness recoiled and the space between stars became blacker. Electricity and darkness banished to smaller and smaller holes. One must wonder if the darkness learned to hate its banishment with an equal fervor matching how it was feared. Mankind has always written the fear of death and sleep, for those are the hours in which one must surrender the light for a time, and close the eyes. Sleep summons the darkness within.

"Humans didn't create dark matters, dark energies. They simply are, just as light is. Every emotion having its equal, eternally connected opposite. Joy and sorrow. Love and despair. But as we begin to harness the light, we also have given power to the dark, for nature abhors a vacuum that is not balanced with mass. Mass and energy are the same, this we understand to be true. We are creatures of mass. Might we therefore posit creatures of energy? Canon specifies angels as creatures of light. If energy can be conscious, should we not posit intelli-

gence that is darkness, for lack of a perfectly specific word?

"Every creature, when learning to travel, learns by traveling through space. Distance had meaning once, to travel somewhere across the surface of a sphere. Now we jump through space in relics left behind by another race, and do not look at all the points of darkness in between our destinations. Some say we have inherited the stars. Have we instead been given the darkness? Did the aliens begin this enmity of light and darkness, when they first learned how to avoid that which they feared most?"

The pen set aside, the writer stretches, cradling a hand to rub at the knuckles that ache in the cold. A knock on the door, and a young woman peeks her head in. "Are you hungry, Priest? I've some soup." The girl bustles in, putting aside the ink and papers with a touch of reverence before setting down the wooden bowl and spoon. Smiling at the murmured thanks, she turns to kneel and stoke the fire that warms the small cell. "Shouldn't let it die down so far, you'll catch chill in this winter," she reproves with respect. "Must mind your health." The smile is marked as she goes about her business, bustling out again to close the door gently behind. The gesture of blessing is entirely missed, but not unexpected.

The soup is plain but full of flavors from the vegetables and recently slaughtered - what was the meat on this world? A sniff provides no answer, but the gamey taste is offset nicely by the herbs. Slowly it is consumed, even as the pen is lifted to write more.

"And then there are the words of those pilots and travelers that claim to have seen the beasts that lie in darkness. Kraken they call them, little remembering the long lost Earth legends of the beasts of the sea that spawned the name. But is it so impossible to imagine that these, too, might be creatures of the heaven, designed for some specific purpose? Perhaps they serve as a reminder to man that there is ever more in the Universe than merely the hops of a jump web. What are these space demons, but the opposition and creation of the shadows of the technology that we ourselves have raised up and given

the power of small gods?

"Light and dark. Suns are fading. We can measure the energy that expanded the universe disappearing, the grand outreaching of the Creator hindered by causes unknown, unexplained by the science we are now allowed to embrace by the Church. Humanity jumps through space using technology it doesn't understand, and avoids thinking too deeply about that which is profoundly alien.

"Why do we recreate our past on worlds, and reward only those things built with our own hands? The difference between everyday life in these settlements and life on the ships is as alien as our own minds must be to the hunger of the stars that we taunt and avoid with every jump. These days our children, eschewing knowledge to keep them pure and clean of taint, are granted new talents with every generation. Once slaughtered outright, now the talents are deemed acceptable if we gather them into the Church. Left free to their own devices, we declare the bearers of these gifts anathema. The dying ones whisper of alien understanding and knowledge, which must be purified by ritual repentance and cleansing. What if they-"

Bordering on heresy, this. But the pen pauses and is set aside. Endless questions burn and tickle at the mind, leading thought from the well-traveled paths of lip service known as orthodoxy to a more genuine hunger for truth. Are the evolving powers of the mind truly as canon dictates, the traces of sin, signs of our fall from grace? Or could they be just another gift of the Creator for his evolving children? There is no truth there, only silence.

Hands with ink stained fingertips lift to run through hair just starting to silver, lank with needing a proper bath and grooming. A body ignored while feeding the mind. In the end, all questions lead to this basic doubt; doubt that is a canker in the heart, biting with worry. And yet, sometimes, the doubt is an odd source of peace. Belief that the universe might, indeed, be doing precisely what it was supposed to. And in the end, if everything of questioning is forbidden, then everything is also allowed if one has the faculty to do so.

There is an implacable mental call from sky outside, the Priest rises and folds the papers away into a pocket. The world whirls, tilts, and resettles into a quiet certainty. Musings must be finished another day, after an experiment has failed or succeeded. With the call there is need, urgent and growing. A need external in source, but matching the rhythm of an internal vibration that grew unchecked.

The young daughter that brought the soup is found first, a smile offered, a hand touches lightly her pale hair. She smiles, willing and pleased to be lead wherever the Priest directs. In her room she lies down with mentally forced willingness, though her spirit is stubborn enough to struggle and the death is not as gentle as was desired. Alas, there is blood, and the sight of it across the crisp white sheets brings a frown, the shake of a head. Not aesthetic.

(Somewhere in the time that is now, I slide down along the smoothly polished wall, sobbing tearlessly, my face in my hands.)

The farmer in his study is more affably dispatched, his heart stopping with a strange expression on his face. The power gathers about the priest's nails, dripping red fire to spark on the stone and disappear within. The goodwife's shriek disturbs the fowl in the yard as she is found in the kitchen, and in an odd sort of pique her spirit is pulled loose more roughly, her body left in pieces for the hogs to eat over the next few days.

Provisions next. A satchel is packed, thrown over one shoulder before the priest leaves the stockyard and off on the trail to the meadow, where something that looks like no ship in the system is just touching the ground with a long, black extension.

§§§

«Is this regret? Is this remorse?», comes the taunting, stilling my sobs in an instant. *«For three, you have found eternity. Answers. All your beliefs proved true. Your theories are tested and proved, or corrected. Be honored, for not often do we seek out humans.»*

I gulp down my feelings and grimace bitterly,

pushing myself to my feet once more. I do not scorn the hollow feeling in my chest, the heaviness of my throat. *«Perhaps. Perhaps not. I am nostalgic, for the years since I have seen my own kind.»*

A wavering image appears before me, gaining in solidity. No. Not a construct. The past returned in energy for a moment, staring at me. I brush a hand impatiently through her form, and it disappears again, leaving only a pang of loss that is quickly smothered. The young girl is long dead, many years. Her energy was absorbed. With time dilation, she would have been an old woman by now, if not dead of bearing too many children in the dirt.

To these thoughts, there is no answer. Onward, the darkness speeds toward two suns, and the ship hanging between their burning. A ship of humans, this time, and a chance drink of their light and dream. I was a priest. Now I am a mage, and eternal. I touch my navel. This time, perhaps one will have the strength to live and father a child before dying. Space is so large. The Kraken are all of alien birth. I dream of a child of my own.

THE AUTHOR

Jeannie Warner is a computer security professional by day, and a writer by night. She spent her formative years in Colorado, but has lived in Washington, Oregon, Canada, Arkansas, and now California as well. Her stories span many genres from fantasy and science fiction to thrillers and crime. She her short story, "Nursery Rhymes," appeared in *Tightbeam* #266 (the August 2013 issue). You can read her here or at *KnightBridge's* latest Rom Zom Com release. Her mythic origins involve a herd of trilling otters serenading her arrival from the sea, but the texts are largely open to interpretation and have even been called apocryphal.

2013 N3F Amateur Short Story

Story Contest Rules and Entry Blank

1. This contest is open to all amateur writers in the field, regardless of whether they're members of the National Fantasy Fan Federation. For the purposes of this contest, we define an amateur as someone who has sold no more than two (2) stories to professional science fiction or fantasy publications.

2. Stories entered in the contest must be original, unpublished, not longer than 8,500 words in length—and must be related to the science fiction, fantasy, or similar genres in the opinion of the judges.

3. Manuscripts should be typed, single sided on 8 1/2"-by- 11" white paper, double spaced, with pages numbered. The name of the author should not appear anywhere on the manuscript to ensure impartial judging. Photocopies are acceptable, if they are of good quality. Computer printouts must be legible. Email attachments of Word documents are also acceptable.

4. Contestants can enter up to three stories, provided that each is accompanied by a separate entry blank. Enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) if you would like your story returned at the end of the contest. Do not send your only copy in case of accidental loss; we are not responsible for lost manuscripts. Stories will not be returned without an SASE.

5. Email entries will be accepted. Send to Jefferson P. Swycaffer at abontides@cox.net. No guarantee can be

made of email receipt. Privacy and property rights will be absolutely respected. No one other than the Short Story Judge will ever see the submission.

6. There is no entry fee charged. While N3F members are encouraged to enter the contest, members will not receive any preference in judging. .

7. Cash prizes totaling \$100 will be awarded as follows: First prize is \$50, second \$30, and third \$20. Honorable mentions and semi-finalists will receive a certificate of award.

8. Send all manuscripts, accompanied by SASEs, and entry forms to the contest manager: Jefferson Swycaffer, P. O. Box 15373, San Diego, CA 92175-5373; abontides@cox.net. All entries must be received or postmarked no later than Dec. 31, 2013.

9. The Short Story Judge is a published science fiction professional, and also a loving fan of the sf and fantasy genres. All comments and critiques are solely the Short Story Judge's opinion, but he promises to be constructive and polite.

10. The N3F assumes no publishing rights or obligations. We want to encourage professional sales, not fan publication. All entries will be returned after the contest is over, if accompanied by an SASE. Winners will be notified as soon as the judging is completed. Announcements and notifications of winning entries will be made in March 2014. Please take your time and submit your best work. You can resubmit stories previously entered. All entries will be kept confidential and will be judged fairly and anonymously.

The deadline for all entries is Dec. 31, 2013. Good luck!

(Detach or photocopy. Must accompany all entries.)

Mail to: **Jefferson Swycaffer, P. O. Box 15373, San Diego, CA 92175-5373** or email **abontides@cox.net**

Title of story (for identification): _____

Author's name and address: _____

Author's email address: _____ Author's age: _____

I have read the above rules for the 2013 N3F Amateur Short Story Contest, and I agree to them.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

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If you've never submitted an article before, it's easier than you think. If you want to contribute, but are unsure what to write about – simply send a letter of comment on any topic (a past issue, some book or show you liked [or hated]). It's that easy. Anyone may submit, although paid members get top priority due to space concerns.

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Letters of Comment (LoCs) are the fan version of Letters to the Editor – except you can feel free to directly address anyone.

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We accept fiction (less than 2,000 words, please) – both original and fan fiction, essays, poetry, con reports and interviews. All writing is subject to being edited, but we usually take a very light hand. Any writer chosen for a feature will get 1 full-color printed version of the issue their work appears.

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We are always looking for cover art, filler art and spot art and amusing doodles and thoughtful ones, too. We have plenty of space to fill and your art may be just what we are looking for. Any artist selected for a cover will get 1 full-color printed version of the issue their work graces our cover.

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TNFF 72.6

STILL NEEDS

Deadline:
Nov 15, 2013

Election Results Issue
Cover art: *Sergey Kostik*
Edited by:
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Interior art, con reports, bureau reports & fan news.



DECEMBER 2013

N3F 2014 CALENDAR

STILL NEEDS

Deadline:
Nov 15, 2013

Special Pub.
Edited by:
David Speakman

Cover and interior Art



JANUARY 2014

TIGHTBEAM #269

STILL NEEDS

Deadline:
Dec 15, 2013

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Cover art, interior art, fiction, (2k words or less) comics, essays, letters of comment, poetry, etc.



FEBRUARY 2014

TNFF 73.1

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Edited by:
David Speakman

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TIGHTBEAM #269

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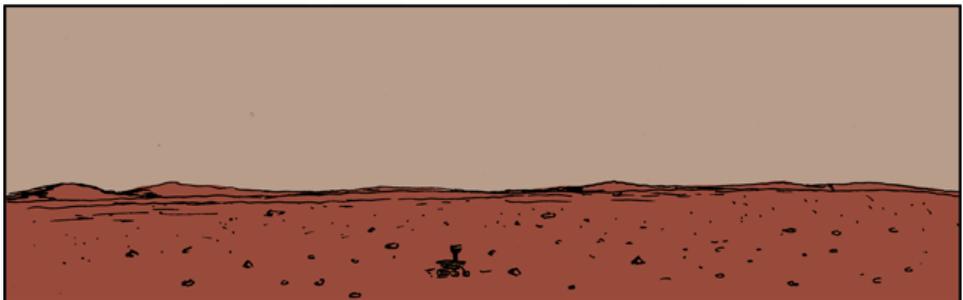
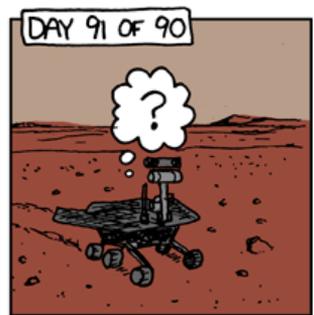
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TB 268

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