



SCI-FI, FANTASY AND HORROR

STORIES ART AND SATIRE

**OUR FEATURE
STORIES:**

The Lost Tale

Of Bandit-Bane

Mattiniah

Trial of the Magi

FANTASTIC

FIVE MINUTE

FICTION!

Movie

T.V Series

And Book

Reviews

**Time Traveller's
Guide**

In the line of fire

Ana Marija Meskova

“Move it! Tighten those cables!” The Captain’s voice was even louder than the sounds of the ship’s hull collapsing.

The entire place was filled with people hanging on for dear life, trying to keep the important systems online. The cables finally came out; they slid through the hands of the man trying to hold them, a stringy looking tall blond.

He was one of the few men who could handle the emergency before him, and for this reason, he was the one dealing with the task that could electrocute him, and now he was on the floor. The sparks flew in every direction, as the wires threatened to swing back and connect with his skin in a blast that would make his state similar to that of a roast chicken.

“For God’s sake, does no one have an ounce of brain left in this God damn hunk of metal?” The man opened his eyes just in time to see the Captain right in front of him, holding the wires in her hands. The thick rubber gloves she had on prevented any shock. He gulped and got up right away, trying his very best not to face the look of anger from those greyish green eyes any longer than he had to.

No crewman knew a lot about Captain Roxanne, not even her last name.

She was a human from a small colony that mostly provided the world with farmers and quarry workers. But this small and skinny woman had proven time and time again that she could handle herself. She passed both of her gloves and the wires to her chief science officer, a reptilian looking woman twice her size and told her to hook them up, then ran with ease across to the fallen people on the deck, yelling at them to get up.

If they wanted to die so badly they would be able to throw themselves overboard after the fight, but not now, when they endangered every crew member.

After dodging the flying circuit cover that threatened to lop off her head as soon as she entered, she jumped to the helm.

Her first officer, a man of exceptional strength and reputation among the crew, didn’t even need to see her to know to get out of her way. He knew the Captain’s way of thinking so he took it upon himself to man the scanner and open the screen. The black panel in front of the ship lit up and Roxanne saw the large Firreanian ship that had lodged its beams to her main power lines and was now tearing them away.

But it was not over yet. She wasn’t spending her day blasted to smithereens. A couple of strokes on the keyboard assured her that the blasters were up and running. They would lose propulsion and lights, but life support would still be online.

“You are not getting rid of me so easily, do you hear me?!” she yelled as she switched to manual aim and targeted the enemy ship’s weak spot, the small round ball from which one of the beams was released, that she figured was near the engine. It was a good idea to move the blasters on top of the ship.

“Who is laughing now, hey General?” was her last thought before her action caused the entire ship to shake violently.

#

The bold light made her squint. She tried to get up, but a sharp twinge notified her of her two cracked ribs. She heard the weak voice of her first officer: “Up again? Fifth time in three days. I told them they should have given you a larger dose, but they assured me this time you would stay under. I swear they could give you enough painkillers to knock out one... one of those big earth mammals, with the trunk, no idea what was its name, and you would still be up after a few hours.”

“Elephant, Jordy, it’s called an elephant.” Roxanne smiled. She and Jordy, as she liked to call him, not wanting to have to call out his pretty long name every time she gave an order, met at the academy.

He was the elite of his generation back on his home planet. She was just a former infantry soldier, not even worth his time, or so he thought. In his first year, he was a proud man, enjoying the way humans compared him to a lion, because of his characteristic appearance and his ferocity.

At the end of their 5th year she had taken him down a couple of dozen notches, and not just physically. She was the first in their year, he was the second. He didn't want to serve under anyone else, she was the only other person he trusted, the only person he respected as being higher than himself, and that paid off well during these years.

The battle with the Firreanians, a race of nomads that took delight in wiping out the populations of entire planets and colonizing them, took a lot of lives from both sides. But their crew, however badly battered, survived.

He looked at her again. No one, not even other humans saw anything except an ordinary female, short with reddish blond hair and a loud voice. No matter how advanced they were, no one could cease to be amazed by the prowess she showed.

"What's the time?" she asked suddenly.

"Uhm..." Jordy looked up at the clock above his head but he didn't get to answer the question.

"It would be after twelve back home. Well, this is indeed a happy 28th for me." she laughed, with a detached look. Jordy raised his brows. He almost forgot to include her age as another large factor in the way she was perceived by others

From what he managed to get from her file, and from what he heard from her, he pieced together that she had joined the ranks at 16, entered the academy after 4 years and was instantly made captain because of her recommendations and grades. He imagined that she was replaying her success over the past year in her head.

But her mind didn't dwell on such things. In fact the only reason she still remembered her birthday was so she would know when she was due for her mandatory physical, a requirement she had to fulfil if she wanted to stay in the military. She didn't care for progress.

She was glad she was alive but it stopped there. She did this because she was a damn good tactician and soldier, and that was it. Functioning in battle was her forte, and that was what she built her life around. There was nothing out there for her.

Her train of thought, the only sign of which being a vague smirk on her face, was interrupted by a voice:

"Another ship devoid of function, but with its crew intact, delivered by our dear Captain." The General was standing in front of the door. He was an old man, too old to be fighting. His voice was weary, and hoarse, Roxanne knew it was from the long years of shouting orders at his men. He stopped to wipe some of the coffee that had gotten on his white moustache. It needed to be trimmed one of these days, now maybe he would have the time

"You can reuse the scraps from the ship to build a new one. Can't do that with people. You've tried, and fell on your asses." She got up, carefully this time, to the dismay of the nurse who was panicking next to her, reminding her that treatment was not over yet and that she was still very much hurt:

"Relax, I may be crazy, but I'm not crazy enough to think I can walk in this state." Roxanne calmed her down.

"That is why we like you." he left an untouched cup next to her bed. She reached towards it.

"I hope you remember how I like it."

"Black, bitter, boiled to oblivion. No one can forget that." he smiled as she drank in the smell and taste. She missed real coffee, the replications she had on the ship were good enough to keep her sharp, but coffee was still coffee.

He waited till she had drank it all and had placed the cup back down before continuing.

"That is, in fact, why you are taking my job." Jordy sprung up on the bed, so fast he could have re-dislocated his shoulder. He couldn't believe his ears. Roxanne's only reaction was to laugh.

"I told you already. The old generals we read about in history books had a more active job than yours, and even they were basically stationary. Not my style." She laid back down in order for the nurse to use the healing console on her injuries. It looked like a large screen that emitted a blue light on her skin.

"I can't understand you. This is an opportunity no one has gotten this early in their career. And your response is 'not my style'." He was still speaking with the same tone, but that didn't stop him from conveying his dismay.

"I'm not pursuing a career. There are easier ways to do that than to put yourself in danger. If you really want to promote me, promote me to a position that still allows me to be out there in the line of fire."

"But, this is why we have been successful so far. Taking the talent and giving it more power, more responsibility, not keeping it out there in the line of fire, but having it command the line." Roxanne stayed quiet a few minutes with closed eyes while the console went through the last stage which was particularly uncomfortable.

When that was done she didn't waste time getting up, buttoning her uniform.

"If the people upstairs really want you to promote someone, promote him." she pointed at Jordy. "He is a better candidate than me anyway. My stubbornness is what keeps me alive. He is actually skilful." Jordy was staring wide eyed at her. The General turned his gaze on him now, only knowing he was her first officer.

He was a strong man, about the same age as his Captain, the mane on his hands and head had a dark orange colour, and he was just as confused.. The General turned back around to face Roxanne.

"He doesn't have the specifications yet. You do, as soon as the credit for this last feat is logged on your card." Roxanne got up, and walked over to the console near the door, where the patient cards were logging in data.

Hers was the first one from her ship, and the next in line. She pulled it off with one smooth movement, and before anyone could stop her, switched it with Jordy's just seconds before the machine started to log in the information.

"Now he does." she turned to the General with a determined look. He seemed shocked. She had completely ignored the rules. If, discounting that feat, she didn't have enough to prove she was irreplaceable; he would have thrown her out

without a second thought. But he couldn't afford to lose her.

"Now are you gonna give me a ship or what?"

"I'm not promoting him."

"As long as you give me the job I want, I don't care what you do. Now do I have a ship, or not?!" The General was somewhere between total defeat and boiling anger:

"If we weren't in a battle that could mean the destruction of our species right now I would have you dishonourably discharged. But, yes, you have a ship. A Phoenix class rider. Blast off as soon as every member of your crew has received treatment."

"Thank you." she bowed.

"I hope you are happy, that was supposed to be the first ship under your command." he told Jordy as he left with a huff. The General wasn't going to tell anyone about that incident, that was certain. No one likes to be the guy in the corner. She climbed back on the bed, sending the nurse away.

"What? You're angry about not being Captain?" She asked Jordy, who was staring at her.

"No. I... just can't understand... why?" Was the only thing Jordy could say.

"I already told you why. I want to fight."

"But why? That is what I can't understand. I have a reason for being here, my culture appreciates honour above many things, but you? It's not revenge, it's not stature, not honour, we all know it couldn't be money. What?"

Roxanne smiled, turning her face to the wall, getting ready to sleep.

"Tell me when you know the answer, I would like to know too."

Ana Marija Meskova

From a young age, Ana Marija has been fascinated by the written word. Feeling the need to release the characters from her head she turned to create that which occupied a large portion of

her life. Her imagination making use of everything around her, she sculpts scenes which can be both dreamy and dark in a way. Only one thing is certain, she will keep following her motto - Everything I write brings me closer to the quality I want my work to have.



Artwork by Keith Whittington

The Lost Tale of Bandit-Bane

By

Tyger St. Germaine

_____Screams of battle echoed off the snow covered mountain peaks where dying orcs fell to the blade of their foe: Tusk Bandit-Bane. The blade of his greataxe bit deep into the fleshy green meat, exposing bone and sending blood to spatter against the surrounding snow.

Tusk was all that stood between the savage rampaging orcs and the village just beyond the mountain pass. A lone roadblock against a tide of death. Tusk Bandit-Bane was a half-orc known and named for disposing of the world's troubles and undesirables.

While most orcs were mountains of muscle born for battle, Tusk wasn't as gifted. He had the height but lacked the muscle mass, but he was no less fierce. Other than his appearance, Tusk gained more from his human blood. His hair was a golden blond like his Viking blood within him, making him stand out from his ill-begotten kind. He kept it shaved in the undercut style, pulling back the longer strands. His brutish orcish face was adorned with white tribal tattoos. Curved horn like markings on his forehead and jagged teeth like ones along this jawline. Much of Tusk's appearance was barbarian like the studded leather armour he wore, covering his left shoulder, most of his upper body, and part of his legs. It left him free to move without slowing him down when he swung his greataxe with deadly intent. An axe made from hardened black steel dripping freely with the blood of slain orcs.

Tusk had no qualms in killing his own kind nor any love for them either. He wasn't raised within the orcish tribes, instead he had been raised among humans. Mostly his uncle after his mother had passed away when he was still very young. She had been raped by the orc war leader known as Ragestorm during a raid on her village and left for dead. She lived on to give birth but died a few years after.

Afterward his uncle took him in and raised young Tusk as his own. For many, the half breed orc was a constant reminder of the horror that befell upon the village. He was shunned and openly cursed for the death of his mother filling him with guilt over it. But his uncle had protected him, although Tusk never understood why he did; showing him mercy and love where most would have killed Tusk at birth.

His uncle would always tell him, "Never blame the child for the parent's actions". Tusk was not to blame for the attack on the village, his mother's rape, nor her passing. In fact she was strong enough to endure and survive to ensure her son's own survival.

It didn't matter to her that her son was part orc, she loved him despite it. That love she passed onto Tusk keeping him from become a savage like other orcs. As Tusk grew older he vowed to rise above his blood and put his strength and skills to aid others. Others who lacked the ability to protect and help themselves.

Such a vow earned him the name Bandit-Bane from the people he had helped. Many thieves, road bandits, murders, and other undesirables met their end at the hands of Tusk. That same vow was why he was here today, facing off against the orc army alone to save those in the village below from death and destruction.

These villages has nothing of value to offer a raiding party of orcs. There was barely enough food to even feed the villagers. So, here is where Tusk made his stand, guarding the only pass out of the mountains. Here, he would not leave unless every orc lay dead at his hand or his body laid broken under their rampaging feet. In masses they charged Tusk in attempt to overwhelm him, only to learn in death that this one orc was strong enough to hold his own against an army.

One by one they fell after coming into striking range. This particular warband of orcs have left nothing but smouldering ruins in their wake. Word of their rampage had spread faster than the fires they had set to mark their destruction.

For Tusk, it had been like chasing a raging storm moving quickly across the land. Night and

day, without rest, Tusk raced on foot and against time to meet the raiding party here in the mountains. Tusk was an orc driven, holding within the knowledge behind what motivates the raiding party of war hungry orcs. Sadly in truth, Tusk really didn't know as much as he believed he did about what he faced. A truth that very well may forever change his understanding of himself, and of his kind.

An immense roar rose above the rages of war and threatened to bring down the mountain around them. All fighting stopped at that moment. So sudden was the cease fire that Tusk wasn't even fully aware of it until after he struck down an orc who gave no resistance to his death.

Breathing feverishly hard and covered in splattered orc blood, Tusk stood ready eyes darting about. The countless droves of war orcs slowly lowered their weapons before stepping aside. Through the masses came what was clearly their leader.

A sickly pale orc that stood a foot taller than the rabble around him. He wore no armour and nor did he carry any weapons, there were only the wrappings to cover his genitals and boots of animal hide on his feet.

But what really made him stand out was not just his wild eyes, it was the spiky bones protruding out of his flesh. Bones taken from his victims he killed himself, sharpened and weaved into his own flesh. Self-mutilation was this monster of an orc's greatest desire. A passion. A lust. An obsession. He was named Bonebeast, and he was Tusk's younger half-brother.

Unlike his lesser minded followers, Bonebeast came to a stop just out of striking range of Tusk's axe. They were not strangers to each other, however this was their first meeting face to face. Seeing the sharpened bones protruding out from all over his body made Bonebeast more grotesque up close than he did in the stories told. It was like standing before a living nightmare. It was all up and down his arms and legs for the most part, with hellish-looking longer and curved bones jutting out from the knuckles on both of his hands.

It gave him the appearance of claws, he needed to carry no other weapon. He was a monstrosity, even from birth when he clawed his way out of his mother through her gut and started to eat her flesh before she was even fully dead. It was the proudest moment for their father to witness, he had had many children but none of them showed such potential. This one he would raise and train in his own image. Bonebeast's mother was inconsequential as were all female orcs. They were never given names and only seen as breeders, used to make more male orc warriors.

It was rumoured that the mother of Bonebeast was the sister of their father Ragestorm, which was not uncommon in orc society.

He had chained her to the wall as he did to all his breeders. Ragestorm was a war leader who was war hungry and lust crazed. He loved to kill almost as much as he loved to indulge his sexual urges, sometimes both in one.

In Tusk's case his mother was lucky to escape with her life after being raped repeatedly by Ragestorm, after he single-handedly attacked the caravan she was with. Tusk often wondered if his father knew of his existence. Not that he cared, he would repay him in kind for all that he has done.

'Hello big brother.' Bonebeast greeted Tusk with a toothy grin.

'So this is the notorious Bonebeast. Father must be so proud!' sneered Tusk, almost spitting his brother's greeting back in his face.

'That he is. Even after I slaughtered him.'

'You killed your own father!?'

'Our father, my brother. Never forget where you come from. But yes I killed dear ol' daddy. Killed and ate.'

Tusk was instantly sickened by this. There was no love lost between Tusk and his father Ragestorm, but to hear his younger brother not only killed their father but ate him as well. The thought was horrific, a cannibalistic orc that held

no life sacred. Orcs in general were savage beings but Bonebeast was truly a monster.

Telling him so seemed moot. There was nothing to be said by Tusk, the look on his face and in his eyes was enough for Bonebeast.

‘In fact I have dined on all our brothers and sisters. And now dear brother it is just you and me.’

‘You will find me no easy meal.’

‘I concur. You reek of human filth! It will be hard to choke down your meat. ...What was it they are calling you? Bandit-Bane? Hardly a fitting name for an orc.’

‘You plan to talk me to death Bone?’

‘I could offer you the opportunity to fight within my army but... we both know you are a hero to the human kind.’

‘You don’t give them enough credit. They aren’t some weak race for you to prey upon.’

‘They hold no value in the world, how can you be so blind! They can’t even protect themselves from this world.’

Tusk was tired of him talking and wanted to end this now. ‘Step a little closer brother I can’t quite hear you.’

‘You would like that wouldn’t you. Step into striking range of that axe of yours. I’m far more intelligent than that. Even if you were able to land a fatal blow my twisted offspring will rise to continue my bloody rampage. I’ve been breeding an army dear brother. Not just these savages that follow me, but over five dozen breeders are fat with my offspring. My death will matter little in the end. But... I am curious to see what the tainted blood can do. If you can kill me in fair combat then my army here will leave defeated.’

‘Agreed!’

‘Then let it be! Here and now! This will come down to the two of us. No other shall intervene!’

‘Then ready your weapon!’ Tusk growled.

‘I have my weapon.’ Bonebeast raised his fists showing off his bone claws. ‘Say hello to father... Just like all the others I have killed, I will eat you and use your bones to line my spine!’

Bonebeast charged suddenly catching Tusk off-guard, the spikes that lined his shoulders tore into Tusk’s armour. Taking full advantage, Bonebeast sunk his claws into Tusk’s ribs where the armour was weak in an attempt to rip out his ribs while he was still alive.

Staggering back, Tusk was thrown off balance and lost hold of his weapon. The great black steel axe spun through the air and imbedded itself into the frozen ground behind the legions of orc raiders standing around watching them. Just what Bonebeast was hoping for, without his weapon he had the upper hand on Tusk.

Now left to fight hand to hand, Tusk felt his body being squeezed and punctured at the same time before he could take a swing at his brother. The pain was immense; the force in which Bonebeast was using to crush him threatened to collapse his lungs and make it impossible for him to breath let alone cry out.

A feeling of light-headedness came over Tusk threatening to cause him to black out. He needed to break free or fall to become this crazed orc’s next meal. That left Tusk with one option, bash Bonebeast in the head as hard as he could with his own. But if he did, Tusk ran the risk of blacking out from the blow, a risk he had no choice but to take.

Not wasting another moment Tusk slammed his hard orcish head into that of his brother’s. Bonebeast released Tusk and staggered back a few steps holding his head. Tusk fell to his knees after, fighting the blackness that threatened to take him.

Before he could fully recover, Bonebeast kicked him in the face knocking him to his back. Bonebeast was on him again and punching those claws of his into Tusk’s upper chest, causing Tusk to roar in pain. Tusk’s arms now being free he was able to strike back.

Fuelled by pain and anger, Tusk landed such a powerful punch it not only knocked Bonebeast off him but knocked one of the tusks from his mouth. After spitting blood, Bonebeast rose to his feet just as Tusk did. The two then went blow for blow with Bonebeast still having the upper hand.

Bonebeast's claws were tearing into Tusk's flesh with every blow he landed. But Tusk was doing a great deal of damage himself despite his open wounds and blood loss. As the battle went on and on it started to take its toll on Tusk, he was pushed to the edge of a snow covered cliff. It was there that Tusk felt defeat upon him and fell to his knees fatigued. Bonebeast smiled and licked Tusk's blood from his claws. Wanted to savour his death, Bonebeast took his time to approach Tusk. Just as weak as the worthless creatures he protects, he thought. A half breed such as Tusk is lacking in ability to stand against the might of a superior orc. Bonebeast would make his death quick by plunging those bone claws into Tusk's throat. He will make a fine meal for Bonebeast, one he plans to share with his orc brethren here with him.

Looming over his brother, Bonebeast let out a dark chuckle before thrusting his claws at Tusk's exposed throat, but Tusk was ready. After dodging the fatal attack, Bonebeast was thrown off balance giving Tusk the opportunity to reach out and grab Bonebeast's arm and pull. The force behind the pull was enough to send Bonebeast toppling over the edge. But as he started to fall, Bonebeast latched on to the shoulder piece of Tusk's armour which yanked Tusk over with him. Acting quickly Tusk reached out and took hold of the rocky ledge leaving them to dangle high above the deadly jagged rocks below. Problem was not only was Tusk quickly losing his grip due to his fatigue but Bonebeast had begun to climb up Tusk as well. Unfortunately fighting him off was not an option. The question before Tusk was should he let go and kill them both ensuring Bonebeast's death or try to climb up with him. But the answer was made for him when the leather armour piece Bonebeast was clinging to snapped due to the damage it received during the fight. Bonebeast was sent to plummet to his death on the jagged rocks below and without the extra weight Tusk was able to pull himself back up. Upon seeing that only Tusk came back up alone, the orc army

turned silently and walked back the way they came leaving behind their dead.

Below on the rocky slopes just shy of the jagged rocks in the shadow of the mountain peak lay the body of Bonebeast. It remained still and lifeless which attracted a hungry wolf looking for an easy meal. As it approached to feast, the wolf whimpered before falling limp. The claws that failed to bring down Tusk Bandit-Bane brought down a mangy hungry wolf. Bonebeast was very much alive and somehow managed to survive the fall. Being slow to get to his feet it was clear he was in a great deal of pain. After it all he vowed no revenge only commended his half-brother. The day would come when he would eat of his brother's flesh and don his bones.

But for now he needed to recover from his wounds and plan. Grabbing the dead wolf by the tail, Bonebeast dragged it along behind him as he limped **Tyger St Germaine:**

Long ago in a small village town located within the flatlands, a tiny orphaned tiger cub was taken in by a family. Even at a young age the little cub showed promise and creativity. Upon learning to read and write she quickly found a love for writing and storytelling. But in that young age is when she learned the dark truth of the family that took her in. They were cruel to her and shunned her passion outright. The tiger cub took to reading and writing in secret, for fear of what they may do if they ever learned she was disobeying them. Things grew worse when dyslexia began to plague the little cub causing her to struggle with reading and writing. Discouraged by those around her and now suffering within, the cub found herself alone most of the time. Only her thoughts were there to provide her any comfort in her darkest moments. In her mind she saw great heroes faced with unbeatable odds and rising above them. She too wanted to be as great of a hero as the ones living out in her head. But the road to greatness would be long and taxing. The following years would be hard and grueling pushing her mind to understand the words and record the never ending stories that played in her mind. Through it all her own personal style in how she weaved the words made itself known. It was simple but not without depth, much like her own soul. Her journey brought her

to others much like herself, those that struggled to read and had all but given up. It was that moment she finally understood her destiny. To use her once-shunned gift to re-spark the magic of stories for those that have become lost and inspire the souls of many more. From there the little cub was no longer little nor a cub. She shed the name given to her when she was found and chose her own name that was more fitting. Bearing a mask to hide her identity she called herself Tyger Saint Germaine, the Loremaster of untold stories.



Star Seers

By Mike C. Bene

The depths of space looked beautiful in the darkness...it was always beautiful with the different nebulas and galaxies roaming through it like the cascade of colours in a Van Gogh piece. Sadly she wouldn't be seeing them for a while. Camille was an engineer aboard the ship known as the U.I.S. Harbinger, working on the robotic sentries, and other engineer bots. She was sadly doomed to this life as Humanic Imperial Code dictated to the peoples of the great and bountiful human empire. "All those born to a job...die in the job." This was both the third law and creed of the Commonwealth robotics caste. Now Camille served on a warship...not as a soldier...but as an engineer.

To be honest it wasn't all bad, she could've been prostituted by the Commonwealth Slum Lord Grosak. However a kind Mutarian Doctor saved her when he found her potential in robotics, staggering as it was for a girl the age of 16 to know as much as she. Camille had the advantage of an engineer mother to train her from the age of 8. The Commonwealth was no more as the Dothari, a warrior race of aliens attacked and decimated it. Her mentor died to save her from the blast in his personal vault.

It was after The Commonwealth Insurrection that Camille enlisted in the Engineer Corps of the Alliance Starfleet. She was the only one capable of fixing the robotic soldiers aboard the ship. Every time they landed on a planet the soldiers would leave, only to come back hours later with the Robotic Forces all scrapped from the fight. When she was alone however she thought back...back to home. She wondered if the Commonwealth was ever rebuilt after the insurrection, or if her family were still stuck in Grosak's little corner of the expanded city.

Today however Camille felt something new was going to happen...something that would change her life forever. "Mistress Camille...you are needed in the war room." Said the voice of H.A.L.E.K.E.L.O.S. the Artificial Intelligence in control of the ship. Once there Camille found the ship's Captain/Fleet Commander in an argument with the Alliance Council of Leaders. The Twelve were demanding that Captain Snowden order the 60th fleet to Dothranik Prime to lead the invasion with the 501st fleet and the 30th fleet. However Snowden told them that this was suicide...and to him his men were too important to destroy in such a pointless mission. As he shut off the video feed to the council prematurely he noticed Camille standing across from the viewing terminal waiting



Artwork by Veronica Raemona Carillo

patiently for him. "Ah sorry you had to see that Lawson...the council is sadly still demanding we invade the Prime world.". The reports Camille gave him were grim with the details of multiple CPU components damaged from the constant fighting, The robot's shells were more damaged than their internal systems.

Her report held another crucial problem as the parts that were vital to the repairs had officially run dry due to their last space battle with the Dothari Dreadnaughts. Snowden read the report with a grim expression as he revealed that he was being forced to comply with the orders of the council...lest he go AWOL and be put to the mercy of the Military Punishment Fleet.

Camille touched Snowden's hand gently, the two had been old friends in the Commonwealth, and were born nearly an hour apart in the same hospital. Camille...now 24, kissed Captain Snowden gently on the lips as they had when they were 12 on a dare from Grosak who was the bully

of the city's children...like his father was of the city's parents. Snowden held his forbidden love in his arms as they kissed passionately, and feeling the inspiration called the entire crew of the Harbinger over the ONCOM system. "To all aboard this vessel...I know as your captain that I have some admiration....as you are all members of the crew I am leaving you a decision. I have opened the Trans-Teleport systems for the next hour...after that we as a ship...and as a family will break from the Alliance to become a mercenary vessel...if you are wishing to leave during the hour...I will not stop you, nor will the defences of the ship. If you choose to stay with us however...I promise we will be fighting for what is right and each and every man and woman aboard will fight and defend each other like family." As he was about to cut the ONCOM broadcast however...the crew chanted the words a great man...an immortal alien once said..."NO MORE!" With that Eric Snowden...his lover, Camille Lawson, and the entire crew of the Harbinger begin a life of space-born piracy.

These stories shall be told.

COMPANION WANTED:

Male or Female Companion wanted

**Come travel to the vast wastes of
Torbordor with me!**

100 gold per day plus expenses

Bring your own horse

**You will find me in the far corner of Hadstrad's
Inn. Look for the hooded fellow with the staff.**

DRAGON TAMER REQUIRED:

Must be able to train and tame baby Dragons

***Experience of Hunting for Dragon Eggs preferred
but not necessary***

Plenty of Virgin Maidens available for bait

Tower Room in the Dragon Hall

***For More information and a full position
description send a pigeon to the Red Palace.***

ROYAL GUARDS REQUIRED:

Full training offered

Uniforms provided

Danger pay offered in the form of Ale

***Send a letter of interest to the Royal Castle
in Faerris***

Bounty Hunter position:

**Hunt dangerous Space Bounties and earn
cold hard credits!**

**There are several openings for intergalactic
Bounty Hunters with our Bounty Hunter
Office**

No experience necessary

Contact Nexus Bounties today!

Subspace: Ωπα668 Ask for Glox

JOIN THE ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE ARMY TODAY

FREE BRAINS!

**MEET INTERESTING PEOPLE AND EAT THEIR
BRAINS**

**SHUFFLE AND GROANING TRAINING
PROVIDED**

ENQUIRE NOW AT YOUR LOCAL ZAA

WIZARD'S APPRENTICE:

**Do you have what it takes to become a
Wizard?**

If so you might be the next great wizard!

**Apply in person at the High Tower for your
Trails.**

STARSHIP MECHANIC WANTED:

***Subspace And FTL Engine craft with planet
hopper class shuttles.***

Radiation Classifications required.

***At least 5 years' experience required
please send your Resume via HyperCom to***

Theta Theta Sigma-779939

Mattaniah
By Endiry Shade

Have you ever had a story from your childhood, things you tend to look at through that innocent skew of youthful remembrance, that, until telling them to someone else, seem completely normal? Like, it's not till you hear the words go spilling outta your mouth that something seems wrong? Or maybe you had a story so crazy no one would believe you? I used to catch myself just as their faces change, as something flickered at the corner of my eye. I was always quick to change the subject. I hated worrying my friends. And I don't wanna see that face that flickers in between blinks.

Maybe He wasn't there at first, not till I was born; maybe He was there before me and I wasn't the first. I don't know when I first began to notice the empty shadow turning in the hall, the cigarette smoke that wasn't my daddy's brand, the creak of the old floor behind me. The cold fingers in my half-sleep I shrugged off as dreams. I was always the brave one, the first of my friends to ditch my nightlight and bedtime stories. I don't know when the pains started either; the bruises that woke me in the middle of the night, the scratches on my neck and back. The whispers that crept in softly, too. Nothing but leaves on the window at first. But then one summer Daddy cut down the old camphorwood by my room, and the leaves didn't quit.

I made up reasons for everything. My old mattress was older than me and twice as stubborn, springs poking through or coming bent were to blame for my pains; the noises weren't nothing but the house settling. It was an old house, older than my great grandmama, and that probably explained the smells too. Who knows what kinda folk lived here before us? The red about the bathroom mirror was rust, the creaks and cracks were the old thing resting its bones. The shadow in the hall? Well hell, the big windows were so old and dirty you couldn't tell if it was shining out or not, hardly a surprise my eyes'd play tricks on me.

Then came time for me to go off to school. I was so excited! Half my friends had gone the year before, and I was so happy to be getting my chance you wouldn't believe! It was lonely business being the one of the youngest on the

block sometimes. Anyways, off to school I went. Mama had already taught me to read well enough, and I was a downright whiz with numbers. Most of kindergarten I spent glued to the crafts corner, drawing every little thing that popped into my head.

That's about when he started showing up. There wasn't much to tell from my scribbles at first; I was still learning that Daddy wasn't taller than the house, and that moustaches go below the nose - I hadn't quite mastered the finer bits of artistic expression. Still there He'd be. An empty face in the window, or off in some corner of a story I was vigorously illustrating, or a fourth in my family portraits of three. The damndest thing was I couldn't remember putting him in there.

As my drawings improved, I got a better look at the fellow. Even beyond my stick figure period, he held a certain sallowness. A yellow gash of a mouth that seemed too wide beneath small dark eyes. His clothes also struck me as off. They weren't quite rags, but they were nothing I'd have caught anyone or their parents wearing. Then the shack showed up behind the garage in one picture, then another.

Weird thing about these pictures was no one seemed to see anything off. My parents seemed confused when I apologized for the man in the pictures. It was like they didn't see him, or the shed. I thought to look out behind the garage one day, too, being careful not to get caught since Daddy told me to stay away from the rickety brick shambles. All I found behind it though was a length of iron chain. It was way thicker than what they used on the swing set, even the giant tire swing. I asked Daddy about it over dinner, and when he was done scolding me for wandering off by the old garage, he said it was probably one of the last owner's, maybe used for hauling something. He said he'd take it to the curb come heavy trash day.

It went on like this for a while, me drawing and no one seeing. I came to just accept it as normal. My mind wandered when I put crayon to paper, and who knows what all I missed in my own drawings. The part that kept nagging at me was no one seeing. They could see the chain though, that much was clear when my daddy yelled at me for bringing it inside. Of course, I didn't bring it in, and was fast to tell him such. For lying I was locked in my room for the rest of

the day. He took the chain back out, swearing under his breath when he thought I couldn't hear him as he dragged the heavy rusted length through the side door and out the hall. Heavy trash came that afternoon, and that should've been that

When it showed up in the stairway a week later though, no one knew how to react, much less what to do. Even Daddy knew I couldn't have done it. He wanted to blame local hoodlums, but with the burglar bars on every window and the Iron gate on our porch it was damn unlikely. Finally, thinking of nothing better to do, he dragged the thing out to the curb again, calling city services and whoever else he could think to complain to. Mama didn't stop him. It gave him something to do, and he wasn't yelling at us. Eventually someone humoured him and sent down some guys to haul it off to the junkyard.

That night though, the whispering got worse. It weren't leaves no more, and I've never heard a settling house half whisper a song. I couldn't make out half the words; the old wheeze had an accent thicker than any I'd ever heard, but it was definitely some kinda rhythm. I slept horribly that night. When I got back from school, Daddy was out in the yard, shovel furiously hacking at the ground, swearing up a storm and a half. When I made it out to him, I saw what had his goat; the damn chain was back.

Mama called me in for supper soon, and that night dinner was heavy quiet. There was some feeling of hapless giving-up over our heads, and even Mama's cooking couldn't wipe the scowl off Daddy's face. At least the singing left off that night. Even so I didn't sleep well. By the time I woke up for breakfast, I felt ready to go back to bed. The bruises didn't help. Fat purple and yellow welts sprang ugly over my arms, and Mama fretted horribly when I lurched into the kitchen. That day I went to school in my sweater despite the warmth.

The next few nights were worse. The singing came and went, and I heard Mama pray. I'd never heard her do that - Daddy said she stopped when Grandpapa died, back when I was just born. Sure as you live though, she was praying. Something 'bout that scared me more than everything else. She was a strong woman, and thinking of her on her knees, begging for help shook something deep in my young world. I tried to hum to myself to cut it out at first, but it didn't

do lick to help. It was like the louder I hummed, the thinner the walls got. By the end of the week I gave up.

Classes were all I had. Spring was rushing into summer, and I hated the thought of being stuck at home all break. Then one day at lunch when I went to grab my bag, something clanked inside. I unzipped my backpack to find a length of that damn chain here at my school. Nowhere felt safe after that. Going out every day slowly seemed more chore-like as I seemed to sink away from everything, and suddenly I couldn't wait for summer. The house shoulda scared me more, but my bed was there, and lately all I wanted was sleep. Singing and wheezing mutters faded into mama's prayers as I tried to sleep, and chain links clanked together in my nasty dreams.

When the chain showed up around my bed one morning, talk of moving started. Mama begged Daddy to let us get out of here, but a hard-working man's a stubborn thing, and he refused to leave the house he's scrimped for half his life, chains or no. There wasn't no one going to budge him, and Mama knew that. Still every dinner she begged, every night she prayed, and every day she looked a little older. Grey started to fleck her brunette hair, and lines snuck slowly under her usually flashing eyes. She wasn't young per se - She told me once she and Daddy had tried for years to get me, but she was starting to look much older than she was.

Even Daddy was starting to wear. He didn't even take the chain past the hall this time, letting it slump in a coil like some wicked brown snake by the side door. Where Mama's eyes seemed to lose her fire, his seemed to catch some new gleam like a man with too much fight in him. Something wild was waking up in him, something territorial maybe. It scared me. When there were only two weeks left in school he pulled me out. Mama didn't say anything about it, but scowled when he told us over dinner. She didn't say much at all really, especially to him.

The less my parents spoke, the more He did though. He wheezed his songs, and even stomped about at night, and each morning my bruises and scratches'd be worse. No matter what Daddy did with the chain, He'd move it that night. By June He'd gone on to slamming dishes. At first Daddy thought it was Mama and came running down stairs to yell at her for being a fool woman,

but she was out in the garden. I came into the kitchen to see him standing there pale-faced and fuming. I helped him pick up the pots and spoons, and when Mama came she helped sweep up the two broken plates. Soon enough, the dish throwing 'came as bad as the chain and whisper, till finally Mama didn't even bother cooking, opting to grab meals to-go rather than try and keep the kitchen tame.

I went with her on a lot of these trips. Anything to escape the house and Daddy's worsening temper. People'd stare at my cuts sometimes, or my bruises. The summer was too hot for long sleeves, and folks couldn't help but see. I guess they thought Daddy was doing it, or something like that, because one day someone showed up at our house. She asked to come in and look at the place, and wanted to ask me questions. Mama tried to get them in and out quick, but she wasn't quick enough. Daddy got home from work and was so angry it scared me. He wasn't a violent man - he'd never even spanked me - but he looked like he was about to strike this woman. She asked him about the mess in the kitchen, and my bruises and he yelled for me to go to my room. Mama held me back, pushing me slightly to the door and putting herself between me and him. He yelled again, and went to grab my arm or something, but Mama jumped full in front of me.

The woman watched Daddy hit Mama in shock, before running out of the house. Daddy seemed shocked, like he couldn't believe what he'd done; a second later he was apologizing to Mama and running after the lady as she ran down the driveway, calling 'Miss! Miss! Please wait' but I guess the damage had been done. The next day is when they came and took me here to live with you.

It was just two days later - you remember, don't you - the fire. They say Daddy killed my mama, but it ain't true! Like I said, he was a stubborn man, too proud to let go of his house, too protective to let anything happen to me or Mama. That's why He killed him. Daddy was in the way, and He killed Mama and set the fire for it. I wasn't there, and that made Him so angry he burned the whole damn place down. I was gone so He couldn't get his payback. You remember that book you helped me find in the library? The big one with all the old newspapers? I think I found Him.

You know it was an old house, very old. It was really nice back in the day, too. The whole

neighbourhood used to be upscale. I mean, obviously not by the time Daddy got it - it was a tumble-down mess. Hell, most of the old houses had been torn down, but not that one. One thing had by the time he and mama moved in though - the old servant's house. It was common back in the day for nicer houses like that to have their own live-in servant or maid. It was after slavery, but not by much, and practices like that took even longer to die out down here I guess.

Anyways, I went through that book for months and months last year. I kept putting off homework and everything, but I finally found it. See, back when there was still a rich family living there, they had a servant and groundskeeper, one C. Mattaniah. Apparently he was a widower but lived with his daughter Sarah in the servant's house. According to the article I found, the son of the family who owned the house was suspected in Sarah's disappearance, but the family was rich and had good friends. When they found his girl's body, the rich boy was already out of the country. Old Mattaniah apparently hung himself shortly after, and the family all but fled. The whole neighbourhood was shocked; and apparently the scandal was when things went downhill for the whole place. Folks didn't want to be any kinda involved with that, and eventually everything went into disrepair. Someone apparently burned down the servant's house a few decades before my daddy bought the place. He had no idea.

Anyways I think that's it. Old Mattaniah, he's angry about his daughter, and wanted the folks in the house to pay. He went after the kid of the folks who owned it, me. I guess he thought I was the rich son, huh. Only, I got away, too. He got my folks, not me. Now you're prolly asking yourself why I'm telling you all this. I'm safe, I got away. It was years ago. I oughta just leave well enough alone and let the dead have their peace, right?

Thing is, payback is a hell of a drive. Enough time and will, and nothing stands in the way of revenge, and He seems to have plenty of both. He even left the house, found me at school. He found me in my damn dreams. I thought maybe I'd put enough years and miles between us, but he even found me here. See, today I found this chain in my bed...

Endiry Shade:

Endiry Shade was born and raised in Houston, Texas. She's travelled a lot and even learned a little. Her tastes tend toward the dark or at least eclectic, and her interests range from mythology, the history and migration of language and culture, the occult, to gardening and baking. She lives with her adoptive family of folks, friends, and too many cats and spends her days engrossed in studies and imaginary intrigues within her own little world.

<p>Swordsman For Hire:</p> <p>15 years' experience in swordsmanship. Accomplished Bowman Excellent Horseman Won't sleep with your maiden daughter. If interested, I'll be at the Pub</p>	<p><i>INTERGALACTIC ESCORTS LOOKING FOR THAT SPECIAL SOMEONE TO WARM UP THOSE COLD NIGHTS IN DEEP SPACE? LOOK NO FURTHER - WE WILL COME TO YOU!</i></p> <p>Our professional Escort Services offer a wide variety of professional escorts of varying races, species and skills to satisfy your needs</p> <p>Contact us via Subspace today!</p>
<p>HELP!</p> <p>I am a 17 year old Princess who has been locked away in a high tower by an evil wizard who wants to marry me and take my crown, I need a Knight or Preferably a noble prince to come and rescue me!</p> <p>THIS IS NOT A JOKE!</p>	
<p>Royal Carriage Ways Regular Carriage journeys between Each Major Town and City in the realm</p> <p>Affordable holiday packages available</p> <p>Freight and Courier services</p> <p>Free upgrade to 'on top of the cart'</p>	<p>Slaandrik's Inn</p> <p>Lunchtime specials: Roast Venison with Potatoes, carrots and Gravy: 10 Gold with a free mug of Mead ~</p> <p>Rabbit Stew with freshly Baked Bread 5 Gold with a mug of Ale ~</p> <p>Pheasant Roast stuffed with Garlic and Leek 15 gold with goblet of Wine</p>

Tiranese Triage
By CJ Muggleston

"Hard to starboard! Get your ass in gear, Bellows!" Captain Rice screamed at his helmsman. The Prophet Class Starship swung violently to the right. The Trion Implosion missiles screamed past the hull.

There was a bright flash of light and the very fabric of space was rent as everything within a thirty foot radius was sucked into the implosion.

The energy exploded outward, bathing the *Rannis* in fire and sending a shockwave through the entire ship, which lurched violently.

Ados Rice was thrown across the small cockpit, slamming into the wall.

"Argh, Christ Bellows, would it kill you to miss one once in a while?" He pushed himself off of the floor and wiped away the blood from his mouth with a grunt.

Nathaniel Bellows pushed down on the controls and the *Rannis* dropped into a gut-wrenching dive

"Ah hell, Cap'n, you know you couldn't fly this heap even if'n ya tried!" Bellows crowed maniacally, full of mirth. He pulled the *Rannis* back up, hitting the hyper thrusters and rocketing up behind and over the Trianese ship

The *Rannis* flew over its target as graceful as a bird of prey, dropping out of the arc and hurtling at the Trianese vessel

"Are we ready, Mr. Bellows? Do it now!" Captain Rice screamed, murder gleaming in his eyes like the fires of hell.

The Tunnarin torpedoes flew forth from the smaller ship vengefully, slamming into the top of their target. The torpedoes punctured the hull and slammed into the mess hall, startling a Trianese soldier.

The ship exploded in a fiery conflagration, sending debris shooting into the dark reaches of space.

"Hell yeah!" Ados Rice crowed, slapping his helmsman on the shoulder.

"Another job well done, eh Cap?" Nathaniel said with a wily grin, skilfully guiding the *Rannis* down into the wreckage.

Large pieces of flaming debris bounced and scraped against the rusty hull as the *Rannis*

navigated the wreck. Charred bodies drifted past the portholes, eyes staring lifelessly back at Captain Ados Rice, full of accusation. He shook his head and turned away with a grimace, activating the ship wide intercom.

"Alright, boys, she's all yours!" He yelled through the speaker, turning and heading down to the crew quarters. As the pneumatic doors slid open with a hiss, he was greeted by the excited whooping of a dozen unwashed men as they scrambled to don their space suits.

Presently, he was opening the bulkhead and his men poured out into outer space, excited for the pillage to come.

A smile twisted the good captain's face as two of his men manoeuvre a large safe through the outer doors. He hit a button, sealing the doors.

The safe fell out of the air and slammed into the metal plates of the floor as gravity was restored.

One of the crew members sprang into action, grabbing a Scalene Torch and getting to work. It popped open with a soft hiss, the metal at the edges glowing bright red. Ados kicked it open and leaned in eagerly, emerging a second later holding a priceless Aresian statue.

Mr. Bellows walked up behind him, grinning wildly

"Lhoma Seven, Cap'n?" Captain Rice roared with laughter and clapped his back

"To Lhoma Seven, lads! It's a good day to be a Pirate!" The *Rannis* rocketed off towards Lhoma Seven,

Captain Rice had an appointment to keep with a certain collector of Aresian antiquities

CJ Muggleston

I'm C.j. I am an unpublished author as of yet, but that is simply because my works are still in the works. I find that I'm different from other writers in several ways. I haven't the faintest clue who my inspirations are, and often times end up inspiring myself, which some may think a ridiculous notion but hey, we're all different. It's what makes Humanity beautiful. I have never taken a creative writing class or been trained in any way. I discovered I had natural literary talent over a year ago and have been writing ever since. I'm just a normal guy that can pen out a great story.

Mrs Smith comes to tea.

By Stacey Welsh

Libby sat in the spring sunshine; an old long sleeved floral dress, that was once her mother's favourite but was now relegated to dress up duty, covered her pants and tee shirt. Her little feet pushed all the way into the toes of an old pair of high heels and a bonny sunhat covered her blonde curls.

A child's table and chairs were set out for play, an old tablecloth covering it with a plastic tea party set, which was overflowing with apple juice. Four chocolate biscuits were slowly melting on a plastic plate, ready for a sticky chocolaty demise.

Libby's happy childlike chatter to the array of dolls and stuffed toys that had 'joined' her for afternoon tea while Mummy cleaned the house, was interrupted by the high pitched whining of a strange craft, no bigger than her grandmother's Volkswagen beetle, as it landed in her back yard.

A door hissed open and a strange little person came out and looked around, large dark eyes gazing at Libby from behind a fish-bowl helmet

"Oh look girls!" She piped up, "Mrs Smith has arrived!" She stood up in her badly oversized heels, over balancing slightly before she righted herself

"Mrs Smith, we are not playing spaceship today! It's tea party time!" Libby chastised the creature she had dubbed "Mrs Smith" she went to her box of dress-ups and found a red cocktail dress with a rip in the skirts that her Aunt had given to her for her dress-ups. She then found a pair of mismatched heels, and some costume jewellery necklaces.

She proceeded to dress Mrs Smith and then led the stunned visitor to table.

Libby looked at Mrs Smith, "you need a hat Mrs Smith!" She smiled and got an old straw hat and popped it on the Glass bowl that completed the Space suit. Libby then proceeded to 'expertly' pour the 'tea' for her newest guest.

Mrs Smith blinked eyelids of pasty grey and looked up at the strange little girl who sat opposite.

"Mrs Smith, don't be rude! Have some tea!" Libby said as she picked up her own Cup and sipped the sweet juice with her pinkie out.

Mrs Smith followed her actions, the plastic cup stopped at the glass bubble of the helmet.

Libby shook her head

"Mrs Smith you need to take that silly Space suit off!" She said as she grabbed the glass bowl and pulled.

The bowl came away with a pop!

Mrs Smith made a strange garbling noise and gasped. Eyes, black as the night sky glared at Libby and Mrs Smith snatched back the helmet, putting it back on with a sigh of what could be assumed of as relief. She then clomped off back towards the Space ship,

High pitched and irritated sounding noises came from Mrs Smith as the door closed. The ship took off and flew away to the clouds.

A minute later sirens and screeching tires were heard at the front of her house, big burly soldiers ran into her yard and looked around.

A man with stars on his hat came up to Libby and went to one knee before her.

"Hi there little girl, did you happen to see a strange looking person here, would have come in a shiny spaceship."

Libby smiled.

"No sir, only person here was Mrs Smith but she left in a hurry and was quite rude!" She looked at all the soldiers around her as they searched her yard with funny hand held machines that clicked and beeped wildly. She flashed a winning smile at the large general before her.

"Would you like some tea?"

Stacey Welsh

Learning to read at the age of four, while on holiday going across the Nullarbor Desert in Australia, Stacey found a love of reading, but it wasn't until she was almost 30 that she discovered her love of writing. One night's dream and 18 months of work later and she was Self-published with her first book Scarlett Blade: The Bandit Queen hitting the shelves of her local bookstore,

and also Amazon.com and several other reputable websites. She is currently working on a few other projects which she hope to have published soon through Kindle, as well as contributing to Far Horizons.



JOIN THE ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE ARMY NOW!



An Exciting Career Change is at Hand!
**THE ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE ARMY is looking for NEW
RECRUITS!**

Benefits include:

- *Meet interesting people and EAT THEIR BRAINS*
- *Limb replacement should yours fall off*
- *Shuffle and Groan as you spread fear!*
- *Did we mention... BRAINS?!*

Go to your nearest ZAA Recruitment center now!

**ZAA accepts no responsibility for any injury caused by
Machete or shotguns during the takeover of the human race*

ARTWORK BY ENDIRY SHADE

Tobias's guide for time-travelling

By Tobias Sørensen

Since the dawn of whatever age mankind started to think about time-travelling, it has always been an interesting subject. Basically it's always been impossible. But what if it wasn't?

Let's presume that time-travel was ideal. Let's say, that you'd be able to go back in time and slap that guy you always hated, or make out with that lovely woman at the post-office.

Would you do it? Or would you perhaps travel even further back in time, perhaps back to Ancient Rome, or Ancient Greece? Maybe you'd go back to the renaissance to meet Leonardo? Heck; maybe you'd even be the inspiration for Mona Lisa. Sounds like a great idea, doesn't it?

I think it does, and if you'd ask me, I would probably head to the dark ages of the Middle Ages. I've always enjoyed stories about the Middle Ages, and I'm also a huge fan of the fantasy genre, which mainly is set in a Middle Age-ish era.

Enough with the chit-chat, it's time for some thinking. You guys do know that for time-travel to happen, you're going to need a time-machine, right?

Now, for the Doctor Who fans out there, you're familiar with the TARDIS. And for those who don't know what a TARDIS is, it's a time-machine disguised like one of those old blue British police boxes.

It's the 'main vehicle' our protagonist, The Doctor, uses. I'm also certain this is where the quote: "It's bigger on the inside." is from. Also, I'm still certain David Tennant was the best Doctor.

Enough with that. My point is, to travel in time, you need a tool or a ship, something that works as a bender of time. Like in the iconic 'Back to the Future' movies, where a DeLorean is used as a time-machine. Or as said before, the blue police box from the 'Doctor Who' series.

So, to summarize, we need a time-machine. But that's not the only thing. When you travel back in time, you need to remember a really special part so you don't screw something up. And that is of course blending in. Think about it, if you travel back in converse shoes, tight jeans and a brown sweater, you're going to look like you don't belong there.

So, to make up for that, you will of course prepare from home! Analyse the age you're going to, and dress properly! Also, people aren't speaking the same language as they do now. For example, the Ancient Romans spoke Latin, and trust me, Latin is a difficult language to learn.

So, by now we have time-machine, outfit and dialect. What else? Aha! The famous space-time continuum! This is one of the greatest things about time-travel, you can literally mess a whole timeline up if you do something stupid. Out of theory, of course. It's not like time-travel exists or anything.

Want an example? Let's say you go back.. a hundred years. Back to the country now known as Bosnia, more precisely Sarajevo. Now you might wonder: "why would I go here?" well, let me tell you why. One hundred years ago precisely, was the year that Archduke Franz Ferdinand got shot. Who's Franz Ferdinand, you may ask? Well, he was the victim that basically started the First World War.

Imagine if you could go back in time and prevent the First World War. Wouldn't that be great? That would of course also prevent the Second World War, which would prevent the holocaust of millions of Jews in the world. That sounds great, doesn't it?

Well, it sure does. But give this a thought. If the First World War, and the Second World War didn't happen, would our world really be the same? Would it be better, or would it be even worse? Who are we to say, that history should be changed? Who are we, as humans, to judge whether or not something had been done correctly or done wrong?

I certainly wouldn't go back in time at all. Unless I could be certain that my choices wouldn't alter anything, which would have an effect on the present or even future. I would feel more confident with going into the future, and I'm not even certain I would do that.

Just imagine how the world would be like, if we knew what our future would hold for us? Wouldn't be that brilliant, would it? Would you really enjoy knowing your destiny? Knowing, that you might not get anything out of your life. Maybe you would get some crappy job you always hated, and you'd feel lonely.

That doesn't sound really good, does it? It doesn't to me. If I actually had the choice to travel in time, I probably wouldn't. But if I would, I actually think I would go back in time and give my thanks to John Harris. After all, he did invent Bacon.

Trial of the Magi

by Thea Gilchrist

Balan Boojum was an irrepressible lad, always clamouring for answers and wanting to know more about things. When he was very young he'd made a habit of asking his mother "Why?" all the time. She'd always laughed when she answered him... After a certain point, the task of answering Balan's endless questions had fallen to his father. Nobody saw the harm in humouring the lad when he asked questions... That was the only way anyone could learn anything! He was so inquisitive one of his friends suggested he study with the mages off to the west. But his father said no, absolutely not. When Balan asked why, his father said they were evil and corrupt. Balan didn't believe it so he packed his belongings and ran off to study with them. The mages took him in to study, showing him kindness and respect, and he found his calling in the Conclave of Fire. The mages taught all elemental magic there, much to Balan's delight. A few days after he found his calling, several months after he'd run away from home to find the mages, the buildings where the novices, initiates and apostates lived and studied had been attacked. It appeared the townsfolk had finally had enough.

Balan came home in the back of a corpserunner's wagon... He'd died when the land of the magi was attacked. His body was unmarked... But for the lack of breath and colour in his face, one would think he was only sleeping. His father knew better. He'd seen death sweep through without leaving a mark on the victim before so it didn't surprise him. He and his other son were wary when the people with the wagon came forward... Three in all, one male and two females. They had reason to distrust the magi... After all, it had been the mages who had waged war on the land so long ago, and the people who lived there weren't about to let themselves forget what had happened.

"But for your son Balan, milord, all would have perished." The mage's eyes and words were

sombre as he addressed Balan's family. Dressed as he was in tones of brown and green, it was obvious he was a mage of earth.

Balan had sacrificed himself so that only a fraction of the other mages had been killed... He had summoned the Great Phoenix and channelled its energies to stop the onslaught.

Balan's brother Orias didn't buy it. "How could a mere apostate use such a powerful spell?" His eyes were narrowed as he studied the man dressed in various shades of brown, russet and gold.

Balan's father agreed. "There's something you aren't telling us. Spill it before we summon the Magistrate." And he had every right to make such a demand... After all, it was his son that was lying dead in the sheet resting on the floor in the living room!

Balan had a natural talent for fire magic and all new students were taught such a spell to protect themselves. Or in Balan's case, to defend against an invading army. Such nobility carried a very high price, unfortunately. His soul had been torn from his body and his heart had just... stopped. "The force of the magic he was using was too much for him. Had we known what he was planning we would have stopped him." The mage seemed truly remorseful and agitated at such a senseless loss.

Balan's father shook his head. "No, he would have found a way to cast that spell. He was very stubborn!" He couldn't help a small smile at those words... But it was true; Balan had been very stubborn indeed. And that small dialogue alone was enough to snuff the flames of distrust and allowed him to have no hate in his heart. He saw no reason not to be kind to those who had brought his son's body home to him... Because he'd never truly believed they were evil or corrupt. He'd only said that to keep Balan at home where it was safe; he'd been afraid something bad was going to happen.

Orias laid a hand on Balan's shoulder and spoke softly. "Thank you for bringing him home

to us.” For all their arguments and fighting, Orias had truly loved his younger brother and it showed in the way he lightly rested his hand on a shoulder that would never shrug or twitch with laughter again.

Balan’s father escorted the trio of mages to the door of the cottage and one of the others spoke. “Others won’t be so accepting. Afram, you and Orias must flee after laying Balan to rest. We don’t want you being killed for showing us mercy.” She too was dressed in the subtle tones of an earth mage.

Afram scowled then sighed. “You’re right... I hate leaving him here, but we have no choice.” His voice was soft, almost too quiet to hear. But hear him they did... And they could only sympathize with him.

Orias tilted his head then lifted his bow. Afram rested one hand on his axe and a flood of angry villagers appeared with torches held high and several men and women in chains. One of the men stepped forward and pointed his torch at Afram as he spoke.

“Surrender the murderers or be put to death yourselves!” His eyes, face and voice were hard with anger... And he silently dared Afram to put up a fight.

Afram merely spoke quietly. “Peace, Jomas, they brought Balan home to me.”

Jomas only scowled. “They killed our children!”

Afram remained calm. “They brought them home to us, yes?”

“Well... Yes. But...” Jomas shifted from foot to foot as he spoke... He knew Afram had a point.

Afram lifted one hand to silence the angry mob. “Heartless fiends wouldn’t care one whit about victims’ families... And if you seek information about the real killers, look to your own! The mages were assaulted by angry villagers like you!” As far as he could tell, that was the

truth. People had long hated and been afraid of the mages because of their gifts, and because the mages were reclusive.

The villagers looked startled, then one spoke with a calm and clarity Afram knew well. “I suggest an inquiry into the day’s events. And once the truth is known we will decide what to do.”

“And my brethren among you?” The mage who had initially addressed Afram lifted his chin and fixed his gaze on this new speaker.

“I apologize, Grand Geomancer, the others got overzealous. They will be released.” And he nodded his head for his fellow villagers to do just that.

The mages were set free and the Grand Geomancer spoke on behalf of his fellows. “We agree to an inquiry, Mayor. We want answers ourselves as to why they targeted our training archive for those new to magic.”

The mayor conferred with the others then made a decision. “Very well. The inquiry will begin in two weeks’ time at the scene of the assault. We convene at the Reliquary of Knowledge.”

But before he led the villagers away he turned to address Afram. “I’m sorry about Balan.”

“Thank you, Barix.” Afram’s face was calm, but the pain was all in his voice.

They left and Orias scowled. Afram saw it. “I know... I don’t like it either. Two weeks isn’t enough time.”

Balan was buried the following morning in the family cemetery, beside his mother and sister who had died of a plague several years before. Other graves were filled as the village laid their children to rest. Jomas came by and spoke quietly. “There are those who would end the magi in spite of their kindness... I suggest you warn them.”

“Thank you, Jomas. I will.” Afram could barely bite back a sigh of sorrow mixed with disappointment. He and Orias packed their belongings to begin the long journey west. People

began to join them as they travelled. The pass to the land of the magi was a place to rest and eat... Afram turned to the others and addressed them. "We go to warn the magi... Our brethren seek their destruction."

Orias's best friend was among the gathering and it was he who spoke. "We side with you, Lord Afram. Our loved ones may have perished under their care, but it wasn't their doing. Ashalia came back on one of their wagons... She told me on one of her visits home that the mages were really very nice. I can't see them being involved in such a thing..."

His emotional statement reflected the heartache the other families were feeling. Ashalia had been Balan's intended bride... And now they were both dead. Orias fought back tears as he spoke. "We continue in the morning. Beware what you see and ignore what you hear."

They woke in the morning to find a lone mage looking at them with her hands folded in front of her. "What brings you to the land of the magi?" She was dressed in the reds and golds of a mage of fire with blue trim that denoted her as one of the border patrol.

Afram spoke calmly and quietly, but the calm was a mask for the fear churning inside. "We come to warn your fellows."

The mage spoke softly but firmly. "Warnings need context to be heeded."

Orias stepped forward. "Our kinfolk would destroy you... They wish you all dead."

The mage didn't even bat an eye. "Be welcome then and make haste so I may seal the pass behind you."

They filed through as quickly as they could and the mage quickly joined them. A shower of rocks came down to block the pass behind them and the mage led the way. "I would address you but I do not have permission to do so."

The mages were trained very early on to ask for permission to use someone's name... It showed other people they had respect for their fellow human beings. Afram smiled slightly. "Permission granted... I am Afram and this is my son Orias."

"We were told of your act of mercy... Thank you."

"Balan never thought badly of you, I owed it to him to..."

He trailed off. The mage wisely left it alone, knowing his grief was still fresh. They travelled in silence, the ruined domes of the Reliquary always in sight. One of the mothers spoke quietly; her name was Naleen. "I think we owe it to our children to find out the truth... I know Amera would have wanted it that way."

Amera had been her oldest, and her only daughter. She'd had a rare gift for seeking out the truth and Orias had always thought she'd gotten it from her mother. "I promise you we'll get to the bottom of this."

Naleen smiled a little and gave Orias a hug, which he happily returned. Their guide frowned slightly, the expression foreign on her face. "That's odd... Benihar should have been here by now."

Orias perked a brow. "Benihar?"

"One of the Reliquary Guards. Excuse me a moment, won't you?"

"Of course." Afram was the very face of calm. It was best to remain polite, even under these dire circumstances.

The mage hurried off and Naleen spoke again. "If they've always had guards, how did this happen?"

Orias was a tactician by nature and it showed in his next comment. "They were taken by surprise. Whoever attacked them knew they wouldn't be expecting anything like that, let alone the children being a target."

The mage came back and spoke in a hushed voice. "Hurry. This way. Keep your eyes forward and don't look down."

They did as they were told... And never saw the fresh signs of slaughter that left bodies strewn about as far as the eye could see. Their guide led them to a large building with its domed roof intact, led them inside and quietly departed. Time seemed to go on forever until the door opened and someone came in. "I see Amber was her usual efficient self..."

Afram gave a quiet sigh of relief. "Grand Geomancer."

"I thought I recognized you the other day, Afram... I bring you grim news."

Afram lifted a hand to forestall the protests. "What happened?"

"Before I begin I think it best if you stopped hiding."

Orias was confused. "Hiding?"

Afram only smiled sadly before putting his hands together. Orias could only watch as thin black streaks appeared on his hands and down over his eyes in a vertical line... The ruddy complexion found in one whose entire life had been spent in the countryside slowly disappeared and left him pale as a freshly bleached bed sheet. His reddish-brown hair turned white, then black. And when Afram finally opened his eyes, they weren't brown any more. Those once chocolate coloured eyes were now purple with a cat's eye slit for the pupils. Orias wasn't sure who said it first... But it came out as an exclamation of surprise.

"Magesworn!"

Afram stood there quietly with his chin raised as they looked at him. Magesworn were people whose ancestors had once stood among the magi but no longer practiced magic. Most had simply chosen such a path, but some had been forced to take that route. And when Afram finally

spoke, he revealed much of the puzzle. "I am Afram, son of Thom, son of Acuna."

The family of Acuna had been hunted down and either murdered or had their magic sucked out of them with a sphere. Siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces, nephews, children, grandchildren... It didn't matter. They were killed or left helpless. Of her husband there had been no sign... It was assumed he'd died of a broken heart. Fanatics and zealots alike had banded together to destroy them... But in the end, they had failed. Because the bloodline of Acuna the Felsworn (so named for the alleged source of her magic; she had been a mage of darkness) hadn't ended like they thought it had. Her youngest Thom had taken his family and escaped to a faraway land that cared nothing for his family history. But now it had all come full circle. Here was one of the Acuna-line Magesworn standing in the land of the magi. Orias understood... And knew why the Grand Geomancer looked so grim. "There's been another attack."

"Yes. Much worse than the one that killed Balan and so many others."

"Tell us so we can help you put a stop to it once and for all." Afram smiled faintly at Orias's passionate declaration. That boy reminded him of his father Thom the Great... And the grandmother he'd never seen again after his family fled when he was 9. Rumour had it she'd been hung in the main square of their homeland, blind and mute. They said her deal with the Devil had taken her sight and speech... Thom had gone back after Afram was grown and come home bitter and empty. Thom's own sister had turned on him after Acuna's death... She'd had the magic sucked out of her and condemned Thom as a murderer. That was when Thom had shown Afram how to hide his markings. Now he turned those violet eyes to the Grand Geomancer. "Tell us, old friend... There isn't much time."

"They came back just a few hours ago... They destroyed the Archive of Inner Sight."

The home of the scholars and record keepers. Orias swallowed heavily.

“How many...” He couldn’t finish.

“Half the scholars were killed... And all the Reliquary Guards.” The Grand Geomancer looked grim.

“ALL of them!?”

“Yes. The mage who brought you had you look straight ahead...”

“Yes.”

“She did so to protect you. They left our brethren strewn around like so many discarded toys.”

“How could they kill all the Reliquary Guards at once?”

Orias knew the answer... And bile roiled in his gut as he spoke. “It was never the villagers... It was the Hunters.”

Afram’s face paled. Mage Hunters. Orias now sounded grim.

“And they’re out to destroy you... By killing the Grand Magister. They’ll destroy one Reliquary or Archive at a time until the Grand Magister surrenders.”

The Grand Magister was the strongest and most powerful of the Magi... And the only one the elemental masters answered to. The Grand Geomancer turned to one of his companions and barked an order. “Rally the survivors... We meet at the Azure Pools in 3 hours.”

His voice was grim and cold at the same time, reflecting the element he had mastered, which was, of course, that of earth. “We go to war.”

The addressed mage took off like a shot. Afram turned and opened a spatial rift, otherwise known as a mage portal. “Jomas. Naleen. Go through and get as many soldiers as you can in 3 hours. We’ll need their help.”

Jomas looked frightened and angry at the same time. “What do we tell them?”

“The Hunters have returned and the spawn of Acuna needs their help... Or the mages will be destroyed.”

Naleen and Jomas exhaled, took each other’s hands and stepped through. The world they came out in was not their own, nor was it any place they had ever been! “Where are we?” Naleen was curious and more than a little nervous.

A passing candle maker answered her. “You stand in Adrestang, miss.” Her puzzled look was ignored as he pulled his cart along the cobblestoned road. Jomas shook his head at the answer that wasn’t really an answer.

A baker waved them over. “What brings you across the oceans?” She was an older woman and had a friendly demeanour about her... She calmed them both simply by offering to help.

Jomas spoke hurriedly. “We were sent to gather soldiers.”

The baker lifted one hand, then pointed to a burly man in plate armour. “Speak to him, he’s the Captain of the Watch.”

“Thank you.”

They made their way to the Captain of the Watch without causing any trouble whatsoever. “Beg pardon, sir...”

“Speak freely, good sir.” The Captain’s voice was mellow and strong at the same time.

“We were sent to gather as many soldiers as we could in 3 hours...” And he swallowed before continuing. “The Hunters have returned.”

The Captain lifted one hand. “Who sent you? Phrase it how they did.”

Naleen silently prayed Jomas remembered... He did. “The spawn of Acuna.”

The Captain stood very still... Then gave a nod. “Long has it been since her kin came here... We owe them a great deal.”

Another voice rose, gentle and kind. "First and foremost, we owe them an apology."

They turned and saw a woman in a red linen dress with her hands clasped loosely in front of her and a silver ribbon sewn to the sides of her bodice. The ribbon disappeared at her waist and the Captain bowed slightly. "Good day to you, Lady. May the Sun always shine on you."

The Lady smiled then turned to Jomas and Naleen. "What was the full family chain?"

Naleen spoke up. "Afram, son of Thom, son of Acuna."

"Thom! So he DID survive!" Her exclamation told them this was where Afram had been born and raised... It explained a lot. Not everything... But they had answers to some of their unspoken questions. Including why he had an accent when nobody else around him did.

"Yes Lady. His son Afram's youngest is dead." Naleen almost couldn't talk.

Jomas was very quiet. "He sacrificed himself to stop the Hunters. But alas, he failed. They struck another building this morning."

The Lady frowned, she led the city, then turned to the Captain. "Go. Assemble the army. We will wait for Afram to open the gate..."

Her face hardened. "Then we will destroy the Hunters once and for all!"

The Captain left without a word. The Lady adjusted the bodice of her dress then spoke softly.

"Tell me everything."

It took them the whole three hour window to tell her everything they knew. Naleen was hoarse, Jomas was pale and both were drenched with sweat. The Captain returned and the Lady nodded. Afram's gate opened right on time and he came through. The Lady spoke firmly. "The army awaits your command... General."

Afram didn't even hesitate. "Proceed through the gate, two at a time. Once they see your armour, the mages will widen the gate. You

report to the Grand Geomancer. He has declared war on the Hunters. They seek the destruction of the magi by killing the Grand Magister."

The Captain pointed and the soldiers went through two at a time. After the first twenty had gone through, the gate widened so they could travel five abreast. Once Afram and the others came through, the gate closed and one of the magi spluttered. "This is a little much..." He was flustered at the sight of so many men and women in plate mail with vicious looking weapons... Magi had no need for such things... They had their spells to protect them. But magic was no use against a well-placed knife or properly swung ax, so the soldiers were a necessary inconvenience.

The Lady stepped up. "This is how we do things. Afram, son of Thom, son of Acuna, on behalf of the people of Adrestang in Aldrea Province, I offer you my sympathies on the loss of your son..."

And she smiled.

"And a formal apology for the wrongs committed against your family."

Afram spoke without hesitation. "I accept your sympathies and your apology... I know my father would do the same if he were here." Thom had died years ago of old age after his wife had passed on from a grievous wound suffered while harvesting the wheat on their small farm.

The Lady nodded gravely, then turned to the magi. "Would the Grand Geomancer step forward please?"

When he approached and bowed to greet her, she stood ramrod straight and her voice was oh so very cold. "How many Reliquaries and Archives have those monsters destroyed?" She held her anger back in order to get as much detail as possible... And being cold was the only way to do it.

The Grand Geomancer's face was grim as he replied. "Two, Lady. The Reliquary of Knowledge and the Archive of Inner Sight. We

lost half the novices, half the scholars and all the Reliquary Guards.”

“How many days between assaults?”

“Four. They struck this morning.” Then his eyes widened and he lifted a shaking hand. “They come again!”

The army sprang into action and fired wave after wave of crossbow bolts into the approaching throng. The reply from the oncoming mob was a retaliatory wave of crossbow bolts, which was easily repelled when the soldiers lifted their great red shields to deflect the bolts. The Lady’s voice was loud and strong. “Get the War Magi in position! They won’t hesitate long!”

“Yes Lady!”

A circle of soldiers formed around the four civilians and Afram stooped to pick up a crossbow bolt. Solid steel, black in colour, three red bands painted near the back of the bolt... The Lady took it out of his hand and frowned. “The Hunters have help. These bolts belong to the Vej’Nari.”

The Vej’Nari were a band of mercenaries who fought alongside anyone who could pay their enormous fee... And the Hunters could easily afford such a fee because they never seemed to run out of money. Screams began filtering back toward them and Afram cursed. “It was a diversion!”

The Lady stood tall once again and her voice rang with barely leashed fury. She knew who was behind all this... And it was time to end it once and for all! “CRISTOBAL!”

And just like that, the leader of the Hunters stood before her with a smug grin and a sardonic note in his voice. “You rang?”

Something about his posture set Afram on edge... The Lady spoke with a voice of stone. “Give me one good reason to let you live.”

Cristobal’s grin widened slightly. “I’m just doing my job, as you well know.”

Then he saw Afram and his entire demeanour changed.

“What is this?”

The Lady’s voice boomed and echoed in the stillness. “You know perfectly well what this is... It’s JUSTICE!”

Afram drew his arms across each other and soon held two wicked gleaming scimitars. “I am Afram, son of Thom, son of Acuna! And by the rights and laws of our nation, your life is FORFEIT!”

Cristobal was no fool... He knew exactly what that meant. And for him to deny it was a foolish move indeed... It was a move he didn’t want to make. “I ask for a delay. Two hours to clear out my troops.”

“You have ten minutes to start the clear out. I want them gone entirely.”

Cristobal turned and beckoned to his aide. “Have them stop and retreat. All of them. NOW!”

The aide took off running and soon the sounds of war began to diminish. When ten minutes had passed, the aide came back and bowed. “They do as commanded, my Lord. All have begun to pull back.”

Cristobal nodded curtly, then spoke quietly. “I must fight to the death... I am guilty of treason and multiple counts of murder. When I die take my badge to show them I have fallen. And then...”

He licked his suddenly dry lips before he could continue.

“Then burn my body and tell them to go home. It’s over.”

The aide spoke in a voice racked with fear. “But Commander...”

“No buts! I can’t run any more. It’s time for me to face my fate and accept my destiny.”

“What did you do that was considered treason?”

Cristobal sighed and his shoulders slumped. That one action made him look frail and old beyond his years.

“I turned my back on my family, my heritage, my nation... All because one rogue mage got me to believe all mages were evil. No, Nestor, I am the evil one. And now I must pay for my crimes. Please... Don’t get involved.”

Nestor was quietly escorted about ten feet away to stand with the Lady, Naleen and Jomas. Cristobal took off his weapons and tossed them aside. Afram offered him one of the scimitars and he took it. Nestor was in a blind panic. “Why does he do this!?”

The Lady’s voice was now soft. “Because honour demands it... And because his wife cannot rest if he doesn’t.”

“He never mentioned having a wife.” Nestor was confused... But not really. Cristobal had held many secrets... All of them about his past.

“Because doing so would betray all he thought he believed in.”

“Who was his wife?” Now he was curious. He wanted to know more about the man he’d sworn to serve until he died.

The Lady’s voice turned sad as she spoke. “His bride was Acuna the Felsworn... And he betrayed her in a manner most foul.”

Nestor didn’t want to believe it. If it were true that meant Cristobal was more than 100 years old. “How can it be true? He looks younger than Afram!”

“It is magic, my boy. Acuna wasn’t the only mage in that relationship.” Cristobal had disavowed all his magic... And in his madness had sworn to destroy all who practiced it. His insane declaration had led to the creation of the Mage Hunters... A wide-spread group of people sworn to the cessation or destruction of all forms of magic.

Afram and Cristobal crossed blades then began, oblivious to poor Nestor shaking all over. Seeing Afram had shaken Cristobal to his foundations. The spitting image of his beloved Acuna... He spoke out loud without realizing it. “Acuna please forgive me...”

Then he turned the scimitar around and jammed it into his own stomach, ignoring Nestor’s cry of dismay.

“Afram... I am your grandfather... And I killed my wife.” His admission came shortly before he grabbed the hilt of the scimitar and jerked it upward until the point on the shorter curve of the blade hit his heart and he died. His body fell to the side and he lay there in a rapidly spreading pool of blood. Nestor’s voice shook.

“Why?”

He hadn’t been expecting that, but she had.

The Lady spoke gently. “His conscience got the better of him.” She’d known in her heart of hearts that the day would come when Cristobal would have to confront his past... In the form of his future. Namely, one of his descendants. She’d thanked her lucky stars it had been Afram... No other would have shown such mercy by offering an honour duel.

Nestor understood that all too well. He’d been in several situations where his conscience had gotten to him and made him say or do something to make it right... But he hadn’t wanted Cristobal to commit suicide! Although deep down he’d instinctively known that was the only way to wipe the slate clean, so to speak... And, yes, it bothered him to no end. He’d seen Cristobal as a father of sorts.

Afram knelt and gently closed Cristobal’s eyes. “Cristobal, husband of Acuna, father of Thom... I grant you peace of mind. Go to the afterlife and be with your family.” His voice was gentle as he spoke and granted his grandfather that last act of mercy... Afram truly was a merciful soul and it showed when he forgave his grandfather for his sins.

Then he turned slightly and spoke gently.
“Nestor.”

Nestor was trembling as he approached.
“Yes?”

“Take the badge and the weapons... And tell them guilt always wins out in the end.”

“But he said to burn his body.”

“I know. But I’m not going to do that. He is part of my family... And he will have a decent burial.” Afram felt Cristobal deserved that much because family was everything in this place... And to him.

“As you command.” Nestor gathered the weapons in a satchel then gently removed the badge before looking at his former commander’s waxen and lifeless face. “I hope you found the peace you were looking for.”

Then he turned and walked away with his head down to hide the tears as he wept... He had been loyal to the very end and would have gladly sacrificed himself in Cristobal’s place if he’d been able to do so. Several of the Lady’s soldiers went with him to make sure he got there safely.

Afram stood at the graveyard that held Acuna and her children... A fresh plot had been dug and a cross set at the head. Cristobal’s name was printed on it, nothing more. “Now you are at peace... I will see you there when my time comes.”

He paused at his father’s grave and put a hand on the black marble slab. “Rest well Father, justice has been served.”

Orias hadn’t spoken since the second attack by the Hunters on the mages.

“Orias? Are you all right?” Afram’s gaze was concerned as he looked at his only surviving child.

“Why bury him there?” Orias’s voice shook as he finally spoke after so long.

“Because he took his own life... He fell prey to his own guilt.”

His voice softened. “If you had known my grandmother you would have understood.”

Orias pondered that for a moment, then nodded. “Blood is thicker than water?”

Afram laughed and slung his arm over Orias’s shoulder. “Always my boy... Always.”

They headed off to reconnect with Afram’s people, who were now Orias’s people as well. They were well away from the cemetery when there was a swishing sound, a gurgle and a wet thump. But nobody found the body until the following morning.

“My God...” One of the city guards knelt and turned the body over so they could see his face after making that exclamation.

One of the other guards recognized him at once. “It’s Nestor!”

Cristobal’s old Hunter badge had been stuffed into Nestor’s mouth after death, the gruesome wound across his throat clear evidence of how that poor man had been killed.

“It begins anew.” The first guard shook his head in dismay and disappointment.

Only this time, someone was hunting the Hunters. And the only clue they left was a trail of bodies as far as the eye could see. Various causes of death included decapitation and strangulation... And they were left wherever the killers felt like leaving them. One was found inside a local tavern with a knife jammed into his eye!

“When will it end!?” The barkeep was at his wits’ end... Having a body discovered inside his establishment had effectively killed his business.

Would it ever end? Nobody knew for sure one way or the other. But they were all sure of one thing... War loomed on the horizon and it didn’t seem to be too far away.

Thea Gilchrist:

When it comes to reading, Thea's no stranger to it. She practically grew up in the school library... She

was happiest curled up in a corner with a good book in front of her. Even school reading assignments were fun to her, because she loved to read, no matter what it was. But it wasn't until shortly before she found out her mother had cancer that she started writing... She had a pen, an empty notebook and no idea what was going to come from it. As with most true artists, she is a slave to her muse and has many projects that are currently incomplete, but she's hoping to go back and finish them someday soon. She cites several different authors as those who guide and inspire her, the literary legend Piers Anthony among them. (Check out his Xanth novel series if you want lots of laughter.) And though her mother is no longer physically with her, Thea plans to dedicate her first novel to her.

PAN GALACTICA STARLINES!
NEW CRUISE LOCATIONS!
NEW CRUISE SHIPS!

*Prepare yourself for the ultimate in deluxe luxury
with our top of the line Star Cruiser "Infinity"
Travel beyond the outer Rim to the "Forbidden
Zone" on a holiday so memorable that you'll
never 'want' to come back!*

*Our Cruise Consultants are waiting your call
now!*

***FOR THE DISCERNING DUELIST,
CHOOSE HACK'N'SLASH
SWORDS!***

***Guaranteed to gut your
opponent before he guts you***

OR YOUR MONEY BACK!

Scales and Steel

Fallout Fanfiction

By Seth Duff McCall

Disclaimer: this is a work of fan fiction, all rights of the Fallout Universe are reserved by Bethesda Softworks LLC.

The cold air over the Mojave gave pause to a dirty prospector, as he abruptly stopped walking in the damp sand. The river. He had forgotten the river. He looked over the worn parts of his T-51b power armour. These things were designed to repel water, and with the helmet on it shouldn't impede his ability to swim, shouldn't. Shouldn't was a big thing to gamble his life on. Savage Steve, was what the other prospectors called him, he didn't feel so savage looking at the water before him. He slowly walked into the water, the seals held fast. Steve wondered if the rumoured treasure on the east side of the river was worth all this. Maybe there was a Utopia on the other side of the river, no one ever seemed to return once they ventured to this side of the river.

Upon the plateau, Sgt Sickle watched the power armour clad enemy glide through the water, like a large trout. The moonlight capturing the metal skin and reflecting wildly into the night. Damn the Brotherhood of Steel, she was there on the oil rig, she knew the Brotherhood had to be behind the attack. The other dozen or so survivors swore up and down that it had been a tribal, Sickle found that hard to believe, and decided to spend the remainder of her days eradicating the Brotherhood. She pondered why a Brotherhood member would be this far out, especially in such old power armour. She felt the familiar feeling of revenge, it had been several months since she last encountered any of the Brotherhood. Patrolling from California to Nevada, she found the Brotherhood increasingly harder to find, the NCR was her best ally in her personal war. Sgt Sickle, tossed off her canvas poncho, she smiled as the moonlight played over her armour. Her squad had always said she was quiet, it had earned her the nickname "Wraith". She looked down at her Multiplas rifle's notched stock. Notched since that day she had killed 38 members of the Brotherhood of Steel. The sergeant smiled as she admired her work, just as fast as the satisfaction had come,

Sickle wiped it away, there was work to do. She crouched down, moving silently in practiced fashion.

Steve exited the river, amazed that the power armour hadn't leaked. The water had rinsed off the T-51b armour, he looked down at his chest just as the moonlight glanced off the faded logo on his chest. Gears overlaid by a flying sword, what nonsense was that? The BoS were supposed to be these legendary badasses, yet, he took the previous owner of the armour out fairly quickly. Sure it took him a while to figure out the armour, but it was worth it, the raider bullets would just bounce off of him. Steve smiled to himself as he began ascending the slope ahead, usually he would turn on the suit's flashlight, but tonight the full moon evaporated the darkness of night. Steve drew his grizzled Tri-beam laser rifle, even though he didn't expect a full on raider assault, he hated mole rats. When he was passing through Quarry Junction he had given the one there a good kick. Steve shuddered to himself and broke right at the top of the rise. He looked and some hills not too far in the distance. Steve didn't like to be out in the open, only fools walked out in the open. He manoeuvred to the west almost to the ridge line, and went down a little depression, rocks on either side he relaxed a little. Just as he was coming around the bend, three florescent green plasma charges splattered onto his armour. Steve fell back on one knee and brought his weapon into firing position, soon his tri-beam laser cracked the silence of the cold air as his shot stuck his enemy. He sought cover around the back of a rock as he heard his opponent scramble on the scree beneath their feet.

Sickle was breathing heavily as she slumped down behind a rock. "Asshole has a tri-beam laser" she muttered to herself. Sgt Sickle was mad, mad from the searing pain in her side where the laser had cooked her armour, but mostly mad at herself for missing what was an easy headshot. She took a deep breath and gathered her thoughts, when she heard heavy trotting coming from in front of her. Sickle tried to back up but the rock held fast. She quickly stowed her fear, it was probably just a super mutant, she could deal with the Brotherhood scum and a mutant without breaking a sweat. She shouldered her rifle and aimed at the approaching super mutant. The trotting got louder, it's steady

rhythm was drowned out by the Brotherhood member's cries: "Awe! Fuck!" The loud clamour of him trying to find footing on the loose ground. Just as Sgt Sickle was about to turn round the rock and fire on the BoS dog, she caught sight of what he had been screaming about. It was a Deathclaw, a big Deathclaw, the biggest fucking Deathclaw she had ever seen. Sgt Sickle scrambled from behind her cover and ran towards the BoS.

The bodies of the two iron soldiers flew together and ricocheted back to the sides of the rocks as a flawlessly coordinated attack by the Deathclaws was unleashed. The Deathclaw mother snorted and grunted, giving approval to the young Deathclaw to move in and eat their prey.



Artwork by Veronica
Raemona Carillo

One last time, I drift.

By Arkon Dia

I remember standing under the arch, as the fireworks exploded overhead. The lights cast shadows on your face. I remember you closing your eyes, the wind blowing away your hair; you looked like you were about to take off. And take off you did, in that flight suit of yours. You gave me a final wink and a smile as you sped away on your boyfriend's speed bike; Half a Harley, half a rocket. The roar of the engines as you sped away drowned out the words you said. But I read it on your lips "See you around, Spacer." I never did see you again.

Now I'm here above Planet Orpheus, in the cockpit of my FT-X200, all rockets and speed. I'm part of the defence measures of the planet, engaging hostile forces, fighting for the future of the colony. It's a light show in the vacuum of space. Even as death streams past in the form of heat seeking missiles, lasers as hot as the surface of the sun, all I can think about was that last night we walked out of the academy gates one final time. You disappeared, some say you became a smuggler, others said you became a pirate.

The one I liked the most was, you being a captain of a migrant ship, exploring new systems, colonizing planets with that smile of yours. It's the smallest of things that remind you of someone. A beam hits the glass of my cockpit, it cracks, the pattern similar to the break in my visor during a flight test all those years ago. I ejected too early from the dummy cockpit, the simulator was in the process of a crash landing, and my seat angled a few degrees to the right. One of the frames snapped and curved backwards hitting my helmet. I was out like a light, when I came to, you were leaning over me.

Your eyes froze everything then, it was like staring into an exit from the atmosphere, where the sky slowly turned into space, with its twinkling stars; beautiful. And that's my favourite part, whenever I launched from just below the exosphere, that's why I became a defence pilot. Just to see a semblance of you, whatever it may be.

The fissure starts to form in the break of glass. And for a moment that is all I see, how the hiss turns into a jet of smoke, like the puncture in your suit when we were in zero-G. We were outside the station that time, the final leg of cadets before they graduate. It was like an internship, showing us the ropes. We were doing a practice run of a Ship entry from the outside. "Foolish" you said, "what pilot would be caught dead outside a ship?" I told you then "Maintenance". You just rolled your eyes, I knew better than to argue. You pushed away playfully, I tried to make a grab for you, but I was caught breathless by the way you held my stare. Neither of us noticed the broken hook until it was too late. Your suit tore, and you lost oxygen fast. I leapt after you, contacting the station all the while. I clipped your belt to mine and I started moving back to the station door. My heart was hammering. It was the longest ten minutes of my life.

We got you in, god you were so cold. I feared the worst. You were sent back to earth then, admitted to the hospital next to the Academy. Two days later I followed, completing my requirements in a rush. I almost cried when I saw you. Putting your finger to your lips, you gave me a look with those sad eyes of yours and we embraced. I will forever remember the way your hair felt against my cheek. Velvet doesn't even come close. I spoke about this and that, not making any sense, just trying to give voice to my relief. You told me not to worry, that you'll be fine.

They released you that day, and you went home to your parents. I steer my ship into a dive, heat seeking missiles on my tail. I do an aileron roll, my ship spins in 360 degrees, and I fire flares in my wake. Most of the missiles detonate but one hits the rear of my ship, rupturing two of my four engines. The force of the explosion sends me careening, I wrestle the controls trying to stabilize my flight. A piece of metal flashes before my cockpit, catching light from the sun, just like how your necklace caught the rays of light from the chandeliers during the graduation ball. We were on the dance floor, pressed close, swaying to the sound of ballroom jazz. Every few steps your

necklace would glint and I would squint. You laughed and your smile was the brightest thing I saw that evening.

My ship goes on a spin without my prompt. Everything a blur of motion, like we were, spinning in the middle of the dance floor. But just like then, it all abruptly stops. The music changes and we swayed again; a slow dance, for a slow night. My ship shudders, took too many hits. Warning klaxons are going off inside my cockpit, my screen flashing with the sounds, everything is a haze of red. Red like that dress you wore during our last night together.

You danced and spun, like a black hole you drew me in. We were supposed to be the talk of the dance floor that night, but then he came. And then you had eyes only for him. I spent the remainder of the night chasing hopes at the end of bottles. I lost count. I didn't care. That was the night before you left. It was the coldest feeling, seeing you be with someone else. I raised a toast to you and him, because even I wasn't rooting for myself. I am drifting, nothing but life support on my screens now. The battle above the planet rages on. But mine is long past. I radio in my status. All I hear is static. I've no choice but to wait. Wait to be found.

There's nothing but the emptiness of space, but it doesn't matter. I am seeing the fading light of a supernova. The same supernova that obliterated your ship as it hung over a terraforming world. I know, because I look at the death of that star ever since I heard it from him. It was our last moment together, you found me floating in the gymnasium pool, and my tuxedo clung to me like a wet suit.

You called out my name, and I swam to the edge. You smiled, and I tried to pull you in. You shook your head "I was just wondering where you went off to after the ball." "I decided that the coldness of water needed my company more. You already had a date." You laughed and for the first and last time I asked you "why him?" The smile didn't vanish from your face, but your eyes lost its brightness. "You shouldn't bother yourself with me, our paths are

different. You have potential as do I; we'll only hold each other back. I can see it; our lives would have ended after graduation. Our dreams would have died." You stopped there but I continued; I felt what you really meant, that we would have been lost in the spaces of our bodies, in the distances that separated us only by a few feet, and in the endless meaning of our breaths; we would have been content listening to our hearts beat. I couldn't say it, I just stared.

You look at me one last time, gently pushing me away, and I drift.

Bloom

By Pete Sutton

The rose-like growth that blooms out of his chest gives forth a hiss and the air is filled with a million tiny spores. I am glad of the gas mask and the full biological protection suit. This isn't the first and, I'm sure, won't be the last. Since the Mars mission returned these incidents were becoming more frequent. It wouldn't have been so bad if the returning shuttle had totally burned up in the atmosphere. Rather than breaking up and some parts coming down in many places. Including this remote farm.

I phoned it in.
"Another bloomer.....Roger that...Over and out"

My orders were clear. Purify with fire. I walk back to the car to get the flamethrower when I note that the barn door is open. I'm sure it hadn't been when I first arrived. I decide to get the flamethrower before investigating so am surprised when the horse and rider burst out of the barn, almost ride me down and set off down the road.

Another spreading of the initial infection. Wherever they end up. Containment is failing. There are too many pieces, spread over too wide an area. I radio it in anyway. Protocol.

I reach the car and open the boot and lift the flamethrower lighting it up, steeling myself for the job to come. I am totally unprepared for the cat that has been hiding under the car. It swipes me on the way past and my finger is on the trigger. The fuel driven flame engulfs the back of the car and I turn to run making it a few steps before the fuel tank goes up. A giant's hand picks me up and throws me away like a discarded doll. As I land there is a sickening crunch and my breath escapes in one large huff. All is darkness.

When I come round I am on my back and have no concept of how much time must have passed. My protection suit is a smoking ruin. I am winded still, shocked, immobile. I watch the red spores settle on my visor.

Pete Sutton

Pete Sutton is a UK writer. He is one of the organisers of Bristol Festival of Literature (<http://unputdownable.org>) and community engagement manager for Vala coop (<http://www.valapublishers.coop/home>)

You can follow him on Twitter @Sutlope and read his blog here: <http://brsbkblog.blogspot.co.uk/>

FREE TO GOOD HOME: One 70 year old Dragon, in the prime of his life, House Trained, Rider Trained Good with Kids Excellent guard 'dog' Regrettably giving away	LOST: An Amulet of Time. If found, please return to Last Tuesday
FREE MEASURE AND QUOTE FOR ALL WIZARD TOWERS! Are you a wizard who has trouble finding space in which to perform your harder spells due to noise and clutter? Maybe it's time for your OWN WIZARD TOWER! Finnegan's construction services offer a free measure and quote for your new Wizard Tower! Now is the time to get your Tower Project Started!	<i>Environmental Suit for Sale: Still in good working order, Small hole recently patched Completely cleaned of the Zombie Virus</i>
	DUNGEON FOR RENT: 1 Classic Dungeon for Rent, Features include: Rack Torture Chamber Built in wall mounted Shackles Solid Iron bars Un-pickable Locks Tea Room Available NOW 50 Gold per week

HERE BE DRAGONS: MYTH, LEGEND AND HISTORICAL FACTS ABOUT YOUR FAVOURITE FIREBREATHERS

By:

CJ Muggleston

Ana Marija Meskova

Veronica Raemona Carillo

Artwork by Endiry Shade

Dragons all over Europe and Asia. Were they a type of Dinosaur that somehow avoided annihilation only to be eventually slaughtered by rightfully fearful humans? We may never know for sure beyond the point of speculation. Join us as we explore the wonderful world of Dragons and Drakes. The very word conjures up images of glistening scales, puffs of fire, ruined villages and elegant beasts soaring through the clouds raining death and destruction in equal measure. But what do we really know about these mythical beasts?



In Western folklore, dragons are usually portrayed as evil, with exceptions mainly in Welsh folklore and modern fiction. This is in contrast to Chinese dragons, which are traditionally depicted as more benevolent creatures. In the modern period, the European dragon is typically depicted as a huge, fire-breathing, scaly, horned, lizard-like creature; which also has leathery, bat-like wings, four legs, and a long, muscular prehensile tail.

Some depictions show dragons with feathered wings, crests, fiery manes, ivory spikes running down its spine, and various exotic decorations. A dragon-like creature with wings but only a single pair of legs is known as a wyvern. The European dragons are most associated with fire breathing. Dragon's blood often has magical properties; for example, in the opera Siegfried it let Siegfried understand the language of the Forest Bird.

Although usually depicted with wings, dragons are rarely seen flying, and it's possible that dragons from European and Mid-Eastern mythology stem from the cult of snakes that can be found in many religions.

The most famous dragons in Norse and Germanic mythology are:

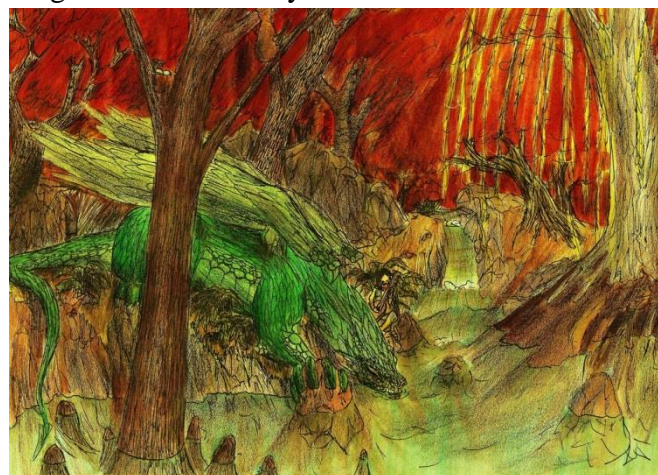
Níðhöggr, who gnaws at the roots of Yggdrasil, the World tree;

Jörmungandr, Miðgarðsormurinn (Icelandic), Midgardsormen (Swedish and Danish), Midgardsormen (Norwegian), the giant sea serpent which surrounds Miðgarð, the world of mortal men;

Fafnir, which had turned into a dragon because of his greed, and was killed by Sigurd;

Lindworms, monstrous serpents of Germanic myth and lore, often interchangeable with dragons;

Landvættur, the benevolent dragon with whom King Harald Bluetooth's servant met in Vopnafjörður according to Heimskringla, and also depicted on the Icelandic Coat of Arms; The dragon encountered by Beowulf.



In Greece the first mention of a dragon like

creature is derived from the Iliad where Agamemnon is described as having a blue dragon motif on his sword belt and an emblem of a three-headed dragon on his breast plate. Although the word for dragon could also mean snake.

Dragons of Slavic mythology hold mixed temperaments towards humans. For example, dragons (дракон, змей, ламя, (х)ала) in Bulgarian mythology are either male or female, each gender having a different view of mankind. The female dragon and male dragon, often seen as sister and brother, represent different forces of agriculture. The female dragon represents harsh weather and is the destroyer of crops, the hater of mankind, and is locked in a never-ending battle with her brother. The male dragon protects the humans' crops from destruction and is generally benevolent to humanity. Fire and water play major roles in Bulgarian dragon lore: the female has water characteristics, while the male is usually a fiery creature. In Bulgarian legend, dragons are three-headed, winged beings with snake's bodies.

In Bulgarian, Russian, Belarusian, Ukrainian, Bosnian, Serbian, and Macedonian lore, a dragon, or "змей" (Bulgarian: Змей), zmey (Russian: Змей), smok (Belarusian: Цмок), zmiy (Ukrainian: Змії), (Bosnian zmaj), (Serbian: Змај), zmej (Macedonian: змеј), is generally an evil, four-legged beast with few redeeming qualities. Zmeyes are intelligent, but not greatly so, often demanding tribute from villages or small towns in the form of maidens (for food), or gold. Their number of heads ranges from one to seven or sometimes even more, with three- and seven-headed dragons being most common. The heads also regrow if cut off, unless the neck is "treated" with fire (similar to the hydra in Greek mythology). Dragon blood is so poisonous that Earth itself will refuse to absorb it. Sometimes the dragons were depicted as good, when opposing the lamya (ламѣа, ламја, lamja) which is an animal that grew from a cut snake's head that had been in a horn of a bull. Usually described as a creature with a dog's head with big sharp teeth, four legs with long claws and a tail that has the horn the lamya grew from on its end. Its body is

covered in large scales similar to a fish. It's said they live in caves where they keep their treasure, and in some stories they are the keepers of water and rivers.

They are described in stories as taking the form that suits them in a particular situation (snake, eagle, even human), its appearance being connected to wind and thunder. Their secrets and language can be learned but the one that shares the secrets with another human dies. It is usually said that they are indestructible, can't be cut by any sword, or bullet, but they can die of natural causes like hunger.



The most famous Polish dragon (Polish: Smok) is the Wawel Dragon or Smok Wawelski, the Dragon of Wawel Hill. It supposedly terrorized ancient Kraków and lived in caves on the Vistula river bank below the Wawel castle. According to lore based on the Book of Daniel, it was killed by a boy who offered it a sheepskin filled with sulphur and tar. After devouring it, the dragon became so thirsty that it finally exploded after drinking too much water. A metal sculpture of the Wawel Dragon is a well-known tourist sight in Kraków. Russian dragons usually have heads in multiples of three. Some have heads that grow back if every single head isn't cut off. In Ukraine and Russia, a particular dragon-like creature, Zmey Gorynych, has three heads and spits fire. According to one bylina, Zmey Gorynych was killed by bogatyr Dobrynya Nikitich.

Other Russian dragons (such as Tugarin Zmeyerovich) have Turkic names, probably symbolizing the Mongols and other nomadic

steppe peoples. Accordingly, St George (symbolizing Christianity) killing the Dragon (symbolizing Satan) is represented on the coat of arms of Moscow. Some prehistoric structures, notably the Serpent's Wall near Kiev, have been associated with dragons.

Spanish Dragons - They're attracted to shiny objects are colourful and are reminiscent of pterodactyls.

The Sardinian Dragons hail from the isle of Sardinia off the south western coast of Italy. The Sardinian was said to have a gaze that could turn the mightiest warrior to stone and hunted in brush. It was also said to be an immortal Dragon of immense power. In any case the mortality rate back then soared higher than any Dragon so any longer lived being would have seemed immortal. It's power to turn people to stone was more likely that anyone foolish enough to wander into its territory was frozen by fear and promptly became an appetizer.

Celtic Dragons were important in Celtic Mythology. The ancient druids believed they existed in a world parallel to our own and were creatures of great energy. The paths travelled by Dragons often were believed to create lines of energy in our world and wherever they slept became particularly powerful. Dragons in Celtic Mythology appear much the same as other Dragons; four legs, glistening scales, the leathery wings of a bat and a spiky tail. There was once a Dragon that lived in the sea called Master Stoorworm. Master Stoorworm always ate too much and yawned seven times before he went to sleep. The people of a nearby village became annoyed because every time Master Stoorworm yawned his tongue shot out into the village and snatched up seven items. The King offered his daughters hand in marriage to anyone that could slay the great beast. The greatest warriors fled from Master Stoorworm in terror. One day, a young boy took some peat and an iron pot and stole a row boat. When Master Stoorworm next yawned, the boy rowed down his throat and down to his Liver. He used the pan and peat to set his liver on fire and escaped as the great Dragon

writhed in pain. As he died, his teeth fell out becoming islands and his body curled up and became Iceland. Dragons are used throughout Celtic art.

Quetzalcoatl was the Aztec god of the wind, wisdom and religion. Often depicted as a feathered serpent, as the word Quetzalcoatl itself means feathered serpent. The ancient Meso-American people believed these ancient Dragons swallowed the sun every night and spat it out every morning. They even sacrificed people to them, believing their gods needed to be appeased or they wouldn't swallow the sun and it would be forever day, preventing them from sleeping. They believed if they couldn't sleep, they couldn't work and their tribe would die. They saw Dragons as the most powerful beings in existence. Some Dinosaurs had feathers as they were closely related to birds. What if South American Dragons were actually distant descendants of the Dinosaurs and when the Aztecs started sacrificing people to appease them, they became dependant on them for food and died out when the Aztec Civilisation vanished? Wouldn't that be interesting?

Some species of Dinosaur spit poison to disable their prey. This could be where the myth of "fire" breathing Dragons started, if Dragons were in fact descended from Dinosaurs, that is. We can only offer speculation.-



But no matter our theories, the Dragon is here to stay. All we can do is marvel at the wonder that are these winged creatures and the place they have carved for themselves in modern literature.

Shifter

By Valery Riddle

He brushed his greying hair off his forehead and squinted. His apprentice was tugging at his sleeve impatiently and apprehensively.

“Master! the people... they are shouting... and hiding in their houses. Master! let's go!..”

The master shook his head and carefully freed his wide sleeve from the shaking fingers.

“Go. Go with everybody, I'll stay here”.

The apprentice continued to stare at him doubtfully, uncertain of what to do.

“Go”, the master rested his hand on the apprentice's shoulder, “I am a powerful and experienced mage. Nothing will happen to me”.

The power of persuasion finally worked. The apprentice tensed as if preparing to spring and bolted after the crowd.

It was noisy all around. People were dashing about, bawling loudly with the wailing snowstorm: “Shifter, Shifter”. Other shouts were also present but those were much duller, not standing out. This was the main one, dominating over the crowd, containing the essence of what was transpiring, tearing out of its chains, hoarse, begging.

Meanwhile the outskirts of the village were becoming deserted. The snow was falling down in heaps. People were closing the shutters on the windows, locking their doors, checking padlocks on barns, stables and sheds.

The mage was watching all this over his shoulder, from under his snow-covered bushy eyebrows, motionlessly, with barely traceable curiosity in his eyes. When everybody finally

disappeared, he turned and started making his way for the dark forest nearby, looming over the white blanket of the field. The reason he had waited was to make sure his apprentice had managed to find a safe, warm nook somewhere and was out of danger. Other people stirred his interest only by so much - he had seen a large quantity of villages, saving their hide and their possessions from the dangers of harsh weather and wild animals, threatening their homesteads.

The forest was advancing like a black ominous castle wall. Again there sounded the blood chilling howl that had made the people in the village scatter. Tiny iridescent fires started lighting up between the trees. A couple of wolves jumped out onto the white snow, stepping silently with their fur-covered paws. They were followed by a rather young girl, agile and flexible, who had an animalistic light in her eyes. She was clad in rough white pelts, covering the lesser part of her body.

The mage leaned onto his staff, expecting some action from his opponent. but so far the girl only bared teeth at him as she noticed the man. Two wolves were growling at each other nearby but they didn't dare to attack without the girl's orders.

The master promptly passed his staff from one hand to another, sliding his fingers along the smooth surface of the wood - it seemed as if it possessed its own will in the way it flew up into the air and then slammed against the ground, breaking the snow crystals with a sharp crunch.

The air cracked between the opponents and a twisted lightning broke through it. The melted snow started freezing back in small puddles where it had touched the ground.

The girl growled bestially as if she had long ago forgotten how to speak in the human way, and dropped to the ground on all fours as fast as a dagger falls to inflict a wound, her long untrimmed hair following her form in a wave. Her beautiful silhouette was transforming, covering with rough dirty-grey fur. The mage lifted his staff, drawing an eight-shaped line in the air and

hitting the ground again but the she-wolf jumped to the side, nimbly steering away from the giant stone chunks, falling from the sky. The wolves stopped their growling and also joined in, circling the mage from behind. He barely had time to draw a magic circle around himself. The smell of burnt pelts appeared in the air and the wolves rolled away into the darkness between the trees, whining.

As opposed to those beasts, the she-wolf had sensibility - she started circling the magical fire, baring her teeth as if cackling. The mage was watching her movements, holding the staff in tensed out-stretched hands; she knew what she was doing as the fire started to abide after fifteen minutes time until it disappeared completely.

She chose the very last moment of its life to pounce, aiming for the mage's throat. He reacted immediately, swinging the staff in a rapid arc over his head; she did not reach him by some ten centimetres, falling to the ground, pierced by fire arrows.

The transformation back was almost instantaneous. The girl jerked, curling in like a wounded hedgehog, and stilled.

The mage leaned on his staff again, peering at the dead shifter at his feet, then squinted and bent down to retrieve a small something, closely resembling a book from out of her top, partially baring her lifeless chest. It was an almost completely illiterate diary of a common village girl who dedicated herself to nature and also had lost a lover due to the villagers' blind phobia of what lived in the forest.

The mage quickly leafed through the biography that bore no interest to him as it was strictly sentimental without a hint of scientific knowledge, threw it onto the snow next to the body, turned around and started to walk away, disappearing in the snowy haze.

As soon as he left, silent shadows emerged from behind the dark trees. One of the wolves sniffed the small book, the girl's hand, then looked into her empty eyes. At this gaze the animal bared

its white teeth that had long since known the taste of better food, and sank the fangs into the girl's pale shoulder...

The flames in the fireplace were crackling hospitably, dancing merrily on the firewood.

"And who is this shifter, Master?" the apprentice asked, squeezing a bowl of hot chicken broth in his palms.

The villagers, sitting nearby, looked at the boy reproachfully, as if afraid he might call the disaster back onto their heads.

"A Shifter is someone who has been immersed in nature and became so feral they are able to turn into an animal", the mage explained, sitting there, his fingers crossed on the knotty surface of the staff, then nodded at the apprentice who was neglecting his food to catch every word he was told. "Go on there, eat, then we are hitting the road".

The apprentice sipped some more of the broth and stared at his master again.

"Are they strong, these shifters?"

The mage shrugged:

"I would say so, yes. Their power comes from the nature and grows rapidly, but it has its limit like everything else".

The master furrowed his brows, observing the apprentice who stilled with the bowl touching his lips, considering what had been said.

"Then they must be evil", the apprentice offered. "That's why they are killed".

The master knew what the questions were about - the boy was trying to see the common reason why he could not become something that turns very strong very quickly, and didn't need to drag himself aimlessly after a powerful mage all over the country. He had been taught that white was definitely not black, there his education

paused.

The master let a smile reach his eyes and shook his head.

"Not evil, no. Killing the shifter didn't make me better, either. It just would have taken the wolves a few more hungry winters to get to her".

The apprentice finished his bowl in heavy silence. The master knew the boy could not yet see the whole picture, he was still pondering, considering, trying to hasten his life as he was young. The mage merely took him to travel together because the boy was an orphan to whom his whole village had been a family and a poor one at that in these harsh years. The mage did not consider it an act of kindness. He did not think of himself as kind. His was a way of knowledge.

The wanderers made their way for the tavern exit, bowing to the villages they were passing. The master was still observing his apprentice, who followed him, his head hung deep in thought.

'He has to realize and choose for himself', the mage thought in a detached manner, 'Just as I have'.

And he opened the door into the white chilly morning, giving his hand to his friend, but just as possibly to his future enemy.

Valery Riddle

Having written her first poem at 8 and her first short story at 12, Valery Riddle has come a long way from an amateur to a self-taught writer as she was trying to find herself in the one talent that really mattered. Between the understanding that small scribbles on the paper might mean something more than simple everyday words and the hope that she has something to contribute, the writer dared to go deeper into the shadows of human weaknesses and desires to find the unquenched well of subjects. Be it an innocent human error behind some drastic action or frightful hidden motives in everyday life, Valery sets on a journey to put her characters in such circumstances that would reveal it all. Just another face in the crowd, she watches people

around her as a silent observer to find new plots to explore, while her true inspiration blooms in the quietness of nature, away from noisy cars and smoky cities, on seashores under the ever-changing sky. To follow her own words from the works that she herself calls "verses-in-prose": "People crave bread and circuses, and I crave to see those people. I will let them outrun me to see them better. However close the sunset is, the sun will always remain in the sky and my shade will not disappear. I will not walk off my path to become closer to people. And I know that when I am asked for an explanation I shall not give it".

Onnwuen's Fortune

By Rose A. Campbell

Ælfgyð heaves her hands to the sky and keens for Egric. The wise woman has forgotten all her wisdom as she stands over the wasted clay that was once her beloved son. In her agony, she charges the sun to enact her revenge upon his slaughterers. My heart echoes this curse, for Egric was my husband. We build a pyre, and consecrate the ground where he fell. As the fire consumes the good man's flesh, so does rage consume me. We stand, wise woman and widow, mourning our loss until bone turns to ash and even the lowest of soldiers has long past wandered from the killing field. The wind toys with my hair, and I can feel Egric's touch in it. He is still warm to me. "Mother, the price this play-king exacts is too great. I cannot be idle now, while this army rapes our home and takes from us all that is precious!" Deep, deep within my throat come my words, softly. My fury burns too hot for any raising of my voice. I am taken with a clarity pure as the rain. "Now I act."

"Onnwuen, consider well what you do." Counsels Ælfgyð. She does not stray me from my purpose. Not all her wisdom can combat her bereavement. Egric was her only son. "Allow me to help you, daughter."

Armed with the wise woman's protection of the elements, earth, wind, water, and fire, I pursue my vengeance.

I walk with resolve into the sprawling camp of my enemy. None try to stop me, for I seem to belong in this place, so confident am I. The drum of my heart pounds louder the closer I come to my goal. I can see the flicker of lamps within the play-king's pavilion. My stride lengthens, and still there is no challenge. The moon sends me her benevolence and strength as I step between the doorkeepers and separate the canvas to enter.

"Who comes?" cries the play-king, drawing iron. I do not speak, but smile my sweetest. He is a buffoon, an ugly, warty man with evil in his face. My smile assuages him, and he blindly sets aside his weapon. I approach him, his stench filling my nostrils, and settle my arms about his neck. He

grins a rotting, broken-toothed gape. "Ah, finally they send me a morsel worth nibbling!"

"You shall not taste of these delights." I speak flatly, coldly, boldly. The grin falls from his face, but only

momentarily. His mind filled with conquest, he passes my words from his thoughts.

"Come now, give proper obeisance to your King!" he chortles, his meaty fingers toying with my hair.

Egric's pyre floods my thoughts. Never shall another woman build a pyre for son or husband killed by this man. Without a blink, I reach for the blade the play-king so idly set by, and with a force I did not know I possessed, I plunge it into his withered heart. He is taken with amazement, gawping at the hilt blossoming from his chest. His voice rings astonished, "Oh, what fortune is this? Ah, me, help!"

His monstrous form crumples to the ground, fits of torment overtaking him. Blood rises from his spittle; his hand raises toward the curtain, toward the guards. Fiercely I grind it underfoot, leaning into his sweating, hoglike face. I watch his eyes glaze in death, and feel once again my sweet husband's spirit touch me. Egric is avenged. "What

fortune is this? Blind fool, it is mine!"

Rose A Campbell:

Inspired by all things fantasy and fairy tale, Rose A. Campbell's work is not to be missed. Her painstaking attention to detail as well as her often whimsical (and sometimes dark) spin on everyday things have been called "a joy to the reader". She has had short stories, artwork, and poetry published in various online publications over the past 10 years



Pints, Betrayal and Dictatorship.

By Arkady Szantovitch

So there I sat. Friday night, let the good times roll and all that shit. All the ingredients were there, sure enough. My friends were there, laughing at some shitty joke I just told. The booze was flowing like some waterfall in a rainforest that I've never been to, but will likely be a field for some fucking cows by the time someone reads this. Above all though, my girl was there. Oh yeah kiddies, it's one of those stories. Met her a few weeks back at some filthy hippy drum circle I was going to make trouble at.

She wasn't drumming; she was throwing shit at those miserable peaceniks, screaming at them to get a fucking job. Needless to say, there was an immediate attraction. At first glance you would write her off as some punk chick. Hair dyed some colour not found in the natural world, even in the most concussed of chameleons.

Blonde hair, blue eyes, tattoos a' plenty, and enough piercings to make her look like just she lost a fight with a frag grenade. It was lovely. She was angry, smart, and above all else... political. Writers for Cosmo like to say that the way to a man's heart is through his stomach.

That is a categorical lie my friends. It's through the weak point in his ribs. Also, through politics. It's true, look it up. So here we are again. At my favourite little bar, with my girl, surrounded by friends, booze, and chatty pretty little things. Being a Friday of course, it was a busy night. The place was fucking packed. Ever since it appeared in a local 'zine, it's become "cool" to be here. I fucking hate it, but what do you do? So, despite being surrounded by hipsters and fucking frat clowns, I was having a great time. Alcohol is a wonderful thing for that. It all started inauspiciously enough.

"Who's that old guy at the bar?" my girl asked me. Being a regular at my little bar, I knew the other regulars well enough. A more desperate

and disparate crew of has beens and never was's you will never set eyes upon. I had seen this guy a few times. Always sat at the bar, downing Schnapps like there was no tomorrow. Always struck me as kind of sad, like the weight of the world somehow rested solely on his decidedly non-Atlas like shoulders.

After some consideration of this rather melancholy moment, I responded to my girl

"Fuck 'im. We've got shots coming!". Much frivolity was had that evening. My dear compatriot Andrew told an absolutely virulent joke regarding a Rabbi, a Priest, and a midget at the gates of Paradise. Hilarity ensued. Ziggy plays guitars apparently.

This was news to some people, but having heard the word of our living messiah David Bowie, I do know that Ziggy does in fact, play guitar. Hilarity ensued. Actually, hilarity only ensued when I had to explain the word of our Saviour, David Bowie, to the nonbelievers that would otherwise be known as my friends. Things winded down.

Slowly but surely, the dickbags, the hipsters, and the fratboys ended up heading their terrible way home. In the glories of hindsight, I almost wish those delightful bastards had stayed...

Ultimately though, it was just us regulars, and those of us far too drunken to understand anything like proper PuNCtuAT:ion. It was ultimately, just us. Us... and that old guy at the bar.

Boredom started it. Of that I am sure. It's no excuse however. We had our happy little macroverse. That should have been enough for me, but in my monumental hubris, I decided

"Hey, I should go up to the old dude. He's the only guy left... he should have some company!". Not a singular thing could be as stupid as that. I regretted it, Oh believe me I did... So the night was winding down. Ultimately, it boiled down to myself, my girl, my friends, and that guy at the bar. I went to Old Guy, introduced

myself, and so many hellish things came springing from that horrible decision like so many aborted children from the irresponsible Ma which denied them, they begged for blood. As I would have too, but that's neither here nor there, though considering what I dealt with... it is decidedly there...

I walked up to the old guy, that was my first mistake. I asked if he'd like to join my motley little crew... (almost like the actual Motley Crue, just a bit less Coke) and sadly he accepted. I thought I caught a smidge of a German accent, but I wasn't sure. It was something European, of that I was sure.

So ultimately kiddies, I brought this odd European bastard to our table... gods, I was such a fool. Let me set the scene as it was... my dearest darling friends had fucked off to points unknown, it was just my girl and this interesting old guy. "I should have never tried Russia" this geriatric stranger started off...

"And Britain... I could have done so much better without Britain against me..." I assumed, much to my loss (that's the joy of hindsight! It always makes you suffer when you know better!) this guilt is very near Catholic in its enormity.

Which is exactly where I found myself. Not being Catholic, just cursing myself none the less.

"What are you so fucking sad about?" my dear girl said. I sat there, I was eyeing this bastard, I just couldn't put my finger on it. I knew that I knew this fucker from somewhere, but it taunted me. Almost like a clown would taunt you with you wanting him to die, but all you have is fucking balloon animals... that thing.

"Nothing, I guess. Just thinking. It's the bane of nations" I said after some consideration.

"Oh" said she "You should probably stop that. Every time I see you planning something, I see worlds die" Flattered as I was by this latest comment, I turned my attention back toward our erstwhile guest. Still staring into his quickly diminishing glass of Schnapps, he muttered

"...and Russia.

"What about Russia?" said I. Laughing, I added "Did'ya piss off Putin?" That was the worst mistake. Should I have known all I did now, then... good gods, would everything have been different. Had I but known...

"Nein" the old man began. "Going into Russia, I should have been done with Britain. That was where I went wrong. So close, so close to Moscow..." Ah, the best laid plans of mice and men, poor guy hit the fuckin' Moscow wall. I swear, those Soviet fuckers just want blue jeans and cigarettes. I almost felt for the guy.

Whatever he was tryin' to sell, it clearly didn't go over well on the foreign market. Maybe he was one of those poor post-war bastards, trying to sell Volkswagens to places that still hated Germany.

"So what were you sellin' man?" I asked, wishing to hell now that I didn't.

"Selling?! Selling? I was selling purity! I was "selling" the civilization of the German Volk!" He sputtered. Volkswagen dealer... I fuckin' knew it. That's when I made the mistake. It may have come from being a history buff, it might have sprung from a desperate wish for some conversation that didn't revolve around fucking Russia, but I did it. Fuck me gently with a chainsaw, I fucking did it. I asked.

"So what did you do during the war sir?"

"The war?" our guest asked, a slightly cagey look in his eye. "I was an architect. I created some of the most beautiful buildings of the time. The Reich's Chancellery, the Berghof, even the Olympic stadium, in which our glorious German men won eighty nine medals!

"So you worked with Albert Speer then?" asked my girlfriend, eyes suddenly bright with historical glee. This came as a bit of a shock to me, I'll admit. Historical discourse had not occurred whilst our many whisky soaked trysts, I can assure you of that. In hindsight, I kinda wish it had.

“Ja, I worked with Speer.” Replied our friend. “I helped correct his few mistakes, especially with the Berghof.”

“Wow, you actually worked with Speer? That’s amazing!” said my girl, eyes all a glitter and other such shitty poetic metaphors.

“Ja, I was quite close with Herr Speer, long ago. I must say, you do remind me of Eva. You have her beauty.” Said our guest, officially over staying his fucking welcome.

I’ve never kicked an old man’s ass before. Would it be leathery? I don’t know. It’s German though, so at least it’ll be efficiently made. I took my girl aside, ostensibly walking her to the washroom.

“Hon, it’s likely time we left. This is fuckin’ creepy. An old German dude is hitting on you, and I must say... I’m nowhere NEAR comfortable enough in my masculinity to allow that to happen!” I said, try to at least make a shitty joke out of it, to make light of just how creepy I was starting to find our closing hours friend.

“Aw, fuck off hon” said my girl, a mildly condescending look gracing those metal speared lips. “He’s a harmless old shit ain’t he? ‘sides, he knew Albert Speer! Do you have any idea how close he was to historical giants? This is right up your alley hon, humour him! I want to know who else he met! If he creeps you out that much, just say that “it’s late and we should be off” and we’ll go. This is just too amazing to ignore!” I have no idea why, but she convinced me.

Somehow. It may have been that I trusted her. Gods, was I that close? Really? I should’ve known better. It was getting late. The night was dragging. This old German guy was fucking creeping me out for reasons that should have been face slappingly obvious to me.

“Well sir, it’s been... lovely, I guess. But we should probably head out. There are only so many hours in the day, and I’ve got to admit, I have things and people to do” making what I hoped were obvious eyes towards my just returning girlfriend.

“Seriously? Already?!” said my girl, clearly not amused to how soon I found our continued presence distasteful.

“Ja” said our guest, clearly siding with my dear girlfriend. “Already you leave? Was it that I compared her to Eva? That was simply a compliment to mein host. I meant no offense by it!” His eyes betrayed him. Those deep fucking blues showed me EXACTLY how much he meant that compliment.

“Right then kids. I’m off.” I started, hoping my hard stand would carry over to my girl. “It’s late. I’m bloody tired, and I’ve been drinking since like... fucking THREE or something! Guten Tag my friend!”

“I’m not ready to go yet.” Said my girl. This wasn’t good.

What the holy shit do I do? I can’t very well say ‘woman, come with me’ now can I?

“Alright hon” I said. Hoping that taking the higher road would work instead. It didn’t. “I’ll see you at my place gorgeous, that door’ll be open” I gave a tiny mock bow, and took my leave. Off I went, blissfully unaware, like those douche bags in reality shows who can never understand how much everyone else hates them. I sat outside briefly. I lit up a smoke.

Then there they were... Jesus fucking Christ! Off they went, in the other direction. My girl, and that old fucking German guy. That fucking German guy who knows the fucking mighty Albert Speer.

Hold it... Wait... Russia? England? EVA?! How could I have never known? That stupid fucking moustache?! I thought he just held onto the fashion, but how could I ever have been more wrong? The haircut? The brown suit? I’m a fucking history man, how could this have eluded me until now?

Off he walks, with my gorgeous gal in tow, like dolphins desperate for someone new to rape and irritate.

There goes my girl. How could I have ever missed that prick for anything other than what he was? Get me another drink. I deserve it. No, fuck you, my story truly does win! Oh, what? You lost your girl to a male stripper? Son, that doesn't even come close to comparing! Who else can say to this most loathsome of things? Who else can say...

... Hitler stole my girlfriend.

Arkady Szantovitch

Arkady Szantovitch is a glorious Renaissance man who hides amongst the populace of Toronto. Poetic epics have been written in honour of his glorious hair and beard, whilst a statue bearing his likeness stands at the foot of Everest after having scaled its peaks while carrying a Sherpa on his back. He has penned many a shameless love letter to the exploitation genre he so loves. When not tending bar, Arkady can be found politely turning down the political leadership of Namibia. History shall remember him as the man who brokered the Treaty of Versailles, but he tries to remain humble and allow the French to claim credit for it.

Book Reviews

By Pete Sutton

Shanghai Sparrow by Gaie Sebold

Eveline Duchen *Evvie Duchen, sharp Evvie, Evvie the sparrow, a spry little fringe-dweller alone in the crowd of them, always scraping for a crumb, always with one eye open for a bigger bird, or a cat, or a cruel boy with a stone* is introduced to us whilst she is casing a posh house for a possible burglary. She is working for a female Fagin figure and feels it is much better to con and steal than it would be to sell her body. How she ended up being an orphan and street urchin means that certain gentlemen in the British government have taken an interest in her, and her education, and how she can affect the fate of the British empire, and the world.

A good blend of Dickens (you can't help but compare to *Oliver Twist*), Folk tales (always nice to see Chinese trickster foxes), spy schools and a light steampunkness - there are steam hansoms, airships (of course) and the plot revolves around "Etheric science". However the steampunk is very much a background, a plot device for sure, but this story is much more a character journey and the character is really engaging. What was really refreshing for me was that there were poor people in this & Sebold manages to turn a story that is basically about a 15 year old girl going to boarding school into an enthralling read. There are few off notes (although I think the ending felt a little too neat) and I'd really recommend this to anyone, whether you're a fan of steampunk or not. There are hints that this is a world that the author may visit again in the future and if she does I'd be willing to revisit too even though I'm still hoping for another *Babylon Steel* book....

Overall – Intelligent & fun steampunk.
Worth a visit.

Nexus by Ramez Naam

This book has been nominated for several different awards and I can kind of see why. It is a very thought provoking read, dealing as it does with human evolution, transhumanism and post humanism, and is also a sometimes gripping action thriller. I didn't devour this book though and at 400+ pages it did actually feel a little long for an action book. The world building is mainly done via "briefings" scattered throughout which felt just a little like infodumps and the author spends a lot of time telling you how the characters feel.

In the near future there are transhumans and posthumans in a world where gene splicing and augmentation is available from governments and black markets. There is a nanobot drug called Nexus which allows mind to mind communication and the book revolves around Kaden Lane a hacker who has upgraded the nano drug by giving it an OS and making it a permanent upgrade to those who take his version. You can run some programs on it and the book opens with a vaguely amusing party at which Lane is running a "romantic" program to make him into a pick-up artist, which goes wrong. All is not drugs and parties though as the government is waging a war against "Emerging Threats" and Kade is dragged into an espionage plot against the Chinese when attending a conference in Thailand.

The main part of the is set in Bangkok and having visited there last year it was nice to see the city explored. The action is kind of comic book in places – people slammed into brick walls and the walls coming off worse etc. But a very imaginable world of semi-autonomous drones including spider-drones, augmented government agents, shoot-outs and fistfights and aerial dog fights. When Naam plays to his strengths it's very, very good.

Overall – Entertaining & worth reading, if Naam's writing ability matches his imagination in future books then they will be pretty special, a writer to watch.

Blackbirds by Chuck Wendig

Miriam Black can see how someone dies just by touching flesh to flesh. Obviously this has turned her into a pretty damaged character. From trying to stop the deaths she soon becomes fatalistic and takes what she needs from those destined to die soon in a peripatetic existence rattling round the USA. When she is targeted by a con man and gets involved with an organised criminal gang things start to go awry. This is a dark and bleak story but is blackly amusing with some great turns of phrase, it's what you'd expect from Wendig really if you follow his blog or twitter. I enjoyed it but think it may not be for everyone, there is also a strange lack of women populating the world of Blackbirds, 90% of the people Miriam meets are men and Miriam and the other main woman character are basically men with breasts which could piss you off. I'm willing, based on the writing to forgive it some but this drop its rating.

She puts her hands on her hips and cocks them this way, then that. With the back of her hand, she wipes away a smear of lipstick from where Del kissed her.

"The lights need to be on," she says to nobody, foretelling the future.

She clicks the lamp by the bed. Piss-yellow light illumines the ratty room.

A roach sits paralyzed in the middle of the floor.

"Shoo," she says. "Fuck off. You're free to go."

The roach does as it's told. It boogies under the pull-down bed, relieved.

Back to the mirror, then.

“They always said you were an old soul,” she mutters. Tonight she’s really feeling it.

Overall – Smart, sassy first book in an interesting series, I will read the sequels despite problems with the first

The Girl with all the gifts by M. R. Carey

Book Trailer here:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Xo3A5UTjso

I think this Nietzsche quote is apposite

He who fights with monsters should look to it that he himself does not become a monster. And when you gaze long into an abyss the abyss also gazes into you.

o Beyond Good and Evil, Aphorism 146 (1886).

Her name is Melanie. It means “the black girl”, from an ancient Greek word, but her skin is actually very fair so she thinks that maybe it’s not such a good name for her. She likes the name Pandora a whole lot, but you don’t get to choose. Miss Justineau assigns names from a big list; new children get the top name on the boys’ list or the top name on the girls’ list, and that, Miss Justineau says, is that.

So starts the latest Mike Carey book (writing as M. R. Carey) which is a contender for best book of the year for me. To get the best from those brilliant opening chapters, which hook you so thoroughly, it’s best not to say too much about the story. Melanie is a special little girl, genius

level IQ, in a school on an army base with about 20 other children. The children are taught and tested by a number of different teachers but Miss Justineau is Melanie’s favourite. The book, at its heart, is an exploration of the relationship between these two compelling characters.

Carey has captured the voice of the 10 year old girl perfectly and creates a very plausible world which is explored in a slowly unfolding and engaging plot. The characters are lovingly crafted such that we care what happens to them, throughout, even those that perhaps are not ‘nice’ people. This book has been plotted with care, with excellent pacing. At around 400 pages it doesn’t feel like a long book and I enjoyed the experience so much that around the half way mark the book became unputdownable and I stayed up late to finish it. It has that effect where, when you close it for the final time, you are utterly satisfied and somewhat emotionally drained. This is a book I’d like to return to once the memory has faded a little. Very much a stand out read. I’m just gushing now but this is highly recommended.

Not every gift is a blessing

Overall – Emotional and unputdownable. Highly recommended.

**Reviews: Firefly & Serenity (TV Series and
Movie)**
By Stacey Welsh

From the very first moment that I laid eyes upon the cover, I thought "Wow, this looks pretty good..." and as I took the DVD copy of 'Serenity' from the DVD hire shelf of our friend's hotel I could not fathom what would lie in store.

Action packed with twists and turns and oh my such scenes of fighting coupled with an intriguing storyline kept me on the edge of my beanbag and wanting more...more ... MORE.

Mind you this was BEFORE I knew of the existence of the precursor series to the film... Firefly... silly me, I thought to myself:

"This would make an EPIC television series... and so it would have. had the fates been kinder to the crew of Serenity.

Following the lives of a rag-tag crew who often walk on the dodgy line between criminal and good citizen, they take on a passenger by the name of Dr Simon Tam who unbeknownst to the Captain, Mal Reynolds, has in his possession something very special, something that the Governing body known as the Alliance is desperate to get back. Simon's Sister, River.

Their adventures vary from robbing a train to saving a house of whores, and even one of their roughest crewmates Jane (who is a guy... yeah...) who is discovered to be the hero of a town unbeknownst to him. Each episode is filled with thrills, fun and a sense of family with the crew.

It would have made a fantastic series, if it wasn't for the Network canning their spacefaring butts

Despite the fans pleading to the network to keep the good Firefly class ship Serenity flying through the outer planets, dodging Alliance and Reavers alike, pulling heists and helping others, and generally trying to just live right and do justly to others, it was not to be.

The words of Serenity's Pilot Wash come

to mind.

"Curse your sudden and inevitable betrayal!" - mind you we have no dinosaurs with which to play while we speak those infamous words!

Yet, the fans of the good ship (sometimes held together with duct tape, bits of wire and a whole lotta hope) Serenity is still growing, and has reached Cult status. Despite this, the actors who played the fantastic crew, whom so many fell in love with, have moved on with their careers, I wonder, if they had continued on their journey, would the show have gone on as long as other cult hits Babylon 5, or even enjoyed the Success of Star Trek?

Only the fates know, and the fans live on to utter

"Browncoats for Life!"

