

The WSFA Journal Nov/Dec 2020



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Note. This Journal is from Nov/December 2020 so it is almost an entire year late. I blame a combination of Covid, work, laziness, sunspots, and aliens, yeah aliens that's it.

Cheers for Capclave Volunteers

Prez Bob opened the 11/6/2020 meeting saying, "This is November of 2020." Sam L read notes from the last Capclave. Sam S gave the treasurer's report – a little over \$\$\$ down \$\$ from last year because no hotel bill while paid this year's Capclave bills already.



"Capclave past is past," said Chair Bill. Gifts to staff and GOH. Things went pretty well. Issue with captioning on Sunday. It stopped communicating. This went well on Saturday. Feedback from guests was very positive. It is done. We learned a lot. Test of Gatherstown at BSFS picnic. It could reduce the use of breakout rooms, but that is up to George." Sam L asked about refund for captioning on Sunday. Kathi said no, but we only paid \$100 for the whole month. Bill said "Could have been a lot worse. Thank you to everyone for your hard work." He thanked Sam S for rapid turnover as people registered last minute. He thanked Rodger for online work.

There was a terrifying moment over whether people would show when Terry Brooks and L.E. Modesitt were late to their first panel, but they were able to stay late.

Carolyn Frank said local bookstore owner Kelly Dwyer stepped in last minute to serve as a moderator. We should do something for her. Bill said, "I'm a friend. She runs One More Page Books so go buy from her."

Sam S. said we had 347 paid registered and 79 more over the weekend (at the door in a sense). This includes people who pre-registered so got in free. 91 were comped. Rodger said he would get data from Zoom on attendance at webinar panels. Getting info from registration is easy. Attendee reports are more complex so ongoing. Registration info found 296 unique emails used to sign up for panels. A tech savvy person could use multiple logins while balanced by those where multiple people watched. The median login watched 5 panels. On Saturday at 11:30, 179 people were online. The Cat-Seanan conversation was the largest panel at 79 people. Sam S asked "What about when Judy and I were using two machines with one login? Rodger said that counted as one registration but two attendees watching panels. Bill said, "Some people were there for just 1 or 2 items." He chatted with Sarah Beth Durst who was "super-happy" with her SBD and Friends panel. Everyone was very happy. Obviously, George and the tech people will need to discuss best way if have to go virtual. Ran fewer panels, longer blocks, and no Friday. People were happy. Haven't seen anything negative.

Sam S. said that he doesn't have all the receipts yet. Income around \$\$\$, expenses \$\$\$ so have loss of about \$\$\$ Laid at the feet of the GoH gifts. Without them a surplus. Bill said the costs of guests came from the WFC funds so were covered.

Kathi said over the 2 days there were 42 webinars, 31 readings, 21 koffeeklatches, 4 parties on zoom, a con suite, 2 nights of Streamyard, 5 book launches. So 91 events, 29 zoom hosts (some doubled as Discord moderators). Kathi said did a lot of stuff in two days. It went well. Most people had a good time. People were smiling and laughing.

Bill said that he is waiting for his full sized candy bar. Sam L. said a round of cheers for Bill. Elizabeth said a round of cheers for Rodger and Kathi. Kathi added Elizabeth and Courtni. Bill said and Alex and Kate for Discord. Cheers for pet pictures. Kathi said and Paul for web stuff. Rodger said and Eric in

Baltimore for Zambia setup. Bill said And Colleen, Aaron, and Angela spent a lot of time in reading room. More volunteers than we typically have, even more than when we had George RR Martin.

Sam S. said Capclave 2021, ## pre-registered, about what we normally get through September. It will be interesting to see if get any others. Total paid ## including dealers. Sam L asked if we have spent that money? Sam S. said no, only \$10 of people's \$55 was assigned for this year and the rest for next year. For those who paid less, all went to next year. Bill said, we didn't dig a hole.



Rodger for Capclave 2022 had nothing new to report. Trustees said, nope. We had a Capclave. We'll have another.

Small Press Award. Capty thanked Kathi for the ceremony and for several rehearsals and a lot of stuff for Kathi to work through. Backup for speeches. Rehearsals and a cheat sheet for Steamyard. So thank you Kathi. Will get committee to meet in Zoom next month to see if anything changes. Opens it to next year. Kathi asked, if this was the first year we had all the finalists. Cathy said, yes, the joy of being virtual. All eight were with us. Sam S. said it was worth noting that in Locus issue, we were listed in front. People publishing. So Locus thinks the award is noteworthy.

Committee to Talk SF. Sam L fave schedule and publications. He is adding graphics to the Journal. For Entertivities, Rodger said a Caltech panel on world building is online. Kim said Creative Writing lectures by Brandon Sanderson are free on You-Tube. Sam L. said upcoming conventions Philcon and Chessiecon. Mark said Ring of Fire is doing a webinar open house monthly to release books.

Old business. Sam L reported Halloween Fifth Friday party went well. I went as Arthur Dent. We had one Emperor Palpatine. No new business. No new people.

Announcements. Elizabeth said people should sign up for ewfsa mailing list since yahoogroups are going away. Kathi said Fast Forward is doing interviews on Youtube and Facebook. Meeting adjourned at 9:54 at what passes for unanimous. Madeline demanded a recount.

Attendance: Sam Lubell, Sam S. Rodger Burns, Kim Hargan, Madeleine Yeh, Cathy Green, Sarah Mitchell, Sam Pierce, Michael Ikeda, Carolyn Frank, Frances Holland, Greg Key, Aaron Pound, Jim Thomas, Bill Lawhorn, Madeleine Yeh, Judy Newton, Fabrice Guerrier, Bob Macintosh, Bill A, Alex Wallace, Kathi Overton, and Courtni Burlson.

Why Should We All Be Afrofuturists?

By Fabrice Guerrier

For a better part of my life when I began writing stories, all my characters that I wrote were White. The funny thing is I didn't realize this until later in life.

Everything I saw of the world growing up – from the science fiction books I consumed profusely and the many movies that I watched. They shaped my imagination of the future as a Black boy. Those who travelled through to far out distant galaxies. Those who lived in advanced technological worlds. Mind and bodies merged completely with advanced sciences. Those engaging with highly intelligent extra-terrestrial beings in their societies. It all depicted a unique future for humanity that brought wonders to my life. Yet it all portrayed itself through the lens of Whiteness.

First, I have to say these stories have inspired me deeply. They continue to. But I began to realize deep within me lay an incredible wealth of creativity and humanity I had not accessed because of it.

As I grew older I began connecting to my immigrant worldview, engaging my Haitian-Americanness and using my experiences as a Black man living in the U.S as a source of inspiration. I intentionally sought out Black writers who for me defined a future where I could thrive. I began taking ownership of my Blackness because of it.

Writing Black characters as leads in my stories might not seem like a huge thing, but it was important for me. It framed a needed connection to a mythological structure that existed in me. Before that my imagination though stretched by wondrous stories of interstellar space traveling was limited in many ways. Because I wasn't the one traveling. I was left back on earth. By that fact metaphorically, it locked me in one place. Because of it I didn't adhere nor accept my whole self, my whole being, my humanity and my whole consciousness. I was fragmented.

Afrofuturism is not only for the Black population. Our imaginations collectively have been kept locked by the legacies of a colonial and decaying world. It insists on propagating directly and indirectly narratives in us that deprive us of the full richness of humanity.

For me, Afrofuturism is the inclusion of different modalities of people especially those of African descent. People from all corners of the world. Those historically that have been kept out of our dominant mythologies in films and popular books we've read and what is promoted and published.

Right now, I believe we are at a crossroad collectively as a human species. I believe stories should not be written just for the sake of it. You might disagree and that's ok. But I feel like our time demands it.

Afrofuturism is for everyone. It's reimagining perspectives other than our own. It's challenging ourselves. Challenging all we have thought previously possible. It's collaborating with those who think and feel differently than us.

Now more than ever, we should all be Afrofuturists. There should be intentionality in the way characters are created. Outside of our lens and in the stories we choose to uphold.

In this old world that is currently collapsing amidst this global pandemic. I see a new human consciousness rising. Embracing Afrofuturism will be extremely pivotal. It will help us collectively put back together a fragmented consciousness whose carcass is now peeling away.

10 Million Emails on Capclave

“On that note,” said President Bob starting the 11/20 WSFA meeting, “Welcome to the Third Friday meeting in this crazy year of 2020.” Sam L read minutes.

Bill for Capclave past said George and I talked transition, virtual and in person, yada, yada. I say close books on 2020. Sam L. said, “We can't do transition until you concede.” Bill said “Term limited and did 2 consecutive Capclaves.” George apologized for not being at last meeting since he took a nap that went late. He will send emails out. Need to get more people involved in programming including Ring of Fire Information exchange. Paul, tell me what we will need for the Capclave web page. Eric Flint is till up for Ring of Fire minicon. Test page. See how many people supposed to be live this year will show up. Capclave Future, Rodger had nothing to report.

Small Press Award. Cathy said scheduling December meeting to set dates for next year and some plans ran into plague-shaped road block. Discuss minor tweak to rules.

Paul for webpage said received 10 million emails from Cathy on next Capclave. Will consolidate and get it up. WSFA Press said Subterranean bought another \$\$\$ worth of books from us and when they have a sale, we sell more books. *The Three Quests of the Wizard Sarnod* sold out. Bill said, only took a decade longer than the Willis book. Paul said next month we will do inventory, and send WSFA a check because sales go into our personal account and we need to make sure WSFA gets paid. Gail said to let webmasters know of what you want up and just saying you should write about X is not enough.

Committee to Talk SF gave schedule.

Trustees. Courtni said she hopes everyone has a good holiday. Publications Heard about WSFA Press. Entertivities, Michael said Smithsonians are closing due to Covid. Downtown holiday market is open. Sam L. said upcoming online conventions include Philcon and Chessiecon.

No old business, no new business, no new people. Announcements. Happily ever after – Elizabeth T. Lisa Fuller, Ghost Bird. Eva Whitley moved to Silver Spring.



Meeting adjourned at 9:44 pm. 1 recount demand.

Attendance: Sam Lubell, Bill Lawhorn, Judy Newton, Rodger Burns, Jim Thomas, Michael Ikea, Frances Holland, Cathy Green, Sarah Mitchell, Kim Hargan, Eva Whitley, Madeleine Yeh, Angela Pound, Greg Key, George Shaner, Carolyn Frank, Bob Macintosh, Paul Haggerty, Gayle Surrette, Aaron Pound, Elizabeth Twitchell, Alex Wallace. Bill A, Curtni Bureson, Mike Taylor.

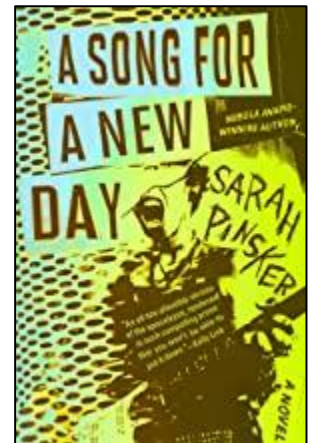
Review of *Song for a New Day* by Sarah Pinsker

By Samuel Lubell

Song for a New Day is arguably the first COVID-19 novel even though it came out Sep 10, 2019, months before the pandemic hit. But the book got so much right—from single person occupancy on elevators to the problems of doing online concerts—that anyone reading it during the pandemic would assume it was written by someone who had seen the actual Covid-19 world. I can only imagine what it must have been like for the author to see the horrors she imagined in her book come to life just a few months later. I know that cons are using the novel as exhibit A on panels on SF as prediction and the problems of writing

The book starts off with Luce, a musician, performing the last concert before everything was cancelled due to bomb threats that evacuate hotels, performance spaces, and anything public. After a bomb explodes a baseball stadium, killing over a thousand people, no one wants to risk any public gathering. Then a mysterious illness hits.

An unspecified number of years later Rosemary, a 24-year old who still lives at home, under the strict control of her parents, works remotely at a SuperWally Vendor Service Center using a Hoodie, a virtual reality device. Her life changes when a service call from StageHoloLive leads her to attend her first virtual concert. She originally applies for a position at StageHoloLive as an upload supervisor, which she was qualified to do, but is hired as an artist recruiter, a job that requires



her to leave the safety of her home and go out into the world. She starts looking for illegal gatherings of listeners of live music, to recruit the performers for StageHoloLive. She meets Luce at one of these concerts and tries to recruit her. But Rosemary soon discovers the shocking truth about StageHoloLive.

Sarah Pinsker, in addition to being an award-winning author, is also a performing musician so the descriptions of the life of Luce ring true. Much of the book is a paean to the power of live music and Pinsker's passion for music shines through. At one point Luce performs under a pseudonym, in a tiny venue, thinking "I was there because I needed the energy I could only get from this connection: the elusive collision of a song, a performance, a moment; the agreement that I would try to reach them, and they'd open themselves to being reached." Only a musician could have written that.

Song for a New Day won the Nebula award and was a finalist for the Compton Crook Award. Anyone interested in music should read this book as should anyone interested in how close science fiction can come to predicting the future.

Look to the West an Hour after Sunset

The 12/4/20 meeting began with "I think it is time to have a meeting," said President Bob. "We only have one month in 2020. Thank God." Elizabeth said, "May 2021 bring new and different trouble." Treasury up \$2,0000. Small Press Winner asked and checked but no receipts sent for actual award. Does anyone have receipts?



George for Capclave Present said not much to talk about. He went to a training session. Rodger led exercise on Zambia. Invite 1632 people. Question about retiring 2020 data on Zambia first. Question from audience about what Zambia is. It is used to do programming. Sam S asked Roger about organizing attendance reports. He is still working on it. George said wonderful limbo period. But wants to get ahead of game. Cathy asked about getting Capclave [page saying 2021. Paul said will do page and get registration up this weekend. Paul's job has gotten crazy.

Rodger for Capclave Future had nothing to report.

Trustees, Elizabeth said 2020 is almost over and everyone owes dues in January. Bob asked Sam S to send instructions for paying dues by Paypal.

Cathy for Small Press said she has set up a meeting. Don't expect much to change because plans to talk to people required live conventions. She is uploading data on new publications and information. Expect awards to open in January. We will set up calendar and send out a release. Distribute far and wide.

Sam L gave schedule for the committee to discuss SF. Paul as webmaster said see previous disclaimer. Sold 2 books through Subterranean. Sam L. said WSFA Press books make great holiday gifts.

Entertivities, now that everything is shutting down. DC holiday market. Kim said Jupiter and Saturn are coming together in the sky. Look to the west an hour after sunset. Deidre is donating YA books through Reading Maryland, Book Bank, and other charities. Elizabeth gave a link to video for a song "Puppy for Hanukkah." Mark suggested donating books to jail. Deirdre said due to Covid everyone clearing house so donations are up. Charities have more stuff than can handle.

No old business. New business – Sam L. said there is a Fifth Friday in January. Bob said that if anyone is hosting would have to do so via Zoom. Think it over.

New people – Wayne Fuergerson. Used to be a member in 80s and 90s when the Gillilands were hosting. Bob welcomed him back.

Announcements: Sam S read Doomsday Book and called it prescient. Discon 3 has a survey on date. Meeting adjourned at 9:57 as unanimous as we get.

Attendance: Samuel Lubell, Rodger Burns, Greg Key, Kim Hargan, Rick Ellrod, Deidre, Sam Pierce, Samira, Mike I, Frances Holland, Judy Newton, Mark Roth, George Shaner, Judy Newton, Bill Lawhorn, Sarac Mitchell, American Science & Surplus, Michael Nelson, Jim Thomas, Alex Wallace, Elizabeth Twitchell, Bob MacIntosh, Eva Whitley, Gayle, Apurve, Zenlizard, Madeleine Yeh, Courtni Burleson, and Paul Haggerty.



George’s F&SF Reading List – 2020 (Part I)

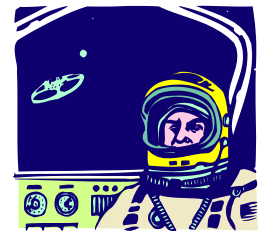
By George Shaner

As to why I decided to create a ranked list such as this, well, I had read enough of a range of novels that it seemed like a worthwhile exercise. Particularly since I’ll be voting on next year’s Hugo ballot, though I tend to be a year behind in my reading.

From the bottom up then:

48: Williams, Drew. “The Stars Now Unclaimed” (SF).

I have a hard time of regarding this as anything other than a workmanlike adventure story, but, since that was what the author was going for, who am I to criticize? Let us then commence. What I do find myself being critical of is the whole phenomena of "the pulse," which scrambled galactic civilization in this milieu; its impact seemed more and more arbitrary as I got into the book and it seems to be basically Williams' way of stacking the deck in terms of the story he wants to tell, which doesn't seem all that interesting. Let's just say that Poul Anderson and Vernor Vinge did this sort of story better.



47: Hanover, Sara. “The Late Great Wizard” (Fantasy).

Despite an interesting scenario, and a promising start, I just found this story too prosaic and "meh" to really hold my attention. The wizard of the title just isn't that much of a character. Maybe that changes as the series goes on, but I doubt that I'll be looking at those books.



46: Blaylock, James P. “The Elfin Ship” (Fantasy).

My apologies to those folks who love this book to death, but I simply bounced off it. And this is freely admitting that it takes a lot of talent to maintain the tone of daft whimsy in question for page after page! On the whole, I've had more enjoyment with Blaylock's steam-punk/weird adventures.

45: Palmer, Suzanne. “Finder” (SF).

In as much as I was expecting nothing more than a routine space adventure, I hate to feel as though I'm hitting a walnut with a sledgehammer, but, if I had ruthlessly followed the "50-page Rule," I wouldn't have bothered finishing this novel. The one thing it has going for it is that I like the main character, the "finder" of the title; a

basically decent man who is trying to live down growing up with a toxic family, and a history of bad impulse control. However, plot and pacing is everything in a caper novel and this novel's plot really didn't cohere for me; particularly once I discovered that the caper didn't seem all that relevant. As always, your mileage may differ.

44: Hurley, Kameron. “*The Light Brigade*” (SF).

At a certain point I'm going to have to try Hurley's fantasy, because, so far, her SF hasn't really moved me. This is considering that her essay on why she felt the need to write this novel impressed me rather more than the actual novel did. Perhaps it simply boils down to corporate armies in a dystopian scenario, mixed with time displacement, being a combination that simply didn't agree with me.

43: Roanhorse, Rebecca. “*Storm of Locusts*” (Fantasy).

This is one of those times where I feel somewhat conflicted, in that while many people really love themselves some Rebecca Roanhorse, I'm just not as impressed. In particular, with this book, the world-building feels a bit shallow as compared to the first novel in this series; particularly in regards to the main antagonist of the plot. The White Locust, while spectacular, really lacked depth as a character for me. Perhaps some flashback moments to provide more of an origin story would have been in order. However, I'm still interested in the further adventures of Maggie Hoskins. I do find it interesting that, for her next novel, Roanhorse is going off in a totally different direction. Roanhorse's Navaho critics, who argue that she reduces tribal religion to the level of a comic book, might well have a point.

42: Haley, Guy. “*Omega Point*” (SF).

This is the second half of a cyber-punk thriller (“Reality 36” being the first half) and, on the whole, I liked the first half better. Part of this is that one has a good sense of how this book is going to end about a third of the way through. The other part is that our main characters spend too much of the book being separated, as one half of the dynamic duo is stuck in a very wonky virtual world that becomes rather annoying, rather quickly. Their banter is a big part of what made the first book enjoyable. That said, Haley did stick the landing with this story and I would read another work of his that wasn't “Warhammer 40k” contract fiction.

41: Novik, Naomi. “*A Deadly Education*” (Fantasy/Weird).

Although I've been looking forward to reading this novel since I heard about it, the reality is that I was a little underwhelmed overall. The short critique is that this feels like a long novella trying to escape from a thick role-playing game manual. Still, I liked the POV character and the world well enough that I expect to be reading the follow-on books; they're just not going to be a high priority. Another problem might be that Novik apparently wanted to slant her story to a younger crowd than her editorial staff, leaving the book in an awkward no-man's land between YA and actual adult (whatever that means anymore). While I had some issues with the Dyachenkos' “Vita Nostra,” (see below) that book had the tone I would have expected for a dark magic school story for adults (they're apparently playing with the same legend that Novik is, only keeping closer to the original myth).

40: MacLeod, Ken. “*Cosmonaut Keep*” (SF).

It's been a long time since I've read anything by this author and, while I enjoyed what I read in the early 2K's, I'm going to admit that MacLeod didn't entertain me as much as in the past. A lot of this boils down to how his quirky take on left-wing politics doesn't seem to have dated very well. As they say, the future isn't what it used to be! If I didn't have newer and shinier things calling to me I might have been more patient with this story.

39: Yang, J.Y. “*The Red Threads of Fortune*” (Fantasy)

While there were elements of the first part of this series I liked, I was somewhat put off by the book's empress coming off like a cardboard image of an evil empress; not to mention that I really didn't care for the magic system. With the second book I still don't care that much for the magic system; whenever the "Slack" is invoked I can't help but think of the Church of the SubGenius, but I still like the main characters. The empress is mostly offstage this time; maybe.

38: Alderman, Naomi. "The Power" (SF/Satire).

In regards as to what to say when a popular book has generated the whole spectrum of likely responses, my snap reaction is that this book is clever, but probably not as clever as the author hoped. While some folks seem to doubt that women, granted physical power, would act just as badly as men have done, that really doesn't bother me. Speaking as a man, there are no shortage of reasons for women to be enraged at the worst behavior of men, when often the last, best, solution seems to be a final solution. Also, since this book has the flavor of a "modest proposal," I really don't have an issue with characters being mostly mouthpieces for positions; that is the tendency with thought experiments such as this. My main question is whether such a sea change would provoke a religious upheaval of the sort depicted, but since so much of male bad behavior is rooted in supposed religious sanction, that's probably a reasonable approach to take. The main point of stories such as this is to rub in just how stupidly unreasonable the real world is.

37: Dyachenko, Marina & Sergey. "Vita Nostra" (Fantasy/Weird).



This sinister exercise in magical realism begins well enough, so you want to keep flipping the pages to see what the authors really have in mind. In the end though, the fate of the female protagonist leaves one scratching your head, making you wonder just what the hell is going on. Apparently, if one goes by an explanation offered at "Good Reads," successfully completing one's program of study at the school where most of the events happen means becoming an angel of the lord, and the key to unlocking a new world; really!? I need to mull over this some more to decide whether the problem is me, or whether the authors are also not quite as clever as they think they are. Your enthusiasm for the more symbolist flavors of Russian literature will probably condition your reception of this novel. As a further spoiler, I might note that the original Russian book cover art can be taken quite literally, besides being a glorious exercise in kitsch.

36: VanderMeer, Jeff. "Dead Astronauts" (SF/Weird)

I always find Jeff VanderMeer interesting and challenging and was prepared to call his "Annihilation" the best genre novel of its year of publication. So, you might ask, you're saying that this is not the best genre novel of its year of publication? Pretty much. Don't get me wrong, VanderMeer's prose can be lyric verging on the poetic, and the best set pieces have the kick of a good creation legend. However, this work will make absolutely no sense at all unless you've read "Borne," and if you didn't care for that you'll really not care for this story. If I really wanted to be snarky, I'd say you might get the same functional impact by playing David Bowie's "Space Oddity" and "Ashes to Ashes" back to back. It also might simply be that 2020 does not leave me in the mood for this level of surrealism. However, if you're looking for the equivalent of a Zen koan to chew over this might be the book for you. Another issue for me is that I didn't think that "Borne" really needed a follow-up, and you'll tend to lose me when fun and games with fonts and page layouts are needed to convey your story.

35: Kiernan, Caitlin R. "Black Helicopters" (Weird/Horror).

Having not read the initial version of this story I can't say whether or not the expanded version is an improvement, and I have to admit that I didn't enjoy it as much as "Agents of Dreamland." This is besides how the time displacement element of the plot made my head hurt at times. However, I don't regret picking it up and I look forward to the forthcoming installment in this cycle.

34: Newitz, Annalee. "The Future of another Timeline" (SF).

I have to admit that this wound up being a mixed bag for me, as while I felt it was time to give the author's fiction a try, the fact remains that I'm not a big fan of time-travel stories.

On the plus side, I have no issues with this novel basically being a polemic, as it's a topic well-worth being polemical about, when we live in a world where some countries have declared miscarriage a crime and we have a class of political "activists" who can think of nothing more manly than beating up on women; making noted uber-prude Anthony Comstock the antagonist of this story was a stroke of genius. I like the main character time operative, and that her struggles to redeem the past, and save the future, come at an appropriate cost. Finally, when Newitz is "on," she does have a real knack for capturing a setting.

The less-than-good remains that I set a really high bar for time travel plots and this story really doesn't get over this bar. If we had a world with known time machines I just can't believe that access would be that easy to achieve. I also think it likely that an exercise in having an "edit" war would result in our assorted time warriors being marooned in an alternate world, where there was no time travel, very early in the game. Also, the militant patriarchalists of the story could have been better developed, even if understanding this sort of person in real life often seems like a fool's errand. I also tend to agree with other commentators that the dialogue is clunky in places. On the whole, this novel probably needed another pass of editing.

33: Leckie, Ann. "The Raven Tower" (Fantasy).

My overwhelming response to this novel is that it's interesting, and I'm not saying that because I'm being ironic, or I'm struggling for something positive to say. However, this is something of a deconstruction of certain fantasy tropes from the perspective of the gods, rendering the human characters somewhat stylized and distancing the emotional response of the reader. This is as these characters struggle to deal with forces that have their own agendas, and that they really don't comprehend. You probably have to be in the right mood to really get into this story but I'd say that it's worth giving it a shot.

32: Yang, J.Y. "The Descent of Monsters" (Fantasy).

What's not to like about a good descent into hell? That is not meant flippantly as I enjoyed this investigation into a Tensorate "research" project gone horribly wrong, by a functionary who knows that they're being set up for disaster. If I don't rate this a little higher it's mostly due to it being a fragment of a larger cycle, which I have had some issues with, and that I'm given to understand are resolved (one hopes) in the fourth and final installment of these novellas.

31: Powell, Gareth L. "Fleet of Knives" (SF).

If you've read "*Embers of War*" (and if you haven't you probably should do yourself a favor and stop reading these comments), the climax of that book was a rousing moment you knew had to be too good a development to be an unalloyed outcome. In this book one gets the blowback, as the Marble Fleet takes its mission of keeping the peace very seriously and very literally; to the point of seeing Humanity as incompetent charges who need to be repressed at all costs for their own good. This is, particularly, since the enemy the fleet was created to fight seems to be making its emergence. Besides the survivors from the first book there is another collection of characters in this installment, represented by Captain "Lucky" Johnny Schultz, who takes his ship and crew on a freelance tomb-raiding expedition that's a major catalyst to plot developments. If you liked the first book you will also like this one, and this installment is certainly better than the first.

30: Porter, Chana. "The Seep" (SF).

I came to this story for the weird and stayed for the catharsis, as one follows the trail of self-understanding trod by a woman who has discovered that she might not be cut out for utopia. What lifts this story above the

generally throwaway, whack-job, utopias of the last golden age of the monthly digest magazines (I'm reminded of a less goofy version of something Ron Goulart might have written), is that the climax definitely felt chilling, as there is some doubt as to whether our protagonist is going to escape being an extra in a wannabe shaman's personal ceremony of transcendence.

29: Kowal, Mary Robinette. “*The Fated Sky*” (SF).

I actually liked this installment rather better than the first book in the series. Nothing profound to add to other what folks have already commented on, though there is a running interpersonal fight running through the mission that is just allowed to fade out in the end with no real emotional resolution; previous readers will know what I'm talking about. Maybe it will be grist for the mill in another story

28: O'Dell, Claire. “*A Study in Honor*” (SF/Thriller).

Does this near-future DC thriller totally hold up? Not quite. Knowing that there is a second book out makes me wonder whether the author pulled some punches so as to allow for a continued story. That said, this is a thoroughly modern re-imagining of the Holmes-Watson relationship and even if Sara Holmes is a little too much to be real, Janet Watson is very believable and gives this story weight. I look forward to continuing with the saga.

27: Hossain, Saad Z. “*The Gurkha and the Lord of Tuesday*” (SF/Weird).

At the opening of this novella it feels as though a shaggy-dog story might be breaking out, but Hossain poses an actual mystery that needs to be unraveled in this post-apocalyptic utopia that deals with the nature of the good and expediency and justice. I enjoyed it and I suspect most people will.

26: Thompson, Tade. “*The Rosewater Insurrection*” (SF).

I had a mixed reaction to the first book in this series, a combination of being irritated with the anti-hero figure of Kaaro (who, while believable, became tedious after a bit), the overuse of flashback structuring (which killed immediacy for me), and a certain suspicion that all I had just read was simply "Invasion of the Body Snatchers" moved to a future Nigeria (though this has a certain value in and of itself as a commentary).

Still, I liked Thompson's book enough to give the second book in the trilogy a try and I'm glad I did. I can see why there are folks who find this work less compelling because of a more conventional structure but, when you're playing with the stuff of thrillers, and all the choices are bad, I expect to be swept along on the tide of events. Also, it may simply come down to that we spend less time with Kaaro and more time with Aminat (a secondary character from the first book (and Kaaro's one-time mission supervisor)); not to mention a woman named Alyssa Sutcliffe who wakes up one morning and finds that she is not herself anymore. It's Alyssa's story that really pulls this work together for me.

Tune in next issue to find out what books George liked better.

Last Meeting in 2020

Bob opened the 12/18/20 meeting by saying, “Alright folks. It is 9:15. Last meeting in 2020. Seasons Greetings and thank you for staying with us this year.” Sam L read minutes.

Capclave Present. George said Boskone asked about an ad in the Program book. Cathy said George shave talk to Mike Nelson about ad layout. Sam L. suggested we offer an ad swap. Rodger said he is moving ahead with a new version of Zambia. Northing to report. Under the weather.

Trustees: Elizabeth said to stay home and stay safe. Courtni said that dues are \$20.



Small Press Award. Had meeting. Leaving rules as is. Sent information to Paul for website. Will drop press release on when to submit on Monday.

Website. Gayle said still selling WSFA Press books. Make great gifts. Paul said second check from Subterranean. New Journal is up. Capclave website defaulting to 2021. Working on registration page. Please check site and late Paul know if problems. George promised to look. Need minibio on Eric Flint. Because virtual we didn't do an attendee page last year. Do you want one? George said doesn't add anything. Let me think about it.

There was a discussion of when can meet live. Bob said probably virtual through May/June 2021. <Hah! We were so optimistic back then.>

Old business. Fifth Friday. Volunteer to be a Zoom host. Sam L. volunteered. Mark calendar and send info to Paul.



New business. Sam L suggested checking the Bungalows to see if they want to do a Zoom party for New Year's otherwise WSFA will organize it. Rodger offered to let them use our Zoom. Bob asked Sam L. to organize it.

New people, Rob Langenderfer in Cincinnati. He was looking around online to find a SF Zoom meeting. He was curious as to see what he could find. Asked if people keeping up with SF on television. Discussion of Stranger Things. Sharon Harris said she was a WSFA member about 30 years ago.

Announcements: Fabrice was selected for Art and Style 30 under 30 Forbes list.

Kim said Marscon cancelled for 2021. Judy Newton said the Expanse is back. Mark said Capricon is online this year Feb 4 – 7. Bill said to nominate for the Hugos need your Discon membership by end of the year. Rodger said Ravencon doing Kickstarter for CORVID-19, a book. WSFA adjourned for the year at 9:44.

Attendance: Samuel Lubell, Rodger Burns, slsharris. Rob Longenderfer, Cathy Green, Mark Roth, Michael I, Carolyn Frank, Eva Whitley, Kim Hargan, Santa Claus, Jim Thomas, Frances Holland, Greg Key, Marc Weidman, Judy Newton, George Shaner, Bob MacIntosh, Sarah Mitchell, Deidre, Courtnei Burleson, Gayle Surrette, Rachel Taylor, Paul Haggerty, Bill Lawhorn, Madeleine Yeh, Don Juan, Rudolph the Red Nose Reindeer, Alex Wallace, Elizabeth Twitchell, Fabrice Guerrier, Aaron and Angela Pound.

...Hanukkah Specials

I've updated my list of Televised Hanukkah specials that deserve to be aired alongside the many, many Christmas specials. Who says the Jews control Hollywood? If we did, maybe some of these would air on real TV.

Rudolph, the Red-Skinned Potato Latke - None of the other latkes, made from brown potatoes will let Rudolph, made from redskin potatoes, play their latke games. Dismayed, he ends up on the Isle of Misfit Dreidels. But when he is the last latke left in the frying pan, he learns a valuable lesson - that latkes of all potatoes are delicious when properly fried, especially when covered in applesauce or sour cream.



How the Grinch Stole Hanukkah - The Grinch steals all the Hanukkah menorahs, latkes, dreidels, and presents from the Jews in town. Undismayed and filled with the spirit of Hanukkah, the townspeople grab the swords and go off to fight the Grinch in the name of the Maccabees.

The Great Hanukkah Debate – Which topping is best for the Hanukkah potato latke (pancake) – apple sauce or sour cream? Top chefs compete with their latke recipes to find the best latke and the best topping match. But what starts out as a debate over how to top a latke degenerates into a debate over how to spell Chanukah, Hanukkah, Hanuka etc.



Year Without a Hanukkah – The evil Snow Miser goes back in time and kidnaps Judah Maccabee and brings him to the present, a dystopia where everyone worships Zeus with no religious freedom at all. Can Judah and his recruits from the local underground synagogue’s pre-bar mitzvah class rally Jewish children around the world to fight for Hanukkah freedom, capture the Snow Miser’s time machine, and use it to restore the timeline?

How the Shamash saved Hanukkah – Detective Shamash, the ninth candle of the Hanukkah menorah used to light the others, investigates when all the Hanukkah gelt goes missing. With his catch-phrase, “Let’s get lit!” the Shamash candle solves the mystery and saves the holiday.

Hanukkah Doughnuts to the Rescue – Magical donuts fight vampires that want to suck the jelly right out of them.

International Dreidel Championship – Teams from Israel, Europe, and the United States compete to spin the dreidels with enough gimels to win the pot. At halftime there’s a latke eating contest.

Peanuts Hanukkah Special – Linus and Snoopy teach Charlie Brown the true meaning of Hanukkah – beating the bad guys to win religious freedom.

The Little Menorah Maven – A young boy fights alongside Judah Maccabee and is given the honor of lighting the menorah in the Temple. But he can only find enough oil for one night. His only hope is for a great miracle to happen there.

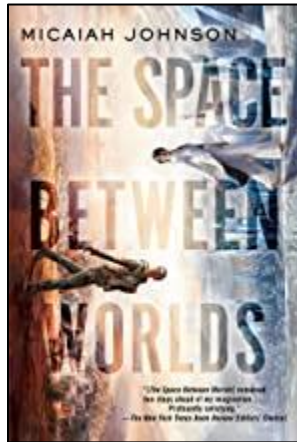
Review of *The Space Between Worlds* by Micaiah Johnson

Reviewed by Samuel Lubell

The Space Between Worlds puts a new spin on a familiar SF idea – travel to parallel worlds – by combining it with a stratified class structure. The Eldridge Institute, using a machine invented by its founder Adam Bosch, sends people to parallel worlds, but travelers can normally only go to a world where their counterpart is already dead. This rules out most of those living in Wiley City, with its vaccines, low childhood mortality, and easy living. So the travelers who can visit the most parallel worlds are those who grew up on the wrong side of the wall, whose families never had enough food, who lacked access to medical care, and faced the constant threat of violence – in other words the poor. These traversers copy data from the other worlds and bring it back to help the rich get even richer. They also bring resources from other worlds.

Cara, the narrator and main character, has had so many brushes with death that she can visit 372 of the 380 parallel Earths. She grew up poor, in a one room shack in an Ash-town in the wastelands outside the walls of Wiley City and in many worlds died because she was in the way. So she jumped at the chance to live in rich Wiley City and have a chance at citizenship even knowing she would be despised for her origins. She has a love-hate relationship with her handler, Dell, with

whom she flirts constantly but thinks she cannot have a real relationship since Dell is from a rich Wiley City family. Her mentor tries to get her to study to become an analyst since the company is working on remote data methods that would make transversers obsolete.



Early in the book, Cara reveals to the reader that she is not the original Cara from this world, but was born on another Earth, where she was Emperor of the Wastelands Nik Nik's concubine until she met the dying original Cara on her first inter-dimensional trip. Eager to escape Nik Nik, she secretly took her alternate self's place and believes no one knows the truth, although her sister suspects since the new Cara is much nicer to her.

Gradually, she learns that her company's new product is not a way of accessing other worlds' data remotely, but a way to open up the worlds to tourism by the rich, without being limited to worlds where their other selves are dead. But Cara discovers that the limitation still exists and the Eldridge Institute plans on murdering the tourists' counterparts on other Earths so the Earth zero version could travel there. This leaves Cara with a moral dilemma especially when she learns the truth about Adam Bosch.

The real strength of the book is not the inter-dimensional traveling, but the sharp division between the haves and have nots. The author has invented a plausible reason for Cara, from the lowest of the low, to interact with both the rich elite of Wiley City and the criminal emperors of the Wasteland. Cara is a fascinating character with the strengths of a survivor who refuses to be a victim so the reader understands why she is willing to lie and deny who she is in order to stay in Wiley City and then cheers for her when she makes the decision to risk everything to do the right thing.

I recommend the book for any reader who likes a little social commentary mixed with an interesting story.

