

The Cascadia Subduction Zone

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Colonization: Marvels and Mysteries

☉ Tahlia Day

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“Since its launch in 2011 *The Cascadia Subduction Zone* has emerged as one of the best critical journals the field has to offer.”

☉ Jonathan McCalmont, February 18, 2013, Hugo Ballot Nomination

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Unqualified

by Nisi Shawl

How good do you have to be to make it as a writer at this time, in this culture? A writer writing in standard English, a popular author whose work supports your existence? A writer who earns more than a pot to piss in and a window to throw it out of?

What if you want to stretch your talent further than that, even, and make a difference in the hearts and minds and souls of others, a difference in the world we all inhabit?

Do you think you're that good?

Most people of color don't. That's a problem.

There are so many obstacles to building a writing career, no matter what your race. I'm not going to claim poor self-esteem is our exclusive burden to bear, but I can tell you some of the ways it has affected me, and I can describe how this losing attitude is fostered among African Americans in particular, how we're constantly getting the message that we're unqualified for the work of creating a lasting literature—or even an interesting one.

And I can also discuss some ways to fix what's broken here.

Where to start? To paraphrase, the personal is historical—especially when you get to be my age. As a child in the 1960s I was praised by the old folks for being “smart,” which to them meant knowing lots of words. At the age of nine I could spell “antidisestablishmentarianism” and “supercalifragilisticexpialidocious.” I could define infinity. My nickname was “Encyclopedia,” just like the little white boy who solved mysteries in the books. But did anyone predict that I'd be able to write my own books? No. In their very wildest imaginings I would be accepted into a major college.

I was, to use the terminology of the period, a Negro. A “smart” Negro, who could get away with correcting her parents' pronunciation, who could absorb the lessons the predominantly white educational system taught. But absorption was as far as “smartness” would take me.

No one dreamed I'd come up with my own lessons, deliver my own messages.

I recently read a review of a science fiction novel written in 1906 and featuring a “germicide for laziness” that was applied with good effect to “negroes.” The unwillingness of my elders to dream big, to voice high ambitions for those in their community, resulted not from “laziness” but from persecution that reached its height not long after that novel appeared. Thriving black farms and businesses were frequent targets of white supremacist terror. Doing well often meant dying horribly. Lynching of African Americans has continued into the present day, occurring in the living memory of many, myself included. And the persecution I'm talking about extends beyond that outrage. When my mother was nine (the age at which I was dazzling older relatives with my etymological acumen) a black child, a boy of fourteen, was legally executed as a murderer in South Carolina.

The squeaky wheel gets the grease, but the nail that sticks up gets hammered down. Probably it was instilled wariness of standing out that kept my parents from putting me forward for arts programs designed to nurture creative children. In junior high school I learned about Michigan's Interlochen Academy for the Arts and their Summer Arts Camps. They accepted students from third through twelfth grade. One of my white friends had attended; she was a violinist, but Interlochen also ran programs for writers. And I knew at a very early age I wanted to be a writer.

Yet it wasn't until many years later, until after I dropped out of the major college my family was so proud to see me enter, that I wondered why I also had not been privileged to attend Interlochen.

Instead, I got sent to Pretty Lake, a summer camp for “disadvantaged youth.” During the pre-camp physical all of us had our heads searched for lice. I swam and wove potholders and advanced my literary career not one whit.

What if you want to stretch your talent further...and make a difference in the hearts and minds and souls of others, a difference in the world we all inhabit? Do you think you're that good?

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Unqualified (cont. from p. 1)

W.E.B. Dubois famously wrote about “double consciousness” as the disjunction between blacks’ own experiences and their internalized understanding of how non-blacks view those same experiences.

It was a National Merit Scholarship that enabled me to attend the University of Michigan. That scholarship was based on my high SAT scores, but according to a close acquaintance (I can’t really call him a friend), the reason I had been accepted as a student at the U of M was so that black football players would have someone to date.

This acquaintance’s remark wasn’t why I dropped out of college. I did so in large part because I didn’t see any way for U of M to help me write—and especially to help me write science fiction and fantasy. Exposure to the feminist works of Joanna Russ, Suzy McKee Charnas, and Monique Wittig had taught me that this genre was where I could do what I wanted to do. And I wanted to do so much. I had dreams, ideas—but any talent I possessed with which to carry out those dreams went unrecognized by my teachers and the rest of the English and Creative Writing departments. I received no mentoring. There were grants I could have applied for, and fellowships, prizes, awards. I knew nothing about them and heard nothing about them from anyone who did know. And I didn’t ask for that kind of information, because I didn’t believe literary grants and prizes were meant for me, despite my high SAT scores. It was all right to be ignorant of them, because they were obviously intended for *good writers*.

I almost didn’t attend the Clarion West Writers Workshop for similar reasons. You can’t get in if you don’t apply, and I almost didn’t apply. Fortunately, in 1991 I met two of the 1992 instructors: Pat Cadigan and John Shirley. Shirley read my work and encouraged me to go. At Clarion West I received six years’ worth of education in six weeks. I made friends with other fledgling authors and some professional authors and editors. I earned respect for my abilities from people whose opinions mattered to me.

When the workshop ended I knew that I was a good writer. But I also still knew that I wasn’t.

W.E.B. Dubois famously wrote about “double consciousness” as the disjunction between blacks’ own experiences

and their internalized understanding of how non-blacks view those same experiences. Something like this was at work in me, so that when Greg Bear didn’t respond to my submission to the anthology he had announced to me and my Clarion West classmates, I assumed that my story had been rejected. In reality, it had been lost in the mail, as I realized after finally working up the nerve to ask him about it many years later. The story I sent around the same time to instructor Gardner Dozois, then editor at *Asimov’s SF Magazine*, had been specifically requested by him, so it only took me a year to ask him whether he actually wanted it. He did, but I had to resend it. The first manuscript, as Dozois eventually discovered, had fallen behind a desk.

These sorts of missteps occur on every writer’s path, I’m sure. But writers of color are more likely to lack the self-esteem necessary to correct them.

Low self worth could well be a barrier to POCs attempting to write in any genre. With my longing to create imaginative worlds that refuse to default to the status quo, speculative fiction was obviously the field where I needed to focus my efforts. This field contained additional obstacles, though.

Science fiction, by my definition, is fiction that promotes science: its plot, settings, and characters are embedded in scientific values and scientific approaches to understanding the universe. The scientific method is easy to describe: you come up with a hypothesis to explain a phenomenon and you test it. You compare your results with those of others who perform identical tests. Simple, right? Anyone can do this.

And yet science itself is contested ground. Histories of science taught in the U.S. spotlight the achievements of individual white males and downplay contributions by groups, females, and POC. Immigrants and the descendants of those brought to this country as slaves may see few images of scientists resembling themselves, just as they may see few images of writers—especially SF writers—who look similar. Worse, they may be taught that qualities the domi-

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nant culture assigns to their race are antithetical to science: passion, intuition, sensuality, spirituality, and so on. Assignment of these qualities is arbitrary, and of course the idea that their presence prevents anyone from using the scientific method is nonsense, as any practicing scientist will tell you. But it is powerful nonsense, and it is often proffered as the truth. Finally, POC may be told that the proper subjects of scientific inquiry have nothing to do with their firsthand experiences and concerns. In some cases this stance relates to the hard/soft science dichotomy (social sciences such as anthropology are sometimes regarded as less legitimately scientific than—what should we call them, asocial sciences?—such as physics, chemistry, and the like).

All these factors serve to divorce POC from science and, by extension, from science fiction. As a girl geek in grade school I studied molds and experimented with creating dyes, so later on I wasn't totally unfamiliar with the scientific paradigm. But to whatever extent I identified as a scientist, I felt I had to disavow my identities as a woman and POC. This circumscribed connection was what I had available. I worked with it. I worried, though. Was I a fraud, fronting, "passing" as scientifically literate? I worry even now, as I research neuroplasticity in the human brain for a story about an imaginary drug, or as I ponder the geoavailability of rare earths in the mountains of Everfair, home of my Belgian Congo steampunk alternate history novel-in-progress.

Much of what I've written sells as fantasy, not as science fiction. Fantasy has a wider market than science fiction: more readers enjoy it without knowing they're straying from the mainstream. Fantasy can be almost any fiction that doesn't mimic consensus reality. But it has its stock elements as well, its familiar tropes. Hardly any of these derive from the cultures of POC. European legends of King Arthur and his Roundtable anchor many a classic fantasy. Unicorns, elves, and wizards wearing pointy hats all spring from Europe's rich magical traditions. Dragons appear in Asian

lore, but it's their European counterparts who soar and roar through the pages of most fantasies, from Tolkien's *The Hobbit* through Martin's *Song of Ice and Fire*. Even the ostensibly mundane settings, characters, and props of the majority of fantasy fiction are undeniably European: the swords, the castles, the farms, the food. Medieval Europe was the default setting for fantasy for decades. Its stories and novels made very occasional (and at times problematic) excursions to more "exotic" locales (see Kai Lung's *Golden Hours*, for example).

Until very recently, POC fantasy writers basically had two choices. We could:

1. ignore the alienation implicit in creating worlds based on the traditions of our oppressors, or
2. write from our own heritage and have the results rejected by publishers or misclassified (usually as horror if ancestors—dead people—were involved).

A few POC authors such as Samuel R. Delany and Octavia E. Butler were able to buck the past's Euro-trope trend. Delany's *Neveryon* series takes place in prehistory, in an unspecified land somewhere in the fertile crescent; Butler's *Kindred*, taught widely in colleges, is set firmly in the US's Antebellum South. Exceptions don't invalidate the norm, though, and the norm's whiteness has taken—and still takes—a heavy dose of self-esteem to challenge. Its presence hangs on via reading lists and curricula, whittling away at the sense of legitimacy POC writers strive to build within themselves. And though fantasy's palette, as it were, has broadened considerably in the last few years, writing a fantasy that deviates from tried-and-true formulas is by no means an assured path to having it published. Nor is having that kind of thing published an assured path to fame and success. We know this. We wonder if we're wrong for trying to write from our hearts, and we wonder if we're wrong for trying to write to the market. We doubt ourselves, whichever way we decide to go.

For more on the topic of the obstacles POC encounter when writing fantasy,

POC may be told that the proper subjects of scientific inquiry have nothing to do with their firsthand experiences and concerns.

A few POC authors such as Samuel R. Delany and Octavia E. Butler were able to buck the past's Euro-trope trend.

We wonder if we're wrong for trying to write from our hearts, and we wonder if we're wrong for trying to write to the market. We doubt ourselves, whichever way we decide to go.

Cont. on p. 4



Unqualified (cont. from p. 3)

Some publications state right in their guidelines that they simply will not accept stories written in, or including sections written in, dialect.

...the rhythms, pronunciations, idioms, and references of nondominant vernaculars can be beautiful, and anyone trying to represent nonwhite cultures will want to represent nonwhite speech patterns. Which means we'll never submit to publications barring such representation.

Now the fun part of this essay: how to fix what's wrong. More models will help. It's easier to believe you can write speculative fiction when you can point to multiple POC who have done so:

please read deepad's excellent essay "I Didn't Dream of Dragons," available online at <http://deepad.dreamwidth.org/29371.html>.

As I write this essay, self-publishing is going for an end run around the book industry's traditional gatekeepers. This has its upsides and its downsides. I'm a word geek and a punctuation nerd, and I have difficulty taking seriously some of the poorly proofed and weakly edited texts self-publishing produces. Their inconsistency demonstrates that these infelicities are flaws, errors, not artistic choices. I can't stand them, and I wish their authors had gotten the help they needed in making their books fit to read, from proofers, editors, someone. Yet my own experiences leave me certain that traditional publishing's predominantly white editors dilute the presence of POC authors in the fantastic genres.

For instance, one of these rejected "Cruel Sistah" because he couldn't credit the story's premise of murderous jealousy triggered by a sibling's "good" straight hair. I had to submit it elsewhere. I had to have the self-esteem to do that. Eventually "Cruel Sistah" was included in a Year's Best reprint anthology, but it might easily have never seen the light of day. Later, I substantially altered a couple of passages in a second story, "Wal-lamelon," because another editor felt that I hadn't made clear the danger of the crime menacing my heroine in the black neighborhood where it was set. This neighborhood, modeled on the one where I grew up, was completely safe and middle class. There was no crime. I had to make this explicit, to tell and not merely show it.

Other suggestions, other changes, other rejections have had their effect on my career and on the stories I will leave as my legacy, and I'm sure the same is true for many more POC. Because our narratives depart from those favored by the dominant culture, they are subject to misreading, and this can be discouraging.

Here's the last area I want to touch on in my lament for self-esteem: "corrections" to the speech of POC characters.

Some publications state right in their guidelines that they simply will not accept stories written in, or including sections written in, dialect. Granted, dialect is difficult to do well. It's easily prone to stereotyping and can devolve into meaningless Buckwheatisms à la Eddy Murphy's *Saturday Night Live* caricature. But the rhythms, pronunciations, idioms, and references of nondominant vernaculars can be beautiful, and anyone trying to represent nonwhite cultures will want to represent nonwhite speech patterns. Which means we'll never submit to publications barring such representation.

Those who don't start by warning authors away from writing in nonstandard English can still have problems with it. I've been told that an intelligent person would never speak in dialect. I've had deliberately dropped *gs* reinstated at the ends of my gerunds. I've had sentences that I constructed in a colloquially black word order rearranged so that they're more "grammatical." Even if the editor herself understands what you're doing, the proofreader may not. Sometimes it's possible to reverse these mistaken "corrections" at the galley stage. But going through page after page of them takes time, and a conviction that you knew what you were doing in the first place. Since so many POC lack that conviction, we may instead accept changes with which we disagree.

Now the fun part of this essay: how to fix what's wrong.

More models will help. It's easier to believe you can write speculative fiction when you can point to multiple POC who have done so: Nalo Hopkinson, Malinda Lo, David Anthony Durham, Thomas King, Tananarive Due, Steve Barnes, Ted Chiang, Hiromi Goto, and Vandana Singh to name only a few.

Honesty on the part of working POC speculative fiction authors as to what our lives are like will give aspiring colleagues a realistic idea of what to expect of their careers. That will protect newcomers' self worth. If you know that established authors are scrambling to pay



their rent, if you hear book covers are being whitewashed en masse, if you read emails complaining that clueless interviewers ask racist questions, you're better prepared to respond when those sorts of things happen to you. Forewarned is forearmed. I also recommend joining the Carl Brandon Society (www.carlbrandon.org) and signing up for its listserv, which hosts discussions about these topics, among others.

Giving POC more access to publication will help. My publisher is Aqueduct, a small press that has also printed two novels by African American speculative fiction author extraordinaire Andrea Hairston. Apex Books, Tachyon Publications, Night Shade, Small Beer, Arsenal Pulp—all the publishers mentioned in this paragraph are small presses making significant contributions to the expand-

ing presence of POC in the fantastic genres. Perhaps their small size translates into greater flexibility, less conservative narrative choices, readier responsiveness to new and growing markets. I'd like to see us all supporting the efforts of the small presses to offer speculative fiction by POC.

Although I've pointed out several ways in which our double consciousness contributes to our low self worth and inhibits POC from writing science fiction and fantasy, I'll close with the observation that it also aids us in our work. The experience of being "Othered" is invaluable for anyone who wants to convey strangeness, cognitive dissonance, and immersion in a nonnative culture. Looked at in this light, the ability of POC to create a lasting literature of speculative fiction is not pretty good. It is good: just plain, unqualified good.

The experience of being "Othered" is invaluable for anyone who wants to convey strangeness, cognitive dissonance, and immersion in a nonnative culture.

Nisi Shawl's story collection *Filter House* (Aqueduct Press, 2008) won the James Tiptree, Jr. Award. Since 1999 she has reviewed science fiction for *The Seattle Times*. She is the Reviews Editor for *The Cascadia Subduction Zone*.

Scatter and Return

for Saira Ali

by Rose Lemberg

the world is more complex than it appears—
the alliances of steel and heat,
the configurations of stars as they fall, whispering
through my fingers; betrayals
of those too wrapped in storyshine to see—see
beyond the simplicity of pain, the patterns
of belonging and breakage; the cobwebs of our minds
are lace-light, too beautiful to tear.

you say each person is an island of aloneness,
words sprouting from us haphazardly like weeds
and woods unmowed; the intersections of starlight
and sunlight, the shining nets of the wave.
I would row my island over, if we are only illusions
floating between these cast-off
shadows of past selves, striking for home—
triangulated by echolocation of poetry
in sonars of seaweed and sand, navigating
with the precision of dreams.

Rose Lemberg was born in Ukraine and lived in Russia and Israel before coming to the US. She now lives and teaches in the Midwestern US. She recently edited *The Moment of Change*, an anthology of feminist poetry from Aqueduct Press. Her full biography can be found at roselemberg.net.



Peerless Steerswoman: Rosemary Kirstein

The Steerswoman and sequels by Rosemary Kirstein, Ballantine, 1989 through 2004; currently available as ebooks for \$5.99.

by Kate Elliott

What impresses about the sequence is the absolute confidence with which Kirstein melds the well-worn theme of exploration and the search for Big Answers into her fiction while at the same time making the lives of ordinary people going about their ordinary lives the bedrock of her story.

When Nisi Shawl messaged me on Twitter on a Thursday morning to ask if I could possibly write a short piece on a feminist classic by a Monday deadline, my thoughts immediately leaped to Rosemary Kirstein's Steerswoman sequence, which I happen to have re-read this summer. Can an unfinished series whose first volume was published in 1989 count as a classic? Is it too early? Yet isn't *Neuromancer*, published in 1984, considered a classic? If so, then why not Kirstein's fascinating, detailed, and nuanced exploration of community, the scientific method, and the way change flows through our physical and cultural landscapes?

There's a necessary conversation that I want to touch on briefly here about how the science fiction and fantasy field trace lines of influence and importance from past works into the present and thus onto the future. Women have always written sff, but in its formative decades as a publishing genre it was dominated by men. In the late '60s and into the '70s a significant push of women into the field opened it up for a flood in the '80s. These waves substantively altered the field (while of course leaving certain entrenched aspects sadly much the same). Women often wrote with perspectives that weren't examined before, ones often taken for granted now without necessarily realizing how ground-breaking those works once were and are not always recognized today for being so. Creating a sense of how a network of influence runs backward through the work of many writers, especially ones left off the usual list of Important Ancestors, seems crucial to understanding the directions the genre is moving in today, while at the same time recognizing how the important discussions we are now having on gender and race and ableism and class (and along numerous other vectors) have been part of our community for many

years. *The Steerswoman* and its sequels can be examined as part of these shifting ways of looking at and defining what topics fit beneath the sff genre umbrella.

Nothing quite like the Steerswoman sequence exists on the sff bookshelf, even as the series dives straight into some of the central questions examined by our genre. What impresses about the sequence is the absolute confidence with which Kirstein melds the well-worn theme of exploration and the search for Big Answers into her fiction while at the same time making the lives of ordinary people going about their ordinary lives the bedrock of her story.

It is difficult to summarize the plot of the four volumes so far available without giving away the abundant pleasures of discovering it as a first-time reader. This is the rare example of a series that truly merits reading with as little prior knowledge as possible. To explain why would give it away. Trust me.

The first novel opens with two lines that made such an impression on me at the time of my first reading that I later used a variant of them in one of my novels (in an entirely unrelated situation).

The steerswoman centered her chart on the table and anchored the corners around. The candlestick, a worn leatherbound book, an empty mug, and her own left hand held the curling parchment flat.

The rest of the paragraph, and indeed the whole of the first two pages or so, describe the chart. Note that the emphasis is not on the details of the steerswoman—we learn nothing of her feelings or her looks or the details of her presence for another few pages—but on the primacy of the chart. The map, and the presence of the map, might be said to represent everything about these books. According to New Zealand writer and geographer Russell Kirkpatrick, “The



map is an expression of your intimate contact with the world you know.”(1)

The Steerswoman books are narrated from a third person omniscient viewpoint that fits perfectly with the story as well as allowing Kirstein to move into different points of view when need be. The viewpoint itself, like the eye looking down on the map, charts the story in just this way: We, as readers, are learning about and adding to our store of intimate knowledge about this world in the same way the characters are. Kirstein unfolds comprehension in the reader’s head while never deviating from the cultural understanding of her point of view characters.

Who and what a steerswoman is I will leave to the new reader to discover, except to say that a steerswoman is a person who both asks and answers questions.

The other element Kirstein so fabulously brings into play is the matter of who populates her story. It gives nothing away, I believe, to mention that the cast is diverse both in depicting numerous women and men in a variety of roles and statuses, and in describing without fanfare a range of diverse ethnicities in a setting in which ethnicity no longer has any particular meaning.

Who matters in these books? The steerswoman herself, Rowan, comes from the equivalent of a frontier town, an ordinary girl with an extraordinary mind who discovers a chance to turn her analytical way of thinking and her unquenchable curiosity into a way of life. The friendship she develops with another woman, Bel, is one of the true delights of the series, and it matters that Bel, too, is a woman from ordinary circumstances within her own society who has extraordinary skills that she has developed through experience and practice. Yes, there are wizards and even a duke. But again and again the important people with whom Rowan works and cooperates are innkeepers, potters, farmers, goat-herders, cooks, merchants, sailors, and the commonplace hired help. Again and again Kirstein suggests that change moves through every person in a society, and that every person has a po-

tentially crucial role to play. This theme culminates in book four in a gripping and emotional scene during which an assembly of absolutely common townsfolk make a consequential decision to protect someone against an antagonist who holds all possible power over them and could kill any or all of them at any moment (and, in fact, does kill someone). Their defiance may seem small, but under the circumstances their collective action has the impact of a culture-altering event that in another book would likely be accomplished through a violent altercation. It’s a radical moment because it displays the power of collectivity in a genre that so often valorizes the exceptional individual as the sole driver of major change.

As Kirkpatrick says, “Maps can make visible geographies people already knew but which had never been visible before.” (2)

That is exactly the genius of the Steerswoman books.

1. Maps, Fantasy, Culture, and Boundaries by Kate Elliott, August 11, 2011, <http://www.orbitbooks.net/2011/08/16/maps-fantasy-culture-and-boundaries/>
2. *ibid.*

We, as readers, are learning about and adding to our store of intimate knowledge about this world in the same way the characters are. Kirstein unfolds comprehension in the reader’s head while never deviating from the cultural understanding of her point of view characters.

Again and again Kirstein suggests that change moves through every person in a society, and that every person has a potentially crucial role to play.

...a radical moment... displays the power of collectivity in a genre that so often valorizes the exceptional individual as the sole driver of major change.

Kate Elliott has published fantasy, steampunk, and science fiction since the 1980s. Her novel *King’s Dragon* was a finalist for the Nebula Award. She currently lives and writes in Hawai’i.



Afrofuturism and Navigating the Apocalypse

Elysium, by Jennifer Marie Brissett,

Aqueduct Press, December 2014, 208 pp, \$18 paperback.

reviewed by LaShawn M. Wanak

Elysium's main character, Adrian(ne), flees through the backdrop of humankind's history, hounded by the apocalypse as he/she searches for the one she/he loves.

Many will compare Jennifer Marie Brissett's debut novel, *Elysium*, to David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* due to its unconventional narrative structure and their shared motif of reincarnation. For me, however, Brissett's novel invoked the slipsiding complexity of Satoshi Kon's movie *Millennium Actress*: the main characters of both works running, through different guises and different ages, searching for someone they have lost.

Whereas in Kon's movie his actress chases her goal through a Who's Who of Japanese history, *Elysium's* main character, Adrian(ne), flees through the backdrop of humankind's history, hounded by the apocalypse as he/she searches for the one she/he loves. Sometimes he finds her; sometimes she loses him. My switching of pronouns is deliberate; as Adrian(ne) pursues, she/he switches gender throughout the book, sometimes even mid-scene. We are warned of an impending change by lines of computer code, which also serve as scene breaks, and become important in other ways as the story moves on.

At first *Elysium* appears to be a series of vignettes. Initially we meet Adrienne as a woman casually walking down a busy street in an unnamed city. She sees an elk picking its way down the street just as casually, with no one giving it a single glance. It exchanges a deep look with Adrienne before vanishing into the crowd. A little disoriented, Adrienne resumes her window shopping. A short time later she stops under a construction site's scaffolding to beat the heat. She glances up to see a green dot in the sky, which quickly vanishes. As she searches for the dot, someone yells at her to watch out—and the scene breaks into computer code, notifying us of a “SYSTEM ERROR.”

The story resumes with Adrienne lying on the ground, covered in dust,

bleeding from her forehead, presumably injured by an accident on the construction site. We next see her at home, enduring a deeper hurt as she deals with her soon-to-be-ex-lover Antoine. As she comes to grips with her relationship with him falling apart, she is frozen by the sight of a large owl staring at her from the window. When she points it out to Antoine, it vanishes. As she questions herself and her environment, there is another interruption of computer code. In its wake Adrian is now male, and Antoine his lover dying of an unspecified disease. Adrian goes out to meet Hector, a friend. They have sex, during which Hector suddenly morphs into Helen before the computer code corrects him back. Adrian returns to Antoine, there is another burst of computer code, and Adrienne is female again, arguing with her female lover Antoinette.

Gradually the vignettes form a narrative. There are rumors of an encroaching war; a cloud that dispenses a strange dust that changes people; a city going from densely populated to eerily silent. Adrian(ne) navigates the apocalypse the best she/he can. As his/her world changes, so she/he adapts to survive, to search, to love.

The heart of *Elysium* is relationships. Other characters also weave their way around the central pair: Hector/Helen as unrequited lover and often friend, Thomas as the watchful guardian, Stephen the planner. But Adrian(ne) and Antoine(tte) define the story, be they lovers, siblings, or parent and child. Always one is searching to protect the other. Always one finds, then eventually loses, the other. Adrian(ne)'s search takes her through the apocalypse and beyond, but we never lose sight of the story, mainly through the motifs that keep us grounded within it: Adrian(ne)'s sightings of the elk from afar, its appearance



becoming more alien-like as the novel progresses; certain scenes feeling like *deja vu*; dust that changes everything; redness and blood, sorrow and loss. Even the ubiquitous computer code becomes a familiar presence, along with the green dot, which appears repeatedly in the sky, a seemingly remote observer.

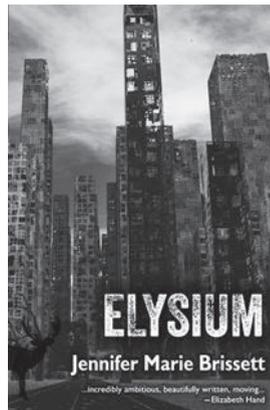
One would say that *Elysium* is Afro-futurist in that it points to a future populated with black people who eventually escape the tribulations of this world and take to the stars. Brissett also gives us Afrofuturism in the rhythm of her prose. She gives us Afrofuturism in that the constant of Adrian(ne)'s everchanging self is his/her brown skin. She gives us Afrofuturism because, out of scant resources, her brown people create their own wings to fly. But her Afrofuturism does not give us a story of rescue. While there are those who eventually flee the destruction of the apocalypse pursuing the novel's protagonist, this is not their tale. *Elysium* is told from the viewpoint of those who remained behind, who watched their city fall to ruin, who had loved ones pulled from their grasp. This is a story of loss.

In *Elysium* we eventually learn who is wiping the humans out. But that doesn't mean that we can ignore the warning signs of it beginning to happen now, in the real world. Though the city in *Elysium* is unnamed, we know full well it represents New York as soon as planes start flying overhead. Adrian(ne) and Antoine(tte)'s tale serves as a cautionary tale, mirroring what is happening to the whole of the human race as they are slowly sent to extinction. There's one scene where we are warned, perhaps with a bit of fourth-wall breaking: "You all knew that this was a possibility! You knew! We warned you! We urged you to prepare, but still you did nothing!"

In our world, the world of now, there are wars, genocides, kidnappings, shootings. We read the news and feel distant; the names blur into numbers and statistics. Often we cannot comprehend that people who are dying are friends, siblings, parents, lovers. It is the nature

of story that binds us to each other, that makes us human, and Brissett takes full advantage of this in *Elysium*. This is a tale meant for us.

And it is a tale meant for those who no longer can speak, leaving behind mentos that call out to their loved ones, hoping they will hear, hoping to be seen and touched by them one more time.



This is a tale meant for us.

The heart of Elysium is relationships.... Adrian(ne) and Antoine(tte) define the story, be they lovers, siblings, or parent and child. Always one is searching to protect the other. Always one finds, then eventually loses, the other.

Elysium is told from the viewpoint of those who remained behind, who watched their city fall to ruin, who had loved ones pulled from their grasp. This is a story of loss.

LaShawn M. Wanak's works can be found in *Strange Horizons*, *Ideomancer*, and *Daily Science Fiction*. She is a 2011 graduate of Visible Paradise and lives in Wisconsin with her husband and son. Writing stories keeps her sane. Well, that and pie.



The Internet and The Law: The Case of On-line Harassment and Abuse

Hate Crimes in Cyberspace, by Danielle Keats Citron,

Harvard University Press, September 2014, 344 pp., \$29.95.

reviewed by Nancy Jane Moore

...Citron draws on earlier campaigns to address domestic violence and workplace sexual harassment as well as on civil rights legislation and litigation to argue that we can change both the atmosphere surrounding online abuse and the law about it without "breaking" the Internet.

How refreshing it is, after so much news of online harassment, to read a book that not only defines the problem clearly but sets out achievable solutions. *Hate Crimes in Cyberspace*, by law professor Danielle Keats Citron, draws on earlier campaigns to address domestic violence and workplace sexual harassment as well as on civil rights legislation and litigation to argue that we can change both the atmosphere surrounding online abuse and the law about it without "breaking" the Internet.

She has done so in a book that, while it provides suggested statutes and links useful for lawyers, is very accessible to the lay reader. Further, she has developed recommendations to address abuse that do not undermine the right to free expression under the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

Citron does four essential things in this book. First, she gives detailed examples of online abuse and shows why this is not a trivial problem. Second, she places the problem in historical context, showing the effectiveness of feminist action in addressing problems once seen as "family matters" and an unimportant part of the working world, and pointing out how the same combined effort of activism and legal action that led to changes in addressing domestic violence and workplace harassment will work with online abuse.

Third, she points out where current law—including civil rights laws—can be used to combat this problem, if law enforcement personnel, prosecutors, and judges are given proper training. And finally, she suggests revisions to the law that address the unique problems posed by online attacks—particularly the fact that much of the abuse comes from cyber mobs rather than one individual. In setting out legal remedies, Citron shows that much of the abuse consists of defamation, invasion of privacy, and abetting

of criminal activity—all types of speech not protected by the First Amendment.

The book begins with a detailed history of three horrific cases of online abuse. The first is the well-known situation of tech blogger Kathy Sierra, who was forced to close her blog and stop making speeches because of attacks. The second is the case of a law student who was subjected to defamatory abuse by posts made on AutoAdmit, a discussion board for graduate students, and later by emails to her employers that contained damaging lies. The third is that of revenge porn victim Holly Jacobs, whose ex-boyfriend published nude photos of her online along with contact information and claims that she was interested in sex with strangers.

Because these three cases involve different types of abuse, they give Citron the opportunity to explain how current law, cultural attitudes, and available responses affect each one differently. The facts in all three offer a response to the common refrain in these cases: "Just get off the computer." Sierra's work was reviewing tech advances, meaning that she couldn't do it without being on the Internet. The defamatory claims against the other two women came up whenever someone—including potential employers—googled their names. Ignoring the behavior did not keep them from suffering significant damage because of it.

The Boulder, Colorado, police were sympathetic to Sierra's claims, but lacked the technical skills to uncover the real names of her attackers, Citron reports. They advised her to cancel speaking engagements. Current law should have covered the revenge porn victim's situation: Florida, where she lived, "criminalizes repeated online behavior designed to harass another person that causes that person substantial emotional distress," Citron writes (p. 139). But law enforcement personnel were unfamiliar with the

...much of the abuse comes from cyber mobs rather than one individual. In setting out legal remedies, Citron shows that much of the abuse consists of defamation, invasion of privacy, and abetting of criminal activity—all types of speech not protected by the First Amendment.



law. The law student eventually brought a civil suit and received damages from some of her attackers.

Online harassment affects women more than men. Revenge porn in particular can cause more harm for women because of the prevailing double standard in attitudes about women's sexuality. As Citron observes, the damage from revenge porn "is another harm that our society is eager to minimize, trivialize, and tolerate" (p. 148). This is one reason—in addition to the success of the earlier campaigns—that she recommends following the model of feminist actions on domestic violence and sexual harassment. This is an important issue for women.

Twenty-two states are now considering laws on revenge porn. Citron sets out her own proposed statute on page 152 of the book. She emphasizes that such laws should be very clear about the behavior that is prohibited. "Revenge porn laws should only apply if a defendant disclosed another person's nude image knowing the other person expected the image to be kept private and knowing the other person did not consent to the disclosure," she writes (p. 150). Careless or even foolish posting of such images would not be a crime.

However, Citron also argues that laws on online harassment should be felonies, not misdemeanors, in part because that will ensure that law enforcement will take the offenses seriously. Her proposed statute also exempts disclosures—even of nude photos—deemed to be in the public interest.

Current laws in some states could prove effective. California civil rights laws allow state attorneys to seek civil penalties in cases of "intimidation by threat of violence" (p. 154). Private suits, with attorneys' fees, can also be brought. Application of such laws, along with revisions to them that make it easier to address online problems, can make for effective solutions.

The individual stories Citron discusses have reasonably happy endings. Sierra is considering a return to tech blogging, in part because the person behind the

second wave of abuse against her has been sent to prison for hacking AT&T customer information. The law student now has a solid professional career and talks openly about her experience.

And Jacobs, the revenge porn victim, started an organization to end revenge porn (<http://www.endrevengeporn.org/>) and has now established the Cyber Civil Rights Initiative (<http://www.cybercivilrights.org/>), which addresses all types of online abuse. Citron is an advisor to CCRI.

It is easy to feel despair over online harassment, especially given the recent #gamergate blow-up and the constant refrain that the Internet is "different" and rules of civil behavior do not apply there. By pointing out how we have solved similar problems in the past and providing ways to address the changes wrought by online communication, Citron shows us that this abuse can be addressed effectively. *Hate Crimes in Cyberspace* is a must-read for activists working against online abuse, for those running websites, for lawyers and law enforcement personnel, and for anyone spending a lot of time online.



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Hate Crimes in Cyberspace is a must-read for activists working against online abuse, for those running websites, for lawyers and law enforcement personnel, and for anyone spending a lot of time online.

Nancy Jane Moore frequently writes essays on gender issues. She has worked as a lawyer and legal editor for many years. Her novel *Seven Cities of Gold* is forthcoming from Aqueduct Press. She lives in Austin, Texas, and Oakland, California.

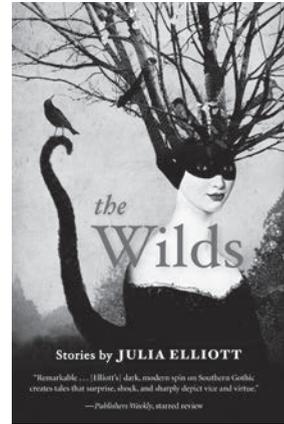


⚙ Life, Death, Prophecy, and Neanderthal Attacks

The Wilds, by Julia Elliott,

Tin House Books, October 2014, 372 pp., \$15.95.

reviewed by Victoria Elisabeth Garcia



Elliott's work offers gorgeous examinations of human feeling, potent imagery, and a powerful sense of the strange.

The Wilds is a fascinating, eclectic, and highly polished collection from multitalented newcomer Julia Elliott. Ambitiously broad in scope and precise in execution, Elliott's work offers gorgeous examinations of human feeling, potent imagery, and a powerful sense of the strange. Written in effortlessly sharp prose, it is a deceptively fast read full of ideas, impressions, and insights that linger long after the book is finished.

Elliott employs a wide variety of genre approaches. Mainstream stories of family, lost youth, and growing up are interlarded with tales of robot love, experimental geriatric medicine, and internet-centered contagious disease. A certain unity of theme is present, however: The majority of these stories are about death, deterioration, and the essential vulnerability of flesh and blood. (Even Elliott's coming of age tales include notes of gore and body horror, and give an impression of youth as red in tooth and claw.)

Because of this, and because many of the pieces are set in the author's home state of South Carolina, there is a temptation to call the collection "Southern Gothic." Indeed, the book includes a number of traditional Southern Gothic motifs, such as madness, wild religious exuberance, and emotional and corporeal monstrosity. But though Southern Gothic influence is unquestionably present, the book as a whole does not quite fit the category. Elliott is far less interested in moral landscapes, vernacular reportage, and the weight of history than she is in her characters' interior worlds and interpersonal relationships. Elliott's work owes as much to writers like Aimee Bender and Lorrie Moore as it does to William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor.

Still, the pieces that exhibit Southern Gothic tendencies are among the strongest in the book. The first, "Whipping," is a mainstream coming-of-age story in

which the everyday savageries of cooking, eating, and being part of a family are depicted in stark terms. At the same time, Elliott delicately limns the connections between human brutality and that of the natural world, while interweaving notes of humorous *grotesquerie* that recall both Lynda Barry and Harmony Korine. This smart and dangerous story ends in a moment of luminous quiet that leaves the reader feeling almost hopeful. It's an extraordinary feat.

Another standout with Southern Gothic overtones is "The Rapture." Here, two affluent girls, forced to attend a poorer classmate's slumber party, bear witness to a deeply religious grandmother's final prophecy. The story is a wonderfully wrought snapshot of the openness and pointed curiosity of childhood, as well as the essential alienness of adult life. And the prophecy itself, which involves spaceships, dragons, Jesus, Jacuzzis, and grape Kool-Aid, is a virtuoso literary jazz riff. It is not to be missed.

Similar in theme and genre is the title story, "The Wilds." In this lovely work, an essentially mimetic story of a young girl's first sensual relationship is garlanded with hints of fairytale (a diaphanous princess skirt, a poison locket, a young man who wears a mask at the full moon). Cleverly and convincingly, Elliott shows us how much adolescence and lycanthropy have in common, and what it means to be a young person coming into knowledge and possession of her own wildness.

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But Elliott doesn't need to cling to the Southern Gothic mode to write stories that are brave, honest, and affecting. In "Jaws," a son is forced to confront the depth of his mother's dementia, the mixture of fragility and strength in his parents' marriage, and his own shame, while trapped on a ride at Universal Studios. And in "The End of the World," a woman searching for recordings of experimental music she made years before re-encounters her former bandmate and lover, and takes stock of the ways that experience and the passage of years have marked his body and her own heart. (Elliott, a member of soaringly wonderful music collective, Grey Egg [<http://greyegg.bandcamp.com/>] writes about music-making in a way that feels particularly rich and true.)

Elliott also shines as a black humorist. The book includes two fabulous pieces about nigh-fantastical health retreats. In one, "Regeneration at Mukti," a battery of carefully curated skin diseases (administered along with yoga instruction and high-end spa treatments) causes patients to encase themselves in veritable pupae of scabs and running sores. From these, they hope to emerge with youth renewed. Through this—plus a complementary spate of natural and manmade disasters—Elliott's protagonist achieves a measure of genuine enlightenment. And in "The Caveman Diet," Elliot's protagonist finds adventure, bafflement, sex, and transformation among radical Paleo lifestyle devotees. Balancing cutting satire with nuanced observation and genuine empathy, these stories are among the most vividly entertaining in the book. Readers who enjoyed George Saunders's "CivilWarLand in Bad Decline" will find them especially delightful.

Other stories are more distinctly SFnal: In "Feral," a grade school teacher, stuck in an increasingly stolid marriage, discovers a unique olfactory connection with the enormous packs of wild dogs that have begun to menace the countryside. Joining forces with an odd but sexually compelling celebrity canine scientist, she braves danger in pursuit of desire, self-knowledge, and neurobiological ad-

venture. In "Organisms," a community's teens are afflicted by a Marshall McLuhan-esque microbial pathogen that causes video screen obsession, then coma, then the flight of the patients from their hospital beds and from society as a whole. And in "The Love Machine," an artificially intelligent robot recalls the development of his ability to feel existential need, erotic desire, and finally, total, self-negating devotion.

In these, as in the collection's other pieces, Elliott does a first-rate job of rendering character, feeling, and emotion. She also has a wonderful way of illuminating mood and mental landscape by showing how her characters think about the science that underlies their stories. As pieces of literature, and as meditations on the intersection of science, lived experience, and emotional being, they most assuredly succeed. However, as pieces of science fiction, they do occasionally lack rigor.

"Love Machine," for example, is set in the extreme near future and centers on a robot that has been purpose-built for indoor, lab-based experiments with the biochemistry of emotional attachment. Its voice (intelligent, articulate, with complex and occasionally poetic diction) is far from realistic, but quite understandably so: the sophistication of its speech, and of its observations of the dysfunctions, intrigues, failures, and redemptions of the researchers in the lab, contribute powerfully to the story on every level.

The same cannot be said, however, of the fact (revealed late in the narrative) that the robot is a bipedal machine with a human-like silhouette that is able to independently negotiate the irregular outdoor terrain of a university campus. (Locomotion of this kind is killingly difficult to engineer. Endowing this machine with such a capacity is the equivalent of giving a middle-schooler a laptop on which to do homework and a commercial-quality offset press on which to print it out.) This unnecessary departure from the probable gives the end of an otherwise wonderful story a feeling of undisciplined bagginess, and renders

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Cont. on p. 14



Life, Death, Prophecy...

(cont. from p. 13)

Though definitely worthwhile, hard SF-oriented readers should come to these stories prepared to suspend a rather hefty bolus of disbelief.

Elliott does far better when the science is more thoroughly submerged beneath her characters' lived experience.

On the whole, the book is marvelous, and doubly impressive for being the author's first.

the final impact a bit hollow. Though definitely worthwhile, hard SF-oriented readers should come to these stories prepared to suspend a rather hefty bolus of disbelief.

Elliott does far better when the science is more thoroughly submerged beneath her characters' lived experience. In "LIMBs," experimental mobility and dementia treatments allow an elderly woman to recall, re-establish, and come to terms with two defining romances from her past. Elliott does not dwell on the technology involved; instead, she renders (with stunning skill) the re-emergence of fragments of memory and self, and the gradual integration of past and present. The effect is of a kaleidoscopic abstraction slowly resolving into a realistic portrait. It is a devastatingly effective piece.

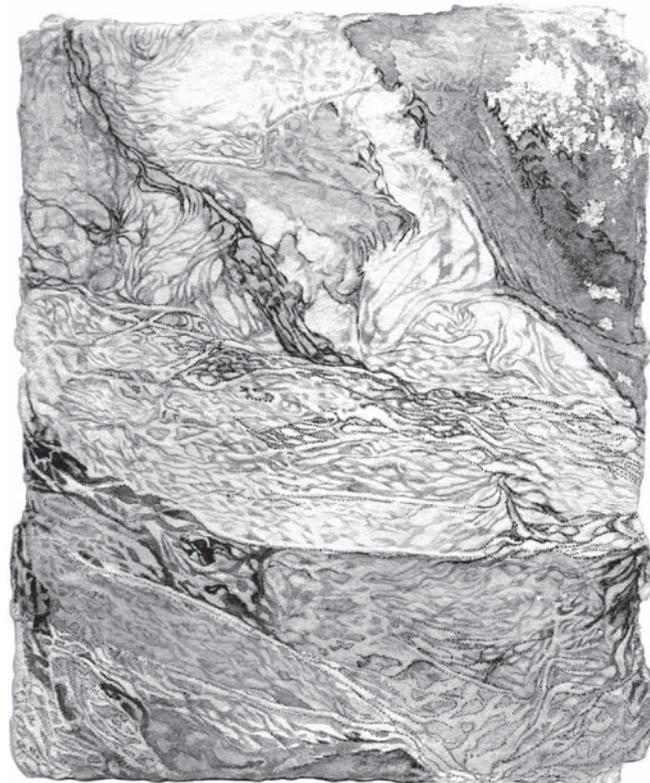
It must also be noted that several of the stories have somewhat unsatisfying endings. "The Love Machine" and "The Caveman Diet" end on dramatic notes that terminate the narrative rather than resolving it. "Feral" and "The Organisms" have endings that are sounder, thematically, but still feel a bit loose. Other stories, however, have endings that positively glow. As noted above, "Whipping" sticks its landing like an Olympic gymnast. Similarly, the "The Rapture's" finish is diamond-sharp.

On the whole, the book is marvelous, and doubly impressive for being the author's first. And take note: Elliott's second book, a novel about Hamadryas baboons, is scheduled for publication in 2015. If it's half as good as *The Wilds*, it will be well worth watching for.



14

Victoria Garcia lives in Seattle with her husband, comics creator John Aegard, and a chunky but agile little dog. Her fiction has been published in *Polyphony*, the *Indiana Review*, and elsewhere.



Paper Topography 2



Song of Steel

Clara Immerwahr Haber, 1870–1915

by Mary Alexandra Agner

This should have been a song of steel
and pressure chambers, flasks and fires
burnt, their catalysts untouched, explosive
paean ending with a portrait: mother
prized by Nobel and her family.

This should have been the story, under covers
with the flashlight on, that kept me reading
salts and solvents, van der Waals, cloudy
electrons humming while I held my breath
at her success precipitated out of emptiness.

These *shouldhavebeens* combust at STP,
convert her Joules to inspiration and to hope,
an alloy of her memory, her chemistry, and me.
My shear strength doubles in adversity.

Mary Alexandra Agner has degrees in earth and planetary sciences, physics, and creative writing. Her freelance writing addresses topics including planetary science, computer science, women in science, women technology leaders, gardening and backyard botany, and astronomy. Her poetry appears in numerous venues.

Midnight Snack

by Mary Alexandra Agner

You cannot map
the fridge dial to Fahrenheit,
you think veggies not viability,
lasagna leftovers not life limits
of bacteria and mold, carefully controlled
environment reduced to ding ding ding,
door open, so many seconds stealing crisp
from lettuce, chill from borscht,
sublime slowdown of decay
an intricate relationship of dewpoint and degree.

What we don't think
when we don't think about refrigerators:
cold chain of insulated trucks,
freezer cases, World War II
perfected processes of preservation
begun in balmy weather, warm rain,
rays of a G-type star turned
to cook-chew-swallow, chlorophyll
making stem and saute leaf one cell at a time
like neurons in the brain of Mary Pennington,
engineer of ice boxes,
calculating safety, spoilage rates,
the Charon of the scientific world
refusing the coin of what junk we've stuffed
into crisper, cheese drawer, back of the door,
until coldness and dryness
have done their utmost
to hold back the ravages of time.

B movie horror scene, ice-encrusted
body parts, pinked and crystallized.
A person forgotten in every appliance.
Pennington's work wrapped in plastic
and coils—original woman fridged?—
her efforts so efficient they fade faster
than the stench of flesh as you ferret out
the ham, the cheese, the mayo hot with horseradish,
the green species, home-grown,
that sends you deciphering expiration dates
and swearing as you slam the door,
extinguishing the light, unsatisfied.



⚙️ Post-Potter YA Made For You

Made for You, by Melissa Marr,

Harper, September 2014, 358 pp., \$17.99.

reviewed by Aaliyah Hudson and Nisi Shawl

Coolness needs to be shared to exist; it's a group value, a socially assigned status.

...Maybe the Harry Potter books made reading cool? Most of the younger fans I'm aware of started with them.

One author who has been supplying the demand for post-Potter fiction is Melissa Marr, whose six-volume Wicked Lovely series can be found on multiple bestseller lists, including the New York Times. Made for You is set in a completely different world.

I think it's going to be most appreciated by young women, teenagers to college students, who are interested in psychologically realistic thrillers. Even "true crime" fans could get into it...

Nisi Shawl: To give *CSZ* readers our impressions of this new novel, my 14-year-old niece Aaliyah and I interviewed each other, asking and answering each other's *Made for You* questions. But before you read the results I'll give you a bit of background.

First of all, did you know that reading is cool? It has always been my private passion—not a secret, but not, by its nature, something easy to share. Coolness needs to be shared to exist; it's a group value, a socially assigned status.

Enter the book haul video. Haul videos, for those of us unaware of them, are YouTube spots in which one caresses and displays one's "haul"—the merchandise one has just purchased. Book haul videos focus on recently bought books. I don't think book hauls make reading cool, though; they just make it easier to show how cool it is.

Maybe the Harry Potter books made reading cool? Most of the younger fans I'm aware of started with them. As these people have grown and matured, they've graduated to books with older protagonists facing equally tough—sometimes even tougher—situations. Fantasy, science fiction, and horror themes predominate. One author who has been supplying the demand for post-Potter fiction is Melissa Marr, whose six-volume *Wicked Lovely* series can be found on multiple bestseller lists, including the *New York Times*. *Made for You* is set in a completely different world.

Here's what we thought of it.

Aaliyah Hudson: Summarize the book without spoiling the end.

NS: Eva Cooper-Tilling survives an attempt on her life by an obsessed friend who calls himself "Judge." Despite psychic abilities awakened by the head injury she sustained during the murder attempt, Eva has no defense against the would-be killer, who strikes those



around her again and again without revealing his true identity.

AH: Who is the protagonist?

NS: Eva Cooper-Tilling is the protagonist, and she's sort of an insider and an outsider at the same time. She's the only daughter of a marriage between two of the leading families in Jessup, a very insular North Carolina town. But she doesn't care as much as you'd think about the politics and posturing involved in being on top of the social hierarchy. Her closest friend is someone who came from a different town—a different state, even—and who, based on her last name of Yeung, I believe is at least partly of East Asian heritage and so a different race than most of the other kids. And even though Eva has been dating her social equivalent, the dearest love of her heart is Nate, another boy who comes from a much poorer family. Eva has the advantages of a rich person, but the comprehension of someone without those advantages.

NS: Did you like this novel? Do you think other people will like it?

AH: Yes. I think that people around my age will like it best, because we are going to be going into high school, like Eva and her friends. And it's also a murder mystery, and nowadays people my age like TV shows and things like that.

AH: Who would you recommend this book to?



NS: I think it's going to be most appreciated by young women, teenagers to college students, who are interested in psychologically realistic thrillers. Even "true crime" fans could get into it, because it feels very much like something that could happen. I say young women because many younger men aren't going to be interested, just like most older men aren't interested in this kind of book. More women than men read mysteries and novels of suspense, plus the main positive characters are female, and so a female audience will more easily identify with them.

I also think there will be fewer fans of horror, fantasy, and straight-up science fiction who'll like *Made for You*. There's a strong supernatural element, but it's unexplained: there's no scientific or magical reasoning behind Eva's visions, so anyone who wants to know why something happens will be left unsatisfied.

That said, anyone who has an open mind and is ready to enjoy that wonderful feeling of not knowing for sure what's happening is going to love this book.

NS: Do you have a favorite part?

AH: My favorite part is when the murderer finally got shot. That made me feel happy, because Eva didn't end up actually killing him but he still got caught. But I also have many other favorite parts.

AH: Who is your favorite character, and why?

NS: My favorite character is Grace, because she doesn't give up even when "Judge" captures her and puts her in a collar at the end of a chain. She also doesn't quit life even when her past outside Jessup comes to light and people dislike her for what she's done. She keeps focused on the present and the future. She's determined to get where she wants to go.

NS: On what page did you figure out who "Judge" is?

AH: Honestly, I didn't figure out until he was at Eva's house.

AH: What part did you think was the best written?

NS: That's so hard to say—so much was gripping and made me want to keep on with the book. The details of the settings, the choices of the characters, all had me believing the story. Looking at what the author did from the perspective of another writer, I'm most impressed with how she got inside the mind of Judge. All his creepy thoughts that made sense to him just fascinated me.

NS: What made Eva's visions happen?

AH: Her car accident did something to her brain I guess.

NS: Do you think *Made for You* should be a movie?

AH: Yes—and no. Because if they decide to leave in the sexual car scene when they make the movie it will automatically become R-rated, and I think it should be at least PG-13, so younger people can see it. But other than that scene, yes, I think it should become a movie.

AH: Do you think she should write another book like this?

NS: I think she should, and I'm pretty sure she is doing that right now.

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Aaliyah Hudson lives with her dad near San Diego. She plays tennis and reads science fiction when she doesn't have too much homework to do. This is her first review.

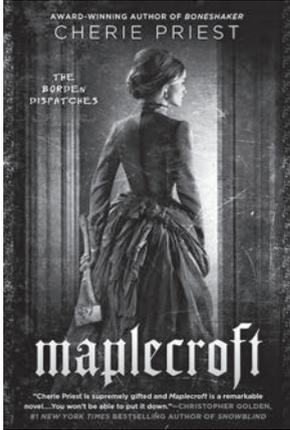
Nisi Shawl takes her cat Minnie for a walk every day. The rest of her waking hours she spends writing stories such as those appearing in her Aqueduct Press collection *Filter House*, and editing things like the reviews in this journal.



Heroine with an Axe to Grind

Maplecroft by Cherie Priest,
Penguin, 2014, 435 pp., \$15.

reviewed by Kristin King



Cherie Priest...chronicles a town sliding into a watery grave, masterfully blending horror, suspense, folklore, mystery, and science. What's going on? It's not clear at first which kind of monstrosity is at work...

Lizzie Borden has a secret. No, it's not that she hacked her father and stepmother to death with an axe. The town of Fall River already knows that. Her secret is why they were so hard to kill. And what she's hiding in her basement.

In *Maplecroft*, Cherie Priest takes us through the heart of madness and beyond. She chronicles a town sliding into a watery grave, masterfully blending horror, suspense, folklore, mystery, and science. What's going on? It's not clear at first which kind of monstrosity is at work—maybe demons, or an alien intelligence, or a natural phenomenon gone wrong. The only thing that's clear is that without Lizzie's axe, the entire town of Fall River would be dead.

Lizzie is a compelling character, vividly drawn and believable. She's smart, strong, fiercely loyal to a town that shuns her, pragmatic, and willing to suspend her disbelief in anything and everything. At the same time, she's not a modern woman in period clothes: her sensibility and understanding of the world are definitely Victorian.

The actual, historical Lizzie Borden has fascinated many. Why did she strike her stepmother 19 times and her father 11 times? (If she even did it; nobody knows.) I first met her myself in Angela Carter's story "The Fall River Axe Murders," which paints such a grim and stifling picture of family life that a hatchet falling is a welcome relief.

The Lizzie Borden from *Maplecroft* goes one better. When she swings her axe, we're cheering her on (and wincing as we think of the cleanup job afterward). This Lizzie is murdering for a good reason: her parents were possessed and transformed into demons. This Lizzie is beautifully accomplished with her axe. "She wielded it easily, lightly," Priest has another character note. "She carried it swinging like a baseball bat, only with more poetry to it. It was a frightening thing to watch, this

small shadow of billowing gray fabric and sprawling, wild hair splaying out behind her, the axe held at the ready with both hands, poised and prepared."

And this Lizzie is just as accomplished at methodical inquiry as she is with her axe. Faced with unnatural, foul aberrations, she brings them to her basement for study. Like Dana Scully of the TV show "The X-Files," Lizzie is matter-of-fact in her investigation of the unknown.

As compelling and fascinating as Lizzie is, the aberrations are even more so. The creatures who attack the house have teeth like needles, ooze foul-smelling fluids, possess the "wet-looking pallor of boiled eggs," and make "slithering, damp coughs." There's also a nightmarish threat in the whispering voice—or voices—that lead people to madness and bodily transformation.

Lizzie doesn't know what she's fighting at first, and neither do we. A demon, a fairy, an alien, the primordial mother of the sea, or even a host of entities? A contagion, like tetanus? Is it male? Female? We keep learning more and more about it as we see it through the eyes of all the characters, but each time it becomes more of an enigma.

As Lizzie grapples with the monstrosity(ies), so too do the other characters. I'm just as interested in them as I am in Lizzie. They all have a journey to take, and they all face danger both from without and from within.

Take Doctor Seabury. He steps into the story after Lizzie's first section, providing a rational counterbalance to her improbable tale...at least, at first. Unfortunately for him, the more he learns, the more he fears a descent into madness. He's a hero straight out of Lovecraft, which means that it's not the monster he fears, but *knowledge* of the unknown. Can he learn enough about the demons to fight them before he goes mad from that knowledge?

Then there's Nance, Lizzie's lover. She's sexy and brave and takes initiative, but is a touch too curious. Hers is the same dilemma as Blackbeard's wife: she can know all of Lizzie's secrets but one,

When [Lizzie] swings her axe, we're cheering her on (and wincing as we think of the cleanup job afterward). This Lizzie is murdering for a good reason...



open any door but one; she has promised never, ever to go into the basement. Can she resist the alien call?

Emma, Lizzie's sister, has the unfortunate failing of having been born a woman at a time only men were expected to have minds, but she still manages to establish an academic reputation as "Doctor E.A. Jackson." She's a biologist and by rights should have been the scientist studying the aberrations in the basement, except that she is an invalid, suffering from tuberculosis. Her body isn't up to it. She can't physically defend herself from the monsters and has to rely on her sister. Meanwhile she corresponds with other scientists, but what she sends out into the world takes on a life of its own, coming back bit by bit to threaten her life and soul.

Gorgoneion by Sonya Taaffe

While the other maidens wove the wool for Athene,
saffron as chariots, purple as victory,
I prayed,
bronze-winged Stheno, boar-tusked Euryale,
to you.
For thighs as hardened as a Spartan runner's,
for hair as strong as snakes,
for hands empty of distaff and water-drawing
and a head bare of dutiful roses,
I watched the moon move the loom-strings on the wall
and weighed what I would offer
to leave them dangling in the sparrow-dusty night.
Sisters of the southernmost ocean,
sea-snarling as vast Keto and claw-pincing Phorkys,
come from the black-figured bottoms of cups,
from kiln doors and carved limestone
and take me from my skin,
as the goddess stripped your sister long ago.
Wear my face
at every festival, guise smiling in my silence
and claim for your crown of ivy
the loss sowed in my wake:
vanished irrevocably
without even a siren to scream over my grave.
Make me stone,
if it will keep me from loving
all this life that chains me
as surely as a mirror the eye.

Finally, there's a police inspector called only "Wolf," sent from Boston by some unnamed organization. He knows something, but will he tell? In a way he's like the X-Files' Fox Mulder, who partners with Dana Scully—except that Victorian mores prohibit a man and a woman from being together alone. Will they ever meet and compare notes?

As the story progresses and we get to know the characters, doom comes closer and closer, the body count rises, and the strange objects in the basement are calling out. How long can anyone resist?

Suspenseful and mysterious, this book is the creepiest I've read in some time.

Almost makes me wish for an axe of my own.

Suspenseful and mysterious, this book is the creepiest I've read in some time.

Kristin Ann King is the author of the short story collection *Misfits from the Beehive State* (2013). She's also had stories and essays in the Aqueduct Press anthology *Missing Links and Secret Histories* (2013), *Strange Horizons*, the *Pushcart Prize* anthology, and elsewhere. She lives in Seattle and blogs at kristinking.org.



Sonya Taaffe's short stories and award-winning poems have appeared in numerous venues. She is currently poetry editor for *Strange Horizons*.

charted unterritories

Tahlia Day

These pieces begin with watercolor or ink stains or washes that I build on in many layers of painting and drawing with more watercolor, ink, pencil, and other media to create final images that are reminiscent of maps or aerial landscape views. It's an unplanned organic process informed by the patterns the watercolor creates as it flows over and through the paper and dries, which seem to me like microcosms of the ways water drives topographical formation.

I call the series "Charted Unterritories" and name them after mythical, fantastical, lost, fictional, theoretical, invented, and otherwise unreal places. In the "Colonization" sub-series I use other

found surfaces such as book pages and wallpaper scraps so that the images become like little worlds growing and taking over unlikely places.

The paintings owe a lot to my lifelong affection for fantasy novels with maps in them, starting with Tolkien's, and also to my general love of the concept of world-building. I made the first few of them in 2006 while studying at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago; since then I've been working in my home studio in Madison, WI, and continue to have new ideas for directions to take with them.

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Lunar Colony 1

Featured Artist

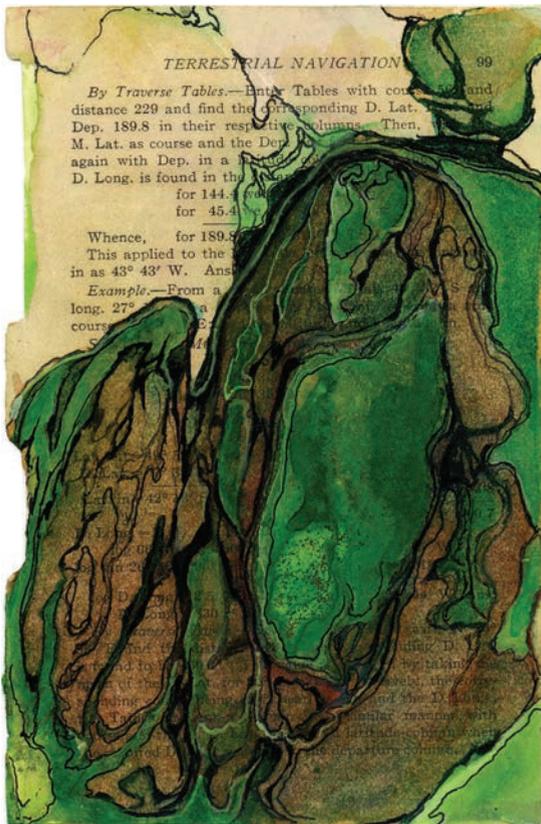




Colonization: Herodotus 1



Colonization: Wild marshes

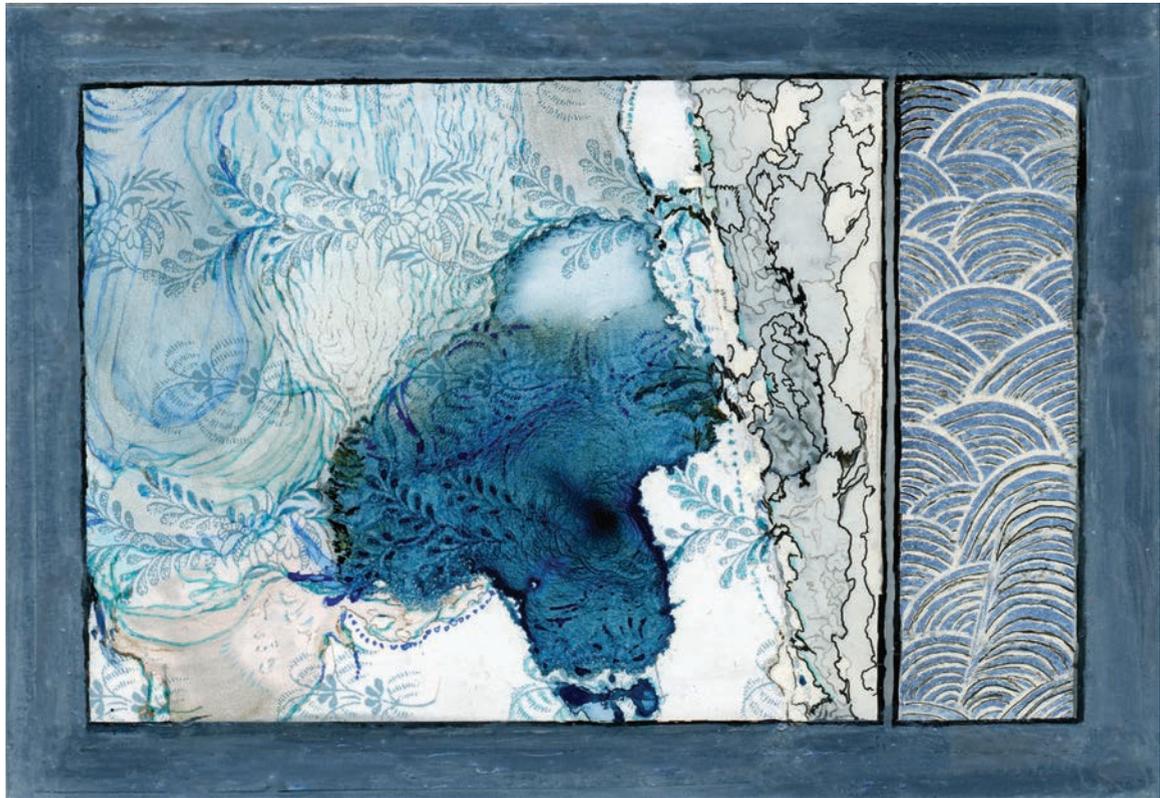


Colonization: Terrestrial Navigation 3



Colonization: Mutation





Colonization: Blue Wallpaper 1 (Silver Fern Bay)

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