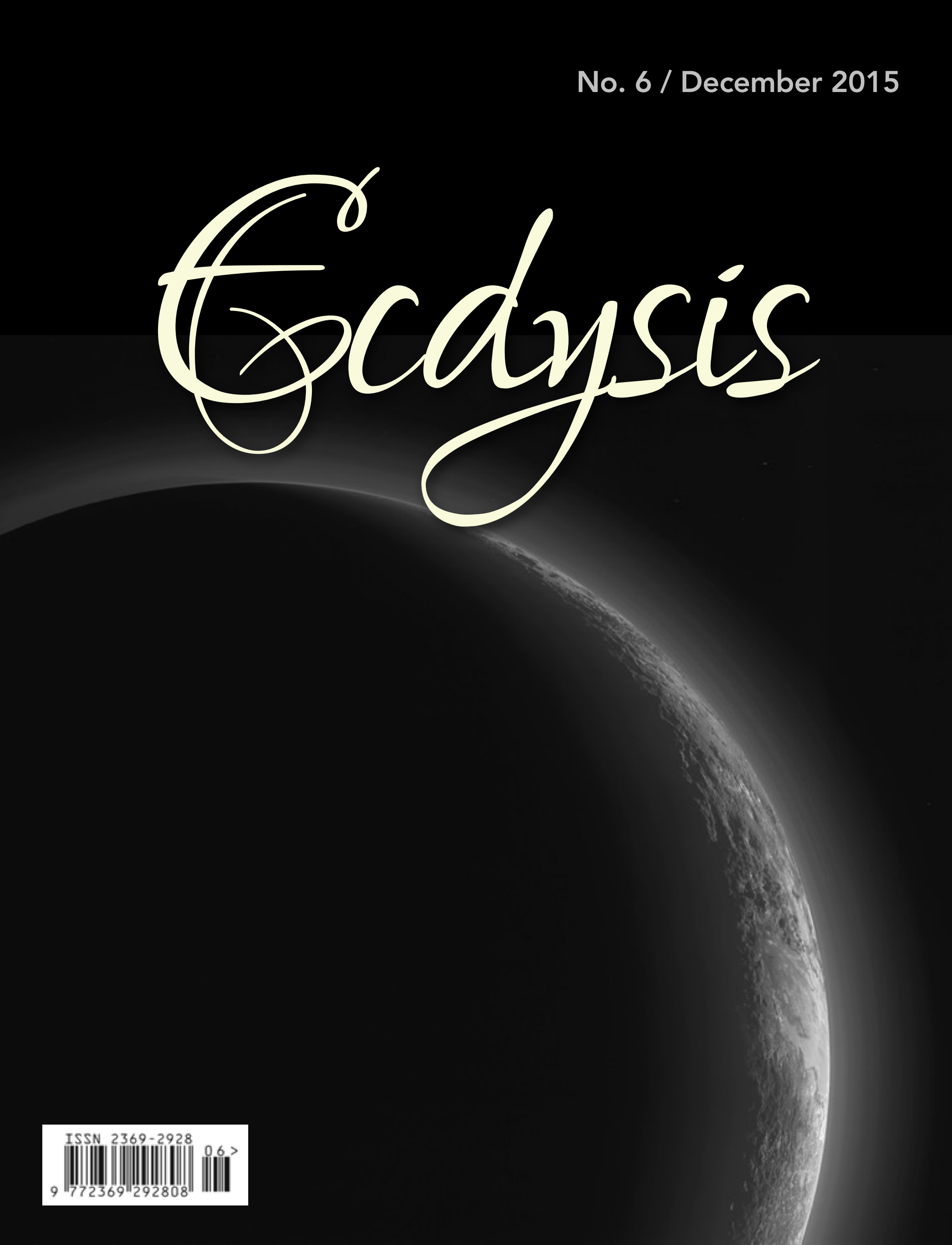
No. 6 / December 2015

Ecdysis



ISSN 2369-2928
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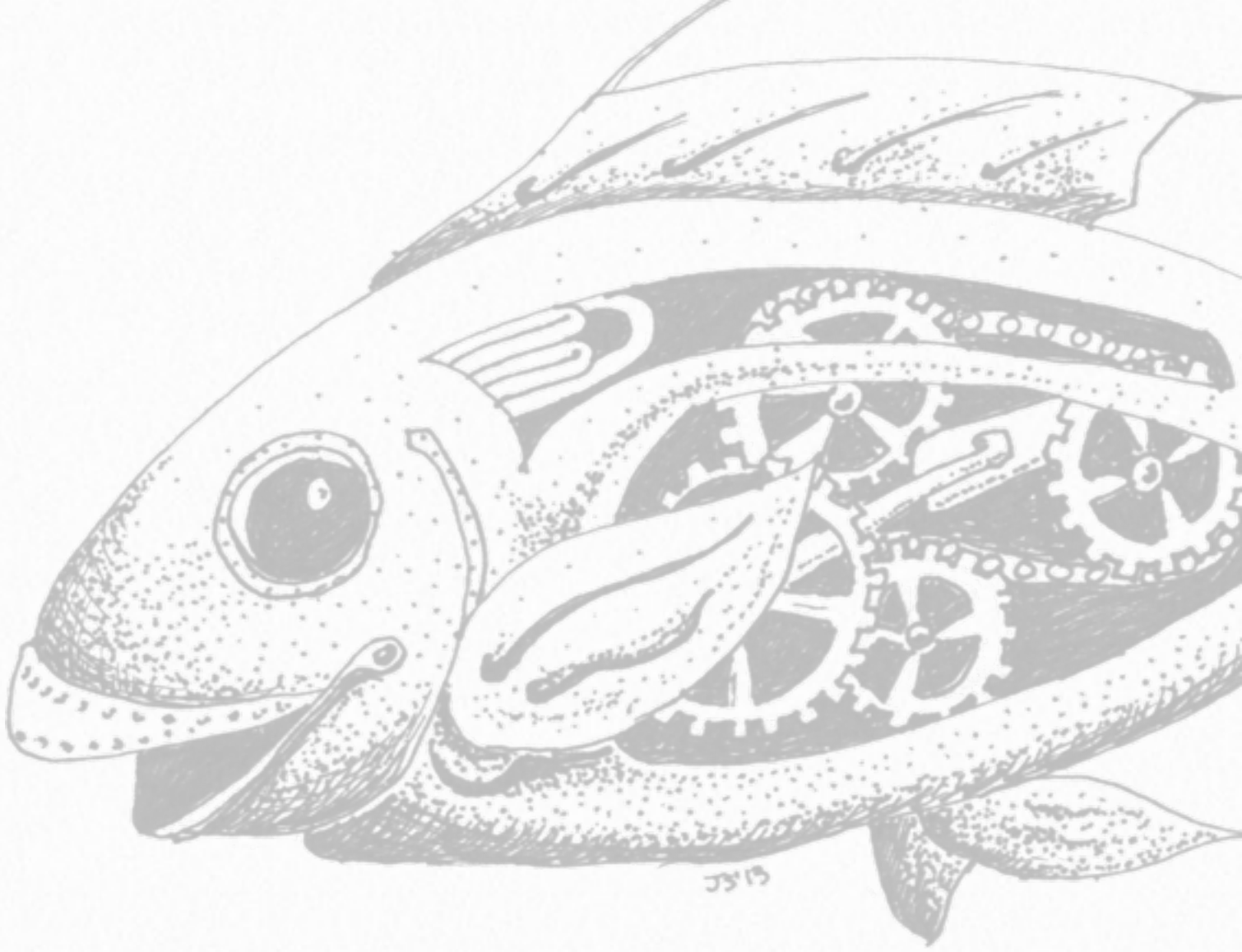
About



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Star War Poems (p. 22) are based on the following: "The Soldier" by Rupert Brooke (1914); "In Flanders Fields" by John McRae (1915); "High Flight" by John Gillespie Magee (1941); "Dulce et Decorum Est" by Wilfred Owen (1920; written 1917); "An Irish Airman Foresees His Death" by William Butler Yeats (1919); "Sea-Fever" by John Masefield (1902); and Rudyard Kipling, "Danny Deever" (1890).

EDITORIAL

We Have Reached Peak Short Story

IN MANY WAYS, we are told, we are living in the Golden Age of sf and fantasy short stories. More stories, first-rate stories, are being published than ever before, in more venues than ever before. We've never had such a wealth of stories to read, and many of them are freely available online.

But every silver lining has its cloud. In the October 2015 issue of *Clarkesworld*, Neil Clarke sounded something of an alarm call over something that many of us might not find alarming: the proliferation of genre magazines that pay professional—that is to say, SFWA-qualifying—rates. "Just like in the rest of the industry, digital publishing has considerably lowered the bar to entry and it has completely altered the landscape for genre magazines. The aspirants category is larger than ever, and may even be growing at a rate faster than the number of new readers and writers entering the field," he wrote.

Clarke argued that there were two reasons to be worried about this trend: quality and sustainability. More magazine issues being published means more publishing slots and more stories: if there aren't enough quality stories to fill all these issues, quality goes down. And given a finite sf readership, splitting that readership among more and more magazines makes it harder for *any* of those magazines to be financially viable. We're in a boom period, Clarke says, and he sees a market correction—what non-economists would call a crash—looming on the horizon.

Indeed, since that editorial was posted, two magazines—*Crossed Genres* and *Ideomancer*—have announced that they're closing, though not necessarily for financial reasons: in each case the staff are basically done and need a break. But in the same period, I've also heard of three or four new magazines launching, with the usual calls for submissions and crowdfunding appeals.

The truth of the situation, which Clarke alluded to, is it doesn't take much to start a "professional" sf magazine. Paying six cents a word for fiction means you could do it for a few hundred dollars a month, if you kept the stories short and didn't pay yourself or your production staff. Online magazines cost next to nothing in overhead. Subscriptions and advertising revenue are practically lagniappe.

But it's worth asking who benefits from the present situation.

The editors and publishers might benefit from the social capital and scene points that accrue from producing a magazine that pays professional rates—all those writers, sucking up to them. But most of them are volunteers. They're not getting paid. (Did you know that magazines once *paid* their slush readers?) Which means that the project is fundamen-

tally unsustainable on its own—not if it requires its staff to have day jobs. It's certainly unsustainable in the long run: at some point you'll want to move on, and while someone in a paid position can be replaced, it's a little trickier to pass on something that's more avocation than vocation, something that costs rather than makes money.

So it's bad for editors and publishers.

It's also bad for readers. Consider that, in the grand scheme of things, hardly anyone reads short fiction; those that do can hardly read every single magazine out there. There are too many. Most of us will limit ourselves to two or three at most, because most of us aren't trying to read comprehensively; we're reading for enjoyment. Anyone who is actively trying to read *all* the magazines is probably editing a year's best anthology.

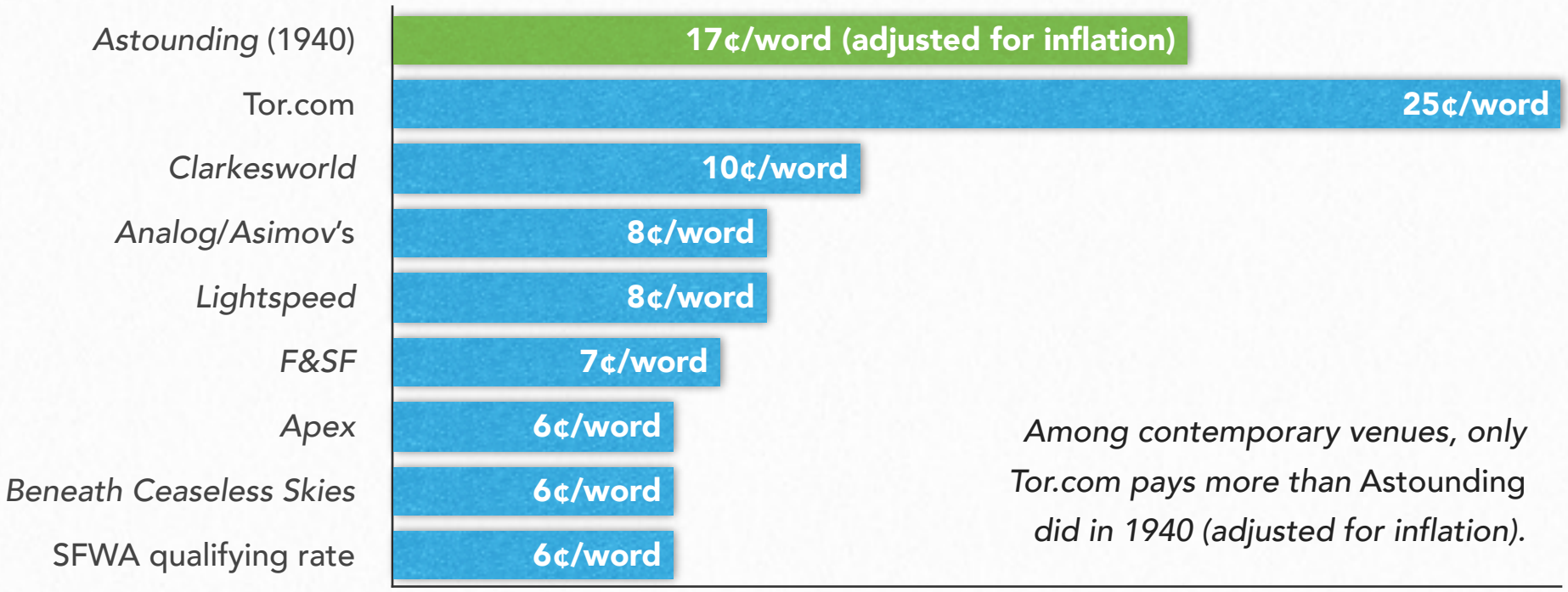
This has implications come award nomination time. It's much harder for a single story to stand out; with a fragmented audience, it's that much harder to reach a consensus on award winners. Not if the three magazines I read aren't the three you read.

And if Clarke is correct and the average story quality declines as the number of stories published each month goes up, because more of the stories being written make it to publication, readers will have to sift through a *lot* more chaff. Short fiction readers interested in quality rather than quantity will have to be selective, or limit themselves to the year's best anthologies, letting the editors of those anthologies make the first cut.

You might think that the only ones to benefit from the boom in sf magazines are the authors. They're the only ones who seem to be getting paid, and the SFWA qualifying rate of six cents a word is a target that most venues try to reach. An increase in the number of publication slots makes for more publication credits, more money, and more professional writing careers. Trebles all around! But authors aren't really benefitting from this situation because the pay is objectively shit.

In 1940, *Astounding* paid its contributors the munificent sum of one cent a word. This was the top rate in the field. Adjusted for inflation, that would be seventeen cents a word today (see graph on page 5). In 2015, only Tor.com and some anthologies pay better than that; the eight to ten cents a word paid by the top venues would have been a bit more than half a cent a word in the 1940s—the equivalent of the short-lived, Pohl-edited *Astonishing Stories*—and the SFWA rate of six cents a word would have been the bottom of the pulp barrel: a third of a cent a word.

Six cents a word is hardly a *professional* rate. It means $300 for a 5,000-word story. Even at a story a week, that's less than minimum wage where I live, and the field cannot absorb a story a week from all of its current practitioners the way the pulps could in their heyday. So let's call it what it is: a hobbyist's rate. A rate sustainable by writers with day jobs, writers who don't need to live by the words they produce. Better than an honorarium—but not by as much as we'd like to



think. Good enough to plow back into conventions and the other ephemera and expenses of Being a Writer. But *not* a living.

This is more about lowering the barrier of entry to professional status—for editors and authors alike—than it is anything else.

And authors don't benefit from too few people reading their stories because the readership is spread too thin. They don't benefit from obscurity. Having more venues to publish in means that the once-fierce Darwinian struggle for publication has been replaced by an even more fierce Darwinian struggle for *attention*. That too has had negative implications for the field and the community, as anyone who's been promoted-at one too many times can attest.

The most controversial suggestion Clarke makes is that SFWA should consider raising its qualifying rate—not because paying writers more isn't a good thing, but because too many venues are capable of paying it. "Given the small explosion in markets that are paying that rate, it's clearly too easy for publishers to earn that badge. Yes, that rate is a badge of honor for publishers. Seriously though, the authors deserve better."

To be sure, Clarke is arguing from self-interest: raising the rate would separate the wheat from the chaff, and he's pretty sure *Clarkesworld* is the wheat, not the chaff. But it's a zero-sum vision: it assumes a finite readership that if spread across too many magazines, prevents any of them from becoming self-supporting and sustainable. It assumes that a new magazine can't grow the field.

But he does makes a point. Imagine if more venues paid like Tor.com. Imagine if more venues paid like *Astounding* did in 1940. Imagine getting $800 to $1,000 for a 5,000-word short story instead of $300. Imagine if six cents a word wasn't good enough any more. What would the knock-on effects be? The competition for publishing slots would be fierce, with authors seriously having to up their game because "good enough to get into

Daily Science Fiction" isn't good enough any more. Financially viable magazines that pay their staff living wages full of excellent stories. That sounds good, doesn't it?

But it would be at the cost of fewer magazines in print, fewer stories being published, fewer writers breaking through, and fewer voices being heard. Fewer editors means more stories written to please a particular editor's taste. It would be at the cost of diversity and distinctiveness. If history has taught us anything, it's that retrenchment is never fairly or evenly distributed.

But if we were to retrench to a handful of established magazines, the process would begin all over again. Whatever they weren't publishing would be noticed, and new start-ups would spring up to address those blind spots. The new magazines would pay very little money—at least at first. They'd launch fundraising campaigns to make up the difference. They'd find their feet, and their voice.

And a decade later, we'd be wringing our hands over whether there are too many magazines for the field to sustain. Again.

—Jonathan Crowe

Surprise! On September 4, 2015, Jennifer and I got married in a civil ceremony at the courthouse in Campbell's Bay, Quebec. Tamara and my father, Brian Crowe, acted as our witnesses.

AURORA NOMINEE

Ecdysis was an Aurora Award nominee this year in the Best Fan Publication category, finishing (an admittedly distant) second to Derek Newman-Stille's *Speculating Canada*. (The Auroras are essentially the Canadian equivalent of the Hugo Awards, and are voted on in a similar manner.) The nominations were announced on May 23, and the awards were handed out at SFContario on November 22. Our thanks to everyone who nominated or voted for us.

From Translation *to* Fanfiction *to* Fiction:

Three Russian Fantasy Derivations and Divergences

WHERE IS THE LINE between plagiarism, derivative works, creative retellings, cultural expressions, and cultural appropriation?

Nowadays, the Russian Internet is still lax about copyright, to put it mildly—many Western works of literature can be found online for free, either in accurate translations or in the original text. It is entirely fair to say that these cause authors to lose out on honest royalty earnings; however, in a country where millions of people (especially outside of Moscow) cannot really afford the extravagance of an elegant hardbound imported book, these bootleg translations can also lead an author to acquire fans that he or she would never have had otherwise, and who may eventually invest in royalty-paying editions.

Another thing that the Internet abounds with in almost any language is fanfiction: amateur writers creating alternative retellings of famous works, or sequels. Some of these in English, particularly in the Harry Potter universe, can go to novel length; perhaps the most famous, pro skeptic Eliezer Yudkowsky's *Harry Potter and the Methods of Rationality*, went to 660,000 words, longer than Victor Hugo's gargantuan *Les Misérables*.

The combination of unrestricted translation and fanfic can lead to the interesting phenomenon of a retelling that tries to be a translation, but gradually diverges from its source material, especially in sequels. In the lands of the Russian Federation, there are three most famous cases of this: **Alexey Tolstoy**'s ***Adventures of Buratino*** as a derivation of Carlo Collodi's *Adventures of Pinocchio*; **Alexander Volkov**'s ***Wizard of the Emerald City*** as a derivation of L. Frank Baum's *Wizard of Oz*; and **Dmitri Yemets**'s **Tanya Grotter series** as a derivation of J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter.

Each of these was to different degrees a translation, a retelling, or (arguably) a parody. Each of these, in the differences, re-

vealed much more about the author than about the source material.

1. Pinocchio and Buratino

COUNT ALEXEY NIKOLAEVICH TOLSTOY (1883–1945) is less well-known in English-speaking circles than his distant relative Leo Nikolaevich of *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina* fame —both were from the noble family of Tolstoy, but from different branches; they are cousins six or seven generations apart. He was born as the result of a family drama: when two months pregnant with him, his mother divorced her husband the Count Nikolai Tolstoy to live with her lover, who ended up raising him as a son; only when young Alexey was seventeen did his mother manage to get him legally acknowledged as a legitimate son of the count, although debates about Alexey's parentage continue to this day. He himself had several common-law marriages. An apologetic for Soviet rule after the rise of Bolshevism, near the end of his life he was also a war crimes investigator and was the first to confirm the Nazi use of gas vans to murder Jews. He died on February 23, 1945, in the last months of the war.

His best-known mainstream novels are the *Road to Calvary* trilogy (*Hozhdenie po mukam*, literally "a walk on torment"), three novels about the Revolution and the rise of Soviet rule, for which he received the Stalin Prize. However, he was also a notable early science fiction writer: his novel *Aelita* (1923) described Earth's expedition to Mars and contact with Martians, while *The Hyperboloid of Engineer Garin* (1927; usually translated as *The Garin Death Ray*) foretold lasers and their military use.

However, the soundest path to literary immortality lies in children's literature, and A. N. Tolstoy is best known in Soviet and Russian culture through his children's story ***The Golden Key or the Adventures of Buratino*** (1936), the story of a long-nosed wooden puppet that came out of his retelling of Carlo Collodi's *Pinocchio*. To this day, despite exposure to Disney and other films, *Buratino* is far better known in former Iron Curtain countries than his Italian forebear. I, too, read of the adventures of Buratino as a child long before I read *Pinocchio*.

Western readers, when asked to recall the story of Pinocchio, either from books or the Disney film, undoubtedly mention two things:

1. Pinocchio is a puppet who longs to become a real boy (and finally gets his wish);
2. Pinocchio's nose grows longer when he lies.

Interestingly, neither of these features got carried over to *Buratino*.

The story begins in an unnamed Italian seaside town where Giuseppe the carpenter acquires a mysterious talking log. Terrified, he gives it to his friend the poor old organ-grinder Carlo, who carves a wooden doll out of it and names the doll Buratino. (The Russian words for "puppet" and "doll" are the

same, *kukla*, and neither Buratino nor the other theatre dolls he meets are ever on strings; animate dolls appear to be a common feature of this world. To meet Pinocchio-raised readers' expectations, I will still refer to them as puppets.) Buratino's nose grows long and pointy despite Carlo's efforts to make it a more pleasing shape, and this does not vary with the truth value of his utterances.

The first few chapters of *Buratino* are a near-translation of the Collodi *Pinocchio*, with Carlo and Giuseppe fighting about the talking wood, Carlo getting thrown in jail for puppet assault, and Buratino trying to eat an egg only to have a chick hatch. Thankfully, the Talking Cricket's outright murder and Pinocchio getting his feet burned off are two episodes Tolstoy omitted (other heads than mine, such as Tor.com's Mari Ness, have commented on the brutality of Collodi's original story).

Alexey N. Tolstoy

Instead of becoming a real boy, Buratino's driving desire is to rescue Papa Carlo from poverty after the latter sold his coat to buy his adopted son a schoolbook, only to have Buratino impulsively trade the schoolbook for a puppet-theatre ticket (following Pinocchio). In the puppet theatre he meets the sad poetry-writing puppet Pierrot and the long-bearded and abusive showmaster Carabas Barabas, "doctor of puppetry sciences," who becomes the villain of the story. And there the two tales diverge in motivations, although there are still some similarities in what happens.

Carabas Barabas seeks a magical golden key and the secret door it opens, which he realizes is in Papa Carlo's garret. To bribe Buratino into leading him to Carlo, Carabas gives the puppet five gold coins. But Buratino is cheated out of them by the secondary villains Alice the Fox and Basilio the Cat, who trick him into planting the coins "on the Field of Wonders in the Land of Fools," (a translation of Collodi, but with more vivid descriptors) really a miserable animal town run by a corrupt fox governor and bulldog police officers. In the "Land of Fools," Buratino is tossed into a pond by the police (he floats, being made of wood) where the old turtle Tortila pities him and gives him the golden key Carabas Barabas had once lost there.

Buratino joins up with the blue-haired puppet Malvina (not a fairy in this version, but a maudlin puppet who had fled Carabas's theatre, tries to "educate" Buratino to dismal failure, and is Pierrot's love interest), her poodle Artemon, and Pierrot himself as they flee the pursuing Carabas and his ally the leech-seller Duremar, who seek the golden key to Carlo's magical door. In the end, Buratino does open the magical door and behind it is a

puppet theatre set that makes the friends' fortunes.

There are no bad boys turning into donkeys or adventures on the sea, and no puppets change into human children. Indeed, almost no human children appear in the story other than as faceless audience members.

A. N. Tolstoy tells the story in omniscient narration, with short paragraphs and visual images much more vivid than in Collodi's version: birds and insects fly in to help Malvina heal Buratino and do battle with the police; Buratino tricks Carabas into winding his long beard around a sap-covered pine tree. No wonder the book was filmed at least three times.

Although Tolstoy's preface to the book claims he had read *Pinocchio* as a child and half-remembered it when relating stories to his own children, his letters confirm that he had at least reread the story on March 6, 1935, and decided to sell a re-telling a Russian audience. Naming the main character *burattino*, Italian for "wooden doll," only happened in the final draft; before that, he was intending to use the name Pinocchio. *Buratino* is an imitation of *Pinocchio* for a Russian audience, but it is the differences that arose in the derivation that reveal the author and his zeitgeist.

As the critic Mark Lipovetsky reveals in a 2003 critical essay, Tolstoy was writing Buratino at the same time as he was working on his novella "Bread," a servile panegyric to the glory of Stalin that compares the dictator to Peter the Great and of course got the former's thrilled approval. Other critics posthumously (and more crucially, post-Stalin) have accused him of being essentially unprincipled.

Yet as Tolstoy wrote a story praising Stalin in order to "fill those empty pockets," he was simultaneously writing a story of a wooden puppet who has no restrictions on his lies, and whose main desires are to make some money for his father's new coat and to escape a cruel puppet-master—and whose end reward is running his own puppet theatre. According to Lipovitsky, the notebook survives in which Tolstoy was working on the theatrical adaptation of the Buratino story, released soon after the print version. Where he wrote the dolls' lines dreaming of a theatre of their own, "without Carabas's whip," in the margins he doodled a mustachioed man smoking a pipe. (Tellingly, those lines were cut from the final version of the play.)

When Malvina tries to teach Buratino to write, he, partly out of ignorance but partly to spite her bossiness, tries to write with his ever-long nose instead of a pen. Unlike his Pinocchio forebear, Buratino lies whenever it suits him. And the writing of the text itself is built on a foundation of lies that were necessary to survive in the Soviet Union, which later satirists would codename "The Land of Fools."

2. Oz and the Emerald City

ALEXANDER MELENTIEVICH VOLKOV (1891–1977) was born in a peasant family in the Siberian Altai mountains. From childhood he

had two passions, math and adventure fiction, and recalled secretly subscribing to a magazine in order to get part of the collected novels of Jules Verne (in Russian translation), to the anger of his father. Later, he became a mathematics docent (assistant professor) in Moscow, and successfully taught himself French so he could read Jules Verne in the original. He wrote an adventure novel of his own, about a prisoner who escapes in a hot-air balloon, before starting the work that would lead to his immortality, ***The Wizard of the Emerald City***.

Volkov wrote *The Wizard of the Emerald City* as a translation exercise of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. (His language skills may have been faulty at times: he refers in letters to the original as "The Wise Man of Oz.") His translation/adaptation was first published in 1939. In it, he removed two chapters that in his opinion did not add to the plot and slowed down pacing (the Dainty China Country and the Forest of Fighting Trees), and instead added three episodes of his own (including a narrow escape from a cannibal and from a flood), as well as changing the entire style to a gently ironic yet psychologically insightful voice throughout.

Instead of Dorothy, he named the heroine Ellie (possibly because Russian does not have a *th* sound). He also assigned or changed many of the names and places: the Wicked Witch of the East became Gingema, Witch of the Blue Land, while the one of the West was now Bastinda, Witch of the Purple Land. The good witches were dubbed Villina of the Yellow Land (for the North) and Stella of the Pink Land (for the South). The Wizard of the Emerald City got named Goodwin and comes from Kansas like Ellie rather than from Omaha (perhaps because one American state was confusing enough for Russian children). The Hammer-heads were replaced by human-like Leapers. The Queen of the Field Mice was Ramina, and the leader of the Flying Monkeys, Worra. Toto himself is usually affectionately called Totoshka, and gains the ability to speak like all other animals when he is in the Magic Land. (Volkov claims multiple times that all birds and animals speak there, but also blithely describes his characters as eating beef and mutton.)

Essentially, like George Lucas (who named every single guard and dancer of Jabba's Palace), Volkov loved making up names for people, and in his books even throwaway characters like servants, soldiers and historical kings mentioned for half a page all get named with phonotactics that are fairly consistent, though neither Russian nor English.

Before World War II, Volkov adapted his translation for a puppet theatre play, and took the opportunity for many more revisions, further diverging the story from Baum's. For example, he changed Ellie from living with her Aunt Em and Uncle Henry like Dorothy to living with her loving parents John and Anna: being a devoted father himself, he did not want her to be pitied as an orphan. With his

"Volkov read some of the other Oz books, but was unimpressed, convinced that only Wonderful Wizard *was any good. He found Ozma of Oz and further books repetitive and tasteless, and wrote, 'Those American writers have a strange passion for long series, like Burroughs's Tarzan and Mars series.' (Thank heavens he didn't live to hear of Robert Jordan.)"*

logical mind, he insisted on adding structure to the story: rather than Dorothy encountering the Scarecrow, the Tin Woodman and the Cowardly Lion basically at random, Ellie's adventures are driven by a prophecy that the wizard would send her back only if she grants three people their dearest wishes (brains, a heart, and courage, of course).

Ellie was sent by Goodwin the Wizard expressly to free the Winkies, as Oz ordering Dorothy to kill the Witch of the West horrified Volkov: "What cruelty in these words! Forcing a little girl to murder, the worst crime. And one must sadly admit that in modern America, youth crime is very high: this is due to the influence of comics, gangster films, radio and TV shows that glorify murder and other crimes."

Volkov also disliked Oz's cowardice for sending a little girl to her near-inevitable death, and was intent on having the heroine be self-reliant and willing to help others, rather than always getting helped. Thus, while slaving for Bastinda, Ellie aids her cook Fregoza in fermenting rebellion among the Winkies.

The book was immensely popular with Soviet children during the war years. Evacuated children told of having to burn all the other books in their home for heating in besieged Leningrad, but leaving that one; of settling down in the Moscow subway during air raids and reading *The Wizard of the Emerald City* for distraction; a Crimean Tatar recalled trying to take the book with him during the May 1944 forced relocation of his people from the Crimea to Central Asia, and a gunman knocking it out of his hand.

However, *The Wizard of the Emerald City* was suspected of West-worshipping during the postwar era—Ellie longs for her home, but her home is in the USA. It wasn't reprinted until the late 1950s, despite many fans' earnest letters to the publisher begging for a reprint, even offering to hand-copy their tattered first editions.

Finally in 1959, the book was republished to immense success, with many revisions and with illustrations by L. Vladimirsky. Translations appeared into Latvian, Armenian, Lithuanian, Uzbek, Czech, Kyrgyz, Georgian, German and Dutch (the German transla-

tion by L. Steinmetz went through six editions from 1963 to 1974). Children still wrote to Volkov asking for books, even from central Moscow and Leningrad, as printings would sell out and libraries had waiting lists.

As far as I can tell, any question of permission from the Baum estate (L. Frank Baum had died in 1919) never comes up in any of the book's discussion or Volkov's correspondence. However, Volkov did include an afterword to the book, explaining its origins and his changes, and preaching how the flaws of the capitalist system had led the Wizard to believe that he can only govern based on lies and cowardice.

In 1958, Volkov read some of the other Oz books, but was unimpressed, convinced that only *Wonderful Wizard* was any good. He found *Ozma of Oz* and further books repetitive and tasteless, and wrote, "Those American writers have a strange passion for long series, like Burroughs's Tarzan and Mars series." (Thank heavens he didn't live to hear of Robert Jordan.) He decided to make his own sequel, although he was still consciously or subconsciously drawing on events and details in the Oz books, particularly the Powder of Life from *The Land of Oz*. According to his letters, he was mostly inspired by Russian folk tales' Water of Life, which resurrects the dead.

Urfin Joos and His Wooden Soldiers appeared in 1960. After the death of Gingema via Ellie's trailer house, her former assistant the carpenter Urfin Joos (or Juice) seeks to gain power of his own. When the wind blows seeds of an extraordinarily persistent weed onto his garden, Urfin grinds the weed into powder, only to have this powder animate his bearskin rug. Urfin uses the powder to create an army of wooden soldiers and conquer Gingema's Blue Land, then march on the Emerald City. A traitor named Rouf Bilan lets him into the City and he imprisons Scarecrow and the Tin Woodman.

Following a law of conservation of characters, Volkov turned the crow that had told Scarecrow that what he needs is brains into a recurring character named Kaggi-Karr (Russian onomatopoeia for crow calls is "karr, karr"). She manages to fly to Kansas and get a message about the disastrous situation to Ellie and her visiting uncle, the old sailor Charlie Black. Charlie builds a sailing ship on wheels to cross the desert to the Magic Land, and they save the situation in conjunction with a popular rebellion against Urfin's rule. After their victory, the wooden soldiers get new friendly faces carved and become productive members of society, the traitor Rouf Bilan flees into a great cave, while Urfin gets exiled, as Ellie judges that his worst punishment would be to be "left alone with himself."

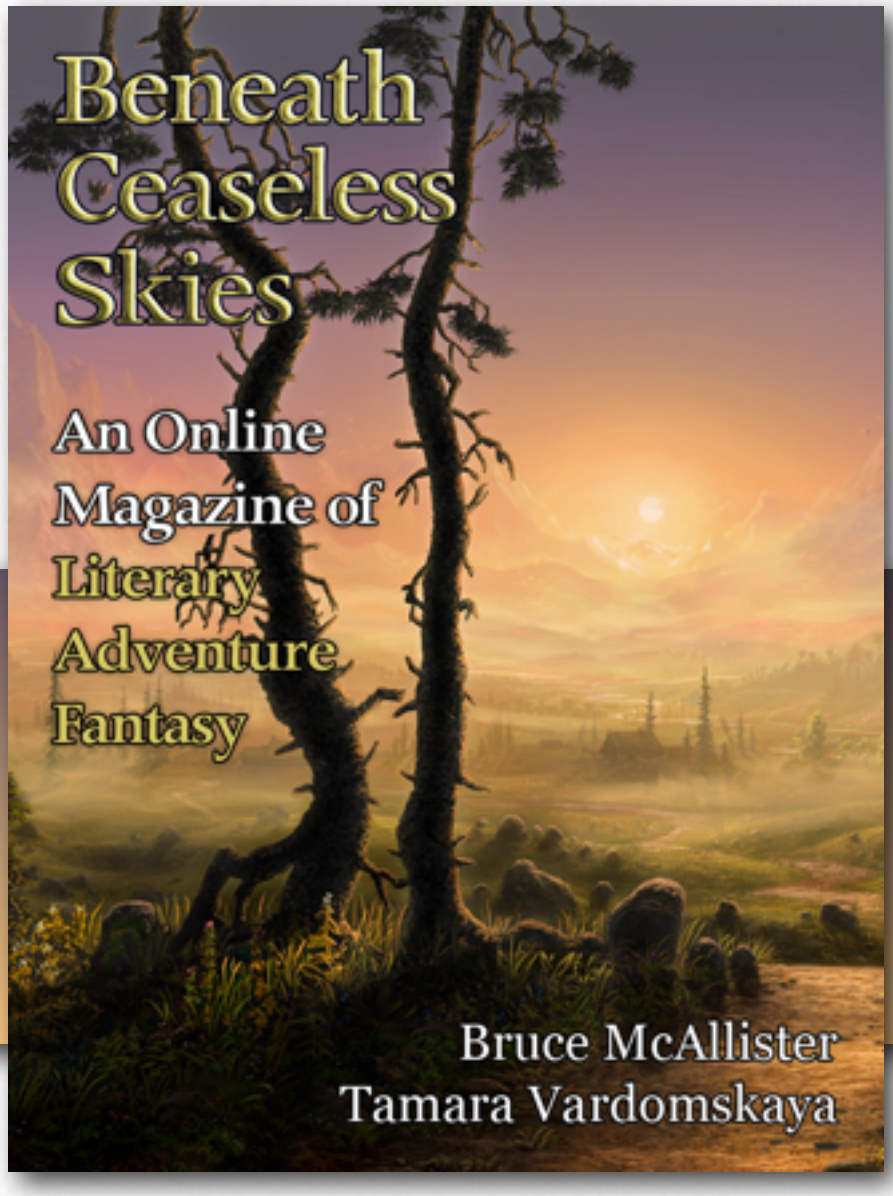
Volkov originally planned for the story to feature some satirical digs at Americans from behind the Iron Curtain: when ruling the Emerald City, Urfin declares "freedom of speech" and graciously allows the citizenry to join either of two parties: the Urfinists who are monarchists and believe Urfin Joos

should be king, and the Joosists who are republicans and believe Urfin Joos should be president. However, these did not make it into the final edition.

This was followed by a more political sequel, ***The Seven Underground Kings***. We learn that there is a Kingdom of Underground Ore Miners underneath the Magic Land. Its long-ago king arranged for all seven of his children and their heirs (associated with the seven colours of the rainbow; this was Volkov's illustrator's idea to cut down from Volkov's original twelve) to take turns ruling for a month each. However, the populace wearies of supporting one ruler's court and six kings-in-waiting and their courts including their lackeys, soldiers and spies; Volkov was a sincere anti-monarchist, even if he followed Baum in having kings. They solve the problem by discovering a spring of magical Sleep Water which sets the imbiber to sleep for a protracted period of time after which they wakes helpless and amnesiac and has to be reminded who they are. Thus, when it is not a king's turn to rule, he sleeps away his interregnum.

This system works for seven hundred years until Rouf Bilan, who had fled into a great cave after Urfin Joos's defeat in the previous book, stumbles onto the underground kingdom in the worst possible way: he accidentally destroys their Sleep Water spring. All seven kings, their courts, lackeys and spies come awake, and the quiet underground kingdom plunges into economic and political chaos.

Coincidentally, at the same time Ellie, who had returned to Kansas, is visiting her cousin Fred Canning in Iowa (he is about two years older than her). As Fred envies her adventures, he leads her to explore a cave system. However, a rockfall cuts them off, and the cave's passages end up leading them back to the Magic Land—or rather, beneath it to the underground kingdom. On learning that this is the wonder-working Ellie they had



Tamara Vardomskaya's story,
"The Guardian's Head,"
appears in Issue 186 of
Beneath Ceaseless Skies.

heard of from Rouf Bilan, the Ore Miners insist that she stay and solve their government problem.

With help from Scarecrow, the Winkies, and other aboveground friends, Ellie and Fred manage to find a better source of Sleep Water. They deceive the Ore Miners into believing that they are in magical battle with "the dread spirit Mechanic" while they actually build a pump.

Here Volkov shows that he was a socialist author after all: the underground population realizes (on the suggestion of Scarecrow, who ironically is de facto a king) that they don't need the kings that much anyway. The kings, and their courts, servants and spies (yes, the fact that each king had his own system of spies is never forgotten) are all sent to sleep and when they wake up amnesiac, their former subjects convince them that they are simple honest tradesmen as the Ore Miners' community moves to the surface.

When Ellie leaves the Magical Land this time, Ramina the Queen of the Field Mice tells her that she would never come back (again, unlike Dorothy who eventually moves her family to Oz permanently). This left Volkov with a dilemma for the heroine of his next story, as demand continued for sequels. He solved it by having Ellie's mother give birth to a much-younger sister, Annie, who grows up on stories of Ellie's adventures, and becomes the heroine of the next book.

The Fiery God of the Marrans was first published as a serial in the prominent science magazine *Science and Life* with the staggering circulation of more than three million copies per issue. It brings back the exiled Urfin Joos from the second book: ten years after the events of the previous books, he has taken over a low-tech people of the Magic Land called Marrans (called Leapers by the other peoples, Volkov had first introduced them as a replacement for the Hammer-heads during Ellie's journey to the Witch of the South). Pretending to be a fire god, he introduces them to fire and rapidly advances their technology in order to back his takeover of the rest of the Land. He succeeds in taking over the Tin Woodman's Purple Land and the Emerald City itself before the Scarecrow summons Ellie for help, and the message reaches her younger sister.

Fred, now an adult, cannot join Annie in her task, but he gives her and her friend Tim solar-powered clockwork mules to ride on, which take them to the Magic Land along with her dog Arto, a descendant of the now-ancient Toto. They save the day once more, in tandem with a popular uprising against Joos's rule by his own Leapers. Joos lies to the Leapers, telling them that the Emerald City has slaughtered their comrades, only for them to find said "slaughtered" comrades happily playing volleyball with the Emerald City dwellers. Yes, volleyball, which Tim introduces to the Munchkins and Winkies; this is described in loving detail so I guess Volkov just liked the sport and figured it would be good for Leapers.

Two more books followed, involving Annie and Tim and giving the Magic Land new antagonists: ***The Yellow Fog*** had a newly-awakened wicked witch shroud the entire Land into the namesake acrid fog that prevented sunlight and threatened the Land with winter (although the Narnia books would have also been translated into Russian by that point, I am not aware of any discussion that Volkov may have been inspired by the White Witch's rule in *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*). Again, Tim, Annie and Charlie Black arrive, this time on the back of a dragon, to help save the day, although as always, Volkov's ethics meant that these foreign champions only applied the right pressure on a popular rebellion already there.

In the sixth and final book, ***The Secret of the Abandoned Castle***, Volkov must have run out of possible antagonists inside the Magic Land, and decided to bring them—from space.

A spaceship from the planet Rameria lands in the Magic Land with the intent to conquer Earth. The aliens onboard (who look and act exactly like humans to the point of having beards, suits with zippers, and soccer—and despite being able to travel nine light years, are all male) are divided into a handsome and hardworking slave class called the Arzaks and a class of cruel masters, the Menvits, who had enslaved the Arzaks via hypnosis and taken away their language, culture and inventions. With the help of Annie, Tim and Fred, the inhabitants of the Magic Land ally with the slave class to overthrow the oppressive masters, and have the newly-freed aliens declare Earth not suitable for conquest.

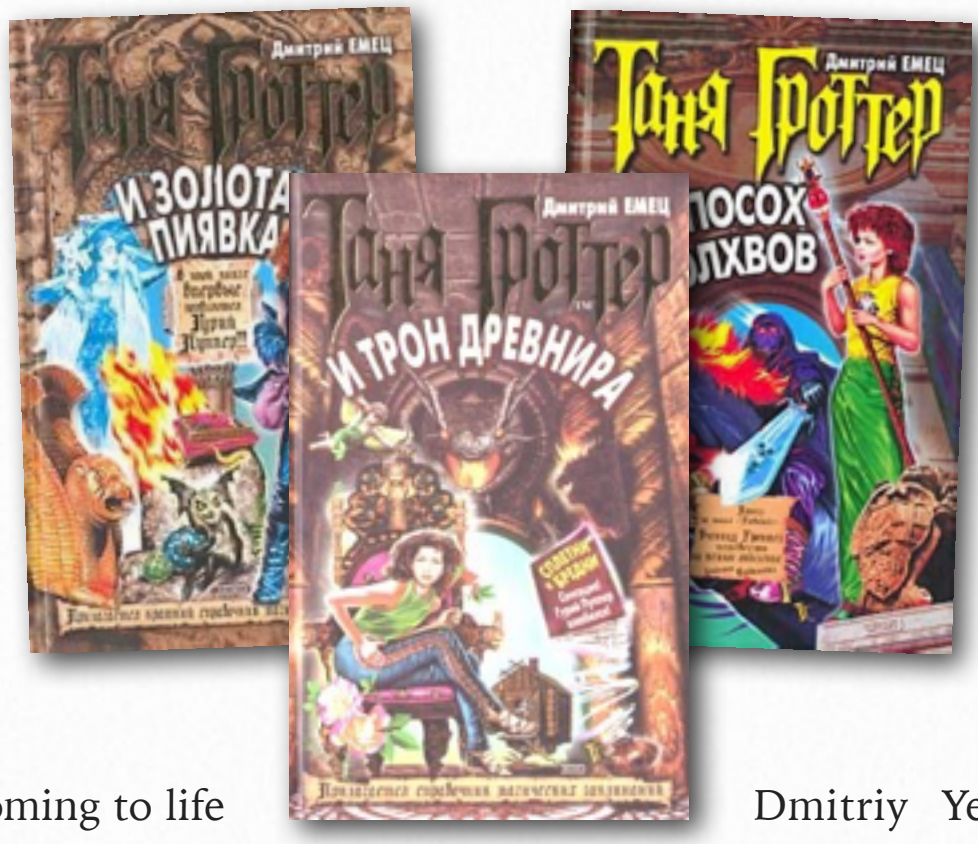
The original version of this book was published as a serial in the magazine *Young Friends* in 1976. It was released as a book only in 1982 after Volkov's death, with considerable revisions by the poet and editor Alla Stroylo.

Unlike the Oz books, which as far as I can tell stayed at turn-of-the-twentieth-century technology, the Emerald City books delighted in advancing technology to time-of-writing levels: Ellie and Annie's family uses photographs and cars, and Fred grows up to be an engineer and explosives chemist. (Ellie grows up to be a teacher: a characteristic of Russian science fiction and fantasy, which deserves a different essay, is that young girls are wonderfully developed strong and intelligent characters, but the (mostly male) authors seem to consider women a completely different species and so have no idea what to do with their female characters after they pass puberty, except as a cluster of gender stereotypes.)

Reading it with eyes trained in the 21st century West, one notes the gaps that show his place and time. His five-thousand-year history of a magical location in America does not mention the Native Americans at all—but then on the other hand, it does not mention George Washington or the Civil War or the "Star-Spangled Banner," either, or any real differences other than names between life in Kansas, USA and life on any other steppe-

type terrain. Mentions of the sailor Charlie Black trading with cannibals made me wince. But this was a man writing from behind the Iron Curtain, for behind the Iron Curtain. America, in his perspective, was just as much a fantasy land as the lands of Munchkins and Winkies and Leapers.

Volkov took Oz as inspiration, but from the beginning he shaped it with his own firm ethic—partly anti-capitalist (and indeed, in the 1930s as Volkov started the work there were certainly some flaws showing in the US capitalist system), but mostly anti-oppressive. Some themes fascinate him and appear again and again, such as created creatures coming to life (and not needing food or sleep). But his main theme was always friendship and mutual aid, and very few of his characters, even his villains, ever die. Above all, the Emerald City books are Oz as shaped by a gentle geek who liked giving things names, and also volleyball.



3. Harry Potter and Tanya Grotter

BOTH *BURATINO* AND *THE EMERALD CITY* were re-shaped from their Western roots by the influence of Soviet rule—Volkov sincerely believed in communism with a human face, while Tolstoy sincerely believed in appeasing his Soviet masters so as not to go hungry. They were also shaped—how could they not be?—by the protectionism of the Iron Curtain and the . . . let's call it *lax* attitude towards international copyright. My third case study comes from the era after the Iron Curtain fell, as ever newer translations of Western works came into the market with the rise of the Internet, but the Internet also allowed non-Russian audiences to learn what the Russians were doing. At the turn of the millennium, Harry Potter came to the former USSR, and in 2002, Dmitriy Yemets published the book ***Tanya Grotter and the Magical Double Bass***.

Dmitriy Alexandrovich Yemets (born 1974 in Moscow) was already a prolific writer of children's books, mostly fantasy, before Tanya Grotter: his first books, a cycle about space pirates, were published in 1995, and he became the youngest member of the Writers' Union at the age of 22. Since 2000, he has been releasing three to four books per year (!), including fourteen books about Tanya Grotter and another series set in the same

universe about the young dark lord Mefodiy Buslaev, who tries to find a middle way between the forces of light and darkness.

The latter series is much more influenced than Tanya Grotter by Yemets's devout Orthodox Christian faith (another way he differs from Tolstoy and Volkov, who were not known to be religious, not that being openly so was welcome in the Soviet era). His series of historical novellas about the early Christian princes of Russia was written to support Moscow's Sretensky Monastery. He also is by all accounts a devoted father of seven children, an unusually large family in a country where the birth rate has been low since before the USSR's collapse.

Dmitriy Yemets

However, I will focus on Tanya Grotter and her relationship to Harry Potter. In researching this article, I was able to acquire the third through fifth books of the series, ***Tanya Grotter and the Golden Leech***, ***Tanya Grotter and the Throne of Drevnir***, and ***Tanya Grotter and the Staff of the Magi***. The first two books were not available in the U.S.-based Russian bookstore where I ordered them online. None of the books are available in English, nor will they be.

The first book, *Tanya Grotter and the Magical Double Bass*, apparently follows the plot structure of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* pretty closely, but somewhat gender-swapped and with intentional parodies of Russian life: the orphan Tanya Grotter lives in Moscow with her distant relative, a pompous member of the notoriously rich and corrupt Chamber of Deputies, his abusive wife and their spoiled daughter, after her parents were killed by the evil sorceress Chuma-del-Tort (Voldemort was translated as Volan-de-Mort, while *chuma* means plague). She enters the magical school Tibidokhs (rhymes with "lochs"; *trakh-tibidokh-tibidokh!*, as well as being onomatopoeia for a crashing noise, is a spellcasting cry in children's stories similar to *abracadabra*).

This school is located on the Isle of Buyan, a location that has hosted magical places in Russian folklore since well before Pushkin borrowed it for his retelling of *The Tale of Tsar Saltan*. The place abounds with specifically Russian fantasy characters, such as rusalki and vodyanoi, old witches and their houses (and apartment complexes) on chicken feet, and magi (*volkhvy*), priests and sorcerers of pagan Russia similar to druids. In contrast to J. K. Rowling's spells in bad Latin, most of the spells involve Russian puns. Instead of Quidditch, the students' favourite sport, which Tanya excels at, is Dragonball. It's frankly simpler and makes more sense than Quidditch: broom-flying teams compete to throw four balls into the

"goal" that is the mouth of the opposing team's dragon, without being swallowed themselves; the dragons regurgitate the players they had swallowed at the end of the game. The death-whistling mythic character Nightingale the Robber is her coach. Her new best friend is Yagun, the grandson of Baba Yaga.

The differences, and Yemets's claim that it was fair-use parody, were not enough for Rowling and Time Warner. They could not do anything about the first book's immense popularity in Russia, but when in 2003 the Dutch publisher Byblos moved to translate the books into Dutch for Western European audiences, Rowling and Time Warner's legal team blocked the books' translation into any other language, on grounds of copyright infringement. One thousand copies were printed of the Dutch translation, and no more; these sold out almost immediately.

However, by the point that I picked up the books, the series had diverged drastically. Unlike the Harry Potter books' escalating arc against Voldemort, Tanya's war against Chuma-del-Tort seems to be nearly settled after the first book (although the third, the one I read, features her visiting an alternate timeline where Chuma had won). In a stroke of meta-irony, a recurring character starting with the fourth book is the captain of England's dragonball team, an immensely famous and popular orphan boy wizard with glasses, a scar on his forehead, and great broom-flying skills. Who is named Guriy Pouper—or technically, "pooper," but Yemets's English, likely learned in the cultured environment of a second-language school program, seems to have been too limited to inform him that "pooper" is not the best English last name. And who falls madly in love with Tanya, to her annoyance as she herself has an on-and-off fondness for her classmate Vanya and resists her female schoolmates' mass adoration of Pouper.

From the sample that I read, the Tanya Grotter books tend to lack the depth of the Harry Potter books. Rowling's acute perception of depression, the mentality of abuse, and lonely children's longing for a family is something that she gets too little credit for. Tanya Grotter comes across as more lighthearted fluff, and sometimes Yemets makes false steps as he strains to portray a girl protagonist while being shackled by Russia's sadly prevalent ideas of gender essentialism, and ends up with Tanya as the proverbial Smurfette who is the one girl on the field tough enough to handle it with the boys, and scorns girls. But I found myself laughing more often than not, and delighted at the cleverness of plot resolutions. I regret that the books will not see an English translation until Harry Potter enters the public domain. They do not harm Harry Potter; they are an alternate path.

4. Conclusion

AS THEIR WRITERS ADAPTED their borrowed/stolen source material, all three of these examples showed one trend: simplification and a

more logical structure. Pinocchio's wildly episodic adventures turn to Buratino's arc, tightly driven by the golden key and the door it opens; where Dorothy simply stumbled across the Scarecrow and friends, Ellie is following a prophecy's instructions; the intentionally eclectic game of Quidditch is turned into the much simpler Dragonball and the four-house system of Hogwarts is reduced to two departments of Tibidokhs, light and dark.

Non-Russians may be tempted to attribute this to something in the Russian soul wanting orderliness and logic, but I strongly suspect that this is just the power of the second draft. On rewriting, if the second author had no idea why the first author wanted to include something (who knows why Baum dreamed up the Dainty China Country), he would simply drop it in order to get something simpler.

The more I read of these books, the less I believe that they are copying. Even if the author meant to copy, his own values and priorities reshaped the material too much, from Tolstoy's desire to run his own show to Yemets's desire to mock corrupt politicians. Buratino, the Emerald City and Tanya Grotter are not original—but then, as the argument goes, neither is most of Shakespeare. And as they expanded, their sequels certainly were original works.

So I disagree with copyright defenders' argument in favour of banning the translation of Tanya Grotter—that people who read Tanya Grotter would not go on to buy Harry Potter. The two works followed a similar pattern in the first volume, but in the subsequent volumes they had to diverge, as Yemets and Rowling are different people. So they become no more similar to Harry Potter than Lev Grossman's *Magicians*, or Diana Wynne Jones's Chrestomanci, or Ursula Le Guin's *Wizard of Earthsea* or Patrick Rothfuss's Kingkiller Chronicles, or any one of a hundred other unique tales of a young person becoming a wizard at a special school. Divergence is inevitable, and it is valuable.

—*Tamara Vardomskaya*

Former Planets

Ceres

Discovered: 1 January 1801
Visited: 6 March 2015
Diameter: 938 km
Orbital period: 4.6 years
Lost planetary status: 1850s
Reason: Was discovered having an affair with an underage asteroid in a dirty bathroom off the Belt.

Vesta

Discovered: 29 March 1807
Visited: 16 July 2011
Diameter: 525 km (mean)
Orbital period: 3.6 years
Lost planetary status: 1850s
Reason: Caught giving bribes trying to become a Jupiter satellite; resigned in a huff.

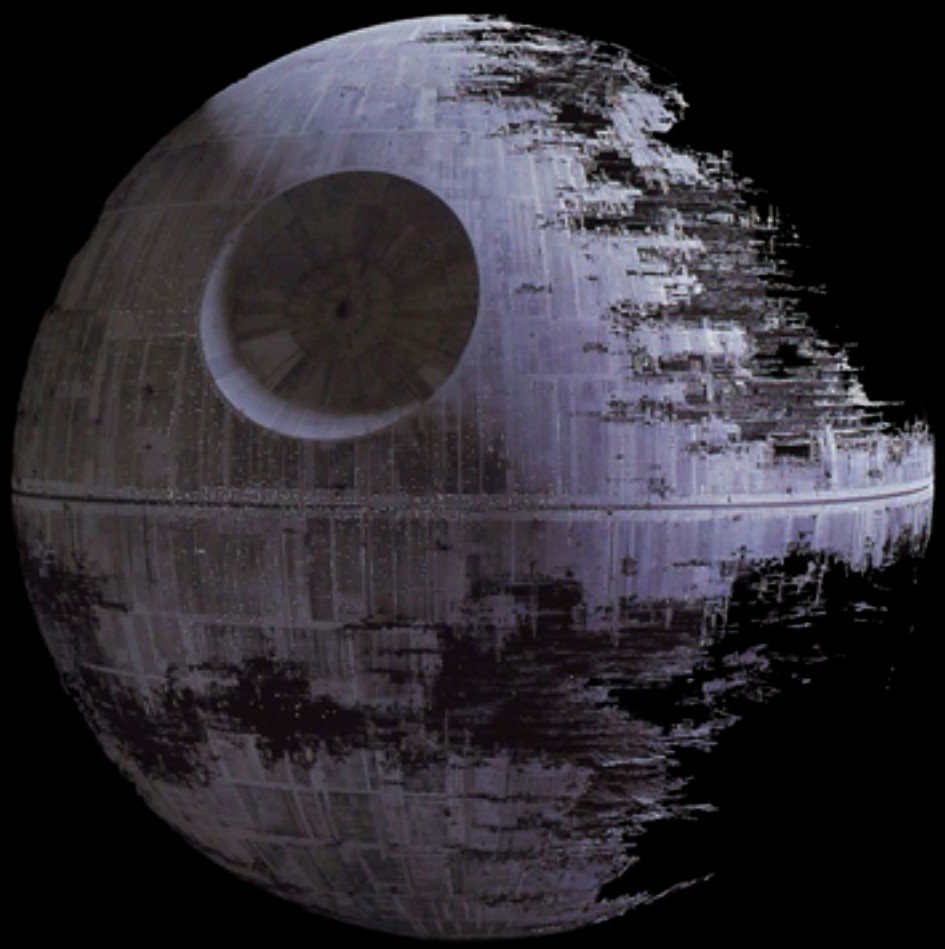
Pluto

Discovered: 18 February 1930
Visited: 14 July 2015
Diameter: 2,370 km
Orbital period: 247.7 years
Lost planetary status: 2006
Reason: Saw its popularity slip as bright new planets came onto the scene; now tries to mooch drinks in the Kuiper Belt on “the days I was the ninth planet . . .”

Star War Poems

British Empire *war* poetry adapted to the STAR WARS universe

by Tamara Vardomskaya



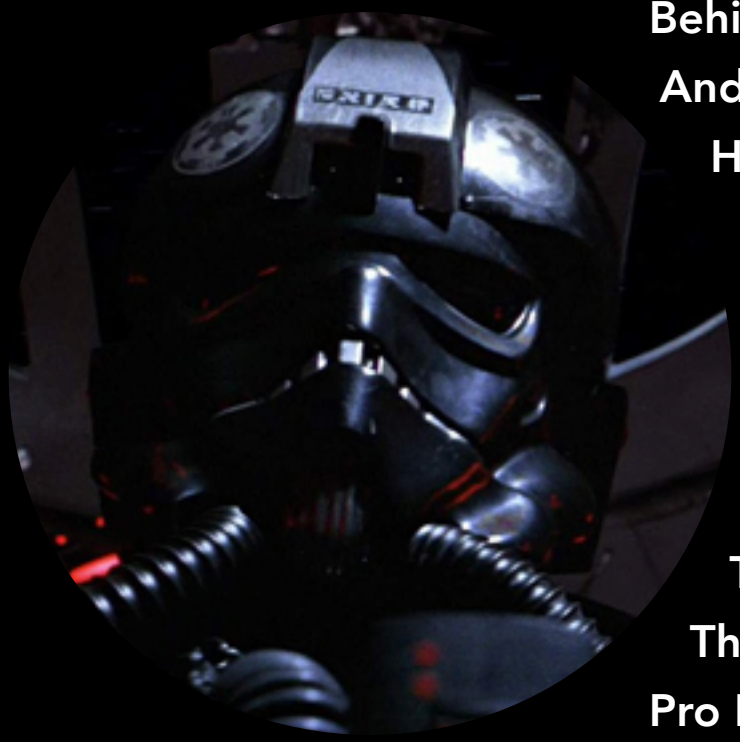
If I should die, think only this of me
That there's some cubic mile of foreign space
That is forever Death Star.

In Hoth icefields poppies don't grow
Between the ionized rubble glow
That marks our place—and up in space
TIE fighters still, shrill-screaming, race
Scarce heard mid blaster fire below.

We are the dead. Scarce days ago
We lived, felt dawns, saw novas glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Hoth ice fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe
To ye from failing claws we throw
The lightsaber; do hold it high.
If ye break Force with us who die
We shall not sleep—even if poppies grow
In Hoth icefields.

Oh, I have slipped the bonds of Tatooine
And danced the skies on barrel-rolled X-Wings.
Sunward I've climbed, and joined the laser din
Of mounted cannons, and done a hundred things
You have not dreamed of—wheeled and soared and swung
Beyond the double suns, and in that place
I've chased the shouting emptiness, and flung
My eager craft through star-lined hyperspace.



If in some smothering dreams you too could pace
Behind the laser cannon split his ship
And watch the ions scatter across space
His hanging face, as lashed with alien whip.
If you could hear, with every jolt, the blood
—But then in space, you cannot hear a scream
—Spilling through vacuum like corrupted cud
Of vile sores, as stars on coldly gleam—
My friend, you will not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory
The old lie: Dulce et decorum est
Pro Imperia mori.

I know that I shall meet my fate
Beyond the Galaxy above:
Rebels I fight, I do not hate,
Empire I guard, I do not love.
My planet is Mos Eisley Cross,
My folk its scum and villainy,
No likely end can bring them loss
Or make them happier or more free.
No law nor duty bade me fight,
Not Vader, nor Coruscant yon:
A lonely impulse of delight
Led me to put white armour on.
I balanced all, brought all to mind,
A waste of breath seemed future's course,
A waste of breath the years behind,
And there's no balance to the Force.

I must go out to space again, to the space where I feel alive,
And all I need is a fast ship and a working hyperdrive,
And a blaster on my hip before, and a Wookiee friend beside me,
And secret compartments beneath the floor for when Imperials chide me.

I must go out to space again, for the sight when stars turn to lines
Is the loveliest sight in the Galaxy (and many of them were mine),
And all I need is a fair game and a good straight fight,
And a reputation to match my name, and no carbonite.

I must go out to space again, to the life that is bold and free,
Where no one cares for the Empire, and the Empire knows not me,
And all I need is an asteroid where Destroyers dare not go,
And someone to tell me that they love me, and I will reply, “I know.”

“Why was Lord Vader running by?” the Stormtroopers all said.
“To pay me now, to pay me now,” said Bounty Hunter Fett.
“What makes you look so smug, so smug?” the Stormtroopers all said.
“I’ve got my job and my revenge,” said Bounty Hunter Fett.
For they’re carboniting Solo, you can hear John Williams play,
Up in Bespin’s Cloud City they are freezing him today,
He had made our good Hutt Jabba mad as ev’n Huttese can’t say,
So they’re carboniting Solo in the morning.

SFWA GRAND MASTER

Larry Niven: Reducing to the Known

Pierson's Puppeteer

MY TEENAGE SELF would have been a lot more excited about the news that Larry Niven was to be this year's SFWA Grand Master than my present-day self was, when the news broke last March. Not that I don't think the honour is well-earned or well-bestowed; whatever you think of Niven's work (or more likely his politics), you can't argue his influence on or stature in the field. As a rule of thumb, if your reaction to the news that someone has been made a Grand Master is, "you mean he isn't one already?" then it's probably high time for the honour.

That Niven should be a Grand Master is, for me, a critical assessment rather than a fanboy's reaction; I stopped being a Niven fan some time ago. At one point he was one of my favourite authors (I confess that the other was Asimov), but he's long since dropped off my radar. The last book of his I actively sought out was ***Destiny's Road*** (1998), which I found problematic and repetitive, for reasons I'll get into in a moment. Nor did Niven lose me in real time: I discovered him in the mid- to late 1980s, by which point he had already begun moving in a direction I could not follow.

His early stuff was engaging, entrancing, even fun. There were a lot of misses, but the hits were in the gold. ***Ringworld*** (1970) was, of course, incredible, but I didn't enjoy his other early novels, like ***World of Ptavvs*** (1966) or ***A Gift from Earth*** (1968) nearly as much. Far better for me were his short story collections. ***Neutron Star*** (1968) was my fa-

vourite, and came very close to making my list of ten books that made a lasting impression on me,[1] but other collections contained jewels as well. ***All the Myriad Ways*** (1971) had the Nebula-winning "**Inconstant Moon**," the satire on Superman's sex life that is "**Man of Steel, Woman of Kleenex**" and "**Not Long Before the End**," an impressive examination of the idea of magic as a scarce, non-renewable resource. ***A Hole in Space*** (1974) reprinted his amazing article on galactic megastructures. And the title story of ***Convergent Series*** (1979), combining geometry and demon-summoning, has lingered in my mind for decades. Niven at his best was delightfully clever.

But at the same time, over time, Niven was revealing himself to be a bit of a crank. The ethics of organ donation, something he delved into in his story for *Dangerous Visions*, "**The Jigsaw Man**," was something he kept coming back to again and again; see *A Gift from Earth* and ***The Long ARM of Gil Hamilton*** (1976). And his obsession with water-monopoly empires—scaled up to planetary and interplanetary levels—spanned decades, turning up as a major theme in both ***A World Out of Time*** (1976) and *Destiny's Road*.

Then there were his politics, which were increasingly impossible to ignore. Though I don't share their views, I don't object to science fiction writers being conservative. I don't impose an ideological litmus test on who I read. But when they go to great lengths to inject their politics into their fiction, they do make it rather difficult for me.

It is probably no coincidence that Niven at his most readable and enjoyable is Niven at his least political. Early in his career, Niven was politically naïve. "I was pretty ignorant of the facts of daily life, politics, history. I didn't get into those matters until I started collaborating," Niven said in a 2014 interview with Andrew Liptak. Why that collaborator had to be the arch-conservative Jerry Pournelle, with whom Niven co-wrote ***The Mote in God's Eye*** (1974), rather than David Gerrold, with whom he co-wrote ***The Flying Sorcerers*** (1971), is a question we will never know the answer to. But in the end, as James Nicoll acidly put it, "Over the years, to borrow from Alan Moore, Niven grew more like Pournelle; Pournelle too became more like Pournelle."

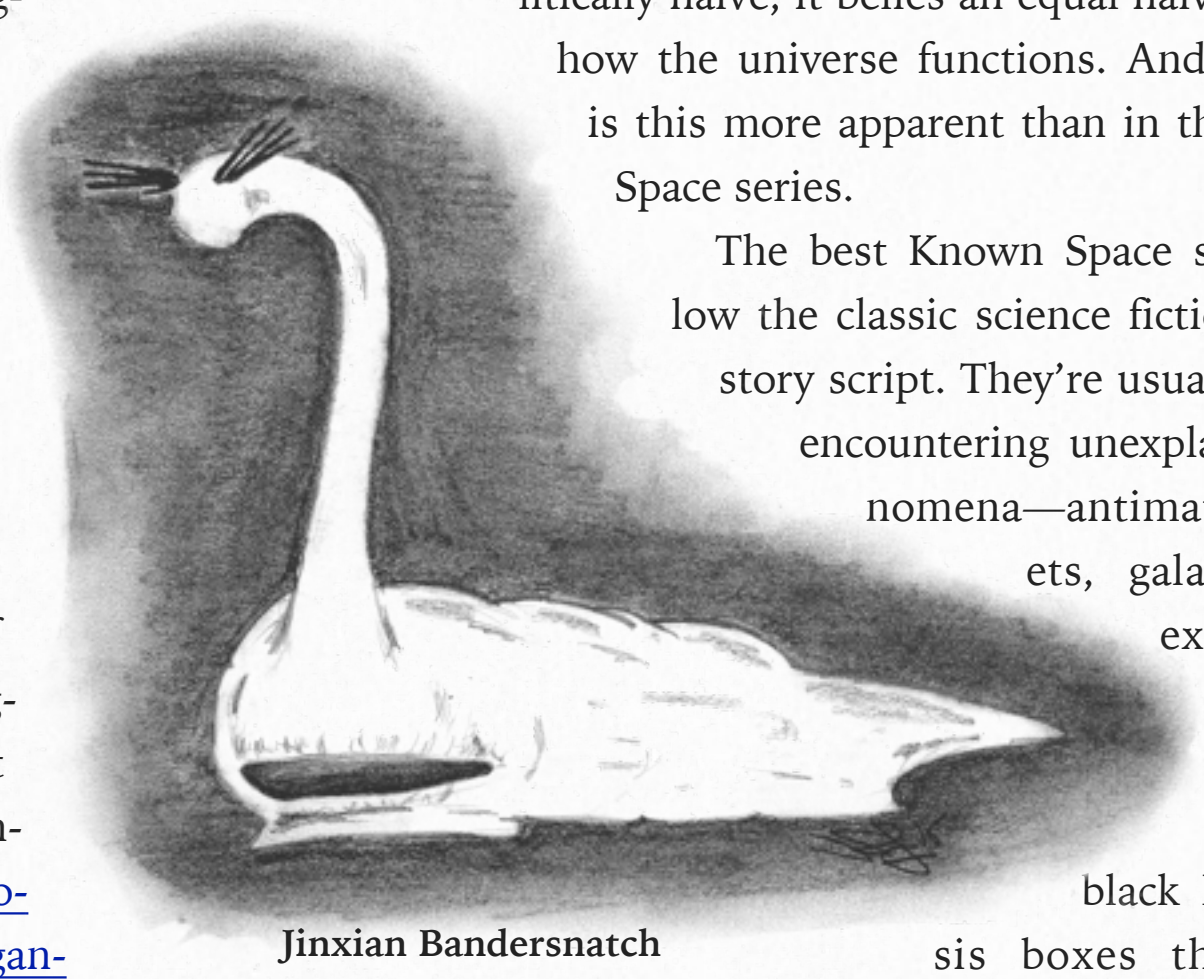
I started noticing the politics. While having Benito Mussolini as the deuteragonist in the Niven/Pournelle ***Inferno*** (1976) was a little weird, it was just one data point. Later Niven/Pournelle collaborations seemed even more problematic: ***Footfall*** (1986), with its contempt of democratic government; ***The Legacy of Heorot*** (1987, with Steven Barnes), with its brute-force reaction to indigenous life; ***The Burning City*** (2000), written in outraged response to the post-Rodney King Los Angeles riots.

The worst, for me, was ***Fallen Angels*** (1991). Written with Pournelle and Michael Flynn, this Baen paperback original was both an exercise in climate change denialism

[1] See *Ecdysis* 4 (October 2014), p. 24.

(look, the glaciers are returning! take that, treehuggers!) and one of the most egregious suckjobs ever given to sf fandom—by which, and I swear I am *not* making this up, the world is saved.

But it can't be all Pournelle's fault. Allow Niven some agency here: he can be just as problematic on his own. It's hard to tell whether the statements he's prone to making are bigoted, misanthropic or simply clueless. When he wrote, in 1984, "Only one nation in all of Africa offers its citizens the vote. Can you name it? It's the rich one. It's South Africa,"[2] was he even aware of the layers of wrongness embedded in that statement? To say nothing of his reported advocacy of spreading organ-harvesting rumors in the Latino community. (And as for how Niven handles women, I can't even talk about that: my early teenage self was, I'm sorry to say, blind to it; my adult self is afraid of what I'd find if I went back and looked for it.)



Jinxian Bandersnatch

All of which is to say that somewhere along the line Niven seems to have become a Right-Wing Author, with simplistic views supported mainly by epistemic closure.

Which is a pity, because his early work doesn't sustain that level of political toxicity. Those who have an anaphylactic reaction to strident wing-nuttery in their science fiction should stick to works published before the mid-1970s.

That said, his early work is not only politically naïve, it belies an equal naïveté about how the universe functions. And nowhere is this more apparent than in the Known Space series.

The best Known Space stories follow the classic science fiction puzzle story script. They're usually about encountering unexplained phenomena—antimatter planets, galactic core explosions, neutron stars, quantum black holes, stasis boxes that themselves contain ancient mysteries like a McGuffin/Matryoshka hybrid, and unreasonably large megastructures like ringworlds—that need to be figured out if the protagonists are to survive.

The difference in Niven's work is the in the solutions, and the ease at which they are arrived. A Niven protagonist has Figured Things Out, or at the very least is in the process of doing so. There is never any doubt that

[2] "Staying Rich," reprinted in *N-Space* (Tor, 1990), p. 451.

he—and I use the male pronoun with intent—will succeed. Whether his name is Beowulf Shaeffer or Louis Wu (or, though he doesn't live in Known Space, J. B. Corbell), he's a Competent Man of insufferable smugness, and the universe, whose laws can be reduced to a few pithy phrases, is his oyster. When mistakes are made, and they are, for disaster does not occur except through temporary ignorance, solutions are obvious in hindsight.

The appeal of Known Space, I suspect, is in its orderliness—its *knowability*. It is possible to make sense of this universe. General Products make four kinds of hull. It takes three days to travel one light year. Here are the planets, each of which has a distinctive feature that has had a specific impact on its inhabitants. Here are the aliens, each of whom have a thing—the puppeteers are cowards, the kzinti scream and leap before they're ready—that, curiously enough, can also be reduced to a pithy phrase.

It's comfort reading, to have everything so known and so solvable. So *simple*.

Niven, whose degree was in mathematics, is at his best with structures and systems, but he's shite at people and societies. Because people and societies are, *pace* Asimov, impossible to express in mathematical terms. They're *complicated*.

The trouble with Known Space is that it's reductionist: reality boiled down to what can be known and solved. But it's a Dunning–Kruger universe, one that fails to understand that reality is far more complex and less fair.

In a sense, both Known Space and the later crankery are part and parcel: Niven's is the self-assured, but wrong, response to intractable problems. That cannot understand why the solutions aren't simple and the people aren't reasonable. That the equations don't always balance. That reality is messy. And that what is known is far outweighed by what is unknown.

—Jonathan Crowe

Grog

Ecdysis

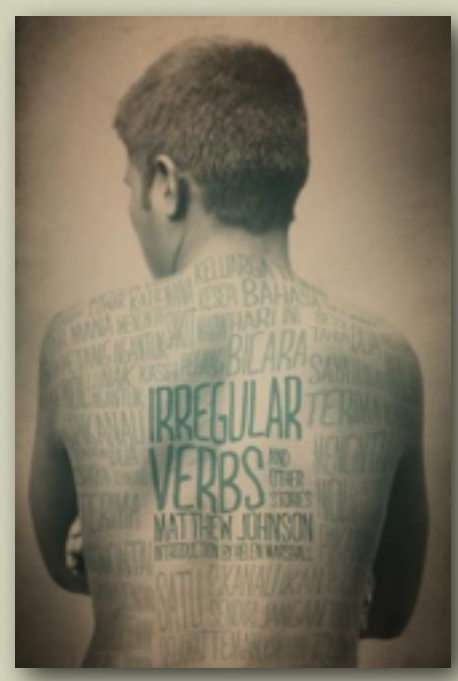
AT CONVENTIONS

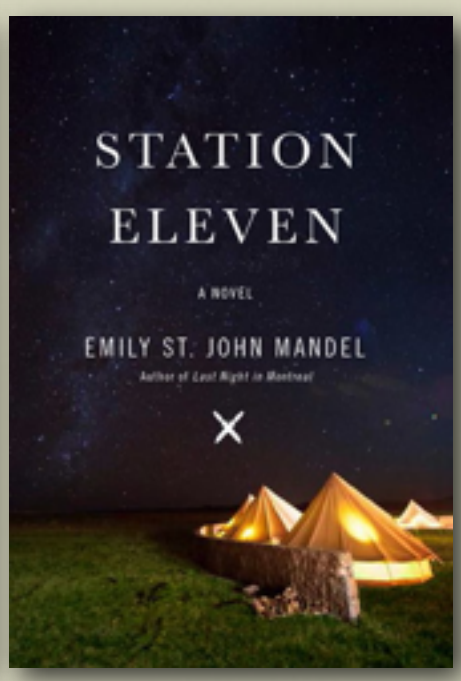
Above left: Kate Heartfield, Amal El-Mohtar and Jennifer Seely at Ad Astra in Richmond Hill, Ontario in April. **Above right:** Tamara Vardomskaya and Liu Cixin at the Nebula Awards Weekend in Chicago in June. **Below:** Tamara Vardomskaya, Haralambi Markov and Ruby Katigbak at the World Fantasy Convention in Saratoga Springs, New York in November.

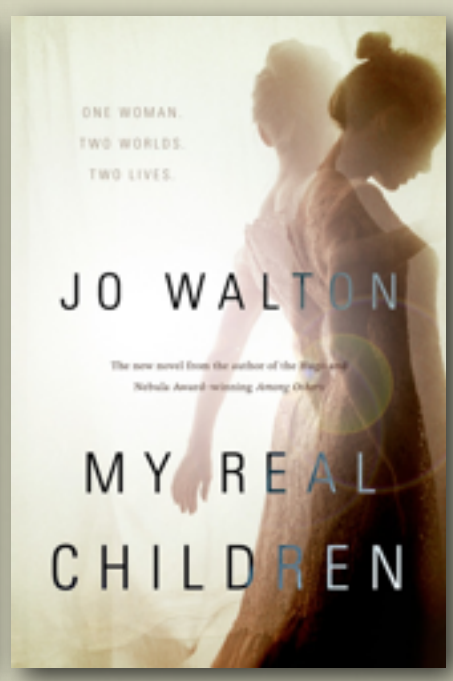
My Year in Book Reviews

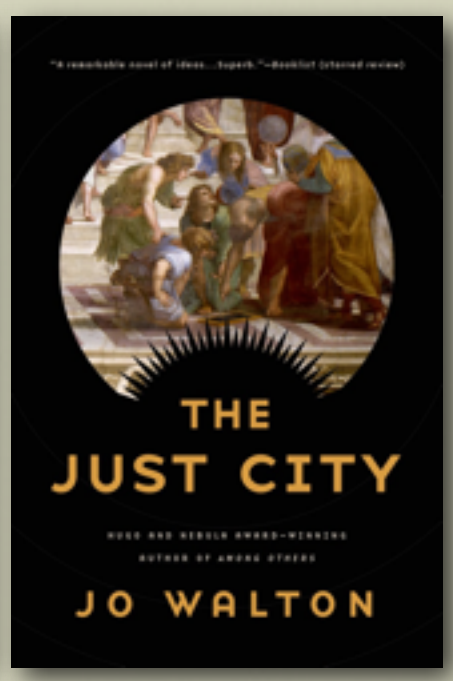
These are the science fiction and fantasy books I reviewed in 2015. Reviews appeared either at *AE: The Canadian Science Fiction Review* or on my personal blog. Tap or click on a book cover to read the review.

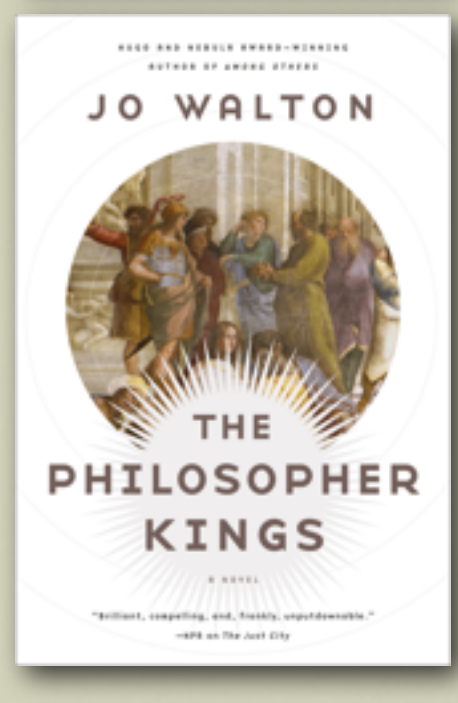
—Jonathan Crowe

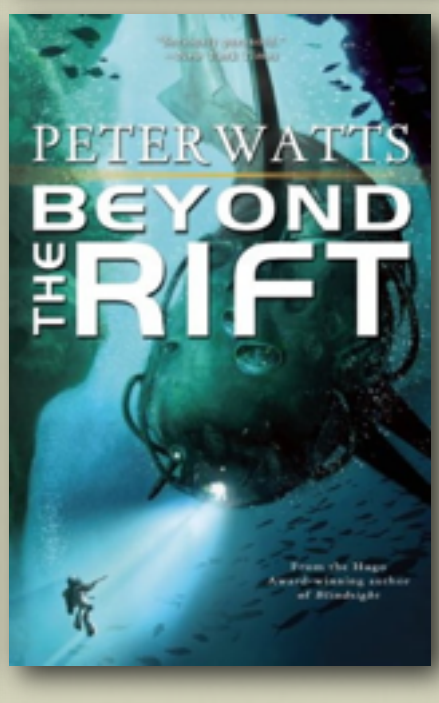


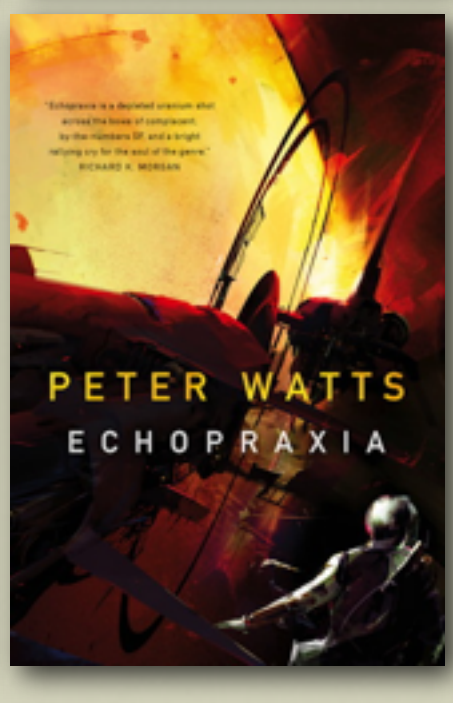












Letters of Comment

Ecdysis *welcomes letters of comment. They may be sent by e-mail to ecdysis@mcwetboy.net.*

MANY THANKS FOR ISSUE 5 of ***Ecdysis***, and greetings to you, Jonathan, and great to meet up with you at Ad Astra. In past years, I certainly would have up in the midst of the convention, but now that we are vendors, we spent just about our entire time at the convention in the dealers' room.

Writers' bad behaviour indeed. I used to go to Worldcons a lot, and I'd definitely take part in Hugo nominations and voting. I don't have that franchise at this point, and I will probably never have it again, and with the state of the Hugos now, that's fine with me. Awards are nice dollops of egoboo made of metal and wood and some plastic, and sometimes paper, and I have a few of them of home, and they are nice. They are not the end of the world, but they can be powerful symbols of approval and achievement, and a little pride. And you are right, we dwell upon them too much, and the various Puppies are the unfortunately logical result of our obsession.

As a science fiction reader, I haven't read a lot of fantasy, but anything Tolkien suits me just fine. I used to reread *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* regularly, and I have certainly enjoyed *The Silmarillion* and *The Children of Húrin*, not to mention the smaller stories in the Tolkien collections. I would love to hear of another recently-found Tolkien book, full of more adventures from Middle-Earth . . . I yearn to return to it. (This from me who skipped the last two *Hobbit* movies. I think the next article illustrates perfectly why. I adored the three *Lord of the Rings* movies.)

I also liked the *His Dark Materials* trilogy by Philip Pullman, and the movie of the first book was quite enjoyable, especially with all the steampunk tropes in it. However, the second and third books showed that Pullman was running out of steam and story, and he was stretching to cover that trilogy. There's no way movies could have been made from those books.

I don't dislike *The Motion Picture*, for it was the first attempt to make an epic movie out of what was originally just an everyday television programme that suddenly found a fandom beyond their expectations, if they ever had any at all. When George Lucas showed he could make several fortunes with *Star Wars*, Paramount wanted to do the same with *Trek*, and I think they've done a fairly good job, and *Trek* continues to be their cash cow. We're like many in that we call that first movie *The Motionless Picture*, or *The Motion Sickness*.

My loc . . . good to see that Jennifer has beaten that cancer, and can get on with life. On the other hand, it looks like Joël Cham-

petier might lose his own battle, and we are all praying for a different outcome, especially for his wife Valérie. [*Joël Champetier died on May 30.—JC*] Are you making any other plans to return to Toronto, perhaps for the Canvention this year? We might be there . . .

David Hartwell is so correct here. The field is simply too big to truly know. I feel left behind by SF as it carries on with new authors, new artists and new ideas. Myself, not being able to purchase or access the newer stuff, which has become completely unfamiliar to me, I have decided to stick with what I do know, and the name to which I am familiar. I think we all do that.

Let me know when you plan to come back to Toronto, and we can talk again. See you then!

—Lloyd Penney
May 9, 2015

It was good to see you at Ad Astra after so many exchanges in these pages. In the end you didn't see us at SFContario (the Aurora nomination made that a tougher decision than usual), but we might be at Ad Astra, and possibly Congrès Boréal, next spring.

NONFICTION FOR SF/FANTASY READERS:

Outward Odyssey

THE YOUNGEST HUMAN BEING to land on the Moon, Apollo 16 astronaut Charlie Duke, is now 79 years old. Of the twelve astronauts to walk on the Moon, eight are still alive; of the twelve who flew to the Moon but did not land, nine are still alive: the oldest still with us is Apollo 8 commander Frank Borman, 87. Of the seven Mercury astronauts, only John Glenn, 93, is still alive.

These are the most visible examples of an increasingly urgent historical problem: the participants of the early days of space exploration—astronauts, astronomers, engineers, many of them from a single age cohort—are passing away, and with them their memories.

The University of Nebraska Press's *Outward Odyssey* series interviews those participants while they're still here, capturing their memories in book form. Twelve books have been published (or are scheduled to be published) to date; I've read five of the first six. Taken together they do not make for a comprehensive history of human spaceflight, but they do fill in the corners (what I learned about the Soviet space program was hair-raising: they accomplished what they did with little more than duct tape and baling twine).

If you've read Andrew Chaikin's *A Man on the Moon*, this is where you go next.

—Jonathan Crowe