

Books

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— Photo by Jupiter Images

NewFoundSpecFic

Local collection of sci-fi, speculative fiction launched tonight

By TARA MULLOWNEY
THE TELEGRAM

Newfoundland and Labrador is full of colourful and imaginative people who produce amazing works of literature, according to Jennifer Graham. When we think of local writers, however, we seldom think of science fiction.

"You hear about them writing historical fiction and things of a more folk nature, that kind of thing, however Newfoundland is a hotbed of science innovation and extremely imaginative projects," Graham told The Telegram.

Graham, a fourth-year Memorial University student and Devin Drover, a student and game designer from Spaniard's Bay, are longtime science fiction fans who were discussing the lack of sci-fi coming out of the province one day, when they came up with a way to encourage it.

The pair decided to try and put together a collection of short speculative fiction stories, and put out a call to local writers. They've published 10 of the entries they received in "NewFoundSpecFic: A Collection of Short Stories" written by Newfoundlanders and Labradorians last month. They'll officially launch the book today.

"Some of the stories are very hard science, about a very scientific topic, kind of what you

think about when you think of science fiction," Graham explained. "There are others that are a little softer science — the science is there, but it's more about how it's used. There are others that are written like historical fiction, but from a future viewpoint, looking back now. It's a broad range of styles, too."

Newfoundland is a hotbed of science innovation and extremely imaginative projects.

Jennifer Graham

Apart from Graham and Drover, other authors included in the book are Ellen Curtis, Ryan Marsh, Breanne Milley, Josh Quinlan and Matthew LeDrew, a sci-fi/horror writer from St. John's who has three published novels under his belt.

LeDrew helped guide Graham and Drover through the publishing process, as did sci-fi writer Kenneth Tam, a 24-year-old native of St. John's now living in Ontario, who has published dozens of books. Tam also wrote the introduction to "NewFoundSpecFic."

The book launch will take place from 4:30 to 7 p.m. today in the Loft Room on the third floor of the University Centre at MUN. Readings and a question-and-answer period with the authors will be held.

Graham and Drover are also accepting submissions until July 2 for the next volume of "NewFoundSpecFic." Details are available at www.newfoundspecfic.com.

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Illustrations, text a delight in latest Jack tale

Keep trying to start this review by saying something along the lines of This is not just a children's story. But that's the wrong note.

For one thing, children's stories can be as delightful, cavernous and probing as anything outside the genre.

For another, "Down By Jim Long's Stage," much of Dr. Seuss and pretty much all of Charles Schultz's "Peanuts" can be reread, and will reward, any attentive reader. In fact, it is most gratifying to revisit childhood faves at a new age, or a certain distance. So, let's start again.

"The Queen of Paradise's Garden" tells a straightforward yet magical story, a kind of quest journey found in all the world's folklore and still resonant at the most current and hyper levels of CG film technology ("Matrix," "Iron Man").

Many of us have been lucky enough to hear actor Andy Jones present the tales theatrically ("Jack Meets the Cat," "Jack Meets the Well-Pressed, Well-Dressed Gentleman," "Jaxxmas"); here, this rendition of the story is in a chapbook format with gorgeous illustrations supporting this latest release of the Jack Tales.

All the Jack Tales I have heard begin thus: "Once upon a time, and a very good time it was, not in your time, indeed not in my time, but in olden times ..." and from there diverge into their different journeys, where Jack, an artless, usually kind, sometimes but not always crafty, rarely-say-die type of everyman fellow, sets out from his home in search of fame and fortune.

Sometimes for him, but often for others; one reason

Joan Sullivan



Queen of Paradise's Garden, and that is three miles this side the end of the world."

The warning doesn't dampen their spirits. They embark. At their first lunch on the trek, a small bird approaches each of the brothers, asking for some crumbs. Tom and Bill shout it away but Jack says:

"More than a crumb, my little one, have a whole bun."

And from there the little bird helps Jack in his many daring adventures. As always, the mission is accomplished not by wealth or brute force, but by a kind of humanity and common sense attention to detail — all the while surrounded by fantastic figures and wondrous places.

And then he sees the Queen of Paradise herself hyn on her daybed and she looks very beautiful. Her long black hair is tied with ribbons made with spun gold and there is a silver crown upon her head with a thousand diamonds sparklin in it.

Speaking of which, Darka Erdelji's illustrations are fluid, expressionistic, set within the text as embedded squares or unframed little scenes or filling entire pages. They never interrupt but attract and engage: a little

The Queen of Paradise's Garden tells a straightforward yet magical story, a kind of quest journey found in all the world's folklore and still resonant at the most current

FICTION REVIEW

Class act from a literary class clown

By ROBERT J. WIERSMA
FOR CANWEST NEWS SERVICE

It'll be the first to admit that San Francisco writer Christopher Moore is an acquired taste, and he seems to be becoming more of one with each new book. He's a gifted writer, with a sure tone and keen skills when it comes to narrative pacing and character development, but he's taken on the mantle of contemporary fiction's class clown and revels in it. His humour runs from the merely juvenile to the utterly puerile, with many of his books seemingly intended to offend as many readers as possible. (I will confess, though, that this is a significant part of his charm.)

With his new book, "Fool," Moore warns prospective readers of his juvenile approach right up front.

"This is a bawdy tale," he explains, before going on to detail some of the elements readers might take offence at, including "gratuitous shagging, murder, spanking, maiming, treason and heretofore unexplored heights of vulgarity and profanity — and the odd wank."

You can't say you weren't warned. Simply put, if you like Christopher Moore's writing, you probably really like it, and if you don't, well, you probably stopped reading this review before the end of the first sentence.

Which is really a shame, because "Fool" is a masterful work, a concise, skilled revisiting of Shakespeare's "King Lear" that, while aimed squarely at the groundlings, rises to its own peculiar grandeur. "Fool" occupies the same literary terrain as Tom Stoppard's "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead," with a peripheral character from one of the classic tragedies elevated to a

central role. Here, that elevated character is Lear's fool, known in the novel as Pocket.

Pocket was a founding, who grew up in the abbey at Dog Snogging on the Ouzie River (note, for the record, the subtlety of the humour), and learned about sex and life from the anchoress, a purportedly holy woman walked into the abbey itself. He is bought out of service as a petty criminal by Lear, who gives him to his youngest daughter, Cordelia.

"Fool" is not merely "King Lear" from Pocket's point of view, however, but a reimagining of the play with Pocket as the instrumental force behind many of the actions. It also answers many of the questions that continue to boggle readers and viewers of the play: it all, ultimately, comes down to shagging, and the strange brilliance of a Fool. Oh, and a ghost.

"There's always a bloody ghost."

A good grounding in Lear is valuable for the full enjoyment of "Fool" (and a passing knowledge of "Macbeth" wouldn't hurt). Moore, however, makes the story his own, creating in the seams of Shakespeare's great existential shout a frantic, sex-fueled romp.

So convincing is he, in fact, that one might forget, as I did, that Lear is, in fact, a tragedy. As the novel turns toward the play's final cathartic scenes, the tension within the reader, and between the two works, and the two genres, comedy and tragedy, becomes almost unbearable. It's a delicate balancing act, and a strong reminder of the skills which underlie Moore's frat-boy-on-a-bender antics.

Robert J. Wiersma is a Victoria bookseller and author of the novel "Before I Wake."

TOP TEN BOOKS

- Fiction**
1 (1) **The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society** — Mary Ann Shaffer and Annie Barrows
2 (5) **The Kindly Ones** — Jonathan Littell

audiences and readers root for Jack is he is not primarily out for himself. He is just up for an adventure.

Jack is one of three boys, and his parents seem to care little for him, placing their hopes for any comfort or social advance on the shoulders of his older brothers Tom and Bill.

In this book, the dilemma is that their parents are old when the boys are born, and, of course, get no younger as the children grow, so in young manhood the lads are very vexed ("shockin worried") about their parents' state indeed:

...and one day when the three boys were at the market they were talkin about it, and an old blind man by the name of Pew overheard them.

Old Blind Pew was sellin baskets and he told the boys about a magic fruit that could make their father and mother grow young again.

"But," said Old Blind Pew, "it only grows in the

resonant at the most current and hyper levels of CG film technology.

yellow bird, mid-text, valiantly signing a semaphore of signals; a bottom half page of a quartet of hopeless compass directions.

They flow seamlessly within the story, pooling into a corner here, a wedge there.

Of course there are many full-page reproductions: the three boys getting directions from the old man; the Queen sleeping tree-top in her garden; Jack approaching an isolated farm.

Each is spare, elegant, sinuous and deeply narrative, embodying the story in its own Expressionistic way. "The Queen of Paradise's Garden" is another lovely release from this publisher, which specializes in small-scale, unique, imaginatively packaged projects.

Joan Sullivan is a St. John's-based journalist and editor of The Newfoundland Quarterly

- 3 (3) **Handle With Care** — Jodi Picoult
- 4 (6) **Old City Hall** — Robert Rotenberg
- 5 (2) **The Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie** — Alan Bradley
- 6 (7) **The Associate** — John Grisham
- 7 (4) **The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo** — Stieg Larsson
- 8 (—) **Cutting for Stone** — Abraham Verghese
- 9 (—) **Fall** — Colin McAdam
- 10 (10) **Through Black Spruce** — Joseph Boyden

Non-fiction

- 1 (1) **Outliers: The Story of Success** — Malcolm Gladwell
- 2 (8) **Animals Make Us Human** — Temple Grandin
- 3 (4) **The Inheritance** — David E. Sanger
- 4 (3) **The Yankee Years** — Joe Torres and Tom Verducci
- 5 (—) **The Cello Suites** — Eric Siblin
- 6 (9) **Angels and Ages** — Adam Gopnik
- 7 (6) **The Return of Depression Economics** — Paul Krugman
- 8 (2) **The Ascent of Money** — Niall Ferguson
- 9 (—) **Sea Sick** — Alanna Mitchell
- 10 (—) **Lords of Finance** — Azar Nafisi

SOURCE: MACLEAN'S MAGAZINE. BRACKETED FIGURES INDICATE POSITION THE PREVIOUS WEEK.

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