

Trans Stories in Science Fiction & Fantasy

Presented by:

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Where we are

SFF as Modern Myth

“In art, liberated from the constraints of reason and logic, we conceive and combine new forms that enrich our lives, and which we believe tell us something important and profoundly ‘true.’”

From A Short History of Myth

What is the role of SFF?

Another world – a novum – a way to imagine people and societies that do not or cannot yet exist.

What is the role of SFF?

SF is rooted in the physical world and natural facts – new ways to think about relations between bodies (anatomical, biological) and minds souls personalities social beings.

Fantasy employs magic that follows rules set forth in the story.

Removing the limits

Thinking about real trans* & gender-variant identities means thinking about relations among three things:

- what gender you feel you are
- what gender other people think you are
- what physical body you have

SFF allows us to remove the limits on all three.

In the binary or not?

Some of us want to switch places within that system and live comfortably in our new place within it – as in the classic transsexual narrative.

Others want to live outside that system entirely – genderqueer, people who go by “ze,” nonbinary identities – or to live in such a way as destroy it

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Where we've been

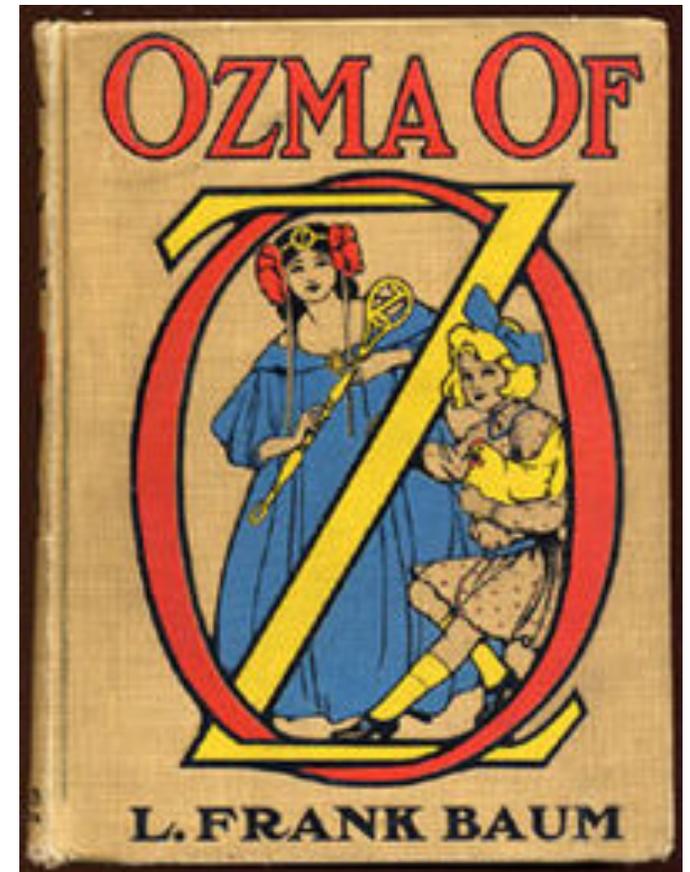
Fairy tales

In *The Violet Fairy Book*: The Girl Who Pretended to be Boy (spoiler alert, she turns into one at the end)

Online at:

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/lfb/vi/vifb33.htm>

Also: Ozma of Oz



Early SF, feminism and gender roles

Representations of gender starting in 1969 and going into the 1980s are inseparable from the feminism of the time and American culture's struggle with gender, sex and sexuality.

Exploring the meaning of gender

*As in *The Left Hand of Darkness**



1970s stories

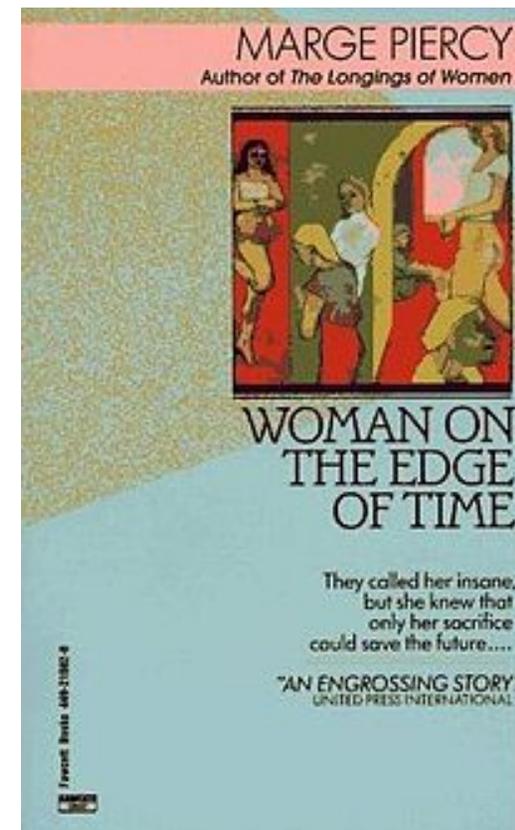
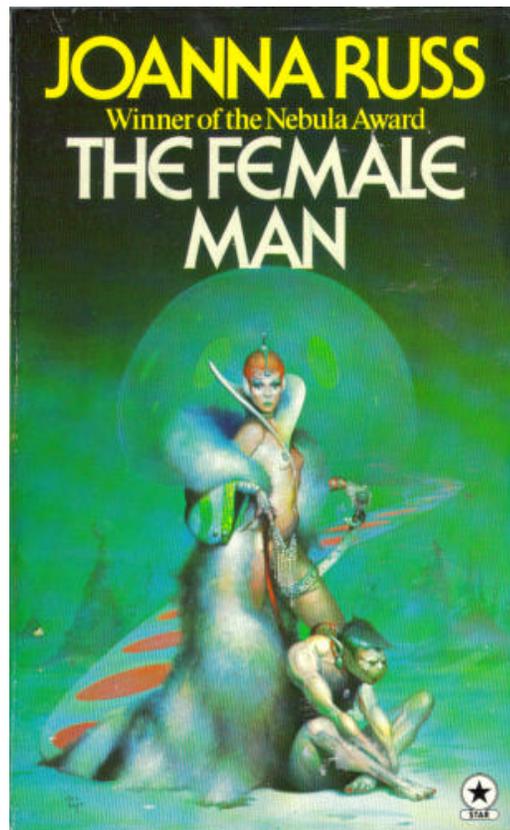
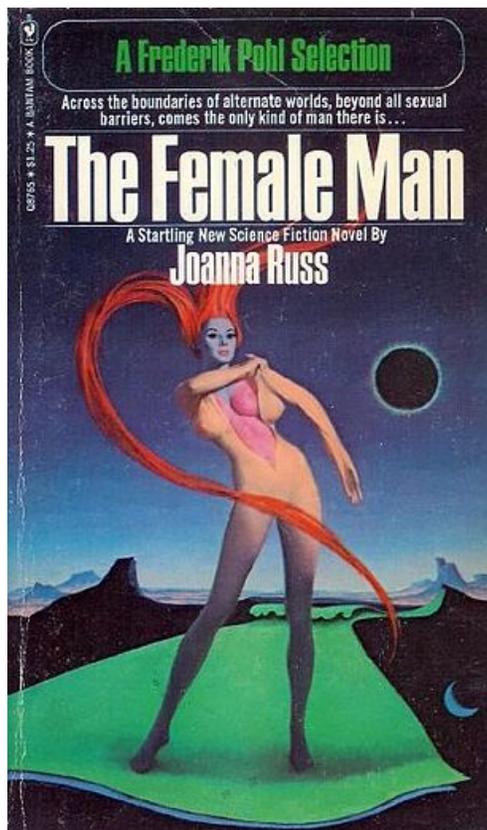
Systems of sexuality, biological sex and social gender, where what's important is who is human, who is alien, or who's on Earth, who is in space:

- Tiptree, “And I Awoke and Found Me There”
- Delany, “Aye, and Gomorrah” where human subcultures chase aliens or space people; Delany’s frelks and Spacers.
- Tiptree, “With Delicate Mad Hands,” C.P. rejects human society to find true love with an alien.

Early American Feminism

Joanna Russ' *The Female Man* 1975

Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* 1976

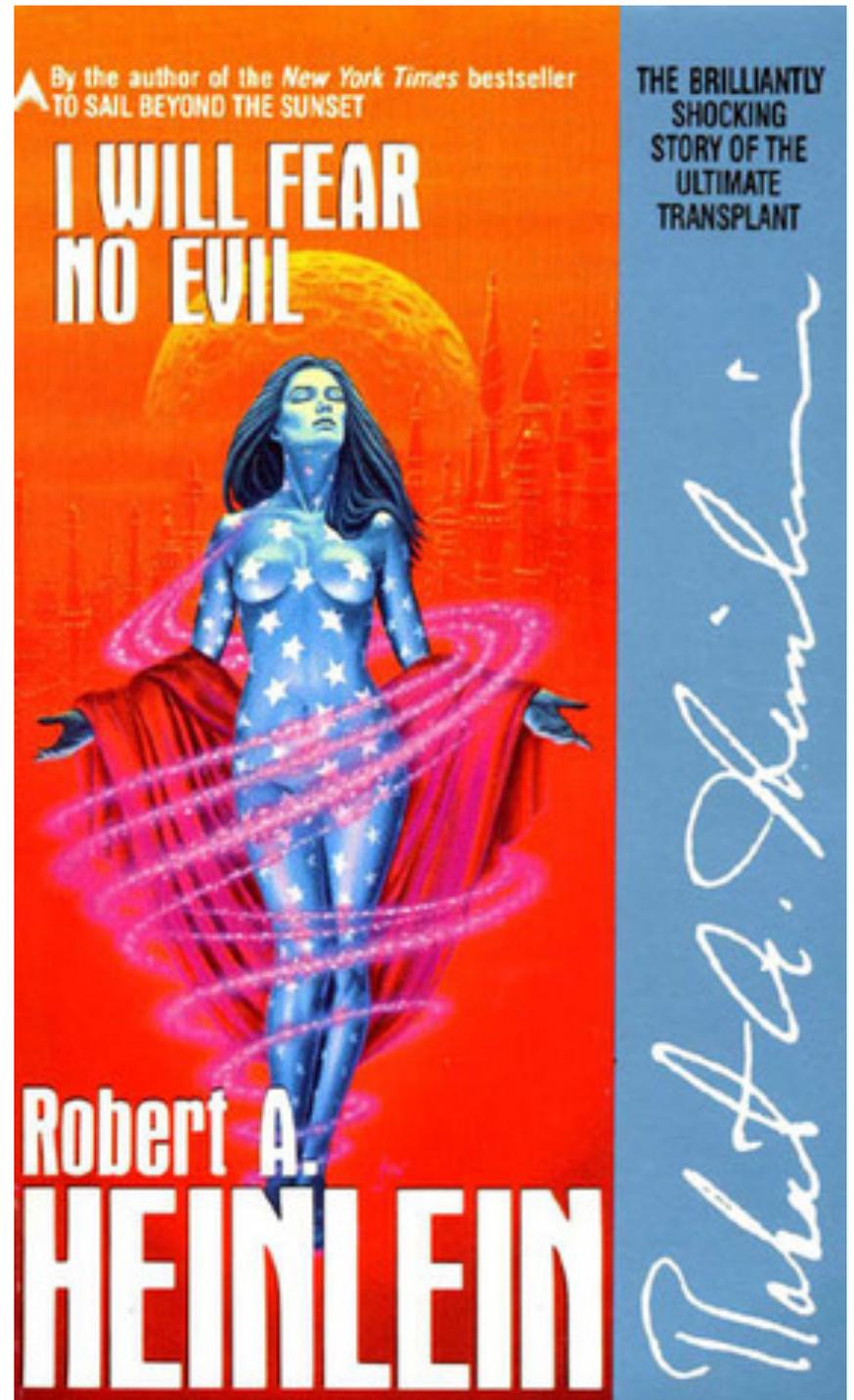


Exploiting the meaning
of gender

Heinlein, *I Will Fear No
Evil*

John Varley, *Steel Beach*

“Easy Sex Change” trope



Golden Witchbreed, 1983



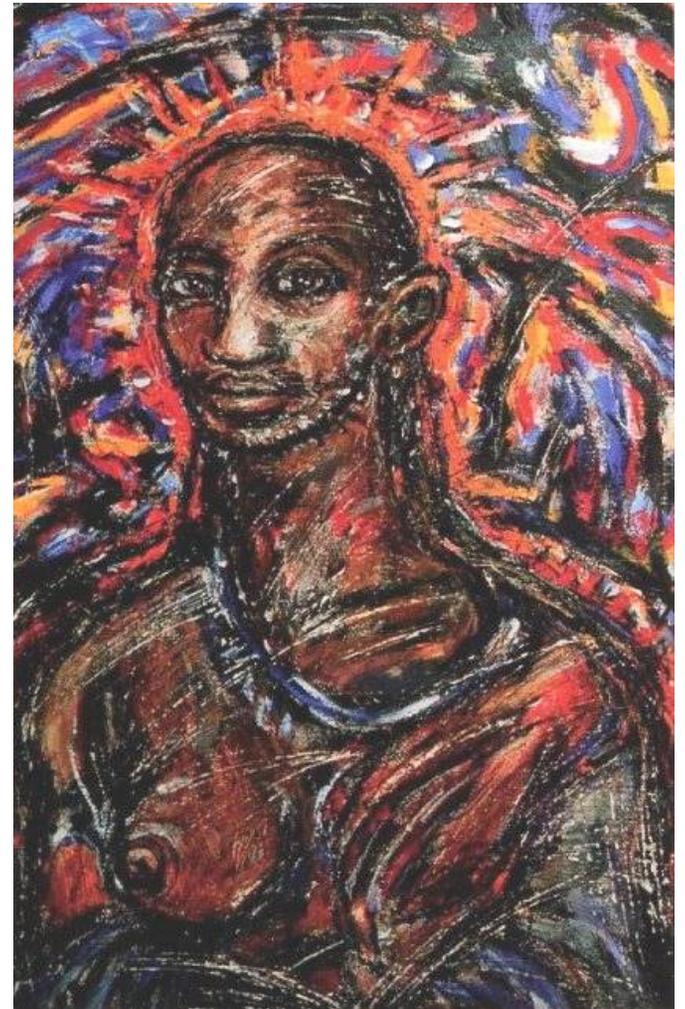
Non-binary characters and cultures appear!

Bel Thorne appears in 1986 in the works of Lois McMaster Bujold

Pie'oh'pah in 1991 in Clive Barker's *Imajica*

Storm Constantine's *Wraeththu* appears in 1987

Iain M. Banks' *The Player of Games* in 1988



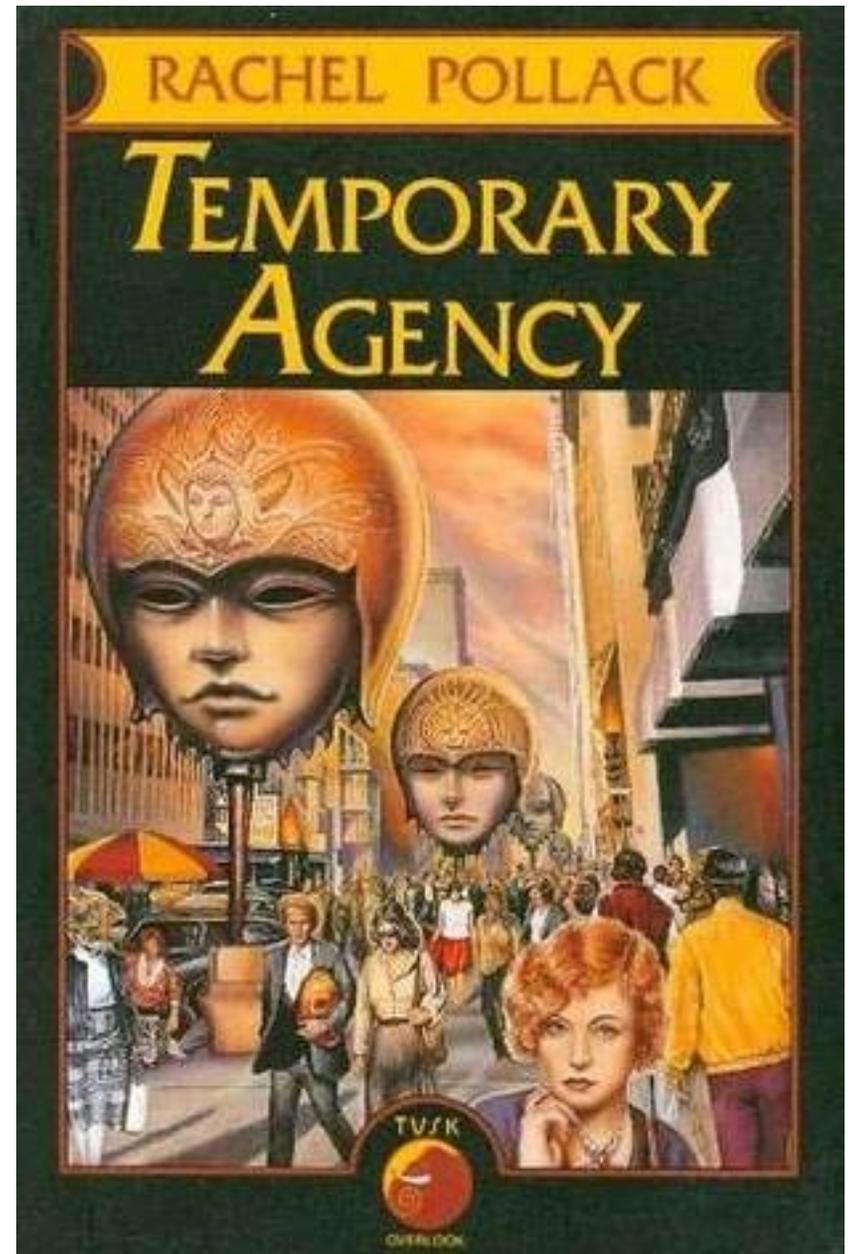
Trans Authors Create

Rachel Pollack

Temporary Agency 1994

Kate Bornstein & Caitlyn
Sullivan

Nearly Roadkill 1996



Outsider views outside of gender

Dawn, Octavia Butler 1997 – Introduces the Oankali, a three-gendered species

Terrorists of Irustan, Louise Marley, 1999 (and *The Child Goddess* 2004)

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What now?

What kinds of trans* SF can we have?

SFF lets us imagine different systems, genders, pronouns:

1. OTHER GENDER SYSTEMS—lots of those and they're awesome—something SF is uniquely good at
2. PEOPLE WHO ARE TRANS* & GENDER-VARIANT IN OUR SYSTEM—harder to do in SF but we can find it
3. PEOPLE WHO ARE LIKE TRANS* & GENDER-VARIANT IN OUR SYSTEM—more of these, also something SF is esp. good at

Egan “Oceanic”

[http://gregegan.customer.netspace.net.au/
OCEANIC/Complete/Oceanic.html](http://gregegan.customer.netspace.net.au/OCEANIC/Complete/Oceanic.html)

Conventional social gender (“he” and “she”) but
intercourse = exchanging a penis; heterosexual
intercourse makes you change genital sex.

Egan “Oceanic”

“I hardly cared about the sensations anymore; it was just contemplating the miracle of being able to give a part of my body to Lena that was wonderful.... I knew that Beatrice had used many of the same techniques for the bridge as She’d used with gestating embryos — but to witness Her ingenuity so dramatically at work in my own flesh was both shocking and intensely moving. Only giving birth could bring me closer to Her than this.”

Kim Stanley Robinson's 2312

- Gynandromorphs, androgynes, bisexuals meaning people with male and female genitals. Many if not most of the main characters are what we would call intersex
- Some people still change genders, what we would call trans
- Multiple pronouns, including ze. There has been a “gender revolution.”
- Lots of control over genes, among well-off: why so many intersex or phenotypically androgyne? Because it enhances longevity!

Kim Stanley Robinson's 2312

Individual asteroids have specialty civilizations inside, intentional communities:

‘Hermaphrodite, where all permanent residents are gynandromorphs and androgynes ... Saint George, a social terrarium in which the men think they are living in a Mormon polygamy, while the women consider it a lesbian world with a small percentage of male lesbians.’

CJ Anders, “Love Might Be Too Strong a Word”

Anders is sophisticated about real-life trans* people as Egan is not, but also more pessimistic about power relations. Ander shows gender system on generation ship w/ genetically engineered quasi-humans in caste system.

<http://www.lightspeedmagazine.com/fiction/love-might-be-too-strong-a-word/>

CJ Anders, “Love Might Be Too Strong a Word”

“Normally, the boides treat us as if we’re way beneath them. It’s only in comparison to a pilot that po and I could become ‘we.’ Or if po wanted to man me, we might be ‘we’ for an hour or two. And po did want me, those twin bulges don’t lie.”

“I wanted to say no to Dot, but he never gave me a chance. Be never even asked me if I wanted to pair-bond with her, or go live in the Pilot Quarter, or whatever. Be just kept sending little crystal cameos, serenading me from a safe distance.” (Anders)

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Toward the Future

Characters & Groups

Great thing about SF with new gender systems
—shows how individual identity isn't in vacuum,
depends on available concepts from social
group, even when dissonant, bad fit with that
group.

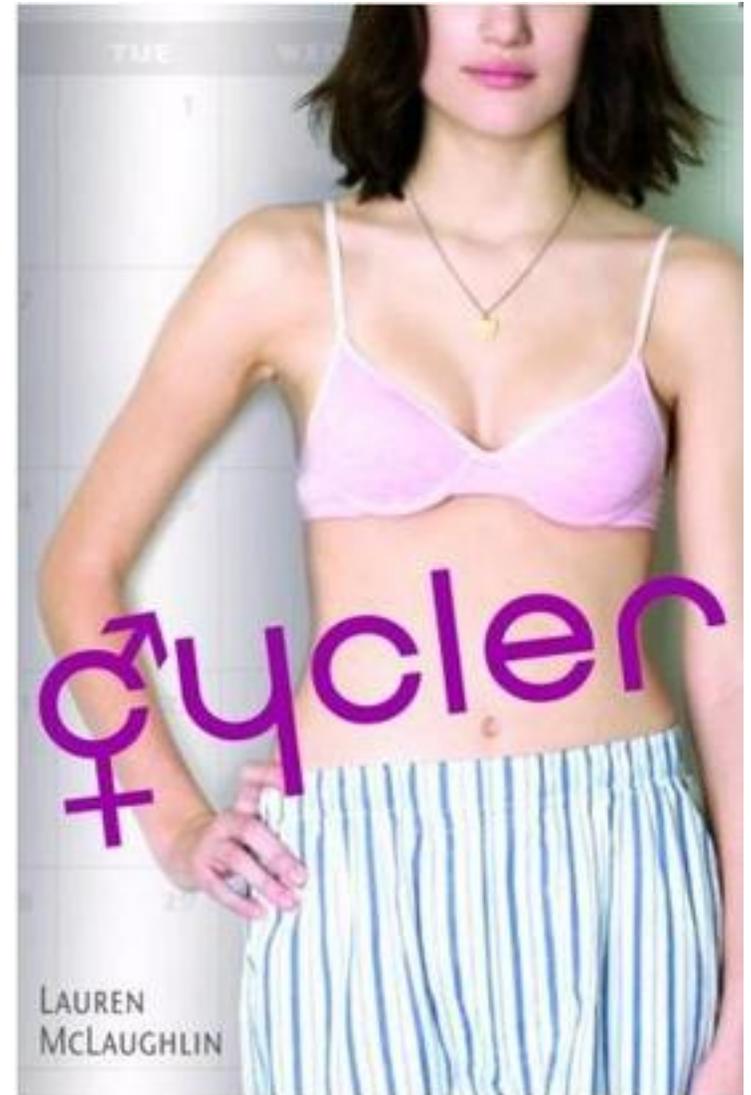
Recognizably Trans & Gender Variant Characters in Systems that Look Like Ours

If you are looking for models for how one human being negotiates being gender nonconforming, having unusual relation to gender in our system, you can find that in SF too but you have to look harder.

Recent new directions in SF

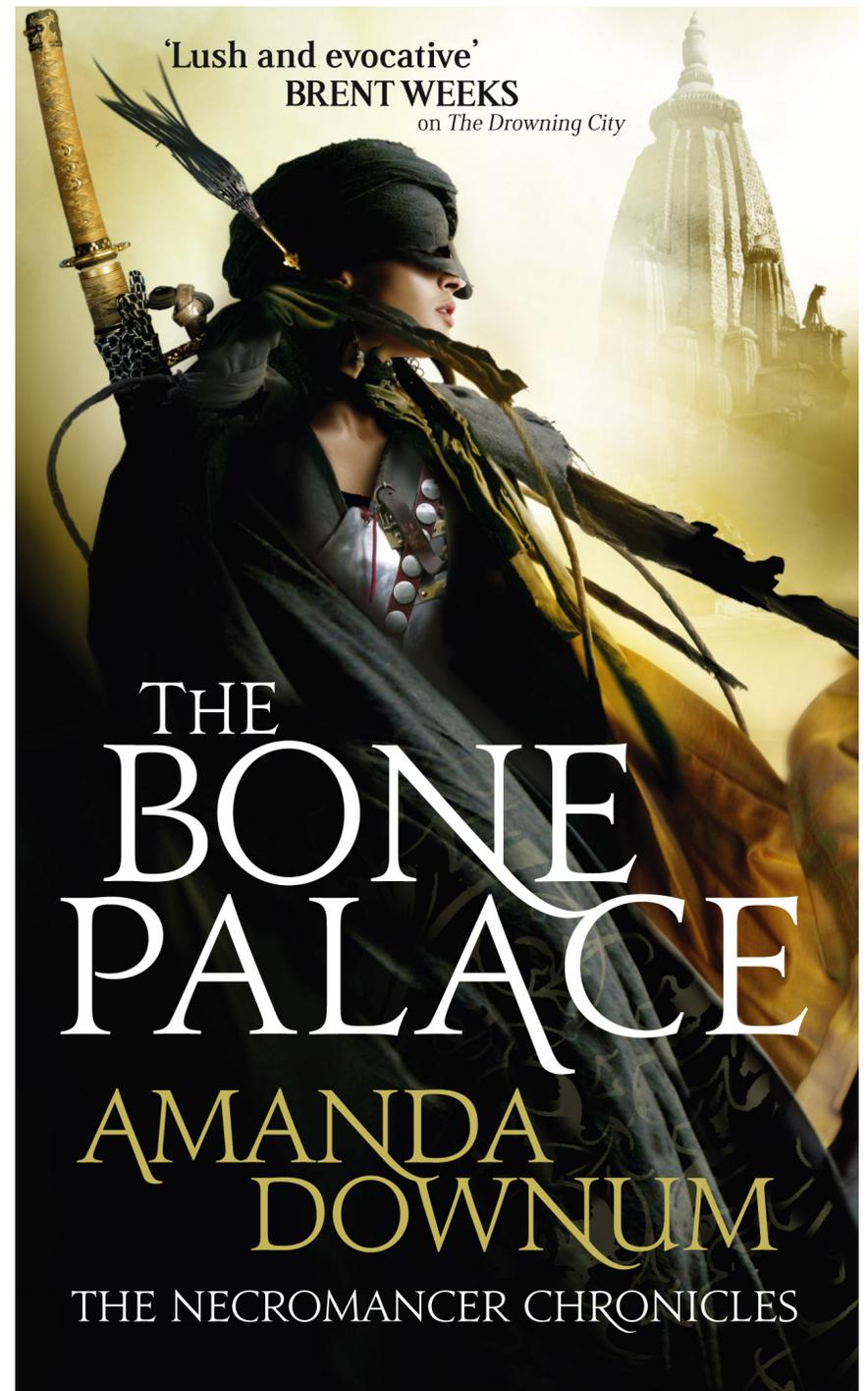
River of Gods by Ian
McDonald 2007

Cycler by Lauren McLaughlin
2008



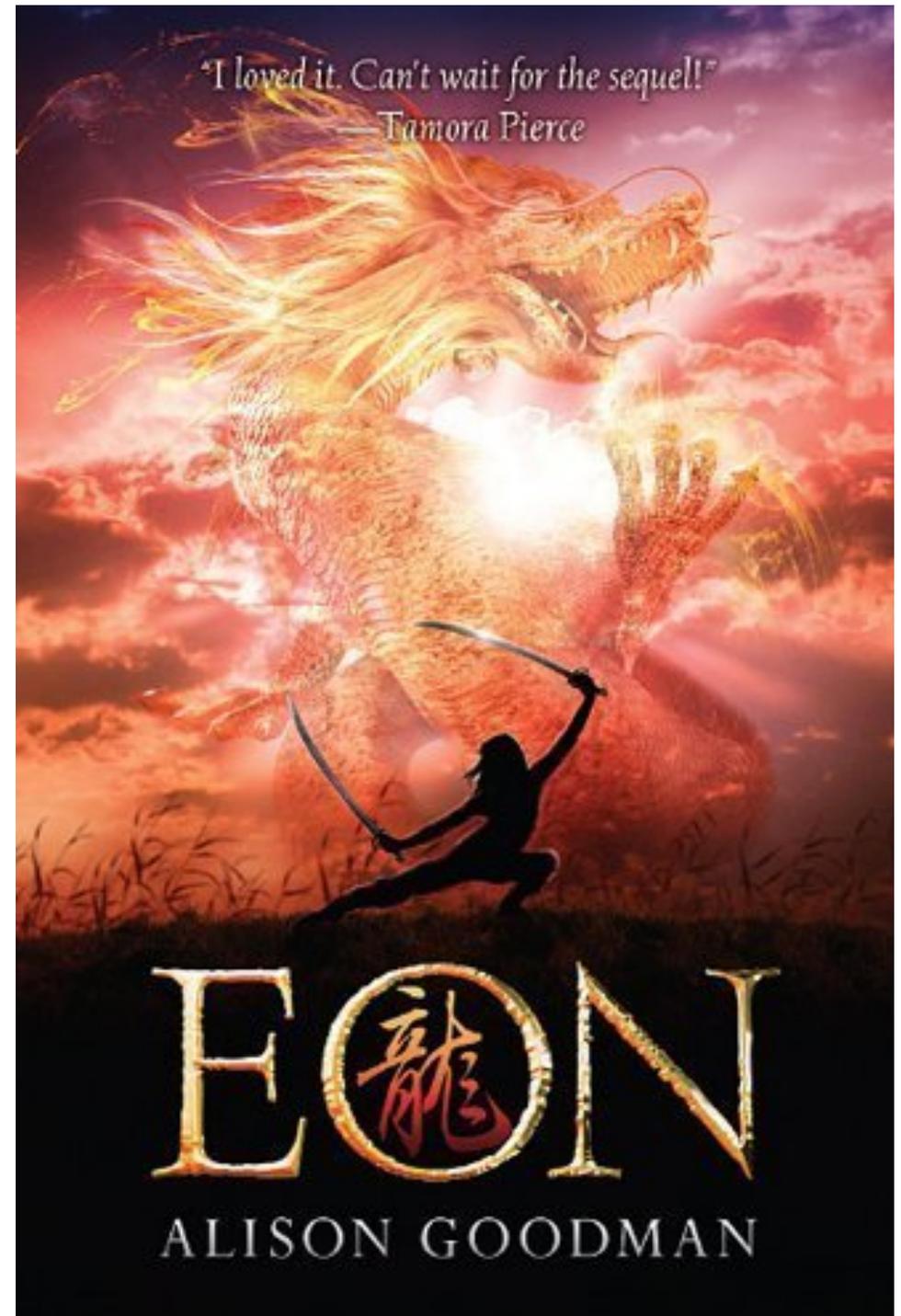
The Bone Palace

Savedra's trans status is integral to the plot!



Eon/Eona

The interplay between Eon and Lady Dela is crucial to both books.



Carla Speed McNeil's comics series *Finder*

Eight graphic novels and counting: future domed city with people and gene-modified animal-people inside and outside; people in cities have clans, and some of the clans have unusual gender: all the Llaveracs look female, but only some are:

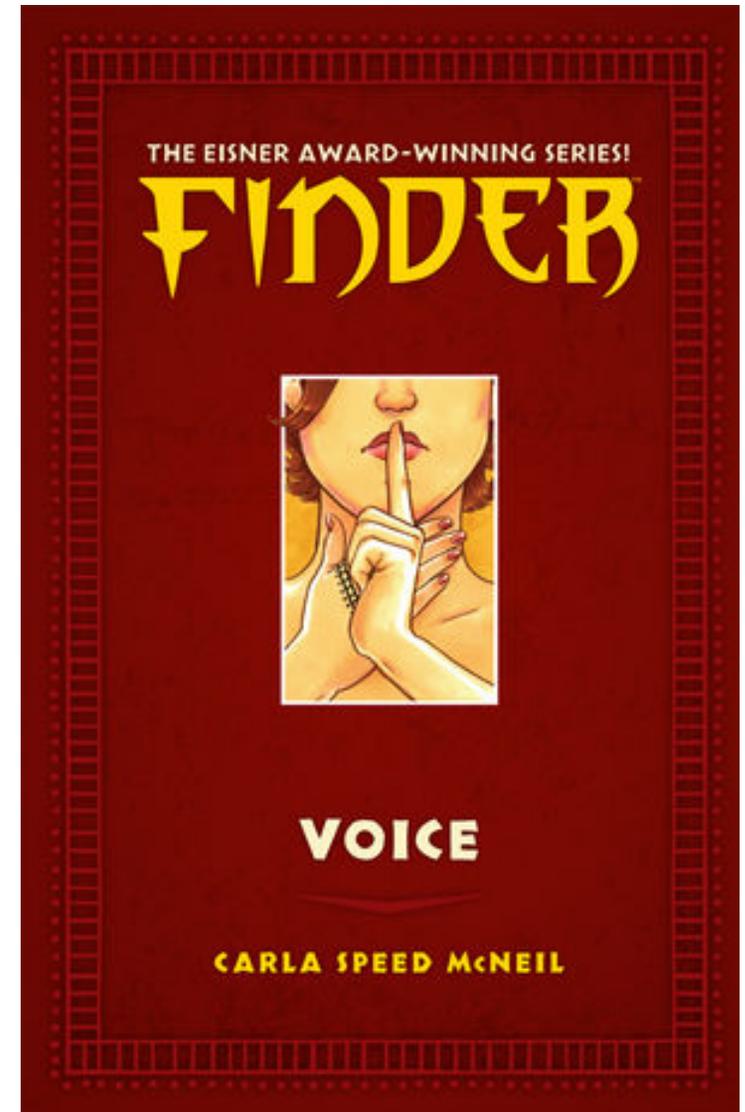
McNeil's own site: <http://www.lightspeedpress.com>

Carla Speed McNeil's comics series *Finder*

Site for VOICE, most recent complete graphic novel: <http://www.darkhorse.com/Books/17-402/Finder-Voice>

VOICE, like other FINDER stories, is about learning to perform your social roles, including gender, and rejecting the roles that are wrong for you... also unusual in SF in that it's about gender as consciously artificial performance, i.e. kinds of drag.

(writing about gender in VOICE, with some images: <http://www.hoodedutilitarian.com/2013/07/crotch-dance/>)



Kelley Eskridge, “Eye of the Storm”

Most people in her neomedieval world are what in our world would be called cisgender but protagonist Mars has no gender specified, only first-person pronouns; nobody genders Mars.

Collected in *Beyond Binary*, ed. Brit Mandelo

<http://www.autostraddle.com/beyond-binary-the-review-and-interview-137111/>

and in Eskridge, *DANGEROUS SPACE*

http://www.bookslut.com/fiction/2007_07_011485.php

which has other characters called Mars whose gender is never revealed

Kelley Eskridge, “Eye of the Storm”

Full of metaphors for being gender-variant, for being between genders; also about becoming comfortable—becoming proficient, becoming a great martial artist—with a body that does not seem to have binary gender

“All the sword dances I do are based on wheels, being able to turn and move in any direction with your body and the sword like spokes on a wheel. It’s not that different from being at the center of a wind, or whatever.” (Eskridge 31)

“It wasn’t much different from living in my village, except that I belonged. We learned soldiery and taught stormfighting and found time to practice by ourselves, to reinforce old ideas, to invent new ones.” (Eskridge 37)

Raphael Carter

1990s MN SF writer & author of intersex manifesto and satire, “The Murk Manual”: <http://www.isna.org/books/chrysalis/murk>

Carter writings from the 1990s: <http://web.archive.org/web/20000815073625/http://www.chaparraltree.com/raq/>

Won Tiptree Award for “Congenital Agenesis of Gender Ideation,” story that is a fake scientific paper, not available online, though you can read about it: <http://spiralgalaxyreviews.blogspot.com/2008/04/congenital-agenesis-of-gender-ideation.html>

Raphael Carter

Idea is that just as we have special brain modules for recognizing human faces, maybe we have one for recognizing gender, and what if that module could be altered, or disabled? people who don't see gender automatically when they look at anybody, "genagnosia":

“The genagnosics seemed to compensate for their disability by not using gendered pronouns to refer to a person until they had managed to overhear some hint of his or her gender. This works fairly well in a language like English, in which only pronouns are gendered; it would be useless in Hindi.” (Carter 98)

Raphael Carter

The genagnosics are doing for organic brain reasons what we would like everybody to do: use gendered categories only when helpful, and refer to people by the gender we prefer.

Then, twins who have genagnosia work in unusual ways, so that they see not two genders but fourteen, can tell when somebody is trans but also when somebody is postmenopausal, when somebody is pregnant, when somebody has androgen insensitivity (genetically male but phenotypically female), etc.

“These results led Botkin to propose a new model for the influence of genes on gender ideation. She suggests that patients with genagnosia are not impoverished by a lack of information, but bewildered by an overplus; the concepts “male” and “female” identify too great a range of variation to be understood.” (Carter 103)

As direct as SF can get in asking us to try to change the ways we think about gender in society we have.

Online serials

Tales of MU: <http://www.talesofmu.com>

Trashmance: <http://trashmance.com>

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Questions? Recommendations?

Thank You

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