



## BOOKS TO LOOK FOR

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### CHARLES DE LINT

*The Kill Society*, by Richard Kadrey, Harper Voyager, 2017, \$25.99, hc.

**A**S SOMEONE whose favorite form of entertainment is a good book, there's nothing I find more frustrating than being unable to find something to read. Does this happen to you? You have tottering stacks of books in your to-be-read piles — books you've really been looking forward to getting to — and each and every one of them gets put aside after a few, or fifty or so, pages because they just don't click. There's a flatness to the prose or the characters or both. The plot feels tired or you can figure out exactly where it's going after a chapter or two. Maybe you're just not in the mood for that story at this time.

So you move on to other forms of storytelling, or other kinds of books. Biographies are always good. TV shows are distracting. Maybe

you can catch up on some of those movies that have been piling up on your DVR or are waiting for you on Netflix.

You might even get out of the habit of reading. It's easier to do than one might imagine, and it's probably the reason you know people who don't read books. Some may have never picked up the habit. Some fell out of the habit.

I never want to be that person.

And because of this column, I don't drift too far into the non-book world. The due date to turn in a new installment gets closer and closer as the days count down to a deadline. And I remember what I love about reading. I do. I'm just not finding something to love.

So I keep picking up books, trying authors who are new, or at least new to me, because my mandate shouldn't be simply trotting out the same coterie of my favorite authors every two months.

I think I'd read the equivalent of five or six books (by which I

these stories told by Oberon are much lighter in tone than the Iron Druid books. Laugh-out-loud lighter in places. Early on this had me chuckling:

“Her opinion of hounds was that we just run around contaminating crime scenes and pee everywhere we can, but that’s not true. We pee wherever we *want to*, and there’s a big difference.”

*The Squirrel on the Train* is a standalone novella (as beautifully produced as the first book) and brings back the character of Portland Detective Gabriela Ibarra as well as the Boston terrier Starbuck Oberon rescued the last time he and Atticus were in Portland. Through Druidic magic, the dogs are able to converse with Atticus, but learning how to do so is a long process. Oberon and his companion hound Orlaith are both proficient but at this point in time Starbuck can only send out two phrases, “Yes, food!” and “No, squirrels!” which he uses interchangeably for whatever he needs to communicate. Much like Groot from *Guardians of the Galaxy*, actually.

The story starts with Atticus and the dogs going to Portland for a day trip. Cue up a squirrel hitchhiking on top of the train, followed by

a chase through the Portland train station when they arrive that takes them into a stairwell where the squirrel has vanished. In its place is Detective Ibarra in the middle of a crime scene. There’s a body on the stairs with a plastic crossbow bolt in its head. The body also looks a lot like Atticus.

The mystery of *The Squirrel on the Train* is good but it’s Oberon’s voice as he tells the tale that makes it a winner. Hearne has moved on from writing the Iron Druid Chronicles, but let’s hope he still finds time to give us more of these Meaty Mysteries, because they’re an absolute delight from start to finish.

*The Perversity of Things: Hugo Gernsback on Media, Tinkering, and Scientifiction (Electronic Mediations)*, edited by Grant Wythoff, University of Minnesota Press, 2017, \$35, tpb.

Anyone with a passing knowledge of the history of science fiction will know the name Hugo Gernsback. He founded the first sf magazine, *Amazing Stories*, is often considered the father of science fiction, and the Hugo Awards are named after him. Gernsback was opinionated, and there have been

many reports of how he steered the writers of his magazine to write a certain kind of fiction, one that was heavily based on technical detail as much as fantastic speculation.

What's probably not as well known — at least it was new to this reader — was how the whole idea of these stories, of science fiction itself, grew out of the electrical parts catalogues of his business, the ElectroImporting Company. Or that he was a commentator on the study of media, describing and assessing the cultural impact of it long before it became an academic discipline.

*The Perversity of Things* is a fascinating collection of Gernsback's writings from his magazines, retrieving long lost editorials and blueprints of media history, critical essays, and short fiction. The material originally appeared in the early 1900s and has been out of print ever since.

But before one delves into this treasure trove there's editor Grant Wythoff's lengthy introduction, detailing not only the basis of the writings he presents later in the book but also a timeline of Gernsback's life that shows us how he, along with the company of his staff and readers, came to embrace their various theories.

The book's heavily annotated

(the footnotes and commentary as interesting as the text itself) and chock full of technical illustrations and ephemera from the various magazines and catalogues.

For those who want still more, there is an electronic edition that includes the complete magazine issues in which all the material in *The Perversity of Things* originally appeared. You can get information about that edition at *manifold.umm.edu*.

I loved what I've read of this book. I've been dipping into it for the past month and look forward to much more exploration in the months to come. The material is both thought-provoking and a wonderful glimpse into a forgotten time when faith in technoscientific progress ran high. I also really appreciated Wythoff's introduction and his commentaries throughout, which were both informative and presented in an easy-to-digest prose that never made me feel like I was reading an academic text.

Highly recommended.

*Weave a Circle Round*, by Kari Maaren, Tor Books, 2017, \$15.99, tpb.

About the best thing one can say about a great sf or fantasy novel

is that it's impossible to describe. You can try, but you'll find yourself taking up just as much wordage to do so as the length of the novel itself — especially if you're trying not to spoil some of the surprising elements that add to a book's considerable enjoyment.

All of which is a preamble to my saying that Kari Maaren's *Weave a Circle Round* is easily one of the best books I've read in a long time, but I don't have a clue as to how to properly tell you why. It also seems fitting that a book this good should be the last one sent to me by the late David Hartwell, because it's a hell of a note on which to hang the end of a long editing career.

I could start with David's own brief description in his accompanying letter:

"Freddy, her younger sister Mel, and stepbrother Roland have an uneasy détente. While Mel has embraced her deaf stepbrother, Freddy carries nothing but anger for him, for her mother for getting divorced, for being a teenager. When the new neighbors crash their van into a tree next door, Freddy's life becomes slightly more surreal — a house that spontaneously rearranges its room and contents and the sense of the uncanny that envelops

Cuerva LaChance and Josiah. Cuerva and Josiah are looking for someone, and when Freddy becomes involved, she gets far more than she bargained for."

But honestly, while it's completely accurate, that description is so bare bones and bereft of the sheer wonder, mystery, and audacity of the book, that it becomes fairly useless. The short and admittedly somewhat bland collection of facts quoted above doesn't come close to addressing the complex elements at play here. From the beginning of storytelling to the possible end of the world. From time travel and tricksters and Samuel Taylor Coleridge to Loki and Heimdallr and Chinese fox spirits.

What I especially liked is that no matter how twisty and complex the story unfolds, the reader always has touchstones of understanding to guide them along the plot path that can sometimes feel as though it's dissolving like quicksand underfoot. The characters are rich and varied, and, as with pretty much everything else in the novel, complicated and at times infuriating.

I loved the language. Maaren has gifted touch with her prose, as well as snappy dialogue, especially that between Freddy and Josiah.

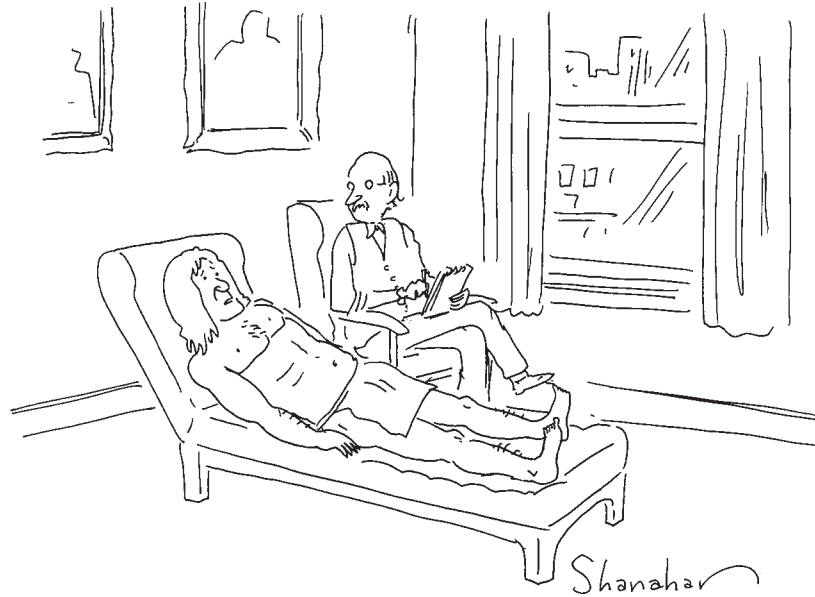
This is one of those rare books that will appeal to both adults and kids, the latter of whom will appreciate it all over again when they reread it as adults. It's a coming-of-age story that requires the unraveling of all the world's mysteries and a sense of wonder to deliver its insights to the main character Freddy, and through her growth, to us.

I'm delighted that having read

as much in the field as I have, it's still possible to be so surprised and enchanted by a new writer and her debut novel.

Highly recommended.

Material to be considered for review in this column should be sent to Charles de Lint, P. O. Box 9480, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1G 3V2. EBooks may be sent as an attachment to [cdelint@gmail.com](mailto:cdelint@gmail.com).



"Me Jane."