

# WATCH THE SKIES





# Assassin's Apprentice

By Robin Hobb


## 25.6

The Six Duchies are ruled by the old family of the Farseers, who if one looked back far enough into history, were the children of raiders that ravaged these peaceful lands. But the raiders that King Shrewd and his vassals are facing are of a different breed. Into this strife comes a young boy sired by his son, Chivalry, the King-In-Waiting. A bastard dropped off by an uncaring family who must find his way in a world that will always consider him a threat. Fitz is not just any child, but rather one with gifts that will make him a prize or an obstacle. King Shrewd decides instead of a weapon turned against him, Fitz will become one for his hand and has him trained as an assassin. Strong in the family gift called the Skill, Fitz will pass from influence to influence until finally he must learn to stand on his own.

-Welcome to the 25<sup>th</sup> year of Watch the Skies, a whole quarter century!  
June's meeting is on the 18th, in person, at the Simpson Library,  
Mechanicsburg (unless otherwise announced) and the book of the month  
is – Black Sun by Rebecca Roanhorse  
-Cover art by Eric V. Hardenbrook

Check out the website at: [watchtheskies.org](http://watchtheskies.org) or  
contact us at: [wtsnewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:wtsnewsletter@gmail.com)





High school is hard even when you're  
not an accidental time traveler.

# SLIP

L. RYAN STORMS

“A thoughtful and satisfying blend of  
magical realism and romance.” — *Kirkus Reviews*

“Endearing to memorable and evocative.” — *IndieReader*

**AVAILABLE NOW**

# NEW RELEASES

June 2025

ELIZABETH BEAR – **The Folded Sky**

L. TIMMEL DUCHAMP – **Like Shards of Rainbows  
Frolicking in the Air**

KATE ELLIOTT – **The Witch Roads**

ERIC FLINT & RYK E. SPOOR – **Fenrir**

AUSTON HABERSHAW – **If Wishes Were Retail**

K. IBURA – **Tempest**

ALLAN KASTER, ED. – **The Year's Top Hard Science  
Fiction Stories 9**

MATTHEW KRESSEL – **Space Trucker Jess**

MERCEDES LACKEY & LARRY DIXON – **Gryphon's Valor**

HELEN MARSHALL – **The Lady the Tiger, and the Girl  
Who Loved Death**

MALKA OLDER – **The Potency of Ungovernable Impulses**

H.G. PARRY – **A Far Better Thing**

RORY POWER – **Kill Creatures**

ALASTAIR REYNOLDS – **The Revelation Space Collection –  
Volume 1**

ALASTAIR REYNOLDS – **The Revelation Space Collection –  
Volume 2**

V.E. SCHWAB – **Bury Our Bones in the Midnight Soil**

ADRIAN TCHAIKOVSKY Bee **Speaker**

ADRIAN TCHAIKOVSKY – **Shroud**

JOHN WISWELL – **Wearing the Lion**

THE PROGENY OF DEVILS BOOK 2

# THE NIGHTMARE IN THEIR BLOOD



# VIKTOR BLOODSTONE

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# NEWS OF THE REALM

## **2025 Arthur Clarke Award Shortlist:**

**Private Rites**, Julia Armfield

**The Ministry of Time**, Kalliane Bradley

**Extremophile**, Ian Green

**Annie Bot**, Sierra Greer

**Service Model**, Adrian Tchaikovsky

**Thirteen Ways to Kill Lulabelle Rock**, Maud Woolf

The award winner will be announced on June 25, 2025, receiving both 2025 pounds sterling and an engraved bookend.

## **Infinity Award Presented to Frank Herbert**

The SFWA award is presented to those who might be eligible for the Damon Knight Grand Master Award but are no longer with us. This is the third instance of the award. Frank Herbert will be honored June 7<sup>th</sup> at the Nebula Awards Ceremony.

## **Le Guin Fellowship Awarded**

The \$3000 Le Guin Feminist Science Fiction fellowship has been awarded to Sam Tegmeyer, sponsored by the University of Oregon Libraries Special Collection and University Archives.

## **2024 Aurealis Award Winners:**

### **Best Science Fiction Novel**

*Temporal Boom*, J.M. Voss

### **Best Science Fiction Novella**

*Ghost of the Neon God*, T.R. Napper

### **Best Science Fiction Short Story**

"The Combat Pilot's Dictionary", Arden Baker

### **Best Fantasy Novel**

*Thoroughly Disenchanted*, Alexandra Almond

### **Best Fantasy Novella**

"Another Tide", Will Greatwich

### **Best Fantasy Short Story**

"Market of Loss", Matt Tighe



# THE STUDY OF FIRE



A COMPANION NOVEL TO *FIRE STUDY*

**MARIA V. SNYDER**

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

AVAILABLE NOW

# NEOTROPOLIS

<https://www.neotropolis.com/about>

A.R.M. Co. Mission Report

Assigned Agent: Sebastian 'Tach' Tachowitz

Mission Location: Kepler-609c, Neotropolis

Mission Objective(s): Escort client and perform ground level market investigation for potential A.R.M. Co. branch investment.

Result: Success

Mission Report: Transcribed from verbal report given by Sebastian Tachowitz.

"Begin report, Sebastian Tachowitz, Asset Recovery Management Agent. I was contracted by the Asset Recovery Management Company, aka A.R.M. Co., to perform some "boots on the ground market research" for them while escorting a client around the city of Neotropolis. My employers seem to have their eyes set on this boring looking dust ball planet 'Kepler-609c' as a potential market for them to place a branch office in the coming years. I'm honestly not sure why they have so much interest in this planet compared to other more populated ones as it's only got one major settlement worthy of note and everything else is either the desert or the ocean, but they're not paying me to wonder. I got my mission briefing, packed my shit, and collected the client on my way to the spaceport. As it turns out, Mr. Mackenzi, preferring to go by 'Beep', was a young financier, looking to see if Neotropolis would be a worthwhile place to start investing in businesses. It suddenly made much more sense why A.R.M. Co. would send this specific young, wealthy, businessman to a dust ball at the ass end of the galaxy with an armed escort to do their 'market research' and I realized the prospects of this job being the cake walk I hoped it would be had just disappeared."

"The trip to Kepler wasn't terribly exciting, though A.R.M. Co. really shelled out the credits for our ride. While our quarters were cramped and most of the cargo hold was filled with our equipment that made moving around rather limited, they were sufficiently comfortable and the excitement of being on mission and seeing a new world made the hours in jump space between stops to refuel bearable. Our original three-day jump route took four days due to a brief detour for a sightseeing opportunity that the client just refused to pass up on while he was in the area, and to be frank once we were there? I couldn't disagree. The universe is a big place and some sights you just have to take in



when you can.”

“When we arrived in the early morning local time on Kepler-609c and it was... exactly the dust ball it was reported that it would be with nothing but high winds, tan sand deserts punctured by terracotta-colored mountains, and vast plateaus as far as the eye could see. We checked in with the port authority before we made our way towards the city, stopping on the outskirts of the sprawling tent city that surrounded Neotropolis itself to set up our base camp. The high winds made setting up our camp more of a hassle than we originally planned for as they bent our shelter nearly entirely flat while we were in it and threatened to rip it from the lag bolts, we buried almost a foot deep into the sand to keep it staked into the desert floor. Our first day of exploration was off to a bit of a messy start as we couldn’t even finish fully setting our base camp up due to the constant winds bearing down on us. It took us about an hour to get the basics established before we prepared our gear and made our way deeper into the tent city and towards Neotropolis proper.

“Now, I’ve seen tent cities before and have been in a lot of other desperate places filled with desperate people, but this one was... different. At first I thought that the city was just surrounded by poor, desperate, impoverished, and unfortunate bastards living in the few places they could and scraping by in the desert while shivving one another over rations and blankets, but instead what I found was that these weren’t struggling people at all but instead were actually rather well supplied travelers who were trying to get inside the city while living on the outskirts. The dusty streets of the tent city were filled with hundreds of people and flanked by merchants bartering and trading their wares as though they were just another extension of the city itself. There was the usual fare, food vendors, bars, the occasional arms dealer, and a few places that were a combination of the three, but overall, the thing that stood out the most was the barter economy. Very rarely did I see actual credits changing hands, but more often than not it was a trade of resources and valuables, skin cremes for alcohol here, a well-loved gun for a piece of body armor there, even a few more generous souls offering drinks to the wayward travelers in need... though speaking of credits, it turns out that Neotropolis either doesn’t participate in the larger galactic economy as a whole or simply converts those credits into local forms of currency instead to help maintain a stronger grip over the local economy... that is to say our credits were worthless and we were effectively broke and needed to make some more credits instead. Fortunately, as it turns out, both Beep and I are more than capable of making money for ourselves.”

“Turns out there are three major players in the city of Neotropolis, two of

which I recognized from other planets, both the PMC company Endline Solutions and the industrial titan Helix Industries had established headquarters within the city, but they were locked in fierce competition with a local megacorp called the Reboot Syndicate, a financial giant in its own right. Suddenly the mystery of my employer's interest in this dirt ball becomes much clearer, and where there is conflict there is money to be made. The remainder of our first day on Kepler-609c was filled with meeting up with the suits of Helix Industries at their local headquarters to take on work, signing a few exclusivity contracts so we couldn't work for either Endline or Reboot, and then getting to work to earn some Neocredits while we got the lay of the land. We made our way into Megablock-01, an industrial arcology of vendors and hab-blocks packed tightly inside a layered labyrinth of Helix Industries branded iron catwalks, ladders, tight stairways, and platforms, and wove our way through tightly packed corridors that were choked with people. It was the perfect place to go if you were trying to disappear amongst the masses, but was also tightly patrolled by the Sentinels, a local PMC masquerading as Neotropolis' independent law enforcement' agency. On a personal note, I've never liked law enforcement, which is ironic given I am effectively a freelance bounty hunter, but it's so much easier to corrupt some dirtbag with a badge and an annual salary instead of we noble bounty hunters who have to work for a living! ... but anyways, after several hours of exploring and gathering information for Helix, we found a bar in a dingy corner of the Megablock called 'The Pilot's Perch' to take a rest and happened to overhear the proprietor talking to some guy about a power delivery and making sure not to get caught by the Sentinels. Naturally, Beep and I took an immediate interest in the potential money to be made."

"Evidently there's a booming market for power within the city and its outskirts before you hit the tent city as it seems Neo's power grid suffers from rolling brownouts to ensure that the lights stay on at least most of the time. The job was simple enough in theory, take a power cell to one of the Perch's clients, a place called Terminal 418, hang out until the power cell got drained into the client's power supply, return the empty power cell to the Perch, don't get caught by the Sentinels in the process of doing all that, get paid. Beep and I were making credits like it was no harder than breathing! We picked up the power cell, snuck our way out of the Megablock while clearing corners and body blocking lines of sight like a couple of pros, made it down Neo's main strip to the outskirts to Terminal 418 and boom! Delivery handled! We hung out for a few minutes while the power cell dumped all its juice into the local power supply and then repeated the process back to the Perch! Once it was all said and done, in our first day we made our way with a few hundred credits from Helix Industries

and I got a sweet new subdermal nanite armor implant! Pretty ritzy reward from the Perch, honestly, makes me wonder if they've got deeper pockets than I originally thought they would but that's not really important. We spent most of the second day doing the same thing, working with Helix Industries and running power for the Pilot's Perch out to their clients around the city, but that's when we ran into two new friends and were introduced to a fascinating opportunity.

"Beep and I were taking a break at this little rest stop in the outskirts of Neo called 'The Domicile', a place where folks could escape the heat of Kepler's sun during the day and warm up to ward off the cold that consumed the night, when we were greeted by a pair of dust covered locals by the name of 'Wash' and 'Spade'. We struck up a conversation, told them we were looking for work and were invited to track down a man by the name 'Slag' who ran an organization called 'The Underdark' somewhere in the tent city outside Neo. We were given a token that acted as our 'Please don't shoot us, we're here for business' invitation card. Now, finding people who don't know someone is looking for them is one thing, but finding someone who actively doesn't want to be found? That's why people hire people like me. So, we tracked Slag down to a shop at the far outskirts of the tent city, funny enough he wasn't far from where we set up our base camp, and it seems that that "Please don't shoot me' token was not just for giggles as Slag carried some serious firepower as his welcome committee. As it turns out, The Underdark was just the place that Beep and I were looking for, rich in both information and opportunity to earn some serious credits with a much more lenient policy on price negotiations with their contractors. The Underdark are a collective of anti-corporate information brokers with a serious disdain for the Sentinels, so while the majority of their interests were in the collection and distribution of information through their agents and contact networks, they had a special love of fucking with the Sentinels... and so did we."

"According to Slag, the Sentinels had been putting up propaganda posters to 'remind' the local citizens of Neotropolis that they were always watching, so he wanted to remind them that they were being watched back. Our mission was simple, place a camera in a position that could watch the nearby Sentinel outpost without getting caught. Slag even offered a bonus for placing the camera in a humiliatingly obvious the position and taking a picture, he could use to show that the Sentinels were as lazy and incompetent as the locals joke they were, something, something hearts and minds and counter propaganda. The Sentinels scared people. They had the funding, armor, and the firepower to control people but more importantly they weren't omniscient, and these missions helped prove that. I haggled with Slag over the bonus. I bet him that if I



could get a picture with the Sentinels, with their camera in the picture without them ever noticing the camera I'd get double their bonus. Slag was, naturally, skeptical it could be done but agreed. A few hours, one well-placed camera at eye level directly across the street from their outpost's glass walled front desk, and a photo with some armored goons later, I was three hundred Underdark Credits richer and thrice as smug about it. Slag thought the picture was hysterical, though entirely unable to be used for propaganda, but he still paid out bonus as he agreed. While Underdark Credits didn't trade as well as Neocredits, they were valued highly enough in the tent city to buy Beep and I some new hardware... just in case our antics with the Sentinels caught up with us."

"The remaining three days until our shuttle arrived to take us back home were a bit of a blur. While they were still filled with doing work for Helix, the Perch, and the Underdark, stacking piles of credits, making new friends at a bar called 'The 10,000 Hours', and making an utter nuisance of ourselves to the Sentinels while gathering information for our employers, we also witnessed the gritty cruelty of the city. I saw criminals paraded down the main strip of Neo before being cut down in the street by the city's gladiators in a public spectacle, one of said 'criminals' was Spade who thankfully managed to survive the event and suggested I go meet a man by the name of 'Orca' at a place called 'The Kaiju Club'. This was followed by the violent disassembly of an android in the streets displayed like an art piece, and at the end of it all the purchase of The Sentinels by Helix Industries... shocking absolutely no one. I told you it's easy to corrupt someone with an annual salary. As for Orca, neither Beep nor I were able to make contact the man at the Kaiju club despite our best efforts, but we did run into both Wash and Spade in the following days who gave us a run down on Orca's terraforming related endeavors. That would be something I would follow up on in the future if I ever go back to Kepler."

"In conclusion, I've never enjoyed working as much as I did on Kepler-609c. Neotropolis is truly an anomaly in the galaxy, a living, breathing neon gem in the desert that would be an excellent place for A.R.M. Co. to invest in in the future. End report."

- Voice Offscreen Redacted-

"What do you mean I've been promoted? I'm a contractor to A.R.M. Co., not an employee, I can't be promoted."

-Voice Offscreen Redacted-

"What do you mean 'Franchise Rights'?"

# Tillyer's News of the High Frontier

The weather recently has been, well let's call it volatile. The news recently reported that the intensity of tornadoes has increased but oddly not the frequency. Rain, there's been plenty of that too. But our Earthly weather is nothing compared to the weather on the Sun. In fact, a recent geomagnetic storm that occurred created patches of high ionized density in the upper layers of the atmosphere. Precipitated in what is known as the E Layer, these sporadic events were studied by researchers at the Kyushu University in Japan since it was previously believed that the layer was typically unaffected by such storms. The results overturned that and showed that the area was instead significantly active creating short-lived sporadic layers beginning at the poles and then slowly extending to the equator. The real-world implication of such events is the disruption of radio communication typically used for navigation. Last year on May 10<sup>th</sup>, an event known as the Gannon or Mother's Day storm caused by multiple solar flares created eight Coronal Mass Ejections that affected Earth. Pictures of Northern Lights filled up the internet from all over in plenty of places that were very atypical. Advance warnings were provided by the NOAA Space Weather branch and prepared the power grid for potential disruption. One place that did experience problems was a little surprising – farming. Over time, the machinery that allows our crops to be maintained uses more and more technology- tech that wasn't hardened like the electrical grid. Since the storm hit in May, a peak planting season for Midwest farmers, farmer's tractors were hard at work being guided by GPS to allow them to plant most efficiently in long straight rows. Using GPS, harvesters can then be sent to the exact same location. As mentioned above, solar storms disrupt the layers of the atmosphere and can disrupt the transmission of signals. Farmers suddenly found that they planters and tractors were dodging back and forth from row to row and had to disengage autosteering if they happened to be riding them. Driverless machines caused problems until they could be shut down. Another storm hit in October once again causing issues. Since then, machine manufacturers have been working to harden their electronics and communications on the farm equipment to enable them to withstand the effects of geomagnetic storms. Up above something else has been occurring during the storms – our Low Earth Orbit satellites are trying to station-keep and maintain their orbits. The Gannon storm caused a mass of satellites to attempt to find a new stability and with all of them doing so at once it increased the possibility of collisions. Nearly half of the satellites all started to maneuver at once. Fortunately, there were no major issues. In fact, it's believed that some of the space junk in LEO was actually pushed into a lower orbit. A final thought, we are still at solar maximum for the sunspot cycle through this beginning of this year and while we can look forward to the possibility of more auroras, we should perhaps watch the skies in case the storms bring something else...

