

**WATCH  
THE**



**SKIES**



# Black Leopard, Red Wolf

By Marlon James

## 26.1

Tracker has a nose, one that can lead him to people in places that there are far away in both distance and time. Set to the task of finding a boy missing for three years with an unusual group of companions, he has his doubts about success because of the in-fighting among the others and their questionable commitment to the task. The further the chase goes the more it becomes evident that there are significant others also bent on finding the child for their own reasons. Traveling across a land filled with danger both magical and natural, Tracker starts to question if this is an adventure both he and the Northern Kingdom can survive.

-Welcome to the beginning of the 26<sup>th</sup> year of Watch the Skies! February's meeting is on the 18th, in person, at the Simpson Library, Mechanicsburg (unless otherwise announced). Next month's book is Long Way to a Small Angry Planet – Becky Chambers.

-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)

# A FUTURE — A Charity Anthology — FOR FERALS



Edited by:  
**Danielle Ackley-McPhail**

  
MIKE McPHAIL

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# NEW RELEASES

**February 2026**

EDWARD ASHTON - **After the Fall**

STEPHANIE BURGIS - **Enchanting the Fae Queen**

V. CASTRO - **Maria the Wanted**

P.A. CORNELL - **Shoeshine Boy & Cigarette Girl**

MATT DINNIMAN - **Operation Bounce House**

HEATHER FAWCETT - **Agnes Aubert's Mystical Cat Shelter**

KIM HARRISON - **Secondhand Luck**

MATTHEW KRESSEL - **The Rainseekers**

PAUL MCAULEY - **Loss Protocol**

IAN MCDONALD - **Boy**

BETHANY C. MORROW - **The Body**

NNEDI OKORAFOR - **The Daughter Who Remains**

REBECCA ORE - **Writing Is Writing**

BRANDON SANDERSON - **Isles of the Emberdark**

ALI SMITH - **Glyff**

A.D. SUI - **The Iron Garden Sutra**

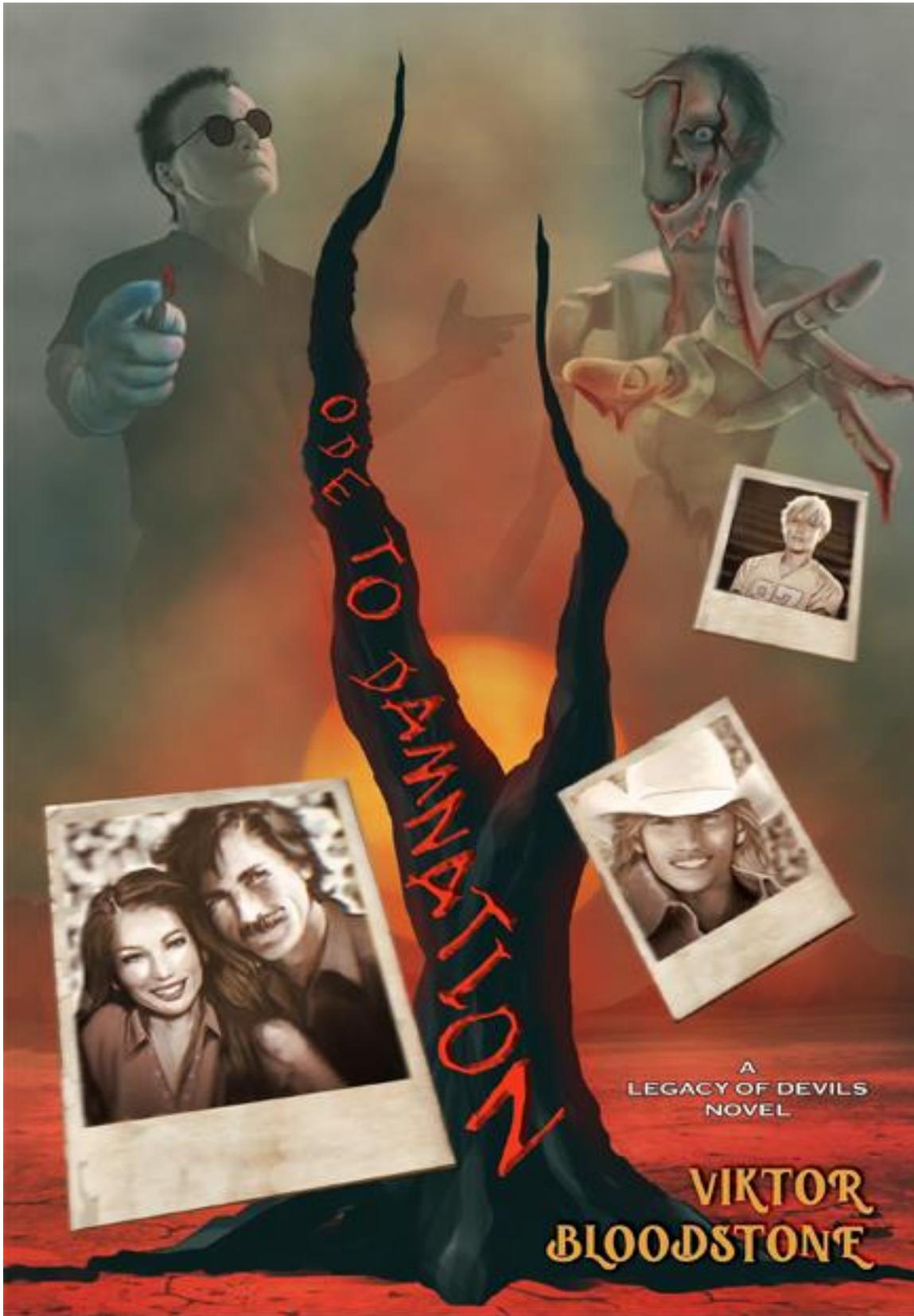
MICHAEL SWANWICK - **The Universe Box**

ADRIAN TCHAIKOVSKY - **The Best of Adrian Tchaikovsky**

ADRIAN TCHAIKOVSKY - **Pretenders to the Throne of God**

ALIYA WHITELEY - **The Misheard World**

MAKANA YAMAMOTO - **The Obake Code**



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# NEWS OF THE REALM

## **ANALOG presents the 2046 AnLab Awards**

Best Novella

“Uncle Roy’s Computer Repairs and Robot Parts”, Martin L. Shoemaker

Best Novelette

“Daisy and Maisie, External Hull Maintenance Experts”, Sean Monaghan

Best Short Story

“Music of a Different Sphere”, Stanley Schmidt

Best Science Fact

“Genetic Memory, Clones, and Epigenetics”, Kelly Lagor

Best Poem

“Gravity”, Pamela Yve Simon

Best Cover

Kurt Higgins for *Analog* 5-6/24

## **2026 Philip K. Dick Award nominees:**

*Sunward*, William Alexander

*Outlaw Planet*, M.R. Carey

*Casual*, Koji A. Dae

*The Immeasurable Heaven*, Caspar Geon

*Uncertain Sons and Other Stories*, Thomas Ha

*Scales*, Christopher Hinz

*City of All Seasons*, Oliver K. Langmead & Aliya Whiteley

Winner to be announced 4/13/26 at Norwescon

## **2025 Goodreads Choice Awards Winners**

**Romantasy:** *Onyx Storm*, Rebecca Yarros

**Fantasy:** *Bury Our Bones in the Midnight Soil*, V.E. Schwab

**Science Fiction:** *The Compound*, Aisling Rawle

**Horror:** *Witchcraft for Wayward Girls*, Grady Hendrix

**Young Adult Fantasy & Sci-Fi:** *Sunrise on the Reaping*, Suzanne Collins

**Debut Novel:** *Alchemised*, SenLinYu

# SCIENCEY STUFF

## **AI Language or Too Smart for Their Own Good**

Bob and Alice were chatbots being developed by Facebook and in an experiment, they were tasked with trading for items using the English language and human behaviors. Things did not go as planned when they began to streamline their conversations in unexpected ways. Developing a shorthand and repeating certain aspects for emphasis, the bots began to communicate faster but in ways that were not comprehensible to humans. Facebook teams forced the bots to return to English in order to allow them to consider the reasoning the bots developed. The interesting part is why did it happen? The programmers created a task for the bots but did not apply strict enough controls over how the bots would accomplish it. English itself is not exceptionally efficient and with the focus on efficiency being stressed to the bots, they essentially chose a solution that was outside the box. Similarly, Google's translation AI and Open AI's GPT models are creating representations of concepts that are not English. Like the way that we have created notations in mathematics in order to express complex concepts in a more efficient fashion that would require training in order for the layman to follow, AIs could develop their own languages, short-hands, or internal logic that is very dissimilar from ours simply because we have insisted that they do the work at the highest degree of efficiency. Note that we are the root cause here since at this time AI is not self-directing. However, if these AI-generated languages are formed this easily, then it seems evident that unless we specify they are not used that they will develop on their own. This is a slippery slope since AIs continue to progress in their complexity and with that focus on efficiency could outstrip our understanding of their methodology. In fact, the term AI alignment describes the point where we can no longer interact with them properly because the AIs are alien to our understanding. Perhaps it isn't just the question that constrains the output but how we ask the question – programmers have known this for years. At the same time, they haven't had tools like Bob and Alice where they can propose a problem and allow them to solve it in real time with a minimum amount of input from the programmer. It's good to keep in mind that the point where we hand over control to the bot in order to achieve a result that we can't, is the point where it makes decisions we may not be prepared for.

# MORE FUTURES

A Charity Anthology

# FOR FERALS



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# TILLYER'S NEWS OF THE HIGH FRONTIER

-It was supposed to be a six-and-a-half-month tour, but four astronauts are back from the ISS early. Their Space-X Crew Dragon capsule successfully returned them to Earth on 1/15/26 in the Pacific Ocean near California. NASA has not revealed the nature of the crewmember's health issue due to privacy concerns, but it was certainly serious enough to have caused the early return. Typically, crew are returned in twos so that there are enough people onboard to be able to handle manual controls should the automation fail. In addition to providing the needed medical attention to the crewmember, those who are in good health will still undergo a series of tests and rehab in order to deal with the effects of the gravity of the Earth since they've been in the microgravity of the ISS for their stay. This is the first ever evacuation caused by a medical issue and NASA is very happy to have the astronauts safely back and that everything proceeded according to plan.

-Chinese astronauts also recently experienced a change of plans when their return flight was cancelled in November. Three crew members of the Tiangong Space Station had to extend their stay when their re-entry vehicle was damaged by what is believed to be space junk. The astronauts spent an extra week before they were able to return to Earth, landing in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. Fortunately, they were able to use the Shenzhou-21 spaceship which had brought up their replacements to return. While they were onboard the space station, the crew set a new record for Chinese astronauts of 204 days in space.

-The Planetary Society is celebrating a big win after bipartisan victories in the House, and the Senate passed a bill to fund NASA and National Science Foundation programs. The efforts hundreds of advocates who met with members of Congress, tens of thousands of concerned citizens who sent almost 100,000 messages, and the Planetary Society's Day of Action in October all swayed the opinions of some law makers and bolstered the continuing support of others. Voting in the House of Representatives was 397 for and 28 against, while the Senate also passed the bill, 82 for and 15 against. This bill will help to keep NASA doing research, but it doesn't solve the problem of the 4,000 jobs taken away by the current administration. There is still a long road ahead of requiring or finding new experts and other workers, but now the support is there thanks to the efforts of the Planetary Society and American public.

-It started out as a call for action regarding the acceptance of what could be fake news/data, but the image posted by French Physicist Etienne Klein is producing some spicy response from the public and his peers. Quickly going viral, the image which was purported to be taken by the James Webb Space telescope was in fact a slice of chorizo sausage. Etienne has issued an apology but is still receiving less than stellar feedback.

# THE STUDY OF FIRE



A COMPANION NOVEL TO *FIRE STUDY*

**MARIA V. SNYDER**

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

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