

ELEMENTS

A COLLECTION OF SPECULATIVE FICTION

SUZANNE CHURCH



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CALGARY

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DEDICATION

To Joseph and Emmett



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Ironically, no writer works alone, except when we sit at our keyboards creating worlds. Each story in this collection has been finessed by others.

First, thanks go to the crew at EDGE Science Fiction and Fantasy Publishing. In particular, thanks to Brian Hades for giving my collection life, to Anita Hades for her boundless energy at every convention, to Ella Beaumont for her fine-tooth comb, and to Janice Shoults for making sure the world seeks the work of EDGE authors. Special kudos to Neil Jackson whose amazing cover art inspired the story “Soul-Hungry”.

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—Suzanne Church





WHAT BECOMES A LEGEND MOST

BY SANDRA KASTURI

I remember there used to be these old Blackglama ads for mink coats. This was of course from back in the day when people actually wore mink coats and no one thought anything of it. The ads had famous celebrities like Marlene Dietrich and Julie Andrews and Maria Callas. They said, “What becomes a legend most?” All of which may lead readers to say, “Who?” And probably also, “What does that have to do with anything?”

I’ll tell you who. Well, no. Because many of you reading (young whippersnappers!) may not have heard of those famous women, and it’s beside the point anyway. But I’ll tell you what and why. Because Suzanne Church is quite likely to be a famous woman soon, and quite probably a legend too. So what becomes her? Obviously not a fur coat. But this book becomes her. And you embracing her prose, that especially becomes her. And awards. Awards become her because she’s already won a bunch. And will no doubt go on to win more. I’ve known her for years now, so Future Me is really looking forward to saying, “Oh, I knew Suzanne long before she won both the Hugo and the Nebula in 2017. She’s had *dinner* at my *house*.” Cue gasps of envy from her fans.

It would all be deserved. Suzanne’s a good writer, if you hadn’t noticed. She has a knack for an elegant or funny turn of phrase. The one that cracked me up most was “better than a hell sandwich.” And then it occurred to me. That’s what this collection is— it’s better than a hell sandwich. Which isn’t damning with faint praise, let me be clear. Because I think a hell sandwich would be pretty fucking extraordinary, don’t you?

Suzanne also has a knack for creating characters you care about. For a pervasive and beautiful melancholy that seems to thread through her work, even in the funnier stories. And ideas. She's got some pretty friggin' cool ideas, no? Well. You'll find out shortly when you get to the book proper.

My favourite story of the bunch is probably "Destiny Lives in the Tattoo's Needle," a dystopian fable set in a future North America where "Atlantica" and "Pacifica" are at war and a "Thinker" parachuting from a destroyed ship is captured by a mysterious (enemy?) combatant. But here's the thing. Suzanne also makes me mad. (You *do*, Suzanne, you do!) Because that story is set in such a rich and fascinating world that I was furious when it ended. What happens to Greg and Alyssa? I wanted to follow those characters and see where their next adventures lay. Suzanne? I'm still waiting.

But that's the trick, isn't it? To leave your readers wanting more. To make them angry about your abandoned protagonists and worlds, to make them furiously snap up every single story you write, just to see if you've gone back to the characters they loved, only to have them realize you haven't done that at all—you've just gone and created new ones that they can agonize over! And so it continues, until you have a whole passel of devoted (and probably cranky) fans in your wake, waiting to see what you'll do next.

Suzanne's on that path. So, yeah, you should read this book. Sure you should. But be prepared for frustration and tantrums when you realize there aren't any sequels, and you don't know what'll happen to the people (and aliens) you liked best, because, well... there isn't a new story out. Yet. Yet.

So I live in hope. I hope that my own destiny will return me to the tattoo's needle. That the Couch Teleportation Universe doesn't teleport itself out of existence. That Austin from "Jelly and the D-Machine" has a good life and things work out for him and Drake. And that all those dystopias Suzanne's envisioned don't come to pass. Because that's the stuff that really stays with me when I lie awake at night. Thanks, Suzanne. Thanks a *lot*.

Your own mileage, as they say, may vary. Maybe you'll worry about the thing in the belfry more than I did. Maybe the drug addiction and failed connections of "Synch Me, Kiss Me, Drop" will be what leaves you melancholy and staring into the dregs of

your coffee cup on a Monday morning. Or the broody and grotesque science fictional riff on shapeshifting in “Mod Me Down.”

But I’ll tell you this— you won’t be unaffected by what you read here. And if you’re one of those people who thinks, “Oh, it’s just science fiction [sub in ‘horror’ and ‘fantasy’ as needed]; it doesn’t *mean* anything.” Well, you’d be really wrong. Suzanne Church is doing what the best writers in genre fiction have always done: she’s writing about the human condition. Even when she’s being funny, she’s still showing you what it is to be (in)human. And Suzanne’s doing it well enough that I’m not sure I’d want her gimlet eye turned my way— because I’m pretty sure she sees too much.

So, yeah. I think Suzanne is on her way to becoming a legend. Wait and see. Get ready to say you knew her when. Read this book and look out for the next one. Watch for her stories in *Clarkesworld* and *Neo-Opis* and *On Spec* and *Cicada* and *Challenging Destiny* and wherever else good genre fiction shows up. You won’t be sorry. But you’ll probably be addicted. You’ll be *synched* and ready for the drop... just like me.

—Sandra Kasturi
Toronto 2013

