

## Plots for Constructed Worlds

### *Shenandoah Fantastic- A short story anthology set in the Shenandoah Valley*

#### The Train to Mt. Jackson- Julie Cline

Claudia races to the side of her great aunt Eula Jean, upon hearing the news that she's dying. She arrives at her great-aunt's house in Woodstock and asks what's wrong. Her great aunt says she hears the train coming; she lives across from the train tracks. Claudia reminds her that there are no trains; the tracks were abandoned years ago.

That evening, Eula Jean tells her story of her beloved Avery, who joined the Army in 1951. He pledged to return on the train in Woodstock, take her to Mt. Jackson to meet his family, and get married. As storms gather, thunder rolls through the valley, and lightning dances on the mountains. Claudia learns that Avery was killed in the Korean War, and, heartbroken, Eula Jean never loved again.

But here's the thing, Eula Jean just got a letter from Avery. As promised, he's coming to get her on the train to Mt. Jackson, and Eula Jean needs Claudia to help her get to the tracks to meet him. Claudia refuses, and Eula Jean, heartbroken again, goes up to bed.

Something pounds on the door in the middle of the stormy night, and Claudia jumps up to answer it. Nothing there except wind and an envelope with a glowing ticket.

"It's Avery!" Eula Jean begs again for help. This time, Claudia agrees, and together they make the harrowing journey down the hill to the tracks. The ghost train roars in, rolling above the tracks and stops. Young handsome Avery steps off the train and sweeps pretty young Eula Jean into his arms, then onto the train. Claudia waves as they rocket into the mists.

The next morning, Claudia thinks she's dreamed it all, but finds that her great aunt is gone. She notifies the Woodstock police about Eula Jean's death. When the officer and an ambulance arrive, he asks where the body is.

"She's not here," Claudia replies, "She took the train to Mt. Jackson."

### The Long-Sought *I. batatas*- Stephen Roddewig

A servant of the Interstellar Imperium is dispatched to a post-apocalyptic Earth to revive the Route 11 Potato Chip factory. However, though the structure and equipment have survived the events of the Very Bad Day that wiped out much of the rest of humanity, the space marine is missing the crucial element of the Emperor's now beloved sweet potato chips: the spices labeled only as "Family Secret." So he sets out to locate said descendants of the original Route 11 owners and convince them to cooperate. Otherwise, he will be forced to atone for his failure by becoming the latest Martyr for the Emperor.

### The Kite Mechanic- Will Fawley

*The Kite Mechanic* is a lyric, fabulist story set in the foothills of the Allegheny Mountains, where an aging man repairs kites—and carries people's wishes into the sky. Each spring, people come to him not just for craftsmanship but for hope. When his neighbor Hank arrives desperate for rain to save his failing farm and secure a future for his daughters, the Kite Mechanic agrees to fly a wish on his behalf.

As he builds the kite, Hank's wish reveals itself to be larger than rain—it's about continuity, family, and survival. Parallel to this, the Kite Mechanic's own weariness deepens. His body is failing, his children are grown and gone, and his wife, Maribelle, quietly wishes for his immortality, even as he dreams of becoming the wind itself.

When the time comes to launch the kite, the effort nearly breaks him. But buoyed by the collective wishes of the valley, he runs once more—and this time, he rises. He disappears into the clouds, becoming the wind, as rain finally pours down on the land below.

### Wishing Home-Ember Heishman

Amelia knows this unfamiliar, too-green valley isn't home. She also knows that captured tree souls grant wishes. When her struggle with silence gets her stuck in the school basement, and her strange rescuer seems to have all the answers, Amelia learns that the lush Virginia landscape—and its enchanting caves and gardens—might have

everything she needs to make her wish come true. But wishes rarely play out the way they're planned, and Amelia must find her voice if she's ever going to find her home.

### The Battle of Route 42- James Blakey

The Battle of Route 42 follows Riley Voss, a senior outside hitter on Eastern Mennonite University's women's volleyball team. In a tense match against Shenandoah University, she executes an impossible diving dig to save match point—her body blurring with unnatural speed as time seems to slow around her—sparking a stunning comeback win that explodes online.

The heroic save leaves her with a head injury. Scans clear her of concussion but uncover a mysterious brain mass, which she keeps secret from her teammates. Soon, under extreme pressure, Riley experiences vivid episodes where time dramatically slows. This grants her extra seconds to react with superhuman precision, allowing feats no one else can match.

As the team faces the heated rivalry “Battle of Route 42” against Bridgewater College for the ODAC top seed, Riley secretly harnesses the ability to dominate rallies and target old rival Ashley. Yet each use brings throbbing headaches and rising danger. Determined to seize every moment, she pushes her limits on the court while privately wrestling with the tumor's implications and the costly nature of her strange gift.

### From The Tyrus Campaign- A Novel by Calvin Hammond

Adrian had finally fulfilled his dream of becoming a captain aboard a Sabre-class cruiser, the flagship *Aurora*. He can truly begin to explore the vastness of space. However, all of his dreams are halted when a communication relay stops working, and his ship needs to go investigate it. The simple matter becomes far more complicated when the relay is discovered destroyed, and the culprits are nowhere to be found. As Adrian takes the ship on a journey to find whoever destroyed it, he comes face to face with the last thing he expected it to be. An alien race.

Oslo is a young marine serving in the 42nd platoon, enjoying peace since the space pirates had been reduced to nothing more than common marauders, and their attacks were becoming more scarce. Finally, he'll have enough money to buy the survey ship he and his brother dreamed of to travel out amongst the stars. His platoon joins

the *Aurora* on her colony tour, and Oslo hopes for the excitement of finally seeing space. Instead, it's boring and repetitive—until the *Aurora* is sent on an investigation, and comes face to face with an alien race.

For Oslo, he's recruited into the Special Tactical Operational Response Mechanized infantry unit known as STORM. Here, he pilots a new line of mechanized infantry machines known as goliaths, a dream come true. But for Adrian, falling into a hole of depression, he only slips deeper into it as his personal demons drag him down.

For both men, instead of exploring space, they find themselves plunged into a nightmarish war where every day will be a struggle to overcome the challenges set forth in front of them. All they know is that the first move is to head to the moon of the planet Tyrus and discover what the fortunes of war have in store for them.