

## TWO MEMORIALS

In the past few months, Tanith Lee and Melanie Tem, two authors that *Asimov's* has been honored to publish, have been lost to death's unknown land. Both women were excellent storytellers with evocative prose styles. Both won their share of World Fantasy, World Horror, and other awards. Their fiction was among the best we've ever showcased, and we are thankful we had the chance to do so.

I'm not sure if I ever met Tanith Lee in person. We worked together, though, through the mail and later email, on seventeen stories. These tales were suffused with unforgettable characters and mysterious lands. The first, "La Reine Blanche" (July 1983), contains both. It begins: "The white queen lived in a pale tower, high in a shadowy garden. She had been shut there three days after the death of her husband, the king. Such a fate was traditional for certain of the royal widows. All about, between the dark verdures of the dark garden, there stared up similar pale towers in which similar white queens had, for centuries, been immured. Most of the prisoners were by now deceased. Occasionally, travelers on the road beneath claimed to have glimpsed—or to have thought that they glimpsed—a dim skeletal shape or two, in senile disarray, peering blindly from the tall narrow windows, which were all the windows these towers possessed, over the heads of the trees, toward the distant spires of the city."

While there is the hint of the familiar fairy tale in this lush opening, there is also the promise that "La Reine Blanche" will veer off in whichever fantastic direction Tanith's fierce imagination decreed. The same was true of the tales that contained the ghosts, vampires, and werewolves of traditional horror.

Tanith was also a fierce taskmaster. One can see the hand of the consummate artist in her concern for the perfection of the minutiae. Her submission letter for "Cold Fire" (February 2007) came with the following, "This tale has some weird grammar and syntax and some odd words—so I've enclosed a note and checklist for composers. . . . I have to say the mode of language in this really took me by surprise. But my characters often do. Ideally I'd love to have left out all the apostrophes too. But given the general syntax, thought I had better put them in." Later, she despairs that we will ever get the story right, "Given the tiny amount of time left before proofs need to be perfect, I find this [emails gone astray] very upsetting. . . . I have done my best. But I really do want the story to appear as I wrote it." Doing our best to get it right is worthwhile a year later when she tells us: "Please find another sub. . . . very unlike the last one—which last story I VERY much enjoyed seeing in the magazine! (Thank you again, and to all concerned on keeping the weird syntax etc as I had it.)"

Our October/November 2010 issue featured her last *Asimov's* story. "Torhec the Sculptor" is an artist who truly creates art solely for art's sake—destroying his pieces before they can be sullied by public consumption:

"Torhec laid the hammer aside and took up the first of the group of flasks also ready on the bench. They contained special mixes of corrosive. As he poured them over the last of his work, the audience watched in wonder as wood and stone bubbled and smoked, curling over, melting, flowing down to unidentifiable puddles on the floor. Torhec finalized things with the hammer, bashing to dust any lingering element."

Fortunately, Tanith left us readers with ninety novels and three hundred short stories. Like timeless fairy tales, her work should be enjoyed for generations to come.

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I knew Melanie Tem for close to thirty years. I'm sure we first met at a convention, but my fondest memory is a fall walk through Central Park collecting pine cones and

talking about children and the adoption process. Although primarily known for horror and dark fiction novels, Melanie sold eight stories to *Asimov's*. Two of these tales were coauthored with her husband Steve Rasnic Tem. In another conversation, Melanie explained that she and Steve had collaborated on their family name as well as their fiction. It's taken from the ancient Egyptian word that means "to complete or finish." It is also another name for the god Atum, the primal creator.

Melanie wrote beautiful, haunting stories of loss: loss of children, loss of siblings, loss of self. I found her novelette "Corn Teeth" (August 2011), about a human child awaiting an alien adoption, so powerful that I could barely finish reading it. Still, I knew that it told an important tale that had to be published. The story was inspired by her experience as an adoption social worker.

Another of my favorites was the collaborative "In Concert" (December 2008). This bittersweet tale connected the hopes and fears of a lost astronaut and an elderly woman. It was also the title story of Melanie and Steve's most recent collection of cowritten short stories. Sadly, the ending can be read as a farewell to authors who leave us far too soon:

"She floated into deep space, too. Soon he would drift beyond her ability to track him. Soon, she thought, she herself would drift beyond her ability to come back.

"Thank you," was in her mind, moving with the music, back and forth.

The music was sweet, and sad, but Inez could not think of it as elegiac, exactly. More, it was resolute, solemn in its understanding. Her face was cold and wet.

The sound of a single string, played solo within the wash of music, caught her attention. It rose and fell in pitch, singing in concert like prayer. It was a solitary thought, a nerve, a vein, a narrow thread of muscle.

While the body and the world disintegrated around it, it lingered a moment, then dissolved. Thank you."