

A FREE EXCERPT FROM THE STORY

The First Manned Flight

From the New Collection "The Aviation Girls"



Art by Anzhelika Domanova. Commissioned for "The Aviation Girls"

Within all of us is a varying amount
of space lint and star dust,
the residue from our creation.
It is strongest in those of us who fly.

– *K.O. Eckland*



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The First Manned Flight

*Anke makes a daring attempt to save her sister.
Rickety battle-kite flies and crashes into forest tower stronghold.*

PROLOGUE

Is it not by the depth of his wounds
that one takes the measure of a man?

--Melisa Gode

“Clean your room,” commanded Romy, careful to stand just at the doorway to her little sister’s bedroom.

She wore an apron. She carried a laundry basket on her hip.

Anke lay prone on her very unkempt bed, reading a book, Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall*. The tall window’s wooden frame cast a pattern in the sunlight that fell on her patchwork quilt.

“You’re such a slob.”

“Well,” countered Anke, “you’re like some farm animal. Which is worse?”

She turned a page in the book.

“I’m sick of it!” said Romy. “It may be one of my chores to do the laundry around here, but I’m not your maid.” She switched the basket to her other hip.

“Anke.”

“I’m not listening to you,” the younger sister, Anke, who was a brat, replied.

“Okay then, live like this --”

“I WILL. I WILL LIVE EXACTLY LIKE THIS.”

“You have a very high opinion of yourself, Princess High-Flier. The boys treat you like you’re so special -- ”

“I AM SPECIAL! Mom and Dad certainly thought so -- ”

“Dad did,” said Romy cryptically.

This comment signified a new and deeper phase of the argument.

Anke looked up.

“What is that supposed to mean?”

“It means you have to CLEAN YOUR ROOM once a month. *Kannst du dir vorstellen?*”

“No, but why did you say that thing about Dad?”

“You keep thinking I’ll do all the housework but you’re mistaken, Miss Anke Möbelbauer -- ”

“Don’t mention them! It upsets me! You COW! I HATE YOU!”

Anke got up from the bed and slammed the door to her bedroom with such force that the echo of it reverberated throughout the house.

I. THE VIEW FROM THE SKY

Your air-widget thing doesn’t work.

-- Charlotte Sanson

The first flight of a manned, fixed-wing aircraft was short, unplanned, and violent.

Its pilot, a thin, moody girl named Anke, initiated the chain of events leading to that flight with a call for more freedom.

“Let out the ropes,” said the voice.

The sentinel moved silently across the skies above the forest landscape.
From that height, everything looks very different.

Seen from above, the familiar ground-level arrangements of matter are new and remarkable. Cliffs and canyons and tree groves did not look deep or tall, when seen from above, but flat shapes and minutely distinct patterns of color. Earthbound blacks, grays, and browns collided with vibrant red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet. It was not only form or color being captured, but it was time, a moment of life, a moment of a life.

Humans do not usually experience that perspective reserved for high-flying clouds and griffon and geese.

“Let go the ropes, Uwe!” said the voice.

“Let me fly!”

* * *

The Forest Marcynian, in the state of Baden-Wurttemberg, sometimes referred to as Baar by the Romans, is a region of tall trees among high mountains and sharp ridges.

It is a land of ghosts.

There, winding roads lead past abandoned castles long overgrown, carved arches, lightning-shattered stone staircases. The phantoms of the centurions of the Salain emperors still line the mountain passes under fluttering lances, so they say. Slumped skeletons in their finery yet sit on broken thrones in the buried mountain halls and forgotten courts of pagan kings. King Theudebald once quashed revolts of the younger stem duchies here, and here the stout warriors of the Alamanni met their fate at the hands of Saxons.

The Forest Marcynian is a haunted, restless land of secrets. Its old-growth forests had seen their share of fairy tales unfold -- sleeping princesses, magical elves, kindly tailors and such -- fairy tales, yes, but also darker stories, stories with less-than-bright endings.

Marcynian's geography gives rise to sail-winged birds and other flying things which take advantage of unusually strong and constant updrafts.

You may know it by another name:

The Black Forest.

2. ANKE'S SANDWICH

I wasn't mad until just now.

– *Babak Amvari*

“No mustard,” Anke said to the plate.

The white ceramic platter sat innocently on the wood surface of the courtyard's dining table, under the trees.

“I'm pretty sure that everyone KNOWS that I don't like mustard.”

No reply was forthcoming from the plate, or the sandwich on the plate.

The excellent sandwich on the platter was piled high with bread, lettuce tomato, sliced beef cheese, all topped by a healthy dollop of yellow mustard.

“This beef sandwich right here,” insisted Anke. She paused. “Can't you see, can't you *all* see that yellow color?”

“I see it,” said Stan.

Anke, the skinny and highly particular second daughter of the woodworking Möbelbauer clan, glared at her food.

“I always say ‘*No mustard.*’ Don’t I always say that?”

The Möbelbauer children were gathered at noon, in the courtyard of the family compound, between the house and the workshop, beneath the leafy oak tree, near the gates, across from the barn and paddock.

“Yes, yes, Anke” replied her older sister, Romy, broad-faced and radiant.

She spoke in a sunny voice that only served to madden Anke more. “We all know your little demands.”

“But you’ve put a TON of mustard on it,” said Anke bitterly.

Anke folded her hands on her lap to make it clear to the world that she would not be eating this sandwich.

The soft clatter of silverware and pitchers pouring liquid into mugs continued as before, seeming to ignore Anke’s sulk.

Everyone was hungry. Delivery of the Town Court benches contract was three days hence. There was so much to do. They had been working since dawn.

Now Anke folded her arms.

“I sure wouldn’t like that,” offered her brother, Uwe, his mouth full. “Who would? Who would like that?”

“Here,” offered Stanislas. “Dake mine, Prinzess. No mooster. See?”

The two plates were exchanged.

“But you already *took* a bite,” groaned Anke. “I can completely see your teeth marks! Stan. Are you kidding? Stan? Tell me you’re kidding ...”

This heartfelt complaint lingered in the air above the table as everyone but Anke continued eating. Uwe refilled his cup from the pitcher.

“Please tell Anke,” said Romy to the table at large, “that we’re out of bread and for that reason, I can’t actually make another sandwich just to please Her Highness -- ”

“Please inform the heifer at the end of the table that I don’t care what she says,” replied Anke. “Fair is fair,” she added. Father used to say that.

A cuckoo in one of the upper branches of the oak tree called out, hoping a mate might be in the vicinity.

“Don’t mention them! It upsets me! You COW! I HATE YOU!”

“*Age quod agis,*” commented Jakob, the eldest, as he entered late from working on the lathes.

“NO! YOU do what you’re supposed to!” replied Anke.

Jakob came over and plucked his little sister out of her seat, so he could hug her --

“Stop that!”

She shoved him and broke away.

“How can I do all that I do, if Romy does such a TERRIBLE job at cooking?”

“*Was zum teufel!*” Anke added angrily. “Try making furniture without the wood I provide!”

“You don’t actually provide the wood, little girl,” Uwe reminded her.

“It’s *dangerous*, what I do!” Anke huffed. “And I do ten other jobs that no one gives me credit for. I feed the livestock -- ”

“Stan feeds the livestock -- ”

“Not always!”

Jakob, the eldest, stood and switched out Anke’s platter for his.

The sandwich on the new platter had extra tomato, a fat pickle on the side ... and no mustard.

The cuckoo, thinking he had heard a faint reply, redoubled his song.

“At last,” said Anke, acknowledging the new plate and its untouched sandwich. “*Thank you.*”

A bell rang among the lathes, marking the cycle end for the Stenross, the steam box oven. Jakob rose to change out the steamer. That more pliable wood would be used for the bench-end handles ...

“We love you, *gliebten*,” said Jakob.

“I know,” Anke replied. She took a bite of her sandwich. She nodded, satisfied.

3. DARK WINDS IN THE WOODSHOP

Those who speak the same language ... belong together and are by nature one and an inseparable whole.

– *Johann Gottlieb Fichte*

Just then, the gate at the top, or street-side wall, of the courtyard opened.

Three strange men entered, to the accompaniment of wind chimes.

“Is this the shop of the Möbelbauers? The woodworkers?” asked their leader.

“Yes,” answered Uwe, rising.

They were young and wore city clothes. The leader was a stocky man with a speaking voice that was a little too loud. He wore a city coat of brown leather, with copper buttons down the in front, and on the sleeves.

The others had groomed mustaches and scented hair.

“Yuuur from Strasbuuurg ...” ventured Stanislav.

“Seebach.”

“Same difference,” said Uwe.

“We are aides of Count Vilnius,” declared the lead city-man.

This statement had no effect on the listeners.

“The poet.”

“Like Schiller?” asked Anke. “*An die Freud --*”

“My client needs a large circular piece,” said the aide. “Carved of your finest wood. It shall be an insignia.”

One of the men from Seebach removed a rolled paper. He spread it on the table.

High in the oak, a female cuckoo made a long, sincere, four-toned answering call. She was considering the offer.

“Vat is dis?” asked Stanislas, eyeing the design on the paper.

“An eagle. Wings spread. He holds gathered arrows in his talons, as you see. They represent our freedoms.”

“It looks like war,” said Anke.

“A republic, Cousin,” replied the Seebacher. “And yes, one that is ready for war, if war is needed.

“It announces the combined power of the fiefdoms. A modern Germany. The New Order. The Count attracts good Germans wherever he speaks --”

“I don’t think you and I are cousins,” said Anke.

“We will all be cousins! Soon!” replied the aide. “You’ll hear for yourself. Count Vilnius visits your town. His message will resound like pealing bells across the uplands -- ”

“We need this proud wood-carved insignia behind him on the stage. You should be honored. ”

“What kind of Count is he?” asked Uwe.

“*Sonderweg*,” replied the aide. “One who will lead us to our special destiny.”

“And let me guess,” offered Uwe. “Highway tariffs and service in the militia come next ...”

“And a t-treaty with Proosha,” added Stanislas.

“When do you need this insignia?” asked Romy, pretending she was in charge.

“Friday. For the *Volksfest* -- ”

“That’s in three days!” exclaimed Uwe.

The city man tossed a bag of coins on the table.

“We’re prepared to pay a premium.”

Jakob came through the swinging doors from the lathes. He wiped his hands on a towel.

“Gentlemen. I am Jakob Mobelbauer.”

He went to each of the three visitors and shook hands firmly.

“What can we do for you?”

He listened carefully to their proposal and admired the eagle drawing.

“I’m sorry,” concluded Jakob. “We are at capacity, and then some.”

He turned, just slightly, to face them squarely. Anke noted something in Jakob’s posture, the tensed lines of his legs and shoulders ...

“They want to pay a premium,” said Uwe.

“Perhaps later in the summer,” said Jakob.

In the trees above, the cuckoo, not having received the desired response from a female, repeated his offer to mate.

“We are most disappointed,” said the Seebacher. He spoke slowly, as if he were leaving out something really important. “We heard you are the best.”

“You are most civil,” said Jakob. “Join us for a beer before you go.”

The visitors demurred. The Number One Seebacher rolled up the eagle drawing. The trio took their leave, leaving one of their illustrated posters on the table.

“*Dark winds blow tru dis foress,*” muttered Stanislav once the city men were gone. His features had gone grim.

“Dis Count. I seen ones like dem. In my village. It’s de auld empire.”

He meant the Austria Hungarian Empire, heir to the Holy Roman Empire, only recently disbanded in these remote regions of Marcynia.

Now that they could look closely, they saw that a woodcut illustration of Count Vilnius decorated the poster which the visitors had left behind. The Count seemed to be a giant of a man, with blazing eyes beneath a tousled beard and long, black, unkempt hair.

“Looks crazy, if you ask me,” commented Jakob.

Anke read the text beneath the illustration:

*Deep into that darkness peering,
Long we have stood, wondering, fearing,
No god but evil; no light but darkness
No hope but doom.
Our banners sway and fall in the haunted gloom.
The gleaming basilisk eyes come for us
Where we lay. Dig me no grave.*

We can only flourish together.

*Brothers! We are the safeguards.
Sisters! Breed an army!
To beat back the shadow tides.
Let the bells peal
From the Meuse to the Neman,
From the Adige to the Belt,
A Fatherland will rise!*

“Breed an army!” exclaimed Romy. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“I don’t hear any bells pealing,” snorted Uwe.

“That is the world’s worst poem!” said Anke. “Our mule is a better poet ...”



Illustration by David Cheney. Commissioned for 'The Aviation Girls'

4. FLIGHT

Within all of us is a varying amount of space lint and star dust, the residue from our creation. It is strongest in those of us who fly.

– K.O. Eckland

“Am I a FROG? Trapped in a *basket*?

“Am I some Chinese BUG in a CAGE?”

She slapped and shook the ropes which tethered her to the slow-walking donkey below.

“Yah. You are,” came the reply.

“Three more and we’ll call it a day.”

Skinny Anke floated high above the terrain, on the big kite, and shouted out when she saw the particular elm, or fir, or beech that they needed.

They were scouting trees.

Stan and Uwe and the sanguine donkey, Leo, and a cohort of curious mountain goats trailed far beneath her. The entourage followed the erratic paths on the forest floor, mirroring Anke’s smooth glide above.

Anke searched carefully among the trees. The best wood tended to hide from her.

“Faster!” cried Anke from her perch thirty meters above the rugged terrain.

There was a mix of trees at this elevation – oak and birch in the valleys, fir and pine and spruce higher up.

“Agh!! Let the tethers go, Uwe!” she urged. “I can fly it on my own --”

The trees of the Marcynian forest murmured amongst themselves. Their roots mingled in the lower realms, out of man’s sight, and away from his limited ken. They clucked at the girl’s impatience. They had seen it before.

The family of woodworkers needed the best wood, and this high perch was a good way to find it.

“Three more,” shouted her brother, Uwe. “Find us a nice, big-waisted spruce, Anke. A hard fir.”

Anke rode thirty meters high above the earth in a floating perch. This most unlikely aircraft was a *Kriegsdrachen* a kite-like antique war device. They had found it years ago, in a hidden cache of war bounty, in a high cavern, a cache of swords and lances and mailed gloves, artifacts of a forgotten campaign of some time-lost war. The high lookout aircraft had been designed to elevate one person above the battlefield, to better see the enemy, to better plot deployments and tactics.

Now Anke and Romy and their brothers used it to hunt wood. A most awkward-looking contraption, with its double-frames, the vessel floated surprisingly well in the forest updrafts. Fabric stretched over a light wood frame reached a span of ten feet, wings jutting out from a cramped sling or pilot’s nest. A second section tethered above the first added to the contraption’s capacity for lift, so that a small man (or a teenaged girl) could crouch in the berth and float high over the earth below.

“Dark winds blow tru dis foress,” muttered Stanislav . . .

“There! Stop, Stan! Stop!! There is a white birch! Two!! Do you see them?”

It took a while for Uwe and Stanislas to scramble over the rocks at her beckoning and climb up the slope until they saw the birches.

“Yes, these will do,” called Uwe. “These will do very well!”

Uwe shot an arrow with a red ribbon, sinking it into the tree trunk.

Anke marked her map, making sure they would be able to find their way back to it.

5. SISTERS BICKER

As a German citizen ... I hold it my right but also my moral duty to take part in the shaping of our German destiny.

-- Kurt Huber

“Improving your kite, as ever, Little Sister,” commented Romy that afternoon as she folded laundry on the big table.

Bang! Clang!

Anke sat at the smaller lathe, smoothing a wooden blade that would eventually become a rudder on her flying crow’s nest.

“You call attention to your bustline, as ever,” replied Anke.

“You’re just jealous,” said Romy.

“You can NOT wear that dress,” remarked Uwe, who stood at the small forge, banging with a hammer on red-hot horseshoes (which he held with tongs).

“Well, you’ll attract the attention of every male within ten leagues,” said Jakob, at the work bench.

Bang!

“That’s the whole point,” said Romy. “I am seventeen. A rose in bloom.”

The hammer once again struck the anvil.

“A rose with no dowry and only one offer of marriage,” continued Romy.
“I need to shake the tree ... ”

“Marry Stan,” suggested Anke.

“His is my one offer,” replied Romy.

Bang! Whang! went Uwe’s hammer.

Patting the stacks of folded laundry, Romy turned to go.

She wrapped a shawl around her shoulders.

“I will be circulating. At the fair.”

Once the door had closed, Jakob gestured to Uwe to follow her.

6. ROMY GETS LOST AT THE FAIR

Hounds follow those who feed them.

-- *Otto von Bismarck*

Late that afternoon, Stanislaus escorted the livestock back into the pens for their dinner. The cows swerved when they saw Anke coming.

“Dey shore don’t wan’ see dat Angry Prinzess come close,” chuckled Stanislav. “Leo, he ‘member that kick you give him las’ week ...”

“He deserved it,” replied Anke.

“Did you see my new wings?” She showed Stanislas what she had fashioned for the *kriegsdrachen*, which lay spread out on the table. “They fold out from the kite’s frame. See?”

“You need a centerboard,” suggested Jakob from the furnaces.

“Almost done,” answered Anke.

Without warning, Uwe burst into the courtyard --

He was breathing hard, disheveled from running.

“They took her! They took Romy!” Panic made his voice tremble oddly.

“She’s been kidnapped!”

“Who?” demanded Jakob.

“Those Seebachs! The Count was with them -- ”

“I was watching the orchestras and then I saw them -- “

“They took her into the Hohenzollern -- the Tower --” gasped Uwe.

Jakob lay down his tools and gathered a jacket and a crow bar --

“How could I be so stupid -- ”

Together, Uwe and he ran out the gate back to the village square. Anke tried to stop Stan from following, but it was no good –

The Tower was Tower Hohenzollern Citadel, a weird and foreboding structure at the edge of the village square. Designed by some eccentric, long-forgotten talent, its architecture was remarkable for two things – broad balconies in the treetops and a base that was impregnable.

If the Seebachs had kidnapped Romy and retreated with her to that Tower, then the only way to save her was from above –

Anke turned and ran as fast as she could in the opposite direction -- towards the high flat clearing where the float was tethered.

7. FLIGHT TO THE CITADEL

The first aspect of flight student pilots must grasp is the concept of aircraft axes: that flying an airplane is a three-dimensional task.

– *Matthew Johnston*

One of the Hohenzollen outposts, the Citadel had been designed by its architect to be virtually unassailable from the ground. Once the steel gates closed, it was impregnable.

The only entry, Anke knew, could be from the sky. She knew the parapets and broad balconies from glimpses on her scouting sorties. She had seen a broad patio, high up on the Citadel's tower. She could land there.

* * *

The first manned fixed-wing aircraft flight was a short and violent affair.

Yet it shared all of the components and concerns of aircraft as we now know them – speed, yaw, pitch, roll, flight path, trajectory, landing. She would resolve one of these forces, make clever progress on three others, and wholly neglect the fifth.

Once aloft, Anke let go of the mooring rope too fast.

Anke flew upwards -- way too high, too fast. Without Stan and Uwe and the mule Leo to anchor her, she let the up-winds carry her skyward too fast.

The earth fell away at a sickening speed –

I'm going to crash in the northern ravines –

Lift was one thing the young pilot Anke had figured out. By floating the old war kite into the updrafts, she had given the craft lift. Lift is the force that opposes weight, or gravity, pushing a balloon or bomber up into the atmosphere.

She leaned forward, pushing the wings outward at a fierce angle, to catch air and force the kite downward.

With a great struggle, she straightened the trajectory of history's first manned aircraft.

She flipped out the two new wing extensions that she had designed. Her rise slowed. The extensions helped hit enough air so that she could control her flight path ...

She crashed through the upper crowns of twin birch trees.

Two crows and a squirrel leapt out of her path --

Below, the mountain goats looked up from their foraging. They bleated at the sight of Anke passing –

Then Anke mistook gliding for actual flying. Anke had no propulsion, beyond that of sheer planetary gravity.

She was not flying the way a bird flies, up and down, turning and wheeling freely. She was falling to earth at a manageable rate.

She assumed she could stay on an even flight path, when in fact she was on a progressively downward trajectory ... with little to brake her berserk momentum.

One wing snapped off.

Gamely, the young pilot grabbed it and tried to use it as a sort of extension.

Was that the Tower she glimpsed?

If only the damn branches would move out of the way --

Gravity. It is what pulls you back down when you rise from sitting. Things fall to the floor. Gravity is the reason why.

A planet – any planet – draws all things to its center, using gravity. It is the invisible force that keeps you on the ground, the power that makes things fall. Anything that has mass has gravity. Objects with more mass have more gravity. Gravity is not the same everywhere. Gravity on the moon is much lighter, weaker force than it is on the earth. Anke knew very well that gravity would end her flight and quickly crash her in spectacular fashion.

Gravity was about to annihilate young Anke, smashing her little aircraft mercilessly into the stone tower that loomed ahead.

Romy needed her.

The pilot Anke held out the former-wing at arm's length, in an attempt to create drag.

Drag is friction. A counter-force. It refers to the surfaces where the aircraft interfaces with the medium through which it moves – an oar through water, an aircraft through air. Drag was of little consequence to Anke, since her flight was so short, and mostly sharply downward, so that she would crash very quickly, with or without drag.

A planet – any planet – draws all things to its center.

As to Direction, Anke had none. By leaning, by changing her center point this way and that, she hoped to influence the craft's direction. She grabbed onto passing branches, to no avail.

The fifth dimension of flight – thrust -- Anke ignored altogether.

The ground approached at a frightening rate.

She was now crashing through the heavy branches of the lower trees.

For a long moment, time stood still –

The Citadel snapped into view --

Resolute, she yanked back on the wings' levers with all her might, holding to her course, battered to and fro --

There! There it is --

Stone and green grass went by in a rush below her.

Where is the landing?

Anke lost control altogether. She put her hands up to cover her face --

The war-kite landed on the broad balcony with a clatter and crash, skidding, sending tables and furniture flying –

-- END OF EXCERPT --



REVIEWS

TOM'S RUBY PI STORIES

Breathtaking . . . Emotional . . . Exceptional

-- Wicky Online, Goodreads, Editorial Book Reviews

Brilliant, engrossing . . . 5 out of 5 stars.

Karen Almeida, Assistant Editor, [Literary Titan](#)

Profound, provocative and eye-opening ... strong, beautiful writing and a sense of deeper emotion.

-- Isha Singh, Good Reads

Diane Donovan Review, Midwest Books

The Aviation Girls

Tom Durwood

Empire Studies Press

ISBN: Price:

www.theaviationgirls.com

Young adult readers of women's biographies and history might already know of teacher/author Tom Durwood's excellent coverages of female achievers. *The Aviation Girls* adds different perspectives about women's connections to not just aviation (as many histories cover), but all kinds of flight. These range from kites and considerations of how birds fly to a young woman's development of a risk assessment process for zeppelins.

The adventure opens with a brief history of flight, followed by high drama. While nonfictional bars of facts are included, dramatic, unexpected developments add attraction

and human interest to the history and science embedded in these fictional tales, making *The Aviation Girls* highly recommended for STEM learners.

What do facts about the Arctic, Moon Colony detective work, and murder and luck have to do with aviation history? The marriage between fiction and nonfiction works nicely in these nine YA stories, profiling disparate situations and contrasting insights that are tied together with colorful art by Tasneem Amiruddin (especially commissioned for this collection).

From the mining camps of the Yukon to Moon Colony intrigue, the intersection of science, history, and disparate settings and stories creates a series of powerful, eccentric fables that employ a historical base to build adventures that girls will relish.

Unexpected characters emerge, from an autistic hero to women who prove powerful pivot points in aviation developments. Tom Durwood adjusts timelines to create more tension and logical associations in his stories, but this in no way detracts from its historical and scientific foundations.

Surprising developments, narrated with high drama, contribute much excitement to the narrative. STEM learners will find equally unexpected the inclusion of such subjects as astrobiology, geology, ancient history, and strong female influencers on rocketry developments.

All these elements make for an outstanding series of stories that will draw YA readers with action, adventure, and insights they won't see coming. This is why *The Aviation Girls* is highly recommended for elementary-level libraries strong in STEM productions that stand out from the crowd, presenting attractive plots even reluctant readers will find compelling.

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Stands out from the crowd.

Attractive plots even reluctant readers will find compelling ...

UNEXPECTED CHARACTERS ...

Surprising developments, narrated with high drama, contribute much excitement to the narratives.

A series of powerful, eccentric fables that employ an historical base to build adventures that girls will relish.

-- Diane Donovan, *The Midwest Book Review*, June

Aviation Girls

Review by Laura Richardson, NetGalley Reviewer

This compilation of captivating short stories with science, technology, engineering and mathematics intricately weaved throughout means the reader does not realise they are learning while they enjoy the stories.

If the knowledge and facts throughout these stories were presented in a non-fiction book they would not be as interesting to read, and the reading may feel laborious and boring. The clever way these facts are delivered to the reader by way of a work of fiction is an ingenious way for the reader to learn more and to find the subjects interesting.

Wholeheartedly encouraging girls to remain learning in STEM subjects, the female protagonists are smart, capable and brave. There are also fine examples of male characters not tolerating sexism and calling it out when they see it which is so refreshing to read and sets a great example for young readers.

The female leads were involved in flying aircraft, showing these dreams are within reach to girls- they were inspiring, astute and brave. They were determined to prove themselves capable to do more than just make a home and they showed great strength and leadership.

The beautiful, vivid descriptions create a world you can imagine you are in. The atmosphere created by the author enables you to almost hear the storm in the first story which was my favourite of the compilation. The stormy weather and violent thunderclaps gave a real sense of foreboding and built up the suspense for the rest of the story.

Interestingly, there are snippets of many other languages throughout the stories and the translations are shrewdly given in the character's replies. There is a rich combination of education throughout. I particularly enjoyed seeing how useful maths had been during the war; after swearing I would never need it again after school it was great to see examples of when it can be important.

I appreciated the investment in the characters, nobody was there that didn't need to be—they all carried the story to where it needed to go. The characters were believable and relatable. I enjoyed reading the way some characters spoke i.e. when they stuttered or spoke very quickly, it was easy to understand how they would sound and made me feel more immersed in the story.

Some of these multifaceted stories are told from lesser-known perspectives from real stories from history. This gives the audience a more well-rounded view and compassion for people and perspectives they were previously unaware of. The traditions and customs depicted show a sense of community, belonging and feeling a part of something giving readers a better understanding so they can develop a respect for these traditions.

Books like these with inspirational role models remind girls and women that we are capable of doing anything we set our minds to and can achieve remarkable things.

-- May, 2024

AWARDS

TOM'S HISTORICAL FICTION

Moonbeam Award (Silver)

Celebrating youthful curiosity, discovery and learning through books and reading.

Pre-Teen Fiction – Historical

Gold

Operation Overlord: A Tommy Collins Adventure by Francis Moss (Self-Published)

Silver

The Adventures of Ruby Pi and the Geometry Girls by Tom Durwood (Empire Studies Press)

Bronze

Molly Shipton Secret Actress by Sheri Graubert (Clear Fork Publishing)



Presented by Jenkins Group and Independent Publisher Online, the Moonbeam Children's Book Awards are designed to bring increased recognition to exemplary children's books and their creators, and to support childhood literacy and life-long reading.



2023 Purple Dragonfly Book Award Winners

The Purple Dragonfly Book Awards recognize accomplished, up-and-coming, and younger published authors in the field of children's literature.

Young Adult Fiction

1st Place: *The Stallion and His Peculiar Boy* by M.J. Evans

2nd Place: ***The Adventures of Ruby Pi and the Math Girls* by Tom Durwood, illustrated by Mai Nguyen**



The Incipere Awards, sponsored by Entrada Publishing, recognize exceptional writing across multiple genres with particular focus on works that have been published by small, independent, and academic presses.

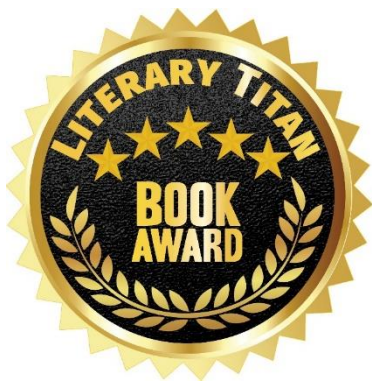
First Place - Anna J Walner - *Saltwater and Driftwood*

Second Place - Tom Durwood - *The Adventures of Ruby Pi and the Math Girls*

Third Place - Frances Schoonmaker - *Sid Johnson and the Phantom Salve Stealer*



Two judges from a select panel of 27 read each book and independently score each entry. Only entries with the highest scores are awarded the coveted Firebird. **The Firebird Book Award judging panel includes a diverse group who represent a cross-section of ages, cultural heritage, races, religions, gender, and experience.**



The Literary Titan Book Awards are awarded to books that have astounded and amazed us with unique writing styles, vivid worlds, complex characters and original ideas. These books deserve extraordinary praise, and we are proud to acknowledge the hard work, dedication and writing talent of these brilliant authors.



SPR BOOK AWARDS FINALIST An unexpected love note to mathematics, this collection of stories is an allegorical plea for young girls to pursue and discover the wonders of numbers. The marketing potential for empowering young girls could make this a sleeper hit.



Congratulations on your work advancing to the FINALIST position of the SHORTS Book Awards for Fiction Series, a division of the 2022 Chanticleer International Book Awards (the CIBAs)!

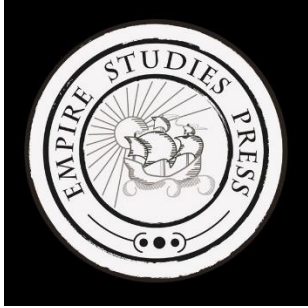




“Ruby Pi and the Geometry Girls” by Tom Durwood receives 5 stars and the “Highly Recommended” award of excellence from The Historical Fiction Company.



Tom’s Teaching Awards (Valley Forge Military College)



STEM-BASED HISTORICAL FICTION

The Adventures of Ruby Pi and the Geometry Girls

A robust entry into the YA field, this first “Ruby Pi” collection of adventures tells of brave heroines fighting tremendous odds, using the one tool that can save them – mathematics.

From ancient India to World War II, from Sputnik-era Moscow to the Benin Kingdoms and the Jim Crow South, clever girls overcome huge odds to save their families.

Few works of fiction truly transport the reader to another place and time, and even fewer give that reader something they can take back home afterwards. ‘Geometry Girls’ achieves both, breaking down barriers in educational literature and making mathematics not only interesting, but a matter of life and death. Tom

has done his homework ... this work will be a treasure of school libraries everywhere in years to come.

Written with a skillful hand and with the kind of attention to detail that will grip an ambitious teenager.

The MLK story ... an excellent story with a crucially important message for young people in modern Western society. The mathematics is simple but elegant.

-- Graham Van Goffrier, third-year PhD candidate (Theoretical neutrino physics)

MLK pendant illustration goes on this page

www.themathgirls.com

STEM-BASED HISTORICAL FICTION

The Adventures of Ruby Pi and the Math Girls

The second volume in this twin work, “The Adventures of Ruby Pi and the Math Girls” delivers five ambitious, not-for-everyone adventures to take young readers deep into mathematics and history. Our critical-thinking heroines are thrust into vivid settings from Mao’s retreat to the cowboy West, from London to Palenque. Can they math their way out?

In this outstanding collection, Tom addresses the chronic problem of our young women dropping out of STEM studies. His stories lend adventure to scientific thinking.

“Sasha with the Red Hair” is thoughtful and surprising, like all Tom’s stories. Exceptional ... a family drama disguised as an adventure.

-- Tanzeela Siddique, Math Teacher



www.themathgirls.com

YA HISTORICAL FICTION

The Illustrated Colonials Trilogy



A new perspective one on of history's most fascinating moments. This richly illustrated trilogy captures some of the global thrill and tumult caused by the American Revolution. The epic tale follows six young rich kids from around the world as they join the cause, finding love and treachery along the path. Unique entry into the robust YA.universe.

A deeply intriguing, ambitious historical fiction series.

-- *Prairie Review*

Clever Durwood's deeply realized characters are sketched with precision and care.

- *Books Coffee Reviews*

www.mycolonials.com

HISTORICAL FICTION

The Illustrated Boatman's Daughter

An Egyptian girl fights intrigue and corruption for the completion of the world's greatest man-made waterway. Illustrated edition of a young-adult novella with 40 original color pieces. An attention-getting story featuring multicultural characters and settings. Classic adventure starring a smart, strong heroine.

“A true pleasure. The richness of the layers of Tom’s novel is compelling.” -- *Fatima Sharrafedine, in her Foreword*

“Uniformly gripping and educational ... pairing action and adventure with social issues.” --*The Midwest Book Review*

www.boatmansdaughter.com

STUNNING ARTWORK ...

I AM A HAPPY READER
AFTER FINISHING "THE
ILLUSTRATED
BOATMAN'S DAUGHTER."

THE BREATHTAKING
ILLUSTRATIONS ADD DEPTH
TO AN ALREADY ENGAGING
STORY ...

WHAT BETTER WAY TO
EDUCATE THE YOUTH
ABOUT HISTORICAL
EVENTS THAT SHAPED
OUR PAST AND CAST
THEIR INFLUENCE ON
OUR PRESENT ...

A TRUE PLEASURE ...THE
RICHNESS OF THE LAYERS OF
TOM'S NOVEL IS COMPELLING.
THE FORTY PIECES OF ART
COMPLETE THE EXPERIENCE ...



A DEEPLY INTRIGUING, AMBITIOUS
HISTORICAL FICTION SERIES.

CHARACTERS SKETCHED
WITH PRECISION AND CARE
A THRILLING SERIES OF
SURPRISES ...

IN A GENRE OFTEN
TEEMING WITH
MALE HEROES, IT IS
REFRESHING TO
READ ABOUT A

FEMALE
CHARACTER
DISPLAYING THE
SORT OF BRAVERY
THAT SALIMA DOES.

DURWOOD

DOES A
FINE JOB OF
CAPTURING

AUTHENTIC
MOMENTS—BOTH

FUNNY AND
NOT—WHILE

TACKLING

DIFFICULT AND
IMPORTANT

IMPERIAL
SUBJECTS

THE ILLUSTRATED

THE BOATMAN'S

DAUGHTER

MADE BY

MADE BY

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HISTORICAL FICTION

The Illustrated 'Ulysses S. Grant in China' and Other Stories



Heroes coming of age... and changing history.

A lushly illustrated collection of stories from turning points in history, the adventures of brave teen protagonists trying desperately to meet the moment.

Poison and pistols, thieves and treachery, bandits and naval battles, opium dens and mysterious Caliphs and love triangles — readers will find it all in this colorful collection.

“All the makings of a wonderful literary property.”

-- Sherri Smith, *Park Road Books*

www.usginchina.com

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXTBOOK

Kid Lit: An Introduction to Literary Theory

There are twin premises to Tom Durwood's "Kid Lit: An Introduction to Literary Criticism." The first is that literary theory is for all of us, and the second is that students can develop marketable lifetime skills when building critical thinking regarding their favorite stories.

Tom is a teacher and it is quickly evident in the clarity of his writing. He poses a simple question – for example, *What makes a good villain?* -- and then draws you into a comparison between Captain Ahab (apocalyptic evil) and Dr. Octopus (simple greed). This then flows into a consideration of evil in all literature. You are then invited to formulate your own theory of good and bad by following his clear illustrations.

This is literary criticism at its least formal and most lively It will definitely challenge you and your students.

-- Todd Whitaker, author of *What Great Teachers Do Differently*

My favorite non-fiction book of the year, by far.

The Literary Apothecary



www.kidlitcrit.com

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXTBOOK

Empire and Literature

Tom Durwood's supplemental-text e-book *Empire and Literature* promises to be an invaluable tool not only for students following his courses, but also for anyone interested to explore the deep relations between literature and empire.

Durwood brilliantly argues that literature and the workings of empire are deeply connected.

An exceptional pedagogical tool, clear and concise exposition.

-- Andrei Ionescu, PhD in Languages/Literature and Psychology, University of Padua

Durwood has indeed given us a thought-provoking introduction to the humanities. Teachers will find much here that is imaginative and innovative. I hope his book will receive the attention it deserves.

-- Dipesh Chakrabarty, The University of Chicago, from his Foreword



www.empirestudies.com

NON-FICTION HISTORY

Teddy's Tantrum

A Case Study in Empire and Literature

This new account revisits a little-known 1906 incident in Teddy Roosevelt's administration and finds an epic "lost" story of intrigue, combat, politics and redemption.

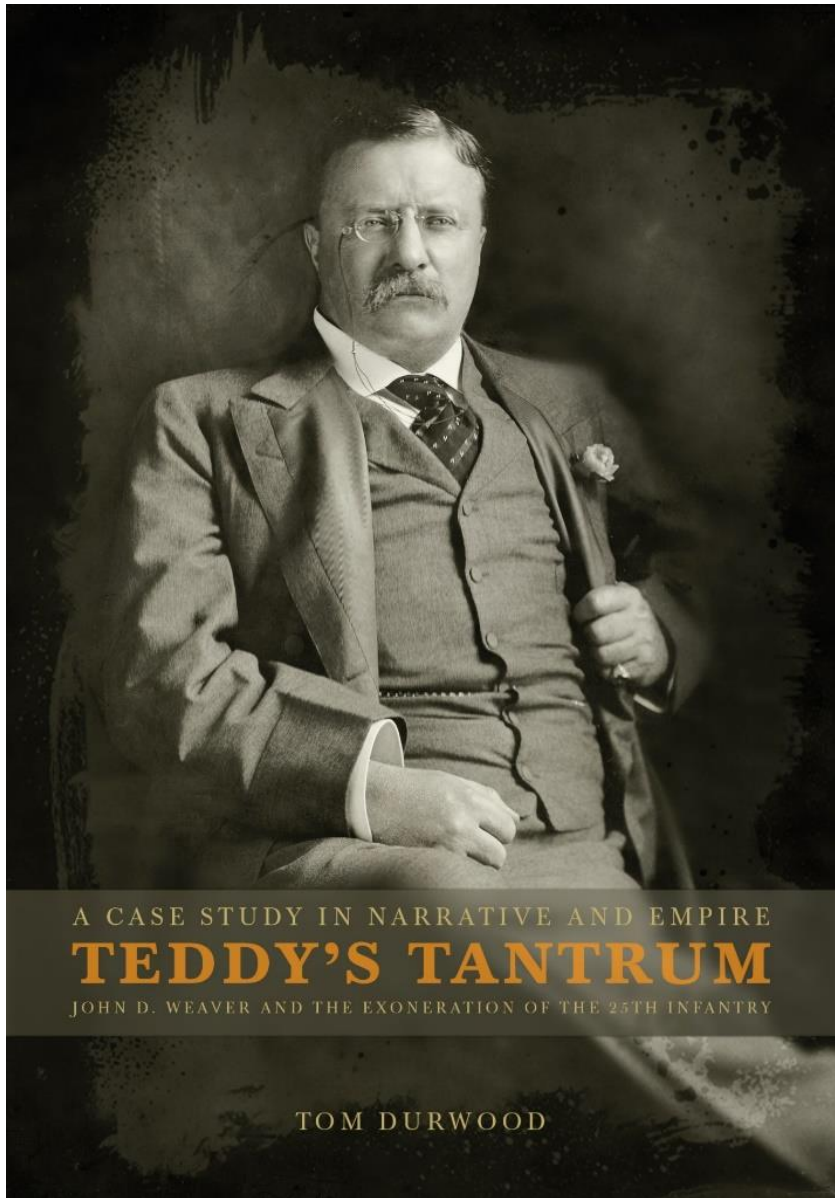
On November 5, 1906, Roosevelt dismissed 167 members of the 25th Infantry in what historian Lewis Gould calls "one of the most glaring miscarriages of justice in American history."

Sixty years later, a journeyman writer named John D. Weaver, the son of a clerk at the 1906 hearings, embarked on a campaign to exonerate the soldiers. His book produced a small measure of justice: in February of 1973, the U.S. Army issued an apology to the men of the 25th Infantry and awarded the sole surviving battalion member (Dorsie Willis) back pay.

This is the first chronicle of the entire Brownsville story, treating Weaver and the troops' exoneration as an equal part of the narrative. Author Tom Durwood scratches the surface of "Teddy's tantrum" and finds a confluence of rich characters and enduring themes. It is a story of military heroism and redemption, loyalty and betrayal, presidential influence and the power of narrative. *Teddy's Tantrum* seeks to set the neglected episode in its historical context.

'Teddy's Tantrum' takes a period of history and shines new light on it ... Tom pulls out the grander themes of the tragedy and triumph. **The true stuff of history.**

-- Tim Pritchard, author "*Ambush Alley*"



www.teddystantrum.com

ONLINE ACADEMIC JOURNAL

Empire Studies Magazine

Topics in the Rise and Fall of Empire



An outgrowth of Tom's Valley Forge course, *Empire and Literature*, this online, open-access *Journal of Empire Studies*, has been posting articles on a wide range of subjects – architecture, war, history, language, horror, art and more -- for over a decade.

**A new opportunity for overcoming access barriers to
knowledge and research ...**

-- Peter Suber, Berkman Fellow, Harvard

www.empirestudies.com

