



Flashback: Siren Song

James A. Hunter

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The year is 1969. Yancy Lazarus—bluesman, gambler, future world-class mage and fix-it man—is just a dumb, unlucky kid serving with the 3rd Battalion 3rd Marines in Vietnam.

With just a few weeks left to go until Yancy gets shipped back to the States, he's just trying to keep his head down and avoid a body bag—no mean feat in Nam. But when his squad is tasked with conducting a routine patrol deep in enemy territory, everything goes to nine kinds of hell, and he quickly sees his chances at survival slipping away.

When the radio operators start to pick up some funky, dirty ol' blues all the way out in the backcountry, it's a nice change of pace. At least until the men in Yancy's squad start losing their minds, turning on each other with murderous intent as the music works its deadly power within them. Convinced it's some kind of new psychological warfare initiative, the squad leader forces the men to push deeper and deeper into the Vietnamese jungle, obsessed with locating the music's source. What they find, however, isn't some new technology, but an ancient spirit awoken by the terrible war. Even worse, the music is changing Yancy too, awakening something buried inside of him.

Only one thing is certain, nothing is ever going to be the same. See how it all began ...

Authors Note: Siren Song is a novella-length story (26,000 words) and is not a full novel. Though it is the first installment in the Yancy Lazarus Flashback series (and can be read as a standalone short story) chronological it is Episode 2.5 of the Yancy Lazarus series.

Flashback: Siren Song Details

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From Reader Review Flashback: Siren Song for online ebook

Magda says

A short story which presents you how Lazarus discovered, or rather awakened his powers in the morbid surroundings of Vietnamese jungle.

Surrounded by dangerous terrain, enemy troops and deadly song that seems to haunt them and even kill them Yancy and the rest of his group are trying to find the source of the deadly music. The strange thing is he can actually see it and follow the bespelling voices. Not without problems, as it seems to hurt like hell and break his mind bit by bit.

I actually liked this short story even more than the first book. It has a good amount of character development, the atmosphere and danger of their situation are well described and we get to know a bit more about Greg.

Well done!

Percy Procrastinator says

I have not read James A Hunter before but this short story was great and makes me want to read more.

This story really pulled me into it. I know just enough about Vietnam, that the backdrop of the story made sense to me. I know just enough about the music of the 20s-40s that all of that made sense to me. More than that, though, I'm intrigued.

A young Yancy Lazarus awakens his magic in the jungles of Vietnam to fight something. I really enjoyed the magic. I liked the antagonist and the history. It was a good, quick read.

Arisillion says

Set amid the backdrop of the Vietnam War, Siren Song treats us to a glimpse of Yancy's younger days. Before the Rakshasa and world-dominating mages, before the malevolent spirits of winter and the politics of the Council, Yancy's only concerns were dogging the VC and not stepping on a landmine. This is the story of how Yancy's life first hit-the-fan.

Hunter's writing continues to impress me. I'm a big fan of the earlier novels: Strange Magic and Cold Hearted, but this prequel is something else. Darker than the later-set stories, this is menacing and sinister; there is a constant tension running throughout the story, and you're thrown into a terror-filled jungle from the first page.

Yancy's Marine buddies are being picked off, one-by-one, as an eerie music slowly drives them to insanity and murder. Their only chance of survival is to find the source of the madness and shut it down for good. With his magical talent still in its infancy, Yancy is only able to watch, as the music enthralls and ensnares his unit.

Superbly written from start to finish, with great characters, interaction, plot and pace. I would thoroughly recommend giving it a go!

? Irena ? says

3.5

Flashback: Siren Song is a prequel to *Yancy Lazarus* series. As an introduction to a whole new series it is really good.

You get a moment when the main character realizes he can see magic, then you have dark humour sprinkled through the story and the whole thing is well plotted. You follow a group of soldiers going through the jungle, following some weird music that causes them to go mad and kill either themselves or others.

I would have loved it more if not for the setting. Vietnam isn't my favourite setting. I enjoyed the second part more because it really turns from a war story into a paranormal one and you see these tidbits of Lazarus's world or, to be more precise, of his future world. I am interested.

I have no idea why this is marked as 1.5 on GR.

Jessie Thomas says

Great origin story

This is a great short read about how Yancy Lazarus first discovered his abilities while serving in Vietnam. *Flashback: Siren Song* builds a fuller understanding of Yancy's character and how he became the mage he is in the rest of the series. If you enjoyed reading the other books in this series, I recommend you picking this up to learn a little more about this rambling, gambling, blues man and how he came to be a mage.

chucklethescot says

A small scouting mission in Vietnam during the war leads a group of marines into danger. There is deadly music in the jungle which is slowly turning the men mad, causing them to kill each other. As their numbers dwindle, Yancy and his friends must find the music source and avoid the possessed Vietnamese soldiers in pursuit.

I decided to read this short novella as an introduction to the series, to see if I liked the character enough to try the first full length novel in the series. The answer to that question is yes! I liked Yancy, a tough soldier who discovers in this book that he has magical abilities which he has no idea how to control. He is the best chance of completing this deadly mission before they all die. I liked the idea of his uncontrolled abilities and I look forward to seeing what he gets up to on other adventures.

This story is full of tension as they creep through the jungle to find the music source. Danger is everywhere-

VC booby traps, deranged enemy soldiers who seem impossible to kill, and the fear of each other and who might turn mad next. It was an exciting plot with good action and a decent pace, but the author also gives a good amount of character development, allowing you to get right into the story and care about their fate. I liked the supernatural element and the war in Vietnam going on in the jungle around them as a background plot. The characters are a good mixed group and it was easy to want them all to survive but you were aware that the chances of them all surviving such odds were remote!

A good introduction to the series and the story ends with a bit of intrigue that makes me want to read on in the series.

D.J. Bodden says

The nice thing about reading a war story written by a Marine veteran is that, like any culture, there are certain things you can only understand from the inside, looking out.

Flashback: Siren Song is an origin story for a modern-day mage, set in the middle of the Vietnam War. It's not overly preoccupied with individual morality, just-war theory, or the Geneva conventions, because the characters are doing the best they can to survive and that kind of reflection is best saved for the after-party. And while Siren Song is a supernatural story, full of ancient temples, berserk cultists, and mythical creatures, it does a great job of conveying the flavor, scent, and dirt under your fingernails feel of war, regardless of the where or when.

One of my favorite parts of the book is when one of the characters pushes to continue the mission, not because it's their duty or to win the war, but because they're going to have to explain what happened to command when they get back. It's that kind of little touch, along with the fear of stepping on landmines, not knowing where the enemy is, and the smell of white phosphorus, that makes this a fun read for me.

Ido Bar-av says

I've read this as part of a "11 first books in an urban fantasy series", and as such - it's a cheat.

If I understand correctly it's a prequel.

A well written, exciting prequel, but a prequel.

It did its job - I'll try reading the "Real" books in the series, but I still felt a bit cheated so no 5 stars for you.

As for the book itself:

The regular Vietnam clichés provide the right setting for this book, when we're starting following a squad of people on the third (or second?) night of club/jazz-music playing in the middle of the forest.

On the first night or two, the music drove some of the people crazy, causing them to turn on each other.

Now the squad tries to get to the source of the music, hopefully to find there some radios to call for evac - or a carpet bombing.

There is enough action to keep the creepy setting interesting, and enough creepiness to keep the story interesting.

The only complaint I had about the actual story is that it is short, and that the conflict resolution (I can't say

more without spoilers) hints to a lot of background that is not expended enough in the book.

I enjoyed it and will read the actual series - though, assuming it'll be similar to this book, I assume I'd recommend people to start there.

Jennifer says

Flashback: Siren Song

This is a prequel to the first Yancy Lazarus book, *Strange Magic*. We get the background of Yancy and Greg's time in Vietnam and when and where Yancy comes into his power. As a vet myself I like how Yancy has a Marine background. Its well written from a man who has also served.

Yancy has just a month left in country before he can return to his family when a strange song floating through the jungle messes all that up for him.

eden Hudson says

Note: I started reading *Siren Song* when I was about halfway through *Cold Hearted* (Yancy Lazarus Book 2), but even if you'd never read any of the previous installments, you would be hard-pressed not to fall in love with Yancy based on this prequel alone. It holds its own in every way possible.

In *Strange Magic*, the first book of the series, Yancy Lazarus immediately became one of my favorite characters. A smart-mouthed, music-loving, magic-slinging, reluctant hero with a broken past, suped-up el Camino, and mystically modded-out sidearm? Shut up and take my money already! So when I heard there was going to be a prequel set during Yancy's time in Vietnam, I was all over that. *Siren Song* does not disappoint. In this Flashback, we get to go along for the ride as the Vis begins manifesting itself in Yancy, and his formerly normal life—you know, the one where he's just trying not to get killed by Charlie so he can go back home and live happily ever after with his wife and sons?—takes a drastic and strange turn for the worse.

All of the crazy imaginative world-building fans have come to expect from Hunter is woven into the conflict in Vietnam, complete with terrifying new baddies—who also just so happen to be a highly trained squad of Vietnamese Special Forces—and a primally supercharged boss that Yancy has to beat or die trying. Hunter brings the dense nighttime jungle to life around Yancy's squad, paints the mysterious music in a gorgeous and creepy light, and amps up the suspense until you just can't take it anymore. The action had me buzzing with adrenaline and turning pages as fast as I could. This isn't the kind of book you read a little of and then put down for later. When you start reading this, you'd better clear your schedule—and God have mercy on you if you think you're just going to read a couple pages before bed.

The absolute worst and best thing about *Siren Song* is the characters. We get to see Greg and Yancy's friendship as young men and their dedication to making sure they both make it home. Tons of times while reading this, I found myself thinking, "That's so Greg." It felt like I was visiting old friends. We also get to meet Yancy's squad, then watch helplessly as the music picks them apart from the inside out.

That's where the worst part comes in: You feel it every time Yancy loses a squad member. That last loss...man... I probably could've recovered faster from being literally stabbed in the heart. That scene is

something I'll never get out of my head. Just one more scar on Yancy's soul...and mine now, too. I guess that's a mark of a great character: They rip your heart out when they leave, but you're still thankful you were there as a witness to their final moments; it feels like they deserved to have someone know they existed, even if only on the page.

And in case you're worried this is an all shoot-em-up war story with no artistic value, let me assure you that the truth is quite the opposite. Hunter's writing is as low-down, gritty, and insidious as the blues Yancy Lazarus loves. Just like the mysterious music drifting through the jungle toward Yancy's squad, Siren Song will get under your skin and sink its hooks into your mind. It's some of Hunter's best work yet.

Fangs for the Fantasy says

This is a flashback for Yancey, back to the days when he first learned he was a wizard: in the rainforests of Vietnam, surrounded by enemies, fighting for their lives and facing the sirens. And an ancient force far more deadly than even the modern battlefield.

For a time in this book I was vaguely frustrated

Not because I wasn't enjoying this book – because I was. Not because it wasn't well written – because it certainly was. It has a great sense of grimness, that classic Vietnam war-film feel all grim and gritty and normal people completely out of their element, fighting a nasty, terrible war far beyond their experience and what their training prepared them for.

Yancey's extremely well portrayed, I can feel him, his anger, his sadness, his loss, his struggle. I can feel the camaraderie of his team and why that makes what the Siren's music is doing to them extra painful and soul destroying.

The quality of the work, the writing, the style and the whole theme and feeling of the story is excellent

But I've read it before. I mean, one of the major elements of one of the books is Yancey confronting the sirens, arguing over what happened, demanding revenge and dramatically announcing exactly why he was so angry with the sirens

So I knew this story, especially since the parts that were added were classic Nam movie fiction that while it was all very thematic and atmospheric it wasn't really adding anything. It was a fun read but then I asked why I was reading it, what it added to Yancey's story

Especially since this was Yancey's opening to magic but contained very little magic or wonder. And that makes sense, they're in a war zone under constant threat. There's a level of "just roll with it and keep moving" that simply has to apply here, no arguing that. But it's another storyline that this book could have explored that would have added so much to Yancey's past that wasn't. I understand why it wasn't, it wasn't the time – but why this book

Then we got the answer with a big epic story about a Leshy and his plot to cause untold suffering and the noble and brave Gregg and Rat and Yancey willing to sacrifice everything to stop him because ultimately

they may not be skilled or magical or powerful and they definitely have not the slightest clue what is really going on – but they know it's wrong, they know people will die and they know they have to stop that

And it's big and noble and epic. And, on the face of it, a good story – I want to say that again and again about this – it's a good story, it's well written, it's atmospheric with some great characters being portrayed. And it's a Vietnam war story without demonising the Vietnamese.

Read More

Lloyd Mackenzie says

YANCY Lazarus is serving for the marines in Vietnam when his squad is plagued by a strange music that sends them into sporadic bouts of madness, causing them to turn on the comrades and friends.

He ventures deep into the heart of the dangerous jungle, following the trail of the music to its source to hopefully put an end to the madness.

This book is just the beginning for Yancy (I prefer Lazarus) as the strange music unlocks his latent magic abilities.

It was an above-average read. The writing style is quite casual and there are quite lengthy similes (and unnecessary) throughout the book.

What did intrigue me was his in-depth writing in combat situations and it was a real page-turner once Lazarus unlocked his powers!

Tracy Reitmann says

First off what a frigging great original story!! And I've read 'em all, believe me. Loved this in that it helped piece a few things together about Yancy's past/foundation (and the start of his powers) and his relationship with his old-time friend (and also a little of why he's now in the line he's in). I'm not into spoilers or long-winded reviews that dance around as many details as possible (I call them sideways spoilers). It's a great book, great read, and if you're getting into Yancy then you'll definitely like this.

Nervous Nellie Justice says

for full review: <http://www.onebooktwo.com>

Author James A. Hunter does it again, except this time with a novella that lends some insight about what kind of man developed from a boy sent to Vietnam on his senior trip. We see his friend Greg and Yancy's unit be overcome with (you guessed it) Siren Song. Wait! There's more! This Siren Song has a different

origin than what you would expect. It's a revengeful "Tree King of Old", a Leshy of the Fae Court that likes – of course – blood.

This is a most excellent adventure - it's worth your time!

Montzalee Wittmann says

An awesome fantasy military short novel

Flashback: Siren Song is a fast paced, action packed, magic filled, military fantasy. The plot is good, the characters are well developed and intriguing. Loved the magic or power our hero develops. Great job, can't wait to see the next book.
