



Agent of Vega & Other Stories

James H. Schmitz , Mercedes Lackey (Preface)

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Volume 5 of the collected works of James H. Schmitz.

Previously appearing in separate publications, these stories of the Galaxy are now in a unitary publication. After the Galactic Empire crumbled, the Vegan Confederacy was too weak to survive, yet it prospered because of its secret weapon--telepathy. Not all of the Agents of Vega were human, but all were the most powerful telepaths in the Galaxy.

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From Reader Review Agent of Vega & Other Stories for online ebook

refgoddess says

another re-read. see witches of karres.

Janelle says

As a Schmitz fan, this did not disappoint. The first half of the anthology was the Agent of Vega stories which were highly enjoyable. My only complaint was that some of the stories in the second portion of the book did not seem very fleshed out, the endings were hurriedly resolved. All in all a great read.

Kevin says

These are some of James H. Schmitz's early stories, written from the late 1940s through the early 1960s. Several of the stories are loosely interconnected -- the "Vega" stories -- others are "stand-alones."

Schmitz had an especially strong imagination. Several of these stories involve concepts that would fit perfectly in stories written today, fifty years late. He was also unusual -- especially for his day -- in writing about strong female lead characters, even strong elderly female characters.

His biggest weakness is his tendency to go off on tangents during his stories. Imaginitive, well-told tangents, but "left turns" nonetheless. This can make it a little difficult to follow along. I find it much easier to follow the stories, and appreciate them, today than I did when I first encountered many of these stories fifty years ago.

His later stories, especially the Telzey Amberdon and Trigger Argee stories of the late 1960s and the 1970s, tend to hold together better.

Still, I really enjoyed these stories.

Jon says

Good 1950's type space-opera fiction, very well written. James had a peculiar bent (for the times) of writing his females as sometimes the heroic protagonists, and a fine job he did of it, especially with some of the female agents in these Agent of Vega stories.

The "other stories" weren't quite as good - but palatable.

Joy says

AGENT OF VEGA has been on my shelves for decades, probably. I got it because I liked Schmitz's *Telzey Amberdon* books. The 4 novellas in this book also include the element of telepathy. Their heroes are undercover agents of the send-one-agent-to-deal-with-one-war type. Some of them were hard to sort out in my mind because Schmitz was keeping his secrets.

The catchiest opening comes from "The Truth About Cushgar".

There was, for a time, a good deal of puzzled and uneasy speculation about the methods that had been employed by the Confederacy of Vega in the taming of Cushgar. The disturbing part of it was that nothing really seemed to have happened!

First, the rumor was simply that the Confederacy was preparing to move into Cushgar - and then, suddenly, that it had moved in. This aroused surprised but pleased interest in a number of areas bordering the confederacy. The Thousand Nations and a half-dozen similar organizations quietly flexed their military muscles, and prepared to land in the middle of the Confederacy's back as soon as it became fairly engaged in its ambitious new project. For Cushgar and the Confederacy seemed about as evenly matched as any two powers could possibly be.

But there was no engagement, then. There was not even anything resembling an official surrender. Star system by system, mighty Cushgar was accepting the governors installed by the Confederacy. Meekly, it coughed up what was left of the captive peoples and the loot it had pirated for the past seven centuries. And, very simply and quietly then, under the eyes of a dumfounded galaxy, it settled down and began mending its manners.

Cheryl Medley says

Still good reading

Okay, somewhere in my collection of books I have a paperback version of this book which I bought when it was first pulished. I was very pleased to find it now in ebook form. There is nothing dated about the stories in this anthology which is more than I can say for myself. I highly recommend it.

Mayank Agarwal says

Mix bag of short stories, all have brilliant plots and innovative sci-fi premises just that James H. Schmitz tends to deviate from the main story line too often, also his fight scenes are always confusing and a bit too intelligent. The writing style varies from stories to stories as they were compilations of his storytelling from across his career, the latter ones are more polished.

The collection has one of my all-time favorite read. Had been searching for it for quite some time as I had read it last 10 years back and it being an old short story was difficult to find, as i didn't remember the author or the books name.

The Confederacy of Vega (2/5)

Took me time to get used to the writing style of the 50's, the plot and the psi based fights seemed a bit confusing to me spoiling the reading experience, the ending was intriguing with the by plots being played over by the coordinator.

The Illusionists (2/5)

The beginning story of the bait and space fights are very confusing, luckily it's not the main plot. Found the idea of the main plot about the pyramid scheme to be brilliant, just it could be better explained. Also I felt too much care was taken to handle the conclusion, with the power gap and gadgets the agents have, it should have been over in minutes.

The Second Night of Summer (2/5)

First of the stories were the writing is easy to understand. While I liked the protagonist being a granny having a rhino as a sidekick, the villains and how they were handled was hardly explained leading to a disappointing ending.

The Truth about Cushgar (5/5)

First half of the story builds up the characteristics of our heroin but it's the second half of the book which makes it special for me. This space opera is one of the best I have read, the empathy one feel's for the protagonist and the way her journey concludes is a pure joy.

The Custodians (3/5)

Nice little space adventure, well written and paced, got a lot of one on one gun swinging action, but it is conclusion with the innovation and future outlook of mankind which is the cool part.

Gone Fishing (4/5)

Really enjoyed the plot and the conclusion, the pace and the writing are great making it a page turner. Got lots of interesting intrigue and mystery going about it, kept out guessing myself on who was playing whom and for what.

The Beacon to Elsewhere (3/5)

I really liked the way the story was panning out about time travel, good writing style, great pace with an intriguing plot but it was all spoiled with the rushed conclusion. The whole lab scene was too confusing for me to even imagine what was going on. Still the ending thoughts on what really happened seemed interesting.

The End of the Line (4/5)

Gem of a story, interesting concepts and lots of stuff happening for such a short story, it's about a group of highly trained explorers/soldiers wanting to break away from their masters.

Watch the Sky (4/5)

Really enjoyed the conclusion on how a hoax plays out by a small colony in middle of no ware to get more attention from Earth.

Greenface (2/5)

More a horror story then sci-fi, some of the actions was intense but otherwise the story is without a plot.

Rogue Psi (2/5)

Kind of similar to The Illusionists having the same brilliant plot premises but the ending the Psi based fights seemed confusing to me.

Dirk says

An uneven collection, centering on telepathy stories of which the first four -the most pleasant to read- were previously published as 'Agent of Vega'.

Jim says

Previously appearing in separate publications, these stories of the Galaxy are now in a unitary publication. After the Galactic Empire crumbled, the Vegan Confederacy was too weak to survive, yet it prospered because of its secret weapon--telepathy. Not all of the Agents of Vega were human, but all were the most powerful telepaths in the Galaxy.

Jo (Mixed Book Bag) says

These are older Science Fiction stories featuring Zone Agent Iliff. They are fun to read and highlight the changes in Science Fiction written in 1960 and Science Fiction written today. I found the book at a garage sale. An interesting side fact, I paid .10. In 1960 it sold for .35.

Manuel Alfonseca says

Fifth volume of the complete works by James H. Schmitz published by Baen Books, edited by Eric Flint. It comprises the four stories in the Agent of Vega series (about the first Schmitz wrote) plus seven various stories. The level is quite good, comparable to that of other volumes in the series.

Stephen Theaker says

The first part of this book concerns the activities of special operatives of the Confederacy of Vega, a small part of the galaxy which consistently and mysteriously punches above its weight in galactic affairs.

I've read the four Agent of Vega stories over quite a long period, and I don't remember the first two all that well. I remember enjoying them, though they weren't Schmitz's best (they are from very early in his career).

The next two I'll never forget: "The Second Night of Summer", in which Grandma is the first line of defence against an interstellar invasion, and "The Truth About Cushgar", one of the most joyous stories I've ever read, about the mysterious fall of the Cushgar Empire.

Chris Gager says

Finally got this after ordering it from the local library after reading the author's wiki page. I read "The Demon Breed" many years ago when it was titled "The Tuvela" and serialized in Analog/Astounding magazine. Then again a few years ago in book form. Still excellent sci-fi. Apparently this author is experiencing a bit of a reprint re-issue revival these days. Well deserved.

Just got started with the first story(the title one) and it's pretty good so far. No surprise ...

Finished the title story last night - most excellent and WAY ahead of its times. I'll bet that Cordwainer Smith read this stuff. This long story was published in 1949. Mr. Schmitz deserves a wider readership. The author shares the slight "problem" of the confusing narrative with CS. Not a big deal but noticeable. The foe in this story was more formidable than in "The Demon Breed" but the supposed hero was rescued by an even more formidable young woman(ish being). As I suspected he would be, having read "The Demon Breed." One Goodreads reviewer said that he started to become a feminist from reading this author's works. I can identify.

The second story, "The Illusionists," continues the exploits of Pagadan, that oh-so-attractive-but-not-really-human Zone Agent and her A-team. A bit easier to comprehend than the previous tale but still a bit confusing in its descriptions of all that psi-stuff and how it weaves into the story. Again - seems WAY ahead of its time(1951) in its level of sophistication and style.

"The Second Night of Summer" - another amusing tale, this time about an older lady(a Zone Agent of course) who saves the day(or a planet at least). Mr. S. just lets his imagination roll on and on. I like the Bradbury-esque title too. This one's from 1950.

"The Truth about Cushgar"(1950) is the last of the included Vega stories and reinforces the notion that the author was ahead of his time. However ... it must be pointed out that these stories have been edited by Eric Flint and Guy Gordon, who "moderned" things up by taking out all the smoking and other outdated cultural and technical benchmarks. Amazing how many sci-fi authors assumed there'd continue to be lots of smoking in the future! Pagadan and Wannattel make cameo appearances, but this is the story of Zamm, elfin cutie and super-duper Agent/Killer of the Periphery. The ending is heart-warming, despite all the killing that has taken place in the story.

The Custodians"(1968) - A more routine drama and set much closer to home(Earth) and much closer to "our" time. I.E. not thousands of years into the future when humans have spread over much of the galaxy. Not as much humor either.

Gone Fishing(1961) - This one seems like a more typical tale for it's times. But ... it does have an ending both funny and philosophical. No actual violence in this one although it does exist in the minds of several characters as a solution to certain problems. Everybody seems to chill out by the end - and that's the point of the story - I think. It is kind of enigmatic.

- a bit of Star Trek comes in: the matter transmitter = the transporter

The Beacon to Elsewhere(1963) - The dialogue is a bit Hollywooden here. Probably not a strength of the author and that goes for MANY sci-fi writers. Cliche' - Cardboard city! The rest of it is fine if a bit less

"original" that the Vega tales. The setting, as in the previous tale, is closer to our time and also deals with the problem of how to get way far away from Earth. Plus time travel(or so we think - there's a bit of bait-and-switch at the end) ...

- a bit of faulty logic pops up - oh well ...

- The "monster" aliens remind of the Tarms in "The Tuvela"

It's a race to finish with this book as I have to return it in a few days. Three stories to go!

The End of the Line(1951) - A good one that used some of the author's serious techno-imagination chops and is another tale ahead of its times. Interesting to be reading this in the midst of reading "Oryx and Crake" as both concern genetic manipulation. This one is suggestive of Dune and the genetic manipulations of the Sisterhood(The Bene Dessert). The ending is wry and romantic. Not a lot of romance in sci-fi ...

Watch the Sky(1962) - Another story that illustrates the author's top-notch idea-making and shaky dialogue building. Typical for sci-fi grade A ideas expressed in only adequate prose. This story is also set fairly close to "home" time-wise - 2345 A.D. The editors forgot to delete the smoking from this one.

Greenface(1943) - Straight out of "Creature Features"! A well-crafted and implacable monster done in by resourceful humans in a close call. The dialogue is pretty corny and sort-of typical for the genre and author.

Rogue Psi(1962) - A bit unusual as the denouement is mostly described by one person to a couple of others rather than by the author as it unfolds. Still, pretty ingenious and consistent with the author's interest in telepathy and other mental powers. Another near-future story with the smoking unedited out.

- Because the second-half stories varied a bit in quality and were generally not as good as the Vega stories I'll lower my rating to 3.5*, which rounds down to 3*.

Sean Brennan says

A really great collection of stories from one of the unsung masters of Pulp S.F. covering a time period from the early 1940's to 1960's, the book is split into two parts, firstly the Vega stories - a galactic Civilization that involves itself(unknowingly) by the use of it's agents into the affairs of it's constituent planets, for the good of the Whole, the stories are very reminiscent of The Culture books by Iain M Banks, and one wonders if Schmitz was the original template.

The Second half of the books covers more varied aspects of SF but all the stories are intelligent, well written and fun, showing that SF does not have to be deadly serious at all times. All in all, a highly enjoyable read and I now look forward to his other Vega Books.

David says

A surprisingly good read! I enjoyed all the short stories, especially the connected ones related to the Agents of Vega. The stories are all of a good length and most ended in a satisfactory manner. I suppose the one I

didn't like would be "The End of the Line"; the twists in this one were just too sudden and neither well-explained nor well-justified. "Greenface" was pretty cliché by today's standards of monster movies but still enjoyable nonetheless. Given how long ago this was written, some of the sentences read oddly; I had to reread some of them. But on the whole, they were very well-written prose.
