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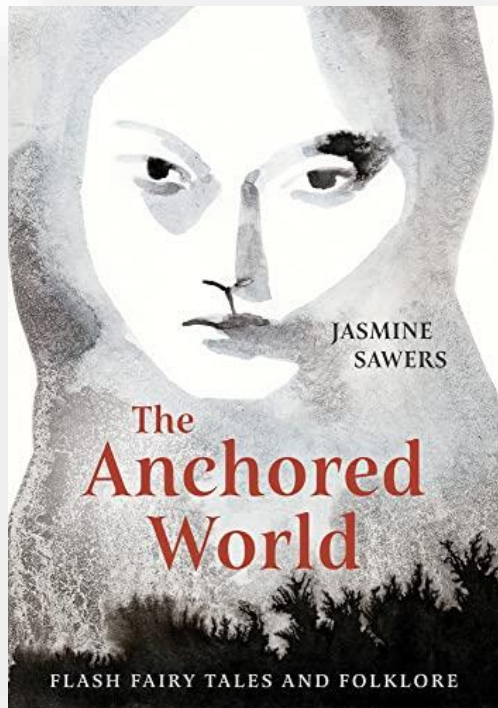
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Jasmine Sawers is the author of *The Anchored World* (Rose Metal Press, 2022). Their work appears in such journals as *Ploughshares*, *NANO Fiction*, [PANK], *SmokeLong Quarterly*, *Sycamore Review*, and many more. Sawers won the *Ploughshares* Emerging Writers Contest and the NANO Prize. They received a Kundiman fellowship in fiction in 2019. Sawers serves as Prose Editor for Osedax Press and serves as Associate Editor for *Fairy Tale Review*.

I sat down with Jasmine (via Zoom) to discuss their new book *The Anchored World*. The room before me was bright with an expansive bookcase. Their dog, Caliban, a tan wiry mix, burst through

the doorway a time or two. We talked about the book and what it means to tell stories now, during a pandemic.

Congratulations on your new book *The Anchored World* (Rose Metal Press). A day after this interview you will be teaching a Kundiman workshop on Reconceptualizing Fairy Tales, Folklore, & Myth as BIPOC. In your course description you describe this generative fiction workshop as a place to “explore how writers of color have rewritten the Western fairy tale to heal cultural wounds...how they’ve forged their own new myths.” Could you talk a little bit about how you see the hybridity of modern fiction with folk tales and myth speaking to your own personal story as a Queer Thai-American storyteller?

In many ways, it is my love letter to the fairy tales I grew up reading, but it’s also an exorcism of their shortcomings. Just because we love something doesn’t mean we don’t see its flaws. The old tales show us bravery and cunning, but so too do they show us the brutality of the bigotry baked into our culture: racism, sexism, ableism, anti-Semitism, etc. In this book, I hope to slip into the cracks of the stories we know and plant the kinds of seeds that destroy foundations.

The Anchored World took me around eight years to write, and in that time I evolved so much as a writer that my intentions in focusing on the fairy tale matured and allowed the final product to become, one hopes, a more profound and meaningful project than it started as. I broadened the scope of my work from retellings and disruptions of Western European stories to giving Thai and Southeast Asian stories the same treatment, and then beyond reinvention into writing original work in the folkloric tradition that reflected the kaleidoscope of my own identity: hybrid, liminal, invisible, mixed, Thai, queer, nonbinary, trans, chronically ill.

I had once been a child who desperately needed not only the stories, but to see myself in them. Not getting that became the wound I learned to write around before realizing I had to write into it for any hope of peace. *The Anchored World*—indeed, all my work in the fairy tale style—has been my answer to that call.

This issue of *Critical Humanities* is timely themed around the pandemic. You have been impressively prolific during this time with multiple publications and a new book release, has the pandemic in any way informed your work or your sense as a storyteller and myth maker?

I think the fact that my resurgence as a writer came during the pandemic is more of a coincidence than a matter of discipline or anything like that. The truth was I had stopped writing, stopped submitting, stopped publishing, for several years following my graduation from Indiana University's MFA in 2013. I had agents in my

inbox telling me they loved this or that short story they'd come across—so where was my novel? No, I could not interest them in a collection of short stories, and as for all these flash fairy tales, well. That was laughable. Never mind that my short work was what had drawn their interest in the first place: I owed the world a novel. I became paralyzed by what I thought I was meant to do, and in my paralysis I became self-punishing. If I wasn't writing a novel, then I wasn't allowed to write anything. So, I wrote nothing.

In 2019, after some prodding to apply by friend and poet Kien Lam, I was awarded a Kundiman Fellowship in fiction and attended their retreat. Kundiman was an utterly transformative experience for me for a variety of reasons, but perhaps the most important was that the community I found embracing me there convinced me that my work mattered, that it had an audience, that somewhere out there was a demand for exactly what I was doing. Going to Kundiman quite literally saved my career. I began writing again while I was there and the stories began pouring out of me as if they'd just been waiting for an excuse.

Six months later we were in a pandemic. I checked in on Rose Metal Press, a press I'd long ago convinced myself would be the only possible market for my fairy tale flash, and realized that their submission window, open for only one month every other year, would be opening in June, and I'd better not miss it.

So I got to work.

You have a presence on Lit Twitter. How do you see this space serving you and your work during the pandemic?

There can be so much noise on social media that it seems daunting to wade in and attempt to sift through the chaff. I wanted to avoid it, but a dear mentor told me in no uncertain terms that I needed Twitter for my writing career. When Rose Metal Press picked up *The Anchored World*, I knew I had to get myself together and build a more public platform than I'd had up til that point.

I've been pleasantly surprised at how positive Twitter's impact on me and my career has been. In a relatively short amount of time, I've met so many people and made real friends, found out about journals I'd never heard of but now love, been pointed toward opportunities I never would have known about without Twitter, learned a lot of cool things, and on and on. Especially during the pandemic, when our contact with other people has been so steeply curbed, the connections I've been able to make via Twitter have been really nourishing. Writing is such a solitary pursuit for most of us that it's easy to sink into your own head and your own space and forget that art, and the part of your brain that makes art, flourishes best in community, in conversation, and that's exactly what Lit Twit has given me.

Of course there are scuffles and drama and people acting in bad faith, but you need to remember that it's your choice whether or not to insert yourself into those situations. I always want to ask people if they are

aware they have the option of simply not saying anything.

What are you looking forward to for the future?

This year has been wild and we're only in June. I keep waiting to come up for air and while it hasn't happened yet, I have plans to start on a novel. Since shelving my previous longform project a couple years ago, I have been casting about for an idea and a viable one finally coalesced for me while I was at AWP Philadelphia. What's great about an event like AWP is how revelatory it can be in terms of illuminating exactly what books, what fiction, what writing can accomplish, and in how many different forms. There are so many ways to tell a story, and so many more kinds of stories than what makes the bestseller lists or gets sold at auction to the big five. Despite what we're often led to believe, there is always room in the lit world for peculiar perspectives and unique voices.