

Nowhere Near Enough Words



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Our Friend Jay Lake - 1964 to 2014

The Drink Tank 373

Jay Lake – Gone, 5 days short of 50...

So, there I was, at Westercon, my first visit to Seattle fandom in ages. I was a newbe, having just come back to fandom maybe a year before. I was wearing one of my all-time favorite loud shirts – black with two strips of Hawaiian print running down the front, making it the perfect outer shirt for Goth Hawaiian Night down at the Elks' Lodge.

My hair was particularly long, and I had a skinny beard at the time. There I was, enjoying myself all over the con, and I walked into the Dealers room to get a few books. As I was standing at Dave Clarke's table, someone came over, and started talking to me about Polyphony and the story he was thinking of submitting, and various other things that I only half-understood. I looked at the dude and I knew exactly what to say.

“Someone told you to find a big long-haired guy in a Hawaiian shirt, right?”

“Yeah.”

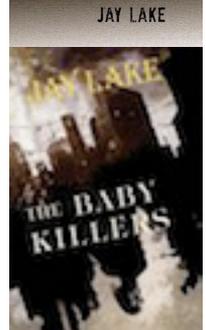
“You're lookin' for Jay Lake. I saw him in a panel about twenty minutes ago.”

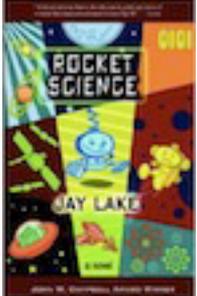
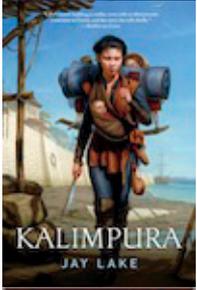
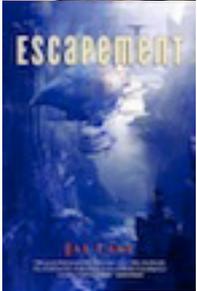
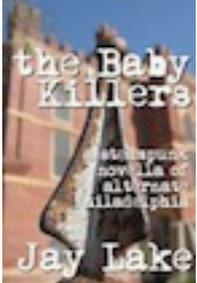
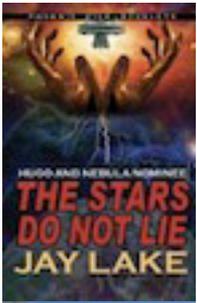
This was neither the first nor the last time we were confused for one another.

Jay's gone now.

Typing those words hurts so much more than I had expected them to.

I knew it was coming. I totally knew, and yet Linda's Facebook message still took me into shock and tears and started a crying jag that went on and on, on-and-off, all day. Vanessa, bless her, was right there, making sure I didn't go all sideways, but still, I should have been ready. We all should have been ready. We know that you don't live long with Stage Four Colon Cancer. We know you don't go into Hospice Care without the End being





closer than it might otherwise appear. I knew he was going to fucking die, that cancer was going to fucking win AGAIN.

And yet, it hit me like it was all brand new. Like it was that first LJ post that sent that look across your face.

I'm devastated. I really am. Jay was a light. An absolute light. He was a good guy, a huge talent, a man who deserved more time here. He and I got along famously, and I'm not 100% sure when we met. It must have been in 2000, or maybe early 2001. I can't remember our first conversation, but I am fairly certain it went dark fast. Jay had the darkest sense of humor I've ever encountered, Nick Mamatas included. We would sit around and tell twisted and evil jokes for hours. We would laugh and laugh and laugh. When I was Baycon's Toastmaster, Jay was the writer GoH, and Frank Wu the Artist GoH and Kevin Roche and Andy Trembley the Fan GoHs. I really can't think of a line-up that would feature more of my favorite people, though I really only met Kevin and Andy that weekend.

And it was a great time.

Over the years, Jay's been great to The Drink Tank. He sent a few articles, and a couple of great stories. I think He was the first real Writer Writer to send stuff my way. I was always glad to have piece from him, and I'm always going to have some great memories of him.

And his stories, too.

The books and stories he wrote ran the gamut from hallucinatory fever dreams to powerfully evocative tales of extraordinary characters walking the line between safety and the Abyss. I might not have taken to all of his books, and there were several that I started into with one set of feelings, and came out the other side with a totally different take. Books like Mainspring and Trial of Flowers or Green were all ones that had some amazing stuff, but that I also thought were flawed.

Flawed, but highly enjoyable. I loved Rocket Science, which I believe was best of the last decade. I am still unhappy about him not winning the Hugo last year for his exceptionally beautiful story *The Stars Do Not Lie*. He was an amazing writer, and long down the line, when I'm one of the Old Guard, I know I'll be talking about the writers of that day either measuring up to, or completely failing, to touch the Jay Lake Standard.

So, coming up will be a big Jay Lake issue. I'm going to have to contact his family (God, Bronwyn is an amazing young woman) to see if I can re-print the stuff he'd sent me, but I also hope folks will send in memories. There are a lot of Jay Lake stories out there. LOTS of them. I wanna put some of them to pixels. Jay Lake, like so many others, was a man worth telling stories about. No, he was the central character in so many stories, there's no way you could contain them all, but you can trap a few without trying too hard.

I'm gonna miss him. I wish I could have spent more time with Jay. I wish I could have read more of his stuff. That's the hardest part, I guess. I wish we would have gotten 20 more novels, hundreds more stories, thousands of more blog posts. I wish he'd won that final battle, that long fight against an enemy that's bested so many people I love. I wish, I wish, I wish...

I wish I'd be seeing him at Westercon again this year, where so many people who love him will be gathered; so many Hawaiian shirts mingling.

I think he might'a liked that.

~ Chris, 6/1/2014

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