



Our current interview is with Nayad Monroe, author of "An Assessment of the Incident at Camp Righteous" from [Space Grunts: Full-Throttle Space Tales #3](#). Nayad is a writer who draws, or an artist who writes, depending on the day of the week and the intersection of factors that require complicated charts and calculations to track. She's also a slush reader for [Clarkesworld Magazine](#). Robert A. Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* was her first military science fiction influence, but it wasn't the last. Nayad is a science fiction and fantasy addict, and she doesn't care who knows it. She lives in southern Wisconsin with her husband, three sons, and three cats, and she blogs at <http://nayad.livejournal.com>.

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### **How did you get involved with *Space Grunts*?**

My involvement with *Space Grunts* was a triumph of accidental networking. I went to [NorwesCon](#) in 2008, and sat in the audience at a panel where David Boop was one of the panelists. I don't remember the panel's topic, but I was impressed enough with the title of David's book ([She Murdered Me with Science](#)) that I wanted to compliment him on it. We didn't talk for long, but we exchanged cards, and David put me on the list of authors he wanted to invite to submit stories for *Space Grunts*. When Dayton Ward contacted me about it, I gladly came up with a story for the anthology.

**What angle did you explore on the theme of soldiers in space in your story "An Assessment of the Incident at Camp Righteous"?**

I explored the intersection of military and religious concerns. Religions have changed throughout history, so I imagined what changes might develop in religious belief in the future, and I thought that advances in science and problems in our environment might lead to people finding religious justification for leaving Earth and conquering as much territory as possible in space. The story is set further along in the timeline, after a lot of scientific progress. It shows some of the developments that come from pursuing an expansionist strategy, and from having beliefs that make it acceptable to conquer planets that are occupied by other intelligent species.

**Where do you get your story ideas?**

It depends on the story. For "An Assessment of the Incident at Camp Righteous" I had some guidance, since it had to be a military SF story, so I thought about what would be an interesting military scenario for me. I knew that I would like to have aliens involved in the story. I also wanted to make the situation as tense as possible, so I thought about what kind of living conditions would make me completely miserable, and those ideas went into my grim prison camp setting, on a rainy planet where the air smells terrible. A lot of storytelling is about conflict, so I look for areas where I can make my characters uncomfortable and at odds with each other. I like to include competing agendas and emotional instability whenever possible. All of those things went into this story.

When I'm developing a story without any guidance, it can be harder to make choices since I could do anything at all, so I have some very geeky methods of choosing parameters for my plots and characters. Some involve lists and dice-rolling, and for some I choose words from randomly-selected pages in whichever book I have nearby. Either way, the next step is brainstorming to see what I can make of the ideas that come up. I won't stick with an element that isn't working and try to force it into a story, but I try to stretch my imagination to fit in most of the things I've chosen.

**What do you see as some of the advantages of the short story format over longer fiction formats, such as novels?**

In short fiction it's possible to show a powerful moment in a character's life, ideally the most important thing that ever happens to her. If it's written well, a story can leave a strong emotional impression about a transformation, or the consequences of a decision, in only a few thousand words. Novels allow for spreading out and exploring a world and a variety of characters, but short stories are about focus and intensity.

### **Did you choose to write, or did writing choose you?**

Writing and art have been fighting over me for a long time. They both chose me, but I have to make them take turns. I can't choose not to do one of them, but I can choose how to organize my time so that both can be in my life. Writing is the higher priority, though. My ambition to write stories began when I was in second grade, when I wrote a very derivative but well-intentioned little tale about a mermaid, inspired by an episode of *Fantasy Island*. I didn't begin to draw mermaids (or anything else) until I was in high school.

### **What advice do you have for someone who is just starting out as a writer of short fiction?**

First, start writing stories, and make an effort to write or otherwise work on some fiction every day, and submit the stories to appropriate markets. That's the most important advice. Be willing to practice.

I have more advice. Learn how to format your submissions properly, to give them the best chance of being accepted. Expect a lot of rejections in the beginning, because everyone gets them. Go to writing conventions, and especially writing-oriented science fiction ones, if that's what you want to write. You'll meet other people who are starting out, and you may get to talk with more experienced writers who can give you the benefit of their experience. Read books about writing, and also "best of" anthologies of short stories, so that you'll learn about the way stories work. If you get the opportunity to be a slush reader for a magazine, do that. Reading all those submissions pays off in knowledge about what's wrong with stories that don't work. Join a local writing group, too. If you want to succeed at writing short stories, it's good to have feedback on your efforts from people you trust.

### **What can readers expect from you next?**

I've been invited to submit stories for a couple of science fiction anthologies this year, and I have plans for several other stories to write, so I'll be busily working on those for the next several months. I will announce any fiction sales in my blog, of course. I'm appearing on a couple of panels at [WisCon](#) in May, 2009, over Memorial Day weekend, and I plan to attend [World Fantasy Convention](#) in October, 2009.