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Book Review: *Final Fenway Fiction*

Scott D. Peterson

Wright State University - Main Campus, petersonsco@umsl.edu

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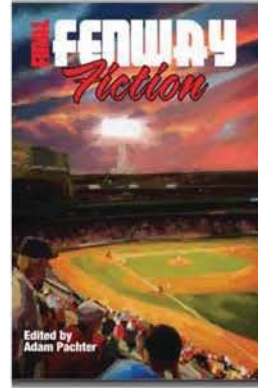
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final fenway fiction

Reviewed by Scott D. Peterson, Aethlon Fiction Editor

26 February 2013

If there is a special room in the house of sport literature for fan creations, then the Fenway Fiction series deserves a place of prominence among the legions of blogs about everything from baseball cards of AAA ball players to Todd Zeile's homers for 11 different teams, "Johnny Marz" tribute videos on YouTube, and mash-ups with A-Rod's head photoshopped onto the bodies of figures from Greek Mythology. (Yes, dear Reader, you can look all of this up: the last visual treat—or threat—is just a few Google clicks away using



"bobblehead" as a key word.) Although the term "fan fiction" might strike some as praise that is as faintly damning as "journeyman pitcher" or "utility infielder," the stories in Final Fenway Fiction have what it takes to come inside and go beyond the warning track—but usually not on the same pitch.

In the way of pre-game warm-ups, one has first to muse whether such a thing as "Final Fenway Fiction" is even possible on this plane of existence. Maybe it will occur when the last ding dong bell from the ultimate ill-advised multi-year contract rings across Red Sox Nation, but surely not before the last brick of the venerable bandbox turns to red dust. Secondly, the long, dark off-season of New England is the perfect period for the promise of well-written prose about one's favorite team—and for the most part I was not disappointed by the book at hand. Thirdly, it is a bit surprising that other editors have not followed the lead of Adam Pachter, who has edited a worthy body of work with *Fenway Fiction*, *Further Fenway Fiction* and now the present title, yet Google searches for Busch Ballads, Yankee Yarns, Turner Tales, (and the inevitable Wrigley Wringings) all fail to turn up similar fan fiction franchises.

With regard to the stories themselves, they provide a full range of fan fiction from a Kafka-esque psychic break to a learning experience for a former POW. The expected is here, but with a few well-placed twists, such as father and daughter bonding through baseball and rookie hazing via ballpark concessions. The unexpected is here as well: the

tryout of a female knuckleball pitcher and the efforts of a diver to help her team by locating Babe Ruth's piano. Historical fiction, science fiction (including a story that SLA members who attended last summer's conference will recognize), and satire all demonstrate the cross-pollination capacity of baseball fiction. Perhaps the only surprise is the absence of a Bildung narrative where a young player uses the game to get a job, get ahead, and get married, although this fact might indicate that the Horatio Alger Myth of the self-made man is finally played out in baseball fiction.

A few quibbles come to mind. While it is nearly true that everyone in Red Sox Nation (RSN) is on a first name basis with the players, the ownership, and each other, bios for the contributors would have been a nice addition. Twenty-three stories is an oddly disquieting number more suited for Chicago Bull fan fiction, although that tally does avoid the cliché of nine or its multiples. Thirdly, readers who have yet to find their way to the RSN will rue the lack of a glossary to provide them with subtext that is second nature to the Fenway Faithful. A (very) short list of examples would include *The Curse*, *The Stolen Base*, *The Bloody Sock*, *Manny Being Manny*, "Ground Ball to Foulke," and "Can You Believe It!"

If the collection is uneven in spots, baseball fans will nonetheless appreciate and relate to the ways that the stories show how the game can get into the fabric of our lives. Some of those same readers will remember the otherwise unremarkable contests and events referenced from the middle of the seasons past and be taken back to that moment in exactly the same way that "serious" writers can transport us.

Although Adam Pachter admitted in the introduction that he may have edited his way into an "alliterative box" with his choice of F-word for this installment, writers of baseball fiction should take note that he did leave "the fate of any future Fenway Fiction" in their hands. (Now, if only a certain ownership team would adopt a similarly progressive, fan-friendly strategy with another much-loved franchise, the RSN might breathe a little easier as the Ides of March approach ...)