

The *Piano* WARS

By Joseph Farley

724 words

WHY WE LIKE IT: *Nothing is probably more terrifying than when an inanimate object assumes a life of its own. Harmless, innocuous props that populate (and clutter) our lives suddenly springing into our reality safety zone as malevolent creatures intent on doing us harm. This is the dark side of surrealism and when it works—as it does in ‘The Piano Wars’—it hits back hard. And even though the genre is science fiction, where suspension of reality is to be expected, it still takes a writer of superior ability to suspend it long enough for us to buy into the story. We’re here to assure you that Farley is up to the task. A short, strongly written, power-packed narrative by a writer in control.*

Five Stars

QUALITY QUOTABLE (*for the love of language...*)

The concert pianos, the warrior class, used poisoned arrows shot from their gut strings. It was a mess until steamrollers arrived from Earth and flattened the native armies in the Battle of Squished Plain. Pacification continued until Urgusian pianos were completely humbled. As we look back now, this is a disturbing part of our history on Urgus 7, but at the time of the war, there were people on Earth who were eager to watch pianos being run over by steam rollers on pay for view.

The Piano Wars

Urgus 7 is known as the Planet of the Pianos. When explorers from Earth first reached the planet, they were amazed by the number and types of pianos sitting undisturbed on hills, plains, mesas and the shores of the alcohol seas. The pianos were well tuned and seemingly there was no one on the planet that could play them. It was unavoidable that some of the explorers would tickle those ivories. Years of music lessons never go away. This created a huge cultural misunderstanding. The original explorers

realized this as they watched their companions get torn to pieces and eaten by raging pianos woken from slumber.

It was a not so simple case of convergent evolution, as the similarities were not between vastly different species, but between an alien species and a domestic Earth musical instrument. Pianos were the dominant species on Urgus 7. They were predators that hunted by night and were dormant by day. They were sentient, aggressive and war like, but had a low level of technology, on the level of what might be found in an early 20th century honkytonk.

Scientists were fascinated by Urgusian pianos, and made the long journey to Urgus 7 to study them. They even succeeded in capturing a few in the wild, and brought them back to Earth. There it was discovered that the “keys” were quite sensitive and were related to reproduction. With this knowledge, scientists eventually learned how to breed pianos in captivity. This worked too well. The number of Urgusian pianos on Earth multiplied. The wealthy adopted pianos as pets. The unscrupulous trained them to perform. You can still find videos of chained pianos being played at Carnegie Hall, and listen to the agony and ecstasy of their moans. Such slavery is now outlawed. Today only free range pianos who have voluntarily agreed to long term entertainment contracts and have a reputable agent are allowed to perform in public. But in private? Who knows what goes on in the crazed mind of a pianist.

Once settlers arrived on Urgus 7, further blunders with the locals occurred. These blunders led to the “The Piano War” which reached its height in 2739 CE. The pianos fought desperately to drive out the settlers. The pianos would surround a settlement, usually at night, then rush in on fleshy wheels and spindly legs, growling loud and raucous tunes. The concert pianos, the warrior class, used poisoned arrows shot from their gut strings. It was a mess until steamrollers arrived from Earth and flattened the native armies in the Battle of Squished Plain. Pacification continued until Urgusian pianos were

completely humbled. As we look back now, this is a disturbing part of our history on Urgus 7, but at the time of the war, there were people on Earth who were eager to watch pianos being run over by steam rollers on pay for view.

Urgusian cultural has dwindled and is in danger of dying away. Most young pianos accept or embrace being played by, or simply living with humans. As on Earth, they have come to realize that being in a house with humans does not necessarily mean that anyone will ever touch your keys. Older pianos, those that can remember a human free planet, lament the attitude of the young, believing their species has sunk into decadence and servitude.

I have head that there is an ancient upright living in the mountains of the Argulath range who preaches of a coming messiah. This messiah will unify discordant pianos and lead them in a holy war against humans. Dissident pianos are said to flock to the mountains to listen to the sounds of that old upright. Security forces take the rumors seriously and regularly send drones and patrols to search for any gatherings of pianos in the mountains. To date no such assemblies have been found, or, at least, have not been made known to the public. Lack of proof does not mean it isn't happening. There are caves in those mountains, and the Urgusians have learned from us. They now have access to machines and more modern weapons. All of human living on Urgus 7 need to be vigilant. Pianos could be boring under their very homes right now, just waiting for the right moment to burst from the ground, and begin a concert of death.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *Many of my ideas come from dreams. Nighttime dreams and daydreams. Sometimes I think of these ideas as memories from time spent in other dimensions, an occurrence that could happen on any day as I am too busy to be observant of the slight differences between worlds as I casually slip between them. Stylistically, I admire folktales, surrealism, magic realism, absurdism, dada, beat writing, and speculative fiction. A story is a journey but that journey is in the mind. It does not need dialogue just as dreams do not need dialogue. Images can be enough. Language can be sufficient action.*

When you look at a piano it seems rather alien. All those teeth. And yet, when you see someone perform with passion on a piano, they seem aroused, their pounding sexual, the music filled with eroticism the composer may never have intended. Is that passion all one sided? For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. Where there is passion there can be violence. Pianos should be approached with caution.

AUTHOR BIO: Joseph Farley edited Axe Factory from 1986 - 2010. His poetry collections include Suckers, Longing for the Mother Tongue, and Her Eyes. His fiction books include a story collection, For the Birds, and a novel, Labor Day (Peasantry Press). His work has appeared recently in Horror Sleaze Trash, Schlock!, Frost Zone, Ygdrasil, Home Planet New Online, Lummox, Mad Swirl, Big Windows, US 1 Worksheets and other places.