

The **WARRING** States: *Seskatch* or How We Know It's Different

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by Anthony **St.** George

WHY I LIKE IT: Fiction Editor JOEY CRUSE writes...

Anthony St. George's, "Warring States: Seskatch or How We Know Its Different," is, honestly, deeper than I can understand. I will completely sell myself short here and say that I am not educated enough to fully understand the satire/post-apocalyptic concept and imagery at work here. For example, when I read Seskatch, I knew it had to do with Saskatchewan (or, for the love of Christ, I hope so) and my dumbass could only remember "Sesesh," a derogatory term (not gonna lie, they had it coming) for mid/low-level to full-blown Confederates during the Civil War that the racist officer in Glory (see: Matthew Broderick and Denzel) used after he shot a black man (well, this is America).

What I mean to say is that this story involves a takeover/necessary destruction of society that I can't fully comprehend because I'm pretty sure that I'm one of 'central state' humans that the Seskatch want nothing to do with.

St. George's work is as if the Handmaid's Tale was still exactly like the Handmaid's Tale – people still trying to get into Canada = the world is garbage because of America and I've not however many seasons to create an Atwood metaphor (spoiler alert).

What I truly enjoy about this story is how the author has crafted a story that only gives you so much and you can take more than given. They mention time, it passes; you read about an expensive apartment, it gets more cramped (because I didn't feel like looking up the conversion rate of future Canadian dollars(?) vs. future American monies); there are regions of American statehood that exist, but, to be honest, apart from New Mexico, even in America, no one would give a shit (Ohio is garbage and South Dakota should be given back even though they're badlands); there was an agreement made between North and South, but the lines are a bit divided...

What St. George does well is to create a world. This world is bleak, humorous, and probably costly (if you can't sell bread in the pseudo-colonies, then why the hell are you in the bread business anyway?).

I think that this piece is a rumination on our current trades, businesses, and transgressions. I think that St. George does an excellent job using speculative-flash fiction to craft what could be in a world that he understands the machinations of. I think that you would enjoy this story because it is a damn fine story.

*I can't say enough that you should read this story, certainly not for what I say about it, for I am what the French call *incompétent* (my French is shit), but because it is true craft – a story that knows what it does and how it impacts the reader.*

Enjoy this story, I did.

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

Planting time is every three months, announced the week before our two-day holiday goes into effect. Rest before starting, rest after harvest. I go in daily to A-frame 90, where I am assigned to inspect the artichokes. Any drops of fertilizer spray sensed on the floor are deducted from my pay.

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Saskatoon, Central States, 6-months before Start of Year 0:

Before Seskatch voted to join the Central States, elements of the street scene and our lives included:

+ Hackeysack players were shushed off the streets, even during folk festivals, in transgression of vagrancy laws.

+ Most church dress was solemn-grey, whites, black, and sometimes, for women, a navy blue blazer. Mennonites who objected to the influx of Central States' vertical farming technology often wore a magenta scarf to signal their objection to the vote.

+ Delia and I rented our 2,500 sq ft loft apartment for C\$5,000. She had half the apartment for her bike repair business; I kept the other half for my flour-dusted, German-style-bread baking business.

+ Easter signaled the welcoming of spring. Time to plant.

+ American automatic weapons were held at the border.

+ Our anthem was "O Canada."

+ Once, when I was out with Delia, a child approached us, her grandmother in tow (literally, the child was in a harness, pulling along an exhausted-looking, short-strided elderly woman. The woman stumbled every few steps, and the girl would stop and look back). The child explained that her mother had left her for the West Coast and would be sending for her when she was safe. By the time the adult had caught up, the girl was explaining that they hadn't eaten for two days. The woman corrected the girl, explaining it had only been since the previous night. Nevertheless, she was worried for the girl. Her apparel was from another age: at the neck of her houndstooth overcoat, a bright orange scarf. Her head was wrapped with a spangly, bronze-

colored turban straight out of a costume shop. The emerald-and-platinum pin above her ear looked genuine. Around the girl's neck lay the gentle filigree of a chain, a *chai*, and cross hanging together over her cardigan's second button.

"How is it you don't have food? You look well enough off," Delia asked.

"We're wearing our house," the grandmother said. "What cost ten dollars yesterday now costs thirty. The money her mother left us with is gone."

"But the Thresherhood, they take care of you, don't they?" I asked.

"In a manner of speaking. They've been giving us food in exchange for humiliating me."

The girl looked up at her harness-and-anchor and frowned.

"I've got some loaves back home, Ma'am," I said. "If you'll take them."

"Where's home?"

"Three blocks away." We were sitting outside at a café, eating rugelach and cheesecake with our afternoon tea.

"Lead on," she said, raising her arm as if leading a charge.

Saskatoon, Central States, Year 3

+ Fortunately, despite open carry legal everywhere now, automatic weapons are gathered and melted into an ever-growing statue in front of our Region House, what used to be the Legislative Assembly in Regina. Open carry was a condition of our joining the Central States; the seizure and destruction of automatic weapons was ours.

+ We found that we now dare not venture across town to the Ohioan, South Dakotan, and New Mexican quarters. We've been stopped at street corners by knife-wielders and shotgun-holders asking our business. "To sell bread," I'd said. And they laughed so hard we could only walk away.

+ Planting time is every three months, announced the week before our two-day holiday goes into effect. Rest before starting, rest after harvest. I go in daily to A-frame 90, where I am assigned to inspect the artichokes. Any drops of fertilizer spray sensed on the floor are deducted from my pay.

+ The Thresherhood now has eighty-six percent of the Region House. We are happy about this because of the aid they provided in the past. They've composed a new anthem, "O the Joys of Victuals," sung long and slow.

+ Delia has taken to playing hackeysack for bucks, competing in tournaments in the region just to make our rent. She hopes to get a visa to participate in the quadrennial alt-Olympics to be held next year in British Columbia. We are hoping she finds Shallah's mother there. Maybe we'll move too if it's as peaceable as they say.

+ Grandma moved in from the tent we'd given them to one of Delia's gear rooms. Shallah, now nine, is all about hairbrushes and not eating bread.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *“Seskatch...” is part of a collection of stories I am writing called “The Warring States,” which illustrate life at the cusp of the 22nd century, as North America reconfigures into different regional groupings and states in response to global political machinations and ecological factors. The collection is a supplement to my novel, “Ann History,” which follows three related characters in succession through this disintegration and reconfiguration. Most of the stories in the collection are standard format; I wanted to mix the collection up with some flash fiction. The inspiration for the format for this piece came from my earlier career working in tech academia (engineering colleges/universities), where bulleted PowerPoint presentations and e-mails were significant means of communication. This is that format gone awry.*

AUTHOR NOTE: Anthony St. George has left the working world of academia to get lost in the world of words. He lives in San Francisco with his husband and has also lived in Toronto, Taipei, and Seoul. He speaks varying levels (descending order) of Mandarin, French, Korean, Japanese, and Scots Gaelic, at least one of which is featured in his as-of-yet unpublished novel, “Ann History.” Other than writing, he spends his time hiking, constructing his website: anthonystgeorge.com, and resisting pontification on Twitter at @asgriobhadh. Anthony has never met a hike or a bird he hasn't liked.