



The Long Arm of Gil Hamilton

Larry Niven

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ARMED FOR DEATH

Gil Hamilton was more than an operative for ARM - the elite global police force. He was an essential. His intuition was peerless; his psychic powers were devastating. And his raw courage took him into the depths of inner and outer space where others feared to tread! But Gil Hamilton had enemies. Many enemies. Some were organleggers - those murderous dealers of illicit transplants. Others were just ordinary killers. Around any corner, Gil could probably find someone waiting to kill him. In order to stay alive - and operating - he always had to be armed for death!

THREE THRILLING NOVELETTES IN THE FAMED KNOWN SPACE SERIES BY THE AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR OF RINGWORLD

Contents:

- Death by Ecstasy ["The Organleggers"] · na Galaxy Jan '69
- The Defenseless Dead · nv Ten Tomorrows, ed. Roger Elwood, Fawcett, 1973
- ARM · na Epoch, ed. Roger Elwood & Robert Silverberg, Berkley, 1975
- Afterword: The Last Word About SF! Detectives · aw

The Long Arm of Gil Hamilton Details

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Andrew says

This was another journey in to Larry Niven's Tales of Know Space - a series of stories which share a common universe which over time formed in to a loose history - I say loose as characters which enjoyed solo stories eventually resurfaced in later stories- sometimes simply because they could and other times to act as a bridge drawing the stories in to a more coherent time line. Now I will admit sometimes its fun to see this - after all its always good to stop by on an old friend and have one more adventure - but other times it feels a little contrived. Anyway the tales in this book (a series of novellas) were set before all of that and I feel were written to tell the tales of Gil and his time with ARM.

Anyway I digress - the stories have a definite NOIR feel to them and I think that is what appealed to me most - regardless of the futuristic setting the fantastic assumptions or the advances in science there at the heart of each story a mystery and that is what I think makes them so enjoyable.

But lets not forget that this is set in the Know Space universe and so I think for me there is always the fun to spot the easter egg (although these stories were written before such a concept) where references to others stories slowly start to pull the threads together - so if the stories do not appeal there is always the intrigue of seeing such a famous series slowly evolve.

There is no guess as where next my retro reading will take me since there are still more Gil Hamilton stories to read.

Victoria Pond says

This book collects three novellas in the classic detective noir genre with a futuristic twist. Though, some of the ideas may be more paleofuture. Three things make this work, even though there are moments of "but we don't use moving sidewalks in our major cities!"

1) Our hardboiled detective deals with one type of major crime: organlegging. Long before *Repo! The Genetic Opera*, there was Gil Hamilton, part of the UN task force that makes sure your spare body parts aren't cannibalized from your neighbor. Hamilton's world is full of medical advances in organ and tissue grafting, so you can imagine the kind of black market that's sprung up around procuring the parts. Like a police show where you only follow a vice cop, or the homicide department, *The Long Arm of Gil Hamilton* is dedicated to a division specialty.

2) Detective noir plus. Everything a detective does, Hamilton does with futuristic flourish. If noir detectives smoke, he does a cigarette trick with his telekinetic third hand. (A cigarette is about the heaviest thing he can manage.) If noir detectives have loving secretaries, his secretary keeps tabs on him telepathically. If noir detectives run afoul of regular city police, well--something's gotta be constant across space and time.

3) The *Encyclopedia Brown* wrap up. You know you love it. You come to the end of the story, and you can't wait to see how Encyclopedia Brown (or Sherlock Holmes or Shawn Spencer, etc.) is going to combine all the little clues into an obvious answer. Hamilton has exactly these sorts of revelations, but with clues you

shouldn't understand. Except that the science woven through the narrative so well that a conclusion hinging on inertialess star drives is just as clear as any other "smoking gun" detail.

Josh says

Hard to pin down Larry Niven's voice exactly. Hard SF by strict definition but explored curiously like a puzzle, like, let's figure out how things work instead of some genius just telling us. Atmosphere mostly cynical with some dark humor, written in a minimalist economical language. He's also wildly imaginative in an understated and un-self-conscious way, with huge or crazy ideas casually tossed in and thrown away depending on how well they serve the story. Taken as a whole it scratches a particular SF itch, so he's in my regular rotation.

Gil Hamilton is down an arm -- *"How did you lose it?" she asked. "Ripped away by a meteor," I said, not without pride.* -- but it's OK, he's got a sort of psychic one to replace it. And that, as one might imagine, will be relevant to these stories. He also works as an ARM agent -- "Amalgamation of Regional Militia" but Niven says in the afterword it's a backronym in the service of the larger pun. It's something like a special investigation unit charged with going after "organleggers" in a future where it's pretty easy to live a long time thanks to advanced medical technology that enables relatively easy body part transplants. The real problem is, uh, supply.

That's probably enough to understand the slightly strange flavor of this collection of three SF/mystery novelettes. As usual with Larry Niven, I liked it. Probably less than *Neutron Star* but up there with *Ringworld*.

David Stuckey says

Three stories, set in the Known Space Future History, which has dated fairly well compared to real life (We have yet to discover a universal anti-rejection drug, however, so no organ banks and all that it implies), deliberately designed to prove that science fiction and detective fiction can be made to work well.

Gil Hamilton is an ARM, the police force of the world-governing United Nations; their three major fields of action in increasing order of priority are enforcing Fertility Laws, investigating and censoring new technologies that have military applications, and chasing down the illegal suppliers of transplant organs, the "Organleggers". Gil is a trifle jaded with life, being a well-educated ex-Belt miner, with a transplanted arm (Lost in a space accident, and the new limb *may* have come from confiscated "organlegger" stock, like most organs, so his ambivalence is understandable) and a third arm - a minor ability of telekinesis that allows him to use a 'ghost' limb to manipulate objects though his ability is limited; he can reach into vacuum from inside a spaceship but not lift more than a full shot glass under Earth gravity. This gives him a unique position in his chosen field, but it only adds to his world-weary viewpoint, like Philip Marlowe with a strong cynicism about society and progress.

The stories are tightly written, with only enough 'info-dumping' to keep the reader up to date; mostly it makes sense as Hamilton reflects on the situations that lead to the current case, which is only natural in a narrative; They range from a highly personal case of slow-motion murder of an old colleague ("Death By Ecstasy"), a kidnapping with horrific fallout and ramifications for cryonics patients ("The Defenseless

Dead") and a technological 'locked room murder' that links physics and organ replacement to set up several false leads as to how the crime could be done.

Time has been relatively kind to these stories - Niven didn't rely on the telekinesis for the plots and only once is it integral to the storyline, and the rest of the science is tight and probable. In one case, prophetic - a character notes watching a TV program "In study hall on my pocket phone screen"(In 1973!). There's a fair chance to reader can guess the killer in the stories, though one has a huge red herring that will distract one from the crux of the tale for a long while.

All together, three good stories that show early Niven at his most thoughtful in several ways.

Maryann Fläsch says

The first story is a reprint from a previous book. Really through me off when I started reading and I knew the story! Being an eBook made it a little harder to figure out if I were reading the same book, but the next story is original. I love the organlegger concept. It takes the "woke up in a tub of ice with no kidney" thing look silly in comparison! With 200 kids in the US being reported PER DAY AND PER STATE in the 20th and 21st century, it seems like the next logical step come the organ bank period. Combine the abductions going to the banks with the reoccurring plot points of "well, we tortured them but who cares! They were going into the organ banks!" And it really gives the layperson insight into the minds of those that abduct kids and adults TODAY, when they'll either survive and spend the rest of their life dealing with the trauma or or just be killed and dumped somewhere! With the organ banks, you don't even need to feel bad about what you're doing! Sure you tortured and raped someone, but after they're broken down they'll save a dozen peoples lives! Scary.

Richard says

Many years after first reading it in the mid 1980s, I still recalled it with great fondness though my copy had disappeared at some point. I re-bought it and read it again in the last couple of years. I still look upon it with fondness. It's perhaps the best future-sci-fi detective type fiction I can recall. Some of Niven's best.

*****Dave Hill says**

Three Detective SF novellas by Niven starring Gil Hamilton, a UN "ARM" agent working mostly on "organlegging" cases (and who, for no particular reason, also someone who possesses a psychokinetic "arm").

The detective tales are, as such, fairly labored and overconstructed, usually with an SF twist. The actual narrative is straightforward and pleasant reading.

More interesting -- as is usually the case with Niven -- the most interest is with the world-building. The series is set in Niven's Known Space book universe, in the period when humans have settled the solar system but interstellar travel and alien encounters are still in the future. The stories examine some of the effects of highly effective transplant technology and cryogenics, especially on crime (organleggers are likely to kidnap you and harvest you for black market parts) and punishment (even relatively minor crimes lead to the death penalty and *legal* harvest of your parts). Other concepts touched on include concepts of body and self, and

the (ab)use of droids (tech to directly stimulate the pleasure centers of the brain).

Good read.

Eric Stodolnik says

Probably my least favorite of all the Known Space books that I've read so far... and I've almost read them all... I have about 3 left in the entirety of the Known Space series: The Patchwork Girl, Betrayer of Worlds, and Fate of Worlds... Then a couple of short stories that didn't make it into the main collections of Neutron Star and Tales of Known Space. So my knowledge of Known Space is almost complete... And I really do think this is my least favorite of the whole series. There are a couple short stories in Tales of Known Space that I would consider inferior to these sci-fi detective stories... most notably his earlier works, the short stories that Niven wrote before he even conceptualized "Known Space" as an overarching universe, effectually writing Known Space stories without realizing that that's what he was doing. But compared to the bulk of his Known Space series, this definitely ranks near the bottom for me.

And even though that statement is very true, like I say with all Known Space reviews where I say that "this book lands in the lower half of my ratings list of Known Space novels and stories", well, I love Known Space so much that that means that even though it's maybe my least favorite of the series, I still enjoyed a lot about it. I think my favorite was probably the middle story, "The Defenseless Dead"... And even though I solved the mystery of the "who-dunnit" aspect of the detective story kind of early on in that one... I thought it was clever enough, and cool enough of a story, to make that not really matter.

All in all, I found that the brevity of the short story format is probably what hurt these stories more than anything... I don't read many detective stories (actually, I don't really read any detective stories)... but I think it felt a bit rushed at times, and much of the interrogating and the conversations seemed quite truncated... So I'm hoping that The Patchwork Girl's being a full-length novel, about roughly 3 times the length of any of these shorter novelettes, solves that issue, because I actually DID like the character of Gil "The Arm" Hamilton, and his whole "3rd arm" psi power that he has... That's another thing I think that fell short in these stories, his USE of that "imaginary" arm of his... sure, he does use it here and there, at least a couple times in each story, but not enough to really make good use of it. It becomes more of an afterthought than what it could've been, which is a true asset to his skills as a detective.

Well, that's about it... I'd recommend it to anyone who has read 80-90% of the Known Space novels and short stories... but not really to anyone who hasn't... That pretty much says is all.

Frogqueen says

Three old school SFnal detective stories inspired by (then recent) advances in organ transplant technology. Our hero tracks down organleggers, solves murders and even faces the odd ethical quandary. They're a bit 'backwards into the future,' but it's interesting speculation combined with competent whodunnits and hold up better than I expected.

The person writing the back cover copy is way off on a tangent though.

Craig says

This is a collection of three science-fictional detective stories featuring the psi-powered Gil Hamilton. Set in his Known-Space framework, they're challenging and fun puzzles that combine the best of the two genres to good effect.

Brian Rogers says

Death by Ecstasy was my first Larry Niven story, and prompted me to go out and find more of his Known Space tales. In this book Niven uses (and builds parts of) the Known Space backdrop to tell two clever and successful SF mysteries, and one that doesn't quite close the deal.

Much of the setting is build backwards: the Amalgamated Regional Militia exists to create the acronym, which itself exists to play off the central character's psi-power (an ESPer arm); ARM covers not just organlegging (murdering for black market transplant parts) but advanced technology just to justify Gil Hamilton being in the 3rd story. Still, so much of the SF mystery genre is setting dependent that the rules have to be written to make the mystery possible, and that means forgiving some forced fits in the world building. Death by Ecstasy is a remarkably evocative story, the Defenseless Dead builds on the world assumptions smoothly as a follow-up about the ethics of this world. The third tale, ARM, takes a different viewpoint of the world and ethics, but Niven admits this is the upteenth draft of this story that predates the others and you can see the wheres and whys of how it doesn't stick the landing. It's not that it's bad, it's just not great.

Are the world's ethics - the expansion of the death penalty to every conceivable crime to fill the organ banks to keep life sustaining transplants to Earth's billions - kinda nuts? Yes, yes they are. But bits of pieces of that are needed not just for some of these stories but some of the other Known Space tales, so you write it off as the classic SF "let's extrapolate this technology as far as it will go" thought experiment (and this one with organ transplants is no more or less insane/disturbing than the one Gene Wolfe does with taxidermy, so there you go).

Robert says

Necessarily chopped, because it was assembled from other sources. The main character was enjoyable, Blade Runner-ish. It could have been longer, as there was more to explore about the main character's feelings about his arm and why he seems to switch between wanting a prosthesis and not.

There are a couple switches in tone and vocabulary, again from the assembled nature, but Larry Niven is one of those authors with whom you can't go wrong. Reading it next to some other less mature science fiction, the pace is ideal.

Jan says

More great Known Space stories. I could easily put myself in the role of Gil "The Arm".

Janine Southard says

This book collects three novellas in the classic detective noir genre with a futuristic twist. Though, some of the ideas may be more paleofuture. Three things make this work, even though there are moments of "but we don't use moving sidewalks in our major cities!"

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Basil says

Better than Ringworld, Niven really hits his stride in this one. Classic cheesy space detective genre. Inventive plot points.
