

Tightbeam 295

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Cover Art found by Bob Jennings

Tightbeam 295

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Art Editors are Angela K. Scott and Cedar Sanderson. The front cover this issue was found by Bob Jennings. The art on pages 4, 5, and 11 is from Angela K. Scott.

Anime Reviews are courtesy Jessi Silver and her site www.s1e1.com. Ms. Silver writes of her site "S1E1 is primarily an outlet for views and reviews on Japanese animated media, and occasionally video games and other entertainment."

Fiction reviews are courtesy Pat Patterson, Cedar Sanderson, and Tom Feller.

Pat Patterson's reviews appear on his blog <https://habakkuk21.blogspot.com> and also on GoodReads and Amazon.com.

Cedar Sanderson's reviews and other interesting articles appear on her site www.cedarwrites.wordpress.com/ and its culinary extension cedarwrites.com/eat-this-while-you-read-that/

Greg Hullender and Eric Wong publish their reviews at RocketStackRank.com

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Letters of Comment

Dear George and Jon:

Many thanks to both of you for issue 294 of Tightbeam. I will try my best to make this a fast letter of comment, and get it to you asap. Well, that's the plan, anyway...

My past letter... I gather that issue 3 of Amazing Stories has emerged from the printers, and will be in the mail to subscribers soon. I am very pleased to be a member of the editorial team, and I hope this can continue for some time to come. As of today, it is 63 days until we fly off to England. (How do I know that? Yvonne's got it written on the calendar...) All side trips are arranged, and there's a few small details to take care of. (I wonder if the impending Brexit will affect the British pound sterling? I expect it will, but will it make pounds cheaper or more expensive?)

Jesse Silver writes about mysterious girls...I don't watch anime at all, yet others who have talked to me about say one of the most popular themes in modern anime is the mysterious/magical girl. Gotta get to an underserved part of the anime market, I suppose...

In this social media era, it is far too easy to be attacked verbally for any and all opinions, especially if some of the crazies on the other side of the monitor take enormous offence. They obviously need a life, but it is a shame when you get personal attacks for your work, as Cedar Sanderson had to deal with. It's mere words, and in the past, I challenged one such jerk to come and get me, and teach me how wrong I was. They are still smoldering in anger...I hope... With all that said, I know a number of Mormons, and when I told them there was a book of Mormon steampunk stories available, well...they laughed at me. I have sent a .jpg of James Wymore's book cover to those friends, and they aren't laughing any more. They are...intrigued. I wonder what Joseph Smith would say?

Thanks for all the info on John Collier. The short stories do look interesting, and they might be available online in the public domain. I think "Evening Primrose" might have been the germ of an idea for a Twilight Zone episode or two. I am thinking of one from the 80s revival of TZ. A quick look...the original episode was from 1960, starring Anne Francis and James Milhollin. The remake was in 1986, starring Terry Farrell, Ned Bellamy and Ann Wedgeworth. I don't think John Collier got any credit either time.

Anyway...time to go. It will be a busy evening, and I have dinner to make as well. Take care, many thanks to both of you, and see you with the next issue.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.
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Dragon Mail by Angela K. Scott

Hi George and Jon;

Received Tightbeam #294 yesterday. I read it immediately. Another varied issue. The cover illo was nicely executed with vivid colors, but it looked more like a castle in the morning fog, rather than a castle in the sky.

Superworld Comics produced by Hugo Gernsback in 1940 was probably not a success because it lacked a cadre of strong heroes to anchor the book. I had copies of this comic years ago, and for anybody interested, all three issues are posted for free on several internet sites. The art is good by 1940 standards, and the science fiction themes were certainly strong, but despite the general Gernsback hoopla of scientific accuracy and teaching people science, you will find none of that in any of the issues. My own personal suspicion is that the distribution for the magazine was never that strong, which would have been a severe limiting factor on overall sales.

At this stage in his career Gernsback apparently wanted quick results from any new project he underwrote. When sales figures on issue one came back and didn't meet his expectation, he axed the title. Of course the other two numbers had already been produced, printed and had been sent to the newsstands, but apparently sales on those issues weren't so hot either. Superworld was certainly as good as Planet Comics at that stage of its existence, with better stories overall. Superworld might have survived and become a sales success if Gernsback has stayed with it a few more numbers, and, if there had been stronger lead characters.

I suppose I shouldn't be surprised to read Cedar Sanderson's comment about an author who was so upset by a negative review she wrote that the offended individual decided to organize a campaign of smear and slander against her. That is another one of the problems in this modern world when anybody can get anything printed in e-book format with little or no effort.



It is the responsibility of a person reviewing any book to write an honest critique. If the story is bad, the plot doesn't work, the writing is inept, the characters thinner than cardboard; whatever, if there are flaws in a book the reviewer has to point those things out and deliver an honest opinion. Otherwise, what is the point of doing a review in the first place?

Writers need to realize that their new novel may not be the pinnacle of English language literature that they believe it is. Good writers listen to critics and reviewers and pay attention to what those people say. Writers can improve their craft and learn to get better at delivering readable stories, but not if they fly into a hissy fit and sulk. Bruised egos are

not an author's friend. A bad book is a bad book, and if an author turns one out, s/he needs to address the problems and try to do better next time, not swear eternal vengeance against a reviewer presenting an honest opinion.

I enjoyed Jon's memories of *Out of This World Adventures*, the SF mag. This was an oddball experiment that was probably doomed to failure purely because it was a mixed hybrid. The original idea, besides appealing to both comic book readers and SF fans, may have been to save on printing costs, and the cost of paying for stories, by presenting a 128 page magazine at a standard twenty-five cent price, using 28 pages from the insides of an already printed comic book; a new level in cheapness even for Avon.

Avon editor Donald Wollheim was very much aware of the popularity of *Planet Comics*, a comic title he himself read and saved regularly (in the early 1960s he offered to sell me his long run of the title, but, alas, I didn't offer as much as he thought they were worth, so the proposed sale fell thru), and may have been looking for something to straddle the gap. *Planet Comics* was conceded to be a very effective introduction to science fiction for young readers, and a stepping stone that very often led them to trying *Planet Stories*.

Other publishers were also aware of the growing influence of science fiction in the movies and comics. In the summer of 1950 DC Comics issued their first science fiction title; *Strange Adventures*, dated September 1950, with a comic book adaptation of the "Destination Moon" feature film. The next few issues prominently mentioned on the front covers the names of some of the science fiction writers who were writing comics for DC at the time, including Edmond Hamilton, Gardner Fox, H.L. Gold, and David Reed. They even got Virgil Finley to illustrate a few stories.

The other problem was that Avon at this stage wasn't really interested in publishing many new prose magazines. They were also a lot more interested in expanding their comic book biz. It should be noted that Avon was one of the most successful of the early paperback publishers, snapping up thousands of out of print and obscure book titles and reissuing them in paperback format with sexy covers and provocative cover blurbs that often had absolutely nothing to do with the stories inside. They also very often changed the titles too (alho they usually mentioned the original title in very small print under the new one). Paperback books were trashing the magazine market, especially the pulp magazine market. Besides paperback books, comics were selling like crazy, and that was the craze Avon wanted to get in on, so it is probable that the only thing that could have saved *Out of This World Adventures* would have been dynamic sales, which it undoubtedly did not enjoy.

Interesting recipes this time round. The chicken one looks especially delicious, without adding any pasta to the mix to dilute the flavors. However it also looks like a lot of work, so I probably will not be trying it myself.

Another good issue. Looking forward to the next one.

---Bob Jennings
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Anime

Battle Girl High School
...Review by Jessi Silver



In the year 2045, the world has been contaminated by Irōsu (mysterious invaders who suddenly appeared), and humans find themselves restricted and contained. Standing boldly against these invaders are ordinary girls everywhere, without a powerful army or even weapons. The Shinjugamine Girls Academy is a school for these “Hoshimori” (Star Guardians) destined to fight the Irōsu. – ANN

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Episode 1 Summary: Miki and her classmates at Shinjugamine Academy are trainees in the fight against the Irosu, alien invaders who arrived mysteriously, appear randomly (signaled only by a miasma that precedes their arrival) and who keep humanity contained and frightened. The girls lead typical lives, but are called up on when needed to invoke the powers given to them to fight and win against the Irosu. Unfortunately as of late, the classmates have been having trouble working harmoniously and seem to be phoning it in a bit. Not knowing just where or when an attack might occur, this makes the individuals running the program a bit nervous. The girls are ordered to undergo another round of training; it’s here that they’re surprised by an injection of new blood – a new member named Misaki.

Impressions: There was a time when I’d be immediately wary of an anime with a cast larger than about four or five main characters, but I’ve been proven wrong too many times to default to that position. Shirobako introduced an entire company full of animators, producers, and staff members while they sat around a table eating; by the end of that episode I definitely didn’t know many of their names, but the show never really suffered for its truthfulness about how much manpower goes into creating an anime. The Lost Village’s internet-influenced bus full of misfits worked around its large cast size by giving each character a chance to prove how distinctly misanthropic or mentally-ill they all were, to (in my opinion) successful ends. So I’m no longer immediately put off by a cast of thousands, as even shorter anime series have proven themselves capable of using large groups for productive means.

This show introduces a number of characters during a chaotic battle in the first half of this episode. Each character gets a snappy line of dialog and the nature of voice-acting being what it is, that’s generally enough to leave a small impression on the viewer of the person’s basic personality. Whereas other series have counteracted the disorientation of these sorts of mad-



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cap intros by providing something else to grab onto, say an unusual plot element or interesting variation in tone, this one ends having not left much of an impression.

There are some vague references within the character dialog to the forever-looming threat of the Irosu, this anime's malevolent foreign invader antagonists. Though not particularly creative, the idea itself is perfectly serviceable as something to challenge our heroes and serve as an ultimate goal. The issue is that throughout the first episode, several references are made to how poorly the characters are working together and how their power as a group is unfocused and lacking, and yet there's not any situation where the beasts with which they're engaged are shown to pose any kind of mortal threat to the characters. There's not element of danger or any indication that any of the characters might lose out or become injured, and so it's really difficult to stay engaged. I found my mind wandering over and over again as I resisted the urge to check Facebook or get up for a snack, and this was all while characters were in battle – ostensibly the most dynamic parts of the episode. It's a bit maddening just how dull the experience is.

This show also seems to be an awkward genre mashup, as at least a few of the heroines appear to moonlight as idol singers, and the franchise's Wikipedia entry seems to make reference to several different (internal?) idol groups and songs. This isn't bad in itself, but I have to confess I've never really been a fan of idols or idol culture so the fact that that aspect seems shoehorned into this action series doesn't really appeal to me personally. It also has the distinct air of trying too hard to appeal to too many different demographics at once which is almost always a poor choice; of many of the anime series I like the best, one commonality between them seems to be that the creators aimed to appeal to a certain fan group, made a product that has high quality attributes (story, animation, characterization, theme, etc.), and ultimately broadened the appeal in that way. From *Yuri!!! on Ice* to *Puella Magi Madoka Magica*, to *Haikyuu!*, this has proven to be true. So I can't really buy when a series seems to haphazardly take shots in several directions without hitting a target.

There's an odd bit of pandering in this episode that I feel is worth mentioning as it didn't land very well with me. For whatever reason, I've noticed over the last five or so years that the amount of low-grade yuri content in otaku anime seems to have seen an uptick. Shows like *Sakura Trick* and *Yuruyuri* make very mild plays at same-sex female relationships, not really to advocate for those relationships, but to provide them as another option for fetishization in shows aimed primarily towards male otaku viewers. It doesn't necessarily mean that the shows are without other merit, or might not also have appeal to people who identify with those relationships, but I don't think their use is meant to be enlightened or representative of ally-ship. The two overt idol characters, Kanon and Shiho, are introduced as kind of an "are they or aren't they...?" couple in this episode, and some romantic aspect to their relationship is implied over the phone. Not only does this feel forced in a show that's already got too much going on, there's literally no other reason one would care about the characters at this point so it feels as though someone, somewhere is just checking off of a list.

Needless to say, this isn't really a standout entry in the season, and there's not much reason to recommend it over other, better-produced game-based anime like *Touken Ranbu* or some past examples like the *Rage of Bahamut* series. It's probably more interesting if you're a fan of idols or have some interest in the voice actors providing the dialog (of which there are many, considering the size of the cast). Add to that the fact that this is a HIDIVE exclusive, which makes it prohibitive to check out if your budget only affords one or two of the big streaming services, and this makes *Battle Girls High School* pretty skipable.

Pros: It's a mostly inoffensive first episode.

Cons: Attempts to flesh-out characters feel forced, the antagonists don't seem to pose a real threat, and the mix of genres is scattershot.

Grade: D+

First Impressions – Princess Principal Review by Jessi Silver

Five girls live in 19th century London, a city within the Albion Kingdom divided into east and west by a large wall. The girls serve as undercover spies enrolled as students at the prestigious Queen's Mayfair school. The girls make use of their individual abilities to remain active in the underground world of disguise, espionage, infiltration, and car chases. – ANN



Streaming: Amazon Anime Strike

Episode 1 Summary: A new path for history was set in motion when the strange element “cavorite” was discovered. Cavorite allowed the kingdom of Albion to create an air fleet that was unmatched in the world, but this imbalance of power tore Europe apart. Albion was split into East and West by a huge wall

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encircling London, and now, as in any divided country, spy networks crisscross from one side to the other trying to get the upper hand for their side.

Five young women attending Queen's Mayfair school moonlight as spies, their current job involving helping a scientist defect so that he can get the money to help his younger sister, who is suffering from cavorite poisoning. But the scientist's goals are muddled by who he's actually working for, and it isn't long before the girls discover that the ultimate goal is to draw them out from their hiding place.

Impressions: Anime is a medium that's tackled a lot of genres and sub-genres over the years, but despite the popularity of steampunk within geek culture over the last decade or so, there haven't been very many anime that have taken advantage of that. Steamboy is probably the most obvious one, and perhaps Last Exile as well, though that one has a slightly different feel. But for the most part it's kind of an untapped market for anime. That's why I was pleased to see a series like this that seems to be all-in as far as the steampunk aesthetic goes. Princess Principal seems to not only be concerned with what type of technological achievements might have been made had the world made a giant leap in discovery around the late 1800's, but also the effects on class in society as a result.



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The first episode takes place in the city of London and its surroundings some years after its eponymous battle that's referenced several times throughout the episode (and which seems to play a large part in at least one of the main characters' backstories). Many of the scenes occur within the elite private school the girls attend which serves as a cover for their nightly activities, and portrays the kind of upper-class Victorianesque setting one might expect in a steampunk-focused piece. With its emphasis on aesthetics, we get the expected steam-powered inventions, English gentility, and costume-like variations upon period clothing that make the genre fun to play around in.



'Tis a very fancy school. Copyright 2017 (c) Actas/Studio 3Hz

What we also see, though, are the bits and pieces of London buried beneath the thick smog, in the gutters of the city where the lower classes dwell. There are scenes of the poor clustered in an infirmary waiting room, and homeless people lining the streets. The discovery of cavorite, and likely the war that went along with it, definitely made some people wealthy, but there are clearly many who weren't lucky enough to share in that prosperity.

The first episode doesn't really take a stance on any of this beyond allowing the audience to see how things are; it's clearly used as a means to demonstrate how stratified the world is. It does

give us some perspective in that at least one of the girls now working as a spy was lucky enough to escape this kind of poverty (having been orphaned) and find a way to some kind of financial means (even if the work she and her compatriots are hired to do isn't particularly savory). Anime has a tendency to "tell" rather than to "show," so despite the fact that these visual interjections were pretty obvious, it's nice to get a little bit of background on the world without an "as you know..." info-dump up front.



Ange keeps watch on their target from on high. Copyright 2017 (c) Actas/Studio 3Hz

In addition to its portrayal of the people populating its alternate-history milieu, the show's background art is striking and detailed, providing a lovely backdrop for the well-executed action in this episode. There's an incredible amount of care in the depiction of the lush plants in the Queen's Mayfair gardens, as well as in the brownish grit and grime of the city streets below the all-encompassing fog. There's just enough of a sepia-tone to give the whole thing a classic feel to go along with its old-timey vehicles and other less tangible period style. It's definitely not a universal constant, but I find that, often, when different pieces of the whole are given a lot of attention and care separately, the final product tends to reflect that extra energy and planning in its overall quality. Obviously nothing is certain from one episode, but I was truly impressed by how this show made its visual impression.