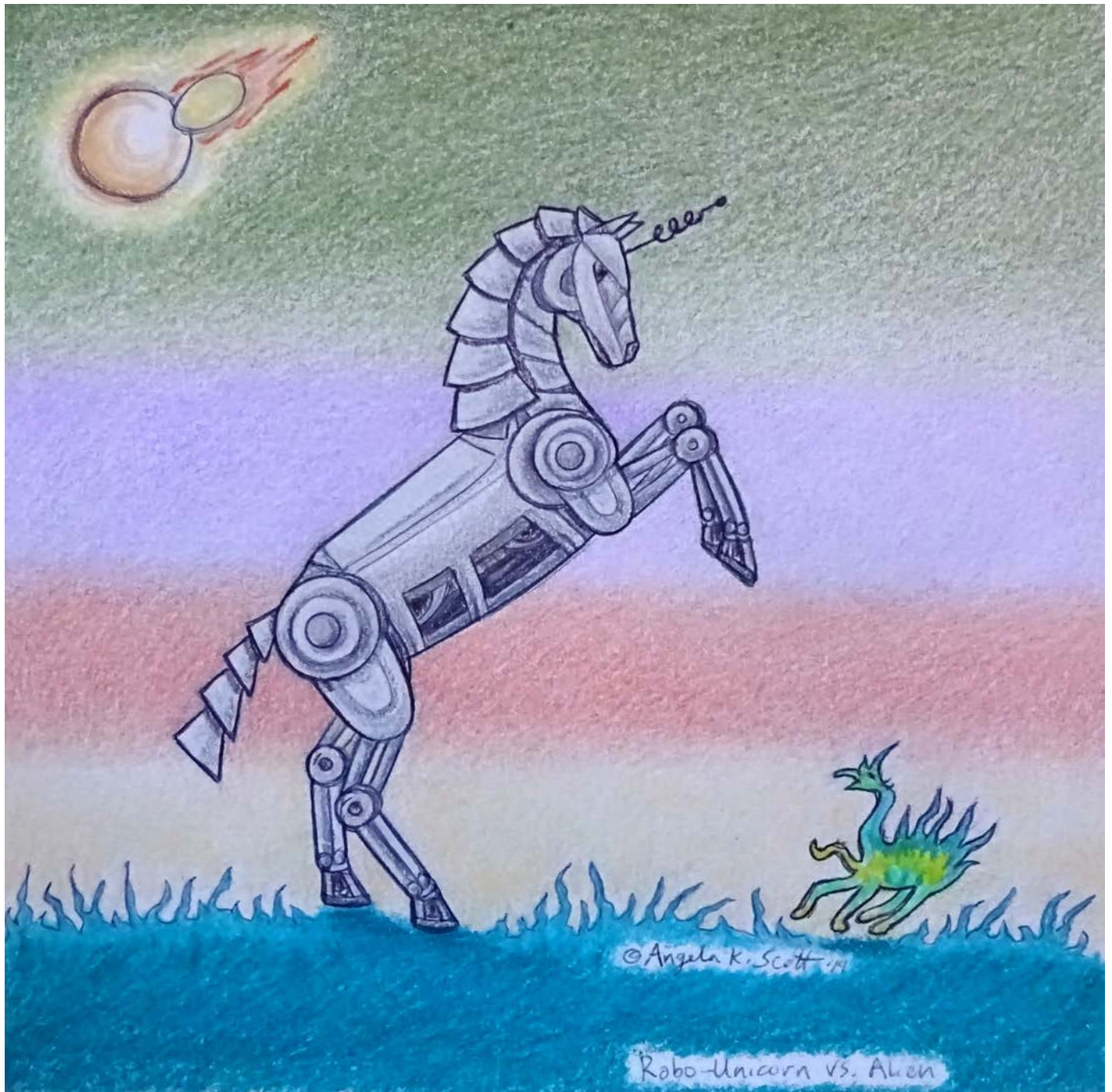


Tightbeam 296

May 2019



Cover Art Robo-Unicorn vs Alien — Angela K. Scott

Tightbeam 296

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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 Greg Fewer, Bob Jennings, and Pat Patterson.

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/

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Table of Contents

Art

Front Cover ... Angela K. Scott ... Robo-Unicorn vs. Alien

Inside ... Angela K. Scott ... 17, 18, 20

Back Cover .. Jose Sanchez ... Bats!

Memorial Notice

4 ... Tom McGovern

Letters

4 ... Lloyd Penney

4 ... Editorial Notice ... New Section on N3F Business: N3F Discussion

Anime

5 ... Jessi Silver ... Kaguya-sama: Love is War

7 ... Jessi Silver ... The Magnificent Kotobuki

10 ... Jessi Silver ... Kono Oto Tomare! Sounds of Life

Novels

12 ... Greg Fewer ... 13 Days of Midnight

13 ... Bob Jennings ... Mycroft Holmes

Short Fiction

15 ... Pat Patterson ... Trace The Stars Anthology

19 ... Pat Patterson ... Trade Winds Anthology

Motion Pictures

21 ... Cedar Sanderson ... Captain Marvel

SerCon

23 ... Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D. ... The Maximo Big Little Books

21 ... Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D. ... The Genre Tales of Hugh B. Cave

Food of Famous Authors

24 ... Cedar Sanderson ... Sabrina Chase's The Scent of Metal and Cornbread

26 ... Cedar Sanderson ... James Young's Acts of War and Corn Pudding

Discussion

32 ... Bob Jennings

Memorial Notice

The Editors note with deep regret
the passing of long-time reviewer
Tom McGovern.

His reviews were greatly appreciated.
He indicated that he equally appreciated
His opportunity to publish them with the N3F

Letters

Dear George and Jon:

Thank you for Tightbeam 295...hope I am not too late to respond, and to help getting more column-inches into the next issue. So, here goes, hope the coffee kicks in soon...

My letter...I think issue 3 of Amazing will be out soon, and I hope to be able to pick up a copy. I've been in touch with editor-in-chief Ira Nayman, and passing along some constructive criticism, but I should check to see if issue 3 is available. How many days until going back to England? As of today, it's 36 days. Looks like Brexit has been postponed to Hallowe'en (how appropriate), but now the Trumps will be in England at the same time, June 3-5. Hope he doesn't do anything to ruin our holidays. I did mention the newest Twilight Zone, but have not seen any of the new episodes...from what I read of the reviews, I am not missing anything.

Sorry, none of the anime, books or movies have I seen. That's why zines like this one are important...if I can't get to see them, at least I will have an idea of what they are about through the reviews. What am I watching these days? ST:Discovery, Murdoch Mysteries and various documentaries.

Time to go...a few things to do, and make a few last-minute plans for England. We leave May 29, and return June 19. I hope to bring back a ton of photos, and perhaps put them all on my Facebook page, we shall see what I have time for. I have to find some work as soon as I return. See you with the next issue.

Yours, Lloyd Penney

N3F Discussion

We are adding a new section *N3F Discussion*. *N3F Discussion* will be focused on the N3F and its operations. Discussion is expected on occasion to be vigorous and pointed. To avoid setting a tone for the entire magazine, *N3F Discussion* will appear as the closing section in *Tightbeam*.

Anime and Comics

Kaguya-sama: Love is War Review by Jessi Silver

Kaguya Shinomiya and Miyuki Shirogane are two geniuses who stand atop their prestigious academy's student council, making them the elite among elite. But it's lonely at the top and each has fallen for the other. There's just one huge problem standing in the way of lovey-dovey bliss—they're both too prideful to be the first to confess their romantic feelings and thus become the "loser" in the competition of love.—ANN



Streaming: Crunchyroll, Funimation, and Hulu
Episodes: 12
Source: Manga

Episode Summary: Kaguya and Miyuki are a perfect match for one-another. Kaguya is the pinnacle of old wealth who approaches life with a regal point-of-view. Miyuki comes from more modest origins, but makes up for that with his top-tier intelligence. Together they'd make a stunning romantic couple, but in an environment where confessing one's feelings translates to revealing one's weakness, love is much less a complicated dance than it is an all-out competition of strategic wit and cunning.

The student council office at Shuchiin Academy is the battle ground for these student leaders, who both have feelings for each-other but refuse to show their hand. Their tactics to catch each-other expressing their true feelings range from trickery, to manipulation, to outright desperation. But will this stubbornness ultimately result in unrequited feelings on both sides?



Two hearts, battling for dominance. *Screenshot from Crunchyroll.*

First Impressions: This series wasn't quite on my radar before the new anime season took off. While I'm often a fan of stories in which smart people use their wits to continually one-up each-other, there's a point at which self-important, near-endless dialog without some kind of accompanying action component or meaty character development starts to lose my interest. There are even plenty of cases where

the stars align and I still find myself unable to maintain my interest (see: the Monogatari series). In this case, the verbal one-upmanship between the characters is helped along in great part by some inventive visual direction courtesy of SHAFT alum Mamoru Hatakeyama (Shinichi Omatu).

If you're like me and enjoyed many of the Studio SHAFT series produced between Sayonara, Zetsubou-Sensei and Puella Magi Madoka Magica, you'll be familiar with the common (or perhaps more appropriately, uncommon) visual branding that set the studio's productions apart. It's

difficult to explain it in short, but to me what always stood out were the avant-garde, blended-media visuals, bright blocks of color, and iconic Shaft “head tilt” (once you see it, you’ll never forget it). Love or hate their productions, their output definitely had (and still has) a visual cohesiveness that most studios don’t bother with (for several very good reasons).

Though this series was animated at a completely different studio, the director’s prior life is still evident in many of the episode’s unusual visuals. The episode (and I assume, the series) relies a lot on the characters’ internal monologues, which come with them some opportunities to visually separate them from their external dialog. I think my favorite of these effects is one which mimics the look of a VHS cassette as played on an old CRT television (am I revealing my age?). Whether that’s meant to be a commentary on the characters’ thought processes, or just a fun effect, it does the job of providing some variation.

It’s also worth mentioning that the majority of the action in this episode takes place in one room – the student council office. Without the luxury of other locales for variety, there’s almost an implied duty on the part of the staff to manufacture some sort of visual interest in one way or another. Motion-filled, patterned backgrounds and some 360 degree camera movement (courtesy of the fact that the room is rendered in 3DCG) give the setting more life than it might have as a static (and honestly pretty sparse and boring) meeting space. Add in some interesting character framing, and the episode comes out the other end feeling lively rather than stagnant or stuffy.

What’s less appealing about this episode is the overbearing narration that explains almost every plot occurrence in excruciating detail. I know we often fall back on the adage “show, don’t tell” when it comes to storytelling, though as an anime fan I find that there are a lot of anime series I enjoy that frequently break that rule. For me it’s not hard-and-fast, but rather a suggestion on one way to tell a story. However, in a series like this that seems to rely directly on the characters’ inner thought processes, I’d rather be “told” what I need to know directly by the characters instead of by a bellowing off-screen male voice. In my opinion, this is probably the episode’s biggest misstep and I hope it gets toned-down in subsequent episodes.



The upper-class Kaguya gets her first taste of delicious octopus-shaped hot dog. Screenshot from Crunchyroll.



...And now I’m getting hungry. Screenshot from Crunchyroll.

I also question how sustainable the premise of this series is over the long haul. While this episode is amusing due to the ludicrous nature of its characters’ conflict and the increasing levels of craftiness and mental chess-playing that come into use, the maintenance of this brand of silliness requires a deft hand and a good sense for escalation, of which not all anime comedies have the benefit. This type of comedy can work; I thought Haven’t You Heard? I’m Sakamoto (the story of a high school kid who manages to finagle his way out of any situation) struck the right tone and managed to transcend reality via Sakamoto’s antics in a successful way. This

series seems more reliant on the appeal of its characters, and it remains to be seen whether that will pan out in the long term.

In spite of some lingering criticisms, I thought that this episode was pretty entertaining. It definitely has a different look to it than most other series this season, which lends it a certain appeal. Someone whose opinions I hold in pretty high regard has often made the claim to me that anime series with offbeat visuals are often “better,” simply due to the fact that someone on staff cared enough to make sure it looked a little bit different from its contemporaries. I don’t always agree with that, but in this case I at least get the feeling that someone had a little fun in constructing this anime’s distinctive look. It’s a comedic first outing that will hopefully be able to maintain its momentum.

Pros: Visually interesting in a multitude of ways. Comedic set-up and amusing characters.

Cons: Features overbearing (and unnecessary) narration.

Grade: B-

The Magnificent Kotobuki Review by Jessi Silver

In a barren frontier where people trade goods with each other in order to help each other survive, the Kotobuki Squadron are bodyguards for hire, led by a strict but beautiful squadron leader, an unreliable commanding officer, and a true artisan of a crew chief. Alongside pilots who don’t lack for personality, they take to the air in dogfights, letting the engine noise of their Hayabusa fighters ring out in the skies. – ANN



Streaming: HIDIVE

Episodes: 12

Source: Original

Episode Summary: Being a pilot-for-hire is a rough job, and because of that there’s some amount of trash-talking and bragging involved in a pilot’s downtime.

When a young man from the Nazarene Squadron gets full of himself and starts to hit on the young women from the Kotobuki Squadron, he doesn’t realize what he’s getting into. These ladies have seen it all and then some, and don’t have time to play with little boys whose 11 stars don’t stack up to their combined 200.

During a nighttime transport of goods, a transport airship is predictably targeted by air pirates. While the Nazarene Squadron is taken out fairly early in the fight, the Kotobuki Squadron, piloting their Hayabusa fighter planes, manages to fend off the attackers with little collateral damage. Kirie, the group’s hot-headed fighter, notices a familiar insignia on the wing of one of the enemies and decides to engage with it one-on-one, which turns out to be a poor decision. For some reason, though, the enemy leaves her alone after connecting a few warning shots.



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Impressions: While I've never been all that interested in history's vast array of military hardware, some of my very vivid childhood memories involve going over to my grandfather's house and looking over his collection of model planes. He was a World War II veteran, and while he never shared many firsthand stories of that experience, he expressed some of that narrative through the tiny scale models he constructed beneath a hobby light and a magnifying lens. I was always fascinated by these delicate pieces of art, bits of wood and wire hand-painted to mimic famous warplanes, as well as bi-and-tri-wing planes from even earlier in history.

Today's military jets are sleek and outfitted with some of the world's most modern technology, but I've always been more interested in the rough-hewn, hand-built, riveted metal fabrications of the past even if what we have now is technically better and more efficient. The *Magnificent Kotobuki* is itself a fascinating clash between traditional and modern that seems to (maybe inadvertently) address this perennial conflict in both its story and its animation style.



Well now girly! If you're gonna run your mouth off like that, I take it you got the skills to back it up?

It's those that bellow the loudest that most need to be put in their place. Screenshot from *HIDIVE*.

Leaving its story aside for the time being, possibly the most immediately noticeable thing about this episode (and, by extension, the series as a whole) is that it takes a combination approach to its character animation. Many of the side or supporting characters are animated traditionally, while the *Kotobuki* members are rendered in 3DCG. It's reminiscent of *Kado: The Right Answer* in that respect; both series appear to have chosen to sacrifice full integration of animated elements in favor of a hybrid approach that makes some important portions easier to

animate. In this series' case, I assume the primary characters exist as 3D models so that they can easily integrate with the 3D airplanes more completely. It's an initially uncomfortable aesthetic clash that ever-so-slowly settles into itself as the episode goes on, though I suspect not everyone will agree with me on that. Not surprisingly, it's the lengthy dogfight sequence in the second half of the episode that's the most visually impressive.

I have a dual-screen desktop computer set-up at my desk; one screen is for research and writing, while the other is strictly for watching video. It's not necessarily the most immersive way to get my anime fix, but it works for me. I've rarely regretted having not watched something on my big living room television, but this may be one of those rare moments. The dogfight between the *Kotobuki Squadron* and the air pirates is one of the most enthralling action sequences I've watched lately, to the point where I caught myself with my mouth open like a fish just caught up in the moment. The direction, the camera angles, the first-person perspectives (utilized judiciously and for emphasis) work together like a dance to provide a sense of danger and excitement. I'm not normally one to talk to myself, but I was tempted on more than one occasion to say out loud just how awesome certain moments were.



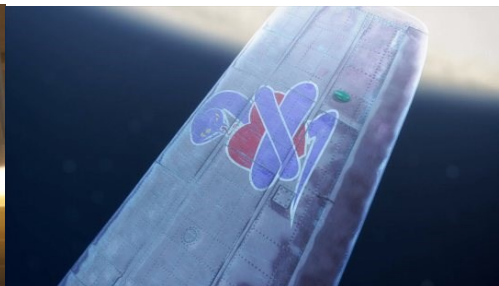
The extended defense of the transport ship is a great argument for CG animation. Screenshot from HIDIVE.

Because the episode spends so much time hooking the audience with flash and excitement, it has less time to devote to character introductions, which leaves us with very little impression of who the characters really are. The opening scene does a serviceable job of providing some surface-level information about the various young women – there’s the feisty one (Kirie, who gets most of the attention this time around), the emotionless one, the grown-up, the heavy drinker... fairly standard for an anime with a cast of mostly women. Knowing how director Mizushima’s projects tend to work I suspect there will be a few character-focused episodes on the horizon, but for all this episode’s “wow” factor, I can’t say that I’ve fully connected with it just yet.

That said, I’m a latecomer but I’m really starting to appreciate this director for his ability to simply construct something entertaining. You’d think that wouldn’t be that difficult, especially if an anime series is adapted from something with well-regarded source material; being an anime fan, though, I think we all realize that a great story can be animated in a way that doesn’t take advantage of what the original source has to offer. This is a series drawn up out of almost nothing (though I will probably continue to joke that this is Mizushima getting the chance to animate Third Aerial Girls Squad in totality) and yet it already feels fun and engaging in spite of some minor criticisms I might have. That, I believe, takes talent.



An ode to fluffy pancakes.



A threatening menace appears.



There’s a dodo, because of course there is.

Each of the characters likely has a story to tell.

I find it appropriate that the characters in this series pilot old, somewhat obsolete planes, retooled with love to serve their current purpose. One of the things that I love about Japanese animation is its (possibly backward) adherence to the hand-drawn techniques of the past; with each passing season, though, I get the impression that more and more of my future favorite series will involve at least some major elements of modern CG animation. The Magnificent Kotobuki appears to exist at that crossroad of old and modern, showing that yes, you can take something old and dress it up with new techniques without losing the core of what makes it entertaining. I certainly hope this is a trait that follows the series through to the end.

Pros: The first episode is very entertaining, especially the long action scene. The CG animation for the planes is utilized well.

Cons: The integration between the traditional and 3D character animation takes some getting

used-to. The characters aren't engaging yet.

Grade: B

Kono Oto Tomare! Sounds of Life Review by Jessi Silver

Takezō is the last remaining member of the Koto club, a club dedicated to the traditional Japanese string instrument. If he doesn't find new members, the Koto Club will be terminated. One day, Takezō is alone in the club room when a student barges in and demands to join. The student is delinquent Chika Kudō, a boy who even scares delinquent upperclassmen at other schools. – ANN



Streaming: Funimation and Hulu

Episodes: 12

Source: Manga

Episode Summary: As the last remaining member of the koto club, Takezo is in a tough position. If he doesn't find some new recruits, the long-running club will be disbanded. However, the koto club room has been infested with ruffians and bullies and Takezo's

insistence that they leave has turned him into their target. When Chika Kudo, a delinquent whose history precedes him, tries to join the club, Takezo won't accept it. This leaves Chika to use his threatening aura in order to get his point across.

Takezo soon learns that Chika's reputation is unwarranted and the result of a grave misunderstanding by both the police and other adults. When history repeats itself and Chika is blamed for an attack on Takezo and the koto club room, Takezo insists on speaking the truth. This provides Chika a pathway to koto club membership, though his shaky relationship with Takezo may need as much nurturing as any musical ability.

Impressions: This series was on my list of anticipated titles for this season. As I mentioned in that piece, I'm attracted to anime series that focus on Japanese culture in various ways. While as a Westerner it's easy enough nowadays to learn about Japanese history, art, music, and other things from a minimal amount of internet research, I find that there's something more satisfying about seeing those things portrayed directly through the point-of-view of storytellers who live within that cultural framework. I also enjoy music generally, and there are plenty of great music-based anime out there that have set a good precedent for this series to follow.



Unfortunately this first episode doesn't contain any actual koto music, which was a bit of a disappointment for me. Instead, though, its focus on two main characters – Takezo and Chika – speaks to something broader than music or culture or even anime. The story it tells expresses the importance of knowing and understanding one's bias, taking rumors and speculation with a grain of salt, and interpreting the actions of others in ways that don't immediately condemn them (as long as there is room for interpretation).



Takezo found a place within the koto club. Screenshot from Funimation.

Takezo found a place within the koto club. Screenshot from Funimation.

A friend of mine recently referred me to an animated short called “Snack Attack,” in which an elderly woman misinterprets the motives and actions of a teenage boy. The cartoon is cute and funny, but points out a mistake that I think all human beings are wired to make – grasping onto assumptions made using very limited information. Assumptions are things that in many ways can be helpful, because our existences don’t allow us the time or the ability to collect and analyze every piece of information about every situation we encounter. If doing so was a requirement,

we’d be in a constant state of information overload. Yet, this sets us up for failures in the form of misunderstandings, some of which can be extremely harmful and consequential to ourselves and others.

Kono Oto Tomare! takes this thought and runs with it. While Chika’s story is handled in a palpably ham-fisted way, I appreciate the focus that it places on both the assumptions that people, including adults who should know better, tend to make, as well as the reasons that they might make them. Takezo’s interactions with his bullies set him up to be distrustful of other boys who carry themselves in a similar way. The police are trained to make observations (and perhaps also draw conclusions), and do so when they identify Chika at a scene of terrible destruction.

Most citizens are prone to assume that a police account is trustworthy and based only on hard evidence. There’s a veritable sea of assumptions swirling throughout this narrative, many of which result in harm. I think this episode serves as a good reminder to all of us that there are often two sides to a story.

Beyond that, this is a very standard setup for an activity-focused anime story. With the koto club on a down-turn, there’s likely to be a lot of focus around bringing it back to its glory days. Both characters introduced thus far have skin in that game; Chika’s family history and Takezo’s pledge to his former club members virtually guarantee their full investment. The need for additional club members is another narrative motivator, and I assume we’ll be learning about the rest of the characters featured in the OP animation pretty soon.



The koto club welcomes Takezo during a time when he doesn’t feel good about himself. Screenshot from Funimation.

I don’t know what demographic this story was originally targeting, but its visual style, including its use of watercolor effects during important scenes, gives it a very shoujo manga aesthetic. I appreciate the use of this effect, as it lends a transient feeling to the series – this is a short snapshot of these characters’ lives, during which they were brought together through their interest in something unique. The character animation quality does struggle a bit with inconsistent detail, to the point where I’m a little concerned about when it eventually features characters playing the koto – I fear it might look clunky or goofy (there’s a tiny bit in the promo linked below, but it’s difficult to tell from just a second or two of video). It’s not a huge issue for me, but it can be

a little distracting or frustrating.



Chika defends Takezo from the bullies.
Screencap from Funimation.

While I have a few reservations about the series now that I've had a taste, I have to say that my curiosity is definitely still thoroughly energized. I'm cautiously excited to hear some koto playing, and that may be the make-or-break aspect here; if the music hits a sour note, even some above-average character drama may not be enough to maintain my personal interest. That's truly the challenge of storytelling that focuses on very specific activities or cultural minutiae – if that focal aspect isn't realized in a competent way it can bring the rest of the story down with it.

Pros: The first episode tells a strong story about the danger of making assumptions about others. The watercolor aesthetic is nice and establishes a pleasant visual atmosphere.

Cons: The animation quality is inconsistent. There's no koto playing in the first episode.

Grade: B-

Novels

13 Days of Midnight by Leo Hunt Review by Greg Fewer

Luke Manchett is a sixteen-year-old boy living with his mother (who suffers serious migraines and spends a lot of time in bed) in the town of Dunbarrow, in north-eastern England, ever since his father left them without any explanation ten years ago. The book begins with Luke opening a letter addressed only to him which informs him that his father has died and that he is invited to meet his father's attorney about his inheritance. He soon finds out that he is to inherit \$6 million dollars – wealth he never knew about and which his father had apparently made from the TV shows he presented about ghost-hunting. The problem is that it also turns out that Luke's father was a necromancer who had gathered a host of eight dangerous ghosts whom he had forced into his service. All of these ghosts want to be free of this service, which they now owe to Luke as his father's successor, and one way to break the spell that binds them to him is to get Luke killed (although they can't harm him directly)! Their best chance of doing that will be on Halloween night when their powers will be at their strongest – and this is less than two weeks away!

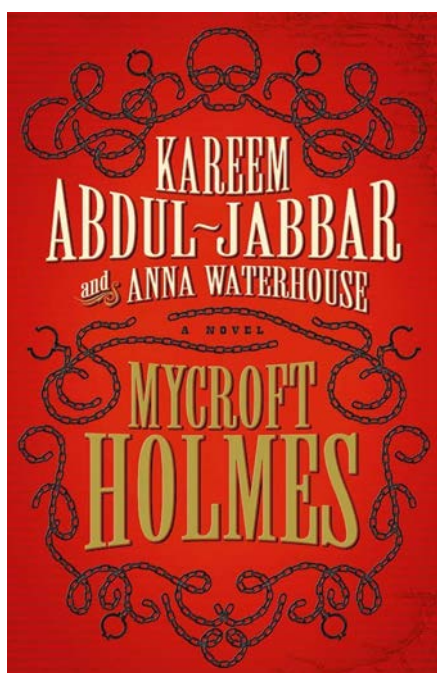


Luke would be happy to let them all go except that he doesn't know how – the many sheets of disordered and incomprehensible notes, a box of finger rings and a strange clasped and leather-bound book that he is unable to open are all the clues his father left him. All Luke would like is to be 'normal', hang out with the 'right' sort of friends, wear the 'right' shoes, play soccer,

rugby and video games, and also ask the gorgeous Holiday Simmon to go out with him. Maybe he will get the chance to do this at Holiday's pre-Halloween party. However, to prevent the host from getting him killed on Halloween night, he will have to – somehow – learn to become a necromancer like his dad. He will also have to rely on his wits, his cowardly dog, Ham, and Elza, the unpopular girl in his class who is the only other person who can see his ghosts!

13 Days of Midnight is Leo Hunt's first novel, which was first published when he was only 24 years old! It is a fun, witty and fast-paced read, with weird and creepy ghosts – two of whom (the Fury and the Shepherd) are especially dark and dangerous. There are some scary moments as the host threatens the lives of everyone Luke holds dear. Indeed, once free of his service, the host would be able to wreak havoc across the town of Dunbarrow – putting everyone's lives there at risk. While 13 Days of Midnight is an urban fantasy/paranormal novel aimed at mid- to older teens many adults will enjoy it also.

Mycroft Holmes
by Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Anna Waterhouse
Review by Bob Jennings



This is the first of a series of novels about Mycroft Holmes, the older brother of Sherlock Holmes, whom Holmes had mentioned as being the person practically single handedly responsible for holding the British Empire together with his brilliant behind the scenes maneuverings. I picked up this book on the review/recommendation of Bill Plott who reported how much he enjoyed the second volume in the series. I decided to start the series at the very beginning.

In this novel we meet Mycroft Holmes, just out of Cambridge University and about twenty-three years old, an undersecretary to the Secretary of State of War, and proving already to be almost indispensable. He is young and in love, and has his future already planned.

His plans are upset when troubling news reaches him thru his close friend, Cyrus Douglas, a Negro from Trinidad who runs an upscale London tobacco shop. Children in Douglas's home region are being enticed by sea spirits, then killed with their bodies being drained of all blood.

This unsettling news alarms Mycroft's fiancé, who is also originally from Trinidad. She decides to return to the island immediately, which causes Mycroft to follow, after noticing mysterious transfers of funds from the European continent thru British banking houses, money that goes to Jamaican and Trinidad locations, then, apparently is being dispersed in mysterious unknown ways. He convinces his boss that these killings are giving rise to some new native superstition that could lead to serious instability in the region where France, Spain and ambitious South American nations stand ready to capitalize on any disruption of British control or trade within their sphere, and that Mycroft should personally go to the area to investigate.

What develops is a complicated mystery involving many personalities, with serious threats upon the lives of Mycroft and Cyrus, beginning almost the minute they step on board

their passenger ship. Many chapters describe a long series of hazardous events before Mycroft and his friend learn what is going on, and then finally decide what must be done to deal with the situation.

The path from page one thru to the end of this novel is long and convoluted. The authors go out of their way to demonstrate Mycroft's powers of observation and deduction, and a number of these little anecdotes and exercises are quite clever. But on the other hand, quite a lot are not, and seem forced, even contrived to this reader.

The plot also seems contrived, and more than a bit forced. An effort to produce plenty of adventure and a feeling of suspense is not always successful. Often times the chapters are tense with a clear flow of action, but just as often they are strung together with a chain of events that are poorly defined and not explained with much detail.

To be honest I was reminded of some of the dime novel stories of the previous century that I collect; those that were written first draft by an author attempted to put his plot down on paper rapidly, keeping the events flowing because action is what the readers wanted and action was what the editor demanded. In this particular novel that leads to a number of near-inconsistencies.

For example, in a scouting assault with a picked crew Mycroft and Douglas need to approach an island they have reason to believe will be heavily guarded. As the scouting force approaches the island, the authors suddenly remember that running several boats up toward this island in broad daylight against alert guards will obviously lead to disaster, so they immediately concoct a storm out of thin air, with no forewarning, to produce dark overcast skies and a steady drizzle so the armed guards will seek shelter away from the shore and not see the party approaching. This is writing by the seat of your pants.

There are several scenes that are jarringly incongruities. For example, in one chapter a leading character and notable MacGuffin in the story, commits suicide by taking an agonizingly painful poison. Why? No real reason is provided, and if the person was going to commit suicide, why not a use a gun or a knife, why take a slow, painful poison? Because the authors didn't think the idea thru. They had to keep writing, they had to keep the plot moving, and they did keep writing, and they kept writing pell-mell thru a whole book full of plot glitches and inconsistencies that simply do not add up to a unified whole. The basic gist of the plot is all here, but it is strung out and cast forth erratically with so many irrelevant and sometimes almost conflicting points that it does not really hold together.

Another example: upon arriving at Port of Spain in Trinidad, and ravenously hungry, the pair are warned to go directly to the island Governor, who is expecting them, and not to stop, because they are in danger. A few paragraphs later on the way to the governor's offices, they see a person they believe attacked them on their ship voyage go into a wretched local saloon. They can't go inside, but what luck, for no reason whatsoever, Douglas finds a ladder leading to an upper floor which, even more fortunately, turns out to be an abandoned opium den, and by another amazing coincidence, there are knotholes in the floor that allow them to look down on the drinking room below. There they see their man with three other unsavory characters that they also recognize, and then, by yet another amazing coincidence, they see the four men get poisoned right before their eyes from meat pies they buy from a street urchin! And, incredibly, Douglas, who has been living in London for some years, happens to recognize the person who

did it, a notorious known criminal poisoner, who, for yet another unexplained reason, happened to be sitting just two tables away from his intended victims. Can you believe it? I sure couldn't

The long arm of coincidence overwhelms and overpowers the entire plot of this novel. There is simply too much that has no logical reason to be part of the story, and when events interject themselves, there often is not even a courtesy attempt to describe and explain these remarkable out of the blue occurrences.

That's bad plotting, and it's bad writing. The novel is filled to the overflowing point with one unbelievably incredible occurrence after another. I found it impossible to accept this chain of circumstances. As I said, there is a good basic plot here, but the authors seem unable to coax it out of hiding and supply sufficient meat over the bare bones to make it palatable.

We are informed that Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, famed basketball player and member of the NBA Hall of Fame, is also a UCLA graduate in English and History, and has written at least nine previous volumes, several of which were New York Times best sellers.

Anna Waterhouse is a screenwriter and script consultant, hired most often as a script doctor to fix and smooth out problems with TV programs and documentaries. She also teaches screenwriting at Chapman University of California.

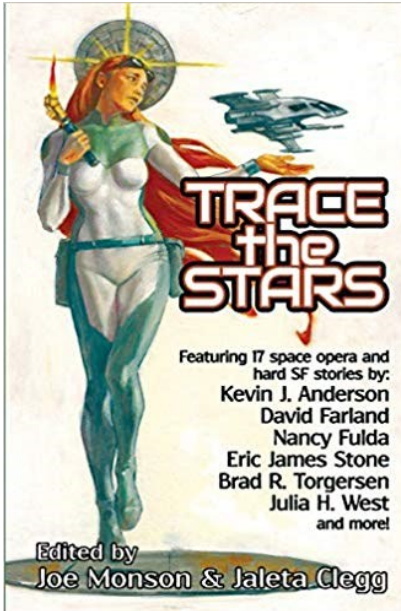
With this much talent on board, why could the pair not have produced a better book? You got me. The book is certainly readable, and the story moves right along, if you don't stop to ask any questions, or pause to wonder why the events described really don't lead to the events that immediately follow. Unfortunately these things do bother me, and so does the long arm of coincidence, and so does the uneven writing style, and so does the off again/on again powers of deduction Mycroft Holmes employs. His brilliant leaps in logic work successfully in some chapters, yet in other chapters he behaves like a stumbling inept tourist. There is no real consistency of characterization, or in the skills of the two protagonists.

This book is marketed for the adult market, but I suspect a lot of adults will find the same problems I found with the story. Young people who may not have acquired much sophistication in their reading tastes yet would probably like it better. Perhaps things improve with the later volumes, but I am including to doubt it. For me, this will be the first and only volume of the series I will read. There are plenty of other good books being published these days waiting to be enjoyed. This is not one of them.

Short Stories

Trace the Stars -
Anthology Funding Student Entry to LTUE
Edited by Joe Monson and Jaleta Clegg
Review by Pat Patterson

Proceeds from the sale of "Trace The Stars" subsidize student admission fees to the LTUE conference. I received a copy of this work from the editor, who requested a fair review. I was happy to oblige, as at the moment I was watching my daughter cheer for her middle school basketball team, and any distraction was welcome.



Proceeds from the sale of this work will be used to sustain the ability to offer students attending the Life, The Universe and Everything conference a much, much reduced entry fee. That's worth doing, so, buy this one, okay? The authors DONATED their work to this cause!

I've never been to LTU&E, and just from the reading I've done as prep for this review, it seems to me that the overall theme is this: what we do matters. Decisions must be made ethically, even if no one knows about it. I may be utterly wrong about that, but I include a couple of links so you can read up on it yourself: [About LTUE](#).

I began reading with a bit of confusion, due to the dedication. I find that my reading pattern involves routinely skipping over content-free sections of text, a category to which I have assigned poetry, proper names, and most designations of time and geography. This USUALLY works, although sometimes I do have to go back and re-read, when I find myself hopelessly lost. That was the case here.

The book is dedicated to (mumble mumble) “Doc” Smith. Well, that's reasonable. Doc Smith was one of the early SF writers, and a noted mentor to Heinlein, after all. So there is no incongruity in the dedication of a volume of space opera to him. Right?

Wrong. My flash-reading let me down; in the place of the (mumble mumble) up above, I find not 'Edward Elmer,' but 'Marion K.' It's an entirely different Doc Smith, linked, as far as I know, only by love of science fiction, and the accident of academic credentials and a common last name. THIS Doc Smith receives proper homage in Monson's “Foreword,” and I encourage you to read it as well as the stories.

To which we now turn our attention:

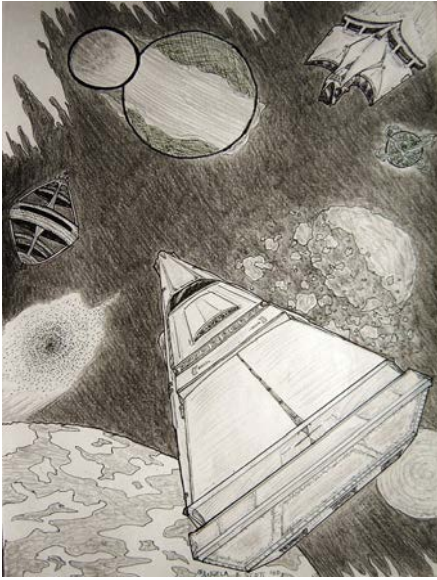
“[Angles of Incidence](#),” by Nancy Fulda. The good doctor Kittyhawk – call her Kitty – is perfectly happy dealing with dead things, whether it's pieces of beings or pieces of structures. They don't bother her with disturbing intrusions into her space; they just sit there, at peace and in pieces, and allow her to discover their secrets at her own pace. So, it's bothersome to her when she is pulled off her field site, and asked to solve a question under a deadline; particularly when this is a literal deadline. Deadly serious actions, with elements of comedy.

“[The Road Not Taken](#),” by Sandra Tayler. It's likely that every one of us have spent time wondering (or fixating upon) what would happen had we made a different choice. We think we would be happier, if we had gone the other way. I've read several stories revolving around ways to make the choice differently, and it never works out, but this is the first story I've seen with this approach. I DO hope the author was going for 'creepy' in the reader reaction, because this

About LTUE — LTUE.NET

Life, the Universe, & Everything: The Marion K. “Doc” Smith Symposium on Science Fiction and Fantasy originated at Brigham Young University and has grown and changed a lot over the last thirty years. LTUE is a three-day academic symposium on all aspects of science fiction and fantasy. Comprised of panels, presentations and papers on writing, art, literature, film, gaming and other facets of speculative fiction, LTUE is a place to learn all about life, the universe, and everything else you love.

The symposium is, most importantly, a gathering place for fans of our creative and innovative world to hang out and share their love of all things amazing, obscure, and even not-quite-real.



Space and Time
Angela K. Scott

one sent chills.

“**Log Entry,**” by Kevin J. Anderson. He's really a masterful writer: gives you (almost) the punchline, then tells the story. It is an engrossing tale of resolve, youthful expectations meeting reality, and a very strange alien ecology. This is one of my favorites in the collection, as it speaks directly to my love of military sci-fi.

“**The Ghost Conductor of the Interstellar Express,**” by Brad R. Torgersen. If he knows how to write a bad story, I have found no evidence of it yet, I've just reviewed his short story 'Scrith' in the recently-issued “Man-Kzin Wars XV,” (it was wonderful) and then I was pleasantly surprised to discover he has a story in this collection as well. WOOT! I don't QUITE know how to describe the feel of this work; it's a bit melancholy, almost. The protagonist, Caddy Brenton, was removed from her parents as a young child, and sent with an older brother on a centuries-long journey to colonize a planet that there was only theoretical evidence of. When the ship arrives, there is, in fact, a planet, but it is totally devoid of life and the chemicals

needed to create or sustain life. The solution: send out comet-catchers, to snag long-period comets and divert them to orbit around New Olympia, where their raw materials will be used to bring a garden where there is only desert. And that's what Caddy's beloved older brother was doing, when he vanished. Just him; his ship returned without him. She has to find out what happened.

“**A Veil of Leaves,**” by M. K. Hutchins. It's her wedding day, and to her great joy, the star-man arrives! The star-people have provided them with power and light; who knows what beneficence will come this time? Surely it will be something wonderful!

“**Freefall,**” by Eric James Stone. Anyone who has read “The Cold Equations” will never forget it, and it has such an emotional impact that you overlook the fact that it's utterly preposterous. It's entirely possible you won't ever forget “Freefall,” either.

“**Launch,**” by Daniel Friend. Charity Penland is on the witness stand, to give testimony that will convict a co-worker of negligence or sabotage of the colony ship that carried away, among others, her treasured baby sister. This one is over the top, in my opinion; it produces a visceral reaction, but at the expense of distorting how humans handle guilt and grief. No one can tolerate living with such strong emotions as are expressed here without blurting out a confession. Just my opinion.

“**Glass Beads,**” by Emily Martha Sorensen. I've read a couple of good treatments of First Contact where the inequality of trade is a factor, starting with "Liberation of Earth" (1953) by William Tenn, with the lovely riff “Any lendi, dendi?” It wasn't until years later that I heard Glenn Miller's band play “Got a penny, Jenny?” More recently is the entire Four Horsemen series, which MUST have reached a hundred volumes by this time (at least, it seems that way). However, I haven't seen the treatment done in quite this way, and really, it's a very good read.

“**Sweetly the Dragon Dreams,**” by David Farland. Space Monsters wish to destroy all life in the galaxy; on a distant planet, humans and allies fight back. That sounds like science fiction, but

this reads like fantasy. I NEVER read fantasy if I can help it. If you like fantasy, I expect you will like this.

“**Working on Cloud Nine,**” by John M. Olsen. Loved this one; didn't think I was going to at first, because it took me a while to understand the plain words on the screen. I have no excuse for that; it's a GREAT read! Sabotage on a space station, having to solve the problem before the rescue team gets there because unauthorized experiments; GREAT stuff!

“**Fido,**” by James Wymore. I was deeply taken into the world of the protagonist, a human on an alien spacecraft. He volunteered to go, because he felt he had nothing to hold him to Earth. After he discovers he was wrong, it's too late to return. And they are messing with his mind... Upon reflection, perhaps this is a horror tale; it's certainly of Twilight Zone quality. Very well done.

“**Knowing Me,**” by Eric G. Swedin. In 20+ years as an educator, I encountered more than a few kids on the Asperger's/Autism spectrum that required modification of their educational program. A very few of them were also extremely intelligent. Only one came anywhere near the limits and the abilities of this protagonist, and he wasn't even that close. What I find best about this selection is the sympathetic way in which he is treated by the author: this is not a monster or a freak. He is a highly gifted individual, with no social skills to speak of, and an overarching need for routine. It's through no fault of his that he was chosen to save the world, and that his selection cost him all that he had. Beautiful story.

“**Making Legends,**” by Jaleta Clegg. There are all sorts of ways in which we are denied our heart's desire. Fortunately, there are all sorts of ways we can find it, as well. Wonderfully wacky story.

“**Neo Nihon,**” Paul Genesse. China has a population bomb that has already exploded on them; it's just that the shock waves haven't reached their limits yet. That's a truth, and this work uses that as a basis for the story. It's set in a far-distant time, and on a far distant planet, but it strongly evokes the Rape of Nanking, which some believe to be the true beginning of WWII, rather than the German invasion of Poland. I wonder if the author had the rape of Nanking in mind when he wrote this?

“**The Last Ray of Light,**” by Wulf Moon. You MUST read the Editor's Note and the Author's Note on this story! The author was 15 years old when this work was published. Seen with that perspective, it's a work of genius. Otherwise, it's merely good, and the 'merely' qualification comes only because the characters' names are Xenon and Argon. That's the kind of thing a 15 year old inserts into the story to highlight the science fiction nature of the writing; it's not something an adult writer would do. Well, except for Isaac Asimov. The other noticeable discrepancy of the story is a function of the time in which it was written (1978); charmingly (to those of us of a certain maturity), the computer ends each sentence with 'STOP.' I am grateful they decided to release it in this form, instead of editing it to remove what would cause dissonance today.

“**Cycle 335,**” by Beth Buck. I really can't say very much about the plot of the story without spoiling it horribly, and I won't do that. I will say that

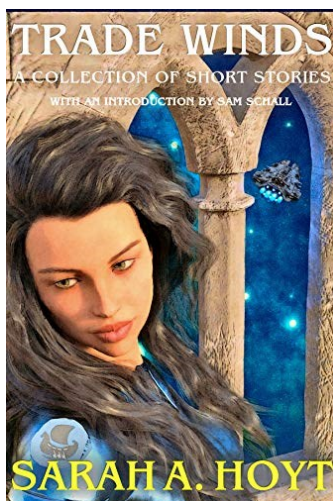


The Warriors
Angela K. Scott

the author sticks in nicely disconcerting thoughts in the protagonist's head. I'll also say that this is one of the worst wide-awake nightmares to have.

“Sea of Chaos,” by Julia H. West. All of the science in the world won't make a good story if the characters aren't real. As far as the science goes, you really aren't asked to make too many leaps of faith. The first one is a standard, which is that there exists a FTL drive, in this case referred to as 'overspace.' However, the charming aspect of this particular drive, is that it is managed by a navigator using a VR interface that simulates the long voyages taken by the Polynesian explorers. Both of those are merely an excuse to bring the real joy of the story, which is of an old dog and some new tricks.

Trade Winds
by Sarah A. Hoyt
Review by Pat Patterson



I want to talk about the cover first. Some 50+ years ago, when I was 15, the husband and wife of the family I was living with at the time were experiencing marital discord. So, they sent me to a psychologist. (I learned later, in my own graduate studies, that this response is common enough in dysfunctional family systems that it has a name.) One of the first things the doc did with me was administer the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), which is allegedly a series of ambiguous pictures for the client to make up stories about. Well, THESE pictures weren't ambiguous in the slightest! Every picture was about a teenage boy murdering people in his house, and getting revenge on all who had harmed him. I wasn't ABOUT to tell THAT to the doc; he'd think I was crazy!

I'm giving you this background so you will take my perception of the cover with a grain of salt.

It's a beautifully executed cover. An attractive woman of indeterminate years (long graying hair, but an unlined face) stands with her head turned away from the cathedral-type window, which appears to be executed in stone. (I'm sure there is a more precise term, but architecture isn't my thing.) Through the window, we see starry skies, and a departing spaceship, shown to be such by the blue exhaust.

The woman is wearing a sky-blue garment; it MAY be a jacket, as there is a hint of darker color at her neckline. On the right shoulder of the jacket is a circular patch, depicting an ancient sailing ship of the longship or birlinn type, single-masted, with three oars visible.

I conclude: she is a naval officer, who has chosen, with regret, to be left behind in port when her ship leaves. I say officer, instead of ordinary seaman, because of the length and condition of her hair; swabbies don't like to have to fool around with the long stuff, because it gets in their way, gets caught in capstans, and who has time to take care of it when yer swabbing decks and chipping paint? Since she is an attractive woman, this MUST be a matter of the heart; physical beauty in literature is never wasted on the uninteresting. The regret is evidenced by the fact that she has turned her head AWAY from the departing ship, and the utter absence of a smile.

And now, the reviews.

Nice intro by Sam Schall. I'd like to see more of those done.

And Your Little Dog, Too. I love that phrase from "The Wizard of Oz," and use it frequently. However, in this story, it sort of applies. An aerospace engineering student with interest in flying saucers picks up an old hitchhiker and his dog on a lonely country road. Nobody gets slashed! However, the old hitchhiker has some interesting ideas about contacting aliens, and he is..strange, somehow. And his little dog, too.

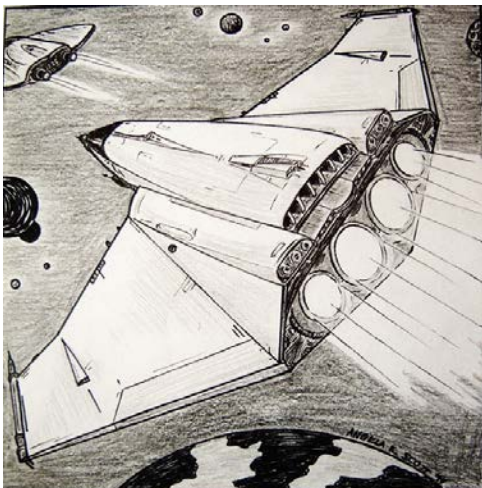
Who Goes Boing? Eccentric genius nerds with high technology at their fingertips and a commanding officer from 'the REAL Army' have to explore a new planet. Cartoons are funny, aren't they? Here, have a cigar. I'll light it for you.

A Cog In Time. Anytime you can hang out with David Drake is a good time. I was appalled when I realized I spent a year living in Chapel Hill and never crossed paths with him. He MAY have been involved with other things, at the time. Or maybe it was another time.

All Who Are Thirsty. Not nearly old enough to have been an authentic Hippie, but of that genre anyway, she really wanted to be an archaeologist and study ancient cultures. Until the aliens landed. And whereas all of the classics films had them giving us advanced technology, and sometimes eating us, NONE of these BEMs wanted anything except to discover God. They had never HEARD of such a concept until Earth entered their lives. But she's an atheist! Selling crap in a New Age bookstore!

Yearning To Breathe Free. Since it's pretty much determined that humans arose out of Africa, EVERYONE in the United States has ancestors who immigrated here from somewhere else, whether it was a land bridge from Siberia, on a boat or for a fortunate few, on a plane. You think we would have adapted to the problems of immigration by now. Evidently not. These undocumented aliens will get eaten if they are deported, though. Should that matter?

Calling The Mom Squad. Those of us who have actually had to shuttle kids to soccer practice, ballet, scouts, karate, and attend orchestra concerts on the same night we are at a cheerleading function know this: it ain't no picnic being a soccer mom. These particular moms also have to fight dragons, though. Yeah, I'd take the dragon fighting, too, except it's NOT "do this OR do that." It's "do this AND do that." And keep it a secret, too, okay?



Through Space
Angela K. Scott

On Edge. In what was SUPPOSED to be discovering new ways to deliver packages for Amazon, the geniuses discover how to open up doors to other times and other worlds. Here's a helpful hint for you, should you be working on the same thing: don't be the first guy through the door.

Some Other Pieta. Okay, here's a thought problem for you: what kind of child would a marriage between Adolf Hitler and Mother Teresa produce? That's not what happens in this story, but I would encourage you to consider the ramifications anyway. One other thing: the bad guys have six arms.

Leaving Home. All across America, you can find little ghost towns that faded away when the railroad came through in the 1880's, or

when the Interstate was built in the 1960's. What happens to the junction points in future travel, when you can cross light years in a moment? And then, something better comes along?

Flying. Earth is maybe an okay place to be for most people, but some folks must emigrate or they will die. However, the government controls the entire system of moving off-planet. If YOU were the head of government, would YOU let just anybody move into your bright and shiny new planets?

The Big Ship and The Wise Old Owl. I don't think Robert Heinlein invented the idea of the generation ship, but he sure did more to popularize it to my generation than anyone else has. I've read several stories using the idea of the generation ship as a basis, and most involve the idea that the people on the ship have forgotten what's really going on. In this variation, nursery rhymes have a special meaning, for those who are able to hear.

And Not To Yield. If you are already a fan of Sarah Hoyt, you know about her novels dealing with the society run by the Good Men, who are anything but. This is a story set in that universe. For the novice, this is a story about a revolution against tyranny, when the USA is only a distant memory, repressed by a few who hold ultimate power.

Trade Winds. I LOVE alternate history! In this story, Hannibal won against Rome, and Carthage became the primary cultural influence. Their society was founded on trade, rather than conquest, and civilization has advanced faster and farther. Even so, some people are still treacherous.

Motion Pictures

Captain Marvel Review by Cedar Sanderson

I took the kids to see a movie last night. Normally I take them, drop them off, and come back later to get them. But this time they really wanted me to go, too. It's a Marvel movie, which they know I appreciate, and as I told the Junior Mad Scientist later, the time approaches when one or more is moving out, and I don't think there will be many more opportunities to do this with them. So even though the initial takes on this movie varied from dubious to downright 'Oh, Marvel, no!' I wanted to be there for my kids. And a healthy serving of curiosity about the movie.

I feel like I should preface this review, before I get into the spoiler bits, with a comment on my film geekery. It is almost non-existent. I rarely if ever watch TV these days, and then when I do, it's not SF/F. It's either cooking shows, or it's mysteries (and specifically British mysteries). While I'm familiar with the tropes and culture surrounding, say, Star Trek, or Dr Who, I watched TOS, and that's about it. The Marvel movies have been a rare exception for me, and as with this last one, they were started with my kids. But something about the Avengers enchanted me, and the geek in me came home, wrote on the book of faces 'hey, where do I find the books behind this?'

That's the other thing. I was never a comic book fan. I learned to read early, and was a sophisticated reader almost from the beginning. I don't mean I had upper crust or literary tastes. Far from it. I read well, and I read a lot. I consumed books like water. Comic books were hard to



come by and short. It was impossible to get the whole story in one or two random issues I might be able to get my hands on. All this is pertinent to my movie review, I'm not just rambling, I promise! In my early reading I came across pulp action adventure stories, like E. R. Burroughs, E. E. 'Doc' Smith, and many others. The Avengers movies, when I encountered them as an adult, were throwbacks to that golden age of pulp fiction for me. And now we come to Captain Marvel.

I think in movies, as in books, you are coming into the experience with a lot of expectations, usually. And a certain amount of what you take away is part of what you brought into the movie theater with you. Unfortunately, there was a concerted effort before this movie's release to make it into something it wasn't. I expected one thing going in, because of the pre-release press. I walked out with a different impression, a sense of huge amusement at how that expectation had been subverted, and feeling very happy with the real takeaway in the story. I'm not a fan of message fiction. This is not message fiction, but like Captain America, there's a moral in the story. Unlike one of Aesop's fables, it's not spelled out for you, and it's not what you might think it's going to be. Go see Captain Marvel and watch for the trick near the end that turns it all on it's ear...

And now, the spoilery part. Read no further if you want to be surprised.

I'm serious!

Despite all the chicks, this is not a chick flick. This is a Human Wave movie, as most of the Avenger's arc has been.

So what I walked in afraid of was that this was going to be a vehicle for third-wave feminism, which is a subversive movement that erodes the initial intent of feminists to establish women as equal to any other human beings. The main actress has certainly been running her mouth saying it is. The main actress, to be kind, couldn't find the point with both hands.

Early on in the film, it's obvious that the heroine has major issues. OK, the plot has major issues. Don't walk in expecting to be surprised by the big reveal at the end. I wasn't, and I doubt you will be either. And if that reveal hadn't happened, I would have been done, done, done with the Avengers. If I'm not a fan of 3WF (third wave feminists is too long to keep typing) I'm even less a fan of the current statist movement. I'm all about human rights, independence, and Liberty! or death. So far, the Avengers had satisfied this side of me with the wonderful Captain America arc. So when you see the Kree set up as this superhuman race of warrior heroes (that's actually a line in the movie) who are ruled utterly by the Supreme Intelligence AI, my first thought was 'they're really the bad guys' and they are. But you don't know that until much later in the film.

Continued in spoilery part:

CEDAR'S SPOILERY PART IS FOUND ON THE NEXT-TO-LAST PAGE

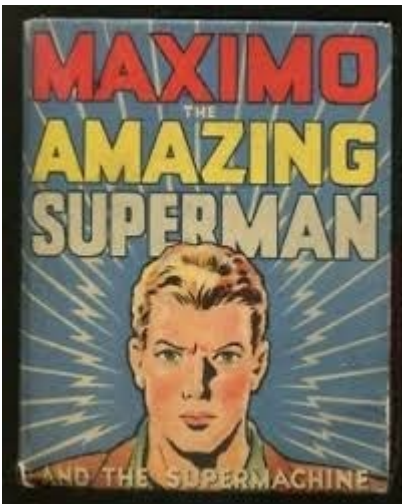
SerCon

The Maximo Big Little Books

by

Jon D. Swartz, Ph. D.

N3F Historian



The Maximo Big Little Books (BLBs) were Whitman's answer to Superman and the best-selling comic books in which he appeared. It has been claimed that Whitman tried to secure licensing rights to the Superman character – as it had with many other popular comic characters such as Dick Tracy, Mickey Mouse, and Little Orphan Annie. Failing in the attempt to acquire Superman, Whitman went to its in-house authors and artists to create a competing superhero for its BLB format. Author Russell R. Winterbotham, a science fiction (SF) writer and author of several BLBs, came through with his version of a comic book superhero: Maximo, The Amazing Superman. Three titles were published featuring this new character, all written by Winterbotham, with two of Whitman's most popular artists – Henry E. Vallely and Erwin L. Hess -- supplying the artwork.

I suppose this scenario is possible, since Superman burst onto the comic book scene in June, 1938 (in Action Comics) and had his own magazine by the next year; and the first Maximo BLB did not appear until 1940. Unfortunately for Whitman, however, Maximo did not even come close to competing with DC's Superman.

Maximo the Amazing Superman (#1436)

by

R. R. Winterbotham

(Illustrated by Henry E. Vallely)

Whitman Publishing Company, 1940

This BLB introduced Maximo, the amazing superman, with a two-page preface titled “What Is A Superman?” In it Winterbotham told of some “supermen” of fact and fiction and then explained that Maximo Miller was a new kind of superman, not a physical superman but one gifted with a super brain.

In the story Maximo is out for a walk, dressed in his hiking togs, and sees an automobile about to be hit by an onrushing train. Maximo steels himself for the impending crash, his mind straining to stop the car by willpower alone. “Suddenly, within the young man's head, there was a crack. It seemed as if a barrier in his brain had broken with the strain of what he saw. Some powerful, new force surged through his muscles, seeming to leap from his body toward the speeding motor car.” Maximo looks up and sees the train is passing. The car is hanging suspended in the air about three feet above the ground, its wheels spinning and smoke pouring from its exhaust. Then a feeling of relaxation comes over Maximo and the car settles to the ground. When the car's tires touch the ground, it lurches forward. The driver, a young woman, brings it to a halt as Maximo runs over to her. This is Maximo's first experience with his unique

brain powers.

Maximo then meets a Professor Arvid of Curfman College, the father of the young woman he so miraculously saved. Arvid encourages Maximo to try his newfound power until he has it under complete control. The villain of the story, a petty tyrant named Watts Garvin, yearns to become an overlord of organized crime and hears of Maximo's power. The rest of the book involves Garvin's attempts to capture Maximo, with the attempts resulting in several cliffhanging situations before Maximo eventually triumphs.

Maximo the Amazing Superman and the Supermachine (#1445)

by

R. R. Winterbotham

(Illustrated by Erwin L. Hess)

Whitman Publishing Company, 1941

This was the first Maximo book with the “See 'em Move” feature that appeared in many of the Whitman Better Little Books (the series that followed their Big Little Books series). This feature had small drawings in the upper right hand corner of each illustrated page that, when the pages of the book were flipped, produced a brief visual story. In the See 'em Move presented here Maximo demonstrated some of his mental powers. The “What Is A Superman” preface from the first Maximo book was repeated here.

In the book's story a dam collapses because of the neglect of its builder, Thaddeus Steinwick, who is a brilliant engineer and a mechanical genius, but warped. Maximo uses his mental powers to save a threatened town from the flooding waters by diverting them into a nearby valley. Steinwick observes this feat, and subsequently dopes and kidnaps Maximo. He is then able to record Maximo's electrical brain power and “translate” it by means of recording instruments into a mechanical device he has built. Steinwick plans to use this supermachine to send out a death ray unless surrounding communities pay him an exorbitant tribute. A struggle between Maximo and the supermachine takes up the rest of the book, with Maximo forced to use his super brain to its limit in the struggle. Eventually, the supermachine is destroyed and Steinwick and his henchmen are captured and turned over to the authorities.

Maximo the Amazing Superman and the Crystals of Doom (#1444)

by

R. R. Winterbotham

(Illustrated by Henry E. Vallely)

Whitman Publishing Company, 1941

The third, and last, Maximo BLB also had the “See 'em Move” feature (“Maximo Makes a Daring Escape!”), but the “What Is A Superman” preface from the first two books was not included here.

In this book's story Professor Arvid seeks the secret of the mysterious and lifeless Death's Head Mountain to the west of Ancel City. Maximo's powers are stretched to their limits by strange crystal spheres there that can force humans to do their bidding. The man controlling the radioactive ice crystals, a crooked land developer named Belhampton Donner, must be brought to justice along with his henchman Fately, who had murdered Donner's former partner on Donner's orders. Maximo is able to do all this and, in doing so, the limitations of his superhuman

mental powers are explored and explained. The reader learns that Maximo, although possessed of a super brain, is neither invincible nor invulnerable.

Russell R. Winterbotham (1904-1971)

Winterbotham began his professional writing career in the 1920s by writing Little Blue Book pamphlets for Haldeman-Julius Publications, then went on to write stories for Astounding and other SF prozines. He also wrote newspaper comic strips, juvenile novels, adult SF novels, and some sixty BLBs -- many of them with SF content.

Henry E. Vallely (1886-1950)

Vallely was best known for the chiaroscuro technique he used in illustrating many BLBs. He also produced a large amount of fashion illustrations for women's magazines and illustrations for food periodicals, magazine covers, and children's books. His art was distinctive. Some of the BLBs he illustrated featured the exploits of radio personalities Edgar Bergen & Charlie McCarthy, Eddie Cantor, Jack Armstrong, The Lone Ranger, Green Hornet, Gene Autry, and Tom Mix.

Erwin L. Hess (1913-1999)

Hess was an artist for Dell publications from 1939 through the 1940s. During this period he also illustrated juvenile novels (including *Joyce of the Secret Squadron* – using the pseudonym of Erwin Darwin) and was also the artist for the *Captain Midnight* newspaper comic strip (1941-1945). He began a cartoon series, “The Good Old Days,” in 1947 and continued it until 1981. In the 1950s he illustrated Dell's Gene Autry comic book. His BLBs included comic book and radio personalities such as Autry, *Captain Midnight*, and *The Shadow*.

Conclusions

What can be concluded about the Maximo BLBs? The artwork was by two of the most talented artists to work in the field, and Winterbotham was a competent SF writer. One critic, in fact, wrote: “Maximo was a very original effort and the writing of R. R. Winterbotham was truly inspired.” In short, these books were on a par with most of the other BLBs published at the time; on the other hand, they were never serious competition for the superhero comic books.

The original Superman finally did appear in the Whitman BLB format. In 1980 a soft cover book 256 pages in length, *Superman and the Phantom Zone Connection* (#5780-2), was published -- one of the last Whitman BLBs. The story was written by E. Nelson Bridwell (1931-1987), a DC editor and author of many of the “Superman family” comic book stories. The artwork was not credited but resembled the art in the Superman comic books of the period. This Superman title was in a Whitman series that also featured such comic book heroes as Batman, The Incredible Hulk, and Spider-Man. By 1980, however, BLBs offered almost no competition to comic books.

Today, the Maximo BLBs -- when available and depending upon condition -- sell in the \$25.00 to \$100.00 range. The later Superman BLB is much less expensive, usually selling in the \$5.00 to \$20.00 range.

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 Lowery, Lawrence F. *The Golden Age of Big Little Books*. Danville, CA: ERAC, 2007.
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The Genre Tales of Hugh B. Cave
 by
Jon D. Swartz, Ph. D.
 N3F Historian

Hugh Barnett Cave was born in 1910 in Chester, England, and moved during his childhood with his family to Boston, Massachusetts, following the outbreak of World War I. His first name was in honor of Hugh Walpole, a favorite author of his mother, a nurse, who had once been friends with Rudyard Kipling.

Cave attended Brookline High School. After graduating, he enrolled at Boston University on a scholarship but had to leave when his father was severely injured. Cave worked initially for a vanity press, the only regular job he would ever have. He quit this position at the age of twenty to write for a living.

Cave corresponded extensively with fellow pulp writer Carl Jacobi, from 1932 until Jacobi's death in 1997. Selections of this correspondence can be found in Cave's memoir *Magazines I Remember*. Relations with his fellow pulp writers, however, were not always so cordial. In the 1930s, Cave lived in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, but he never met H. P. Lovecraft, who lived in nearby Providence. The two engaged in a heated exchange of correspondence, however, regarding the ethics and aesthetics of writing for the pulps. At least two of Cave's stories are loosely attached to Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos: "The Isle of Dark Magic" and "The Death Watch."

During World War II, Cave traveled as a reporter in Southeast Asia. Following the war he moved to the Caribbean, spending five years in Haiti, after which he rebuilt and managed a successful coffee plantation in Jamaica. He returned to the United States in the early 1970s, after the Jamaican government had confiscated his plantation.

Hugh Cave married two times -- first to Margaret Long in a union that produced two sons before the couple began living apart -- and then to Peggy (aka Peggie) Thompson, who died in 2001. Cave was 93 when he died in Vero Beach, Florida, in 2004. His remains were cremated. During his writing career he used many pen names, including Allen Beck, Carey Barnett, Justin Case, J. C. Cole, Jack D'Arcy, William Decatur, Paul Hanna, Rupert Knowles, R. T. Maynard, Max Neilson, Maxwell Smith, Geoffrey Vace, and John Wayne! His publications were many and varied.

One of his most remembered statements regarding writing: "Many of today's writers seem to think that obscurity is a virtue and have apparently decided that a reader who can't understand them will think them artistic. . . The great writers of the past would not be remembered today had they fallen into this subtle trap."

Novels

Fishermen Four; an Outdoor Adventure Story (1942)
 The Cross on the Drum (1955)
 Drums of Revolt (1957)
 Black Sun (1960)
 The Mission (1960)
 Run, Shadow, Run (1968)
 Larks Will Sing (1969)
 Legion of the Dead (1979)
 The Nebulon Horror (1980)
 The Evil (1981)
 Shades of Evil (1982)
 Disciples of Dread (1988)
 Uncharted Voyage (1989)
 The Lower Deep (1990)
 Lucifer's Eye (1991)
 Isle of the Whisperers (1999)
 The Dawning (2000)
 The Evil Returns (2001)
 The Restless Dead (2002)
 The Mountains of Madness (2004)

Short Fiction Collections

The Witching Lands; Tales of the West Indies (1962)
 Murgunstrumm and Others (1977)
 The Corpse Maker (1988) (with Sheldon Jaffery)
 Death Stalks the Night (1995)
 Bitter/Sweet (1996)
 Escapades of the Eel (1997) (as by Justin Case)
 The Lady Wore Black, and Other Weird Cat Tails (2000)
 Long Live the Dead; Tales from Black Mask (2000)
 Officer Coffey Stories (2000)
 Come Into My Parlor; Tales from Detective Fiction Weekly (2002)

Selected Stories Reprinted in Anthologies/Periodicals

"The Watcher In The Green Room." *Terror By Night*. Selwyn Blount, England. (1930s)
 "The Cult Of The White Ape." *Keep On the Light*. Selwyn Blount, England. (1930s)
 "Steve Takes A Hand." *Second Mystery Companion*. Gold Label Books. 1944
 "Beyond Price." *Short Stories of Our Times*. Houghton Mifflin. 1950
 "Treasure Deep." *Finders Keepers*. Morrow. 1969
 "Two Were Left." *Vanguard #1*. Scott Foresman. 1967
 "Ladies in Waiting." *Whispers I*. Doubleday. 1977
 "Cult Of The White Ape." "Rivals of King Kong." *Corgi*. England & Germany. 1978
 "From the Lower Deep." *Whispers II*. Doubleday. 1979
 "The Door Below." *Whispers III*. Doubleday. 1981
 "What Say the Frogs Now, Jenny?" *Whispers IV*. Doubleday. 1983

- “Footprints In Perdu.” Whispers V. Doubleday. 1985
- “Death Tolls The Bell.” Selected Tales of Grim & Grue. Bowling Green Popular Press. 1987
- “Brotherhood of Blood.” Weird Tales. Doubleday Book Club. 1988
- “A Place of No Return.” Best Horror from Fantasy Tales. Robinson, England; Carroll & Graff, U.S. 1988-90
- “Appointment with Yesterday.” Tales from Alfred Hitchcock. Wm Morrow. 1988
- “Ladies In Waiting.” I Shudder at Your Touch. ROC. 1990
- “In the Dragon's Lair.” It's Raining Corpses in Chinatown. Starmont. 1991
- “Spawn of Inferno.” Weird Tales Anthology. Japan. 1984
- “After the Funeral.” Masters of Darkness III. Tor. 1991
- “After the Funeral.” Complete Masters of Darkness. Underwood Miller. 1991
- “Imp of Satan.” Rivals of Weird Tales. Bonanza Books. 1990
- “Murgunstrumm.” Mammoth Book of Terror. Robinson (England) and Carroll & Graf (U.S.). 1991
- “Another Kind of Enchanted Cottage.” Journeys to the Twilight Zone. Daw Books. 1993
- “Stragella.” Mammoth Book of Vampires. Robinson (England) and Carroll & Graf U.S.). 1992
- “Mountains of Time.” Ghosttide. Revenant Books. 1992
- “Murgunstrumm.” A Taste for Blood. Dorset. 1992
- “Stragella.” Weird Vampire Tales. Gramercy. 1992
- “The Watcher in the Green Room.” Nightmare. Marboro Books. 1991
- “Vanishing Point.” Northern Frights #2. Mosaic Press, Canada. 1993
- “A Place of No Return.” Horrors By Lamplight. Chancellor Press, England. 1993
- “Gordie's Pets.” Return to the Twilight Zone. Daw. 1994
- “Mission to Margal.” Mammoth Book of Zombies. Robinson, England. 1993
- “The Lady Wore Black.” Mystery Cats. Germany. 1994
- “Derelict.” Sea Cursed. Barnes & Noble. 1994
- “The Death Watch.” Cthulhu's Heirs. Chaosium. 1994
- “Take Me For Instance.” “Ladies in Waiting.” Both stories in 100 Creepy Little Creature Stories. Barnes & Noble. 1994
- “The Whisperers.” Mammoth Book of Werewolves. Robinson, England & Carroll & Graff (U.S.) 1994
- “Stragella.” Mammoth Book of Vampires. Magic Books, England (Robinson). 1994
- “Murgunstrumm.” The Anthology of Horror Stories. Tiger Books International. 1994
- “Of Time and Space.” 100 Wicked Little Witch Stories. Barnes & Noble. 1995
- “The Door Below.” Lighthouse Horrors. Down East Books. 1995
- “What Say the Frogs Now, Jenny?” More Dixie Ghosts. Barnes & Noble. 1995
- “Just the Two of Us.” 100 Wicked Little Witch Stories. Barnes & Noble. 1995
- “The Skeptic.” 100 Tiny Tales of Terror. 1996
- “Five to Get Ready, Two to Go.” The Best of Cemetery Dance. 1996
- “Ladies in Waiting.” A Century of Horror: 1970-1979. MJF Books, N.Y. 1996
- “The Brotherhood of Blood.” Blood Lines: Vampire Stories from New England, 1997
- “Ladies In Waiting.” Haunted Houses: The Great Stories. MJF Books. 1997
- “The Back of the Mirror.” “Tomorrow Is Forever.” Both stories in 100 Fiendish Little Frightmares. 1997
- “The Room Above the Top.” 100 Twisted Tales of Torment. 1998
- “Purr Of A Cat.” Fields of Blood: Vampires of the Heartland. 1998
- “Stragella.” Vampire Slayers. Cumberland House Publishing. 1999 ?
- “Affair Of The Clutching Hand.” Phantom Perfumes & Other Shades. 2000
- “Forgetful Charlie.” 100 Hilarious Little Howlers. 1999

Conclusions

Cave wrote two stories for *Astounding*: “The Corpse on the Grating” (February, 1930 issue) and “The Murder Machine” (September, 1930). From the titles, it appears that -- even when writing science fiction -- he wrote melodramatic rather than “sense of wonder” tales.

Popular culture critic/historian Lee Server wrote that Cave was “a valued contributor to the two most honored magazines of the pulp era, *Weird Tales* and *Black Mask* (a distinction in itself, as most noted contributors to those two magazines wrote only for one or the other).”

Among the awards Cave received during his lifetime were the World Fantasy Best Collection Award in 1978 (for *Murgunstrumm and Others*), the Phoenix Award in 1986 (with Orson Scott Card), the Bram Stoker Lifetime Achievement Award in 1990, the International Horror Guild “Living Legend” Award in 1997, and the World Fantasy Lifetime Achievement Award in 1999. He was also a nominee in 1996 for the World Fantasy Best Collection Award (for *Death Stalks the Night*).

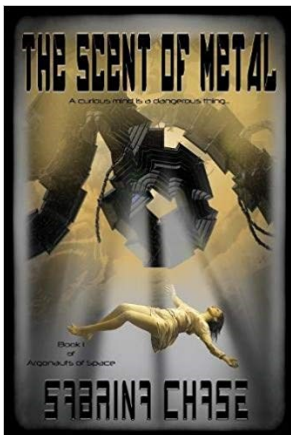
When he received the World Fantasy Lifetime Achievement Award in 1999, he remarked that he had received it only because everyone else was dead.

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 Parnell, Frank H. *Monthly Terrors: An Index to the Weird Fantasy Magazines Published in the United States and Great Britain*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985.
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Food

Food of Famous Authors: Sabrina Chase Book and Recipe from Cedar Sanderson



When I asked Sabrina Chase for a dish to cook and a book, she had an instant answer. It seems that there is a recurring mention of cornbread in her book, *The Scent of Metal*. Perfect! And it’s such a versatile side-dish, too. We eat it often here, although our recipe is a bit different. But trying new things is what this series is about. New books, new authors, new food. It’s a delicious combination. Go ahead and pick up a copy of the book, but make sure you set a timer, because you don’t want to get lost in her world and burn your cornbread!

You could easily make this into cornbread muffins just by putting muffin cup liners into muffin tins, or greasing the tin liberally. Change the bake-time to 12-15 minutes, though, and check for doneness with a toothpick. When the (wood!) toothpick comes



Buttermilk Cornbread

Ingredients

2 cups cornmeal
 1 cup flour
 1 teaspoon salt
 1 teaspoon baking soda

2 cups buttermilk
 2 eggs
 1 tablespoon bacon fat or butter

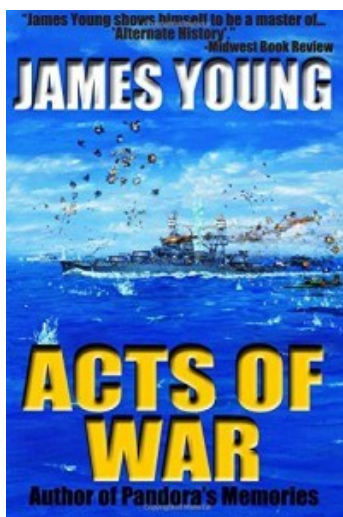
Instructions

Preheat the oven to 400 deg F. Mix the dry ingredients in a large bowl. Pour in the buttermilk and beat in the eggs. Melt the fat in a cast iron skillet. Pour fat in the batter and bake in the skillet for 20 to 25 minutes, until risen and browned.

You could easily make this into cornbread muffins just by putting muffin cup liners into muffin tins, or greasing the tin liberally. Change the bake-time to 12-15 minutes, though, and check for doneness with a toothpick. When the (wood!) toothpick comes out clean, they are done.



Food of Famous Authors: James Young Book and Recipe from Cedar Sanderson



As my readers likely realize, I know most of the authors in this series to one extent or another. That is, after all, how I get the chutzpah to ask them for a moment of their busy time to talk to a nutty lady about food and cooking. James Young is no exception. I met him and his lovely wife Anita at Libertycon a while back, and wound up working with James on some of his early book covers, including *An Unproven Concept*, which had the loveliest art to work with. But I'm drifting off topic. James is, unlike most writers, an extrovert. The man is a marketing machine. He's also funny, and a damn good writer.

Which means I can recommend one of his latest books, *Acts of War*, without reservation even though I haven't read it yet (I'll make time! Really!). James is, among other things, a professional historian, which translates into writing rollicking good alternative historicals. Pick up the book, and let's get started on his recipe.

Growing up, my grandmother would make Corn & Oyster Pudding for Christmas dinner. This; is not that.

James told me, "Not exactly how my Mom makes it (I think she adds cinnamon and uses the

oven), but close enough. Let your slow cooker be your helper with this family-favorite corn pudding—a great side dish for holiday meals or parties.”



Corn Pudding in a cup: I will admit that smaller ramekins would have been better. I must get some.

Corn Pudding

Ingredients

- 1 can (14.75 oz) Green Giant™ cream style sweet corn
- 1 can (15.25 oz) Green Giant™ whole kernel sweet corn, drained
- 1 pouch Betty Crocker™ cornbread & muffin mix
- 1 cup sour cream
- 1/4 cup butter, melted
- 1 egg
- 1 cup shredded Colby-Monterey Jack cheese blend (4 oz)

Instructions

Spray 3-4 1/2 quart slow cooker with cooking spray.

In a medium bowl, mix all ingredients.

Pour into slow cooker.

Cover, cook on High setting for 2 1/2 to 3 hours, or until mixture is set and knife inserted in center comes out clean.

Let stand 5 minutes before serving.

I wound up doing mine in the oven, like his mother does, and in large ramekins (soup mugs, if you want). I baked them at 350 deg for 25 minutes.

The corn pudding is not as sweet as I was afraid it would be. Like most commercial cornbread mixes, sugar and corn syrup rank high on the Betty Crocker ingredient list. You know me, if you read this blog much, and it's not a health thing (all things in moderation). It is, on the other hand, a cornbread-isn't-sweet! thing. The First Reader, southern boy that he is, was a bit cautious about this recipe at first. He was reassured by the cheese, though. After he'd eaten his, he leaned back and relaxed, telling me it was comfort food.

It's very good. Rich and heavy, you don't want a lot of it at a time, but it makes a fine side-dish. It complements ham very well, the slight sweetness with the salty smokiness is perfect.

Yellow cornmeal

A minor snag we ran into while whipping up this quick and easy meal was that I didn't have cornmeal in the house. I have self-rising cornbread mix (NOT jiffy mix, which is terribly sweet) and grits, but no meal. The First Reader ran out and got me some nice yellow cornmeal, eagerly anticipating the dinnertime treat. I always know cornbread will go over well with him. This recipe makes a great, moist, rich cornbread that stands up well to butter. I like it with honey, too. You could embellish this recipe to your heart's content. I've added cheese, salsa, more corn (frozen kernels work great), diced jalapenos, handfuls of crumbled bacon... you could put anything in there. But the First Reader loves it straight up.

Discussion

17 Apr 2019

Hi George;

I haven't finished reading the new issue of Eldritch Science yet, but I thot I would shoot off some random thots. My first thot is not random, it is a repeat of a previous complaint.

I am deeply concerned that the N3F club zines, and the other fanzines sent out as part of the free zine distribution, are still being emailed out in fragments. I am glad you sent me the latest issue all in one lump, because I'm not sure I would have had the patience to download and fit together five separate sections.

This is ridiculous. For well over a year now (or has it been more than TWO years?) you have been saying somebody is working on this problem to get it resolved. I don't know what this individual has been doing, because nothing has changed. In fact, the situation may even be getting worse.

As I have mentioned before, I myself have no problem sending files of any size to any number of people using AOL. I don't know why the N3F can't do the same. If sending out two hundred forty+ emails all at one time is not allowed (altho, why not?), then break the mailing down and send the zines out to forty or fifty people at a time. I am sure some easy program could be devised to feed forty email addresses into the Send To line, press send, and repeat the process until the entire membership gets the fanzines all in one lump instead of in aggravating fragments.

The club zines are the primary activity that most of the members are making use of. For some, it is the only club activity they are making use of. It behooves the survival of the club if those fanzines can be delivered in the simplest, and easiest to access possible way. I cannot understand why this problem has not been taken care of yet, but I really urge you to get it resolved, before the club starts shedding members because they don't want to go thru the hassle of downloading and fitting fragmentary club zines together.

I thot I had a bunch of comments about the last Tightbeam, but it turns out that I only have a few.

I do have a bone to pick with Jon Swartz's write-up about the Fawcett Dime Action big little books. He states that the books were all original adventures, but in fact all of them were adaptations of already published comic book stories. The original artwork was chopped up to provide the art, with some additional material being drawn as needed. Primarily the new art consisted of an opening panel(s) at the beginning of each book's story, probably because the original comic story splash panels were too large or too difficult to reformat to the square BLB size page, but perhaps to fool young readers who might be flipping thru the title and might otherwise recognize the story from a comic they had recently read.

The Dime Action books are very difficult to find, and I personally believe this is because the original distribution was not good. BLBs were sold in dime stores, variety stores and the like.

Fawcett was primarily a magazine publisher with little experience putting books into places like Woolworth's, Newbury's, Kreskie's, or Grant's. Those were the places that sold the bulk of the BLB style volumes, and without good placement sales would not have met expectations.

I also think Jon overthot the situation with Nathaniel Hawthorne's stories. Most of his fantastic fiction clearly falls into the fantasy category. I don't think he was necessarily anti-science, so much as using his fiction to show the foibles and failures of the human animal.

"Dr. Heidegger's Experiment", for example, is not about the dangers of science in modern society. His experiment(s) including this one are clearly shown to be mostly vested in the realm of ancient black magic. When he gives the elixir of life to his aged friends, what happens is a demonstration of the folly and shallowness of the human spirit. Despite having presumably learned wisdom and maturity from their long years of experience, when his friends revert to youthful bodies, they begin to repeat the same mistakes and errors of judgment that they did before, despite knowing that these actions are foolish and dangerous. The story speaks to the failure of human beings to learn from their mistakes, or to change their basic nature, and has nothing to do with science at all.

If Jon can make any sense out of "The Minister's Black Veil" he is doing better than me, or most people I know who have read that story. I'm sure there is a moral there, or a plot, or something that makes sense, but the ending is so frustrating that it invalidates all the interesting writing that came before.

I think Hawthorne was interested in exploring human character under unusual conditions, and he created unusual situations in both his short stories and his novels to demonstrate how the basic character of an individual does not necessarily change even given a unique opportunity to reformulate itself. I don't think he was a universal pessimist, but it is hard to read a book like "House of Seven Gables" and accept that he thot the best of humanity either.

I will fully support Pat Patterson's "Thiotimeline Award" the minute he (or some other interested fan) can produce a time machine so we can check the results of all those future-perfect awards. I think there are way too many awards in this hobby already. We are beginning to look like an echo of the movie and TV entertainment biz, where egos are so fragile that a hundred and fifty-five awards have been created so that nobody will feel left out. SF fandom hasn't got that many award slates---yet, but we are moving in that direction. I am certainly in favor of Chattanooga's LibertyCon hosting this prestigious ceremony, providing they can successfully predict what the room rates and the price of southern style pork barbeque sandwiches will be five years in the future. Oh hell, why be picky. Let me know the true & exact price of a non-subscription newsstand issue of F&SF the year after next and I'm willing to support the con and the Thermopile, eh, 'Thiotimeline' Awards whole heartedly.

As always the recipes this issue look delicious, but they also look complicated to make. Also, what is it with Ms Sanderson and noodles? How many issues/recipes does this make where she creates something scrumptious, and then tells us to dump it all on a pile of soggy, wet noodles? Does she own shares in a noodle factory or something? I personally think noodles are among the blandest and most uninteresting foods on the planet. I would never defuse the flavors of good cooking by allowing a pile of limp noodles to corrupt the creation.

That's it for some short thots. I will try to get another email out to you when I finish reading

the Eldritch Science issue.

---Bob Jennings

“The greatest of pleasures in this life is saying what you think, and your friends have to be people who can at least give decent consideration to your ideas.”

---Upton Sinclair (1878-1968)

Captain Marvel Spoiler

And here's where the feminism thing came in. We get to see Vers (later, Captain Marvel) conflicted over memories, or whatever they are, in which she is knocked down, belittled, and told she's a girl, a failure, and so on. We're supposed to feel badly that men were awful to her. Um. I can see where the actress was all 'look, men are awful but the girlz rule!'

Except that's not what the ending does to those 'memories.' During the fight scene with the Supreme Intelligence, it's revealed that the memories were selected and used to control the woman who could become Captain Marvel. Her focus on how she'd been beaten down, scolded, and so forth... was a tool the AI was using in part to keep control over her. When she stopped focusing on the feminism 'done me wrong' mantra, and instead remembered how she had gotten up, tried again, been given second chances, been given the opportunity to fly experimental jets, had proved her humanity by being resilient and DOING not just lying down and whining about how men wouldn't let her get up... that's when she was able to tap into her true power and win the fight. Captain Marvel isn't about girl power. It's about humans. It's specifically and blatantly about humanity and how we don't give up. We dust ourselves off, wipe the blood out of our eye, square our shoulders, and walk right back into the affray, only this time to win.

So yes, in spite of the silly special effects, the over-the-top comic book tropes, the media portrayal of 'girlz rule!' I really enjoyed this movie, and I can recommend it if you enjoy that sort of thing. Human wave, baby. Ride it to the stars!

(oh, and the cat. You really, really want to watch it for the cat. I promise you, it will not disappoint).



Bats! — Jose Sanchez