

Tightbeam 297

June 2019



The Goldfish Riders — Jose Sanchez

Tightbeam 297

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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 Declan Finn, Bob Jennings, and Pat Patterson. Pat Patterson’s reviews appear on his blog habakkuk21.blogspot.com and also on GoodReads and Amazon.com. Declan Finn’s web page declanfinn.com/ covers his books, reviews, writing, and more.

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/

Regular short fiction reviewers Greg Hullender and Eric Wong publish at RocketStackRank.com

Tightbeam is published approximately monthly by the National Fantasy Fan Federation and distributed electronically to the membership.

The N3F offers four different memberships. Memberships with The National Fantasy Fan (TNFF) via paper mail are \$18; memberships with TNFF via email are \$6. Zines other than TNFF are email only. Additional memberships at the address of a current member are \$4. Public memberships are free. Send payments to N3F, POB 1925, Mountain View CA 94042. Pay online at N3F.org. Our PayPal contact is treasurer@n3f.org.

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Neffies

Behold! These are the nominations for Neffy Awards for stfnal works published in 2018.

For our next issue, we need reviews of these fine works! Discussion is also strongly desired. Please send your comments to your Editors, George Phillies phillies@4liberty.net and Jon Swartz jon_swartz@hotmail.com, for inclusion in the next issue of Tightbeam.

Best Novel (over 100,000 words)

Against Three Lands—George Phillies
 A Guide For Murdered Children—Sarah Sparrow
 Legion---The Many Lives of Stephen Leeds -
 Brandon Sanderson
 The Princess in the Tower—Chris Nuttall
 Uncompromising Honor—David Weber
 We Sold Our Souls - Grady Hendrix

Best Shorter Work (under 100,000 words)

Shadowdrop - Chris Willrich—Beneath Ceaseless Skies issue 261
 The Black God's Drums - P. Djèlí Clark - Tor Publishing
 Joyride - Kristine Kathryn Rusch - Asimov's Science Fiction 11-12/2018
 What Is Eve? - Will McIntosh - Lightspeed Magazine issue 95
 Intervention - Kelly Robson - Infinity's End, Solaris
 Bloom - Kate Elliott - The Book of Magic, Bantam Books
 When We Were Starless - Simone Heller—Clarkesworld issue 145
 Prophet of the Roads - Naomi Kritzer - Infinity's End, Solaris
 A Song of Home, the Organ Grinds - James Beamon - Lightspeed Magazine issue 98
 Meat And Salt And Sparks - Rich Larson - Tor.com
 The City of Lost Desire - Phyllis Eisenstein - the Jan-Feb F&SF

Best Book Editor

Toni Weiskopf

Best Fanzine (electronic publication is allowed)

Ionisphere from John Thiel
 Optuntia from Dale Spiers
 Origin from John Thiel
 Spartacus, published by Guy Lillian
 Tightbeam from the N3F

Best Blog

Gary Labowitz

Mad Genius Club—the Mad Genii

Best TV Show

Game of Thrones
Supergirl

Best SF Movie/Video

A Quiet Place

Best Anime

Devilman Crybaby
Planet With
Revue Starlight
A Place Further Than the Universe
Aggretsuko

Best Graphic Art Publication

Lady Mechanika - M. M. Chen and Joe Benetez
Monstress - Marjorie M. Liu and Sana Takeda
Raven Daughter of Darkness - Marv Wolfman

Best Cover Art

Kent Bash - the March-April 2019 F&SF
Brad Fraunfelter - The Broken Throne (novel by
Chris Nuttall)

Best Magazine

Amazing

Letters of Comment

Hi, George:

Well, I am more easily startled now-a-days, so I was startled to look at that cover on #296 and realized it was May, 2019. Then I glanced up at the cover of TB I have hanging in my little computer room just over my desk and there it is: May, 1968, a mere 51 years ago. My brain goes into a wave pattern at the thought. Just two days ago my wife and I bought our cemetery plot, and most of today was spent in transferring funds around so that the total would be covered on the bill that will be coming in on my next credit card statement. Everything here is paid automatically, and my job is to be sure the checking account has enough to cover all the bills each month.

51 years. Impossible!!

I always enjoyed reading the letters in TB, but it has changed now to something different. TB was sort of a poor man's APA, where you didn't have to gather letters to make up a quarterly

response to other publishers, but there were lots of reviews of each others' work to comment on. That was about the gist of most APA's except for the occasional short story or poem. The times, they are a-changin'.

It is kind of you to continue sending to me. I am running out of time to read much, so I'm not a candidate for doing reviews of books or magazines, and the movies I watch are mostly on Video Prime or my FIOS on demand. Watching with my wife means it's mostly historical dramas and love stories (sometimes humorous). No stf or fantasy.

While doing our shopping I innocently asked the salesman if the caskets come in different sizes (I'm always curious). He looked me up and down and said, "Oh, you'll fit in the standard size we use." I give him credit for being able to joke a little with a customer ... I guess he realized I'm not the snowflake type and am not offended by much.

The plots are so small in the section we were buying, I really wondered if two of us would fit. I didn't have the heart to ask him if we get buried in portrait or landscape mode. I hope it's landscape. He said they put couples in head-to-foot positioning, so portrait mode would mean that one of us would be standing on his/her head for eternity. Bad news, that.

So much for this LOC. Thanks again for leaving me on your send list. I promise not to violate the copyright notice I saw on one of the pages. Really?

Hoping you are the same, and

Keep smiling,
Gary

Editors:

I'm sorry to see Tom McGovern go. I had been wanting him to rejoin NAPA, of which he was the assembler at one time, but he told me he was ailing. Back when I joined NAPA, he told me "stay long, talk much" and I had been wanting to say the same thing to him. He'd have had something to say, I assume.

As I understand it, Captain Marvel was transformed from the original man to a woman in the movie Cedar reviewed. That's the same thing that happened with Boomer and Starbuck in BATTLESTAR GALACTICA, and I have thought it very unusual of Hollywood to do this. Why they would want to is not apparent. I also saw Peter Pan transformed into a woman in a remake of the Peter Pan story. Is there any theory of motion picture production behind this? Is it done with movies other than science fiction and fantasy films? Anyone know the answers? I think it's at the very least unnecessary to do that.

The new TIGHTBEAM is, I think, going along well, and I especially like the introduction of N3F discussions, but have no particular discussions of my own to add to it at this time, as I've already been doing so elsewhere in the NFFF. I hope the new feature will prosper.

-John Thiel

Hi George & Jon;

Thanks for the new issue of Tightbeam, #296. As always, I admire Jessi Silver's careful analy-

sis and discussion of new anime series, but, I still have no particular interest in anime, and as packed as my schedule is with other reading/listening/viewing I would be unlikely to check out her new topics even inadvertently. Still, it is good that the N3F can feature such a knowledgeable and dedicated person to discuss this segment of the hobby.

I am sure I will not be the only person saddened by the news of Tom McGovern passing on 21 April from complications brought on by pancreatic cancer. This is depressing news, altho it was not unexpected. He had battled cancer so valiantly that I think all his fan friends believed that he would somehow be able to pull thru this last downturn as well.

I've known Tom for a lot of years, back since the early 1980s when he was a regular customer at my comic book/science fiction book store in Worcester. In addition to buying comics we would talk, sometimes for hours, about religion, politics, the state of the world, technology, and of course, what was happening in the world of comics and science fiction. I introduced him to Dungeons & Dragons, and he was a very able player in our sessions after the store closed. I also convinced him to join SFPA, and to run for office in the N3F, where he served several terms as a member of the club's executive board. He was also briefly the OE of N'APA the N3F apa. I still remember the crazy humor zine we did at his apartment that was voted the best humorous one-shot fanzine of the year by the SAPS membership.

Everybody was happy he returned to fandom a few years back. I nagged him again until he re-joined SFPA. His zines there have been among the high points of the mailings for me. He was articulate, funny, with a wide range of interests, and he was glad to enter into spirited discussions about a myriad of subjects with the other members.

The recent issue of Fadeaway I emailed him was one of the very few in recent years that did not have a letter of comment from Tom in the letter's section. It is very difficult to believe he is really gone. I was very sorry to hear that his final days were filled with so much pain. I hope his vision of Christianity is correct, and that he has entered into an afterlife enjoying the glory of the loving god he always believed in.

I enjoyed Jon Swartz's coverage of the Maximo Big Little Book series. I don't think Maximo had any kind of a chance to become competition for Superman, or any of the other popular comic book heroes of the period. For one thing, his powers were mental, not physical, and while his stories may have been interesting and designed to be challenging while geared to his specific abilities, it's hard to compete with a heroes like Superman, Captain Marvel, or dozens of the other long underwear crowd who had astonishing physical powers, including the ability to fly, with action packed adventures told in full color at that.

I think it is significant that almost all the companies that produced the Big Little Book style volumes tried a few original creations, but none of them were really successful. Almost all the BLBs relied on stories about popular comic strip, cartoon, radio, or movie characters, often adapting stories from those other mediums directly into the BLB prose-picture format. BLBs appealed directly to a juvenile audience, the same audience that many of the comic books were initially aimed at, and the full color comic magazines won the popularity battle hands down.

Bob Jennings

Thanks, George,
Everybody sure does shine here!
Will Mayo

Hi, George--

Regarding Bob Jennings' discussion letter, I agree with him about the nuisance of having to download fanzines in pieces rather than a single file. Unless the zine in question is one I know could be of interest to me, I usually don't bother. Tightbeam fits into that category, but even so I only downloaded the first section (to see the contents listing) and the last section (to see Bob's letter).

As for his dislike of noodles, I'm on the other side of that particular fence. I wouldn't care for "soggy, wet noodles," but draining them well after cooking takes care of that little problem -- and I usually give them a light coating of olive oil to ensure they don't stick. I also usually cook an entire package, generally one pound, at one time and freeze what I don't use during the meal I'm preparing them for. That way I have easy access to already cooked, not wet or soggy, noodles for whatever I cook next.

Best wishes,
Robert Lichtman

Anime

The Complexities of Motherhood ...Review by Jessi Silver

Please Note: This post contains character and plot spoilers for several anime series and films, including A Place Further Than the Universe, The Promised Neverland, Made in Abyss, and Mirai.



Last year around Mothers' Day, I used the opportunity to feature one of my favorite anime mothers from the previous year. While I'd originally wanted to do the same thing this year, I ran into a bit of an issue – nothing that I'd watched from the past year or so struck me as having a really central, memorable mother (or mother-type) character who wasn't already missing or dead. Too often, nurturing family members are sacrificed at the altar of "character development," allowing a protagonist to develop pathos as their earthly familial connections are ripped

away in return. This leaves one with very few choices of motherly role-models. This isn't to say that there weren't great moms this year, but I was unfortunately not lucky enough to view anything in which a mother's story was detailed, complete, and plot-central.

As someone still attempting to become a mother, even as the world around me does its best to demonstrate its hostility toward me and other women (mothers or not), what I'm consistently reminded of is the fact that motherhood itself is a complicated and messy state of being, filled with decisions that have no correct answers. While I hesitate to assert that all mothers have their children's best interests in mind (unfortunately, abusive situations exist and I think it would be

unjust to folks who've experienced them to say otherwise), I do believe that the majority of parents out there are trying to do the best with what resources they have. I think that anime and manga might honestly be better at featuring the messier aspects of parenthood than the average, mostly-positive ones that (hopefully) exist in reality.

Anime, and, in fact, most other media, has a “dead mom” problem. The first time I realized this, I was in my teenage years; I was already going through a phase where I'd started to disdain the things I'd loved as a child, and the knowledge that a good chunk of Disney films featured characters whose mothers had been killed, then sometimes replaced with evil female surrogates, was only fuel for that fire. The mothers in these films seemed to be pawns in the telling of the hero or heroine's story, something I found incredibly frustrating at the time and which still bothers me. The same goes for the JRPG video games I've loved; one of the major tropes that's often still joked about is that the hero's quest only begins once his tiny home village (including his friends and family) has been burned to the ground by some evil faction. Having parents seems to be an inconvenience in many cases; it's only once parents, especially mothers, are out of the picture and the hero's attachments to place are severed completely that the real adventure can begin.

What I'm choosing to acknowledge is that its prevalence and inherent misogyny as a trope doesn't always mean that this type of predictable tragedy is doomed to be trite and meaningless, as much as I still wish storytellers would find some other route to travel. Even media's most frustrating characterization habits can sometimes be turned toward the purpose of powerful storytelling, depending on who's telling the story and about whom the story is told. I recently had occasion to re-watch *A Place Further Than the Universe* at my long-time local anime club. In this series, a group of four high school girls travels to the continent of Antarctica along with a scientific research group. Each of the characters experiences her own story arcs and personal challenges, but the quest itself is prompted by Shirase's memories of and relationship with her mother, who was a researcher and passed away tragically during the previous expedition three years prior. What we know of Shirase's mother Takako is told mostly through the eyes and mouths of others – her fellow researchers reminisce about her drive to explore and her deadly mahjong abilities, while the characters find physical remnants of Takako throughout the trip. They remember her enigmatic final words, commenting on the singular beauty of Antarctica's stark environment. Takako is a present, guiding light to Shirase, even though she is no longer of this Earth.



Takako lived her life vibrantly.
From *A Place Further Than the Universe*.

There's a temptation, I believe, to blame characters like this for abandoning their children in service of what seem like more selfish goals. With a child to take care of at home, why risk death halfway across the world? This is one of the complexities of becoming a mother, as I see it. Motherhood comes with an expectation that one's life is now secondary to one's children's existence. “You've had your chance, now settle down and put your energy toward uplifting your progeny.” While there are parents who choose this for themselves with eyes wide open, I've always thought the assumption that people's lives and senses of self should fade into the background once they procreate is flawed in many ways. I've read a lot of writing and commentary from mothers who are frustrated and depressed that their rich inner lives are somehow hidden behind the label of being “so-and-so's mom;” as if that somehow trumps their sense of

humor, love of music, interest in literature, film, or art, or ability to grill a mean steak or bake a beautiful cake. While the love for a child is said to be something so deep that it's difficult to describe, there is also a fully-fledged human being at the giving end of that love and devotion. I myself, in those quiet moments, consider how the maintenance of my personhood in the eye of the public is at least as important as someday becoming a parent to a beloved child.

In *Made in Abyss*, there are explorers who are inexorably drawn toward the Abyss, a dangerous and mysterious hole in the Earth. Protagonist Riko's mother was (or is) one such explorer, and a high-ranking one at that. The Abyss is a literal death trap; those who descend past a certain level can't ascend unaltered (physically or mentally), and the dangers beneath the surface are such that most explorers meet their doom within the maw of some horrifying creature or environmental anomaly. Riko's mother Lyza, after giving birth to Riko and making the difficult trek out of the Abyss to return her to the safety of the surface, chooses to descend again rather than remain at her daughter's side. The choice seems unfathomably selfish at first glance; leaving the care of an infant to others while pursuing a very likely death is the antithesis of what most of us may consider "good parenting." Yet, there is something deeper going on that's difficult to understand except perhaps for those who understand the consequences of certain types of abuse or who have experienced the breakdown of a relationship.

In the context of potential divorce, there's an idea that some parents should stay together "for the sake of the children," but the underlying toxicity of the relationship – the disdain between partners, the disconnect, the unhappiness – can be evident to the perceptions of a child even if the parents attempt to hide it. It's usually considered better to separate no matter how logistically-challenging life becomes; when the example children see of interactions between two people in a relationship is disrespectful or abusive, they carry that baggage forward into their own relationships.



A mother's motivations are often complicated and unfathomable.

*From *Made in Abyss*.*

Lyza may seem irresponsible leaving her infant daughter's side, but unwillingly staying in one place would doom Lyza to a deep unhappiness that she'd be unable to hide. Riko, the bright child that she is, would likely perceive this resentment and bear the burden of it. Lyza also doesn't want to hamstring Riko's life by becoming too comfortable a home base; instead, she'd rather serve as a model and a motivation by following her own quest, even if that quest leads to nothing but doom. It's a difficult and complicated character motivation that I'm not sure if I completely condone, but I think, on a very basic level, I can at least understand.

One of the most emotionally stunning series I've watched this year is *The Promised Neverland*, whose vision of childhood is both idyllic and horrifying in equal measure. The child protagonists are watched-over by kindly women who aren't biologically their mothers, but serve that nurturing role. We learn very quickly that the children are essentially livestock, and that the "mothers" are merely overseers that ensure they never discover the truth. Isabella, the mother to Emma, Norman, and Ray (in addition to several other younger children) at Grace Field House, is an immensely terrifying character. Her loving facade exists in opposition to her intensely manipulative, cunning nature. In *Isabella*, the children discover an adversary who can predict their every move and has a vested interest in keeping them trapped and subdued. It seems almost like a joke, then, that these women are referred to as "mothers" and use their love to ac-

comply with nothing but prevent children from existing freely in the world.

And yet... I can't help but feel some kind of sympathy for Isabella and the state of the world in which these characters live. Honestly, our world right now is a very scary place; wars continue to rage around the world, driving people toward hunger, disease, and death, the state of the world's climate has long since revealed itself to be tenuous, and people continue to lose their lives needlessly at the wrong end of firearms wielded by those with an ill-conceived hatred toward others. These are problems that people seem unwilling to tackle in any meaningful way; the symptoms are easy to see, but the root causes are difficult to address when many of those with the power to do so seem all-to-willing to stick their heads in the sand in exchange for temporary worldly desires. I watch the daily news go by, experiencing feelings of anger and hopelessness in alternating measure, and yet I'm still trying to bring a child into this complicated, messy world – a world which, by many assumptions, might be in a worse state by the time my potential children are my age than they are for me right now.

Isabella is a mother figure who exists in a horrifying world. She's carved out a place within a system that leaves no room for winners; one with no personal freedom and one which is filled with only the promise of an early death. She exists at a cross-road of potential decisions – continue to work within this cruel system for the purpose of self-preservation, or work toward the eventual dismantling of the system. We learn why Isabella chooses her path; she discovers the world's biggest secret and loses hope in the promise of escape. The burden then falls to her “children” to discover a way out of humanity's perpetual prison. When I witness movements like the School Strike for Climate, led by the whip-smart, driven Greta Thunberg, or the March for our Lives led



Isabella is cunning, but exists within a no-win situation. From *The Promised Neverland*.

by the students of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, I both marvel at the tenacity of these young people to take on such enormous issues and feel disappointment towards those of us in previous generations, supposedly the stewards of the world that these young people are set to inherit, for choosing to exist within an unjust system rather than work to change it. When I look in Isabella's eyes, I see a woman whose sanity was broken by the forbidden knowledge of the world's terrors, and a parent who, however hopelessly, perpetuates a cruel system that dooms her children. I see in her the mother I hope I choose not to become.

As complicated and ambiguous as motherhood can probably be, I think it's worth noting once again that, as humans, most of us still attempt to do the best job that we can to raise the next generation with the resources we're given. While *Mirai* is a great film about a young boy who's allowed the rare chance to experience multiple generations of his family first-hand, it's also a story about parenthood and the indelible marks we as parents leave on our children's experiences. It's tempting to focus on Kun's mother as an expression of non-traditional gender roles, and while her role as breadwinner and company executive is definitely notable in realm of anime families, there's already interesting commentary out there. What resonates with me is that the film paints parenthood as a state of perpetual questioning, where there are no rules, only well-meaning attempts at nurturing and guidance.

One of my favorite parts of the film occurs when Kun meets his mother during her childhood. They have their disastrous fun, dumping toys on the floor, pulling laundry off the line, and



Kun's mother was mischievous in very familiar ways. From *Mirai*.

stuffing their mouths full of treats and candy. Pointedly, kid-Mother tells Kun that “it’s more fun when it’s messy,” echoing Kun’s sentiment when his adult mother in the current time scolds him for leaving his toys out. As we grow and mature, it’s amazing how our perspective on life starts to change. As young people, our worlds are ruled by what’s fun; as adults, we begin to see potential safety hazards and grow to have concerns about what others think of us. Kun’s adult mother’s parental scolding seems humorous considering the type of child she was; it’s that “grown-up” perspective, as well as those learned feelings of shame and a society-influenced view of correct behavior that transforms us from juveniles to caregivers.

Near the end of *Mirai*, Kun’s mother and father turn to one-another as they pack the car for a trip, and ask themselves if they’re doing an okay job as parents; having witnessed plenty of Kun’s acting-out behavior following his baby sister’s arrival, the question’s likely been hanging in the air for a while. I think most viewers would agree that they’re doing fine; they have a place to live, they have enough to eat, and they clearly love their children (even if one of the kids is currently acting like a jerk). But motherhood and parenthood are complicated and there’s no instruction manual or road map on Earth that allows us to avoid every pothole or mishap. The world is a judgmental place, and filled with dangers unfathomable. Especially for mothers, one’s image of success is one part child-rearing, and 3 parts enduring the barrage of judgment from society, misguided politicians, “friends,” nosy family members, heck, even other moms. I think the best we can do is look in the mirror at our own behavior, and constantly, consistently ask of ourselves “am I doing the best job that I can?” For whatever outsiders say, motherhood is less a matter of becoming an infallible person, and more a matter of putting purpose to the love one has toward one’s offspring. I hope to carry this thought forward myself someday. It’s really the best any of us can hope for. From *Mirai*.

Midnight Occult Civil Servants ...Review by Jessi Silver

Arata Miyako is a new government worker assigned to the Shinjuku Ward Office’s “Nighttime Regional Relations” department. Each of Tokyo’s 23 wards has one such department, which



were established to solve paranormal and occult-related events. Arata can understand non-human speech that no one else understands, and he encounters a yōkai (supernatural entity) at Shinjuku Gyoen park that calls him Abe no Seimei — the name of a historical Japanese occultist and diviner. – ANN

Episode Summary: Arata Miyako begins his job without a clear image of what it might entail, but he soon realizes that he wasn’t hired to perform typical government work; the Office of Nighttime Relations is focused on maintaining the order of Tokyo’s many residents – including those of the supernatural variety. Arata begins his evening unaware of fairies and tengu, but soon realizes that the nighttime world is filled with those supernatural creatures, and many others.

The team has been summoned to the park in order to research some odd disturbances, and what they discover is that the tengu and angels are at odds over something. Arata happens to find out the source of the conflict – an angel and tengu have fallen in love, and neither of their families is happy about it. Arata learns this because he seems to have the rare ability to understand non-human language, though it takes some convincing for his colleagues to believe it. Arata is able to help the two groups reach a truce, though no sooner have they flown off into the night sky than he's approached by an old tengu who calls him by an unfamiliar name.



Arata experiences his first night out on patrol. Screenshot from Crunchyroll.

Impressions: I'd overlooked this series while preparing for the current anime season. Though



Arata experiences his first night out on patrol. Screenshot from Crunchyroll.

I'm a fan of supernatural stories, especially if they involve the sometimes-complicated relations between humans and their fantastical neighbors (think Natsume's Book of Friends, or Mononoke for example), for some reason I lacked awareness of this series prior to the onset of the Spring anime season. Oddly enough, that sensation of being out-of-the-loop fits this opening episode fairly well; while it's got some interesting pieces and seems like the type of anime that I ought to really enjoy, it seems like some bits of it are missing (or at least somewhat amiss).

As always, one thing that I really appreciate in this series (and in others) is the fact that the characters all appear to be adults. While I feel like adult characters have seen a bit more representation in anime as of late, as an adult myself it's always nice to see some aspects of my own life reflected in the things I enjoy watching. I can't say that I've personally had a lot of experience interacting with angels or demons... but anime can't get everything right all the time, I suppose. This episode does lay bare one of the challenges that come along with utilizing older characters, however. This series maintains something of an "anime" aesthetic (which probably sounds silly) but what I mean by that is that it relies on a lot of character tropes that come to mind when one thinks of anime, including some that are typically confined to more comedic, "zany" series. Theo in particular is sort of a youthful, standoffish hot-head type, and thus doesn't read much as an adult professional. If the series is meant to cultivate a sense of seriousness, I find that characters yelling at one-another in goofy overblown ways or bickering endlessly tends to detract from that impression.



The two lovebirds (har har) make their escape. Screenshot from Crunchyroll.

This episode also hits on one of my major pet peeves in anime, with which many of my long-time readers will be familiar. An annoying trend I notice is that in workplace-based series, protagonists often embark on a new job without knowing anything about that job's specific requirements, even the most basic ones. There are always things that differ from workplace to workplace – office culture, reporting structures, specific tasks – but it should be a given that new hires are at least familiar with the essential functions of a company once they accept a job there. And yet, Arata arrives on the first evening of

his new job with zero inkling about its true nature. While this is convenient in that it provides the opportunity to fill the audience in on the basics, it's also distracting in the way that it doesn't reflect how life actually works. In this series we're dealing with an entity that oversees supernatural happenings in the city, so obviously that's not information that should be on posters advertising the job opening, but one would assume there'd be a pre-briefing before a new hire's first day in the workplace. Maybe just a "hey, we're going to be working with fairies – maybe prepare yourself for that."

Still, as I said, this Men In Black scenario does serve the purpose of bringing the audience into the story, so in that sense I can kind of forgive it for being a bit wonky. In general, I feel like this is something that anime storytelling in general suffers from; its tried-and-true methods of conveying information so often stray more toward "tell" rather than "show," and as a Western viewer I'm forced to confront my own cultural storytelling preferences. Much like character archetypes providing easily-identifiable base-line info about characters that can then be expanded upon later, I suppose info-dumps, used judiciously, can allow storytellers to get to more interesting subjects more quickly. It's mildly frustrating but one of those things that comes with the territory.

This first episode reads to me as anime "junk food." I don't mean that as an insult; for me, "junk food" has its problems (in this case, blunt-force storytelling and a silly scenario) but hits the spot nonetheless. I like series about adults having adventures, their "serious" lives of employment coupled with some decidedly less mundane fictional elements. It reminds me that taking responsibility and living one's life doesn't exclude the possibility of magic or adventure. I think this series might be a lot of fun, but it's definitely not at the top of my watch-list. It's missing some of the elements of mystery that feel compelling to me, since it seems prone to laying all the information out from the get-go.



Arata is confronted by an elderly tengu.
Screenshot from Crunchyroll.

Pros: A series about adults having adventures, awesome! Seems like the fun kind of "junk food" entertainment.

Cons: Sometimes the characters don't behave like adults. The idea that individuals enter into employment knowing nothing about what they're doing is bothersome.

Grade: B-

Novels



Heroes Fall, Serenity City, book 1, by Morgon Newquist. Review by Declan Finn

Eligible for Dragon Awards, 2019, in either SF, Fantasy, or even Alternate History if you prefer.

People keep trying to give us "realistic superheroes."

I think the trend may have started with "Watchmen," which frankly told me more of what was in the soul of Alan Moore than said anything about the superhero genre. A better example (I'm told) is Kurt Busiek's Astro City, which addresses themes such as a man who becomes a superhero to find redemption, or even the legalities of X-Ray vision and super senses. Here's the successor.

For those of you who long for the days when comic books were actually entertaining, and the most angst you were subjected to was the occasional Spider Man nervous breakdown, welcome to Heroes Fall, Serenity City, book 1, by Morgon Newquist.

We open with The Rampage, a mission where Superman, Batman and Iron Fist, I guess.... goes horribly, horribly wrong. One is murdered, the other goes mad, and only one is left standing.

Sounds like fun ... except this isn't a comic book crossover. This is Morgon's new world of heroes and villains. The heroes are Achilles, Pendragon and Banshee. And an epic battle of massive destruction throughout the city As the writeup says

He wanted to be a good man. Instead he became a hero.

Twenty years ago, Serenity City's great Triumvirate of heroes - Achilles, the Banshee, and Pendragon - maintained a golden age of peace and prosperity. Then, in an instant, it all went wrong. The city's mightiest champion, Achilles, lost his mind during a showdown with the enigmatic supervillain Thanatos and went on a rampage across the city, leaving the Banshee dead and a swath of destruction in his wake before Pendragon could stop him.

Today, as Achilles rots in solitary confinement, Victoria Westerdale investigates a new mystery. Why are young and forgotten heroes disappearing off the streets? Why doesn't anybody else care? And how is it tied in to those infamous events that brought the city's greatest heroes to ruin?

And what's going to happen to them all after Achilles escapes?

The first of a new wave of superhero novels! Coming soon:

Hollow City from Dragon Award nominee Kai Wai Cheah

The Phoenix Ring from Jon Mollison

Gemini Man from J.D. Cowan

Atlantean Archons from Richard W Watts

So, yeah, this one was fun. It starts strong, introducing plenty of side characters (even throwaway characters) effortlessly. It was a Hell of a way to open.

Despite the amount of time the blurb spent on the setup, 90% of the story focuses on Victory Westerdale. She doesn't want to be a superhero, just a simple, straightforward hero who saves people and goes back to the daily nine to five. Victory's powers are like Jessica Jones, if the latter weren't a raving bitch. It's mostly a mystery set in a new and improved Astro City. And I can't say a whole heck of a lot without spoiling it, so I won't.

I like the breakdown of the superhero class structure. No, we're not going into class warfare here, merely a practical approach to superheroes. DC and Marvel comics are truly unrealistic -- that only one superhero (Booster Gold, IIRC) -- seems to be offered or has desires for fame and notoriety. In the world of Serenity City, everyone wants to climb the hero totem pole. It's a competitive culture for the next brand endorsement, coming with a good paycheck. And there are some of those heroes who are Iron Man narcissistic and some who are simply saving people and heroing, and taking cash because they'll take all the help they can get. Of course, this environment means that no one really teams up, but considering how many times the JSA and the JLA have broken up, is anyone surprised when heroes can't get along?

The villain of the piece ... there are two. They're both fairly well developed, though one has barely any screen time. If you're wondering how that happens, it's largely because of the quality of the "evil plan." One is a narrative underdog, and the other is a cunning master manipulator. One comes off as David Tennant's Kilgrave, and the other is trying to do "good" for noble reasons, but has all the skills and talents of Richard III, or the MCU's Civil War villain. It's a bit of a train wreck, with a moral quandary that had only one solution.

At the end of the day, fans of the superhero genre should recognize the occasional tip of the hat to everything from The Dark Knight to Astro City to Green Hornet. That would be a spoiler if you could get the permutations right. We have Alfred with superpowers. A character named Ash who I suspect could be played by Bruce Campbell. A healer hero named Panacea (yes, really). A hero lawyer with the ability to cloud men's minds. And oh dear me, we're going to have a realistic portrayal of what it would be like as a superhero, only none of this grim and gritty Alan Moore BS? Be still my heart.

Also acknowledging that Batman basically has a superpower. Long story. But the description of the bat cave here will have you playing the Danny Elfman score from the Batman film in head.

Of course, Morgon gets her martial arts right. If she didn't, I think everyone who knows her would worry. And she does a good job of playing superhero chess -- how does Y superhero use X powers against Z and Z's powers. Even the execution of powers are well thought out.

Also, Morgon has a degree in Latin, so expect a ton of quotes and references from ... everyone. Peter Pan, The Aeneid, The Illiad, The Odyssey, Greek myth, Roman myth, a few other myths. I do so enjoy it when the authors I read actively read other people and steal from them. It warms my heart. You get little bits like "He is Lancelot, not Arthur. Byt even Lancelot is better than Mordred."

And the moral of the story, as it usually is in classical mythology -- Pride kills.

Just get *Heroes Fall: Heroes Unleashed Book 1*, today. If you like superheroes, you'll enjoy it. If you like "literature," you'll enjoy it. Or fight scenes. Or action pieces. Or mysteries. Or Scifi. Or Fantasy.

Yeah. It's just plain fun.

Tesla's Attic
by Neal Shusterman and Eric Elfman
.....Review by Bob Jennings

This is volume one of the Accelerati trilogy of novels. Neal Shusterman has written more than a dozen other science fiction and fantasy novels, most of them aimed at the young teen market. He has also written TV scripts, often for Disney, and some movie screenplays. Eric Elfman is primarily a screen writer and writing coach, a script doctor for TV programs, with special emphasis on children's television presentations.



This is clearly a Young Adult novel, written for and specifically aimed at the pre and early teen audience. The protagonists of this adventure are all in middle school, eighth grade specifically. The hero is Nick Slade. He, his father and younger brother have moved to Colorado Springs into a large, ramshackle old Victorian age house they inherited from their deceased great-aunt. Originally from Miami, the move was necessitated by the disastrous fire that destroyed their Florida home and took the life of Nick's mother.

Pulling down the fold-up stairs to the attic, Nick is whacked on the head by a falling ancient electric toaster that sends him on a rush visit to the local hospital emergency ward. Later he discovers that the attic, which he has staked out as his own large bedroom, is crammed with tons of old junk. It would cost money to have the stuff hauled away, money the family doesn't have, so he decides to have a yard sale.

To his astonishment, everything sells, despite a sudden torrential downpour that was not predicted, and the junk sells for lots more than he had ever anticipated. People arrive in drove, grab objects, make extravagant offers and shove money into his hands faster than he can keep up with it.

Some of the people who buy yard sale items are local teenagers, students who attend the local middle school Nick will be going to, including Catalin Westfield, hot popular young 'modern Avanti style' artist who Nick is instantly attracted to, and Mitch Murlo, talkative semi-Hispanic/French near-outsider who immediately tries to befriend Nick, along with Vince, a morbid ultra-dark Goth personality.

A day thereafter he and his new acquaintances discover that the old junk has remarkable properties that seem unbelievable. The devices lead to bizarre situations. The old reel-to-reel tape recorder Catalin bought records what people are actually thinking or what they really mean instead of the words spoken into the microphone. An old bellows camera bought by Petula Gabowski-Jones takes pictures of the future, up to 24 hours into the future. A see-and-say pull

toy Mitch bought actually gives advice and short term predictions into the future. There are more gadgets, including a fan that acts as an industrial grade thermal refrigeration unit, a thing that resembles a crude early radio that is an earthquake generator, and a corroded old dry-cell style battery that can bring dead creatures back to life, so long as the current flows.

Nick figures out that the material was built, or tinkered with and altered by famed eccentric inventor Nikola Tesla. Tesla lived in the area, one of the local schools is named for him, and it was rumored that he had a secret lover in the area, which may have been the family's reclusive great-aunt.

It turns out that there are other people who are interested in the collection of electronic junk at the yard sale. Sauv  men in expensive suits, wearing sunglasses and looking like government agents offer lots of money for information as to who might have purchased the material.

The novel is a series of events about Nick and his new friends trying to figure out what is happening, then trying to retrieve all the gadgets, while more and more unusual things occur. Meanwhile, the team of people who want to retrieve all the objects themselves step up the pressure. It turns out they have a group symbol, a red letter A with the crossbar being an infinity symbol. We learn that they are known as the Accelerati and will stop at nothing, including murder, to get the objects back and to keep their existence well hidden.

The action here is steady and is mixed nicely with good solid character development as Nick, and his new friends become better acquainted and learn more about themselves. The authors are very good at using conversation among the characters to advance both plot and characterization. There is also a steady stream of small quips and attempts at humor, some of which are more successful than others, and most of which I am convinced will resonate more with adult readers than with any pre-teenager who might be following the story.

While I enjoyed the book I had problems with it. One of my primary problems is the writing style. Screen writers are used to telling stories with scenes in which the viewer takes part as the plot unfolds visually. My experience has been that too often when screen writers revert to the novel form they tend to retain their screen writing habits by writing at the reader, as though telling a story, rather than developing the story as a flowing narrative that the reader is involved with. That is exactly the situation here. The authors are not exactly talking down to the reader (altho in some scenes that is the case), but they are talking at the reader, as though explaining to the reader what is happening, and also why it is happening. This is particularly the case in some of the attempted humor and cosmic coincidences which struck me as being too cutesy-poo to be acceptable. Events in a prose story should unfold as a blend of narrative and conversation so that the reader becomes part of the plot movement, but I did not have that feeling with this novel at all.

My other problem is that because this story is aimed at a young audience, a lot of realism gets tossed out the window immediately, beginning with the opening premise. The characters in the story have looked up the life and times of Nikola Tesla, including his eccentricities, his successes, and his many failures, and conclude he was the original Mad Scientist, thus allowing the authors to propose that these fantastic inventions are his contraptions. Actually precious few of these gadgets fall into even the outermost realms of science fiction. The devices and the things they do are pure magic, offered up with no local explanation of any kind.

In one chapter the authors describe an old baseball glove from the attic accumulation that somehow manages to pull every fly ball into its pocket. Then the glove manages to pull an incoming meteorite out of the air. But when they describe how the magical baseball mitt somehow pulls an asteroid out of its orbit in deep space so that its course will now target the Colorado Springs sports field and completely destroy planet Earth, that's when my willing suspension of disbelief left me.

The other problem with this lack of realism is the lack of logical believability in the movement of the plot. The bad guys are part of a super secret society over a hundred years old, determined to conquer the world and dominate the human race by controlling all energy sources. Since Tesla bragged many times over his career of his ability to transmit energy thru the air, or to create energy using the force of gravity, or by other means known only to himself, the authors seize on this as a central plot device.

It would seem that this new 21st century has now become the age of Vast Hidden Evil Secret Societies in literature. They seem to be everywhere, in every kind of media, but I am hardly sick of the whole concept. Dominating the human race and controlling the entire planet seems like a lot of work to me. Personally, I'd rather be fabulously wealthy, then I could have McMansions on six of the seven continents, a fleet of private jets to take me anywhere, and scads of money to engage heavily in sex, drugs, rock & roll and any other hedonistic activity that might strike my fancy. Who wants the aggravation of keeping world-wide civilization operating while protecting your secret society from being revealed by a bunch of snotty nosed eighth graders?

Unfortunately, the authors decided this would be a great plot device, and the whole trilogy is stuck with it. And that's the other problem with the novel. If this ancient, ruthless, super secret society is so powerful and so paranoid that they will resort to murder to get what they want, why don't they just kidnap Nick and his buddies, subject them to their wonderful truth-serum tea, or more directly, simply apply some good old fashioned torture and get the information they want, then kill the kids and be done with the whole mess? Projected total time allocated for direct intervention: forty-eight hours, and their whole problem is taken care of.

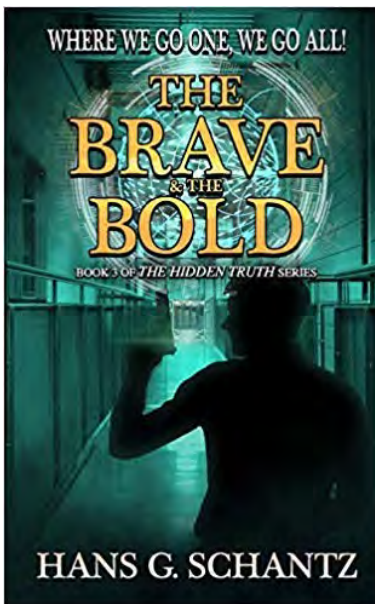
But because this is a pre-teenage style novel, practical solutions or direct logistics are not allowed to happen. Neither are practical solutions by the young heroes of the story. I could think of four or five things I would have done that Nick and his friends never even consider. But of course, the novel has to run its full length, and then there are two more novels to be written as well.

I suspect the audience this book was aimed at will enjoy it. Even as world-wise as modern thirteen year olds are these days, they will probably not notice the anomalies and inconsistencies of the plot line that bothered me, nor will they mind being talked at with the writing instead of being invited to become part of a plot flow that moves logically from one point to the next building toward a believable conclusion. Alas, I am no longer thirteen years old. The book was a quick read, but altho I recommend it to younger readers, I will not be back for the other books in the series.

The Brave and the Bold: Book 3 of The Hidden Truth.

.....Review by Declan Finn

Eligible for Dragon Awards, 2019, for Alternate History



You may remember that the previous two books in the series explored an alternate history where 9-11 killed President Al Gore, destroyed the White House, spared the twin towers, and revealed a shadowy conspiracy that had been twisting fate, warping history, and bending culture and all of society to their will.

And most of that was in the opening chapters of book one.

Book two was a chess game, as the enemy came closer and closer to encroaching on our heroes' turf, raiding academia, targeting professors for personal destruction, and a game of wills that only the wary would pass.

Then there came the Order of Preacher spies, the tong assassins, and the forces of counter revolution, for lack of a better term.

And now, book three.

As the write up says,

Where we go one, we go all!

When the Civic Circle tries to embroil the U.S. in a senseless war, Pete must leverage his summer intern position to infiltrate their Social Justice Leadership Forum on Jekyll Island, and disrupt their plans. The danger - and the opportunity - are far greater than he imagines. The sinister power behind the Cabal - a power that aims to reshape society, destroy our civilization, and cast humanity into bondage - tolerates no rivals. Deep within the conspiracy's stronghold Pete discovers not only the secrets by which they retain their power, but also a crucial vulnerability that could cripple the Cabal with one decisive blow.

With his plans in jeopardy and his life at risk, Pete must forge an unlikely alliance of rivals, turn The Civic Circle against itself, expose their secrets, and end their threat once and for all. The ultimate struggle for the ultimate stakes hinges on one simple question:

Will fortune favor the brave and the bold?

While much of the series has been espionage with a hint of satire, with a heavy slathering of science, this one was extra heavy on all three. The spy stuff with countermeasures and counter surveillance, the pages of manipulation through mind-bending "feelz logic" of special snowflakes, and very heavy on the science.

Right off of the bat, I can say that they had some very nice twists in this one, just in the opening pages. Let me just say that that's one way to do a recap. And while the front half is a solid recap with laying some solid foundations, the back half is the really fun part. I won't say any of it is a slog, but the pacing was a little uneven, especially in the first hundred pages or so.

However, the one thing I should point out here is that this is possibly the best conspiracy theory I've seen since Foucault's Pendulum. What Umberto Eco did with conspiracy theories, Hans has surpassed, weaving together a collection of real life events that create a dark pattern when you

look at the convenient timing.

Also of interest is that, while this is an alternate history, unlike many of the ones I've read, with some exceptions -- there is a concrete reason discussed in the novel for why the timeline has diverged.

All in all, a fun read. Thoroughly enjoyed.

Hollow City
by Kai Wai Cheah
Review by: Declan Finn

Eligible for Dragon Awards, 2019, in either SF, Fantasy, or even Alternate History if you prefer.



Hollow City (Song of Karma, book 1), by Kai Wai Cheah is the latest in Silver Empire's superhero universe line. While it's been discussed in terms of this version of the Punisher....

This may end up as a Punisher origin story, but our hero is way, WAY too sane to be Frank Castle. The vibe as you read the novel is more Michael Connelly doing a noir superhero novel, with gun porn that outdoes Larry Correia. (No, I'm not exaggerating, and you did not misread that. Gun porn that would make Larry Correia blush).

Six kills in six years.

Super powered cop Adam Song has dedicated his life to the law. In the military and the police force, Adam ruthlessly protects the innocent.

But this time he's killed the wrong bad guy. Now the local drug lord's son is dead, and the boss is out for Adam's blood. Even his secret identity won't keep him safe. The police department hangs him out to dry, his years of exemplary service forgotten. Adam must take justice into his own hands to keep his family safe.

Because Adam is a Song. And Songs take care of their own. No matter the cost.

When does justice become murder? And just how far will he go to protect his clan?

Dragon and Hugo Award nominated author Kai Wai Cheah steps onto the superhero scene with his debut Heroes Unleashed novel. His characteristic fast-paced action and attention to detail brings Adam Song and the Chinatown of Hollow City vividly to life.

What makes a straight-laced hero cop go rogue? Buy the book or read it in Kindle Unlimited today to find out!

Imagine if Baen did a superhero novel and it was one part Connelly, one part Correia. You've got smart police tactics by a super-powered former soldier as part of a SWAT team, but you al-

so have the problems of the politics of "Primes" (they're not superheroes or mutants, they're Primes). It becomes an interesting mix of politics, powers and police. When I reference Michael Connelly, most people should think of his hero, Harry Bosch (yes, now an Amazon Prime show). And the police department in Halo City is very much like the corrupt, politics-ridden (but I repeat myself) legal system of Bosch's LA. It helps with the noir feel of the novel, as it constantly refers to Halo City as the Hollow City, dark, soulless and corrupt....

You know, Chicago.

(Okay, if you're looking for a direct parallel, it's probably if San Francisco were run by Chicago politicians, down to the demographics, and "Grand Park" instead of SF's Grant Park.)

Once again, as with the first book in the series, (Morgon Newquist's "Heroes United") it's a superhero world that feels very real. Screwups are not tolerated, leaving a realistic feel to the narration -- such as referring to an egomaniac "hero" who was going to live stream an arrest... so the criminal set a trap and put three rounds in the sucker's face. Stupidity is its own death penalty. The politics are realistic enough to make me want to strangle the politicians -- even down to having a Black Lives Matter group that's against Primes. And I love the line "Politics is never personal until it happens to you," I may need to steal it.

And the tactics are solid. The guns are detailed and make sense given the use of force required. The fact that Adam has three guns, as well as a taser, is one of the better carry policies I've seen of a hero in a novel for some time.

The world building is solid. The tactics are great. The character is also well developed. Publicly, Adam Song seems to have the powers of Marvel's Bullseye -- he always hits what he aims for, with preternatural reaction time. That's what everyone else thinks, too. But it goes beyond that, and he has a very simple, straightforward approach to handling everything -- it's handled by the book. I love the byplay between what the public thinks he can do, what he says he can do, and what he actually can do. It's the usual conflict of the civilian mindset versus the mindset of people who actually get shot at with some regularity. I had to look up his Amazon bio to make certain that Kai Wai Cheah hadn't served in law enforcement or the military.

And then there's our hero's family... I await someone to bitch about Kai Wai Cheah using "Asian stereotypes" as he writes his novel in his native Singapore. Heh.

There are a bunch of cute bits as well. They're not SWAT teams, but STAR teams (Resident Evil, anyone?). The investigator is Herbert Franks (cute Cheah. Very cute). Cheah also has bullet storm haiku... no, I'm NOT kidding.

Short version: If Harry Bosch were an Asian superhero, and Michael Connelly had a sense of humor, this is the book you'd end up with -- a Superhero Baen novel. If you enjoy anything put out by Baen, or Harry Bosch, or Astro City, or Jon Bernthal's portrayal of the Punisher in Daredevil, you're probably going to enjoy this one.

My only problem? There is a bit of a cliffhanger. But then again, it did say book 1. For some reason, it does NOT piss me off anywhere near as much as others have.

I wholeheartedly recommend this one. 5/5. I'm seriously considering this for a Dragon Award if I knew where I'd put it.

War Demons
by Russell Newquist
Review by Declan Finn

Not eligible for a 2019 Dragon Award, it came out in 2017. But it's good anyway

The Devil went down to Georgia. He was looking for a soul to steal.



And this time, he isn't coming with a violin.

Welcome to War Demons, by Russell Newquist.**

When he came home, so did they...

Driven by vengeance, Michael Alexander enlisted in the Army the day after 9/11. Five years later, disillusioned and broken by the horrors he witnessed in Afghanistan, Michael returns home to Georgia seeking to begin a new life. But he didn't come alone. Something evil followed him, and it's leaving a path of destruction in its wake.

The police are powerless. The Army has written Michael off. Left to face down a malevolent creature first encountered in the mountains of Afghanistan, he'll rely on his training, a homeless prophet, and estranged family members from a love lost...

But none of them expected the dragon.

Jim Butcher's Harry Dresden collides with Larry Correia's Monster Hunter International in this supernatural thriller that goes straight to Hell!

That tag at the end isn't bluster. It's fairly accurate. Personally, I think War Demons leans more on the MHI than the Harry Dresden. So much so that I'm willing to say up front that I would not be surprised if Russell ends up authoring an MHI spinoff novel. No, I'm not exaggerating. This is a story that could have been mistaken for a Monster Hunter International novel if Larry Correia used prayer as a weapon more often. But I will admit, there is a TON of Dresden-level action.

Let's back up a step.

Chapter one opens up with a swordfight with a demon, and ends with dropping a daisy cutter on it.

That irritated the sucker a little.

Fast forward a few years to our hero, Michael Alexander, who Jack Ryaned out of the military when his helicopter crashed. He and his buddy hid in a cave only do discover something in the cave that was colder than the dark and hungry.

When Michael returns to Georgia, the thing that haunted him in the sandbox follows...

Ahem, "The Devil went down to Georgia...."

But when Michael starts to see his dead friend stalking him in the shadows, well, it's just some PTSD demons. Nothing to worry about, right?

Yeesh. When this guy is haunted by his past, he takes it literally.

The fun continues as the circle of crazy threatens to suck in the entire state. Black Ops commandos, Vatican operatives, a billionaire prepper (seriously, don't mess with the billionaire prepper), a moment of "I wanna bring the flamethrower" that I really believe (Down to "We got it from the Bureau of Land Management"). He gathers the magnificent seven, mounts up, and "We're gonna save the damsel from the dragon"

Aaaaannnnndddd it's only the halfway mark. Which made me wonder how the bloody blue Hell the rest of the book was going to go.

That was pretty much the point where things got worse, complete with a villain you really just want to run through with a stake, cut its head off and burn the body ... maybe in that order. It was such a deliciously evil sucker.

And then he had a couple of black hawks and Apache attack helicopters fight a dragon.

And, it being Georgia, it ends at a football stadium.

Because of course it does. It's Georgia.

Honestly, War Demons was solidly authored and put together. 11% into the book, he's established most of the characters we're going to see throughout the novel, including the villains. Yes, all of them. What? You thought just a demon was going to be enough? Nah. We're going to have golems and vampires and zombies and warlocks and Jihadis, oh my. (Or, as I thought of it as I read it, "terrorists and demons? Challenge accepted.") Newquist also does a great job of sprinkling the back story throughout the novel.

It's got a nice sense of humor. Up to and including a spook who picks his aliases out of a liquor cabinet.

But as I said at the start, the tag line for this novel is no boast. The action is MHI at its most gonzo (otherwise known as Harry Dresden on a day that ends in Y). The atmospheric top even F. Paul Wilson's *The Keep* (book, not movie).

Here's the short version: get War Demons. If you like Urban Fantasy, or books with a Southern atmosphere, or military UF, Larry Correia or Jim Butcher novels, you're going to enjoy War Demons.

**For those people who are wondering, yes, Russell is my publisher at Silver Empire. Don't think that influenced my review. Mainly because if I thought it sucked, I wouldn't mention it

here, or ever again. I'm actually worried that since it took so damn long for me to review this one, someone is going to think I didn't like it. In this case, no, I got a free copy of this book for review on e-ARC, and then my Kindle died.

Short Stories

Noir Fatale, With Graphics ...Review by Pat Patterson

O be joyful, internet friends and neighbors, and those relatives who are taking a break from the things which are really important! For, Papa Pat has written a REVIEW again! YAY! Not just ANY review, either! This is a review of the lovely, delightful, occasionally scary collection of stories called NOIR FATALE!

MAJOR kudos to Sarah A Hoyt on the cover. She has captured a representative of the genre in the act of....something.

Kacey's Introduction & Larry's Introduction. Long, long ago, when I was first discovering the excitement of STORY (!), I always skipped the prefatory material. It took about twenty more years for me to discover that there was often some VERY interesting and important things going on in those ignored sections. Today, I love them! Particularly when, as in this case, we are given a peek backstage, and get an understanding about How It Works. Don't miss these!

Ain't No Sunshine by Michael J. Ferguson and Christopher L. Smith. Slade and Collier are tough, hard-nosed PI types, not out of place in the 1930s Los Angeles setting, but in this little twister, they are in space. Slade's a bit of a techno-phobe, much to the amusement of others. Their business is (just) scraping by. Under those circumstances, you can't AFFORD to do much pro bono work. However, when an old flame, now one of the most powerful women in the habitat, dies under mysterious circumstances, penniless techno-phobes are on the job. Side characters include a second old flame, and a little sister-type. Remember the little sister in 'The Big Sleep?' The one who kept biting her thumb?

Recruiting Exercise by David Weber. Sometimes, when I read David Weber's work, I want to grab up a couple of history books, and re-examine the entire section of Western Civ that dealt with the various insanities that visited France in the 18th & 19th centuries. However, I just don't like the French very much- sorry – and so I haven't done that. This particular story deals with a young woman, starving, and with food and medicine withheld from her ailing brother, who decides to prostitute herself in order to get the things the utterly corrupt bureaucrats are holding back.

Spoils of War by Kacey Ezell. One day, Kacey Ezell is going to write a bad story. Maybe. From the evidence I've seen so far, though, that day is likely to come after the sun burns out. This gem sits on layer upon layer; the mysterious woman; the gent she seeks out for assistance, a war-time friend of her brother; and what WAS her brother up to, anyway? An evil, wicked Bad Man sends gunsels. And she has found the man of her dreams, and desires nothing more than to run away with him, and just be Joe and Betty Grumble; and Ezell writes in such a way that WE want this for her as well, and we are so very, very glad when it is finally in her grasp... Apropos of nothing at all, did you know the most famous painting in the world wasn't really

THAT famous until it was stolen? And that it's painted on wood, not canvas?

The Privileges of Violence by Steve Diamond. - Consider: Russia during the darkest days of consolidation of the Soviet Union; secret police everywhere; rebellions internal, and foreign intervention always possible. Therefore, the terror police were perhaps the most active and effective part of the entire country. Did I mention the monsters? Because there are monsters. With secrets. More twists and turns in this one than in the Runaway Mine Car at Six Flags, and I believe it captures the same bleakness of spirit that Orwell painted into '1984.'

A Goddess in Red by Griffin Barber. We use the term 'goddess' to describe a woman who takes our breath away with her beauty. This one is beautiful, and she can CERTAINLY take your breath away, but she also has some pretty creepy powers. She gets involved in a plot, and you have to wonder: what's in it for her? Is this just boredom setting in? Read it with the lights on. In every room. And a German Shepherd at your feet while you clutch a cat and a Browning Hi-Power close.

Kuro by Hinkley Correia. After reading this, I became curious as to the identity of Hinkley Correia, and her relationship to Larry. One thing I can say is this: the inclusion of this story in the collection owes NOTHING to nepotism. Great characters, GREAT story. Lots of depth, and wear your seat belt. Japanese freaky ghosts, and a significant serving of what life is like for the Japanese salaryman. Well done!

Sweet Seduction by Laurell K. Hamilton. I read this story while I was in the hospital, on a clear liquid diet. I wanted all of the cupcakes described in the book, and if they had been available, I just MIGHT have broken the rules. Now aside from that, it's a GREAT detective story, and a very nicely done social commentary as well. But I must have the address of that bakery, do you hear?

A String of Pearls by Alistair Kimble. Alistair has the credentials to write devastatingly fascinating detective fiction. However, none of that is evident here. I hated this story, which is obscure, internal, and boring. If you like internal dialogue from a protagonist who never gets to the point, you'll love this. I grew tired of internal dialogue that skirted the issue of what was really going on, and resolved that this one must be DEFENESTRATED. Hit it, Alicia Ann!

Honey Fall by Sarah A. Hoyt. The last story in which I didn't care what was going on is followed by a story in which the protagonist doesn't know what is going on. We don't either, BUT we can see that there is a clear path that will take her, and us, there. Taking place in post-war, magic-infused world, a deliciously lovely little tale of the damsel in distress, and the distress of those who wish to harm or help.

Three Kates by Mike Massa. I had the great privilege of living in what was then West Germany for two and a half years, and I worked closely with a man who was a veteran of the Wehrmacht, and a woman who was a veteran of the Luftwaffe. Therefore, I know from experience that not all Germans were Nazis, nor evil, nor anything of the sort. It had to be different during the actual conflict, even without the addition of magical themes this story brings us. Our protagonist is a German agent, sent on a mission to discover certain items of power. His crisis of conscience is NOT easily resolved, and is, in fact, perhaps even aggravated by the intervention of three lovely ladies with their own agenda.

Worth the Scars of Dying by Patrick M. Tracy. Evidently, story length is of great importance to

me, even if I can't define it. What starts out as a simple case of a damsel in distress, seeking assistance from an innkeeper who transforms into a beast, soon devolves into a story that seems interminable. So, I terminated it. Perhaps you will find a different outcome. Kenneth, I believe this one is yours:

The Frost Queen by Robert Buettner. If someone had told me that Robert Buettner, cited as one of Heinlein's heirs, author of (among others) the Orphan series, was going to write a sweet YA adventure story about heroism, sacrifice, and falling in love, I would have murmured politely and changed the topic of conversation. BUT HE DID! It's a lovely little story; I think he gets all of the characters down perfectly. Along the way, he tosses in enough references to tension between the Earth dwellers and those on the Moon that we get it, we really do. I pass his house (sort of) every time I go Papa-sit three of my grands, and I'll wave a little more sweetly from this point on. (Not to be stalkerish: I DON'T know where his house is. I just know which exit off the highway it is.)

Bombshell by Larry Correia. If Correia didn't invent a couple of genres, he certainly made them come alive to new generations. My youngest son, the Moose, is a dedicated Monster Hunter and is enormously proud of the fact that he ran into Larry at a DragonCon. But in this delightful little tale, instead of sticking with mainstream Grimnoir-type special talents, he uses a cop with ZERO talent to solve crime, in spite of the specials. It's a great story, and, as is the case with so many others in this volume, keeps you on your toes.

All in all: despite the two stories I chose to dump, it's WELL worth your time. I found this fascinating; I don't know if it can be replicated, but I, for one, would love to see more.

And I want those cupcakes, too.

Peace be on your household.

Sercon

The Fantastic Tales of Saki

by

Jon D. Swartz, Ph. D.

N3F Historian

Hector Hugh Munro (1870 - 1915), better known by his pen name of Saki, was a British writer, whose witty and often macabre stories satirized contemporary society and culture. He is considered a master of the short story and is often compared to O. Henry. According to one critic, his tales “featured delicately drawn characters and finely judged narratives.” His most famous story is probably “The Open Window,” with a closing line (“Romance at short notice was her specialty”) that “has entered the English lexicon.”

In addition to his short stories -- which were first published in newspapers and then collected into books -- he also wrote a full-length play, *The Watched Pot* [in collaboration with Charles Maude]; two one-act plays; a historical study, *The Rise of the Russian Empire* (the only book published under his own name); a short novel, *The Unbearable Bassington*; *The Westminster Alice*, a parody of *Alice in Wonderland*, and *When William Came* (an early alternate history nov-

el). Critics have written that he was influenced by Lewis Carroll and Rudyard Kipling, and that he himself influenced such later writers as A. A. Milne and P. G. Wodehouse.

Early Life

Munro was born in Akyab, Burma, the son of Scotsman Charles Augustus Munro -- an inspector-general in the Burma police -- and Mary Frances Munro (née Mercer), who died in an accident in England. He had a brother Charles and a sister Ethel. Like Hector, neither would ever marry.

After the death of their mother, the children were sent to Broadgate Villa, in Pilton village near Barnstaple, North Devon, to be raised by “two horrible aunts” who frequently resorted to corporal punishment. It is said that they were most likely models for some of his characters, notably Sredni Vashtar, in his story of the same name. Undoubtedly the days of his youth provided many subjects for his future writing career. Leading slightly insular lives Munro and his siblings were initially educated by governesses. At the age of 12, however, young Hector -- described as a delicate youth who liked to draw -- was sent to Pencarwick School in Exmouth and then to Bedford Grammar School.

His Death

Although he was almost 45 when the first World War began, Munro joined the army as a private -- after turning down a commission as an officer. He was a corporal when he was killed in a shallow trench (shot in the head) during an attack on Beaumont-Hamel on November 13, 1916. It has been reported that his last words were: “Put out that bloody cigarette.”

The Saki Pseudonym

“Saki” is Farsi for “cup-bearer,” and is thought to be taken from either *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* or from the New World Saki monkey *Pitheciidae*, both of which were referred to in Munro's stories.

Selected First Edition Genre Books

The Chronicles of Clovis (1912)

Beasts and Super Beasts (1914)

When William Came: The Story of London Under the Hohenzollerns (1914) [an alternate history story in which Britain had lost a war and been annexed by Germany]

The Square Egg (1924)

The Short Stories of Saki (1930)

Short Stories Reprinted in SF/F/H Anthologies

“The Hounds of Fate” in *The Pocket Mystery Reader* (edited by Lee Wright, 1942)

“Laura” in *Out of This World* (Julius Fast, 1944); in *Strange and Fantastic Stories* (Joseph A. Margolies, 1946); in *The Wordsworth Book of Horror Stories*, (David Stuart Davies, 2004)

“The Easter Egg” in *In the Grip of Terror* (Groff Conklin, 1951)

“The Schartz-Metterklume Method” in *Fifty Great Short Stories* (Milton Crane, 1952)

“The Open Window” in *Children of Wonder* (William Tenn, 1953)

“Sredni Vashtar” in *Tales To Be Told in the Dark* (Basil Davenport, 1953); in *The Wordsworth Book of Horror Stories* (David Stuart Davies, 2004)

“The Music on the Hill” in *Great Tales of Fantasy and Imagination* (Philip Van Doren Stern, 1954); in *Ghosts and Things* (Hal Cantor, 1962)

“The Interlopers” in *The Unexpected!* (Bennett Cerf, 1948); in *Great Tales of Action and Ad-*

venture (George Bennett, 1959)

“The Background” in *Tall Short Stories* (Eric Duthie, 1959)

“Tobermory” in *Journeys in Science Fiction* (Richard L. Loughlin & Lilian M. Popp, 1961)

“The Story-Teller” in *Best Fantasy Stories* (Brian W. Aldiss, 1962)

“The Wolves of Cernogratz” in *The 4th Fontana Book of Great Ghost Stories* (Robert Aickman, 1967)

“The Toys of Peace” in *Eco-Fiction* (John Stadler, 1971)

“The Seventh Pullet” in *Echoes of Terror* (Mike Jarvis & John Spencer, 1980)

“The Cobweb” in *100 Hair-Raising Little Horror Stories* (Al Sarrantonio & Martin Greenberg, 1993)

“The Soul of Laploshka” in *100 Ghastly Little Ghost Stories* (Stefan R. Dziemianowicz, Robert A. Weinberg, & Martin H. Greenberg, 1993; in *Phantastic Book of Ghost Stories* (Richard Dalby, 1996)

“The Peace of Mowsle Balton” in *Tales of Witchcraft* (Richard Dalby, 1994)

“The Stalled Ox” and “The Stampeding of Lady Bastable” in *100 Hilarious Little Howlers* (Stefan Dziemianowicz, 1999)

“Gabriel-Ernest” in *Classic Horror Stories* (Charles A. Coulombe, 2003)

Stories Reprinted in SF/F/H Prozines

“The Hedgehog” (*The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, 12/55 issue)

“The Music on the Hill” (*F&SF*, 09/55)

“The Seventh Pullet” (*F&SF*, 12/54)

“The Soul of Laploshka” (*F&SF*, 06/55)

“Wolves of Cernogratz” (*F&SF*, 03/56)

“Sredni Vashtar” (*Shock*, 07/60)

Saki on Television

In 1962, a Granada Television eight-part series was telecast. The series was titled *Saki* and was produced by Phillip Mackie. One of the actors was Mark Burns, who played Clovis.

A dramatization of “The Schartz-Metterklume Method” was an episode in the *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* TV series, telecast on June 12, 1960.

Conclusions

Munro's work is highly thought of by most critics, and several have favorably compared his stories to those of O'Henry. Julius Fast wrote that “there has never been anyone to equal Saki in his cold, clean and brilliant prose” and that each of his stories “is a perfectly plotted little masterpiece.” SF historian I. F. Clarke regarded his alternate history novel, *When William Came*, as the best of all such works.

After his death, Munro's older sister Ethel wrote a short biography of her brother, and it has been reprinted in *The Short Stories of Saki* (Modern Library, 1958).

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The Library Book
by Susan Orlean
.....Review by Bob Jennings

This is another book recommended by my friend Bill Plott, and it is a good one. On the morning of 28 April 1986 fire broke out in the central Los Angeles Public Library. The fire started in one of the interior shelving units, difficult to reach, especially for large fire hoses. The building had an alarm system, but no sprinkler or CO2 containment system, and no fire doors. In a very short time the flames had spread from their initial location, running along baseboards and walls, across ceiling tiles, growing in intensity as more and more books fed the flames.

The fire rapidly became a raging inferno. The fire moved up and down the floors of the building, thru almost every department, moving too fast to be contained, and reaching a state of perfect ignition; where the oxygen level feeding the flames exactly matched the material being burned, producing a pure clear white flame with temperatures reaching 2000 degrees, a condition rarely seen outside of laboratory experiments. Fireproof metal shelving units melted like tallow candles. Support beams and interior structures cracked and crumbled. The fire raged for over seven hours with every fire department in the city and county aiding the efforts to contain it.

Thousands of gallons of water poured onto the building seeped thru the room, down along support beams and other shelves, filling the basement where the reference stacks were located with a rising flood. It was the absolute worse disaster any library can experience, devastating fire and ruinous flooding. Entire departments were completely wiped out. Four hundred thousand books went up in flames, while seven hundred thousand more were heavily damaged.

This is a book about that fire, its possible cause, what happened after the fire, and it is also a story of Susan Orlean's love of libraries and books, woven with a complete history of the foundation and development of the Los Angeles public library system, and a look at libraries and the interaction they play with the development of civilization.

This is a difficult mesh-up to attempt, but Ms. Orleans manages to pull it off beautifully. She is a staff writer for The New Yorker Magazine, and has written other books, including "The Orchid Thief" which was turned into the Academy Award winning movie "Adaptation". Her command of language is extraordinary, and I found the book riveting. I read thru the entire volume in one setting, something I almost never do.

Originally the author was primarily interested in the cause of the fire, and the outcome of the investigation into the cause. Almost all library fires are the result of arson, and both the LA police and fire departments determined that arson was the case in this fire. They launched an arson investigation as soon as the ashes cooled enuf for investigators to get inside. Interviews with library employees and security guards soon centered on a suspicious man with shaggy blond hair, a big blond mustache, and a handsome, cheerful face. That person was determined to be Harry Peak, a happy-go-lucky gay man who wanted to be a movie actor, who adored the public spotlight, and who apparently was on the scene when the fire started.

The problem was that Harry Peak was a pathological liar, who loved to spin yarns about himself

and the people he knew to impress his family and friends. Everybody who knew Harry Peak liked him, but nobody took anything he said seriously. He was not only a casual liar, he was also absent minded, and apparently unable to concentrate on any situation enuf to hold any kind of regular job.

He has told friends he has set the fire, but when the police interviewed him he denied starting the fire, but gave them multiple different stories of his actions. He took a polygraph test and failed. Later he claimed he set the fire but the details were wrong. Then he said he was nowhere near the library fire, and some of his friends supported him, but then he changed his story again, and again, and yet again. The police finally arrested him and held him for seventy-two hours with constant questioning, hoping he would confess and provide some kind of details that would make a case, but the district attorney's office refused to prosecute because of the mercurial lack of solid evident for or against Peak's involvement with the fire.

Meanwhile there was plenty of evidence that the fire could have been started accidentally. The building was state of the art when it was built in 1926, but by 1986 it was very old, overstuffed with three times more books and material than it had ever been designed for, with an outdated, badly overloaded wiring system, inadequate ventilation, windows designed mostly not to open, and clutter everywhere. The fire department routinely wrote up dozens of fire hazard citations with every inspection, and a recent fire department evaluation had concluded that the entire building was a potential disaster just waiting to happen. In April of 1986, that disaster did happen.

This is more than a book about the fire, or the investigation into the causes of the fire. It is also a story of the Los Angeles library system, about how the city, with the generous help of plenty of ordinary citizens, managed to recover from the disaster and rebuilt the main library into something bigger and better than it had even been before.

This is a book by an author who loves books, and who loves libraries. It is also a book about the way libraries have evolved over the years to meet the ever changing needs of their patrons. The book also looks at the evolution of the library experience in the internet computer age. It discusses the difficulties libraries face with the problems of homelessness, and open computer access available to the general public.

Libraries nowadays offer not just books, but ideas, and information. Not just information, but ways to use that information with constant community outreach. Not just fiction, but ways that the fiction can be presented outside of books; with plays, puppet shows, discussions about books, audio books, movies, photographs. Not just information, but knowledge, and the way that knowledge can enrich individual lives and the entire community while using libraries as the central clearing point.

If you want a book that discusses the fascinating people who created and operated the libraries of Los Angeles, and how they tried to cope with all the modern problems associated with libraries as a public institution determined to serve the public needs on short budgets and limited spaces, then this will be fascinating. If you love books and you like libraries this book will probably appeal to you.

But this book may not be for everyone. If you are looking for a true-crime mystery unraveled, be aware that this book does not provide any solid answers as to who or why the LA main library burned in 1986.

It also may not be everybody's style of book. The four pronged foci of the book require an ambitious juggling act by Ms Orlean to balance everything out and create a uniform whole, but she handles most of it very well. There are some occasional glitches as the shift back and forth between past and present, between old history, modern history and a look at the current people who comprise the library system bump into each other in odd ways. However Ms Orlean's writing style is direct and magnetic. If you are a person interested in books, or libraries, or the ways libraries are evolving to meet the needs of their many patrons in the new information age, I'm pretty sure you will enjoy this book as much as I did.

The "Radio Script" Dick Tracy Big Little Books
by
Jon D. Swartz, Ph. D.
N3F Historian

Dick Tracy has been called the second most famous detective in the English language (after Sherlock Holmes). His exploits have been presented in newspapers, books, radio programs, comic books, motion picture serials, feature films, television shows, animated cartoons, and countless other commercial ventures. He was also the star of the very first big little book (BLB) ever published by the Whitman Publishing Company of Racine, Wisconsin, the principal producer of these popular children's books.

Dick Tracy Big Little Books

There have been many Dick Tracy Big Little Books (and related publications) over the years. The titles published during the 1930s, the Golden Age of the big little book, were as follows:

The Adventures of Dick Tracy, Detective (1932)
 The Adventures of Dick Tracy (1933) [premium]
 Dick Tracy & Dick Tracy Jr. (1933)
 The Adventures of Dick Tracy & Dick Tracy Jr. (1933) [premium]
 Dick Tracy Out West (1933)
 Dick Tracy From Colorado to Nova Scotia (1933)
 Dick Tracy & the Stolen Bonds (1934)
 Dick Tracy Solves the Penfield Mystery (1934)
 Dick Tracy on the Trail of Larceny Lu (1935)
 Dick Tracy & the Boris Arson Gang (1935)
 Dick Tracy in Chains of Crime (1936)
 Dick Tracy & the Racketeer Gang (1936)
 Dick Tracy Meets a New Gang (1936) [Tarzan Ice Cream premium]
 Dick Tracy, Detective & Federal Agent (1936) [first Dell Fast-Action]
 Dick Tracy & the Hotel Murders (1937)
 Dick Tracy & the Chain of Evidence (1938) [Dell Fast-Action]
 Dick Tracy & the Mystery of the Purple Cross (1938)
 Dick Tracy & the Maroon Mask Gang (1938) [Dell Fast-Action]
 Dick Tracy & the Man With No Face (1938)
 Dick Tracy in Smashing the Famon Racket (1938) [Buddy Book]
 Dick Tracy on the High Seas (1939)

Dick Tracy & the Blackmailers (1939) [Dell Fast-Action]

Dick Tracy Radio Programs

The Dick Tracy radio shows were juvenile crime dramas based on the popular comic strip by Chester Gould. They appeared in several different formats over national networks during a 14-year period. A 15-minute daily version was aired during 1935-1939, a short-run 30-minute weekly version was heard during 1939, another 15-minute daily version ran from 1943 to 1948, and a 30-minute weekly version was broadcast concurrently with the daily version during 1945-1946. All programs were peopled with the various characters appearing in the comic strip. The 1946-1948 programs opened with a burst of static, followed by Tracy's terse commands as he gave orders by wrist radio, an invention that figured prominently in the comic strip.

There was considerable cast turnover in the various series, with at least three different actors in the title role: Ned Wever, Matt Crowley, and Barry Thomson. The sponsor during the late 1930s was Quaker Oats. The programs offered many premiums, some of which are quite valuable today.

The "Radio Script" BLBs

The Dick Tracy radio programs and BLBs came together in the late 1930s when Whitman and the Quaker Oats Company decided to publish two Dick Tracy radio scripts as premiums (each was available for two box tops from either Quaker Puffed Wheat or Quaker Puffed Rice). These two miniature BLBs books are described below, along with the conventional Dick Tracy BLB that evolved from one of these giveaways. All three of these books have been described as science fiction (SF), although most Dick Tracy experts believe that true SF plots did not appear in the strip until the introduction of the two-way wrist radio in the 1940s.

Dick Tracy and the Invisible Man (1939)

The first part of this 64-page book was an introduction to radio broadcasting in general and to *The Dick Tracy Program* in particular. Following this part was a radio script that involved an "invisible" man and the mysterious Grey Mask. There were only about a dozen interior illustrations in this booklet (only four in the script part), but Quaker Puffed Wheat and Quaker Puffed Rice commercials were presented in full. The Official Dick Tracy Signal Code Siren Cap Pencil played an important role in the story.

Dick Tracy and the Ghost Ship (1939)

Unlike the previous giveaway, this premium booklet was solely a radio script from the early years of the program. In this script Dick Tracy encountered a ship that was thought to be the legendary Flying Dutchman and a crook named the Shark. There were only seven interior illustrations in this second 64-page booklet and no radio commercials were reproduced.

Dick Tracy and the Phantom Ship (1940)

This BLB was an expansion/revision of *Dick Tracy and the Ghost Ship*. Again the plot was an

adventure in *The Bay of Whales* in the Antarctic. Tracy's help was sought because the whales had disappeared. Tracy and Pat Patton received permission from their Commissioner to go to the Antarctic to investigate this mystery; and they, along with Junior, flew to the Antarctic to investigate. The Flying Dutchman also appeared in this book, but Dick Tracy stated early in the story that she looked like a real ship and not a phantom. As in the radio booklet, a criminal named the Shark (he looked more like a real shark than in the premium giveaway) was responsible for the disappearance of the whales. This book followed the usual BLB format, with an interior illustration on almost every other page. It was 432 pages in length, and radio communication played a major role in the story.

Tracy's Creator: Chester Gould (1900-1985)

Born in Pawnee, Oklahoma, the son of a newspaper publisher, Gould moved to Chicago to finish his college education at Northwestern University. After graduation in 1923, he found work as a cartoonist and produced his first comic strips: *Fillum Fables*, *The Radio Catts*, and *Why It's a Windy City*, a topical strip about Chicago. Then he conceived of the idea of a detective who would fight criminals on their own terms – using fists and guns when necessary. He submitted his idea to Captain Joseph Medill Patterson of the Chicago Tribune-New York News Syndicate and began his famous hardboiled comic strip, originally called *Plainclothes Tracy*, on Sunday, October 4, 1931. He wrote it until Christmas Day, 1977, when he handed over the writing chores to Max Allan Collins. Patterson had recommended the short first name for the character (a slang term for detective).

At its height of popularity 800+ newspapers carried the strip, with a total readership of over 100 million. Gould once wrote that “pursuit, deduction, and action” were the ingredients he stressed in his police procedural strip. He was a two-time winner of the National Cartoonist Society's Reuben Award and in 1980 was given a Special Edgar Award by the Mystery Writers of America.

Conclusions

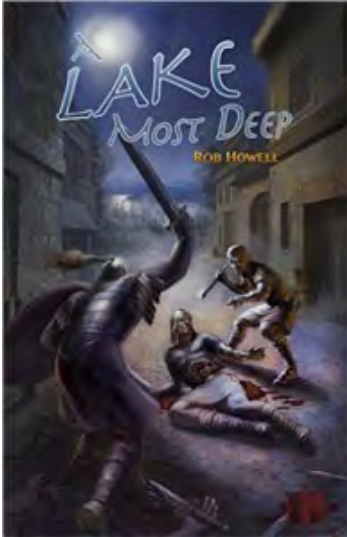
Although the radio script booklets -- the main subject of this article -- were published in the late 1930s, most experts believe the strip officially entered its science fiction (SF) phase with the introduction of the two-way wrist radio in 1946. Later, of course, came many other SF and fantasy elements, including cities in a moon crevasse, anti-gravity space coupes, moon maidens, magnetic space cars, and so forth. As can be seen from the descriptions of these premiums, however, the strip flirted with SF plots early on.

Food of Famous Authors

Rob Howell: *A Lake Most Deep and Butter Pie*

I think this may be the best book I've read all year that was published this year. If I did that sort of thing, I'd nominate it for an award. And not only is it an excellent read, but it's a debut novel. You don't see this much awesome in one place very often.

I wasn't too sure about this at first. Debut novels tend to have... issues. Yeah, issues, that's the word. I had put a call out for more ETWYRT authors to come play (I'm always taking suggestions) and Rob responded. I didn't know him, and wasn't too sure. I try to include folks in this



series that I can send my readers to, without fear of quality. So, I bought Rob's book before I committed to accepting him. I read it. The First Reader read it. You can read a review here. A Lake Most Deep is worth buying and devouring.

So his book impressed me. I asked for a recipe, and, well, Rob blew us away one more time. Try it, he suggested, you might like it...

A rich, buttery, but not-too-sweet pie of Canadian origins. Serve just slightly warm and curl up around the rest of Rob's book to finish it. You'll feel like purring, take it from me.

Butter Pie

Ingredients

Pie crust

1/2 c raisins or chopped nuts (I used pecans)

1/4 c softened butter

1/4 c brown sugar (packed into measuring cup)

Salt - a pinch or so, unless using salted butter,

then omit

1/2 c corn syrup

1 beaten egg

1/2 tsp vanilla

Instructions

Bake the pie crust, piercing or using pie weights to keep it's shape, at 400 deg F for 10-15 minutes.

Cream together the butter and sugar, salt if desired (I added it along with salted butter and the result was like salted caramel), and then corn syrup.



Add egg and vanilla, beat in.

Stir in nuts, or soaked raisins if so desired (raisins could be soaked in hot water, or a bit of rum for added flavor).

Pour filling into baked pie crust, return to the oven at 400 deg F for another 15-20 minutes, the longer it bakes the less runny the filling is.

The 'batter' for the filling is paler than for pecan pie.

Allow to cool to room temp and serve.

The pie crust, pierced and ready to bake. Pie weights are better but I don't have room for all the kitchen stuff I want!

The First Reader looked at the kitchen while I was working on this and asked “what’s the difference between this and a pecan pie?” Good question. This has less eggs, less sugar proportionally, and most important, it doesn’t have the molasses. I used less nuts than I would have for a pecan pie (although you could put in more). The results were a lot more buttery, less sweet and gooey than a pecan pie can be, and the prebaking of the pie shell kept it crispy under the candy-like filling. I was serious when I said salted caramel – that’s what this pie is like.

When you are serving it, you’ll find that you have three layers: the crisp, flaky pie crust (I’m using my lard Pie Crust recipe), the gooey middle filling, and a candy topping that has been heat-crystallized into something like toffee.



A finished Butter Pie with the crusty top of the filling and nuts showing.

It’s not a big pie – you’ll note the aluminum pie plate I used – but you really don’t want it to be. Because you will eat this. It’s not so sweet that it makes your teeth hurt, and there is something about the flavor that just got both of us.

Lloyd Behm: Martian Aria and Dolmades

Lloyd A Behm is responsible for one of the Hard SF books written in the last couple of years that is eminently readable. Since this meal took me a couple of days from start to finish, you’ll have plenty of time to read. *Martian Aria* is reviewed elsewhere, but the thumbnail is: great characters, Mars colony. Fun reading.

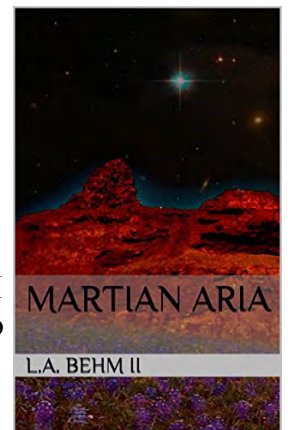
Wait! Stop, don’t go away. You don’t have to do it the hard way. As a matter of fact, I recommend you don’t do it the way I did. So grab the book, and come back here to see how I learned not to make dolmades.

I’d asked Lloyd for a recipe for this series, and I’m not sure this is the right one. You see, he’s one of the few people I talk food with and we send each other recipes. So... I hope this is right. Because it was a fun meal to prepare, and somehow I think Brumbar would approve. Anyway, it wasn’t crepes... (and yes, you’ll have to read the books to get that joke).

Great-Grandma's Dolmades

Ingredients

- Grape Leaves - (use the jarred, not my method)
- ½ Lb Ground meat
- 8 Oz Tomato sauce
- ¼ teaspoon allspice
- Small jar (8 oz) grape leaves
- 1 Cup Long Grain Rice
- ¼ teaspoon cinnamon



Dash salt

Instructions

Remove grape leaves from brine, unroll and rinse.

Place in bowl of cold water.

Mix meat, rice and spices together in bowl. Add half tomato sauce.



Remove stems from grape leaf, put app 1 teaspoon of meat mixture in center of leaf.

Fold outside ends of the grape leaf over meat mixture and roll from base of the leaf to tip (cigar style)

Repeat until all meat mixture is used. Stack rolls in heavy sauce pan. Pour remaining tomato sauce over rolls, cover completely with water, put top on pan and simmer for 2 hours. Check rice to determine if done.

Once cooked, can be served cold.

Note – I found that most jars of grape leaves were 16 oz jars, so I double the recipe.

To begin with, I went out with my little basket, kitchen shears (and camera, natch) and harvested grape leaves. First note, if you decide you want to do this recipe the hard way, make sure you are picking the younger, more tender leaves. Tough old ones will leave you picking leaf-veins from between your teeth. I brought my leafy haul home, washed, patted dry, and slipped them into a ziploc to freeze for another day (hat tip to Kathryn McCrary for this idea).

It's at this point I highly recommend you do Lloyd's version with the jar of leaves. They will be more pliable, uniform in size, and will yield better results.

Making a little leaf envelope for a small spoonful of rice and beef mixture.

Roll from the stem end toward the tips. Don't make your packet too tight, the rice will expand while cooking. Once you have used up all of your leaves, it's time to cook.

Special note – pack your dolmades snugly and don't put in too much broth. Mine were too loose and some unraveled while cooking.

Pita bread

I did finally learn the trick to properly puffed pitas. Once you roll out your disc of dough, let it rest for 15-20 minutes before baking in a very hot oven on a stone.

Pita Bread

They puffed, and went back down, but they were tender, tasty, and perfect for this meal.

Fatoush

Fatoush: a salad of mint, tomato, onion, cucumber, and garlic, tossed with a little lemon juice, olive oil, and salt.

Dolmades

Fatoush, dolmades, and pita bread.



The dolmades were, sadly, overdone. I simmered them for longer than the rice I used needed to cook. I would cook this for no more than 30-40 minutes next time. But they were tasty, and the tough leaves we unwrapped and ate the middle. The First Reader learned that it's not the lemon of the restaurant dolmades he doesn't care for, but the grape leaves. Next time I try them, they are all mine Muahaha.. ahem. Anyway the tzatziki sauce, pita, and fatoush were all wonderful so the meal was a success even if the dolmades weren't quite spot on.

Happy Reading!

Noodles and How to Cook Them

In cooking noodles, there are several key issues:

#1: At least drain very thoroughly. After cooking, drop them into a colander and toss every so often, several times

#2: DO NOT OVERCOOK! If the spaghetti hangs limply from a fork, you have overcooked the noodles. For an inexperienced cook, the best you can do is to cook for somewhat less long than it says on the box, take out a sample noodle every minute or two, and administer a chew test. At first the noodles will be crunchy. Then they will be chewy and sticky. Finally they will have plumped up, the color will have changed a bit, and they will be slightly firm to the teeth. That's when they are done.

As a simple approach, bring water to a boil. For a pint or two of water, add several tablespoon-fulls of powdered dehydrated chicken broth. One might also add rosemary leaves. Put a good dollop of olive oil on top of the water. Cook the noodles as described above. When done, drop them into a colander. Have the colander on top of a pan; the collected broth is a nice chicken broth to start the meal.

The pot used to cook the noodles is now empty. Return it to the fire. Add to it a respectable amount of olive oil, several pats of butter, and a heaping tablespoon or three full of minced to crushed garlic. Chopped artichokes are a nice addition. The butter should melt and start to brown. The garlic should start to change color—a faint change. Drop the drained noodles back into the pan and toss the noodles in the oil. Any remnant water in the noodles will boil off; the noodles will coat with oil so that they are no longer soggy.

Discussion

Editor:

As head of the Welcommittee I receive information on new members - favorite science fiction and fantasy, authors, conventions attended, club interests. Many mention correspondence as something in which they would like to become involved. As of this writing, the club does not have a Correspondence Bureau. (I know there was a Correspondence Bureau in the 90's, and my understanding is that it was very active.) When I welcome new members I send them a list of bureaus and activities in which they may be interested. The postal mail and electric round robins are always listed with contact information for joining. They are the closest thing the club has, at the moment, to the Correspondence Bureau.

What I don't understand is why so few members take advantage of the round robins. I have never been involved in a round robin that only talked about the subject of the round robin. Robin members always bring their personalities and outside interests into the communication. That is one of the things that make them so fun.

As the bureau head of the Electronic Round Robins, (introduced in the January, 2016 issue of TNFF) I have tried for over three years to encourage members to join. I have tried many ideas. A long list of topics. A short list of topics. Combining topics. Cutting down the number of members to start an ERR to two members. Sending personal invitations to members who indicated an interest in round robins or correspondence. In the August, 2018 TNFF I introduced another version of the ERR in which two people are paired and discuss whatever topic they choose. Sort of like pen-pals. In last month's TNFF (April, 2019) I changed the name of the ERR to Electronic Round Robins - Correspondence, hoping this would spark some interest. So far nothing.

To date the ERR, in any form, has had only five interested members. Four of these members joined under the original ERR set up. One quit after the first rounding. Of the other three members one slowly dropped out of ERR existence. I have no idea if that ERR is rounding with the remaining two members. The fifth interested member joined when the pair ERR was introduced. This person was a new member to the club and no one else joined the ERR.

I'm beginning to think the ERR is not a good use of space in the TNFF zine.

Judy Carroll



Space Wanderer — Angela K. Scott