

# Tightbeam 311

August 2020



White Dragon under Orange Sky  
by Jose Sanchez

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August 2020

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Anime Reviews are courtesy Jessi Silver and her site [www.s1e1.com](http://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.”

Regular contributors include Justin E. A. Busch, Tom Feller, Declan Finn, Greg Hullender, Jim McCoy, Chris Nuttall, Pat Patterson, Heath Row, Cedar Sanderson, and Tamara Wilhite. Declan Finn’s web page [declanfinn.com](http://declanfinn.com) covers his books, reviews, writing, and more. Jim McCoy’s reviews and more appear at [jimboss-ffreviews.blogspot.com](http://jimboss-ffreviews.blogspot.com). Chris Nuttall’s essays and writings are seen at [chrishanger.wordpress.com](http://chrishanger.wordpress.com) and at [superversivesf.com](http://superversivesf.com). Pat Patterson’s reviews appear on his blog [habakkuk21.blogspot.com](http://habakkuk21.blogspot.com) and also on Good Reads and Amazon.com. Cedar Sanderson’s reviews and other interesting articles appear on her site [www.cedarwrites.wordpress.com/](http://www.cedarwrites.wordpress.com/) and its culinary extension. Tamara Wilhite’s other essays appear on Liberty Island ([libertyislandmag.com](http://libertyislandmag.com)). Samuel Lubell originally published his reviews in The WSFA Journal. Anita Barrios is a former middle school ELA and Social Studies teacher. Regular short fiction reviewers Greg Hullender and Eric Wong publish at [RocketStackRank.com](http://RocketStackRank.com).

Some contributors have Amazon links for books they review, to be found with the review on the web; use them and they get a reward from Amazon.

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

The N3F offers four different memberships. To join as a public (free) member, send [phillies@4liberty.net](mailto:phillies@4liberty.net) your email address.

To join or renew, use the membership form at <http://n3f.org/join/membership-form/> to provide your name and whichever address you use to receive zines. 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 dues-paying member are \$4. **Public memberships are free.** Send payments to N3F, POB 1925, Mountain View CA 94042. Pay online at [N3F.org](http://N3F.org). Our PayPal contact is [treasurer@n3f.org](mailto:treasurer@n3f.org).

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# Editorial

For this issue for once we have a great surplus of wonderful material, for which your editors are most thankful. In particular, Tom Feller's review of a large number of Hugo nominees, and how his choices compared with the actual vote, will be split into at least two parts, perhaps concluding in the next issue.

I am particularly happy to welcome new writer Justin E. A. Busch and his fanzine review column *Fanfaronade*. If you publish a fanzine, please send it marked 'review copy' to him at 308 Prince St., #422, St. Paul, Minnesota 55101. I am just as happy to welcome new video reviewer Cathode Ray and Young Adult reviewer Anita Barrios.

I have deviated from my usual practice of alternating front and rear cover artists, simply because Jose Sanchez's latest work is so spectacular. The alternation pattern will resume with the next issue.

## Letters of Comment

Editor:

I received your mailing and wanted to do my usual with it: namely, write a letter of comment. Of course, I don't know what attachment it would be published in, if it were to be published. I will say that I am interested in becoming a member of the National Fantasy Fan Federation. What kind of member, I'm not certain.

First, I will comment on the leaflet. Good luck unifying science fiction fans past and future and all fan interests. A new specialized fandom seems to arise every couple of years: literary science fiction, fanzines, cosplay, movies, comics, gaming, military gaming, etc. For now, unified fandom seems like a lost cause. On the other hand, at seventy-five, I am a lost cause so that isn't a swear word for me.

Let's go on to the attachment "Founders of the National Fantasy Fan Federation". I guess a collaboration between you and Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D. In the introduction, you mention one of the founders of the N3F is still alive. I wonder who. On the other hand, I recognize all the notable founders except two, Art Widner and E.E. Evans. Actually met both Russ Chauvenet and Jack Speer at the 1984 Virginia CorFlu. I didn't get along too well with Jack, but I got along very well with Russ. In fact, I was writing him until he physically could not write back.

Having finished with your Founders attachment, I will go on to the N3F Review of Books. In the review of James Young's *Unproven Concept*, I think Jim McCoy had a good criticism. It would be great if there were novel which gave the aliens' viewpoint. In *Unproven Concept*, it would tell us why the aliens are ultimately defeated. Of course, a writer would have to have a really good imagination to do that.

Next I will comment on the review by Heath Row of Clifford Simak's *City*. I haven't read much by Simak. I know he still has his fans. Especially of his short stories. He shouldn't have tried to integrate several diverse short stories into a novel, though. It is mixing the proverbial apples and oranges. Not necessarily a rotten tomato in Simak's case, but certainly verging on mishmosh. I imagine his Editor didn't think so. Around that time, an editor allowed A. E. Van invoked to publish several such 'novels'. In A. E.'s case, definitely mishmosh.

Next still, Heath Row reviews *Donovan's Brain* by Curt Siodmak. My comment has nothing to do with the novel. Instead, it's an anecdote about the movie. I remember Nancy Reagan

who, who starred in it, thought Donovan's all-powerful brain, whose brain has been liberated from his body, reminded her of father. Ho boy!!

In another review, this one of the novel *Hell Will Rise* by Skyla Murphy, Tamara Wilhite mentions a cure for cancer was being kept secret. Several decades back, I read a parody of the tabloids of the time. In one headline, Elizabeth Taylor received 'the cure for cancer from the flying saucer people'. I was wondering if Skyla's cure was the same as Liz Taylor's. Certainly, Liz's has been kept secret.

In addition, *The Immortal Unknown* by K. H. Scheer is reviewed by Heath Row. This is a Perry Rhodan novel. I remember, when I was doing research in the MIT Science Fiction Society Library, one of the club members in charge had the deepest contempt for Perry Rhodan. Since *The Immortal Unknown* didn't sound like a bad novel, I suspect he got that impression from the sheer number of Perry Rodin novels. For him, large quantity ipso facto meant bad!

Furthermore, in reviewing the tomb of the old one, *Heaven's Damned* by Maxwell Zain, Jim McCoy mentions all the info-dumps in the novel. I doubt it matches all the info dump's in Hugo Gernsback's *Ralph 124C41+*. If I remember correctly, the novel was one enormous info-dump with a few paragraphs of plot.

I have some comments on the columns which deal in writing mechanics. However, at this point, let's get some comments on Tightbeam. Anime, movies, novels, history, and short stories are reviewed there furthermore, includes a letter column. What's not to like about it?

In the letter column, Lloyd Penney complains that there are problems with interlibrary loan. For popular books, yes. The publishers want you to buy their book. On the other hand it is easy to get interlibrary loans for more arcane materials. Fewer people want them. I have done a lot of my research that way.

Next comes anime. Jessi Silver reviews 'Somali And the Forest Spirit'. Golems are characters in it. They were originally Jewish androids. That night, I think is the best way of describing them. They were fabricated, with odd ingredients, like a dirt and magic words. Later on, you had better know how to control them. In legend, a number of people have paid for not knowing. In cartoons, Mickey Mouse did. Of course, golems have changed a lot since then. In some Japanese anime, 'Somali and the Forest Spirit', they are now protectors of the forests. Other creatures like zombies and werewolves have changed a lot, too.

Jessi Silver also reviews 'Darwin's Game'. She wonders at one point what purpose violence has. At the very least, the hero takes revenge against the villain who was thwarted him. The happy ending. This is true even these days when heroes are not all white hats and villains all black cats. The reason is tragedy is still not that popular.

Now we come to comics. There Heath Row reviews the Blade Runner comic. He is right that the plot and characters were much changed for the movie. Dick's novel was comic in a black sort of way, and the movie was anything but comic in any way. I remember that before the hero could kill androids, he had to give them a test to prove they were androids. One of the questions was 'Before the war, would you have eaten dog?'

Now come the movies. There, Bob Jennings reviews the 1935 movie 'The Bride of Frankenstein'. I agree with a lot he said. Among other things, the movie was incoherent and illogical in parts. I suspect it was a mood piece. However, unlike Bob, I give it kudos for the ending. One of the most effective tropes in Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* runs through the movie 'Bride of Frankenstein'. Frankenstein's monster wants a wife to, among other things, keep him company. In the movie, he is blackmailed into doing it by Professor Pretorius. However, the monstrous wife rejects Frankenstein's monster. Out of anger, the monster kills Professor Pretorius and destroys the laboratory. He is angry because he also has no one to keep him company.

For movies, we pass novels and go to SerCon. Jon D. Swartz talks about Fredric Brown. I remember the novel *Martians Go Home*. I think everyone loved that novel where too much

truth created a hell of its own. Unfortunately, a story, I thought, was by Fredric Brown wasn't: 'The Martians and the Coys'. It is true the anthology that contained it, *Science Fiction Carnival* (1953), was edited by Fredric Brown. However, Mack Reynolds co-edited it. In fact, 'The Martians and the Coys' was by Mack Reynolds. Remembering my high school reading of it, it probably wasn't very good.

We go from SerCon to a zine, which Heath Row reviews, *Sci Fi*. I have a comment on his review for December 2019, where Heath talks about George Takei's FX show on the internment of Japanese-American citizens during World War II. I haven't seen it. A Japanese-American friend and co-worker gave me a book on it, though. I gather the military treated the internees like they were clear and present danger. Eventually, though, Dylan S. Myers, an official of the Agriculture Department, was responsible for the camps. He decided to give the internees a measure of self-government and sent many out on work release to far-flung parts of the country. The latter meant that they were no longer imprisoned. However, many younger generation Japanese believed he was a sellout.

Sincerely yours,  
Richard Dengrove

Good afternoon, George and Jon,

I have been slowly digging out from the backlog of fanzines and such brought about by the ongoing pandemic, teaching online, and chairing this past spring's Corflu. All this was quite overwhelming, but things are now looking better. Of course, now the fall term is staring me in the face, so as a result I am preparing for that. The fun never ends.

Many thanks for sending the latest Tightbeam my way. It may now be July, but reading through the March 2020 issue was a pleasant way to pass last evening. Items that caught my eye were the movie reviews by Bob Jennings, the interview with Fred Tribuzzo (whose work I have never read), and the brief piece on Fredric Brown, one of my favorite writers in any genre. Face it: anything by Brown is fun reading. I always recommend his work to anybody asking for a good storyteller in the science fiction genre. Invariably I direct the person to Brown's mysteries, which I personally believe are his best work, and never hear a bad report in return. Fredric Brown is simply one of those writers you can depend upon for a well-told story.

Bouncing back to the movie reviews, I agree with Bob Jennings about *Bride of Frankenstein*, and I do not think I have ever seen *Caltiki the Immortal Monster*. That one doesn't sound familiar, so I must search that one out. It definitely sounds interesting.

This was a nice diverse issue, George, and I thank you for sending it along.  
All the best,  
John Purcell

Dear George and Jon:

Once again...I have two issues of Tightbeam, 309 and 310, and a little bit of time to get caught up with correspondence here. I will try my best...

309... My loc...AmazingCon came and went, and it was a good time. It looks like many fans have embraced Zoom, but now I keep seeing references to the benefits of Discord... I always thought social media was supposed to bring us all together, but with so many social media platforms, the reverse is happening, in my opinion.

I haven't read Jim Gardner's latest book, but if he indeed uses the terms sparks and Mad Genius, those terms certainly remind me of the *Girl Genius* comics. Those terms are used everywhere in the story line to describe most of the main characters, who are Mad Geniuses to begin with. I found Andy Weir's *The Martian* dry to read, and the movie, not much better. I

guess I have preferred stuff like C.J. Cherryh's *Chanur* books, all much enjoyed some years ago.

I guess I am old enough to say that I met Fritz Leiber many years ago at a litcon in London, Ontario. Ah, there it is, Rhinocon 2. Honestly, he was in a wheelchair, and he looked like a sad marionette whose strings had been cut. He had been a good guest at the event, but if I recall, he died not long after that convention.

310... I am sure I have that Star Trek novel by Barbara Hambly tucked away somewhere. I enjoyed it, and that may have had something to do with Barbara and George Alec Effinger meeting at our local convention. George and his writings are sorely missed around here. The Clement and Blish books are both on my shelf, the Blish read only a couple of years ago.

Thank you, Jon, for your article on Walter M. Miller, Jr. I had known that there was some level of mental illness in his own story, and you filled out details wonderfully well. I am very much tempted to go and find the Leibowitz sequel. Ah, yes, the Darfsteller!

Well, we are all still in lockdown in this pandemic, and I am hopeful that all have been protecting themselves and others with a face mask. I keep seeing the online childish tantrums of those who don't wanna, and you can't make me! Yvonne has been making homemade masks for others here, which has truly derailed any other projects she may have had in mind. I have been working as editor on a few other books, plus a couple at the moment, but paying editorial work is petering out very soon, and I have to find something else that will help me build the bank account.

Anyway, done for the moment. Thanks for these two issues, and I will try my best for the next one.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

## Anime

### Afro Samurai ...Heath Row

Source: Serialized in the doujinshi manga *Nou Nou Hau* from 1998-2002

This anime miniseries and its original self-published manga focus on the path to vengeance taken by the titular character Afro Samurai, who watched the No. 2 samurai, Justice, kill his father—the then No. 1—when Afro was but a child. Created by Takashi Okazaki; whose early artwork was influenced by soul and hip-hop music, and American media; the artwork and visuals, pacing, and edit cuts are all very highly stylized. In fact, the character design at times reminds me of the comics work of Paul Pope and the video game *The World Ends with You*. It's a little messy and frenetic, at times hard to follow, but there are enough moments of stillness and subtlety to make up for it. (And all the blood spray is actually pretty cool, too, reminding of the red on black and white of the movie version of Frank Miller's *Sin City*.)

There's a slight science fiction aspect to the anime, with futuristic monitoring and remote viewing technology, robotics, and cybernetics. But for the most part, it's a straight-forward revenge story and samurai tale, perhaps similar to the anime *Samurai 7* and *Samurai Champloo*. The anime was produced by Gonzo for release in America on Spike TV, airing between Jan. 4 and Feb. 1, 2007. Samuel L. Jackson served as executive producer, voicing



two of the characters: Afro himself and the comic-relief sidekick Ninja Ninja. Ron Perlman voiced Justice. The soundtrack—worth checking out itself—was created by RZA from the Wu-Tang Clan. And Shepard Fairey received a backgrounds credit in at least one episode.

If you can get past the frenetic jump-cut approach to animation and editing, it's a fun series. The world is just odd enough that you have to make sense of it. The personal relationships from the past bring an emotional weight to something that might not really matter otherwise. And some of the details—the bearded brother always bopping out to his headphones, the oversized teddy bear head mask, and the cinematic snowfall—which reminded me of the snow scene in *Kill Bill: Volume 1* (which, also, interestingly, included the animated short *Kill Bill: The Origin of O-Ren*)—are quite excellent elements.

Tor's Seven Seas imprint published two volumes of an updated version of the doujinshi in 2008, and a TV movie, *Afro Samurai: Resurrection*, followed in 2009.—Heath Row

## Fanzines

### Fanfaronade: Celebrating Current Fanzines ...Justin E.A. Busch

I have had the honor of being appointed fanzine reviewer for N3F; with the honor came a clump of fanzines patiently awaiting a review. Some of these are a bit older, and subsequent issues may already have appeared, but I thought it best to reward patience rather than waiting to be wholly up-to-date. And so--

**Christian\* New Age Quarterly: A bridge supporting dialogue.** Volume 24, #3; Spring 2020. Editor, Catherine Groves. Subscriptions are 12.50 for four issues; a sample copy is 3.50. PO Box 276, Clifton, NJ, 07015-0276..

If you had you asked me a year ago whether I expected to be reading a fanzine called *Christian\* New Age Quarterly*, I would have thought it unlikely; had you told me I would enjoy reading it, I would have thought it improbable. I would have been wrong in both instances. C\*NAQ offers intriguing articles on a much wider range of topics than its name might suggest.

The link to SF is that each issue features one or more essays analyzing some science fictional story (written and/or cinematic) from a religious, philosophical, or theological perspective. Here, for example, the lead item is Robert M. Price's "The Theology of Preacher," examining the TV series's four seasons in some detail. Price's conclusion regarding Preacher's theological stance is neither Christian nor New Age, at least in any conventional sense: "The claim of God's influence is, in the end, unfalsifiable, compatible with any and every state of affairs-- and thus meaningless."

The articles and discussions alike are both thoughtful and calm, even when disputatious; the entire publication is conducted in a manner both gentle and generous.

**Fadeaway #64.** July 2020. Editor, Robert Jennings, 29 Whiting Rd., Oxford, MA, 01540-2035. Copies for LoC, print fanzine in trade, or 25.00 for six issues.

Fadeaway remains one of the better known, and better, sercon fanzines (oddly enough, this was the first copy I've seen). This issue, fronted by a cover by Steve Stiles, among



Winged Kitten by Angela K. Scott



the last work he did before his death last January, features some long-form reviews of three fanzines (Opuntia, This Here, and My Back Pages), embedded in an essay speculating on the motivations driving their creation. Dale Nelson contributes an article revisiting childhood sf favorites (to which he had given numerical ratings in a 1968 listing) and seeing how well they held up; it's much more interesting than it sounds, and at times even poignant-- although some of his revised ratings strike me as perhaps overly generous. Tom Feller reviews the various cinematic incarnations of *The Fly*, providing all sorts of subsidiary details regarding members of cast and crew. A solid lettercol wraps things up. A fine publication for sercon fans, yet likely to be of interest to regular readers as well.

**The Kommandeur.** Vol. 55, #3. Editor, Omar DeWitt, 900 Loma Colorado Blvd. NE, Apt. 4434, Rio Rancho, NM, 87124. Comes with membership in AHIKS.

This is the newsletter of AHIKS, "an international society of mature adults who play historical simulation games by email and mail." It wasn't clear whether copies could be obtained on their own, but, if you want to sample the world of historical gaming before committing to actually playing, the contents justify the attempt. Besides club business, there are numerous short news articles about recent games, along with reviews of history books of likely interest to gamers. Illustrated in color throughout.

**Mark Time 132.** Editor, Mark Strickert, PO Box 1171, Rialto, CA, 92377. Copies for trade, LoC, or 2.00.

I gather that this is an atypical publication for Mark Strickert, who normally favors extended accounts of journeys he has taken, accompanied with detailed considerations of the various methods of transportation involved. There's a bit of that, but most of the issue is given over to fanzine reviews (some expressed in rather obscure terms suggesting some kind of in-joke relation to the editor) and a lettercol ("Lettuce of Condiments"). Generally lighthearted; a quick read to perk up Covid-flagged spirits.

**My Back Pages 23.** Editor, Rich Lynch. PO Box 3120, Gaithersburg, Maryland, 20885. No terms are given, but presumably the usual apply.

As the title suggests, each issue is composed mainly of reprints from Lynch's decades of fanzine writing; it is his "personal time capsule." The essays here are all recent (none earlier than 2018), and cover a wide range of topics, from 2001: *A Space Odyssey* and *The Atomic Submarine* ("My First Scary Movie"), through trips to New York City and Melbourne, to staying home from school, possibly legitimately, to watch the coverage of John Glenn's Mercury launch. The articles are breezily written and engaging; if one topic doesn't excite you, turn the page for something completely different.

**Portable Storage Two. (Autumn 2019).** Editor, William Breiding. Copies for "letters of comment, trade, contributions of writing and visuals, or endowments of cash." See [portablezine@gmail.com](mailto:portablezine@gmail.com) for further info.

The matte color cover and 10x7 format give this 76-page PoD sercon zine the feel of an academic literary journal; the opening editorial extols the virtues of "Amazon's Print on Demand service," complete with pricing statistics. The well-written essays themselves tend toward literary discussion, usually with a personal slant (including Alva Svoboda on *Apas* to which he belonged; Cheryl Cline on cruel stories which scarred her childhood and their significance as writing; Don Herron on the now largely forgotten David Mason; Dale Nelson on "two SF-loving English professors" who shaped his mind and work). The extensive lettercol is mostly commentary and critique (this time primarily on the previous issue's article on 1960s popular music,

a topic I confess I find so uninteresting I mainly skimmed the bulk of the letters). A handsome and solid fanzine more than worth a trade, submission, or LoC.

That's the lot for now. Editors-- send your fresh fanzines to Justin E.A. Busch, 308 Prince St., #422, St. Paul, Minnesota 55101. Please mark 'review copy' on the envelope, lest I assume that all you want is a trade for one of my own fanzines.

## Hugo Nominees

The Hugos  
Tom Feller

While I did not manage to read all the fiction award finalists this year, I did read a few works from other categories. If you are not familiar with the voting system, the voters rank the finalists in order of preference.

### Novels

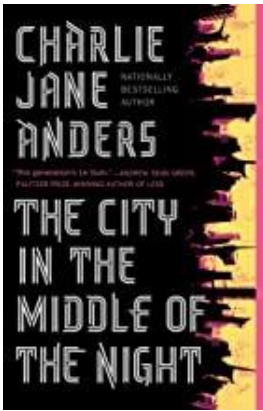
I read four of the Best Novel finalists and naturally, one of the two novels I did NOT read was the winner: *A Memory Called Empire* by Arkady Martine.

#### *Middlegame* by Seanan McGuire—



Although this is a fantasy, the term “quantum entanglement” is used to describe the relationship between the two central characters, a pair of a little bit more than fraternal twins named Dodger, the girl, and Roger, the boy. They were separated at birth, if you can call it that, since they came out of the laboratory of Jack Reed, an alchemist with ambitions of ruling not just the world, but all of time and space, and reaching the Impossible City, a combination of Mount Olympus from Greek mythology, Avalon in the Arthurian legends, and the Emerald City from *The Wizard of Oz*. Dodger is a math and chess genius whose favorite fictional character is Ian Malcolm, the mathematician in *Jurassic Park* while Roger is a genius at words, languages, and persuasion. She is adopted by a family in Palo Alto, California while he is adopted by one in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Neither has an step-sibling, so each is raised as an only child. They are also called cuckoos by

Reed and his homicidal henchwoman, Leigh Barrow, in direct reference to *The Midwich Cuckoos* by John Wyndham, aka *The Village of the Damned*. The story follows them from the age of seven, when they form a telepathic link, to about the age of thirty. The occasion was that Roger needed help with his math homework and Dodger needed helped with spelling. Reed himself, like Frankenstein’s monster, was created out of the parts of dead bodies by Asphobel Baker, an alchemist and children’s book author whom he later murdered. Reed and Barrow are pretty standard villains, but Roger and Dodger are really interesting, especially earlier in the book when they are children. There is another character named Erin, another of Reed’s creations, who is also quite interesting because you don’t know if she is a good guy or a bad guy until the end. The plot is fairly complicated, especially when Dodger discovers she can reset time, and contains frequent info dumps, but the book is hard to put down the closer you get to the end. I ranked it #3, but the other voters ranked it #2.



### The City in the Middle of the Night by Charlie Jane Anders—

Some reviewers are comparing the author to Ursula LeGuin, but I'm not ready to go there just yet. Her latest novel is set thousands of years from now on January, an Earth colony on a planet that is tidally locked. In other words, one side permanent faces its sun, and the other side faces away. There are native life forms, including ones the humans have named crocodiles, although they look more like lobsters, and bisons, although they are carnivores. The humans have colonized the narrow strip on the terminator between the two sides, and on rare occasions venture into the day and night sides to hunt or to scavenge lost technology. There are two main cities, Xiosphant and Argelo, separated by the Sea of Murder, so-called because of creatures that live in it and the pirates who live on its shores. The former city is a totalitarian dictatorship, and while the latter offers more freedom, it also has a sizable homeless population and criminal gangs that dominate the power structure. The generation starship that brought humans to January still orbits the planet, but the humans have lost the ability not only to travel to and from it but even communicate with it. They have also lost communications with the Earth, but in the back story, there are references to an ecological disaster on the Earth so there may not be anyone back home to communicate with.

The two point-of-view characters are Sophie, a member of Xiosphant's working class who has earned a scholarship to the city's university, called the Gymnasium, and Mouth, one of the last survivors of a tribe of nomads who called themselves the Citizens. Sophie's roommate at the university is Bianca, a beautiful member of the ruling class who is a combination revolutionary and party girl. Sophie is in love with her, although she doesn't know it since homosexuality is suppressed to the point that Sophie does not even know what it is. At the beginning of the story, Mouth is a member of a group of smugglers who call themselves the Resourceful Couriers, and her best friend is fellow smuggler Alyssa, a native of Argelo who is always ready for a fight. There is no legal commerce between the two cities, so the void is filled by smuggling and that is how Mouth and Alyssa come to be in Xiosphant. The paths of these four characters cross fairly early in the story.

The story really kicks off when Sophie takes the blame for a petty theft that Bianca commits and is arrested. Instead of being tried and imprisoned, Sophie is exiled to the night side, where she is rescued by one of the crocodiles. It turns out that the crocodiles are intelligent, and Sophie learns to communicate with it. They do not have genders, but Sophie names it Rose and eventually begins calling the species the Gelet. They do not communicate with words, because they have a kind of telepathy and are quite interesting. They have technology, but have managed to keep it hidden from the humans. The title refers to the Gelet city, which is located on the permanent night side of the planet, rather than to either of the two human ones. I found this to be a fascinating read, and the world-building is excellent. Unfortunately, I did not find the ending satisfactory. I still ranked it #2, but the other voters ranked it #5.

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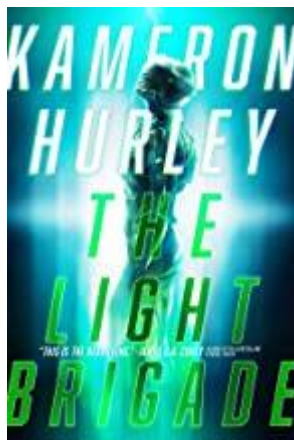


### Gideon the Ninth by Tamsyn Muir—

One recent trend in science fiction and fantasy is for works in those genres to blur the distinctions among science fiction, fantasy, and supernatural horror. This is one of those works, the first book in a trilogy and the first novel by the author. It is set at least 10,000 years in the far future in an empire that has both space travel and necromancy. Most of the action is set in a kind of Gothic haunted castle, and the plot owes much to Agatha Christie's *And Then There Were None*. The title character is a reluctant protagonist, a foundling who has grown up in the castle of one of the nine noble houses. Each house owns its own planet, and they dominate the empire. Now 18 years old and an expert in two-handed swords, Gideon wants

to leave her home, the ninth house, and enlist in the imperial military, called the Cohort. Her initial enemy, but later ally and best friend, is 17 year old Harrowhark Nonageismus, the heir to the ninth house and a necromancer whose specialty is bones and skeletons. When Harrowhark receives an invitation to apply to become a Lictor, a near-immortal member of the emperor's inner circle, she forces Gideon to accompany her and become her cavalier, a kind of bodyguard/servant. The main hitch is that cavaliers are expected to be proficient with the rapier, and Gideon has to take a crash course in using that weapon. They travel to another planet called Canaan House, where they meet the other candidates and their cavaliers. By the end of the novel, they all become distinct characters. The necromancers include terminally ill Dulcinea, military officer Judith, twins Coronabeth and Ianthe, teenager Isaac, Abigail, who is married to her cavalier, nerdy Palamedes, and snobbish Silas. Although not as well developed as characters, the cavaliers are military officer Marta, cranky Naberius, teenager Jeannemary, friendly Magnus, who is an incompetent swordsperson, Camilla, who is probably the best swordsperson of the group, handsome Protesilaus, and honorable Colum. They are in competition, but they also form friendships, alliances, and rivalries. The world building is excellent and the story is quite funny at times, but it starts slowly and the fight scenes are rather long and tedious. I ranked it #4, and the other voters ranked it #3.

#### The Light Brigade by Kameron Hurley—



I first encountered the concept of teleportation in Isaac Asimov's 1955 short story "It's Such a Beautiful Day", so I was already familiar with the idea when the original Star Trek premiered in 1966. There were several episodes, such as "The Enemy Within" and "Mirror, Mirror" in which the transporter malfunctioned and became a key plot point. In this novel, teleportation is how they move military units into position to do battle. In the case of the narrator, Dietz, the process malfunctions spectacularly.

The novel is set several centuries in the future, when humans have colonized the Moon (before it was blown up), Mars (the settlers are called Martians and are well on their way to terraforming it, as in Kim Stanley Robinson's Mars trilogy), and the asteroid belt. Earth resembles the future described in William Gibson's cyberpunk stories. Governments have been replaced by six corporations who are at war with the Martian colony and, unofficially, each other. People without a corporation are called "ghouls". Dietz, one of the ghouls, joins the army of the Tene-Silvia Corporation after the Martians, or so everyone thinks, wipe out Sao Paolo (Dietz's home town), including Dietz's brother and girlfriend. The event became known as "The Blink".

Another motivation is that military service should result in Dietz earning corporate citizenship, somewhat like Robert Heinlein's Starship Troopers. After basic training, which is described in considerable detail, Dietz becomes "unstuck in time", as in Kurt Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse Five, whenever Dietz is teleported. These experiences cause Dietz to experience the war in a non-linear manner and learn far more about it than the typical foot soldier. Since Dietz never experiences a time when the war is over, the novel feels like Joe Haldeman's The Forever War at times. The novel starts fast and world-building is excellent, but Dietz is the only character you really get to know well. The others just seem like bit players. I ranked it #2, but the other voters ranked it #4.

### Novellas

I read all six of the Best Novella finalists.

*Anxiety is the Dizziness of Freedom* by Ted Chiang—

The main premise of this story (the title is a quote from Kierkegaard) is that the many-worlds interpretation of quantum mechanics is correct and that every time we make a decision, a new world is created. A secondary premise is the invention of a device called a “prism”, which allows someone to communicate with their “para-self”, the same person only in another timeline that started to diverge when the prism was activated. Unfortunately, prisms have a finite life, so they should be used judiciously. Nat, a recovering drug addict, and her partner Morrow work in a prism shop not unlike the old Radio Shacks and have found a way to run scams using prisms, although at least she feels guilty about taking advantage of people. Using prisms is psychologically disturbing, so Nat infiltrates a support group run by Dana to find victims. Dana, a therapist, has her own issues as well, but with Nat’s help, she resolves them by the end of the story. I ranked it #1, but the other voters ranked it #5.

*The Deep* by Rivers Solomon with Daveed Diggs, William Hutson, and Jonathan Snipes—

The premise of this fantasy novella is that pregnant women thrown overboard during the transatlantic slave trade. The unborn children, however, were magically rescued and transformed into mer-people. The author doesn’t go into their reproductive process, but the Wajinru, as they call themselves, appear to be unisexual and the process of making babies sounds somewhat like Ursula Leguin’s *The Left Hand of Darkness*. The main character is Yetu, the Wajinru’s historian. Since they do not have written records and have no long-term memories, one of the Wajinru is selected in each generation to telepathically store those memories. Yetu hates being the historian, because she feels overwhelmed by six centuries of memories and has to suppress her own individuality. Much of the story consists of her coming to accept her responsibilities. Once a year there is a ceremony called “The Remembrance” in which the historian temporarily transfers the memories back to the Wajinru and has a few days off. During the Remembrance, Yetu takes the opportunity to escape and winds up in a tidal pool somewhere on the African coast, where she meets and makes friends with Oori. Her new friend, a fisherwoman, is the last survivor of her tribe. Another conflict that stays mostly in the background is that humans have been encroaching on Wajinru territory in search of oil. The prose style is more flowery than I usually like, the pacing is slow, and there is not much of a plot, but overall this is a very moving story. I ranked it #5, and the other voters ranked it #6.

*This Is How You Lose the Time War* by Amal El-Mohtar and Max Gladstone—

Despite the title, this story is nothing like Doctor Who or the “Temporal Cold War” in *Star Trek: Enterprise*. The two organizations seeking to control history are the Agency, a technology civilization, and the Garden, some sort of organic entity. (You would think the Garden would need some sort of high tech to achieve time travel, unless this is a fantasy story masquerading as science fiction.) Specific events are rarely mentioned, but one exception is the assassination of Julius Caesar. Red is an agent for the Agency and Blue for the Garden. They never actually meet in person, but become aware of each other and start writing each other letters. They reminded me of the characters in John le Carre’s espionage novels in which spies on the opposite sides of the Cold War found they had more in common with each other than their fellow countrymen. Red and Blue eventually fall in love, and this is what the story is really about, not about which side wins the war. It was both the Nebula and Locus Awards winner in the novella category. Stylistically, this epistolary novella is quite beautifully written, but I found it too long. I ranked it #6, but it was the actual winner in this category.

*The Haunting of Tram Car 015* by P. Djeli Clark—

This is not exactly a ghost story, although there is some sort of supernatural entity inhabit-

ing a tram car. This story is set in the same alternate history as the author's 2016 story "A Dead Djinn in Cairo", in which Egyptians used djinns to kick out the British in 1879 and become a great power in their own right. Set in 1912, this story includes a suffragette movement in Egypt that plays an important part in the plot toward the end of the story. Cairo's tram car system uses a combination of magic and technology. Hamed Nasr and Onsi Youssef are agents of the Ministry of Alchemy, Enchantments, and Supernatural Entities and are assigned to investigate the alleged haunting of one of their cars. Hamed, the point-of-view character, is the seasoned veteran, and Onsi is the "fresh out of the academy" youngster who is also a Coptic Christian. Their interplay is quite entertaining. Hamed and Onsi conclude fairly early in the story that the entity is not a ghost, and it takes about half the story for them to figure out exactly WHAT they are dealing with. The second half consists of them figuring out HOW to deal with it. Spoiler Alert: It involves cross-dressing. This story is quite a pleasure to read. I ranked it #2, but the other voters ranked it #4.

#### In an Absent Dream by Seanan McGuire—

The premise of the author's Wayward Children fantasy series is that portals to alternate worlds are scattered across our world, including, but not limited to, rabbit holes, looking glasses, and wardrobes. This is the fourth novella in the series to be published, although chronologically it is the earliest and set during the Sixties. The main character in this story is smart, quiet, bookish eight year old Katherine Lundy, who originally appeared as a supporting character in *Every Heart a Doorway*, the first book in the series. She walks through a door in a tree and finds herself in a world called the Goblin Market. She meets a female character called the Archivist who functions as a surrogate mother and Moon, a girl about her own age who is turning into an owl, becomes her best friend. Unlike the children in the other books, she has the option to come and go between that world and ours, although she has to make a decision as to which one she will stay in permanently before her eighteenth birthday. Although she likes the clear barter-based rules of the Goblin Market better than the confusing rules of our world, she also loves her family, especially her younger sister Diana, and the decision as to which world to live in is a hard one. This is the central conflict of the story and the more traditional fantasy action sequences, such as her battle with the Wasp Queen, take place off the page. Her father, she eventually discovers, had also spent time in the Goblin Market as a boy, but eventually chose our world. The Goblin Market feels like an Ayn Rand utopia, and the prose is excellent. I found this to be a fascinating read, and a big improvement in the previous instalment in the series *Beneath the Sugar Sky*. I ranked it #4, but the other voters ranked it #2.

#### To Be Taught, If Fortunate by Becky Chambers—

This novella is NOT in the author's Wayfarers series, which won the Hugo for best series last year. This story is set in the 22nd Century, and humans are starting to explore interstellar space. The story concerns an expedition of four astronauts on a hibernation ship called the *Merian* to a red dwarf star named Zhenyi 14 light years away. It takes them 28 years to get there with the characters aging 2 years during that time. The narrator is Ariadne O'Neill, the ship's engineer, and the other members of the team are Chikondi Daka, biologist, Elena Quesada-Cruz, meteorologist and senior astronaut, and Jack Vo, geologist. Of course, they are crossed-trained in other specialities as well. The story itself is rather simple. They get there and explore one moon named Aecor and three planets named Mirabilis, Opera, and Votum, but the author provides so many rich details that she kept my attention. They find life on all four worlds and are careful not to contaminate them. Actually, the real story is how the four astronauts are changed by the worlds they explore, not just physically but also spiritually. Like the Wayfarer books, this story is character-driven rather than plot-driven. The ending, while logi-

cal, felt anti-climactic, unfortunately.

I found their visit to Opera to be the most interesting of the four, because it reminded me of Heinlein. He had several novels in which his explorers visit a planet, realize it is a big mistake, and barely escape with their lives. That was the case with Opera, although it was the most earth-like of the four worlds. The native species that is so dangerous reminded me of the “dopey joes” in Heinlein’s *Tunnel in the Sky*. One individual is harmless, but there are so many of them that they almost kill the crew. I ranked it #3, and, for once, the other voters agreed with me.

### Novelettes

I read five of the six Best Novelette finalists, but, once again, the story I missed was the winner: “Emergency Skin” by N.K. Jemison.

#### Omphalos by Ted Chiang--

This story is set on a world almost exactly like our own except that young-earth creationism is supported by scientific evidence, such as the absence of rings in tree fossils and mummies without navels. The story consists of a series of prayers and one letter to a friend by Dorothea Morrell, a Christian archaeologist who considers her scientific work to be a way of glorifying God. According to the scientific consensus in her world, the Earth was created 8,912 years before the events of this story. Unfortunately, her investigation of stolen museum artifacts leads her to learn of an astronomical discovery that causes her to have a crisis of faith, because it alters her belief in the relationship between humans and God. The title, by the way, is taken from a book by a 19th Century naturalist named Philip Henry Gosse who attempted to reconcile the scientific evidence with the Biblical account of creation. I ranked it #1, and the other voters ranked it #2.

#### The Archronology of Love by Caroline M. Yoachim—

The strange word in the title of this story refers to one of its premises, which is that humans have discovered a way to observe events in the past, referred to as the Chronicle, which is actually an alien invention. The main limitation is that the maximum number of times anyone can visit a past event without distorting the record appears to be two. Saki Jones is one such archronologist who is investigating a plague that wiped out the human colony on New Mars, so named because it resembles the Mars of our solar system. One of the deceased is the love of her life, M.J., and she was already on a hibernation ship on her way there when he dies. M.J. was also the father of her son Kenzou, who has accompanied her and is also the lover of her graduate student Hyun-Sik. However, this sub-plot is barely developed. Another complication is that the planet is the site of ruins of an alien civilization, which may or may not be the cause of the plague. That makes this story both a mystery and a love story. The part in which Saki’s inner conflict in which she must be a professional investigator while still in the process of grieving is excellent, but the back story of the Chronicle and the alien civilization is not adequately developed. This story needed to be longer, at least novella length, but I still ranked it #2. The other voters ranked it #6.

#### Away With the Wolves by Sarah Gailey—

In most werewolf stories, when the human wakes up after



Blue Unicorn by Angela K. Scott

reverting back, they don't remember what happened to them while they were in werewolf form. Suss, on the other hand, has at least a vague memory of what she did. Another difference is that the residents of her home village all know that she is a werewolf. She just has to make restitution for killing chickens and other domestic animals, and she has never killed a human being. The one time her memory fails her is when she is accused of killing a goat, which is considered a much more serious offense in her village. Suss prefers being a wolf, because she has a chronic pain condition while in human form. Unfortunately, the back story is much more interesting than the story itself, because the conflict is resolved much too easily. My ranking was #5, but the other voters ranked it #3.

#### The Blur in the Corner of Your Eye by Sarah Pinsker—

At first, I thought this was going to be the kind of story featured in the *Murder She Wrote* TV series, but with a science fiction/fantasy twist, and later I thought it would become a sort of Jekyll/Hyde story, but it turned out to be a little bit more complicated than that. Zanna is a mystery novelist who rents cabins in remote locations when she is ready to actually sit down and write. Shar is her assistant/secretary/driver who makes the travel arrangements. When a blown fuse derails Zanna's first day of writing, she walks to the cabin of the owner, whom she finds dead. The death appears to be accidental, but Zanna notices some details that do not fit the official explanation. Unfortunately, those details lead her to find out some things about herself and Shar that are unpleasant, to say the least. It is a very effective, clever, and entertaining story, but rather inconsequential. My ranking was #4, and the other voters ranked it #5.

#### For He Can Creep by Siobhan Carroll—

The point-of-view character in this story is a cat named Jeffrey. It is set in an insane asylum in Eighteenth Century England, where Jeffrey can come and go as he pleases while protecting the inmates from demons, and the cat's human is a poet whose soul is targeted by Satan. (Satan takes the form of a literary critic, which I guess is an inside joke.) The human, Christopher Smart (1722-1771), was a real person who wrote "Jubilate Agno" some time around 1763. The poem includes a section about his cat Jeffrey which concludes with the line "For He Can Creep". Although initially seduced by Satan's ability to provide him with anything he wants to eat, Jeffrey enlists the help of other cats to protect his human. This is another highly entertaining, although somewhat minor story. My ranking was #3, and the other voters ranked it #4.

### Short Stories

I read five of the six short story finalists, and in this category, my rankings were very close to the other voters.

#### As the Last I May Know by S.L. Huang—

During the Cold War, the President of the United States was always accompanied by a military officer who carried a device known as "the football" that would enable the President to order a nuclear attack if one became necessary. In this story, the President is accompanied by a child, and the codes to launch the missiles are embedded in a capsule near the heart of that child. To order a nuclear attack, the child has to be killed. The President is even provided with a ceremonial dagger for that purpose and is expected to kill the child himself. Ten year old Nyma, the point-of-view character and aspiring poet, is the newly selected child and Otto Han is the newly elected President. At the suggestion of her tutor Tej, she establishes a relationship with Han. Their country is at war, and so long as it is going well, she is safe. Unfortunately, the war starts to go badly, and Han is seriously considering killing Nyma and using the nukes. This is a very touching story. My ranking was #1, and, miracle of miracles, the other voters



agreed with me and made it the winner.

**And Now His Lordship is Laughing by Shiv Ramdas—**

Although there are some anachronisms, this story is set during the Bengal Famine in India in 1943 when the British confiscated the rice crop to feed their troops as well as to prevent it from falling into Japanese hands in the event of an invasion. Apa is a maker of beautiful magical dolls out of jute fiber, but refuses to make one for the local British governor until after her family dies of starvation. She survives the famine and finds a way to take her revenge. This is a very powerful story. My ranking was #2, and the other voters ranked it #3.

**Blood is Another Word for Hunger by Rivers Solomon—**

Presumably set during the American Civil War, fifteen year old Sully is the only slave on a farm when she learns that Albert, her master, has died in battle while serving in, presumably, the Confederate Army. He left his wife, two daughters, and both his wife's mother and sister there. Sully cuts their throats that night, presumably because she was abused. The murders disturb the "etherworld", so she miraculously gives birth to Ziza, the revenant of a slave who died two hundred years previously. Ziza magically grows to adulthood within a few minutes and takes charge. Sully then gives birth to five more revenants of deceased slaves so that they can work the farm. Unfortunately, the story starts to lose steam at this point, although the revenants murder some more generic white people. The prose is quite good, but the only thoroughly developed character is Ziza, and I found the ending quite unsatisfactory. I would say that it is probably too short for the author's ambitions, especially since I have used the word "presumably" too many times in this short review. At times, it felt like an outline for a story rather than a story itself.

It is interesting that there are two revenge tales in the short story category. I much prefer the story by Ramdas, because the objects of revenge have names and the reader knows exactly what they did to deserve revenge. None of the people Sully kills have names. The reader does not know what they did besides owning a slave and being white, and I was even wondering if they wore red shirts. My ranking was #5, and, in this case, the other voters agreed with me.

**A Catalog of Storms by Fran Wilde—**

There is an old saying that everyone talks about the weather but no one ever does anything about it. In this story, there are a group of people who do do something about the weather. They are called Weathermen, even the females, and they do battle with the fierce, even supernatural, storms that plague one particular coastal town, where blue skies are a rarity. Unfortunately, if they survive long enough they eventually lose their humanity. The narrator of the story is Sila, the youngest daughter of a family that has already produced several weathermen. To her mother's dismay, Sila's sister is showing signs of becoming a weatherman herself. It is an interesting story without being anything special. My ranking was #4, and, once again, the other voters agreed with me.

**Do Not Look Back, My Lion by Alix E. Harrow—**

This fantasy is set in a world with two suns and in which women are Amazon-like, that is bigger and stronger than men. One exception is Eefa, a small woman who is the mate, referred to as "the husband", of Talaan the Lion, who is her city's greatest warrior and pregnant with her fifth child. They already have three daughters and one son, but their biology father or fathers are never mentioned. Nonetheless, the female Emperor wants Talaan to lead a war of conquest. Talaan does go off and takes their sweet and sensitive son Tuvo with her. Talaan survives, but Tuvo does not. Although Eefa is the point-of-view character, she is rather passive. On the oth-

er hand, Talaan and the world they live in is much more interesting, especially the author's use of gender. My ranking was #3, and the other voters ranked it #2.

To be Continued in Our Next Issue

# Manga

Yotsuba&! Volume 1 By Kiyohiko Azuma,  
Translation: Amy Forsyth, Lettering: Terri Delgado  
... Heath Row

Originally serialized in the monthly boys manga *Dengeki Daioh*, *Yotsuba&!* was developed by the creator of *Azumanga Daioh*, which focused on a group of high school students and their teachers. This simply and cleanly drawn, light-hearted, gentle manga focuses on an energetic six-year-old girl named Yotsuba, her adoptive single father, and their friends and neighbors. The foundation of their relationship unfolds over the course of this first volume, which opens with the pair moving to a new neighborhood, and meeting their new neighbors.

Yotsuba herself is the focal point of the manga, and the characters' relationships and interactions are through and adjacent—relative—to her. As a character, she is very pure and open—open hand, open heart, open mind—and much of the humor stems from that naivete and freshness, drawing on happy accidents, misunderstandings, or simple-minded mishaps. “That kid always finds enjoyment in everything,” her father says at the end of this volume. “Nothing can ever get Yotsuba down.” For example, in the first chapter in this volume, “Moving,” Yotsuba was unaware that she and her father were actually moving—and recovers from that surprise almost immediately. Her adoptive single father, Koiwai, seems to be a 20-something slacker, but not quite a NEET (“Not in Education, Employment, or Training”), because he works as a translator.

Each chapter has a focal point that helps propel the story and character—and relationships—development along. Chapter one introduces Yotsuba, her father, and his friend Jumbo, as well as the three sisters now living next door: Ena, Fuuka, and Asagi. Chapter two's humor focuses on getting locked in a bathroom. It seems like such a small event, but the way Azuma set it up, returned to, and prolonged the gag works rather well. Chapter three introduces the novel technology of air conditioning—heretofore unknown to Yotsuba—and the deadly peril of global warming, resulting in a touching turn of emotion. Chapter four introduces the three sisters' mother—and Jumbo (Yotsuba's father's tall friend) to the sisters, resulting in a small but very fun recurring gag. The next chapter shows that Azuma can draw urban cityscapes, backgrounds, and panoramic views of sorts, in addition to the simple, basic character designs that already work so well. The view from the top of the temple steps is beautifully rendered. The sixth chapter involves the catch and release of many cicadas, letting Azuma stretch his natural drawing skills—as he does in the final chapter, in which it rains.

This is a slow-moving manga, dipping its toe into the waters of these new neighborly relationships. But even if it doesn't ever go anywhere, where it is is pleasant. In his book *The Complete Guide of Manga*, Jason Thompson likens it to “an endless summer day.” That's not too far off the mark. In this 224-page volume, we've met the initial set of characters (except for one, Yanda, whose ongoing absence is itself a running joke)... and that's about it. We've learned what Koiwai does for work—though that itself leads to a misunderstanding—and very little

about his adoption of Yotsuba. Regardless, Yen published at least 11 volumes collecting the manga, and I've got the second and third volumes in addition to this one. You can rest assured that I'll read at least those two.

## Motion Pictures

### Falcon Down (2001)

...Heath Row

This television movie first aired on Feb. 12, 2002, and stars William Shatner, Dale Midkiff (Pet Sematary), and Judd Nelson (The Breakfast Club). The movie's aircraft design is loosely based on two experimental aircraft, the XB-70 Valkyrie supersonic bomber and the Aurora, a supposed top-secret hypersonic spy plane developed by the U.S. Air Force in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Aspects of the film's plot are loosely based on the book Firefox, as well as its movie adaptation.

Falcon Down is mostly an action movie centered on the theft of an experimental aircraft equipped with a directed energy or microwave weapon. The protagonist, Capt. Hank Thomas, played by Midkiff, is enlisted by Shatner's character, Maj. Robert Carson, because Thomas lost a close friend in a plane crash caused by an earlier test of the weapon, because he was in fact court martialed and stripped of his rank by Carson—and because the contractor that lost its funding was apparently planning to sell it to the Chinese military.

There are some sf elements, however, mostly incorporated in interspersed and framing material, some produced to seem like found footage. Several shadowy, mysterious interviews and found footage segments suggest that the directed energy weapon is based on alien technology. And the recovery—or thieving—team, actually parachutes into Area 51, of all places, to steal the aircraft. Besides, Shatner's in it, and that's something.

The best parts of the movie, as far as sf is concerned, might very well be the interspersed and framing segments—or occur once the plane has been stolen and you learn just what's intended for the aircraft. Falcon Down isn't a very good movie, but if you like unidentified flying objects, experimental aircraft, directed energy technology, and the like, it's a fun watch.

### IRL (In Real Life) (2007)

...Heath Row

This is the second time I've watched this documentary written and directed by Stephanie (now Stevie) Tuszynski, but it's been more than a decade since the first time I've seen it; if I've already reviewed it, forgive me! Self-described as one of the first feature-length documentaries about online community, IRL (In Real Life) focuses on “The Bronze,” an online discussion area for fans of Buffy the Vampire Slayer from 1997-2001. It was a linear, unmoderated discussion space offered as part of the official Buffy site and was named after the nightclub in Sunnydale. Even Joss Whedon and the show's cast participated occasionally.

The documentary considers the evolution of the discussion area—from a 12-hour rolling discussion before archiving to a four-hour rolling discussion, with archives available a week—and activities undertaken by participants, 29 of which are interviewed in the film. Group activities included games of Charades, roleplaying via the Whedon Improvisational Theatre Troupe,

weddings, and funerals. Conversations also explore the occasional dangers of such online spaces, such as bigotry and predators; and the rich, true, vibrant friendships and relationships that can develop in fannish communities.

The film also looks at those friendships moving offline into the real world. From 1998-2003, an annual Posting Board Party was held so fans, cast, and crew could mix and mingle—and raise money for charities such as the Make-A-Wish Foundation—and one Wolfram & Hart Review took place in 2004 after the show went off the air. Community members often talked to each other on the phone and traveled to spend time with each other.

That's perhaps the most interesting and important aspect of the fan community. Even though the discussion area shut down when the show moved from the WB to UPN in 2001—causing some frustration among the fans, some of whom thought Whedon could have done more to support a transition, perhaps—the connections and friendships still outlive the Bronze and the show itself. “They're no longer fans of a show like you, but just friends,” one interview subject said.

It's a loving documentary, made by a participant in the community, who also did her Ph.D. dissertation in American Culture Studies/Communication at Bowling Green State University on the topic: IRL (In Real Life): Breaking Down the Binary of Online Versus Offline Social Interaction. In fact, if you'd like to explore her work further, you can download the dissertation at <https://tinyurl.com/yb3zluol>. To learn more about the documentary, visit <http://dlfilms.com/irl/>.

## SerCon

### Clifford D. Simak Bio-Bibliography

by

Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D.

N3F Historian



Clifford Donald Simak (August 3, 1904 – April 25, 1988) was a science fiction (SF) writer and newspaperman. In his writing career, he won three Hugo Awards and one Nebula Award. The Science Fiction Writers of America (SFWA) made him its third SFWA Grand Master, and the Horror Writers Association made him one of their three inaugural winners of the Bram Stoker Award for Lifetime Achievement.

#### Early Life, Education, and Career

Simak was born in Millville, Wisconsin in 1904, son of John L. Simak and Margaret Wiseman Simak. His father had been born in a town near Prague, Bohemia. Simak worked on his parents' farm while growing up, and then attended the University of Wisconsin, Madison, where he majored in journalism. He once said that he decided to become a newspaperman at age five, when his mother read a newspaper to him and told him that such papers printed the truth.

He taught in the public schools until 1929, and then worked at various newspapers in the Midwest, beginning a lifelong association with the Minneapolis Star and its companion newspaper, the Tribune, in 1939. This association continued until his retirement in 1976. He became the Star's news editor in 1949 and coordinator of the Tribune's Science Reading Series in 1961. He also wrote a weekly science column, “Tomorrow's World,” for the two newspapers.

### Personal Life

Simak married Agnes Kuchenberg on April 13, 1929, and they had two children: Scott and Shelley Ellen. In a blurb in his *Time and Again* he wrote, "I have been happily married to the same woman for thirty-three years and have two children. My favorite recreation is fishing (the lazy way, lying in a boat and letting them come to me)." His hobbies were chess, stamp collecting, and growing roses. He dedicated a book to his wife – who served as his typist and proof-reader -- "without whom I'd never have written a line." He was well liked by many of his fellow SF- writing friends, especially Isaac Asimov.

His first published SF story was "The World of the Red Sun" in *Wonder Stories* (December, 1931 issue).

### Principal Books

The Creator (1946)  
 Cosmic Engineers (1950)  
 Empire (1951)  
 Time and Again (1951) [aka First He Died]  
 City (1952)  
 Ring Around the Sun (1953)  
 Strangers in the Universe (1956)  
 Time Is the Simplest Thing (1961) [aka The Fisherman]  
 Trouble with Tycho (1961)  
 They Walked Like Men (1962)  
 Way Station (1963) [aka Here Gather the Stars]  
 Worlds Without End (1964)  
 All Flesh Is Grass (1965)  
 The Werewolf Principle (1967)  
 Why Call Them Back from Heaven? (1967)  
 The Goblin Reservation (1968)  
 So Bright the Vision (1968)  
 Out of Their Minds (1969)  
 Prehistoric Man (1971)  
 Destiny Doll (1972)  
 A Choice of Gods (1972)  
 Cemetery World (1973)  
 Our Children's Children (1974)  
 The Enchanted Pilgrimage (1975)  
 Shakespeare's Planet (1976)  
 A Heritage of Stars (1977)  
 Mastodonia (1978) [aka Catface]  
 The Fellowship of the Talisman (1978)  
 The Visitors (1980)  
 Project Pope (1981)  
 Special Deliverance (1982)  
 Where the Evil Dwells (1982)  
 Highway to Eternity (1986)  
 Note: Books listed by date of publication

### Awards/Nominations/GoH Recognitions

1953 – International Fantasy Award for City  
 1959 -- Best Novelette Hugo for “The Big Front Yard”  
 1964 -- Best Novel Hugo for Way Station  
 1968 -- Minicon 1  
 1969 -- Minicon 2  
 1970 -- Minicon 3  
 1973 -- First Fandom Hall of Fame Award  
 1976 -- Conclave  
 1977 -- Unicon 3, SFWA Grand Master Award, Jupiter Award  
 1981 -- Nebula Award/Best Short Story Hugo for “Grotto of the Dancing Deer”  
 1982 -- Minicon 14  
 1988 -- Minnesota Fantasy Award  
 2001 -- Readercon 13/Memorial Guest  
 Seven other Hugo nominations.

### Death

Simak died of leukemia in Minneapolis on April 25, 1988.

### Critical Evaluations

Fellow SF author, Donald A. Wollheim, once wrote: “Simak has been a journalist all his life and was for many years the news editor of a large metropolitan daily, during the course of which he must have been doused in all the daily human disasters possible. Yet for all that his writings reflect a positive and utterly compassionate sense of the joy of life, of man with nature, and of the infinity of the universe.”

Famous SF author Robert Heinlein once said: “To read science fiction is to read Simak.”

Simak’s stories in general have been described as containing “little violence and much folk humor [stressing] the value of individualism tempered by compassion” and he was “the finest pastoral elegist of his genre.”

Genre critic Mary S. Weinkauf has written: “Simak insists on the dignity of all life and the irresponsibility of undervaluing any.”

### Some Concluding Comments

Simak once said: “I don’t even pretend to know where the field is headed. I do think that the status of science fiction has improved . . . . Today it is widely accepted as a legitimate literature.”

Genre historian Sam Moskowitz has written that Simak’s greatest love and affection was reserved for the farmer. Moskowitz’s profile of Simak appeared in the June, 1962 issue of *Amazing Stories*, and is Chapter 15 in Moskowitz’s *Seekers of Tomorrow*.

My SF-reading friends and I enjoyed many of Simak’s stories, especially the eight-linked stories that made up his novel *City*, which even some of our children enjoyed reading, years later. This fix-up novel certainly deserves to be viewed as a classic of the genre.

### Sources

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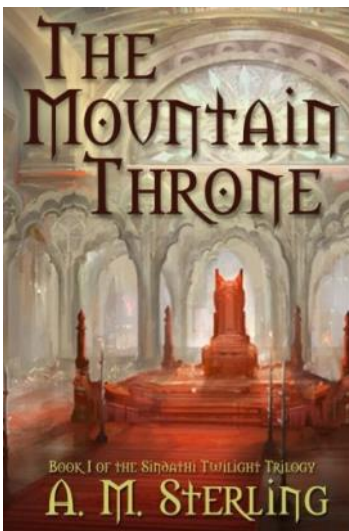
Currey, L. W. *Science Fiction and Fantasy Authors*. Boston, MA: G. K. Hall, 1979.

Moskowitz, Sam. *Seekers of Tomorrow*. NY: Ballantine Books, 1967.

Tuck, Donald H. *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction and Fantasy, Volume 2: Who's Who, M-Z*. Chicago, IL: Advent, 1978.

Note: In addition to the above, various Internet sites were consulted.

### An Interview with Aaron Sterling Tamara Wilhite



Aaron Sterling is an electrical engineer, Army intelligence veteran, and lawyer. He's the author of "The Mountain Throne", the first of the Sindathi Twilight books. He's working on a sequel to that novel due out in 2020 tentatively titled "The Dark Brother".

Tamara Wilhite: You mentioned that your day job is working as an engineer for the DoD. How then did you end up with a law degree?

Aaron Sterling: Law came first, actually. Things were bad for lawyers during the Great Recession and so I used some residual education benefits from my military service to go back to school for engineering. A childhood friend of mine had done the engineer-lawyer thing and entered patent practice, and his career didn't suffer much because there are only a relatively few lawyers qualified for that kind of work, to begin with. Thought I'd do the same thing.

In engineering school, I got a fairly exclusive, valuable scholarship that had DoD strings attached. So that's where I went when I graduated.

Tamara Wilhite: You've edited law review articles as well as worked in military intelligence. How has this experience influenced your writing?

Aaron Sterling: For the former, it has helped my editing. I spent two straight years checking sources for correctness, relevance, and formatting, along with the clarity, syntax, and grammar of prose. It got to the point where I could see the difference between a period and an italicized period at a glance. I still 'don't see' some of my own mistakes, like every author, but my technical writing skills are well-honed.

My MI experience has helped with world-building and intrigue. I spent some time in geopolitical analysis. That kind of analysis is rooted in fundamental facts, like geography and climate, and their implications. By understanding how these things affect real cultures and nations, it makes the ones I invent more plausible. And since my MOS dealt with human intelligence, scenes or plot points dealing with espionage or political or military intrigue are salted with the same kind of plausibility.

Tamara Wilhite: Your first novel "The Mountain Throne" has been compared to George R. R. Martin's works, at least in terms of world-building. What do you think prompted the comparison?

Aaron Sterling: I don't think it is world-building, specifically. A Song of Ice and Fire's similarities to real world inspirations, from the Wars of the Roses and Hadrian's Wall to the Colossus of Rhodes and Renaissance Italy, are oft-discussed. But there are other gaps. The political system is a rough, simplified



Little Mermaid  
by Angela K. Scott

facsimile of generic European feudalism. There are an unrealistically small number of languages or dialects. There is no calendar; not even measurements of days or weeks. I know unpredictability of seasons is part of the premise, but wouldn't that make the measurement of smaller units of time more important? Wouldn't the people try to predict when the next winter would arrive? The ancient Babylonians spent generations tracking the regular movements of stars and planets for astrological purposes. Much of the world-building is derivative from Earth (which is easy and familiar, to the writer and readers). Mine isn't.

I think the comparison is really because of similarity of style. Both stories could be described as low-fantasy political intrigue, and there are certain common approaches in the treatment of magic, the social and political rank of the characters, and the premise of the stories. Much, if not most, of the history of fantasy has been "epic" or "high" fantasy with grand events, noble elves, wicked orcs, and clear cut lines of all sorts. I deliberately do not write that way, and neither does Mr. Martin. The low-fantasy style, itself, probably demands certain similarities. So simply by virtue of being different in the same way, we would engender some comparison.

Aside from sub-genre, I think there are similarities in how we treat characters. ASoIaF has been described as a sort of fantasy soap opera. There is a large number of relevant characters, but only a relative few of whom are meaningful to the whole story. Those few are static. Their relationships, usually by blood or marriage, tend not to change much, if at all, they rarely die or otherwise drop out of the story. Personal drama is magnified. It is, in large part, a character story driven by certain world events and circumstances.

The Mountain Throne is also a character story, though not in the same way. I have only three perspectives, not two dozen. Emphasis is on those few characters' development. They change. Their relationships change. The focus is tighter. But they are still both limited-perspective, ensemble character stories, which tend to be uncommon in fantasy.

Tamara Wilhite: I know that many writers are simply happy to find paying work. How did you end up writing video game fiction?

Aaron Sterling: It was paying work. I found online (I forget how) a place where people advertised for writing jobs, and someone wanted fantasy world-building. I submitted a sample and got hired. It paid by the word and I worked at it for a few months. It was the first hint that my fantasy musings might be worthwhile. I'd never written for anyone else, before.

Tamara Wilhite: Can I ask what video game franchise it was for?

Aaron Sterling: Days of Darkness, or something like that. I don't think it ever came out. It was someone's pet ambition in the early 21st century, not an established studio.

Tamara Wilhite: You've designed board games and tabletop roleplaying games. What is that like?

Aaron Sterling: More like work than you might guess. Games are systems. No matter how fun or enjoyable the theme or setting or fluff, the game itself is just a system of numbers and rules, not terribly different from programming. You need to understand probability to know how the dice or cards or whatever are likely to fall, and recognize what tweaking this does to that. There have to be bounds, to control runaway results, and the variables evolve as the game does; early-game differs significantly from late-game, so the system has to be able to account for that. Any game with currencies needs to have attention paid to resource-management and scarcity.

Anyone who has spent much time in board gaming has been disappointed by something that looked or sounded cool, but failed in execution. That's because the designers didn't understand well what I just told you. Believe it or not, there are designers who think that, when using 2d6, the probabilistic difference from 7 to 8 is the same as from 8 to 9. Nope.

Tamara Wilhite: Did the detailed world-building required to create such games influence your fantasy books?



Aaron Sterling: Absolutely. My books started as a video game. The video game started as an incarnation of the tabletop RPG. I eventually determined that I couldn't do everything I wanted to do in the video game, so turned it into a book. The RPG came first and birthed everything else. Now, the books lead to refinement of the world. For example, my second book, *The Dark Brother*, deals with a caste system that is only generally treated in the RPG setting. But now that I have characters in it, I have had to fill out significant details. Those details feed back into the RPG.

Tamara Wilhite: Those are all the questions I had. Is there anything you'd like to add?

Aaron Sterling: I don't write to get rich. It's nice to sell books, but I value good reviews more than dollars. I write for the satisfaction of creating something good and overcoming a personal challenge. A magnum opus approach. Once that's done, I intend to try other projects that are easier and probably more sale-able.

Tamara Wilhite: Thank you for speaking with me.

## Shorter Works

### Edgar Allen Poe's *The Unparalleled Adventure Of One Hans Pfaall* ... Will Mayo

This, Mr. Edgar Allen Poe's tale of a balloon ride from the Earth to the Moon, marks an early foray into science fiction - and may well indeed establish his place, not only as the Master of Horror, but also as the Father of Science Fiction. Many are its marvels, from a description of a respiration device for operating beyond the confines of Earth's atmosphere to the curious description of what Mr. Poe would have as the inhabitants of the Moon. That he won over his audience at the early age of 25 years with his insinuation of fiction as fact is not as surprising as is the fact that by doing so he almost inadvertently created a whole new genre of science fantasy writing. This is a marvel not only as a historical artifact but also as a work of fiction all by itself. I urge the readers to explore and see the tale for themselves.

## Video

### Rabid Ears: Ravings of a TV Fiend By Cathode Ray

The new issue of *TV Guide* just materialized in the transporter room, so it's time for another edition of "Rabid Ears: Ravings of a TV Fiend," a periodic column about the best and most brilliant in sf, fantasy, horror, and other genre television programming. Let's see what's what—now, and next—on the old boob tube, shall we? After you, Alphonse. No, you first, my dear Gaston! Just put your lips together and blow.

Right off the bat in the current issue—we're talking page *four*, people—wide-eyed reader "Susan" (if that even be her real name) writes in to ask critic Matt Roush whether CBS All Access's remake of Stephen King's *The Stand* has been shelved because of m-m-m-my Corona-

virus. He says thee nay! Filming on the 10-part mini wrapped just before the TV production shutdown, and Stephen King-niks (true believers, all) can still expect it to air late this year. With Alexander Skarsgard cast as Randall Flagg—to quote the band Anthrax, “I’m the walkin’ dude. I can see all the world!”—and Whoopi Goldberg cast as Mother Abigail, it just might be worth watching—if you can stomach a pandemic-related horror show in the midst of a horrible pandemic. (Personally, I’ve been loath to reread the book during this Age of Quarantine.) A previous TV miniseries adaptation of the 1978 novel aired in May 1994, separated into four episodes, so you could also watch that if you wanted to.

Roush also contributed a tribute to Carl Reiner, who died in late June. Perhaps best known for his work in comedy, Reiner also dabbled in zones more familiar and of interest to Neffers. If the “2,000 Year Old Man” routine first done by Reiner and Mel Brooks in the ‘60s isn’t science fiction or fantasy, I don’t know what is. Their 1997 recording *The 2000 Year Old Man in the Year 2000* even won a Grammy—in 1998’s Spoken Comedy Album category. Readers of this fanzine might also be interested in revisiting *The Man with Two Brains*; *Dead Men Don’t Wear Plaid*; the half-hour 1975 TV animated short, *The 2000 Year Old Man* (why, naturally); and *Oh, God!* Reiner also did voice work and other acting in productions such as *Toy Story 4*, *Justice League Action*, *Jake and the Never Land Pirates*, *Hercules*, and *Night Gallery*. Want to track down his 1971 *Night Gallery* segment, “Professor Peabody’s Last Lecture”? Try, Lon, try!

Pencil *these* in your calendar, fans and fellow freaks: Friday, July 24, *Radioactive*, a biopic about Marie Curie debuts on Amazon Prime (She’s the dreamiest! *Swoon*.)... Saturday, July 25, Dan Aykroyd (aka *Ghostbusters*’s Ray Stantz—and reprising the role in next year’s *Ghostbusters: Afterlife*) narrates the new Travel Channel series *Hotel Paranormal*... Sunday, July 26, *Wynonna Earp* premieres on Syfy, featuring a mystical gun, the Garden of Eden, and the demon-filled Ghost River Triangle; sounds fantastic!... Monday, July 27, a new show exploring American myths and Legends, *Into the Unknown*, premieres on the Travel Channel—looking for the swamp monster Rougarou in the Louisiana bayou... Tuesday, July 28, TCM will broadcast Reiner’s *Oh, God!* as part of its *TCM Remembers Carl Reiner* five-film marathon... Thursday, July 30, a plague-themed episode of *Babylon 5* airs on Comet... Friday, July 31, the second series of *The Umbrella Academy* premieres on Netflix; I also recommend Gerard Way’s comic book series... and *Upside-Down Magic*, based on the fantasy book series by Sarah Mlynowski, premieres on the Disney Channel... and Sunday, Aug. 2, epic fantasy series *Britannia* returns to the small screen on Epix... and *NOS4A2* “heats up” on AMC and BBC America.

But the best part is always the programming grids. Let’s see what’s hiding between the lines: Afternoons bring us *One Step Beyond*, *Bradbury Theater*, and *Doctor Who* on Retro; and *The Munsters* on Cozi. We could just stop there! But when night falls, there’s more. Mondays air *Quantum Leap*, *Battlestar Galactica*, and *Stargate SG-1* on Comet; *Star Trek*, *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, and *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* on Heroes; and *Beyond the Unknown* and *Buried Worlds* on Travel. Tuesdays have *DC’s Stargirl* on The CW, Comet’s sf lineup, Heroes’s *Star Trek* sequence, and *Ghost Adventures* on Travel. Wednesdays offer *Marvel’s Agents of SHIELD* on ABC, *The 100* on The CW, Comet’s evening fare, Heroes’s *Star Trek* sequence, and more paranormal programming on Travel: *Paranormal Caught on Camera*, and *Man vs. Bigfoot*, *Bigfoot Is Real*, and *Bigfoot in Alaska*, continuing the sasquatch shows. Thursdays sport the old standbys—the good standbys!—on Comet and Heroes, and *Ghost Adventures* and *The Dead Files* on Travel. (I’m surprised that that network hasn’t changed its name yet.) Fridays bring the tried and true from Comet and Heroes—still the best networks ever—*Ancient Aliens* all night long (all night!) on History, and *The Dead Files* on Travel, and on July 24, the fantasy adventure *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* on ThisTV.

Don’t forget you can still catch the lively undead on *Dark Shadows* weeknights at 9 p.m. on Decades, Monday through Friday. Every single weeknight, Barnabas Collins! (Vampires only

come out at night, you know.)

After last issue's column went to press, I went *off* the programming grid and discovered *additional* daytime programming that also tickles the pleasure center. The shows and exact times might change week to week, so check your local listings, but BBC America has been airing *Monty Python's Flying Circus* Monday through Thursday; *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* on Monday and Tuesday mornings; and *Star Trek: The Next Generation* mornings Wednesday through Friday—with *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* and *Star Trek III: The Search for Spock* sneaking in early July 31. Trekkers, exult! (In previous weeks, *Doctor Who* regenerated on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, so keep your eyes peeled for the big blue Tardis.)

Weekends are also worth watching. Saturdays continue *The Six Million Dollar Man* and *Bionic Woman* on Cozi; *The UnXplained* on History; and *Terror in the Woods*, *Believers*, and *Hotel Paranormal* on Travel. And Sundays end the week with *War of the Worlds* and the *Star Trek* sequence on Heroes, and *Mummy Mysteries* and *Unearthed: Seven Wonders* on Science.

We fans even sneak into the crossword. 26 Across is "Bionic Woman employer," 29 Across is "Rogue \_\_\_: A Star Wars Story," 30 Across is "\_\_\_ Recall," 53 Across is "Star \_\_\_: Picard," 8 Down is "Matthew of *Stranger Things*," and 16 Down is "Ripley's Believe It \_\_\_!" Send in your well-educated guesses care of this fanzine. All your base are belong to us.

Until next time, true believers, this is "Cathode Ray," tripping the light fantastic halfway to Betelgeuse with Optimus Prime. Don't stub your fingertip on the remote. And wipe off your TV screen; that reflection you see is you. Turn on, tune in, and *blast off!*

## Young Adult Fiction

The Firefly Code, by Megan Frazer Blakemore

...Anita Barrios

This book was very interesting for a middle grade read in that it wasn't driven by an external plot. There was no quest, not exterior objective the main character, 12-year-old Mori, has to achieve.

You could even say there was no "typical" action for MG sci-fi -- no moon buggy races, no invading aliens, no 'splosions (the stick by which my son and husband judge every book and movie they've ever read / seen), no flying spaceships, although there is a house fire the kids watch from afar. In fact, the most "exciting" thing that happens is, of course, at the very end and sets the stage for the second book.

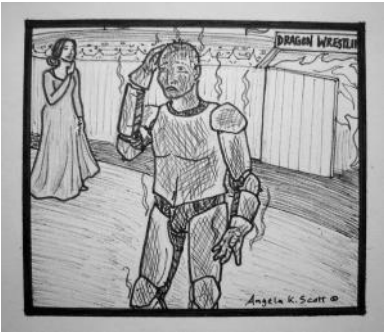
Instead, this book focuses on a philosophical journey undertaken by children, not adults (because the adults represent some very fixed ideas about the world and these issues), considering the following questions:

If your parents could design you, pick and choose genes for attributes they wanted in you, would you want to be designed? Or be a "natural" kid, with all the limitations that implies? And if your parents also had the ability to alter your brain through surgery, say release a hidden talent or dampen a negative or self-destructive trait, would you want them to?

Would doing so change who you are?

And finally, what makes a friend? Flesh and blood? Or is it possible to call an artificial intelligence, around which flesh and blood are grown, a friend, too?





Dragon Wrestling  
by Angela K. Scott

Mori is 12, on the cusp of having her brain-altering surgery to "release her latency," a technique pioneered by her Baba (grandmother) in the super technologically advanced settlement of New Harmonie.

The bulk of the book takes place on Firefly Lane, in a cul-de-sac, as the kids ride bikes and visit each other's houses / pools, or in Mori's case, the woods just outside the town but inside the fence that keeps them safe from the hordes and diseases outside their town.

One day a new girl appears, Ilana. She whisks into the empty house in the cul-de-sac with some amazingly trendy parents, high-ranking in the Krita Corp., which runs the settlement, and Mori, on a whim, takes Ilana to her place in the woods. It's the one place Julia, Mori's best friend, doesn't get. Mori is a naturalist at heart, and loves drawing the plants and

naming the trees and just spending time surrounded by foliage and greenery. She's also a true "natural," not a designed kid, and was born with a retinal impairment. Her parents have used up almost all of her 30% allotment for enhancements fixing her eye, with a combination of a surgically implanted new lens and special prescription, adaptive glasses that enable her to see. Mori and Ilana click, the way friends do at that age, sparking Julia's jealousy.

Julia is the exact opposite of Mori -- she's a designed child, exceptionally physically fit and capable of amazing feats of running, jumping, etc. She's hyper-competitive about everything, more so this year than ever before, and of course Julia doesn't like Ilana from the start.

Ilana, Mori is convinced after they bond over the moss in Oakedge, Mori's forest oasis Ilana helps her name, is all-natural, like herself. Mori's been taught that nature is gorgeous, and Ilana is too, so of course, Ilana must be a "natural."

Mori is determined to integrate Ilana into their circle of friends -- including Theo, another "designed" kid, and Benji, a genius and a "natural." (Although you learn later to not trust what the kids have been told by their parents, at all.)

Then Theo has his latency surgery, and he comes back...changed. He has bad headaches. He's downright nasty, for no reason, to Mori, with whom he's always been very protective and gentle. He has to go back, for more brain surgeries, to "fix" him, because they (Krita Corp.'s doctors) got it wrong, the first time. Eventually, he evens out, but...Mori pauses to think about what's been done to him.

At the same time, Mori's putting together some not-so-subtle hints that Ilana may not be what they all think she is. They go into her Baba's house at #9, which has been abandoned all these years, and find a closet packed with humanoid android parts and an old computer they boot up, with files about a scuttled project named, "Alana."

And then there's a near-drowning in Julia's pool, in which Ilana just "shuts down" and then, once rescued, suddenly "reboots." And there's the fact that Ilana's never quite meshed with any of the other kids, except Mori.

When they go back to the house for more answers, Ilana hurts Mori, grabs her arm way too tight and leaves a painful bruise, to prevent her from going inside. The house burns down, destroying all evidence inside and any chance the kids could get solid answers to their questions. Still, Mori isn't sure Ilana is natural at all, or if she's even human.

But does that mean, Ilana isn't a friend? And when Ilana's in trouble, when Krita Corp. decides to "scuttle" the experiment that is her, can Mori convince all the kids to come to her rescue?

I won't spoil the ending. You'll have to read to find out what they do, which I will say is the basis for Book 2.

A thoroughly enjoyable, if uncharacteristically quiet, science-fiction middle grade read.

## The Daybreak Bond, by Megan Frazer Blakemore ...Anita Barrios

Twelve-year-old Mori is determined to undo the damage her parents did to her by giving her brain surgery to "dampen," or take away, her bravery, even if that means charging outside New Harmonie with only a half-baked plan to get Ilana to safety.

Mori and the kids figure out Ilana is an artificial intelligence (AI), an experiment by the Krita Corp. extending work done by Mori's Baba and Dr. Varden, early pioneers of New Harmonie.

Benji, using his genius, figures out which wires to cut to get them beyond the perimeter fence that protects the town from the outside world. Theo steals a very old, paper map of the outside from Mr. Quist's shed. It shows a railroad line leading into Cambridge, where Mori believes (with no real proof) that Dr. Varden, who is a professor emeritus at MIT, will help and protect Ilana from the Krita Corp., as Alana was her original project and responsibility.

Julia comes along, despite her dislike of Ilana, more to protect Mori than anything else. The kids think they'll make the 24-mile hike to Cambridge in 11 or so hours, but they quickly run into obstacles.

And here the book becomes more like a traditional middle grade book, in that a series of physical obstacles or events impedes the kids from reaching their goal, MIT and getting Ilana to safety, easily. But Mori and her friends learn about the "outside" world, and how it's sacrificed a lot so Krita Corp. could build New Harmonie, but it's also not quite as bad as their parents have warned them it was.

First, the train tracks run into a lake. It's the reservoir for New Harmonie, and not on Theo's map at all. They find a causeway, big enough for two people to walk abreast, and when they're hiding from surveillance drones, Mori falls off and into the water, where she encounters a statue. Initially it frightens her, but after they've had a few moments to consider everything, the kids figure out Krita Corp. must've flooded an entire town to create the reservoir.

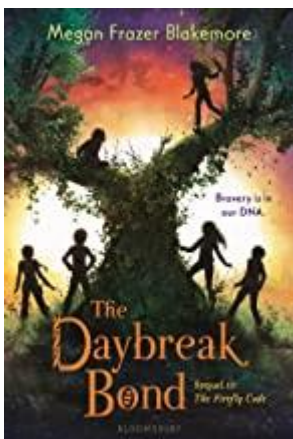
On the other side, they encounter a town and observe the dirt roads and the kids playing in poor, ragged, clothes, in the streets, etc. They aren't spotted and keep going, following the railroad tracks again, and are chased by a pack of feral dogs. Theo gets Mori to safety, but when a dog knocks Julia down, Mori rages back in her best friend's defense and scares the dog off -- but not before it's taken a chunk out of Julia's leg.

That's when they're found by the local kids, including Tommy and Amnah, who sneak Julia and the others into town in two wagons. Once they're inside, they meet Mouse, another "natural" genius like Benji, but who has acute anxiety and finds it really hard to speak to anyone, so Amnah does most of the talking for her.

Tommy informs them the railroad tracks go way out of the way, adding miles and hours to their journey on foot, where they'll likely encounter more dogs and dangers. He proposes, instead, they "borrow" a car from his uncle's junkyard.

Even the car's not a fool-proof method to get them to Cambridge. It gets a flat tire, due to Tommy's distracted driving, and the kids spend a night in the woods, when Mori and Amnah are forced to put aside their prejudices toward each other and discover they have more in common than they thought possible.

When they finally get to Cambridge, to MIT, and find Dr. Varden...she's been waiting for them, and not in a good way. I won't spoil the ending, but know Mori makes a choice no one expects, and later, once returned to New Harmonie, she finds a sign that perhaps, just perhaps, some part of Ilana escaped.



# Food of Famous Writers

Eat This While You Read That: Jason Rennie  
...Cedar Sanderson

I've expanded this series far beyond the traditional author roles, seeking to promote people who bring stories to readers. I've featured a long-form editor, Toni Weisskopf, whose efforts keep Baen Books the great place to find fun reads that it is. Now, I'm bringing you a gentleman who edits and brings you the short-form fiction reads you want for the busy times, the interstices of life as you wait in line, or at the mechanics, or doctor's office... Sci Phi Journal is better than the tatty magazines you'll find in places like that, and you can access the goodies Jason has collected for you with your phone or tablet. It's not just fiction, either, it's articles and reviews.



One of the recurring features is Superversive fiction, which is defined as having these elements:

Most importantly a Superversive story has to have good storytelling.

The characters must be heroic.

Superversive literature must have an element of wonder

Jason had to think about it when I asked him for a recipe. Time passed, and I reminded him. Oops, he apologized... and sent me this recipe, which made me laugh when I saw the title.

## Editor's Procrastination Chicken

Jason's comment: "It is kinda easy but I like it. Basically just a rub for chicken breasts."

Celery salt  
Paprika  
Mustard Powder  
White Sugar  
Garlic powder (Cedar's addition)

Combine the rub ingredients in a bowl and mix, then coat chicken breasts with it and put in the fridge, covered, for about 4 hours. Cedar's note: I used about 1 tsp salt, 1 tbsp paprika, 2 tsp mustard seeds, 1 tbsp sugar, 2 tsp garlic powder and also about 2 tbsp brown mustard and made it into a paste since I didn't have mustard powder. I coated 4 chicken breast filets, the equivalent of 2 full breasts.

I mixed it all up in a bowl then covered it and put it back in the fridge until almost dinnertime.



You could put this on the grill over coals for about 4-5 minutes on each side. I put it on a rack under the broiler as we had a cold spring rain that kept me indoors.

A full sheet pan under a matching sized rack is a handy thing to have in the kitchen.

With the chicken, prepare potatoes, one per person plus one extra. Cut them into halves, then wedges lengthwise. Toss with olive oil, salt, pepper, and chili flakes. Cedar's note: I used

about 1 tsp chili flakes for three potatoes and it was spicy. These can be cooked over the bbq as well on a rack, and I did them along with the chicken under the broiler on a rack. It worked well to cook them in the same time as the chicken.





*Where Dragons Fly*  
by Angela K. Scott