

Tightbeam 313

October 2020



TR-3B The Manta Has Landed
Jose Sanchez

Tightbeam 313

October 2020

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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 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. Our PayPal contact is treasurer@n3f.org.

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Editorial

We recently updated the N3F web site, so the files of back N3F zines are now more or less up to date.

Suggestions on improving Tightbeam and our other issues are most welcome. Some suggestions are more practical than others. For example, Tightbeam has a rigid limit of 32 pages. It would be interesting, a fine idea, to merge some other N3F zine into Tightbeam, but that's impossible ... we have no more room.

Some readers believe that a strong letter column is the heartblood of a good SF fanzine. Your mileage may vary. However, we would continue to welcome letters of comment from any and all readers.

Letter of Comment

Editor:

I was reviewing my review of J. Michael Straczynski's autobiography and realized that I needed to make a clarification. I did read Jeanette Ng's Campbell Award acceptance when it was first published on the Internet. I did not then nor do I now consider it Hugo worthy, so I did not re-read it when it became a finalist in the Best Related Work category.

...Tom Feller

Anime

Higurashi: When They Cry – New Review by Jessi Silver



A totally normal story set in a totally normal town... or is it?

Streaming: Funimation

Episodes: TBA (at least 14)

Source: Visual Novel (re-make of 2006 TV anime)

Summary: Keiichi Maebara returns to his home in the tiny town of Hinamizawa following a family funeral. There he reconnects with Rena, Mion, Satoko, and Rika, four girls who form a very informal (but in their minds, extremely structured) after school activity club. Keiichi enjoys his afternoons with the girls, despite the fact that they often make him into the butt monkey of the group.

As he and Rena are walking home one evening, they stop at a garbage dump where Rena goes digging for “treasure.” While he’s waiting, Keiichi meets a photographer who implies that the town may be hiding a few unsettling secrets. However, when Keiichi asks Rena for more infor-

mation about this, her demeanor changes abruptly and he drops the subject. Over the next couple of days, Keiichi learns a few details about the town's fight to prevent some developers from building a dam which would have flooded the town upon its completion. Mion insists that there was no violence involved in the town's eventual victory, but Keiichi's chance discovery of an old magazine article tells a very different story. It also appears that his friends may have a vested interest in keeping this all a secret.

Impressions: This review may contain mild spoilers for the original anime adaptation of this story. Screen captures are taken using the official legal stream of the series, when available. It's a cute show full of happy friends and idyllic country life.

The original Higurashi no Naku Koro ni TV anime came out at a time when so-called "moé" anime (a term maybe incorrectly used for any show with cute girls in it) was newly ubiquitous. As someone whose tastes as an anime fan at the time ran contrary to that trend, I had a pretty big bone to pick with any anime series that seemed to rely too heavily on those kinds of character tropes. I watched the original Higurashi partly out of spite; my impression was that its popularity was based solely on the fact that it was "edgy." The dichotomy of sickeningly cute girls getting involved in heinous, disgusting, murderous acts was really the pinnacle of edgelord anime fandom at the time, or so I thought. I watched it and became willing to argue its faults in detail with anyone who thought otherwise. Rude? Possibly. But hearing time and time again that you should like something when you're almost positive you don't can sometimes put a chip on your shoulder.



In the years since, I've had time to think more about those kinds of gut reactions and how they're often very unfair to the actual media product. I've seen plenty of moé anime that excels in storytelling (and sometimes even characterization), as well as many anime series that utilize violence in a way that doesn't feel empty of meaning. I've even talked to many people who enjoy shows like Higurashi and I've made an effort to see their point of view. The only thing I haven't done is re-watch the series, because it's really difficult to find the time to do that when I've got so much other stuff on my plate. The anime gods work in mysterious ways, though, and I recently got the opportunity to not only revisit the original series, but to watch this new incarnation. I'm happy to get the chance to see both with fresh eyes.



Just friends having fun!

Those who are familiar with the original anime adaptation will feel a lot of familiarity with this opening episode. It begins with a glimpse into the bloody conclusion of the first story arc before almost immediately working to make the viewer forget all about that in favor of the somewhat vapid and inconsequential antics the characters experience in their daily lives. It's only as the episode flows into its second half that moments of uncertainty begin to creep back in – Keiichi's encounter with the photographer and his allusion to the town's violence, Rena's all-too-insistent reply to Keiichi's questioning that she doesn't know about anything bad that might have happened, and Mion's rather forceful denial of any violence (and the associated suggestion

that Keiichi keep his nose out of their business). These moments start to punctuate the idyllic nature of the first episode, until it's made clear that this is no typical slice-of-life anime.

However, it's these moments that feel somewhat less successful than the previous take on the story. There's a phenomenon that I mentally think of as the "Silent Hill effect", characteristics of that particular game series that occasionally spill over into other media. The first few Silent Hill video games (survival-horror games that appeared on the earlier Playstation consoles) were known for being disorienting and terrifying, while the later games in the series never managed to recapture the magic that made the originals so spooky. Part of the reason why, in my opinion, is that the first three or so games featured very uncomfortable controls that weren't as responsive as one might expect from a modern game. It was difficult to control your character and they sometimes didn't do what you wanted them to do – they ran out of stamina at inopportune times and occasionally missed their target when shooting or bludgeoning baddies. There was an element of chance that in many cases could become infuriating, yet in my opinion often added to the overall atmosphere of helplessness and horror. The later games tended to control too well, to the standards that most gamers expected from their modern video games, and their more polished graphics removed a lot of the grit that gave the earlier games their particular look. It was as if some of their fundamental charm had been stripped away in the inexorable march toward modernity.



Keiichi and Satoko have an adversarial relationship.

There are many opinions about how the original Higurashi anime series looked and felt, but most people seem to agree that the character art was often pretty jankey and the animation was not often that great either. The character animation could be extremely distorted in certain scenes, especially when characters began to appear consumed with their own madness. Yet, having watched a bit of it a few days ago, one thing I can say with some certainty is that these visual metamorphoses were masterful at capturing the story's iconic mood shifts, imbuing the characters with a fundamental creepiness that I haven't seen much of here as of yet. I was looking forward to this series if only for its improvements in character art and now I'm wondering if I may have been mistaken, as the more polished look cleans up a lot of the weirdness that the original art style provided (whether intentional or not). Still, this is only the first episode, so it's difficult to say whether this will carry through or whether the production will settle in and find its bearings once the really upsetting material commences.

This series slips in a few Easter Eggs for fans, including an excellent use of the original anime's theme song (an unexpected surprise), as well as the original voice cast for the main characters. I also thought the background artwork was really well-done, and portrayed the rural town of Hinamizawa in a way that emphasized the beauty of the area in addition to its isolation from the outside world. Don't let my criticisms seem overwhelming, because there are plenty of reasons to be optimistic about the series, too; it's just a matter of how the story unfolds, and whether the pretty artwork ends up competing with the darkness of the story itself. The detailed background artwork does a good job of establishing the rural atmosphere.



As it stands, this certainly wasn't a bad way to start off the Autumn season. While the shrieking of the cicadas that so defines the sound design of this series implies the sultry heat of late Summer, in my mind this is really an Autumnal, Halloween-ish horror series that fits right in this time of year. Whether this incarnation ends up being successful or not, at the very least it may introduce the franchise to newer fans.

Pros: The updated character artwork is pleasant to look at. The background art does a good job of portraying the small town setting.

Cons: The series might be "too pretty" to the detriment of its atmosphere.

Content Warnings: Violence/gore (brief but extreme). Slapstick violence.

Grade: B-

Books

Overmorrow Review by Tamara Wilhite

There are long lists of inventions inspired by "Star Trek". I've heard book covers and movies described as the artworks that launched a thousand engineering careers. Scientists may have been inspired by "Star Trek" or "Cosmos". But in nearly every case, they were inspired by engaging, optimistic science fiction, not the dark dystopian and near end of the world sci-fi that dominates today. "Overmorrow: Stories of Our Bright Future" is a science fiction short story collection curated specifically to bring back a hopeful vision for the future. The stories have adventure, challenges and travails, but there is a bright hope for the people within them.

This short story collection has several additional points in its favor from my perspective - it includes short stories by several of my favorite authors. Karina Fabian's story "Doall's Brain" is a hilarious parody of "Spock's Brain" from "Star Trek: The Original Series". (I've read all of her "Space Traipse" stories.)

Glen Damato has included a story set several decades after Martian colonization by young adults fleeing an oppressive worldwide regime. We thus see the future the colonists achieved, when his novel "The Far Shore" ended with them managing to get through their first nights on Mars.

One story looks at a United States torn by civil war and people uniting, in a fashion, to fight the after-effects of a plague disabling and killing many of their sons. Another has an orbital satellite struck by a terrorist whose group wants to destroy the habitats so we'll dedicate these resources to Earth. There's a chicken farmer on Mars and a colonization ship that finds out that the world they've arrived on is already colonized. They range from good to great.

That's why I recommend the science fiction anthology "Overmorrow" to anyone who wants something uplifting and fun to read. And give it to a teenager who needs something other than "Divergent", "Hunger Games" and "The Lunar Chronicles".

Keith R.A. DeCandido's *Supernatural: Nevermore* Review by Will Mayo

This is a novel based on the *Supernatural* TV series about a pair of brothers that roam the countryside hunting down demons and sending them to hell where presumably such demons belong and this particular tale involves a ghost in the Bronx, a bad rock and roll cover band and a deranged serial killer with schemes of bringing Edgar Allan Poe back to life. It's a fun read and although it includes many references to episodes of the *Supernatural* television show you don't have to be totally familiar with that show to dive into the read. Just right for those that like their horror told straight out. I enjoyed it.

Fade by Daniel Humphreys Review by L. Jagi Lamplighter

Harry Dresden's sorcery goes on a *Supernatural*-style road trip. Cool car sold separately.

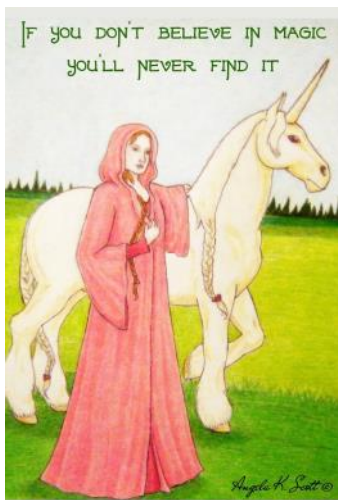
Paxton Locke is the son of a Witch.

Family drama is bad enough without adding human sacrifice to the mix. Ten years ago, his mother killed his father in a grisly ritual that Paxton interrupted. Now he criss-crosses the countryside in his RV working as a paranormal investigator while Mother languishes in jail. She'll never forgive him for interfering...or for stealing her spellbook.

It started as a normal job for Paxton. At least as normal as speaking to ghosts ever was. But then the terrified shade of a murdered boy warns him of a dangerous, newly-freed entity, and suddenly he has to talk to Mother again to save the day.

In a battle for his very soul, will he be able to endure – or simply fade away?

Dragon Award nominee Daniel Humphreys' urban fantasy debut brings all the best elements of *Supernatural* and the *Dresden Files*, written with his typical engaging style and evocative prose. Avid fans of the genre will be satisfied with the sarcasm, quips, and pop culture jokes found in *Fade*. Not to mention the spells, action and family drama.



Edgar Allen Poe's *Some Words With A Mummy* Review by Will Mayo

This delightful tale by Mr. Poe unfolds in which the narrator of this story and his comrades disinter an Egyptian mummy and bring it back to life and then try to inform him of the marvels of the 19th century. Imagine then, their surprise when they learn that the Egyptians had all these marvels and more in their day! The story ends with the narrator, being utterly sick of the 19th century (of which it is a total bore), and seeking to have himself entombed, so that he might be brought back to life in the year 2045, the marvels of which have yet to be discov-

Violet Eyes—Angela K. Scott

ered by this reviewer and others. Now, I have already given away the beginning and end of this story but I have not given away the middle whose details may still excite you. I suggest that you, Dear Reader, now go ahead and download this tale on your newfangled computing gadget, so that you may see them yourself. There is much still to know in this old world, is there not?

William Shakespeare's Macbeth Review by Will Mayo

This play, said to be based on actual events, is one of Shakespeare's finest and, whereby a Scottish lord murders the Scottish king for the right to royal ruin, lies firmly in the Greek tradition whereby a life of pride leads to ruin as ordained by the gods. When Macbeth, says, with the rightful king's forces closing in upon him, that this life is but "a tale of sound and fury told by an idiot signifying nothing," he could well be echoing the thoughts of many of us in this plague year centuries after Shakespeare penned his tale for the stage. The end with McDuff bearing the head of Macbeth signals well the start of a new era. Recommended reading for all. [ED: But is Macbeth STFnal? Of course it is! It has witches and precognition, not to mention ghosts.]

Fanzines

Fanfaronade: Celebrating Current Fanzines Justin E.A. Busch

Originality is harder to achieve than many-- myself included-- might think. Seeking a title for this column, I lit upon fanfaronade, a word containing the all-important first three letters but not widely used. It refers, among other things, to the use of boisterous or bragging language in calling attention to some particular thing or quality; since the purpose of the column is to call attention to the better aspects of (mainly print) fanzines, and since my writing tends to the enthusiastic, the word seemed amusingly appropriate yet unlikely to have appeared in such a context before.

I should have known better, of course. As it happens, I recently received a veritable treasure trove of older fanzines, including several issues of *Rune*, the central publication of the Minnesota Science Fiction Society. As I read through these, what to my wondering eyes should appear but a fanzine review column by Carol Kennedy, glorying in the title of-- you guessed it-- "Fanfaronade." She wrote it from Issue 51 to Issue 61; it ended when she ended her tenure as co-editor in 1980.

Well, forty years is next to forever in fandom, so I don't anticipate too many letters decrying my lack of originality in title choice. In any case, as Harry Warner, Jr. pointed out (*Entropy*, Spring, 1989), "Every possible fanzine title has been used up and most of them have served several times and nobody ever complains very loudly unless the duplication involves a fanzine that is currently alive." This surely applies to column titles as well. Doesn't it?

I hope that my own column lives up to Carol Kennedy's, even though her use of the title inspired a Teddy Harvia cartoon, an honor of which I can only dream.

We now return to the regularly scheduled reviews of fanzines....

Christian* New Age Quarterly: A bridge supporting dialogue. Volume 24, #4; Autumn 2020. Editor, Catherine Groves. Subscriptions are 12.50 for four issues; a sample copy is 3.50. PO Box 276, Clifton, NJ, 07015-0276.

For SF fans, the main interest here will likely be regular contributor Robert M. Price's discussion of the Star Trek: The Next Generation episode "Masks," drawing out parallels with "basically the same astronomical myth preserved in Isaiah 14." The argument is intriguing, but could have been developed more fully. While the other articles may or may not directly appeal to any given fan, writers may find that each contains elements which might be very useful for plot or character development in a story. The lettercol once more demonstrates editor Catherine Groves' skill at replying fruitfully to missives which might easily attract sarcasm or derision.

Pablo Lennis #394, September, 2020. Editor, John Thiel, 30 N. 19th St., Lafayette, Indiana, 47904. Available for the usual or 2.00/copy.

The usual variety of poems, mood pieces, and short stories or serial chapters is augmented by a reprinted article about editor John Thiel's brother, a longtime activist in sound (you'll have to read the piece to see just what that means). Also of interest is an excerpt from a larger story by Nescher Psycher; unfortunately, it's a prequel to an earlier tale in PL, so for further details you'll have to go backwards. Some of the photographic illos have been squashed rather awkwardly, but there's a new Jose Sanchez drawing on the last page.

This is the second column with just two fanzines to review, which seems a bit thin to me-- like butter that has been scraped over too much bread. If you publish a fanzine and would like it reviewed here, send a copy to Justin E.A. Busch, 308 Prince St., #422, St. Paul, Minn, 55101.

Sercon

Judith Merrill Bio-Bibliography

by

Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D.

N3F Historian

Science fiction (SF) author, editor, and critic Judith Josephine Grossman (January 21, 1923 – September 12, 1997) took the pen name of Judith Merrill in 1945, and used it for the rest of her career. For much of her life, she worked as a book editor in the United States, and then – beginning in 1968 – in Canada. She moved to Canada, after spending time in England, because of the undemocratic practices she thought she saw taking place in the United States. In Canada, she became involved in social and political activism.

As a young woman, she was a member of the famous Futurians of New York, under her married name of Judith Zissman. She is credited with being the first woman to join the influential SF club who was not a wife or a girlfriend of one of the male members.

Daniel A. Zissman, her first husband, whom she married in 1940 (and divorced in 1947), was a SF fan, and a member of FAPA and VAPA. He introduced Judith to SF. As Judith Zissman, she published a fanzine, *Temper*, for two issues in 1945.

Her pen name, Judith Merrill, was taken from the first name of her oldest daughter, Merrill Zissman.

After a brief romance with fellow Futurian, John B. Michel, while her husband was in the Navy, she divorced Zissman and then married her second husband, Frederik Pohl, also a Futurian, in 1949; when their marriage fell apart and they divorced in 1953, she lived for a time with fellow SF author Walter M. Miller, Jr.



Major Works

She began writing SF as a career in 1947. Her first notable story, “That Only A Mother,” was published in the June, 1948, issue of *Astounding Science Fiction*.

Her book-length genre fiction included the following: *The Best of Judith Merrill* (1976), *Daughters of Earth* (1968), *Gunner Cade* (1952) [as by Cyril Judd], *Out of Bounds* (1960), *Outpost Mars* (1952) [as by Cyril Judd], *Shadow on the Hearth* (1950), *Sin in Space* (1961) [as by Cyril Judd], *Survival Ship and Other Stories* (1974), and *The Tomorrow People* (1960).

Merrill is remembered for the popular SF novels she wrote with Cyril Kornbluth, another former Futurian, under their joint pseudonym of Cyril Judd (see above paragraph).

She is principally remembered today, however, for the SF anthologies she edited -- starting in 1950 -- especially a “Year’s Best” anthology series that ran from 1956 to 1967. For some time, hers was the only regular SF anthology series being published.

In 1956 Merrill, Damon Knight, and other former Futurians founded the Milford Science Fiction Writers’ Conference, an annual conference in Milford, Pennsylvania; it ended in 1972, when its counterpart in the UK was begun by another former Futurian, James Blish, and his wife, Judy Lawrence.

As a part of the New Wave in SF (that emphasized form over story), she edited the influential *England Swings SF* anthology in 1968.

Awards/Honors/GoHships

Lunacon 7 (1963)
Galactic Fair (1969)
UnreelCon (1978)
KulaCon (1979)
Contradiction 3 (1983)
Keycon 5 (1988)
ReinCONation (1995)
WisCon 20, Readercon 6 (1996)

SFWA Author Emeritus (1997)
 Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy Hall of Fame (2014)
 Cordwainer Smith Rediscovery Award (2016)

Critical Comments

British SF author and critic, J. G. Ballard, once said of Merrill: “Science fiction is now dead, and died about the time that Judy closed her anthology and left to found her memorial library to the genre in Toronto. I remember my last sight of her, surrounded by her friends and all the books she loved, shouting me down whenever I tried to argue with her, the strongest woman in a genre for the most part created by timid and weak men.”

Professor S. H. Goldman, writing in Gunn’s *The New Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, wrote: “The sum of Merrill’s impact on science fiction is far greater than her output in the field. . . . her stories and novels serve as prime examples of how this new material can bring a dimension of art to good, readable SF.”

Fellow SF author Samuel R. Delaney once said that “Merril is perhaps the most important intra-genre critic the field has had. . . .”

She spent much of her professional career struggling with a definition of SF, redefining it many times over the years. At one time she adopted the definition favored by fellow author/critic Anthony Boucher: “The literature of disciplined imagination.” For the most part, however, she preferred to think of the genre as science *fantasy* rather than science *fiction*.

Some Concluding Comments

In 1947, she and her second husband, Fred Pohl, were two of the founders of New York’s Hydra Club, an organization of SF writers, artists, and editors. Merrill wrote about the club in the November, 1951, issue of *Marvel Science Fiction*, an article that featured caricatures of 41 of the members drawn by SF artist/author Harry Harrison.

The first time I remember seeing her name in print was as editor of the early Bantam paperback, *A Shot in the Dark* (1950), with stories by such popular authors of the time as Theodore Sturgeon, Fredric Brown, Robert Heinlein, Ray Bradbury, and Murray Leinster. My adolescent friends and I hesitated to buy this book, however, because money was hard to come by at the time, and the book was marketed as an anthology of mystery stories -- hence the title.

I bought it, however, because I recognized several of the names whose stories were included, and because “science-fantasy” appeared in small print on the back cover. The striking Bischoff cover, illustrating the Leigh Brackett story (“The Halfling”), was another plus in my decision to buy. Merrill included stories by some of her former Futurian friends, including Isaac Asimov, James MacCreigh (Pohl), and Hugh Raymond (Michel).

During 1965 -1969, Merrill was Book Editor of *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*.

In 1970, while living and working in Canada, Merrill began an endowment at the Toronto Public Library, and donated all her books and magazines to the Library. This collection of research materials, known for a time as the Spaced Out Library, was later renamed the Merrill Collection

of Science Fiction, Speculation, and Fantasy.

She was a judge of the International Fantasy Award.

Emily Pohl-Weary, the granddaughter of Merrill and Pohl, is a Canadian writer. She completed Merrill's autobiography, *Better to Have Loved: The Life of Judith Merrill* (2002) after Merrill's death. The book won a Hugo Award.

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

An Interview with Matt Trinh Interview by Tamara Wilhite

Tamara Wilhite: The Mythics comic series is based on Dan Sacharow's 2013 novel "Adobe Kroger: Knight Errant". What led to you turning it into a web comic?

Matt Trinh: I'm glad that you asked this question, it's a popular misconception that either these stories were spun off of "Adobe Kroger: Knight Errant" (perfectly reasonable since it's technically the first story to be released from the Mythoverse stories), or we had this all planned out since 2013.

The real story is pretty unbelievable, but Dan, Brett McGowan, and I were acquaintances on Twitter back in 2018 and this wild ride began when Brett direct messaged me on Twitter asking for my opinion over his first draft of "Changeling". I read it, noticed that he was going a similar path with using folklore in his story as I planned on doing for "Mythics". We talked it over, originally planned to have a crossover between the two comics, and eventually we started talking to Dan on a Slack server he created. Dan sent us free copies of the "Adobe Kroger: Knight

Errant” audiobook.

That was when the Mythoverse started, as Brett and I realized that “Adobe Kroger” fits in very well with “Changeling” and “Mythics”. One Kickstarter campaign later, we are building a community around our books.

“MythoChibis” began when a gag drawing of the three protagonists turned the shortest of the three protagonists into a baby for height. The stories are comedic, and the characters in the strips do not reflect what the characters are like in their books. With characters like “Mythics” lead Elthia Fletcher, and Adobe Kroger, the personalities are effectively flipped, and “Changeling”’s Maeve has an invented personality as she is fourteen in her comic.

Tamara Wilhite: What is the origin of the current name, MythoChibis?

Matt Trinh: The MythoChibis is a spin-off comic strip to keep us working in between crowd-funding campaigns for the main Mythoverse comics. The name is derived from the Mythoverse, and the cutesy chibi art style for the comedic comic. There is no real connection to the main comics aside from us just taking time to relax and do ridiculous things with our characters.

Tamara Wilhite: What’s your role in the organization? What do you do as head writer?

Matt Trinh: As the writer for Mythics I am responsible for writing the scripts and contributing to one-third of the stories. As head writer, it is my responsibility to make certain all the connections between the stories work and making certain the continuity works.

Tamara Wilhite: How has the comic affected the original novel’s sales?

Matt Trinh: According to Dan, the author, the audiobook sales have increased, but he has been mostly pushing “Adobe Kroger: Dame Commander”.

Tamara Wilhite: And how do their storylines relate to each other? How does “Changeling” tie into your comic and the original story?

Matt Trinh: Banshees. Basically each other three books have a banshee in them, though “Adobe Kroger: Dame Commander” has a full-blooded banshee making a short appearance. Aside of that, each story is showing a different part of the world from three perspectives, a holy knight from Florida, a witch from Michigan, and a banshee who was swapped with a human child from Washington.

Tamara Wilhite: What have you learned from having an international team of creatives? For example, you’re based in Michigan, Washington, and Florida, but one of your artists for MythoChibis is based in Lebanon. And apparently Paypal is no longer an option for paying her.

Matt Trinh: Fortunately Paypal works in most of the places where the artists are from, but it is an unfortunate reminder that there are some places where Paypal won’t be, so you fall back on other services such as Western Union. Aside from that it has been pretty fun working



The Hunters — Angela K. Scott

with people who live in different states, and countries.

Tamara Wilhite: You have a well-stocked Mythoverse. What other projects have you worked on?

Matt Trinh: There was a comic anthology that I have a five-page story for, but the less that is said of it the better. There were a couple of comic studios that I was brought aboard as a freelancer, both of them ended up falling apart due to failed crowdfunding campaigns, and a photographer brought me aboard for a motion comic idea that he eventually ghosted me on. There is a short comic for a horror anthology called “The Eynnes Anthology” that will appear in a future issue.

Tamara Wilhite: What are you currently working on?

Matt Trinh: Aside from “Mythics”, I’m working on a science fiction comic for Wikid Publishing called “MacKinnon Chronicles” due out sometime next year. A couple of other projects that I can’t talk about just yet.

Tamara Wilhite: Is there anything you’d like to add?

Matt Trinh: If someone comes to you and asks for your opinion on a script, or a concept they are working on, give it. It might end up making you friends, and partners in something great.

Tamara Wilhite: Thank you for speaking with me.

An Interview with Elizabeth Bennett Interview by Tamara Wilhite

I had the opportunity to interview Elizabeth Bennett, also known as CatwomanTheGoddess, shortly after her fantasy novel “Wartime” came out. It is the first in her planned “The Immortals” series.

Tamara Wilhite: “Wartime” is your first published novel. What is it about?

CatwomanTheGoddess: Wartime is a dystopian fantasy, based in an entirely Underground civilization. It is a story of struggle and survival, focusing on the main character named Mire. It’s really her journey of fighting to survive the Underground which has become a prison tomb, and her longing to be free. When her adopted sister is stolen by the terrifying Draith, she has nowhere to turn and finds herself trusting an Elf named Rána. He promises to help her find her sister, and together they face horrors of every kind as they fight to find her sister and search for a way to escape the Underground.

Tamara Wilhite: What would you say are the biggest influences on your writing?

CatwomanTheGoddess: There’s so many! But the main ones that come to mind are: J.R.R. Tolkien, Elizabeth Haydon, Maria V. Snyder, Veronica Roth and Suzanne Collins.

Tamara Wilhite: You said you were writing journals and stories at a young age. Have you had

short stories or nonfiction published anywhere?

CatwomanTheGoddess: I had several published in small papers and local school publications. This is the first piece that has been widely available. My literary instructors and teachers always encouraged me to publish, but I didn't pursue it until a couple years ago.

Tamara Wilhite: Your second book, *Soul Singer*, is slated for release in 2021. Are you aiming for a trilogy?

CatwomanTheGoddess: Yes! I already have the first trilogy plotted out, including *Wartime*, *Soul Singer* and the yet untitled third book. There will also be an accompanying *Líeláryë Elvish Dictionary* as well as at least one book that is set before *Wartime*. It may become a trilogy as well.

Tamara Wilhite: I know you do a lot of drawing. Did you come up with your own book cover?

CatwomanTheGoddess: I did, with some help from a very good friend of mine, Jim Balent. Jim is an exceptional artist who has done art for DC comics on the 1990's *Catwoman* run. He was the one who suggested infusing hidden weapons within the trunk of the tree. Everything you see on the cover has significance within the pages of *Wartime*.

Tamara Wilhite: A different question. How did you come up with the pseudonym *Catwoman-TheGoddess*?

CatwomanTheGoddess: I already had a following for both my art and comic book reviews that I was writing up. It seemed like a natural progression to publish my first novel under the name that everyone already knew me by.

Tamara Wilhite: What else are you working on?

CatwomanTheGoddess: My second focus is finishing the *Líeláryë Elvish Dictionary*, after that I'm hoping to expand the world of *Wartime* and write additional external books about other characters within the world of *Teria*.

Tamara Wilhite: A lot of people escape into fantasy or science fiction, and you're writing it. What do you do for fun? Or read in your spare time?

CatwomanTheGoddess: I both read and write in my spare time. As a writer, I have a rather unique view on the experience as an author, and I see myself as the vessel that the characters tell their story through. So as I'm writing, I experience the story just as my reader's do. Aside from writing, I love to read fantasy, steampunk and historical romance novels.

Tamara Wilhite: Is there anything you'd like to add?

CatwomanTheGoddess: I am so excited to share the world of *Wartime* with my readers, thank you for giving me the opportunity to reach the fantasy community!

Tamara Wilhite: Thank you for speaking with me.

Short Fiction

The Transubstantiation by Evan Dicken Review by Greg Hullender

(Fantasy Adventure) Deff and his team hunt the countryside for illegal Heroes, whom they kill and then sell the body parts. Something truly terrible happened with these “Heroes” in the recent past, and it’s not entirely done.

Pro: Deff and the others in his crew pretty much just want to kill one of the big heroes and collect a payday enough to retire on. And yet, except for young Neren, they really do want more. Those of them who fought in the Leveling Wars expected more as a result. Yes, they got rid of the dictatorship of the Heroes, but the Synod hasn’t delivered what it promised either.

Deff himself is a traditional old soldier type. He’s not really comfortable with anyone except other old soldiers, which is why he and Alinari bonded so well. I was very glad when Deff and his people didn’t kill Alinari and the rest of the censors after they drugged them. (And I was even more pleased when the story gave them an excellent tactical reason not to kill the censors.)

The deeper meaning of the story is worth thinking about. The Weeper ascended the sky to talk to the gods, only to learn that the gods had killed each other and heaven was empty. She returned to learn that, just as the gods had failed, the heroes had failed as well. Unaware of the tools men had developed to kill Heroes, she fell, unable to defend herself.

This message that people are better off without heroes is an old one, but I’ve never seen it presented quite so graphically. Not only are Heroes outlawed, they’re hunted, butchered, and sold for the healing powers of their body parts! And the problem with the Heroes was that they didn’t let the people think for themselves. The Weeper, in particular, bent people’s minds to follow her, and simply slew everyone who didn’t conform.

A government led by people might be a messy one—as evidenced by the fact that Deff and company are about to start a revolution against the Synod—but at least it’s still alive. The best the Heroes offered was the stagnation of the grave.

Con: I expected a bit more of an emotional punch at the end, but the characters who died weren’t developed well enough for me to care that much about them.

Fire and Falling by Andrew Dykstal Review by Greg Hullender

(Steampunk Thriller) Mir’s mission to deliver codebooks gets complicated when she realizes she’s being followed—and followed by more than one person at that.

Pro: I really enjoyed Mir’s attempts to protect herself and deliver her package. She’s quite resourceful, thinks carefully, and (usually) cares about other people. In Russian, Mir means “Peace” (and also “world”), although I’m not sure if that’s deliberate.

Lady Dogwood's another great character. For all her frightening reputation, she's clearly got a soft spot for impressionable young people, and she keeps trying to mentor Mir, which is kind of funny if you think about it the right way.

From his name, we expect Abelard's story to be a tragic one, but it definitely does not go the way I thought it would. The continuing threat of him learning that Mir destroyed the Windhover adds continuing tension to the story.

And then there's the unfolding mystery of what exactly is going on and why everyone wants whatever Mir is carrying.

Con: The story ends unexpectedly. I feel like I've read the opening section of a novel. (But I really want to read the next part!)

The Forge by Andrew Dykstal Review by Greg Hullender

In the aftermath of the king's assassination, the guard commander and high mage struggle to discover who was behind it and what to do about it.

Pro: The best part of the story is watching all the various mysteries get resolved. What was Mark's motive? Where did the ultra sharp blade come from? Who put Mark up to it? Etc.

Con: We learn little about Lyric or Hodge, for that matter. Hodge's character is never properly "grounded," in that the story never gives us any description at all. We can conclude that "he" is probably male based on his fighting style, but that's little more than a guess.

The Bone-Stag Walks by K.T. Bryski Review by Greg Hullender

In mid-winter, a skeletal stag comes to the village begging for food, but it eats anyone foolish enough to talk to it.

Pro: The longer the story goes, the more terrible it gets. We learn more and more about just what happened to grandmother's brother all those years ago.



Fairy Unicorn by Angela K. Scott

Con: It's unclear why the stag is transformed when Liese gives it some food. It seems that didn't work for anyone else in the past. And is it a happy ending, or are we to believe that Liese and the Stag still go around eating people—they just do it in warmer weather?

It's unfortunate that the horror of the stag is somewhat spoiled by the fact that it seems to be trying to quote from "The Fox in Socks," by Dr. Seuss.

Video

Rabid Ears: Ravings of a TV Fiend By Cathode Ray

Not one, not two, but three new issues of TV Guide have clawed up through the kitchen sink drainpipe since the last installment of this column, so it's time for another edition of "Rabid Ears: Ravings of a TV Fiend," a periodic column about the best and beknighted 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? Wait a minute. What was that? Lean closer. Oh, you!

Let's start at the very beginning. That's a very good place to start. In the Aug. 3-16 issue, the "Readers' Letters" column opens with a Dear John letter—the faithful correspondent's name is John, appropriately enough—challenging a previous issue's back-page "Cheers & Jeers" Jeer review of Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.'s seventh season. "This should definitely be a Cheer," John writes. "You can't put them down for doing well, even if you didn't like the previous seasons, which I also disagree with. ... Thanks for the veiled recognition, though." You've got to fight for your right to fandom. Nick Fury would be proud.

The article, "Get Your Remotes Ready," includes some notable news: Ruby Rose, original star of Batwoman, a recent Neffy Award nominee, has been replaced. Now donning the cowl will be Javicia Leslie, the first black actress to play a live-action Batwoman. Her character, Ryan Wilder, is a former drug runner and out lesbian who takes on the defense of Gotham after Rose's Kate Kane stops fighting crime.

Matt Roush recognizes Disney+'s streaming Muppets Now with a half-page piece, remarking on one gag featuring a list of TV shows Fozzie Bear pitches to Scooter. One such program idea: Agents of S.C.H.T.I.C.K. Nick Fury would be amused. Roush also blurbs Britannia, a new fantasy drama that airs Sundays on Epix. Previously on Prime Video, the show features mystical druids, rival tribes, and Roman generals. Sounds promising. And it's got to be better than The Shannara Chronicles.

Season six of Outlander is expected to return to Starz by 2021. You can currently stream the first five seasons on Starz and the first three on Netflix.

Aug. 6, Syfy aired the season finale of Syfy Wire's The Great Debate, popping the question, "Would you rather live in the Marvel world or the DC one?" (Um, anything's better than this one, currently, even with the Chitauri.) On Aug. 9, there were two notable season finales: The Alienist: Angel of Darkness on TNT and Perry Mason on HBO. I haven't seen either show, but if The Alienist is anything like Caleb Carr's excellent novels, Neffers are in for some wonderful Alan Moore-styled mysteries From Hell.

The Musketeers, a 2014-2016 BBC series based on Alexandre Dumas's 1844 novel, became available on Prime Video at the beginning of August. Aug. 3, The Fugitive premiered on Quibi—what, now?—updating the 1963 series. And the first season of William Shatner-hosted The

UnXplained explores haunted houses, the Egyptian pyramids, and death itself on Hulu. Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.'s series finale aired Aug. 12 on ABC, ending a run of more than 130 episodes. Nick Fury must be sad. And on Aug. 14 and 16, Heroes & Icons broadcast the 2005 Star Trek: Enterprise two-parter "Demons" and "Terra Prime," which addresses xenophobia and the origin of the United Federation of Planets.

The Aug. 3 crossword, Puzzle #1394, might tickle your fandom trivia fancy. 19 Across is "Emilia of Game of Thrones," 21 Across is "Thing is one on The Addams Family," 36 Across is "Ellen of Beauty and the Beast," 52 Across is "Star of I Dream of Jeannie," and 31 Down is "Valerie of Superman."

The issue ends with a "Cheers & Jeers" Jeer to Netflix for delaying the return of sf series The Society despite renewing the show a year ago. I honestly can't say that I've missed the show, but maybe I'm missing something.

In the Aug. 17-30 issue, Comic-Con@Home gets a mention, detailing Comic-Con International's first online con in its 50-year history. There's lots of that going around lately! More than 350 pre-recorded panels are available on SDCC's YouTube channel, so sit down, dial up, and get your fan on.

Matt Roush reviews CBS All Access's Star Trek: Lower Decks, the new animated series—and the franchise's first since 1973-1975's Star Trek: The Animated Series. Trekkers, alert! He also takes a look at HBO's Lovecraft Country, which combines the weird fiction of the pulps and the racism of 1950s Jim Crow America. Definitely one to watch, but perhaps avert your eyes. You might go mad.

On Aug. 18, Dead Pixels premiered on The CW. A British sitcom focusing on three gamers, the show mixes CGI and live-action footage. Comet aired "The Caterpillar," a 1972 episode of Night Gallery on Aug. 22. And NOS4A2's season finale broadcast on AMC and BBC America on Aug. 23.

Part one of the fifth season of Lucifer became available on Netflix Aug. 21. Reportedly the final season of the show, the season includes a black-and-white noir episode, as well as a "self-referential murder case involving a TV show starring the devil." Et tu, Beelzebub? And a healthy, hearty kudos to Watchmen for securing 26 Emmy nominations—one for every letter of the alphabet!—including one for limited series. Not bad for a show based on a comic book written by Alan Moore!

Aug. 26, Travel Channel aired a new episode of Paranormal Nightshift, a documentary series exploring haunted workplaces. They'd have gotten away with it, too, if it weren't for those meddling co-workers! On Aug. 27, Cozi TV broadcast a 1966 episode of The Munsters in which Grandpa gets struck by lightning. Dr. Frankenstein would be proud.

The Aug. 17 crossword, Puzzle #1395, will help Neffers flex their heads. 11 Across is "___ Flash," 15 Across is "Salem's ___," and 38 Down is "What the game is, to Sherlock." And the issue's "Cheers & Jeers" column rightfully offers Cheers for Muppets Now and Netflix -- for offering plenty of fine fannish fare: Lucifer, The Umbrella Academy, and the fantastic cartoon Wizards: Tales of Arcadia.

But, wait! There's more. In the Aug. 31 issue, which just flopped from the edge of the sink to the linoleum floor, Matt Roush reviews *Raised by Wolves*, a new series premiering on HBO Max on Sept. 3. The science fiction fable is helmed by executive producer and director Ridley Scott and focuses on a family struggling to colonize—and raise children on—an uninhabited and inhospitable planet, Kepler-22b. This might soon be the best thing on TV. Roush also comments on *Away*, a 10-episode space drama premiering on Netflix on Sept. 4. It's a three-year mission to Mars. What could possibly go wrong?

Pencil these in your calendar, fans and fellow freaks: Seven new episodes of *Supernatural* will return to The CW in mid-October, capping the show after 15 seasons. They were originally supposed to air this spring but The CW postponed them because of the pandemic. Meanwhile, Syfy will broadcast nine episodes of *Xena: Warrior Princess* on Sept. 4 to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the series. If you can watch, watch.

The issue also features an interview with Jason Katims, executive producer of *Away*. The brief conversation touches on Katims's fascination with space, how leaders can best handle dissent, and how the crew handled filming zero-gravity scenes. On Sept. 4, the second season of *The Boys* will premiere on Prime Video. But the premiere of the column might very well be *Julie and the Phantoms*, which debuts on Netflix on Sept. 10. After her mother dies, a music-loving teenager starts a band... with three ghosts!

On Sept. 7, Travel Channel will air *Devil's Road: The True Story of Ed and Lorraine Warren*, the first installment of *Shock Docs*, which "chronicles America's most infamous true-life horror tales..." Professionally active from the 1950s to the 1990s, the couple—a demonologist and a clairvoyant—inspired the *Conjuring Universe*. Sept. 9, Comet will air a 2005 *Stargate SG-1* two-parter in which mechanical monsters invade the Milky Way.

And the Aug. 31 crossword, Puzzle #1396, is a real brain teaser that wouldn't die. 15 Across is "The X-Files actor (2 wds.)," 34 Across is "___ vs Evil Dead," 42 Across is "Mork's Spaceship," 5 Down is "Wizard of __," 7 Down is "NOS4A2 network," and 41 Down is "1970s TV superhero." As always, mail in your best moon shots care of this fanzine. Who knows. You might just win a No Prize!

We'll skip the grids this edition, but stay safe and stay strong. We'll return to them next issue. The best part is always the programming grids. Until next time, true believers, this is "Cathode Ray," staggering under the weight of the world while keeping my eyes on the skies. Don't look too long at the little red light at the end of your remote. And if you eat all the ice cream, be sure to buy more. Turn on, tune in, and blast off!

The new issue of *TV Guide* just arrived at the Village, so in lieu of yet another visit to the Palace of Fun, it's time for another edition of "Rabid Ears: Ravings of a TV Fiend," a periodic column about the best and most bewitching 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? Did you know we have our own little newspaper? I must send you a copy.

In the Sept. 14-27 issue, the staff offers a sneak peek piece entitled "What's Ahead for These Top Dramas?" Two of the three programs addressed, *Outlander* and *Supernatural*, are clearly fantasy shows. I'm not sure how I feel about them categorized as dramas, but including them in the roundup certainly indicates the current widespread presence of genre programming on tele-



Heart Flower
by Angela K. Scott

vision. Scribe Kate Hahn refers to *Outlander*'s origin as a fantasy novel, directly mentioning "Diana Gabaldon's bestselling ... series." And she reports that the sixth season, which is reported to air next year, will be based on the sixth book in the series, *A Breath of Snow and Ashes*. Meanwhile, *Supernatural* returns to the CW on Oct. 8 for its seven final episodes. Upcoming shows will feature time travel, a monster hunt, and demons, and word is that every... single... loose... end will be tied off in the last two episodes. I'll believe it when I see it.

A reader named "Sam" (if that even be his real name) writes into the "Readers' Letters" column to cheer ABC for airing *Black Panther* without commercials before the network's Chadwick Boseman memorial at the end of August. My family watched the movie again, as well, but not on ABC, to recognize Boseman's death. If you haven't seen the comic-book movie yet, it's worth seeing. And if you've already seen it, *Black Panther* holds up well on subsequent viewings. Wakanda forever!

The new HBO series *The Third Day* earned an Editors' Choice for its premiere Sept. 14. Described as a "psychological thriller," the program's "mystery-shrouded setting," "creepy locals," and "ancient festival open to the public for the first time" bring to mind the 2019 movie *Midsommar* and suggest an air of the fantastic, if not horror. If you've watched any of the six episodes, write in care of this publication and let us know what you think!

FXX's animated spy comedy *Archer* premiered its eleventh season Sept. 16. The "arrogantly buffoonish James Bond wannabe" wakes from a three-year coma that features "dream-state genres including film noir and sci-fi." Also on that date, TNT continued its weeklong celebration of *Supernatural*'s 15th anniversary by airing five episodes, some voted on by fans.

On Netflix, the new animated adventure series *Jurassic Park: Camp Cretaceous* premiered Sept. 18. Set during the events of the 2015 movie *Jurassic World*, the cartoon focuses on a group of teenagers participating in the theme park's summer program. Reportedly, *Jurassic Park* director Steven Spielberg consulted on story and design.

Meanwhile, on Prime Video, *Utopia* premiered Sept. 25. Based on a 2013-2014 British series of the same name, the show focuses on a group of comic book fans who meet up at a convention. "They're out to acquire the recently discovered sequel to a legendary comic book that's rumored to contain clues to a looming, devastating virus," writes Damian Holbrook. My kind of people!

Some Neffers had to make a challenging decision Sept. 22. So: Did you watch the season premiere of *Cosmos: Possible Worlds* on Fox, or did you watch *Dead Pixel*'s season finale on the CW? In the followup to last spring's National Geographic docuseries, Neil deGrasse Tyson explores planets, the human mind, and almost two decades in the future. And the first season of the British comedy focused on a group of online friends "who finally figure out how to complete their mission inside the video game *Kingdom Scrolls*." I know, I know. You DVR'd one to watch later -- or both!

The third season of *Star Trek: Discovery* will start on CBS All Access in mid-October, and to help promote that, CBS proper began airing the program's first season Sept. 24. The network plans to air the show's entire run. Somewhat similarly, the 1952-1958 series *Adventures of Su-*

perman returned to Decades on Sept. 26 for a weekend run of all 86 episodes. That's right: 86 episodes. Did any Neffers make it through the marvelous marathon? This might have been the neatest thing on television in recent days. Great Caesar's ghost!

The Sept. 14 crossword, Puzzle #1397, includes several fannish clues. 2 Down is "Counselor on Star Trek: The Next Generation." 23 Down is "Dexter's place, in cartoons." And 37 Down is "Largest moon of Saturn." If you think you know what's what, mail in your informed guesses, care of this fanzine.

With the passing of the Autumn Equinox, the shortening of days, and the coming of fall, it is only natural that the hot-blooded television fan's attentions and interests turn toward... the 68th annual Fall Preview issue of TV Guide! The magazine itself is a time machine. Not only does each issue foretell the future -- what will air where, and when -- but back issue collectors can help document the history of sf and fantasy TV by scouring the daytime and primetime listings of the past. The Sept. 28 to Oct. 11 issue is "your complete guide" to the upcoming season, as well as all of its sights and sounds.

The issue's "In the News" section opens with a Matt Roush-written tribute to Diana Rigg, who died Sept. 10. Rigg earned four Emmy nominations as Olenna Tyrell in *Game of Thrones* and two for her role as Mrs. Emma Peel in *The Avengers* in 1967 and 1968. "It's a rare talent who can inspire cult obsessions nearly a half century apart," Roush writes. Emma Peel ranked No. 5 on TV Guide's 2014 list of TV's top action heroes of all time.

A piece titled "Big New Shows Beyond 2020" recognizes the upcoming end -- of sorts -- of *The Walking Dead*. AMC will air the finale of its tenth season in early October. That's to be followed with six bonus episodes in early 2021 and then a 24-episode final season expected to begin in late 2021. But just like any good zombie, the franchise is expected to keep shambling. Offshoots include *Fear the Walking Dead*, *The Walking Dead: World Beyond*, Rick Grimes-related movies, a forthcoming anthology show titled *Tales of the Walking Dead*, and a 2023 drama -- again with the drama! -- featuring characters Carol and Daryl. Because they wouldn't be zombies otherwise, now, would they?

In the Fall Preview section, an AMC sf show premiering Oct. 5 is featured in the Drama category -- oh, the drama! *Soulmates* is a new anthology program set "in the not-too-distant future." The gambit for the show is that there's a scientific test that can accurately identify the love of your life. "[T]hose who take it rarely get what they bargained for," writes John Russell. But don't think this is just a futuristic take on *The Love Boat*. One episode focuses on "a young man who joins a cult that promises to connect him with his dearly departed," and "[o]ther hours veer into horror." The magazine also mentions Disney+'s eight-part adaptation of Tom Wolfe's *The Right Stuff*, which premieres Oct. 9.

In the Comedy category, TV Guide highlights Showtime's *Moonbase 8*, a "quirky workplace comedy" about "[t]hree inept astronauts [who] train for life in a lunar colony." Starring John C. Reilly and Fred Armisen -- and created by the folks behind *Portlandia* -- the show could have potential. "Space [itself] is not really that funny but it's supercool," says co-creator Jonathan Krisel. "This is a way for us to play in our favorite world of sci-fi but still do the sort of comedy we love." Well, if you say so. Only fans will tell.

Also filed under Comedy, Prime Video's *Truth Seekers* is a horror-comedy focusing on amateur paranormal investigators, including a character played by Nick Frost. *Shaun of the Dead*'s Simon Pegg plays a "shady boss," and the "investigation points toward an Armageddon-level conspiracy." Emily Aslanian writes: "The idea for the series came out of their love of all things supernatural -- they even used to hang out in graveyards!" Of course they did; the reception is better out there.

A two-page spread covering the Sci-Fi category -- we get our own category, too! -- takes a look at a handful of genre shows of note, including Fox's *Next*, AMC's *The Walking Dead: World Beyond*, Hulu's *Helstrom*, the CW's *Swamp Thing*, and Hulu's *Monsterland*. *Next* explores the possible benefits and risks of superintelligent AI. *Helstrom* is based on the Marvel comic book character Daimon Helstrom, a "demon hunter... with some serious psychological damage." *Swamp Thing* is based on... well, the DC comic book *Swamp Thing*. This most recent take on the ecological antihero is steeped in horror and was originally produced for the DC Universe streaming service. "We wanted to capture the creepy, unsettling Southern Gothic feel you get from [Alan Moore's] comic books," saith showrunner Mark Verheiden. And *Monsterland* is based on Nathan Ballingrud's short story collection, *North American Lake Monsters*.

April Bernard's two-page timeline "50 Years of PBS" includes several broadcasting history events of potential interest to Neffers. On March 3, 1974, "Science gets a weekly platform with *Nova*." On Sept. 28, 1980, "Astronomer Carl Sagan brings science to the masses with *Cosmos*, PBS's highest-rated series until *The Civil War*." And on May 20, 2012, "Benedict Cumberbatch's modern-era Holmes hurls himself from a rooftop, landing with a sickening crunch." I think it's a crime, however, that the timeline didn't include *Doctor Who*'s first four seasons reaching PBS in 1978. To make the sf series more palatable to an American audience, up to three minutes was cut from each episode to make space for voiceover recaps of the previous episode -- and teasers for the next one. Other notable sf programs aired on PBS -- but left out of this celebration -- include *Blake's 7*, *Land of the Giants*, *Lost in Space*, *The Prisoner*, *Red Dwarf*, *The Time Tunnel*, and *The Tripods*.

The Animation category also includes several new cartoons of interest to Neffers: *The Lego Star Wars Holiday Special*, which will stream on Disney+ and is "based on the infamous 1978 holiday special;" *Doctor Who: The Faceless Ones*, a cartoon adaptation of the 1967 storyline, which will air on BBC America (we're particularly excited about this one); and Netflix's *Over the Moon*, which touches on "folklore about a moon goddess" and launching a self-designed rocket into space. Additional new series and specials of potential interest -- not necessarily animated -- include Syfy's *Magical Girl Friendship Squad* and *Wild Life*, as well as Marvel's 616 on Disney+.

Oct. 9, *The Haunting of Bly Manor* premieres on Netflix. The follow-up to 2018's *The Haunting of Hill House* takes place on a remote English country estate in the 1980s. Reportedly, the show is "a mashup of *The Turn of the Screw* and other stories by 19th- and 20th-century writer Henry James." And look for Prime Video's limited series *Rosemary's Baby*, a remake of the 1968 thriller. It originally aired on NBC in 2014.

The Sept. 28 crossword, Puzzle #1398, under-indexes in terms of genre clues. 21 Across is "Assassin on Lexx." And 31 Down is "Bill ___ the Science Guy." Put pen to paper and rush your entries, care of this fanzine.

The issue ends with Damian Holbrook's "Cheers & Jeers" column, which jeers The Boys' Stormfront "for being so vile we can't even love to hate her. ... [W]e actually hope she doesn't survive the season." Well, that's not very nice.

Netflix's Death Note Review by Chris Nuttall

The human whose name is written in this note shall die.

-The first rule of the Death Note.

TL:DR – a whitewashing controversy masks far deeper flaws.

Death Note is unusual in that it's the only manga I've been able to get into, probably because – unlike the handful of others I've read – it relies more on good storytelling and a fairly well-crafted background than fan service and absurdities galore. And yet, I was not enthused by any of the animated or live-action versions of the manga. Being a largely cerebral story, Death Note simply doesn't lend itself very well to the TV screen. I was therefore unenthused when Netflix announced that it would turn Death Note into a movie.

The sad irony, alas, is that Netflix's Death Note – hereafter NDN – is a very good horror movie ... if one knows nothing about the original. If it had been stripped of the title – and much of the background – it would be quite watchable, although not – perhaps – memorable. But watching NDN reminds me of watching the Harry Potter movies or Batman Vs Superman, stories where the source material is warped out of shape to suit the director, rather than the long-time fans. NDN isn't as bad as the Starship Troopers movie, but it doesn't impress the fans.

Death Note revolves around a Villain Protagonist – Light Yagami, a genius-level Japanese high school student who discovers (or is given) a supernatural notebook that grants its user the ability to kill anyone whose name and face he knows. Egged on by a Shinigami (Ryuk), Light starts using the Death Note to kill criminals in a bid to reshape the world, eventually taking the name 'Kira' and declaring himself a god. In doing so, Light comes into conflict with a mystery detective – known only as 'L' – and a cat-and-mouse game begins, with Light trying to discover 'L's' true name while 'L' seeks proof that Light is the supernatural killer. The immense manga follows Light, L, and a handful of others as both sides devise gambits to trap and incriminate the other.

That is, in many ways, a poor description. Go read it. Seriously. You won't regret it.

Light himself is not the hero, although he clearly sees himself as the hero. Light is very much a narcissistic sociopath, delighting in the power of the Death Note even as he works towards a world cleansed of crime. The manga doesn't lose sight of that, even as we – the readers – are brought to admire his intelligence and adaptability. Light is cool and confident when in control, but – when provoked – he can lose his cool as easily as he can lose his nice suit. One may argue that the Death Note corrupted Light, turning him into a monster. But the seeds of disaster were already planted by the time Ryuk found him.



In the Wings
By Angela K. Scott

The manga is huge, with over a hundred chapters and story arcs. It really should have been turned into a series – the material was there. Instead, Netflix ruthlessly hacked and slashed at the story, removing huge aspects of the overall whole and changing others beyond recognition. While I understand the problem with telling a complete story in less than ten hours, it cheapens the source material and removes some of the more interesting aspects.

NDN makes the fatal decision to treat Light Turner as a far more likable person than Light Yagami. Turner is a more average student, one familiar to most as a classic geek or nerd from any high school. He's scared by the Death Note and Ryuk, when the Shinigami makes his appearance. Ryuk has to urge him to use the note for the first time, being more of a corruptor in this incarnation than the manga. His sinister nature and black comedy jokes – “Each death must be physically possible. So, no shark attacks whilst someone's on the toilet, as much as I love that idea.” – only underline his true nature. The bumbling and somewhat apathetic death god of the manga has been replaced by the devil.

Light is joined by Mia Sutton, a cheerleader who urges him to use the note to punish criminals. In doing so, Light comes into conflict with ‘L’ and – worse – his own father, a police officer. His reluctance to proceed further with his plan leads to Mia taking action to thwart the police and then secure the Death Note for herself. Light's bid to find L's name fails, forcing him to launch a desperate gambit to kill Mia and clear his name. And when he does, the ending is ambiguous. Light may be cleared, but ‘L’ has a piece of the Death Note and he might write Light's name ...

The whitewashing is a very minor matter indeed, compared to the other travesties perpetrated on the manga. Just about every character has had their race swapped around. Light, Mia and James Turner are all white; ‘L’ is black (I'd say he was mixed White/Asian in the manga); Watari is Japanese (elderly English gentleman in the manga). Names have also been changed to fit – Soichiro Yagami has become James Turner. (Light Yagami's sister and mother were both adapted out of NDN, along with every other Shinigami.) None of this is a problem, although it does seem rather pointless. The arguments in favour of whitewashing in ‘Doctor Strange’ and ‘Ghost in the Shell’ hardly seem to apply here.

What is more annoying is that the characters have been changed. I've already touched on Light being more of a whiny student in NDN. Mia provides the sociopathic tendencies that NDN's Light lacks, but she also lacks the charm, intelligence and devotion of her manga counterpart (Misa Amane.) In some ways, this works: Misa became a less interesting character after she meets up with Light Yagami, losing most of her agency. In others, it makes Mia far less charming than the original and removes the ‘Second Kira’ aspect of the plot. ‘L,’ meanwhile, is a confused mess, showing some of the intelligence and bravery of the original, but lacking the original's cool and collected approach to solving the case. (This is made worse by the cut-downs, which removed most of L's justifications for suspecting Light Yagami.)

James Turner, by contrast, is something of an improvement, being the first person to point out the dangers in Light's approach to law enforcement. Who do you complain to if ‘Kira’ kills the wrong person? He is also more defensive of Light, to some extent; police officer or not, he does nothing when Light is bullied, but angrily berates and threatens L for accusing Light of being Kira. And Ryuk is almost perfect, save for the darker side of his nature. When Light throws a tantrum and threatens to write Ryuk's name down ...

“You could try. But I warn you, there are four letters in my name. Most anyone’s ever gotten were two.”

The production values were clearly a little mixed. Some elements are good – dramatic, even – others are just annoying. I’m no fan of playing songs over scenes, particularly when they don’t seem to fit. The visual effects are suitably gruesome – Ryuk’s giggling suggests he was doing the killing, rather than the Death Note itself – but they do seem to go a little too far at times. At other moments, the story jumps forward with a vigour that convinces me I’m missing something. The manga’s slow build is completely missing.

Like I said, NDN would be reasonably watchable as a stand-alone. But it doesn’t come up to the source material.

The major problem, of course, is Light himself. He just isn’t the outright Villain Protagonist of the manga. And ‘L’ isn’t the detective of the manga either (and a number of other characters are wiped from existence.) This erases the moral dilemma of the manga – is Light right to kill criminals? – and cuts down the people who support Kira, as well as the involvement of other Shinigami. There’s no final warehouse confrontation, nor is there the denouncement of the manga:

“No. You’re just a murderer, Light Yagami. And this notebook is the deadliest weapon in the history of mankind. If you had been a normal person and had used this notebook once out of curiosity, you would have been surprised and scared of what had happened, regretted what you had done, and never used this notebook again. To speak of extremes, I can actually understand those who would use this notebook for their personal interests and kill a couple of people, and even think that they’re normal. But you yielded to the power of the notebook and the Shinigami and have confused yourself with a god. In the end, you’re nothing more than a crazy Serial Killer. That’s all you are. Nothing more... and nothing less.”

Indeed, the decision to move the story from Japan to America leads to other missed opportunities. America is different from Japan, so why not have an American Kira tackle American problems? Should George Zimmerman be killed? Or that a-hole who arrested a nurse because she wouldn’t let him commit a crime? Or ... I don’t really blame Netflix for keeping away from (more) controversy – it would probably have ruined the launch – but it’s still a missed opportunity.

Netflix’s Death Note wasn’t a complete disaster. It had its moments. But it neither lived up to the manga nor carved out an existence of its own.

In truth, I don’t think the former is actually possible.

Food of Famous Authors with Cedar Sanderson

Amie Gibbons' Baked Apple Streussel Cupcakes



I first met Amie Gibbons at LibertyCon this last summer. She's a sweetheart and full of energy... and stories. She asked me if I would look at one of her short stories and give her some feedback, which I was happy to do. Her story was as sweet and fun as she was – not all authors do that, distilling a bit of themselves into the story without making it feel like a mary-sue – and when her first novel was released last week, I was delighted to be able to be part of her debut with this recipe.

Amie's book *The Gods Defense* involves a young lawyer, the return of magic, talking plants, the gods of myth, and... well, I'll let you read it. You'll have some time while the cupcakes are baking! And with an ebook you can't get crumbs on the pages.

When I asked Amie for a recipe, I guessed that it would be a fun one. You see, I'm friends with her on facebook, and I know that when she's stressed about something, she bakes, just like I do. So when I opened the email and saw the title she'd given her dish, I had to laugh. Also, the First Reader immediately gave her two thumbs up for an apple recipe.

Baked Apple Streusel Cupcakes

Ingredients

Swirl and Topping

- 1/2 cup sugar
- 2 tsp ground cinnamon

Cupcakes

- 1 cup grated apple (1 large peeled apple)
- 2 Tbsp cinnamon-sugar (from Swirl and Topping)
- 1 1/4 cups white flour
- 3/4 cup sugar
- 3/4 tsp baking soda
- 1/4 tsp salt
- 2 large eggs
- 1/2 cup vegetable oil
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 3 Tbsp unsalted butter, melted



Directions



Preheat oven to 350°F and line a dozen cupcake tin cups with paper liners. Peel the apple then use a cheese grater to grate a cup. Toss the apple with 2 Tbsp of the cinnamon-sugar. Set aside.

In a large bowl, mix together the flour, sugar, baking soda and salt. Then blend in the eggs, oil and vanilla. Stir in the apple (along with the juice)/sugar mixture. Drop 2 Tbsp of batter into each muffin cup. Spoon 1/2 tsp of cinnamon-sugar on top of the batter. Drop another 2 Tbsp of batter on top. Dollop melted butter on top of each cup. Sprinkle the remaining cinnamon-sugar on top of each cup of batter. Bake for 25 minutes or until a toothpick inserted into the cupcake comes out clean.

Cedar's Notes: I pulled a bonehead move and didn't take any pictures of the prep... but that was mostly because this was super simple to pull together. The only thing I changed was to use sprinkles of my homemade struesel I keep in the freezer on the tops of the cupcakes. And I frosted them.

Vanilla Cream Cheese Frosting

6 oz cream cheese
1 tbsp vanilla extract
1 vanilla bean
Powdered sugar

Prep the vanilla bean by slitting it down the length and then scraping the seeds out with the back of the knife passed firmly down the bean, at right angles to the length. (I really need to photo that) In the stand mixer bowl with whisk attachment, cream the cream cheese until it's whipped softer a bit. Slowly add about a cup of powdered sugar. You don't want the mixer going too fast here, or the sugar will become a dust bomb. Add in the vanilla and seeds. (reserve what's left of the pod for making the next batch of vanilla extract). Add more sugar, a half-cup at a time, until the frosting is thick, and looks something like this:

cream cheese frosting Soft creamy frosting that is thick enough for a bit of decorative effect. See the teeny black 'beans'?

I used a large star tip (#808) to put a pretty dollop of sweet creaminess on top of the cupcakes, but you could just smear it on there once they are completely cool. Also, this will make more frosting than you need for one batch of cupcakes, but it refrigerates well and can be frozen, too. I will be using it on a planned carrot cake next weekend.

Just a dollop of frosting, and left the crispy strueselly (totally a word) edges alone.

The First Reader didn't have much to say at first, just happy noises. He was the one to suggest the frosting, because as Amie said, without it they are more muffins. Which makes them legitimate breakfast food. I left half unfrosted so I could try that out this morning and they are all going to be gone very soon!



Political Fiction

Chasing Freedom by Marina Fontaine

Review by Jim McCoy

America as we know it is dead. All of our freedoms, from the freedom to worship to the freedom to own guns and even the right to eat what we want have been taken from us. People have been forced to live in cities for "environmentalist" reasons. America is a place where cell phone time is rationed and children born with birth defects are immediately put to death. Well, at least in Marina Fontaine's *Chasing Freedom* it is. The crazy part of the story is that it all seems so possible.

The story here, though, is not one of downtrodden people with a boot on their neck sitting quietly. There is a reason Fontaine has work published by Superservice Press. This is the story of a fight from the shadows against an unforgiving government. It is a story of cyber warfare and sometimes outright violence. It is the story of people fighting the only way they can against a government that has them outnumbered and outgunned. It is, in its way, the story of the plucky underdog. It is also a story of sacrificing safety and wealth for freedom. *Chasing Freedom* also asks a question that pops up again and again in literature and in history: Was it all worth it? I won't reveal Fontaine's answer, but at the end of the day, I agree with it.

It's easy to see why *Chasing Freedom* was nominated for a Dragon Award for Best Apocalyptic Novel. It really moves. The characters live and breathe. I couldn't put this thing down. I read it in a day and was left wanting more. That's not to say that the ending wasn't satisfying. It was. It also made sense and was realistic which is something you don't often see in fiction anymore. All in all, I thoroughly enjoyed Fontaine's work.

You know that whole "Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events, is purely coincidental" disclaimer that comes at the front of most works of fiction? It's there, right on page three. I just quoted it directly out of the book. I am totally not rude enough to up and call bullshit here. Nor will I make comparisons between the self-righteous absolutist attitudes expressed by politicians like Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton because then I might be tempted to point out the possibility that such things had been intentionally included and I am far too polite to ever utter such a sentiment. Of course, if someone else were to read the book and make such statements I would probably find myself unable to manufacture an argument to dispute them with, but such is life.



The characters in *Chasing Freedom* are amazingly well done and believable. From fighting a war, to falling in love, to having children they do what most people do. The leaders of the movement understand their roles and do what they must but never quite feel right in the role. The role players play their roles. Pretty much anyone involved in the movement suffers, some worse than others. Fontaine's cast is made up of not just characters but people. Seriously. If only he existed, I would totally sit down with Randy over a beer. Well, if I could get him away from Julie (his wife) for long enough I would.

The part that I enjoyed most about the book is not its dystopian setting, but the hope and resolve of the characters. They're faced with a world where it would be easiest to go along to get along. The United States of Chasing Freedom is not the type of place to engender hope for a brighter future. The fact remains that they do. They don't give up. Nothing stops them and the horrors just pile up. Julie and Randy are forced to leave their oldest child to be raised by someone else to protect him. Another character loses a hand. KGB style torture is in common use by the US government and some break, but most don't. Friends die. Bases are destroyed. The fight continues. The characters in the work are people we could all learn a lesson from.

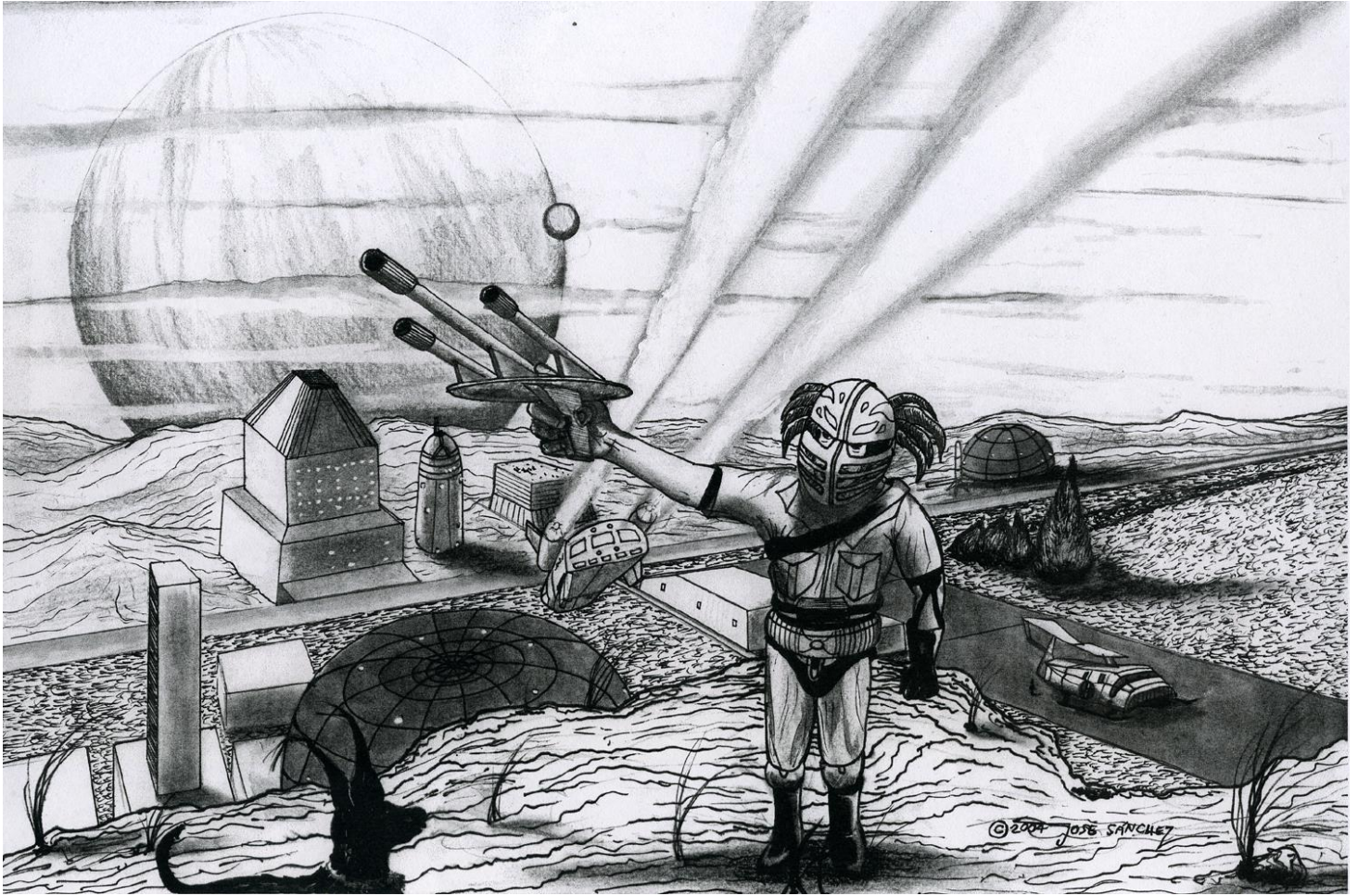
Fontaine's villains have motivations that, from their point of view, make sense even if, from my point of view, they don't excuse their actions. A man that participates in torture in order to provide a good living for his family is not someone I'd hang out with on a Saturday night. That much being said, men have always done whatever they needed to do to get by and torture and murder are not exceptions, even if they are despicable. The key to writing believable villains is, in my mind, providing them with not just an evil act to commit but an understandable reason for doing so. Fontaine nails it. I can somewhat sympathize with one particular villain while still considering his actions to be deplorable. It may be possible to write a villain better than that. If so, I have yet to see it happen.

I do have one complaint about the tome. We see a lot of government agents at the sharp end of the stick, but almost none at the top. Something I've always enjoyed in fiction is the Big Bad. The concept is not totally missing from CF but is really underdeveloped. The president is (appropriately) set up as the over-arching nemesis but has no "screen time" that I remember. She's just kind of out there somewhere fuming offscreen and appointing evil people. Nor do we get to spend much time with the members of the cabinet that coordinate the battle against the good guys. This is far from a fatal flaw but it does irk me just a bit. Having stated that I really did love the book. Oh, and I just bought an e-copy even though one was given to me for free. I will undoubtedly read it again at some point so it's worth it. It really is that good.

Bottom Line: 4.5 out of 5 exploding flash drives



Demons on a Ledge by Jose Sanchez



FutureScape
by Jose Sanchez