

Tightbeam 315

December 2020



Space Wolf
by Jose Sanchez

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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.

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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 Kevin Trainor, PO Box 143, Tonopah NV 89049 . Pay online at N3F.org. Our PayPal contact is treasurer@n3f.org.

Table of Contents

Art

- Front Cover ... Space Wolf by Jose Sanchez\
- 8 ... Unicorn Waters by Angela K. Scott
- 24 ... Yoda — Scratchboard by Angela K. Scott
- 26 ... Unipegs Flight by Angela K. Scott
- Back Cover ... Jade Dragon by Angela K. Scott

- 4 ... N3F News

Letters of Comment:

- 4 ... Will Mayo, Joe Siclari

Anime

- 5 ... Autumn 2020 First Impressions – Jujutsu Kaisen ... Review by Jessi Silver

Books

- 7 ... Lovecraft: A Biography ... Review by Will Mayo

Comics

- 8 ... An Interview with Ibai Canales Benito ... Tamara Wilhite

Fanzines

- 9 ... Fanfaronade: Celebrating Current Fanzines ... Justin E. A. Busch

Games

- 11 ... The Young Diplomats of East Paterson, New Jersey... Fred Lerner
- 13 ... On Race for the Red Planet ... Short Note from Wesley Kawato

Movies and Books They Inspired

- 14 ... An Interview with D. G. Martin ... Tamara Wilhite

Novels

- 16 ... Sword's Edge by L.S. King ... Review by Jim McCoy

Sercon

- 17 ... Jack London Bio-Bibliography by Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D.

Short Fiction

- 21 ... Hive by Jay Werkheiser ... Review by Greg Hullender
- 22 ... All The Turns Of The Earth by Matthew Claxton ... Greg Hullender
- 22 ... Birds Of A Feather by Gregor Hartmann ... Greg Hullender
- 23 ... Bulkheads Make The Best Neighbors by Ian Randal Strock ... Greg Hullender
- 23 ... Valley of Loss: Jim Cartwright—At Large, Chapter Two by Mark Wandrey ... Pat Patterson
- 24 ... Fantastic Schools, Volume 1, edited by Christopher Nuttall and L Jagi Lamplighter Pat Patterson

Video

- 27 ... Rabid Ears: Ravings of a TV Fiend by Cathode Ray

Food of Famous Writers

- 29 ... Cinnamon Rolls: Kacey Ezell ... Cedar Sanderson

N3F News

In general N3F news, we have a new editor for Mangaverse. Patrick Patrick Ijima-Washburn (ぱと), expert in Comics Research & Monster Theory @ Kumamoto University マンガ研究・モンス, will be the new editor. We have deployed a new mailer for all of our zines.

There were some minor startup glitches associated with the URL not propagating well. Associated with the site is a VPS server courtesy of Bluehost, the server permitting us to use PhPlist to mail. The interesting features associated with the former PhP mailer appear to have gone away, so we can now mail larger files to all of our computer-using members instead of only 75% of them.

Publication of N3F zines continues on a regular monthly basis. We recently emailed issues of Eldritch Science, Fantastic Films, N'APA, The N3F Review of Books, and Origin. Our other zines, including The National Fantasy Fan, Ionisphere, this magazine, and soon enough Mangaverse also continue to appear on their regular monthly and bimonthly cycles. Your support of the N3F publishing effort with articles, reviews, and letters of comment are most appreciated.

Editor George Phillies has been elected President of AHIKS (formerly the Avalon Hill Intercontinental Kriegspiel Society), which is the board wargaming equivalent of the N3F, except for having several times as many members.

Letters of Comment

Thanks, George,

That one is greatly appreciated. While I am neither a conservative, nor a libertarian like you, Mr. Fox and I have to agree with the remarks in the latest issue of Tightbeam that free speech is clearly under fire these days from both the left and the right. Many of the books I enjoyed reading and the movies I enjoyed watching in the '70s and '80s simply could not be aired today without being shot down with all kinds of hue and cry from all directions. This is not just true of science fiction and horror with which I have a particular interest. The status is culture wide and growing. Needless to say, I look forward to getting a hold of Mr. Fox's Hazardous Imaginings with due interest.

And, oh, I hope to also have a bit more out and out science fiction review for you in the near future. All best and thanks again.

... Will Mayo

George,

We're glad to be helpful. We [fanac.org] have added about 45 older N3F fanzines over the last two months, in addition to the new pubs you have been sending us. These include issues of Tightbeam, Postwarp, TNFF and a 1956 Fanspeak. We will continue to add more as I find them. I am going to be turning older issues, including the Bonfires from the 1940s, into searchable PDF issues as well.

... Joe Siclari

Anime

Autumn 2020 First Impressions – Jujutsu Kaisen Review by Jessi Silver

Don't go eating fingers you picked up off the ground...

Streaming: Crunchyroll

Episodes: 24

Source: Manga

Screen captures are taken using the official legal stream of the series, when available.



Summary: Yuuji is a high school student with an enviable amount of strength and ability in sports, but rather than join a sports team, he'd rather hang out with the Occult Research Club. It means he can leave school grounds at a reasonable hour, which is important because he spends that extra time visiting his dying grandfather in the hospital. One afternoon, after beating the track-and-field coach at his own games, he rushes away to buy flowers and put them in his grandfather's room. His grandfather gives Yuuji some advice – do what he can to help people, or else end up dying alone. Unfortunately this fate comes to pass for his grandfather, who then passes away.

As he's leaving the hospital, Yuuji is cornered by a man named Fushiguro who's been hanging around the school grounds in search of a cursed object that he believes Yuuji might have. Unfortunately, Yuuji gave it to the upperclassmen in the Occult club, and they're unsealing it as they speak. They rush to the school, but it's too late – a lower-level (but still dangerous!) curse has discovered their folly and is now attempting to supplement its own power by consuming the cursed object. Fushiguro tells Yuuji to stay behind, but Yuuji feels he has it within his power to help his friends, so he rushes into the fray. Though he's able to save the other club members, he finds himself about to be eaten by the creature. He then pulls one last, desperate maneuver and gives himself the finger – by literally eating the cursed finger. This gives him the power to destroy the curse, but has the added terrible effect of turning him into one. Will Fushiguro have to take him out?

Out of all the new series this season I wasn't already familiar with, I think Jujutsu Kaisen is the one I've been hearing about the most. Riding high on some well-regarded source material it seems like an ideal story for this time of the year – some cool action, grotesque, spooky monsters, all coalesced around a likeable male hero (and his body's new demonic interloper, maybe). But it's easy to get into the mood when the leaves are falling outside and the neighbors are all doing their best to decorate in the Halloween spirit. Once the spiders and skeletons are put away and the snow stars falling, will this kind of creepy anime series still be entertaining?



Yuuji and his dying grandfather

My prediction based on this episode is, thus far, yes. The series seems to have more than just demons and darkness at its core. I think one of my favorite things about how the series establishes itself is that the first episode puts its early focus toward the emotional core of the story. Yuuji's grandfather is a memorable character despite the fact that he's not on screen for very long; his curmudgeonly nature is revealed to be more than the typical comic relief when, just prior to his death, he tries to convey his regrets to his grandson. His message of helping others becomes a motif that carries through to Yuuji's confrontation with the curse late in the episode. While Yuuji doesn't otherwise dwell much over his grandfather's death during the episode aside from some inner-monologuing about his own fear of death (though I suspect his grief might show up more later) it's still made very clear how much he may still be influenced by him.



I think this message of “doing whatever is in your power to help others,” something that sounds simple on its surface, is likely why I enjoyed this episode beyond just the surface level appreciation for its visuals. I think that there's a lot of selfishness in the world that's been manifesting in ways that are undeniably harmful to many people, especially as we enter month 153 of this pandemic situation (well, that's how long it feels to me...). I think it's easy to fall into a

trap of despairing over all the bad things in life that feel impossible to change, when in fact so much positive change can be accomplished by people making the choice to do right by others and help in ways that they're able. Though shounen anime gets dumped on a lot for sometimes lacking in nuance, I think it's good to remember that simplicity and straightforwardness can convey important messages as well.

Having said all that, this episode demonstrates Yuuji's expression of this idea through his willingness to do anything, even to the point of extreme danger, to help his friends in the Occult Research Club. It's the second part of the episode where it demonstrates its other major strength, which is its interesting and exciting action direction, and great animation. Coming off of the uneven (but often exhilarating, I hear) *God of High School*, director Sung Hoo Park demonstrates a good sense for conveying some of the extreme things that happen while Fushiguro and Yuuji battle the curse. Yuuji in particular does some crazy flying around, and when he eats his fateful snack, the distortion of his face is suitably affecting. There's no denying that this show has a very cool look and promises to be an exciting ride.

If I'm to be critical at all, I'd have to say that, despite having an emotional connection with the early themes of the episode, I'm not sure that I have a lot of interest in the show itself. It's a difficult feeling to explain, but I had a similar reaction to *Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba* – I liked the characters and the show looked really cool, yet I found it a chore to actually watch it at times (I still haven't finished it, though I intend to at some point). I have a lot of positive feelings toward this episode, and yet it took me two tries to watch it all the way through and several days to figure out how to talk about it. I think there are just some cases in anime





fandom where a series is missing some indescribable “X” factor that makes it compelling to a particular person, and I have a sense at the moment that this series might be lacking in a way that would keep me enthusiastically tuning in from week-to-week.

There’s also a brief, blink-and-you’ll-miss-it moment that I was originally reticent to comment on, but on further thought I decided it would be important to mention. As the curse is attempting to consume Yuuji’s classmates, the multi-armed entity appears to grope his female club-mate. The cut is maybe a second or two long (about 18 minutes in) and I think it’s easy to miss, so there’s maybe some sense of plausible deniability. However, it was obvious enough to me that it mentally snapped me out of the moment, and having gone back to confirm that I wasn’t completely mis-remembering something I thought it prudent to mention for those like me who aren’t interested in that kind of material.

Perhaps as the ensemble cast expands and we get some more information about what exactly is going on in this episode’s cold open (I’m definitely intrigued), I might feel a little more compelled to become a regular viewer. That aside, I can see why this show was so hotly-anticipated, and for those who have the distinct luxury of watching anime without my kind of hang-ups and baggage, it looks like this will turn out to be one of the more popular viewing experiences this season.

Pros: Good animation and exciting action scenes. I enjoyed the theme of choosing to help others.

Cons: Currently seems to lack an “X” factor that would really make it stand out.

Content Warnings: Violence. Body horror. Character Death. Very brief groping.

Grade: B

Content Warning: Violence/blood.

Books

Will Mayo's Review Of L. Sprague de Camp's *H.P. Lovecraft: A Biography*

What, if anything, can one say about Mr. Lovecraft? A recluse who distrusted anyone unlike himself. A racist and a xenophobe that shed most if not all of his fears through the travels of his final years. A writer whose posthumous success was for the most part despite himself. L. Sprague de Camp explores all of this in his well written biography and the impression this reader is left with is mostly of how Lovecraft, like many writers, faced the darkness within himself and conjured up a universe in his fiction that was neither moral nor immoral but rather amoral in nature. Of a cosmos where mankind occupies a lonely backwater and is no way, shape, or form in charge of his destiny. Of Lovecraft's creation of Elder Gods that are neither good nor evil but rather bat man away the way a fellow might well bat away a fly. This world view may, despite all Lovecraft's prejudices, be the most meaningful and lasting of his many creations. I thank the late de Camp for filling us in on the life of a most curious man.

Comics

An Interview with Ibai Canales Benito
By Tamara Wilhite

I had the opportunity to interview Spanish comic book artist and author Ibai Canales Benito. He has contributed to horror comics like “Necromancer: Tombstone Blues”, “CU Next Tuesday”, and “Iron Sights”. He’s also helped create sci-fi comics like “The Abductables” and “Decimators”.

Tamara Wilhite: Your bio says you’ve worked as an artist, a colorist, a letterer and an inker. How do those jobs differ from each other?

Ibai Canales: Well, artist usually means full art, pencils, inks, colors, all that. Being a letterer is easy, you just have to illustrate the word balloons, and inking is really satisfying, you trace over the pencils (drawn by you or another artist) with a pen or a brush and it can really improve or ruin a drawing.

Tamara Wilhite: How do science fiction, horror and thriller comics differ from each other, aside from the storyline?

Ibai Canales: It all depends on the tone of the story more than the genre, really. If it's humorous, I try to draw more cartoony. If it's serious and dramatic, I try to be as realistic as possible. I've been told that my ability to go from one style to another depending on the script is a great asset, so there's that.

Tamara Wilhite: Of all the comics you’ve worked on, which one sold the best?

Ibai Canales: That would probably be Iron Sights 1, mostly due to the popularity of the writer.

Tamara Wilhite: What are you working on now?

Ibai Canales: I'm currently working on the third instance of Iron Sights, this time with extra martial arts fights, and SOS vol.2 in my spare time.



Unicorn Waters by Angela K. Scott

Tamara Wilhite: You’ve worked for a number of comic book publishers. You’re currently at Splatto Comics. How has the current state of affairs affected your projects?

Ibai Canales: Luckily, I work from home, so my income hasn't been affected. I have been unable to work elsewhere. (His day job is as a kickboxing instructor.)

Tamara Wilhite: And what has the second coronavirus shutdown been like for Europeans? You’re located in Spain, I believe.

Ibai Canales: Yeah. It's been devastating. The first one hit us really hard, but most of us still could hold on. The second one is completely decimating the country. We have "hunger lines", people waiting to be fed by food banks, of a length that the country hasn't seen since the Franco years. The worst thing is, it's not doing anything since the figures keep rising. Never let them do this to you.

Tamara Wilhite: What is the general state of the comic book industry from your perspective? For example, are people buying more comics because they're shut in or buying less because they're short of money?

Ibai Canales: That's a really good question. I've been buying more comics due to the boredom, but not as many as I'd like to, because I didn't have the steady source of income that was my day job at the gym, so I had to spend carefully.

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

Ibai Canales: Just that I've enjoyed this experience very much.

Tamara Wilhite: Thank you for speaking with me.

Fanzines

Fanfaronade: Celebrating Current Fanzines

Justin E. A. Busch

I would love to know the median age of fanzine editors; I suspect it's closer to 60 than 30. Where once fanzines were a way of introducing a new fan to fandom at large, they are now rather more likely to be all but self-contained communities sharing their thoughts and conversations with passersby. Yet they persist, even if in dwindling numbers; here are a few recent examples.

Confabulation #1 (3rd edition, July, 2020). Editor Garth Spencer, 4240 Perry St., Vancouver, B.C. Canada V5N 3X5. "Single copies go for \$10.00 CAD (That means Canadian dollars)."

This is a reconstruction of a collection of fan writing (mostly fiction) and art first published in 1996; the writings themselves come from a wide range of zines, most no longer being published, dating back as far as 1982. Authors include Andrew Hooper, Eric Mayer, Dr. Robert Runté, and Spencer himself, with the greater moiety being Canadian. Art comes from Taral Wayne, Steve Stiles, Alan White, and Brad Foster, among others. The result is a melange of moods and styles, giving the reader some interesting snapshots of the what fans thought significant in previous years and the different ways they expressed it. Some of the references will be rather obscure to contemporary readers, but the overall effect is one of geniality and fun; the collection is something like a miniature convention whereat the reader is able to attend a wide range of unpretentious and well-presented talks and programs.

The Obdurate Eye #6 (July 2020). Editor Garth Spencer, 4240 Perry St., Vancouver, B.C. Canada V5N 3X5. No terms, but probably the usual apply.

The rambling introduction is not so much an editorial as an engaging stream-of-consciousness review of recent events in the life and thoughts of editor Spencer. This is followed by a genuinely unusual item: a talk on the world-historical context of First Fandom given in 1987 by Clifton Amsbury (1910-2007), a member of the Science Correspondence Club in the early 1930s who edited *Cosmology* (formerly *The Comet*, the SCC's clubzine. Amsbury knew whereof he spoke from direct experience; he had actually fought in the Spanish civil war against the Francoist fascists. Spencer seems to have a cache of Amsbury's writings, and promises a regular column of them; this is indeed something rare to look forward to.

Letters and a discussion of some current fanzines round out the issue. The Al Sirois cartoon on the back cover is reproduced very fuzzily, and the rest of the few illos are mostly plundered from the internet. Despite that complaint, this is a publication worth keeping an eye on.

Pablo Lennis #396, November, 2020. Editor, John Thiel, 30 N. 19th St., Lafayette, Indiana, 47904. "Available by periodical exchange, \$2.00 an issue, letter of comment or as a contributor's copy. But if I get in the wrong mood, it won't be available to you. However, that mood may be the right mood for you, because you won't want a copy if I'm going to be that way about it. Maybe you didn't want it anyway."

Editor Thiel may have been in the wrong mood while working on this issue, as there are some technical infelicities in the editing. Most noticeable, because most confusing, is an interleaving of the fandom column and the lettercol.

Apart from that, the contents are typical, albeit with a slightly greater preponderance of serial chapters than usual. Nescher Psyche offers an amusing account of the struggles (and conflicts) he and his wife went through to select a name for their coming child. A few names were selected and an uneasy peace reached; "I could let go if my wife picked one, and my wife had quit sleeping with a knife." I suspect this story, in manifold variations, will ring true with many readers.

The major article (the first of a series?) is Jeffrey Redmond's "Religion in Science Fiction." Redmond considers the near-total absence of religious belief among science fiction characters to be a "serious lapse, a dishonesty in our contemporary literature," arguing that this ignores a key point: that "the behavioral and cultural patterns that we have always associated with religions are indistinguishable, except by vocabulary, from the behavioral and cultural patterns of the a-religious intellectuals." He doesn't so much argue for this as lay out the proposition suggestively, presumably to be developed, with specific examples drawn from sfnal writing, later on.

This essay needed a bit more care in the editing; it has the feel of something cut down from a longer piece but with a few elements left dangling (as, for example, references to "Ms. Smith's thesis" and "Ms. Smith's interviews of Nebula attendees [sic]," which presume acquaintance with who Ms (there is no period in the designation) Smith is or which convention is meant by "Nebula attendees."

Purrsonal Mewsings #76, November, 2020. Editor, R-Laurraine Tutihasi, PO Box 5323, Oracle, Arizona, 85623-5323. Available "for the usual (a response of any kind, including letters, email, and phone calls of comment; trade; contributions of illos, fiction, or articles; or even money: \$5.00 per issue)."

After whetting the reader's appetite with the usual photographs of the little (a spiny lizard, squirrels, grosbeaks, and two separate quail families) and the large (various planets and galaxies), the zine segues into a brisk report on Ring of Fire Con, held virtually in October. Several big name pros (e.g., David Gerrold, Melinda Snodgrass) livened up the proceedings, but apparently the most consequential session was with an immunologist; he "was fascinating to listen to," and gave editor Tutihasi "a couple of things to discuss with my allergist as well." The con was "a lot more convenient and more affordable," Tutihasi concludes, "than a physical one." The extensive lettercol, with interlinear editorial responses, wraps things up in its usual genial manner.

Editors: If you have a fanzine and want it reviewed, please send a copy to me at 308 Prince St., #422, St. Paul, Minn. 55101.

A Late Addition: When I opened my e-mail to send this I found a message from John Thiel: "I'm sending this for review in Tightbeam." Attached was a copy of his on-line zine Event Horizon, oddly enough in an editable docx format (I resisted the temptation, even though the absence of certain fonts on the library computer's version of Word played hob with the zine's layout). I had limited time to peruse it, but enough to see that it is essentially a deluxe version of Pablo Lennis (an impression supported by the fact that one of the articles was a reprint from the March issue of PL), making plentiful use of color. A good dramatic dragon by Jose Sanchez on the cover; the stories and articles, mostly by PL stalwarts, tended to be a bit longer than in the print zine but were otherwise similar in character and content. If you enjoy Pablo Lennis, you'll enjoy this. It's available exclusively at efanzines.com, and you could have clicked on it and started exploring it in the time it took you to read my response.

Games

The Young Diplomats of East Paterson, New Jersey by Fred Lerner

Sometime during the early years of the Kennedy administration, I founded "the world's first formally organized Diplomacy club." Or so I was told by Allan B. Calhamer, the inventor of the game. I had written him on our club's behalf to enquire into some now-forgotten detail of the rules of Diplomacy, and received from him a hand-written reply.

I first heard of Diplomacy from my best friend in high school. Tom Bulmer showed me a brief description of the game that he had found in Science Digest. It seemed to occupy a middle ground between chess and the Avalon-Hill board games, and it had a special appeal for people (like me) with an interest in history. After all, its playing-board was a map of Europe on the eve of World War I.

Games like Tactics II had no appeal for me. I was intimidated by the complexity of their rules and paraphernalia, and I had no great interest in military strategy. The only strategic games that had ever held my interest were the variants of Capture the Flag that I had played years before in Boy Scout camp. Nor had I any talent for chess. I never could think far enough ahead to anticipate the ultimate outcome of a move, and I agreed with Sherlock Holmes's contention that an aptitude for chess is the mark of an evil and scheming mind. And Risk was too simple-minded to appeal to me. It seemed another variant on such outgrown board games as Monopoly and Careers.

Part of the appeal of Diplomacy was that its rules and equipment were essentially simple. As with chess, this simplicity did not preclude a complexity of play: there was no reason to expect that one game of Diplomacy would much resemble another. But unlike a chess match, a Diplomacy game involved several players: seven if we could get them, five or six if we couldn't. (Sometimes we might play a two-handed version that we called Tactical Diplomacy, but that was primarily to get some practice in handling the challenges facing a country we hadn't much played before.)

"We" were the East Paterson Diplomacy Club, a group of (mostly) juniors and seniors at East Paterson Memorial High School in Bergen County, New Jersey. Most of us were members of the school's Science Seminar or its debate team (I was in both), and many of us were science fiction readers. But none of us had any contact with Fandom, or indeed anything more than a vague knowledge of its existence. Still, anyone who imagines us as a small group of teenaged proto-fans would not be too far off the mark.

Like any self-respecting fan group, we had a written constitution, which we called our Charter. (A hand-written constitution, it was, for none of us had any duplicating equipment.) We had no official connection with the high school, for we saw no advantage to seeking recognition as a student club. At least the way we played, personalities were too important for that.

I've played a little fannish poker in my time, and (at least in the low-stakes games that I remember) the satisfaction of winning a hand from a particular player often outweighed the trivial financial gain involved. So it was in a Diplomacy game, whether in the EPDC or in the early days of fannish postal play.

The East Paterson Diplomacy Club had its cherished idiosyncracies. Each session would begin solemnly with a mutual nonaggression pact, which of course had no effect whatever on the making and breaking of alliances among the players that is the essence of the game. At the end of each fifteen-minute "diplomacy period," the Gamesmaster—we invented that term—would call the players to the table, require all pens and pencils to be put away and the papers containing that turn's moves to be placed in plain sight on the table, and demand that all players keep their hands in view at all times. (By the time I bought my Diplomacy set, the rules had been changed to eliminate "infiltration," the surreptitious sneaking of additional pieces onto the board that had caught my eye in the Science Digest article. But the rules did not explicitly prohibit changing one's moves after hearing one's rivals' orders—if one could get away with it.)

Then each of us in turn would read his moves aloud, and the Gamesmaster would change the position of pieces accordingly. (The published rules required that moves be unambiguous, but it was understood in East Paterson that a fleet ordered "from the Land of Milk and Honey to the BBC" would leave Brest and sail into the English Channel.) He would resolve standoffs, take care of any other necessary business, and send us off to another round of negotiation and betrayal. (And espionage: in one session held in my family's second-story apartment, a player climbed a nearby tree to eavesdrop through an open window upon the scheming of a rival coalition.)

In June 1962 most of us graduated and went off to college. During my freshman year at Columbia I discovered Fandom, joined the Evening Session Science Fiction Society at City College, and met John Boardman. He, too, was a Diplomacy player, and he suggested that the game could be played through the mail. He organized the first postal Diplomacy game early in 1963,

and served as its Gamesmaster. The five players (we couldn't find seven) were EPDC members Jimmy Goldman, Stu Keshner, and I, and LASFS members Ted Johnstone and Bruce Pelz (playing under the pseudonym of "Adhemar Grauhugel"). I recall that I played Austria-Hungary—and played it rather well, considering the difficulties of its geopolitical situation. (As I recall, Franz Joseph had a few problems in his own game...).

I also got together a few fellow-Columbians for an on-campus game that met twice weekly in the lounge of Hartley Hall. This allowed plenty of time for negotiation between meetings, and gave me the idea for intercollegiate play. There are eight colleges in the Ivy League, so one could serve as host and Gamesmaster while clubs from each of the others gathered for a weekend's session. Each college team would play a country, and would appoint from among its members ambassadors to each other country—these would conduct the actual negotiations—as well as military and naval chiefs of staff. Presumably the president of each collegiate club would serve as his country's prime minister. (I reckoned that this would afford endless opportunities for intra-club squabbling and politicking, which might well be more entertaining than the intercollegiate game itself.) Play would commence Friday evening at six, and continue night and day for forty-eight hours. I even fantasised some techniques of negotiation and betrayal that went beyond our wildest high school dreams. Who has not heard of Mata Hari?

But this never came to pass. The logistics of getting this many college students together were impossible, even if there had been Diplomacy groups at each campus. Perhaps it could be done today, at a gaming convention. (Perhaps it has been done.) And anyway people had other things to do. I joined the Lunarians, where I found enough squabbling and politicking to satisfy the most ravenous appetite.

One evening in the fall of 1963 Allan B. Calhamer came up to the Columbia campus, and told us—a mixed audience of old EPDCers, Columbia students, and New York fans—something of the origins of Diplomacy. We bestowed upon him the title of Honorary Grand Gamesmaster of the East Paterson Diplomacy Club. And then the EPDC faded out of existence. My high school companions went their own ways, and I've had no contact with any of them for twenty or thirty years. I was too busy with college life and fan activities to take the time for Diplomacy games, whether in-person or postal. But the East Paterson Diplomacy Club left its mark on Fandom. Several of its customs and traditions were adopted by postal players, and the whole sub-fandom of postal game-playing evolved from John Boardman's first game with its three EPDC participants.

Postal Diplomacy is still played today, almost forty years on. But that's a story for John Boardman to tell.

On Race for the Red Planet Short Note from Wesley Kawato

Let me clarify something I said recently. Race for the Red Planet is not a standalone game. It is one of the scenarios in Stellar Horizon. I've played this scenario a lot because it is one of the Stellar Horizon scenarios that can be played solitaire.

Some members of my gaming club have started meeting again. I haven't gone to any of these meetings because there is no way you can play board games while staying six feet away from the other players.

Movies and Books They Inspired

An Interview with D. G. Martin by Tamara Wilhite

There is an entire genre of Santa Slasher movies. It may have started with “Tales From the Crypt: And All Through the House”, though you could say it was Bob Clark’s “Black Christmas”. It led to movies like “Silent Night, Deadly Night” (which even spawned a sequel) , “Santa Claws” and at least a dozen others. And apparently, there are books based around the same theme like “Hammer and Sleigh: The Rise of the Crimson North”.

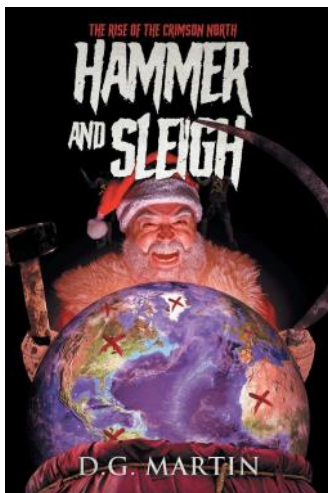
D. G. Martin: I am not the biggest movie buff, and am surprised to learn that there are movies about an evil Santa Claus. Twenty years ago, I did watch "Tales from the Crypt", with my brother Chris, but I can only remember an episode or two, which is funny in retrospect because I remember episodes of "Brisco County Jr." in more detail. But I do find it interesting that there is a niche of Santa Based Horror.

Tamara Wilhite: What is your book “Hammer and Sleigh: The Rise of the Crimson North” about?

D. G. Martin: This book, to be honest, was supposed to be a political parody from the very beginning.

To preface this, as a child, my father both read and had us watch George Orwell’s “Animal Farm”, which to a youth was terrifying. Growing up, that stuck with me as my personal tendencies and political understanding took shape. So, while this book was meant to be more comical, it also had to strike a serious tone; because communism, sadly, is not a joke and it has some serious moral implications. Eventually I realized that if this parody was to take shape, there would have to be violence, to the point of gratuitous.

So this book is about a Santa Claus who undergoes a psychotic break, becomes consumed with revenge, and espouses himself with the radical ideologies of the socialists and communists. It is the story of the radical change, the evil that consumed the North Pole, the suffering of the elves, and ultimately their rebellion.



Tamara Wilhite: What led you to write “Hammer and Sleigh”?

D. G. Martin: My brother Chris and I were standing in my kitchen in late November 2009 talking about the forthcoming Christmas Season, and began joking about how it must be living in the North Pole as an Elf. This sparked some serious imagination. 1) Remote location, isolated from the rest of the world. 2) Everyone wore the same outfits. 3) subsidized housing. 4) assigned jobs. 5) Santa was domineering and basically covered in Red.

By this point, we were both staring at each other, awestruck, and jaws lowered. We had arrived at the same conclusion. “Holy Sh!t, Santa is a Communist!!”

A flood of ideas poured through my mind as what I could only imagine is how Stephen King or Dan Brown must have felt when this idea landed in their lap, and they had to start writing a book about it.

I looked at my brother Chris, and immediately told him that we needed to write a book about this revelation. Chris immediately retorted that in fact we (pointing to the both of us) should not write the book, but rather I should write the book.

Tamara Wilhite: Did you intentionally release your book in July as a parody of Christmas in July?

D. G. Martin: Actually no, which is even more hysterical, because I remember all of the silly advertisements on T.V. about “Christmas in July” sales. To compound this, the day of the release was July 15, which is the day after my son’s birthday, and the same day I was honorably discharged from the Marines in 2007. So this milestone is a bit more awesome than I realized.

Tamara Wilhite: What do you think of the entire genre of movies where Santa is the villain?

D. G. Martin: I think the idea of Santa and making him into an antagonist is creative – it really goes against the grain of what virtually every Santa Believer is accustomed to. This is how some really great books and movies come about – something we know, but not accustomed to. That spin on stories, good vs. evil, simple vs. complex; it can become something fascinating.

Tamara Wilhite: This is your first novel. May I ask what your day job is?

D. G. Martin: Right now I work as an investigator dealing with regulatory compliance with the U.S. Government.

Tamara Wilhite: And what do you like to do for fun?

D. G. Martin: I enjoy woodworking, home improvement, reading, archery, love cooking, writing, political discourse (of a non-violent type) and logic.

Tamara Wilhite: It took you a decade to get this novel published. Do you have anything else in the works?

D. G. Martin: At this point, no I don’t have anything in the works, but, you never know where the future will take me.

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

D. G. Martin: I really hope this book speaks to the reader, is thought provoking, and ultimately enjoyed by them. Thank you so much for this opportunity, Tamara. Semper Fidelis!

Novels

Sword's Edge

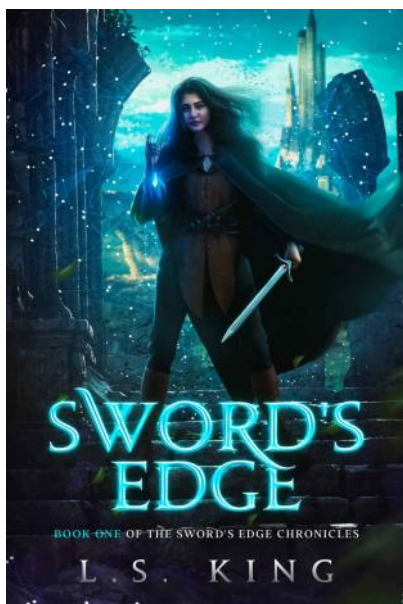
by L.S. King

Review by Jim McCoy

I love Science Fiction. I love Fantasy. I've seen Star Wars, with its setting that is primarily SF (Lightsabers, FTL Travel, Aliens, Giant Space Stations, etc) but partially Fantasy (The Force) but L.S. King has done the opposite in *Sword's Edge* (*Sword's Edge Chronicles*, Book One). She's created a setting that is primarily Fantasy (Rangers, Psychic Powers, Nobility, etc.) and partially SF. (Nope, not saying why. Read the book.) So I guess, in a way, it's reverse Star Wars, except that it takes place on one planet. Then again, that makes it even more reverse Star Wars, right?

So yes, the setting does a lot for the story. *Sword's Edge* is a book that works based on the world where it's at as much as it does on its characters. (More on that in a minute.) The politics of the world move the story, as does the science fiction aspect of it, which we really don't get all that good a glimpse of at first. We're kept guessing for quite awhile as to certain aspects and I like that about it. We get hints here and hints there, but nothing concrete for quite awhile. And, getting back to the politics, they're complicated, convoluted and corrupt. There are only two political figures in the entire work that read as not evil and treacherous but that's necessary to the plot and makes a lot of sense given the internal logic of the book.

Our main character is a girl named Tamissa, Tam for short. Tam is a young girl who has been raised in seclusion by her father. She is a member of the Ranger clan, which is responsible for both police and military duties in the Lairdom, but was brought up believing that she had no family. She belongs to the Clan but knows nothing of it. In short, King seems to have used a technique very similar to one used by a certain Mrs. Rowling: Her character is accepted as a member of the society she is in, so we can see her functioning within it, but she views it the way an outsider would. Another apt comparison would probably be Data. Everyone seems to know how to fit in, but her.



This leads Tam to be a bit naive about some things, even for a girl in her early teens. This can cause a bit of consternation among those of us who were born into a more egalitarian age. Tam knows nothing of romantic love and less of sex. She has no real concept of marriage. She can't even recognize her society's version of a wedding ring for what it is. She has no idea why women fear men, since she had no fear of her father and no interactions with any other man. But the thing is, she is actually an extremely intelligent young lady. She learns quickly, but has had no context.

That's not to say that Valdor didn't teach his daughter anything: She can read. She can write. She can grow a garden, hunt and cook the proceeds from both endeavors. She knows uses of spices and herbs both medicinal and nutritional. She can make a poultice to cure a wound and identify plants that are harmful.

There's got to be something else, too. I feel like I'm missing something...

Oh yeah. Tam can fight. Tam will kick your scrawny (or fat, well proportioned, heavily muscled, etc) ass barehanded and won't feel bad about it. In the Rangers, they call it matching and it's basically like Mixed Martial Arts (watch the backfist bro, trust me) except less formalized. She also seems to know quite a bit about swordplay and archery to go with a working knowledge of tracking. In short, she's every bit as tough as any man in the book, but it gets more complicated from there.

King has done her research well. Sword's Edge features a type of reality that everyone else misses: Tam suffers the mental consequences of succeeding in battle. Here in the real world, Planet Earth, circa the last probably hundred and ten years at least, the leading cause of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder among combat veterans is that they were forced to kill. Having studied history (and I got one of them fancy pieces of paper what has my name and the words "Bachelor of Arts in History" written on it) I can attest that everything I've read agrees to that fact, but most authors and play/screenwriters ignore that fact. It makes me a little batty sometimes watching a hero make his first kill and walk away like nothing happened. The act of killing effects people. Kudos to King for looking the real world in the eye and not backing down. Other authors would do well to follow her example.

That's not to call Sword's Edge overly maudlin. The plot moves quickly. Points of view bounce around at times and we see things when we need to. The fight scenes actually gave me a burst of adrenaline at points. There is no navel gazing. There's no time for it. Tam is hard-core and even when she is relaxing it seems that there's always a prankster around to keep it interesting. Somehow, she makes it through the novel without developing a love interest even though I had two separate dudes picked out for her at different points in the novel.

The only weird part of Sword's Edge was that it didn't end when I thought it would. I was reading it on an app called FB Reader. Page numbers appear in the lower right corner of the screen and often don't match up with Kindle or print page numbers. When I got to what I thought was the end, it still had fiftiesh (I think) pages left. What followed was both fun and interesting and ended up with me being very frustrated with my dispatcher at work (Seriously, if the whole day sucks and I'm not making anything don't interrupt me just when the weird stuff starts. It makes me cranky.) but in some ways it felt like it was more set up for the rest of the series than it was part of the story I was reading. Then again, it must have been a good ending because I've already snagged a copy of the omnibus edition containing not only Sword's Edge but also the sequels Children of the Enaisi and Laws and Prophecies. Maybe if you're lucky, I'll let you know what I think about those too.

Sercon

Jack London Bio-Bibliography

by

Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D.

N3F Historian

Author and journalist John Griffith London (original name John Griffith Chaney) was born in San Francisco in 1876, and died in Glen Ellen, California in 1916. In addition to his writing, he



was a social activist. He was usually known as Jack London, and was one of the first writers to become a worldwide celebrity and earn a fortune from his writing. He was also an innovator in science fiction (SF).

His most famous works include the novels *Before Adam*, *The Sea Wolf*, and *The Iron Heel* -- as well as the short stories "To Build a Fire," "The Call of the Wild," and "Love of Life."

Early Life

Jack London's mother Flora Wellman was a spiritualist, and his biological father was an itinerant astrologer. They "had dissolved their marriage" before London was born. When he was eight months old, his mother married Civil War veteran John London who worked as a farmer. Jack was known as Johnny London until he was fifteen years old, when he decided he wanted to be called Jack. He was mostly raised by his step-father and his foster mother, a former slave named Virginia Prentiss. A librarian at the Oakland Public Library, Ina Coolbrith, also had a strong influence on him, as she guided him in his exploration of books. London graduated from Cole Grammar School in West Oakland in 1891.

After completing grammar school, he worked at a variety of jobs, including a stint on a ship as an oyster pirate. In the context of London's life, it refers to a specific set of conditions peculiar to the oyster industry in San Francisco Bay in the 1880s. While San Francisco Bay had a native oyster, it was never very abundant, and entrepreneurs began importing oysters from elsewhere. Competing oyster companies began consolidating into a single monopoly. Their harvest from a private place (San Francisco Bay) led to an opportunity for "oyster pirates." Pirates raided the beds at night and sold their take in the Oakland markets the next morning. The public disliked the monopoly, liked cheap oysters, and the "pirates" therefore had public sympathy, with the police reluctant to do anything about the "piracy".

As a 15-year-old, London participated in this activity.

At eighteen he traveled the United States as a hobo. A 30-day stretch in a New York county penitentiary for vagrancy helped to convince him of the value of an education. He went back home, attended high school, and crammed for a few months in order to get into college. He was at the University of California for only one semester, however, when he left to prospect for gold in the Klondike when he was twenty-one.

Marriages

London married Elizabeth "Bessie" Maddern on April 7, 1900, the same day his *The Son of the Wolf* was published. Bessie had been part of his circle of friends for a number of years. "Both acknowledged publicly that they were not marrying out of love, but from friendship and a belief that they would produce sturdy children." Jack had made it clear to Bessie that he did not love her, but that he liked her enough to make a successful marriage.

London's pet name for his wife was "Mother-Girl" and her pet name for him was "Daddy-Boy." Their first child was born on January 15, 1901, and their second on October 20, 1902. Both

children were born in Piedmont, California. Here London wrote one of his most celebrated works, *The Call of the Wild*, that went through many printings and was translated into sixty-eight languages. At the age of twenty-nine, London was the highest paid and most widely read writer in the United States.

After divorcing Maddern, London married Charmian Kittredge in 1905. The two had met prior to his first marriage but became lovers years later after Jack and Bessie London had visited the Wake Robin resort in 1903. London was injured when he fell from a buggy, and Charmian cared for him. The two developed a friendship, mainly because Charmian and London both were politically aligned with socialist causes. At some point the relationship became romantic, and Jack divorced his wife to marry Charmian, who was five years his senior.

London and Science Fiction

London was part of the radical literary group, “The Crowd” in San Francisco, and a passionate advocate of both workers' rights and eugenics.

His SF included such works as *Before Adam* (1906), *The Iron Heel* (1907), and *The Star Rover* (1915).

His short genre fiction included the following stories, all of which are reprinted in *The Science Fiction Stories of Jack London* (1993):

“Who Believes in Ghosts!”

“A Thousand Deaths”

“The Rejuvenation of Major Rathbone”

“Even Unto Death”

“A Relic of the Pliocene”

“The Shadow and the Flash”

“The Enemy of All the World”

“A Curious Fragment”

“Goliath”

“The Unparalleled Invasion”

“When the World Was Young”

“The Strength of the Strong”

“War”

“The Scarlet Plague”

“The Red One”

Legacy/Honors

Mount London, also known as Boundary Peak 100 -- on the Alaska-British Columbia boundary, in the Boundary Ranges of the Coast Mountains of British Columbia -- is named for London. Jack London Square on the waterfront of Oakland, California, is also named for him.

He was honored by the USPS with a 25¢ Great American series postage stamp, released on January 11, 1986.

Fictional portrayals of London include Michael O’Shea in the 1943 film *Jack London*; Jeff East

in the 1980 film *Klondike Fever*; Aaron Ashmore in the *Murdoch Mysteries* episode, “Murdoch of the Klondike,” in 2012; and Johnny Simmons in the 2014 miniseries *Klondike*.

Death

Jack London died November 22, 1916, in a cottage on his ranch. He had been a robust man but had suffered several serious illnesses, including scurvy, in the Klondike. Additionally, during travels in the Pacific on his ketch, *The Snark*, he picked up unspecified tropical infections and diseases, including yaws. At the time of his death, he suffered from dysentery, late-stage alcoholism, and uremia; he was in constant pain and taking morphine to relieve it.

Jack London’s Credo

London’s Credo was widely reported, as follows:

“I would rather be ashes than dust!

I would rather that my spark should burn out in a brilliant blaze than it should be stifled by dry-rot.

I would rather be a superb meteor, every atom of me in magnificent glow, than a sleepy and permanent planet.

The function of man is to live, not to exist.

I shall not waste my days in trying to prolong them.”

Critical Evaluations

In a letter dated December 27, 1901, London’s Macmillan publisher George Platt Brett, Sr. said “he believed Jack’s fiction represented ‘the very best kind of work’ done in America.”

Critic Maxwell Geismar called *The Call of the Wild* “a beautiful prose poem” and editor Franklin Walker said that it belongs on a shelf with *Walden* and *Huckleberry Finn*.

The historian Dale L. Walker once commented: “Jack London was an uncomfortable novelist, that form too long for his natural impatience and the quickness of his mind. His novels, even the best of them, are hugely flawed.”

Walker also wrote that London’s *The Star Rover*, that magnificent experiment, is actually a series of short stories connected by a unifying device.

The Iron Heel has been described as an example of a dystopian novel that anticipates and influenced Orwell’s 1984, and meets the contemporary definition of soft SF.

Some Conclusions

Sonoma State College’s Jack London Website states: “Though London considered himself self-made, he was in fact the product of his time and the people around him. We include references

to such themes as Progressivism, the Arts and Crafts Movement, and the socialism of his day. Similarly, we include information on key figures, his family and friends.”

Critic Franklin Walker: “Jack London’s best adventure story was his own life.”

His presumed biological father, William Henry Chaney, denied all his life that London was his son.

Some of London’s fiction is available on the Internet.

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Gunn, James (ed). *The New Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*. NY: Viking, 1988.

Tuck, Donald H. *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction and Fantasy, Volume 1: Who’s Who, A – L*. Chicago, IL: Advent, 1974.

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

Short Fiction

Hive

by Jay Werkheiser

Review by Greg Hullender

[Analog]

A good hard-SF story.

An alien hive mind encounters something strange and tries to understand it. The human colonists are even more clueless, even though they’re caught in the middle of a pending war. (5,184 words; Time: 17m)

Pro: The fun of the story is watching the aliens and the humans experiencing the same events from utterly different standpoints. It’s refreshing to find aliens that are so alien that they and the humans don’t even recognize each other as intelligent.

It’s noteworthy that the aliens come closer to figuring us out than we do to figuring them out. The humans conclude that if there’s any intelligent life, it’s nowhere near this site. But the aliens figure out that they need to look up to the stars.

Con: The characters aren't all that interesting. Matt in particular is so pea-brained that one wonders why he was allowed to go out in the first place.

All The Turns Of The Earth
by Matthew Claxton
Review by Greg Hullender
[Analog]

A teen girl falls through a hole in time and ends up in the Cretaceous, where she makes friends with a Pterosaur she raises from the egg.

Pro: For the most part, this is almost a Robinson-Crusoe story, telling how a young girl managed to survive in a really hostile place.

Con: I didn't care for the magical time travel, complete with the implication that it's usually random but sometimes God cares about the feelings of people enough to do it on special request.

I doubt a teenage girl dropped into the Cretaceous with nothing to support her would survive more than 24 hours.

Birds Of A Feather
by Gregor Hartmann
Review by Greg Hullender
[Analog]

A scientist has a great idea for a revolutionary new space telescope, but he can't get approval to build it.

Pro: The best part of the story is the interactions between the two very different brothers. By the end, I felt they each had real strengths—neither was a wimp—but also that they really loved each other.

I'm not sure the kaleidoscope telescope has a hope of working, but the story made it very real, and I was definitely rooting for it to somehow get launched.

It was a nice touch that Frank's boss wasn't fooled by their stunt to steal his materials, but she let him get away with it in exchange for doing something for her.

Con: The plot requirement that the department head wouldn't even let Frank explore his idea on his own struck me as very hard to believe.

There seem to be some editing problems. The opening paragraphs in particular are more awkward than I expect in a professional publication. Once it gets going, it's fine, but the takeoff was pretty rough.

Bulkheads Make The Best Neighbors

by Ian Randal Strock

Review by Greg Hullender

[Analog]

A group of human habitats in Earth orbit get tired of taking orders from the Earth and decide to put up a fence. Sort of.

Pro: It's a clever idea; given that the hubs can supply themselves from the asteroid belt, they don't need access to Earth, so they can just put enough junk in the orbits under them to discourage anyone from Earth from trying to leave the planet.

Con: This would destroy the low-Earth satellite network, which would doubtless make a lot of people unhappy. And it wouldn't prevent the launch of, say, a nuclear warhead or two on very energetic launchers on polar trajectories to destroy the hubs.

Valley of Loss: Jim Cartwright—At Large, Chapter Two

by Mark Wandrey

Review by Pat Patterson

A great good afternoon, to all my friends and neighbors in Internet Land. And to family members who have dropped by: fr I E nds, and n E I ghbors. I think that's Weird. Or is it Wierd?

Preliminary Statement. I'm going to edit out all the ravings for my Amazon review, the entirety of which is contained within. But this is MY blog, so you get the ravings.

Raving One. This is a 36 page Kindle document, as it is currently formatted on my screen. How can I justify a LONG review, of a SHORT document? And yet, I am known for long reviews. Sometimes, that's how I find them. I page rapidly through the Amazon reviews, my eye only caught by verbosity.

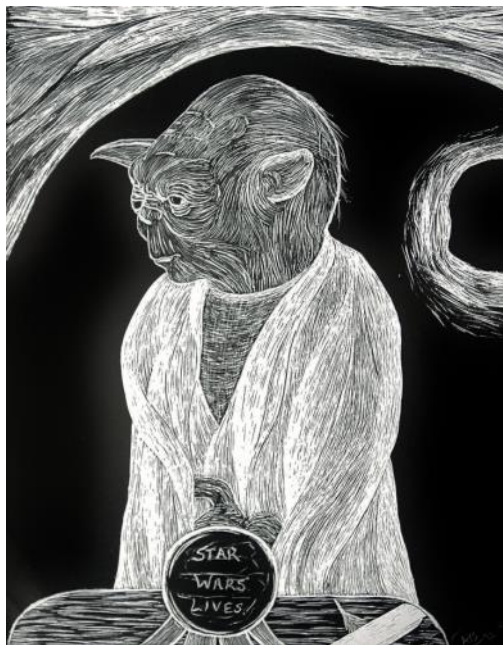
Raving Two. I picked this book up from Kindle on March 18, 2020. It's now November 3. Any FRESHNESS my perspective may have given is long since stale. Heck, my memories of that time are stale.

Raving Three, and the most significant, dealing with SPOILERS. Admittedly, I was sucked into a black hole of circumstances, just after I brought myself current on all of the related storylines, and thus I MIGHT be wrong, but: THERE ARE SOME THINGS THAT LOYAL READERS WILL KNOW ABOUT, THAT THE CHARACTERS DO NOT.



Now, for the reader, that likely only enhances the experience. Alas for the poor reviewer, though! We dast not violate the no spoiler rule in our reviews!

Over the next few galactic cycles, I plan to convene a reviewer council to come up with a comprehensive program. Until then, I plan to mask spoil-



Yoda — Scratchboard by Angela K. Scott

er-sensitive material with some sort of snark. You'll know it when you see it.

The review. This is all that's going on Amazon.

I obtained this book through the Kindle Unlimited program.

Jim Cartwright, the youthful, obese but dieting commander of Cartwright's Cavaliers, has a closely defined set of goals for his mercenary company. At the top of his list: obtain as many of the massive, ancient fighting machines, known as Raknars, and restore them to function.

While certain members of his team don't quite understand the degree to which these devices inspire him, Jim can always count on his drop-dead gorgeous, passionate, faithful, and utterly committed girlfriend Adayn. Somehow, out of all the human females, she alone has discerned the bodacious hunk hidden inside Cartwright's corpulence.

Jim is also the recipient of support from his good buddy Splunk, a harmless and playful alien of limited intelligence; perhaps a savant, though, for somehow this miniature creature has been able to discover ways to harness the potential of the Raknar.

Exciting things ensue.

This is a delightful background interjection into the main story lines of the Four Horseman Universe, and **MUST** be read that way.

Fantastic Schools, Volume 1
 edited by Christopher Nuttall and L Jagi Lamplighter
 Review by Pat Patterson

A great good afternoon to all my friends and neighbors out there in Internet Land! And to family members who dropped by, **NO!** This isn't horror, I don't **READ** horror!

I **THINK** I remember when the request for stories went out for this volume. I was rather intrigued, since I had been Dean of Admissions at a tiny, private, non-magical school for a bit over three years, and I wondered if there was any way I could make a story out of my experiences that would fit in with the theme. I couldn't see it happening. But, who knows? There **IS** a story here about getting admitted; there is another story about the problems of budgets.

For now, though, it is **ENOUGH** to read, and enjoy, which is what I did. I actually said to myself, "these stories are quite charming!" but I refuse to repeat that, because magic, charms, you know.

DO NOT!!!! skip the intro by Christopher Nuttall. He says some things that **HAVE** to be said,

and it's just lovely to detach from some of the spider webs associated with literature that parallels this work. And along those lines, the title of my Amazon review (they posted it almost INSTANTLY!) is "If you mention H*** P*** or J K R***, I might slap you." There IS a tie-in with his intro.

Here's my thinking about the stories, and what follows is contained in my Amazon review, and my Goodreads review.

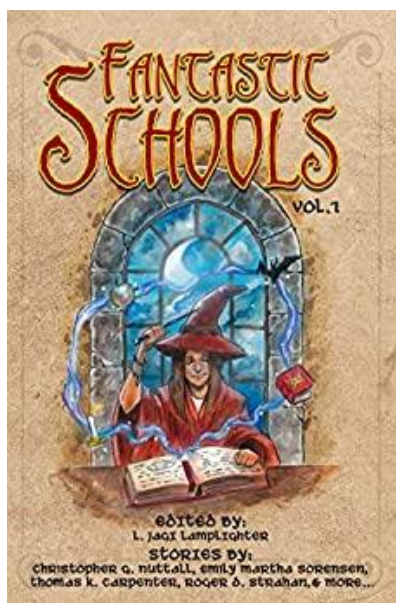
"A Note From The Editor," Christopher G. Nuttall. Oh, hurrah, hurrah! Some things truly needed to be pointed out explicitly, particularly for those who think everything worthy was invented this morning around half-past ten. Discover these for yourself, but I must cheer the point that there is an extreme pathology of boarding schools that has NOTHING to do with magic.

"Little Witches" by Mel Lee Newmin. Anyone who has ever been affiliated with an educational institution knows the EXTREME importance of The Budget, and schools which are not supported by the state often must close their doors. Institutions of magic are not excepted. Loved it (but romance doesn't happen that fast).

"Path of the Phoenix" by Emily Martha Sorensen. I have heard that in some matters, if you aren't cheating, you don't deserve to win. I can't testify to the truth of that statement, and whether or not Rulisa, our protagonist, deserves to win is up for discussion. However, she DID know what she was doing when she accepted enrollment in a school consequences are...intense.

"A Firm Hand" by Aaron Van Treeck. Some schools welcome you with a reception, including food and handshakes. Not THIS school. Clearly, their school is modeled on basic training/boot camp for a uniformed service. As a graduate of D-7-2 at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, I can say that the only significant inaccuracy is that harsh treatment at this magic school actually has a training goal in mind.

"Asymptote at Three O'Clock" by Steven G. Johnson. For anyone who has EVER watched the clock, longing for release, this story will take that experience, and add another dimension. You see, time really does go slower, but not for the reason you think.



"Practical Exercise" by George Phillies. I have found that education is a great leveler of differences. Well, that's the way it appears, at least; those who maintain a fiction that their differences matter more, somehow manage to linger on for quite some time. A punch in the snoot would have done them some good, in their earlier years.

"The Ascendant Cup" by Thomas K. Carpenter. High-stakes testing is something that seems to bother adults and educators more than it bothers students, at least initially. Perhaps that is because they don't recognize just how high the stakes are. This test: it can kill you. Our protagonist knows this, but sometimes the win IS worth the risk.

"Doom Garden" by Benjamin Wheeler. Warren G. Harding was a

wizard. The gardener has a shotgun that never runs out of ammo. And both of those things are needed, because all gardens are not alike. I loved this one, particularly the fact that the point of view character is a.....Methodist? No, that's not right...

“Crucible” by Frank B. Luke. This is an intriguing world, in which those who work magic come in three flavors: Good, Neutral, and Evil. It’s not QUITE an accurate set of descriptors, though. The subtle differences matter, because this test can be lethal.

“The Last Academy” by G. Scott Huggins. In the world of the mundanes, there is a huge drop-off between the number of people who enroll in the fall, and the number who eventually graduate. Why shouldn’t this be true with schools of magic as well? But, where would the drop-outs go? And what CONCEIVABLE use could they be?

“Finals” by Bernadette Durbin. The only people who like finals are those who have over-prepared, and a few instructors who are looking for a break from classes. Even those don’t want the routine to be disturbed. But sometimes, outside events trump academics.

“Metamorphosis” by Roger D. Strahan. Listen: just because your parents are monsters, and school is awful, that doesn’t mean that you get to go another way. That NEVER happens! Well, hardly ever. It would take a miracle.

“How To Get Into Magic School” by Erin N.H. Furby. I spent 7+ years working in college admissions. I only was threatened a few times. But then, magic wasn’t a factor. This lad is a recruiter for a scholarship program. I think he needs to seek additional reimbursement.

“Deep School Tuition” by Denton Salle. Private school tuition is outrageously high, but there ARE those who can afford it. Even so, defaulting on loans is a really bad idea. So: make SURE you understand the terms of the contract before you sign it. And if they want you to sign it in blood? Should be a clue.

“Gennady’s Tale” by Christopher G. Nuttall. It’s rather an old tale: the fresh-faced idealist who toddles off to college, and returns as an obnoxious know-it-all. The rules at college are just DIFFERENT than the rules at home; everybody changes, one way or another.

I did not ENJOY reading all the stories at the same level, but that's because a couple of them



dealt with subject matter that was uncomfortable, particularly the last one. That is NOT a reflection on the quality of the stories, which I found to be excellent. It's just a matter of taste. I recommend them all to you, and, with the exception of "Gennady's Tale," I would be pleased to have 14 year old Alicia Ann and almost 16 year old Kenneth read these, unsupervised. With "Gennady's Tale," I'd want us all to read it together, and then discuss it. I DO hope you understand that minor caveat.

Peace be on your household.

Unipegs Flight by Angela K. Scott

Video

Rabid Ears: Ravings of a TV Fiend by Cathode Ray

The new issue of TV Guide just danced around the kitchen with the desiccated corpse of our Thanksgiving turkey—tip your hat, do-si-do, Electric Slide, and Cotton Eye Joe—so it's time for another edition of "Rabid Ears: Ravings of a TV Fiend," a periodic column about the lowest—and most lofty—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? That's me in the corner. That's me in the spotlight.

The Nov. 9-22, 2020 double issue of TV Guide is a Supernatural finale special, promising "amazing true stories shared by the cast and crew from 15 seasons of the beloved series." Inside, Ileana Rudolph and Emily Aslanian offer the cover story "Carry On, My Wayward Sons," an eight-page—long for TV Guide!—oral history of the fantasy program. Highlights include photographs of Todd Stashwick as Dracula from a black-and-white episode, a still from the animated episode featuring Scooby-Doo and Shaggy, Felicia Day (Be still, my beating heart. Even if you are hooked up to a car battery.), and a photo of the main duo mugging with prop copies of Weekly World News before that august periodical folded. I wish I could say I'll miss the show more than I actually, really, truly do miss Weekly World News, but so it goes. I still need to watch all of Buffy the Vampire Slayer, eh, wot?

Matt Roush comments on Moonbase 8, which airs Sundays on Showtime, in "The Roush Review." Unfortunately, I will have to wait until this is streaming somewhere other than airing on Showtime. Have any Neffers seen it yet?

Nov. 13—Friday the 13th, natch—American Horror Story: 1984 paid homage to 1980s slasher movies with an episode in which a killer stalks the counselors at a summer retreat. That might be fun to check out. Just don't go near the lake. Nov. 16, season two of His Dark Materials, based on the writing of Philip Pullman, premiered on HBO. And Nov. 21, Fear the Walking Dead aired its midseason finale (um, midseason finale?) on AMC.

The Nov. 9 crossword, Puzzle #1401, offered a handful of clues sure to get the true sf and fantasy fan salivating in advance of holiday dinners. 30 Across is "Star Trek: Picard actor Evagora." 10 Down is "Barry's wife on The Flash." 34 Down is "Twin Peaks dessert." And 40 Down is "Cosmonaut Gagarin." As always, we accept any and all entries, via postcard or letter, care of this fanzine.

With the passing of Halloween and Thanksgiving, and the slow, steady, heavy approaching footfalls of the forthcoming winter holidays, it's no surprise that the Nov. 23-Dec. 6, 2020, double issue of TV Guide tips hat to holiday programming. There's not a lot of sf in the mix, but plenty of fantasy—and animation fans will be thrilled silly with television airings of seasonal favorites such as A Charlie Brown Christmas, Dr. Seuss' How the Grinch Stole Christmas, Frosty the Snowman, Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer, and Santa Claus Is Comin' to Town.

With the death of Sean Connery, Hulu's streaming of James Bond favorites From Russia with

Love, Thunderball, You Only Live Twice, and Diamonds Are Forever will be welcomed by genre fans. Also of potential interest—though slightly adjacent to our usual bread and butter—is the new Netflix limited series *The Minions of Midas*. In the series, based on a Jack London story, said minions aim to extort mucho dinero from a monied publisher.

Pencil these in your calendar, fans and fellow freaks: Next airs on Fox, Tuesday, Dec. 1. The sf drama continues to escalate, and it'll come as little surprise that the artificial intelligence's creator already regrets the AI's creation. Huh. Wednesday, Dec. 2, *BattleBots*'s new season premieres on Discovery. 60 teams from five countries build massive fighting robots. What's not to like? And Sunday, Dec. 6, *Britannia* airs a season finale on Epix. You had me at "diabolical druid."

The Nov. 23 crossword, Puzzle #1402, certainly served up some real stumpers for this Neffer. 23 Across is "Star Trek: Voyager character _____ of Nine." 33 Across is "God of war on Xena: Warrior Princess." 41 Across is "Pointy feature of Spock." 8 Down is "American _____ Story." 22 Down is "Baby _____: nickname for a Mandalorian character." 24 Down is "What Tarzan swings on in the jungle." And 48 Down is "Bill & _____ Excellent Adventures." Be excellent to each other and send in your educated guesses and wild-eyed stabs in the dark by mail care of this fanzine.

This week, the new issue of *TV Weekly* was tucked nestled inside my Sunday newspaper. You can subscribe to the weekly magazine—a useful companion to *TV Guide*—which is delivered with your Sunday paper regardless of where you live. (If you don't get a Sunday paper, I don't know how it works.) While not every issue of *TV Guide* includes daytime listings, and even then, just for afternoons, not mornings, *TV Weekly* includes daytime listings every issue, mornings and afternoons. Additionally, *TV Weekly* includes more channels in its daytime listings but still excludes some notables *TV Guide* contains: *Antenna*, *Cozi*, *Decades*, *El Rey*, and *Retro*. While the primetime listings channels selection is closer to parity between the two publications—in terms of range and what's included—*TV Guide* includes several channels of particular interest to Neffers: *Comet*, *Epix*, and *Heroes*.

The best part is always the programming grids. Let's see what's hiding between the lines:

Daytime: *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* from 6 a.m. to 12 p.m. weekdays on BBC America; *The Munsters* 4-5 p.m. weekdays on Cozi; *One Step Beyond*, *Bradbury Theater*, and *Doctor Who* 3:30-6 p.m. weekdays on Retro. *Heroes* from 6 a.m. to 12 p.m. Mondays on Sundance. *The Twilight Zone* from 6 a.m. to 12 p.m. Mondays on Syfy. And *Star Trek: The Next Generation* from 12-6 p.m. Monday through Thursday on BBC America.

Primetime: *Quantum Leap* from 7-10 p.m. and *Stargate SG-1* at 10 p.m. most weekdays on Comet. A sequence of *Star Trek*, *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, and *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* from 8-11 p.m. Sunday through Friday on Heroes.

As you can see, it's a good time for Trekkers on TV. Between BBC America and Heroes alone, you can watch up to 15 hours of various *Star Trek* series almost every single day. But that weekday afternoon block on Retro is also interesting and well worth checking out: *One Step Beyond*, *Bradbury Theater*, and *Doctor Who*, back to back to back? Be still, my beating heart. Even if you are in a vat of saline on the table.

Until next time, true believers, this is “Cathode Ray,” keeping my feet on the ground and my eyes on the stars. Turn on, tune in, and blast off!

Food of Famous Writers

Cinnamon Rolls: Kacey Ezell Cedar Sanderson

I’m not sure where to start with Kacey Ezell. For one thing, I want to fangirl her, but I don’t want to embarrass her, either. It’s not for her writing – although that’s very good, and you’ll enjoy it – it’s for what she’s done. I knew about her for years before I got to read her work, through John Ringo who wrote about her and immortalized her in a way with his stories. There have been many writers who lived larger lives than in their stories, and Kacey is one of them.

But I’ll stop. Otherwise I’m likely to get a Gibbs-slap next time we’re at the same con. Instead I’ll urge you to pick up one of her stories, either in *Citizens*, or *Black Tide Rising*. See that cheerleader in zombie-hunting mode? That’s from Kacey’s story. If you want it now, pick it up from *Baen*, in the June monthly bundle along with several other great reads. Then you’ll join me in urging her to write more, we want more!

I’m going to break from tradition and offer you a snippet to whet your appetite. This snippet is from the anthology *Black Tide Rising*.



Once upon a time a very good friend had described a cheerleading competition as the seventh circle of hell. It was probably sacrilege for a cheerleading coach to feel that way, but Mia Swanson had to admit that her old flying buddy had a point. After eight hours of squealing, chanting, hyper high-schoolers throwing each other up in the air, tumbling down open hallways and quite literally bouncing off the walls... Mia had a headache. And there was still most of an hour left on their seven hour drive back to Albuquerque from Colorado Springs.

Two hours, Mia promised herself. Two hours and I’ll be home, in a bathtub, waiting for Max and the girls to get home. We’ll have dinner. It will be great.

One of the most irritating things about this particular competition was that it had fallen on a Shooting Weekend. Once every other month or so, Mia and some friends and their families got together and went shooting out on White Mesa, just outside of Albuquerque. It was all BLM land out there, and as long as they took precautions not to hit anyone or any animals, there were no restrictions. It had started before she retired from the Air Force a year ago, and it had rapidly become one of her favorite traditions.

Alas, retirement meant a new career, and a new career meant new commitments. Mia glanced over her shoulder at the teenagers sprawled in various seats in the fifteen-pax van and smiled. Seventh circle of hell aside, this really was her dream job. These were good kids, and Mia was proud to coach them.

“What’s that?” Jessa asked, sitting up and pulling her iPhone earbuds out of her ears, as if that would help her see better. Mia looked up and cursed lightly under her breath. Blue and red flashing lights stained the sky up over the next slight hill, and she’d been doing closer to eighty than seventy mph. She eased off the gas and began to break, just as they crested the hill.

“A roadblock?” Mia could hear the incredulity in her own voice as she continued to slow the van. “Jessa, have you got signal? See if you can pull up the news.” The senior immediately set to work as Mia pulled to a stop, rolling down her window as a uniformed officer approached her window.

“Officer. Good Evening,” Mia started. “What’s going on? I...” She’d been about to disclose that she was armed, even though she hadn’t exactly told the team that, and she was certain that she’d hear from some irate parents. It might even cost her the job, new as she was, but there had been no way Mia was going to be taking a three day competition trip, with a fourteen hour total drive time with twelve teenagers and no weapon. No fucking thank you.

When I asked Kacey for a recipe for this series, she sent me this one, and commented that it was something her character would make, but she hadn’t put it into the story in *Black Tide Rising*. This is what sequels are for!

Big Beautiful Cinnamon Rolls

Ingredients for Cinnamon Rolls:

3 1/2 cups warm water
 3/4 cup sugar
 1/2 cup oil
 6 Tsp quick rise yeast
 1 Tbsp salt
 3 eggs
 10 1/2 cups all purpose flour
 Filling:
 1/2 c butter (melted)
 1 c brown sugar
 1 tbsp ground cinnamon

Ingredients for frosting:

1/2 cup butter
 2 dash salt
 2 tsp vanilla extract
 6 cups powdered sugar
 milk as required

Directions for Rolls:

0. Preheat oven to 400 deg F.
1. mix water, sugar, yeast and oil. Let sit for 15 min.



2. add salt, eggs, and flour. Mix for 10 min. Let sit for 10 min.

3. oil counter and dump out dough. Divide in 1/2

4. roll one of the halves into a rectangle. Spread with 1/2 cup melted butter and sprinkle liberally with cinnamon sugar

5. roll up along the long edge. Tightly, but not too tightly. (I'm not kidding, these are the directions my mom gives me)

6. cut the resulting log into 12 rolls. Place on greased cookie sheet. Let rest for 10 min.

7. repeat with the other half of the dough.

8. Bake 12-15 min at 400deg F

Yield 2 doz massive rolls.



Directions for Frosting:

1. cream ingredients together. Spread on rolls.

Cinnamon rolls are one of my favorite things to make – they have been a traditional Christmas-Eve recipe since my babies were babies – and I was looking forward to making this recipe. I knew just from looking at it that it would make a lot of rolls. Kacey commented that she doesn't bother with the frosting, which I was delighted to hear. Less-sweet is better for the First Reader, and my hips.



Making this in the stand mixer, my original plan, lasted until I had about 8 cups of flour in the dough. Frankly, I was surprised I was able to fit in that much before needing to turn it out into a pile of flour and work the rest in. I don't need a baby Hobart. Doesn't mean I don't want one!

Divide the dough in half. This is not optional. Do it. Roll out half the dough until it is 1/2 inch thick. Try to keep it roughly rectangular. Spread half the filling on the dough, not too thickly. Roll loosely, lifting up and giving the filling some space or you will squish it out.

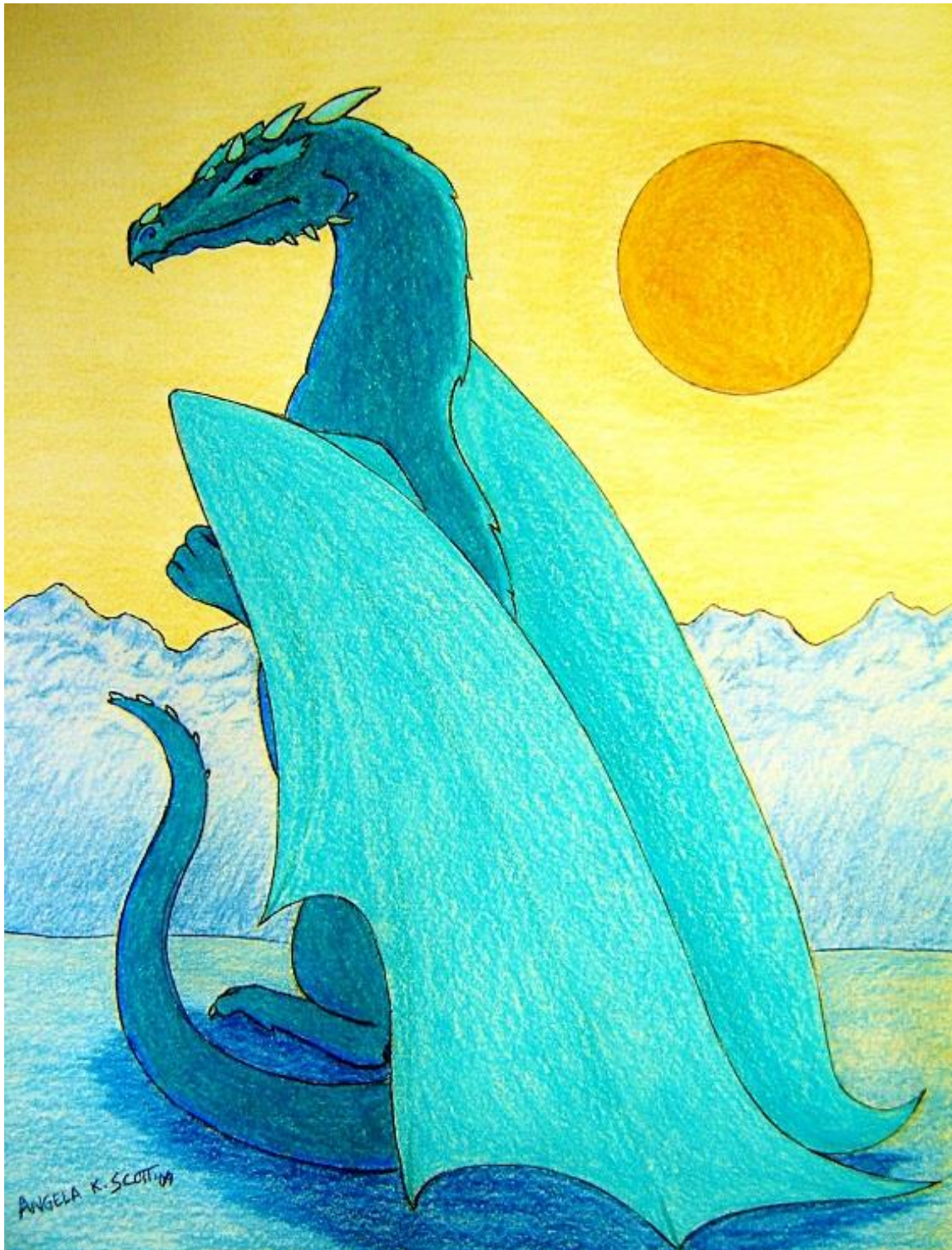


Once you have the 'log' cut it into half, half again, then each quarter into thirds, so you have a dozen rolls.

Place the slices into your pan – a whole sheet pan, if you're making them all at once, and you have an oven big enough.

After allowing the rolls to rise for twenty minutes, put them in the oven at 400 deg F for twenty minutes. Allow to cool, at least a little! The sticky filling is like lava right out of the oven.

These came out beautifully, fluffy, huge, delicious... and not too sweet without the frosting. We split one for dessert and that was plenty! I'll be giving my classmates largesse today. The First Reader's comment is that they were just right. Iced they would be too sweet, he says. He wants me to make them again, but only a half batch. Or maybe a quarter.



Jade Dragon
by Angela K. Scott