

Tightbeam 317

February 2021



Cover by Alan White

Tightbeam 317

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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. PayPal contact is treasurer@n3f.org.

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Editorial

Now with Multimedia

Now, for the first time in living memory, the N3F presents a MultiMedia FanZine. Yes, this issue of TightBeam has an internet video component. It is certainly highly appropriate that fen, beyond producing quality video programming, should add video components to their zines. After all, it was in 1928 that Radio Experimenter Hugo Gernsback, the creator of modern science fiction publishing, and his radio station WRNY made the first television broadcast in the United States.

The video of the month cover's Cedar Sanderson preparing a Blood Orange Ricotta Cake. The video is strictly experimental; the heroic videographer has never before worked to this level of completion. Rather than complaining that the video might have been better, remember the story of the rookie newspaper reporter and the tap-dancing elephant.

The rookie was sent to cover a circus that claimed to feature a tap-dancing elephant. The reporter returned, saying that there was no story because the elephant really was not a very good tap-dancer. The editor explained to the rookie reporter in words of few Anglo-Saxon syllables that the rookie had missed the story. The miracle was that the elephant could tap dance at all, and that was the story. Similarly here, relative to what all past generations of fen might have expected, the miracle here is that our fanzine has gone multimedia.

You can see the video at <https://youtu.be/siITrFIXnTs>

Letters of Comment

Editor:

What a sensational issue of Tightbeam number 316 was! The cover was just great, and when I looked over the issue I found the rest of it to be right in step with the cover—three letters of comment, anima, comics, movies and video covered well, Fanac reporting, Justin Busch still in there, and I hope he continues and manages to get the zines he needs for review (I note he has a few major problems), the interviews by the everywhere-present Tamara Wilhite, my own and Will's reviews, and a nice section of sercon. Not to leave out something to eat presented at the end. And Jose Sanchez' back cover wrapped up the issue very well. I hope this excellent pace keeps up.

As to Bob Jennings' comment on Will's review last issue, I think Will's reviews have a speculative and whimsical attitude which is just what I enjoy about them, and they do interest people in the books, but as a book dealer Jennings wants flat facts, I believe. Take reviews for what they are—I don't need to tell him this, though, as he already shows that attitude in his letter.



Cat Silhouette by Angela K. Scott

... John Thiel

George,

I read with interest Bob Jennings's comments on my review of Arthur Machen's Great God Pan and it does indeed sound different from the story I read. I plan to revisit the novel in question and I hope that you will find the latest review I sent your way more on target. As always, constructive criticism is welcome.

Kindly,

... Will Mayo

Dear George and Jon:

Many thanks for Tightbeam 316, and I am trying my best to keep to what I did last month, and that is not to let the zines I receive pile up too much. I got this 11 days ago, so here comes a loc now.

My loc...Yvonne very much enjoyed her birthday, and her presents were what she wanted to get. They may not be surprises, but they are what was wanted, and that's more important to each of us. Just for the record, I did write 175 letters of comment in 2020. Getting past that number is my challenge for 2021. I have heard nothing more from Amazing Stories, except that I have been dealing directly with Kermit Woodall, the art director, and I expect to hear from him soon. Today was the inauguration of Joe Biden, and the relief is almost palpable, especially online. Many say expectations of Biden are low. I hope they are pleasantly surprised.

I did download the .pdfs of Outworlds 71/Afterworlds, and I am continuing to work on a long loc. I also thought, what the heck, I'd download the .pdf of Warhoon 28 for my own references. I can see where some may not want to review e-zines, but given how expensive paper, printing and postage are, and how the medium isn't necessarily the message intended, I wouldn't much care how the zine is reproduced. More e-zines mean fewer Bankers' Boxes to store them all in. I know some who will not respond to a fanzine if it isn't printed on paper, and that is their loss.

I have not read Dan Brown's The Lost Symbol, and I am not likely to, but if it does take place within the USA, then I must assume that it has something to do with the eye-on-a-pyramid seen on US currency, and perhaps the fact that many of the founders were Masons, and the streets of Washington are laid out to resemble Masonic symbols? Just an assumption.

Many thanks for this new, to me, information on Henry Kuttner. I do have a few of those titles readily available. I don't know how many of his books are in print, or if they are readily available through a download service.

Yours,
Lloyd Penney

Anime

VladLove Review by Jessi Silver

Episodes: 12
Streaming: YouTube (Episode 1)
Source: Original

Story Summary: Mitsugu Bamba is a high school student with a blood donation fetish so extreme that the local clinic recognizes her on sight so they can deny her service. One day she meets another young woman there who's on the hunt for some fresh blood. Her name is Mai Vlad Transylvania, and she's a real, honest-to-goodness blood-sucking vampire. It's love at first sight for Mitsugu, as well as a, well, uniquely reciprocal relationship for both girls once they start living together.



Impressions: This is the type of anime series I may not have paid much mind, except that its pedigree makes it noteworthy (even if its execution hasn't quite achieved much yet). Mamoru Oshii is a huge name in anime, to the point that even most Western fans are likely to be familiar with some of his directorial work. I'd wager that he's most known for directing the two Ghost in the Shell animated film adaptations, as well as being involved with the Patlabor franchise, especially the two film adaptations. You know, Serious Art™. But he's also had a hand in bringing forth some iconic comedy moments to the screen, including most familiarly Urusei Yatsura, as well

as one of my personal favorite weird old OVA series, Gosenzosama Banbanzai!. So an anime series like VladLove is definitely within his wheelhouse as a creator and director, despite whatever current, popular impressions we may have of his body of work.

That said, if this episode is representative of the whole it seems the director's sense of comedic rhythm hasn't evolved much over the years. My feeling on this is really difficult to describe in concrete terms, but as an example I'll mention this – partway through the first episode, Dr. Chimatsuri, a mature and quite voluptuous school nurse, reacts to a gag situation by falling over with her legs up in the air in the classic manner. Sure, it's not entirely out-of-the-ordinary for this stuff to happen in modern anime, but it's also a gag that's been around for decades. It's also not a knock on the series as a whole, but more an observation on its apparent philosophy. I don't have a handle on why Oshii had a desire to tell this particular story at this particular time, but that may be more apparent as the story unfolds.

Never mind, he outlined his entire philosophy here.

Pros: One thing that interests me about this series is its production. Ichigo Production (which provided the funding for the show) is a real-estate subsidiary; it sounds as though the series is partly meant to be an advertisement for some of its real-estate holdings in the Akiba area, and partly a continuation of the “Cool Japan” cultural export initiative that's been a component of Japan's export philosophy for some time. In short, it's a business decision on their part. To be honest, I'm not necessarily sure that this qualifies as a positive, but my understanding was that they kept a hands-off approach with the actual creation of the series, so thanks to our benevolent capitalist overlords in this case, I suppose.



A more interesting way to convey conversations.

While the animation itself is fairly workmanlike, I did enjoy some of the storyboarding. There are several character conversations during which the dialog is conveyed through sort of a manga panel format. This isn't anything new; check out Toilet-Bound Hanako-kun for another recent anime series that makes good use of this technique. But it provides some visual interest when there isn't much other movement, so it's appealing in that sense at least.

The series (at least the first episode) is available on the VladLove official YouTube Channel, so it's accessible to a lot of folks.

Cons: I'm all for more yuri relationships in the world of anime, but this one seems weirdly... transactional in a way that feels a little uncomfortable to me. That's mostly a personal preference, however.

The slapstick humor also doesn't land most of the time for me. For me, that's a type of physical humor that has to be earned through the development of character relationships (to ensure it doesn't read as abusive) or be extremely over-the-top; if it occurs just as a matter of course, it feels either annoying or harmful.

Content Warnings: Blood-donation fetish. Blood consumption. Slapstick violence. Mild fanservice.

Would I Watch More? I might pick it back up again when it premieres in earnest mid-February. At this point it's still more of a curiosity rather than a must-watch in my book, though.

Cute Executive Officer Review by Jessi Silver

Streaming: Hidive

Episodes: 1 (or 13, depending on how you're watching it)

Source: Manga

Story Summary: Najimu Mujina is the 5-year-old CEO of the Mujina company. Though she can be a handful for the adults she works with, she always approaches her job with the innocent eyes of a child.



That's it, that's the whole thing!

Impressions: I really didn't think I was going to enjoy this, and if it had been released in 2 minute segments on a weekly basis I may not have given it a second look. But for whatever reason all of the episodes were released at one time as a half-hour chunk and I think the material fares much better that way.

I tend to think the business environment is fairly bizarre on its own, but those traits are amplified when seen through the eyes of this series' smallest of CEOs. It's a cute, absurd premise

that's executed well.

Pros: The quality of the humor ramps up over the length of the episode. Much of the early moments are spent picking low-hanging fruit, watching as Najimu has to hold a phone conversation, or scribbles all over an important business contract. As things move forward the story gets a bit more over-the-top, ending in a kidnapping plot and action-packed climax which is extremely goofy.

The characters also all seem pretty well-meaning, though there's not a lot of time to go very deep into their individual circumstances.

Cons: One of the characters, Garcia, is depicted with a racially-stereotyped backstory (she hails from a tribe somewhere which was decimated due to war).

The pacing of the episode is odd since it's really 13 very short episodes crammed together. While there's some basic continuity there's not a real through-line to follow, so there are parts that feel like just quick-draw disjointed gags.

Content Warnings: Slapstick violence (including cartoony explosions and half-consumption by an alligator). Racial/cultural stereotyping of a brown-skinned character.

Would I Watch More? Yes, but that's all there is

Comics

Western Comics

Capsule Reviews by Stephanie Souders

Daredevil #26

Writer: Chip Zdarsky

Artists: Marco Checchetto & Mike Hawthorne

To everyone reading this column: please don't sleep on Chip Zdarsky's Daredevil run. It is, in my opinion, one of the best things Marvel's publishing right now — yet as far as I can tell, hardly anyone is talking about it.

Way back In Zdarsky's first issue, Matt accidentally killed a guy. Since then, he's been working through a fascinating existential/religious crisis in which he's questioned the morality of his actions as a masked vigilante and struggled to atone for his mistakes. That's why issue #26 opens with Matt sitting in a prison cell: at the end of the last mini-arc, he ultimately decided to turn himself in and, over the objections of allies, plead guilty to manslaughter. Meanwhile, Elektra has donned the Daredevil costume and is doing her best to live up to Matt's example — despite her own personal preferences.

It's a dicey thing to call out your protagonist's privileged position vis-a-vis law enforcement. It's also a dicey thing to replace the hero readers have come to love with someone else. But in his most recent contribution to Daredevil's canon, Zdarsky manages to do both without pissing off the reader. His secret? He allows everything to unfold organically within the context of the story he's telling. It's logical, for example, for a fellow inmate to complain that Matt's mask provides him with protection other convicts don't enjoy. And Elektra's role here has been properly

built up — and is properly humble. She doesn't claim to be the all-new, all-different, always-superior Daredevil. Instead, the narration reminds us that, temperamentally, Elektra is not quite prepared for the job she's taken on.

Oh, and finally: did I mention that Zdarksy, while doing all of the above, also seamlessly ties his ongoing story into the King in Black event? Because yes: he does that too. I will have more to say about the King in Black elements of this comic when said event finally draws to a close. For the time being, however, just know that the “interruption” is handled with praise-worthy competence and should not be missed.

Avengers #41

Writer: Jason Aaron
Artist: Javier Garron

The Phoenix Force is a world-destroying entity so powerful and so dangerous that, back in the 80's, Jean Gray had to sacrifice her very life to expunge it and save the world. Therefore, it makes perfect sense to reduce it to a magical MacGuffin in a WWE style tournament.

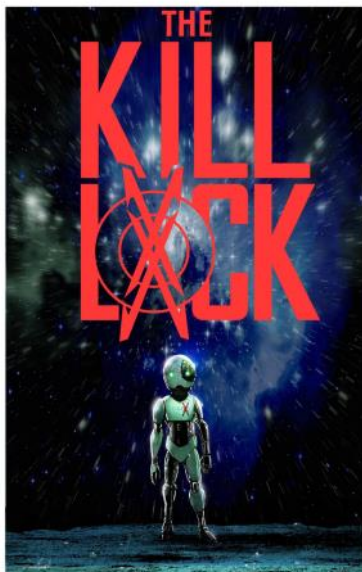
Hopefully, you detected the sarcasm in that last sentence. *Avengers #41* is, in fact, an absolute mess of a comic. The Phoenix Tournament is a dumb idea at its base; worse, it's executed in a manner that's deeply boring and scattershot. The internet chatter has focused on one page in particular on which T'Challa gets into a bizarre CNN-style debate with an adversary, but honestly, nothing in this issue is good. No insights into character are provided, and there appear to be no stakes. Aaron, in short, fails to persuade the reader to care about the outcome of this supposedly epic contest, rendering this book a hard miss.

DC — A Quick Note on the Lack of DC Reviews This Month:

I have been keeping up with *Future State*. However, I would like to hold my full commentary until the rest of the books have been released and I can definitively share my personal high- and lowlights. This month, however, I will offer this preliminary impression: the event is not a cluster. Some of the books are worth reading, particularly in the Bat line. Go check them out if you're so inclined (and can absorb the pain of the higher price point).

The Kill Lock

Writer/Artist: Livio Ramondelli
(IDW; Science Fiction)



The setting of this miniseries is an interstellar civilization in which capital crimes are punished in a novel way: four convicts are linked via a “kill lock” that terminates the other three if one should die. This, says one character, is designed to rehabilitate criminals by forcing them to care about someone other than themselves. And in fact, as the story proceeds, something like this does happen for two of Ramondelli's four principals, for it turns out the starring quartet includes an innocent: an “unfinished” robot with the mind of a small, slow child.

All of Ramondelli's leads are robots with distinctly non-human features, which adds an extra level of challenge when it comes to characterization and acting in the art. Nonetheless, Ramondelli leaps over this hurdle with no problems at all. Indeed, the way he gracefully - and economically - establishes his characters' unique personalities and backstories through both the art and the writing is genuinely impressive. I fell in love with the alcoholic laborer bot, was properly creeped out by the sociopathic engineer bot, and definitely wanted to know more about the crusader.

The only downside? This series ends far too soon — with certain promises of redemption left unfulfilled. I only hope Ramondelli returns to this concept for a much-needed sequel.

Huck
 Writer: Mark Millar
 Artist: Rafael Albuquerque
 (Image; Superhero)

The title character of this miniseries (which, for me, is a late discovery) is a simple gas station attendant who was born with incredible strength and the uncanny ability to find anything (or anyone) that's missing — superpowers he uses to perform at least one kind deed each day for the people in his hometown. Huck lives in obscurity, protected by neighbors who adore him and appreciate his holy foolishness — until a newcomer blows Huck's cover and consequently makes the man's life infinitely more complicated.

After reading the trade for this series, I definitely wanted more. Huck is a refreshingly innocent character whose acts of charity are performed for no other reason than advancing the good. It's rare to encounter something like that in a modern comic — and contrary to popular belief, it doesn't lead to uninteresting storytelling. Put this in your "to read" list if you're looking for something that celebrates old-fashioned purity and selflessness

Reader Requests Yes, I take requests! If there's a particular review you'd like to see, please contact me at hobsonphile@gmail.com and tell me the title, creators, and - most importantly - point of sale. Assuming the comic in question is available for immediate purchase, I will respond in the following issue!

Jinny Hex Special #1
 Writer: Magdalene Visaggio
 Artist: Gleb Melnikov
 (DC; Weird West)



Around the turn of the new year, this one-shot was generating some surprisingly positive buzz on YouTube; thus, when our fearless editor requested that I take a look, I was happy to oblige. My verdict? Notwithstanding the online excitement, I don't think this book is good enough to cure cancer — but it is a solidly enjoyable read. Jinny comes off as a likeable protagonist who reacts to events with genuine human emotion, and the design of the villain here is legitimately compelling (and disturbing!). True: given her experience in the superhero world, Jinny probably should've reacted to the arrival of her supposed long-lost "father" with a bit more skepticism. Still, her resulting conflict with Three-Eyed Jack fits pretty well with the weird west aesthetic readers associate with the Hex family name. I don't love it — but I don't regret reading it either.

Fanzines

Fanfaronade 7
 Reviews by Justin E. A. Busch

In a letter to *Don-O-Saur* (#58, May, 1990), Brett Cox described a friend's visit for dinner. "While the food was under way," Cox recalled, he started leafing through a magazine he had pulled out of the stack by his chair. It was DON-o-SAUR 55. After glancing at it for a few minutes, he looked up and asked, "What's this?"

"A science fiction fanzine," I said.

"It doesn't seem to have much about science fiction in it."

“They seldom do,” I said.

What was true then had been true for many years, and remains so today; many SF fanzines are considered as such simply because they are created or edited by people who identify themselves (or are identified by others), however vaguely, as science fiction fans. The vast majority of fanzines are perzines, and their success is measured as much by how strongly the reader cares about the person presenting the material as by the material itself.

There are exceptions, but some of those, I think, run afoul of the expectation that fanzines are, or should be, more personal than general, especially if the topics at hand are religious in nature. A fanzine entitled *Khwort Urly*, edited by one Christianne Wage, consisting of her thoughtful musings on religion and responses to letters about last issue’s musings, would be well-received. Yet it seems to be hard for Catherine Groves’s *Christian*New Age Quarterly* (four issues for USD 12.50, to PO Box 276, Clifton, New Jersey, 07015-0276) to get much attention, even from fan writers interested in religious topics. This is unfortunate; the essays and letters in the zine are generally thoughtful and clearly written, and one need not agree with them at all to find them stimulating.

The current issue (Vol. 24, #4+, Winter, 2020), unlike most issues, does not contain anything specifically sfnal in orientation; there seems to have been a dearth of submissions. Leading in to several reprints from earlier issues of the zine there is a lengthy editorial piece by Groves, a key element of which is suggesting a link between “isolation and the void” and genuine interpersonal communication and understanding; “perhaps it’s only when the chatter around us is stilled that we can explore these deeper questions.” The reprints are briefer; the most extensive, Robert M. Price’s “Black Hole Sun,” uses black holes as an extended metaphor which ends up encompassing Buddhist ideas, the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas, and the words of Paul Tillich.

C*NAQ, it turns out on closer consideration, is very much a perzine— but one comprised of multiple individual voices taking up aspects of topics orbiting a central gravitational point.

Religion, of a sort, plays a role in the most recent issue of *Pablo Lennis*, John Thiel’s long-running zine, one whose regularity and reliability I deeply appreciate; so long as it exists I can count on at least one item to review in each column (this is issue 398, January 2021, “made available to you for \$2 a copy or for an exchange of publications or for written or artistic material put to use in its pages including letters comment.” Contact the editor at 30 N. 19th Street, Lafayette, Indiana, 47904).

The color cover is “The Rapture,” probably the best known painting by the contemporary Canadian artist Edmund Prior. It illustrates, so to speak, the rather cryptic editorial, which declares that “the Rapture has come,” and predicts “better times for one and all,” before asserting that “this year will bring about the Rapture.” Make of it what you will.

Two longish stories dominate the issue. Jeffrey Redmond’s “New Prohibitions,” an unsubtle satire on feminism, has the feel of something written quite some time ago. “Gla-Rea Sten-um,” from the town of “Ha-Vad,” “in the coastal province of Chu-Sets,” founds her own all-female school, “Rad-Klef,” to lessen male influence. It works, but she ends badly; “she had no offspring of her own, and perhaps she was regretting this.” After all, “She’d had no one to truly care about her ever, and she had caused many others to end up the same way.” Presumably the Rapture has not yet come to Harvard/Radcliffe.

Some sort of Rapture occurs in Lawrence Dagstein’s “Legacy Holder,” but its nature and provenance remain ambiguous. This is a genuinely interesting piece. I think Dagstein should work with a professional editor to tighten and polish it; it is complex and thoughtful enough to deserve the extra work. It is about what appears to be death but may not be, and the range of emotions and attitudes stimulated by, and embedded in, a new approach to aging and dying.. The rest of the issue is the usual mix of fiction, poetry, essays, and letters.



Dark Unicorn by Angela K. Scott

Captain Flashback 24 (November 2020) describes itself as “A fanzine composed for the 413th distribution of the Turbo-Charged Party-Animal Amateur Press Association; it is edited by Andy Hooper and Carrie Root, and written mostly by Hooper (fanmailaph@aol.com; Carrie Root at carrieroot49@yahoo.com). Its remit includes “ old fanzines, monster movie hosts, old-time radio stars and other fascinating phenomena of

the 20th Century.” Of special interest to N3F members will be Hooper’s critical essay on Jon D. Swartz’s column on The Shadow in the October TNFF (this is why George Phillies forwarded me a link to Hooper’s zine). Hooper, dissatisfied with the brevity of Swartz’s description, launches into a lengthy discourse on the various incarnations of The Shadow; this expands to include an almost equally lengthy discussion of the early career of Orson Welles. Hooper thinks that Welles’s association with the character (1937-1938) was key to the program’s having “such a prime place in the history of mass media in America.” The essay, packed with fascinating details, is not always easy to follow (in part because Hooper prints two related but separate elements of his discussion as parallel columns, meaning that one has to scroll down, up, and down again to follow the juxtapositions); its focus (Welles or The Shadow) wavers as it proceeds. Oddly enough, one of Hooper’s criticisms of Swartz— that Swartz fails to “give any clue as to why the radio show starring the character was so popular and persisted so long”— is not addressed here; Hooper does not answer the question either.

Briefer articles, one on Bob Wilkins, a California-based horror film host, and another on (and by) Cleve Cartmill, a short essay of whose is reprinted, offer some contrast to the Shadow piece. *Captain Flashback* being an apazine, there is also an extended section of comments on the contributions of other members; as with all of these, the discussion will generally not be wholly clear to those who have not seen the previous mailing. The lettercol (in this case a single letter), prompts an editorial reply which is an intriguing historical essay in itself.

As I mentioned, George Phillies, not Hooper, sent me the link to this; I don’t know whether Hooper sends it out independently. It’s worth asking, though; if you are interested in any of its areas of discussion you will find much to enjoy here.

Editors desiring reviews: If you have a print zine, send it to me at 308 Prince St., #422, St. Paul, Minn. 55101; if you have an e-zine, send the link (or a PDF) to me at jeab@musician.org.

Films

Well ... If Hollywood Can't Get Itself Together...

Jim McCoy

It has recently come to my attention that Hollywood execs think that the whole universe is stuck on repeat. We have, after all, seen reboots of just about everything that doesn't still have a reboot coming. Think about it. People keep talking about how it's a great time to be a nerd because of all the movies coming out and how mainstream gaming has gotten (I'm going to leave gaming for another post, mainly because I've been spending so much time playing World of Warcraft that I haven't played anything else in approximately forever.) but what's really coming out? Think about it:

Star Wars: listen, I'm a fan. I wear the gear. I watch the movies. Before I got so wrapped up in MMOs I played the video games. I've even played the old RPG by West End Games. The fact remains that these movies debuted forty years ago and as much as I loved The Force Awakens it was basically a remake. Star Wars basically started the nerd era with its re-releases, special additions and prequels. There were geek movies before all of that to be sure, but it was the wild success of Star Wars and its later iterations that led to the great times we're enjoying now.

Teenage Mutant Turtles: I am, admittedly a bit of a weird Turtles fan. They came in just as I got too old to collect the toy line, but I've read the comics and seen the movies, and I played and collected the old Palladium RPGs back in the day. I love these guys too, but how did they come out of nowhere again? The first of the new movies was kind of meh, and I don't expect the next one to be any better.

The Telegraph has posted a list of reboots coming soon. The list continues and it's quite frankly getting annoying. Very rarely you can get a reboot that was better than the original (Battlestar Galactica anyone?) but it's definitely not something you can count on. I have however, been informed by a good friend and retired Marine noncom that you should never bring up a problem without a solution. Since I believe in taking advice from intelligent people, and since I've been told that Gunny is never wrong, I have a solution. Are you ready for it? It's revolutionary. It's

going to turn the whole world on its head. Here it goes: HEY HOLLYWOOD: MAKE SOME NEW STUFF!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Since that was a relatively imprecise suggestion, I will endeavor to make a few examples of books that I have read that would make great movies. Granted, the whole book to movie thing has been done repeatedly but that's because it works, so without further ado, let me get to my list:



Monster Hunter International by Larry Correia: Note to every producer who has ever held a pen or typed a word: If you can't take a story that starts with a big ass accountant throwing his werewolf boss out of a thirteenth story window and continues with battles against vampires, and an ancient curse and make a blockbuster out of it you need to stop trying. Seriously. At that point you're probably so inept that you're not sure whether you should retire to bake mittens or knit cookies but it doesn't matter. Just get out of the way and let someone with some talent in. There is a whole series here. I could see this being a TV series a la Game of Thrones, but I'll be honest: I want to see it on the big screen. It'll look cooler when things blow up that way. Also, I want to see who they get to play Julie Shackleford. The only thing better than a hot blonde is a deadly hot blonde. Someone make this happen.

Pixie Noir by Cedar Sanderson: Ok, I'll be honest. Part of the reason I want to see this made it so that I can see a movie with a female protagonist named Bella that doesn't suck. Of course court intrigue, massive monsters and big explosions are why the rest of me wants to see it. Bella gets sucked into a world that she had no reason to suspect existed and things get crazy. This could be massively successful because it would be so much fun. I'd pay to see it and I'm sure a lot of others would too.

Impaler by Kate Paulk: Yes, it's Count Dracula but not as we've ever seen him. This is a story that involves two things no other Dracula story I've ever read or seen does: Vlad's younger days and his family. The real Vlad Dracula was a complicated man and this story reflects it. Also, if there is anything that has been proven by The Hobbit and Lord of the Rings it's that massive medieval combat appeals to modern audiences and there is plenty of it here.

Draw One In the Dark by Sarah Hoyt: Shapeshifting people. Dragons. Diners. Sexual tension. Death. Romance. What else do you want out of a movie? This one is heavy on the paranormal but so is a lot of other stuff and it sells tickets. They're remaking The Craft and Sarah blows that away. Of course, there are only two sequels to this novel published so far but they'd both make great follow ons after this one makes millions and millions.

Dipped, Stripped and Dead by Elise Hyatt: Ok, so this is a mystery and I'm mentioning it on a SF/F blog. Good thing I'm not a purist. Not only is this a great mystery but it has one of the best casts of characters I've ever read. Dyce is the main character and she's a little off but her son Enoch aka "E" is the coolest little kid ever.

Artifice by Lianne Miller: Wow. If you've ever wondered what a modern hospital would do if presented with a vampire read this book. If you want to sell millions of tickets, turn it into a movie. Eliza is not only a great character but her character arc is amazing and the twist and turns in this one will keep an audience enthralled.

Castaway Planet by Ryk Spoor: Robinson Crusoe IIIINNNNN SPAAAAACE! 'Nuff said. Honestly, I see this as more of an animated family film but it's one I'd love a chance to take my daughters to see. Disney could rock this thing and I'd love every minute of it.

I'm tempted to add Amy Lynn by Jack July, but there is one scene in particular that would have to be in the film and I don't know if Hollywood has the balls to do it. I mean, I'd love to see it, but umm... yeah. Then again, maybe they would if half of what I've heard about the Game of Thrones TV series is true. (Sorry, I don't have HBO). But regardless, what's better than southern justice and war stories? Both in a single package!

That's just a few but it's my two cents. If any of you have suggestions, I'm open to them. The point here is as much about the fact that there is plenty out there to use and I'd like to see it. I seriously heard a rumor that there may be a Greatest American Hero remake coming and that wasn't even all that good the first time. It's not that hard. Just find an awesome book, fork over a bunch of cash to the author and make a movie out of it. We really don't need remakes and reboots of movies from thirty years ago.

Interviews

Interview of Guy Lillian by George Phillis

George: Let us start with the traditional question, namely 'Please tell us something about yourself'. Age, occupation, other hobbies, things other than sfnal topics.

Guy: Okay. I'm the son of one Guy Lillian (and his lady Nancy) and the grandson of another (and his wife Anne), urban (Birmingham) and rural (Arkansas) Southerners. However, I was born in the desert town of Mojave, California. The date was July 20, Mojave is short miles from Edwards Air Force Base, familiar nowadays from early shuttle landings, so science fiction must have been in the air.

Dad was emblematic of his generation, a professional son of a working class father, an engineer with Union Carbide. So we lived all over the USA -- Bumminham, Delaware, Buffalo NY, southern California, northern California. Attracted by the Free Speech Movement, I chose UC-Berkeley for college, where I took a creative writing seminar with Lillian Hellman. Her recommendation and a segment of a ridiculous novel about a cyclops got me into the University of North Carolina's writing program. There I wrote adolescent drivel while studying and talking with Fred Chappell, a one-time SF fan, now a famous poet and literary author. I received my Masters in Fine Arts there, met my first wife.

Before and after Greensboro I lived in New Orleans, a liberating experience to be sure. I'm surprised I survived. My friends there are friends of a lifetime. I had joined SF fandom through the San Francisco-based Little Men (and met Quinn Yarbro, Poul and Karen Anderson, Harlan, the works), but the New Orleans SF Association was young, like me. They got me into fanzines. First con, St. Louiscon, 1969, but I think you want me to wait for your questions on fandom. Got LOTS to tell on that subject.

Finally decided to live out an adolescent dream and become a lawyer when I was 34. It cost me that first marriage to move to Louisiana from North Carolina, again, but I ended up graduating from Loyola University of the South law school in 1988. I was a public defender in various parishes (counties) around Louisiana for about 25 years.

Now married to Rose-Marie, daughter of SF writer Joe Green, and living in Florida. Occasionally I teach basic English at a nearby state college, and I'm working on a memoir of my time as a public defender. Rosy and I were DUFF delegates to Perth in 2003, and plan a jaunt to the UK and Paris next year, virus permitting.

I have a brother and two yorkie terriers, love movies (crime noir more than SF), books, cons, and occasionally try to write fiction. And fanzines. I'm bug nuts about fanzines. Even now planning my zine celebrating 50 years in the Southern Fandom Press Alliance.

George: What are your fannish interests?

Guy: I started out as a comics fan. I published 120+ letters in comics lettercols from age 13 through college -- it led to my first job, at DC Comics, friendship with Julius Schwartz, an interview with Alfred Bester and a meeting with Bradbury.

My main fannish interest has been, for 50 years, membership in amateur press associations. I've been doing fanzines for the Southern Fandom Press Alliance for just that -- half a century. I was Official Editor four times and produced its utterly amazing 100th mailing ... along with all members, past and present. It topped out at 1,750 pages, largest apa mailing ... ever.

My generally distributed publication, Challenger, received 12 Hugo nominations in a row -- a record for never winning. I still do that: publish a genzine and not-win Hugos..My other zines are Spartacus, a political pub for the most part, and The Zine Dump, reviewing every fanzine in English that I can find. Catch them on eFanzines.com.

I love the community aspects of fandom, and for decades was a faithful attendee of the DeepSouthCon in, surprise surprise, the South. I was the President of the Southern Fandom Confederation for three years in the late '80s, and won the Rebel Award in 1984 for fannish activity in the region. We play Hearts.

Rose-Marie and I were elected DUFF delegates in 2003 and spent three glorious weeks in Australia on fandom's dime. We returned in 2010. Next trip, virus permitting, to the U.K. and Paris in September 2021. I wanna see Stonehenge and the Mona Lisa. Rosy wants to see Versailles.

I love solid, intelligent SF which doesn't preach. Favorite novel of the past decade: Cixin Liu's THE THREE-BODY PROBLEM. I danced when it won the Hugo.

George: Do you have a vast collection of fanzines, or do you review them in The Zine Dump and then send them on? Over the decades, what changes in fanzines seem most worth commenting upon?

Guy: I give all of the fanzines I receive to various conventions for their freebie tables. I keep a very rare few.

The major change I've seen is the aging of fan editors and the growing emphasis on nostalgia -- very little contemporary commentary. Of course, the nostalgic stuff is occasionally splendid, and the writers are excellent. Used to be that new fans writing about media or gaming -- anything modern -- were seriously condemned, but hopefully that meanness has passed.

The growth of blogs in the fanzine field is undoubtedly the most significant development of the last decade or two. I don't consider blogs fanzines in the classic sense, but I'm what they call a "paper slut." Even posting my zines online strikes me as somehow disloyal to the hobby!

George: You mentioned your own current and past zines. What would you like to say about them?

Guy: I do four zines on a regular or sort-of regular basis. SPIRITUS MUNDI is my apazine for SFPA, bimonthly for fifty years. I'm working on both my 299th and 300th issues now. CHALLENGER is a genzine, published once a year or so, available on eFanzines.com. I do theme issues to which all of good will are invited. Twelve consecutive Hugo nominations ... not bad. Wish I'd win one. SPARTACUS is a zine of opinion, monthly of late but usually bimonthly. It sings with loathing for Trump, but I try to talk about fannish issues, too. And you know THE ZINE DUMP ...

Love the hobby.

George: Your four zines. How large are they? Have their lengths drifted with time, or have they always been more or less their current size? Are they now all-electronic, or do you use spirit master? I am indeed familiar with The Zine Dump. How complete do you think it is?

Guy: How large are your zines? 8 1/2 x 11. HAHAHAAAAAAAAHA Challenger often tops 100 pages, Spiritus Mundi is about 18-20, Spartacus rarely exceeds 8 pp, TZD about 12, depending.

George: Have their lengths drifted with time, or have they always been more or less their current size?

Guy: Spiritus Mundi, the SFPazine, averaged 50 pages or so back in the day. Not now, though. No changes in the others.

George: Are they now all-electronic, or do you use spirit master?

Guy: I print a paper copy of all for my files, but only Spiritus is paper only. The rest are electronic and on eFanzines. I run paper copies of Spartacus through SFPA.

George: I am indeed familiar with The Zine Dump. How complete do you think it is?

Guy: Every fanzine in English that I see gets reviewed.

George: Over the decades, fanzines must have been involved in all manner of fannish disputes. Do any in particular come to mind as being especially noteworthy?

I missed or avoided most fannish disputes in my zine "career," except for one: the almost hysterical criticism of new fans and new fanziners by older publishers. There seemed to be a severe resentment towards neos who wrote about their interests instead of old guard types who only wrote about nostalgia. I see fanzines as a completely free medium of expression, and such bullying as contrary to good manners, good sense, and the future of the hobby. And I said so.

George: Sometimes it is better to focus on positive rather than negative aspects of the hobby. Over the time you have been reading and commenting on fanzines, what improvements have you seen?

Guy: Repro, certainly. I'm not the kind of purist who insists on getting mimeo ink under his fingernails. The net has its drawbacks but it's also broadened the scope of fanac and specifically, fan writing, which is a great thing.

George: What about the caliber of the writing? Better or worse? Would you care to recall any particularly great fannish writers or artists?

Guy: Since most physical fanzines nowadays are nostalgic, and written by experienced fan writers, the quality of writing is high. Also, if the subject is researched, as in many of Andy Hooper's zines, then the spontaneous sloppiness fans often spread is lost -- not a bad thing. Hooper, Joe Major, Chris Garcia, Jerry Kaufman ... fine fan writers who put care and research and critical thought into their work. Fan artists -- Alan White, Ditmar, Kurt Erichsen, my great buddy Charlie Williams, Alan Hutchinson before he gafiated -- the list is endless. Fandom throngs with talent.

George: What about fan fiction writing, where I include not only people writing in someone else's universe (e.g. Star Trek fiction) but orthodox original fiction published in fanzines? Has that changed?

Guy: I never -- or seldom -- review fan fiction writing based on established characters, as it's often dreadful and evokes memories of "slash" fiction, which I find nauseating. What can I say? I'm an old fart with a weak stomach. Actually, I've engaged in some fanfic myself, as I started a Star Trek pastiche many years ago about Saavik, the under- and often misused ingenue Star Fleet rookie in *The Wrath of Khan*. I was three chapters in and enjoying myself immensely when Carolyn Clowes' excellent novel about Saavik, *The Pandora Principle*, came out, and I let my project go. I met Carolyn later -- great person! -- and would love to see her and her work again. One chapter of my nonsense remains. (If anyone cares, I avoided *Vulcan's Heart* like COVID.)

As for original fiction, I've done that, too -- a couple of minor pieces in my genzine, *CHALLENGER*. Trouble is, as I like to say, I have no talent and have a Masters of Fine Arts to prove it. Again, I prefer not to review other fans' amateur work.

George: You have been very active in aspects of fandom. For what do you want to be remembered as your great or important fannish accomplishments?

Guy: What would I like to be remembered for? My love of Southern fandom, my loyalty to the Southern Fandom Press Alliance (50 years without missing a mailing!), my genzine, my Worldcon program books, my DUFF delegation with Rose-Marie, my openness to new fans and their efforts -- which means opposition to the now-rare ugly arrogance of those who thought they owned the fanzining hobby and had the right to disparage anyone trying something new in the hobby.

An Interview with John David Martin By Tamara Wilhite

John David Martin is the author of science fiction novel "Charis Colony: The Landing". It is his first science fiction novel, though he wrote other books such as "The Space Boys and The Winter of 78". And I had the opportunity to interview him.

Tamara Wilhite: Can you tell me about your new novel, "Charis Colony: The Landing"?

John David Martin: The novel takes up a number of themes that have been occupying my mind in the last couple of years. One is this: Suppose the answer to the Fermi Paradox is that there are no technological civilizations within



1,000 light years of Earth? Suppose the smartest life-form inhabiting the nearest Earth-like planet is about as smart as one of the great cats? Or a racoon. Well, that planet is Charis, and in the novel it's been colonized by humans for a little over 277 local years.

The next theme is the trouble resurgence of eugenics as a medical, ethical practice.

The third major theme is how countries like China - and now the Netherlands and Canada- are institutionalizing a downright predatory corruption of medicine: Mandatory organ donation. The sort of thing Larry Niven was already warning about over fifty years ago in A Gift from Earth and the Gil the Arm stories.

Finally, it's all wrapped up in a struggle between a soft totalitarianism that gives citizens material comfort and security and a classically liberal free society where life is less certain and more risk-fraught. And it's a love story between Raj and Shirin, the protagonists, and it also deals with the future of religion.

Tamara Wilhite: I know you periodically write scientific articles. Have you written any other science fiction?

John David Martin: Not yet.

Tamara Wilhite. I saw your article on "The Demise of the Drake Equation". Can you explain the implications of that to the audience?

John David Martin: Yes. First here's the equation for those who don't have it fresh in their heads:

$$N = R^* \times fp \times ne \times fl \times fi \times fc \times L$$

N= the number of extra-terrestrial civilizations with which we could communicate

R* = the average rate of star formation

fp= the fraction of stars with planets

ne= the fraction of planets capable of supporting life

fl = the fraction of planets that actually develop life

fi= the fraction of planets that develop intelligent life capable of developing civilization

fc= the fraction of civilizations that develop the ability to communicate across interstellar distances (i.e., send and receive radio or laser signals that we could detect)

L= the length of time over which such civilizations transmit signals that we could detect

Assumptions about the values of these terms, in particular ne and the terms following it have guided all more or less serious thinking about the possibility of extra-terrestrial life and civilisations ever since Drake committed the equation to paper.

Only, those assumptions about the terms have not kept up with astronomical discoveries. We now know that there are thousands of planets orbiting other stars, but...those planets tend to be either hot Jupiters or massive rocks with 5 times Earth's mass, most of which have tight, fast orbits around their parent stars, meaning a) they are almost certainly tidally locked- very bad for habitability- and b) the solar winds from the parent stars have blasted the atmospheres of the rocky planets out into space and baked their surfaces in hard radiation for millions of years.

If you look at the text below the headlines in all those articles pronouncing "Earth's twin discovered", what you find is that in every case where we're not looking at a hot gas giant, we're looking at a sterile, likely tidally-locked chunk of rock with essentially zero chance of supporting life. Why, only 30 of the 3,700 (give or take) exoplanets yet discovered are even in the water habitable zone. That's a miniscule number in galaxy with 100 to 400 billion stars.

Now, while it's true that these observations could just be artefacts of our observational capabilities right now, it's also possible that they are representative. If they are, this has grave implications for SETI (it's a waste of time and money) and for SF writers who want to be even remotely realistic about what's waiting for us out there.

Tamara Wilhite: Your sci-fi novel "Charis Colony" is quite a departure from your Christian fiction and your work translating other books to and from German. How would you describe what you do for a living?

John David Martin:

Most of the time, I translate texts from international clients. I've done lots of legal contracts, but also texts like personal letters, bills, scholarship applications, even Christmas cards, all from German, Dutch or Swedish into English. And I've done some interpreting as well. In essence, I am enabling people who otherwise could not communicate at a professional level to communicate at that level.

Tamara Wilhite: I believe you'd translated a few comics and short stories like those in "Detective Comics". Can you talk about the differences between American and European science fiction? Are there differences in the themes they're writing about, the tropes authors use or the most popular monsters in their stories?

John David Martin:

Well, first I have to correct the impression you have. I have not translated any comics or short stories yet. I did translate passages of medieval German and Old Norse sagas for academic work, but literary translation ...not something I've done on a significant scale yet. There are three Christian inspirational books out there, inspirational biographies, that I have translated, but no comics.

As for the differences between American and European SF, there does not to me seem to be much in the choice of subject matter. Maybe AI-themes and time travel/alternate reality stories have a slight edge over space opera here, but I am not sure. Eco-apocalypses did dominate the SF bestseller list last year, but that could just be a politically informed expression of the global wave of apocalyptic fiction that we've seen in the past ..what...seven years or so? There does seem to be more fear of the future in Euro-SF than in American, for sure.

Tamara Wilhite: You've written under a pseudonym about the death of space opera. You mention that most of the successful semi-recent space operas like "Guardians of the Galaxy" are based on content created in the 1970s. Why do you think there really isn't any truly new, successful space operas?

John David Martin:

First, I have to clarify that I was talking in that article- back in 2014- about scripted visual entertainment, i.e. movies and TV. That being the case, I am going to stand by the assertion in 2020. The biggest hit on Disney+ right now is what? Another iteration of a 44 year-old space opera franchise, namely The Mandalorian. It's good entertainment. I like it in spite of all the nonsensical elements that show up like the plot point we have to travel at "sublight" in Episode 10. Then there are the multiple new Star Trek shows, which again, all derive from a series that is 54 years old.

But other space operas on streaming services? Only The Expanse has had what an honest observer could call significant success. It's certainly got all the key elements: adventure, political intrigue, romance and spaceships. What it is trying to do and mostly succeeding at is to be the hardest hard-SF show to ever be produced. In that respect it succeeds quite well. But it seems to be the only game in town, the only successful, new series, film or TV that fits the space opera description.

Dark Matter was cancelled after three seasons and has not, to my knowledge, developed any kind of fan following. Babylon Five has a fan following, but J.M. Straczynski has repeatedly confirmed that the franchise is dead. There will be no Babylon Five: The Reboot.

Why is this the case? Economics is likely part of it. Studios want to back proven winners. It takes dedicated fans - like the ones who saved The Expanse from cancellation - to change their minds. Dedicated fans are paying customers. And it could be that these established properties just suck up all the audience for space opera and now people have gotten bored with it. The western died out, too...for a while.

Tamara Wilhite: What are you currently working on?

John David Martin: A sequel to *Charis Colony: The Landing* called *Charis Colony: The Southern Shore*. That's the title for now, anyway. Also, an Arthurian tale based loosely on the medieval romance *Iwein, the Knight with the Lion*. And getting paid work. I am not quitting my day job.

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

John David Martin:

No. I am pleased and thankful that you took the time to do this interview.

Tamara Wilhite: Thank you for speaking with me.

Manga

Spirit Circle

Review by Jessi Silver

Fuuta Okeya can see ghosts. Besides that—and the bandage he always keeps on his cheek—he's a perfectly normal 14-year old boy enamoured with the new transfer student. Unfortunately, Kouko Ishigami wants little to do with him. A strange ghost that follows her, however, seems to feel quite differently. But, when Kouko sees the strange birthmark hidden beneath the bandage on Fuuta's cheek, she has a change of heart...for the worse. Not only does she denounce him as her enemy, but she claims that the birthmark is a curse she engraved upon his face during one of their many past lives. – ANN

Artist/Author: Satoshi Mizukami

Volumes: 6

Published By: Seven Seas and also available digitally via Crunchyroll Manga

It's uncommon, but there are times where I'll be so emotionally moved after consuming a piece of media that I become immediately obsessed with seeking out other work by the same storyteller. While my tastes in manga and anime are somewhat broad, there are occasionally certain thematic elements in particular stories that cut deeply to the heart of how I approach the world and its many experiences. It's in those vulnerable, reflective moments that I feel as though I've made a personal connection with an author who's somehow on a similar wavelength to myself.

Last year saw the release of a lot of excellent anime series, one of which was Summer 2018's *Planet With*. The series told the story of an amnesiac teenage boy, his oddball adoptive family, and multiple alien factions arguing over whether to allow humans to evolve or to forcibly contain their violent nature within a powerful Matrix-like illusion. The show was not only razor-sharp with its pacing, cramming 6 months' worth of plot and character development into 3 months' worth of episodes without batting an eye, but it stands as one of the few anime series I've watched that I'd classify as being "emotionally intelligent," spending much of its thematic energy exploring the power of forgiveness and acceptance as an option instead of the endless cultivation of hatred and obsession with vengeance. The series was immensely affecting to me; after allowing it to settle for a few days, I found myself consumed with the desire to read more work by Satoshi Mizukami, the author responsible for the anime's story.

While one of Mizukami's previous works, *Lucifer and the Biscuit Hammer*, is somewhat more cult-famous in the West (likely due to both its quirky title and an earlier digital release), I found myself more drawn to the premise of *Spirit Circle* (its shorter length also helped). The series follows a teenage boy named Fuuta, who's perfectly average but for the strange scar on his cheek and his ability to see ghosts and spirits. He finds himself smitten with Kouko, the new transfer student, but his overtures are quickly rebuffed when Kouko threatens to kill him. Though he doesn't immediately realize it, Fuuta and Kouko have a long-running and upsetting history with one-another; they've met in several past lives and those meetings often end violently or tragically. Rather than kill him outright, Kouko wants Fuuta to experience each and every one of his previous lives so that he realizes the full extent of his



transgressions; she forcibly begins this spiritual journey on his behalf by knocking him in the head with a “spirit circle,” an object of mysterious origins that seems to connect them both.

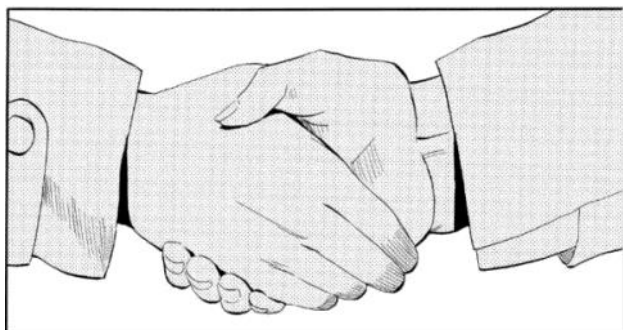
Kouko and Fuuta have a strange shared history. Image taken from Seven Seas’ paperback release.

From the first time that Fuuta inhabits one of his past incarnations, it’s clear that his lifetimes have fallen into certain patterns. He tends to meet the same people time and again; it’s explained that souls will continue to meet when they still have lessons to teach one-another. What sets things in motion is the fact that Fuuta seems to be someone who often questions the accepted realities of the times and places he exists. In one case, he interrupts a violent, sacrificial cleansing ritual, as the spirits he can see (in this lifetime and others) reveal to him that the bloodshed doesn’t actually aid in any sort of protection. In another lifetime (and it should be noted that these are often non-linear and possibly exist in some far-off future rather than only in the past), he questions the belief that the disembodied brains being kept alive artificially are still living beings; is being kept in stasis indefinitely really living?

It becomes clear early on that Kouko’s hatred of Fuuta seems partly based on her own half-knowledge of various situations. In one lifetime she passes away early on, whereas Fuuta’s analogue lives a long life and becomes a very different person than the one she met. In another it’s Fuuta who dies and Kouko who experiences the fallout. In each situation it feels as though some discussion in their part could help resolve the bad blood that’s been festering over the millennia, and there are several points throughout the story where it feels as though a non-violent resolution may be possible with a little bit of work. As Fuuta tumbles ever more quickly to his 7th and final past-life experience, though, what’s revealed is a crime so heinous that Kouko’s sense of vengeance seems more than justified.

In many other manga the final resolution of the situation would likely be wrought through the launching of fists and ultimately the physical domination of the individual found to be in the wrong, but travelling this extremely messy journey alongside the characters reveals that, despite past-Fuuta’s heinous sinning, there may still be hope for a solution that doesn’t leave one of the characters forever locked out of the cycle of death-and-rebirth. It’s this revelation, along with Mizukami’s ability to portray the emotional truth of situations, that turns this from a compelling tale to a truly great one.

The most powerful thematic element at play is that of forgiveness, and even such a seemingly simple concept is treated with a sensitive hand that slowly reveals its underlying complexity. When we think of forgiveness, I believe we often try to couple it with a set of conditions that aren’t emotionally realistic. Forgiveness to many is defined as choosing to allow someone’s trespasses to go unpunished, for the sake of the greater social good and without expecting anything in return. Speaking as someone who’s been harmed deeply by others, this unconditional release of responsibility for perpetrators of that harm is something that I’m personally unequipped to handle. I’ve only recently come to understand forgiveness as something that’s never meant to be a given, but instead is a gift we’re



allowed to give to those who’ve done what they can to earn it. When we learn the truth about Kouko’s multi-lifetime grudge, we also learn how justified she is in nursing it. When we experience Fuuta’s story, we also see the diligent work he puts in to try to earn her forgiveness. It’s a delicate balance that could have easily been mishandled, and yet Mizukami allows us to understand and sympathize with both characters to the extent that we believe in their separate journeys.

Forgiving oneself is sometimes the most difficult challenge of all. Image taken from the digital release of the

manga.

Without revealing too much about the manga’s most climactic moments, I believe it should be mentioned that perhaps its most powerful statement is that forgiveness is not something only reserved for others, it is also a powerful choice we can make regarding our own actions. I think it’s easy to get caught up in the gravity of our own errors, and once realizing their severity we might spend a great deal of energy trying to apologize for them. While there’s always the danger of trying to absolve our own sins without doing the hard work of atoning for them, I find that it’s

more common for people to wallow in their own feelings of guilt well past those feelings' best-by dates. This story emphasizes that self-forgiveness is one of the grandest gifts that we can give to ourselves – one which is earned alongside the kind of personal growth that we ideally strive for.

This profound emotional gravitas is presented through Mizukami's simple, straightforward character artwork. While some might find the art style overly-simplistic and possibly even a poor match for the grand ideas being told through the story and dialog, I found the contrast to work very well to present the narrative without a lot of visual confusion. On a related note, the story features a cast of several characters in their different incarnations throughout time, and the character artwork did a good job of preserving the key facial features and builds of the different characters so that they were recognizable throughout these different eras without their names being outright stated every time.

I find that examinations of human nature are oftentimes focused around our negative aspects. While I believe that there are many things we could collectively improve on as a species, it's easy to fall into a pattern of believing that there may be no hope for the future of humanity. What I appreciate about this manga, and by extension what I've been introduced to through other examples of Mizukami's storytelling, is that it seems to express a belief that we can make the choice to do and believe better about ourselves, and ultimately to learn from our mistakes and choose to forgive one-another for our many collective errors. This is something that I truly want to, and possibly even have to believe; without this small sense of hope to look toward it becomes easy to fall into a depression.

Though Spirit Circle wears the skin of a typical shounen ("boy's") manga title, in its heart it stands alongside some of the more universally truthful entertainment out there, revealing the power that exists in eschewing violence and might for the sake of something greater and more enduring.

Pros: The series is profoundly emotional, perfectly paced, and beautifully constructed.

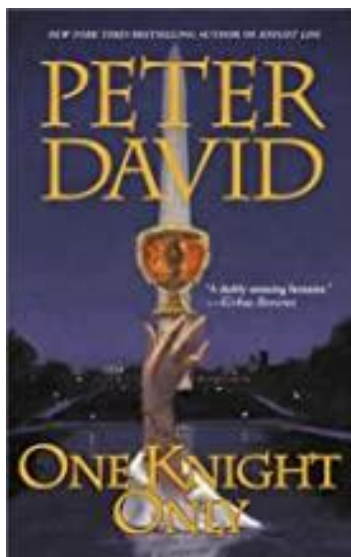
Cons: The character artwork may read too "young" or simplistic.

Grade: A

Content warning for mild nudity and some violence.

Novels

One Knight Only by Peter David Review by Sam Lubell



Many years ago I read a fun little book by Peter David called Knight Life about King Arthur being brought into the present day and running for mayor of New York City with the help of Merlin, who by aging backwards is now a young boy, a reincarnated Gwen, and a black Percival, made immortal by tasting the Holy Grail. This was light and very funny. So, years later, when I saw a sequel I picked it up and was surprised at how different this book was. It is much darker with most of the humor gone or very dark. Essentially, Arthur Penn, now president, resigns to care for his wife when a terrorist almost kills her. Meanwhile, Percival, who is still questing for the Holy Grail, finds it in the possession of Gilgamesh the High King. This leads to a conflict between the two kings as Gilgamesh has betrayed everything that once made him a hero and Arthur, who resigned the presidency as part of a bargain with the Basilisk to kill the terrorist who had tried to kill his wife, seems to be moving in that direction. So a large part of the story is a deconstruction of what it means to be a hero.

Don't go into this book thinking it is a continuation of the light, fun tone of Knight Life. This is a much more serious work.



A Song of Wraiths and Ruin by Roseanne A. Brown Review by Sam Lubell

In a fantasy based on West African folklore, Malik and older sister Leila and younger sister Nadia are refugees from the despised Efran tribe trying to smuggle themselves into the capital city of Ziran for the holiday of Solstasia. But when Nadia makes a wish to an old storyteller, the spirit called Idir captures Nadia and refuses to let her go unless Malik kills Princess Karina. He decides the best way to get close enough to princess is to use his illusion power to get himself chosen as one of the contestants for the Champion's Challenge, which, unknown to everyone except the royal family, is essential to restoring the magical barrier protecting the city.

Princess Karina would rather compete with the musicians in the city's disgusting taverns than learn the lessons a future ruler needs to know. When her mother the queen is assassinated, Karina resolves to use forbidden magic to bring her back to life. One necessary ingredient is the heart of a king. But since her father is long dead, the only way to get a king is for her to marry. So she promises to wed the winner of the Champion's Challenge, secretly planning to bring back her mother.

Unfortunately for both their plans Malik and Karina fall in love.

This is a somewhat predictable YA fantasy adventure that creates a situation where the hero and heroine are at odds and the reader keeps reading to see how they will get out of it. The characters are interesting although Malik spends a little too much time doubting himself (partially justified as everyone around him told him that his glimpses into a magical world were just hallucinations). As this is the first book in a duology, not everything is resolved.



In an Absent Dream by Seanan McGuire Review by Sam Lubell

This is an entry in McGuire's Wayward Children novella series. However, unlike the earlier stories in the series, it is not focused on a child who returned to Earth from a faerie world and searches for a way back. Instead Katherine, who has no friends because her father is the school principal, finds a door with a sign saying "Be Sure" that takes her to a magical market with rules based on fair value. She meets an owl-eyed girl named Moon who becomes her friend. They have adventures together, but Katherine still occasionally returns home to her family who insists that she stay with them. The market demands that people must choose which world they will live in by the time they turn 18.

This story is interesting in the implications of fair value, and the prices the market imposes on those who do not give fair value. And the choice at age 18 adds an element of suspense. But I think the books in the series set in magical worlds are more conventional and less interesting than the original concept of children kicked out of their magical world struggling to live in normal Earth.

Catfishing on CatNet by Naomi Kritzer Review by Sam Lubell

This novel is sort of a sequel to the story "Cat Pictures Please".

The cat-picture loving AI has expanded into offering a whole network CatNet for people to share cat pictures. The system groups people into Clowders, a small group of people who the AI believes will be compatible who share

pictures and chat with each other. Steph and her mother are constantly on the move, hiding from Steph's father who physically abused Steph's mother. So the Clowders are her only friends. They settle in a small Wisconsin town where Steph befriends an artistic outcast. But when Steph's father finds her, the AI reveals itself and its control over online systems in order to save her. This places its own existence in jeopardy. Steph and the Clowders have to meet in real life in order to save the AI.

Parts of this are a little too painfully YA and the climax requires an awfully convenient setup. Still, this is a very fun book with interesting characters and a nice take on AI.



Martha Ward's Voodoo Queen: The Spirited Lives Of Marie Laveau

Review by Will Mayo



Who were the women called Marie Laveau, mother and daughter, the fabled Voodoo queens of nineteenth century New Orleans? With a little bit of detective work, Martha Ward, an anthropologist, unravels the tale. She tells of the mother who danced naked in the Congo Square, a snake wrapped around her, conjuring up Zombi, the greatest of African gods, and who also nursed the sick and wounded of the War of 1812, various epidemics and the Civil War. And she tells of the daughter, also named Marie Laveau, who was said to have transformed threatening policemen into barking animals at her doorstep and who, like her mother, had a passion for freeing the imprisoned and those on Death Row. She tells of the mother named Marie Laveau's dying days and she also tells of how the daughter, so like her father, disappeared under mysterious circumstances. And she relates how Voodoo has almost invariably been an agency for the oppressed, the Creole and those of color, to resist their bonds and strive for a color blind society. She then

closes with remarks on how echoes of Voodoo continue into the present day in the forms of jazz, Mardi Gras costumes and some fundamentalist Christianity. Leaving the reader with what can only be a sigh of wonder. It is well worth the read to one and all.

SerCon

Walter Tevis Bio-Bibliography

by

Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D.

N3F Historian



Walter Stone Tevis (February 28, 1928 - August 9, 1984) was a successful author and a professor of English literature at the University of Ohio. He taught there until 1978, at which time he moved to New York, rented a small apartment, and began writing full-time. He wrote several books in the next six years.

Born in San Francisco, when he was ten years old, his family, suffering financially, went to Kentucky to live with his father's sister and left Walter – who had contracted rheumatic fever – behind in a convalescent home. He remained there for almost a year before he was able to rejoin his family, traveling cross country alone in a train.

He attended school in Kentucky, joined the Navy the day he turned 17 and served for two years during World War II (as a carpenter's mate). He then attended the University of Kentucky. While there he earned B. A. (1949) and M. A. (1954) degrees. After college, he embarked on a teaching career, first at various high schools in rural Kentucky, then at Northern Kentucky University, the University of Kentucky, and then at Southern Connecticut State University.

He attended the Iowa Writers Workshop at the State University of Iowa, where he received an M. F. A. in creative writing in 1960. He then taught English and creative writing at the University of Ohio, where he held the title of University Professor, from 1966 until 1978.

Among his works were several science fiction (SF) books, including *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1963), *Mockingbird* (1980), *Far from Home* (1981), and *The Steps of the Sun* (1983). *Far from Home* was a collection of his short SF, most of which had originally been published in popular genre magazines of the time such as *Galaxy*, *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, *If*, and *Omni*.

His non-SF appeared mostly in the "slick" magazines: *Atlantic Monthly*, *Collier's*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Esquire*, *Playboy*, *Redbook*, and *The Saturday Evening Post*.

He is better known today for his non-SF novels, some of which were made into successful films -- such as *The Hustler* (1959), his first published novel, and *The Color of Money* (1984). Both movies starred Paul Newman. Tevis wrote a screenplay for *The Color of Money*, but it was not used. My own favorite non-SF novel of his, *The Queen's Gambit* (1983), was recently made into a popular TV series on Netflix.

SF Books

The Man Who Fell to Earth (1963)

First published as a Gold Medal original novel, *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, Tevis' second novel, told the story of a humanoid alien who landed on Earth seeking a way to transport his people to Earth from his home planet (Mars?), that was suffering from a severe drought. The novel was filmed in 1976 (starring David Bowie, Rip Torn, Candy Clark, and Buck Henry), and then was a made-for-TV film in 1987 (starring Lewis Smith, Beverly D'Angelo, and Wil Wheaton). It was announced in 2019 that a TV series based on this novel was being planned. *The Man Who Fell to Earth* has been translated into several foreign languages.

This book is seen by some critics as a representation of the effects of alcoholism, from which Tevis suffered for most of his adult life. At one point in his life, he attended AA meetings to help him fight his addiction.

Mockingbird (1980)

Mockingbird, published 17 years after *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, was nominated for a Nebula Award for Best Novel. It was the story of a centuries-old android who wanted to "die." In the time of the story, mankind had lost the ability to read. A teacher, who had taught himself to read, wanted to teach others; but an android dean sent him to prison for the "crime" of reading. The teacher escaped and eventually helped the ancient android "commit suicide." Critics have described it as "fine writing" and "a good story."

Far from Home (1981)

Far from Home was a collection of 14 of Tevis' short SF stories. Included were the following: "The Other End of the Line," "The Big Bounce," "The Goldbrick," "The Ifth of Oofth," "The Scholar's Disciple," "Far from Home," "Close to Home," "Rent Control," "A Visit from Mother," "Daddy," "The Apotheosis of Myra," "Out of Luck," "Echo," and "Sitting in Limbo." "The Ifth of Oofth" has been singled out by UK critic John Lee as "a wonderful feat of the imagination and certainly worthy of that much abused adjective, unforgettable."

The Steps of the Sun (1983)

The Steps of the Sun was Tevis' last SF novel, a story about an energy crisis in the future. The early part of the book was said by some critics to reflect Tevis' own childhood of pain, illness, and alienation. In this novel's future world, China was the world's leading superpower. The title of the novel was taken from William Blake's poem,

Ah! Sun-flower. The novel was reviewed positively in several SF magazines and fanzines. British SF writer and critic Brian Stableford described it as “a tale of extraterrestrial redemption.” It has also been described as an expanded version of “The Apotheosis of Myra,” a story included in his *Far from Home* collection. A French critic called *Steps of the Sun* among the most original SF novels of the 1980s.

Awards/Honors

Hugo Award for Best Dramatic Presentation (1977) for *The Man Who Fell to Earth*; Nebula Award Nomination (1981) for *Mockingbird*; Locus Award Nomination for Best Short Story (1980) for “Rent Control” (originally published in the October, 1979, issue of *Omni Magazine*).

He was given the Screen Writers’ Annual Award in 1961 for his screenplay adaptation of *The Hustler*.

He was inducted posthumously into the Kentucky Writers Hall of Fame in 2018.

Private Life

Tevis married Jamie Griggs, a teacher, in 1952. They were married for over 20 years before they divorced. They had two children together, William Thomas, a son, and Julia Ann, a daughter. Jamie later wrote a memoir of her life with her ex-husband, *My Life with the Hustler* (2003).

Tevis married his second wife, Eleanora Walker, in 1983, and dedicated some of his work, including *The Queen’s Gambit*, to her. Tevis had met Eleanora through the Robert Mills Agency, where she worked.

Critical Comments

Some critics have written that the fictions all of us live by were mainly what Tevis wrote about.

It has been pointed out that Tevis “had a fondness for duosyllable surnames ending in ‘on’ (i. e., Newton, Felson, Harmon, Belson). . . and most of his heroes play chess.”

Tevis himself wrote of his fiction: “I suppose I write disguised autobiographies. . . My major characters are alienated, by virtue of being pool players, from Mars, robots, the only people alive who can read, or alcoholics. I like to write about people who are under psychological stress, and when I write I am very serious about it.” Some critics have written that Tevis died “before finishing his story.”

Tevis once said that he had originally wanted to be a poet. After his death, his widow said: “He could drink and teach, but he could not drink and write.”

Concluding Comments

The first story Tevis sold was “The Best in the Country” to *Esquire Magazine*. It was published in the November, 1954 issue of the magazine.



Designer Horse by Angela K. Scott

He left teaching briefly in 1959 and worked for the Kentucky Highway Department while writing *The Hustler*. This first novel of his was well received.

Tevis was friends with SF author and editor, Daniel Keyes, once confiding to him that the rejection by Harper’s of his *The Man Who Fell to Earth* had produced his lengthy writer’s block. He and Keyes played chess and pool together.

In what was probably his last interview, Tevis said: “It is very bad for people to find substitutes for living their lives.”

Death

Tevis died of lung cancer at age 56 in New York City. He is buried in the Richmond Cemetery at Richmond, Kentucky.

His papers are housed in a library at the University of Indiana.

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SF Predicts the Future: The Good, The Bad and The Ugly. Analysis by Jim McCoy

I once read a Facebook post by none other than SF/F author John Ringo in which he lamented the fact that he was having trouble keeping ahead of engineers with his writing. It appears that Science Fiction authors are so good at predicting the future that engineers are following right along and inventing new products directly from the pages/ from the screens of works of Science Fiction, only the engineers have gotten so good at it that they are now catching up to what SF writers have predicted. I'm not sure if this is because SF authors and screenwriters are so used to recycling tropes now that the engineers are hip to what comes next or if it's because engineers are just that damned good. I have a feeling it may be some strange co-mingling of the two but I have no evidence of that either. For purposes of this blog though, I will confine myself mainly to what's been seen on screen.

It's worth mentioning that Star Trek in no way has a monopoly on guessing what's coming. Plenty of writers and movies have made predictions. I used that picture because it got me thinking, not because of any belief that only Trek is accurate. We'll get to who else is in a moment. This is something I've been meaning to write about. Hey, maybe I'll even make a prediction or two of my own. What could go wrong with that? Heh.

The Good:

Well, I started the article off with a Star Trek picture. Trek predicted all of the above and more. Trek gave us the communicator/cell phone, PADD/tablet, etc., etc., etc. Interestingly enough, it gave us more though. I know that a lot of fans of the "hard" sciences don't exactly suffer from an overabundance of enthusiasm for the social sciences but Trek predicted a lot of future trends there as well. "Seeking out new life and new civilizations" would be any anthropologists dream and, while we don't exactly have any aliens to observe yet, they have sought out many groups of people in less populated parts of the world to study. Kirk's Enterprise featured an integrated cast. There was a black woman and an Asian man on a bridge mainly populated by white people. At the time that was science fiction. No one in the modern US Navy would bat an eyelash at it.

The Battlestar Galactica reboot predicted cyber warfare before it was cool. The Galactica survives because it is the only ship in the fleet whose computers are not networked. The Cylons, being robots and therefore having computer brains, were able to easily access the computers of the other Battlestars and destroy them. In our own world, we're just beginning to see true cyber warfare take place but it is here. It's going to get more pervasive. The worst part is that it's not a shooting war and so it's hard to spot until it's too late.

George Orwell's 1984 predicted the rise of the surveillance state and the media-governmental complex. Seriously. There are cameras everywhere, especially in places like Great Britain. The NSA watches everyone in the United States and their communications. The Thought Police seemingly exist today as well, just not as a government agency. We have the media for that. When Brandon Eich, CEO of a major corporation, can be forced to resign for giving money to a group that supported traditional, as opposed to same-sex, marriage and Kelvin Cochran, Fire Chief of the City of Atlanta can be fired from his job for stating that homosexual sex is a sin while off the clock, the Thought Police exist. This time, they're the media though.

The Six Million Dollar Man predicted the use of mechanical replacements for lost limbs. Not only are prosthetic limbs fairly common but some actually are mechanical. Three D printers have made them much less expensive as well. They will continue to improve.

Exoskeletons, such as in Iron Man or Starship Troopers (the book) are on their way. They are currently being tested for military applications by several countries. While it is unlikely that we'll be seeing a workable model in the extremely near future they're on the way. It's just a matter of figuring out what will work. I do find it unlikely that the first working model will be invented by a millionaire with a bad heart working with hand tools in a cave but what do I know?

The Bad:

Just about everybody has predicted the invention of a portable laser pistol. Whether it's Star Trek's phaser or a Star Wars blaster it's just not going to happen, for a few reasons. One is practicality. No one will ever be able to generate a bright enough beam and focus it tightly enough using a package small enough to fit in one hand. Yes, the Air Force is working on a laser that can shoot down aircraft and missiles. It takes an AC-130 to carry one. They haven't made it work yet, but it's probably coming. It's just never going to be small enough to be man-portable.

Dick Tracy had an atom powered watch. Look guys, I'm a proponent of nuclear power on a macro scale as long as the technicians aren't dumb enough to pull out all of the control rods (Chernobyl) and the reactor isn't built in a freaking tsunami zone (Fukushima). The fact remains that nuclear power produces radiation and no watch is going to be able to contain it. Sorry all, but we need to leave the nuclear power generation to plants that are big enough to contain the radiation.

Mutants, such as those in X-Men or Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles are simply not possible. Yes, mutation has been going on for as long as there has been life but it is far more likely to lead to the death of whatever just mutated. Even successful mutation doesn't lead to the kind of changes in TMNT. Something as simple as super strength isn't going to happen all at once based on simple genetics.

The Ugly:

Umm... I love them too.. but...uhhh... Lightsabers are never going to happen. Light doesn't work that way. Two beams of light that come into contact won't rebound... they'll simply pass right through each other. The only way to make something that looked like a lightsaber would be to get something small enough to fit in one hand that could generate a plasma field. It would be so hot that it would burn its user to death as soon as they turned it on. This one just isn't going to happen.

Mecha, such as those in Robotech, Battletech, Avatar and four million other things are just not going to happen either. There is no benefit to a mech when compared to a tank and they'd be harder and more expensive to build. Listen, I know about the rule of cool but that doesn't apply in real life. Such a machine would have too many problems balancing to stand up. Having read that, I'm going to go suck my thumb and watch Robotech. I've been a fan for thirty plus years now.

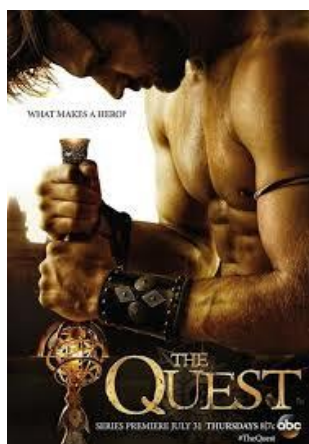
I loved The Jetsons too but the mass use of flying cars is never going to be a thing. There isn't enough room for runways. The air traffic control requirements would be impossible to meet. Tightly packed lanes are a pipe dream. People would be flying off in nine million different directions and mid-air collisions would be common.

No one - and I mean not a single living human being that I'm aware of- predicted the internet before it became popularized. Even Babylon 5, which existed in the era of America Online, Prodigy and Compuserve ignored it. They had William Edgars, the millionaire, read an actual hardcopy newspaper instead of looking up the news on a laptop. The internet may be the single biggest technological innovation of the last fifty years that wasn't predicted on the page or on screen by a SF writer. It amazes me.

Well, that's what I've got. The list is obviously not all inclusive but those are some of the big ones from my point of view. All of the opinions above are, of course, mine. Feel free to tell me I'm full of crap if you have a mind to.

Video

ABC's The Quest Review by Jim McCoy



Who out there has ever played Dungeons and Dragons or World of Warcraft? Have you read The Dragonlance Chronicles or the Lightbringer series? Have you ever dreamed of being Frodo or Aragon, Sturm or Caramon? Who here has watched The Dragonslayer or The Princess Bride and wished that they could be there, if only for a second to feel the triumph over evil and see justice done? How does that dream about reforging Narsil to defeat the evil demon go again? Have you defeated Lassic or watched Garrosh Hellscream fall dead at your feet? If you get some of these references, you'll love The Quest by ABC. If you get most of them, you may have seen it already. If you get all of them and you haven't seen it already you obviously don't watch much television.

The Quest is the story of the Twelve Paladins: Reality show contestants who have signed up to fight for the honor of becoming the One True Hero. They battle each other and the enemy. The Quest comes with a twist though: It is not just a reality show. It is also a story about the Kingdom of Everrealm and its fight against Verlox the Darkness. The Twelve Paladins are warriors in the service of the kingdom and competitors for the title of the One True Hero; the person who gets to rebuild the Sunspire and use it to defeat Verlox and free the Kingdom.

The storyline is constantly front and center of the show. The challenges (similar in concept to something you would see on Survivor) follow along with the story of the show, beginning with the training of the neophyte Paladins and continuing through the fight: In later episodes the remaining Paladins (one is eliminated in each episode) are actually tested on different aspects of the war itself. Each challenge produces a winner who is awarded with a Mark of a given heroic attribute, sponsored by one of the local kingdoms. It also produces a losing team, or sometimes just collection of people who came in last, of three people who then go to another challenge for immunity. After the immunity challenge, which the contestants refer to as a Fates' Challenge, the two remaining contestants go before the fates to be judged by the other contestants. The final voting is my favorite part of the process.

In most reality shows, the voting is done behind closed doors and whisper campaigns are the rule and voting is done in secret, with the results revealed by the host. Not in Everrealm. The Quest has its own system. Once the two candidates are eliminated, the remaining Paladins are sent out to debate their merits around a table, in the open. After the debate (only a couple of minutes on screen, I'm not sure how long in actuality) the Paladins are led back in front of the fates where the two candidates wait to learn their fate, then line up behind them. When the candidates turn around, they see everyone who voted for them, and everyone who did not. This works because the final winner is chosen in a competition and not by vote. It also helps, along with the storyline itself, to get rid of a lot of the backstabbing and intrigue that goes on in games like Survivor or Big Brother. Throughout the show the Paladins are searching for people who exemplify the virtues that the One True Hero should possess.

The fantasy elements of this show are pervasive. The contestants begin the season living and training in a castle. There are fights between sword and spear equipped armies and smaller scale combats between our heroes and Ogres. When Verlox the Darkness is revealed he is shown to be something other than human. There is a crone and a dragon. Potions and orbs abound. Scorpions (Roman-era ballista) are used in quite a few episodes as are swords, shields, bows and of course the Sunspear. At the end of every episode the eliminated Paladin is shown as disappearing magically in a puff of smoke. This seriously is like reading a good fantasy novel (Honestly, if someone from ABC happens across this review, I would recommend commissioning a novelization. If it were well done it would sell a ton of copies. I'd buy the first one.) while watching an awesome reality show.

The cast of the show, outside of the Paladins, is also a huge attraction. The heroes are welcomed and guided by Crio, the Steward of the Queen, who is important to the plot in her own right. They are trained by Sir Ansgar the Fierce, a knight with a bit of a temper at times. The Royal Vizier is a regular sight and not the most popular person among the Paladins. Other Non-Player Characters are best left as a surprise, but all are entertaining.

My only real complaint about the first season is that it wasn't long enough. The series started with the Twelve Paladins and given that the last challenge is fought by all three remaining contestants, that only leaves us with ten episodes. The storyline does manage to complete over the course of the season, but I feel like it could have been extended and enriched. Maybe I'm just complaining because I watched it all in a day and I wanted it to last longer, but I can't help but shake the feeling that a few more Paladins and a few more episodes would have made the show that much more rewarding for viewers and players alike.

I won't spoil the ending except to say that I really enjoyed it. The competition part didn't turn out quite the way I wanted it to, neither my first or second choice won, but the ending to the storyline was pretty epic. There were obviously some special effects employed, thus lowering the "reality" of the reality show, but it's a fantasy storyline so it was necessary. Seeing all of the Twelve Paladins back in action was both rewarding and fun as well. As for the Sunspear and the final battle with Verlox the Darkness? Watch the show and you'll find out.

Bottom Line: 5.0 out of 5 Marks of Appreciation

Rabid Ears: Ravings of a TV Fiend By Cathode Ray

The new issue of TV Guide just stepped outside, saw its shadow, and returned to the deep, dark recesses of its Stan Cave, so it's time for another edition of "Rabid Ears: Ravings of a TV Fiend," a periodic column about the most grand and gussied up 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? Now, when I turn to see, there's a perfect shadow cast of me.

The Feb. 1-14, 2021 double issue of TV Guide includes some notable genre offerings among the premieres featured in "For the Record": The Snoopy Show (Apple TV+) on Feb. 5 and Black Lightning (The CW) on Feb. 8. It also mentions the renewal of Snowpiercer (TNT). In "The Big Number," the staff comments on the 70 original movies planned by Netflix for the year. Highlights of interest to Neffers include Don't Look Up, an sf comedy about "a comet that could destroy the planet;" (erm, great idea for a comedy) and Thunder Force, which is about "unlikely superheroes." A likely story...

Matt Roush seriously rocks the (space)ship in this issue's "The Roush Review," dedicating space to review WandaVision (Disney+), Resident Alien (Syfy), and Snowpiercer (TNT). Bump, set, and spike, sf and fantasy fans! This is the most science fiction and fantasy I've seen Roush report on in his column—ever, I think. Of the three shows, the first program seems most promising and surreal: It combines Nick at Nite with The Twilight Zone as Marvel superheroes the Scarlet Witch and Vision find themselves trapped in a mysterious sort of classic sitcom. (Who do you think is behind it: Mojo? Mysterio?) WandaVision also earned a callout in the Jan. 4-17 "2021 Preview" issue of TV Guide; that writeup indicates it picks up where Avengers: Endgame leaves off. Meanwhile, the program Resident Alien is based on a series of Dark Horse comic books by Peter Hogan and Steve Parkhouse—there have been five miniseries published since 2012. And Snowpiercer is a show based on a 2013 movie and, before that, a bande dessinée. Can't get much better than that, in terms of cross-media lineage and provenance.

The cover story "Hot List 2021" doesn't pay much attention to Neffer fare, but there is an item on Batwoman (The

CW), which focuses on new lead character Ryan Wilder, an ex-con turned crimefighter who's also Black and gay. The new original *For All Mankind* (Apple TV+) might also be of interest to sf fans—as well as alternate history fans. The show posits a world in which the Soviets beat America to the moon in 1969. Ouch. That's gotta hurt.

Also mentioned in the Jan. 4-21 “2021 Preview” issue of *TV Guide*: *The Witcher* (Netflix), *Evil* (CBS), *Snowpiercer* (TNT), *Batwoman* (The CW); *For All Mankind* (Apple TV+), *The Walking Dead* (AMC and AMC+), *American Horror Story* (FX), *The Handmaid's Tale* (Hulu), *Supergirl* (The CW), *Vikings* (Prime Video and History), *Black Lightning* (The CW), *Superman & Lois* (The CW), *Dune* (HBO Max), *Foundation* (Apple TV+), and *Resident Alien* (Syfy).

Pencil these in your calendar, fans and fellow freaks: Tuesday, Feb. 2, getTV airs back-to-back episodes of *Charlie's Angels*—not our usual fare, per se, but fun regardless (I say it's a fantasy because we never see Charlie! He's like Mr. Snuffleupagus.). Feb. 6, H&I screens a 1976 episode of *Wonder Woman* featuring Gargantua, a seven-foot-tall circus ape controlled by the Nazis. (That's right: a seven-foot-tall circus ape controlled by the Nazis.) Also that day, on Syfy, a new animated comedy called *Devil May Care* premieres: The Devil hires a social media consultant to rebrand Hell. S-S-S-Smokin'! And Feb. 7, on PBS, *Miss Scarlet & the Duke* sends Victorian private eye Eliza Scarlet to a seance.

Feb. 8, *Black Lightning*'s new season premieres on the CW; this will be its fourth and final season. Feb. 9-10, Comet screens a 2007 two-parter of *Battlestar Galactica*. On Feb. 12, William Shatner participates in a panel discussion with UFOlogists and other experts on *Ancient Aliens* (History). Feb. 13, on HBO2, you can binge the first seven episodes of *30 Coins*, a Spanish-language “fright-fest about a badass exorcist ... battling supernatural terrors to find Judas' blood money... .” What!?! How have I not heard about this show? Apparently, this marathon is in advance of a season finale mid-month—but this show... sounds... awesome. Anyone watching it? Please do send in your reports, care of this clubzine. And Feb. 14, *Crossword Mysteries: Terminal Descent* (Hallmark Movies & Mysteries) pits a crossword editor against a supercomputer... but the creator of the artificial intelligence dies. Let's slow down a minute and say that again together: “*Crossword Mysteries*.” What is this ____ coming to? (See below, that's what!)

Also of potential interest to Neffers: *Jurassic World: Camp Cretaceous* (animated dinosaur franchise!) and *Invisible City* (magic creatures underground!) on Netflix, *Celebrity Ghost Stories* (celebrity ghost stories!) on Prime Video, *Into the Dark* (themed anthology horror!) on Hulu, and *Balthazar* (mad scientists and psychotic clowns!) on Acorn TV.

The Jan. 31 to Feb. 6, 2021, edition of *TV Weekly*—a totally different magazine—recommends additional programming of potential interest: *The Watch* (BBC America), *30 Coins* (HBO) again, the animated *Kid Cosmic* (Netflix), *The Expanse* (Prime Video), and *Star Trek: Discovery* (CBS).

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

Daytime: *The Twilight Zone* from 6-9:30 a.m. Mondays on Syfy; *Heroes* from 6 a.m. to 12 p.m. Mondays on Sundance; *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* from 6 a.m. to 12 p.m. weekdays on BBC America; *Supernatural* 12-3 p.m. weekdays on TNT; *Star Trek: The Next Generation* from 12-6 p.m. Monday through Thursday on BBC America; *One Step Beyond*, *Bradbury Theater*, and *Doctor Who* 3:30-6 p.m. weekdays on Retro; and *The Munsters* 4-5 p.m. weekdays on Cozi. You can even watch Retro online at <https://www.myretroTV.com/>.

Primetime: *Star Trek: The Next Generation* at 7 p.m. continues its daytime run on BBC America on Tuesday-Thursday; *Quantum Leap* from 7-10 p.m. and *Stargate SG-1* at 10 p.m. most weekdays on Comet; and a sequence of *Star Trek*, *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*, *Star Trek: Voyager*, and *Star Trek: Enterprise* from 8 p.m. to 1 a.m. Sunday through Friday on H&I. You can watch Comet online at <https://www.cometTV.com/>.

The Feb. 1-14, 2021, *TV Guide* crossword, Puzzle #1407, truly tripped the light fantastic. 5 Across is “Singer of Beastmaster.” 17 Across is “Addams Family cousin.” 50 Across is “Logan's ____.” 41 Down is “____ of the Lost.” 43 Down is “*Star Trek: The Next Generation* counselor.” 44 Down is “Computer programmer on *Heroes*.” And 45 Down is “DeSalvo of *Highlander*.” Send in your entries by mail care of this clubzine.

On the last page of the issue, *Jurassic World: Camp Cretaceous* earned a Cheers for an “epic Season 2 ... full of Easter eggs.” And *Riverdale* snagged a Jeers for “being too out there.” Turns out the dark drama's a little too dark

of a drama for TV Guide. Until next time, true believers, this is “Cathode Ray,” looking for shadows in all the wrong doorways. Turn on, tune in, and blast off!

Food of Famous Authors

Cedar Sanderson’s Blood Orange Ricotta Cake by George Phillis



In addition to being head of the N3F Gourmet Bureau, Cedar Sanderson is also a famous writer. Her most recent books include *The East Witch* — modern fantasy more-or-less set in magical Russia, *Possum Creek Massacre* — modern supernatural detective, and *The Cute Moose* — illustrated rhyming book for younger children.

And here we have her latest recipe, for a Blood Orange Ricotta Cake. This recipe is unique, in that it is multimedia...there is a video accompaniment at <https://youtu.be/siITrFIXnTs>. Readers should note that the video is a first-time experiment; do not expect modern sci-fi special effect quality in the film. Three cheers for the experiment!

Without further ado, the recipe:



Blood Orange Ricotta Cake

Preheat the oven to 325F

You will need a 9” round cake pan, with parchment paper to line the bottom after it has been well greased.

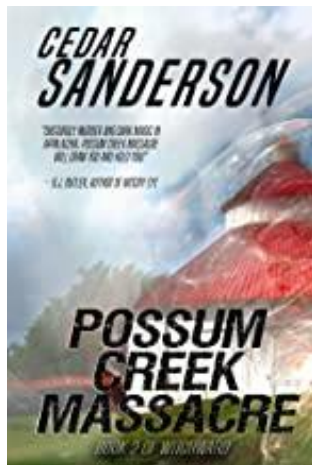
1/2 c brown sugar
2 blood oranges
1 1/2 c ricotta
1/4 c olive oil
1/2 tsp vanilla
3 eggs
1/12 c flour
2 tsp baking powder
3/4 tsp salt
3/4 c sugar



First, zest one of the blood oranges, and set the zest aside. If you remember, which I did not in the video, mix this into the sugar. Then juice the zested blood orange into the brown sugar. Thinly slice your other blood orange with a sharp knife.

Mix the brown sugar and juice to form a sludge, and then spread this out in the bottom of the pan more-or-less evenly. Press your slices of orange into this, and set the pan aside.

In a mixing bowl (I used a stand mixer, you could do this by hand or better, a hand mixer) mix the ricotta so it loosens up a bit. Then add in the eggs, beating until light and creamy. Drizzle in the olive oil, the vanilla, and finally, your orange zested sugar. Beat well.



Sift together the flour, baking powder, and salt. Slowly add this to the mixing bowl, beating until just fully incorporated. Don't overmix!

Pour slowly into the pan, over the orange slices and sugar.

Bake for 45-50 minutes, until a wooden tester comes out clean.

Cool for a few minutes. Loosen from the pan by running a thin knife around the edges, then carefully invert.

Voila! Pretty, and very tasty. I wasn't sure about leaving the peels on, but they cooked soft and were very eatable. The blood orange slices are tart, offsetting the rich sweetness of the ricotta cake. It was surprisingly fluffy – I was expecting it to come out a dense cake, but that's not what I got, and I'm not sorry at all.

As I mention in the video, I knew a lemon ricotta cake was a thing, but I'd never made one. I worked off a variant for that, to make this. If I do it again, I may try running the orange through the mandoline for thinner slices – mine were thicker than I wanted, plus it would be nice to have fully covered the top of the cake. The other thing I was toying with was the idea of doing this like I do pineapple upsidedown cakes – in a cast iron skillet, and getting that topping already hot before I put the batter in.

Making the video with my son was fun, and yes, there are a lot of things we can improve on! We were learning. He tackled the project with enthusiasm, and although I'd been housecleaning all day and was tired – which probably shows on screen – I couldn't bring myself to say no, next weekend. He's been doing video editing for a buddy, so he knew what he was doing there. Audio? Well, we have a plan for that already, a separate audio feed. Using my phone to make the video meant I was standing too far from the microphone at times. But we will learn, and see how we do time after next – next video is already shot and ready to go!

For the video: <https://youtu.be/siITrFIXnTs>





The Staging Point
by Jose Sanchez