

Tightbeam 320

May 2021



Morningtide

By Angela K. Scott

# Tightbeam 320

May 2021

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Anime Reviews are courtesy Jessi Silver and her site [www.s1e1.com](http://www.s1e1.com). Ms. Silver writes of her site “S1E1 is primarily an outlet for views and reviews on Japanese animated media, and occasionally video games and other entertainment.” Regular contributors include Justin E. A. Busch, Tom Feller, Declan Finn, Greg Hullender, Rob Kroese, Jim McCoy, Chris Nuttall, Pat Patterson, Heath Row, Cedar Sanderson, Alan White, and Tamara Wilhite. Declan Finn’s web page [declanfinn.com](http://declanfinn.com) covers his books, reviews, writing, and more. Jim McCoy’s reviews and more appear at [jimbossffreviews.blogspot.com](http://jimbossffreviews.blogspot.com). Chris Nuttall’s essays and writings are seen at [chrishanger.wordpress.com](http://chrishanger.wordpress.com) and at [superversivesf.com](http://superversivesf.com). Pat Patterson’s reviews appear on his blog [habakkuk21.blogspot.com](http://habakkuk21.blogspot.com) and also on Good Reads and Amazon.com. Cedar Sanderson’s reviews and other interesting articles appear on her site [www.cedarwrites.wordpress.com/](http://www.cedarwrites.wordpress.com/) and its culinary extension. Tamara Wilhite’s other essays appear on Liberty Island ([libertyislandmag.com](http://libertyislandmag.com)). Samuel Lubell originally published his reviews in The WSFA Journal. Anita Barrios is a former middle school ELA and Social Studies teacher. Regular short fiction reviewers Greg Hullender and Eric Wong publish at [RocketStackRank.com](http://RocketStackRank.com).

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

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## Letter of Comment

Dear George and Jon:

We have had a lot of Zoom sessions again, and again, there's one on today, Fanac.org presents an interview with Erle Korshak. I am looking forward to that, but will have to see what my time schedule is like. We are still able to come up with activities for ourselves, although now that we are in month 13 of the pandemic, and month 6 of lockdown, it's getting tough to keep to the schedule and diet.

FanFaronade... I agree on Justin's words on Outworlds 71/Afterworlds. The articles, locs, artworks are all a huge mass made into a masterpiece. My copy sits beside an even larger fannish tome, Warhoon 28. And, also agree on MarkTime and This Here... All fanzines together give me the variety of printed discussions I like, and I'd take this over a Zoom session any day.

I did know a few things about Edmond Hamilton, mostly because I was doing some editorial work on the new Captain Future books by Allen Steele, being issued by Amazing Stories in their Amazing Selects series. I have a couple of Hamilton's books on my shelves, and I re-read them recently...still good fun.

I wish I could do more here, but I think I have made all the comments I can for this issue. Perhaps there will be more for me in the next issue...see you then.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

Thanks, George,

And happy 80th birthday to everyone. It's nice to be included again. Our lives are brief here on this earth but, for a while anyway, in our writings we are led to believe that something may outlast us.

Well, I'll keep it all coming. I trust you folks to do the same.

Will Mayo

## Anime

Backwards Into The Nasuverse, or,  
The B-Side Wins Again  
Review by Kevin Trainor

All of the above. IIRC Fate/Stay Night started as an erotica video game, was rewritten as a light novel, and then started going off in several directions on different media. Fate/Grand Order is relatively new; it's only been available for a little over two years in the Anglosphere.

Is this a game? Anime? Something else? All of the above?

I have a habit of getting into things backwards. I didn't discover *Sailor Moon* on TV, I got interested in it by reading *Ranma 1/2* fanfic. When I was rediscovering the joy of baseball, it was because I got talked into a Pursue The Pennant league, which led me to Bill James' Baseball Abstracts, and the next thing I knew I was taking the kids to Twins games at the Metrodome. And so it went with Kintoko Nasu's Fate/Stay Night multiverse - first I got talked into playing the mobile game Fate/Grand Order, then I binged *Unlimited Blade Works*, and then I discovered the bizarre comedy stylings of Carnival Phantasm, which never fails to amuse me even if I don't get all the *Tsukihime* references.

Now, let me begin by saying that it is almost impossible to completely grasp the full extent of the Fate/Stay Night multiverse. There are manga, games, light novels, and anime (in both movie and TV formats) and not all of them have been or will be translated into English. There are also endless arguments among fans about where to start, and in what sequence one should experience the whole thing. I'm not going to presume to tell you any of that, mostly because I'm simply not familiar with the majority of it except as Infogalactic entries or memes on Reddit. I can say that (broadly speaking) there are two main groups of stories: the Fate/Stay Night series and its various spinoffs, which mostly revolve around the Holy Grail Wars, and the more recent (but growing rapidly) Fate/Grand Order game with its spinoffs, which treat the Holy Grail Wars as bothersome distractions from the main task of saving the world from being destroyed in December 2018. (You're welcome.)

Fate/Grand Order's plot is fairly straightforward. You play the role of the last master of Chaldea, an organization set up to monitor and preserve humanity which finds itself staring down the muzzle of an impending apocalypse. Along with your kouhai, Mash Kyrielight, who has been fused with a Heroic Servant but doesn't know which one or what its powers are (her discovery of the Servant and his powers is an ongoing subplot in the game), you travel to seven Singularities in human history to find the cause of each one, recover the Grail that triggered it, and thus fold the distorted timeline back into its proper place.

In addition to Ms. Kyrielight, you have the assistance of Heroic Servants, spirits from the past with skills and special abilities augmented by Craft Essence cards. There are six basic classes of servants: Archers, Assassins, Berserkers, Casters, Lancers, and Sabers, which have advantages & disadvantages against each other in combat; these are referred to as affinities. Without getting too far into the weeds of the game mechanics, suffice it to say you can summon servants through random "gacha" rolls. Once summoned, servants can be enhanced, and for each battle, you can select five of your own servants and a support servant provided by friends or the scenario, which allows you to arrange matters to take advantage of affinities.

The two halves of the Fate franchise aren't completely separate. Between the main chapters of the Fate/Grand Order storyline, there are special events that refer to other parts of Fate/Stay Night - for example, the Garden of Sinners crossover with Kara no Kyoukai, which introduces the assassin servant Ryougi Shiki. Others are less serious, especially the Halloween events that usually include some weird variation on the dragon idol Elizabeth Bathory, and the Christmas events that have some inappropriate servant in the role of Santa Claus; this past year, it was a lancer version of genderflipped Attila the Hun, riding a magical sheep.

I've been playing the game for a couple of years now and enjoy it immensely. Because it folds so many of the other Fate/Stay Night tales into itself by way of the servants and their lore, it may just be the best introduction to the whole thing, even the contradictory parts. Maybe especially those parts. If you enjoy a tale of someone from whom very little was expected rising up to accomplish great things, then Fate/Grand Order is definitely something you should consider.

Spring 2021 First Impressions –  
I've Been Killing Slimes For 300 Years  
and Maxed Out My Levels  
By Jessi Silver



Streaming: Crunchyroll  
Episodes: 12  
Source: Light Novel

Story Summary: Azusa is a 27-year-old office worker who keels over and dies one day from overwork. When she arrives in Heaven she learns that God has a soft spot for women, and Azusa is allowed to reincarnate as an immortal witch and live her desired “slow life.” The only monsters she encounters near her highland home are slimes, and she defeats around 25 of them a day to provide herself with money enough to live a modest life. Eventually 300 years pass in this manner, and a verification of Azusa’s strength reveals that she’s now maxed-out at level 99.



This is an inconvenient secret that might spell the end of her lazy days at home, but of course rumors being what they are the news of her power soon spreads across the land. Eventually a dragon named Laika shows up at Azusa’s front door, and after a short duel accidentally smashes the home Azusa’s enjoyed for 300 years. Later, Laika returns in human form with repair funds and a request: she wants to become Azusa’s pupil and learn how to become strong like her.

A truly just God.

Impressions: Hmm, should I be concerned that the isekai story set-ups I relate to the most are the ones that involve the main character suffering from overwork? Please don’t worry, I’m not in danger of dying or anything, but I do sometimes feel like too many of my waking hours are devoted to my job. It’s no surprise that Japan, with its infamous work culture, would inspire these types of fantasy stories, and that the dreams of characters forced to endure the harshest work conditions would likely amount to mundane things like getting enough sleep and having time for leisure activities.

I’ve Been Killing Slimes... (sorry, I’m afraid my hands will get tired if I type out the full title each time), in direct opposition to its protagonist’s original real-world problems, seems to go all



Dragons are Cute, Actually

-in on its more lighthearted reincarnation narrative, and I’m very much here for that. It’s not as though I wouldn’t appreciate a more serious takedown of the culture of overwork in my entertainment, because I think some more direct commentary in media could do a lot to help further shift the tides away from those kinds of destructive expectations. But more comedic series like this and last season’s Cells at Work: Code Black also have their roles to play in pointing out the ways in which we tend to cope (or not) with being made to believe that working

hard is the only way to live. There's nothing wrong with enforcing boundaries and leaving some work for the next day, and Azusa's discussion with Laika enforces that. It's a very comforting turn of events that provides a different perspective I didn't realize I needed to hear. Dragons are cute, actually.

This episode reminds me a lot of what I loved about Bofuri; the main character is inadvertently overpowered, but it's a skillset she uses without malice and eventually serves to create positive relationships rather than to seek out competition. There's something more satisfying to me about a fantasy story that puts its focus on character building and interactions as opposed to being simply a power fantasy about domination, and though we see it mostly in flashback and montage, it's clear that Azusa has used her 300 year life as a witch to help and serve the nearby townspeople. It's sort of the same philosophy that makes Superman an interesting character; he's a figure who sometimes seems impossibly good, which might not on its surface seem to make for a compelling story. His superhuman abilities could allow him to rule over Earth with an iron fist if he wanted, yet he chooses instead to help and defend people rather than to dominate them. I think about that a lot because it goes against the adage that "power corrupts"; we see examples all over the place in the news every day where having power causes people to do terrible things, but we continue to cling to the kind of optimism that, at least for the characters in our stories, that behavior isn't a given.

Anyway, I enjoyed this episode quite a bit. Azusa is a good witch (with a nice hat!) and I just like the show's upbeat and fun attitude.

Pros: This might be a one-joke anime series (witch reluctantly utilizes her OP abilities, comedy ensues) but it's one joke that I really enjoy and which I don't have to feel guilty about. It's one thing for a series to allow its protagonist free reign to whoop ass, but I enjoy it more when there are a few qualifiers and a protagonist who isn't a complete misanthrope.

I like that Azusa makes it a point to pass on her life philosophy to Laika, who offers to work through the night to repair Azusa's house. I think it's a good way to emphasize the message that the boundaries between work and rest need to be actively enforced.

Cons: The production values are kind of middling. It's by no means a deal breaker; the show's more cartoonish attitude suits the simplistic designs well. But it's hard not to notice when a female-dominant series kind of gets the short end of the stick in the design and animation department when there are some very high profile and lavishly-produced series of a similar nature featuring their male counterparts.

Azusa reincarnates in a form that God describes as appearing 17-years-old, and while I found this amusing I think there are some criticisms to be made about the fact that this is apparently when women look their best (not the case, in my opinion) and how it feeds into the trope of "she's actually an 800-year-old vampire." Her character design (and her attitude) read as "young adult" to me, but it's something to think about.

Content Warnings: Description of death by overwork. Fantasy violence (magic and some bloodless sword-fighting). Mild fanservice (breast size comparison with a sound effect to match).

Would I Watch More? – Yes, this seems like a very fun, upbeat palate cleanser with cute characters.

## Comics

### Western Comics: Capsule Reviews

Stephanie Souders

Marvel

Captain America #28

Writer: Ta-Nehisi Coates

Artist: Leonard Kirk

This comic quickly became infamous on social media for its gratuitous - and not at all disguised - swipe at one of the writer's prominent philosophical opponents, but I'm not going to use this space to comment on that bit of controversy (other than to state the obvious: it was bad writing). Instead, I'm going to focus on what this comic gets wrong when it comes to the personality and motivations of Steve Rogers. As I wrote in a longer blog post on this particular issue, Steve didn't embrace service to his country because he was weak and lacking in purpose. His desire to enlist was a function of his greatest *strength*: his steadfast morality. Yes, he was shrimpy before the serum. But he's Captain America because he recognized evil and cruelty in the world and desperately wanted to confront it head on — *not* because he was some pathetic character seeking to fill a spiritual hole. Furthermore, the premise that Steve would be fundamentally humiliated if he were rescued by a woman completely ignores the female Avengers under whose leadership he's happily served — and the multiple times they've saved his bacon without prompting Steve's objection. In other words: the villains' plan here is dumb. Indeed, it diminishes said villains *and* Steve to reduce the former to disgruntled vloggers. Even beyond the ridiculous caricature of Jordan Peterson, this book is definitely not one I would recommend. ★

Way of X #1

Writer: Simon Spurrier

Artist: Bob Quinn

The most recent crop of X-Men books are, to put it mildly, polarizing. In one camp, we have the intrigued: comic book fans who generally trust the overall creative vision of Jonathan Hickman and expect this different take on mutantkind to lead to some sort of revelation that will ultimately redeem their current behavior. In the other, we have the angry: fans who believe their lifelong favorites have now become supremacist villains for no discernible, salutary reason. To be honest with you, I lean more toward the second position than the first — which is why the 40-page first issue of *Way of X* caught me so completely by surprise. I picked it up to see how exactly Marvel was planning to screw up Nightcrawler and, in particular, his established Catholic Christian faith. I put it down feeling *hopeful* (maybe foolishly) that *someone* at the leading, oh-so-frequently-misguided American comic book publisher actually has some brains — and a chest to match.

Which is not to say that this book is perfect. There are times when Kurt's dialogue doesn't quite sound like Kurt. At one point, for example, he states that he "can see no moral flaw" in how the mutants of Krakoa are currently behaving, which certainly doesn't line up with the explicit horror he displays while witnessing his fellows' casual disregard for the sanctity of life. As I wrote



in the comments of one YouTube review, I think this line should've been "I can *articulate* no moral flaw" rather than "I can *see* no moral flaw." I can buy that Kurt is having trouble reconciling his religious traditions - and their associated moral instincts - with the fact of effective mutant immortality. But he quite obviously *does* see - and is just as clearly bothered - that killing mutants in gladiatorial arenas so that they may theoretically be resurrected with all their powers intact has made many mutants careless and cruel.

Still, it is so, *so* promising that this comic actually acknowledges the darkness beneath the surface of Krakoa society. This is only the first chapter of this story, so there is still time to utterly flub the landing. But for me, this opening did what no X book has done for years: earned a digital subscription. ★★★1/2

### DC

#### Superman #30

Writer: Phillip K. Johnson

Artists: Sami Basri & Scott Godlewski

It's only been a couple months, but I've been liking Johnson's work on the Superman titles so far. He's shown signs that he does understand the true source of Superman's heroism. Even more importantly, he's addressing the relationship between Clark and Jon in a very earnest, very heartfelt manner. As some readers of Tightbeam may know, when Jon was aged up (via time/dimensional travel shenanigans), many fans of Superman who enjoyed the dynamics of the Kent family were upset. Well, in issue 30 in particular, Johnson wisely acknowledges those reader complaints in the narrative itself, allowing Clark to express regret that he missed an enormous chunk of his son's boyhood. If Johnson can continue dipping into this well of genuine human emotion, I think what will result is a fine-to-great run. ★★★1/2

### Batman: Urban Legends (Anthology)

And speaking of genuine human emotion: I can't recommend the above anthology as a whole. Most of the stories are, for me, eminently forgettable. But if you have the money to spare, you may want to pick this up just for Chip Zdarsky's Red Hood story, which explores Jason Todd's troubled past - and his equally strained relationship with Batman - as he tries to do the right thing for a boy he's quite possibly orphaned through his own rash (though understandable) actions. Said story really is a master class in establishing character motivation - specifically, in driving Jason Todd to murder despite his promise to Batman that he would refrain from killing - and, like *Three Jokers* (which I reviewed in this column a while back), really tries to get at the core of Todd's trauma. I only wish Zdarsky had been given his own book!

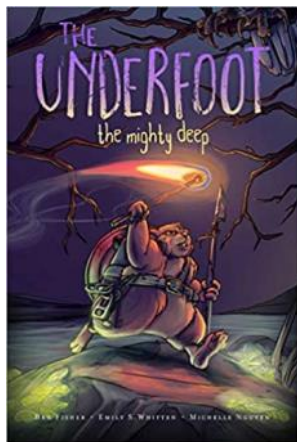
For the anthology: ★★1/2; for Zdarsky's story alone: ★★★★★

### Independent/Crowdfunded Comics

#### The Underfoot, vol. 2

Writers: Ben Fisher & Emily Whitten

Artist: Michelle Nguyen



The protagonists of this terrific - and sadly underrated - series are intelligent hamsters — descendants of uplifted lab animals who survived some as-of-now mysterious environmental cataclysm that resulted in the disappearance of their former (presumably human) masters. In this volume, we are introduced to a lizard antagonist who deeply resents that his kind were left behind when the mammals escaped their cages and is therefore determined to visit revenge upon the “furs” once and for all. It's a basic plot — but nonetheless well-crafted. The writers elegantly solve the world-building vs. satisfying progression problem by adding explanatory notes between “chapters,” thereby allowing the story itself to move at a brisk, enjoyable pace. And as with the first volume, the characters are all distinct and lovingly rendered. I definitely recommend this series to any

fan of the Redwall or Green Ember books. I myself am eager to pick up volume 3! ★★★1/2

### Soulfinder: Black Tide (Book 2)

Writer: Douglas Ernst

Artist: Matthew Weldon

(Iconic Comics, Christian Fantasy)



This series stars a Catholic priest, exorcist, and combat veteran who’s learned he’s especially suited to fight the demonic. Ernst is a very new writer, but he knows how to pick good artists to complement his work. Further, I think his writing reaps the benefits of his real-world experience, his Catholic tradition, and his additional reading in history and philosophy. Impressively, he manages to invent an entirely plausible (but still fictional) saint story to round out the background for the relic that drives the plot for the current volume. And I have always appreciated that the protagonist's abilities here are rooted in his acquaintance with suffering. It’s a solid showing, to say the least — one that manages to convey a religious worldview without necessarily putting off readers with more secular mindsets. Ernst is coming from a clear perspective, but he focuses first on his storytelling and doesn’t preach. ★★★1/2

### Reader Requests/Suggestions

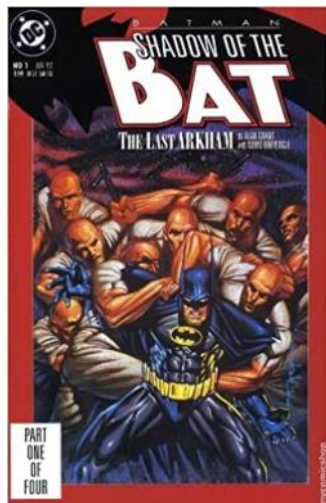
Batman: Shadow of the Bat

The Last Arkham

Writer: Alan Grant

Artist: Norm Breyfogle

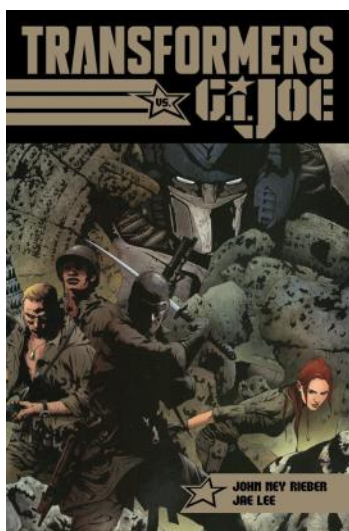
One of my regular correspondents found the first issue of this story in a bargain bin at his local shop, and on his recommendation, I immediately decided to check out the entire story for myself. The premise? There’s a serial killer on the loose in Gotham whose MO quite closely resembles that of a criminal who’s presumed to be locked up in Arkham Asylum. Suspecting that said criminal has found an escape route within the asylum’s walls, Batman arranges to be imprisoned there — and is immediately abused and tormented by Arkham’s newest lead psychiatrist. What I like about this several issue arc is that it shows there is more than one way to be a villain. On one side, you have the maniac who cuts tally marks into his skin for every murder he



perpetrates. On the other, you have Dr. Jeremiah Arkham, who exudes a coldly intellectual, calculating evil that is driven by totalizing ideology rather than a pure lust for mayhem. Speaking for myself, I found the latter a more frightening foe. His absolute certainty that he can modify anyone's anti-social behavior is creepy in the extreme — as is his (eerily familiar) conviction that the past is worthless and ripe for erasure. If you pick this up, be sure to look out for the B. F. Skinner easter egg! ★★★1/2

*Yes, I take requests and suggestions! If there's a particular review you'd like to see, please contact me at [hobsonphile@gmail.com](mailto: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!*

### IDW's Transformers vs. G.I. Joe Volume 1 Review by Jim McCoy



There are those of us out there who \*GASP\* grew up reading comic books at a time when publishers didn't reprint them as trade paperbacks. Yeah, I'm that old. I'm so old my parents let my twelve year old self ride two miles on my bike to get to the comic shop alone or with a friend. They thought nothing of it. Yet, the fact remains that I am no longer twelve. I have a car now. And comic book publishers do indeed make trade paperbacks now. So, one day when I went walking into my Local Hobby Shop (that sells comics) in search of a Dungeons and Dragons game to join, I came across something that made me smile. (For the record, I didn't manage to find a game to join. Sucks to be me.)

You see, up on a shelf near the door was a stack of trade paperbacks marked Transformers vs G.I. Joe. I had been dimly aware of the series, but when it started back in 2014, I was fresh off of a divorce and five dollars a month was an amount I just couldn't afford (no, I'm not joking). So I missed it the first time around. I'm going to do my best to make sure I don't miss it the second time around though. Admittedly, it'll be around longer than it was last time. That's one of the things that I love about the trend toward TPB. It makes it much easier, and cheaper, to catch up on the old stuff.

As a wee little Jimbo (which I actually was, back in the Dark Ages) I loved both the Transformers and G.I. Joe. I had way more Joe stuff, but that's just me. I watched the cartoons religiously. I didn't have anything approaching the same amount of Transformers toys as I did G.I. Joe but I enjoyed both immensely. I'll be honest in stating that a lot of the rest of this review is based on nostalgia and less on cold, hard professionalism, but it's my job to call 'em as I see 'em and I loved this book.

See, when I was a kid Transformers vs. G.I. Joe wasn't just the title of a book. It was a game we played. You should have seen what the First Generation Optimus Prime did to my G.I. Joe MO-

BAT. (That's Mobile Armored Battle Tank for you non-Joe loving communists out there.) It was a good time. I'm really glad someone saw an opportunity and decided to tell this story in visual form.

And the visuals are really awesome. The art in this book is highly reminiscent of the comics I had as a kid. I had copies of both Transformers #1 and G.I. Joe: A Real American Hero #3 (yes, really, even if both were hand me downs and in bad shape when I got them) and they looked a lot like this. I'm not saying bad things about the art of the modern era because it's good. I'm just saying that, the whole Transformers vs G.I. Joe concept is nostalgic for me and the art makes it more so.

Growing up one of my greatest disappointments in both franchises was when they released a new generation of toys and the old generation straight up disappeared from the comics and the TV shows. That made me do a major sad. But, I'm happy to say that IDW, in the form of writers Tom Scioli and John Barber, did the right thing by including characters from all generations. Even in the animated Transformers movie from the Eighties all of the older characters are killed off in the first few minutes.

I especially enjoyed the commentary at the end with the writers. I've always said that I would listen to the commentary while watching some of my favorite DVDs but I never have because listening to someone talk over my movies sucks. This is different. It's at the end of the book so I was able to flip back and forth and find out what they were talking about while not having the story interrupted. I get why that wouldn't work for DVDs but it works great here.

I also like the fact that they included some of the rough drafts of the actual panels as they were working toward a finished product. Any writer knows the process of writing followed by revising, followed by more revising and the revising your revisions, but for some reason it had never occurred to me that actual comic book artists do the same thing. It's good to see that other groups of people deal with the same crap that we have to.

I may be just a bit bitter because they gender-swapped one of my favorite characters. I've talked about this before. I am not at all against representation. Hell, it can be a good thing if it's done right. Of course, doing it right means that the groups of people who wish to be represented should create their own characters and write their own stories instead of expecting someone else to do it for them. Especially since G.I. Joe has plenty of female characters already. I'm not a fan of pandering to the SJW set and there is no reason for it to happen here. That was the one place where I'm going to call bullshit. The rest of the story was interesting and engaging. This was just rampant liberal politics and therefore an unnecessary detraction from the story.

Overall though, this was an enjoyable book and I'll be picking up Volume 2 as soon as I'm able to. Actually, I need to check my email because I think I have a coupon for a discount because my birthday is this weekend. Yep, two more days and I'll be the answer to Life, the Universe and Everything. I'm old. I'm not sure what that has to do with the price of tea in China, but what the hell? It's my bloggie and I'll be goofy if I want to.

Bottom Line: 4.5 out of 5 Energon Cubes  
Transformers vs. G.I Joe Volume 1  
Tom Scioli and John Barber  
IDW, 2014

## Fanzines

### Fanfaronade 10

By Justin E. A. Busch

Plenty of zines this month, including (thanks to George Phillies) a couple which are new to the column. Diving into the task at hand, we first find—

*Jomp, Jr* 38 (April, 2021; Richard A. Dengrove, 2651 Arlington Drive, #302, Alexandria, Virginia 22306. richd22426@aol.com).

Three articles on quite distinct subjects and, coincidentally, three letters of comment make up the issue which, despite its range of discussions, is very much a perzine: “my subjects are determined by my taste and my memory. What my taste approves after the subject turns up in my memory,” editor Dengrove comments in his introduction. “It helps that I have strange taste and a strange memory.”

Strange or not, Dengrove’s memory brings out some intriguing points across a wide historico-literary spectrum. His investigations include a pseudo-quotation from the Roman satirist Petronius which turns out to be a twentieth century invention; the modifications Shakespeare made in recreating the historical Macbeth and his motivations in making them; and, most interestingly, sixteenth century conjuring tricks as explored in a 1584 book by Reginald Scot arguing against the reality of witchcraft.

The zine could stand more careful proofreading; there is an abundance of typos, most noticeably a number of random @ signs, and some of the writing could be more clearly phrased. These, though, are minor annoyances by comparison with the pleasures of taking unexpected voyages back through history.

*Pablo Lennis* 401 (April, 2021 (dated 2012 on the cover, which indicates either recycled art, a mistake, or, as a note below the date says, an April Fool’s joke); John Thiel, 30 N. 19th Street, Lafayette, Indiana, 47904).

The house artist (for so we shall call him), under the name Larry Etn this time, has created one of the most striking covers I have seen on a fanzine in some time. The colors are almost hectographic in their intensity, but a moment’s glance reveals the thick impasto and heavy brush strokes: this is in part a painted original, exceptionally well reproduced on thick paper. The title, “A High Time in Leng,” links it with Lovecraft, a link amply sustained by the almost ferocious sense of madness and chaos with which the image is imbued.

Most interesting among the zine’s contents is a retrospective essay by editor Thiel on essays and stories from earlier issues (inspired in part by the lack of reader comments at the time of first publication). Thiel is quite willing to admit that sometimes he didn’t fully understand the purpose behind a given author’s words, which makes one aware of his (Thiel’s) unusual treatment of his role as editor: in general, he prefers to remain out of the author’s way in order to allow them to speak fully in their own voice. Although PL decidedly reflects Thiel’s own editorial personality, it remains also quite the opposite of a perzine, in that voices which might

otherwise have remained unread are allowed full run of the author's allotment within its pages. This may not always work, but it is an approach worthy of respect.

*Portable Storage 5* (William Breiding; efanazines.com or, for the (highly recommended) print edition, 3507 Santa Rita Ave., 31, Tucson, Arizona 85719 [full disclosure; I have an essay, reprinted from *Dreams Renewed*, in this issue].

In the 1980s and 1990s, certain editors specialized in producing huge fanzines, a hundred pages or more, with multiple contributors collectively covering a colossal scope of topics. Broadly speaking, these fell into two types. One was akin to a farmer's market, crowded and sometimes messy, but with all sorts of unexpected and delicious discoveries awaiting (*Lan's Lantern*, for example); the other is more like a well-run conference containing a wide range of carefully curated presentations, each requiring some work on the part of the reader yet likely to provide plenty of rich rewards (*Outworlds* being among the finest of these).

*Portable Storage* is the principal, perhaps only, contemporary descendent of this tradition, especially the side represented by *Outworlds*. In practical terms, this means that a reviewer with limited space can only suggest the riches within the zine. Here, for instance, we find on one hand a poignant memoir of William Breiding's brother Wayne, who died last year after a fairly rough life, and a moving, yet utterly unsentimental, personal essay by Lynn Kuehl on losing his right leg, balanced by fannish memoirs by Dale Nelson and Kurt Erichsen (with lively illos by Erichsen), balanced yet again by an elegiac column on discoveries among fanzine back issues by Andy Hooper, and then re-balanced, in a wholly different direction, by Lord Jim Khennedy's amusing "Diamonds in the Trash," devoted to the "intriguing, if never very respectable, independent genre movies that obsessed me (and, frankly, still do)."

And that's only six articles out of well over a dozen, along with a thirty-three page lettercol, itself containing much of interest.

You can't replicate the experience of such a fanzine on-line. The heft of the issue, the texture of the cover, the act of turning yet another page, the bookmark which serves as a table of contents (an idea borrowed from Bill Bowers)—each of these aspects of the zine carries with it the sense that the contents are important, that they are unique, that they deserve to be retained for future reference. This one is absolutely worth sending away for.

*This Here...* 41 (Nic Farey; "Locs & that to: 2657 Rungsted Street, Las Vegas NV 89142, or Email fareynic@gmail.com")

The "Egotorial" is a cranky affair, its knickers in a knot about John Purcell's annishes, which then launches into a consideration, and rejection, of the possibility of any sort of TH annish ("Fuck no, business as usual..."). It seems an undue, and unduly *ad hominem*, expenditure of energy on a topic avowedly of no interest to its writer....

Good humor is restored by the music column, atypically largely devoted to a Renaissance music group (The Suspicious Cheese Lords, an a cappella ensemble marking its 25th anniversary this year) and the music of Thomas Tallis. There are links, well worth investigating, to relevant recordings. Much of what follows is taken up with Corflu and the FAAn Awards (in which, to be fair, *This Here...* was a winner), as is a considerable portion of the lettercol, which may be more than some readers will care for (I admit to skimming some of those comments and replies) but

there is plenty else to keep the reader occupied; this is indubitably one of the largest (18 pages out of 29 total) and liveliest letter columns currently running. As Farey comments, “the loccol is the prime measure and support structure for creating and maintaining a sense of community.” He cannot be accused of failing to live up to his own standards.

Fine art, as usual, by Ulrika O’Brien.

\* \* \*

George Phillis recently sent me several fanzines whose editors e-mailed him PDFs, which I review below. If you’re one of those editors, and you didn’t expect, or want, to be reviewed here, please tell George when you send him your next issue.

*Ansible* 405 (April, 2021; David Langford, 94 London Road, Reading, Berks, RG1 5AU, UK. Website news.ansible.uk).

There is surely nothing any comment of mine can add to the luster of either David Langford’s name or his best-known publication. These two pages of small print are crammed with stfnal news, serious and bizarre by turns (the latter often presented with an amusing touch of sardonism), convention listings, obituaries of those in the stfnal field (depressingly, a full quarter of this issue), and, most amusingly, “Thog’s Masterclass,” a sampling of writerly solecisms (e.g., ‘Blaydon stood up, made his way past a couple of piles of paper and shook hands with them both.’ Many of you will know Philip K. Dick’s early short story “The Eyes Have It,” which builds an entire conspiracy theory out of exactly this sort of writing; Langford’s examples demonstrate that such gaffes— by professionals, no less— remain all too common). If you’re unfamiliar with *Ansible*, you should get to know it immediately (you can come back to my column later). I believe the paper copy is, alas, available only in the UK.

*TommyWorld* 83 (March 31, 2021. Tommy Ferguson, editor: available from: 125 Haypark Ave, Belfast, BT7 3FG, Northern Ireland; tw@tommyworld.net [or] http://tommyworld.net. The masthead describes the zine as “a sort-of-letter substitute, fanzine kinda thing. Maybe weekly, maybe not.” As the first issue was in 1997, it’s probably more often not).

It’s hard to say much about this three-pager, as it is essentially an independent publication of the letter columns for the preceding four issues. Judging (without having read the previous articles) from the lively letters, though, the non-epistolary issues are probably brief, wide-ranging in their subjects, and filled with comment hooks.

*The Typo King* 69 (February-March, 2021; Robert Jennings 29 Whiting Rd., Oxford, Mass., 01540-2035; email: FABFICBKS@AOL.COM).

This is a zine for SFPA (which Robert Jennings founded sixty years ago), apparently distributed more widely than usual as a placeholder for *Fadeaway* 66, delayed by the overwhelming demands of Jennings’s mail order business. The lead article is a lengthy, and quite interesting, account of Robert’s encounters with the Covid vaccination process, before, during, and after. A reprint, from the on-line journal *Mental Floss*, of an article by Ethan Trex on Billy Beer, a ghastly product from the late 70s, which some readers may recall, is both amusing and informative. A detailed discussion of a minor 1930s radio show and its star Joe Twerp (I kid you not; it was the performer’s long-established stage name) is, from the descriptions, quite probably more

interesting than the show itself.

An enjoyable read, probably even more so if you have the facilities to view it as created. The zine was sent to George in the form of a Word document; the computer on which I viewed it did not use that version, which made for some awkward layout and reading.

\* \* \*

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 a PDF to [jeab@musician.org](mailto:jeab@musician.org). In the latter case, it would be helpful if it arrives before the third Tuesday of the month; I generally send the column to George Phillips on the fourth Tuesday, and haven't always seen anything sent close to that day, which means that the review is likely to be based on a quick skim of the contents. If the zine is new to me, or seems to require more extensive consideration, I may hold it over for a month.

## Movies

### Universal Pictures' *Mortal Engines* Review by Jim McCoy

So this past Saturday was my birthday and I decided to treat myself to a movie as a birthday present to myself. Seeing as my next two days off were Sunday and Tuesday and I had an absolute crapton of stuff to do on Sunday, I decided to go see a movie on Tuesday. And, since I was convinced that both Aqua and Bumblebee had opened this past Friday, I spent all weekend trying to decide which one to go to. So, when the time came to choose, I decided that I would find the one in the most workable time slot. Oops! They're both starting this coming Friday and not last Friday! I suck! But I REALLY wanted to go see a movie, so what's a nerd-boy to do? I know! I'll go see *Mortal Engines*. GOOD CHOICE NERD-BOY!!!

Seriously, I enjoyed this movie. It's got a post-apocalyptic setting and I love those. The acting was good. The special effects were amazeballs (more about those below) and the story was tight. I've looked for a reason to complain about *Mortal Engines* and I can't find one. It's that good.

Don't blink while you're watching *Mortal Engines*. This flick moves fast and there is a lot to it. Plot twists abound and not everything is as it seems. Characters come and go quickly and you're never sure whether you should trust the newest person to show or not. I looked down to scratch my nose at one point and missed thirty-seven plot points, four new characters and a major clue about something. I think. Or maybe I'm exaggerating, but why take the chance? Seriously, you paid for the ticket, now pay attention.

The special effects for this movie were orgasmic. I don't know who did them (and I'm too lazy to look) but WOW. Big guns, moving cities, explosions, one thing I'm not going to talk about and more. This was one of the most visually impressive movies I've ever seen in my life. Obviously, a lot of the credit for the concepts put forth go to Phillip Reeve, the author of the *Mortal Engines* novel that the movie was based on. I'm more than happy to give him that credit because he deserves it. The fact remains that translating that writing into the extravaganza that appears on screen. It seems like every scene has some kind of awesome looking something in it. Wheth-





er it's a city on treads or an airship or whatever it all looks awesome and that's good because a Steampunk movie demands a Steampunk aesthetic.

And speaking of Steampunk: I know it's a less popular sub-genre of Specula-

tive Fiction than most. I know it's treated like an unwanted stepchild. I just don't know why. It's kind of weird, but it's not like Wookies and Vulcans aren't. The stories are good. Anyone who has ever enjoyed a Mad Max movie or The Walking Dead can get with post-apocalyptic Steampunk. Anyone who like historical fiction can get with actual steam age Steampunk. So why the hate? I don't get it.

I do know this much though: Taking your friend who doesn't like Steampunk to see Mortal Engines is likely to create a new fan. This movie is that good. Seeing it was maybe the fastest two hours of my life. I mean, I could've brained the guy in the row ahead of me who decided to pull out his phone during one of the good parts, but honestly I can't put that on Universal Studios.

Speaking of Steampunk though, I have to ask: Why is it necessary for every single thing to be different than every other? Is it some weird unwritten rule of Steampunk physics that every airship has to be built differently than every other one? Why has no one ever made the same model mining unit as someone else? I get the fact that things are cobbled together with whatever is available. I get the fact that modern-day factories either don't exist anymore or never have. But dude: The American West was settled with Conestoga wagons in a time period with a comparable level of technology to most of Steampunk. It was ubiquitous. So why can't one airship maker create an airship that looks like someone else's? I don't get it. I probably never will.

Getting back to Mortal Engines, I have to say that the characters all make sense and feel real. As a moviegoer, I was able to understand what they did and why they did it. Phillip Reeve apparently understands human nature. Yes, there was one incredibly stupid moment for one of the characters. I won't spoil too much but given the character's level of knowledge and experience, what he did makes sense. I can't say I'd have acted much different in their position.

The world building element to this story was excellent. It was a slow build, but that makes sense. We learn things as the story progresses and we need to. A good writer (whether book, TV or movie) can teach us about their world without pages (or minutes) of exposition while we're all just sitting there waiting for something to happen in the story. Reeve and the people who wrote the screenplay both seem to have a sense of what to reveal when and how that works. It's really well done, with our questions being answered when it's necessary.

Mortal Engines has all of the good stuff you could possibly want. It's got heroes and heroines. It's got villains who think they're heroes but you hate them anyway. It's got a romance. There's fighting. There's honesty moments. There's trickeration. Everything you could ever want you'll find here. So go see the movie and bring your friends. You'll all thank me.

I haven't read the book (I didn't even know that there WAS a book until the end credits popped

up) but it turns out that there is a whole series here. That's good news because I was hoping for a sequel. The bad news is that not enough people have seen it and it looks like it will probably lose money. That sucks because there won't be a sequel unless the take is big enough to supply a profit. I really hope things turn around for Mortal Engines somehow because I want to see more. I guess if it does fail, then at least I've done what I could for it. Bottom Line: 4.5 out of 5 Traction Cities

## Novels

### Draw One in the Dark by Sarah A. Hoyt Review by Pat Patterson



I don't know when I read this, but it was before Baen partnered with Amazon. I suspect it was before 2003, though. This is the second edition, which includes small extras, so that something something something. It's POSSIBLE that this was the first of Sarah A Hoyt's work I read; no wonder I fell in love with her writing.

She's a panther shifter, he's a dragon shifter. They meet while working at a Greasy Spoon Diner, in a college town in Colorado. And what follows is MOST of the Amazon review I posted in 2014.

I think the best books are those which take ordinary people and put them in extraordinary places.

If this was the ONLY review published, I'd go into more detail, but frankly, after two doctors' appointments yesterday, doing homework, making dinner, followed by a surprise PTA meeting with my third grader performing, I'M BEHIND ON MY READING!

So let me just reflect on one of the end scenes. The darkest hour. Hope is lost. And the two heroes have had their guts kicked out, one figuratively, one literally. Kyrie sits at the table, and wails the 'If Only' song to herself.

It's just so beautifully done; it's real, and evokes the moments I've been there. I'm thinking of reading this part to my son tonight, or at least this weekend. Perhaps if I can speak to his emotions as well as this scene speaks to mine, maybe he will have the foresight to avoid some of the If Only moments in his life.

### Karma Upsilon 4 by Mark Wandrey Review by Pat Patterson

The artwork is radically different from the other entries in the 4HU series. This cover is, for lack of a better word, almost a cartoon, compared to the realism of the other books. The artist is Mika Gruszka. Kind of a nice way to set-off this sub-set from the others, I think,

"So, sport, how did you wind up owning that planetoid, anyway?" That's the first question this

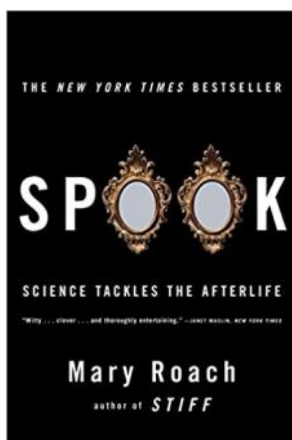


story answers.

If all you want is pure space opera, you likely want a longer book. However, what makes this different is that it goes into the back story a bit more, and we get to see Jim and Splunk work out their relationship, as well as see Jim in the midst of his transition from Fat Boy to Fighter/ Leader of Fighters. And that's the more important question.

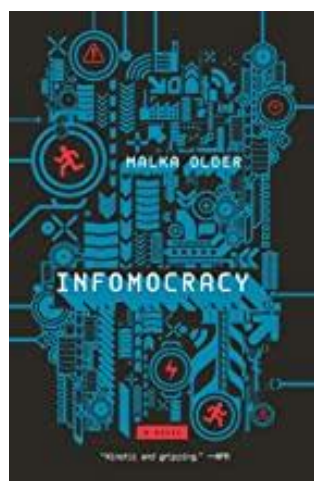
Good action, good character development, lots of fun, and a quick read

### Mary Roach's *Spook: Science Tackles The Afterlife* Review by Will Mayo



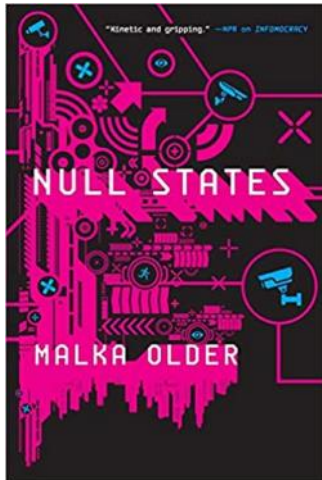
Here, Mrs. Roach, seeking out answers both for her own benefit and that of others, explores scientific explorations of such phenomena as reincarnation (whereby, she travels to India and meets what is said to be a four-year old boy and his grown son from a previous life - apparently a common sight in that country), ghosts, out of body experiences and near-death experiences and, finding at the end that science cannot explain everything in this life, walks away from it all with a belief in something out there. Call it not heaven or hell or other lives but ghosts for want of a better word. My only regret in reading her book is that she finished her tale long before I was ready for her to do so. But then we live in a modern world that expects an answer for everything - and comes up short time and again. Recommended reading here. I enjoyed this one.

### The Centenal Cycle by Malka Older— Review by Tom Feller



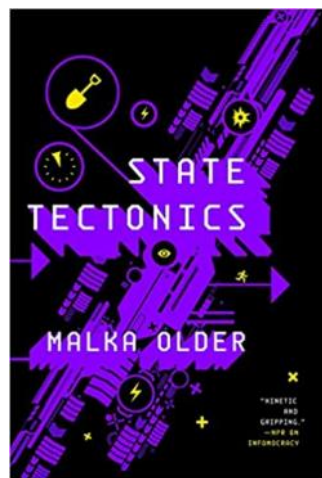
There have been stories about “new world orders” since before I was born. This trilogy, consisting of the novels *Infomocracy* (2016), *Null States* (2017), and *State Tectonics* (2018), postulates the rise of what the author calls “micro-democracy” in which most of the world is divided into 100,000 person political units called Centenals. Political units outside the micro-democracies, such as Saudi Arabia and Switzerland, are called “null states”. The novels take place around the year 2040, but they are rather sketchy about how we got from here to there, although there is one reference to the collapse of the United States. There is a multiplicity of political parties, called “governments” in these books, but the one that controls the most centenals, which do not have to be geographically contiguous, is the de facto world government. It is very easy to move to a different centenal if you don’t like the ruling party. The novels are set from about 2060 to 2065.

There is a world-wide public utility called Information that apparently was the takeover of Facebook, Google, Wikipedia, the BBC, and other news services by the United Nations. It also administers the elections which take place every ten years and later every five. In addition, In-



formation operates an extensive system of surveillance cameras around the world and has a monopoly on the news.

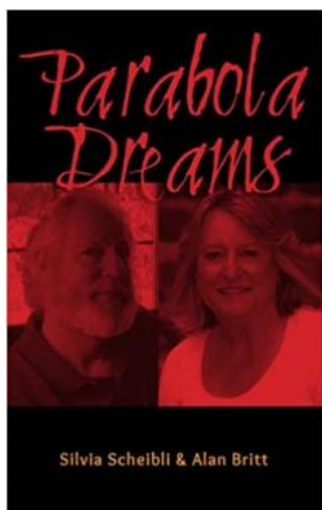
There are several point-of-view characters, several of whom work for Information. Mishima is an assassin/spy, Amran her apprentice, Maryam a computer technician, and Roz an analyst, all for Information. Ken, a Brazilian of Japanese descent, is a political operative for one of the governments. He becomes Mishima's lover and later the father of her daughter, and their relationship survives even after she drives a stiletto into his thigh. Yoriko is a taxi driver in Okinawa who moonlights as a spy. Domaine is an anarchist who works to undermine the system of micro-democracies. They all seem to travel around the globe with little difficulty.



The plot of the first novel is a political thriller in which two of the governments attempt to fix an election, the second a murder mystery about the assassination of the head of a minor government in what used to be The Sudan, and the third a spy thriller about a plot to overthrow the entire micro-democracy system. One of the twists in the second novel is that Roz falls in love with one of the murder suspects. The second novel also includes a war between two of the null states, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.

The first part of the first novel is rather slow reading, because the author is building the world the characters interact in. However, once she gets going, they are hard to put down. Whether it is dystopian or utopian will depend on your point of view.

### Alan Britt and Silvia Scheibli's Parabola Dreams Review by Will Mayo



Many people trying to make sense of their lives turn to the possibilities of rocket ships to Mars and the Moon, strange equations perhaps or exotic religions. But for Alan Britt and Silvia Scheibli, these two remarkable poets, they turn instead, as Alan Britt put it in more than one poem, to their status as "lovers of the universe." They find mutual joy in this world around them and, of course, the possibilities of others. I think of Ms. Scheibli's poem "Sinagua Ruins - Sedona, Arizona" in which she muses on a place where "Sinagua ruins consist of untold stories," "Not holding their breath/Giving away nothing/Except when it rains." And I think of Alan Britt's poem "Girl In Yellow" in which he muses upon breasts like "frozen/tulips" and concludes "Clearly you were that girl in yellow/reading the verses of obscure poets/as though they were sacred hymns." While in another poem Mr. Britt meditates on the wild romp through our earth, a universe in miniature, in which he and his companions were "aware the moon nursing Manhattan/

skyscraper also splinters the icy peaks/of Peru, ignites Caymans in Columbia/the Quichua in Ecuador, yucca lightning/in Mexico, plus Bolivar's bones down in Mexico." Clearly, these are

poems to reckon with. They shift rapidly among "a young girl's perky breasts" and the ruins where spirits dwell to the stars above. The reader leaves this book of fine poems with a look of wonder. Recommended.

## SerCon

### Leigh Brackett Bio-Bibliography

by

Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D.

N3F Historian

Leigh Douglass Brackett was a science fiction (SF) author and a Hollywood screenwriter, known for her work on such movies as *The Big Sleep* (1945), *The Long Goodbye* (1973), and *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980). She was born on December 7, 1915; and she died on March 18, 1978.

#### Published Work

Her first published SF story was "Martian Quest" in the February, 1940, issue of *Astounding Science Fiction*. Early in her career, she was known for her "space opera" stories in pulp SF prozines such as *Planet Stories*, *Startling Stories*, and *Thrilling Wonder Stories*. Some of her pulp SF is collected in *The Best of Leigh Brackett* (1977).

In the trilogy she published in the mid-1970s – *The Ginger Star*, *The Hounds of Skaith*, and *The Reavers of Skaith* -- she attempted to recapture the spirit of her earlier pulp SF stories.

In addition to SF, she also wrote detective and western fiction, and her western novel, *Follow the Free Wind*, won the Spur Award for Best Novel in 1963. Other SF authors who won Spur Awards include Chad Oliver and Lee Hoffman.



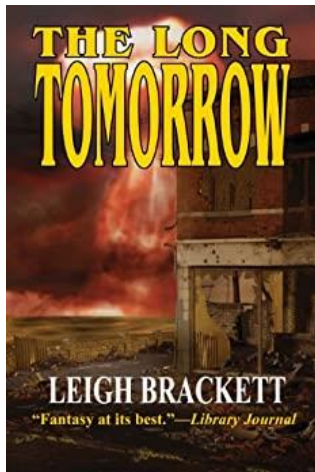
Leigh Brackett  
at age 15

Brackett did not routinely use pseudonyms in her career, but she did "ghost write" a novel for actor George Sanders, *Stranger at Home*, in 1946.

#### Edmond Hamilton

Brackett was married to SF author Edmond Hamilton, from 1946 until his death in 1977 (see last month's *Tightbeam*). The Hamilton-Brackett Award was named in their honor. The award was presented at the Spellbinders Foundation in Sonoma County, California, at Octocon. The winners were selected by a vote of the convention's attending members. Octocon was only held through 1982, but Reginald's lists a winner for 1986; the mechanism for selecting the winner following the end of Octocon, or presenting the award, is unknown to me.

Brackett was nominated for the 1956 Best Novel Hugo for *The*



Long Tomorrow. She was GoH at Pacificon II, the 1964 Worldcon; and she won the 1981 Best Dramatic Presentation Hugo for her screenplay for *The Empire Strikes Back*.

#### Other Awards, Honors, Nominations, and GoHships:

1941 – Best Short Story Retro Hugo nominee

1944 – Best Novelette Retro nominee

1954 – Metrocon 1

1969 – 1969 Detroit Triple Fan Fair

1972 – Pulpcon 1972

1976 – Minicon 11

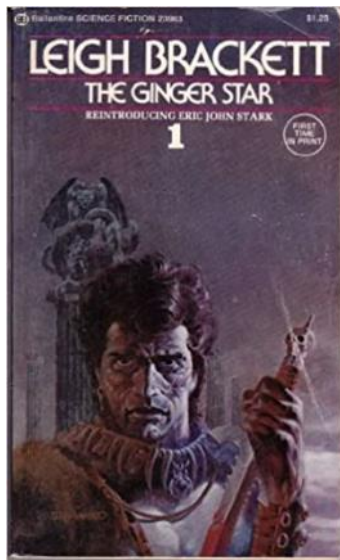
1977 – Penulticon, Rovacon 11

1978 – Forry Award

1998 – Readercon 10 (Memorial Guest)

2005 – Cordwainer Smith Rediscovery Award

2020 – 1945 Best Related Work Retro Hugo, 1945 Best Novel Retro Hugo, 1945 Best Novella Retro Hugo nominee



#### Some Critical Comments

“Brackett’s early science fiction is highly romantic, depicting saturnine heroes on perilous worlds,” wrote John L. Carr in Gunn’s *The New Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*. Carr’s doctoral dissertation was partly based on the work of Brackett.

Brackett was often referred to in genre literature as “The Queen of Space Opera.”

She claimed that SF should never be put into drawers and confined with labels. She has been described as “a masterful storyteller of limitless imagination, exquisite writing skills and quite an impressive range, [she] was ahead of her time just as she was ahead of most of her colleagues.”

#### Concluding Statements

Brackett is best known today for her work on the screenplays of several popular detective, western, and SF movies, especially ones starring John Wayne. In SF fandom, she is primarily remembered for her work on the classic genre film, *The Empire Strikes Back*.

She is also remembered for the screenplay of *The Big Sleep*, which she co-authored with future Nobel Prize laureate William Faulkner.

Brackett’s 1944 novel, *No Good from a Corpse*, a hard-boiled mystery novel, was read by film director Howard Hawks; he was so impressed with her writing that he helped steer her career towards the movie business.

She coached Ray Bradbury on writing techniques when he was a teenager and aspiring author.

They were close friends and collaborated on one SF story, “Lorelei of the Red Mist,” published in the Summer, 1946, issue of Planet Stories.

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

### An Interview with Nick Cole by Tamara Wilhite

Nick Cole is a prolific science fiction, horror and fantasy author. His “*Galaxy’s Edge: Savage Wars*” novel was the winner of the 2020 Dragon Award for Best Military Science Fiction. His novel “*The Old Man and the Wasteland*” sold more than 100,000 copies. And I had the opportunity to interview him.

Tamara Wilhite: You referred to “*CTRL ALT Revolt!*” as the story that cost you your job but that it was worth it. Can I ask you about the story behind that statement?

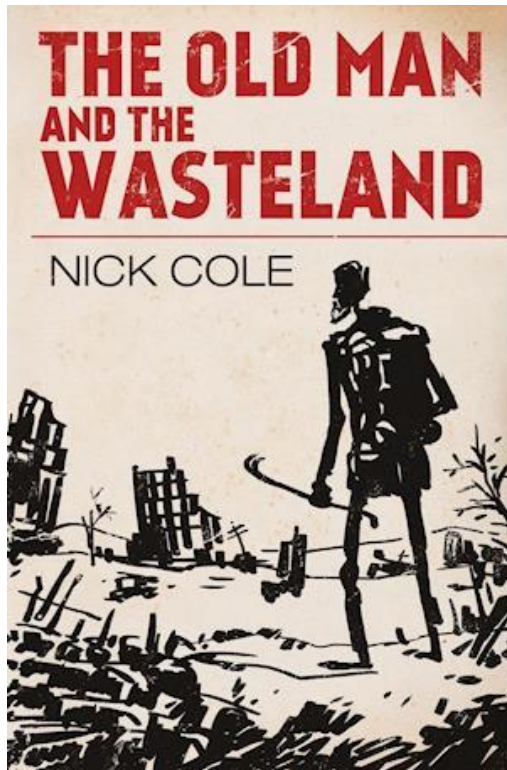
Nick Cole: Basically what happened is they asked me to change some content they felt was offensive. I declined. They threatened me that I was “finished” if I didn’t. I don’t do threats. They cancelled my publishing contract because I made a fairly good argument against abortion from an A.I.’s perspective. It was just to give the main villain some motivation for wanting to destroy the world. The rest of the book was *Night of the Living Dead-Robots meets Ready Player One*. They felt that I as a male had no business making the argument.

In essence, they felt I wrote *WrongThink* and then tried to censor me. So they fired me. It was a great move because it was the right thing to do, for me.

And, it fed me up to return to indie publishing which is a lot more fun, and profitable than Traditional Publishing.

Everything about Trad Pub is a myth. It’s a terrible experience. One Star. Would not recommend.

Tamara Wilhite: You’ve written quite a bit of science fiction. Did you write the entire *Galaxy’s*



Edge series?

Nick Cole: I write it with my writing partner Jason Anspach.

Tamara Wilhite: “*Soda Pop Soldier*” is described as *Call of Duty* meets *Diablo*. It is an intriguing concept. What led to you writing it?

Nick Cole: I love video games and cyberpunk. *Diablo 2* is one of my favorite all time games and I play *Call of Duty* after ending my writing day. The dark fantasy of *Diablo* makes a kind of excellent dark net Vegas in the novel while *Pro Call of Duty* serves as the protagonist’s day job. Purely fun book. Love the series. It’s my guilty pleasure and people like it.

Tamara Wilhite: What is the inspiration for your “*The Old Man and the Wasteland*” series?

Nick Cole: *The Old Man and the Sea* is one of my favorite books. I wondered what it would be like if the novel was set 40 years after a nuclear war. That was the inspiration. What came out of it was a book-lovers homage to your favorite character becoming your only friend in a difficult time. Love that book.

Tamara Wilhite: I’ve noticed that you’ve put out audio books of many of your novels, and you even did the narration. What is that like?

Nick Cole: I love it. But it’s grueling. I’ve done some voice acting work. It’s tough. Long hours, physically draining. Totally rewarding. It’s a leveling up plus one experience for a book. And it’s the future.

Tamara Wilhite: What are you currently working on?

Nick Cole: Jason and I are launching a new series in a new genre we’ve created. Details to come. We’re also producing our own audiobooks now. No corporate middle men.

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

Nick Cole: Just this ... books will take you farther than any jet airplane ever will. Always have one in your back pocket.

Tamara Wilhite: Thanks for speaking with me.

Nick Cole: My pleasure.

[Ed: To which the Editor will add that in *CTRL ALT REVOLT* we appear to have the classical sfnal trope of an artificial intelligence doing something totally off the wall for what it thinks are totally logical reasons, a fine warning about trusting computers too far.]



## Video

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



Roll up for another edition of “Rabid Ears: Ravings of a TV Fiend,” a periodic column about the most interesting and important offerings of sf, fantasy, horror, and other genre television programming. Let’s see what’s what—now, and next—on the old boob tube, shall we?

The April 26 to May 9 double issue of TV Guide features two collectible Supergirl covers, one featuring Chyler Leigh and Melissa Benoist, and one featuring Benoist on her own and lonesome-only. Damian Holbrook contributes a two-page feature story that examines the actresses’ roles as sisters, as well as the DC superhero show’s final season. At the end of April, bridging into May, a two-part sequence of episodes—”Prom Night” and “Prom Again!”—further explores the sisters Kara and Alex Danvers when they travel back in time with Brainiac-5. A sidebar considers current plot elements involving Jon Cryer’s Lex Luthor and the Martian Manhunter.

Matt Roush’s April 26 column “The Roush Review,” calls out new Victorian dark fantasy *The Nevers*, which airs Sundays on HBO. In the show, which is set in the 1890s, women and a few men—dubbed the Touched—gain mysterious powers after they’re exposed to some kind of cosmic radiation. I’ve now watched the first two episodes of this new series, which was originally a Joss Whedon project—with Whedon initially serving as writer, director, executive producer, and showrunner. In the end, Whedon wrote six episodes, served as EP on six episodes, and directed three. It’s a wonderful steampunk adventure.

In Roush’s May 10-23 TV Guide column, he highlights *Debris* and *The Handmaid’s Tale*. In his writeup of *Debris*, he compares it to *The X-Files*, suggesting that while that show’s intent was to terrify, the goal of *Debris* is to inspire awe—and hope. If you haven’t checked out *Debris* yet, it’s worth watching.

New episodes of *The Handmaid’s Tale* premiered at the end of last month on Hulu. The fourth season of the program returns after an almost two-year hiatus. Also available on Hulu: The 2015-2018 Fox comedy *The Last Man on Earth* starring Will Forte. In that show, a virus wipes out most of the world’s humans. But hilarity ensues regardless: “A lot of the other survivors ... are weirdos.”

The May 2021 issue of Channel Guide magazine highlights the following “returning favorites” and recently renewed shows: DC’s *Legends of Tomorrow*—which TV Guide calls “the funniest superheroes on network TV”—returned to the CW on May 2.

In early May, FETV aired a six-hour marathon featuring episodes from the classic fantasy TV

show *Bewitched*. The episodes showcase Agnes Moorehead's "haughtily droll witch" mother-in-law to Dick York's—and later, Dick Sargent's—mortal character, married to the magical Samantha. Episodes screened included "Junior Executive" and "You're So Agreeable." (Fans of Agnes Moorehead might also want to calendar the May 14 Night Gallery episode on Comet.)

May the Fourth be with you! What a great day for Disney+ to premiere *Star Wars: The Bad Batch*. The animated spinoff from *The Clone Wars* follows Clone Force 99, a group of unique clone troopers active after the end of the Clone Wars. On Hulu, the animated spoof Marvel's M.O.D.O.K.—or, Mental/Mobile/Mechanized Organism Designed Only for Killing, true believers—premieres May 21. Think *WandaVision*, but animated, as M.O.D.O.K. copes with losing his job at A.I.M., as well as relationship challenges in his family life and home.

Also May 4, the second season of History's *The Secret of Skinwalker Ranch* premiered. A team of investigators led by an astrophysicist explores a parcel of land in Utah known for its UFO and "high strangeness" phenomena. In this season premiere, the excavation of a mysterious hole in the ground leads to a frightening encounter.

Pencil these in your calendar, fans and fellow freaks: On May 7, *Jupiter's Legacy* becomes available on Netflix. Based on graphic novels by Mark Millar and Frank Quitely, the series spans decades and considers how the world's first generation of superheroes passes the baton to their children to continue protecting the world. The next generation—the resentful children of heroes such as the Utopian and Lady Liberty—deals with their folks' public reputations, as well as parental expectations. The multilayered narrative also addresses the origin of the core team, the Union.

The second half of the second season of *Ghostwriter* becomes available on Apple TV+ on May 7. If you like bookstores... and ghosts who live—well, you know what I mean—in bookstores... you might enjoy this show, which will soon feature Dr. Watson of Sherlock Holmes fame.

Also on May 7, the 2021 TCM Classic Film Festival Day 2 will include a primetime airing of *SF Sketchfest Presents Plan 9 from Outer Space*—Adapted by Dana Gould. It's a table read of a script based on the 1959 Ed Wood movie and was originally produced by SF Sketchfest. The airing of the table read will be followed by a screening of the movie itself. That's good stuff!

Fans of children's series books might be interested in the May 12 episode of *Nancy Drew* on the CW. "The stage is set for a potential spinoff when Nancy helps billionaire inventor Tom Swift investigate a case of creepy proportions," reports TV Guide. Tom Swift on television! Last October, an article in *Deadline* suggests that a Tom Swift show is soon to come: "Like the *Nancy Drew* books, which inspired *The CW* series, the Tom Swift book series hails from Stratemeyer Syndicate, which also publishes the *Hardy Boys* and *Bobbsey Twins* books."

A modern-day counterpart to *Bewitched*, perhaps, *Good Witch* on Hallmark is returning for its seventh season, airing Sundays beginning May 16. Catherine Bell has played the title character, Cassie Nightingale, for 13 years now—an unlucky tenure, for sure!—in the original TV movies, as well as in the series. Has anyone actually watched this show? Given that it's on Hallmark, it might be a little vanilla—it is a "feel-good family drama," after all—but there's definitely a supernatural aspect to the show. In this season, the witches start to lose their magic. May 18, *Supernatural & Lois* returns to the CW after a Covid-19-related scheduling shift.

Later in the month, the animated *Jurassic World: Camp Cretaceous* comes back to Netflix on May 21. This will be the third season of the Steven Spielberg-associated cartoon series. And on May 27, anime series *Eden* will consider a robot-managed city thousands of years in the future—and what might be the last surviving human. May 24, the season finale of *Debris* will air on NBC. Airing Monday nights, recent episodes address how the “mysterious wreckage from space may be having a horrifying impact on the fabric of reality.” (And if *Debris* doesn’t do it for you, reruns of *The X-Files* airs Tuesday nights on Comet.)

Neffers might also be interested in a couple of forthcoming programs in development. An upcoming series *The Man Who Fell to Earth* moved from Paramount+ to Showtime. The show is based on the 1963 Walter Tevis novel and 1976 movie starring David Bowie. Also in production and of potential interest is the NBC sf drama *La Brea*, which centers on a massive sinkhole in Los Angeles.

Starz reportedly approved production of a seventh season of *Outlander*. The forthcoming season will be based on the seventh of the eight *Outlander* novels by Diana Gabaldon, *An Echo in the Bone*. Also, *Resident Alien* will return for a second season on Syfy. TV Guide reports that the animated *Star Trek: Lower Decks* has been renewed for Paramount+.

Additionally, AMC and Shudder will produce a scripted Black horror anthology series featuring the work of Black directors and screenwriters. It’ll debut later this year on Shudder and AMC+. And Shudder acquired *The Amusement Park*, a recently restored lost film by George A. Romero. What might be Romero’s “wildest and most imaginative movie” hasn’t been seen for 46 years.

But the big news—we’re talking epic—is Amazon’s upcoming *Lord of the Rings* series. Reportedly, the streaming platform will spend \$465 million to produce the first season of the show. That’s a good amount of money. By comparison, HBO only spent \$100 million on each season of *Game of Thrones*. Expected to air over five seasons, the Tolkien-inspired program will be set thousands of years before *The Hobbit*. (And if you haven’t seen the 1990s Russian TV adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings* yet, look for it on YouTube. It’s kooky.)

In the TV fandom press, the May 2021 issue of *Remind* includes a feature titled “Where Are They Now?”, which reports on notable TV actors, musicians, and other celebrities from the ‘50s, ‘60s, and ‘70s. Genre highlights include Lisa Loring, who was 5 when she was first cast as Wednesday Addams on *The Addams Family*; David McCallum, originally cast as Illya Kuryakin on *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* and now starring on *NCIS*; Butch Patrick, who played Eddie Munster on *The Munsters*; and Lynda Carter, cast as Wonder Woman—and recently appearing on *Superman & Lois*.

The Spring 2021 issue of *Sci Fi* magazine’s “TV in Focus” column reports on new developments related to *American Gods*, *Debris*, *Batwoman*, *Snowpiercer*, *Pennyworth*, *The Astronauts*, *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, and *Charmed*. Feature stories focus on the second season of *The Mandalorian*, *WandaVision*, the 20th anniversary of the *Justice League* cartoon, Netflix’s *We Can Be Heroes*, BBC America’s *The Watch* (reportedly inspired by Terry Pratchett’s *Discworld*), and *The Outpost* on the CW. Has anyone seen *The Watch* yet?

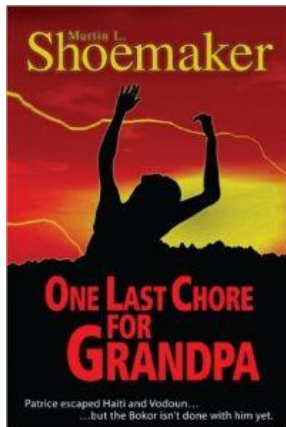
The April 26 to May 9, 2021, TV Guide crossword, Puzzle #1413, poses the following conun-

drums. 4 Across is “Fay of King Kong.” 18 Across is “Bassett of American Horror Story.” 28 Across is “HBO show \_\_\_ Dark Materials.” And 50 Across is “Harington of Game of Thrones.” The May 10-23 crossword, Puzzle #1414, offers some other brain teasers for Neffers. 1 Across is “Amy on Doctor Who.” 20 Across is “Mystery Science Theater 3000 android (3 wds).” 26 Across is “Beauty and the Beast actor Perlman.” 35 Across is “Studi of Penny Dreadful.” 38 Across is “Aimee Garcia, on Lucifer.” 42 Across is “John of The Addams Family.” And 32 Down is “Batman and Robin, say.” Send in all entries by mail care of this clubzine.

Until next time, true believers, this is “Cathode Ray,” your guide to the best of what’s hidden in the grids. Turn on, tune in, and blast off!

## Gourmet Bureau

### Eat This While You Read That: Martin Shoemaker With Cedar Sanderson



When I asked Martin Shoemaker, who I know best for hard science fiction stories, for a dish and a title for ETWYRT, he surprised me. The story he recommended was one that he’d written this dish into... and it’s about voodoo, and a grandfather, and a sweet potato pudding. Ok, the pudding isn’t really a big part of the story. But it is the primary part of this post today. Go grab *One Last Chore for Grandpa*, which is a novella, perfect while reading as the Pen Petate bakes and the spices tease your nose with the promise of their flavor.

This recipe is a Haitian family recipe, and it makes quite a lot – you’ll want to cut it in half if you aren’t feeding a family. Pen Petat-10

Pen Patate is sort of a baked pudding. It’s very easy to make, and if you have a sweet tooth it’s well worth the effort... Unless you cheat like I did, in which case it’s not a lot of trouble at all. The grating of the potatoes is the hardest part, and I used my Cuisinart for that.

#### Ingredients

- 2 lbs. peeled and finely grated sweet potato/batata
- 1 mashed banana
- 1/2 cup grated coconut
- 1/2 cup dark brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon grated ginger
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cloves
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
- 3 tablespoons melted butter
- 1/4 teaspoon salt (only if butter is unsalted)
- 1 12 oz. can evaporated milk
- 1 1/2 cups coconut milk





### Instructions

Preheat oven to 375 degrees.  
Grate sweet potatoes into mixing bowl.  
Mash banana into sweet potatoes.  
Add all the ingredients (except 1 tablespoon brown sugar),  
mixing in 1 ingredient at a time until each is fully blended into  
the mix.

Spread evenly into a 9-by-13-inch baking pan and sprinkle reserved  
brown sugar over top of pudding.

Bake for 1 1/2 hours or until a toothpick inserted in the center  
comes out clean and the top is golden brown.

Serve warm or cold and refrigerate leftovers.





*Team Mandalorian  
By Jose Sanchez*