

Tightbeam 329

February 2022



Paired Beauty
Angela K. Scott

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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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Letter of Comment

To the Editor:

re: And Tales Of A Mirror Earth Review by Will Mayo

That would be "Journey to the Far Side of the Sun" (UK "Doppelgänger"; 1969). As an organic chemist, what I really like is its use of real science in pointing out that a human from our world would not be able to survive long in a truly mirror-image one through being unable to digest the looking-glass versions of certain molecules essential to life (many amino acids and carbohydrates; the fats and oils would be OK, though). Even though, in real life, no "Counter-Earth" (a plot device also used in John Norman's "Gor" series) could long be hidden by the Sun without drifting into view, or perturbing the other planets; and you certainly couldn't count on everything there being a mirror image of here--the view of the other planets & stars, for instance, wouldn't mirror our own.

Produced by Gerry and Sylvia Anderson/AP Films/Century 21 Productions, who had made the "Thunderbird" and other Supermarionation TV series, and went on to make the live-action "UFO" show, which re-used many of this movie's props, then "Space 1999".

-GrayJay

Anime

Winter 2022 First Impressions – Miss Kuroitsu from the Monster Development Department Review by Jessi Silver



Episode Summary: The Secret Society Agastia is one of several evil organizations operating throughout Japan. Many of the other groups have recently met their demise when pit against local heroes, and Agastia needs to come up with some winning monster design to help quell their own heroic interloper, Divine Swordsman Blader. Enter Miss Kuroitsu, a researcher in Agastia's Monster Development Department, with her group's latest extremely well-thought-out and absolutely not last-minute monster design.

In reality, Miss Kuroitsu and the Doctor she works alongside are constantly operating at a budgetary and energy deficit, crunching to put together monster proposals that are subsequently picked apart by the other members of Agastia. Their most recent project, a lupine creature called Wolf Bete, seems to have been created within the relative luxury of plenty of development time until Agastia's leader, Akashic, demands a much cuter design at the eleventh hour. This causes some... conflicts between Wolf Bete's mind and body, but this new design may turn out to be an advantage against the sexually-inexperienced Divine Swordsman Blader.

Impressions: Over the course of the pandemic, one activity that's provided me with some fun now and then is playing Jackbox games with my friends. For those who aren't familiar, these are packs of party games that can be



Sometimes form comes before function
when pleasing one's bosses.

played either in person or online using a computer, tablet, or smartphone. I've participated in several game nights over Discord, and these party games are always a favorite. One game in a more recent party pack is called "Talking Points," where players are forced to come up with a corporate-style presentation based on subject matter and stock images picked out by other players. It's a lot of fun, especially if you're experienced in the fine art of bullshitting your way through the sort of presentations in question. The opening segment of this episode of Miss Kuroitsu from the Monster Development Department provided me with some fond memories of playing this game, and my affection only grew from there.

One anime series that I'm sad has never had a release in the US is Astro Fighter Sunred. The series is a parody of tokusatsu entertainment, and stars a semi-retired masked hero and a group of mostly very incompetent baddies. The show gains most of its humor through defying expectations; Sunred is a bit of an asshole and Vamp, the leader of the local evil organization, is extremely nice and has the air of a stay-at-home spouse with very developed domestic skills. Miss Kuroitsu, while different in its details, is similar in the way that it twists the viewer's expectations of the established tokusatsu character dynamics. After their failed presentation, one would expect Megistus, a threatening member of Agastia's upper echelon, to take out his wrath on the Doctor and Miss Kuroitsu in a violent way. Instead, he scolds them for not requesting extra time to prepare their proposal and not taking adequate breaks. Akashic is extremely non-threatening as an evil leader, seemingly focused more intensely on a monster's aesthetic cuteness rather than its effectiveness at world domination. The episode does a lot to cultivate viewer affection toward these ineffectual dummies, and I enjoyed that a lot.

Comedy is a tough genre, and I spend a lot of time thinking about what makes comedy successful in my eyes. My favorite anime comedy is Nichijou, and while some of its success really boils down to comedic timing that's helped along by truly excellent animation, another big factor is simply that the characters, with all their flaws, are likeable and that their personalities weigh a lot into the various gags – especially in the second half of the series. One episode into Miss Kuroitsu, it's difficult to make many judgments on what the overall tone may end up being like. But the episode does a really good job of demonstrating how the central characters we've been introduced to thus far are likeable people with particular personal situations and personalities, and I did laugh out loud a few times, so it must already be doing something right.



Truly a nightmare for some.

Pros: This show clearly has some affection toward tokusatsu series and their various tropes, which provides some fun window dressing to the episode. During the credits, it introduces some of the hero characters who were briefly featured throughout the episode, claiming that they're real-life heroes. I unfortunately don't have a ton of experience with the genre, so I'm not sure whether these are actual characters from TV series, or amateurs who enjoy dressing up in costume, but I thought it was a nice touch to include live-action photos of them all.

Cons: Visually this episode is just very basic and uninteresting. Scene layouts are uninspired at best, and the character animation is clunky. I think a lot can be accomplished in anime comedies without much animation, so this is by no means a statement meant to condemn the show for these flaws. But high-quality visuals can really add to the experience of visual humor, so the mostly mediocre execution here is a bit disappointing.

I think it's also worth mentioning that Wolf Bete is a monster developed with a "male brain" whose body is converted to that of a cute woman at a late stage, and the mis-match between their two aspects is treated as a joke. This... is pretty distasteful as a source of humor; at the very least it reads as ignorant of the realities of gender expression in our world.

Content Warnings: Nudity/Fanservice (humorously censored but fairly frequent in the second half of the episode). Gender dysphoria as a source of comedy. Comedic violence.

Would I Watch More? – This premiere episode was a pleasant surprise for me, and I think I'll watch more. At the very least, I'd like to see for myself whether or not some of the more frustrating gags even out over time.

Art

I Think Of Dali ...Will Mayo

In my most improbable moments, I am taken by the Surreal artist Salvador Dali's painting "Persistence Of Memory," showing melted watches hanging from tree limbs and boulders and atop living things — Everywhere, really — thereby showing just how arbitrary a thing time was to Mr. Dali. Since then studies have come along showing time ticking by at a different speed at a mountain peak and on a spaceship than on the ground and there have been, too, studies showing how one twin that has been to outer space ages at a different rate than his brother on earth. While all manner of science fiction stories have been devoted to time standing still, no one summed it up so well as the artist named Dali with his painting of melting timepieces. Yes, I have to say he captured it well.

Comics

Rom: Spaceknight #1 Reviewed by Thomas E. Simmons

Rom the Spaceknight began as a toy manufactured by the Parker Brothers firm. Parker Brothers licensed the character to Marvel. The toy did not sell well. The comic on which it was based, however, continued for 75 issues, lasting until February of 1986.

In the first issue – boasting a stunning cover by Frank Miller – Rom arrives on Earth in pursuit of his enemies, the Dire Wraiths. The first human he encounters is Brandy Clark. Brandy nearly crashes her sports car when she encounters Rom on a dark highway. Rom intervenes to save her.

We see in a flashback that 200 years ago, Rom's planet Galador (sounding suspiciously similar to Gallifrey, Dr. Who's planet) was threatened by the Dire Wraiths. Rom volunteered, along with other select citizens, to undergo cyborg warrior transformation in order to resist the invasion.

In a pitched battle, Galador prevailed, the surviving Wraiths scattered, and the Spaceknights pursued them. They pursue them still. On Earth, numerous shape-shifting Dire Wraiths have already infiltrated human societies. They masquerade as ordinary humans.

Rom's analyzer allows him to spot Dire Wraiths, although the true form of Dire Wraiths remains hidden to humans even when Rom's analyzer ray bathes them in its discerning light. Rom's second sidearm, a neutralizer, allows him to banish his enemies to the phantom dimension of limbo with a piercing "SHREET!" – leaving behind body-shaped piles of ashes. Human observers assume that Rom has assassinated ordinary human beings.

In the first issue, Rom is introduced as a misunderstood hero in the same mold as silver age Spider-Man. Rom can explain himself only to Brandy. We also see that the Dire Wraiths are deeply embedded in the population and have been for decades. When a detachment of National Guard troops arrives to combat Rom, several officers are revealed to be, in fact, Dire Wraiths.

Rom dispatches them handily, and Brandy repays Rom's favor by warning him of one additional Wraith maneuvering behind his back.



Rom: Spaceknight #2

Reviewed by Thomas E. Simmons

With the bare-bones origin story out of the way, Rom's second issue concentrates on fleshing out characterization and rounding out some additional backstory. In the process, Rom engages with a few more Dire Wraiths. In the battle with them, he is nearly bested by a Wraith weapon and – oddly – utilizes a gazebo as a weapon, hurtling it at his enemies. (Who knew that a gazebo could be a deadly weapon?)

We're also introduced to three new characters, Steve (Brandy's boyfriend), and Brandy's parents.

Three important points can be discerned:

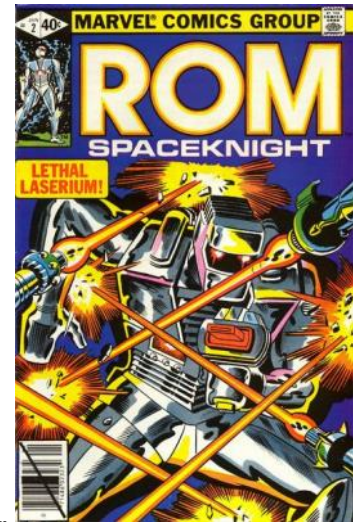
First, as was alluded in the first issue, Rom's race of Galadorians value life highly. Galadorian society had been a naïve utopia – leaving them open to an ambush by the Dire Wraiths, while also motivating the vigorous defense of their homeland. Their “pro-life” stance presumably underscores their rejection of capital punishment of any Wraith and Rom's non-lethal banishment-gun. Rom, like Batman, never kills a villain.

The Dire Wraiths themselves do not value life. They would much prefer death to eternal banishment in limbo. But Galador elevates life above autonomy. The Wraiths' preferences for death are subordinated to Galadorian values.

Second, Rom has suffered some degree of psychologically damage from his two-century stint as a cyborg. Life as a mechanical man is a kind of “living death” and “Rom hates what he has become.” Still, he's “not forgotten how it feels to hold a woman” and he finds himself crushing on Brandy. When Steve enters the picture, Rom trains his analyzer ray on him to confirm he is a non-Wraith, but leaves it trained on Steve for just a tad longer than necessary in order to frighten him. Rom is not above jealousy.

Finally, the Wraith's mission becomes clearer. The Wraiths have adopted a long-term strategy for invading Earth by gradually introducing Wraith technology across the world. Wraiths are scientifically advanced, but also employ sorcery. By means of bending Earth's technological advances to their own ends, they will eventually establish a base from which to launch wider attacks and eventually capture distant Galador.

Thus, Rom introduces a unique element to the “Invasion of the Body Snatchers” scenario – not only is our population infected with an alien presence, but our technology is similarly infected.



Rom: Spaceknight #3

Review by Thomas E. Simmons



In Rom's third issue, we cement the comic's themes and map the parameters of an upcoming conflict between Rom and a technologically-endowed criminal who has signed on with the Dire Wraiths in a misguided attempt to quash the lone Spaceknight's mission.

The innovations of the Rom comic include a layering of alien sorcery-inspired technology on top of the familiar conspiracy plot of hidden strangers (allegorical Communists) among us. The enemy is intent on eroding American values from within. We've seen this before in films like “Invasion of the Body Snatchers” and “They Live.” Our neighbors cannot be trusted. They appear to be Americans, but, in fact, they're subversives.

In Rom, not even law enforcement be trusted. Nor can politicians – nor the military industrial complex. Nor S.H.I.E.L.D. The Dire Wraith infection has even reached the Pentagon itself which now features a bird-sized window for shape-shifting Dire Wraiths to enter and exit at will – disguised as

ordinary songbirds. The Dire Wraiths are unseen by anyone but Rom with his analyzer ray.

The Dire Wraiths' technology, along with their sorcery and anti-life ideology, has infected America. It saps strength from the body politic – and even from the Earth itself – like a virus. Rom's narrator explains: "Their malefic sorcery sustains itself by draining the life of the planet!"

But Rom – and Rom alone – can discern truth. Ordinary humans like Brandy Clark are blind to the identity of Wraiths and the infection they are spreading except to the extent Rom informs her of the threat. But the attentive reader can often spot a Wraith even before Rom does because Buscema endows them all with a characteristic grimace.

The solution to the Dire Wraith invasion and its technological cancer lies in another alien technology; in Rom's sidearms. Only Rom's analyzer ray can discern good from evil, human from Dire Wraith, thus placing all of humanity's hopes in an alien and his weaponry – Rom's unerring analyzer ray gun and his limbo-dispatching neutralizer gun.

The Desperate Iron Man Fan's Pull List by Stephanie Souders



I have spilled many words (and recorded many YouTube videos) documenting my frustrations with Christopher Can't-Write-Well's ongoing Iron Man series. Interestingly enough, however, I have not been left completely bereft of decent Iron Man content. Indeed, I can cobble together several recommendations for the discerning Iron Man fan that cover just the last year or so of publication time. None of the comics discussed below quite rise to the level of my favorite Bronze Age issues, but at the very least, they don't inspire a desire to put out my own eyes.

Topping the aforementioned list? The Darkhold: Iron Man. The individual one-shots that make up the entire Darkhold event never cohere into a real story; the darker versions of each involved character are not critical to the conclusion, which is an unfortunate missed opportunity. Nonetheless, I thoroughly enjoyed Ryan North's take on Tony Stark. Referencing Tony's first appearance in *Tales of Suspense* #39 throughout his issue, North gives us genuine body horror — and also a Tony who is both the cocky playboy and the tormented soul desperately seeking a path to redemption. "I want the world to remember Tony Stark as a — a hero who helped people," he says on one lovely page. "Who made the world a better place. Who saved the little guy when nobody else would." Yes: this captures the true soul of this character in a way the main Iron Man book does not.

Speaking of one-shots, I also recommend the 2021 annuals for both Iron Man and The Avengers. The former has nothing to do with Can't-Write-Well's story. Instead, it features Tony flying off to visit some vengeance upon a villain who recently kidnapped and tortured Miles Morales — and being a smart, self-loathing BAMF while doing so. The latter, meanwhile, is a team-up issue in which Tony and Steve Rogers together battle an embodied infinity stone — right after they spend a page or two amiably sharing breakfast. Why do I care about that last bit, you may ask? Well, because that's the sort of thing *Civil War* stole from me: Captain America and Iron Man as intimate battle buddies who actually like each other and are constantly watching each other's backs.

And that leads me to my next provisional recommendation: Captain America/Iron Man. Three issues of this limited series have been released so far, and while I think it's suffused with a little too much modern irony to be counted among my all-time favorites, I still appreciate the writer's evident desire to incorporate what he learned from a year reading old Iron Man comics into a current-year story. Number one, he understands that Tony and Steve were once very close friends. Number two, he acknowledges that Tony is actually incredibly generous — and also his own worst critic. Oh: and you have to appreciate the return of the Overseer, which calls all the way back to Iron Man #29 (1970).



Definitely keep an eye on this one.

And while you're at it, also try: 1.) The Marvels, Kurt Busiek's ambitious ongoing, which is attempting to integrate the entire Marvel Universe into one unified story and so far is superior to Jason Aaron's current run on The Avengers; 2.) Avengers Forever, which features a hard-drinking alternate universe Tony Stark who's donned the Ant Man costume and seems set up for a solid redemption arc; and 3.) The Death of Doctor Strange: The Avengers, which features Tony muscling through his own fears to learn something very critical about the Three Mothers and the threat to the multiverse as a whole.

Again, none of these comics is a Denny O'Neil-level classic, but at least they give me something.

Films

The 7th Voyage of Sinbad Review by Caroline Furlong Upstreamreviews.com



The 1958 film *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad* starred Kerwin Mathews as Sinbad the Sailor, one of the heroes of *One Thousand and One Nights*, the tales reportedly made famous by Scheherazade. The film begins at night, with Sinbad guiding his vessel through fog in search of land to replenish the vessel's supplies. Although his men are certain they are lost and will never find land, Sinbad orders them to take a sounding.

When the sounding indicates that they are coming up on an island, to be confirmed by a call from the crow's nest, the tension eases immediately. Leaving his aide Harufa to guide the ship closer and drop anchor, Sinbad goes below deck to talk to his fiancée. Princess Parisa of Chandra is eager to arrive at Baghdad where she and Sinbad will wed to secure peace between the two kingdoms, though she understands why they must stop to gather supplies.

But while on the island of Colossa collecting water and other necessities, Sinbad and his men encounter the magician Sokurah being chased by an enormous cyclops. Though all hands escape safely the sorcerer loses the treasure he sought and for which the beast pursued him: a genie's lamp. When Sinbad and then the Caliph of Baghdad refuse to give him passage back to the island to retrieve it, Sokurah shrinks Parisa, angering her father into declaring war on Baghdad.

Desperate to save the princess he loves Sinbad agrees to take the magician back to the island to find the ingredient needed to restore her to her true size. But the voyage back is fraught with peril, and Colossa's natural inhabitants will not be easy to overcome...

This film has long been one of my favorites, primarily for the model work Ray Harryhausen did for the movie. In contrast to a great many CGI monsters of the modern era, the cyclopes' and other beasts shown on the screen have a realistic feel to them. They look and move like true creatures of that general size would, and while the stop-motion animation is clear, that enhances rather than detracts from the film.

Harryhausen reportedly liked the cobra woman shown early in the story the best, with most viewers remembering the cyclops better. I concur with Harryhausen; the snake-woman was one of the monsters I recalled most vividly from this film, as it was both creepy and plausible. The stop-motion nature of the beast meant it really looked like a woman had been crossed with a cobra to create a monster that may or may not strike at any moment.

My second-favorite monster has to be the dragon. While the cyclopes were indeed impressive, the dragon is absolutely beautiful, in the way that an angry tiger is beautiful. You can admire it from a distance even as you bite your nails and hope the hero will not be eaten by it.

On a recent rewatch of the film, I was struck by the strength of the romance between Sinbad and Parisa. Kathryn Grant is every inch the bright-eyed, somewhat naïve princess who is head-over-heels in love with her betrothed. In a world where romance is generally approached as a game of equal give-and-take, this more straightforward view is not seen often these days. Sinbad and Parisa are not just marrying so as to secure peace or solidify an alliance; they are so deeply in love that the sailor is willing to risk his life and the lives of his men on Colossa in a desperate gamble to save her.

There are few modern movies today that would portray such determined devotion in the hero or such certain faith in the heroine. On the night she is bespelled, Parisa tells Sinbad that she will dream of monsters just so she can envision him coming to rescue her. The scene has some foreshadowing in it, given Sokurah's (Torin Thatcher's) treachery some hours later. But the fact that she falls into Sinbad's arms at the slightest excuse, finds every chance to kiss him, or otherwise throw herself into his expectant embrace is extremely refreshing.

In modern times romance is less about the woman alluring the pursuing man toward her and more about equal give-and-take. While both types of courtship occur in the real world and have their place in fiction, the former has been all but replaced by the latter, which is a shame. It is nice to see a heroine behaving like an actual girl rather than insist on taking care of herself when the man swoops in to her rescue. Parisa is not helpless – she displays cleverness, loyalty, and unshakable faith in her husband-to-be throughout the story.

But she is a woman. She is not capable of fighting a sword-wielding skeleton, avoiding a dragon, or battling a cyclops; these are all things she has to rely on Sinbad and his men to do. That reliance is accepted and reciprocated, as Sinbad asks her to take advantage of her small size to help free him and his men when they are captured. It makes her a more endearing heroine and Sinbad a more admirable hero.

Of equal interest is the moment when Parisa is confronted by a dilemma with regard to a promise she made to free the genie. Unlike Aladdin in the Disney movie of the same name, Parisa wants to free the young spirit but wonders along with Sinbad if it might be necessary to keep him imprisoned to escape Colossa safely. After a few moments' contemplation, however, Sinbad unhooks the lamp from his belt with the comment: "Well, you must keep your promise." Thereafter Parisa releases the genie from the lamp before joining her fiancé to return to the ship.

What is most striking is the fact that Sinbad considers Parisa's honor more important than their mutual survival. Despite knowing firsthand how the genie can provide them a safe path out of Sokurah's fortress and through the island's many dangers, he is unwilling to put practicality over his future wife's integrity. Thus he decisively solves the dilemma by reminding her that she gave her word before demonstrating that he is willing to brave the dangers of Colossa for her dignity as well as her life. That is something seen even less today than the romance between the two characters.

The 7th Voyage of Sinbad has a great deal to recommend it, but the vibrant romance and the reminder that honor is important to both man and woman has to be one of the most significant items. Are there better stories in film? Certainly. But in this lost day and age, the passion of Sinbad and Parisa along with the note on the sanctity of integrity is not to be underestimated or dismissed. If nothing else it will be 88 minutes worth of fun for the whole family to enjoy!

Ghostbusters Afterlife Review by Tom Feller

Harold Ramis, one of the stars and co-author of the original Ghostbusters, died in 2014, so this film deals with this by killing off his character, Egon Spengler, played by a body-double without showing his face, in the opening scene. Estranged from his family, he had moved to Summerville, Oklahoma (actually filmed in Alberta, Canada), for reasons that are eventually revealed, and was living on a farm that had neither crops nor animals. His daughter Callie (Carrie Coon), grandson Trevor (Finn Wolfhard), and granddaughter Phoebe (Mckenna Grace) come to live there. Phoebe, a science geek, makes friends with a supernatural-obsessed boy who calls himself "Podcast", because he has a podcast, Trevor, a relatively normal teenage boy, is befriended by a pretty waitress (Celeste O'Connor), and Callie finds romance with Gary Gruberson (Paul Rudd), a seismologist investigating anomalies in the area

while teaching summer school there. Dan Ackroyd, Bill Murray, Annie Potts, and Ernie Hudson from the original film all make cameos. Together they resemble the Scooby Doo team, discover ghosts, of course, and save the day.

Ghostbusters Afterlife Review by Jim McCoy



You guys! You guys! You guys! I heard the sound! I heard the sound! If you're a Ghostbusters fan you know the sound. If you're not, GO WATCH SOME GHOSTBUSTERS SO YOU CAN HEAR THE SOUND!!!

And trust me, the amount of pure, unadulterated AWESOME contained in the sound will make it obvious what the sound is. I know you're skeptical but it really is that cool. And when you point it out, you too can be known to your friends as 'Captain Observo, King of the Obvious.' I mean, it's a hard earned title that comes with a massive amount of responsibility, but it's worth it.

For those that missed it; I just got home from watching Ghostbusters: Afterlife.

So like, yeah totally awesome. But before I get to the awesome part (other than the unbelievably amazing sound of THE SOUND) I have a bone to pick with Columbia Pictures and it's writing staff.

Listen guys, you had to have known that there were going to be a bunch of old dudes watching this flick for the nostalgia value alone. (See, this is how you get to be Captain Ob-servo.) And listen, I have a lot of love for young ladies with glasses who love things like science and math. (If you don't know, that describes both of my daughters. They are - being 100% serious - both in accelerated science and math classes and their daddy is so proud it hurts.) But DUDE - WHY IS THE SMART SCIENCY CHICK THE TWELVE YEAR OLD?!?!?!?!?!?!?!?! Or, I mean, maybe you could have made the junior high aged female smart and sciency AND made her mom the same way, because honestly, all of the former pimple faced freaks who went days without eating so that they could save up their lunch money to buy tickets to the first two movies would have LOVED a woman approaching their age that was, like, smart and stuff. Seriously, I'd compare nerdy girls to gold only I don't want to insult nerdy girls like that. As far as a worthy compliment, sorry ladies. I got nothin'. You're just that unbelievably awesome.

Why, yes I have been single for a long time. What brought that up?

SIGH Yes, Callie was a good character. I enjoyed her. I even get why she wasn't written to be sciency. I'm just that guy sometimes.

And while we're on the topic of girls:

I'm not telling you to kiss the pretty lady, brother. I'm just telling you that I went to high school with a guy who wouldn't and we still dog him about it. In his forties. Your call.

Anyway...

So yeah, I enjoyed the movie. It wasn't what I expected exactly, but that's okay because it's better than what I expected and people, I expected a lot.

There is a lot more to the latest installment in the Ghostbusters mythos than I thought there would be. The first two were popcorn movies. They were fun and engaging but somehow I missed just exactly how much lore there was. With something like Lord of the Rings or any D&D related world, it's all there and it's obvious. Somehow, I learned it all without knowing I learned it all with Ghostbusters. To be fair, I haven't seen the 2016 remake because the trailers were weak and everyone I know that saw the movie hated it. I therefore cannot comment on it directly.

I don't do the thing where I remember who produced and directed every movie/TV show ever. That's just not me. I'm thinking that whoever wrote Ghostbusters: Afterlife must have been related to Stranger Things somehow or is at least a fan, and I don't say that just because Finn Wolfhard is in both.

Seriously, this movie feels like *Stranger Things* on it's best day only better. Kids in the lead, adults in support, kids get in trouble...

So much fun. *Ghostbusters: Afterlife* is the movie to take your kid who doesn't remember the original *Ghostbusters* movies to when you want to have a fandom to share with them. I can guarantee that any kid with an interest in geeky things will love this movie just as much as the old fart sitting next to them. And then you can be Mr(s). Sneakybutt and get the kid to watch the first two because they love the new one.

It's got the feeling of the first two movies as well. Not only do we get to see some old friends, there might be an old enemy or two along for the ride, and possibly not in the way you, or at least I, anticipated.

They kept a lot of the old ghostbusting technology and you would think it would look outdated but the way they presented it makes it work. Like, I totally got behind the Eighties look of some of the props. Partially because I remember things that way but also because it works in the setting.

And about the setting: Most of *Ghostbusters: Afterlife* does not take place in the big city. I liked that about it. I'm a straight up city-boy who has spent his life thinking that driving fifteen minutes to get McDonalds was hardship, but I've also spent time in the country, riding in the back of pickups and heading out to the woods to get away from the old people. The feeling is right here. Writers, director, actors, they all get it. And if all this country flavored leads into something straight out of an epic fantasy novel, I'm with it. That was maybe the best part.

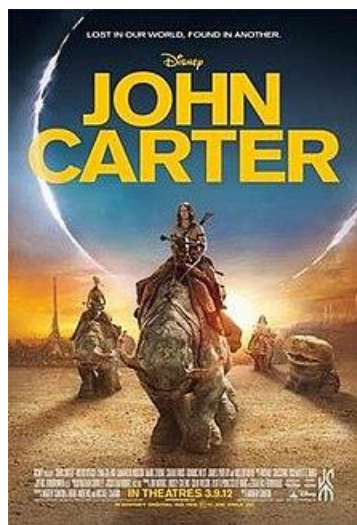
Any *Ghostbusters* fan knows that we lost Harold Ramis awhile back. If you've been paying attention to nerdish news and rumors it should come as no surprise that the Egon character that he played so well makes an appearance as a CGI construct. I don't want to say too much here and spoil things, but let me say that Egon's actions were in character, entertaining and necessary to the plot. If the CGI had a *Star Wars* feel to it, then that's good too.

Seriously, if you haven't seen *Ghostbusters: Afterlife* do so. Now. The script, the nostalgia, seeing our old heroes and the new generation all make this movie an instant favorite. You DO NOT want to miss it.

John Carter

Review by Caroline Furlong

Upstreamreviews.com



John Carter came out the same year as Marvel's *The Avengers*, which walked away with more praise from critics and audiences. While I love *The Avengers* dearly, the fact that John Carter was allowed to falter and fail at the box office by Disney remains a crying shame. This film is a modern classic.

Everything in the film is directed toward making John Carter a timeless sci-fi/fantasy movie. Andrew Stanton – creator of *Finding Nemo* and *WALL-E* – outdid himself in bringing Edgar Rice Burroughs' story to life. Although there are some concessions made for a modern audience, those hardly dent the effort put into making this homage to space opera storytelling.

Having re-watched *John Carter*, I was struck again by how lavishly it was filmed. We do not see this level of craftsmanship in films anymore, since movies are more about spectacle than establishing an otherworldly setting. Stanton's love for Burroughs' books shows in every scene in the movie. The vistas, the CGI, the practical effects, the acting all combine to put the viewer directly on Barsoom. Not Mars; as the voiceover introducing the story says, that is the airless red planet we know. The red planet in the movie is another world entirely.

Good films are able to transport viewers to their locations and make them feel like the place is real. John Carter achieves that effect by taking everything about the nature of the story seriously even when it uses or seems to be making fun of the titular character. For instance, the sequence where Carter learns to walk and leap across Barsoom is hilarious, but it also takes the concepts offered in Burroughs' books at face value. It does not mock Carter for learning what he can do, only points out that the process of discovery is quite amusing from an outside perspective.

Although the Barsoomians' native telepathy is not a factor in the movie, the film leaves their cultures intact. Barsoom is a world in steep decline, its oceans having vanished long ago while its remaining rivers are drying up. This makes sustaining a sizable population difficult – hence the Tharks' practice of infanticide and Princess Deja Thoris' desperate search for a limitless energy source to rejuvenate her homeworld.

The make-up and costumes only help to enhance the feeling that Carter is on another world at the same time they remind viewers that the hero and heroine come from completely different cultures. John Carter's manners, his concern for Deja and suggestion that she stay behind him “when things get dangerous,” along with his compassion are things taken for granted in the West even today. Yes, they are mocked regularly now, but such derision could not exist in a society that did not at least remember these proprieties.

Additionally, John Carter does not make fun of the titular hero's “old-fashioned” manners or his masculinity. While it takes pains to show that Deja Thoris can fight, she never belittles the Earthman for making an effort to protect her, or for rescuing her. She teases him, but it is clearly just that: banter, something meant to show she appreciates his concern for her. A far cry from The Force Awakens' infamous scenes where Rey shouts: “Stop holding my hand!”

On that point, John Carter never avoids the fact that his hero abides by his culture, despite adapting to at least some of Barsoom's customs. Although he uses or abides by the Martians' traditions when necessary, particularly toward the end of the film, for the most part he behaves like a Christian gentleman from the American southeast.

He offers a salute to Tars Tarkas – who adopts the practice himself later on – and rescues the “dog” Woola when the beast is being abused in the middle of a party. When he proposes to Deja Thoris toward the end of the film, he does so in the traditional Christian manner, not the Barsoomian way.

Some viewers may find that a bit weird. Carter is currently living amongst aliens – some of whom are human enough in appearance, certainly – who have a different culture than his. Shouldn't he be behaving according to their culture, not his own? Disney's Atlantis: The Lost Empire did this with Milo Thatch and Kida. Why doesn't John Carter?

Carter refrains from this complete assimilation to Martian culture because it is precisely this difference between John and the natives of Barsoom that allows them to achieve victory over Zodanga, as well as thwart the Thern. The hero's American way of thinking coupled with his Christian upbringing makes John Carter a foe to be reckoned with, and no one who opposes him – be they Thark, Red Martian, or Thern – can compete with him because of his grounding in and determination to act according to his native civilization. It is a refreshing reminder of American exceptionalism and the power of Christian culture.

John Carter is an overlooked sci-fi gem that brings the wonder, beauty, and depth of Edgar Rice Burroughs' work to the silver screen. It is not a perfect adaptation, but it is a loving one, and those are far too few these days to be dismissed.

Andrew Stanton reportedly adored the books after reading them in his youth, and his admiration for the novels shines through in this film. Once again, it must be stated that it is a shame that the sequels will never be filmed and produced.

In a world that has forgotten both Christian culture and American exceptionalism, John Carter is a worthy addition to any sci-fi fan's film collection. This jewel is too good to lose, especially since it serves as an able reminder of what American filmmaking can be when the people in charge love their craft and the story they are presenting to audiences. So if you need something entertaining to watch or are looking for the right gift for a friend or family member, choose this movie. It will certainly be a conversation starter!

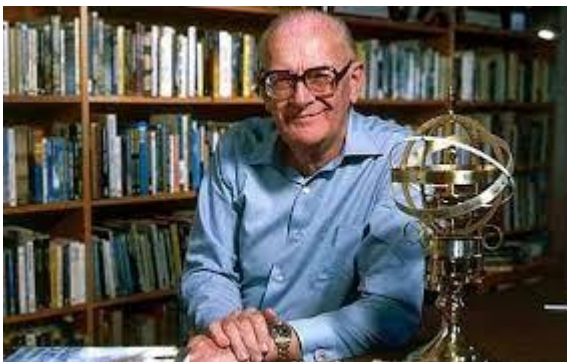
Music

David Bowie's Is There Life On Mars? Review by Will Mayo

David Bowie's "Is There Life On Mars?", a song dealing with drug abuse as much as the question of alien life, is one of the most inspired works of science fiction from the late 20th century. With lines such as "It's the freakiest show" and "Mickey Mouse has gotten a cow" and colorfully inspired by old Beat writer William S. Burrough's cut-up method, it broadens the territory. I urge you to give it a listen.

SerCon

Arthur C. Clarke Bio-Bibliography by Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D. N3F Historian



Sir Arthur Charles Clarke, CBE, FRAS (December 16, 1917 – March 19, 2008) was a British science fiction (SF) writer, science writer, inventor, undersea explorer, and television series host.

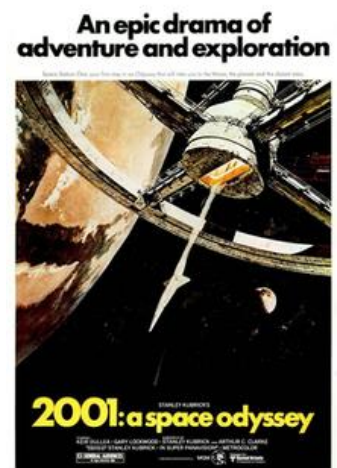
He is famous for being co-writer of the screenplay for the 1968 film *2001: A Space Odyssey*, widely considered to be one of the most influential films of all time. As a science writer, Clarke was both an avid popularizer of space travel and a futurist of uncanny ability. On these subjects he wrote over a dozen books and many essays, which appeared in various popular magazines.

In 1961 he was awarded the Kalinga Prize, an award which is given by UNESCO for popularizing science. These, along with his SF writings, eventually earned him the title "Prophet of the Space Age."

His SF writings earned him a number of Hugo and Nebula awards -- which along with a large readership -- made him one of the towering figures of SF. For years Clarke, Robert Heinlein, and Isaac Asimov were known as the "Big Three of Science Fiction."

Clarke was a lifelong proponent of space travel. In 1934, while still a teenager, he joined the British Interplanetary Society. In 1945, he proposed a satellite communication system, one that later became a reality. He was the chairman of the British Interplanetary Society from 1946 to 1947, and again from 1951 to 1953.

Clarke emigrated from England to Sri Lanka (formerly Ceylon) in 1956, with the stated purpose of pursuing his interest in scuba diving. That year he discovered the underwater ruins of the ancient Koneswaram temple in





Trincomalee. Clarke augmented his fame in the 1980s, mainly from being the host of several television shows such as Arthur C. Clarke's Mysterious World. He lived in Sri Lanka until his death. He was knighted in 1998, and was awarded Sri Lanka's highest civil honor, Sri Lankabhimanya, in 2005.

Marriage /Personal Life

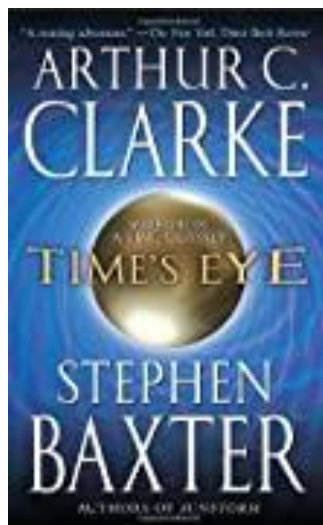
On a trip to Florida in 1953, Clarke met and married Marilyn Mayfield, a 22-year-old American divorcee with a young son. They separated permanently after six months, although the divorce was not finalized until 1964. "The marriage was incompatible from the beginning," Clarke said later. He never remarried, but was close to a Sri Lankan man, Leslie Ekanayake, whom Clarke called his "only perfect friend of a lifetime."

Major SF Series

"A Space Odyssey" -- 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968), 2010: Odyssey Two (1982), 2061: Odyssey Three (1987), and 2001: The Final Odyssey (1997).

"Rama" -- Rendezvous with Rama (1972), Rama II (1989) [with Gentry Lee], The Garden of Rama (1991) [with Lee], and Rama Revealed (1993) [with Lee].

"A Time Odyssey" -- Time's Eye (2003) [with Stephen Baxter], Sunstorm (2005) [with Baxter], and Firstborn (2007) [with Baxter].



Other Works of Fiction

Against the Fall of Night (1948)

Prelude to Space (1951)

The Sands of Mars (1951)

Islands in the Sky (1952)

Childhood's End (1953)

Earthlight (1955)

The City and the Stars (1956)

The Deep Range (1957)

A Fall of Moondust (1961)

Dolphin Island (1963)

Glide Path (1963)

Imperial Earth (1975)

The Fountains of Paradise (1979)

The Songs of Distant Earth (1986)

Cradle (1988) [with Gentry Lee]

Beyond the Fall of Night (1990)

The Ghost from the Grand Banks (1990)

The Hammer of God (1993)

Richter 10 (1996) [with Mike McQuay]

The Trigger (1999) [with Michael P. Kube-McDowell]

The Light of Other Days (2000) [with Stephen Baxter]

The Last Theorem (2008) [with Frederik Pohl]

Awards/Honors/Other Recognitions

1956 -- Hugo award for his short story, "The Star."

1961 -- UNESCO-Kalinga Prize for the Popularization of Science

1963 -- Stuart Ballantine Medal

1969 -- Academy Award nomination for 2001: A Space Odyssey. The fame of 2001 was enough for

the Command Module of the Apollo 13 craft to be named "Odyssey."
 1975 -- Nebula and Hugo awards for Rendezvous with Rama.
 1979 – Nebula (1979) for The Fountains of Paradise.
 1980 – Hugo for The Fountains of Paradise.
 1982 – Marconi Prize (for innovation in communications and remote sensing in space).
 1985 – SFWA Grand Master.
 1986 – National Academy of Engineering
 1988 – Honorary Degree (Doctor of Letters) by The University of Bath.
 1989 – CBE.
 1994 – Nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize.
 1997 – Science Fiction and Fantasy Hall of Fame.
 2000 – Knighted.
 2002 – First Fandom Hall of Fame.
 2004 – Heinlein Award.

Some Conclusions

In SF fandom Clarke was known affectionately as Ego Clarke.

Genre critic Eric S. Rabkin wrote, as early as 1953, that "Clarke provides us handily with but one of countless examples of powerful science fiction based on older literary and cultural forms."

Clarke corresponded with the renowned author and lay theologian C. S. Lewis in the 1940s and 1950s, and they once met in an Oxford pub to discuss SF and space travel. Clarke voiced great praise for Lewis upon his death, saying that the Ransom Trilogy was one of the few works of SF that should be considered literature. During his career Lewis held academic positions at both Cambridge and Oxford.

Sources

Bloom, Harold. Science Fiction Writers of the Golden Age. NY: Chelsea House, 1995.

Clarke, Arthur C., & C. S. Lewis. From Narnia to a Space Odyssey: The War of Letters Between Arthur C. Clarke and C. S. Lewis. NY: iBooks, 2003.

Clute, John & Peter Nicholls (eds.). The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction. London: Orbit, 1993.

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

Tuck, Donald H. The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction and Fantasy, Volumes 1 – 3. Chicago, IL: Advent, 1974 – 1982.

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

Video

Will Mayo Reviews

Beauty And The Beast

A TV series that I enjoyed watching in the late '80s and early '90s was the show Beauty And The Beast about the love affair between a woman and the wild man thing that lives in New York's sewer. When at last the woman is killed and the beast is caged by scientists for their study and their own enjoyment the wild man cries out. For he is of the wild and longs to be free. I have often felt caged like that. Haven't you?

I Dream Of Jeannie

Another hit TV fantasy show I delighted in as a child was "I Dream Of Jeannie" in which an astronaut crash lands in an exotic locale on Earth and discovers a genie in a bottle (thus, "Jeannie") willing to

grant him every wish. Afterwards, they cohabit together (scandalous by '60s standards) and their efforts to hide Jeannie's magic lead to all kinds of hilarious conditions. This was a show to remember.

The Munsters

One early TV show that delighted me in the early days of my childhood was the old black and white sitcom *The Munsters* in which a Frankenstein-like monster named Herman Munster presides over an American family of oddities with that one so called normal child that can never fit in anywhere. The opening scene to this show always began with the front door of Herman's house hitting him in the head, his saying, "Thanks! I think I needed that," and falling backwards. For the next 50 years after this show aired on television I could be found greeting my visitors with this old remark much to their confusion until at last the joke at last ran its course. Yes, that was the *Munsters*. Bringing some joy into one child's life.

Quantum Leap

Among the shows I delighted in decades ago was that science fiction television show *Quantum Leap* about a time traveler that traveled across the years, back and forth, to make matters right. The fact that this fictional time machine was run by the United States government shows how much belief in my country's establishment has changed with the years. Yes, it was a show for a different time.

Food of Famous Authors

Making Sausage with G. Scott Huggins Report by Cedar Sanderson

So the conversation went something like this... Scott: I don't know. Something with sausage? Maybe wurst?

Me: I'll do my wurst for you.

And on that note! You should really read Scott's book *Doctor to Dragons* if you appreciate humor. Especially low humor, because the book is about a veterinarian, and if you thought James Herriot was funny with cats, dogs, and cows, this take on dragons, basilisks, and other mythological creatures ought to be right up your alley. I loved it and am hoping for more from Scott.

But this post is about what to do with the animals who die for tasty deaths. Or: a vet's side-job in a crumbling fantasy city where money is hard to come by and you don't ask what's in the sausage. Because this is a recipe for sausage,

only it's more like guidelines. Suggestions, if you will. Techniques... I did say I'd do my wurst.

When you are cutting up tasty, tasty animals, you get steaks and chops and roasts and... a lot of odd little bits that aren't really big enough to cook by themselves, but you don't want to waste an ounce of this food. Soup, stew, and the like are great ways to cook the bones and clinging bits to make stock, or what-have-you. But someone back in the mists of time got the great idea to chop up those bits with some flavorings added – seeds, herbs, spices, salt, lots of salt – stuff the resulting mess into some nice clean intestines, and voila! sausage was born.

My *Ginja Ninja*, who has never made sausage before (although she's watched me do it when much younger) got in on the fun when we were talking about how to tackle Scott's tubular challenge to me. We were joking around about dragon sausage (she seemed to think it ought to be blue. Drag-





Green Dragon-with-no-name likes garlic in his sausage.

on meat is blue? Who knew?) when she told me she wanted to do a Chinese style sausage. So I bought a chunk of meat, the cheap kind with a bone in, and acquired a slightly-more-modern than stone age meat grinder (you'd be amazed what you can find at antique flea markets. Those old bugs sure knew a thing or two).

As a side note, when you are cutting up the store-bought roast, you'll want to make sure you get all the silverskin and stringy connective tissue cut off, or you will gum up your grinder. Sharpen your knives before you start, unless you are one of those sorts who always has the sharpest knives in the drawer. I am not. Also, I highly recommend an energetic and interested teenager to provide arm strength and sound effects, not to mention the inevitable innuendo and dirty jokes.

Now, usually you'd grind once on coarse, and then grind again with the herbs and spices and seasonings in. We didn't. For two reasons: one, the Chinese Sausage recipes I'd looked at, and the ones I've eaten, were a coarser grind than most wurst, or brats. (and no, brats are not made of naughty children) Second, the butcher job I did was second-rate and the grinder was giving us fits and it was late and I threw my hands up and called it done. But if you prefer a sausage with less 'bite' you will want to grind on coarse, then medium. Fine, if you want breakfast sausage. If you want wurst, like liverwurst, just use the food processor and make it into paste *shudders* and go from there.



What I did instead was grind, then mix in the flavorings by hand. This was roughly 2 lbs of ground meat bits. Dragon? maybe... or maybe dragon's meat (i.e. pork). Pigs can fly! when dangling from a dragon's talons. Added to that was:

- 8 oz. alcoholic citrus drink
- ground pepper, about 2 tsp
- salt, about a tablespoon
- more salt
- sugar, about 3 tablespoons
- garlic chili paste about 4 tbsp
- garlic cloves (these we ground with the meat) (um. maybe a whole bulb? 10 cloves?)

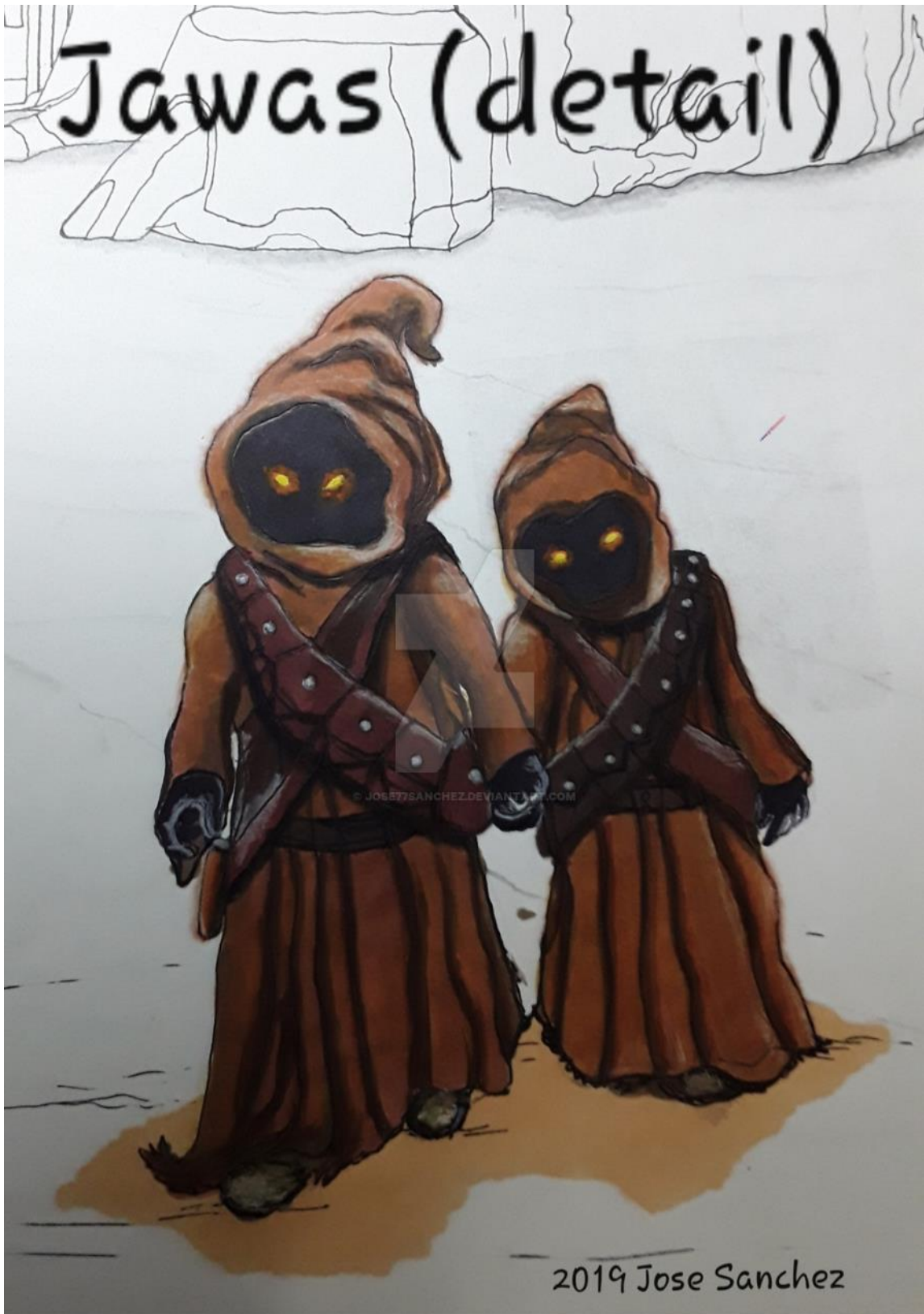


Chinese Sausages are meant to be smoked, or air-dried, and they have a lot of sugar and salt in them to retard microbial growth. Since we were going to fry some up loose, as we lacked a sausage stuffer and casings, we sort of eyeballed the amounts there. I was surprised how well the meat soaked up the liquid, that was good. I was reflecting that it was like marinating the meat. Only there was so much surface area it just sucked it up like a sponge.

The flavor was good. I'd add more chilies, for heat, but the Ginja Ninja liked it this way. There was some spice, just not a significant amount. We still have some to experiment with stuffing and smoking, once I have casings in hand. I found a manual stuffer, so that part is taken care of.

We also made about a pound and a half of fresh herb sausage with the other half of the roast. Herbs picked from the garden and ground with the meat, along with a lot of garlic. We like garlic around here.

So now you know what goes into making sausage. If you make some, just don't tell anyone where the meat came from. During the process, we were explaining to the GN who CMOT Dibbler is... but that's a different book. Although, if you know who that is, you'll like Scott's book. I promise.



Mandalorian Jawas
Jose Sanchez