

# Tightbeam 341

February 2023



Before the Storm by Tiffanie Gray

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Tightbeam is published approximately monthly by the National Fantasy Fan Federation and distributed electronically to the membership.

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## Editorial

Long-time member Ray Nelson, inventor of the propeller beanie, author, and cartoonist, has passed to the next plane of existence. There will be an obituary statement in *The National Fantasy Fan*. A decade ago, the N3F published an interview with him. In this issue, we reprint that interview.

For those wishing for recipes with exotic ingredients, in this issue Joe Monson's Adventurer's Stew includes ground dried saffras leaves and alligator/pork sausage.

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## Anime

### Impressions – Sweetness and Lightning

#### Review by Jessi Silver

Sweetness  
& Lightning



Math teacher Kōhei Inuzuka is a widower with a young daughter named Tsumugi. Inuzuka isn't adept in the kitchen but with the help of his student Kotori Iida and his daughter, he embarks on a culinary adventure.

Summary of Episode 1: Kyouhei Inuzuka is a high school teacher, but he's also a single father to his young daughter, Tsumugi. It's been six months since his wife died, and he's just trying to take each day one day at a time and make sure he can take care of Tsumugi. Unfortunately, he's often out late and more often than not resorts to grabbing convenience store bento for dinner. While out in the park flower-viewing, they happen upon a young lady weeping over her rice balls. She's not sad, just moved to tears over the delicious food that her busy mother prepared. It just so

happens that her mother owns a restaurant, and she passes along a business card. A couple of days later, Tsumugi is really feeling sad over the lack of home-cooked meals at their house, so Kyouhei does something impulsive – he races to the restaurant, daughter in tow, in order to provide something warm and nourishing. One problem – the owner is out and the restaurant is



technically closed for the day, but Kotori, the owner's daughter and coincidentally one of Kyouhei's students, offers to cook up something simple. That night, they enjoy hot rice together, and Kotori asks that they join forces and learn to cook with one-another.

Kyouhei pieces together Tsumugi's lunch using store-bought pre-prepped side dishes.

Impressions: I have a major soft spot for stories that involve parenting and genuinely cute kids. Not because I have any of my own, but likely because it's such a unique occurrence in anime. I remain a big fan of Bunny Drop (hey, it was a really excellent 11-episode anime and an equally good 4 volume manga!), enjoyed Kotetsu's relationship with his daughter in Tiger & Bunny, and in general am impressed when the parental relationship is depicted as being substantial rather than as some afterthought in an anime full of teenagers (I don't really have time to get into the related issue of dead moms in anime, but that's certainly something to note). In any case, anime series that consider the parents' point of view and depict that trials of trying to bring up a young person in an environment which makes that difficult are some of the anime I find appealing.

So far this show has a lot going for it in that regard. Kyouhei is depicted as a genuinely good person who has his daughter's best interests at heart. It's the specifics of their situation, as well as perhaps some residual depression following the death of his wife, that creates a lot of challenges for him to try to overcome. For the most part, Kyouhei seems fairly on top of everyday life; he makes plans to do the laundry with Tsumugi that weekend, they get out of the house to spend time together, he gets her dressed and out the door in the morning and generally arrives in time to pick her up from daycare. In short, he's loving and competent, and while obviously any single parent situation is difficult to manage, there's a decent amount of realism in his ability to juggle all these things and it's clear that Tsumugi is grateful.



A cell phone shot of Tsumugi during her first (and only) experience with dad's cooking.

What left an impression on me after the first episode, though, is its (and by extension, the show's) focus on food and meals as they relate to family life. In flashback, we learn that Kyouhei's late wife Tae was quite the experimental chef, and her meals were beloved in the household. Because of the food lifestyle I (mostly) adhere to, I'm used to hearing the refrain that "food is fuel" and that we should strive to remove the emotional aspect from it (as in, try to stop emotional eating and listen to your body's hunger signals instead). That's fine on a logical level, but for me in particular food and meals have always served

the purpose of showing love to those I care about and bringing together friends and family around a shared table. Tsumugi is a generally happy, bubbly youngster, but her sadness at eating convenience store bento boxes while her dad catches up on his classroom work is obvious. To her, meals are something that she wants to share with family, and a home-cooked meal trumps anything from the microwave (though her dad's early attempts at home cooking so far have left a little to be desired, judging by her reported reaction).

I think this episode does a good job of explaining (without explicitly doing so) why Kyouhei hasn't taken up cooking, and in fact has outright avoided the task. Aside from the fact that he doesn't have much cooking experience and his first attempt was a major bomb (seriously, that photo of Tsumugi making a disgusted face is hilarious), it becomes clear that the subject of cooking is too strong a reminder of what's missing now that his wife is gone. Trying to do something that was so closely associated with someone who's now gone has got to be incredibly painful; each dish, whether successful or a failure, is just another way of pointing out the empty space left behind. It wouldn't be unusual for Kyouhei to avoid cooking out of respect for his wife's memory and a desire to keep from feeling as though he were trying to replace her. All of this is interpreted from what's written between the lines; unlike a lot of anime, this one so far is a little bit more "show" and a little less "tell," which in itself is nice.



Kotori crying while eating in the park.

Lest everyone think this is a show all about doom and gloom and death, let me mention that I found the first episode to be incredibly cute and also pretty funny. Tsumugi is at that particular age where emotions are still shared right out in the open, and social norms don't necessarily play a large factor in everyday interactions. She says what's on her mind and expresses her feelings without worrying what others might think, and that's one of the things I find cutest about little kids (well, until their emotions go into overdrive and devolve into tantrums; then I'm

quick to leave the area). I enjoyed how she declares her love for her dad, and also how she had no qualms about approaching Kotori (at that time a total stranger) in the park to comfort her and ask why she was crying. There's just something really heartwarming about the earnestness of children that gives me that warmhearted feeling.

I'm guessing that any "concerns" about the direction of this show that one might have would be due to the fact that one of the three main characters is a high school student of Kyouhei's. May-



be it's my cynicism talking, or maybe it's just anime's propensity for being willing to go in distasteful directions, but I'm wary of the fact that Kotori is likely going to be spending a lot of time with Kyouhei and possibly filling part of the role that Kyouhei's wife used to and of the fact that the Wikipedia entry references Kotori's possible crush on her teacher. The anime seems fairly cute and innocent so far, and Kotori's attitude seems innocent

enough, but I've been burned in the past and just don't want such a cute series to go down that dark road.



I've been feeling kind of crappy the last few days (bad allergies are keeping me medicated-up and I'm having a hard time staying awake and focusing on anything), so it was nice to take a moment to sit down with something that's very cute and heartwarming while trying to unwind. For now, rather than worry about what direction it will take, I'm going to accept the show at face value and just appreciate the fact that anime is a medium with so much

variety in story and character and that there are still series that are made to appeal to people my age. I was impressed with the first episode's ability to demonstrate its cuteness without being overly saccharine, as well as how well I gained a window into the protagonist's feelings. I'm calling it – "feel-good anime of the season."

Pros: Kyouhei's life and choices are explained well through the narrative. The episode is genuinely cute and heartwarming.

Cons: Kotori's "crush" on Kyouhei, though mostly unexplored thus far, has me feeling wary.

Grade: B+

## Movies

### The Osiris Child Review by JR Handley As seen on Upstream Reviews

#### Summary:

When a dangerous outbreak threatens to destroy everyone living on a newly colonized planet, Lt. Kane Sommerville goes against orders and leaves his station to rescue his young daughter before it's too late. It's set in a time of interplanetary colonization, and Sy Lombrok, a former nurse who is now a drifter with a haunted past, forms an unlikely alliance with Kane Sommerville. The lieutenant works for an off-world military contractor, Exor, and his daughter arrives for a visit just in time for things to go to pot. In a race against time, they set out to rescue Kane's young daughter Indi amid an impending global crisis precipitated by Exor.



The blurb on the back of the movie did an excellent job at setting the scene, so I won't elaborate past that! If you like cheesy budget science fiction, I'd highly recommend you give this movie a chance! Plenty of action, adventure and just enough explosions to move the story along. The action is authentically gritty, without being over the top and I enjoyed it. If this sounds like your flavor of badassery, then you've come to the right place! This movie is a brilliant introduction to what I hope becomes a series from director Shane Abbess. I wish I could give you an easy comparison, if you enjoyed movie X, buy this book but I'm sadly very far behind on pop culture. I don't know what movies are out there anymore. All I can say is that this is one birthday present that isn't getting returned!

#### Characters:

In this movie we meet a diverse group of inhabitants of a new colony world that's in the process of being terraformed. During the course of the movie we meet three main characters, who were pretty well fleshed out. The actors and actresses were on their A game, which is odd for what was clearly a B movie. All the characters felt flushed out and three-dimensional. They added to what is clearly a vast and expansive universe. All the characters were a lot of fun to get to know, so let's dive in!

**LT Kane Sommerville:** He was one of the three main point of view characters, and was played by actor Daniel MacPherson. The acting was solid, and in that regard, I had no complaints. The character was flushed out, with clearly defined motivation. Maybe it's the combat veteran in me, but I felt for his battle with his memories. I understood his drive to save his child, despite the odds. This one hit me in the feels, and I was moved by this character.

**Sy Lombrok:** He was one of the three main point of view characters, and was played by actor Kellan Lutz. He was a former nurse, who became a convict and drifter stuck on the Osiris Colony as a slave to the Exor Corporation. When stuff hits the fan, he rises to the occasion, showing true character. The acting was well done, and I truly believed in this character. I loved his tale of redemption, that arc worked for me. I can't tell you more about him without ruining the movie, and I promised no spoilers. I'll leave it saying that the character was awesome, and I want to know what happens to him at the end of the movie.

**Indi Sommerville:** She was one of the three main point of view characters and was played by actress Teagan Croft. Her acting felt a bit stilted, but it was hard to tell if this was a directing choice or was just a limitation of a child actor. She serves the role of the other two main characters motivation, and in that role, she was an excellent character. She then served as the narrator of the events, telling the audience what had taken place on this planet.

Overall, I will give these characters 5 out of 5 Grenades and can't wait to see where the director takes this character throughout this new series!

#### Plot:

This was a fairly simple plot, and it made the acting by the main characters even more compel-

ling. The main character, Kane Sommerville, is on a desperate quest to save his daughter. The proverbial clock is ticking, though in this movie the clock is real. When the buzzer sounds, the planet will be destroyed by an existential threat. Like most of the science fiction I love, this was an action-packed movie. The story is set in a galaxy far, far away when humanity is post-Sol System. There was nothing new or groundbreaking in this movie, but that's fine. No need to reinvent the wheel, when the wheel isn't broken. This movie kept me engaged, which is a requirement for any science fiction that I watch. Time is money, people! This story gave me the escapism and enjoyment I needed, so a win.

All of that escapism was done under the banner of intergalactic science fiction, so I had no complaints about the plot. It felt comfortable, like well broken in boots. The plot was well set-up, and extremely well executed. The scope of the tale was extremely limited, but I could definitely see bigger things coming from this series. Fingers crossed that they make the second movie that was implied in the title. My only complaint was that at times the story was confusing, because the director chooses to tell the story out of chronological order. Maybe your mileage will vary, but it's definitely worth giving it a chance to form your own opinion. That didn't take away from the extremely well executed pacing. There was never a slow moment, and I was never bored. I couldn't ask for anything more from this trope; it was perfectly executed, and incredibly acted with solid pacing! I again give this movie a 4 out of 5 Grenades! If it was told in chronological order, this would've been a 5 Grenade affair.

#### World Building & Cinematography:

This movie is listed as the first movie in a science fiction universe, though it was an indie film and sequels for those are notoriously unpredictable. I loved the story, and the use of creative visual work made this world come alive. It was good, though some of the scenes set in the prison made me dizzy; lots of flashing lights and swirling artistic camera angles. This was clearly a low budget film, but despite that the future tech shown in this movie was visually stunning. The fighter craft was amazing, I loved it! And the tech created was extremely motivating to see, we need more of this! Again, I absolutely loved this movie. Can I say that enough? Okay, back to the nitty gritty of the review. This movie had a very flushed out world that was visual consistent, made sense and sucked you in. The director didn't reinvent the wheel, but instead built on the existing troupes of science fiction moviedom. Overall, the world building and cinematography was well done, and I was sold on the way it played out. It felt believable, and the characters fit within the universe the director created. It was a fun ride that made me want a sequel, which is the goal of action/adventure directors! This movie didn't take itself too seriously, which allowed you to focus on the fun. That's why I read or watch films in the first place. I give the world building and cinematography 5 out of 5 Grenades.

#### Overall:

I really loved this movie, it was a lot of fun to watch. Definitely a solid B movie, but those hidden gems are sometimes the real winners! In a world where movies tend to have an overreliance on green screens and cinematography, movies like this stand out. Unlike some movies, this film relied on solid acting. Sure, there were some of the director tricks to move the story along, but the acting was solid. I definitely see big things from director Shane Abbess if he's ever given the chance. This story was fun, though I wouldn't let anyone too young watch it. The actors did an outstanding job portraying their characters and I lost myself in the world that the Exor Corporation built. It brought back the epic space romp shows I loved as a kid, though grittier and geared to the over 13 crowd. No deep messages, or political themes, just good clean fun! The



only reason the movie didn't get five stars was because of the decision to tell the story out of chronological order. It was a bit distracting, but not overly so. Just enough to take the 5th Grenade away. Overall, they had me hooked from the beginning and kept it going throughout the entire 99 minutes. This is a movie I would happily recommend, and a director I will definitely watch again. Buy or rent this movie! But hey, it's easy to spend someone else's money! I give this film a 4 out of 5 Grenades!

## SerCon

### Richard Wilson Bio-Bibliography

by

Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D.

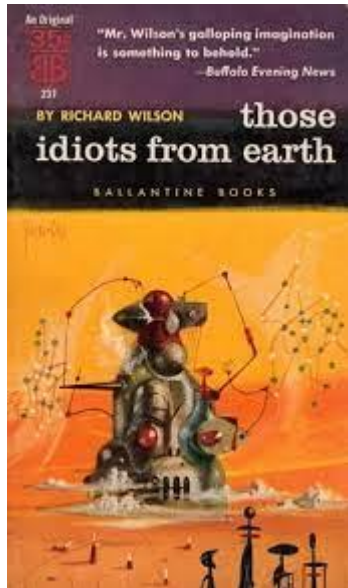
N3F Historian



Richard "Dick" Wilson (1920 – 1987) was a Nebula Award-winning science fiction (SF) author and longtime fan. He was a member of the famous New York Futurians, and was married during the 1960s to former Futurian Leslie Perri (Doris "Doë" Baumgardt), who had been married to Frederik Pohl, another Futurian.

As a Futurian in the late 1930s-early 1940s, Wilson wrote for their fanzines and for the SF magazines they edited. His first published SF story, "Murder from Mars," appeared in the April, 1940, issue of *Astonishing Stories*, a prozine edited by Pohl.

Wilson occasionally used the pseudonyms of Edward Halibut and Jay Cross, and he and Cyril Kornbluth used the joint pseudonym of Ivar Towers. According to Pohl, Wilson often collaborated with fellow Futurian Dirk Wylie (Harry Dockweiler). Wilson published the fanzines *Incredible* (1938-1939) [with W. E. Marconette], *Escape* (late 1930s), and *Science Fiction News Letter* (1937-1939).



He was one of the Futurians not barred from the First Worldcon by the infamous Exclusion Act.

#### Career

He served in the United States Army Signal Corps during World War II (1942-1946). After the War he was Chief of Bureau, TransRadio Press, Chicago, Washington, D.C., and New York, 1946-1951. He then was a reporter and deputy to the North American editor, Reuters, New York (1951-1964).

Wilson also worked in the field of public relations as director of the Syracuse University News Bureau (1964 - 1980). In 1980, he became the University's senior editor; he retired from the University in



1982.

### Publications

Wilson's writing was particularly noteworthy for its consistently high level of quality. Whether working at novel length or with short stories, Wilson was incapable of writing anything less than professional, highly polished work.

Wilson's genre books included the novels *The Girls from Planet 5* (1955); *30-Day Wonder* (1960); and *And Then the Town Took Off* (1960); and the collections *Those Idiots from Earth* (1957) and *Time Out for Tomorrow* (1962). Some of his better known genre short stories were "The Eight Billion," "Mother to the World" (winner of a Nebula Award in 1968); and "The Story Writer."

A posthumous collection of his fiction was *Masters of Science Fiction* (2018), a compilation of his best short fiction edited by John Pelan.

### Radio Play

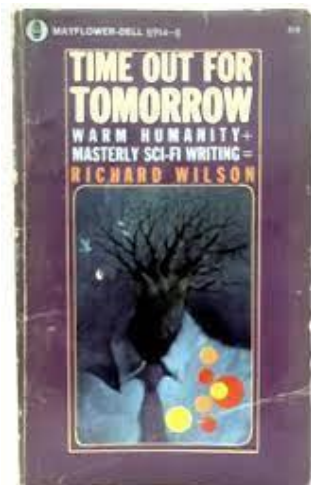
Wilson's "Inside Story" was broadcast on NBC's *Dimension X* on June 30, 1957, and starred Bob Hastings, Leon Janney, and Ralph Bell. The short story originally appeared in *Galaxy Science Fiction* in its February, 1956 issue.

### Critical Comments

It has been written that Wilson's writing was noteworthy for its consistently high level of quality. "Whether working at novel length or with short stories, Wilson was incapable of writing anything less than professional, highly polished work."

According to a blurb on one of his books, "He could quite accurately be said to have written something for everyone."

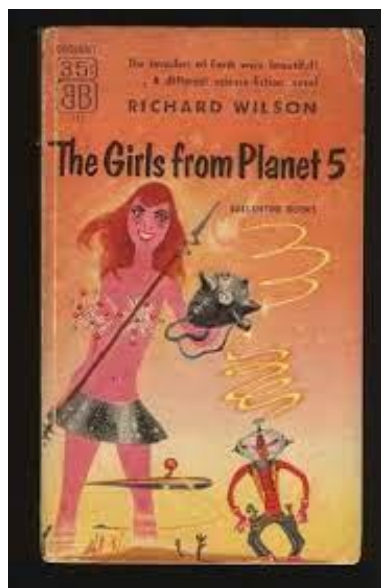
### Contributions to SF/Syracuse University



His other major contribution to SF and to Syracuse University was in securing papers from many prominent SF writers for the University's George Arents Research Library. As part of this effort, Wilson wrote an article entitled "Syracuse University's Science Fiction Collections" for the May, 1967 issue of *Worlds of Tomorrow*.

The collection eventually included manuscripts, galley proofs, magazines, correspondence and art donated by Piers Anthony, Hal Clement, Keith Laumer, Larry Niven, Frederik Pohl, and others, including Wilson himself.

Initially housed in a warehouse annex, the papers eventually made their way to the climate-controlled top floor of Ernest Stevenson



Bird Library on the Syracuse University campus. It has been described as the “most important collection of science fiction manuscripts and papers in the world.”

#### Concluding Comments

In his later years, Wilson reportedly made it clear to his friends and colleagues that he was too content in his professional life to continue seriously in a writing career.

In addition to all of his accomplishments, Wilson was one of the founding members of our club, The National Fantasy Fan Federation, in 1941.

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Note: In addition to the above, several Internet sites were consulted, including Fancyclopedia 3, ISFDB, and Wikipedia.

## Ray Nelson An Interview by Jon Swartz, Ph.D. N3F Historian

Ray Nelson was born on October 3, 1931 in Schenectady, New York, the son of Walter Hughes Nelson and Marie Reed Nelson. He married Kirsten Enge in 1957 in Paris, France -- where their son, Walter Trygve Nelson, was born in 1958. Ray was an early science fiction fan, originally from Michigan, who later became a professional author and published a dozen SF books, including *The Ganymede Takeover* in 1967 (co-authored with Philip K. Dick). Other Nelson SF novels are *The Ecolog* and *Then Beggars Could Ride*; he also wrote an historical mystery, *Dog-Headed Death*. In addition, he wrote four “sex” novels under a pseudonym.

Ray once belonged to several genre organizations, including the N3F, the Golden Gate Futurians, the Detroit S-Fantasy League, SAPS, Little Men, ISSFS; and he believes he is the last sur-



living member of Claude Degler's famed Cosmic Circle. He published the fanzines *Universe* and *Stupefying Stories* and wrote and did cartoons for many other zines. He is credited in fandom with originating the beanie with a propeller on top as a fan symbol. He is a member of First Fandom and CAPA, and in 2006 he rejoined the N3F.

A fan of the Golden Age comic book hero Dr. Fate, he sometimes illustrates his pages in *5X5* (CAPA fanzine) with images of the Mystic Mage. His son Walter, a professional web designer, has created a website on the Internet that describes his father and his work. Ray's SF novel *TimeQuest*, featuring a time-traveling William Blake and his wife, is excellent and should be required reading for all SF fans.

He has used several pseudonyms in his work, including R. Faraday Nelson, Ray Faraday Nelson, Frank Amitage, Jeffrey Lord, R. F. Nelson, California Ray, and the Old Beatnik.

JS: Some Personal Statistics, Please.

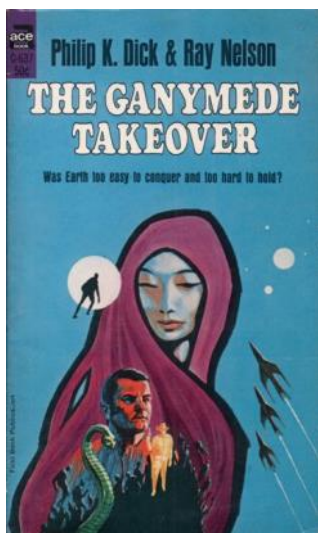
Weight 160 lbs, waist 34 in., Height 5ft, 9 in, eyes brown, hair white (very long). Always always wears a black French beret.

JS: How did you get involved in SF and SF fandom?

In the '30s I collected newspaper strips and comic books from a neighbor's trash bin, favoring science - fiction themes, and began drawing SF comic books for classmates. At the 1939 New York World's Fair I really got hooked by a huge robot who blew smoke rings. Much later I became aware of fandom by way of prozine letter columns, wrote to Ben Singer, and the rest is history.

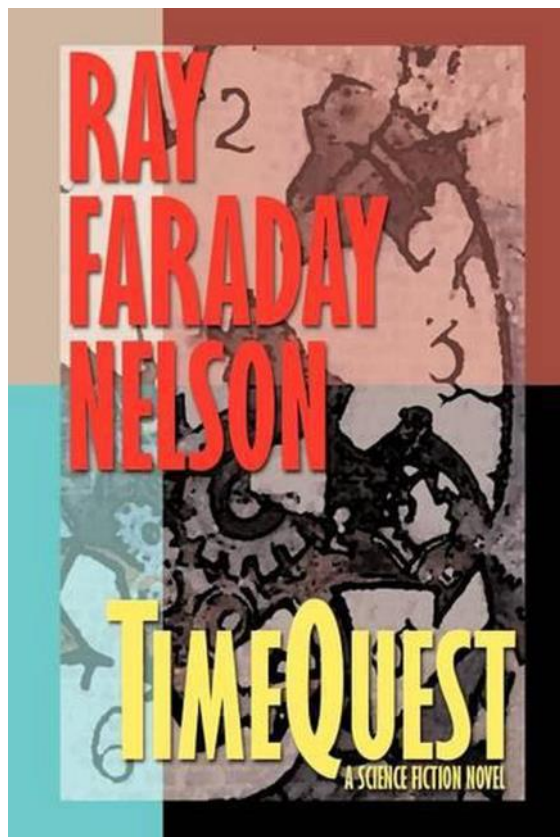
JS: Tell us how you came to invent the propeller beanie as a fan symbol.

At a small local con in Cadillac, Mich, my friends and I were taking joke snapshots on SF themes, but lacked some kind of hat for our SF hero. At a nearby five and ten I bought some odds and ends which, together with some model airplane parts I had in my room, strapped together the first (I thought) beanie copter, only minutes before the sun went down, and took the pictures we wanted based on Buck Rogers. Decades later I learned that the movie "Flying Down to Rio" included seconds of showgirls in beanie copters!



JS: What are some of your current fan activities?

I still write fantasy fiction which appears in fanzines and Little Reviews, but mainly write poems I enter in poetry contests, and read aloud at Open Mike events. I also lecture on science-fiction at my church, The Unitarian-Universal Church of Berkeley, and write to various pen pals of which I have many.



JS: What was fandom like in France when you were there?

In the late fifties the Big Name Fan in Paris was Boris Vian, a translator of American science-fiction novels., among his many other talents. When Jean Paul Sartre quit existentialism, Boris took over his former role, though the rest of the existentialists stayed on. Meetings were informal, usually held in Left Bank sidewalk cafes, and I fit in perfectly. Most of the gang spoke English, many spoke German. Simone de Beauvoir and I were very close because we both loved to take long walks.

JS: What are some of your current professional activities?

I try to avoid professional activities.

JS: Is there anything else you'd like to tell our readers?

Overseas, Science Fiction and Fantasy are taken much more seriously than stateside. We are a real literary movement in Paris, not "crazy Buck Rogers stuff."

JS: Thank you , Ray, for participating in this interview.

Thank you for asking!!

## Video

### She-Ra and the Princesses of Power Season Two Review by Chris Nuttall

It is politically incorrect, in this day and age, to say that boys and girls are attracted to different kinds of TV shows (and books, comics, etc.) but it is true. At one extreme, a boys show features action and adventure; at the other, a girls show is effectively a light soap opera, focusing



on romance and personal interaction. It is also true that girls will watch a boys show, but it is rarer for boys to watch a girls show. Works that appeal to both genders try to find a balance between action and soap opera (and leave plenty of room for fan works focused on both, such as Harry Potter.) The original She-Ra largely managed to avoid being treated as a girls show because, despite featuring a largely female cast, it remained focused on action and adventure.

The first season of *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* found its balance quite nicely. On one hand, there was the constant war against the Horde; on the other, there was the complex relationship between Adora, Catra and their abusive (adoptive) mother, Shadow Weaver. Both Adora and Catra won free of their mother: the former by finding the sword that allowed her to transform into She-Ra and realize that the Horde was evil; the latter by besting Shadow Weaver at her own game and rendering her (seemingly) powerless. By the end of the season, the situation had changed remarkably: Adora had managed to reform the Princess Alliance, while Catra had become Hordak's right-hand-cat (a pun no one seems to make.)

However, in season two, the balancing act started to go off the rails. Instead of thirteen episodes we get seven, ranging from the brilliant *Roll With It* to the rather tedious *Signals and Reunion*. The overall plot inches forward slowly – with a little regression in places – while some episodes are hampered by their soap opera focus on the characters rather than the action. It's nice to see Scorpia and Sea Hawk bond, despite being on opposite sides, but it isn't what I want to watch.

This isn't to say that the season is bad – there are a lot of brilliant moments – but they don't go together as well as they should. In some ways, there is a slight lack of serialisation; this would be a strength, under some circumstances, but here it's a weakness. A couple of episodes switch back and forth between both sets of characters, instead of focusing on the main adventure. Others stay focused and reward their viewers.

The core of the series lies, as before, in character development ... and here, the villains come out ahead. Catra is a wonderfully-conflicted character, although – as she grows into her new role – I find myself having less sympathy for her. This works out quite well in *The Ties That Bind*, where Glimmer (after finding that Catra makes a nightmarish prisoner) slaps her down by snapping “Adora didn't run away from the Horde, she ran away from you!” It doesn't work out so well in *White Out*, where Catra is ready to let herself be killed rather than see Adora win. Scorpia is a curious mixture of likable girl, heroic (if only for the wrong side) warrior and teenager with a crush on Catra. Entrapta comes across as far more interested in scientific research than morality, joining the Horde and befriending Hordak rather than remaining true to the Princess Alliance.

That said, the villains do have weaknesses too. Hordak degrades as a character – switching his favour from Catra to Entrapta – as he grows more desperate to get home (or bring in a new army – it isn't clear which). It also isn't clear just how much he cares about conquering the world. To some extent, he leaves fighting the war in Catra's hands while working on his own projects – a mistake, as Catra isn't ready for the post. Shadow Weaver is given a more sympathetic backstory that degrades the original character, to the point of practically having her driven to do something incredibly stupid by her former superiors. It seems that people are prepared to try to humanise someone who is, at base, the most despicable character in the series.

The princesses definitely come off worst in the character development stakes. In some ways, they go backwards. Glimmer finds herself treating Frosta like an irritating kid sister (how her mother treated her), while Frosta herself shifts from super-mature to kid heroine. None of the others really grow ... and *Swift Wind* is a joke that's no longer funny.

First prize for funniest episode probably goes to *Roll With It*, which is based around the prem-

ise of the main characters trying to plot out an attack on an enemy fortress. Adora's planning session promptly degrades into an RPG game, with imagine-spots of various versions of the characters; Glimmer portrays herself as a super-spy, Bow envisages the main cast as their 80s incarnations, etc. What sounds like a daft idea actually works quite well, with the cast actually noting the cringe-worthy humour that would otherwise let the story down considerably. (Bonus points for Adora fretting over how Catra would defend the fortress, only to discover – when the attack is actually launched – that Catra is nowhere near.)

There are also odder moments as the scale continues to veer between relatively small-scale operations and adventures that take place all around the globe. It's hard to tell just how quickly the action can move from one place to the other, suggesting the planet is smaller than Earth. A flicker of reality pops up in one episode, where the Horde is starting to grind to a halt ... not because of She-Ra, but because Catra has been neglecting the 'minor' logistics issues of running a large army. It's odd, though; Shadow Weaver solves Catra's problem, but surely she should have had a staff? One logistics officer, no matter how brilliant, could not keep an army running. Hordak should have a whole army of people dedicated to keeping the Horde functioning. (Although, that said, it wouldn't be out of character for Shadow Weaver to keep all the power in her hands.)

Overall, the second season is something of a mixed bag. Individually, most of the episodes are great (particularly if you tune out the digressions from the main plot.) Collectively, however, the season doesn't have the punch of the first season. The increased focus on characters weakens the series and, while it does have some nice moments, it makes it harder to enjoy the action. YMMV, of course.

## Zines

### Cirsova Magazine of Thrilling Adventure and Daring Suspense, Issue #9/ Winter 2021

Review by Caroline Furlong

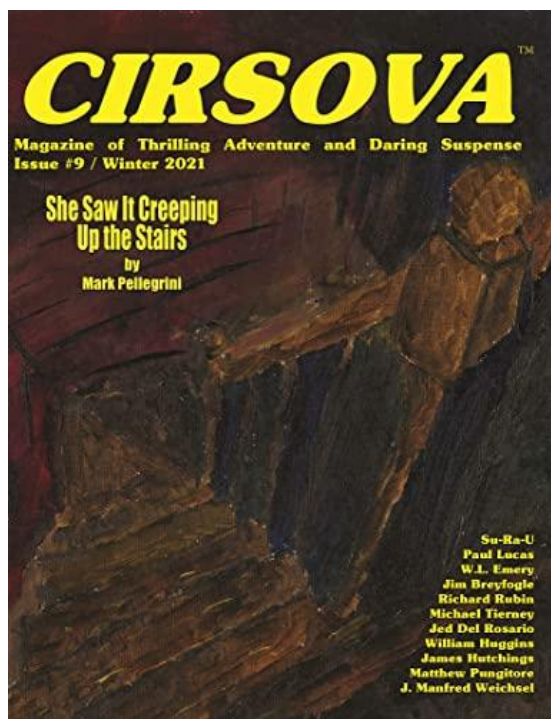
Courtesy of [upstreamreviews.substack.com/](http://upstreamreviews.substack.com/)

Thrills and Chills abound in this issue of Cirsova....

Winter is a time of darkness, a time of cold. Finding light to scatter the gloom can be an effort. The ninth issue of Cirsova Magazine of Thrilling Adventure and Daring Suspense does the heavy lifting for readers while taking full advantage of the seasonal chill – for though it brings tales to warm the soul, it will also make one fear what goes bump in the night. The story

“For We Are Many” is a tale that would make The Twilight Zone and Sliders proud. An experiment to see if travel to alternate universes is possible ends with a man coming face-to-face with his sins. Horrified by what he has become in the universes he sees, he seeks to end the terror the only way he can: by destroying himself in every world where he exists!

The tale of “Wychryst Tower” is written in an archaic style, but while one may need to adjust to read it, this episode would put the Pirates of the Caribbean series to shame. Searching through



ruins in the Caribbean leads the protagonist to an old family house in Maine. Learn how dark rituals and unholy terrors from the Caribbean tie into the deadly secret of an apparently respectable New England family in this horror story of misbegotten desires!

Lisa's grandmother is ill, so she and her mother go to live with her and take care of her. But something strange is in the old house – something strange and too horrible to name. Grandmother knows it, and admits that she has never looked it in the eyes. All summer long Lisa hears it moving about the house, and eventually, “She Saw It Creeping Up the Stairs....”

On a future, dying earth, an enforcer and delivery-man for a drug kingpin learns too much about his boss' plans to avenge himself on a former friend and a former lover. For that, the enforcer is punished by being fed a drug none can resist, one which can kill man or woman in less than a week. With little time to

live, he must decide if he can survive listening “To the Sound of a Silent Harp” or if there is another way out of his predicament.

Between laughter and horror, this issue of Cirsova Magazine will have a reader alternately amused and sitting on the edge of his seat as he follows tales that send chills up his spine or tickle his funny bone. Nothing is as it seems and darkness lurks around every corner. Whether the protagonists rise or fall depends entirely on if they listen to their better angels...or their all-too-human frailties.

### The characters

The characters jump off the page and rent out rooms in a reader's mind without so much as a by-your-leave. Whether or not these characters deserve to be cheered on, however, is the decision of the reader entirely. Some are heroes, some are villains, but all are human (even when they are actually alien) enough to be immensely interesting people.

### The world

Every world is memorable and individual, bringing with it a sense of wonder or horror as the story requires. The episodes are self-contained and, while some feel like they are part of a wider world, none make the cardinal error of ending on a cliffhanger. Moreover, no two locations are alike, so there is always something new to discover in each tale.

### The politics

“Thorwynn Stapledon and “The Mellifluous Phoenix” mentions some politics, but it is more humorous than serious and serves to make the story hilarious.

### Content warning



“She Saw It Creeping Up the Stairs” is NOT for children, and if a reader dislikes harm coming to children, this would be a story to skim or avoid. Do not read it at night. Yes, you are welcome.

The rest of the stories are generally favorable for all audiences, but reader discretion is advised in the case of passing the issue on to younger readers.

Who is it for?

Those looking for good stories told well and with enthusiasm will enjoy this issue of Cirsova Magazine. It has everything from daring space battles with alien marines to robot maids cleaning house, with the Bogeyman and various devils appearing and disappearing at will. The more eclectic one’s tastes, the more likely one is to find an episode (or several episodes) in this issue that will satisfy the craving for a good story.

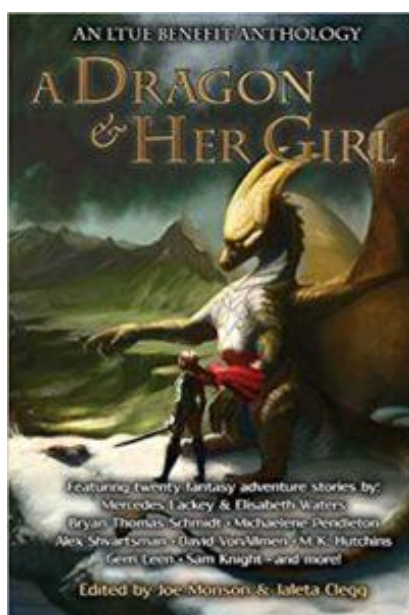
Why read it?

It is fun, and it is dark – perfect for winter reading. Why not pick it up and mix the laughter with the thrills and chills? Or are you scared?

## Food of Famous Authors Joe Monson’s Adventurer’s Stew Cooking by Cedar Sanderson

Joe assigned me a delightful task, with this book and meal. He didn’t send me a recipe, he suggested that I create an Adventurer’s Stew. You couldn’t possibly make a recipe for that. When you are out on a quest with your dragon...

I should explain. Joe’s book to read with this meal is the anthology *A Dragon and Her Girl*. You



should definitely pick it up to read while you make this meal. Not only are there 20 stories to enjoy, but it benefits LTUE (Life, the Universe, and Everything) which is one of the best writing symposiums out there. Anthologies are like a smorgasbord of stories, not a multi-course meal, because there is something for everyone and you can pick and choose your favorites, and they come all together rather than strung out neatly like beads on a string. Stew – or at any rate, this stew! – is a bunch of things put in a pot all together and simmered on the fire while you are busy doing other things, then enjoyed in the evening along with good company. You wouldn’t want to eat it too soon – like a group on a quest, it takes time to mesh and meld into the greatness it will become with time, heat, and, ah, pressure.

What I wanted to do with this stew was to be playful, and imaginative, and not stick too closely to a formula. Just like the stories in the anthology.



### Adventurer's Stew

More like guidelines than a recipe

You'll want some meat. Me, I wanted this to be where I was playful, so I acquired some alligator andouille sausage. Closest thing to dragon meat I could get in the store. Markets these days!

That wasn't enough, so I had some nice fat brisket with plenty of smoky goodness (note- meat really shouldn't be on fire. But if it is, put it out and cut off the black bits.)



So you have about a pound and a half of meat. You'll want more if you have a large adventure party, but for 4 who hadn't been sword-fighting all day, this is a good start.

Now for the filler. I cubed up:

2 medium turnips (what farmer will miss just a few turnips from the edge of his field?)

I don't know what I was expecting, but not that.)

2 medium golden beets (when they said dragons hoarded gold,

1 lb. piece (give or take) of Daikon .

1 and a bit of a large onion.

Some mushrooms (look, don't pick the pretty ones. Trust me on this. The dull brown ones near the old horse apples are right.)

Garlic. Plenty of it. Don't bother to chop it too small, either.

Some grease. Bacon grease is fine, and don't skimp – fighters need the calories!

Handful of herbs (mine were thyme, oregano, and garlic chives.)



Filé powder (what? your cook doesn't collect sassafras leaves and hang odd bundles of green from their horse until they look like an ambulatory bush, then grind 'em when they are dry and you no longer know what that was, but it's tasty?)

A pint of lager (if no one in the party will sacrifice their beer, water or beef broth will do.)

Grinding filé powder from dried sassafras leaves. This both adds a classic gumbo flavor, and thickens the broth.

In a pot – I happen to have the convenience of my kitchen, and an



InstantPot set on saute, then slow cooker – you’ll want to heat up the grease.

Into the hot grease, put your onions and garlic. Stir over the high heat until they are translucent and soft, then add your chopped-up brisket to render out the fat. Finally add in your mushrooms, sliced, and the alligator sausage, sliced. Chop up your herb leaves (toss the stems) and put those in.

Those beets are real gold!

Once this is all cooked, add in the diced root veggies, the beer, and the filé powder (about a tablespoon of this, from a handful of dried leaves, sifted). Cover, move to a lower heat (slow cooker setting) and let alone for about 7 -8 hours. Long enough to go explore that ruined castle. You’ll work up an appetite. Whoever stays at the camp to mind the horses might stir it from time to time.

Uncover, taste, and add salt as needed (the sausages were quite salty, we didn’t need extra). Stir in a spoonful of that soured cream. Why did you swipe that poor farm wife’s crock of nice cream? You knew it wouldn’t keep! But that’s all right, it’s good in the stew. Maybe a few flakes of that hard cheese, if you have any left.

Dragon-approved stew, complete with the heat to give you just a bit of dragon-breath yourself. Not enough to hurt, just enough to warm you through and through. Those dank ruins can give you quite a chill!

On a more serious note, this is not so much a recipe as it is an exploration of making a stew that isn’t loaded with carbs. The adventurers would probably want lots of potatoes, and maybe a nice roux with a handful of flour to make this stick to their ribs, and definitely a nice crusty loaf of bread (doubtless acquired like the cream from some poor farm wife). You might, too! But this writer is trying to slim, so I stuck with ingredients that were more protein and fiber, less sugars. It made for a lovely meal. The filé was a great touch, and I’m tickled. I’ve been trying to come up with a good recipe for it.

The Junior Mad Scientist – who is a very picky eater, indeed – ate her bowl up with approving noises and a dragon on her lap. She now wants to read the anthology herself, and I hope she does, just as you should! Adventures are lovely to read about while you contemplate the wonderful flavors in a really complex bowl of stew. Much warmer and dryer to read about than to have. The First Reader points out this is much better than you have any right to expect on the trail. He’s willing to try it again and also to do without that spice that starvation while questing adds to any meal you have out there! He was surprised at how well the turnips, daikon, and beets worked in the stew, as two of those he will usually avoid at any cost. He likes radishes, but isn’t used to them cooked and enjoyed them like this.





Dragon and Rider by Jose Sanchez