

Tightbeam 348

September 2023



*With my writing, I can still
play inside an enchanted castle
or live inside an old fort. I can
run from ghosts or ride dolphins
any day of the week.*

- Mary Pope Osborne

DAK-IMARTS.artstation.com

Cloud Unicorn by Tiffanie Gray

Tightbeam 348

September 2023

What is Tightbeam? We are the N3F literary fanzine, not the novel and anthology fanzine, but the fanzine that tries to cover all tastes in fandom, such as anime, comics, cosplay, films, novels, biographies, poetry, music, short stories, food, ...

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The N3F offers four different memberships. To join as a public (free) member, send phillies@4liberty.net your email address.

To join or renew, use the membership form at <http://n3f.org/join/membership-form/> to provide your name and whichever address you use to receive zines.

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Additional memberships at the address of a current dues-paying member are \$4.

Public (non-voting) memberships are free. Send payments to Kevin Trainor, PO Box 143, Tonopah NV 89049 . Pay online at N3F.org. PayPal contact is treasurer@n3f.org.

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Letter of Comment

Dear George and Jon:

Thank you for issue 346 of Tightbeam. I am moving forward, getting all these zines done while working on Amazing. It somehow works, although I wish it (and I) could work faster. Comments will follow.

My letter...car problems prevented us from getting to the Harry Potter event north of Toronto, and it will unfortunately prevent us from going to a steampunk event southwest of us this coming weekend. We gather the HP event to the north was quite the success, so maybe we can go next year to see what we missed. I hope to say the same about the steampunk event.

We had two cons other than Anime North this spring, Forest City Comic Con in London, Ontario, and Pretty Heroes in the north end of Toronto. Both were fun, but sales were poor at both of those cons, and that brought us back down to earth after the records sales for us at Anime North. We have decisions to make for 2024.

I recognize David C. Kopaska-Merkel, mostly because he used to live here in Toronto. I had wondered what he was doing these days, and now I know.

H. Beam Piper...it's good to know more, as always, but a career cut short by suicide...who knows what more could have come from this creative mind? It sounds like he was disappointed in his own output, and didn't listen to those who enjoyed his work.

ST:Picard...I enjoyed all three seasons, the third most of all, and there were some clunky episodes, but all series do have them. The series finale was great fun, and was the perfect sendoff for the Enterprise-D crew, but some things were just a little too convenient, and a little Star Wars-ish at the end, but still, Picard's crew saved the Federation again, and there may yet be another Trek series springing up from it. Trek fans are spoiled for choice for anything post-Next Gen, and there's lots more coming up.

Done for the moment, and I hope there's more shortly.

Yours, Lloyd Penney

Anime

Legion of Superheroes Review by Jason P. Hunt



I'm catching up on a few things, so this review comes after this animated feature has been out for a while. Legion of Super-Heroes gives us the tale of Supergirl (Meg Donnelly) learning the delicate art of heroics (and hopefully some self-control) after she proves to be a bit too reckless for a modern (and to her, primitive) Earth. So Superman (Darren Criss) takes her to the 31st century to train with the



Legion.

What follows is a mostly predictable story wherein Kara learns that she can't always just punch first and ask questions later. There are echoes of the "Little Girl Lost" episode of *Superman: The Animated Series* here, but this Supergirl is less even-tempered, quicker to pop off in anger before thinking her way through. And that gets her started on the wrong foot with

Brainiac 5 (Harry Shum, Jr), who has his own agenda for being at the Legion's training facility.

And by predictable, I mean I had most of the basics figured out in the first half-hour or so: the villain reveal, the basic plot involving the vault full of universe-destroying weapons, etc. If you haven't seen it yet, and you're a fan of the Legion from the comics, you might not like what they do with a particular character.

There's a complaint going around that the "strong female lead" characters are starting to lose their luster because they're being written like men, and in this particular story there's a little bit of that. Supergirl is brash, arrogant, reckless, and nowhere near likeable. And given that this is coming from Josie Campbell, the writer of *She-Ra* and the *Princess of Power* and executive producer of *My Adventures with Superman*, it's not much of a surprise that Kara Zor-El (Meg Donnelly) is written with this as her starting point. Because it gives her an arc to let her become a Girl Boss.



The main visible enemy is The Dark Circle, lifted from the comics and presented here pretty much as they are in the books: an organization bent on conquering the United Planets and bringing order to the galaxy. Their goal is to get to the Miracle Machine, created by the Guardians of Oa, to remake the universe. Naturally, there are heroes standing in the way, but this isn't the first string. These are the students waiting to find out if they even qualify to be members of the Legion. So there's a secondary arc where the kids come into

their own because they have to step up, and Supergirl is the one who inspires them to fight the villains.

(Remember, Supergirl was sent to the 31st century to learn how to become ... not reckless.)

Yes, Supergirl becomes sort of a Girl Boss in this one. At one point, she's even described as "confident, and brilliant, and strong, and beautiful" and that she's the only one powerful enough to stop what's happening. (Oh? I can think of at least a handful of other heroes from various times who could step into that rol)



The dynamic between Supergirl and Brainiac 5 is predictable to the letter. The villain(s) reveal, not a surprise. Now, having said that, it's a watchable flick. It plays out well, it holds together, but there's nothing new here. Josie Campbell is painting by numbers for her first feature, and it shows. I will say the first scene on Krypton between Kara and her mother Alura is interesting, and it helps give some weight to Kara's loss as she's sent away just before the planet explodes. But Kara's father, the sci-



entist Zor-El, is completely missing from this story. Not even mentioned. Alura is the scientist who's been working with Jor-El on an escape plan.

Now, there is a little bit of body horror at one point, and it's an interesting take on a character that I won't spoil here, but it leads us into that PG-13 rating, along with a couple of choice words that I still find off-

putting in a "Superman Cartoon" even after all this time. There's no reason for it other than to do it and somehow prove this isn't for kids. OK. Point made. I'll go back and re-watch Justice League Unlimited.

That Girl Power theme carries over into the rest of the story, with a good number of the Legion trainees also being female and the male Legion candidates being some of the more ... well, comical entries in the roster. Granted, Bouncing Boy is one of the earliest members of the Legion, but here he's presented as a Legion hopeful. The men folk have plenty to do, sure, but on balance the women get the meatier parts — at least on the side of the Good Guys.

On the technical side of things, I'm still not enamored with the animation style that started with Superman: Man of Tomorrow. I'm not sure if that's an artifact of the studio they're using or if it's a conscious design choice on the part of DC Comics and/or Warner Bros. Animation, but it's chunky and clunky. Too many hard lines on the characters, especially in their faces. The animation is blocky and stutters a little more than I prefer.

But one thing that stands out is that even after all these years, and with all of the hyperbole about Zack Snyder's DC work, it's still Richard Donner's first Superman from 1978 that holds sway over it all. Kryptonian crystal architecture, the title sequence where Kara's ship is flying through spacescapes that bounce between Donner's film and 2001, the Kent farm, and even a twist on "The son becomes the father" line at one point.

Which just goes to show you how powerful that first film remains. Superman is still the gold standard. Hollywood should remember that.

The music by Kevin Riepl isn't much to write about. Much of it is repetitive, especially the main theme. There are variations of it throughout, and after watching the film I can't really bring any of it to mind.

It's not the worst animated DC film — that honor still belongs to Flashpoint, I think — but it's not great. It's not memorable. It's serviceable, which is disappointing given that in the last decade-plus, DC has delivered some pretty solid animated features while their live action films have been a mess.

But now, like almost everything else coming out of Hollywood, it's just there. And there's very little in this story — or any other, for that matter — to make me care.

And that's the worst place you can be as a custodian of a legacy that's over eighty years old.

Summer 2017 First Impressions – Clean Freak! Aoyama-kun/Keppeki Danshi!
 Aoyama-kun
 Review by Jessi Silver

The handsome young soccer genius named Aoyama is a Japan representative. His play style is “cleanliness.” He doesn’t tackle and doesn’t head the ball. If he’s doing a throw-in, he’ll only do it if he’s wearing gloves. – ANN



Copyright 2017 (c) Studio Hibari
 Streaming: Crunchyroll
 Episodes: 12
 Source: Manga



Episode 1 Summary: Aoyama is the star soccer player on his high school team. This is in spite of (or perhaps actually

because of) his germophobia. He won’t touch a dirty soccer ball, he won’t get his clothing dirty, and he won’t do anything that causes him to come into physical contact with other players, including his teammates. This drives his teammate Zaizen up the wall, since he thinks that everyone else is much too accommodating to Aoyama-kun’s needs. The thing is, though, that everyone else seems to admire Aoyama’s cleanliness, and they sure as heck think he’s the best player at their school. Even members of rival high schools keep trying to poach Aoyama-kun away. After Aoyama leads the team to victory in a game against a clearly better school, Zaizen starts to gain a grudging respect towards his unusual teammate.

Impressions: This episode is a great example of a premise that could have resulted in something really terrible, but which managed to avoid becoming terrible and instead settled comfortably into being slightly above average with some hit-or-miss comedy for flavor.



Aoyama goes for the goal. Copyright 2017 Studio Hibari

Speaking as someone with a history of mental illness (though of a different style than featured here), I wasn’t looking forward to watching an anime try to feature a character who seems to be someone living with one. Anime, like other forms of media, has a very spotty track record when portraying mental illness, and more often than not it serves as the punchline to a joke. For every show like Trapeze which to my memory seemed to get a lot of the emotional side of mental illness right (despite

being a comedy), there are several more like Welcome to the NHK that mix up “profound social anxiety” with “hapless otaku maladjustment” and end up becoming insulting in the process. It’s a difficult thing to get quite right and there’s a feeling of glaring falseness that’s there when it’s wrong. So you can imagine how low my expectations for this anime were, knowing nothing much beyond its premise. Surprisingly, though, I’d qualify this attempt as “pretty okay,” which might not sound like high praise but which I think does a good job of capturing the fact that the show is decent without a lot of major screw-ups.

The first episode’s point-of-view character is Zaizen, who shortly becomes very frustrated by the fact that Aoyama seems to require so many special accommodations and his classmates and



Zaizen watches Aoyama's post-game cleaning of the soccer balls. Copyright 2017 Studio Hibari

in fact there are several people who try to get him to adjust his attitude by showing Aoyama's good points as a player and a person – he's an excellent soccer player with an incredibly accurate and focused playing style that's the direct result of his needs as a player, after all. I think by the end of the first episode we're all on board with who Aoyama-kun is.



Aoyama is admired by his team's manager. Copyright 2017 Studio Hibari

yama, as well as the rival school members who know all about Aoyama's skill on the field, but not really anything else about the way he operates as a person. It may be too much to ask for a comedic series to provide a lot of deep insight into a character, let alone from their own perspective. But that doesn't make we want to stop asking for it.

Something I made note of while watching this episode was the fact that it exists somewhere in between a straight sports anime and a true gag series, and the juxtaposition of the two without a strong focus on either is actually a little bit disorienting. One shared trait of many of the best sports anime I've watched is that they do a good job of being funny while also portraying the seriousness and intensity of the sport. Hinata and Kageyama of *Haikyu!!* are quite the odd couple, and the comedic tension that arises due to their opposing personalities is really entertaining. But the show is also great at portraying exciting volleyball action and knows when to forgo the humor and bring that to the forefront. *Clean Freak! Aoyama-kun* seems to be just slightly uncomfortable focusing too much energy on exploring either side of the equation; there are a couple of good visual gags (Aoyama cleaning his classroom window got a chuckle out of me) and some heartfelt moments, like Aoyama working on the soccer balls after the game, I didn't get the impression that the show was really committed to either piece. Unfortunately, I didn't feel like the first episode left much of an impact (aside from a repeating gag focused on a rival character's abs – many people might find this kind of non-sequitur obnoxious, but it's honestly so stupid that I actually laughed every time the character appeared with his shirt pulled up).

fellow team members seem unruffled by this and are even willing and able to deal with them without pulling their hair out. I think that Zaizen, despite being a pretty outspoken jerk throughout the episode, is used well throughout. Though I tend to stick with people online and in real life who understand the need to celebrate diversity, including neuro-diversity, I think there are many other people who are unfortunately not in the frame of mind to give others what they think of as "special treatment," and showing Zaizen having that kind of reaction acknowledges that. That said, the point is that Zaizen isn't shown a lot of sympathy, and

One downside to this setup, though, is that Aoyama doesn't get much of an opportunity to speak for himself. We're positioned as outside observers who learn about Aoyama through the eyes of the people who know him. There are the gaggle of girls who have crushes on him because of his spotlessly clean hands (when in fact, all the hand washing would probably be more painful than anything else, but I suppose there has to be some element of fantasy), the other players and team manager who seem to be admirers rather than close friends with Ao-



Thankfully, the anime does seem to have a stronger visual style than its blander storytelling might suggest. During goofier moments, the characters do switch into kind of a funny “chibi” mode that, while not lending a lot of extra strength to the humor, does at least notify the viewer when things are meant to be comical. This is sort of a classic technique that might feel a little bit overbearing to some, but I found it kind of

cute. The animation is fairly serviceable when portraying the sports action as well; the opening scene where Aoyama scores an important goal during the All-Japan championship is really well-done, as is the match that caps this episode and proves Aoyama’s prowess as a player (and his ability to be less-stringent about cleanliness depending on how far into the match he is – sometimes a little mud is tolerable, as long as it’s less than five minutes to the end of the game). The lines are clean (har har) and the animation is consistent throughout this opener.

Ultimately I don’t know if this show will satisfy sports anime enthusiasts or fans of comedy anime, but it does have the distinction of being significantly less offensive to me as someone with mental health issues than I would have expected, and its heart seems to be roughly in the right place, so that might be a decent starting place.

Pros: The animation serves its purpose well. The premise could have skewed in a much more offensive direction, but instead the bulk of the characters seem to be supportive of Aoyama’s needs.

Cons: The comedy and sports aspects seem to be at odds with one-another.

Grade: B-

Comics

By Crom, CONAN is a Valiant Effort!

Review by Jason P. Hunt

Conan the Barbarian #1 (2023)

Based on the character created by Robert E. Howard

Written by Jim Zub

Art by Roberto De La Torre

Colors by José Villarrubia

Letters by Richard Starkings of Comcraft

Published by Heroic Signatures & Titan Comics

Jim Zub has done his homework.

In this day and age, it’s more often than not that I approach any new creative work with a touch of trepidation. Will the story entertain? Will the writer try to lecture me or preach at me? Will the characters look like potatoes? The comics industry has been very hit and miss over the years, so much that I’d pretty much drifted away from comics for a long while. I don’t remem-



ber the last time I picked up a new comic book. Maybe Action Comics #1000? Detective Comics #900?

And I'm not a big fan of reading comics digitally, but that's the usual format for review copies these days, so with teeth firmly gritted, I opened up Conan the Barbarian and dove in.

Right off the bat, Zub establishes some bona fides for established fans by quoting Robert E. Howard himself from *The Nemedian Chronicles*; and as we begin a new adventure, the first page is a classic-style map of the area to let us know where we are — something that helps new readers as well. And the splash page with the issue's title and credits is a great throwback to Conan's days at Marvel Comics.

We find Conan doing what he does best: fighting.

Set years after the battle of Venarium, Conan is on his way home to Cimmeria for rest and solitude. But as he travels through Aquilonia, he's caught up in a new adventure when a scout from the Picts arrives to warn everyone of a coming threat. She gets to the town just ahead of a horde of foul zombie-like creatures, which hints at some of the supernatural aspects of the Conan legacy without going over the top (at least, not yet).

De La Torre's art is very reminiscent of the artwork you'd find in Harold Foster's *Prince Valiant*: detailed, epic panels with a lot of action that doesn't get muddled. Others have compared his art to that of John Buscema, and I can see that as well. But the layout De La Torre is using here seems to be reaching back even further to the 1930s — selective use of white space, occasionally dispensing with boxes around the narrative text, and layers of characters in the action sets.

The story is very much a set-up to a bigger adventure. Zub first establishes Conan as a fierce fighter who doesn't take orders too well; nor does he want to give orders. He just wants to go his own way. But circumstances are going to conspire to put Conan at the heart of a new adventure where he'll have to battle fierce supernatural forces. Where do they come from? How did this ravaging horde arise to spread death throughout the land?

The dialogue feels like something Howard would have written today, and the art allows space for the text in a way that flows rather smoothly. There are a couple of places where the path from one panel to the next isn't clear, but that's probably me being the Old Man. Outside of that, it was a steady paced story with a good mix of action sets and quieter character moments to give the action room to breathe. Overall, a great first entry into a new series, and I can definitely recommend you pick this one up.

Conan the Barbarian #1 is on shelves now, and there are a number of variant covers available. My personal favorites are the one by De La Torre and the Marvel throwback cover by Patrick Zircher.

SerCon

James H. Schmitz Bio-Bibliography

by

Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D.

N3F Historian



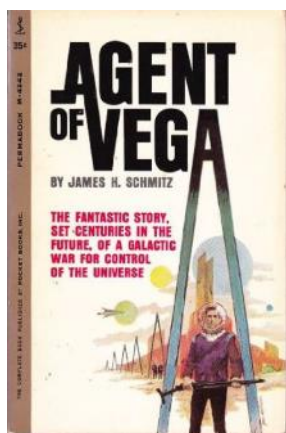
James Henry Schmitz (October 15, 1911 – April 18, 1981) was an American science fiction (SF) writer, born in Hamburg, Germany of American parents. After working in various businesses, he began writing full-time in 1961.

He is best known for his novel *The Witches of Karres* (1966), originally published in the December, 1949, issue of *Astounding Science Fiction*. He was very popular with *Astounding* readers, and became one of editor John's W. Campbell, Jr.'s mainstay authors. Schmitz had more than 35 stories published in *Astounding/Analog*.

Early Life/Education

Schmitz was educated at a Realgymnasium in Hamburg, and grew up speaking both English and German. The family spent World War I in the United States, then returned to Germany.

He traveled to Chicago in 1930 to go to business school, then switched to a correspondence course in journalism. Unable to find a job because of The Great Depression, he returned to Germany to work in his father's company.



Schmitz lived in various German cities, where he worked for the International Harvester Company, until his family left shortly before World War II broke out in Europe.

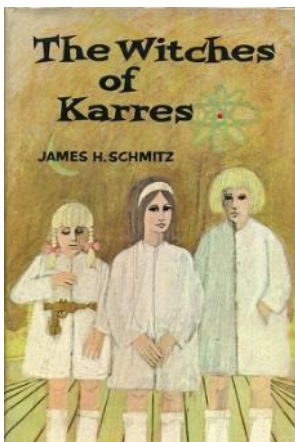
World War II

During World War II, Schmitz served as an aerial photographer in the Pacific for the U. S. Army Air Forces. After the war, he and his brother-in-law managed a business that manufactured trailers until they ended the business in 1949.

After the war, he made his home in California, where he lived until his death.

Most Popular Genre Books

- Agent of Vega (1960)
- The Universe Against Her (1964)
- The Witches of Karres (1966)
- The Demon Breed (1968)
- A Pride of Monsters (1970)
- The Telzey Toy (1973)



Genre Collections

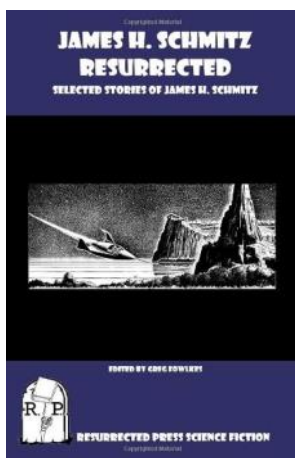
His stories were collected in a series of volumes during the early 2000s by Baen Books: *Telzey Amberdon* (2000), *T'n'T: Telzey & Trigger* (2000), *Trigger & Friends* (2001), *The Hub: Dangerous Territory* (2001), *Agent of Vega and Other Stories* (2001), and *Eternal Frontier* (2002).

James H. Schmitz Resurrected: Selected Stories of James H. Schmitz was published by Resurrected Press in 2010.

Awards/Honors/Recognitions

He was awarded The Invisible Little Man Award in 1972.

Concluding Comments



Schmitz died of congestive lung failure in 1981 after a five-week stay in a hospital in Los Angeles. He was survived by his wife, Betty Mae Chapman Schmitz.

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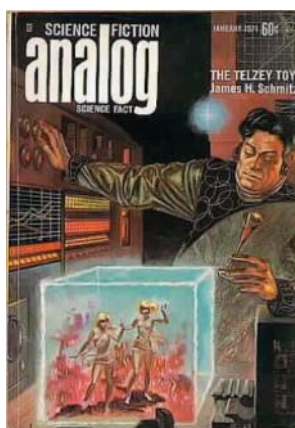
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Note: In addition to the above works, various Internet sites were consulted, including Fancyclopedia 3, ISFDB, and Wikipedia.



[Editor Phillis aside: New England readers seeing the *Analog* cover of *The Telzey Toy* repeatedly observed that the villain on the cover, the distinguished gentleman holding the glass of unspecified fluid, bore a remarkable semblance to Isaac Asimov as he appeared in 1971, a semblance denied both by the artist and by the good doctor. Editor Swartz thinks there is no semblance.]

Television

Fantastic Television: Travelers Review by Heath Row As seen in *Faculae & Filigrees*

S2E6: “U235”

The episode opens with a philosophical discussion about whether people should make their own decisions, or rely on the Director for salvation. The conversation also addresses whether the actions undertaken by the team under the Director’s guidance are any better than those undertaken by the now-ill Jenny and other members of the Faction. Both are supposedly working for the betterment of humankind. Their methods are what differs. The team doesn’t buy that line of reasoning, and Philip asks Jenny why she tried to kill herself — whether it was because of guilt. It was not; it was because she wanted to avoid the intensity of the late-stage virus. Having brought her back to consciousness, Philip assures her that she’ll now suffer just like the other infected people.

Grace, who is also ill, takes center stage in a way this episode. She informs the team that there was a backup plan for the Director should it be powered down. At the location of the domed base that collapsed, north across the Canadian border, there should be a store of uranium that can be used to bring the artificial intelligence back online. So the team attempts to gain entrance to a military base nearby in an effort to procure a decommissioned warhead. She also uses a lengthy restroom break to program the nanites, administering them to Jenny while Marcy is out of the room. Unfortunately, that doesn’t work as well as intended, and the trust between Grace and Marcy continues to erode. At one point, Grace says something to Marcy to the effect of, “Just admit it: You hate me.”

David volunteers at a soup line to help the needy homeless people he cares for, experiencing the death of one. There are rumors of looting, of violence in the streets. And the television news continues to advise people to stay home. Jeff and Carly’s son is ill. Grant’s wife is sick, particularly at risk given her pregnancy. And team members other than Grant and Carly exhibit symptoms, as well.

Arriving at the future base in Canada—the show is now clearly located in Washington—Grant, Philip, and Carly encounter Forbes, who’s there to stop their efforts. But the warhead they’re bringing is a decoy, and Trevor powers up the actual energy source. That brings the Director back online. Almost immediately, an antidote formula is transmitted for production and distribution, and the Faction members are taken over, displaced by other travelers.

The episode resolves a little tidily for my tastes, ending a threat that could have lasted much longer. We have a bunch of new travelers on hand, loyal to the Director, and it’s not yet known how many of the Faction remain. (Forbes indicates that the Director might not know all of their TELLs.)

The team members make the rounds to administer the antidote to their loved ones, and the episode ends with the arrival of a messenger. Why this messenger is more momentous than any

other, meriting an episode ending, we shall find out.

S2E7: “17 Minutes”
Fantastic Television: Travelers
Review by Heath Row

This is going to be perhaps my shortest write-up, because the episode is absolutely amazing and I don't want to give too much away. Regardless, it's one of the most interesting takes on Groundhog Day's approach to time travel that I've ever encountered. It's never entirely clear that the team will eventually get it right, and that makes for some serious edge-of-the-seat television. The stakes are that high.

Along the way, we get parallel meditations on the importance of love, a gentle quip about how old Trevor is, friendly jousting among the teammates, and a strategic use of sign language. The result is one of my favorite episodes in the two seasons so far—if not my favorite episode. That I really didn't want things to go off the rails as much as they could have suggests I'm now attached to and invested in these characters. Otherwise, the iterative time travel plot line wouldn't work as well as it does. S2E8: “Traveler 0027”

I neglected to mention another important aspect of Episode 7, “17 Minutes.” The iterative nature and the forested setting of the episode gives more room than usual for the sound design and score or soundtrack by Adam Lastiwka. The music's been building in importance—or perhaps in my awareness—over the last few episodes, and I'm now considering his music of primary importance in the show.

Lastiwka himself made an edited compilation of the score and sound cues from Season 1, Episode 2 available on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Euealh3TO4I>. And if you're interested, original series soundtrack recordings are available for Season 1 and Season 2 via Apple Music, Spotify, and perhaps other streaming services. The music holds up well on its own, for sure.

This episode also showcases Lastiwka's sound design and scoring. (It helps that I've watched the last two using headphones rather than over room speakers; the sound is all right there!) The episode is a relatively self-contained outing in which Grace, the Traveler 0027 of the title, is brought to trial for resetting the Director, interrupting the traveler program, and otherwise interfering with the grand plan. Her trial takes place in a church, which seems fitting given the reverence some travelers hold for the Director. During the trial, it comes to light that Grace might have taken more than memories from Marcy when she overwrote her to reset the Director. That process might have removed emotions and qualities such as empathy—which would certainly affect her relationship with David. The revelation becomes important once the tribunal makes its decision known—one of the tribunal members offers to restore Marcy's host memories, developed during her first overwriting.

Also in the episode, Blair reaches out to David on her birthday, Trevor and Grace share an interesting moment over French cuisine, and Grant and Kat show signs of reconciliation. One of the most impressive and effective scenes is the one in which the Director confers directly with Grace during her expected sentencing. The series of terminal patients offering single sentences of the Director's direct expression and conversation was very well done. I believe it was our first direct exposure to the AI as a personality.

Writing

The Ten Most Badass Women In All of Science Fiction and Fantasy (Part 1 of 2)

By Jim McCoy

While I was working yesterday, it got a bit slow. That has a tendency to happen on Sundays. While I was sitting in a parking lot meditating over whether I would have enough time to run into the store I was parked in front of for a quick pit stop, my mind started to wander. I thought about who the most amazing badass characters in Science Fiction and Fantasy were. This told me two things:

1.) Yup, I'm a geek. That's confirmed.

and

2.) I need to get to a con stat. I haven't had a chance to discuss the things that really matter for a while.

So as I sat there, staring past the crack in the windshield, I started making a list. As I went along, I realized that everyone on it was female. I found that kind of weird, I guess. I mean, I've always loved a strong female character. I'm a member of The Royal Manticoran Navy: The Official Honor Harrington Fan Club. Honor is a career military officer. I've mentioned my love for a strong female protagonist several times over the life of this blog. It's not that I have anything against strong women. It's just that I expected some dudes to make the list, too.

And I'm sure they will. I'll do a most badass dude list someday, I guess. Maybe framing it that way will make it easier to write.

But for now, here are the Ten Most Badass Women In All of Science Fiction and Fantasy as compiled by our Publisher, Chief Editor and Lead Author here at Jimbo's (All of which happen to be me. It's good to own the blog and award the titles.) as of January 2, 2023 at 1630 hours. Buckle up. It's gonna be a fun ride. See if you can guess which woman was one of the people I thought of first and didn't make the final list.

Oh, and spoilers abound. None of this is new material but you may not have seen/read all of it. You have been warned.

Number Ten: Molly Weasley (Harry Potter)
"Not my daughter, you bitch!"

I see you out there. You think I've finally lost it. I'm crackers. That Jimbo Guy has totally gone 'round the bend. You're not wrong, except that none of that applies here.

Listen, this chick rode herd on six young boys and a young girl, kept her household straight, kept Arthur Freaking Weasley out of trouble with the law and oh, by the way, killed Bellatrix Lestrange, multiple murderer and trusted confidante of the Dark Lord in a wizard's duel at the

Battle of Hogwarts. Mama Bear was in full effect that day. Let's not forget that it was also her second war. Order of the Phoenix, indeed.

The only thing worse than sending five of your six kids off to war would be going with them. Molly had to look upon the face of her dead son and go back out to fight. I couldn't have done it. Mollywobbles is bad to the bone and I'd never have the guts to go heads up with her in a duel. Props to an often ignored character.

Number Nine: Kathryn Janeway (Star Trek: Voyager)

"There are three things to remember about being a starship captain: Keep your shirt tucked in, go down with the ship, and never abandon a member of your crew."

First, she gets sent across the galaxy by something she doesn't understand with a crew of Starfleet officers and Marquis rebels. Then she manages to build a crew out of them, keep them from fragmenting due to the poor morale that resulted from being seventy plus years from home, get the ship pointed in the right direction and travel an awfully long way. While doing all of that she manages to defeat the Kazon. Then she straight up punks the Borg, managing to get them to make a deal to preserve her and her crew. She was the only Starfleet captain ever to do so. Next up, she defeats Species 8472, the only species ever to come close to beating the Borg. Then she makes it home and gets promoted to Admiral.

Janeway wasn't the straight up fighter that some of the other women on the list were, but there may not be a better leader on the list. We'll see what you all think, but to hold things together through the Year of Hell took a leader of the highest order.

Number Eight: Luna Lovegood (Harry Potter)

"Harry Potter, you listen to me, right now!"

Luna was loving. Luna stood strong for her beliefs in the face of adversity. Luna survived the bullying of countless classmates and managed to stay strong. Luna was Luna and didn't care what you thought about it. Luna was good with her wand. Luna, above all, was loyal.

When Harry needed help at the Department of Mysteries, Luna answered the call. When Dumbledore's Army needed to posse up and fight at the Battle of Hogwarts, Luna was there. And, when the crucial moment came and Harry needed a conk on the head to find what he needed to find, it was Luna who led him to the right place. Okay, so I'm a Harry Potter mark and Luna is my favorite character, but it doesn't change the facts.

No one, not even Harry himself, faced more adversity or fought harder than Luna Lovegood. She risked it all for people who treated her like crap. Harry didn't remember his parents. Luna was there when her mother passed.

And it is possible, maybe, that the reason I see Luna as such a badass is because she grew up as a nerd and so did I. It's possible. But I know what it's like going through that crap and she survived it and prospered. But to hell with all of that.

'Nuff said.

Number Seven: Diana Prince (Wonder Woman)

"If no one else will defend the world, then I must."

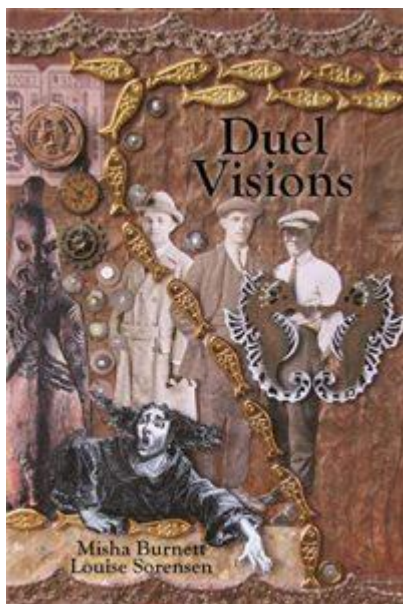
Somewhere along the line, Wonder Woman has defeated Nazis, the First Reich, aliens, and a whole lot besides. She blocks bullets with her bracelet. She can defeat just about any man in a straight up fight and she's not afraid of anything.

I've been a fan of Wonder Woman longer than any other woman on this list. In comics, on TV, the movies, whatever. I remember taking my daughters to see the Wonder Woman movie. My youngest was scared. She was six at the time. My oldest freaked out when I said that yes, poison gas is very scary. She hadn't realized that such a thing existed. Well now she knows and I doubt that she'll ever forget.

Whether she's a drawing on a page, or being portrayed by Gal Gadot or Lynda Carter she's one of the most badass women around. Don't get caught up in that Lasso of Truth.

Food of Famous Authors

Misha Burnett and Louise Sorenson Cooking by Cedar Sanderson



Buckle in, folks! This is going to be a long one! Also, these are less recipes, and more techniques which you can use to make many, many delicious variations on a theme.

When I reached out to Misha, who I know well, to ask him for a book and a dish for ETWYRT, I was curious to see what he'd come up with. He's a fascinating writer – you've met him before on these pages, with the deliciously creepy goblin poem that came from an Odd Prompt. To my surprise, he came back and asked if I would do a post for both him and his coauthor. Of course! I've done that before. But what I hadn't done before was two separate but equal dishes for those authors, so this is fun and different!

First! The book is *Duel Visions* by Misha Burnett and Louise Sorenson, and surprising no one who has read the goblin poem, it's a grim and macabre collection of ten stories. Designed to terrorize the reader and heighten their senses, it's perhaps suitable that a book which will make you glad to be alive when you finish it, should go with that most necessary of living chores, eating. Both dishes are a delight to the senses, and while you might not choose to make them at the same time, you also might! Especially if you have teenagers to feed...

Misha asked for Cuban Sandwiches, and Louise for sushi. Since I have wanted to make the former for some time, and the latter is a common meal at our house, this was a fun pairing. The new with the familiar, and the kids would get involved, too. Sushi does not necessarily involve raw fish, and it is a kinetic meal to prepare, perfect for kids who want to get handsy with their food.

To begin, you want to make pulled pork. This is not a difficult process, and I'm going to elide over it, because I'll admit I have bags on hand in the freezer for quick and easy meals on de-

mand. Usually, I season this with barbecue sauce for pulled pork sandwiches, but for the Cuban sandwiches you could toss it with a bit of cumin, chili powder, garlic, and some finely chopped fresh cilantro (this is optional for those who abhor the stuff). And if you want to make your own bread for the sandwiches, get that started. Or, if you're like me this last week and not up to it, grab some hearty hoagie rolls.

For the sushi, start the rice. I use a short grain sushi rice, but we have successfully done sushi with arborio as well. Medium or long-grain rice, jasmine, or basmati, will not work. You need rice grains that stay a bit sticky when they are cooked, so they can be structurally sound when building onigiri (rice balls) and sushi rolls. We use a ratio of one cup dry rice to 1 1/2 cups water, and we use a rice cooker. Once the rice is cooked, transfer it to a wooden bowl (this is actually important, as it helps suck up any excess moisture, but the kids say they do it in any old bowl with success, so you can manage without it!) and fold in a mixture of 1 tbsp rice wine vinegar and 1 tsp sugar gently (increase this according to how many cups of uncooked rice you used. You'll get about 3 rolls per cup of rice). You don't want to break or mush up the rice, just coat it in the seasoning.



Lay out a sheet of nori on a bamboo mat, if you have one. If not, a sheet of plastic wrap or waxed paper works fine. You'll see my hands (photography by the Jr. Mad Scientist) and note that I use the nori itself for rolling. The only thing you must do is moisten the nori. We keep a bowl of water handy and dip our fingertips in, then 'fingerpaint' the water onto the dry seaweed paper sheet. Obviously, there's a lot of handwashing before this point! Because we also use our hands to put the rice on the nori. It's sticky, so wetting your fingers keeps too much of the rice from clinging to you and not your

rolling paper. Once your rice is leveled out, not too much, not too little, you can lay out the filling bits. We use tons of things for this. Whatever is in the fridge, really. The mainstays the Jr. Mad Scientist (our in-house sushi chef) insists on are carrots, cucumbers, avocado, cream cheese, salad shrimp, and fake crab (I like real crabmeat, and buy a tin of it for this very purpose). You could do this with fruit and cream cheese – we have, and it's tasty! Most of the time we're making California rolls.



Filling going in. Almost ready to roll!

Roll with a gentle, firm, continuous pressure. You are pushing all the sticky rice together and giving the structure the adhesion to stand up to the cutting.

Keep rolling after you have come to the end. This compresses it all. Compression is a theme in this post...

The bamboo mat is handy for rolling because it keeps a constant, even pressure on your roll. I opted to work without it so I could show what was going on to the camera.

Cut your roll in half, then into equal pieces. The children, being barbarians, will eat a roll whole, like a burrito. I prefer the chopstick method, myself!

I ate my sushi roll with some soy for dipping, and pickled ginger and kimchee on the side. I'm

not a big fan of wasabi, and most US wasabi is just colored horseradish, anyway. The real stuff is nicer.

On to the sandwich! You know, both of these are sandwiches, sort of? Portable lunch-type food, easy to eat on the go and light meals. Well, the Cuban sandwiches are not so light!

You'll need:

- Hearty rolls, or a baguette-style loaf
- pulled pork
- bread and butter pickle slices
- deli sliced ham (I suppose you could do it with just ham slices, but nice thin ones!)
- Mustard
- Sliced cheese (we used provolone, it was what we had on hand)

You will also need:

- Two cast-iron skillet, or one and a regular skillet for the bottom
- A weight (I used to keep a foil-wrapped brick in the kitchen for making gyro meat, I wonder where that went? Can of tomatoes worked well)



Assemble your sandwiches. Split the bread down the length of it. Apply a schmear of mustard to each side. Put a slice(s) of cheese on each side. In between the cheese, put the pulled pork, pickles, and ham. You don't want to overfill this sandwich, as the next step becomes a lot messier and more difficult if you do (learn from my mistakes...). Heat a skillet to medium heat. Not too hot, because you want to get the sandwich warm to the center without blackening the bread. Lay the sandwich down in the pan, then set the second pan on top, with a weight on that pan.

Cook the sandwich under pressure for a couple of minutes, then turn it over and weight it back down to cook another 2-3 minutes. You really want the sandwich to compress and heat gently through to get all your flavors going here!

The result? A meal that will make you glad to be alive and enjoying it! We did the big sushi



prep on a different day than the sandwiches, so what you see above is **coffwaytoopretty** not my handiwork. However, a couple of pieces of sushi was a nice cool accompaniment to the warm, rich sandwiches!

I am already contemplating variations on the Cuban sandwich. I like the pressed sandwich style of cooking, and it's less greasy than my grilled cheese. So yum.

Cuban Sandwiches and Sushi pieces.



A Mandalorian Babysitter
by José Sánchez