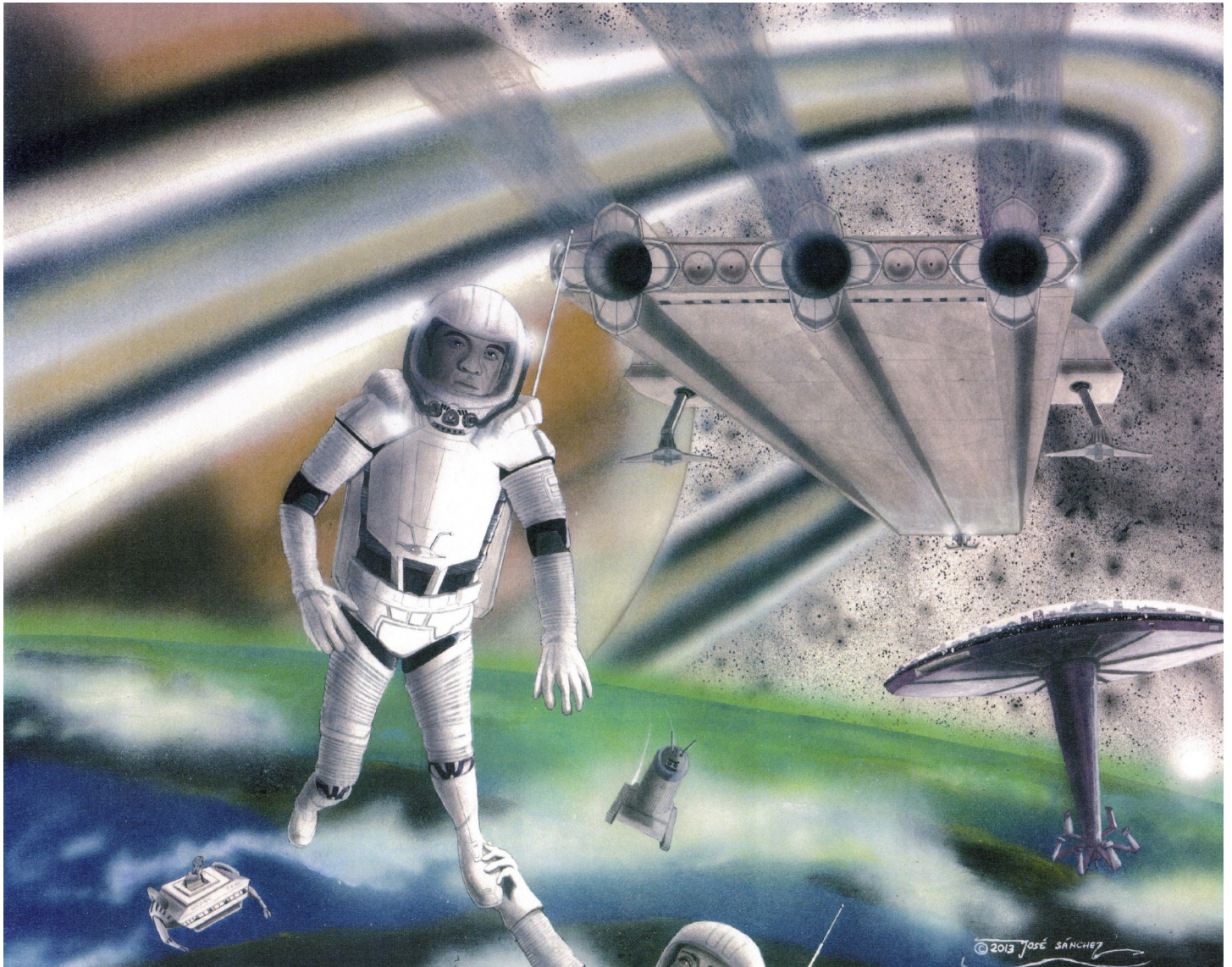


Tightbeam 293

February 2019



Jose Sanchez — Saturn in Our Sights

Tightbeam 293

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Letters

Dear George and Jon:

Many thanks for Tightbeam 292. I hope I'm not too late for a fast loc for the next issue's letter column. This month has been very strange, but at least there is the chance to once again get caught up.

The local... Bob Jennings is right about Dragon*Con outnumbering the Worldcon by quite a lot. I have never been to a Dragon*Con, too big and expensive for me, but the Dragon Awards... There are no fan awards, and I am not even sure that the attendees of Dragon*Con can nominate for these awards. Can anyone set me right here?

I have a niece who is into anime, but is really liking the French/Korean production Miraculous. It is CGIed, with lots of anime influences. I would be interested to read Jessi Silver's take on this rather popular production. (I Googled it up...thousands of assorted social media pages, artwork and fanfic galore, and that must mean millions of dedicated fans.)

Is anyone in the N3F subscribing to the newest incarnation of Amazing Stories? The editor-in-chief for this actual magazine is Ira Nayman, who lived here in Toronto. I offered my services to Ira as a proofreader/copy editor starting with issue 2, and issue 3 may be at the publisher. I am told issue 4 is imminent, and with some luck, I will be taking on the proofreading/copy editing responsibilities again. (Just for the record, I have been one of four proofreaders/copy editors for each of those issues.)

The bacover reminds me that this year will see the 50th anniversary of the first moon landing. That was science fiction at one point; it is appearing more and more like science fiction today. I hope this world will smarten up soon, clean up this world and look more and more towards science, rather than the worst in politics. Please don't make that last sentence science fiction...

Anyway, a loc as promised; I wish it had been longer. Many thanks, take care, see you all soon!

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

Anime

Anime Review – Mary and the Witch's Flower
...Review by Jessi Silver March 19, 2018

It is Tib the black cat who leads Mary to the strange flower in the woods. When she discovers a little broomstick shortly afterwards, she is astonished to feel it jump in to action. Before she can gather her wits, it is whisking her over the treetops, above the clouds, and in to the grounds of Endor College, where: 'All Examinations Coached for by A Competent Staff of Fully-Qualified Witches.' – ANN

Copyright 2017 – Studio Ponoc/GKIDS



Source: Novel

Episodes: 1 (film)

Summary: Young Mary Smith moves to the countryside to live with her great aunt Charlotte while her parents are away. Mary wants more than anything to be useful, but she's a clumsy person and often causes more problems than she solves. While lamenting her situation one day, she encounters two cats – Tib and Gib – who lead her to a forest glade where a cluster of spectacular blue flowers are growing. Mary takes the blossoms back to her room to admire them, but soon discovers that they're more than just attractive blooms – the flowers, called “fly-by-night” by magic users, bloom but once in seven years and have the power to grant magical abilities to even the most mundane of users.

Mary stumbles into these mystic powers and finds herself a magic broom, which takes her to Endor College, a witch school above the clouds. She's mistaken for a magical prodigy and the headmistress goes so far as to approach her about joining the honors classes, but it isn't long until her secret is discovered and the faculty of the school chases Mary down in search of the fly-by-night blossoms. Mary must then protect herself, rescue her friend Peter and his cats, and make sure that the flowers don't fall into the hands of those who would try to use them for horrifying experiments.

Review: This review contains mild plot spoilers for the film.



Studio Ponoc/GKIDS

It's cliché at this point for one to speculate on what Japanese animation studio will turn out to be the “next Ghibli.” It's difficult to define exactly what that's supposed to mean – Ghibli's output has encompassed films aimed squarely at very young children (Ponyo or My Neighbor Totoro, for example), to more intense adventures that families can enjoy (Nausicaa, Princess Mononoke, Spirited Away), to films that I'd argue take more maturity to appreciate (Porco Rosso, Only Yesterday, Grave of the Fireflies). Does Ghibli mean “animation quality?” “Story craft?” “Character and background design?” I've seen all of these traits thrown around as potential components of the Ghibli magic that's captivated animation fans all over the world, and even somehow managed to gain credence with the incredibly insular, inscrutable, and in my opinion, sometimes downright infuriating Academy Award voters (seriously, Boss Baby over Your Name? You've got to be kidding me). Whether or not there's a definitive way to identify the Ghibli style is a question that I'll leave to others who are more invested in it. As for myself, I'm just enjoying the fact that, as animators and directors graduate from Ghibli, we're able to enjoy the new perspectives they bring to this classic film making form.

Much like Hosoda Mamoru, Hiromasa Yonebayashi worked for Studio Ghibli as an animator and director before venturing off on his own to join the newly-established Studio Ponoc. Mary and the Witch's Flower, the studio's first feature-length animation, captures a lot of the classic family-friendly charm that typifies the bulk of Ghibli's output, while providing a enough freshness to distinguish itself and its creative staff from their predecessors.

I commented on social media that one thing that charmed me about the film was that it seemed to speak to me as a little girl who always wanted to grow up to become a witch. Similar to the Harry Potter series, Mary and the Witch's Flower suggests that there might be an entire

secret world out there, where magic is real and those with a talent for it might be able to distinguish themselves and make impossible things happen. It helps that film eschews the tendency to make its heroine a strong but unattainable fantasy version of feminine purity, seen in such characters as Nausicaa or Kiki. It's not that those characters are inherently terrible for women (and to be honest they're much better role-models than a lot of "strong female characters (TM)"), but they also feel like an outsider's perspective on what girlhood should be, when in reality it can be messier, more painful, and more awkward than it is often portrayed. I'm definitely not saying that Yonebayashi and friends have insider knowledge in pre-adolescent girlhood, but Mary feels closer to the type of person someone could meet in real life. She's fundamentally kind and not overly-rebellious (which tends to be another direction writers take these kinds of characters), but she's not particularly talented, gets bored easily, and goes against orders sometimes. She also lies by omission in order to feel better about herself, which ultimately gets her into trouble but is so understandable from the perspective of someone who often feels unworthy of praise. The idea that there could be a world out there somewhere in which the differences that one dislikes about oneself are seen as beneficial can become intoxicating.

The film also makes some attempt at real-world commentary, its most discernible issue-of-choice being animal (and human!) experimentation, as an offshoot of the typical environmentalism that crops up in similar films. Whether this is entirely successful is up in the air; my attitude was something akin to "I see what you did there" but more from the perspective of being repulsed by the mild body-horror aspect than buying into what I thought the creators were trying to say.

Visually the film doesn't disappoint, and manages to combine traditional character animation, lush, vivid background art, and even some CG effects into a very appealing package. It straddles the line between traditional and modern very well, making an argument for utilizing new animation techniques even while trying to maintain a mostly hand-drawn look. After watching *Shirobako* multiple times, it's interesting the kind of things I tend to notice when watching animation. In this case it was the animal movement- one of the film's climactic moments involves a herd of animals escaping from captivity, and the horde of different creatures moving across the landscape feels very natural, chaotic, and whimsical as well. The depiction of the English countryside that serves as the setting for the more mundane parts of the story recalls some of the background art from *The Secret World of Arietty*; the lushness of the plant life and the misty hillsides are almost a character all their own.

One aspect of the film that I really liked was the revelation that Mary's aunt Charlotte played an important part in the story when she was a youngster, and that Mary as a descendant of that family line is in prime position to draw things to a close. Even when young women have central roles in a narrative, it's often the case that they're the only female in a sea of men. In this case there are important connections between Mary and Charlotte, as well as the Endor headmistress. Additionally, Mary comes to the rescue of Peter, her male companion, multiple times throughout the film, which was a refreshing surprise.

The one thing that detracts from this story, and I suspect that others may agree with me, is that the whole package feels a bit rote. Stripping away the visual trappings and the spunky main character reveals a story that's competently formulaic but not otherwise special in any way. It's a fairly typical "heroine's journey" in which a young girl is forced to look inside herself and make personal improvements, all in the guise of going on a grand adventure that, once completed, brings her back again to her mundane normal life. That said, it's the type of movie that I

wouldn't feel uncomfortable watching with a child and which demonstrates an example of how to be heroic and fight for something ethical. It's certainly more tolerable than your typical CG talking animal movie, and it doesn't talk down to its intended audience.

The more creators there are making great movies, the better, and having graduated from Studio Ghibli I think Yonebayashi has a bright future ahead of him bringing to screen the type of anime films that have wide appeal. *Mary and the Witch's Flower* is an above-average interpretation of a Western-style fairy tale that centralizes a somewhat-atypical female heroine and brings to life a magical world that might make some viewers long for the opportunity to attend a witch school. Check it out at a local film festival, or grab the disc when it's released in May.

Pros: Mary is a spunky heroine with some realistic pre-teen flaws. The female relationships provide a good through-line to the film. The artistry is excellent.

Cons: The story is pretty average and can feel like a re-hash of old concepts.

Grade: B

Winter 2017 – Follow-up Reviews by Jessi Silver

Despite the title of this website, I rarely stop after watching intro episodes of anime (unless the show is so terrible or offensive that it doesn't deserve a second look; there have been many of those over the years). Here are some collected thoughts on some of the second and third episodes I've watched of selected series. This post will be updated as I conduct more follow-up viewings, so stay tuned.

Saga of Tanya the Evil – Episodes 2 and 3



I was fairly unimpressed with the first episode of the series, since it seemed to glorify violence and to specifically fetishize the fact that some of the most violent acts of war were being committed by a character in the body of a pre-pubescent girl. “Young girls in horrific situations” could be a sub-genre unto itself in anime, considering all of the series whose main point of interest involves thrusting youngsters into roles way above their emotional pay grade in order to look edgy or wring some sort of unearned emotional response out of the audience. In this case, I'm totally baffled why the first episode begins where it does, because Tanya's origin story is much more compelling, and puts a totally different slant on what's actually happening.

We learn that Tanya was originally a (male) Japanese middle manager who was known for being ruthlessly devoted to the health of his company. This meant taking a very uncaring attitude towards other employees, especially when firing them. A disgruntled former employee of the company pushes our protagonist(?) in front of a train early in the second episode. Time stops, and he has a lengthy conversation with God(?) regarding the existence of any deities (I have to hand it to the main character – his ability to maintain skepticism in the existence of God while speaking directly to him requires guts). Refusing to soften up, God (or “Being X” as the main character dubs him) causes him to be reborn in another world, but with all his memories

intact. He scrapes by, does what he can to survive, and then joins the military, eventually reaching the point at which we joined the tale in the first episode.

What stood out to me was the fact that the story was less focused on the actual war than it appeared at first. Instead, my main take away from these follow-up episodes is more related to the main character's conflicts with Being X regarding the need for faith, and Being X's incredibly manipulative ways of forcing the main character to acknowledge the miraculousness of "God" and the situation God has forced him into. Tanya is compelled by Being X to pray each time the calculation jewel (which hones her magic powers) is used, otherwise it remains unstable and could kill her through its malfunction. This is supposed to eventually instill in her (and in the mentality of the man who still exists within her mind) a sense of humility and faith. On one hand I can see that the character truly needs to learn this lesson, because he's a total jerk who caused a lot of upset in the lives he supervised. On the other hand, this manipulative deity who pulls strings to get humans to "believe" is pretty abhorrent. I gained a lot more sympathy for Tanya over the course of these episodes, simply for trying to hold onto a worldview while essentially being forced to let it go (or die in the process). This is certainly a lot more complexity than I would have expected originally.

With the way I watch anime, there's always the danger of being so put off by something right away that I miss out on an anime's better side by not wanting to bother with it anymore. Personally I think that there are some things that are beyond forgiveness, but there are also cases like this where I feel like maybe whoever was handling the series composition just didn't do a good job of putting the story's best foot forward. It's not as if there aren't still problems (I'm curious whether reviewers, including myself, can really speak to the genuine nature of the female-female professional relationship between Tanya and her subordinate when Tanya still houses the mostly-unaltered mentality of the Japanese salaryman she once was), but I think I might be up to following this through now.

ACCA: 13-Territory Inspection Department – Episode 2

Watching the second episode of ACCA helped to reinforce some of the general feelings I had about the particular construction this show seems to have. While, again, not a whole lot actually "happens" as far as action-y plot-related stuff, there are a lot of subtleties that seem to be leading in a particular direction.

Jean is still ostensibly the focal character, but there are many scenes throughout the episode where he is present but the POV appears to be held by someone else. This time we're introduced to "photojournalist" friend of his named Nino, actually an undercover agent hired by Jean's superiors to follow him around. There are several scenes here and there of Nino reporting on Jean's whereabouts when normally we the audience would be privy to a firsthand what Jean was doing instead. There were a lot of scenes where I thought to myself that it would have been nice to know about Jean's activities after going inside his home or turning the lights off in his hotel room; being on the outside and not knowing exactly what's going on is disorienting, but I also suspect that we're meant to develop a healthy suspicion of Jean in preparation for some bombshell later on. I've been trying to stay away from any plot spoilers to ready myself for this eventual surprise, so I hope that my interpretation is correct. There are several references to his possible involvement in a coup d'état; whether that's actually what's going on or not is the question here.



This episode has similar pacing to the first, so viewers who found themselves frustrated with the slow-moving story in episode 1 will probably not be especially compelled to keep up with the series any further. I feel as though I've made my case as to why I find this type of anime series compelling already; the fact is, I haven't found it boring at all, and I can feel the makings of a good thriller bubbling under the surface of what I've seen so far.

Gabriel DropOut – Episode 2



I had the feeling that the unique humor element of this show might wear down pretty quickly, and that was confirmed for me after watching the second episode. The show is reliant on one central gag, that being the opposing (and typically unexpected) personalities of the angels and demons in the main cast. This in itself admittedly remains pretty chuckle-worthy when I think about it, but the second episode falls into a rut that so many anime comedies do, in that it relies too much on its central gag and dances around it without doing much to expand or escalate any of the humor.

In this episode, Satania continues to be haunted by the bread-stealing dog, and thinks she knows more than she actually does about eating lunch in the school lunch room. Raphael picks on Satania some more. Vigne and Gabriel bicker about Gabriel's lack of motivation. The girls have an adventure trying to prepare a meal in their cooking class (using some... unusual ingredients). It's all fairly standard sitcom stuff, with the flavor being the characters' particular personalities. The issue I'm having at this point is that their personalities could really exist in any similar ensemble comedy, regardless of the characters being heavenly or hellish beings. Remove the horns, wings, halos, and upside-down crosses from the mix, and this is just another typical anime comedy without much worth recommending it above other similar anime series.

I probably won't watch more of the show at this point, but I'll try to keep an ear to the ground to see if anything actually ramps-up over the next few weeks.

Miss Kobayashi's Dragon Maid – Episode 2

The second episode of Dragon Maid continues in the same vein of being mostly cute, humorous, and primarily harmless. We meet a second dragon, a juvenile named Kanna, who's been nursing a crush on Tohru and who wants to punish Kobayashi for monopolizing her time. Jealousy can be a dangerous motivator, but Kanna's feelings are pretty simplistic and she gives up the pursuit once Kobayashi-san makes her feel welcome (and feeds her some chocolate). The dragons take miss Kobayashi out to play (dragons playing together can be a little dangerous, as we find out). Tohru also uses her dragon strength to capture a thief while out shopping (it's also very evident that she's well-liked by all the merchants, though she doesn't really understand why).



I was really glad that there wasn't a repeat of the uncomfortable, non consensual nudity from the first episode. It was a stain on what was otherwise a pretty enjoyable first outing for the show. The second episode continues to be fairly cute, manages to feature some really great

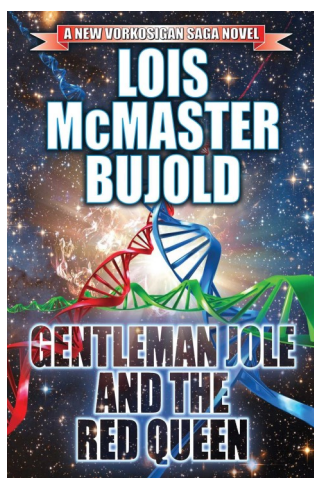
animation during Tohru's and Kanna's play date, as well as during Tohru's confrontation with the thief in the shopping arcade, and demonstrates a certain charm that makes it fun to watch despite the fact that it doesn't really get me laughing all that much.

The one aspect that I don't really like actually forms the basis for the show, which is a little problematic, I suppose. I'm not a big fan of characters who immediately proclaim their love for another character, especially against all logic and their target character's wishes. Tohru is very forthcoming with her desires and there's clearly some reason why she's become fixated on Kobayashi (little bits and pieces of Tohru's backstory have been peeking through already, so I'm guessing there's something going on), but her fervent love and overwhelming jealousy is tough to handle without having some of that background to grasp onto. I'm hoping that a little more nuance develops as the show moves on. I'm not familiar with the manga, so I don't know how realistic I'm being.

I will likely continue along with this show since I'm a fan of the KyoAni aesthetic and animation.

Books

Gentleman Jole and the Red Queen by Lois McMaster Bujold— ...Review by Tom Feller



The latest and seventeenth novel, not counting the short stories and novellas, in the Vorkosigan saga features two characters who have not had much attention in recent installments. Cordelia Naismith Vorkosigan, the mother of Miles, was a central figure in two of the early books, *Shards of Honor* and *Barrayar*, but ever since has been relegated to a supporting role once the emphasis shifted to Miles. Oliver Jole, the former aid and lover of both Cordelia and Aral Vorkosigan, Cordelia's husband and Miles's father, has always been a supporting character. This is the first time he has taken center stage. Miles himself is relegated to a supporting role.

The novel is set mostly on the planet Sergyar, which is part of the Barrayaran Empire. Cordelia is the Vicereine, succeeding her husband who died three years previously. Oliver is the admiral in charge of Barrayaran naval forces in that system. To their mutual surprise, they fall in love after meeting again in their middle age, and the story is about their romance. As someone who fell in love during his middle age, I approve of this.

There is very little action in this novel, and I do not recommend it to anyone not already familiar with the series because it is atypical. For fans of the series, however, I can recommend it as a change of pace and as an exploration of some characters who have not been as visible as others. I would compare it to *A Civil Campaign*, an earlier entry in the series that is a really romantic comedy in a science fiction setting rather than an action-packed space opera like most of the other books, but the new book is not as funny.

Up until now Bujold has kept the relationship concerning Aral, Cordelia, and Oliver on the “down-low” even from readers. I checked with other reviewers and found I was not alone in not realizing that they were even lovers let alone involved in a ménage a trois. Some of the really fanatic fans of the series have been going back to the older books to see if the author really foreshadowed this development or has just thrown it into the story arc now after thirty years, but I wasn’t planning on doing it myself.

May the Schwartz Be With You ...Review by Tom McGovern

A few issues ago, I reviewed *The MLJ Companion*, which is a detailed history of the Archie Comics superheroes. More recently, I’ve been reading *The Silver Age Sci-Fi Companion* by Mike W. Barr, which is also an interesting book, though not as impressive or absorbing as the MLJ work.

There are a few differences between the two works. MLJ is in full color throughout, whereas *Silver Age Sci-Fi* is all in B&W, except for the covers. The MLJ book is also about twice as thick, and consists of historical articles, interviews and anecdotes, with a small amount of the content consisting of actual listings of issues, artists, writers, dates, etc. *Silver Age Sci-Fi*, on the other hand, consists mostly of listings that are much more detailed than those in MLJ, along with a few articles and interviews thrown in. That’s not necessarily a bad thing; it’s just a different approach.



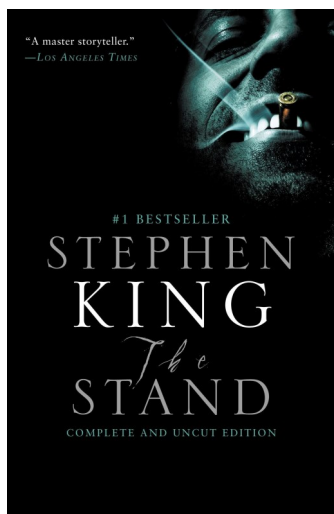
Silver Age Sci-Fi focuses on the era in which Julius Schwartz was the editor at DC Comics, and even more specifically on the science fiction titles that were published during Schwartz’ tenure, particularly on *Strange Adventures* and *Mystery in Space*, and the various character series that ran in those titles. The big name to emerge from those titles was, of course, Adam Strange, still a fixture in the DC Universe today. The section dealing with him is of considerable length. There are also chapters dealing with other, lesser known characters and series, such as *The Atomic Knights*, *Space Museum*, *Star Hawkins* with his faithful robotic companion Ilda, *The Star Rovers* and *Darwin Jones*. There’s even a section reviewing the *Strange Sports Stories* series, which somehow never appealed to me as much as the other titles, given that I was never a very big sports fan.



Angela K. Scott — Blood Lust

There is also attention given to the various writers and artists involved with these books, particularly (but not limited to) Gardner Fox and Murphy Anderson. Some of the stories of their interactions with Julius Schwartz are pretty amusing. Overall, it’s a good reference work and interesting reading. If you remember these comics as fondly as I do, this book will bring back good memories. I note in passing that the original art for the story “Shadow People of the Eclipse!” that appeared in *Mystery in Space* #78 was awarded to a fellow named Robert Jennings, then of Nashville, TN. I wonder whether he still has it.

King's Classic ...Review by Tom McGovern



I've been on a bit of a Stephen King binge this summer. I reviewed *Joyland* last issue and have read a few short stories and novellas in between other things. But with vacation on the horizon a few weeks ago, I got ambitious and started one of King's best known and most well-regarded works (which I had never read before), *The Stand*. More specifically, I read *The Stand – Complete and Uncut Edition*. I almost don't know what to write about this book; certainly many of you reading this have already read it. It's a masterpiece; King's world-building is amazing. This story relates to many of his other works in a number of ways, but in particular in the introduction of the bad guy, Randall Flagg, who pops up again and again under various names in other stories that King has written.

This is the story of a government-created plague that is accidentally unleashed from a secret laboratory, with the effect being the eradication of 99% of the human race within a few weeks by means of an incurable super flu. A small percentage of humanity finds itself immune to the flu and is left to rebuild as best they can. The novel is divided into three "Books," and Book One tells the horror story of the flu's spread mostly through the eyes of some of the survivors. King builds an incredible cast of characters in great depth. These are survivors from all over the United States who gradually come together in a quest to restore civilization. These characters' lives are explored in depth, generally starting with their situation before the plague and following them as disaster hits, and then continuing the narrative after the plague has run its course. You will care deeply about these characters; many are extremely sympathetic, including even the ones who turn out to be bad in the end.

As the survivors regroup after the pandemic, two spiritual forces are arising. One is the above-mentioned Randall Flagg, a demonic figure who gathers power in Las Vegas, and the other is Mother Abigail, a 108-year-old black woman who is a prophetess representing (seemingly) the biblical God. Survivors are drawn to either one or the other through dreams and visions. Mother Abigail operates from her home in Nebraska, but as survivors gather with her, she moves them to Boulder, Colorado as instructed by God.

Book Two follows the efforts that the survivors in Boulder make to restore the elements of civilization and to counter any efforts that Flagg might be making to subvert them. Relationships develop between various characters, and there are betrayals by those drawn more to the evil Flagg than to saintly Mother Abigail. Flagg, at the same time, is ruling his empire in Las Vegas with an iron hand, crucifying those who are disloyal or who flout the rules, and plotting the destruction of Mother Abigail's followers. Honestly, this is the slowest part of the novel, though it's worth slogging through, and the story does remain interesting despite the lack of much overt action. Ultimately, the survivors do get organized and hatch a plan to send spies into Flagg's territory to find out whether he is plotting against them.

Book Three brings the entire story to an explosive climax;



some characters die, some survive, and the fates of all are revealed. I won't go into any more detail than that, since I don't want to spoil the novel for anyone who may not have read it yet. It's an incredible experience to read – all 1153 pages of it - and if you haven't done so, what are you waiting for?

By the way, if you have seen the TV miniseries of *The Stand* from the 1990s but haven't read the book, you've missed out. I watched the series on DVD right after finishing the book, and was a bit disappointed. The characters are not nearly as well-developed, nor as interesting, as in the novel. Many of the nuances of the story have been left out or mentioned only in passing, while they were explored in depth in the book and made major contributions to the storyline. For example, the character of Frannie Goldsmith (played by Molly Ringwald in the miniseries) is shown very early in the book to be pregnant by her ex-boyfriend Jess, who died in the plague. This is an important factor in the novel, since it contributes greatly to Frannie's actions and motivations, as well as to how other people react to her, particularly in the early parts of the novel where the characters of the survivors are being developed. In the miniseries, Frannie's pregnancy is revealed only halfway through, and it is never made clear who the father is. One is almost left with the impression that she may have become pregnant by her teenage friend, Harold Lauder, who bears an unrequited love toward her – which in turn contributes to the motivation for his actions later in the story. This makes the whole thing very confusing, and characters often seem to be doing what they do for no particular reason. That's not to say that there are no good points to the miniseries: I particularly liked the acting performances by Jamey Sheridan, who played Randall Flagg (though I'd have enjoyed it better without the horrible mullet that he sported) and by Bill Fagerbakke, who played Tom Cullen, a mentally disabled man who becomes one of the spies sent from Boulder to Las Vegas. But overall, I think that if you watch the miniseries without having read the book, you will often find yourself scratching your head wondering who these people are and why they are doing what they are doing.

As an interesting final note, I've just started reading another King classic, *It* – which, in the trade paperback edition I have contains exactly the same number of pages as my trade edition of *The Stand* – 1153 pages. I wonder - is there any significance to that?

Witchy Winter Review by Pat Patterson

A LITTLE preliminary. First, there is actually a title for this specific genre, which is news to me. It's SO new to me, that I can't remember it, and I'm not going to look it up, because , hey, it's 10:38 PM where I am, and I want to get to sleep SOMETIME tonight. It's "flintlock something," though, if that's any help. Second, this book CAN be read as a stand alone, but I REALLY, don't recommend it for two reasons. the first book, *Witchy Eye*, has got some AMAZINGLY beautiful language in it that I wouldn't want anyone to miss. Secondly, for those not QUITE so fascinated by the beauty of describing thousands of years of catfish trails, this is a COMPLEX book. There are so many characters (and they aren't just throw-aways, either) that you might feel like you need a scorecard, and the plot has so many sub-plots, you might feel lost if you don't read the first installment. Click that link up there, about two or three sentences ago, okay?

A TINY background. It's an alternate timeline, set in North America, around



1820 or so. Technology is appropriate for the age, except that magic works, and in addition to human people, there are a large, but indeterminate number of Beast Folk, who have a mix of human and animal features. Nothing like the United States exists, but many of the historical characters appear in modified roles. Napoleon is a convert to Islam, for example; Ben Franklin was a combination magician/mystic/scientist, and Andrew Jackson was executed for piracy. The North American continent is carved up into enclaves, and schoolchildren learn songs to memorize which enclaves have the ability to send representatives to the sort-of advisory board to the emperor.

A SHORT review. Sarah is the unacknowledged niece of the emperor, who wants her dead. She had been hiding out in the Appalachian area, with no knowledge of her history, until her powers are revealed, and she discovers that she can see into spiritual realms with her right eye. because the emperor is an ass, she decides she will attempt to reclaim her real father's throne, which has been vacant since his death 15 years ago. She discovers that she is one of triplets, and that her brother and sister were also hidden from the nasty emperor, and their tales began to be woven into hers.

The emperor squeezes more taxes, and sends agents to kill the triplets, and talks to the ghost of his ancestor, and kills people who miff him. Don't miff the emperor if he's a jerk. Just sayin'.

What's great. Butler has a real gift for description. The opening scene to 'Witchy Eye' makes you feel, and smell, and taste the atmosphere in a country market; and he just keeps putting out scene after scene like that. He also puts some really great dialogue in the characters' mouths, and that in itself makes it worth reading the book. I'm not sure exactly how it's done, but somehow, he had me feeling sympathetic to some REALLY bad people. It's not all 'good guys' and 'bad guys,' either; just like real flesh and blood people, his literary people have some pretty complex motivations and emotions.

And, you HAVE to love the amount of content you get in this book, in terms of the well-crafted sub-plots. I want to tell you about the loyal beastwife's bravery, and her beautiful singing voice, although she does tend to moo when she really gets into song; the wicked bishop of New Orleans who weeps for his dead father; the father who leaves his family to find a healer for his son. SO many good stories here!

I really can't say enough about the complexity of the world-building Butler does, The way he describes a society which is basically determined by about six or seven competing religions is something I don't think I've ever seen.

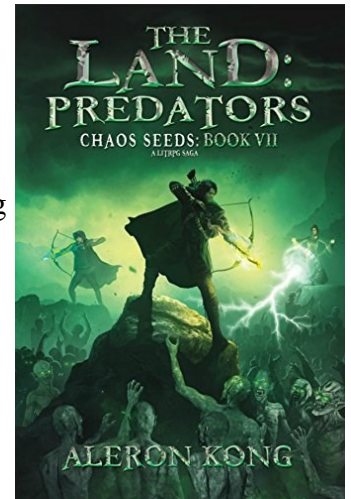
What's awful. Nothing is awful; that's just a book blog version of click-bait. Nothing is even mediocre. It DOES require more investment on the part of the reader than the average novel, because there are so many storylines, and he has taken the physical world we live in, and reshaped it, but that's not a bug, it's a feature. And, at 592 pages, I was hard pressed to finish this in 24 hours.



Angela K. Scott — Boundless Skies

Review: The Land: Predators ...Review by Pat Patterson

Disclaimer: Other than some remote history with some PC-based single-player games, I'm really not familiar with the world of Role Playing Games. Somehow, I missed out on Dungeons and Dragons, and I don't know if that was just a function of my age and college experience, or if I just wasn't paying attention at the right time. Furthermore, until I picked this book to read, I had never heard of the 'LitRPG' genre. So, take what I have to say as coming from someone who is, at best, a novice.



The nature of the book. The Main Character, Richter, does the sort of things that one does when playing a role-playing game: he enters caves, has fights, and gets tired. Now, those are ALSO the things that Bilbo Baggins did, right? Except that Richter has a feature Bilbo didn't: little screens pop up, and tell him what he is looking at, and what benefits may accrue, and what to do about it. In short, it's like what I can recall from my EXTREMELY limited experience playing World of Warcraft; from what I understand, a player in Dungeons and Dragons gets the same sort of information from the person running the game. As I said, I've never played, so I could be wrong about that.

Please feel free to explain it to me, if you have knowledge in the area.

This gives the reader the experience of observing someone else play a game. Since I know absolutely NOTHING about the experience of observing someone else play a game, I drafted an expert: 13 year old Kenneth, my 8th grader. In the past, I had observed him sitting in front of his game screen, and I THOUGHT initially that he was playing Minecraft. Instead, he was watching, avidly, a recording of someone else playing Minecraft. Now, Kenneth OWNS the game, and plays it, so I just didn't get the attraction of observation. Here's what he told me:

Part of it is that you can learn different strategies to solve puzzles in the game. The best part, though, is the jokes the guy makes as he is playing the game.

This is Kenneth, and his 8th grade Home Room teacher, Mrs. Tucker.

Now, while that explanation helped me understand why Kenneth watched Minecraft games, it shed no light on the value of reading about someone else going through an RPG.

The problem. Clearly, with 1,889 reviews Amazon reviews, with 96% being 4 and 5 stars, this work has appeal; it's also the 7th book in a series, so the author has staying power. However, I cannot see the wisdom in including this in the 'Best Fantasy Novel' category. If LitRPG is a genre with staying power, then perhaps it is deserving of it's own category. If not that, then include it in a category that covers games and accessories. Or something. I just don't think it belongs in the 'Best Fantasy Novel' category.

I cannot comment on the content or professionalism of the writing, since I only got through 7% of the book before realizing that this simply was not going to fit my definition of a fantasy novel. I DID read a number of the other reviews, some of which objected to certain scenes, and

I had intended to evaluate that portion for myself, but that would serve no purpose, as I am rejecting the entire work as inappropriate for the award category.

More problems.

1. The extraordinary number of 'Game Dialogue Boxes' that are presented in the text as graphic objects, not as text. When I said above 'little screens pop up,' I do not mean that little screens pop up as you are reading the text; I also do not mean that the text says 'a little screen popped up and told him what he had done.' Nope, inserted as a graphic box in the text is the entire information screen, which frequently includes tables. It takes up a LOT of screen space, and depending on the size of screen you are using, it ranges from 'Not That Bad' to 'Approximately Incomprehensible.' Here's what I'm talking about; this is a screenshot from my laptop on one of the first pop-ups Richter experiences:

Ya see that? I have ONE word of text: 'wished'

The rest of the page is taken up by the TOP of the pop-up. Readability can become a significant issue. My laptop screen gave me the quality of 'Not That Bad'; however, my iPad screen size, while perfectly adequate for most applications, broke the dialogue boxes into pieces, making it difficult to follow. Smart phone? Don't think so.

2. The text is formatted as double-spaced, regardless of the Kindle setting.

These two items are related, in that they both make significant contributions to page count. The Amazon listing for this book reports a page count of 2,202 pages. Since authors are reimbursed via the Kindle Unlimited program based on the number of pages read, I can see the advantage of a high page count. However, a bigger payout to this author for an inflated page count means that other authors, who do NOT artificially inflate their numbers, are being penalized. This is a significant issue, and I lowered my rating from 3 stars to 2, based on this alone.

I can't see "The Land: Predators" as a legitimate contender for the Dragon Award for 'Best Fantasy Novel', regardless of any other merits of the work. YMMV, and I apologize in advance to those who are fans of the LitRPG genre. To them, I can only suggest that they appeal for an award category of their own.

The Tempered Warrior Review by Pat Patterson

I selected 'A Tempered Warrior' because it is a finalist in the Best Fantasy Novel category for the 2018 Dragon Award, and that gives me an opportunity to give yet another disclaimer:

I am attempting to read and review every nominee in the first five categories for the 2018 Dragon Awards. That's gonna require MORE than one book per day; fortunately, I HAVE read SOME of the nominations. My gift-from-God, happily-ever-after trophy wife Vanessa, the elegant, foxy, praying black grandmother of Woodstock, GA, is supporting me in this, and has told me that she will give me some space to work between now and Labor Day weekend. HOWEVER! You are going to be getting FAST and CHEAP. I ain't guaranteeing that my reviews nor my blog posts are going to be GOOD. I hope not to leave any major points untouched, but hon-

ey, I ain't got much time to polish my prose. So, if you find a major failure or bad word choice, just take it in maturity, and go on your way. I will return to proficiency later. Maybe.

Let's spray paint the elephant in the room with some orange Day-Glo: The title contains a pun. The referenced warrior, Erin, has a TEMPER, and one of her tasks is to learn how to use her anger in battle. It is through mastery of that task, plus learning how to use her weapons to defend as well as attack, that is turning her into a person who is hardened and experienced, hence TEMPERED. Get it?

It is not necessary to read the first book in the series to get a great amount of enjoyment from it, in much the same way as it is not necessary to hug your beloved before kissing them. If you HAVEN'T read the first book in the series, then I suggest you do what I am going to do, and read 'A Reluctant Druid' at your first opportunity.

WARNING: since I HAVEN'T read the first volume yet, I may have missed critical plot points or drawn incorrect conclusions. However, the author drops almost all of the needed clues, WITHOUT resorting to tired explanations to new cowpokes who only enter the scene to have the story explained, then ride off into the desert to be eaten by a cactus.

For example: I KNOW, just from reading THIS book, that there is going to be a great murderin' battle between rival forces, sometime in the immediate future. I do NOT know the exact circumstances of the battle, and I don't know exactly who the rival forces are.

I KNOW that Erin is the chosen Champion. I do NOT know how or why that happened.

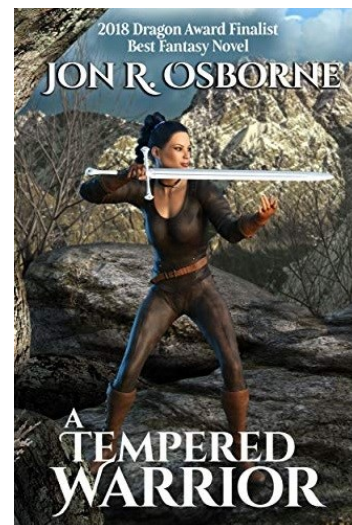
I KNOW that while she is being prepared for the battle, she is living in a timeline that is slowed down at a rate of about 50 to 1 with the timeline on Earth As We Know It.

I KNOW that in the Earth timeline, a corresponding struggle is going on between her somewhat-lover, Liam, and Forces They Don't Like, but I know almost nothing about Liam's story, that being told in "The Reluctant Druid."

She comes by her temper honestly, being a descendant of the mythic Irish hero Cu Chulainn, known for his battle frenzy, among other characteristics. This is not an unmixed blessing, since there are folk in her current environment who fancy themselves ill-treated by her multi-great granddaddy, and they are capable of holding a grudge for thousands of years. And since much of her training involves being hit with sticks (temporary substitutes for swords), there is plenty of opportunity for them to vent their spleen on her.

That would be a bummer, wouldn't it?

The different rate that time flows on Liam's Earth and Erin's Dunos Scaith allows us to contemplate a little exercise in ethics. You see, before Erin was transported, she and Liam were an item; in fact, several years ago, they conceived a son, now 13 years old, named TIM! (No, not the Holy Grail Tim; just...Tim). They weren't at the point of marriage, although that was Liam's



desire. Still, there was something there, and if they were in physical and temporal proximity...who knows?

But NOW, as far as Erin is concerned, she's going to be away for SEVEN YEARS, while to Liam, only seven WEEKS will have gone by. And both of them are not only full of the normal human hormones, they were also given some additional ...stamina, let's call it... before they separated.

So, what ARE the ethics of the situation? It's completely a different issue than if they were both experiencing time pass at the same rate. It's a pretty little thought problem.

I found the entire set-up to be quite appealing, and I'm a little bit surprised by that. Fantasy isn't my first choice for reading material, and some of it just leaves me cold. However, I'm VERY taken by the theological implication of the story. I have to suspend all KINDS of belief to really enjoy my favorite form of literature, which is military Sci-Fi. Even straight Sci-Fi, dumps an awful lot of NO-WAY! in my path, which I just have to hop over so I can enjoy the story. I've been such a fan for so long, that I don't even pay attention to all the impossibilities any more. FTL? Sure. Artificial gravity on board space ships? No problem. Heck, there's not even such a thing as vat-grown meat; that chicken heart experiment was just bad science, fatally flawed, and it ain't never gonna be a thing in my lifetime. So, between fictional science, and conflicts with my (mostly) orthodox Christian world-view, I find most literature merely entertaining, and not engaging.

So, I find it quite heartening to find someone attempting to rationalize at least part of the PRINCIPLES of faith in a fantasy world. It's another reason for me to read the first novel in the series. And, by the way: Jon Osborne has done this before. He wrote an EXCELLENT story, 'Angels and Aliens' for the collection "The Good, The Bad, and The Merc," in which the protagonist gets involved in a discussion about the nature of God in a firefight. Frankly, I can think of no better time to be thinking of such matter than when death may be moments away, but I can't really say I seek those opportunities out.

Conclusion? You betcha, this is a finalist-class entry for the 2018 Dragon Award for Best Fantasy Novel, and you could do a LOT worse than to place your bets, and your vote, here.

Review: The Private Shambler ...Review by Cedar Sanderson

It's been a hectic couple of weeks. I skipped out of writing a review last week partly because of my schedule, and partly because I hadn't finished anything recently. Well, this week I did finish a nice, light, funny book. With Zombies... and vampires, and ghosts, and pretty much anything else Kevin J Anderson could think of to throw into the Unnatural Quarter for the private detective he'd created to interact with.

Death Warmed Over is the tale of Dan Shamble, PI. Along with his human lawyer partner Robin, and ghostly girlfriend and receptionist, he's the man zombie unnatural beings turn to when they are afraid the human system will let them down. Dan's life is complicated not only by the heavy caseload this creates,



but by trying to solve his own murder that happened not long before the events of the book unfold.

I enjoyed this. The humor is laid on with a trowel in places, but in others it got me chuckling. There are some truly BAD jokes batted back and forth between Shamble and his human cop friend McGoo, and puns are here, don't say I didn't warn you. The mystery itself unfolds slowly, as Dan is trying to help others before he helps himself. I knew who the bad guy was, but I didn't expect **quite** the twist Anderson put on him at the end, there. I will say I would have liked a little more complexity here, perhaps three or four threads rather than knitting it all up neatly together. But then again, I read rather a lot of mystery, and that's not really what this book is. More like a cozy, only with goo and slime.

I like the characters in this. I feel a little exasperation toward Robin, but Dan's affection for her kept me going. I really liked the mummy, and the witch sisters, and McGoo. Anderson builds a complex cast well, leaving them fully-fleshed out (yes, even Ramen Ho-Tep) in my mind. If you're looking for something that isn't demanding to read, might make you laugh (or groan, as befitting an unnatural) then this is a good choice. I keep saying I'm not going to read zombie/werewolf/vampire books, but then... this one is different!

Short Fiction

Two Reviews by Greg Hullender and Eric Wong. For far more of their reviews, read RocketStackRank.com

The reviewers caution that some readers may view these reviews as containing spoilers, so you may want to read the items being reviewed first.

The King's Mirror, by M.K. Hutchins Cover illustration by Rachel Quinlan

(Mayan High Fantasy) The king demands a mirror he can use to see the future, and he'll enslave Wak-Lamat if the young man can't make one good enough. But Wak already knows his mirror works because it persists in showing him terrible things. (5,966 words; Time: 19m)

"The King's Mirror," by M.K. Hutchins (edited by Jane Crowley and Kate Dollarhyde) appeared in *Strange Horizons* issue 01/21/19, published on January 21, 2019.

Pro: The Mayan king in the story is K'inich Yo'nal Ahk II, and the capital of his kingdom of Yokib was on the site today called "Piedras Negras."

The goddess puts Wak-Lamat in an impossible situation when she tells him that his sister will die in just a month and that there's nothing he can do about it. It's to his credit that he views this as more important than whether the king enslaves him or not. The only upside to this news is that he knows for a fact his mirror works.

Then, to make things worse, the second vision, where he sees the fate of the king and the kingdom, explains why the goddess won't show it to the king. The first two mirrors worked just

fine (as we might have suspected). Wak's situation looks hopeless.

It's a nice touch that the king catches him in the middle of his vision. He doesn't have to convince the king he saw a vision; there's no way he could convince the king he didn't see one.

He doesn't really lie to the king (except about the goddess being unhappy with him enslaving the other mirror grinders), but he manages to deceive him enough to get the result he wants. The King will make decisions that save the kingdom, never knowing that they will lead to his own death.

Finally, he makes the right decision as far as his sister (and her fiance, his best friend) is concerned. It's very sad, but it makes the best of a bad situation.

Con: The narration is a little uneven in a few places, and the dialogue hits a false note here and there.

Seven Stops Along the Graffiti Road, by David Cleden Cover illustration by Richard Wagner

Clever and Mysterious

(Horror) Ry can't remember much about the old world. No one can. They just remember getting up every day to walk further down the apparently endless road. (7,485 words; Time: 24m)

"Seven Stops Along the Graffiti Road," by David Cleden [bio] (edited by Andy Cox), appeared in Interzone issue 279, published on January 1, 2019 by TTA Press.

Pro: It's a clever, mysterious setup.

The seven stops are:

Child of the Road, where he meets Kari, the little child.

Freia, where he meets the woman who becomes his companion.

The Kovac Family, where they meet some really nice folks who make things interesting for a while.

The Wrong-Way Man shows that it's possible to go the opposite direction, but painful and confusing.

Going Off-Road, where the Kovac's decide to try to find the ocean through the woods.

Going With the Flow, where Kari appears again and dances with Ry.

The Road Ahead, where Ry feels invigorated by the dance and thinks the end must be near.

The first three are about Ry meeting new people, and, in the process, teaching us about the strange world Ry lives in (and quite a bit about him as a person too). The next three are about breaking the rules, either by going the wrong way, or leaving the road entirely, or getting on the road when you're not supposed to.

At the conclusion, Ry is still on the road, but now he has company, and he's more optimistic than he's been in many years.

Con: None of the mysteries is solved. It ends with all the big questions unanswered, and it's not clear what Ry really has to be optimistic about.

Comics

Hugo Gernsback's Superworld Comics

by

Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D.

N3F Historian



Motivated by the success of science fiction (SF) in newspaper comic strips and in comic books -- and also by his stated desire to make comics scientifically accurate -- Hugo Gernsback (1884 - 1967), the “Father of Magazine Science Fiction,” launched Superworld Comics in 1940 under the auspices of his Komos Publications Company. He explained at the time that his main purpose was to educate and inform the children of the United States.

Although this new venture lasted for only three issues, these comic books (called magazines by Gernsback) are of interest today, mainly because Gernsback used SF writers and artists to produce what has been described by genre historian Sam Moskowitz (1920 - 1997) as the first all-SF comic book, in which “No superhuman feats impossible of accomplishment are ever printed.”

The Three Superworld Issues

Superworld No. 1 (dated April, 1940) had a cover by popular SF artist Frank R. Paul (1884 - 1963) -- the frequent cover artist for SF pulp magazines of the time, and the Guest of Honor at the first Worldcon (New York, 1939) -- known in fandom as “Mr. Science Fiction Illustration.” The main SF contents of this initial issue consisted of the following three strips: Mitey Powers, Hip Knox, and Buzz Allen. These three strips were featured throughout the comic book’s three-issue run.

Superworld No. 2 (dated May, 1940) also had a Paul cover and some Paul interior illustrations. The featured strips were the same as in the first issue: Mitey Powers (drawn by Paul), “The Super Hypnotist” (Hip Knox), and “The Invisible Avenger” (Buzz Allen). In addition, a fourth major SF strip was added: Marvo 1-2 Go+, The Super Boy of the Year 2680 (also with art by Paul).

Superworld No. 3 (dated August, 1940) featured the SF strips that were in the first two issues, plus Detective Crane, and a few humorous strips that had also been in previous issues: Smarty Arty, reprints of Little Nemo in Dreamland by Winsor McCay (1874 - 1931), Alibi Alice, and Dream of the Mince Pie Fiend (signed as drawn by Silas, a McCay pseudonym).

All three issues were in full color, sixty-four pages in length (sixty-eight pages, counting covers), and sold for 10 cents.

In addition, all three issues -- of necessity in a 64-page comic -- contained a lot of filler material, some with science and/or SF content: puzzle and prize pages (A Rubber Band Prize Project), quizzes (How Smart Are You?), a Junior Inventor page that paid readers \$1.00 for each invention sent in that was printed, illustrated articles on other planets, an Unbelievable But True page, and text pieces and editorials by Gernsback (e. g., "Learn While You Sleep," "The Thoughtwriter," and "To Parents and School Teachers"). Even some of the ads in Superworld had science associations (e. g., The Superworld Black Light Outfit).

Artists/Writers

In addition to Paul and McCay, artists/writers for Superworld included Jack Alderman (Hip Knox), Ray Burley (Buzz Allen), John Macery (Smartie Artie), Homer Porter (Detective Crane), Art Helfant (Fables In Rhyme), and Ruth Leslie (Alibi Alice).

Also included in every issue was a Cookoo Nuts feature. Cookoo Nuts was a Gernsback invention from the 1920s of which he was particularly proud. It consisted of taking a popular expression, and with appropriate artwork, presenting the expression in a humorous fashion (e. g., "Holy Smoke" would be illustrated by a drawing of a church burning). Readers were asked to send in their own Cookoo Nuts ideas for cash prizes. The response to this request was so favorable that Gernsback issued a separate Cookoo Nuts Magazine in March, 1941.

Several of the SF stories in Superworld Comics were written by Charles D. Hornig (1916 - 1999), who had edited Gernsback's pulp SF magazine, Wonder Stories, while he was still a teenager. Some of the stories were credited to Derwin Lesser, a Hornig pseudonym.

A Few Conclusions

Gernsback stopped publishing Superworld Comics after its third issue for the same reason he stopped publishing many of his other magazines: it was not profitable.

Comic book historians have had mostly negative comments to make about Superworld Comics. Some felt that Gernsback assumed comic books were bought by parents for their children, when, in fact, most children in 1940 bought their own comic books -- with their parents paying little or no attention to comic book contents.

Other critics felt that the middle-aged Gernsback had simply lost touch with the SF of the time. In addition, Superworld Comics was seen as too conventional to stand out from the many other comic books being published in 1940.

On the other hand, a few critics praised the reprinting of cartoonist Winsor McCay's popular strips in Superworld.

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

Sercon

“The Inventive Ray Cummings”

by

Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D.

N3F Historian

Raymond King Cummings was one of the founding fathers of science fiction (SF) in America. He was born in New York, NY (in Times Square), on August 30, 1887, and died in Mount Vernon, NY, on January 23, 1957.

Cummings worked for the famous inventor Thomas Alva Edison from 1914 to 1919, “editing house organs, writing copy for record albums, and similar endeavors.” According to Hall of Fame SF author Jack Williamson, Cummings married Edison's daughter; but this seems highly unlikely. Cummings' most highly regarded fiction was the novel *The Girl in the Golden Atom*, originally published in 1922.

His career resulted in hundreds of stories, using his own name and the pen names of Ray King, Ray P. Shotwell, Robert Wallace, Gabrielle Cummings, and Gabriel Wilson (joint pseudonym used by Cummings and his second wife).

According to a site on the Internet providing information on Cummings, he first married Janet Matheson; they divorced, and he then married Gabrielle Wilson -- with whom he wrote several stories.

The reference work *Contemporary Authors* states that Cummings was a “contributor of over seven hundred and fifty short stories under various pseudonyms to numerous periodicals.” Certainly, he has to be considered one of the founding fathers of SF, especially as it appeared in American pulp magazines. His work inspired many of the writers who created the Golden Era of SF (approximately 1939 - 1950), during which Cummings continued to write and publish.

His second wife Gabrielle wrote some stories with Cummings; and their daughter Elizabeth (Betty) was also something of a writer, selling a short story to Liberty Magazine at the age of thirteen. During the 1930s Cummings himself contributed a series of “World of Tomorrow” science and SF sketches to Liberty, at the time one of the most prestigious and popular periodicals in the United States.

Critics of his SF have written that, over the years, Cummings failed to grow as a writer. They contend that his stories were more or less the same, regardless of the decade in which they were written. His major SF concept was that of chemically induced human shrinkage; but, while many other pulp writers matured with the times, Cummings remained a writer of space operas for the pulps.

On the other hand, Cummings was a pioneer, credited with being the first to write of such SF concepts as artificial gravity, an invisibility cloak, a moon dome, and a paralyzer ray. It has been said that the SF writers of the pulp era “were able to scale the high fence by climbing on Ray's shoulders,” and he maintained that position to the last. Many others acknowledged his role, his inspiration, and his creation of a sense of wonder. In addition to SF, Cummings wrote mysteries and horror stories.

According to Wikipedia, during the 1940s -- with his fiction career declining -- Cummings anonymously scripted comic book stories for Timely Comics, the predecessor of today's Marvel Comics. For example, he recycled the plot of “The Girl in the Golden Atom” for a two-part Captain America tale titled “Princess of the Atom.” He also contributed stories for other Marvel characters, such as the Human Torch and Sub-Mariner, for whom his daughter Betty also wrote stories.

Principal Science Fiction Novels

The Girl in the Golden Atom (1923)
 A Brand New World (1928)
 The Man Who Mastered Time (1929)
 The Sea Girl (1930)
 Tarrano, the Conqueror (1930)
 Brigands of the Moon (1931)
 Beyond the Stars (1942)
 Into the Fourth Dimension (1943)
 The Shadow Girl (1946)
 The Princess of the Atom (1950)
 Beyond the Vanishing Point (1958)
 Wandl the Invader (1961)
 Explorers Into Infinity (1965)

Selected Short Genre Fiction

“The Thought Girl” (1920)
 “The Big Idea (1920)
 “The Curious Case of Norton Hoorne” (1921)
 “The Other Road” (1921)
 “The Spiral Photograph (1921)

“Moon Madness” (1921)
 “The Peppermint Test” (1922)
 “Into the Fourth Dimension” (1926)
 “Phantoms of Reality” (1930)
 “Jetta of the Lowlands” (1930)
 “The Mark of the Meteor” (1931)
 “The White Invaders?” (1931)
 “Death by the Clock” (1932)
 “Rats of the Harbor” (1932)
 “Terror of the Unseen” (1933)
 “Earth-Mars Voyage 20” (1934)
 “The Moon Plot” (1935)
 “The Polar Light” (1935)
 “Blood of the Moon” (1936)
 “Trapped in Eternity” (1936)
 “Earth-Venus 12” (1936) [as by Gabriel Wilson]
 “Elixir of Doom” (1937)
 “Cat-Woman” (1938)
 “Voyage 13” (1938)
 “The Thing from Mars” (1938)
 “Secret of the Sun” (1939)
 “The Cult of the Dead” (1939) [as by Gabriel Wilson]
 “The Dead White Thing” (1939) [as by Ray King]
 “The Atom Prince” (1939)
 “The Man Who Killed the Earth” (1940) [as by Ray King]
 “Space Liner X-87” (1940)
 “Ice Over America” (1940)
 “Priestess of the Moon” (1940)
 “Space-Flight of Terror” (1941)
 “Monster of the Asteroid” (1941)
 “Bandits of Time” (1941)
 “Gods of Space” (1942)
 “Beyond the End of Time” (1942)
 “Wings of Icarus” (1943)
 “A Fragment of Diamond Quartz” (1944) [as by Ray P. Shotwell]
 “Juggernaut of Space” (1945)
 “The Lifted Veil” (1947)
 “The Simple Life” (1948)
 “Science Can Wait” (1952)
 “He Who Served” (1954)
 “The Man Who Could Go Away” (1955)
 “Requiem for a Small Planet” (1958)

Note: Stories are listed by year of publication.

Stories Reprinted in Genre Anthologies/Periodicals

“The Curious Case of Norton Horne” in Avon Fantasy Reader #13 (April 1950)
 “The Three-Eyed Man” in Avon Fantasy Reader #14 (July 1950)
 “The Gravity Professor” in Every Boy's Book of Science Fiction (Wollheim, 1951)



Angela K. Scott — Breath of Summer

“The Man Who Discovered Nothing” in Avon Science Fiction Reader
No. 2 (January, 1951)

“The Girl in the Golden Atom” in The Giant Anthology of Science Fiction (Margulies & Friend, 1954)

“The Girl in the Golden Atom” in Under the Moons of Mars (Moskowitz, 1970)

“Secret of the Sun” in Ackermananthology
(Ackerman, 1997)



Angela K. Scott — By Moonlight

Note: Stories are listed by date of the anthology/
periodical in which they appeared.

Some Concluding Comments

Despite the criticism that he failed to grow as a writer, at one time Cummings was very highly thought of by American magazine editors. For example, Bob Davis, known at the time as the “Dean of American Magazine Editors,” said of Cummings: “He is a Verne returned and a Wells going forward.” (Cummings dedicated his *The Girl in the Golden Atom* to Davis.) Moreover, at least one other critic stated that Cummings was “the American H. G. Wells.”

Several of his books currently are available on the Internet at Project Gutenberg, including *Beyond the Vanishing Point*, *Brigands of the Moon*, *The Fire People*, *The Girl in the Golden Atom*, *Tarrano the Conqueror*, *Wandl the Invader*, *The White Invaders*, and *The World Beyond*.

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

Food of Famous Authors

Chicken Paprikash with David Burkhead ...Cooking with Cedar Sanderson

David is a talented writer and a man who loves to cook. When I asked him for a recipe, he pointed out that he has a regular feature on his blog 'Feeding the Active Writer' but he gave me one of his favorite dishes so I could do this piece on him. I will say that of his writing, I think my favorite was EMT, a short story about emergency medicine on the moon. Growing up, my father was a medic, and Burkhead's story resonated strongly with me. Also, he does very good, readable Hard SF, which isn't the easiest thing to do.



This is a relatively quick and easy dish to assemble, so I will suggest that you check out the short novel *Survival Test* while the paprikash is simmering.

Chicken Paprikash

- 2-3 lbs chicken
- 1-2 large onions
- Fresh mushrooms
- 2-3 tbsp butter
- 1/4 c paprika (the good stuff, Hungarian if you can find it. The cheap stuff has no flavor, might as well throw sawdust in the pot)
- 1 c chicken stock
- 1 c yogurt
- 2 tbsp flour
- salt and pepper to taste

Tempering the dairy keeps it from curdling when added to the hot sauce.

Begin by searing the chicken until browned on both sides (I was using legs and thighs for this, but boneless thighs or breasts would be nice) in the butter in a heavy-bottomed or cast iron pan. Remove the chicken, set aside, and caramelize the onions and mushrooms together. Add the paprika, then the chicken. Don't allow the paprika to burn, as it will develop a bitter unpleasant taste. Pour in the chicken stock and cover the pan, allow to simmer for about 20 minutes, until the chicken is cooked through.



In a small bowl or measuring cup, whisk the flour into the yogurt (you can also use sour cream for this). Then before adding it to the cooking pot, temper the creamy mixture with a few spoonfuls of the hot sauce, whisking it in. Pour the tempered mixture into the pot and cook gently, stirring often, until the sauce is thickening. Remove from heat.



Serve over egg noodles, or as Burkhead suggests, his zero-carb flax-meal muffins. We had it with steamed broccoli on the side as well, and it was a delicious meal.

Chicken Paprikash

Chicken Cordon Bleu a la Tom Knighton Cooking with Cedar Sanderson

By sheer coincidence, this post is coming out just at Tom announces his newest release, *Bad Moon on the Rise*, his third tale of post-apocalyptic America. I haven't read this one yet, too busy cooking, but I will soon! If you haven't had the pleasure of Tom's writing, I will assure you that unlike most dystopian fiction, Tom's books are stories of ordinary people plunged into bad situations, and making the best of it. His work is human wave, with a strong current of hope carrying his fiction along.

While you are prepping this delicious meal, take a minute to count your blessings... electricity, running water, and modern comforts. What happens if those are all gone?

Chicken cordon bleu ala Knighton
Good simple food...

Ingredients

3 Large Chicken breasts (but this recipe scales pretty easily, all things considered)
1 Egg
1 package of Panko
6 slices of ham
6 slices of swiss cheese
Salt
Toothpicks



Preheat the oven to 425.
Dump the Panko into a gallon Ziploc bag. Add salt to taste (I usually guess, truth be told) and mix thoroughly.
Crack and beat the egg in a bowl
Take the three chicken breasts and cut them in half.
Chicken breast

Pounded out flat.



With a meat mallet, beat the ever-loving snot out of the breast pieces until they are thinned out.

chicken cordon bleu

Prep station: chicken with ham and cheese, panko in a bag, and a bowl of egg.

Flip the chicken over and lay one piece of ham, and one piece of cheese. Then, fold the breast in half and pin together with a tooth pick.

Take each breast and dip into the egg, then into the Panko mixture. Be sure to completely coat the breast with Panko, then place in baking dish. Optional: Sprinkle some of the Panko on top after their in the dish.

Bake at 425 until top is a dark golden brown.



Now, is this really Chicken cordon bleu? Damned if I know. I saw someone make this when I was a kid, so I make it this way and it's a hit with my family. We have a belief here in the Knighton household that melted cheese make almost anything taste luxurious, and this is a prime example for us.

Cedar's note: I'm honestly not sure, either, I have never eaten or made it before. Turned out pretty tasty, though, and the First Reader likes it, so we will make it again.

I apologize for not having specific times and such, but when I make up my own recipe, I have a hard time bothering to time how long things take. Especially since I'm one of those intuitive cooks who seasons pretty much everything "to taste", which I honestly believe is the culinary equivalent of "I don't have a flipping clue how much I used".

Cedar note: I baked the single breast, portioned into two pieces, for a total of 30 min at 425 deg F and it was perfectly done without being dry.

As for serving instructions, this is a good protein that seems to work with anything. If I'm feeling fancy, I'll serve with croissants and some kind of vegetable.

Cedar: I served it with steamed veg, herbed butter, and fresh croissant rolls. Note that if you have large chicken breasts, as I did, that 1/2 a breast fed two of us. In other words, if you do the full recipe you will have enough food to feed a small army – or at least a couple of hungry teenagers.

Chicken Cordon Bleu

Herbed Garlicky Butter Spread
Herbed butter spread

Pulling the herb spread together in the food processor.

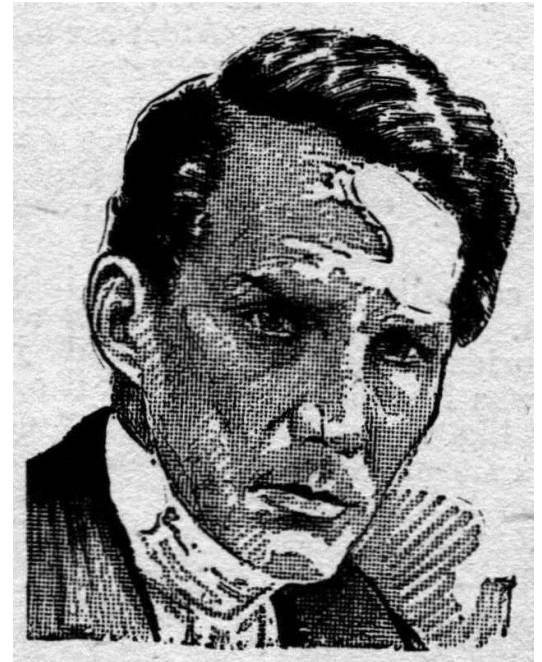
The First Reader joked that just steamed vegetables wasn't fancy enough for this meal. Can you add some herbs to them? he asked.

2 sticks of butter
2 tbsp olive oil
Handful of chives, cut into small sections
Fresh oregano leaves (about 6-7)
3-4 cloves of garlic
1/4 c parmesan cheese (fresh is better than the powder in a can)

In a food processor with a flat blade, chop the herbs, cheese, and garlic by pulsing several times. You could add different herbs to taste. Slowly add the butter in small pieces through the portal, alternating with drizzles of olive oil. This came out very green, smooth, and tastes lovely on the vegetables and rolls.



Ray Cummings, from his obituary



Ray Cummings, 1931