

Tightbeam 295

April 2019



Cover Art found by Bob Jennings

Tightbeam 295

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Art Editors are Angela K. Scott and Cedar Sanderson. The front cover this issue was found by Bob Jennings. The art on pages 4, 5, and 11 is from Angela K. Scott.

Anime Reviews are courtesy Jessi Silver and her site www.s1e1.com. Ms. Silver writes of her site "S1E1 is primarily an outlet for views and reviews on Japanese animated media, and occasionally video games and other entertainment."

Fiction reviews are courtesy Pat Patterson, Cedar Sanderson, and Tom Feller.

Pat Patterson's reviews appear on his blog <https://habakkuk21.blogspot.com> and also on GoodReads and Amazon.com.

Cedar Sanderson's reviews and other interesting articles appear on her site www.cedarwrites.wordpress.com/ and its culinary extension cedarwrites.com/eat-this-while-you-read-that/

Greg Hullender and Eric Wong publish their reviews at RocketStackRank.com

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Letters of Comment

Dear George and Jon:

Many thanks to both of you for issue 294 of Tightbeam. I will try my best to make this a fast letter of comment, and get it to you asap. Well, that's the plan, anyway...

My past letter... I gather that issue 3 of Amazing Stories has emerged from the printers, and will be in the mail to subscribers soon. I am very pleased to be a member of the editorial team, and I hope this can continue for some time to come. As of today, it is 63 days until we fly off to England. (How do I know that? Yvonne's got it written on the calendar...) All side trips are arranged, and there's a few small details to take care of. (I wonder if the impending Brexit will affect the British pound sterling? I expect it will, but will it make pounds cheaper or more expensive?)

Jesse Silver writes about mysterious girls...I don't watch anime at all, yet others who have talked to me about say one of the most popular themes in modern anime is the mysterious/magical girl. Gotta get to an underserved part of the anime market, I suppose...

In this social media era, it is far too easy to be attacked verbally for any and all opinions, especially if some of the crazies on the other side of the monitor take enormous offence. They obviously need a life, but it is a shame when you get personal attacks for your work, as Cedar Sanderson had to deal with. It's mere words, and in the past, I challenged one such jerk to come and get me, and teach me how wrong I was. They are still smoldering in anger...I hope... With all that said, I know a number of Mormons, and when I told them there was a book of Mormon steampunk stories available, well...they laughed at me. I have sent a .jpg of James Wymore's book cover to those friends, and they aren't laughing any more. They are...intrigued. I wonder what Joseph Smith would say?

Thanks for all the info on John Collier. The short stories do look interesting, and they might be available online in the public domain. I think "Evening Primrose" might have been the germ of an idea for a Twilight Zone episode or two. I am thinking of one from the 80s revival of TZ. A quick look...the original episode was from 1960, starring Anne Francis and James Milhollin. The remake was in 1986, starring Terry Farrell, Ned Bellamy and Ann Wedgeworth. I don't think John Collier got any credit either time.

Anyway...time to go. It will be a busy evening, and I have dinner to make as well. Take care, many thanks to both of you, and see you with the next issue.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.
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Dragon Mail by Angela K. Scott

Hi George and Jon;

Received Tightbeam #294 yesterday. I read it immediately. Another varied issue. The cover illo was nicely executed with vivid colors, but it looked more like a castle in the morning fog, rather than a castle in the sky.

Superworld Comics produced by Hugo Gernsback in 1940 was probably not a success because it lacked a cadre of strong heroes to anchor the book. I had copies of this comic years ago, and for anybody interested, all three issues are posted for free on several internet sites. The art is good by 1940 standards, and the science fiction themes were certainly strong, but despite the general Gernsback hoopla of scientific accuracy and teaching people science, you will find none of that in any of the issues. My own personal suspicion is that the distribution for the magazine was never that strong, which would have been a severe limiting factor on overall sales.

At this stage in his career Gernsback apparently wanted quick results from any new project he underwrote. When sales figures on issue one came back and didn't meet his expectation, he axed the title. Of course the other two numbers had already been produced, printed and had been sent to the newsstands, but apparently sales on those issues weren't so hot either. Superworld was certainly as good as Planet Comics at that stage of its existence, with better stories overall. Superworld might have survived and become a sales success if Gernsback has stayed with it a few more numbers, and, if there had been stronger lead characters.

I suppose I shouldn't be surprised to read Cedar Sanderson's comment about an author who was so upset by a negative review she wrote that the offended individual decided to organize a campaign of smear and slander against her. That is another one of the problems in this modern world when anybody can get anything printed in e-book format with little or no effort.



It is the responsibility of a person reviewing any book to write an honest critique. If the story is bad, the plot doesn't work, the writing is inept, the characters thinner than cardboard; whatever, if there are flaws in a book the reviewer has to point those things out and deliver an honest opinion. Otherwise, what is the point of doing a review in the first place?

Writers need to realize that their new novel may not be the pinnacle of English language literature that they believe it is. Good writers listen to critics and reviewers and pay attention to what those people say. Writers can improve their craft and learn to get better at delivering readable stories, but not if they fly into a hissy fit and sulk. Bruised egos are

not an author's friend. A bad book is a bad book, and if an author turns one out, s/he needs to address the problems and try to do better next time, not swear eternal vengeance against a reviewer presenting an honest opinion.

I enjoyed Jon's memories of *Out of This World Adventures*, the SF mag. This was an oddball experiment that was probably doomed to failure purely because it was a mixed hybrid. The original idea, besides appealing to both comic book readers and SF fans, may have been to save on printing costs, and the cost of paying for stories, by presenting a 128 page magazine at a standard twenty-five cent price, using 28 pages from the insides of an already printed comic book; a new level in cheapness even for Avon.

Avon editor Donald Wollheim was very much aware of the popularity of *Planet Comics*, a comic title he himself read and saved regularly (in the early 1960s he offered to sell me his long run of the title, but, alas, I didn't offer as much as he thought they were worth, so the proposed sale fell thru), and may have been looking for something to straddle the gap. *Planet Comics* was conceded to be a very effective introduction to science fiction for young readers, and a stepping stone that very often led them to trying *Planet Stories*.

Other publishers were also aware of the growing influence of science fiction in the movies and comics. In the summer of 1950 DC Comics issued their first science fiction title; *Strange Adventures*, dated September 1950, with a comic book adaptation of the "Destination Moon" feature film. The next few issues prominently mentioned on the front covers the names of some of the science fiction writers who were writing comics for DC at the time, including Edmond Hamilton, Gardner Fox, H.L. Gold, and David Reed. They even got Virgil Finley to illustrate a few stories.

The other problem was that Avon at this stage wasn't really interested in publishing many new prose magazines. They were also a lot more interested in expanding their comic book biz. It should be noted that Avon was one of the most successful of the early paperback publishers, snapping up thousands of out of print and obscure book titles and reissuing them in paperback format with sexy covers and provocative cover blurbs that often had absolutely nothing to do with the stories inside. They also very often changed the titles too (alho they usually mentioned the original title in very small print under the new one). Paperback books were trashing the magazine market, especially the pulp magazine market. Besides paperback books, comics were selling like crazy, and that was the craze Avon wanted to get in on, so it is probable that the only thing that could have saved *Out of This World Adventures* would have been dynamic sales, which it undoubtedly did not enjoy.

Interesting recipes this time round. The chicken one looks especially delicious, without adding any pasta to the mix to dilute the flavors. However it also looks like a lot of work, so I probably will not be trying it myself.

Another good issue. Looking forward to the next one.

---Bob Jennings
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Anime

Battle Girl High School
...Review by Jessi Silver



In the year 2045, the world has been contaminated by Irōsu (mysterious invaders who suddenly appeared), and humans find themselves restricted and contained. Standing boldly against these invaders are ordinary girls everywhere, without a powerful army or even weapons. The Shinjugamine Girls Academy is a school for these “Hoshimori” (Star Guardians) destined to fight the Irōsu. – ANN

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Episode 1 Summary: Miki and her classmates at Shinjugamine Academy are trainees in the fight against the Irosu, alien invaders who arrived mysteriously, appear randomly (signaled only by a miasma that precedes their arrival) and who keep humanity contained and frightened. The girls lead typical lives, but are called up on when needed to invoke the powers given to them to fight and win against the Irosu. Unfortunately as of late, the classmates have been having trouble working harmoniously and seem to be phoning it in a bit. Not knowing just where or when an attack might occur, this makes the individuals running the program a bit nervous. The girls are ordered to undergo another round of training; it’s here that they’re surprised by an injection of new blood – a new member named Misaki.

Impressions: There was a time when I’d be immediately wary of an anime with a cast larger than about four or five main characters, but I’ve been proven wrong too many times to default to that position. Shirobako introduced an entire company full of animators, producers, and staff members while they sat around a table eating; by the end of that episode I definitely didn’t know many of their names, but the show never really suffered for its truthfulness about how much manpower goes into creating an anime. The Lost Village’s internet-influenced bus full of misfits worked around its large cast size by giving each character a chance to prove how distinctly misanthropic or mentally-ill they all were, to (in my opinion) successful ends. So I’m no longer immediately put off by a cast of thousands, as even shorter anime series have proven themselves capable of using large groups for productive means.

This show introduces a number of characters during a chaotic battle in the first half of this episode. Each character gets a snappy line of dialog and the nature of voice-acting being what it is, that’s generally enough to leave a small impression on the viewer of the person’s basic personality. Whereas other series have counteracted the disorientation of these sorts of mad-



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cap intros by providing something else to grab onto, say an unusual plot element or interesting variation in tone, this one ends having not left much of an impression.

There are some vague references within the character dialog to the forever-looming threat of the Irosu, this anime's malevolent foreign invader antagonists. Though not particularly creative, the idea itself is perfectly serviceable as something to challenge our heroes and serve as an ultimate goal. The issue is that throughout the first episode, several references are made to how poorly the characters are working together and how their power as a group is unfocused and lacking, and yet there's not any situation where the beasts with which they're engaged are shown to pose any kind of mortal threat to the characters. There's not element of danger or any indication that any of the characters might lose out or become injured, and so it's really difficult to stay engaged. I found my mind wandering over and over again as I resisted the urge to check Facebook or get up for a snack, and this was all while characters were in battle – ostensibly the most dynamic parts of the episode. It's a bit maddening just how dull the experience is.

This show also seems to be an awkward genre mashup, as at least a few of the heroines appear to moonlight as idol singers, and the franchise's Wikipedia entry seems to make reference to several different (internal?) idol groups and songs. This isn't bad in itself, but I have to confess I've never really been a fan of idols or idol culture so the fact that that aspect seems shoehorned into this action series doesn't really appeal to me personally. It also has the distinct air of trying too hard to appeal to too many different demographics at once which is almost always a poor choice; of many of the anime series I like the best, one commonality between them seems to be that the creators aimed to appeal to a certain fan group, made a product that has high quality attributes (story, animation, characterization, theme, etc.), and ultimately broadened the appeal in that way. From *Yuri!!! on Ice* to *Puella Magi Madoka Magica*, to *Haikyuu!*, this has proven to be true. So I can't really buy when a series seems to haphazardly take shots in several directions without hitting a target.

There's an odd bit of pandering in this episode that I feel is worth mentioning as it didn't land very well with me. For whatever reason, I've noticed over the last five or so years that the amount of low-grade yuri content in otaku anime seems to have seen an uptick. Shows like *Sakura Trick* and *Yuruyuri* make very mild plays at same-sex female relationships, not really to advocate for those relationships, but to provide them as another option for fetishization in shows aimed primarily towards male otaku viewers. It doesn't necessarily mean that the shows are without other merit, or might not also have appeal to people who identify with those relationships, but I don't think their use is meant to be enlightened or representative of ally-ship. The two overt idol characters, Kanon and Shiho, are introduced as kind of an "are they or aren't they...?" couple in this episode, and some romantic aspect to their relationship is implied over the phone. Not only does this feel forced in a show that's already got too much going on, there's literally no other reason one would care about the characters at this point so it feels as though someone, somewhere is just checking off of a list.

Needless to say, this isn't really a standout entry in the season, and there's not much reason to recommend it over other, better-produced game-based anime like *Touken Ranbu* or some past examples like the *Rage of Bahamut* series. It's probably more interesting if you're a fan of idols or have some interest in the voice actors providing the dialog (of which there are many, considering the size of the cast). Add to that the fact that this is a HIDIVE exclusive, which makes it prohibitive to check out if your budget only affords one or two of the big streaming services, and this makes *Battle Girls High School* pretty skipable.

Pros: It's a mostly inoffensive first episode.

Cons: Attempts to flesh-out characters feel forced, the antagonists don't seem to pose a real threat, and the mix of genres is scattershot.

Grade: D+

First Impressions – Princess Principal Review by Jessi Silver

Five girls live in 19th century London, a city within the Albion Kingdom divided into east and west by a large wall. The girls serve as undercover spies enrolled as students at the prestigious Queen's Mayfair school. The girls make use of their individual abilities to remain active in the underground world of disguise, espionage, infiltration, and car chases. – ANN



Streaming: Amazon Anime Strike

Episode 1 Summary: A new path for history was set in motion when the strange element “cavorite” was discovered. Cavorite allowed the kingdom of Albion to create an air fleet that was unmatched in the world, but this imbalance of power tore Europe apart. Albion was split into East and West by a huge wall

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encircling London, and now, as in any divided country, spy networks crisscross from one side to the other trying to get the upper hand for their side.

Five young women attending Queen's Mayfair school moonlight as spies, their current job involving helping a scientist defect so that he can get the money to help his younger sister, who is suffering from cavorite poisoning. But the scientist's goals are muddled by who he's actually working for, and it isn't long before the girls discover that the ultimate goal is to draw them out from their hiding place.

Impressions: Anime is a medium that's tackled a lot of genres and sub-genres over the years, but despite the popularity of steampunk within geek culture over the last decade or so, there haven't been very many anime that have taken advantage of that. Steamboy is probably the most obvious one, and perhaps Last Exile as well, though that one has a slightly different feel. But for the most part it's kind of an untapped market for anime. That's why I was pleased to see a series like this that seems to be all-in as far as the steampunk aesthetic goes. Princess Principal seems to not only be concerned with what type of technological achievements might have been made had the world made a giant leap in discovery around the late 1800's, but also the effects on class in society as a result.



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The first episode takes place in the city of London and its surroundings some years after its eponymous battle that's referenced several times throughout the episode (and which seems to play a large part in at least one of the main characters' backstories). Many of the scenes occur within the elite private school the girls attend which serves as a cover for their nightly activities, and portrays the kind of upper-class Victorianesque setting one might expect in a steampunk-focused piece. With its emphasis on aesthetics, we get the expected steam-powered inventions, English gentility, and costume-like variations upon period clothing that make the genre fun to play around in.



'Tis a very fancy school. Copyright 2017 (c) Actas/Studio 3Hz

What we also see, though, are the bits and pieces of London buried beneath the thick smog, in the gutters of the city where the lower classes dwell. There are scenes of the poor clustered in an infirmary waiting room, and homeless people lining the streets. The discovery of cavorite, and likely the war that went along with it, definitely made some people wealthy, but there are clearly many who weren't lucky enough to share in that prosperity.

The first episode doesn't really take a stance on any of this beyond allowing the audience to see how things are; it's clearly used as a means to demonstrate how stratified the world is. It does

give us some perspective in that at least one of the girls now working as a spy was lucky enough to escape this kind of poverty (having been orphaned) and find a way to some kind of financial means (even if the work she and her compatriots are hired to do isn't particularly savory). Anime has a tendency to "tell" rather than to "show," so despite the fact that these visual interjections were pretty obvious, it's nice to get a little bit of background on the world without an "as you know..." info-dump up front.



Ange keeps watch on their target from on high. Copyright 2017 (c) Actas/Studio 3Hz

In addition to its portrayal of the people populating its alternate-history milieu, the show's background art is striking and detailed, providing a lovely backdrop for the well-executed action in this episode. There's an incredible amount of care in the depiction of the lush plants in the Queen's Mayfair gardens, as well as in the brownish grit and grime of the city streets below the all-encompassing fog. There's just enough of a sepia-tone to give the whole thing a classic feel to go along with its old-timey vehicles and other less tangible period style. It's definitely not a universal constant, but I find that, often, when different pieces of the whole are given a lot of attention and care separately, the final product tends to reflect that extra energy and planning in its overall quality. Obviously nothing is certain from one episode, but I was truly impressed by how this show made its visual impression.

I did a panel at an anime convention a year or two ago that was a discussion of moé tropes and how employing them in character creation isn't necessarily a mark of laziness on the part of a creator, but instead can be a shortcut to get the audience up to speed quickly, with character detail and development to follow as required by the story. Some examples of this technique used well are Puella Magi Madoka Magica, or perhaps a slightly better comparison to this show, Sound of the Sky. In both of these shows, we're fooled into thinking that the characters, being who they are and marked by their moé characteristics, will have a particular, predictable story arc. In both cases the characters have much more depth than might be obvious at first glance, and as details are added to their personas, we learn more about the world they inhabit. I think many of us are still wary when the cast of an anime looks like "a bunch of girls each with her unique one-note personality," and that was my knee-jerk reaction to this show. Ange, who we spend some time with in this episode, feels like a typical "emotionless girl with a tragic past" that is meant to appeal to a certain type of fan, and there are a couple of other obvious character types within the group of characters we don't know very well yet. But I get the impression that we'll learn more about these characters as we go, and I'm interested to see that happen. And hey, if we don't end up with richer portraits of our protagonists as we go, perhaps at the very least we might end up with something like Joker Game, which oozed style despite not sharing any pertinent details about the cast; I can dig a show about cool people doing cool things.

It's not surprising to me that this show, which wasn't really on my radar, seems much more promising than I would have thought; that's something that happens every season. Though I might have some slight misgivings about the show's ability to keep up the standard of this

opening episode, I'm impressed enough by the type of story it told and the environment it portrayed that I think it's definitely worth a second look.

Pros: Lots of visual style and a cool alternate history premise. Depicts class differences in a steampunk setting.

Cons: Difficult to tell if the somewhat-generic characters will develop as we go. The visuals may not be able to maintain quality going forward.

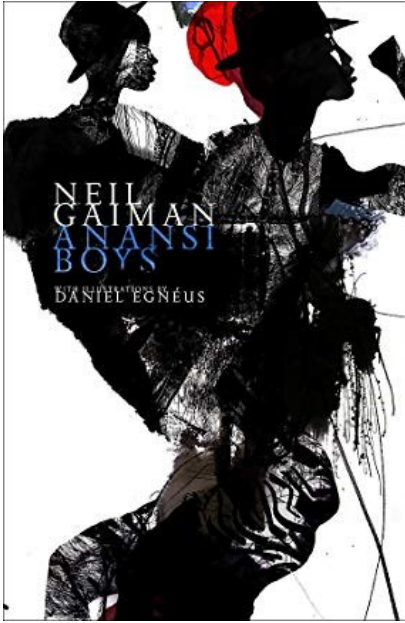
Grade: B+



Charge by Angela K. Scott.

Novels

Anansi Boys by Neil Gaiman-- ...Review by Tom Feller



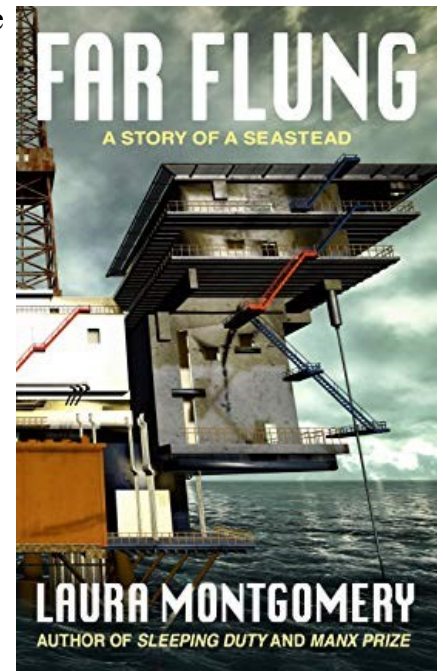
The author's *American Gods* is now a mini-series on the cable channel Starz, but before then there was a BBC radio play based on this novel, which is a spin-off featuring one of the characters from the original, the West African spider/trickster god Anansi and utilizes other African folklore. The premise of the original was that when people from Europe and African migrated to the New World, whether voluntarily or forcibly, they brought their gods with them. The main character is Fat Charlie Nancy, who did not know that his father, known as Mr. Nancy, is really Anansi. When Mr. Nancy dies in Florida while singing karaoke, Charlie discovers that he has a twin brother he never knew existed and that the brother is the one who inherited Anansi's powers. One major difference between this novel and the earlier one is that while the first one was an epic battle between old and new gods, this one is more of a farce with mistaken identities and misunderstandings. Until his father's death launches him on a series of adventures, Charlie is a bookkeeper living in England whose boss is an embezzler planning to frame Charlie and Charlie's fiancé ends up sleeping with Spider. Fortunately for Charlie, he finds love with the female detective investigating his boss. I found this to be an enjoyable read, but consider it one of the author's minor works.

Fortunately for Charlie, he finds love with the female detective investigating his boss. I found this to be an enjoyable read, but consider it one of the author's minor works.

Far Flung by Laura Montgomery ...Review by Pat Patterson

The review: *Far Flung* is a novella-length (53 pages) work painting the picture of a small population of adventurer-engineers who determine that libertarian principles will be better served by forming an independent nation. They acquire a decommissioned mining platform, add to it, and construct a huge sea-going island, which they christen New Oregon. Most of the N.O. crew are from the United States, and they have formally renounced their US citizenship prior to declaring a new entity.

They are opposed in this endeavor by factions in the United States, some governmental, others private. The governmental factions are headed by the IRS, which regards the new nation as a fictional construct, designed to free the NO citizens from their tax burden (including prior accumulated debt). Other governmental agencies are interested in nationalizing new technology being pioneered in New Oregon. And finally, in the private sector, families of the relatively young crew/citizens of New Oregon want them to return to the US because of concerns for their safety.



All of this is brought to a head when Venezuela, pretty much acting as a rogue state, decides to annex New Oregon, claiming it has entered waters under their control. Since this is a patent lie, provable by satellite imagery and GPS recordings, it's clear that they are relying on brute force to impose their will, and give a black eye to the US in the process.

Communications have been established between the US government and the crew of New Oregon. As a libertarian state, New Oregon refuses to ask the US for aid, because they can't pay for it, and accepting it would revoke their independent status.

And as a kicker: the Secretary of State for New Oregon is engineer Betha Tenney, the daughter of Navy Captain Adam Tenney, who has been sent as an observer to the negotiations. This permeates the drama of the "rebels with a cause" narrative with a personal tension, which brings the theoretical home to roost.

Thus endeth the review.

Short Fiction

Joyride, by Kristine Kathryn Rusch
Cover illustration by Donato Giancola

Review by RocketStackRank.com, which reviews enormous amounts of short fiction. You'll have to see it to believe it, and it is well worth the e-trip.

Moving story in a fascinating setting with lots of action

A Fleet training ship passes close to a "scrapheap" of abandoned ships, and Teenage Nadim, leads a group of his friends to "borrow" a scout ship and check it out. (18,409 words)
Although this is set in the author's "Diving Universe," it shares no characters with the other stories, so you can enjoy this story without having read the rest of it, and you can read this one first without spoiling the rest of the series.

"Joyride," by Kristine Kathryn Rusch [bio] (edited by Sheila Williams), appeared in Asimov's Science Fiction issue 11-12|18, published on October 18, 2018 by Penny Publications.

Pro: Although the basic plot is about Nadim pulling off the visit to the scrapheap and coping with the aftermath, at a deeper level, this is his coming-of-age story. He thought himself very grown up at the start. At the end, he no longer thinks so, but, ironically, he's taken a big step towards being a man.

Nadim has complex motivations. First, he's got a strong need to prove himself, probably as a result of his abusive parents. Second, he's infatuated with Tessa, and he wants to show off to her. Third, he cares about his "crew" and wants to do right by them too, as we see at the end when he tells them to admit nothing and blame it all on him.

The author does a great job of introducing background on the Fleet without resorting to infodumps. I've read all the other stories, and yet the information was introduced so naturally that it never bothered me that I was reading things I already knew.

Throughout, dialogue and narration are flawless. In particular, they do an excellent job of making Nadim seem like a real teenager, together with all the second-guessing and worrying over little things that's typical at that age. After they docked back at the ship, I expected Nadim to report to the captain to let her know exactly what had happened, but, of course, Nadim wanted to know if Tessa had survived. Him sitting in the Third Level Mess mourning her was less noble, but much more realistic, and awfully sad.

I particularly liked the repeated reminders of how protective he felt of the "little-littles." That goes a long way toward making him a sympathetic character.

The conclusion is very satisfying. Nadim pays a heavy price, but not as heavy as he'd feared. And although he's responsible for a lot of death and destruction, he's also responsible for saving a lot of lives.

I suspect this isn't the last we'll see of Nadim. I look forward to seeing what he's like as a man.

Con: The story takes too long to get going. The kids take forever to get from the Third Level Mess Hall to the bridge on their little ship. There's some danger of getting caught, but, we pick up Nadim's attitude that risk amounts just to nothing more than a slap on the wrist, so there's no real tension until Tessa uses her Anacapa drive to win the competition. That doesn't happen until after the 50% mark.

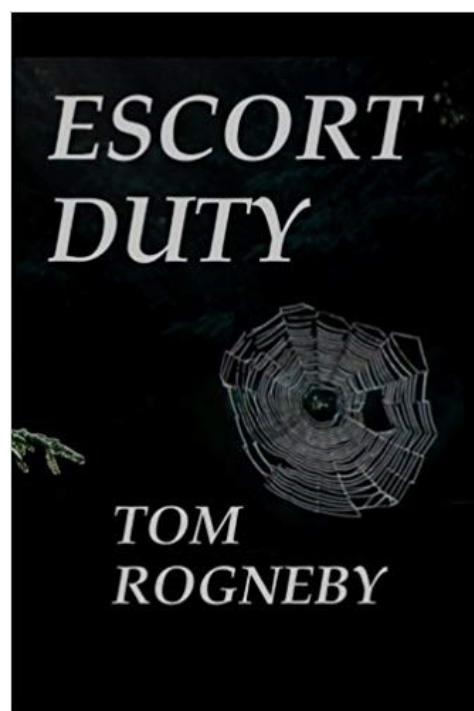
Escort Duty

A collection of Short Stories by Tom Rogneby

Review by Pat Patterson

I should have known I was in for something unusual when the graphic of the book cover only took up the bottom half of the page in my Kindle Library. Wasn't really expecting THIS, though; six short stories, in WILDLY divergent settings. Admittedly, I already knew Rogneby was a author with an unusual ability to write about different worlds, and make them believable. My first exposure was to his book of the Lost Legion, Via Serica, in 2015. That book was so good, I literally got lost in doing research to supplement my appreciation of the text, so much so that I forgot to write the review until two years later. Bad, Bad Reviewer! No Cookie!

I've also got a huge affection for his Daddy Bear stories. If you haven't discovered the loveliness of a mashup of suburban life and medieval magic, then stop reading this now, and go get Tales of the Minivandians. I love the stories for their own sake, BUT I also used them to drown out my screams and whimpers during more than one long session in the dentist's chair, as beautiful women stabbed me in the face with sharp pointy things.



The following is the sum total of my Amazon review:

"Escort Duty," the first and longest of the stories in the collection, could very well have been set in Daddy Bear's universe. It's the story of a powerful and powerfully determined princess, determined to achieve her goal without understanding all the details and sacrifices that have to be made; and it's the story of a not-so-glamorous dude on a horse, who has certain skills and talents, and who has pledged his life to see her safely home. Bad things happen. Will good things come of that?

"Grandma's Kitchen" is the next story, and I still don't know whether to be warmed and comforted at the example of the sweetness of a sanctuary, created by a grandmother's love; or to be horrified at the prospect of a reincarnation to make good the things we did wrong in this life. For some, the concept of reincarnation may not be terrifying but for me? Brrrrr. HOWEVER! This is a fresh take, and Rogneby has the ability to make you feel the warmth of a Grandma's kitchen, whatever it represents.

"Plaza of Pain" is over the top. It's so over the top, it ALMOST aggravated me, until I realized it was deliberately over-stating every cliché of smash-em bop-em love-em shoot-em fiction, and then turning up the amp to 11. And that's when it got FUNNY.

"Sacrifice" is beautifully moving. Rogneby takes a minor liberty with time, altogether excusable, given the cast of characters, and ties together two foundational stories of sacrifice and redemption. This is one you need to spend some time with.

"Victory Garden" is a sad, post-apocalyptic tale of a guy just trying to get by, and they won't let him. Figuratively, they have strapped his hands down and covered him with lice, and now they hit him when he wiggles. The society he describes must have closely resembled that found in the earliest years of the USSR, but is made more poignant because the level of prosperity in the United States didn't require anyone to riot because they were starving. We just did it to ourselves because we could.

"The War," the last selection in the book, concerns the aftermath of a series of terrorist attacks in the United States. It's a very, very unpleasant scenario, but in my opinion, there really isn't anything we currently have in place that will prevent it. The United States is a haven for people who want a better life, and if they can walk into the country, so can bad actors. And we really have been at peace for so long that it seems it will never end, but that's simply not the case. Rogneby merely takes incidents that occur regularly in, for example, Israel, and has them take place here. At best, we respond in the way he describes.

This was a tough book for me to review, largely because it covers so much ground. Regardless, it's a GREAT read, and I strongly recommend it.

Peace be on your household.



Motion Pictures

Captain Marvel

Review by Cedar Sanderson

I took the kids to see a movie last night. Normally I take them, drop them off, and come back later to get them. But this time they really wanted me to go, too. It's a Marvel movie, which they know I appreciate, and as I told the Junior Mad Scientist later, the time approaches when one or more is moving out, and I don't think there will be many more opportunities to do this with them. So even though the initial takes on this movie varied from dubious to downright 'Oh, Marvel, no!' I wanted to be there for my kids. And a healthy serving of curiosity about the movie.



I feel like I should preface this review, before I get into the spoiler bits, with a comment on my film geekery. It is almost non-existent. I rarely if ever watch TV these days, and then when I do, it's not SFF. It's either cooking shows, or it's mysteries (and specifically British mysteries). While I'm familiar with the tropes and culture surrounding, say, Star Trek, or Dr Who, I watched TOS, and that's about it. The Marvel movies have

been a rare exception for me, and as with this last one, they were started with my kids. But something about the Avengers enchanted me, and the geek in me came home, wrote on the book of faces 'hey, where do I find the books behind this?'

That's the other thing. I was never a comic book fan. I learned to read early, and was a sophisticated reader almost from the beginning. I don't mean I had upper crust or literary tastes. Far from it. I read well, and I read a lot. I consumed books like water. Comic books were hard to come by and short. It was impossible to get the whole story in one or two random issues I might be able to get my hands on. All this is pertinent to my movie review, I'm not just rambling, I promise! In my early reading I came across pulp action adventure stories, like ER Burroughs, EE 'Doc' Smith, and many others. The Avengers movies, when I encountered them as an adult, were throwbacks to that golden age of pulp fiction for me. And now we come to Captain Marvel.

I think in movies, as in books, you are coming into the experience with a lot of expectations, usually. And a certain amount of what you take away is part of what you brought into the movie theater with you. Unfortunately, there was a concerted effort before this movie's release to make it into something it wasn't. I expected one thing going in, because of the pre-release press. I walked out with a different impression, a sense of huge amusement at how that expectation had been subverted, and feeling very happy with the real takeaway in the story. I'm not a fan of

message fiction. This is not message fiction, but like Captain America, there's a moral in the story. Unlike one of Aesop's fables, it's not spelled out for you, and it's not what you might think it's going to be. Go see Captain Marvel and watch for the trick near the end that turns it all on it's ear...

And now, the spoilery part. Read no further if you want to be surprised.

I'm serious!

Despite all the chicks, this is not a chick flick. This is a Human Wave movie, as most of the Avenger's arc has been.

So what I walked in afraid of was that this was going to be a vehicle for third-wave feminism, which is a subversive movement that erodes the initial intent of feminists to establish women as equal to any other human beings. The main actress has certainly been running her mouth saying it is. The main actress, to be kind, couldn't find the point with both hands.

Early on in the film, it's obvious that the heroine has major issues. Ok, the plot has major issues. Don't walk in expecting to be surprised by the big reveal at the end. I wasn't, and I doubt you will be either. And if that reveal hadn't happened, I would have been done, done, done with the Avengers. If I'm not a fan of 3WF (third wave feminists is too long to keep typing) I'm even less a fan of the current statist movement. I'm all about human rights, independence, and Liberty! or death. So far, the Avengers had satisfied this side of me with the wonderful Captain America arc. So when you see the Kree set up as this superhuman race of warrior heroes (that's actually a line in the movie) who are ruled utterly by the Supreme Intelligence AI, my first thought was 'they're really the bad guys' and they are. But you don't know that until much later in the film. And here's where the feminism thing came in. We get to see Vers (later, Captain Marvel) conflicted over memories, or whatever they are, in which she is knocked down, belittled, and told she's a girl, a failure, and so on. We're supposed to feel badly that men were awful to her. Um. I can see where the actress was all 'look, men are awful but the girlz rule!'

Except that's not what the ending does to those 'memories.' During the fight scene with the Supreme Intelligence, it's revealed that the memories were selected and used to control the woman who could become Captain Marvel. Her focus on how she'd been beaten down, scolded, and so forth... was a tool the AI was using in part to keep control over her. When she stopped focusing on the feminism 'done me wrong' mantra, and instead remembered how she had gotten up, tried again, been given second chances, been given the opportunity to fly experimental jets, had proved her humanity by being resilient and DOING not just lying down and whining about how men wouldn't let her get up... that's when she was able to tap into her true power and win the fight. Captain Marvel isn't about girl power. It's about humans. It's specifically and blatantly about humanity and how we don't give up. We dust ourselves off, wipe the blood out of our eye, square our shoulders, and walk right back into the affray, only this time to win.

So yes, in spite of the silly special effects, the over-the-top comic book tropes, the media portrayal of 'girlz rule!' I really enjoyed this movie, and I can recommend it if you enjoy that sort of thing. Human wave, baby. Ride it to the stars!

(oh, and the cat. You really, really want to watch it for the cat. I promise you, it will not disappoint).

Sercon

The Thiotimeline Award ...A Modest Proposal from Pat Patterson

I've got an idea that people of a different time would have called "the cat's meow." I don't actually know when this time would be, and I've never heard anyone use that phrase, but I'm sure I read it in a book or perhaps a magazine article or something. The idea is for a new KIND of award for works that fall into the category of Science Fiction, Fantasy, Vampires, Zombies, Monsters and Killing Them, Military Sci Fi, and whatever else we are reading, watching, listening to because we are trapped in this awful reality and really need to escape. Now, I live in Woodstock, GA, Cultural Center of the Universe, so I'm gonna have to have the award near me, at least until it's potty trained. I briefly thought about Dragon Con, which is sort of next door, but hey: I fought that Atlanta traffic for YEARS, since 1969, and I ain't going back there without a struggle. But just a little bit farther away in the opposite direction is Chattanooga, and as we all know, LibertyCon is the coolest EVER, so:

I propose that LibertyCon create a new award, addressing the future of science fiction and fantasy, and whatever else we are reading. I suggest the name "Thiotimeline Award," after the chemical compound which has the property of dissolving BEFORE being added to water. (The Endochronic Properties of Resublimated Thiotimeline", Asimov, I., March 1948, J.A.S.F.)

The award would be given annually for the best work in each category (perhaps mirroring the Dragon Awards), but for future works, published, say...oh, I don't know...five years out?

So, at Liberty Con 2017, the Thiotimeline Award would go to the best work published in 2021, five years after the current eligible candidates for awards such as the Dragon, Hugo, Nebula, and John Campbell. I suspect this will rapidly become a highly favored award by Toni Weiskopf at Baen, always a forward-looking publishing house, and perhaps the Big Five (or is it Four? can't remember) publishers as well. For them, it will have the dual benefits of providing authors with manageable yet concrete deadlines, while also making possible a long-term publishing schedule, constructed around an award-winning work.

One category will become particularly popular with the entire F&SF community. "Best New Writer," also doing business as the John Campbell Award among others, is currently appallingly retrospective, looking BACK at newcomers for the previous year, or even from the year before that! Instead of being 'New,' the award as currently construed should really be stamped with an expiration date. The winners of the Thiotimeline Award for Best New Talent are undoubtedly either not in the profession at all at the moment of the award, or have been laboring over fine-tuning a work for an agonizing number of years. Receipt of the award will therefore instantly become the sort of thing that eager candidates strive for to an unprecedented degree. Imagine the impact this could have had in years past: Michael Crichton would not have had to waste all those years in medical school, for example.

While the Best New Writer is certain to be the headline award, the others are not without their own allure. One Sunday in the Mad Genius Club, Dorothy Grant wrote a wonderfully informed article about something I didn't understand because I didn't read it, but it at least

mentioned in passing (or something) about authors being concerned about shifting their genre. I THINK this means (I glimpsed some of the comments, but really, y'all, I just ran out of time) that if an author has been writing books about exploding spaceships, but then has an idea for a series about the conflict inherent in a love affair between a hyperintelligent shade of blue and a leopard who shape changes into another leopard, but just in spots, then winning the award for Best Novel would not even be necessary: just showing up on the list of nominations would provide the encouragement needed to take the plunge. "Look! I'm nominated for Best Novella for 'Lilac Summer!'" "Oh, really? What do you suppose THAT's about?" "I have no idea, but it's not about an accountant born without bones falsely imprisoned for making out with his music teacher and conquering the world wearing a power suit! I'm up to number twenty-two in that series! I knew I was ready for a change!"

And then we come to what is likely to be the most pernicious, heinous, malevolent criticism of this precious little white kitten of an idea: Won't fixing a particular outcome five years into the future be deterministic? What about the grandfather paradox? What about freedom of will?

I dunno. Try it; if the universe implodes, it was a bad idea.

The Fawcett Dime Action Books

by

Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D.

N3F Historian

The Fawcett Publishing Company of Greenwich, Connecticut entered the big little book (BLB) field in 1941 with four titles. The characters for these books – Captain Marvel, Bulletman, Minute-Man, and Spy Smasher -- were taken from two of Fawcett's monthly comic books, Whiz Comics and Master Comics; and all of them also appeared in their own titles – although all but Captain Marvel were for relatively short runs. All of these BLBs were 192 pages in length, 4 inches by 5 ½ inches by 5/8 inches in size, and had four-color board covers with glued bindings. The cover illustrations were based on previously published comic book covers. Because they sold for 10¢, Fawcett called them Dime Action Books. They were very similar to Dell's Fast-Action Story Books, which had been published in 1936.

Bulletman and Minute-Man came from Fawcett's Master Comics while Captain Marvel and Spy Smasher were featured in the company's Whiz Comics. The inside front and back covers of all the Dime Action books had ads for Fawcett comic books. Dime Action Books resembled traditional BLBs in many respects, but they are very hard to find today, especially in good condition.

Dime Action Titles

Captain Marvel and the Return of the Scorpion

The writer of this book was Otto Binder and the principal artist was C. C. Beck. Some authorities list Bill Parker, one of the Captain Marvel writers, as the author, but there is little doubt that this was Binder's first writing assignment at Fawcett -- and led to his 12-year writing career with the company.

Captain Marvel was Fawcett's most popular character, appearing in several of their comic books on a regular basis and starring in a Republic Pictures serial in 1941. This Dime Action

story was created as a sequel to the movie serial. It seems that The Scorpion was not really killed in the climax of the serial. Instead, he returns to wreak vengeance on Billy Batson and others. The Scorpion captures Billy and some of his friends and takes them to Siam, where he has made a deal with a native chieftain to deliver them for human sacrifice. In exchange, The Scorpion is to receive “a mountain of uranium” as his reward. Captain Marvel eventually exposes The Scorpion as a racketeer, and angry natives throw him off a cliff.

Bulletman and the Return of Mr. Murder

Bulletman was the second superhero to star in Master Comics, replacing Master-Man in issue #7. Bulletman was himself knocked out of the lead story (and off the cover) by Captain Marvel, Jr. -- who teamed up with him to defeat Captain Nazi -- but continued to appear in the comic book until September 1949, issue #106.

In *Bulletman and the Return of Mr. Murder* (although *Bulletman and Bulletgirl* is the title on the cover) the duo of Jim Barr and Susan Kent fight “Mr. Murder, Purveyor of Eternity,” who kills just for the sake of killing. In the story he declares open season on all doctors because “they cure people faster than I can kill them off!” Bulletman apprehends Mr. Murder as he flees in his autogyro, and knocks him into the Pacific Ocean. Inconsistencies abound in the story, including having a thug biting Bulletman’s ear (“the pain was terrific”) -- even though Bulletman’s gravity helmet is described as fitting “snugly over Bulletman’s head and around his ears” and is so pictured in the illustrations.

Minute-Man and the Mystery of the Spy Ring

Minute-Man was a secondary Fawcett superhero, their answer to Timely’s (later Marvel’s) Captain America and MLJ’s The Shield.

In this Dime Action book Army private Jack Weston (alias Minute-Man, the One Man Army) is confronted by Illyria, “Queen of All Spies,” who tries to sell America’s secret metal thelium to a foreign power. This metal, invented by a scientist named Thorgerson, is described as one-fourth the weight of aluminum, twice the strength of steel, and bulletproof. The “Red, White, and Blue Man” pursues Illyria across the Adirondacks and Lake Champlain and secures the thelium, but the Queen of All Spies escapes.

Spy Smasher and the Red Death

Spy Smasher (later Crime Smasher), like Captain Marvel, had a movie serial that featured his exploits.

In *Spy Smasher and the Red Death*, members of the underworld learn that Spy Smasher is actually playboy Alan Armstrong and decide to get rid of him. Attempts to assassinate Armstrong fail, however, and Spy Smasher soon has his principal antagonist, the Red Death, imprisoned.

Conclusions

While some reference books say the Dime Action stories were adapted from ones in the character’s regular comics, this is not true. Instead, the stories were new ones based on the characters. The plots of these books – with the possible exception of the Captain Marvel title -- have been

criticized as being illogical and inconsistent, with espionage elements clumsily superimposed onto common gangster themes -- perhaps due to the approach of America's entry into World War II.

These four Dime Action Books are difficult to find today, especially the Captain Marvel and Minute-Man titles. Prices for these books are in the \$50 to \$500 range for each, depending upon condition. The entire series of four books has been sold for as much as \$2000.00.

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“The Science Fiction of Nathaniel Hawthorne”

by

Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D.

N3F Historian

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804 - 1864) [birth name: Nathaniel Hathorne] was born in 1804 in Salem, Massachusetts to Nathaniel Hathorne and Elizabeth Clarke Manning Hathorne. He later changed his name to "Hawthorne" -- adding a "w" to dissociate from some of his relatives, including a judge during the Salem Witch Trials. Hawthorne attended Bowdoin College and graduated in 1825; his classmates included future president Franklin Pierce and future poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Hawthorne anonymously published his first work, a novel titled Fanshawe, in 1828. He then published several short stories in various periodicals, and these were collected in 1837 as Twice-Told Tales. The next year he became engaged to Sophia Peabody. He worked at a custom house and joined a utopian community before marrying Sophia in 1842. The couple moved to “The Old Manse” in Concord, Massachusetts, later moving to Salem, the Berkshires, and then to “The Wayside” in Concord. The Scarlet Letter was published in 1850, followed by a succession of other novels. A political appointment took Hawthorne and his family to Europe before their return to “The Wayside” in 1860. Hawthorne died on May 19, 1864, leaving behind his wife and their three children.

Hawthorne was one of the nation's first science fiction (SF) authors. He set out to espouse his ideas in “The Minister's Black Veil,” in which he tried to make the case that all of us have secret sins that we hide from others (including ourselves). Not content to deal with these abstract issues of morality and future judgment, however, Hawthorne quickly turned his talents to the issues of the time. An explosion of the sciences in the mid-to-late 19th Century left many Americans trying to understand this unfamiliar ground. Therefore, Hawthorne published such stories as “Dr. Heidegger's Experiment,” “The Birthmark,” and “Rappaccini's Daughter,” in which he warned readers of the dangers of unrestrained scientific growth. Hawthorne argued

through his characterizations and plot lines that any scientific advancement must always keep in mind the public good.

“Dr. Heidegger's Experiment”

In “Dr. Heidegger's Experiment” Hawthorne shows his wariness of the scientific advances of the time. Heidegger is the embodiment of science in this story. He is a learned man, with mountains of ancient manuscripts in his study and an intense, clinical detachment from the universe. He is both withdrawn and aloof, even from his friends. Life is not for living in; it's a laboratory from which he conducts experiments into nature's fundamental truths.

A “black book” Heidegger consults on occasion further embodies Hawthorne's wariness of the sciences. The book, “bound in black leather,” is considered by Heidegger's friends to be a dangerous book of magic. Hawthorne uses the book to represent the mystery and peril inherent with science, raising science almost to the level of the supernatural. He recounts an episode in which a housekeeper, upon touching the black book, was startled out of her wits when the inanimate objects of Heidegger's study suddenly came alive:

The skeleton had rattled in its closet, the picture of the young lady had stepped one foot upon the floor, and several ghastly faces had peeped forth from the mirror; while the brazen head of Hippocrates frowned, and said, “Forbear!”

As the story unfolds, the reader discovers the extent of Heidegger's thirst for knowledge. After giving four friends -- Mr. Melbourne, Colonel Killigrew, Mr. Gascoigne, and the Widow Wycherly -- a sample of the recently discovered “elixir of life,” Heidegger becomes an observer of the events that unfold. He does nothing while his now-childlike friends go at each others' throats, with the men literally tearing the room apart to win the widow. Heidegger is too engrossed in watching the unfolding drama to interfere. If Heidegger declined to intervene and at least attempt to save his friends and his study, then would he intercede if his experiments caused even more serious repercussions? The answer, according to Hawthorne, should scare the reader more than the question.

“The Birthmark”

In “The Birthmark” Hawthorne takes his conclusions to the next logical step: not only is scientific detachment dangerous but scientific tampering should be avoided. He again presents the reader with his archetypal metaphor for science. Aylmer, a self-professed scholar, is withdrawn from the everyday world in his pursuit of the laws governing creation.

As in “Dr. Heidegger's Experiment,” Hawthorne provides a plot device that embodies his wariness of science: Aylmer's laboratory. This source of Aylmer's discoveries is presented as a portal into one of the hotter regions of hell: oppressively dark with the only illumination coming from a huge furnace that also manages to keep the room uncomfortably hot. Evidently, though Hawthorne was awed by the discoveries that were transforming his world, he felt uncomfortable as to their origin.

Obsessed with perfection, Aylmer nearly goes mad as he attempts to remove the fatal flaw of Georgiana's beauty, a red birthmark on her face. Georgiana eventually agrees to have the birthmark removed using Aylmer's scientific processes. By removing the birthmark from his wife,

Aylmer irrevocably upsets nature's "Plan" for Georgiana and she wastes away, flawless but now unable to subsist in "this imperfect plane of existence."

"Rappaccini's Daughter"

Hawthorne's loathing for unrestrained scientific discovery finds its peak in "Rappaccini's Daughter." Though Rappaccini, an Italian doctor of renown, again embodies science, this time Hawthorne expresses his hatred of the man and people like him. His description of the doctor:

His figure . . . showed itself to be that of no common laborer, but a tall, emaciated, sallow, and sickly-looking man, dressed in a scholar's garb of black. He was beyond the middle term of life, with gray hair, a thin grey beard, and a face singularly marked with intellect . . . but which could never, even in his more youthful days, have expressed much warmth of heart.

Instead of a study or a laboratory, Hawthorne instead chooses a garden to express his fear of nature gone awry. The garden, from which Rappaccini had created his fantastic potions and curatives, contains unearthly plants and herbs. Instead of being light and airy, the place exudes a twisted sense of wrongness. The mutant plants "are inherently dangerous, releasing poisons into the air and discharging deadly oils." Clearly, science has pushed the limits of nature and created something dark and sinister.

It is in Rappaccini's character that the potential harm that Hawthorne sees in unbridled science finds its most potent form. The doctor is without morals; life is one big experiment, and the "human beings that inhabit it are mere lab rats to be toyed with and thrown aside."

As Hawthorne tells his tale, the Giovanni Guasconti character falls in love with Beatrice, Rappaccini's beautiful daughter. Beatrice is even more dangerous than most of the plants in Rappaccini's garden. "Her touch burns and the cloying aroma of her breath kills." As Giovanni is drawn further into Rappaccini's machinations, he begins to become like her, with her poisons being absorbed into his very essence. The death of Beatrice, an unintended consequence of Rappaccini's experiment, and the slow transformation of Giovanni into this "poisoned being" is a damning indictment of those like Rappaccini who would sacrifice anything for science.

Science Unrestrained

In these three short stories, Nathaniel Hawthorne made a compelling case against unbridled scientific advancement. Reacting to the explosion of knowledge and inventions in his time, Hawthorne portrayed those who would seek to expound on the cumulative "body scientific" at the expense of their fellow man as reprehensible monsters. Science should never try to alter nature's design, nor should it be looked at lightly.

Other famous genre stories by Hawthorne, but more fantasy than SF, include "Puritan Passions," "Young Goodman Brown," "The Artist of the Beautiful," and "Earth's Holocaust."

Stories Reprinted in Genre Anthologies

"Dr. Heidegger's Experiment" was reprinted in *Tales of Mystery and the Unknown*, edited by Robert Potter (Globe, 1976); and in *Isaac Asimov Presents the Best Fantasy of the 19th Centu-*

ry, edited by Isaac Asimov, Charles G. Waugh, & Martin H. Greenburg (Beaufort Books, 1982).

“The Birthmark” was reprinted in *Journeys in Science Fiction*, edited by Richard L. Loughlin & Lilian M. Popp (Globe, 1961); and in *Approaches to Science Fiction*, edited by Donald L. Lawler (Houghton Mifflin, 1978).

“Rappaccini's Daughter” was reprinted in *Great Science Fiction about Doctors*, edited by Groff Conklin & Noah D. Fabricant (Collier Books, 1963); in *Strange Signposts*, edited by Sam Moskowitz & Roger Elwood (Rinehart and Winston, 1966: in *The Road to Science Fiction: From Gilgamesh to Wells*, edited by James Gunn (Mentor, 1977); and in *The Ascent of Wonder: The Evolution of Hard SF*, edited by David G. Hartwell & Kathryn Cramer (Tor, 1994).

Conclusions

Hawthorne was one of the founders of American literature in general and the SF genre in particular. On the other hand, while several of his stories are undoubtedly SF, he really used the genre to write moralistic parables. His son, Julian (1846 – 1934), also wrote several stories that fall into the SF/F/H genre. Critic Eric Rabkin called Nathaniel Hawthorne “one of America's truly great narrative artists.”

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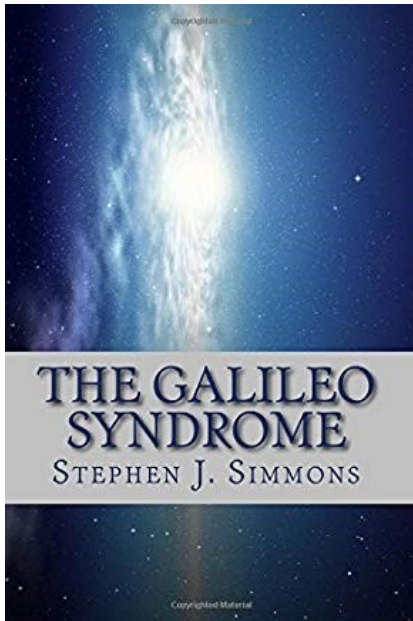
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Food of Famous Authors A Column from Cedar Sanderson

Steve Simmons Souvlaki

As I am working my way through this blog series, I am tapping authors of all sorts for recipes and dishes. There will be traditionally published best-sellers, at least one who is better known for graphic art than prose, an editor, and independent authors. In some ways this was conceived as a way to help promote the lesser-known authors, ones who I know of and sometimes have reviewed their books, but a little more publicity never hurt anyone. Stephen Simmons is one of the latter.

I read and reviewed his book when it came out, and really enjoyed it. I highly recommend it if you are looking for science fiction that is as much about exploring what lies within the mind of



a savant (two of them, really) as it is about exploring space. The title refers to the infamous scientist who was not jailed for, as popular myth would have it, his scientific beliefs as much as for his abrasive personality. What more could he have done with someone to cushion society from him and vice versa?

Now that I have given you food for thought, let's get started on the food for the belly. When I asked Stephen for a dish to prepare, he asked if I had ever made souvlaki. I hadn't, but the First Reader has very fond memories indeed of eating it hot, fresh, and garlicky from street vendors. Of course I was going to try making it! Also, it's perfect as summer heat makes cooking indoors rather miserable right now.

I served the souvlaki with a quick tomato and feta salad dressed with greek vinaigrette, tzatziki sauce and flatbreads. I didn't bake the flatbreads because having the oven on at 450 deg F for pita breads was just too... too steamy for me!

I remembered to take a picture of my grill ignition system this time.

Grill Chimney

My little grill, with the chimney.

I will only bother grilling over charcoal or wood, and I never, ever, allow lighter fluid anywhere near my grill. When I got this little guy (it's so small!) this spring, the First Reader was very dubious. He'd only ever had lighter-fluid flavored food from charcoal grills, and was hinting that a nice gas grill would be better, wouldn't it? I got my stubborn on, because I knew it was a nasty taste that had been left in his mouth, and I could show him what it ought to be like. The chimney you see in the photo allows for lighting the charcoal briquets (I sometimes use uncompressed charcoal, but this is cheaper and easier to find) with paper crumpled under them and a match to light that. It takes 15-20 minutes to start.



My fancy skewers (we picked them up while out junking one day) on the little grill.

Souvlaki

Ingredients

2-3 lbs meat (lamb, goat, beef, or pork, but you could use chicken)

5-6 Tbsp Olive Oil

Juice of one lemon, and zest

handful of fresh oregano

7-8 garlic cloves, crushed

1 tbsp peppercorns, crushed or ground, but fresh

4-6 sprigs fresh thyme

1/2 tsp cumin

4 tbsp white wine



Instructions

Cut the meat into roughly 1 1/2 inch cubes, removing any connective tissue and fat (particularly if you are working with lamb or goat, as they will add more gamey flavor than most people prefer). Set the meat aside in a gallon ziploc.

Place all the marinade ingredients (everything but the meat) in the blender. Pulse until the herbs are pureed.

Pour the marinade into the ziploc, press the air out, and seal.

Place the meat in the refrigerator for a minimum of 30 minutes, and up to two days. The longer, the more flavor gets in the meat.

Put the meat cubes on skewers, discard the excess marinade.

Grill the skewers, turning at least once, for about 3 minutes to a side.

Serve and enjoy!



Dining Al Fresco: the finest way to end a long day, relaxing in the backyard chatting with your loved one.

The souvlaki met the First Reader's approval. His only note was that it wasn't as garlicky as he remembered from Greece. I have already updated the recipe to reflect this, as I put 4-5 cloves in the marinade. But I will have to try it again very soon to see if that is enough. He insists. *laughing* Or it might be he just wants to do this again. Only he wants to try to find goat to do it

with, that's what he was eating over there most of the time. We had lamb, and not a good cut, so it was lamby in places and in others mostly herbal, lemony, and delicious. A worthy meal of a good writer. Thanks, Stephen! And thank Karen for her tzatziki recipe.

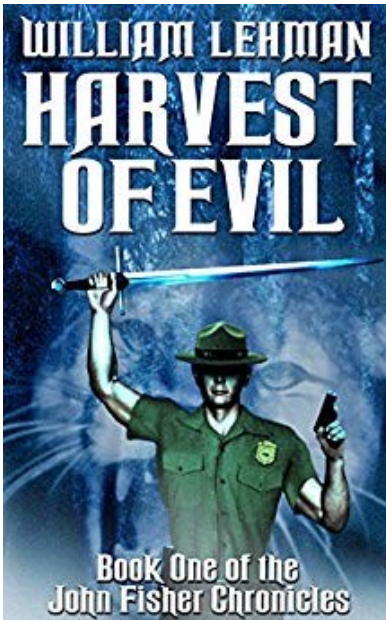
Brown tomatoes: we were given some kumato tomatoes, which were almost chocolate brown. But sweet and good in the salad.

And what evening by the grill would be complete without toasting marshmallows over the dying coals?

Because we can, that's why!



Unka Lars' Jagerschnitzel



Today I'm doing something a little different for me. You see, I know William's work best from the Otherwhere Gazette. I know he has a novel, Harvest of Evil, and it looks like a fun one. But I haven't read it yet. I think I can risk recommending it, because the man writes non-fiction with force and conviction. Besides that, novel pushes a lot of my buttons: shifters, wilderness, Park Ranger, police procedural... I've had a copy of this for a while, and I will do a full review when I've finished it.

In the meantime, I can assure you that the recipe Lehman gave me is excellent. The First Reader got almost as excited for this one as he did for the Souvlaki, as he was stationed in Germany for years and loved the food.

Jägerschnitzel: Hunter's Schnitzel
 veal or pork cutlets
 smothered in a brown gravy
 with sauteed mushrooms

Ingredients

- 1 ½ pound boneless pork cutlets
- 2 eggs (beaten)
- ½ cup bread crumbs or more as needed
- ½ cup milk
- ½ cup flour
- oil
- 4 ounces bacon (diced)
- 6 ounces onions (chopped)
- 10 ounces mushrooms (sliced)
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- ½ cup water
- ¾ cup dry red wine
- 1 dash thyme
- black pepper
- salt
- 1 teaspoon smoked paprika
- 1 tablespoon parsley
- 4 tablespoons sour cream

Instructions

Heat oil in a large skillet over medium high heat. Pound cutlets with a meat tenderizer to flatten them. Season cutlets with salt and pepper, dredge them in beaten eggs. Dredge in flour, dip in milk, coat evenly with bread crumbs. Place cutlets into skillet and fry until golden



brown (1-2 minutes on each side). Remove the meat from the skillet and drain on paper towels. Keep the meat warm in the oven while you make the gravy. Saute bacon and onions until golden brown. Add tomato paste and mushrooms, and saute over a low heat. Add wine, water and seasonings; let simmer for about 5 minutes. Stir in the sour cream. Pour over Schnitzel just before serving.

I omitted the tomato paste, wanting more of a brown gravy without the tomato flavor.

The First Reader's comment was that Americans never add enough mushrooms to Jagerschnitzel. This is two lbs of freshly-sliced mushrooms.

You know, dear, there's a name for people who are greedy about mushrooms...

Tonight, we eat like Hobbits!

The cutlets, to the First Reader's surprise, were breaded. He didn't recall that added touch from his days abroad.

The final dish, served over egg noodles (the First Reader says spaetzle is traditional, or fried potatoes) was delicious! It really was the perfect amount of mushrooms, too. They did cook down so I could stir in the skillet without making too much of a mess. But the next time we will try it without the breading and see how that tastes!



William Lehman's Jagerschnitzel