

Tightbeam 306

March 2020



The Mandalorian—Mando—Here Comes Trouble
Jose Sanchez

Tightbeam 306

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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.”

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Regular short fiction reviewers Greg Hullender and Eric Wong publish at RocketStackRank.com.

Cedar Sanderson’s reviews and other interesting articles appear on her site www.cedarwrites.wordpress.com/ and its culinary extension.

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The N3F offers four different memberships. Memberships with The National Fantasy Fan (TNFF) via paper mail are \$18; memberships with TNFF via email are \$6. Zines other than TNFF are email only. Additional memberships at the address of a current dues-paying member are \$4. Public memberships are free. Send payments to N3F, POB 1925, Mountain View CA 94042. Pay online at N3F.org. Our PayPal contact is treasurer@n3f.org. If you join, please use the membership form, at least for your name and whichever address you use.

To join as a public (free) member, send phillies@4liberty.net your email address.

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Editorial

We've been encouraged to make our zines look more different. In this issue, we experiment with a different type face, namely 12pt Baskerville Old Face. Here are a set of alternatives. Please advise on which of them you do or do not like.

Baskerville Old Face 12 pt We reach another issue of Tightbeam, the all-topics genzine of the National Fantasy Fan Federation.

Times New Roman 12 pt We reach another issue of Tightbeam, the all-topics genzine of the National Fantasy Fan Federation.

Century 12pt We reach another issue of Tightbeam, the all-topics genzine of the National Fantasy Fan Federation.

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Letters of Comment

1706-24 Eva Rd.
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February 9, 2020

Dear George and Jon:

I have gotten a little bit behind once more, what else is new, and I find myself two issues of Tightbeam behind. Here come comments on issues 303 and 304.

303... There's my loc on issues 300 and 301, and let me know if you do not have my loc on 302. I do not use interlibrary loans with the local public library...the demand for it is quite high, and there is no guarantee that I could get the books I might want. Also, they are strict about out-dated library cards, and it is tough to get a regular card in the first place. Our provincial government would like nothing better than to shut down our libraries with the idea of saving money.

With the anime column here, it is timely that in a short time, I will be attempting to get us a vendor's table at our own local anime convention, Anime North, coming up in May. AN is the third or fourth (depending on the year) largest anime convention on the continent, and we are lucky enough to live just down the highway from the convention centre where it is staged. Our overhead

is therefore very low, and it is regularly our best show of the season.

Thanks for a ton of information on Jack Williamson, one of my favourite authors. The more I see of researches into our history, the more I am reassured that all of the fun we've had since the 1930s won't be forgotten.

Just for the record, the FAAn Awards are now ready to be voted on, and I will try to attach a copy of the ballot. It's only a few days to the deadline.

304...Ah, there's my loc on 302. The work I was anticipating at the beginning of this year never arrived, mostly because the originating place for the work is Manila, Philippines, which is currently recovering from an earthquake. I hope they can get themselves put back together, and get the work going again, I could use it. BrunchCon was a fine time, but there were a number of old friends looking back at us, going, "What are THEY doing here?" We might not return.

Ted Sturgeon was an author I had wanted to meet, but of course, there's never enough time or money, and he died around the time I was starting at attend Worldcons. His books are probably out of print, but they shouldn't be. Mine still stand proudly on my book shelves. I do like to say that when it came to his famous Law, Sturgeon was an optimist.

It is about 21 minutes until I try to get that table at our local anime con, so I will wrap this loc up, and fire it off to you. Many thanks, take care, and see you with some more issues.

Yours,
Lloyd Penney

Hi George and good morning,

I just had a look at the n3f.org site and saw all of the newest issues (for me, anyway) containing lots of my work appearing as covers and interior art in the N'APA, Tightbeam and The National Fantasy Fan from November 2019 up until January 2020. They all look GREAT !!!- Thank you for posting them up. Thanks very much for using my stuff and I feel very happy to be a part of your organization !

Take care,
Jose Sanchez

Dear Neffers,

This is a letter of comment on Tightbeam #305, published in February 2020. Angela Scott's cover illustration, "Fairy Sword' is wonderful. I especially like the colored background and the hued transparency of her wings. Her facial expression suggests that one should be wary, perhaps!

Tom Feller's review of Diane Duane's Harbinger Trilogy, part of the Star Drive series based on TSR's Alternity role-playing game surprised me. I occasionally enjoy reading Dungeons & Dragons and Pathfinder role-playing game tie-in novels. (Dragons of Autumn Twilight, anyone?) Alternity came out while I wasn't actively involved in RPG's, so I'd never heard of these books before. I'll have to spend some time with any Alternity materials I might have in the back room, and the review made me experience a yen for Star Frontiers fiction. Perhaps even Traveler tie-in fiction. Or even Sky Realms of Jorune fiction! Thank you for reviewing several books that might

not of been reviewed outside of RPG magazines of the time.

Robert Hullender's short story reviews were also neat to read. Looks like we have at least two Clarkesworld and Asimov's readers in the club. Who else reads the magazines? What other magazines do people read?

Angela's "Fantasy Fair" illo was also noteworthy. Was that part of a series? I'd love to see other scenes from that fair. I could easily see it as a series of panels, perhaps details from a larger map of the fair. (Hint, hint.)

Tamara Willhite's interview with Ken Lizzi was enjoyable. As an homage to Edgar Rice Burroughs's Barsoom novels, Under Strange Suns sounds promising, as does Lizzi's penchant for genre blending and genre bending.

And Jon's bio-bibliography of James Blish was fun. I didn't know Blish corresponded with Lovecraft, and his involvement in the Science Fiction Advancement Association and Science Fiction Foundation made me want to learn more about those organizations. I've been aware of Blish's writing ever since seeing his Star Trek books at the public library as a child, but I've read woefully little of his work. Perhaps it's time to amend that.

Inspired by the Blish-Lovecraft correspondence, I spent some time this weekend reading Crypt of Cthulhu #111, published by Necronomicon Press and Cryptic Publications. Edited by Robert M Price, the chapbook-format zine is a mix of fiction, poetry, and nonfiction, all oriented around the work of Lovecraft and other writers of the weird. In his Disturbing and Disquieting Editorial Shard "From Beyond Dunwich", Price considers the nature of the Great Old Ones as presented in various stories. Gary Myer's short story "Sadiva's Lover" is a four-page narrative addressing hierarchy, lust, and the price one might pay for either. Scott Connor's nonfiction piece "The Many Worlds of Clark Ashton Smith" explores just that, drawing on the fiction as well as Smith's correspondence with Lovecraft and others. I also read several notable poems by Randall D. Larson and Charles Lovecraft (seemingly his legal name!). I look forward to reading the remainder and recommend this zine to those Neffers intrigued by a scholarly approach to weird fiction while still enjoying modern-day approaches to the form. You can learn more about — and order — the publisher's zines at <http://necropresse.com>.

Yours truly,
Heath Row

Anime

Somali and the Forest Spirit

Streaming: Crunchyroll
Episodes: 12
Source: Manga

Episode Summary: Golems exist to guard and protect their forests, and it's their nature not to interfere in the workings of the food chain. But one day a particular golem happens to find a human child, dirty and huddled in the hollow of an old tree. The child is immediately drawn to the golem and calls him "dad." Though the golem cannot experience human emotion, on some level a bond is formed between them.



Many generations ago, humans first ventured into the realms of the beast people. Though their first interactions were fruitful, eventually the humans insulted the beasts and became their targets. Nowadays humans are nearly extinct. The Golem and his surrogate child, named Somali, are in search of humans with whom Somali can live but their quest seems hopeless; there are few humans left, and many of the beast people would probably eat them if they knew where to find them. Still, their journey continues, as does the Golem's and Somali's quest to understand one-another.

Impressions: This was one of my most anticipated series this season, as I really love stories about parenthood in all its forms (unless it goes full *Bunny Drop* manga, that is). It was a pleasant surprise that Crunchyroll offered the series up a full week before its Japanese broadcast (they're a member of the production committee, which works out well for us!). Though the episode itself is rather subdued (some might go so far as to say "nothing really happens"), I really appreciated the overall gentle tone of the story so far. While the human situation is tragic, the narrative knows not to dwell on it for longer than needed, and most of the episode is Somali being a cute kid and Golem not entirely sure how to handle her rambunctiousness (but trying in his own way through logic and analysis). It's a fantasy more about setting and atmosphere than outright adventure, which is certainly fine with me.



The simple act of holding hands can speak volumes. Screenshots from Crunchyroll.

Speaking of setting, the backdrops and environments are certainly their own character in this series.



The environment is populated by odd animals and colorful, otherworldly plant-life, and the texture of the background artwork looks soft and painterly despite being digital. The beast characters come in every shape and size, too; I think my favorite of the ones who get some screen time was the moth-man waiter at the tavern, although there were certainly interesting creatures to spare ambling throughout the bustling town featured in the episode. If nothing else, this episode is definitely a treat for the eyes.

The real core of the episode, though, is the relationship between its two leads. I see within it something of a thesis statement – that being unable to understand someone doesn't preclude a person from caring about them. Emotionless characters are always interesting to me because their natural state of being is so different from my own. Much like the aliens in "A Wrinkle in Time" who don't have a sense of sight, I feel driven to understand what that sort of existence might be like. The Golem states that he doesn't have or understand emotions, but he does have skills in observation and the ability to analyze and learn from situations, which allows him to be the father figure that Somali insists that he is. I think that's a powerful statement to make.



My only real misgiving is that I suspect there might be sad things to come on the horizon. I don't mind sad stories, but sad stories involving kids and loss are always kind of tough for me to navigate. I hope that the series is able to uphold the gravity of those emotions and experiences as the characters experience them while maintaining the sense of wonder it creates in this episode.

Pros: Charming relationship between the two main characters. Bright, colorful visual design.

Cons: The story seems left open for bad things to happen (not necessarily a con for everyone).

Content Warnings: References to humans being killed for food. Child in minor peril.

Grade: B

Darwin's Game



Streaming: Funimation, Crunchyroll and HIDIVE (Crunchyroll and HIDIVE start their streaming broadcast on February 2nd)

Episodes: 11

Source: Manga

Episode Summary: Note: The first episode is a double episode. I will try to keep the summary as concise as possible.

Kaname Sudo is an average high school guy whose life is changed forever once he clicks on a missing classmate's final text message and accidentally enrolls himself in an app called "Darwin's Game." He doesn't understand the full implication of this until a match starts and he finds himself facing off against an enraged, violent incarnation of his city's baseball mascot. With the help of a classmate who clearly knows more about the game than him, as well as the blessing of some dumb luck,

Kaname defeats his opponent. However, his classmate's wounds ensure that his death soon follows. It's then that Kaname discovers the source of the horrifying body-shaped marks that have begun to appear throughout the city, and how they are certainly not some strange art installation as the public suspects.

After preparing some weaponry for himself in anticipation of another match, Kaname responds to a text from a mystery opponent in the game. Drawn into a warehouse (which might very well be a trap), he meets a young woman dressed in red. She offers information in exchange for insight into Kaname's sigil, a special power that participants in the game have. He doesn't seem to have one (or doesn't know what it is), so the young woman acts to protect herself. In this time of stress, Kaname wishes for the handgun he left at home, and suddenly it appears in his hand. His sigil seems to be the ability to conjure what is most useful to him in the moment – a powerful ability indeed. Seeing that she's met her match, the young woman surrenders and becomes indebted to Kaname, thus ending the game without either of their deaths. When Kaname wakes up two days later, he finds that he may have gained more than just an ally in this young woman.



The snake's poison spells a death sentence of a different nature. Screenshots from Funimation.

The snake's poison spells a death sentence of a different nature. Screenscaps from Funimation.

Impressions: Twenty years ago, the Japanese novel “Battle Royale” and its subsequent manga and film adaptations introduced the concept of a fight-to-the-death as symbolic of the cutthroat nature of the Japanese school system. Much like any shocking subject matter, there's been much discussion in the ensuing years about whether the violent, brutal presentation of the material was truly necessary in order to make its point, or whether it's simply gratuitous and crass, but needless to say the premise has clearly remained in the creative and public consciousness for many years now. Much like any media that achieves notoriety due to shock value, it's also spawned a lot of copycats, most of which choose to ape the violence without having anything of value to say about it.

Darwin's Game seems to be the latest in this string of misanthropic power fantasies, thrusting its every-man protagonist into a corner, torturing him with bodily injury and forcing him to witness the deaths of those around him, then revealing him as uniquely overpowered, thus giving him the opportunity to take out his revenge on whatever other psychopaths cross his path. The second half of the first episode sees him face off against Shuka, a young woman clad in red who's clearly powerful and has been enjoying the type of carnage required of this sick game. However, by the end of the episode she's enslaved herself to Kaname and transformed into some sort of nude, mewling sex object with her face buried in his crotch, suggesting that they should grow their family together (ugh). I guess she just needed a big strong man to set her straight. Yikes.



There's an attempt to make this double-length episode feel cinematic through various lighting and compositing techniques which is somewhat effective, but one major issue with the visuals reveals itself almost right away – there's a major consistency problem when it comes to the characters' faces. It gets so bad at one point that, while it's clear who the characters are, some of them look like completely different people from scene-to-scene. Thank goodness for silly anime hair.

I think series like this can be cathartic for some viewers; I know I have those moments where I wish I could say the things I really want to say to people who don't really care about me one way or the other and being able to live vicariously through a character who gets to do those things can certainly relieve some tension. For me, though, there's definitely a limit to what bad behavior I'm willing to stand by and watch, and if the point of it all isn't in service to something greater then I'm just not interested.

Pros: The act of watching characters get their revenge can be cathartic.

Cons: Another in a string of “Battle Royale” copycats that doesn't appear to have much to say. Some very noticeable visual inconsistencies.

Content Warnings: Violence (Knife, crossbow, handgun violence), decapitation (partly censored), dismembered body parts (somewhat censored), blood, some nudity (brief, seen from behind).

Grade: C-

Comics

See You in the Funny Papers

by Heath Row

This is an occasional column of comic book reviews focusing on titles related to science fiction, fantasy, and horror. You should be able to find the recommended series at your local comic shop. (You can find a local store using <https://www.comicshoplocator.com>.) I encourage other Neffers to submit comic book reviews—for this column or otherwise. Surely, we have other comics readers in the club.

Blade Runner 2019 #6 (Titan, March 2020)



Written by Michael Green and Mike Johnson, and drawn by Andres Guinaldo, this Blade Runner tie-in comic takes place in 2026. Six issues in, quite a bit has already been established—and happened. A Blade Runner named Ash rescued the young daughter of an agribusiness tycoon before she was sent to the Tyrell Corp. for genetic experimentation. Using adopted personas, they found work in lunar mining with Replicants. The mining colony was attacked by rogue Replicants, and the pair's ship destroyed—but the young woman is saved by a sympathetic Replicant. And that's all back story!

In this issue, Ash is rescued by Hythe, who tests her to determine whether she's a Replicant before repairing her back brace and equipping her to go back and get the girl held hostage by the Replicants. Despite misgivings that she hadn't run far enough or hidden well enough, Ash agrees to stop running and return to rescue the girl.

Meanwhile, Rabbit—the tycoon's daughter disguised as a young man—trades a valid gate cypher for Ramanuja for safe passage, advising the rogues that Heidecker-Vostro will come after them because of the destroyed mining ship. They reach the gate safely.

I'll have to check out the other issues. The tone of the comic is pretty solid, and the characters interesting enough to spend more time with. Guinaldo's artwork is relatively realistic, and I particularly enjoyed the muted lighting, color palette, and pacing of the test scene with Hythe and Ash. The title page indicates that the issue is dedicated to Syd Mead, "whose vision continues to inspire the Blade Runner comic series." This issue reads pretty true to the original movie, if not Philip K. Dick's novel.

Science fiction and genre fans might also be interested in Titan's other comics. The British publisher also offers titles based on the Arthur Conan Doyle Sherlock Holmes character Irene Adler, Doctor Who, the recent Sherlock TV show, and other adjacent properties.

Carson of Venus: The Eye of Amtor #1 (American Mythology, 2020)

This issue includes two stories. The first, "The Eye of Amtor," was reportedly received by writer Matt Betts directly from Carson Napier via mental projection—along with the canonical novel Carson of Venus: The Edge of All Worlds. Betts was assisted in writing by Mike Wolfer, and the



comic was drawn by Vincenzo Carratu. The opening story starts with Carson and friends scaring some Tharbans from attacking a herd of zaldar, much to the appreciation of farmers from Loton, who invite them to replenish supplies in the city. Jong Kabalo takes Carson, Korvan emissary Duare, and Sannarans Ero Shan and Nalte on a tour of the city before separating the two couples.

Impressed by Carson's anotar flying machine, Kabalo enlists Carson to construct a telescope, collecting materials from Maltor, Voo-Ad, and the Mountains of the Clouds in three days or less, with Ero Shan and Nalte imprisoned as motivation. Carson and Duare go to Maltor in search of Aprith Stones, transparent coral that can be used as lenses. There, they encounter a sea serpent.

The second piece, "Pellucidar: Dark of the Sun," then, was reportedly received by Gridley Wave transmission. (Truth be told, the introductory material on the inside front cover is among my favorites in the entire issue.) This piece, written by Christopher Paul Carey and drawn by Mike Wolfer, relates to Edgar Rice Burroughs's Tarzan at the Earth's Core, as well as another new ERB Universe novel by Win Scott Eckert, Tarzan: Battle for Pellucidar.

Victory Harben and Jason Gridley jumpstart the Gridley Wave in the Maker city of Mintra, provoking a winged reptilian creature. Here, the introductory editorial piece is more interesting and substantial than the comic itself. But we'll see where the story goes.

Fans of Burroughs will be thrilled by this comic. An all-new canonical series of books is coming out this year, including at least the Carson and Tarzan novels mentioned above. And American Mythology, current holder of the ERB license, offers multiple ERB Universe comic titles including The Land That Time Forgot, Pellucidar, Moon Maid, Carson of Venus, and The Monster Men.

Frankenstein Undone #1 (Dark Horse, January 2020)

The first issue of a new five-issue series from the world of Hellboy, this comic was written by Mike Mignola and Scott Allie and drawn by Ben Stenbeck. It opens on the Arctic Sea, as Frankenstein's creature speaks with Captain Robert Walton before saying farewell to his recently dead maker—and then heading further into the arctic wastes.

The creature encounters a bear and its cubs, which befriend him or at least tolerate him. He helps them find food, and they even sleep near each other, a sign of trust. Then a simian creature wearing a medallion kills one of the cubs, provoking Frankenstein's creature. As they fight, the simian knocks Frankie out.

Regaining consciousness in a structure of some kind, the creature meets Arobas, who nursed him back to health. The two discuss the role of man and beast, whether sin is forgiven, and the dangers of dwelling in loneliness.

Having just seen a stage production of Frankenstein and rereading the book, this comic arrives at an opportune time. Consider it a Hellboy-styled continuation of the original story. At times, Stenbeck's art reminds me of Mignola (no surprise) and Richard Corben (not really, but occasionally), and I look forward to future issues.

Star Trek: Year Five #10 (IDW, January 2020)

This issue takes place on Stardate 7148.1 on the planet I'Qosa. The sea-dwelling I'Qosa are embroiled in a cold war with the land-dwelling Lo'Kari, and after Chekov accidentally shoots a Lo'Kari ambassador during a bar brawl, the cold war heats up.

Sulu is none too happy. His I'Qosa lover Ayal and his people are now in massive danger because of the actions of the crew of the Enterprise. With the death of the Speaker of the Crest, Bryni, at the hands of the Lo'Kari, Ayal becomes speaker and summons the crest, a “living ecosystem” and birthplace to the I'Qosa and Lo'Kari alike. The Enterprise crew returns to the Sagan and then to the ship with a serum that will heal Captain Kirk (injured in a previous issue) and Chekhov's arm.

I missed the other issues in this story arc, but this issue—written by Jim McCann and drawn by Silvia Califano—makes me think the Year Five series might be worth reading more of. The original characters we know and love are present, there's a good mix of action (the spread on pp. 12-13 of the crest emerging to join the battle was particularly impressive) and reflection (the parting kiss between Ayal and Sulu on p. 15, as well as p. 21's scene focusing on Sulu's introspection while in his quarters highlights his love and loss), and the Year Five aspect of the series enables the creators to explore new ground rather than fit storylines into the existing canon.

The portrayal of Sulu as gay in the comic is slightly provocative, but in line with the reboot retcon that took place in *Star Trek Beyond*, even if it diverges from Gene Roddenberry's vision for the original series. Regardless, the comic is otherwise relatively true to the original series. There's a great full-page picture of the Enterprise on p. 4, and the issue's storyline resonates with the crew's mandate not to interfere in the worlds, societies, and people they encounter. Spock expresses interest in returning to the ship “before we become more entangled in this situation,” and Sulu's reflections at the end communicate a yearning to have been able to spend more time with Ayal—and to find him again some day.

The above review appeared in slightly different form in a March 1, 2020, letter to the N3F's *Star Trek Classic Round Robin*.

Zorro: Rise of the Old Gods #4 (American Mythology, 2019)

This is the final issue of Jason Pell and Puis Calzada's Lovecraftian Zorro series. I've read the previous issue and thought I'd reviewed it for the N3F, but that might not be the case. Zorro arrives to free soldiers about to be sacrificed to aquatic creatures summoned by cultists.

Those cultists challenge Zorro as brothers Murillo and Mathias disagree on the wisdom of the course they've chosen. Captain Eugenio leads reinforcements to reclaim the town, and Mathias uses the *ke'hng ephaai* to sacrifice his brother, transforming him into a winged conglomerate crustacean warrior to accost Zorro.

In the end, Zorro's sword prevails. It's a sensible pairing, Zorro and Cthulhu, and this series worked pretty well despite picking it up midway. Calzada's artwork is a little cartoony, leavening the cosmic horror, and that was sometimes distracting. But overall, this series was a fun read and is worth checking out.



Interview

An Interview of Fred Tribuzzo by Tamara Wilhite

I had the opportunity to interview science fiction and general fiction author Fred Tribuzzo. A professional pilot and author, he's written several novels that range from survivalism to modern fantasy.

Tamara Wilhite: Your aviation experience obviously influenced your book *American Sky*. Is *American Sky* fiction, true stories from World War 2 or a combination thereof?

Fred Tribuzzo: Tamara, thanks for that question, and a chance to set straight my work on *American Sky*. Creative nonfiction best describes the book. Whether I'm asking questions of my friend Frank Corbi on his survival of the Bataan Death March or describing a sightseeing tour in Mexico City, I use the facts, the dialogue, and impressions, and then freely arrange elements of an experience, juxtaposing various stories; sometimes adding personal experience or even a childhood dream.

Tamara Wilhite: And how else has your flying experience influenced your writing?

Fred Tribuzzo: Well, even though the ratio is different, flying, like writing, weds the analytical and intuitive. You're going down the runway and a thrust reverser inadvertently deploys sending the plane toward the grass. Instinct has you stomp on opposite rudder and pull the power back. Repetitive training, usually memory items, come into play before going to the checklist. Also, pilots are taught early in our training to pay attention to a gut feeling that something is wrong, or forgotten. So we don't discount hunches knowing that there may be a very good reason why you'd keep coming back to the same gauge more often than others. Hunches, minor epiphanies work well in writing as well.

A fellow I had great respect for, an aircraft salesman, a real no-nonsense guy, would deliver or pick up a plane he had bought or sold and often had to fly it for the first time in lousy weather with an eye to potential mechanical problems. He told me over a cup of coffee that an engine oil gauge kept drawing his attention one night, even though the reading was normal. A short time later the pressure dropped quickly, the engine died, and he was ready, immediately feathering the propeller, that is streamlining the blades with the flight path. Otherwise, the turning flat blades of the seized engine would have produced considerably more drag with a greater loss of airspeed and control problems, especially on landing. In writing, however, the surprises are usually welcome, unless it's your editor saying the plot's not working and you're close to crashing and burning.

Tamara Wilhite: Liberty Island Magazine published your *American Blackout* series, the first of which is *Pulse of the Goddess*. Where does the name *Pulse of the Goddess* come from?

Fred Tribuzzo: It comes from a nuclear weapon's burst of radiation, a pulse of energy. In *Pulse of the Goddess* the destructive burst is also "emitted" by the villainess the Brazilian, who entertains the very bad idea that our high-tech civilization of comfort, safety, and individual freedom requires complete destruction.

Tamara Wilhite: If I were reading 1950s-1980s survivalist fiction, it would assume the power goes down because of the aftermath of a nuclear war. Why does the power go out in your *American Blackout* series?

Fred Tribuzzo: In the series the power outage is due to a one-two punch: first, the sun generating a massive solar flare (like it did in the nineteenth century) destroys many power grids across the planet. A week later a rogue state specifically targets America by exploding a nuke high above Kansas. The EMP (electromagnetic pulse) wipes out power grids and finishes off the digital age throughout the continental US.

Tamara Wilhite: What led you to write it?

Fred Tribuzzo: Fear, and I needed a worthy opponent for my heroine Cricket Hastings to battle. One night I was up late researching the consequences of an EMP attack and scared myself into a sleepless night. The US has 2000 major transformers that are big and heavy and require a special railroad car to move them. It could take a couple of years just to get a single power transformer back online. The folks who have studied the devastation of such an attack put first year deaths at 90%, adding that those still alive would be inhabiting the nineteenth century. I took the liberty of devising a plot where there's some wiggle room for Cricket and company. The wake-up call from the sun's sucker punch allows for a degree of city and town preparedness. But it's still an awful scenario.

Tamara Wilhite: Will there be any short stories or further novels in this universe?

Fred Tribuzzo: Not at this time. I have completed the last two books of the series and hope to have those out within the next year.

Tamara Wilhite: Your novel "*Saint Nick*" seems like a mix of horror, fantasy and modern fiction. How would you classify it?

Fred Tribuzzo: Christian fantasy is probably the best description. My "ghosts" make a straightforward case for the riches of the Christian tradition. The ghosts also remind the story's protagonist that the fossil-fuel powered world has led to a cornucopia of spiritual and material wealth for the modern-day person. And though worship of big oil like the Lakota Sioux's reverence toward the buffalo isn't required, *Saint Nick* makes the plea--where is our common sense appreciation for a resource that is the basis for our remarkable standard of living?

Tamara Wilhite: What are you working on now?

Fred Tribuzzo: Besides the editing of the last two books, I have an idea for a modern-day Devil and Daniel Webster tale.

Tamara Wilhite: Is there anything you'd like to add?

Fred Tribuzzo: Yes, there is. I've had the pleasure of working with the fine folks at Liberty Island: my very smart and thoughtful editor, David Swindle; marketing gal and writer Bokerah Brunley, and Liberty Island's wonderful publishers: David Bernstein and Adam Bellow. And thank you, Tamara, for your interest in my work!

Movies

Bride of Frankenstein

Review by Bob Jennings



The feature film of the evening was “Bride of Frankenstein”, the 1935 sequel to the original Universal thriller “Frankenstein”. A significant number of movie fans regard this movie as a masterpiece. I belong to the other percentage of the population who believe this is a bad film, saddled with a seriously flawed plot that makes not a lot of sense.

The film is largely carried by the mood, dark imagery, and the excellent music scored for the production by Franz Waxman. There is no denying that director James Whale created a spooky gothic themed picture that makes effective use of dark shadowing and European medieval imagery, with a focus on the Frankenstein monster and the people involved with the monster. I might add that all the actors turn in excellent performances, in particular Ernest Thesiger as Doctor Pretorius.

Unfortunately the plot does not hold together. Efforts to inject campy humor into the production begin early and continue thruout, starting with Una O'Connor’s snarky comments and insults during the burning of the monster (both occasions), where she is supposed to be the wife of one of the local village monster hunters, then later, as she inexplicably turns up as a maid at Castle Frankenstein, then suddenly morphs into a lady in waiting to the future Mrs. Frankenstein, the Lady Elizabeth who is living at the castle.

The story plot tries to show the Monster evolving and gaining human emotions, but the film can’t resist showing him to be a brutal, mostly mindless creature of sheer destruction, destroying almost everyone and everything he comes in contact with.

The movie poster proclaims that “The Monster Demands A Mate!” but in fact the monster cannot distinguish between male and female, and is almost incapable of any kind of human emotions beyond hunger, thirst, and then, suddenly out of the blue, a need for friendship.

The impetus for the creation of a female monster lies solely with the character of Doctor Pretorius, who takes on the role of an evil manipulator, a malicious fiend who tempts both the young Dr. Frankenstein (who had resolved to give up his “unnatural” search for creating life), and the master plotter who also willingly manipulates the Monster for his own ends. Pretorius’ desire to create a female monster leads him to plan murders and grave robberies to obtain body parts from which a “Bride” is to be assembled.

One of the primary plot problems here is why in the world would either Pretorius or Frankenstein even bother? Early on Dr. Pretorius demonstrates that he has already created artificial life far in excess of anything Frankenstein could ever hope to achieve. He displaces glass tubes with living figures, fully formed human beings in tiny miniature, all perfect in every way, and with none of the crude chunkiness of Frankenstein’s monster.

If Pretorius can already do this, then what does he need with Dr. Frankenstein, or any of Frankenstein's crude slap-dash attempts to sew together dead body parts and somehow reinsert the spark of life? Why doesn't he just use his magical powers and create a female "bride" for the monster himself?

Then there is the whole question of why would he want to create a female monster at all. The original Monster, roaming around the countryside, can't tell male from female and has no instincts beyond basic survival. The monster doesn't want a bride, it just wants to live without being harrowed and hunted. Pretorius wants a female monster, but there is no reason given for why he wants such a thing, or why he has to use Frankenstein to create it.

Later Dr. Pretorius manages to befriend the Monster, by, (get this one), sharing a few rounds of drinks inside a mausoleum from which he has just orchestrated a grave robbery. Again for no reason at all, it turns out that the monster has apparently become addicted to wine, gin, and other hard spirits. Really? It is very hard to maintain any kind of willing suspension of disbelief when the movie repeatedly offers these kinds of inexplicable plot anomalies out of the blue.

It turns out that the Monster becomes Pretorius' willing friend and ally, doing whatever the evil genius wants him to do. Pretorius then kidnaps Frankenstein's soon to be bride Elizabeth on her wedding night and holds her hostage for Frankenstein's good behavior in creating a female creature to be the "Bride" of the original monster.

During a huge lightning storm "life" is artificially inserted into the female creature, who turns out to be rather attractive, not at all like the hideous clunky, clumsy batch of sewn together body parts that was the original Monster. But, she has all the basic instincts of the original creation, namely, she hates and fears everyone.

Suddenly, for no reason at all, the original Monster is horrified & upset & irked that the female monster decides she doesn't like him and doesn't want to be his friend. Then, yet again, for no reason, the Monster, whose sole desire thruout this film has been to somehow survive, decides he wants to commit suicide, taking the newly formed "Bride" monster with him, and also his drinking companion Pretorius. Then yet again, for no reason at all, the Monster decides to let Dr. Frankenstein and his true love Elizabeth (who has, again with no explanation at all, somehow managed to escape from her captors and rushed straight to the laboratory) to leave the building and live.

The Monster pulls a conveniently placed lever setting off a series of explosion that destroys the castle and himself along with all those he holds captive within. By the way, there is also no explanation as to why Dr. Frankenstein would rig up a series of explosive charges around his laboratory and then leave an obvious handle sticking out so the Monster could easily set off those charges.

The plot simply makes no sense. There are too many incongruities, too many unexplained events, too many stupid coincidences, too many things that happen for no reason at all, incidents that do not fit together as part of any coherent ongoing plot, beginning with why Dr. Pretorius wants to create a female monster at all.

The movie survives because of the mood and imagery director James Whale created, carried along for seventy-five minutes by the skill of the actors and the fact that the film moves so fast that most audience members don't have time to think about the inconsistencies and all the things that

don't make sense or fit together into a believable story. This is not a good movie. This is a bad movie with good imagery. One wonders what it could have been if it had actually had a coherent story plot.

Caltiki—The Immortal Monster

Review by Bob Jennings

The feature film of the evening was “Caltiki—The Immortal Monster”, a 1959 Italian science fiction/horror/monster film. The film was produced by Galatea Films who had released “Hercules” in 1958 to great box office success, then followed up with “I Vampiri” which also did well in European markets. Moving into the science fiction field seemed like a natural, especially with accomplished director Riccardo Freda doing the directing with his friend Mario Brava handling the cinematography.

The story deals with an archeological expedition in Mexico that uncovers an overgrown Mayan city and a hidden temple dedicated to Caltiki, a vengeful Mayan god about which little is known. One of their party goes insane and dies, leading them to investigate a sacrificial pool beneath the temple.

Diving into the pool they discover skeletons with plenty of jewelry and gold originally adorning the sacrificial victims. Abruptly abandoning their scientific interests, the surviving members of the expedition decide to dive and grab as much of the gold and gems as they can, so they can get rich quick. Alas, avarice and abandoning their scientific interest proves to be a Bad Thing, as something in the pool strikes the greedy diver, puncturing his diving suit. As he is hauled up, the expedition sees he is being consumed by some sort of jelly-like mass. They chop it off him, but it is clear whatever it is has attached itself to his arm and neck, and is slowly digesting him. He is in danger of experiencing an agonizing death.

Rushing their friend to Mexico City for modern medical treatment does no good; the problem is beyond the realm of medical science. The leader of the expedition has brought back some samples of the jelly-like substance for study, leaving some at the university lab, and taking a glob with him to his palatial home on the outskirts of the metropolis (apparently archeology paid much better in Mexico during the 1950s than I previously suspected).



Investigation reveals that the blob-substances react to radioactivity and grow rapidly under its influence. It is a uni-cell metabolism that seeks to constantly grow, rather than sub-divide. It turns out that a strange comet that appears only once every 850 years is rapidly approaching, and its radioactive tail passing across the surface of the Earth will invariably cause the blob to grow to gigantic proportions unless it is destroyed.

There is a soap-opera style back-story that goes with all this as well. The greedy diver Max Gunther lusts after Prof. John Fielding's beautiful young wife who was along on the expedition. He already has a sexy companion, but he has grown tired of her, even tho she is passionately devoted to him. The blob that destroys his arm drives him insane. He escapes from the hospital and crashes into the home of the beautiful young wife with rape and murder on his mind. Since the prof is off investigating things and drawing

disturbing conclusions about the blob-beast, Fielding decides to settle for violent rape.

This leads to lots of scenes of the madman chasing after Ellen Fielding clad only in her negligee, but, the comet has apparently hit the horizon, because the specimen piece of the jelly-monster breaks out of the glass case in the Prof's study and begins to grow enormously right before our eyes. In fact, it fills up the entire house, while the beautiful wife with her small daughter in arms race around with the lustful Fielding and the blob very close behind.

Prof Fielding alerts the military of the danger. The military forces arrive with flame throwers, tanks, and lots of troops to battle the monster. During the confrontation somehow or the other the wife and daughter are saved by Fielding who urges them to jump into bushes beneath a second story window (this, despite the entire house being filled with the blob and most of the outside also being heavily covered by with it). Gunther gets consumed by the monster blob, the army manages to finally kill it off, the house is completely destroyed in the process, and all ends well, or so we are told.

Am I the only one who remembered that the original blob was still out there, resting and ready to grow in that sacrificial pool beneath the ancient Mayan temple? Am I the only one who wonders how this jelly-creature can grow so enormous so rapidly while feeding only on comet radiation that doesn't affect human beings or any other creatures, and doesn't even light up the sky?

Despite a more complex and involved plot than most monster movies of the period this was not a particularly impressive outing. There was some excellent cinematography for this film which helped in creating a strong suspenseful mood, and all the acting in good, but the story, despite moving along at a rapid pace, doesn't hold up all that well. The special effects were good enuf for 1959, but also do not age well. The problem is that by 1959 the audiences had already seen this same type of story too many times before for it to have the kind of emotional impact the producers hoped for, and by 2020 the blob-monster story plot has become almost a cliché.

The movie did not do particularly well in Europe when it was originally released. It was imported to the United States in 1960 with the English language version being dubbed in New York Tira Studios who did many other Italian films of the period. The voice synchronization for this film was much better than many of the other Italian movies they dubbed. United Artists handled the US distribution where it showed up mostly as part of monster-double features and on the drive-in movie circuit. It was released in the UK in 1962 using the United Artists prints. It was periodically re-released in Italy and France in the following years, and may have been released to television in Europe as well.

Remembered by students of film mainly as the first sound science fiction film produced in Italy, it was a minor cult oddity for a long time, judged too insignificant to even be reissued when VHS tape became popular in the 1980s. The picture was finally released as a DVD in 2017. By this time the original foreign language dubs, even the British ones, had mostly disappeared. The DVD print had to be reassembled from a variety of scrapped copies of films from the UK and from American collectors.

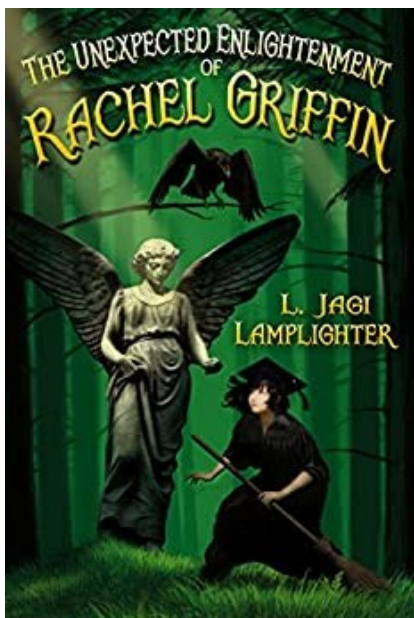
"Caltiki—The Immortal Monster" is a minor league film, but it has a stronger plot than a lot of other monster movies of the era. Most of the film's flaws are minor. Despite treading very familiar ground plot-wise the picture features decent suspense, crisp, effective film work, good acting, and it provided some light-weight entertainment to while away a winter's evening.

Novels

The Unexpected Enlightenment of Rachel Griffin

by L. Jagi Lamplighter

Review by Jim McCoy



Alright guys, I have a confession to make. Even though I'm most definitely not part of the generation that grew up on Harry Potter, I have an addiction to it. I follow HP Facebook groups. I've gotten both of my daughters hooked on it. I'm a flat out J.K. Rowling fanboi to the point that I even know that it's pronounced like "bowling." (Note to international readers: Most Americans don't know that. They pronounce it like the ow in "cow".) So when I picked up a copy of *The Unexpected Enlightenment of Rachel Griffin* by L. Jagi Lamplighter, I was pretty amazed.

The Unexpected Enlightenment of Rachel Griffin is most definitely not a Harry Potter clone, but it has some similar elements that made it feel simultaneously comfortable and exciting. Why? Well, it takes place in a boarding school. The inhabitants of the World of the Wise (as magic users call themselves) also like to ride around on brooms, although Rachel's is definitely unlike any other broom I've ever read about anywhere. And, of course, it is a fantasy story set approximately in modern times. I love that aspect of it.

The titular Rachel is our heroine and she is quite the intrepid young lady. She has been admitted to Roanoke Academy for the Sorcerous Arts a year early (aged thirteen instead of fourteen) and she is raring to go. This is a thirteen year old that I can admire. She works hard, doesn't make excuses and is extremely brave. She's also smarter than your average bear (that's why she got admitted early) and has one hundred percent recall of anything she's seen or heard. She often uses that to her considerable advantage. I like this chick. It's too bad she doesn't actually exist. I'd try to get her to hang out with my daughters.

Rachel is a member of an old-school magical family that's kind of important. She's a member of a noble family and her father is a higher-up in the magical law enforcement community. People know who she is. She's not as famous as some others, but she definitely gets recognized. I kind of liked this aspect of her. Rachel is for sure not the Chosen One per se. There is no legend following her around. She has just enough renown to get the other important characters to notice her and yet still has enough humility to get along with almost anybody.

Rachel ends up in a situation that not many adults would do well at facing and comes out of it a champion. Seriously, one would have to think that perhaps Mrs. Lamplighter has done some reading about Medal of Honor winners from the United States. Rachel has no quit in her. She can go to war at my side anytime. I mean, just as long as she doesn't stand too close. Chick takes a beating like a champ, but I'd prefer not to be taken down as collateral damage just for being next to her.

And it's weird too, because she doesn't come to school to be some kind of hero. Yes, she wanted to have some adventures but I doubt that what she had in mind came anywhere close to how it all shook out. This is a girl who wants to learn all there is to know about magic and enjoy herself along the way. I admire her commitment to learning. She's like Hermione in a way, only more so.

In Harry Potter it's just accepted that every student studies every type of magic. So we see Harry in everything from Transfiguration to Potions. That's not so at Roanoke. The students there are sorted into houses not based on some nebulous personality trait, but on what form of magic they wish to study. Rachel is an enchanter. She plays music and uses it as a focus to cast her magic.

One of her friends is a thaumaturge. He uses objects as a focus. Thaumaturgy has a bit of a rough reputation and it's something that Rachel struggles with when deciding whether or not to trust him. I'm not going to go through all of the types of magic, but I like this system.

In a world where you can specialize in very narrowly defined fields in the world of the Unwary (those are non-magical type folk) it makes sense that a mage would specialize in an area of magic too. Concentrating on one area often makes someone better at what they do than studying an area in general would. I like the way this works. Of course, I've got something similar in my current Work in Progress so I may be a bit biased.

Her cast of friends is also pretty amazing. You've got some royalty. Add to that a touch of dragon-killing commoner. Throw in a dash of that one dude from the other side of the tracks and the occasional surprisingly on our side guy and it really is a good time. The cast mixes well and is believable. These kids are something else.

WATCH OUT!! FLYING FLAMING SKUNK!!!!AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!!!!

Sorry, flashback. Where was I?

Oh yeah...

The action in this book is awesome. There are some wicked fights and some terrifying visions. The Unexpected Enlightenment of Rachel Griffin is not a story for the faint of heart. Things move quickly. Sometimes stuff explodes. It's not always clear what kind of magic is being used by who.

This is a Young Adult novel, but it's supercharged. When things get moving, they go quickly. There is very little time to stop and breathe. Don't get me wrong; I like a nice relaxing read every once in awhile, but I much prefer something that doesn't let up and that's The Unexpected Enlightenment of Rachel Griffin.

Also, a word to the wise: The title page clearly states that The Unexpected Enlightenment of Rachel Griffin is based on the works of Mark A. Whipple. I feel like I should make some type of comment on how well I see those works reflected here, but I haven't read them. That much having been said, I had absolutely no problem following the story and look forward to reading the rest of the series.

4.75 out of 5 Talking Dragons

Sercon

Fredric Brown Bio-Bibliography

by

Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D.
N3F Historian



Fredric William Brown (October 29, 1906 – March 11, 1972), born in Cincinnati, Ohio, was an American science fiction (SF) and mystery writer. He was the only child of Karl Lewis Brown, a newspaperman, and Emma Amelia (Graham) Brown. Both parents died when he was in high school.

Brown briefly attended both The University of Cincinnati and Hanover College in Indiana. He married his first wife, Helen Ruth, in 1929; they had two sons – James and Linn – before divorcing in 1947. He married his second wife, Elizabeth Chandler, whom he called Bethie, in 1948.

Brown spent his twenties in a “deadening” office job. His move to work on the Milwaukee Journal as a proofreader was a much-needed change of scene for him, and also introduced him to genre authors such as Robert Bloch and Stanley Weinbaum; in addition, he joined the Milwaukee Allied Authors Club. Brown then began writing fiction himself. His first

short story, “The Moon for a Nickel,” was published in the March, 1938 issue of Street & Smith’s Detective Story Magazine.

Brown was known for his use of humor and for his mastery of the “short short” story – stories of one to three pages, usually with surprise endings. Humor was often present in his SF and mystery novels as well.

The first SF story he had published was “Not Yet the End” in the prozine Captain Future (Winter, 1941 issue).

Writing Habits

According to his wife Elizabeth, Brown hated to write and did everything he could to avoid it: Play his flute, challenge a friend to a game of chess, or play with his Siamese cat Ming Tah. If Brown had trouble working out the plot for a story, he would go on a long bus trip, where he sat and thought, sometimes for days on end.

When Brown finally got around to sitting in front of his typewriter, he produced work in a variety of genres: SF, mystery, fantasy, black comedy – and sometimes all of these genres were present in the same story.

He loved puns, as shown in some of the titles he used for his stories, with “Nothing Sirius,” “Pi in the Sky,” “Paradox Lost,” “Cause and Defect,” and “A Little White Lye” among my favorites.

Popular SF Works

His classic novel, *What Mad Universe* (1949), is a parody of pulp SF stories. It has been described as both “a critique of its genre and a superior example of it.” His novel, *The Lights in the Sky Are Stars* (1952), told of an aging astronaut who tried to get the space program back after funds for it had been cut off.

Brown’s short story “Arena” was used as the basis for an episode of the same name in the original series of the *Star Trek* television series. It was also adapted in 1973 for an issue of the comic book *Worlds Unknown* – published by Marvel Comics. “Arena” was also voted by the Science Fiction Writers of America as one of the top twenty SF stories written before 1965.

Brown occasionally used the pseudonym Felix Graham; and he sometimes collaborated with his friend, fellow genre author Mack Reynolds.

Brown’s Principal SF Books

What Mad Universe (1949)
Space On My Hands (1951)
The Lights in the Sky Are Stars (1953) [aka *Project Jupiter*]
Angels & Spaceships (1954) [aka *Star Shine*]
Martians, Go Home (1955)
Rogue in Space (1957)
Honeymoon in Hell (1958)
The Mind Thing (1961)
Nightmares and Geezenstacks (1961)
Daymares (1968)
Mikey Astromouse (1971)
The Best of Fredric Brown (1976) [published posthumously, as was the book listed below]
The Best Short Stories of Fredric Brown (1982)

Uncollected Works

The Proofreaders' Page and Other Uncollected Items (2011) was an attempt to assemble as many uncollected works by Brown as possible. The principal contents of this book were 109 of his newspaper columns -- *The Proofreaders' Page* -- twenty-four humorous advice columns, and some of his published poetry.

Edited SF Anthology

Science-Fiction Carnival (1953) [with Brown’s introduction, notes, and short story, “Paradox Lost” -- edited with Mack Reynolds]

Non-Genre Novel

A non-genre novel by Brown, *The Office* (1958), was a character study of the lives of seven people who once worked together in a small office. Brown based this book on his office work experiences early in his career.

Awards/Honors

Brown was nominated for the 1946 Best Short Story Retro Hugo and the 1946 Best Novelette Retro Hugo.

He was awarded the Cordwainer Smith Rediscovery Award, posthumously, in 2012.

His novel, *The Fabulous Clipjoint*, won the Edgar Award for outstanding first mystery novel in 1948.

In addition, his 1945 short story “The Waveries” was described by author Philip K. Dick as “what may be the most significant – startlingly so – story SF has yet produced.”

Personal Information

Brown had a lifelong interest in chess, poker, and the works of Lewis Carroll.

According to some authorities, he was also a heavy drinker.

He suffered from respiratory problems most of his life, and in the early 1950s moved to Taos, New Mexico, in the hope that the climate there would improve his health. Taos boasted a large colony of writers; and his good friend, and sometimes collaborator, Mack Reynolds, lived there at the time.

Critical Comments

Like most pulp writers, Brown often wrote at a fast pace in order to make a living. Because of this, some critics found his writing to be uneven.

His friend and fellow writer, Walt Sheldon, described Brown as “A genius of sorts.” Fellow mystery author Bill Pronzini has written about Brown: “[His] view of the world, of the entire universe, is paradoxical and slightly cockeyed.” Popular author Donald Westlake once wrote: “Fredric Brown had one of the eeriest and most fascinating minds of his time.”

Brown said of himself: “I was an office worker until 1936 (age 30), when I became a proofreader, and started selling stories. Worked at both proofreading and writing, off and on, until 1947; since then have been a full-time writer. Have written slightly more in the mystery field than in science fiction, but prefer the latter.”

Some Concluding Remarks

The first Brown SF story I read was probably “The Star-Mouse,” reprinted in the Dell anthology *Invasion from Mars Interplanetary Stories* (1949), an early paperback SF anthology that also introduced me to the work of Nelson Bond. Brown’s story and Bond’s story (“The Castaway”) had originally been published in *Planet Stories*, a SF prozine I didn’t read at the time.

I had heard of the other authors collected in this Dell mapback – including Asimov, Boucher, Bradbury, Heinlein, Leinster, and Sturgeon (and also the artist who did the striking cover, the

popular genre artist Malcolm Smith) – but neither Brown nor Bond. I soon rectified my error, however, and included works of both these authors in my future SF reading.

Brown has developed a considerable cult following since his death, and his SF and mystery works have been reprinted many times. He has a large fan base, especially in France, where there have been several movie adaptations of his stories.

Something else about him – and something with which I can readily identify – is that his given name was often misspelled in print (usually as Frederic or Frederick), even on some of his own works!

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

Short Stories

If You Take My Meaning, by Charlie Jane Anders

Published by Tor.com

Review by Robert Hullender

Alyssa seeks out the aliens who can give her an augment that will let her exchange thoughts and feelings with other humans. But why does she want it, and what is the cost?

Pro: To start with, Alyssa just wants to be more like Sophie. Getting the grafts will make their relationship even more intimate, and no one seems too concerned about Mouth being left out. Plus she thinks she knows what to expect, so how bad can it be? She didn't grow up with much, most of her life was as a criminal, and she's consumed with guilt over her role in installing the murderous tyrant who rules Xiosphant. Accordingly it's not a big surprise that what she wants from the gift is selfish and very small-scale.

Jeremy has a much more concrete plan for his grafts: he wants to use them to enable a superior form of activism. Why try to convince people with mere words when you can deliver whole meanings to them? He grew up with a life of privilege, which he lost when his family found out he was gay. No surprise, then, that what he wants is very large scale, although it would benefit him personally to some degree.

But the grafts don't work the way either of them expects. Neither realized how much pain would be involved—apparently Sophie failed to transmit that to them, but maybe that's not a surprise, since we don't really experience physical pain again when we remember it. Alyssa tries to kill her-

self (or at least rip the graft out), and Jeremy tries to kill a Gelent—and then each is consumed with remorse, since their behavior was uncharacteristic of either of them.

Once they get past that, they learn that the Gelent are on the path to extinction, and that humans are at least partly to blame. Further, the reason for them creating hybrid individuals is precisely because they need help.

Now Alyssa wants to be an activist. Suddenly she has a cause worth fighting for. And Jeremy wants to essentially be a personal trainer for people getting the grafts in the future so they won't have the awful reactions he and Sophie did. These are both much more reasonable roles for each person, so it's quite satisfying that that's where they end up.

Con: If Xiosphant is so repressive, it's hard to believe they tolerate these grafts. If they persecute gay people, it's hard to believe they don't persecute hybrids.

Second Annual LTUE Anthology

Review by Pat Patterson

The cover art is magnificent, the sort of thing you might want to hang on a wall for friends to view. Donated by a person not previously known by me, a certain Kaitlund Zupanic, there is much to be admired here.

A Game of Stakes Max Florschutz

Victoria, daughter of famous Count Antares, the Wolf, is seeking a husband via a dragon, Dostoy the Mighty. She has established three challenges for her prospective suitors: The first was that a suitor had to be fleet of foot enough— or clever enough— to make it to the Stakes board with Dostoy defending it. The second was that they must beat him in a game. And the third was that she herself would duel them.

Dragon Soap M. K. Hutchins

These are smallish dragons, about the size of a raccoon. And they aren't really ENEMIES: more like pests. They keep stealing radishes. Somebody has been messing around with the ecology, it seems. And the poor folks who live way out in the woods are the people who are paying the price.

Li Na and the Dragon Scott R. Parkin

Unique among these stories, this is a tiny slice of, at least, a novel. It's more likely that the story will need multiple installments. Li Na, the protagonist, has been tending to the worship of the dragons in her household for her entire life. With the birth of her seventh daughter, multiple threads come together to form a crisis.

High Noon at the Oasis Jaleta Clegg

She'd turned into a horse, somehow. She couldn't recall much of anything that took place before that. But she could smell out magic, and water, and even lies, and somebody was going to pay.



Cat Magician by Angela K. Scott



Castle and Moon by
Angela K. Scott

The Wild Ride Christopher Baxter

We have a husband-wife team of something with tusks; we have a wild dragon round-up. Each one is going to grab a wild dragon, ride it to the end, and they hope to use their winnings to buy their own ranch. They might die, though.

Rising Star Michaelene Pendleton

Near the end of a wild pursuit of a mage, a dragon gets slammed through dimensions into the desert outside Los Angeles. And there, she finds a Hollywood agent at the end of his rope.

The Diamond-Spitting Knight S. E. Page

All she wanted was to be a princess. With a tiara, and everything. But somehow, the gifts that pixies give always turn out to be a pain, and she

gets imprisoned, more or less, because she spits jewels when she speaks. If ever a fair young maiden needed rescue, it was poor Millet.

Amélie's Guardian Bryan Thomas Schmidt

This is a pure, sweet tale of redemption, birthed by mutual need and affection.

Aer'Vicus Jodi L. Milner A girl and a dragon learn together, and that's a good story; however, a

throw-away line grabbed my attention, and is one of the best parts of the entire book. Here it is:

"It's as if you are a mouse standing on a corner of the road squeaking as loudly as it can about the surprising lack of cheese in its life." (Joe Monson and Jaleta Clegg. *A Dragon and Her Girl* (Kindle Locations 2497-2498). Hemelein Publications with LTUE Press)

Loyalties Josh Brown

Anessi has fought to keep her people alive, even though most of them have died in the process.

When she is sent on a mission to kill a dragon, she finds the end of her quest.

Ash and Blood Hannah Marie

I'm not sure, but I **THINK** that this story illustrates the corrupting nature of power. It's certainly gory enough, with a more than ample casualty list.

Therapy for a Dragon Sam Knight

Hmmm. Marjorie, strapped onto an interrogation couch, certainly needs dragon therapy. I'm not quite sure that the therapy is for the dragon, though.

Taking Wing Julia H. West

The little crippled girl, Sofria, sat on one corner of the widest street in Tarnisi. And, over time,

she began to speak with the gargoyle perched high above her on the ledge. And it spoke to her, as well.

Lullaby John D. Payne

Any parent of multiple small children knows the middle-of-the-night torture of dragging yourself out of bed to care for one (or more) who is sick, or hungry, or lonely, or wet. Dismal, dismal, dismal. But, at least you have the hope that they will grow out of it. Dragons, though, live for a very, very long time.

Rain Like Diamonds Wendy Nickel

In a time of drought, with the people starving, it falls upon the monarch to heal the land. That's the price of ruling.

Here by Choice Gerri Leen

You had one job: guard the woman who was ready for paradise. Wait; she changed her mind!

Dragon's Hand David Von Allmen

Well, this one is a combo: you get magic, the Old West, and card strategy, all mixed into one.

Take out the Trash Melva L. Gifford

Snicker, snicker. I don't know how many puns are hidden in this little beauty. It really is about taking out the trash, at a magic school.

Burying Treasure Alex Shvartsman

Okay, somehow, we wind up with a dragon on the throne. But this is a **SMART** dragon, who puts into place significantly enlightened policies which will, eventually, result in prosperity. In the meantime, though, there are some unemployed soldiers around.

Dragon in Distress Mercedes Lackey and Elisabeth Waters

Turns the hero-rescuing-maiden-from-dragon story on its' head, but it's a bit pervy, too. Adults only.

Generation Gap by Thoraiya Dyer appeared in Clarkesworld issue 161

Review by Greg Hullender

Young Wipwai's tribe has always fought their neighbors, but she's secretly made friends with one of them, and they plot a future of peace.

Pro: This is the story of how, as children, Wipwai and Fe a dream of bringing peace to their warring families and what happens as a result.



Cat Mage by
Angela K. Scott

From the start, we know that these folks are relatively primitive for their kind. Elsewhere there's a city where things are not so resource-limited and people can have more than one child per family. Arguably, one thread of the story is the government's attempts to achieve the same thing young Wipwai and Fe dreamed of: peace in their territory.

Wipwai's choices are severely limited because the old Tower is so single-minded and the old Worker is so brutal. When she becomes Tower, she can only trust Ancient; the others who should have supported her only hold her in contempt. They have their own agenda, and it's not hers.

But the land itself is failing them. More and more it looks as though they really do have no future. Either they need to destroy the other tribe or else join it somehow.

Fe a puts her childish dreams aside, for the most part, although she remains fond of Wipwai and even trusts her enough to bring her people's Child to her. When the Child dies in an accident (partly but not entirely Wipwai's fault), it ironically resolves the problem. The government liquidates Wipwai's tribe and gives their Child to Fe a's people. Note that this wouldn't have been possible without the relationship that already existed between Wipwai and Fe a.

What's remarkable about this story is that even though it ends with defeat for the protagonist, it's clear that the outcome (a single family controlling both territories) is probably the best that could be expected, and Fe a's tribe is far better suited to be the surviving one. Just as remarkable, despite the long time span of the story, there's plenty of tension and excitement in it, particularly towards the end.

Finally, this is the rare imaginary-toads-in-imaginary-gardens story that actually works. Quite an accomplishment!

Con: The story gets off to a slow start. The reader needs a good bit of patience before it becomes compelling.

Zines

Sci FI

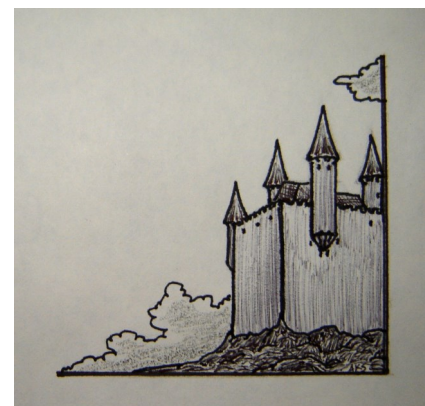
Reviews by Heath Row

Sci Fi Vol. 26 #1 (Spring 2020)

There aren't many magazines like this any more. In fact, there might just be this one. While science fiction, fantasy, and horror literature and media have largely infused popular culture and mainstream magazines such as Entertainment Weekly, TV Guide, and Rolling Stone, the best magazines on the topic might very well be the bookazines focusing on the newest superhero or science fiction movies, franchises, or creators such as Stephen King and Stan Lee. So, four times a year, this magazine is refreshing: a wide-ranging cross-media survey of genre productions—books, TV, movies, and video games. Originally published as a house magazine to promote Sci-Fi Channel (now Syfy) programming, the periodical ranges more widely now. Its content isn't all to my taste, but it keeps me up to date and includes enough of what does interest me that it's a need to read.

This 80-page issue features Patrick Stewart on the cover and includes cover lines about Star Trek: Picard, Birds of Prey, The Turning, Fantasy Island, The Invisible Man, The Expanse, Project Blue Book, and other projects. The opening Editor's Log address the recent wealth of genre remakes and reboots, suggesting the longevity and ongoing value of various comic book, film, and TV characters. The TV in Focus section builds on that, offering synopses and updates on shows such as Arrow, The Witcher, Marvel's Runaways, Black Lightning, and Watchmen.

Feature stories focus on the new streaming Locke & Key, Star Trek: Picard—I'm still watching season two of Star Trek: Discovery, so I haven't started watching the new show yet—Birds of Prey, The Invisible Man,



Corner Castle by
Angela K. Scott

The Turning, and other items promoted on the cover. Similar to the Editor's Log, some of the best content connects the past to the present. The Invisible Man feature, for example, devotes a half page to the 1933 Claude Rains movie, and the Turning piece considers the Henry James novella and the 1961 movie The Innocents, which was also based on "The Turn of the Screw."

The Fantasy Island story draws a straight line to the 1977-1984 TV series. And the Vintage TV end piece considers the show Forever Knight, positioning it among other media portrayals of vampires.

The magazine also includes DVD and Blu-Ray reviews (Joker, Ad Astra, Doctor Sleep, The Lighthouse, and others), book reviews (a Harlan Ellison tribute anthology, posthumous books by Michael Crichton and Stan Lee, a Blade Runner graphic novel, and a collection of Elizabeth Bear short stories), and video game reviews.

With a print run of 21,000, the magazine could attract more readers—Neffers, mobilize!—but the ads are a little more upscale than previous issues I've read. Past ads have focused mostly on self-published and small press material. Advertisers in this issue include Warner Archive (Shazam!), Mill Creek (Ultraman), Tor—four ads!—Baen, Harper Voyager, Angry Robot, and Syfy. Looks like the magazine can't fall far from the tree—and like the mainstream genre purveyors are returning to the magazine, too.

Sci Fi Vol. 25 #5 (December 2019)

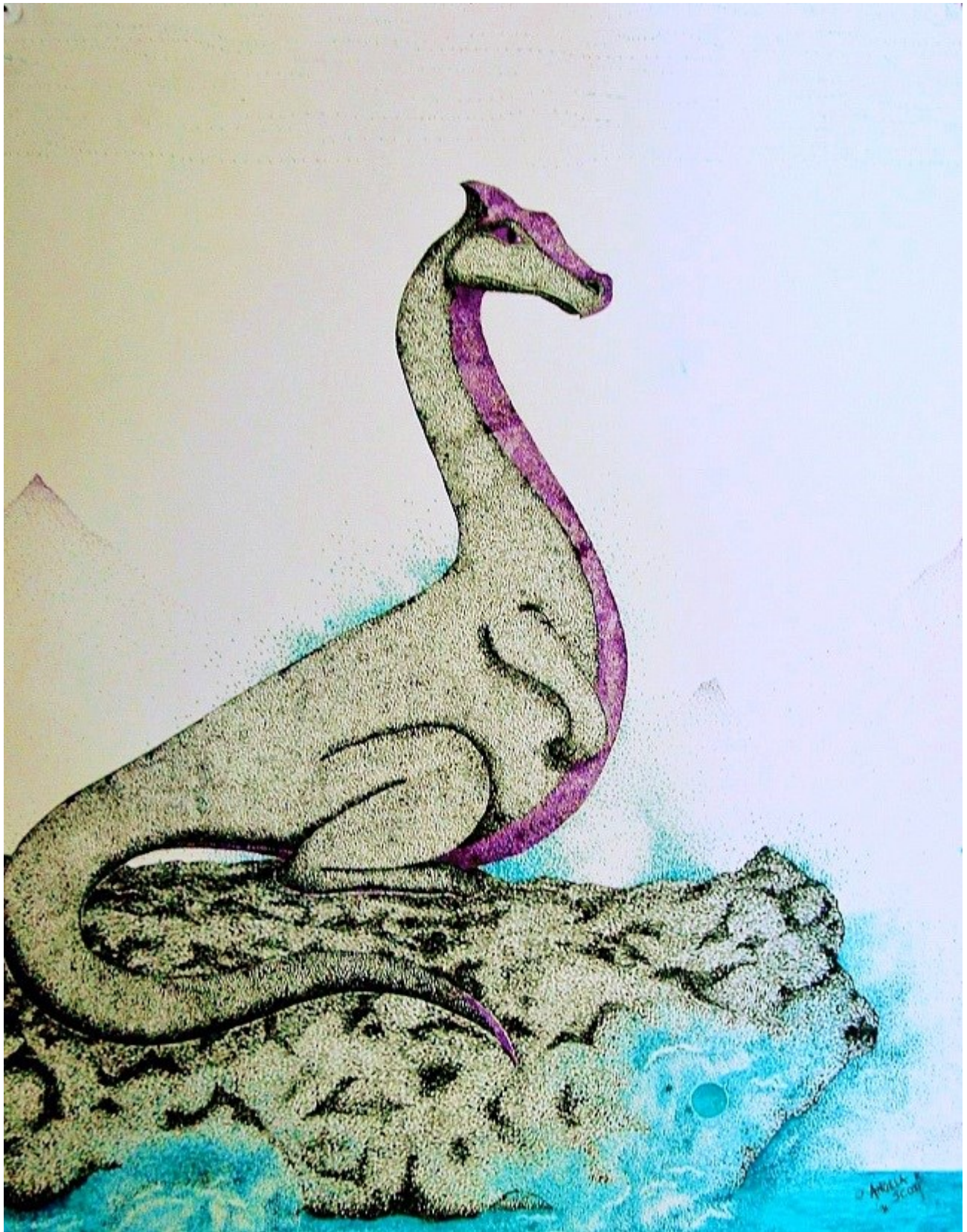
While the indicia in the more recent Spring 2020 issue says the magazine is published quarterly, the indicia in this 76-page issue indicates bimonthly, so the periodical recently scaled back its frequency. This issue features Michelle Pfeiffer on the cover, which sports cover lines drawing attention to Maleficent: Mistress of Evil, It Chapter Two, Zombieland: Double Tap, and The Addams Family, as well as other movies and TV shows.

The Editor's Log comments on the FX show The Terror: Infamy, which stars George Takei and focuses on the Japanese concentration camps in the United States during World War II. The half-page piece, accompanied by an Ansel Adams photograph of Manzanar, which my family has visited, expresses hope that the camp's setting of the show will inspire viewers to learn more about that period of our history.

The TV in Focus section covers then-recent developments in Good Omens, Stranger Things, the cartoon Young Justice: Outsiders, Preacher, Pennyworth, and other programs. Feature articles focus on The Dark Crystal: Age of Resistance, It Chapter Two, the animated The Addams Family, The Terror: Infamy, Batwoman, and other projects.

There are also DVD and Blu-Ray reviews, book reviews (including Bearmanor's Bela Lugosi and the Monogram 9), and video game reviews. While there's less of interest to me in this issue, the article on The Terror: Infamy and the American concentration camps was excellent, and it was a pleasant surprise to see the Lugosi Monogram book review.

Despite the decrease in frequency and uneven article mix, there's still plenty of interest issue to issue—and this remains perhaps the best cross-media genre magazine focusing on current productions.



Stippled Dragon
Angela K. Scott