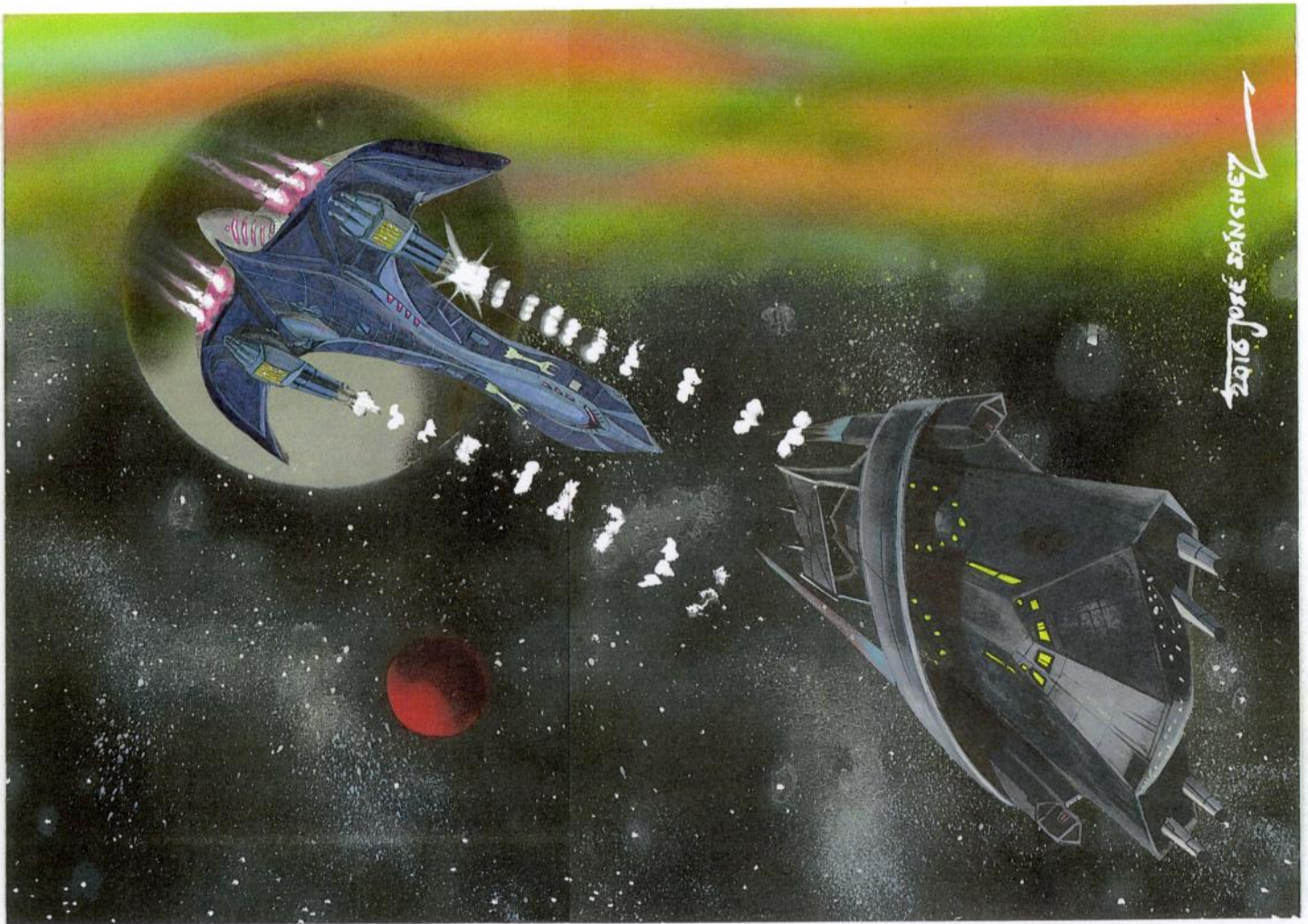


Tightbeam 308

May 2020



The Space Chase
By Jose Sanchez

Tightbeam 308

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Regular contributors include Declan Finn, Jim McCoy, Pat Patterson, Tamara Wilhite, Chris Nuttall, Tom Feller, and Heath Row. Declan Finn’s web page declanfinn.com covers his books, reviews, writing, and more. Jim McCoy’s reviews and more appear at jimbossffreviews.blogspot.com. Pat Patterson’s reviews appear on his blog habakkuk21.blogspot.com and also on Good Reads and Amazon.com. Tamara Wilhite’s other essays appear on Liberty Island (libertyislandmag.com). Chris Nuttall’s essays and writings are seen at chrishanger.wordpress.com and at superversivesf.com. Some contributors have Amazon links for books they review, to be found with the review on the web; use them and they get a reward from Amazon.

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

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

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Editorial

We reach another issue of Tightbeam, the N3F's third-oldest fanzine. We are most of two decades younger than The National Fantasy Fan, and a year younger than N'APA. Over the decades, Tightbeam has existed in a variety of roles. Once upon a time, we published letters. In other times, apparently we published short works of fiction. In recent years, we have been a review zine.

Our success as a zine, no matter the fine details of our purpose, depends on you, our fellow Nefers. It is through your contributions of art, reviews, SerCon, recipes and more than we continue to be able to publish our material. Please write for us that we may continue our fannish work.

Letters of Comment

Editors:

I'm wondering if you want comments on the books themselves, in commenting on the reviews. I was really struck by some of the books being reviewed, and think it's of discussable interest what they were about. For instance, C.J. Cherryh's novels. I notice from the names given things in the novels and their titles that there's reference to Heaven and Hell being made. The involvement of several generations is rather Biblical. That gives the book, I think, an additional interest, and is another reason that people might want to read these two forty-year-old novels. My own interest has been aroused.

I've heard Jules Verne's science described as a superior asset possessed by that author, so I was surprised to see Tom Feller describing the science content of Verne's writing as dubious, though of course he is describing it as being filtrated by Kevin Anderson. Still, there's more conflict there about Verne's science, which has been discussed for a long time now.

Lots of science fiction writers now are using the universe as their scope, which was not so much so at the midcentury. It makes present-day writings truly vast. IN CONQUEST BORN by C.S. Friedman sounds that way. I'd compare the scope described, both in space and time, to Greg Benford's BEYOND INFINITY.

Generation ships have been found in enough SF stories to make the term "generation ship" part of the science fiction vocabulary, as used in Greg Hullander's review of Gregor Hartmann's F&SF story. I have had a complaint all along about generation ships. They are part of a science fiction which portrays a racial preservation instinct in mankind that transcends individual concerns, so that there are projects that won't be completed in single generations and nobody maintaining the project will live to see any results of their endeavor. Either they like what they are doing for its own sake or they identify with a well-maintained racial consciousness.

-John Thiel

Editor: Interesting point on Verne. The attention of readers is drawn to the two modern translations of 20,000 Leagues under the Sea, as opposed to the much older one by an English don

who arguably did not always understand so well what Verne was writing, and whose translation therefore was weaker than it might have been.

In response to a discussion of older anime, Jessi Silver writes us:

Hi George,

Some of those are freshly (well, within the last few years, anyway) re-released on DVD/Blu-Ray. If you're looking to revisit some of the classics, I recommend the publisher Discotek Media (<https://www.discotekmedia.com/>) who rescue a lot of older releases and sometimes even remaster video and such. There's also a new streaming service focused on classic anime called RetroCrush (unfortunately I think it's just an app and doesn't have a desktop platform) which seems to have a lot of crossover with Discotek's catalog. It's nice that these things don't seem to be disappearing in to distant memory (although maybe some of them are better left forgotten, haha).

Nice to hear from you!

Jessi Silver

Anime

Spring 2020 Anime – What I’m Looking Forward (or Backward) To A Report from Jessi Silver

Oof, it's times like these where I feel like it's a good choice to anticipate the good in life, rather than spend too much time being dwelling on the frustrating and terrible aspects of the present. Granted, there are extremely serious things going on in the world right now and sometimes being able to make the choice to set that aside is more of a privilege than we might recognize, but I'd like to at least give it a try. And what better way to do so than to talk about brand new seasonal anime? Honestly, my awareness of this new season has been less than optimal, since I've been dealing with a lot of real-life stuff. But there are tons of resources out there that have helped me get up to speed and have reignited my interests to the extent that they're able to be reignited.

Yes, I know the season has already started. Like, really really started. But I still haven't begun watching any new anime (because life has just been... so much), so technically as far as this site is concerned, this is still timely. And technicalities are how we manage to keep our heads above water (or manage our sanity).

Note: As usual, this list comprises the new anime that sound interesting to me personally and is not meant to be comprehensive nor complete. Anime that sounds interesting from a description may not pan out, and something unassuming might turn out to be a hidden gem. For a more complete picture of the season as a whole, might I suggest the following resources (which I have also used):

My Anime List – Spring 2020

Livechart.me – Spring 2020

Anime News Network – Upcoming Anime List (constantly updated, so may be out-of-date depending on when you're reading this)

Random Curiosity's Spring Anime Preview

I will also be using the officially-translated English language title, if available, so that people are more likely to find official streaming versions if they go looking.



Tower of God

ANN Encyclopedia
Streaming: Crunchyroll
Airing: April 1st, 2020

As anime becomes more and more international, it's interesting to see which productions draw from unusual source material. This obviously isn't the first Korean Manhwa adaptation that a Japanese studio has produced, but it seems to be a fairly high-profile one. And with Crunchyroll, an American company, on the production committee (and advertising the heck out of the series, as you would expect them to), it represents a truly interesting combination of factors that I'm expecting to see more in the coming seasons.

As far as the series itself goes (boy chases after girl, boy undergoes a series of increasingly-difficult trials on the journey to do so), I don't necessarily think the story itself is that unique. That's not really an issue, but I also admit the show's production situation is more interesting to me than the content. But it does have a very unusual visual style, with settings and creatures that feel drawn from a very different visual language, and that's usually enough to keep me interested, if not for the long haul, at least briefly.

BNA – Brand New Animal



ANN Encyclopedia
Streaming: Netflix (late-cast in the US)
Airing: 6 episodes released to Netflix Japan on March 21st, 2020. Japanese TV broadcast begins April 8, 2020

Because American Netflix wants me to suffer, I'm adding this to my seasonal preview simply as a formality; we won't be getting the show in Spring (or maybe even in Summer, who knows?). But I still want to watch it.

Studio Trigger's output has always been variable, but I tend to think they're more successful when they put their specific stylistic talents toward original stories instead of adaptations of others' work. This is an original series, directed by Yoh Yoshinari, which makes me hope it'll be more Little Witch Academia than When Supernatural Battles Became Commonplace. It also has the distinction of being yet another anime with anthropomorphic characters (or, I suppose, human-anthro hybrids), which, as someone who appreciates the furry fandom, appeals to me.

The style of the series seems unabashedly Trigger, with whip-tight animation and cute, stylized characters. Story-wise, though, it also seems like the show might attempt to tackle some bigger themes, racial discrimination being one of them. I'm interested, and yet a little cautious; Trigger's stories often hit with the subtlety of a sledgehammer, and certain social issues require a bit more delicacy to avoid becoming offensive. Still, it looks like a really fun ride, and I hope that, at some point in the near future, Netflix will get a clue about how to release their anime.

Gleipnir



ANN Encyclopedia
Streaming: Funimation
Airing: April 5, 2020

So... I'm almost positive that this show is not my thing. I've had a lot of bad experiences with "hype" anime that just ends up being violent and misanthropic, and I have extremely strong suspicions that this is what Gleipnir is. But it's admittedly difficult not to be curious about an anime when its key art is riddled with images of a giant, terrifying mascot suit. The animation in the trailer looks really sharp, also.

While series about angry boys lashing out just aren't my favorite, I do take a lot of interest in stories about people with hidden lives and feelings, even if those aspects are dark and uncomfortable. We all have our secrets and they aren't always flattering. I can't claim that my hidden frustrations are quite as distinctive-looking as a toothy, grinning hell-beast, but who knows how they'd physically manifest, and what horrors they might commit?

Content Warning: Violent imagery, mild nudity.

My Next Life as a Villainess: All Routes Lead to Doom!



ANN Encyclopedia
Streaming: Crunchyroll
Airing: April 4th, 2020

I think as otaku we all hope that our arcane knowledge of anime-related minutiae will come in handy someday. The heroine in this series relies on that sort of expertise for her very survival. This take on the "reincarnated in another world" scenario doesn't seem as though it really breaks the formula, but the setup does imply that the protagonist is a more active user of her inherent advantages as a genre-savvy otaku than someone who passively reaps their undeserved benefits. As someone who appreciates stories of smart people using their wits to problem-solve, the story of a former gamer using her knowledge and cunning to think her way out of a potentially bad situation appeals to me.

And as a long-time anime viewer, I just have a soft spot for clever, funny young women in these protagonist roles. At one time I considered myself one of them, but as I get older I'm more than happy to relive those (possibly imagined) glory days through the characters I like and admire in the stories that I enjoy.

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2020.4.4 On Air
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Sing “Yesterday” For Me

Streaming: Crunchyroll

Airing: April 4th, 2020

I admittedly know very little about this one aside from what seems like a fairly mundane, low-key setting and premise. I think anime is a wonderful medium that can portray so many different types of stories, including the drama of human relationships. We might not always think of these stories when we talk about “Anime-with-a-capital-A” because the medium’s most iconic stories are flashy and visually-striking. But even stories that could just as easily be filmed in live-action can have a place in animation, so I feel drawn toward ones that choose the medium rather than require it.

This seems to be the story of people at life’s crossroads. While we associate that state of mind with early adulthood, I think it applies to all sorts of circumstances that we encounter throughout our lives – new jobs, new relationships, moving to new places, and growing our families, among so many other experiences. It’s good to have that kind of representation to look toward in media. The visual style of this series looks really interesting as well, with its rough lines and muted colors.

Kakushigoto



ANN Encyclopedia

Streaming: Funimation

Airing: April 2nd, 2020

As adults, we all have our secrets. Perhaps not all of them are as large as having a career drawing lewd manga (or maybe they are, who am I to judge?). The difficulty of keeping that sort of thing a secret is compounded when children are in the picture, because kids are curious about everything. The protagonist of this series goes to great lengths to ensure that his young daughter doesn’t learn about his occupation until she’s of an adult age – a responsible thing to do, but perhaps something that’s more difficult than it seems.

I have a great fondness for the character designs of Koji Kumeta; I enjoyed watching Sayonara, Zetsubou-Sensei quite a bit, and loved the personality his character designs provided for The Eccentric Family. I’m more wary, however, of any story that involves a dad and his young daughter, especially if the subject matter strays into the sexual realm. The fallout from the second half of Bunny Drop has reached far and wide, unfortunately. Still, I’m looking forward to this and hope things don’t go sour.

The Millionaire Detective – Balance: UNLIMITED

ANN Encyclopedia

Streaming: Funimation

Airing: April 9th, 2020



This series falls under the “I like to watch hot anime guys do things” category. There’s really not that much to it – I may not be that hot-blooded of an anime viewer, but I enjoy watching attractive characters do things that don’t completely offend my sensibilities otherwise. I also enjoy police procedurals, though that’s contingent more on the types of crimes that the series choose to focus on (I’ve yet to see any crime series handle any sort of sex crime in a sensitive way, for example). Really, cool dudes doing slick things is a genre that I can get behind, whether or not the specific anime series is spectacular or not.

The interesting thing about this specific series to me is its pedigree – it’s based on a novel by the author of *The Girl Who Leaped Through Time*, which is an anime film adaptation that I loved. It can be difficult to say how much of an author’s original work ends up in a piece of media adapted by someone else, so I suppose it’s hard to say how much of the author’s influence will end up in this anime’s final product, but it’s something to hold onto, in my opinion.

Appare-Ranman!



ANN Encyclopedia

Streaming: Funimation and Hulu

Airing: April 10th, 2020

What happens when two Japanese men wash ashore in Los Angeles near the turn of the 20th century? Why, they participate in a cross-country automobile race, naturally. It’s difficult not to be intrigued by this small snippet of story; aside from the logistics of how one “accidentally” crosses the Pacific Ocean to arrive in North America without starving or dying in some other manner, this seems like the type of tale that’s so goofy, it just might work.

This series also seems to have loads of visual style. The characters certainly don’t adhere to any kind of actual Old-West aesthetic, incorporating all sorts of anachronistic design elements into their character presentation. I love their goofy getups and wild color schemes. The atmosphere gives off a very “Jojo’s

Bizarre Adventure Part 2” vibe as well, which I’m definitely here for.

Arte

ANN Encyclopedia

Streaming: Funimation and Hulu

Airing: April 4th, 2020

This series is almost a no-brainer for me. It stars a young woman who confronts expected gender roles in a time period where this was difficult to accomplish. She does this by



Dino-Dragon by Angela K. Scott



choosing a vocation that's close to my heart – fine art. Set in Firenze, Italy during the Renaissance, the series seems filled with potential for historical commentary and robust culture, in service of an inspirational story.

My one potential beef is that the gender element to the story seems like it might be a bit ham-fisted. This isn't to say that there aren't people out there who need the mere concept of gender-equality knocked into them with a blunt instrument, but the subject itself is full of complicated feelings and nuance (at least for me) that the story of one (white) woman overcoming some obstacles really doesn't tell the whole story of the challenges that women have faced when attempting to enter into traditionally male spaces. But let it be known that this is a teeny, tiny, extremely negligible complaint. I'm just happy that this sort of story exists in a medium that I love.

Listeners



ANN Encyclopedia
Streaming: Funimation and Hulu
Airing: April 3rd, 2020

Anime and music are two great tastes that taste great together, and there are lots of really memorable anime that incorporate music in creative ways. This original series revolves around music, or really the lack thereof – the characters fight an antagonistic group called the “Earless” in some music-less post-apocalyptic landscape. Somehow things must change, as the trailer involves some pretty rockin' guitar riffs and the visual motifs (including some aspects of some of the characters) recall things like guitar amps and such. The details of the story are a bit fuzzy to me, but it looks cool.

This series has been conceptualized by Dai Sato, who's a fairly respected writer (though sometimes known to be pretentious – I recall some essay or interview he gave many years ago decrying the fact that anime fans don't seem to be interested in substance or challenge in their entertainment – while I prefer to watch things that require a little bit of analysis, I get a little tired of people who believe that's the only way one should consume entertainment). For what it's worth, I just tend to have an affinity for original anime projects, so I'm excited about this one.

Wave, Listen to Me!

ANN Encyclopedia
Streaming: Funimation
Airing: April 3rd, 2020

The setup for this series reads like a cringe-worthy personal horror story – a young woman goes on an angry rant that's subsequently played over the airwaves. Yikes! I'd be embarrassed. Yet,

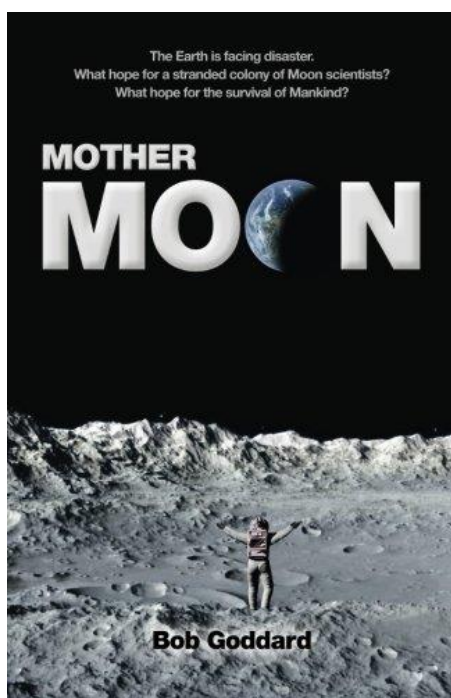


when she confronts the radio stations personnel, she somehow stumbles into a job as a radio talk-show host. Funny how life works out, isn't it?

This is one of the few comedy-forward series I've been interested in for a while. The trailer alludes to both situational comedy and some completely over-the-top physical comedy, both of which I can get behind (as long as it's not too cringe-y). I'm also curious because the author of the manga on which the show is based also created *Blade of the Immortal*, and it fascinates me how someone who could pen something so famously violent might also create a story that's so comedy-focused. The tonal whiplash is fascinating to me.

Novels

Mother Moon by Bob Goddard Review by William Cruz Carroll



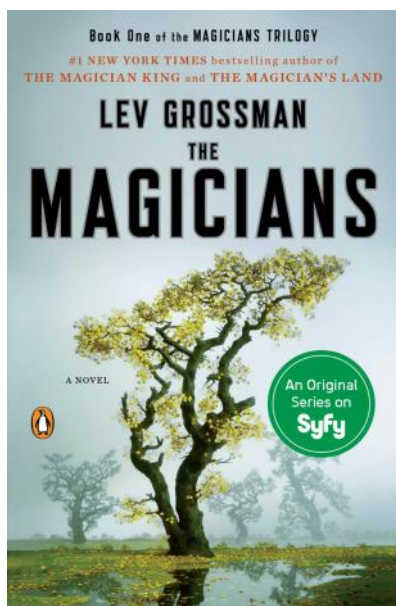
This book captured my imagination from the beginning. I was hard-pressed to slow down and enjoy the book as it unfolded. Having the eBook and later the audiobook with whispersync gave the advantage of both worlds. Early on, the book had the feeling of something like *Cloud Atlas* by David Mitchell and *Seveneves* by Neal Stephenson. Being a great fan of both, it was intriguing from the first page to the last. Although I liked the book, and do plan upon reading it again later this year... the ending was a real cliffhanger. It is my hope that the following books in this series will jump back in time to the future to fill in such omissions. The book was written in the UK, so do not let words like tyre confuse you. As for Bernard Faricy as the Narrator. I was warned by someone (unnamed) not to purchase the audiobook because he was rather flat and dry. Rather glad I ignored that opinion. He did a good job. I would not even mind listening to him do another book. Buy the eBook, buy the Audiobook. *Mother Moon* by Bob Goddard has my quite positive recommendation.

Spoiler... little did I know that we were not looking at 2 points in time, but the same points in time using 2 calendars. The revelation was epic.

The Magicians by Lev Grossman Review by Christopher G. Nuttall

The Magicians is a deeply overrated book.

There's no way to get around this. The world-building is derivative in many ways – drawing its principle inspiration from Harry Potter and Narnia – but that alone is not enough to dissuade me from finishing a book and moving on to the sequels. Indeed, the world-building has just enough



original flair to keep my attention.

The problem lies with the main character, the ‘hero.’ I started to dislike him the moment I first met him and my feelings didn’t improve as the book went along. Quentin Coldwater isn’t much more likeable than Left Behind’s Rayford Steele (although he’s much less creepy) and while he does have a few moments of self-reflection (Steele has none), he never actually grows into adulthood. Indeed, in many ways, Quentin is the boy who never grew up. And while the book is aware of his weaknesses – Alice points them out to him at one point – he is never seen to overcome them.

Quentin – a brilliant student from a wealthy family – is obsessed with finding the adventure that will give his life meaning. Or he thinks will give his life meaning. He finds his way to Hogwarts – sorry, Brakebills Academy – where he studies magic, but he is still not satisfied; he finds

his way to Narnia – sorry, Fillory – where his lust for adventure leads to tragedy and a return to the mundane world ... that lasts around five or six pages. And yet, Quentin is simply unsatisfied by his life.

It is this complete lack of satisfaction that leaves me wanting to shake him. Quentin is basically a spoilt rich kid, the type of person – like Chelsea Clinton – who can comfortably say that he doesn’t care much about money. During the second part of the book, Quentin and his friends basically act like college students even though they’d not in college any longer – they spend their days in hedonism while the rest of us have to count pennies while desperately searching for a job. Quentin has the love of a good woman, yet he cheats on her purely for shits and giggles. And then he has the gall to be hurt when she refuses to take it in good part.

Quentin is simply never satisfied with his life.

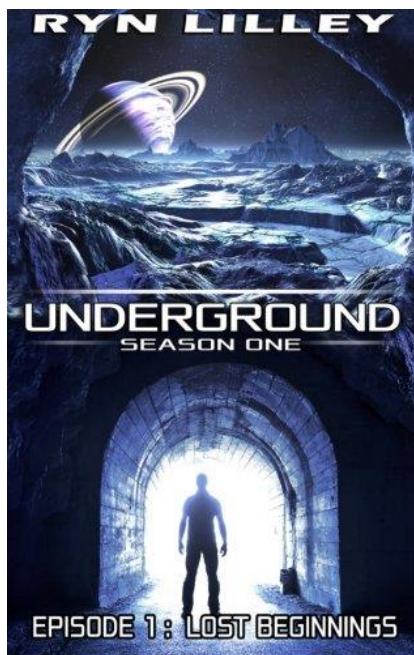
I’ve said that several times because it is a recurring theme in the book. He lusts for adventure, for something that will give his life meaning, then largely ignores it when it is right in front of him. And then, when he does find a gateway to another world, he and his friends plunge in without thinking.

It would be fun, perhaps, to write a novel exploring what happened if the four Pensive children – the original children – stumbled into Narnia as adults. Children and young teens accept the magic of the world, adults would start asking questions. (And realistically, can you blame Susan for turning away from Narnia?) But this book doesn’t really answer any of those questions. Instead, they just blunder around like idiots.

The Magicians is also badly-paced. The first part of the book – life in magic-college – covers several years; the second part – life as a post-student – seems equally as long. The third part, where the adventure really starts, isn’t anything like long enough. I would have preferred, really, to have the entire first book set in college. There are a lot of ideas here, but Grossman doesn’t do any of them true justice. Indeed, quite a few aspects of Harry Potter or Narnia that should have been explored are not.

In the end, The Magicians is an interesting book badly let down by its main character. Two stars out of five.

Ryn Lilley's Underground Episode One: Lost Beginnings Review by Jim McCoy



Sometimes I read a story and think that the author must have spent a lot of time watching television and/or movies. Often, this is for a bad reason but it doesn't have to be. I watch a lot of television too and if I tell the story about Return of the Jedi being the first movie I ever saw at the theater one more time I may be murdered. I've loved going to movies ever since and now I've got Netflix. I mention this because Underground Episode One: Lost Beginnings has a television style feel to it. I really did feel more like I was watching this on television than reading it at times. It has similar pacing and dramatic draws as a full hour episode of something fun minus the commercials. Come to think about it, Ryn Lilley seems to be encouraging my Netflix addiction without trying to. That's okay because I enjoyed the book.



Robotech—New Generation
Soldier by Jose Sanchez

The first three books in the series are known as Season One, so I'm thinking that this is intentional. As a matter of fact, I actually went looking to see if there was a television series of the same name. I couldn't find one on the American version of Amazon, but this book was sent in by Dave Freer. He lives in Australia so maybe it is a show there. Then again, maybe not too. I've never been to Australia so I'm not going to claim to know anything about their television shows.

Part of the reason I say that this feels like a TV show is because of the way it starts. In a way it feels almost like an episode of Doogie Howser. Seriously. The book starts with a series of emails going back and forth to set the scene. We get to know the characters a bit and then it all drops in the pot and things go from scary to bad to worse in something like two minutes of camera time. The acceleration curve is steep.

This book, like many others admittedly, has a tendency to flash back and forth between point of view characters rather quickly. I'm a big fan of this kind of thing. George R. R. Martin and Harry Turtledove both come to mind. Lilley uses the technique effectively, yet I can't quite get over the fact that it feels like there is a director outside switching scenes and soundstages. I kept waiting for jump cuts. It was a lot of fun and kind of took me back to a class I took called Intro to Film. I kept trying to picture the camera angles.

The main character is a teenage boy who owns a computer/Artificial Intelligence with a nagging problem. He needs to get his homework done and the thing will not leave him alone. It's just as he gets it done and decides to head off to the other side of the asteroid that he lives on that things get interesting... and he ends up waking up somewhere he'd rather not be. The inhabitants of his new planet aren't human and their medical technology is not up to snuff and it just gets crazier from there. I really started to feel for the kid.

At one point the book cuts to either another planet or another part of the same planet. Things got a little hazy for me here. Here we meet a gladiator, imprisoned for a crime and forced to fight for his life. Things don't work out for his captors as he fights better than he is supposed to. He eventually manages to get himself freed but only because there is a war coming and his descendants will prove useful to the war effort. Apparently he has strong genes and is therefore useful as breeding stock. He is given a leadership position and then... the book ends. Left unclear is whether the war will be against humanity, or the planet where our heroes are, or somewhere else. Also unclear is how the humans in the book relate to this whole thing.

This is where the sensation of watching a TV show gets even stronger. *Lost Beginnings* has a lot of similarities to the first episode of *Farscape*, including the part where nothing is resolved and we're left with more questions than answers. There is a sequel out so I guess we'll get some there. Of course, that has the potential to lead to more questions, which will lead to another sequel... Yeah, that seems to be the way good SF is trending right now. I won't complain.

Lost Beginnings could have been longer. Things move really quickly and it would have been beneficial to see some more details added. I didn't count the words in this one, but I read it on my phone and I went through it in no time. It wasn't very long at all. What was there was definitely enjoyable, but I really wish there was more. Answering a few more of the questions brought up by the story would have been helpful as well.

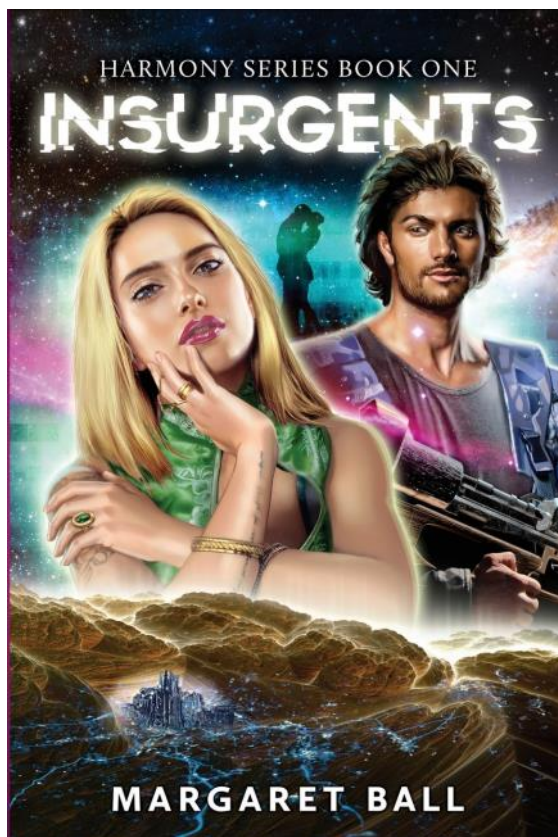
It did take a little longer for this book to really get started than I wanted it to. The emails, the typical disagreements with parents were useful as lead in material, but I prefer an opening that just explodes from the page. We've all seen the opening to Episode IV right? The one where the Star Destroyer comes out of nowhere and starts firing on the Rebel ship? That type of opening is missing here and I would have preferred to see something in that vein rather than dragging the beginning out. Those are minor things though and other than that the book was really good. I would seriously like to see this on my TV at some point. I think it has that kind of potential.

Bottom Line: 4.25 out of 5 alien artifacts.

Insurgents by Margaret Ball **Review by Pat Patterson**

When you have literate friends, you are always going to be prompted to read new material. This is TRULY important for someone like myself, by which I mean the kind of person who reads no newspapers, watches no TV, subscribes to no magazines. I'm sure that the latest lovely works are being promoted in all the customary places, but I pay less attention to those than I do to the occasional coffee stain on my monitor. (I get those from time to time, because I read something goofy, and spew coffee through my nose.) I frequent one or two Facebook sites, subscribe to a couple of blogs, and that's it. Literate friends post in those places, and I use their research to my advantage.

So a couple of weeks ago, some of my literate were raving about Margaret Ball, and her latest book. I do not know this Margaret person, and perhaps that means that my environment is sealed just a bit too severely. Couldn't say. Don't really care. But one thing was clear: Margaret Ball issuing a new work was making people run around in circles, emitting squee noises; people



whose opinions I respect.

So, I figured, I'll get the book. Assorted Huns and Mad Genius types like her work, it's worth a try.

Then, I looked at the cover art.

Oh, my.

This is the kind of art that screams to me : "DO NOT GET THIS BOOK!" It is very well executed, I should make that clear. It's just that it trumpets 'ROMANCE' to me, and romance, dear friends, is something I do.not.like(true). My gift-from-God, happily-ever-after trophy wife Vanessa, the elegant, foxy, praying black grandmother of Woodstock, GA, likes romance. She also likes Hallmark movies. Especially Christmas movies. I wouldn't mind that so much, if she didn't want ME to watch them WITH her.

And this looked like the kind of book she would read. There is a beautiful blond woman, staring dreamily off into the distance; standing behind her is Mr. Tall Darken Handsome. He gazes on her with just the right amount of love

and intrigue in his eyes...

STOP THE MADNESS!!!

But, despite the cover, I got the book.

And it's great! It's not a cow-eyed romance at all, although there IS love and affection exchanged between the two characters portrayed on the cover.

It's an adventure story, with intrigue, and treachery, and adherence to principles, and honor, and all of the good sorts of things that produce a nicely done story. It is, I suppose, going to be forced to bear a YA label, just because there isn't any naughty language or scenes with heaving whatever. Don't let that YA thing put you off, though. It's a great read. And this recommendation is from a guy who left off reading this book and immediately for sheer reading pleasure picked up one of Ringo's earliest Baen books, about the Posleen invasion.

The core story is that on a planet far, far away, a group of idealists have formed their society, and now demand everyone else conform to the terms of their perfect social order, or be deported. Eventually, that's not only murderers and thieves, it's anybody who has an innovation in mind.

The penal colony rebels. The parent civilization sends governors who repress, and then a general to rescue the governor. And he takes his daughter along.

That's her on the cover. And that's one of the lead rebels standing behind her. But it's not a romance! Oh, my, NO! It's an ADVENTURE story! Get the book!

Shorter Works

The Haunting of Tram Car 015 by P. Djèlí Clark

Published by Tor Publishing

Review by Greg Hullender

Strong Characters in a Cool Setting with Lots of Action

(Steampunk Fantasy Mystery; A Dead Djinn in Cairo Universe) Handling a routine haunting is a bit mundane for an agent of the Ministry of Alchemy, Enchantments and Supernatural Entities, but no one ever heard of a haunted tram car before. Although this is set in the same universe as "A Dead Djinn in Cairo," there's no overlap, and the stories can be read and enjoyed in either order.

Pro: The story has several charms, starting with the setting. The bustling, prosperous, magical Cairo of 1912 really comes to life in this tale, with its rich foods, smells, and, of course, entertaining people.

Hamed doesn't hold a lot of surprises; he's a standard-issue police type, but he's honest, hard-working, and has his priorities straight.

Agent Onsi provides non-stop comic relief. My favorite was his initial speech to the AI, the one starting with "Good Morning, unknown being," where he tells it it's violating the law and needs to depart the tram or else be arrested. And yet his various enthusiasms make him easy to like, and he does earn his place at Hamed's side.

The plot has plenty of action and plenty of tension, and the ending is very satisfying.

Con: The story verges on slipstream, which is fine, but it's not really a humor piece, and I think that deprives the story of any emotional content.

Gremlin, by Carrie Vaughn

Asimov's Science Fiction issue 05-06|, 2019

Review by Greg Hullender

Sweeping, Triumphant, Moving (Epic Military SF) A Russian fighter pilot in the battle of Stalingrad comes back from a mission to find a wounded alien stuck under the wing of her airplane.

Pro: There are really three stories here spanning centuries, but the overarching story is how Natalia's descendants returned Drook to his people.

Drook is well named; he is a good friend to Natalia, to Elena, and, presumably, to many generations of their descendants. He returns Natalia's kindness to him a hundred times over, and he well deserves Ellie's efforts to find his home and take him there.

For me, the most moving scene in the book is where Drook saves Elena by holding her plane together long enough for her to land it at her base. I'm not quite sure why that one had more punch than the final scene, though.

Con: Why is Drook only passed to female family members? That seemed contrived.

It was also hard to believe that no one ever took Drook to be examined by scientists, who might have deciphered it's language much earlier.

**The Gorilla in a Tutu Principle or, Pecan Pie at Minnie and Earl's,
by Adam-Troy Castro Analog Science Fiction and Fact issue 09-10|19
Review by Greg Hullender**

(Future Fantasy) A young man working on the moon during a construction boom keeps seeing two men doing crazy things in the middle of nowhere. Men who leave no trace and whom no one else can see.

Pro: The main fun of this story is all the cultural references. Even before Minnie tells us, it's pretty obvious that Ben is seeing visions of Laurel and Hardy on the moon. (The bowler hats, the relative proportions, and the slapstick give it away.)

The Stanley G. Weinbaum story Minnie talks about is "A Martian Odyssey (1949), and it's one of the classics of SF.

The band that plays at Ben's wedding is the Beatles, as the "Blue Meanies" are a reference to their film "Yellow Submarine." (1968)

Beyond that, the emotional payoff of the teleportation scene is worth the whole read up to that point.

Con: Once you figure out this is Laurel and Hardy on the moon, it's very tedious waiting for the explanation. Laurel and Hardy are better seen than described, and, as Minnie points out, Ben's descriptions are dry and dull and suck all the life out of the scenes, and it's tedious reading through them when you already know what's going on. Even with Ben's delivery, I really don't see how anyone else failed to recognize that he was describing Laurel and Hardy sketches.

Minnie and Earl are surreal by themselves. Perhaps if I had read the earlier stories, they'd just be part of the background, but coming to them right after Laurel and Hardy really didn't work for me. I wasn't ready for yet another suspension-of-disbelief breaker.

There really isn't much to the main story beyond this. Ben sees alien cosplayers. Gets confused. Gets advice from Minnie. Meets the cosplayers briefly, and they help him out. The end. Everything else is the framing story, and that's pretty much all infodump.

**The Savannah Problem, by Adam-Troy Castro
Analog Science Fiction and Fact issue 01-02|19
Review by Greg Hullender**

(SF Action/Adventure; Draiken) Draiken kidnaps a hired killer from a space station and spirits

him away for a “demonstration.” But what sort of demonstration could possibly change the man’s mind?

Although this story can stand alone, it’ll be extra fun for anyone who’s read the previous stories in the Draiken series.

Pro: Without a doubt, the best part of this story is the nonstop thrills, chills, and excitement. Hunting Jathyx, knowing Draiken is likely to lose, trying to get Jathyx off the space station, trying to escape unnoticed, talking to Jathyx at risk of being stabbed, trying to evade the “Dart,” etc. Every point in the story is drenched in tension, and every scene has a good payoff.

We do end up wondering (up to the very end) what possible demonstration could convince a man like Jathyx, so the ending is quite satisfying.

As a bonus for anyone who read the previous story, we knew that Andrea Cort sent Draiken here to get him out of her hair, but we didn’t know what she told him. Now it seems clear that she told him that Jathyx had been kidnapped from the Belari Alliance and was the victim of the sort of mind control Draiken is fighting. In between stories, he must have gone to Belari, made his case to the general, and then come to Piithkarth to capture Jathyx and bring him to her as proof.

Con: It ends on a cliffhanger.

Waterlines by Suzanne Palmer
Asimov's Science Fiction issue 07-08|19
Great Characters, Great Plot, Great Setting

(SF Thriller) By treaty, people on Erax never talk to the Oceanics, so when an Oceanic turns up at a south polar base to deliver a few dead human bodies, it’s trouble for sure.

Pro: It’s kind of cool the way the story morphs from a first-contact story to a murder mystery to a thriller in a way that steadily ratchets up the tension and never drags. Plenty of action, plenty of excitement,

The setting itself is very rich. The surface operation has quite a few people doing various jobs across the planet, and the hints of what Earth society is like are pretty grim, what with nonstop surveillance and executions without trials. The Oceanics’ society (nice touch that they’re not natives either) is well-enough developed to be interesting as well, and their harmony between organic beings and AIs is a nice idea. Finally, the awful injustice of the people turned into Yetis makes a horrible sort of sense as well.

Of course, the final revelation is a big deal too, which I think means that not only are the Yetis modified humans, so are the Oceanics..

There are only three well-developed characters, but they’re great: Ray, of course, who’s much more competent than he gives himself credit for. Lena, whose mix of honesty, loyalty, and cleverness makes her adorable. And, of course, Ajr en Logo, who knew it was urgent that his people and humans learn to work together.

Finally, the scene where Hudson has tried and failed to save Haldi is really touching.

There are a number of small touches that are really nice, but I particularly liked “Lena in self is more frightening than you.”

I liked the explanation for why the Dwellers and Drifters had such good command of our language.

Con: The key bad guys are introduced early, but they make so little impression that you have to look them up again when you meet them during the climax.

The dialogue with John Eddy at the climax hits a wrong note for some reason, although I can't put my finger on why.

A small but annoying detail: “Hollie Goodman” turns into “Hillie” in the middle of the story.

Videos

Star Wars: The Force Awakens Review by Jim McCoy

Long, long ago (in 1983) in a galaxy far, far away (or maybe it was a movie theater in suburban Detroit, I get confused sometimes) a much younger Jimbo saw a movie called Star Wars: The Return of the Jedi. It was the beginning of a love affair that has lasted for over thirty years now. There have been good patches (the re-release of the original movies) there have been rough patches (the Special Editions and the prequels) but it has endured on the strength of a strong story and a sense of wonder. As I look back over the better days of my life one of them will always be the day I sat in a movie theater with my mom and watched some dude lead his kid out of the place because he thought Jaba the Hutt was gross. (True story). So, when I heard that there was yet another trilogy coming, I got both excited and nervous. Excited because I wanted more Star Wars. Nervous because I didn't want them to screw it up again. And this time Disney made the movie. We didn't need another Jar Jar. Fortunately, we didn't get one. What we got was far better than any Star Wars product since ROTJ. I hate to say it, but Disney got it right where George Lucas didn't. Make no mistake about it. Star Wars: The Force Awakens delivers.

I'm not going to spoil the story. And granted, I don't get many comments but I will delete any comments that contain spoilers but I will say that I loved this movie. I loved this movie because it introduced new characters that I care about. I loved the story. I loved the twists. I hate the fact that maybe the biggest one was spoiled for me by some douchebag on Facebook, but I can't put that one on Disney. I can't get over the fact that I had a couple of theories about things going into this flick and they're right, well...probably... or uhhh...maybe...well... I'm still trying to work things out but there are all kinds of issues still to be resolved in the sequel and things seem to be going in a direction that makes sense but is still open to interpretation. I mean, I went to see The Force Awakens and walked out wanting to see the sequel. It was that good. Of course there was this one part, that felt like it confirmed one of my theories probably but then....

UGH!!! Yeah, I could still be wrong. I'll be waiting two years to find out if I'm right or not and I'll be suffering the whole time. Then again, it beats going to see Revenge of the Sith simply because I had seen the first two and well, it was Star Wars... kinda. And yes, it was the best of the prequels but that's like saying it was the best tasting Brussels Sprout. The Force Awakens wasn't a Brussels Sprout though. It was a big honking steak.

Let's face it. My two favorite things to see in a movie or read about in a novel are a BAFF (Bad Ass Fuckin' Female) and a BAFF (Big Ass Fuckin' Fight). Yes, they have the same acronym. Sue me. This movie had both. Rey was a straight up ass-kicker. Of course there was a fight. I won't go into details but it was huge and things blew up all over the place. It's Star Wars. It's Space Opera. It was like being a little kid again. I can give no higher praise.

If the Special Effects crew doesn't win an Oscar I'm going to call bullshit and never watch the Oscars again. Well, ok. I don't really watch the Oscars but that's because most of my favorite movies lose to artsy crap that sucks. Please, if you have a vote in the Academy or if you know someone who does or if you know someone who knows someone who does don't vote for anything else. I'm not asking for a win for best movie, although it probably deserves that too, but simply one for Special Effects that dazzled. Industrial Lights and Magic is the best for a reason and that reason is Star Wars. The Force Awakens is their best work yet.

I've always been more about the story contained within a movie than the music and story is what I've developed this blog around but I'm also a band geek who played John Williams's music in marching band in high school. Something the SW franchise has always done to great effect is using music to influence emotion and emotional reaction is what makes a good story. Williams once again knocked it out of the park. I have always hoped that one of my kids would play in a marching band someday. Should that happy day come to pass, I now hope that they get to play some of the music from this movie. It was that good. It reflected the music of the first two trilogies but had enough of a new sound to be distinctive. I was impressed.

As we've all known for months now, Mark Hamill, Carrie Fisher and Harrison Ford are all in the movie reprising their original roles. I've been critical of Star Trek in the past for overusing old characters but that didn't happen here. Han, Luke and Leia were there and they played roles with varying levels of importance but they never overshadowed the new cast. It never felt like they were there just to be used as exclamation points. I remember DeForest Kelley and Leonard Nimoy refusing to have anything to do with it.

In short, The Force Awakens was everything I hoped it would be. I don't say that about many movies. And, while I can't claim to have been there since Day One since I hadn't TURNED one yet, I've been a fan for a long time. I grew up with the toys and the games. I read the books with the record that went with them. This film was a worthy successor to those films in ways that the prequels just weren't. I hate to say it, but here's to the Mouse. Long may he reign.

Star Wars: The Force Awakens
Lucasfilms, 2015
Review by Chris Nuttall

One problem with having a baby is that going to see a movie when it is new is impossible, so watching The Force Awakens had to wait until it came out on DVD. And it says a great deal

about the movie that I watched it in three instalments, rather than sitting down and letting it play from start to finish.

The Force Awakens has two major problems, both of which need to be acknowledged before we proceed. On one hand, it isn't Heir to the Empire. The Expanded Universe had its problems, but the Thrawn Trilogy books were outstanding and, until recently, considered the Episodes VII-IX. The Force Awakens does not live up to them. And, on the other hand, The Force Awakens follows the plotline of A New Hope so closely that it's tempting to accuse the scriptwriter of plagiarism. Even without the multitude of spoilers, there are few true surprises in this movie.

Heir to the Empire and its sequels built on the ending of Return of the Jedi. The Force Awakens effectively goes back to the start.

That said, there are a number of good moments in the movie. Kylo Ren is no Darth Vader, but in many ways that was a good choice. Vader could not be outdone, so the producers chose to go with a whiny little man-child than an abused, tormented and ultimately tragic character. Ren is, in fact, a stand-in for the problems we face today; students and other youngsters who literally don't know how lucky they are to live in the modern world. There is no logical reason for Ren to embrace the dark side – unlike Darth Vader – and perhaps that is his ultimate tragedy. If Darth Vader was a reflection of fears from the 70s – and Palpatine was a reflection of fears from the post-9/11 world – Ren is a reflection of the problems we face today.

Kylo Ren: Han Solo. I've been waiting for this day for a long time.

Han: Take off that mask. You don't need it.

Kylo Ren: What do you think you'll see if I do?

Han: The face of my son.

This actually leads to the best part of the movie, the final confrontation between Han Solo and his son.

I like to think that Han and Leia would be happy after Return of the Jedi – they certainly were throughout the Expanded Universe – but in The Force Awakens they are split-up and probably devoiced. Han goes back to being a smuggler ... why? But I forgive that because the final meeting is perfect. Han knows he's screwed up with his son – although it's hard to understand why Ben turned out so poorly – and he's prepared to risk his life to save Ben from himself. And even in death – a scene that bears more than a passing resemblance to Obi-Wan Kenobi's death – Han still loves his son.

Unfortunately, the weaknesses in The Force Awakens drag it down.

Of the three new characters – Poe, Finn and Rey – I find that I like Finn the best. Finn has come in for quite a bit of knocking online (just like Rey) but Finn as a character has room to grow. And he does grow over the course of the movie. Poe, by contrast, remains static throughout the movie.

And then we have Rey, Rey who is far too close to being a Mary Sue.

A Mary Sue is a character who is unreasonably good. Han, Luke and Leia are not Mary Sues; they grow and develop throughout the original trilogy. Han is the most capable of the three of them – which makes sense, because he's definitely the most experienced character – but Rey has no reason to be so good. She's a superb mechanic, a superb pilot and an excellent fighter (with blaster, staff and lightsaber); she shows more ability to use the force than Luke did (in all three movies) and fights Ren to a standstill despite never having used a lightsaber before. (Ren was wounded, after all, but still ... he should have stomped her effortlessly (unless part of the point is that Ren isn't anything like as good as he thinks)). And Rey has a tragic backstory ...

The reason that Leia is not a Mary Sue is that while she is good, she is not unreasonably good. She is defiant when captured – perhaps hoping to goad her captors into killing her before she breaks – but she doesn't free herself. She can't. And yet, once she's free, she helps plot the escape from the Death Star, kills Jabba with the chains he put her in and helps destroy the shield generator on Endor. Leia grows and develops throughout the trilogy, like Luke.

Rey does not. Indeed, the only time she comes close to losing is when she is captured and taken to the enemy base. And she is very quick to free herself.

Leaving the characters aside, there are other problems. The plot mimics A New Hope far too closely. The Super Death Star – sorry, Starkiller Base – is awesome, but we've seen it before – twice! And does the First Order really have the resources of the Galactic Empire? This is not the time for investing vast amounts of money in a giant base, even if it is a terror weapon of great power. Surely, fighting a more conventional campaign would be a better idea. And then there's the odd relationship between the Resistance and the New Republic. And surely destroying a single planet will not be enough to put the New Republic out of business permanently ...

On its own, The Force Awakens isn't a bad movie. Like I said, there are parts of it I enjoyed – unlike the reboot of Star Trek, which was awful.

But it doesn't live up to Heir to the Empire.

Paramount's Transformers: Age of Extinction

Review by Jim McCoy

Once upon a time, when I just a wee little Jimbo I loved a toy line/cartoon named Transformers. They were brand new and transformable robots were a new craze. That's right. I'm so old, I remember Transformers, G1. Optimus Prime was the big tough good guy. Megatron was his arch-nemesis and actually transformed into >GASP< a gun!. Ironhide, Starscream, Soundwave (when he was still a boombox), Bumblebee, Scout, I could go on for hours. This was before such newfangled craziness as the introduction of Rodimus Prime or Ultra Magnus. Nobody knew who Blur was because he hadn't been invented yet. Ironhide was simultaneously the best character on the cartoon and the dumbest toy ever made. Seriously, whoever



Cat Wings by Angela K. Scott

heard of a humanoid robot with no FREAKING HEAD?!?!?!? But eventually time went on. I got involved with other geekish pursuits (Star Trek, Star Wars, RPGs and books. Lots and lots of books.) Some of the iterations of the toys/cartoons just got weird. Then awhile later, they started releasing live action Transformers movies, the latest being Transformers: Age of Extinction.

I went into the movie knowing what to expect. I mean, this is Michael Bay and Transformers right? I got what I was looking for too. Say what you want about Michael Bay and his story telling ability (I'll get to that later) but nobody does explosions as well as he does. Yes, I've seen and loved every Star Wars and Star Trek movie (Yes, even number one. I was the only person in the theater opening night that liked Jar Jar Binks and was over the age of twelve.) but Michael Bay can do a fight scene better than anyone who has directed in either series of movies. Things go boom. They go hack and slice. Someone lives. Someone dies. It all starts over.

I don't want to spoil too much, but I kind of have to here. If you don't want to see it skip the rest of this paragraph. The new, human made, Transformers and their method of transforming on screen is just awesome. The new "transformium" alloy that scientist Joshua Joyce discovers makes some really cool looking things possible. Watching a Transformer transform not just by moving one part over this way and one part over but by basically disappearing into a cloud and reforming out of nothing was down right awesome. I won't say that it seemed all that plausible, but let's face it. This is Transformers. When you're dealing with a Mack truck that can turn into a thirty-foot robot and talk you're not starting from a very plausible place to begin with. That much being said, I'm going to take this someplace a lot of younger folk may not like.

I have, since the 2007 movie Transformers had an intense dislike of the look of these robots in these movies. Talking about this in public makes me feel like I should tell a bunch of kids to get off my lawn and then drink a Geritol but I remember when the robots looked like robots. I am not at all a fan of the new "organic" look. They're not organic, they're freaking metal. I could see something more contoured. Cars don't look as boxy as they did in 1984 anymore. I'm not good with this whole-wires-hanging everywhere thing. I'm organic. Do you see veins hanging out of my arms? The spaceship has the same kind of look to it and it's not even a living thing. I could see an organic look if it was necessary to the story. The Invid Clamships from Robotech: New Generation come to mind. For *Transformers*, though? Not so much.

The story here is only kind of okay-ish. I will give Michael Bay this much though; At least he doesn't treat his audience as if they're too stupid to realize that Megan Fox is attractive this time. I wonder if they gave him a high school aged character this time specifically to prevent him from doing that again. The whole father versus boyfriend angle is one that I can kind of feel from both sides being a father of three girls and having not spent my entire life devoid of female companionship. The eventual friendship between father and boyfriend was pretty much inevitable given the plot, and the characters do develop a bit over time but it's just too disjointed. We're here we're there we're everywhere. The US government is trying to destroy the Autobots to get a seed and the president doesn't know about it? Umm, no. I get scientists and obsession but there is such a thing as going too far. I can't buy that. And where did the Dinobots get involved?

As far as the Dinobots go, I've been a fan for as long as they existed. Grimlock was an utter badass back in the day. Swoop provided the air cover, etc. But, unless there was something important that I missed somehow, there was no connection between them and the Autobots/

Optimus Prime until Prime showed up like "Follow me or we all die." That sounds like good advice but what reason did they have to believe him? There was no prior relationship established. I get that the movie was almost three hours long but come on. If you can't fit in it, don't put it in. The writers and Bay could have found another way for the good guys to win.

That much being said, this was what I expected. If you want to have fun and not put too much thought into what you're watching, Transformers is a good franchise. It makes no attempt at imitating actual scientific principles or advancing anything that may someday be possible. It's not always all that internally consistent. But things blow up. Chase scenes happen. There is a surprise or two along the way. Explosions happen and the bad guys always get their tails whipped. The quality of this one depends on what you're looking for in your story telling.

Bottom Line: 3.75 out of 5 Hanging wires

Sercon

Lester del Rey Bio-Bibliography

by

Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D.

N3F Historian

Lester del Rey (June 2, 1915 – May 10, 1993) was an American science fiction (SF) and fantasy author and editor. He is famous both for his juvenile novels and for Del Rey Books, the SF/fantasy branch of Ballantine Books.



Del Rey first started publishing stories in pulp magazines in the late 1930s. He was closely associated with the leading SF magazine of the day, Astounding Science Fiction, and its editor, John W. Campbell, Jr. In the 1950s, del Rey was one of the three leading SF writers writing for adolescents -- along with Robert Heinlein and Andre Norton. During this time, some of his fiction was published under the pen name of Erik van Lhin. He also used the pseudonyms of John Alvarez, Marion Henry, Philip James, Charles Satterfield, and Edson McCann (the last two used on writing collaborations with Frederik Pohl, who also used Charles Satterfield on some of his solo stories).

During a period in which del Rey wasn't selling his stories, he took a job as a short order cook at the White Tower Restaurant in New York. In 1945, he quit that job to write full time. After meeting Scott Meredith at the 1947 Worldcon, he began working as a reader at Scott Meredith's literary agency, where he also served for a time as office manager.

Del Rey later worked as an editor for several prozines and then for book publishers. In 1952 and 1953, he edited Space Science Fiction, Fantasy Fiction, Science Fiction Adventures (as Philip St. John), Rocket Stories (as Wade Kampfaert), and Fantasy Fiction (as Cameron Hall).

As SF gained respectability and began to be taught in the classroom, del Rey fought against its appropriation. He said that academics interested in the genre should “get out of my ghetto.” Del Rey said that “to develop” SF had “to remove itself from the usual critics who viewed it from the perspective of [the] mainstream, and who judged its worth largely on its mainstream values. As part of that mainstream, it would never have had the freedom to make the choices it did – many of them quite possibly wrong, but necessary for its development.”

Major Works

Novels:

Marooned on Mars (1952)
 Rocket Jockey (1952) [as by Philip St. John]
 Attack from Atlantis (1953)
 Battle on Mercury (1953) [as by Erik Van Lhin]
 The Mysterious Planet (1953) [as by Kenneth Wright]
 Rockets to Nowhere (1954) [as by Philip St. John]
 Step to the Stars (1954)
 For I Am A Jealous People (1954)
 Preferred Risk (1955) [with Frederik Pohl/as by Edson McCann]
 Mission to the Moon (1956)
 Nerves (1956)
 Police Your Planet (1956) [as by Erik Van Lhin]
 Day of the Giants (1959)
 Moon of Mutiny (1961)
 The Eleventh Commandment (1962)
 Outpost of Jupiter (1963)
 The Sky Is Falling (1963)
 Badge of Infamy (1963)
 The Runaway Robot (1965)
 The Infinite Worlds of Maybe (1966)
 Rocket from Infinity (1966)
 The Scheme of Things (1966)
 Siege Perilous (1966)
 Tunnel Through Time (1966)
 Prisoners of Space (1968)
 Pstalemate (1971)
 Weeping May Tarry (1978) [with Raymond F. Jones]

Short Fiction Collections:

. . . And Some Were Human (1948)
 Robots and Changelings (1957)
 The Sky is Falling and Badge of Infamy (1966)
 Mortals and Monsters (1965)

Gods and Golems (1973)
 The Early del Rey (1975)
 The Early del Rey: Vol 1 (1976)
 The Early del Rey: Vol 2 (1976)
 The Best of Lester del Rey (1978)
 War and Space (2009)
 Robots and Magic (2010)

Non- Fiction:

Rockets Through Space (1957)
 Space Flight (1958)
 The Mysterious Earth (1960)
 The Mysterious Sea (1961)
 The Mysterious Sky (1964)
 The World of Science Fiction, 1926-1976: The History of a Subculture (1979)

Marriages

In 1971 Lester married Judy-Lynn Benjamin (1943 - 1986). The marriage was his fourth. His first two marriages had ended in divorce. His third wife was Evelyn Harrison, shortly after she was divorced from SF author/artist Harry Harrison. Evelyn was killed when she and Lester were involved in an automobile accident in Virginia in January, 1970.

Judy-Lynn Benjamin del Rey, an achondroplastic dwarf, was an associate editor at Galaxy Science Fiction, a position she had taken over from Lester. She switched to Ballantine Books in 1973, where many of the authors working under her direction produced bestselling books. Lester joined her at Ballantine in 1974. In 1977 Ballantine launched a new imprint bearing the name Del Rey, with Judy-Lynn and Lester in charge of the new project. Del Rey Books went on to become the most successful SF publishers of its day.

Awards/Honors

Lester del Rey was awarded the 1972 Elmer E. Smith Memorial Award (Skylark Award) for Imaginative Fiction by the New England Science Fiction Association for “contributing significantly to science fiction, both through work in the field and by exemplifying the personal qualities that made the late ‘Doc’ Smith well-loved by those who knew him.”

Del Rey also won a special 1985 Balrog Award for his contributions to fantasy, voted on by SF fans and organized by Locus Magazine.

The Science Fiction Writers of America (SFWA) named him its eleventh SFWA Grand Master in 1990, with the award presented in 1991.

Critical Evaluations

Del Rey did not lack for ego. His friend, fellow author Isaac Asimov – who himself did not lack for ego -- told many amusing anecdotes about his friend. One of my favorites was when, at a convention, del Rey told a new bride that she had experienced two remarkable events that

day: getting married and meeting him! Furthermore, in his own book, *The Worlds of Science Fiction*, he listed a couple of his own books in the Recommended Reading List he included.

Asimov was a true friend of both Lester and Judy-Lynn, however, and suggested in print that Lester be named a Grand Master of Science Fiction, which he was in 1990/1991.

Del Rey sometimes claimed that his real name was Ramon Felipe San Juan Mario Silvio Enrico Smith Heartcourt-Brace Sierra y Alvarez del Rey y de los Uerdes. The lawyers who settled his estate after his death said that this was total nonsense, and that his real name was Leonard Knapp. His sister later confirmed this.

Fellow SF author Algis Budrys once said of his writing: “The typical del Rey character is an individual who is trying to do the decent thing to the best of his ability.”

Some Concluding Remarks

I didn’t think of myself as a Lester del Rey fan, but I did enjoy some of his stories in *Astounding*, a prozine I began collecting in the 1940s. Principal among his stories for *Astounding* were “Helen O’Loy,” “Instinct,” “The Smallest God,” and “Nerves.” In addition, he wrote for the short-lived fantasy magazine, *Unknown*, also edited by John W. Campbell, Jr.

To his credit, del Rey was an early and outspoken critic of Hubbard’s dianetics. Other evidence of a positive nature, at least for me, was that he spoke highly of our club, The National Fantasy Fan Federation (N3F).

On the other hand, some genre critics have stated that, while versatile, del Rey was an erratic writer who never fulfilled his early promise.

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

An Interview with Misha Burnett by Tamara Wilhite

Misha Burnett has been writing for forty years, though he's had many day jobs, too. I became familiar with his work due to the Planetary Anthology science fiction anthologies. And I had the opportunity to interview him for N3F.

Tamara Wilhite: How many of the “Planetary Anthology Series” books have you contributed to?

Misha Burnett: I have stories in Venus and Mercury. I have submitted to Neptune and Saturn (fingers crossed).

Tamara Wilhite: I noticed that the “All These Shiny Worlds” anthologies are the most popular works you've contributed to. What is that collection of stories about?

Misha Burnett: The Shiny Worlds collections are the brainchild of Jefferson Smith, who runs the Immerse Or Die website for reviews of Indie fiction. (<https://creativityhacker.ca/immerse-or-die/>). His review system is to read books on his treadmill, and any books that survive for 40 minutes without three strikes—that is, three things that break immersion—are said to have survived the challenge.

It's tougher than one might think, and reading his reviews is very instructive.

A few years back he put out a call to authors whose books made it through the full forty minutes, and my novel *Catskinners Book* was one of them. (Full disclosure—the sequel, *Cannibal Hearts*, did not make it.)

The stories that he received were then put through a similar testing process with a panel of judges and I made the cut on the first two volumes. My submission for the third was rejected. The stories in the collections are all over the board—SF, Fantasy, Horror, Thriller—the only thing they all have in common is that they were judged most harshly before publication.

Tamara Wilhite: What genre do you write most?

Misha Burnett: Short fiction. I know, that's not really a “genre”, but I can't nail down any more than that. Judging from my published work in 2019, fantasy has a bit of an edge, but that's because I came out with a collection of stories all set in the same fantasy world. I tend not to think in terms of genres, just what particular toolbox I need to tell a particular story.

Tamara Wilhite: What do you prefer to write more: heroic fantasy, horror, science fiction, or something else?

Misha Burnett: Heroic Horror. I like stories about ordinary people who face extraordinary perils and overcome them—or at least go down fighting. My characters tend to be working class regular Joes because those are the people I know—that's what I consider myself to be. I am an optimist about the human condition. I believe that most people are much stronger than they think they are and when tested, most people are going to rise to the occasion.

Tamara Wilhite: What are some of the jobs you've held over the years?

Misha Burnett: I tend to work at the intersection of mechanics and security. I've been a locksmith, a repo man, done both uniformed and plain clothed store security. I fixed postage meters for a while. Currently I work in maintenance for a small university, with an emphasis on physical security and Fire/Life Safety.

Tamara Wilhite: And how has this diverse experience affected your writing?

Misha Burnett: I don't trust systems. Science Fiction, as a rule, tends to assume that technology will change the world. I look more towards the people who use the technology, and human nature hasn't changed much over the centuries. Cops will always be cops, whether they have bows or wands of fireballs or blaster rifles. The fundamental things apply as time goes by.

Tamara Wilhite: What are you currently working on?

Misha Burnett: My overall goal is to average two short stories a month this year. The spring has been rough, I'm way behind right now. So I'm trying to write more stories. However, I've also started writing a tabletop role playing game based on Horror movies, and I'm currently talking to an artist about collaborating on a coloring book, with me providing poems and the artist doing coloring pages for them.

I've got two collections in the works, one Hard SF and one Dark Fantasy, that should be coming out sometime in 2020. I'd like to see if I can put a third together, of my previously published Horror fiction.

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

Misha Burnett: I think that fiction is undergoing a Renaissance right now. Publishing in the last few decades of the 20th Century was controlled by a handful of companies. Those companies became simultaneously complacent and timid. They knew—or thought they knew—what sold and that was what sold last year and the year before and so on.

Genre Fiction in particular grew stale. The last big artistic movement in SF was Cyberpunk—and we now have authors who are living in the real 2020 and still writing about what the 1980s thought that 2020 would be like.

Fantasy survived largely as an adjunct to Romance, with very formulaic plots and the fantastic elements often used only as a rationale for bizarre erotica. Horror turned into Splatterpunk, divorced from its roots as morality play and focusing on trying to find new ways to shock an increasingly jaded audience. Mystery split into Cozies where screwball characters dabble in detection and Thrillers that are just Splatterpunk without any fantastic elements.

Fiction marketing has been focused on safe nich-



Spaceship Concept by Jose Sanchez

es—readers who know exactly what they want and aren't interested in any stories that don't follow the rules. As a result, general fiction readership dropped like a stone. If you don't like any of the half-dozen niches that are still published or—even worse—you have a taste for fiction that doesn't fit any one particular niche, then Traditional Publishing has nothing to offer you.

That means that Indies have a huge untapped market. Worldwide there are tens of millions of potential readers who think they don't like reading for pleasure, when in fact they don't like the few choices that were all that was available.

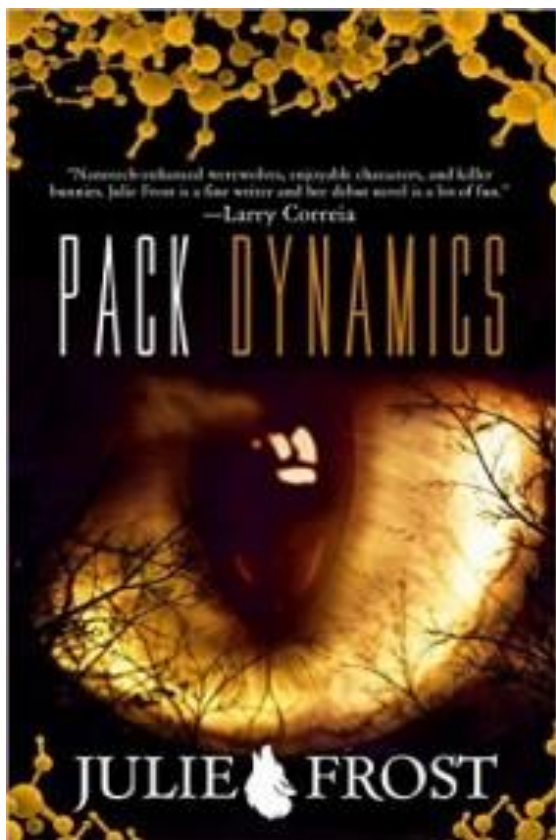
I'd go so far as to say that when we see the top selling fiction genres of 2040, most of them will be new—genres that we don't have phrases for today.

I don't claim to be a particularly brilliant writer, but I am an original one, and I'm betting that there are readers who are looking for something like my work, they just don't know it yet. Those authors who have reached this market of readers who don't know what they are hungry for are taking off explosively.

Tamara Wilhite: Thank you for your time.

Food of Famous Authors

Eat This While You Read That: Julie Frost Cooking with Cedar Sanderson



I met Julie Frost at LTUE last year, and then when her first novel came out, based on listening to her being funny and witty on a panel, grabbed the book. I discovered to my delight that she could write as well as she can talk – hey! There are people who can't you know. So after reading and reviewing *Pack Dynamics*, I asked Julie if she would be willing to participate in this, and although I'm fairly sure she didn't remember me, she still said yes. The generosity of authors to strange fans never ceases to amaze me. People can be so nice sometimes.

Julie's first novel, and not the only one I'm hoping, is a fun werewolf story, hard to do in what seems like a saturated market. But she introduces some science, and a lot of fun, and I really enjoyed reading it. I think you will, too, although this recipe cooks up pretty fast, so you won't have time to do more than get started before it's time to chow down.

I call these "Wif Burritos".

Ingredients:

3 medium roma tomatoes
1 green pepper
1 can of black olives
five green onions (or whatever onion you like in that relative proportion)
3/4 lb ground beef
1/2 tsp dried sage
1 tbsp minced garlic
1/2 onion, minced fine
1 tsp paprika
2 tbsp taco seasoning
3/4 c water

Chop and mix the vegetables.

Brown the ground beef (I add sage, garlic, salt, paprika, and fennel seeds while it's browning). Once the meat is browned (you may want to drain it if you've not got lean beef), add 2 tablespoons of taco seasoning and 3/4 cup of water, mix it around, and let it cook down until thickened.



Wrap a few scoops of meat and veggies, along with shredded cheese and your choice of salsa, into a flour tortilla. ENJOY. This makes about seven or eight of these things for us. Mmph, so good.

Warm up your flour tortillas on the flat griddle or a pan (you can zap the whole bag in the microwave for 30 seconds) before rolling your burrito for best results.

Cedar's note: these came out really well. I totally forgot my olives, so I have to make them again soon so I can try

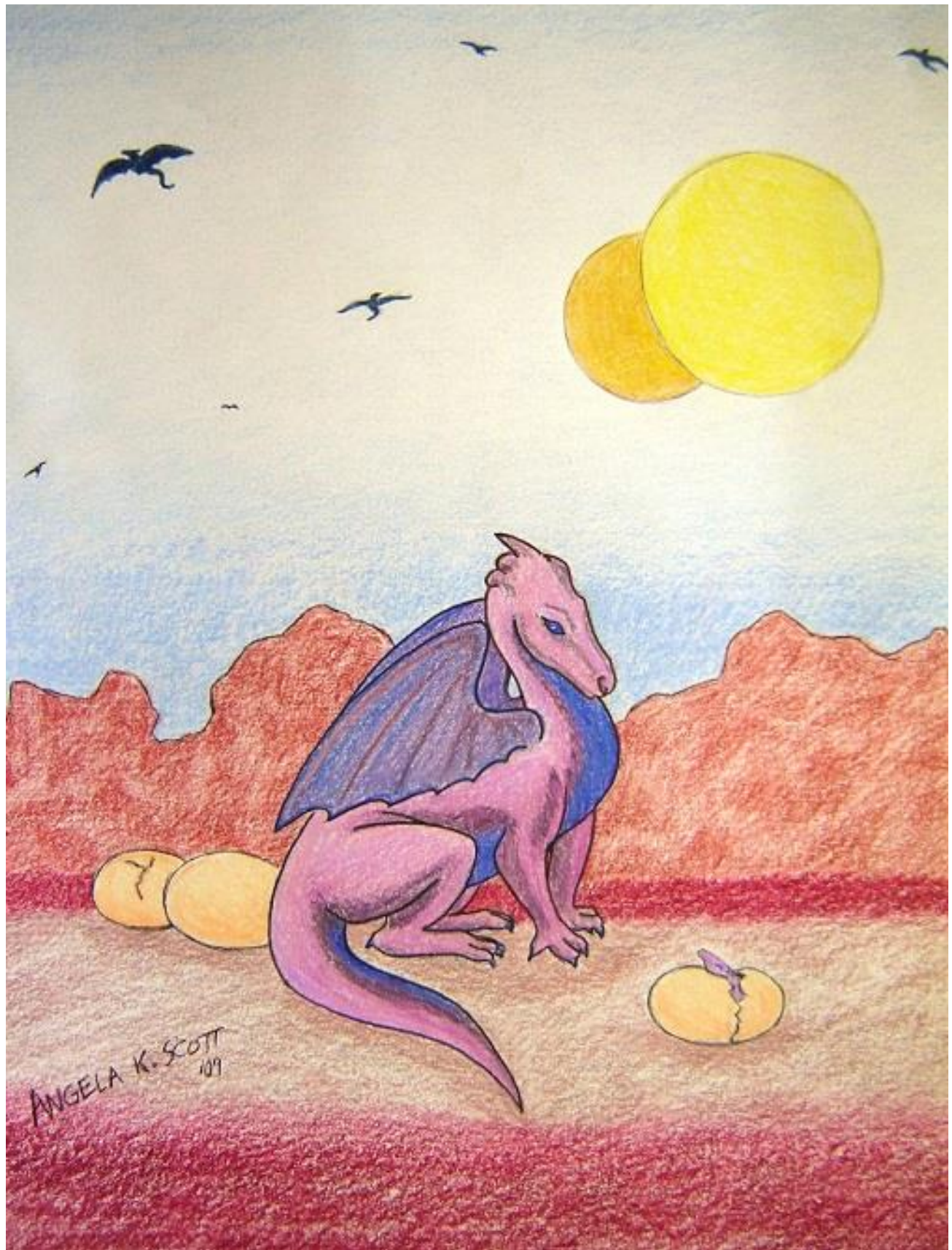
with olives. And for some reason we had no salsa in the house, although I could have sworn there was a jar in the pantry... chipotle Tabasco worked nicely, though. The fresh veggies made a nice crunch and change from the usual sauteed veg with fajitas or burritos.

Add veggies, cheese, sour cream... what have you. Fold up one edge toward you, the ends in toward the center, and then roll it up from there.

The First Reader's comment was next time he wants his crunchy taco shells instead of the flour tortillas. But I can make these again anytime.

Ok, it looks fancy, but it's Blood Orange soda (to which I am slightly addicted but don't indulge often, it's pricy). It was a nice accompaniment to the spicy burrito.





Mother Dragon
By Angela K. Scott