

Tightbeam 324
September 2021



Party Time
by José Sánchez

Tightbeam 324

September 2021

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Letters of Comment

Dear George and Jon:

I was just getting ready to respond to Tightbeam 322 when Tightbeam 323 arrived. I hate doing one loc for two issues, but I unfortunately do that a lot.

So, here's a letter for both, and maybe it will be double the usual size. Not holding my breath...

322... Having to come up with Isaac Asimov's best books would seem a daunting task; there were so many that formed the beginnings of my SF reading career. I have a whole shelf of Asimov books...I wonder which ones hold up over time, and or should I just start at the beginning, re-read them all, and perhaps relive some of the original thrills of such new stories.

Thanks to Jon on the biography of Kate Wilhelm. As I read many authors, I sometimes wonder about what they were like as people so that I might understand a little better why they wrote the way they did. We lose them all too quickly, too. She was one of many authors I wanted to meet.

323... My letter. Many short-sighted politicians have seen the easing of the pandemic as a good excuse to make lots of people happy in the short term, and lift all restrictions. As a result, the numbers of daily cases of COVID-19 skyrocket up. That's happening in many states and provinces. Also the new newszine title sounds great.

I rarely have anything to say about comics, but I can this time...Scott Bieser's Quantum Vibe is one of the few webcomics I follow, and I admit I am way behind. I went back to the very beginning, and have ploughed through all of it, and enjoyed every frame.

What I said above about Kate Wilhelm, I can say about Miriam Allen deFord. These interesting people created some of the writing I enjoy, and I guess I'd like to know why they wrote it.

Maybe it's too late at night for me to write anything with some measure of depth, but anyway, here it is for the moment.

I promise to try better the next time. Take care, see you again soon.

Yours,
Lloyd Penney

George,

Thanks for another excellent issue of Tightbeam. It makes me want to catch up with the 300+ issues that I missed. (I wish I could remember what happened to all the N3F material I had back in the 90s.)

The history piece on Miriam Allen deFord was especially appreciated.

All the best,
Lloyd Penney

Anime

Impressions – The Great Jahy Will Not be Defeated By Jessi Silver



Streaming: Crunchyroll
Episodes: 20
Source: Manga

Episode Summary: The Great Demon Jahy was once the demon lord's second-in-command, but when a magical girl entered the demon realm and shattered its mana crystal, Jahy suddenly found herself banished to Earth. Even worse, without her powers she takes the form of a child, so she lacks the presence she needs to order folks around. With a tiny shard of the mana crystal left, she's able to retain her adult form long enough to hold down a service job, but even so she has difficulty making ends meet. Jahy's come up with ever manner of excuse to keep from paying rent; unfortunately her landlord is also her boss's sister, so she can't keep up her ruses for long.



But perhaps living among humans might not be such a bad thing, even though Jahy can't quite see things that way. At the very least, her boss cares about her and wants to see her healthy and happy. It's just that, when you're used to wielding nearly unlimited power, having to deal with human rules and customs is a huge burden. Hopefully she can find the other shards of the mana crystal soon and return to her rightful position!

Back when Jahy was at the top of her game.

Impressions: Life's tough when you're knocked off your high horse, or so I imagine. While I can't say I've ever been in the position to really lord power over anyone, I have spent time believing in the superiority of my own knowledge (I think it's a phase many people who consider themselves critics go through – or maybe I'm just a special kind of disaster). The thing is, after going through a hot-headed period of thinking you know everything about your chosen niche, you suddenly begin to realize that there all sorts of people around you who know much more, or who are better researchers or writers. It's humbling and I still struggle to deal with the fallout from learning about all the gaps in my anime knowledge.

The titular Jahy hasn't quite gotten to the point of humility yet, and that's the main well from which this episode draws its humor. There's an illicit joy we sometimes feel when watching the mighty get pulled down to earth, repeatedly and due to their own lack of awareness. I'm... a little bit hesitant to laugh too hard, though, because having felt those feelings myself I suspect we're all a little bit closer to getting the wind knocked out of our sails than we might think. One bad day, one shitty take, and the force of the internet's collective ire is knocking at your door. That said, it's still funny to see humans, who'd normally be cowering in fear from her demonic presence, treat Jahy like the petulant little kid that she's transformed into.



And that's it; that's the story. This series definitely isn't rocket science and isn't trying to sell anyone on anything truly objectionable, in my opinion. It feels like the opener to a series that kind of belongs in this season – pretty good, nothing unique, and kind of fun without a ton of long-term staying power. I just hope Jahy can save up for a better outfit at some point, because the oversized T-shirt look isn't cutting it.

Pros: This seems like an essentially good-natured series, and with so many stories poking and prodding at the low parts of human nature, it's nice sometimes to have something cute and fun to turn to. I especially like the relationship between Jahy and her boss, because the boss seems like a truly caring person and I suspect that motherly nature might rub off on Jahy.

The humor also strikes a good balance between being too toothless or too mean-spirited. I like some amount of competent slapstick, can enjoy a little insult humor, and even some anime-style yelling (although that's probably my least favorite type), but the one thing I can't really tolerate is when characters are just overly mean to one another. Even though the relationship between Jahy and her landlord is adversarial, to say the least, it hasn't yet devolved into outright meanness.

Cons: This feels like a single gag series to me, and it's not an especially creative one. So I'm a little bit wary that the show is listed as 2-cours. Even with the addition of more characters later on, it doesn't seem like the sort of comedy series that would be very narrative-based, so that many episodes feels like a stretch to me.

Content Warnings: Mild Fanservice. Mild non-sexual nudity. Slapstick humor/roughhousing. Food insecurity played for humor.

Would I Watch More? – I think I would if I heard there was more to it than its central gag. I enjoyed the first episode but I'm not sure I'd be interested in two seasons worth of the same content.

Night Head 2041
Review by Jessi Silver

Streaming: Crunchyroll

Episodes: TBA

Source: Manga (there have also been previous TV and anime adaptations)

Episode Summary: In the year 2041, society has disavowed any depiction of the supernatural. Belief in ideas and entities that can't be proven is criminalized by the government. The Special Weapons Enforcers work to root out illegal thought activities and arrest those responsible. When they're assigned to capture a man purporting to be a psychic along with his followers, they assume this will be a straightforward mission, but when brothers Takuya and Yuuya begin to see oddities that the others on their team don't, it suggests there's something much stranger going on. Takuya then exhibits a strange power when he tries to rescue Yuuya from being hurt. A huge EMP wave is emitted and they're suddenly faced with the prospect that the realities of

their own minds and existences may not be quite as factually cut-and-dry as they may have assumed.

Meanwhile, brothers Naoto and Naoya Kirihara find themselves freed from the laboratory where they've been isolated for the past 15 years.



Because they truly do have telekinetic abilities they soon discover that this unfamiliar world they've been separated from for so long isn't the bastion of understanding and acceptance that they had hoped it may have become in the interim. While they're able to leave their isolation with a few resources at their disposal, they're about to enter a hotbed of prejudice in which their powers are decidedly unwelcome.

Is the girl a hallucination, or something more sinister?

Impressions: Though human belief systems and the differences therein may be a frequent source of conflict in this world, I have a difficult time believing that, in the course of 20-something years from today, any event (even one as devastating as a World War) could possibly cause any government to outright ban unrealistic thinking altogether. So much of our culture is based around fantasy, imagination, storytelling... to completely eliminate things like that feels like an impossibility. Imagination is actually one of the foundations of science; many concepts that we consider factual nowadays could once only be theorized (and some still today can't necessarily be directly observed even despite many advances in tools and measurement devices). Anyway, the unreality of this scenario means that stopping to take in this episode requires telling one's brain to take a step back and ignore the lack of logic in the premise.

Besides the hurdles revolving around suspension of disbelief, this is actually a pretty decent premiere episode. I've never seen any other adaptations of this story, but at the very least the 2006 anime adaptation has existed at the periphery of my fandom knowledge for a while; that made me curious even in spite of the premise's inherent goofiness. Setting aside some of its storytelling mechanics, it's interesting to think about what might happen if certain humans were able to perform feats of psychic manipulation. I think the scenario laid out in *From the New World* is one logical endpoint – the psychic users become the ruling class and establish their own society using extremely strict (and f'ed-up) rules and a disguising of historical context. On the other hand, if so-called “normal” humans are able to channel their fear of winding up powerless over time in the face of more evolved brethren, they'd probably end up doing some pretty awful things – like separating psychic kids from their parents and performing experiments on them for 15 years as this story implies. Thus, “normal” society exerting extremely strict rules on its people and punishing those with the newly-revealed power. Two sides of the same screwed-up coin.



When a story is introduced so bluntly, I start looking for characters worth sympathizing with. Predictably, introducing both sides of the potential conflict and

then complicating it by suggesting one of the protagonists more associated with the oppressive government sponsored police force might have something in common with the two brothers re-

cently introduced to the outside world (and conceivably with a bone to pick) is a decent way to ensure that picking sides is more than simply based around “good guys” and “bad guys.” The SWE’s are pretty scary, especially since state-sponsored oppression is a very real thing in the world that has to be dealt with. But the Kirihara brothers are a bit scary in their own way because they simply exist outside the bounds of a society that they’ve been unaware of for so long. I think there’s the potential for a decently-compelling conflict here.



Pros: Hooray, it’s everyone’s favorite topic – full CG animation! In all seriousness, though, this is yet another series this season that manages to make the most of its animation technology in a way that’s unobtrusive. The show contains so much military weaponry and detailed costuming (primarily for the SWE soldiers) that I can’t imagine it would look very good depicted within today’s limited-resource traditionally-animated world. I’d like to call

out something specific that I noticed that I think helped to provide a better sense of life to the characters – there seems to be some animation algorithm in place that allows their eyes to faintly twitch every once-in-a-while, much like our own eyes do as they focus and refocus. It’s a tiny thing, but one which keep the characters from looking dead-eyed and creepy.

Cons: The episode begins with a loudspeaker narration reminding the populace that believing in gods, Buddhas or what-have-you is considered criminal activity. This comes across as extremely ham-fisted world building and sort of laughable in its execution.

Content Warnings: Kidnapping (referenced briefly in a flashback). Military-style violence using firearms, with glimpses of blood. Physical violence, including a character being thrown into a wall and attacked by sharp glass. General dystopian atmosphere.

Would I Watch More? – I’m curious about this one. Perhaps not so much that I’d build my watch schedule around it, but I think it’s sort of conceptually interesting in spite of its flaws.

Books

The Balanced Power of OVERPOWERED

Written by Mark H. Kruger

Review by Mindy Hunt

I hit the jackpot.

I finally picked up a book that was the first story of two. This is a nice change to start at the beginning compared to the last few books that were in the middle or end of a series. This means I have somewhere to possibly go after I finish the book.

And I do.

I find that in the current lockdown, it could be worse. We could be in Barrington, Colorado, the new home for Nica Ashley. Well not so new. She was born and raised there until her parents



divorced. Her father stayed, and she traveled all over the world with her journalist mother. Unfortunately, a once-in-a-lifetime assignment for her mother in Antarctica sent Nica back to live with her father until she graduated from high school. She soon finds that what appears to be a sleepy little town with the most cheery residents is not what it seems.

First, there's the curfew when everything shuts down. "Everything" means even cell service and internet. Then there is the mysterious and stunning Jackson, a fellow school mate with a reputation obsessed with trying to find out why his girlfriend suddenly 'disappeared'. And finally, the mysterious pulse of light in the sky which causes the town to become anxious and angry at anything and everyone. She realizes these are all connected, but the mystery is how and why. This sends her on an adventure that might be more exciting and dangerous than Antarctica. In my mind, it is. Not to mention warmer.

Sometimes you need a break from adult thinking, and as much as some YA books are more teenagers whining, this was not bad. There is the usual puppy dog lust between teenagers but not overwhelming, like certain vampires. Plus the story is good. Some of the strangeness of Barrington is obvious; however, the why is not so much. There is some explanation but then a twist pops up making things even more mysterious. The characters tease just enough to keep your mind shifting all over with your own ideas. But the general story is simple and not too over thought... yet. I say that because this is the first of two books and I'm not sure how the full story will unfold.

I enjoyed the dynamics between the characters, the slow unraveling of secrets, the moments that make the reader question what they think they know. With as complicated as this could have been, so far, Kruger's managed to keep it to a level that lets you think without hurting your brain, which helps keeps me engaged. He did well building this sleepy town and twisting it just enough to make it believable.

Or maybe I've just gotten used to 2020.

I have gone out and found the second book, *Overtaken*, to find out what happens to Nica, her friends, and her family. I was surprised to discover there was more to tell, not thinking about the story not ending yet when I ran out of pages to read. I think that is a good thing, that I've managed to get lost in the story and become this invested in these characters and their outcomes.

I recommend starting this journey and hope that at then end of the next book, I can fully recommend both.

J.A. Sutherland's Alexis Carew Series Review by Jim McCoy

Seriously, if you're an Honor Harrington fan and you haven't read J.A. Sutherland's Alexis Carew series, what are you doing with your life? And if you're an Alexis Carew fan who hasn't read Honor Harrington, what's wrong with you?

Or sumfin'.



I mean, the two series are far from identical, but they have a lot in common. The plucky young woman who takes a position of authority in the navy, the career growth, the love interest, a certain willingness to do what is necessary even if it doesn't -strictly speaking- match up with the exact wording of their orders as given, etc.

The thing is, we get to meet Alexis younger and follow her career sooner and that means, potentially at least, more death rides than Honor got to have. We all love that, right? The charge directly into fire, the blasting away, the shooting, the carnage, horror, it all works for those of us who like a particular kind of literature, and it's all here. This is combat in its gritty, horrible detail, and yet...

It's not what you'd expect from a typical work of Space Opera. I mean that. And the reason is because of how the combat and inter-stellar travel are conducted.

Combat in the Alexis Carew series is closer to that of the Age of Sail than David Weber ever dreamed of for his Honor Harrington series. Stop laughing. I'm serious. When Alexis charges into battle, she's not loading a missile. She's loading a cannon. Granted it's a cannonball coated in Gallenium to decrease the effects of Darkspace (keep reading, I'll get there) but it's a freaking cannon, on a rail that has to be loaded from the muzzle and fired over open sights. When Ms. Midshipwoman Carew goes into her first boarding action, she's not just armed with a flechette pistol, she's carrying a cutlass. Yes, just like pirates used to use. And she's not afraid to use it. She actually does really well with it.

Space travel is so Age of Sail that it hurts. Real space transits are made to Lagrangian points, where the ship transitions to Darkspace. This is where the Age of Sail thing really takes over. It works out that Darkspace is filled with dark matter, which flows and creates "winds" that ships can sail on. It also collects in places and creates dangerous "shoals" that ships can founder on. So it is really close to real life travel on the high seas circa the seventeen and eighteen hundreds. The ships are actually three masted (sticking off the sides and top of the ship one hundred and twenty degrees apart) so you get people actually working the masts. The best of the crew are referred to as "topmen" because they handle the highest sails. Add in the fact that dark matter causes shots to curve and drop like what would happen when firing a normal cannon on planet Earth and if it wasn't for the loss of oxygen and need for suits, you'd never know you weren't in a real world naval battle two hundred years ago. Sutherland did some serious research to write this novel and it shows. I don't know that John Paul Jones could have written a more accurate and entertaining account of combat at sea than Sutherland has.

Alexis Carew is not a character for the squeamish or for those of you who will rise up screaming about political correctness and strong female characters. Alexis is a teenage girl with a girl's smaller physical frame and more powerfully displayed emotions. She also starts out stuck on a world where she cannot inherit her grandfather's lands and political power due to her gender. That's why she takes to the stars. She is strong, proud, smart, tough and brave. Her guts get her through when nothing else will. I wanna buy this chick a drink, only I can't because she's too young. Also because she doesn't really exist, but nobody's perfect.

Alexis finds herself in a world where she is doubted by the provincials that she has chosen to

protect. She puts them all to shame, not with her words but with her actions. This is a woman that I would gladly follow. She has the grit, the determination and, above all, the intelligence to lead a crew into their duty. That's not to say that she's the nicest person ever. Her job is to fight wars and wars are fought by killing people. It's that she understands her job and that mistakes on her part will cost lives on her side. She is also forced to accept that doing the right thing will sometimes lead to the deaths of her "lads". I won't say she's happy about it, but she doesn't shy away from it. Well, for the most part.

This is a series of books that goes much further toward showing the true costs of war on the people that survive it than anything else I've read. Alexis looks the horrors of war straight in the face...

And blinks.

Hard.

It almost ruins her. She struggles with the guilt of giving the orders she had to give. She feels the weight of every crew member she loses in combat. That's not a small amount, especially for such a young girl. She attempts to balance some of the losses against some of the lives she's saved, but it's not easy. There may be a bottle involved...

It gets ugly.

Let's face it though. War is ugly. What war does to people is ugly. This is a fairly accurate depiction, which means it's going to be ugly. Kudos to Sutherland for the hard work he put into creating a character that acts the way she really would. And no, I don't say that because she's a girl. Men act like this too and it's time we acknowledged the cost.

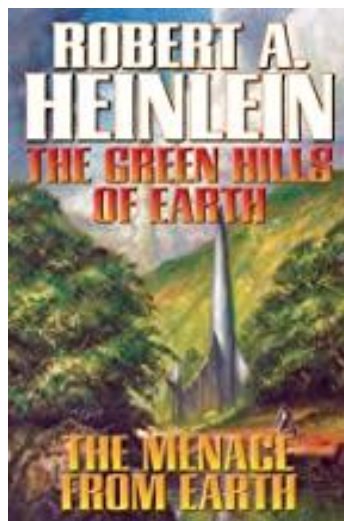
There are six books to this series so far and I've read them all. Of course, I would read more but there aren't any more to read and I find myself somewhat vexed by that. Now, it happens that Sutherland had a somewhat rough 2020 (he's err... not the only one by the way) and didn't get any novels completed last year. I'll give him a pass because 2020 was pretty terrible, but still I've subscribed to his newsletter and I keep hoping to see an update about a new novel coming soon. It hasn't happened yet, but I'm confident that it will. The ending of the last novel lead me to believe that more was coming and that's all I'm gonna say about that.

Bottom Line: 5.0 out of 5 Cutlass Blades

The Green Hills of Earth/The Menace from Earth
by Robert Heinlein
Review by Chris Nuttall

Robert Heinlein's short stories have always been something of a hit-or-miss affair. Some of his shorts have been very good, either exciting or thought-provoking, but others have been quite weak. The short story is an art that few writers can master – I'm honestly not very good at writing shorts – as one must either write within a developed universe (which Heinlein did, to some extent) or get across a great deal of information in a very small amount of words.

Heinlein's shorts were originally written for magazine publication – it was the glory days of the



old science-fiction magazines – and were later compiled into books. This set of short stories were placed in two collections – The Green Hills of Earth and The Menace from Earth – which were later republished, by Baen Books, as a single volume. The majority of them fit into Heinlein’s Future History – which will be discussed later – but there are aspects of the stories that probably required editing to make them wholly part of the shared universe. There is also a considerable amount of values dissonance.

I do not intend to look at each of the stories in great detail – only a handful demand that sort of attention – but it’s interesting to note the common themes. Most of them revolve around the sort of men (and women) who become pioneers, the people who put their lives on the line, time and time again, to explore new territories, boldly go where no man has gone before, and cope with disasters. Space Jockey, Gentlemen Be Seated, The Black Pits of Luna, It’s Great to Be Back, Ordeal in Space, The Green Hills of Earth, Sky Lift and Water is for Washing are all focused on such heroes, many of whom are seemingly normal people until they find themselves being tested by circumstance. It’s Great to Be Back, for example, features a couple who spent years on the moon and hated every moment of it, only to discover – when they returned to Earth – that they no longer liked it. They promptly returned to the moon, where they were happy. In a similar vein, The Black Pits of Luna features a teenage boy who goes on a lunar walk with his little brother, who gets lost. After finding him, the boy determines to return to the moon as soon as possible. The story works very well, at least in part, because Heinlein captures the teenage male voice so well. Anyone who’s ever been on a family trip as the elder son will sympathise.

“I was desperate. “Look, Dad,” I said, keeping my voice low, “if I go back to Earth without once having put on a spacesuit and set foot on the surface, you’ll just have to find another school to send me to. I won’t go back to Lawrenceville; I’d be the joke of the whole place.”

The Long Watch, by contrast, is a prequel of sorts to Space Cadet, the story of a young officer who sacrifices his life to avert a military coup. It’s a strong tale of heroism, which Heinlein milks for all the sentimentality he can. Arguably, he overdoes it.

Several of the other stories represent attempts to peer into other genres. We Also Walk Dogs features a concierge service that can be hired to do almost anything (as long as its legal) trying to put the pieces together to accomplish a near-impossible task. The Year of the Jackpot focuses on statistical odds, with the characters calculating that bouts of periodic insanity are all too common. It has an uncomfortable resonance today. By His Bootstraps is a neat time-travelling story, quite like The Door into Summer, where a man gets press-ganged by a dictator and, eventually, becomes the dictator (and has to press-gang his former self). The time loop is neat, even though the future is quite depressing. Project Nightmare features military telepaths struggling to avert a Russian nuclear attack; Goldfish Bowl has a team of researchers stumbling across far more advanced (unseen and incomprehensible) aliens, who see humans as pets. It does not, I should note, have a proper ending. It is a creepy little story that seems out of place.

Columbus Was a Dope is a good example of how a short story can make its point. Two men debate the value of Christopher Columbus’s voyage across the ocean, concluding, in the end, that it was sheer foolishness. But they’re having the argument on the moon. Heinlein neatly

shows us, as the men depart, that they're actually wrong. Where would they be without men like Columbus and Armstrong?

Logic of Empire is longer, but it makes the same general point. Two men make a bet that conditions on Venus (still presented as a habitable world) are not akin to slavery. Unwisely, they take ship to Venus to find out ... and get enslaved. The POV character rapidly comes to realise that the vast majority of men on Venus are enslaved and, when he gets home, he discovers to his horror that people on Earth don't want to know. One can argue that the distance between Earth and Venus makes it impossible to care, but there is a more salient point. Slavery is, and always has been, part of the human condition.

It's not a point that is discussed often these days. It's easy to forget that blacks weren't the only slaves in America, although the other slaves were not always called slaves. Nor is it easy to realise, as Heinlein points out, that slavery sprang from conditions that made it economic. The idea that black slaves were inferior was invented as a later justification for keeping them enslaved. It wasn't the reason for enslaving them. As one of Heinlein's characters points out:

“You have attributed conditions to villainy that simply result from stupidity. Colonial slavery is nothing new; it is the inevitable result of imperial expansion, the automatic result of an antiquated financial structure.” [SNIP] “You think bankers are scoundrels. They are not. Nor are company officials, nor patrons, nor the governing classes back on earth. Men are constrained by necessity and build up rationalizations to account for their acts. It is not even cupidity. Slavery is economically unsound, non-productive, but men drift into it whenever the circumstances compel it.”

The last two stories appear very different, at least on the surface. And yet, in many ways, they share similar themes.

Delilah and the Space-Rigger may be the first science-fiction story featuring a woman trying to break into a male-only field. Tiny, the Chief Construction Engineer of Space Station One, is shocked to discover that his latest communications officer is a woman. His first response is absolute horror, a belief that her presence will distract the men ... and a number of attempts to get rid of her. (Interestingly, Heinlein makes it clear that Tiny wasn't entirely wrong.) Gloria – on the other hand – is equally determined to stay. A battle of wits and stubbornness ensues, which ends with Tiny reluctantly conceding that Gloria has won her place.

It reads oddly today, in many ways. Gloria is competent at her job, a point that is made subtly clear when Tiny tells her that one of the techs is a good man ... and she agrees, noting that she trained him. But, at the same time, she is neither a kick-ass heroine nor a bitch who will not accept even an unconditional surrender. Gloria is smart enough to make it clear that she wants to be one of the boys and that she will act like one of the boys (she went by 'G' on her paperwork to hide her all-too-revealing first name) ... and she will seek no special privileges for herself.

She earns respect, rather than demanding it; indeed, perhaps more importantly, she is smart enough to allow Tiny room to retreat. It's better to allow someone to come to the right conclusion than force it down their throats, even if (particularly if) the conclusion is right. People resent such treatment and, if you have to have a working relationship with them, it can come back to bite you.

Indeed, Heinlein neatly illustrates the problem with ‘lean in’ advice. The good side is that it ensures that the woman gets noticed, which makes it harder for her to be exploited; the bad side is that it’s hard to tell, particularly if you haven’t practiced, where to stop.

The blunt truth is that men do not instinctively understand women and vice versa. Most men know, at a subconscious level, techniques for minimising the apparent threats they pose to other men; they understand, all too well, that most men who think they are being challenged will react badly. A demand for something – anything – will generate pushback, where a more reasonable request may not. It is impossible to learn such skills from books – you have to practice – and it is very easy to mess up. Girls who were tomboys as kids tend to get much further in male-dominated spheres.

Heinlein also demonstrates the problem with the modern-day demand that men call out other men for bad (read sexist) behaviour. A secure man, like the narrator of the story, can point out when someone is being an asshole, but an insecure man – a teenager, for example – cannot without risking serious consequences.

“She does her work okay. You give her orders you wouldn’t give to one of the men—and that a man wouldn’t take.”

As oddly as it reads in places, *Delilah and the Space-Rigger* is far better at getting the idea across than more modern works. And, to Heinlein’s readers, it would have been revolutionary.

In some ways, *The Menace from Earth* is very different from *Delilah and the Space-Rigger*; in others, it has quite a bit in common. Holly Jones may actually be Heinlein’s most successful attempt at portraying a teenage girl; indeed, she is superior to Poddy of Podkayne of Mars, who came later.

Holly is both a very typical girl and one with great – and plausible – dreams of becoming a spaceship designer. Living on the moon, Holly works as a guide when she’s not in school ... a good life, until trouble intrudes in the form of an actress from Earth who captivates Holly’s boyfriend. Holly is non-too-pleased about this until she is forced to risk her life to save the actress from her own stupidity, an act that reveals that her boyfriend genuinely loves her.

It’s perhaps the strongest story in the book, both in background and foreground. Luna City is astonishingly detailed for such a short story, with both familiar and alien elements. And Holly herself is a living breathing person. The actress, on her way back to Earth (like some of the other people in the story collection), takes the time to reassure Holly that her boyfriend loves her ... and remind her not to rub salt in the wounds of his mistakes. Like the previous story, giving someone room to retreat is a very good idea. Just because someone made an ass of himself is no excuse for making matters worse.

Overall, most of the stories in this collection showcase precisely why Heinlein became popular in the first place. The combination of sweeping visions of the future with real-life people, true to his era, works in a way many other stories do not. Indeed, the people are the core of the stories, something which is true of most of Heinlein’s works. As *Delilah and the Space-Rigger* put it:

“Sure, we had trouble building Space Station One—but the trouble was people.”



William Goldman's Magic Will Mayo's Review

This is a book that exerted a profound effect on me. It is a novel in which a puppeteer puts his personality into his puppet, the puppet puts its personality into him and between it all - life, death, success and love lost - it all comes to a finish. This is a work of fiction that gives itself over to suspense and that suspense gives itself over to fantasy. I strongly suggest it to all lovers of the make believe.

Isaac Asimov's Nightfall Will Mayo's Review

Perhaps one of the stories that moved me most over the years was Isaac Asimov's short story, "Nightfall," about a planet whose orbit is so peculiar about its stars that nighttime is only experienced there once every thousand years. When this happens, civilization on this particular planet inevitably falls and madness ensues. This was the story that Asimov wrote as a young man and that would later inspire him to write his series of novels about the rise and fall of galactic civilizations, a job that would occupy him well into his old age. But nothing so summed up the twilight time for civilization as this brief story written decades before his more well known work. On a night like this with my cat asleep behind me I think of it and give Mr. Asimov a nod.

Comics

Micronauts issue 1 (Jan. 1979)

Writer: Bill Mantlo

Artist: Michael Golden

Review by Tom Simmons



Any licensed toy properties comic book series necessarily suffers from a contrived foundation. But like its sibling, Rom: Spaceknight, (based upon a Parker Brothers toy), Micronauts benefitted from an especially gifted writer, Bill Mantlo. (Additional toy-based comics from Marvel would include Transformers, Shogun Warriors, and, later, G.I. Joe.)

As the series' tagline proclaims, the Micronauts "came from inner space." Their homeland is the "Microverse" and their home planet is (you guessed it) "Homeworld." There is enough plot packed into the first issue to justify a thick graphic novel or a lengthy mini-series. A thumbnail summary follows:

Our villain is a bearded fascist-leaning evil-scientist with royal blood, Baron Karza. He schemes to conquer Homeworld by means of enticing the populace with the youth-preserving technology of his "Body Banks."

On the heroic side, there is a cast of six. We have Commander Arcturus Rann and his sidekick-android co-pilot Biotron. There is the lovely Princess Mari (alias Marionette) (who, along with her brother, Prince Argon, are the only survivors of the Baron's coup in which the rest of Homeworld's royal family was slaughtered). Toss in a pair of alien gladiators – Acroyear (noble; reserved) and Bug (a wiseacre with insectoid features) – and Mari's robot tutor, Microtron (clearly an R2-D2 rip-off), and we have a team.

Baron Karza's coup is largely successful, but the Micronauts manage to escape the despot by crossing the Spacewall which separates the Microverse from the ordinary-sized universe. They will land on Earth, conveniently resized into 3.75-inch action figure dimensions.

The first issue of Micronauts is overwhelming. There's too much backstory; it feels overstuffed with exposition. We also learn, for example, that Baron Karza used to be Commander Rann's instructor. And that Rann's parents, Dallan and Sepsis [sic], defied Karza, becoming martyred deities for the resistance. But at least it succeeds in laying the foundations for the conflicts which follow.

Micronauts issue 2 (Feb. 1979)

Writer: Bill Mantlo

Artist: Michael Golden

Review by Tom Simmons

With the very busy, overloaded, and overstuffed origin issue of Micronauts in the rear-view mirror, writer Bill Mantlo turned to simply telling a story in the sophomore issue. The effect is a much more relaxed, engaging, and readable storyline.

The six-member team having crossed the energy barrier separating the Microverse from the Universe, their ship, the Endeavor, plops down in a suburban backyard on Earth, with Karza still in hot pursuit.

Let's review our team-heroes: They can be organized into two sets, beginning with a pair of humans, Commander Rann ("Space Glider" – because he can glide) and Princess Mari (not an alternative spelling for Mary, but rather a short form of "Marionette"). Initially, their relationship is constructed around him repeatedly carrying (or gliding) her out of danger while she pouts and claims she's not helpless (though she is flightless).

The four robots are more interesting: Acroyear, Biotron, Microtron, and Bug ("Galactic Warrior"). Their character traits are also emerging. The predictably tiny Microtron (Mari's companion) is "overly succinct" – a flaw he blames on his programming. Bug has a speech tic – literally, a <Tik!> – which distinguish his dialogue bubbles. The android Biotron (Rann's shadow) exhibits butler-like mannerisms and constant irritation with Rann. Acroyear boasts immense ear-like extensions which render him a little like Galactus. And in this issue, we learn that Acroyear's brother, Prince Shaitan is fighting for Karza, intent on murdering his brother, the rightful "Prince of all Acroyears."

We're also introduced to adolescent Steve Coffin of Daytona Beach, Florida, in whose backyard the tiny cast of six lands and is immediately molested by Steve's Cocker Spaniel, Muffin, whom they dispatch with their phasers thoughtfully set to "stun." Next, Garza appears. A dog-fight ensues, charring large patches of the lawn Steve had been tasked with mowing.

What will Steve's father have to say about the ruined turf when he gets home? We'll have to wait until issue 3 to find out.

Micronauts issue 3 (March 1979)

Writer: Bill Mantlo

Artist: Michael Golden

Review by Tom Simmons

The introduction of young Steve Coffin in the last issue humanizes the Micronauts. Steve is even able to participate in the tiny spaceship dogfight in his backyard by swinging lawn implements at the enemy ships.

Alarmingly, when Steve explains the arrival of the itty-bitty aliens to his father, Ray, his first inclination is to have his son examined by "Doctors at the Cape" – but he soon relents when he discerns the slightly wounded Bug Micronaut hidden in the blades of grass at his feet.

There is plenty of action in this issue, whose title – "Death-Duel at Daytona Beach" – pretty much sums it up as the combat-choreography between Garza's henchmen and the team of two humans and four robots relocates from Steve's backyard to the landmarks of Daytona Beach.

The mayhem triggers a response from the U.S. military security detail guarding Cape Canaveral and a pair of fighter jets is dispatched. One pilot radios the other, "What're we looking for, Tiger 8?" The other replies: "Something small, fast, and 15 feet off the ground" to which the first acknowledges: "Uh ... Roger!" Soon thereafter, the battle heats up.

The simmering romance between Commander Rann and Princess Mari likewise begins to thaw. We get a glimpse of Mari's discomfiting interior thoughts on their maturing relationship: "Rann entrusted me with the Thorium Gun without once questioning my ability! I like that in a man! In fact, I like almost everything about that man!" Ah-hem.

Our heroes win the battle over Daytona Beach after jettisoning a tracking device on their spaceship by which Karza had been able to locate them. The existence of the device is revealed to Mari by the appearance of a ghostlike apparition with many names – among them, the "Time Traveller" and the "Enigma Force" – whose main function appears to plug otherwise leaky plot holes.

Meanwhile, back on Homeworld, Baron Garza reveals that he has promised the youthful body of Princess Mari to an aging royal supporter and has dastardly medical experiments in mind for her brother, Prince Argon.

At the conclusion of issue 3, the setup of Micronauts is complete. By escaping from Baron Garza, the Micronauts created a gap in the Spacewall, allowing him to pursue them – while also exposing the people of Earth to his imperial ambitions. The conflict has widened. Now, the stakes involved in the civil war which began on Homeworld extend to our planet as well.

Movies

Black Widow Review by Tom Feller

I was rather surprised when I saw this movie on the schedule, because the title character, played by Scarlett Johansson, was killed off in *Avengers: Endgame*. Obviously, it is a prequel to the last two *Avengers* movies and set shortly after the events of *Captain America: Civil War* when the Avengers were outlawed all over the world. There is an action-packed prologue that shows twelve-year old Natasha, later the Black Widow, and her younger sister Yelena as the daughters of two Russian spies, Melina (Rachel Weisz) and Alexei (David Harbour), who are living in Ohio. This part is rather brief, because they immediately escape to Cuba. The film then fast forwards to 2016. Yelena (Florence Pugh) is a member of the Widows, young women trained by the Russian organization known as the “Red Room” to be assassins and/or “black ops” agents. (Natasha was also a Widow, but she defected to the West and became an Avenger.) Yelena is exposed to a chemical that releases her from the mind controls the Russians use and sends samples to Natasha, who is in hiding from S.H.I.E.L.D. This forces Natasha to go on the run from the Taskmaster, a Russian super-soldier sent to retrieve the samples. Natasha and Yelena re-unite with their parents (Melina is a scientist and Alexei is a super-soldier known as Red Guardian currently in a maximum security prison) and track down Dreykov (Ray Winstone), the head of the Red Room.

The plot resembles one of the Jason Bourne movies but with a feminist theme, and the mind control premise made it feel like *The Manchurian Candidate*. The scene in which Natasha and Yelena break their father out of prison resembled the climax of the Charles Bronson movie *Breakout*. The actors are good, especially Pugh as Yelena, and the action scenes are excellent, reminiscent of the James Bond and the *Mission Impossible* films. However, it is a minor film in the Marvel Cinematic Universe serving to introduce Yelena as the new Black Widow.

Old Review by Tom Feller

M. Night Shyamalan had such a big hit with his debut directorial effort, *The Sixth Sense*, that he has spent the last 20 years trying to live up to it. People especially remember that film’s twist ending. His latest movie also has a twist ending. While not as powerful as the one in the earlier film, it is a good effort.

The setup is that a family (Gael Garcia Bernal as the father, Vicky Krieps the mother, Nolan River the six year old son, and Alexa Swinton the eleven year old daughter) visits a tropical resort for a vacation. (It was filmed in the Dominican Republic.) The resort manager (Gustaf Hammarstan) offers them an exclusive deal for “very special guests”, a trip to an isolated beach not available to the general public. They, another family (father Rufus Sewell, mother Abbey Lee, six year old daughter Kylie Begley, and grandmother Kathleen Chalfant), and a couple (Ken Leung and Nikki Amuka-Bird) take him up. After they are dropped off by Shyamalan himself in a cameo, they find a man (Aaron Pierre) already there. The problem is that after a few hours, they discover that they are all aging at the rate of one year for every half hour

they stay on the beach. It becomes immediately evident with the youngest and the oldest, who dies first. They quickly learn that they can't leave the way they came, can't climb out, and can't swim out. Furthermore, none of their cell phones can get a signal. Something they discover they all have in common is that at least one member of each group has a chronic medical condition, and this becomes a key plot point.

Beautifully photographed, the new film is very intense and certainly keeps your attention, despite the awkward dialogue and cardboard characters. It is based on the 2010 French graphic novel *Sandcastle* by Pierre Oscar Levy and Frederik Peeters. Unfortunately, the solution to the mystery feels forced and does not measure up to the mystery itself.

The Green Knight Review by Tom Feller

I have never read the anonymous 14th Century epic poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, so I am relying on secondary sources for how this movie differs from it. The premise is that a knight (voice of Ralph Ineson), who is half-man and half-tree, visits King Arthur's court at Christmas (in the poem it is New Year's) and challenges the Knights of the Round Table to exchange blows. Only Arthur's nephew Gawain (Dev Patel), who is not yet a knight (a deviation from the original), takes up the challenge and cuts the Green Knight's head off. However, the Green Knight recovers his head and tells Gawain to meet him at the "Green Chapel" in a year. Gawain has a series of adventures, including being robbed, encountering a talking fox, and seeing pregnant giants, in the following year before meeting the knight for their reunion.

In this version of the Arthurian legend, Gawain, in another deviation from the poem, is the only son of the sorceress Morgan Le Fay (Sarita Choudhury), who has good relations with Arthur and Guinevere (Kate Dickie). He is first in line to inherit Arthur's throne, and he has a prostitute lover (Alicia Vikander) who dreams of becoming his wife and eventually the queen. This movie incorporates the legend of St. Winifred (Erin Kellyman), whose head was cut off by a suitor, although this story is not in the original poem. The physical adventure is actually secondary to the emotional, moral, and spiritual one. The acting is quite good, especially Patel, and the visuals very beautiful. The story is NOT dumbed-down for a 21st Century audience, and the ending is deliberately ambiguous.

Jungle Cruise Review by Tom Feller

Disney has a mixed record when it comes to movies based on their theme park attractions. On the one hand, *The Pirates of the Caribbean* movies were far better than they had any right to be. On the other, my wife and I tried to watch *The Haunted Mansion* on cable (it disappeared from the movie theaters before we ever got a chance to see it) and found it so unwatchable that we gave up after about an hour. This new movie splits the difference.

Set in 1916, Emily Blunt plays a female version of Indiana Jones. (If you are going to steal, steal from the best.) Dwayne Johnson is the punning captain of an Amazon riverboat. (The boat design and Johnson's wardrobe were based on Humphrey Bogart's in *The African Queen*, a movie that Walt Disney himself loved.) He is the ostensible owner of the boat, although the local tycoon (Paul Giamatti) repossesses the engine at the beginning of the film.

Blunt hires Johnson and, with Blunt's overly-civilized brother (Jack Whitehall, who reminded me of the John Hannah character in the Brendan Fraser Mummy movies), they go off in search of a legendary tree called "Tears of the Moon". It is so-called because the leaves, which only come out during a new moon, have miraculous healing powers. Jesse Plemons plays the main villain, the youngest son of Kaiser Wilhelm (he just happens to cruise around in his very own submarine) and Edgar Ramirez a secondary one, a cursed Spanish conquistador named Aguirre, a nod to Werner Herzog's Aguirre: The Wrath of God, still alive after 400 years. If this sounds very derivative, it's because it is. Nonetheless, it is quite entertaining.

SerCon

Mark Clifton Bio-Bibliography

by

Jon D. Swartz, Ph. D.

N3F Historian



Mark Irvin Clifton was born in 1906, and died in 1963. Trained as a teacher, Clifton spent twenty-five years in personnel work in industry, compiling 200,000 case histories using an approach like the one Kinsey used in his investigations of human sexual behavior.

Clifton began writing science fiction (SF) part-time in the 1950s, and produced three SF books during his lifetime. A posthumous collection of his stories, *The Science Fiction of Mark Clifton*, was published in 1980 (see below).

Other SF Publications

First published story: "What Have I Done?" in *Astounding* (May, 1952); First novel: *They'd Rather Be Right*, with Frank Riley (Gnome Press, 1957); First short story collection: *Eight Keys to Eden* (Ballantine, 1960).

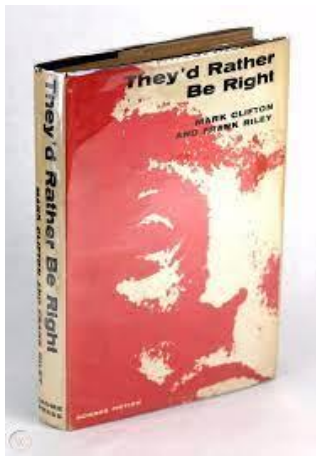
Southern Illinois University Press published a collection of his genre work in 1980, *The Science Fiction of Mark Clifton* [edited by Martin Greenberg and Barry Malzberg, with a memoir and appreciation by Judith Merrill].

Non-Fiction

Clifton published considerable non-fiction, including the book *Opportunity Unlimited: What Management Is Looking For In You* (1959).

Radio

One of his short stories, "Star, Bright," originally published in *Galaxy Science Fiction Magazine*, was dramatized April 10, 1956, on the NBC radio program *X Minus One*.



Honors/Awards

Hugo (Novel) for *They'd Rather Be Right*, 1955; GoH, Westercon, 1957; 2010 Cordwainer Smith Rediscovery Award “for unjust obscurity.”

Critical Evaluation

Today Clifton’s works are known for their psychological insights, their dark views of human nature, and the recurring theme that we see only what we are prepared to see.

In his brief ten-year writing career, he created two memorable SF series, with most of the stories published in *Astounding*: the “Joey” (later “Bossy”) series, that led to his and Riley’s Hugo-winning novel about a super-computer that helped humans to evolve psi powers and immortality; and the “Ralph Kennedy” series, about an extra-terrestrial psychologist, that resulted in Clifton’s last novel, *When They Come From Space* (Doubleday, 1962).

Frank Riley

Frank Riley, Mark Clifton’s co-author of *They'd Rather Be Right* (re-titled *The Forever Machine*, the original title of the *Astounding* serial when published as a *Galaxy* SF Novel in 1959), was the pseudonym of Frank Wilbert Ryhlick (1915 -- 1996). Ryhlick was a freelance writer and later travel editor for the *Los Angeles Times*. His first published SF was the cover-featured story “The Execution” in *If* (April, 1956).

In addition to the famous novel with Clifton, he wrote the “Father Anton Dymek” mysteries and published two mainstream novels and a non-fiction book, *Dixie Demagogues* (1939), under his own name. Under his Frank Riley pseudonym he wrote several SF stories for *If* in the 1950s. His obituary appeared in the June, 1996 issue (#425) of *Locus Magazine*.

Some Conclusions

Although Clifton wrote SF for only about ten years, some genre critics feel that he had an enormous impact on the field.

He began writing fiction as a side-line, using the results of his extensive personnel work as guides for the characters in his stories.

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

An Interview with Thom Dresser By Tamara Wilhite

Thom Dresser is the creator of the fantasy “Beggars Rest” series, starting with “The Heart of the Necromancer”. And I had the opportunity to interview him.

Tamara Wilhite: What is your “Beggars Rest” series about?

Thom Dresser: “Beggar’s Rest” is a fantasy setting based in the imaginations of countless gamers and fantasy enthusiasts who have shaped this imaginary world for many years. In many ways it reflects the mundane world we’re trapped in though it was written as pure escapism.

Tamara Wilhite: You have four fantasy books out now. I believe you’re working on the fifth. When does that come out?

Thom Dresser: Book five (Foghaven) will be available soon and the five-book compilation with illustrations by the amazing Chet Minton will be released as soon as I can get it compiled. They’re so much easier to write than to release.

Tamara Wilhite: How many books do you think it will be when completed?

Thom Dresser: Thousands, I hope. The gaming world has existed for over thirty years and has been colored and influenced by many strange and wonderful minds. Musicians and artists have shaped its evolution and continue to do so constantly. Sometimes I’ve lost control so thoroughly that I had to write the tales. My son’s character broke my campaign with time travel and that was what really gave me the motivation to write these tales. I see no end in sight. There will be more.

Tamara Wilhite: And what else have you written?

Thom Dresser: Oh, no. There are some truly horrific tales of modern horror that I released under a similar name but I’d just as soon not have them associated with these. Anyone who is curious will have to find them on their own.

Tamara Wilhite: You’ve come out with multiple fantasy novels in 2020. May I ask what you do for a day job? Or what you decided to do before jumping into writing?

Thom Dresser: What did I do when I was pretending not to be a writer? Well, I’m a former US Marine with a background in international security, and used to be a level 2 gamma radiographer, but have done many things professionally including trimming trees for the power company, restaurant management and, more recently, a musician. The last doesn’t pay many bills

but is its own reward.

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

Thom Dresser: Well, these tales are primarily meant to entertain but, like any writing should, might give a different perspective about the issues involved. Fantasy reflects reality and these are no different. The characters evolved from the minds of real people and their responses to various stimuli and situations. Complex issues like doing bad things for the greater good are explored in depth, and the idea of rising from the ashes of failure and despair to rise again re-born is paramount.

Thanks for giving me this opportunity to share. I hope you enjoy these stories.

Tamara Wilhite: Thanks for speaking with me.

An Interview with Richard Paolinelli, Author of "Galen's Way" By Tamara Wilhite

Richard Paolinelli is a science fiction writer. Richard Paolinelli's novel "Escaping Infinity" was a Dragon Award finalist for best science fiction novel. I had the opportunity to interview him after his latest novel "Galen's Way" came out.

Tamara Wilhite: In your bio, you mention your first science fiction credit being the Elite Comics sci-fi/fantasy series, "Seadragon". What exactly was your role in that project?

Richard Paolinelli: I was the lead writer, tasked to transition "Seadragon" from the eight-page story that ran in the back of several Epsilon Wave comic books to his own full 24-page comic. I wound up writing the first two of the six books that were produced. Ironically enough, I recently got the green light to make a novelization of "Seadragon" from the surviving co-creator Tom Floyd and I hope to have that book out by the end of the year.

Tamara Wilhite: What led you to retire from sports writing in 2010?

Richard Paolinelli: Working until midnight every night was getting old. Plus I felt I had done everything I'd wanted to do as a sportswriter. So when newspapers starting cutting staff – beginning with us old-timers who commanded higher wages than the kids coming out of school – I read the writing on the wall, spent a couple of years working as an online editor for a web-only paper in Southern California, and finally made the move back to full-time fiction writing in 2013.

Tamara Wilhite: You've been busy with a steady stream of science fiction novels and short stories. How many stories did you contribute to the Planetary Anthology series?

Richard Paolinelli: I wound up in eight of the 11 books, with Mercury, Venus and Mars being the three I did not get into. This makes me even more impressed with Bokerah Brumley, who is in all 11, and A.M. Freeman, who was in 10 (Neptune was the only miss for her). I don't mind finishing third behind these very talented authors at all.

Tamara Wilhite: Your latest novel is “Galen’s Way”? What is that about?

Richard Paolinelli: It’s a space opera set in John C. Wright’s Starquest universe and, by a quirk of fate, it is actually the first Starquest novel to be released. John has a trilogy coming out soon and I know two other authors are also writing in this new universe.

My story is set in the 4th age of Starquest (John is writing in the 12th, millions of years after my stories), when the human race has forgotten it originated in a different galaxy as well as the Galactic Knights that held the line against a Dark Force long enough for them to escape oblivion.

It follows the exploits of the Andromeda Galaxy’s most feared mercenary, Galen Dwyn, who might just be descended from one of those long-lost Knights. Galen has been hired by an emissary of the King of the planet Salacia to recover the King’s kidnapped daughter. She is being held on a fortress planet, impervious to an all-out assault by the Salacian military, but possibly vulnerable to a man with Galen’s cunning and skill. That he will also be able to settle an old score of his own with the kidnapper only sweetens the pot for Galen.

But, when he arrives on the planet he discovers not one kidnapped Princess, but four. He also discovers he is right in the middle of an attempt to overthrow the Chancellor of the Interplanetary Alliance by the very man whose daughter he was hired to rescue. A rescue, that is instead a trap designed to kill the four Princesses and hang their deaths on Galen and the Chancellor.

Now, Galen must use all of his cunning to keep himself and the Princess Rhiannon alive long enough in a galaxy filled with people looking to kill them both to stop the birth of an evil Empire. And he will do so the only way he knows how – Galen’s Way.

Tamara Wilhite: And how does it relate to other books or stories you’ve published?

Richard Paolinelli: It really doesn’t, to be honest. I’ve never written Space Opera before and certainly nothing else that sets up what is – so far – an eight-book series when you factor in the pre-migration stories I have planned within the Starquest universe. Several will take place before humanity is transplanted from the Milky Way Galaxy to the Andromeda Galaxy. Even the Del Rio series started out as a three-book series with my decision to expand to a fourth – and likely final – book only being made recently.

But the one thing it does have in common with the others is my approach to the storytelling: That the reader will finish the book well entertained by a well-plotted out story with characters they connect with and are happy they invested the time and money they did in reading it.

Tamara Wilhite: What else are you working on?

Richard Paolinelli: In addition to the “Seadragon” novel, I have an Alt-History project based on the Biblical character Cain that I started some time ago and set aside while trying to work out how exactly I wanted to end it. Then there is the long-called-for sequel to Escaping Infinity that I finally figured out how to write.

Provided I have time, I have the fourth book in the Del Rio political-thriller series to finish up before the end of the year as well. Then I plan on spending 2022 and 2023 writing the other seven novels I have plotted out in the Starquest Universe.

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

Richard Paolinelli: First, thank you for interviewing me again. And if your readers would like to keep up with what I am up to they can do so at www.scifiscribe.com and get access to some exclusive giveaways and content – including some new short stories and a few others no longer in print – here: <https://www.buymeacoffee.com/rdpaolinelli>

Tamara Wilhite: Thank you for speaking with me.

Another Interview with Mike Baron By Tamara Wilhite

I interviewed Mike Baron shortly before his comic book “Florida Man” came out. He is more famous for creating the “Nexus” science fiction comic book in the 1980s. He worked on “Star Wars – The New Republic” and “Star Wars: The Thrawn Trilogy” books.

Tamara Wilhite: You created the comic book version of the Thrawn Trilogy. I am assuming that you know people like Timothy Zahn. Do you have any insight about the fight over Star Wars novelists not being paid by Disney?

Mike Baron: A little. I've met Tim at several cons. I would have to comb through my royalty statements to see if Disney has coughed up. I think all longtime Disney fans are appalled at the direction the company has taken: censorship of classic films like *Song of the South* and *Dumbo*, choosing their writers and directors not on their ability to do the job, but on basis of ethnicity and sexual orientation, canceling Gena Carrano for expressing mainstream traditional ideas, altering their classic *Jungle Cruise* so as not to offend. Entertainment is job one. Most people know that. Most people also have the common sense to smell nonsense.

Huh. I just got a check from Disney for a hundred and thirty-nine bucks! I can only conclude it's for my Star Wars work.

Tamara Wilhite: I don't know if your latest works count as science fiction related. But how well did your “Florida Man” series do? I know the sequels “Hogzilla” and “Catfish Calling” came out.



Mike Baron: We're real happy. Florida comic shops can't keep them on the shelf. We're about to start the art on the second Florida Man graphic novel, “Hogzilla.” There's a strong science fiction element in the novel *Hogzilla* as Tallywhacker, the artificially intelligent mechanical bull, is invaded by aliens with multiple personalities. It's complicated!

Tamara Wilhite: Your earliest comics like “Nexus” came out in print. “Florida Man” and your other recent works are available as digital comic books as well as print versions. How does publishing an e-comic, if that's the right word, differ from traditional print publishing?

Mike Baron: I have no idea. I demand physical product. I don't do downloads. But what do I know? If people want all their entertainment digitally, who am I to say thee nay? They'll be sorry when the giant alien electro magnetic pulse hits and they're left with useless junk. There's a huge dif in looking at your hand-held device reading Punisher, and holding the print copy in your hand. There's something magical in the way good comic illustration can suck you into the page. Digital readers are jaded. They just accept that as normal, if it's done well. If it's not done well, they can see it's bad art.

Tamara Wilhite: What are the biggest online comic book publishing platforms? And which do you recommend to creators?

Mike Baron: I've heard of Comixology! Otherwise, precious little of light filters down here into the badger den. I can barely operate ths computer.

Tamara Wilhite: You're working on a new comic series called "Buddy McGill". What is that about?

Mike Baron: Buddy is the James Bond of Dogs. He starts out as a TSA agent, sniffing for drugs, but when Buddy spots a terrorist boarding a jetliner, he takes action! He rips the disguise off the terrorist and flushes himself out the toilet, using the garment as a parachute. And that's just the beginning. By the end of the first issue, Buddy has become famous. Artist Fer Calvi is unique. A genius. I've included the cover and some pages.

Tamara Wilhite: What else are you currently working on?

Mike Baron: Writing a military sci fi novel with Major Diggs Brown, finishing a second Nexus novel, writing a new Biker, writing 2084, a dystopian future comic, for Martin Pirkl (enclosing some art,) watching Pat Broderick do the best work of his career illustrating Bronze Star, our Western, watching Richard Bonk finish the new Nexus GN Nefarious, coming from Dark Horse next year, waiting for copies of Kelsey Shannon's three issue Nexus series, waiting to fulfill MONSTER HUNT 2: LET'S GET KRAKEN, the Nexus/Lonestar/Bigfoot Bill crossover with art by Matthew Welch, writing The Saints for Allegiance, and some other stuff.

Tamara Wilhite: Thank you for speaking with me.

Videos

Review Of UFO By Will Mayo

There was that shortlived science fiction TV show of the '70s that went by just the name of UFO and had to do with the Earth's military and scientists on guard against those pesky UFOs in the sky, ready to shoot them down on a moment's notice. It didn't last long, no, but I clearly recall the ever vigilant men and those Go-Go dress-wearing women with the weird hairdos standing guard at the threat from those outer space invaders. Following head on the heels on the fact-based TV show Operation: Blue Book, concerning our government's inquiry into extraterrestrials, it was all too typical of the time.

Food of Famous Writers

Eat This While You Read That: Jim Baen
Cedar Sanderson



Writing this post made me reflect on missed opportunities. I never got to meet Jim Baen in person. I would have liked to, and to take him pecan sandies, which I knew were his favorites. Sadly, I couldn't travel, and then, he was gone. But he'll never be forgotten and I wanted to pay tribute to him, so I asked Toni Weisskopf if it was ok, and she said to go right ahead.

And I baked, and thought, and tasted, and talked to a friend who did know him. A sense of loss, but also the happy memories of the books, the Baen's Bar, and the people I met there. That number includes my First Reader, who I met there years before he earned that title. Which was Jim's gift to me although it wasn't his intent and he never knew. What he wanted to do – and succeeded admirably at – was to sell books. It was his vision that created something extraordinary in Baen Books. His revolutionary ideas about ebooks, the Baen Free Library, and the community that I found in Baen's Bar, those all added up to a fierce loyalty to a publishing house, which isn't a common thing. In fact, I think it may be unique.

I suppose that if I put this in other words, you'd better be ready to curl up with a lot of cookies and milk or your beverage of choice... Because there are so many good reads with Jim Baen's name on them

Ingredients

- 2 sticks (1 cup) butter
- 1 c powdered sugar
- 2 tbsp water
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 3 c flour
- 2 c pecan meal. You can actually buy powdered pecans.

“pecan meal” Failing that, you need to fine-grind them.



Instructions

Cream together the butter and sugar until light and creamy.

Beat in the water and vanilla, then slowly add the flour a half-cup at a time.

Stir in the pecans - I actually kneaded in about half of them, as the dough was very stiff at this point.

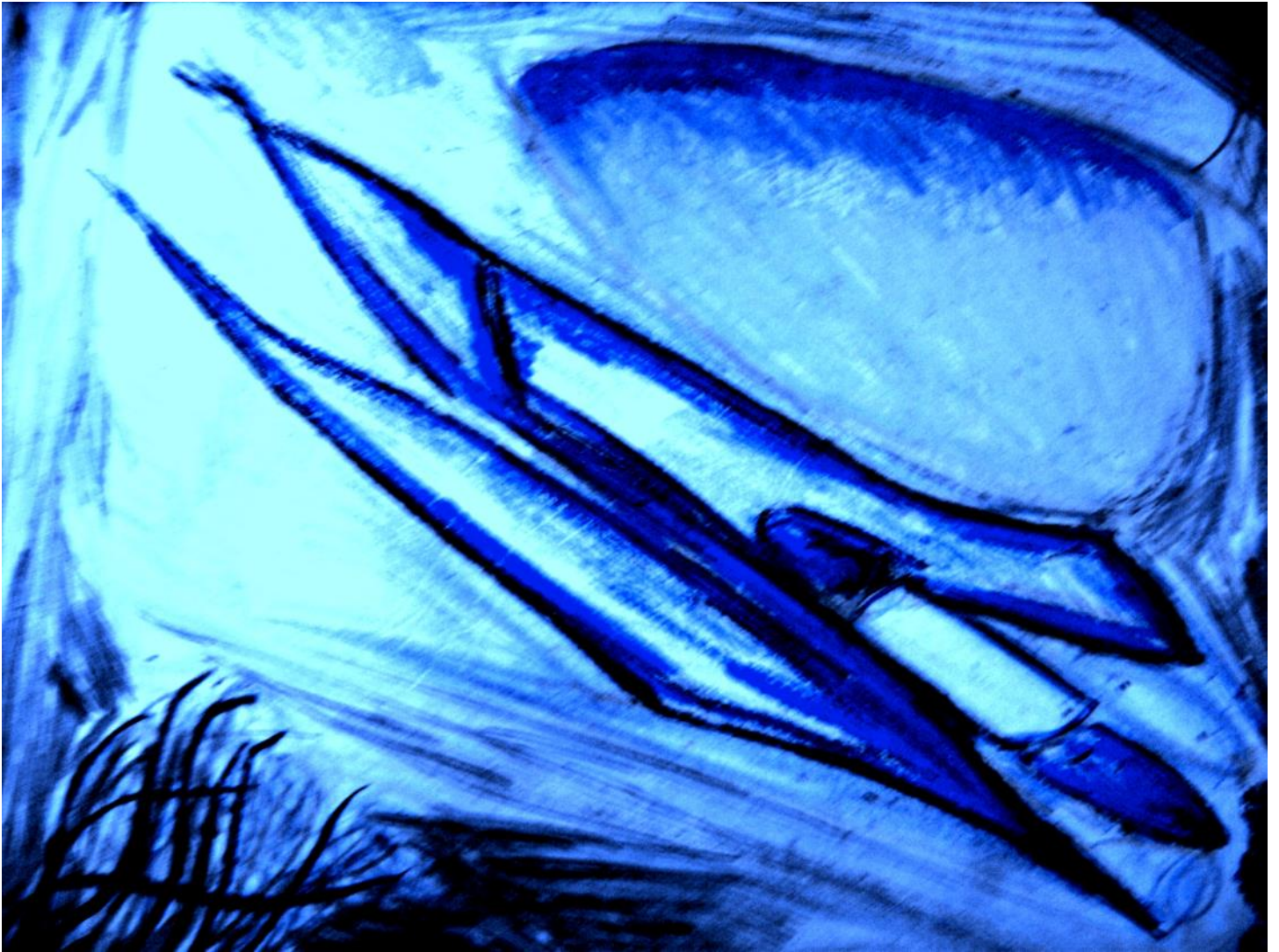
Make a log of the dough, about 3 in in diameter, and wrap it in wax paper. Refrigerate for a couple of hours, until firm.

Preheat the oven to 325 deg F

Slice the log into 1/2" thick slabs. You can dip the slices into powdered sugar for a sweeter cookie.

Place the cookies on a baking sheet and bake for 15-20 minutes, until they are just starting to brown on the bottom.

Makes about two dozen cookies.



Shrimps by David Russell