

Tightbeam

November 2022



Snow Warrior by Cedar Sanderson

Tightbeam 338

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Editorial

We are saddened to report that Justin E. A. Busch has joined Will Mayo in passing to the next plane of existence. His obituary will appear in a future issue of FanActivity Gazette, in the place of the Fanfaronade column he edited for all Neffers.

Justin had briefly assumed the editorship of Films Fantastic. In light of our losses, for the nonce film reviews will appear in these pages. It is sad state of affairs, but over the years we have gradually lost reviewers for Tightbeam, so that this zine is less long than in years past.

Neffers are encouraged to write reviews specifically for Tightbeam, including reviews of films, television, videos, poems, music, short stories, comics, and anime.

Table of Contents

Art

Front Cover ... Snow Warrior by Cedar Sanderson
Back Cover ... Battle of the Sea Kings by Tiffanie Gray

Anime

4 ... Fuuto, P.I. Jessi Silver
6 ... The Maid I Hired Recently Is Mysterious Review by Jessi Silver

Films

8 ... Fantastic Beasts 2: The Crimes of Grindewald Review by Jim McCoy
9 ... Paramount's Scream (2022) Review by Jim McCoy

SerCon

11 ... John Michel Bio-Bibliography by Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D.

Food of Famous Authors

15 ... Christopher Woods' Fish Tacos ... Cooking by Cedar Sanderson

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Anime

Fuuto, P.I. by Jessi Silver



Streaming: Crunchyroll

Episodes: 12

Source: Manga

Episode Summary: The city of Fuuto is a mysterious place where it's very easy for magic to become reality. Shotaro Hidari considers himself a hard-boiled detective (though some would beg to differ) who knows the city like the back of his own hand. However, when a supposed "witch" begins mugging people, Shotaro finds that despite meeting her in person one night and being struck by her beauty, she's especially difficult to track down. When a victim approaches him to help find her (along with his stolen items) it takes the extent of Shotaro's information network to simply figure out where she might appear next.

When it becomes apparent that this witch may also have had her hand in the murder of the member of a local crime organization, Shotaro considers leaving the matter to the city's police. However, the insistence of the client, as well as the nature of his own pride as a private investigator, keeps driving him toward answers. When he and his client are drawn into an alternate



Truly "hard-boiled."

version of Fuuto and find themselves under attack, Shotaro finds himself in a pinch. The only thing that can save them is the intervention of Phillip – Shotaro's literal other half as part of Kamen Rider W.

Impressions: Most of what I know about the Kamen Rider franchise I know through a very passionate friend of mine who's an expert on most things tokusatsu in a time where some of that information is still difficult to come by (at least in the US where we live). Oftentimes another person's enthusiasm about something can become contagious, though, and so I have at least a little bit of appreciation for the franchise's history and have enjoyed the little samples of it I've watched here and there.

The thing is, I've discovered over the years that I'm just not that big of a live-action tokusatsu fan. It's not the quality of the special effects that gets me – I find their corniness charming. It's just that, if I had to choose between watching a live action hero series and an equivalently-produced animated one, I'll just feel more drawn to the animated one every single time.

Enter Fuuto, P.I., a new animated entry into the Kamen Rider mythos. While not exactly the first – if you're willing to squint slightly, you could probably count Studio Bones' adaptation of *The Skull Man* – it definitely seems to be working to capture the particular look and mood of at least the recent Kamen Rider series. It's got a slightly edgier feel than a typical hero series, with its protagonists operating somewhere alongside but outside the law. However, it's also got that specific brand of over-acted, corny dialog that I personally associated with a lot of the live-action tokusatsu material I've seen. I don't mean that as a criticism either; it's a specific

“brand” and I really enjoy it.

The interplay between the characters (especially the two halves of this universe’s titular Rider) remind me of the leads in Tiger and Bunny, in that they represent the hot-headed goofball and cool-headed genius contingents of character expression (now that I’m thinking of it, I’m sure T&B was the one cribbing off of material like this). I imagine if that character dynamic appeals to you, then this ought to as well.



The very creepy alternate world Fuuto.

This episode was a lot of fun, and definitely a pleasant surprise since it was a late drop and I don’t think I was actually aware enough of its existence to really anticipate it.

If you’re into fairly straightforward heroic action kind of material, it’s definitely worth checking out. At least in my opinion, you don’t really need to have a past history with Kamen Rider to get something out of this episode.

Pros: This episode is ridiculously well-made in comparison to the majority of anime I’ve watched lately. The character designs are very detailed and there are a lot of creative shot choices that make the episode feel lively rather than mostly static.

While Kamen Rider is partly iconic due to the fact that he’s depicted as an actual rider on a motorcycle, I’ve learned that, due to liability reasons, the recent TV series have strayed from using that as a gimmick. Of course, that’s not an issue when it comes to animated characters, so in this episode we get to watch an exciting chase scene in which Shotaro dodges between traffic on his motorcycle. Don’t try this at home, kids!

Cons: Possibly the only real stain on this episode, and something that’s specific to me as a viewer, is that almost every scene involving Tokime, the “witch” and antagonist, is framed so that her secondary sex characteristics are more front-and-center than her face. She enters Shotaro’s frame of vision tiddies-first and we never really get a break from that.

I know Kamen Rider is generally a shounen property, but I find it very cynical to assume that it takes female sex appeal to maintain boys’ attention, especially when the rest of the episode is otherwise so good in a more universal way.

Content Warnings: Mild nudity. Depictions of violence and injury, including dismemberment and gunshot wounds.

Would I Watch More? – I got a little spoiled before watching this episode by someone posting the henshin scene from the second episode, so I feel like I want to at least watch that one to get the full experience.

This episode was a lot of fun and it’s something different this season, which in itself is appealing.

The Maid I Hired Recently Is Mysterious

By Jessi Silver

Streaming: Crunchyroll

Episodes: 11

Source: Manga



Episode Summary: After Yuuri's parents pass away tragically in an accident, he decides to let the servants at his small mansion go to help preserve some of his inheritance. Unfortunately, for a kid with very little experience cooking and cleaning, living life entirely on his own has a steep learning curve. It's at his moment of greatest need that Lilith, a maid, shows up on Yuuri's doorstep and offers to work for him in exchange for nothing more than room and board. Though

Yuuri finds this suspicious, the alternative isn't appealing.

Almost immediately, Yuuri finds Lilith's behavior questionable. She teases him with a familiarity that seems counter to the fact that they barely know one another. Yuuri often finds her up late at night reading books or cooking up concoctions in the kitchen. He's sure that she must be some kind of sorceress out to get him. It's true that her motives run deeper than they may seem



Lilith arrives at Yuuri's mansion.

to at first, but despite her seemingly playful nature, Lilith wants to wait for the right time to let the young master know more about herself.

Impressions: Trauma can sometimes change us in ways that we don't necessarily expect or realize. After I went through the end of a relationship and its accompanying divorce, I realized that many of the friendships I'd had were sort of conditional on that relationship existing and didn't have much to actually do with me. Dealing with that was a chal-

lenge and it left me feeling disconnected from most people, including the friends I still had. Now I still have trouble letting down my own defenses around others and cultivating the kinds of intimate friendships I once had (or thought I had), mostly because experience has taught me, at least, that people aren't always interested in "your side of the story," especially if you aren't willing to broadcast your feelings or opinions publicly and repeatedly and prefer privacy.

Having said that, I found myself sympathizing with Yuuri quite a bit throughout this episode. While I don't know what it's like to be rich (which probably brings with it a whole other set of suspicions about the motives of people in one's orbit), I do know what it's like to be approached by people whose purpose for doing so is motivated by information-gathering on behalf of others. His suspicion of Lilith makes sense, since she literally just showed up seemingly out of nowhere and offered him the help he desperately needed without asking for anything. Sometimes "going through some shit" causes even altruistic kindness to feel like a ploy.

Lilith is also kind of an interesting character – the type to play up her air of mystery while simultaneously being unable to fully pass off the illusion of having it all together at all times. She’s happy to tease Yuuri by playing into his suspicions, but her acting eventually ends up faltering (which for the purposes of the show is meant to be cute although I can take it or leave it). This characterization has the intended effect of making the audience as curious about her as Yuuri is, and it’s effective.

Overall I found this episode to be pretty cute and sufficiently intriguing. I wonder a little bit about how the interplay between Yuuri and Lilith is intended, though; there’s a lot of blushing back-and-forth between the two of them that could be read a number of different ways and not all of them innocently. The last thing I want is another creepy predatory age-gap situation, especially when one of the characters is a kid. So far I think the intended read on it is innocent teasing, though, so I’ll assume that until shown otherwise.



Funny, I say this every day and it’s never true.

Pros: I like how Yuuri’s characterization does a good job of allowing him to feel like a kid, just a kid with a burden of responsibility on his shoulders. His “theories” about what’s going on with Lilith are all completely silly, misinterpreting her actions to become a better cook and maid as creating magic potions and casting curses when he’s out of sight.

He knows what his responsibilities are, but he hasn’t lost that big imagination that’s an effect of his youth.

Cons: While this is me absolutely being critical of the very basis of the show, I’m not a huge fan of the fact that Lilith doesn’t come right out and tell Yuuri what’s going on with her and how she discovered that he needed a caretaker. There are enough little clues throughout the episode that one can come up with a few theories, so “the audience” not knowing isn’t really the issue.

It’s more that... I guess personally I think keeping major secrets from someone in this type of scenario is wrong, especially a child in a vulnerable situation. And yes, “anime isn’t real-life” and “not every character has to be perfect and moral” (*sigh*) but I can also only react to things based on my own experiences, and it squicks me a little.

Content Warnings: Offscreen parental death. Mild fanservice.

Would I Watch More? – This really depends on how generous the series is with providing information.

While I do enjoy a good mystery and definitely don’t need to be force-fed story details to be satisfied, I don’t appreciate getting constantly teased with no reward for twelve episodes, so I might try to get a few more details before I commit either way.

Films

Fantastic Beasts 2: The Crimes of Grindelwald Review by Jim McCoy

I just finished watching Fantastic Beasts 2: The Crimes of Grindelwald about two hours ago and decided I'd share my thoughts about it.

SIGH

Once upon a time, during a decade of my life best forgotten, I was told that I should always start off with something positive when critiquing someone else's work. That's good advice, so let's start with this:



The special effects crew for Fantastic Beasts 2: The Crimes of Grindelwald deserves an Oscar. That was one of the most intense visual experiences of my life. The magical creatures lived and breathed. There was an underwater scene that looked better than anything similar I've seen in movies, TV or gaming. Barely a minute went by when there wasn't something awesome looking somewhere in my view. I seriously hope that whoever did the CGI for The Crimes of Grindelwald gets a raise or a promotion, or maybe a raise AND a promotion. I didn't watch the credits but WOW, WOW, WOW, WOW, WOW. I wonder if somewhere out there some other special effects people weren't watching this movie in awe wondering how they managed to pull some of this stuff off. It was that good.

Unfortunately, I have to wonder if they didn't spend too much of the budget on effects and not enough on a good team of writers. I mean that seriously. It hurts to write this because I've been a fan of Harry Potter since my then-GF (now ex-wife) put me in a spot where I had no choice but to read the first one. I loved all of the books. I loved the movies almost as much. The first Fantastic Beasts was awesome. That doesn't change the facts about The Crimes of Grindelwald though, and the fact is that this was not a very well written movie.

I remember way back in the day, during the same decade I mentioned earlier, I posted the first few chapters of my first attempt at a novel on a website known as Baen's Bar. It was a rough draft, but I thought it was non-sucktacular. That kind of scared me though, because most of the writers I know who feel confident about their work probably shouldn't. I was happy though because the community was very supportive. The worst comment I got was something along the lines of "This reads more like a collection of events than a story." I took that to heart, re-read what I had written and decided that the poster (I don't remember who it was) had a point. I re-worked it and made it suck less. It was a good experience.

It's also something that I wish the writers of Fantastic Beasts 2 had experienced because their work had the same problem. There was no plot here. There's no narrative thread. This happens over here. That happens over there. They're somewhat related, but let's face it, as a human being I'm somewhat related to the Pope. It's something that I can see happening to anyone in a rough



draft. It's not something that makes sense in a script that has been edited enough times to appear on the big screen. Someone needed to take charge in a production meeting and get some stuff ironed out. It's glaringly apparent that no one did.

It's not that I'm opposed to large casts and stories taking place with widely dispersed points of view. I've read enough Harry Turtledove and David Weber to be used to it. Hell, I enjoy it. It has to be done well though, and in this case it really wasn't. I'm going to cast an aspersion in absence of knowledge of the facts here, but I honestly believe what I'm saying, even if I can't prove it.

The Crimes of Grindlewald feels like it was written more as a way to show off special effects than as an attempt to tell a good story. The underwater scene that I mentioned earlier was awesome but it had nothing to do with the plot. It just looked cool. Grindlewald did some really impressive looking magic but that's all it was. He showed up and got everybody to do one really impressive looking spell but that's really all he was there for. That was as big a disappointment as anything else.

I've got to wonder if the reason this wasn't all that good is because J.K. Rowling wasn't writing it. She invented the universe. She created the characters. She engineered Hogwarts. She was conspicuous by her absence. I really missed her input here. She could have made this story sing. As it is, it barely hums and is badly off-key.

The Crimes of Grindlewald is such a disjointed mess that even when it tries to advance a relationship between two of the most important characters it falls flat. Seriously. The payoff, when it came, didn't move me at all. Seriously.

The worst thing about the movie is that it left me bored. Fortunately for me I went to see the two-thirty matinee and was the only person in the theater. That came in handy when I pulled out my phone and started Facebooking. There was no one around to complain. Yes, I really did need something to hold my attention while I was watching a movie that I had paid to see. I almost got up and left early. There really wasn't much there.

I'm up in the air as to whether or not I'll see the next one. This is, after all, the tenth movie (count again and remember that the seventh book was two movies) set in the Potterverse and they were just about due for a stinker. This should be a fairly easy act to follow as well. It's not like it could be all that much worse. On the other hand, what if it doesn't get better? I'm not rich and even a reduced price for a matinee is seven bucks. I might be better off spending that money on a couple of jerky sticks and a two liter. I guess I'll have to see how the trailers look.

Bottom Line: 2.5 out of 5 Broken Wands

Paramount's *Scream* (2022) Review by Jim McCoy

I was hesitant to watch *Scream* because I'm a LOOOOOONG way from being the world's biggest fan of reboots, but it wasn't really a reboot in the same way that the new *Ghostbusters* wasn't a reboot, so I figured I'd check it out. If nothing else, it was a movie with Courtney Cox and



Neve Campbell in it right? I've had a thing for both of those women for years. (NEWS FLASH: They're still beautiful.) And turns out that I was right: It's not a reboot, it's a sequel.

There are all kinds of rules about what makes a sequel versus what makes a reboot, but *Scream* definitely is one. It's all explained in one of the

movies meta moments and honestly, it wouldn't BE *Scream* without the meta moments. Those have to be there and they were. There has never been a *Scream* (or for that matter, one of its *Scary Movie* parodies) that wasn't very heavily meta. What would be over the line in any other entertainment, on- or off-screen, is normal and necessary for *Scream* and, as someone who saw the original *Scream* in movie theaters back during the Clinton Administration, I can assure you that they did it right once again.

Seriously, this was a good movie. It had the kill scenes, the jump moments, the circuitous logic, the big plot twist, and everything else you would expect. *Scream* is a whodunit wrapped in a slasher flick and they pulled this one off brilliantly. The only thing it was missing was the popcorn and that's my fault. I had two bags and just didn't put one in the microwave.

To be fair, I'm uhhh...

Not totally certain that was the film's fault. I just can't think of who else's fault it might be.

Listen, I've never admitted to anything being my fault. Just ask my ex-wife.

Anyway...

I like the new cast of youngsters. *Scream* started out as a movie about young people and it looks like the franchise is headed back that way. I approve. Running for your life from psychotic killers is a bad career choice in your 40s (which is where the remaining original cast members are). Us forty-somethings don't have the high energy levels, physical conditioning and ability to bounce back once injured that we did twenty years ago. There is a reason most professional athletes retire before they hit forty and it's not because they don't love the millions.

Which isn't to say that the original cast members aren't important to the movie. They for sure are and their presence makes sense. I remember reading somewhere about how Leonard Nimoy had refused to do *Star Trek: Generations* because there was no reason for Spock to be there. The character served no purpose. That's not the case here. All three returning *Screamers* are there for valid reasons and are central to what's going on. You won't see any "human exclamation points" here.

In a world where school shootings continue to happen because they get press, the *Scream* franchise has a visceral realism that other franchises just don't. Schools get shot up by evil assholes who want to get their faces on TV, so why wouldn't someone go to a town with a history of serial killers whose exploits get made into movies and kill people? Don't get me wrong. I'm not encouraging it. I'm just saying that this story hits close to home and it makes the fear more real. A *Nightmare on Elm Street* movie might be scary in the moment, but on some level you know

that no dead guy is ever going to murder you in your dreams. When copycat killings happen in real life, it's easy to see something like the plot of a *Scream* movie occurring. I'm honestly kind of surprised that it hasn't.

Somewhere out there exists an EMT/trauma surgeon type that's going to tell me I'm wrong about this, but the injuries looked totally realistic to me. Even down to the blood spatter (not spray! I watched *CSI*, so I know this) on the walls, floors and the characters themselves. This movie left me disgusted when I needed to be and in shock when I needed to be.

Speaking of in shock, I want to compliment both the writers and the actresses here. Sydney Prescott (played by Neve Campbell) and Gale Weathers (Courtney Cox) have been through a lot in the previous four movies. It would have been very easy to write and play them as jaded and immune to the types of reactions that most people would have upon encountering some of what is in this movie. In some parts, they actually are. But in the parts where you need to feel the shock that the characters would, those two characters shine. It wasn't until I sat down to write this that I thought about how well those scenes were done, but they were flawless. I should probably mention David Arquette as Dewey Riley here as well. He played his part well but, to be honest, I've never been a fan of either the character or the actor. Still, he did a better job than I expected him to and I really enjoyed him.

Anyone who says that horror movies in general, or *Scream* movies in particular, are not highly formulaic is lying. That much having been said, that's part of why I enjoy them. You never know what the details are going to be, but there's always the sense that, at least in a vague way, you know what's coming up. It's an unthought of comfort when someone is screaming, the blood is flying and you're starting to get that queasy feeling in the pit of your stomach. That is very much here. As part of the generation that grew up on Michael Myers, Freddie Kreuger, Jason Voorhies, Pinhead and whoever else I'm forgetting you have an expectation. Out there in Internetland, some egghead is complaining that the plot of *Scream* is the result of a formula. They're right. They're also an idiot. OF COURSE IT'S FORMULAIC. THEY'VE BEEN MAKING THESE TYPES OF MOVIES FOR DECADES NOW BECAUSE IT WORKS. Movie-goers love the formula. So seriously, go file the point off of your head and join the rest of us who like to have a good time, If you want big serious boring crap go watch something that won a *Nebula* or a *Hugo*. I'll be over here with the people having a good time. For those of you who like to watch something you can enjoy, go watch *Scream*. You'll be glad you did.

Bottom Line: 5.0 out of 5 Long Bladed Knives

SerCon

John Michel Bio-Bibliography

By Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D.

N3F Historian

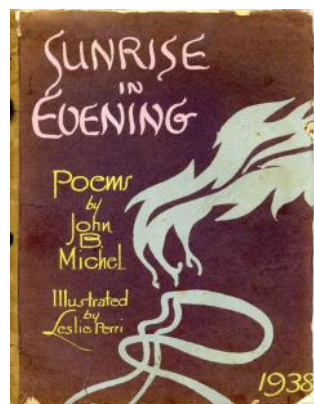
John B. Michel (1917-1968) was one of the leaders of the famous Futurian Society of New York City (The Futurians), founded in 1938 by a baker's dozen of avid science fiction (SF) fans. The group never had more than 20 members at any one time, including wives and girlfriends; but the Futurians produced some of the most successful people in the genre. From this little group of fans came successful SF writers, editors, critics, anthologists, literary agents, and



even a publisher.

Michel was one of the founders, the oldest member of the core group and the club's acknowledged political firebrand. The Michelism movement of "progressive thinking among science fiction fans" was named for him. He was also the one who many outsiders thought had the most promise -- yet he came to an early and tragic end, drowning at the age of 52 in a foot or so of water. It was reported that he had been drinking heavily at the time of his death.

Michel was an only child and suffered from poor health most of his life; his parents also were of frail constitutions, his mother dying young. Michel contracted diphtheria when he was nine, and the illness left him paralyzed in his right arm and left leg. Before he completely recovered from this illness, he contracted osteomyelitis – a staph infection that caused painful ulcers of both soft tissue and bone. As a young man, he wore glasses and was described as bandy-legged and with several missing teeth. Michel was in and out of hospitals until he was in his forties -- when penicillin cured him of most of his illnesses.



Then, unfortunately, he began to experience mental problems and subsequently spent time in mental institutions where he received shock therapy. Friends said one of his major problems was that he "was obsessed with fatherhood." Michel and Donald A. Wollheim were close friends until Michel's erratic behavior became too much for Wollheim and his wife Elsie to tolerate.

Michel used several pseudonyms, including Hugh Raymond, Louis Richard, Edward Bellin, E. Bellin, Bowen Conway, Arthur Cooke, John Tara, and Lawrence Woods. Some of these bylines were joint pseudonyms with other Futurians. Michel is said to have used pseudonyms because he wanted to reserve his real name for his serious writing.

Short Genre Fiction

Michel won seventh prize (\$2.50) in a Wonder Stories plot contest when he was 14. A story by Raymond Z. Gallum, "The Menace from Mercury," was written from this plot and published under a joint Gallum/Michel byline in the Summer, 1932 issue of Wonder Stories Quarterly. This was Michel's first publication. Some of his other published genre fiction was as follows:

"Power," Cosmic Stories, May, 1941 (as by Hugh Raymond).

"Earth Does Not Reply" (with Donald A. Wollheim), Science Fiction Quarterly, Summer 1941.

"Path of Empire," Science Fiction Quarterly, Summer, 1941 (as by Hugh Raymond).

"Spokesman for Terra," Stirring Science Stories, June 1941 (as by Hugh Raymond). [reprinted in Shot in the Dark, Bantam, 1950]

"When Half-Worlds Meet," Cosmic Stories, July 1941 (as by Hugh Raymond). [reprinted in Avon Science Fiction Reader #2 (1951), as by John Michel]

“The Year of Uniting,” *Science Fiction Quarterly*, Winter 1941-1942 (as by Hugh Raymond).
[reprinted in *Blue Moon*, Mayflower Books, 1970]

“The Goblins Will Get You,” *Stirring Science Stories*, March, 1942 (as by Hugh Raymond).
[Reprinted in *Avon Fantasy Reader #8*, 1948]

“Boomerang,” *Science Fiction Quarterly*, Summer, 1942. (as by Bowen Conway).

“Washington Slept Here,” *Future Fiction*, August 1942 (as by Hugh Raymond) [reprinted elsewhere, including in *Blue Moon*, Mayflower Books, 1970]

“The Inheritors” (with Robert Lowndes), *Future Fiction*, October, 1942.
[reprinted in *Terror in the Modern Vein*, edited by Donald A. Wollheim, Garden City, NY:
Hanover House, 1955]
[reprinted in *More Terror in the Modern Vein*, edited by Wollheim, Digit, 1961]
[reprinted in *Avon Fantasy Reader #11*, edited by Wollheim, 1949]

“Glory Road,” *Science Fiction Quarterly*, Fall, 1942 (as by Hugh Raymond).

“Claggett's Folly,” *Future Fiction*, December 1942 (as by Hugh Raymond).

“Hell in the Village,” *Science Fiction Quarterly*, Winter 1942 (as by Hugh Raymond).

“Eight Ball,” *Unknown Worlds*, June, 1943 (as by Hugh Raymond).

“Lunar Station” and “The Man-Eating Lizards” (comic book stories in the July, 1950 issue (Vol. 1, No. 1) of *Out of This World Adventures* (as by John Michel and Edward Bellin) -- both stories illustrated by Joe Kubert); “The Corsairs from the Coalsack” and “Dead Man’s Tale” (comic book stories in the December, 1950 issue (Vol. 1, No. 2) of *Out of This World Adventures* (as by John Michel and E. J. Bellin). The first story was illustrated by Joe Kubert, the second story by A. H. Johnston).

Poetry

Sunrise in Evening: Poems by John B. Michel. NY: Michel-Wollheim Publications, 1938.
[Illustrated by Leslie Perri]

“The Unconquerable Fire,” in *The Phantagraph*, March, 1942.
[reprinted in *Operation: Phantasy*, Rego Park, NY, 1967]

Speech

“Mutation or Death,” a speech written by Michel, was delivered by Wollheim at the Third Eastern Science Fiction Convention, Philadelphia, October, 1937. Apparently, Michel had a speech impediment at the time and felt uncomfortable giving the speech.

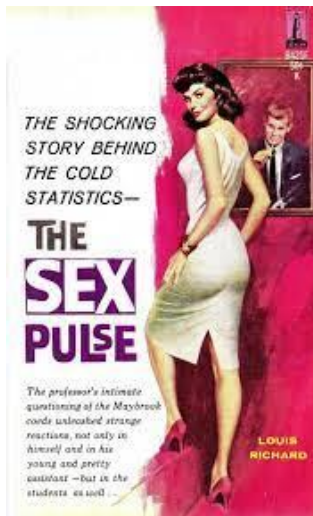
Mundane Writing

Small Motors You Can Make (D. Van Nostrand, 1963)

Michel's Writing Plans

Michel made a large wooden box and filled it with his manuscripts, letters, and journals – and secured it with a padlock. It was his hope that his writings would be preserved after his death. He kept journals from 1948 to 1962 and from 1955 to 1960, consisting mostly of what SF author/critic Damon Knight described as “rambling political diatribes.”

Among the manuscripts were God's Roost (a never completed mainstream novel of 30,000+ words), a book on model boats (contracted for, and all but one chapter completed, but never published), and a young adult book on famous battles (contract signed, book written, but never published -- because Michel refused to make the changes his publisher wanted).



“Sex” Novels

The Sex Pulse (1961)
 And Sex Is the Payoff (1962)
 Secrets Lusts (1962)
 Artist's Woman (1963)

Note: All these books were written under Michel's “Louis Richard” byline, and most of them with the help of his wife Joan.

Some Conclusions

What, if anything, can be concluded about the life and work of John Michel at this date? Nothing of his fiction is still in print, and only secondhand copies of his book on model motors still can be found in stores selling used books.

He left many writing projects unfinished, but some of this can be explained by his poor health, both physical and mental.

Damon Knight wrote in *The Futurians* that Michel could be an excellent writer, even in his “sex” novels. After praising his writing, however, Knight concluded that -- while Michel deeply felt some things -- his tragedy was that “all his depth was in shallow places.”

Photos of both a young and a middle-aged Michel were included in Knight's book, *The Futurians*.

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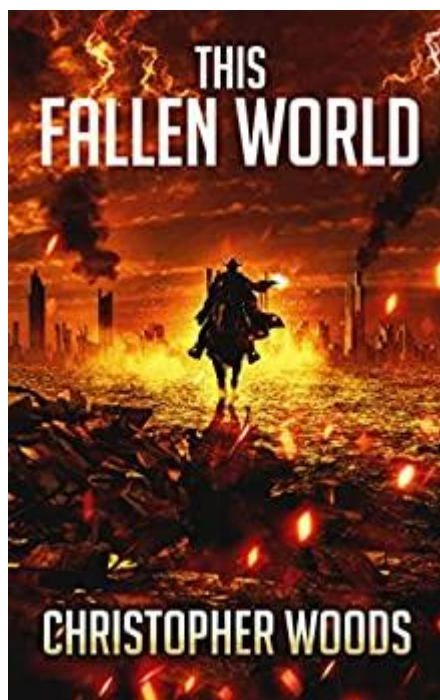
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Note: In addition to the above, several Internet sites were consulted, including Wikipedia, Fancyclopedia 3, and ISFDB.

Food of Famous Authors

Christopher Woods' Fish Tacos Cooking by Cedar Sanderson



Chris is an awesome human being, second only to his lovely wife (sorry, Chris!) so I was very happy that he was willing to let me do a recipe for one of his books. I was downright giddy when he picked one of my favorite meals as his choice. The only problem was that the First Reader does not eat fish...

More for me!

Before you start on this meal, which can be dead simple, or complex depending on your approach (I've chosen simple), you'll want to grab a copy of Chris's latest, *This Fallen World*. "Matthew Kade was a corporate assassin—one of the best agents Obsidian Corporation had. But then the bombs began falling, and the old world ended. Now he must navigate the new world he finds himself in, a world where the strongest survive, and the weaker do their bidding...or die."

Postapocalyptic seems so appropriate in this time. Fortunately, this is Chris. Things will work out in the end, he's not a writer of nihilism. Grab the book, and then set it aside. You'll want it for later, but cooking this meal won't leave you with much reading time until it's time to sit and eat. Ebooks are nice to read with messy meals – you can wipe off the screen like you can't with paper!

Christopher Wood's Fish Tacos

Fish tacos are one of those things that I've learned to be wary about when ordering at a restaurant. They are a good bellwether for finding a good Mexican joint, though, so I will do it from time to time. But I love to make them – they are so easy!

I prefer to use a nice firm white fish for them, but I will readily admit that when the kids were



small and I was in a hurry, I've made them up with fish sticks (not the cheap crappy ones). The kids liked them that way. But for this meal, I chose cod. Tilapia will work fine on a budget. And I suppose in the postapocalyptic landscape, whatever you can catch is going to be a great option at the time.

Prep step: thinly shred or julienne some napa cabbage leaves. Slice a roma tomato (or a few) lengthwise into narrow wedges. Section a couple of limes. Make or buy guacamole, or simply an avocado. And have a little sour cream on hand if you like.

First things first: Make your tacos. Or buy them. For fish tacos I am firmly in the camp of soft corn tortillas. My kids have unanimously decided they do not care for the texture, and the First Reader wasn't joining me in the meal, so I scaled the recipe on the Masa bag way back.



Too far back, as you'll see from that lone tortilla that isn't like the others. But if you are making them for the family you'll just need a couple of things. One is a tortilla press...

Seriously, these will work on store bought tortillas, but if you have access to some ladies who make tortillas, buy those. And if you don't, make your own. They are so, so good when

compared to the pale flabby things in the supermarket.

2 c masa (regular cornmeal will not work. Masa is treated corn, it's been slaked with lye, which releases a lot of the nutrients, but also allows the meal to bind)

1 c water (more or less. Here's where it gets tricky)

Mix the masa and water together in a bowl, adding the water in slowly. When the texture reaches that of playdough – springy, not too soft, but not crumbly, either – you've got it. This will make about 16 tortillas, but it may take some time and practice to learn how much to pinch off and roll into a ball. Think slightly smaller than a ping-pong ball.



Heat a pan – flat griddle will do nicely – to medium high. You can brush it with butter or lard just before the first tortilla goes on, and in between each one.

I use a liner on my tortilla press. Mine is simply a quart ziploc bag that has been cut at the side seams and the zipper removed. Open that up, and place the ball of dough closer to the hinges of the press than the handle (the press pushes toward the handle, so you get a more round tortilla this way).

Press gently, and not all the way down, with the handle. You'll learn after a few tries where the sweet spot is on your press – they vary according to the looseness of the hinges.

Lift up the top of the press, and lift out the tortilla on the liner plastic. You should be able to



easily peel this back, put a flat hand on the tortilla, and then flip the tortilla on the pan as you pull off the other side of the liner. With practice this gets to be a graceful routine. But don't be surprised if it takes a few! Imperfect tortillas taste yummy too. If the dough is too wet, it will stick. Knead a little more masa into your dough if this happens.

Cook your tortillas for about 30 seconds to a minute on each side – they will be a little 'dry' looking at the

edge when ready to flip. Slide them into a tortilla warmer or a covered plate until they are all done.

Heat a second pan, or simply use the same griddle, for the fish.

You neither need nor want large fillets – pieces the size of two fingers will work nicely. On a well greased griddle over med-high heat, lay the fish down.

Allow to cook for 2 minutes (more if a very thick cut) then flip, and sprinkle liberally with Tajin. (This is a chili pepper and lime seasoning. If you can't find it you can season with chili powder, garlic powder, and salt, then squeeze lime juice over when serving.)

The fish is done when it is firm to the touch and opaque through the center.

Put your fish on your tortillas, adding shredded cabbage, guac, tomato, and sour cream as desired. Eat! It's best hot off the griddle!

Yum. So yum. Curl up with these, the sun warm on your back, and a book. The red seasoning is such a nice color pop, too. Eat with your eyes, yes?





Battle of the Sea Kings
By Tiffanie Gray