

Tightbeam 340

January 2023



Dragon Book by Cedar Sanderson

Tightbeam 340

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Editorial

We are obliged to note that we have gradually lost writers. New writers are needed. Please write for us.

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Letter of Comment

Dear George and Jon:

Happy New Year!, and this is my first letter of comment for 2023. And, the issues at hand are issues 338 and 339 of Tightbeam.

338... A shame about Justin E.A. Busch. I thought he was a fairly new name emerging into fanzines, now to me, at least, and now, he is gone. We are of the age where this might happen, and we continue to lose friends and acquaintances.

We got to see the second Fantastic Beasts movie, but never did get to go to the third. I have read that there probably won't be any more movies with Newt Scamander in it, the third movie didn't do well at the box office. I think Rowling and Warner Brothers will have to think of something else...or perhaps anything from the Wizarding World has run its course.

Thank you for the bio of John Michel, just another of the names of those who have fanned before us. As like many of us today, he not only was involved in fandom, but also took a chance at becoming a pro.

339... What I said above about John Michel? Same goes for Ross Rocklynne. I can say I do have a book of his on my shelves, *The Men and the Mirror*. He's one of many whom I have thought didn't get the fame he deserved in that early time of SF writing.

I have been mildly swamped with my work on *Amazing Stories*, and its website. We may have some stories on the website coming soon. With some luck, and the further employment of what time management skills I may have, I might be able to get more letters of comment out, but no promises. I hope this might arrive in time for inclusion in the next issue, fingers crossed.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

Anime

Jessi Silver Reviews 2016 Releases Tonkatsu DJ Agetarou

Streaming: Crunchyroll

Episodes: 7 released (as of this writing), total TBD

Source: Manga

Thoughts So Far: Agetarou is a young man who works at his family's tonkatsu (fried pork cutlet – it's delicious) restaurant. He doesn't have a lot of passion for his job, but doesn't really have any other direction in life. On a fateful night, he's asked to deliver tonkatsu to an employee at a local dance club, and as thanks he's granted free admission. It's at the club that he experiences his first taste of dancing to a famous DJ's beats, and he's enthralled. It's then that Agetarou starts walking the path of becoming a famous DJ.

Aesthetically, this series represents some of the things I don't really like about the short-form



“boom” in anime. It’s a stretch to call it “animated” at all most of the time, since the movement is extremely minimal. It’s more of a moving comic than an animated series, in my opinion. On the other hand, the show is extremely music-oriented, and though it uses a lot of the same tracks over and over again, they’re all very poppy, catchy, and fun to listen to. As goofy as the tale of Agetarou’s rise to fame can be at certain points, the music itself seems to have been taken seriously, and in that sense I think the resource expenditure was well-managed.

One criticism I have of the show is a beef I have with a lot of comedic anime series – a lot of the humor is based around the main character reacting incredulously to some situation and protesting loudly about it. I’ve never found that to be particularly humorous unless it’s done very well (Nichijou is probably the best example I can think of, and a lot of that is the accompanying animation and the great handle on escalation humor that that series has). I think the visual gags, namely the comparisons between DJ skills and tonkatsu-making, are much more successful. It’s silly enough to garner some genuine laughs while also upholding the main premise well.

One item worth noting is the weird, stereotypical language quirks applied to the series’ Black character, DJ Big Master Fry. In the first episode of the show, DJ Big Master Fry gives a monologue that’s audible in Japanese and visually-represented in some kind of heavily-accented written pidgin English on screen. I’m guessing the creators were trying to represent slang dialect, but it comes across as sounding like dialog from Huckleberry Finn. The Crunchyroll translation does a good job of smoothing this out, but there’s really no avoiding it and it comes across as ignorant on the part of the show’s (or the manga’s?) creators. It’s a weirdly uncomfortable moment in a show that’s otherwise very lighthearted and fun.

Space Patrol Luluco

Streaming: Crunchyroll

Source: Original

Thoughts So Far: Luluco is a middle school student who just wants to live an ordinary life in an exceedingly extraordinary place – Ogikubo, a city where Earthlings and Aliens live alongside one-another. When her father, a member of the Space Patrol, gets into a pickle, Luluco is forced to take over his job and thus her life strays further and further from the ordinary.



When I think “Studio Trigger” what I’m really thinking of is animator/director Hiroyuki Imaishi, a creative voice who specializes in visual stylization and wacky vulgarity. After Trigger’s Kill la Kill, I found myself waiting around for something



similarly accomplished to come from the studio. And while we did finally get a hold of *Little Witch Academia 2* in the meantime, both *When Supernatural Battles Became Commonplace* and *Ninja Slayer From Animation* were decidedly mediocre. My original enthusiasm for the company began to flag. Luckily, this season has been pretty good for Trigger, and while I'm still mostly undecided on how I feel about *Kiznaiver* about 5 episodes into it, I can already safely say that Luluco is living up to that Imaishi spirit.

The series is what I imagine the lovechild of *Kill la Kill* and *Inferno Cop* to be. It's an apt comparison, too, since the show is pretty clearly drawing influence from both in its visual style and sense of humor. The show is not well-animated in the traditional sense, and this is a complaint that a lot of people have with Trigger's productions. I think there's something to be said, though, of being able to take one of Japanese ani-

mation's common shortcomings – few frames and choppy animation – and morphing that into something stylistic in its own way. Luluco incorporates elements of Flash and web animation and puts a lot of emphasis on dynamic character poses rather than smooth in-between animation. It's one of those things that bothers people and would cause a lot of them to call the show “cheap,” but I really like it as a style choice. I think it takes a lot of talent and an eye for composition to be successful with something like this. I love the character designs, too, which are cute, round, and drawn with thick, bold lines. I hope that they sell figures of the characters at some point!

The current story arc is an extended homage to some of Trigger's other works, and that really tickles me. What some might see as blatant self-advertising, I see as having fun with some great properties. Of the short series I'm watching this season, this is probably my favorite.

Pan de Peace

Streaming: Crunchyroll

Source: 4-koma manga

Thoughts So Far: With episodes this short, it's difficult to create something that's too complicated. In this case, it's simply about a group of four high school girls who are brought together by their love of bread. All of their (decidedly mundane) adventures revolve around bread (making it or obtaining it).

This is one of those shows that's best described as “mostly inoffensive.” I say mostly, because it occupies a weird slice-of-life sub-genre that I'm still not sure what to do with. There are a lot of shows, both normal and short-form, that feature groups of girls doing this or that. It's been popular in the last few years to go further, and suggest that the characters might or might not be gunning for some sort of lesbian romantic tension with one-another. *Yuru-Yuri* made it famous, but there have been several copycats. There's something that makes me uncomfortable about fetishizing sexual orientation, and then not even being brave enough to follow-through with it.



For a show ostensibly involving bread, there's unfortunately not a lot of focus on the bread. I kind of live for the last two or three seconds of each episode where there's a luscious photograph of the type of bread in that episode (as someone who no longer eats bread on a regular basis, looking at pretty pictures of it is one way I continue to go on living without it). As a general rule, I'm congratulatory towards a series that focuses on its characters rather than its gimmick, but these episode are three minutes long and there's not enough time to develop these characters beyond their stereotypes, so give me my damn food porn!

If you can't tell, I'm very picky about my food-related anime.

Have you been enjoying any of this season's short-form series? Let me know!

Comics

Wonder Woman (2009)

Review by Caroline Furlong (Upstream Reviews)

The 2017 live-action Wonder Woman received much critical acclaim, but its success makes it very easy to forget that the princess of the Amazons has been appearing in animated media for decades. In 2009, DC produced an animated film about Diana Prince that took a decidedly unconventional look at the heroine and her people.

Reimagining Wonder Woman's origins means starting at the beginning, and so 2009's Wonder Woman opens with Hyppolyta and her sisters rebelling against the Greek god of war. Having enslaved the Amazons and betrayed their queen, Ares sired a son – Thrax – by Hyppolyta and goes to war with the Amazons, who oppose his attempt to gain enough power to rule mankind. Feeding off the fear and hatred generated by war, he appears unstoppable. Though the queen of the Amazons succeeds in bringing him to heel after beheading Thrax on the battlefield, Zeus (voiced by David McCallum) prevents her from killing Ares.

Hera then steps in, removing Ares' power and giving the island of Themyscira to the Amazons. There they build a new nation for themselves and hold Ares prisoner. After establishing her kingdom on the island, Hyppolyta is granted a daughter of her own blood without the help of any man. Forming an infant's body from the island's clay and with the use of her own blood, Hyppolyta brings Diana – the future Wonder Woman (voiced by Keri Russell) – into the world.

Centuries later, Themyscira is a peaceful nation sequestered from outsiders via magic. It is also boring. Diana hates being restricted to the island along with some of the other Amazons, but Hyppolyta refuses to let anyone leave. She even takes Diana to see Ares to prove the point that the World of Men and the island of the Amazons must remain separate. It is soon shown, however, that Hyppolyta herself misses the outside world and longs to re-establish contact with it.

Mother and daughter both get their wish, but not as they had intended. With the help of the Amazon Persephone, Ares escapes his prison after orchestrating Steve Trevor's crash-landing on Paradise Island. Diana wins the competition to decide which Amazon will return Trevor to the outside world, and following Ares' escape, she is tasked with not only bringing Trevor back but stopping the god of war.

2009's *Wonder Woman* is unique among portrayals of the heroine in large part because it both takes her better-known origin story seriously and considers the question of whether or not all Amazons really prefer being warriors over being women. Persephone openly states that she fell in love with Ares unintentionally, telling Hyppolyta to her face that the "life of peace and beauty" provided to the Amazons was incomplete "without families and children."

This is a stark contrast to most prior and following portrayals of the Amazons in DC's animated series and comics, which typically focus on the female warriors' preference for battle and pride as fighters above all else. Diana herself is the youngest Amazon in most adaptations, with only recent comics delving into other Amazonian city-states where the women traded for male slaves to increase their population. Themyscira is marked by being an all-female paradise with no men and, thus, no children. Since they are immortal, the women of Themyscira have no need for daughters to raise and train up to take their place in the future.

Further distancing itself from prior *Wonder Woman* material, another Amazon in the film actually prefers books to battle. She takes off in the midst of a fight at one point, hiding behind an overturned cart to recite philosophy as though in prayer. Along with Diana, early in the film she advocates for a reunion of Themyscira with the World of Man "if only to add more material to [the Amazons'] library." This is a highly unusual portrayal of the women warriors out of Ancient myth.

Even the weaker parts of the movie serve to make it stand out in comparison to its fellows. Steve Trevor (voiced by Nathan Fillion) is not particularly well used or handled, but he does have a number of impressive moments and one or two speeches that are worth hearing. He is also the subject of one of the best gags in the film. Midway through the movie, Etta Candy conscripts Trevor for help with a minor annoyance in an attempt to assert control over him. Though he is clearly uncomfortable with her predatory advances, Steve cannot tell Candy "no." Diana must rescue Trevor from Candy, allowing him to disentangle himself from the other woman and escape with his Amazonian escort.

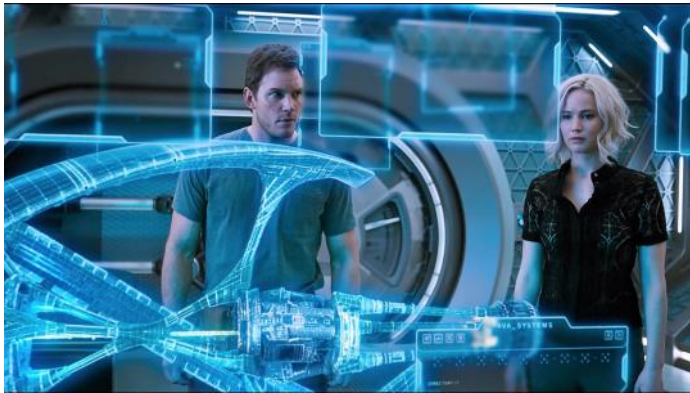
Diana's speech on sexism after this is probably an attempt to cover the fact that Candy's skill at using her femininity to pin Trevor outclassed her own. Even more likely, she was trying to hide her feelings of jealousy rather than face the fact that she actually liked Trevor and wished she could maneuver him into doing what she wanted as well as Candy did. While the more straightforward and honest arguments between hero and heroine serve *Wonder Woman* in better stead, it is hard not to appreciate the fact that the writers and directors remembered and demonstrated in this scene that Diana is a woman, not just a warrior or a superheroine.

The 2009 *Wonder Woman* film takes a surprisingly nuanced look at the Amazons and their culture, something very few writers would be willing to do today. Fans of Diana would be wise to purchase the movie, grab a bag of popcorn, and sit down to enjoy it. While an imperfectly cut gem, it is nonetheless a worthwhile piece of entertainment that will make fans happy – and may even bring new fans into the fold!

Movies

Passengers

Review by J R Handley (Upstream reviews)



I had so much fun writing the last reviews, I decided to give you another one! I hope you enjoy my efforts! Seriously, I'm breaking new ground by going where literally everyone else has gone before!

Speaking of reviews, please remember to rate anything you've read on Amazon, GoodReads and anywhere else fine reviews are shared! Anyway, I wanted to share my thoughts on a movie that I just

finished with you!

Plot

First, let me say that none of what I'll say in this section couldn't be found on the back copy of the movie. Heck, I cribbed this summary from the back, and then I added my own twist! And not even much of one, since most of the movies I watch have kick butt descriptions (aka blurbs). If the blurb and cover don't catch my eye, then I tend to skip the movie unless a friend recommends it. Generally speaking, my goal is to provide a spoiler-free review, so here goes nothing!

Jennifer Lawrence and Chris Pratt star in a high-stakes adventure about two passengers, Aurora and Jim, onboard a spaceship transporting them to a new life on another planet. The trip takes a deadly turn when their hibernation pods mysteriously wake them 90 years before they reach their destination. As they try to unravel the mystery behind the malfunction, they discover that the ship itself is in grave danger. With the lives of 5,000 sleeping passengers at stake, only Jim and Aurora can save them all. If this sounds like your flavor of badassery, then you've come to the right place!

Characters:

In this movie, we followed just two characters, which is definitely not the kind of movie I normally watch. I enjoyed the acting of the two principal stars, though I felt like some of their characterizations were lacking.

Jim Preston (Chris Pratt): He's a mechanical engineer who wants a new life on the planet of Homestead II, one where there is room to grow and settle down. He's seeking an existence where his skill at repairing things has value and is disillusioned by the consumer waste that was modern Earth. When his hibernation pod malfunctions, he wakes up 90 years too early and is stranded on the Avalon, the colony ship taking him to his new home. I liked this guy as a character, I was sympathetic to his plight and how the isolation nearly drove him mad. However, it felt like, other than the creeping madness that Jim fought off, the character arc was flat. I just

wish the movie had done more with his character, something to climb that hurdle into 5 Grenade territory!

Aurora Lane (Jennifer Lawrence): She's the daughter of a famous novelist, who is herself a journalist and author. She plans on traveling to the colony world of Homestead II, living for a year and then returning to Earth to tell the tale. This would make her the only passenger to return from a colony world, though it will be over 200 years into the future, meaning everyone she knows and loves is dead. She's desperate to live up to the shadow cast by her famous father and has a generally listless personality. She's constantly on the move seeking new experiences to write about, and in doing so she's forgotten how to live. We see that person grow and evolve over the course of the movie, until Aurora can accept her circumstances and live in the moment, enjoying the world around her. I really liked her character, more so than Jim, because we could see a more meaningful character arc. My only real complaint was that her name sounded like something out of the adult industry, but we didn't dwell on her full name, so it was mostly a momentary cringe before we simply called her Aurora.

Gus Mancuso (Lawrence Fishburne): He's one of the Chief Deck Officer's onboard the Avalon, who was woken prematurely when his hibernation pod failed. This character was well acted and seemed like someone you'd want to know in real life. His role was brief, but his performance was one of the bright shining stars of this movie experience! He's the reason I took my overall assessment of 3.5 Grenades and rounded it to a solid 4.

Overall, it seems like these characters weren't horrible. There was definitely room for growth from the two main protagonists. It was clearly an issue caused by the script and not something caused by poor delivery. I felt like the secondary character, Gus, was a lot more fun and definitely someone you'd want to have on your team. His performance saved the bad characterizations given to us in the form of Jim and Aurora. I give these characters 4 out of 5 Grenades and can't wait to see if the movie studios do more with these characters.

Overall:

I really wanted to love this movie, but it was only a sort of meh experience. It was tied between a 3 and a 4 out of 5, so I gave it the benefit of the doubt because of the cool special effects and the superb characterization from Gus Mancuso (Lawrence Fishburne). It was a fun movie, with some interesting themes about humanity, but the script ultimately fell short in exploring them. The special effects were amazing, though in this modern age that seems to be what viewers expect as a baseline, so I'm not sure how to quantify the value of this. I also really loved the musical score for this movie, which won an Academy Award for Best Original Score in 2016. I wouldn't mind listening to it as white noise while I write, it was seriously good!

Moving on, let's talk about the cover of this movie! The first thing that caught my eye was the fantastic cover. Seriously, the art was compelling because it lacked the frills of many of the modern movies. The art director instead opted for a simple theme and inadvertently hit the art out of the park. It showcases a couple, holding hands, ready to walk into the light. The imagery was evocative, with the cover seeming to showcase humanity stepping into the cosmos. By showcasing the characters before they crossed the threshold into the stars, the viewer can relate to them. Further, because it's a silhouette, we can picture ourselves in their place. I love art that allows us to place ourselves in the shoes of the characters, for me this cover was a win.

One of my biggest complaints about this movie was the huge plot hole that was the design of the Avalon. I wasn't satisfied by the gaping holes the ship suffered from, merely because of lazy writing. Seriously, a spaceship where the engines and power plans were controlled by ONE computer? There should've been redundancy in place, meaning there would be no cascading failures of the system.

Further, why did none of the ships design crew plan for the pods to fail? Nothing is infallible, nothing. A simple program to open the appropriate crew during such an emergency would've prevented all of this. And the inability to put people BACK into hibernation? Ugh, I can only suspend my disbelief so far. Do better Hollywood, I know you can do it!

Keeping with my complaints about the colony ship, I also had an issue with the onboard medical facility. The automated system required the singular onboard doctor to approve things, meaning if the doctor gets ill, everyone is screwed. Additionally, there was only one autodoctor pod in the medical bay. Again, the lack of redundancy is a huge flaw in the Avalon's design. What happens if two people get sick at the same time? Further, if the doctor only has to supervise the mechanical surgery pods, why aren't there more of them? One doctor could feasibly supervise several surgeries at once, which would be important for a ship with a crew of 5,258.

Seriously, redundancy is the basic watchword for any technological innovation. Even a neophyte like myself is aware of this, so why weren't the scriptwriters or ship/set designers? I understand that only having one pod was pivotal to the ending, but there were several easy workarounds. Make the machines require a human to touch the start button and you have addressed the core redundancy issues without changing the major plot point. I'd still suggest that multiple medical staff be on hand, but that's just me. It was very clear that whoever thought of this wasn't a sci-fi nerd.

Another foundational concept from this movie that seemed flawed were the fiscal motivations of the Homestead Company. They fund these trips using an indentured servitude model, with the new colonists owing 20% of their income to the corporation in perpetuity. This is a huge risk for the corporation, as the payouts are hundreds of years away. Each leg of this trip takes 120 years. Comms signal traveled only marginally faster, so nothing would be there to keep each new colony world from simply declaring independence as soon as the colony ship departed. They could become sovereign polities and deny their debt the second the ship leaves for the return trip, instantly torpedoing the monetary impetus for this massive fiscal risk. Additionally, who's to say that the founding colonist's children will decide to honor the agreement their parents made? I'm no economist, so I could be wrong here, but this struck me as a flawed system.

Another thing that seemed out of place for me were the lack of kids. The main couple was awake for 80 years, with little to do to pass the time. (Wink, wink.) You're telling me there were NO babies made by this healthy young pair during their journey? Colonizing planets requires fertility, it demands that a second-generation be created upon arrival. Anyone being shipped off to a colony world would be more likely to receive fertility drugs than birth control. Ergo, there should've been healthy baby Jim and Aurora's running around when the crew reached their final destination. This lack of offspring makes no sense; if you want this to be true, you need to explain it better!

One area where this movie did an exceptional job was in the exploration of the moral issues faced by Jim Preston. We watch him struggle with this issue before he ultimately surrenders to

weakness and wakes up Aurora Lane, his fellow passenger. I've seen several "holier than thou" reviewers crucify the man for this decision, but isolation is a cruel master. The lack of human contact can drive a man or woman insane. His desire to have company is understandable, though the decision was still morally questionable. This movie also explored the concept of love; who we love, how we love them and why we love them. This was done in an enjoyable way, allowing you to think more deeply on your own without feeling like you were being preached at. We get to explore the foundations of a romantic relationship and how we define free will. It has been argued by some professional movie critics that Aurora suffers from some sort of Stockholm Syndrome, but the ending showed that she used her free will. I would love to continue analyzing these concepts, but I'm desperately trying to keep this review spoiler-free, so I will end this part of the review.

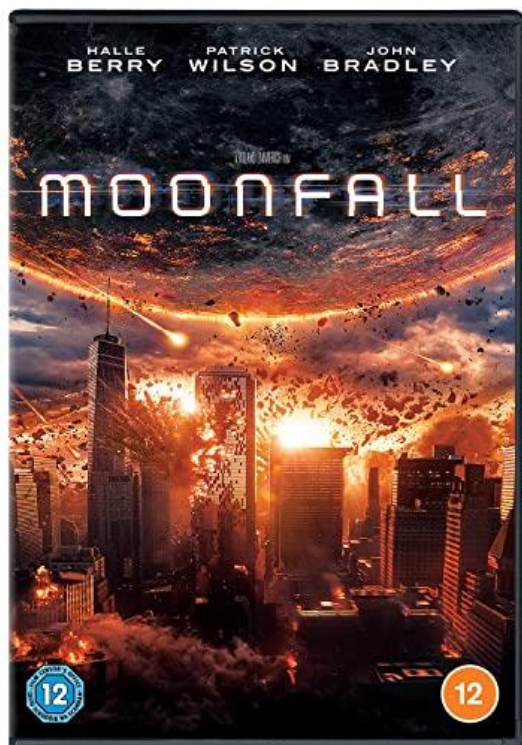
Let me be clear, I did enjoy watching this movie with my wife family. It didn't put me to sleep or make me want to switch it off. I loved seeing the scene were Aurora was swimming, and the gravity failed. Watching a swimming pool-sized floating water drop with someone trapped inside of it was breathtaking. I enjoyed the interaction with Arthur, the robotic bartender. Exploring the ship with Jim was also a lot of fun, especially for a space nerd like myself. This movie was a visual experience, one I wish I'd been able to experience in all of its large screen cinematic glory. I loved watching the performance of Gus and Arthur was a hoot.

My only major complaint with the movie was my hatred of the ending. I seriously didn't like it; it felt rushed and unfulfilling. Also, as I mentioned above, the lack of children waiting for the other passengers and crew when they awoke felt off.

So yeah... the ending sucked and, in conclusion, I can only give this movie a 4 out of 5.

Moonfall

Review by Jeff Copeland



On my shelf, I have a copy of the Halliday and Resnick's 4 1/2 pound purple-covered Physics, which I bought as reference material just before I left for Caltech. Resnick commented that they didn't really need thirteen hundred pages to explain physics, since the relevant equations could all be written on the fingernails of one hand. Which is an interesting take, since the movie Moonfall manages to violate every single one of those equations.

I sometimes say "no science was harmed in the making of this movie," however in this particular Roland Emmerich disaster movie the laws of physics suffered grievous bodily harm. Fluid mechanics? Broken kneecaps! General relativity? Lying in a ditch by the side of the road. Newtonian force? Newtonian farce! Gravity? Stabbed repeatedly in the back, poisoned, shot, and drowned.

According to IMDb, the astronaut they had on-set as a

consultant kept saying “that’s not really possible” and was told to “roll with it — it’s just a movie.” Yes, it’s just a movie, but it’s a complete catastrophe of a plot with an amazing number of “give me a fucking break” moments.

I kept thinking “why am I wasting these two hours” and kept telling myself “because this is such an unmitigated disaster that it’s almost funny.” But now that I’ve wasted those two hours, you don’t have to, so please don’t.

Ghostbusters: Afterlife Review by Jeff Copeland



What if one of the original Ghostbusters was so tied up in what he was doing that he abandoned his family, and his daughter never told her kids who their grandfather was. Except that he really did understand that there was about to be a global spectre apocalypse and moved to a small town in Oklahoma which is the epicenter of spooky happenings. When he dies, his neglected daughter and her children move into his remote farmhouse. And then stuff happens — predictable stuff to be sure, but all nicely played out with lots of action and not a few tears to give us Ghostbusters: Afterlife. With the stunningly good McKenna Grace as the very bright granddaughter, Carrie Coon as Egon Spengler’s daughter, and comic relief from Paul Rudd as the summer school teacher trying to put the make on Coon. Directed by Jason Reitman, whose dad directed the original and is a producer on this one.

Sercon

Patricia Highsmith’s Comic Book Work

by

Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D.

N3F Historian



Born Mary Patricia Plangman (January 19, 1921 – February 4, 1995), Patricia Highsmith was an American novelist and short story writer, widely known for her psychological thrillers. She took the name Highsmith from her step-father, although there is evidence that she was never legally adopted.

She had many lovers during her lifetime, both male and female. Some of these relationships were long-term ones, but she never married. Her bi-sexual orientation is present in many of her fictional characters.

Highsmith published twenty-two novels and numerous short stories during a career that spanned nearly five decades, and her work has led to more than two dozen film adaptations. She



was dubbed “the poet of apprehension” by the world famous novelist Graham Greene.

Highsmith’s first novel, *Strangers on a Train*, has been adapted for stage and screen, the best known being the 1951 movie directed by Alfred Hitchcock, which had Raymond Chandler as one of the screenwriters.

Highsmith used the pen name of Clair Morgan on her lesbian novel, *The Price of Salt*, originally published in 1952 by Coward-McCann. The events in the novel were based on Highsmith’s own life.

Comic Book Work



Unknown to most Highsmith fans, she also worked as a comic book writer from 1942 until 1948. She initially worked in a bullpen at the office of comic book publisher Ned Pines. After she left Pines’ company (aka Standard, Better, Nedor), she worked for DC, Fawcett, Timely (now Marvel), and Western, eventually going freelance and writing comic book profiles of historical figures as well as more standard comic book fare.

Comic books she wrote historical profiles for included True Comics (Parents Magazine Institute), *It Really Happened* (Standard), True Aviation (Parents Magazine Institute), Real Fact (DC), and Real Life Comics (Standard), all of which featured life stories of famous men and women, that included Oliver Cromwell, Billy Bishop, Dr. Livingstone, Catherine the Great, Galileo, Eddie Rickbacker, and FDR, among others.

She also wrote some of the 2-page text stories that were usually not signed, or were signed with house names. These stories were required by the U. S. Post Office in order for comic books to qualify for magazine postal rates. Highsmith could lay claim to having received credit on at least one of these text stories. According to one of her biographers, a text story by Highsmith was published in one of the Standard comic books in the 1940s, with her real name credited.



Comic book characters she wrote scripts for included, among others, *The Black Terror*, Pyroman, Sgt. Bill King, and *The Fighting Yank* for Standard; Golden Arrow, Spy Smasher, Captain Midnight, and Crisco & Jasper for Fawcett; and for Timely, she wrote about *The Destroyer*, *The Whizzer*, *Nellie the Nurse*, and Doug “Jap-Buster” Johnson. She later wrote westerns, romances, and funny animal comics for a variety of comic book companies.

Jap-Buster Johnson appeared in several Timely comic books, along with much more popular Timely superheroes such as Captain

America and The Human Torch. Another would-be novelist who wrote Jap-Buster Johnson scripts was the (later) crime novelist Mickey Spillane, who probably enjoyed comic book work more than Highsmith.

Highsmith wanted to write stories for Wonder Woman comics, but “was shut out of the job.” Her biographers have speculated what those scripts would have been like, with so many published Wonder Woman stories of the 1940s devoted to bondage, women dominating men, and nubile young Amazon women!

One of Highsmith’s editors once tried to set her up on a date with Stan Lee! According to the editor, nothing came of the introduction because “Lee was only interested in himself.” Why does that not surprise me?

Editor-Writer Richard E. Hughes

Highsmith was hired at Sangor-Pines as a “writer-researcher” by Richard E. Hughes, her main editor while she worked in their bullpen. Hughes had created The Black Terror, and wrote most of his scripts. He was very supportive of Highsmith. In turn, Highsmith described Hughes as “as a good writer . . . who considers this work most seriously.”

Hughes was married to Pines’ daughter. For Hughes, Pines, and Sangor, the comic book business was truly a family affair, as Pines was married to Sangor’s daughter.

Ned Pines

Ned L. Pines (December 10, 1905 – May 14, 1990) was an American publisher of pulp magazines, paperback books, and comic books. He was active in the field from about 1928 until 1971.

His Standard Comics imprint was the parent company of the comic-book lines Nedor and Better Publications, and their most prominent character was the The Black Terror, a superhero. Pines also established the paperback book publisher Popular Library, that eventually merged with Fawcett Publications.

When Highsmith started working for Pines, the shop was known as Sangor-Pines. Sangor (1889 - 1953), a disbarred lawyer, later formed the American Comics Group that published a variety of comic books until the late 1960s, specializing in funny animal comics.

Highsmith’s Life in the Bullpen at Pines

Male members of the staff at Pines described her as tall, slender, dark, serious, attractive, and aloof. A couple of the staffers “fell in love” with her, one writing her sonnets every day. Another, who would become a psychotherapist, later remembered “her ability to produce an enormous amount of material.”



Most of the scriptwriters would come into the office, greet the others, get their assignments, and then “try to bat ideas around” before they

faced their typewriters. Highsmith, on the other hand, would come in and start typing “just like a machine” the moment she entered the office, remembered one staff member who worked with her. And “she wouldn’t quit until it was time to leave.”

Her co-workers often spoke of her large hands; she also had large feet, a characteristic of most of her maternal female relatives.

Ray Kinstler, later a renowned portrait painter known as Everett Raymond Kinstler, while a teenager, also toiled in the bullpen as an inker. In addition, he worked on *The Fighting Yank* comic book at the same time as Highsmith. He “had a teenage crush” on Highsmith, and thought she looked a bit like movie star Katherine Hepburn, mainly because she was tall, slender, and “had cheekbones.”

Highsmith would later work some of the names of her comic book compatriots into her novels, including inker Joe Sinnott and editor Dorothy Woolfolk (aka Dorothy Roubicek).

Highsmith and Jerry Bails

Although Highsmith destroyed all her comic book records, when Dr. Jerry Bails contacted her about her work in comics for his 4-volume reference work on the subject, she filled out (at least partially) the form he sent her. I suppose we’ll never know exactly why she participated in this project, although it may have been because Bails was a college professor with a Ph.D.

On the other hand, it has also been written that she enjoyed being included in various “Who’s Who” reference works. Schenkar (2009) wrote that she was very proud to be included in the UK international version of *Who’s Who* (circa 1970).

In Her Own Words

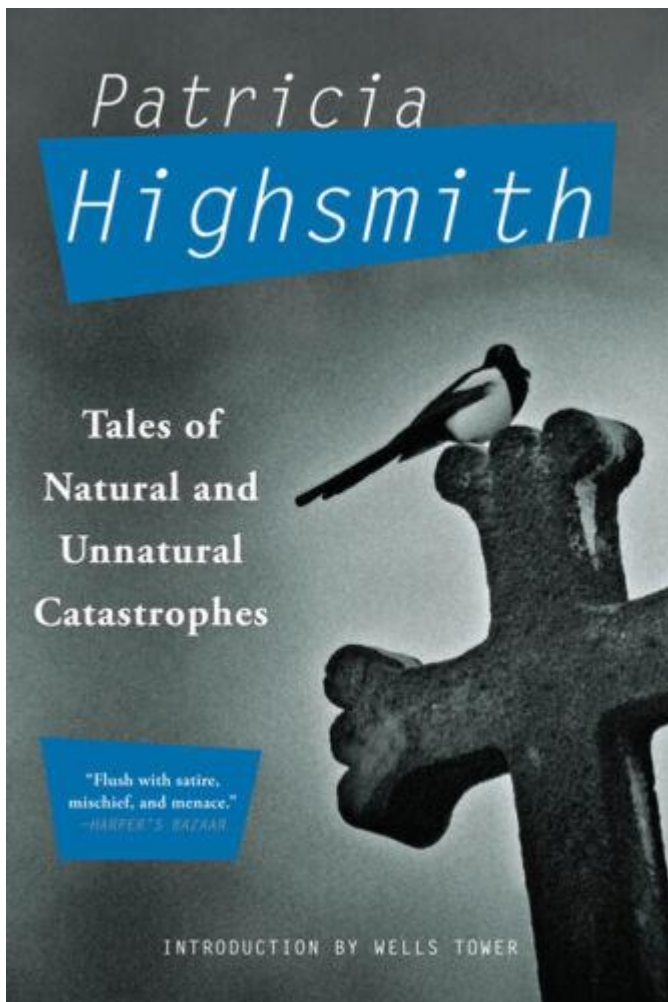
Highsmith was very quotable throughout her writing career. There aren’t a lot of quotes available for her comic book work, but one of her quotes relating to writing in general was “My imagination functions much better when I don’t have to speak to people.”

Although self-critical of her comic book work, she wrote in her diary that such work “does me good, because it makes me write rapidly with a lot of action, and even with a certain style of sincerity – this is necessary.”

Another thing she wrote, something that many would be-writers probably should pay attention to, was: “I like to work for four or five hours a day. I aim for seven days a week.”

Highsmith and Genre Fiction

Because many of her stories had horrific elements, it is sometimes asked whether or not Highsmith wrote genre science fiction (SF), fantasy (F), or horror (H). While much of her comic book writing certainly fell into these genres, some of her short stories also could be classified as SF/F/H. Ten of these stories were collected in her *Tales of Natural and Unnatural Catastrophes* (1987). “The Mysterious Cemetery” and “No End in Sight,” included in this collection, should be of special interest to SF/F/H fans.



Some Conclusions

Patricia Highsmith is remembered today for her popular psychological suspense novels, especially the ones that were later made into movies, such as *Strangers on a Train*, *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, *The Blunderer* (filmed as *A Kind of Murder*), and *Deep Water*. The movie *Carol*, based on Highsmith's *The Price of Salt*, was released in 2015.

Her work is often compared to that of Cornell Woolrich, another writer whose fiction often depicted a demented and malevolent universe. She has also been called the most important expatriate American writer since Henry James.

Some biographers have speculated that Highsmith's comic book work, with many of the characters she wrote about having alter-egos, led her to write novels in which some of her characters had alter-egos. As a psychologist, this makes some sense to me.

Highsmith destroyed the records of her comic book work, and her work in comics has been largely forgotten -- which is exactly the way she would have wanted it.

Sources

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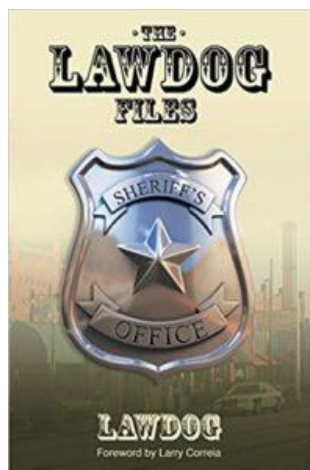
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Note. In addition to the above, several Internet sites were consulted.

Food of Famous Authors

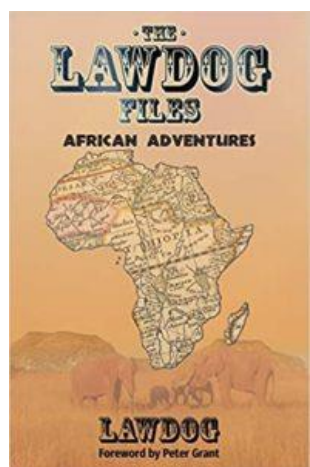
LawDog's Chili Cooking by Cedar Sanderson



This one is a little different. Unlike most of my posts, there isn't an ebook for quick and handy reading. There is, however, audiobooks, and if you are patient and plan ahead, paper. It's worth it. Lawdog's books are trenchant observations on the human condition... but most of all, they are laugh-out-loud fall out of your chair funny. There's some pathos here, but far more bathos without descending so far as to be trite. I can't recommend these books highly enough. African Adventures is the story of his coming of age years in, yes, Africa. I gave my son this book, and for a kid who really only reads history, he got into this one. I think it's the glimpse into another world, where lizards make good drinking companions and honey badgers are treated with the respect they deserve.

The Lawdog Files are tales from his years in law enforcement, seeing behind the facade into the worst... and best... of humanity. Some of the humor is dark, but I'm due for a re-read because it's good to laugh that hard.

And the chili is pretty darn good, too! I did take off from Lawdog's original recipe, because I made mine in the InstantPot and let it cook long enough to really break down the flavors into a fantastic meld. I also made a slight miscalculation, but, well, you'll see!



You can find the whole recipe over at his blog (which is worth reading for other reasons, too). I'm going to put my version below and discuss what I oopsied on.

2 lbs hamburger
1 lb mild italian sausage (this lent a different flavor, but I like it. Doing this again)
1 onion
6 cloves of garlic (I used up a head I'd started on. There may have been more than 6)

He calls for a chipotle cube. I hadn't heard of that, so I grabbed a can of chilies in Adobo sauce. Now, normally in a recipe I'd use part of the can. This one? I threw it and the garlic in my food processor, pulsed a few times, then it went in the pot. Which may have been a mistake. But when our friend who ate with us took his first spoonful, the look on his face makes me think not.

Chipotle and garlic. Mmmm

3 teaspoons (ish) of chili powder. I have not got good chili powder. I put in 3 tablespoons of my mildish chili. Need to get the good stuff.



He called for smoked salt, which I didn't have, although I am intrigued by it. I figured the can of smoked chilies made it good! I added about a half teaspoon (didn't measure, just chucked some in) of kosher salt.

1 can diced tomatoes and chilies

1 large (28 oz) can fire-roasted crushed tomatoes

1 14 oz can diced tomatoes

1 small (4.5 oz) can diced green chilies (I need to check Jungle Jim's for Hatch chilies)

about 1/2 cup red wine (I used a shiraz that needed to be used up)

Now, you really ought to go read his description of how to cook this up. It's a hoot. My version was going in the instantpot and I was working with a chunk of frozen ground beef. So I started in a big cast iron skillet, then moved the meats and onion to the instantpot once they were all browned and drained.

I ran the chilies in adobo through the food processor with the garlic, dumped that in. Added the spice, then all the cans of tomatoes, and opted to add the wine then, rather than later in cooking as Lawdog does. Since I was going to cook under pressure and not be able to put it in the middle.

I cooked this under high pressure for 20 minutes, with a natural release, plus some 'I'll get to you when we are ready' as we had an unexpected dinner guest, so about an hour total cook time. You could do it faster, for sure.

We served with shredded cheese, sour cream (my version is on the spicy side for me, but I have a delicate mouth), and I offered crackers but it was thick enough to not need them.

This is a superlative bowl of red. We all very much enjoyed it, heat and all. I had some of the leftovers (it's a good sized pot of chili!) for lunches and it was yummy.

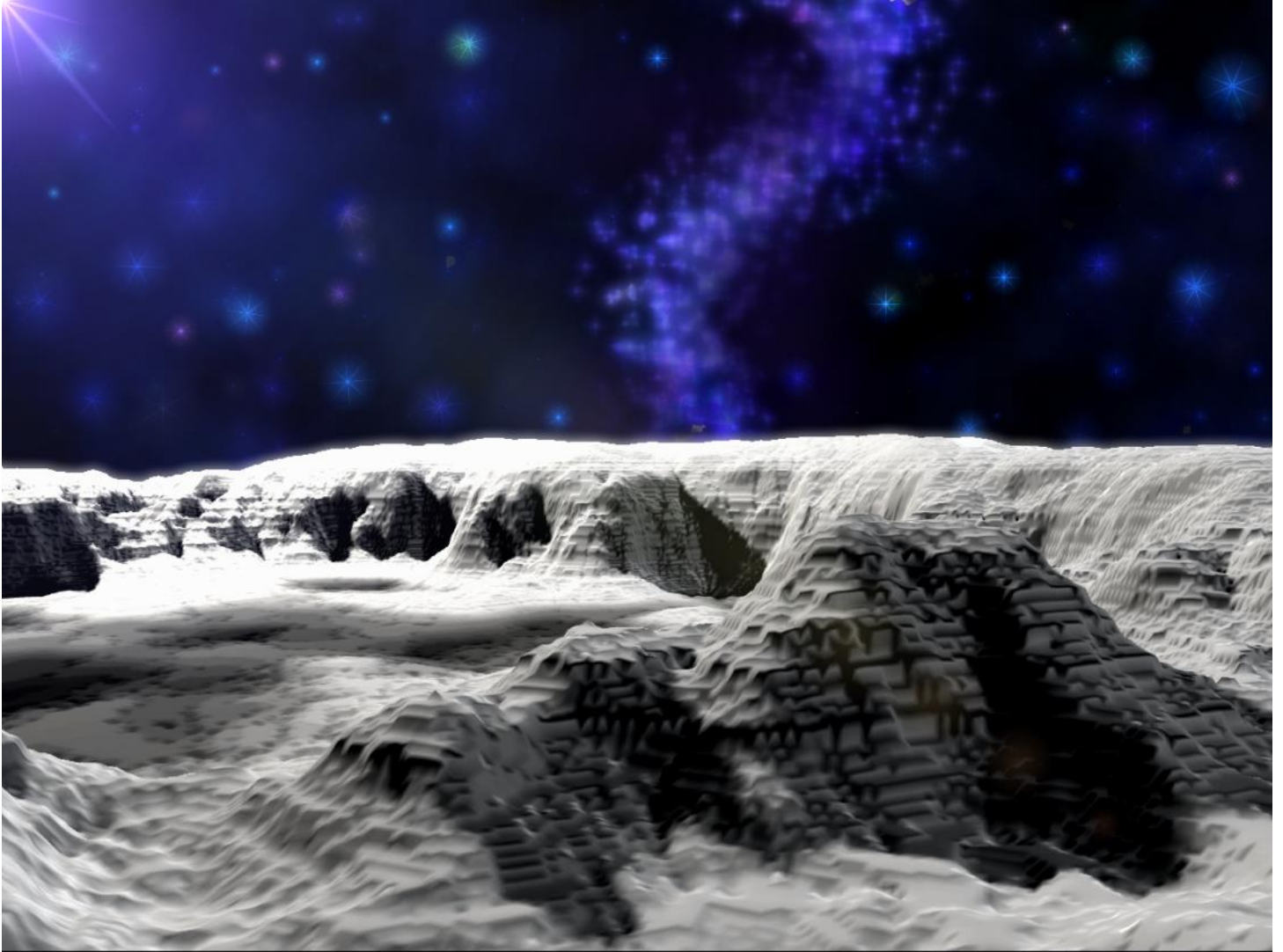
So grab a listen, or a book, and wrap your tummy around some warm deliciousness!

For more Eat This While You Read That recipes, check out the page. We're up past 75 books and recipes now! From the exotic to the mundane, it's a fun exploration of authors and food.

LawDog comments:

The chilies in adobo sauce is absolutely a good substitution for the chipotle topper, and one I use when I can't find the topper.





Moonscape
by Tiffanię Gray