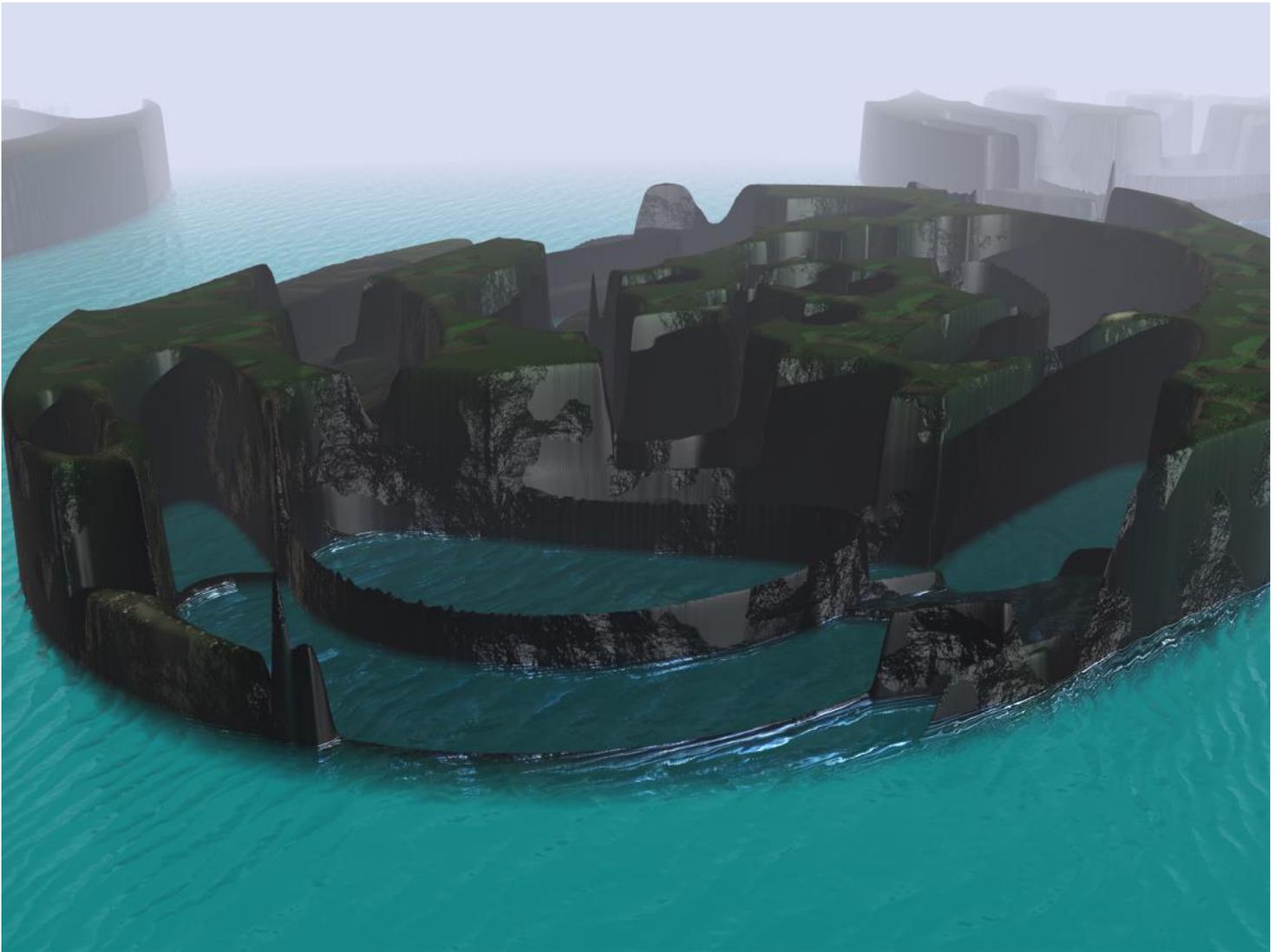


Tightbeam 345

June 2023



Island City Ruins by Tiffanię Gray

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What is Tightbeam? We are the N3F literary fanzine, not the novel and anthology fanzine, but the fanzine that tries to cover all tastes in fandom, such as anime, comics, cosplay, films, novels, biographies, poetry, music, short stories, food, ...

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Letters

Dear George and Jon,

This issue was unexpectedly interesting for its book and film reviews. But, I warn you, my mind goes in odd directions from the titles and subjects raised. In respect of Wakanda Forever and the conflict with another submarine nation, I thought: Why are these undiscovered nations kingdoms, particularly? Why not oligarchic republics, or H.G. Wells' idealistic socialism, or warring tribes, or anarcho-syndicalist communes that elect an administrator of the week whose plans require a simple majority for domestic operations, but a 2/3rds majority in the case of external affairs?

The retrospective review of Stand on Zanzibar took me back to when I first read the novel. For a while, in fact, I read a lot of John Brunner's works. The impression that left is that Brunner alternated between short paperback novels like The Stardroppers or The Infinitive of Go, that showed an unlikely maguffin leading to a bright future, and long, hardback novels like Stand on Zanzibar or The Sheep Look Up, that showed more realistic progressions of current events to a very dark, future for us all.

Yours,
Garth Spencer
Vancouver, Canada

Greetings folks !

Jump on board and be part of the creative wagon that's improving the N3F's overall quality by sending in your artwork right now ! We accept jpgs., pngs. and tiffs. Another option, is to email me your direct url page or gallery links and well have a look at it.

Thank you for your contributions and upwards and onwards we go !

Jose Sanchez
jose77sanchez@yahoo.com
Art Bureau

Animated Videos

Turning Red Review by Tom Feller

Meilin, aka Mei, aka Mei Mei (voice of Rosalie Chiang) is a 13 year old overachiever who has a crush on a clerk in her local convenience store in Toronto in 2002. She writes down her feelings and draws pictures of him in her notebook. Unfortunately, her mother Ming (voice of Sandra Oh) discovers it. Mei is upset, of course, and literally turns into a giant red panda. She learns from her parents that the women in her family have this affliction that manifests itself during puberty. She reverts to her normal self when she calms down, but the red panda reappears whenever she feels a strong emotion, which is quite frequent for a 13 year old. This condition can be suppressed by undergoing a ritual during a lunar eclipse. However, the ritual is scheduled for the same time as a concert that Mei and her friends want to attend. It's their favorite boy band 4*Town, loosely based on O-Town, *NYSYNC, and the Backstreet Boys. I've never been a 13 year old girl, but I have it on good authority that the film accurately captures the emotions of one. It's a Pixar movie, so the animation is first rate, and it was nominated for the Oscar in the Best Animated Feature category.

My basic impression was that the movie was second-rate Pixar which meant that it was a first rate when compared to most other movies. I did not realize that it was controversial until I started to write this review. A prominent white, male critic complained in a review when it first opened that it was

“unrelatable”, because the central characters were female and Asian. He was attacked for both racism and sexism, and the review was taken down. Other critics have objected to the obvious metaphor that “turning red” stood for menstruation and that it is an inappropriate subject for a “children’s” movie. Other critics also objected to the portrayal of Mei and her friends as what we used to call “boy crazy” rather than “woke” and that there is insufficient LGBTQ representation.

Vatican Miracle Examiners Review by Jessi Silver

To detect lies, refuse fakes, and reach the miracle of God – that is their mission as Vatican Miracle Examiners. Hiraga, a scientific genius and Roberto, an expert on the decryption of cryptography and ancient documents are not only good partners but also “Miracle Examiners” working for the Vatican. They are secret examiners, who are requested to examine and identify the authenticity of miracles from all over the world. – ANN



Streaming: Amazon Anime Strike
Episodes: 12
Source: Light Novel

Episode 1 Summary: Hiraga and Roberto are Vatican priests with a very important job – when claims of miraculous events are reported, they travel around the world to investigate their veracity. Having just received word of a virgin impregnation, the two hop a plane to Mexico in order to examine all the evidence. Before they leave, though, they’re warned that they may meet with the Devil himself once they’ve arrived. The two enter the grounds of Saint Rosario church, which has an attached boys’ boarding school and a hospital that seems strangely well-equipped. They speak with the pregnant nun in question, who doesn’t seem to be lying and who greets them sporting stigmata, but Hiraga (the more scientific of the two) seems unconvinced. There’s also kind of an odd, unsettling atmosphere hanging over the estate, and as night falls the two suspect that word of the Devil’s presence might have been more than just a faint warn-

ing. Late at night a security guard comes upon the body of one of the priests, bloodied and sprawled across a pentagram on the ground. Murmurs of students playing at devil worship begin to rumble a little bit harder, just as a statue of the Virgin Mary in the chapel begins to shed tears.

Impressions: Oh anime, forever attempting to combine religious iconography with animated entertainment. I’m kind of kidding on that point, as this series seems to at least make a play at portraying some aspects of Catholicism in a way more accurate than many others (see Hellsing or Crono Crusade for some great examples of ham-fisted pasted-on Western religion). As the setup for a horror-mystery series, well, there are worse out there. But there’s something about this episode and the overall feeling it establishes that seems a little bit “off” to me.



The examiners pray in the chapel at Saint Rosario Church. Copyright 2017 J.C. Staff

Though you’d be hard-pressed to find a whole lot of concrete evidence in this first episode, it has a very odd, pervasive sense of violent sexuality to it that rubs me the wrong way. This is possibly my mistake, but I’d sort of assumed before watching the show that the two male leads were supposed to be some kind of low-key yaoi bait; there’s obvious potential to frame up something that’s taboo and exciting between two attractive male priests. The first episode makes kind of a weak play at this sort of thing, with a shower scene in which Hiraga goes over his personal internal struggle while nude under the running water, and Roberto does domestic duties in the sitting room, ironing his companions clothing before they both go to meet their head priest for their assign-



Dial “1-800-SATAN-66” to speak to the dark lord. Copyright 2017 J.C. Staff

ment. There’s a lot of relationship coding, but absolutely zero chemistry between the two characters. I was left feeling kind of puzzled. It’s certainly not a requirement to feed shippers, and in fact I felt a little bit guilty going in with that kind of assumption. But on the other hand, why the weird fan-service? It left me feeling disoriented, like I couldn’t quite nail down the tone.

There are some other offhand comments and some actions that occur briefly that speak to kind of an unsettling view of sexuality. I was really getting uncomfortable when the protagonists and the related side characters started to get into the nitty-gritty regarding the nun’s pregnancy. The reference to her hymen (which isn’t examined on screen, but was apparently looked-at by someone at some point to verify her physical virginity) and the kind of faint suggestion of how she may have become impregnated (there’s literally no direct evidence, but I interpreted a few cues to mean that there may have been student involvement) made me really uncomfortable, and I would venture a guess that some people might even find themselves triggered by the entire situation. It should be news to no one that the religious view of women’s sexuality isn’t that great, but to dive right into it with episode 1 was something I wasn’t really prepared for.

Oh, and there’s also a bizarre and completely incongruous split-second scene of a nun suggestively and violently biting into a juicy sausage at the dinner table. I rewound the video a couple of times to try to see if there was some context for it, and other than just the overall creepy atmosphere, it doesn’t seem to be related to much of anything. She’s briefly introduced earlier in the episode and immediately reads as “sexy” and “probably not actually a nun,” but beyond that prepare yourself for a laugh and a great opportunity for a screen capture.

There are also some situations that came across as being (probably unintentionally) funny. For example, the episode begins with a group of cloaked figures performing a ritual around something that looks similar to any off-brand Ouija board you might find at a game shop. For a show that honestly seems a little bit in love with itself with its richly-depicted scenes of Vatican City and such, to represent occultism and Satan worship in such a cartoonish way just made me laugh. Next time they’ll be trying to find the name of Carlos’ crush or how many kids Steven will have, right after they bloody up another priest as sacrifice to Satan’s will.



Ah yes, I can see so much more with my monocle. Copyright 2017 J.C. Staff

One thing I did really like about this episode is the music that was chosen. The use of choral songs for many of the scenes that take place in religious houses of worship or similar environments is overbearing but very pretty in its own way, and gives a good feel for the looming presence of God wherever seems appropriate. As the priests arrive in Mexico, there’s also some pleasant Central/South American flute music to accompany them to their destination. Like the rest of the show itself, it’s sort of corny, sort of cheesy, and sort of try-hard, but I thought it worked well against how over-the-top some of the other content was.

If I had to choose a word to describe how the first episode presents itself, I’d have to choose something like “goofy.” The characters are so serious that I can’t take them seriously, if that makes sense. Hiraga’s sad situation, as a scientist and a man of God who just knows there’s a way to save his younger brother from whatever kind of horrible bone cancer is plaguing him, is just over-the-top; it doesn’t really build sympathy so much as it paints him as kind of a madman with a penchant for playing made-up games with himself. Roberto seems like kind of a nothing person, serious and more fatherly but without even a strong backstory to distinguish him from others. Other than that, the flying rose petals that accompany the characters’ stigmata, as well as the over-the-top acting and really obvious use of color, shadow, light, and darkness, paints this as campy rather than serious. Not necessarily a bad

thing so much as something I wasn't really looking for.

With so few series starring adult characters, I had some hopes that this show might provide a more mature supernatural series to compliment all those that are focused on teens. I should probably know better that, just because an anime stars grown-ups, doesn't mean that it's made for grown-ups. This one might just be a little too weird for me to enjoy.

Pros: The soundtrack does a lot to create the proper atmosphere, at least in some situations.

Cons: The overall atmosphere seems in conflict with itself. There's some weird-but-not-surprising treatment of women's sexuality.

Grade: C-

Films

Planet Terror Review by Heath Row

This sf-horror film directed by Robert Rodriguez was initially released as a 2007 double feature—Grindhouse—with Quentin Tarantino's *Death Proof*.

When screened together, the double feature was accompanied with trailers for non-existent films, some of which were later filmed. Released separately for home media, they weren't released together on DVD in the United States until 2010. This is a review of the initial *Planet Terror* standalone two-DVD release. Incorporating effects that suggest imperfections and flaws in aging film stock, the movie is a standard sf-horror concept: the release of a mysterious gas used by the military... changes area citizens, who threaten the health and wellbeing of those unaffected by the gas. Rodriguez offers a group of stock characters—the good girl gone bad, the independent rebel who's good at everything, the jealous abusive husband, the rigid military leader, the bickering brothers—while tweaking tropes enough that *Planet Terror* is not just a 1980s action movie pastiche.

More interestingly, however, a reel is lost, and when the movie resumes, a lot has happened: back story revealed, relationships improved, and plotline accelerated. The gap is a lot of fun. In the end, the movie is really about two things: a gas that mutates those exposed to it—resulting in some wonderful special effects—and Rose McGowan's character, soon an amputee, receiving a custom-built assault rifle as a prosthetic leg.

Rodriguez even scored the movie, and its soundtrack is delightful. The film is dark, none too serious, action-packed without being too intense, and there's an opportunistic scientist in it. The movie glosses over the science, but it's there. It isn't friendly.

Kiss Meets the Phantom of the Park Review by Heath Row in Telegraphs and Tar Pits

Another TV movie, this rock 'n' roll, science fiction oddity produced by Hanna-Barbera Productions originally aired on NBC on Oct. 28, 1978, just in time for Halloween. Also not broadly available, I obtained a copy from an online retailer specializing in rare movies. Intended as a mainstream, mass-market showcase for the theatrical hard rock band, the TV movie was aired the same year the band members released their solo albums.

To this day, the movie is hard to find. A European edit of the movie was released as part of *Kissology Volume Two: 1978-1991* but has otherwise only been briefly available on VHS twice during the 1980s

and on laserdisc in 1991. The band didn't like the movie even during test screenings; attitudes toward it haven't improved over time.

In a recent *Life Kiss: 50 Years—Gods of Rock and Roll* mook (or bookazine) published by Dotdash Meredith Premium Publishing, Jed Gottlieb writes, "Kiss couldn't act. Critics noticed." Contemporary Los Angeles Times coverage rated the movie "a four-star abomination ... a five-minute idea for a cartoon, disguised as a two-hour movie." Times staff writer James Brown wrote on the day of its airing, "[W]hat transpires is witless, bloated and, given the stars' reputations, exasperatingly tame—even by television standards." Regardless, Gottlieb indicates the movie is "deliciously campy and fun..." I agree.

The basic gist of the flick is that a mad scientist working at a down-on-its-luck amusement park has figured out how to convert human beings into robots, utilizing an on-site laboratory. That park was set at Magic Mountain, now Six Flags Magic Mountain, in Valencia. Once he learns that the park is for sale, endangering his work, the scientist intends to use a Kiss concert held at the park as a promotion to unleash his dastardly plan upon the world at large. The members of the band have some kind of otherworldly amulets or icons that they use to gain power—giving them the gift of rock 'n' roll, as well as superheroic abilities.

The members of Kiss are kidnapped, a robotic copy of Gene Simmons leads security guards on quite a chase, and the band confronts robotic simians controlled by the scientist—resulting in one of the better scenes as the band fights animatronic white monkeys (men in gorilla suits) while they clamber threateningly on the scaffolding of a roller coaster. Of course, there's also the Kiss concert at the park, as well. Its occurrence is a celebration.

LASFS-fan Susan Fox was at that concert, as a teenager. I interviewed her briefly to see what she remembered about the experience.

"There's not very much to say because it was more than 40 years ago. An uncle of mine was one of the [uncredited] producers, Louis M. Heyward, who was Uncle Deke to us. My boyfriend and I got to hang out by a lighting stand in the back, and watch the concert at a great distance. I was not particularly a Kiss fan, but I was a teenager and a free concert was always a bonus. It was fun! And loud. Which is, of course, part of the fun. Magic Mountain opened in 1971, and there were concerts at the time. I saw Sonny and Cher there very early on. But the Kiss concert and shoot was not in the amphitheater, but out in the vast parking lot."

Indeed, it was. Throughout the movie, almost 20 Kiss songs are performed, including "Radioactive," "Almost Human," "Mr. Make Believe," and "Man of 1000 Faces"—perhaps the most in line with the themes and tropes of the movie.

All in all, the movie might have been an easily forgotten example of sf TV movies of the 1970s, were it not for the involvement of Kiss. While it's not very good, it did contribute to the sf and superhero mythology of the band. In 1977, Kiss appeared in *Howard the Duck* #12-13 and two issues of *Marvel Comics Super Special*. The first super special incorporated band members' blood in the red ink used for printing. A Kiss Colorforms Set featuring a backdrop showcasing a guitar-shaped laser beam and bank of computers was produced in 1979.

Renfield Review by Tom Feller

I've seen many film and television versions of Dracula, but this is the first one in which his servant Renfield (Nicholas Hoult) is the main character. In the first Bela Lugosi film, he provides comedy relief when he extols on how delicious spiders are. In this film, his consumption of insects turns him into John Wick. He is still the servant of Dracula (an over-the-top Nicholas Cage), but has come to realize that

they have an abusive and exploitative relationship. They now live in New Orleans, and Renfield has joined a support group for people in toxic relationships. The plot gets them involved with Rebecca Quincy (Awkafina), the only honest cop in New Orleans, according to this movie, her FBI agent sister (Camille Chen), and Teddy, the drug dealing son (Ben Schwartz) of a cartel boss Bella-Francesca Lobo (Shohreh Aghdashloo). It is quite entertaining.

Everything Everywhere All At Once Review by Tom Feller

This multi-verse film is a star vehicle for 60 year old Malaysian-born Michelle Yeoh, whom I first noticed in the Pierce Brosnan James Bond film *Tomorrow Never Dies*, although she had already been the star of Chinese-language martial arts movies made in Hong Kong. She had originally wanted to be a ballerina, but a spinal injury forced her to switch to acting. Not only was this the first time she won an Oscar, but also the first time she was nominated, although many critics believe she deserved one for *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*.

Yeoh plays Evelyn Wang, a Chinese immigrant who runs a laundromat with her husband Waymond (Ke Huy Quan). She married Waymond despite the opposition of her father Gong Gong (94 year old James Hong). Waymond is filing for divorce at the same time that they are being audited by the IRS. They have a lesbian daughter named Joy (Stephanie Hsu) whose girlfriend is Becky (Tallie Medel). They make Evelyn uncomfortable.

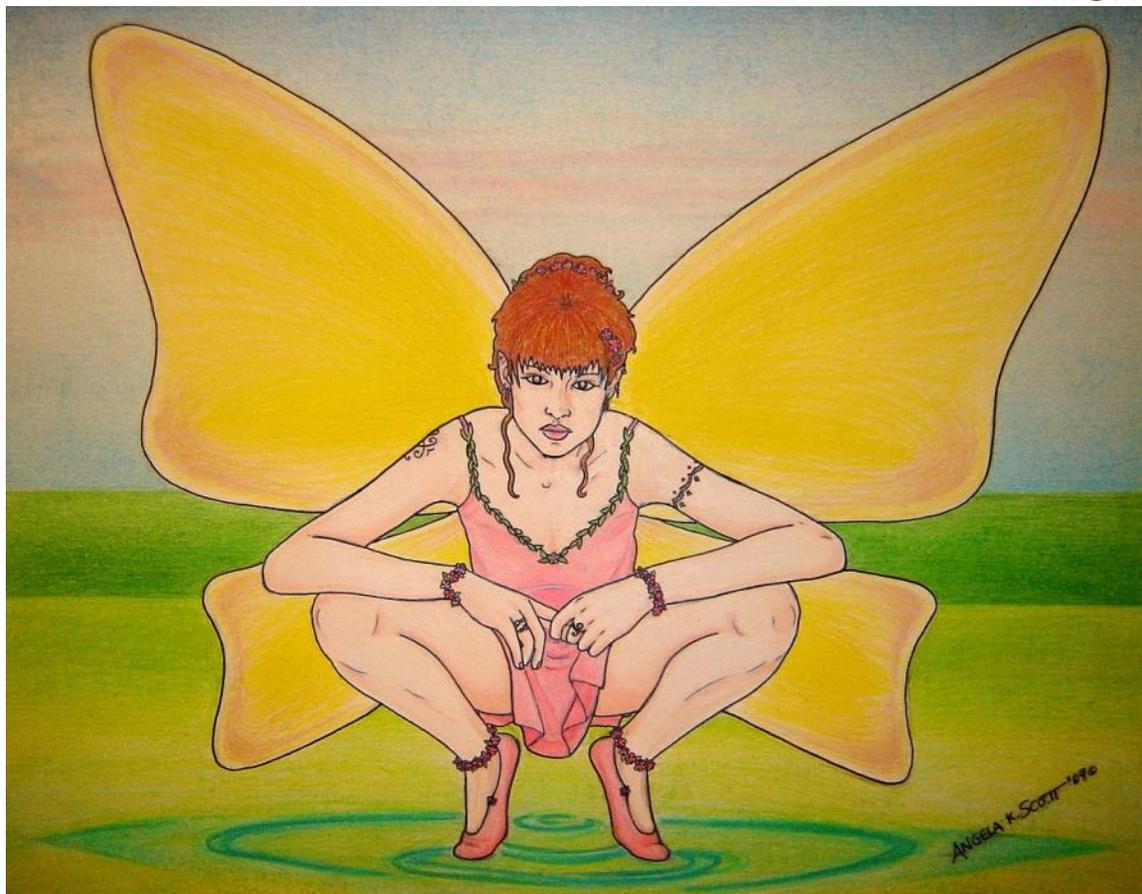
The multi-verse intrudes while they are in an elevator at the IRS building. Waymond changes briefly from a meek, mild-mannered middle-aged man to a superspy to inform Evelyn that all hell is about to break loose. Then he reverts back to himself for their meeting with the auditor (Jamie Lee Curtis). Their mundane meeting quickly turns into a martial arts extravaganza, and a supervillain emerges. The actor playing the villain is one of the film's biggest plot twists. Between fights, Evelyn finds herself in universes in which she is a singer, a movie star in Chinese martial arts films, a sign spinner, and even a rock.

Besides Yeoh, the film won Oscars for Best Picture, Director, Supporting Actor (Quan), Supporting Actress (Curtis), Editing, and Original Screenplay and was also nominated in the Costume Design category. I liked it so much that I have seen it four times.

Pinocchio Review by Tom Feller

My first reaction upon hearing about another version of *Pinocchio* was why? However, this new rendition makes some changes from both the Disney version and Carlo Collodi's 1881 story that are quite interesting. First, it is set firmly in 20th Century Italy. Geppetto's village is located close enough to Austria that they can see planes flying to and from the Austrian front during World War I. One day a stray bomb falls there and kills Geppetto's 10 year old son Carlo (voice of Gregory Mann). Later, Geppetto (voice of David Bradley) and Pinocchio (also the voice of Gregory Mann) fall afoul of Podesta (voice of Ron Perlman), the local leader of the fascists, and Mussolini (voice of Tom Kenny) himself has a cameo.

The Land of Toys and Pleasure Island sections of the story are removed in favor of Pinocchio and Candlewick attending a military boot camp. The narrator is Sebastian J. Cricket (voice of Ewan McGregor), who has the best lines, and Pinocchio is granted life by a wood sprite (voice of Tilda Swinton). The stop motion animation is excellent, but the songs are mediocre. It won the Oscar in the Best Animated Feature category.



Faery Flowers by Angela K Scott

Magazines

Silence and Starsong Magazine: Spring 2023, Volume 1 Number 1

Review by Trevor Denning

Review courtesy upstreamreviews.substack.com

Lovecraft meets Lewis in this collection of the weird and wonderful

Silence and Starsong aspires to dismantle the nuts-and-bolts materialism of sci-fi and bring back a sense of awe. And maybe, just perhaps by acknowledging the spiritual, change how we see the world. H.P. Lovecraft famously advised writers to “never have a wonder taken for granted,” and it’s an admonition the writers here have fully embraced.

A Matter of Honor by Jason McCuiston: A small group of soldiers on opposing sides (of both country and the Catholic/Protestant divide) at the end of the Thirty Years’ War accept a challenge: stay the night in a haunted churchyard and see whose faith is stronger. When the gates of Hell open, they’re forced to band together. It’s a great, atmospheric start to the collection. Standout line: “...I suppose the will to survive can bestow upon one an extra measure of strength when the danger is great enough.”

A Wanderer of Ur by Gaston Nerval: At the dawn of civilization immediately following the biblical Flood, a mercenary named Thark lives a carefree life. When a priest of the Creator God tells Thark he will be the father of a great nation if he slays a witch, the arrogant barbarian seriously underestimates the challenge. Thark obviously shares some DNA with Conan the Barbarian, but giving it an Old Testament twist makes it unique. Standout line: “‘You are in danger,’ he said, and as she leaned toward him she

replied, ‘Not from you.’”

Archangel by Frederick Gero Heimbach: During the Cold War the US has nukes, but Soviet missiles can literally unleash Hell on earth. When the Russian submarine loses its priest and spiritual defenses buckle under the pressure, the captain and crew are tortured by demons, past and present. While this longer entry gets very, very dark I love setting and concept. Standout line: “There are reasons to ask if our policy of weaponized demonology is concordant with the will of God.”

The Two Godly Fishmongers by Kevin White: Feuding Quakers are at the heart of this accidental alien abduction story. You have to give it points for the audacity of the concept, but more so for the excellent execution. After the previous tale, it’s like a warm, nourishing bowl of oatmeal on a cold winter day. Standout line: “‘Embrace Chastity, fie’, barked Dudley, naming his new daughter-in-law, ‘and you just could not wait to do that, could you?’”

Free Lunch by S. Kirk Pierzchala: A dark fairytale about the dangers of accepting food of unknown origin, Free Lunch is the story of a family that stumbles into the Air BnB from the otherworld. With a clever teen protagonist, it’s a charming, unsettling, little story that will make you think twice about anything that’s too good to be true. Standout line: “A sickening, soft flutter of giant wings beat against the gray of her amorphous, unsettling dreams...”

Have Ye Offered Unto Me by Zachary Grafman: The battle between intellect and religion, Christian tradition and pagan, is fully realized in this period piece. There’s a subtle humor throughout the story, which is prerequisite when the syllabus includes ghastly rites in stuffy old England. The growing sense of dread and finally full-fledged horror earns it top marks. Standout line: “The entire point of the university environment, after all, was the separation of the intellectual, allowing their own set a respite of sanity from the philosophical estate sale of the world.”

The Gamer by Nathan Karnes: In this case “gamer” means one who places wagers, and the Gamer is in a remote village for a glider race. Or is he? Questions of destiny and free will linger on the fringes. Who is the Gamer, really? You’ll probably be pondering that for a long time. While very dialog heavy, there’s enough world-building here to hold our interest. Standout line: “The right kind of traveler would doubtless have found this astral anomaly extremely intriguing. He was not the right kind of traveler.”

The Secret of Phelim Darke by S. Kirk Pierzchala: The second story from Pierzchala is both small in scope and cosmic in implications. At first, it seems to be about a couple with fertility problems before it turns into something much more sinister. While attentive readers might guess the trajectory, the ending is still divine. Standout line: “His mind roamed planes and dimensions he knew the other two could not possibly comprehend.”

The Shadow of the Stain by Patrick Lauser: If Walt Disney had lived long enough to see the final films from Hammer Studios, his nightmares may have looked like this. It’s a story of a haunted forest, cursed girls, and evil (if handsome) young men. Delving into the story’s theme would spoil it, but this atmosphere heavy tale is uncomfortably weird and eerily familiar.

Standout line: “...it seemed that the air he breathed acted like a telescope, lining up and drawing together several rooms.”

Hidden Empire by T.R. Alexander: When Joseph Cartwright is sent to address some problems within the CIA he learns the sort of things that break men’s minds. And then he shares them with us. How do the people who trade in lives not lose their souls? Maybe they don’t. Conspiracy theorists will find the story all too plausible, and everyone else can appreciate the unsettling “what-if?”

Standout line: “We are building a secret empire as broad as it is hidden.”

The Characters

Through these stories we’re introduced to characters from all times and walks of life. Mercenaries, Quakers, teenage girls, academics, supernatural beings, and more are all represented. Even the shortest stories do an excellent job of developing characters first and letting the plots build from there, so that we always understand who they are, where they are, and why they need to complete their objectives.

The Worlds

Most of the stories take place in our world, though a few may or may not be high fantasy. Some are contemporary, but many are historical. There’s no lack of variety.

The Politics

None of the stories are terribly political. If anything, it’s all pretty based, “the government is not your friend,” type stuff.

Content Warning

Some mild sensuality, gore, demonic horror, and some poor animals get killed.

Who is it for?

This collection is well-suited to anyone who appreciates the old pulp masters like Howard and Lovecraft, newer voices like Gaiman, dark fairytales, or a juicy conspiracy theory, with the caveat that they’re primarily from a Christian worldview.

Why read it?

It may seem odd to reference the atheist Lovecraft when reviewing such a theistic collection, yet this melding of the weird with sci-fi might not exist without him. But where Lovecraft only saw cosmic horror, some believe in the cosmic hope threaded throughout these stories.

Asimov’s Science Fiction May/June 2023 Review by Heath Row in Telegraphs and Tar Pits

The May/June 2023 issue of Asimov’s Science Fiction features a novella by Allen M. Steele, but following my usual form, I started with the short stories. Sandra McDonald’s “Sex Apocalypse Robot” is provocatively titled—who doesn’t like robots? As the biographical sketch preceding the story indicates, the story is part of a series of Sexy Robot stories, which also include “Sexy Robot Mom,” “Seven Sexy Cowboy Robots,” and “Sexy Robot Heroes.” The eventual collection is sure to be amazing.

This story is set in a post-apocalyptic Manhattan, and the streets are dangerous, the only safety many stories high. Joseph, who communicates with his distant sister via instant messaging, meets a new neighbor, who’s very handsome. They become close, in part aided by a woman who braves the city streets to make deliveries, and Joseph learns his neighbor is an art-restoring android. The story develops nicely, and a few intriguing particulars are revealed, making the story even more meaningful. Worth reading!

Zack Be’s “The Visions Are Free After Exit 73” is a piece about terraforming, ecological disaster, an alien race, and hallucinogenic soil. The scientist responsible for the disaster seeks closure with his dead wife before he leaves the planet. The near-religious acolytes are interesting, and the protagonist ends up finding more, or less, than he was looking for.

The third story I've read so far is "Zoo Station" by Lavie Tidhar (T&T #57). Tidhar might be my current favorite current author, and this story helps shore that up. High above a ruined Earth, space detritus clogs and cramps Earth's orbits. The protagonist ventures to an orbiting zoo facility before its orbit decays, sending it into danger. What he encounters changes how he thinks about life among the stars. Tidhar's approach to maintaining a historical record of animal life is wonderful, as is his portrayal of the resulting accuracy—and inaccuracy of such a record.

Ray Nayler's guest editorial, "Not Prediction, But Predication: The True Power of Science Fiction" touches on a theme we address occasionally, that sf's job is not to predict the future. "What sf authors are involved in is not divination, but a more productive type of thought experiment—asking detailed 'what-if' questions and then predicating their stories on the idea that those creative 'what-ifs?' are, in fact, true," he writes. That single letter can make all the difference.

Novel

Legendborn by Tracy Deonn Review by Tom Feller

I have read several versions of the Arthurian legends and seen even more in the movies and on television, so any time I find an original take on the old stories, it gives me pleasure. This version is set in our time, and the premise is that descendants of King Arthur and his knights are still with us and are secretly protecting us from demons. They refer to themselves as "legendborn". The novel is set in and around the University of North Carolina (UNC) in Chapel Hill, where they hide in plain sight as a "secret" society called the Order of the Round Table and use a kind of magic called "aether". The main character is Bree Matthews, a sixteen year old African-American girl who has just lost her mother in a hit-and-run accident. She and her best friend Alice are accepted into a special program at UNC (the author's alma mater) for exceptional high school students. On her first night, Bree witnesses an attack by a demon, which brings her into contact with Selwyn Emrys Kane, a mage only slightly older than her, whom she later learns is a "Merlin". He attempts to wipe her memory of the incident, which is not only unsuccessful, but unlocks memories about her mother's death linking her to another "Merlin". At school, Bree is assigned a mentor one year ahead of her named Nick Davis, whom she later learns is not only a member of this secret society, but supposedly the heir of King Arthur himself. (The identity of the true heir is a big plot twist that is revealed late in the book.) At her request, he brings her into the society as a "page", so that she can learn the truth about her mother's death. It also turns out that Bree has magic of her own called "rootcraft" that she inherited from her mother. Both forms of magic use the same sources, but "aether" was developed in 5th Century Wales, while "root" was brought over from Africa by slaves. This is a very fast-paced novel, the first in a trilogy, that is hard to put down, and Nick, Selwyn, and Bree make for a very compelling love triangle. My only criticisms are that the plot depends heavily on coincidences and that there a lot of characters to keep track of.

SerCon

Cleve Cartmill Bio-Bibliography By Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D. N3F Historian With Minor Amendments by George Phillies

Cleve Cartmill was an American journalist and science fiction (SF) author. He was a member of the Mañana Literary Society of Los Angeles, and was an inspiration for the fictional character, Matt Dun-



can, in Anthony Boucher's popular SF-mystery novel *Rocket to the Morgue* -- originally published in 1942, and dedicated to the Society, Cartmill, and Robert Heinlein. Heinlein hosted the Society meetings.

Cartmill probably is best remembered today for what is referred to as "The Cleve Cartmill Affair," when his story "Deadline" (March, 1944, *Astounding Science Fiction*) attracted the attention of the FBI -- because its detailed description of an atom bomb was similar to that being developed by the then highly classified Manhattan Project. *Astounding* Editor Campbell was actually happy about this incident because he felt it showed that people were taking the stories in his magazine seriously.

Personal Life

Born in Platteville, Wisconsin, on June 21, 1908, Cartmill attended Webb City High School in Missouri before moving out to California with his parents. He died on February 11, 1964 in Orange County, California.



During the course of his life, Cartmill was married three times.

In 1941 he married Jeanne Ruth Irvine, and they had a son, Matthew. In 1948 he married Vida Jameson (1916 - 1988), the daughter of fellow SF writer Malcolm Jameson, who at one time lived with Heinlein and his wife Leslyn. SF writer Alfred Bester once had the following to say about Vida: "Now and then he (Jameson) brought along his pretty daughter, who turned everybody's head." Cartmill's final marriage, in 1954, was to Ingrid Asting. Cartmill's son Matt was a professor of biological anthropology at Boston University and a science writer, to whom Robert Heinlein partly dedicated his 1947 book *Rocket Ship Galileo*.

Pseudonyms

Cartmill also wrote as Michael Corbin, and "ghosted" publications for Leslie Charteris, Craig Rice, Gypsy Rose Lee, and George Sanders.

Genre Novels

The Space Scavengers, 1975.

Prelude to Armageddon, 2004.

Genre Short Stories

Oscar, Unknown (February, 1941)

The Bargain, Unknown (August, 1942)

With Flaming Swords, *Astounding Science Fiction* (September, 1942)

No Graven Image, Unknown (February, 1943)

Hell Hath Fury, Unknown (August, 1943)

Deadline, *Astounding* (March, 1944)

Number Nine, *Astounding* (May, 1949)

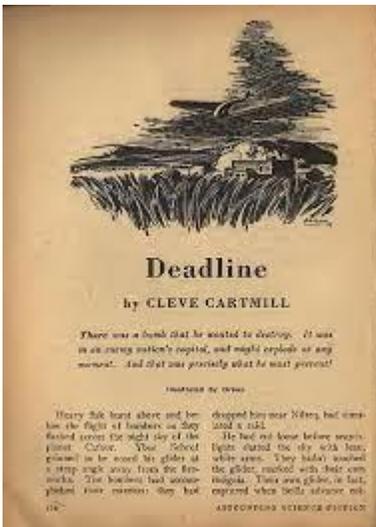
Bells On His Toes, *F&SF* (Fall, 1949)

Punching Pillows, *Astounding* (June, 1950)

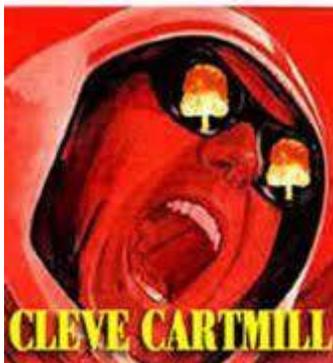
Huge Beast, *F&SF* (Summer, 1950)

You Can't Say That, *New Tales of Space and Time* (1951)

At Your Service, *Thrilling Wonder Stories* (August, 1951)



DEADLINE! & OTHER CONTROVERSIAL SF CLASSICS



My Lady Smiles, F&SF (November, 1953)
Youth, Anybody?, F&SF (November, 1955)

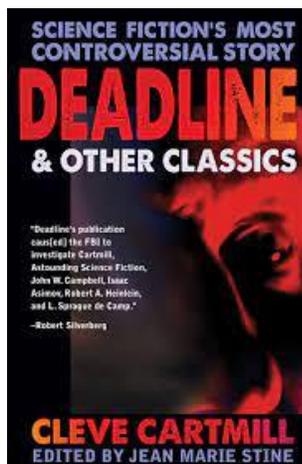
Comments on SF by Cartmill

In a 1962 fanzine article, Cartmill characterized the SF of the late 1940s and 1950s as being “inanimately introspective” by which he meant that most SF writers had turned their thoughts inward. Previously, most SF writers had written to be entertaining, and not instructive.

Critical Comments

Astounding historian Alva Rogers wrote about Cartmill’s fiction: “Cartmill wrote with an easy and colloquial fluidity that made his stories eminently readable.”

Some Concluding Comments



Cartmill was said to be co-inventor of the Blackmill system of high-speed typography, but questions have been raised as to whether or not the system exists, or whether it was a creation of Cartmill’s imagination.

Heinlein introduced Cartmill to Astounding Science Fiction editor John W, Campbell, Jr. During 1942 – 1950, Cartmill had several stories published in Astounding.

His 1944 story Deadline led to an FBI visit to John Campbell and Astounding. As is generally not noted, the reason for the upset was that his description of the Sixa atomic bomb included a feature of atomic bombs that was actually a secret, sufficiently secret that it is not mentioned in the Smythe Report: The Sixa bomb used a beryllium-radium (moderns use beryllium-polonium) initiator to supply enough neutrons to start the detonation, without which implosion-type bombs will detonate only feebly.

He had polio as a child, and suffered from a withered leg. Due to this condition, he was exempt for medical reasons from serving in the military during World War II.

Sources

Ashley, Mike. The Complete Index to Astounding/Analog, 1981.

Hawk, Pat. Hawk’s Author’s Pseudonyms II, 1995.

Metcalf, Norm. The Index of Science Fiction Magazines, 1951 – 1965, 1968.

Rogers, Alva. A Requiem for Astounding, 1964.

Smith, Curtis C. (ed.). Twentieth-Century Science-Fiction Writers, 1981.

Warner, Harry, Jr. A Wealth of Fable, 1992.

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

Short Stories

Worlds Long Lost, edited by Christopher Ruocchio and Sean CW Korsgaard

Review by Heath Row

Also seen in *Telegraphs & Tar Pits*

From the back cover: “We were not alone. The farther we push into the universe, the more obvious it becomes. The signs are everywhere: canals and pyramids on Mars, old roads on the moons of Jupiter, ruined cities on worlds about the nearer stars. The galaxy once teemed with life, or so it seems. Which begs the question: What happened to it all? These stories explore the ruins of lost civilizations, solve ancient mysteries ... and awaken horrors from beyond the dawn of time.”

I love stories about unearthing alien artifacts. Whether it’s Stephen King’s *The Tommyknockers* or *In the Tall Grass* (with Joe Hill), Jack McDevitt’s *The Engines of God* (*Faculae & Filigree* #10), Ray Bradbury’s *The Martian Chronicles*, perhaps even Tim Powers’s “Salvage and Demolition” (*T&T* #51), there’s something about the idea of ancient remains of alien civilizations—or items imbued with the consciousness of an alien other—that I find intriguing. So far, I’ve read 10 of the 14 stories.

The first story I read, “re: something strange,” by Jessica Cain, did not disappoint. Told in a somewhat epistolary structure using emails interspersed with telephone call transcriptions, voicemail recordings, and additional narrative, Cain’s story details two storylines: One of a rural woman finding carved stone objects on her property—the sign of an interstellar being’s pending arrival—as well as the unraveling and aftermath of a romantic relationship. The setting and tone reminded me of H.P. Lovecraft’s “The Colour Out of Space,” particularly the death of 57 trees. If the other stories are as good as this one, boy howdy!

Sean Patrick Hazlett’s “They Only Dig at Night” takes a different approach to the theme, setting its tale, told by way of conversation between two old friends or acquaintances, in a roadside diner. A dig site in the desert has been secured, and a security guard is concerned about events on site, including people who seem to die only to live again after consuming some kind of alien worm. Similar to *Men in Black* and *The X-Files*, the story is an enjoyable read despite its limited setting.

“Dark Eternity” by Jonathan Edelstein is the author’s first story to appear in print, after outings in *Beneath Ceaseless Skies*, *Strange Horizons*, and other prozines. It’s set in a shared universe that Edelstein has tapped in four other stories, which bodes well for a future collection or fix-up. Taking yet another approach to the theme, the piece is set in a more distant future rather than the present day and involves a sympathetic alien race, a representative of which joins the protagonist in her search for a race that captures stories and songs by way of recordings to document history, communicating in a way through a game. I would read more of Edelstein’s work.

Les Johnson’s “Mere Passers By” features a spaceship crew that discovers a solar system in which there’s a three-planet group in the same orbit around the sun. The gas giant in the group seems to have something—or things—inside of it creating a variable gravity that keeps the grouping stable. While the story is largely unresolved—the crew continues on its way—it reminded me of large-scale constructs similar to Larry Niven’s *Ringworld* or Arthur C. Clarke’s *Rendezvous with Rama*.

“The Sleepers of Tartarus” by David J. West was originally written for the anthology *Sword & Planet* but was adjusted slightly for inclusion here. The result is a fun *Barsoom*-like romp that includes giants, Masonic secrets, and a setup for what could be a fun pastiche novel.

Erica Ciko's "Never-Ending, Ever-Growing" is explicitly tied to H.P. Lovecraft's eldritch tradition—her work has appeared in *Cosmic Horror Monthly*—but didn't feel that Lovecraftian to me. Regardless, it's an interesting narrative: the core of a terraformed and colonized planet fights back in an unexpected way.

"Rise of the Administrator" by M.A. Rothman and D.J. Butler seems to be a prelude to—or promotion for—their novel *Time Trials*, which might be the first of a series. After successfully defeating an interstellar threat, a group of advanced civilizations decides to implement a series of tests to determine whether emerging populations are worthy of joining the group. The pyramids of Egypt are featured, and there are allusions to the Labyrinth of Minos. *Time Trials* came out in March.

Orson Scott Card might be the biggest name in the book. His contribution, "Giving Up on the Piano," is one of the shorter pieces in the book—and almost seems incomplete. The story's a good read, regardless. A young man practicing the piano meets a young woman before encountering something neither of them can explain. Like Rothman and Butler's story above, this feels like the setup for a longer piece of work, or something forthcoming, but I'm not sure it is. It might just be a short something banged out by a name author to support a worthwhile project. I'd read more along these lines, Mr. Card!

Griffin Barber's "Retrospective" is a friendly tribute to Rick Boatwright, a member of Eric Flint's Ring of Fire community who died in 2021. It's also a largely military sf story—the piece is mostly combat—that considers how encountering an alien artifact might change someone. Barber's description of the item that is and is not there, as well as what it felt like to touch—and be touched by—it are noteworthy. In the end, we're not sure how the protagonist has changed, entirely, but we know he's been entirely changed.

"Rocking the Cradle" by Patrick Chiles is one of the most scientifically oriented stories in the anthology. Extremely well written—it inspired me to make note of Chiles's novels *Frozen Orbit* and *Frontier*—it explicitly draws on geology and archaeology. It also spends quite a bit of time describing the solar system being explored, which was enjoyable. (As were the author's musings on infinity.) In the end, the story focuses on discovering abandoned alien structures very far from Earth, but with a stronger connection to human history and mythology than might be expected.

Television

Travelers S1E12: "Grace" Review by Heath Row Telegraphs and Tar Pits

As the final episode of the season, it continues—and complicates—a few existing storylines: Marcy doesn't remember anything from her previous life with David but picks up on their closeness and intimacy, making him self-conscious and responsible. Carly is threatened by a new wrinkle I'll touch on below, and Jeff comes to her rescue—perhaps in a way that will remove him as a threat more generally. And Grant tries to reconcile with Kat, admitting that there is someone else but expressing that he wants to stay. All of that is well and good—relatively par for the course in terms of previous episodes and the season to date. But it's the new elements and developments that propel viewers and the plotline toward Season 2 that really shake things up.

First of all, an assassin, OK, assassins have been sent back to kill Grace the senior programmer. She is attacked at school by a student, who Trevor says is the girl who misfired when the rest of her family became hosts. That seemed unnecessary. It could have been anyone. After Grace and Trevor fight her off, she later tries to kill Carly—which is how Jeff is embroiled in a manner that might serve Carly in the future. And members of the team begin to get mysterious text messages from an unknown source giving them various missions, including to kill each other.

We also learn that the Director, rather than being a person or leader of a faction in the future, is an artificial intelligence humans developed to manage its society, facilities, and remaining resources. That came as a bit of a surprise to me, because the plot hadn't really telegraphed the idea at all—and as we've seen in recent months, AI, particularly generative AI, is fallible. For AI to be a television theme in 2016-2017 given the state of technological development at that point in time (pre-mainstream generative AI) shows particular foresight.

In addition, the idea of warring factions struggling for power in the future is built upon, revealing a disagreement over whether the AI, the Director, should be in charge of making decisions—or people. Similarly, it turns out that one of the major factions grew out of a disaster that occurred in the future of travelers who'd previously arrived in the 21st century—but not the two more recently arriving programmers. In the future of later arrivals, not everyone had died, and the survivors became rebels. To top it all off, the farmer-programmer built a device that can house the Director should it choose to escape the future to the past itself. Grace begins to doubt the farmer's loyalties, Trevor is given a mission to destroy the device, Carly is ordered to kill Grant... And Forbes and the FBI arrive.

This is another doozy of an episode, a doozy upon doozies, suggesting that some plotlines might be tied off soon, or early next season, introducing a few more, and continuing a compelling view of a dystopian future—and the heroic efforts undertaken to avoid it.

Food of Famous Writers

George Phillies and Greek Lamb Stew Cooking by Cedar Sanderson



The last time I had a recipe from George, it was a fun hot mess, not because of his snickerdoodles, but because I was baking under unusual circumstances. This recipe was a bit more pulled-together, but not by much, because...

But first! You should check out George Phillies' books. *Minutegirls* is my favorite, not only because (full disclosure) I created the cover art and design for him, but because it's a fun military science fiction and it's a fat book. But if you want something lighter, check out his *Against Three Lands*, but something you should know: George writing 'light' is still incredibly well constructed and detailed. Any of his work shows that he's spent a lifetime designing worlds for gaming, and his work shows that he understands economics on a level most of us don't bother with.

But for this meal, the economic struggle was real. Ok, it's a long story, but for whatever reason, we here in the US of America just don't eat goat and sheep the way most of the rest of the world does. I personally love both, for different reasons, but that just goes to show that I'm weird, to begin with, for an



American. So when I needed to acquire a lamb neck to make this stew, I was both excited and apprehensive. Lamb in Ohio is hard to find, and expensive. The halal market where I used to get it is now a hookah café. I knew of another one nearer to home, but less friendly. I ventured in, smiled politely a lot, and voila! One lamb neck, ready for stew. Also, at 5.99 a pound, reasonably priced for lamb.

Here's a sample of why you'll like George's fiction, as it's the tale of how this recipe came to be, and it made me laugh. I think you'll like it, too, dear readers.

Greek Lamb Stew

Perfect for sitting out with on a cool and raining summer's eve. Better for winter, but this worked nicely!

There is a story behind this. My mother's parents were Hungarian. My father's parents were Greek. My parents carefully gave everyone minimum notice that they were getting married, so that my father's parents would have enough time to recover from the news that he was not marrying a woman from my grandfather's village, and not enough time to do anything else. In any event, my mother actually did not know how to cook at the time they got married. Fortunately, she had taken college chemistry, knew what boiling water looked like, so the first morning after they were in her, now their, apartment, and my father asked about breakfast, my mother was able to boil water, for eggs and coffee. She improved a great deal.

In particular, my mother realized that in order to make peace with her husband's parents she would have to learn how to cook Greek as well as Hungarian food. My father had Greek friends, older women, who were delighted to help. There came the day when she invited my paternal grandparents for dinner, cooked everything in the Greek style, and proceeded to see what would happen. There first came the point where my grandfather lectured at vast length about the glories of Greek history. From the Greek point of view, history consists of the glories of pre-Roman-conquest Greece and the Byzantine Empire. My mother blandly said, I am told, "that's absolutely fascinating. But what the Greeks done since then?" My father had to flee to the kitchen so that his parents would not see him attempting not to laugh. However, my grandfather had already turned to the food, clearly loved absolutely everything, and in the end turned my grandmother and said "Yaya, this was all wonderful. We have a wonderful new daughter. You used to cook this way." After that last sentence, relations between my parents and my grandmother took a little longer to improve.



In any event, the recipe:

3 pounds lamb stew meat (this is a neck or shoulder piece in square chunks)
one small onion per pound meat.

Brown the meat in a dry pan (do not add shortening!)

Browning the lamb's neck. I didn't bother to cut it down, as I knew it would cook just fine as is, and I could pull the meat off later.

Chop onions, add to the pan when meat is browned, and sauté. Add salt and pepper. Add water to barely cover the meat and simmer.

Tomato type stew.

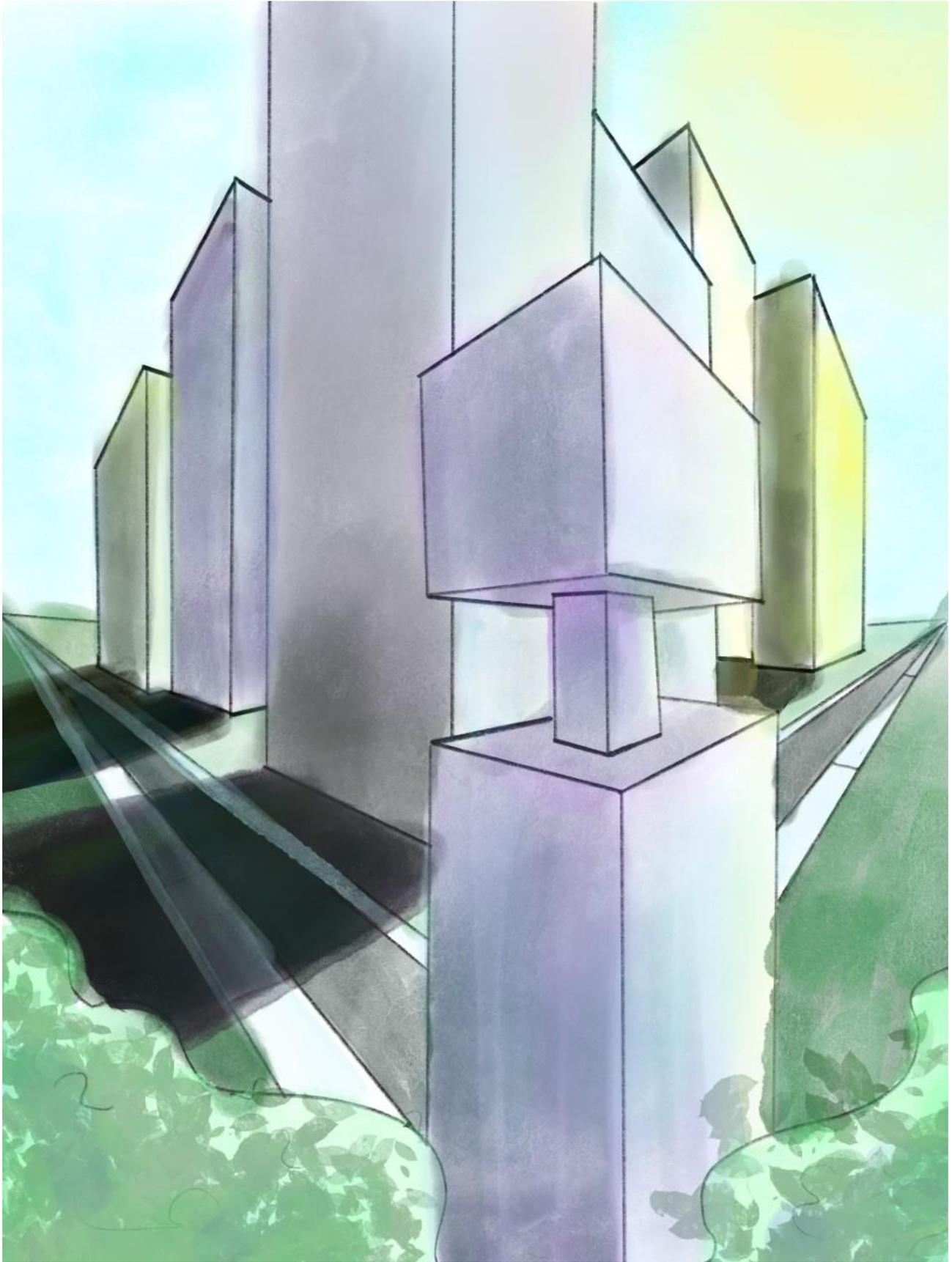
Add one can tomato paste (scant) with water and simmer until meat is tender. Remove meat and to sauce in skillet add a vegetable of choice: green beans, or peas, or okra, or zucchini, or: add about a quart of water to the sauce, bring to boil, and add two thirds of box of Rosa Marina, stir well, cover, simmer, stirring occasionally. The "minestra" can stick to the bottom of the pan if you are not careful. If the water cooks down before the Rosa Marina is tender add more water.

If you use this recipe with chicken rather than Lamb, brown the chicken in a little olive oil.

I added carrots for the veg (it was what I had on hand) and fresh herbs.



Cedar's notes: I cut the recipe in half. None of the kids living at home currently will eat tomatoes in any form, so I knew this would just feed the First Reader and I. I also added about 6 garlic cloves, minced, with the onions to saute at the beginning, and then a handful of fresh herbs (mostly oregano and thyme) to the stew. I cooked it overnight in the crockpot, then pulled the meat off the bones and removed the bones. I cooked the pasta separately as the stew was already quite thick (my crockpot runs very hot. If it's thinner, you could do the pasta in the broth). Finally, I served it with feta crumbled on top and fresh bread on the side. Mmmmm!



Cityscape by Artist Fish