

Tightbeam 352



Star Wars Mandalorian
The Jawas Way of Life
by Jose Sanchez

Tightbeam 352

January 2024

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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Table of Contents

Art

Front Cover Star Wars Mandalorian The Jawas Way of Life by Jose Sanchez
 Back Cover Christmas Robots by Tiffanie Gray

Letter of Comment

4 ... Lloyd Penney

Anime

4 ... Restaurant to Another World/Isekai Shokudou ... Review by Jessi Silver
 7 ... Battle Girl High School ... Review by Jessi Silver

Comics

9 ... Eerie Publications: The Complete Covers—The Whole Bloody Mess (second edition)
 by Mike Howlett ... Review by Heath Row

Movies

10... Star Trek: Generations and Changing Characters Fundamentally ... Review by Jim McCoy
 13 ... The 1995 Batman Forever ... Review by Heath Row
 14 ... After the World Ends: When Post-Apocalyptic Movies Were Telling the Future!
 by Claude Gaillard with Fred Pizzoferrato and Stephane Erbisti ... Review by Heath Row

Rolegaming

15 ... JoCat's A Crap Guide to D&D(5th Edition) ... Review by Jim McCoy

Sercon

16 ... Philip E. High Bio-Bibliography by Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D.

Short Stories

18 ... Thrilling Science Fiction ... Review by Heath Row

Television

19 ... HBO's The Last of Us Season One ... Review by Jim McCoy
 21 ... Fantastic Television ... Heath Row

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Letter of Comment

Dear George and Jon:

‘Tis the end of the year, and I thought I’d try to clean up the IN box of fanzines. I have Tightbeam 351 here, so I will attempt a loc on this issue before it gets too late, and I sleep through the coming of the New Year.

My previous loc... I think the fifth season of Discovery will be airing soon, I hope. Odd that this popular show was cancelled, but we now have a replacement (Starfleet Academy), plus another movie (Section 31). We’ve had so much Trek and Wars; can these two properties carry on, or will they die at some point? With the review of The Last Jedi, I guess others are thinking of this same problem.

Thank you for the bio on Tom Godwin. There’s another name I recognize from short stories, but it looks like there isn’t much found about Godwin beyond this physical handicap, and his marriage. The list of short stories is actually longer than I thought it would be.

Another short loc...maybe it’s just fatigue. I haven’t had much sleep lately, and staying up for New Year’s Eve isn’t helping. May all the members have a great 2024...may you all get what you need, and even what you want. I think we could all use it. See you next year!

Yours, Lloyd Penney

Anime

Restaurant to Another World/Isekai Shokudou Review by Jessi Silver

A restaurant called “Yōshoku no Nekoya” (Western Cuisine Cat Restaurant), which is located on the first basement floor of a building at a corner of a shopping district near an office area. While it normally feeds salarymen, there is a secret in Nekoya. Every Saturday when the shop takes a day off, Nekoya is teeming full of “special customers.” For the office workers, it is a familiar place with familiar dishes, but for these Saturday customers — “people from that world” — it is nothing but cuisine never seen or heard before. –



ANN

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Streaming: Crunchyroll, with Simuldub on Funimation

Episodes: TBA

Source: Novel Series

Episode 1 Summary: Nestled somewhere in the city is a mysterious restaurant serving “Western” cuisine. What Western really means in this context is anyone’s guess; generally anything not “Japanese” in origin, coming from somewhere across the ocean, might be considered Western. What’s special about this restaurant, a little hole-in-



the-wall with a cat on the door, is that one day a week its door opens into the “other world,” and fantastic creatures including elves, demons, werewolves, and even dragons enter to taste Earth’s delicacies. On one of these special days, a young demon named Aletta wanders into the restaurant and, hungry from not having any money or a place to stay, eats an entire pot of corn potage before falling asleep. Rather than punish her, the restaurant’s chef lets Aletta

shower and then gives her a job as a waitress for the customers from another world.

Impressions: As a fan of both relatively-plotless low stakes anime series and anime revolving around food and drink, *Restaurant to Another World* is a rare instance of something that seems perfectly constructed to scratch multiple itches. The show also puts a bit of a twist on the popular Isekai fantasy anime subgenre by bringing the “other world” into ours, rather than allowing yet another character-less teenage guy have all the fun in a fantasy world of his imagination and invention. There’s a lot stacked in this show’s favor, and so far I’m having mostly positive feelings.

The dishes featured in this episode aren’t necessarily anything out of the ordinary; within the first few minutes we get to see restaurant customers ingest teriyaki chicken, curry rice, katsu-don, and beef stew (while also arguing about which goes best with white rice). This might seem like a fairly typical conversation to be had among friends, but the twist is that, to the individuals sampling these dishes, these relatively commonplace foods are strange, delicious delicacies from our world that aren’t easily obtained in their own. There are times where I’ve daydreamed about what it might be like for someone from our distant past on Earth to be brought suddenly into the present day; what might they think about our technological progress or the strangeness of our popular culture as compared to our own? What’s fun about this episode (and by extension, likely the series as a whole) is that it speculates on the reactions of people to whom our world, customs, and favorite foods are completely foreign. It’s difficult to say exactly what a lizard man might think about the ways in which we prepare chicken, but I appreciate that someone has tried to speculate.

The first episode also devotes a little time to the subject of prejudice, and how even a world about which we might fantasize could still have some of the same types of discrimination that we’re still working hard to identify and mitigate. The way that this is approached is pretty obvious and somewhat ham-handed; Aletta is a demon, and so the humans of her world don’t want to be around her or let her have a job despite her harmlessness. It’s the type of situation that pretty much anyone, aside from the most fervent racists, would identify as being wrong, so there’s a definite lack of nuance that doesn’t result in the type of meaty commentary that the creators might think that they’re providing, but I’d be curious to know if it’s a subject that comes up again and if so, whether it’s examined in more depth.

I’m a bit amused by where the show’s staff seems to have devoted the most visual resources. Most of the character animation is functional but unremarkable. Even the depiction of what seems to be a relatively important (and incredibly sexy) character, the female dragon who seems to own the magic restaurant door as one of her many treasures, is mostly serviceable ra-



ther than eye-popping. But when it comes to the food, I can't say I have any complaints. The glistening, darkened skin of the chicken, the crunchy fried katsu coating, the fluffiness of the fried eggs... almost all the food we get to see throughout the episode is incredibly appetizing and makes me want to pull out the pots and pans and cook up a feast for myself. I may not have been hungry before I started watching, but I'd be lying if I said I didn't develop a bit of an appetite after getting an

eyeful of juicy deliciousness.

Unfortunately (and along those same lines, to some extent), this anime suffers from something that I've refrained from commenting on too much as of late (because of reasons). Though the show's focus isn't exactly on the humanoid characters for the most part, it seems like there's an exception when it comes to the women of the show. Both Aletta, one of the few named characters, and the powerful dragon who seems to have ownership over the restaurant, are both subject



at various points in the episode to the camera leering over their questionably-necessary nudity. I've gone from a near zero-tolerance policy on this kind of material to something of a more grudging acceptance of it in certain small amounts (believe me, when you've seen some of the vile anime I've seen throughout my time as an amateur reviewer of anime, there are a lot of things that suddenly become tame in comparison), but there's never a point at which it doesn't rankle

me a little bit, and in this case it feels really out of place. The narrative doesn't seem constructed to appeal to a primarily straight male audience otherwise; on the contrary, it's these types of iyashi-kei series that I often think of as being almost universal in their potential appeal. So why waste multiple camera shots lingering over nude bodies when there isn't otherwise a focus on titillation? It's frustrating and jarring in a way that it wouldn't be if this were just another in the endless string of fanservice vehicles.

All of our faves are problematic, though, and while I can't quite place this premiere among my favorites yet, I do think the basic setup allows for something mostly pleasant and kind of unique to come. If the show can play to its strengths and stick to the food rather than the fanservice, I think this could be a nice low-key addition to my Summer queue.

Pros: The food looks delicious – it'll whet your appetite! The show might have something to say about prejudice (albeit in a simplistic way).

Cons: There are several lingering shots over female nudity that are distracting and don't serve a purpose.

Grade: B-

Battle Girl High School Review by Jessi Silver



In the year 2045, the world has been contaminated by Irōsu (mysterious invaders who suddenly appeared), and humans find themselves restricted and contained. Standing boldly against these invaders are ordinary girls everywhere, without a powerful army or even weapons. The Shinjugamine Girls Academy is a school for these “Hoshimori” (Star Guardians) destined to fight the Irōsu. – ANN

Streaming: HIDIVE
Episodes: TBA
Source: Mobile Game

Episode 1 Summary: Miki and her classmates at Shinjugamine Academy are trainees in the fight against the Irosu, alien invaders who arrived mysteriously, appear randomly (signaled only by a miasma that precedes their arrival) and who keep humanity contained and frightened. The girls lead typical lives, but are called up on when needed to invoke the powers given to them to fight and win against the Irosu. Unfortunately as of late, the classmates have been having trouble working harmoniously and seem to be phoning it in a bit. Not knowing just where or when an attack might occur, this makes the individuals running the program a bit nervous. The girls are ordered to undergo another round of training; it's here that they're surprised by an injection of new blood – a new member named Misaki.

Impressions: There was a time when I'd be immediately wary of an anime with a cast larger than about four or five main characters, but I've been proven wrong too many times to default to that position. Shirobako introduced an entire company full of animators, producers, and staff members while they sat around a table eating; by the end of that episode I definitely didn't know many of their names, but the show never really suffered for its truthfulness about how much manpower goes into creating an anime. The Lost Village's internet-influenced bus full of misfits worked around its large cast size by giving each character a chance to prove how distinctly misanthropic or mentally-ill they all were, to (in my opinion) successful ends. So I'm no longer immediately put off by a cast of thousands, as even shorter anime series have proven themselves capable of using large groups for productive means.



This show introduces a number of characters during a chaotic battle in the first half of this episode. Each character gets a snappy line of dialog and the nature of voice-acting being what it is, that's generally enough to leave a small impression on the viewer of the person's basic personality. Whereas other series have counteracted the disorientation of these sorts of madcap intros by providing something else to grab onto, say an unusual plot element or interesting variation in tone, this one ends



having not left much of an impression.

There are some vague references within the character dialog to the forever-looming threat of the Irosu, this anime's malevolent foreign invader antagonists. Though not particularly creative, the idea itself is perfectly serviceable as something to challenge our heroes and serve as an ultimate goal. The issue is that throughout the first episode, several references are made to how poorly the charac-

ters are working together and how their power as a group is unfocused and lacking, and yet there's not any situation where the beasts with which they're engaged are shown to pose any kind of mortal threat to the characters. There's not element of danger or any indication that any of the characters might lose out or become injured, and so it's really difficult to stay engaged. I found my mind wandering over and over again as I resisted the urge to check Facebook or get up for a snack, and this was all while characters were in battle – ostensibly the most dynamic parts of the episode. it's a bit maddening just how dull the experience is.



This show also seems to be an awkward genre mashup, as at least a few of the heroines appear to moonlight as idol singers, and the franchise's Wikipedia entry seems to make reference to several different (internal?) idol groups and songs. This isn't bad in itself, but I have to confess I've never really been a fan of idols or idol culture so the fact that that aspect seems shoehorned into this action series doesn't really appeal to me personally. It also

has the distinct air of trying too hard to appeal to too many different demographics at once which is almost always a poor choice; of many of the anime series I like the best, one commonality between them seems to be that the creators aimed to appeal to a certain fan group, made a product that has high quality attributes (story, animation, characterization, theme, etc.), and ultimately broadened the appeal in that way. From Yuri!!! On Ice to Puella Magi Madoka Magica, to Haikyu!, this has proven to be true. So I can't really buy when a series seems to haphazardly take shots in several directions without hitting a target.

There's an odd bit of pandering in this episode that I feel is worth mentioning as it didn't land very well with me. For whatever reason, I've noticed over the last five or so years that the amount of low-grade yuri content in otaku anime seems to have seen an uptick. Shows like Sakura Trick and Yuruyuri make very mild plays at same-sex female relationships, not really to



advocate for those relationships, but to provide them as another option for fetishization in shows aimed primarily towards male otaku viewers. It doesn't necessarily mean that the shows are without other merit, or might not also have appeal to people who identify with those relationships, but I don't think their use is meant to be enlightened or representative of ally-ship. The two overt idol characters, Kanon and Shiho, are introduced as kind of an "are they or aren't they..." couple in

this episode, and some romantic aspect to their relationship is implied over the phone. Not only does this feel forced in a show that's already got too much going on, there's literally no other reason one would care about the characters at this point so it feels as though someone, somewhere is just checking off of a list.

Needless to say, this isn't really a standout entry in the season, and there's not much reason to recommend it over other, better-produced game-based anime like *Touken Ranbu* or some past examples like the *Rage of Bahamut* series. It's probably more interesting if you're a fan of idols or have some interest in the voice actors providing the dialog (of which there are many, considering the size of the cast). Add to that the fact that this is a HIDIVE exclusive, which makes it prohibitive to check out if your budget only affords one or two of the big streaming services, and this makes *Battle Girls High School* pretty skippable.

Pros: It's a mostly inoffensive first episode.

Cons: Attempts to flesh-out characters feel forced, the antagonists don't seem to pose a real threat, and the mix of genres is scattershot.

Grade: D+

Comics

Eerie Publications: The Complete Covers—The Whole Bloody Mess (second edition) by Mike Howlett Review by Heath Row

Along with Warren Publishing's well-regarded magazines *Creepy* and *Eerie*; and *Skywald* publications such as *Nightmare*, *Psycho*, and *Scream*; there was also a third tier, its lowest level perhaps represented by *Eerie Publications* and its *Weird*, *Terror Tales*, *Tales of Voodoo*, and other inexpensively produced black-and-white reprint anthologies. Publisher Myron Fass had been in a race with James Warren to release a magazine titled *Eerie*, retitling it *Weird* when he lost. This wonderfully garish art book collects all of the cover art from the entire runs of *Eerie*'s magazines, accompanied by detailed notes crediting artists, source material, and record of Carl Burgos's penchant for cobbling together covers from previously run covers—some surprisingly soon after initial publication. The artistic reuse and revisions are fascinating.

Owing a debt to Howlett's previous book, *The Worst of Eerie Publications* for Yoe Books, the resulting book is a DayGlo exhibition catalog of horror and gore. Artwork by Burgos, Bob Powell, Chic Stone, Bill Alexander, Johnny Bruck, Fernando Fernandez, and others abounds, as Fass and Burgos sought ever-cheaper sources of artwork.

Of special interest is the work by Bruck, taken from material previously used on the covers of the *Perry Rhodan*, *der Erbe des Universums* serial novellas between the years 1962-1969. Such artwork adorned titles such as *Tales of Voodoo*, *Strange Galaxy* (a rare sf title, though the innards weren't consistently sf), *Tales from the Tomb*, *Weird*, *Weird Worlds* (another sf title), *Witches' Tales*, *Horror Tales*, and *Terror Tales*—regardless of whether the cover image was addressed inside.

While the covers are a glorious curiosity, reading this book made me want to read the actual magazines—and perhaps Perry Rhodan itself. Checking out *Strange Galaxy #8* (the first issue, in 1971), readers are treated to innards including reprints from Stanley Morse's 1953 *Weird Tales of the Future*, Fiction House's 1953 *Planet Comics*, Avon's 1952 *Strange Worlds*, and Story Comics' 1953 *Mysterious Adventures*. It might not all be sf, but it's all fine stuff. You might not be able to judge a book—or a magazine—by its covers, but they can certainly serve as useful sign posts.

Movies

Star Trek: Generations and Changing Characters Fundamentally Review by Jim McCoy

(Authors Note: The following post contains spoilers. It discusses major plot points of *Star Trek: Generations*, which came out in 1994. If that bothers you, I'm sorry, but you've had twenty-nine years to see it before I spoiled it and I kinda think that's enough lead time. You have been warned.)

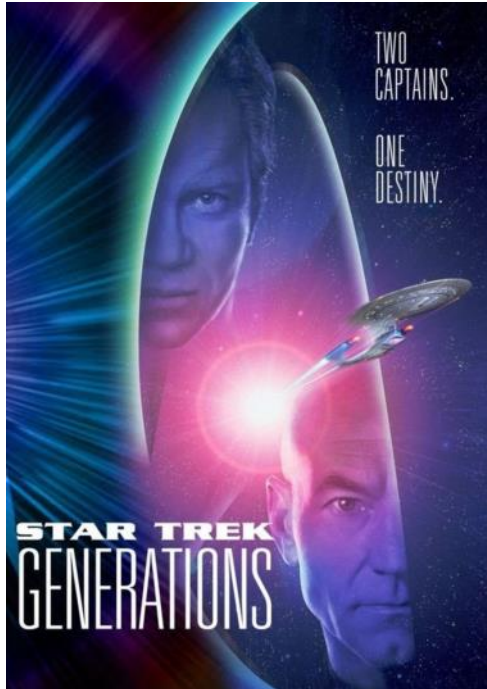
Once upon a time, when I was a wee little Jimbo, I used to be (and really, still am) a huge nerd. I got picked on a lot at school. It hurt. I mean, of course it did. I was a kid and while I gave back as well as I got, and got suspended for fighting a couple of times (I'm a McCoy. Ask a Hatfield what it's like to try and pick on one of us. Better yet, ask my father what he thought about it and what my reaction should be.) but it still sucked. I know a lot of my readers can relate, because I was a long way from the only one who went through this.

Still and all, though, I got through it, using a mixture of grit, hatred, adrenaline and grudge-carrying (I'm working of forgiveness as a Christian, but if God hadn't commanded it, I wouldn't be bothering.) and I'm a stronger person because of it, I think. The fact remains that I needed an escape, a way out. I was too young to even think about substance abuse (My parents would have lost their ever-loving minds if I had gone that route at that age—justifiably so) and I needed a way out. My way out was geekery, which in some ways made it worse, but it worked too, and no system is perfect.

To this day, my way of escaping my problems is to disappear into my books and my games, my TV shows and movies and forget about it all. It's cheaper than drugs, doesn't cause the problems that other coping methods do (Seriously, you can't overdose on *Star Wars*. A person who does too much heroin dies. A person who binges too many *Mandalorian* episodes needs a shower and possibly a meal, if they didn't order something by delivery.) And that's why my most favoritest character of any series or story was Spock.

Spock, you see, was Vulcan. They couldn't feel emotions. So, naturally, if someone said something mean to Spock it wouldn't matter. I didn't get the whole half-human thing till later. I don't remember not being a *Star Trek* fan and nuance is simply lost on a four year old. It wasn't my fault.

It wasn't until later that I got to start checking books out of the big kid part of the library that I



happened upon the Log books and found out that Spock could feel emotions and that he had been devastated as a child when he was picked on, it tore me up. Not just because I could identify with what he was going through, although believe me I could, but because he was my hero precisely because that crap didn't matter to him. And it sucked because I had always idolized the guy, to the point of pretending to be Spock when people would talk trash, thinking that he wouldn't feel the pain. My one get out of "jail" free card was gone. I don't know who, if anyone, shares this experience but it was a terrible feeling for me. Here I was getting my one chance at being "represented" as an outcast and it killed me.

Enter Star Trek: The Next Generation and Lieutenant Data. Data was what I always wanted to be for real. He was an android, a machine. He was literally incapable of feeling emotions. Even when he was threatened with being dismantled and studied in "The Measure of a Man" , he

didn't freak out, didn't cry, didn't wail emotionally about the unfairness of it all. He did - and very well should have - object to it, but he didn't emote about it. He handled the situation in a logical manner, did the right thing, accomplished his goal and moved on with his life. "The Measure of a Man" is and always will be one of my favorite Trek episodes for precisely that reason. He stayed that way through the entire ST:TNG TV series. But then came Star Trek: Generations.

I love the movie, although I know that not everyone would agree. Generations catches crap from Trek fans and actors both. Leonard Nimoy, who not only played Spock in both TOS and TNG refused to have anything to do with the movie because he thought it sucked and there are those fans that would agree with him, but I liked it. In a way, it was more Trek than any of the TNG movies actually attempted to be. Seriously, watch Star Trek: Insurrection sometime. It's a good Space Opera popcorn flick with plenty of action, but it's not really Trek. It's got the window dressing but not the feel.

But I digress.

So today, I decided to watch a movie and, seeing as I couldn't find anything else I felt like watching I went with Star Trek Generations. For those that aren't familiar, which probably doesn't include most of the followers of this blog, in Generations Data gets an emotion chip. It allows him to feel emotions. Almost immediately, he heads to Ten Forward (that's the bar, for those that missed it) and has a drink which he totally HATES. He's oddly happy about hating it and it's one of the funniest moments in all of Trek. But then later, things get a little less funny.

When Data is cornered and under fire, he should have done the logical thing, although at considerable risk to himself, and went and saved his buddy Geordi. He didn't because he was scared.

SIGH

Listen, I'm not debating about risks versus reward in the real world with actual lives on the line. I'm not trying to criticize any real world people or say that I wouldn't have acted the same while being shot at. I've never been shot at, so I have no way to compare my behavior to his. I'm just saying this:

Data failed to rescue Geordi, not because of any type of tactical analysis, but because he was scared. They had killed the essence of the character at that point. And yes, watching him say "Oh SHIT" as the ship was about to crash at the end was every bit as funny as watching him find his cat in the debris of the wreck was touching. None of that matters though, because they took my Data away from me.

Now, the totally logical, totally able to function character that I loved was ripped away. He could feel stuff again. I had to go from loving Data to loving pre-emotion chip Data. Don't get me wrong, I'm not blaming Brent Spiner. That dude can act. I'm just saying that they changed the character in a very fundamental way and I hated it. I felt disrespected. This isn't the character I had grown up loving (and I was not quite eleven when ST:TNG debuted in 1987. It was a major part of my childhood.) I still like the rest of the movie, but...

Yeah

The Data I knew was deader than disco, doornails, Dracula and Sturm Brightblade all rolled into one. They took him away from me and gave him back broken. Fans of The Second Chronicles of Thomas Covenant, Unbeliever know what I mean. It still irritates me.

And that, my friends, is why I don't like race/gender/orientation swaps in my fiction. Now I'm not saying that minorities shouldn't be represented. I mean, yeah, I grew up on James T. Kirk and Jean-luc Picard, but I also grew up on Nyota Uhura, Hikaru Sulu, Geordi Laforge and Worf, Son of Mogh. I loved both shows. I'm just saying to leave existing characters alone.

If you want a character that is black/Latino/gay/bi/transgender/whatever else you can come up with, that's fine. Make a new character and make them matter to the story. Frankly, if you can't come up with a reason for the representative character to matter to the story, you're patronizing the group you're representing anyway and stating flat out that they don't matter, but their money does. You're looking for ticket sales, not showing respect.

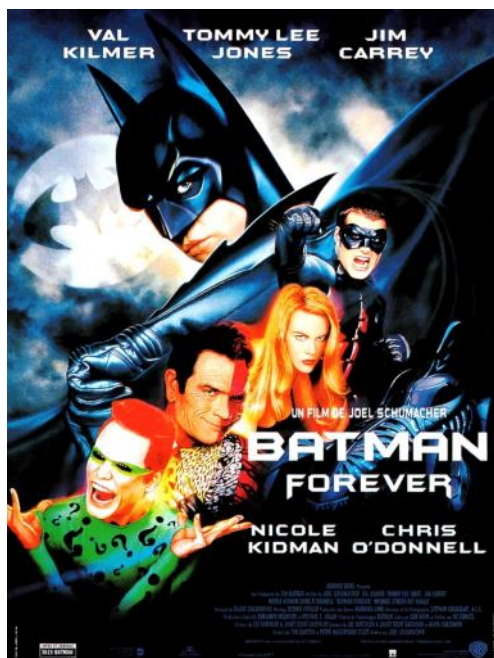
And, by handing the fans who have supported your product with their time, money and yes, emotions for years or maybe decades something broken you are pissing in their face. At that point, they have no reason to continue to support your product. And yes, this means that if there is a Next Gen reboot with a new cast, that Geordi and Worf should both be black. But it also means that if you want to add a LGBT representative/couple/ you need to come up with (a) new character(s) and create something. (If you still can't figure this out. Gay Riker = lose. New bridge officer who is gay = win.)

No one freaked out when Jadzia Dax was bi because she was a new character who didn't have a history of heterosexuality (probably the wrong word. Work with me.) and so you weren't slapping your fans in the face by tearing one of their favorite characters apart. Stop talking about how "Audiences weren't ready for..." and include people in a way that WILL work. The audiences ARE ready if you do it right. And, given the fact that you're in the business of mak-

ing money off of an established property, you might want to do right by the fans. They're where your profits come from.

Some Star Trek related products are available for purchase at the links below. If you click a link and buy literally anything from Amazon, I get a small percentage at no additional expense to you.

The 1995 Batman Forever Review by Heath Row Telegraphs & Tarpits



Batman Forever, produced by Tim Burton and Peter Macgregor-Scott, and directed by Joel Schumacher. While this is indeed a Batman movie, Val Kilmer's portrayal is overly muted, so much so that Batman is almost not present. But that's okeh because the filmmakers tried to cram so much other stuff into the flick that Batman doesn't even really matter. Similar to the 1992 Batman Returns, which featured Catwoman and the Penguin, and 1997's Batman & Robin, which includes Batgirl, Poison Ivy, and Mr. Freeze—and many other superhero movies—Batman Forever tries to accomplish too much in one movie.

In this flick, we have the origin story and introduction of Robin, a storyline focusing on the origin of the Riddler, and one concentrating on Two-Face. Additionally, Two-Face, portrayed by a deliciously aggressive Tommy Lee Jones, has two girlfriends representing his better and worse natures. The angelic partner, Sugar, is played by

Drew Barrymore. Nicole Kidman also stars, so there's a lot going on. Kidman almost provides enough onscreen chemistry for her and Kilmer combined.

The cleanest throughline in the picture focuses on the Riddler, portrayed by Jim Carrey. The very flexible comedic actor takes strong cues from Frank John Gorshin Jr.'s TV portrayal of the quizzical villain, and his aspect of the plot is very much science fictional. Edward Nygma, a researcher working for Wayne Enterprises, has developed a device with which he can transmit TV broadcast signals directly to a viewer's brain. After his project is rejected, he kills his manager, becoming the Riddler and teaming up with Two-Face to unleash the new technology on an unsuspecting Gotham City. One side effect of the device is that it also allows the Riddler to download viewer's thoughts and memories.

That technological component provides substantive critique of mindless TV viewing. Gothamites are shown slack jawed and blank faced as the beam pours into their foreheads, and a fundraising benefit introduces the idea of using the technology for surveillance and the gathering of kompromat. Luckily, Carrey's manic rubbery Riddler and Jones's chortlingly duplicitous Two-Face are enough to carry the movie, and the TV angle delights. The rest is just mess, an unnecessary ball of twine too tightly wound.

Watching the movie inspired me to read some recent comic book appearances of the Riddler, which brought up *The Riddler: Year One*, a six-issue mini series released between December 2022 and September 2023. Written by Paul Dano and drawn by Stevan Subic, the series is ostensibly a prelude to the 2022 movie *The Batman*. In that film, writer Dano also played Edward Nashton, an orphaned forensic accountant who identifies some criminal discrepancies and transforms into the Riddler.

Subic's artwork occasionally reminds me of the comic-cover collage work of Steve McKean, who drew Grant Morrison's graphic novel *Batman: Arkham Asylum*. And the storyline is compelling, if a bit stretched out. Learning that the business he works for is perhaps complicit in corruption involving city leaders, Nashton connects the dots, eventually realizing that urban renewal efforts are tainted by dirty money.

Nashton sends evidence to the police, attempting to help the daughter of an immigrant. He also sinks into madness, remembering his past. We don't see Nashton as the Riddler of the movie until the final issue of the series, and there's very little of him in the comic other than his computer hacking hijinks and preternatural pattern recognition within the financial records he's researching.

This Riddler is definitely not the Riddler we generally see in *Batman* comics. He's also not the Riddler of Carrey in *Batman Forever* or Gorshin on TV. And there aren't that many riddles, which is disappointing. Of the more modern portrayals of the Riddler, I much preferred that in the late 2010s DC Rebirth.

After the World Ends: When Post-Apocalyptic Movies Were Telling the Future! by Claude Gaillard with Fred Pizzoferrato and Stephane Erbisti Review by Heath Row

This intriguing 254-page volume translated by Patrice Louinet considers the recent history of post-apocalyptic (not necessarily post-nuclear) film—anticipation cinema—eschewing explicitly science fictional or fantastic flicks. The authors' view is less broad than that of David J. Moore, whose *World Gone Wild* cataloged more than 800 post-apocalyptic films, instead focusing squarely on three decades: the 1970s, '80s, and '90s.

Regardless, Gaillard's survey briefly considers the earliest post-apocalyptic movies, dating back to *Deluge* in 1933, as well as films such as *Things to Come*, *Arch Oboler's Five*, *The Last Woman on Earth* (*Faculae & Filigree* #25), and other examples. But the lion's share of the text focuses on the three decades in question, starting with 1975's *A Boy and His Dog* and ending with 1996's *Escape from L.A.*

That bookending is notable, given the persistent influence of *Mad Max* and *Escape from New York* (see below). Even though a good amount of copycats are in the mix—and to be expected—the book is definitely global in its scope, drawing on world cinema, including examples from the Philippines, Italy, and other countries. (There's a straight line from spaghetti westerns to post-apocalyptic flicks, it turns out.) Gaillard and his contributors do a good job de-

scribing the movies, sharing stories from their production, and indicating how widely available they are for current viewing. The book ends with a summary of the persistent elements of such movies—the lone wolf, women, the warlord, the pack, and children, for example—as well as a consideration of more science fictional fare and erotic cinema portraying similar themes (including Mad Max parodies).

Though very focused, this is an excellent survey of such cinema. Even some of the movies the authors warn readers against might be worth watching, and I'll have to go through the book again to identify what I need to see next. Because after the world ends... the viewing begin

Rolegaming

JoCat's A Crap Guide to D&D(5th Edition) Review by Jim McCoy

Readers of this blog with IQs higher than that of the oatmeal I ate for breakfast this morning (cinnamon and brown sugar, if you're wondering) may have noticed that I have a somewhat strange sense of humor. I mean, I'm a little weird. I'm okay with you thinking that though.

SIGH

I'm not making any sense here and it's a worse attempt than usual. Don't worry though, I'll get there. I hope.

JoCat's A Crap Guide to D&D (5th Edition) is freaking hysterical. I mean, it's humor similar to mine, but if you're reading this you probably like that. Unless you're a masochist and that's okay. I'm not into kink shaming here. But seriously, if you like my humor you'll probably like his. That's unless you're not okay with profanity, because he uses a bunch of it and I try not to go there very often. Jimbo's is a family show. A Crap Guide to D&D is something I would recommend to my seventeen year old daughter, but not to her eleven year old sister. Other than that though, it's awesome.

Being one hundred percent serious though, this is not the show for those who are easily offended by either foul language or someone who makes fun of your favorite class. I mean, he's going to make fun of that one class you can't stand too, but I know how some people are. If you play a sorcerer and you've always played a sorcerer and you can't take it when someone doesn't take your class seriously, you'd be better served to watch something else. On the other hand, if you're okay with some off color language and get a kick out of fictional stereotypes than this is the place to be.

JoCat (whatever his real name is) goes through the classes in alphabetical order and gives his advice on how to play each. It is a litany of stereotypes (Horny Bard, anyone?) and worse mechanics, but it is ACHINGLY funny. One of the guys in my D&D group recommended it and I watched all twenty videos in one night.

And yes, I'm aware that there are less than twenty classes, but one gets done twice and we get

some bonuses. Being a Dungeon Master, his DM guide was my favorite, as a matter of fact. It was great.

The best part about these things is that they're not that long. I binged all of them in less than two hours. It was great. I didn't have to stay up late and ruin my day at work to get it all in after my Sunday D&D session. I was in bed on time, only I was smiling because this stuff made my night.

JoCat has some other Crap Guides. I'm going to check them out, but it looks like D&D is the only game I play and this does kind of feel like an in-joke. If you're into the other things he plays check them out and let me know how they are because I'm guessing they're just as good.

Bottom Line: 5.0 out of 5 One Liners

Sercon

Philip E. High Bio-Bibliography

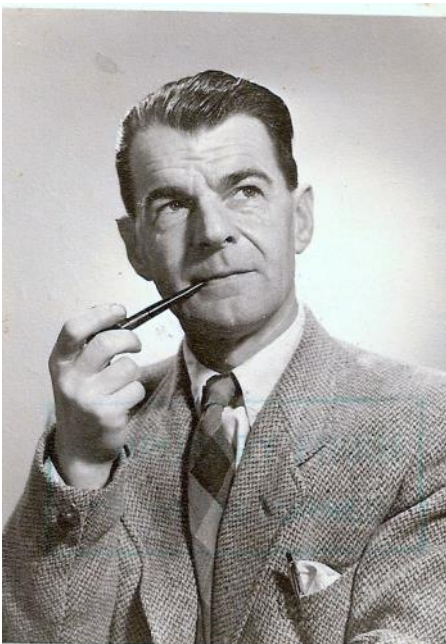
by

Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D.

N3F Historian

Philip Empson High was born on April 28, 1914, in Biggleswade, Bedfordshire, England. His father was a bank worker, and the family moved around a lot. High married Pamela Baker in 1950 and they had two daughters together, Beverley and Jacqueline.

As a child, High was a prodigious reader of all types of fiction, as well as much non-fiction. At the age of 16 he began to write his own stories in various genres, but he did not write any science fiction (SF) until years later.



Although he said he had first encountered SF at 13, it was not until the 1930s that he began to read English SF magazines such as Scoops. He also bought imported copies of American SF magazines such as Astounding Stories -- when he could get them.

High's career as a local newspaper reporter was interrupted by World War II. After serving in the Royal Navy, he gained employment as an insurance agent and then became a bus driver in 1950 -- a job he retained until he retired in 1979.

SF Publications

In the mid-1950s High decided to try his hand at writing SF stories. His first attempt, "The Statics," was published in the September, 1955, issue of Authentic Science Fiction. This was the beginning of a successful writing period for



him, with the publication over the next eight years of nearly 50 stories in British SF prozines such as Authentic Science Fiction, Nebula Science Fiction, and New Worlds Science Fiction.

By 1964, High had decided to redirect his efforts to writing novels. His first, *The Prodigal Sun*, was published by Ace Books and led to a string of fourteen genre novels.

SF Novels

The Prodigal Sun (1964)

No Truce With Terra (1964)

The Mad Metropolis (1966) (later reissued as *Double Illusion*, 1970)

Reality Forbidden (1967)

These Savage Futurians (1967)

Twin Planets (1967)

The Time Mercenaries (1968)

Invader on My Back (1968)

Butterfly Planet (1971)

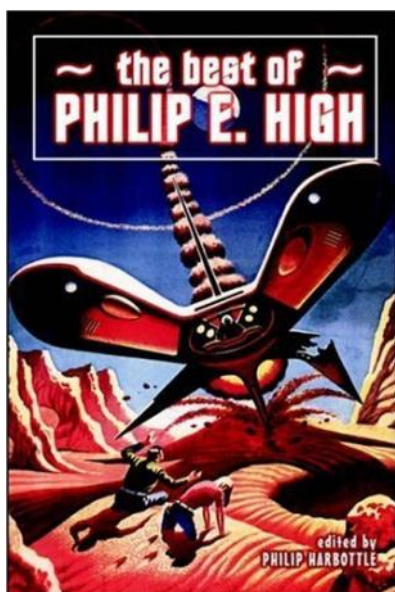
Come, Hunt an Earthman (1973)

Sold – For a Spaceship (1973)

Speaking of Dinosaurs (1974)

Fugitive from Time (1978)

Blindfold from the Stars (1979)



With the exception of four stories for the short-lived magazine *Vision of Tomorrow* (1969 - 1970), High continued to concentrate his efforts on writing novels until 1979, when he was told by editors that there was no demand for his stories. He took their word for it and stopped writing.

Almost two decades later, Philip Harbottle, who had previously edited *Vision of Tomorrow*, approached High with a request to contribute to *Fantasy Annual*, which he edited. High became a regular contributor to *Fantasy Annual*, and 30+ new stories followed, as well as reprints of some of his novels.

Concluding Comments

High said the only author he recognized as a model for his own work was Nevil Shute, famous for his apocalyptic novel, *On the Beach*.

High died on August 9, 2006, in Canterbury, Kent -- at age 92.

Sources

Day, Donald B. *Index to the Science Fiction Magazines, 1926 – 1950*, 1952.

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

Reginald, R. (ed.). *Contemporary Science Fiction Authors, 1975.*

Tuck, Donald H. *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction and Fantasy, Volume 1: Who's Who, A – L, 1974.*

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

Short Stories

Thrilling Science Fiction Review by Heath Row

The October 1972 issue of *Thrilling Science Fiction*, “a new collection of great sf stories” according to a cover line. Featuring no non-story editorial matter and a single science fact piece on space stations that I haven’t read yet, the magazine doesn’t even credit its editorial staff. Regardless, the stories are quite good.

Robert F. Young’s “The Honeyearthers” was reprinted from the August 1964 *Amazing Stories*. A subtle and loving May-September romance, the story focuses on corporate malfeasance, mining for ice in the orbit of Saturn, and a pleasure dome resort. There’s an anti-grav vest, arachnid guns, and spacefright, which provides the resolution to part of the tale. This story was very well written, and I look forward to reading more by Young.

“Placement Test” by Keith Laumer initially appeared in the July 1964 *Amazing Stories*. It’s a workplace drama, narrating the aftermath of a learned young scholar being “quota’d out” of the opportunity to test for a role in his chosen field. In the end, the steps he took were just what his chosen employers were looking for. Another excellent short story.

Roger Zelazny’s “The Furies” (*Amazing Stories*, June 1965) teams up “a mind-picker, an interstellar policeman, a galactic geographic genius” to track down a criminal “with a metal heart.” It’s a very fun chase story, and the geographic genius’s ability to identify locations based on scant landmarks was fascinating.

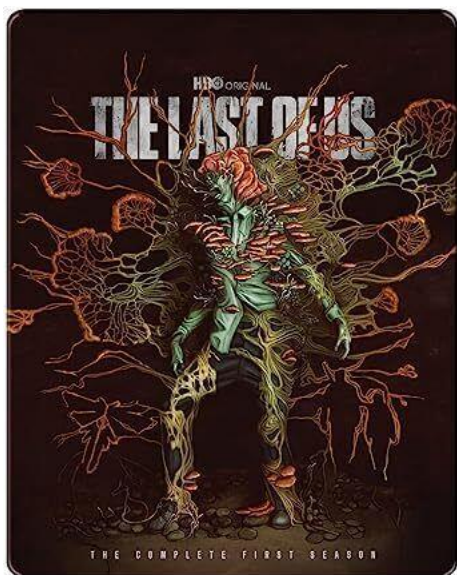
The character development of the criminal—and his relationship with a former crew member—was very well done. That the title gave away what might have been a revelation at the end was unfortunate but not overly detrimental.

And “After a Judgment Day” by Edmond Hamilton first appeared in the December 1963 *Fantastic Stories of Imagination*. The Earth uninhabitable, the remnants of humankind are on the moon. They decide to send Charlies, cybernetic organisms, to the far reaches of space carrying information about the human race before they return home.

This is an awesome selection of stories, some more widely reprinted than others. And the cover line is worth returning to. It’s a “new collection” of “great ... stories”—not new stories. Sometimes, that’s enough.

Television

HBO's The Last of Us Season One Review by Jim McCoy



(First off, the disclaimer: I haven't played the game. If you're looking for someone to make a comparison between the show and the game you've come to the wrong place. That isn't meant as a slam. I've been a gamer for longer than a significant portion of the American population has been alive. I played Pong when it was the new thing. I just haven't played this game. I love and respect gamers and I respect their desire to see the games that they love translated faithfully. I'm a Harry Potter fan. I'm a Lord of the Rings fan. My love affair with fantasy starts with The Hobbit. I know what it is when the source material doesn't get translated faithfully. If you're frustrated with something that was added or missing I'm sorry. I don't even know what it is. On the other hand, if you're looking for an evaluation of the The Last of Us television/streaming series as a form of entertainment, then read on and let's have some fun.)

Okay, so...

Wow.

I just finished binging The Last of Us last night. Are you kidding me? That was one of the best shows I have seen in a loooooong time. It's weird too, because the first time I watched the first episode I fell asleep ten minutes in, woke up with five minutes left and almost gave up on it because it was too confusing.

This time I watched in on my day off after a nap and didn't shut it off until it was over. I even stayed up until Midnight. I get up early during the week. I fall asleep if I try to stay up that late, unless I'm watching The Last of Us. As a matter of fact, The Last of Us, how do I love thee? Let me count the ways:

1.) We actually get a look at how things break down and it doesn't skip multiple months. Seriously, I loved the first like seven or eight season of The Walking Dead, but the fact that we had to endure the whole "Oh, I was injured in a coma society fell apart" trope and I hated that about it. Things go from zero to disastrous in about three seconds on screen but we get to witness it.

2.) I have developed a taste for zombie stories where the zombies don't die and come back. I still like the old-school style, but there is something about a disease that destroys the victim mentally but leaves them physically alive. It's just more believable that way. I love the way Cordyceps works and the fact that it takes a long time to kill its victims, even if the transformation is quick.

3.) They picked the right cast. Seriously, mad props to Pedro Pascal, and Bella Ramsey for their performances and to the people who selected them for their roles. Someone hit the lottery that day because these selections were perfect. Hey Twilight fans! I finally found a Bella that I like.

4.) I love Joel. Dude is a straight-up mensch. He does what he says he would regardless of the cost. Deaths, wounds, fear, starvation, whatever. If you fall under his protection he will fight to his own death to protect you. Threaten him or something he loves and he will kill you till you die to death. Joel is the guy you want with you when the fecal matter hits the rotary air impeller.

5.) I love Ellie. That little girl is hard core. She doesn't always make the right decision, but that's inevitable in any human being, especially in one so young. Her mouth is the worst thing I've heard on a fourteen year old since I was a fourteen year old. That much being said, I know people who could out-swear her when I was her age. I was one of them. We did it because we thought it sounded cool and because we knew our parents wouldn't like it and then it became habit. Ellie also does it out of habit.

She's smart though. This is a kid who has been through enough and who has learned from her experiences. She's seen and done things that no human being should ever have to, especially when they're not even an adult yet, but she comes through it stronger. And this young 'un is every bit as dedicated to her own as Joel. I was blown away by this character.

6.) I love the fact that they get the gun play right. Listen, this isn't a book by Larry Correia, where you're going to get endless gun facts, but whoever wrote the script has obviously been around guns before. If you've ever squeezed and trigger and you've watched The Walking Dead and seen the characters snap off multiple head shots with pistols while under pressure (IE something is literally trying to EAT them) then you know what I mean. You don't see the unending parade of miracle shots followed by characters who act like it's all in a day's work. It's realistic and believable. (As a side note, don't sit next to me while watching TWD if you're easily startled. I can get a bit grumpy when things go off the rails like that and sometimes I make enthusiastic comments. I've frightened more than one person with my timing.) And the one time a character makes a stupid comment, he gets called on it. I'm wondering if that wasn't put in there simply because of the way TWD does its gunplay.

7.) I love the worldbuilding. In a way, The Last of Us uses standard Zombie Apocalypse tropes to fill up its world. Not totally though. The use of a government trying to restore order just works, as does the frontier justice it dispenses. The resistance against it makes sense too. In a weird way, so does the episode dealing with a place having electricity when I wouldn't have expected it to as a sort of byproduct of what was actually attempted. The Law of Unexpected Consequences is a thing in the real world. I love it when it pops up in fiction. too.

8.) They get the often ignored details right. Joel even mentions how gasoline breaks down after a given amount of time. An ambush happens because of something that should have been obvious, yet wasn't but it made sense given context. A menu adjustment happens because it's necessary, even if it isn't pleasant. Things decay. Skyscrapers collapse. I love it.

9.) I hated the ending and that's why I loved the ending. I'm not going to tell you what it was, why it made sense or how it works with the characters and is perfectly in character for the people involved. That would be spoiling. I will say that it made sense in context and I'm not sure if I agree with the way things went down or not. I mean, that was a rough decision to have to

make and, well...

Yeah, never mind why or what it was. Just know that there is a five minute (actually probably less) passage in the last episode that in and of itself makes the whole season worth watching. I mean that.

10.) I don't know how or if this works with the game, but there is room for another season. I want to watch it. I want to know what comes next. I don't know if it will happen or not. I don't know if it works with the game. I'd say we've got better odds of a second season of The Last of Us than we do for a second season of Firefly though.

AND OMG THERE'S A COMIC BOOK PREQUEL!!! I WANNA READ IT!!!!

And, oh jeez. I forgot about the special effects and make up and the music and the show opening that looks just like the one from Game of Thrones/House of Thrones and...

JUST GO WATCH IT!!!!

Bottom Line: 5.0 out of 5 Tainted Loaves

Fantastic Television Heath Row

Setting aside current-day programs for now, classic sf is very well represented on the air.

MeTV remains the most interesting broadcaster, particularly its Saturday night lineup. Earlier in the day, The Wild Wild West airs at 10 a.m. Pacific Time, with the evening kicking off at 8 p.m. with Svengoolie. Following that horror host movie screening, viewers are treated to Batman, Star Trek, Kolchak: The Night Stalker, Lost in Space, Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea, Land of the Giants, The Time Tunnel, The Invaders, and Thunderbirds.

In recent days, I've watched an episode of Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea, "The Mermaid" (S3E19), and Land of the Giants, "The Secret City of Limbo" (S2E18). I haven't watched many Irwin Allen TV programs, but both were quite good, and I'll return. One could do worse than only watching MeTV. Monday through Friday, The Twilight Zone and Alfred Hitchcock Presents end each day.

If you enjoy Star Trek, it's also well represented on the air. Mondays, BBC America airs a handful of Star Trek: The Next Generation episodes starting at 11 a.m. or noon depending on the week. Tuesday morning brings Star Trek: Deep Space Nine from 1-10 a.m. DS9 continues Wednesday mornings from 3-10 a.m. Thursdays, Star Trek airs from 6:45 a.m. to 1:45 p.m. (Another week, it might be TNG from 6 a.m. to 3 p.m.) TNG returns Friday mornings from 6:30-11:30 a.m. (or 9:30 a.m. depending on the week). There's certainly plenty to watch on TV.



Christmas Robots
by Tiffanię Gray