

Tightbeam 354

March 2024



Temple Isle

by Tiffanie Gray

Tightbeam 354

March 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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Anime Reviews are courtesy Jessi Silver and her site www.s1e1.com. Ms. Silver writes of her site "S1E1 is primarily an outlet for views and reviews on Japanese animated media, and occasionally video games and other entertainment." Cedar Sanderson's reviews and other interesting articles appear on her site www.cedarwrites.wordpress.com/ and its culinary extension. Jason P. Hunt's reviews appear on SciFi4Me.Com.

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The N3F offers four different memberships. To join as a public (free) member, send phillies@4liberty.net your email address.

To join or renew, use the membership form at <http://n3f.org/join/membership-form/> to provide your name and whichever address you use to receive zines.

Memberships with TNFF via email are \$6; memberships with The National Fantasy Fan (TNFF) via paper mail are \$18. Zines other than TNFF are email only.

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Minor Editorial

Why do we always start with Anime? Our reviews are grouped by topic. The topics appear in alphabetical order, except for Cedar Sanderson's Food of Famous Authors, which ends our collection of reviews.

News Note

FanAc History Zoom

The Women Fen Don't See — A panel with Claire Brialey, Kate Heffner, and Leah Zeldes Smith. Saturday, March 16, 2024 Time: 3PM EDT, 2PM CDT, Noon PDT, 7PM London (GMT), and Mar 17 at 6AM AEDT in Melbourne

To attend, send a note to fanac@fanac.org

Letter of Comment

Dear George and Jon:

Thank you for Tightbeam 353, and given it's a day off, and a hopefully-successful phone interview is done, I can now get on with what I'd like to do, rather than what I need to do, and enjoy myself responding to the zine.

First up in my loc... According to the ads I have seen on television and online, ST: Discovery returns in April for its fifth and final season. So popular with the fans, but in effect, it was cancelled. (A warning...that evening in April when it returns, be ready for not one, but two episodes, just in case you're PVRing it, like I will be.) ST: Strange New Worlds, I am not sure yet, but I gather the cast is in Toronto getting the scenes shot for what I think will be another ten-episode season. Just to let you know, George, I have received the 40 N3F flyers you sent to me, and I will take them to the Buffalo NASFiC, the Niagara Falls World Fantasy Convention, and to Loscon 50 in LA in late November.

Anime column... Cavorite? Ah, well, borrow from the best. Cavorite was the special metal that negated gravity and took men to the moon in the 1901 scientific romance *The First Men in the Moon*, by H.G. Wells, and appears in many more novels, short stories and movies, and now anime. Cavorite may be the most popularly used fictional material. The anime sounds like it is steampunk-flavoured, so Cavorite would fit that plot quite well.

I have an old ratty copy of Max Ehrlich's *The Big Eye*. There's not much about him, but it is good to find out at least a little, and as always thank you, Jon, for your researches.

I think I must wrap this up and say my thanks. We've got some places to go, but we are experiencing a blowing snowstorm outside, and everything is quite white. Good thing the snow tires are still on the car. Thank you for this, and I will look for more.

Yours, Lloyd Penney

Anime

Gamers

Review by Jesse Silver



Keita Amano is a lonely young man who loves video games; Karen Tendō is the beautiful president of the video game club; Chiaki Hoshinomori constantly fights with Keita; and Tasuku Uehara puts on a facade of being satisfied with his life in the real world, but he in truth loves video games. – ANN

Episode 1 Summary: Keita Amano’s high school life is lacking in the things that make fun – he’s got no friends and he doesn’t belong to any clubs. He goes home everyday and spends his evenings playing video games. While perusing new titles in the game shop he’s approached by Karen Tendou, his schools’ most beautiful, smart, and popular student. She invites him to join the newly-reestablished game club she’s put together at their school, and she’s extremely passionate about it. All the current members are experts at the various types of games that they play, and they all seem to have much larger reasons for playing them than “they’re just fun to play.” Keita starts to feel like the odd one out, since he just likes to play video games for his own enjoyment. When Karen asks him to join the club officially, he declines in spite of multiple reasons why he knows the experience will be good for him. Though, to Karen, this feels like the ultimate rejection, it’s likely that this isn’t the last word in the matter.

Impressions: Most people have hobbies, and I think for many, their hobbies are a type of escapism.



I don’t sit down and knit a scarf because I need another scarf to wear; I knit the scarf because I like the experience of choosing the right yarn, of feeling it running through my fingers with each stitch, and of watching the rhythmic loops upon loops of fiber expand into a finished project. I can knit while watching television or just enjoying the quiet somewhere, and it helps me relax. If I were to start an Etsy shop to sell my finished projects, suddenly a hobby that I enjoy would morph into an obligation,

losing all of its power to take me out of my daily life. It’s the same reason why I don’t really do art commissions or write articles for money; when there’s a transaction involved, it just isn’t fun anymore. When there’s a hard deadline, it’s much easier to stress about it.

I can understand Keita’s reluctance to join Karen’s video game club, in spite of all the potential positives. He likes to game in his room, alone; it’s a form of relaxation after spending all day at school feeling mediocre and isolated from his classmates. Why would he want to place himself among people who play video games for a broader purpose? It would only invite comparisons in which he comes out looking like an aimless doofus.



These are thoughts I never expected to have while watching yet another anime about some hapless high school kid with a crush on a girl who joins a club full of misfits on some grand time-wasting adventure in slice-of-life territo-



ry. There are a lot of pieces in this show that seem to defy expectations, and I find that kind of fascinating. In my defense, the promotional image for the series is misleading – it makes it seem as though the protagonist, through some form of dumb luck (or “protagonist syndrome”), gets thrust into a group of girls, creating the potential for a romantic entanglement while the obnoxious male sidekick cracks jokes and acts as wing man throughout. Just in this episode I think we were introduced to at least four total male characters and roughly an equivalent number of young women, taking the ratio pretty far out of harem territory (two of the characters are even already a couple). The assumed romantic relationship between Keita and Karen is already in a very different place; rather than dancing around an awkward attraction, things are already on the rocks and Keita’s denial of her club invitation is even framed as a romantic rejection. Whether this is a setup to turn things back around in twelve episodes is a mystery, but it definitely went against my own expectations.

There are also several humorous interjections via the on-screen text throughout the episode. They’re kind of self-aware, from the POV of some omniscient narrator, and give some snappy perspective on future developments for the characters. It’s reminiscent of, say, *Ouran High School Host Club*, with its blinking pointer-finger indicator of the doomed vase in episode 1, or even some live-action films like *Scott Pilgrim* (which, coincidentally, also deals in video game culture for its aesthetics) that are self-aware and call blatant attention to it via blending of referential special effects. Stuff like this always runs the risk of making media feel too “know-it-all” about its own tropes through overuse, but it’s used sparingly enough here that it doesn’t wear out its welcome.

The episode does fall in line with some expectations, however, especially in regards to the character relationships between boys and girls. There’s still kind of a disappointing lack of sexual awareness that Keita displays towards Karen; there are a few shots of her legs and body from Keita’s point-of-view that follow with him blushing and being unable to get words out of his mouth properly. Attraction turns some of us into disasters, but I have yet to meet a teenage kid who is made into such a mess from seeing an attractive person that their eyes wander around their crush’s body like the cameras in these anime series seem to think they do. Shots like that are one of those tools of the trade that are used as a shortcut, but which could be eliminated with just a minor amount of finesse (and a big dose of respect towards women and their bodies – this is probably the bigger hurdle).

Aside from that, though, I found myself amused by some of the game parodies already featured in the first episode (Will there be more? I hope so). Karen’s polite conversation with King Koopa as a result of her delirium from lack of sleep, was surprisingly funny for a show where I didn’t expect there to be a decent comedic element. Video games are part of our shared culture, and as a Gen-X/Millennial cusp baby, I’ve experienced most of the big, important moments as games have grown into their own as an art form. In part, this show (and likely the light novel on which it was based) seems to have some of that same perspective. Even if it never takes on any of that broader cultural analysis (which it definitely doesn’t have to), it’s still fun to see the things that I’m familiar with featured fondly in an entertaining way.

In any case, sometimes hobbies are just distractions, and that’s okay. But even if a beloved hobby never provides the potential for financial compensation and couldn’t necessarily morph into



a day job, there could also be a happy medium (like, say, watching anime and having an opinion on it...). Keita might not have a broader purpose to his gaming, and competitiveness might not be something he wants to inject into his hobby. But perhaps there's a happy medium somewhere, and I'm actually kind of surprised at how interested I am to see how the show handles this proposition.

Pros: The show seems somewhat self-aware about its own tropes, and can be pretty funny about it. The cast is large enough that, while there could be love triangles or whatever, it doesn't feel like a harem.

Cons: The show is still pessimistic about teenage male sexuality.

Grade: B-

Books

Tales Yet Unsung by Denton Salle Review by Becky Jones

Tales Yet Unsung is a collection of short stories and almost novella length stories that provide history or backstory and fill in some gaps in Denton Salle's Avatar Wizard series. Some of the stories take place before the first book in the series, Sworn to the Light. In Tales Yet Unsung, we are gifted with ten stories. Two take place before Book 1, one tells us what happened in Book 3 while Jeremy and his friends were in Krali Marko's black mountain, one takes place immediately after the events in Book 4, and the remaining six are set after Book 5... which has yet to be published.

All of the stories can be read without spoilers for any of the books in the series. We also are provided with more details on the rich world of Slavic myths and legends that provide the basis for the Avatar Wizard series. Additionally, the two stories that precede Book 1 do not leave you wishing you'd known those stories before reading Book 1. And that's a rare accomplishment. All the stories in Tales Yet Unsung are complete in themselves and do not require any information from the series.

The first two stories, "The Weight of the Past" and "A Boon for a Vixen" provide us with more details on the background of Jeremy's father, Petrov, and Mistress Arianna. We learn about the precipitating event that drove Petrov to renounce the ways of the volkhvy and the battle he faced after that, trying to put his past behind him and become a good husband and innkeeper. In the second story we get the accurate account of how and why Mistress Arianna came to the keep and how she convinced Master Anthony to marry her. This story is far more accurate than that told by the bards, believe me.



"Lessons in the School of War" takes us into Krali Marko's mountain with Jeremy and his six companions. We are given a glimpse of what they endured and conquered, how much they grew, and the deep friendships forged in the seven days (fourteen months for them) they were gone.

“Changes” gives us a brief glimpse of the very happy occasions that come, every once in a while, for those who live in the keep. Taking place after the events in the city of Venetsiya detailed in Book 4, we head back to Volkheim keep with Jeremy, Galena, Ivana, Kirill, and Yaros. They bring with them Helena, the Doge’s granddaughter so she may be trained as a volkva, the first heron-shifter to show the gift in many generations. The group arrives home to several other joyful changes and happy surprises.

Finally, the last six stories all take place after Book 5, Halls of Eternal Music (published in 2023). In “Riding with the Storm” Jeremy repays a promise to the spirit of Winter and rides with the Hunt. The temptations to do so eternally are great. Will Jeremy find it in himself to overcome them? In “Winter Megrims” Jeremy and Galena return to his family’s inn so Jeremy can introduce Galena to his parents and younger siblings. Always a bit stressful for anybody. “A Wedding Present for Vasilia” follows up on the story of the bard that got tossed out of the keep for insulting Mistress Arianna and a new song makes its debut at Vasilia’s wedding.

“At the Forge of the Sun” tells Harald’s story and the forging of his new and named war hammer. “Heron and Puppies” was previously published in Adventure Stories for Young Readers and gives us a look at life in the keep from the view of a young girl who is finding out that the volkhvy and volkva are not the monsters she heard about in the stories of her childhood. Helena also learns that chasing a Grim can have some less-than-fun consequences. Finally in “Danil and the Nightingale” we follow Danil as he and Harald ride back to Danil’s land to see if they can figure out what’s going on. The land is crying in pain and sorrow and things at the family keep are not what they seem. Danil and Harald have to face the Nightingale, a monstrous creation of the Dark thought to have been destroyed in the great war.

All of these stories have the same rich descriptions of land and people that characterize Salle’s other books in this series. Salle was raised on these stories, and it shows in how skillfully he weaves his characters and their lives into the folktales. I have read all four of the books published so far, and I can say with certainty that you do not need to read those in order to enjoy the ten stories in this book. I highly recommend you go get and download Tales Yet Unsung and start reading. After that, if this is your first introduction to the world of the Avatar Wizard, I recommend you head back to Amazon and start in on the series. You won’t regret it.

If you’ve already read the four books in the series, you’ll end up like me – happy to be back in the world of the volkhvy and eagerly awaiting more stories.

Comics

Judge Dredd: The Small House Review by Chris Nuttall

We are fascists. We rule.
-Judge Smiley, to Judge Dredd.

Why do I like Judge Dredd?

It’s a hard question to answer. I can recognise the appeal of the zero-tolerance attitude to policing Dredd and his fellows bring to Mega-City One, but I can also recognise the dangers of slip-



ping from what one character called ‘good solid judging’ to outright oppression. The better Dredd stories acknowledge the weaknesses of the Justice Department itself and the scope for corruption and tyranny, both direct and indirect. Part of the appeal of Dredd himself, as a character, is the curious balance between Dredd’s commitment to the Justice Department and to justice itself. Dredd is both a noble servant of his city, putting his life at risk time and time again to save the citizens, and the defender of a fascist regime.

In a sense, therefore, Judge Dredd is Mega-City One’s greatest hero and its greatest villain.



Dredd himself appears to believe that there is simply no alternative. Mega-City One exists on a permanent edge, endlessly on the cusp of collapsing into chaos. The city is barely capable of keeping itself going even when there isn’t a massive outside threat; the judges are badly overstretched, the vast majority of the population is unemployed and permanently bored, there’s little hope of building a better life for most of the citizens ... and the rest of the world is worse. This, perhaps, is the key to Dredd’s character. He loves his city and sees himself as doing an unpleasant, but necessary job. He also sees himself, perhaps, as someone with the freedom to temper the justice system – sometimes – with compassion and mercy. This may be the root cause of his constant (until recently) opposition to robot judges. A robot lacks the ability to determine when the situation calls for mercy, rather than ‘justice.’

The Small House pits Dredd against the enigmatic Judge Smiley, the head of a top-secret black ops unit that has been quietly manipulating events in Mega-City One since the death of the insane Chief Judge Cal. Smiley has effectively separated himself from the Chief Judges and now acts alone, happily doing whatever he feels he needs to do to keep the city safe. His methods bring him into conflict with Dredd, who thinks Smiley has broken the law repeatedly (even though they started out as allies). Smiley presents Dredd with a difficult problem. If Dredd moves against Smiley, what’ll come crashing down with him?

Smiley himself is an odd contrast to Dredd. Where Dredd is a man of action, Smiley is a teatipping backbencher. Dredd clings to his faith in the greater cause, Smiley is unapologetic about the simple fact the judges are fascists – I think he’s the first of the judges to openly acknowledge that they really are fascists – and that they do whatever they have to do to maintain their power. The law is, as far as they are concerned, little more than a guideline. This is not the first time this has been discussed – Dredd himself was involved with crushing the pro-democracy movement, on the orders of Chief Judge Silver – but it is considerably more blatant here as Smiley is no longer being overseen by anyone. No one, not even Smiley himself, is carrying out sanity checks.



The story develops quickly as Dredd and his allies try to unearth



Winged Creature
by Artist Fish

Smiley's covert teams and take them into custody, eventually discovering a long-buried truth. Smiley and his team discovered the Apocalypse War was about to take place ... and did nothing, because they believed Mega-City One needed to be pruned a little. (Meta-commentary – this was one of the reasons the epic was written in the first place.) Dredd is horrified by this assertion and understandably so – they came very close to losing the war – and clashes with the Chief Judge as he tries to bring Smiley to justice. In the end, Smiley is brought down by the shock of being exposed. By this point, in the middle of a breakdown, it must have been a relief to die.

It's hard to assess the story as it fits into canon, because parts of it feel like a ret-con. There was no need to have the war, which caught the judges by surprise, be 'allowed' to happen. It strains credibility that Smiley would have lost his sense of balance so quickly, let alone that he would have survived a series of city-shattering events without ever coming into the light or simply being killed in passing. Smiley's infrastructure would have been smashed and rebuilt repeatedly, without anyone ever noticing. On the other hand, an isolated group might well lose track of reality. It happens to internet forums as well as intelligence teams.

But it does focus on the difference between Dredd, who is empowered by his belief in the system, and a cynical judge who sees the system as an end in itself. It also allows some moments for Dredd to fear that Smiley really does have authorisation from the Chief Judge, forcing him to confront a possibly (even more) corrupt system.

The story could have done with a great deal more development, if you ask me. Smiley was never built up as a formidable threat and kept in the shadows, at least until it was too late. It works in his favour – Smiley was never interested in mounting a coup – and yet there is a sense that when the covers are pulled away, Smiley simply shrivels.

It is a good glance into a darker part of Dredd's world, but – at a deeper level – it is also a grim warning of what happens when people with power are allowed to lose track of reality and operate without oversight. And the artwork is extremely good. The only major downside is that the story ends abruptly, not with a real examination of the consequences.

Games

Monomyth's Grim Tides Review by Jim McCoy

I like gaming. Do you like gaming? I'm guessing you probably do, because most geeks are gamers and if you're not a gamer you're probably not going to read my blog. That's unfortunate, I suppose. Everyone should read my epic awesomeness (I mean, the name of the blog is Jimbo's AWESOME Science Fiction and Fantasy Reviews) but some people just don't know how to have a good time.

Today though, it's not about a book or a movie. Today, we're discussing a game. A pretty sim-



ple one, actually. It's a cell phone app and I don't remember when it came to my attention, but I have been playing it a lot lately. There's a reason for that. It's fun. But it goes a little deeper than that, too.

At the most basic level, the reason I like Grim Tides is because it's the kind of app that I really enjoy: I don't have to spend my entire paycheck to succeed. I don't have to play constantly to accomplish anything. I don't have to wait for hours because I ran out of my energy when I do feel like playing. There's no "this will be done in six hours while you're asleep and you can't start your next twelve hour project till lunch time tomorrow when you get a chance to play again" type thing. There is crafting, but it's instantaneous as long as your cellular provider isn't being a buttface. I hate you, Cricket.

Anyway...

There's a lot of nostalgia for me here, because Grim Tides has a similar feel in a lot of ways to old school console Role Playing Games like Wizardry on the original Nintendo Entertainment System. The levels are easier to navigate, not being mazes like they were back in the day, but the random encounter system and linear advancement remind me a lot of the "olden days" as my oldest daughter would call them.

Grim Tides has a bit of open world to it, but not really. As you progress in the game, new areas open up and you can get back to the old places as well. I can't get to most places just yet, because I haven't progressed far enough. That's okay though, because I can see where I have yet to go and, if I'm not sure exactly what it takes to unlock each location, at least I know I'll get there eventually. There are new monsters at each new location and each matches with the environment in that area. Honestly, it's like a series of dungeons in Dungeons & Dragons in that manner.

With a name like Grim Tides, it shouldn't come as a surprise that you have to obtain and maintain your own ship. I was a bit concerned about how the maintenance aspect would work, but it's pretty easy. It's just a matter of docking your ship (which you do at the end of every dungeon crawl) and paying the gold to do it. I have a couple of crew members now, and they add bonuses to different things. It's a matter of picking the right person to give the right bonus and I've done no research. I've probably got the wrong dudes, but whatever. This is not a super serious kind of thing.

Grim Tides is also a single player game and that's something I've been looking for. There is no player versus player content, so I don't have to try to outspend the other guy. While playing another game, I had a guy lecture me because I was so far behind him in increasing my power. It turned out that he had pumped three hundred dollars into the game. I hadn't spent a penny. I'm still convinced that I'm smarter than him, but I got my ass kicked. Lesson learned. I don't play those kinds of games anymore. I've got bills to pay.

Of course, being free to play means that Grim Tides is ad supported. I don't mind it though. You have the chance to view an ad after every dungeon run to get gold, but you don't have to. There are ads at the bottom of the screen, but they're really non-intrusive. Grim Tides is not the kind

of game where you're constantly interrupted by annoying ads. And the amount of gold you earn for watching ads goes up as you level too, so it at least stays relevant.

There are a number of classes available, but I only have one character so far. He's a Paladin. I figured some healing and some tanking would be a good mix since you don't get a party: Grim Tides is a solo adventure once you get into the dungeon where most of the action takes place. There are plenty of other classes though. I just haven't had time to work through all of them yet.

Abilities are a huge part of the game. Leveling them requires a lot of gold, but you won't make it if you don't acquire and level them. I really need to experience more than one class to get a good feel for how it works overall, but I like my pally abilities. I've min-maxxed into hacking weapons and the abilities that go with them. This seems to be an effective strategy for now as, from what I can tell, weapons come in tiers and pretty much any weapon of a given tier has the same damage codes. It's the abilities that go with them that change things. And, "whack it as hard as you can as often as you can" has been a tactic that's worked for me for decades now.

The town you base out of is pretty basic, but it's got what it needs to be interesting. It's also small enough to be easily navigable. There's an Inn where you can buy supplies, acquire quests and raise your morale, as well as storing things you have acquired but don't have an immediate use for. That's an important thing, because inventory space is limited. There's a store, an arena where you can fight and win lots of gold, the harbor and a couple of places to do some crafting of magic items and weapons and armor.

The story aspect is pretty cool, too. There's a prologue at the beginning and a journal feature that lets you re-read the story entries that you've found so far. It's also where you track your quests and get your rewards. And yes, the story is all about chasing down the evil wizard and his henchmen but it works.

Bottom Line: 4.75 out of 5 Undead Pirates

Music

The Library Bards! Review by Jim McCoy

What do you get when you cross Weird Al and Mikey Mason? If you're anything you get excited and a sprained finger from trying to switch your Spotify and find out what the hype is about...

Wait, that's not how that was supposed to go. I'll try again.

What do you get when you Cross Weird Al and Mikey Mason? You get the Library Bards! They're a group that I just found out about accidentally while clicking suggestions on Spotify in search of something new and, let me tell you, I'm impressed.

Seriously, it doesn't get much better than nerdy parodies when I'm trying to keep myself sane



while participating in repetitive tasks and, if people look at me funny because I'm singing D-N-D to the tune of AC/DC's TNT well, they're the confused ones. I know what I'm talking about. They only think they do.

And seriously, this is an all ages show, with parodies of everyone from the aforementioned AC/DC and Styx to Miley Cyrus. Topics include everything from Star Wars to comics books, to Dungeons & Dragons, to Pokemon and other geeky thing. They even have a single called Grammar Got Run Over. I guess I found them at the right time.

It's worth mentioning that one of the members of the group is Bonnie Gordon, formerly of ABC's *The Quest*. I've been a fan of her music since she wrote *The Ballad of Sir Ansgar the Fierce*. And I can honestly assure you that my admiration for her is based strictly on musical talent and hard work and has nothing to do with her long red hair, good looks or geeky atti...

COUGH

HACK

WHEEZE

AHEM

Look, I tried. I failed. But whatever. It is what it is. It's not my fault she's hot. And she's done a bunch of other stuff, too including working as the computer voice on *Star Trek: Prodigy*. Anyone who played on *Star Trek* can sing to me. Notice that I didn't mention playing trombone. Seriously, I played trombone in high school and Will Riker was my reassurance that I wasn't the worst trombone player in history. But I digress...

I mean, digression is kind of what I'm good at, right?

Her co-conspirator in an evil plot to make us all feel happy and entertained is Xander Jeanneret who has a reality TV show background of his own, having been on TBS' *King of the Nerds*. I didn't realize that, having never seen *King of the Nerds*, but I might just see if I can track it down on streaming to see if I can figure out who stole my title. I'm sure they know who the TRUE *King of the Nerds* is and that all of you read his blog, but I doubt that they'd admit it publicly.

The Library Bards have released two albums: *Bombarder* and *Bardcore*. I loved both albums. They're produced well and sound good. Their Wikipedia article says that the bards hire people to produce their background music. This is a good thing because, while both are excellent singers and lyricists, knowing one's own limitations is a good thing. They seem to have overcome those admirably by hiring someone else for their strengths.

Bombarded has probably my favorite Library Bards song: DND. I think I mentioned it already, but I don't care. Listen, this is quality. Who doesn't love a song about their favorite tabletop role playing game? Who doesn't love AC/DC? Why wouldn't you love a crossover between the two? I mean seriously. *The Princess Bride* is another favorite movie (I have not, alas, read the

book) and a great song. Come Fly Away crosses Styx's Come Sail Away with Star Wars.

Bardcore starts off with a reminder that the Library Bards are All About That Space (No Tribbles!). That one has me rolling every time. Gandalf features Gollum rapping. Read that again. Rapping freaking Gollum. ARE YOU NOT ENTERTAINED? If not, I suggest holding on for when they come in like a Pokeball, or when Bonnie reminds us all that she's a Geeky Girl. Trust me, Bonnie, we notice. Or at least I did. I mean, I know you're a celebrity and probably get this all the time..

While you're listening to Bardcore, listen to Finn and Poe for me and let me know what song they're parodying here. I recognize it but I can't come up with it. The answer to this greatest of all conundrums is on the tip of my tongue, but I have no answer and I was flirting with insanity before I listened to it. Somebody help your boy out here. I deserve it.

And, as I've been told by many World of Warcraft players, Shut Up and Raid. (That's one of their singles.) Who am I fooling. I was the official floor inspector for both of my guilds: Atone-ment and Sadistic Betrayal. I got the nick because I was constantly lying on the floor dead. I was good at my job too. The best tasting flooring in all of Azeroth is at the Wicket boss fight in Return to Kharazan. Strongly oaky, with a slight hint of Murphy's Oil Soap. And, OMG did we wipe a lot there.

And since I'm writing this on Christmas Day (night) I have to mention their other single: Grammar Got Run Over. Not only is it hilarious and awesome, it's also seasonal. I loved it.

I had mentioned something on my Facebook about the Library Bards becoming my new geeky obsession, but that's a little iffy. That's not because the music isn't good enough to obsess over. They've got it going on there. My problem is that they've only got two albums out. When I freaked out over Mikey Mason he had, I think, six albums out AND I got to listen him write a song on Facebook. It was great. I'm not trying to be mean here, though. I'm actually giving the Library Bards the biggest compliment I can give an artist/group of artists: I want more of your art. MAKE ME ANOTHER ALBUM!!! Or, make it for yourselves and I'll listen to it. Either way, more is better and less is NOT more. Trust me on this one.

Bottom Line: 5.0 out of 5 Rocking Tracks

SerCon

H. B. Fyfe Bio-Bibliography

by

Jon D. Swartz, Ph. D.

N3F Historian

Horace Browne Fyfe, Jr. (1918 - 1997) was a science fiction (SF) author whose first published story, "Locked Out," appeared in the February, 1940, issue of the popular SF prozine Astounding Science-Fiction.

Personal Information

Born in Jersey City, New Jersey, Fyfe was educated at Stevens Academy and Columbia University -- from which he received a B. S. degree in creative writing in 1950. During World War II, he served in the U. S. Army's infantry and won a Bronze Star. He was the son of Horace and Lillian Lewis Fyfe, and married Adeline Marie Dougherty in 1946.

Publications

Fyfe became fully active as a writer -- with appearances in *Astounding* and several other SF prozines -- after his army service.

These other prozines included *Astonishing Stories* (story written with F. H. Hauser), *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* (F&SF), *Future Science Fiction*, *Planet Stories*, *Worlds of If*, *Galaxy*, *Science Fiction Quarterly*, *Space Science Fiction*, and *Wonder Stories*.

Fifteen of these stories were collected in *Fyfe Resurrected: The Stories of H. B. Fyfe* (2010). In addition, several chapbooks of his work were published after his death.

By 1967, when he became more or less inactive, he had published nearly sixty stories.

His five *Bureau of Slick Tricks* tales, beginning with "Bureau of Slick Tricks" (December, 1948, *Astounding*) were typical of John W. Campbell Jr.'s fondness for stories in which humans outwitted aliens; in these stories, the *Bureau of Special Trading* specialized in "leveraging Terra's position as a hub of interstellar trade to keep aliens happy -- and trading in Terran-controlled space."

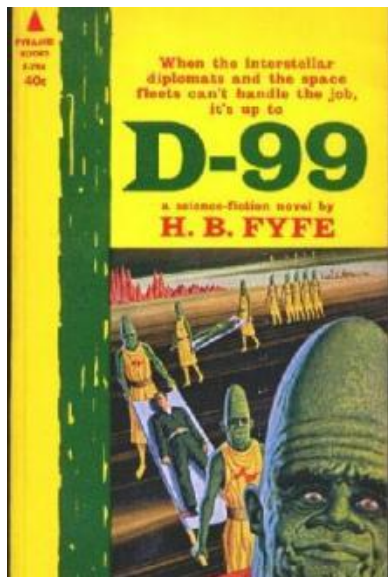
Fiction Series

Bureau of Slick Tricks (1948)
Special Jobbery (1949)
Compromise (1950)
Implode and Peddle (1951)
Bluff-Stained Transaction (1952)
D-99 (1962)

The stories listed above comprised Fyfe's "Bureau Of Slick Tricks" series. Most of these stories originally appeared in *Astounding*.

Other Short Fiction

Experimentum Crucis (1951) [as by Andrew Mac Duff]
Protected Species (1951)
Conformity Expected (1950)
In Value Deceived (1950)
Locked Out (1940)
The Shell Dome (1955)
Sinecure 6 (1947)
Spy Scare (1950)



The Well-Oiled Machine (1950)
 Hold that Comet (1940) [with F. H. Hauser]
 Afterthought (1951)
 Calling World-4 of Kithgol! (1952)
 Yes, Sir! (1951)
 Welcome, Strangers! (1954)
 Fee of the Frontier (1960)
 The Wedge (1960)
 Transmutation of Muddles (1960)
 Tolliver's Orbit (1961)
 The Talkative Tree (1962)
 Star Chamber (1963)
 The Clutches of Ruin (1965)

Novel

In Fyfe's fixup novel, D-99 (1962), Department 99 of the Terran government has the job of getting citizens out of jams on other planets when conventional diplomatic approaches have failed (see Bureau of Slick Tricks stories listed above).

Pseudonym

Fyfe used the pseudonym of Andrew Mac Duff at least once during his writing career.

Criticisms

In the genre reference work, Twentieth Century Science Fiction Writers, Don D'Amassa wrote:

"Fyfe has remained a dabbler, and his obvious talents have not been developed. There is little difference in quality between the earliest and most recent stories. Nevertheless, his competent stories have provided entertainment and adventure to his audience."

Some Concluding Comments

Before he began writing full-time, Fyfe worked as a laboratory assistant and as a draftsman. He also had a lifelong interest in photography.

Fyfe was born on September 30, 1918 in Jersey City, New Jersey; and died on November 17, 1997 in Teaneck, New Jersey.

An obituary for Fyfe appeared in the Science Fiction Chronicle in the February, 1998, issue of the magazine.

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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

Notes on the Hugo Packet by Tom Feller

I had a lot of short stories from the Hugo Award packet that I have just recently gotten around to reading.

This is What You Came For by Phong Quan—

This story could have been a Twilight Zone episode. The main character visits a disco every night in search of his true love, but whenever he finds her, she leaves.

Rattlers by D.K. Lawhorn—

The narrator of this story and his best friend have just returned from a seven year exile. They were wrongly accused of betraying their people, loosely based on Native Americans, and only recently have cleared their names. They are allowed to dance in costume in a ritual and are welcomed back.

Tina Yu and the Karaoke Time Machine by Allison King—

The title character is a Chinese-Taiwanese-American who worked as a computer programmer for a defense contractor. When she builds a “karaoke time machine” on company time with company equipment, she is arrested and imprisoned.

The Ballad of the Octopus by Simo Srinivas—

When a man cuts off one of the arms of an octopus, cooks, and eats it, they become psychically intertwined.

Strange Horizons

This publication finished second in the Hugo Semi-Prozine category.

What Anger Breaks and Builds by Devin Miller—

Suuana is a lesbian witch whose village tolerates her because she is the local midwife. However, this did not apply to her lover Yiltaia, whose husband consented to letting the villagers bury her alive for her sexual deviancy. Suuana now lives with Niilu, a thirteen year old transgender girl. Suuana uses a storm to create a portal through which she hopes to resurrect Yiltaia and help Niilu transform physically from male to female.

Objects of Value by AnaMaria Curtis—

Keth makes a living by moving memories associated with one object to another. She lives in Spire's Ledge, a floating city that is about to fall apart, and her business booms for a few days moving memories from large items to ones that are easily transported. She remains in the city until the last possible moment because her memories of the things there are precious to her.

12 Things a Trini Should Know Before Travelling to a Back in Times Fete by R.S.A. Garcia—

This is a series of warnings from a time traveling service about the dos and don'ts of time travel, specific to visiting Trinidad during past carnivals.

Our Heartstrings Howl the Moon by Eleanna Castroianni—

During the Greek civil war, children become wolves to survive.

Bonesoup by Eugenia Triantafyllou—

Dina's grandmother firmly believes that you are literally what you eat, so she made Dina avoid sweets and eat healthy foods while growing up plus some of them have magic powers. When the grandmother is in the hospital, Dina returns the favor.

The Pigeon Keeper's Daughter by Su-Yee Lin—

The title character is a young woman who works as a groundskeeper at the University of Taipei in Taiwan, where pigeon racing is a real sport. Her family, who lives on another part of the island, keep in touch via carrier pigeon, and birds follow her around.

The Demon Sage's Daughter by Varsha Dinesh—

The title character is named Devayani, but her father will not teach her his most valuable spell, which involves resurrection, but only allows her to knit cloth skins. When a young God named Kacha comes to ostensibly study under her father but with his own agenda, he inadvertently creates options for her.

An Exploration of Nichole Otieno's Early Filmography (1232-1246) by Kola Heyward-Rotimi—

This story is supposedly an academic paper, but with personal recollections by the narrator who returns to his home island of St. Isila in search of lost footage by a deceased famous film director. He meets people who possess various fragments of the director's films, takes part in island

rituals, and reflects on how both he and his home have changed since he left.

Native Country by Karim Kattan—

Noor was raised in a city by the sea, but his mother came from a swampland whose culture she rejected. Trained in the art of potion making by his uncle, he journeys to his mother's homeland, despite her objections. There is a twist ending.

Ootheca by Mario de Seabra Coelho—

Bilal's teeth turn into cockroaches, which, of course, made me think of Kafka. You would think this would be a big turn-off, but Joanna pursues him romantically, although she has a secret agenda. They live in the city of Almagris, home to an elder god who is sleeping and demigods with their own selfish purposes.

We Broke Nairobi by Noel Cheruto—

The city of Nairobi is affected by a lethal dose of heat. Some people, whom the narrator considers disreputable, are immune and act as runners connecting people sheltering in their homes. The runners fight among themselves until they succumb to the heat as well.

The Giant with No Heart in Her Body by Nike Sulway—

After a prologue in which the narrator mentions that she lost an arm in the same accident that killed her brother, the story completely changes. A giant tries to hide her heart, but has dreams of crows finding where she puts it and placing the bones of her brother with it.

Balfour in the Desert by Fargo Tbakhi—

The title character is an Englishman who, with an Arab companion, are chasing a creature in the desert.

The Center of the Universe by Nadia Shammas—

Abigail has created a virtual reality world with virtual characters, such as Fatima, who supposedly only exist when Abigail is paying attention to them. However, Fatima decides to take matters into her own hands.

Uncanny

This magazine was the winner in the Hugo Semi-Prozine category. One of its stories, "Rabbit Test" by Samantha Mills, was the Hugo winner in the short story category, and another, "If You Find Yourself Speaking to God, Address God with the Informal You" by John Chu, finished second in the novelette category.

Ribbons by Natalia Theodoridou—

A transgender male prostitute wears a ribbon that applied to him while he was still a woman, but if he is afraid that if he removes it, his head may fall off.

This Village by Eugenia Triantafyllou-

The village in question is made of sugar and spice.

The Coward Who Stole God's Name by John Wiswell—

The title character, Gavin Davenport, is undeservedly unconditionally loved by everyone in his world, but wants to experience hatred.

The Calcified Heart of Saint Ignace Battiste by Christopher Caldwell—

A city was founded on the basis of a holy relic, but a young acolyte of a cathedral devoted to the saint in the title discovers that the relic may not be what it is supposed to be.

The Goldfish Man by Maureen McHugh—

Set during the pandemic, the main character is Sima, a potter who has lost her home and has to live out of her car. She is helped by a homeless man named Lane, who claims to be an alien.

Lily, the Immortal by Kylie Lee Baker—

Lily, a female YouTube star with a vlog, dies, but the owners of the channel engage an AI to continue the vlog and masquerade as Lily.

Food of Famous Authors

Cedar Sanderson's Fried Cabbage and Apples

This is so simple, a recipe hardly seems necessary, but on the other hand, perhaps this will remind you of this side dish, estimably suited for fall and winter when the cabbage and apples are the best sorts of things to store from harvest until wanted for the table.

Even if you aren't a farmwife with a root cellar, cabbage is inexpensive enough, and this is an excellent recipe for that apple or two you wanted to use up as it began to shrivel just slightly. In any case, it's easy enough to adjust proportions to taste. It's excellent with glazed ham, as we had it for this meal, but really any pork will pair harmoniously with it.

This serves 4, or two adults of light appetite and one teen boy after a long day of work.

- 1/4 head of cabbage
- 2 apples
- 1 onion
- 4 juniper berries
- 1/2 tsp fennel seeds
- 1/2 tsp coriander seed
- 1-2 tbsp bacon grease
- salt to taste

Slice the cabbage into strips about 1/4 in wide, beginning at the tip of the wedge and working horizontal to the base. Core the cabbage before slicing. Cut the apples and remove the core, then slice thinly, skins and all. Slice the onion thinly. In a mortar and pestle, grind the spices to a fine paste or powder.

In a large skillet over med-high heat, melt the bacon grease. Once it is hot, add in the vegetables, and the spices. Stir well, then cover the pan. Stir every few minutes until cooked soft, about twenty minutes. Salt to taste. You can increase the spices if you like, but they are just a minor note – it's the sweetness of the cabbage and apple that play so well with savory meat.

Just beginning the fry – the lid I used allowed for steam to escape, but you can do this without the lid if you don't want the end result to be at all wet.

And the end result should be tender, but not cooked to mush.



Eyeballs Sunday by Artist Fish



The Visitor
by José Sánchez