

Tightbeam 355

April 2024



Walking the Cub
by Tiffanie Gray

Tightbeam 355

April 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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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.

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Letter of Comment

Dear George and Jon:

Thank you for issue 354 of Tightbeam, and I will see what's inside, time is at a premium, and I have a long list of current responsibilities, and responding here is just one of them. Let's see...

That long list of responsibilities is one reason I had intended to see the Fanac.org Zoom on The Women Fen Don't See...but never did get to it. Sometimes, I just can't get what I want. I am hopeful for the next one.

My loc... Discovery is almost here, looking forward to it. With the cancellation of Discovery, there is the arrival of Starfleet Academy, and I asked where it would be likely shot, Los Angeles or Toronto, and the answer seems to be Toronto, with Discovery packing up. We've had a couple of summery days, but we are usually back in the deep freeze, which is making this past winter look very strange.

H.B. Fyfe... He was totally under my radar, I'd never heard of him. If he was but a dabbler, imagine what his output might have been if he'd totally applied himself...I think I would have heard of him then. Thank you for ensuring that I've heard of him now.

I am hoping that future Hugo packets might also have a look at the short stories we've been publishing on the Amazing Stories website. Then again, we can't pay a full 8 cents a word, so perhaps our stories are not eligible to be considered for awards, not sure. By the way, book coming out soon, the best of Amazing 2023. I will relay info on the book soon.

All done for the moment, and I have to consider dinner, and what to make. Thanks for this issue, looking for the next.

Yours, Lloyd Penney

Anime

A Review of Death Note by Declan Finn

The Villain you love to hate.

A while back, I kept tripping over this thing called Death Note. There was the Netflix film. Then there was a cover of the series' two main songs. After awhile, I looked up the general premise. Then I looked up a video on YouTube. Then I ended up binging the whole bloody show.

A Shinigami (A Japanese god of Death) named Ryuk is bored. His world is a mess, a disaster. On a lark, for something to do, he takes his death note--a black notebook that will kill anyone whose name is written down in it--and throws it down to Earth, just to see what happens.

Enter Light. And boy, is he misnamed ... unless they meant Lightbringer.



Light Yagami is about to graduate high school. The son of a police officer, he finds the world grim, unchanging, and ... boring.

And then he finds this little black notebook. The Death Note comes with instructions.

Light reads the rules of the death note, and first tests it out on a hostage taker, and then a rapist mid-crime in progress. Five days later, he has filled the Death Note with hundreds of names. When Ryuk comes to him to elaborate on the death note, Light declares that “I will happily sacrifice my soul to make a better world.” But Ryuk explains that, no, the Death Note will not come with selling his soul, but “merely” forfeiting his place in Heaven or Hell. With that bit of new information, Light's mission becomes all about him becoming a god, out to start the creation of a new world, free of criminals.

There's little buildup to Light's declaration. It's just that sudden. But we have a show to start, and all of this is episode 1.

After the first thousand dead criminals, it becomes obvious to all that it is the work of a mass murderer, and he is labeled "Kira" -- killer.

Over time, we see that Light is possibly one of the most evil SOBs I think I've ever seen outside of Sauron. Seriously, there's not one person near him he doesn't manipulate. He drives at least one person to suicide without using the death note. At least one person he spent 30 minutes of screen time with (IE: who knows how much in-story time with) and gets to know them, connect with them, realize what a good and loving person they are ... then kills them, because there's a possibility that they know something that might expose him. Friends? What's a friend? Allies? An ally is just a tool, a pawn, for his own convenience. Light needs no one. Light cares for no one but himself. Even his family seem to be of value to him only as an extension of Light's own ego, and there are points in the plot where even they seem to be expendable.

At the end of the day, Light is charming and suave, and I have read blood-sucking vampires written by Ringo and Correia that have more humanity than this guy.

But good God, it is hard to tell which of these people are scarier. Light wants to be a god, and reshape the world where only “hardworking good people” exist. Light jumps onto this bandwagon fairly quickly. He goes from killing criminals, to killing cops investigating him, to ultimately deciding with one person “You have defied me, the new god! For that alone, you will die.”

Then there's Light's girlfriend, Misa.

Yes, his girlfriend.

On the surface, Misa is every anime blonde cliché made manifest. She is bright, she is perky. She is outgoing. And she might be more evil than Light is. She possesses her own death note, and is a fan of “Kira.” Because that's what every mass murdering serial killer needs — a groupie.

But when Misa gets going, the bodies start dropping all over the place.

While Light, at the very least, makes certain to ascertain the guilt or innocence of criminals who drop dead—or cops coming after him directly—Misa's quite happy to off anyone who even expresses disapproval of “Kira.”

While Misa comes off as a ditzy blonde, I don't think there's a single person in this entire series who classifies as stupid. We won't even go into some of the various and sundry oddballs, nut jobs, and seemingly “normal” people who join Light's team. Though it is amusing to have Light deal with girl trouble at some particularly perilous points in the story. It almost gives you hope that he's human. Don't worry, those moments don't last long.

Then we meet L, the detective in charge of hunting Kira.

L is the Holmes brothers, Nero Wolfe, and a stack of eccentricities rolled into one. There is an awful lot of thought put into this character, as well as the various and sundry back and forth between L and Light that would make for a great Columbo episode. Heck, there's even a tennis match here that Alfred Hitchcock would love. The tennis matches are interesting—but only one of them is literal. Watching the various and sundry thought processes of L and Light ping ponging back and forth between each other is particularly entertaining.

One of the things that makes Death Note particularly tragic is that, at one point, Light has to give up the death note. Without the notebook, he loses every and all memory of being Kira. During this time, we see that Light is actually not a bad guy. He's particularly bright, and possibly on par with or smarter than L. Like Aquinas put it, the corruption of the best leads to the creation of the worst — and Light is one of the worst.

And that's before Light starts to truly spiral out of control

The animation is largely smooth and fluid. The artwork is creative and beautiful. The faces are unusually well defined for anime. The music is great and atmospheric, and borrows from Gregorian chant.

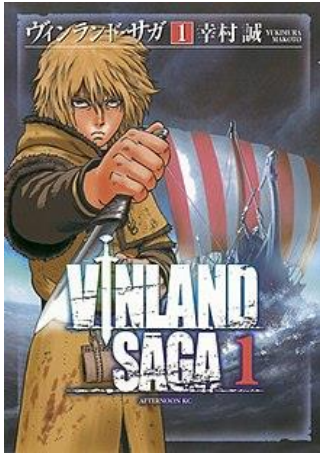
Overall, I was surprised at how easily I was sucked into this series. There is little of the hysterics that usually mark anime, and the characters are largely rich, well-developed people, with a host of strengths and foibles. Light is possibly the best murdering psychopath since Hannibal Lecter. And yes, I have read Dexter. Light makes Dexter look almost shallow in comparison, and I enjoyed those books.

All in all, I recommend it.

Comics

VINLAND SAGA Omnibus vol.1 Review by Graham Bradley

Japanese artist does Vikings better than the West does its own craft.



It's no secret that Western comics have been circling the drain for close to a decade at this point. A couple of YouTubers took note—chief among them Ya Boi Zack—and soon started an independent counter-movement that produced quality alternatives for diehard consumers. The main problem for these indies has been distribution; normie comic readers who don't spend time online have simply stopped buying the DC/Marvel stuff in stores. Rather than back crowdfunding campaigns, they go for the next most accessible thing: manga.

The sales numbers bear this out and it's easy to see why: Japan's big artists haven't gone the same route as America's. They still have stories and characters at the forefront of their books, backed by high-

quality illustrations.

While I'm no connoisseur of the eastern arts, I have been dipping into the backlog of more successful titles in recent years, often with delightful results. Today I finished the first omnibus of a long-running series by Makoto Yukimura called VINLAND, an illustrated Viking saga set 1,000 years ago.

Get your copy!

The Story

Viking dominance in Europe covered a span of roughly three hundred years, from 850 AD to 1150 AD. This story is set right in the middle, and while it doesn't give you an exhaustive view of everything, you can easily get a grip on what's going on: there are Danish raiders who travel from place to place when the weather is good, sacking and stealing and killing as they please, returning home to hole up for the winter. Within this lifestyle we're introduced to some central figures, namely Askeladd and Thorfinn. The former is a successful raider, and the latter is a slave in his employ, bound and determined to kill his master.

After we see a run-of-the-mill raid, complete with tactical siege-breaking and wanton mayhem, the story mostly turns to the past, explaining Thorfinn's origins and his feud with Askeladd. In the space of about 500 fast-moving pages, we see that Thorfinn grew up in a village in Iceland, listening to stories from Leif Ericson himself, the Scandinavian explorer who landed in America 500 years before Columbus. In the back of his mind, Thorfinn has always known there was a place across the sea that didn't know the wars and conflicts of Viking Europe.

But he can't go there until he settles his score with Askeladd, who killed his father.

The Characters

Thorfinn establishes himself right out of the gate as a feisty firebrand who, while skilled in combat, still has his vulnerabilities. Askeladd is a worthy nemesis, as he's a veteran of a trade where men die easily. Askeladd isn't afraid of Thorfinn killing him in his sleep because he has his father's sense of honor, and will only fight his master in a sanctioned duel. Thus he serves faithfully as a raider, doing what the Vikings won't and carrying out Askeladd's orders, always with the hope of earning another shot at a duel.

I really liked the generational story here, especially once you meet Thorfinn's father, Thors. (Yes, very original Viking names.) He himself was a hotheaded warrior in his youth, but fatherhood softened him, and in a violent battle he faked his own death and fled north to raise his children in peace. Now the Viking affairs have spread to Iceland and Thors' secret is revealed. A man who thought he'd escaped his past now has to deal with a village full of young men who look up to him and want the glory he earned in his day.

Each of the characters shows you another side of the theme of this book, the reality of violence, the desire for peace, the cost of freedom, the folly of youth, the inescapability of conflict. Somewhere off in the distance, 'Vinland' (their name for North America) looms, a promising escape from it all. But Thorfinn knows his father once tried to run, and his past still caught up to him.

For me, that quarrel he has with himself is what makes him such a compelling character, and easy to root for.

The World

When I read Robert Kroese's Iron Dragon series, I became aware of just how little I know about this period of European history. I can't vouch for its authenticity: Nevertheless, it feels consistent and believable, like an honest depiction of the era as much as I grasp it. There's some talk of England and France, but so far we're just focusing on the Scandinavian part of it. No magic, nothing supernatural, though they believe in gods and the afterlife, as was their way.

This is not a world with grocery stores and credit cards.

Content Warning

Sparse language, but there was a pair of F-bombs, and a little kid taking a leak off the side of a boat. Combat violence.

Who is it for?

If you're on the fence about comics generally and manga specifically, this is a great entry point. It's 500 pages but you can read it in an hour. The characters are admirable and relatable, the setting is immersive, and it reads like historical fiction at a great clip.

Why buy it?

It's a powerful tale of classical virtues, of heroism and courage, bravery, family, the faults of youth and the hard-won wisdom of age, and the endless human ability to dream of something better. To boot, you can read a manga over and over and appreciate the artwork with fresh eyes each time; that's why I add physical copies to my library.

In fine, there's a reason why manga continues to beat Western comics, and books like VINLAND are it. Check it out.

Get your copy!

Film

Dungeons and Dragons, Honor Among Thieves Review by Jim McCoy



I've been playing Dungeons and Dragons on and off since the Eighties (admittedly, mostly off. It's not always easy to find a group.) I've seen the cartoon that was on when I was a kid, and both of the earlier movies. Admittedly, I missed the Dragons of Autumn Twilight movie, but that's because the reviews were terrible. I have no idea how many D&D setting based novels I've read, but it's a bunch. No small amount of them were set in The Forgotten Realms, just like the latest D&D flick, Dungeons and Dragons, Honor Among Thieves. I have to say, I'm in love with this movie.

Seriously, someone took some time and put some care into this movie. Honor Among Thieves actually uses the source material appropriately. I mean, if you don't want to slap the writers of the I, Robot flick then you either haven't read the book, haven't seen the movie, or both. And if you haven't read the book then you probably know as much about Asimov's writing as the guys who wrote the script for I, Robot. Seriously, read the book. It's good.

Honor Among Thieves isn't like that. Honor Among Thieves reads like it was written by a fan, but it's not fan fiction. Here you'll find the Harpers, the Red Wizards of Thay, get visuals of Neverwinter (for all you gamers out there who aren't into the lore yes, this is the Neverwinter of Neverwinter Nights.) We get mentions of Baldur's Gate (yup, that one) and Waterdeep (from the Warriors of Waterdeep cell phone app.) We get multiple character classes that fit with the subject matter for the most part, and we get abilities that match things you would see in game. There's even a quick dip into the Underdark, which no D&D movie would be complete without. Of course, Honor Among Thieves is its own story and not everything is straight from the rule-books.

I can already hear some D&D fans out there crying. Someone at Paramount decided not to adhere too closely to the rules as written for D&D and I'm okay with that. If you haven't home-ruled something in your life you've never been a dungeon master. Telling the rules to piss off is the second best part of the gig. (The first being creating your own world.) So one or more of the writers didn't follow the rules. Big deal. I don't either and I do DM. Homebrew, house rules and The Rule of Cool have been part of the Dungeons and Dragons game since it debuted in the Seventies. And, while I may not allow a druid to Wild Shape into an Owlbear at my table, I can't deny how awesome it was to see it on screen. I'm a bit bitter because the writers can homebrew magic items better than I can. I'll get over it though. Eventually. Probably. Maybe.

So kudos to the writing team for writing this thing the way it needed to be written and not the way the rules called for. I mean, I never saw anything about a deity following the party down a staircase and healing them every time things got too intense with no limit on spells either, but I allowed it. My players better be glad I did, too. They needed the help. What party of third level characters charges down stairs guarded by hoards of ogres? Goofballs.

But I digress.

Then again, isn't digression my strong suit? I mean, unless this is your first time here you're probably used to it. I go off on more tangents than a trigonometry book. Just don't ask me to calculate one. Interpolation isn't my thing. Or was that square roots? It's been awhile.

Huh? Calculators? TODAY'S KIDS ARE A BUNCH OF WIMPS!!!

Anyway...

While I'm feeling cranky, I'm going to whine. I'm good at that.

OMG, WHERE IS ELMISTER? HAS ANYONE SEEN CADDERLY? WHAT ABOUT DRIZZT?

Okay, I'm over it.

Yes this is an all new cast of characters, but I like it that way. There is no mention of any of these people in the existing canon, so Paramount was free to do what they wanted, make them look how they wanted, etc. without spitting in the fans' faces. They used the broad strokes of the setting masterfully and created something new for the fans to enjoy.

Did I spell Cadderly's name right? It's been a minute since I've read *The Cleric Quintet*. Seriously though, next time you're bored, find something with the name R.A. Salvatore written on the spine. I mean that.

We do get to see some old friends. If you haven't been spoiled yet, I won't tell you who they are, but I got a real kick out of it. Then again, my buddy David didn't notice them, so if you go and don't see them it's not because I'm full of crap. You just missed it. I had a good time with it though. It took me back to my childhood.

If every single member of the special effects team for *Honor Among Thieves* doesn't get a raise, the whole world is a fraud and someone needs to hit the reset button. This was one of the most beautiful movies I've ever seen. The magic effects, the scenery, the fight scenes, that one axe thing, it's awesome.

Also, while I'm busy praising people I don't see on screen, can I show some love to whoever choreographed these fights? (Trick question. My blog. I make the rules.) Of course I can! I'd love to know how they did it and what goes into planning something like that. These guys could put on a clinic and I'd pay to show up. The brawls are just that amazing. Of course, let's not forget about the people doing the stunt work, too. They were awesome.

I should probably mention the cast as well. I mean, they're the ones people pay to go see, right?

Chris Pine was amazeballs as the bard Edgin, but we all expect that, right? I mean Steve Trevor is pretty...

Uhh..

Captain Kirk totally sold me...

Yeah, so Pine's a geek icon and I would've been totally disappointed if he hadn't delivered but he totally did and I loved it. Michelle Rodriguez was just as good as Holga. I'm still trying to decide if she's a warrior or a barbarian but it doesn't matter. Rodriguez owned that role. Seeing Hugh Grant in a movie I actually enjoyed and not some chick flick romcom was a pleasant surprise. Sophia Lillis blew me away as Doric. I have a thing for tieflings though. Justice Smith as Simon was not only fun, he was the guy a lot of D&D players can probably identify with and he pulled it off with aplomb. I can't wait to see this movie again.

Bottom Line: 5.0 out of 5 Homebrewed Magic Items

I usually don't do this, but per Margaret Weis's Facebook page, Gary Gygax, and Dave Arneson, creators of Dungeons and Dragons, are not credited in the movie, nor is Ed Greenwood, creator of the Forgotten Realms D&D Setting. I find this to be troubling. It didn't affect my enjoyment of the movie since I didn't notice it, so I didn't include it in my rating but this is a loser move by Paramount. Hopefully, they can fix this before the movie goes to streaming. Gene Roddenberry gets credited in every Star Trek movie or episode because it needs to happen. The same principle should apply here.

Child's Play 2

Review by Heath Row

Telegraphs & Tar Pits #101

It's been years since I've seen Child's Play, and I haven't watched the more recent television show Chucky, but a friend and I recently turned to Child's Play 2 on video tape for our weekly movie night. In classic horror franchise tradition, the possessed doll—an animatronic toy similar to Teddy Ruxpin—was destroyed at the end of the first movie only to be recovered and rebuilt at the beginning of the sequel. We all know how well that goes.

The initial scenes involving the toy company Play Pals, maker of the Good Guy dolls, and Chucky's revivification are somewhat fun—featuring Greg Germann who went on to Ally McBeal—and the bulk of the movie details the malevolent plaything seeking out its former owner, who's been placed in foster care. That leads to a couple of things. One, viewers learn—or are reminded—that the doll is possessed by a Chicago serial killer who's trapped in the toy's body until he can possess another, preferably the boy.



(Occasionally, the doll's nose bleeds, suggesting he's becoming more human, a la Pinocchio.) And there's a bit of a Mr. Snuffleupagus effect in which the boy's new foster parents think their new ward's blaming broken tchotchkes and other such occurrences on Chucky is the deflection of a disturbed child acting out while his mother recovers in a medical facility. Much to his surprise, the foster father realizes the threat posed by Chucky only too late. The set design of the basement is particularly good.

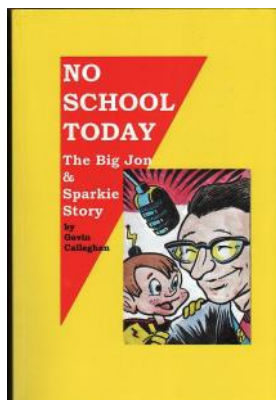
The boy finds a champion in another foster child, the teenager Kyle, played by Christine Elise, with whom my wife used to work. Elise also appeared on Beverly Hills, 90210 and stars in the newer Chucky TV program. She, too, realizes the threat posed by Chucky and proves a formidable companion.

The final scenes in the Play Pals factory are absolutely wonderful, reminiscent of Halloween III: Season of the Witch. The large number of Good Guy boxes suggests the awesome potential power of an army of such dolls and proves an adequate maze for an effective chase scene. And the manufacturing process leads to some risky situations and excellent visuals, especially the machine with which limbs are attached and the vat of melted wax or plastic. Goop galore!

Radio

No School Today: The Big Jon & Sparkie Story by Gavin Callaghan Review by Bob Jennings

Almost every kid who grew up in the 1950s and early 1960s is familiar with Big Jon and Sparkie; the human adult and Sparkie, an elf from the land of make-believe who wanted more than anything else to become a real live boy. The Saturday morning radio program “No School Today” was an extremely popular children’s show that had enormous influences on the field of children’s media entertainment.



This book is the definitive reference to the show and its creators. It traces in loving detail the entire history of Big Jon and all his achievements and frustrations in the world of radio and related media. Born in 1918 as Jonathan Arthur Goerss, his father was a Lutheran minister. Arthur got his start in radio in 1939 West Virginia. The germ of the concept that eventually became his lifetime commitment to children’s entertainment supposedly came when a regular act failed to appear and Jon was pressed into service to fill the time slot. He told his own humorous version of the Three Little Pigs, speaking directly, he recollected, to two children in the producer’s booth.

There were fits and starts along the way before the “No School Today” program initially aired in Cincinnati, Ohio. It was an immediate local hit. The program was picked up for national distribution by ABC in 1950, initially as a half hour program, but within a year it had expanded to an hour and a half, a block buster show that appealed directly to children but had just as many adult fans who were drawn into the mix of comedy and everyday soap opera style adventures involving Jon and Sparkie along with an ever widening cast of unusual and fascinating friends.

Jon never spoke down to children, and he always included social satire and down to earth realistic humor as part of every show. There was almost always a short play that covered famous works of fiction or some notable event from history, often performed with humorous overtones. There were silly songs, and of course, the weekly recounting of Sparkie’s visit to the local movie theater with his pals to watch the never ending serial “General Comet of the Universe



Patrol” which starred Captain Jupiter, a firmly tongue-in-cheek satire on the movie serials popular during that era. Arthur had one of the world’s largest collection of children’s records and every show had at least one adventure or learning session from his record library.

Another recurring part of the program was Big Jon’s Magic Spyglass, with which he was able to look across the airwaves into the homes of his young listeners and determine who had been good and who might not have washed their hands before dinner, or remembered to brush their teeth that morning. This gimmick also became part of his many cross-country live theater performances. Mothers were especially fond of this and submitted names of their kids who deserved praise or a reminder about their behavior.

Virtually all the voices on the show were done by Jon Arthur. Sparkie’s voice was created by altering the speed on a tape recorder. During the earliest years of the show Sparkie was an invisible elf, but listeners, young and old kept asking what Sparkie looked like so Big Jon finally asked his audience on the air to send in their ideas on what Sparkie looked like. He reportedly received 25,000 letters in reply. He asked comic book artist Leon Jason to create a drawing of the character. Somewhat later he commissioned a marionette to resemble Sparkie, which proved to be very timely, since the enormous popularity of the radio show allowed him to begin a long running series of public appearances with live shows in dozens of cities both big and small across the nation.

The Saturday program spun off a daily real-life family afternoon daily serial in 1951 starring Jon and Sparkie and the whole cast of characters in local settings that ran thru most of 1954. Ironically, many of these episodes exist, but very few complete copies of the hour and a half long “No School” Saturday programs have survived.

Attempts to move the program into television were not successful. There were special records, activity and coloring books, and an entertaining but short lived (only 3 issues) comic book that died when Ziff-Davis got out of the comic book business,

At its height the two shows were carried by 288 ABC affiliated stations. When ABC decided to start phasing out network radio in the late 1950s, Jon and Sparkie transferred to Armed Forces Radio, where the show ran and then reran in syndication for many years. I personally heard the show on AFTS when I was in the military in Germany in 1967 and 1968. The program transitioned yet again in the 1960s and was broadcast from 1962 to 1982 over the Family Radio Network, a religious radio cooperative, which led to some changes in the program’s format and content.

Gavin Callaghan is a long time comic book fan, an active writer and researcher in the realm of H.P. Lovecraft’s fiction, and a huge fan of Big Jon & Sparkie. He has managed to tell the entire saga of Big Jon and Sparkie from beginning to the end. Doing meticulous research he has managed to unearth a considerable wealth of background information that has not been known in the radio hobby before.

The relentless attention to detail is sometimes overwhelming. For example, Gavin lists most of

the assorted cross county stage shows and special events Jon and Sparkie appeared at, along with newspaper write-ups of each event. Since Jon did pretty much the same show each stop on each year's tour, and since the public reaction was always wildly enthusiastic and positive, the excess coverage becomes tedious.

But this is a minor point. Especially valuable is a detailed time line provided with dates of Big Jon & Sparkie's entire career from beginning until Jon Arthur's death in 1982. In addition there is a list of every single character that appeared in either the Saturday program or the daily serial, with description and information about each one, plus a lengthy section with detailed story plots and episode numbers, with the correct dates as researched and verified by Gavin, of all the fifteen minute serial plot lines.

The book is available as a print-on-demand volume from lulu.com. I enthusiastically recommend this book for anybody interested in OT Radio, and especially if you happen to be one of the millions of people who lived in the 1950s and listened to Big Jon & Sparkie.

Science

Extraterrestrial: The First Sign of Intelligent Life

Beyond Earth by Avi Loeb

Review by Heath Row

Telegraphs & Tar Pits #101

This is a nonfiction book about an interstellar body called 'Oumuamua that was first observed on Sept. 6, 2017. It is Loeb's hypothesis that this is a relic of some extraterrestrial civilization, a scout sent through space.

He bases that contention on three traits: its extreme shape, reflectivity (very bright, like metal), and orbit (it deviated from an orbit shaped by the Sun's gravity without showing any discernible comet's tail). He proposes that it is a "Lightsail," a large thin flat disk, rather than the cigar-shaped object others proposed, and the change to its orbit was a result of the pressure of the sun's light against the sail.

Convincing? Well, the only actual photograph in the book (there are other illustrations) is one of the time lapse pictures of stars that are reduced, fuzzy, blurry lines. No one knows, and I don't understand how anyone can find out more hard data; but his ideas are entertaining in a good and provocative way.

Not good is the excessive padding in the book. It's like hard science fiction: I really don't want to know about his early life on a family farm in Israel (as much as I might under different circumstances), I want to know more about 'Oumuamua. Except there is no more information.

The rest of the book consists of background information on the SETI Institute, exoplanets and the possible chances for life, and how—for the future and benefit of mankind—we should continue exploring and funding research. Nothing a "hard science" sf fan already has not read before.

The only thing notably new to me was “Starchips.” That program (which Loeb worked on, too) involves sending tiny electronic devices with radio and camera attached via laser-propelled sails to Proxima Centauri, the closest star system.

I just have doubts about the inevitability of life being created from nothing; biology gets ever more complicated. As a boy, I saw pictures of Mars, with the polar caps melting in the spring, and large areas of dark spreading down from them—obviously the spread of vegetation watered by the polar caps melting. Nothing is obvious, and we fool ourselves. Skim a borrowed copy if you can.

SerCon

P. Schuyler Miller Bio-Bibliography

by

Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D.

N3F Historian



Peter Schuyler Miller was born on a 100-year-old farm located in upper Rensselaer County, New York, on February 21, 1912, and raised in New York's Mohawk Valley -- which led to his life-long interest in the Iroquois Indians. He pursued this interest as an amateur archaeologist, and as a member of the New York State Archaeological Association.

Miller had several famous ancestors, including Major General Philip John Schuyler, who defeated Burgoyne at the Battle of Saratoga, and the first governor of the state of New York, Peter Schuyler. Miller's father was a chemist and his mother a teacher. Miller himself received B. S. (1931) and M. S. (1932) degrees in chemistry from Union College in Schenectady, New York. He subsequently worked as a technical writer for General Electric in the 1940s and for the Fisher Scientific Company in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, from 1952 until his death twenty-two years later on October 13, 1974, at the age of 62.

Introduction to Science Fiction

Miller was an excellent student while growing up, graduating as the valedictorian of his class at the age of 15. As a child he read the science fiction (SF) novels of Jules Verne. He was introduced to magazine SF with the August, 1924, issue of Hugo Gernsback's *Science and Invention* that contained an installment of Ray Cumming's story “The Man on the Meteor.” Miller spent his lunch money for this particular magazine, began reading other magazines with SF stories, such as *Argosy* and *Weird Tales* -- and was literally waiting at the newsstand for the first issue of *Amazing* when it was delivered.

When his father died, Miller was in his early twenties and became the sole support of his mother and younger sister. Sam Moskowitz reported that this responsibility, which continued until his sister married and his mother died, is one of the reasons Miller never married.

Miller died at the Blennerhassett Island Site of the West Virginia State Archaeological Society.

He was on an archaeological tour of the “Fort Ancient Civilization” site west of Parkersburg at the time. Miller was a member of the Society for Pennsylvania Archaeology, and at one time was associate editor of the *Pennsylvania Archaeologist*. A memorial article on Miller by Moskowitz appeared in the February, 1975, issue of *Analog Science Fiction/Science Fact*. In this article Moskowitz wrote that Miller acknowledged that his rich writing style was one in which he sometimes “shouted on paper” in his stories.

SF Writing

Miller wrote pulp SF stories beginning in the 1930s. His first story, “Visitors from Infinity,” written in the late 1920s, never sold [but was eventually published in the fanzine *Cosmology*]. In 1930, however, he won first prize (\$150 in gold) in the *Air Wonder* cover story contest (500+ entries) with his story “The Red Plague” -- that was subsequently published in the July, 1930 issue of *Wonder Stories*, which by that time had absorbed *Air Wonder Stories*. Editor Gernsback said Miller's “The Red Plague” was “one of the best stories we have received since the inception of our magazines.”

Miller went on to be one of the more popular authors of the period, with his stories appearing in all the major SF magazines of the time. He seldom used a pseudonym, but -- when he collaborated on a story with friends Walter L. Dennis and Paul McDermott -- they used the byline of Dennis McDermott.

Fan Activities

An active fan of the work of other authors, Miller corresponded with Conan the Barbarian's creator Robert E. Howard in the 1930s and -- with his friend (and fellow chemist) John D. Clark -- compiled the “probable” outline of Conan's career for fans [published in 1938 in Howard's book, *The Hyborean Age*].



Miller contributed regularly to genre fanzines, and his *Alicia in Blunderland* satire was originally published in the fanzine *Science Fiction Digest* in the early 1930s. *Alicia* poked fun at some of the SF professionals, fans, and famous stories of the time. Miller was also the treasurer of Pittcon, the World Science Fiction Convention held in Pittsburgh in 1960.

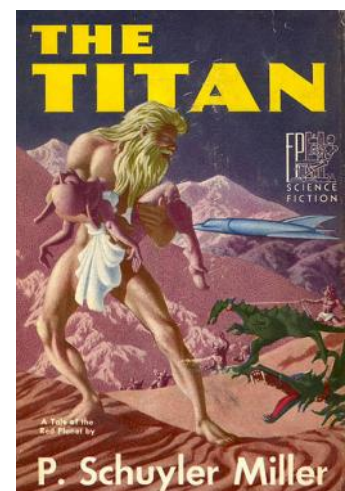
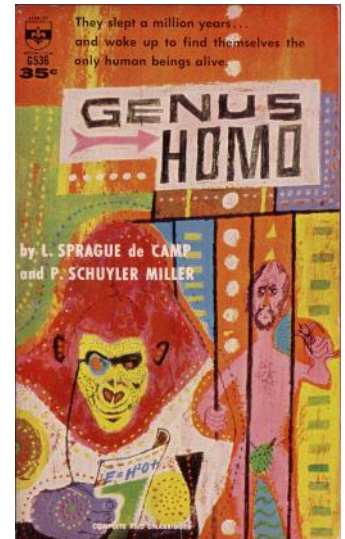
Book Reviewing

Beginning in 1945 Miller gradually shifted from writing fiction to book reviewing, initially for *Astounding Science Fiction* (later *Analog Science Fiction/Science Fact*). After reviewing several books for *Astounding*, he began his regular monthly review column, “The Reference Library,” in October, 1951. As a critic he was notable for “his enthusiasm for a wide coverage of the science fiction field.” In 1963 Miller was awarded a special Hugo Award for his book reviews.

Published Short Fiction

"The Red Plague" (July 1930)
 "Dust of Destruction" (February 1931)

"Through the Vibrations" (May 1931)
 "Cleon of Yzdral" (July 1931)
 "The Man from Mars" (Summer 1931)
 "The Arhennius Horror" (September 1931)
 "Tetrahedra of Space" (November 1931)
 "Red Spot on Jupiter" (July 1931) (as by Dennis McDermott)
 "Duel on the Asteroid" (January 1932) (as by Dennis McDermott) [with Paul McDermott and Walter Dennis]
 "Forgotten" [aka "The Forgotten Man of Space"] (April 1933)
 "Red Flame of Venus" (September 1932)
 "Jeremiah Jones, Alchemist" (May 1933)
 "The Atom Smasher" (January 1934)
 "The Pool of Life" (October 1934)
 "The Titan" (Winter 1934-35)
 "The People of the Arrow" (July 1935)
 "The Chrysalis" (April 1936)
 "The Sands of Time" (April 1937)
 "Coils of Time" (May 1939)
 "Pleasure Trove" (August 1939)
 "Spawn" (August 1939)
 "In the Good Old Summertime" (March 1940)
 "Living Isotopes" (May 1940)
 "The Flayed Wolf" (July 1940)
 "Old Man Mulligan" (December 1940)
 "Trouble on Tantalus" (February 1941)
 "Bird Walk" (April 1941)
 "Over the River" (April 1941)
 "Counterfeiting a Golden Age" (May 1941 [guest editorial])
 "The Facts of Life" (May 1941)
 "Smugglers of the Moon" (May 1941)
 "The Frog" (October 1942)
 "The Cave" (January 1943)
 "John Cawder's Wife" (May 1943)
 "The Hounds of Kalimar" (June 1943)
 "Gleeps" (July 1943)
 "Fricassee in Four Dimensions" (December 1943)
 "As Never Was" (January 1944)
 "Cuckoo" (May 1944)
 "Plane and Fancy" (July 1944)
 "Ship-in-a-Bottle" (January 1945)
 "Ghost" (July 1946)
 "The Thing on Outer Shoal" (September 1947)
 "Daydream" (1949)
 "Status Quondam" (1951)
 "For Analysis" (November 1958)



Verse

"Man's Question" (June 1931)
 "Meteor" (August 1931)

"Space" (February 1933)

Books

Genus Homo (1941) [novel/with L. Sprague de Camp]

The Titan (1952) [collection of Miller's short fiction]

Alicia in Blunderland (1983) [satire/originally published in a fanzine in the early 1930s, under the pen name of Nihil]

Some Concluding Comments

When he was publishing SF stories in the 1930s-1940s, Miller was sometimes mentioned as a worthy successor to A. Merritt -- high praise indeed for a young genre writer of the time. As he wrote less and less fiction, however, and began writing book reviews on a regular basis, Miller came to be known almost exclusively as a critic of the genre.

Donald Tuck called Miller "the most important book reviewer in the science fiction magazines" and SF historian Paul Carter wrote that the "turning point" in SF criticism came at the end of World War II when The Reference Shelf (sic) was created by Miller -- who conducted it with "skill and intelligence."

His extensive collection of papers, maps, books, and periodicals -- accumulated largely as a result of his review work -- was donated to the Carnegie Museum after his death by his sister, Mary E. Drake. A catalog of these materials, The Miller Science Fiction Library, was published by Dragon Press in 1977. These materials now form the basis of the P. Schuyler Miller Memorial Library at the Edward O'Neill Research Center in Pittsburgh.

Sources

Carter, Paul A. The Creation of Tomorrow, 1977.

Hawk, Pat. Hawk's Authors' Pseudonyms II, 1995.

Moskowitz, Sam. A Canticle for P. Schuyler Miller, 1975.

Nicholls, Peter (ed.). The Science Fiction Encyclopedia, 1979.

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

Tuck, Donald H. The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction and Fantasy, Volume 2: Who's Who, M-Z, 1974.

Tymn, Marshall B. (ed.). American Fantasy and Science Fiction, 1979.

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

Short Stories

Pinup Noir 3 Edited by Kortnee Bryant Review by Declan Finn

Now, Raconteur Press is run by Ian McMurtrie, also known as Lawdog. Raconteur has a successful line of anthologies. After a while, I took a hint and decided to check out their shorts. One of the ones I considered submitting to was "Pinup Noir 2."

The description was pretty simple

Gritty streets, hard-boiled detectives, and dames that are trouble on two legs. Whether they're in a world that looks like ours but isn't, a futuristic setting, or a different planet altogether, these are the things that make a noir story.

Obviously, my specialty is Urban Fantasy. The world I could think of was only one: Thomas Nolan.

Yup, here we go again. Tommy just won't stay down.

Yes, another Thomas Nolan short story. And this one is set after

For something in this genre, requiring a femme fatale, my first thought was "I need a succubus."

After that, I was off to the races. I get to throw Tommy into museum and recreate The Relic. Only even more threatening.

However, I didn't get into Pinup Noir 2

But I did get into Pinup Noir 3.

To mangle a quote, every now and then, in order for there to be justice, a being must walk down the mean streets who is not, themselves, mean. Whether those streets are hard-packed dirt, the metal of a space station corridor, or the slick cobblestones of an alternate San Francisco doesn't matter. And sometimes, the Dangerous Dames can do it themselves.

Join 10 authors as they explore what Noir looks like in the past, present, and future.

Takeout by Samuel Nettles

Behind Every Successful Man by Paul Williams

Blonde and Blue by Michael A. Hooten

In The Kudzu by Robert McDonald

Hot Time in Tomato Town by Seth Taylor

Jared Thorne and the Tech Smugglers Son by John D. Martin

Lady Killer by Andrew Milbourne

A Lady of Means by Kimber Lin

Succubus Blues by Declan Finn

The Doll with the Peekaboo Bangs by Lee Allred

Short Stories — Concluded

Notes by Tom Feller

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

The Eternal Cocktail Party of the Damned by Fonda Lee—

There is a new circle of Hell, a cocktail lounge in which the patrons act like people on the ser-



vice formerly called “Twitter”.

Family Cooking by AnaMaria Curtis—

A mother asked her daughter to magically prepare the food for the mother’s wedding. She is tempted to poison her grandmother for leaving her mother when she was a child.

The Portal Keeper by Lavie Tidhar—

The title character cleans and maintains the grounds around a portal between worlds and keeps a diary. During October, she sees a white rabbit, Peter Pan, a toad driving a Rolls Royce, and other fantasy characters, although she herself is not familiar with any of the stories.

The Prince of Salt and the Ocean’s Bargain by Natalia Theodoridou—

A grain of salt in the ocean wishes to become a human being, and its wish is granted. Created as a man, he becomes a prince and falls in love with both a man and a woman. However, there is a price.

Can I Offer You a Nice Egg in this Trying Time by Iori Kusano—

Matt keeps getting into fights with Gary, a Waffle House chef, ostensibly about his eggs. However, their real conflict is over their shared experience of a fantasy world called Hirekkyo, to which they can never return.

Neil Clarke

The editor of Clarkesworld was the winner of the Hugo in the Best Editor-Short Form category. Two stories he published, “Murder by Pizel: Crime and Responsibility in the Digital Darkness” by S.L. Huang and “We Built This City” by Marie Vibbert, were both finalists for the Hugo in the Novelette category. He also published “Calf Cleaving in the Benthic Black” by Isabel Kim, which I reviewed previously in this article. Here are the other stories in his Hugo Award sample:

Two Spacesuits by Leonard Richardson—

Carlos comes home to find his parents acting strangely. His father is building a mound in his back yard, while his mother is looking at Youtube videos featuring an alien alphabet and makes growling sounds while talking. Both are evasive when Carlos questions them. However, they open up while playing Uno.

The Dragon Project by Naomi Kritzer—

Vivian is a bio-engineer who makes animals with an organic 3D printer while her partner Jed handles the business side of things. One day a client asks them to create a dragon. However, the client rejects her efforts not once but twice. She adopts the first one, which is the size of a cat, and Jed adopts the second, which is the size of a dog. However, neither is fire breathing, because of the potential liability. Later they learn that the client found someone to make him a fire breathing dragon and also hear about a big fire at the client’s place of business. They believe the events may be connected.

The Sadness Box by Suzanne Palmer—

A young boy lives in a suburb with his mother and step-father but still visits his father, an eccentric inventor. Unfortunately, they live in a war-time future that involves nanobots and biological weapons, and there is no clear cut front line. One day the boy’s father gives him a box with an AI that is afraid of everything, so it shuts itself down as soon as it is turned on. The

father thinks this is funny.

Sweetbaby by Thomas Ha—

A family is stranded on a remote planet after their spaceship crashes. The son, Sweetbaby, becomes a monster and must be kept tied up. His older sister Fran is his primary target whenever he frees himself. The story did not do much for me, but it was nominated for the Shirley Jackson Award.

Upstart by Lu Ban—

In some future, overpopulation is dealt with by offering money to people who agree to take an early death. When he is nineteen, K Li agrees to euthanasia at the age of 46 in return for enough money to not have to work during those 27 years, which he mostly spends getting drunk. However, once he turns 40, he experiences buyer's remorse. Then he meets a woman who offers him a way to get out of his deal. It has an excellent twist ending.

Bishop's Opening by R.S.A. Garcia-

This novella features two story lines that link up in the middle of the story. The first is about 3 people who operate the interstellar cargo ship Kiskadee, Sebastian, Olly, and Reece. The second features a character referred to by his title, Bishop. He is a high ranking official in the world of Valencia, where the leaders are given titles named after chess pieces and the king is called the Grandmaster. While on shore leave looking for Olly's favorite restaurant, Sebastian foils an assassination attempt on Bishop and is rewarded by being arrested. This was my favorite story in Clarke's sample, and it was nominated for a Nebula.

Company Town by Aimee Ogden—

Cass and Maya live in a dystopian society where there is constant surveillance. Cass is the breadwinner, working in a cafeteria making salads. She and her fellow workers are planning a strike. Maya, on the other, goes through a portal every day to a fantasy world in which she is a warrior battling goblins and wolf-men.

Carapace by David Goodman—

Armored Suit SM-14 becomes sentient after its human operator is killed in battle. It then takes an enemy soldier named Klezta prisoner and makes its way back to its own line. Along the way, it bonds with the prisoner.

Timekeeper's Symphony by Ken Liu—

This is not much of a story, because it reads more like an essay on world building, time, and how we perceive time..

Food of Famous Authors

Gingerbread by Cedar Sanderson

This is an annual treat for me, and I think every year I say I will make it more than once, and then there are other ideas and I forget. This time! This time I shall do it again... perhaps with apricot preserves instead of the applesauce, but I must remember to reduce the brown sugar if I do it that way. I prefer a less-sweet dessert.

Makes a lovely moist cake, and will easily serve 8-10 for dessert. Can be served warm with apple butter smeared on a slice, and some whipped cream, for sheer indulgence. Peaches pair well with gingerbread as well.

Begin by heating your oven to 325F.

Grease and flour a pan – a bundt cake pan will work here, for the photographed gingerbread I'd baked it in a 7" springform pan.

Cream together, then beat until fluffy once all ingredients are incorporated:

- 1/2 c molasses
- 5 tbsp lard
- 1/2 c dark brown sugar
- 2 egg yolks
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 2 tsp ground ginger

Sift together:

- 2 c flour
- 1 tsp baking soda

Add flour alternating with:

- 1/4 c water
- 1/2 c applesauce (homemade is best here!)

As soon as the batter comes together, stop mixing. Pour into the greased and floured pan.

Bake until a tester comes out clean. For the deep 7" pan, this took almost an hour. For a bundt pan it will take less time, more like 40 minutes.

Remove from the pan and allow to cool for a bit, but not too long, as it's best warm. Still good cold, though, and the next morning with coffee it's pretty darn good still!





Star Wars Images
by Jose Sanchez