

Tightbeam 359

August 2024



Futurescape 2
by Jose Sanchez

Tightbeam 359

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

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Tightbeam is published approximately monthly by the National Fantasy Fan Federation and distributed electronically to the membership.

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Letters of Comment

Dear Jon and George:

Thanks muchly for issue 357 of Tightbeam. I am typing this on my tablet as there's a raging thunderstorm blowing out there, but I will send it to my Bell account RSN.

My loc...it is getting so close to the release of Amazing Stories Best of 2023. I will relay the URL to everyone as soon as I am sent that information. All of our big celebratory dates are past, and our next big event, the NASFiC in Buffalo, is just a month and a highway drive away.

Mack Reynolds...another informative essay. Those titles sound so familiar, but...I couldn't even find our copy of Mission to Horatius. His was the first Trek novel, and he has been followed by hundreds and hundreds more of novels. I used to keep track of Trek books for the Star Trek Welcomittee, but when Shirley Maiewski shut down the STW, my list was shut down, too.

I have liked the newer Treks. All the seasons of Discovery, and the first seasons of Strange New Worlds have been great fun. I have not been able to follow Lower Decks and Prodigy, but still hope to watch them at some point. Starfleet Academy, a movie on Section 31, and perhaps another Kelvin timeline movie...Trek fans have been spoiled for a long time, and we may have another 5-6 years of the Federation. I keep hearing that Paramount is trying to sell itself off to the highest bidder, but deals keep falling through. Any sale of the studio might affect the future of Trek. I have to ask...with the jump to a distant century, what more Trek could we get? Are there any future futures to explore? Unless we include the trope of the Time Police...

It's been a day of catch-up on many fronts, especially after a fun weekend. Thank you for this issue, and I am sure another is on the way soon.

Yours, Lloyd Penney

Dear George and Jon:

Tightbeam 358 is here, and given that the workload is rising yet again, it is time for a fast letter of comment.

All Our Yesterdays...my copy is right beside my desk on my reference shelf. It's a very informative history of all of us in our early days. It's a very dry read, but it does show where we came from, plus all the activities we might call fannish, why we do what we do. It is but one of the various fan history books I have on my shelf.

The first issue of Amazing Stories...I was able to read it through archive.org files, and while it was mostly reprints, having all of it together between a couple of covers must have looked like something special was being put together. And, I will freely admit that I am terribly biased.

Thank you for the biography of Henry Hasse. Honestly, I'd never heard of him, but thanks to this mini-biography, I now have, and thank you.

The NASFiC...we went, mostly because Buffalo is a relatively short drive away, and we just barely got through customs, but we did arrive at our hotel, and easily checked in, and got our

assorted stuff for Amazing Stories off to our table in the dealers' room at the Buffalo Convention Centre. It was what we needed, a fannish convention like what we hadn't had in years. I saw lots of friends there, many of which were also Canadian, but we got to meet people like GoH Alan Dean Foster, and many of the other pro writers in attendance.

We enjoyed ourselves, but we heard attendance of only 400 or so, making it one of the smallest NASFiCs ever. We took some N3F flyers down, and they all disappeared. We have some more to take down to the World Fantasy Convention, even closer to home in Niagara Falls, NY. Just bought our memberships today!

All done for the moment, and off it goes! Thank you for this, see you with 359.

Yours, Lloyd Penney

Anime

Anime Review – Aggressive Retsuko (Aggretsuko)

By Jessi Silver



Retsuko is a 25-year old red panda who works in her dream company's accounting department. But it turns out that she is forced to keep doing more and more impossible tasks by her superiors and co-workers. She doesn't talk back to them, but she still has to let off steam, so she ends up going to karaoke by herself and singing death metal. – Copyright 2018 – Sanrio/Netflix

Streaming: Netflix

Source: Original

Episodes: 10 (15 minutes apiece)

Review: About two years ago I caught wind of Aggressive Retsuko, a new Sanrio property debuting in two minute chunks on YouTube. The concept really tickled me – a twenty-something OL who puts up with typical office politics during her day job, lets out her many frustrations in the evening by growling death metal into a microphone at her local Karaoke parlor. A bit of a one-note joke to be sure, but one that hit me the right way and provided some decent belly laughs. I never watched much of it because it wasn't that easily available, but I definitely indulged in some of the merchandise when it started popping up in my local Hot Topic and other Asian pop-culture shops. When this sequel appeared it actually took my by surprise; I only caught wind of it after reading Jacob Chapman's preview of the first couple of episodes the most recent Spring Preview Guide over at ANN, and initially questioned the choice to make the episodes longer than their original two minute format. I doubted that one gag, even a pretty good one, could sustain a longer episode, much less make it entertaining.

As they say, boy was I wrong. While Aggretsuko is still primarily what I would call a comedy, it's also a fairly robust critique of some Japan-specific (but still widely-relatable) office issues, especially as they affect women in a workplace setting.

One of the series' many successes is how Retsuko is presented as a character, because despite her cutesy, merch-ready appearance her situation feels so genuine. She's a cute, earnest person who feels lucky to be working at one of her dream companies, but her accounting job is anything but satisfying and her situation is greatly complicated by the fact that she doesn't interact well with some of her coworkers and doesn't have the personality that helps her to play games and suck up to the right people. She tries to lay low and get through the day, but this only turns her into a dumping ground for others' work and, unsurprisingly, she's unwilling to tell anyone "no" and spoil the office harmony. While my work situation is leaps and bounds better than depicted in this series, I'm fully sympathetic to the idea that it's just easier to become a "yes man" and take on more and more work than to speak up and potentially make someone else's life more difficult. Maybe it's due to my problems with social anxiety or my poor handle on how to maintain human relationships, but I can see how the idea of "harmony over all else" can be desirable while also ultimately harmful.



Mr. Ton is a literal chauvinist pig.

Retsuko is also exposed to some of the most blatantly awful chauvinism I've seen depicted in media in a long, long time. Every interaction with her boss, Mr. Ton, is a tension-filled exercise in suffering through off-color comments about women's place in the office and what jobs they're meant to perform. Each time Retsuko got caught in the cross-hairs I could feel myself welling up with frustration. I've luckily never been in her exact position or had a boss so profoundly terrible, but I have been made to feel like an outsider and I've heard my share of casual sexism, so subtle and insidious that it doesn't register even with people who otherwise have a handle on those sorts of things. It's exhausting and defeating, and even several days later I have to marvel at the ability of this series to capture that and bottle it for consumption. I'm reminded a bit of Hataraki Man, another workplace series



Gori and Washimi help to mentor Retsuko.

similarly frustrated by both.

This is supposed to be a comedy anime, right?

If the series were nothing more than a string of upsetting circumstances for Retsuko to deal with via death metal therapy, it's likely that it wouldn't be upbeat enough to maintain its own sense

that follows the trials of several women working for a magazine publisher and examines their specific hurdles and ways of coping with unjust and unequal treatment and expectations. In that case, the protagonist is hyper-competent and admired for her ability to "work like a man," when the men around her don't put in half the amount of work that she does. Both series are very telling about what we expect of men and women in the same setting, and those concerned with workplace equality will likely be

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of humor. What helps immensely is that the show allows Retsuko to get by with a little help from her friends, as well as with some personal mentorship from a couple of high-powered working women in her company who have seen it all and lived to tell the tale. Retsuko is by no means a loner and often gets support in one form or another from Fenneko, a snarky fennec fox who survives each workday through pure cynicism, and Haida, a hyena who's an everyday normal guy nursing a crush on our heroine. There's a good sense that these three have been in the trenches together for a while and the others do a decent, if flawed, job of talking Retsuko out of some situations. Fenneko in particular was a real source of entertainment for me just because of her deadpan delivery and ability to see right through the world's fakery. She's not a character who would work well as a protagonist, but in small doses she was hilarious. As Retsuko connects with Washimi and Gori, two women who she has only admired from afar prior to their meeting in a yoga class, she learns that there are opportunities to get things done even when the system seems rigged and unfair. There is a lot of depth in these interactions, especially when Washimi and Gori attempt to help Retsuko directly with her management or try to guide her towards making good life decisions, and I think they really elevate the show.

My one complaint, and it's a relatively minor one, is that the series attempts to insert a sub-plot of sorts near the end and isn't able to devote enough time to it for it to fully mature. In her desperation, Retsuko starts to believe that her only "out" from her job is to find a partner and get married so that she can live as a housewife. She ends up falling for a guy with zero personality whose only real distinguishing quality is his low-key lack of consideration for her. She grins and bears it for a while until she's forced to face reality. The lesson, of course, is that we tend to tolerate so many things when we feel that our lives are hopeless, and in doing so give up our chance at happiness and dignity. I really loved that message, and only wish that the show had been a couple more episodes long to allow it to unfold more gradually. As a sentiment, it was absolutely right on the money and just another way in which the series surprised me.

In the couple of weeks that the series has been available I've seen the amount of fan work for it blow up completely, so I doubt that my giving it a glowing review is somehow going to inform anyone who isn't already aware and interested. But in case someone does randomly stumble across this anime blog (or, more likely, discover the show while adding dozens of things to their Netflix queue), I hope maybe my words or their own curiosity will give them the push that they need to give it a try. And then, maybe we can continue to try to dispel the myth that cutesy-looking cartoons are only for kids.

Pros: The protagonist is very sympathetic. Portrays Retsuko's tough situations in a way that feels real and relatable. The character relationships and interactions add a lot of depth.

Cons: The late-game romantic subplot could have used a couple more episodes of exploration.

Grade: A-

Comics

Rock'n Roll Ninja Meyer/Dixon/Bahr

Review by Graham Bradley

Ya Boi Zack's best work to date! What if a quartet of Vietnam veterans, disillusioned and low on prospects after the war, got recruited to train a clan of ninjas for a quick payday? And then—



plot twist!—it’s a trap? And rather than roll over and take what’s coming to them, they decide to hide in the open as an indie rock band in the 80s?

If that sounds like a crack-addled concept that just might work, then you’re the target audience for ROCK ‘N ROLL NINJA by Richard C. Meyer, Matt Bahr, and Chuck Dixon.

Here’s the catch: you won’t find this in conventional stores. In fact, by the time I was able to sit down and write up this review, Meyer (better known as Ya Boi Zack on YouTube) had already sold out of his extra prints. There will be more in the future, as this is his best-received, best-reviewed book ever (his company has been publishing for six years) and he’s got sequels on deck.

While I haven’t kept up with Meyer’s Jawbreakers series, I remember being stoked when he announced this as a standalone book...in 2021. Yes, the campaign went live 3 years ago, and like a true creative, Meyer has a tendency to overcommit on too many projects and fall behind schedule. He’s refreshingly self-aware on the front, and even took a first-ever hiatus from his long-running YouTube channel this year to catch up on all of his delayed books.

And these aren’t just quirky little throwback books that mimic what comics used to be—he’s got a licensed Expendables comic with Sylvester Stallone’s blessing, with writing from none other than Will Jordan, a.k.a. The Critical Drinker himself.

Meyer may have started his channel in 2017 as a comic critic, but he's the rare critic that gets things done, and RNRN proves that he can go in any direction he likes. His only limitation is that there’s just one of him.

The Story

Images and descriptions are from the now-closed IndieGoGo campaign.*

1973- 4 young MACV-SOG soldiers finish up their Tour Of Duty in Vietnam and fly back to the USA to start their dream of becoming rock musicians.

1975- After having all of their equipment & van stolen after a concert, they accept an offer from a colonel they knew in Vietnam for a 6-week "security consultant" gig in Japan... As they finishing the consulting gig, they find out they won't be going home...ever. The people who they had been training are NINJA!

1981- After years of service to the Ninja Clan, the boys finally escape and head back to NYC. They reform the band, but must turn down all record deals and promotion since they have to lie low, so that the Ninja Clan cannot track them down...

1983- Realizing that their big shot is passing them by, the boys create an elaborate plan to lure their Ninja Clan to New York City and pick them off one-by-one... But they're not the only people with plans for the Ninja Clan. The Colonel wants to bring Ninja into the modern world and FRANCHISE them!

Even after reading the description above and knowing what's coming, Dixon's writing gives it teeth in the right places so that when the betrayals arrive, you really feel it. There were several "Ha ha!" and "Whoa!" moments when I read this book, to say nothing of how I kept going over the art several times before turning each page. It's so crisp and sharp and perfect.

The Characters

The band call themselves "Uzi Duz It," and they're a colorful bunch. Bahr draws them in the Army as looking mostly the same, though still distinct enough, as Army dress code might do. As they return to civilian life they have their own grooming and wardrobe that makes it even easier to tell them apart.

Francis is the AV guy, Dennis is an elevator mechanic, Hudson works in the sewers, and Angel is a drag queen.

The single page of the book that reveals their hard adjustment to civvie life is a rough snapshot of what a lot of veterans go through—and it was something new in America after 'Nam, because of how the war was broadcast to the population.

The World

The story pitches itself as something that could happen in our own, it's just secret. You can easily imagine it happening in the same world as *Die Hard* or *Highlander*. Furthermore, there are little cues sprinkled throughout that hint at a hidden knowledge of New York and its boroughs. I know Meyer lived there for a while, I can't say as much for Bahr or Dixon, but it doesn't matter—even if the readers don't know what's above what street number, or what's peculiar about which neighborhood, the characters know, and you can extrapolate from there.

What matters is it's fleshed-out and detailed, and the characters know how to thrive in their setting.

The Politics

None, and in a sense, this is where the book shows some of its best qualities. The "Uzi Duz It" team is 'diverse' in the ways that the superficial cultural crybabies care about (one white guy, one Asian guy, one black guy, one gay guy) but it almost never comes up. Angel is a flamboyant dresser after the war and yet none of his fellow veterans give him any lip about it.

The only one who says anything is the Colonel who picks them up after the war, calling Angel a 'fairy' and Dennis a 'junkie' in the same breath. These are observations about how the men are going nowhere with their lives, and he instead wants them to live up to their warrior potential. There's no Current Day screeching at the audience.

It's almost like there's a spectrum to this! A story that refuses to depict a heterogeneous world is in one area, and a story that can't stop mentioning is far in the other direction. Meanwhile, a talented writer like Dixon can add it as any other brick in the wall, and then just keep building the wall.

Content Warning

It definitely gets graphic at times. Frank takes up a relationship with one of the ninjas, and

there's a bedroom scene here and there. The language pops up with the odd F-bomb. And the violence, while mostly action-based, does have the occasional frame where someone gets decapitated.

Who's it for?

"1980s throwback in the 2020s" is definitely becoming a genre, because there's an audience for it. Not just because it's about veterans doing action stuff in New York, but because those veterans are also ninjas in a rock band. Popular entertainment doesn't give us these gonzo concepts these days, but the 80's were full of them, and they've had incredibly staying power. Comics is a resilient medium that allows this kind of story to be told with less budgetary risk, and boy does RNRN land gracefully in that spot.

Why read it?

This is a mashup of three underrated talents that produces a truly special and fun book. Bahr's artwork is sharp and alive and suffers nowhere. Perspective, value, character design, scale, all of it. Dixon shows why he's the legend that he is, and why so many of the indies (who can) are paying him for his talents. Meyer continues to show why he's the right man at the right time, a lifelong fan of this medium who understands why it appeals, why the mainstream isn't working, and what to make instead.

As of this review, you can't buy this book, because of how Meyer runs his business through crowdfunding. But if you follow his YouTube channel and keep an ear to the ground, you'll catch the next campaign, or one for another book he's publishing that's up your alley. I'm stoked for the next one.

Magazines

Cirsova Magazine of Thrilling Adventure and Daring Suspense Issue #19 (Summer 2024) Review by Caroline Furlong

There are hungry things lurking in this issue. Hungry things – and people desperate for one last chance.

Cirsova Magazine of Thrilling Adventure and Daring Suspense has outdone itself in this issue. It starts out slow, luring a reader in cautiously, carefully, with tales of mysterious flesh lumps in rivers and weird West rustlers that never take the cattle. Then it turns up the heat as it investigates the Great War, horrors better left unspoken, alt-history, and some Wild Star action. It ends off with a powerful comic preview for Yakov Merkin's upcoming release, *Amaranth Angels!*

There is something for everyone in this issue as fate and the Fae vie for life and death while men struggle in the trenches. Bizarre and humorous calls to late night radio shows featuring the weird and mysterious lighten the mood, while tales of fleshy monsters and dark demons will ensure you never want to wander the halls of academia without a weapon to hand. James Hutchings returns with his next installment for *My Name Is John Carter*, a lyrical poem that makes

you long for the days when poetry was actually serious, while Yakov Merkin takes you to the depths of space in his haunting comic *Wilted Flowers*.

If there was ever a magazine issue you needed on your shelf, this is it!

The Story

“The Creek Tumors” sets the stage, showing us a Stack Master named Harold at a dying University going about his business as little as he may. The school is cutting its budget due to low enrollment, and he knows he hasn’t got long left before he is given a pink slip. Why work hard when he can simply get by until then? His collected vacation days will make a nice going-away present on the University’s dime. Besides, watching the local police pick up fleshy lumps from Colton Creek is a bonus, as he gets to enjoy being dry while they are wet and wrinkling their nose at the smell....

“No-Rooms at the Kellogg Inn” is a fun romp in the Depression Era, where a hobo stumbles upon a cabin in the woods with secret passages. He has to teach himself Braille to get around, but when he learns where the passages lead, he seems to be set for life – at least until the builders get wise to him. This story is followed by “Range of Deceit,” a delightful Weird West tale about cattle that turn up dead with no clear sign of what killed them. The local cattle baron is sure it is rustlers, but as the sheriff and Marshal note, what rustler kills a cow and leaves its carcass for the predators?

Jim Breyfogle’s “Songs of Loss and Love” takes a reader to the trenches of the Great War, where Edward lies looking at the corpse of his best friend. A chance encounter with the Fae who called Flanders home before the War is Edward’s best hope to get home and meet with his lady love, his best friend’s sister. But no bargain comes without a price, and the War left its mark besides. How can Edward look into the eyes of his love now?

Daniel J. Minucci’s “The Death of Robespierre” is a masterpiece of horror in the vein of the old pulps: John “Jack” Church is tasked over the winter break with caring for a deceased pulp writer’s last effects and archives. All he has to do is light a kerosene lamp before five p.m. every night and he will be fine. But Jack makes a mistake – and the darkness the lamp keeps back escapes!



“Flyboy,” by Blake Carpenter – author of *Deathbringer* (reviewed here at *Upstream*) – is an alternate-history twist on Wonder Woman’s origin. Reed Diesel is fighting in the Oceanic forces against Imperial Russia, which has already absorbed China and Japan. Now Australia and its allies stand in an uneasy position against the Great Bear, though at the moment, Reed’s main concern is not dying after being shot down by Imperial fighters. When he lands on an island run by nude Amazons, he has to focus on the mission – doesn’t he?

“A Most Exquisite Specimen” is pure horror. Word to the wise – do not trust anyone academically inclined to see only objects where life exists. This tale is followed by “The Twilight Delve Homeowners Association,” which is an homage to Tremors that will give fans of the franchise a smile. Meanwhile, “Midnight Caller” has a neat twist on the men in black. But “Requiem for a Revolver” is, frankly, too short. There is more there and this reviewer wants it!

Jeffrey Scott Sims’ “Egyptian Blue” is an homage to noir detectives, Indiana Jones, and Harry Dresden all rolled into one. When dark magicians threaten the best thing to do is scat, and pray you are quicker than they are. Luckily Sterk Fontaine is very quick – but can he be as fast as a cat?

Rounding out the issue is My Name is John Carter (Part 18), a haunting requiem from John Carter after his return to Earth. It is followed by Yakov Merkin’s prologue for his upcoming graphic novel, Amaranth Angels. The comic has a mournful tone that sets the stage for the novel and will leave readers craving more!

The Characters

Every character in these stories has personality and jumps off the page, but the standing ovations go to Breyfogle, Minucci, and Carpenter, with a shout out to Sims as well. The protagonists in their stories all live and breathe for the reader, and Edward in particular is masterfully presented with his shell shock. That is not seen every day, and it deserves commensurate notice.

Carpenter’s skill with characters is as obvious in “Flyboy” as it is in Deathbringer. He makes sure you root for the protagonists and hiss and boo the antagonists – at least when you’re not biting your nails wondering how the good guys are going to get away, that is! Meanwhile, Minucci does an excellent job in presenting his hero as a wounded man who makes a mistake but has the will to repair the damage he does, even if it might cost him his own life.

Sims’ presentation of character is also excellent, and Burnett has mastered the art of short form fiction with enough character packed inside his works to be fulfilling no matter how small the tale may be. Merkin’s prose depiction of his protagonists is not lost when he transitions to a visual medium, either, making his comic a pitch perfect finale for the issue as a whole.

The World

All the worlds are well-crafted, but again, the standouts are Breyfogle and Carpenter’s tales. Breyfogle captures the rules of faerie well while Carpenter makes one feel the alternate history of his story. They both leave a reader hungry for more stories in these two settings. In terms of atmosphere, Minucci’s piece is one of the best, ratcheting up the suspense and the horror as a reader rushes to the finale. Sims’ adventure has plenty of atmosphere to go with the protagonist’s attitude and it makes for a tense tale.

Runners up in both departments would be “A Most Exquisite Specimen,” “Requiem for a Revolver,” “No-Rooms at Kellogg Inn,” and “The Twilight Delve Homeowners Association.” This doesn’t mean “The Creek Tumors” or “Range of Deceit” lack worldbuilding or atmos-

phere, they just have some stiff competition to beat. They stand among giants, but they make certain to use their height to full advantage in the process!

Politics

None.

Content Warning

There are some explicit descriptions in a couple of stories and there is a single shot in the comic of a deceased person's hand as well. Other than that, however, the issue is clean as a whistle and a mature reader can skip past them without losing any part of the story they are reading.

Who is it for?

Anyone looking for a good summer read will want to pick up this issue. It has something for everyone; romance, tragedy, horror, weird science, Weird West, and more. There is heroism juxtaposed with great villainy, poetry for those hungry to have some lyricism to chew on, and a manga in the back (to read that, you need to flip open the issue from the back and start at what would – in an American comic – be the end of the story and read right to left). The artwork in *Wilted Flowers* is a real treat for the eyes and if a reader wants something beautiful to study, a comic about female starfighter pilots is a good place to start! Those who want worldbuilding they can sink their teeth into will also enjoy this volume and have a hard time not demanding the writers build upon these worlds in their other works. In short, this issue is a veritable buffet for readers looking for something good to read!

Why buy it?

This issue of *Cirsova* is manna in the desert for starving readers, and it just went live today. What are you waiting for? Shoo! Go pick it up and see for yourself just how good it is!

Movies

DC Comics' *The Flash* Review by Jim McCoy

Gather round, my friends, and allow Jimbo to make a confession in front of God and everyone. I freely admit that I have not, in all ways and at all times, necessarily been the biggest fan of superhero movies in the DCEU. This is for reasons that should be fairly obvious to anyone who knows my taste in movies: The DC heroes tend to be broody and boring. The scripts tend to have been written to suck the life out of the audience so that it can be used to clean the toilets. The punch lines aren't funny. The characters aren't believable as people (and no, I don't expect a scientific explanation for why Superman can fly. I just want him to act in a manner that makes sense most of the time and to have a reason for why he doesn't at other times.) or that they try to put too much in (my nickname at one place I used to work was Green Lantern and even I thought that the GL movie was subpar) but with 2023's *The Flash* I can happily (ish) report that it rates a solid "Meh."



Seriously, the story was pretty decently written. I mean, the whole "The Flash lost the Speed Force" thing was okay, and it makes sense that he would try to get it back. The whole multiverse thing is a well established trope for a reason and it was explained by Bruce Wayne about as well as possible, given that he wasn't talking to a twenty-first century geek from the real Earth that would just understand it because it's so commonly used by so many authors. I mean, the plot evolved in a more or less organic manner and was easy enough to follow. Even the one guy who took things WAY TOO FAR had a valid reason for doing what he did and I can't say I'd have acted any differently than he did given his abilities.

The acting was okay and, although I wasn't really a big fan of Michael Keaton as Batman the first time around, it was still nostalgic in a weird sort of way. Ezra Miller was really good as both versions of Barry Allen. The only DC movie I've really liked was Wonder Woman and so it should come as no surprise that I enjoyed Gal Gadot reprising the role. Part of my dislike for DC movies in general started in the early 80s when, even as a small boy...

(Jimbo ducks behind both concealment and cover and calls for close air support and probably a dust-off.)

Christopher Reeve couldn't sell me on his version of Superman circa the early 80s. That was when I was watching the Super Friends and Justice League cartoons and trying to talk my mom into buying me comics at the grocery store and before I was old enough to ride my bike to the comic shop. Still, those movies were kind of painful to watch and, to this day, I'd rather watch a DC cartoon than a live action movie. Even my ex-wife got that. She used to buy me DC cartoons on DVD for Christmas. True story.

And both cuts of Justice League still sucked, Zach Snyder be damned.

I will give The Flash this much: The fight scenes were excellent and, given the powers of the characters involved, believable. Seriously, there's not a whole lot more impressive than the ability of someone moving at faster than the speed of light to apply an ass whooping. I love the way they slow things down. It really does remind me of the way things look in the comics at times, with Barry able to basically stop and think while moving at a quadrillion miles a second.

Well, give or take, anyway. Just work with me.

The special effects were pretty awesome as well, but somebody help me out here: I've seen too much of this lately. Why are movie studios spending all of this money on special effects when they'd do better saving themselves tens of millions in special effects and spending a couple million extra for a decent writer? Or, and I know this is straight sacrilege...

But has DC ever though of hiring a lifelong comic fan as a director instead of some goofball who just doesn't get what fans love about comics? Of course, there are plenty of fans of Trek and Wars wondering the same thing about the people helming the properties in their universes as well.

But I'm digressing.

Seriously, if all you want from a film is awesome visuals and cool fight scenes you can get that from *The Flash* all day long. Watch that movie on a loop, guy, because it's here and it's great.

I may have missed a trick or two here because I've never really been a fan of *The Flash* as a solo comic as I have been of super groups he's been in, but I will say they didn't screw too much up that I could see. Like Barry Allen is Barry Allen except where he's not because he's not intended to be. If you don't get that watch the movie.

And, on the script front, I have to give it this much: Barry does at least take the chance to do something we'd all do if we could. I mean, I can't and the real world doesn't work that way, but damned if I wouldn't have the second I figured out that I could. That much of the movie I felt in a way that I really wish I wouldn't have.

At the end of the day, I'm glad I got a chance to watch *The Flash*. I can't say that about most DC movies I've seen. It's just that there are times when the movie feels like it was outlined by a world class writer and had the details added by a freshman writing major at a commuter college. This movie tried really hard. But hey, I'm pretty sure I got a quick glance of the Golden Age Flash at one point, so that was cool. Watch for it. Tell me if I'm right.

The 7th Voyage of Sinbad Review by Caroline Furlong

If nothing else it will be 88 minutes worth of fun for the whole family to enjoy!

The 1958 film *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad* starred Kerwin Mathews as Sinbad the Sailor, one of the heroes of *One Thousand and One Nights*, the tales reportedly made famous by Scheherazade. The film begins at night, with Sinbad guiding his vessel through fog in search of land to replenish the vessel's supplies. Although his men are certain they are lost and will never find land, Sinbad orders them to take a sounding.

When the sounding indicates that they are coming up on an island, to be confirmed by a call from the crow's nest, the tension eases immediately. Leaving his aide Harufa to guide the ship closer and drop anchor, Sinbad goes below deck to talk to his fiancée. Princess Parisa of Chandra is eager to arrive at Baghdad where she and Sinbad will wed to secure peace between the two kingdoms, though she understands why they must stop to gather supplies.

But while on the island of Colossa collecting water and other necessities, Sinbad and his men encounter the magician Sokurah being chased by an enormous cyclops. Though all hands escape safely, the sorcerer loses the treasure he sought and for which the beast pursued him: a genie's lamp. When Sinbad and then the Caliph of Baghdad refuse to give him passage back to the island to retrieve it, Sokurah shrinks Parisa, angering her father into declaring war on Baghdad.

Desperate to save the princess he loves Sinbad agrees to take the magician back to the island to find the ingredient needed to restore her to her true size. But the voyage back is fraught with peril, and Colossa's natural inhabitants will not be easy to overcome...

This film has long been one of my favorites, primarily for the model work Ray Harryhausen did

for the movie. In contrast to a great many CGI monsters of the modern era, the cyclopes' and other beasts shown on the screen have a realistic feel to them. They look and move like true creatures of that general size would, and while the stop-motion animation is clear, that enhances rather than detracts from the film.

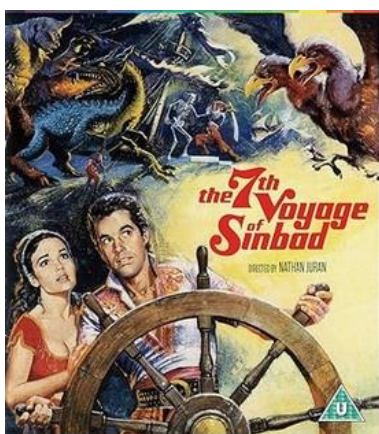
Harryhausen reportedly liked the cobra woman shown early in the story the best, with most viewers remembering the cyclops better. I concur with Harryhausen; the snake-woman was one of the monsters I recalled most vividly from this film, as it was both creepy and plausible. The stop-motion nature of the beast meant it really looked like a woman had been crossed with a cobra to create a monster that may or may not strike at any moment.

My second-favorite monster has to be the dragon. While the cyclopes were indeed impressive, the dragon is absolutely beautiful, in the way that an angry tiger is beautiful. You can admire it from a distance even as you bite your nails and hope the hero will not be eaten by it.

On a recent rewatch of the film, I was struck by the strength of the romance between Sinbad and Parisa. Kathryn Grant is every inch the bright-eyed, somewhat naïve princess who is head-over-heels in love with her betrothed. In a world where romance is generally approached as a game of equal give-and-take, this more straightforward view is not seen often these days. Sinbad and Parisa are not just marrying so as to secure peace or solidify an alliance; they are so deeply in love that the sailor is willing to risk his life and the lives of his men on Colossa in a desperate gamble to save her.

There are few modern movies today that would portray such determined devotion in the hero or such certain faith in the heroine. On the night she is bespelled, Parisa tells Sinbad that she will dream of monsters just so she can envision him coming to rescue her. The scene has some foreshadowing in it, given Sokurah's (Torin Thatcher's) treachery some hours later. But the fact that she falls into Sinbad's arms at the slightest excuse, finds every chance to kiss him, or otherwise throw herself into his expectant embrace is extremely refreshing.

In modern times romance is less about the woman alluring the pursuing man toward her and more about equal give-and-take. While both types of courtship occur in the real world and have their place in fiction, the former has been all but replaced by the latter, which is a shame. It is nice to see a heroine behaving like an actual girl rather than insist on taking care of herself when the man swoops in to her rescue. Parisa is not helpless – she displays cleverness, loyalty, and unshakable faith in her husband-to-be throughout the story.



But she is a woman. She is not capable of fighting a sword-wielding skeleton, avoiding a dragon, or battling a cyclops; these are all things she has to rely on Sinbad and his men to do. That reliance is accepted and reciprocated, as Sinbad asks her to take advantage of her small size to help free him and his men when they are captured. It makes her a more endearing heroine and Sinbad a more admirable hero.

Of equal interest is the moment when Parisa is confronted by a dilemma with regard to a promise she made to free the genie. Unlike Aladdin in the Disney movie of the same name, Parisa wants to free the young spirit but wonders along with Sinbad if it might

be necessary to keep him imprisoned to escape Colossa safely. After a few moments' contemplation, however, Sinbad unhooks the lamp from his belt with the comment: "Well, you must keep your promise." Thereafter Parisa releases the genie from the lamp before joining her fiancé to return to the ship.

What is most striking is the fact that Sinbad considers Parisa's honor more important than their mutual survival. Despite knowing firsthand how the genie can provide them a safe path out of Sokurah's fortress and through the island's many dangers, he is unwilling to put practicality over his future wife's integrity. Thus he decisively solves the dilemma by reminding her that she gave her word before demonstrating that he is willing to brave the dangers of Colossa for her dignity as well as her life. That is something seen even less today than the romance between the two characters.

The 7th Voyage of Sinbad has a great deal to recommend it, but the vibrant romance and the reminder that honor is important to both man and woman has to be one of the most significant items. Are there better stories in film? Certainly. But in this lost day and age, the passion of Sinbad and Parisa along with the note on the sanctity of integrity is not to be underestimated or dismissed. If nothing else it will be 88 minutes worth of fun for the whole family to enjoy!

Novel

Rachel Aaron's Minimum Wage Magic: DFZ Book One Review by Jim McCoy

Let me tell you all a very basic fact about myself, Jimbo Supreme, your humble blogger. I'm from Detroit. I spent a year in Tulsa but outside of that and the occasional trip, I've lived here since 1976 (I'm a bicentennial baby, baby!) and I love it here. This is the picture I took when I got home from Oklahoma.

So you'll imagine my happiness when I wandered across Rachel Aaron's Minimum Wage Magic (DFZ Book 1) and realized that DFZ stood for Detroit Free Zone. Yes! Yes! YES!! Somebody finally wrote a fantasy story set in my hometown! That was followed quickly by "She better not screw this up! This is my hometown!" Believe me, us Motown types get a bit emotional about our city. It's not just me.

But anyway...

Aaron has me hyped up for this series. She missed one or two details about the city (i.e., a Great Lakes flood would have to wipe out almost the whole state to get Detroit and Troy only comes south to 14 Mile which is nowhere near 8 Mile, Detroit's northern border and the namesake of the Eminem movie, 8 Mile) but overall this is a terrific story which totally never had me tearing my hair out. I mean, except for those two times.

Part of it is the way in which Aaron has remade the city. The Detroit of the DFZ is a living entity. Literally. It has been taken over by first one goddess then another. The second one wields so much control she can move the buildings and roads in her city. Aaron has turned my the whole city into a huge version of the Hogwarts staircases and I love it. Lord knows I'd love to see I 75

move closer to someplace I need it to be while I'm on it. Probably. Maybe. I mean, it might be a little scarier, but if it saves me five minutes..

Yeah, Detroiters are like that.

This also makes Minimum Wage Magic more enjoyable if you're a Detroit. She didn't put a building on the wrong intersection, the building moved. That road DOES go there and it has for the last six months at least. Honestly, I love this whole concept. I'm glad I don't have to live in Aaron's Detroit (imagine getting lost on the way to your favorite Coney Island). It's a lot of fun to envision.

And lawlessness is the rule. The goddess (who I don't seem to remember as having a name) who rules the city isn't big on rules. Magic has returned. Cybernetic implants are common and easy to get if you've got the money. Think Shadowrun (the Will Smith film Bright was based on Shadowrun if you're not familiar) only it's more fun despite having no metahumans. Oh, and Detroit instead of Seattle.

Enter Opal Yong-ae, our main characters. She's a Cleaner, meaning that she cleans out the homes of people who have passed with no known heirs or whose family refuses to make a claim. Think Storage Wars writ large. She bids on places in auctions then goes in to clean them out, hoping to be able to sell the stuff she sells for more than she paid for it, thus making her living. She had been pretty good at it prior to the last couple months during which all of her auction wins have been losers as far as turning a profit. But then she finally comes across an apartment full of stuff with massive spellwork on it and finds out what it's for, and we're off and running.

Along the way, we get organized crime (does it still count as organized crime in a city with no law and order? I'm confused now.) shootouts, magic fights (more on that in a moment) and some pretty decent detective work. Also a dragon, because dragons are cool. Of course this dragon is way uncool and quite frankly deserves a beating but that's neither here nor there and I don't do spoilers.

Opal is an enigma. She has a fancy degree but she doesn't want to use it. She could live in luxury but she'd rather risk her life and financial well being by cleaning out spaces formerly occupied by the dead. All she has to do is not pay a debt and she can be on a private plane in the morning. Minimum Wage Magic centers around her struggles to pay that debt. She makes no sense at all and yet I get her and respect her for what she's willing to do to do her. I like this chick.



Most of the mages in Minimum Wage Magic are very scientific in their use of magic. They use runes. They gather power carefully. They distribute their power judiciously and channel it carefully with the intent of producing a single, predictable effect. Think of a surgeon carefully removing a patch of skin cancer and deftly wielding a sharpened scalpel while making sure to get it all and leave minimal or no scarring.

Not Opal. No, Opal using magic is the rough equivalent of seeing a skin cancer and trying to knock it off with a thirty pound sledgehammer. What she lacks in finesse she makes up for in raw enthusiasm and

a tendency to overdo things a bit. I have never been known for my subtlety in any way shape or for, my chemistry partner in high school used to refer to me as “Ramjet Boy” for my tendency to pour things too quickly, yet I can’t feel like Opal has me beat. Her raw talent and ability are amazing. Her lack of patience and skill are frightening. Opal is definitely not a weapon I’d want pointed at me. Or the guy standing next to me. Or, put bluntly, the guy down the street. A few blocks away is probably okay. She does, however, get results.

I’m kind of embarrassed that I hadn’t found Aaron’s work before now, because a brief look at her author page shows that she not only has a lot more books published, but that there is at least one other DFZ series. I’ll be burrowing into her other stuff soon.

Bottom Line: 5.0 out of 5 magic eggs

Minimum Wage Magic
Rachel Aaron
Aaron/Bach, 2018

Minimum Wage Magic is available at https://www.amazon.com/dp/B07JWFDM2F?k=minimum+wage+magic+by+rachel+aaron&crd=2BAPH2ZT1WXC9&sprefix=minimum+wag&linkCode=ll1&tag=jisawsffre-20&linkId=6cc56f744322aae7a39942cfb34ba364&language=en_US&ref_=as_li_ss_tl

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Sercon

Dean Ing Bio-Bibliography by Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D. N3F Historian

Dean Charles Ing (1931 - 2020) was a science fiction (SF) author, who also wrote stories in the techno-thriller genre.

He was born on June 17, 1931, in Austin, Texas. He earned a bachelor's degree from Fresno State University in 1956, a master's degree from San Jose State University in 1970, and a doctoral degree from the University of Oregon in 1974.

During his lifetime, he was a member of the U. S. Air Force, an aerospace engineer, and a university professor with a doctorate in communications theory.

Publications

His first published SF story was “Tight Squeeze” in *Astounding Science Fiction* (February, 1955, issue). This story is still available on the Internet as an audio book on Chip Slater’s Storytime Theater.



Ing's *Soft Targets* (1979) is a tale of future terrorism.

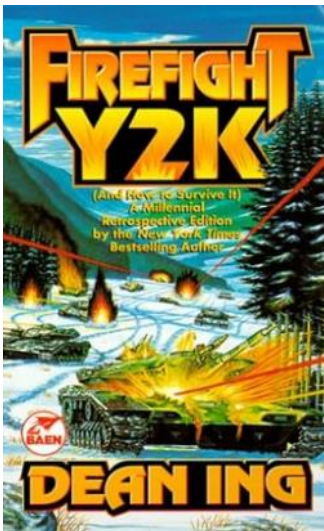
Following the death of fellow SF author Mack Reynolds in 1983, Ing was asked to finish some of Reynolds' incomplete manuscripts, including *Eternity* (1984), *Home, Sweet Home 2010 A. D.* (1984), *The Other Time* (1984), *Trojan Orbit* (1985), and *Deathwish World* (1986), with the last book being a popular futuristic thriller.

Ing's later novel, *The Ransom of Black Stealth One* (1989), was a *New York Times* bestseller.

He wrote or co-wrote more than 30 books, co-authoring some of them with his friends Jerry Pournelle, S. M. Stirling, and Leik Myrabo (see below).

Novel Series

The book series he wrote included the following: "Quantrill" (3 novels, 1981 – 1985); and "Aerospace Systems" (3 novels, 1989 – 1993); plus he also contributed to Larry Niven's "Known Space" series (2 novels, 1988 – 1989).



Collections

Ing's short fiction collections included *High Tension* (1982) and *Firefight Y2K* (1987).

Non-Fiction Works

Mutual Assured Survival (with Jerry Pournelle), 1984.

Future of Flight (with Leik Myrabo), 1985.

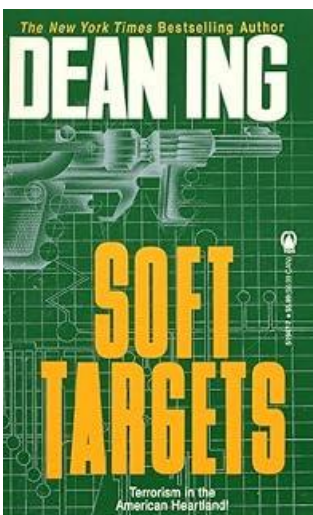
Marriage/Family

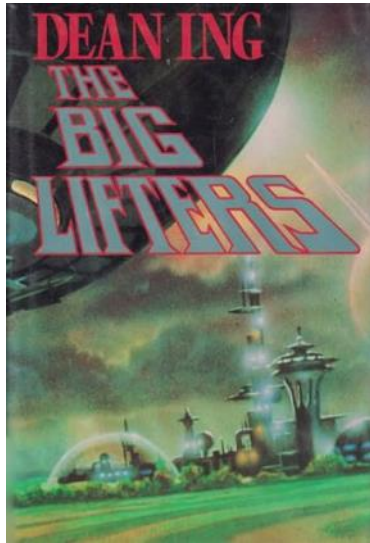
Ing married Geneva (Gina) Lorene Baker in 1959, and they had two daughters together.

The family moved to Oregon in 1970, a state that would become their home base for the rest of their lives, except for a brief three-year adventure to Missouri -- where Gina received her college degree while her husband taught at Northwest Missouri State University, Maryville, Missouri.

Awards/Honors/Recognitions

During his career, Ing was nominated for several genre awards, including Hugo, Nebula, and Locus Awards.





His short story, “Devil You Don’t Know,” was both a Hugo Award and Nebula Award nominee in 1979.

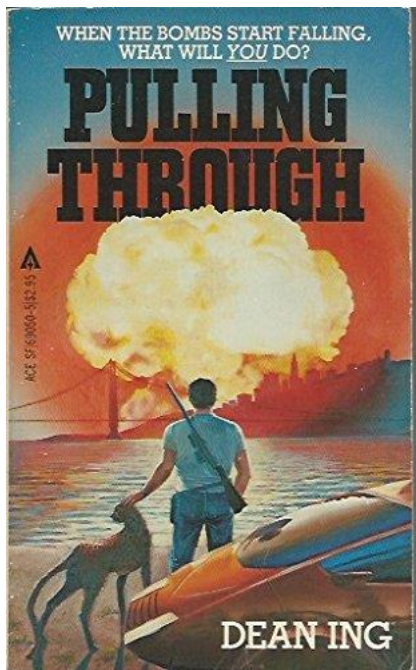
He was honored at several conventions, including Eucon 1 in 1983; ICON 9 and AdAstra IV in 1984; MosCon VIII in 1986; IbCon ‘90; Con-Version VIII in 1991; Windycon XIX in 1992; and Chattacon XIX in 1994.

Robert A. Heinlein dedicated his 1985 novel *The Cat Who Walks Through Walls* to Ing and eight of the other members of the Citizens' Advisory Council on National Space Policy.

Criticisms

One genre critic noted: “Much of Ing's fiction includes detailed, practical descriptions of techniques and methods which would be useful in an individual or group survival situation.”

Fellow genre author, Spider Robinson, once called Ing “something of a moralistic writer.”



Some Concluding Comments

Ing believed that a person’s chances of survival are best in a small town like Ashland, Oregon, where he lived, beginning in 1980.

He built his own car in 1965: the Mayan Magnum coupe. It recently sold on eBay for \$30,500.

He died on July 21, 2020, at his home in Ashland, survived by his wife and daughters.

Sources

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



Cylon Assault by Jose Sanchez