

Tightbeam 368

May 2025



Dolphin Island
by Tiffanie Gray

Tightbeam 368

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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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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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Public (non-voting) memberships are free. Send payments to Kevin Trainor, PO Box 143, Tonopah NV 89049. Pay online at N3F.org. PayPal contact is treasurer@n3f.org.

Editorial Note

We particularly thank our regular contributing authors, including Heath Row and Cedar Sanderson. Heath Row's many works are collected by him in The STF Amateur, issues of which are found in The N3F FranklinZine. Cedar Sanderson is cedar.sanderson on Facebook and cedarwrites.com elsewhere. Many fine reviewers appear in Upstream Reviews.

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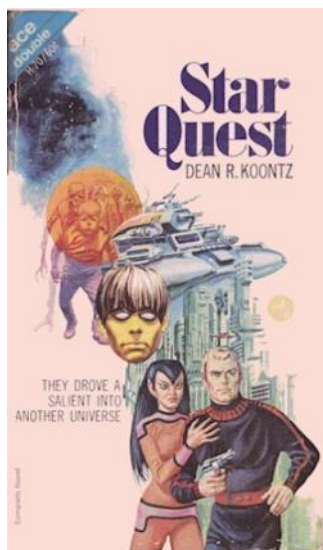
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Book

Star Quest by Dean Koontz

Review by Heath Row



Before Dean Koontz became a best-selling author of suspense thrillers, he wrote about a dozen science fiction novels. Several of his books have even been nominated for awards such as the Locus, Hugo, British Fantasy Award, World Fantasy Award, Bram Stoker Award, Prometheus Award, and others. And Koontz's first novel, 1968's *Star Quest*, was published as an Ace Double, H-70, opposite Emil Petaja's *Doom of the Green Planet*. Koontz was 23 at the time.

I didn't read Petaja's contribution to the double because the e-book edition I read was sourced from a 2003 scan made by "BuddyDk." Used copies of the paperback generally sell online for \$35-\$95. That price point might make sense to collectors of doubles or Koontz completists. Otherwise, I'd seek more affordable options.

Featuring a wonderful painted cover by Gray Morrow that reminds me a little of Laser Books' consistent cover design—perhaps because of the placement of the face in the center, the 127-page novel was a surprisingly fun read. It's not a bad beginning for a notable author.

Since those early days, Koontz has appeared on the New York Times Best Seller list with 14 hardcovers and 16 paperbacks reaching No. 1. He's published more than 100 novels, selling more than 450 million copies of his work. I've yet to assess whether his pseudonyms—including David Axton, Deanna Dwyer, K.R. Dwyer, Leigh Nichols, and Brian Coffey—dealt with genre early in his career, but even his more recent works could be considered slipstream, incorporating elements of horror, fantasy, science fiction, and mystery.

As an Ace Double, *Star Quest* does exactly what it says on the tin. And then some. Two groups, the Romaghins and the Setessins, have been engaged in ongoing combat for a thousand years, disrupting the rest of their universe. A peasant on a backwater planet has been abducted against his will, pressed into military service as a disembodied brain encased in an armored battle suit: Jumbo Ten. Because of a narcotic sedative malfunction—"a vial ... run dry before its time"—while attacking the Romaghin home world, the mind and pilot inside the Setessin technological warrior regain consciousness and self-awareness, realizing that he's not just a mindless fighting machine.

Tohm remembers the attack on his home world, his abduction, the abduction of his mate Tarnilee, and select subsequent events. So he decides to go AWOL. Decanting a new humanoid body—a convenient function of the battle suit, should it crash or become otherwise inoperative—he encounters Floating Library No. 7, on which he gets up to speed on current events beyond his homeworld before falling in with interstellar smugglers, meeting his first mutant, and putting together the pieces of where Tarnilee might have been taken, to be sold into slavery as a concubine, or worse.

The mutants, or muties, more commonly, are a third party of sorts, working against the Romaghins and the Setessins. Our protagonist, Tohm, travels to Basa II, where he expects to find Tarnilee at a slave market. The portion of the book in which Koontz details the disagreements between two political factions, the RadRi and the RadLef, might seem familiar.

On Basa II, after freeing a mutant from the smugglers, Tohm meets a group of mutants—also encountering another who’s sort of a living psychedelic hallucinogen, generally feared—he becomes involved with the mutant rebellion. “[Rebels also identified with the common people,” Koontz writes. “You gain something when you lose normality...”]

Jilted by Tarnilee, who’s found that her new life is preferable to her former status as a backwater peasant, Tohm finds new love with a fellow, feline rebel. The discussion of family love being displaced by self-interest and, later, lust (personified by the living hallucinogens) is also thought-provoking. Also of note: the mutants’ collective ability to physically displace entire cities and, eventually, almost an entire universe.

There are a lot of neat ideas in this first novel by Koontz: brains encased in battle suits, self-cloning, the floating library, diversity of mutation, and the transference of a universe through an interdimensional rent. The writing is relatively light, perfect for an Ace Double. Based on his later work such as *Whispers* and *Demon Seed*, I never would have imagined that a 23-year-old Koontz wrote such a thing. I’m glad that he did.

Comics

Ascendant: Star Spangled Squadron Review by Jim McCoy



I love this concept. One day, there are now superheroes or villains. The next day, they’re everywhere. The US government decides to form a team (shades of both *The Avengers* and *Justice League America*) and picks a guy named American Eagle to lead the team. I like this guy. His teammates are cool too. The team ends up including everyone from a former firefighter to a sports fan to an exotic dancer. There’s nothing missing here lifestyle wise.

I’ll be the first to admit that part of the reason I love the guy is because he’s a firefighter when he first gets his powers and my daughter is about to complete firefighter training, but so what? (And for the record, Riley having the courage to run into a burning building does mean that my daughter has bigger balls than I do.) Who doesn’t love firefighters? They run into burning buildings and save people. They’re superheroes only they’re just as vulnerable as the people they’re saving. Not all of the heroes are from professions that the common man might consider to be “respectable” but that fits. Not only does a somewhat suspicious background not disqualify some from doing good but, let’s face it, there’s more than one way to skin a cat and sometimes the non-standard approach is the best.

The villain in this *Star Spangled Squadron* is just flat out cool. I love the power. I love the gimmick. I love the attitude. I was never quite sure exactly what his motivations were but he was one bad dude. It was fun and he was a believable opponent against a super team.

There is an awful lot of story here. I didn’t keep an exact count but you’ve got more than just a couple of origin stories here. That’s a lot to fit into one trade paperback but I think it’s necessary given the way the universe is built. This wasn’t a Marvel Cinematic Universe type story that spans several editions before they even form the super group. Instead it has more of an RPG type feel and that makes sense.

It turns out that *Star Spangled Squadron* is the first book in a series inspired by

the *Ascendant* TTRPG. I haven't played it but it sounds pretty cool. I played both *Heroes Unlimited* and the DC RPG back in the day, so I'm into those kinds of things. *Star Spangled Squadron* is not written to quite reflect an RPG group playing but it's still a lot of fun and the plot is logical and flows, unlike a lot of what happens at a RPG session.

And I'd kind of like to get my hands on a copy of the *Ascendant* RPG and play it. It can be awfully hard to get people together now so it probably won't happen but let me know if you're down and maybe we can do something on Roll20 and Discord. I'm usually a forever DM/GM so I can cover that end. I just need the players.

The art is beautiful. The characters are fully formed and muscular and have a look similar to some of the Renaissance art that I studied when I took an art history class back in...

Uhh... Well... It wasn't last week. Let's put it that way.

There were explosions and damage and at least one laboratory. There was a fire. There were all kinds of exciting scenes well rendered and exciting to gaze upon.

There were also some full page pieces after the conclusion of the story. I'm not sure if they were just there because awesome or if they were meant as alternate covers. I do know that they'd make some excellent posters though. Seriously, those were some hot footage.

I will say this much, though. The final page says something about "the extreme aesthetic of heavy metal music" that leaves me a bit non-plussed. Maybe this is because I'm a member of the Great Unwashed, being a guy who doesn't really listen to anything heavier than Guns and Roses, but I'm missing the heavy metal connection here. That's not really a complaint. I mean, I love the art. I just find that part confusing. If one of you read *Star Spangled Squadron* and has a better take on this let me know. Then we can headbang to *Bohemian Rhapsody* or sumfin' because that's about the only song I headbang to.

All in all though, *Star Spangled Squadron* was a good way to spend an hour and I'm waiting (im)patiently for the second one to come out. It's sure to be a rollicking good time as well.

Bottom Line: 4.5 out of 5 Tsar Bombas

Dream Diary #3 (Winter 2025)

Review by Heath Row

The STF Amateur

This 48-page, full-color comic book by Larry Johnson continues capturing his ongoing illustration of his dream life. That approach to cartooning resonates with Cutch Tuttle's work in *Strange Times* below, though their stylistic applications differ. Color is a repeated theme throughout this issue, as Johnson experiments with different color schemes, the opening editorial considering the relationship between whether people dream in black and white or color and the development of television.

Topics that arose in Johnson's dreams include motorcycle gangs, a shootout at a hospital, a "cave locomotive," an indignant men's club, an obelisk, cat poop, apartment life, tattoos, office work, a living doll, nuclear disaster, and record albums. The dreams occurred between 2004 and 2021.

As always, Johnson's approach to page layout and his creative use of panels is consistently impressive. The narrative text is deadpan and personal, and the creator considers a handful of "guest stars" in a page-long text piece before the review column, which draws on United Fanzine Organization (<https://unitedfanzineorganization.weebly.com>) member commentary in *Tetragrammaton Fragments*, the UFO newsletter.

Of the imagery in this issue, I was particularly struck by the “Boom” page of the hospital piece, the muted color palette of “The Obelisk” and “Apartment Life,” the airy spaciousness of the first two pages of “Cat Poop,” the portrayal of fire in “Office Engineer,” and Johnson’s surprising reaction to the “charred, burnt” living doll.

Available for \$8 from Larry Johnson, LEJ Comics, 31 Greenbrook Road, Hyde Park, MA 02136; Lew Brown1@verizon.net; <https://sites.google.com/view/larryjohnsoncomics/home>.

Jenny Dunnigan: Paladin #1

Review by Heath Row

The STF Amateur

This 32-page black-and-white comic written and drawn by John Yeo Jr. takes place “somewhere in Ireland,” offering a fantastic origin story of the titular character. A mysterious figure, a wizard, pays several diminutive goblins for services rendered before checking on the status of an arrangement made with the Scarlet Gaze.

Dunnigan seems to be a drug-using motorcycle gang hanger-on, “totally gassed up on China white,” who wants to go home. Instead, her supposed boyfriend dumps her in the woods, risking an overdose. A voice in her head, “Declan,” offers to help her as she’s buried alive in an unmarked grave.

Waking to encounter a horned female demon “trapped here for 200 years,” Dunnigan’s life is extended, and she comes to on the couch of Declan, the paladin of the Winter family. He intends her to be his successor. While Yeo is a capable artist, the comic is relatively verbose, and the small typeface occasionally challenging to read.

Regardless, Dunnigan seems poised to become embroiled in the politics of warring families of wizards, and there are also gnomes involved. The scenes in which the reborn paladin rises from the grave to dispatch the motorcyclists, destroying an automobile with a gesture, are effectively action oriented, but overall, it’s a slow, text-heavy read.

Almost a cross between Tim Vigil’s Faust and Steve S. Crompton’s Demi the Demoness, this is an example of good girl art gone bad. The issue ends with a thank-you list pinup and a two-page text piece, “The Long Road Here...,” which details the series’ history dating back to 1992. Reportedly, there’s also a family-friendly version of the issue available, but I’m not sure how this could possibly be sanitized thusly.

Available for \$5 from Screaming Monkey Comics, <https://www.screamingmonkeycomics.com/john-s-books>, screamerboy23@hotmail.com.

Fanzines

Perryscope

Review by Mark Nelson

Perryscope is a personal zine published “mostly monthly” by long-term Australian SF fan Perry Middlemiss. Amongst his many contributions to SFdom I’ll only mention that he was chair of Aussiecon Three (1999 Worldcon) and co-chairman of Aussiecon 4 (2010 Worldcon). Four regular features in his zine that he writes himself are: What I’ve Been Talking About Lately, notes from his monthly podcast with fellow Australian SF fan David Grigg, What I’ve Been Reading Lately, What I’ve Been Watching Lately - TV, and What I’ve Been Watching Lately - Film.

One of the movies that Perry mentions in this issue is *The Death of Stalin* (2017). I've enjoyed watching this, having seen it a couple of times on SBS (Special Broadcasting Service). (SBS is Australia's multicultural and multilingual national broadcaster). I have to watch it holding my phone, so I can look up all the named individuals and find out what they did to get where they were in 1953 and what happened to them afterwards. It's only in the final scene that Brezhnev makes an appearance. How did he go from being a relatively minor figure, I assume, at the time of Stalin's death in 1953, to becoming General Secretary in 1964? In 1953 he was both a member of the Communist Party's central committee and a member of the Secretariat. He must have been a reasonably significant figure in the hierarchy, if not yet in the top echelon.

In issue 51 (February 2025) Julian Warner reviewed Graham Greene's *The Human Factor* (1978) and the 1979 movie of the same name. I've been interested in the pairing between a novel and its movie adaptation for just over three decades: ever since my mum enrolled in a course at the Derby WEA (Workers' Educational Association) on this theme. The premise of the course was that the students read the novels before watching the movie. Clearly, there are restrictions on the combinations of books/movies that the instructor can pick. The novels must be easily accessible and the movies have to be ones that can be sourced.

The N3F is, in case we have forgotten, the National Fantasy Fan Federation and has the motto "Science And Fantasy". Let me therefore pose you with the following question. Suppose that you are running a course on "Science and Fantasy: their novels and movie adaptations". Which novel/movie combinations would you include? For the purposes of answering this question let's cap the maximum number of combinations at eight. Let's further assume that any novel you pick is readily accessible. Let's also assume that you won't experience any difficulty in acquiring a DVD containing each movie.

Supplementary Question. Let's open up the literary field to include short stories. Would you replace any of your novel/movie pairings by a short story/movie pairing?

Beam #18 (November 2024)

Review by Heath Row

While Beam is available as a PDF, the unofficial, occasional journal of the Unusual Suspects also offers a small print run. I received a copy because I'd sent in a letter of comment (dated November 2022), included in this issue. Reading that missive several years later was an interesting experience in time travel. Beam #17 was published in October 2022. This has been a long time coming!

Edited by Nic Farey and Ulrika O'Brien, the issue opens with an editorial by Farey titled "Living in the Past." It addresses the Balkanization of the faniverse, fostered by marginalized subdivisions based on doctrine, rejection of new technology, and nostalgia. The piece sets the content for the issue to come.

O'Brien's "Bungle in the Jungle" explores her ongoing changes in political thought. Long voting Libertarian, she registered as a Democrat—still was at the time of this writing—but has since swung back to the right based on her social media posts. This essay offers a more nuanced view of that development, suggesting that it's less the result of support for President Trump and his administration and more a rejection of the first draft of history as reported by mainstream media.

Indicating that she's been "red-pilled," a conservative adoption of the phrase from the *Matrix* series of movies, she claims disinterest in being a conspiracy theorist but recognizes a tendency toward perceived heresy in some fannish quarters. Inspired by the writing of Matt Taibbi, she lists other writers she now follows, suggesting that they're liberal and lefty, though some might claim they're right wing. Even if they're not entirely right wing, this "rogues gallery"

does have right-wing tendencies and demonstrates an assortment of anti-vaccination, anti-liberalism, anti-Barack Obama, pro-Tea Party, media criticism (always a valid exercise), left-libertarian, evangelical Christian, and similar tendencies.

While not all of that resonates with me, the people she now takes inspiration from aren't explicitly on the far right but are more aligned with "progressive" third-party thinking. Which introduced its own spoiler effect in the most recent election. So I was surprised by her seemingly pro-Trump stances online.

I disagree with her lack of faith in professional journalism. "The purpose of the press is to spin plausible myths to support existing power structures," O'Brien writes. As a former newspaper reporter and copy editor, and magazine writer and editor, that was not my experience. If anything, the purpose of journalism is to portray the world as it is so people can make informed decisions. I don't believe it's possible to be purely objective—the press in other countries is more open about institutional political ideology—but in my experience, the owners and publishers of media (the business side) have the vested interest in supporting existing power structures, in most cases, free-market capitalism and pro-business forces. One thing we can agree on entirely, "the landscape is a very scary fucking place." May we hike a trail of love and empathy instead of one of division and exclusion.

Rich Coad provides a borderline faanfiction story considering the importance of movie posters. Ian Sales reports on three cons in three countries in four weeks, exploring the state of Nordic fandom. Lee Wood weighs in from Chickadoodle Farm in New Zealand, addressing local stock animals, tattoo art, and the generational divide.

In "The Peacock," Terry Karney continues the focus on wildlife, detailing the relocation of a lovesick bird. Jacqueline Monahan reviews David Langford's collection of con reports, *Don't Try This at Home*. William Breiding explores a memoir by Will Sergeant of the musical group Echo and the Bunnymen. Farey moves on from reading online news to honest-to-Ghu books, including work by Brian Aldiss and A.E. van Vogt.

And a 12-page letter column blends reader comment and correspondence with editorial response. Bob Jennings, Eli Cohen, and I continue the discussion of the fracturing and factionalization of fandom; Gary Mattingly disambiguates between being alone and loneliness; and those "also heard from" are quoted briefly.

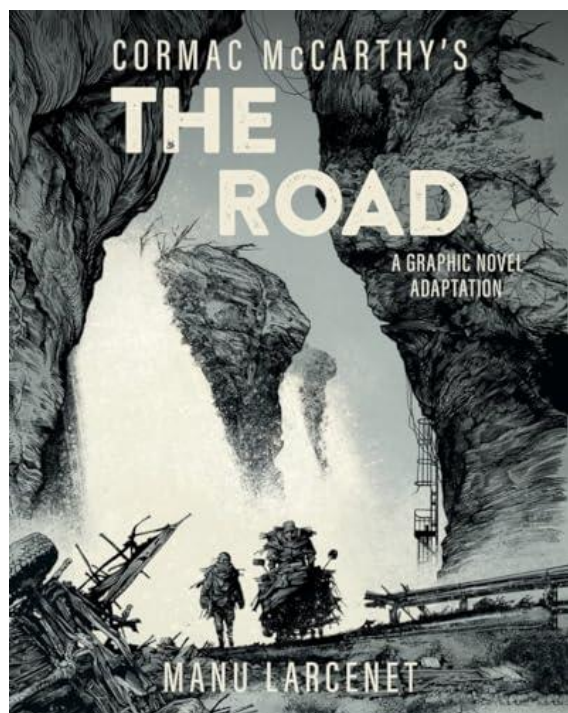
Beam is a fun, wide-ranging, and thought-provoking read. It's a good reminder that science fiction and fandom occur in a context—the world is a system—and part of the value of participating in the community is learning how to walk alongside people with whom you might not always agree.

Inquire via Nic Farey, 2657 Rungsted St., Las Vegas, NV 89142; fareynic@gmail.com or Ulrika O'Brien, 418 Hazel Ave. N, Kent, WA 98030; ulrika.obrien@gmail.com. The fanzine is also available at <https://efanzines.com/Beam/Beam18.pdf>.

Graphic Novel

Cormac McCarthy 's *The Road*: A Graphic Novel Adaptation by Manu Larcenet. Review by Thomas E. Simmons

The literary output of Cormac McCarthy (1933-2023) included one dozen novels. Most are categorized as Westerns or Southern Gothic. *The Road* (2006) was his only science fiction novel, and it's barely science fiction. Post-apocalyptic is a better genre-descriptor. Or even horror.



The adjectives commonly associated with *The Road* are: dismal, grueling, grim, austere, haunting, heart-breaking, and bleak. It's no playful romp. It lacks even a single dram of humor or lightheartedness. The sky is perpetually downcast and the landscape is literally ashen. When it rains, the ash turns to mud. When the wind blows, the characters don handkerchief-masks to keep the particulates out of their throats and lungs.

The end of the world as we know it is narrated in the novel by just seven words: "The bombs fell, and the world ended." There are survivors, including a man and his son. They push a metal shopping cart loaded with essentials down a state highway littered with wreckage. In the graphic novel, the end of the world occupies the first seven panels, each a wordless billowing of black smoke; this leaves any suggestion at the etiology for the apocalypse shrouded in non-explanation.

It's a straightforward graphic novel. It's entirely linear. The closest thing to a flashback occurs when the two characters – a father and a son of about ten – refer to the son's mother's death as they trek southward toward the coast and a warmer climate.

The fixed linearity and total absence of an explanation for the catastrophic extinction event underscores the fable-like feel of the tale. It doesn't read like a fairytale, exactly, it boasts such pinprick realism that it induced nausea in this reader at certain points. There are more corpses than survivors and the survivors that the father and son encounter on the road are more monstrous (for the most part) than the decomposing carcasses. In a world in which nothing grows and even all the birds and fish are poisoned, the only edibles are found in the dwindling supply of canned, powdered, or freeze-dried foods. Or people themselves.

Cannibalism is widespread. The father and the son face two principal antagonists: starvation and being eaten.

There is one particularly meta moment after the pair have squared off against an attacker; the father shoots him dead. "You wanted to know what the bad guys look like. Now you know," the father says. His son asks, "B-but ... are we still the good guys?" The man pauses for a moment before answering: "Yes...and we always will be." The father is assuring himself. But it's as if the author is confirming the same for the reader as well.

What distinguishes good from bad is what you eat – and what you refuse to eat – even if it means starvation. What also separates the good and the bad is empathy. There's not much space for empathy, though the son helps his father retain what meager morsels of generosity toward other survivors as can be preserved.

The father-son relationship highlights the other moral distinction between the good and the bad in this dour landscape: family, or what remains of it. Until the very last pages, no one encountered by the protagonists is part of a family. There are solitary vagabonds. There are communal groups of bad guys. There are shackled victims. But except for the pair, there are no children; there are no parents.

The contrast of the dyad family unit with the marauders, the corralled victims, and the occasional nomad speaks to the core of what makes a grotesque tale highly engrossing. The father

and the son traverse the dangers of the road because a road (hopefully) leads somewhere. It is not an end in itself.

The others on the road consume each other. For them, survival is the only end and they find plenty of space for unfettered destruction of anyone weaker than they are on the road. They are both literally and figuratively consumers, and nothing more.

But the father and the son are trekking in search of more than a better supply of physical nourishment. They are trekking to connect with other families. They are trekking on the road because it leads somewhere else.

This accomplished but unsmiling adaptation is a masterpiece. While recommended per its release materials for anyone age thirteen and up, I would share it with youngsters reservedly.

Manga

Neon Genesis Evangelion Vols. 1-2 Review by Heath Row

I stayed up to read the first two volumes of the Viz Communications edition of Neon Genesis Evangelion. Those two volumes collect #1-6 and Book Two #1-5 in their entirety. Based on an original concept by Gainax and written and drawn by Yoshiyuki Sadamoto, the manga is a good example of Japanese mecha manga. In this case, the manga preceded an anime; the manga was published to promote the 1995-1996 TV series. Installments of the manga were published in *Shōnen Ace*, and the final chapter was released as late as 2013.



The gist of the story is that in 2015—then 20 years in the future—humanity is still recovering from the Second Impact, a global catastrophe that occurred in 2000. More than half of the human population died. Tokyo has been destroyed, as has Tokyo-2 in Nagano Prefecture. Mysterious kaiju dubbed Angels are now threatening Tokyo-3.

A 14-year-old boy has been summoned by his distant, inattentive father to pilot a giant robot designed to fight the Angels. The protagonist is somehow especially well suited to synchronize with the “Eva,” and after a few halting steps, his control of and facility with the mecha are remarkable.

In addition to the fight scenes with the Angels, the manga focuses on three main themes. One concentrates on the estranged relationship between the father and son, and the son’s hunger for his father’s praise and recognition. Another explores the protagonist’s emotional development, primarily his lackluster engagement with life—and growing lust for the same. And the third pairs the teenager with a 29-year-old woman who serves as both commanding officer and caretaker. He moves in with her and a... penguin. Their growing friendship introduces another adult perspective, as well as some comedic levity and age-gap frisson. There’s enough character development and storyline to make this manga more than a sequence of fight scenes. There’s also enough mystery to inspire the reader to seek out subsequent volumes. What are the Angels? Where did they come from? What do they want? Also, who is the young woman who piloted the Eva before our young hero came on the



scene? The Wikipedia entry about the manga and anime suggests that there's a lot yet to unfold: cloning, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and a countdown-oriented element of risk. That doesn't come up in these two volumes, but will they be able to defeat the remaining Angels and avoid the Third Impact and world annihilation?

Movies

Devil of the Desert Against the Son of Hercules

Review by Heath Row

The STF Amateur



Originally released as *Anthar the Invincible* in Italy in 1964, the movie was retitled for inclusion in Avco Embassy's syndicated television series *The Sons of Hercules*. That series featured edited versions of 14 peplums, a peplum being a sword-and-sandal flick. On its own, there's little of the fantastic in the movie, though it is genre adjacent. As part of the series, however, if Anthar is a son of Hercules, we get a little closer.

The movie tells the tale of the evil Ganor seizing control of a kingdom after assassinating the sultan. With the prince imprisoned and the escaped princess sold into slavery—later rescued by Anthar—the usurper is able to prevent revolt among the sultan's former subjects.

Anthar boldly ventures into the kingdom to rescue the prince, who then leads an attack by hill tribes still loyal to the sultan. A youthful deaf-mute character is intended to provide a comedic counterpoint to the sword-and-sandal action but serves more as a middleman when the main characters aren't with each other or able to communicate.

At the end of the movie, there's one scene of visual note. Ganor has a hall of mirrors in which he can trap enemies and tradesmen he wants to manipulate or kill. That setup is visually impressive, and the scene in which he kills one such victim, stalking his prey through the maze, is quite effective. At the end of the movie, Ganor finds himself trapped inside the hall of mirrors with Anthar, who stalks him. That might be the best part of the movie.

Final Destination 2

Review by Heath Row

A couple of weeks ago, a friend and I watched this 2003 horror flick on video tape. Of the relatively recent horror franchises, *Final Destination* isn't bad. You don't really need to have seen *Final Destination* to understand what's going on in the second instance, but it's helpful, mostly because the presence of recurring characters will be more meaningful.

The gist of the series is that there's a tragic accident—in the first, an airplane disaster, in the second a multi-car accident—during which people who were “supposed” to die don't. Having cheated Death, the survivors are then targeted one by one to clean the slate and balance the books. An innovation introduced in the sequel is that the second wave of deaths occurs in reverse order rather than in the sequence they would have originally occurred. Ooh: Tricky!



Recurring characters include the sole survivor from the first movie—a final girl—who’s sequestered herself in an insane asylum to seek isolation and safety. Tony Todd also returns, portraying a somewhat blasé coroner and at one point breaking the third wall. Also known for his role in the Candyman series, his presence is brief but notable.

Even more notable, however, is Michael Landes’s role as a police officer investigating the aftermath of the accident. Landes had previously starred in the television series *Special Unit 2*. (Emulators & Engines #14)

Death is never visually portrayed in the movie, though it qualifies as supernatural horror. Instead, Death is represented by a confluence of signifiers and signs, or harbingers, such as a flock of crows. If you’re able to recognize such premonitions, usually dangerous coincidences or accidents waiting to happen, you might be able to cheat Death once again.

Final Destination 2 is a light-hearted series of sequential impending dooms, some expected, some unexpected. There’s not a lot of substance, necessarily, but it’s a fun if dangerous ride. Rest assured, that Final Destination 2 wasn’t the final entry in the franchise. The series includes six films, 10 novels, and two comic books. Interestingly, the first movie was based on an unproduced spec script for *The X-Files*. Though the franchise has taken on a life—and taken lives—of its own, it’s not a bad idea for an episode of *The X-Files*. It would have worked quite well!

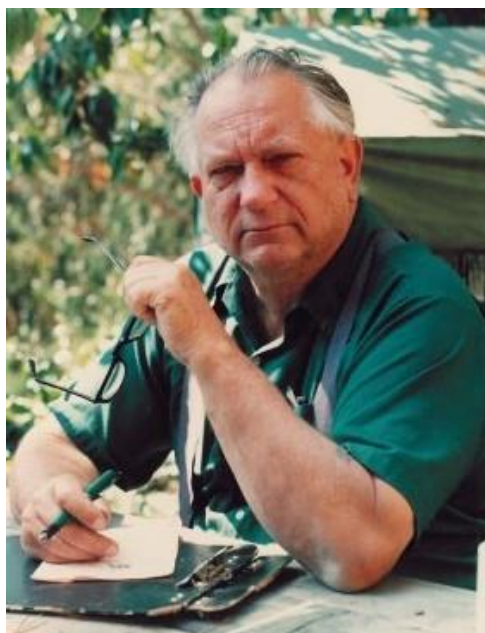
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Jack Vance Bio-Bibliography

by

Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D.

N3F Historian

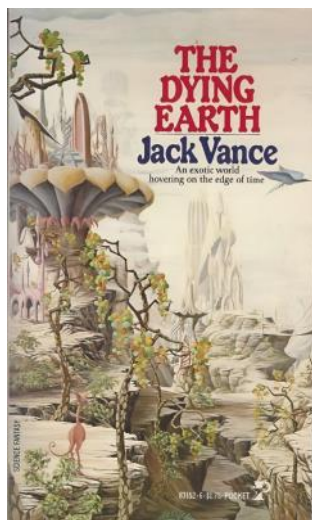


John Holbrook (Jack) Vance was born on August 28, 1916, in San Francisco, California; and died on May 26, 2013, in Oakland, California, aged 96. He was survived by his son John.

Early History

Vance was educated at the University of California, Berkeley (B.A., 1942). He married Norma Ingold in 1946; and they had one son, who described his father as an unpretentious man who did an enormous amount of physical labor during his life and was modest about his writing. Vance himself once said: “I wrote to make money, not for any other purpose.”

Poor vision kept him out of the military during World War II, but he was able to qualify for the Merchant Navy by memorizing the eye chart during his physical exam.



He wrote his first stories while at sea, and became a full-time writer after the War. He had lost most of his sight by the 1980s, but was assisted in his work by his wife, who – as his sight failed -- became his work partner, typist, and editor.

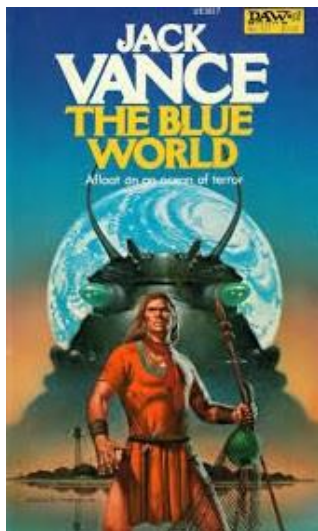
First Publications

Vance's first science fiction (s-f) publication: “The World Thinker” in Thrilling Wonder Stories (Summer, 1945). First s-f novel: The Space Pirate (Toby Press, 1953); First s-f collection: The Dying Earth (Hillman, 1950).

Awards/Honors/Recognitions

Among his many awards were: Hugo Awards, in 1963 for The Dragon Masters, in 1967 for The Last Castle, and in 2010 for his memoir This is Me, Jack Vance!; a Nebula Award in 1966, also for The Last Castle; the Jupiter Award in 1975; the World Fantasy Award in 1984 for life achievement, and in 1990 for Lyonesse: Madouc; an Edgar (the mystery equivalent of the Nebula) for the best first mystery novel in 1961 for The Man in the Cage. In addition, in 1992, he was Guest of Honor at the WorldCon in Orlando, Florida; and in 1997, he was named a SFWA Grand Master.

Later Writing



Vance had been a full-time writer since the mid-1940s, and in the 1950s was a screenwriter for 20th Century Fox. In the early 1950s, he also wrote scripts for the Captain Video television series.

His many s-f and fantasy books include the novels To Live Forever (1956), Big Planet (1957), The Languages of Pao (1958), The Dragon Masters (1963), Son of the Tree and The House of Iszm (1964) [an Ace Double], Space Opera (1965), The Blue World (1966), The Brains of Earth/The Many Worlds of Magnus Ridolph (1966) [an Ace Double], The Last Castle (1967), Emphyrio (1969), The Anome (1973), Showboat World (1975), Maske (1976), The Face (1979), The Book of Dreams (1981), Cugel's Saga (1983), Lyonesse: The Green Pearl (1985), Ecce and Old Earth (1981), and Throy (1992); and the short story collections Future Tense (1964), Eight Fantasms and Magics (1969), The Worlds of Jack Vance (1973), The Best of Jack Vance (1976), Green Magic: The Fantasy Realms of Jack Vance (1979), Lost Moons (1982), Light from a Lone Star (1985), and When the Five Moons Rise (1992).

More recently, he published Alastor (1995) [an omnibus volume collecting three of his Alastor novels]; The Demon Princes, Volume 1 [collecting The Star King, The Killing Machine, and The Palace of Love]; Ports of Call (1998), Night Lamp (1998), and The Laughing Magician (2000). An omnibus volume of his four-novel “Dying Earth” series, The Compleat Dying Earth, was issued by the SFBC in 1998. Lurulu, a sequel to Ports of Call, was issued in 2004. A collection of his shorter works, The Jack Vance Treasury (edited by Terry Dowling and Jonathan Strahan), appeared in 2007.

Autobiography

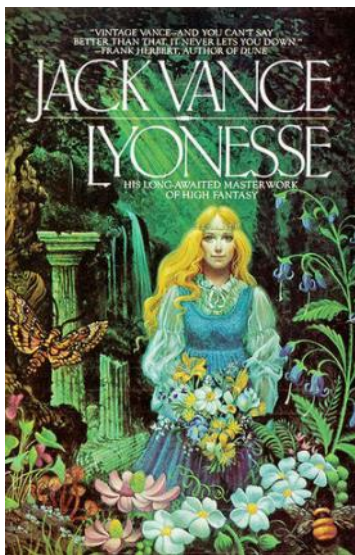
In 2010, Vance published an autobiography, *This is Me, Jack Vance! Or, More Properly, This is "I"* which won the 2010 Best Related Work Hugo. This autobiography concerns itself largely with family reminiscences, and descriptions of extended vacations around the world with wife Norma.

Pseudonyms

As John Holbrook Vance he wrote several mystery/suspense novels, including *The Pleasant Grove Murders* (1967), *The View from Chickweed's Window* (1979), *The House on Lily Street* (1979), *Bad Ronald* (1973), and *The Mad Man Theory* (1988) [originally written under the "Ellery Queen" house name]. Another book written as by Ellery Queen was the locked-room murder mystery *A Room To Die In* (1965).

In addition to Ellery Queen, Vance also published under the pseudonyms of Peter Held, Jack Holbrook, John Holbrook, and Alan Wade.

Fanzine Publications



A one-shot fanzine, *Jack Vance – Science Fiction Stylist*, by Robert Briney was published in 1965 by Buck and Juanita Coulson; and *The Vance Phile*, *Honor to Finuka*, and *The Many Worlds of Jack Vance* were fanzines devoted to Jack Vance and his work. The first issue of the latter fanzine, dated Spring 1977, included two interviews with Vance and a bibliography of his work; the second issue of *The Many Worlds of Jack Vance*, dated January 1978, included Vance's "The Horns of Elfland."

The 11th issue of the fanzine *Trumpet* (1974) contained a portfolio of "The Dying Earth," and Vance was interviewed in *Science Fiction Review* # 23 (1977) [conducted by Peter Close]. "A Meeting with Jack Vance" by Marty Halpern and a retrospective on *The Dying Earth* were included in *Paperback Parade* #17 (March, 1990), a special issue of the magazine devoted to s-f in paperback.

Vance Integral Editions (VIE), a non-profit organization pledged to preserve and promote the work of Vance, published Vance's complete works in a 44-volume set, beginning with *Coup de Grace and Other Stories* in 2001.

Critical Comments

A 2009 profile in *The New York Times Magazine* described Vance as "one of American literature's most distinctive and undervalued voices." Critics have written that he influenced many other genre writers, including Ursula K. Le Guin, Jack L Chalker, Michael Moorcock, George R. R. Martin and Gene Wolfe. The critic John Clute has even suggested that J. G. Ballard's "peneplains venues" might be traced back to Vance.

Other Comments

Vance was also a musician, and played the cornet, ukulele, kazoo, and harmonica. His literary papers are held in Special Collections, Mugar Memorial Library, Boston Uni-

versity, Boston, MA; and in The Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX.

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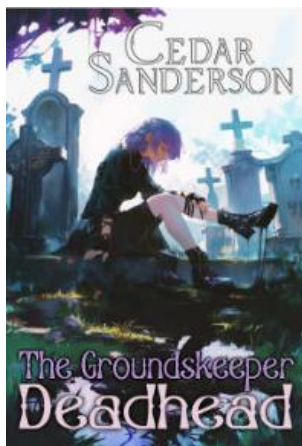
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Note: In addition to the above, several Internet sites were consulted, including Wikipedia, Fancyclopedia 3, and ISFDB.

Food of Famous Author

Homemade Ice Cream A summertime staple Cooking by Cedar Sanderson



This is a riff off a recipe I wrote up years ago, and I think I like this one better. Also, it's easier to make! You can use any ice cream maker, but I was testing out one I recently bought that works on a stand mixer for the power, and was very impressed with it's performance. This one, if you want to look into it (that's an affiliate link which, if you buy something, supports these recipes, thank you!).

As with any of the frozen-bowl churning devices, you want to make sure the bowl is frozen for at least 24 and preferably 48 hours before you plan to make the ice cream. I keep mine in the freezer all the time, which makes it simpler, and never make it so often I run into trouble with that. A trick I picked out of the instructions on this one is to start the churn paddle before you pour in the thoroughly chilled ice cream base, so it can't freeze and 'trap' the paddle. All this chilling means I tend to make the base ahead, stick it in the fridge overnight, and then when I'm ready, pop it into the maker. The stand mixer powered device made really nice soft serve in about fifteen minutes, I would say slightly longer time for the full six cups it will hold, but this recipe makes from four cups of base, six cups of churned, airy sweet frozen goodness.

Vanilla Ice Cream

4 egg yolks
1 c sugar
2 c milk
1 tsp vanilla
1 c cream

In a large measuring cup or microwaveable bowl, whisk together the egg yolks, vanilla, and sugar. Set aside for a minute. In another microwave-safe container, microwave the milk for about two minutes on high - you don't want this to boil, but to get nice and hot.

Whisk the hot milk slowly into the egg mixture. Once completely combined, microwave a minute at a time, stirring between, for two minutes. Then, do another thirty seconds, keeping an eye while it runs. You don't want this to boil! If it does, it will make a mess and you'll have to run it through a sieve to filter out any cooked egg bits. Somewhere between two and three minutes on high will do. Put into a covered container and chill for at least eight hours, you want this to be completely cool.

When ready to churn, stir the cream into the milk mixture. Slowly add to the ice cream maker, as you start the paddle (with an old-school churn, just pour it all in and close 'er up before you start cranking!)

Just after I started mixing - it's messy to pour into this! - you can see how the paddle clamps onto the orbital shaft rather than locking onto it. It works well.

Churn for about 15-20 minutes, until ice cream is no longer 'flowable' and looks like soft-serve. For a firmer ice cream, pack this into a lidded container and freeze for at least thirty minutes. It can be stored, should any remain, in a tightly closed container in the freezer for some time. I don't know how long, it doesn't last very long in my house!



This is how it was looking when I decided it was about done. You can see the gaps at the side where it isn't flowing back out to touch the sides of the bowl any longer.

In theory, this makes twelve servings. Reality is about six, or four if you have teenagers. You can top it with whatever you like! And of course you could add

things into the ice cream, although I do suggest adding them near the end of churning to keep the texture smooth.

Anime

An Anime I'm Ashamed That I Enjoyed Review by Jessi Silver

I secretly hope that with each one of these very simple writing prompts I'll manage to come up with a straightforward answer that gets to the heart of my appreciation for anime. Unfortunately, this one has probably managed to drum up some of the most complicated feelings I've had thus far. The question itself has more depth than it might seem on the surface; it delves to the heart of what causes shame and how we often question our own feelings about the things



that we love.

My brief, contrarian answer is that I try not to be ashamed of anything that I watch. I've definitely come to the end of an anime series and felt that I could have better spent my time, but for the most part I knowingly choose the anime I consume and whatever the outcome, I'm not hesitant to talk about it with others. I don't hide the fact that I've watched and enjoyed anime that other

fans have disliked, sometimes intensely. One example that I've mentioned several times before is *The Perfect Insider*, which I found to be philosophically compelling and emotionally affecting. Many other fans were quite vocally unimpressed by one aspect of the series or another. *The Lost Village* is another recent example; it was goofy, but had an underlying message that spoke to me. I'm not ashamed of having enjoyed these anime series, but I am disappointed in my inability to convince other fans that they're worthwhile and have some amount of merit.

The longer answer is that any shame I've had while watching anime has less to do with the anime itself and more to do with the complicated factors that play into my media consumption. I make no secret of the fact that feminism and its intersectional areas of thought weigh heavily in how I interact with the world, including with media. Part of this is just due to my own inherent desire to see myself represented (whether by gender, age, mental health status, etc.) in what I watch and read. I've also been influenced by people in my life who have tolerated some of my less-enlightened moments, given me the tools to learn to say and do better, and generally helped guide me in my growth. I owe a lot to friends who were ahead-of-the-curve in understanding concepts related to social justice; even when I was probably being insufferable they elected to deal with me and give me more chances than I likely deserved to learn to be a more open-minded person.

When I think about the person I was 20, or even 10 years ago, I cringe a little bit. I've been told that this is a sign of growth, but that doesn't necessarily make the process of self-reflection any less difficult. I like to think that maybe I've learned to be better along the way, and honestly most of that has been due, as I said, to the much smarter people I've been privileged to know, their willingness to put up with me, and also their ability to tell me I need to STFU and go learn myself a thing or two (or ten) about being kind to others.

To elaborate on what's written above, the shame I feel when watching certain anime is not so much because of the anime itself; it's shame that comes from knowing that I have the luxury to overlook problematic elements of an anime in favor of my own ability to enjoy it. It's especially present when those elements would be hurtful or offensive to other people that I know and care about. I think, to some extent, this is a justification that we all make to ourselves at one point or another; I know I've told myself more than once that there'd be nothing left for me to watch if I crossed something off the list for each and every "minor infraction." Though in a sense that might be true, it's also a lazy and defeatist thing to say.



Many of us are aware of or have read the now-famous post "How to be a Fan of Problematic Things," which explains the importance of recognizing problematic content in different texts, acknowledging it, understanding how it might affect various groups, and then making the conscious decision not to deny or minimize those effects, especially when people speak out about them. Media is the product of human minds, and our minds are the products of the places we've lived,

the people we've known, and the cultural influences that permeate our existences. Media makes mistakes because people do; this isn't so much an excuse as it is a simple fact about how we are. I think the original post is a call to all of us to recognize this, make changes, and do better, though I feel like it's more often used as a "get out of jail free card" for people who aren't interested in altering their comfortable position and worldview. "Everything is problematic, so why worry about it so much?"

As much as we may want to work towards a world where all people are treated equitably, it unfortunately takes significantly less energy to continue with the status quo. Speaking as someone with a (very minor) internet presence, criticizing problematic content (especially if it feeds into and maintains the privilege of groups in power) comes with its own special brand of consequences – name-calling, harassment, threats, bullying... I've experienced them all. There are days where I feel capable of defending myself, and days where my physical and emotional energy just isn't robust enough. I feel I should use my voice to stand up for myself and others, to point out when a piece of media is reflecting or proliferating harmful content, but sometimes it's not possible for me. That makes me feel ashamed.

There are a lot of anime series that have made me feel some complicated and conflicting things; sometimes I'm aware of them right away, and sometimes it's taken me years to realize that I'd overlooked or outright ignored something that I shouldn't have. I was enthralled by the first half of *Steins Gate* when I watched it weekly. The creepy atmosphere it cultivated as Okabe and company uncovered the secrets of time-manipulation was compelling. It was only once I watched it a second time in a larger group that it registered with me that Okabe molests and denies the gender of a transgender girl, humiliating her in front of other characters. To their credit, the anime club reacted with discomfort rather than laughter, but the damage was done; I felt like I had had a part in disparaging any transgender person who might have been in the audience that day.

There are other series I've seen that are similarly problematic that I tend to keep on the down-low. *Detroit Metal City* doesn't hide its vulgarity in any way, shape or form, and it's not a series that I go around suggesting to people on a daily basis. I still chuckle at some of the humor, though, despite the fact that so many of the gags are just variations on the main character saying "rape" over and over again. I'm strongly against rape jokes, especially as they appear in so many half-baked sit-coms and poorly-realized stand-up routines. Yet I can't seem to let this series thrash its way into the eternal garbage can full of jokes that should no longer be told.

I think perhaps the deepest shame occurs when we know what we're doing is betraying ourselves. When we look past our own hurtful life experiences and wear a smiling mask as the things we enjoy pick away at our self-esteem. It stands to reason that media we consume for fun probably shouldn't also be doing us damage, but occasionally the other merits and the likability of a story might outweigh that little protective voice that keeps us from committing acts of self-inflicted hurt.

Princess Jellyfish is a truly good anime series about a group of young women who make fandom a priority in their lives at the expense of social interaction. Tsukimi, the main character, is a jellyfish hobbyist who falls in with this group. She has a chance meeting with a young man named Kuranosuke who cross-dresses and has a considerably superior grasp on women's fashion than most women Tsukimi knows. Through Kuranosuke, Tsukimi meets his older brother Shu, a very straight-laced political type who's as inexperienced around women as Tsukimi is with men. Shu is eventually targeted by an unscrupulous real-estate developer named Inari,



a woman who's used to getting what she wants and using her "charms" to seal the deal. One evening she corners Shu in a bar, roofies his drink, and takes him to a hotel room. Though they don't have intercourse, Inari takes a lot of incriminating photographs and behaves as though they had sexual relations, all as part of a plan to blackmail Shu into letting her have what she wants.

Though the situation is clearly played for comedy to some extent, if my description makes it sound upsetting you wouldn't be wrong in interpreting it that way. I remember watching the series in anime club and feeling the color drain from my face as others' laughter echoed throughout the room. It wasn't as if I hadn't watched it before, but suddenly sitting in that room full of people, I became more conscious of the dull ache in my chest that signified my sympathy for Shu and the horror of his situation – the feeling of helplessness, the loss of control, the re-emergence of trauma surrounding his father's infidelities, and even the potential for his public image to be falsely manipulated. All of this is very upsetting to think about, even (or especially) right now.

This situation is juxtaposed against a rather poignant outing that Tsukimi and her friends have with Kuranosuke, who dresses them up and takes them to a fancy cafe. As their story unfolds, they become more comfortable and more engaged with the outside world that they've all shunned for so long. There's an element of triumph as they gaze upon the glowing city lights from their rooftop terrace; it feels like the young women are making progress in realizing that they can enjoy themselves in their own way, even when doing things that are outside of their comfort zone. It's as powerful as Shu's situation is upsetting to me, and it creates an emotional complication that I haven't done a very good job of articulating in the past.

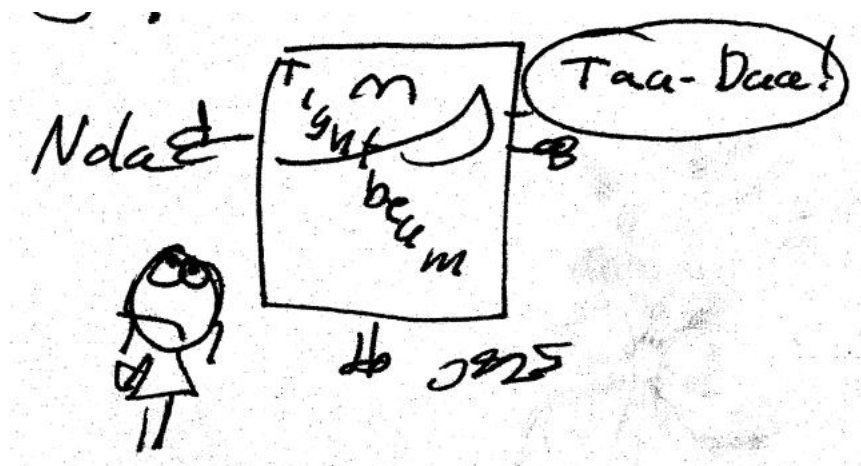
I'm not really ashamed for liking the anime in general or even finding wonderful things to



enjoy in this particular episode. What I'm ashamed about is the fact that I've proclaimed my love for this series time and time again, recommended it to several other people, and watched it several times without pointing out or acknowledging the fact that Shu is drugged and led to believe that he's been assaulted. I've smiled and laughed along with others while watching it because I didn't want to spoil the atmosphere or get a bad reaction. I didn't want to make waves by writing about

it. I didn't want to draw too much unwanted attention to myself. I didn't want to go into too much detail about why I found it so upsetting. I didn't want to admit to myself that I was letting something I liked hurt me for the sake of entertainment. I can only imagine how many people have gone to watch it on my recommendation and been made to feel unsettled or upset. I'm ashamed that I wasn't strong enough to say anything about it in the almost 8 years since the episode first aired.

This isn't the only example I have, but I won't beleaguer the point too much. I think we've all watched or read something that we know skirts the line on propriety or taste. Even though our conscience might start making noise about it, it's often easier to ignore its protests for the sake of our continued entertainment. I have learned over the years that enjoying something with major issues isn't necessarily a terrible thing, but I think we do have a duty as fans and critics to call attention to those issues and discuss them out in the open. I think we owe it to ourselves and our fandom to do what we can to make the fandom better for everyone – there's certainly no shame in that.



Taa-Daa

by Nola Framç-Gray