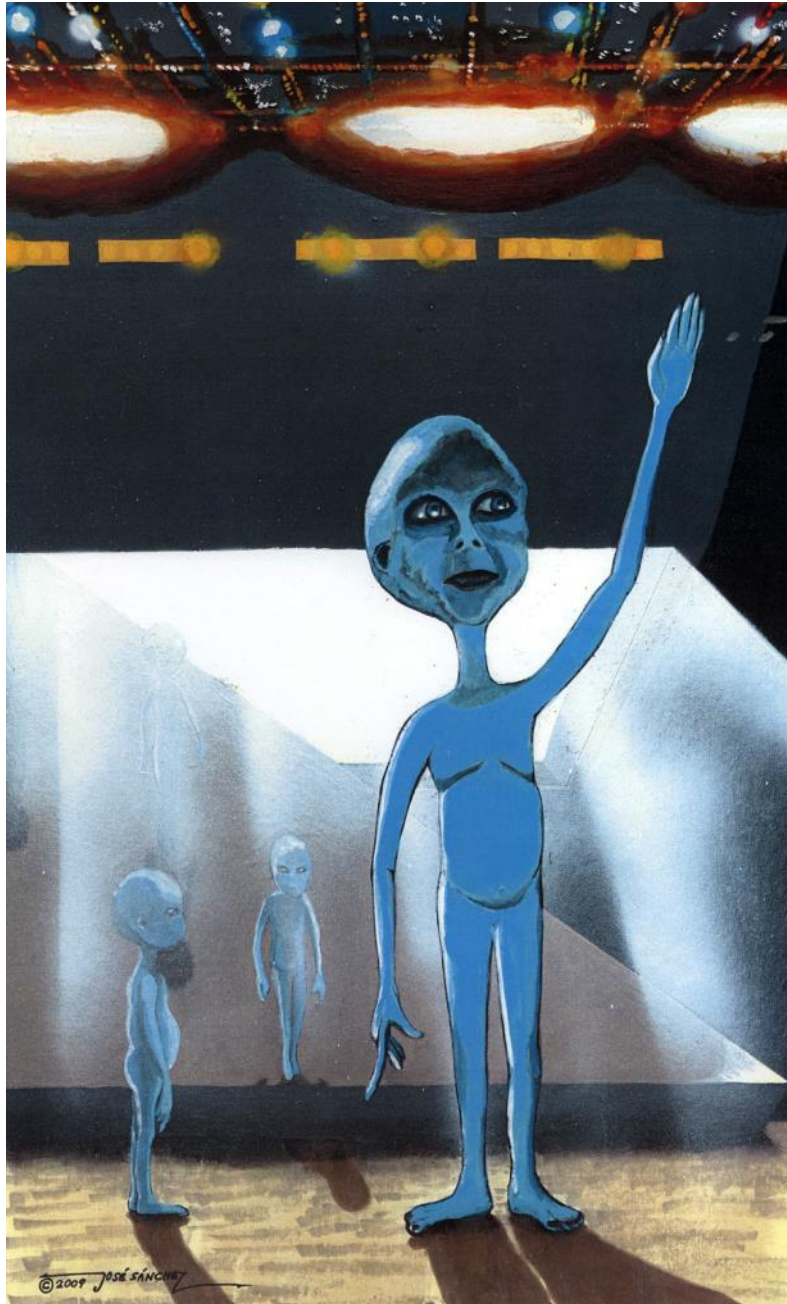


Tightbeam 369

June 2025



We Come in Peace

By Jose Sanchez

Tightbeam 369

June 2025

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, ...

The Editors are:

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Art Editors are Angela K. Scott and Jose Sanchez. Art Contributors are Tiffanie Gray, Alan White, Cedar Sanderson, and Artist Fish.

Anime Reviews are courtesy Jessi Silver and her site www.s1e1.com. Ms. Silver writes of her site "S1E1 is primarily an outlet for views and reviews on Japanese animated media, and occasionally video games and other entertainment." Cedar Sanderson's reviews and other interesting articles appear on her site www.cedarwrites.wordpress.com/ and its culinary extension. Jason P. Hunt's reviews appear on SciFi4Me.Com Jim McCoy is now found at Jimbossffreviews.substack.com. Heath Row publishes The StF Amateur.

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

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

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

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

Additional memberships at the address of a current dues-paying member are \$4.

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 FrankinZine. Cedar Sanderson is cedar.sanderson on Facebook and cedar-writes.com elsewhere. Also of note are Jessi Silver on S1E1.com and Caroline Furlong on Upstream Reviews.

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Editorial

This issue has some minor changes. There are few surviving SF&F magazines, but Cirsova is one of them. An issue is reviewed below. Jon Swartz's Bio-Bibliography is of SF Writer Joe Kelleam, who wrote 3/4 of a century ago. There seem to be no available photographs of Kelleam. Jessi Silver gives us another of her wonderfully thoughtful anime reviews. We have lamented a shortage of articles on prize nominees, though note Tom Feller in a forthcoming N3F Review of Books. We offer Declan Finn's ideas for Dragon Award nominations. Finally, the Infamous Fan Phillies offers his recipe for lentil stew.

..... George Phillies

Letter of Comment

Dear George and Jon:

I have Tightbeam 367 for about a month now, and with a slight easing of time pressures, I can prepare a suitable letter of comment to you. Suitable may be in the eye of the beholder, but I will see what can be done.

My previous letter: We did work the afore-mentioned provincial election, and just past close to two weeks ago, we had the federal election. A nice payday is nigh, and it can't come soon enough. I got word from Amazing Stories managing editor Kermit Woodall that AS: Best of 2024 should be out just about any day now, and you will definitely hear about it when it does.

Heath Row's review of Flow... One interest that has come up over the past few years in independent animation. I am not surprised that the movie was animated in Latvia, France and Belgium. There are popular cartoons on television that are made in France, which seems to be becoming the newest animation central location.

Thank you for the deCamp bio. He and Catherine were Pro GoHs at Ad Astra 14 in 1994, and they were perfect guests, very gracious. They are much missed. Also at that convention were Diane Duane and Peter Morwood. Through much sorrow, Diane this morning announced Peter's passing.

I have a copy of deCamp's Rogue Queen from Bluejay Books... Either the cover or spine showed Rouge Queen, as if no one had bothered to check for spelling. We also have a twice-signed copy of the Science Fiction Handbook.

I paused myself from working on more short stories for the Amazing Stories website, and now that this loc is done, I should get back to it. Thanks for this issue, and looking forward to more.

Yours, Lloyd Penney

Magazines

Cirsova ... Review by Caroline Furlong

Techno-thrillers, good old-fashioned fantasy, and planetary romance all meet in issue 22 of Cirsova Magazine!



Summer is almost here but that is hardly a reason to let Cirsova's 2025 Spring issue lie unread. With entries from the inestimable Jim Breyfogle, Richard Rubin, Michael Tierney, JD Cowan, and others, this is a collection of short stories you will not find anywhere else! The fantasy installments lift readers to new heights of wonder and awe while the space opera has all the derring do a reader could want. Add some spine-chilling but not overwhelming horror from the techno-thrillers, and you are good to go!

Let us dive in and take a closer look at these stories, shall we?

The Story

First is the latest entry in Michael Tierney's Wild Stars saga, "Flight from Reckoning." It opens with Fastrick, a Starrior, and his son Gilrick aiding in the preparation of a rogue planet for movement within the Wild Stars. They are also making a star map so that the Wild Stars' path through the universe will be smooth and clear. Since Gilrick is a newly minted Starrior, his father is following him to test him. But that all changes when a mysterious Starrior appears with a cryptic warning minutes before the Wild Stars' enemies, the Brothans, arrive.

In the shelling, Gilrick is killed, and Fastrick is left holding his remains.

Many years later, Fastrick follows his adopted daughter – Tamarick – on her first mission as a Starrior to test her. He did not want her anywhere near the job but he also could not bear to stay with her or his wife after losing Gilrick. So she went into the Starrior corps despite his best efforts; she is now learning alongside Tall Trees Wolf and her mother, Songwolf. It should be a routine shuttle flight.

Except that there is an infiltrator aboard. He has a vendetta against all the Wild Stars, but also special animosity toward Tamarick, who has no idea who he is – or where she is from....

"Salt Roses" by Jim Breyfogle follows Aelia, a young diver from a fishing village. Today she is tasked with watching to make sure the dreaded Mer do not arrive unannounced and kill the divers, but she must climb a nearby crest to keep one particular ship in sight. Didyme, the captain of this errant boat, is such an idiot with his dreams of finding the Emperor's sunken lost treasure. If she could, she would ignore him, but her job is to keep everyone in sight. That includes morons like him.

But scaling the crest to keep his ship in sight makes her invisible to the other divers. When the Mer attack her warnings go unheard, and all that is left are empty boats – including her sister's.

Ashamed and horrified, Aelia flees to the rotting city of Kolaki, where a drunk healer teaches her to heal and fight. When a drug lab explodes and she must help to tend the survivors, one of the men who got hit with the drug prophecies that she will find the emperor's crown and restore the Empire. But that's utter nonsense. The emperor is dead. The dead cannot be brought back to life....

Can they?

Richard Rubin returns in "The Siege of Verisa," a sequel to his story in Cirsova's 2021 Winter

issue. Burke Fletcher is an Earthman trapped on Rigel IV, a planet where science and sorcery are one. He married Llana, one of the blue-skinned native inhabitants, and helped her steal the legendary Alchemist's Stone. Now, though, he must rescue his wife from the clutches of a cult that seeks to use the relic to withstand the very baron he and Llana stole it from!

How much has man lost since going to the stars and spreading across the galaxy? This is the question which Galactic Enforcer Brandon Stone ponders in "Void Railway." Stone, his friend Ronan Renfield, and several others guard their principle for this mission: a rich man named Duke who is heading to New Eden. Duke has a lot of money and he is paying...but he may have brought something truly Dark with him on this ride. The only immediate clue five days into a week-long job is a strange smell both Stone and Renfield detect before entering Duke's room.

The Space Railway filters air. There shouldn't be a smell, much less a scent of creek water and earth....

Jaime Faye Torkelson's "Machine Dreams for Wired People" follows a family in a cyberpunk future. But they aren't just any family – they are all special operators. Hitters and hackers who will do legitimate jobs for the right fee, and their new client wants his drug-addicted daughter back. Only problem is, she is addicted to digital dreams peddled by the Müllerwerks Corporation. Müllerwerks Corporation specializes in BioAI – that is, stripping your brain bare, pulling it out of your body, and hooking it up to an AI to help the machine run the programs that the corporation sells. If they don't get her out of there in time, she is as good as a Legion drone from Asato Asato's light novel series 86 – Eighty-Six.

"Cracking the Cyber Ziggurat" by Kevin Larson combines The Matrix with Tron and stories like Sword Art Online or Log Horizon. The Web is where anyone not rich enough to live in the real world is trapped in a simulation that can warp and transform your avatar. Whether or not that has an effect on your body in the pod – well, Abraham Kursk might know, but that rich old monster doesn't even care about the children he sires.

Hector should know, since he is one of Kursk's illegitimate children, and he got thrown in the Web early in his life and joined a crew of Web pirates. So when his captain, Forkbeard, is given a contract to break into the vault where Kursk keeps information on the political and rich who back him...well. Turnabout is fair play, and Hector wants vengeance as much as the rest of the crew does. But will they actually be able to pull it off? Or will they all die trying?

The Characters

Among the standout characters in this issue are Fastrick, Tamarick, and Songwolf in Tierney's "Flight From Reckoning," as well as Aelia in Jim Breyfogle's "Salt Roses." To those who know these authors' work this is not really a surprise, but both writers truly brought their A-game to the stories this time. Aelia in particular is a fascinating heroine who will prompt readers to return to her story again and again so they can relive her exploits.

Hector and the Colonel in Larson and Torkelson's tales also stand out from the crowd. So does Peacekeeper Glease in "The Demacron," while Burke and Llana also get their time to shine in "The Siege of Verisa." Readers are spoiled for choice of favorite characters to read about in this issue, that is for sure!

The World

Each world is sketched quickly but effectively, taking a reader from the shining waters of Aelia's world to the dark, dank tunnels of a dying planetoid with ease. JD Cowan's "Void Railway" is especially good at atmosphere, as is Torkelson's "Machine Dreams for Wired People." Along with the characters, a reader is spoiled for choice of which world they like best and want to re-read most!

Content Warning

Drug use appears in several stories while "Machine Dreams for Wired People" shows people being broken down into parts so organs can be sold; the rest of the body is turned into "biowaste" that is flushed. There are also some brief gory scenes and allusions or hints to sex in numerous stories. Horrific mass murder is described as well. This issue is best read by those in their mid-to-late teens and by adults.

Who is it for?

Fans of Tierney and Breyfogle, full stop. This issue contains some of their best work to date and readers who do not already know them would be remiss not to pick it up and learn about these storytellers so they stop missing out on good tales. Noir and cyberpunk fans will love Torkelson's entry in this issue, while those who liked Tron and The Matrix will definitely want to read Larson's short story. Meanwhile, Cowan's fans and those who want a space opera cyberpunk adventure will be upset if they do not grab "Void Railway" right now. Rubin's "The Siege of Verisa" will appeal to Andre Norton fans – if you have not already heard of his work, this is the issue to pick up in order to become familiar with him. The Grande Dame of Science Fiction would approve of his handling of science and magic. Poetry fans will also want to read this new work by Jim Hutchings, as you do not find a poet this good very often these days. General interest readers looking for something fun should be perfectly happy with this issue, too, as it is a good introduction to Cirsova Magazine and the writers they publish.

Why buy it?

Do you need something to read while waiting at the dentist's office or while the kids are practicing for soccer, in dance class, or otherwise occupied? This issue of Cirsova will have you so engrossed they will need to shake you to get your attention. Don't take my word for it – read it for yourselves and see what you think!

SerCon

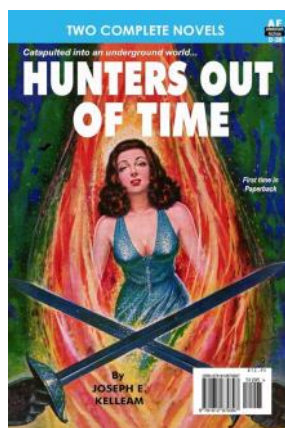
Joe Kelleam Bio-Bibliography

by

Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D.

N3F Historian

Joseph Everidge (Joe) Kelleam (1913 - 1975) was a contract officer with both the U. S. Air Force and the U. S. Army of Engineers, a rancher, and a part-time poet and author -- sometimes of science fiction (s-f) stories.



Personal Data

Joe Kelleam was born in Boswell, Oklahoma, on February 11, 1913, the son of a physician, Edwin Ayres Kelleam, and Ophelia Everidge. He died on June 15, 1975, aged 62. Kelleam married Alta Tolle, and they had two children: Aljo and Edwina. He dedicated his s-f novel, *When the Red King Woke*, to Edwina.

During his lifetime Kelleam was a member of the Oklahoma Poetry Writers and the Science Fiction Writers of America.

At one time he was a contributor to Ray Bradbury's *Futura Fantasia*.

First Book



Kelleam's first book, *Blackjack*, a novel about the effects of the Oklahoma oil boom on the citizens of a small town, was published in hardback by William Sloane in 1948; it was reprinted in paperback by Bantam Books in July, 1949. Kelleam dedicated this book to his father.

In his later years, Kelleam mainly wrote poetry.

Genre Novels

Overlords From Space (1956) [bound with *The Man Who Mastered Time* by Ray Cummings]

The Little Men (1960) [aka *Hunters Out of Time*]

Hunters of Space (1960) [aka *Hunters Out of Space*/sequel to *The Little Men*]

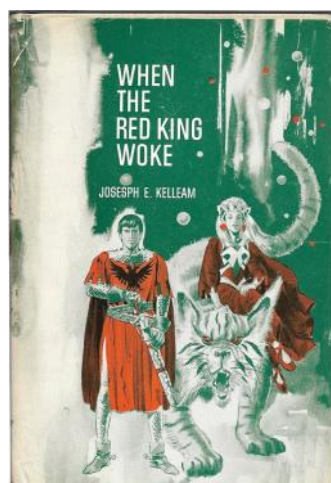
When the Red King Woke (1966) [with his name misspelled on the book's dust jacket!]

Poetry Collections

Days Beyond Number (1971)

Good-Bye to Babylon (1974) [dedicated to his daughters]

Short Genre Fiction



"Rust" (*Astounding Science Fiction*, October 1939) [His first published SF story and first professional sale]

"The Last of the Asterites" (*Astounding*, May 1940)

"The Eagles Gather" (*Astounding*, April 1942)

"From the Dark Waters" (*Avon Fantasy Reader* #6, 1948)

"Revenge of the Were-Thing" (*Monsters and Things*, January 1959)

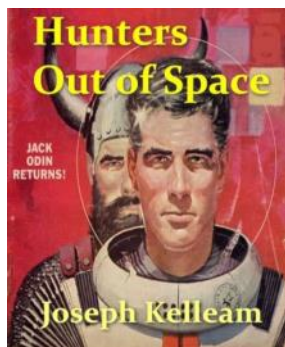
"Hunters Out of Time" (*Amazing*, February 1959)

"Hunters Out of Space" (*Amazing*, May 1960)

"The Last Druid" (*Fantastic*, October 1961)

"The Red Flowers of Tulip" (*Fantastic*, February 1962)

Note: Stories are listed by date of publication, from earliest to latest.



Genre Fiction Reprinted in Anthologies

“The Eagles Gather” in Crossroads in Time (Conklin, 1953)

“Rust” in The Robot and the Man (Greenberg, 1953)

“Rust” in The Great SF Stories: 1, 1939 (Asimov & Greenberg, 1979)

“Rust” in Fighting the Future War (Krome, 2011)

Note: Stories are listed by year of publication of the anthology in which they were reprinted.

Autobiographical Quote

Kelleam once wrote: “My family was one of the first five or six to settle in SE Oklahoma. They were chased out of Mississippi for taking up for the Five Civilized Tribes who were also being chased out at the time.

“The name Kelleam came from the Scotch Irish border, and I have been told it is Gaelic for ‘church-man’ though I’m not much of a churchman.”

Some Concluding Comments

A researcher won't find much about Kelleam in the standard reference works. Reginald's reference book (see Sources) was the most helpful, but it also had little to report. I wasn't even able to find a photograph of Kelleam -- in his books, in magazines, fanzines, or on the Internet.

“Rust” is probably Kelleam's most remembered and noteworthy story. In addition to the anthologies in which it has been reprinted (see above), it is also available as an audiobook, Classic Science Fiction, Volume 4.

In addition, some of his s-f novels are available on the Internet.

Sources

Parnell, Frank H. Monthly Terrors, 1985.

Reginald, R. Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature, Volume 2: Contemporary Science Fiction Authors, 1979.

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

Tymn, Marshall B. & Mike Ashley (eds.). Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Weird Fiction Magazines, 1985.

Note: Several Internet sites were also consulted, including Wikipedia, ISFDB, and Fancyclopedia 3.

Opinion

A Flight of Dragon Awards by Declan Finn

If you've been hanging around me a while, you know I often talk about the Dragon Awards from January to July. They're the largest fan-voted awards out there. It's free to vote in them. You don't even have to register attending the convention. It also gives me an excuse to talk about books at large. Not that I really need an excuse. But it helps me from looking like a monomaniac. And if you want to vote, trust me, I'm going to be investing WAY more time than you are. It should take you a few minutes on your phone / computer to do.

Again, the nominations are already open! I'm not even joking.

Yes, I have a list of who I'm voting for. Here, for you folks, I'm also going to give you my reason for why I'm voting for each, and why I think it's important.

But first...

My thought process:

I'm not nominating anyone who already has an award. Most of those who have won already have the attitude of "Oh, I don't need more dust collectors."

I'm trying to leave out Big Name Authors. Frankly, if you're Jim Butcher or Timothy Zahn, you (a) probably don't want another nomination and (b) you sure as Hell don't need my help.

If I leave the categories blank, it means I STILL got nothing.

You may wonder why I'm not having a full, massive, months-long discussion, gathering up every eligible author and product.

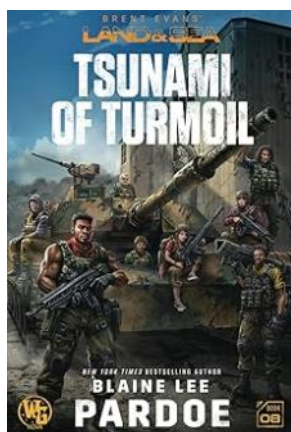
Been there, done that. It turned into an unmanageable mess. Authors would come by, skip straight to the comments, leave their book, and disappear. It was especially funny when they were already on my list, but they never even looked to see.

Clearly, you can feel free to drop a suggestion in the comments.

But please read my substack post <https://declanfinn.substack.com/p/flight-dragon-awards> first, okay? Thanks.

Again, please remember that eligible nominees came out AFTER 7/1/24, up 6/30/25. So double check before throwing something into the ring.

Let's get into the nitty gritty of each category.



Best Science Fiction Novel

Tsunami of Turmoil by Blaine L. Pardoe

How does one write military SF War and Peace and make it readable? Simple, you read Blaine Lee Pardoe's Land & Sea series.

Book 8, Tsunami of Turmoil, is intense, covering aspects of the war on multiple levels, from geopolitical, to local politics, to ground warfare, to chapters of just character-driven events that build up to a climax I didn't see coming.

It, of course, ends on a cliffhanger that drives me nuts. Aside from that... Well, one does have to keep them coming back for more. (And book 9 is already at the editor, I hear.)



If you have not read the Land & Sea novels yet, humor me and just read the first three. If you're not hooked by the end of book one ... I don't know why you wouldn't be, but I don't know you... you will be hooked by the end of book three.

As for Tsunami of Turmoil, I'd definitely give it a shot.

If for some reason, you don't trust me, or don't want to give Blaine Pardoe a read, okay then. I can come up with two alternatives.

The first, of course, is Space Pirates of Andromeda. I have read it, but have not reviewed it.

The second alternative is The Icarus Needle, by Timothy Zahn.



You can read my review over at Upstream.

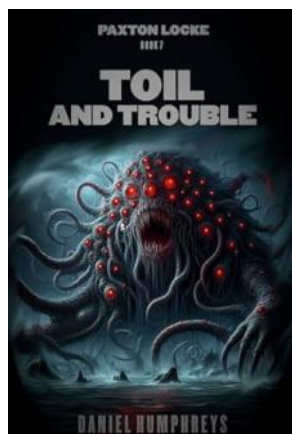
With the Icarus novels, Timothy Zahn apparently decided that Leverage and Mission: Impossible were just playing on easy mode... and Le Carre was only medium difficulty...

If you look at all the adulation I heap upon Zahn, you may be wondering: Why I haven't put Zahn in the top slot?

That answer is simple: Zahn has a Dragon award. In fact, if you believe the Wiki page, he has five. I didn't think he'd want another dust collector. Being Timothy Zahn is pretty damn awesome already, don't you think?

Best Fantasy Novel : Toil and Trouble, by Daniel Humphreys

You want epic fantasy, I got your epic fantasy right here.



Yes, I'm a little behind in reviewing the Paxton Locke series. In part because I will probably want to start the series over from the beginning, and I don't have to worry about anything like cliffhangers, now that the Paxton Locke series is finished.

But yeah, this one went all out:

Deranged magic school, check. Society of wizards, check.
Dimension hopping.
All out warfare
Magic rules and regulations.
Outsider monstrosities.

This book has pretty much everything you want in fantasy.

It's literally the best urban fantasy not written by Jim Butcher. I'm serious. Should anyone, God forbid, need to finish The Dresden Files for Butcher, Dan is my candidate to Brandon Sanderson that end. Toil and Trouble gives Battle Ground a run for its money.

If you don't want to vote for Humphreys, fine. But I implore you to at least give the Paxton Locke series a chance. I'd bet money that you will be hooked.

You might notice a certain Bestselling author isn't here. I will refer you back to my thought process on no previous winners if we can avoid it. If you don't want to vote for Dan (please, vote for Dan) I suppose you could always plug in a Honeymoon from Hell novel if you wanted. But at least give Humphreys a try first.

Last time, there were comments of "What about—" No. 100% No. I'm offering no alternative to Toil and Trouble. I don't care who you have in mind. Why?

I already said I wasn't nominating anyone who already has awards. Read that again if you have to.

Toil and Trouble is better than anyone you can offer. Yes, even him. And her. And that other one you were thinking of.

Best Young Adult/Middle Grade Novel



So, there's a guy named Jared Anjewierden (Anne-Jew-Wierd-Den). We have a mixed history. I think calling us acquaintances may be too much. In the Based Book sale, he had a novel up. I think it was free. It may have been \$0.99. Either way, I thought I'd give it a shot. I already have one of his science fiction novels that I'll get to ... eventually.

In the last Dragons post, the comments section suggested the book I picked up.

Mech Bunny

Yes. Mech Bunny.

So, I had the book on kindle already. Might as well give it a shot.

I must admit, it's quite impressive. Also surprising.

First of all, the book is YA, but PG-13. Maybe it's PG (80s PG). It makes for a nice change from THE REST OF YA. If you don't know what I mean, trust me, ignorance is better.

Anyway, this was a straight up Military SF YA novel. If you take the PsyOps twists out of Ender's Game, and make it mech combat instead of a space navy. If I were to guess, about 50%-75% of the book is pure action. Half of is certainly mech combat. But don't worry, we have straight-up infantry combat just for a change of pace. It's almost exhausting.

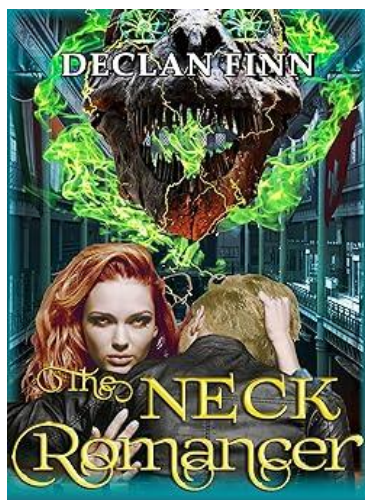
But since the Dragons no longer have a Military SF award, Jared will just have to settle for best YA.

Best Alternate History Novel

1919: The Romanov Rescue

I put out an entire review on this one.

Best Horror Novel



The Neck Romancer by Declan Finn

You probably saw this coming. I do not read most of the horror genre, mainly because I don't do slasher porn. The closest I have ever come to reading horror is Michael Gallagher's Body and Blood, and that was a few years ago. (Then again, I guess NR LaPoint does horror ... but nothing in the time frame.)

I have little problem with "monster" books, and if you consider something like Monster Hunter International as horror ... okay. Fine. We disagree on that.

However, I will write horror... only because The Dragons don't have an urban fantasy category. Even though it should have been a genre category any time after Jim Butcher. (Yes, I could argue that it goes back to Fred Saberhagen, if not Bram Stoker, but we're coming perilously close to being lost in the weeds.)

So, yes, I'm going to vote for The Neck Romancer in best horror ... largely because the prequel series, Love at First Bite was nominated for best horror—twice. Once for Honor at Stake and once for Live and Let Bite.

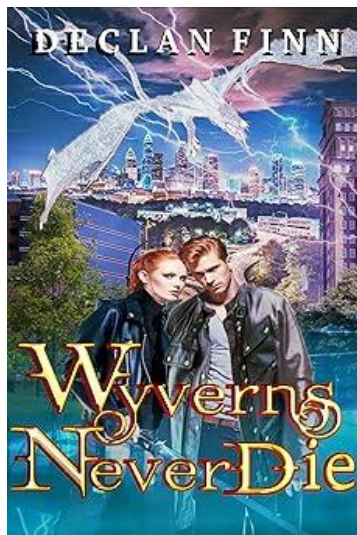
So, really, why not?

The Neck Romancer has ... a lot, really.

It has the fae at Area 51.
 A wendigo in a hospital.
 Zombies at a wedding.
 A necromancer who is a Chicago alderman (write your own joke here).
 An IRA vampire from the 1920s.
 Demons.
 A Tolkien elf on a rampage.
 And a final smackdown in the Chicago Museum of Natural History.

And looking at the cover, you can tell something about what's going to happen there...But don't worry, it's not what you think it is.

Granted, if you want to be silly, you could probably plug in all five of the Honeymoon from Hell novels into a slot if you want. But I wouldn't recommend that unless you had literally nothing else in the category (And, of course, if it fits. Wouldn't want to plug Blood Country into best comic book, that sort of thing. And no one can plug anything other than Wyverns Never Die into science fiction, because that one has the most mad science)



Best Illustrative Book Cover

Wyverns Never Die, cover by Vanessa Landry

Look at this cover, isn't it nice? The lighting is great. The lightning effects are nice. You have to love the little touches of the electrical Wyvern in the background. The model used to be blonde and is now a redhead. The male model used to be dark haired and is now blond.

The most important element: it's a cover created by my wife. So do me a favor and vote for it, even if you vote for nothing else. Okay? Thanks.

Her name is Vanessa Landry. Be certain to get that right. They want the artist's name.

Best Comic Book

Land & Sea Paradise, by Blaine Lee Pardoe

Land & Sea Paradise isn't out yet. But it's my contender based on the showing of the previously released novels. I'll give this another look over once the comic comes out. It's not like I've been reading a lot of other comic books. I've heard good things about Kamen America and Fri-eren (am I spelling that right?). But I haven't read them. Right now, this spot will need a placeholder.

For the record: No. I'm not getting into whatever current ComicsGate nonsense is going on between Mister July and Mister Scrivener. I neither know what the fracas is about, nor do I care to know. Unlike certain online personalities, when I say I want no part of internet drama, I mean I WANT NO PART. I am actively avoiding internet drama like it's one of the freaking Ten Plagues of Egypt.

Best Science Fiction or Fantasy TV Series, TV or Internet

I don't know. I really mean it. I don't know.

Nothing comes to mind outside of two shows. First of all, there's One Piece. It's been on forever, and will probably be eligible next year. It's clearly beloved, or it would have run out of steam by now.

There is also Pokemon. Why do I suggest it? Because I hear that it's finally come to a conclusion after years on the air. There is no more. It is over. It is an ex-series. Which means it's also the final year to vote for it. (Yes, I will have to double check to make certain that the last episode falls within the eligibility window.)

The Daily Wire is threatening to air an adaptation of the classic Stephen Lawhead Arthurian novels, but so far, they haven't delivered. (Meanwhile, the books are being reissued by Baen with new covers.)

Best Science Fiction or Fantasy Movie

I can't remember the last film I saw in theaters. Hell, I can't remember the most recent film I saw.

But I've heard good things about three films.

Transformers One

Sonic 3

Deadpool & Wolverine

So, maybe one of them? I mean what else came out last year... Argh,

Borderlands? Hahahahaha. No.

Alien: Romulus? The retread, copy and paste film?

Venom: The Last Dance? Don't even talk to me about the Venom movies.

Kraven the Hunter? Madam Web on one end and this on the other. Perfect bookends. Ugh.

Mickey 17. So far, so garbage.

So... yeah. I think the first three above are the best options.

Best Digital Game

Only two games really stand out from last year.

Warhammer: Space Marines 2

Stellar Blade

Best Tabletop Game

Last time, it was suggested that I try the Mistborn card game.

And that's it. That's all I got for right now. With luck, I'll have some more next time.

Please remember to vote.

If you could, please share this as well.

The nominees need all the circulation they can get.

Anime

RErideD – Derrida, Who Leaps Through Time Review by Jessi Silver

In 2050 engineer Derrida Yvain is famous for his contribution to “Autonomous Machine DZ,” at his father’s company, Rebuild. But when he and his colleague Nathan discover a dangerous flaw in their creation, their warnings go ignored. The next day after Nathan’s daughter Mage’s birthday party, the group barely escapes an attack by unknown forces, leading to Derrida’s unwitting captivity in cryogenic stasis. Ten years later, he emerges in a world at war with the mechanical lifeforms he helped create. Now, he fights to survive his nightmare future to make good his promise to “Take care of Mage.” – Crunchyroll



Episode Summary: Derrida Yvain is a scientist working on a team developing “automata,” service robots that have insinuated themselves into many aspects of people’s lives. They’ve recently shipped the DZ model which are considered to be top quality new tech, but Derrida and Nathan, his friend and co-developer, have discovered a bug in the DZ programming that, if activated, could cause the model to go out of control. They beg Hans Andrei, project leader, to recall the units that have already been shipped so that they can patch them, but for whatever reason that plan is a no-go. Derrida will have to meet with his father, Jacques, the original developer, to hopefully work something out. That issue takes a back seat, however, to Nathan’s daughter’s birthday.



Mage, Nathan’s daughter, is a bright girl with an interest in her father’s work. She looks up to Derrida and seems downtrodden when he declines an invitation to join in Nathan’s upcoming research. As Derrida is leaving their home, she asks him one last time to reconsider, and though he’s noncommittal he hands Mage an electronic key to pass along to Nathan. Derrida meets with his father, Jacques, the next day and the meeting goes poorly; Derrida accuses Jacques of caring more about the DZ than the well-being of his own son. He learns soon enough that Hans has a hit out on Nathan and himself for “knowing too much” about the flawed DZ programming, and having “taken care” of Jacques Yvain earlier, intends to kill Derrida and Nathan and frame it as a murder-



suicide to the media. Nathan comes out on the bad end of the situation, but Derrida manages to escape into the woods where in his pained delirium he begins to see strange visions of Mage appearing and disappearing as if phasing in and out of reality. The vision leads him to an underground cryogenic facility, where Derrida's final act is to seal himself away in one of the pods. But what will he find when he awakens?

Impressions: This review contains some minor spoilers for the first 4 episodes of the show.

Though I would have liked to have gone into this viewing session clean, I happened to read the ANN preview of the first few episodes that was posted following the recent Crunchyroll Expo convention. The article certainly gave the impression that the story was a muddled mess and the technical aspects of the show were disappointing, so my expectations were definitely tempered somewhat. To be honest, when I discovered that Crunchyroll posted the first four episodes yesterday, I looked at it as an opportunity to get this first impression "over with" so that it would be out of the way by the time the Autumn anime started in earnest. I'm not sure if it was the effect



of lowering my expectations or whether I'm just not as harsh a critic, but having seen the first episode I'm kind of questioning the rude audience reactions I read about in ANN's article. The episode certainly has its share of aesthetic problems and some of the dialog absolutely has issues with emotional realism, but while it's mediocre it's certainly not an unmitigated disaster. Mage and her friend Yui enjoy the birthday party.

My suspicion is that many anime fans saw the name "Yoshitoshi Abe" attached to the series and became saddled with a set of expectations that the series could never hope to achieve. For those who are unfamiliar, Abe is an artist and writer who loaned his particular style to several well-known and influential series during the late 1990's and early 2000's. The most famous and well-regarded of these are *Haibane Renmei*, which is based on one of his own self-published manga, and *Serial Experiments Lain*, to which he provided very iconic character designs. He also created the *NieA_7* manga, another doujinshi effort that was later adapted into an anime, though despite being fairly charming doesn't seem to be quite as famous. In any case, to many of us who came into our own as fans around that time period, Abe's name brings with it a certain feeling of nostalgia and admiration; it's not surprising that the fact of his involvement would drum up some expectations about the type of story and its quality level, no matter how small his actual contribution was.

The fact is, Abe's rich, textured art style isn't represented well in the series; if I hadn't been told multiple times that he was involved, I wouldn't have guessed it on my own. The character designs as they appear in the show itself are very generic, which isn't necessarily a problem in-and-of-itself, but it does beg the question – why employ the services of a fairly famous character artist and not go to some effort to preserve the charm of their designs? Obviously anime production is more complicated than that, as anyone who's seen *Shirobako* will attest. It's not a system that allows the time or resources necessary for people to do their best work; we just happen to be lucky enough to get some great results some of the time anyway. Geek Toys, the animation production company for this series, is brand new, and with that newness comes many challenges. I can't entirely fault a studio for simplifying some designs more in favor of ones that could be more easily animated. That said, the fact that there are a lot of off-model shots in the first episode doesn't exactly bode well for how the rest of the series is going to look.

Some of the writing and dialog leaves a bit to be desired. I actually mistook this for a direct time-travel story; thus far the only confirmed “time travel” is Derrida’s missing ten-year gap. I make it a personal policy to look past all but the most glaring plot holes when timey-wimey stuff is involved, but judging by the first episode, time travel and its resultant paradoxes aren’t a major factor (though based on what I’ve heard that stands to change at some point). Some of the character dialog, however, feels very melodramatic, and in the “bad” (meaning: not entertaining) way. I think the best example of this occurs when Derrida confronts his father with the information about the DZ’s flawed operating system; when Jacques doesn’t give Derrida the answer that he’s seeking, the situation goes from “zero” to “you never loved me, dad!” in a matter of seconds. While I can accept the fact that Derrida and his father might have some issues to work out, introducing those issues when we know very little about either character to begin with feels more like a ploy to wring some quick, cheap drama out of an under-developed situation. I could have managed with less time spent at Mage’s birthday party if instead there would have been a few more moments spent establishing the main character’s personality and the clearly important and probably complicated relationship he had with his genius father.

Still, I’m not ready to entirely discount the series yet, and this episode was actually fairly entertaining in spite of its flaws. At the very least, it manages to do what so few stories can; it warns us of the consequences of inaction and then, thanks to time manipulation (of a sort), proves those consequences to have been genuine.

Because they were available (and I decided it would be a better use of my time to watch the episodes now rather than pick them back up later), I decided to go ahead and watch episodes 2-4 of the show. It’s not my regular practice, but it’s difficult to pass on an opportunity to kill two birds with one stone. In the subsequent few episodes, Derrida awakens from cryo-sleep to find that his fears have come true and that the DZ robots have gone rogue, causing mass destruction (which of course seems to benefit the wealthy Rebuild shareholders and other upper-class types, including Hans. Derrida joins up with an older man and his young daughter – two people who have the tools and survival instincts to navigate the unfriendly robot-riddled terrain. They travel to find Mage’s whereabouts, learns that she’s dead (from her friend Yuri), then learns that that was a lie. Mage is, in fact, missing. Derrida’s new goal is to obtain a copy of the software patch so that he can nullify the DZ troops and save humankind, but they learn that the robots’ malfunction was not so much a bug as it was completely intentional and entirely by design. This unsettling corruption appears to run deep and Derrida must trudge through it to find the answers that he seeks.

These episodes continue much in the same vein as the first; the show is basically competent in most respects and manages to maintain a modest amount of tension as Derrida and friends find themselves pursued by various factions (including a frighteningly-persistent female assassin whose identity I assume is less of a secret than it first appears). Hans Andrei makes for an ineffectual villain; rather than proving to be a real danger to the protagonist, he’s mostly a bumbling rich guy who seems terrified of anything that might threaten his position. Derrida turns out to be kind of an unlikable protagonist, not because his goals aren’t sound but more because he lacks emotional range and maturity; it becomes exhausting to listen to him fly off the handle while simultaneously trying to convince (coerce?) those around him to give up their safety to help him achieve his goals.

Part of me would like to give this one a shiny “You Tried” award; I feel like this is a story someone really wanted to tell and there are definitely echoes of something bigger and better to be found within the show’s modest package. There are just a lot of aspects (visual and story-wise) that are holding it back, and as it stands it’s too much of a hard sell.

Pros: Seen from afar, the show is fairly competent, (if unimpressive).

Cons: The protagonist and antagonist are insufferable. There are many distracting aesthetic and quality-control issues.

Grade: C-

Food of Infamous Fen Lentil Stew George Phillies

A pound of lentils. Soak submerged in water with an occasional stir and addition of more water. In my experience, start in the evening and it will be ready in the morning.

Ingredients:

A pound of carrots, coarse chopped.

Two large onions chopped.

A pound of mushrooms, fine-sliced.

A pound of spinach leaves.

Several pounds of kielbasa. sliced to rings.

A large soup pot, a large frying pan.

A small can of tomato paste.

My mother noted ham bones as a variation or addition to the kielbasa, but I do not know what ham bones are...never saw them for sale.

Drain the lentils thoroughly. While they are draining, chop all ingredients.

Add a third of a cup of olive oil to the pan. Starting with the carrots, saute each ingredient.

After sauteing each ingredient, drop it in the soup pot. The carrots will change color slightly.

The onions should caramelize. The lentils will change color. At about this point, add crushed garlic. A quarter cup or a bit less is about right. YMMV. The onions and lentils will lose water, which can go into the soup pot. The mushrooms will reduce. I usually use portabello... white onions drop too much water. The spinach will shrink, but don't take it all the way down. . Add the tomato paste and enough water to cover everything. Stir diligently. Heat on a low heat -- well, pots shed heat, so you want enough that the mixture has an occasional steam bubble -- for a couple-three hours. Then add the kielbasa and heat for another hour. Beef stock as an additive is an option. Spices include tarragon and dill--you need a fair amount; the pot is large.

Alas, the friend for whom I wrote this down has two teenagers, so I don't know what the other one would have to eat.



Dust Storm
By Tiffanie Gray