

Tightbeam 372

September 2025



Dangerous Waters
by Tffanie Gray

Tightbeam 372

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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.

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

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.

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.

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

We are occasionally asked how we choose the order of our articles. The current sort is partly by article length, so that relatively short articles appear first and Jessi Silver's magnificent anime reviews appear toward the rear. However, Food of Famous Author Cedar Sanderson always closes the issue, this time with a flour- and dairy-free dark chocolate cake.

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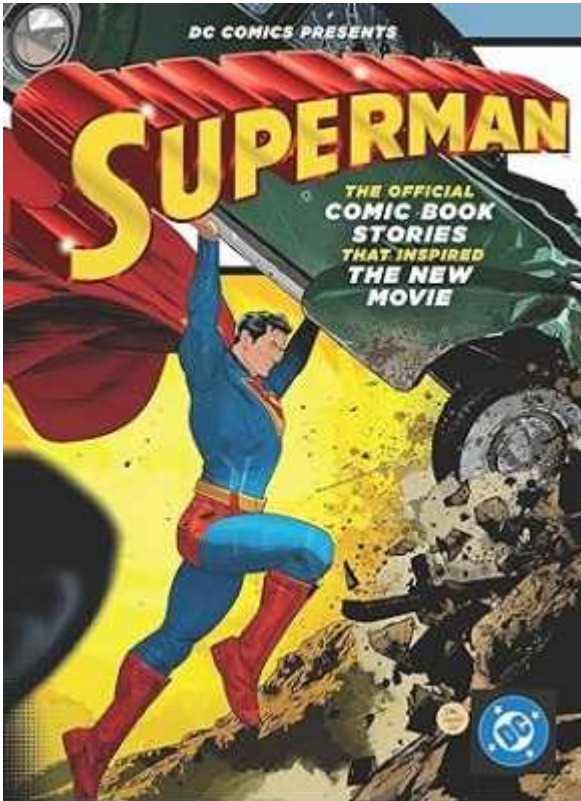
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Comics

Comic Books Disguised as Magazines Analysis by Heath Row



In late May, fellow UFO member Rob Imes brought something to my attention on the Facebook. “I saw this Superman bookazine magazine on the newsstand today...,” he wrote. “This is the kind of thing that a lot of fans claim that DC ought to be doing, in order to reach new readers. Well, here they are doing it. Will fans be happy now? Probably not.”

Having worked as a newspaper and magazine journalist for almost two decades early in my career, I’ve been fascinated by the emergence of bookazines as the primary form of periodical present on many newsstands. As the name suggests, bookazines are publications that combine elements of books and magazines. They take the form of squarebound magazines and usually eschew advertising—except for house ads. Bookazines also tend to be more expensive than other magazines. \$14.99 is a pretty common cover price.

Generally, comic book-related bookazines are published to take advantage of increased public attention drawn to the release of a comics-related movie. Titles in my collection—now packed up to send to Portugal—include A 100th Birthday Salute to Stan Lee (a 360media Special), Ant-Man and the Future of Marvel

(360media), The Story of Marvel (published by Time), The Story of Spider-Man (Time), Superman: The Comics, the Films, the Cape (Life), Ultimate Guide to Black Panther (Los Angeles Times), The Ultimate Guide to Batman (Entertainment Weekly), The Ultimate Guide to Comic Books (360media), and The Ultimate Guide to Spider-Man (Hollywood Spotlight).

As we speak, so to speak, at least two such bookazines are available on newsstands. 360media and McClatchy Media offers DC Comics Presents Superman, featuring “the official comic book stories that inspired the new movie,” and Meredith Operations Corporation and SPC Specials bring us Marvel Comics: The Fantastic 4, promising “epic comic book adventures,” “behind the scenes of the new movie,” and “First Steps interviews.”

While similar to previous bookazines—squarebound, ads-free, tied in to a movie release—these two examples are notably different in at least two ways. Even though the movies remain the primary motivator and reason for being (Superman premiered July 7 and The Fantastic Four: First Steps [premiered] July 21), for the first time, these bookazines primarily concentrate on the comic books—relatively recent comics—that relate to or inspired the movies. They are a form of comic book. Other, earlier bookazines focused more on the movie, the characters, the actors—and a movie’s relationship to comic books. Sometimes, such bookazines contextualized the characters and comics in the history of comics publishing, but if there was comic art in the bookazine, it was a spot illustration. Never a full page or story.

These bookazines are different. DC Comics Presents Superman is a 100-page bookazine that is almost all comics. There’s a two-page introduction and a quarter-page lead-in preceding each reprinted story that explains

how the piece influenced the movie. There's an occasional bit of trivia dropped in on a page. Otherwise, the bookazine is all comics reprints, including stories from 2005's All-Star Superman #1, 1998's Superman for All Seasons #1, and 2005's Lex Luthor: Man of Steel #1.

While these are more recent reprints than I tend to be interested in—I'm mostly a golden, silver, and bronze age guy—I enjoyed reading them. You can't go wrong with the writing of Grant Morrison and the artwork of Tim Sale (which is absolutely beautiful in this instance). What interests me most, however, is the shift away from such bookazines concentrating on the movie as a movie—the director, the actors as celebrities, and some context—toward showcasing the actual comic books that inspired the movie. In the past, such information might occasionally come up in interviews with a screenwriter or director, but this is an explicit centering of the source material. It's not just that the new Superman movie comes out of the context or history of comics. It was influenced by specific issues and series.

Obviously, before the advent of bookazines, there were movie tie-in comics—The Superman Movie Special from 1983, the 1989 Batman one-shot, and 2017's two-issue Spider-Man: Homecoming Prelude come to mind—but those were perhaps more intended for existing comic book readers rather than the general public. Even if sold outside the direct market, they were published in the comic book format. They were sold where comics were sold. This bookazine takes a step beyond that. It is an example of comic books returning to the newsstand—but in the format of a magazine. Not only might a non-comics reader be interested in the new movie, they might be interested in the actual, specific comic books that provided its inspiration. Here are those comic book stories. You might be interested in reading more.

Marvel Comics: The Fantastic 4, then, is somewhat similar. Also a 100-page squarebound bookazine, the SPC special reprints three Fantastic Four stories. Included are reprints from 2002's Fantastic Four #60, 2009's Fantastic Four #570, and 2022's Fantastic Four #1. In addition to a page-long introduction to each reprint—the increased length offering more information on the impact and influence of the given story—there are also several short articles on the origin of the Fantastic Four (itself a two-page comic reprint), the transition from the page to the screen (less a history of movie depictions of the heroes over the years and more a consideration of the new movie specifically), and the movie's production design elements.

Similar to the Superman bookazine, the focus is on more recent comics rather than the history of comics. The readership they're targeting is a more recent, perhaps younger audience. I've only read two of the three stories so far, but Mark Waid's piece on the team's hiring of a public relations consultant is a nifty bit of comic book movie meta-commentary. Similarly, the idea that the Fantastic Four exists not just as a team of superheroes but as an implicit apology from Reed Richards for putting his friends and family at risk is thought provoking. I also enthusiastically support bringing the writing of Jonathan Hickman to a broader audience. In my opinion, he's one of the more interesting comic writers in the last couple of decades. Again, the comic book reprints take center stage.

But these bookazines are also notable for another reason. Not only do they primarily reprint comics, the house ads they contain direct readers in a very specific direction. In the Superman bookazine, there are two ads. One is for the three graphic novels that build on the pieces reprinted in the bookazine: All-Star Superman, Superman for All Seasons, and Absolute Luthor/Joker. The other house ad, on the back cover, promotes DC Universe Infinite, the publisher's online service. While the ad leads with text encouraging readers to “[g]o to a comics shop near you,” the real offer is a 30-day free trial to DC Universe Infinite's monthly standard tier. They don't want you to buy comic books, per se, they want you to read comics online. (Actually, given the recent distribution challenges, that might be a survival tactic rather than a cop out.)

The Fantastic Four bookazine also includes house ads. One promotes the first issue of Matt Fraction's The Fantastic 4: First Steps series. "Explore the world of the upcoming film," the ad reads. (That series might be more in line with the tie-in one-shots and miniseries mentioned above.) A second house ad focuses on the publisher's Marvel Premier Collection, which I've yet to check out. And the third mirrors the approach taken by DC in its Superman bookazine. "Your next steps are on Marvel Unlimited," the ad reads. By scanning a QR code, readers can "redeem" four collections to continue reading online. Those titles include Fantastic Four: Behold... Galactus, Fantastic Four: Solve Everything, Fantastic Four: Imaginators, and Fantastic Four: Whatever Happened to the Fantastic Four?

In both cases, the next step isn't necessarily to go to a comic shop—despite some token encouragement offered by DC—but to go online. Regardless, these bookazines serve a purpose: to showcase the comic books that inspired or relate to the new movies, and to help new readers find their way to more stories.

Both are steps worth taking. Comic books have returned to the newsstand, disguised as magazines!

Fanzine Reviews

Juvenatrix #270-273 (May-August 2025)

Review by Heath Row

Editor Renato Rosatti, currently based in São Paulo, Brazil, has been publishing this horror and science fiction fanzine for 35 years—producing almost 6,000 pages to date. I've been receiving Juvenatrix via email since late last year and just recently started using Google Translate to translate each PDF issue into English so I can read it rather than skim it. I wish I'd done so sooner and plan to continue the practice on an ongoing basis. (I might even do the same for Perry Rhodan!) While Portugal has an active comics and roleplaying game culture—and sf fandom—there aren't many fanzines in Portugal, so one's attention might occasionally turn toward Brazil.

The issues addressed in this review range from nine to 20 pages in length; three of the four include 18-20 pages. They follow a relatively similar structure, combining photographs of heavy metal concerts in Brazil, occasional news about new Brazilian Portuguese comic book and book releases, reviews of horror and sf movies, serialized fiction, and genre-oriented comic art.

Because the metal coverage is relegated to a handful of photos—other than a memorial to Ozzy Osbourne in #273—if you aren't interested in heavy metal, it doesn't detract from other content. (I am curious, however, whether Rosatti has included more music-oriented material in the past; record and show reviews, and interviews would complement the other writing quite well.)

Movies reviewed in these issues include Night Slaves; Beginning of the End; Rattlers; A Cold Night's Death; The Aftermath (which features Forrest J Ackerman); The Cat Creature; Killdozer; Phantom Ship; The Evil; The Devil's Partner; Sisters of Death; Destination Inner Space; The Cape Canaveral Monsters; Project Moon Base; Caltiki, the Immortal Monster; The Alligator People; The Man Who Lived Again; and The Forest—all likely candidates for a screening at the Infernal Wilson. Additional reviews are reprinted from back issues of Juvenatrix, as well as a fanzine titled Astaroth.

Each review features cover or poster artwork, and a selection of stills from the movie. Multiple TV movies are included among those reviewed. Rosatti comments on the cast, plotline, production, and themes of the films, as well as whether they're available in Brazil—either online, subtitled in Brazilian Portuguese, dubbed, or aired on TV. For local genre fen, it's a helpful resource to track down such fare in one's primary language.

Caio Alexandre Bezarias's serialized story, "The Guardians of the Black and Silver Shields" ("Os guardiões dos escudos negros e de prata"), appears in three of the four issues. #270 features the fifth part of the 17th episode, so we're pretty far along in the story. The serial's content is similar to the rest of *Juvenatrix*, featuring a headbanging protagonist and a horror-sf narrative. Each installment is about a page or two in length, and the fiction offers a welcome balance to the pacing of the fanzine. The portion published in #270 is especially cool.

Also of note is the artwork of Angelo Junior, which is absolutely fantastic. Featuring older and newer pieces, the art depicts sf, fantasy, and horror themes, and the longer-form comics in #272-273 are excellent. It's no surprise that the artist publishes his own comics. (<https://clubedeautores.com.br/livros/autores/angelo-junior>) The recently released *AlmanaHQue Nona Arte* #5 is a horror special.

It's heartening to know that this form of genre film fandom—and fanzine—is alive and well in Brazil. *Juvenatrix* is an energetic, reliable fanzine that readers of *Drive In Asylum*, *Stapled Spine* (both reviewed in *Faculae & Filigree* #36), *Misfit Cinema Journal*, and similar fanzines might find interesting, even if it's in Brazilian Portuguese. Don't let that stop you. Inquire via Renato Rosatti, juvenatrix.blogspot.com.br, renatorosatti@yahoo.com.br.

Pablo Lennis #450-453 (May-August 2025) Review by Heath Row

If fanged John Thiel has been publishing Pablo Lennis on a monthly basis consistently, not only did earlier this year mark the fanzine's 450th issue, but the midpoint of its 38th year of publication. That's an impressive and inspiring milestone that deserves recognition and applause, and I welcome receiving the fanzine in the mail every month. Thiel published his first fanzine in the 1950s when he was 12, and I've enjoyed my correspondence with him over the years, primarily through the National Fantasy Fan Federation—and Pablo Lennis.

Each of the issues read to prepare for this review contains between 18-22 pages, a manageable monthly output that features a mix of editorials, serialized fiction, poetry, fanart, fandom news, fanzine reviews, and letters of comment. The contributors and correspondents that Thiel publishes might not participate elsewhere in fanzines generally, though some do, and Pablo Lennis offers an interesting role model: Regardless of their involvement in broader fandom, faneds and fen can create and nurture their own pocket universes. Pablo Lennis is a seething, somewhat self-contained mass of creativity and commentary, though the quality of its writing can vary widely.

Much of each issue is composed of the ongoing serialization of Thiel's story "Omnis Vivandi" and Joanne Tolson's "How I Became a Ghost." In #453, Thiel indicates that "Omnis Vivandi" might conclude soon. I hope the fanzine—or another fanzine—continues after the story ends!

Other highlights include Jose Sanchez's personal writing, "Flying Saucer Sighting;" the artwork of Peter Zenger; Daniel Slaten's "The Billionaire and His Satellite" and "Dylan and the Chatbot;" and Gerald Heyder's contributions of poetry, provocative questions, and artwork. Heyder's cartooning is delightful. The mix of different kinds of content helps bring a balance and rhythm to Pablo Lennis that I appreciate.

But the real reasons to read Pablo Lennis are Thiel's editorials, fandom news and fanzine commentary (largely concentrating on the N3F), and the letters of comment. Every issue, Thiel offers a glimpse into his state of mind, his perspective on fandom ("Anniversary Issue" in #450 and the introduction to "Science Fiction

Fandom” in #453 are especially interesting), occasional alerts to unfamiliar fanzines—such as Mystery Adventure Review in Tucson, Ariz. (Faunch! Is that, perhaps, Fred Woodworth’s Mystery & Adventure Series Review?)—and personal news sometimes merely mentioned in passing. The mention of vandals and racketeers in #452 concerned me; I hope everything’s okeh in your neck of the woods! (I was also amused and slightly perplexed by Thiel’s description of The Stf Amateur as “dyspeptic” in #452, but I’ll take that as a compliment!)

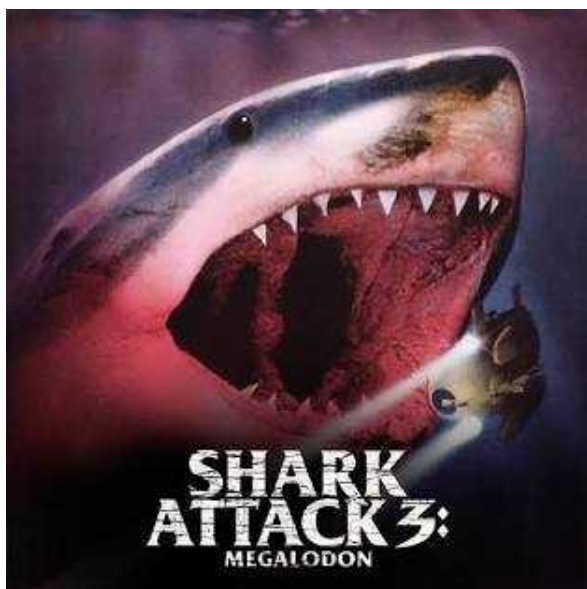
The lettercol includes missives from correspondents such as Joe Napolitano, Tolson, Sanchez—who mentions Lon Strickler’s Phantoms & Monsters Radio (<https://www.youtube.com/@PhantomsMonstersRadio>)—Andy Dobson, and Slaten, indicating that the fanzine is read actively and attentively by its contributors. Tell me more about your “cult group” in Madison, sir! Anyone I should meet?

And the “Re-Entry” sections, which end each ish with an editorial evaluation, are also interesting. Thiel considers his fanzine’s layout, typesetting, and content; as well as his own writing, the poltergeists that might interfere with achieving “the perfect issue,” and other topics.

Pablo Lennis is a long-running fanzine that is very much its own ecosystem. I am grateful to be adjacent to it—and sometimes even mentioned inside! (Thank you for your ongoing recognition and support of the Amateur, Mr. Thiel; I value it.) Available for \$2 or the Usual from John Thiel, 30 N. 19th St., Lafayette, IN, 47904; kinethiel@outlook.com.

Movies

Shark Attack 3: Megalodon Review by Heath Row



Pretty much a knockoff of *Jaws*—as most shark movies are—*Shark Attack 3* is borderline science fiction because the animal on the attack is reputedly extinct and exhibits exceptional intelligence. The megalodon lived roughly 3.5 million years ago. The movie is more notable, however, because it stars John Barrowman. It was Barrowman’s second feature-length film, and he went on to play Captain Jack Harkness in *Doctor Who* and *Torchwood*. Apparently, he’s not proud of the movie, but it did help pay for a house. Maybe the down payment.

After discovering a large tooth embedded in a damaged underwater cable, Barrowman’s character posts a photograph on the Internet seeking help identifying what kind of creature it came from. The depiction of what Web browsers and the Internet look like—and how they work—is pretty humorous. A marine biologist—played by an actress who portrayed a different character in the first *Shark Attack*—encounters the protagonist’s request for assistance and travels to Mexico to search for a shark she believes to be a megalodon.

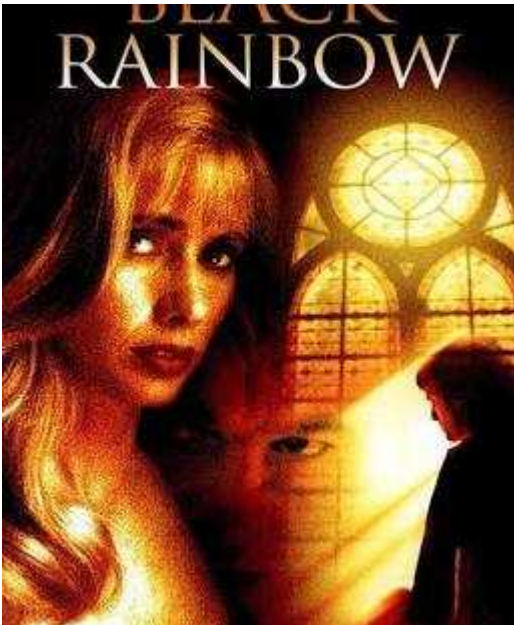
A shark that’s not very large if it is a megalodon begins to terrorize the beaches, killing a drunk, amorous couple after they go down a waterslide and a man playing Frisbee with his dog. That scene is particularly grisly.

Barrowman's character teams up with the biologist to tag and track the shark, eventually confronting it before meeting its mother.

The parent, a much larger megalodon, offers several opportunities for some relatively bad computer-generated imagery. Not only is a miniature submarine larger on the inside than it is on the outside, but the size of the megalodon varies as it eats people, a jet ski, and a boat. (The shark remains the same size on screen while the scale of what it consumes varies.)

Mostly following the trajectory of *Jaws*—including an employer who declines to close the beaches—the movie isn't very good, though it was enjoyable.

Black Rainbow Review by Heath Row



I watched this 1989 horror/mystery movie starring Rosanna Arquette, Jason Robards Jr., and Tom Hulce. Largely filmed in North and South Carolina, the film tells the story of a father-daughter duo on tour to showcase the young woman's abilities as a medium and clairvoyant. She is able to help audience members contact and communicate with dead relatives.

When her stage act—which is much more than an entertaining performance—begins to foresee events that have yet to come, contacting people who are not yet dead, she draws the attention of a hired killer enlisted by a wealthy industrialist to quell labor unrest. His employer doesn't want to be identified.

In addition to the portrayal of seances held on the stages of churches and rented halls, *Black Rainbow* concentrates on the challenging relationship between Arquette's medium character and her alcoholic father, portrayed by Robards. It also focuses on her developing relationship with a skeptical newspaper reporter. The sense of familial isolation, codependence, and control might be the most interesting aspect of the movie.

Also of interest, however, is that the movie could have inspired one of my wife's favorite novels: Hilary Mantel's *Beyond Black*. Mantel reviewed *Black Rainbow* for *The Spectator* in 1990 (<https://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/11th-august-1990/32/cinema>), later turning her hand more seriously to fiction. *Beyond Black*—which also focuses on a psychic—was published in 2005.

The main narrative of the movie is bookended by a couple of scenes in which the reporter—years later—tracks down the medium to better ascertain what really happened. Those scenes, while potential padding to lengthen the runtime, might offer the most eerily fantastic elements of the film. Did he actually track her down? Is she really still alive? The final scene, in which the reporter returns again, is especially atmospheric and creepy, much like the kudzu featured in the bookends.

SerCon

The Inhumans and Other Stories
 edited by Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay (MIT Press, 2024)
 Review by Heath Row



I’ve had my eye on the Joshua Glenn-edited Radium Age series of proto-sf from 1900-1935 since it launched in 2022. Though I’ve acquired several of the series’ titles—and plan to interview Glenn at some point—this is the first book from the series I’ve actually read. It’s a wonderful anthology— and helps affirm that the Radium Age series might be one of the most important sf series currently published. (The British Library’s Tales of the Weird series might be another.)

This book collects a “selection of Bengali science fiction,” including a novel and three short stories: Hemendrakumar Roy’s 1935 novel *The Inhumans*, Jagadananda Ray’s 1895 “Voyage to Venus,” Nanigopal Majumdar’s 1931 “The Mystery of the Giant,” and Manoranjan Bhattacharya’s 1931 “The Martian Purana.” Glenn contributes a Series Foreword contextualizing the book in the series and asserting the series’ intent, and editor Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay’s introduction considers the importance of the selections, as well as challenges posed by their translation—this is the first time the novel has been published in English.

I was surprised that there’s a history of Bengali sf dating back so far, though the region’s colonial history offers at least one reason for the genre’s proliferation and popularity. Such stories were published in a number of magazines, including *Randhanu*, *Rangmashal*, *Mouchak*, *Bharati*, and *Sandesh*. Those literary magazines weren’t necessarily sf magazines, though they published sf, fantasy, and “myth-fiction,” as well as translations of Arthur Conan Doyle, H.G. Wells, Edgar Rice Burroughs, and Jules Verne. (That might itself be a form of literary colonialism. John Reider’s *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* might be a thought-provoking resource.)

Roy’s *The Inhumans* is a relatively straightforward “lost race” adventure story that takes some liberties with the form. A Bengali large-game hunter travels to a forbidden mountain—Juju Mountain—in the Congolese jungles of Africa in search of sport. He encounters a human woman raised by gorillas before falling into a crevice. When the hunter regains consciousness, he finds himself in a subterranean world.

That world is populated by an advanced—or degenerate—form of Bengali, the offspring of an expedition long thought lost. They are able to manipulate their physical forms and roll about in barrels for transport. One of them, a scientist, plans to develop a race of superhumans—hoping to use the hunter as a subject—and the protagonist meets a young woman, perhaps falling in love. Even though much of the humor might be lost on me given the writing’s era and country of origin, the novel is very funny, as well as adventurous.

Roy’s “Voyage to Venus,” the oldest of the works included, was originally published in *Bharati*. An amateur scientist falls asleep while visiting with a friend, waking on the dark side of Venus. There, he encounters his friend, who had also been transported to the planet. They meet savage Venusians, travel to the other side of the planet and climb a mountain before plunging into a sea. Another group of Venusians pulls them from the water, and they eventually return home.

“The Mystery of the Giant,” written by Majumdar, first appeared in Ramdhanu. The story focuses on a scientist whose body changes radically after he consumes a potion. And Bhattacharya’s “The Martian Purana”—perhaps an example of the myth-fiction mentioned above—combines aspects of the Mahabharata and Ramayana with sf elements.

Of the works collected, *The Inhumans* is clearly the marquee text. Even so, “The Martian Purana” offers an opportunity to explore a hybrid literary form that does something other than don the clothing of a colonist’s writing. That’s not to say that that’s all *The Inhumans* does—its parody is critical and pointed— but the incorporation of Hindu epics proves quite interesting.

In addition to the series’ books focusing on longer and shorter works of proto-sf, I hope that this anthology leads to further exploration of writing from other countries in which English is not the primary language. I’m curious what forms sf takes when it develops more independently of colonial forces.

Jerome Bixby Bio-Bibliography

by

Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D.

N3F Historian



Drexel Jerome Lewis Bixby (January 11, 1923 – April 28, 1998), who usually published as Jerome Bixby and was known to his friends as “Jerry,” was a prolific author of science fiction (s-f), fantasy, westerns, and stories in other genres. He was born in Los Angeles, California, to Rex and Ila Lewis Bixby.

He died of heart failure in San Bernardino, California, survived by his sons.

He was married to Linda Burman, and they had three sons together before they divorced.

He served in the United States Navy during World War II.

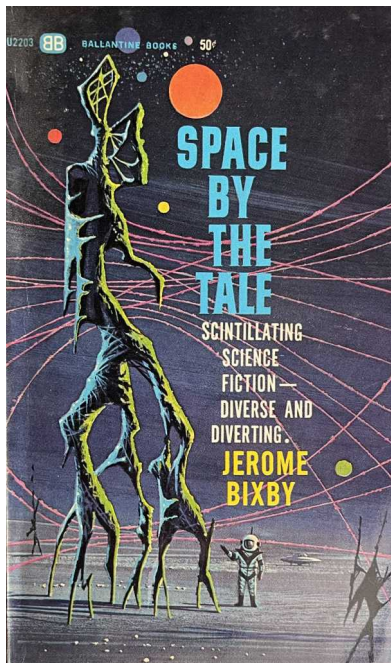
Pseudonyms

He used several pseudonyms during his career, including Jay Lewis Bixby, D. B. Lewis, Harry Neal, Albert Russell, J. Russell, M. St. Vivant, Thornecliff Herrick (house name), and Alger Rome (with fellow s-f author Algis Budrys).

Later Career/Life

He was an editor of *Planet Stories* during 1950 – 1951. During the same time period, he also edited *Two Complete Science-Adventure Books*, a companion volume to *Planet Stories* -- both published by Fiction House of New York. During the early 1950s, he was an associate editor with both *Thrilling Wonder Stories* and *Startling Stories*. In 1953, he was an associate editor at *Galaxy*, working under editor H. L. Gold.

He was a member of the famous Hydra Club of New York, founded in 1947 by nine s-f authors. An article by s-f author/editor Judith Merrill about the club in the November, 1951, issue of *Marvel Science Fiction* was accompanied by a Harry Harrison drawing caricaturing 41 of the 60 members. Bixby’s image was included in the drawing.



Bixby attended Midwescon 4 in 1953. Midwestcon 4, aka the 4th Annual Midwest Conference, was a relaxacon held May 16 – 17, 1953, at Beatley's on Indian Lake, Russells Point, Ohio.

Bixby was also a composer, and studied piano and composition at the Juillard School of Music.

In addition, he wrote screenplays, including It! The Terror from Beyond Space (1958) – which is said to have inspired the later movie Alien -- and The Man from Earth (2007). His story, “Fantastic Voyage,” was made into an award-winning movie in 1966, starring Stephen Boyd and Raquel Welch.

Principal Writings

Bixby is remembered today mainly for writing four episodes of TV's Star Trek (“Mirror, Mirror,” “Day of the Dove,” “Requiem for Methuselah,” and “By Any Other Name”) and for his popular short story, “It's a Good Life” (1953). The latter story was the basis for a 1961 episode of The Twilight Zone (and later included in Twilight Zone: The Movie in 1983).

His short story collection, Space by the Tail (1954), is representative of his s-f work.

The Devil's Scrapbook (1964) is a collection of his fantasy and horror stories.

Awards/Honors/Achievements



He was nominated for two Hugos (Best Dramatic Presentation, 1967, 1968), and for a 1954 Best Short Story Retro Hugo. His short story, “It's a Good Life,” was voted into their Hall of Fame by the Science Fiction Writers of America.

Some Concluding Comments

He once worked as an insurance investigator.

Late in his career, he said that his hobbies were painting, architecture, and psychical research.

Critics have reported that Bixby had more than 1,000 stories published during his career.

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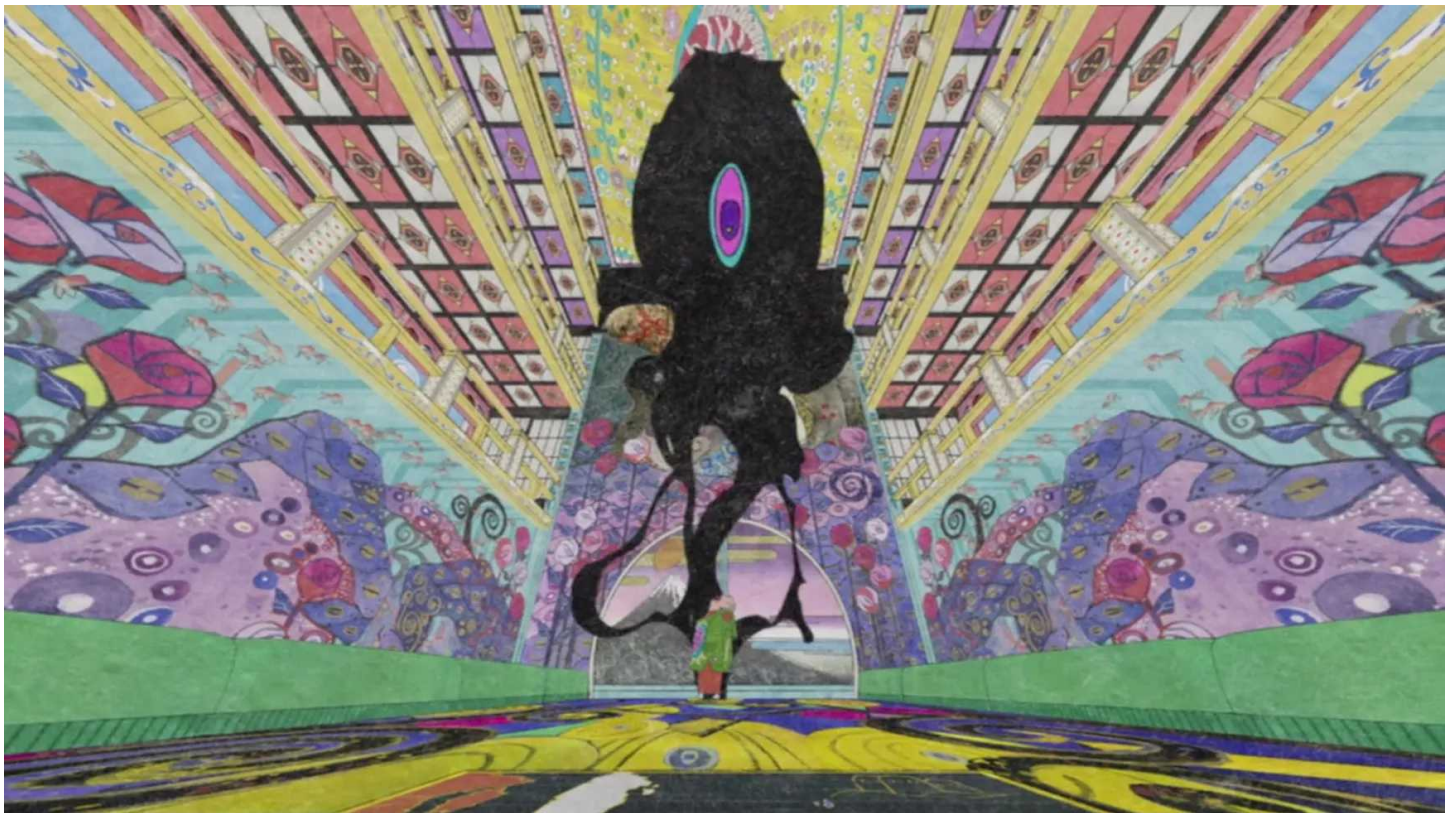
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Note: In addition to the above, several Internet sites were consulted, including Wikipedia, Fancyclopedia 3, and ISFDB.

Anime

Mononoke Week 3: Umibouzu (Sea Bishop)

Review by Jessi Silver



Doing an “anime book club” on a series that I adore so much has certainly opened up a mixed bag of emotions. On the one hand, it’s awesome to have the opportunity to watch something I love over again; as I’ve stated many times at this point, it’s not something I give myself a lot of time to do (it usually only happens if I manage to dupe my local anime club into watching some of the weird stuff that I like). On the other hand, I have this creeping fear that I’ll reach a point where I can’t manage to write anything that truly captures my feelings about the show. I have a difficult enough time already trying to make my writing convey the full nature of my thoughts, and that’s compounded by the fact that this is one of my favorite series and I want people to have the same love for it that I do. Sometimes it feels like there’s a weight on my shoulders, though of course this is burden I carry by choice!

This week's story is told over the course of three episodes instead of two, so there's a little bit more to take notes on and unpack. It also takes longer for the story to get to the root of its mononoke's origin, though in my opinion this gives it some additional time to focus on setting and atmosphere. But I'll leave my commentary for after the episode summaries.

Part 1



A group of individuals have boarded a merchant ship to gain passage to Edo. The trip normally takes four to five days to complete, so the travelers decide to introduce themselves to one another to make for a more cordial passage. Among them are an ascetic (Genyosai), a samurai (Sasaki Hyoe), a bishop and his monk-in-training (Genkei and Sogen), Kayo (a house servant who should be familiar to fans of the show), the merchant who owns the ship (Mikuniya) and his ship's captain (Goromaru), and the Medicine Seller. The trip is expected to be uneventful, because the ship has an infallible compass that

always points North, at least according to the captain. However, many of the passengers seem to have a similar desire; they hear that there are ayakashi in these waters, and they're inclined to want to see some. Genyosai even regales the other passengers with stories he knows about ayakashi and how he'd like to become famous by defeating or exorcising them. He may very well get his wish – sometime during the second night, someone on board sets a magnet near the compass, throwing the ship off course into an area of the sea known as the "Dragon's Triangle," a place where ayakashi are said to run rampant.

It isn't long before the sea breeze stops blowing and the ship is surrounded by heavy clouds that blot out the sunlight. A giant vessel appears in the sky and attempts to make off with the merchant ship. The Medicine Seller is able to fight it off utilizing the tools he has at his disposal, but this wipes out all of his ingredients and he won't be able to utilize the same tactic again. The passengers begin to accuse one another of setting them all on this dangerous path. Though the Medicine Seller has the power to exorcise the demons that are plaguing them, the sacred sword is not yet inclined to release its power.

Part 2

Following their near-miss encounter, the passengers discuss and debate the nature of ayakashi and mononoke



and how they might be categorized and dealt with going forward. Kayo starts to wonder who the Medicine Seller is beholden to and whether he's actually trying to help anyone other than himself. As the Medicine Seller takes a moment to reflect on the situation, the sound of a ghostly biwa rings out across the ship. The group is approached by an ayakashi strumming the instrument. Genyosai recognizes this exact situation from one of his stories and informs the others that the ayakashi will ask each of them to state their greatest fear. If they lie they could be left to wander the netherworld forever (though this doesn't seem to deter some of them).

Each individual is asked in turn to state their fear, and then is forced to experience an illusory version of it (some more terrifying than others). Lastly, the ayakashi makes his way to Genkei.

Genkei is revealed as the person who set the magnet to the compass to gain passage to the Dragon's Triangle, because no fisherman would dare go there knowingly. Genkei's greatest fear is related to his sister, Oyo, who sacrificed herself in his place by closing herself within a hollow boat – a vessel made from a giant hollowed log from which the passenger cannot escape. He believes that the grudge she bears for having to sacrifice her life is what has caused the Dragon's Triangle to be filled with terrifying ayakashi, and he has returned to this place to try to calm her soul and release her from her suffering, as is his duty as a monk.

Finale

After the hollow boat is pulled to the surface, the men work to open the locked porthole. They assume that if they can lay Oyo's body and soul to rest, they may be able to calm the Dragon's Triangle for good. Though a haunting scratching noise can be heard coming from within the boat, when the door is opened they find nothing inside. Genkei realizes that it is time to lay bare the story that has haunted him for fifty years of his life. When he and Oyo were very young, their parents died. The siblings were devoted to each other, perhaps too much so; though Genkei left to join a strict Buddhist order, his mind would wander to the improper feelings he had towards his sister. Because the Devil's Triangle was a dangerous area even before it was swarmed with ayakashi, Genkei was asked by his people to become a sacrifice to the gods in hopes that it would calm the water. Knowing that this would release him from his lustful suffering, he agreed. But he was afraid, and Oyo sensed that. She offered to take his place, both because she thought him too good-natured to go through with the sacrifice, and because she harbored feelings towards him as well and would rather die than marry another man. This, he says, is what became of his sister.

Because his sword cannot yet be released, the Medicine Seller presses Genkei even further. He identifies the fact that it is not Oyo who has become the mononoke (as his scales are not indicating a mononoke in that vicinity), but some darker aspect of Genkei himself that he has wrestled with and feared for so long. To defeat this presence, Genkei must allow it to be exorcised. The Medicine Seller makes short work of the demonic shadow, and peace befalls Genkei for the first time in many years.

Thoughts and Reactions

This story arc has always been one of the most difficult for me to wrestle with. It's taken me quite a while for me to identify why that is, but I think part of the reason has to do with the resolution, which has never really sit well with me. Like I've mentioned in previous weeks, one of the things that's appealed to me about Mononoke is that its stories deal with the unjust situations that women have had to endure both historically and into the modern age. In the case of this story, the exact nature of the injustice is somewhat difficult to pinpoint right away; it's not just some plain-spoken example of sexism or abuse that's simplistic and easy to vilify. Instead, it's a story about two people whose emotions towards one another are uncomfortable to think about and difficult to relate to, and the different ways in which they make sacrifices to wrongly accommodate them. I suppose, though, that this is what this project is about – it's an attempt by me to get to the heart of a series that has allowed me to experience such complicated feelings for so long.

A motif that reveals itself in many different facets of this story is that of opposing forces, mirror images, inner and outer presentations of self – the two halves that make up the personalities and existences of the characters. Almost universally, I believe people develop a persona that they're willing to present in public, as well as an inner world comprised of the parts of themselves that they wish to keep secret, their truly-held beliefs, and traits that they feel may not be quite ready for prime time (now or ever). Because Japan's culture is more focused on maintaining the harmony of the group dynamic, their language has specific terms that speak to this concept – *tatemaie* (建前), or the public or outward-facing components of one's existence (the persona and opinions you'd

be comfortable sharing with strangers), and honne (本音), one's true thoughts and opinions. I think for the most energy part the aspects of ourselves that we keep hidden are innocuous but maybe seem embarrassing in some way – I probably wouldn't announce to my coworkers that I recently attended a furry convention, for example. This idea shows up throughout the series, because really nobody wants to tell the Medicine Seller the entire truth the first time he asks; there's always something else being kept hidden, something that paints the accused in an even worse light, and they've often put a lot of time and energy into fooling those around them (and often, themselves) into thinking that they're a normal, or even upstanding person. Genkei is a clear example of this concept, because he's literally two halves of a person – one half of which carries all the darkness and guilt that he's collected over fifty years.

Genkei's situation is frustrating to me, not really because of what he says or does, but because in thinking about it I realize that his attitude is so reminiscent of things we're experiencing currently and in his resolution I see many of the flaws in how we address (or don't) men's transgressions against women. When I think of some of the Hollywood stars, comedians, and politicians who've been (rightly) adversely affected by our current willingness to call out and become intolerant towards their various abuses, I think about how ill-equipped we are to expect and apply meaningful consequences to their actions. Many of them have lost high profile jobs in the industry, and there have been some half-hearted apologies provided, but beyond that we seem to lack a framework for these individuals to truly atone for the things that they've done. I honestly don't know what I would ask of someone like Louis C.K. or Aziz Ansari, but hearing that both men have started to trickle back into performing (some, unfortunately, to great applause) is causing me a lot of anger and anxiety, and I'm not even the direct victim of their crimes!

Genkei's hidden shame, his ambition and sense of self importance that allowed him to value his own life over that of his sister, becomes its own separate terrifying entity that's eliminated at the very moment he manages to reveal the truth. Even his sister's spirit seems to forgive him; the malevolent form of the mononoke becomes that of a young woman, before it rejoins Genkei and makes him whole and beautiful. What bothers me is that Genkei has really only done the bare minimum of what ought to be done – he reveals and acknowledges the truth, which is a truth that paints him in a poor light. After performing that one deed, he's allowed to shed this burden and shine brighter than he did before. He's allowed to reintegrate and maintain his position as a religious leader. No one really seems to question the justice in this. But he hasn't really done the difficult work that ought to be done; in fact, the truth about his sister's sacrifice, his rotten self-serving feelings, and the situation's resolution, could very well never be heard again beyond the confines of the ship, and he would never have to bring it up again if he so chose. Instead he ought to be doing something to help ensure that the things that happened to him and his sister don't happen more in the future; that's the bit of the story that we'll never see, and can only speculate about whether or not they happened.

I think too often "I'm sorry" is the end of the story, rather than the beginning. They're words that can carry a lot of weight, but only if they're accompanied by action and even then, only action that's meaningful towards the parties that have been harmed. I suppose, assuming that the visual symbol of the shadow woman is meant to represent Oyo, then the person harmed by the action has chosen to forgive the perpetrator. I have to say, though, that I would certainly expect something more out of the deal. I don't like to hold grudges, but I'm absolutely not someone who's handing out forgiveness like Halloween candy. I think perhaps I may always wonder if Oyo's sacrifice was finally met with some kind of justice later down the line.

I think there's more to be taken from this story arc when we read between the lines a bit. I found it interesting that almost all the characters (aside from the Medicine Seller with his sword) assumed that the mononoke was the result of a woman's grudge, and not an offshoot of a man's transgressions as turned out to be the case. I think as viewers I think we're easily led to believe that the easy, obvious answer is clearly the correct one; even

other stories in this series seem to imply on the surface that to commit a crime against a woman is to invite her undying supernatural rage in some way. Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned, right? But it's always more complicated than that. As it turns out, Oyo's sacrifice was perhaps the most untarnished action of anyone's; she knew she could not exist happily in the world considering her immoral feelings towards her brother, and chose to become one with the sea without malice and of her own volition. There's certainly some nobility in that, though it does also make me think about women and the sacrifices we are often asked to make even when it's not entirely logical or warranted. For example, we often make sacrifices of our free time, energy, sleep, and other things when we choose to have a family. Sometimes we sacrifice our job satisfaction and livelihood by choosing to stay home. While these are all choices that men are free to make, despite the fact that the world has changed over the years to be more equitable it often still falls to women to give up more pieces of themselves in the pursuit of what we are told is some kind of higher duty to society. I certainly don't mean to invalidate the choice itself, but I do think we have a long way to go until it becomes an actual choice and not a thinly veiled expectation. The resolution of this story glorifies the sacrifice somewhat, and Genkei is not really asked or required to respond in kind.

As I mentioned earlier, this story arc uses a lot of "dual" and mirror related imagery to suggest the duality of the characters and, by extension, the truth. The Medicine Seller seems to have access to some alternate plane of perception; there are several moments where the scene jump cuts to one of him standing in a similar position, but upside-down in the room as compared to the other characters. In this place he sees ayakashi that are present in the vicinity. He also provides his mirror amulet to his other self when battling the mononoke, to use as a tool against it. This is another way that the arc references the duality of all people – the Medicine Seller, who is normally mysterious and restrained, has within him a presence that could be considered another being entirely, one who fights rather than analyzes. And, of course, with the exception of Genyosai whose interaction with the biwa-playing fish man is left to the viewer's imagination, we are treated to the inner mental workings of most of the other characters as they struggle with facing the manifestation of their deepest fears. Reflections, inner and outer selves, meat space and the spiritual realm... all of these interrelated pairs show up throughout this story, emphasizing the two-sided nature of our human interactions.

I find Genkei's visual transformation to be incredibly striking. After his mononoke half is exorcised and becomes a visual suggestion of his sister's spirit, Genkei's appearance changes completely. Smooth skin, bright eyes with long eyelashes, full lips... he becomes much more feminine in appearance. I've always kind of wondered how to interpret this. If he truly has incorporated his sister's spirit into his body, then I suppose it makes some sense for their shared body to have traits from both. It could also be an echo of (or a suggestion about) the Medicine Seller – I learned many years ago that the way he dresses is considered more feminine than masculine with the wide obi and layered kimono, and he seems to speak in a more feminine mode despite his deep voice. This appearance outside the binary does, I'm ashamed to admit, imply something supernatural about his existence; Genkei's beauty and more feminine appearance has some of the same effect. Ultimately, I think we all are a blend of traits that are considered (correctly or not) masculine or feminine in nature; this may be yet another way of acknowledging that duality, though in sort of a clunky way.

A final piece of the story, one which took me until this viewing to perceive, occurs after the credits roll on the final episode. Sasaki Hyoe has a final scene during which he clutches his right eye (like Benkei) and seems to experience some kind of emotional release, after which his broken sword disappears completely. I always found this scene very strange and out-of-place, until I noticed that, in the background of a shot in which we also see the Medicine Seller, there is another Hyoe facing the opposite direction. Whether his situation was related to Genkei's directly, or whether it was coincidentally just similar, it appears to me that perhaps the Medicine Seller was able to lead him to a similar resolution. (Unrelated, but his look reminds me a little bit of the character Kitaro; I think it's the one glaring eye).

Though this isn't one of my favorite story arcs in the series, it still managed to provide some interesting fodder for interpretation (and that's assuming I'm even on the right track!). I feel like I understood it a lot more with this viewing than I have with prior ones, though I'm sure there's still even more to be discovered in the future. For now, though, I think I'll leave this post as is, and allow others to reflect as they deem necessary.

Food of Famous Author

Midnight Sky Cake

A positively gothic recipe by Cedar Sanderson

I was noodling around with recipes and came up with this one. I didn't mean to bake a Goth cake, it's just that the only baking cocoa in the pantry was Black Cocoa¹ and I'd been asked for a dairy-free chocolate cake. In fact, this recipe is not only dairy-free, but egg free. The base recipe, which I have tweaked rather a lot from its origin, came from a James Beard cookbook, so it's entirely possible this cake has roots in the Great Depression and the food rationing during (and somewhat after, depending on the part of the world you live in) World War II. I can tell from the use of only baking soda that it is an older recipe, newer ones will use double-acting baking powder as it is a more reliable leavening agent with less touchiness about how much mixing you do, or how fast it gets in the oven.

Midnight Sky Cake

Preheat oven to 350F, then grease or line a 9x13 pan with parchment paper, or 12 cupcake liners in a muffin pan

1 1/2 c all-purpose flour

4 tbsp black cocoa powder

1 1/2 tsp baking soda

1 c sugar

In a mixing bowl, sift together the dry ingredients. Pour in the wet:

1 c water

1 tbsp lemon juice

1 1/2 tsp coffee extract²

1/2 c melted and cooled lard (If dairy-free is not mandatory, butter is good)

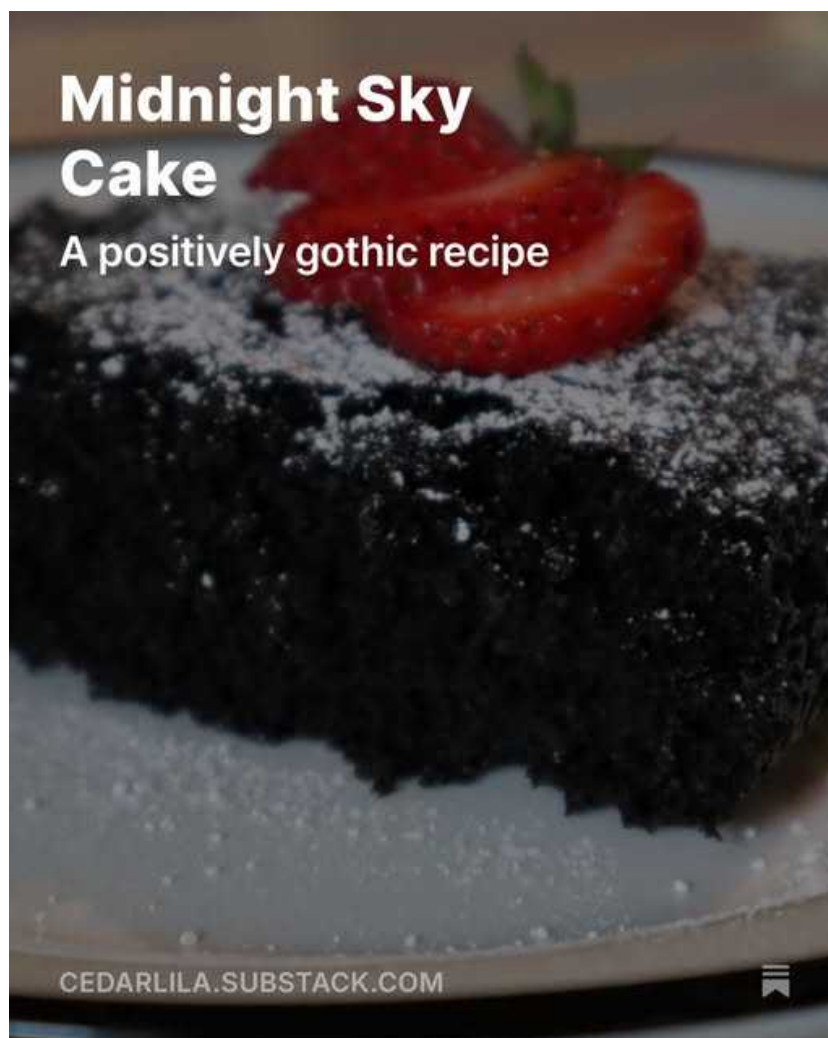
Quickly stir the wet into the dry just until the batter is combined, don't worry about any lumpiness. Pour the batter into the pan. Get it in the oven as soon as you can, the leavening reaction works right away and you want to keep it in the batter!

Bake for about 20 minutes, until firm to the touch and a cake tester comes out clean. Cool, sprinkle lightly with powdered sugar. Serve with berries if you have them, or a drizzle of warm berry jam, in lieu of frosting. Or simply as it is, for a less sweet treat!

I was pleasantly surprised at how fast and easy this is to make up, and how moist it was. It is a very chocolatey, sweet cake for it's simplicity. It was served to supper guests and got praise from all, and my friend Dorothy dubbed it Midnight Sky cake, for the color and sprinkle of white powdered sugar stars on top. It tends towards tender and crumbling, so would not be ideal for frosting and decorating, unless made into cupcakes where no lateral pressure need be applied. It's so easy, and you could make it with whatever baking cocoa you had on hand, if you don't want to keep the black in your pantry, that it would be a lovely fast informal dessert or treat any day of the week.

1 No food coloring involved, the cocoa processing leaves it black as night, and it's dutch-processed which means it's less bitter than baking cocoa powder generally is, although still more bitter than I like in my coffee. You can find it on Amazon (that's an affiliate link, thank you).

2 Or vanilla, if you haven't soaked some coffee beans in vodka or other clear liquor for a couple of weeks, which is all you need to make coffee extract.





Nocturnal Visitors by Jose Sanchez