

Tightbeam 371

August 2025



In Deepest Space
by Jose Sanchez

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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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Anime

Frankenstein Family

Review by Jesse Silver

Tanisu's parents are mad scientists who live outside of normal society. They locked up their own children on an isolated island and did experiments on them in secret, turning Tanisu's older brother and three older sisters into strange creatures. One day, their parents were arrested, and the siblings were moved to another island by the welfare office. The trouble is that none of the siblings except Tanisu know how to interact in modern day society... – [Crunchyroll](#)



Episode Summary: Tanisu's older siblings are all the result of their mad scientist parents' experimentation. They have special forms and abilities that distinguish them from normal humans, but they know very little about how to interact with society. Tanisu's distinguishing factor is that he's smart and kind, and he wants for his family to be able to live among others. As the only sibling without mutant abilities, he takes it upon himself to reintegrate them all while their parents are serving time for turning them all into scientific guinea pigs.

When the ingredients for their dinner are ruined, Tanisu suggests that they all go out to eat; a big deal when most of the family is unfamiliar with common social etiquette and can't always agree on what to have for dinner in the first place. As they sit down to dim-sum, their various alterations are on full display. Transformation, photosynthesis, predatory tendencies... these things don't mesh well with the polite restaurant atmosphere. The other patrons begin to chatter and make remarks and Tanisu becomes more and more upset with his family. It's only after he has an outburst that his siblings realize how important being out in public is to Tanisu, and they work to use chopsticks, clean up their table manners, and keep their abilities in check. Integrating into society might be an uphill battle, but they are beginning to take the first steps.

Impressions: This series technically debuted in the Spring (outside the US) and it's getting pretty close to the Autumn anime debut season, so I split the difference and decided to lump it in with the Summer anime. While I think many anime fans have some complaints about anime not being simulcast in a timely manner, personally I appreciate the fact that Crunchyroll (and other services) will continue to add to their catalog as they can. And really, do you actually have time to watch 30-60 series week-by-week as they're broadcast? Speaking for myself, that answer is "no."

I've written before about the rising popularity of international anime co-productions; I can say with complete authority that I know very little about the ins-and-outs, reasons, and mechanisms of these productions,

but the fact that they're becoming more prevalent likely speaks to several different factors in animation production. While I highly doubt there's any shortage of Japanese manga or light novels to adapt into animated form, there are definitely some overused storytelling trends among them and I suppose production committees start to see diminished returns by the time they hit isekai series number 127. I've actually noticed this phenomenon in another of my hobbies – lolita fashion.



Aisley has a predatory side.

As the fashion became popular in the West over the span of many years, Japanese brand dress releases were always the most coveted. They were expensive, often difficult-to-get, and featured quality materials and construction. I always felt that there was an element of copycat-ism to Japanese releases, though. If one brand released a certain print motif (chocolate, for example), variations on that became a trend for a while. Cutlery prints were popular, there have always been a lot of floral prints, and “old school” styles (solid colors with contrasting details and lace) continue to feature in brand releases to this day. There are *always* sailor-themed lolita dresses released in the summer time. It's not that these prints were or are bad, but they do start to blend together after a while. The last several years, though, have shown a rise in the variety and availability of lolita fashion from worldwide indie brands, and brands from places like China, Hong-Kong, and Korea. They've taken the shape and general aesthetic of lolita fashion from Japan and incorporated many new and fresh ideas, from prints that feature unusual items or themes (jellyfish, bread, and I even own a Chinese dress that incorporated Egyptian iconography) to sub-styles that mimic traditional Chinese clothing. This isn't to disparage the Japanese brands – they continue to do good work and their output was and is foundational to the fashion. But sometimes a fresh perspective is required to inject some vitality into an art form that has gotten a bit stuck in its ways.

In the case of *Frankenstein Family*, the typical Japanese anime format and style has been coupled with a setting that has a distinct Taiwanese flavor, thanks to its primarily Taiwanese (I think?) production staff. The character designs and animation style are all what one would expect from a Japanese anime; it's in the small details, like the architecture, foods, and customs (such as when Tanisu taps his first two fingers on the table when his waiter is pouring the tea), that the series reveals its origins.

Content-wise, I think this first episode is an intriguing and somewhat uncomfortable (not in the bad way) blend of tones. Because the siblings are all socially-untested and display a wide array of different abilities and traits that distinguish them from typical humans, there are lots of opportunities to demonstrate just how atypical their situation is. I think my favorite character is Snow, the older brother who can transform himself into a dog. The results are as you would expect – he's comically food-motivated, and he's very much a lovable, clumsy ding-dong with a good heart. Spider-sis Aisley is constantly on the prowl for prey. Ashise is half-plant and would rather bask in the sun than eat human food. And nothing is a surprise to Suishi, who has psychic powers. This odd blend of characters provides many comedic moments throughout the episode, but there's always an undercurrent of sadness and it crops up fairly often and unexpectedly.



The siblings have a long road ahead.

Honestly, the siblings' situation is pretty horrific. Their mad scientist parents used them as experimental subjects, fiddling with their genetics to provide them with traits that make it incredibly difficult for them to get along in any sort of social context. They were kept isolated from others and then abandoned when the parents were (rightfully) sent to jail. Tanisu occupies an odd position in this mess, being the only child who wasn't the target of his parent's special brand of bad parenting, though it's clear that he's absolutely experiencing emotional after-effects of the experience. I think that's one of the most effective parts of this episode; the sadness and horror creeps in unexpectedly, casting a pall over the characters' everyday lives. I liken it to my experience of depression, which lurks in the background of my life until something seemingly innocuous (or, honestly, sometimes nothing at all) triggers it and it becomes a shadow that saps color from the world.

This is perhaps what's special about the final scene, where the siblings walk together as the sun sets in a rainbow of colors. Life has been needlessly dark for them, and they had little to no choice in the matter (to some extent they don't even seem to realize that what happened to them was wrong). But there's some hope that, now that their situation has changed, perhaps there's some new light to be found in the world. Many parts of the episode have a watercolor washed-out feel to them; most of these moments are asides or references to memories or past events. But this final scene in particular has a definite Makoto Shinkai influence, its magical-realism providing emphasis to what might be to come.

While the anime portion itself is actually pretty good, it comprises only one part of the episode's run time. The rest is taken up by a couple of in-real-life voice actor segments that don't really add much (I know there are some fans who enjoy that sort of thing, but they don't really interest me). There's also a really awkward part of the conversation during which one of the actresses insists multiple times that, if she could be anything she wanted, she would want to be a boy. I'm not sure if she's genuinely indicating that she would want to change genders, or if it's a sentiment that's just kind of lost-in-translation, but there's a lot of time spent on it and I didn't really know how I should react. I think the series would be better served by sticking to the in-anime segments and leaving the voice-actor stuff out, but I might be in the minority. I also didn't watch another episode to see whether it carries through or not, so it might be a one-shot issue.

While this has all the hallmarks of a typical slice-of-life series with some fantasy elements sprinkled in for fun, it also has a certain freshness that I believe is due to its multi-cultural origins. These types of productions haven't always been that successful, but I have noticed that they're on the path to getting better and I think this series looks and feels fairly competent and distinct.

Pros: The show has a good visual style and uses color well. The blend of slice-of-life comedy and darker moments replicates the feeling of depression well.

Cons: The voice actor segments don't add much to the episode.

Grade: B-

Books

The Golden Age of the Solar Clipper by Nathan Lowell
Review by Jim McCoy

Listen folks. I have, indeed, been known to wax poetic and speak eloquently (in my mind at least) about works of fiction with major space battles with huge body counts, gigundous missiles and massive blowuptuations that render entire star systems into piles of spare parts. I have praised authors for their talents in describing battles and the bonds of those who fight side by side. Let's face it. I like that stuff. Having said that, there is room in science fiction and fantasy for works that don't center on violence and it's practitioners. A world where a peaceable man can do his best to make a buck by honest trading and working his way up the ladder and across the space lanes. A series that takes an honest look at the people who sail the high seas in the real world, only putting the story IN SPACE so we'll all read it.

Nathan Lowell has written that story. It's called The Golden Age of the Solar Clipper. It's a really awesome series about a guy named Ishmael Wang and his journey from a raw youth just trying to survive to a ship owner (and no, that's not really a spoiler when the title of the last book is Owner's Share). It's a story of personal struggle and sacrifice and love, both between a man and his ship, a man and space, and a man and a woman.

The series was recommended to me by a good friend with similar tastes in books, but I was still a bit skeptical when I found out that there were really no battles, no derring-do and nothing a hardcore action junkie would expect. It turns out that I was dead wrong to be concerned. There is plenty going on here. It's just non-violent. Seriously, one of the most important moments in pretty much every book in the series is the first time Ishmael makes coffee. Yeah, I know that sounds lame but it's true. When the coffee starts brewing, so does the story. Trust me here. It works.

The story is richly woven and surprisingly well rendered. It's weird how little of this series I was able to predict and how much sense it made. Nothing went quite the way I wanted it to but I was happy with how things turned out. I don't know if that makes any sense, but it's true. This series would have gone very differently if I had written it, so maybe it's a good thing that I didn't. Lowell finds ways to make things work that make tons of sense after they've unfolded. It's pretty obvious that he spent a lot of time planning and editing to make it all work, but it had to have been worth it for the story to turn out this well.

Of course, Ishmael isn't alone in his mad dash (or slow poke) across the stars. He has friends along for the ride and maybe one or two people he just doesn't seem to get along with. The friends all serve a useful role in the story and the one or two enemies may serve a bigger one. Watching who a man associates with is always useful in telling what kind of person he is, but seeing what he'll risk himself to oppose may tell you more. Ishmael Wang is the kind of guy I sometimes wish I could be. He does the right thing even when it may technically not be the smart thing. This is one character I can respect.

Ishmael's first friend is a fellow youngster named Pip. Pip is unstoppable, irrepressible and just a fun dude. He comes from a long line of spacers and knows more about interstellar trade in the Golden Age series than anyone besides Nathan Lowell, who probably spent a long time thinking "I wonder what Pip would think" while trying to make his universe work. Pip's ideas are not conventional, but they seem to work and it's weird how well that mimics some of the things I've studied in history classes.

You have to really read the series to get a sense of the character arcs present. Along the way, things move kind of slowly and you never quite notice how much our heroes are changing. But then you finish Owner's Share, the last book in the series, and reflect and it's just like "Wow, how did THAT KID do THAT?!?!?!?" I mean that in a good way though. It makes sense if you followed the story but when you try to consider it all together it's just like "WHOA!".

Uh-oh. Lowell quotes famous works of literature throughout the series and I just quoted Joey from the 90s sitcom Blossom. I'm pretty sure he wouldn't be very proud of me right now. Whatever. I loved that show when I was in the right age bracket for it to be relevant.

At any rate...

The method of space travel as described in the Golden Age series is not at all reminiscent of Trek or Wars or anything else you've read. The term space clipper really does apply here because there are elements of technology that were common during Earth's Tall Ship Era that are in play while traversing the stars. Throw in a bit of jump technology ala Battletech and you've got a pretty close match for how things work. It was fun and the fact that it takes a bit longer to get places than it would in many other franchises works given the internal logic of the setting and also helps set up some things that wouldn't make sense in other universes. Longer trips provide more opportunity for tension and thus drama and entertainment.

My only complaint really is that Nowell likes to start off each book with a line directly lifted from a literary classic that is no longer subject to copyright. This threw me for the first couple of books, but once I got past the first sentence I was good. Most of the other literary quotes throughout the books are spoken directly by Ishmael (his mother was a literature professor) and make sense, but those were a bit weird. All in all though, if my biggest complaint is about six sentences in a six book series, I suppose I should get over myself. Oh, and if the lack of action has made you feel put off of the series, just trust Lois. And if you don't know what that means read the books.

Bottom Line: 4.75 out of 5 Precious Cargoes

Halo: The Fall of Reach by Eric Nylund Review by Russell Lockwood

I rather enjoyed the Halo video game -- so much so that my Xbox 360 died after years of yeoman service. I had just binge-watched the TV series and picked up this discount bin book that breathlessly touts "The origin story of the Master Chief!"

The good news is that this book does indeed cover the Master Chief and the origins of the Spartan program as well as the AI Cortana. The battles against the Covenant take center stage up through the loss of the planet Reach.

The bad news is that everything in the game and first year of the TV series is in the book almost verbatim, so it was more recap and less origin. Makes sense given the time frames.

I will note that some UNSC weaponry in the book seems, if I recall right, not to be in the game. Indeed, the effectiveness of the generic UNSC assault rifle in the book is far more deadly than in the game. That said, the space battles oft ignored in the game are interesting in the book. Makes me want to go out and get another Xbox...

Enjoyed it.

Comics

Jenny Dunnigan: Paladin #2 (Screaming Monkey, May 2024) Review by Heath Row

The second issue of John Yeo Jr.'s ongoing black-and-white series continues the tale of a newly minted supernatural hero in rural Louisiana. Found naked on a highway by an HVAC technician, Dunnigan seeks the assistance of her friend Nikki, who worries about her influence on her boyfriend and her 8- or 9-year-old daughter. Instead, Nikki should be concerned about her boyfriend, Lloyd. The mysterious figure from #1 (*Telegraphs & Tar Pits* #158) returns to punish his daughter, threatening her son and pet, for allowing Dunnigan to "survive... the culling."

While Dunnigan still lives, more than a dozen others "who could have accepted the power of the frenzy" were killed. Perhaps most enjoyable, however, was the portion of the story in which the toughs who tried to kill Dunnigan before she became the Paladin interact with local law enforcement and struggle to stay out of trouble.

Yeo offers a one-page editorial addressing the delay between issues (#1 was published in January 2024), indicating that his comic book store in northwest Indiana moved into a larger space that can now accommodate more public game events. A third issue has since been published, and the store's Web site indicates that this is a four-issue miniseries. There's a lot to accomplish in the next two issues!

Films

Argoman the Fantastic Superman Review by Heath Row

Seemingly inspired by the cartoony camp of the 1966 Batman television show, this movie combines elements of Italian crime cinema—not quite incorporating aspects of giallo—James Bond knockoffs such as *Agent 077: Mission Bloody Mary* and *008: Operation Exterminate*, and the rich tradition of millionaire playboy crimefighters such as Batman, the Green Hornet, the Spider, Doc Savage, and similar heroes. (It also owes a debt to *Danger: Diabolik*, based on the Italian comic book.)

The movie concentrates on Argoman's efforts to thwart the criminal activities of Jenabell, Queen of the World. A telekinetic who can hold his breath under water for 33 minutes and nine seconds, Argoman poses as Sir Reginald Hoover, a wealthy dilettante and aggressive womanizer, when he's not fighting crime in a garishly colorful costume. When he is fighting crime, his powers seem to last only a limited amount of time; he must wait for his powers to return.

In addition to the Batman and James Bond parallels, the movie includes several science fictional elements. Hoover uses his telekinesis to bring a hovercraft to shore in order to bed its pilot—the Queen of the World in disguise. A large gem, the Muradoff A IV, can reflect any type of light and destroy molecular cohesion. Hoover utilizes a Geiger counter ring to locate people who have smoked radioactive cigarettes. And Jenabell clones politicians, embodying them in androids.

It's a vapid flick, though visually stimulating. References to Argoman the Fantastic Superman appear in books such as Thom Shubilla's *James Bond and the Sixties Spy Craze*, Roberto Curti's *Diabolika: Supercriminals, Superheroes and the Comic Book Universe in Italian Cinema* (a truly promising volume!), and Howard Hughes's *Cinema Italiano: The Complete Guide from Classics to Cult* (which is also intriguing), but there doesn't seem to be much criticism or scholarship of import beyond articles and items in magazines such as *Obskuriøst* and *Starburst*.

In response to my posting the movie poster on the Instagram, a friend recommended several Filipino Batman-inspired movies, including *James Batman*—in which Batman and James Bond team up!—*Batman Fights Dracula*, and *Alyas Batman en Robin*, a musical. Those, too, seem like worthy diversions.

Games

Solo Game Report: Goblin Quest Review by Heath Row

While at Gamer's Library (see above), I was drawn to Grant Howitt's *Goblin Quest* (<https://gshowitt.itch.io/goblin-quest>) largely because of its appealing book packaging and colorfully playful artwork by Jon Morris. After reading a couple of issues of *White Dwarf*, it was the perfect roleplaying game to explore in a solo session. Reminiscent of the Pathfinder module *We Be Goblins!* and games such as *Monsters! Monsters!* in which players roleplay the creatures that inhabit fantasy roleplaying game settings, *Goblin Quest* is a very fun—and funny—game. It would be much more fun playing with a group of other people, even without a

gamesmaster (what Howitt calls the game master), but even solo, it resulted in some delightfully simple silliness.

Instead of creating characters, players create clutches of goblins, each representing five distinct goblins. Death comes quickly in Goblin Quest. You select an expertise, a quirk, and an ancestral heirloom, as well as a good luck charm that's utilized to reroll unfavorable outcomes. The character sheet features all five goblins, which you name, and Howitt encourages you to draw the members of your clutch. So I did:

When playing with a group, each player identifies the quest its goblin wants to embark upon. Those quests are then combined into one big, confusing quest. Playing solo, I selected a quest for each member of the clutch before combining them. A couple of my options were deprioritized in order to make the resulting quest work better as a unified, though messy, singular goal.

Bingo Red Eye had found a dilapidated boat in the Great Battle Camp's Junk Pile. He wants to sail across Slime Lake to see what's on the other side even though he can walk there. (You can actually see across Slime Lake.)

Kutt of the Mudborn Avengers—which might be a better clutch name than *Destined for Greatness*, which I chose hastily, misspelling it in Goblinese—has been reading a ratty paperback of Rainer Maria Rilke and wants some answers: Who made All This? Why? He'd like to find them and rub their face in it.

And Finger the Keg Killer is really hungry for a chicken dinner. The goblin-beautiful Hatey Bloodpaw has agreed to cook one for him, as long as he provides the chicken and lets her eat half—the bottom half. If they sail far enough in Bingo Red Eye's ramshackle dinghy, maybe they'll reach Cowsmash the Butcher. He usually has chickens.

Combining those quests, I ended up with the following quest: Sail to find the Chicken Who Made All This. Players brainstorm what equipment and materials you might need to accomplish the quest. My list included items such as the boat, a map of Slime Lake and navigation tools, chicken bait (seed or worms), a chicken trap (a basket or sack, perhaps), a chicken dictionary to enable and foster communication, Kutt's dog-eared and well-worn paperback book, and a not-too-dirty washcloth.

You then break the quest into three more manageable tasks, each of which has three stages. You identify whether a misfortune befalls you at any step along the way, and you assign a difficulty rating to each stage based on the number of players and the existence of a misfortune. For solo play, I used the number of goblins rather than the number of players. All of my misfortunes, randomly selected, occurred during Stage 3 of each task.

Task #1: Prepare to Hunt Chickens

Stage 1: Enter Cowsmash the Butcher's (4) Stage 2: Procure chicken-related tools and materials (4)

Stage 3: Learn as much as we can from the chickens to prepare for the Chicken Who Made All This (Misfortune: Orcs and bugbears—Some bugbears decide to play goblin football)—5

E&E 2-3

Task #2: Float the Boat

Stage 1: Enter the Junk Pile without being seen (5) Stage 2: Find the boat again (5)

Stage 3: Take the boat to Slime Lake (Misfortune: Orcs and bugbears—A bugbear makes you a deal that you foolishly accept)—6

Task #3: Chicken Catch-a-Story

Stage 1: Find the Chicken Who Made All This (6) Stage 2: Establish without a doubt that we have the Right Chicken (6)

Stage 3: Capture the Chicken (Misfortune: Goblins and hobgoblins—A hobgoblin cart full of paperwork and supplies smashes into the goblins)—7

I had to look up the game online to learn how difficulty ratings work—thankfully, there was a discussion on Reddit. Difficulty ratings are not target numbers or modifiers for use when undertaking actions or while engaged in combat. They're countdown dice, and each successful action lowers the rating by one. At 0, you've successfully accomplished the stage in question.

When goblins undertake tasks, players make a modified d6 roll against a simple oracle-like table that determines the degree of success or failure. The actions you undertake at each stage—and whether your goblins succeed or fail—offer additional opportunities for silly storytelling and subsequent hilarity. For solo play, I might lower the base difficulty rating from 5 to 3 to decrease the number of actions needed. Regardless, even though I haven't yet undertaken the quest—I've only created it—Goblin Quest is great fun.

Not a bad way to spend a Sunday afternoon. The misfortune for Stage 3 of Task #1 reminded me of Games Workshop's game Blood Bowl, which introduced another interesting option for game play. That stage itself could be played through as a simplified, modified solo game of Blood Bowl.

Game Report: Unsurmountable Review by Heath Row

Scott Almes's Simply Solo games (<https://buttonshygames.com/collections/simply-solo-games>) published by Button Shy are extremely compact, portable card games packaged in their own pocket-sized carrying case. Unsurmountable is designed for one player of at least 8 years old and can be played in about 15 minutes.

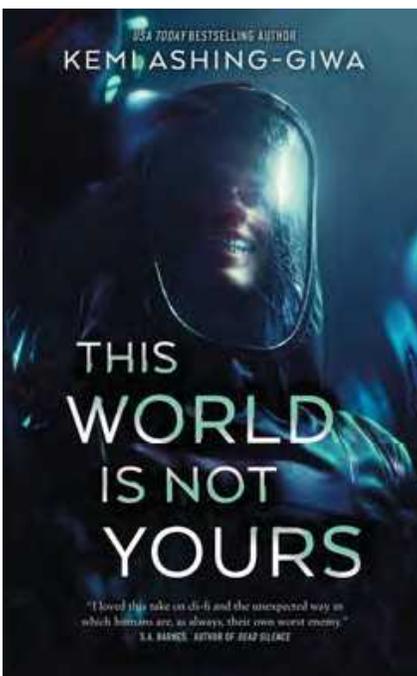
The game's small deck includes 17 Mountain cards and one Rescue Helicopter card, all featuring artwork by Christy Johnson. Your goal as the player—or mountain climber—is to arrange the Mountain cards from your Base Camp (effectively your hand) so there's a continuous route up the mountain, each level getting progressively smaller from a base of four cards to the one-card peak. You can only play cards in a specific location of your base camp, but you can discard other cards to activate their abilities. As your base camp empties, you adjust and refill its cards.

If you're able to build a complete mountain with a continuous path from bottom to top, your mountain climber succeeds. If you run out of cards before you finish building the mountain, however, you lose. The rules offer additional levels of difficulty to keep the game fresh and new over time.

I've only played Unsurmountable once since buying it at I'm Board! (see above), but it was fun—and I'm likely to play it again. Given the game's small size and portability, it's a great game to carry with you. The only thing you really need to find in order to play wherever you are is a flat surface large enough for your mountain. At the Infernal Wilson, I found that a folding television tray table offers adequate room.

Horror

This World Is Not Yours by Kemi Ashing-Giwa Review by Heath Row



This might be the first book I've read published by Tor's Nightfire imprint, which specializes in horror fiction with sf and fantastic elements. (I've got to say: I like the combination!) The cli-fi novella is a good introduction to the imprint, as well as the writing of Kemi Ashing-Giwa, who wrote the book—originally a short story but not published as such—during the pandemic. Ashing-Giwa is a self-described “scientist-in-training;” she studied integrative biology and astrophysics at Harvard, and is currently pursuing a PhD in Stanford's Earth and Planetary Sciences department.

The protagonist of the novella serves on the crew of a ship undertaking the colonization of New Belaforme. The planet is home to the Gray, a polycule that serves as a planetary self-cleaning mechanism, seeking out invasive organisms in order to consume them. (The manner in which it does so is somewhat

horrific.) Tensions develop among the primary triad of the book—the protagonist, a childhood friend, and another colleague—as well as between their crew and a rival colony, also competing to benefit financially from the planet’s resources.

At first, the human colonists—and their activities on the planet—aren’t interpreted by the Gray as an invasive species, or as threats. Over the course of the book, however, that changes. With chapters numbered in reverse order, counting down to the end of the text, the progress and rhythm of the book is steadily—and increasingly—intense. The book serves as an intriguing read adjacent to Frank Herbert’s *The Green Brain* (Telegraphs & Tar Pits #165); the polycule is much less intentionally benevolent than Herbert’s composite insectoid intelligence.

The Gray does not want to collaborate or co-exist with the colonists of New Belaforme. While explicitly an example of cli-fi fiction, the book is also strongly anticolonial in its tenor and tone. We could apply the novella’s ideas—and perhaps lessons—to our role and impact on our own world. Are we inhabitants of the planet Earth, or colonists? With so much science fiction studies concentrating on the Anthropocene—or Capitalocene—in recent years, might humanity be an invasive species? That’s not a new idea.

Magazines

White Dwarf #512-513 (May-June 2025) Review by Heath Row

It’s been a while since I’ve read a recent issue of *White Dwarf*, but having recently packed up my assorted Warhammer, Warhammer 40,000, and Middle-Earth Strategy Battle Game miniatures in padded carrying cases to ship overseas—and seeing that recent issues are serializing a “Trials of Albarak” story reminiscent of *Gotrek and Felix*—I wanted to check in on the state of the periodical.

After Games Workshop’s frustrating experimentation with slimmer weekly issues of *White Dwarf* and the thicker monthly Warhammer Visions periodical in 2014-2016, I’m glad they’ve since returned to one, monthly magazine. *White Dwarf* has largely served as a house organ and magalog—magazine catalog, natch—since issue #140 or #152 in the early 1990s. If you play the various Warhammer games, that can be useful and fun. Even if you don’t, the magazine remains adjacent to roleplaying games and is absolutely beautiful to this day. It’s worth picking up for the artwork and photography alone. The quality of the miniatures painting featured in *White Dwarf* is astounding—rich fodder for campaign and game session ideas, as well as character and creature design—and the magazine occasionally focuses on Warhammer-related tie-in novels and audio recordings, roleplaying games, and other ways to experience the fantasy and sf settings. With Cubicle 7’s release of *Warhammer: The Old World Roleplaying Game* early next year, it might be a good opportunity and time to reengage.

These two issues focus on Warhammer 40,000 and the “Season of Chaos,” concentrating respectively on the Nurgle and Khorne factions or armies. The Planet Warhammer section in the front of the book features letters of comment and photographs of players, as well as reader-painted miniatures. *White Dwarf Bunker* at the back of the book reports on the global Warhammer club, offering profiles of local clubs and even more reader-painted minis. Every month, the Bunker offers various assignments that readers can choose to pursue, providing useful motivation in the hobby, if such encouragement and guidance are desired.

The Hobby Hangout painting tips remind me slightly of model railroading, more than similar content has in the past. In fact, the piece about painting rust and grime in #512 resonates strongly with the weathering of HO scale equipment and structures. And additional material focuses on game-adjacent offerings. The *Worlds of Warhammer* piece in #513 refers to the recent tie-in novel *Blacktalon: First Mark* by Andy Clark, and #512 includes an interview with the screenwriters of the animated *The War of the Rohirrim*.

White Dwarf is an interesting balance of crunch (mini statistics and gameplay reports) and fluff (lore and artwork), hobbyist how-to tips and tricks, and other content. Regardless of how you engage with miniature wargaming as represented by Games Workshop’s activity, there’s an entry point in the magazine.

For me, the entry point was the serialized fiction in these two issues. James Brogden’s “The Trials of Albarak” is a five-part serial, with issues of White Dwarf including a self-contained portion of the story in the Black Library section of the magazine. The framing device for the stories is a lore-speaker of the Frostfang clan telling tales of Albarak to its beardlings. Given the self-contained nature of each portion, you don’t really need to purchase all five issues to enjoy it—it’s not really a serial—but it’s a good excuse for me to buy White Dwarf again for a while.

The story so far is fun, perhaps published to lead up to the forthcoming release of Games Workshop’s Order Battletome: Kharadron Overlords volume, which will inspire even more content related to the duardin (what dwarfs are called in the Age of Sigmar). Personally, I’m more intrigued by Warhammer: The Old World, which Games Workshop released in early 2024 to revisit its classic Warhammer Fantasy Battles miniature wargame. The Age of Sigmar hasn’t really piqued my interest.

SerCon

Robert Bloch Bio-Bibliography

by

Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D.

N3F Historian



Robert Albert Bloch (April 5, 1917 – September 23, 1994) was an early science fiction (s-f) fan, who later became a very successful professional author. He is remembered today primarily for his 1959 novel *Psycho*, which became a popular Alfred Hitchcock movie of the same name.

Born in Chicago, the family moved to Milwaukee in 1929. Bloch was an early and active member of Milwaukee fandom, joining the Milwaukee Fictioneers in 1935. Heavily influenced by genre author H. P. Lovecraft, Bloch was also a member of the Lovecraft Circle. He moved to Los Angeles in the early 1960s.

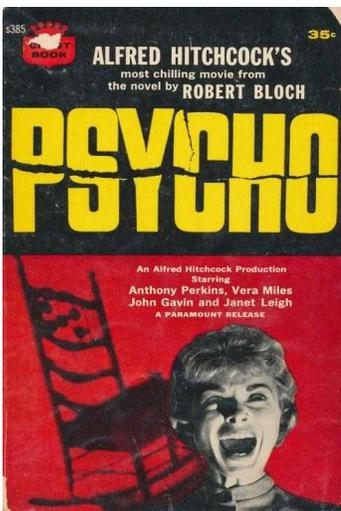
He wrote for a large number of s-f fanzines, and some of his best fan writing was collected in his 1962 book from Advent, *The Eighth Stage of Fandom*. Unfortunately for fandom, after 1960 he became so involved in his professional career that he had little time for fandom. Still, he was a frequent Worldcon toastmaster, Hugo presenter; and he stayed friends with many of the prominent members of s-f fandom. He won the Big Heart Award in 1960, and in 1985 was elected to First Fandom’s Hall of Fame.

Later Personal Life

He was married twice, first to Marion Holcombe (1940 -1963), with whom he had a daughter, Sally Ann; and later to Eleanor Alexander, whom he married in 1964.

Pseudonyms

During his career, Bloch used several pseudonyms for his writing, including Tarleton Fiske, Nathan Hindin, Wilson Kane, Sherry Malone, John Sheldon, and Collier Young, among several others.



Awards/Honors/Other Recognitions

In addition to the awards already listed, Bloch won many other awards/honors,

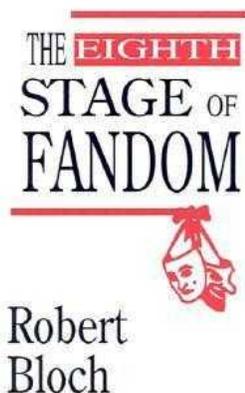
including an E. Everett Evans Memorial Award (1959), an Ann Radcliffe Award (1960), a Forry Award (1974), Hugo Awards (1959, 1983, 1984), an Inkpot Award (1975), a World Fantasy Award for Lifetime Achievement (1975), a Fritz Leiber Fantasy Award (1978), Bram Stoker Awards (1987, 1993), a Rondo Hatton Classic Horror Award (2019), and he was GoH at both World Fantasy (1975) and World Science Fiction (1948, 1973) conventions. After his death, the NecronomiCon Award was renamed in his honor.

Genre Fiction

His first published genre story was “Lillies,” which appeared in the Winter, 1934, issue of the fanzine *Marvel Tales*. Later, he published hundreds of genre stories in professional magazines, including such memorable ones as “Yours Truly, Jack the Ripper,” “The Thing,” “Sales of a Deathman,” “Crime Machine”, “Block That Metaphor,” “How Like a God,” “Water’s Edge,” “Oh Say Can You See,” “Time Wounds All Heels,” “The Skull of the Marquis de Sade,” “The Hell-Bound Train,” etc.

Non-Fiction Works

The chapter, “Imagination and Modern Social Criticism,” in *The Science Fiction Novel* (1959)
The Eighth Stage of Fandom (1962)
Once Around the Bloch (1993)



Films Based on His Work

Bloch’s movies included *Psycho* (1960), *The Couch* (1960), *The Cabinet of Caligari* (1962), *Strait-Jacket* (1962), *The Night Walker* (1964), *The Skull* (1965), *The Psychopath* (1966), *The Deadly Bees* (1966), *Torture Garden* (1967), *The House That Dripped Blood* (1967), *Journey to Midnight* (1971), *Asylum* (1972), *The Cat Creature* (1973), *The Dead Don’t Die* (1975), *The Return of Captain Nemo*, (1978), and a remake of *Psycho* (1998).

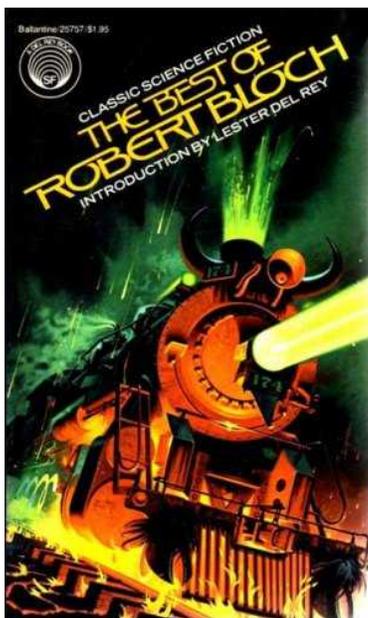
Robert Bloch Collection

Many of Bloch’s published and unpublished stories, manuscripts, correspondence, books, recordings, tapes, transcripts of his speeches, and other memorabilia are housed in the Special Collections division of the Library at The University of Wyoming.

Concluding Comment

A new Bloch bibliography was published this year: *Robert Bloch: An Unconventional Bibliography* (2025) by Jim Nemeth.

Sources



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Jeffery, Sheldon & Fred Cook. *The Collector's Index to Weird Tales*, 1985.

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Swartz, Jon D. *Pseudonyms of Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror Authors*, 2010.

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

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

Writing

Losing is Not the End Cedar Sanderson

An article for writers and creatives.

There are many venues now for short fiction. Check the contracts, though; some of the biggest names in magazines have been bought out by a private equity firm which has added terrible clauses to their contracts. Don't sign a contract until you've read it and understood it.

We live in a society - or most of us do, since I'm sure there are a few readers who hail from distant shores that aren't the US of A - which fosters the idea that everyone will win. Whatever the game is. From reading contests at school (I was perma-banned from them in high school, since I would always win, and it didn't hurt my feelings a bit) to getting a job, everyone wants to come out on top. Reality, as the adults among us know, is a rather different beast.

Writers will not always win. If you're submitting a story, over and over, and it's being rejected over and over, it's hard to hear 'It's not you, it's me' but in reality, that's what it is. Your story might not have been what was needed right at that moment, so it didn't make the cut. Not that it's a bad story, but there was bad timing. Now, I am predicating this prep talk on you having done your due diligence. Finding a beta reader or six that has given you objective feedback (feel free to trade stories in the comments) and knowing the story you are sending out is the best it can be. That brave little story all dressed up in it's Sunday finest may still come home with head hanging and a lovely shiner that Billy-Sue gave him.

'Cause you don't always win, and Billy-Sue has learned to fight like h*ll because of that name his parents saddled him with. And sometimes that's what it takes. Learning how to fight for your victories. Look, life isn't handing anything to you on a silver platter, unless there is polish and a buffing cloth in the other hand and you aren't to leave a speck o'tarnish on that, y'hear? Someone is going to sell their story, and someone isn't. Until recently. Because now, you have options. You don't have to play the rigged game. You can become truly independent. You have victory in your grasp...!

Until you don't. The story all toggged up in a super-duper cover that doesn't make it look like it's wearing a burlap sack to Sunday School, it's not selling. You don't know why. It's gotten decent reviews, but then, it just petered out. Once more, you aren't a winner. There's only one thing to do when this happens. Write more.

I was, once upon a time (no comments from the peanut gallery), a runner. I was never terribly fast, but wind me up and let me go and I wouldn't quit. I'd just keep chugging along until I was told to stop. You aren't going to win the race on your first try. It takes practice, and it takes work. I think I mentioned that already... and that's the four-letter word that no-one wants to hear. Words do not fall like pearls from your fingertips onto the page.

Rather, they are accumulated like a pearl growing around a grain of sand, until the itch that started that story, that process, is assuaged and you can finish it off with a final swipe of that buffing cloth (belay the silver polish). It's a painful process, and the modern author, looking through the golden haze at yesteryear, is tempted to believe the stories that are told of huge advances, superb editors, and *coff* ethical agents. Today, when you finish up your pearl, you will still need to market it in a shiny box, put it well-formatted into just the right setting, and then flag down interested connoisseurs to talk about your wares.

We've talked about many of those steps on this blog. If you look up at the top of the page, to the 'Navigating...' link, you'll find resources on problems you need to solve. But today, I'm here to tell you about how everyone can be a winner.

You only win if you play the game. The story that sits on your hard drive or in your drawer will never win acclaim, fans, and applause. The only way that will happen is if you put it out there, with hard work and persistence. If you entered a certain Baen contest, and didn't make the final cut, then take a minute to dissolve your sorrows in chocolate before contemplating that story and what you can do with it next. You can look for markets here, at the Submission Grinder and Raconteur Press Open Calls, or you can develop it into a full novel, or you can collect it and friends together with a spiffy cover to dress them up and release a collection, or... The options exist. Losing is not the end.



Eat This While You Read That: Dorothy Grant's Deviled Eggs Cooking by Cedar Sanderson

As I was gearing back up into the series, I realized I hadn't yet featured Dorothy's books. Since we swap recipes fairly often, I wasn't sure what I'd get when I asked her for a dish to go along with her latest book, *Between Two Graves*. She neatly tied the recipe to the theme of the book. Unlike the earlier books in this series, which are TACROM (Tactical Romance) this book comes after marriage, when the reality of in-laws kicks in. The book deals with a funeral, and family, and the nostalgia of returning to a home long forsaken, deviled eggs are peculiarly suited. I think we all expect them at family meals and potlucks, when the spread is making the table groan.

And these are very good deviled eggs, indeed, which shouldn't surprise you if you're familiar with Dorothy's impeccable research and attention to detail in her writing, along with her finely crafted and very real characters. The eggs will keep you coming back for more, and jostling aside the other family who are reaching for that last delectable morsel!

I've tweaked the original recipe just a tiny amount. One thing was an accident, the other on purpose.

Deviled Eggs ala Dorothy

14 Eggs (which is what my InstantPot rack holds)

1/3 c mayo (more or less)

1 tbsp brown mustard (I like the sort with whole seeds in)

1 tsp hot sauce (Cholula, tabasco, what have you)

1 tbsp bacon grease

2 tbsp dill pickle relish

1 tbsp* (see below) pickle juice

3/4 tsp berbere (I subbed this in for the white pepper, looking for a touch more kick)

(I forgot 1 tsp mustard powder, but you could add it in if you want to punch up the mustard a notch)

smoked paprika for garnish

I have a two-tier rack for the InstantPot, just place eggs on it and add a cup of water below them.

For these eggs, I put them under pressure in the InstantPot for 5 minutes, then performed a quick release before quenching the eggs in an ice bath until they were cool.

Putting the eggs in the ice bath stops the cooking process and will mostly eliminate the unsightly and stinky green oxidization of the yolks.

Once the eggs are peeled, cut each in half longitudinally. The yolks should be a nice bright yellow, and firm throughout, but not overly hard.

Perfect yolks!

Place all of the yolks into a small bowl, along with all of the other ingredients except the paprika. Set the egg whites aside.

There are many ways to vary deviled eggs, but the essence of all of them is the spiciness of the mustard and any pepper you add.

Deviled is an old term that means spicy!

I used a food processor to render the filling smooth, adding the *pickle juice a little at a time. You might not need the full tablespoon to reach the desired viscosity. You want this to be smooth, but not so soft that it slumps

in the egg white when used as filling. You could also do this with a hand mixer, stand mixer, or a whisk. Whatever you have!

Here the filling still has enough stiffness to maintain it's shape. I usually pipe into the shells. If I am going to feed family, or friends, I enjoy taking the little extra effort to make it pretty. But you can just spoon it in there, and no one will care because these are delicious.

To garnish, if desired, sprinkle a little bit of sweet smoked paprika over them. You don't need it, with the seedy mustard these are pretty just the way you made them.

A bit o' warmth and a boost to the bacon smokiness, these eggs are special.

And if you want, you can double the recipe. Or halve it, and enjoy them by yourself while you read *Between Two Graves*.

