

Tightbeam 375

December 2025



The Cylon Ambush
by Jose Sanchez

Tightbeam 375

December 2025

What is Tightbeam? We are the N3F literary fanzine. We try to cover all tastes in fandom, such as anime, comics, cosplay, films, novels, biographies, poetry, music, short stories, food, etc.

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Table of Contents

Art

Front Cover ... The Cylon Ambush by Jose Sanchez

Back Cover ... Don't Kill the Messenger by Tiffanie Gray

Letters

4 ... Lloyd Penney

Anime

4 ... Anime Review – Revue Starlight -- Review by Jessi Silver

Books

11 ... The Burning God by R.F. Kuang -- Review by Chris Nuttall

13 ... Whispers of the Nether by Dan Sugalinov -- Review by Jim McCoy

Games

15 ...Grey Fox Games's Last Light -- Review by Jim McCoy

SerCon

17 ... George Zebrowski Bio-Bibliography by Jon D. Swartz

Video

19 ... The Running Man, a Timely Adrenaline-Fueled Morality Play -- Review by Jason P. Hunt

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Letters

Dear George and Jon:

Thank you both for Tightbeam 373, and as always, things to do and things to say, and things to keep up with. You start with my previous loc...

I hope the bios of classic SF writers will continue. I like seeing those names again, a reminder of the imagination that goes into SF, and a reminder of how long it's been happening. Wyman Guin is a welcome addition to that list of bios. Word on the Street was a lot of fun for me, also quite lucrative for me, and I was surrounded by peers and friends...what more does one need? Can*con in Ottawa took place last month...the same fun, sales and friends. I wish there were more similar shows in the Toronto area.

To Heath Row...Renaissance Faires can be a lot of fun, mostly because of how laid back everything is. The clash of the swords, the outdoor atmosphere, the comely wenches, the food... a day to relax and let the medieval chaos happen around you. It's also a day out in the warm sun, and we never get too many of those. There's about five or six of them that happen in central Ontario, and some of them are one-day events. I remember one that happened every weekend in the summer, but that was years ago. Still, perhaps next summer...

Breakfast cake? Grumble, grumble, goes my stomach...pass it over, let's give it a sample...

Newest Amazing Stories news...the big book we've been working on for a year or more is finally ready to go. The Martian Trilogy by a lot of people, including me, is the story of another Amazing Stories, this one starting in the late 1920s in Black newspapers in the southern USA, with stories of exploration by men of money, science and philosophy, all Black, as they explore other worlds and interact with the alien beings they find. White explorers would interfere with the conflicts, but Black explorers would observe, and offer solutions if they are asked for them. These stories appeared in these newspapers under the name Amazing Stories, unaware of the pulp magazine that had appeared out of New York a few years earlier. This is a new chapter in the history of science fiction, rediscovered by Black scholars, and we are pleased to help present this back to SF readers and fandom.

All done at my end, I think...thanks for this issue, and see you with the next.
Yours, Lloyd Penney

Anime

Anime Review – Revue Starlight By Jessi Silver

“Starlight” is a song and dance revue troupe loved throughout the world. Karen and Hikari make a promise with each other when they’re young that one day they’ll stand on that stage together. Time passes, and now the girls are 16 years old. Karen is very enthusiastic about the lessons she takes every day, holding her promise close to her heart. Hikari has transferred schools and is now away from Karen. But the cogs of fate turn, and the two are destined to meet

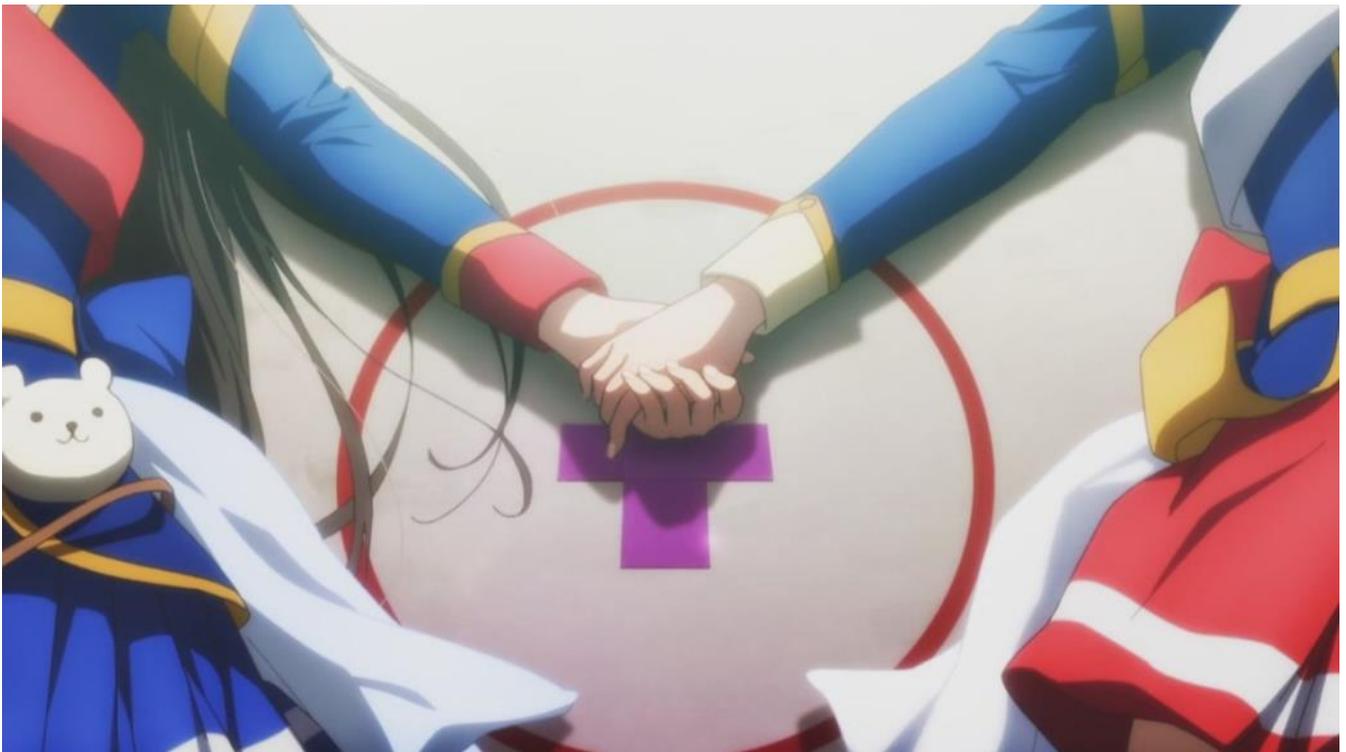


again. The girls and other “Stage Girls” will compete in a mysterious audition process to gain acceptance into the revue.

Episodes: 12
Source: Original

Do you believe in fate? That once our life is set in motion, its pre-determined pathway is truly an immovable arc of destiny? Anime is filled with stories of prophecies fulfilled and traditions unbroken; it’s a theme whose expression allows us to believe in the possibility and comfort of things greater than ourselves. There are also plenty of anime, however, that dare to suggest that we, as human beings, are more responsible for our lives than some of us may be comfortable fully accepting. I tend to like these stories better, because rather than simply implying that our poor state of being is solely the result of our own mistakes, it suggests that we might also have some power

to alter the flow of the river and set ourselves on a better course, given the opportunity and support of course.



Revue Starlight is, in its simplest form, a story about a group of girls choosing not to accept an exclusionary story – a fate which does not encompass the happiness of them all. Instead, they attempt to rewrite the stage-play of their existence and to reinterpret their story as one which allows room for successful fulfillment of their desires.

The story begins at Seisho Performing Arts Academy, where student Karen Aijo and her friends

comprise a particularly talented group of students who held the starring roles in the previous year's production of "Starlight." "Starlight" holds a special place in Karen's heart; she and childhood friend Hikari Kagura, after seeing the play performed, vowed that they would one day share the stage as stars in a future production. Karen is positive that their dream is about to become a reality when Hikari returns from London and transfers to Seisho; unfortunately Hikari behaves coldly to her and seems to have her own very singular ambitions. Karen searches for her friend one evening and happens to find a mysterious elevator that plunges deep into depths below the academy. What she finds is that many of her classmates are embroiled in a series of secret and physically exhausting auditions for the title of "Top Star," Hikari among them. Against others' protests, Karen forces her way into these auditions to find a way for hers and Hikari's shared dream to become a reality.



Hikari arrives at Seisho music academy.

The series appears to be the product of many influences. Takarazuka theater is an obvious one, with its similar stage and actor terminology and school training system. The general makeup of the cast, as well as their wardrobe styling seems to reference various popular idol series. My first gut reaction, however, was to compare the series to *Revolutionary Girl Utena*; while I wouldn't necessarily say that this anime has the depth or staying power of Ikuhara and Be-Papas' powerhouse shoujo series, the way much of the story plays out via duels, the visual eccentricity and sense of scale in many of the scenes, and the way the story provides a vehicle for young women to support one another and seize control of their destiny in the face of a strange (and vaguely threatening) male figurehead definitely feels inspired and somewhat informed by Anthy and Utena's story. Influences are one thing, though; the end product's incorporation of those influences and the way in which they're used to express something different is the more impressive aspect of the show.

Those who haven't actually seen the series may still be aware of it due to its surreal and lavishly-animated auditions, during which two (or more) of the characters engage in an all-out physical battle while expressing their emotions through song. I think it would be easy to be bombarded by the action grandiosity and miss the forest for the trees so-to-speak; though the theatrical

numbers in this series are top-notch and definitely worthy of notice, what I found more powerful were both the moments of character drama and the ways in which the series addresses the central theme of overthrowing fate.

The series is built on the shoulders of its characters' relationships. Karen and Hikari's friendship is the beating heart of the story, the one which disrupts the system put in place to declare a single victor in the fight for Top Star. There are also several other couplings between the characters, both platonic and (likely) romantic, which comprise the basis for many of the other duels depicted during the auditions (some of which occur concurrently with others). What impressed me about the series was that it was able to refrain from portraying these conflicts as petty or based on simplistic rivalries, instead wholeheartedly conveying the fact that most of the characters had generally positive feelings towards their competitors and were forced to weigh their own ambitions against the task of maintaining their treasured friendships. This does nothing to deplete the tension of the duels; instead it clearly raises the stakes. Since it's not entirely apparent whether the songs and sword-fights are actually happening or are instead some shared hallucination between the characters, I found the sense of suspense they generated to be impressive.

Aside from central two characters, there are 7 others with relationships and roles of varying significance. I think the one I identified with the most was Nana Daiba (in Japanese name order *Daiba Nana* or "Banana" as her nickname goes). Nana is portrayed as a helper; she's supportive to a fault and always bakes banana-themed treats for her fellow stage-girls as they prepare for their performances. Her altruism is somewhat of an illusion, though; her contributions are all geared towards the end goal of fulfilling her wish as a future top star. What we discover roughly halfway through the series is that the characters have been caught in a time recursion of Nana's making; having won the title of Top Star, the wish she made was to go back and repeat the experience of her first-year performance in "Starlight." In her mind, nothing can possibly top this performance – the feeling of preparing for the play, donning the costumes, and being on stage can never be replicated or surpassed unless all the conditions are exactly the same. Each time she wins the auditions (which she does as, per her wish, the outcomes are all predetermined), the cycle begins anew.



Nana Daiba wishes for her perfect performance.

As much as we can see that this is harmful, it's also very understandable; who among us hasn't wanted to relive some rose-colored past glory? Nana's desire plays to her self-perceived strength as "background support" – she's the "helper" who makes sure that all the gears are turning and that the show goes as planned. It's just that her hand in it is heavier than the other characters realize. In a strange juxtaposition, Nana's acts of repeatedly allowing her version of the "correct" fate to play out are predicated on her ability to retain control and manipulate her world via the system as-is.

Hikari's arrival is the wrench that stops the cogs from turning, or perhaps it may be more accurate to say that her entrance is what finally causes the timeline to jump tracks and make forward progress again. 8 actors become 9, their roles in the play are shaken and redistributed, and fate is no longer so certain. Karen, who was not originally a powerhouse player, is driven to succeed by Hikari's presence, and now the group begins to question a system that gives all the glory to one while the others walk away with nothing.

Setting this story in the world of live theater was not just an aesthetic choice and relating it to the allegorical tale of lost friendship in "Starlight" was no offhand decision, in my opinion. Much of the series is spent lamenting the fact that the heroines in "Starlight" are never able to achieve the ultimate unity that they seek. The story is tragic and ends with the two characters being separated for all eternity. The ultimate end of the secret auditions will choose a Top Star, and, as we learn later on, the consequences for coming in second place are dire – the runner-up's love for the stage and performing upon it are stolen for good. Neither of these are fated to be stories with happy endings; the words in the storybook that Hikari has and the lines of the play that the girls perform are locked into that tragic form by tradition and the permanence of the written word.

Or are they?



It's lonely at the top.

Some of my favorite anime series (and my favorite characters) are those which question the need to rely on tradition and which refuse to accept the inevitability of fate. Karen Aijo is *Revue Starlight*'s squeaky wheel, the person who holds her promise with Hikari in much higher regard

than lines or stage direction or rules. She's convinced throughout the series that there must be a way for Hikari and herself to achieve stardom together, though the way to achieve that goal isn't apparent. A powerful example of Karen's stubbornness occurs within the last couple of episodes, when she takes the copy of the storybook on which "Starlight" is based and creates her own translation of the text. This montage might seem extraneous at first, perhaps a last ditch effort to glean some meaning in order to rescue her friend. However, I think it conveys something much more meaningful.

We think of literature, especially "classic" literature, as monumental and unchanging, but so much of a story's meaning can be based on the way one person interprets it for themselves. Stories like *The Tale of Genji* with its complicated relationships and characters with ever-changing social ranks, or even something more familiar to Western audiences like *The Little Mermaid*, which was at one time a tragic allegory for the author's sexuality, can be given new meaning by people with new perspectives, insights, and yet, even agendas. Sometimes a story is remade for the society that exists at that point in time. Sometimes a reminder of life's many tragic outcomes is less valuable than a story which rejects that tragedy for something that lifts up its participants. The value of a sad story versus a happy one is always up to the person doing the reading – personally, I believe that stories which present negative outcomes and emotions have as much purpose and power as light-hearted ones, but not everyone agrees. Sometimes it pays to question *if* and *why* a well-regarded, famous, or traditional story or play still has value; throwing up one's hands and saying "it's an important part of literary canon" (whose canon?) or "it's always been performed that way" is often a way of shirking responsibility when we are in the position to question the status-quo.



Hikari and Karen hope to achieve their shared will.

"Starlight," which at first seems allegorical for not only the opinion that women must forever compete with one-another, but also that relationships between women (and especially very close and/or romantic ones) are doomed to end in tragedy. Karen chooses to reject that by wholly rejecting all the arbitrary rules of their competitive stage system and choosing to rewrite and refine the story that she and her friend love. I find that to be an incredibly powerful act of creation and rebirth.

My understanding is that this series' production had problems almost from the get-go, the product of an ambitious concept and the expectation of lavishly-animated and unique revue battles for all the characters. While I hate to sound as though I'm encouraging a production system that overlooks the health of its workers, it's also difficult for me not to admire the sheer force of will it took to bring this story to life.

Smooth, expressive animation, unique story-boarding, convincing compositing... these aren't the sorts of things that I require when I'm watching anime. Though it's a visual medium I'm generally satisfied if the story itself is interesting. But there's just something exhilarating about full animation when it's put to good use. Along with the massive sense of scale present in many of the later scenes, including depictions of enormous towers and nearly-endless staircases, this series leaves an impression visually and emotionally.

My one minor criticism of the series is that, like so many other anime, its final episode doesn't allow enough time to resolve all the latent feelings that it generates. As much as I love a good climax, especially ones so emotionally powerful, I feel that huge, grandiose moments of catharsis are only enhanced when coupled with similar moments of reflection.

Speaking generally, I think the ultimate message this series has to share is that both theater and life aren't doomed to be static. It may feel as though a situation is plunging towards an inevitable conclusion – that our fate is truly unavoidable. This anime presents a full-on rejection of the systems that serve to hamper our relationships – the ones that keep us in endless competition with others for some ill-defined, amorphous “prize” that benefits the few and harms the many. Society pits us, women especially, against one another in many facets of our lives.

Rather than manipulating the system to survive or throwing one-another under the bus to gain a leg-up, sometimes the best answer to this conundrum is to reject the flawed system entirely and relieve it of its power.

I don't know that *Revue Starlight* is an anime series for the ages; I suspect that my connection to it is very personal and that may not translate to anything broader. Occasionally, though, I believe that we receive messages at coincidentally relevant times, and for me this series echoes a lot of my feelings about our society which often encloses us in boxes and pressures us to fulfill roles which don't quite fit.

Rather than suffer throughout this dissonance, perhaps the better answer is to, when the option is available, aim to re-make society in a way that less focused on strict roles, titles, winners and losers. One which honors our diverse goals and supports the relationships that we have built with one-another. A new start, from position zero

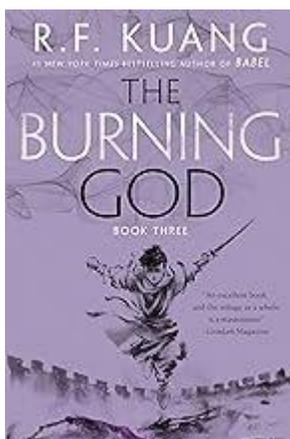
Pros: Lavish animation production throughout. Emphasizes character relationships. Thematically rich.

Cons: Could have used another episode for some falling action.

Grade: A

Books

The Burning God by R.F. Kuang Review by Chris Nuttall



As a general rule, there are three ways to do book trilogies. You can tell a reasonably coherent story across three novels (*The Lord of the Rings*). You can tell a starter story to set the scene, followed by a coherent story across two novels (*Island in the Sea of Time*). Or you can switch the setting each time so you're telling a three-part story that can be read as both a trilogy and a set of stand-alone books (*Mistborn*). The third is the most rewarding, if done properly, but it is astonishingly difficult to bring it off without the cracks starting to show. I am happy to report that Rebecca Kuang's *Poppy War* series brings it off magnificently.

The *Poppy War* is patterned on the history of China over the past two hundred years. The first book – *The Poppy War* – is set in an analogue of Imperial China, as the creaking edifice of empire wilts and collapses under an onslaught of invaders and, far more dangerously, its own massive structural flaws. The second – *The Dragon Republic* – is set in the Warlord Era, with various military warlords struggling for power against the remnants of the old world and far more powerful and dangerous outsiders. Third, and finally, *The Burning God* is set in the Communist era, with analogues to the Long March (in which the communists escaped enemy pursuit by marching through very rough terrain to safety), the fall of the old order and the problems of actually fixing the country after the combination of war and outside interference.

As before, we follow the story through the eyes of Fang Runin – Rin – as she leads the war against the invaders and the old regime, led by one of her old classmates. Rin – who wields the power of the Phoenix, a god of fire and destruction – is no longer content to be a follower, but has now become a leader – a leader of a vast army of peasants and commoners who may not be as capable as their enemies, but have the numbers to drown the invaders in a sea of bodies. But as Rin comes to grips with the problems of leadership, and the issues resulting from a country bathed in war and blood, she encounters betrayals as well as enemy fanatics, allies who have their own agendas and enemies who aren't all bad. She has her dazzling rise to power, then her fall to crushing lows, then rises to power once again. She is both a very likeable character and someone constantly teetering on the brink of total insanity.

This has been a part of her character for all three books, but now it comes into the open. On one hand, Rin simply can't give up. She keeps struggling even when resistance is seemingly futile, not least because she has nowhere to go and no hope of safety. On the other, she isn't remotely suited to be the leader of a country and rapidly becomes overwhelmed by the problems facing the ruined empire. She can't trust anyone to do it for her, either. She has simply been betrayed too many times.

Perversely, this works in the book's favour. Rin burns away many of the problems facing the empire, from the semi-divine founders of the old empire (who threaten to plunge the world back into chaos) to the deeply corrupt and self-obsessed nobility that made it impossible for the em-

pire to heal itself. She appears, at least partly by accident, to embrace the doctrine of Kylo Ren – “Let the past die. Kill it, if you have to” – and this is, at least in the book’s universe, a good idea. (It was much less so in *The Last Jedi*, or the real-life aftermath of Imperial China.) In the end, when it becomes clear that Rin herself has become the final threat to the empire, she deals with herself in an ending that is both fitting and deeply ambiguous. In some ways, Kuang manages to do what *The Last Jedi* could not and subvert our expectations in a manner that catches us by surprise, while being perfectly predictable in hindsight. In others, the ending seems a little unfair. But then, the world is never fair.

The book spares no effort in depicting the effects of a brutal grinding multisided war. It shows how people can become accustomed to occupation and the forcible reshaping of their society; it also shows how people can simply give up as resistance becomes futile, a double-edged sword for the occupiers because there may be no resistance, but there is also no energetic crop production. Famine becomes a very real threat even as the war seems to come to an end. Rather more strikingly, it shows how a seemingly more advanced society can overwhelm a lesser one, although it isn’t clear how deeply this took root before the invaders were thrown out.

On a more personal level, the book shows how far desperate soldiers are prepared to go for victory, from the aristocrats casually sentencing millions of peasants to death just to eradicate an uprising to the fighters embracing cannibalism just to stay alive one more day. Kuang spares us nothing, convincing us the war comes with a high price even though victory might be worth the cost. And yet victory brings more and more problems in its wake.

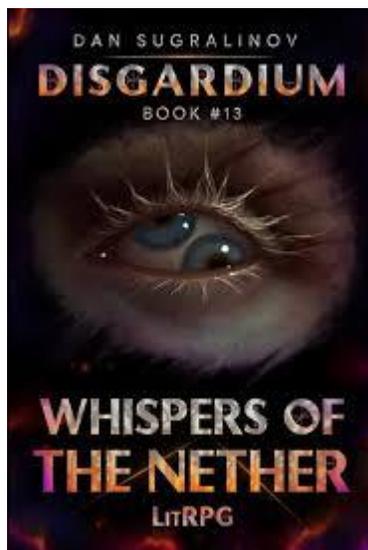
I have often said that the truly great books are the ones that combine pulpy elements (action and adventure) with literature, the great ideas that make you stop and think. The *Poppy War* trilogy joins a handful of others that rise to the very top and satisfy both the desire for a ripping good yarn and meaning. That it draws on Chinese elements – rather than Western – helps to give it a sense of freshness that many other works, such as *Game of Thrones*, lack; it also lacks the grimdark fatalism of many more modern works, the suggestion that – no matter what the characters do – the world will remain an awful place. Perhaps the one moment where this fails is in the ending, yet that very ambiguity gives it a punch other works simply can’t match.

If there is an underlying theme to the trilogy, it is that you cannot trust anyone to have your best interests in mind. (A sneaky rebuke of the CCP, perhaps?) The old rulers are monsters. The warlords are fighting for their personal power rather than the good of their provinces, let alone the empire as a whole. The outsiders are colonists, either directly (settlement) or indirectly (cultural reorganisation). Even the gods have their own agendas. A secondary theme is that rigid thinking and orthodoxy rarely cope well with the unexpected, from tutors who dismiss Rin because of her country roots to armies and leaders who cannot handle outside context problems such as superior foreign armies with superior weapons. This is more evident in the second book – where a superior tactician has to give way to an inferior because the inferior is his elder brother – but true of all three ... and, of course, one of the reasons China had so many problems when it reencountered the outside world.

Overall, *The Burning God* is a good – indeed brilliant – end to the *Poppy War* trilogy.

I highly recommend it.

Whispers of the Nether by Dan Sutralinov Review by Jim McCoy



SINGS

I've been waiting
For a book like you
To come into my life...

Or sumfin'

Maybe it's just the fact that I read the first twelve books of the Disgardium series thinking it was, in fact, a twelve book series and then finding out, upon completing the twelfth book, that there were two more on the way.

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Either way, I've just read Dan Sutralinov's Whispers of the Nether: Disgardium Book 13 and I loved it. It's been an interesting wait for it because I hadn't originally anticipated that it would even exist. I was under the impression that the series ended in twelve books because I read something about "download the complete twelve book series." I was kind of excited when I didn't get to see the end after book twelve. I was also really happy that it didn't end when I thought it did. Who wants an awesome book series to end?

As it turns out, Book Twelve, Unity, was split into three parts. Which means that there's a Book 14 coming. I'm excited. First let's state the painfully obvious:

Whispers of the Nether is the thirteenth book in a series. It was not conceived or written as a standalone novel. It would not function well as one. There is a brief synopsis of the series so far at the beginning of the book but it's not really enough, in my opinion, to make Whispers enjoyable if you haven't read the rest of the series up to this point. (It is, however, enough of a reminder if you're too lazy to re-read the first twelve before you get into the thirteenth.) Of course, the solution to that problem is simple. As you can see from my reviews of Book 1 Class A Threat and Books 2-12 this is a series worth starting from the beginning.

This time around, we see a billion and one different threads starting to coalesce. We venture back and forth into the main Disgardium game, the Inferno (the Disgardium version of hell) and the Nether (the still existing Beta version of the Disgardium game.) and all of their assorted horrors. He's also trapped inside the game with no exit button.

Things don't look good for our hero.

Some of his friends are dead in real life. Some can't get into the game to help him. Some of his in-game NPC friends are no longer. His nemesis from the Nether, June Curtis/Nine has escaped

from her hole in the Nether and gone to Disgardium where she has overthrown the New Gods and taken her place at the top of the world, demanding that everyone worship her. It's ugly.

Scyth though, being Scyth, isn't giving up. Not now. Not ever. He's the kid who has gone from hating a game, to loving a game, to pwning the competition, to getting involved in real life political games, to literally being nuked and only surviving because he was far enough underground. He was denied citizenship, had his fortune taken and built a new one. This kid is downright dangerous to the powers that be and they know it.

In *Whispers of the Nether*, Alex is trapped in game in the form of his alter-ego Scyth and there are problems going on all over. He is all over the place with too much to do, not enough time and no real idea what's going on in the real world. He does know this though: If he can't find a way to fix the in-game problems, to include there being no way to log out, other players are going to start dying in real life. The fight is on.

Sugralinov has spoken of *Whispers of the Nether* being the first half of the last book in his Facebook group rather than the book before last and that makes sense. I see a lot of subplots headed toward completion but none that have been completely tied up yet. In some senses *Whispers* has a feeling close to the beginning of the third act of a three act play. Everything was at its absolute worst thirty seconds ago, but now we're starting to move toward a possibly good outcome if nothing else goes wrong. Only then it does and Alex has to fix that, too.

If you play Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games, (MMORPS for short. MMOs for shorter) and I've played a couple but not a bunch, this is the series you have no choice but to read. *Whispers of the Nether* has some really cool gameplay elements as part of its plot. It is LitRPG in the purest sense and the story wouldn't work if it didn't. But a lot of the absolute most awesome parts of the story are built on what came before. And the achievements Scyth and friends lack up is awesome dipped in awesomesauce on a stick. This is a guy with multiple world first achievements. (For the uninitiated that means that Scyth and his friends have done things in game before anyone else in the world has done them. There is no higher honor in-game than a world first.)

It's not just that though. If you've ever played a MMO and you've gone from either the base game into a new expansion or from one expansion into another for the first time you've seen some pretty awesome. Dalaran being torn from the surface of Azeroth and flung into the sky, or moved from Northend to the Broken Isles know what I'm talking about. Scyth is the guy who triggers those expansions. It's a bit different than what I'm used to in that the expansions already exist but Scyth is the first one to see it. He makes it happen. Just reading some of that gave me goosebumps.

This time around the new content is old content redone but it's still really cool. The level cap gets thrown out the window too. The power is all there to be gathered. Scyth knows it and he pushes to get the strength that he needs to do the things he needs to do.

I can't wait to see what the last book of the *Disgardium* series has in store for me. For now though, just know that *Whispers of the Nether* is a worthy successor to the first twelve books in my favorite LitRPG series.

Bottom Line: 5.0 out of 5 Broken Interfaces

Games

Grey Fox Games's Last Light Review by Jim McCoy



I really like tabletop gaming, even if I don't get to do it as much as I would like to. So when I took a trip out to my buddy's lake house and he pulled out Last Light by Grey Games, I smiled. I mean, I had never played it before, but half of the fun of being a tabletop gamer is playing games you haven't played before. It's the thrill of "how do I do this" combined with "he doesn't know what he's doing either. I bet I can figure it out before he does and win!" That's my normal strategy, and it usually works. Usually. This time? We'll cover that later.

So...

Yeah. Something that usually kills me with a lot of tabletop games is the learning curve. If you've played games like Nemesis or Twilight Imperium you know what I mean. Both games are an absolute blast to play, but they can take a good four or five turns (spread out for like an hour or two) to really get a grasp on what you can do on your turn and then another hour or two to figure out which of those possibilities you should be using when. That all adds to your sense of satisfaction when you finally figure it all out and lay a beating on either the game (Nemesis has a cooperative mode and that's my favorite to play) or your opponent(s) but it can still be a

little frustrating when you can't figure out what you're doing.

That is not at all a problem with Last Light. The point is to collect light, which basically amount to victory points. There are different ways to do so, varying from bum rushing the only star on the board to finding a planet where you can get one free light per turn to...

You get the idea. The point is that Last Light is not at all complicated on its most basic level. There's the stuff, go get it. I like that. There are a few different methods of getting the stuff, but it's a race to twenty, and once you get there, it's all over.

Of course, there are a few complications along the way. Your opponents are trying to do the same thing you are. They have ships just like yours. Well, probably. There are three different classes of ships and they have different capabilities. Add in the ability to customize your ships using different types of tech and things can vary pretty widely. I like the ship customization options, too. Adding speed to one of the big ships would be cool, but I always use that tech card before I get a big ship. Even on the smaller ships it's fun though.

There are a bunch of techs and not all of them focus on the ships. It sounds a lot more complicated than it is though. Basically, you draw the card. If you decide to use it, you spend the resources and you get the tech. Some seem to be more helpful than others, but none of them are the type of thing I would avoid building.

There is a strong element of resource management as well. In Last Light resources are used for everything from shipbuilding to tech usage. They're important. Resources are gained from planets. Planets are placed on the board, which is made to resemble a solar system. They have different types of resources available for mining if you have a mine on them. I always place mines when I take a planet. Any planet with a mine will generate whatever resource it generates every turn. Some of them generate light.

Of course, if your opponent has a planet and you want it, there is a way to get it. You can fight for it! That's where the multiple ship classes come in, because the bigger ships have expanded offensive capability and more ability to absorb punishment. Only the largest class of ship starts with the ability to bombard a planet and eliminate a mine, freeing it for occupation by another player. It's fun, but you can't get too combat minded or you will lose.

Probably my favorite game mechanic is that the board rotates at the end of every turn. This adds a degree of difficulty because you have to plan to travel to someplace on the board based on where it is going to be and not where it is currently. Anyone who understands orbital mechanics gets this. It's not all that easy to compensate for if you haven't played the game though, and I err...

Well...

Uhhh...

I didn't lose both times we played. Not precisely...

It's just that uhh....

I tested negative for victory, and one of my opponents tested positive. I just ran out of time to gather light before Tom did. Yeah, Bobby Lane style. Time ran out on me.

That's my story and I'm sticking to it.

Somehow, I've managed to make it this far into the review without mentioning my favorite part of the whole thing: Players play simultaneously. The game goes in phases I think they're called. Every player gets to take one action based on a list of possible actions. Then every player takes another action. Your turn ends when you pass or run out of actions. When everyone's turn ends you reset everything, rotate the board and get back after it.

Set up was quick. The first time it took us maybe five minutes. The second game it took us like two. It's not super complicated and you don't need to spend eight years trying to puzzle out some weird diagram. It's a click-clack boom kind of thing. I like that. We got right to playing.

The game moves fast. We played it twice. The first time took just over an hour, but the first turn took a bit of time because we were figuring the game out. The second game took more like forty-five minutes. This is not a Risk type game that you play for years on end. You start. You play. You finish. Then you can play again if you want to. It's a good time.

Bottom Line: 5.0 out of 5 Rotated Sectors

SerCon

George Zebrowski Bio-Bibliography

by

Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D.

N3F Historian



Jerzy Tadeuz Zebrowski (December 28, 1945 – December 20, 2024) was a Polish-descended, Austrian-born author, who lived in the United States from 1951 until his death. He began publishing science fiction in 1970. He was born in Villach, Carinthia, Austria, and anglicized his name to George Zebrowski when he moved to the United States.

He wrote and edited a number of genre books, and was an editor of *The Bulletin of the Science Fiction Writers of America* from 1970 to 1975.

Personal Life

He attended The State University of New York, Binghamton, from 1964 to 1969.

He lived with fellow genre author Pamela Sargent from 1970 until his death from cancer, but they never married. He and Sargent wrote a number of works together, including four *Star Trek* novels, 1996 - 2003.

Publications

Noteworthy Novels

The Omega Point (1972)
 The Star Web (1975)
 Stranger Suns (1991)
 The Killing Star (1995) [with Charles Pellegrino]
 Brute Orbits (1998)
 The Sunspacers Trilogy (1996)
 Cave of Stars (1999)
 Empties (2009)

Short Fiction Collections

The Monadic Universe and Other Stories, 1977.
 Swift Thoughts, 2002.
 In the Distance, and Ahead of Time, 2002.
 Black Pockets, 2006

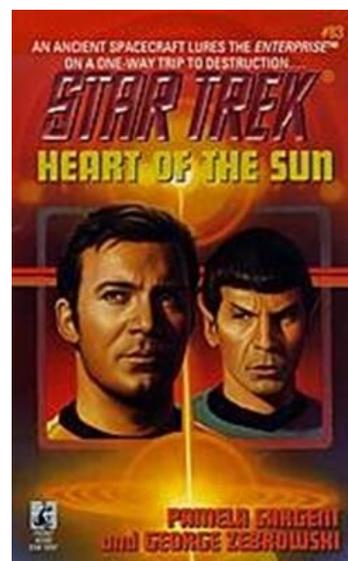
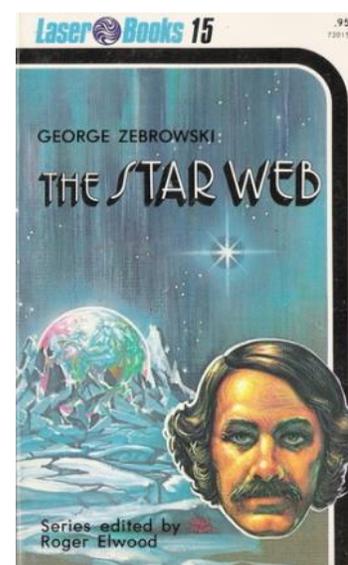
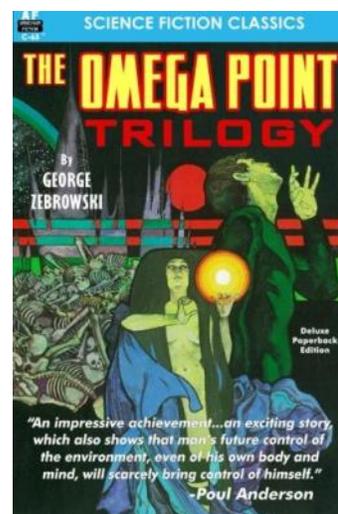
Edited Works

Human Machines: An Anthology of Stories About Cyborgs (1975)
 [with Thomas Scortia]
 Tomorrow Today: No. 1 (1975)
 Faster than Light (1976) [with Jack Dann]
 Three in Space (1981) [with Jack Dann and Pamela Sargent]
 Creations: The Quest for Origins in Story and Science (1983)
 Nebula Awards 20 (1985)
 Nebula Awards 21 (1986)
 Synergy: New Science Fiction, Volume 1 (1987)
 Nebula Awards 22 (1988)
 Synergy: New Science Fiction, Volume 2 (1988)
 Synergy: New Science Fiction, Volume 3 (1988)
 Synergy: New Science Fiction, Volume 4 (1989)
 Three in Time (1997) [with Jack Dann and Pamela Sargent]
 Synergy SF: New Science Fiction (2004)

In addition, he was Series Editor of the eleven volumes in the Classics of Modern Science Fiction published in the 1980s by Crown Publishers of New York.

Non-Fiction Works

Beneath the Red Star: Studies on International Science Fiction (1996)
 Skylife: Space Habitats in Story and Science (2000) [with Gregory Benford]



Awards/Honors/Recognitions

Zebrowski won the John W. Campbell Memorial Award in 1999 for his novel *Brute Orbits*.

Three of his short stories, “Heathen God,” “The Eichmann Variations,” and “Wound the Wind,” were nominated for Nebula Awards, and his story, “The Idea Trap,” was nominated for the Theodore Sturgeon Award.

Some Concluding Comments

He worked as a filtration plant operator in New York during 1969 – 1970.

Pamela Sargent said after his death: “We both thought he’d come home and write again, but his body just gave out.” He and Sargent met as freshmen philosophy students at Binghamton University in the 1960s.

Death

He died on December 20, 2024, in a nursing home, Delmar Center, at the age of 78.

His death was announced after he had been in the nursing home for several months.

Sources

Clute, John & Peter Nicholls (eds.). *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, 1993.

Hawk, Pat. *Hawk’s Authors’ Pseudonyms II*, Second Edition, 1995.

Reginald, R. *Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature*, Volume 2, 1979.

Smith, C. C. (ed.). *Twentieth-Century Science Fiction Writers*, 1981.

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

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

Video

The Running Man, a Timely Adrenaline-Fueled Morality Play Review by Jason P. Hunt

The Running Man (2025)

Screenplay by Michael Bacall and Edgar Wright

Based on the novel by Stephen King

Produced by Simon Kinberg, Nira Park, Edgar Wright

Directed by Edgar Wright
R, 2hr 13m



This is not a remake of the 1987 film starring Arnold Schwarzenegger and Richard Dawson. And that's a good thing.

Very much like the Battlestar Galactica reboot, it's good that the new version delivers a fresh take on the story, which in this case is based on the novel by Stephen King. Both versions have the same spine of a story — guy gets suckered into participating in a deathmatch game show to improve his lot in life — but the details are much, much different between the two.

Ben Richards (Glen Powell) is a down-on-his-luck laborer who can't get employment because he keeps calling out safety violations that endanger his co-workers. So now he can't get a job because he's not a team player and has been labeled "insubordinate" by the corporations and labor unions. And he's got a two-year-old daughter who's dying of the flu because they can't afford the right kind of medicine — meaning real stuff from a real doctor as opposed to black-market off-label concoctions.



So instead of letting his wife Sheila (Jayme Lawson) go back for a third shift at the club to flirt with the high-rollers, Ben decides to audition for one of the many high-stakes game shows that dominate the "freevee" network broadcasts. He's even done a sort of spreadsheet to figure out the minimums he can win if he stays in the game past a certain amount of time. Of course, he promises his wife he's absolutely not going to audition for the most dangerous game, The Running Man...

Naturally, he ends up on The Running Man.

L-R: Katy O'Brian, Glen Powell, Martin Herlihy

Richards, along with Jenni Laughlin (Katy O'Brian) and Tim Jansky (Martin Herlihy) are the poor, unfortunate souls who get to "come on down" as contestants, only Ben's the only one of the three who realizes this is not such a hot ticket as everyone seems to think. The rules: survive for thirty days while being hunted by not only professional mercenaries working for the show, led by Agent McCone (Lee Pace), but also the general public, who get reward money for reporting the location of — or even killing — the contestants. It absolutely leans into the "See it. Say it." paranoia from a few years ago back when we were all being told by the Powers That Be to report any neighbor who had more than six people in the house for the holidays....

Remember those days? Fun times.

Set upon by both the corporate network and the general public, Richards finds himself running for his life — with a little help from his friend Molie (William H. Macy), who sets him up with a disguise and some free advice, neither of which helps Ben for very long. (Would that we all have a friend like Molie when the balloon finally goes up.)



allows him to think that he practically owns Ben Richards and every other contestant on his shows.

William H. Macy as Molie



difficult to imagine something like that happening here in the US despite our Constitution, because how many politicians here want to strip us of certain inalienable rights?

Josh Brolin as Killian



people, who can then take that construct and craft an entirely new narrative.

Michael Cera as Elton

Throughout the course of the contest, Richards has a number of close calls and lucky breaks, and along the way becomes a bit of a folk hero for many in the audience, who are enjoying both his ability to survive in the face of great peril and his brash “up yours” attitude directed at the network boss Dan Killian (Josh Brolin). Killian, I should say, looks absolutely as you would expect: shiny white veneers on his teeth, sculpted cheekbones, tailored suits, perfectly coiffed hair, and an elitist mindset that

This goes to the heart of the film, at least in my mind. Like *The Matrix Resurrections* back in 2021, *The Running Man* is a dystopian future-set indictment of present-day media, social media, the surveillance state, corporatocracies, and the “us vs them” cultural Marxism that threatens to rot our society from within. Even more so in 2025, the dystopian future in this film is so recognizably our own, given where things stand now. Just look at what’s going on in the UK and their censorship and social credit programs, and project forward maybe five years? And it’s not that

The technology isn’t that far removed from today’s tech, either. TVs that watch us watch them. Mobile devices that track our location. Cookies and algorithms that track our browser history, our purchases, our text messages and e-mail. All the while AI sits waiting around the corner ready for someone to fabricate your likeness out of whole cloth and make sure you say the right (or wrong) thing at the right (or wrong) time to the right peo-

Ben Richards is at that moment here. The network contrives to put him in a certain made-for-ratings narrative based on his early success and popularity, building a mythology around him that rivals that of season one, when one runner almost went the distance. Meanwhile, there are those who see Richards as the spark to light up a revolution against the corporatocracy, and they contrive to get him in contact with Elton Perrakis (Michael Cera). Elton is the very definition of the paranoid anti-establishment prepper who has taken steps to outwit the system, and Cera delivers such a solid performance that's a departure from pretty much anything he's done up to this point in his career.

Powell, for his part, is the heir apparent to Tom Cruise. He is both charming and charismatic while maintaining an everyman attitude. With this flick, I think he cements his action star status, and it's obvious he took Cruise's advice to film himself running to see how it looks. As Richards gets deeper and deeper into the month, he faces a choice of being just a guy trying to save his daughter's life or a symbol of the revolution. Powell sells this emotional dilemma with just enough of an edge. It's clear he's in over his head, and he's trying to make the best of it.



Colman Domingo as Bobby T

In that same vein, I think Brolin is having a great time chewing scenery with his veneers. Now, in the 1987 film, Killian was both host and network chief. Here, Killian is just the Big Bad Boss and the hosting duties are handled by the effervescent Bobby T (Colman Domingo), who's flamboyant and energetic and over-the-top with his enthusiasm for seeing people compete. He gets the audience jazzed while at the same time understanding that the whole thing is rigged and he's just getting his piece of it while it lasts, reinforcing the idea that everything you see in the media is a manufactured narrative that can change on a whim. Richards is a hero, until he isn't.



Bobby T understands the game, and he plays it to the hilt, even at one point telling Richards to go along with the story because everyone knows it's a bit.

Now, there are a couple of convenient coincidences that work in Ben's favor. I mentioned Molie. There's also the help he gets from Bradley (Daniel Ezra) and his little brother. But given how today's YouTube/Rumble ecosystem works, and given how many people are out there with channels focused on perpetuating

(or debunking) conspiracies and such, it's not much of a stretch to think that there would be a whole set of channels dedicated to *The Running Man*, and they'd be on the lookout for Richards.

Daniel Ezra, left, and Angelo Giorgio Gray

The risk with a character like Bradley is that he exists mainly for exposition, which means information dumps. But this infodump is done in a fun way that's organic to the story and the dystopian setting. Bradley is a functional character, but he also gives Richards another reason to keep going. Turns out Richards isn't the only one down on his luck with a sick infant...

Director Edgar Wright delivers a solid, well-paced action movie, and I don't care that it didn't perform to expectations at the box office this weekend. I'm recommending that you go see this film for the final moments — the payoff for the entire film reaches into the cultural zeitgeist of today and hopefully makes you think twice about handing your information over to some app. There are robots that could be designed to take on menial tasks, and drones that make deliveries, and touch-sensitive screens that show everybody everything. And all the while in the background all of this technology is watching you and manipulating you and gathering your data to sell off to the highest bidder. Meanwhile, some 14-year-old uses A.I. to doctor up some video of you waving a Confederate flag.

It's time for you to stop being the product.

Go see *The Running Man*. And then get outside away from the surveillance state and go running, man.



Don't Kill the Messenger
by Tiffanię Gray