

Tightbeam 376

January 2026



The Cylon Ambush

by Jose Sanchez

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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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Cedar Sanderson's reviews and other interesting articles appear on her site www.cedarwrites.wordpress.com/ and its culinary extension. Jason P. Hunt's reviews appear on SciFi4Me.com. Jim McCoy is now found at Jimbossffreviews.substack.com

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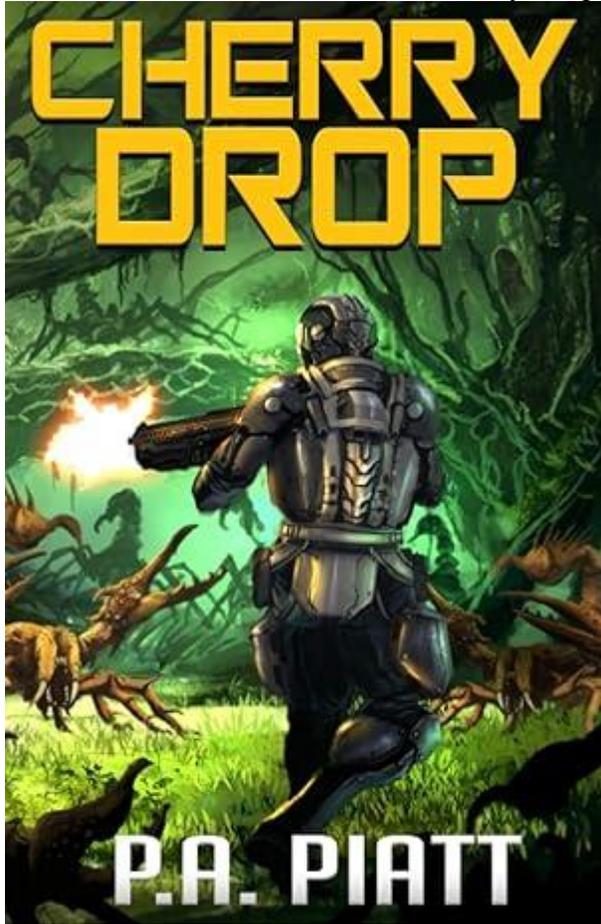
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Books

P.A Piatt's Cherry Drop Review by Jim McCoy

So I was kind of reluctant to read Cherry Drop.



See, I had read and reviewed P.A. Piatt's Redcaps Rising and, while it was a very good book, it was very humorous. I was kind of concerned that Cherry Drop was some kind of weird allusion to a cold medication and that this was going to be some weird, humorous craziness. I mean, I like humor in my Urban Fantasy but well-written Military Science Fiction has this sort of feeling to this that the type of humorous atmosphere in Redcaps Rising is just not conducive to. I wasn't going to read it. It wasn't going to happen. Then one of my friends, who I don't believe has ever read Redcaps Rising, but reads lots of MilSF, said something nice about it. I trust my buddy's judgment, so I thought I'd try it.

I'm glad I did. Cherry Drop is every bit as well-written as Redcaps Rising, but it doesn't have that comedic feel. It has the military feel that it needs. I'm extremely happy to report that it works. I felt like I was there with these guys. Now, part of that may very well be that it's been hotter than the inside of Satan's armpit here in Michigan, but whatever works. They were in the jungle. I was baking my behind off in a cab in a hot, humid place. It just felt right. I will grant

you that there were no crazed aliens trying to eat me, but I can feel comfortable thanking God for small favors there.

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The story begins with our hero, one Second Lieutenant Abner Fortis, about to make his first drop into combat IE his Cherry Drop. He's been sent to lead a short platoon whose last platoon leader is no longer available for duty. His men don't trust him. His platoon sergeant is a corporal. Yes, you read that right. His troops are kind of cranky...

And they send him on a mission to a planet where he has no way to contact higher. So he's on his own, with a little help from a non-promotable subordinate, and a mess lands in his lap. Granted, this SHOULD have been a milk run but it turns out that it wasn't. Fortis watches eve-

rything drop in the pot when he should have spent his deployment napping and waiting for his ride home to show.

There are a lot of action sequences in *Cherry Drop* and they are all well done. Piatt has a knack for keeping things moving and unpredictable. Fortis, being a cherry, has a tendency to do the dumb thing every once in awhile but that actually fits. There is a reason so few second lieutenants make it back from their first combat assignment in the real world. The fact remains that Fortis has just enough luck, enough brains and enough support from his NCOs that he makes it through and actually manages to get some stuff right.

The initial enemy Fortis and his troops face is not all that creative or dangerous. I mean, the bugs can kill you but they rely on numbers and ferocity as opposed to tactics and strategy. The troops are missing a key piece of intel on them and they still manage to win some battles before they figure it out.

Fortis's Marines face a situation that would not be familiar to many United States Marines in that they get hung out on a branch with no help and a jacked up situation. Fortunately for them they, also like real world Marines, manage to bring themselves through somehow. No matter what the odds, they seem to at least keep their integrity intact. Of course, every Corps has its traditions and the ISMC is no exception. Whether it's using slang terms (like DINLI, which stands for Do It, Not Like It and is a term I'd actually like to see pass into general usage because it works so well.) or brewing homemade hooch in violation of regulations (which, oddly enough, is called DINLI) the ISMC has things that need to happen and they do. I love that aspect of the story because it's part of what make the book work. Every military force has its own idiosyncrasies and that is one major part of what makes *Cherry Drop* work.

The enemy is not who it initially appears to be. This is a good thing, because it makes things more interesting. The reason I never liked Pern (and yes, I know that's heresy) is because thread sucks as an enemy. It is mindless, falls in sheets and has no real ability to fight smart or use tactics. I can't deal with that kind of an enemy. After awhile, we see someone new enter the fight, and they have a lot more intelligence and adaptability. Of course, none of that means that their superiors are going to see eye to eye with their decisions or that they're going to be exceedingly popular with the public afterward, but *c'est la vie*, right?

I like reading newer MilSF because the tech makes sense. There's so much that the modern military has that a writer forty years ago could never have imagined that it boggles the mind. Still, when I see troops in a far future story they should be using things like unmanned drones with webcams. It makes no sense if they're not. Now, maybe I'm wrong and at some point in the future we'll invent something that's man portable and works better. I'm not counting on it though, and until a better idea crops up, they need to be there. A lot of really well written older science fiction is missing concepts that your average Joe would come up with now simply because no one had thought of it then. I'm not blaming the authors. I get why it's not there. I'm just saying that as a fan reading a story now, some things need to be there and Piatt includes them.

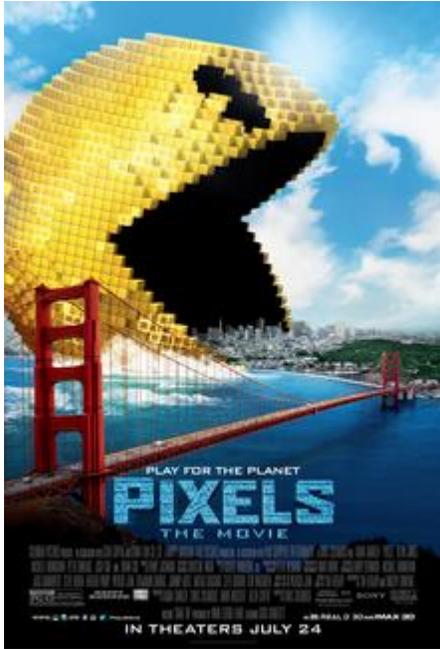
All in all, this one's a keeper. Also, I'm kind of bitter that I didn't realize that I could nominate it for a Dragon Award until it was too late.

Bottom Line: 4.5 out of 5 Lost Troopers

Movies

Columbia Pictures' Pixels A Movie Review by Jim McCoy

How did I miss Columbia Pictures' Pixels when it came out? Granted, I was still reeling from the effects of my 2012 divorce when this came out. I also had a new GF, if I was even allowed to call her that at that point, and I was a brand new blogger at in 2015 when Pixels was released but that's no excuse. What matters is that I missed this movie and I shouldn't have.



Any movie with Adam Sandler and Peter Dinklage is probably going to be worth watching. They're two of the reasons that Pixels works so well. Sandler, as usual, plays himself in a different outfit, only this time some of his more obnoxious personality flaws are missing or at least muted. Dinklage is Dinklage; this time flawlessly portraying an early Eighties arrogant video game champion turned convict. "Fireblaster" indeed. He's not the most principled individual but he tends not to lose and that counts for a lot.

The beginning of Pixels felt like a trip back to my childhood. I was there in the early Eighties. I remember the games. I remember arcades like the one shown early in the movie and, if I've never competed in video game competitions like the one shown in the movie, I've at least heard and read about them. I loved it. Pixels is a movie with a strong side of Ready Player One type Eighties nostalgia without being a Ready Player One clone. I'm really digging this wave of Eighties callbacks and this is actually a really good example of such.

After a few minutes establishing the bona fides of both Fireblaster, Adam Sandler's Brenner and a few others, we fast forwarded to the present. It took a second to catch onto what was happening, but it quickly becomes apparent that the Earth is under attack. When the US sent a time capsule on a space probe, it included examples of American culture, to include video games. Some alien race (and it never is made clear who they are, precisely) has found this time capsule and decided that it was a declaration of war. They then send an attack force comprised of video game characters to do battle on their behalf.

Both sides have three lives. There is a series of challenges. Lose a challenge, you lose a life. The first side to lose three challenges/lives loses the war. Loss of the war will result in the annihilation of the Earth or uhh...

I'm not sure what the loss penalty was for the aliens. That detail was never included but that makes sense in a way. Who ever knew what happened to the ghosts in Pac Man when you completed a level? Not me. You just kept rocking along and helped to make it through the next level. And the next. And the next. And so on.

The number of games in Pixels is staggering. I personally remember seeing Galaga, Tetris, Joust, Arkanoid, Joust, Q-bert, Frogger, and a bunch of other stuff. Some of it goes by really fast. It was a hoot though. Even if I had to google Arkanoid to figure out how to spell it. I mean, it's been a minute, okay? Some things just don't stick in your brain the way you want them to.

And it's nice seeing video game nerds participate in the fight to save the world. Listen, I love movies with lots of guns and explosions and physically fit mega-soldiers armed with nukes. I've watched a bunch of them. But I've got a lot more in common with a gamer than I do with an 'operator' and that made it interesting. Watch guys like myself and my friends getting to do cool stuff and win the awards and accolades was awesome.

I don't want to know what the special effects budget for Pixels was but I'm guessing it was more than I made last year. I'll be honest in stating that it's probably less expensive to create Eighties video game characters onscreen than it would be to sink the Titanic or blow up a Death Star, it obviously isn't cheap and the amount of car wrecks in this thing alone would be expensive.

They looked good for being what they were. Eighties video games didn't have the graphics that modern games do. The CGI in Pixels was true to the way things looked forty years ago. It didn't have the sharpness and realisticnessitude (YES THAT IS A WORD) that modern games do. That's okay. The movie worked because things looked the way they used to. I mean, when I see a Frogger frog it needs to look like a Frogger frog or it doesn't put me in a Frogger frog flavored fit of nostalgia and I therefore get froggy. Pixels got that part right. It needed to look old-school, because these games were all old-school.

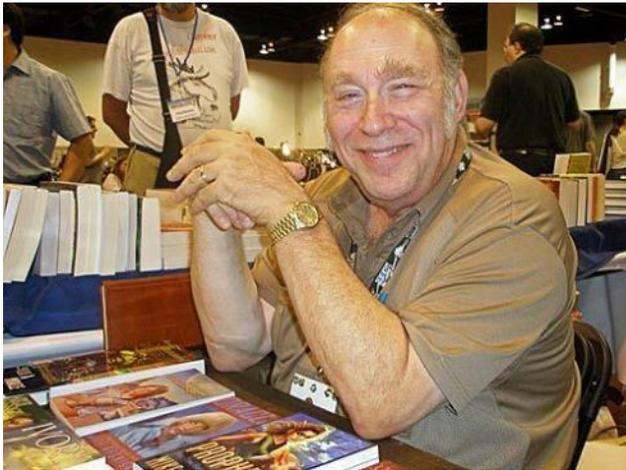
Pixels also sports an enemies to lovers type love affair for you Romantasy types, even if it's not as sexually explicit as some romance fans would prefer. I actually kind of enjoyed it and Adam Sandler managed to not trip over his own feet to the point where I was rooting for the woman to break his nose this time. I'm pretty impressed. I don't think he's over quite managed that before. Seriously, dude got through a whole romance arc without using the phrase "old balls" once. Who would've ever thought that was possible? It's actually fun and a little bit goofy. I enjoyed that part of it.

I'm seriously thinking about downloading an Atari emulator after watching this. Or maybe an Intellivision emulator, since that's where I used to play Burger Time and that was definitely on there. Then again, I could probably do both. I can't imagine either one would take up all that much space on my hard drive. A chance at memorizing some patterns and beating some games might be the perfect thing to occupy my mind during the dead of winter. I'll have to look in to that.

Bottom Line: 4.5 out of 5 Cheat Codes

SerCon

Mike Resnick Bio-Bibliography by Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D. N3F Historian



Michael Diamond Resnick (1942 – 2020) was an American science fiction (s-f) writer and editor. He was born in Chicago on March 5, 1942, the son of parents who were both writers. He made his first sale in 1957 while still in high school.

Later, he was the executive editor of the s-f magazine Jim Baen's Universe, and the creator and editor of Galaxy's Edge magazine.

Later Personal Life

He attended The University of Chicago (1959 – 1961), and Roosevelt University (1962 – 1963). He met his future wife, Carol L. Cain, when they both attended The University of Chicago. They became engaged in 1960, and were married on October 2, 1961. They later bred and showed purebred collies.

Their daughter, Laura Resnick, is an award-winning genre author, as well as the writer of several romance novels..

Activities in Fandom

Resnick and his wife were participants in s-f fandom from 1962. As of 2012, Resnick had been the guest of honor at some forty-two s-f conventions and toastmaster at a dozen others.

Resnick's wife created costumes in which she and Mike appeared at five Worldcon masquerades in the 1970s, winning four out of five contests.

Resnick wrote extensively for such genre fanzines as Mimosa, Challenger, Foxfax, and Lan's Lantern; and he published the apazines To Whom It May Concern, Return of the Heretic, and Masquerade (a one-shot).

Publications

Mike labored anonymously from 1964 through 1976, selling more than 200 novels, 300 short stories, and 2,000 articles. In addition, he edited seven different tabloid newspapers and a pair

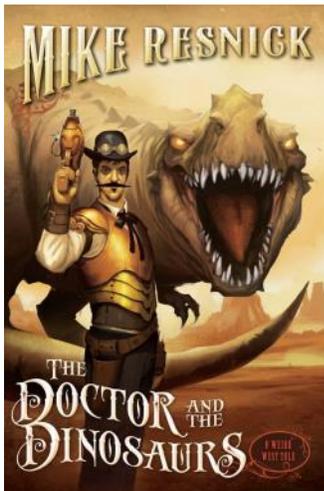
of men's magazines.

Some of his most popular s-f series were Birthright (33 books), Starship (5 books), Santiago (3 books), The Chronicles of Lucifer Jones (5 books), Weird West Tales (4 books), Galactic Comedy (3 books), and The Widowmaker (4 books).

He published books on writing, including Putting It Together: Turning Sow's Ear Drafts into Silk Purse Stories, I Have This Nifty Idea... Now What Do I Do With It?, and The Business of Science Fiction: Two Insiders Discuss Writing and Publishing (co-written with fellow author Barry N. Malzberg and based on a series of articles originally published in the SFWA Bulletin, and which ended in controversy).

Resnick edited more than forty genre anthologies, some with co-editors; and twenty-six collections of his short fiction were published.

His work has been translated into French, Italian, German, Spanish, Japanese, Korean, Bulgarian, Hungarian, Hebrew, Russian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Czech, Dutch, Latin, Swedish, Romanian, Finnish, Portuguese, Slovakian, Chinese, Catalan, Danish, Croatian, and Greek. His papers are in the Special Collections Library of the University of South Florida in Tampa.

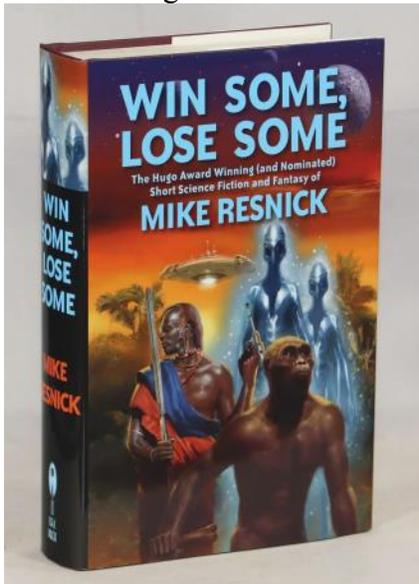


Pseudonyms

During the 1960s – 1970s, he also wrote many gothic and “adult” novels under pseudonyms.

Awards/Honors/Other Accomplishments

During his career, he won five Hugo Awards and a Nebula Award, and was the guest of honor at Chicon 7 in 2012.



He was one of the founders of ISFiC, the organization that runs Windycons. He was also a long-time member of the Cincinnati Fantasy Group, and a member of the “Hawaii in 1981” Worldcon bid.

The Mike Resnick Memorial Award was established in 2021 in his honor.

Some Concluding Comments

I read his reference work, Official Guide to the Fantastics, when it was published in 1976. It was obviously written by a s-f fan for other fans. I found it both enjoyable and useful, especially the section on fanzines.

He died January 9, 2020, survived by his wife Carol and their daughter Laura.

SFWA President Mary Robinette Kowal commented, “Mike Resnick has been a force in the science fiction community. . . I am truly saddened by his passing.”

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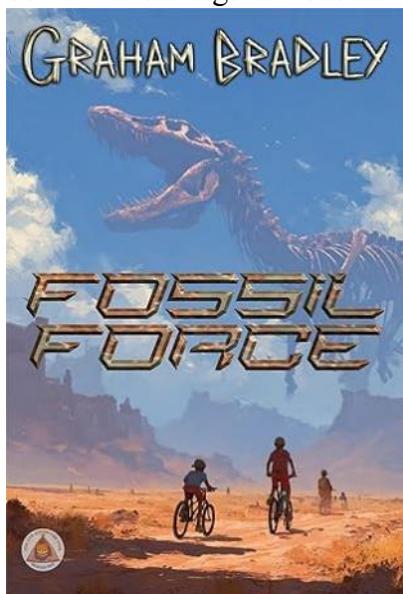
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Note: In addition to the above, I consulted several Internet sites, including Fancyclopedia 3, ISFDB, and Wikipedia.

Young Adult

Graham Bradley's Fossil Force Review by Jim McCoy

Some times things that shouldn’t make me nostalgic do. I mean, I’ve never lived on a farm. I’ve never lived near an Indian reservation. I’ve certainly never gotten to pilot a magically powered mecha that I dug out of a pond on my grandpa’s land. But when I opened up Graham Bradley’s *Fossil Force* I was hit with a wave of nostalgia so hard it almost knocked me over. It was really cool.



I think it’s because of the easy camaraderie of the kids in the book and the way they conduct themselves. These are kids who want to do things and just do them. Remember when you wanted to >insert activity here< with your friends and you just jumped on your bike and went and did it? That’s what these kids do. Don’t get me wrong. They’re good kids. They go to school and do their homework or whatever. But they still have that ability that I miss: The one where you could get your nearest and dearest together on less than an hour’s notice and be off and away doing what you wanted while the old people went to work and agonized over whatever it was today.

And these kids do the right thing wherever possible. I like them for that. They don’t always do precisely what they should do, and main character Patrick makes at least one questionable decision, but even when they screw up it’s with good intentions. He also faces the consequences of

his foolish action and I enjoyed seeing that. Bradley keeps his characters on the straightish and more-or-less narrow throughout the book. There is no goofy nihilism here. Things aren't always what they should be, but the core group of the story tries to make them right.

And there's a lot of good things Patrick and friends can do. Fossil Force is a book full of good guys and bad guys and at least two guys I wasn't sure of through most of the book, even though one of the guys is a girl. Or sumfin'. Yes, I am making this up as I go along. What I'm saying is that the tension is real, the stakes are high and you don't have to be a kid to enjoy this story. I mean, I'm not a kid (although I've been called one) and I loved it. But that brings up an interesting point.

Fossil Force is listed as a children's book. Amazon has it at eight years and up, although I might think it's closer to a book for ten year olds, but that might depend on the kid. I was reading the newspaper at eight, so I could've handled it at that age but I'm guessing most kids would need a bit more seasoning. Regardless of all of that though, it's a good read. It's just more of an "I love this book because it was fun," book as opposed to a "my professor assigned me this crap so I have to read it" type tome.

Bradley's world building was top notch. He Heinleins in his details to the point where you feel like you've ridden your bike down the road with Patrick. He hides the fact that he's doing it so well that you don't even know that you've been told what the world is like though. Bradley avoids all of the typical problems (like the dreaded infodump) that plague lesser authors. His world feels lived in, not ethnographed. The story benefits from that and so did I as a reader.

I really enjoyed the world building part of Fossil Force for another reason: I'm working on my own novel set in a world much like our own and, although it feels nothing like Bradley's, I feel like I learned a lot by re-reading certain passages and trying to figure out what he did to make parts of it work so well. I mention this not to say that this is a teaching novel or whatever (and definitely not as an excuse to mention that my paid subscribers can read my book right here at Jimbo's before it comes out) but to point out that dude is a master worldbuilder. I'm not saying I'm jealous. I'm just saying my eyes just turned green and looked directly toward Bradley.

And there is very obviously more to the Fossil Force world than what we see in just this first introductory novel. Bradley hints at something deeper and, a purpose to the mecha used by Fossil Force that leads to another whole world. The fact that we haven't really seen that yet has me both bummed out and excited for the next novel.

Listen, I never said that last sentence made sense. I just said it was true. It's emotional. It's not designed to be logical. So just lift your eyebrow, say "Fascinating" and move on, Mr. Spock.

And there is a next novel coming. I read about that somewhere. I'm geeked. Like, I know enough about Fossil Force to know that I don't know enough, but I'm not really sure what all there is that I don't know yet. It's like standing next to a place with a shovel while you're watching someone else scrape off the concrete so you can get to the dirt and start digging. Like, I want to read more but there's just no more to read. Somebody needs to buy Graham Bradley a jackhammer. GET THROUGH THAT CONCRETE GUY! Jimbo needs to feed his reading addiction.

Fossil Force is part of a movement by Raconteur Press to release content to get boys interested

in reading. Seeing as I have written about the need for such books before I am duty bound to thank them for doing so. You can read my take on the situation here. And, while I'm a fan of good speculative fiction regardless of who publishes it, I have to hand it to them. They're being the change that I want to see in the world. So thank you, Raconteur Press for doing what is necessary. The last thing the world needs is a bunch of illiterate men.

So yeah, buy yourself a copy. But Christmas is coming and that boy you want to see reading instead of getting in trouble deserves a copy of Fossil Force as well. I'm just sayin'.

Bottom Line: 5.0 out of 5 Mysterious Masks

Food of Famous Author

Cacao Powder Cooking by Cedar Sanderson

The difficulty, I suppose, with an advent calendar is that we tie Christmas to baking, and hot cocoa, and sweet things all month long. It really isn't a big surprise to find that the spices are more geared in that direction. What it is, though, is a fun challenge for me to take that gearing and add a little twist in a different direction!

Cacao powder is less processed than the more familiar cocoa powder. Which means it retains a bit more of the bitterness than cocoa - and certainly is nothing like most chocolate preparations which contain rather a lot of sugar. This means that I can easily use it in a savory preparation. My immediate thought was chili, since my chili always has a bit of chocolate in it. Not enough to taste chocolatey! Just enough to be a earthy undertone backing up the symphony of chilies and alliums along with the rich meats that have cooked long and low and slow. However, the menu plan for the week has chili on for Friday, and I didn't want to hold this post until then. I looked at what was in the refrigerator, and spotted the tablitias I'd pulled out, then realized I had no plan for them.

Tablitias are a thin crosscut of ribs, meant to be cooked quickly over high heat. Generally on a grill, but I won't be doing that today - I'll sear them off on a very hot pan indoors. They are quite fatty, which means they will take up flavor well. Ideally, I'd have rubbed or marinated them the night before, but due to having recently acquired a vacuum sealer (again, but that is a different story) I could short-circuit the process and get them ready for lunch.

Cacao Rub

Sufficient for about 2 lbs. of meat, which would be about four tablitias, or 4-6 pork chops, or a couple of steaks... you get the idea.

1 tbsp cacao powder

1 tsp chili powder

2 tsp smoked paprika

1 tsp garlic, granulated

1 tsp salt

I used liquid smoke both to cheat the flavor of the grill, but also to just slightly moisten the meat for better rub adhesion. I brushed the tablitas with it on one side, probably using less than a teaspoon.

After mixing up the rub, I coated both sides of the meat with it, then put them and any extra rub into a vacuum bag before sealing that up. I set this aside for about four hours in the refrigerator. You can do this with a ziploc, excluding as much air as possible, and letting it sit for several hours in the fridge before searing it.

These will cook through quickly on the grill or a hot pan, just a few minutes on a side will be enough. Let rest for a few minutes more, then pull or cut the meat off the bones, and eat with a tortilla to hold onto it!

Cacao and chili play so very well together. This was delicious - rich, unctuous, and just a bit of



heat from the peppers in it. It helped to start with good local beef, I'm sure, but we were talking about it as we cleaned up after our meal, and this would be beautiful on pork as well. I may try that with a sous vide cook and sear after, see how well that works. For me, spices spark inspiration, and I want to compose dishes that use them either as a solo, or in harmony with others as this rub is. It doesn't taste like chocolate, but it does... just not at all sweet. It's bring it's own flavor to the heat and fat and it's sa-

vory, all right!

Anime

Defining Darkness at the Expense of Others Analysis by Jessi Silver

Though I assume most people who were planning to have already watched the first episode by now, I'll warn that the first episode of *Goblin Slayer* – and by extension this discussion of it – includes references to sexual assault and rape, both generally and specifically.

As I mentioned in my *Goblin Slayer* first impressions post, I had the desire to write further about some of the extreme content that appears in the episode. This isn't because other bloggers and reviewers haven't been writing about it, but more because I haven't seen my thoughts and feelings reflected in most of the reactions and I'd like to provide my perspective. A lot of what I've been reading in the past week has been very analytical, weighing various points in an at-



tempt to come to some kind of logical conclusion about whether the episode's content is warranted or appropriate. I believe that kind of disaffected point-by-point examination of scenes and images is the luxury and privilege of those whose lives are untouched by crimes of sexual aggression. I'm not trying to make enemies by saying as much, but I feel that there's a certain survivors' perspective on this matter that can be difficult for others

to understand except from first-hand experience (or an incredibly robust sense of empathy).

The first episode of *Goblin Slayer* has at this point been primarily defined by its extreme violence, as well as its inclusion of a scene in which a young woman is brutally raped by a group of goblins. There's nothing appealing about this scene; the woman's terrified screams and the goblins' violent clawing of her flesh as they attack her is clearly intended to be sickening to the viewer. As the episode closes, we see the woman one last time; as she rides away in the back of a horse-drawn wagon with a group of other female victims, it's clear that she's no longer the brash combatant she was when she entered the goblins' cave; her lifeless eyes and huddled posture say all we need to know about the spiritless husk of a person that she's become. As the audience, we're meant to think "oh, what an awful, cruel world this is, so unlike our own."



The world is cruel, especially to young women.

What the episode fails to show, though, is the true aftermath of this attack – the affect it has on this woman's life days, months, years afterward. Sexual assault is an experience that influences a survivor's life in one way or another forever. It's an experience that can tear apart a person's sense of safety and security, adversely affect their ability to form relationships, or cause them to feel negatively about themselves or their bodies. Depending on their environment, it can stigmatize and isolate them from others. This does not mean that

survivors are doomed to an awful life; many (including myself) are some of the strongest people I know. But that experience is always with them. The way sexual assault and rape are used in fiction, however, is more often to provide a character with some kind of blunt-force revenge-worthy backstory, or as in this case, to indicate that the world in which the character exists is dark, backwards, horrifying, and particularly violent. It is utilized to create shock-value and to



define media as hard-core. Too often, though, it does nothing to honor survivors' experiences. We will likely never bear witness to how the young woman processes what she went through, because that's not what the storytellers deem to be "important."

I find this type of world-building troubling for several reasons. For one, it implies that this type of violence (at

least to the level portrayed in instances like this one) is somehow unrealistic – that it’s an element of fantasy that just “doesn’t happen here.” As much as I wish that gang rape were a foreign concept in our world, or even some horrifying crime that we left behind in the dark ages, the truth is that it’s something that happens to this day. It happens in refugee camps, at colleges, in religious settings, and essentially anywhere there’s an unequal power structure in place. To claim it as something from long ago or far away is disingenuous at best.

It also suggests that perpetrators of these crimes are somehow sub-human. In many anime, rapists and perverts are defined by their physical ugliness; In the case of *Goblin Slayer*, the rapists are literal beasts. It’s fashionable (and, honestly, understandable) to claim that rapists are “monsters;” that no one with an ounce of humanity would choose to victimize anyone in this way. It is convenient to think that you and I aren’t on the same level as these types of criminals – I’ve seen so many people I know say things akin to “I want to murder that piece of shit” when they read news about a rapist’s crimes. I feel this is the type of rhetoric that people who consider themselves rational feel comfortable proclaiming when they believe there is some fundamental difference between themselves and the target of their anger. The unfortunate truth is that people who perpetrate sexual assault are people, full-stop. They’re people we see and with whom we interact; we likely know someone who’s done this, even if it never comes to light and they experience no repercussions. I’m not saying this to try to sow paranoia, but more to provide a reminder that we do ourselves a disservice by othering perpetrators; if we can convince



Look who's talking, with your skirt up to there.

ourselves that their crimes are true aberrations, then we can absolve ourselves from any responsibility of correcting the culture and power structures that helped them to flourish in the first place.

Perverts in anime are often signaled by their physical ugliness. From “*My Love Story!!*” Episode 1.

It’s an unfortunate truth that sex crimes are most often gender-based. While it’s certainly an experience that can happen to anyone regardless of their gender, the unfortunate truth is that these crimes are most often committed against individuals who are socially vulnerable and have access to less power. Despite the strides that we have made over time, women still occupy more vulnerable social positions in ours and many societies. The events in episode 1 of *Goblin Slayer* do nothing to reject, refute, or deny this; despite the fact that the story takes place in a fantasy world in which the rules of society could have taken almost any shape or form, the story’s creators chose to mirror our own in the way that the adventuring party experiences their defeat. The swordsman is brutally beaten to death, which is horrifying in and of itself, but it’s the women who have their dignity stripped away along with their lives. The Mage is stabbed, poisoned, and has her clothing stripped off by goblins; there are several very uncomfortable shots of the character’s nude, bloodied body sprawled on the cave floor. The Martial Artist’s fate has already been discussed at length. I understand the necessity of establishing danger and brutality in this kind of low-fantasy world, but even so there’s something especially frustrating when it still falls on the women alone to bear these additional horrors.

The swordsman meets a violent death, but the goblins choose not to defile his body as they do with the women’s.

Why, when given literally limitless opportunity to write a story that takes place in a brand new world, a world in which it's clearly common for both men and women to seek out adventure and to wield various forms of physical and magical power, would a creator feel obligated to then fall back on tropes that do a specific disservice to one gender more so than another? I struggle with this question quite a bit, whether related to anime, novels, live-action television, or other forms of media. I believe that human beings are true storytellers, and I am often blown away by the stories that people are able to dream-up from their own minds. And yet, whether bleak or beautiful, harrowing or heart-rending, darkness and so-called realism still sometimes seems predicated less on what women do, but what is done to them. Despite our position as creative beings, are we still so woefully uncreative that we cannot picture for ourselves new worlds in which evil is not described in part by gender-based horrors?

Though fiction allows us to explore scenarios that exist outside of ourselves, it is ultimately informed by the experiences and beliefs of those creating it. The phrase “a fate worse than death” was originally a euphemism for rape; in societies that consider the shame of rape something that a victim bears alone, the weight of that shame and its varied consequences are probably more terrible than a quick or even violent death. I find it maddening that, even as we are becoming more enlightened to the aftermath of rape, the affects it has on survivors, and the need to find and prosecute individuals to commit this crime, we still find it necessary to fall back on rape as an easy, unsubtle shorthand to convey a sense of darkness in a fictional world. Ultimately this is what bothers me about *Goblin Slayer*; it cribs from the experiences of rape survivors to avoid doing the leg-work of creating a genuinely affecting atmosphere. It also treats rape survivors like chaff; expendable in this pursuit of ultimate edginess. It steals without giving back. It creates rape survivors but does not give them the dignity of telling their stories. In a world of limitless possibilities I feel like we ought to be able to do better by now.

This isn't meant to be a call for censorship, by any means; I think if people want to watch this anime, they ought to be able to. My hope, though, is that perhaps at some point we as a fandom may become more willing to look critically at media that very blatantly “punches down” or serves to harm a group of people who are already at a disadvantage. I hope that, eventually, individuals like myself whose life experiences are at the forefront of their media consumption won't be made to feel as though our act of speaking out is somehow inconvenient to others.

As always, thank you for reading.

Boarding School Juliet Review by Jessi Silver

At Dahlia Academy, a prestigious boarding school attended by students of two feuding countries—the eastern Nation of Touwa, and the Principality of West—Romio Inuzuka, leader of the dorms' Touwa first-years, wishes for a romance that can never be. For his ladylove is none other than his arch-enemy, Juliet Persia, leader of the dorms' West first-years. – ANN

Streaming: Amazon Prime

Episodes: 12

Source: Manga

Episode Summary: The feud between the Principality of the West and the Eastern Nation of Touwa is played out daily in the microcosm that is Dahlia Academy. Romio Inuzuka leads the Touwa Black Doggy Dorm, while Juliet Persia heads the dorm of the Western White Cats, and they truly do feud like cats and dogs; the confrontations between the two groups occasionally erupt into actual violence, with their passionate leaders at the center of the conflict. Romio has a secret, however – he’s been in love with Juliet since the two were children, but he’s never been brave enough to state it out loud (for obvious reasons).

When Juliet finds herself cornered one afternoon, Romio manages to save her from attack, though in doing so embarrasses her so much that he believes there’s no salvaging their potential relationship. Later that night he receives a message from Juliet beckoning him to the school’s fountain, more than likely so that they can hash out their “differences.” When she challenges him to a sword duel, Juliet explains that she’s always considered Romio the rival she wants to beat; she works and trains hard so that she can one day have the power to change the world. Romio lays it all on the line and shares the truth of his feelings as their swords clash. They eventually decide to start dating – but it has to be in secret, for the sake of the school and its tenuous harmony.



Impressions: For whatever reason I’ve never been that big a fan of most anime romance series. The pining and the feeble non-movement of many potential romantic couplings in anime generally leaves me pretty bored. There are some exceptions; even though it takes something like 40 episodes for the protagonists to kiss, I will forever love the sweetness and purity of Kimi ni Todoke (seriously, I will fight you over these sweet dumb teenagers). One trend I have really appreciated, though, is the tendency for more modern anime romances to have characters confess early on and then present the couple with various hurdles they need to overcome in order to achieve true happiness – one of my favorites is My Love Story!! which is still pure and wonderful and funny, but the characters actually start dating very early on and the drama develops because they don’t know what the hell they’re doing (I want to hug them). I enjoy this set up much more than the “will-they-or-won’t-they” (of course they will, we don’t have to spend 23.5 episodes pretending that they won’t) dance that’s perpetuated in many famous romance anime.



Boarding School Juliet is one of the latter examples, which ends up making for a pleasant and snappy opening episode. The story almost feels self-contained because the characters’ fountain-side duel serves as a good climax and their dating situation is somewhat resolved to a steady-state by episode’s end. Obviously there’s more ground to be covered because a relationship isn’t something that’s likely to stay a secret for long, no matter the context; the fact that these two characters are leaders of their respective factions doesn’t help the situation. I expect the next several episodes to feature all sorts of mental (and literal) acrobatics to keep nosy students and others in the dark about their juicy secret.

This episode is told primarily through Inuzuka’s point-of-view and I found him to be an inter-

esting character. His is sort of a frustrating position to be in, because as we realize fairly early on he's pushed to fight for his faction, but he's not really a willing participant in the conflict. His physicality has become really the only way he knows of to get close to the young lady that's stolen his heart. I feel like there's perhaps a good discussion to be had about masculinity's many limitations buried somewhere within Inuzuka's internal conflict; there's definitely a "might makes right" mentality that's exacerbated by the fact that a proxy war is being fought on the school grounds on an almost daily basis. I don't know if this is the type of anime series to address this head-on, but it might be worth talking about later on.



This is echoed in Persia's story – as a young lady of certain noble birth she has a responsibility to uphold her family's values, but as a girl she cannot become head of the family. Gaining physical strength has become her imperfect agent of change, because in her world becoming a leader and having power means to perform masculinity and to somehow do it better than all the men. But ultimately something greater will

have to change in order for her to achieve the leadership that she seeks. I like the amount of subtlety and complexity of character motivation that was achieved in this short amount of time. I think Persia would have been a much less effective heroine if she were simply a tomboyish girl picking fights for no reason – in a shounen romance series like this, it would have likely set her up to be conquered and cowed rather than treated as an equal. Because there's some reason to her behavior I feel marginally more confident that, should the relationship work out in the end, it might be somewhat more equitable for Juliet than it could have been otherwise.

The one major hiccup in this episode occurs about halfway through, where some Black Doggy upstarts decide to attack the White Cats where it'll hurt the most – by humiliating their leader. Three boys corner Juliet as she walks back to her dorm and attempt to sexually assault her; Inuzuka swoops in to stop them in the nick of time, of course. I've said this many times, but I continue to find it frustrating when sexual assault is tossed around as a short hand way to demean and humiliate "upstart" female characters as well as to identify certain male characters as particularly evil. In this case, a simple mugging or even a 3-on-1 fight would be enough to get the point across in this scene. As good a duelist as Juliet is, she'd probably be unable to hold out against 3 attackers, and this would still create the correct situation for Inuzuka to save the day and set up the end of the episode. Especially nowadays it should be crystal clear to almost



everyone that sexual assault isn't just a momentary inconvenience, it's a trauma that has long-lasting consequences for survivors. This was really the only major pitfall of this episode, but to me it's a pretty formidable one, and one that might prevent some viewers from enjoying it.

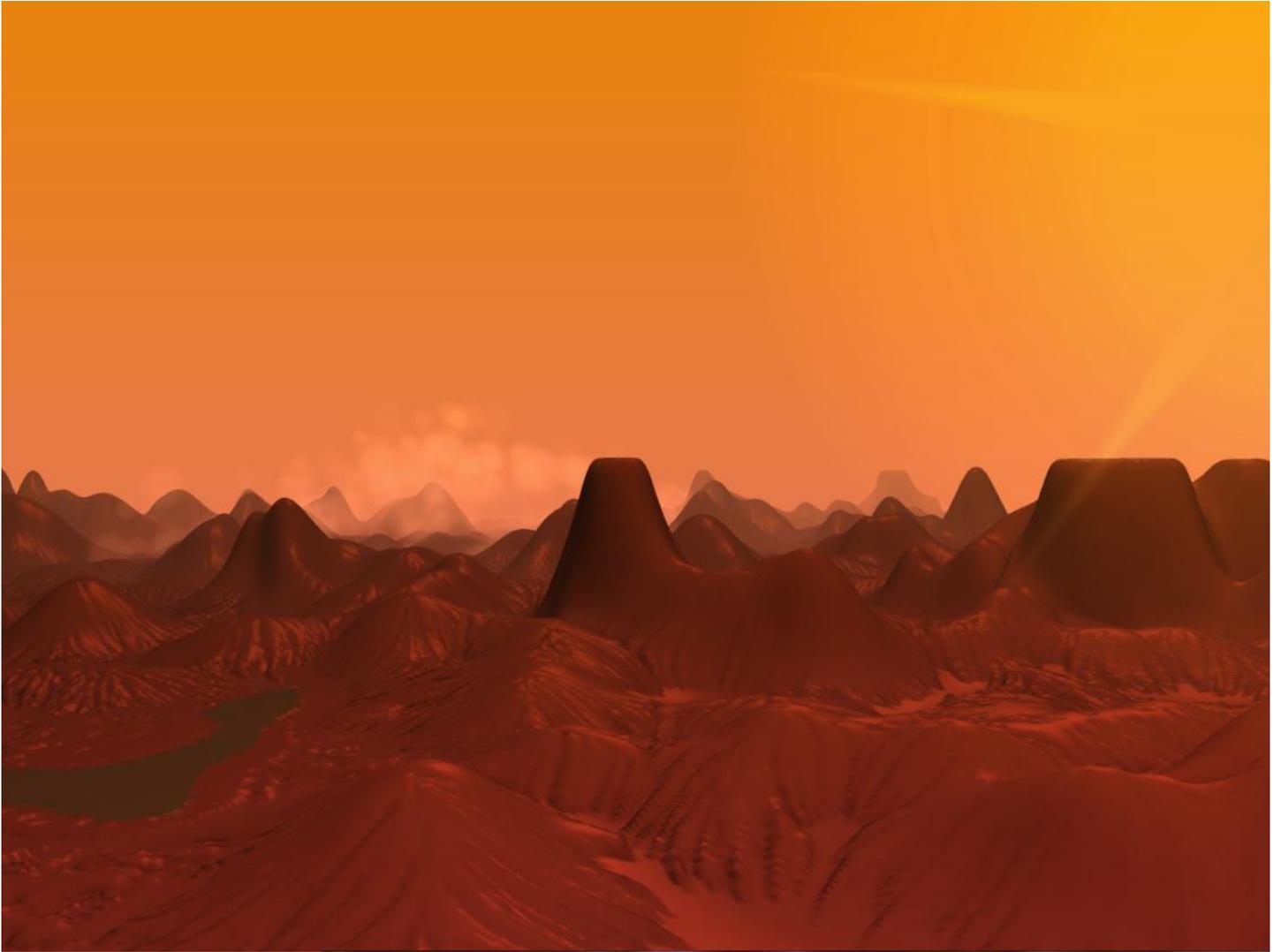
Ultimately, what I appreciate about Boarding School Juliet is that it gets to the point. The cen-

tral couple may not be in an ideal situation, they may not have the nuances of their feelings figured out just yet, and really, judging by the Shakespeare play upon which this is loosely-based, they may not ultimately have a happy ending ahead of them. But I like the fact that the drama will likely revolve around how their relationship develops and whether it can actually work, and not predicate itself on whether one of them can summon the courage to say those 3 words. This was a surprisingly fun episode and something I definitely didn't expect to like so much going in, but anime seasons almost always have a few gems and this might be one of them.

Pros: Both of the protagonists are admirable characters. There's no waffling about the relationship – confessions happen in episode 1.

Cons: There's an unfortunate near-sexual-assault that occurs partway through the episode.

Grade: B-



The Deadly Desert
by Tiffanię Gray