

Tightbeam 377

February 2026



Winter Flight

By Tiffanie Gray

Tightbeam 377

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What is Tightbeam? We are the N3F literary fanzine, not the novel and anthology fanzine, but the fanzine that tries to cover all tastes in fandom, such as anime, comics, cosplay, films, novels, biographies, poetry, music, short stories, food, ...

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

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

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

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

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

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

Public (non-voting) memberships are free. Send payments to Kevin Trainor, PO Box 143, Tonopah NV 89049. Pay online at N3F.org. PayPal contact is treasurer@n3f.org.

Editorial Note

We particularly thank our regular contributing authors, including Heath Row, Cedar Sanderson, and Jessi Silver. Heath Row's many works are collected by him in The STF Amateur, issues of which are found in The N3F FrankinZine. Cedar Sanderson is cedar.sanderson on Facebook and cedarwrites.com elsewhere. Also of note is Jessi Silver on S1E1.com

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Editorial

We seem to go through phases in which we have more material or less material. The current phase is "less". Nonetheless, we found a range of stellar reviews that we expect will be of interest to readers. The recipe for chocolate storm pudding appears particularly appropriate given the local weather.

..... George Phillies

Letters of Comment

Dear George and Jon:

I finally have some time to work on fanzines after digging us out of one of the worst snowstorms we've had in some years. Here goes with a few comments on Tightbeam 376.

The cover...it's been a long time since I have seen fan art about the original Battlestar Galactica. Every so often, I see a great photograph of a Cylon in a downtown area asking for support because his job has been made redundant by CGI. I like the photo because it was taken outside a meat market on Bloor St. in Toronto.

I never did get the opportunity to meet Mike Resnick, and I wish I had. I had no idea he's been so busy, and was so involved with fandom. Again, thanks for so many informative bios.

Just for information's sake...we're currently working on the first issue of a modern day Amazing Stories, and we hope to have it out by March. March 10th will see the 100th anniversary of the publication of Vol.1, #1 of Amazing Stories, from way back in 1926.

Also, you've seen the news from Minneapolis. The Canadian Foreign Affairs department in Ottawa strongly recommends to all Canadians not to travel to the United States. If American lives are in such danger, foreign nationals will become a suitable target. So, even with memberships to LAcon V, we will not attend. We'll just continue to save our money, and enjoy the 2027 Worldcon in Montreal.

Thanks for this issue, looking forward to the next!

Yours, Lloyd Penney

Dear George and Jon,

Courtesy of word-of-the-day I recently learnt the word "dataveillance". In some ways this is quite an old word (1972) for a concept that is beginning to creep into the collective consciousness. But what is the concept? Dataveillance means "the collection or monitoring of data relating to personal activities". This is a much older idea than 1972. Still, I'm prompted to ask - what is the "best" exploration of dataveillance in the SF literature? Short story or novel? You decide!

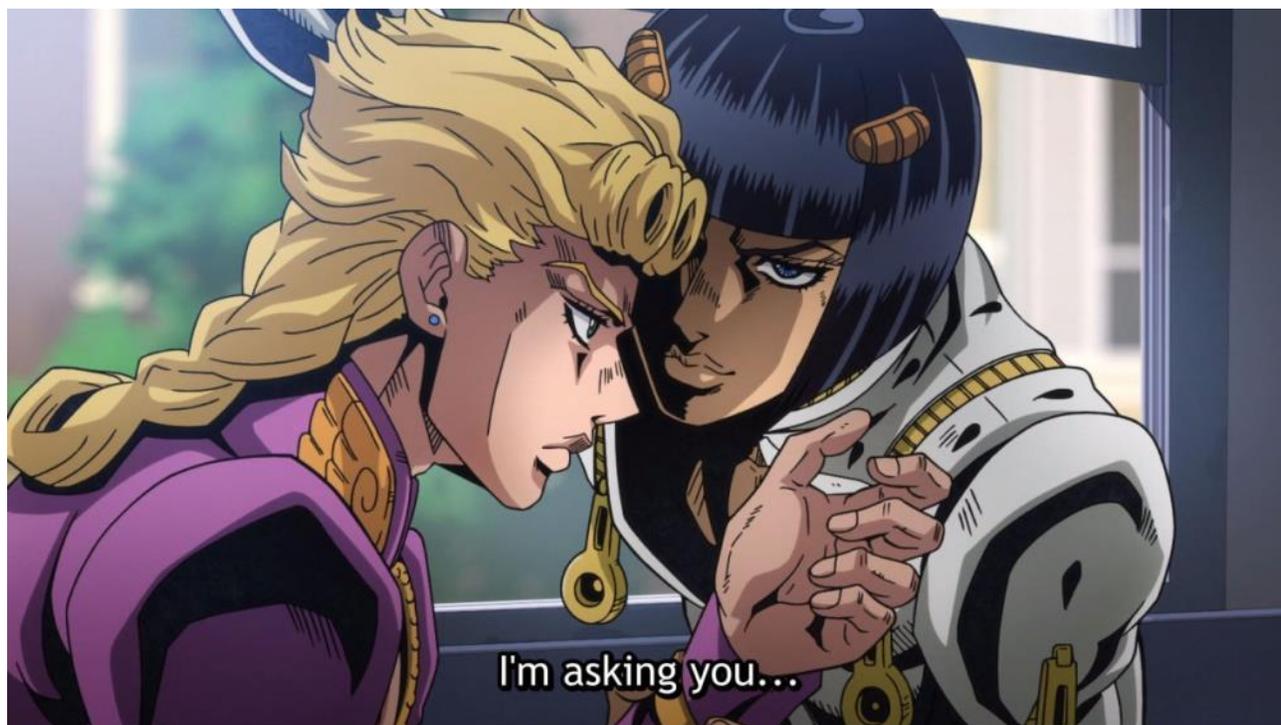
Cheers,

Mark Nelson

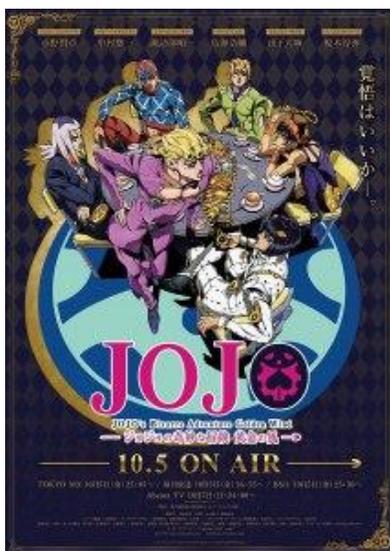
Anime

Jojo's Bizarre Adventure Part 5: Golden Wind

Review by Jessi Silver of S1E1.com



Naples, 2001. Giorno Giovanna is a small-time crook with one big dream—to become a “Gang-Star.” No ordinary thief, Giorno has a connection to the remarkable Joestar bloodline, and possesses a Stand named Gold Experience. His dream starts to become reality when he meets Bruno Buccellati, a mobster from the gang Passione and a fellow Stand user himself. Realizing that they share similar ideals, and both disagree with the gang’s harmful affairs, Giorno reveals his goal to Bruno: with Bruno’s help, he will reform Passione by overthrowing the boss. – MAL



Streaming: Crunchyroll

Episodes: 39

Source: Manga

Episode Summary: Naples, Italy is a beautiful city drawing tourists from far and wide, but it has a darker underbelly filled with drug use and crime. Teenager Giorno Giovanni exists somewhere in between, committing petty crime for profit and paying the police to look the other way, but also occasionally also thwarting the efforts of local gangsters. When he crosses Leaky-eyed Luca, a violent gang member after protection money, Giorno uses a mysterious power, called “Golden Wind,” to turn the tables on Luca. The gangster’s defeat draws the attention of his associates and puts a target on Giorno’s head.

In the meantime, Koichi Hirose arrives in Naples on the orders of Jotaro Joestar; he's been sent on a mission to gain information (and perhaps a DNA sample) of a young man named Haruno Shiobana, who Jotaro believes may be the human son of DIO. After encountering Giorno multiple times (and being duped by him), Koichi is positive that Giorno and Haruno are on-and-the-same; Jotaro agrees, and believes Giorno's un-Japanese blond hair is likely a symptom of the awakening of his stand powers. As Koichi mulls over how best to fulfill his mission, Giorno is cornered on the trolley by a gangster named Bruno, an associate of Luca and someone with frightening powers of his own.

Impressions: While it may have been more logical to save this impression for my upcoming "sequels" post, each season of Jojo's Bizarre Adventure is so distinct and relatively self-contained that I feel comfortable enough giving it its own highlight. That said, this season is deep into the saga's overall storyline and has character crossover from parts 3 and 4, so it's definitely not a good place for new viewers to jump in.



Giorno helps out some tourists...
but takes a cut for himself.

My measure of a good Jojo series might not be the same as everyone else's; I'm much more about the humor than the very serious shounen action component. Parts 2 and 4 have been my favorites thus far, but I gave up on part 3 a few episodes in (though I'm slowly making my way through it now as I have some free time) because it seemed to take it self too seriously as the most "famous" story arc. I live for the unique and goofy internal logic, the barely-contained homoeroticism, and the continual escalation of plot intensity and mortal danger that makes the series

what it is. I suspect these are the things that many female fans get from other shounen anime series, but for me there's just something special about Jojo that makes me want to go out of my way to watch it.

Part 5 begins much like part 4, establishing the setting and giving the focal Joestar (or Joestar proxy) a chance to define himself through his actions. Giorno is already kind of an interesting fellow, definitely the type of person whose morality you'd expect to exist on the cusp between the upstanding Joestar family line and the pure, ridiculous evil of DIO. He's clearly a "gangster with a heart of gold," or at least that's the impression he gives off. He's not beyond manipulating people to gain some extra cash, but he also has little tolerance for outright violent criminality of the type displayed by Luca. He doesn't run away from a fight, but he respects opponents (like Koichi) who aren't out for the kill. He's got his own moral compass and sense of justice even though he's not really out to "do good," and I think this introductory episode does a good job of presenting this. As someone who's never read the manga, I suspect that some of the drama may revolve around which "side" of Giorno's personality will eventually become dominant. Is his genetic destiny to become as evil as his father, or will his Joestar blood prevail?

Unlike Part 4, the setting of this series seems pleasant but visually lacking in style. I suppose it would be difficult to add much additional interest to Italy's familiarly historic milieu, but Diamond is Unbreakable really wow-ed with its color-clash background artwork that gave the entire season an appropriately 1990's flair and that's certainly missing here. The background art in



There's... sort of (?) a family resemblance.

this installment seems like a step down and almost too “typical” for a Jojo series. On the other hand, important characters are immediately identifiable, probably more so than before, because their macho comportment and flamboyant sense of fashion is so entirely out-of-the-ordinary and sticks out like a sore thumb. I’ve heard that there are some staffing differences between this season and previous ones, so these differences are likely just a result of differing tastes and talents. It remains to be seen whether the changes are successful or at least fitting to this story or not.

Once again I’ll warn that this is not a friendly place for newcomers to join up with the story. This episode assumes that the viewer knows about the Joestar family and how DIO fits into that saga. There’s no explanation of the characters’ “stands,” the supernatural entities that “stand” beside them and exhibit all manner of different abilities. Jotaro is a fairly iconic (and meme-able) character, but Koichi certainly isn’t; I was surprised to learn that he’d be a part of this story (though he was important to the last one). There’s a lot of information to have on hand and only so much of it can be gleaned from a compilation video or a Wiki article. Though I realize that over a hundred episodes of “backstory” is likely a lot for most people to handle, I will say that it’s been a worthwhile journey for me to take. If any part of this review or ones you read elsewhere pique your interest, I’d encourage you to give it a try.

There’s really not much more for me to say about this episode because Jojo’s Bizarre Adventure seems to be one of those franchises that people either love or don’t understand at all. It’s definitely not the type of anime series that I would have pegged as a favorite from description alone, but it’s certainly singular in its storytelling style and its sense of humor, which is something that I appreciate. At this point, there’s just something that makes me happy about having a Jojo series to watch week-to-week.

Pros: It’s always a great time for more Jojo!

Cons: The setting lacks visual flair.

Grade: B

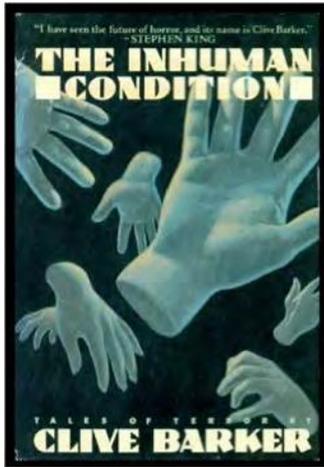
Books

The Inhuman Condition by Clive Barker (Poseidon, 1986)

Review by Heath Row (STF Amateur)

Originally published in England under the title Books of Blood, Volume IV, this collection compiles five tales of terror. All of the stories seem to have been original to that volume, without previous publication.

The title story, a novelette, is a tale about several juvenile delinquents who roll a drunk, procuring a mysterious length of knotted string. The knots become an obsession, passing from hand to hand, and as they become undone, dangerous creatures are released. Sometimes, powerful forc-



es can be restrained by little. “[appearances can be deceptive. In fact, that’s the rule, not the exception,” Barker writes.]

“The Body Politic,” also a novelette, is a humorous example of body horror. Shades of movies such as *The Hand and Idle Hands*, or even *The Addams Family’s Thing T. Thing*, the story details an uprising in which appendages go out on a limb. The author terms it “body-in-rebellion” syndrome. One of my favorite characters, a Rastafarian, suggests that multiple appendages can be affected thusly.

The novella “Revelations” might be my favorite story in the collection. A traveling revival preacher, his wife, and an assistant are stuck overnight in a motel during a thunderstorm. Their room was the site of a shooting 30 years ago, and the ghosts of the killer and victim, a married couple, return from the afterlife to patch things up if they can. Their presence has some effect on the relationship of the preacher and his wife, and history—in a way—repeats itself. The character Laura May, daughter of the innkeeper, is especially interesting.

The short story “Down, Satan!” is the briefest piece at six pages. It reminded me slightly of Edogawa Rampo’s *Moju: The Blind Beast* (*Faculae & Filigree* #43). A wealthy man who failed to find heaven attempts to recreate hell on Earth in order to attract the attention of the devil. He might have succeeded.

And “The Age of Desire,” a novella, qualifies as sf. Scientists develop a serum that, when injected, brings its test subjects to hitherto unreached heights of passion and lust. That goes about as well as you might expect. The story is also notable for its gently critical commentary on pop music, advertising and product design, and machismo. “Men’s supply of passion ... was easily depleted,” Barker writes. “Though they might threaten to move earth and heaven too, half an hour later their boasts would be damp sheets and resentment.” What a phrase at the end!

The writing in this collection is more fantastic and less splatterpunk than I remember from my previous reading of Barker. He also put into writing something I’ve long thought but not expressed as well: “We’re all dying... . Life is a slow disease, no more nor less. But such a light, eh? in the going.”

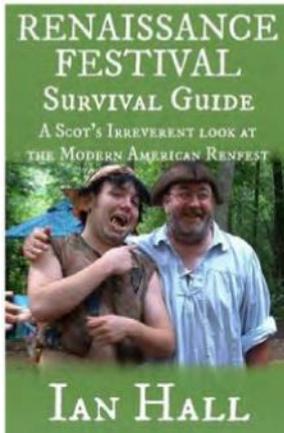
Barker burns brightly in this collection.

The Renaissance Festival Survival Guide by Ian Hall

Review by Heath Row (STF Amateur)

After visiting the Bristol Renaissance Faire near Kenosha, Wis., last weekend (*Telegraphs & Tar Pits* #176), I had Renaissance festivals on the brain—and sought out the HBO miniseries *Ren Faire* and related reading. This “informal and hopefully amusing guide to the modern Renaissance Festival” was written by a long-time fair participant who eventually became a performer and jewelry maker, selling his wares at festivals throughout the midwest.

The primary purpose of the ebook is to determine what is appropriate—and inappropriate—at a Renaissance fair. The GRiFON test—Genuine Renaissance Festival, or Not?—is jokingly ap-



plied to multiple aspects of current-day events: the music performed, pirates, Gypsies or the Romany, belly dancers, and other elements.

Hall's approach to determining what belongs at a Renaissance fair and what decidedly does not is somewhat based on historical research and is primarily delivered with humor and verve. He also addresses other aspects of such festivals, less to apply the GRiFON test and more to share the background on why particular aspects are present.

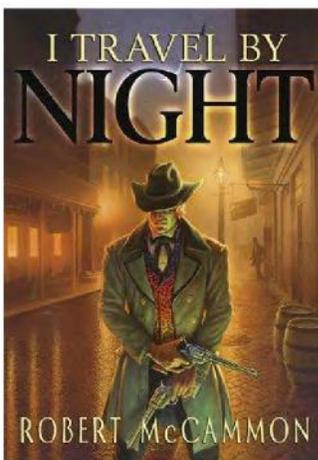
The author discusses jousting, turkey legs, William Shakespeare, accents, the codpiece, cleavage, and weaponry. The result is a brief, breezy read that's shallowly interesting and amusing, but not important or in depth.

The Renfest Out-of-Place Game might make for a fun on-site scavenger hunt or Bingo counterpart.

It was worth the \$0.99 I paid for it.

I Travel by Night

Review by Heath Row (STF Amateur)



And if you enjoy it, there's a sequel, *Last Train from Perdition*, which was published several years later. An ebook edition includes both. Set in New Orleans shortly after the Civil War, the novella focuses on a well-intentioned but understandably sun-averse gunslinger who works as a sort of bounty hunter or troubleshooter. His calling card reads: "All Matters Handled. I Travel by Night."

He is hired to rescue the kidnapped daughter of a man who subsequently received a ransom note—asking for the protagonist by name to deliver the ransom. After encountering an enemy in the city, Trevor Lawson, our antihero, heads into the swamps in search of an abandoned town, a folly now sliding into the mire, to rescue the girl.

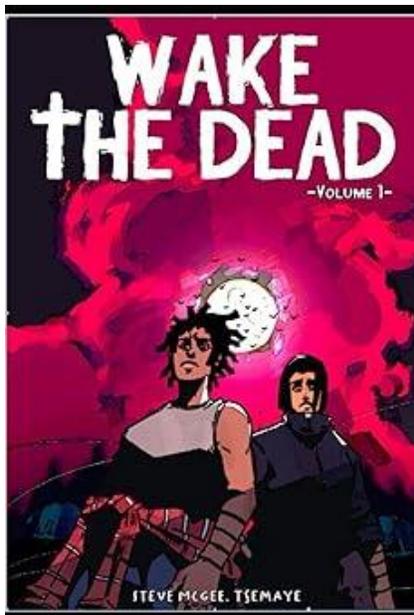
As a novella, the book is short, sharp, and succinct. McCammon accomplishes his goals as a storyteller efficiently, effectively, and elegantly; I read it the evening I obtained it. It's tempting to seek out the sequel immediately, and I'm glad that McCammon is still writing. Apparently, he'd taken a decade off, effectively retiring, following a series of publisher disagreements. Luckily for readers, his retirement has ended. The tenth and final book in McCammon's Matthew Corbett of historical thrillers was published just last year, so there's plenty more to explore.

Comics

Pathfinder: Wake the Dead #1-4 (Dynamite, 2023)

Review by Heath Row (STF Amateur)

Inspired by my repeated exposure to *Pathfinder* in recent months (see above), I read several issues of this 2023 comic book series. I occasionally enjoy roleplaying game tie-in comics



(*Culver City Comics Collector* #4—I published six issues!—*Theoretically: Game* #1, and a Media Diet Comics Commentary video I recorded during the pandemic—<https://youtu.be/I41yIceVOCw>), and this was no exception.

Written by Fred Van Lente and drawn by Eman Casallo, the series features iconic *Pathfinder* characters such as Sajan, Lem, Seelah, and Harsk (you might recognize them from the artwork in the handbooks)—and introduces a consulting investigator named Quinn. While the comic draws heavily on the *Pathfinder* world of Golarion, game mechanics don't really show up in the story beyond the inclusion of creatures from the various *Bestiary* volumes, such as shredskins.

Instead, the story, which focuses primarily on undead themes given the series' title and the character Nyctessa of Geb, is a relatively straightforward fantasy adventure. There's even a zom-

bie triceratops.

Game elements come more into play in the *Pathfinder Rules Appendix* material included at the end of each issue. Articles written by Mikhail Rekhun focus on the iconic characters featured in the series, even including a character sheet for each. #1 features Seelah the champion, #2 Sajan the monk, #3 Lem the bard, and #4 Quinn.

There were five issues in total, so I haven't yet read the whole storyline. Regardless, the series is fun, funny—and offers game-related content you can incorporate into your own game, if interested. The *Pathfinder Rules Appendix* material is even approved for use in *Pathfinder Society* public play. Dynamite also collected the series in a 136-page hardcover so you don't need to miss an issue—like I did.

Films

Prospect

Review by Heath Row (STF Amateur)



A friend and I watched this 2018 space western a couple of weeks ago, in part because of Pedro Pascal's role in the flick—he's top of mind because of the recently released *The Fantastic Four: First Steps*—and in part to continue an accidental career retrospective focusing on the work of 25-year-old Sophie Thatcher, who appeared more recently in *Heretic*.

Prospect is an absolutely awesome movie. While clearly science fiction—the movie takes place on an alien planet populated by alien flora and fauna, the characters wear spacesuits, and there are spacecraft—the movie is also entirely a western. In fact, Pascal pretty much plays his character straight from a western, delivering his lines in an archaic, somewhat stilted learned diction

All in the Family by Jose Sanchez



(occasionally similar to dialogue written by Quentin Tarantino), providing the most obvious bridge between the two genres. His delivery seems a little over the top at first but ends up being a highlight of the picture. The screenplay could have worked as either a western or an sf flick. As both, it's a lot of fun.

The storyline focuses on two pairs of characters: a father and daughter stranded on a hostile planet after their ship malfunctions and a pair of potential claim jumpers who seek the same treasure sought by the family members. That treasure is a little mysterious and challenging to obtain. You have to reach into the body of a partially buried or excavated creature, remove its organs, and apply some sort of solvent or solution to remove a valuable gem. If you do it wrong, the gem is ruined.

Due to some ill happenstance, two characters are forced to partner in order to survive. The movie seems to have had a limited theatrical release but did well on the festival circuit. It secured multiple nominations and won awards at FilmQuest (<https://www.filmquest.fest.com>) and the Festival Européen du Film Fantastique de Strasbourg (<https://strasbourgfestival.com/en>). Both of those genre-oriented festivals are scheduled for later this year.

SerCon

Barry Longyear Bio-Bibliography

by

Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D.

N3F Historian

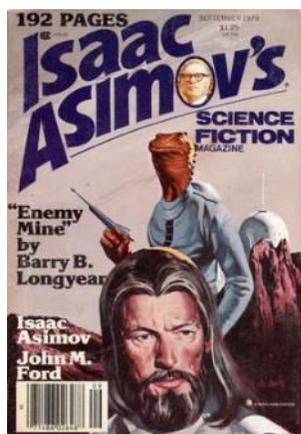


Barry Brooke Longyear (1942 - 2025), born in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, was an American author who wrote in the science fiction (s-f), fantasy, and mystery genres. He attended Staunton Military Academy in Staunton, Virginia.

Marriage

He married Regina Bedsun, and they made their home in New Sharon, Maine. They were married for 58 years, but had no children together. They ran a printing company together before Longyear started to write professionally.

Publications



His first s-f publication was “The Tryouts” in the November/December, 1978, issue of Isaac Asimov’s Science Fiction Magazine (IASFM).

His most popular s-f publication, also published in IASFM, was undoubtedly “Enemy Mine,” his award-winning short novel.

The sequels to this iconic story, *The Tomorrow Testament* and *The Last Enemy*, also were popular. These three works have been collected in *The Enemy Papers* (1998), and explore in detail the bond between humans and the alien Draconians.

Early collections of his genre stories were *Manifest Destiny* (1980) and *It Came from Schenectady* (1984).

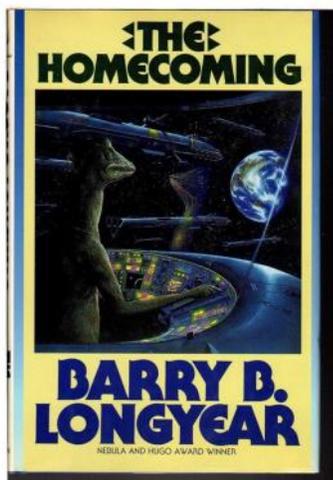
In addition to these books, he wrote several other s-f and fantasy novels. Some of these were *Circus World* (1980), *The City of Baraboo* (1980), *Elephant Song* (1982), *Sea of Glass* (1987), *Naked Came the Robot* (1988), *The Homecoming* (1989), *Infinity Hold* (1989), and *The God Box* (1989).

He also wrote *The Hangman’s Son*, a popular 2011 Joe Torio mystery novel.

Before his first s-f story had appeared, he had already sold more than 100,000 words of fiction.

Pseudonyms

He used several pseudonyms during his career, including Frederick Longbread, Tole Rant,



Mark Ringdale, and Shaw Vinest.

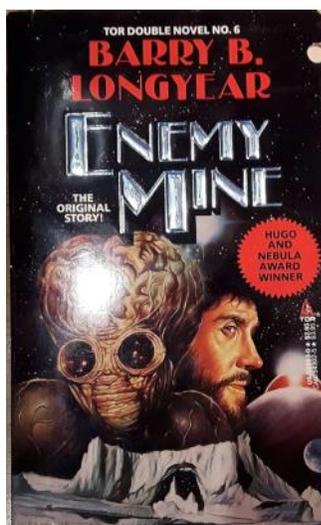
Awards/Honors/Recognitions

Hugo, Nebula, and Locus awards were awarded to Longyear, all for his novella, "Enemy Mine," originally published in IASFM (September, 1979 issue).

This story was made into a film in 1985, starring Dennis Quaid and Louis Gossett, Jr..

Longyear also won the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer (now called the Astounding Award for Best New Writer) in 1980.

Some Additional Comments



In addition to writing, he enjoyed painting, acting, carpentry, wood carving, and stonework.

It was said by those who knew him that he would do anything for a friend.

He suffered from various forms of substance abuse for much of his life, but was able to recover after entering St. Mary's Hospital in Minneapolis in 1981.

He then founded the oldest continuously meeting Narcotics Anonymous (NA) group in Farmington, Maine, in 1982.

Conclusions

Longyear was born on May 12, 1942.

He died on May 6, 2025, age 82, at the Health Franklin Hospital in Farmington, Maine.

He was survived by his wife Regina, his sister Jannettja, nieces and nephews, and other family members.

Sources

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

Video

This Didn't Have to Happen Star Wars Episodes 7-9 Could Have Been Much Better. Here's How.

Analysis by Jim McCoy

Jimbo's Awesome Science Fiction and Fantasy Reviews

I'm not writing this. I swear I'm not. I have promised myself that I wouldn't write it. That it was no longer topical, didn't matter and no one really wanted to read it anyway. Seriously, it's not going to happen.

Except for the fact that, as I learned the hard way, my most implacable enemy is the one that's located inside my head. And, let's face it, this has been bothering me for like a decade and it's not going to leave me alone until I write it.

If you're a writer, you get this. If you're not you probably don't but you're also probably better off that way. Trust me on this. If you haven't been bitten by the writing bug, spray yourself with Off and move rapidly away from the temptation. It will make you crazy. But I digress and I haven't even gotten started yet.

So what am I writing about this time?

(Hopefully at least one of you is wondering that.)

I know there are some strong opinions out there, and that not all of them agree with me when I say I liked the sequel movies. Seriously, as individual movies they're all actually really good. As a trilogy they're complete dreck. And if they had used the first movie as their starting point,



they could actually have made a really good trilogy. The fact that they failed to do so wasn't from lack of potential. It was because there was no continuity between the films.

Seriously, stories need to hold together. They need to be built cohesively. Authors have to use the literary equivalents of nails, glue, screws, bolts or even concrete to craft the thing so that it holds together.

Think of a story like the water in an aqueduct: It has to be channeled properly and held together properly so that the water will flow to its destination.

The problem with the Sequel Trilogy is that the "building tools" used by the cre-

ative teams for the second and third movies were a ten pound sledge, two axes, an icepick, and a jackhammer. They tore things to shreds instead of building up.

But here's the thing. They didn't have to. There was so much there to build on. You're laughing, but hear me out here. Let's take a look on what happened and how it could have moved forward. It helps that I was just starting to write my own stuff when *The Force Awakens* first came out. I was looking for hints as to how the writing team was going to move forward after the end of the first movie so I could steal their techniques. I guess it's my bad for assuming they were using any.

Let's take a look at my takeaways for *The Force Awakens*. I'll show you what I'm basing all of this on.

The Rebels blew up a newer, more impressive Death Star. Good for them. But the creative team called it "mirroring." Remember that, it's going to come up later.

Rey was an obvious Jedi doing Jedi things. She had no training, but neither did Luke at the beginning of *A New Hope*.

Poe was doing things in an X-Wing that shouldn't have been possible. Dude was straight up amazing.

Finn was seen actually using a lightsaber at some points.

And, before I go any further, I'm aware that John Boyega and friends cried about his character not getting treated better because racism. I'm not buying it. A racist producer or director wouldn't have given him a crappy part. They would have just hired a white person to begin with. Finn's arc sucked because the people running the films had no more of an idea of what they were doing with him than they had of what they were doing with anyone else.

But I digress.

So here's what I see as regards "mirroring."

To hell with Starkiller Base. It was a pretty explosion, but it's gone now.

Rey needed to find some training. This is where Luke Skywalker should have come back a movie earlier and played the Yoda role. Then Rey mirrors Luke and Luke mirrors Yoda.

Anakin Skywalker was the only human who could pilot a podracer because he had use of the force. Poe Dameron is the most splendid pilot ever to grace the cockpit of an X-Wing with his presence. He should be a Jedi. Then Poe would mirror Ani.

Jedi and Sith use lightsabers, as do Force sensitives like the Knights of Ren. The exception to this rule appears to be General Grievous but, being a cyborg, he has another set of enhancements which allow him to wield one effectively. Ergo, Finn, who uses a lightsaber is either a Jedi, a Sith or a cyborg. Given the fact that he's not shown to have any implants and he walked away from the Dark Side with both middle fingers extended, he's a Jedi. This mirrors pretty much all of Star Wars canon.

So now we've got three Jedi up against, you guessed it, the Knights of Ren led by Kylo himself. It also creates a reason for the Knights of Ren to exist beyond just selling toys. Yeah, I said it. They had no influence on the story and shouldn't have been there to begin with.

But think about it. An epic battle between Jedi, mentored by Luke Skywalker, and the Knights of Ren against a backdrop of massive space battles between the Rebel Alliance and the First Order with the occasional combat drop/battle on the surface of a planet would have been as good as anything that came before in the Star Wars universe.

I'm not going to try to provide the scripts for two full movies in one blog post, but think about it:

There could still have been an attraction/love affair between Rey and Kylo. They could grow closer as the war rages around them. Maybe they find themselves in a duel or two that prove inconclusive.

They could still have created the feeling of an actual military campaign. Imagine the new Episode VIII ending with a First Order Victory and one of the Jedi badly wounded, barely escaping with their life. Maybe it's Rey after she got distracted by Kylo. Better yet, maybe it's one of the guys (either Finn or Poe work here) who got wounded saving Rey BECAUSE she was distracted by Kylo.

And at that point, you've got a continuous storyline and an actual trilogy, as opposed to three movies with nothing in common except the same cast of characters. It all builds to a crescendo where our outnumbered heroes (in terms of troops, ships and Force users) show up to battle valiantly for the fate of the galaxy. They could still have had the Force Dyad if they wanted, but I don't see why it would be necessary. They could have left Palpatine dead (that sucked anyway) and waited to kill Snoke off until the end of the trilogy and mirrored Palpatine.

This is the Way. That other crap was crap.

Think about it. Real Star Wars. Real stakes. A believable (for Star Wars values of believable) story about people who actually matter. That's what could have been. Instead, we got what we got, a Star Wars pastiche with no planning and no storyline. That's because I didn't get to write it.

My services are available for anyone who wants to pay an unpublished author to write a story along the lines listed above. I can be contacted via DM here on Substack.

But for now I'm off to do something else.

Thirteen hundred words is all you get for free today.

Food of Famous Writers

Winter Storm Chocolate Pudding

From Cedar Sanderson

Bureau Head, N3F Gourmet Bureau

This was based on my husband asking me very nicely for pudding, as he does. I'm dieting, so can't indulge, but if I make up a batch he'll be a happy man for a week! My friend Arkay told me years ago now that she makes her puddings in the microwave, and I've just now gotten around to trying that method. To sum up: I'm sold. I'll be making pudding this way from now on! It's so easy, you don't have to stand over the stove and stir, you don't have to worry about the bottom burning if you aren't stirring attentively. This took seven minutes of cook time, and just a few minutes of prep time.

I got the recipe out of the 1980 Microwave Baking and Desserts cookbook and modified it to suit my microwave, as I'll note in the instructions. I also watched this charming video tutorial, but didn't follow her recipe.

You'll want a good-sized microwaveable bowl, glass is best, this will bubble up so at least an 8-cup bowl or mix-and-pour is necessary. Have two eggs at room temperature, ideally, but they will work from fridge-cold¹.

Whisk together in the bowl:

2/3 c sugar

2 tbsp cornstarch

1 tbsp flour

1/4 tsp salt

2 oz unsweetened baking chocolate broken into pieces (or dark chocolate chips)

Then whisk in:

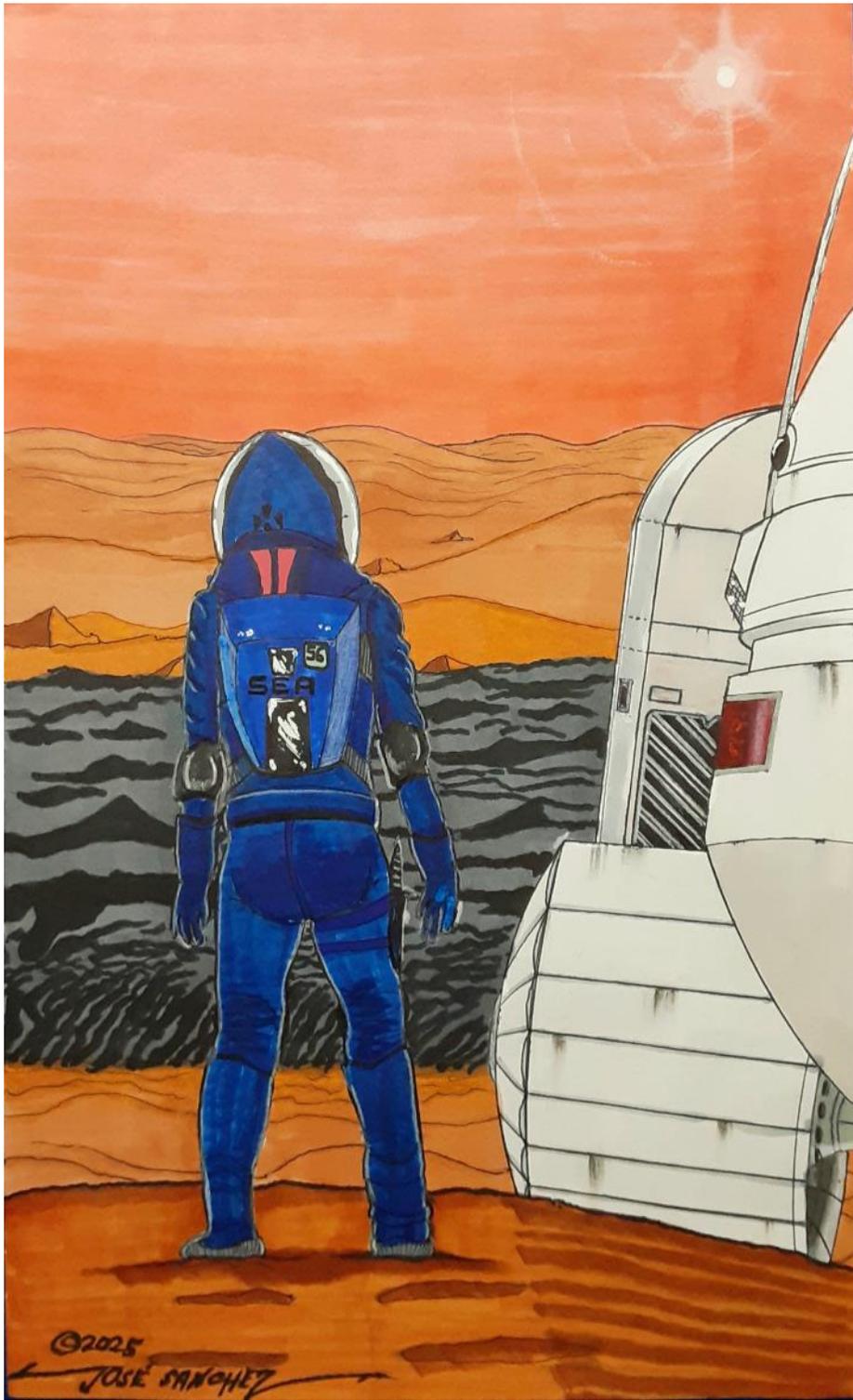
2 c whole milk, warmed by microwaving for 1 minute

Microwave the pudding mixture for three minutes, and stir. The chocolate will be melted but not homogenous yet. Return to microwave for another 2 minutes and while it is going, break the eggs into a bowl or mixing cup you measured the milk in, and beat them thoroughly. When you remove the pudding from the microwave, the chocolate will be seen upon stirring to be homogenous and emulsified. Take about a half cup of the hot pudding mixture and drizzle it into the eggs very slowly while stirring vigorously to temper the eggs. Then you can safely stir the tempered egg mixture into the pudding. Microwave for one more minute.

Allow to cool for a couple of moments, then stir in:

1 tsp vanilla extract

Stir in completely, and you can pour this into containers, chill it in the cooking bowl, or pour it into a blind-baked 9" pie crust. Entirely up to you! Chill and consume³. Or not. I'm not your mother (unless you're one of my kids, in which case, it's like thick, rich hot cocoa and you will burn the roof of your mouth).



Elsewhere
by José Sánchez