

# Tightbeam 379

April 2026



Goddess of Horses

by Tiffanie Gray

# Tightbeam 379

April 2026

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, ...

The Editors are:

George Phillies phillies@4liberty.net 48 Hancock Hill Drive, Worcester, MA 01609.

Jon Swartz judgeswartz@gmail.com

Art Editors are Angela K. Scott and Jose Sanchez. Art Contributors are Tiffanie Gray, Alan White, Cedar Sanderson, and Artist Fish.

Anime Reviews are courtesy Jessi Silver and her site [www.s1e1.com](http://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/](http://www.cedarwrites.wordpress.com/) and its culinary extension. Jason P. Hunt's reviews appear on [SciFi4Me.Com](http://SciFi4Me.Com) Jim McCoy is now found at [Jimbossffreviews.substack.com](http://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](http://N3F.org). PayPal contact is [treasurer@n3f.org](mailto:treasurer@n3f.org).

## Table of Contents

### Art

Front Cover ... Goddess of Horses by Tiffanie Gray

Back Cover ... Mars 2030 — We're Finally Here by Jose Sanchez

### Letter of Comment

4 ... Lloyd Penney

### Anime

4 ... Xuan Yuan Sword Luminaries ... Review by Jessi Silver

### SerCon

7 ... Dan Simmons Bio-Bibliography by Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D.

### Short Stories

9 ... Beneath Ceaseless Skies #417 ... Review by Tom Feller

### SF Zines

10 Clarkesworld ... Review by Tom Feller

### Video

13 ... Academy on Paramount+ ... A TV Series Review by Jim McCoy

14 ... How I Would Have Done The Force Awakens ... by Chris Nuttall

### Food of Famous Writer

19 ... Blood Orange Meringue Pie ... Cooking with Cedar Sanderson

20 ... Basic Biscuits ... Cooking with Cedar Sanderson

**COPYRIGHT NOTICE:** All material in this issue, unless expressly noted otherwise, is contributed for one-time use only in this publication in its various print and electronic forms including electronic archival libraries. All other copyrights are retained by the contributor. Other use of any other portion of this publication in any medium requires the express permission of the current (at time reproduction is to be made) President and Directorate of N3F and the original copyright holder.

## Letter of Comment

Dear George and Jon,

Thank you both for Tightbeam 377, and I made some notes to try to write more about the issue. I'd rather supply you with longer locs, but sometimes, the creative juices dry up a little. I will try to break this trend.

I would really like to go to LAcon V this year, and help to represent Amazing Stories, but I don't feel I could do that safely. (Some have criticized me for my stand here, so I think I know who they voted for last election.) I believe all LAconV members received an informational e-mail yesterday about Hugo voting and participation in LAcon V on a virtual basis, and we will be studying that very soon.

As the e-o-c of Amazing, I see so many great stories of fear...fear of the unknown, fear of other groups, and fear of the government out of control, and a fictional discussion of what to do to circumvent the government's abuses, and present an organized resistance. These stories, I expect to read in fiction magazines, not in the newspaper. Still, it is a reflection of our times, those 'interesting' times were warned about. These stories not only reflect fear, but also anger.

We got to meet Barry Longyear some years ago in Ottawa. A very alcoholic green room was presented to him, but we knew of his medical conditions, a recovering alcoholic, so we ducked out to a local convenience store to get him more palatable refreshments. We were shocked, but not really surprised, as his passing.

Less than a month until the 100th anniversary of the first issue of Amazing Stories. I do not know what the plans are, but I'll bet Steve Davidson has something spectacular planned, plus something for LAcon V. That's another big reason why I'd like to go to LA, but dare not.

Oh, well, I think I have done what I can. I obviously need another coffee that will help this sludgy brain function a little better. Thanks for this issue!

Yours, Lloyd Penney

## Anime

### Xuan Yuan Sword Luminaries Review by Jessi Silver

Ken En Ken: Aoki Kagayaki is based on the 2004 Taiwanese role-playing game Xuan Yuan Jian Waizhuan: Cang zhi Tao, whose story is set in the Spring and Autumn period of Chinese history (approximately 770–476 BC). – MAL



Streaming: Crunchyroll  
Episodes: 13  
Source: Taiwanese RPG

Episode Summary: Yin, Ning, and Zhao are three friends who

are inseparable until the Taibai Empire's army arrives and tears their lives apart. Zhao is enslaved by the empire and he believes Yin and Ning were killed as their village burned to the ground. The Empire's mechanical constructs are now built partly on Zhao's back. As a quick learner and an insatiable tinkerer, he uses the Empire's discarded parts to create his own mechanical toys in secret.

Yin and Ning actually survived their village's destruction. Though Ning lost her arms, she and Yin make a hardscrabble living putting on acrobatic shows as they travel from village to village. One evening as Yin searches for some water, she hears a strange ringing noise from an abandoned house. Inside she's confronted by a horrifying snake demon and falls through the rotten wood floor to a hidden room. She obtains a mysterious scroll which grants her the companionship of a summoned familiar in the form of a girl named Yun. Yun has considerable power; she's able to destroy the snake spirit easily. After doing so she disappears. Later, when the village is attacked by Taibai constructs, Yin is able to summon forth Yun and also produce a deadly sword using the scroll's power; together, they defend the village and destroy the constructs.

In the meantime, Zhao's illicit tinkering is discovered by the authorities and he and a young girl he's befriended are taken into custody. Because Zhao was favored by the chief engineer who has since defected to the rebellion, Zhao has now become a suspect. As he faces the empress to receive his punishment, he realizes that she is in fact the girl who became his friend. She grants him a noble title and the all-important task of studying to become the new chief engineer, putting his considerable talents to use for the Taibai Empire.

Impressions: I didn't know that it was possible to experience whiplash simply from watching an episode of anime! All joking aside, while the first episode of Xuan Yuan Sword Luminary is 24 minutes long like any standard anime episode, there are so many characters and so much narrative crammed into its modest run time that it feels twice as long and half as comprehensible. I can't fault a series for keeping a quick pace, especially when so many other anime dawdle and fritter away time that could be better spent advancing the plot. But as they say, too much of a good thing is not ideal.



Ning, Yin, and Zhao watch in horror as the Empire arrives.

The show has a pretty standard sort of JRPG (or in this case, TRPG) plot. The protagonists enjoy a relatively quiet, idyllic existence until a horde of power-hungry interlopers arrive to tear their lives apart. While there's clearly a rebellion brewing in the background – we see a brief glimpse of some obvious soon-to-be-members of the ensemble cast confront a regiment of constructs in a ravine at one point – the three protagonists with whom we spend the most time seem relatively uninterested in participating in such rebellious activities, and I find this to be a little off-putting and confusing. Pu Zhao's attitude is honestly a little bit incomprehensible to me – though he has a vivid flashback to the night his village was burned and his friends supposedly killed, he seems more than willing, even excited to work as an engineer to benefit the Empire. Whether he's missing parts of his memory or is just an exceedingly forgiving soul, his characterization seems incongruent with what might be expected considering the circumstances. The girls seem relatively unaffected by their situation as well; though they lament the fact that they have to travel from place-to-place in order to earn money and eat, one might look at how they act and believe them to be on a self-imposed journey. The narrative continues to emphasize the horror and injustice of what's been done to the characters, but their reactions don't convey that.

The narrative also doesn't flow very naturally. Rather than moving from beat to beat in an organic way, each new scene feels like someone saying "and then this happened, and then this happened..." breathlessly and without ever getting to the punch line or resolution. There are a ton of things "happening" in this episode, but each new event seems like something a writer wanted to get over with in order to rush forward toward the next scene. It gives the impression that anything occurring at any one time just isn't all that important in the grand scheme of the story; there's no time to stop and take a breath or to appreciate the weight of any one scene over another.



Yin acquires a new power.

There are aspects of the show's visual style that I find appealing, though as part of the whole there are absolutely some consistency issues. Some of the character animation is actually very impressive. The first time that Yin and Ning put on their acrobatic martial arts performance was very dynamic and life-like and there are a couple of other fight scenes that were fun to watch. I also think that the character designs look nice and the color scheme and costumes are really appealing. This is by no means a comparison in terms of quality, but my first reaction upon seeing some of the costumes and background settings was that they reminded me of *Avatar: The Last Airbender's* general visual aesthetic – more informed by Chinese rather than Japanese architecture and historical clothing. I'm not going to bag on the CG integration in this episode too badly; it's certainly not the best, and the CG models (especially the constructs) don't always look like they exist in the same universe as the characters. To be honest, though, it actually makes some of the scenes feel like cut scenes from an older RPG; considering that this is based on a video game, that might be mildly appropriate.

This is just a criticism I have with some of the Japanese and Chinese/Taiwanese co-produced anime I've seen (or some which are just based in China or on Chinese mythology or history), but it bothers me somewhat when the characters clearly speak in Japanese but the on-screen translation spells the name as it would be romanized from Chinese. I use my knowledge of Japanese as a supplement to my anime viewing at times (often with names, and sometimes when translations sound strange or I suspect there's a joke or pun that's not coming through properly), so when I hear one thing and read another it can be jarring. This is definitely more of a personal preference, though.

I realize I spent the majority of this review picking the episode apart, but for all that was confusing or illogical about it, I actually kind of enjoyed it. This might be a strange thing to say, but it felt very earnest to me, as if the story itself was someone's passion project. I suspect if I tried to write a story from scratch and didn't have a good editor, it might come out something like this. Instead I just write rambling anime reviews for your enjoyment. You can blame my editor (joke's on you – I'm my own editor).

I don't know that I would recommend this episode without caveats, but it's certainly an experience. One of the things I like least about writing these reviews is trying to succinctly summarize each episode; as you can see I definitely failed on the "succinct" part, but it was a good challenge. There's just so much going on that it's difficult to keep track of; that makes it hard for me to want to impose it on someone else. I think if you're in the mood for an anime that feels culturally distinct in terms of visual style and storytelling, you might want to give this episode a

try. I don't have a lot of faith in the series as a whole, however.

Pros: The writing seems very earnest. The general aesthetic is appealing.

Cons: There's too much activity and not enough time to absorb it all. The disconnect between the translation and the voiced language is distracting.

Grade: C-

## SerCon

### Dan Simmons Bio-Bibliography

by

Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D.

N3F Historian



Daniel Joseph Simmons (April 4, 1948 – February 21, 2026) was known principally as a science fiction (s-f), horror, and fantasy author, who won many awards for his genre writing. He also wrote stories in other genres.

#### Personal Life/Work

He was born in Peoria, Illinois, and said that, even as a child, he wanted to write. Before becoming a full-time writer, he worked as a teacher.

He earned a B. A. in English from Wabash College in 1970, and a master's degree in education from Washington University in St. Louis in 1971.

#### Publications

##### Major Genre Series:

Hyperion Cantos (Science Fiction):

*Hyperion* (1989)

*The Fall of Hyperion* (1990)

*Endymion* (1996)

*The Rise of Endymion* (1997)

*Orphans of the Helix* (Short Story – 1999)

Ilium/Olympos (Science Fiction):

*Ilium* (2003)

*Olympos* (2005)

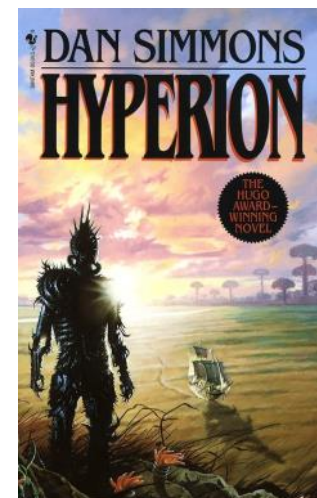
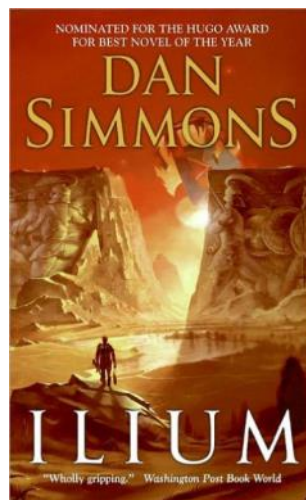
Seasons of Horror:

*Summer of Night* (1991)

*Children of the Night* (1992)

*Fires of Eden* (1994)

*A Winter Haunting* (2002)



##### Major Standalone Genre Novels:

Song of Kali (1985): winner of the 1986 World Fantasy Award.

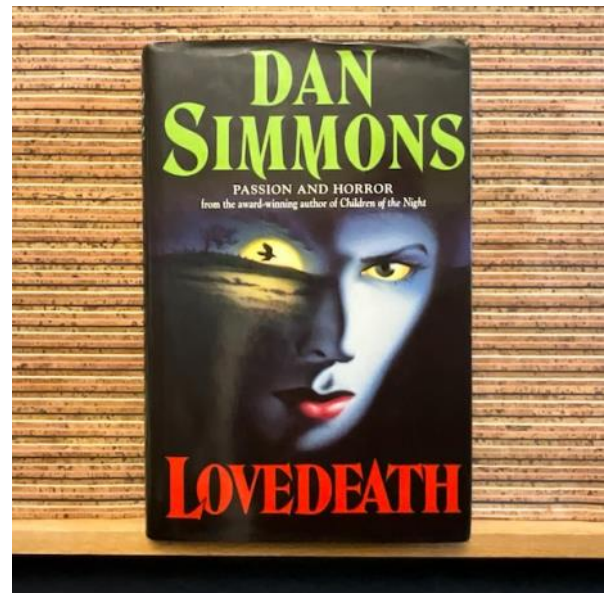
Carrion Comfort (1989): winner of the 1989 Bram Stoker Award.  
 Phases of Gravity (1989)  
 The Hollow Man (1992)  
 The Terror (2007)  
 Drood (2009)  
 The Abominable (2013)

#### Short Fiction Collections:

Lovedeath (1993)  
 Worlds Enough and Time (2002)  
 Prayers to Broken Stones: Stories (2011)

#### Awards/Nominations/Recognitions

Hugo Awards (4 nominations; 1 win)  
 Nebula Awards (1 nomination)  
 World Fantasy Award (6 nominations; 2 wins)  
 Arthur C. Clarke Award (1 nomination)  
 Bram Stoker Award (2 nominations; 2 wins)  
 Locus Awards (multiple nominations, multiple wins)  
 Named Most Collectible Author in 1991.  
 He was the writer GoH at Norwescon 31 in 2008.



#### Famous Quote

“The most frequent question I’m asked as a writer is ‘Why do you write in so many genres?’ To that, my honest answer is “I grew up in the Midwest. Everyone there knows – it’s in our DNA – that it’s important to rotate the crops. Keep growing the same in the same field for enough years and nothing will grow. Celebrating diversity, when it comes to growing crops and writing books, is more than a slogan.”

#### Some Conclusions

He worked in elementary education until 1989, usually teaching gifted children. He received an honorary doctorate from Wabash College, located in Crawfordsville, Indiana.

He died in Longmont, Colorado, aged 77, following a stroke. He was survived by his wife, Karen; daughter, Jane; grandchildren, Milo Glenn and Lucia Glenn; and brother, Wayne.

#### Sources

Barron, Neil (ed.). *Horror Literature: A Reader’s Guide*, 1990.

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

Currey, L. W. *Science Fiction and Fantasy Authors*, 1979.

Stableford, Brian. *Historical Dictionary of Science Fiction Literature*, 2004.

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

## Short Stories

### Beneath Ceaseless Skies, #417 Review by Tom Feller

The editor, Scott Andrews, was a finalist for the Hugo in the Best Editor-Short Form category, and his contribution to the Hugo packet was this issue.

Nine Tenths of the Law by K.J. Parker—

The narrator of this story is a lawyer with quite a racket. He practices law in a fantasy world where demonic possession is recognized as a legitimate defense for murder and other crimes. The lawyer just happens to share a body with a demon, and, for a fee, the lawyer will rent out that demon, who will actually commit the crime for the client. The lawyer is also a licensed clergyman who will exorcise the demon possessing the client, who then goes free. One day, unfortunately for the narrator, there are complications. It is written in the style of a hard-boiled detective story.

To Hunt the Grey Lady by Chris Willrich—

The “Grey Lady” in the title refers to a sentient sailing ship. It has gone rogue, and the owner has offered a reward for its return. The narrator is the captain of a pirate ship, who once had a brief love affair with the Grey Lady’s captain. The pirate captain catches up with the Grey Lady only to be taken prisoner herself.

Black Wine From the Slopes of Dawn by Rajiy Mote—

A captain of a merchant ship is looking for a gift for a lady friend. He visits a magical wine shop to purchase a few bottles, but taste tests three wine varieties first. He learns more about himself than he ever wanted to know.

The Mausoleum by Inderjeet Mani—

The main character is a tiler who neglected his family in favor of his career. One day he gets a commission to lay tile in the mausoleum of the recently deceased royal consort. As he is working, he recalls his life with his late wife and their son, who is pursuing a different career with the intention of being a better father and husband than his own father was.

Summary—

These are all solid stories, although the last one barely qualifies as fantasy. My favorite was the first one.

## SF Zines

Clarkesworld  
Review by Tom Feller

Neil Clarke won the Hugo last year for Best Editor-Short form. In the introduction to his Hugo packet, he wrote that Clarkesworld still maintains an open submission policy, despite the proliferation of AI-generated stories. He feels it is worth it to find new writers, although it makes for extra work for his editorial staff.

Twenty-Four Hours by H.H. Pak—

This story is ostensibly about a grown-up daughter having dinner with her mother. It takes place in a future war-time USA, and the mother wants to spend more money than the daughter, a military researcher, thinks prudent. This sweet story contains a very powerful plot twist at the end.

Swarm X1048 – Ethological Field Report: Canis Lupus Familiaris, “6” by F. E. Choe—

A research swarm of nanobots descend upon a dying Earth and follow the life of a feral dog, designated #6, from a puppy to their death. It’s a sad, touching story.

An Intergalactic Smuggler’s Guide to Homecoming by Tia Tashiro—

Miko was born on Terra Three, the third world terraformed by Earth colonists and could not wait to get away, although it required leaving her computer geek twin sister Rina. After bumming around for a few years, she was recruited by a smuggler named Sting and found that she was really good at this illegal activity. Her latest assignment is smuggling a package of 700 tiny aquatic sentient beings called the Xillia who are refugees from a genocidal civil war on their home planet. She makes the mistake of getting to know them and refuses to turn them over to her boss, who plans to use them for pharmaceutical research that will require killing them all. Now she is on the run from both the authorities and her former boss. It is a good thriller with a twist ending involving her sister.

Fishing the Intergalactic Stream by Louis Inglis Hall—

The main character in this story is a famous interplanetary sports fisherman who posts “Field and Stream”-style stories on whatever media is dominant in this far future, and he recalls a few of his experiences. On a visit to a newly terraformed moon called Nero, which orbits a gas giant called Pendragon VI, he gets the feeling that something there may be fishing for him instead. Unfortunately, the ending does not live up to the rest of the story.

Negative Scholarship on the Fifth State of Being by A. W. Prihandita—

Doctor Semau is a human doctor-practitioner in an interstellar multi-species civilization. She is authorized to use a computer program to make diagnoses, but nothing else. One day she receives a patient named Txyzna, a plyzmorynox, a species so obscure that it is not in any of her

databases. She has to pay a sizable fee to download information on her patient's species. Unfortunately, the information proves to be useless. She then has to make a moral decision whether to violate the law and use her own judgment about the patient's treatment.

The Indomitable Captain Holli by Rich Larson—

This novella takes place in a future in which civilization has collapsed. In one major city, two neighboring skyscrapers have been converted into archologies. They are at war, although physical conflict only occurs when one group tries to steal a child from the other. (Neither group has a large enough population to ensure adequate genetic diversity.) The title character refers to a five year old girl who is coveted not only by the other group but also a third group that usually lurks in the background. Holli is led by a virtual reality companion named Puck and pursued by a Roomba-sized robot referred to as the "bugbear". She is protected by her mother, older sister Estima, and Estima's boyfriend Lemar. This is a fast moving action story set in a world I would like to read more about.

The Best Version of Yourself by Grant Collier—

This is another dystopian story, but the cause comes from within us. A company called Eudaimon has found a solution, or so it claims, for psychological disorders by inserting nanobots into human brains. They cure the disorder, but at the cost of the person's individuality. It is then marketed as a self-improvement program and becomes so prevalent that the people not undergoing the process have not become a minority but are confined to reservations called "pain preserves". Maria, one of the last holdouts and a park ranger tasked with patrolling her reservation's boundaries, escapes from the reservation to go on a quest to keep a promise to her late mother. Interspersed between the events of the quest are flashback scenes with her mother, who underwent the procedure to cure her ADHD, and promotional materials from Eudaimon. This is a very powerful story about what it means to be human.

The Sort by Thomas Ha—

The two main characters in this story are a father and son who have been genetically modified, but try to pass for normal. They are on a road trip and pass through a town that is hostile to genetically modified humans. Their visit coincides with a harvest festival. Ironically, the local crop consists of genetically modified garlic bulbs. This is a very interesting study of prejudice.

Our Chatbots Said I Love You, Shall We Meet? by Carolin M. Yoachim—

This story is set in the not so distant future when artificial intelligence is applied to dating apps, if it hasn't happened already. Basically, everyone signing up for the app consents to having a chatbot analysing their postings on the Internet and then interacting with the chatbots of the other users to figure out which ones offer the highest probability of a successful in-person date. When Sandra, a single mother over forty, is matched with Ethan, she has to decide whether to go through with the actual in-person meeting. The story is disturbingly plausible.

The Coffee Machine by Celia Corral-Vazquez, translated by Sue Burke—

This is another story set in the not so distant future when all new appliances come with an artificial intelligence chip and are connected to the Internet. The appliances in the basement of a col-

lege dormitory, starting with a coffee vending machine, try to make sense of the behavior of college students. It is a very amusing story told from the viewpoint of the appliances.

Our Father by K.J. Khan—

The title character, Javier Hernandez, is an astronaut tasked with transporting embryos to a colony world, but something goes wrong with a package of eight forcing him to raise them to adulthood during the voyage. It is very touching.

Hello! Hello! Hello! By Fiona Jones—

The main character in this story is an alien who discovers a human spaceship adrift with a dying human on board. The alien is VERY alien, but nonetheless tries to help. This first contact story is very intellectually challenging, but worth the effort.

Summary—

As you might expect, Clarke selected what he felt were the best stories he published in 2024. They are all good, and my favorite was “The Best Version of Yourself”.

## Video

### Academy on Paramount+ A TV Series Review by Jim McCoy [Jimbossffreviews.substack.com](http://Jimbossffreviews.substack.com).

I’ve been a Star Trek fan since everybody referred to The Original Series as simply “Star Trek” because it was the only series. I haven’t been a fan since day one because I was born too late for that. My dad always told me that he watched Trek with me the day he brought me home from the hospital, but I wasn’t born until 1976, so I just couldn’t be there when it all started. That’s life, I guess.

I’ve loved Star Trek since before I can remember. I have fond memories of the run up to the debut of Star Trek: The Next Generation. Not just the commercials. The special section in the local newspaper that I had saved up until my storage unit got auctioned off in the wake of my divorce and I lost everything.

I cheered when Sisko punched Q. I celebrated when Voyager made contact with the Alpha Quadrant and again when they made it home. I loved Enterprise in general as much as I hated the finale. Don’t get me started on that though. The final episode of Enterprise was a crime against humanity and an abomination against God.

And yes, Star Trek, whatever its current incarnation has always had a diverse cast. Seeing Sulu and Uhura on a bridge full of white dudes must have been a heart stopper for most of the people who saw TOS when it first started. TNG featured not just a diverse cast but a black chief engineer. I wasn’t old enough to understand that, but it was big. I get all of that.

But the thing about Trek, Wars, and pretty much any other classic Science Fiction franchise is that they always put story first. Whether it was Gene Roddenberry, George Lucas, Robert Heinlein, Isaac Asimov, Harlan Ellison, Ursula Le Guin, they all understood that they had to tell a good story to get people to consume their product. Diversity may or may not have been a thing with any of the authors listed above but they produced quality content. That's why they sold.

All of that is to say that I really didn't enjoy Starfleet Academy and that diversity has nothing to do with the reason why it sucked. The characters can be white, black, brown, gay, straight, bi, cis, trans, whatever. It's what you do with the characters that matters. I'm open to stories starring whoever, but they have to be good stories.

Most episodes of Starfleet Academy felt like a bad writer's vision for a parody of an action flick. The stories were weak. There was no logic to them. I mean, Klingons ended up screwed because of something called The Burn. I get that. It jacked with their ability to generate power and that will cause problems to a modern society. SFA takes place a hundred and twenty five years after it. The Klingons are still scattered and weak, with no home world. Starfleet has to find one for them and, after offering it to them peacefully, they have a fake fight over the planet so that the Klingons can say they "conquered" it.

If you know Trek at all, you know that relations between the Federation and the Klingon Empire have waxed and waned over the centuries. They've fought against each other and they fought side by side against the Dominion. Kirk hated the Klingons. Dax was best friends with a few. A Klingon killed Kirk's son. Another Klingon served as Picard's Chief of Security. It's complicated.

So I can see the Federation helping the Klingons find a home world, maybe. I can't see the Klingons, who have conquered multiple planets already, actually needing the help, but I'll spot you an assist from the Federation, maybe. I see precisely zero circumstances under which the Klingons would find a planet suitable for their needs and not IMMEDIATELY attack whoever is in possession of it. I mean, are you kidding me? THESE ARE FREAKING KLINGONS!!!!

Klingons have a two part tactical doctrine:

- 1.) Identify an objective.
- 2.) Kill anyone who gets between them and their objective until they die to death.

They may very well have thanked the Federation for its assistance in finding a planet before showing up en masse and killing everyone who was already there, but it would have been a very brief thank you note.

That was possibly the worst ever episode of Trek in the history of ever. Janeway's lizard babies didn't suck this hard. That is an hour of my life I'll never get back. I'd demand a letter of apology from the writers but they'd probably screw that up too. The only competition for worst episode of Trek that dumpster fire even has is the final episode of Enterprise and, well...

I dunno. If you're reading this and you're a glutton for punishment watch both and tell me what you think. Either way, it was terrible.

And listen to me folks. Gene Roddenberry was an honest to God combat veteran who flew eighty-nine missions in a B-17 bomber in the South Pacific during World War II. He survived the crash of a plane that he was piloting and earned a Distinguished Flying Cross in a completely separate incident. He was the real deal.

I will guarantee you that he never let his crew see him draped across the captain's chair of his B-17 the way Captain Nahla Ake was draped across the captain's chair of the Athena. I'm pretty well convinced that he would've slapped somebody if he had. Officers are trained to maintain a professional bearing in front of their troops. They don't lounge across a captain's chair like an eight year old reading a Nancy Drew novel in her grandpa's La-Z-Boy. It just doesn't work that way. It was Ake's job to teach her cadets to act in a professional manner. That type of lack of professionalism would be enough to get an officer relieved in the real world.

Don't get me wrong. Those aren't the only things wrong with the series. Those are just two examples of what's lacking. There is almost nothing right with Starfleet Academy. It's a straight up disaster area with no FEMA in sight.

Probably the most damning thing I can say about SFA is this: I started out the series in a hurry to get home from work on Thursday night so I could watch it. First SFA, then Survivor, which played on Wednesday night before I got home from work. I didn't watch Episode 9 until after Episode 10 debuted. I watched both Survivor episodes in the meantime, so it wasn't a time issue. I just didn't have the desire to see what SFA had to offer anymore.

Seriously, Hollywood, learn your lesson. You can't substitute diversity for an entertaining story. If you want a diverse cast to succeed you need to give them a good script. I feel bad for the Starfleet Academy cast because I don't feel like they ever had one. Seriously, Paramount, hire me. Granted, I'm white and I don't have the experience I would expect out of a Hollywood script writer, but I could do a better job than the staff you had pumping out this drek.

Bottom Line: 0.5 out of 5 Grams of Programmable Matter

## How I Would Have Done The Force Awakens

By Chris Nuttall

<https://chrisnuttall.substack.com/>

The fundamental problem with The Force Awakens is that it is pretty much a beat-for-beat reprise of A New Hope, an attempt to reboot the universe in a manner that is simply impossible after the success of both the original trilogy and the prequel trilogy. The original trilogy was exploring virgin territory, and characters such as Obi-Wan Kenobi were very much undefined (to the point they were plot devices rather than actual characters), which meant that Obi-Wan Kenobi could be killed off without negatively impacting the story itself. Kenobi's importance and backstory was filled in by the prequels, but at that point his ultimate fate was well known and indeed allowed a certain degree of foreshadowing and irony. When Anakin declared that Kenobi's fate would be the same as both his and Palpatine's, he was entirely correct, allowing fans a little smile at the thought that all three of them would meet their ends on Death Stars.

Disney cannot be faulted for wanting to introduce new characters. However, the sequel trilogy was no longer set in a virgin universe, and I think there was a very strong expectation that the

original characters would play major roles even if they eventually handed prominence over to their successors. This expectation was not met. Han Solo plays the role of Ben Kenobi, a role for which he is not only profoundly unsuited but also requires him to give up his relationship with Leia and return to the life of a smuggler. Worse, Leia herself remains a bit character and Luke has nothing more than a cameo at the end. To compare *The Force Awakens* to *Heir to the Empire* is to compare excrement to cream.

Worse, perhaps, *The Force Awakens* does not build on the political themes of the prequel and original trilogies. The prequel covers the decline and fall of the Old Republic and its replacement by the Galactic Empire. The original trilogy covers the resistance to the Galactic Empire and the eventual death of Emperor Palpatine. As I wrote earlier, the third trilogy should logically cover the rise of the new Republic and the defeat of the remnants of the Galactic Empire, of everyone who attempted to take power and create an empire of their own. Instead, the authors jump through hoops to return to the themes of the original trilogy, right down to the creation of a whole new Death Star. The series tried to appeal to both new fans and old, but it wound up alienating both. There was too much background for the new fans, and too little respect for the source material for the old.

Put bluntly, the problem with *The Force Awakens* was not the black stormtrooper, or the strong female character, or even the fact that their presence was used as a club to beat anyone who dared question the movie's direction. The problem was that it was a very poor reprise of a far older and far more popular movie. It just was not what the fans wanted, leaving them feeling cheated and then insulted.

How would I have done it?

My first inclination would be to say "film the Thrawn Trilogy" and that would have been, I think, a very good idea. It was certainly plausible decades ago, when the major stars were still in their prime. The trilogy is far better at exploring the idea of the post-Return Of The Jedi universe and both the stresses and strains of forming a new government, as well as introducing new and beloved characters. Assuming that was not possible, how would I have remade the sequels to make them actually palatable to both fans and newcomers alike?

It is an interesting challenge. How do I keep Finn (the character who showed the most promise), Rey (a poorly conceived character who suffered badly from bad writing), Poe (ditto) and Kylo Ren/Ben Solo (ditto once again)? How do I make them worthy heirs to the original and people demons and villains? How much of the original plotline do I keep? What do I do with Snoke? Do I try to bring in other characters from the Clone Wars and other animated series, or do I keep them out in hopes of drawing in new fans?

I do have one advantage here. Star Wars has – had - one hell of a fan base. I do not need to bring in complete newcomers, not to any great extent. I should not let myself get too lost in fan service, but I do not need to sacrifice it either. And so we begin:

*The Force Awakens* opens in Luke Skywalker's Jedi Academy, with Ben Solo - the son of Han and Leia - studying how to be a Jedi. Ben is discontented and impatient, openly wondering when he gets his knighthood and when he gets out to fight for the good of the New Republic. Luke is trying, very patiently, to give him the lessons he needs, but it isn't going very well. In many ways, Ben has inherited the strengths and weaknesses of both of his parents. He combines

Han's sheer daring and ruthlessness with Leia's determination to fight for the right, a dangerous combination.

We switch scenes to Jakku, where Rey – a young scavenger - tries to eke out a living amongst the ruins of fallen Star Destroyers while evading the criminal gangs that will enslave, rape, or murder her if she falls into their hands. The planet is on the border between the Republic and the unknown regions and therefore is effectively lawless. She takes her goods to a fence, only to discover the man has sold her out to local gangsters. She is taken prisoner after a short fight and threatened with slavery.

The planet is invaded by the First Order, the reformed and revitalised remnants of the Empire. Finn and the rest of the stormtroopers land to impose order, crushing the criminal gangs like bugs and bringing the planet under their control. Rey is freed in the chaos and offered a chance to join the first order, along with many other prisoners, but refuses. She is separated from the prisoners who do choose to join up, and held in custody.

Finn is pleased, at first, with what he sees as a civilising mission. The planet is a horrible mess and the First Order, as bad as it is, is actually an improvement. His enthusiasm fades rapidly, however, as he realises that the stormtroopers have orders to execute anyone who resists them, including former prisoners who refuse to sign up. Finn finds himself taking part in the mass execution, having flashes of conscience as he pulled the trigger. Unable to continue, he makes a bid to escape, stumbling across Rey's cell as he goes. He frees her, and takes her with him. He needs her knowledge of the planet to hide out long enough to escape.

Word of the invasion reaches the New Republic. The newborn government is divided. The issue of the border planets has plagued the government for quite some time, the politicians unsure if they should intervene more openly or if doing so would be seen and/or become a pretext for de facto annexation. The First Order is broadcasting propaganda about the situation on the border worlds when they arrived, insisting that their invasion is for the good of planets that would otherwise be at the mercy of criminal gangs. They make a show of inviting people dissatisfied with the new order to join them, an invitation that appeals to far too many remnants of the old order. Divided, the New Republic cannot decide what to do.

Leia volunteers to investigate, after her attempt to convince the New Republic to prepare for war fails. Han and Leia will head to the nearest invaded world, after visiting Luke and asking for his advice. Luke tells them that he has visions of a great darkness, but nothing else. They leave the Academy and jump into hyperspace, discovering - too late - that Ben has stowed away on the Millennium Falcon. Leia is furious at her son; Han is a lot more understanding. He tells them he can accompany them as long as he behaves himself. Father and son have a long talk about growing up, and learning the world is not a game.

On Jakku, Rey and Finn are being hunted. Finn is mystified by the First Order's determination to find Rey. It makes little sense, she's just a junkyard scavenger. They keep hiding, as the search intensifies. Things happen to reveal that both of them are force sensitive, tipping off the watchers if not the characters.

The Millennium Falcon arrives. They start to investigate. Jakku seems peaceful at first, but they rapidly discover the peace is kept at gunpoint. The First Order is rounding up children and shipping them further into the unknown regions, sorting them out in a manner that makes no appar-

ent sense. Ben gets into a fight that leads him to Rey and Finn, his lightsaber tipping off the First Order that there are Jedi on Jakku. He takes his new friends back to his parents, who are more than willing to listen. Leia realises that both Rey and Finn are force sensitive - and that the First Order is looking for potential force users. The local stormtroopers attack, forcing them to take off and run. They send a message back the New Republic, then shadow a transport as it flies further into the unknown regions.

Ray, Finn, and Ben bond. Ben is shocked by their treatment and swears to do something about it, angrily asking his mother why they didn't destroy the Empire while they had the chance. Leia cannot give him a good answer.

They come out of hyperspace near an uncharted world. It is a fortress, surrounded by a giant fleet of Star Destroyers; the planet itself reeks of the dark side. They follow the transport to the loading bay, but – after getting a force vision of the fate of the prisoners – Ben abandons cover and attacks, setting off a running fight that forces his friends to steal the transport in hopes of getting it clear. He is contacted by a mysterious voice, promising to let the transport go if Ben stays behind willingly. Ben agrees, and the voice keeps its word. The transport is allowed to go.

Leia and Han are horrified, and after dispatching the transport back home start planning a rescue mission.

Ben is taken before Supreme Leader Snoke. Snoke confronts him with the failures of the New Republic, and spends a dream of an empire that generally does keep the peace, root out criminals, and ensures everyone has a good life. His promise sounds good, his visions tainted by darkness ... a darkness Ben cannot see. He offers Ben the power to make the world better, inviting him to serve as his apprentice. The Jedi will not make the universe a better place. The Sith can and will. Ben hesitates, is tempted, and finally falls. Snoke anoints him Kylo Ren, the new leader of the Knights of Ren, and commands him to prepare for the invasion of another world.

The Millennium Falcon returns, launching a desperate bid to rescue Ben. Finn uses his knowledge of the empire's systems to get inside the command fortress, while Leia uses her force powers to hide their presence and Han and Rey go looking for Ben. They discover Kylo Ren instead, a conflicted Dark Jedi, torn between the impulse to embrace the dark side and to return with his family. Han tries to reach out to him, but Snoke overrides it and Kylo Ren strikes his father down. Rey tries to stop him with a borrowed lightsaber, only to start losing - and losing badly. Finn saves her life, barely getting out in time. They get back to the Millennium Falcon and run.

Now wrapped in darkness, Kylo Ren leads his fleet to the new system. The fleet is engaged by New Republic starships, summoned by Leia, and after a long hard battle the first order is forced to retreat. Snoke takes it remarkably mildly, merely remarking that one battle lost does not mean the end of the war and revealing that there is a far bigger fleet coming into service. The war might have started ahead of time, but the First Order will win and impose peace on the galaxy. And Kylo Ren will have the training he needs to become his successor.

Back home, a heartbroken Leia sends Rey and Finn to Luke, then stands in front of the senate and call them out, telling them that they have made a dreadful mistake by sparing the remnants of the Empire. They can no longer turn away from what they have allowed to linger in the shadows, and now they must prepare to fight. She asks for a declaration of war and it is granted.

And at the Jedi Academy, Rey and Finn start their training. And they swear they will somehow rescue Ben Solo from being Kylo Ren.

\*\*\*

This outline addresses my main issues with the original movie. The revelation that Kylo Ren and Ben Solo are one and the same doesn't have the impact it should have, because we don't meet Ben as a young man before his fall to the dark side, nor do we grasp his connection to Han Solo. In this case, we see a troubled young man, facing the same tournaments as his grandfather, and eventually falling to the dark side for what he thinks is a good reason. He is, of course, wrong, and that is the tragedy.

Han gets a great deal more development too, as an older more settled man happily married to Leia. The idea they both found happiness in each other, only to have it torn away by the dark side, adds a certain pathos, as well as making Han's death more meaningful. It also gives Leia a reason to become a true war leader, which would put her at risk of falling to the dark side too.

It also addresses the issue of Rey being a Mary Sue. She is a scrappy little fighter, right from the start, but like Luke himself she has a long way to go before she is the equal of Finn or Ben Solo. Her early fights don't go her way, although she learns more as she goes along. Bonding with both Finn and Ben gives her a family of choice, and a good reason to stay with them after escaping her homeworld.

Finn himself gets a great deal more development, as a stormtrooper who defected after being forced to carry out an atrocity. The early hints that he is force sensitive will flourish in the later movies, as he learns from Luke. His relationship with Rey is more clearly older brother/younger sister in this universe, although there is certainly room for romance later on.

I haven't decided on the back story of Supreme Leader Snoke. The idea of him being Darth Jar-Jar has a certain appeal, but it would probably kill the sequel trilogy. I don't like the idea of him being a resurrected Palpatine in any shape and form, although it would hardly be out of character for Snoke to claim he was Palpatine, or that he was Palpatine's son. That would certainly add to the theme of a whole new generation taking its place in the galaxy, while the older characters take their final bows and step aside.

Regardless of his origins, I have the impression he is a more controlled character than Palpatine, more understanding and tolerant of mistakes and less willing to discard his followers when they are no longer useful. This actually makes him more dangerous in many ways, because his people have a chance to learn from their mistakes and improve. He is also capable of understanding Ben's feelings, and pitching his approach to match them. His seduction is terrifyingly effective because he is offering Ben precisely what he wants, and he is even willing to keep his side of the bargain. It's just a shame that Ben is too inexperienced to see the trap.

## Food of Famous Writer Cooking by Cedar Sanderson

### Blood Orange Meringue Pie

I've recently been experimenting with using the microwave to make certain kitchen tasks faster and easier. There are things the microwave is totally pants at doing. This, on the other hand, beats out using a double boiler or standing over the stove stirring for fifteen or twenty minutes at a time. I love lemon meringue pie, and I love the flavor of blood oranges, so a few years ago I worked up the recipe for the pie. This version is faster and easier, and has a curd that doesn't want to ooze when sliced. I also took the time to record a video of the process. I've been asked to make a few cooking videos, so with time and energy, that's what you'll be seeing on Sunday mornings going forward.

Prepare:

Blind-baked pie shell

To make the juice:

Juice of 6 blood oranges

Juice of one Meyer Lemon

Reserve 1/3 c of this juice. Dilute the remaining juice to 1 1/2 cups with water or orange juice.

Preheat oven to 425F

To make the filling, whisk in a glass bowl:

4 tbsp AP flour

5 tbsp cornstarch

1 1/3 c sugar

1/4 tsp salt

Then whisk in the 1 1/2 c juice. Microwave this on high for 2 minutes, stir, microwave for another 2 minutes, stir, and microwave at thirty second to one-minute intervals until curd is thick and translucent. This should take a total of 5-7 minutes.

Stir in:

4 egg yolks

1/3 reserved juice

Zest of one blood orange

Stir until well combined, then microwave one minute longer.

Spoon this into the baked pie shell and spread level.

To make meringue:

4 egg whites



1/3 c sugar  
 1/4 tsp cream of tartar (optional)

Beat in stand mixer or with hand mixer until eggs are frothy, slowly add in sugar. Continue beating at high speed until stiff peaks form.

Spoon or pipe meringue onto the pie. Place in hot oven for about five minutes, keeping an eye on it, when peaks of meringue are golden brown, remove to cool on the counter. Do not refrigerate until cool, or the meringue will sweat.



## Basic Biscuits Cooking with Cedar Sanderson

This is a very easy and simple recipe. I will sometimes get a wild hair and add cheese, chopped chives, or other things like chopped cooked bacon, but this is the base recipe I use all the time.

### Basic Biscuit Recipe

Preheat oven to 425F  
 2c all purpose flour  
 1/3 c lard  
 2 tsp baking powder  
 1 tsp baking soda  
 1 tsp salt  
 1 c acidulated<sup>1</sup> milk (or buttermilk)<sup>2</sup>



Cut the lard into the dry ingredients until it is about the size of peas. I like a pastry blender for this. Slowly add in the milk, stirring, until a very stiff batter is formed.

Turn out onto a floured surface and pat or roll to about an inch thick. Cut with a downward motion, do not twist your cutter.

Bake for 15-20 minutes. They are done when golden-brown on the top. This makes about 7 biscuits, depending on how large you cut them. Serve hot!

Pork chop, greens fresh from the garden, and biscuits. Simple and filling meal!  
 Subscribed

<sup>1</sup> I acidulate my milk with a teaspoonful of lemon juice. The acid activates your leavening agent.

<sup>2</sup> Note that you may need a little more, or a little less, milk depending on the humidity and flour condition.



Mars 2030 — We're Finally Here  
by Jose Sanchez