

Tightbeam 380

May 2026



Newest Angel
by Tiffanie Gray

Tightbeam 380

May 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, ...

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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.

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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.

Table of Contents

Art

Front Cover ... Newest Angel by Tiffanie Gray

Back Cover ... Coming in for a Landing by Jose Sanchez

4 ... More Laureate Nominations

Anime

4 ... The Girl in Twilight ... Review by Jessi Silver

Books

6 ... Rayguns & Rocketships ... Book Review by Cedar Sanderson

8 ... The Armchair General World War One: Can You Win The Great War? by John Buckley and Spencer Jones ... Review by Chris Nuttall

Motion Pictures

12 ... Project Hail Mary ... Review by Jason P. Hunt

SerCon

15... John Varley Bio-Bibliography by Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D.

Video

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

Food of Famous Authors

19 ... Oatmeal Cookies ... Cooking by Cedar Sanderson

19 ... Cooking with Cayenne Pepper ... Cooking by Cedar Sanderson

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More Laureate Nominations

Best Fan Poet: Juan Manuel Pérez

Best Poem or Collection:

Space Exploration: Strange New Worlds by John C. Mannone

Entropocene by Jean-Paul L. Garnier

Best N3F Fan Publication: There is a proposal that all of our zines should automatically be nominated

Best Book Editor: Rob Carroll - Dark Matter Ink <https://darkmattermagazine.shop/pages/dark-matter-ink>

Anime

The Girl in Twilight Review by Jessi Silver

What was supposed to only be an urban myth turns out to be very real when high school student Asuka Tsuchimiya and her friends open the door to a parallel world when they perform a ritual. – HIDIVE

Streaming: HIDIVE

Episodes: 12

Source: Original



Episode Summary: When the skies are clear, a group of five girls gathers at sunset to perform a ritual of their own making. In doing so, they hope to open the gate to another world, but thus far they've never been successful. After yet another failed attempt, one of the girls finds an odd crystal on the ground and utilizes it to operate a crystal radio. After a while all the girls swear that they can hear odd, alien noises somewhere within the static. The girls decide to make another attempt at the ritual, even though the skies are cloudy. This time, their makeshift prayers are answered and all five are transported to a strange golden world.



Unfortunately this world is a hostile one; creatures which first appear cute and harmless band together to become a mortal threat. The group is saved through the intervention of another girl who resembles Asuka, their bubbly ringleader. The mysterious stranger defeats the creatures and guides the group back to their dimension, ordering them never to set foot in the Twilight World again. Unfortunately, she collapses before returning to her own world and Asuka is left to take care of her. It takes Asuka a while to realize that this girl, also named Asuka, may be her equivalent from an alternate

dimension. The next morning, Alter-Asuka is gone, but she's left behind a locket with the photo of a young boy inside.



Impressions: The Girl in Twilight was one of the series I was looking forward to this season, if only because conceptually it sounded kind of interesting and I have a soft spot for original anime productions (though this one is also linked to an upcoming(?) smartphone game). The first episode is not necessarily mind-blowing, but it does lay a bit of groundwork for a story that might turn out to be fun and functional.

The group performs the 4:44 ritual.

I should mention that, for ostensibly being an ensemble cast series, this episode spends very little time developing any of the characters beyond Asuka. Asuka seems to be the one who's central to the story, so it makes sense for her to be the focal point, but I'm left wondering about the other four girls and how most of what we know about them is that they don't exactly seem to mesh well with one-another. Their dynamic feels like it would be more appropriate for a slice-of-life comedy; each of the characters seems to have a very trope-y personality (or at least an identifiable personality quirk) which is what one would expect for a series taking a lot of moé shortcuts. It's easy to generate comedy when the characters are all lovable misfits with clashing personalities. This series feels like it's supposed to be much more straight-laced, however, so the friction and dissonance feels like it's getting in the way of something that ought to be more harmonious. I'm not sure if the other characters are meant to play equally important roles later on, but I'm left wondering how that will pan out when they don't feel like they belong in the same anime series.

I do think Asuka is a fun heroine. Her "genki" attitude gives the impression that she might be more of a side character, but in this case her peppy inclination and willingness to believe in the supernatural is what gets the plot moving. She also serves as a sharp contrast to her alternate-universe self, which is obviously intentional; I believe we're meant to ask what sort of horrible things could have happened to such an upbeat, bubbly character to cause her to become grim and sullen. Clearly her younger brother(?) is gone in both universes; why has she accepted this and gone one to live a typical life in our universe when her alter-self has become so worn-down? I suspect the story may be moving to answer this very question.

The visual style leaves a bit to be desired. The animation quality isn't bad by any means, but I wouldn't have identified this as an "Animax 20th anniversary project" just by looking at it. The character animation is somewhat inconsistent throughout the episode, though I do have to call out the fact that all of the characters have enough differences in their facial features that they're not suffering too horribly from "same-face" syndrome, as tends to happen when multiple female characters share the same anime space. The Twilight realm utilizes some 3D animation which looks fairly decent; in one scene a group of sinister snow bunnies combines to form a multi-headed serpentine creature, and the visual is fairly effective. I feel like it gives those scenes some dynamic movement that wouldn't otherwise be possible. I do have to question the choice to make the Twilight Realm quite so yellow; I realize it's supposed to emulate the evening sunset but the effect is low-key nauseating rather than tense and mysterious.



Is there a universe where he still lives?

What I am pretty jazzed about is that this dimension-hopping sci-fi story stars a cast of women. I feel like these types of stories tend to be the purview of young male characters. Steins; Gate and Erased immediately come to mind, as well as this season's RErideD to some extent. Time travel plotting so often seems to revolve around men and their pain – lost loves, missed chances, the

desire to save others. Orange comes to mind as an outlier, but even that dealt much more with character drama than with the details of the time-manipulating mechanic that allowed the heroine's letter to travel into the past. With the genders (and the gender balance) reconfigured, somehow a series that doesn't otherwise stand out all that much feels a bit fresher and more interesting. While that's not a trait that can sustain the narrative all the way through, I think it does provide something unique for the viewer to latch onto; it's a storytelling angle that's sorely lacking in a lot of other anime.

I'm definitely not blown away by this episode, but I do find it encouraging in many respects. While I have nothing against slice-of-life anime, it does become a little exhausting when those are the only types of series in which one can typically find several female characters of any importance. Rather than just observing the characters existing, I would rather, sometimes, watch them acting and doing. The selection of this type of anime gets better and more robust all the time, but that doesn't mean we should stop celebrating it when it arrives.

Pros: The main character is engaging and fun. It's nice to have a sci-fi story with so many young women.

Cons: The cast thus far are under-developed. There are some iffy aesthetic choices.

Grade: B-

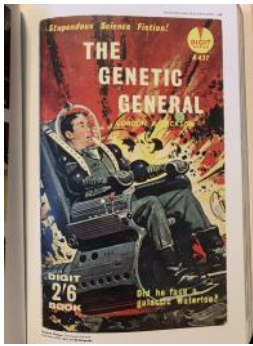
Art

Rayguns & Rocketships

Book Review by Cedar Sanderson

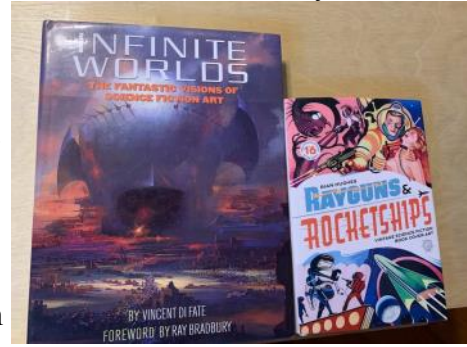
I bought this book a year or two back, and I find that I dip into it occasionally, for fun and for research. I was a bit disappointed when I received it, so it took me a long time to consider doing a review. I was disappointed in one major thing: it's thick, but not big. If that makes sense. For the price and the concept, I was expecting coffee table art book size, and what I got is a hard-cover, yes, but trade paperback sized which means the art...

I'm getting ahead of myself. *Rayguns & Rocketships* by Rian Hughes is a lovingly curated collection of British Science Fiction art, specifically pulp covers. You see why I bought it!

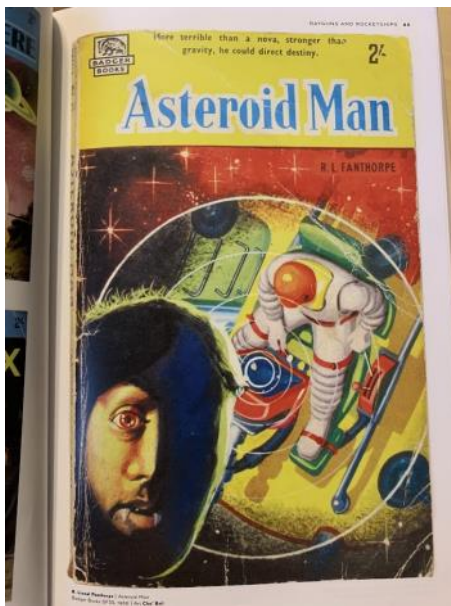


Pictured here for scale with the magnificent collection curated by Vincent DiFate.

Despite my disappointment over size, this book really is packed with artwork, and as a study for the kinds of pulp covers I find myself doing, it is a rich resource. For one thing, although there are certainly strong parallels, the British covers differed from their American cousins in many ways.



Up to and including the ridiculous plot elements as depicted on the covers. No, I'm not talking about the ones you just scrolled past...



Radioactive beavers? Really? I mean, I know slang doesn't cross the Atlantic, but still! Enter bubblegum, twirling it's moustache in evil glee.

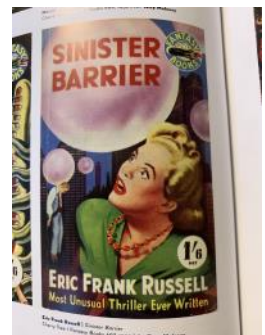
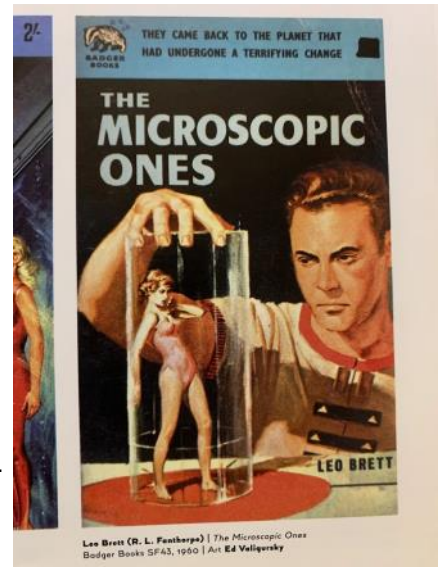
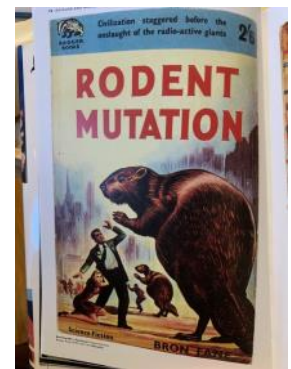
The book is a lot of fun just to open at random and see what you get. Might work as an art prompt that way, or even better, a writing prompt. See, some of the covers were drawn from the title, the same title that was handed to an author who was told something like this on a given Friday, 'write me 4000 words on this, make it a thriller! due on Tuesday.' The cover artist and

the author likely never even spoke to one another. This led, as I'm sure you can imagine, to some amusing mismatches.



Readers didn't necessarily care. The cover art told them this was the kind of story they wanted to read. Sheer whimsical escapism. Action, adventures, weird things far from their daily humdrum.

I think you can kind of tell when the story was doing something that the author hoped would be literary. I still think the red boots/pants onesie was a fashion *faux pas*.

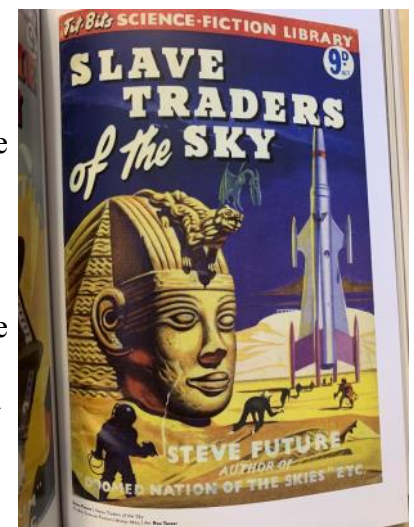


I've been sharing full-page images, but the majority of the book is thumbnails. The author clearly wanted to pack as many exemplars into the space he had. I wasn't too sure about this at first. I like being able to see the details, but on sec-

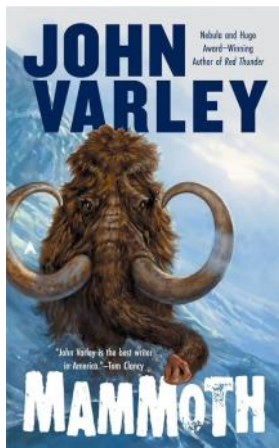


and thought I realized since I have to design for thumbnail it worked for my purposes. Most readers will see a book on Amazon or other retailer site and the cover will be the size of their thumbnail, which is a challenge for cover artists to sell the book so a reader will tap on it to embiggen and pull up the blurb.

The late 1960s were a lot, weren't they? These covers are no longer trying to sell the readers on action and adventure, but on cerebral and a certain longing for literary legitimacy.



Would I recommend this book? If you can get it through your library, absolutely. I wouldn't say it's worth the \$50 retail price, unless you are seriously studying a certain era of SF art. On the other hand, the Vincent DiFate book *Infinite Worlds*, which I bought based on Ben Yalow's recommendation, is wonderful and I do recommend that even if you aren't designing your own covers. There is so much art in there worth resting your eyes on, while your brain whirrs into motion building a story from the image.



Books

The Armchair General World War One: Can You Win The Great War?

by John Buckley and Spencer Jones

Review by Chris Nuttall



It is very easy, as I noted in my review of the first Armchair General book (covering the Second World War), to fall into trap of believing that the people on the spot, at the time, enjoyed the same luxury of hindsight as yourself. This is obviously untrue. We have a far more rounded picture of what was happening than anyone who was actually there; the fog of war, at the time, made it impossible for them to know what was actually going on. Many seemingly bizarre decisions make sense in this context, because they were made based on what the decision-maker knew at the time.

The Great War has not been a particularly big stomping ground for alternate history. The war does not seem to have so many possible points of divergence as its successor, not least because the initial war of movement gave way to stalemate until tanks were invented and put into mass production. The battles outside Europe did not have any great influence on the war as a whole. Germany lost colonies, of course, but assuming a German victory, those colonies could be easily reclaimed. The forces involved were often very small, and their absence did not affect the overall balance of power. This could not be said of the Second World War, where the relatively small engagements in North Africa played a major role in defining the military balance in Europe.

In this book, the writers have attempted to put the reader in the shoes of people who made the decisions and present the facts to them as the POV character would have seen it. (Like I said before, this comes across as a choose your own adventure book.) You are invited to decide what you would have done, under the circumstances, and explore possible alternate outcomes for the war. These outcomes are kept within the bounds of possibility, without any striking alterations such as a German invasion of Britain or a complete collapse of Germany much earlier than in the original timeline. As such, it is a very interesting read.

The book starts by asking just how the original July Crisis of 1914 blew up and what might happen if the assassination did not take place, or if the United Kingdom stayed out of the war. It offers several possibilities for the assassination never taking place, and suggests it might lead to a better world, but it also discusses the British decision not to take part in the war and speculates that the Germans might have won fairly quickly if the British stayed out. This might be true, but it would be seriously against British interests to allow one power to dominate Europe. It is also true that personal feelings played a role in the outcome, and those should not be underestimated.

We then move on to look at the dispatch of the British Expeditionary Force to France and the alternate prospects of the campaign. Deploying to Belgium instead of France looked good on paper and was actually quite a popular decision with British officers, who didn't like the French. There was also an urgent need to provide support to the Belgians before the Germans crushed them. The book suggests that such a deployment would have been disastrous, at least at first; there were no plans for joint operations with the Belgians and they were simply not prepared for modern war, forcing both British and Belgian forces to withdraw into France. The only positive outcome: Britain would be a distraction for the Germans, ensuring they could not take Paris in 1914.

Even following the historical path leaves you open to other possibilities. Should you stand and fight when the Germans give chase to British, or should you keep going? There are good arguments for both, but choosing to continue the retreat would have been disastrous; the Germans would have overwhelmed the rearguard and crushed the British Army before laying siege to Paris, almost certainly winning the war in 1914.

This campaign also led to personal clashes between British officers – the authors speculate that if Sir John French had been dismissed by Kitchener in 1914, he would have been able to challenge Kitchener later and get promoted into a position he was temperamentally unable to handle, leading to later disaster. His historical character assassination of his rival would in this case be a military disaster instead.

The book then moves on to Gallipoli, and asks what might happen if the campaign had taken place elsewhere. On paper, the Dardanelles appear to be a reasonable target, but there were others – most notably Alexandretta in Syria. There were political issues, as the French believed the region had been promised to them after the end of the war, but these problems could have been solved. The authors argue that a successful landing in Syria would have crippled the Ottoman Empire and driven it out of the war in 1915 – ironically, this would have ensured the survival of the Ottomans in some form, although quite how long for is impossible to say.

The book then assesses the different choices of the Dardanelles campaign itself, pointing out the dangers of forcing the straits and then landing troops in very difficult and exposed locations

along the shore. Deciding to embark on a naval-only campaign would end poorly, if the Navy could not silence the Turkish guns (and it could not); the only chance of a quick victory in the campaign came with an immediate trust into enemy positions and if that attack failed it is unlikely the campaign would have been victorious (although it is possible British and Allied troops would have remained in the Dardanelles trenches until 1918).

We then move onto the Battle of Jutland, which the authors believe to have been largely insignificant. It was possible, they argue, for the British to score more hits (particularly in the opening moments of the battle, if the fifth battle squadron had remained with the battlecruisers) and if the British commander had acted without orders he might have played a decisive role in a clear British victory. It was also possible that the battleships could have risked charging into the German torpedoedoes, closing the range between both fleets; in that case, the authors argue, greater British numbers would have led to a more significant victory. However, as I mentioned above, the impact of the battle was unlikely to be decisive even if the British wiped out the German fleet completely; the authors appear to believe the Germans could not have scored a decisive victory of their own.

The book then assesses the potential alternate outcomes for the Battle of the Somme. There were possibilities that the battle might be a slow and grinding victory for the British, following a 'bite and hold' set of tactics that would drive the Germans out of their trenches, and then force them to make counter-attacks against dug-in British troops. The authors speculate that this would have been decisive in a tactical sense, but the weather would prevent any major collapse of the German lines and the war would continue at least into 1917. An alternate possibility involves tanks – should they have been deployed as soon as they were available, or should they have been held in reserve? The authors speculate that the tanks would have been decisive, and even though there would still have been a muddy stalemate by the end of the year their deployment would have boosted French morale and led to greater victories the following year. The authors conclude that a truly decisive victory was unlikely, but a firm commitment to one plan for the battle might have led to a vastly different outcome.

The book then considers the possibilities surrounding Lawrence of Arabia and the Arab Revolt, starting with which Arab faction the British should back. Should they side with Hussein bin Ali or Ibn Saud? Both warlords have their strengths and weaknesses; Hussein has greater political skill and legitimacy, while Saud has an army of zealots who may be more militarily effective in the coming conflict. The book believes that a decision to support Saud instead of Hussein would have been a dangerous mistake, sparking off a Civil War within Arabic ranks and effectively ensuring they posed no threat to the Ottoman Empire. The book then considers possible disasters that could have overwhelmed the revolt, many of which would have ended the Arabs as a military useful force.

The writers then explore the dilemma facing the British code-breakers when they deciphered the Zimmermann Telegram. On paper, the decision to inform the Americans that the Germans were planning to ally with Mexico and Japan against the United States seems a no-brainer. In practice, there were a number of other considerations. The United States would not be pleased to know that diplomatic telegrams were being deciphered – and the Germans, of course, would be delighted to know that their codes were being broken. Simply releasing the intelligence would unleash an international incident, not least because the Germans could simply insist the message was faked.

An alternate possibility, of course, is the telegram never being publicly disclosed. If that happened, there was a very real possibility of Mexico taking hostile steps against the United States. The preponderance of American power was bitterly resented in Mexico, and the prospect of nationalising foreign-owned businesses was very tempting. It is unlikely, the authors argue, that Mexico would actually declare war on United States, but there might be some hostility along the border, which might distract the United States from sending troops to Europe.

Finally, the book looks at the last great what-if of the period, the Russian Revolution, and identifies a number of possible points in which a different decision could have changed history. Could the Tsar be convinced to reach out to dissidents before it was too late? Or should he use force to crush the rebels before they gained momentum that will be impossible to stop? Should he sue for peace, when the war becomes too costly, or risk continuing the fighting until it takes him down? Even when the provisional government takes power, should it continue the war?

The book argues that a German-Russian peace treaty in 1917 would have saved the provisional government from the Bolsheviks, not least by giving them the prestige they needed to crush the uprising, although this would cause long-term problems for Russia (not least because the peace treaty would be seen as a betrayal by Britain and France). On the other hand, it could hardly be worse than the original timeline. They would certainly avoid the disaster of Brest-Litovsk!

It also suggests that the Bolsheviks were right to make peace in 1917, even on deeply unfavourable terms. Continuing the war, after overthrowing provisional government because it wanted to continue the war, might well have led to a White Russian victory in the Civil War. This would not be an unmixed blessing. On one hand, the world would be spared the horrors of communism; on the other, the reactionaries would certainly try to crush the rebels and lay the seeds for future rebellions in later years. It is unlikely that Germany (with or without Hitler) would have become so powerful in this timeline, but a reactionary Russia would not be as capable of defending itself and eventually crushing the Nazi beast in Berlin.

Overall, as the authors try to remind us, history is driven by more than just impersonal forces and geopolitical realities. Some decisions were driven by what the decision-makers knew at the time, and what they thought they knew, and others were driven by personal feelings that rarely enter into the calculations of dispassionate alternate historians. On paper, some decisions looked very good indeed and yet, as the Dardanelles Campaign taught us, turning a concept into reality can be incredibly difficult. Other choices were driven by factors that are difficult, if not impossible, to account for: personality conflicts and faction in-fighting can change history, yet they can be frighteningly difficult to predict.

Relatively few decisions offer the prospect of a radically changed world, although that seems incredible. If the July Crisis never takes place, what will spark a major war? If Britain does not join the war, or is driven out of France in 1914, Europe will be dominated by Germany, changing history beyond repair. The Ottomans leaving the war early might convince other German allies that they can leave too; by contrast, if the Dardanelles were abandoned without a major commitment, the Ottoman victory would not appear so crushing and the peace factions might be able to put together a workable compromise. A major failure in Arabia might not be that significant, at least immediately, but it would have an effect on the post-war world. So too would be America staying out of the war, or Russia trying to stay in it longer than OTL.

These points are disputable, of course. There's plenty of room for speculation about what might happen if something had been different. But overall, this is a fresh look at the realities facing the decision-makers of the First World War and the limitations they had to overcome to win. It demands a great deal of commitment from its readers, but I do not feel that you will consider the time wasted if you're interested in the war.

Motion Pictures

Project Hail Mary

Review by Jason P. Hunt

Project Hail Mary (2026)

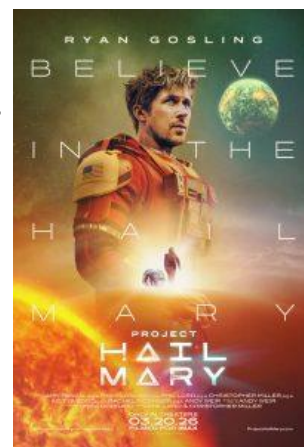
Screenplay by Drew Goddard Based on the novel by Andy Weir
Produced by Amy Pascal, Ryan Gosling, Phil Lord, Christopher Miller,
Aditya Sood, Rachel O'Connor; Directed by Phil Lord & Christopher
Miller

PG-13, 2hr 36m

This is a definite win for Phil Lord and Christopher Miller.

As *Project Hail Mary* succeeds at the box office, I have to wonder just what *Solo: A Star Wars Story* would have been like had Lord & Miller not be unceremoniously fired from the picture. Of course, coming out six months after *The Last Jedi* was enough to kill the movie, regardless of who directed it. But after seeing this one, and especially with how impressive the visuals are, I'm willing to entertain the notion that these two could conceivably produce a *Star Trek* movie.

The visuals are stunning, with the end credits even incorporating actual astronomical imagery. Miller says there wasn't any bluescreen used in the film, and I can believe it. While there may be some judicious use of CG to hide the puppeteers for Rocky (designed and voiced by James Ortiz), none of the spaceship shots or planetary images struck me as feeling artificial. No uncanny valley. As I'm watching these ships, I'm thinking about how these shots resemble those of *2001: A Space Odyssey* or *Apollo 13*. It's model-level work, and it's hugely impressive.



As for the story, I haven't read the book by Andy Weir, so I have only the film to work with. But it's a satisfying mix of humor and pathos. The jokes land when they're supposed to, and they don't undercut the severity of the problem at hand: namely, there are alien particles that have been discovered around a cluster of stars, including the sun, and those particles are essen-

tially eating those stars — save one. Earth sends a team out to find out why.

Sandra Hüller as Eva Stratt and Ryan Gosling as Ryland Grace Photo credit: Jonathan Olley
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Deftly edited by Joel Negron, the film shifts back and forth between the present and past. Dr. Ryland Grace (Ryan Gosling) finds himself on the *Hail Mary*, destined for Tau Ceti, the only star not succumbing to the “astrophage” — Grace’s name for the particles eating the sun. As he regains his memory after being in an induced coma for so long, we bounce back and forth to see the beginnings of the mission, with Grace recruited by Eva Stratt (Sandra Hüller), who leads a team desperately trying to find a solution before the sun dims to the point where all life on Earth dies.

As Grace’s mission progresses toward Tau Ceti, and as we see the progression of the mission as it comes together on Earth, we get insights into Grace’s personality as he re-discovers himself. This is helped along the way by his encounter with Rocky, a native of 40 Eridani (which some would say is home to Vulcan, but I digress...).

Rocky’s sun is also suffering from the astrophage, and he’s also the only survivor on his ship sent to find out why Tau Ceti is immune. Rocky and Grace quickly — maybe a bit too quickly? — figure out a mathematics-based program that allows Grace to translate Rocky’s musical language into English and vice-versa, and that allows them to begin working together to find a solution.

Rocky is the breakout element of the film. As reported in a few places, he’s an animatronic puppet, not CGI, and you can tell the difference. Rocky inhabits the space and is really there in front of the camera, making his interaction with Grace all the more compelling because it’s not photographic fakery. According to Ortiz in an interview with *Variety*, CGI was used when Rocky was moving through the ship in his environment ball. But the scenes with him and Gosling have both of them in front of the camera.



That interaction is the source for a lot of the humor — and of course, the pathos that comes with it. There’s a point in the story where Grace has to make a choice, and it works so well because that moment has been *earned* by the relationship Ortiz and Gosling have built between these two characters throughout the film.

Props also to Sandra Hüller, who delivers an emotionally charged performance throughout. It’s clear that Stratt is focused on the mission of saving lives, and she’ll do whatever she has to in order to achieve this goal. But she also demonstrates empathy as well as a good dose of regret

in how she has to go about it. She's backed into a corner by circumstances beyond her control, and even as she's making the hard choices she's recognizing that it's going to be painful for some, especially Dr. Grace.

Choices and sacrifice make up the heart of this story, and it's not without irony that you can find some Christian allegory here as well. I mean, come on, the *Hail Mary* full of Grace is on the nose, and he's making the ultimate sacrifice to save humanity, building his work on the rock — a rock that believes that Grace can save both humanity and the Erids. When Grace asks Stratt if she believes in God, her answer is reminiscent of Pascal's wager: "It beats the alternative."



Grace even experiences a sort of "born again" moment as he emerges from an induced coma, only to come into his own as he gradually remembers why he's there. He's not brave, and he even has a "let this cup pass from me" moment with Stratt. But ultimately he's got choices to make that will save humanity or doom them to oblivion. Even though you already know what he will choose, Gosling sells us on the emotional journey to get there.

This is, by far, the most ambitious project to date for Lord and Miller, and it's worthy of numerous awards and repeat viewings. It's also *not* dark, grim, or gritty, even in spite of the fact that the sun's dying. The subject is there, yes, the 800-pound gorilla in the room, but it's the *people* who make the story flow. Lord, Miller, screenwriter Drew Goddard, and author Andy Weir have done something rare in Hollywood these days: they've delivered characters that make us *care*. And Grace is a "good guy" in every sense, not some nihilist brooding about his fate. It's enough to put this film in that "superservice" category we've discussed on several occasions — a rich, character-driven story with heroes who do what they have to in order to save the day.



We need more films like this. Go see it.

SerCon

John Varley Bio-Bibliography

by

Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D.

N3F Historian



John Herbert Varley died December 10, 2025 at his home in Beaverton, Oregon. Varley, known to his friends as “Herb,” was born August 9, 1947, in Austin TX. He attended Michigan State University on a scholarship.

Publications

His first novelette, “Picnic on Nearside,” released in 1974, established his Eight Worlds Universe. He went on to publish about 20 more Eight Worlds works, including his first novel, *The Opiuchi Hotline* (1977); the Anna-Louise Bach detective stories; and his Metal Trilogy.

He also wrote the Gaeon trilogy, that included *Titan* (1979), *Wizard* (1980), and *Demon* (1984), and the four-book *Thunder and Lightning* series: *Red Thunder* (2003), *Red Lightning* (2006), *Rolling Thunder* (2008), and *Dark Lightning* (2014).

His standalone novels included *Millenium* (1983), *Mammoth* (2005), and *Slow Apocalypse* (2012).

Short Stories/Anthologies/Collection

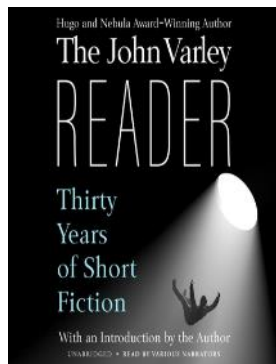
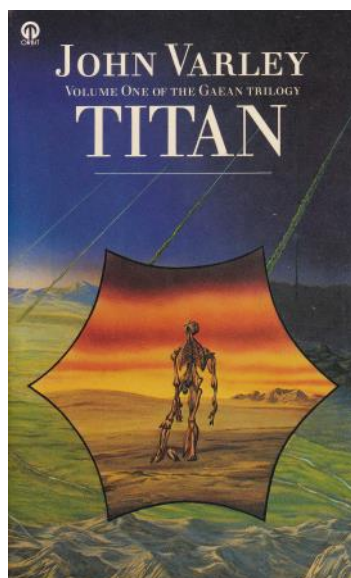
He also wrote many shorter works of fiction -- featured in magazines such as *Analog*, *F&SF*, and *Asimov's*, and in other outlets such as *New Voices III: The Campbell Award Nominees* (1980), *Year's Best SF 9* (2004), and *The John Varley Reader: Thirty Years of Short Fiction* (2004).

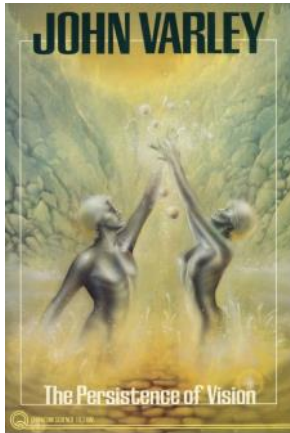
His popular short fiction included “Air Raid” (1977), “Beatnik Bayou” (1980), “A Christmas Story” (2003), and “In Fading Suns and Dying Moons” (2003).

Much of his work has been translated into languages other than English.

Awards/Nominations/Recognitions

Varley was nominated 15 times for a Hugo Award, nine times for a Nebula Award, and 40 times for a Locus Award. His short story, “The Pusher” (1981), won Hugo and Locus Awards; and his “The Persistence of Vision” (1978) and “PRESS ENTER[]” (1984) both won Hugo and Nebula





Awards.

Titan (1979), *The Barbie Murders* (1980), “Blue Champagne” (1981), his collection *Blue Champagne* (1986), and *The John Varley Reader* all received Locus Awards.

He also won an Endeavour Award, a Prometheus Award, two Seiun Awards, a Jupiter Award, and a Prix Apollo Award; and he had many other nominations for awards.

In addition, he received the Robert A. Heinlein Award in 2009.

Criticism

Genre critic John Clute once wrote about Varley: “He was fresh, he was complex, he understood the imaginative implications of transformative developments....”

Some Concluding Comments

Some of Varley’s writing has been compared to that of Heinlein’s best work, and he was once called “The New Heinlein.”

Varley suffered from both COPD and diabetes before he died in 2025.

He was six feet, six inches in height.

He was married to Lee Emmett (1942 – 2023), and she often served as his editor.

Sources

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

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Note: In addition to the above, Fancyclopedia 3, ISFDB, and Wikipedia were also consulted.

Video

Starfleet Academy on Paramount+

A TV Series Review by Jim McCoy

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.

Jimbo's Awesome Science Fiction and Fantasy Reviews is a reader-supported publication. To receive new posts and support my work, consider becoming a free or paid subscriber.

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 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 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

Food of Famous Authors

Oatmeal Cookies

Cooking by Cedar Sanderson

I made this cookie recipe for my husband, as these are his favorites. Oatmeal cookies like this are a great snack, the recipe I use is less sweet than other cookies I make. If you want them even less sweet, use 1/2 c applesauce in place of the white sugar. It need not be sweetened, I used my homemade applesauce many years ago with no added sugar. They will be soft and cake-like but marvelous treats for small children.

Oatmeal Cookies

1 c room temperature butter
1/2 c brown sugar (packed)
1/2 c white sugar
1/4 tsp salt¹
2 eggs
1 tsp vanilla
1 1/2 tsp baking powder
2 tsp pumpkin pie spices²
1 1/2 c old fashioned oats
1 3/4 c flour

Preheat oven to 350F

Cream together butter and sugars, add in salt if using, then beat in eggs, vanilla, baking powder, and spices. Once combined, mix in the oats and then the flour.

Spoon onto a cookie sheet. A sheet of parchment paper is really handy here to slide right off onto the cooling rack. Bake for 13-15 minutes (might be less, but depends on your oven) until just golden-brown at the edges and firm on top. Leave on the cookie sheet for a couple of minutes after removing from the oven, then move to a cooling rack.

This makes between 2-3 dozen cookies depending how large you make them. They are a soft oatmeal cookie. If you'd like them crispier, bake longer.

¹ Omit if you are using salted butter.

² Garam masala spices are awesome in these cookies!

Your Editor advocates adding a bag of butterscotch chips.

Cooking with Cayenne Pepper

Cooking by Cedar Sanderson

Chili is one of those things that there really is no wrong way to make. There are as many variations as there are cooks, and times it is made. I know I adjust it to what's on hand, often enough. I didn't cook it for years because small children object to 'it's spicy!' even when the Scoville

units are in the triple digits. Which time of life is past, and now I can make it again, the rich, dark red stew that will clear your head and leave you breathing easy. Perfect for the winter blues as it will warm you from the center out.

I tend to be cautious with the cayenne, as it is the hottest of the chilies I grow in the garden, and I'm not a big one on heat without flavor - which cayenne doesn't really bring to the table. Unlike the ancho chilies which are the star of this dish, the cayenne powder has only a hint of the sweetness, and none of the complexity of fragrance and flavor. Which is fine. It's mostly added to kick some heat in, and a tiny sprinkle on hot chocolate does just that, which makes that drink even better when coming in on a cold day.

You can always add more capsaicin later, in the form of a hot sauce, and you really can't take it out. If you aren't used to it, add a little, taste, let it simmer, and decide if you want more.

The bright orange of cayenne differentiates it from the darker brown-with-a-hint-of-red of chili powder.

Chili

Begin by rehydrating the ancho chilies. I seed mine, if you like more spice heat, you can skip it, but you likely want to remove the stem before hydration as it's bitter. Seeding after hydration is easier, maybe, but messier to me. I'd rather break the dried chilies and shake the seeds out.

6 ancho chilies, seeded
4 c water

Bring the water to a boil, and drop the seeded chilies into it. Set this aside, off the heat, for about 15-20 minutes. Carefully put the chilies into the blender, then pour most if not all the liquid in, and puree (I use the highest setting) until as smooth as possible.

While the chilies are hydrating, sauté the onions, garlic, and meat.

2 medium onions, chopped

5-6 cloves garlic, minced

2 lbs. beef, cubed, or ground

Once meat is browned, add in:

2 tbsp cocoa powder

1 tbsp dried oregano

1/2 tsp cayenne*

1 tbsp espresso powder**

1 tbsp brown sugar

Stir this in and allow it to cook a minute, then add in the chili puree

3 c strong coffee** or beef stock

2 cans (14 oz) diced tomatoes

4 tbsp tomato paste

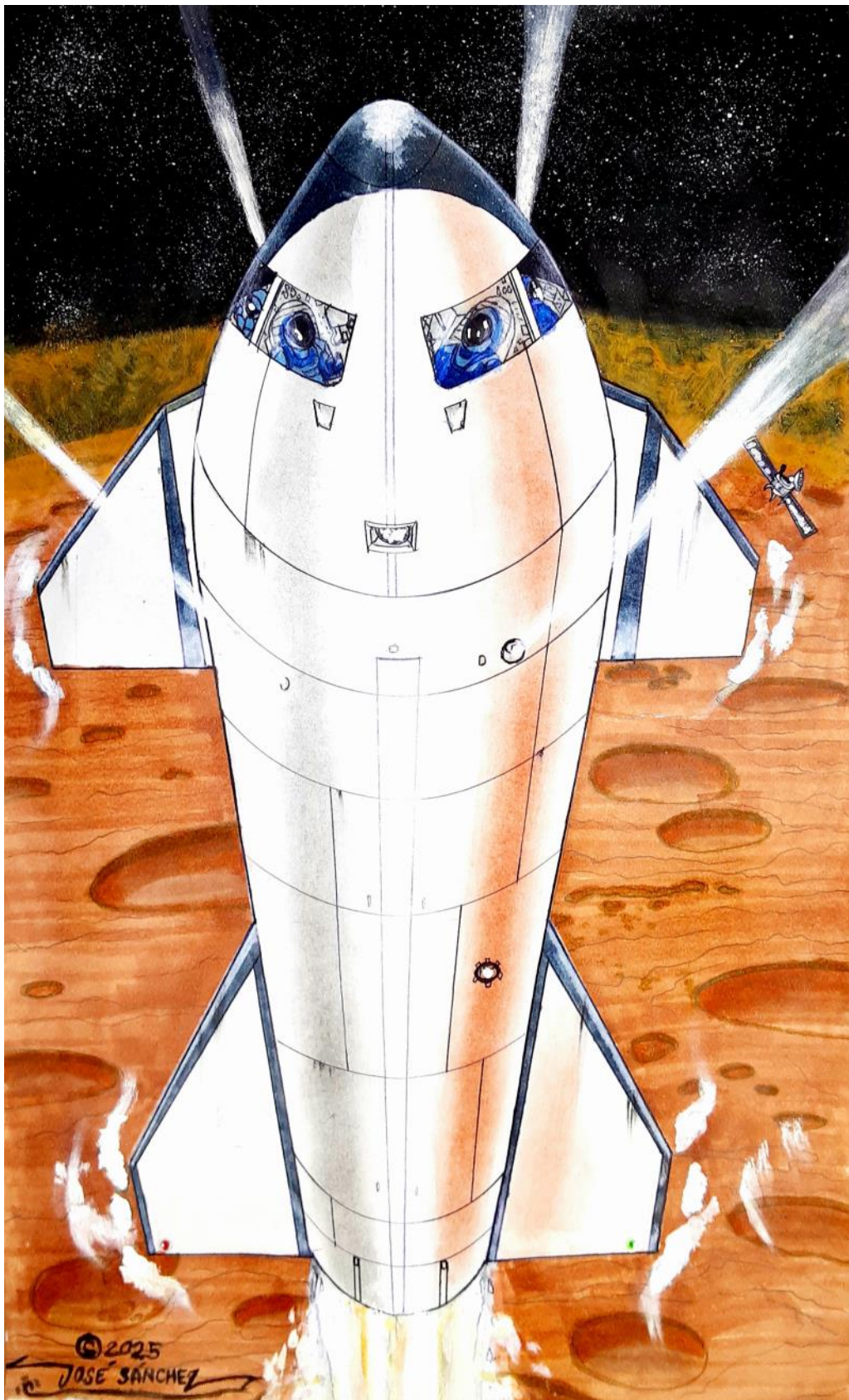
Salt (I put in a palmful to start, perhaps that is 3 tsp, then taste and adjust later)

Simmer low or slow cook for a few hours. Serve with sour cream or crema, crumbled queso fresco, cornbread, avocado, pickled onion, or whatever suits your fancy. Including nothing at all!

Notes:

*or less, or more, depends on you and your family's heat tolerance. You could even omit it entirely. The dried ancho chilies have very little heat on their own, so the heat in this recipe is almost all the cayenne.

**espresso powder if you don't have coffee on hand. Not both!



Coming in for a Landing
by Jose Sanchez