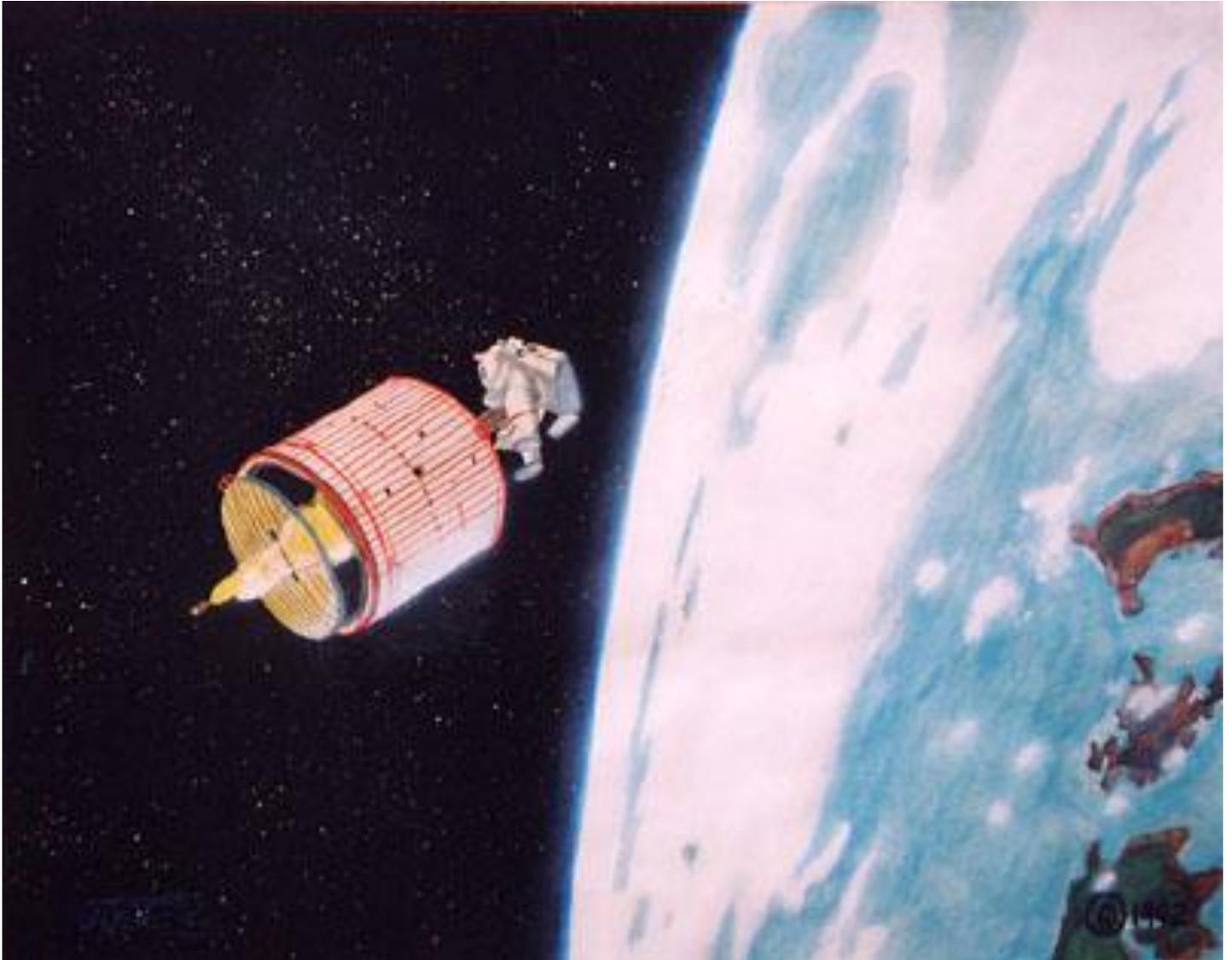


Tightbeam 310

July 2020



Orbiting
By Jose Sanchez

Tightbeam 310

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Some contributors have Amazon links for books they review, to be found with the review on the web; use them and they get a reward from Amazon.

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

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Letters

Editor:

Re: Tightbeam 209. An excellent look at Fritz Leiber by Jon Swartz. I first became aware of Leiber when his book TWO SOUGHT ADVENTURE was published, I think by Martin Greenberg's press, with dust jacket art by Dillon. I recommended it to Glenn King, who did reviews for my fanzine, and sent a copy of the issue to Leiber, receiving a long letter in reply from Leiber, in which he described (since we seemed curious about it) his history in fantasy writing and spoke of his inspiration for Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser stories. I wish I still had that letter; I could have expanded that profile somewhat. After reading the book, I discovered his horror story "You're All Alone" in a back issue of Fantastic Adventures I had purchased from a dealer, and found it to be a real shocker. Not long after that I went to see the movie THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME with Charles Laughton and was amazed to see Leiber's name on the acting credits. He had mentioned having some acting in his background.

I liked Will Mayo's review of the Poe biography as well. I read a different biography of Poe sometime back and agree that he made a great impact on literary history. I printed a review of that biography in my fanzine and found his life to be one very stimulating of controversy.

Glad to see the Lou Antonelli interview. Lou started out on the Dell Forums speaking of his wish to publish SF stories, and deserves a lot of recognition from fans for his writing.

Jose Sanchez is becoming more and more notable as an artist of the imagination. He is indeed beneficial to the N3F.

-John Thiel

Anime

Winter 2016 First Impressions – Dagashi Kashi

Review by Jessi Silver



“Kokonotsu Shikada is the son of a dagashi snack shop owner. Although he wants to become a manga artist, his father, Yo, wants him to take over the family business. One day, a girl named Hotaru Shidare shows up at the shop and challenges Kokonotsu.” – Funimation

Streaming at Funimation.com Episodes: 12 Source: Manga

Summary of Episode 1: It's difficult when your own aspirations conflict with your family's expectations. Kokonotsu "Coconuts" Shikada just wants to draw manga, and his art skills are actually pretty good, but his father wants him to take over the family business – becoming the next



in line to run the family sweets shop. It's not just tradition informing this opinion; when an outgoing and snack-obsessed girl named Hotaru shows up at the shop one day, Kokonotsu learns the truth – Hotaru's candy company wants Yo, Kokonotsu's father, to join with them because of reasons. Kokonotsu will have to commit to running the shop before Yo is free to follow his own dreams. Kokonotsu isn't keen to give up his own goals, but Hotaru is very insistent. She plans to insinuate herself into Kokonotsu's life and use anything in her power to convince him to change his mind, including becoming friends with his sort-of girlfriend and spreading candy throughout town.

First Impressions: I wanted to check this show out because I have a certain interest in Japanese cuisine, and obscure Japanese snacks fall under that umbrella. While I can't really eat most of these goodies anymore since sugar makes my brain feel like it's about to burst out of my skull, I can still stand having them paraded around in front of me. As I feared going in, however, the snacks are probably the most interesting things about the episode and the characters who eat them are somewhat hard to tolerate.

I've seen several reviewers describe Hotaru as a "manic pixie dream girl," and to some extent I think that's accurate. Kokonotsu is faced with a life decision that's likely to take the length of the series to resolve, and Hotaru shows up as he stands at a crossroads and promises to make big changes in his life. She's a very weird human being, defined so far by her sweets expertise and weirdly regal bearing. She also looks almost exactly like a manga character that Kokonotsu was drawing as the episode opened, which helps contribute to an eye-rolling introductory scene. She's a male fantasy, an unrealistic woman who is more plot device and catalyst than equal partner. It's not the worst of sins that a piece of fiction can commit, but it makes things a lot less interesting.

Something else that turned me off was the constant over-acting and forced comedy that peppered the episode. There's a lot of yelling, goofy behavior, and immaturity on the part of several of the characters, especially Hotaru and Yo. As far as I can tell, the majority of the characters are young adults, and at the very least Yo is, but the humor is incredibly juvenile and Yo especially is a complete goofball. One of my least favorite tropes is parents who act less like adults than their own children, and while I've probably seen this trope expressed more by some anime mothers or female authority figures it's just as irritating when dads do it. The jealousy exhibited by Saya, Kokonotsu's childhood friend and likely romantic interest, is extreme. To be perfectly blunt, Kokonotsu really hasn't proven himself to be a man worth giving a crap about, so Saya's reaction upon hearing that there was merely a weird city girl in his family's shop just makes her look bad. It's difficult to get invested in a story when all the of the characters range from irritating and unrealistic to completely intolerable.

Yo is a grade-A doofus.



The show's saving grace is the minimal amount of attention that it pays to the "dagashi" (traditional snacks) that are referenced by the show's title. Like I've mentioned, I really like learning about food even if it's technically food that I can't eat anymore (sugar and simple carbohydrates make my brain feel like it's about to leap out of my skull). Possibly my favorite scene in the episode occurs when Hotaru challenges Kokonotsu to create a delicious culinary combination of different Umai-bou flavors. I had coinci-

dentally watched a Youtube video earlier in the week in which the person making the video took different flavored Umai-bou and combined them with various actual foods to create new taste sensations. It fascinates me that such a culture exists around what are essentially large, diversely-flavored Cheetos, and these are the things I really like to learn about. It amuses me that there are more desirable ways of eating the “fries” that the characters snacked on, or that you can buy what are essentially mini-donuts in cute little packages (they look way yummier than the dusty powdered-sugar “Donettes” that are ubiquitous at American gas stations). And now I’m really craving something sweet and doughy to spoil my dinner.

I didn’t have especially high expectations for this show, but I thought it might be an amusement worth checking out. I could conceivably see myself watching another episode or two just to gain some more trivial knowledge about Japanese treats, but the characters themselves make doing so feel like more of a chore than an amusement.

Pros: It’s fun to learn about Japanese cultural tidbits, and Japanese treats and snacks are one of those obscure areas that don’t get a whole lot of coverage in the West.

Cons: The characters are irritating in various ways and the women especially get the short end of the character development stick. The comedy is heavy-handed.

Grade: C-

Games

Stellar Horizons

Review by Wesley Kawato



This game simulates the future exploration and colonization of the solar system. There is a campaign scenario and seven shorter scenarios. The campaign scenario and five of the shorter scenarios can be played solitaire.

Each game turn is one year of real time. There is an economic turn after every ten regular turns. Players get income and buy new technology and economic cards. There are seven nations that players can choose to play. Each has a special ability and a different mix of ships they can build. Each ship is rated for exploration ability, combat ability, and cargo capacity. Your tech level, in three areas, defines what you can and can’t do with your ships. At the start of many scenarios, nations are unable to leave Earth orbit with their ships. Certain biology and physics tech systems increase movement ability. Engineering tech systems give players the ability to build larger ships.

In most scenarios the main way to score points is through exploration. You add the ship’s exploration value to the planet’s exploration value to determine how many tech points chits you draw. Chits can range in value from 1 to 5. Scoring 3+ tech points gets you a victory point. These tech chits will get you new tech systems as well, during the next economic turn. The second way to gain victory points is by building installations on planets and moons. Different kinds

of installation require the expenditure of different kinds of resource chits. There are three kinds of resources in this game: supplies, ore resources, and fuel. Resources are also needed to build ships, so it's also a delicate balancing act. You acquire resources during economic turns.

A third source of victory points is public and secret exploration goals. These are only used in the campaign game. In the shorter scenarios the winner is the first player to place a certain number of settlements on a certain planet or moon. (Settlements are a type of installation.)

The rulebook includes a campaign scenario, plus 7 shorter scenarios. The campaign game and five of the shorter scenarios can be played solitaire.

The game board consists of thirty-eight planet and moon tiles. The tiles are beautiful. Some of them are large. You'll need lots of table space to play this game. Some of the scenarios may take hours to play. The campaign game will need to be played in multiple sessions.

So far I've only played this game solitaire but I like it. The strategy you use depends on the nation you play. Some nations can build bases at the start of the game and others can't. To build a base you need to have a ship that can both explore and move cargo. If you're playing a nation that can build bases early on (North America, Russia, and China), then the way to go is to build a base in Earth orbit and then add a research station. That allows you to score tech points every economic turn.

If your country can't build bases at the start of the game, then launch robotic explorers to the nearby planets and hope you draw good tech chits.

What makes this game exciting is the different strategies each country needs to use. Japan has good robotic explorers so go strong on unmanned exploration. Europe gets a die roll bonus each time they use a space telescope to explore. Take full advantage of that ability. Russia has rugged space crews who can remain in space longer. If you're playing the Russians, then go strong on manned spacecraft. The list goes on but I better stop at this point.

In my opinion Stellar Horizon is a well-designed game, but only if you have the table space and time to play this game the way it deserves to be played. Also I had to read the rulebook five or six times before I understood this game system.

...Wesley Kawato

Neko Atsume — Kitty Collector

Review by Jessi Silver



I no longer self-identify as a gamer; the fandom started to attract too much controversy and as someone who didn't really appreciate where AAA gaming was headed, I finally bailed out (no hate towards people who identify as gamers, though). I'm someone who doesn't enjoy being involved in drama, and what I was seeing was truly beyond the minor geek drama we all know and occasionally like hearing about; women questioning the status quo started getting death threats, the industry attitudes weren't really changing to reflect real-life demographics... I just felt unwelcome and a little bit nervous to boot. There are a lot of brave women out there who continue to engage with the fandom – Anita Sarkeesian is the “big” name (and a controversial



one, but I like her videos and the type of analysis she does, haters gonna hate), and Leigh Alexander is one of my favorite writers on the subject, hands down. But I, personally, am just too nervous to directly engage anymore. Maybe that makes me a wimp; I like to say I have a well-developed sense of self-preservation.

I have, though, gotten into casual gaming over the last year or so. Anime is my main fandom and it's where I devote the majority of my energy, but sometimes I just need a little break and if I can pop in for 10 minutes and play something, that helps me a lot. My recent favorite game for this purpose is a little something you might have heard of called Neko Atsume.

Neko Atsume: Kitty Collector is a cell phone/tablet game that you can download for free for iOS and Android systems (you can pay money for items in the game, but you can have plenty of fun for free). In the game, you have a yard that you can fill with things to attract the neighborhood kitty cats – cushions, scratching posts, toys, cat trees... the list of items is really extensive. If the cats enjoy what you've provided, they leave you fish – silver and gold – in exchange. You can then use those fish as currency to buy bigger and better toys, and the cycle continues until you lose interest. All of the cats eventually give you special trinkets if they like your yard well enough – they're items that are technically worthless, like birthday candles, books of matches, and broken toys, but to a cat they are special gifts that demonstrate the true extent of their love. There are also "rare" cats that show up if you meet certain requirements, mainly by having special/unique items placed in your yard.

The game fits into a weird genre called "maintenance games" in which there really aren't any end goals in mind or even a plot to worry about; the fun comes from cultivating a certain aesthetic, collecting things, enjoying the atmosphere, and appreciating the cute artwork. The Animal Crossing series of games are a much more famous example from this genre; anyone who's played and enjoyed the games from that series will understand that what's "fun" about those games are the exploration aspect as well as the satisfaction that comes from collecting all the items for the museum, designing and renovating your home, getting all the different fruits to grow in your town, and building up your infrastructure. It can be incredibly engrossing, especially for a genre that's considered very "casual" and doesn't get a lot of love from the mainstream gaming fandom.

I, frankly, don't have time to play many video games. Neko Atsume is really the perfect solution to that. I have it downloaded on my Android phone and check in on my kitties a few times throughout the day (and occasionally during the night if I'm having one of those nights – one of my friends mentioned that she thinks the game might be on "Japan Time" since that's where it was developed, making certain cat appearances likelier to happen when we're asleep in the US). I refill the cats' food dishes, switch out items in the yard, take photos if something cute is happening (one of the things you can do is have a photo album for each cat), and see if the kitties have left me anything. On paper it's completely low-stakes; nobody gets hurt and there's no tension or hard goal. You can play the game how you want. But I always have a positive feeling when one of the cats leaves me something special or a new cat visits my kitty playground. As someone who could be a crazy cat lady if the stars aligned a certain way, playing this game

helps fulfill that desire without having a house full of cats.

I think some people appreciate having a concrete goal in mind when they're playing a game. I find that I have a lot more fun when I'm the one deciding how to have my fun. Just like enjoying the freedom that games like Minecraft and the Elder Scrolls series provide, I like being able to define my own success in games like Neko Atsume. It's a nice change from the daily demands and expectations of boring old real life.

Movies

Doctor Strange – Movie Review Review by Chris Nuttall



I find myself with curiously mixed feelings about Doctor Strange. On one hand, I enjoyed much of it immensely. There was, as always with Marvel, a nice balance between exciting action, moments of reflection and flickers of humour that made me laugh even in the darkest moments. The solution to the major crisis is very well-played, standing in stark contrast to the battles that ended both Avengers movies. And yet, there were moments – mainly in the adaptation of the original comic to the big screen – that grated on me.

The original Doctor Strange was an a-hole, to put it mildly. He only got better after his near-fatal accident and years of training. The movie version is less of a pain in the butt, even before the accident. In some ways, the movie version comes across as a decent guy when we need to think of him as a prat. This is not, however, the real problem. The re-imagined Mordo is also a decent guy, if a little rigid in his thinking. His fall from grace at the end of the movie – in the stinger – actually cheapens the character. I couldn't help thinking of just how badly Green Lantern messed up its source material, although – in this case – in reverse.

In the original comics, Mordo starts out as a bad guy – the Ancient One's greatest apprentice who also happens to be evil. He actually pushes Strange into committing himself to his studies, just by providing the motivation to think of something beyond himself that Strange lacked. (Nice job fixing it, villain.) In the movie, Mordo – a man unable to see the world in anything more than black and white – falls to evil through his determination to rid the world of it.

This does add a layer of tragedy to the (genuine) friendship between Mordo and Strange – it's clear, even at the end, that they genuinely like one another. But at the same time, it provides a layer of excuse for Mordo that was lacking in the comic-book character. This is not someone who is out-and-out evil – and I think this was a mistake, because the world needs to be reminded that evil does exist. This 'fallen from grace' theme pervades too many of the Marvel movies and I find it more than a little annoying.

It also undermines some of Strange's character. Instead of giving him a reason to fight, the movie puts him in places where he has to fight. (And it removes the plot point that the original Ancient One knew very well that Mordo was falling into evil.) I can't help comparing it to

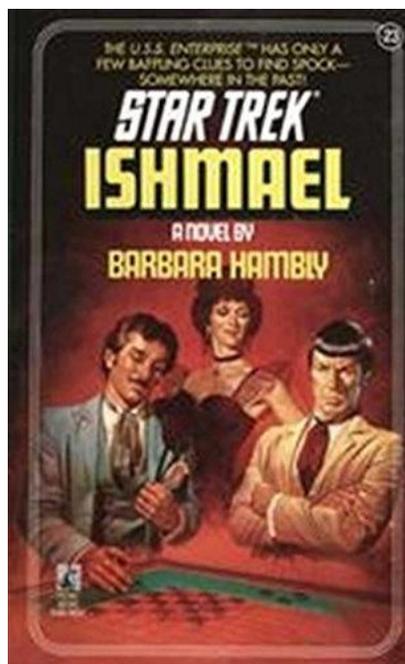
Thor, but that fitted in with Marvel canon.

Overall, this was a good movie. It stands very well on its own – there are hardly any mentions of other parts of the MCU – and remains focused on its characters. But while people may complain about race-swapping some of the older characters, the real problem lies in how they are used. Their flaws are cheapened and so too are they. YMMV, of course.

Novels

Ishmael by Barbara Hambly

Review by Heath Row



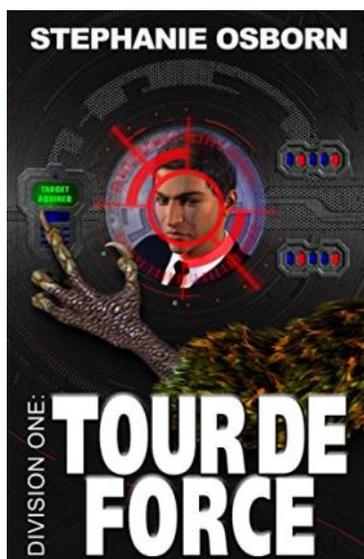
This excellent tie-in book opens revealing that Spock has been apprehended by the Klingons, tortured, and perhaps killed. It all started on Starbase Twelve, where the crew of the U.S.S. Enterprise became suspicious of Klingon activity at the edge of the Tau Eridani Cloud just as a wandering white dwarf was about to pass through. Spock gains access to a Klingon ship -- “Espionage is not something that one does carelessly, Captain,” he says -- to see what is going on, and doesn’t return. Soon he transmits a mysterious message: “White dwarf, Khlaru, Tillman’s Factor, Guardian.” And later, three numbers. That is all his compatriots have to go on.

Unbeknownst to the crew, Spock wakes up just outside of Seattle sometime between the beginning of Reconstruction and the statehood of Washington. He is returned to wellness by some local citizens and becomes involved in the fledgling city -- as well as time travel plot involving the Klingons and the Karsid, which reportedly were rebuffed by area settlers after first contact.

Almost a western, it’s a fun historical read. There are the New Bedford Girls, young women brought from the east coast to marry area loggers; the connection to the Harlan Ellison episode, “City on the Edge of Forever” (and a separate reference to the Ellison trials -- an in joke?); travel to San Francisco; an appearance by Imperial Majesty Norton I, Emperor of the United States and Protector of Mexico (an actual person!); gambling; singing (“I must remember to avoid dancing... with medical doctors.”); a rewarding love story; and a surprising connection to Spock’s own lineage.

There are also several references to popular songs of the time, including “Three Score and Ten,” “The Rising of the Moon,” “The Minstrel Boy,” and “Red River Valley.” Spock -- as Ishmael, given his self-induced amnesia -- even plays chess and sings. Hambly writes relatively well, so this is not a write-by-numbers tie-in. She alludes to slavery and racism, including McCoy’s southern ancestry, and includes some thoughtful commentary such as this quote: “We are all exiles here. Whyever we left the places we left to come here, there is no way back to the past for any of us. This is our home, and we are all that we have.” The above review appeared in slightly different form in a Sept. 3, 2019, letter to the N3F’s Star Trek Classic Round Robin.

Division One: Tour de Force by Stephanie Osborn Review by Pat Patterson



STEPHANIE OSBORN I really liked it

People from the South don't talk like people anywhere else, and I'm going to include Texas in that generalization. However, if you look at the dialogue in most books, you'd never know that there were any regional differences.

Stephanie Osborn has an EXCELLENT ear for dialogue. Her people converse in the cadences I've heard all my life, and I'm not talking about just hanging out on playgrounds, either. I spent a disproportionate number of years in colleges and universities, and three more in the Army, so I've heard a LOT of conversations going on from people all over the country. Osborn nails speech by humans, and does it better than anyone else. I wonder, though, how long it took her to teach her word-processing program not to highlight her dialect as spelling errors?

Division One's Team Alpha One has a series of crisis events to overcome. I was pleasantly surprised to see that the book did NOT stretch out the first FIGHTING crisis, which was the second (or third) total crisis, to the end of the book. Instead, it provides the setup for the next crisis events.

However, more important than gunfire and stun rays is the nature of the first crisis. Agent Omega has a hunch that if Agent Echo gets onboard an alien first-contact vessel, his life will be over. The crisis is that Echo won't believe her; he thinks she is sulking because she can't go into space. It speaks to a lack of trust.

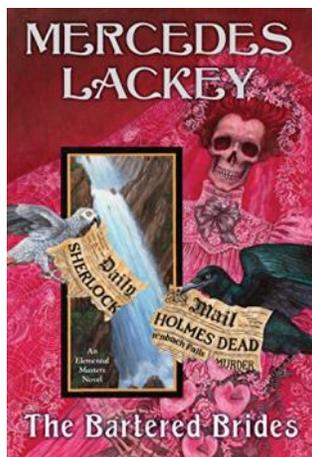
And...strange things...are happening with Omega, as well. She's having very vivid dreams.

Lack of trust, in a nutshell, defines the sum total of the problems that Echo and Omega are having: they aren't trusting each other, and they aren't talking about the things that are most important. These are two people who are brilliant and talented in every way, and everybody around them has seen them falling in love from the beginning, but they are still afraid to talk about it with each other, for fear it will risk their professional relationship. Well, come on, guys. This is the fourth book.

The Bartered Brides by Mercedes Lackey Review by Heath Row

Alert, members of the Sherlock Holmes Round Robin! Have I got a book for you. I haven't really been keeping up with Mercedes Lackey—or perhaps even really known or understood her work as a writer—but this is the thirteenth novel in the Elemental Masters series. The basic idea of this particular entry—unfortunately, they're not all like this—is that Sherlock Holmes didn't die, and John and Mary Watson are magicians—specializing in elemental magic.

The book takes place shortly after Holmes's and Moriarty's (!!!) supposed deaths at Reichen-



bach Falls, so readers of Arthur Conan Doyle's writings will find this novel particularly interesting. But anyway, if it's not sufficient that Holmes is back, and John and Mary Watson are elemental sorcerors, they chum around with psychics and mediums—and people expert in spirit magic, the fifth elemental magic, it seems.

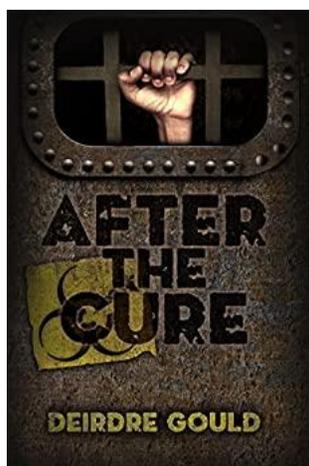
The group of friends, in Victorian London, naturally, set out to solve the murders of a series of young women at the hands of a Jack the Ripper-like serial killer. Without giving too much of the story away, let's just say that creating a battery for a reincarnation engine using the trapped souls of the dead is a pretty darn cool idea. Pretty darn cool, indeed.

When I read this book—a chance buy from the down-on-its-heels Science Fiction Book Club—I got all excited thinking that I had missed 12 previous books featuring Holmes and Watson as an elemental magician. Alas, that is not the case. Previous Elemental Masters outings, mostly alternate histories, feature other characters, are set in other locations, and are loosely based on a fairy tale. While that's a pretty cool gambit, this book's gambit—Holmes! Watson as a mage! Trapped soul battery!—is even cooler.

If you've read any of the other Elemental Masters novels, let me know what you thought, care of this publication. I'm curious how they compare to this one—and how this one stacks up.

After the Cure by Deidre Gould

Review by Jim McCoy



Imagine, if you will, a world. A world filled with people who have been cured of a virus that turned them into a zombie. A world where the Immune (who never suffered the disease) are living alongside the Cured (who were zombies not all that long ago). Imagine a world where a greater disease may be lurking hidden.. Imagine, in short the world of Deidre Gould's *After the Cure*. It is a well conceived world which contains enough plausibility that it actually seems possible. It's a world that I'll never forget. It's also a world that gives me nightmares.

I love post-apocalyptic fiction. I always have. Usually though, there's enough distance between the real world and what I'm reading that it doesn't really soak in past my defenses. I read it, enjoy it and then move on. This one got into my mind and soul hardcore. The premise is that a virus was released accidentally by a scientist who broke protocol and spread before it could be detected. Everything in the ATC universe springs from that one action. What made this one scary to me is that it seems way too possible.

I recently reviewed *The Wasteland Chronicles Omnibus* by Kyle West. I love it. The difference here though is in real world possibility. *The Wasteland Chronicles* twisted the *Sweet Meteor of Death* with an alien invasion. I was well able to suspend disbelief while I was reading the books but once I put it down it didn't really haunt me. *After the Cure* isn't like that. I'm not against genetic engineering at all. Every fruit known to humanity, including so-called "organic" fruit, has had its genetics altered through selective breeding for at least centuries if not millennia. The fact remains that protocols exist for a reason and it's way too easy to believe that a scientist would break them because they were overzealous. It hits really close to home.

Gould's characters come to life as well. Our heroine is Nella Rider, an Immune psychiatrist who has been hired to interview two of the scientists who were on the team that invented the virus that destroyed the world. She ends up being a lot more intrepid and resourceful than I would expect out of a big city doctor stuck in a fallen world but that's a good thing. She would not have made it otherwise. I teach my daughters to be strong, proud, tough, smart and brave. Nella is the type of woman I have in mind when I teach the girls that. She is someone I admire and what I want my daughters to be. If there is a higher compliment, I don't know what it is.

Her partner throughout the book is Frank, the defense lawyer. He is a member of the Cured. The book goes through some of the things he experienced while infected (which I won't spoil) and it's not pretty. He is still capable of great acts of intelligence and bravery but his memories are just plain disgusting. What amazes me about this character is how well Gould manages to keep us sympathetic to him while still revealing some of the revolting things that he has done. It helps that he contracted the disease by trying to be a nice guy but I'll be reading this one and trying to extract some techniques for my own writing. Gould really impressed me with this character.

The rest of the cast is impressive as well, both as zombies and just normal people. Something a lot of post apocalyptic fiction forgets is that a lot of the world after an apocalypse would still be just trying to get along. I loved Mad Max but even in that type of a setting not everyone would be a bad ass. Gould remembers that. There are certainly brave good guys clearing out/ curing the infected and bad guy looters who would probably be good with a gun, but there are also neighborhoods full of people who just want to make a living in their new reality. I like that. I love heroic fiction but it's good to remember that not everyone is a super hero.

Gould also makes the Cured react with revulsion to what they've done. She mentions repeatedly a high suicide rate among those who have survived because of their memories. This is horrifying but it's true to life. Anyone who had been through what these people have gone through would have been damaged by it and they have. It just makes sense. It also adds to the believability of the story. I get the feeling she may have studied some psychology while writing this or before. It shows. She has thought through the consequences of her world and it works.

Speaking of the consequences of the world, Gould does a really good job in other areas as well. There is a clear divide between some of the Cured and some of the Immune based on attitude. A lot of Immune can't forgive the Cured for what they've done while they were out of their minds and sick. A lot of the Cured can't forgive the Immune for killing infected individuals to protect themselves when the infected could have been cured. There are the predictable shortages that would occur in a fallen world. Perhaps most importantly for the book, all of the above happen to the main characters. This is a way a Chosen One (actually, probably Chosen Two) story, but that status doesn't prevent them from dealing with the same problems everyone else has to.

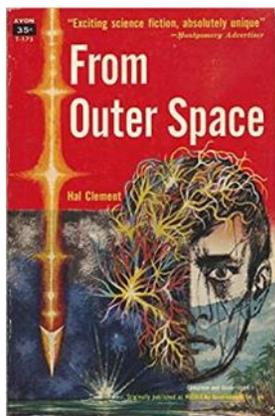
Somehow I've managed to avoid the fact that this is really a mystery novel with a SF background. That's what makes it great. I don't want to reveal too much and spoil the story. I will say that solving the mystery is not just a personal goal. It has ramifications for literally the entire world. So what we've got here is a cross between SF (zombies) a mystery (the whole plot) and my favorite thing about epic fantasy (literal world ending consequences). It's no wonder I enjoyed it.

Of course, After the Cure suffers from the same problem just about every other novel of this

type does. Her virus affects the brain and produces a zombie like brain disability. I guess maybe it's just the nerd in me, but I'd like to see something about how it happens in the book and I don't. There is a character whose brain is eaten by the virus but that doesn't make much sense either. I could be wrong here, and if so I apologize, but I don't think viruses act like that. If someone's body parts are eaten by a microscopic organism it's generally bacteria and not a virus, but then I don't claim to be a biologist or a doctor so I could be wrong here. Then again, even if I'm right the problem is well within the author's rights to adapt reality to the necessity of story. It's a lot less egregious than what Hollywood commonly does with history on a regular basis. These are all minor gripes though and I intend to hie me off to Barnes and Noble to purchase the rest of the series on payday. The first one was that good.

Bottom Line: 4.5 out of 5 Missing Bacteria Cultures

From Outer Space by Hal Clement Review by Heath Row



This brief but dense and occasionally ponderous juvenile fiction paperback was an interesting precursor to reading James Blish's *Midsummer Century*, reviewed below. Originally published as *Needle*, the novel is a law enforcement chase story in which the protagonist—the hunter—and antagonist—the quarry—are aliens who crash land on Earth. The latter is a criminal striving to evade the former and elude capture and arrest.

The aliens are symbiotes, able to inhabit human and other animal hosts, and as a result, much of the novel explores three primary aspects of the story. One, the biological relationship between the host and passenger creatures, the physical effects of being inhabited by the symbiote, and the perspective, perception, and experience of the host and passenger alike. That portion of the book was perhaps the most interesting.

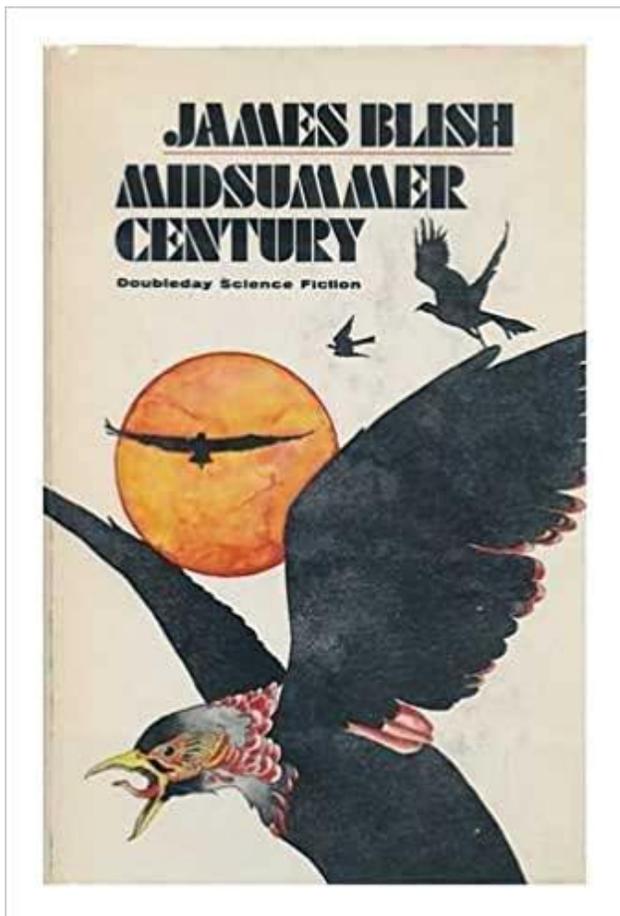
Secondly, the book explores the psychological and emotional relationship between the host and passenger, how they communicate, how they feel about being inhabited, and—in the case of the law enforcement alien—the moral and ethical boundaries recognized and respected by the symbiote. (The criminal symbiote doesn't necessarily have the same moral and ethical framework.) And finally, there is the plot itself, in which the young man hosting the hunter symbiote helps his passenger track down his quarry—which, all things considered, takes longer than it might have given the actual outcome of the mystery.

It took me quite awhile to read the book despite its 188 pages, and I admit I took several breaks with little enthusiasm to return to the text. But at some point, the plot, the characterization, or my interest in the outcome accelerated and increased, and I read the end of the book relatively quickly—finding the resolution of the search slightly anticlimactic and dissatisfying. I had to reread one portion to be sure that the mystery had, in fact, been solved.

Regardless, the school boy aspects of the story are interesting and detailed—the boarding school elements, the concerns of that age youth, island life with the main character's friends, and the very setting and geography of the island, as well. Perhaps worth reading with other sf novels addressing symbiosis and parasitism; this was an intriguing consideration of its biomechanics and ethics.

Midsummer Century by James Blish

Review by Heath Row



I read this shortly after Hal Clement's *From Outer Space*, reviewed above, and the two books make for a wonderful pairing. While they address similar topics and themes, they do so differently and are very different reading experiences. If you only read one of the two, however, I suggest you read this one.

A shorter version of the novel appeared in the April 1972 issue of *Fantasy and Science Fiction* magazine. At only 110 pages, this Book Club Edition isn't very long at all, and I read it in perhaps three or four sittings. In an author's note, Blish indicates an interest in the science behind extrasensory perception and mystical experience, which play a role in the story as it unfolds.

The story opens similar to Edgar Rice Burroughs's *John Carter of Mars* books, or perhaps Alan Burt Akers's *Transit to Scorpio*. In this book's case, a scientist fiddling with a radio telescope falls into it—falling into another world! (And the future: 25,000 A.D.) He, one John Martels, also falls into an ancient computer, which is what inspires comparisons to *From Outer Space* above.

I don't want to give too much of the plot away, because it really is delightful as it develops, but suffice to say that in

this post-apocalyptic future, humanity is waning, birds are waxing, and Martels has a hand in changing the direction of human development.

Some of the best sections of the book expound and expand on the author's interest in ESP and metaphysics, as well as the personal nature of reality, and what happens when reality is shaken: orientation, reality loss, concentration, meditation, contemplation, the void, re-emergence, and re-stabilization. The text also explores the search for certainty, and the dangerous passivity that certainty can bring.

Readers interested in the singularity and posthumanism will also find items of interest in the book. "The personality is a semistable electromagnetic field; to remain integrated, it requires the supplementary computing apparatus of a brain, as well as an energy source such as a body, or this case we live in, to keep it in its characteristic state of negative entropy," Blish writes. (p. 19)

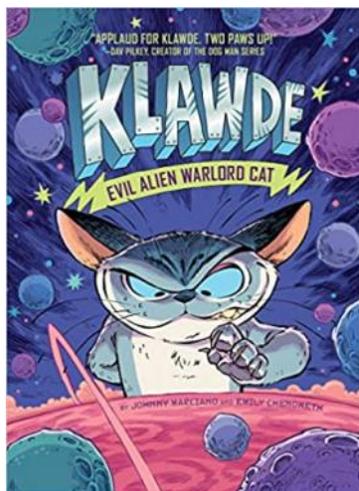
Highly recommended. There are some retrograde character-establishing comments on race and class at the very, very beginning of the book, but if you can push past that, the rest of the book is extremely surprising and rewarding—and a very different approach to symbiosis, software and wetware alike.

Novels — Young Adult

Klawde Evil Alien Warlord Cat

by Johnny Marciano, Emily Chenoweth, et al.

Review by Anita Barrios



Klawde is from the planet Lyttyrboks. A planet of all cats.

Hold your breath -- he's an evil alien warlord, exiled to Earth for his evil deeds, while he was napping.

He looks like a cat, and acts like a cat, and lands on Earth in the rain. Soaking and miserable, cursing his lack of opposable thumbs, he jumps up to ring the doorbell. Poor naive and misguided 11-year-old Raj lets him in and worse -- names him. (You know about naming stray cats, right? Give them a name and they're no longer strays -- they're yours.)

Raj quickly discovers Klawde can talk. Klawde pulls the -- cat hair? -- over on Raj and convinces him he was a loving, wonderful despot.

Klawde is desperate to get back to Lyttyrboks, get revenge on the cat who stole his evil warlord title and banished him to this planet of hairless ogres. He builds a teleporter from a toaster and a few other components bought on the Internet.

But just as he's planning to head back to Lyttyrboks, Raj goes to nature survival camp -- and needs rescuing.

I won't spoil the ending, just know, reading this book produced loud, explosive guffaws, snorts and exclamations of delight!

Truly, enjoy this read. It's great.

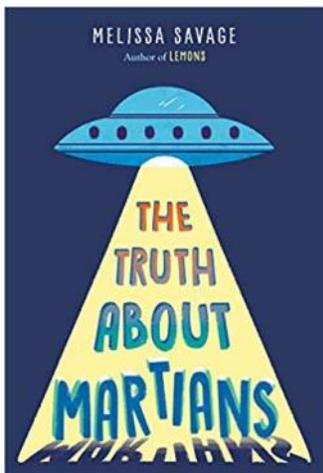
The Truth About Martians by Melissa Savage

Review by Anita Barrios

Mylo's best friend Dibs is a Martian fanatic -- every unexplained phenomena could be explained by Martians, if he listened to Dibs. Mylo doesn't. He's more of a Superman kinda guy.

Dibs spends the night a lot, especially after Obie, Mylo's brother, dies. The boys are spending the night at Mylo's house, when there's a storm and something crashes in a blaze of light near his parents' Roswell, NM ranch. Dibs misses it (!) but Mylo hears a call for help in his head.

The boys and friend Gracie are warned away from the crash site, but you know



what kids do when they're warned NOT to do something -- they have to investigate it.

Mylo finds a real Martian and he's a she, and she's not from Mars, she's from Europa and on a field trip, and the Army has her brother captive on base.

I won't spoil the ending! Enjoy the read.

The Wild Robot by Peter Brown

Review by Anita Barrios



Gentle Read: The Wild Robot

This story taps into the same, rich vein as *The Iron Giant*. It's a thin little volume, deceptively appropriate for younger readers, but be prepared -- it will make you cry.

ROZZUM unit 7134 washes up on the shore of a remote island after a shipwreck. She's the only robot survivor.

From the moment she opens her eyes, she's challenged to learn and survive in her alien surroundings (nature). The wild animals are all terrified of her, thinking unfairly that she's a monster, until she adopts, quite by chance, a gosling who hatches and imprints on her as "Mama."

From that point forward, Roz has purpose -- seeing her gosling to adulthood. She does all sorts of things for him, including helping all the woodland animals stay warm through one of the worst winters ever.

The problem comes when the owners of the shipwrecked robots send more robots to find Roz. I won't spoil how it ends, just know, there are tears aplenty.

At its core, the story examines what it means to be human and shines the not-so-flattering mirror on some of our worst traits.

It would be an excellent addition to an elementary classroom library for discovery by potential robot lovers.

The Wild Robot Escapes by Peter Brown

Review by Anita Barrios

In this thoughtful, gentle sequel to the original, Roz cunningly hid everything she learned from living on the island, so when she awakens on the Shareef family farm, she can plan her escape.

The farm is crumbling around her, but she pretends to want to do her programming -- taking care of the cows, milking them, protecting them from wolves. All along, even when she interacts with Farmer Shareef's two children, she's scheming a way to escape and get back to her island and goose son, Brightbill.

Of course, Brightbill has wings and can come to her -- which he does, after he finds her -- but Roz still has to escape. She tries, but she's discovered by Dr. Molovo, the creator of the Rozzum robots, and when Dr. Molovo discovers Roz has learned, independent of and in addition to her programming...well, I won't spoil the ending! You have to read to experience the twist.

Short Fiction

A Breath of Air by Tom Jolly

Analog Science Fiction and Fact issue 05-06|20,
Review by Greg Hullender RocketStackRank.com

Pro: I loved this story because it tries so hard to get the science right. For example, the magnetic shield for Mars is a real NASA proposal.

I also liked Banner and his shy teenage son Shep. They're both loveable characters, even though Shep doesn't get a lot of lines. I'm impressed that, without the author ever saying it, it's clear that Banner loves his son and is proud of him, and that Shep feels the same about his dad.

The plot includes plenty of twists and excitement. Mars is dangerous, and the story really makes us feel that. The mystery about who is sabotaging things and why is great, particularly because of the misdirection.

Con: The ending seemed a little rushed. Also, given how intrusive the Mars Corp AI was, it's hard for me to believe they couldn't pin anything on the Redheart company. Also, I'm with Shep: it really makes no sense for a company to try to kill people just to save money. It's hard to find employees who'll kill people just for a paycheck.

Ronni and Rod by David Gerrold and Ctein

Asimov's Science Fiction issue 05-06|20
Review by Greg Hullender RocketStackRank.com

Good, old-fashioned thrills, chills, and excitement. A young San Diego couple face a megatsunami. Although this is a part of a novel-length work, it stands alone very well.

Pro: It's a very nice setup: Rod is in the traffic copter and Ronnie is floating on a lounge chair held up by balloons when the alert comes that a big chunk of a Hawaiian volcano has fallen into the ocean.

The writing is top-notch: the narration is transparent and the dialogue is flawless. There are a couple of scenes where it seems the POV shifts between Ronni and Rod, but the effect is to show us just what a close couple they are, so I viewed that as a plus, not a minus.

Obviously the rescue of the little girl is the best part, tempered a bit by sadness at knowing her mother isn't coming back.

Megatsunamis are a real thing, although none the size of this has been seen in historical times.

Con: It doesn't have much sophistication to it: It's a fairly straightforward rescue story with a simple plot.

February Moon by Josh Rountree
Beneath Ceaseless Skies issue 303
Review by Greg Hullender RocketStackRank.com

A steady build up to a shattering climax.

In 19th-Century Texas, a German immigrant mother defends her farm and family (in the absence of her husband and eldest son) against a vicious wolf as well as some of the local townspeople.

Pro: I like the way all the little details work together to finally give us the complete, horrifying picture. The tension is palpable, fed by potential threats from the wolf, the townspeople, even the Comanche.

The story is a strong reminder of how much death was the constant companion of early settlers. I spent some time looking at my family tree (mostly country people in Tennessee, Georgia and South Carolina going back over 200 years) and what struck me was how often people had to remarry after the loss of a spouse, and how many little children reported in one census weren't there ten years later.

It's probably bad that I found myself wondering what R□ is for Lycanthropy.

Con: The narrator's situation seems to be hopeless, and she seems to have no real plans for dealing with it.

Little Free Library by Naomi Kritzer
Tor.com
Review by Greg Hullender RocketStackRank.com

A delightful adventure in books and revolution.

When Megian sets out her homemade book exchange, a mysterious neighbor starts trading objects and art for the books, but some of the items don't seem to come from this world at all.

Pro: The best part of this story is Meigan's gradual realization that her correspondent is not just an ordinary neighbor. Subtle hints, like the neighbor having never heard of the Lord of the Rings, then more serious ones like the leaf that's unlike any from any known tree.

The way it escalates when she passes on a copy of *Defending Your Castle* is priceless. "I believed that I would never have the opportunity to avenge what was done to my family" is both funny and scary at the same time. And the little gold coin (with a bird on it) is a nice touch.

And, of course, the ending is excellent. Based on what we've learned of Meigan to this point, she'll be a great caretaker for the egg.

I was pleasantly surprised to learn that Little Free Library is a real organization.

Con: It's a sweet little story, but there's really only one character, Meigan, no actual conflict, and no real tension.

SerCon

Walter M. Miller, Jr. Bio-Bibliography

by

Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D.

N3F Historian



Walter Michael (Walt) Miller, Jr. (January 23, 1923 – January 9, 1996) is primarily remembered today for his award-winning novel, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, the only novel of his that was published during his lifetime. Prior to its publication, however, Miller was the author of several excellent science fiction (SF) stories.

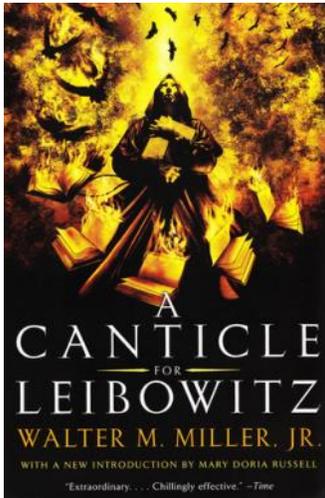
His first professional sale was “MacDougal's Wife” to *American Mercury* in 1950; and his first SF sale was “Secret of the Death Dome” to *Amazing* (January, 1951 issue). During the 1950s he also wrote scripts for television's “Captain Video and His Video Rangers.”

Miller was born in New Smyrna Beach, Florida, and was educated at The University of Tennessee and The University of Texas at Austin. Before becoming a full-time writer, he worked as an engineer. During World War II he served in the Army Air Corps as a radioman and tail gunner, flying 53 bombing missions over Italy. He took part in the bombing of the Benedictine Abbey at Monte Cassino, an event that haunted him for the rest of his life.

After the war, Miller converted to Catholicism. He married Anna Louise Becker in 1945, and they had three daughters and a son. In 1953 he lived with SF writer/editor Judith Merrill for six months.

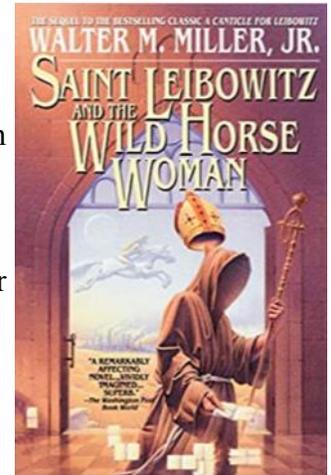
A Canticle for Leibowitz

Miller began writing while recovering from an automobile accident. Between 1951 and 1957 he published over three dozen SF short stories, winning the Hugo Award in 1955 for his story “The Darfsteller.” Late in the 1950s, Miller assembled a novel from three closely related novels he had published in *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* (in 1955, 1956, and 1957, respectively). He titled this fix-up novel *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, and it was published as a book in 1959. At the time of its publication, reviews were mixed.



Canticle is a post-holocaust story revolving around the canonization of a fictional Saint Leibowitz and is now considered a masterpiece of the SF genre. It won the 1960 (1961) Hugo for best novel. Canticle is also a statement about the cycles of world history and Roman Catholicism as a force of stability during history's dark times.

After the success of Canticle, Miller never published another new story in his lifetime, although several compilations of Miller's earlier stories were issued in the 1960s and 1970s. In addition, a radio adaptation of Canticle was produced by WHA Radio and NPR in 1981 and is available on CD. SF critic David Pringle called Canticle “the greatest of all post-bomb stories.”



Miller's Later Years

In Miller's later years he became a recluse, avoiding contact with nearly everyone, including family members.

According to SF writer Terry Bisson, Miller struggled with depression during his later years, but had managed to write a 600-page manuscript for the sequel to Canticle before taking his own life in January, 1996.

The sequel, titled Saint Leibowitz and the Wild Horse Woman, was completed by Bisson and published in 1997.

Genre Books

A Canticle for Leibowitz (1959) [novel]

Conditionally Human (1962) [collection of 3 short novels]

A View from the Stars (1965) [short stories]

The Science Fiction Stories of Walter M. Miller, Jr. (1978) [short stories]

The Best of Walter M. Miller, Jr. (1980) [short stories]

Saint Leibowitz and the Wild Horse Woman (1997) [novel/published posthumously]

Note: Books are listed by date of publication.

Edited Genre Anthology

Beyond Armageddon (1985) [with Martin Greenberg]

Short Genre Fiction

“Anybody Else Like Me?” (1952)

“The Big Hunger” (1952)

“Big Joe and the Nth Generation” (1952)

“Bitter Victory” (1952)

“Blood Bank” (1952)

“Cold Awakening” (1952)

“Command Performance” (1952)

“Conditionally Human” (1952)
 “Crucifixus Etiam” (1953) [considered by many critics to be his best short story]
 “The Darfsteller” (1955)
 “Dark Benediction” (1951)
 “Death of a Spaceman” (1954) [aka “Memento Homo”]
 “Dumb Waiter” (1952)
 “The First Canticle” (1955)
 “Gravesong” (1952)
 “The Hooper” (1955)
 “I, Dreamer” (1953)
 “I Made You” (1954)
 “Izzard and the Membrane” (1951)
 “Let My People Go” (1952)
 “The Lineman” (1957)
 “The Little Creeps” (1951)
 “Memento Homo” (1954) [aka “Death of a Spaceman”]
 “No Moon for Me” (1952)
 “The Reluctant Traitor” (1952)
 “Secret of the Death Dome” (1951)
 “Six and Ten Are Johnny” (1952)
 “The Hoffer” (1955)
 “The Song of Marya” (1957)
 “The Song of Vorhu” (1951)
 “The Soul-Empty Ones” (1951)
 “The Sower Does Not Reap” (1953)
 “The Space Witch” (1951)
 “The Ties that Bind” (1954)
 “The Will” (1954)
 “The Yokel” (1953)
 “Vengeance for Nikolai” (1957)
 “Way of a Rebel” (1954)
 “Wolf Pack” (1953)
 “You Triflin' Skunk!” (1955) [aka The Triflin' Man]

Note: Stories are listed alphabetically by title.

Stories Reprinted in Anthologies/Periodicals

“The Big Hunger” in Prize Science Fiction (Wollheim, 1953)
 “The Little Creeps” in Looking Forward (Lesser, 1953)
 “No Moon for Me” in Space, Space, Space (Sloane, 1953)
 “Dumb Waiter” in Science Fiction Thinking Machines (Conklin, 1954)
 “Crucifixus Etiam” in Human? (Merril, 1954)
 “Wolf Pack” in Beyond the Barriers of Space and Time (Merril, 1954)
 “The Triflin' Man” in Off the Beaten Orbit [aka Galaxy of Ghouls] (Merril, 1955)
 “Blood Bank” in All About the Future (Greenberg, 1955)
 “Memento Homo” in The Best Science Fiction Stories and Novels (Dikty, 1955)
 “The Will” in The Best Science Fiction Stories and Novels (Dikty, 1955)
 “A Canticle for Leibowitz” in The Best from Fantasy & Science Fiction: 4th Series
 (Boucher, 1956)

“The Hooper” in *The Year's Greatest Science-Fiction and Fantasy* (Merril, 1956)
 “Crucifixus Etiam” in *Asleep in Armageddon* (Sissons, 1962)
 “The Darfsteller” in *The Hugo Winners, Volume 1* (Asimov, 1962)
 “Memento Homo” in *The Worlds of Science Fiction* (Mills, 1963)
 “No Moon for Me” in *An ABC of Science Fiction* (Boardman, 1966)
 “The Ties that Bind” in *A Sea of Space* (Nolan, 1970)
 “Dark Benediction” in *Eight Strange Tales* (Ghidalia, 1972)
 “The Big Hunger” in *Space Odysseys* (Aldiss, 1976)
 “A Canticle for Leibowitz” in *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction: A 30-Year Retrospective* (Ferman, 1980)
 “The First Canticle” in *The Road to Science Fiction #4* (Gunn, 1982)
 “Command Performance” in *The Great SF Stories 14* (Asimov & Greenberg, 1986)
 “Crucifixus Etiam” in *The Great SF Stories 15* (Asimov & Greenberg, 1986)
 “The Darfsteller” in *The Great SF Stories 17* (Asimov & Greenberg, 1988)
 “Crucifixus Etiam” in *The Oxford Book of Science Fiction Stories* (Shippey, 1992)
 “God Is Thus” in *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* (October-November, 1997)
 Note: Stories are listed by date of publication of the anthology/magazine in which they were reprinted.

Miller and I

I met Miller at The University of Texas when he visited his friend and fellow SF writer, Chad Oliver. Chad and I were on the University’s faculty at the time. Chad invited me and my girlfriend (later wife) Carol to have lunch with him and Miller, and Miller later spoke at the University’s SF club that Oliver and I co-sponsored. Miller was quite personable and autographed copies of his books that club members brought to the meeting. I believe I still have the copy of the paperback edition of *A Canticle for Leibowitz* that he autographed for Carol.

Some Concluding Comments

Whenever there is a reference to Miller in the SF literature today, his *A Canticle for Leibowitz* is mentioned, usually in glowing terms. *Canticle*, described over and over as both the most witty and the most profound of all the post-bomb stories, seems almost certain to be a SF novel that survives the test of time.

Acknowledging the magazine serialization roots of *Canticle*, literary critic David N. Samuelson wrote that *Canticle* “may be the one universally acknowledged literary masterpiece to emerge from magazine SF.”

Critic David Cowart placed the novel in the realm of works by Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene, and Walker Percy, stating it “stands for many readers as the best novel ever written in the genre.”

Because of his long battle with depression (and eventual suicide), it seems likely that biographers will always mention that Miller could not get over the part he played during World War II.

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Cowart, David & Thomas L. Wymer (eds.). *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Volume 8: Twentieth-Century American Science Fiction Writers, Part 2: M-Z*. Detroit, MI: Gale Research Company, 1981.

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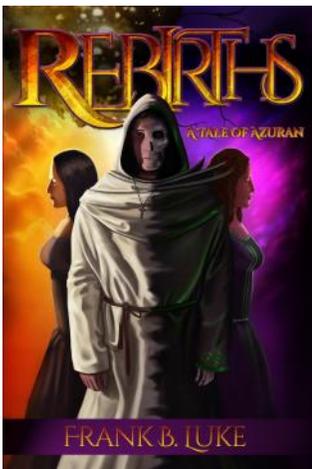
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Note: In addition to the above, several Internet sites were consulted.

An Interview with Frank Luke by Tamara Wilhite



Frank Luke is a prolific fantasy author. He writes both modern and medieval fantasy. He's had short stories come out in several *Planetary Anthology* books by Tuscan Bay press. And I had the honor of interviewing him.

Tamara Wilhite: Which genre sells better for you: medieval type fantasy like "*Hall of Heroes*" or modern fantasy like your story "*Joshua's Pawn Shop*"?

Frank Luke: Modern fantasy has sold better for me. Honestly, that was kinda surprising.

Tamara Wilhite: Why do you think that genre is more popular?

Frank Luke: I started writing "*Joshua's Pawn Shop*" on a sudden inspiration. I gave very little thought to its popularity. As I've started treating writing more as a business, I pay more attention to what's popular. But, I think modern fantasy sold better for me because people want to think the fantastic is just one step away. They identify with the situations better.

Tamara Wilhite: You met your wife in seminary. You write non-fiction for your denomination. How does that influence your fantasy works?

Frank Luke: I write for more than just entertaining the audience. Though, if they aren't entertained, they won't buy another. I also write to unveil God's truth; it's another way for me to teach. I love to dive deep into Scripture, and I want what I learn there to come out in my writing.

Tamara Wilhite: What else in your life influenced your writing?

Frank Luke: The two books series I've read that I imagine come forward the most in my writing are Lloyd Alexander's Prydain series and the first six books of Weis and Hickman's *Dragon-Lance* setting.

Tamara Wilhite: Your story "*Crucible*" is described as lit-RPG. What does that term mean?

Frank Luke: Lit-RPG stands for Literary RPG. Stories in the genre usually take place in worlds that run on rule systems like pen and paper or video games. The references to the RPG system may be subtle like the Guardians of the Flame series or more obvious like in "*Crucible*." They're usually a portal fantasy where someone from our world goes into the other world. "*Crucible*" mixes the humor of adjusting to the rules with a serious issue for the main character. I can't say much more about it. "*Crucible*" is actually my second Lit-RPG, but will come out before "*Fun and Games*".

Tamara Wilhite: Your Amazon author profile is dominated by short stories in a variety of anthologies. Yet you've written novels, as well. What is your novel "*Rebirths: A Tale of Azuran*" about?

Frank Luke: *Rebirths* tells the story of a man of God who falls away while grieving. He gives in to despair and turns to black magic, hoping to bring his dead family back to life. The book certainly qualifies as high fantasy as it takes place in another world, unconnected to our own with a high stakes battle between good and evil. It's been described as "CS Lewis writing Narnia after playing Elder Scrolls." Incidentally, I have never played Elder Scrolls.

The most important thing to remember about *Rebirths* is how no matter how far he has fallen, redemption is still possible. I used "Once Called" for the title of the final third. That's short for something a companion tells him near the start, "Once the Father calls, He does not uncall." The scene where our hero embraces that saying and accepts that he is still to be a prophet gave me chills when I wrote it.

Tamara Wilhite: You have short stories coming out in the "*Fantastic Schools*" and "*Planetary Anthology Series: Sol*". Do you have anything else coming out in the near future?

Frank Luke: I have four short stories under consideration at different places right now. Still waiting, I also have "*Joshua's Pawn Shop*" with an editor who is interested in taking both it and "*Lou's Bar & Grill*".

Tamara Wilhite: What else would you like to add?

Frank Luke: I have found that writing Christian fantasy is a great way to connect the reader's heart and head. By showing the characters acting out their faith and the journey to get to that point, it both teaches and encourages the reader.

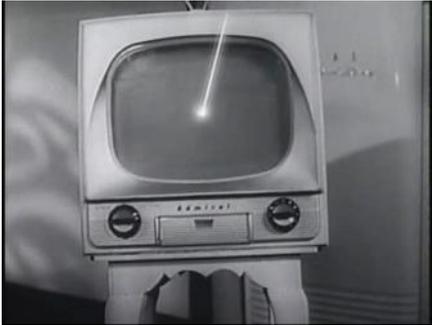
Tamara Wilhite: Thank you for speaking with me.

Frank Luke: It was my pleasure.

Video

Rabid Ears: Ravings of a TV Fiend

By Cathode Ray



The new issue of TV Guide just slithered through ye olde mail slot, so it's time for another edition of "Rabid Ears: Ravings of a TV Fiend," an occasional column about the best and brightest in sf, fantasy, horror, and other genre television programming. Let's see what's what—now, and next—on the old boob tube, shall we? Oh, for sure, most certainly, let's. Just wiggle your antenna and... that's right. Just like that.

Shame upon shame, nothing good made "America's Most Watched 25 Top Shows" as determined by Nielsen Media Research for June 15-21, 2020. No science fiction. No fantasy. No horror. Nothing. Aren't you people watching television? Your assignment, should you choose to accept it, is to watch TV. That's it. That's your only job, and there is no Plan B. Skip the Redbox and stay in for once. There's plenty to see, as this column will most surely show. (There is one bright spot on that page, though: Nickelodeon's working on a new Smurfs cartoon; look for a premier in 2021. And if you see Peyo, say hi for me.)

In "The Roush Review," critic Matt Roush devotes a full page to *The Twilight Zone* and *The Vast of Night*. The new *Twilight Zone* season premiered on CBS All Access in late June and includes episodes featuring body switching, telepathy, and a "futuristic housewife." As long as the future of housewives is nothing like *The Stepford Wives*, sign me up. And if you haven't seen *The Vast of Night* yet, shame on you. It is so, so good. So good. Set in a deliciously moody 1950s New Mexico, there's a totally crush-worthy couple, popular mechanics and science, radio broadcasting, static and raster lines, and UFOs. The ending will truly get you. If you get it. In my household and circle of friends, there's some debate over just what exactly happened at the end. Watch it, and write your humble scribe care of this fanzine to share your take on the ending. Just what exactly happened? You tell us, true believer.

NBCUniversal launches its own streaming service, Peacock, in mid-July. There's a free tier. There's a paid tier. And there's some shows of note: An original *Brave New World* series based on the Aldous Huxley novel; a Dreamworks cartoon titled *Cleopatra in Space* (I have no idea what it's about, but that title is to blast off for!), and a reboot of *Battlestar Galactica*. Or a reboot of the reboot. Or a prequel to the sequel. Only time will tell. Sigh, Lon, sigh!

Pencil these in your calendar, fans and fellow freaks: Wednesday, July 8, *The 100*, sf drama on the CW... Saturday, July 11, *Early Edition* on Decades: A guy gets tomorrow's newspaper today; how'd I miss this show's run 1996-2000?... *The UnXplained* on History: William Shatner hosts this program about Harry Houdini's mysterious escapes; if you loved the Shat's DVD Club and *Full Moon Fright Night*, you might like this. Wonder if he's going for his own version of *In Search Of...?*... *Warrior Nun* is a new series streaming on Netflix: "an ancient order of religious women ... are in the habit of fighting evil forces on Earth." Get it? "Habit"? Oh, never mind... Thursday, July 16, *Killer Camp* premieres on The CW: It's like a reality competition

show, only set in an '80s horror movie whodunit. Tell me what you think; I'll be hiding behind these fingers... Saturday, July 18, *Believers on Travel*: Dramatizations of paranormal encounters... *Unidentified: Inside America's UFO Investigation* on *History*: Nuff said, true believers.

But the best part is always the programming grids. Let's see what's hiding between the lines: *Afternoons* brings us *One Step Beyond*, *Bradbury Theater*, and *Doctor Who* on *Retro*; and *The Munsters* on *Cozi*. We could just stop there! But when night falls, there's more. Mondays air *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* on *BBC America*; *Quantum Leap*, *Battlestar Galactica*, and *Stargate SG-1* on *Comet*; *Star Trek*, *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, and *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* on *Heroes*; and *Beyond the Unknown* and *Buried Worlds* on *Travel*. Tuesdays have *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* on *BBC America*, *DC's Stargirl* on *The CW*, *Comet's sf* lineup, *Heroes's Star Trek* sequence, and *Ghost Adventures* on *Travel*. Wednesdays offer *Star Trek: The Next Generation* on *BBC America*, *Marvel's Agents of SHIELD* on *ABC*, *The 100* on *The CW*, *Comet's evening fare*, *Heroes's Star Trek* sequence, and more paranormal programming on *Travel: Paranormal Caught on Camera* and *Expedition Bigfoot*. Thursdays sport *Star Trek: The Next Generation* on *BBC America*, the old chestnuts—the good chestnuts!—on *Comet* and *Heroes*, and *Ghost Adventures* and *The Dead Files* on *Travel*. (That network should just change its name already. Geezo, Beezo.) Fridays bring the tried and true from *Comet* and *Heroes*—best networks ever!—*Unidentified* and *Ancient Aliens* on *History*, *The Dead Files* on *Travel*, and on July 10, a *James Bond* marathon on *ThisTV*.



Weekends are also worth watching. Saturdays include *The Six Million Dollar Man* and *Bionic Woman* on *Cozi*; *The UnXplained* on *History*; *Drain* on *NatGeo* (“*Egypt’s sunken city*” and “*The Atomic Ghost Fleet*” are two episodes.); and *My Haunted House*, *Paranormal Emergency*, *Believers*, and *Hotel Paranormal* on *Travel*. And Sundays end the week with *DC’s Stargirl* on *The CW*, *Stargate SG-1* or *Battlestar Galactica* all night long—all night!—on *Comet*, *War of the Worlds* and the *Star Trek* sequence on *Heroes*, *Secrets of the Lost* and *Unearthed: Seven Wonders* on *Science*, *Snowpiercer’s* season finale July 12 on *TNT*, and a *Batman* double feature that night as well—with a *Tremors* marathon July 19 on *Sundance*.

And don’t you dare miss *Dark Shadows* weeknights at 9 p.m. on *Decades*. Monday through Friday, *Barnabas Collins*, people.

We fans even sneak into the crossword. 26 Across is Doctor ____, 33 Down is Boris’ cartoon partner, and 45 Down is *Fantastic Four* hero the Human _____. Send in your guesses care of this fanzine. We are legion. We will take over the worlds.

Until next time, true believers, this is “*Cathode Ray*,” slinking off somewhere between the test pattern and the American flag TV sign-off at the end of the day. Don’t drop the remote on your best foot forward. And dust *Charlotte’s web* off your rabbit ears. Turn on, tune in, and blast off!

Food of Famous Reviewer

Chili, Lace Bread, and Dump Peach Cobbler

Pat Patterson and Cedar Sanderson



I haven't always done these posts for authors – there has been a webcomic artist, and an editor, and... and today I'm cooking to highlight the work of a reviewer. I'd call him a book critic except that's a shallow description of what he is and what he does – because he doesn't critique in public. Instead, with warmth and humor, he spins a tale about each book he reads. His goal, if I can be so bold as to put a name to it, is to encourage. I suspect that Pat worries about running out of the good stuff to read, so he has made it his mission in life to make sure that authors get the praise they deserve so they

will write another book.

And I for one have been delighted to have his words on a few cold days. But it wasn't that I was thinking of when I asked him for a meal for ETWYRT. What I was thinking of was his love for his wife, his family, and his friendship. He may not write fiction, but his blog is well worth reading, as are his reviews. I'm going to send you to Papa Pat Rambles, but there's something you, my readers, can do that will make him happy. When you follow a link to one of his reviews, click that you found it helpful. He says that helps him help the authors he reviews.

Chili dinner-2

I added the spices by feel rather than measuring. I've made chili enough in my life to know what looks right – but for a pot this size, a tablespoon of the tame American chili powder will work. If you have the good Mexican stuff, start at a teaspoon and taste up from there.

Cedar,

This meal is $\frac{3}{4}$ homage to my grandmother and mother, and $\frac{1}{4}$ homage to being lazy. Both of them were famous cooks, and they cooked everything from scratch. The meal consists of lace bread, chili, and peach cobbler.

Cedar's note: When I opened Pat's email and read this I started to laugh. Pat and my First Reader could be brothers of the soul. This is exactly the meal request I'd get from my dear man if I asked what he wanted for dinner on a chilly evening.

A dump cake and pot of chili. Comfort food!

CHILI: this is something my mother made, but I have no idea what recipe she used, or if she used one at all.

Ingredients:

2 pounds of cube steak;
 2 pounds of ground beef;
 four onions;
 four sticks of celery;
 four one pound cans of spicy chili beans;
 two one pound cans of spicy black beans;
 three 28 ounce cans of diced or crushed tomatoes;
 one 28 ounce can of RoTel diced tomatoes and green chilies;
 spices to taste.

I cook this in an Oster roaster that's big enough to cook a turkey in, but any big kettle or stockpot would work.

Stick the cube steak in the freezer until it's slightly frozen; that will make it easier to cut.

Put all the (opened) cans of beans and tomatoes into your cook pot on medium heat.

Dice the onions and the celery, and dump them in the pot.

Brown and drain the ground beef, and stir it into the pot.



Remove the cube steak from the freezer. Slice it into pieces about the size of the end joint on your little finger. Brown the pieces, and stir them into the pot. The purpose of the cube steak pieces is to give added texture to the chili.

Add seasoning to your personal taste. I use garlic, curry, chili pepper, and a bit of vinegar. Cook it on low to medium heat until the celery and onions are soft. Serve it with lace bread.

Cedar's note: I cut this recipe down for the two of us. Way down. Like... maybe a third of what he's listed here. I don't know, but I'm guessing Pat comes from a large family. There's only two of us to eat this up! Also, I didn't add the curry powder. It still made a 12" dutch oven full. I finished mine in the oven to keep it from sticking, but this is a perfect meal for the slow cooker.

DUMP PEACH COBBLER: my grandmother was famous for her fruit cobblers. We have spent many hours out in the country picking blackberries. You have to watch for rattlesnakes; they don't eat blackberries, but birds do, and the rattlesnakes eat them.



1 cup Bisquick;
1 cup milk;
1 cup sugar;
1/2 cup butter melted;
one 29 ounce can of sliced peaches, drained

You can make this in a crock pot if you want to, but here's how to do it in a baking dish: heat oven to 375; stir together the Bisquick, milk, and butter into the dish. Mix the sugar and the peaches together, and dump them in the dish. Bake for 1 hour.

Cedar's note: I did modify this just a little. Extrapolating from Pat's comments on berries, I deduced that the one cup sugar was for unsweetened berries, and I had peaches in heavy syrup. I cut the sugar in half. As I discovered at the last moment we were out of milk, cream went in the bowl instead. It worked!

LACE BREAD: this is the only from-scratch recipe I'm sending you. I didn't know there was any other kind of cornbread until I went into the army.

In a cast iron skillet, cook four pieces of bacon. Leave the skillet well-lubricated, and save the bacon grease, because that's what you're going to cook the bread in. You may do as you wish with the bacon.

In a mixing bowl, combine 1 cup of cornmeal, 1 1/3 cup water, 1/3 cup bacon grease (you can substitute oil if you must), a tablespoon of flour, and a teaspoon of salt. You'll have to keep stirring this mixture, or the cornmeal will settle to the bottom.

Drop a tablespoon of the mixture onto the hot skillet. Ideally, you will see bubbles all the way through the cake as it cooks. When it is crispy on the edges, then flip it.

The goal is a thin, flat, pancake, crispy on the edges. I've always had to experiment to get the right consistency, by adding water and more bacon drippings to the mix, and almost always I have the heat too low at first, and the lace bread disintegrates. It's still good to





eat though.

I usually ask the First Reader's opinion on a meal. But when we'd settled into this one, I looked at him, a spoon in one hand and lace cake in the other. He had an expression of bliss on his face. What do you think?





Stormy Myths
By Angela K. Scott