

Tightbeam

May 2022



by José Sánchez

Tightbeam 332

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Letters of Comment

Editors:

Jose Sanchez's cover to Tightbeam #331 (April 2022) is amazing! Between this cover and Alan White's recent cover for Eldritch Science, we're really pulling out all the stops in terms of cover art in recent months. The back cover, while an older piece, is also impressive. Wonderful book ending, and what a joy to behold. I look forward to seeing more of Jose's work.

I like your use of the phrase "N3F Revival." We are indeed enjoying fine days in terms of fanzine and apa activity. The migration of some material from Tightbeam to FanActivity Gazette makes total sense thematically, and we now have a proper newszine. I was sorry to hear that Silver Empire shut up shop. Hopefully, if rights to the works they published weren't already held by the writers, the rights have reverted so we can see other publishers reprint and distribute their former catalog. I wasn't familiar with them previously, so I don't even know what I was missing. But "heroic, wondrous adventure fiction" sounds up my alley.

Graham J. "GrayJay" Darling's letter of comment on the mistaken origin of the unicorn and its cultural importance goes beyond my brief comments in response to Tightbeam #330, and I resonated with his reference to Physiologus and T.H. White's consideration of the unicorn as an "ur-wild beast that could only be tamed by a gentle maiden."

While I was somewhat familiar with the recent scandal involving comic book and fiction author Warren Ellis, I was unaware he'd penned an anime, *FreakAngels*, as reviewed by Jessi Silver. Interestingly, it started as a Web comic and was later collected and published by Avatar Press, which has published multiple Ellis comics over the years. I might have to look for the Avatar edition before checking out the animated series.

Thomas E. Simmons's comic book reviews are a welcome addition, and we get reviews of three issues of *Shogun Warriors*! I have the third issue and another in storage and will have to return to the series based on Simmons's comments. I hope to see more of his writing in the future.

I appreciated Jon D. Swartz's bio-bibliography of Frederik Pohl. His origins in the Futurians, fandom, and sf magazines are fascinating, and Mr. Swartz's profile makes me want to return to his writing. I have a handful of his books cataloged in my personal library, including *Alternating Currents*, *Shadow of Tomorrow*, *Space Merchants*, and the anthology *Star Science Fiction Stories No. 3*. Which do you recommend I dip into first?

Will Mayo's short reviews are always welcome, and we end the issue with your recipe for Greek stew. I've yet to make any of the recipes offered in Cedar Sanderson's column. Have any Neffers made anything in particular that they'd recommend?

Thanks to all who submitted content to this ish of Tightbeam. It was well worth reading.

Sincerely,
Heath Row

Editors::

I was getting close to being able to respond to Tightbeam 330, really I was, but Tightbeam 331 showed up, so it's time for a patented twofer, some response to both issues at once.

330... Two locs, not bad. Should have been able to do as well this time... I have to wonder that with a lack of real heroes in many stories, has the idea of the good person as hero or superhero a tired old trope that no one believes in anymore? Also, I have just completed a full edit of a sec-

ond book by D.J. Holmes, and the grand story continues from Goodreads and Amazon. I have also had the chance to read more short stories from Dreamforge Anvil Magazine.

I think what I need to do is watch all Matrix movies from the start to end to grasp the full story line. Maybe, there is a book on all the stories and Easter Eggs within it all. I might also have to re-read all of the Foundation books in order to realize the story line, and catch up with books in the series I might not have read.

331... I met Judith Merrill several times in the long ago, and found she had little appreciation for fans and the conventions she ran. I have met Emily Pohl-Weary once, and a very nice young lady she is. Merrill appeared on the provincial educational channel for many years as the Undoc-tor, taking shots, deserved or otherwise, at episodes of Doctor Who, and other things/people she didn't especially like.

I haven't written much here, but I think I have commented on what I can comment on. With luck, I will have more inspiration the next time, and I'm looking forward to it. See you then.

Yours,
Lloyd Penney.

Anime

The World of Otome Games is Tough for Mobs Review by Jessi Silver

Episode Summary: In his former life, Leon was a typical Japanese adult who happened to have been blackmailed by his younger sister into completing an otome game for her. He does it grudgingly, complaining the entire time. Unfortunately once he completes it he gets little time to celebrate his freedom from the task before taking a fatal spill down a staircase. Having been reincarnated, it takes Leon several years to realize that his new life exists within the boundaries of the otome game that he so despised.



In the world of this game, men are second-class citizens. Rather than go to the academy to try to woo a young woman as his suitor, Leon is tossed into an arranged marriage with a woman 50 years his senior. Rather than sit idly by for this scenario, Leo goes on an adventure using his prior knowledge of the game to uncover a futuristic space ship that he makes his own. Returning to his father with treasures unimaginable, Leon buys his way into the academy to try his luck there. But searching for love among the elite might be a challenge in and of itself.



Wow, they sound like my kind of people!

Impressions: One thing I've come to believe is that often the thing that oppressors must fear the most is that the social positions will somehow be reshuffled and they become the oppressed. Cue entertainment like this, which stars a protagonist so maladjusted that he can't afford a form

of entertainment aimed at an underserved segment of society some leeway in portraying a form of social fantasy that makes his fee-fees sad. Talking about this kind of thing can be touchy; as someone who's personally invested in the idea of equality for all humans, my ideal endgame doesn't really involve seeing certain people suffer and I think turning the tables would ultimately be the wrong thing to do. But there have been times where I've wished that people behaving in awful ways toward others could get even just a small taste of their own medicine, on the off chance it might help them gain some valuable perspective.

Anyway, about this series. I frankly haven't played many otome games myself, but as someone who is (or was) in the genre's target audience, I have some sense of its appeal. Looking past all the pretty window dressing (which might be a little bit difficult, depending on how attracted you are to cute anime guys), I think the fantasy at play in these stories is simply the scenario in which the heroine (or the player) has agency over their life and relationships. It's unfortunately not a reality for some folks for whom expectations regarding their conduct as a product of their gender are more pronounced.

This series' attitude regarding this form of entertainment gives off the vibes of being written by someone who doesn't "get it." It seems to bubble from the same rancid well that designates feminists as "man-haters" by constructing various straw-man positions about what feminists might want to do to society. In short, it designs its key conceit around an idea that has no interest in representing its subject accurately, because the point isn't to make real commentary – it's to make fun of something.

So perhaps the real question is – do I feel like watching anime that makes fun of an entertainment genre that already gets picked on enough as it is? Nah, not really.

Pros: Usually I don't have too difficult a time coming up with something positive to say about most series, because in spite of some truly terrible content in many cases there's some aspect of the premise or the production that manages to stand out in one way or another. This isn't nearly the worst premiere I've ever seen, but it just kind of left me with a bad feeling and not much nice to say about it. I suppose the animation was decent enough.



Cons: "Not the worst I've seen" really is damning with faint praise, though. There are a lot of series that seem more outwardly mean-spirited than this one, but there are very few that I've watched and just disliked most of the characters. Leon is a jerk, his sister from his former life seems like she was kind of a jerk, and the gender-based villainy going on in this world just seems to have turned many old women into villainous moustache-twirling baddies, and I just don't really have time for it.

Hopefully Leo can pay his tuition in gold and jewels.

Content Warnings: Cartoonish sexism. Age gap relationships. Violence.

Would I Watch More? – Sometimes shows like this are so out there that I'm compelled to watch a little more just to kind of enjoy the grotesque unraveling of the plot. This episode really wasn't fun to watch in that way and I can't imagine watching any more of it.

Ya Boy Kongming! Review by Jessi Silver

Episode Summary: General Kongming, a brilliant military strategist during the time of the War of the Three Kingdoms, wished on his deathbed to be reborn into a peaceful world. He awakens on the street in what he believes to be “hell,” but what is really Shibuya at Halloween. The tides of the crowd bring him to a dance club where he’s suddenly drawn in by the sublime voice of Eiko, one of the club employees and part-time singer. While the rest of the crowd couldn’t care less about what’s happening on stage, Kongming is moved.



Eiko wants more than anything to become a successful singer, but keeps getting rejected by agents. Kongming, lost in this strange futuristic world, knows one thing for certain – Eiko has talent. With his skills as a strategist (and his status as Eiko’s number one fan), Kongming vows to help her gain an audience and achieve stardom.

Impressions: From their earliest days, human beings have made music. Whether tapping on stones, blowing into reed flutes, or programming music into synthesizers, music is one of the more truly universal creative urges of the human race. It’s how we celebrate our victories, mourn our deaths, and simply have a good time. In fact, even Chinese generals from centuries ago can appreciate modern music, despite the medium’s many changes and transformations over the span of 1800 years or so. Or at least, that’s the assumption that this series aims to convince us has merit.

And to be fair, this episode does a marvelous job in its convincing. The premise here is silly, to be sure, and some of the humor relies loosely on knowledge of a place and time in history that most Westerners (including myself) are unlikely to know much about. Yet this issue is solved by Eiko’s presence – she’s not stupid, but she’s also not a Three Kingdoms otaku the way, say, her employer is. So her confusion mirrors our own confusion in a great way (although I’m sure there are a few of you reading right now that are likely experts on the subject and don’t really need any hand-holding). Aside from the very specific Three Kingdoms gags, though, Kongming is simply the latest in a long line of endearing “fish out of water” characters whose ignorance of (and quick adaptation to) modern culture fuels their particular charm. His formality is goofy and unfamiliar, but his reactions and mannerisms are genuine – this is why he works so well as a character.

Eiko, for her part, serves as an excellent “straight man,” becoming flustered over her strange new acquaintances’ pure ignorance of the modern world (which she continues to assume is just an act taken too far). What makes this contrast work is Eiko’s kindness and empathy – in short, she’s never too mean, even in cases where one might be really, really frustrated. And, as an important character trait, she keeps pushing forward even when it might feel right to give up. Her motivations at this point aren’t complicated, but in that sense they’re universal. She just wants to achieve her goals but doesn’t have a clear path forward to do so.

This episode was a real charmer, just one of what I assume will be many pleasant surprises this anime season. If the Funimation/Crunchyroll merger has gotten you down, this is a great reason to pick up an inexpensive HIDIVE subscription to check it out.

Pros: Have I ever mentioned how I enjoy anime “musicals?” While there are very few anime that I’d categorize as musicals in the typical storytelling sense (meaning that the characters move the plot forward by singing rather than simply speaking lines), there are several anime that punctuate emotional moments using insert songs, and this appears to be one of them. I really enjoy this; it tends to break up some of the dialog and provide variety while I’m watching. Of course not every type of anime lends itself well to this sort of thing, but as a story focused directly on music it would be stranger if this one didn’t incorporate any singing.

The visuals of the series are bright and fun. The neon lights and the bustling atmosphere of Shibuya’s nightlife are portrayed in an appealing way. Eiko’s acoustic guitar-backed singing in her apartment is punctuated by the early evening light of the setting sun. It’s a very nice looking show.

Cons: While just a minor issue due to other factors that offset this, I still think knowledge of the Three Kingdoms saga would help people get a fuller grasp of some of the humor. It’s obviously not deal-breaking but I think a lot of folks may end up shrugging their shoulders a time or two. On that note, the narrative does poke fun at Eiko’s boss a bit, who’s a consummate Three Kingdoms otaku, so it’s at least a little aware of that as a factor.



This partnership might become a perfect match.

Content Warnings: Mild nudity. Depiction of a past suicide attempt (nearly jumping in front of a train). Alcohol use.

Would I Watch More? – This was a charming premiere that does a lot with a premise that, at first, I wasn’t sure about. I’m definitely a sucker for “unique” anime series, and this one was definitely that! I’m really interested in watching more.

The Executioner and Her Way of Life Review by Jessi Silver

Episode Summary: Menou is both a priestess and an executioner, tasked with protecting her world from the destruction wrought by outsiders summoned from Japan. When the noblesse – the rulers of her country – complete their most recent summoning, Menou spends little time with their latest discarded “Lost One” before discovering that his destructive power has the potential to be extremely deadly. After executing him she learns that he wasn’t the only one pulled through the dimensional gate.

Menou has odd dreams that almost feel like memories, of being in Japan, going to school, and being friends with her classmates. But there’s always one mysterious figure just out of sight that she knows in her heart was her best friend. Even her priestess training never managed to erase these odd partial recollections. When Menou confronts the second Lost One to arrive in her world, the girl seems to be incredibly familiar.

Impressions: While I'm the sort of anime fan who feels that every genre has its standout examples, when a genre by its nature is indulgent of certain traits that don't jive with my worldview very well, it becomes more difficult to find examples that I can recommend without major caveats. *Ascendance of a Bookworm* is one of my favorite isekai stories, and yet even in that case, considering that the heroine's adult mind is confined to a kid's body, there are some minor hurdles regarding her in-universe crush on a boy "her age." Some series are so inherently gross that the phrase "just shut it all down" has crossed my mind. And yet, some of the most interesting genre stories are those which seem conscientious of those kinds of flaws and manage to create something interesting in light of them.



The Executioner and Her Way of Life asks "what if we acknowledged the fact that OP protagonists with unfettered use of world-breaking powers are bad, actually?" and formulates that idea into a pretty interesting set-up.



I will admit, I heard a synopsis of this series and thought to myself "oh yes, finally a show about a cool woman offing the endless string of same-face, rancid isekai chuds that I can't stand." Pettiness aside, the first episode is much more subtle and well-built than my brief wave of spite might have considered. There's a real sense that, while Menou's world has benefitted from the kinds of technology that know-it-all Japanese Earthlings have brought with them, there have also been consequences. These consequences have affected the various classes in unequal ways, and the aristocracy seems to be summoning people mostly for their own gain. And as destructive as these Lost Ones might be, there's also the troubling fact that they're people who ended up in their situation not by choice (the otaku's wishes to be pulled into a fantasy world notwithstanding). Menou's job is tragic, akin to killing wild animals who wander into urban areas and pose too great a risk to the local population. It's a problem caused by humans that results in (basically) innocent victims. I'd be interested to know if this is explored further.

Oh buddy...

Aside from these aspects, this is just a genuinely entertaining opening episode, with some neat action and interesting magical system. While I feel like some of it was made especially for me, I also think that anyone who enjoys fantasy in general, or even some dyed-in-the-wool isekai fans who can manage a sense of humor about the genre, would have a good time with this one.

Pros: This is an example of a story built within the boundaries of an oversaturated genre that manages to distinguish itself by twisting the formula. This can be a tough balance to maintain, but I get the impression that whoever created the story has some affection for its genre's tropes, so it gives the impression of an examination rather than a mockery.

I like that the characters who are centered in this episode are primarily women. While I think there are unflattering interpretations that could be made, I of course often appreciate when various women have central roles rather than one who might be tokenized.

Cons: I'm made a little uneasy by the fact that the conflict between the various factions in the world of this story seem to be fought using the innocent lives of uninvolved people. It's the sort of mechanic that really begs further examination by the narrative, and I'm not sure how heavily the story delves into that.

I'm not a huge fan of Menou's assistant, Momo, who's annoyingly touchy-feely. I think a show like this can benefit from a little levity, but I'm not sure her fondling really adds much.

Content Warnings: Violence resulting in death. Mild fanservice.

Would I Watch More? – This seems like an interesting fantasy series with some compelling world-building that's already come into play. I like the protagonist, who's strong without being cartoonish. I suspect that this season will result in a lot of series being added to my watch-list, though, and while this series is fun for now I'm also not ecstatic about it to the point that I would clear off my calendar to keep up with it.

Books

Will Mayo Reviews Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll And Mr. Hyde*

This is a by now familiar story of a scientist's effort's to explore man's darker side only to have his efforts turn addictive and overwhelm his civilized side. It is a story containing elements of the other, multiple personality disorder and the werewolf in its transformative sequences. Not bad for one slender novel whose first draft its author burned in the fireplace out of frustration. I, for one, would recommend it. It comes in handy for a day's reading.

Will Mayo Reviews Stephen King's *Under The Dome*

One of the more interesting novels I've read by Stephen King over the years has been his *Under The Dome* in which a small New England town is entirely enclosed in an invisible dome that none can enter and none can escape. At last, when the residents of this burg are fighting to their last breath amid smoke and the violence they harbor within, they discover that the dome has been created by the alien child that has imagined them and they appeal to this alien to release them. A good read if any. I would recommend it.

Will Mayo Reviews Thomas Lynch's *The Undertaking*

Because death is a constant theme for us horror and fantasy writers. This is a thought provoking book from a man who makes it his business to deal with death. The blood and brains and tears of it all. The broken families left behind. He looks back on 25 years and more of embalming and burying his town's citizens and then he pauses to give instructions for his own funeral before saying, disregard all and love one another. And remember. Yes, always remember. A handy book for those who may or may not be pondering their mortality. And death is always in season.

Comics

Demon in a Bottle Is Not the Best Story Tackling Iron Man's Alcoholism by Stephanie Souders

Demon in a Bottle does deserve its fame. After all, it is the arc that officially introduces Tony Stark's drinking problem. But I have just spent four three-plus hour long live streams on my YouTube channel unpacking a later - and, in my view, richer - run that is often confused with Demon in a Bottle but in fact goes further than its predecessor in exploring just how low a man can sink while hobbled by addiction. The run in question is Denny O'Neil's, the meat of which is covered by #163-200 in the first Iron Man volume.

In prior articles, I have mentioned O'Neil's story in passing as the yardstick by which I measure other comics (particularly if they feature Iron Man). The reasons for this are several, but here, I'd like to focus on two that are especially relevant to present-day comic book industry trends.

You may have noticed, for one, that today's comic book creators are very, very eager to "update" their casts, replacing legacy characters with new heroes who are perceived to be more "representative" of the modern audience. Now I for one don't object to increasing diversity in theory — but these days, it's often done without sufficient development of the new characters and with no acknowledgement that a newbie might need to suffer a difficult period of adjustment at first before fitting well into the role.

Want a new, more diverse character to take up a heroic mantle? Then do it right: follow O'Neil's example. When Tony starts drinking again (in #167) and ultimately becomes too disabled to function as Iron Man (#169), Rhodey - who by this point has long been established as a top-notch fighter pilot and a heroic companion on some of Tony's adventures - dons the armor and takes up the responsibility Tony has abdicated. But this is not a job Rhodey accepts with confidence. He doesn't really know all the features of Tony's armor and has to rely on two former SI technicians to explain the specs to the best of their ability (which still doesn't cover everything Tony would know). Further, Rhodey has an entirely different personality, an entirely different manner of speaking (which hints at his more working-class roots without being insulting), and an entirely different style of fighting. We see that he is smart and capable — but he's still a distinct person with his own history and his own motivations. And crucially, the story allows him to be stressed out - to the point of developing crippling migraines - as he attempts to hold things together while Tony is away. So in summary: O'Neil gives us a realistic learning curve — and uses an existing character who's an eminently logical choice for Tony's replacement.

Another popular modern trope is the deconstruction of the hero. These days, arcs of this type read - to me - as mean-spirited attacks on older characters who certain creators have decided, sans evidence, are "problematic" in some way. (Chris Cantwell's Iron Man, anyone? I'm restraining myself from excess complaining about that run in any place other than my personal blog and YouTube channel, but holy hell.) But there was a time when even deconstructions were done right. Frank Miller's Daredevil: Born Again is one such success (which I may discuss further next month), and O'Neil's Iron Man is another.

And why are these older stories better, you may ask? Because they pair a deconstruction with a reconstruction that demonstrates the hero's resilience and capacity for redemption and growth. In O'Neil's Iron Man, the humiliation of Tony Stark is both total and brutal. He loses his dignity (in one issue, we see an inebriated Tony stumbling desperately through his armory clad in nothing but his underwear), he loses his company to his worst enemy, and he ultimately loses access to his fortune and all of his homes. By #182, he's a "skell" indistinguishable from the rest of New York's homeless — and worse, he's so psychologically broken that he very nearly chooses to die of exposure in a blizzard rather than live in his self-inflicted hell for one more second. But then — a newborn baby turns him around. And from #183-200, we get the story of Tony getting sober, starting a new company, building his new Silver Centurion armor, and - in the end - triumphing over the psychopath who drove him to alcoholic ruin in the first place. Thus, the unmaning of Iron Man has a purpose: to demonstrate that Tony can bounce back from his own terrible mistakes and deal with their consequences with humility and courage. It's a beautiful, emotional story — one that Cantwell could stand to read in greater detail (assuming he's read it at all, which — press X to doubt).

Demon in a Bottle is a classic for a reason — but Denny O'Neil's accomplishments in addressing the same theme have never been surpassed. Read it — whether you care about Iron Man or not.

Dick Tracy

I've since been informed by another penpal that the Dick Tracy comic strip is still going strong. It's just not apparently in circulation in my area. I stand corrected. Nice to keep a good thing going.

...Will Mayo

Con Report

The Resurrection of Pulp by Cedar Sanderson

I'm at FantaSci 2022 this weekend, reporting from Raleigh, North Carolina. Even as I speak, with only Thursday for Precon, and Friday of the con, I'm having a blast, and I have two more days of this to go. This post isn't going to be about the con, necessarily, as I plan a full AAR on my blog Monday *noting that Monday is a Big Day as it's the first day of my new job.

No, I want to talk about pulp fiction, my love for it, and the new wave of pulps, carried to us by Amazon. There was a panel Friday, Pulp (Science) Fiction, asking "Has Indie E-Publishing become the new Pulp?" Now, I rarely go to panels at a con, unless I'm on the panel, because I have trouble not keeping my mouth shut when something is wrong, and, well, this one was no exception. I begged the moderator's pardon later, and she graciously forgave me, but in all honesty, the audience got feisty on this one and that's not always a bad thing for a panel, especially in a relatively small audience (there were about 20 people in the room, counting the panelists). Pulp Panel: JP Chandler, Jonna Hayden, Ian Malone, and Henry Vogel

Is Indie the new pulp? I certainly hope so! There are a lot of parallels. Including with some people thinking that rather than a wave of innovation, they are a tsunami of crap. Am I saying all

pulp is good reading. I am not. I collect pulp. I aspire to write pulp. I do not think that what I write is crap (don't ask me that question right after I finish a book, though), I don't think what Henry Vogel (one of the panelists) writes is crap. In fact, learning more about his background in Indie Comics (who, as he points out, did this before publishing, as did music), made me regret not having read more of his sword and planet series, which I will rectify soon.

There are few things that poke me in a raw spot harder than the implication that Indie = Crap, and it's not simply that I am one. No, it's the community. Walking around the con, I can't get more than a few feet without seeing a familiar face, getting a hug, talking shop... this is why I love cons. And the writing I see from this community? Is varied in ways you might not expect at first. Are we brilliant wordsmiths? Nah. We aim to entertain. And that is just what pulp was about. Learning, in the serials and magazines that are making a renaissance as anthologies. Honing a craft through direct exposure to the grindstone of fandom and reader feedback. You should read your reviews. Just don't let them take the edge off your writing, instead figure out the angle that will make your writing sharper, more incisive, cleaner. Then write more.

The market will, given time, correct itself. Writers who simply can't learn, and improve, will see their sales dip. Readers will give up on being lured into an awful story by a slick cover and blurb, and will learn how to find books they want to read. As authors, it behooves us to not only teach them how to find us, but to learn how to use the tools that will help them in that search. Word of mouth, always, is king. Be active where there are people that like the same kinds of things to read that you do – you are writing what you like to read, yes? And it's not a quick paycheck. There is no get-rich quick in Indie, despite the wild rumors.

I joined in on a D&D session run by the Rogue DM, and here's another child of Pulp in action, a game that has endured decades to tell stories impromptu.

Here's the other thing. Pulp swept across the nation in the way that it did because there was a populace hungry for entertaining reading material, not the 'edifying' books that the gatekeepers preferred to push. I have brittle, crumbling paperbacks from this era, but I also have books from the era before this, when the piracy was cross-Atlantic, and in my 1898 American Kipling editions (First US printing was almost certainly unauthorized) I see the precursor to pulp. People want exciting stories, they want stories about ordinary heroes, and the extraordinary.

Pulp was about cheap paper, and cheap stories, and it touched the hearts and minds of far more than anyone could have predicted. In an era when paper is getting scarce and expensive, electrons are rising up as the conveyor of strange tales, told dirt cheap. Ebooks are the new Pulp, and their sibling the Audiobook right alongside them. I, for one, plan to surf this wave as a reader and a writer, and may it never wane.

Films

Will Mayo Reviews The Black Cat

"The Black Cat" is an early movie starring Boris Karloff as a Satanic worshiper out to sacrifice a virgin to his idol and Bela Lugosi as the rival, equally fiendish, who outwits him. Although a black cat figures in this film, it bears no resemblance to the Edgar Allan Poe story of the same name but is nonetheless worth watching. I, for one, enjoyed it.

Will Mayo Reviews Ghost

One particular movie that leaves me thinking decades after the fact is the movie "Ghost" starring Patrick Swayze as the ghost of a murdered man who returns to comfort his beloved and seek justice on his killers. Whoopie Goldberg wins honors as the psychic that shows the way. I suggest you see this one. It is one good flick.

Will Mayo Reviews Tron

There was that movie Tron of about forty-odd years ago in which a child literally dived into a video game to become the hero of his imagination. Since then philosophers and scientists across the world have come up with the theory that we're all living in a video game, each one of us a simulation of some child's imagination. But Tron was the first to imagine this idea on a smaller scale. I think of it still. [GP: Amusingly, Tron is no longer available in full length. The laser gadget — a real fusion simulator — was classified, and the laser sequences are no longer in the video.]

Music

Will Mayo Reviews Donovan's Atlantis

Perhaps the greatest of the speculative songs of my childhood was Donovan's song Atlantis that paid homage to a lost land. In this song, he tells of how the kings of Atlantis colonized the earth and spread their gods and legends far and wide before the sea took them at last. More than fifty years later, I can hear Donovan proclaiming, "Hail, Atlantis!" And I am moved all over again.

SerCon

Donald A. Wollheim Bio-Bibliography

by

Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D.

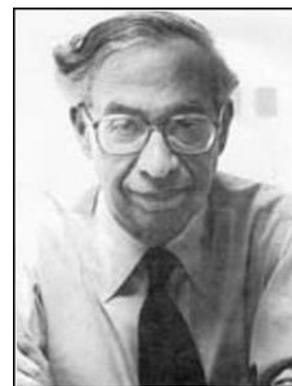
N3F Historian

Donald Allen Wollheim (October 1, 1914 – November 2, 1990) was a science fiction (SF) fan, author, editor, and publisher. Over his career, he used several pseudonyms, including David Grinnell and Martin Pearson.

As David Grinnell, he published most of his SF novels intended for adult readers. As Martin Pearson, he published his "Ajax Calkins" series of stories that became the basis for his novel *Destiny's Orbit* (1962), and its sequel, *Destination: Saturn* (1967), written with Lin Carter. Wollheim's novels for young readers were published under his own name.

Early Life/Activities

He was among the first SF fans, publishing numerous fanzines and editing *Fanciful Tales of Space and Time* and *The Phantagraph* in the 1930s. His importance to early fandom is chroni-



cluded in the 1974 book *The Immortal Storm* by Sam Moskowitz and in the 1977 book *The Futurians* by Damon Knight.

Wollheim's first published SF story, "The Man from Ariel," appeared in the January, 1934, issue of *Wonder Stories*, when he was 19. He was not paid, however. When he learned that other authors had also not been paid, he wrote about it in the *Bulletin of the Terrestrial Fantascience Guild*; eventually, publisher Hugo Gernsback settled with him and other authors out of court.

Wollheim helped organize the first SF convention. A group of fans from New York met with a group from Philadelphia on October 22, 1936, in Philadelphia. Out of this meeting, plans were formed for future regional and national meetings, including the first Worldcon.

In 1937 Wollheim founded the Fantasy Amateur Press Association whose first mailing was in July, 1937. In 1938, with several friends, he formed The Futurian Science Literary Society (The Futurians), arguably the most important and best-known of all the SF clubs. At one time or another, the membership included Isaac Asimov, Hannes Bok, David A. Kyle, Frederik Pohl, Cyril Kornbluth, James Blish, Judith Merrill, Robert A. W. Lowndes, Richard Wilson, Damon Knight, Chester Cohen, Virginia Kidd, Doris Baumgardt (Leslie Perri), Jack Rubinson (Jack Robins), Joseph Harry Dockweiler (Dirk Wylie), John B. Michel (Hugh Raymond), Jack Gillespie, Mary Byers Kornbluth, Art Saha, and Larry T. Shaw.

In 1941, Wollheim was one of the Charter Members of our club, the National Fantasy Fan Federation (N3F, NFFF).

In 1943, he married fellow Futurian Elsie Balter (1910 – 1996), who would later help him found his own SF book publishing company.

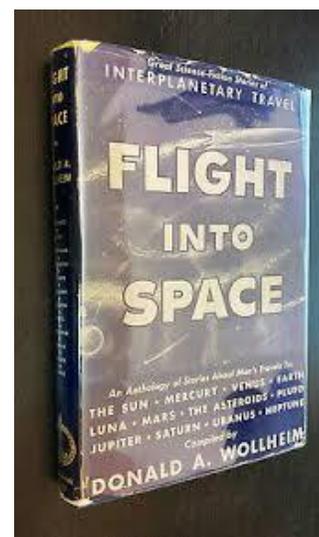
SF Anthologies/Magazines Edited

Wollheim edited the first SF anthology to be mass-marketed, *The Pocket Book of Science Fiction* (1943). It was also the first book containing the words "science fiction" in its title. This paperback anthology included stories by Robert Heinlein, Theodore Sturgeon, John Collier, Stanley G. Weinbaum, Don A. Stuart (John W. Campbell, Jr.), and H. G. Wells.

Shortly before World War II, Wollheim edited two of the early periodicals devoted entirely to SF, *Stirring Science Stories* and *Cosmic Stories*.

In 1945 Wollheim edited the first hardcover anthology from a major publisher and the first omnibus, *The Viking Portable Novels of Science*, with novel-length stories by H. G. Wells, John Taine, H. P. Lovecraft, and Olaf Stapledon.

Wollheim also anonymously edited the first anthology of original SF, *The Girl With the Hungry Eyes* (Avon, 1947), with short fiction by Fritz Leiber, William Tenn, Stephen Grendon (August Derleth), P. Schuyler Miller, Frank Belknap Long, and Manly Wade Wellman.



Juvenile Novels

Wollheim's Mike Mars series of novels for young readers, eight titles in all (1961 – 1964), explored different facets of the NASA space program.

His three "Secret" novels from Winston (1954 - 1959, another juvenile series, were also well received.

Avon Books

Between 1947 and 1951 he was the editor at the pioneering paperback publisher Avon Books, where he made available highly affordable editions of the works of A. Merritt, H. P. Lovecraft, and C. S. Lewis, bringing these genre authors a wider readership.

During this period he also edited the influential Avon Fantasy Reader and the Avon Science Fiction Reader series.

In 1950, he edited two issues of Avon's Out of This World Adventures, a pulp magazine with comic book inserts.

Ace Books

In 1952 Wollheim left Avon to work at the Ace Magazine Company and spearhead a new paperback book list, Ace Books. In 1953 he introduced SF to the Ace lineup, and for 20 years as editor-in-chief was responsible for their renowned SF list.

Wollheim invented the Ace Doubles series which consisted of pairs of books, bound back-to-back with two "front" covers. Among the authors who made their paperback debuts in Ace Doubles were Philip K. Dick, Samuel R. Delany, Leigh Brackett, Ursula K. Le Guin, and John Brunner. Wollheim also helped develop other important SF authors, including Marion Zimmer Bradley, Jack Vance, and Roger Zelazny. While at Ace, he and co-editor Terry Carr began an annual anthology series, The World's Best Science Fiction.

DAW Books

Upon leaving Ace Books, Wollheim and his wife founded DAW Books, named for his initials. DAW can claim to be the first mass market specialist SF and fantasy fiction publishing house, issuing its first four titles in April, 1972. Most of the writers whom he had developed at Ace went with him to DAW. With the help of Arthur Saha, Wollheim also edited and published the popular Annual World's Best Science Fiction anthology series from 1971 until his death. His daughter, Elizabeth (Betsy) Wollheim, is now president of the company, after working there since 1975.

Non-Fiction Books

Wollheim's biography of Lee de Forest, the inventor, Lee de Forest: Advancing the Electronic Age, was published in 1962.

His *Operation Phantasy: The Best from The Phantagraph*, containing material that had been published in his early fanzine, was published in 1967.

His *The Universe Makers: Science Fiction Today* (Harper & Row, 1971) was seen as important in the genre when it was first published. It was “a discussion of themes and philosophy in science fiction.”

Honors/Awards/Recognitions

In 1975, Wollheim was inducted into the First Fandom Hall of Fame.

The Science Fiction and Fantasy Hall of Fame honored him in 2002, its 7th class of two deceased and two living persons. He was the third person inducted primarily for his work as an editor or publisher (after Hugo Gernsback and John W. Campbell in 1996).

One of his short stories, “Mimic,” was made into a motion picture of the same name. It starred Mira Sorvino, Jeremy Northam, and Josh Brolin, and was released in 1997.

His story, “The Embassy,” was dramatized on radio’s *Dimension X* on June 3, 1950 (starring Joseph Julian); and was heard again on *X Minus One* on July 28, 1955 (starring John Larkin).

Critical Comments

In the 1950s, award-winning author Ursula K. Le Guin called Wollheim “the tough, reliable editor of Ace Books,” during which time he published her first two novels, in an Ace Double.

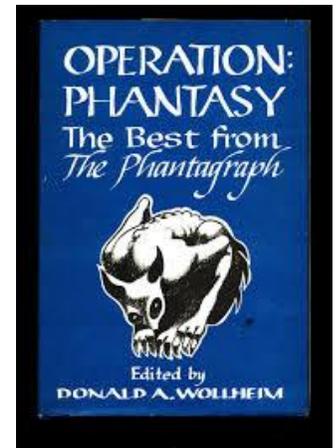
SF award-winning author Robert Silverberg said that Donald Wollheim was “one of the most significant figures in 20th Century American science fiction publishing.”

In 1966, fellow author/editor Algis Budrys gave him a *Galaxy Bookshelf Award* “for doing his job.”

His daughter once stated: “In true editorial fashion, he was honest about the quality of his own writing. He felt it was fair to middling at best. He always knew that his great talent was as an editor.”

Some Concluding Remarks

His *The Men from Ariel* (1982) reprinted some of his short fiction; and the *Donald A. Wollheim Science Fiction Collection* (2016) reprinted three of his more popular stories. Although he was mainly known for his work in SF, he edited all kinds of magazines: fantasy, detective, sports, and western periodicals. At one time he was a member of the Science Fiction Writers of America, the Mystery Writers of America, and the Western Writers of America. He lived in New York City all of his life. His parents were Jacob Lewis Wollheim, a physician, and Jacob’s wife Rose Grinnell Wollheim. Donald earned a B. A. degree from New York University in 1935. He died at the Jewish Home and Hospital in Manhattan. According to his family, he died in his sleep, apparently of a heart attack.



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 Note: In addition to the above, some Internet sites were consulted, along with several of Wollheim's books.

Poetry

Will Mayo Reviews Sara Teasdale's *There Will Come Soft Rains*

In Sara Teasdale's poem, "There Will Come Soft Rains," rain falls over ruins of forgotten cities across the land. There are no people. The people are long gone from this earth. But the rain falls and nature covers all. We can take comfort in that. It is a future worth considering as well as a worthwhile poem.

Short Stories

Will Mayo Thinks On Sleepy Hollow

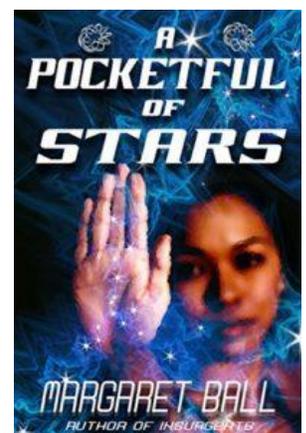
One of the stories that thrilled me as a boy was Washington Irving's *The Legend Of Sleepy Hollow* with its headless horseman. This kept me up many a night. Years later I was interested to learn that there actually is a Sleepy Hollow in which strange things continue to happen to this day. But that, I suppose, is another story.

Food of Famous Authors

Cedar Sanderson Cooks Margaret Ball's Baklava

A while back I noted that I had a commenter by the name of Margaret Ball. "Can't be," I told the First Reader. "Must be a common name." I followed the blog link in her username and found a lovely fabric artist's blog. "It's not her..." I was wrong. It was indeed that Margaret Ball, and I had a small fangirl moment when I discovered that not only did she follow my blog, she was writing and releasing books Indie. Her *Applied Topology* series has a special connection for me – I did the covers. So when I asked if she would be willing to take part in this series, it wasn't a surprise that she said yes.

And it shouldn't have been a surprise, given the character's background in that trilogy, that what she gave me was a Greek specialty. Thalia Kostis in the books is a fiery young woman who will tell you emphatically that it's not magic, it's simply math, no matter what it looks like to an observer. The books are delightful reads. I found myself giggling over the first one, devoured the second, and have the third fairly



18 high in my TBR pile with some regrets for lack of time to read like I want to.

TIGHTBEAM

You'll want to pick up a copy of *Pocketful of Stars* to start out on the trilogy, and if you are anything like me, you'll appreciate that the whole series is available for immediate binge reading. Baklava is one of the First Reader's favorites, and I've always meant to try my hand at making it. I am not, as I assured Margaret when she sent me the recipe, crazy enough to try making my own fillo (phyllo? filo? spellings vary) dough. I've worked with that stuff before and whew! it would be like making paper. So I was delighted to dive into this recipe.

Baklava

1 lb. phyllo pastry, thawed
1 lb. finely chopped nuts (traditionally walnuts, but sometimes I use pecans) [Cedar's note: I used pistachios, since I have a JMS who doesn't like nuts but said she'd try it with pistachios]
1 cup butter, melted
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar
2 cinnamon sticks
1 tsp. ground cinnamon
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup water
1 T lemon juice

Mise en place is very important for this recipe, as you will have to work fast once you open the fillo dough.

Preheat oven to 350. Butter an 8 x 11 or larger baking pan. [Cedar's note: I seem to have lost my 9x13 baking pan in the move. So I wound up using a jelly-roll pan, which is something like 11x17, the exact size of the fillo dough I had. Mix $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sugar, ground cinnamon, and chopped nuts. Unroll the phyllo and cut through all layers to fit your baking pan; you should wind up with two stacks of phyllo sheets and some scraps. Lay down 4-6 phyllo sheets, brushing each with melted butter.

Now repeat until you run out of nuts:

 Sprinkle ground nut mixture over phyllo.

 Lay down two more buttered sheets.

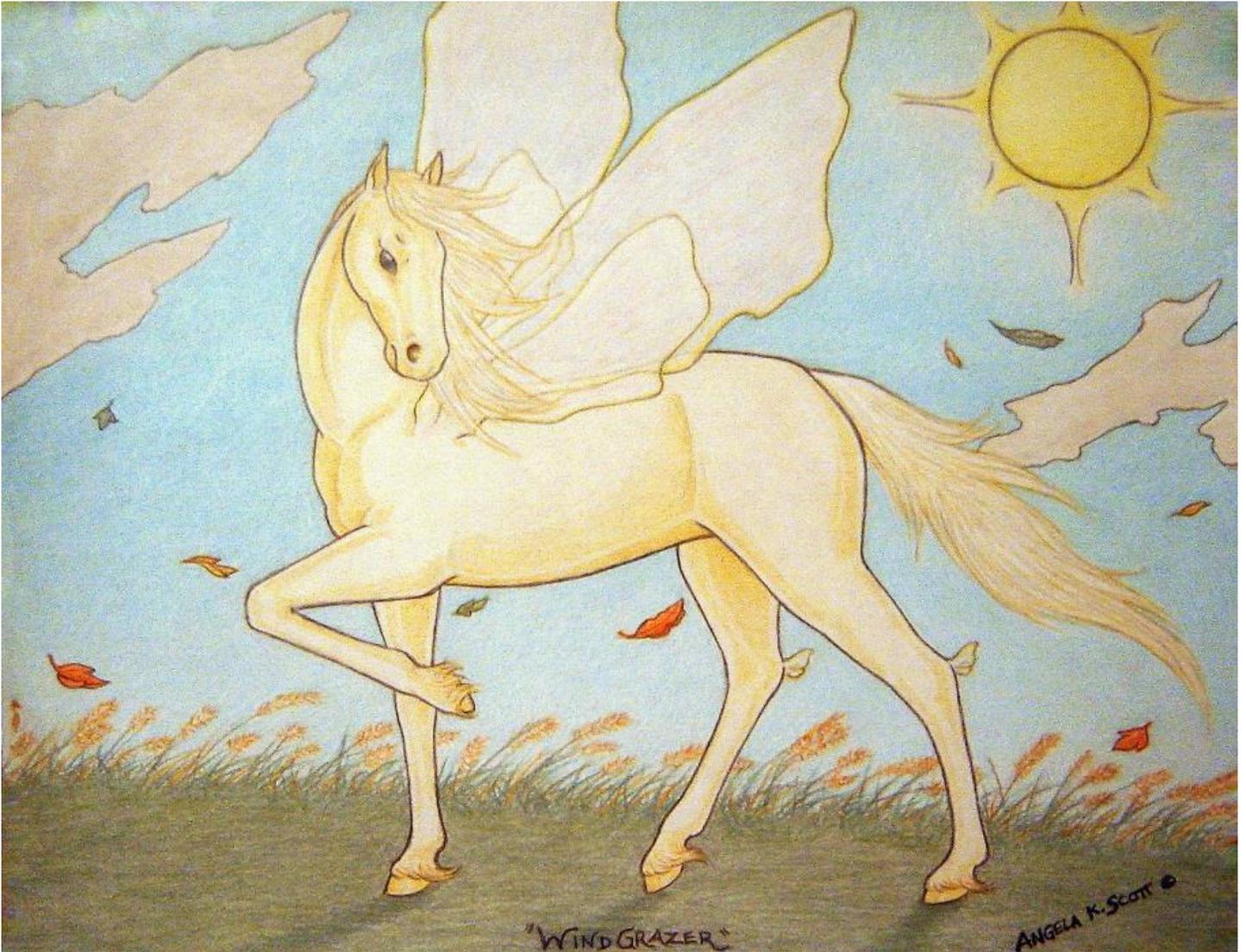
(Work fast – the phyllo will try to dry out and go crumbly).

butter, layer, sprinkle...

Finish with 4 buttered sheets of phyllo. With a sharp knife, cut through all layers to create small squares or diamond shapes. Bake for 40 minutes at 350 degrees. Thin, and fun to cut neatly. By fun I mean tricky, and a bit of a PITA. While pastry is baking, simmer water, lemon juice, cinnamon sticks and remaining sugar until the resulting syrup coats a spoon when you stir it. [Cedar's note: I added about $\frac{1}{4}$ cup honey. It didn't seem right without honey.] Pour syrup over the baked pastry, cover the baking pan and hide it for at least six hours to give the syrup time to soak in. It baked up perfectly and soaked up all of the syrup in about 4 hours – all the time I could give it!

The Baklava was both perfect, and different. Not having honey in the original recipe I worked around – the First Reader wants me to make it again in a smaller pan, i.e. thicker, and with honey only. Also, he wants me to omit the lemon. I really liked how the acid cut some of the sickly-sweetness baklava can have, but he didn't. So tastes vary! But it was so good. Like candy. And as we had guests over the weekend, this pan full lasted through more than 20 people trying it out, some for the first time, and some who had more than one piece because they couldn't help themselves!





Wind Grazer
by Angela K. Scott