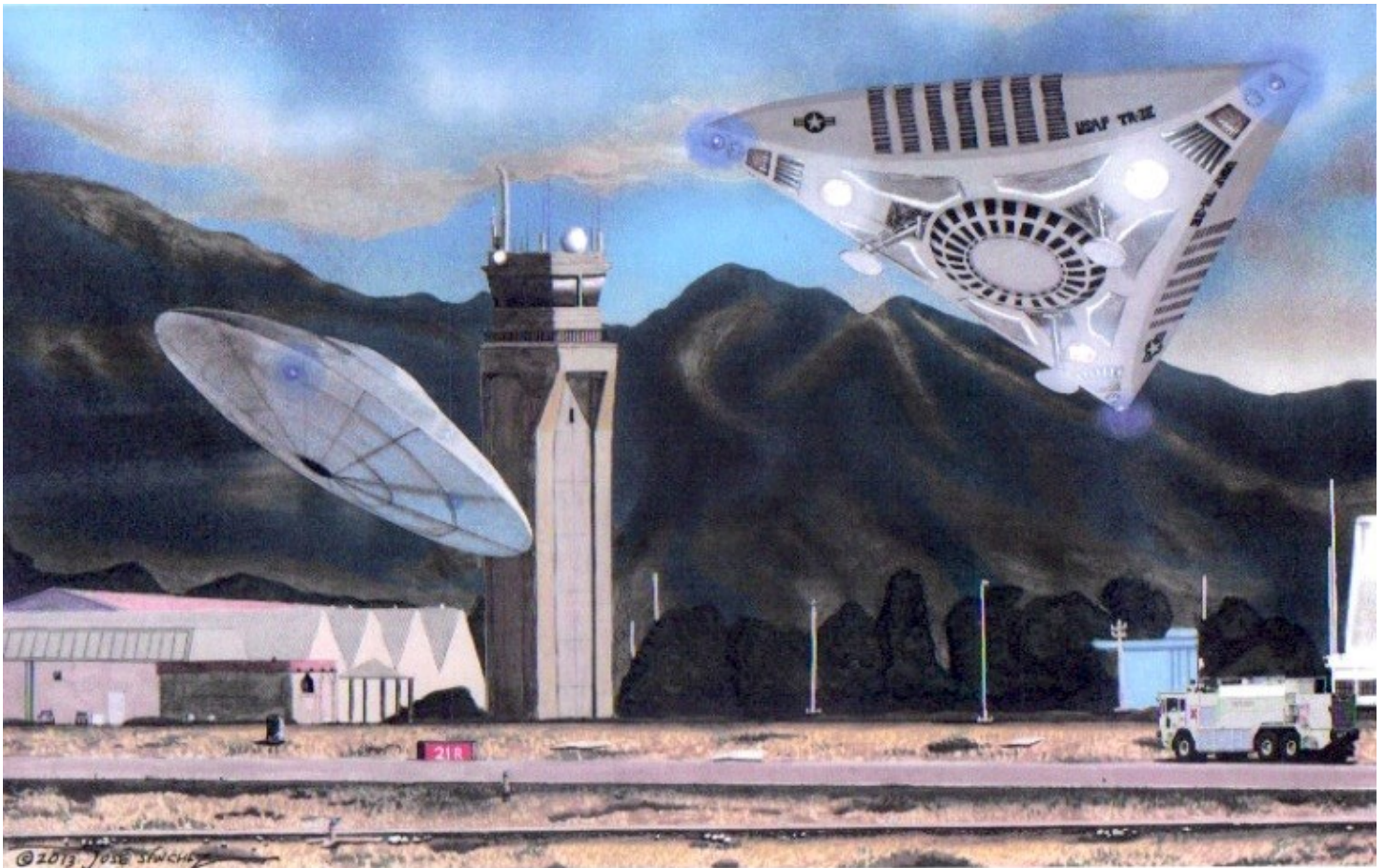


Tightbeam 291

December 2018



Jose Sanchez — Undisclosed Alliance

Tightbeam 291

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Anime Reviews are courtesy Jessi Silver and her site www.s1e1.com Ms. Silver writes of her site “S1E1 is primarily an outlet for views and reviews on Japanese animated media, and occasionally video games and other entertainment.”

Fiction reviews are courtesy Pat Patterson, Cedar Sanderson, Greg Hullender, and Eric Wong.

Pat Patterson’s reviews appear on his blog <https://habakkuk21.blogspot.com> and also on GoodReads and Amazon.com.

Cedar Sanderson’s reviews and other interesting articles appear on her site www.cedarwrites.wordpress.com/ and its culinary extension cedarwrites.com/eat-this-while-you-read-that/

Greg Hullender and Eric Wong publish their reviews at RocketStackRank.com

Eric Jamborsky gives us Films Fantastic.



Left: “A World Apart” from Amanda K. Scott

Right: “Abandoned” from Amanda K. Scott



Editorial

Welcoming Films Fantastic

Yes, the N3F now has a Film Bureau, under the leadership of Eric Jamborsky. The Bureau has its own zine, Films Fantastic, which for the nonce will appear within the pages of Tightbeam. You can find Film Fantastic starting on page 22.

Topics in this issue include Anime, Novels, Short Fiction, Films, Serious Constructive discussion, and Food. For anime, this issue we collected some of Jessi Silver's more positive reviews from the second quarter of the year. Pat Patterson continues reviews of Dragon nominees.

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Letters of Comment

Dear George and Jon:

Thank you for issue 290 of Tightbeam. Let's see if I can come up with a decent letter of comment on it, Who knows, I might just pull it off.

Great artwork, and good to see some more from José Sanchez. Welcome to Jon, and I will send this to you directly, as I do with George. Ron Goulart is an author I might not have recognized as a funny writer, like Sheckley, but if nothing else, he is prolific. Was it proved that Goulart all of Bill Shatner's SF novels?

Not ever having been at a Dragon*Con, do members of the convention nominate and vote on the Dragon Awards? If not, I cannot see how they might be an improvement on the Hugos. The rocketships are silver metal, and have a lot of history behind them. Meanwhile, the Dragons are still very new, and I am not sure if Dragon*Con members have any feedback on who wins them.

Lots of reviews, and of books by authors I don't know, and titles I don't recognize...indeed, SF has left me behind. These days, I am so busy with job hunting, I rarely, if ever, have the time to read. I do have some books from friends, and I will have to write some careful reviews, once I get to reading them.

My loc. I recently found out that a niece of ours is a big fan of Ladybug and Cat Noir, and she said the fandom (she knows her terms) around this is going crazy for the final episode of its second season. It was just broadcast in Europe, and is already in an English dub on YouTube. They are happy fans, the good guys won and the bad guys lost, and they are looking towards episodes from Season 3, which should start sometime in early 2019. When it comes to zines that may be catering to no audience at all...I wonder how many blogs and podcasts are doing the very same, for no audience?

Lolitas...there is a tea room within a short drive from our home, and the local steampunks have gone in there a couple of times for an afternoon tea. I asked our hostess if she was a little freaked by us, and she said no, for the local goths and local lolitas also came in for afternoon tea. We're just a group of fans with different clothes, is all.

It is a very dark and rainy day today, so getting some writing done has been no problems at all. I think it's supposed to rain here all week, so I have lots of incentive to stay in. Thanks for this, take care, see you with the next issue.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

Anime

Phantom in the Twilight Review by Jessi Silver

In London is "Café Forbidden," a mysterious café that only opens at night. Bayrou is a girl who is in London to study abroad. She meets the handsome men who work this place where the guardians of the boundary between the human and shadow world gather. – ANN

Episode 1 Summary: Ton Baileu and her friend Shinyao are excited to be moving to London. They're there to study abroad, something neither of them would likely have attempted if not for the support of the other. After arriving at the airport, it's just a train ride into the city and they can move into their new apartment. Ton is extra excited because her great-grandmother once made London her home and she feels a special connection to the misunderstood matriarch. Unfortunately the ladies aren't in the city very long before their luggage is nabbed by a thief



that's only visible to Ton. Calling upon a magic spell gleaned from her great-grandmother's writings, she's lead to a mysterious cafe staffed by Vlad, Toryu, and Luke, all of them young (?), attractive men. They react to Ton as if they already know her; as it turns out that they were all familiar with her great-grandmother through some unexplained means. They're also involved in the supernatural and occult, and determine that it was a goblin who stole Ton's baggage.



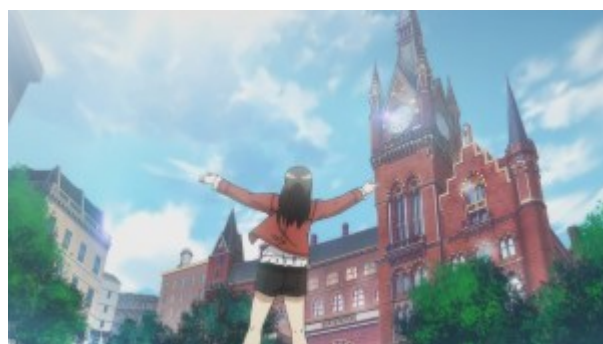
They make their way to Hyde Park where they suspect that the goblin's stash is hidden among the trees, but they're in for a surprise when Spriggen, lord of the forest, attacks. Not only do all the attractive young men appear to have special abilities (including lycanthropy, in one case), but Ton herself reaches within herself and demonstrates her mettle. As day breaks, Ton awakens on a bench in the park surrounded by her luggage. Could the experience, and the young men, have been just a strange dream?

Impressions: We live in an age when mobile game companies are reaping huge profits from their popular freemium franchises. It stands to reason that at least some of those profits would be used to reinvest in their brands in order to increase exposure and keep the cycle going. While in some cases, such as that of Cygames where their game library includes collaborations with established properties in addition to their own originals (Rage of Bahamut in particular) which they've helped bring into the anime realm, there are also situations like this one, where a mobile game company (Happy Elements) contributes funding towards an animated

production unrelated to a current release. It's interesting to speculate about what this new-ish source of funding might mean to an industry that has historically had some financial struggles; surely the next several years will see some interesting changes in how money is funneled into anime production.

Yay, London!

This review, however, is about Phantom in the Twilight – an original anime production which represents a collaboration between a Japanese Studio (Liden Films) and Chinese-based mobile game company (the afore-



mentioned Happy Elements). Chinese/Japanese co-produced animated series have become more common over the last couple of years, or at least they're being acknowledged as co-productions rather than Japanese productions with East/Southeast Asian in-between animation. They've also gotten a bad rap, sometimes due to issues of animation quality, sometimes for their general tone/feel as compared to historically typical anime productions. I suspect this is a combination of both industry growing pains and a fandom intolerance for things that don't fall within some sort of ill-defined yet extremely important boundary (full disclosure, I've been guilty of gate-keeping in this way, too). This episode definitely wasn't the best I've seen; it had some consistency issues and definitely read like it was based on a game, even though it actually isn't (though it wouldn't surprise me if it inspired one). It does, however, have a different feel from many anime series and has some aspects that set it apart from the pack.

One thing I really enjoyed about this episode is the close relationship that Ton and Shinyao have. I'm not entirely sure how to read it – to me they just seem like they've known each other for a long time and have a closeness that's almost sisterly, but I could see a more romantic interpretation as well. In either case, it's clear that their relationship with one-another is incredibly important. Considering that I would have pegged this as a straight-up reverse-harem based on the key artwork and gender ratio alone, it's heartwarming that the episode isn't just about Ton



and whoever she chooses as a romantic partner (if it even ends up getting that specific). I am a bit worried that Shinyao is going to end up being damsel-ed more often than not – they hang a lampshade on that in the little chibi bonus animation at the end of the episode (she jokes that she'll be gone for the next few episodes due to being kidnapped; at least the writers have a sense of humor!). While I'm glad that Ton doesn't seem helpless, it wouldn't make me happy if Shinyao was just a surrogate put in place to be kidnapped repeatedly instead.

Ton seems very familiar to Vlad.

I also think that Ton is a fun protagonist so far. She's got an enthusiastic attitude, has demonstrated intelligence and bravery repeatedly. She also appears to have access to some cache of spiritual abilities that will allow her to participate in whatever excitement befalls her and her new male friends. I like that she chooses to accompany Vlad and company to the park, making her own way there; it shows that she's willing to be an active voice in what happens in this story. That said, it troubles me a bit that Vlad, Toryu, and Luke acknowledge her history and pedigree and seem to hold Ton's great-grandmother in very high regard, yet they choose to change Ton's memories in the aftermath of the goblin encounter so that she believes that her ordeal was due to ordinary thieves who were caught by the police. It seems to be saying two conflicting things and I had a difficult time reconciling that as a viewer.

I'm pretty neutral on the whole reverse-harem angle and don't think any of the male characters are particularly compelling as of yet. Considering the series' pedigree, it seems as if it's fulfilling an obligation rather than justifying the characters' existence, not in the sense that it's adapting a pre-existing game (which it isn't), but instead it making itself available to be adapted into a game with multiple possible paths. I can see the logic there, but it feels very non-committal. Some of the character model consistency leaves a bit to be desired as well; in a series that seems more reliant than some on how good-looking its characters are, this aspect of it seems poorly-planned in many scenes.

Having already watched multiple reverse-harem episodes this season, I will say that this one seems the most interesting out of the bunch. Parts of it are over-the-top and silly, and I question whether it'll go the "monster-of-the-week" route and ultimately remain insubstantial, but I have

a lot of positive feelings towards the protagonist and look forward to seeing whether she grows into her abilities and gains more respect from her new supernatural acquaintances. And heck, the hot guys don't hurt, either.

Pros: Ton is a very fun protagonist. The relationship between Ton and Shinyao is refreshing.

Cons: The visuals aren't that great. I take issue with the way Ton's memories are altered. I fear Shinyao will become a damsel.

Grade: B-

Harukana Receive Review by Jessi Silver



Haruka is a girl who has a complex about how she is very tall, and Kanata is about to give up beach volleyball because she is too short. With Haruka's height and Kanata's experience, the two girls form a pair to play beach volleyball in Okinawa.

Episode 1 Summary: Because her mother is leaving the country on business, Haruka gets to spend her Summer vacation in beautiful, sunny Okinawa with her grandmother and cousin. She's absolutely looking forward to it, down to wearing her swimsuit underneath her clothes so she can get into the water as soon as humanly possible when she arrives. At the airport, it takes a while for Haruka to recognize her cousin, Kanata; after puberty hit, Haruka gained a lot of height and Kanata really didn't. They both feel that the grass is greener in that regard. After taking a dip in the ocean near grandma's house, Haruka meets a couple of girls her age playing volleyball on the beach. When Kanata arrives to join her it becomes clear that there's some history between them. A fun pickup volleyball match becomes intense when the relationship between Kanata and Narumi (one of the other girls) starts to reflect some past strain. When Haruka and Kanata suffer an unsurprising loss, Haruka begs for a rematch. Narumi decides to grant one on one condition – Haruka should spend the next week practicing and learning the rules of the game.

Impressions: Whereas Hanebado! wore its badge of honor as a serious sports-and-character-driven anime very visibly, Harukana Receive feels a bit more like what one would expect of a typical upbeat sports series, which feels appropriate considering its setting and subject matter. Blue skies, warm sand, and clear water create the perfect backdrop for Haruka's sunny personality, and it feels extra appropriate that this anime series is starting in July, when we'd be more likely to head outside and hit up the volleyball court (who am I kidding? I don't go outside).

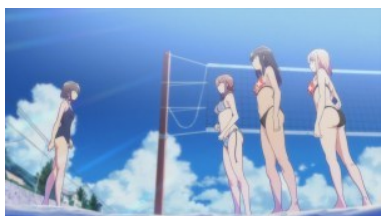
While I wouldn't go so far as to ascribe much depth to this episode, it's fun, pleasant, and a nice break from some of the more serious and/or convoluted things I've been watching lately.

In my opinion, this opening episode is all about establishing atmosphere and depicting an uncommon setting for anime. Okinawa seems to be a typical destination for school trips, so it might show up in an episode or two of various anime sometimes, but rarely is it the main focal point. I'm a little bit excited to see if the show takes full advantage of the uniqueness of Okinawa as compared to the mainland. Speaking to the anime's vision of Okinawa specifically, I'll just say that I live in an area where Summer days can be miserably hot and humid; there are times where it feels as though the air isn't moving at all and it sticks to your body like glue. When I was watching this episode, I could almost feel the breeze blowing from the ocean and



the coolness of the clear water at my ankles. While I'm not as big a fan of direct sunlight (when you look like me, you get a sunburn even thinking about making contact with the sun's rays), even the light glistening on the water and warming the sand demonstrated some appeal. It was nice to experience such a physical reaction when I wasn't initially expecting to.

Less convincing is Haruka as a protagonist because she expresses some character traits that I've come to dislike much of the time. I don't have a quick catchy name for it to sum up my feelings, but she comes across as someone who doesn't know enough to question her own lack of knowledge about something. While other characters are busy sussing out their own troubled relationships or struggling with past conflicts, she's diving headfirst into a game that she doesn't understand and trampling all over the tension in the room (or on the open-air court, I guess). I suppose Japanese has a decent term for that type of person – 空読めない (“Kuuki Yomenai” or “can't read the air”), someone who can't sense the atmosphere and adjust their behavior accordingly. I know that we as audience members who aren't as familiar with beach volleyball in particular need a character who's coming in fresh, because that's how we get up to speed with how the game is played. Though I think Haruka fits that role on paper, I don't know that she, with her height complex that's mentioned maybe one time and her unsubtle niceness that disregards other people is exactly the right fit.



On the other hand, I think that the potential of Kanata's and Narumi's past as volleyball partners is much more interesting. Again, though, I feel that there's a lack of subtlety in how the tension between them is introduced; Narumi is a bit too intense and angry, and Kanata (despite being obviously short) doesn't necessarily seem like she quit the sport for that reason alone despite most blurbs suggesting that her short stature is a major personal issue for her. I don't want to be overly-critical of a series for being more simplistic and straightforward, but I also feel that there would be some benefit in exploring the more emotional aspects of Kanata's situation (which I expect that it will do). If Haruka ends up being the primary focal character, I don't know if that leaves enough room to get into the nitty-gritty of Kanata's situation. I expect, considering the title (a condensation of “Haruka” and “Kanata”), that I'm being wary for no reason. Beach volleyball, from my limited knowledge based almost entirely on this episode, is all about partnerships and I would like to believe that the creators are aware of that fact and that the story will prove to be more balanced between the characters than I'm worried about.

I think it bears mentioning that beach volleyball is a sport played in swim attire, so the characters in this episode spend the majority of time in bikinis. I'm aware that this is how the sport is played in real life (I'm not sure if this is a requirement or uniform or what; obviously I understand that it's hot on the beach and bulky clothing would be detrimental to both temperature and movement), but there are a lot of young-ish characters making big sports moves on the screen in not a lot of clothing. There are also some questionable camera angles and sound effects that emphasize areas of their bodies. It's not pervasive, but it's still in very questionable taste. I have a personal test for material like this – would I feel uncomfortable if the person sitting next to me on the bus happened to see me watching this? Some of this is borderline per those guidelines.

Overall, though, this sports anime seems to occupy a lighter and more upbeat part of the genre spectrum, and I believe that there's some value in that. Beach volleyball seems like the perfect subject for a Summer series, and despite some less-than-stellar character choices so far, this seems like it could become a fun little show to watch.

Pros: I'm loving the setting and atmosphere. I learned a little bit about the rules of the game.

Cons: I'm unconvinced that Haruka is that interesting of a protagonist. The balance between the characters in this episode feels off.

Grade: B-

Noppera-bou (Faceless Monster) Review by Jessi Silver



One thing that kind of stinks about writing in this format is that, no matter how much prep work you do and how long you consider what you want to say, sometimes you just come up with a better idea later on. I don't know that I've outright regretted anything that I've posted (aside from using language and slang then that I wouldn't use now), but there have been times I've struggled with trying to interpret

something, only to have "the answer"™ drop into my lap days or weeks later. This happened to me last week when I was writing my post for "Umibouzu," despite the fact that I've watched those episodes many times and had a decade to ponder their meaning, it wasn't until the middle of last week that I had half a thought about them that actually made sense. I sure wish that lightning had struck me on Sunday when I was writing the post! I won't go into too much detail here; I'll probably end up just posting an aside or addendum this week as I have time. I don't want to steal the thunder from this week's set of episodes, after all. I did, however, want to mention the situation because I know I struggle with knowing when a piece of writing is "finished." I might spend hours editing, re-editing, and picking away at something without it ever being entirely where I want it to be. Finally cutting myself off can be painful, and I suspect there are others out there with the same issues. I just wanted to let you know you're absolutely not alone!

I've been both excited about and dreading having to analyze this two episode story arc. I've mentioned before that it's my favorite arc of the entire series, and the one I feel I connect with most personally. Having such a strong connection with something can be difficult, though. To see my own situation laid bare so clearly by people who have no idea you even exist leaves me with mixed feelings. It's comforting to know that I haven't been alone in my sorrow, but it can also be off-putting to feel as though I'm not unique and that my problems are just typical of human experience. It certainly doesn't feel average when you're going through your own traumatic experience.

Part 1

Ochou is in prison, awaiting the execution of her sentence for brutally murdering her husband and his family. Coincidentally, the Medicine Seller is sharing a cell with her (he had a run-in with a dissatisfied customer that ended poorly for him). In speaking with Ochou, the truth of her guilt begins to come into question. She doesn't appear as though she'd be able to murder a group of people on her own, and she doesn't recall exactly what actions she took to kill them. But she confessed her responsibility to the authorities, resulting in her death sentence. The Medicine Seller's instincts prove to be sound, however; soon a mononoke with a roughly human appearance reveals himself and claims Ochou's act as his own. He wipes away the Medicine Seller's identity and takes Ochou to another realm.

The mononoke begins to court Ochou and reveals that he's kept watch over her. He then asks her to marry him. The celebration is filled with the faces of other spiritual beings who are also said to have watched over Ochou. She feels as though a new path has opened up to her. But



the Medicine Seller reappears and through his presence, information about Ochou's relationship with her mother is revealed. This destroys the mononoke's illusion. As the Medicine Seller and mononoke fight with one another, the Medicine Seller's mirror breaks through the illusory masked faces of the mononoke. What is the true form of the creature who has taken root in Ochou's heart?

Part 2



The Medicine Seller seals away the masked mononoke under its extreme protest, and presents Ochou's life to her in four acts, through which he hopes to come to a conclusion about the actual mononoke's truth and reason. All the while the sword of exorcism is chomping at the bit, teetering at the threshold of its release. Ochou relives memories of her childhood, learning to play the koto as her mother looked on. Ochou loved her mother, but her mother seemed more content to groom Ochou to marry into wealth than to

nurture her with kindness. Her love only went so far as Ochou was obedient and accomplished at her studies. Her mother's greatest joy seemed to manifest when Ochou was married into a samurai family at last; now her mother could go to the family grave without the shame that came along with losing everything.

The Medicine Seller continues to prod Ochou, asking her who she really killed, as it appears that this was anything but a straightforward murder. Because her love for her mother runs so deep, she's loathe to admit the fact that in working to please her, she gave up every last one of her own desires. The fact is that the only person Ochou ever killed was herself, over and over and over again, as she molded herself to others' desires. This reveals that the mononoke is actually the life she never lived, the choices she never made, and the prison she constructed out of her own situation. She is the mononoke. Having finally made peace with that, Ochou opens herself to the sword of exorcism. Suddenly, she's back in her home's kitchen, listening as her husband and his family demand more sake and berate her. This time, she looks out the window at the sky that gave her a small bit of joy so many times. Then, she's gone.

Thoughts and Reactions

As I've mentioned before, for a long time I've related deeply to this story arc (and it's likely the bulk of this reaction section will elaborate on that – not sorry!). While I luckily never experienced the burden of living beneath a parent's selfish expectations, I was for a long time in a situation where I felt fundamentally trapped. As the Medicine Seller repeats multiple times throughout the story, if you feel trapped in a place it becomes a prison, but if you don't want to leave it becomes a palace. For a long time I was in a relationship that I chose to believe was the latter. I wore the mask of the happy lover, throwing my energy into being an enthusiastic host and playing into the role of the self-sacrificing woman, leaving myself little time to understand my own self and desires. I came into the relationship feeling as though it was an escape from loneliness, and it took me a long time to realize "loneliness" and comfort with being alone were two dramatically different things.

As the masked mononoke interacts with Ochou, it offers her an array of kind words and eventually welcomes her into marriage with him. The wedding has all the luscious trimmings and Ochou is hypnotically drawn in by the festivities. In the whirlwind of sake and dancing she seems ill-equipped to realize that all of it is nothing more than a distraction from the core of her predicament. A marriage makes a good comparison with a prison or a palace; though it's just a pact between two people there are many aspects of the legal and emotional binding together of

individuals that make leaving it a non-trivial act. The mononoke is better served keeping Ochou happy on the surface and allowing her to wear her mask, because if she begins to question anything within herself or becomes more focused on self-acknowledgement it will likely demolish the darkness in her heart that keeps him sustained. Letting herself be distracted by the bright colors and the mononoke's proclamations of love helps her hold onto a brief (but ultimately false) sense of well-being. She believes this marriage to be an escape from her prison, just as many of us believe that marrying might be an escape from financial hardship, loneliness, or familial pressure. A successful, meaningful marriage requires so much more than that from the people involved, though – mutual respect, honoring one-another's boundaries and choices, a belief in the other's fundamental human dignity and a respect for the person that they are. If these things are missing and the act is just a move to escape from something else, then it becomes a trap.

The Medicine Seller references human faces as the facades or "masks" that we put in place to present only what we want the world to see (or what we want to convince ourselves is the truth). The faces we share with the world might be the ones that make us feel safe and protected, or they may be what we believe to be true about ourselves; it's a dubious skill of human beings to be able to choose the persona that serves them. I have social anxiety and people are often surprised to learn that because I give off the impression of being relatively unruffled; that's my mask. In this story arc this concept is represented well by the use of Noh masks. If you're unfamiliar with Noh theater, it has deep ties with Japanese spirituality, and the characterization is conveyed exclusively through strictly-codified dance movements and traditional masks worn by the main performer. The masks each represent either a character archetype (child, young woman, spirit etc.) or even specific characters in some cases. The masks are constructed of one type of wood and painted by hand. An incredible amount of effort goes into creating these visual facades that provide almost all the information that one would need to know about the person being portrayed. Human beings spend years constructing their own personal masks; Ochou's mask began to manifest in childhood and became so much a part of her that it was eventually indistinguishable from her own face.

While I've never worn a Noh mask (nor danced atop a Japanese stage), like most people I've done many things to keep up appearances and to convince myself and others that everything was "just fine." As my own situation deteriorated I expended a lot of energy insisting to myself that all was well, and made sure that others believed it. I was the hip gamer-girl who indulged her spouse's eccentricities and accepted him, warts and all. Up for any new sex thing without question and willing to dose myself with mood-terrorizing hormones to ensure that children were never an unintended consequence of that. Feminist, but not too much and not when it came to myself. Willing to put everyone else first. While I never got to the point where I wanted to actively attempt suicide (even at my lowest point), as I allowed my boundaries and sense of self to be further desecrated I began to secretly wish that I would go to sleep and not wake up the following day, or that one of us would end up in some kind of tragic accident. The mask I wore was one with a smile and a laugh, as everything within began to shrivel and die.

Much like Ochou, what saved me was the realization that these feelings were all the result of something, and not something for which I could rightfully be blamed. At one point my ex demanded that I explain why I never shared these terrible, dark feelings as they emerged, why I let them fester to the point that they became toxic. I found the question fundamentally unjust, but it took me longer to come up with an answer to "why" that satisfied me (it's hard to say if he'd be satisfied with it; I doubt it). Abuse is almost never an immediate swing of the fist or a first time argument that barrels out of control into name-calling. It's someone, whether they realize they're doing it or not, testing the waters, lightly prodding the Jenga piece to see if they can knock it loose without causing the tower to fall. It's gaslighting so the target begins to ques-

tion their own truth. Slowly boundaries are crossed, self-esteem is chipped away. It's "not that bad" because there aren't any bruises; in the meantime you've lost contact with your friends, your hobbies have stopped bringing you joy, and you feel like a ghost trapped inside your body. And it's humiliating. Why would someone speak up about something they can't even yet articulate properly, especially to the person they instinctually realize is causing the hurt? Especially when some of the people around you would blame you for having a hand in building your own prison.

Ochou has the Medicine Seller's play to help her realize the truth of her situation; it allows her to come to the correct conclusion since the truth becomes obvious as it's laid out for her. I don't necessarily think there was one thing in particular that helped me; nobody sat me down and said "this is what's going on and we're worried." I was very good at hiding it all and it doesn't surprise me that nobody noticed or felt the need to hold some kind of intervention. Sometimes all it takes is something small – the outstretched hand of a genuine friend or an opportunity to grow outside the bad situation itself (I had both). In any case, I thankfully came to the realization that I was acting as my own worst enemy and compounding my own treatment by not allowing myself to recognize it. Sometimes the mononoke really is oneself.

One of my favorite things about this story arc is that it's never stated outright how real (or not) the fox-masked mononoke's form is. Just as the entire episode walks the line between staged fantasy and reality, his actual existence is called into question throughout. He resembles the Medicine Seller's alternate form enough that the common interpretation is that he's either a spirit conjured by the Medicine Seller for the purposes of interacting with Ochou, or his other form itself. Because this episode is so focused on the rift that formed between Ochou the "mask" and Ochou the person, I find the thought that the Medicine Seller may have split his own aspects apart in some sort of solidarity with her to be comforting. The pipe he smokes is kind of the big tip-off for me; I don't believe we see him use it in other story arcs (he does carry it in the cool figurine I have, however), but it's prominently featured as a tool of the mononoke and the Medicine Seller takes a long draw from it at the end of the episode before leaving. There are tantalizing clues to support several theories, but as a general fan of the show and someone who's intrigued by the Medicine Seller as a character, what I've always liked to believe is that the mononoke is some aspect of himself, and that he came to know of Ochou somehow and through his knowledge of her situation really did fall in love with her. I can't help it – I'm a sucker for romance, even bittersweet romantic tragedy.

There's also a lot of imagery that references split existences. I don't usually talk all that much about film-making techniques here, but this series actually utilizes the frame in interesting ways to emphasize (even before we realize it) that Ochou has been of two minds (and perhaps two existences) throughout her ordeal and beyond. The quick cuts where half of her face is on the left side and the other half on the right side of the screen are just long enough to leave a striking impression on the viewer. They don't linger, but their presence is enough to be disorienting. It's a good compliment to the ghostly images of Ochou that represent her true self and unfulfilled desires. To me, there's something powerful about the belief that, if we don't honor ourselves to some extent, or even go so far as to deny our desires in pursuit of goals that aren't our own, some piece of our psyche breaks away to make itself happy in our absence. Perhaps its why years of self denial (and even depression) feel more like emptiness than sadness.

Lastly, I'd like to mention Ochou's (お蝶) name, which simply means "butterfly." While I believe a lot of the character names in this series have some kind of meaning that can be interpreted from how they're written, I think this one is a good example since it's so short and to the point. I find it telling that her name references a creature who can fly; the one mental escape Ochou has from her abusive husband's family is the sight of the sky through kitchen window.

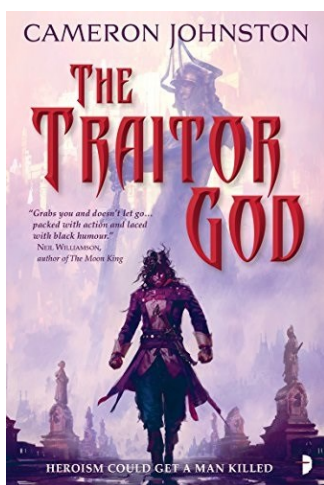
Only a small creature like a bird or butterfly could fly out through its wooden slats. She looks a bit like a butterfly too, with her large obi and brightly-colored clothing. Butterflies are usually short-lived creatures, their lifespans averaging something like a month in good circumstances. This may serve as a reminder to us – life is so short already, so why choose to spend it enclosed and suffering? In the final scene Ochou disappears from the room, seemingly without going through a door. There is something poetic about imagining her taking wing and leaving.

Novels

Dragon Award Finalist, Best Fantasy Novel

The Traitor God

Review by Pat Patterson



This book was not available through my usual sources, but the author responded most kindly and promptly to my request for a review copy, for which I am grateful. In this picture, you can see in the background the reason that so one in Scotland grows rice: the land goes up and down, not side to side.

And speaking of pictures, this is only my opinion, BUT: I like the cover art. It's by a person who is so cool, my ordinary character set won't even get the name right. Using the American English character set, though, it's Jan Wessbecher, and you can check out the art for yourself if you like.

A review, sort of. Ten years ago, Edrin Walker made a solemn promise: first, {do something}; second, leave town and never come back; third, never talk to anyone about anything. In exchange, his only friends in the world would live. As a post-script: "Oh, yeah: don't let the monsters kill ya, but for that you are on your own."

Leaving was rather a sad thing, what with having to start a new life without the friends he loved dearly; and because of the monsters, he had to keep on the run, so he couldn't settle down and make new friends. But not telling anybody anything?

That was easy: with respect to the bracketed 'do something' statement referenced up above, he had not a clue. Evidently, someone had made partial amnesia part of the deal.

He didn't COMPLETELY sever all ties, though; he and his best friend had arranged via magic to have a mental connection. It wasn't enough for real communication, but it did allow him a thin sense of companionship with his best friend Lynas, who remained in Setharis, the magic capital of the empire. And, as long as he has a sense of Lynas' well-being, Walker will continue to stay away and not talk.

Then, a bad thing happens.

Just as he is about to move on down the road (down the sea, actually), nasty pirate people try to kill him; they DO kill other people; and they burn down the town of Ironport, where Walker has been lingering until his ship left.

In the midst of this, Lynas sends a series of frantic, high bandwidth messages: he is being hunted; he has been caught; he is being killed horribly; and then, inexplicably, his last message is of a scene when he and Walker were on the receiving end of a rather nasty schoolboy prank.

We discover later that the prank nearly cost them both their lives, and that this was what had cemented their friendship, all those long years ago.

Without entering into the land of spoilers, the rest of the book is a murderous magical mystery, with monsters, meanies, and memories, all making an appearance at the appropriate time.

Some minor commentary. I found that the scenery almost rose to the level of a character from time to time. For example, Walker rents a room, sleeps on the straw mattress, and wakes up in the morning itching, because the place is lice-infested. There are also numerous contrasts drawn between the squalor of the lower city, where the poor people live, and the clean, well-ordered streets of the upper city. This is particularly significant when Walker notices a decline in the maintenance of formerly prosperous areas. He also does a nice job of describing the filthy state of the water around the docks, and the pollution running through some of the waterways.

This is a perfect fit for this category; as I have mentioned before, I tend to avoid fantasy, so my opinion is that of an amateur, but I think this is well-done. Yes, magic IS used, BUT so are brains. It is as good a job of dragging out a reveal as anything I've seen anywhere. Perhaps it is easier to do that when the MC is cut off from part of his memories, but I don't think THAT should be a hindrance if you writing fantasy (or sufficiently advanced technology).

It's a good read, with strong characters exhibiting strength, self-sacrifice, and affection. I found it to be well worth my time, and I can recommend it as being well worth your investment; and, once again, I am compelled to say that if this one wins the Dragon Award, I would not be surprised.

Dragon Award Finalist, Best Alternate History

Uncharted

Review by Pat Patterson

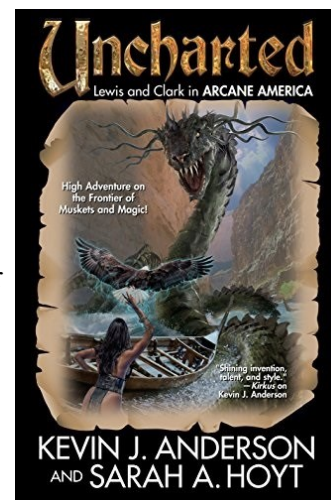
I obtained my copy directly from the Baen website, although the book is also available on Amazon. I'm pretty sure I have never gotten a BAD book from Baen, although there have been a couple, but ONLY a couple, I didn't finish. I've also never gotten a bad book from either Sarah A. Hoyt or Kevin Anderson, DESPITE having to silently close the Magical Shakespeare trilogy and sneak away under the cover of darkness; I'm just not enough of a Shakespeare/ Shakespeare era scholar to catch the nuances. It's a personal failing, although not one that causes me much remorse. On the other hand, I'm neither a dragon scholar nor a diner scholar, and I love 'Draw One In The Dark' and the follow-up books. Go figure.

The review. Halley's Comet was destroyed in a massive battle of wizards. This resulted in some bizarre outbreaks of magic in North America; as far as the rest of the world, we just don't know, because there is an impenetrable barrier in the Atlantic Ocean, and thus no communication with any place in Europe.

Some of the same figures that were prominent in colonial America are still influential in this timeline. Thomas Jefferson lives as a wealthy planter, but has no role to play in government. Benjamin Franklin, on the other hand, has magically had his aging process arrested at about a vigorous 70, and is the most prominent wizard on the continent. He is quite famous, and fabulously wealthy, and at least as inquisitive as he was in real life.

He has been considering sponsoring a trip to explore the land west of the Mississippi, both to see what lies out there in that great undiscovered territory, as well as to determine if there is a possible route to Europe by crossing the Pacific. Following a serendipitous introduction to Meriwether Lewis, during a dragon attack of all things, he proposes that Lewis head up the expedition.

And thus, the famed Lewis and Clark Expedition of OUR timeline is initiated in theirs. Although this is a private venture, and not sponsored by a non-existing government, the essential



purpose is the same, except for the magical components of this expedition.

A pleasing bit of research & writing: the names of the members of the fictional L&C expedition are the same as those of the real expedition. I wouldn't have noticed that, had I not been jotting the names of the characters down. In fact, even the original expedition dog Seaman is included in the book. That's nicely done, don't you think?

The 'Uncharted' expedition encounters the same environmental challenges that the original trip did: rivers, mountains, hostile natives, bugs, weather. And, just as happened on the original trip, Sacagawea appears to serve as a guide. However, her motivation in the book is that she is looking for the magical dragon warrior who can protect her and her child, and rescue her husband, along with the rest of the country, from the depredations of the evil wizard. Nasty, nasty person, this evil wizard: raises up long extinct predator animals (which we recognize as dinosaurs), who have a devastating impact on the buffalo herds; kills people and reanimates their bodies. Nasty guy.

The characters are depicted with sympathy. I can't really go into detail about this without spoilers, but I'm struck by how Sacagawea is presented as such a resolute and courageous figure, based STRICTLY on her human qualities. William Clark pours out his heart to his young fiancée in Virginia, knowing his letters may never reach her; he strives to find the right words to tell his story, without bringing the horrors into her living room.

Alas, tragedy does strike others not a part of the expedition. One luckless trader/trapper, not very good at his work, is brought low by the pinpricks of a tribe of pygmies. Poor fellow, he was at one point forced to boil and eat his boots during a particularly bad winter, and was ever after known as Barefoot Johnny.

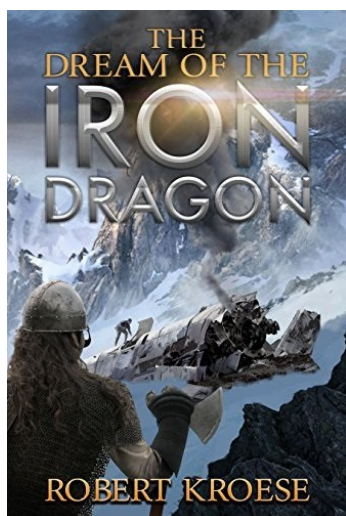
Even the deities of the natives are treated with respect. The two principals here are Coyote and Raven, and the writers do an excellent job, in my opinion, of demonstrating that whatever standard they think they might be judged by, it's doubtful that the opinions of the rascalion explorers will be a factor in any way.

Concluding comments. The historical character of Meriwether Lewis just couldn't get a decent break, after coming back from the expedition. He died alone, not many years after returning, and there is controversy to this day as to whether or not that was a result of murder or suicide. Read up on him; it will be enlightening. In THIS book, however, Anderson and Hoyt manage to put into his character some resiliency factors. It's a nice thing they did for him.

Dragon Award Finalist, Best Alternate History: Dream of the Iron Dragon Review by Pat Patterson

Disclaimer: I am not on the Dragon Awards Committee, and that's something for which I am truly grateful. However, if I HAD been on the Committee, I don't think I could have allowed this as an entry in the 'Alternate History' category. Yes, it SAYS it's alternate history, right there in Amazon listing, the full version of which is: The Dream of the Iron Dragon: An Alternate History Viking Epic (Saga of the Iron Dragon Book 1). But, for those of us of a certain age, we remember that there used to be a product known as 'Carter's Little Liver Pills' that had absolutely nothing to do with the liver. Saying it don't make it so; this is a time travel story, mostly. A bit of mil sci-fi as well. But I just don't see calling it alternate history.

The review part. In the present day, an American air force colonel and a British air force major are engaged in a cover-up of ancient artifacts related to space travel. The current find is a



thousand-year-old space helmet.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, two hundred years in the future, humans have zoomed all the way from space flight to space colonies to space empires to space refugees, with only a few, out of the way planets still alive on the losing side of the genocidal war waged by the Cho-ta'an. An exploratory probe ship picks up a beamed transmission of the first 17 numbers in the Fibonacci sequence. The author, by the way, includes those number, split into two bite-sized pieces, for those of us who have forgotten what the Fibonacci sequence is. I appreciated that.

The beam is, of course, from the aliens. A splinter group, actually, evidently infected with a love of numerology, and SERIOUSLY out of favor with the Cho-ta'an leaders. They have discovered a planet-busting bomb in the ruins of an abandoned race, and have flagged down the humans so they can present it to them, so the humans can wipe out the Cho-ta'an home world.

I was seriously tempted to spell the alien name differently every time I used it in this blog post. Cho-at'an, Cho-ta'ra, Cha-ta'ru, and so on. Would you have caught me in that feeble attempt to protest alien names, Gentle Reader? I think not.

Wait: we haven't gotten to the weird part yet.

A different alien faction decides to retrieve the planet buster (it liquefies solids, briefly, long enough for all life to die and buildings to fall) , and chases the human exploratory ship. At high accelerations. High enough that it's not safe to use a warp gate, but there is no other option, and at the warp gate, SHAZAM! enough bad things happen that the humans AND the aliens are transferred back through time, to Earth in 883 AD. The human ship is damaged, no longer capable of interstellar voyage, and the aliens are still after them.

However, this IS an exploratory ship, after all, and thus there are a number of scientists and engineers aboard, in addition to the regular Navy-type ship's crew, so they put their heads together and come up with some CRAZY ideas. One of them, of course, is So Crazy That It Just Might Work, and so they send a landing party of four down to Earth so they can fix the Big Metal Thing That Makes It Work. Those four are Head Engineer, Chemist/Geologist, Biologist/Shuttle Pilot, and the (usually red-shirted) security guy who is a former Marine/amateur historian, and y'all ain't gonna BELIEVE this, but in the future, Space Marines provide their own MEDICS, and he is one of those, too! I don't know HOW that happened, because the Navy provides the Marines with medics, but, this IS a work of fiction, right?

And then, all the typical clash-of-cultures-across-time things happen. Book ends, not so much on a cliff-hanger, but on a 'here's what we are gonna do next' note.

Commentary. I do NOT know how you can communicate a Fibonacci series unless you have a shared language system, but evidently all that is worked out.

I also don't know how you go from where we are today to the peak of technology they were at before the aliens appeared, in only two hundred years.

The social/ political systems have changed enough that there is support for a galaxy-wide ban on eating meat. That's carried over to the point that the engineer has a conniption fit when she discovers that some horses are going to be used as meat. It's a big issue; really it is.

I found this to be fascinating reading. Even though I didn't particularly like any of the characters, except for a couple of the Vikings on 883 Earth, I was intrigued at how they were going to survive, once they lost the high-tech weapon systems.

In all of the other time-traveler stories where the people from the future have to go back to black powder, the sulfur is just...there. In some cases, and I'm thinking particularly of 'The Wheel of Time' series, the future-tech people have access to a highly developed transportation system, and mines are already established. However, I had no idea that iron pyrite (fools gold)

could be processed to produce sulfur, but the author did; and that is, by the way, a real thing, that was at one time a common industrial process.

A sort-of conclusion. The book is highly entertaining, and I can recommend it as an interesting read. With respect to the Dragon Award in the 'Best Alternate History' category, though, I'm just not making the connection. However, it's pretty obvious that others do NOT hold to the rather narrow definition of 'Alternate History' that I evidently have developed, else it would not be included in that category. So, you be the judge; that's the way it works!

Dragon Finalist: Best Science Fiction Novel

Prequel Qualify

Review by Pat Patterson

The novel which is the finalist is 'Win,' by Vera Nazarian. I have a copy of that novel, courtesy of the author, but it is my understanding that this is a case in which reading the novels in sequence will make a difference.

These are hefty tomes. 'Qualify' comes in at 600 pages; the second installment, 'Compete,' has 530 pages, and the third installment, which is the actual contender, boasts a beefy page count of 930 pages.

A brief review of the book. It's 2047, and we are all about to die; the Sweet Meteor of Death, which we had all longed for during the last presidential election, has been sighted, and it's composed mostly of heavy metals, so there is no way we can divert it with our nuclear arsenal.

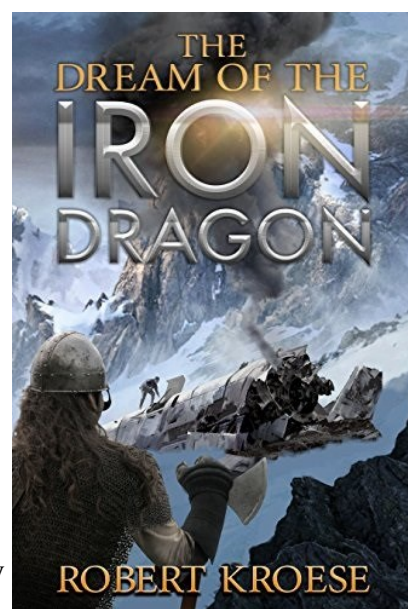
However, just as the winter brings the snow, and the dead rhinos bring the hungry vultures, so the impending arrival of SMOD brings back our long-lost relatives: the folks from Atlantis. It seems that they escaped the sinking of their civilization by going to the stars, where they have lived and prospered; now, seeing Mother Earth about to be smashed into planet juice (pulp included), they have returned with a fleet of space transports to rescue a remnant.

Alas, it is ONLY a remnant. They don't have the space to take everybody, and they are also concerned that the Earthlings will have some difficulty in adapting to their culture, so they have determined that only people between the ages of 11 and 20 can be considered for rescue. Furthermore, they insist that the selection process be competitive. There will be a series of screenings and competitions, which will decide who gets to board the spaceships, and who becomes Meteor Chow.

Four children of the Lark family seek selection. Their parents, who obviously harbor a deep hatred for their children, have given them all names beginning with G: George, Gwenevere, Gordie, and Gracie. The children, in a pathetic attempt to make light of the mark of Cain branded on their foreheads, refer to each other as G1, G2, G3, and G4. You can't REALLY blame the parents, of course; the father is a professor of antiquities, and the mother was an opera star before cancer took away her ability to sing. With that kind of parentage, I suppose the children should be grateful that their names aren't Abelard, Heloise, Brunhilda, and Igor.

The story is told from the POV of nearly-seventeen Gwen, who feels herself to be an ugly duckling, with no hope of becoming a swan. She excels in academics, but is not confident socially, and has neither skills nor experience with athletics.

The Atlanteans provide very little in the way of information about the testing program, and



some of the tests seem nonsensical. The entire program is mysterious, bordering on creepy, and there is inevitable backlash to the idea of teenagers being swept off into the sky, leaving behind everybody else.

And with this, I conclude the REVIEW part, because to go further would be to get into the realm of spoilers.

Final comments. I can already hear someone grumbling out there. You say, 'why, this is derivative of "The Hunger Games.."'

Nope. It ain't.

Yes, they do share the feature of a life-and-death struggle between young people, but that's the ONLY thing they have in common. There are supposedly only some very small number of unique plots anyway, right? What makes a book valuable, it seems, is not having some exciting new plot twist. Those are RARE. Brad Torgerson came up with a completely new vision of the BEM a few years ago in "The Chaplain's War," but really, that's the first true innovation I've seen since I became aware that some of the greatest stories were simply older stories with the serial number filed off.

Nope, what makes a book a GREAT book is the way the story is told. And I have to tell you, quite honestly, that I didn't think I was going to like this story. For one thing, most of the characters are teenagers, and I was a middle school counselor for 16 years, and am raising teenagers #5 & #6 at the moment, and frankly, the little monsters aggravate me. Wonderfully, there is only enough of that teen-age emotional storming to remind me that they ARE teens, and not so much as to make me want to drown them. But, even with that bit of prejudicial disfavor, I found myself DEEPLY involved with the story. Nazarian is one HECK of a good writer, and I think this would be an excellent book to take along on a long plane flight, drive across country, or to curl up with and turn the real world away. Actually, I tend to forget that not everyone reads a zillion words a minute, the way that I do; this volume in itself might make for some nice reading on a weekend getaway, and the entire series might last you Earth People for an entire two-week vacation at the beach. You could surely do a lot worse!

As it should be, the competition for Best Science Fiction Novel is going to be intense. At this point, I wouldn't dare to hazard a guess as to who is gonna win this category. I wouldn't whine if "Win" won, if for no other reason that it makes such a moofie sentence to write. However, Nazarian's work made the 'Finalist' cut, and I have great hopes that her bank account will reflect that popularity, as fans vote with the TRUE award, which is little green pieces of paper.

Twisty Christmas Review by Cedar Sanderson



Also, I saw that this book I'd been asked to review is free as an ebook today, so I thought I'd jump on it and give my readers the chance to pick up a very sweet collection of children's stories, perfect for reading aloud while sitting by the Christmas tree.

The Best of Twisty Christmas came to my attention through Dave Freer, and he has a story in this collection, called How to Train a Princess. In his usual subversive sense of humor, it is likely not at all what you'd expect it to be, and I have a feeling little girls will love it. I'm just sad mine are probably too old. I'll try it on my 12 yo, she might get into it.

The other stories are mostly short enough to be comfortable bedtime read-

alouds, although as they are from the Land downunder (specifically New Zealand) there were a few terms I saw that will need explaining to the younger set. I know that just adds to the exoticism of the stories, and it's always fun to learn new slang (anyone else remember when 'brilliant' became the rage of the tween set?).

As with any collection, quality is uneven. The book starts out strong, with cats, Dave Freer's princess, and then falters with the too-twee-for-words BFF. But I had a good chuckle over the monsters under the bed and their encounter with Santa, in the story *The Red Giant* by Peter Friend, and I think you will, too.

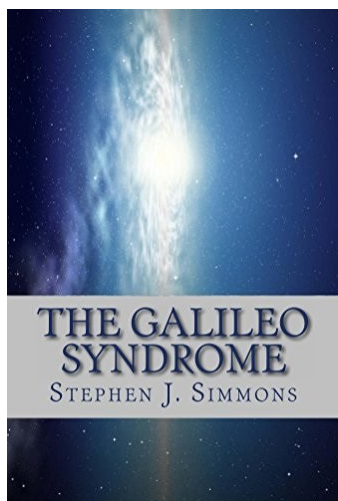
The New Zealand version of the Natal Story is sweet and simple, and well told. If you want to flip ahead, it's *Kiwi Christmas* by Joy Cowley. Further ahead, there's the silly story of Candy Cane, the elf who was too tall, by Charlotte Kieft. There's even a science fiction – of sorts – tale in *Christmas in Space* (also by Peter Friend).

But enough of this. I think you should pick up a copy and discover all its little delights on your own, with a favorite small person on your knee to enjoy them, too.

Merry Christmas!

(was that a very small dragon sneeze under the tree? I'd better check... back later...)

The Galileo Syndrome Review by Cedar Sanderson



And on the other hand, something completely different. Stephen Simmons's *The Galileo Syndrome* follows the life and development of a pair of savant children, through the eyes of the older sister Peaches, from about the age of three onwards. This does not necessarily make it a YA story, and it annoys me (yes, I'm going on a side rant) that people assume that just because the protagonists are young, there's nothing there for them. YA has a lot more to do with the simplicity of plot, language, and direction of the theme than it does the age of the protagonists. Although this book could be read by younger people (in fact, I plan to give a copy to my 12 yo Junior Mad Scientist) it contains much that will go right over their heads. Just because a book is clean, sweet and lacks sex, does not make it a YA. Ok, rant off.

Ever thought about what education for a savant would be like? Simmons lays it out, and along the way delivers some interesting points about teaching science, history, and well, teaching. The book is entirely from the point of view of Peaches rather than her brother Ricky, because his thought processes are more opaque. Peaches thinks of herself as normal (although she isn't, but it's a good characterization by Simmons as he develops her), and her little brother as autistic, although she knows what he is. It's more complex than autistic. Simmons's conceit in this story is that Ricky can sense all the parallel universes, can hear them, almost from birth. He also has an eidetic memory. Yeah, that could leave a child seeming very Odd indeed to the outside world.

I'm not going to summarize the plot for you. It's a fun read, for all the weight of some of the topics he introduces. This is a satisfyingly long book (I like big books, I cannot deny...) and there is wit and humor to leaven the action, character development, and a few cameos I'll leave you to try and figure out who. I liked this, from Peaches: "But while the 'curve fairy' was drifting invisibly through the school, gently tapping all the girls here and there, for some reason the little bitch decided it would be fun to grab her wand with both hands and beat the crap out of me with it." That made me laugh out loud. I can remember feeling just that way when I developed young.

The drawback of the book for me is the title. I personally don't think that Galileo was beset for his science, but for his inept politics. Which isn't the case with Ricky in this book. On the other hand, it's catchy, and most readers won't know better. So? I don't know. Lesson for me with Galileo was don't piss a pope off. Only because I'm so very not-a-catholic this was never even a half-thought for me. Heh. Enough digression. If you like old-school science fiction with development of characters, alien worlds, and yes, political commentary, you'll enjoy this book. He left it fairly open at the end, so I don't know if a sequel is planned, or if we can simply extrapolate from what's given to the conclusion of their lives.

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RocketStackRank Short Fiction Reviews

Master Zhao: The Tale of an Ordinary Time Traveler

Review by Greg Hullender

<http://www.rocketstackrank.com>

"Master Zhao: The Tale of an Ordinary Time Traveler," by Zhang Ran [bio] (translated by Andy Dudak, edited by Neil Clarke), appeared in *Clarkesworld* issue 147, published on December 1, 2018.

Note: I visualized the nameless narrator as male because a) Zhao calls him "Master" Zhang b) he had a male roommate c) he casually invites Master Zhao up to his room for drinks d) he's such a cheerful slob. None of these is conclusive, of course; it's just how I experienced the story.

Pro: The best part of the story is seeing Master Zhao's attempts to take care of his wife across past, present, and future China despite her illness. It's also amusing to learn that disappearing socks are a universal problem, not just a Western thing.

It's surprising what a sympathetic character Master Zhao is despite the fact that he tells us one story after another about his own dishonesty: He gets into this when he tries to stage an accident with a rich person's car but ends up getting killed (and going back in time). Then he tries to deal heroin with his uncle. When he learns the doctor in Huanggang is a fake, he throws a rock through the man's window. Then he steals money from his drug-dealing uncle. Later he admits he robbed banks.

But he also has a heart of gold. He gives up the bike business because he's afraid it will lead to Old Chen dying, and of course, his tender love for his wife despite her scolding and her illness is the one constant theme throughout.

Zhang gets quite a lot just for listening to his story. It gives his life a purpose that it hasn't had in years, if ever. In his thirties, he's already given up on life, so Zhao's gift to him is substantial. Zhao's entrusting him with notifying his wife (and telling her where the money is hidden) is quite an act of trust, but it seems plausible. We trust the narrator at this point too.

The ambiguous ending is perfect. We ourselves don't know whether this was the mainline or just a sideline.

Beyond that, the narration is smooth and the dialog is natural. It's a fun story and a pleasant read.

Con: There ought to have been more of an emotional punch to this story, but I didn't feel anything. Zhao had lived for so long and his existence seemed like a burden to him, plus it wasn't clear he was really dying at all.

I'm surprised neither of them entertained the idea that all the different timelines might be

real.

The Island and Its Boy, by Bo Balder Review by Greg Hullender

(Alternate Reality Fantasy) Inu's people need to leave their island home before it heads south. There's a new island for them, but Inu wonders what would happen if he stayed with the old one. (6,817 words; Time: 22m)

"The Island and Its Boy," by Bo Balder [bio] (edited by C.C. Finlay), appeared in The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction issue 11-12|18, published on October 27, 2018 by Spilogale Inc.

Pro: The story is clearly meant to be set in an alternate version of our world, and Inu's people are an alternate humanity based on the Inuit people of our world. Mentions of things like birth pouches and nest brothers don't much change our impression of these folks as more or less like the igloo-builders we're familiar with.

Of course the moving, telepathic islands are a much bigger difference!

He and the Island were in it together.

Inu enjoys the privilege of being a "sister-brother" (i.e. a boy who has a female twin), but he's got the extra ability of being able to communicate with the island—the only male known to be able to do so. It's rather nice that he never uses this ability for his personal advantage, but he's a very nice guy.

I love the way he gradually builds a set of allies for his mission, gently wooing Okiu, knowing she won't get many offers, but eventually falling in love with her for herself. And how his nest brothers don't take his plans to stay behind seriously until he gets punished for it, but then they're with him 100%.

By the time they're all together alone on the island, they're a team, and it looks like they'll make a success of it.

Con: : You'd think someone else would have done this before and they'd have a system for coping with it. No one ever offers a reason to fear going south, other than that it was against their ways. There was also mention of trade, so they must have known something about the rest of the world.

About Rocket Stack Rank

RocketStackRank.com says of itself: We want to make it easier for people to nominate short works of speculative fiction (short stories, novelettes, and novellas) for the Hugo Awards. We saw that there were two big obstacles to doing this: the first is that there is such breadth of new material that most people can only read a subset. The second is that even if someone recommended a story, most people have no way to get hold of it unless it was offered online for free.

We read original stories in eleven magazines, Analog Science Fiction and Fact, Apex, Asimov's Science Fiction, Beneath Ceaseless Skies (BCS), Clarkesworld, Interzone, Lightspeed, Strange Horizons, The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction (F&SF), Tor.com, and Uncanny, and we rate them on a scale of one to five, with the intention that most stories will get a score of three, and that few will get either one or five. Someone with very little time could simply read our five-star stories and choose from those. Someone with more time could read the fours and fives.

Additionally, we have documented different ways to get the back issues of magazines so people can read stories from earlier in the year.