

Tightbeam 321

June 2021



Pegasus Lake

By Angela K. Scott

Tightbeam 321

June 2021

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

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To join or renew, use the membership form at <http://n3f.org/join/membership-form/> to provide your name and whichever address you use to receive zines. Memberships with The National Fantasy Fan (TNFF) via paper mail are \$18; memberships with TNFF via email are \$6. Zines other than TNFF are email only. Additional memberships at the address of a current dues-paying member are \$4. **Public memberships are free.** Send payments to Kevin Trainor, PO Box 143, Tonopah NV 89049 . Pay online at N3F.org. PayPal contact is treasurer@n3f.org.

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Editorial

The time for a newszine has arrived. Its name will be chosen by the membership. The practical issue is that The National Fantasy Fan and Tightbeam both have rigid length limits. The National Fantasy Fan stops at 12 pages, first because postage costs change and second because I have to print and collate the zine. Tightbeam stops at 32 pages for other reasons. Of course, I could use smaller type or eliminate all the white space, but that sounds ... unattractive.

We have three fannish news columns, namely Justin E. A. Busch's Fanfaronade, Mindy Hunt's convention listing, and Cathode Ray. They need a home that is not space-constricted. On due consideration, we'll do that as an experiment this month. We do need a title for our newszine, hopefully better than News of Fen. See Justin E. A. Busch's letter this issue. Zine title suggestions are most welcome. George Phillies

Letters of Comment

Will Mayo writes:

Thanks again, George. It's good in any case to be included. And I'll try to take your advice and concentrate on some long term news in the making. After all, we live in an incredible time. Empires rise and fall. Our civilization is just at the beginning of its interplanetary voyages. And we ask ourselves the same old questions - What does it mean to be a man alive in the world today? Where will our hopes and dreams lead us next? For all this and more we turn to talespinning all over again...

Dear George and Jon:

Thank you for Tightbeam 320, and I hope I am not too late to contribute to the June issue. I gave myself a little holiday from writing to deal with a couple of celebrations and some jewelry-making, but now, it's back to the loccing dungeon, and get caught up once again.

First of all, my previous letter...we're now on month 14 of the pandemic, and month 7 of lockdown, although it does look like we may escape the lockdown, and I can go and get a haircut! I see that Outworlds 71/Afterworlds won a FAAn Award, I think, but there was outrage over it not getting on the Hugo ballot.

Justin Busch's Fanfaronade 10...not too long ago, I tried doing a fanzine review column, and even in my training as an objective journalist, I couldn't be objective at all. I am just happy they're here, and still going in the nearly 40 years I've been in the letter column. I fully agree that you cannot replicate the experience of a fanzine online. There are online fanzines and similar blogs, or even a spoken zine, but I still prefer the magazine format, for I can read and respond, read further and respond further, until I am done.

I have certainly enjoyed steampunk, and I suspect I would enjoy Mortal Engines if I was ever to see it. I admit that what attracted me to steampunk was the costuming. I find many of the steampunk books I have read to be slow and ponderous, so I enjoy most the steampunk reference books, and there's many of them.

Thanks to Jon for more on Leigh Brackett. I have some of her books on my shelf, but it al-

ways seemed out of place to see that she wrote the screenplay for *The Empire Strikes Back*, and won a Hugo for it, too. Always something new to learn.

Yvonne and I celebrated our 38th wedding anniversary on May 28, and I had my 62nd birthday on June 2. So, I can say I had a few other things to do. I am getting back on track, so many thanks for this issue, and I will keep an eye out for the next. See you then.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

Dear George,

There have been publications with some version of ‘fanews’ in the title (hence my reference to using an old word in a new context), but, so far as I can tell, none is even remotely recent. The list includes:

Fanews Analyzer (Don Rogers, Jimmy Rogers, Raym Washington, Helen Bradleigh, 1943 (a Cosmic Circle [Claude Degler] publication)
Fanewscard (Bob Tucker, Ed Conner, Frank Robinson, Walt Dunkelberger, Earl Kay, 1943-1954 (from 1945 on, the name was increasingly given simply as *The Fanews*)
Fan-Newsie (Bernard Cook, end of 50s/early 60s)
Fanew Sletter [sic] (Leigh Edmonds, 1974-1978)

As with the appearance of the term in many mundane newspaper titles, there are plenty of fanzines which have used ‘Gazette.’ Most, and probably all, no longer exist. They include:

The Science Fiction Gazette (Leeds Group, 1937; this fractured into two identically titled fanzines with Issue 4)
Z.Z. Zug Gazette (Jack Speer, 1939)
The Chattahoochee, Okefinokee and Ogeechee Occasional Gazette (Choog) (Lee Hoffman, Bob Shaw, 1951-1957)
The Saturday Morning Gazette (John L. Magnus, 1953)
The Coventrianian Gazette (Bruce Pelz, 1962)
Crabapple Gazette (Mike Horvat, 1968)
The Somerset Gazette (Melbourne SF Club, edited by Noel Kerr, circa 1970-1971)
Earth Gazette (W.G. Bliss, circa 1970-1974)
The Gobrín Gazette (Eli Cohen, 1975-1976)
The Little Gazette (Nikki Lynch, 1981; a one-shot clubzine)
Crickhollow Gazette (Simon Carter, circa 1982; a Tolkien clubzine)
The Gallifrey Gazette (editor unknown, circa 1982-1984)
The Space Cadet Gazette; or: The Aging Old Fhart Nostalgic Time Waster Gazette (R. Graeme Cameron, 1994-2014)
The Wollongong Pig-Breeder's Gazette (Perry Middlemiss (ANZAPA), circa 1993-1997)
The Royal Swiss Navy Gazette (Garth Spencer, circa 2003-2010)
Catchpenny Gazette (David Burton, 2004-2006; superseded by *Pixel*)
St. Petersburg Gazette and Dawson's Landing Herald (Steven H. Silver, 2010; this, commemorating the centennial of Mark Twain's death, is a one-shot).

With the dubiously possible exception of Graeme Cameron's *Space Cadet Gazette*, none of these is still being published. There are at least a few others, especially apazines, for which I haven't been able, in the available time, to track down to provide any details, but I doubt they had much of a presence. I do not think that using either word is likely to generate any confusion (so long as we don't claim to have resurrected Lee Hoffman).

I still favor *Fanactivity Gazette*, mainly because its name sounds like a taradiddle on a snare drum. But as I said before, the name is less important than what we do with the fanzine.

Justin E. A. Busch

Anime

Spring 2021 First Impressions – The Saint's Magic Power is Omnipotent Review by Jessi Silver



Streaming: Funimation

Episodes: 12

Source: Light Novel

Story Summary: Sei is an overworked office employee who, after being made to stay late yet again, returns home under dark of night only to be magically summoned to an alternate world called Salutania which suffers from the proliferation of a terrible miasma. In this world a figure called a “Saint”

is said to have the power to hold back the miasma, but in dire cases where they do not appear organically they are often actively summoned into duty through magical means. Sei arrives with a second woman and Prince Kyle seems to take to her more quickly, whisking her away and leaving Sei to spend her days alone in boredom. But a chance meeting introduces Sei to a magical research institute, where her prior interest in herbal remedies translates very well into the distillations of magical potions. She has a knack for it, too; despite having had no idea how to use magic when she arrived in Salutania, it turns out that her magical abilities are powerful and seemingly bottomless. When a group of knights is attacked by a monster, Sei’s special 1.5-strength healing potions turn out to be a boon.

Impressions: One of the things I’ve been most thankful for over the past few months is the greater understanding I’ve gained toward the development of modern isekai stories. I think as a woman who’s been an anime fan since the 1990’s, it’s really easy to get caught up in the idea that the shoujo fantasy series of yesteryear were objectively superior to the isekai power fantasies of the last decade or so, when in fact they’re different beasts entirely. I recommend Kim Morrissy’s recent historical breakdown of where stories like *Mushoku Tensei* and its brethren originate from for some interesting perspective. That said, the genre does tend to come with its share of tropes and I’d be lying if I said I was cool with all of them. One thing that’s bothered me in the past is the gender ratio of isekai protagonists, at least as far as anime adaptations are concerned.

One thing I’ve appreciated over the past few years is the relative increase in isekai stories starring girls and women. I can’t say we’ve reached gender parity in these kinds of anime adaptations, but similar to my feelings on fan-service, it’s easier to accept a non-ideal situation when you feel like you’re being treated like a



valid audience member at least some of the time. Stories like *Ascendance of a Bookworm* and *So I'm a Spider, So What?* have served as a bit of an oasis for me when I've been feeling bummed over the state of affairs in anime fantasy-genre storytelling.

The Saint's Magic Power is Omnipotent seems to be shaping up as a good addition to that list, at least as far as the first episode is concerned. It's got some of my favorite things going for it – it stars an adult woman protagonist who arrives armed with a useful skill set based on her hobbies, she's smart and isn't a pushover, and there's perhaps a bit of subtle commentary buried within the story about how damaging prejudiced perceptions of women's skills can be.

I can't say I wouldn't have the same reaction.

The other woman Sei is summoned with is immediately whisked away by the Prince; it seems that everyone assumes she's the real Saint whereas Sei is just an extraneous figure. There's a somewhat unstated assumption that the other young woman – more traditionally feminine, quiet and pretty – must be the actual Saint, whereas Sei – a gruffer, perhaps older (hard to tell), and more overworked woman – doesn't fit that idealized image. While my hope is that these two characters aren't pitted against one-another in a way that boils down to women just being competitive for dubious reasons, I think I can see a path forward where the wrongful assumptions of the men in this story (seriously – the only other woman we've been introduced to thus far is a maid) comes back to haunt them. And heck, maybe our unnamed other Saint candidate has her own set of abilities we haven't learned about, yet. What's better than one cool woman? Two cool women, of course.

Pros: While the background plot of this story seems pretty typical, the focus on herbalism and healing magic definitely is not. Multiple people I know have compared it to *Snow White with the Red Hair* because of the protagonists' shared herbalism skills and focus on benevolent rather than violent magic, but I'd actually say it reminds me more of *Ascendance of a Bookworm* in its hobbies-turned-skills framing. Either way those are both fantasy stories I really enjoy and I'm glad that I feel I can favorably compare this first episode to those series.

I also really appreciate how readily the other characters accepted Sei's desire to do something useful with her time and even encouraged her interests. I just find it nice that she wasn't questioned or warned against wanting to learn. I suspect that there are perhaps other motives for letting her off her leash, but for right now it's just a really pleasant turn of events.

And I really just like Sei. She's not a wholly sarcastic person, but she definitely doesn't take to her isekai circumstances right away, and I can appreciate that.

Cons: As much as I like our main character, I feel there's a risk of her being tokenized. All the other named characters we spend any amount of time with are men and I worry that Sei may end up being framed as an exception of her gender, rather than just a person with exceptional skills. I also don't want her other real-world counterpart to end up being an antagonist in some way (though Prince Kyle is already looking to be kind of a bad guy, or at least he's being framed that way, so maybe I'm worrying too much).

Content Warnings: Aftermath of violence, including bloody and dire injuries (no gore).

Would I Watch More? – Yes, it's going on the list. I really liked this episode a lot.

Books

Life: Science Fiction 100 Years of Great Movies

Review by Jim McCoy

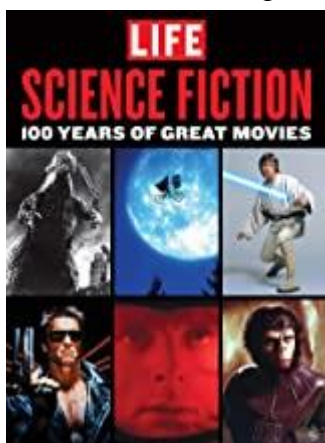
Sometimes when you're a cab driver working the midnight shift you make a pit stop at the local gas station at three in the morning. And sometimes you're a bit tired because it's three AM and you're eleven hours into a thirteen hour shift and dammit, you need something to keep you up in case you get a call. So you buy a really cool looking magazine and then...

Proceed to fall asleep with the magazine in your hand. It's three o'clock and you were already half asleep when you bought it. Whatever, it's all good. What that means, really, is that you've got something to look at when you get to the laundromat a week later. And, if it's a cool magazine then it's worth the wait. Fortunately, this magazine was definitely worth the wait. Actually, it was double fortunate, because when I read it, I noticed a tag on the front cover that said "Display until 9/23/16." Oops, I guess I was later than I initially realized. Whatever, I still enjoyed it.

The magazine in question is Life: Science Fiction 100 Years of Great Movies. It was a lot of fun. It was kind of like walking into a room with an old friend and talking about some of my favorite movies. All of the best ones are here. The best stuff that you grew up watching is in the magazine. This thing is full of classics. Godzilla (the original), Star Wars, Planet of the Apes, 2001: A Space Odyssey (not that I liked it, but it is a classic), The Martian. They're all here.

Now, I don't agree with all of the choices. I get including Star Trek. I don't get making it the 2009 edition. Avatar is in here. Seriously. Avatar? Why? I mean it wasn't all that good of a movie. It's not as bad as some people have said, but it's maybe a 3.5 out of 5 Annoying Blue Dudes. I mean, how did that land in here? Overall though, I really do appreciate the choices that they made and it's pretty much inevitable that I wasn't going to agree with them on everything.

This magazine is gorgeous. The cover is beautiful. The table of contents features the Millennium Falcon taking fire from a TIE Fighter. Every movie has a layout of big, awesome pictures. Someone put a lot of work into laying this out and it shows. OK, so maybe the Invasion of the Body Snatchers pictures were a little gross, but it's Invasion of the stinking Body Snatchers. They couldn't NOT look gross. It just wouldn't have worked that way. I have a feeling that some of the older pictures may have been digitally remastered. The 1953 War of the Worlds was never that clear. It was clearly improved. That's good though, because they kept the content of the picture and made it look better.



There is a lot of political commentary included in SF100GM. It's not overwhelming and some of it actually fits. Some of it I'm not so sure of. Specifically, they quote Jack Finney as saying he never wrote Invasion of the Body Snatchers to have a message... and then assign a message to it. Call me crazy, but I'm a bit more convinced by what the author says than by someone else's interpretation. That having been said, a lot of movies are influenced by cultural and political zeitgeist and most of it fits.

There is a story to go with each movie that is featured. In many cases (Star

Wars, Star Trek, etc.) there is talk of the series of flicks that come after. It's weirdly awesome to see a story about the original Star Wars (before it was known as Episode IV) and seeing a picture of Rey and BB8 but it works. It seems appropriate to talk about each film's legacy and, let's face it, sequels are part of that legacy. Without Star Wars, we don't get The Last Jedi. Without Back to the Future, we don't get Back to the Future II and III. It just makes sense. Oh, and we also get more of those gorgeous pictures that way. This makes me happy.

The work begins with an introduction. It's a good one. As Science Fiction fans, we all remember the first movies we saw in the genre. For me, there will never be anything to match sitting in a theater with my mother watching Return of the Jedi just a couple weeks after it's initial release. That was my first. What a lot of us forget though is that before we were born, even before the classics that so many of us watched on TV because they had been out long before we were born, there was the foundation.

Le Voyage Dans le Lune was the first ever SF movie. It was released in 1902. Metropolis (nothing to do with Superman) was released in 1927 and had the biggest budget in movie history up to that point. (It's also the subject of a beautiful picture on the back cover of the magazine.) They don't spend a lot of time on it, but it's good information. A lot of fans will tell you that modern day SF is simply a recycling of old tropes. These old, old flicks are where those tropes come from. Would I read a thousand page book about them? Probably not. The fact remains that giving them a few pages in a magazine makes sense and is entertaining.

The magazine is further divided into sections entitled "The Age of Anxiety", "A New Hope?" and "Reel to Reality." Each includes a couple pages about the cultural background at the time. I like this a lot. Speaking as a man with a history degree, it's important to remember that the past is a foreign country. That may be more true now than ever before. I remember watching an episode of House. It featured a man coming out of a coma. He had been asleep for like two to three years, I believe. In the backseat of one of the doctor's cars, he found an Ipod and didn't know what it was. (Granted, it's an older episode, so they were still kind of new.) Technology had changed that much in only a couple of years.



Dogfight by Jose Sanchez

I'm still pretty young but I remember turntables and eight tracks. My parents had both. I owned a tape recorder. I owned a CD player. I even owned an .mp3 player, but who needs one of those anymore? I've got a cell phone now. Along with all of the technological changes come the cultural changes. Sixty years ago, McCarthyism was prevalent. People were investigated for communist leanings. In the here and now, you're more likely to be investigated for NOT being a Leftist.

When the cultures change, the movies change and spending a page or two to set the stage for what comes next is the smart thing or two. Movies don't happen in a vacuum.

All in all, I really enjoyed this. Oh, and I got all my laundry done too, which is a plus. A trip down memory lane is good for the soul. My wa is very settled now. I had a blast.

Bottom Line: 4.75 out of 5 Classic Flicks

Comics

Western Comics Reviews by Stephanie Souders

As it turns out, I don't have much to say about May's offerings from the Big Two, so this column will focus on three four-star independent graphic novels I read in the past month — one recent release followed by two online recommendations.

T-Bird & Throttle vs. the Moon Men Writer/Artist: Josh Howard (How Rad Comics, Superhero)

A YouTube commentator I regularly follow has described this book as the anti-*Watchmen*, noting that it is a *reconstruction* (rather than a deconstruction) of the superhero. Said reviewer, in my view, got it exactly right. The first volume of *T-Bird & Throttle* opens with our protagonist living in disgrace, despised by a world that views men like T-Bird as fascistic, misogynistic, racist — basically any au courant insult you can imagine. But lest you think Josh Howard is simply out to satirize “wokeness,” it should also be noted that T-Bird's past is *not* sinless — that, in fact, he *does* have one major skeleton in his closet for which he needs to atone. So while this story does have some pretty pointed things to say about the eagerness with which certain factions embrace misinformation and smear campaigns, its more important purpose is to tell a *redemption* story — a purpose it achieves with genuine heart.

Cardboard Writer/Artist: Doug TenNapel (Scholastic, Fantasy — Real World Setting, Young Adult)

Are you someone who absolutely adores books like *The Velveteen Rabbit* or *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane*? Then this comic might be for you. The premise: an out-of-work widower, struggling to put together some semblance of a decent birthday celebration for his son, meets a weird salesman who sells him an enchanted cardboard box from which figures can be made and brought to life. From this box, father and son build a man who actually turns out to be a great protector and friend — something they end up needing when the neighborhood ne'er-do-well steals some of the magical cardboard and uses it to make a menacing army of monsters. As an adult reader, I was able to predict the progression of the story here fairly easily — and even foresaw the ending. Nonetheless, it still hit me hard in the feels. Why? Because throughout, TenNapel tackles his main characters' background grief with touching sincerity and real human emotion. The depiction of the father's difficulties in particular make *Cardboard*, in my view, an unquestionable winner.

The Shadow Hero Writer: Gene Luen Yang Artist: Sonny Liew (First Second Books, Superhero/Historical)

As I hope I made clear a while back when I reviewed *Superman Smashes the Klan*, Gene Luen Yang knows how to write. And because he has that talent, he's able to do “representation”

right. He doesn't lecture the reader, and he doesn't stack the deck in favor of his specific view of the world. Instead, he channels his experiences as a Chinese American into stories that are creative, complex, and honest — stories like *The Shadow Hero*, in which Yang unearths a little-known Golden Age hero and gives him an interesting (and tragic) origin story rooted in the mid-20th-century Asian immigrant experience. The only complaint I have here? I would've liked to have seen just a little more acknowledgement of the father's decency and bravery. That he asked the turtle spirit to keep him sober instantly inspires my fascination and sympathy — and puts the lie to the idea that he was a coward. But that bit of quibbling aside, this is an essential read for anyone looking for *high-quality* "diverse" titles that *aren't* just thinly-disguised political tracts.

Yes, I take requests and suggestions! If there's a particular review you'd like to see, please contact me at hobsonphile@gmail.com and tell me the title, creators, and - most importantly - point of sale. Assuming the comic in question is available for immediate purchase, I will respond in the following issue!

The Prince of Artemis V
 Written by Jennifer Brozek
 Artwork by Elizabeth Guizzetti
 Review by Jim McCoy

Long ago, in a decade now remembered as "The Eighties" my neighbor Dennis brought over a large box. I wasn't sure what was in it, but once he saw me playing in the yard, he made me carry it into the house. Once there, he opened it and showed the contents to my father. They were comic books. On those pages of wonder were stories of mutants, stories of transforming robots, stories of beings with power rings who could travel the stars through the force of their will...

I fell in love. My love of science fiction and fantasy broadened. Then, in the fullness of time, I started a blog. I went out on a limb with my first post and stated that comic books were indeed part of the universe of Science Fiction and Fantasy (which I consider to be an incontrovertible fact but others disagree with) and proceeded to...

Never do a review of a comic book, Well, at least until now. What you are reading is a moment I've been waiting for since I started this blog. I GET TO REVIEW A COMIC BOOK!!! And it's a good one too.

The Prince of Artemis V is a pretty awesome story. It goes quickly, as comics are wont to do, but it's full of action. I find it kind of ironic that the story takes place in dreams but it's so entertaining. Actually, maybe I don't. It's not like A Nightmare on Elm Street was ever boring. At any rate, the story is a good one and asks a lot of questions.

There is a mystery with this book, but it's not one that is solved/revealed by the end of the story. That's okay. The characters themselves know who the villains are.. sort of. They know that they're older brother was a victim, but not why. The weird thing about this comic is that, while there is a name for the villains, no one knows who they really are or why they do what they do.

I'm really hoping that there is a sequel coming to this story. There is so much here that is unknown that I'd love to see revealed at some future date. Note that this is meant as a compli-

ment to the author of the piece. I want to see more! I want to know more! This is a good thing. If I ever get something published (Don't hold your breath waiting) it's the response I want. There needs to be more here. I want to know more.

Ok, so this one ends on a cliffhanger and I'm not a fan of cliffhangers. I've stated that many times before. The fact remains that they're a good marketing tactic because they make you want to buy the next book and/or watch the next episode. This one is no exception, or it wouldn't be if I knew there was a sequel coming to answer some of these questions. We'll see what Brozek, Guizzetti and Apocalypse Ink decide to do, but I think it's fairly obvious what my suggestion would be.

When talking about a comic, one must always mention the art. Elizabeth Guizzetti has done an outstanding job here. This book is beautiful. The people come alive on the page. The facial expressions do an awesome job of portraying emotion. There is a picture of a castle (supposedly drawn by one of the characters) that just sings to me. Guizzetti has created an amazing world with her drawings. Seriously. I want to travel to the planet of the Takers (assuming that it's accurately represented in the dreams) and I damn sure don't want to be anywhere near the misery of Artemis V, the dark, dreary world where life sucks, everything is dreary and kids disappear. Granted, both were created by Brozek with her writing (and she did a damn good job) but it's Guizzetti's artwork that really brings it to life. She really needs to take a bow.

The majority of the action in this story takes place between the members of the royal family on Artemis V. It feels real. The family has suffered a horrible loss and it shows. Hurt feelings and resentment abound. Through it though, the fact that they love each other is obvious. They look out for each other, tying their legs together to avoid being taken. Mom makes her kids wear their coats. In a weird way, the mundane things about the story and the family interactions are what make the fantastic elements of the story work. All of the normal stuff is so believable that everything else just fits in place around it.

My only complaint is that this work doesn't really provide the satisfying ending I wanted. I was really hoping that something would be revealed about the Takers. I wanted to know more. So, I guess my main complaint is the same as my chief compliment: There needs to be more here. If the Takers are taking kids, why? What do they hope to gain by it? They state that they're doing it for the good of the children, but are they really? I mean, they could be but that doesn't mean they are.

All in all though, I really enjoyed this comic. I can't wait to see more from the creative team that came up from this one, whether together or separately. I'd pay for another installment.

Films

Godzilla Vs. Kong

A Review by Richard Paolinelli

As seen in upstreamreviews.com/?p=487

Two points to warn you about right from the beginning of this review of Godzilla Vs. Kong.

There will be spoilers. I've waited this long to write this so that the diehard Monster movie

fans could watch the film for themselves.

I went into this film with some trepidations. From the trailers, it appeared they were going to make Kong the hero and Godzilla the bad guy after two very successful Godzilla films that made the Titan a savior of humanity. Just to be clear I am a HUGE Godzilla fan and have been since the first time I caught the 1954 classic on late night TV back in the before times. I have two Godzilla figures on my shelf, one being the 1968 TOHO version of the King, and the other from the more recent franchise. I'm not a fan of Kong at all, so you can guess who I was rooting for in this film.

Happily, they didn't go there and what I can tell you, pre-spoilers, is that this was a great film that you should go watch right now and then come back and read this so you can avoid the spoilers.

Okay, you're still reading, so either you've watched it or you have said "Spoilers be damned my good fellow, review away!"

The best part of this film, as was the case with the previous two Godzilla movies, was the battles between the big boys and the two encounters between Godzilla and Kong did not disappoint. Both were allowed to be dominant when in their own element and Kong was only saved from being drug to the bottom of the ocean to drown by souped-up depth charges that broke him free of Godzilla's grip.

The fleet that got in the way of the pair didn't fare so well though, neither did Hong Kong at the end of the film. I was kind of disappointed the last showdown didn't go down in Tokyo, where most of the big monster fights usually ended up back in the 1960s and 1970s, but it was close enough.

The introduction of Hollow Earth and the long-standing war between Godzilla's species and Kong's was shown nicely. Bringing in MechaGodzilla was a nice touch, although that has always been my least favorite of Godzilla's foes, but it served its purpose as the reason why Godzilla and Kong set aside their hostilities and joined forces against the new threat.

I would have liked to have seen more of a battle between the three, it seemed like this one was somewhat rushed and easily resolved. Then again, the creation of MechaGodzilla was also a little contrived in my opinion. The evil businessman, Walter Simmons, uses his company, Apex Cybernetics, to construct MechaGodzilla, but needs to track down a power source in Hollow Earth to make it work. Once that source is located, by following Kong to Hollow Earth after he survives his first battle with Godzilla, Simmons has Ren Serizawa, the son of the late Ishiro Serizawa, hook himself up to MechaGodzilla by using the skull of the defeated Ghidorah as a neural pathway. Simmons' intent is to use his creation to protect mankind from all of the monsters – though I never caught why Godzilla wasn't considered good enough for the job. When his fully powered creation comes to life, it turns on its creators and kills them both before venturing out to tackle Godzilla, who has just beaten Kong and is leaving him to die.

Kong gets a supercharged jolt to the heart as Godzilla is getting walloped by the machine monster and jumps into the fight. When the two Titans work together, they defeat the creature. For a moment, it looks like the next round of battle between the two is about to begin, but instead they go their separate ways – Godzilla to the sea to patrol the Earth and Kong back to his

newfound home in Hollow Earth.

Overall, a good film, though it felt more like a second Kong film than a third Godzilla movie at times.

My lone complaint with the film is the Russell family.

Dr. Mark Russell has to be the worst dad in history and Madison Russell should have been killed at least a dozen times since she first appeared back in *Godzilla: King of the Monsters*. Seriously, its time to move on from these characters that brought nothing to the franchise in the first place.

It's a pity that Ken Watanabe's character was killed off in the previous film. It might have made for a better plot point to have him around trying to figure out why Godzilla was on a rampage, attacking cities for no apparent reason, and then having a showdown at the end with his son's mechanical monster.

I could not tell if a fourth film is coming in the Godzilla franchise, though Kong exploring Hollow Earth seems a natural next step for that monster. Here's hoping we have more films to come. The last year has not shown us a lot in the way of new films. Many of those that have been released fell flat (hello, *WW84*) but at least for this once we had a film worth watching during this otherwise dismal decade.

Tenet— Review by Tom Feller

This movie was written and directed by Christopher Nolan, so you expect an intellectually challenging but not necessarily emotionally satisfying film. I would call it a time traveling variation on the James Bond movies (Nolan is a big fan) with a plot so convoluted that it is impossible to summarize. It throws the terms "time inversion" and "temporal pincer" around, for example, without explaining them, but the script was reviewed by physicist Kip Thorne for scientific plausibility before filming began.

The protagonist is a former C.I.A. agent played by John David Washington, and he is assisted by a British agent played by Robert Pattinson. The organization they work for is called Tenet. The villain is an Anglicized Russian billionaire arms dealer (Kenneth Branagh), who abuses his wife (Elizabeth Debicki), the mother of his son. Michael Caine, a veteran of both spy thrillers and spoofs of spy thrillers, has a brief cameo. There is so much action that there is little time for romance and character development in this two and a half hour movie, and the MacGuffin is a weapon from the future that, if assembled and activated, will destroy the universe. This movie is quite an experience.

Filming took place in Italy, Estonia, India, Norway, Denmark, Great Britain, and the United States with a budget of \$205 million. The film is actually rather light on computer generated images, but instead had the actors walk and talk backward to demonstrate the concept of time inversion. Even the car chase scenes had the cars being driven in reverse. A real Boeing 747 was trashed, and several scenes take place on a real yacht that is big enough to have its own helicopter pad.

“Tenet”, by the way, is a palindrome, a word that is spelled the same forwards and backwards, which was Nolan’s intention. It was the winner of Best Visual Effects Oscar and nominated for Best Production Design.

Star Trek: The Undiscovered Country Review by Will Mayo

Like most guys that grew up in three '60s and '70s, I was a big fan of the original Star Trek TV show. And though I never got into any of the subsequent shows that followed I was always a big fan of the movies that starred the original cast. My favorite, by far, of those movies has got to be "Star Trek: The Undiscovered Country," in which the gang go in search of the center of the galaxy. And what should they find at the center of that galaxy but a being that claims to be the god of all being. Leave it to Captain Kirk to get involved with a showdown with this god/being. This has got to be the most entertaining and thought provoking of all the Star Trek movies to date. Worth a download on your device any day.

Old Guard— Review by Tom Feller

Based on the 10 issue graphic novel series from 2017 by Leandro Fernandez and Greg Rucka, who also wrote the screenplay, the premise of this film is that a group of (almost) immortals walk among us and make their living as mercenaries. Their immortality is not absolute, because there are fleeting references to a member of their group who dropped dead one day. Their leader is Andy, aka Andromache of Scythia (Charlize Theron), the oldest of the group, at least 2,300 years old. The others include Joe (Marwen Kenzari) and Nicky (Luca Marinelli) who discovered neither could be killed at the time of the crusades and eventually became lovers, and Booker (Matthias Schoenaerts) who dates from the Napoleonic wars. They have recently obtained a new recruit in Nile (KiKi Layne), courtesy of the U.S. Marines in Afghanistan.

Copley (Chiwetel Ejiofor), an ex-CIA agent, recruits them for a mission that fails disastrously. The principal villain is Merrick (Harry Melling), the head of a big pharmaceutical company, who wants to harvest their DNA in the hope that their immortality can be replicated in a laboratory. This film is very entertaining, well-acted, and full of action, but really does not cover any new ground.

Games

And I Thought The Europa Series Was Bad A Review of Hearts Of Iron IV by Kevin Trainor

Many of you reading this are old enough to remember when wargames were played on paper maps with cardboard counters. Some of you may even remember Game Designers Workshop, a company in Bloomington Illinois that's probably best known today for being the creators of Traveller, arguably the most successful of the science-fiction role playing games. Back in the day, though, they were best known for something else completely - the Europa series of wargames, a collection of games that allowed players to replay all of World War II in the Euro-

pean, Mediterranean, and North African theaters. The series started with Drang Nach Osten, which covered the German invasion of the Soviet Union up through 1943; the remainder of the Eastern Front was covered by DNO's sequel, Unentschieden.

Compared to other games of the time, they deserved the nickname of "monstergames", since the maps for DNO and its sequel covered most of a ping-pong table, with just enough room around the edges for the charts - and there were a passel of charts covering movement costs for terrain, the relative effects of armor in the attack, defense, and against anti-tank guns, replacement of destroyed air units...between the charts and the voluminous, highly detailed rules (to say nothing of the orders of battle/replacement/reinforcement/withdrawal listings), you needed at least a 1" three-ring binder to keep it all together. While you were at it, you probably sent off to SPI to get some counter trays, or resigned yourself to stuffing all the punched-out counters into ziploc bags by country and unit type. Did I mention that while the basic game unit was the division, the game also provided unit counters for specialized units (like flamethrower tanks and combat engineers) down to battalion size?

All this at a time when computers were barely able to play Pong, or perhaps Asteroids if you knew somebody with a PDP-10 mainframe that was idle...

Almost fifty years later, we have the modern equivalent of the Europa series, expanded to cover the rest of the world and now including diplomatic and espionage rules. Hearts of Iron by Paradox Games is in its fourth iteration, and much like its Dark Ages counterpart Crusader Kings, it is fiddly as hell. The Europa series stuck to the historical orders of battle and reinforcement/replacement schedules, but Hearts of Iron makes you get down into the nuts and bolts of figuring out not only how many tank battalions your panzer divisions are going to have, but what kind of tanks you're going to put in them - and what kind of infantry & support battalions will you be having with those? You have to make decisions about research, production, and foreign affairs based on your country's event tree (which in the case of the Germans starts with a decision whether you want to stick with the Nazis or overthrow Hitler and replace him with the exiled Kaiser Wilhelm) and of course choosing some options forecloses others.

Want quality strategic bombers so you can reduce New York to rubble in 1945? Kiss those Stukas goodbye, friend. Want a decent surface fleet with battleships and carriers? Your U-boat fleet is going to suck, because there's only so many shipyards in Germany, and those battleships take up a lot of time and resources. It's not a game you can just leap into and enjoy with a six-pack of beer and a bag of pretzels; if you are going to do well, much less win, you need to bone up on a bunch of the game's mechanics, which are not always intuitive or even in the same time zone as intuitive. (The game's AI is not smart enough to realize that your fighters based on the borders of the Netherlands are probably going to want to fly missions there.) Speaking of those air units, unlike your army divisions which appear on the map already trained, you'll have to exercise them to get them up to "trained" status, and that uses fuel, which comes from oil, and guess what the Axis powers don't have much of? So you have to research and build synthetic fuel plants, research refining so you can make more fuel out of the oil you get...it just goes on and on. The same applies to your ships and U-boats, by the way, and there's more tinkering there as you decide among various torpedo, gun, and mine options, plus sonar or radar. Which all have to be researched.

So if you like fiddling around with all this kind of detail, and exploring wacky alternate histories where (for example) King Edward VIII doesn't abdicate but makes common cause with

Hitler (while the colonies & dominions tell him to get stuffed along with his American whore), this is definitely the game for you. On the other hand, if you just want to spend a few hours chilling out with some beer & pretzels, pushing counters and rolling the dice, I have a shelf full of those games too. Hearts of Iron IV (and its sizable collection of downloadable content) is available on Steam, and frequently on sale for about \$40 including half a dozen of the more interesting DLC.

Novels

The Testaments by Margaret Atwood Review by Tom Feller

This is a sequel to *The Handmaid's Tale* set over fifteen years later. You may remember that it had a premise similar to Robert Heinlein's 1941 novella "If This Goes On". In Atwood's telling, the government of the United States has been overthrown by an organization known as the Sons of Jacob and replaced with a puritan, misogynistic theocracy called the Republic of Gilead. (Texas and California are not part of Gilead, by the way.) Another premise is that because of climate change, chemicals in the water and food supplies, and sexually transmitted diseases, there is an infertility problem. For this reason, upper class men were allowed concubines called "Handmaids", whom they rape in a ritual called "The Ceremony". This new novel has three point-of-view characters: Aunt Lydia, Agnes Jemina Kyle, and Daisy, aka Jade, aka Nicole. Their story lines converge about two-thirds into the novel.

Aunt Lydia, one of the villains in *The Handmaid's Tale*, was a 53-year-old family court judge when the revolution took place, which included an attack on Congress not unlike the one that took place on January 6. Her family had been "trailer trash", but she worked her way through college and law school. After being subjected to torture, she decides to throw in with the new regime and becomes one of the four most powerful "Aunts" in Gilead. This is an order of women, developed by Lydia and her colleagues, who have taken oaths of chastity. They provide education to upper class girls, arrange marriages within the upper class, and maintain genealogical records. Aunt Lydia eventually develops an agenda of her own.

Agnes Jemina is the adopted daughter of a Commander, a high ranking government official, and his upper class wife. Her education consists of drawing, painting, and embroidery, but deliberately excludes reading and writing. When she reaches puberty, she is molested by her dentist and betrothed to the head of the "Eyes", Gilead's spy organization and secret police. However, she does not want to get married, to him or anyone else. Her only alternative is to become an Aunt, where she finally learns to read and write, starting with modified editions of the Dick and Jane books. (In the original drawings, Dick and Jane are too scantily clad for Gilead.)

Daisy, aka Jade, aka Nicole was smuggled from Gilead to Canada when she was a baby and is raised by a couple who ostensibly operate a used clothing store. However, they are secretly members of Mayday, an underground organization dedicated to the overthrow of Gilead. After they are assassinated by the Eyes, Daisy goes on the run and is eventually sent on a mission to Gilead, where she infiltrates the aunts, meeting both Lydia and Agnes.

This novel is quite a page turner, and it is plotted like a thriller. The sequel is actual-

ly much more plot driven than the original, and Agnes and Nicole would not have been out of place in a Young Adult novel. Speech making is kept to a minimum, because that would have slowed down the narrative, and there is even some humor. While my edition came out at around 400 pages, there did not seem to be any wasted words. It even has an optimistic ending.

That Haunting Novel Review by Will Mayo

A book which haunted me in my early years was Daniel Keyes's science fiction novel *Flowers For Algernon* about a mentally disabled man who is given a drug at a treatment facility that elevates him into a genius of near-mythic proportions only to have it all slide back into mental deficiency again. Popular in the '70s - an age in which there seemed to be a drug for everything - this story was made into a movie called *Charly* that also had a haunting feel to it. I think of this novel often, especially with its subplot of a love gained and then lost, in my midnight moments. It was a big influence on me and who I became as a man and a writer in my own right.

SerCon

An Interview with Tony Andarian by Tamara Wilhite

Tony Andarian is the author of *Sanctum of the Archmage*. He published his first novel in 2017 before reworking it and preparing to re-release it, and is developing plans to continue it as an epic fantasy series.

Tamara Wilhite: What led you to rework and release your first novel in the *Sanctum of the Archmage* series? And can you tell me more about the series?

Tony Andarian: *Sanctum of the Archmage* is a story concept that I've been working on in several forms, on and off, for years. It got its start as the setting for a D&D campaign that I ran back in college. I've been slowly fleshing out its storyline ever since, with the intent to eventually try to publish it as a series of novels. Developing the saga always took a backseat to my career as a computer scientist, though, so progress on it has been slow and much of it's still "in my head." I've also published part of the story as a pair of fantasy RPG "adventure game modules" built in the *Neverwinter Nights* toolset. That's actually how the series first came to be known, which I can go into a bit later.

The story arc starts with a typical epic fantasy trope: a deposed princess fighting against an invasion of demons. It builds on that by exploring more philosophical themes, from independence vs. conformity and obedience to an elite leadership, to the rise and fall of civilizations and what actually causes them. In addition to obvious questions (like where did these demons come from and what are they after), it tries to address more subtle ones, such as what actually made their existence possible in the first place. A lot of world-building (with opposing cultures and "worldviews") went into planning how the story will play out, which I hope will make it more interesting.

The reason I decided to rework and re-release my first novel (the new title is *Hell Gate*) is that I wanted the beginning of the saga to be as strong as possible before moving on to the rest. I've got about ten volumes plotted out, and I really wanted to try to give those later books a sol-

id foundation. Also I've learned a lot about style over the last few years, and I realized that there was a fair bit of overwriting in the edition I'd published. The edit cleaned that up a lot, and I think improved the writing significantly. I'm also trying to make sure to get the marketing elements right this time: getting a good cover, figuring out where to publish and how to "get the word out" to "my kind of readers," and so on.

Tamara Wilhite: Aren't you working on the next book in the series?

Tony Andarian: The next book is already written. It's a "transition novella" titled *Aftermath*. *Aftermath* is partly an epilogue to *Hell Gate*, and continues the story of what happens to the main characters after its events. It also sets up the next novel in the series, *Wrath of the Peregrine King*, which I'm beginning to write now. The series has an introductory novella as well that sets up *Hell Gate*, titled *Prologue to Chaos*. It's been out for a while, and I've recently re-released it as a free download "funnel" for the rest of the series.

Aftermath and *Hell Gate* are only waiting for new cover art, and for me to plan how and when to release them. That's something that I'm actively rethinking right now, because I have some significant concerns about the state of indie publishing in 2021. That's got me re-evaluating whether to explore some more "out of the box" ideas that don't rely on major e-book publishers like Amazon, such as direct e-commerce sales and serializing the saga on sites like Patreon. There are also some very intriguing options becoming available for monetizing or promoting this kind of epic, world-building content, such as [World Anvil](#), which I'm actively pursuing. It's a great time to be exploring new ways to launch a series; my main obstacle is finding the time to do it.

Tamara Wilhite: What are the biggest influences on your writing?

Tony Andarian: There are several, but the biggest by far is Ayn Rand. Her ideas have been the most significant *intellectual* influence on my thinking for the last several decades, and some of Sanctum's philosophical themes were inspired by her work. The *Sword of Truth* by Terry Goodkind (who was also influenced by Rand) is another inspiration, as are the *Wheel of Time* and *Babylon 5*. And of course there's Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, which got me started reading fantasy in the first place.

I also count the entire field of fantasy RPGs (table-top and computer-based) as an influence. That came from playing a lot of D&D when I was younger, and a lot of fantasy computer games later on – including classics like Baldur's Gate II, Dragon Age: Origins, and Witcher 3. I've also been active in the Neverwinter Nights "modding" community for many years – which is where I first cut my teeth on learning to write and create stories in the new medium of story-based games.

Tamara Wilhite: What else have you written? Is it all fantasy?

Tony Andarian: These are my first forays into releasing the story in novel form. As I mentioned earlier, though, I've also published part of the saga in the form of story-based role-playing games. That was done in the *Aurora* engine that came with a Bioware game called *Neverwinter Nights*, which provides hobbyist game creators with a "toolset" to create their own adventures. The two "modules" I authored ([Sanctum of the Archmage: The Sight and The Quest](#)) tell a later part of the tale, for which the first novel is largely an "origin story."

What I tried to do with these was make the experience not just like being immersed in a *game*, but in an adventure *story*. Games do usually have stories, but they're often relegated to a secondary status behind a focus on gameplay. I wanted to try to create one where telling the story was the primary goal of the game's design, while of course still having good gameplay as well. I learned a lot in the process about storytelling through things like branching plots and dialogues, creating drama and mood through visual elements and music, and so on.

The games were highly rated, garnered some critical acclaim (including a few awards), and attracted a small but enthusiastic set of fans. They even earned me an interview for and prominent mention in [a PC Gamer article](#) a few years back, when plans for Beamdog's *Enhanced Edition* of *Neverwinter Nights* was announced. I thoroughly enjoyed making them, and I'm glad I did – but it was always a side-hobby in the spare time from my technical career. When I finally admitted to myself a few years ago that what I *really* wanted was to pursue a career as a storyteller, exploring indie publishing seemed like the obvious way to go.

Tamara Wilhite: What do you think is the basis of the trope of ancient, nearly forgotten evils? This is fairly frequent in fantasy, from Eldritch evils to Sauron lurking for thousands of years ...

Tony Andarian: That's a really good question. And it's obvious on reflection that that trope, and the kind of deep *worldbuilding history* that typically goes with it, runs through most of the works that I listed as influences. It's in the *Sword of Truth* and the *Wheel of Time*, and, of course, Tolkien's *Middle Earth*. It's even in games like *Dragon Age*, and it permeates *Sanctum* as well.

I'm not sure there's a single answer, but one thing that comes to mind is that it often goes with a love of discovery. I think that's something that a lot of people come to stories for. Unpeeling a deeply layered tale is kind of like solving a mystery. And it can be very effective to shroud that mystery in ancient history, rather than try to somehow create it out of a present-day world. Combine that with the fact that good stories need a “problem” to overcome anyway, and an “eldritch evil” starts to seem like a natural approach – especially if you're looking to create a story with a more “epic” feel.

It's also probably worth remembering that the discovery of ancient, forgotten evils can go hand in hand with the discovery of ancient, forgotten wonders. The latter is an oft-loved fantasy trope too. That's much of what my first game story, *The Sight*, is about, and the upcoming novels will expand on it as well.

Tamara Wilhite: I've heard that fantasy sells much better than science fiction, because it is more accessible – whether or not it is a clear morality play of good versus evil like *Harry Potter*. Your books are clearly set up as a fight of good versus evil. What do you think this says about society?

Tony Andarian: I hadn't heard that about fantasy being more accessible than science fiction, but it doesn't surprise me. While there are exceptions (*Game of Thrones* comes to mind), I do think that trying to present a clear moral conflict *is* probably more common in fantasy – and one of the things that *does* tend to make it more accessible.

What I think that says about society is that people are hungry (and rightly so) for art that

portrays a worldview with a clear-cut sense of right and wrong. Intellectual culture for most of my life has been dominated by a relativist philosophy that treated as an axiom that there was no such thing as “absolute truth,” and that moral ideals were somehow naive or unrealistic. Moral cynicism has been an intellectual fashion for decades, and to an extent still is. And as Ayn Rand observed, this often caused art that embraced the value-orientation inherent in moral action to retreat into “popular” art and literature, and to allegedly “less serious” genres. When culture treats heroes and morality as unrealistic, it's perhaps not surprising that they should show up in fantasy.

As much as people may hunger for clear moral conflict, though, I also think that many of us are losing patience with the parade of false alternatives that we're often offered for it. That's why as much as the Sanctum series may look at the outset like a straight-up “good vs. evil” story, a major theme of it is also about how *who the good guys really are* doesn't necessarily jibe with what we've been told. Or, as Kosh from Babylon 5 put it: “Understanding is a three-edged sword: your side, their side, and the truth.”

Tamara Wilhite: Is there anything you'd like to add?

Tony Andarian: I'd be very interested in hearing from readers about how open they are to exploring new ways for authors to publish in 2021. Are they committed to Amazon and/or Kindle Unlimited? Would they buy e-books direct, or subscribe to a serial on something like Patreon? Or something else? Anyone interested can email me at sanctum@andarian.com. And of course they can find links to follow me, and the progress of the saga, at <http://sanctum.andarian.com/social>.

Margaret St. Clair Bio-Bibliography

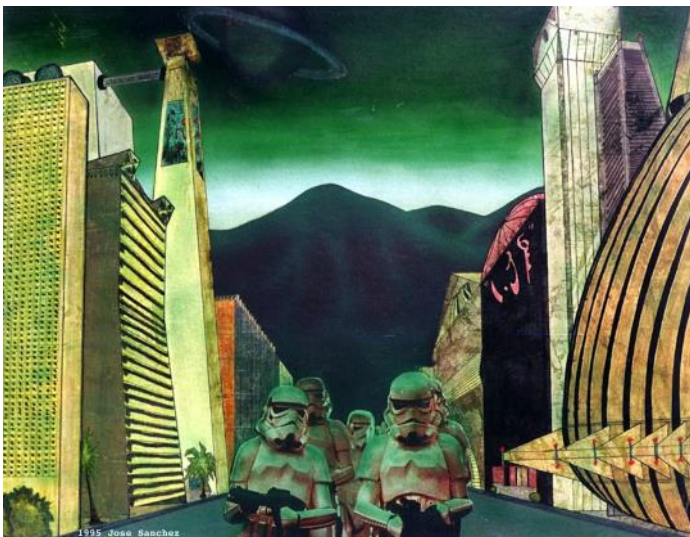
by

Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D.

N3F Historian

Margaret St. Clair was born Eva Margaret Neeley on February 17, 1911, in Hutchinson,

Kansas. Her father, United States Representative George A. Neeley, died when she was seven; but he left her and her mother well provided for. With no siblings, Margaret recalled her childhood as “rather a lonely and bookish one.” When she was seventeen, she and her mother, a teacher, moved to California.



City Patrol by Jose Sanchez

Margaret graduated Phi Beta Kappa from the University of California, Berkeley in 1933. In 1934, she earned an M. A. in Greek Classics. She had married author Eric St. Clair, whom she met while attending college, in 1932. The St. Clairs lived in a hilltop house with a panoramic view in what is now El Sobrante, California, where Margaret liked to garden. For a time in the late 1930s and early 1940s, she and her husband were professional horti-

culturists.

She became a full-time writer in 1945. Her first professional sale was “Current History” in *Detective Story* (March, 1945, issue). Her first genre publication was “Rocket to Limbo” in *Fantastic Adventures* (November, 1946, issue).

Genre Novels



Sign of the Labrys (1963), set in a vast underground shelter after the world has been depopulated by plagues, featured an overt early use of Wicca elements in fiction; St. Clair wrote that the book “was primarily inspired by Gerald Gardner’s books on witchcraft.” The editor of *The Crystal Well* called *Sign of the Labrys* “an occult classic,” and in his review of the novel for *Analog*, P. Schuyler Miller declared that St. Clair was one of the most unappreciated writers in science fiction (SF). Her research into witchcraft led to her friendship with Raymond Buckland, who recalled the St. Clairs as “absolutely wonderful people, very warm and loving.”

St. Clair’s last three novels comprise a loose trilogy, all having in common a near-future setting along the coast of Northern California, and elements of Wicca. In *The Dolphins of Altair* (1967), dolphins and three human compatriots stage a war on mankind by creating earthquakes and polar melting. In *The Shadow People* (1969), a young male narrator in Berkeley descends into a mysterious underworld to rescue his abducted girlfriend. *The Dancers of Noyo* (1973) draws on Pomo lore as a young male narrator in a California largely depopulated by plague goes on a “Grail Journey” along Highway 101. In these last two novels, the narrator’s quest climaxes in an “experience of transcendent enlightenment.”

All of her SF novels were published in paperback editions by Ace, Bantam, or Dell from 1956 to 1974; moreover, two of her short fiction collections were published by Ace in 1964 and 1974, respectively.

A *Compendium of Margaret St. Clair*, a collection of 62 of her short stories, edited by Christopher Broschell, was published in 2020.

During her writing career, she published eight novels, four of which were published in the Ace Double series. One of her most popular novels was *Sign of the Labrys* (1963), notable for its early use of Wicca elements in fiction.

TV Adaptations

Three of her stories were adapted for television. “Mrs. Hawk” was filmed as “The Remarkable Mrs. Hawk” for the 1961 season of *Thriller*, with Jo Van Fleet in the title role. “The Boy Who Predicted Earthquakes” (1950) and “Brenda” (1954) were seen as segments of *Rod Serling’s Night Gallery* during its 1971 season.

Later Personal Life

In her autobiographical writings, St. Clair revealed few details of her personal life, but interviews with some who knew her indicate that she and her husband were well-traveled, remained childless by choice; and in 1966, they were initiated into Wicca, taking the Craft names of Froniga and Weyland.

Eric St. Clair worked variously as a statistician, social worker, horticulturist, and laboratory assistant in the University of California's Physics Department; he also published numerous short stories and magazine articles and was "perhaps the leading American writer of children's stories about bears, having sold close to 100 of them." He also wrote SF, some of it published in F&SF, where many of his wife's stories were published under her Idris Seabright pseudonym.

Her Idris Seabright stories contain more fantasy and comedic elements than the stories she published under her own name.

The St. Clairs eventually moved from El Sobrante to a house on the coast near Point Arena, "where every window had an ocean view." A lifelong supporter of the American Friends Service Committee, Margaret spent her final years at Friends House in Santa Rosa, California. She outlived her husband by several years, and died on November 22, 1995.

Some Notable St. Clair Quotes

"I am not a natural writer. Writing is painful and difficult for me."

"I don't think I amount to anything especially."

"I am a passionate gardener, and I like cooking. I make most of my own clothes. I like to use my hands."

"I like my amusing stories a little better than the serious ones...."

"I have written two unperformed plays, and once had a short article in *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly*."

Critical Comments

According to Tuck, she began writing SF when her detective and other fiction was being rejected by publishers.

Her best work was described as "tightly written shorter fiction" that introduced unusual protagonists, by critic Rosemary Herbert, writing in *Twentieth Century Science Fiction Writers*.

Ramsey Campbell has described her work as "startlingly original" and argued that it has "yet to be fully appreciated."

"Her pulp sf is undercut by a dark skepticism...." (Stableford, 2004).

Genre critic Eric Leif Davin has written of her "pioneering role as a woman writing SF."

Some Concluding Comments

St. Clair was a member of the Golden Gate Scientific Association in 1930. She is much better known, however, as a SF writer, who also wrote under the pen names of Idris Seabright,

William Hazel, and Wilton Hazzard (a house name). Under her own name, she published stories in all the major SF prozines. She coined the fannish catchphrase “broad mental horizons.”

She became a full-time writer in 1945. Her first story in F&SF (December, 1950 issue) under her Idris Seabright pen name, “The Listening Child,” was selected as a distinguished short story of the year.

From 1947 to 1949, she published a series of stories about Oona and Jick Ritterbush, a suburban married couple of the future who lived in a rotating house and ate “Super Whost,” the “chronometrized carbohydrate.”

Her papers are archived at the University of California, Riverside.

A Personal Recollection

The first story of hers that I read was “Quis Custodiet. . .?” in Groff Conklin’s *The Science Fiction Galaxy* (1950), and originally published a couple of years earlier in *Startling Stories* (a SF prozine I didn’t read at the time). The story impressed me as a teenager, and continues to impress me now. I later liked her score of stories in F&SF, written under her Idris Seabright pen name; but it was years before I learned that St. Clair and Seabright were the same person.

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Short Stories

Seanán McGuire's October Daye Series: The Short Stories Reviews by Tom Feller

The series was nominated for the Hugo this year, and I found some unread stories from the series on my Nook from when it was nominated for the same award a few years ago. The premise of this fantasy series is that the Faerie world running parallel to our own as depicted in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* really exists. October "Toby" Daye is the name of a female faerie knight and a central character in the series.

The Fixed Stars—

The first story ties the series in with the King Arthur legends and is set in Albion (Great Britain) in 572 AD. The narrator, a daughter of Oberon, is a recurring character in the series: Nimue, aka The Lady of the Lake, aka Luidaeg, aka Annie, aka the Seawitch, aka Antigone of Albany. There is a war between the faeries and faerie/human hybrids called "merlins", and the leader of the merlins is called Emrys, aka Merlin of the Arthurian legends. He just happens to be Nimue's great-grandson, and she decides to betray her own kind to help him.

Rat-Catcher—

The series then jumps to 1666 London. Rand, the narrator, is a Cait Sidhe, aka a faerie cat, able to shape-change between cat and human. In his cat form, he inhabits a theater in London, where he catches rats and other vermin. In return, the acting company feeds him. One day his younger sister Jill brings him a summons from Ainmire, his father, the King of Fogbound Cats. Ainmire is an abusive, sadistic father, having killed Rand's oldest brother and sister and exiled his other brother, and he bullies Rand, Jill, and Colleen, his older sister. The King sends Rand to a convocation held by the faerie King of London, where he and other faerie nobles hear from a Roane, a kind of mermaid, who prophesies the Great Fire and the Plague and advises them to evacuate. Roanes are famous for accurate prophecies, so everyone there starts making preparations to leave. When Rand brings the news back to his father, his father decides to NOT evacuate out of spite. Rand then challenges Ainmire and overthrows him. His first act as king is to assume the name of Tybalt, after the character in *Romeo and Juliet*, and order the evacuation of faerie cats from the city.

Forbid the Sea—

The next story advances to 1676 and is also narrated by Tybalt, aka Rand, now the King of Fogbound Cats. Taking up with a friendly sailor while in his cat form, Tybalt takes a boat from London to the mouth of the Thames. At a fishing village, he changes his form to human and is eating dinner at an inn when a male selkie walks in the door. Tybalt and the selkie, who introduces himself as Dylan, strike up an acquaintanceship and become lovers before the night is over. Then they return to London where they spend a month together before the selkies find them. Dylan, it turns out, has broken one of their laws, and Tybalt has to decide whether to defend him.

Stage of Fools—

This is another Tybalt story set in 1700 London. His one surviving sister Colleen shows up with a baby girl named Callie. The father was a fairie prince who was murdered before the girl was born. Colleen is suspected of being the murderer by the prince's family, but she claims to be innocent. Tybalt not only has to solve the murder, but he also has to come to an arrangement with the father's family about Callie's status.

The Act of Hares—

In 1709, Tybalt is visited by four faerie cats in their human form who ask his protection, which he grants. When he goes to the market to buy food for supper, Tybalt is accosted by two representatives from the Faerie King and Queen of London who escort him to their presence. They have a conversation in which they stake out their relative positions in the faerie world. The story concludes when Tybalt pays a visit to an alley populated by mortal cats and announces the reformation of his court.

Leaps of Pearl—

Patrick is a faerie nobleman living in the San Francisco area in 1840 when he receives an invitation (actually a summons) to attend a royal ball held by the "King of the Mists", the faerie king and queen of the San Francisco area. Patrick hates balls and other high society functions, preferring to spend his time working on steam engines and other machines. His friend Simon persuades him to at least put in an appearance, so Patrick goes with the intention of leaving after an hour. However, he meets a young woman named Dianda who is ravenously hungry and as bored with the party as Patrick, so they retire to the kitchen for a private dinner. The rather predictable plot twist concerns the true identity of the young woman.

Never Shines the Sun—

This story is set in 1959 when October Daye is seven years old. She and her mother Amy have been hiding in San Francisco in our world. However, her aunt Annie, aka Nimue from "The Fixed Stars", insists that October be taken to the Faerie world and trained in its ways.

In Sea-Salt Tears—

In 1972, Annie from "Never Shines the Sun" crashes a beach party celebrating a teenage selkie receiving her seal skin. However, it is a bittersweet celebration, because there are a limited number of seal skins that are passed down from generation to generation. Consequently the other teenagers feel left behind. Annie bonds with Elizabeth, one of the teenagers. They meet several times over the years and become lovers and eventually a couple. Unfortunately, Lizzy leaves Annie when a seal skin becomes available. This is a very sad love story. It felt familiar to me, so after I finished it, I checked and found that it had been nominated for the Hugo in the 2012 novelette category. I read it in 2013, and it obviously made an impression on me because I remembered a lot of it.

Through This House—

October Daye herself is the narrator of this story. She becomes the Countess of Golden-

green, which includes possession of a knowe, a kind of sentient, enchanted mansion. When she first visits, the knowe doesn't like her and throws her out. When she returns with some allies, including Danny, a troll, and Quentin, her squire, they are attacked by pixies and giant spiders. Obviously she survives, because she appears in subsequent stories.

Dreams and Slumbers—

At the same time as the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, the King of the Mists, which refers to the San Francisco area, was assassinated and his two children, Arden and Nolan, forced to take refuge in our world. Arden worked as a nanny and other occupations before finally settling in as a book store clerk. In 1932, Nolan was shot with an arrow containing a magic spell called an “elf shot”, which caused him to be in a coma. Arden was restored as Queen of the Mists in 2012 by October Daye. (Faeries have a much longer lifespan than humans.) An alchemist, Walter Davies, devised a potion to bring Nolan out of his coma, but there are complications that cause him to fall into a second coma. Arden, Davies, and Cassandra Brown, a seer, work to solve the mystery of the second coma and have to go to Luidaeg, aka Annie from “In Sea-Salt Tears”, for help.

No Sooner Met—

Tybalt is still alive in 2012 and has relocated to the San Francisco area, where he is King of the Dreaming Cats. He has fallen in love with October Daye and they go on a date to a restaurant owned by a faerie cat passing as human. Complications ensue, of course.

Full of Briars—

Quentin Sollys is the seventeen-year old son and heir to the High King Aethlin and Queen Maida of the “Westland”, which in the Faerie world comprises North America. For the last five years, he has been secretly fostered in the household of October Daye and become her squire. During an adventure, he had to reveal his true identity. The High King and Queen pay a visit to confirm Arden's ascension to Queen of the Mists and, at the same time, meet with Quentin, Tybalt, and October to decide whether to bring him back to their court.

Summary—

I found all the stories to be entertaining and one in particular, “In Sea-Salt Tears” to be quite moving. Based on them, I consider the series to be Hugo-worthy.

Video

Altered Carbon on Netflix Review by Jim McCoy

So, being a nerd with a Facebook addiction, I kept hearing about this whole Altered Carbon thing. Some were praising it. Others were a little less impressed. The one thing that no one can deny, though, is that the show had generated precisely one metric bunchaton of buzz. Oh, and it's on Netflix. I have Netflix.

SIGH

Alright, you stupid meanie heads are making me do this. I don't wanna! I don't have time. I work sixty-five hours on a slow week and I need to read these books so I can review them (Note: Jimbo loves his authors. Thank you for submitting!) and I have stuff to do as far as keeping things clean and washing clothes and you're all a bunch of Commie-loving, evil weenies and oooh...SHINY! I like this!

I'll be honest. The first time I watched the first episode I missed a lot of it because I was falling asleep. This is not the show to be watching in bed while falling asleep after working a fourteen hour shift. It's just not. There is too much in that first episode that you need to understand to make the rest of the show work. This is a rich universe with an absolute buttload of backstory and new technology like I've never seen before. I've been a science fiction fan for as long as I can remember. Yes, there are people out there who have been watching/reading SF longer, but they're all older than me. I thought I knew all the tropes. I didn't, or more accurately, whoever wrote the book that this is all based on came up with some new ones. Altered Carbon puts the whole world on its head. The most important piece of tech changes basically the entire society that we're viewing.

What is that technology you ask? It's called a Stack. Basically, it gets installed in the base of the human head/top of the neck and it works like a hard drive. When a person gets one installed (done at some point in childhood) all of their thoughts, feelings, memories, everything that makes them them is uploaded into it. A stack is updated continuously. If you choke to death +while eating a steak you can still remember the taste of the meat and the sense of panic when it lodged in your throat when you're "spun up."

Spun up? Yep. They cut the spot where your stack was implanted open, then pull it out and slap it into another body. In the show they're known as "sleeves" and if you die but can still be loaded into a new sleeve, that's called "sleeve death." Hey presto, you're alive again. As long as your stack doesn't get damaged or destroyed, or if you have paid big money to have it backed up on a satellite just in case it gets damaged or destroyed you can be brought back to life. New sleeves come from convicts, who have their stacks pulled and are placed into a Matrix like construct to serve their time, or from cloning. Victims of violence get new sleeves on the government dime. Others can purchase or be gifted new ones. The sad part is that not everyone gets one.

The whole world changes because of this one invention. Sleeve death isn't all that scary to a person who has someone else to buy them a new body. Rich people keep clones of themselves stored so that they can be spun up immediately if something kills their sleeve. A fight to the death for the entertainment of a crowd is no big deal. The fight promoter can simply replace both sleeves. The dead person lives again and the beaten up but still alive person gets put into a new, uninjured sleeve. Life goes on just like before only now they have a new look. Oh, and is your wife not as hot as she was twenty years ago? Buy her a new sleeve, move that stack over and BAM! She's hotter than ever and she's still all yours. Yeah, it's awesome but it's a little weird until you get used to it.

This...uhhh... leads to a lot of depravity honestly. I'm not just talking about the show's indulgence in gratuitous amounts of sex and nudity, I'm talking about straight up twisted shit. At one

point in the show, a hooker actually suggests to a visiting client that he could stab her and then, in her words “fuck me in the hole you made.” I mean, I've seen a lot. I've done quite a bit. I'm a bit of a dom myself. That much being said, DAMN THAT'S TWISTED. Eat your heart out John Ringo, because you can't touch that. It's done for plot purposes though.

The villains are the people who patronize these places and put these people through all of this crap. I loved the show, but I will give you this warning: If you find yourself bothered by nudity, sex and/or depravity, this is not the show for you.

A word to the wise since I know I have some Conservative readers. There is a lot of Leftism in this book. Rich people are assumed to be both corrupt and depraved. Religion is well... uhh... not mocked, but more like treated as backward. Catholics, in particular, are called believers and treated as weirdos because they don't believe in re-sleeving. To a Catholic, you are meant to stick to the body you were born with and accepting a new one is a one way ticket to hell.

It's weird though because the hero of the whole thing is pretty damn well funded. At one point, a terrorist/freedom leader tells her followers that they have to be against re-sleeving because it will create an immortal existence for the rich and they will take over society and suck the life out of it. I'm paraphrasing. It doesn't linger long over it though, or become overly preachy.

Our hero is Takeshi Kovacz. He is a terrorist from (I think) one hundred fifty years ago and he is an utter bad-ass. Seriously. Not only can he kick your ass in a straight up fight, he can probably outshoot you too. He's got a problem. I wasn't joking when I called him a terrorist. His stack has been imprisoned for over a century. He is freed by an uber rich individual, the aforementioned Laurens Bancroft, whose sleeve was murdered, stock shot out and damn near had his satellite backup deleted. He's more than just a little pissed. Bancroft wants to know who tried to kill him. Kovacz spends the entire first season trying to put together a team and figure out who did it.

Along the way, there is plenty of action. Altered Carbon features fight scenes that are both intense and bloody. There are twists aplenty and nothing is what it seems. This thing was really well done. I haven't read the books (Hey, don't blame me. None of my Adoring Public [TM] told me they existed.) but I've been told by people that have that it's a good translation. That makes sense. It takes ten hours to do a good translation of a novel, not two. You get your ten hours here. I think I'm going to check the books out though.

Yes, I did say books, plural. I'm hoping that translates into more seasons of Altered Carbon. Takeshi Kovacz is apparently involved in lots of things. I'm not sure how far we are into the series but I'm guessing that it's only one book based on the way the storyline works. There's only one major resolution. It only makes sense if this is only one book. At the end of the day though, grab hold and ride hard because this is one wild ride.

Bottom Line: 4.5 out of 5 Stacks

Altered Carbon
Netflix, 2018

Food of Famous Writers

Jody Lynn Nye's Quistaminatos with Cheese and Nutmeg Recipe by Cedar Sanderson

Jody Lynn Nye handed me a challenge for her ETWYRT. Most often, an author suggests their favorite meal, either to eat or prepare. Others choose a meal that reflects their heritage, like Sarah Hoyt's Bolinhos de Bacalhau, and Peter Grant's Koeksusters. Jody suggested a meal from one of her books. Since she writes science fiction (and have I mentioned yet that it's delightful SF? She has a very different, light touch, and a great sense of humor. I have suspicions about that humor...) Now a book cover and a quote from the book:



The serverbot flourished a large silver platter on which reposed large, thick, chocolate-brown leaves oozing with rich yellow filling, and brandished flattened serving tongs. A heavenly aroma of sweet and savory spices rose in a cloud of steam. Marcel's matchingly unctuous voice emerged from the speaker.

"Quistaminatos," it said. "May I serve you, madame?"

"Yes, please!" Laine said, with delight. "I've never seen anything like it."

"It's a cheese-filled flowering succulent from one of the Imperium's outpost worlds," I explained, pleased to have surprised her with something new. "Rather difficult to grow, but long-lasting in cold storage. I find them delectable, and hope you will enjoy them, too."

"Oh, it looks fantastic!" she said, picking up the next crystal fork. "Those tiny vegetables around it are just precious. And all of it smells wonderful!"

I cut into my own portion. Quistaminatos had the texture of mushrooms, but none of the gray heaviness. They could be served in a sweet or savory preparation, but my preference was for savory. The first bite was divine. I wondered if the second would add another to the pantheon. It did. I closed my eyes to appreciate the texture and the taste on my tongue.

"Marcel, you are a genius," I said aloud. "Do I sense ... nutmeg?"

"Only a pinch, sir. I thought it would add a mysterious air."

In her space opera *View from the Imperium*, she writes about a meal served to her intrepid heroes, and that's what she suggested I create for this post. Here's part of the passage – Jody also suggested another part of the meal that doesn't appear in the passage, a cardamom sorbet. Quistaminatos

I will admit here that I had to ask for help. The crowd in the ETWYRT facebook group gave me some terrific suggestions. I'd initially thought that chile rellenos would work, but as Jody is allergic to peppers, I started looking at different options. Bok Choi, squash blossoms, zucchini...

We wound up settling on a succulent leaf – a prickly pear leaf! I found them at Jungle Jim's, spines and all. Did you know cactus spines have little (microscopic) hooks in them that make them hard to pull out of skin? I know that now.

Quistaminatos

Ingredients

Filling:

2 oz shredded cheddar

2 oz feta

2 oz cream cheese

¼ c heavy cream

Tarragon and basil

4 tbsp bacon bits

¼ tsp nutmeg

Instructions

In a blender or food processor, pulse until the mixture is a paste.

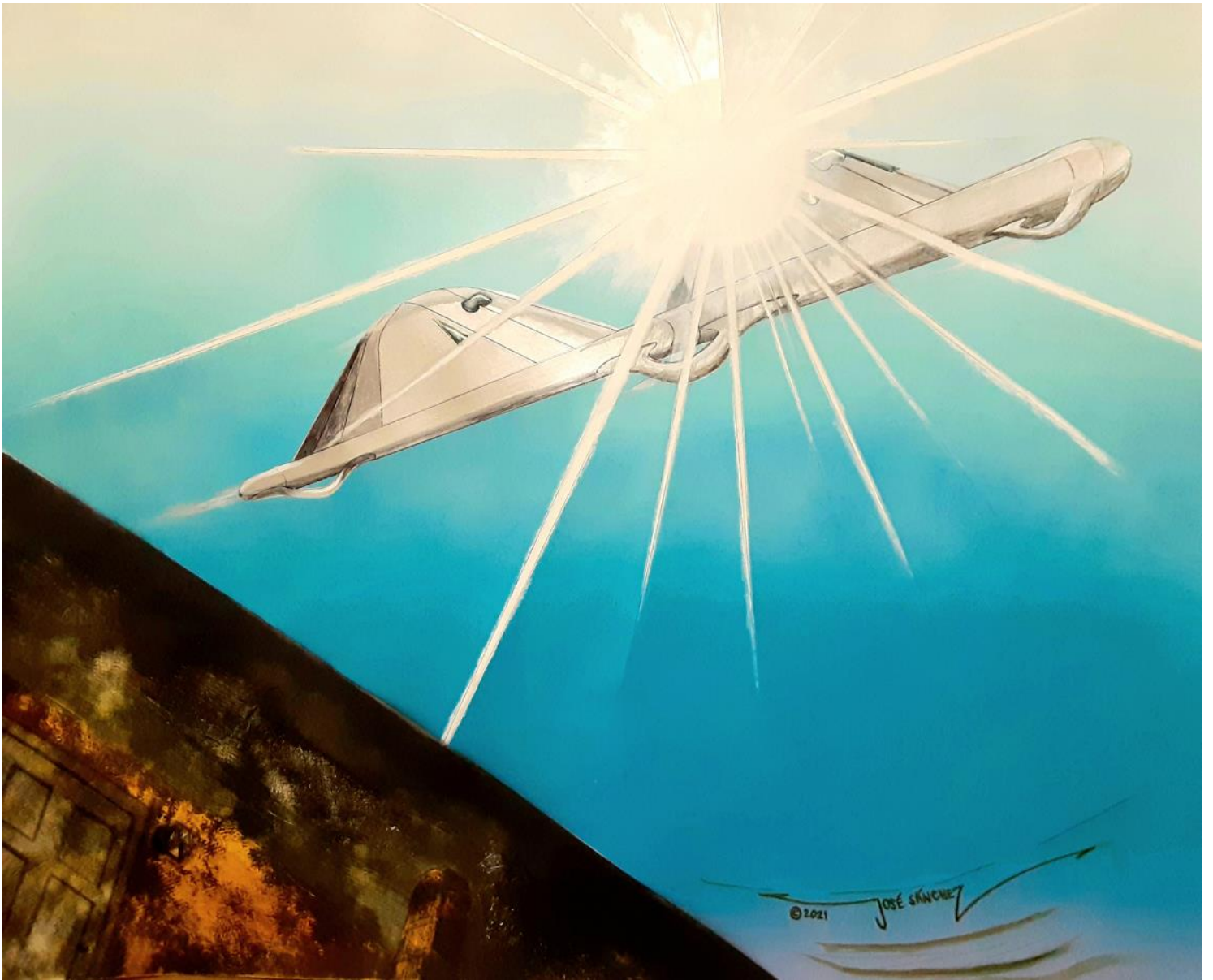
Over an open flame, sear the prickly pear leaves. You must make sure that all the spines are gone before eating.

Scrape the nubs and any remaining spines off the leaf. It should be flexible at this point, although you may have to cut off the end (I did). Stuff the leaf with the cheese mixture, then wrap in a section of banana leaf before skewering to place on the grill.

Grill for about 20 minutes.

Setting the leaves on the coals for about a minute on each side took care of parbaking and the spines.





Jose Sanchez