Tightbeam 386
November 2026



The Barbarian And The Monster
by Steven Fox

Tightbeam 386

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What is Tightbeam? We are the N3F literary fanzine, not the novel and anthology fanzine, but the fanzine that tries to cover all tastes in fandom, such as anime, comics, cosplay, films, novels, biographies, poetry, music, short stories, food, …

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Tightbeam is published approximately monthly by the National Fantasy Fan Federation and distributed electronically to the membership. The N3F offers four different memberships. Memberships with TNFF via email are $6; memberships with The National Fantasy Fan (TNFF) via paper mail are $18. Zines other than TNFF are email only. Additional memberships at the address of a current dues-paying member are $4. **Public (non-voting) memberships are free.**

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Editorial

Tightbeam still welcomes articles on all branches of fandom: movies, videos, television shows, comic books, cosplay, radio, fanzines, fan productions, music, writing,…

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Writing

Happily Ever After the End
by Cedar Sanderson

This was originally published over at Mad Genius Club on June 16, 2018. It holds true even more today than it did then. I can claim to be a veteran Indie Publisher now, and I was in for the birth and initial growth of a small press that is Raconteur Press now. I've seen how the sausage is made, I've made the sausage and writers… do not throw your babies to the wolves. Get it in writing. Hold them to it. Don't sign an abusive contract. Treat your book like it has value.

Ok, if that wasn't confusing enough, here's this: this post is not about writing. It's about what comes from writing, after the story is finished. Because as we all know in our cynical little back-brains, there's no HEA.

So, let's say that you did it. You sat down every day, or not-every-day for years (heaven forfend), and now you have a complete manuscript in front of you. You're done, right? You've reached the pinnacle of being a writer. Readers of this blog know that isn't even close to true, but sadly there's a whole community of writers out there beyond the reach who do. Who think that handing over their intellectual baby to the publisher, or an agent, is the only choice they have. And I sit here typing and wondering how the mothers of Canaan felt about handing over their bundles of joy to the priests of Moloch who insisted it was the only way for them to succeed in life. You must have an agent, you must have a publisher...

Not even close to the truth. In fact, going with a publisher could land you with the hideous reality of a book relegated to one of the worst distribution platforms, no reviews (or very few), no print version, having to write your own blurb... but you still have to share what tiny bit of money comes in, because you signed away the rights to your own work. Then, the person you trusted to form a profitable business partnership with you did all the wrong things, and left you standing in the dust wondering what you did wrong.

The blog I'd read this week that got me all fired up about this is one of Kristine Kathryn Rusch's Business Musings. They are usually excellent, but this one hit a resonant chord with me, and while I highly recommend you read all of it, I'm also quoting extensively here.

You've all heard that writers can't make money, so why even try? You're writing for the love. You're writing to create something lasting. You're writing to become famous or well-reviewed or accepted in your own literary circle.

You're not writing to make money.

Only fools and hacks write for the money. The more someone publishes, the worse their skill must be. The more financial success they have, the more their writing abilities go downhill as they "sell out."

That's counterintuitive to the way that humans operate. The more humans practice something, the more they refine their techniques, the closer those people get to the top of their game. Their

game might not be as good as someone else's, but writers—like everyone else—improve with practice.

Those professors with a handful of novels and tens of thousands of teaching hours behind them? They're probably quite adept at teaching. But their writing won't improve much over the years.

This myth that writers can't make money plays right into the hands of embezzlers and con artists. Think about it: I'll handle your negotiations, your paperwork, your money, so you don't have to bother your pretty little head about it.

Money gets pocketed, writers need those teaching jobs, and the leech who made the offer benefits from the myth. The writer sure doesn't.

And then there's the silence.

Silence is the hallmark of abuse.

Read more at Business Musings...

I am not a veteran of the traditional publishing business like Kris is. I don't even consider myself a veteran of the Indie side, yet. But I have the advantage of being on the outside looking in, and of having people who talk to me in private and offer glimpses of what's going on out there. It's not pretty. The Big Five are ugly enough, with their biases and bigotry. But small publishers are no better, folks. I'm not offering a blanket condemnation. I'm asking that any of you, before you walk into an arrangement, open your eyes and really take a close look at the situation. Ask yourself: am I making a false assumption here? Do I really need this publisher/agent?

I'm going to bet the answer to that, 90% of the time, is no.

Seriously. Look... I wound up running a business because I had no choice. It was that, or be homeless and my babies starving. I couldn't shuffle the responsibility off to anyone else. I had to soldier on, and learn how to market, sell, fill the word-of-mouth pipeline. I learned how to do graphic design, how to build a website, how to keep the books. I didn't have any choices, so I did it. I surprised myself time after time with what I could learn if I applied myself to it. And? You say, I don't have time. Um. Sorry, yes, you do. I'm being harsh and blunt here. While I was doing all that? I was in an abusive relationship and having four babies who were growing into toddlers and I was running that business from home with them underfoot. Was it hard? Damn near killed me. Was it worth it? When I survived the relationship and ventured past it and the learned helplessness Kris described on her blog, I was able to use those skills to keep the kids and I afloat. And to use the endurance to move beyond mere survival to where I am now, thriving and growing with a partner who pulls in tandem with me for mutual goals. Hell, yes, it's worth it. If for no other reason that to prove to yourself that YES YOU CAN DO THIS THING.

So stop telling me you can't take care of your own work. You can hire a cover artist. You can (and should) hire editors. That's what your publisher would do, after all.

The phrase is "learned helplessness." Learned helplessness explains so much in an abusive situation. It's why an abused person needs support networks, because the abused person has been

so emotionally and mentally beaten down (in addition to the physical abuse) that they can't do much for themselves. [...] Studies have gone on to show that people might have learned helplessness in one area of their life, but are very competent in other areas. [quote from the above blog]

I stayed in a very bad situation for thirteen years. But, Cedar, you were married... and you, Writer, you signed a legal document also? A contract? Did you read it? Most people don't. There are times it's a very bad idea to form a legal bond with someone you don't fully know and understand (or be stupid proud, like I was, and know I was getting in deep, but the culture I was raised in made me feel like I had no choices, and the social pressure on a bride who wants to run on her wedding day rather than make those steps up the aisle... ok, there are a lot of parallels here). The writing culture might make you feel like you have to marr... er, sign on with an agent and sign your baby away to the publisher. But it's not true. Pull back the curtain, to mix yet another metaphor here, and take a long look at the reality you reveal there. And then? You get to choose. Not the culture around you. Not the family sitting in the pews looking expectantly at you. If you turn on your heel and walk away, you'll find more support than you might have dreamed possible. Blogs like this one, with practical how-to's for covers, formatting, blurbs, and much more. Kris's blog on the relationships of the industry and how to navigate them.

But I implore you. Do not throw your baby to Baal just because you think you can't take care of it on your own. You can. We'll help, but really? It's you. You're stronger than you think you are, better, and you can do this.

Books

A.E. van Vogt Retrospective
By Dani Zweig

This is an update of a retrospective originally posted as https://web.archive.org/web/20051214210031/http://sf.www.lysator.liu.se/sf_archive/sf-texts/Belated_Reviews/001.Van_Vogt,A.E. It was part of a series written to introduce then-new readers to even-then-older authors. The focus is still "If you aren't familiar with this earlier author you might want to take a look", but don't expect books written 50-80 years ago to appeal to a modern audience.

AE van Vogt's most popular works appeared in the forties and fifties (after which he was sidetracked). They varied widely and imaginatively in terms of setting, but most typically followed a protagonist of superhuman abilities, or extraordinary competence, as he came into his powers. The focus was on the plot and on the plot devices, rather than on the growth of the protagonist: van Vogt wrote stories that were weak in characterization and character development, for an audience didn't much value them. His best books include

__Slan__ An early superior-mutants-in-hiding novel. Slans are the next evolutionary step -- super-intelligent, telepathic, and possessing betraying (but concealable) antennae. Ordinary humans tend to kill them when they find them -- as Jommy Cross's parents are killed when he is a child. Cross himself escapes, and spends his next years hiding, growing in power (and developing superscientific gizmos), cautiously seeking other Slans.

__The Weapon Shops of Isher__ The Earth of the future is one that could be a high-tech dysto-

pia, with an unsentimental Imperial government and largely-unfettered corporations. The weapons shops provide a mitigating, somewhat anarchic counterbalance: They sell weapons which represent better technology than the government can muster, can only be used defensively, and make it very difficult to coerce their users. The story -- involving a conflict between the Imperium and the weapon shops, some involuntary time travel, and an extremely *lucky* young man who goes to the big city -- serves primarily as a vehicle for a tour of this future world. A sequel, "The Weapon Makers" (not as good), focuses upon the secret immortal who works behind the scenes to maintain the balance between the Imperium and the weapon shops, and who only makes a brief appearance in the first book.

__Empire of the Atom__ An early sword-and-spaceship novel. In this post-holocaust world, humanity is struggling back up. Soldiers fight with swords, and spaceships (simple-to-use hand-crafted vehicles whose principles are no longer understood) carry them between planets which were terraformed during the lost golden age. Clane Linn is a slightly radiation-damaged mutant -- brilliant, physically frail -- born to Earth's ruling family. This book follows his survival of family intrigues, his rise from obscurity, and the start of his accession to power. A sequel, "The Wizard of Linn" (not as good), adds an interstellar scope to the story, as Clane discovers the secrets behind the collapse of the earlier golden age.

__World of Null-A__ The world of null-A is a future Earth that has developed a non-Aristotelian (hence the name) discipline of thought. (Since van Vogt never developed such a discipline in reality, his descriptions are necessarily evocative, rather than informative, but for plot purposes it amounts to Clear Thinking.) Clear thinking is not as wide-spread as it might be, so there is still scope for intrigues and political machinations. Into the midst of these intrigues is thrust Gosseyn, a man with unusual abilities, memories which turn out to be false, and a peculiar serial immortality. The book ends with his discovery of a key secret about himself. The story is continued, on a broader galactic stage in "Players of Null-A", also published as "Pawns of Null-A" (not as good). A further sequel, "Null-A 3", was published decades later, and doesn't repay reading.

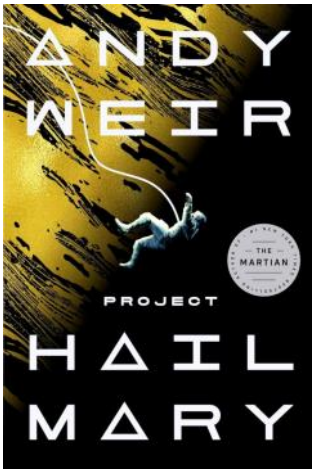
__The Voyage of the Space Beagle__ This book is an early link in the chain of development and inspiration that led to "Star Trek" (and "Alien"). It is made up of linked stories about a space-going 'Beagle' and its long-term mission of exploration. The spaceship keeps meeting monsters that want to (and can) kill everybody on board the ship, and having to overcome them though clever gimmicks. The stories are weakened by a couple of intellectual plot devices that serve more as straight jackets: Understanding monsters through Toynbean historical analysis and Nexialism. (Nexialism is an imaginary discipline which comes from the same stable as General Systems Theory. What it amounts to in practice is that the ship's Nexialist is the one who comes up with the clever gimmick to defeat the monster.)

If these books appeal, the better van Vogt books in the next quality tier include "The War Against the Rull", "The Mind Cage, "The Beast", "Rogue Ship", "The Silkie", and (with E. Mayne Hull) "Planets for Sale".

Random Quote:

The surface of the strange, forbidden planet was roughly textured and green, much like cottage cheese gets way after the date on the lid says it is all right to buy it.--Scott Jones

Project Hail Mary
by Andy Weir
Review by Jason P. Hunt



Earlier this year, I reviewed the movie adaptation of Project Hail Mary, noting that I hadn't yet read the book. Well, now I have, and I get to let you know what I thought about the source material. And probably to no one's surprise, I enjoyed the book as much as I enjoyed the movie.

In fact, there's a small chance I might have enjoyed the book a little better, because there's more detail in how Ryland Grace gets from point A to point B, and the flashbacks deliver more information on how the crisis evolved and how Eva Stratt moved Heaven and Earth to save humanity.

The story in the book is the same as in the movie, of course, with a few slightly different details. For one, there is no character named Carl in the book. He appears to have been constructed for the film in order to facilitate exposition as Ryland figured things out on how the astrophage worked. Talking with Carl in the movie replaces the on-going internal monologue in the book, wherein Grace goes through step-by-step in his research, noting the various scientific aspects of the work along the way. And those scientific details are important in that they pave the way for us to understand how Grace can use the knowledge he has to work with Rocky and develop a solution to save both planets.

Recruited from his classroom by Stratt, Grace is one of many scientists trying to find a solution to the Petrova Line, a sequence of particles moving between Venus and the Sun while draining the Sun of its energy. After a certain number of years, it's determined, Earth will cool to the point where humanity will likely die off due to the loss of solar energy and the impact that will have on the planet's ecosystem. After scanning nearby stars, they discover that while Tau Ceti has its own Petrova Line, it does not appear to be affecting the star. So a team of astronauts will be tasked with travelling the distance on a one-way trip to discover just what makes Tau Ceti immune in the hopes of getting that information back to Earth in time to make a difference.

One thing I don't remember being in the movie, but it could be just because it's been a while since I watched it: the genetic marker that allows some people to tolerate long-term induced coma. Grace has it, which is why he becomes the replacement science specialist on the mission after the accident that kills both the primary and the backup specialists just weeks before the launch. Another difference: there is no comedic-ish running from the needle in the book. It plays out much more as a straightforward betrayal by Stratt, regrets notwithstanding. And after reading the book, I have to agree with screenwriter Drew Goddard and would have liked to see the nuclear bombardment of Antarctica.

Also of note: I thoroughly enjoyed the fact that Andy Weir is not one of those "trying to be Joss Whedon" writers. Yes, his story has humor, but it's not snarky over-the-top twentysomething slang that no one should be using ever, and the humor comes in the midst of circumstances that need humor to let everyone breathe. Rocky is pretty much in the book the same as he is in the film, only with more elaborate explanations as to how Grace puts together his translation program on the laptop. It's not glossed over in the film so much, but the book has more detail as to how Grace figures out Rocky's method of communication uses musical frequencies in layers to

convey concepts and ideas. It's an intriguing notion, and I'm glad the book explores this a bit more. Would have taken up too much time in the film, of course, but then everything does when you're adapting book to movie.

This is also one of those rare exceptions to my "present tense bad" rule. It's not something that an author can get right very often (looking at you, Wendig…), but in this case it absolutely works because Weir uses it to separate what Grace experiences on the ship with his memories of how he got there. Not only does it serve up some narrative separation between events, but it also acts as a visual cue to the reader as to where we are in the story. Grace's memories bubble up to the surface as he encounters different aspects of the ship, the mission, the fact that he's on a one-way mission to Tau Ceti, with two corpses aboard… Weir weaves the flashbacks into the narrative in a natural organic way that doesn't jar the reader with the jump from past to present, and the shift from past tense to present tense aids in that transition to make it smoother. I almost didn't notice it until I did.

Honestly, as much as I enjoyed the movie, I think I like the book just a tad bit more for its additional detail and scientific elements. I have no doubt this one will be on my "read again" pile, and I'm now primed to read The Martian and Artemis.

James H. Schmitz Retrospective
By Dani Zweig

This is an update of a retrospective originally posted as https://web.archive.org/web/20051214210031/http://sf.www.lysator.liu.se/sf_archive/sf-texts/Belated_Reviews/002.Schmitz,James_H. It was part of a series written to introduce then-new readers to even-then-older authors. The focus is still "If you aren't familiar with this earlier author you might want to take a look", but don't expect books written 50-80 years ago to appeal to a modern audience.

James Schmitz wrote from the forties to the seventies. He is noted for his use of strong female characters in a time when this was uncommon in sf. The milieus in which these characters act tend to be somewhat anarchic (high-tech) societies overseen by high-handed but generally benign governments. They're not designed to stand much analysis, and serve primarily as stage settings.

The strengths of his novels and short stories are in interesting characters and well-told yarns. Perhaps for this reason, much of his writing has stood up well over the years.

__The Witches of Karres__ is a light space fantasy, and is unlike his other books. Pausert, a merchant space captain, impulsively rescues a child from a beating, only to discover that it is the most expensive impulse he has ever had. She and her sisters are from the prohibited world of Karres, and in undertaking to get them home, he finds himself up to his endangered neck in spies, pirates, monsters, elementals, and extra-dimensional nogoodniks. It's a delightful book. Schmitz apparently wrote a sequel, "Venture of Karres", but the manuscript was lost when he moved. (A number of sequels have been published by other authors. They're entertaining-if-you-liked-the-original.)

__Agent of Vega__ is a fixup space opera, and consists of linked stories about Zone Agents.

Zone Agents are roving trouble-shooters for a secretive governmental agency. Their job is to unobtrusively take care of awkwardnesses such as genocidal pirates and invading aliens from other galaxies. Good fun.

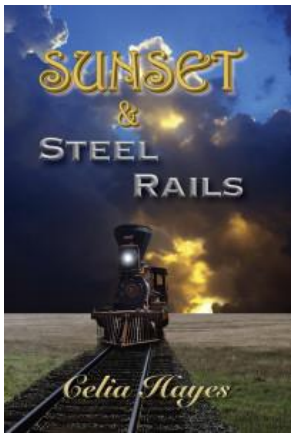
__The Lion Game__ features Telzey Amberdon, a teen-aged psi of remarkable power, who is accidentally enmeshed in the feuding of high-psi humanoids who are contemplating an invasion of the Hub (the interstellar federation in which much of Schmitz's work is set). Shorter stories following this character have been collected into several collections. Any of these stories can be read independently.

Not featuring Telzey, but set in the same milieu, are "Legacy" - also titled "A Tale of Two Clocks", and "The Demon Breed". The latter is about a woman who must prevent an impending invasion by pretending to be superhuman. (Schmitz seems to have had a fondness for impending alien invasions.) These and others have also been collected and reprinted by Baen.

Random quote:

'T is with our judgements as our watches, none
Go alike, yet each believes his own
--Alexander Pope

Eat This While You Read That
Cooking by Cedar Sanderson
Shrimp and Sausage Gumbo



This recipe is drawn from the book, which doesn't always happen with an Eat This While You Read That recipe. It is always fun, though, because I feel it really brings the book to life. I talk about it more in the video where I show you the techniques. The book itself is a historical tale, impeccably researched. Celia's books are very interesting, well-conceived, and safe for all ages to read I think.

So! Grab a copy of Sunset and Steel Rails, and start assembling your ingredients. You'll have plenty of time to read because if you cook like I do, this is a two-day meal although most of that time is spent letting things simmer and cook down into rich flavors you really cannot rush into being.

Celia's Gumbo

For the stock, if making at home:
1 whole stewing chicken
Handful herbs
1 onion, halved
10 c water

Cook under pressure for 2 hours, then overnight at medium in a slow cooker or InstantPot. Do not allow to boil or your stock will be cloudy!

Gumbo

This will feed about 15 people when served with rice and crispy warm baguette slices on the side.

Roux
1 c fat (bacon grease, lard, tallow)
1 1/2 (roughly) all purpose flour

Cook the roux over med-low heat until almost chocolate brown. This will take about 45 minutes, don't leave it alone once it really starts to brown up.

Stew
3 onions, chopped
3 Bell Peppers, chopped
1/2 bunch celery (about 2-3 cups chopped)
6-8 cloves garlic
Chicken stock (about 10-12 cups)
2 c white wine (dry is best)
1 1/2 lb andouille sausage, cut bite-sized
chicken meat from the chicken carcass
2 lb shrimp, cleaned and shelled
salt and pepper to taste

Once the roux is dark brown, add in the onions, cooking until soft, then add in the peppers, celery, and garlic. Cook until soft. Add in the wine, stirring, then slowly stir as you pour in the stock. Add in the sausage, reduce heat to low, and allow to simmer for 3-5 hours. Just about five minutes before finishing, add in the shrimp. You want them to cook just enough to form a 'c' shape, an 'o' is overdone. Add in the chicken from the carcass, chopped roughly.

Serve over rice, with good bread on the side. Quite filling!



Video

Star Trek: Strange New Worlds Season 4
Review by Jim McCoy
A TV Series Review with Added Commentary



Guys…

I mean…

I dunno.

I just do not, under any circumstances, have the right to claim to understand what I've watched during this season of Star Trek: Strange New Worlds.

Seriously, I don't get it.

Look at it this way: I feel like I've been the unwitting victim of a marketing research survey conducted in lieu of the only NuTrek that felt like real Trek. I'd be really angry about it, except that I'm not sure that I can give the writers' room that much credit.

Everyone hated the puppet episode. I didn't. I thought it was kind of neat that they took the crew of the Enterprise, took all of their high tech toys away and made them defend their own ship. It was fun. It's not the type of thing I'd like to see for every episode of any Trek series, but for one episode it was a good time.

And dude, I hated the drug episode. I myself have never used illegal drugs (to include marijuana.) but I know many people who have and have at least two friends that have died of an overdose. I'm not judging, I'm just saying it's not for me. And brother, if I want to watch a soap-opera I can binge Dallas or Dynasty or some junk. Daytime soaps are still on. It wouldn't be hard to find. I just don't see the need to turn Starfleet into General Hospital.

Then there was a fantasy. And some other gimmick. And the other thing. It's maddening. I know Trek has always used gimmicks, but they don't usually go to the extent of changing the genre of the show. Trek gimmicks usually involve aliens, time travel and/or the mirror universe. They might branch out into other stuff at some point, but it's all still Space Opera.



I loved the Muppets as a kid. I loved Marco Dane when I watched soaps with my mom as a kid. And if any of you doubt that I love fantasy, I'd advise you to look at the banner

at the top of this page. This is Jimbo's Awesome Science Fiction and Fantasy Reviews. I just don't get all of these in one season of one show.

It's entirely possible that the writers got out of control and just lost the thread. It's been known to happen. At that point the showrunner should have reigned them in, but maybe he got sold on a bunch of stuff that really didn't benefit his brand. Under this scenario, some people who should have known better apparently didn't. Alternately, maybe they just didn't want to believe that no one would like their work.

Writers refer to their work, at times, as their baby. And someone telling a writer they don't like that writer's work is the equivalent of telling that writer that their baby is ugly. Yes, I really mean that. So I get it if somebody(ies) in the writers' room lost their mind and pushed and pushed until their treatment got accepted.

But what if that's not what happened?

What if, hear me out here, someone at Paramount decided that they weren't getting as many Trek viewers as they wanted and told the writers to try to find something else that they could get Trekkies to watch. What if they tested every tacky thing they could think of on us this season and were just trying to throw things against the wall and see what would stick? What if we're all unwitting guinea pigs in a Paramount led experiment?

Listen, guys, I get the importance of market research. And if Paramount is concerned about its Trek offerings and wants to know what they can get all of us to watch once they stop producing new TV content. I wouldn't blame them if they set up some kind of survey or questionnaire or if they just pulled up some kind of query in their database of who watches what (for the record I don't know that they have one. I'd just die of shock if they didn't.) and find out what the strongest correlations are. I'd be surprised if they hadn't done that last already, and probably on a regular basis.

And it kind of bothers me that I'm stuck thinking that I'm basically a lab rat. It also bothers me that this may just be my paranoia talking, but that's a separate issue. Do your thing, Paramount. Give us more good stuff. I won't fight you on that. I'll be watching Survivor tonight on Paramount Plus because I love it. Survivor might also be the furthest you can get from Trek on TV, but who cares if it's good TV?

I hope I'm wrong but I think I'm not. I have read that pretty much all of the sets have been torn down and that there won't be another Trek series for at least a little while. This is probably a good thing as I've seen no evidence that Paramount knows what to do with Trek currently. Strange New Worlds gave me hope, but not if they're going to treat it like this.

Listen, Paramount, let me help you out here. I'm a loving person. I want to make your life better, even if it makes my life better in the process. So let's see what I can do here:

If you're looking for fans of good old-fashioned Space Opera you can feel free to contact David Weber. He does a series called the Honorverse which is basically Horatio Hornblower in space. For your DEI types, main character Honor Harrington is actually a woman, making her "diverse."

If you're looking for a more Military Science Fiction feel, I'm sure Chris Kennedy would be willing to take your money in exchange for a license for the Four Horsemen Universe. There's a lot of material there as well.

If you're looking for a space romance type thing, Monalisa Foster has a series known as Ravages of Honor. It's total war making and bodice ripping. This one would go over well with women who want romance and men who like to see lots of fighting. Seriously. I mean, I'm not empowered to negotiate for her, but I'm pretty sure she could use a major cash infusion if you loved her work as much as I do.

And if you're looking to do something with puppets you could try some LitRPG since that would be very expensive to do as live action. You could maybe try the Disgardium series by Daniel Sugralinov.

Or maybe you could just put Trek back in the hands of someone who cares about the fans that you've alienated and try to win them back? But what do I know? I'm just a guy who has been watching your product since I was born, way back in the 1970s. Who cares what I think?

Bottom Line: 3.0 out of 5 Confused Fans

SerCon

Wallace West Bio-Bibliography
by
Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D.
N3F Historian

Wallace George West (1900 – 1980) was a lawyer, public relations officer, farmer, barber, journalist, telegrapher, pollution control expect, editor, and writer -- who began publishing fiction in 1926 with "Static" in Sea Stories (Street & Smith, September, 1926). His first genre story was in 1927 (a werewolf tale, "Loup-Garou," in Weird Tales). He was never a full-time writer.

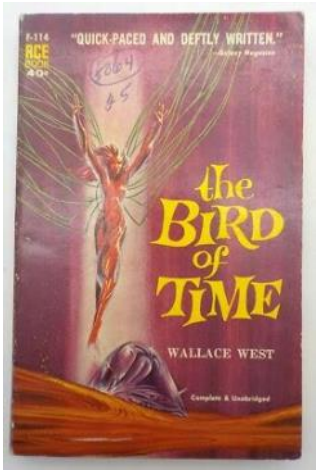
His first science fiction (s-f) story is considered to be "The Last Man" for Amazing Stories in 1929. He published several stories in Astounding Science Fiction in the 1930s, and also had stories in other s-f magazines, including Fantastic Adventures and Thrilling Wonder Stories.

He was born in Walnut Hills, Kentucky on May 22, 1900, and died on March 3, 1980, in Shelby, Michigan. He was the son of Colonel William West and Anna Pauline Scott West. He married Claudia M. Weyant in October, 1928.

In addition to English, West spoke Spanish and Portuguese. He attended Butler University (A. B., 1924, graduating Phi Beta Kappa), and the Indiana Law School (L. L. B, 1925).

Principal Science Fiction Publications

His s-f novels included The Bird of Time (1959), Lords of Atlantis (1960), The Memory Bank (1961), River of Time (1963), The Time-Lockers (1964), and The Everlasting Exiles (1967).



A collection of his short fiction was Outposts in Space (1962),

The Bird of Time series included “En Route to Pluto,” “The Lure of Polaris,” “The Bird of Time,” and “ Captive Audience.”

One of West’s more unusual stories was “The Time Lockers,” set on a parallel Earth, where time can be deposited and then redeemed later.

Stories in Anthologies

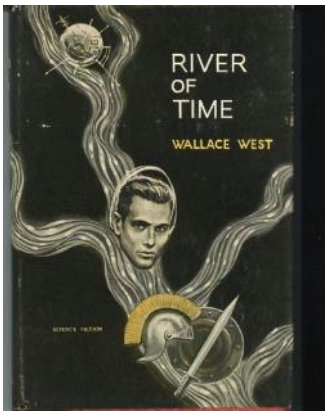
"The Last Man," in The Pocket Book of Science Fiction (1943), edited by Donald Wollheim.

“Enroute to Pluto” in The Best of Science Fiction (1946), edited by Groff Conklin.

“Sculptors of Life” in Science Fiction Thinking Machines (1954), edited by Groff Conklin.

“Listen, Children, Listen” in Zacherly’s Midnight Snacks (1960), edited by John Zacherle.

Other Writing



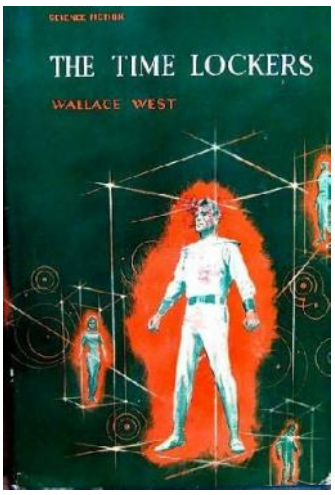
West’s other stories for Weird Tales included “The Incubator Man” (October, 1928 issue), “The Empty Road” (June, 1930), “The Last Incarnation” (October, 1930), “Moon Madness” (August, 1931), and “The Laughing Duke” (February, 1932).

He also wrote a couple of Big Little Books about the popular animated cartoon character, Betty Boop, in 1934 – 1935.

He was credited with the “novelization” of the children’s book, Jimmy Allen in The Sky Parade (1936). Jimmy (also spelled Jimmie) was a popular aviation character on radio.

West suggested the plot for the Arch Oboler radio play, “Profits Unlimited.”

West also wrote several textbooks, and occasionally used the pen name of Roger Barlow.



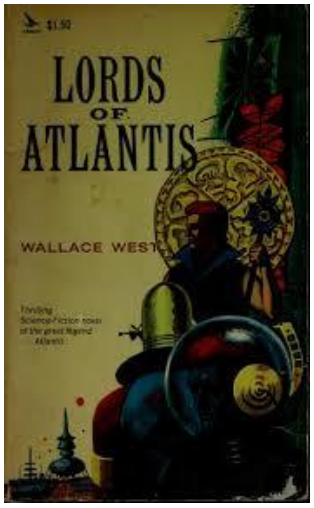
Editorial Work

He edited several magazines, including Roto, America’s first picture and news magazine (similar to the later Life Magazine); Voice of Experience; Song Hits; and Movie Mirror.

Film History

Alice in Wonderland (1934).
Betty Boop in Snow-White (1934).
Paramount Newsreel Men with Admiral Byrd in Little America (1934).

Criticism

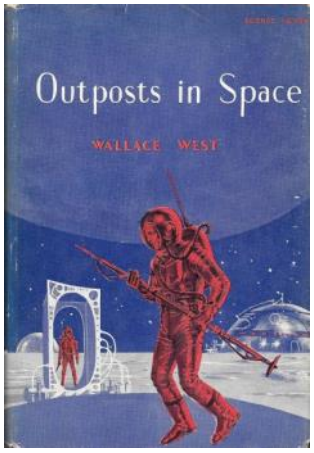


One critic stated: “He was never a remarkable writer. . . but he was never dull.”

A book reviewer for Galaxy Science Fiction Magazine, Floyd C. Gale, reviewed The Bird of Time novel favorably, calling it "quick-paced and deftly written. . . .”

Fellow genre author Robert A. W. Lowndes said that West was concerned with air and water pollution decades before it became a public issue. Ashley (1977) wrote that West was better known for his s-f than his horror, but that he was equally adept at both.

Remembered Quote

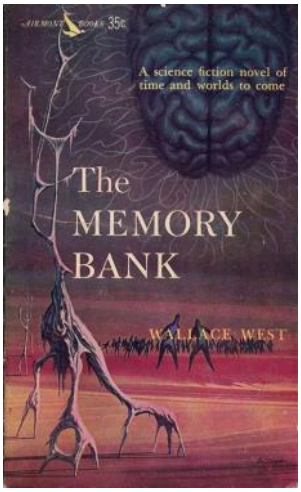


West has been quoted as saying: “I started writing at age 13, when I won Honorable Mention in a McCall’s Magazine short story contest. At about the same time I wrote a lost worlds SF novel. This manuscript was lost when my home burned.”

Some Concluding Comments

In the 1930s, he worked in public relations for Paramount Pictures. During World War II, he was assistant to the director of radio censorship for the U. S. Office of Censorship.

Sources



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Tymn, M. B. & Mike Ashley (eds). Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Weird Fiction Magazines, 1985.

Note: In addition to the above, several Internet sites were consulted, including Fancyclopedia 3, ISFDB, and Wikipedia .

Anime

Girly Air Force
Review by Jessi Silver



Mysterious flying creatures known as Zai suddenly appear, and in order to fight the creatures, mankind creates fighter aircraft called "Daughters," as well as the automatic fighting mechanism "Anima," which are shaped like human girls. The story centers on a young man named Kei Narutani, who yearns to fly in the sky, and an Anima considered to be humanity's trump card, a girl name Gripen. – ANN

Streaming: Crunchyroll
Episodes: 12
Source: Light Novel

Episode Summary: The Xi (rhymes with "sigh") are an enigmatic, hostile group of aerial fighters currently targeting humankind. Kei Narutani and his adopted sister Minghua are attempting to evacuate Shanghai by carrier ship when they come under attack from a squad of Xi fighters. The Japanese Air Self-Defense Force arrives to defend the civilian vessels, but they're no match for the maneuverability and speed of the enemy planes. All seems lost until the arrival of a mysterious red-hulled fighter jet that navigates as well as the Xi and shoots them down before crashing into the ocean. Kei exits his evacuation vessel to rescue the pilot – a beautiful pink-haired young woman – who states some incomprehensible words before kissing him and passing out again.

Kei feels like this experience may have just been a dream, and after he and Minghua manage to settle into their new lives in Japan it might as well have been one. Kei can't leave the experience behind, however, and even begins to research joining the Japan Air Self-Defense Force because of it despite Minghua's protests. As he's heading home from the convenience store, Kei swears he sees the mysterious red fighter plane being taken by truck to the local air-force base, so he sneaks out later that evening to see if he can catch a real glimpse of it. Minghua follows him, and they're both blindfolded and taken onto the base. As it would happen, Kei's presence seems to be the only thing keeping the animus, the artificial pilot of the experimental jet, from rebooting itself. He's invited to join the project in hopes of helping to finally defeating the Xi.



Impressions: Girly Air Force is one of a couple of flight-focused anime this season, and not really the one I was most looking forward to. Its odd title is a bit of a turn-off and suggests a type of

content that isn't typically of interest to me as a viewer. The first episode is a bit of a mixed bag that manages to provide a fair amount of exciting action and avoid some of the expected content pitfalls while seriously stumbling in other areas.

The episode really wears its priorities on its sleeve, and it's fairly easy to extrapolate where most of the animation resources were concentrated. The opening scene is fairly lengthy and involves not only a slow-speed escape via ship, but also a fast-paced aerial dogfight between friend and foe. The fighter jets are unsurprisingly all 3D models, which are competently constructed and are up to the task of portraying the quick and breathless action sequences. The Xi planes, as well as the red-colored Swedish Gripen jet that enthralls Kei, are embellished with glowing design elements and the Xi vehicles also undergo various physical transformations – things which would be much more difficult or impossible to portray traditionally. In short, the mechanical elements of the episode look very good and the scenes where they're put to use are the most successful, in my opinion.



The opening dogfight is exciting and the 3D models look very good. Screencap from Crunchyroll.

Less successful, unfortunately, is the character animation, which just doesn't quite seem up to the task a lot of the time. As I've said before, I don't like to complain too much about the quality of hand-drawn animation, because I have some idea, especially with Japanese animation, of the long hours, hard work, and sub-par salaries that go into each and every TV anime series that I watch. Most of the time, especially with the slower-paced and more drama-focused series that I tend to watch, the animation isn't that big of a factor anyway. In series with an action focus, however, character movement and rendering is more of a concern, so when the two major visual aspects of a series like this clash in quality so much, it's difficult to ignore.

The story itself is a little bit messy and I haven't quite decided where I "land" (har har) with regard to some of it. Going in, I'd anticipated something to the effect of "girls fly special planes due to archaic gender-related reasons." While that isn't quite the case, the reality leaves itself more open to frustrating interpretations. In the case of this series, it appears that the young women actually are the planes in some manner; rather than use human pilots whose reaction time and tolerance to gravitational forces are sub-par in comparison to their enemies, the military has chosen to go the route of their opponents and develop autopilot systems that can do the job better. It just so happens that these systems, for reasons that are thus far mostly unexplained, require human forms and the avatars chosen were – surprise! – cute teenage girls. Naturally, our lucky protagonist is the one person who has the ability to set the Gripen anima in line.



#4 The Gripen bears the form of a pretty pink-haired girl. Screencap from Crunchyroll.

It's not a surprise to me that the "key" to unlocking the power and control over this lovely avatar might flow from the hands of the series' protagonist, but it's a predictable turn that I wish had been subverted in some way. It's easy to grumble about male power fantasies; it's like the low-hanging fruit of the anime criticism world to point them out. To be honest I think everyone gains something from being to imagine themselves as having more power and influence as long as that fantasy is harmless and remains in the realm of the imagination, so they don't bother me in principle. But these twists are so ubiquitous and therein lies the issue; the sheer number of anime plots that rely on the idea that "this one guy has the answer to it all" means that they all start to feel exhausting and cliche.

Kei, for his part, appears to have a good heart and a desire to put his talents to use, thus his push to join the Air Self-Defense Force to help with the war(?) effort and to provide an outlet for his interest in military aircraft. It's in this detail, though, that I think this series has lost me. I'm not strongly anti-military, but my personal stance is that I support the efforts and sacrifices of military personnel while longing for a future where they're no longer required in order to maintain peace and safety. Kei's enthusiasm for the JASDF, his knowledge of and fondness for military aircraft (and their apparent fondness for him), and the general tone of the episode start to feel like a low-key recruiting commercial after a while. Personally, I don't enjoy feeling like I'm being actively sold on something while I'm indulging in an unrelated hobby, especially if it's something I have ambivalent feelings about.

For folks with more of an interest in planes (especially military aircraft) or for fans of sci-fi harem series which aren't focused on being overwhelmingly titillating, I think there's probably more to enjoy here even considering the lackluster character visuals. The action components of the episode are genuinely enjoyable to watch, and at the very least the CG jet models are cool to look at. I just can't get over the feeling that this could be interpreted as a recruiting tool in disguise, and that bothers me enough that I've mostly lost interest in watching more episodes.

Pros: The aerial dogfights are exciting and entertaining.

Cons: Kei's power over the plane avatar is a predictable development. The episode feels like a push to get viewers interested in the JASDF.

Grade: C-

Dororo (Episodes 1-6)
Review by Jessi Silver

This post discusses plot spoilers through episode 6 of the anime.

While I hate to keep mentioning my recent out-of-town trip since it's not relevant to this site otherwise, it continues to be on my mind because these types of mini-vacations (work trips to other cities where my evenings are basically free to do as I please) are great opportunities for me to keep up on my anime-watching. Aside from The Promised Neverland, the other series that kept my company that week was Dororo. For whatever reason I was getting seriously intermittent access to Crunchyroll where I was staying (I blame it more on the Android app itself, which has always worked spotty for me even with great internet and a brand new cell phone), so I stuck to Amazon Video this time around.



In some ways Dororo isn't my typical style of viewing material, mostly because it's fairly violent. I have a pretty well-deserved reputation for being gore-averse, but the somewhat incomprehensible other side to that coin is that some of my favorite anime series (or at least some I can speak highly of) are also some of the more violent ones. Berserk is an old favorite that's well-known for its demon-slashing, blood-spraying horror elements, although I'd argue the old anime series is often cartoonish in its depiction of gore. Blood-C, which I thought had an interesting pseudo-feminist message at its core, also features some of the most gut-wrenching images of human dismemberment I can recall. And Devilman Crybaby is pretty infamous for its adult content, unrestrained due to its release outside the boundaries of broadcast television. All of these are series I liked or even loved, though the violent content was no so much a feature as it was a challenge for me to overcome.

Dororo isn't yet in the same league with those anime in terms of how violent it gets, but considering that one of its plot elements is the fact that Hyakkimaru, the protagonist, grows back limbs and organs as he defeats his foes, there's a strong element of body-horror that tags along with the more garden-variety blood and dismemberment that feature in the series. It's strong enough that I've taken notice of it several times, but not so dramatic or shocking that I've felt compelled to drop the series.


The show definitely has its share of body horror.

It really helps that the story itself has been so compelling, because that makes it much easier to overlook some of the unsavoriness. Dororo is a very classic-style story about an individual seeking vengeance. While revenge stories aren't necessarily my style, there's something uniquely fascinating about the mechanism by which Hyakkimaru's revenge results in the restoration of the person he may have been had his father not been willing to sacrifice him to selfish ends. He's a person whose personality certainly wasn't a blank slate at the beginning of the series, but it existed in a form that was difficult for others to perceive. Now that he's slowly gaining back things that many of us take for granted – limbs, hearing, his voice – some more of his inner feelings and thought processes might become more perceptible to us outsiders.

This does beg a few questions about how the series represents disabilities, though. Vrai Kaiser of Anime Feminist has made some good points about how Hyakkimaru reads as disabled, but that his quest is one which essentially aims to remove and erase those disabilities. In the fifth and sixth episodes, we see how Hyakkimaru's restored sense of hearing becomes a weakness, because the sudden onslaught of sounds is too much for him to process. Gaining back his feeling of pain alongside the restoration of parts of his flesh means that he can suffer from injuries, providing him with wariness and making the outcomes of his battles less cut-and-dry. There's an interesting push-and-pull as to the way that the character's disabilities also serve as abilities; if Hyakkimaru could see like average folks, he'd be much less equipped to battle demons. On the other hand, the more parts of himself he regains, the more he's portrayed as human rather than supernatural. There are a lot of conflicting aspects that are a bit difficult to disentangle from one-another.

Overall it's a complicated criticism that I feel under-qualified to make, so I'll be interested to watch this aspect of the series unfold and read whatever critical follow-up there might be discussing it. Personally I find the series difficult to relate to real-life disability culture due to its supernatural/magical elements, but I suspect that's my own clouded reading of the content rather than a legitimate distinction.



Sometimes demons take beautiful forms.

One of the interesting things I've noticed throughout these episodes is how rain and storms are used to compliment the story and action. Lord Daigo's pact with the 12 demons ensures that his lands will become verdant and his crops will grow, so the rain becomes a sign of prosperity… until Hyakkimaru begins to defeat those demons and reassemble himself. It's then that the gentle rains become oncoming storms, bringing with them landslides, lightning, and other destruction. Hyakkimaru is the thunder drumming in the background, as Lord Daigo readies once again for war. It's an image that suits the series well.

The reason why I waited until now to post my thoughts on the show thus far is because episodes 5 and 6 comprise a 2-part story and I was interested to see how it resolved before following-up in writing. These episodes feature a story that's both tragic and predictable and which adheres to some tropes that I find personally frustrating. In them, Dororo and the injured Hyakkimaru discover a group of orphans living together in a dilapidated house who are being parented by a young woman named Mio. She provides them with care and with food by working at night; the type of night-work is what one might expect. Hyakkimaru is drawn to Mio because her singing is the only sound that doesn't overwhelm his newly-obtained sense of hearing. Unfortunately Mio is pegged as a spy by the authorities since she travels to the samurai camps of both warring factions – she and the children are then slaughtered. This "twist" brings out a demonic rage in Hyakkimaru, who brutally destroys the samurai responsible for the murders.

This is one of the first times that Hyakkimaru really expresses strong emotion in the series, and it's also the first time that he speaks an identifiable word. It's a shame that these turning points – Hyakkimaru's voice, and his pain – are motivated, as they are so often, by the death of a "disposable" woman. I use the word disposable not because Mio isn't an interesting character, but she's an interesting character whose life exists for one purpose – to motivate the hero with her tragic death. It's a truncated existence and a sadly typical way of handling a story.

Mio's death isn't a surprising twist by any means; since this story has been around for quite a while it wears a lot of its "twists" on its sleeve and so I'd predicted what was likely to happen during the first episode of the two. That said, even if a story element is essentially unavoidable due to its history or whatever other reason, it doesn't prevent me from having feelings about it.

Even considering that particular flaw (one which speaks more to the story's age than it does any underhanded motivation of the author, I expect) I've really been enjoying the series so far. It's beautifully-rendered with some of the most subtly-beautiful background artwork I've seen in a long time. It's also very compelling, and I find myself very interested in the type of person Hyakkimaru may become once his quest is complete. This is turning out to be the type of classic adaptation I really enjoy – one which retains the original story's spirit but which utilizes some of the best resources available in the modern era to provide visual refinement and refocus the narrative.



Sunset of Civilization

by Tiffanie Gray