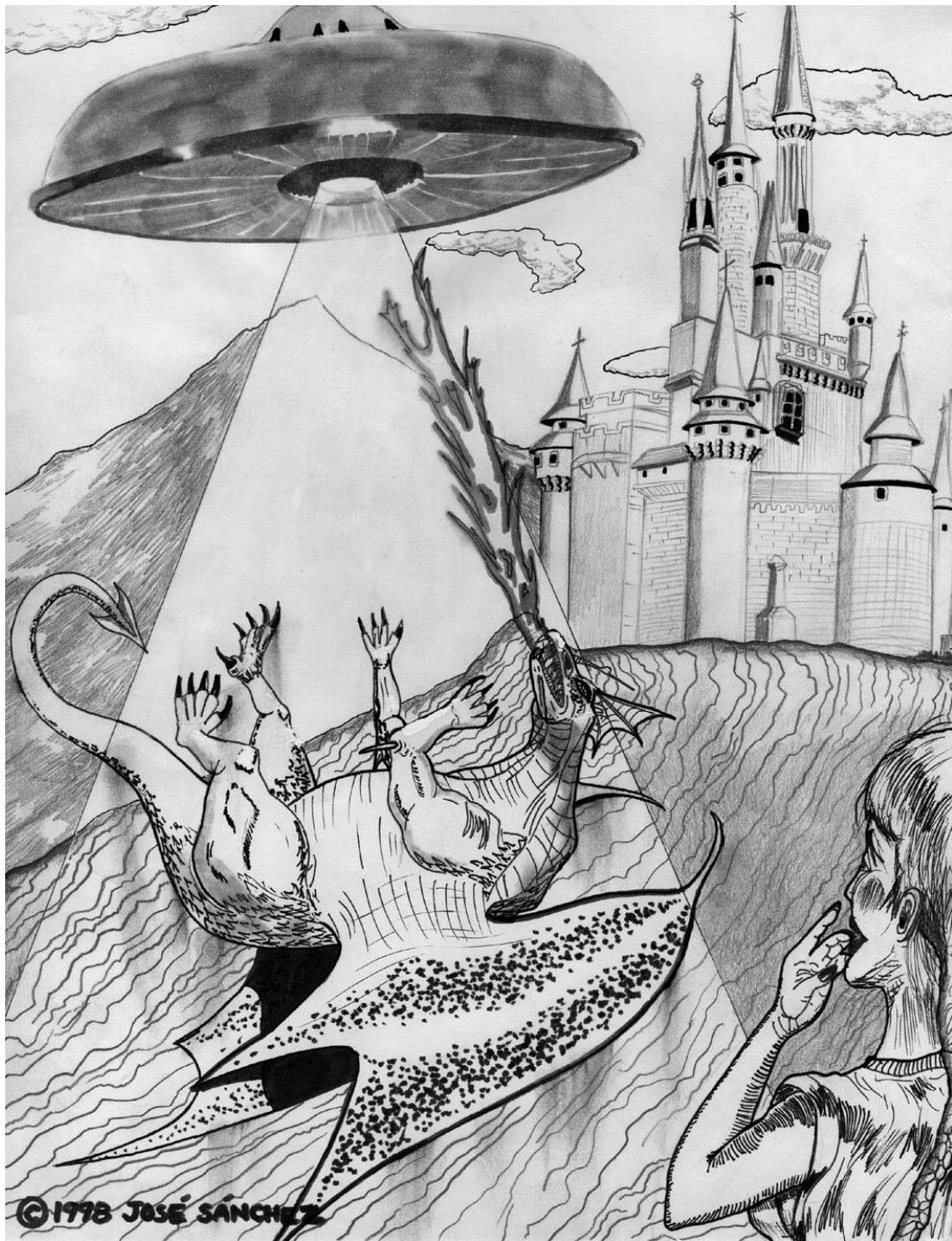


Tightbeam 322

July 2021



When Worlds Collide

by Jose Sanchez

Tightbeam 322

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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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Editorial

Welcome to the July issue of Tightbeam, now the N3F's Review Zine. We are now in our sixth decade of publication. Over that span of years we have been a letter zine, a club news zine, and more. Now we try to publish a range of reviews of different sorts of material.

Note one rearrangement. Several of our wonderful contributors, notably Justin E. A. Busch, Mindy Hunt, and Cathode Ray, have regularly given us very long fan/media-news articles in the forms of Fanfaronade, Upcoming Conventions, and Rabid Ears. Because Tightbeam is rigidly limited to 32 pages, it started to become difficult to fit everything in. On the other hand, I have always felt that the N3F should have a fan news newsletter. Those three entries now form the core of Nameless News (a search for a new name is under way), the new N3F Fan News newsletter. Correspondingly, until natural process set in, Tightbeam is a bit lighter on material than I would like.

Your letters of comment would be most welcome.

Anime

Summer 2021 First Impressions – The Case Study of Vanitas

By Jessi Silver

Streaming: Funimation

Episodes: TBA (a second cour has already been announced)

Source: Manga



Episode Summary: The vampire Vanitas was born under the inauspicious sign of the blue moon, causing others of his kind to shun him. In order to seek revenge, Vanitas created a powerful grimoire with the goal of eliminating other vampires. Noé, a young vampire, travels to Paris in search of this grimoire when it suddenly falls into his lap (in a manner of speaking). As Noé attempts to help a young woman who has collapsed on the deck of the airship he's riding to his destination, he's attacked by a young man in black who comes crashing through the windows of the airship.



A Lofty Goal

The woman is a vampire who's been attacked by a malady that steals vampires' true names, thus corrupting their power. The brash young man in black uses the power of the grimoire he holds to heal and return control of her body to her. He claims to be a vampire doctor operating under the name "Vanitas," although he was given this name and the grimoire from his master who formerly held both. Is Noé's encounter with this Vanitas fate or luck working its magic? As Vanitas hassles Noé to become his meat

shield, he wonders just with whom he's become involved.

What do you do when your last, best hope of salvation lives within the actions and whims of a complete crackpot? From the outside, *The Case Study of Vanitas* seems like it might be an elegant gothic horror piece. And while those elements are there, as soon as the OP animation starts to roll it becomes clear that its tone is not all seriousness and refinement (boring!). Rather, while there's plenty of atmosphere in this premiere, the real draw is the manic genius/straight man dynamic of Vanitas and Noé. As someone who enjoys the anime subgenre that can best be described as "two idiots get into trouble and perhaps homoeroticism together," it's truly a cherry on top of a series I was already looking forward to.

In fact, as soon as Vanitas came crashing through the window, I knew I was on board with what the anime had on offer. I get a little bit tired of action anime that takes itself too seriously; as much as it might try to build excitement through characters performing amazing feats and fighting impossible foes, if the inherent unreality of a scenario goes unacknowledged it ends up sticking out like a sore thumb. On the other hand, I prefer it when stories face up to and even embrace their own ridiculousness because it then becomes a lot easier to go along for the ride. Vanitas is a pompous blowhard who seems to lack a sense for danger; who better, then, to come crashing through the window of an airship and hassle an uptight, straight-laced foil? It's just the sort of thing for which I reserve my precious suspension of disbelief.



To go along with the fanciful action is an ornate sense of set design, which combines historical Paris with the brass and gears of steampunk. To be honest, when steampunk seemed to be at its height several years ago I got a little bit tired of everything being reinterpreted in that aesthetic. However, now that broader geek culture has seemed to have moved along to some extent there's a refreshed sense of novelty when it comes to this particular type of alter-

nate history setting. What if the development of technology had gone a different route? While that idea may simply serve as a backdrop for *Vanitas*, I feel like it adds to the show's charm. Just two guys having a good time...

Pros: One of my side hobbies is learning about historical clothing, and while it's difficult to compare a fantasy/supernatural setting 1:1 with actual history, one thing I'll say is that I was impressed by how this episode featured a variety of "Victorian style" dresses and didn't appear to really duplicate any of them. There are a couple of crowd scenes during the episode, and I feel like animating all of them (even in the limited way they're animated) must have been quite the task.

The opening scenes of the episode are presented in a very cool, slightly unsettling storybook style that's very attention-getting. I think this also speaks well to the intention of the overall visual design.

I like how, in this interpretation of vampire lore, vampires aren't automatically a species existing at odds with the human race. In traditional vampire scenarios, one always has to wonder how the vampires manage to survive and perpetuate themselves if they have to drink blood to survive. If they're near-immortal and drinking blood all the time, in the process turning some of

the humans upon which they feast into vampires as well, at some point mathematically they'd probably run out of humans. In this scenario, drinking blood doesn't seem like a necessity for a typical vampire. This kind of begs the question, though – what's the point of distinguishing vampires from humans if they aren't adversarial races? But it's a small criticism.

And there's a cat! Even the worst of anime isn't completely lost if there's the presence of a cute cat, but in this case it's simply the icing on the cake.

Cons: I think the story is maybe ever-so-slightly up its own ass with its specialized terminology (“Malnomen” for the ailments that corrupt the names of vampires, for example).

There are also several “chibi” moments with the characters. While for me this just feeds my appetite for “silly boys being silly,” it definitely messes with the tone at times and I imagine it might be outright irritating for some viewers.

Content Warnings: Violence, including some physical violence and vampire bites with blood. Bullying/shunning.

Would I Watch More? – I really enjoyed this premiere. While, as I mentioned, I'm trying to keep my watch list from becoming too bloated this season, there is definitely some room on it for cute vampire boys.

Summer 2021 First Impressions – Remake Our Life! By Jessi Silver



Streaming: Crunchyroll
Episodes: 12
Source: Light Novel

Episode Summary: Please note – the first episode of this series is an hour-long special. I will endeavor to keep the summary to a manageable level.

When the game company that 28-year-old Kyouya works for shuts its doors, he's forced to move back in with his parents. Through a stroke of luck he meets Eiko Kawasegawa, a director at game giant SucceedSoft, and due to Kyouya's vast skillset he's able to land a pinch-hit job working on their 30th anniversary project. But the gaming landscape has changed dramatically in recent years, and despite the reported involvement of members of the so-called “Platinum Generation,” (several well-regarded artists who graduated from art school at the same time), the 30th anniversary project is canceled, as is Kyouya's contract. When he returns home yet again, he wonders if his life would be any different if he'd chosen to follow his dreams and attend creative arts school. But life doesn't generally provide many second chances.

When Kyouya wakes up later, he discovers that he's indeed been granted a second shot at life – he's inhabiting his body from 10 years prior, only in this timeline he's accepted the offer from “Oonaka University” to become a student. He goes to live in a shared house with three other students and learns quickly that the arts aren't all fun and games. But a pep talk from Aki Shino, one of his roommates, gives him the strength to work toward learning his true talents.



Some individuals from Kyouya's past (future?) appear unexpectedly.

Impressions: Funny story – I have fairly vivid dreams on a regular basis and I usually have a pretty easy time remembering the really weird ones. A couple of years ago I had a dream in which, similar to this series, I returned to my past with my current memories intact. In this case I returned back to my elementary school days which likely affected my reaction to the dream afterwards. But to say the experience was unsettling wouldn't do a complete job of capturing the absolute horror of the situation. Having an adult mind and yet being thrust into the prison of childhood with limited rights and resources is pretty damn terrifying.

In *Remake Our Life!* the protagonist isn't doomed to relive his entire life, which probably makes a lot of difference. He still gets to be an adult and have some freedoms, yet he's traded the rat race for the competitiveness of art school – an environment where the students know they're vying for a very limited number of employment opportunities once they leave the nest. In some sense having an adult mentality might seem like an advantage; one's emotional regulation is often more refined by that point, most of us probably have better organizational skills... it feels like it would be going through life on easy mode in some respects. And yet, speaking as someone who's even older than this series' protagonist, being an adult rarely means you've got things all figured out. I still struggle with feelings of inadequacy and a fear of failure. Those things, I'm finding, are just facts of life.

That's one aspect of this exceedingly lengthy premiere that I believe gets things right. Aki describes Kyouya as being very mature, because his mannerisms belie his greater age. Yet he still benefits from hearing her say that sometimes people just need to figure out what they have to offer the world. For all its tedious moments of fanservice and its dubiously-utilized 50 minute run time, this episode does a good job of establishing its emotional core. Eventually.



Sometimes it's nice to have a cheering section.

Sometimes it's nice to have a cheering section.

Pros: There's something that's always interested me about art school. For me it's probably because it's a road I never took despite believing for years that I was going to end up majoring in art. It's always been a hobby of mine, but taking a few art classes kind of turned me off of the entire experience (apparently wanting to draw cartoon characters "isn't real art." Just think how many young people we

harm by ragging on them for "drawing that anime stuff." Anyway, rant over). Because of that I think there's certainly part of this entire scenario that tingled my brain specifically. Even though I ultimately wouldn't want to change how my life has unfolded because there are enough good things about it that I wouldn't want to give up (and like I said, the idea of being trapped in my former body is upsetting), it's difficult not to consider "what if?"

I think Aki's pep talk is the highlight of the episode. The scene does a good job of showing that even adults don't have things all figured out.

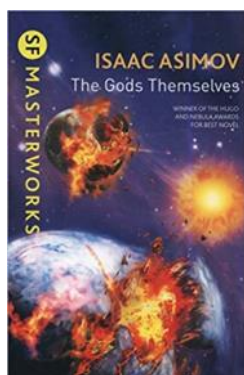
Cons: There are a few “twists” that are obvious from a mile away. In a sense that’s not such a bad thing, because I think good storytelling should give the viewer an opportunity to figure things out for themselves. That said, there’s a tough balance between logic and extreme predictability, and our protagonist’s good luck leaves little room for mystery. He ends up living with (at least) one of the artists he admires (and of course she’s introduced as a very child-like young woman with little awareness of her own body or the weird sexuality of her actions – a “con” in-and-of-itself). The woman who later becomes his boss happens to now be a student in his class. It’s a string of silly contrivances that feel much too convenient.

Content Warnings: Mild fanservice.

Would I Watch More? – Mostly likely not. I think there are some good things about this premiere, but I’ve got to be ruthless to my watch list this season and I wasn’t in love with this episode.

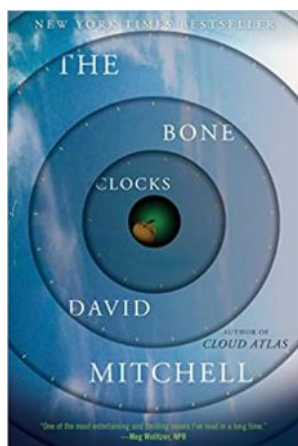
Books

Asimov's Best Review by Will Mayo



Out of Isaac Asimov's many books - the man wrote hundreds - one in particular comes to mind, that of a stand alone science fiction novel called *The Gods Themselves* involving a contact being made between universes. On Earth's side, is a scientist in a laboratory. On the other side, are 3 alien genders, male, female and neuter (it takes all 3 alien genders to produce an alien child). The contact between universes is near-cataclysmic yet is readily healed - though not without profound change being affected on all the characters. Of all Asimov's many tales, I have to say that this one is my favorite. With his genderbending hypothesis, he foresaw much in society today.

The Bone Clocks by David Mitchell Review by Will Mayo



This is a great fantasy novel that concerns on one level the centuries old war between a group of immortal beings and a band of vampires that feed on souls, but on another level it concerns the life of the English psychic Holly Sykes. As we journey through the pages we watch her grow and change from a teenage runaway in the 1980s to a barmaid in Switzerland in the years following the end of my country's first Cold War to being a pawn in that aforementioned war between immortals and vampires in the 2020s, to the end of the story as Holly watches civilization and life ebb away from her in the 2040s at the Irish coast. It is such a good story that I was reluctant to put the book down once I had finished reading it. I recommend it to anyone interested in fantasy and life's journey in general. It's that good, yeah.

Project Hail Mary by Andy Weir

Review by Stephanie Souders



Unfortunately, over the past month, I was a little strapped for cash and thus was unable to buy many newly published comics (and the ones I did buy, quite frankly, were too boring to be worthy of comment). However, I *did* sit down to read Andy Weir's [Project Hail Mary](#), which is *absolutely outstanding* and thus earns my highest recommendation. Indeed, I don't think I've been *this* excited about a book in quite some time.

How shall we describe the premise of Weir's third novel? Well, I read it as an offspring of a marriage between *The Martian* and my favorite first contact narratives (like, for example, James Cambias' *A Darkling Sea*).

Like Mark Watney, the protagonist and point-of-view character in *Project Hail Mary* - Dr. Ryland Grace - is a wise-cracking, super-skilled scientist who must rely on his wits to solve seemingly insurmountable problems. In this case, however, the primary test he faces is not mere survival but an imminent apocalypse: a newly-discovered space-faring unicellular lifeform is syphoning energy off our sun (and off many other stars in our local cluster), and Grace has been sent to Tau Ceti on a fast-tracked suicide mission to find a solution before crop failures and radical climate change destroy the human race.

Interestingly, the above remit is not something Grace realizes right off the bat; interestingly, it is something he has to discover gradually after waking up from an extended medically-induced coma with severe memory loss. And it is this choice to situate the main character in the same condition of ignorance as the reader as to the full context of his predicament that, in part, makes for a riveting story.

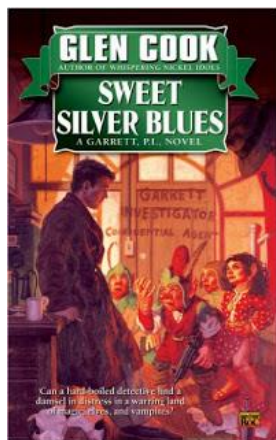
The other thing that kept me turning the pages besides Grace's slow-to-resolve amnesia (and, of course, Earth's impending doom) is "Rocky," our second principal character. "Rocky" (dubbed thus by Grace because of his mineral-based exoskeleton) is an ammonia-breathing alien spider from the Eridani system who has come to Tau Ceti to save his own species from the very same invasive organism that is threatening Earth. It is "Rocky" who brings the *Darkling Sea* elements to the table; after Grace and "Rocky" encounter each other, much of the middle chapters are devoted to their attempts to 1.) recognize each other's sapience, 2.) communicate, and 3.) learn about each other's biology and cultural traditions. I suppose another breed of reader might find such exposition boring, but I don't; on the contrary, I'm attracted to science fiction precisely because it tackles this challenge of mutual comprehension so often.

Plus? "Rocky" is *so. damned. likable*. Once Grace and "Rocky" learn the basics of each other's languages and it's revealed that they're both the sole survivors of their respective missions, they strike up a genuine, heart-felt friendship that, at several points, moved me to tears. The end of chapter 19 in particular is a stand-out moment. I actually had to stop for a while to collect myself before proceeding to chapter 20.

Bottom line, what we have in *Project Hail Mary* is a book that brings several positives to the table: 1.) sympathetic characters, 2.) high stakes, and 3.) more than one intellectually engaging

mystery. On top of all that, we can add the fact that our main characters do *not*, as we eventually learn, hail from the cream of the crop. "Rocky" is a workhorse engineer, and Grace -- well, I don't want to spoil the specifics about his history, but suffice it to say that he's not a stellar specimen either. And I like what that says, implicitly, about the heroic capacities of ordinary people. This novel is competence porn -- but it's also Human Wave to the core. A+

Glen Cook's Sweet Silver Blues: Garrett, PI Series #1 Review by Jim McCoy



Welcome to Day One of Jimbo's Memorial Day Weekend Extravaganza! I'll be posting four reviews in four days for your reading pleasure. Up first, we have Glen Cook. I am sometimes able to get in direct contact with authors, but not this time. Here is what I have about his time serving the good ol' US of A. Cook served in the United States Navy from 1962 to 1972 and specifically was attached, for a time, to the Marine Force Recon unit, 3rd Marine Battalion.[2] During his time attached to the Force Recon Unit, Cook participated in what he called, "practice combat," and left active duty, "a month before [the unit] shipped out to Viet Nam.

Ok, so maybe the hard-bitten detective is a bit of a cliché. I mean, it's been done to the point where even Star Trek parodied it. Remember Dixon Hill? And, of course, we're all Harry Dresden fans here, right? It just works. That's one of the biggest reasons I love Sweet Silver Blues by Glen Cook. Our main character, Garrett, is the stereotypical cynical detective who has seen it all. Except that this is the first book in the series, so apparently he still has more to see. You'd never make him believe that though.

Garrett is what makes the book. I mean that seriously. Of course, there are a slew of other characters, some major, some minor, some seen repeatedly, others that show up only once. But Garrett is THE MAN in the book. It's not just that everything centers around him. He's the main character. That's how it's supposed to work. It's that his personality suffuses the whole book. Sweet Silver Blues has a feeling to it that you can't quite shake, and it comes from the way Cook depicts Garrett. SWB is a first person novel and that's a big part of it. Any story is, of course, going to be flavored by its narrator.

Cook's characters make sense. They do what they do for their own reasons and their reasons are at least somewhat logical. I can believe that Garrett had a tryst with a woman when he was young because that's what young men want and what young men do. I can believe that people are seeking a large sum of money and are willing to commit fraud to obtain it, because that happens in the real world every stinking day. Money makes people crazy. I used to work in a call center that served over three hundred credit unions. I've seen it.

As a side note, and since this is the Memorial Day Event, service members beware. A lot of credit unions serve military members, and I've taken the "I just got back from deployment and my wife/girlfriend took everything I own. My house is empty. What's my balance?" calls WAAAAAY too many times. I left that job in 2012 and I'm still sick of hearing this. (And since I know someone out there is lying in wait to make a stink: Has a woman ever come back to her man having cleaned her out? Probably, but that's a call I've never taken.) Make sure you know who you're dealing with and know that if it was me, I'd keep some money where only I had ac-

cess to it while I was deployed.

Sorry. I guess that's your public service announcement for the weekend. Back to the reason you all came here.

As *Sweet Silver Blues* is the first in the series, it is also our introduction to the world that Cook has created and it's a good one. Cook avoids the mistake of many other authors who seek to cram the entire setting into the first two paragraphs. He gives us the details when he needs us to have them and relaxes the rest of the time. I love this approach because it gets me what I need and I don't feel like I should be sitting in a classroom taking notes.

The fights in *Sweet Silver Blues* are epic. They're up close, personal and intense. They're more fist fights than sword and sorcery per se in most cases but they work that way and you do get the occasional flash of steel and magical effect as well. Not all of the combatants are human and there are some adjustments made to make that work as well. I was reminded of the time I saw *Rocky IV* at the theater and the way the crowd reacted. I wanted to cheer, but that wasn't safe while reading an e-book. I use my cell phone for work. Waving my arms around cheering would have been counterproductive.

Cook's take on mythological creatures is original too. There are some creatures here that are portrayed in ways that I'm not used to seeing them. There are also some effects that come from certain things that aren't quite the way I learned it. If you're the super-nerd purist-guy type and everything has to appear exactly the way it appeared in *Bulfinch's* or in *LOTR* or some other junk you're going to lose your mind. That's okay though, because I'll be the person laughing at you. A fresh take is always good to see and there are definitely a few here. There are also a few new species that I've not seen anywhere else and I like that.

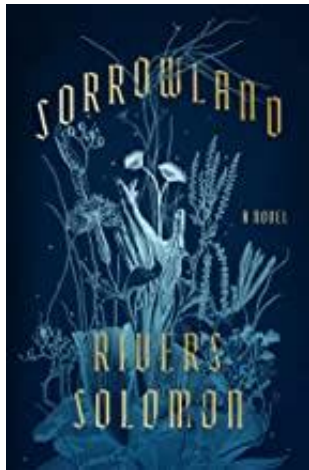
The easily offended might take offense at Cook's offensive use of what he calls "breeds"; half-breeds between humans and magical species. Think Hagrid and Flitwick from *Harry Potter*. It didn't bother me. Yes, some of the characters (including Garrett himself) have a negative attitude toward beings that are only half human. It makes sense though. If it's going to get your panties in a bunch though, I'd suggest reading something else. If you missed it, that's my version of a trigger warning. Quite honestly though, it's one of the most believable parts of the book. And if you think it wouldn't happen elsewhere, I'd suggest you take a look at some of the attitudes that Hagrid has to put up with.

This is the part where I don't talk about a particular creature that I liked or how they come to be because it would be a spoiler. That kind of irritates me because it was cool but I don't do spoilers. Trust me on this one though, if you don't read *Sweet Silver Blues* you're missing out on something with these guys.

Magic is handled in a way I've never quite seen it done before too. I loved it. Garret has a definite dislike of spellcasters in general and that seems a pretty common attitude. There's a bit of fear there too. Both are fairly common and yet, it seems pretty easy to use magic if you've got the right connections. I plan on reading further in this series and I hope he explores the magic of his world further, because it seems like there's a lot there we don't see in book one.

Bottom Line: 4.75 out of 5 Hung Over Detectives

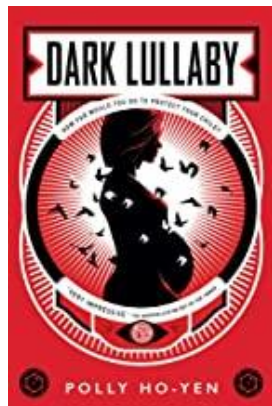
Sorrowland by Rivers Solomon Review by Jeffrey Redmond



Sorrowland by Rivers Solomon (MCD, 2021) is an exhilarating journey to the outer limits of science fiction, steeped in the southern gothic tradition and grounded in the physical and social realities of being poor, powerless, black and female in America. It begins with teenage Vern giving birth alone in the woods to twins she names Howling and Feral. She has escaped from Cainland, a religious compound ostensibly set up to allow black people to live free from white oppression, but with strict rules that make it a prison. She is determined her children will grow up truly free. Their life in the woods is hard, but also idyllic – unfeasibly so, but there’s a reason for that, revealed when she makes an impossible escape from an armed stalker, and realises that her body is in a process of transformation. She is becoming superhumanly strong and quick, but there are other changes, physical and mental, which frighten her into returning to civilisation to search for answers and find safety for her babies. After many struggles, she uncovers the terrible truth behind Cainland. A furious, justified anger drives this novel, drawing on the US history of racial oppression, but it’s also joyful and wildly entertaining.

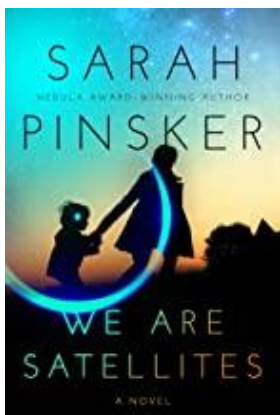
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Dark Lullaby by Polly Ho-Yen Review by Jeffrey Redmond



Recent reports on declining sperm counts suggest that by 2045, most people wanting children will have to rely on assisted reproduction. Polly Ho-Yen’s Dark Lullaby (Titan, 2021) imagines how this might change society. In her near-future Britain, no one is forced to undergo repeated rounds of painful fertility treatments, but women of childbearing age are under constant social and financial pressures to try. Because babies are so rare and precious, they are monitored by the “Office of Standards in Parenting”, and parents who prove less than perfect may have their child taken away. The cover references The Handmaid’s Tale, but the book has more in common with Orwell’s Nineteen Eighty Four; extrapolating from current trends in our surveillance society, it’s horrifyingly plausible.

We Are Satellites by Sarah Pinsker Review by Jeffrey Redmond



Would you get a brain implant to help you multitask? What about one for your child, to help them do better at school? In Sarah Pinsker’s We Are Satellites (Berkeley, 2021), these questions are explored through the experiences of one loving yet conflicted American family. After teenage David gets the “Pilot” implant he wants so desperately, his grades improve, but he finds it hard to cope with the increased influx of sensory impressions – although doctors insist nothing is wrong. His sister Sophie has epilepsy, which rules the implant out, but having a Pilot quickly becomes near-mandatory for most jobs and she joins an anti-Pilot movement demanding accountability from the manufacturer. This is science fiction as domestic slice of life. A gripping, believable immersion in the day after tomorrow.

The Kingdoms by Natasha Pulley Review by Jeffrey Redmond



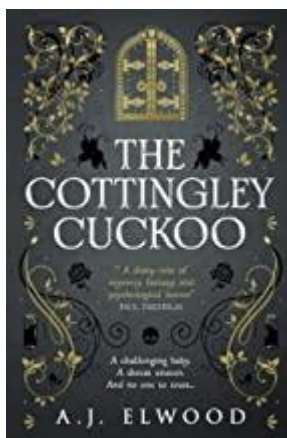
The Kingdoms by The Watchmaker of Filigree Street author Natasha Pulley (Bloomsbury, 2021) begins 90 odd years after the British were defeated at Trafalgar. Londres is an outpost of the French empire. As the novel opens, Joe Tournier steps off a train in the “Gare du Roi”, with no idea of who he is. Attacks of amnesia are well known in this world, and usually brief. But, although he is quickly returned to his home and family, Joe never regains his memory, and remains haunted by a sense of loss, which is only assuaged by love for a new baby daughter. Then he’s transported abruptly back to 1807 as the prisoner of a rag-tag remnant of the British navy, who

hope his knowledge of future technology will allow them to defeat the French. But Joe fears that if he changes history, his beloved daughter may never exist. Is it wrong of him to care more about one child than the fate of a whole country? Meanwhile, he is attracted to his captor, Missouri Kite, an unlikely character who combines a sensitive nature with casual brutality. Bromance simmers, always thwarted by a lack of honest conversation, and multiple flashbacks to earlier years can make it hard to follow the complicated story. Pulley is an inventive writer, and there is much to enjoy, but eventually my suspension of disbelief collapsed beneath the many contrivances.



Borders-Companion, Heralds, &
Wolf Night by Angela K. Scott

The Cottingley Cuckoo by AJ Elwood Review by Jeffrey Redmond



The Cottingley Cuckoo by AJ Elwood (Titan, 2021) references the famous Cottingley fairies hoax of a hundred years ago. But instead of pretty little people with gauzy wings, these fairies are the dangerous, spiteful creatures of folklore. In the present day, Rose works in a care home, where one of the residents, Charlotte Favell, shows her letters written in 1921 by a man who claimed to have found a dead fairy, and photographed others. Rose is too intimidated to ask questions, but Charlotte seems able to read her mind, and tells Rose she is pregnant before she knows herself. Rose becomes obsessed with this mysterious old woman, and with fairy lore, increasingly worried that her own baby has been replaced by a changeling. Unease escalates into dread in a very accomplished blend of dark fantasy and psychological thriller.

Films

Punching Nazis with the Speed Force – JUSTICE SOCIETY: WORLD WAR II Review by Christopher Hoffman scifi4me.com

Justice Society: World War II (2021)

Directed by Jeff Wamester

Casting and voice direction by Wes Gleason

Written by Jeremy Adams & Meghan Fitzmartin

PG-13, 84 minutes



Warner Bros. Animation returns with the latest chapter in the DC animated universe, *Justice Society: World War II*, a rip-roaring Earth-1 adventure that exceeds expectations in cinematic scope and storytelling.

Gone are the dark flame-filled skies and hopelessness of 2020's *Apokolips War*. They've been replaced with bright blue ones and the optimism of new beginnings. Continuing the tonal reboot originating in *Superman: Man of Tomorrow*, we are presented with a rookie Barry Allen aka The Flash (Matt Bomer) trying to create the perfect romantic picnic for girlfriend Iris West (Ashleigh LaThrop).

Their festivities are soon interrupted by a nearby explosion, prompting Allen to rush off to investigate. He finds Superman (Darren Criss) battling Brainiac (Dain De Paul) and his robot drones in the middle of downtown Metropolis. While trying to intercept a kryptonite bullet hurtling towards Superman, The Flash enters the dimensional limbo called the Speed Force. Once inside he encounters a mysterious entity who pleads with The Flash to remain in the Speed Force and follow the sound of its voice.



The Flash is transported to World War II Europe, arriving in the middle of a battle between Wonder Woman (Stana Katic) and a battalion of SS troops. After dispatching the troops singlehandedly, in a beautifully animated display of badassery, Wonder Woman spots the disoriented Flash. Believing him to be part of the SS due to the lightning symbol on his costume, she captures The Flash for interrogation. It is here that we are introduced to the rest of Wonder Woman's team —

a truncated version of the Justice Society consisting of Hawkman (Omid Abtahi), Black Canary (Elysia Rotaru), Hourman (Matthew Mercer), and The Flash's earlier counterpart, Jay Garrick (Armen Taylor). We also learn that not only did The Flash travel back in time but also dimensionally, landing in an alternate version of Earth. Now the Flash must not only find a way home through time and space but also convince these uncannily familiar heroes that he is not a threat.

In order to prove his integrity to his would-be captors, The Flash saves a family from execution by German soldiers in a slow motion scene that's fairly reminiscent of the live action introduction of Quicksilver in *X-Men: Days of Future Past*. It's an interesting visual concept that actually translates well to animation, allowing the audience to experience The Flash's sense of

distorted time specifically in battle. In a neat touch, one of the soldiers is knocked unconscious from merely the shockwaves of force generated by The Flash winding up a punch.

While The Flash's fish out of timestream plotline is interesting, the main focus is on Wonder Woman leading the black ops Justice Society against the Nazi threat of world domination. There's something viscerally appealing about seeing a stylized version of William Moulton Marston's classic Wonder Woman design come to life kicking the crap out Nazis. Her interplay with the endearingly smitten Col. Steve Trevor (Chris Diamantopoulos) is delightful.

Although using an alternate earth version of the Justice Society allowed the writers to use fewer characters, some of them are more well rounded than others. Hawkman and Black Canary are given some nice moments allowing their characters to form a bond that pays off later in the film. Whereas Hourman's power limitations, his fear of inadequacy, and possible addiction to Miraclo — the drug that gives him multiple superpowers for sixty minutes every twenty four hours — are barely touched upon. Still, it's an interesting choice to include him in the roster. The diminishment of Jay Garrick's speed abilities by having to share access to the Speed Force with the displaced Flash is also mentioned briefly but never really expanded upon. This leaves the audience feeling like it's a mere inconvenience rather than a possible catastrophic event. Doctor Fate (Keith Ferguson) shows up in the story serving as the catalyst for The Flash to make the journey to Earth-1, although it isn't specifically made clear if he is part of the Justice Society at this time. There are also surprise appearances from two of DC's heavy hitters in the film that would serve as major spoilers if revealed here.



The first half of the film is a pulpy World War II two-fisted tale that abruptly turns into an otherworldly adventure as the team is stranded in Atlantis after the submarine transporting them is attacked by German warships. The highly futuristic Atlantean architecture and technology is beautiful, but totally severs the audience from the actual time period that the film takes place in. This is made obvious when a group of sleek

streamlined Atlantean battle cruisers attack a very Max Fleischer inspired art deco New York. The storyline for this part of the film is really interesting but the lack of any retro-futuristic design choices makes it seem visually incohesive.

That being stated, the animation and character design is fluid and beautiful with multilayered backgrounds that add a Cinemascope feel to the film and give it an added layer of production value usually not seen in direct to video animation. The fight layouts are amazing, with each battle given distinct choreography that not only highlights the characters' individual fighting styles but separates them from becoming a generic series of punch ups. This wouldn't feel out of place on theater screens should it ever get a theatrical run.

The voice acting is top notch with Stana Katic and Matt Bomer shining as Wonder Woman and The Flash respectively. Omid Abatahi, Mathew Mercer, Elysia Rotaru, and Armen Taylor round out the rest of the Justice Society with solid performances under the skillful voice direction of Wes Gleason. Director Jeff Wamester and his team of highly talented animators complimented with a punchy script by writers Jeremy Adams and Meghan Fittzmartin have created a fantastic homage to vintage war movies and adventure serials that is well worth your time. Having The Flash encounter the Justice Society was a great introduction to the team, but their

rich and varied characters shouldn't have to share the spotlight again if Warner Bros. Animation should ever make a sequel. They're strong enough to stand on their own, even if Rex Tyler's powers only last one hour.

Justice Society World War II is currently available digitally on Blu-Ray and 4k HD formats through Warner Bros. Animation.

Phantasm Review by Will Mayo

One of the few horror movies to give me a serious fright over a lifetime of seeing horror movies was a movie called Phantasm I saw about forty years ago. It featured among other things a flying apparatus that drilled into people's brains and a long, tall man that haunted (and terrorized) a mortuary in a variety of dream montages. I would recommend this flick to anyone interested to see what a clever cinematographer can do when armed with a good and frightening script. Good for any nighttime viewing.

High Plains Drifter Review by Will Mayo



Top notch Western starring Clint Eastwood about the ghost of a man that returns from the dead to see his revenge on the mob that killed him, this one features excellent dream montages and haunting music. As handy with a whip as a gun, the ghost says, "Paint the town red, boys." And so they do. "Welcome to hell," the sign reads. The ghost thereby treats the mob to as kind a treatment as all the demons of hell. 5 stars. Recommended.

Andy Warhol's Dracula Review by Will Mayo



One of the best yet strangest movies I've seen over the years has got to have been "Andy Warhol's Dracula" in which the by-now well known vampire serves as a symbol of capitalism at its worst and is brought to its end by a workingman wielding an axe. Quickly, he severs all four of the vampire's limbs before impaling its heart and declaring that capitalism is now dead. Surely, Andy made a cool mint off that one. I, for one, enjoyed it.

Tron Review by Will Mayo



And I think of the movie Tron of about forty years ago in which a boy falls, body and mind, into a video game and becomes an action hero for whoever controls the game. And so we find ourselves in this strange new time in which UFOs are frequently sighted in our skies and scientists talk openly about their theory that we are all just toys in some alien's video game. Whether any of that is true or not remains to be seen. But the game can surely only get stranger as we go along the way. Stay tuned.

Clive Barker's Hellraiser Review by Will Mayo



Inspired by the screenwriter's trip to an S & M club, this is notably one of the few films about a trip to hell that makes you glad you came. It has every fright and every delight. Worth special attention is a character named Pinhead who is your host to Hell's every attraction. Worth the price of admission, I give this one five stars.

The Retro (And Bloody) Pleasures of PG: PSYCHO GOREMAN Review by Timothy Harvey — scifi4me.com



PG: PSYCHO GOREMAN (2021)

Directed by Steven Kostanski

Written by Steven Kostanski

Produced by Stuart F. Andrews, Shannon Hanmer, Steven Kostanski

Rated R, 99 min

Lovecraftian horror isn't that easy to get right, but Steven Kostanski's 2017 feature *The Void* had viewers and critics alike praising its genuine chills and emphasis on practical effects over CGI. *The Void* evoked 80's horror films like Carpenter's *The Thing*, Prince of Darkness, and Stuart Gordon's *Re-Animator* and *From Beyond* without imitating them, and fans of cosmic horror could be genuinely excited about what else would emerge from the minds and talent of Kostanski and writer Jeremy Gillespie.

If you were expecting a love-letter to 80's and 90's guys-in-monster-suits – think *The Guyver* meets *The Power Rangers* meets *Psycho Cop* – then congratulations, you win the prize of PG: *Psycho Goreman*. If you weren't expecting this smart, funny, cheerfully gory and bonkers film, well, don't feel bad, because I didn't either. Part of that comes from my only exposure to Kostanski's work being *The Void*, and not taking into account his work with Astron-6, the Canadian film group behind his *Manborg*, and the films *The Editor* and *Father's Day*. I also hadn't realized just how much of Kostanski's work I'd seen without realizing it, considering his extensive makeup work on films like *Nurse 3D*, *ABCs of Death 2*, *Crimson Peak*, *Suicide Squad*, *IT*, and shows like *Star Trek: Discovery*.



Keeping things spoiler-lite, siblings Mimi (Nita-Josee Hanna) and Luke (Owen Myre) discover a glowing gemstone in a hole in their back yard, not realizing that removing it will release the alien creature imprisoned beneath it. When they discover the creature it tries to kill them only to discover it can't since Mimi has the gem and whoever controls the gem controls the alien. That the alien

was imprisoned on Earth for being a psychopathic, genocidal, intergalactic despot doesn't matter to Mimi for two reasons: first, she's something of an adolescent sociopath herself, and second, she has an alien monster she can control, so why shouldn't she have some fun?

Meanwhile, the alien alliance that imprisoned the newly-renamed *Psycho Goreman* discovered



he has been released from his prison, and his greatest enemy makes her way to Earth to confront him. The word “noble” might be used to describe her, but she has no intention of letting “The Arch-Duke of Nightmares” roam free again and if a few humans have to die along the way, well...

What follows is part sci-fi creature-feature, part horror monster-movie, part family drama, and, rather unexpectedly, a story about the power of love. That the love is between a murdering space alien and a little girl who might be more of a monster than he is, well, I did use the words cheerfully gory and bonkers earlier. There is a delightfully warped sense of humor that runs through the entire film, and PG: Psycho Gorman is always aware of the absurdity of the story it is telling and leans hard into all of its various inspirations in a way that homages its origins without actively making fun of them. You can tell Kostanski loves these genres but isn't afraid to push them to their boundaries and cover them all in a lot of blood and exploding body parts.



And the practical effects...

If you grew up before CGI became the norm for creating the aliens and monsters of our entertainment, this film is a delightful throwback to a time where creating a costume, animatronic or puppet was the only way to bring these kinds of creatures to life. Kostanski clearly loves to play with his

toys, and here he gets to let his imagination run wild. His creatures all have character and make you want to see more of them, and that so many of them are shown moving around and engaging in actual fight scenes is rather impressive in this day and age.

Of course, great creatures, lots of blood and gore, and a warped sense of humor are all a great deal of fun but only go so far without entertaining performances from the actual people on the screen. Thankfully, Nita-Josee Hanna's Mimi is delightful to watch in her youthful malice, and Owen Myre's effective turn as her long-suffering older brother Luke is a voice of semi-reason, even if he is promptly ignored. Great child actors – good child actors – are not in as plentiful supply as we'd often like, but both of these young talents are perfect for these roles. As their mother, Susan, Alexis Hancey is enough of the 80's sitcom mom eternally exasperated by her slacker husband, Greg, and endlessly tolerant of her children's antics, and yet she plays a pivotal role in the action-packed climax. Greg, played by Adam Brooks, also evokes the hapless sitcom father while also getting to show off some perfectly-timed physical comedy and, in the end, show that he's not entirely useless when the chips are down. In many ways, the family dynamic has to work in this film, exaggerated as it is, and these actors provide exactly what this film needs to sell that critical part of the story.

Mention must of course be made of the men and women inside the creatures, most notably – of course – Matthew Ninabar, the man who brings Psycho Gorman to life. Acting under significant prosthetics is never easy, but Ninabar makes it look like it is, and his body language both as an interstellar threat and put-upon plaything of a child is simply a lot of fun to watch. Moving around in that level of costuming is a challenge, but it's one he performs extremely well, especially in the fight scenes. His climactic confrontation with his arch-enemy Pandora – Kristen MacCulloch, also hidden beneath extensive prosthetics – is everything you would want in such a scene, coming across as deadly serious if just a bit ridiculous.

In the end, this movie is simply fun. If you are of an age to have lived through the films that Kostanski clearly loves the first time, or came to them later and fell in love with them, there is much to enjoy here. The practical effects, the knowing riffs on the tropes of these kinds of films, and the clear amount of fun the director and the cast are obviously having while making the film elevates PG: Psycho Goreman above a standard alien monster movie into a loving and knowing homage to a kind of movie that is so rarely made anymore.

Having said that we want to keep the spoilers lite, if you've already seen the film during its theatrical run or on VOD – or just don't mind some spoilers – I had the pleasure of talking to Steven Kostanski about writing and directing the film, and you can watch that interview here: <https://youtu.be/foXWqwcQHWA>

I also got to talk to Owen Myre, the very talented young man who plays Luke, and someone whose career I shall be watching with interest. https://youtu.be/5odJWd_EOJE

And finally, I spoke to the man inside the Goreman himself, Matthew Ninabar, about playing the titular alien overlord. <https://youtu.be/PzmRLd924O8>

All of them were kind enough to take the time to talk to me about their work on the film and what comes next for them, and as always, I appreciate the chance to have these kinds of conversations with the folks in front of and behind the camera.

PG: Psycho Goreman will be released by RLJE Films on Blu-ray and DVD in the U.S. on March 16th, 2021.

Graphic Tales

LOVESICKNESS: Junji Ito Delivers Trauma, Obsession and Urban Folk Horror Review by Christopher Hoffman — scifi4me.com

Junji Ito returns to Viz Media with Lovesickness, a dread shrouded collection of tales absolutely permeated with the horrific darkness that has made him the modern master of horror manga.

The collection consisting of ten stories begins with the titular Lovesickness, consisting of the first five stories forming the longer narrative. The story centers around the young student Ryusuke, who returns to his childhood hometown, a strange fog drenched city that is soon plagued by the Beautiful Boy at the Crossroads, a malevolent entity that drives young girls to suicide.

Sensing a connection to the current tragedies, stemming from a similar incident eight years ago, Ryusuke becomes obsessed with finding the origins of the Beautiful Boy and stopping him at all costs. It's a task that may cost Ryusuke not only various relationships but his very sanity.

The strongest story cycle in the collection, Lovesickness touches on the despair of survivor's guilt, mental illness and mass trauma and their effects literally leading some characters to become mere shadows of their former selves. Ito's highly detailed expressive line work is on full display here as it subtly shifts between delicate facial curves and bold thick crosshatching enveloping characters in ominous blood drenched shadows. For all its bleak subject matter and

gruesome imagery, it is ultimately a story of forgiveness and hope.

The second set of two stories introduces us to the strange Hikizuri siblings, a comedically morbid abusive family. A family that enjoys playing homicidal pranks and summoning the spirits of their dead parents to settle family disputes. The family is mean spirited and opportunistic with the comedy arising from how absurdly vile each member of the family truly is. The second oldest son bares a passing resemblance to Uncle Creepy of Warren Publishing's Creepy while the youngest and brattiest sister is drawn with pigtails and an ever-present demonic grin. Ito's choice of a caricature-like visual approach to the family serves to reinforce the over-the-top nihilism of the narrative. You won't find anyone to root for in this family and perhaps that's the point.

The Mansion of Phantom Pain is a bizarre claustrophobic tale of a chronically ill boy, whose pain permeates the very foundation of his home, and the young man hired to care for him. An effectively chilling Poe-esque narrative that delivers.

Reading like a Japanese urban legend mixed with cautionary tale, The Rib Woman tells the story of Yuki and her struggle with society's unrealistic beauty standards. Yuki, believing herself to be unattractive in comparison to her brother's beauty pageant winning girlfriend, struggles with her body image. Yuki makes the decision to undergo extreme plastic surgery. Little does Yuki know that she is being stalked by the Rib Woman, the mysterious first patient of her plastic surgeon.

The final story, Memories of a Real Poop, is a total tonal departure from the previous bone chilling entries. A memoir of a young boy's love for the most realistic "fake" pile of poop he has ever seen. This oddly awkward remembrance seems out of place ending the collection on a low note.

Originally published in Japanese in 2011, this debut English translation and adaptation by Joceylyne Allen with touch up art and lettering by Eric Erbes makes a great starting point into the dark world of Junji Ito for newcomers and a welcome addition to any Ito collector's library.

Sercon

Kate Wilhelm Bio-Bibliography

by

Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D.

N3F Historian

Katie Gertrude Meredith Wilhelm Knight (1928-2018) was an award-winning American author. She wrote works in science fiction (SF) and fantasy, including the popular novels *The Killer Thing* (1967) and *Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang* (1976); and the collections *The Mile-Long Spaceship* (1963) and *The Infinity Box* (1975). Her first novel, however, was a mystery, published in 1963; and she later returned to writing mysteries with her *Barbara Holloway* and *Constance & Charlie* series of novels. During her career she wrote and edited scores of books.

Her writing crossed over the genres of SF/fantasy, mystery, suspense, family sagas, and radio plays. Her works have been adapted for television and movies in the United States, England,



and Germany; and her stories have been translated into more than a dozen languages. She contributed to many popular American magazines, including *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, *Amazing Stories*, *Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, *Fantastic*, *Omni*, *Redbook*, *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine*, and *Cosmopolitan*.

Pen Names

In addition to Kate Wilhelm, she used some other names on her work, including K. Wilhelm and Kathleen Curran.

Notable Genre Works

The Mile-Long Spaceship (1963)
 The Clone (1965) – 1966 Nebula Award nominee
 The Nevermore Affair (1966)
 Andover and the Android (1966)
 Baby, You Were Great (1967) – 1968 Nebula Award nominee
 The Killer Thing (1967)
 The Planners (1968) – 1969 Nebula Award winner
 The Downstairs Room (1968) – collection of 14 SF stories
 Let the Fire Fall (1969)
 The Year of the Cloud (1970)
 April Fool's Day Forever (1970) – 1971 Nebula Award nominee
 A Cold Dark Night with Snow (1970) – 1971 Nebula Award nominee
 Abyss: Two Novellas (1971) – contains “The Plastic Abyss” (1992 Nebula Award nominee) and “Stranger in the House”
 Margaret and I (1971) -1972 Nebula Award nominee
 City of Cain (1974)
 The Infinity Box (1975) – collection of 9 SF short stories
 Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang (1976) – Hugo and Locus Award winner; Nebula nominee
 Somerset Dreams and Other Fiction (1978) – collection of 8 SF stories
 Juniper Time (1979) – 1980 Nebula Award nominee
 The Winter Beach (1981) – 1982 Nebula Award nominee
 A Sense of Shadow (1981)
 Listen, Listen (1981) – contains four novellas
 Welcome, Chaos (1983)
 Huysman's Pets (1985)
 Forever Yours, Anna (1987) – 1988 Nebula Award winner
 Crazy Time (1988)
 Children of the Wind (1989) – contains “Children of the Wind”
 Cambio Bay (1990)
 Naming the Flowers (1992) – 1994 Nebula Award nominee
 And the Angels Sing (1992) – collection of 12 SF short stories
 I Know What You're Thinking (1994) – 1995 Nebula Award nominee
 Fear is a Cold Black (2010) – collection of her early short stories
 Music Makers (2012) – collection of 5 stories
 The Bird Cage (2012) – collection of 4 stories

Awards/Nominations/Other Honors

Wilhelm won many awards for her writing (see above), including the Prix Apollo, Kurd Lasswitz, Jupiter, Hugo, Locus, and Nebula Awards.

She was Guest of Honor at the 1990 Worldcon, and in 2003 was inducted into the Science Fiction Hall of Fame.

In 2016, the SFWA renamed the Solstice Award the Kate Wilhelm Solstice Award in her honor.

Marriage to Damon Knight

Wilhelm and SF author/editor/critic Damon Knight, her second husband -- whom she married in 1963 and with whom she had one child -- also provided assistance to numerous other writers over the years. Their teaching careers covered a span of several decades, with hundreds of students.

The couple helped to establish both the Clarion Writer's Workshop and the Milford Writer's Conference. They lectured together at universities in South America and Asia, and were guests and panelists at numerous SF conventions around the world.

Her husband, a member of the famous Futurians of New York, was born September 19, 1922; he died April 15, 2002.

Comments about Wilhelm and Her Works

According to genre author and critic Paul Di Filippo, Wilhelm was: "Arguably undervalued in her lifetime—she worked in the shadow of her more-famous husband, Damon Knight. . . ."

In her Constance & Charlie series of six mystery novels, Charlie Meiklejohn was a former arson detective turned private investigator; and his wife, Constance Leidl, was a professional psychologist. Together they solved mysteries.

Concluding Comments

After Damon Knight's death, Wilhelm continued to host monthly workshops, as well as teach at other events. She also edited Clarion and Nebula Award anthologies. She was an avid supporter of local libraries and helped raise funds for them.

A non-fiction book, *The Works of Kate Wilhelm*, was published in 1983; and *Masters of Science Fiction: Kate Wilhelm* was issued in 2020.

Infinity Box Press was created to present the works of Wilhelm and Knight in both hardcover and ebook formats.

Best known in the SF field for her 1977 Hugo and Jupiter Award winning novel, "Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang," Kate Wilhelm died March 8, 2018, after a brief illness, according to her son, Richard Wilhelm.

Sources

Bloom, Harold. *Science Fiction Writers of the Golden Age*. NY: Chelsea House, 1995.

Clute, John & Peter Nicholls (eds.). *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*. London: Orbit, 1993.

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Mallett, D. F. & Robert Reginald. *Reginald's Science Fiction and Fantasy Awards, Third Edition*. San Bernardino, CA: The Borgo Press, 1993.

Tuck, Donald H. *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction and Fantasy, Volume 2: Who's Who, M - Z*. Chicago, IL: Advent, 1978.

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

An Interview with Tom Cosentino by Tamara Wilhite

Tom Cosentino's bio says he's been a soldier, a chef and a writer. Tom Cosentino is associate editor of *Liberty Island Magazine*. He is the author of the new comedic novel "The Art of Looking for Trouble". And he's written a number of short stories, many of which are available at *Liberty Island Magazine's* website.

Tamara Wilhite: You told me that you pivoted to short stories after trying to get your novels published. What genres do your stories typically fall into? I ask because stories like "Restoration" and "No Greater Love" are borderline horror.

Tom Cosentino: My novels were nowhere near ready to be published and to be honest, they weren't very good. I pivoted to short stories for the writer's group that I joined in Safety Harbor, FL. My strategy was to write a new short story for each meeting. I found that with a new short story I could get immediate feedback on the entire story and improve my writing. Reading a chapter out of a novel at a meeting was always out of context for anyone who missed a meeting.

I tried several areas of fiction. Usually it was based on the idea that I had that needed to get out. "Restoration" was based on the death of my son, but I couldn't tell that story, it would have been too difficult. So I pivoted to the story of a father that lost his son in combat. It was the horror of losing a child. "No Greater Love" was the horror of war and the concentration camps. My father liberated camps as a soldier in World War II. I read an oral history where a WWII soldier talked about Latin in the form of a Catholic prayer that allowed him to connect with a German prisoner. I combined those thoughts for that short story. After all that experimentation I decided to write more humorous, character-based stories. One of which became my novel, "The Art of Looking for Trouble".

Tamara Wilhite: Is "The Art of Looking for Trouble" your first published novel? And can you tell me more about it?

Tom Cosentino: It is my first published novel. As I said, it started as a short story that I wrote for a writer's group. I started with the true story of my friend's father getting a goat as a gag birthday gift for a friend of his and taking it to their bar. I liked the characters in that short story so much that I just kept writing.

It is the story of Mike Lee who owns an Irish Pub in a fictionalized Upstate New York city, similar to Syracuse, where I grew up. The city is going through the decline that almost all of the older rust belt cities are going through, the increase in crime and the decrease in jobs and population. Mike decides to run against an incumbent mayor, in a one-party city, just to give people a choice and because he feels the needs to at least get the message out that there is a better way to run a city other than the failed, progressive ideas, that are really making the city worse. The campaign for mayor becomes a roller-coaster of hilarity, vendettas and lessons as they dive into the campaign. I hope the readers will connect with the characters and take the ride with them.

Tamara Wilhite: Before you became associate editor of Liberty Island Magazine, what was your day job?

Tom Cosentino: I still have a day job, working in the insurance industry. It has taken a lot of discipline to work all day and then go to writer's group and write on top of that. It would be a dream come true to only be a writer and an editor. I have done a lot of different jobs. I was an officer in the Army, I was a chef, I have a degree in Political Science from Syracuse University, and an MBA from the Rochester Institute of Technology. All of my life experiences have helped me be a better writer.

Tamara Wilhite: And what led you to come to work for Liberty Island?

Tom Cosentino: I read the article in *National Review* about why Adam Bellow founded Liberty Island. I found that the people I ran into at writer's group and at seminars were more concerned about who the writer was than what they were writing. I went to one seminar at a local university and the topic was supposed to be about the elements of a novel's plot. That topic lasted about five minutes before the professor started a rant about the last president, which lasted at least a half hour, the time I walked out.

Tamara Wilhite: What advice would you like to give to potential authors who are reading this?

Tom Cosentino: Write, write a lot. Keep writing even if you think it isn't any good, you will get better if you work hard. Hopefully you can get lucky and find a good writer's group that actually wants the writers to get better. I had two or three people that gave me great advice. I had thick skin and took their advice and kept working.

Also, read, read a lot in the same genre that you want to write in. I got that advice from Stephen King's "On Writing" and it was the best piece of advice in my writing journey. I was up to two novels a week on top of my day job and writing.

Tamara Wilhite: What would you say is the breakdown of books that are going to be released by Liberty Island Magazine? What percent are going to be horror, science fiction, fantasy, historical fiction, etc?

Tom Cosentino: I'm not one-hundred percent sure but my guess would be that would be dependent on the quality of the work that is submitted. If the best is horror and science fiction, I

would think that would be the direction we would go in. As the fiction editor I want to see a good story and good characters. For me a good novel gives me the same feeling at the end as watching a friend move away, seeing them drive down the road and you miss them before their car is out of sight.

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

Tom Cosentino: I would just like to say that I've been extremely lucky to connect with a great group of writers here in Florida and to connect with Liberty Island and David Swindle. I also hope that the readers enjoy my novel and feel that same sadness that I described when they finish and have to leave Mike Lee and all his friends at Quinn's Pub.

Tamara Wilhite: Thank you for speaking with me.

An Interview with Robert Kroese by Tamara Wilhite

Robert Kroese is the author of "Mercury Fall" and "The Dream of the Iron Dragon". He's also started the new science fiction site, Upstreamreviews.com. And I had the opportunity to interview him.

Tamara Wilhite: I have to admit that your novel "The Dream of the Iron Dragon" is in my Amazon wish list, though I haven't yet read it. What genre would you consider it to be? And how would you describe it for those who aren't familiar with it?

Robert Kroese: I have this terrible habit of not sticking to a single genre, even within books. I call the Iron Dragon books "alternate history," but they're really more "secret history" – that is, they start from the premise that history can't be changed, but there's a lot of wiggle room with what *might* have happened that we don't know about.

Much of the books concern the protagonists' attempts to overcome various technical challenges using only medieval technology, but then there are also aliens trying to eradicate humanity and a fair amount of space combat, particularly in the later books. So I guess they're time travel/secret history military hard sci-fi?

One reader said the series is like Michael Crichton's *Timeline* combined with Andy Weir's *The Martian*, which I thought was a good description.

Tamara Wilhite: How many books are in the series now?

Robert Kroese: I just finished the 5th and final book, *The War of the Iron Dragon*. Originally I only intended to do 3, but there were still a lot of unanswered questions at the end of book 3, so I wrote two more to tie everything up nicely.

Tamara Wilhite: You've written a variety of fantasy, scifi and what I think are blended works. For example, what is "Distopia"?

Robert Kroese: *Distopia* is one of the three books in my "World of Dis" series, which also in-

cludes *Disenchanted* and *Disillusioned*. (I wrote *Disenchanted* first, but *Distopia* is a prequel, so it's really Book One although it shows on Amazon as Book Two for some reason.) *Distopia* is a little like *The Princess Bride* mashed up with Terry Pratchett. It's one of my favorites of my books.

Tamara Wilhite: Is it fair to say that a lot of your science fiction is humorous or absurdist? I've seen it compared to "Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy", or in the case of your fantasy works, "Good Omens" and other Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett's works.

Robert Kroese: Yes, I started writing humorous novels because I'd written a lot of humor pieces in the past so I knew how to do it. I figured that if I threw in enough jokes, nobody would notice I didn't really know how to write a novel. And it seems to have worked! I gradually got better at structuring my books and now I write mostly more "straight" (I won't say "serious") science fiction.

Tamara Wilhite: I believe your most recent project is the website Upstream Reviews. Can you tell the readers about it?

Robert Kroese: Upstream Reviews is, not to mince words, a website intended to showcase freedom-loving independent writers who are increasingly less welcome in the leftist-dominated publishing/entertainment industry.

Tamara Wilhite: What led you to create it?

Robert Kroese: Personally, I'm sick to death of woke garbage being rammed down my throat by big entertainment corporations, and I know I'm not the only one. It's been said that politics is downstream from culture, and a fundamental aspect of culture is literature. That's where the name comes from: we want to influence the culture at the source, both by showcasing lesser-known authors and by giving readers an alternative to corporate entertainment.

Tamara Wilhite: What else are you working on?

Robert Kroese: My current project is a sci-fi series called *Mammon*, which is about an attempt to rescue the U.S. from a looming financial crisis by redirecting an incredibly valuable asteroid into orbit over Earth. It sounds a little ridiculous, I know, but both of these scenarios (the financial crisis and an asteroid being brought into Earth orbit) are becoming increasingly likely, and I thought it made a weird kind of sense to tie them together. The concept of rescuing a country's finances in this way actually isn't new: the idea is loosely based on the efforts of France to alleviate its debt burden by selling stock in a company with exclusive rights to mine for gold in its Louisiana territories. That scheme eventually collapsed, leading indirectly to the French Revolution. As you might suspect, not all will go as planned with the asteroid-harnessing scheme either....

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

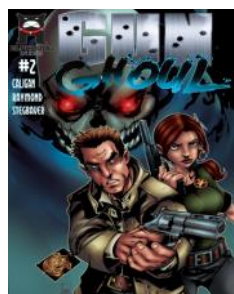
Robert Kroese: If you want to make a difference in the culture, support independent, freedom-loving authors! There is an amazing amount of talent out there, and most of these writers just barely get by. Much of the publishing industry is actively hostile to Christians, libertarians and conservatives, so it's hard for us to get noticed.

The next J.R.R. Tolkien or Robert Heinlein could be out there right now, and your support might be the difference between them continuing to write and throwing in the towel. We post several reviews a week at Upstream Reviews, so you're guaranteed to find something there you'll like.

If you sign up for alerts at https://upstreamreviews.com/?page_id=95, you'll never miss out on a great read!

Tamara Wilhite: Thank you for speaking with me.

An Interview with Will Caligan by Tamara Wilhite



Will Caligan is the creator of the “Gun Ghoul” graphic novel series. He is a comic book artist, character designer, and a storyboard artist. He’s also a Desert Shield and Desert Storm veteran. And I had the opportunity to interview him.

Tamara Wilhite: Bounding Into Comics described “Gun Ghoul” as a revenge story, whether the supernatural vigilante Gun Ghoul is taking out mob bosses. How would you describe it?

Will Caligan: I would agree. I think you can see elements of that in the story. Although, through the book Gun Ghoul is very clear that what he is doing is “justice” and not vengeance. The book does revolve around a mob boss and his crew. The story focuses more on Agent Justice and Detective Callahan trying to stop the killings and finding out who is responsible; you really only get small nuggets about who “Gun Ghoul” actually is and where he comes from and his motives.



Tamara Wilhite: This concept seems close to that of Ghost Rider, though Bounding into Comics also compared it to The Punisher. What do you think?

Will Caligan: I do hear that a lot. I think the Ghost Rider comparison comes from the fact Gun Ghoul has a skull as a head and the Punisher comes from him carrying two guns. The comparisons are pretty close. I would probably add in a little touch of the character Spawn too.

Those are great characters to be compared to and I am happy that focus like the character enough to even give it those qualities.



Tamara Wilhite: How does this compare to “Cereal and Pajamas”?

Will Caligan: Cereal and Pajamas was a very interesting project. At the time I was a pretty well known comic book artist on the site: Deviantart.com and I knew a lot of up and coming artist and thought it would be cool to do a book with them. We took the idea to APE Entertainment and they gave us the green light to do it.

The book is an anthology book filled with stories that each artist just wanted to tell and have fun with. It was mostly all up to the individual creators to do whatever they like.

The idea was to make a book that reminded everyone of watching Saturday morning cartoons. It was a very fun project to work on and most everyone that did work on the book went off to do a lot of bigger projects with Marvel, DC and other major companies.



Tamara Wilhite: Can you tell me about "Outlaw Angel"?

Will Caligan: Outlaw Angel is one of the first books I ever had published. It is one of my babies. This is the story that I promised God that I would do if I ever had the opportunity to just do whatever I liked or wished.

The story is about the a couple of agents that work for a company called "Trinity Corp" and their mission is to stop Satan from basically bringing about the end times.

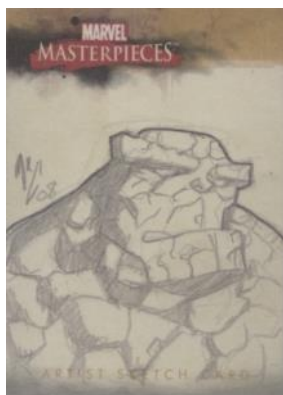
One of the agents is named "Grace". She is actually Satan's daughter and has chosen to fight against him instead of helping him. Her partner is named "David Cross". He is an ex operative for a CIA group called "Black Sheep". They were basically the guys you send in to do the dirty jobs and you could disavow them if needed. The government experimented with David and now if he gets too angry he turns into a demon type of creature. Sort of like what the Hulk does.



The story has a lot going on with it. I have really added a lot and taken a lot away from it since I created way back in the 90s. I am hoping this will be my next project that I actually write and draw for but with everything going on with Covid and how it has affected the publishing industry; I just am not sure how all of it is going to work out. God will find a way though. He always has for me and he has always made sure to give me the platform I should have.

Tamara Wilhite: What is involved in creating cards like you're doing for Upperdeck Marvel Masterpiece set 2?

Will Caligan: It was really fun and led to other opportunities for me at Upperdeck. I ended up doing some toy designs there too.



Being able to work for Marvel was fun. I don't draw a lot of known characters because my focus has always been on doing my own thing. In saying that though, getting to draw any Marvel character I wanted and having such a large amount of cards to do; I did 150 for that run, gave me a chance to draw characters I probably will never get to draw again. It was a true blessing for me to do them.

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

Will Caligan: I would like to thank God and you for giving me this plat-



form to tell a little about myself. I appreciate all my supporters and they are such a blessing to me.

Here are a couple links where you can purchase my books:

[Gun Ghoul Trade Paperback](#)

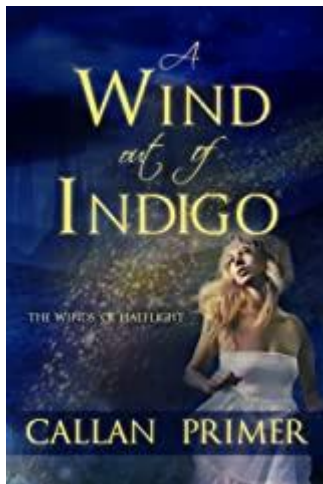
[Cereal and Pajamas Trade Paperback](#)

God bless everyone and thanks for taking the time to learn about me and my work.

Tamara Wilhite: Thank you for speaking with me.

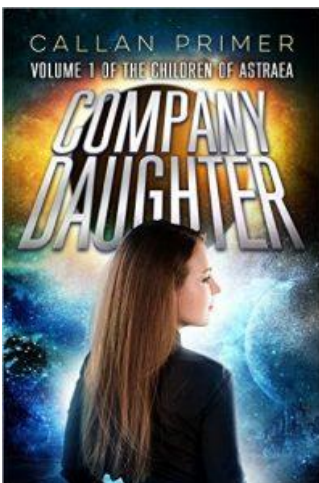
Food of Famous Authors

Eat This While You Read That: Cal Primer Cedar Sanderson



Most of the time when I contact an author, it's about 4-6 weeks before their dish appears here. I try not to rush, I know what it's like between writing and life and everything. I'd pinged Cal a while back, asking if she'd like to take part, and she was interested... and then I turned this week into an impromptu YA lit week. I messaged Cal and asked if she didn't mind me hurrying her. Um – this was on Monday. Cal is a very good sport!

She gave me a dish, and I'd already known it would be paired with her young adult novel *Company Daughter*, and the dish is a perfect accompaniment to that book. In *Company Daughter* we meet a young woman who's lived all her life on a space station, and all she wants to do is cook. Her father has other plans, and she flees in desperation, winding up on a remote moonlet. But she's doing what she loves, and cooking noodles.



Which is why, I'm sure, Cal suggested Yakisoba for this ETWYRT.

Like any stir-fry, you will want to get all your ingredients prepped and ready because once the heat is on, you'll be flying. For this meal, plan on slurping noodles with one hand while you read with the other, because there's no sit time to eat while it's cooking!

I chose cabbage, green onion, sweet pepper, and thinly sliced beef to go in our noodles.

Yakisoba
by Cedar Sanderson

Ingredients

Yakisoba Sauce:

3 tbsp Worcestershire sauce

1 tbsp Oyster sauce (or Pad Thai sauce)

1 tbsp Ketchup

1 tbsp Soy Sauce

1 tsp sugar

1 tsp ginger paste

Noodles, parcooked (less cooked than al dente) and drained.

Veggies and meat as on hand



Instructions

Whisk together the sauce ingredients, set aside.

Prep the veggies into fairly thin slices. You can use almost anything, cabbage is more traditional.



Prep the meat into thin slices, unless its shrimp, that you can leave whole. Pork is most traditional.

Heat a wok to near smoking. Pour (carefully!) about 2 tbsp vegetable oil in. Peanut oil if you have it - higher smoke point.

Carefully put the meat slices in. Stirring as you go with a wooden spoon or wooden spatula.

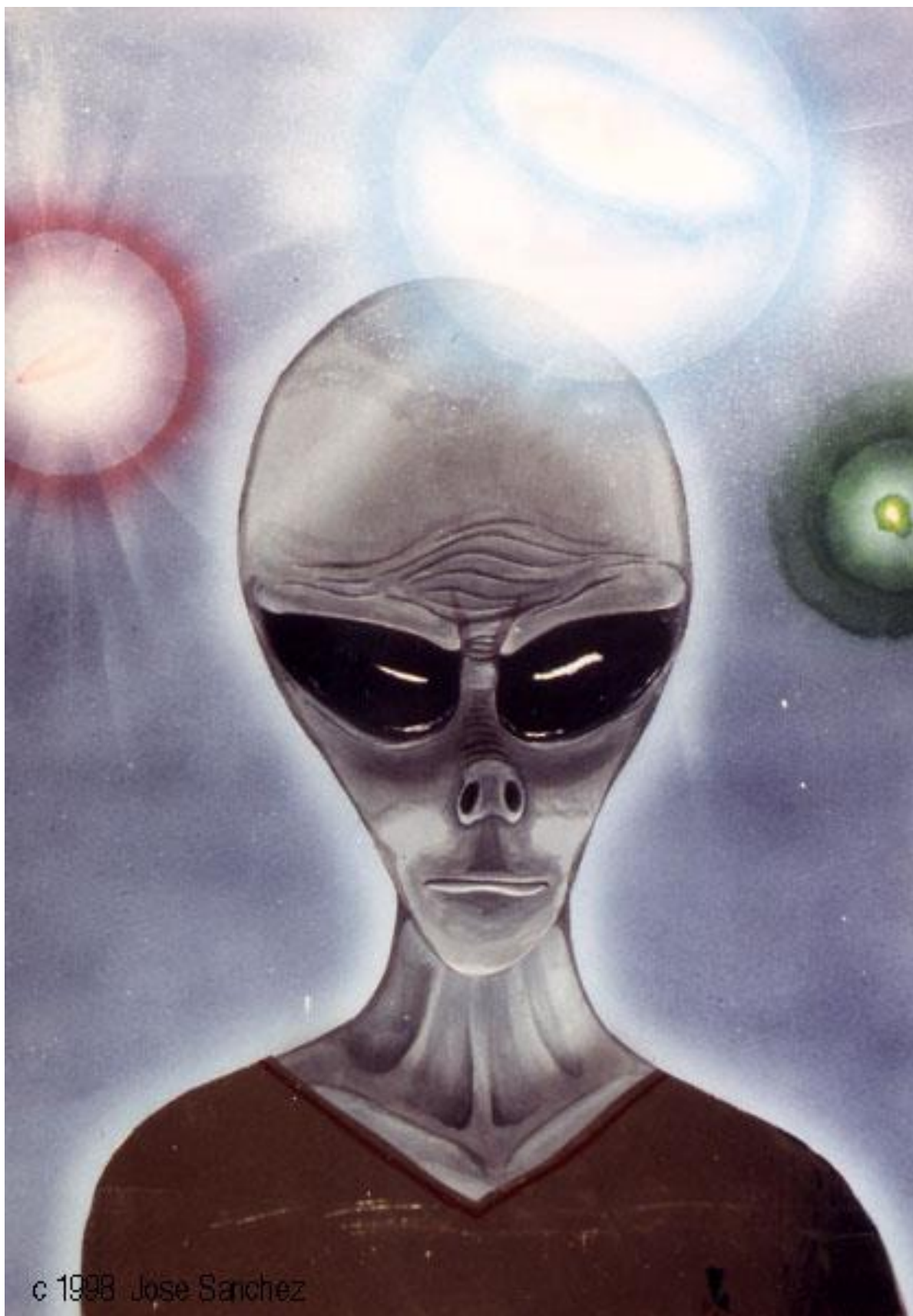
Once meat is nearly cooked through, add veggies that need more cooking. Stirring!

Cover for a couple of minutes. Once cabbage is soft, add the cooked noodles, and stir. Cover again for a minute or two.

Pour in the sauce, add green onions (and anything that doesn't need long cooking like bean sprouts) and stir. When sauce is well incorporated (the noodles suck it up) then serve.

Top with sesame seed, nori shreds, or what-have-you.





Angry Alien

By Jose Sanchez



Dreamings
by Angela K. Scott