

Tightbeam 327

December 2021



Team Mandalorian
by Jose Sanchez

Tightbeam 327

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Editorial Note

Your Letters of Comment are always appreciated. We have on hand the latest First Fandom Annual, a memorial to Erle Korshak. A review will be appearing by and by.

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Letter of Comment

Dear Neffers:

I have here issues 325 and 326 of Tightbeam. I got a little behind, so two issues with one letter. Not fair on my part, but more and more, I have holidays from writing, and I certainly enjoyed the last one...

325... Vale Tamara Wilhite. She wrote up a lot about new and upcoming writers, plus a number of established writers I admit I'd never heard of before.

My previous letter... I keep hearing rave reviews and terrible notices for the series based on Asimov's Foundation trilogy. I hope there might be a review of it soon, to give me some measure of whether to try to see it or not. Some say it's worth watching because Alexander Siddig (Dr. Bashir in Deep Space Nine) is in it. I do like Alexander Siddig as an actor, but it will take a lot more than one actor to get me to watch.

Thank you for the information on Katherine McLean. The name is familiar, but unfortunately, I have none of her books. I certainly remember Night Gallery, especially the stories told, and the artworks, which, I gather was saved some years ago, and is now in a collection. There are many writers, but Rod Serling is still well-remembered, and the reasons are many.

326... I see so much about the assorted more modern Star Wars movies, and even TV series, and I fully admit that I saw the original Star Wars in the theatres in 1977. But after Episode 6 and the first trilogy, I thought I've gotten a good story. Episode 7 was a dud for me, and I have seen nothing more in the series since. To be honest, I have been happier with the various Trek series.

Great essay on Philip José Farmer. Most of the Farmer books I have are Riverworld, but I don't believe I have actually read them all. He was someone I had always wanted to meet, and never did.

There's a fannish get-together tonight, and it's not far off, so I'd better getting this letter ready to go. Thanks for these two issues, and I will try to do better for future issues, that's a promise.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

Anime

AMAIM Warrior at the Borderline

Review By Jessi Silver

Streaming: Funimation

Episodes: 25

Episode Summary: It's the year 2061. For years, Japan struggled under a declining birthrate and economy, which made it a ripe environment for outside countries to take advantage of beneath the guise of offering aid. Now, the different factions battle one-another using unmanned battle



units called AMAIMs. Amou Shiiba is an orphaned Japanese citizen – a member of the underclass – who works as a scrapper, collecting remnants of broken AMAIM units. His friends use the spare parts to upgrade their personal electronics and vehicles, but Amou has a much larger project in the pipeline – a full suit of AMAIM battle armor he happened to find sitting in an abandoned warehouse.

When the authorities catch wind of Amou's scrapper group, his comrades are captured and used to try to lure Amou out of hiding. But what these colonizers fail to realize is that Amou has a trump card. After finding an abandoned AI unit named Gai in the woods with the know-how to bring Amou's AMAIM online, he now owns one of the only manned units around. And human thoughts and reflexes, coupled with AI information, seem to be a powerful force that might turn the tables against the factions that have taken over Japan.

Impressions: We all like to imagine ourselves as heroes. In the US, where I live, we're very fond of our police and military, to the point that those organizations are often lionized in our fiction and being critical of them is often interpreted as being anti-American. They're the forces that help us come together and lead the world against much greater threats, or at least that's the story they would like us to cling to. Japan has its own propaganda, and even a cursory look at Japanese history can explain why it manifests the way it does, at least to some extent. It's a country that was closed-off until it was forced open at by the hands of Westerners. It rapidly industrialized, got into the colonialism game on the later end of the game, and then was brutally scarred in what were the closing moments of World War II. They were occupied by America, saw their economy expand and contract, and now are struggling with the consequences of various conflicting cultural and modern forces that have brought us to the modern day.

There are a lot of jokes out there that revolve around the declining birth rate in Japan; former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, in meme-able form, served as kind of a joking reminder of the political push for people to have more children, while policies that would facilitate that – better child care, eliminating discrimination toward pregnant people in the work force, among other things – were and still are ignored. It's much the same as in the United States – there are those who would like to grow their families, but their situations, including shaky access to expensive healthcare and the need for both adult members of the family to work (or in other situations, single parents), make it untenable. People want to have choice in how they live their lives, and, if the choice be made is one between financial freedom and being confined to the home as a stay-at-home parent against one's wishes and inclinations, it's pretty obvious what many people are going to do.

That's kind of the framework within which I approached this episode. The premise of AMAIM relies on many of Japan's personal anxieties coming to fruition – the declining birthrate making the country vulnerable to takeover by hostile outsiders who want to, among other things, oppress the Japanese people and take advantage of their resources. It's almost cartoonish in a way, and it's easy to be a little grossed-out by the obvious nationalistic bent. At the same time, I'm also reminded of the skewed manner in which we portray our own supposed heroism; every episode of Law and Order and every round of Call of Duty similarly relies on our shared impression of ourselves and our authority figures as generally helpful or heroic in response to various outsider threats.

I suppose what I'm trying to say isn't that everyone makes propaganda so it's okay to ignore the extreme political implications of certain pieces of fiction, because I think it's important to go into any story with some amount of healthy skepticism and critical thinking. But I think it's a good opportunity to both look in the mirror at our own culture's storytelling practices and to acknowledge the very obvious, potentially harmful aspects of pieces of fiction before deciding whether to engage or not. Neither answer is right or wrong, but to ignore the issue entirely is disingenuous.



Do what Gai says – get a grip on your critical thinking skills!

Pros: Taking away the politics for the moment, I enjoy that this seems to be turning into a conflict between pure AI and AI-enhanced human control of the technology in the series. We already rely on AI and other modern tech quite a bit and it's often convenient but definitely imperfect. There's been a low-grade debate raging on Twitter for a while regarding machine translations (automatic language translations using algorithms) and human translations when it comes to dialog, and we're far from a point where AI and software are able to detect the sort of linguistic nuance that's to be found in human speech. Human intervention is required to end up with the best

end product; apparently that carries over to piloting AMAIM units. This episode looks nice, with solid hand-drawn mecha action and good looking characters.

Cons: While I'm not a "plot hole" complainer and not in the business of picking apart fiction based solely on its ability to explain every little detail, I will say that there are some aspects of this episode that ask the viewer to hand-wave a few things. Somehow Amou discovers an abandoned development lab with an extra AMAIM frame and the electricity and resources to tinker with his own personal mecha unit, and the hostile authorities somehow either don't know about it or can't be bothered to monitor or guard it. It's very convenient that it all works out that way so nicely.

Content Warnings: General propaganda/nationalistic story elements. Mecha violence, including gun and blunt-force violence. Depiction of an occupying force violently oppressing a minority population.

Would I Watch More? – I'm unsure whether I'd watch more, but overall I enjoyed this episode and think it has the potential to be entertaining. I think it's good to remember that the mecha genre has often featured very political stories (I mean... Mobile Suit Gundam anyone?) so it's not really that strange that we've got some very distinct politics at the front-and-center. I just personally kind of wish that those politics weren't so specifically alarmist and almost comically beholden to obvious cultural anxieties.

The Vampire Dies in no Time

By Jessi Silver

Streaming: Funimation

Episodes: 12

Episode Summary: Ronaldo is the world's premiere vampire hunter, so when he catches wind of a potential vampire-related kidnapping involving Draluc, a so-called progenitor vampire, he

jumps at the chance to intervene. As Ronaldo enters Draluc's lair, however, it's obvious that the situation is not quite what it seems. The missing child has just been sneaking in to play Draluc's video games, and Draluc is so weak that he turns to sand at the slightest provocation. Though Ronaldo tries to handle things as a proper vampire hunter, one thing leads to another and he ends up destroying Draluc's home.



People – and vampires – die
if they are killed.

Now homeless, Draluc travels to Ronaldo's agency and takes up residence there. As the two argue over the propriety of this arrangement, Ronaldo is called to handle another local vampire crisis, this time at the convenience store right downstairs. There, a wannabe vampire threatens a hostage. But of course, the situation is somewhat more emotionally complex and involves an unrequited love never fated to be successful. With the local journalists now aware of Ronaldo's "arrangement" with Draluc, there's no going back to being a one-man operation for Ronaldo.

Impressions: Hey look, we've got a madcap comedy over here! Anime comedies aren't rare, but there was a time where what we used to call "crack anime" was much more common. These types of shows were goofy and absurd and didn't give you a lot of time to think too deeply about what was happening – they were kind of like being beaten over the head with a stick. You know, in a fun way.

That type of anime seems to be much more rare nowadays, with anime comedy skewing more towards situational comedy that isn't quite so fast-paced. The Vampire Dies in No Time definitely isn't quite a return to glory for crack anime, but it certainly expresses some of those features and I found myself on a bit of a nostalgia trip all the same.

The show's central gag is that Draluc is so weak that he turns to sand when the very slightest negative thing occurs. Some situations that provoke this are:

- Getting hit by a door
- Getting karate-chopped
- Seeing his video game get stepped on
- Being embarrassed
- Getting sprayed by a questionably-branded scent remover
- Getting caught in an automatic door



Sometimes dangerous reputations
are the product of overzealous
outsiders.

...and many other things that I will leave to you to discover on your own. I'm typically a little bit bored by one-joke comedy shows, but the catch with that is that if the escalation of comedic stakes (or comedic ridiculousness) is handled well, then it tends to breathe a little more life into something that might otherwise turn stale rather quickly.

This show doesn't really have a lot of meat on its bones to talk about or analyze; it's simply a goofy show about an odd-couple pairing of dudes who accidentally stumble into a shared purpose. There are a lot of visual gags that come

and go in a matter of seconds. It's not complicated at all. But it is pretty funny and serves as a nice counterpoint to some contemporary shows that like to take themselves more seriously, and I can't really be mad about that.

Pros: This episode has a nice visual style, with colorful character designs and background art. It's the sort of series that's not top-tier as far as animation resources are concerned, but it uses what it has at its disposal to express visual comedy in an effective way.

Ronaldo's and Draluc's personalities are portrayed in a way that allows them to butt heads with one another, but aren't so oversimplified as to become annoying. Ronaldo is a haughty celebrity type that has some sense of what he needs to do in order to maintain his image in the eyes of the public, but who falls apart a little more easily than one would expect, giving him a more sympathetic air than he might have otherwise. Draluc tries to fake the "spooky, powerful vampire" image, but is such a clear disaster that it's hard not to feel sort of sorry for him. When the two come to verbal blows, their hostility never reaches the point of pure or effective hatred, which allows the show to maintain its goofy tone.

I like that the vampire mythology in this series changes things up a little bit, including revealing the existence of low-grade vampires who lack the ability to fully "turn" people. There are apparently also medical interventions that can be taken to prevent people from fully transforming into vampires, which feels very modern.

Cons: There are a couple of gags that don't hit, mostly because they deal with sort of gross material. There's a few lines of dialog during the characters' initial encounter where Ronaldo still believes that Draluc has kidnapped a village child, and he accuses Draluc of being both a shotacon and a lolicon. It's just something that I find to be in poor taste.

Content Warnings: Cartoonish violence, including slapstick and some silly traps. Brief jokes about shotacon/lolicon.

Would I Watch More? – I don't tend to make a lot of room for comedies like this anymore because I tend to get tired of them partway through, but I could see coming back to this one at some point if I catch wind that it stays funny and mostly harmless instead of relentlessly mean-spirited (which is always the trap of these kind of comedic scenarios).

Comics

X-Men: Green Tries to Make Nature Girl Into the Eco-Punisher — with Disastrous Results by Stephanie Souders

Back when I offered my opinions on the new Marvel Unlimited app, I briefly highlighted the X-Men: Green infinity comic as an appalling entry in the digital X-Men line that definitely deserves a hard pass. In fairness, however, that was my impression after reading two installments in what would eventually become an eight chapter storyline. So you may be wondering: does this series improve in later issues? Do the members of the creative team eventually recover their senses?



The answer is no. No, it doesn't. And no, they don't.

As I mentioned a few articles ago, Nature Girl's rampage on behalf of the environment begins with the murder of a grocery store clerk whom she blames for the death of a sea turtle. But the mayhem doesn't stop there. While evading a pursuing Wolverine, she escalates by injuring (or slaying) a bunch of pipeline workers up in the Dakotas —

then blows up an oil refinery. And none of this violence really weighs down her conscience; on the contrary, she glories in her bloody-minded crusade. She refuses to consider the humanity of the people she kills, and rages self-righteously at the Quiet Council when they finally apprehend her and put her on trial. Indeed, I honestly think real-world ecoterrorists who spike trees in the Pacific Northwest would look askance at Nature Girl's actions here and say, "Whoa, girl, let's dial it back!"

I'm going to try to be charitable, though: I'm going to assume that Gerry Duggan's intent was not to stump for violent retribution against the perceived enemies of Mother Earth. I'm going to assume instead that he was attempting to create an anti-hero in the style of the Punisher. So why, exactly, does this comic fail so utterly to accomplish this goal?

Well, for one thing, Frank Castle punishes the guilty; he guns down gangbangers, rapists, child molesters, and other confirmed scum who are actually responsible for the crime and disorder he wishes to avenge. He doesn't intentionally aim his fire at innocents; he's actually quite principled (in a sense that runs perpendicular to law-abiding dignity culture) when he chooses his targets. (At the forefront of my mind right now is that scene in the main Civil War series in which he just lets Steve Rogers beat the crap out of him because he absolutely refuses to hurt Captain America. Scruples: Castle does have a few.) Nature Girl, however, has no identifiable code. Whatever you might think about single-use plastic bags or cross-country oil pipelines, the fact remains that workers in hardhats and store managers are not the primary decision makers when it comes to environmental policy; they're just ordinary schlubs trying to make a living. Attacking them is tantamount to immolating the kid manning the register at McDonald's because you oppose corporate's dealings with conventional factory farmers.

Additionally, in universe, few approve of what the Punisher does. Marvel's classical superheroes believe him to be a psychopath and a loose cannon, and they say so — openly. Heck: even Castle himself is quite aware that he's a monster. But no strong opprobrium is leveled at Nature Girl; for her, consequences of any kind simply do not exist. In fact, the only reason anyone is eager to capture her is that she's bad for mutant PR; no X-Man (not even Nightcrawler, usually our gentle moral compass) evinces any real revulsion at her indiscriminate slaughter. The Quiet Council sentences her to the hole with great reluctance, looking upon Nature Girl as a poor, misguided child who took a wrong turn out of desperation. And most incredibly of all? At the conclusion of this sordid tale, Krakoa itself decides to free Nature Girl from her imprisonment — and even gifts her with a special staff with which she can continue her campaign of terror in more careful, "subtle" ways.

Improving X-Men: Green would've been very simple if anyone at Marvel had actually cared. First of all, Duggan's editors should've struck every panel in which Nature Girl celebrates the



death and destruction she wreaks. If she's meant to be a vaguely sympathetic anti-hero who simply snaps when she witnesses the unnecessary death of one more innocent wild creature, then violence, for her, should be a grim course she's taking as a last resort — and one that constantly tortures her. Secondly, we should've seen Nature Girl impose boundaries on her own behavior. For example, maybe she could've limited herself to property crimes — and maybe we could've even seen her ream out Curse when said twisted little sidekick goes too far and actually kills someone. (Note: I don't approve of property crimes, mind you. I also don't approve of the Punisher's style of vigilante justice. The point here is that even an anti-hero needs some rules.) And lastly - and probably most importantly - the X-Men should've been written in character; by that, I mean they should've strongly condemned Nature Girl in no uncertain terms without any pussy-footing or apology.

In the end, however, even my above attempt to rehabilitate the X-Men: Green premise suffers from one possibly insurmountable problem: in a fictional context in which omega-level mutants have just terraformed Mars in a single day, it makes no sense for climate change - or environmental degradation in general - to exist on Earth. After all, couldn't mutantkind's big guns reduce everyone's carbon footprint with a figurative wave of their hands? Isn't Nature Girl's new mission ultimately misdirected? Maybe she should save her anger for the super-powered beings who've withheld possible solutions to the planet's woes.

Want to tackle environmental issues in your comics? Knock yourself out — but do avoid the mistakes made by X-Men: Green. Address the theme in a way that makes sense for your fictional world, eschew the lionization of objective evil, and - oh by the way - leave out the pretentious, on-the-nose blather on “late-stage capitalism”. Remember: the members of your audience are here to be entertained first and foremost. Even if, like yours truly, they're sympathetic to the “green” movement, they don't want to walk away from reading your work feeling like they just consumed a lecture — or worse, worrying that you sincerely want working class white men to be massacred en masse.

Will Mayo Reviews Lee Falk's The Phantom

From my earliest boyhood well into my teens I fell in love with The Phantom, a comic strip that ran in my daily newspaper and had been created decades earlier by writer and artist Lee Falk. Featuring the descendant of British sailors that had been killed by pirates generations before, a man that dwelled in an African cave and, donning a skin tight costume and mask, combated crime and the forces of darkness, this comic captivated the imagination of my childhood and launched me into many an imaginary adventure of my own. I finally abandoned it when I saw that it was every bit as much a racist stereotype as the Tarzan novels with none of the nature versus nurture plotline of the Burroughs stories. But, for a while there, just a while, that cave shaped like a skull with its phantom hero that dwelled within bedded down my Southern nights with flights of fancy unknown since. I suppose it captures some of childhood's innocence that I believed in it so.

Movies

The Man Who Fell To Earth Review by Will Mayo

I think of that mid-'70s movie "The Man Who Fell To Earth" in which rock star David Bowie, in characteristic genderbending fashion, plays an alien that is neither wholly male nor female, whose spacecraft crashes to Earth, and soon runs afoul of one of my country's many secret government agencies. Bowie's songs form the soundtrack for this movie and the fate of this particular alien leaves the viewer haunted long after the movie is done. It is a film that could not have been made ten years previously or ten years later but was just right for the androgynous, psychedelic 1970s. You'll watch it now and leave pondering every scene.

Will Mayo's Review Of The Movie Zardoz

I think of that movie Zardoz that came out a little less than 50 years ago and starred Sean Connery (yes, Sean, previously known as James Bond) as a savage warrior out to exterminate the male humans around him. Shouting, "Death to the penis!" he set forth with his mighty gun, killing men all around him. It was only through time and effort and the death of the multidimensional machine that he counted as his god that he learned the error of his ways and bedded down with a woman of his choice and sent his only son out into the world to make good on things. If you get a chance to see this film in its unedited form, I think you'll enjoy it. It's since been edited to shreds by misguided censors, both left and right. But, for one brief, shining moment in the early 1970s, it changed my world. Hopefully, it can change yours.

Last Night In Soho — Review by Tom Feller

I had wanted to see this movie if for no other reason that it features the last film appearance of the late Diana Rigg, and she picked both a good film and a good role as the landlady of the main character, Eloise "Ellie" Turner (Thomasin McKenzie). Ellie is a girl from Cornwall enamored by the Sixties who gets accepted to a fashion design school in London, and the film early on establishes that she can see ghosts. She finds the school's dormitory too noisy and the other students too much the party animals for her shy personality so she finds a furnished room on the top floor of Rigg's house, which turns out to be haunted. Whenever she goes to sleep, she dreams that she has become the room's 1965 occupant Sandie (Anya Taylor-Joy) who tries to break into the Soho nightclub scene as a singer. Unfortunately, the dreams turn into nightmares when Sandy engages a manager named Jack (Matt Smith) who turns out to be a high class pimp and eventually she finds herself working as a prostitute.

Ellie's and Sandie's story lines come together by the end of the film. Although the film's second half is not as good as its first, it is still a very effective supernatural thriller enhanced by casting two more survivors of the Sixties besides Rigg: Rita Tushingham as Ellie's grandmother and Terence Stamp as a mystery man whom Ellie thinks is stalking her. It also features many hit songs from the Sixties in its sound track and was filmed on location in the Soho district of London.

The Eternals — Review by Tom Feller

I do not recall ever reading an issue of the Marvel comic book featuring these characters, which were created by Jack Kirby in 1976. The premise is that Arishem, the creator of the universe, created these heroes to protect humans from the Deviants, monsters who eat people. They have been on Earth since about 5,000 B.C. In itself this is not all that interesting, but it turns out that Arishem has a secret agenda, known only to Ajak (Salma Hayek), the leader of the Eternals. The other Eternals are Thena (Angelina Jolie), Starfox (Harry Styles), Ikaris (Richard Madden), Sersi (Gemma Chan), Gilgamesh (Don Lee), Druig (Barry Keoghan), Kingo (Kumail Nanjiani), Sprite (Lia McHugh), Makkan (Lauren Ridloff), and Phastos (Brian Tyree Henry). The Eternals killed the last Deviant in the 16th Century, but, absent an order from Arishem to leave, embedded themselves in the human population while secretly influencing its evolution. The present day story line kicks off with a world-wide earthquake and the appearance of a Deviant in London, which Sersi, Ikaris, and Sprite fight. They then travel to South Dakota, where Ajak has been living on a farm, only to find that she has been killed. Sersi then becomes their leader and re-assembles the team.

This is the 26th film in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), and one of the longer ones, because a lot of time is spent on the back stories of the characters, which are shown in flashback scenes. For example, Sersi and Ikaris were lovers for millennia, but broke up during the 19th Century. At the beginning of the film, Sersi has a new boyfriend, a poet named Dane Whitman (Kit Harrington), Kingo is the star of Bollywood movies, Gilgamesh and Thena are living together in the Australian outback, and Phastos is living in Chicago with his husband (Haaz Sleiman) and their son. Although the plot is rather convoluted, the film is beautifully photographed, the dialogue is humorous, and the action scenes are excellently choreographed. Aside from a few references, it feels more like a stand-alone film than an MCU one, but I'm sure there will be crossovers with the other Marvel characters in future films.

Will Mayo's Review Of The Wax Museum

I've seen a great deal of acts of violence on the silver screen in my time. I've seen Freddie Krueger slash his way to fame in the Nightmare On Elm Street movies. I've seen Jamie Lee Curtis cringe in horror from her brother in Halloween. I've seen Friday The 13th in all its gory mess as well. But nothing so scared me as the afternoon I went to see Vincent Price as the murderous proprietor of a wax museum who filled his exhibits with his victims and ended his rampage with his own head on a platter in his own show. That was some 55-odd years ago. I saw that movie with my father and brother then at the local theater and laid awake in my own bed later that night, tossing and turning, my head filled with that house of horror. Afterwards, my father changed what kinds of movies he took us kids to see. He took us to Westerns instead. To this day, I debate whether I was better off.

Will Mayo Reviews Gargoyles

One movie I saw late one night on television in a long ago youth never did make it big but deserves some mention because of its novel ideas and worthwhile script. It's a movie called Gargoyles about those mythical creatures perched atop cathedrals and other medieval buildings throughout much of the world. Only in the movie those creatures are real and have been alive

and hidden away for centuries. Watch as a group of historians unearth the secrets in ancient literature and then venture to the American Southwest to combat the monsters as they come flying at them from every angle. Wonderful depiction of the gargoyles given the low production costs. Really, I think you'll like this one.

The Most Frightening Scene: The Tse-Tse Fly Review by Will Mayo

Perhaps the most frightening scene I ever saw in a movie was not in a horror story but was in some as-yet unknown film playing on my family's one black and white TV set in our little town of Montevallo, Alabama in the 1960s. In this film, a group of explorers is busy exploring the African jungle when one of them is taken sick by what came to be known as the mischievous tse-tse fly. And why does this tse-tse fly do but proceed to busily burrow its way through a man's brain from one ear to the other. I have no idea whether this insect ever existed in real life or was just one more mark off American imperialism (perhaps my African correspondents can fill me in on the truth of the matter), but that one scene in that one movie kept me lying awake for weeks on end in my bed that summer. Chalk one more up for the masters. They knew how to scare a boy.

Will Mayo's Review Of The Omen

One of the films that so captivated in my youth was the movie "The Omen," a flick about an infant revealed to be no less than the spawn of Satan, I saw in the late 1970s when I was still all caught up in the Christian mythology. Its cinematography is amazing as its direction and the late Gregory Peck wins the film as the baffled father who eventually comes round to the truth of the child in his care.

Perhaps the most memorable scene in the whole film is one where a priest determined to stop the AntiChrist is instead impaled by an iron rod from his shoulder to his chest to his leg to the ground, leaving him upright in abject terror. Although I understand the movie has since been remade for the 21st century there is nothing like the original. If you are a fan of horror films in general, or you just dig stories about Christianity's old-time enemy Satan, this is the movie for you.

SerCon

Andre Norton Bio-Bibliography by Jon D. Swartz & John L. Coker III

Frequently cited as the all-time most popular female science fiction (SF) writer, Andre Norton was born Alice Mary Norton on February 17, 1912, in Cleveland, Ohio. During her career, she wrote more than 130 novels and nearly 100 short stories; and she also edited numerous anthologies in the SF, fantasy, mystery, and western genres.



Andre Norton at Home

Awards

She was the first woman to be a SFWA Grand Master and to be inducted into the Science Fiction and Fantasy Hall of Fame. She also received Skylark, Balrog, and World Fantasy awards during her career, and was the first woman to win the Gandalf Grand Master of Fantasy Award.

She was inducted into the First Fandom Hall of Fame in 1994.

Her Early Writing/Mundane Work

Her love of books began early, when her mother started reading and reciting poetry to her. While attending Collingwood High School, she edited a fiction page for the school newspaper, *The Collingwood Spotlight*, and started her first novel, *Ralestone Luck*, which became her second published book. As a teenager, she read the SF of both Wells and Verne.

She attended the Flora Stone Mather College of Western Reserve University, studying to be a history teacher. Financial pressures forced her to quit after her freshman year, however, because she had to work to help support her family during the Great Depression. Still, she managed to take night courses in English and journalism offered by Cleveland College, and she continued to write.

She held several jobs in the literary field, including working for the Library of Congress during World War II. She also briefly owned a book store. Even more important to her career, she was the children's librarian for 22 years at the Cleveland Public Library, where she worked in all but two of the Library's 47 branches. During this time she wrote her own children's fiction.



Robert Bloch, Andre Norton, and Kitten

First Fantasy Novel/Other Genre Publications

The Prince Commands, a historical fantasy, was her first published novel. It was released in 1934, when she was only twenty-two. She legally changed her

name that year, after publishers told her that a masculine name would help sell to her target audience, young boys. By 1950, at age 38, she had nine novels to her credit. That year she left the Cleveland Public Library to take a job as a reader at Gnome Press. By the time she left Gnome Press eight years later, she had had 23 novels and several short stories published.

In 1958 she decided to become a full-time writer. Over the next twenty years she wrote nearly seventy novels, two dozen short stories, and also edited several anthologies. One of her most

beloved series, “Witch World” – a wondrous planet reachable through metaphysical gateways – started with a single novel in 1963. More than thirty “Witch World” titles followed.

Pseudonyms

In addition to her birth name, she used the following pen names in her work: Andre Norton (usual name), Andre North, Andrew North, Allen Weston (with Grace Allen), and Enid Cushing (with Enid Louise Cushing).

Research Library

In 1966 she moved to Florida, and then later moved to Murfreesboro, Tennessee, where in 1999 she opened her High Hallack, a working retreat and research library for writers of genre and other popular literature. It was located in the mountains of Putnum, Tennessee, near a university and several national parks. Unfortunately, she had to close the library in 2004. She had applied to “all the writer organizations for tax deductible seed money” but could not obtain the needed long-term support.

Edited Genre Works

Through the years, she edited several anthologies for Martin H. Greenberg’s Tekno Books company, including the long-running “Cat Fantastic” series, which began in 1989, and “Renaissance Faire” -- which was published by DAW Books in February, 2005.

Earlier, she edited some unique genre anthologies. One of the finest was one she edited for Dutton on some almost forgotten supernatural tales featuring the young, Small Shadows Creep. Contributors to this unique volume included stories by Wakefield, Benson, James, and Walpole.

Last Novel

Her last complete novel, *Three Hands for Scorpio*, was released in 2005 from Tor Books. It is the last manuscript she penned alone, and she was especially proud of it. *Return to Quag Keep*, a sequel to her *Quag Keep* from 1979, was released as a collaboration in January, 2006.

Love of Books and Cats

She surrounded herself with books and cats, ending each evening reading in bed with a favorite cat curled next to her. She incorporated her love of both in the many “cat anthologies” she edited, and in numerous short stories.

Her short story, “Faire Likeness,” in *Renaissance Faire*, featured a cat she adopted. When her health began to decline in 2004, she parted with a few of her cats. However, she continued to keep the oldest, RT, by her side until the end; and she managed to feed the stray cats that frequently visited her yard.

Other Interests/Hobbies

She was quick to recommend good books to friends, and to offer advice to new authors, helping to pave the way for several people to be published. She also instructed hobbyists in the art of

making jewelry.

Crafting necklaces, bracelets, and earrings became a passion in the last two years of her life when she found it increasingly difficult to write at a keyboard. Jewelry she fashioned was featured at her eBay store.

Popular Works

Her many books are too numerous to list here. However, among her most popular novels are *Witch World*, *Beast Master*, *Secret of the Lost Race*, *Star Guard*, *Sargasso of Space* (as Andrew North), *The Time Traders*, *Catseye*, *Steel Magic*, *Fur Magic*, and *The Solar Queen*.

Collaborators

Many other authors/editors collaborated with her. Among them were Robert Adams, Alicia Austin, Robert Bloch, Marion Zimmer Bradley, A. C. Crispin, Rosemary Edghill, Martin H. Greenberg, P. M. Griffin, Grace Allen Hogarth, John Kaufman, Mercedes Lackey, Dorothy Madlee, Patricia Matthews, Julian May, Lyn McConchie, Phyllis Miller, Sasha Miller, Jean Rabe, Mary Schaub, Susan Schwartz, Sherwood Smith, and Ingrid Zierhut.

Meeting Donald Wollheim

Fellow SF author Basil Wells had a farm in Pennsylvania, and on June 8, 1957, he held an all-day party there. Among the guests were Norton, P. Schuyler Miller, Betsy Curtis and her daughter Margaret (later known in SF and comic book fandoms as Maggie Thompson), and Donald Wollheim and his wife. Norton met Wollheim here for the first time, and talked him into reading her *Witch World*. Wollheim was a very influential SF editor, having worked at Avon, Ace, and his own publishing company, DAW books.

In Her Own Words

In a 1994 interview with John L. Coker III, she made the following statements regarding herself and her work:

“Mother started reading to me when I was two years old.”

“Getting published depends a great deal on luck.”

“I always try to do my best.”

Further Comments by Norton and Others

In his *Dream Makers*, Volume II, Charles Platt described Norton, the “Grand Dame of Science Fiction and Fantasy,” as follows: “She very seldom gives interviews; she values her privacy, never travels, and never allows photographs, either, because they would conflict with the image she projects in her novels.”

Norton once said: “The advantage in the older days was that my first editors knew the field well, and they cultivated a relationship with their writers.”

Some Conclusions

She died of congestive heart failure in her Murfreesboro, Tennessee home, on Thursday morning, March 17, 2005. At her direction, there was no service. She was survived by her friends and caretakers, Sue and Ollie Stewart, her cat RT, and her many fans throughout the world. Norton requested before her death that she not have a funeral service, but instead asked to be cremated -- along with a copy of her first and last novels.

Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America (SFWA) created the Andre Norton Award for excellence in young adult novels. She approved this before her death, and suggested several titles for consideration. The awards are announced along with the Nebulas. The first winner was Holly Black. The subsequent awards were selected following the same procedure as the Nebula Awards.

She died at the age of 93. She had never married, and left no descendants.

Her manuscripts are held in the Special Collections Research Center at Syracuse University.

Sources

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- Note: In addition to the above, several Internet sites were consulted.

Video

Will Mayo's Review Of Kolchak: The Night Stalker

There was that TV show of the early '70s we all loved, "Kolchak: The Night Stalker," featuring Darren McGavin as the Los Angeles reporter out to confront the supernatural demons from another world. How we all loved to tune into that show!

Kolchak did us proud when nothing else would do. Most memorably, in the 2-hour opening premiere when the reporter battled a vampire out to drink the city's blood. I know of nothing like it now...

Will Mayo's Review Of Star Trek: The Satire

There was some cartoon show that I came upon on network television some 45-odd years ago that featured the Starship Enterprise scouring the galaxy for signs of garbage and that lovable Vulcan who says, memorably, "My name is Spot. I am a plant." Even more than the spoof on Saturday Night Live a few years later that featured John Belushi as Captain Kirk this struck me as the best send up of the original science fiction series. I don't know whether for reasons of copyright it was taken down, but as lifelong lover of Star Trek, I found it hilarious in every way. A man's got to laugh if he knows what's good for him.

Will Mayo's Review Of The Six Million Dollar Man

I think of that TV show that thrilled us youngsters in the early '70s, The Six Million Dollar Man, starring Lee Majors (formerly of Big Valley fame), as an astronaut, who, as a gift of a surgical operation following a near fatal accident, is gifted with prosthetic parts that give him superhuman strength, speed and sight. The show followed this-near superman as he engaged in various adventures for my country's government (including at least one in outer space) and was followed by its spinoff, The Bionic Woman. These days, reality follows science fiction close behind and a man and a woman can be gifted with artificial parts given at a lot less than six million dollars and, in one notable case, made it possible for an athlete to compete in the Olympics on artificial legs in a race. But some 50-odd years ago, this TV show brightened up our day along with that drink, Tang, billed as the drink of astronauts. Those were the days when anything seemed possible and actor Lee Major made it all imaginable. I thank him today for showing us the way.

On Elvira, Mistress of the Dark by Will Mayo

Late in the 1980s and early in the 1990s, I was taken by the character of the host of late night horror shows on television. This was none other than Elvira, Mistress of the Dark. She was (and is) pure camp in her short black dress, her spiked heels and her cutting remarks for the living and the dead. Though I was older than her general audience of young teenagers, I couldn't help but laugh and grin from ear to ear at her whole routine. My appreciation only deepened late in life when I learned that the actress who played her had fallen in love with another woman and had taken to driving around the hotspots with RuPaul, another notorious drag queen. As for the shows she introduced in the late night hours, they were rendered only more dark and sinister by her routine. To this day, I can only say, Elvira, Mistress of the Dark, long may you reign! She's a horror queen fit for your ready watching mania.

Will Mayo Reviews Tales From The Crypt

Another TV show I was privileged to watch in my younger days around the late '70s and early '80s was the iconic Tales From The Crypt in the late night hours. It had the hallmarks of its time, filled as it was with all kinds of blood and gore including pierced eyeballs, and was regularly hosted by the Cryptkeeper, a short figure of the special works of those days with a skull, long gray hair and a cackling laugh. In time, the TV show would make its way to the movies but there's nothing like the original series. See it if you dare.

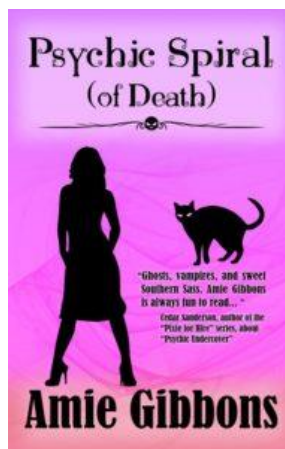
Montage... Review by Will Mayo

I think of that interesting montage from the science fiction cable show of years past of a man forced by aliens to watch every bad science fiction movie from the ages while keeping up bizarre commentary with a pair of robots and throwing popcorn at the screen. Hell, I can think of worse hells...

Food of Famous Authors

Eat This While You Read That: Amie Gibbons Cedar Sanderson

I first met Amie Gibbons at LibertyCon this last summer. She's a sweetheart and full of energy... and stories. She asked me if I would look at one of her short stories and give her some



feedback, which I was happy to do. Her story was as sweet and fun as she was – not all authors do that, distilling a bit of themselves into the story without making it feel like a mary-sue – and when her first novel was released last week, I was delighted to be able to be part of her debut with this recipe.

Amie's book *The Gods Defense* involves a young lawyer, the return of magic, talking plants, the gods of myth, and... well, I'll let you read it. You'll have some time while the cupcakes are baking! And with an ebook you can't get crumbs on the pages.

When I asked Amie for a recipe, I guessed that it would be a fun one. You see, I'm friends with her on facebook, and I know that when she's stressed about something, she bakes, just like I do. So when I opened the email and saw the title she'd given her dish, I had to laugh. Also, the First Reader immediately gave her two thumbs up for an apple recipe.

Stress Baked Apple Streusel Cupcakes

Ingredients

Swirl and Topping

1/2 cup sugar
2 tsp ground cinnamon

Cupcakes

1 cup grated apple (1 large peeled apple)
2 Tbsp cinnamon-sugar (from Swirl and Topping)
1 1/4 cups white flour
3/4 cup sugar
3/4 tsp baking soda
1/4 tsp salt

2 large eggs
1/2 cup vegetable oil
1 tsp vanilla extract
3 Tbsp unsalted butter, melted

Directions

Preheat oven to 350°F and line a dozen cupcake tin cups with paper liners. Peel the apple then use a cheese grater to grate a cup. Toss the apple with 2 Tbsp of the cinnamon-sugar. Set aside. In a large bowl, mix together the flour, sugar, baking soda and salt. Then blend in the eggs, oil and vanilla. Stir in the apple (along with the juice)/sugar mixture. Drop 2 Tbsp of batter into each muffin cup. Spoon 1/2 tsp of cinnamon-sugar on top of the batter. Drop another 2 Tbsp of batter on top. Dollop melted butter on top of each cup. Sprinkle the remaining cinnamon-sugar on top of each cup of batter. Bake for 25 minutes or until a toothpick inserted into the cupcake comes out clean.

Cedar's Notes: I pulled a bonehead move and didn't take any pictures of the prep... but that was mostly because this was super simple to pull together. The only thing I changed was to use sprinkles of my homemade struesel I keep in the freezer on the tops of the cupcakes. And I frosted them.

Vanilla Cream Cheese Frosting

6 oz cream cheese
1 tbsp vanilla extract
1 vanilla bean
Powdered sugar

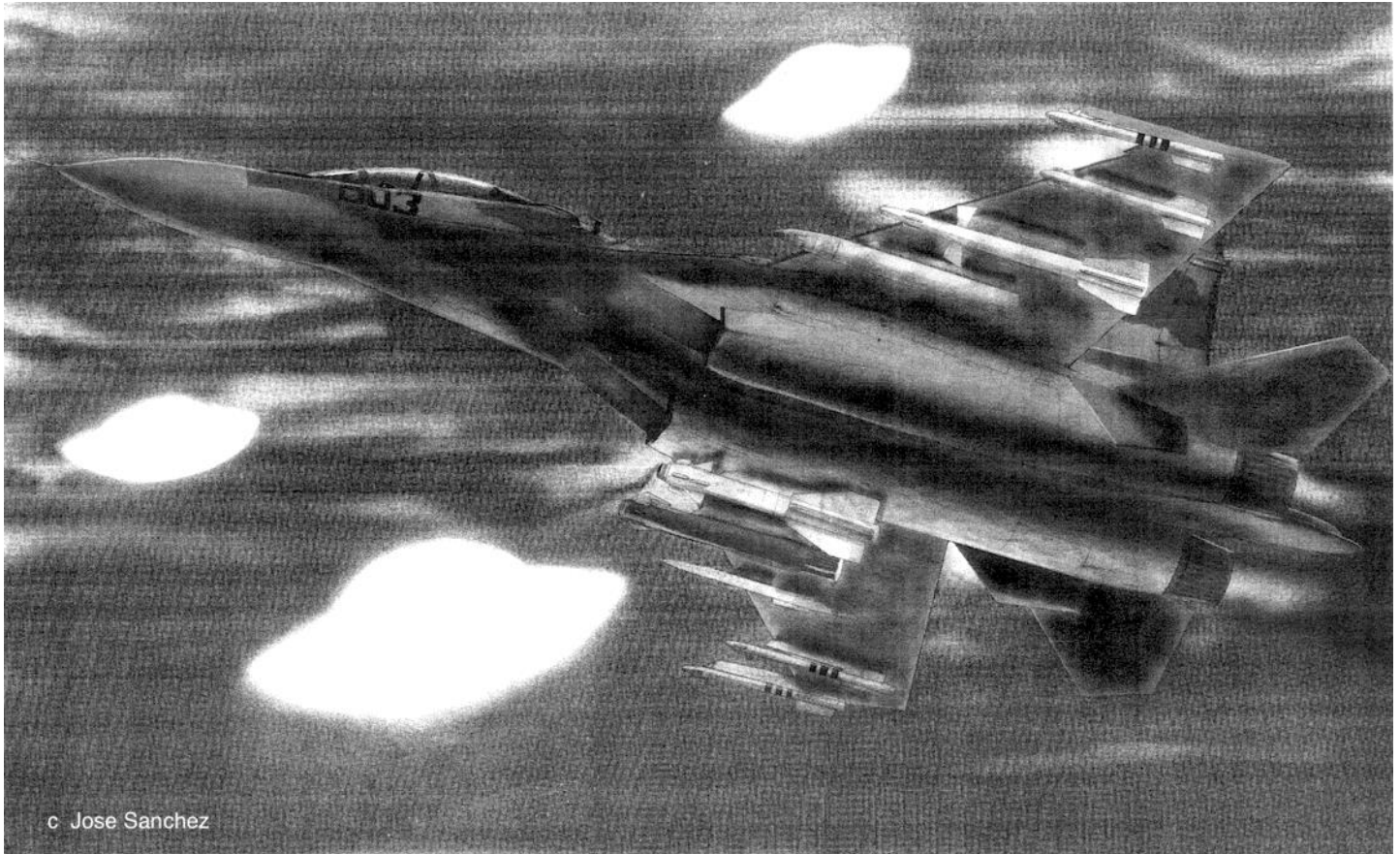
Prep the vanilla bean by slitting it down the length and then scraping the seeds out with the back of the knife passed firmly down the bean, at right angles to the length. (I really need to photo that) In the stand mixer bowl with whisk attachment, cream the cream cheese until it's whipped softer a bit.

Slowly add about a cup of powdered sugar. You don't want the mixer going too fast here, or the sugar will become a dust bomb. Add in the vanilla and seeds. (reserve what's left of the pod for making the next batch of vanilla extract). Add more sugar, a half-cup at a time, until the frosting is thick enough for a bit of decorative effect. See the teeny black 'beans'?

I used a large star tip (#808) to put a pretty dollop of sweet creaminess on top of the cupcakes, but you could just smear it on there once they are completely cool. Also, this will make more frosting than you need for one batch of cupcakes, but it refrigerates well and can be frozen, too. I will be using it on a planned carrot cake next weekend.

The First Reader didn't have much to say at first, just happy noises. He was the one to suggest the frosting, because as Amie said, without it they are more muffins. Which makes them legitimate breakfast food. I left half unfrosted so I could try that out this morning and they are all going to be gone very soon!





c Jose Sanchez

Too Close for Comfort

Jose Sanchez