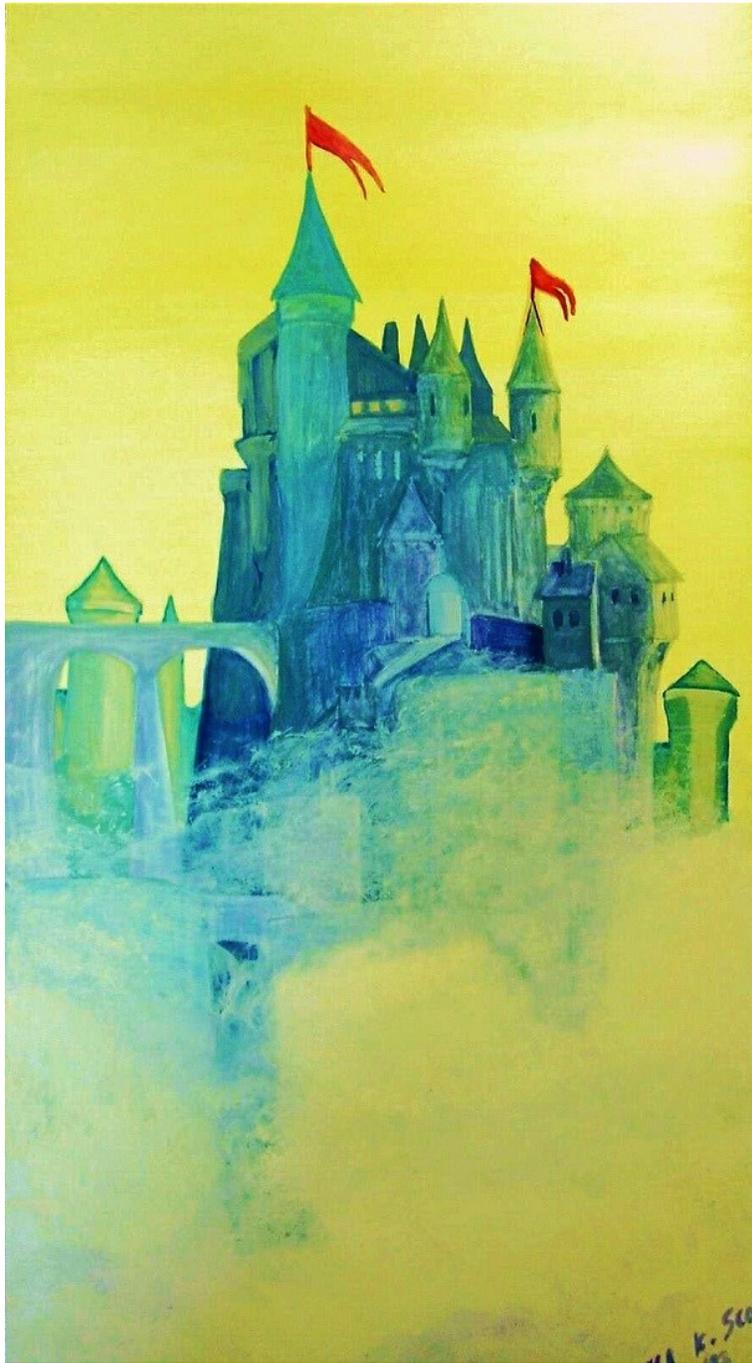


# Tightbeam 294

March 2019



Angela K. Scott — Castle in the Sky

# Tightbeam 294

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Fiction reviews are courtesy Pat Patterson and Cedar Sanderson.

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

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

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# Letters of Comment

1706-24 Eva Rd.  
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CANADA M9C 2B2  
February 19, 2019

Dear George and Jon:

Thank you both for the newest issue of Tightbeam, no. 293. I might have to make this a fast loc, but make it I will. Let's see what I can say...

First of all, my past letter. More on Miraculous...it is broadcast all over the world, and has been translated into more than 30 languages, but if there is any place where it has the least popularity, it is in North America. Other places...looks like the kids just can't get enough. I guess there's plenty of other programmes to keep the animation fan quite happy. Still waiting for issue 4 of Amazing Stories to come for an edit, and for issue 3 to go to the printers.

As I go through the various reviews of comics and books I haven't read, I suspect I have just read one review that gave the book a lower satisfaction grade for the way the e-book version was formatted for Kindle. Truly, I am living in another era.

Thanks to you, Jon, for I honestly didn't know that Hugo Gernsback launched Superworld Comics in 1940. I'd never heard the title before, either. Only three issues... I get the feeling that while the idea of scientific accuracy is admirable, perhaps people don't mind a little fictional science in their science fiction, or at least they didn't mind back then. As you said, it wasn't profitable, which definitely was a hallmark of many of Gernsback's publications.

It is now less than 100 days until we head back to England for our second (and probably last) trip. In late May, we celebrate our 36th wedding anniversary, and the day after, Yvonne will take me to London (with side trips to Lincoln and Liverpool, to name two) for three weeks. We still have to arrange a couple of those side trips, but once they are done, we're just waiting to go.

Anyway, we are heading out to get a few things done this afternoon, so I will tie this up with a bow, and gift it to you. Thanks for this, and see you both with the next issue.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.



# Anime

## What You Missed, Fall 2017 Reviews from Jessi Silver



The air is cool, the leaves are changing, and the most wonderful time of the year (apple season) is upon us! And with all that comes a new harvest of anime to look forward to. Every season is a chance to have one's expectations confirmed or subverted – it's something that makes watching anime fun! Below are some of the series that I've been looking forward to (a special thanks to the twenty or thirty people who've asked me what new Autumn shows I'm looking forward to – I've been drawing a blank in person, but now I'll have this handy-dandy list to link to).

### Mahoutsukai no Yome/The Ancient Magus' Bride

Synopsis: Chise is a young girl shunned for her ability to perceive the magical world and her lack of family. At her lowest point, she encounters a Magus, a sorcerer with the head of a beast and a wielder of great magical power. He purchases Chise and frees her from the bonds of slavery; in exchange, he asks that she become his apprentice, and his bride.

Impressions: Having already seen the OVA episodes that preceded it, I can safely say that this is my most anticipated anime of the season. Aside from the fact that the show looks to be visually stunning as compared to many TV anime, it also combines some of my favorite things together in one package – dark magic, Eastern/Western fantasy, and complicated character relationships. It bugs me that labeling anime as “shoujo” conjures an image of something frothy and immature in many viewers' minds – glob only knows that trying to get the anime I attend to vote to watch anything with that label is a challenge, especially as of late. This looks to be an example of something that successfully bucks the expectations of its demographic label, and I hope that many people will give it a look.



### Kekkai Sensen & Beyond Blood Blockade Battlefront and Beyond

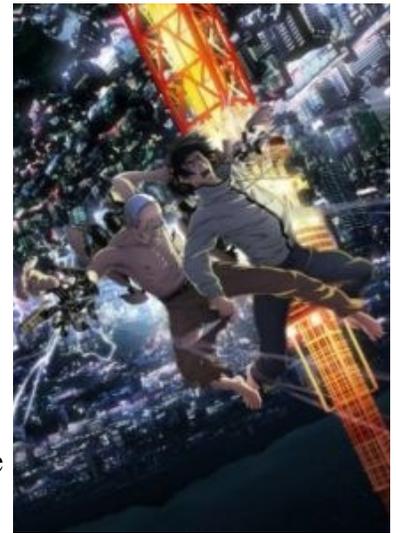
Synopsis: One day, New York City was consumed by a mysterious fog, and a break between dimensions occurred. Now the city maintains a tenuous balance between our world and the netherworld, its combined existence now known as “Hellsalem's Lot.” A group of superhuman protectors known as “Libra” helps maintain the balance between worlds, and the hapless Leo is recruited into their organization by chance.

**Impressions:** I watched the first four episodes of the original season back when it was broadcasting and had a serious case of the “I-don’t-get-it-itis” for some reason. I felt as though I was consistently missing something that would serve to pull the plot together. Luckily I got a second chance when our local anime club chose to watch the series – I had purchased the discs to support the show, since it was directed by a woman, but my second impression was also much more positive than my first and I was glad to have watched it. So it stands to reason that I’d be excited about the sequel. I’m slightly apprehensive because season 2 has a different director, and has been advertising itself as being “closer to the manga.” My hope is that director Matsu-moto didn’t somehow get blacklisted for following an anime-original plotline, and that the second season won’t be too slavishly-devoted to adapting its source material that it loses all of the charm the first season had. I’m hopeful but wary.

### Inuyashiki

**Synopsis:** Ichiro Inuyashiki is a man who looks old beyond his years. He’s a kind soul with an ungrateful family who steps all over him. One day as he’s standing in a park, a meteor crashes down from the sky and obliterates him. Or, at least that’s what it seems like until Inuyashiki awakens and finds that his body has gained several new abilities. He looks at this development as his life’s new purpose, and puts his powers to good use helping others. But there was another man in the park with him that night, and he has more sinister ideas about how best to utilize his violent new abilities.

**Impressions:** I read a good chunk of the Inuyashiki manga about a year-and-a-half ago, and despite it being a bit out of my comfort zone in terms of violence and the cynical motivations of its antagonist, I was impressed by the use of a non-standard (meaning, not a teenage boy) main character and the fact that it ultimately seemed to speak against cynicism and lack of hope. I’m hoping that the anime interpretation will carry that through and not focus too much on brutality and violence. noitaminA has been really hit-or-miss for a while, but I think the source material has enough potential to bring this adaptation to an interesting place.



### Kino no Tabi

#### Kino’s Journey: The Beautiful World

**Synopsis:** Kino is a traveler who crosses the world astride her talking motorcycle, Hermes. She spends no more than three days in each of the countries she visits; any longer, and she may feel compelled to settle down in one place. Throughout these travels, Kino encounters the best and worst that humanity has to offer and learns that the world is beautiful due to its imperfections.



**Impressions:** I’m a fan of the original Kino’s Journey anime series and its related OVA episodes, but I was caught completely by surprise when I first heard the announcement that a new anime adaptation was being created for the story. I’m not entirely certain whether this adaptation contains entirely new material or is re-adapting some of the older stories, but I suspect it may be a mixture of the two. Either way, I love how the setting, despite being kind of reductive in some situations, still does a lot to show how and why humans behave how they do. The story vignettes are always very fascinating, and Kino is a truly unique protagonist. I

would not have expected this to get another adaptation, but I'm certainly not going to argue!

### 3-Gatsu no Lion 2nd/ March Comes in Like a Lion 2nd Season

**Synopsis:** Rei is a teenage shogi prodigy, rising in the ranks as he wins out over players more than twice his age. But Rei also struggles with depression and a complicated family life, and spends much of his time alone. His one solace is the time he spends with the Kawamoto family, three sisters who provide Rei with a glimpse of the loving family life he never had. As Rei tries to make an attempt at finishing high school, eventually he has to learn to reach out and seek help from others in his life.

**Impressions:** While the first season of the show ended on a note that wasn't necessarily final, but presented a feeling of optimism, and I wouldn't have been disappointed in a lack of continuation, I'm definitely happy that we'll get another 22 episodes to see Rei progress in his professional and family life. While there were some complaints that the first season got a little overly-involved in the shogi plotline and strayed from the more emotional elements of the story, I found the overall balance to be pretty good. My one hope is maybe that the second season will look slightly more Shaft-y than the first, but season 1 played the visuals pretty straight, so that might be too high an expectation.



### Shoujo Shuumatsu Ryokou Girls' Last Tour



**Synopsis:** Chito and Yuri are two girls left living in a world that is nearly dead. Rather than despair, the two load up their motorbike and set off across the desolate world, devoid of civilization, and spend their days enjoying life to its fullest for as long as it's possible.

**Impressions:** I've mentioned previously that I really enjoy post-apocalypse stories, especially those that aren't necessarily focused on how the disaster happened, but which are more about living on in a changed world. Summer's Made in Abyss did a great job of presenting a world that was clearly an after-image of something, but focused more around the humanity of the people desiring exploration of the mysterious world at their fingertips. Whenever some new information appears to fill in the gap, it's like a treasure, but the real joy is just the journey and experience. I'm hoping that this series revels in the experience of living, rather than trying to outright answer too many questions. The first volume of the manga is currently available, so I might check that out, too.

### Just Because!

**Synopsis:** As a group of students approach their high school graduation, a mutual friend of theirs, who left in middle school, transfers back into town. This group of friends is suddenly revitalized; while they were all just standing around, waiting to graduate, now their relationships seem to have a renewed sense of vigor.

**Impressions:** This show is definitely an unknown quantity for me; as an anime-



original series with its claim to fame being that it's written by the creator of *The Pet Girl of Sakurasou* (a show that people continue to tell me is good but which had a first episode that squicked me the hell out), all I really have to go on is a short synopsis and a trailer. Something about it, though, reminds me of *Orange*, a series that I enjoyed in both manga and anime form. Perhaps it's the focus on character relationships, and the fact that people are crying a lot. In any case, I'm definitely curious about it. As someone who doesn't believe that emotional melodrama is necessarily a bad thing, it might be worth a look.

### Two Car

Synopsis: Yuri and Megumi are high school students who enter into the world of competitive motorcycle sidecar racing. Though they have opposing personalities, they learn to work together as a team. And they're not alone; it seems as though most of the teams they race are similarly complimentary.

Impressions: This is a case of "this is dumb enough that it might be totally awesome." I actually have fairly low expectations for a show about something as specific as motorcycle sidecar racing, but as a fan of anime based around obscure themes and activities, I had to give a shout-out to this one. My fear is one of forced comedy and the potential for fan service, considering the gender makeup of the cast and what appears to be a propensity for silly character designs (judging by the trailer), but I'm game to give it a try. It wouldn't be the first time I'd watched a show about girls doing goofy crap.



### Kujira no Kora wa Sajou ni Utau Children of the Whales

Synopsis: Chakuro is the 14-year-old archivist of the Mud Whale, a ship/floating island that sails across the sand dunes. He and his companions have never seen anyone from the outside world, but they yearn to someday explore it. One day they find a ruined ship, and the girl they recover from the wreck will change their lives forever.

Impressions: Ignoring the fact that the plot hinges on a "mysterious girl" arrives to "change the life" of the male protagonist (I'm cynical, please forgive me, I have low expectations), there's something kind of haunting and fascinating about the setting of this series. Again, I think it kind of falls into that "mysterious post-apocalypse" sort of situation; it's the bleakness of the world and the mystery of the characters' isolation that becomes so fascinating as the basis for an interesting story. The first PV is also really beautiful – while I have suspicions that some of the visuals were animated specifically for the PV and probably won't appear in the same form in the show, it definitely made an impression on me.



So that's a pretty good run-down of what's got me interested this season. As usual, some of these will ultimately pan-out while others will falter, and I'm positive that there'll be some interesting surprises buried in there too. What's got you fired up this season?

...Jessi Silver

# Novels

## An Unproven Concept

By James Young

(and some preliminary comments)

...Review by Cedar Sanderson

I'm struggling a little with continuing to do reviews. A while back – and I delayed this discussion to give some space, but those who read regularly will know which one – I did a less-than-glowing review on a book. Look, it's a bad book. There are a lot of flaws with it, enough that I finally decided not to waste any more of my life on it, and I set it down. But I did a review anyway, pointing out that the hang-ups I had with it were in large part me... things I know that the general public doesn't know or care about. I did like the first few books in the series.

I was attacked, personally, privately, and through multiple others, who told me quietly that they had received private messages asking them to squash me, or join in the attack. I was disappointed by this behaviour by an author, but not terribly surprised, I have caught flack for my reviews in the past. But I'll make this clear. You can buy a 'professional review' if you want rave reviews about your book. You can't buy or bully me.

Here's the thing, though. I must be honest in my reviews. Just because I am also an author (and sure, I hate negative reviews of my work, but constructive criticism doesn't bother me at all) does not mean I am going to 'go easy' on other authors for no better reason than tit for tat. I have an obligation to my readers, yes, you whose eyes are on these words. I'm going to tell it straight. Now, you might disagree with me. The book I couldn't finish, you might feel it's the greatest thing since sliced bread. And I urge you to publish that review, because you'll make the other author feel great! but don't lash out at me just because you don't like what I wrote about your book. Hiding that attack behind fans is even more unbecoming.

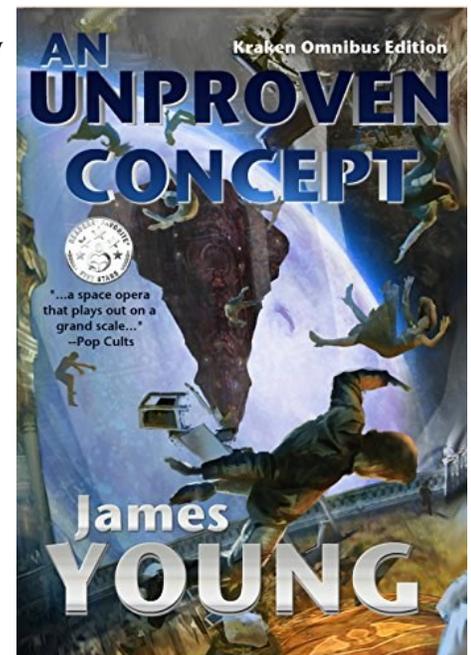
WHEW! Now that is off my chest, I can go on to the real meat of the matter today.

James, my friend, you already know this, but for my readers, I must say the truth and nothing but the truth. Readers, beloved readers, bear with me...

Your original cover sucked, man. This isn't true any longer, although I'm not going to talk about what a great cover it is now, since I had a hand in laying that out on the great art James came up with.

BUT the story inside the cover is terrific!

Ok, enough teasing the author. James L. Young came to my attention relatively recently, and I had picked up his short story *The Ride of the Late Rain*, hadn't started it, when he released his novel *An Unproven Concept*.



Space Opera fans, my Harrington series peeps (heh), this is another one you'll love. Those of you who glaze over at overly detailed space battles? Bear with the first chapter, then, and dig into the dovetailed plot and interesting characters he gives you from there on out.

The two plots intertwine, one the tale of the Space Fleet and the men and women who struggle to keep humanity from imploding into an interstellar war that threatens between the core worlds and the Spartans. The other is the story of the fatally-named Titanic, a gargantuan space liner for the rich and powerful to soar through the spectacle of the stars, dancing in micro-gravity. The collision of these two story arcs is unexpected, and yet well-foreshadowed. I really enjoyed the gritty realism that Young, himself a veteran, put into the battles and something I rarely see detailed; the aftermath of battles.

He made me cry. I almost never cry at science fiction anymore, and I won't spoil it, but the character who... well, there's a holographic farewell delivered that made me laugh while crying. It was masterfully done.

And the ending, well, he keeps delivering right through the end, continuing after the climax to give the reader enough to satisfy them about the emotional growth of the major characters. It's good. Really. It just needs a new cover to properly cue the awesomeness within. On the other hand, my blog readers can now be ahead of the curve, and sneak in before it takes off like Andy Weir's *Martian* (which initially had a crappy cover, and I was surprised at the quality of the writing inside) and gets all popular.

Follow-through. Yeah, that's what James Young has...

## Monster Hunter Nemesis

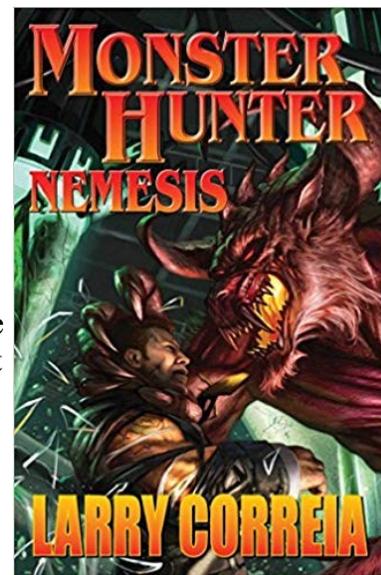
By Larry Correia

Review by Cedar Sanderson

So I give you Larry Correia's *Monster Hunter Nemesis*.

Yes, this book is one of a series, and while I have read all of them (and enjoyed immensely, and I highly recommend them to anyone) I think this one can stand alone. While there are references to what came before, the story that unfolds is constructed well enough to keep an observant reader up to speed. It is the story of Franks, the government agent extraordinary, who is not human. I don't think it's a major spoiler to reveal that Franks is in reality Frankenstein's Monster; I had deduced this almost from his first appearance. Who Franks really is, however, is not so simple.

The unfolding of the layers of Franks, exactly like an onion, with the accompanying pungency you would expect, is masterfully done by Correia. I believe that of the authors I enjoy who are writing currently, his work will stand the test of time and be seen as classics in a generation. Especially the *Grimnoir* series, but this book is on a level with that when it comes to exploring the existentiality of a monster. Where Correia takes the backstory of Franks is not something I anticipated in an Urban Fantasy, and when it dawned on me what he was doing, I think I may have crowed a little gleeful laugh.



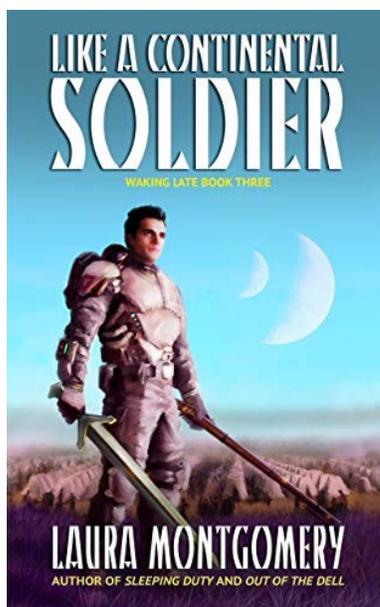
You know I hate to spoiler, or do plot summaries. I'm not going to do it to this book, either. Read it. It's fun, it's a darkly humorous romp that may make you tear up a bit, but it will certainly have you laughing out loud at least once. And the reveal at the end of the book? Yeah, that will get you...

You want to know what a Correia Monster Hunter book is like? Well, if you have read and enjoyed Jim Butcher, you will enjoy this. If you have read my Noir books, but not Correia, then you will definitely enjoy this. I don't think there is anyone else who does what he does.

## Like a Continental Soldier

by Laura Montgomery

Review by Pat Patterson



A variation on 'In the country of the blind, the one-eyed man is king,' is that brand of lovely escapist literature (and movies) about being in possession of advanced technology among primitives. There are LOTS of ways to make this happen, from time warps via messing around with superstrings, as in the 1632 universe, or Lord Kalvan of Otherwhen, to landing on a primitive planet, as in a million movies and Twilight Zone episodes, to all of the post-apocalyptic stories, regardless of the nature of the apocalypse.

Now, while I PERSONALLY would favor being provided with lots of weapons, ammo, and magic healing devices if I were to be dumped in a pre-industrial society, what I prefer in reading is how advanced technology is re-introduced, and it seems a lot of people agree with me. I take the 1632 for evidence of that; not only do we have the BODACIOUSLY large number of novels and nonfiction books published in that universe, there is also the Grantville Gazette, which is, I believe, up to Issue #80. They never thought it would go that high, and I support THAT statement by pointing out that they started by numbering the Gazette with Roman numerals.

And thus, the series that Laura Montgomery has brought us, "Waking Late," is something I enjoy tremendously. She manages to insert time travelers into the story without having to have time travel, which I really appreciate, since I think time travel stories are too full of malarkey to be much fun. Her time travelers are colonists and soldiers who went into long-term suspended animation in order to make a lengthy space passage to a new planet. Unfortunately (details are in the first book), they didn't make it.

At the time of the three books, the descendants of the first people awake have devolved into a ferociously tyrannical monarchy, and most of those who are not rulers are serfs or slaves; they may not be called that, but that is their existence. Labor saving technology has not been introduced, and thus muscle power, either human or human directed, is what brings in the crops.

I speak now as one who was seduced at age 18 by the myth that 'living off the land' was a good thing; it's not. The best thing that science and engineering ever did for us was to free us from back-breaking, continuous labor needed to feed ourselves. While it required legislation to legally free the slaves in this country and others, it is technology that made that a viable alternative.

The society of First Landing, with the brutal monarchy in charge, **REQUIRES** slave labor to exist. Their ability to control the population is dependent on the absence of the slaves to fight back, and that's what the protagonist Gilead brings. There is minimal use of spaceman technology; only a few communicators exist. So, how is the conflict created and resolved?

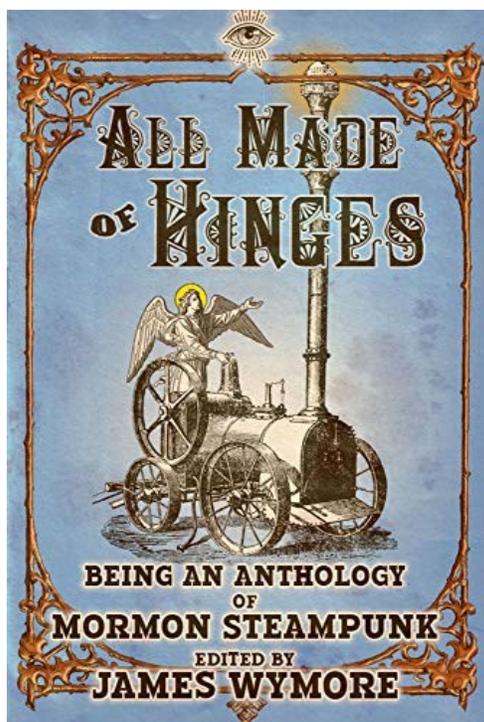
This is where we **MUST** give proper homage to the author, and to her diligence in doing her research. I was fortunate to visit with a gunsmith who specializes in working on antique fire-arms. He walked me through the evolution, handing me examples of each, from matchlock, to flintlock, to percussion cap rifles. It's the **NEXT** step that makes the difference, and Montgomery was faithful in her reproduction of the Spencer rifle, introduced in our timeline just before the start of the Civil War. Her account of some of the battles in the book mirror some of the conflicts in that war, when the rebel forces were limited to muskets loaded with ramrods, and the northern troops armed with fast-firing Spencers. The fact that she is a **SPACE LAWYER** ( although not a lawyer in **SP-A-A-CE!**), and not any kind of fire-arm expert, makes the reading all the more delicious.

I reviewed this on Amazon as well. The link will be posted down in the comments; 'helpful' votes are appreciated.

Peace be on your household  
Pat Patterson

## Short Fiction

All Made of Hinges,  
Being an anthology of Mormon Steampunk  
Review by Pat Patterson



Two questions I must address first:

1. Why **MORMON** Steampunk?
2. Why am I, a non-Mormon, and a member of a high commitment, non-traditional Christian church, reviewing this work?

My response to the two questions.

1. Why **MORMON** Steampunk?

I have only quotes by the editor, but whether those answer the question, I am not sure. James Wymore, in his introduction, offers these as something that may constitute an answer to 'Why is there an anthology of Mormon steampunk?':

- A. Steampunk has always been good to him
- B. He is a faithful Mormon
- C. He was asked to do it.

Those work as answers to me, but if you have more questions, direct them elsewhere. I only review, I do not justify.

A very cursory run through my memory reveals no corresponding

volume which is a precise match. Certainly, there are other forms of literature linked with a particular belief system: pure expositions of theology; collections of hymns; children's instructional literature. There may even be such a thing as a particular Baptist expression of art, or a Methodist-inspired school of photography, although I am familiar with neither. Precedent exists at those times when EVERYTHING artistic had to be sponsored by The Church, because no one else had enough money to divert from survival needs. I suppose that Lewis' "The Chronicles of Narnia" and the Space Trilogy, besides being explicitly Christian works, may also be Protestant Christianity, and thus have some degree of specificity about them, but I wouldn't put them in the same category as "Here I Stand: A Biography of Martin Luther."

So, while it may not be a customary thing for a work of non-religious literature to be linked to a particular belief system, it is not without precedent.

2. Why am I, a non-Mormon, and a member of a high-commitment non-traditional Christian church, reviewing this work?

I was asked to.

### The Reviews

Mere Pulp, by D. J. Butler. It's my understanding from reading the intro that D. J. Butler is the other primary mover of this anthology, for which we accord him due accord. He has written some EXCELLENT alternative history, published by Baen, in the "Witchy Eye" series, the last of which, *Witchy Winter*, was a finalist for the Dragon Award. The quality of writing extends here, in a plot/subplot/counterplot steampunk detective story, concerning a plot to reanimate the body of Brigham Young and purify/save the Church, and the non-believers can go jump in the lake.

Marching On to Glory, by John M. Olsen. This one is exciting! It also manages to bring in the truth that military leaders frequently do not take into consideration the strengths and limitations of their troops when they make their plans for conquest. It's also a good example of that genre of literature which demonstrates that a prophecy may be fulfilled in more ways than one. Join the troops of the gigantic airship, as they make their way to battle the mechanized monsters of the South, and on the way get a glimpse of what the Eternal City must be like. This one, as others, makes lovely reference to the genius works of John Moses Browning, one of which is strapped to my right hip at the moment.

A Strike To The Heart of the Cannon Lord, by Stephen L. Peck. It doesn't matter whether we are discussing steampunk, magic, Iron Age implements, or antimatter devices, SOME Bozo is going to find a way to make people miserable with it. And some force, even it dwindles down to a Remnant, will defy the Bozo. And someone is bound to fall in love, even in the middle of a war. In this case, the Bozo is the Cannon Lord, and his superior use of steampunk tech have prevailed, up until now. A pitiful handful makes the final assault.

Avenger's Angel, by Elizabeth Mueller. She's just a poor orphan girl, down to one faithful retainer and the last bit of technology left to her by her father. Alas, whatever shall she do? Well, she can become a bounty hunter, using her feminine wiles to win the confidence of wicked evil-doers, and then clap the bracelets on them, and turn them in for the reward. Lately, though, a tall, dark, and handsome stranger, mysteriously costumed while remaining devastatingly gorgeous, is getting the drop on her, and shooting the bad guys before she can turn them in. Alas,

whatever shall she do? (Hint: she isn't gonna quit.)

Ganesh, by Scott E. Tarbet. It is ingrained into the nature of men under arms, or engaged in some other death-defying career, that when the moment for rest comes about, they talk about what brought them to the place where they are. This is one of those conversations, more engaging than many. That it takes place between a sentient airship and a mecha-man is irrelevant; the best parts are still about fidelity and love. I couldn't say whether this story is most similar to Kipling, Jack London, or O. Henry, but it has that pleasing comfort those stories can bring.

The Pipes of Columbia, by Jay Barnson. Premise: the steel of Deseret has properties not found in other metals. In this case, it is the acoustical properties that are of particular value to a miscreant. A lovely lady in distress reaches out for help to a man crushed beyond endurance. And then, we have a very fine detective story.

Napoleon's Tallest Teamster, by Joe Monson. Dippel's Oil, in this universe, is more than an obsolete animal and insect repellent. It actually acts as a restorative agent, which permits the construction of reanimated men with mechanical enhancements. However, although the substance may generate activity, it is the actions and ethics of the Teamster that drives the story. The loyalty and determination that drives him is thus entirely his own creation, and may thus commend to his Ultimate Maker, those his earthly maker find him repellent. Nicely based on real events taking place in those years when France was having more difficulty than usual.

Reversals of Fortune, by Amanda Hamblin. It is in this story that I found my ignorance of Mormon history to strike the hardest. From the descriptions, I get the feeling that these characters represent actual persons; if not, then they are singularly well-drawn. A dark-skinned Methodist girl, on her way to Italy, to work with their advances in steam technology, intercepts a young white girl whom she believes is intent on some sort of sabotage. Two Mormon evangelists look on, and render what assistance they can.

The Machinations of Angels, by Christopher McAfee. This is a ghost story. There are a moderate number of Mormon references and steampunk devices, but the essential nature is that of BOO! What would YOU do if an angel appeared, offering technology thought to be lost forever? We may not be able to count the number of angels who can dance on the head of a pin; in fact, COUNTING appears to be one of the last things you will want to do with angels. (Spine-tingle!)

The Best Among Us, by Jace Killian. The details of the story include steampunk elements, such as airships, steam-powered guns, and mechanical legs. However, it's the message of alienation, repentance, and restoration which set this apart.

Strange Pilgrims, by John D. Payne. A house elf and a robot walk into a bar...

Well, it's not a bar, it's a cargo hold. However, they DO strike up a conversation, just as strangers will sometimes do in a bar. What is the nature of man? It almost always comes down to that, doesn't it?

Tracting Out Cthulhu, by Lee Allred. (Did you ever want to write Cat Hewell Hugh, and then get into an argument about the correct spelling? Never mind.) This installment has the best bad guys, and what might be the best good guys, and the goofiest pun. You'll know the pun when you get to it; it's the name of a robot. The heroes include Japanese schoolgirls, and genius John

Moses Browning is respected for his works, one of which I have strapped to my right hip at the moment. The sufficiently advanced steampunk technology is indistinguishable from magic, and a wicked-efficient airship captain spits tobacco. Nasty human bad guys are attempting to restore Cthulhu to power, and their location is hidden, and must be determined by sending Mormon missionaries door-to-door. Help! Help! The world is under attack!

I just went back over the list to see if I could find a favorite, and found it impossible. I MIGHT be able to pick a top five. I even might be able to separate the stories into two groups: stories I will read again, and those I won't. Even that would be twitchy: the story I am MOST likely not to read again is so well crafted, I think it belongs in a 'Best Of' collection. I just don't LIKE stories in that genre.

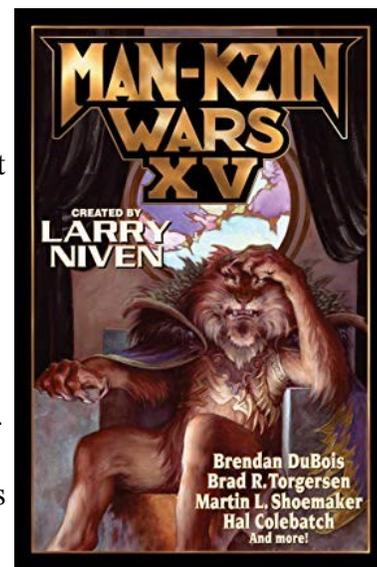
Peace be on your household  
Pat Patterson

## Man-Kzin Wars XV

Review by Pat Patterson

Seems like decades, but it's only been six years since the last Man-Kzin Wars collection was released. SIX LONG, MISERABLE, STARVING YEARS!!!! Maybe that's a good thing; they say "Absence makes the heart grow fonder", but that's only the pathetic solace sought by one who has been denied access to the object of affections.

And there is SO much that we can be affectionate about when it comes to the war cats. To the best of my knowledge, the Long Peace, those 300 years in which humanity was lobotomized out of studying war, produced exactly ONE story: "Safe At Any Speed." Those who are SMOFs will correct me on this matter (or rather, they would if they read my blog) in the event that I'm wrong; I'm just basing that statement by Larry Niven that it's the only story from that time that he wrote, because: it's so BORING.



I wish to make this point perfectly clear: I would VASTLY prefer living during the Long Peace. I rather doubt that I would ever vote in a government that promised to socially engineer us to that point, especially since there are several billion people who don't share citizenship with me, and thus would not be subjects of that engineering, but still: if I were PERFECTLY assured (and there's the problem) of living in peace with all, I would be willing to forfeit some irascibility. I've got grandchildren, you see, and I'd like for them to be able to live as the first generation of my family who didn't HAVE to go to war. I am proud of the four generations of veterans! But war is not what I would choose for my life.

It IS what I choose for my escapist reading, however. I do not wish to read stories of interesting conversations all the time, as amusing as I find "The Importance of Being Earnest." It's a pleasant diversion, but I rather need the smell of horse sweat, the clack of the Winchester as I jack another round in the chamber, the "vroom-vroom" of the light saber.

So, HOORAY for Man-Kzin XV! These are the droids stories we were looking for! Even if we

DID have to wait six years!

And now, to the stories:

"Sales Pitch," by Hal Colebatch, one of the strong veterans of the series. I suspect he knows more about this aspect of Known Space than anyone else. Whether everything he knows is TRUE remains to be seen, but he tells an excellent story. In this one, he provides deep, deep, deep background to the conflict between Man and Kzin, giving us another reason to despise those who pull the strings.

"Singer of Truth," by Martin L Shoemaker, another long-time writer. This tale is set relatively early in the Wars, before much of the self-centered nastiness of the human race has been stripped away by the desperate need to unite for survival. A human psycho-therapist risks his life and well-being in order to make contact with the Kzinti, especially those who don't wish to make contact with him. His biggest struggles come from his own people, who fight over their own privileges as if that were the biggest deal in the world.

"The Third Kzin," by Jason Fregeau. WHO IN THE HECK IS JASON FREGEAU??? When I first heard about this volume, I went looking, and I could find NOTHING he had written. And yet, he does one of the most elaborate combinations of classic films and Man-Kzin conflicts I have read. I love this particular method, although I am partial to the Humphrey Bogart movies. This one, though, is just wonderfully satisfying, combining the best elements of the movie (including the zither) with the story of Wunderland after the war. I found "The Third Man" on a streaming service, and watched it in parallel with reading the story. I think that served to enhance my experience; YMMV. But, don't miss this one, and I hope we get more Jason Fregeau in ANY lit form.

"Excitement," by Hal Colebatch and Jessica Q. Fox." Both authors are veterans of this world, and it shows. I love the way in which they take pre-existing characters, ask 'What WOULD happen?' and then proceed to answer the question. In this case, it's the WunderKzin Vaermar-Ritt, who may yet solve the problem of a universe with both war cats and monkeys.

"Justice," by Jessica Q. Fox. As mentioned above, Fox is a MK veteran, and in this particular selection, she appears to show some significant history with another thread that I don't recognize. Her characters seem to me to be too well developed to be created just for this story. The Kzin morality is their primary influence on the plot, which involves probably the nastiest villain I have seen in Known Space.

"Saga," by Brendan duBois. I'm having difficulties remembering if I have duBois' name associated with the MK universe, and the fact that I have to pick up my daughter for a cheerleader function in 29 minutes prevents me from taking advantage of my usual google-fu. Regardless, the snapshot of a particular point in Kzin development rings just as true as anything could. There have been numerous stories about the change from sentient to non-sentient females, but this strikes EXACTLY at the cusp. Even better than that, it inserts Kzin into one of the oldest myths humans have.

"Scritch," by Brad R. Torgersen. This is my personal favorite in the book, for at least three reasons. In the first place, Torgerson, a fellow POG, has written magnificently of the way in which a POG (Person Other than Grunt) can be the source of the human race being saved from a novel

type BEM. Secondly, I loved Ringworld, as well as the other novels in the series, and this goes very far in answering some of the itch from "but what about" questions that linger after Niven closed the last book. Finally, it does a Wonderful job of covering new territory, while reading EXACTLY like Niven. It is UTTERLY faithful to the entire series. If you read Jurassic Park II, the you know that one of the serious questions was "How did they get this dino-clone thing right straight off the bat?" Well, same question goes for the RingWorld.

As mentioned above, I have to be elsewhere (now in only 19 minutes) so I will not take the time to proof this, nor will I attempt a brilliantly succinct summary paragraph. Get the book!

Peace be on your household!

Pat Patterson

### Not a review, but a list:

<http://www.rocketstackrank.com/2019/01/sff-ballots-for-stories-from-2018.html>

Rocket Stack Rank has aggregated descriptions of various award ballots for 2018 science fiction and fantasy., including awards on which anyone may vote, awards on which members may vote, and juried awards. Hullender and Wong, the authors of RocketStackRank, as usual do a superb job of aggregating vast amounts of stfnal

## SerCon

### Avon's Pulp Magazine--Comic Book Experiment

by

Jon D. Swartz, Ph. D.

N3F Historian

Early in 1950 -- at the suggestion of his printer -- Joseph Meyers, the publisher of Avon Periodicals, asked an editor to put together a new science fiction pulp magazine to be titled *Out Of This World Adventures (OOTWA)*. What made this venture new, and the proposed magazine different from the other pulps of that time, was the "plus" that was later advertised on the magazine's cover: "32 Pages of Fantasy Stories Illustrated in Full Color." The original plan called for this 132-page (counting covers) SF magazine to be published on a bi-monthly schedule, although only two issues, dated July and December 1950, ever saw print. Science fiction pioneer Donald A. Wollheim was the editor chosen to carry out this publishing experiment. Wollheim wrote in his first editorial for this new magazine that it "will carry its readers 'out of this world' both in story and picture."



Issue 2. Cover Artist:  
James Bama

Moreover, apparently this SF magazine with comics in the middle was only part of a larger plan that called for three new Avon pulps with comic book inserts. In addition to *OOTWA*, *Pioneer Western*, and *Sparkling Love/Sparkling Love Stories* were published. I have not seen copies of these latter two titles, but reference sources report that only one issue of *Pioneer Western* (dated December

1950); and two issues of the last title: *Sparkling Love* (dated June 1950), and a slightly retitled *Sparkling Love Stories* (dated July 1950) were published. One Internet source has reported that *Sparkling Love* [reprinted in 1953 by Realistic] had a photo cover. It's obvious from these statistics that Avon's innovation of including comic inserts in pulp magazines was not a huge success.

On the other hand, I still remember the thrill I experienced when I picked up the first issue of *OOTWA* at the newsstand where I worked on Saturdays. I was 15 at the time, and had given up reading/collecting SF comic books for the SF magazines. At the time *Galaxy*, *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, *Other Worlds*, and other new titles were appearing; and *Astounding* and *Amazing* were still going strong. I had been reading and collecting *Astounding* for a couple of years, and loved the writing of its regular contributors: Isaac Asimov, Robert Heinlein, Lewis Padgett (Henry Kuttner & C. L. Moore), L. Sprague de Camp, Hal Clement, Poul Anderson, Theodore Sturgeon, Will Stewart (Jack Williamson), and A. E. van Vogt. Van Vogt was a particular favorite of mine, and of most of my SF-reading friends. Still, I recall vacillating for some time over whether or not to buy this first issue of *OOTWA*, despite the fact that it included a story by van Vogt. In the early 1950s my funds were limited, and I was buying several other SF titles on a regular basis. Others I was reading on a semi-regular basis at the newsstand.

### July 1950 Issue

The first issue had an imposing lineup of authors. In addition to van Vogt, stories by A. Bertram Chandler, Lester Del Rey, Ray Cummings, William Tenn, Lloyd Williams, Mack Reynolds, and Kris Neville were included. Cummings' story, "The Planet Smashers," the longest story in the issue, was featured on the cover; but van Vogt (as "A. E. Vogt"), Del Rey, Chandler also were named. I recognized several of these authors from my reading of *Astounding* and other SF magazines. While *OOTWA* #1 probably did not contain some of the best work of these authors, their stories nonetheless made for entertaining reading.

The "special story section, illustrated in full color," had stories by John Michel, Edward Bellin, W. Malcolm White (2-page text story), and Gardner Fox. The illustrators of these stories were Joe Kubert and John Giunta. Bellin was one of Michel's many pseudonyms. At the time Michel was a close friend of Wollheim's.

The unsigned cover art showed a monstrous Martian from Ray Cummings' story, "The Planet Smashers." This particular gray-skinned creature was depicted wearing a gray helmet and with a young blonde woman in a low-cut red dress in its clutches.

Notable stories from the first issue included "The Planet Smashers" and van Vogt's "Letter from the Stars". In the first, a novelette, Cummings wrote of a war between pleasure-loving Venusians and warlike Martians who attempt to blow up Venus. In the second, a short story, van Vogt told of correspondence between an Earthman and an alien who planned to conquer Earth.

### December 1950 Issue

The second issue carried over only one author from the first, A. Bertram Chandler. His story, "Raiders of the Solar Frontier," the longest in the issue, was featured on the cover. Other sto-