

# Tightbeam 318

March 2021



Cover by Alan White

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

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The N3F offers four different memberships. To join as a public (free) member, send [phillies@4liberty.net](mailto:phillies@4liberty.net) your email address.

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# Seal

Yes, courtesy of Alan White we have a redrawn club seal. We also have a club GIF featuring it, but I am not sure how to email it to people.



# Editorial

We are fen, fandom being a hobby, so please do not expect every column to show up every month. I try to have a mix of all sorts of material, and am sometimes more successful than other times. If anyone reading *Tightbeam* reads short stories and would care to do short or long reviews, I would be delighted to see them.

Under modern conditions, reviews can become controversial. If you disagree with a review, why not send us ([phillies@4liberty.net](mailto:phillies@4liberty.net)) a Letter of Comment for the next issue? You will feel better for it, and your fellow fen will enjoy reading it.

# Letter of Comment

Dear George and Jon:

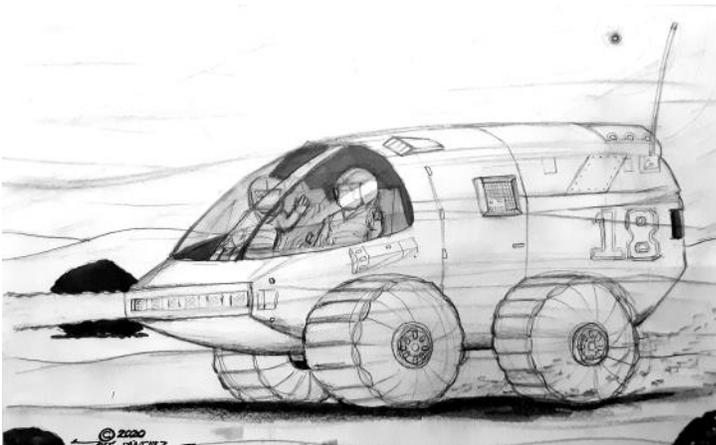
Many thanks for issue 317 of Tightbeam. Yvonne and I are recovering from our own bouts of the disease of the past year, COVID-19. It feels like we had a serious flu, but it will take a longer time to recover from it. I wouldn't wish this on our worst enemies. Anyway, to the issue.

My loc from last time... I have all hopes for more Amazing Stories magazines, as departing editor-in-chief Ira Nayman is still working with art director Kermit Woodall and publisher Steve Davidson to wind up the most recent issue, and find a new editor. I have responded with a letter of comment to the Outworlds 71 part of that wonderful new fannish publication, and I have started a letter of comment on the second part, the Afterworlds section.

Fanfaronade 7... There seems to be the impression, which I had had for many years, that new faneds would chat about science fiction and fantasy and other fannish things directly, which made them look a little neoish. If we could get the science fiction, the common interest, out of the way, then we could chat about everything else under the sun, and we'd be looking at those topics with the eye of the science fiction fan, which might allow us to share a unique but common perspective on those topics.

A great interview with Guy H. Lillian III. It's more proof that we all have our own fannish origins, and while the vast area of fannish interests is like a smorgasbord table, we have the freedom to chow down from it as we will; a little of everything, or a whole lot of one. We have to suit ourselves, and we also have to remember what while there may be some dishes on the board we don't like, we should never put others down for dining from the dishes you wouldn't. We all find our interests.

No Babylon 5 reboot? That's fine with me. So much of what I see on television is a reboot, or reimagining, or a redo, and that says to me, we don't enough imagination to create something new, or would rather invest our money in redoing something that was popular the first time. I guess fresh ideas have too much financial risk involved.



Vehicle by Jose Sanchez

My kudos to Jon on his researches into Walter Tevis. I have some of his SF on the shelf, but knew very little about him...until now. Many thanks.

It is a quiet morning, which has allowed me to work ahead a little bit, so here it is, hope this fills the bill. Many thanks for these issues, and see you with the next one.

Yours,

Lloyd Penney.

# Anime

## Wandering Witch: The Journey of Elaina Review by Jessi Siler



It's probably nothing more than a coincidence that around this same time I decided to finish watching *Wandering Witch: The Journey of Elaina*, a somewhat controversial anime from this most recent season. It's sort of a recent poster child for what can happen when stories are bogged down by expectations when trying to accomplish too many things at once. The anime follows the titular Elaina, a young witch with a strong will and a desire to follow in the footsteps of her hero, a witch named Nike. Elaina visits several different countries and gets involved in local affairs to various degrees. She interacts with other magic-users, as well as with normal non-magical folk. Her degree of enmeshment varies based on the story, but all of her experiences make their way into the ever-expanding journal of her travels.

I should say right now, I liked Elaina a lot more than I liked *Cats*.

I'm really drawn to stories of young witches – *Little Witch Academia*, *Tweeny Witches*, *Flying Witch*... I'll be completely honest that there's a part of me that grieved after first discovering *Harry Potter* as a high school student, because I knew it was too late for me then to have gotten my invitation letter to Hogwarts (yes, I know it's not real, but there's a piece of it that lived in me right up until J.K. Rowling revealed her true colors). And I enjoyed *Wandering Witch* quite a bit in that it presented witches as being flawed people – Saya's lovesickness, Fran's flightiness, Sheila's rough nature, and Elaina's overconfidence and haughtiness all added to the image of witches as humans first and magic users second. There's something comforting to me about the fact that the witches in Elaina's world can be defined by their skill and yet still have room to grow and mature as people.



Much like *Cats*, however, I think *Wandering Witch* struggles with a format problem. For example, *Cats* doesn't have a particularly strong or comprehensible narrative thread, and on top of that it also tells its tale through the mouths and actions of obvious humans in silly jumpsuits or bad CG, depending on your favorite flavor of performance. It feels to me to be a tale more suited to short form animated anthology with more cat-like feline characters, than a poorly-

composed CG production starring human-faced actors with distressingly furry bodies (I'm to this day still traumatized by Idris Elba's flesh-colored fur). Elaina's story is a disjointed one as well, cobbled together from single episodes that truly run the gamut from humorous to distressing and heartbreaking. There's nothing inherently wrong with telling a story this way, and in fact *Wandering Witch* is frequently compared to *Kino's Journey* because *Kino* kind of defined that storytelling style for many Western anime fans. But where *Kino* more often than not strikes a good balance between the protagonist remaining an observer in some cases and

intervening in others, Elaina's strong personality sometimes leaves one wondering why or how she can remain disconnected when terrible things are happening.

There's an episode early on in which Elaina encounters a young girl who's been forced into slavery. The girl serves a wealthy family, and the son of the family doesn't comprehend the girl's feelings or her immense emotional suffering – he just wants for her to be happy and thinks that he can accomplish this through some straightforward means under his control. With the amount of slavery-flavored fantasy series lurking around nowadays, I think there's a desire on the part of the audience (at least, certain audiences...) to see characters be released from that kind of servitude by an actual heroic character. Yet, this episode mostly serves as a cautionary tale to remind Elaina and the viewer that sometimes the road to Hell is paved with good intentions. We don't get to see a solid resolution to this distressing situation firsthand; I personally found it to be a little upsetting, and maybe not in the thoughtful way that was likely intended.

That may simply be a problem inherent to anthology stories – it's difficult to avoid the kind of tonal whiplash that arises from treating a story like a series of tenuously-related experiences. *Cats* skips along from song to song, some of which are goofy, some heartbreaking, and others (uncomfortably) erotic. *Wandering Witch* is heavy on lighthearted adventure, but occasionally delves into some deeper, darker subject matter. It's difficult to know what you might end up feeling when starting a new episode, especially when the resolution of the story may spring some upsetting revelation on the viewer. There's also some confusing aspects of the timeline that occasionally makes things unclear – it's difficult to latch onto whether some of the stories are reactions to previous ones (directly or indirectly) and whether or not Elaina's character growth and evolution should be at a certain point as a result of those experiences. I'm not sure whether the books on which the anime is based are similarly disconnected, but while I try not to have too many expectations about stories I'm unfamiliar with, the sense of being consistently off-balance gets a little exhausting.

But, like I've hopefully been able to explain, *Wandering Witch* is a complicated experience with as many highs as there are lows (which, honestly, aren't even lows, just storytelling choices I didn't really agree with). I think what I like about it the most is that there's not really an attempt to make the protagonist into a more palatable personality. The series begins with Elaina learning a lesson about the dangers of putting up with too much. I think the expectation, especially with a young woman character, would be for her to take on a more mature personality, and maybe in a sense that does happen. Yet Elaina is far from the typical anime "good girl." She's confident and seems to truly like herself as a person. She doesn't hide her own power to make others comfortable. She can be hot-headed and kind of selfish, but knows how to set boundaries and only gets her feet wet on her own terms (ideally, anyway). I think part of the reason that episode 9 of the show (the one dealing with time-travel) hits so hard, aside from the fact that the storyline deals with murder and abuse, is that Elaina has been to this point so confident and mostly unflappable that her lack of control and inability to decipher the situation until it's too late is traumatic. Some may call that cheap storytelling, but I think at the very least the series earns the feeling it's going for.



Watching *Cats* again was not just a reminder of the film's unapologetic weirdness, but also the fact of its occasional, very brief goodness, which I don't think I would have expected (I just wanted to have

a drink and some fun, after all). I'm not really sure if I'll ever have time to give Wandering Witch another watch, but even just looking back on the experience and through the cloud of ambivalence I felt about it a lot of the time, there were definite high points that made the viewing worthwhile. Though the pieces may not have fit together very well, in hindsight perhaps the whole package was a bit better than that.

Pros: As I mentioned, I think Elaina is a unique anime character, especially as young women in anime are concerned. While I'd say anime in general has the potential to portray iconic young women, the end result is often not as extreme and interesting as I would like. Elaina is a very confident and competent person, and mostly unapologetic about that.

I think the visual design of the series as a whole is very nice, with lush details that distinguish many of the different locations from one-another. The show portrays a lot of natural scenery (the field of flowers in a particular episode pops out to me, as do the treetops that Elaina glides above in many travel scenes).

When the show hits it really hits hard; I think the first episode is a great introduction to the protagonist, and episode 9, while somewhat manipulative, is definitely memorable.

Cons: The series falters at times due to its general unevenness. Some of the side characters are annoying, especially Saya; she's a borderline example of the predatory lesbian trope and just generally could have been toned down a lot. More palatable are Fran and Sheila, two senior witches with a history of their own that's explored late in the series.

There are some times where the humor falls flat, also. Probably the biggest goof-up I can think of is the plot of a late episode that involves a love spell which I suspect is supposed to be funny, but feels manipulative to the women involved. The final episode also sees Elaina face several alternate-reality versions of herself, and while one strong-willed Elaina is a boon for the show, sixteen or so, all with different personality traits, are a little too much (and ring slightly hollow due to their one-note, very specific personalities).

Content Warnings: Mild predatory lesbianism (multiple episodes). Slavery. Magical violence (offensive spellcasting, sometimes with physical injury). Physical violence/gore (severe in one instance).

Grade: B-



Captain Glovall from Robotech by Jose Sanchez

# Comics

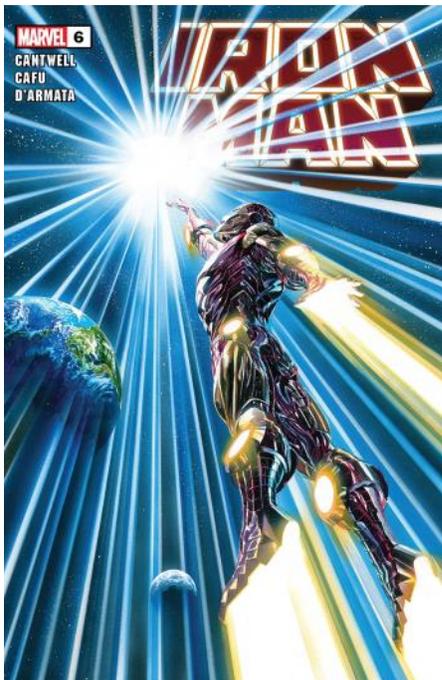
## Western Comics: Capsule Reviews Stephanie Souders

First, Let's Talk About Marvel:

Iron Man, #5-6

Writer: Christopher Cantwell

Artists: Cafu, Frank D'Armata, & Alex Ross



When last I commented upon the current Iron Man series, I complained about its cringe-worthy attacks upon its title character — and about Tony’s ineffectual whining. So what’s been going on since issue #4? Well, I’ve got good news and bad news.

The good news: As Cantwell dives deeper into Tony’s conflict with the megalomaniacal Korvac, the ties that bothered me in his first issues have essentially disappeared. Tony and Patsy are now interacting with each other as human beings and not as nag and target. Further, Tony is displaying a little more virility; in issue #6 in particular, he decides he’s done with apologizing and declares (in the narration) that he’s ready to stick up for himself and for the world he’s determined to protect.

The bad news: In my view, the weak Tony of the first issues is now being replaced with a callous and ridiculously imprudent version of Tony that’s also out-of-character. Tony Stark is supposed to be one of the smartest men in the

Marvel Universe — but in these issues, he’s demonstrated no ability to think inventively or strategically. Rather, he seeks confrontations with Korvac with zero plans beyond intentions to employ “good old-fashioned brute force.” Worse, this Tony uses and discards the people around him for the sake of his own ends with disturbing ease, which absolutely does not align with his history as Marvel’s consistently guilt-ridden pragmatist. Tony always - always - feels bad and blames himself when people get hurt in his general vicinity. He would never, ever say, "He's useless to me. Leave him." (Seriously: Can I smack Cantwell upside the head with The Confession? Or the entire Director of SHIELD run?)

The bottom line? Cantwell can’t seem to strike the appropriate balance between Tony’s softer facets - like, for example, his depressive streak and penchant for self-criticism - and his sharper, more hard-headed edges, swinging wildly between the poles instead of integrating Tony’s complexities. The art team here is still doing an amazing job — but the writer has yet to hit the right notes.

Black Widow, #1-5  
 Writer: Kelly Thompson  
 Artist: Elena Casagrande



Black Widow is not generally a go-to character for me. However, YouTube chatter led me to catch up on this new run — and I’m not sorry I did because the premise of Thompson’s opening tale is shockingly compelling. In a nutshell: Intent on breaking our heroine, a cabal of villains gets together to brainwash Natasha and convince her that she’s an architect who’s lived in the San Francisco area with her loving husband and toddler son for the past few years — a false biography that eventually breaks down as events remind her of her former life.

Now, Thompson could’ve taken this in the expected direction; she could’ve had Natasha abandon her “family” without compunction once the ruse is revealed. But what actually happens here is something you very rarely see in a modern female-led comic: Natasha retains her emotional connection to her husband and son and is genuinely devastated when she has to send them away for their own protection. Her new memories are constructed; nonetheless, to Natasha, they are categorically real.

So yeah: I really, really liked these books. I just hope like hell that this arc doesn’t get forgotten or retconned because it’s added something very special to Natasha’s canon. Admittedly, the art is a little rough at times, but the acknowledgment of the natural and common feminine yearning to procreate and build a home makes this story, in the current climate, breathtakingly counter-cultural and absolutely a do-not-miss

Daredevil, #27  
 Writer: Chip Zdarsky  
 Artists: Marco Checchetto & Mike Hawthorne

Yep: this month, I’m coming back to Daredevil (identified in the last column as Marvel’s hidden gem) because the latest issue is out-freakin-standing and deserves to be highlighted.



To recap: At the end of issue #26, Knoll took control of a voluntarily-imprisoned Matt Murdock as part of his larger plan to subdue the Earth with his vast symbiote army. In issue #27, we see how Matt responds: by fighting Knoll off with the power of his own faith and his capacity for self-sacrifice. What a fantastic wrap-up for this King in Black tie-in!

Indeed, to be perfectly honest, I’m having trouble choosing the right words to express how awesome this issue actually is — but maybe describing one stellar scene in particular will help inspire your interest. On page 8, Knoll directly questions Matt’s belief in God, observing that “when your loved ones die and ascend to your ‘heaven’, you weep... because deep in your heart, you know there’s no such thing.”

Matt's reply? "I weep... I wail... because deep down, I suspect... I'm not worthy of God's love... and heaven is out of my reach." This right here beautifully captures Matt's fundamental and long-standing Catholic guilt and, yes, is 100% emblematic of this issue's overall attention to character and history. Well done, Mr. Zdarsky. Well done.

Meanwhile, My Final Thoughts on DC's Future State Event Are as Follows: Meh.

Like I suggested last month, Future State is not a total disaster. The two Swamp Thing issues - though rushed - approach excellence. Yara Flor, the next Wonder Woman, is an actual character and not a cipher for some writer's woke politics. Jace Fox, the next Batman, leads a tense double life that could generate reader engagement if wholly exploited in his ongoing series. And I find it heartening that Superman's new writer accurately roots Clark Kent's heroism in his childhood home. Still, I'd say most of the content here can best be described as "aggressively generic."

The principle problem, I think, is that Future State provides us with random sketches of the DC universe at different points in the timeline — sketches that are divorced from their essential context. As far as I can tell, there's no central vision that ties it all together — no clear frame to guide the reader through this panoply of speculative story-telling and help him or her extract some much-needed meaning. Even the Bat books - which, to be fair, all take place in the same paint-by-numbers dystopia and are therefore more unified than the rest - fail to take full advantage of their setting. The result? A bunch of comics that are decently entertaining in the moment — but slide off the brain once they're finished. Or, as I said at the start: meh.

And Finally, Please Remember:

I take requests! If there's a particular review you'd like to see (especially of an independent comic that you feel needs my special attention), please contact me at [hobsonphile@gmail.com](mailto:hobsonphile@gmail.com) and tell me the title, creators, and - most importantly - point of sale. Assuming the comic in question is available for immediate purchase, I will respond in the following issue!

### Power Pack 3

Not-quite-a-review from George Phillies



We approach the end, and a truly strange thing happens. The villain says he has drained people's superpowers by having them drive generators to make electricity. He says he overdid it, so he will run the generator backward and put the superpowers back in the superheroes. At this point Julie Power catches the villain's lie — running a generator in the other direction will just make more electricity, not recharge the heroes. Faraday's Law of induction. A magnet moves inside a coil of wire. And some electricity gets made: However, she actually says '*Faraday's Law of Induction*', which is a real physics law, *and invokes it correctly*, meaning one of the writers actually knew what he was talking about when speaking of physics.

This miracle may be repeated, perhaps as soon as the next century.

Well, I always was an optimist...

Judge Dredd: The Small House  
Review by Chris Nuttall

We are fascists. We rule.  
-Judge Smiley, to Judge Dredd.

Why do I like Judge Dredd?



It's a hard question to answer. I can recognize the appeal of the zero-tolerance attitude to policing Dredd and his fellows bring to Mega-City One, but I can also recognize the dangers of slipping from what one character called 'good solid judging' to outright oppression. The better Dredd stories acknowledge the weaknesses of the Justice Department itself and the scope for corruption and tyranny, both direct and indirect. Part of the appeal of Dredd himself, as a character, is the curious balance between Dredd's commitment to the Justice Department and to justice itself. Dredd is both a noble servant of his city, putting his life at risk time and time again to save the citizens, and the defender of a fascist regime.

In a sense, therefore, Judge Dredd is Mega-City One's greatest hero and its greatest villain.

Dredd himself appears to believe that there is simply no alternative. Mega-City One exists on a permanent edge, endlessly on the cusp of collapsing into chaos. The city is barely capable of keeping itself going even when there isn't a massive outside threat; the judges are badly overstretched, the vast majority of the population is unemployed and permanently bored, there's little hope of building a better life for most of the citizens ... and the rest of the world is worse.

This, perhaps, is the key to Dredd's character. He loves his city and sees himself as doing an unpleasant, but necessary job. He also sees himself, perhaps, as someone with the freedom to temper the justice system – sometimes – with compassion and mercy. This may be the root cause of his constant (until recently) opposition to robot judges. A robot lacks the ability to determine when the situation calls for mercy, rather than 'justice.'



The Small House pits Dredd against the enigmatic Judge Smiley, the head of a top-secret black ops unit that has been quietly manipulating events in Mega-City One since the death of the insane Chief Judge Cal. Smiley has effectively separated himself from the Chief Judges and now acts alone, happily doing whatever he feels he needs to do to keep the city safe. His methods bring him into conflict with Dredd, who thinks Smiley has broken the law repeatedly (even though they started out as allies). Smiley presents Dredd with a difficult problem. If Dredd moves against Smiley, what'll come crashing down with him?

Smiley himself is an odd contrast to Dredd. Where Dredd is a man of action, Smiley is a tea-sipping backbencher. Dredd clings to his faith in the greater cause, Smiley is unapologetic about the simple fact the



judges are fascists – I think he’s the first of the judges to openly acknowledge that they really are fascists – and that they do whatever they have to do to maintain their power. The law is, as far as they are concerned, little more than a guideline.

This is not the first time this has been discussed – Dredd himself was involved with crushing the pro-democracy movement, on the orders of Chief Judge Silver – but it is considerably more blatant here as Smiley is no longer being overseen by anyone. No one, not even Smiley himself, is carrying out sanity checks.

The story develops quickly as Dredd and his allies try to unearth Smiley’s covert teams and take them into custody, eventually discovering a long-buried truth. Smiley and his team discovered the Apocalypse War was about to take place ... and did nothing, because they believed Mega-City One

needed to be pruned a little.

(Meta-commentary – this was one of the reasons the epic was written in the first place.) Dredd is horrified by this assertion and understandably so – they came very close to losing the war – and clashes with the Chief Judge as he tries to bring Smiley to justice. In the end, Smiley is brought down by the shock of being exposed and dressed into the light. By this point, in the middle of a breakdown, it must have been a relief to die.

It’s hard to assess the story as it fits into canon, because parts of it feel like a ret-con. There was no need to have the war, which caught the judges by surprise, be ‘allowed’ to happen. It strains credibility that Smiley would have lost his sense of balance so quickly, let alone that he would have survived a series of city-shattering events without ever coming into the light or simply being killed in passing.

Smiley’s infrastructure would have been smashed and rebuilt repeatedly, without anyone ever noticing. On the other hand, an isolated group might well lose track of reality. It happens to internet forums as well as intelligence teams.

But it does focus on the difference between Dredd, who is empowered by his belief in the system, and a cynical judge who sees the system as an end in itself. It also allows some moments for Dredd to fear that Smiley really does have authorization from the Chief Judge, forcing him to confront a possibly (even more) corrupt system.

The story could have done with a great deal more development, if you ask me. Smiley was never built up as a formidable threat and kept in the shadows, at least until it was too late. It works in his favor – Smiley was never interested in mounting a coup – and yet there is a sense that when the covers are pulled away, Smiley simply shrivels.

It is a good glance into a darker part of Dredd’s world, but – at a deeper level – it is also a grim warning of what happens when people with power are allowed to lose track of reality and operate without oversight. And the artwork is extremely good. The only major downside is that the story ends abruptly, not with a real examination of the consequences.

# Fan News

The Fan History Project is running Zoom Sessions. Future events are

Topic and Speakers: The Benford Twins, Fandom and the Larger Universe with Greg and Jim Benford

Date and Time: March 27, 2021, 2pm EDT (11AM, 6PM London, 5AM Sunday Sydney)

To attend, please send an RSVP to [fanac@fanac.org](mailto:fanac@fanac.org) in order to receive a link.

Tentative Schedule for Future sessions

- March 27, 2021 at 2pm EDT - The Benford Twins, Fandom and the Larger Universe
- April 17, 2021 at 2pm EDT - Early Star Trek Fandom, with Ruth Berman and Devra Langsam
- May 2021 - An interview with Erle Korshak by Joe Siclari

Past Sessions

An Anecdotal History of Southern Fandom, with Guy Lillian III, Bill Plott, Toni Weisskopf and moderator Janice Gelb (February 2021)

A Tour of Fannish Holborn (London) by Rob Hansen - December 2020

Ted White, an Interview by John D. Berry - January 2021. The video of the interview is in 4 parts.

# Games

## Threads Reconnecting: A Discussion of Supergiant's "Hades" Review by Jessi Silver

Note: This post contains thematic and story spoilers for Supergiant Games' Hades. If you're thinking about checking the game out, I highly suggest you do so! Then feel free to come back and let me know what you think.



Copyright Supergiant Games

It's difficult to resist the urge to refer to 2020 as a lost year, because for so many of us it feels like the culmination of a lot of bad decisions and missed opportunities. For me personally, it was a time period defined by stress without a healthy outlet. I couldn't attend conventions and see friends, I could really go on vacation, I suffered an undercurrent of fear that something might go awry with my or my husband's employment situation... and that's even

aside from the relentless thumping of day after day of exhausting election news. It was bad enough for long enough that I couldn't even get myself to watch anime. For some, their hobbies are an escape; something that lets them settle into a pleasant state of mind and forget about the outside world. For me, it's kind of the opposite in that I have to be in a certain state of mind to be able to focus and enjoy something.

It was around Autumn of 2020 that I began to hear chatter about Hades, a new video game from beloved indie-game studio Supergiant. I no longer really have my finger on the pulse of the gaming world, but I enjoyed the company's earlier games and really enjoy rogue-like/rogue-lite gameplay, so took a chance and purchased it on Steam (\$25, which, considering the amount of time I've spent playing it, is an incredible bargain). In it, you play the role of Zagreus, son of Hades, god of the Underworld. Zagreus has an adversarial relationship with his father, though it takes a little time to discover the reasons why. He makes motions to escape to the overworld, and thus run away from his troubled life. The thing is, the Underworld is known to be inescapable, because it needs to be – who'd want to have to deal with the problem of the dead returning to the land of the living? Thus, Lord Hades has a vested interest in making sure his son doesn't upset that balance. and his journey through hell is arduous and deadly.



### Copyright Supergiant Games

boons you've received from your relatives on Mt. Olympus are taken away. For your first several attempts at the game, it can feel as though you're making very little progress; you don't have a good handle on how to use the weapons properly, you haven't developed a solid play style, and the enemies and environments just feel impenetrable. It seems like a truly Sisyphean task – which is funny because you actually get to meet Sisyphus and surprisingly he seems fairly cool with his circumstances, truth be told.

One of the early reviews I read for Hades was on NPR which isn't exactly known for game reviews, but I can respect them wanting to provide some insight on what's now a very popular media form with many if not most demographics. The article frames the reviewer's interaction with the game as being heavily influenced by the state of the world in which they were playing it, which I can understand; when you've spent months disconnected from other people and struggling with the disappointing ways in which the world seems to be failing at meeting its challenges, playing a game that requires hours of failure before providing any major payoff and which frames its main character as angry and rebellious probably doesn't seem that appealing. It's times like these where I curse the quick turnaround that's required of game reviewers, because this game in particular requires a lot of time and patience (especially if you're like me and no longer much of an expert gamer); a week's worth of puttering around with it really doesn't bring you to the point of uncovering its major themes.

One hallmark of rogue-like/rogue-lite games is that each attempt to complete the game is its own journey, and each death sets you back at the beginning without many or sometimes any of the abilities you gained along the way. Hades folds this mechanic into the story; after each unsuccessful attempt to escape, Zagreus finds himself at his father's doorstep once again, delivered to the Underworld via the unforgiving, one-way flow of the River Styx. While you get to keep certain items that allow you to slowly build on your base abilities, all of the cool

Rather than a meditation on futility or the unavoidable nature of suffering, as its story slowly unfolds and the player gets the opportunity to open up some of the side quests, Hades reveals itself as a poignant examination of the resiliency and diversity of love and the power of forgiveness. It's a revelation that takes escaping the Underworld a few times and learning just how broken and dysfunctional Zagreus' family life really is, as well as how that situation is echoed within the lives of the people working within his father's house. As Zagreus, through the hands of the player, plugs away at trying to solve his own problems, he learns more about his teacher Achilles' self-destructive behavior and the lover he lost because of it, his adoptive mother Nyx's distant relationship from her own parent, and god of death Thanatos's feelings of having been betrayed by Zagreus, among others. Zagreus even gains a more nuanced understanding of his father's feelings, having split from both Zagreus' birth mother and his relatives on Mount Olympus, for reasons that are frustrating and complicated.



**Thanatos and his brother Hypnos are at odds over work philosophy. Copyright Supergiant Games.**

There's a period of time while playing this game where all of these sad situations feel insurmountable, and just like reaching a skill cap in a game like this I can see why it might inspire some feelings of futility in the player. But just as the game offers options for those

of us who aren't hard-core gamers (I know several friends who appreciate "god mode," which allows easier gameplay), it also offers the opportunity for Zagreus to use his stubbornness and naivete to start mending the broken threads of these various relationships back into a full tapestry.

Using the tried-and-true method of getting people to open up over drinks, by giving characters the nectar you've collected over several escape attempts Zagreus begins to learn the details of what the other characters have been through during their mortal and immortal lives, and you're provided the opportunity to help. In some cases there are tangible awards for doing this – access to new bonus items being the main benefit. But in other cases, the only real "prize" is that you gain the opportunity to learn more about the characters that surround Zagreus and bring color to his otherwise gray-hued underworld life. You get the sense that even bad circumstances aren't nearly so terrible if there are friends or family there to help you endure them. It's an examination of the power of communication; though talking to someone might be difficult, especially if one or both of you might already be hurting, it's truly the only way to learn and perhaps even start to heal.



**Thanks for the pep talk, Uncle. Copyright Supergiant Games**

While this game was obviously in the works for a couple of years (I can't even imagine how long it took to write the reportedly 300k words of dialog, wow!) the fact that its 1.0 version was released this past September almost made it seem like a boon from the gods. Its story really echoes a lot

of the things I'd been feeling – the general malaise brought on by pandemic fatigue and the disconnect I'd been experiencing being unable to visit in person with the people I loved. The feeling of wanting to escape from a situation that was unfortunately mostly inescapable. But also the hope that, with some work – reaching out to friends when possible and searching for ways to make each day more interesting – things might eventually get a little better.

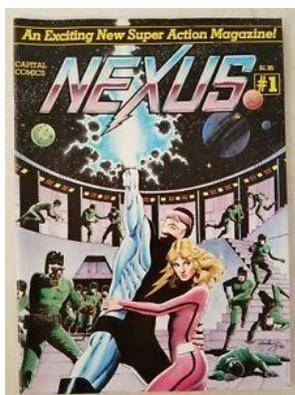
I know that the gamer/anime fan crossover isn't always 100%, but I'd encourage those of you out there who might not identify with gaming, but might still have some interest, to give Hades a try. The world's been pretty cold lately, but this game weaves together a story that's surprisingly filled with the warmth of connecting with others, forgiving, and being forgiven.

## Interviews

### An Interview with Mike Baron

By Tamara Wilhite

*“If men were benign, there would be no need for superheroes.” — Mike Baron.*



Mike Baron is a comic book creator. He launched the science fiction comic “Nexus” in the 1980s. However, he’s been busy releasing a variety of comic books and novels ever since. And I had the opportunity to interview this prolific author.

Tamara Wilhite: You’ve contributed to a number of best-selling science fiction comic books. What was your role in the “Star Wars – The New Republic” and “Star Wars: The Thrawn Trilogy” books?

Mike Baron: I adapted Timothy Zahn's best-selling novels, to my mind, among the best Star Wars novelizations. It was an easy job. Each novel yielded six comics. I only used Zahn's dialogue. Since he writes in such a visual manner, they were easy to envision. I wrote those comics by drawing each page out by hand. I'm not a professional artist, but I'm good enough so that artists and editors can tell at a glance what I'm doing.

Tamara Wilhite: Your comic book “Nexus” won every industry award when it came out. It received six Eisner awards. What other awards did it get? And why do you think that is?

Mike Baron: Steve received the Russ Manning Award for best new artist. We both got Inkpots. Nexus was something new in science fiction comics. It came out of left field. The depth of characterization and world-building brought us many fans. The mix of serious drama leavened with funny animal interludes (Clonezone) won us a lot of fans.

Everything we did up through the nineties is available in hardbound Archive editions, or in the smaller Omnibus-size.

Tamara Wilhite: How many books are based on the “Nexus” comic series?

Mike Baron: Individual comics? About one hundred and fifteen. Steve has tried publishing it himself, but he's not a publisher. He is going to re offer the Sunday newspaper strips in a more manageable size next year. I scripted those comics, but he changed all my dialogue. We came to an understanding. He's free to offer his version of Nexus, virtually all of which is based on my writing, and I'm free to offer my own versions. Thus, I am offering a new three issue series from Splatto Comics next year drawn by Kelsey Shannon. Richard Meyer commissioned these books and is crowdfunding them.

Tamara Wilhite: “Nexus” is far from your only comic book. “Florida Man” comes to mind. Disclaimer: I contributed to that crowdfunding campaign. What other projects are you working on, and how many of them are crowdfunded?

Mike Baron: Florida Man was a novel before it was a comic. I conceived it as a comic series, but when I finished five scripts, I realized I had a very detailed outline. I wrote the novel. It is by far my most successful novel. The sequel, Hogzilla, is out.

Tamara Wilhite: What are some of the lessons you’ve learned from crowdfunding comics?

Mike Baron: I know nothing! If it weren't for my wife Ann, I could never run a successful campaign. Ann ran both the Q-Ball campaign, and the Nexus novel campaign. Chris Braly is running our Florida Man Graphic Novel campaign. Chris is a professional video guy. The video he created for Florida Man is far and away the best video of any crowd-funded comic ever. It's still open. Florida Man is the funniest comic ever made. I guarantee you will laugh out loud.

Tamara Wilhite: The big names in comic book publishing are in decline. That’s demonstrated by the layoffs at DC Comics and others. How are you managing to succeed? What makes you stand out or attract an audience?

Mike Baron: I know how to entertain. I know how to grab readers by the throat. My first three rules of writing:

1. Entertain.
2. Show, don't tell.
3. Be original.

These may seem simple, but they have eluded most comic creators.

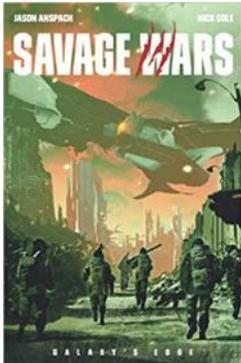
Tamara Wilhite: What else are you working on?

Mike Baron: We are about to offer a Badger novel. I've included the cover. I have written a Nexus/Lonestar/Bigfoot Bill crossover that Matt Weldon is illustrating. I have written THIN BLUE LINE, a graphic novel about the police that Joe Arnold, a full-time police officer is illustrating. It is a nuclear bomb. Jeff Slemons, an accomplished artist in his own right ([www.jeffslemons.com](http://www.jeffslemons.com)) is inking and painted the cover over Joe's layouts.

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

Mike Baron: Working on a third Florida Man novel, When Calls the Catfish, and finishing up the eighth Josh (Biker) Pratt novel.

## An Interview with Nick Cole by Tamara Wilhite



Nick Cole is a prolific science fiction, horror and fantasy author. His “Galaxy’s Edge: Savage Wars” novel was the winner of the 2020 Dragon Award for Best Military Science Fiction. His novel “The Old Man and the Wasteland” sold more than 100,000 copies. And I had the opportunity to interview him.

Tamara Wilhite: You referred to “CTRL ALT Revolt!” as the story that cost you your job but that it was worth it. Can I ask you about the story behind that statement?

Nick Cole: Basically what happened is they asked me to change some content they felt was offensive. I declined. They threatened me that I was “finished” if I didn’t.

I don’t do threats.

They cancelled my publishing contract because I made a fairly good argument against abortion from an A.I.’s perspective. It was just to give the main villain some motivation for wanting to destroy the world. The rest of the book was Night of the Living Dead-Robots meets Ready Player One. They felt that I as a male had no business making the argument.



In essence, they felt I wrote WrongThink and then tried to censor me. So they fired me. It was a great move because it was the right thing to, for me.

And, it fed me up to return to indie publishing which is a lot more fun, and profitable than Traditional Publishing.

Everything about Trad Pub is a myth. It’s a terrible experience. One Star. Would not recommend.

Tamara Wilhite: You’ve written quite a bit of science fiction. Did you write the entire Galaxy’s Edge series?

Nick Cole: I write it with my writing partner Jason Anspach.

Tamara Wilhite: “Soda Pop Soldier” is described as Call of Duty meets Diablo. It is an intriguing concept. What led to you writing it?

Nick Cole: I love video games and cyberpunk. Diablo 2 is one of my favorite all time games and I play Call of Duty after ending my writing day. The dark fantasy of Diablo makes a kind

of excellent dark net Vegas in the novel while Pro Call of Duty serves as the protagonist's day job. Purely fun book. Love the series. It's my guilty pleasure and people like it.

Tamara Wilhite: What is the inspiration for your "The Old Man and the Wasteland" series?

Nick Cole: The Old Man and the Sea is one of my favorite books. I wondered what it would be like if the novel was set 40 years after a nuclear war. That was the inspiration. What came out of it was a book-lovers homage to your favorite character becoming your only friend in a difficult time. Love that book.

Tamara Wilhite: I've noticed that you've put out audio books of many of your novels, and you even did the narration. What is that like?

Nick Cole: I love it. But it's grueling. I've done some voice acting work. It's tough. Long hours, physically draining. Totally rewarding. It's a leveling up plus one experience for a book. And it's the future.

Tamara Wilhite: What are you currently working on?

Nick Cole: Jason and I are launching a new series in a new genre we've created. Details to come. We're also producing our own audiobooks now. No corporate middle men.

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

Nick Cole: Just this ... books will take you farther than any jet airplane ever will. Always have one in your back pocket.

## Movies

### NBC Universal's Minions Review by Jim McCoy

Minions is not a movie for the uber serious SF/F Fan. If, however, you enjoy goofy, cute, family friendly goodness this is a good place to look. Fans of the Despicable Me franchise (or their parents) will immediately recognize these lovable little guys. They've been around for what seems like forever and the merchandising is everywhere. I have to admit that I hadn't seen the first two movies when I allowed my two minions to talk me into taking them to see this flick, but I'm glad I did. We had a good time.

First, just in case one of the uber-sensitive true-fen Puppy Kicker types walks in: Yes, this is SF. Any movie featuring lava guns, jet pack dresses, abominable snowmen, etc. has enough SF elements to qualify. Plus it's my blog and I'll post if I want to. And besides, you idiots gave If You Were a Dinosaur My Love a Hugo and that wasn't SF or a story. Anything that includes guns that shoot lava and/or dresses that have rocket boosters and fire missiles is SF even if it wasn't written for the cause of advancing your leftist BS.

The story follows our little yellow heroes from pre-history up until the late 1960s. They have a boss. They lose a boss. They gain another one. Then they go years and years without one. Life is bleak for a people whose entire existence revolves around service to an evil master because they don't know what to do without one. Freedom sucks when all they know is service. They no longer have a purpose in life. And then... well, if you've seen the first two movies you can make a decent guess as to who the boss they end up with is.

This is not a movie you go see for its awesome special effects budget or its Heinlein-esque plot. This is a movie made for kids. That's not to say that adults can't enjoy it. I did. It's silly. It's fun. It's entertaining. It's just not sophisticated. It's a straight up good time.

As someone who hadn't seen the first two movies I wasn't sure what to expect out of our little yellow heroes. They were personable, fun and actually had personalities. It was weird, but after about the first ten minutes or so I stopped noticing that they couldn't speak. That's not quite right. They do verbalize a bit it's not in words. Well, except for Ba-na-na! I guess Bob just likes them. So does my four year old. I had to give her one when we got home.

The non-minion characters are fun as well. As someone who has been to a couple SF/F cons I got a kick out of seeing the movie's take on them with VillainCon. The con was both funny and entertaining, complete with the appearance of the celebrity on a big stage. Since the Minions were looking for a new boss, it was a logical place for them to go. Even their trip to the con was fun to watch. For the record: When Bob isn't eating bananas he's kind of a bad-ass.

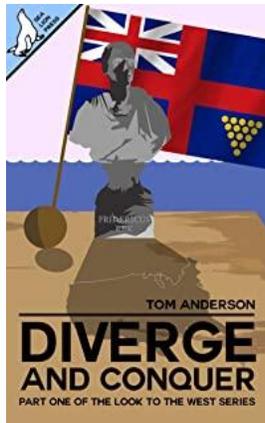
As far as real complaints, I didn't have many. I went into the movie expecting campy and fun. I got campy and fun. This movie will never be a classic to me the way *GI Joe: The Movie* (1987) or the animated *Transformers* flick are, but I could see them becoming that for my daughters' generation. In fact, I'll predict: This movie (and probably the first two based on the way I've heard kids talk about them) will be one of the comfort movies that people like us are watching in twenty to thirty years to take them back to their childhood. Seriously. This could be the next generations' *The Princess Bride* or *The Neverending Story*. Only time will tell if I'm right, but I think I will be.

Bottom Line: 4.5 out of 5 plastic toys from McDonalds  
Minions

## Novels

### Look To The West by Tom Anderson Review by Chris Nuttall

Alternate history, like future wars, is a genre that lends itself very well to essay-writing, in which the author writes a manuscript that reads like a history book, rather than a more standard action and adventure novel. There are no characters, in any true sense; the author details vast sweeps of history – and conflicts – and while he may compose fictional diaries and war reports, the characters are not of any great importance. The important issue is the sweep of (alternate) history itself.



Short essays are very common, but book-length manuscripts are relatively rare and almost always, prior to the internet, published by specialist presses. This is, perhaps, unsurprising. Books like *For Want of a Nail*, *Invasion*, *Gettysburg* and *Disaster at D-Day* have relatively small readerships, certainly when compared to novels written by well-known authors that combine historical scholarship with entertainment (Harry Turtledove, SM Stirling), novels that appeal to a far wider readership that isn't particularly concerned with realism and won't throw the book away in disgust if the Germans deploy Panther tanks in 1940. Put bluntly, book-length essay-manuscripts are very hard sells. It is difficult to convince editors and publishers that they'll see a return on their investment.

The internet, and indie publishing, has changed all that by reducing the publishing costs to the bare minimum. That has given birth to a whole new range of specialist presses, including Sealion Press, which focuses on alternate history books and publications of interest to the AH community. Some of their productions are novels, but others are essentially book-length manuscripts like *For Want of a Nail*, on a much greater scale. The *Look to the West* series is one of the best of them. (Disclaimer; I know and have worked with both Anderson himself and several other people involved in Sealion Press.)

History diverges from its planned course, according to Anderson, when Prince Frederick, King George II's firstborn son (whom, in the olde Hanoverian tradition, was detested by his father) made the mistake of sniggering when his father tripped during his coronation. Instead of dying relatively young, Prince Frederick was exiled to the Americas in the same year George Washington was born. Angry and ambitious, Prince Frederick plotted his return to London with the aid of the colonials, eventually taking the throne after his father died and his brother (the historical George III) was assassinated.

This alone would be an impressive achievement, but the historical outline continues to expand until it sweeps over the entire world. Without the American Revolution, and the Americas remaining part of a very different British Empire, the French Revolution takes a very different course. Different political ideologies are born, some very dangerous; the alternate French Revolutionary Wars, following a different technological development framework, include a French landing in Britain that does immense damage before the French are finally booted out, leading to a dictatorship fully akin to Bad King John before a civil war eventually restores order ... for the moment. The series touches on issues that plagued our own world – slavery in the Americas, serfdom in Russia; neither of which could be avoided – but always puts its own spin on them. It also draws in figures from our world, ranging from the well-known – Napoleon and Nelson, in very different roles – to the more obscure Henry Stuart, brother of Bonnie Prince Charlie, in his declining years.

Wars and politics are not the only issues of interest, as the books touch on social issues as much as everything else. Power shifts lead to different points of view, then to cultural issues intended to shape public opinion. The far greater chaos of the revolutionary wars in Europe leads to reaction, followed by more revolution. The different balance of power in the Americas leads to a different take on slavery and racism, with a far less powerful slavery lobby that responds, at least in part, by doubling down on racism. Others fight back in more subtle ways, pushing people to question their preconceptions. For example, a hooded hero is eventually revealed, after

50-odd pulp adventures, to be black ... causing everyone to either scream in outrage or re-evaluate their positions.

The book also links back to our timeline, or something close to it, by touching on commentary from a cross-time team of explorers studying the alternate world and comparing it to our own. Their insights are very interesting, as – unlike the locals – they have a basis for comparison. They can assess developments and see how and why things went differently. And this also provides some tension, as the explorers – as of Book IV – to have been discovered by the locals.

It is difficult to exaggerate the sheer level of detail Anderson has worked into the series, although it can be a little overwhelming at times. It can also be hard to follow what's going on, as the borderlines are in very different places. (Anderson deserves credit for not creating the OTL British Empire, plus the United States.) The books do have the downside of being very dry in places, to the point where I skipped some sections and returned to read them later.

If you're looking for an action-adventure novel, *Look to the West* isn't for you. It reads, like I said above, as a history book. It is unashamedly written for the alternate history community, rather than a more general readership; it doesn't try to compromise in hopes of getting more attention from people who might not otherwise be interested. But if you're looking for an outline of an alternate history world, and a study of how one relatively small change can lead to a very different world, *Look to the West* has few equals. I highly recommend it.

**I Am Legend**  
by Richard Matheson  
Review by Will Mayo

Richard Matheson paved new ground in this vampire classic about one man alone in a world of the Undead. Other vampire books and movies have come along in the decades since Matheson penned this thriller but none have done it with the same attention as he did. You have to read it to know it. Five stars. Recommended.

## SerCon

Daniel Keyes Bio-Bibliography  
by  
Jon D. Swartz, Ph. D.  
N3F Historian

Daniel Keyes (1927 - 2014) was a science fiction (SF) author, editor, and teacher. He was born in New York City, and educated at New York University and Brooklyn College, where he earned a B. A. in psychology (1950) and an M. A. in English (1961).

After serving from 1945 to 1947 in the United States Maritime Service as a ship's purser, Keyes



attended college and then was employed as an associate editor for Marvel Science Fiction (1950 - 1952), doing much toward improving that pulp SF magazine during its post-World War II period.

During the 1950s he also edited and wrote for the Marvel and EC lines of comic books. He then taught English and creative writing at a succession of high schools and colleges, including Wayne State University and Ohio University, where he was friends with fellow SF author and chess player Walter Tevis. In addition to chess, they played pool together.

#### First SF story/First SF novel

Keyes' first published SF story was "Precedent" in Marvel Science Fiction (May, 1952). His first SF novel was *Flowers for Algernon* (Harcourt, 1966).  
Other Works

Keyes published the genre novel *The Touch* in 1968 (reissued in the UK as *The Contaminated Man* in 1977), a half-dozen or so SF short stories, and in 1981 the genre novel, *The Minds of Billy Milligan*, a story of a man with multiple personalities. This novel won the 1985 Kurd Lasswitz Award, the German SF and Fantasy Achievement Award for best foreign novel. In addition to Marvel Science Fiction, his short stories appeared in such SF magazines as *Other Worlds Science Stories*, *Galaxy*, *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction (F&SF)*, *Fantastic Story Magazine*, and *Worlds of Tomorrow*. The short story version of "Flowers for Algernon" was published in the April, 1959, issue of *F&SF*.

Keyes was one of the editors included in the "All-Star Editor Issue" of *Other Worlds* (dated June, 1952), with his "Robots Unwanted." Other SF editors with stories in this issue included Jerome Bixby, Anthony Boucher, and Sam Merwin, Jr. *Other Worlds* editor, Ray Palmer, contributed an article to this issue.

Keyes' additional book-length works included *Unveiling Claudia* (1986), a true story of a woman who confessed to being a serial murderer, but who was not; *The Fifth Sally* (1980), a fictionalized story of the true case of a woman with multiple personalities involved in espionage; *The Milligan Wars* (1994), a sequel to *The Minds of Billy Milligan*; *Until Death Do Us Part* (1998), a story of mental competency; and *The Asylum Prophecies* (2009), about a schizophrenic girl involved in terrorism.

Two collections of his short fiction, *Daniel Keyes Collected Stories* (1993) and *Daniel Keyes Reader* (1994) have been published in book form.

#### *Flowers for Algernon*

*Flowers for Algernon* is the reason he is remembered today (and famous in SF circles). Although undoubtedly SF, the story has been praised as much for its artistic merit as for its SF plot. In addition to the award-winning short and long printed forms, the story was made into a full-length play by David Rogers (1969), a TV drama ("The Two Worlds of Charlie Gordon"), and a

movie (Charly) -- and was successful in those media as well. Keyes also wrote a memoir: Algernon, Charly, and I: A Writer's Journey (2000).

### Interviews

Interviews with Keyes were published in the June, 1997, issue of Locus Magazine ("40 Years of Algernon"), and in the March, 2002, issue (#13) of Alter Ego ("A Timely Talk with Daniel Keyes").

### Awards and Honors

1960 - Best Short Fiction Hugo for "Flowers for Algernon"  
 1966 - Nebula Award (Novel) for Flowers for Algernon  
 1967 - Best Novel Hugo nomination for Flowers for Algernon  
 2000 - SFWA Author Emeritus

In 1988, Brooklyn College awarded Keyes its Distinguished Alumnus Medal.

### Personal Information

His wife Aurea Georgania Vazquez, whom he married in 1952, died in 2013. They had two daughters together, Hillary Ann and Leslie Joan.

### Critical Evaluations

George Mann's The Mammoth Encyclopedia of Science Fiction (2001) stated: "Daniel Keyes has had a profound effect on the science fiction genre, achieving this with just one novel."

Some critics have argued that Flowers for Algernon pointed out some of the deficiencies of the scientific method.

### Concluding Statements

When he was young, his parents pressured him to become a medical doctor. Before becoming a writer and teacher, he worked for a time as a fashion photographer. He was promoted to professor of English in 1972 at Ohio University, Athens, Ohio.

His agent was Robert P. Mills, the award-winning magazine editor of F&SF. Mills was also the agent for Walter Tevis.

Keyes is highly regarded in Japan, where most of his work has been reprinted.

He died at his home in Boca Raton, Florida, on June 15, 2014, due to complications from pneumonia. He was survived by his daughters.

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

## Videos

### Best Villain Ev-ARRRRRRR!!!!

Review by Jim McCoy

(There will be spoilers for The Walking Dead below. I don't mean a couple and I don't mean minor. They're big time and there are oodles and bunches of them. They're unavoidable)

I am an aspiring writer. As of yet, I have not been published and seeing as I'm currently writing this while I should be working on a submission for an anthology, I guess I'm not getting a whole lot closer. That much being said, I do have several kinds of goals. (I'm told it's not REALLY a goal unless it includes a date.) I want to be able to write a world spanning epic like Harry Turtledove. I want to write a space battle like David Weber. I want to write a character as complicated as Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman's Raistlin Majere (Dragonlance Chronicles, Dragonlance Legends, The Lost Chronicles, The Raistlin Chronicles and probably some other stuff I'm forgetting. No, the Meetings Sextet doesn't count because it wasn't written by Weis and Hickman.) I want to be able to conceive a universe as optimistic as Star Trek and make it as believable. I want to write an epic as magnificent as the Lord of the Rings. I want to write a Hero's Journey as engaging as Luke Skywalker's. I've had most of these goals for years and I'm still progressing toward them. I may never make it, but there is honor in the pursuit. Today though, today I've adopted a new goal: I want to write a villain that is as entertainingly capricious and evil as Negan.

Negan is a slimy fuck but he's charismatic. He uses methods that can charitably be called questionable. I mean, he crushes skulls with a baseball bat as a method of teaching a lesson. He shows up and within a few minutes he's murdered both Abraham and Glenn. That was one of the most shocking moments I've ever seen on television. Seriously. I mean, I watched the series

late (I just finished season seven about thirty minutes ago) and I knew Glenn was going to get it. I remember when the entire internet lost its shit over his death. But dude, I've never seen it done that way. The murder of Glenn and Abraham was as much about theater as it was about killing. Negan killed the two as an example to their friends and to excite his followers.

It's worth mentioning his other side though. Negan rewards those who support his rule. As big of an asshole as a guy like Eugene is, he's well taken care of. I mean, who else gets to have a video game system after the zombie apocalypse? Who else gets to hang out with the bosses' wives? He provides his most important followers with anything they want that he can provide. All they have to do is ask for it.

Of course, his method of acquiring assets is not exactly polite. He forces others to work for him. They have to get what he wants somehow. Whether it's the Kingdom growing produce for him or Rick and the rest of the crew at Alexandria foraging for whatever they can find that he will like, they do it. I find this interesting because basically what Negan does is basically taxing a conquered population but the way it is presented is as the horrible thing that taxation really is. He seizes merely because his position as leader of a group of armed people allows him to do so. It makes us hate him more when he takes more than he should.

While his followers get anything they want, his enemies get hurt badly. He's so twisted that he doesn't even kill the person who wronged him. He kills someone else that the wrongdoer knows while they watch. He imprisons people. Negan tortures the families of those who won't follow orders. If you can think of something horrible Negan has probably done it. Well, except for one thing. Negan does not commit rape.

It's a weird thing. Negan won't hesitate to kill a woman if he feels it's necessary. He has a whole freaking harem of wives. Yet the women are all welcome to leave him if they wish to. He kills a man in cold blood once Negan realizes that said individual is about to rape a woman. Upon walking in on Mr. Rapey McShitface, Negan pulls a knife and runs it directly through his neck. He does it quickly but with no hesitation and no remorse. Negan then apologizes to Sasha, the potential victim who was in prison for trying to kill him.

The weird thing is that it almost makes him feel more slimy. Negan is not insane, at least not by the legal definition. He knows right and wrong. He is an enforcer of rules and talks about how they're all that are keeping his people alive. He has a twisted sense about what constitutes right and wrong but he definitely has one. And if he sometimes gets a little weird and talks about Lucille, his baseball bat, as if she is a real person, well maybe it's just an eccentricity.

All of this adds up to a leader that people will follow. His methods are harsh toward his enemies but his followers love him. In the climactic battle of Season 7, he is nearly eaten by Sasha, newly turned to a zombie after committing suicide as part of a plan to save her friends. One of Negan's followers gives his life to save him from Sasha. Another follower, Dwight runs out into gunfire to pull Negan to safety. As evil as the man is, he inspires incredible amounts of loyalty in his followers.

Negan calls his faction The Saviors. He believes that he is going to save the entire human race. How he is going to do so given his methodology is something that only seems to make sense to him yet he believes that it will work. It almost seems like he believes in himself as the savior of humanity all on his own. I'm wondering if the writers of the series didn't speak to a trained

psychologist or psychiatrist to get an idea of the symptoms of megalomania. Negan genuinely seems to be afflicted with it.

The Negan character is so well written it's disgusting. It should not be humanly possible to write a villain this well. He's complicated. He's motivated. It makes sense that those who follow him do so. (If you disagree, think about it. Would you rather have a comfortable home and a good meal or a baseball bat upside the dome?) He has a semi-definable goal. He has a twisted code of honor. What a sick, twisted, disgust slimeball shit. Negan says things that should be shocking but coming from him it's just what's expected. He's freaking perfect.

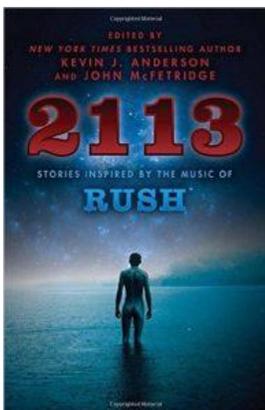
Now listen, a WHOLE FREAKING LOT of the credit goes to actor Jeffery Dean Morgan. That guy can play a villain like a stinking champion. I don't watch awards shows. They're just not my thing. But seriously, if there is a single show that gives awards to American TV shows and hasn't at least nominated Morgan for an award they've lost all credibility. Tell them to shove their award up their ass and stop watching because they no longer matter. The fact remains that the character was conceived by the production team and without them, Morgan wouldn't even have a job.

So long live Negan! I mean, at least until Rick and Company finally hunt this POS down and take him out with extreme prejudice. On one hand, I can't wait to see it. On the other hand, I'll miss this guy when he's gone. He has added a lot to the show. A good hero gives us someone to root for. A good villain gives us someone to root against. Combine the two and you've got one hell of a story. Negan has made a terrific show even better. I can't think of a better compliment.

## Gourmet Bureau

Eat This While You Read That:  
Kevin J Anderson's Spaghetti Squash  
by Cedar Sanderson

Not only is Kevin J Anderson one of the giants in the SF writing world, but his publishing house, Wordfire, is a bright new light in the field. When I asked him for a dish and a title, he was gracious enough to send it along, and I was delighted to see what was in store for me. "For the book, the just-released anthology 2113, stories inspired by the music of Rush, edited by me and John McFetridge. It has new fiction by me, Michael Z Williamson, David Farland, Brian Hodge, Brad Torgersen, Dayton Ward, Mercedes Lackey, and more. (And it's got a naked guy on the cover.)"



It does indeed, although he's facing discreetly away, and one hopes the water isn't too cold. I found myself intrigued by the concept of the anthology – discovering that there were science fiction songs, about a decade ago, was a revelation to me. (Yes, I know, but my contact with pop culture has been intermittent and odd. Comes of growing up with no TV and certainly not that kind of music.) As an adult, discovering songs like Red Barchetta was a delightful surprise, as are some of the stories in this anthology.

The dish that Kevin sent me was also a pleasure.

## Spaghetti Squash with Peanut Sauce

As my regular readers know, I love cooking Thai food, and have done a peanut sauce before in ETWYRT (Dan Hoyt) but this whole recipe is super simple, with very little cooking involved. I wound up using it as lunch on a lovely late spring day. It would work very well as a side dish. I have, of course, made some minor alterations to the magazine clipping recipe I was given.

I started with the squash, since it needed to actually be cooked. The squash I was using was on the smaller side, and I was able to cut it in half with very little difficulty, although some instructions suggest microwaving it whole (poke a fork in the rind to release steam) for 5 minutes before attempting to halve it. I then placed it cut-side down in a glass baking dish with a little water, and microwaved it for 15 minutes.

While the squash was cooking, I assembled the sauce ingredients.

Some of the sauce ingredients.

- 2 tbsp peanut butter (smooth, although I suppose you could use chunky)
- 1 tbsp soy sauce
- 1 tbsp rice wine vinegar
- 1 tbsp lime juice
- 1 tsp fish sauce
- 1 tsp grated ginger
- a garlic clove, minced
- 1/4 tsp garlic chili sauce (more if you like spicy! This made it 'mild')
- chopped peanuts for topping
- julienned mint and cilantro for topping

In the blender, combine all the sauce ingredients and puree.

Pull the squash out of the microwave and carefully scrape up the 'noodles' with a fork. They will still be a little crispy to the bite, but that's ok. They aren't pasta, and they won't feel like pasta in the mouth, but they are still good.

Toss the noodles and sauce together, put it on the plate and sprinkle desired toppings over it.

Serve with mango nectar. The peach-and-turpentine flavor of mango actually works really well with the rich, slightly tart, a little spicy, flavor of the sauce.

Great summertime lunch when you're tired of salad! Could be really lovely on the side with grilled chicken, too.

# Fanzines

## Fanfaronade 8

by Justin E. A. Busch

Personal circumstances made it advisable for me to submit my copy for last issue's Fanfaronade much earlier than usual. This, it turns out, had an unexpected benefit. Soon after I sent in the column Nic Farey e-mailed me an e-zine for review, and soon after that George Phillies e-mailed the same fanzine to the entire N3F membership. Since anyone who reads this column will almost certainly already have read that fanzine and formed their own opinion about it, we have here an excellent opportunity for readers to test their responses against mine and form an idea of just how likely they are to agree or disagree with my reviews. As Ethel Lindsay said, in *Haverings 16* (August, 1964), regarding her own comments about fanzines, "I like what I like and you can chart your way (if you want to) by that. I do, however, try to give some information helpful to fans who wish to sub to fanzines." So, in a similar vein—

**This Here... #38** (January, 2021 (the interior is dated 2020, but this is presumably a typo). Nic Farey, editor; available at [efanzines.com](http://efanzines.com)) is a lively combination of perzine and genzine. Thus the opening page is dominated by three photographs of his friend Jennifer's face: one an hour after what must have been a pretty bad accident; the second a couple of days later, and third, much cheerier, about three weeks later; a fourth, concealed under a question mark, refers to her appearance after upcoming dental surgery to replace the front teeth she lost in the accident. The text to either side of the photos is an account of an event in Nic's job as a taxi driver; only on the next page does it connect to the photographs, as he includes a link to a fundraiser (<https://www.gofundme.com/f/help-jen-replace-her-front-teeth>), necessary given the impact of such unexpected expenses. As he writes, "it's undoubtedly true that every sixpence helps us not only get this sorted, but also to alleviate the issue of all the other fuckin' bills like rent and utilities that aren't taking a break." You don't get much more personal than this in a fanzine.

The lettercol has been broken into two parts; the first, in order that "those actually interested in it can have a wallow, while others whose garden of fucks is, yea, verily barren can safely enter the 'Loco Citato' waters," is concerned entirely with a discussion of an earlier issue's article on the idea of "focal point fanzines." There are thoughtful points made here, but reading them is rather akin to reading the 'Mailing Comments' section of an apazine whose previous issue you've missed. Most interesting, being grounded in the comments at hand, are Farey's summary comments.

A lengthy column by David Hodson on association football (soccer to Americans), well-written and no doubt appealing to readers more knowledgeable, and more concerned with, the subject than I am, divides the first lettercol from the second. Both lettercols are quite snappy, but the latter is more wide-ranging and, to me, more entertaining. Among other things, there are some speculations on the state of fandom and letterhacking, the character of Christmas, and a long letter from Leigh Edmonds which includes a discourse on swearing which is all but an article in its own right. The issue concludes with a two-page collection of random items, some quite bizarre. The best was a link to a Smithsonian article on (I'm not making this up) Giant Technicolor Squirrels; the most relevant to N3F members was a brief piece on an internet controversy in which George Phillies has gotten himself embroiled, complete with links for those who care to dive deeper into the internet maelstrom, and Farey's own take-no-prisoners comments thereupon.

The overall tone of *This Here...* is energetic and thoughtfully opinionated, and there is enough variety to allow most readers to find something with which to engage. It's worth clicking on.

[P.S. to Nic and anyone else interested in taxi driver stories: I highly recommend Khaled Al Khamissi's *Taxi* (Aflame Books, 2008), which is 58 very short chapters grounded in taxi driving in Cairo (the Cairo), and "Code Two," Part Three of John Moore's *Three of a Kind* (Ekstasis Editions, 2001), which is deeply and movingly grounded in Moore's experiences as a taxi driver.]

Late addition: As it happens, **This Here... 39** (e-fanzines) was waiting for me when I came in to submit Fanfaronade. I was going to wait, until it occurred to me that I would be forever behind by an issue, so I'm giving it a brief lookover instead of taking an extra month; I assume issue 40 will appear between now and then. I have not revised the earlier review, so some of it is already out of date.

The focal point for N3F readers is, unfortunately, a confrontation between Nic Farey and a letter from our own George Phillies regarding George's attempt, mentioned above, to recruit members from some rather unsavory e-neighborhoods. I won't go into the unpleasanties, but included amidst them is a reprint of a letter from David Speakman, apparently posted to two websites but not (as of this writing) in any N3F publication, withdrawing from involvement in N3F as a result of George's recruitment activities. This reaction seems extreme to me, but if it is not a momentary but repairable surge of anger then this is a serious consequence; we need active members like David Speakman far more than we need higher numbers of uninvolved public members. I have not followed the links, having no available time as I write this, but it is something I intend to do as a result of Nic's comments; it is probably worthwhile for N3F members to check them out.

Otherwise, the issue is filled with what appears to be the usual mix of editorial comments, soccer reportage, pop music commentary, an extensive and wide-ranging lettercol, and "Indulge Me," a collection of various odd, and sometimes quite funny, items. As before, worth clicking on quite apart from any relevance to specifically N3F concerns.

**The Obdurate Eye #7 (November 2020** (what the masthead says)/January, 2021 (what the cover, with an Al Sirois illo which deserved to be less blurry, says). Editor Garth Spencer, 4240 Perry St., Vancouver, B.C. Canada V5N 3X5). This is something of a perzine with unexpected elements of genzine. The personal comes in the form of, among other things, a diagram, "What It's Like Inside Garth's Head," a short piece, "Things I Said on Facebook," and, most interestingly, "My Comedy Routines," under which rubric come a wide variety of brief opinion pieces, some as questions, some as statements. There are plenty of comment hooks here, to say the least. Key to the genzine element is an essay (from 1997, but previously unpublished) on patronage as a political structure, by Clifton Amsbury, which provides plenty of ideas upon which to chew. It moves from 1815 to 1996 in five pages, with interesting things on every one of them; especially interesting is an account of a brief conversation on Bob Dole and Herbert Hoover toward the end.

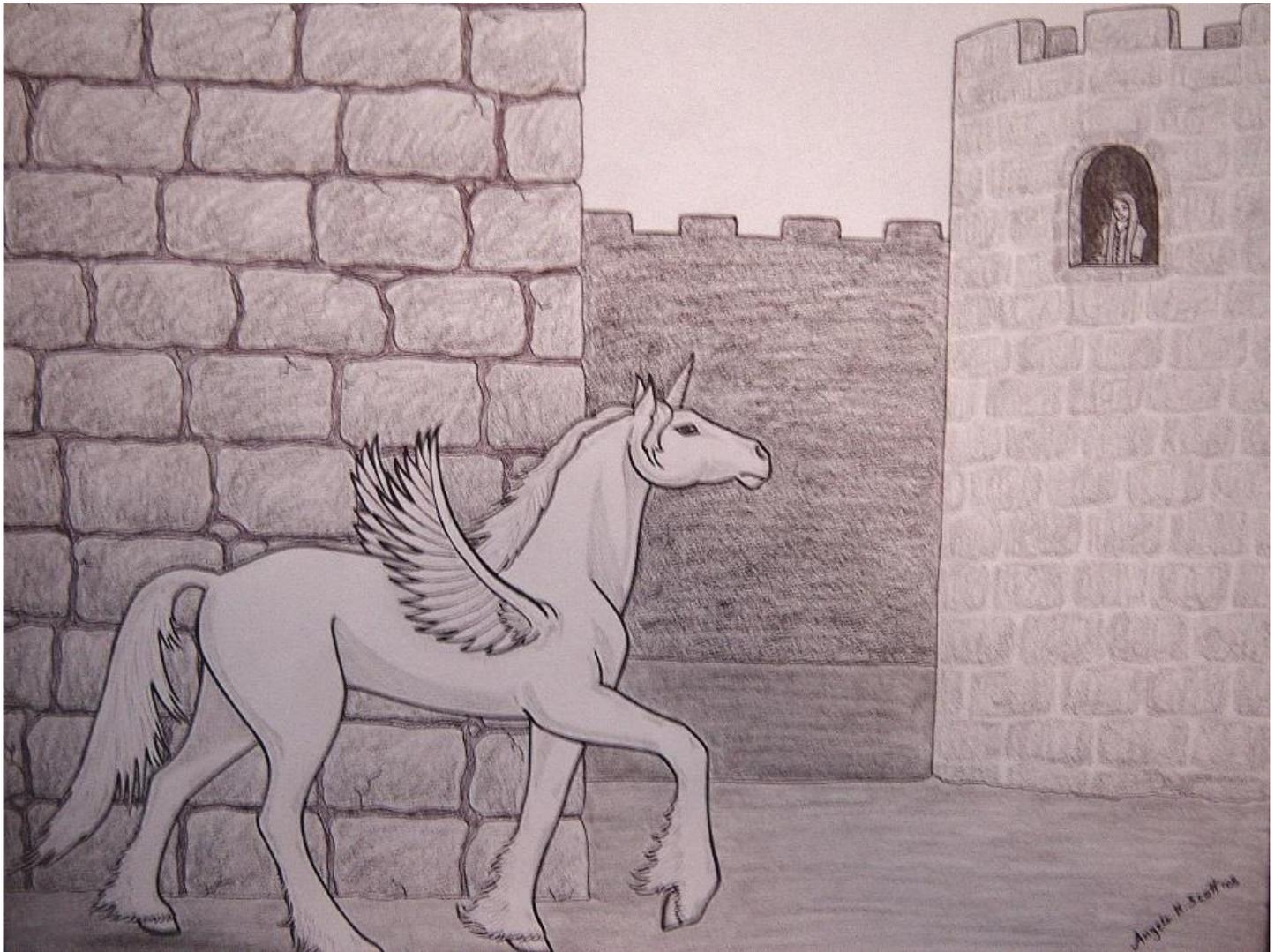
Good letters and some fanzine reviews, stressing the ideas found in each, extend more comment hooks; this is a zine to read slowly and maybe more than once.

**Pablo Lennis (#399, February, 2021.** Edited by John Thiel, 30 N. 19th Street, Lafayette, Indiana, 47904). The usual mix, a bit shorter than usual; presumably John Thiel is busy planning and preparing the landmark 400th issue, which he told me will be larger than usual. Jeffrey Redmond offers a short article on drugs in science fiction which, like so much of his work, begs to be expanded and developed. Thiel's closing comments on the difference between having a photo-offset cover decades ago and having a photo-offset magazine today are charming and illuminating.

**First Fandom Annual 2020: Celebrating Robert A. Madle.** (25.00; Edited by John L. Coker III and Jon D. Swartz, P.O. Box 608056, Orlando, Florida 32860). I wouldn't normally review a fanzine no longer available, but this one sold out in three days and First Fandom is considering a second printing. If you have any interest whatsoever in, a) the history of fandom; b) N3F's sole remaining Founding Member; and/or, c) a sumptuously produced 57-page fanzine filled with articles, reminiscences, tributes, and illustrations bringing a bygone era and one of its most active participants vividly to life, you should let John Coker know. This is well worth the price.

\* \* \*

**Editors desiring reviews: If you have a print zine, send it to me at 308 Prince St., #422, St. Paul, Minn. 55101; if you have an e-zine, send the link (or a PDF) to jeab@musician.org.**



**Curiosity**  
by Angela K. Scott